

FESTIVAL CITY (2013) by Tod Machover

Festival City was composed in spring 2013 for Peter Oundjian and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, on commission from the Edinburgh International Festival. The 11-minute work is a compact sonic portrait of the city and its festival(s), and was created in collaboration with Edinburgh lovers from around the world (based on a creative model I developed for the Toronto Symphony Orchestra over the past year, designed to cultivate careful listening to the world around us to discover its hidden music). *Festival City* is a single movement work that conveys Edinburgh's fascinating layers, the complexity, darkness, energy and edge that lie beneath the touristic beauty and order of the cityscape and surrounding nature.

I came to this piece equipped with strong impressions of Edinburgh developed over many years – this was the first non-American city to which I traveled when I was 13 and convinced my parents to take me with them from New York on a business trip – but my concepts were pushed further and inspired greatly through contact with the numerous project participants, in person or via the Internet. With the help of the EIF, I invited anyone with a connection to Edinburgh (resident, visitor, faraway fan, etc.) to submit sounds recorded here, along with stories, impressions and memories of the city and festival. Then I made these sonic materials – as well as melodies, harmonies and textures I composed – available online in the form of specially designed apps (created by Akito van Troyer at the MIT Media Lab) that allowed the music to be further shaped and shared. Along the way, I visited Edinburgh in person in order to work with students, meet musicians, and listen to the city myself. I found freshness and surprise everywhere I went, not least in a Gaelic youth choir and teenage bagpipe ensemble.

All of this material has influenced the final form and flow of *Festival City*, and much of it has been included in the performance. The work is scored for full orchestra plus *concertino* ensemble of 14 soloists, and has an electronic part as well – controlled onstage by a keyboard player – which injects and layers real and imaginary soundscapes. Together, these forces make up a kind of musical cauldron which, when stirred, reveals mysteries and surprises beneath the surface, much like Edinburgh itself.

I'd like to thank the entire Edinburgh International Festival team – and especially Jonathan Mills – for supporting this work and helping in its realization. It was also a pleasure to do several collaborative workshops with the musicians of the RSNO; they helped to “translate” some natural sounds into instrumental techniques, and to explore with me how to inject bits of “festival memory” into the composition. Special thanks to

David and Eloise Hendy, as well as to Matt Thompson, who taught me so much about the sounds of Edinburgh and provided many great ones themselves. And much gratitude to the MIT Media Lab where *Festival City* was created, and to Simone Ovsey, Ben Bloomberg, Abbey Bethel and Tae Kim who contributed so much to the project.

-- Tod Machover