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SCOTTISH MENTAL HEALTH ARTS FESTIVAL CELEBRATES ALL THE WAYS IN WHICH WE ARE **CONNECTED**

- Key festival themes include community, family, and the impact of suicide
 - **Ian Rankin** and **Emma Pollock** to appear at SMHAF Writing Awards
 - Week of Scottish dates for multi award-winning theatre show *Electrolyte*
- Film programme includes powerful documentaries **Evelyn** and **Irene's Ghost** and a Scottish tour of **Final Ascent: The Legend of Hamish MacInnes**
 - 70th anniversary of Mental Health Foundation celebrated
- Festival runs 3-26 May, coinciding with Mental Health Awareness Week.
 - Festival listings and trailer online now at www.mhfestival.com



Images from top left: Evelyn, Electrolyte, Ian Rankin and Irene's Ghost

In a time of anxiety fuelled by Brexit and other divisive political issues, the **Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival (SMHAF)** today announces a nationwide programme exploring all the ways in which we are 'Connected'.

SMHAF 2019 includes events with asylum seekers, travellers, the LGBT community, and families affected by suicide and other traumatic events, in a wide-ranging programme that focuses on the importance of staying connected to each other, and the impact of isolation on our mental health.

SMHAF is one of Scotland's biggest, most diverse festivals. Its unique approach – programmed from the ground up by a team of regional co-ordinators all across the country, in combination with a film and theatre programme curated by the Mental Health Foundation – ensures it connects with audiences that other arts festivals often struggle to reach.

FILM

The 'Connected' theme runs through our **International Film Awards** programme, which this year expands beyond the CCA to include screenings at Glasgow Film Theatre and Flourish House, as well as Edinburgh, Inverness and the Isle of Lewis. **Evelyn**, directed by Oscar nominee Orlando von Einsiedel (*The White Helmets*, *Virunga*) is a poignant feature documentary about a family processing the loss of one of their own to mental illness. On a similar theme, **Irene's Ghost** sees filmmaker Iain Cunningham trying to find out the truth about his mother, who died when he was three. The short films **We Are All Here** and **The Song and the Sorrow** explore the impact of suicide on, respectively, Scotland's hip-hop community and Canadian singer-songwriter Catherine MacLellan, whose musician father took his own life. And we are very pleased to be supporting the Scotland-wide release of **Final Ascent: The Legend of Hamish MacInnes**, including screening and discussion events at the CCA in Glasgow, the Filmhouse in Edinburgh, An Lanntair in Stornoway and Eden Court in Inverness. The film programme will open on Friday 3 May with our **International Film Awards** at the CCA, hosted by leading film critic **Alistair Harkness**.

SMHAF WRITING AWARDS

The **SMHAF Writing Awards**, in partnership with **Bipolar Scotland**, are one of SMHAF's most enduring successes, offering first time writers the chance to be published alongside established names. This year the awards are hosted by best-selling author **Ian Rankin**, and will open with a short set by one of Scotland's top singer-songwriters, **Emma Pollock**, before our ten shortlisted writers read from their work.

The SMHAF Writing Awards will also see the launch of **70 Stories**, a year-long project to mark the **70th anniversary of the Mental Health Foundation**, which will connect stories from our writing competition, stories from 13 years of SMHAF, and more in a compelling portrait of mental health in 2019.

THEATRE

Electrolyte, at the Tron Theatre and the Traverse Theatre, is a multi award-winning piece of gig theatre telling the story of a woman isolated from her friends by a psychotic episode, and how she ultimately manages to reconnect with them – the show won the 2018 **Mental Health Fringe Award**. **Holding it Together** at Platform, Easterhouse, is a new performance piece in Glasgow by two young women brought together by shared experience of grief. The show, by Jassy Earl and Chloe Smith, is produced by SMHAF associate artist **Emma Jayne Park**, who also curates **A Day of Failure**, a gathering at Tramway in Glasgow at which people will connect with each other by sharing their experiences of failure. **Doing it Our Way** is a whole day of conversation and performance centred around a mental health themed piece of theatre by Mariem Omari and Mark Jeary (who worked together on SMHAF hit **One Mississippi**). **Viola**, in Glasgow is a solo aerial performance that reimagines Shakespeare's Twelfth Night to explore isolation and anxiety.

VISUAL ART

For our visual art programme, **Emily Furneaux** has created **She Stepped Backwards In Front Of the Words Behind Her**, an audio tour of Glasgow that will offer audiences an insight into her experience of psychosis. Elsewhere in Glasgow, **All, Entire, Whole** is a See Me curated group exhibition bringing together artists exploring mental health. Other exhibitions focus on people who are often discriminated against, such as gypsy/travellers (in **Moving Minds'** show in Craigmillar), refugees (**Women's Café Project**, Edinburgh) and the LGBT community, in exhibitions such as **Belonging**, in Glasgow and **Queer Connections** in Hawick.

CONVERSATION

Often the simplest and most effective way to connect with someone is just to start a conversation. Our film programme this year will include **We Are All Connected**, an opportunity for one-to-one encounters with filmmakers, supported by Creative Scotland. We also welcome back Lily Asch's **Real Talk: Storytelling for Wellbeing**, an evening of storytelling, connection and honesty in Edinburgh. Elsewhere, **Walk a Mile** events across Scotland invite you to connect with people over the course of a mile-long walk – our festival programme includes Walk a Mile events in Paisley, Kyle of Lochalsh and Inverness; in a similar spirit, there are nature walks in places including Inverness, Golspie, and Pollok Country Park.

COMEDY

If, after all that, you just want a good laugh, **Angela Barnes** is performing her new show **Rose Tinted**. The comedian, who has previously performed at our **Gala for Mental Health** at the Edinburgh Fringe, is bringing last year's sell-out Fringe show to the Stand Comedy Club in Edinburgh and Glasgow and we're delighted to have her part of our festival programme.

The SMHAF 2019 programme is online now at www.mhfestival.com, where you will find full, nationwide festival listings.

Lee Knifton, SMHAF founder and director of Mental Health Foundation Scotland, said: "Since this festival began 13 years ago it has grown and thrived because of the connections it has made, between communities all across Scotland, between the arts and the public sector, and also with artists, filmmakers, activists, organisations and other festivals from all across the world. Those connections are authentic, deep-rooted and unique, and have taken a long time to build. This year we want to celebrate that. We also want to continue to be provocative and challenging, which is partly why we are making a point of celebrating connectedness at a time when so much of what is happening politically, from Brexit to the rise of the far right, is pushing people apart."

For further information and interview requests, please contact Andrew Eaton-Lewis on 07475 210703 or at aeaton-lewis@mentalhealth.org.uk

INTERNATIONAL FILM COMPETITION WINNERS

ANIMATION - HERMAN BROWN IS FEELING DOWN (UK)

Anxiety noisily interrupts a simple life in this colourful musical animation, created using digital and traditional techniques.

ANTI-STIGMA: EVELYN (UK)

Twelve years after the suicide of his younger brother, a director and his family walk the length of the UK in an attempt to come to terms with their grief.

COMMUNITY: AN OPEN DOOR (IRELAND)

A vibrant documentary set in a pioneering community space, which comes alive through music, performance and shared experiences.

EXPERIMENTAL: ON EXILE: FRAGMENTS IN SEARCH OF MEANING (USA)

Attentiveness to structure and form creates space for individual voices, as ten people share their stories about living with depression.

FEATURE DOCUMENTARY: IRENE’S GHOST (UK)

A son unravels his family’s silence to find out what happened to his mother, who died when he was three but always lived on in his imagination.

MID-LENGTH DOCUMENTARY: THE SONG AND THE SORROW (CANADA)

A folk singer prepares to pay tribute to her legendary father, who took his own life after a long-term struggle with depression.

PERSONAL NARRATIVE: MODEL CHILDHOOD (UK)

An autobiographical, partly animated documentary about a filmmaker striving for a better future as a survivor of childhood sexual trauma.

SHORT DOCUMENTARY: WE ARE ALL HERE (UK)

A hip-hop community comes together to talk about their issues and challenge stigma after the suicide of a much-loved rapper.

SHORT DRAMA: I LOVE YOU (AUSTRALIA)

Improvised drama filmed with a real life couple, exploring the impact that mental instability can have on a relationship.

VOICES OF EXPERIENCE: ASYLUM (NETHERLANDS)

Poetic and revealing documentary in which a man recounts his experiences with psychosis as he prepares to leave a psychiatric hospital.

Notes for editors:

About SMHAF: The Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival is one of Scotland's most striking and provocative cultural events, encompassing music, film, visual art, performing arts, dance, and literature. The annual Festival takes place in venues across Scotland throughout May (previously October), aiming to support the arts and challenge preconceived ideas about mental health. By engaging artists, connecting with communities and forming collaborations, the Festival celebrates the artistic achievements of people with experience of mental health problems, explores the relationship between creativity and the mind, and promotes positive mental health and wellbeing.

Partners: The Festival is led by the Mental Health Foundation in association with the following national partners: See Me, Scotland’s programme to end mental health stigma; Creative Scotland; NHS Lothian; A Sense of Belonging; NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde; The Royal College of Psychiatrists; and Scottish Forestry (formerly Forestry Commission Scotland). The Festival is also supported by hundreds of arts, community and public organisations across Scotland.

The Mental Health Foundation is the UK’s charity for everyone’s mental health. With prevention at the heart of what we do, we aim to find and address the sources of mental health problems so that people and communities can thrive. The Foundation is a UK charity that relies on public donations and grant funding to deliver its work. The Foundation is proud of the vital role it plays in hosting, developing and managing the Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival. www.mentalhealth.org.uk