

One of
Scotland's finest talents of the younger generation.

THE SCOTSMAN

Nicolson is not only a maker, but also a shaker. His creating of festivals, his performing, his work in the theatre and his projects enlivening others interest in music are carried out with boundless enthusiasm and tireless energy and a good deal of natural charisma. He is one of the new breed of artists whose world of influence and interest is wide and ever growing.

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Alasdair Nicolson was born in Inverness and brought up on the Isle of Skye and the Black Isle. He studied at Edinburgh University and later became Shaw McFie Lang Fellow there working in composition and music theatre. His music has won critical acclaim and he is regarded as one of Scotland's leading composers of the younger generation. He has written music for the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, BBC SSO, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Joanna Macgregor, Catherine Wyn Rogers and Malcolm Martineau, the Emperor Quartet and the City of London Sinfonia amongst others and in 1993 his *Cradle Song of the Disappeared* was chosen to represent Scotland at the International Music Forum in Kiev. In the same year he was also awarded the IBM Composer's Prize for his work *The Tree of Strings* and was one of the composers chosen to provide the music for BBC TV's award-winning series *The Loch* all of which quickly established him as a richly individual talent.

In 1994 there were premieres of works commissioned by TAG, the Chester and Canterbury Festivals and Mayfest, Glasgow. He also contributed a work to the Royal Festival Hall's "Boom Room" Series called *The Ballad of Bulbous Sniff*, a work for singer, mime and ensemble, for EOS. In 1995 he wrote works for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra (a collaboration with the choreographer Laurie Booth) *The Last Meeting*, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra *Street*, a music theatre work in collaboration with the Scottish novelist Janice Galloway *Five Card Trick*, a piece for two accordions *Squeeze* for the Duo Danica, and a trio *Don't Explain* for the Derngate Concert Series in Northampton. He also wrote the music for the BBC TV "Dance for the Camera" programme *T-Dance* which has won awards at both the Naples and Bratislava Television Festivals. This year also saw performances of his music on Radio 3's "Composer of the Week" series and by the Philharmonia, the RSNO, the Chamber Group of Scotland, Psappha and Aequitas. In 1996 there were premieres of new works for the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra *Breakdance*, the Emperor Quartet, the St Magnus Festival, *Mirror Dances* and a guitar piece *..the isle is full of noises...*, for Allan Neave. For the 1997

Highland Festival he wrote the opera *Sgathach* with a libretto in Scottish Gaelic by Aonghas MacNeacail and performed on the Isle of Skye by members of the local community.

Between 1997 and 2005 Nicolson was Composer in Association with the City of London Sinfonia and was involved with both the orchestra's concert work and education programmes. His first piece for the orchestra was an overture to celebrate the orchestra's tour of Chile in March 1998 and this has been followed by several works for the strings of the orchestra *Stramash* and *Stormwatching* and a work for the full orchestra *Ghosts at the Water's Edge*. His opera *Cat Man's Tale* commissioned by Opera Circus received its first performance in October 1997 to critical acclaim and toured extensively in the UK as well as abroad. For the 1998 St Magnus Festival, he wrote the large radio music-theatre piece *Greenvoe* for the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra which was subsequently performed at the Northlands Festival and became the centrepiece of the BBC's tribute to the author George MacKay Brown. He was also featured composer at the Covent Garden Festival during this year where his opera was performed alongside three new pieces, *The Big Issue*, *Mrs O's Saturday Nights* and *Single Letters (an opera in a mini)* and his *42nd Street* was performed as part of the British Music Days at the New York Philharmonic. More recently he has written works for the Paragon Ensemble in Glasgow *dansmusik* who also featured his music in their 99/00 season, a new work for the Barbican Centre in London *To the future* as part of its Millennium celebrations and involving the participation of 700 children with the City of London Sinfonia and a new work *Midsummer Songs* premiered in Tokyo by the Japanese violinist Ken Aiso. Also in 2000 he collaborated with Eva Salzman on a short music theatre work *Shawna and Ron's Half Moon* for ENO's Knack project. He has recently completed an opera with the writer and film-maker Philip Ridley which will be premiered in the spring of 2007 by The Other Opera, London and his community opera *ICE* with a libretto by Andy Rashleigh for the City of London Sinfonia was performed in East London in late July 2001.

His music has been regularly broadcast in the UK and abroad and most recently his *Ghosts at the Water's Edge* was broadcast as part of the BBC Hear and Now programme and *Three Scots Songs* were broadcast on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation by the soprano Iren Bartok. His new work *42nd Street Stomp* was premiered by Joanna MacGregor with members of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra at the Sydney Opera House in September 2001 and was also featured in the South Bank Show about Joanna MacGregor. 2002 premieres included a new song cycle *Backward Glances* commissioned by Catherine Wyn Rogers and performed by her with Malcolm Martineau at the Buxton Festival and *The Blue Rampart* commissioned by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Highland Festival for a tour of the Highlands. 2004 saw the premiere of a work for chorus and orchestra for the Royal Scottish National Orchestra *Songs and Secrets*, a work for the Nash Ensemble *A Gift o' Tunes* commissioned in celebration of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies's 70th

birthday and a choral work for the City of London Festival *Ecce Puer*. In 2005 his final work as Composer in Association with the City of London Sinfonia *Il pleut* was premiered by the orchestra conducted by Joseph Cullen with London Voices as part of the City of London Winter Music Series.

Nicolson has a strong commitment to promoting new music and co-founded Platform Festival in London in 1991. This festival ran for three years and included twenty five concerts of music and mixed media over the course of a week. More recently he worked as Artistic Director of the Northlands Festival for part of 2002. He has also led many education projects with orchestras and festivals throughout the UK and has made a television programme about composition for BBC TV schools with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. From the earliest part of his career, he has been involved with community projects ranging from entire operas and pieces of theatre created from scratch to performances of concert music. In 1996 he co-hosted the composition summer school held by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies on Hoy. He has also taught composition for the University of London at Royal Holloway College. He also created the materials and methodology as Creative Director for *Sound Inventors*, a national project for composition with young people between 2001 and 2005 and has written two books on composing called *Composition Kit 1 and 2*. In the summer of 2002 he joined the Faculty of the Britten-Pears summer school working with young professional composers. He is Director of the newly created St Magnus Composers' Course for young professional composers which will run concurrently with the St Magnus Festival and will commence in 2006.

Nicolson has worked extensively in the theatre in the UK and written scores for many companies and has created scores for several theatre works around the country and in London's West End. He has worked with the Traverse Theatre, the Citizens Theatre, Birmingham Rep, Oxford Stage Company, Unicorn Theatre, the Players Theatre, Malcolm Knight Productions, Testing Testing, New Company, Polka Theatre, Liverpool Playhouse, EdenCourt Theatre, Wildcat Theatre Co, Theatre Workshop, Communicado amongst others. He is also a pianist and conductor and was for a time on the music staff at the Opera de Monte Carlo. As conductor, he has worked with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the City of London Sinfonia, the Scottish Masking Company, Paragon Ensemble, the Chamber Group of Scotland, the LSO Ensemble and as pianist has accompanied several British singers in recital.

2006-2007 saw the premiere of several large-scale works including the hour-long dramatic oratorio *Two Sisters, A Rose, A Flood and Snow* commissioned by the LSO, *The Broken Symphony Part One and Two* commissioned by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, *The Stamping Ground* for the Nash Ensemble *Vapour Trail* for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Cheltenham Festival. He also contributed some songs for the National Youth Choir of Scotland's Anniversary Songbook.

The 2007-2008 season sees premieres of an hour-long dance score *Corryvreckan* for SYD, a choral work *Winterings* for the St Magnus Singers and two site specific pieces one for 40 flutes *The Whistler's Ballad* and another commissioned by the Edinburgh International Festival *The Twittering Machine* to be premiered in the Palm House of the Edinburgh Botanic Garden. This season will also see performances of new versions of *Keepers of the House* with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and *Two Sisters, A Rose, A Flood and Snow* with the London Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican. He has also contributed some of the music to accompany the exhibition of photographs by Edward Weston at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. He is also currently working on a third volume of his book on composition the *Composition Kit 3*.

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