

## Spirit of '47

*70 years of the Festival city, i.m. of Rudolf Bing, Harry Harvey Wood  
of the British Council and Lord Provost Sir John Falconer*

They were visionaries in '47, special people with dreams  
of dry bones dancing out of desolation, of creativity revived.  
Europe was in lament; so many lives lost. And its art stolen,  
its orchestras fragmented. Austerity was utility homes,  
rationed food, little fuel. It was survival that mattered.

These seers knew that politics can fail but stories connect,  
that the spirit needs elixirs – music, art and dance;  
surprise part of the enchantment; that we should expect  
to be shocked as well as thrilled. Some would tut-tut,  
but yes, Edinburgh would take the risk. Sir Thomas Beecham  
wouldn't come, but the Queen graced the Royal box and  
Kathleen Ferrier sang Mahler. Each obstacle was resolved:  
water and alcohol in short supply – afternoon tea, darling?  
Ring the Fire Brigade! Pull a few strings – whisky galore!

The sun shone, audiences filled theatres,  
cafés buzzed, the critics were ecstatic.  
Bruno Walter conducted his Viennese orchestra:  
Haydn, Schubert, Mozart, a waltz by Strauss.

\*\*\*

It's the full spectrum of cultures now: from classical  
to contemporary to *avant-garde*; and all the various fringes,  
spin-offs – they still bring the best from every corner  
of the world, from continents in flux, people on the move  
joining forces with us to make a new songbook, a new identity.

Refugees, migrants narrate experience in their own voice;  
soldiers – former adversaries – peel layers off with honesty,  
strip down to the minefield of memory. Through them  
we empathise, feel spirits rise again. We relearn the power  
of words, of naming: Malvinas, Argentina. Whose story is it?  
Whose culture, class or creed? Whose song? Art is still  
the impartial witness, bridge-builder, connecting spark ...  
... Too soon, we're disbanding, glad to go out with a bang: rockets  
shimmer like grand chandeliers mirrored in the Assembly Rooms.

So much has changed in 70 years, yet much remains  
the same. In days like these it seems we still need  
cultural exchange, still long for transformation;  
still crave a space and time for celebration.

Christine De Luca