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News release

Journal Culture Award 2018 finalist, Eliot Smith, performs in world premiere spectacular

The Journal's Culture Award 2018 Performing Artist of the Year finalist, Eliot Smith, is due to perform in an amazing spectacle of dance, ice skating, music, costume and Japanese drumming, in the region.

Ikebana, the Journey in Quest of Harmony, is a world premiere performance taking place in August as part of the 54th Billingham International Folklore Festival – and Newcastle-based Eliot and his dancers will play key roles in the newly created piece.

Eliot is Artistic Director of Eliot Smith Dance (ESD), which has been at the forefront of contemporary dance since its founding in 2012, with Her Grace the Duchess of Northumberland as patron. Eliot and his dancers were invited to take part in what promises to be a spectacular performance, funded by Arts Council England, and which has been especially created by a nationally-renowned creative team.

Eliot said, "The Billingham International Folklore Festival has supported Eliot Smith Dance in previous year's as guest performers. This has enabled ESD to grow and engage with various artists and audiences. On behalf of everyone at ESD, we are delighted and excited to be returning to the 2018 Festival, as the talented ESD dancers, and myself, play a key role in the newly created piece IKEBANA. It is very rewarding to have the opportunity to collaborate with such a diverse team".

Ikebana is the ancient art of Japanese flower-arranging, which is meant to promote spiritual and mental harmony. *Ikebana, the Journey in Quest of Harmony*, will be performed by 300 performers, including Mark Hanretty, champion ice skater who took part in ITV's Dancing on Ice earlier this year. Mark will be skating, as well as performing dramatic aerial dance.

Ikebana will include specially commissioned music by Moony Wainwright and Japanese Taiko drumming, led by Japan's leading Taiko performer, Hiro Hayashida.

Eliot continued, "The dancers will perform powerful yet simple movement, embodying the IKEBANA theme for the Quest of Harmony. Each dancer will represent the three core elements (and associated costume colours). Imagination (blue), Humanity (yellow) and Nature (green). The opportunity to collaborate with newly composed music, actors, singers, ice skaters and community participants will enrich the dance movement to new heights – a inimitable experience for all".

Born in Newcastle, Eliot studied ballet and contemporary dance at London Contemporary Dance School and at The Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance in New York, before forming his own company. ESD tours internationally, with dancers that are all technically and theatrically talented.

Jane Tarr, Director North, Arts Council England, said, "I'm delighted that we have supported this ambitious production, that brings together North East-based choreographer Eliot Smith with so many international artists, through our National Lottery funded Grants for the Arts programme.

"It's particularly exciting to see the plans for 300 community cast members to perform alongside the 300 international artists to create an unforgettable night of ice dancing, drumming and song celebrating global journeys. It will certainly put Billingham on the map as a leader in international folk-dance production and performance."

***Ikebana the Journey in Quest of Harmony* takes place on Saturday 11th and Sunday 12th August at 7.30pm in Billingham. Act 1 takes place in Billingham Forum Theatre, with the audience being taken on a mysterious and magical journey to watch Act 2 in Billingham Ice Arena.**

Tickets are on sale now at www.billinghamfestival.co.uk/store or www.forumtheatrebillingham.co.uk

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For press enquiries, images, extra information or interview requests, please contact:

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Notes to editors

Billingham International Folklore Festival 2018:

- More information on the programme can be found at www.billinghamfestival.co.uk
- The Festival runs from Saturday 11 August to Sunday 19th August 2018
- More information on Eliot Smith Dance can be found at www.eliotsmithdance.com/

- Billingham International Folklore Festival 2018 is sponsored by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council; Arts Council England; Billingham Town Council; Youth Social Action Fund; The Billingham Legacy Foundation; Boyes & Co Ltd; K W Deveraux & Sons; St. Modwen; Tees Active; Croft Coaches; plus Big Lottery Fund
- Social media: Facebook at @billinghamworlddancefestival and Twitter @BillFest