

# BELTANE



# FIRE FESTIVAL

EVENTS PROGRAMME 2024

Beltane Fire Festival is back - bolder,  
brighter and fire-ier than ever before!





# BELTANE FIRE FESTIVAL 2024

## A BELTANE FIRE SOCIETY PRODUCTION



### FESTIVAL OVERVIEW

*The Beltane Fire Festival marks the changing of the seasons by bringing ancient Celtic harvest traditions and stories alive with a modern twist.*

As the wheel of 2024 continues to turn evermore, where the days get longer, and the flowers show the first signs of sprouting...we invite you to a celebration into warmer seasons, a traditional Celtic retelling, and an immersive experience of revelry with us as we set Calton Hill ablaze on Tuesday 30th April!

Beltane is a living, breathing re-interpretation and modernisation of an ancient Iron Age Celtic ritual which is over three thousand years old. Established in Edinburgh, the Beltane Fire Society is a community which brings people from all over the world together for the largest Celtic festival of its kind!

Join us for the spectacular Beltane Fire Festival, where we will retell the traditional stories of The May Queen, and The Death and Rebirth of The Green Man, set amongst fire-play, acrobatics, drummers, dancers, musicians, witches, actors, a cavalcade of curious and larger-than-life characters, and even a little...kaos!

With the on-going climate crisis, we ask ourselves how we approach our seasonal celebrations when those seasons no longer resemble those of our ancestors? For us, our story is one of empowerment in the face of climate change, as we invite witnesses to join the May Queen in observing and righting the natural cycles of the world.



# HOW TO EXPERIENCE BELTANE

There is almost no wrong way to experience Beltane, the exception being that you mustn't interfere with the trained performer's fire play, or start some fire play yourself! Beltane is an experience and event which speaks differently to each person, and must be celebrated how you want!

You are invited to witness the procession of the May Queen as she moves through and greets an assortment of characters, groups and performers all here to celebrate the turning of the wheel. We recommend starting at the Acropolis and then moving to whatever speaks to you throughout the night.

Perhaps at times, you may feel lost, but that's okay! Let the evening move you about the hill, and make sure to join in with the dancing and merriment!

There will be plenty of overlapping and dazzling acts surrounding you. You may not see everything but don't fret! You can still plan and witness your favourite chapters unfold. Our fire festival map below shares where each significant point will take place.

There is so much to see throughout the night with many acts overlapping and interacting with one another! Whilst you might not have a chance to see everything, you can plan and witness your favourite chapters unfold. Take a look at our fire festival map which shows you where each significant event will be taking place.

We know that audience interaction isn't for everyone. Our friendly performers are excited to meet our audiences and share the magic of Beltane, but also respect and stand by everyone's individual boundaries. Therefore, **if you do not wish to interact with our performers** we will be providing consent wristbands. You can pick up your wristband at the Box Office Tent of the night of the festival.



# OUR BELTANE CHARACTERS



## AQUASPHERE

AquaSphere is an enchanted underwater theatre where a diverse cast of storytellers, dancers, actors and circus-folk (of both human and non-human persuasions) gather to present their Fishy Tales in a fantastic Cabaret Show of Amphibious Extravaganza! There will be thrills, chills and (possibly) spills as they weave their stories through the element of water with themes of transformation and redemption (and dancing jellyfish!!).

## ANGELS OF KAOS

Sparkling purple Angels of Kaos, we will roam and bring fire, bubbles, smoke and any kaos we may find or create. We are good hearted joyful people and entities, yet fully mischievous with some hints of darkness. Playing with fire, we symbolise the collision of opposite worlds rolled together in every AoK and every one of us. We want to take the crowd on this journey, on the transition from Winter to Summer, from Night to Day while exploring the conflicts we all have in us.

## BEASTIE DRUMMERS

The Beastie Drummers are the heartbeat of summer, the irrepressible, chaotic force of life that bursts anew from the Earth after a long winter. Strongly aligned with summer, the Reds and the energy of the Green Man, we awaken on Beltane night exploding with childlike curiosity, joy and the sheer exhilaration of being alive. We delight in exploring the Hill and everything we encounter on it. We soon discover our drums and bouncy summery rhythms, and learn that our purpose is to share our joy by making you--yes you--dance!

## BEATROOTS

The seeds of the Beatroots were planted in winter - but now, as warmer times approach, they are ready to sprout! Get ready to shake what nature gave you to the raucous rhythms of our percussive plants, as we celebrate the summer with drums and dancing.

Fun fact - most of the Beatroots have never drummed before joining the group - so be sure to give them an extra whoop of encouragement if you see them!



# OUR BELTANE CHARACTERS

## BELTANE STEWARDS

On a night when the veil between worlds is at its thinnest, Beltane Stewards are the guardians of that veil who escort the May Queen and her entourage safely throughout their journey.

We ensure everyone has a safe and enjoyable evening by welcoming witnesses into the space, explaining what's happening at the festival, and telling the stories of the characters that form part of the celebration. We may ask audience members to clear the way for groups or to turn camera flashes off to avoid distracting performers, and will be on hand to manage unexpected problems. We would appreciate everybody's help toward this aim.

## THE BLUES

The Blues occupy the position of community elders within the society. On the night of Beltane, they hold the May Queen's gaze, holding space for her and the Green Man as they progress on their journey. Their colours are blue and copper, and they hold willow branches as a means to guide & direct. They are guardians and protectors of the ritual, and the keepers of community memory

## COVEN

Coven, a group inspired by the Scottish Witch Trials, pays homage to the lives lost in past and present 'witch-hunts' by embracing diversity and freedom of expression. Our witches come back to life at the Fire Arch to lift the veil of reality by lighting the gate and ushering our May Queen and Green Man into their magical journeys. Then, they dance all night, celebrating life, body autonomy, and freedom of expression. As beings deeply connected to nature's cycles, they playfully manipulate the elements, captivating onlookers and inviting them to revel in the endless circle of death and rebirth.

## EARTH RHYTHM

We are here to take you on a journey full of sensations and emotions into the sources of the rhythm. Drum is our ritual through which we celebrate the awakening of the Earth after long cold months of winter. The Mesmerizing, Lively, Trance-like music we create with our drums will take you to another world where you can release your primal energy in an expressive dance! As 'Earthers' we create a vibrant energy and a space for people to immerse themselves into the present moment and the sound of Earth Beat. For this ONE night we invite you to become ONE and dance as ONE body.

# OUR BELTANE CHARACTERS

## GREEN MAN SOUNDSPHERE

Green Man Soundsphere is a musical entourage of the Green Man. They have been invited from the wilds to act as his interface between earth and humanity to bring the disjointed cycles of nature into balance. As he moves over the hill, you will hear crickets, birds and frogs, the humming network of the fungus through soil, and the magical connection of the Wood Wide Web. Tuned gongs made of earthly metals play in cycles, along with mysterious humming instruments, a melodious harp, shakers, horns and bells that will enchant you to follow him into the woods...

## MAIPOLE (AIR POINT)

The Maipole is an international collaboration centred around the Maypole dancing and its link to traditional Beltane. It will be the first of our elemental points to meet with the May Queen, and embodies the female archetype and the Air element, formed of wom\*n identifying dancers and musicians.

## NO JOY!

Jubilant wanderers, NO JOY! roams around the hill, engaging with the audience in spontaneous, whimsical encounters. Sometimes this will be sharing a small trinket or playing a silly game, and at other times this will be directing them to other events on the hill that will bring JOY to their hearts! They embody the JOY that Beltane brings as the seasons change and wish to share this transcendental JOY with every witness they come across!

## PHOTOPOINT

Capturing the moments for those who can't be there, and for those who can - PhotoPoint are our team of volunteer photographers. If you spy someone painted but with a camera - it might be them. Not likely to stop and chat on the night - you'll see their work appear in coming days on [Beltane Photos \(FB page\)](#).

## PROCESSIONAL DRUMMERS

The Processional drummers provide the motive force of the procession, they are an engine driving forward movement through the points and perils of our trip across the overworld.

## QUEEN'S HANDS

The Queen's Hands are the May Queen's white and green clad retinue of living-tree companions. We share in her purpose of healing and realigning broken natural cycles and connections. On the night we accompany the May Queen around the hill and, through ritual dance, assist her in building the spiritual energies needed for her to bring in a healthy and harmonious Summer.

# OUR BELTANE CHARACTERS

## THE REDS

Born on Beltane night out of the same energy as the Green Man, brimming with boundless life and vigour, Reds represent the fiery and virile energy of the festival. You can find us making mischief, dancing to the beat of our Beastie siblings' drums, doing acrobatics, or seeking the Queen's Hands' gaze. On Beltane night we wake up to see the world for the very first time, explore our nascent selves and revel in the intoxicating thrill of being truly alive.

## TORCHIES

For the first time, each performance group have found their own torchbearers for this festival. Our torchbearers can still be found lighting the way for the May Queen's procession alongside our Neidfire torchbearers, but if you look carefully you might see some torchies lighting the way for the other fae and mythical creatures that can be spotted across the entire hill.

## TECH

Beltane Tech adorn themselves in red boiler suits on the night of Beltane.

Grounded in the physical world they ensure the fires stay lit across the hill and, along with the Stewards, look after the safety of both, the deities and the spirits, and the witnesses of the Festival.

Some of Tech this year seem to be taking on unusual characteristics. Vague memories of recent festivals are coming back to us in snippets, memories of those who guarded the fire arch in 2022 and welcomed and replenished participants at the bower last year. Frequent statements of "No Goblins in Tech" and reassurances of "HELPING!" make us suspicious that maybe the GoBLiN TeKoVeR may be upon us.

## WISHING TREE

For many Beltaners, burning a wish of something we want to let go of is a time honoured tradition, and once again we invite all to join the community and partake in placing your wish with the Wishing Goddess.

As the May Queen and Green Man light the bonfire, all wishes will be cast and cleansed into the flames.

When you arrive at Calton Hill, you can find the goddess where you can place your wish in the basket, or tie it to the basket. The basket and tree will then be ritually burned at the end of the night. Anything to be burnt will need to be natural fibre.



# FESTIVAL MAP

WATERLOO STEPS  
AND GREENSIDE  
GATES CLOSED



WATERLOO PLACE / REGENT ROAD

**MAIN GATE**  
Ticket Holders  
Groups with Children  
Ticket Buyers  
**EXIT ROUTE**



# F.A.Qs

## **Where should I arrive?**

Please have your QR code ready for scanning, either in print or on mobile. Enter via the Waterloo Steps (Ticket Holders Only) and Carriage Drive (no entry via Regent Gardens).

## **What time does the procession start and end?**

Festival gates open at 7:30pm (last entry 11pm) with the main procession beginning at dusk. We recommend coming along to enjoy the sunset! The procession will end around 12/12:30am.

## **What should I wear?**

Dress for the weather. This is a fire festival, and as such we recommend natural fabrics. Loud drumming will take place throughout the night so ear plugs are advised if you plan to get up close to the action.

## **Can I bring food and beverages to Calton Hill?**

Alcohol is not being sold on site, but you can bring your own drinks (Please, NO GLASS). We recommend bringing cash for our caterers in case, as there is no ATM on site.

## **Are my dogs able to be on the Hill?**

Dogs are not allowed – or would particularly enjoy – this fire-focused event!

## **What should the size of my bag be?**

Please limit bag size to no bigger than an A3 piece of paper.

## **Are children allowed at this festival?**

Under 16s must be accompanied by an adult with a ticket. Parents and guardians please note - this event contains semi-nudity and uninhibited behaviour. Your discretion is advised. We recommend ear plugs for little ones. Missing persons is located at the Welfare area.

## **What if I don't want to interact with characters?**

Beltane Fire Society deeply respects people's boundaries and understands that some attendees might not want to be interacted with. If you do not wish to be interacted with, you can collect a consent wristband upon entry (these will be clearly signposted).

Is this event being filmed? Yes! While not live streamed, we will later share a festival video on our social channels and website, as there will be film crews on-site capturing the action.

*For the safety of our performers and audience, please do not use flash photography. The fire should light up your photos nicely. Re-entry to the festival is not permitted.*

# ABOUT BELTANE FIRE SOCIETY

The Beltane Fire Society (BFS) is a community arts performance charity responsible for putting on the annual Beltane Fire Festival and Samhuinn Fire Festival in Edinburgh, having celebrated these festivals since 1988.

BFS is run by a volunteer Board of Trustees who oversee the year-round operation of the organisation and our dedicated volunteers who keep the fire burning year after year. The Society is funded entirely by donations, charitable grants and ticket sales.

Help us put on more 'fire' festivals by making a BFS PayPal donation.



**Artwork:** Hester Aspland Illustration @hesteraspland  
**Beltane Fire Society** | [www.beltane.org](http://www.beltane.org)  
@BeltaneFireSociety

**Taken some great photos? Join the conversation and tag us using #Beltane2024**

# HAPPY BELTANE!