

Donkey with Horsey and Free Kazoos debut in The Counting House - The Ballroom socially distanced Balloon Animal Show - Cecily Donkey's Belly Laugh Picnic - at Free Fringe Festival with the Musical Balloon Band - Live Music With A Twist!

The show features percussion, singing, movement and unique balloon animal sculptures as the characters in the story plus lots of joining in from the audience.

When: 11:30am - 12:30pm (1 hour) on Thurs 26, Fri 27, Sat 28, Sun 29 August

Where: Venue 170 - Cecily Donkey's Belly Laugh Picnic premier - 38 West Nicolson Street, Edinburgh EH8 9DD

Suitable for the whole family, ideal for under 8's

When Verona Chard lost her mum Betty at the beginning of the pandemic and all performing work came to an abrupt halt in 2020 she feared she might never feel like singing ever again.

A few months later, the pull of Cecil 'the balloon' Donkey and her supportive family audience members were too strong to ignore and she agreed to perform Free 'Donkey Dots for Tots' sessions online with Cecily donkey (Cecil 'the balloon' donkey's daughter), as the 'star', in a bid to drag herself out of her Covid malaise. "I had cared for my mum for over 25 years as a 'sandwich carer' with no help from any official body even when requested, I didn't feel much like caring about anything after she died. It is a tremendous void".

A couple of weeks ago in July with the help of Alex Petty and the amazing team at Laughing Horse Comedy, Verona put her best hoof forwards to bring a new show, 'Cecily Donkey's Belly Laugh Picnic' to The Counting House in The Ballroom as part of the Free Fringe Festival.

"Mum loved the Musical Balloon Band projects, she had a great sense of fun. Betty was registered blind and partially deaf, she so enjoyed our music with the vibration of the drums and the sound of children joining in with singing, percussion and movement. I feel that this is a fitting tribute to her and a focus for me to move forward."

Verona is joined by Roan Kearsley-Lawson percussionist (tuned and untuned) and her musical director Chris Neill has arranged popular children's rhymes and Verona's original songs with a jazz feel, encompassing swing, latin and funk themes with pop, global and classical themes mixed in too. Andrew Fettes directs the interactive music and balloon animal show for a family audience.

The Musical Balloon Band was founded in 2013 by Verona Chard with the help of the Beanbag Music initiative at the Nottingham Theatre Royal and Concert Halls with research and development funded by the Art's Council.

The band have performed across the country and this is their first time in Scotland although Verona has taken part in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and Festival several times before.

TICKETS - Box Office: 0131 226 0000 and <https://www.edfringe.com>

www.freefestival.co.uk

[@freefestivalfringe](https://twitter.com/freefestivalfringe)

[@edfringe](https://twitter.com/edfringe)

<https://twitter.com/muballoon>

<https://www.musicalballoonband.com> (currently developing a new interactive website)

<https://instagram.com/musicalballoonband>

<https://veronachard.co.uk>

"It was enchanting. The children were really enjoying it and it was a great way for them to find out about music - lovely!" Mandy Hare, General Manager - The Woodville, Gravesend, Kent

"feedback about you guys was nothing but positive. Everyone loved it. Until the next time....." Glenda and Lyn - Hayes Carnival / Family Fun Day 2018, 2019 (2022 fingers crossed)

"I think you've got something really special" David Longford - Creative Learning Manager - Theatre Royal & Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham

"Just wanted to say a big thank you. The team said you were great and that the kids and parents were all very happy" - L. Cleaver, Events and Special Projects, The Club at The Ivy - April 2016

"Thank you so much for your hard work. I could tell that you just love what you do which is so refreshing to see! It was a fantastic addition to our event!" C. Roberts - London Business School Congregation Events Team

" The music was excellent and the script moved along at a cracking pace. The audience was fully engaged and it all felt like great fun!" - Neil Bennison, Music Programme Manager, Theatre Royal & Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham

MUSICAL BALLOON BAND
LIVE MUSIC WITH A TWIST!

fringe **LAUGHING HORSE COUNTING HOUSE**

HEE-HAW!
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BALLOON MONKEY

Can Cecily
find her friend
Lesufa the
Monkey?

CREATED BY VERONA CHARD

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11.30AM THE BALLROOM
26-29 AUGUST LAUGHING HORSE COUNTING HOUSE
38 WEST NICOLSON STREET (VENUE 170)

FREE FESTIVAL

Testimonials from families:

When I found out only a few weeks ago that Verona was running the sessions online, I was really excited. I've been joining for the past 3 weeks and my daughter has loved the sessions. She takes out her guitar, piano and tablas and gets me to dance in the background. It's a great interactive session and she loves being able to see herself as well as Verona and the other kids. We would love the online sessions to continue if possible. Thank you!!!

I attended a Donkey Music session with Verona at Fairfield Halls when they first started. It was fun, colourful and energetic and my 2 year old daughter really enjoyed herself. Best of luck, Poonam Chhatralia

Hello Verona,
Just wanted to send an email to say how grateful we are for you and all. It really is such a joy to join your online session, especially during such testing times of the pandemic.

You are so mindful of both the child and the adult, and as a parent this is so important. It can be very lonely with a toddler at home, especially when we cannot venture out to see others, so this has really encouraged us both mentally and developmentally for my 21 month old daughter. Although it has been tough at times to get her to tune into a screen with home distractions around, you are able to capture the individual and include a range of ages, with no pressure or expectation. Having moved away from our friends in London last year, we are amazed that we can still join into a community even though we are quite a few miles away.

It is also very much appreciated that these sessions are free or 'pay what you can' coming from a low income household this enables us to join in.

Verona, you and the team are experts in your field and to know that we get to learn in so many ways (musically, emotionally, socially and much more) is such a privilege.
Best wishes, Maryanne Jones

Hello Verona,
I did play along to Incey Wincey and one or two others. What you don't hear is Ruth trying to get me to go away, telling me it's "private," and me telling her to get up and move around a bit! She does enjoy joining in. It's so different from watching stuff passively- there's some great stuff online, but it's a different experience actually doing something together and getting a response. Thank you very much for the sessions, they're great fun,
Love, Rachel (Ruth has Downes Syndrome and is aged 12) xxx

THE FREE FESTIVAL MAP 2021



The Musical Balloon Band was founded by Verona Chard who is joined by Percussionist and multi-instrumentalist, Ron Keats-Lawson. Caddy Dooley's Dolly Laugh Picnic features jazz arrangements by Chris Nell and original songs and lyrics written by Verona. Directed by Andrew Fettes.



Feedback about you guys was nothing but positive. Everyone loved it. (and the next time...)

"The music was excellent and I really enjoyed going to a dancing space. The audience was fully engaged and it all felt like great fun!"

"You've got something really special!"

"It was so relaxing. The children were really enjoying it and it was a great way for them to bond and about music - lovely!"

"Thank you so much for your hard work, it could be like you just love what you do which is so refreshing to see a fantastic addition to our event!"

"A big thank you. The team did you were great and I felt like I was part of something very happy."

"We took a big balloon band to the festival and it was so much fun and we had a great time."

a) Thanks, Verona. That was wonderful. Such a fun class. We'll be back next week xx
b) Verona, we love your class and will see you next week. Paloma Lacy x

Donkey Dots what a fantastic way to spend a morning ! My 4 year old and 6 month old absolutely love it and the balloons are always a great addition even if they get burst straight away! 😂
Suzanne Huntley

We are beyond excited to join you for the online sessions! Debbie Harris (childminder)

Dear Verona and the talented donkey dots team,
Just want to say thank you very much for making our Mondays bright and cheery.
We have really enjoyed your Monday morning sessions at Fairfield Halls since Arabella was 3 months old. She's 8 months old now, and every time she hears one of your songs, she's very happy!
It has been wonderful to look forward to getting out of the house on Mondays with the baby and coming to a place where the music is therapeutic, both for baby and mummy and daddy! Even mummy and daddy both enjoy your music and knows the words to your songs!
So thank you very much for these entertaining and mentally stimulating sessions. We wished you were here more than once a week, and hope that you will stay on beyond 2020.
Many thanks and best wishes,
Arabella, Mummy and Daddy.

Hi Verona

We love coming to Fairfield Halls on Mondays mostly my wife and also myself when I'm on school holidays always bring Elsie along and you can see she gets so much from it and have recommended it to people as well who have come. It's always a lot of fun.
Look forward to a live stream during these odd times. Hope you are keeping well.
Much balloon love, Anthony Norris-Watson, Tilly and Elsie

Hi Verona

Thank you for this morning's session of Donkey Dots!
I just wanted to write to say how valuable these sessions are for my family. I regularly attend your morning sessions with my 2 year old daughter and have often come to the Saturday morning performances with my 5 year old son too.

I hope both children develop a deep appreciation for music as it stimulates their interest in numbers, patterns, organisation and words. The sophistication of the music you make with your band is a significant level above comparable children's music classes. You encourage the children to join in playing percussive instruments thereby sharing the joy of making music collaboratively. However you strike a perfect balance between encouraging participation and permitting the children to be themselves so that every child feels welcome and comfortable. My daughter Hazel loves to join in the dancing and has become more physically coordinated and expressive since beginning these sessions.

The concerts are also a valuable hub for the community of parents and young children. Hazel became friends with a girl whom she also sees at her nursery. Making this connection and forming a new friendship has greatly helped her to build confidence and settle in at her nursery.

I hope that these sessions will long continue, the availability of cultural and developmental opportunities like this make me glad that I located to Croydon to raise my young family. Warm wishes, Benjamin Senior