

SAMHAIN



FIRE FESTIVAL

EVENT PROGRAM 2026

-Walk Beside the Darkness-



ARTWORK

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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

Beltane Fire Society | www.beltane.org

@BeltaneFire Society

Taken some great photos? Join the conversation and tag us using #Beltane2026

HAPPY SAMHUINN



A BELTANE FIRE SOCIETY PRODUCTION

SAMHUINN -2026- FIRE FESTIVAL

THE SAMHUINN FIRE FESTIVAL MARKS THE CHANGING OF
THE SEASONS FROM SUMMER TO WINTER BY BRINGING
ANCIENT CELTIC HARVEST TRADITIONS AND STORIES ALIVE
WITH A MODERN TWIST

At the heart of this year's festival stands the Cailleach, the ancient Crone and Goddess of Winter. She reminds us that Winter is not simply an ending, but a necessary part of the cycle of life, death and renewal. Beneath her frozen cloak, the earth rests and gathers its strength, ready for life to begin again.

This Samhuinn, the Cailleach invites audiences to reconsider our relationship with darkness and the things we must eventually let go. Drawing on wisdom carried through generations of crones, she asks us to recognise the value of rest and sacrifice, and to find the courage not to fight the darkness, but to walk alongside it with wisdom and compassion.

Beside her, the Summer King and Winter Queen bring this ancient story into the contemporary world. A tired Summer King explores our culture of consumption and the consequences of continually demanding more, while the Winter Queen confronts personal and collective grief, learning that some things cannot be defeated, but can be carried together.

Their stories return us to the wisdom of the Cailleach: endings are part of living, rest is necessary, and Winter is not the end of life, but one of the ways life survives.

This Samhuinn, audiences are invited to gather around the fire, step beneath the Cailleach's cloak and join the turning of the Wheel, welcoming Winter with one of Edinburgh's most spectacular nights of fire, mythology and performance.

HOW TO EXPERIENCE SAMHUINN

There is no wrong way to experience Samhuinn. Follow the performers, follow the fire, follow your heart. We only ask that you do not interfere with the trained performer's fireplay, and never start your own.

Throughout your journey, you will meet a cavalcade of strange and wonderful beings, who will each play a part in the turning of the wheel. Once Neid Fire is lit at 7:30 you can follow Summer King, Winter Queen, the Cailleach or any of the groups as they make their way eventually to the stage.

You might feel a little lost, and that's okay! Samhuinn will move you, draw you in and take you to where you need to go. You can watch and witness the festival around you, or join the revelry when the moment feels right.

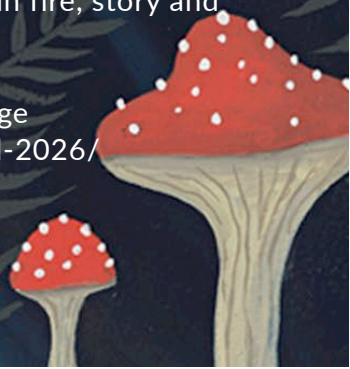
No one's Samhuinn will be the same, and you won't be able to see everything. Every journey is unique, but if you'd like to plan your evening, take a look at the festival map and approximate timings to see where/when the key moments will be happening.

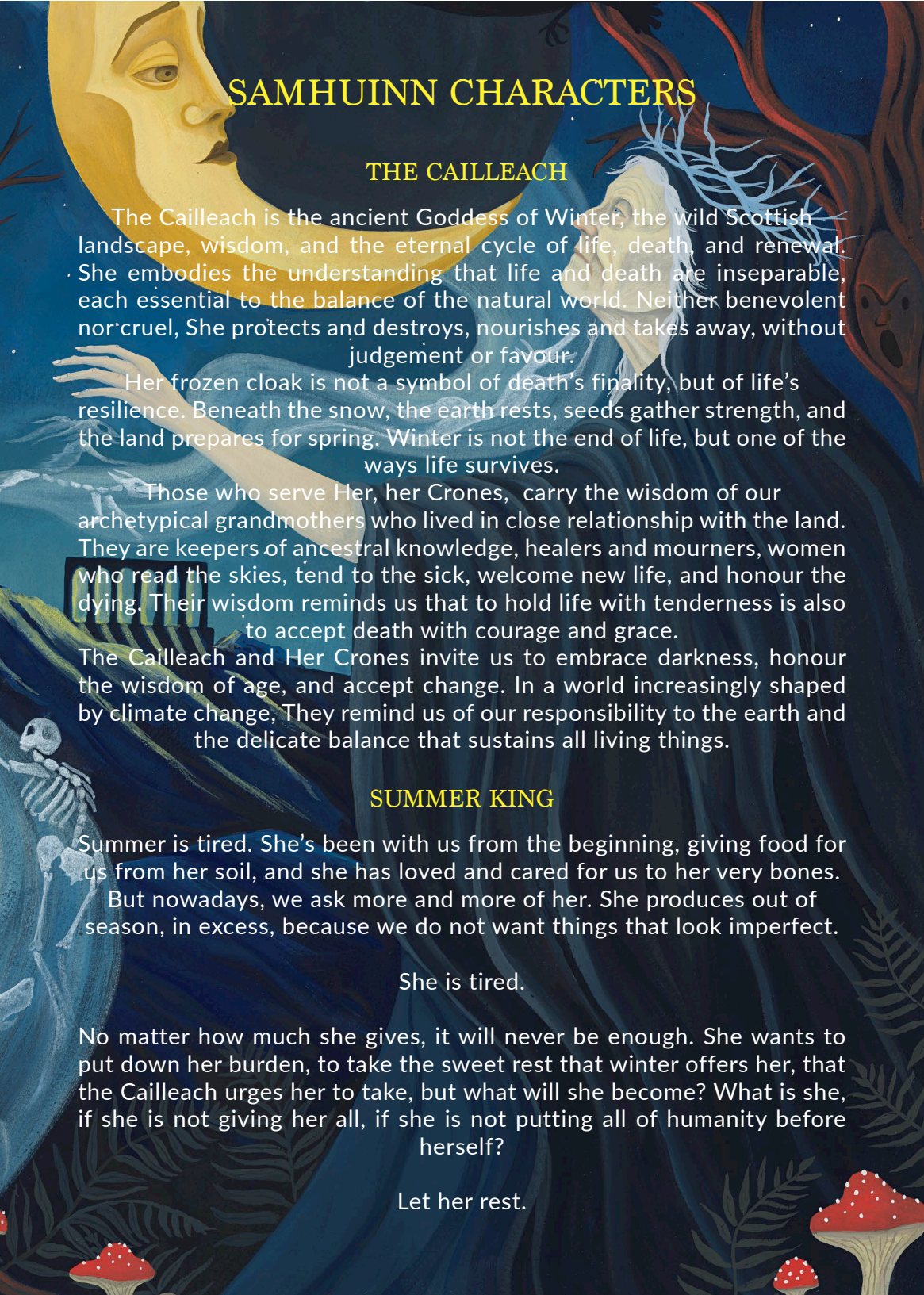
The Bonfire will be a held space for you to remember a loved one or let go of an old way of life.. Let this space be the first step towards a new path.

AUDIENCE INTERACTION ISN'T FOR EVERYONE, AND OUR PERFORMERS ARE COMMITTED TO RESPECTING EVERYONE'S BOUNDARIES. IF YOU DON'T WANT TO BE INTERACTED WITH, SIMPLY RAISE YOUR ARM AND POINT TO YOUR WRIST, AND OUR PERFORMERS WILL LEAVE YOU ALONE.

Walk beside the darkness, this Samhuinn. As the exhausted summer sets to rest to bring into the winter, find strength in fire, story and community.

Please see our event information page
<https://beltane.org/samhuinn-fire-festival-2026/>





SAMHUINN CHARACTERS

THE CAILLEACH

The Cailleach is the ancient Goddess of Winter, the wild Scottish landscape, wisdom, and the eternal cycle of life, death, and renewal. She embodies the understanding that life and death are inseparable, each essential to the balance of the natural world. Neither benevolent nor cruel, She protects and destroys, nourishes and takes away, without judgement or favour.

Her frozen cloak is not a symbol of death's finality, but of life's resilience. Beneath the snow, the earth rests, seeds gather strength, and the land prepares for spring. Winter is not the end of life, but one of the ways life survives.

Those who serve Her, her Crones, carry the wisdom of our archetypal grandmothers who lived in close relationship with the land. They are keepers of ancestral knowledge, healers and mourners, women who read the skies, tend to the sick, welcome new life, and honour the dying. Their wisdom reminds us that to hold life with tenderness is also to accept death with courage and grace.

The Cailleach and Her Crones invite us to embrace darkness, honour the wisdom of age, and accept change. In a world increasingly shaped by climate change, They remind us of our responsibility to the earth and the delicate balance that sustains all living things.

SUMMER KING

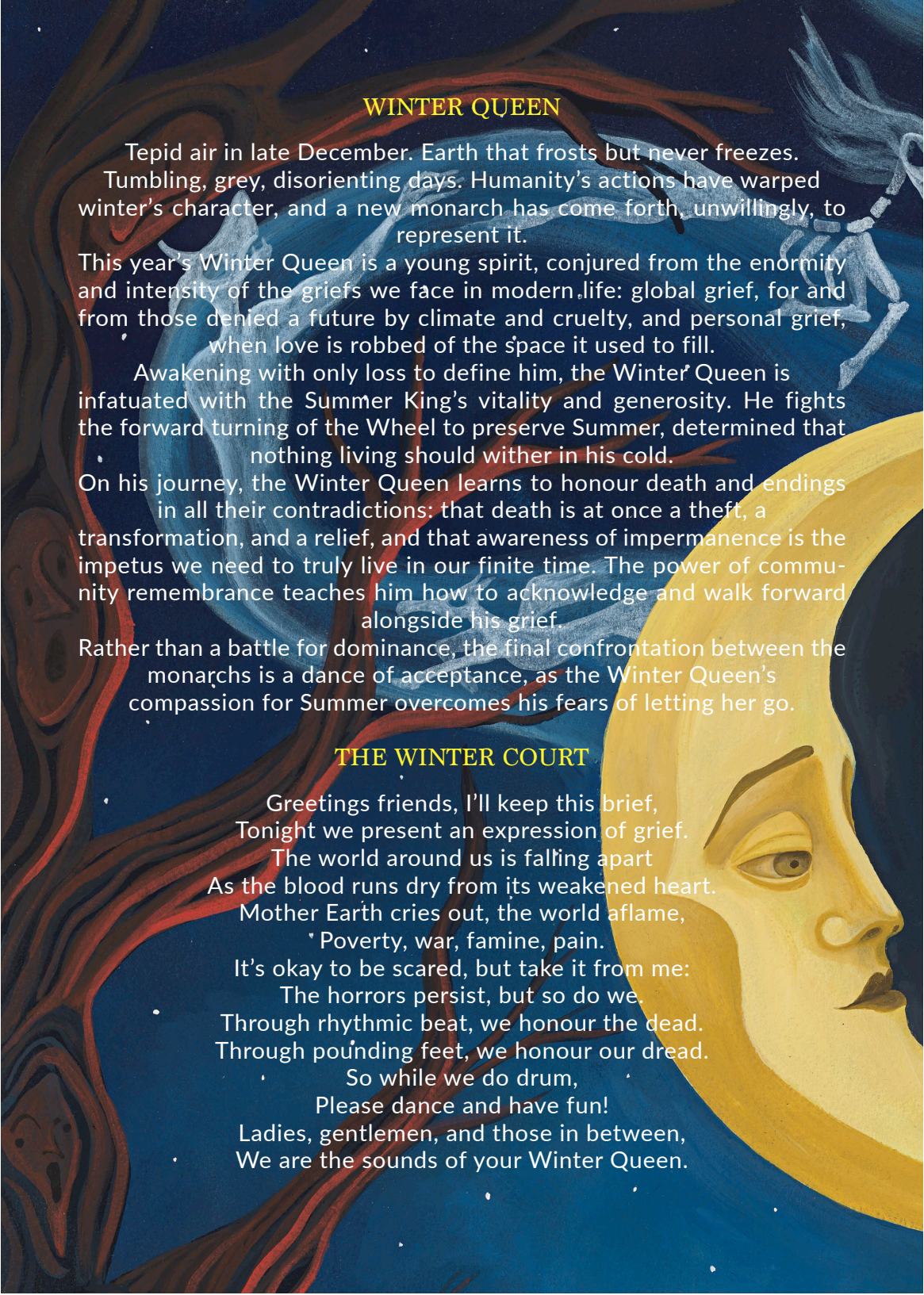
Summer is tired. She's been with us from the beginning, giving food for us from her soil, and she has loved and cared for us to her very bones.

But nowadays, we ask more and more of her. She produces out of season, in excess, because we do not want things that look imperfect.

She is tired.

No matter how much she gives, it will never be enough. She wants to put down her burden, to take the sweet rest that winter offers her, that the Cailleach urges her to take, but what will she become? What is she, if she is not giving her all, if she is not putting all of humanity before herself?

Let her rest.



WINTER QUEEN

Tepid air in late December. Earth that frosts but never freezes.
Tumbling, grey, disorienting days. Humanity's actions have warped
winter's character, and a new monarch has come forth, unwillingly, to
represent it.

This year's Winter Queen is a young spirit, conjured from the enormity
and intensity of the griefs we face in modern life: global grief, for and
from those denied a future by climate and cruelty, and personal grief,
when love is robbed of the space it used to fill.

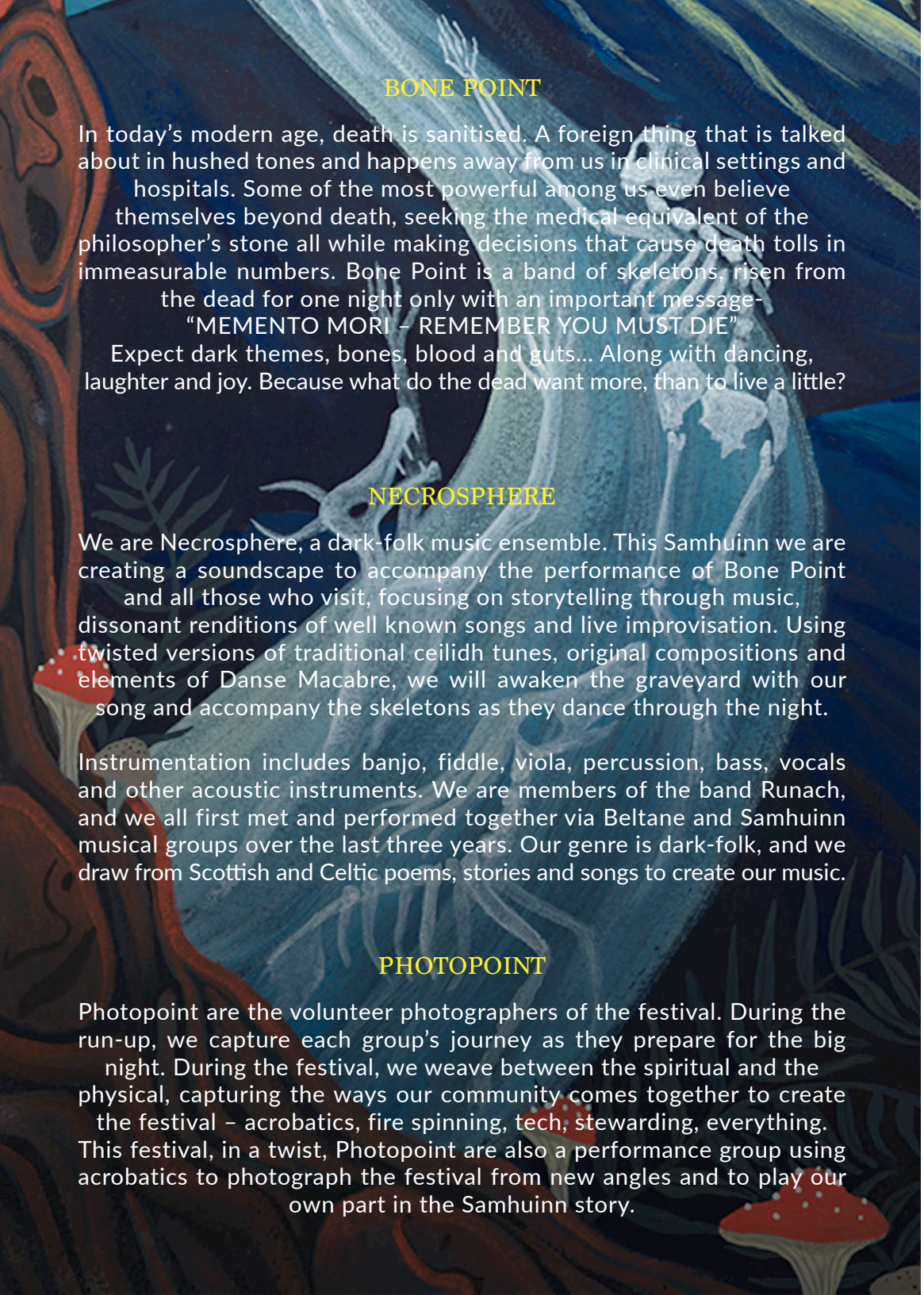
Awakening with only loss to define him, the Winter Queen is
infatuated with the Summer King's vitality and generosity. He fights
the forward turning of the Wheel to preserve Summer, determined that
nothing living should wither in his cold.

On his journey, the Winter Queen learns to honour death and endings
in all their contradictions: that death is at once a theft, a
transformation, and a relief, and that awareness of impermanence is the
impetus we need to truly live in our finite time. The power of commu-
nity remembrance teaches him how to acknowledge and walk forward
alongside his grief.

Rather than a battle for dominance, the final confrontation between the
monarchs is a dance of acceptance, as the Winter Queen's
compassion for Summer overcomes his fears of letting her go.

THE WINTER COURT

Greetings friends, I'll keep this brief,
Tonight we present an expression of grief.
The world around us is falling apart
As the blood runs dry from its weakened heart.
Mother Earth cries out, the world aflame,
Poverty, war, famine, pain.
It's okay to be scared, but take it from me:
The horrors persist, but so do we.
Through rhythmic beat, we honour the dead.
Through pounding feet, we honour our dread.
So while we do drum,
Please dance and have fun!
Ladies, gentlemen, and those in between,
We are the sounds of your Winter Queen.



BONE POINT

In today's modern age, death is sanitised. A foreign thing that is talked about in hushed tones and happens away from us in clinical settings and hospitals. Some of the most powerful among us even believe themselves beyond death, seeking the medical equivalent of the philosopher's stone all while making decisions that cause death tolls in immeasurable numbers. Bone Point is a band of skeletons, risen from the dead for one night only with an important message-
"MEMENTO MORI – REMEMBER YOU MUST DIE"

Expect dark themes, bones, blood and guts... Along with dancing, laughter and joy. Because what do the dead want more, than to live a little?

NECROSHERE

We are Necrosphere, a dark-folk music ensemble. This Samhuinn we are creating a soundscape to accompany the performance of Bone Point and all those who visit, focusing on storytelling through music, dissonant renditions of well known songs and live improvisation. Using twisted versions of traditional ceilidh tunes, original compositions and elements of Danse Macabre, we will awaken the graveyard with our song and accompany the skeletons as they dance through the night.

Instrumentation includes banjo, fiddle, viola, percussion, bass, vocals and other acoustic instruments. We are members of the band Runach, and we all first met and performed together via Beltane and Samhuinn musical groups over the last three years. Our genre is dark-folk, and we draw from Scottish and Celtic poems, stories and songs to create our music.

PHOTOPOINT

Photopoint are the volunteer photographers of the festival. During the run-up, we capture each group's journey as they prepare for the big night. During the festival, we weave between the spiritual and the physical, capturing the ways our community comes together to create the festival – acrobatics, fire spinning, tech, stewarding, everything. This festival, in a twist, Photopoint are also a performance group using acrobatics to photograph the festival from new angles and to play our own part in the Samhuinn story.



NIGHT FOXES (STEWARDS)

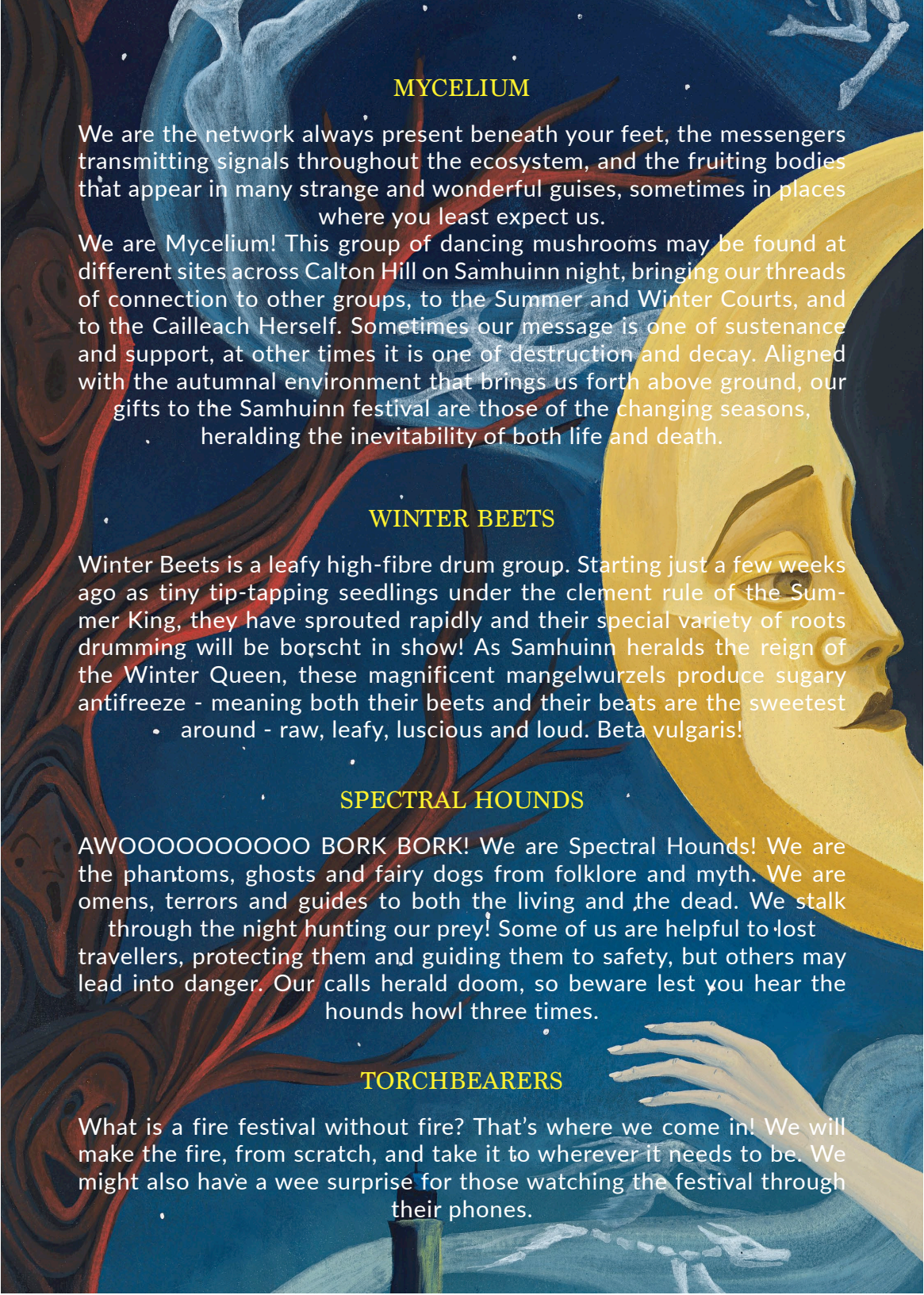
Nightfox Stewards are the guardians of the hill on Samhuinn night. Michelle and Jenny look after the group and their top priorities are to help keep everyone safe and to have a little fun with the fox theme using the orange high vis vests as a costume basis, then adding a few foxy twists. That also includes interacting directly with the audience with storytelling, question answering and direction giving in a positive and friendly way. Being a Steward is important. Since September, we've been working together as a group to discuss potential risks and how to mitigate them, together with important matters like consent, accessibility and health and safety. And on this one night, this Samhuinn night, we'll have the chance to put all our training into practice. After the festival, we'll be available to answer any questions about how people can get involved with the next festival, scheduled for April 30th, 2027. We're friendly and welcoming and always ready to help, just contact us as nightfox@beltane.org

REDS

Reds are the devils on your shoulders, whispering the best worst ideas straight in your ear. We are the last embers of summer who don't want to stop. We are the bad influence daring you to let it all out one last time. Through acrobatics and character we embody the burning flame of summer: joy, energy, sexiness and laughter. On Samhuinn we will burn to the extreme, into mania, wildness and mischief. We are the reds.

PÚCAÍ

Púcaí are a band of drumming, shape-shifting, trickster fae that delight in toeing the line between benevolence and malevolence; a modern twist on the original Irish Myth. Join us as we relish in our last night of mischief and mayhem before we are expected to behave civilly on Púca's day (November 1st). We will be easy to spot in our neon, punk inspired, animal-esque guises. Follow the beat of our drums if you dare! Any presence of clown horns, associated paraphernalia, or related items can neither be confirmed nor denied. Púcaí will not be held responsible for any unhinging of psyches or jaws during the show. Please keep your hands inside the cart.



MYCELIUM

We are the network always present beneath your feet, the messengers transmitting signals throughout the ecosystem, and the fruiting bodies that appear in many strange and wonderful guises, sometimes in places where you least expect us.

We are Mycelium! This group of dancing mushrooms may be found at different sites across Calton Hill on Samhuinn night, bringing our threads of connection to other groups, to the Summer and Winter Courts, and to the Cailleach Herself. Sometimes our message is one of sustenance and support, at other times it is one of destruction and decay. Aligned with the autumnal environment that brings us forth above ground, our gifts to the Samhuinn festival are those of the changing seasons, heralding the inevitability of both life and death.

WINTER BEETS

Winter Beets is a leafy high-fibre drum group. Starting just a few weeks ago as tiny tip-tapping seedlings under the clement rule of the Summer King, they have sprouted rapidly and their special variety of roots drumming will be borscht in show! As Samhuinn heralds the reign of the Winter Queen, these magnificent mangelwurzels produce sugary antifreeze - meaning both their beets and their beats are the sweetest

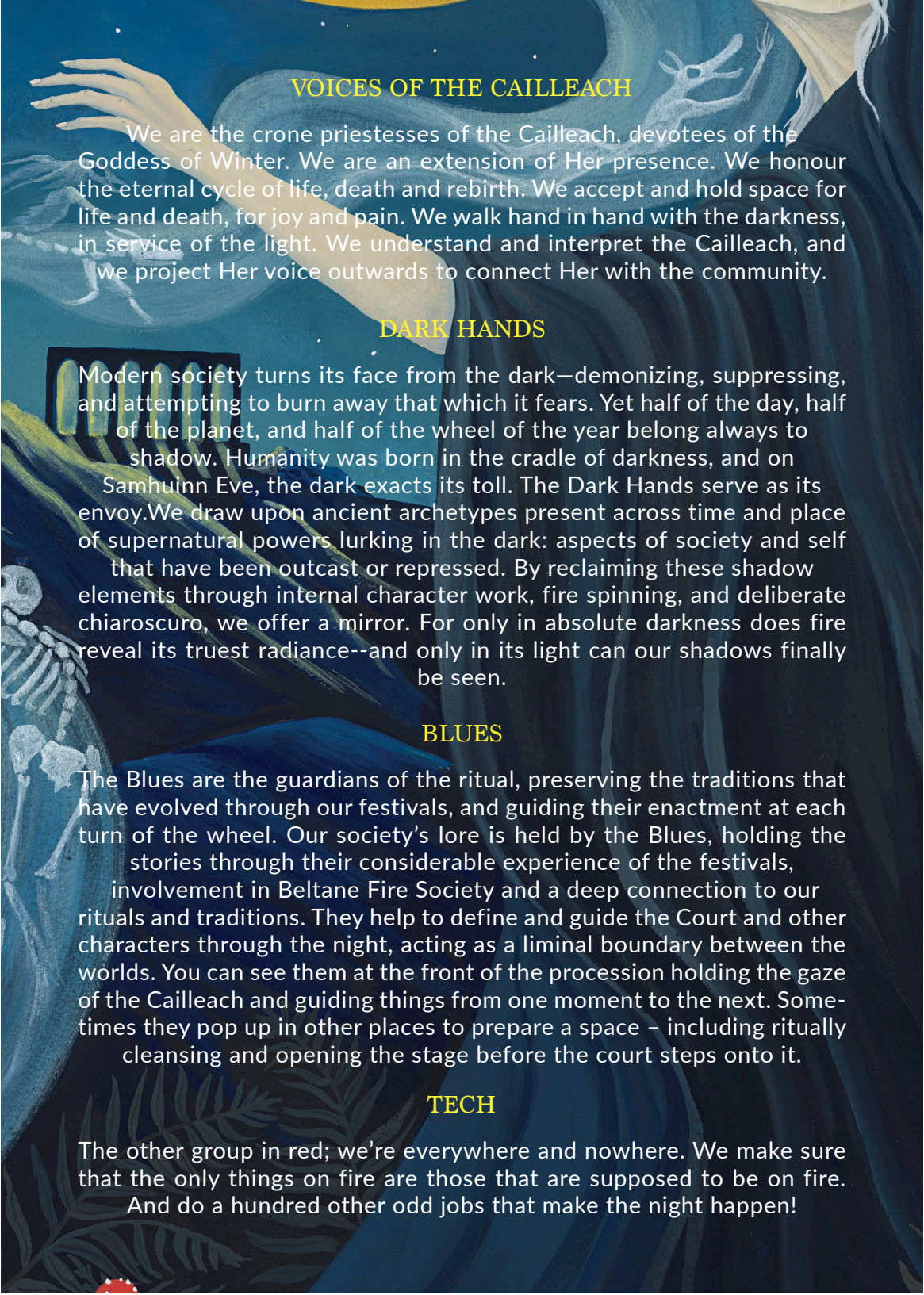
- around - raw, leafy, luscious and loud. Beta vulgaris!

SPECTRAL HOUNDS

AWOOOOOOOOOOO BORK BORK! We are Spectral Hounds! We are the phantoms, ghosts and fairy dogs from folklore and myth. We are omens, terrors and guides to both the living and the dead. We stalk through the night hunting our prey! Some of us are helpful to lost travellers, protecting them and guiding them to safety, but others may lead into danger. Our calls herald doom, so beware lest you hear the hounds howl three times.

TORCHBEARERS

What is a fire festival without fire? That's where we come in! We will make the fire, from scratch, and take it to wherever it needs to be. We might also have a wee surprise for those watching the festival through their phones.



VOICES OF THE CAILLEACH

We are the crone priestesses of the Cailleach, devotees of the Goddess of Winter. We are an extension of Her presence. We honour the eternal cycle of life, death and rebirth. We accept and hold space for life and death, for joy and pain. We walk hand in hand with the darkness, in service of the light. We understand and interpret the Cailleach, and we project Her voice outwards to connect Her with the community.

DARK HANDS

Modern society turns its face from the dark—demonizing, suppressing, and attempting to burn away that which it fears. Yet half of the day, half of the planet, and half of the wheel of the year belong always to shadow. Humanity was born in the cradle of darkness, and on Samhuinn Eve, the dark exacts its toll. The Dark Hands serve as its envoy. We draw upon ancient archetypes present across time and place of supernatural powers lurking in the dark: aspects of society and self that have been outcast or repressed. By reclaiming these shadow elements through internal character work, fire spinning, and deliberate chiaroscuro, we offer a mirror. For only in absolute darkness does fire reveal its truest radiance--and only in its light can our shadows finally be seen.

BLUES

The Blues are the guardians of the ritual, preserving the traditions that have evolved through our festivals, and guiding their enactment at each turn of the wheel. Our society's lore is held by the Blues, holding the stories through their considerable experience of the festivals, involvement in Beltane Fire Society and a deep connection to our rituals and traditions. They help to define and guide the Court and other characters through the night, acting as a liminal boundary between the worlds. You can see them at the front of the procession holding the gaze of the Cailleach and guiding things from one moment to the next. Sometimes they pop up in other places to prepare a space – including ritually cleansing and opening the stage before the court steps onto it.

TECH

The other group in red; we're everywhere and nowhere. We make sure that the only things on fire are those that are supposed to be on fire. And do a hundred other odd jobs that make the night happen!

SAMHUM

-2026-

- FIRST AID & LOST CHILDREN
- FOOD & DRINK
- TOILETS
- ACCESSIBLE PORTALOO

PERFORMANCE AREAS

ENTRANCE VIA
CALTON HILL DRIVE

BONFIRE

STAGE

DIP

BONE POINT
& NECROSHERE

MUSHROOM
POINT

THE DELL
DARK HANDS
(FIRE POINT)

PURPLE AREA IS CLOSED

REGENT ROAD

NEED HELP WITH TICKETS?
BOX OFFICE CAN HELP

FOR UNDER 16 WRISTBANDS LOOK FOR  SYMBOL

TIMINGS

BONFIRE

Neid Fire 7:30pm

Remoria - a Public Ritual Space from shortly after Neid fire until 8:45pm

Arrival Of Cailleach (just before 9pm)

STAGE

Winter Queen departs 7:45pm

REDS AND PHOTOPOINT 8:45pm

Groups perform on the stage

Main Court Ritual Sequence from 9:25pm- 10:30pm

Cailleach Unveiling and Dance

Crowning of Winter

Party Drums!

BONE POINT AND NECROSHERE

First Meeting of Summer and Winter 8pm

Reds Charge with fire 8:15pm

Danse Macabre 8:30pm

Space closes as all head to the stage (8:40pm)

THE DIP

Winter Beets and Mycellium Play

The Cailleach arrives 8:10pm

Summer King Arrives 8:25pm

Winter Queen Arrives For Second Court Interaction
8.35pm

THE DELL

Summer King Departs 7:45pm

Reds, Pucai & the Dark Hands play

Reds Steal Fire and head to steal the Summer King (at bone point)

Pucai and Fire Play on

Winter Queen Arrives

space closes by 8:20pm

MUSHROOM POINT

Mycellium Dance with Winter 8:25pm