



PRESS RELEASE

October 2008

Henley Festival 2008 breaks box office records!

With the summer festival season beginning to wind up, the autumn is a time of evaluation for many Festival Directors before programming starts in earnest for next year. We talked recently to Stewart Collins, Artistic Director of Henley Festival, about the success of this year's event. He said:

"What I can tell you is that the Henley Festival was a pretty amazing success story this year. The box office broke all records and the public response was exceptional – and of course if people have a great time even in the damp, we must be getting a least part of it right! An audience survey confirmed this time and again and we're absolutely delighted when we get responses like these three here:

" 'The festival is a wonderful one-off evening in our calendar. Despite the weather this year we had a memorable evening.'

" 'I thought it was amazing. I was going into hospital the next day and it was all so uplifting.'

" 'The Henley Festival is an annual pilgrimage for me and my wife (we've only missed two!). Now my son and his wife have taken up the baton'

Asking Stewart what makes people view it with such loyalty, he said, "I would say that, although the Henley Festival has been part of the summer scene now for 26 years, it has really found its feet and its place in the last few years. The format is utterly unique, the location extraordinarily beautiful (as all know who live here) AND the programme offers

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something you simply don't get anywhere else; classical music, world music, contemporary music, jazz, theatre, comedy, outdoor spectacle, art, sculpture and, of course, a whole range of wining and dining opportunities.

"Above all though, the festival continues to generate an extraordinarily feel-good atmosphere. The international street theatre is a hugely important element and the unusual and unpredictable is always around the next corner. I'm not sure that the Festival qualifies as the UK's 'strangest festival' as the BBC national website homepage page trumpeted before showing a full 2½ minute guide to the event, but several million surfers got a very clear idea this summer that Henley has a great deal that stands out from every other summer event.

"People sometimes ask me, 'How do you keep going when the stakes are so high?' I can only reply, quite simply because of that most basic of human instincts, the need always to improve – and also because of the wonderful phenomenon that is the world of the arts. There are always people generating fantastic new shows and creating new ideas, and there is always something that hasn't been done before. That's certainly the inspiration for anyone working and curating the arts... There will never be a shortage of amazing things to keep the Henley Festival amazing. I just have to make sure I find them... and sometimes even create them...

"So a huge thank-you to everyone who visited us this year. We hope to see you – and many others who couldn't make it this year – for what I'm planning to be a superlative event next year."

ENDS

For more press information, please contact Miranda Johnson on 01962 890208 or Rachel Shimell on 02380 732981 or email mirandajohnson@btinternet.com / rachel.shimell@ntlworld.com

Henley Festival Trust

As in previous years, all net proceeds from Henley Festival 2009 will go direct to the Henley Festival Trust to finance charitable activity. Examples of this valuable, and much appreciated, work include providing: music and arts activity in local schools, instruments for promising young musicians and music therapy for brain-injured attendees at Headway day centre in Henley-on-Thames.

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