

Sunday 31 August 2008/For immediate use



A record-breaking year: highest ever ticket sales as curtain falls on Edinburgh International Festival 2008

- **Highest ever** ticket sales, with over £2.6m taken.
- **World events** give “Artists without Borders” theme powerful resonance.
- **Usher Hall** concerts given a wonderful critical and public reception; the Festival looks forward to its first season in the renovated hall in 2009.
- **Bank of Scotland Fireworks Concert** set to light up the sky.
- Festival continues its successful **Sharing the Festival** next week in Stirling and Cumbernauld.
- Plans already underway to build on this year's **successful initiatives**.

RECORD-BREAKING YEAR: Highest ever ticket sales

More money than ever before was taken at the Edinburgh International Festival box office in 2008. The final figure at the box office is estimated to be **£2.63m**. The increase, estimated at a **7% rise on last year**, is due in part to the widespread popularity of the dance programme, including *Matthew Bourne's Dorian Gray* which became the biggest-selling dance event in the Festival's history. This sell-out event was seen by 13,123 people. Festival audiences for talks and conversations also grew this year, signifying an increasing engagement with artists and the ideas behind the Festival programme.

International bookers for Festival 08 were up 3% on 2007, coming from all corners of the world: Singapore, Australia, China, France, Germany, Spain, Argentina, Hungary, Iran, Brazil, America, Pakistan, India, Austria, Japan, Belgium, Canada and Iceland. There was a significant increase of bookers from the Eastern fringes of Europe, tying in with this year's theme.

Edinburgh residents turned out in force, with city audiences increasing 2% on last year, and a small increase in students and people under 26, up 1% on 2007, all contributed to a very good year for the Edinburgh International Festival.

Sell-Outs

1 in 3 events were total sell-outs. Events that sold all available tickets were: *The Whirling Dervishes of Turkey, The Opening Concert, Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, Israel in Egypt, Alfred Brendel, London Symphony Orchestra, Sir Charles Mackerras and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Matthew Bourne's Dorian Gray, A Child of Our Time, Roby Lakatos, Fazil Say, Mischa and Lily Maisky, The Jerusalem Quartet, The Beaux Arts Trio, Gabriela Montero, Psalms and Canticles from the Eastern Churches, Chant Wars, Sacred and Secular Songs from Corsica, Secular and Spiritual Music from Georgia* and the *Bank of Scotland Fireworks Concert*.

World events give Festival 08 theme powerful resonance

World events lent powerful resonance to the programme's central theme: **Artists without Borders**. Many of the companies and artists selected for Festival 08 - from areas with very real challenges on their own borders - were chosen because of their immense contributions to the communities in which they work and live.

This year, however, some artists not only thrilled audiences with their Festival performances, but brought with them an extra significance to their appearances as events unravelled at home. Prima ballerina Nina Ananiashvili and her company the **State Ballet of Georgia** "danced for their country" as troubles continued to escalate in South Ossetia. A week later, **Valery Gergiev** took a planned break from his residency at the Edinburgh International Festival to travel to South Ossetia to conduct a concert in the shelled capital, Tskhinvali.

Mahmoud Darwish, the multi-award winning and highly respected Arab poet, died on 9 August 2008. An adaptation of his work *Jidariyya* had its UK premiere from the Palestinian National Theatre at the Festival five days later, the day after his funeral. The company dedicated its performance to its "beloved poet". Darwish's poem was written following his previous experience of recovering from heart surgery, lending the performances an extra level of poetry and poignancy in light of the events which preceded its opening.

Webcasts and International Profile Raising: Building on Success for 2009

New initiatives which were successfully piloted in 2008 will be developed in 2009. These include promoting the Festival abroad through **international press launches** (in 2008, press events were held in **Sarajevo, Warsaw, Singapore** and **St Petersburg**) and this year's web simulcasting pilot which saw two Festival events broadcast live on-line to an audience recruited to test the experience.

Although mid-way through a **multi-million pound redevelopment**, the Usher Hall hosted 22 concerts in 2008. Many of the musical highlights received ecstatic audience receptions, not

least Valery Gergiev's residency with the London Symphony Orchestra, Alfred Brendel's last-ever Edinburgh concert and Sir John Eliot Gardiner conducting the Monteverdi Choir. **The Usher Hall redevelopment is scheduled to be complete in Spring 2009**, and will be a centrepiece for next year's Festival.

Sharing the Festival

Sharing the Festival, now in its second year, aims to take the Edinburgh International Festival to audiences who otherwise might not experience the Festival. As the Festival drew to a close in Edinburgh, *Class Enemy* opened to a strong audience and good reception in **Rutherglen**. Next week the play continues its tour to **Stirling** and **Cumbernauld**. Violence in schools, gun crime and disaffected youth are just some of the hard-hitting themes of the powerful and gritty drama, presented by Sarajevo-based East West Theatre Company.

Supporters

The Festival's award winning sponsorship and development department had another successful year. The continued loyalty of and creative partnerships with trusts and foundations, including Dunard Fund, and individual givers along with a fantastic line up of corporate supporters including Bank of Scotland, Standard Life, Scottish and Newcastle/Heineken, and Baillie Gifford's Centenary Celebration helped make Festival 08 possible.

The **Scottish Government's Edinburgh Festivals Expo Fund** in its inaugural year gave the Edinburgh International Festival £277,916 towards the Scottish Opera/Edinburgh International Festival co-production of *The Two Widows*.

Festival Heroes

The Festival appointed Sir Charles Mackerras its new Honorary President after his acclaimed concert with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Alfred Brendel on Wednesday 20 August. Sir Charles received a standing ovation from a packed Usher Hall. He is only the second Honorary President to be appointed in the Festival's history, the first being Yehudi Menuhin.

The sprightly queen of The Queen's Hall front of house staff, Vera Alexander became a hero in the final week of Festival 08, stopping an attempted robber in his tracks minutes before Irvine Arditti, Rüdiger Lotter and Lyriarte took to the stage for the morning concert. She may be in her 80s but Vera is certainly no push over, remembering the man from an attempt a year earlier.

Is it over yet?

The Festival hasn't finished till the last rocket has whizzed, and the ever popular Bank of Scotland Fireworks Concert, performed live by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra at 9.00pm on Sunday 31 August, saw fans queuing from 4.00am this year for the final allocation of tickets.

If you're missing it already

There is one final opportunity to enjoy Festival 08. BBC Radio 3 continues to broadcast concerts from the Festival until Monday 29 September when the closing concert in the Usher Hall, Michael Tippett's wonderful *A Child of Our Time* can be heard at 7.00pm on Performance on 3.

Next year

And finally, the first company to be announced as part of the Edinburgh International Festival 2009 were **Belt Up (nothing to see/hear)**, winners of the Edinburgh International Festival Award 2008. The Award is made for innovation, creativity and potential to a company on the Fringe, and having won it this year Belt Up Theatre will appear in the Behind the Scenes programme of Festival 09.

Some words from the Festival Director

Jonathan Mills, Festival Director, said: "So many people have drawn together to put on a fantastic Festival. I would like to thank our funders, our sponsors and supporters, the audiences, the staff and of course the artists for giving us a tremendous three weeks of performances. I hope people have enjoyed the journey we have been on together and I extend an invitation to join us again in 2009 for a very different Festival."

- ENDS -

Editors' Notes

Festival 2009 will be announced in March next year. Featuring world class new and classic drama, opera, music, and dance, the **2009 Edinburgh International Festival** runs from **Friday 14 August to Sunday 6 September** across the city in theatres, concert halls and opera houses attracting audiences from around the world to Scotland's picturesque capital. Full details will be available at www.eif.co.uk from March 2009.

For further media information please contact the Edinburgh International Festival press office + 44 (0)131 473 2020 or 07810 383 091, press@eif.co.uk