



**Belfast Children's Festival**  
**22 May 2009 – 31 May 2009**  
**Festival Report**

**Introduction**

Young at Art's international children's festival has continued to grow and build upon previous years, being one of the largest in the UK. Young at Art is one of the flagship youth arts organisation in Northern Ireland, possessing unique elements such as a year-round programme of activity, a history of commissioning and supporting new artists, and a multi-artform programme. With a unique theme each year, the 2009 festival explored the subject of Black and White, combining accessible quality local and international artists and events for families, schools and groups.

**Belfast Children's Festival**

Over its ten days the festival

- mounted over 190 events
- hosted exhibitions in 3 venues
- was attended by over 27, 164 children and adults
- involved over 120 artists
- was supported by 47 volunteers, 15 staff and the staff and volunteers of participating venues

Many events sold out with an average capacity of 78.6%. Total attendance of the festival combined with a substantial weekend event was 27, 164 a substantial increase in audience figures This included participation by over 30 schools and groups, many from areas of high deprivation.

The festival blended performance and participatory activities with a healthy mixture of free drop-in and ticketed events, combining local and international artists, multiple artforms and cross-artform events. Participating artists came from Ireland, Northern Ireland, Portugal, Italy, Switzerland and Denmark. Festival in a Weekend at Belfast Waterfront returned, drawing families into Belfast for a range of family-friendly activities and performances under one roof during the opening weekend of the festival. Festival venues included the SQ Space Gallery, Clifton House, St Kevin's Hall, Old Museum Arts Centre, Belfast Waterfront, Youth Action, No Alibis Bookstore, Brain Friel theatre and Naughton Gallery.

A delegate programme welcomed visitors from Ireland and Northern Ireland. The festival was awarded ASSITEJ International Festival status in 2008 and retained this status in 2009, the only festival on the island to receive it. Young at Art continued to promote and discuss issues around children and young people's cultural entitlement and creative needs through its newly named annual 'Making Space' programme. Two seminars took place during the festival commencing a partnership with the University of Ulster and included performances and discussions from the visiting international artists.

**Programme highlights**

Themed around black and white, this year's Belfast Children's Festival was packed with an exciting international programme of music, theatre and art for all the family.

Highlights included;

- Baby Rave Baby Ska – a real child-sized rave with DJ and dancers.
- Kaleidoscope – a spectacular interactive labyrinth theatre.
- Festival in a Weekend – one of the festival's biggest events with 2 days of creative mayhem at the Belfast Waterfront.
- Story of a Family – a powerful play focusing on family life based on research in Italian schools.
- The Family Hoffmanns Mystery Palace – a circus tent in the picturesque setting of Clifton House.
- More of it than we think 3 – the annual showcase of children's and young people's artwork exhibited throughout festival venues

**Outreach**

## **Community Ticket Scheme**

The Community Ticket Scheme returned for a fourth year in 2009, working with Hanna Centre Sure Start, Martin Centre Sure Start, Alessie Centre and Shaftesbury Community & Recreation Centre.

The Community Ticket scheme was devised to provide access to arts and cultural events for children in communities who cannot or do not attend arts events on a regular basis outside of their communities. In 2006 Community box offices were set up in targeted community venues in the run up to the festival. With regular review and evaluation over a number of years, a series of information sessions now take place in each community (mostly in playgroups) followed by a one-off box office in the community. The Community Ticket Scheme allowed Young at Art to offer half price tickets to families in areas of socio-economic deprivation.

## **Friendship Fund**

The Friendship Fund returned for a third year, offering discounted tickets and transport assistance to schools and groups in disadvantaged areas. Offered as part of its general easy to use booking promotion to schools and groups, it provides discounts of up to 70% on (already subsidised) tickets for those coming from the top 25% of areas showing the highest levels of multiple deprivation. Other forms of hardship are also considered.

## **Festival Marketing**

The festival marketing campaign rolled out over a four-month period through advertising and direct mail. It was supported by a strong PR campaign generating significant local coverage and significantly supported by in-kind sponsorship from Clearchannel and Paperjam.

The promotional print for the festival, in addition to brochures, included leaflets to highlight specific events and draw attention to the festival and its on-line presence. A significant increase in web sales was generated while the additional bulk of print enabled far wider distribution.

## **Print**

- 20,000 x Belfast Children's Festival brochures
- 10,000 x A5 Highlights leaflet
- 10,000 x A5 Champion of the Child leaflets
- 5,000 x A5 OMAC events leaflet
- 5,000 x A5 Festival in a weekend leaflets
- 4,000 x A5 More of it than we think 3 leaflets
- 200 x A3 full colour posters
- 4,500 x advance booking forms and letters (schools & groups)
- 800 x balloons
- 3 x pop-up stands
- 1 x banner
- 100 x staff/volunteer t-shirts
- 1 x Box Office A-Board
- 300 x A5 Launch invite

## **Additional Print**

- 5,000 x A5 Captain Najork leaflets
- 5,000 x A5 Cahoots leaflets
- 150 x A3 Captain Najork posters
- 50 x A3 Cahoots posters
- 6 x pages in OMAC seasonal brochure
- 4 x pages in Waterfront seasonal brochure

## **Advertising**

- 30 x festival adshel
- 15 x Adshel sites across festival launch
- 15 x Adshel sites across festival opening
- 2 x adverts with editorial in NI4Kids
- 1 x sponsored advertising in Grand Opera House theatre programme

- 1 x sponsored advertising in 'my first baby' publication
- 15 x sponsored radio adverts on Cool FM

### **Direct marketing**

- Direct mail to 2114 schools and groups
- Direct mail to 2114 schools and groups
- Direct mail to 2000 families
- Direct mail to 2114 schools and groups
- 300 festival launch invitations
- Telemarketing to schools
- E-marketing to groups and families on YAA database

Brochures were distributed to family friendly retail outlets, cafes, visitor attractions etc. across Belfast, Greater Belfast and County Down, leisure and community centres and libraries. Brochures and information were also distributed through a range of youth and community networks.

### **Summary of media coverage of the 2009 festival**

The festival generated a high level of media coverage including several features on BBC Radio Ulster, U105 FM, Cool FM, Downtown Radio, CityBeat, Lisburn Community Radio, Inishowen community radio, Drive 105, Radio Failte, Radio Foyle, NVTV community television, GMTV, BBC Newsline and a very high web presence.

Print coverage included front page photo feature in Irish News and features and articles in NI4Kids, Belfast Telegraph early edition, city edition and final edition, North Belfast News, Community Telegraph in East Belfast, North Belfast, South Belfast and North Ards & Down edition, East Belfast Herald, News Letter and News Letter special supplement, Whatabout Magazine, Verbal Magazine, City Matters plus regional coverage in the Armagh Observer, Antrim Times, Ballycastle chronicle, Ballyclare gazette, Ballymena Times, Ballymoney Chronicle, Banbridge Leader, Carrick Times, Carrickfergus Advertiser, Coleraine Times, Coleraine Chronicle, County Down Spectator, Derry News, Down Recorder, Dromore Leader, Dungannon Observer, Impartial Reporter, Larne Gazette, Larne Times, Limivady Chronicle, Lurgan & Portadown Examiner, Mid-Ulster Mail, Mid-Ulster Observer, Mourne Observer, Newry Democrat, Newry Reporter, Newtownabbey Times, Newtownards Chronicle, Newtownards Spectator, North West Telegraph, Sunday Life, The Democrat, Fermanagh Herald, Tyrone Herald, Ulster Herald, Ulster Star and national coverage included Irish Times, Irish Times Weekend Review, Mayo News, Mayo Advertiser, Connaught Telegraph, The Sunday Times and The Guardian.

### **Promotions**

Brochure and balloon promotions were held at five shopping centres in the North, South, East and West of the city and in Bangor. This was in addition to leafleting outside Victoria Square pre- festival and during the initial weekend.

Working closely with the NI Tourist Board and Belfast City Council, a window display was taken in the Consumer Advice Bureau, Belfast for the entire festival period in May.

### **Funding**

The festival received funding from a range of sources, notably from the National Lottery Fund through ACNI, towards programming and promotion costs for a third year. ACNI Lottery funded both the main festival programme and Festival in a Weekend. Without this support and the support of its core funders ACNI and Belfast City Council, the festival would not have taken place.

Long-standing relationships with Belfast Waterfront, ClearChannel and Paperjam continued to be a success while new partnerships were forged with the Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner, the University of Ulster and Victoria Square.

### **Funders**

- Arts Council of Northern Ireland (core funding)
- Belfast City Council (core funding)

- National Lottery Fund through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland
- Department for Social Development
- Youth Council of Northern Ireland

### **Sponsors**

- ClearChannel (in-kind)
- Paperjam Design (in-kind)
- NICCY
- London Jewish Museum (in-kind)
- Cool FM (in-kind)
- NICMA (in-kind)
- Wheelworks (in-kind)
- Belfast Waterfront (in-kind)
- Premier Inn (in-kind)
- University of Ulster
- Youth Justice agency
- Victoria Square

### **Evaluation**

A range of monitoring and evaluation tools were employed during and post festival. Recording audience feedback was vital, but the views of volunteers, staff, artists and venues were equally important in determining the success of the festival and ensuring issues can be addressed for future years.

### **During event**

Qualitative feedback from children and adults that attended the festival was captured by Young at Art. Festival volunteers encouraged audience members to complete comments slips which could be posted into comments boxes located at various points throughout the festival venues.

Feedback was also captured on-line via our feedback questionnaire on the Belfast Children's Festival Website. All those who provided feedback were automatically entered into a free draw to win a golden family ticket to 2010 festival.

### **Post-event**

An online survey was made available on the festival website. An email was circulated to all patrons of the festival, with a link to this survey. All those submitting either comments or online surveys before the end of June 2009 would be entered into a free prize draw.

Groups and schools, Volunteers and groups participating in the NICCY workshops received postal evaluations with post-paid reply envelopes.

### **Debriefs**

Staff recorded any general comments and suggestions while post-event debriefings were arranged for all front of house staff to capture the general and event specific comments and suggestions.

### **Feedback**

The overall impression was very positive with happy audiences appreciating a high quality programme of events. Below is a sample selection of feedback received via comments slips and the online survey.

- I was familiar with the Festival before I had children and have always found it to be well organized and imaginative. Thank you!
- This is a very valuable festival for Belfast as it engaging, entertaining and in some ways educational for the kids. We will all be back again next year to see what's going on. Wishing you all the best for next year's events
- We loved the events we attended, which were thoughtfully organised and presented.
- Overall performances were absolutely delightful and a treat for children to watch!
- I find the festival wonderful for one son in particular who is quite easily scared (ie won't go to the cinema at all). It's a shame to have everything on within such a short time frame – but that's the nature of a festival I guess.
- I just had two days but they were packed and worth it. Staff were extremely friendly and helpful. Will go for longer next time! Thank you all.

## **Successes**

- Delivering a high quality international arts festival for children across a variety of arts and non-art venues
- Reflecting the multi-culturalism of Belfast and Northern Ireland with performances from Swiss, Portuguese, Italian and Danish artists
- Offering many free drop-in events, encouraging people of all ages and abilities to get involved and visit festival venues
- Continuing to run the Friendship Fund and Community Ticket Scheme, to help those experiencing hardship to access the festival by providing assisted transport, tickets and supplementary workshops

## **Challenges**

There were a number of issues which affected this year's festival and may have greater future implications:

- There is a growing skills gap in the sector of available skilled freelance personnel.
- The economy in a credit crunch. Despite growing numbers, the overall financial box office target for the festival was not as high as expected.

## **Conclusions**

The 2009 festival brought the festival to new heights of attendance. The volume of activity and attendances soared during a bright early summer. Working in partnership with supporters and venues, a high level of media coverage was achieved throughout the festival and in advance. Praise for the high standard of activities was consistent and the quality of work on offer was very high. The presence of children in the venues was significant and the use of the exhibition spaces alongside events and added value free activities worked extremely well. The festival attracted returning and new audiences while also maintaining high levels of access.

Young at Art concludes that the 2009 festival was a success on which future festivals can be built

**Belfast Children's Festival 2009**  
**Attendance & participation summary**

| <b>Event</b>                                | <b>No of events</b> | <b>Venue</b>         | <b>Total Aud/</b> |
|---|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Funny Business (all ages)                   | 4                   | Studio               | 406               |
| Baby Rave, Baby Ska (0-4 years)             | 4                   | Waterfront           | 1317              |
| Concertos para bebes (0-5years)             | 6                   | Waterfront           | 799               |
| What a wonderful world (2-4 years)          | 5                   | Youth Action         | 304               |
| Twinkle Twinkle (3-7 years)                 | 4                   | Youth Action         | 137               |
| The Elves and the Shoemaker (3+ years)      | 6                   | Waterfront           | 852               |
| Hansel and Gretel (4-10 years)              | 6                   | Waterfront           | 585               |
| A hedge called Hog (5-8 years)              | 6                   | OMAC                 | 270               |
| How to beat Captain Najork... (5-7 years)   | 4                   | Brian friel          | 291               |
| Family Hoffmann's (6+ years)                | 10                  | Clifton House        | 519               |
| Story of a family (6+ years)                | 5                   | OMAC                 | 159               |
| kalejdoskop (8+ years)                      | 8                   | St Kevins Hall       | 169               |
| Queen (10+ years)                           | 6                   | OMAC                 | 254               |
| Play in a Day (10-12 years)                 | 2 days              | Youth Action         | 139               |
| Playing with Shadows                        | 6                   | Waterfront           | 44                |
| King Matt the First (7+ years)              | 1                   | Waterfront           | 35                |
| Ann Bryant (8-12 years)                     | 1                   | No Alibis            | 30                |
| Tea & tales (all ages)                      | 2 days              | Waterfront           | 400               |
| Tea & tales (all ages)                      | 3 days              | OMAC                 | 524               |
| Finger Painting (all ages)                  | 2 days              | Waterfront           | 457               |
| Free Art Workshops (all ages)               | 2 days              | Waterfront           | 500               |
| Silver Sounds Interactive Tours (all ages)  | 1 day               | Naughton Gallery     | 52                |
| Rock Bottom (Theatre for one) (3+ years)    | 2 days              | Waterfront           | 130               |
| * Festival in a weekend (all ages)          | 2 days              | Waterfront           | 3000              |
| Face painting                               | 2 days              | Waterfront           | inc above         |
| Premiere circus                             | 2 days              | Waterfront           | inc above         |
| Banzai Chess (all ages)                     | 2 days              | Waterfront           | inc above         |
| Festival goes to Victoria Square (all ages) | 2 days              | Victoria Square      | 3032              |
| Banzai Chess (all ages)                     | 2 days              | Victoria Square      | inc above         |
| Geoff Gatt                                  |                     | Victoria Square      | inc above         |
| Wheelworks Art Cart (8+ years)              | 1 day               | Victoria Square      | 15                |
| Champion of the child (all ages)            | 10 days             | Waterfront           | 5664              |
| More of it than we think 3 (all ages)       | 10 days             | Waterfront           | 5664              |
| More of it than we think 3 (all ages)       | 10 days             | OMAC                 | 683               |
| More of it than we think 3 (all ages)       | 10 days             | Square Space Gallery | 326               |
| Akidemy                                     | 2 days              | Waterfront           | 163               |
| Pre teenage kicks                           | 1day                | Waterfront           | 145               |
| TYA Ireland                                 | 1 day               | CAF meeting room     | 8                 |
| Youth Arts Network                          | 1 day               | Oh Yeah building     | 32                |
| Making Space                                | 2 days              | UU                   | 59                |
|   |                     |                      |                   |
| <b>Totals</b>                               |                     |                      | <b>27, 164</b>    |

\* Festival in a Weekend attendance based on estimated footfall at free events