



Registered Charity No. 245282

www.hexhamabbey.org.uk/festival

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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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All the balls in the air

Hexham Abbey Festival 2009

Friday 25 September – Saturday 3 October

beautiful classical and early music, spiced with folk, jazz, film, free street festival & family weekend in the unrivalled setting of Hexham Abbey

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“Running Hexham Abbey Festival gets more like running a circus every day.” Artistic Director Graham Coatman as the showmaster has the job of getting the whole shebang on the road, and negotiating the tight bends of the economic downturn or the chicanery of the recession - an there’s no time to rest on his laurels, even if he gets to earn them. “It’s the lion-taming on the side, juggling the budgets, and jumping through hoops of fire that keep me on my toes” he says. Yet the 57th Hexham Abbey Festival (25 September - 3 October) has the most adventurous and all appealing programme yet.

The theme is “Distant Voices!” with music and performers from all stations east - eastern Europe, Russia, the middle and far East featuring in the wide ranging programme. Alongside these is a very strong home team of local talent. Here’s the latest news on the programme:

Our audiences have asked for more orchestral music, so we’ve splashed out with wild abandon on the most enterprising band, new kids on the block - **Skipton Camerata** - so named for the building society who continue to support them. Ben Crick formed the orchestra in 2004 from young professionals on graduating from Royal Northern College of Music. They have a remarkably full diary, and of any of the enterprising concerts in the Festival, this one deserves attention. Abbey organist Michael Haynes plays the ever popular Poulenc Organ Concerto, its soupy tunes make reference to Tchaikovsky, who

also appears in the programme alongside Mendelssohn. But the novelty treat is a new work, penned specially by Festival Director Graham Coatman, The Devotions of Eddi. Eddi being Aedmer, St Wilfrid's chaplain. Wilfrid founded the Abbey, and as a bit of a medieval wide boy his life was rather colourful. His is the other distant voice being celebrated in the Festival - 1300 years since his departure to another world.

Matt London, fresh from his success at the World Saxophone Congress in Thailand brings his trio **Interference** to play a tribute to the Swedish jazz pianist Esbjörn Svensson, who tragically died in a diving accident last year. They include Svensson's Seven Days of Falling, Elevation of Love and Behind the Yashmak alongside music by Jason Rebello and Andy Scott.

Music from the Middle East comes in the all singing all dancing shape of **Joglaresa**, likened more to a carnival street band than the seriously enthusiastic early music ensemble they are. They perform on instruments from the European Middle Ages and on contemporary folk instruments. With flamenco guitar, oud, darabuka, bendir, cláirseach and searing vocals they meld together a sound that is both extrovert and personal.

Real Russian music from a real Russian is the exhilarating and flamboyant feature of diminutive **Natalia Strelchenko's** piano recital. She plays Rachmaninov and the fifteen minute pianistic firework display that is Balakirev's "Islamey - Oriental Fantasy". She also plays Chopin.

Hexham born pianist **Simon Passmore**, fresh out of school, is already a remarkably accomplished artist, and having already made an appearance playing Liszt at the Swaledale Festival, adds Bach, Chopin and Ravel to this for his Young Artist Platform recital in Hexham. His equally accomplished brother **Andrew Passmore** turns his recital on the new chamber organ into more of a party, bringing friends to play Golden Age music of Byrd and Gibbons plus Bach and Handel. Another young musician from Hexham, **Tessa Smith**, glowing from the successful launch of her first solo CD, brings her 5 piece a cappella vocal group **Solaris** to perform music of a different ilk, creating beautiful harmonies out material ranging from African chants to jazz standards.

Established headliners include the fantastic Flamenco experience that is **Eduardo Niebla**, playing with Carl Herring (guitar) and Dharmesh Parmar (tabla), and equally compelling are the **Hilliard Ensemble**, back from globe trotting for concerts in England, they also embrace the Distant Voices theme with music from the Armenian and Greek traditions, in their programme Arkhangelos, with the ethereal sounds of Estonian Arvo Pärt and Scotsman James Macmillan. And local folk duo **Landermason** launch their new CD Tree of Souls in a gig, too!

Oh, and the juggling? Yes there's that and more in the biggest street festival-cum-family day-cum-food festival all with live music ever on Saturday 26 September. Led by Newcastle street band **10th Avenue**, the line up includes, besides Morpeth juggler **Tony Armitage**, Weardale folk duo **Brother Crow** and other traditional music, plus, of course, Hexham Morris. What a feats!

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