



Kathryn McDowell

Data

the Corporation of London

The governance of London is divided between 32 districts and the City. The governing body for the City of London is called the Corporation of London. Like the district offices of the other regional governments, the Corporation of London provides the usual services with its own police, fire, sanitation and other departments but, due to the extremely small resident population in comparison to the City's size, the city council and the mayor are not chosen traditionally through the usual type of elections based on party politics. Instead they are appointed posts. And, the primary role of the Corporation of London is said to be the promotion of the City as an international financial center and upholding its traditions. Making use of the large corporate tax revenue, the Corporation of London is able to give large-scale support to institutions like the Barbican Centre and various programs in the arts and culture.

<http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation>

*Cutting-edge contemporary architecture

Recent years have seen a construction rush that has brought many new buildings to the City. Especially noteworthy is the new building of the re-insurance company Swiss RE designed by Sir Norman Foster and completed in 2004. This skyscraper has acquired the nickname "Gherkin" because of the way its shape resembles a pickles cucumber. Meanwhile, other buildings like the Lloyds of London building by Richard Rogers, built in the 1980s with state-of-the-art technology stands among old churches and other historic buildings.

Presenter Interview

プレゼンターインタビュー
The "City of London Festival" is an arts festival that has taken route in the international financial center of "the City"

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世界の金融センター「シティ」に根ざした
シティ・オブ・ロンドン・フェスティバル

The area of London known as "the City" is a vibrant mix of historic buildings like old churches standing alongside the contemporary buildings of the world-leading financial district. In this interview, the City of London Festival's Director, Kathryn McDowell talks about how the festival has shaped itself to fit the environment of the City, in ways such as using its historic buildings as performance venues, and how the festival is run with tie-ups to the City's corporations.

(Interview by Mariko Inaba)

*This interview was taken on May 31st, 2005, about a month before the London Bombings.

Tell us about the history of the City of London Festival.

The City of London Festival is one of the oldest arts festivals in Britain, along with Edinburgh and Brighton, and it was started in the early 60s.

The City is the oldest and the original part of London. It has its own mayor and local government which is called the Corporation of London. In the area of only one square mile with St. Paul's Cathedral in the centre, there exist 40 to 50 old churches, as well as some very modern architecture used in office buildings. The number of residents in the City is only 5,000, but its daytime population rises up to 500,000. It has always been the financial sector and trading hub of London, where a lot of global, multinational businesses, including Japanese are based. But only a few miles away from the City lies an area of London which is very much socially deprived.

The festival began with the Mayor, who thought it would be a good idea to have cultural activities in the City alongside business initiatives, as otherwise it could become a busy, serious and austere place. Since its inception the Lord Mayor has been the honorary president of the festival, and the Dean of St Paul the vice president, which is a good mix. The Lord Mayor changes every year — a successful business person of that year eventually takes up the post — but they have always been aware of the importance of culture in the City. The Barbican Centre, for example, which was built in late 70's, is now one of the main venues for performing arts not only in the City but in the whole of London.

The festival is held for three weeks, normally from late June into July, when people are all ready to be off for their summer holidays. We try to create festive atmosphere, making good use of all the interesting buildings and spaces in the City that we can have access to at this particular period. The bell ringing at St Mary-le-Bow indicates the start of the festival. We always try to attract varied audiences and visitors to the festival — from the people who are working or living in the City, to those who are interested in the history of London or contemporary architecture here. I became the director of the festival in 2001.

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What features of your festival, make it different from other festivals in Britain?

We take the full advantage of the uniqueness of the community of the City. As the buildings here show, it is a place where old traditions and the forefront of new ones co-exist, so our programme reflects this aspect. It started mainly as a festival of music, but now it covers wider areas, such as performance and visual arts. For theatre, we closely work with the Barbican, as they run a big theatre event called BITE.

The strength of our festival is that we have so many interesting venues. Rather than putting events in one main place, we put on performances of the highest quality in a number of unusual spaces that are unique to the City. We know that only a few miles away from the City there are such prestigious theatres as Sadler's Wells or the South Bank, so we do not need to have things in our festival that can already be experienced in these places. The largest venue we have is St. Paul's, but we also use private halls called guildhalls, which are owned by the guilds of goldsmith, carpenters, skimmers, etc., for their meeting places. Although they are all beautiful historic buildings they are normally not open to the public, but during the festival we are able to go inside them and use them as concert halls. Likewise, concerts are held in the buildings of Lloyd's of London and The Gherkin. For instance, this year a famous pianist Joanna MacGregor will play works by American contemporary composers on the 4th of July, American Independence Day, in the atrium of the Lloyd's just by the shipping bells that toll at every hour when a ship leaves the port. On the top storey of Swiss Re called 'Gherkin' by Norman Foster, Stockhausen's 'Stimmung' will be performed. Stimmung itself is an amazing, iconic piece of Stockhausen from the seventies, and to play it in equally striking surroundings, with the backdrop of a 360 degree panorama of the City, will be very special. We also put on concerts in smaller churches in the City, which Christopher Wren designed before he worked on St Paul's, after the Great Fire of London. So by listening to music in these churches and going to a big concert later on at St Paul's, you can also trace the path of this great architect.

What I find fascinating in the programming is that big artists don't necessarily always want to play in conventional concert halls. I remember, when I asked the renowned violinist Viktoria Mullova what she wanted to do, she had the idea of doing an experimental concert with her own band in a tiny club space in the City. As interesting venues can attract artists, we have been able to present performances the quality of which is as high as some other prestigious arts festivals. While booking established, world-class artists, we also emphasize the introduction of younger, new talents, too. So this year, for instance, artists will appear ranging from Evelyn Glennie, who is the queen of percussion, to a wonderful singer called Anna Dennis who made her debut just last year.

There are also free events such as lunchtime concerts throughout the festival, held at various places outside buildings.

Visual arts can be enjoyed in our festival, too. This year we have commissioned some artists to create site-specific pieces that respond to City churches. And we do not necessarily have to curate exhibitions by ourselves. Many of the companies in the City - ING Barings, Deutsche Bank and UBS Warburg — they all own impressive collections of arts and paintings. They are normally not shown in public for security reasons, but during the festival we offer tours of these corporate collections. It is an exciting programme for arts lovers, and is greatly appreciated by the companies, too, as it is a good opportunity for them to promote themselves.

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We organise various other events, like guided tours to historical sites in the City, or a debate called ' Ancient & Postmodern', about the installation of contemporary art works in churches, so you can enjoy all aspects of the city through the festival.

As for programming, we have regular meetings of the British Arts Festivals Association (www.artsfestivals.co.uk), where we exchange information and ideas about what we do, which is a useful forum. There we coordinate on which project we can collaborate with, or do it separately. Each festival after all wants to have its own uniqueness.

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The festival seems to focus on a country and its culture each year — what is the concept behind this?

Again, it has greatly to do with the nature of the City. We think of the country chosen as the theme as a trading partner of the City, rather than a country. It was the 9.11 in the year I took the festival job. When I saw the people gathering in St Paul's looking totally devastated, I had a strong impression of how close they were feeling towards New York — and I realized they were in a special relationship, holding open-line conferences and so on. In a way to the people working in the City, New York means more than other cities in the UK, through their day to day business together. So I thought of looking at countries and introducing them from the angle of the City's trading partners. I wanted to show that a global trading place such as the City can reflect a cultural exchange that mirrors the financial exchange that goes on every day.

Last year we focused on South Africa on a big scale, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the country's democratization. This year features Holland, which also has a long history of trade with London. We've invited Ton Koopman, one of the world's leading performers of Bach and his ensemble, the ICP Orchestra, the legendary Dutch jazz group, and a lot of other individual musicians. There will be the Dutch cinema in the Barbican, and a Dutch artist is bringing in his installation of light and sound called 'Stalagmites'.

Next year is Japan. Needless to say Japan has a deep relationship with the City. Japanese companies play an enormous role there, and their presence has been always very strong since the Fifties. I felt from conversation with business people that they were thinking it would be a good time to concentrate on Japan. The Lord Mayor for the next term is also very familiar with Japan, and has worked in Japan for many years. So it will be a big event like last year's South African festival. As I've mentioned, I am strongly aware of 'contemporary' as oppose to 'tradition', so it will be a programme in which the long history of Japan and cutting-edge arts can be well contrasted. We are planning on a double-bill production of Noh and 20th century opera, there may be a 'syomyo' performance lined up along with club music — not only the performing arts but there will also be opportunities to see Japanese 'anime', fashion or even food culture all of which are very popular here. I listen to the advice of and closely work with producers, agents and specialists in each field who know a lot and have strong connections with Japan, so I expect it will be a wide-ranging, rich programme.

Who runs the festival and how is it funded?

The festival is run by City Arts Trust, which is an independent, charitable organization set up for cultural and educational activities. The core source of funds is the Corporation of London, and it works on a matching system with other partners from the business sector with whom we have a positive relationship. PricewaterhouseCoopers is the principal sponsor of the festival, there is a company sponsoring education programmes, and companies who support particular events of the year. And we receive grants from funding bodies and sales from our box office. For promotion and publicity, we have a media partner that changes every year — this year it's the Times, last year it was Independent. We also have a strong relation with Radio 3, through which 15 to 18 of our concerts are broadcasted every year enabling people outside London to experience the festival. One of the greatest joys of the City of London Festival is that the director is hired both to devise artistic plans and then seek financial underpinning to deliver them. So I have both roles as artistic and executive director, which I think is a good

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discipline. In the City we see that business is all about risks — calculated risks — one must always research and evaluate what one is going to do. In the same way, I need to explore new artistic ideas while being realistic about what is possible. Every year after the festival, I immediately gather the whole team, before our part-time staff gets dispersed, to review every single event from different view points. We look at previews and reviews in the press dealing with artistic quality, get the reaction from our business partners — whether they and their clients were satisfied, saw an enhancement of the companies' branding — see our ticket sales, look back to see if we could have run the events in a better way. Most importantly, we pay attention to our audience — whether we could attract new people, or whether they reflected the wider London community we have now. After all these meetings we submit a comprehensive report of the festival to the Corporation of London.

In what way does the festival contribute the revitalization of the City and its neighbouring community?

Our festival puts lots of emphasis on education and community programmes. We have a core team that works all year round to take the essence of the festival outside the City. With our business partners we have special projects using the arts to create leadership development and team building in companies. And in contrast to all these international companies in the Square Mile, we have communities just a few steps away that are some of the most socially-deprived areas of London, where people from various different backgrounds live, people who have few opportunities to be in touch with the arts. I think it extremely important to understand the cultural diversity of the city. So in order to engage these people in the arts and in the festival, we provide programmes that run throughout the year. We go to schools and create music, dance and drama with children based on the history of the City and London, and present these during the festival. This year for example, the children are making banners with their image of the city's history — such as the Great Fire, the plague of London when many people died and so on — then each child will hold their banner and march in the procession into the City on the opening day of the festival. Other community projects involve local dance groups of all genres and ages — from teenagers to senior citizens or 'recycled teenagers' as they like to be known — who take part in the opening of the festival and dance on streets and outdoor spaces. These are people who normally never come inside the City. We had a fascinating event last year, when that great trumpeter of South Africa, Hugh Masekela took the lead and got some 2000 people singing in chorus in St Paul's. They had never sung before, but absolutely stole the show in the end. If arts organizations can offer projects of good quality that can relate to their own area and problems, and engage the people in a way they never forget, it will certainly benefit the revitalization of the community.