

The Times Cheltenham Literature Festival 2008

With its signature blend of award winning writers, world-renowned thinkers and international star names The Times Cheltenham Literature Festival is a hotbed of debate and discussion with a unique regency style. In this year's literary line-up Man Booker Prize winners rub shoulders with the finest classically trained actors, whilst top class comedians appear alongside leading political figures. With more than 450 writers and over 350 events this promises to be an exhilarating ten day celebration of the written word.

Kate Adie and **Ian Rankin** are the Guest Directors and each has programmed a dynamic series of events with their own unique flavour. Kate Adie will be breaking through the blue pencil of political correctness throughout the opening weekend with firm views on PC food from **Clarissa Dickson Wright**, **Nick Cohen's** view into a PC future and the shackles of PC language facing the BBC's *From Our Own Correspondent*. As Ian Rankin takes to the helm for the second festival weekend he promises "...art, crime, dissent and even perhaps a helping of controversy" with a focus on censorship, sex and taboo. **Jilly Cooper** takes a candid look at sex on the page, **Will Self** confronts the final taboos in writing and **Jack Vettriano** contemplates his work and influence on popular culture.

At the heart of this year's programme is an exploration of the family - how it shapes who we are and how we live, read and write. In a series of events tackling the challenges that face a modern family **Richard Madeley** joins **Frank Furedi** to take a uniquely honest look at the changing role of the father; whilst **Esther Rantzen** and **Oliver James** are joined by **Julia Neuberger** to confront attitudes towards age and **Camila Batmanghelidjh** joins the debate to discuss the complex relationship between society, children and their families. **Linda Grant**, **Sadie Jones**, **Isabel Fonseca** and **Fay Weldon** will all explore the complex portrayal of families in literature as we celebrate the richness of family relations as an inspiration for fiction. Fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, brothers and sisters – all will feature in this year's family focussed festival.

Cheltenham boasts the largest pure literature venue in the country in the fantastic Centaur arena at the Race Course. Hosting an audience of over 2000 this unique setting offers the chance to see some of the biggest stars of the stage and screen. **Julie Walters** appears in her much anticipated return to Cheltenham. With characteristic wit and candour she presents her new autobiography and discusses the highs and the lows of her remarkable life. In a moving and intimate event **Sheila Hancock** will explore her life after the death of husband John Thaw with wit, gusto and curiosity. And award-winning comedian **Frank Skinner** takes to the Centaur stage for a look at his life and work and triumphant return to stand-up.

In the first of two exclusive events star of the West End and Saturday night sensation **John Barrowman** joins the festival to talk about the world of show business and just why *Anything Goes*. And in a real festival treat reinventor of Doctor Who **Russell T Davies** joins John on a voyage from the Tardis to *Torchwood* and back again.

The festival takes a step into the unknown as it welcomes two of the country's favourite contemporary explorers **Ray Mears** and **Bruce Parry**. Ray will share the secrets of *Bushcraft* whilst Bruce will take us on a journey down the *Amazon*. Screen legends **Richard Attenborough** and **Roger Moore** offer two unique looks at the glamour of Hollywood and life on and off the big screen. And firm festival favourite, **The Times Debate** returns with a panel of top thinkers to ask *Did we ever have it so good, and have we really got it so bad?*

The festival continues to host the very best of international writers and award-winning authors. Undisputed queen of crime **Ruth Rendell** joins the programme to discuss the benefits of writing under an alter-ego and of course explore her best selling works. To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Man Booker Prize the festival welcomes a host of Booker winners to premiere new work on BBC Radio 4. **John Banville**, **Penelope Lively**, **Ben Okri**, **D B C Pierre** and **Graham Swift** will all take up the challenge. Elsewhere in the programme **David Guterson**, **Anita Shreve**, **Alan Hollinghurst**, **Thomas Keneally** and **A L Kennedy** are just some of the literati to look out for...

The 2008 programme explores an enormous breadth and variety of speakers with comedy legends appearing alongside political heavyweights. **Dawn French** leads the way to the funny side of the festival with a look at her life and role as one of the country's favourite actresses as she explores her new book *Dear Fatty*; the fantastic **Alan Carr** steps into the limelight as he takes us on a journey from awkward schoolboy to household name and **Tony Robison** and **Richard Curtis** are reunited in a celebration of the iconic success of *Blackadder*. Comedy turns from **Dave Gorman**, **Alexei Sayle** and **Sandi Toksvig** add to this superbly entertaining line-up. Taking up the political baton **Menzies Campbell**, **Ken Livingstone**, **Chris Patten**, **John Prescott** and **Martin Bell** all feature in a series of hard-hitting debates.

Cheltenham continues its hugely successful relationship with the Royal Shakespeare Company as **Antony Sher** gives this year's Shakespeare Lecture, **Harriet Walter**, **Janet Suzman** and **Tim Piggott-Smith** discuss tackling some of Shakespeare's great roles, and acclaimed Shared Experience / RSC director **Nancy Meckler** joins **Jonathan Bate** to give a fascinating insight into her work. Sticking with the theatrical theme *Magic Ballerina* **Darcey Bussell** will feature in a family event for budding ballerinas and full time thespian **Julian Fellowes** will talk about his life and work.

Add to all these star-turns the fantastic **Book It!** children's programme, the Festival fringe with a style of its own, **voices off**, with an all new town centre stage and the writing workshop programme **Write Away** and the Festival really is in a league of its own.

Join in all the festival fun from 10 – 19 October.

For more details visit cheltenhamfestivals.com or call the box office on 0844 576 7979

Notes to editors

The Times Cheltenham Literature Festival

10-19 October 2008

Box office 0844 576 7979

cheltenhamfestivals.com

The Times is the title sponsor of the Cheltenham Literature Festival. Now in its 59th year, Cheltenham is the oldest and most prestigious of the literary festivals. Its reputation is rooted in its illustrious tradition of bringing an array of world-renowned writers, critics, historians, actors, playwrights and thinkers to the historic Regency Spa town of Cheltenham. *The Times* has renewed its three-year sponsorship contract with the Festival and will assist in bringing international, literary, political and business stars to the event.

With more than 350 events to whet literary appetites and prices ranging from £3 - £15 (and, as always, huge numbers of free events) the 2008 Festival aims to cater for adults, children and families alike.

The Festival uses twenty different venues over ten days. Events start from 10am in the morning and run up until midnight. The brochure release date is Monday 4th August.

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