

NEWS RELEASE
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YOUTH ARTS TAKE CENTRE STAGE IN KINGSTON

And wins the support of the stars!

From 3 to 12 July, young people will take centre stage in Kingston's first **International Youth Arts Festival** with both local and national youth arts groups participating in this exciting venture. On the international front, there will be performances by the **Young Zulu Warriors** from South Africa, **On & Off** from La Rioja in Spain and **Theatre 4 All** from Korea.

The ambitious programme comprises 33 indoor productions, three outdoor events and 20 workshops, offering a fantastic choice of activities and shows for people of all ages to enjoy across three main venues – Rose Theatre, Kingston College's Arthur Cotterell Theatre and The Performing Arts Centre at Kingston Grammar School. It is a testament to the vision and hard work of all those involved that the festival has, in its first year, secured the support of **His Royal Highness The Earl of Wessex KG KCVO as President**. Other supporters include Kingston born actor, **Chiké Okonkwo** (*New Tricks, Lewis*), **Tom Chambers** (*Holby City, Strictly Come Dancing Winner 2008*), **Ben Barnes** (*The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*), **Connie Fisher** (*The Sound of Music*), **Sheridan Smith** (*Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps*) and **Hannah Yelland** (*Doctors, Dalziel and Pascoe*).

Organised with the support of Kingston University, the Rose Theatre and the Royal Borough of Kingston, the festival not only aims to showcase the very best in youth arts, but to provide opportunities for young people to hone their performing, producing and marketing skills. Local youth groups have been involved in creating the diverse programme - with comedy, storytelling, puppetry, mask dances, band nights, vocal and instrumental ensembles and innovative theatre all represented.

Aniela Zaba, the Festival Coordinator, is in no doubt of the magnificent contribution made by the young people of Kingston in getting the project off the ground: ***"I am so proud of the young people who have been working with me to develop the festival. They have proved that they can be involved at every level – as performers, co-ordinators, managers, publicists, producers and most importantly as the ones with the new and exciting ideas that are going to make this festival so unique."***

Rose Theatre will host the core programme, including the festival's own production of Pendragon, a spectacular musical that tells the story of the early years of King Arthur. Produced and directed by Frank Whately (Head of School of Performance at Kingston University), Jeremy James Taylor (Founder of the National Youth Music Theatre), Jo Horton (Director of Drama at James Allen's School) and David Nield (National Youth Music Theatre). Together the team has an outstanding theatrical pedigree, having inspired many young actors, including Tom Chambers who starred in the original 1994 performance of Pendragon at the NYMT. With 40 local young actors in the cast, the team is now looking to support and inspire the next generation of rising stars, as **Chiké Okonkwo** enthusiastically acknowledges:

"I feel very much a product of my area in that I can trace a line directly from the youth arts I was a part of in the Royal Borough, to anything I've achieved as a professional actor since I left. I've known Robin Hutchinson and Frank Whately for 20 years, so when asked to come back to be a part of this wonderful scheme I jumped at the chance. I'm proud to be a part of the IYAF and look forward to the great creativity that is always the result when talent, enthusiasm and, yes, youth are combined!"

Programmes for the **International Youth Arts Festival** are available from the Rose Theatre, borough libraries, the Guildhalls and other venues in Kingston.

Tickets go on sale on **12 May** from the Rose Theatre box office 0871 230 1552, www.rosetheatrekingston.org for Rose Theatre shows and from the Visitor Information Centre, Market Place, or online from www.kingston.gov.uk for shows at the Arthur Cotterell Theatre and Kingston Grammar School. A separate leaflet is available for the workshops – or call 020 8547 5205 (booking answerphone only). For more information about the festival please visit www.iyafestival.org

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