

6 October –  
7 November  
2021

# 2021 Review

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**BELFAST**  
INTERNATIONAL  
**ARTS**  
FESTIVAL

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Over the last couple of years, it has felt to me as if every good theatre or dance production, concert, film, exhibition or book was also an argument for why art matters.

There is a lot of anxiety, pandemic-related and otherwise, about what the future of art and its various disciplines might look like. Will everything be streaming except a handful of I.P.-driven spectacles? Will streaming platforms (and their subscribers) be receptive to daring, difficult, obnoxious or esoteric work? Will indeed we tire of small screen events that would be better experienced live? Anyone who claims to know the answers is a fool. What I can tell you for sure is that many of the events featured in our 2021 edition, did what they could to resist the dishonesty, complacency and meanness currently rampant around the world. They rewarded your attention, engaged your feelings and respected your intelligence. And what's more they arguably increased accessibility to arts practice.

*The Great Irish Songbook* at the Grand Opera House was a shot of pure joy and an argument for why art matters — and what it can do — in times of unease and anxiety. And it was heard by a global audience thanks to 8 weeks on BBC Sounds. Young and old gathered, again at the Grand Opera House, to hear an evening of music from video games — *Electric Arcade* - performed by the Ulster Orchestra and conducted by the "Irish Queen of Game Music", Éimear Noone.

There are a lot of talented, competent, interesting storytellers working today. Then there is Alanna Mitchell, who practices theatre on a whole different level. Her critically acclaimed production *Sea Sick*, about climate change and the state of the global ocean, was a powerful testament to the ability of the arts to present complex ideas in an accessible and humane manner.

Productions like Big Telly's *Department Story*, Maiden Voyage's *Epilogue* and Cahoots NI's *The Grimm Hotel* - all of which utilised digital technology to some degree - and solo and group exhibitions from Paul Seawright, John Rainey and the Royal Ulster Academy remind us just how vibrant our homegrown arts sector is, even in these trying times. They also reflect the increasing realisation that arts projects make a greater public impact when delivered in a genuine partnership with artists, funders, venues and other promoters.

As we look forward to 2022 and our 60th anniversary programme, the resilience of artists from home and abroad and the fundamental joy and inspiration they bring to all our lives, should give us all hope.

RICHARD WAKELY  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR  
AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

# 2021

Audience Attendance

**34,399**

**253 events**

(including 37 digital)

**33 days**

**10 premieres**

Featured companies, artists and speakers from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, South Africa, Russia, Morocco, Norway, France, and these islands

**25 venues**

& locations across Belfast

289 pieces of positive media coverage August-November 2021, with a reach of

**24.4 million**

**150**

Sold out events

**30**

free performances (in-person and digital) plus 5 free entry visual arts exhibitions

**83% of ticketed events** priced £16 or under, 58% of ticketed events priced £10 or under. Average ticket price £10.41.

**The Great Irish Songbook broadcast live on BBC Radio Ulster/Foyle**

(517k weekly listenership, RAJAR Sept 21) and repeated on New Year's Eve, plus available globally for 8 weeks on BBC Sounds (a weekly audience of 3.7 million users, BBC Aug 21)

**BBC Radio 3 partnership concert series** (4 programmes) with a weekly listenership of 2.1 million (RAJAR Sept 21)

**37.7k social media followers**

6 Aug – 7 Nov 2021 (on-sale period): total Twitter impressions of 785,900 combined Facebook post reach of 808,633

**65,028 users and 337,348 page views** on BIAF website (1 April to 30 Nov 2021)

**5.3k e-newsletter subscribers**

**Box office analysis:** 50% of bookers from Belfast, 42% from the rest of NI, and 8% were Out-of-State (3% ROI, 3% GB, 2% Rest of World)

**Age:** Just over half (51%) are aged 35-54, over a third (35%) are 55+, with the remainder (14%) aged under 35. Source: BIAF21 Audience Survey

**29% of BIAF21 Audience Survey** respondents attended an event with children or adolescents.



## What our Audience said

**96%**

would recommend BIAF to a friend or family member

**93%**

stated their overall experience was very good or good

**83%**

stated variety of events very good or good

**86%**

stated quality of events very good or good

**84%**

stated the value for money of ticket prices was very good or good



“All excellent. Amazing to be back watching live performance/ talks. Excellent covid protocols in place. A lot of joy to be had from connecting again!”

“All fabulous events. Great to bring such variety and quality events to Belfast.”

“The events were all very interesting and thought-provoking and gave me a lot to mediate on for many days afterwards.”

“This was a fantastic interactive theatre event that had my 10 year old son in complete awe, fantastic value for money and has excited him to want to attend further artistic experiences that covid had prevented us doing last 2 years.”

(THE GRIMM HOTEL ATTENDEE)

“A super event. Extremely well organised, communications in advance of the event were excellent, timely and communicated the various covid compliant measures/ restrictions very well. The Grand Opera House was a fantastic venue and the evening itself was wonderful. So good to be at a physical event!”

(GLEN HANSARD EVENT ATTENDEE)

“Sea Sick was an excellent event and I'm glad BIAF were able to include it this year. More creative events that combine arts with social issues would be great.”

“I love that these beautifully wonderful people take interest in bringing theatre to people who are homebound as myself.”

(DEPARTMENT STORY ONLINE SHOPPER)

“Wonderful event with thought provoking conversation and points being made all tied in with the great work of two expert authors.”

(NIKESH SHUKLA AND MUSA OKWONGA EVENT ATTENDEE)

“Absolutely fantastic show, both of us as parents thoroughly enjoyed as well as our 5 year old daughter. Very well put together very entertaining and amazing talent and completely free which meant we got out of the house and travelled from Lisburn to attend.”

(ROLL UP, ROLL UP ATTENDEE)

“A film of The Border Game should be shown in all secondary schools and in community venues all over NI - there is a lot that people from all sections of the community could take from it.”







## What the Press said

“...we were in proper hooley territory with Dervish tearing off percussive jig and reels... We could have been in some massive Irish bar... a joyous night of reclamation.”

**JANE HARDY, THE IRISH NEWS  
ON THE GREAT IRISH SONGBOOK**

“... Uncle Ray offers a rich meditation on fathers and father figures. Ultimately, the dance suggests ways to reconnect with the past, celebrate its formative magic and grieve those who made it possible. And, like Dorothy following the Yellow Brick Road, to continually search for ways to find home, where everybody loves you.”

★ ★ ★ ★

**MICHAEL SEAVER, IRISH TIMES ON UNCLE RAY**

“...offers a sparky response to the centenary commemorations with a piece guaranteed to kick off thorny conversations and confront our political pronouncements on an issue now finding itself, uncomfortably, centre stage in the ongoing post-Brexit debate.”

★ ★ ★ ★

**JANE COYLE, IRISH TIMES  
ON THE BORDER GAME**

“...a compelling, deeply troubling commentary on the deteriorating state of the world's oceans.”

**JANE COYLE, THE STAGE  
ON SEASICK BY ALANNA MITCHELL**

“An electric night of the best video game music... There was a definite Romantic undercurrent to many of the iconic video game scores that made the near capacity audience yell their approval.”

**JANE HARDY, THE IRISH NEWS  
ON ELECTRIC ARCADE**

“‘Hotel’ with a difference looks like scarily good fun. The Grimm Hotel is not just a converted 10,000 sq ft warehouse; it's also a spookily entertaining walk-through experience designed by the award-winning children's theatre company Cahoots.”

**MAUREEN COLEMAN, BELFAST TELEGRAPH  
ON THE GRIMM HOTEL**

“...a frenetic dash through the sad remnants of a liquidated department store.. The whole thing is fraught with potential disaster and therein lies the fun.”

★ ★ ★ ★

**JANE COYLE, THE STAGE  
ON DEPARTMENT STORY**

“... a superb account of what it really means to be an artist...the performers, who have emerged from retirement with skills beautifully intact, confront the physical issue of ageing.”

**JANE HARDY, THE IRISH NEWS  
ON EPILOGUE**



## Highlights

### **Giving NI audiences the opportunity to see world class artists from home and abroad**

Featured artists and events included Eimear Noone with the Ulster Orchestra, Alanna Mitchell and Theatre Centre (Canada), CoisCéim Dance Theatre (Ireland), Glen Hansard, Damon Galgut, Colm Tóibín, and Dominique Barbéris and Gaëlle Josse with the support of Institut Français

### **Global audiences for Irish Music**

The Great Irish Songbook concert broadcast live from the Grand Opera House on BBC Sounds and available online for 8 weeks

### **Developing and supporting homegrown talent**

Festival Artist in Residence, Eileen McClory with world premieres from Prime Cut Productions and the Lyric Theatre, Cahoots NI, Maiden Voyage Dance and Big Telly, and solo and group exhibitions from Paul Seawright, John Rainey and the Royal Ulster Academy

### **Promoting NI artists internationally:**

Digital showcases and curated programmes for Ranga Shankara Theatre Festival (Bengaluru, India), International Theatre Festival of Kerala (India) and Attakkalari India Biennial (Bengaluru, India)

### **NI's representative in major national cultural celebrations:**

Australia – UK Season of Culture 2021-2022 featuring authors, Laura Jean McKay and Meg Mason, and Fly The Flag, with young people exploring their response to human rights through dance

**Spotlight on Northern Ireland Theatre and Dance**, delivered in partnership with Theatre and Dance NI, and showcasing 10 major new works at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe

### **Celebrating cultural diversity**

Featured artists included Said Mouhssine (Morocco), Natasha Brown, Caleb Azumah Nelson, Nikesh Shukla and Musa Okwonga and promoting the Irish language through films such as The Queen Vs Patrick O'Donnell and Wolfwalkers/ Na Conriochtaí

### **Encouraging and supporting cultural relations across the island**

IN-visible ID-entities 3, a unique programme of artistic collaborations from across the island supported by the Government of Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs Reconciliation Fund, and ranging from a BIAF commissioned programme from Laoise Kelly inspired by the 1792 Belfast Harp Festival through to a shared digital and performance programme with Westival in Westport.

### **Promoting access, participation and inclusion**

Free performances, films and exhibitions online and in person and across the city. Supporting neighbourhoods and local communities, for example, with free outdoor performances at CS Lewis Square. Community ticketing scheme, supported by Belfast Harbour, with free tickets to paid events for local community groups.

**All delivered with a range of cultural and community partners across the city and island.**

## Festival Funders

**PRINCIPAL  
FUNDER**



**arts  
council**  
of Northern Ireland

 **BRITISH COUNCIL**  
Northern Ireland



An Roinn Gnóthaí  
Eachtracha agus Trádála  
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Foreign Affairs and Trade



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## Programme Partners

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**WESTIVAL**  
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## Key Sponsors

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