

● News picture of the day



Mary Teresa Madders, dressed in period costume, and Leon Litvack, director of the Dickens 2012 Northern Ireland festival, attend the event's launch at the Ulster Hall in Belfast. The festival, which runs throughout 2012, will play host to a number of events in celebration of the bicentenary of Charles Dickens

PICTURE: Paul Faith/PA

■ FESTIVAL LAUNCH:

Musician and Dickens enthusiast Marcus Patton from the Pickwick Players helps launch the Dickens 2012 Northern Ireland festival at the Ulster Hall in Belfast. The festival, which runs for the duration of 2012, plays host to a number of events in celebration of the bicentenary of Charles Dickens

PICTURE:
Mark Marlow



Dickens fans to celebrate author's bicentenary

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A YEAR-long programme of events celebrating the 200th birthday of Charles Dickens has been launched in Belfast. A David Copperfield Read-A-Thon, exhibitions on Dickens and Ireland, touring theatre productions, musical evenings and films are among more than 70 activities planned across 35 venues.

More than 20,000 people are expected to be involved in locations including Belfast, Derry, Cookstown, Larne, Ballymena, Newtownabbey and Bangor. Dickens himself visited Belfast three times in the

1850s and 1860s to read from his novels, describing the city as a "fine place with rough people" but speaking glowingly about his audiences. Leon Litvack, director of Dickens 2012 NI, said the year

would be "fun-filled". "During the festival you will find a rich and diverse calendar of events, appealing to enthusiasts of all ages. "We want you to be entertained and excited by the spirit of fun that was uniquely dear to Dickens's heart. Our aim is to provide a lasting cultural, social and charitable legacy for the people of Northern Ireland." Lynda Wilson, director of Barnardo's, a charity partner of the festival, said Charles

Dickens and charity founder Thomas Barnardo were both 19th century philanthropists. "However, just as Dickens characters are still relevant today, so too is the reality of child poverty and its is with the support of organisations like Dickens 2012 NI that Barnardo's is able to put practical programmes in place to give those children the best possible start in life," she said. See www.dickens2012ni.com for further details.

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