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Features



Dickens 2012 NI Festival Launch

Listen to a podcast featuring performances by the Belfast Pickwick Players and actress Rosie Pelan

Updated: 25/01/2012

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By [Lee Henry](#)

– a biological manifestation! – of the boredom so keenly felt during such events.

Peppered with a sprinkling of disparate performers who all too often lack cohesion and do little to illuminate the raison d'etre of the festival in question, one would much rather clip one's toenails to the tune of 'Waltzing Matilda' – and with a rusty pair of scissors, happily, should a well-oiled and freshly sharpened pair not present themselves upon a search – than attend another badly-devised festival launch this side of the grave. (Homage over, honest!)

How pleasing, then, to spend time at the Dickens 2012 NI Festival launch at the Ulster Hall this afternoon. Though blustery and overcast outside, the warmth and welcome provided by the players and performers on show – all smartly dressed in faultless period garb – was nothing less than festive; the enthusiasm for the great author, Charles Dickens, and the series of events scheduled to celebrate his centenary year shared by all. Even the sandwiches were up to scratch. We wanted for nothing. Finally!

In top hat and tails, festival director Dr Leon Litvack – an expert on the great English author, and Reader at Queen's University – addressed the assembled crowd, and related some of Dickens' own thoughts on Belfast and her inhabitants. Dickens 2012 NI Festival, after all, also celebrates the author's unique connection to Ulster, Dickens having visited Belfast three times in [1858](#), [67](#) and [69](#) to read from his novels and short stories, to great public acclaim. Listen to some of Dickens' Ulster anecdotes in the podcast below.

'During the festival visitors will find a rich and diverse calendar of events appealing to Dickens enthusiasts of all ages,' said Litvack, who also performed a number of Dickens-penned tunes along with the Belfast Pickwick Players. 'We want you to be entertained and excited by the spirit of fun that was uniquely dear to Dickens' heart. Our aim is to provide a lasting cultural, social, and charitable legacy for the people of Northern Ireland.'



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As such, the Dickens 2012 NI Festival is ably supported by children's charity Barnardo's NI, and will run in various Northern Irish venues throughout the whole of the year. Litvack added that there are some 70 events already scheduled, including a *David Copperfield* read-a-thon, a library reading tour, three exhibitions on Dickens and Ireland, five touring theatre productions, musical evenings, films, educational workshops and more.

It is, said Litvack, the 'only centralised [centenary] festival in these isles'. At the launch event, Northern Irish actress Rosie Pelan also performed a reading from *Oliver Twist*. Listen to an extract and performances from the Belfast Pickwick Players in the podcast below, and keep your eye on Culture Northern Ireland in the weeks and months to come for some exclusive festival competitions.

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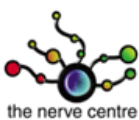
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