

Snaps

Lang is new RSNO chairman

Brian Lang has been appointed as the new chairman of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. Lang is currently deputy chairman of the National Heritage Memorial Fund and was previously a

member of the Scottish Executive's Cultural Commission. The RSNO has also appointed three directors – Dorothy Lowry, Keith Cochrane and Stephen Carter.

Theatres' free weekend

More than 100 theatre and entertainment venues from

around the UK will open their doors free of charge this weekend, to allow tours of their premises as part of Heritage Open Days 2008. Highlights include Leeds' City Varieties Music Hall, a Grade II-listed building, and Watford Palace Theatre, which celebrates its centenary this year. More

information at www.heritageopendays.org.

Sher of Shakespeare

Antony Sher is to take on the role of William Shakespeare in a new play for BBC Radio 3 called *The Pattern of Painful Adventures*, by Stephen Wakelam. The play examines Shakespeare's life

as his daughter prepares to give birth and his new play *Pericles*, a collaboration with a brothel owner, opens in London. Other highlights in the broadcaster's autumn schedule include Tony Marchant's *24 Weeks* and an adaptation of *The Duchess of Malfi* starring Sophie Okonedo and Rory Kinnear.

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news feature

The Cultural Olympiad launches this month with a programme Sebastian Coe says will allow people to "share the lure" of the 2012 Olympics. **Lalayn Baluch** reports on the highlights of the four-year artistic offering and assesses the public support

Hot on the heels of Britain's handover ceremony at the Beijing Olympics – labelled by critics as 'kitsch' and the subject of 3,000 negative comments on the BBC's website – the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games has announced plans for its four-year cultural offer.

According to committee chairman Sebastian Coe, the Olympiad will allow more people to "share the lure" of 2012, while LOCOG chair of culture, education and ceremonies Jude Kelly has promised that it will be "the largest celebration of our cultural life in living memory".

The programme will launch on September 26-28 with an open weekend, that will see 500 events take place across the country, delivered by 160 organisations.

Arts companies such as the English National Ballet and the Royal Court will take part in the Mayor of London's Open Rehearsal scheme, allowing people to see activities which are usually behind the scenes, and the Wales Millennium Centre will present performances by young people. Blackpool Tower will be lit up in the Olympic colours and the town's leisure facilities will be available at 1948 prices – the last time the UK hosted the Games.

Kelly believes it was the plans for the Olympiad – which she was instrumental in developing – that helped London win its 2012 bid. But speaking to *The Stage*, she admitted that convincing people of the UK's ability to deliver a cultural offer has also been her biggest task.

"The first main challenge was getting people to understand that putting culture back inside the centre of the Olympic movement was something that Britain is uniquely able to do, which is why we should host the Games," she said.

"Britain has such an incredible story to tell – it is teeming with creative activity of such a high quality. It is at the forefront, not just the quality of its cultural institutions, but in terms of diversity, participation and the commitment to education. There is no nation like it in this aspect. In this way it mirrors the Olympic values so much. The challenge has been to make people believe and understand that, and get people behind it."

Public support for the Cultural Olympiad has not always been high. A survey carried out by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport last year revealed that only 15% of people knew there was to be a creative offering tied in with the Olympics and only 11% of respondents believed that 2012 would increase involvement in artistic activity.

Despite this, LOCOG has promised that its creative programme will leave a lasting legacy, particularly for young people.

"This is not just about Britain showing off culture during the Olympics, it really is about our belief that culture is a transformative thing," Kelly said. "The conversations have been about how you unleash the creativity of young people – by bringing them to work with great artists and storytellers of the world, by giving them platforms for their work to be seen, by giving them their first opportunities of the arts, or by helping them to become leaders of artistic change."

The Cultural Olympiad has so far been earmarked to receive £40 million from a range of sources – with £9 million from the Youth Music Foundation, £5 million from the Legacy Trust and £8 million from LOCOG itself, accounting for some of the donations.

Arts are ready for action



From left, musician Nitin Sawhney, Sebastian Coe, soul singer Cleveland Watkiss, actress Scarlett Johnson, dancer Agnes Oaks, artist Yinka Shonibare, jazz saxophonist Soweto Kinch and author Catherine Banner celebrate the launch of the Cultural Olympiad

Sceptics have questioned whether this sum is enough and, speaking at the Olympiad launch, LOCOG's director of culture Bill Morris admitted that the organisation will continue to try and raise additional cash.

So far, a list of ten major projects across the cultural sectors – in various stages of development – have been announced. These will include a World Shakespeare Festival, a host of carnival-led events and a series of music and arts initiatives which will aim to get young people involved.

However, plans remain vague, with Morris' promise that "some" of events will be fully funded and Coe's description of projects as "advanced yet flexible".

Smaller organisations across the country will also be able to take part in the Olympiad by making applications to LOCOG to receive the 'inspire' mark – designed to recognise outstanding work with the potential to leave a legacy. Currently 34 projects, which have had to secure their own funding to take part, have

received the mark and more are to follow.

Kelly added: "We have deliberately not gone 'our theme is...', because I think that culture is far more complex than that. We are talking about a four-year period, where many ideas need to flourish.

"I think that the sectors are very clever and sophisticated, and they will come up with their own individual projects. I didn't want a top-down approach. Nor did I want it to be that we'll put on just anything – that's not what we are doing."

10 major projects

- **Artists Taking the Lead**, a £7 million project funded by Arts Council England, will see 12 practitioners – one in each nine English regions, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales – develop a piece of work celebrating cultural life. Details of how artists can get involved will be announced this autumn, with the project launched in spring 2009.
- **World Shakespeare Festival** is led by the Royal Shakespeare Company, with contributions from the National Theatre and the Globe. It will feature collaborations, work by international theatre companies and world premieres. The main hubs of

activity will be Stratford-upon-Avon, London and Newcastle.

The scheme will launch on (Shakespeare's birthday) April 23, 2012 until the start of the Olympic Games in July.

- **Festival of Carnivals** culminates in five events in London and other cities in 2012, including a series of night carnivals.
- **World Cultural Festival** includes offerings from all the 205 nations involved in the Games.
- **Sounds** is led by the BBC and will have four strands – a country-wide scheme called *The Band*, two vocal initiatives by Youth Music, and *World River*, which will focus on the music and performing arts of different continents.
- **Somewhereto** is a collaborative project between LOCOG and the

Legacy Trust – which has invested £5 million – that will allow young people to access spaces for dance, music, art, film-making and sport.

- **Unlimited** – a series of commissions for disabled artists and arts organisations, which has so far received £600,000 funding.
- **Film Nation** includes a programme of workshops, master-classes and screenings for young people.
- **Stories of the World** features a series of exhibition across the UK, which will tell the story of Britain's history of travel, trade and empire.
- **Discovering Places** is a £2 million programme led by Heritage UK, which will open up historic sites and areas of regeneration to the public.