

Perfection by design

Cardiff will be the first European city to host the World Stage Design festival next month which will see theatre and design talent from across the world showcasing work to industry experts and theatre-lovers. Kirstie McCrum asks three high-profile exhibitors what we can expect

It may have a population of more than 20 million, a high business and political profile, not to mention opulent palaces, temples and gardens, but when it came to winning the rights to stage World Design Festival 2013, Beijing couldn't compete with Cardiff.

Next month the Welsh capital – population 300,000 – will be hosting the global celebration which will shine a light on theatre and design talent from Wales and beyond.

And among the exhibitors are those who have worked for international names like the Royal Shakespeare Company to those who have been behind global projects like the Queen's Jubilee Concert.

Taking place at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama from September 5 to 15, it will also be an opportunity to show the world just how dynamic Cardiff is as a centre for performance design.

The festival has a packed programme of exhibitions, workshops, talks and a competition to design and build an innovative theatre space using sustainable materials.

More than 30 performance companies will travel from 20 countries, including Taiwan, South Africa, Russia and throughout Europe for the event.

Taking place every four years, World Stage Design has previously been held in Toronto (2005) and in Seoul (2009).

The first European city to host, Cardiff's bid for the 2013 event was headed up by project director Sean Crowley, director of drama and head of design and production at RWCMD, who recently won an Inspire Wales Award for Outstanding Contributions to Arts and

Culture in Wales.

During the past few months, Sean has been overseeing the team responsible for naming 100 international designers chosen to showcase their set, costume, lighting and sound design work.

This year, one of the competitions is to design a temporary theatre space using sustainable materials with the winning design being built in the courtyard of the Cardiff-based conservatoire for use during the festival.

The free exhibition at the heart of the festival, which opens on September 8 in the RWCMD's Linbury Gallery and Bute Theatre, features a selection of the most innovative and groundbreaking designs for performance from across the world.

This unique collection of international work will include original costumes, puppetry, drawings, photographs and props alongside interactive exhibits from lighting, video and sound designers.

Exhibits will include original costumes, scale set models, design sketches and production photographs alongside original props and interactive sound and lighting installations.

Among the 100 exhibitors will be the Olivier and Tony Award-winning Richard Hudson (UK) who's made sets and costumes for the Royal National Theatre, Royal Opera House, Royal Shakespeare Company and The Lion King; Marie Jeanne Lecca (Romania), the costume designer for Welsh National Opera's Lulu and Yei-Sheng Wang (Taiwan), whose stunning multimedia projection stage design for Water Stains on the Wall by Taiwan-based Cloud Gate Dance Theatre is our striking cover image this week.

Here we meet three of the other exhibitors to find out how they will help put Cardiff on the global creative map.



>> MAIN IMAGE: Synchro from FASTER Birmingham Royal Ballet. Choreography - David Bintley. Costume Designer - Becs Andrews. Photographer - Roy Smljani

>> COVER IMAGE: Design by Yei-Sheng Wang (Taiwan) from Water Stains on the Wall by Taiwan's Cloud Gate Dance Theatre. Photographer - Liu Chen - hsiang

Becs Andrews is exhibiting her work, FASTER, for Birmingham Royal Ballet. A set, costume and video designer based in Leeds, she's worked across theatre, opera, dance and film. She is the DARE Fellow in Scenography at Opera North and University of Leeds, and in 2003 was the winner of the Linbury Biennial Prize for Stage Design for her designs for Jeff Koons by ATC



It's never just the designer who's responsible for the design – it's a massive team of people who support what you do and can really take it to another level

"I was approached by David Bintley at Birmingham Royal Ballet to work on FASTER. I think he'd had a recommendation from Anya Sainsbury who runs the Linbury Prize which I won 10 years ago. He'd been following my work with interest for a while and the right project had come up.

"Planning something like this is about having a series of chats, and you start to introduce visual stimulus to talk about and then you'll start to work up initial design ideas.

"It's a cliché to say every job is different, but it really is. Sometimes I'll be working in a cardboard model box, sometimes with Sketchup, which is a 3D design programme, or in Photoshop.

Sometimes I'll be drawing costumes by hand, generally I'll start by looking at loads of images.

"Obviously the director or choreographer is a key person for stage designers to work with, but there are lots of other people who have input too. It's never just the designer who's responsible for

the design – it's a massive team of people who support what you do and can really take it to another level.

"FASTER was a close collaboration with David. It's his project and his concept broadly and I'd go off and come up with some ideas and he'd then respond. He's very experienced so it was a really good and concise process.

"The creative team was really strong. People were remarking that the music by Matthew Hindson and the lighting by Peter Mumford and my costumes went really well together.

"The music is really bombastic, pumping, it's almost like rave music for orchestra. You don't get that in the exhibition, but hopefully some of it comes through from looking at the still images I'm showing.

"FASTER opened last summer to coincide with the Olympics. Each costume in each group is sort of a different sport, so there are fencing girls, synchronised swimmers, a basketball team and so on, but none of the designs are straight representations of those sports, they're all interpretations.

"Sometimes they're a hybrid, so the fencing girls have a tennis influence in the whiteness, the texture and the lightness, because actual fencing costumes are quite heavy and thick.

"I think what came back from reviews was that it was obvious which sport they were, but it wasn't like a fencing outfit you've ever seen or a basketball outfit you've ever seen. It was synthesised in a way that I think people found aesthetically pleasing and quite intelligent too, hopefully.

"I'm looking forward to showing the images at the exhibition, and I think it's quite easy to understand and get from the photographs and the drawings because I was given quite a clear



>> Wrestles from FASTER Birmingham Royal Ballet. Choreography - David Bintley. Costume Designer - Becs Andrews PICTURE: Roy Smljani

design brief. I'm exhibiting actual costumes for the first time, too.

"I had some amazing makers on FASTER, they were so talented. I was delighted by what they could do – making Lycra fit people and move. It sounds easy, because it's a stretchy fabric, but it has all sorts of problems you wouldn't imagine.

"Showing at WSD is a lovely accolade – it's recognition, but it's also about being part of the wider community of people who make visual performance work. My colleague at University of Leeds, David Shearing, is also exhibiting and it's exciting that we're both there from our small department.

"I can't wait to see the other exhibitors, I'm more excited about what I'm going to see than what I'm putting up, because I already know about what I'm putting up!"

Durham Marengi is exhibiting his lighting designs for the Queen's Jubilee Concert on June 4, 2012, which were set against the spectacular backdrop of Buckingham Palace. Based near Hull, he has created lighting designs for a wide variety of theatre, opera, dance, trade, heritage, concert, live event and television productions worldwide and was awarded Lighting Designer of the Year at the TPI Awards in February 2013



"We integrated the lighting into the roof, so that from a camera point of view and a live audience point of view there was as much transparency in the stage design to allow a view of the projection and the palace behind.

"I'm often asked about stress on those kinds of shows where you've just got one hit at it.

"I'm fortunate in that I've moved on from theatre and event work into large one-off projects such as the Winter Olympics opening and closing ceremonies in Turin in 2006 and quite a few of my projects now are like that, like the New Year's Eve Show at the London Eye where we worked for a year for basically 10 minutes of show. It's a one-off and you have to get it right.

"We do as much homework as much as we can, including a lot of work in the virtual world. The concept of that is two-fold. One is that we can't do a lot of the work because we're on a roundabout in London, so we have to do it on computers, but two is also that we tend to hide what we're going to do from the public and the press.

"I've been using software called WYSIWYG – What You See Is What You Get – from a company in Toronto for many years now. You get to understand and empathise with the software and realise the differences with what you're seeing

"The Queen's Jubilee was the obvious choice for me to exhibit, because it represented, as far as I was concerned, quite an ambitious staging on what is basically London's largest roundabout.

"In the main, I worked with Mark Fisher, who sadly passed away recently, who was the architect and stage designer for all the Rolling Stones concerts and The Wall by Roger Waters and quite an inspirational character in the world of rock'n'roll and staging architecture and design.



>> Diamond Jubilee Concert finale Union Jack, and below left, Fireworks. Lighting Design by Durham Marengi Pictures: Jennie Marengi courtesy of Robbie Williams Productions



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and what you will see in the real world.

"It's an invaluable tool – for example, some of the lights we had outside, mainly indoor theatre technology lanterns, are susceptible to rain. As it only stopped raining for three hours virtually the whole fortnight we were there, we were unable sometimes to unbag the lights long enough to put them into a focussed position, so all that work could be done in the virtual world.

"For WSD, we were hoping to get some footage of the concert, but the BBC won't allow us to reproduce it, so we have photographs and also some of those renderings that I made in the virtual world.

"One of the reasons why I was intrigued to exhibit is that as lighting and set designers, we very rarely work with other set designers or lighting designers, so any event like this is great, both socially and educationally.

"It'll be great to see what's out there, what people are doing, and maybe find somebody who is doing something particularly inspirational that we could bring to one of our shows.

"There's a cross-fertilisation of talent and work in these things, and it's a great showcase for people to visit."

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