

# FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact:** The Harwich Festival Press Office

**Email:** [info@harwichfestival.com](mailto:info@harwichfestival.com)

**Website:** <http://www.harwichfestival.com/>

## THE FESTIVAL CHRONICLES COMMUNITY EXCHANGES UNVEILS AN EXTRAORDINARY 11-DAY CELEBRATION OF MUSIC, ART, AND PERFORMANCE IN HARWICH

The Harwich Arts Festival - one of the oldest and most beloved arts festivals on the Essex coast - has officially announced its 43rd edition. Running from **Thursday 18th June to Sunday 28th June 2026**, this year's festival is defined by a spirit of renewal. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Peter Davis, General Manager Chris Berwick, and newly appointed Head of Visual Arts Helen Spencer, the festival enters exciting new territory.

By uniting established and emerging talent with raw and fine art, the event embraces emerging technologies, international artistic voices, and the pressing questions of contemporary life. While remaining deeply grounded in one of Britain's most distinctive historical port towns, this year's theme - **that the whole is the sum of its parts** - shapes a collective voice and a shared memory across ten days of programming. It stitches together Harwich's past, present, and future, offering an open invitation to a cultural celebration where everyone can truly participate and belong.

### A NEW VISION

Helen Spencer joins the festival as Head of Visual Arts, bringing a rich background across the creative industries as a practicing artist to shape our visual identity and exhibition programme. Her appointment signals a deliberate ambition to honour the festival's deep roots in the Harwich community, while opening outward to national and international artistic networks, digital practice, and the wider world. By embracing future-facing technology, she aims to challenge the boundaries of contemporary art - bringing alternative portraits and landscapes to life through a dynamic fusion of music, moving footage, and the visual arts.

Peter Davis Artistic Director: "This is an exciting time for Harwich Festival. Having secured our long-term future, we can now push the boundaries even further. This bold, challenging and energetic programme will bring new experiences and promises something for everyone to enjoy."

To expand this vision, Spencer has teamed up with co-curator Isil Ezgi Celik to present a diverse collection of international Outsider Art.

## SPOTLIGHT ON "NEITHER THERE NOR HERE"

Co-curator Isil Ezgi Celik (director of CapitArt and founder of the upcoming Immersive Media Port research laboratory in Harwich) explains that Outsider Art represents pure, subjective compulsion. By pairing these raw works with mathematical AI art, the exhibition mirrors the festival's broader mission: standing at the intersection of a 43-year historical legacy and an uncompromising determination to be future-proof. (*Websites: capitartx.com, capitart.com, isilezgelik.com*)

## FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS & HEADLINE EVENTS

The festival deeply integrates public participation through hands-on activities, including:

### World-Class Music, Soul, & Soundscapes

- **Headline Music Acts:** Highlights include the rollicking blues and funky jazz of **Tom Waters** (*Saturday 20th*); international clarinet virtuoso **Luca Luciano** (*Monday 22nd*); rising London soul/blues star **Lucca Mae** (*Tuesday 23rd*); the global raga fusions of sitarist **Jonathan Mayer** (*Friday 26th*); and a powerful solo show by multi-award-winning singer and pianist **Ian Shaw** (*Friday 26th*).
- **Grand Finales:** The festival closes out on Sunday the 28th with a massive **Jazz & Blues Day** at the New Bell Inn, culminating in an exclusive performance by British prog-jazz legend **John Etheridge and Trio East**.
- **AND**
- **The Lost Sound Project:** A major two-part headline event transforming the Cliff Park Bandstand into a living instrument. Led by Artist Thomas Downing the community will help collect environmental sounds to co-compose a profound sonic performance. (*Saturday 27th – Sunday 28th*)

### Captivating Cinema & Historical Soundtracks

- **The Lodger with Hugo Max Accompaniment:** A special evening of silent cinema at the Electric Palace, featuring acclaimed violist Hugo Max performing a live solo score to Hitchcock's gripping thriller, alongside a presentation by archivist Gavin Maitland. (*Friday 19th*)
- **William Laurance and Sons:** A cinematic documentary portrait of local landscapes and resilience, followed by a live Q&A session. (*Sunday 21st*)

## COMMUNITY INTERACTION & WELLBEING

The festival deeply integrates public participation through hands-on activities, including:

- **Health & Wellbeing Day:** Featuring Tai Chi, smoothie making, and the **Tendring Brass Band** at Cliff Park, alongside a community competition to design a new, unifying coat of arms for Harwich. (*Saturday 20th*)
- **Interactive Workshops:** From "Seaside Explorers" beach workshops for families and "Signals Green Screens" tech sessions, to a "Pencils and Shading" art club and history talks with former *Hi-de-Hi!* star **David Webb**.

## CONTINUOUS VISUAL ARTS EXHIBITIONS

Running daily from 10:00 at the **Harwich Arts & Heritage Centre**, a massive curated collection of local and international visual arts will be on display throughout the festival. Admission to the exhibitions is free:

Amongst them:

- **Neither There Nor Here:** Curated by Isil Ezgi Celik and Helen Spencer. Places traditional outsider art from Asia, the Balkans, Central Africa, Central Europe, and the UK into direct dialogue with tech-based digital and AI art.
- **Daniel & Clara: Landscape Imaginary:** *On The Island* – a moving response to lockdown and restricted environments.
- **Co-Op Community Mural:** A mobile mural celebrating collaboration and local identity.

*Satellite displays will also be available across the town, including a **Textiles Banner Exhibition** on the Navyard Fence and the central **20x20 Exhibition** at the Ebenezer Chapel.*

## Engaging Theatre & Thought-Provoking Performances

- **The Path to Cold Mountain:** A serious, three-part theatrical and poetic sequence for serious times, featuring Phil Knight, Mike Gosling, and percussionist Karl Thomas. (*Acts run Friday 26th, Saturday 27th, and Sunday 28th*).
- **Swarm: Play Reading:** Written and directed by Rose Lawes with music by Lisa Strong, this short play explores the steep increases to the State Pension age and is performed by the Walton-on-the-Naze singing group, Women in Harmony. (*Friday 19th*)
- **Dramatic Pause:** Audiences will step back into the funky 1970s for a unique adaptation of William Shakespeare's classic comedy *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Redoubt. (*Monday 22nd*)

## TICKET & ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

The festival kicks off with the official **Festival Launch: 20x20 Exhibition** at the Ebenezer Chapel on Thursday 18th June at 18:00, featuring music from folk duo Ruth and Jim Anderson. Admission to the festival is free.

For the full festival itinerary, event timings, locations, and details, please visit the official website at [www.harwichfestival.com](http://www.harwichfestival.com).

## NOTES TO EDITORS

- **About Harwich Arts Festival:** Operating as a registered charity, the Harwich Arts Festival has been a cornerstone of cultural life on the Essex coast for 43 years. It brings together visual art, performance, music, and public programming across venues throughout the historic port town of Harwich.
- **Interview Availability:** Director Peter Davis is available for interview. Please contact the press office to arrange

- **Neither There Nor Here**

*Neither There Nor Here* is curated by Isil Ezgi Celik and Helen Spencer. The exhibition brings together well-known outsider art creators from across Asia, the Balkans, Central Africa, Central Europe, and the United Kingdom, alongside digital outsider artists blending raw creative instinct with technology. Celik is a curator, researcher, and director of CapitArt, a London-based platform at the intersection of outsider art and digital practice, and is preparing to launch Immersive Media Port, an applied media art research laboratory in Harwich.

For Celik, Outsider Art sits at one end of the creative spectrum - sensuous, strongly subjective works born of pure compulsion and an irresistible urge to create. At the other end, tech-based digital and AI art is transforming the entire artistic and social field, carrying us towards a mathematical universe.

*Neither Here Nor There* places these two extremes in dialogue, asking what happens to raw creation in the age of AI - much as the festival itself stands at the intersection of decades of historical legacy and an uncompromising determination to be future-proof.

Websites: [capitartx.com](http://capitartx.com), [capitart.com](http://capitart.com), [isilezagicelik.com](http://isilezagicelik.com)

Socials: [instagram.com/capitartx](https://www.instagram.com/capitartx), [instagram.com/capitart](https://www.instagram.com/capitart)