

Looking back on the Edinburgh International Magic Festival 2011



Artistic Director Kevin McMahon at the Edinburgh International Magic Festival launch

It is hard to believe that the Edinburgh International Magic Festival, which came to an end last weekend, was only the second event of its kind – and, as artistic director Kevin McMahon (himself a magician) is keen to point out, ‘It’s the only magic festival in the UK that has this focus on live-performance magic.’

With shows ranging from intimate close-up performances to a gala show at the Lyceum Theatre and a sumptuous Magic Dinner at the Royal Scots Club, the breadth of events belied its short history.

How did it compare to last year’s inaugural happening? ‘It was bigger and more ambitious,’ says McMahon. ‘We moved from a five-day festival to one that lasted just over seven days. Five days into the festival I started thinking, I can tell it’s longer! But you find the energy to continue.’

What did McMahon find particularly memorable? ‘The Magic School for kids is really popular, and it very much makes the festival into a festival. The kids that go along love it, and they are really encouraged to have as much fun as possible.’

He was also delighted to have a particular well-known face in attendance. ‘Inviting Paul Daniels along was fantastic – there

was a real buzz about the place. He won the Great Lafayette Award this year, which is an annual prize we launched to honour great magic performers. He thoroughly enjoyed himself – he said after the gala show that it was one of the best events he'd ever been to.'

Did McMahon get a sense of who was coming to the shows? 'The vast majority of our audience are from around Edinburgh – I'd say about four out of five people. But a lot of visitors to the city don't have English as their first language and might want to see something more visual – so for one show that I compered, *Parallel Realities*, you didn't really need to speak English to understand it.

'The individual acts in that show only last a few minutes, but a huge amount of effort goes into them. For example, Dion from the Netherlands, who does a tango act, has been perfecting that particular act for years, but it's only ten minutes long. This is where the Magic Festival really comes into its own – we can give the audience the chance to see some really cool, amazing magic that they would never normally have the opportunity to see.'

Looking ahead to next year's festival, McMahon is keen to stick to his early-July time slot. 'We didn't want to coincide with any other major Edinburgh festival, or clash with them. We don't want to steal their audience – we want to develop our own. And we want to coincide with the school holidays – the first week of the school holidays will be The Edinburgh International Magic Festival.'

What kind of events can we expect this time next year? 'We're looking around Europe at some of the more up-and-coming acts, to see what the state of the art is. We're planning to bring really cool and inventive new acts to Edinburgh, ones that convey a story or an emotion in their performance. I'm really keen to bring those kind of guys along.'