

PRIMADONNA

Primadonna Festival will return after 2025

Despite Record Success, Financial Challenges Halt This Year's Festival – but plans continue for a more secure future

February 2025



It is with regret that Primadonna literary festival announces it will not run its 2025 festival due to financial pressures. Despite a record-breaking 2024 edition that saw its highest-ever audience, artist, and volunteer ratings, rising costs and lack of funding have made it impossible to deliver this year's event. However this is not a decision to cease operations. The festival's organisers are working on a plan to secure its future and to return at full throttle in 2026 whilst continuing with bespoke events and collaborations over the intervening period.

Since 2019, Primadonna has won a passionate following offering joyful and transformative experiences for writers, readers, book lovers, audiences, artists and volunteers across a vibrant three-day weekend each summer in Suffolk. With line-ups including Bernardine Evaristo, Elif Shafak, Kit de Waal, Kate Mosse and many more, the annual event offers access to top-tier literary talent, as well as nurturing pathways for



emerging writers such as Elissa Soave and Louise Mumford, who have since gone on to secure their own book deals. However the loss of core project funding, soaring costs and overheads and the Cost of Living Crisis have made delivering its three-day festival this year untenable.

Tracey Bleakley, Chair of the Primadonna Festival and Prize CIO, said: “Primadonna Festival is more than just an event—it is a platform for creativity, connection and positive change. Whilst we are disappointed to be unable to deliver a festival this year, the decision to pause and take a ‘fallow year’ marks an important step in our evolution. We have a brilliant team committed to building on Primadonna’s special roots and seeing it thrive in 2026 and beyond, and we’d like to take this opportunity to thank our wonderful volunteers, suppliers and partners who have made our festival what it is - a particular thanks to our hosting venue The Food Museum. With 13 festivals in our region already announcing pauses and cancellations this year, our thoughts also go out to our fellow festival organisers who are struggling to operate in an unprecedentedly difficult climate for festivals and the wider arts sector.”

The most recent edition of the festival received record feedback, with 9 in 10 participants saying they were extremely or very likely to return. With 84% of its income last year going directly to delivering its charitable objectives, Primadonna also ran its most ambitious community programme yet: quadrupling its schools partnerships, working with over 40 local charity partners including Recovery’s Got Talent, Bury Drop In and The Umbrella Hub, and engaging over 500 children and young people.

Primadonna continues to champion the power of arts, culture and new writing. It welcomes conversations with potential funders, sponsors, and supporters who can help secure a sustainable future for the festival and is already in discussion with new funders and potential partners.

For more information, interviews, or to support our work, please contact hello@primadonnafestival.com.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

- **Who we are:** Primadonna is more than a beautiful retreat-festival for writers and book-lovers. It is a charity (Primadonna Festival and Prize CIO, registered charity no. 1202918), rooted in Suffolk but with national reach, that aims to create ‘the world as it could be, for one weekend’: somewhere to be part of a community, to escape the everyday, and to imagine better worlds. Primadonna Festival is for people of all genders and backgrounds; people with both seen and unseen



disabilities; and people who have been disadvantaged in the arts. We are proud of our history of opening up access to the publishing industry and we support creative careers for those that are under-represented in the arts: 50% of our artists have never been programmed at a festival before and each year, festival goers credit Primadonna for helping secure their first book deals.

- **2024 festival feedback:** “Please keep going, what you create in those few days is too important to stop. Thank you to everyone who helps make it happen” (2024 community participant) / “Thank you so much for allowing me to volunteer at Primadonna. I had a really memorable time and it gave me a confidence boost... The whole team were so lovely and friendly. The whole area felt safe” (2024 volunteer) / “I did not want to leave. It was soul nourishing, heart healing and inspirational. What an amazing space you all have built! Thank you for inviting me to be a little part of it” (2024 platformed artist) / “I'm just grateful for the opportunity to attend. I truly loved it” (2024 community ticket beneficiary)
- **Our founders:** The 17 founding Primadonnas are Amie Corry, Athena Stevens, Catherine Mayer, Catherine Riley, Cathryn Summerhayes, Jane Dyball, Joanna Baker, Jude Kelly, Kit de Waal, Lisa Milton, Monisha Rajesh, Sabeena Akhtar, Sandi Toksvig, Shola Mos-Shogbamimu, Shona Abhyankar, Sioned Wiliam and Sonia Purnell. These 17 women got together at the start of 2019 with the aim of establishing a space for readers, writers and creatives to be part of a community, to explore ideas, and to imagine better worlds.