

FEET TAPPING?

Songlines Music Travel has a wide range of overseas festival trips for 2010 on offer, including the Lake of Stars Festival in Malawi and RIFF in India. www.songlines.co.uk/musictravel



→ FESTIVAL PROFILE

MUSICPORT FESTIVAL

YORKSHIRE, UK

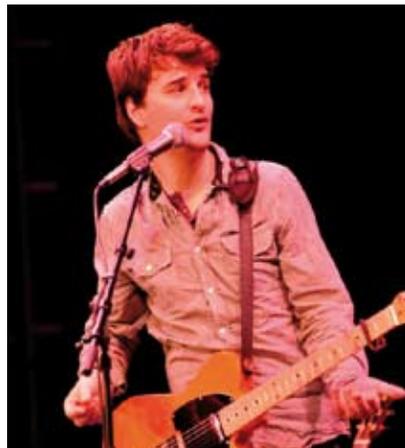
The East Yorkshire coastal resort of Bridlington is home to Europe's largest indoor festival. Jill Turner revels in the outdoor spirit of this intimate event

PHOTOS GAIL COOKE & JILL TURNER

There's nothing more quintessentially British than a trip to the seaside in search of old-fashioned entertainment. Every summer, hordes of city dwellers head to picturesque towns along the coast to enjoy salty-air strolls and tuck into fish and chips.

Come October, people will be flocking to the seaside town of Bridlington for a different reason entirely. Musicport Festival – a three-day event that brings together music, dance, film, food, culture and crafts from across the globe – is held in this East Yorkshire town, the birthplace of aviatrix Amy Johnson and home to artist David Hockney. Taking place under one roof, but lacking none of the atmosphere of an outdoor festival, Bridlington's refurbished art-deco Spa is transformed into the perfect indoor venue – the ballroom becoming the main stage, its surrounding balconies draped with fabric and more colours than the brightest sari.

Above: the art-deco surroundings of Bridlington's Spa provide the ideal indoor venue
 Right: Zanzibari Mim Suleiman; folk experimentalist Jim Moray and master *biram* player Mamané Barka from the Niger



When Musicport co-founders, Jim and Sue McLaughlin, ran the Old Chapel in Robin Hood's Bay, near Whitby, as a café, bookstore and occasional venue, they never in their wildest dreams imagined that one day they would be running one of the UK's most important international festivals for world music. The festival's director appreciates the audience's connection with brilliant performances, as well as the provision of a friendly welcome and good food.

Robert Maseko, who was booked to play the Old Chapel in an experimental departure from folk acts, recounts with fond affection the gig that started it all. Revved up after a sell-out night, Jim, Sue and Robert returned to the McLaughlin's Whitby home, fuelled by positivity, where they talked until dawn. A decision was made that night that would change Whitby's cultural landscape. They were going to stage a millennium celebration at the Pavilion – 'The World Comes to Whitby' – which would focus on world music. Over 300

emotion, brought the audience to tears and rendered the compere speechless.

As well as being part of the year-round local and regional music scene, Musicport has considerable pulling power – attracting some of the biggest international names, many of whom now make Musicport their only date outside of London. Take for example Tiris, the Saharawi refugees; the newly reformed, Paris-based, Les Quatre Etoiles, or the busy Blowzabella who are in great demand across Europe. Jim takes it all in his stride, for him it's about providing something for everyone. "It's the joy of seeing

.....
One of Musicport's big appeals is the intimacy in which you can engage with the music, buoyed by the sheer enthusiasm and exuberance of the audience

Simpson, Rolf Harris and Etran Finatawa, Musicport experienced its most ambitious, yet nerve-wracking time. But now, the festival with all its offshoots such as the children's festival, fringe and the world cinema programme, can take place under one roof.

The South Sea Stage is where you'll make those musical discoveries – unrehearsed, unrepeatable, impromptu moments that will just blow you away. Names chalked up on a blackboard joining Karen Tweed, now one of the most sought-after accordionists in Europe, include *uilleann* piper Dicky Deegan and The Hut People, whose debut the previous year had people standing and stamping their feet in appreciation.

Its polar opposite, the North Sea stage, provides commanding views across the waves and the perfect backdrop to wonder what music Captain James Cook may have encountered on his voyages as he set sail from Yorkshire's coast. It was on this stage that Rango displayed their Sudanese voodoo rhythms and ancient instruments; that Paula Darwish & The Country and Eastern Band introduced the audience to their unique blend of Arabic music and where you could hear a pin drop whilst Kurdish violinist Nahro Zagros captivated everyone.

Festival-goers who enjoy a sit down will appreciate the comfortable surroundings of Musicport's venue. Tables and chairs are placed around the ballroom edges, raked balcony seats overlook the main stage, but the jewel in the crown are the 950 plush velvet seats in the self-contained Edwardian Theatre. Here variety is alive and kicking. On the bill have been Jim Moray, the saviour of English folk, Mamané Barka, the last master of the *biram* from the Niger, and Carmen Souza's Cape Verdean jazz melodies.

And once those weary legs are rested, drink some festival beer and dance into the small hours with festival residents Cloudbase or one of the guest DJs. In the early hours of Saturday night, when the festival straddles two time zones, there's the added bonus of an extra hour of dancing as the clocks go back and British summer time ends. ●

.....
DATES This year's festival takes place from October 22-24.

ONLINE www.musicportfestival.com

Competition

We have a pair of weekend tickets to give away to this year's festival. To enter, simply answer the following question: What is the name of the venue where Musicport is held?

See p5 for *Songlines* competition rules and address. Closing date September 3 2010



Clockwise from far left: Tutu from the Sudanese trance group Rango enthralled the crowd; multi-instrumentalist Bob Brozman gives a workshop; The Spa in Bridlington sits right on the coast



people attended, all vowing to be back next year, and Musicport Festival was born.

Alongside community involvement; links with schools and charities; lack of corporate interference and absence of any ego, one of Musicport's big appeals is the intimacy in which you can engage with the music, buoyed by the sheer enthusiasm and exuberance of the audience. Over the next eight years, Whitby's Pavilion would witness many memorable performances including Kékélé, Vocal Sampling, Värttinä, Rachid Taha, Lau, Bonga and Palestinian singer Reem Kelani, who, in a moment of collective

how music connects people and if we provide the right environment, we can slot other bits and pieces in and stretch the boundaries."

Like the waves that form its logo, Musicport has never stood still. In 2008, with an ever-expanding reputation, it had outgrown the Whitby Pavilion. Lacking alternatives, and without the finances to acquire their own venue, Musicport had to contemplate leaving its spiritual home. Announcing its move to Bridlington with a stellar line-up that included Toumani Diabaté, Warsaw Village Band, Ska Cubano, Martin