

54th



香港藝術節
HK ARTS FESTIVAL
2026



Ontroerend Goed —
Handle with Care



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27.02-29.03.2026

The Jockey Club Studio Theatre, Fringe Club
Each session lasts approximately one hour
without interruption

English and Chinese versions are available at
different timeslots

The instructions for the Chinese version are
written in Traditional Chinese characters.
Instructions in Simplified Chinese characters
will be available upon request during
the performance. Some of the Chinese
instructions will be spoken by participants.
A printed version of the spoken text will
be available if you cannot understand
Cantonese or Putonghua

Free seating. Participants are expected
to come on stage to participate in the
performance

Admission of latecomers and re-admission
of audience members who leave the
auditorium during the performance will not
be permitted

House Rules

- ✘ Please switch off mobile phones and all electronic devices so they will not emit sound or light during the performance, disturbing the performers and other audience members.
- ✘ Unauthorised photography or recording of any kind is strictly prohibited.
- ✘ Please keep noise to a minimum during the performance.
- ✘ The content of all works is independently produced by the creative team, and does not reflect the views or opinions of the Sponsor.
- ✘ The content of this programme and the opinions featured in this publication are solely those of the artists/guest writers and do not represent the views or opinions of the Hong Kong Arts Festival (“HKAF”).
- ✘ No refunds or changes will be offered if ticket holders are refused admission due to late arrival. In the event of any dispute, the HKAF reserves all rights to make the final decision.
- ✘ The English version of the house rules on the [HKAF website](#) and front-of-house announcements will prevail in the event of any dispute.

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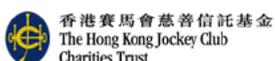


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54th



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2026

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Acknowledgements

Chief Executive's Message

I am pleased to congratulate the Hong Kong Arts Festival on the organisation of its 2026 season. This year's Festival, the 54th edition, features some 180 performances, encompassing music, Chinese and Western opera, theatre, dance, arts technology and a dazzling variety of performing arts productions.

The Festival opens on 27 February with Ballet Nacional de España's acclaimed operatic ballet *La Bella Otero*, recreating the glamour of Paris' golden era on stage. The Festival concludes on 27 March with the large-scale dance theatre production

Dream in The Peony Pavilion, directed and choreographed by Li Xing, injecting fresh life into the timeless love classic. This year's music performances present a number of brilliant pianists, including young Korean piano sensation Yunchan Lim, and Hong Kong-born Aristo Sham, the gold medallist and audience award winner at the 2025 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition.

As ever, the Festival features a diverse range of outreach and educational activities. This year's PLUS programme focuses on a wide cultural experience for arts lovers and deeper understanding of world-class artists, contributing to promoting engagement in cultural events and consolidating Hong Kong's positioning as the East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange.

I am grateful to our many sponsors and donors for their generous support. My thanks also, as always, go to the Hong Kong Arts Festival for once again bringing Hong Kong, and the world, a shining season of arts and culture, entertainment and wonder.



John KC LEE

Chief Executive

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

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Chairman's Message

A warm welcome to the 54th Hong Kong Arts Festival. As a leading international performing arts event, the Festival continues to uphold its mission of enriching our city's cultural life and promoting the best of the performing arts to different sectors of our community. This year, the Festival brings to Hong Kong more than 1,100 distinguished local and international artists from a wide range of artistic disciplines in over 180 performances of more than 45 programmes, as well as about 300 "PLUS", outreach and education events.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the HKSAR Government, acting through the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, for its annual subvention and matching grant. My heartfelt thanks also go out to The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, our corporate sponsors, charitable foundations and donors for their generous support. Their invaluable contributions empower us to actively advance the community through the performing arts.

My genuine appreciation goes to all our internationally renowned and most talented artists for their creativity and outstanding performances on stage. Their dedication profoundly motivates us to continue showcasing exceptional productions, commissioning new works and nurturing local talent. I am also deeply grateful to the HKAF team for its commitment and efforts to bring this Festival to life.

Finally, I extend my warmest thanks to all audience members. We truly hope you enjoy this artistic journey and discover moments of delight, resonance and inspiration throughout the programmes being presented this year.



Lo Kingman

Chairman
Hong Kong Arts Festival



Supporting Organisation:



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[Foreword](#)

Foreword

The 54th Hong Kong Arts Festival once again brings together great masters and outstanding artists, presenting more than 180 performances across music, dance, theatre, opera, Chinese opera, arts-tech and interdisciplinary creations—showcasing the exceptional craft of leading local and international talent.

One of this year's themes is an exploration of "Courage and Peace". At a time when the world is troubled by war, displacement, economic downturns and other hardships, artists respond from their own distinctive perspectives and in their own languages on stage, reminding us of the need to be resilient and hopeful.

Some works in this year's Festival adopt a minimalistic theatrical approach, enabling us to transcend the constraints of geography and resources. We also continue to embrace arts-tech, using mixed-reality technologies to open up new performance possibilities.

As always, the Festival presents more than 300 outreach and education activities. Our PLUS events feature a curated series of talks, masterclasses, backstage tours and guided cultural walks. Our comprehensive education initiatives tailored for primary, secondary and tertiary students are aimed at enabling students to gain a more in-depth understanding and appreciation of the works we present.

I sincerely thank you for joining us at this performance, and we hope that you find joy and resonance in the experience.



Flora Yu

Executive Director
Hong Kong Arts Festival

The Hong Kong Arts Festival is made possible with the funding support of:


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The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust


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Creative & Production Team

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Alexander Devriendt

Karolien De Bleser

Samir Veen

Leonore Spee

Charlotte De Bruyne

Design

Nick Mattan

Edouard Devriendt

Photography

Ans Brys

Joëlle Desmet

Production Team

Lynn Van den Bergh

Leda Decleyre

Willie-Marie Hermans

Hannes Pieters

Production

Ontroerend Goed

With the support of the Flemish Community, the city of Ghent, the Tax Shelter measures of the Belgian federal government & Cronos Invest



Production Manager

Fan Ho-yin

Production Assistant

Leung Ho-yee

Hong Kong version produced by
Hong Kong Arts Festival

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Handle With Care

About *Handle With Care*

Handle with Care is a theatre performance in a box. No actors. No technicians. Just a box. And you.

A box is mailed to the theatre. The instructions are clear: Invite a group of people, on a specific night, at a specific time.

Let the audience take their seats.

Place the box at the centre of the stage.

The audience is waiting.

And then an audience member stands up and opens the box. The show has started.

In *Handle with Care*, Ontroerend Goed gives you complete control. For an hour, you'll experience something unique—one-off and unrepeatable. Here. Now. Together.

No one is watching. Can you create something meaningful?



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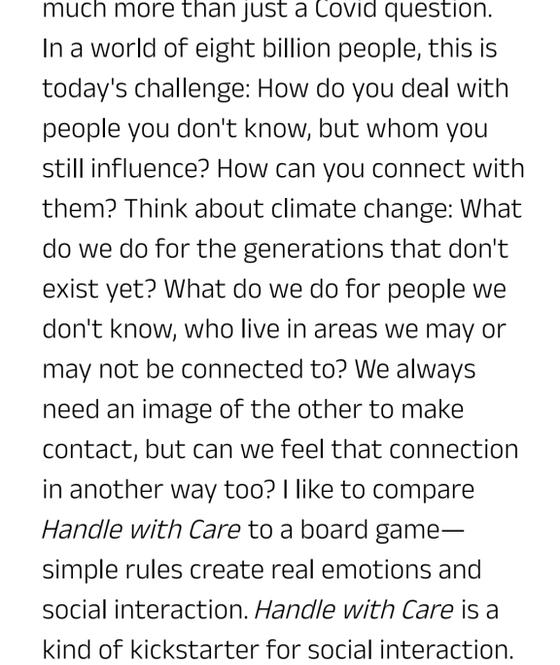
Interview

“People are truly unimaginable”



How do you connect with people you'll never meet? *Handle with Care* is perhaps Ontroerend Goed's most radical theatre performance to date. It's a performance without actors, without technicians. Just a box with instructions sent to theatres worldwide. What happens next, Ontroerend Goed doesn't even know itself.

This is a conversation with Alexander Devriendt and Samir Veen, two of *Handle with Care*'s creators, about letting go of control, the boundless poetry of people and the realisation that we are more connected than we realise.



Where did you find the inspiration for this performance?

Alexander:

During Covid, we all felt that those digital connections we made didn't bring us closer. The question was: "Can you make an analogue connection with people you don't see, who aren't there? And can you do that through theatre?" But it's about much more than just a Covid question. In a world of eight billion people, this is today's challenge: How do you deal with people you don't know, but whom you still influence? How can you connect with them? Think about climate change: What do we do for the generations that don't exist yet? What do we do for people we don't know, who live in areas we may or may not be connected to? We always need an image of the other to make contact, but can we feel that connection in another way too? I like to compare *Handle with Care* to a board game—simple rules create real emotions and social interaction. *Handle with Care* is a kind of kickstarter for social interaction. That's why I love theatre so much—because it's inherently social.

Samir:

The result became a theatre performance in a box. *Handle with Care* needs no actors, no technicians, no director. We send the theatre a box with simple instructions: Put the box on stage and place notes on the seats for the audience. From then on, the performance unfolds by itself.

What does the title mean?

Samir:

"Handle with care" is obviously a nod to the stickers placed on shipping boxes. But it's also about the gentleness with which we want to look at each other, about being moved by the beauty of someone who just does something, without overthinking. That gentleness and "care" in how we treat other people.

What is the performance about?

Samir:

The boundless poetry of how people behave.

Alexander:

It's also about the fact that there's no such thing as "normal". Nobody is "normal" and thank goodness for that.

Samir:

It's not about the everyday... It's different every time. And that's where the poetry lies.

Alexander:

Theatre at its best creates a unique experience. That's why in times of streaming, video games and films, we still go to the theatre, because it's so unique and magical. And this performance is unique every time because nobody else knows what happened there, not even us. It's a crystallisation of a moment that exists only in the here and now.

Samir:

Theatre is an attempt to create a valuable experience for someone in front of you. With *Handle with Care*, we want to create a valuable experience for someone we'll never meet, in a place we'll never go. It's about connection through time and space.

You did many try-outs for this performance. What did you learn from them?

Alexander:

The process was more difficult than expected. I gradually learned that control is an illusion. The more we tried to control how people read the text and what they did, the more we made them into pseudo-actors and directors—which they're not. Now I embrace the unpredictable, and hope they make things their own and do things their own way. Because people are truly unimaginable.

What were some memorable moments during the try-outs?

Alexander:

I most enjoy the things I couldn't have predicted. After more than 40 try-outs, things still happen that make me think: How is that possible? And yet it's the same performance. It doesn't feel like the performance was hijacked or failed. It succeeded precisely because there were events I didn't expect. Because people fill in the performance with their own uniqueness. I've seen more than ever that people are "unimaginable", and I mean that very positively. It might sound a bit corny, because in our zeitgeist it's more fitting to respond with cynicism and relativism, but I refuse to do things that way. An elderly lady was asked during a performance to call her mother. Because she had already died, her friend asked: "What did you do?" She answered: "I called her in my thoughts." That's what we do this for.

Samir:

I also found it incredible to see the number of ways that a rope can be hung. While they all get a clothespin, a piece of tape and a rope, people still do something every time that makes you think: How did you come up with that?



How does *Handle with Care* relate to other performances by Ontroerend Goed?

Alexander:

It fits into the trilogy (after *Funeral* and *Thanks for Being Here*) that I call *An Hour Spent With Others*. These pieces are all about the collective aspect of the experience, that communal, connecting element. And it's crazy that nobody is there to see it, except themselves.

The performance is being translated into more than 10 languages and will be seen in more than 17 countries. How does a production made in Ghent work on the other side of the world?

Alexander:

We're so focused nowadays on what doesn't connect us. This performance shows precisely how beautiful it is that we're all different. There's no such thing as universal, but there is something universal in being different.

Samir:

There's kind of paradox in it: it's both the conviction that everyone is unique and people are unpredictable, but also that everyone is fundamentally the same. I can read a book written 250 years ago by a Russian count, and see it as recognisable and also universal. There's poetry and beauty in that paradox.

Something universal in being different. It's exciting to consider what art should be and what a human should be. In our post-show discussions, it's striking how often people said things like, "That's because we know each other" or "That's because we're from this region, we're like that, it's in our nature". Or people who warn us beforehand, "That won't work in our culture", only to see exactly the opposite. And that happens in almost every place. If there's one thing we've learned from this, it's that people differ much more among themselves than cultures differ from each other. But at the same time, people also have more connections than they realise. That's perhaps the most beautiful thing: despite all of the differences, a fundamental connectedness is always there.

Alexander:

I think that puts it beautifully. There's no such thing as "universal", but there is.

Interview source: Ontroerend Goed

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About Ontroerend Goed



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Ontroerend Goed is a Belgian performance group that creates self-devised theatre grounded in the present, inviting audiences to participate as well as observe. Known for unpredictable content and form, the company crafts immersive experiences that blur the line between reality and the theatre, turning spectators into active participants and exploring how we position ourselves in the world.

The company first gained international attention in 2007 with *The Smile Off Your Face*, a one-on-one piece in which audience members are tied to a wheelchair and blindfolded. Its 2008 hit *Once and For All We're Gonna Tell You Who We Are So Shut Up and Listen* celebrated raw teenage energy on stage. Since then, Ontroerend Goed has won numerous European awards and has presented in New York, Sydney and London to critical acclaim.

Ontroerend Goed tours globally and creates multilingual remakes of its productions, with versions in Russian, French, Putonghua, Cantonese, Kazakh and more. Led by Artistic Director Alexander Devriendt, the collective emphasises ownership by every contributor—from actors to designers and conceptual thinkers—believing that every idea deserves its own artistic expression.

Other key members include Charlotte De Bruyne, Karolien De Bleser, Aurélie Lannoy, Leonore Spee, Samir Veen, Remi Cosijn, Wim Smet, Hannes Pieters, Luna Boone, Justine Boutens and Beth Thyrión.

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Creative Team Profiles

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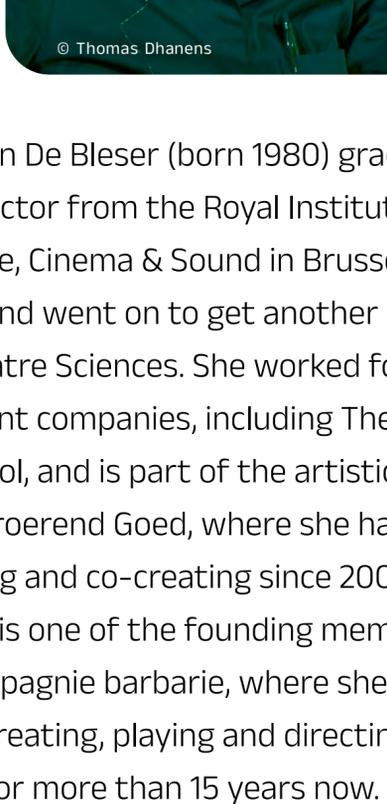
Alexander Devriendt



Alexander Devriendt (born 1977) is the Artistic Director and one of the founders of Belgian theatre performance group Ontroerend Goed. His past work includes the creation of the personal theatre trilogy (*The Smile Off Your Face*, *Internal* and *A Game of You*) and the celebrated teenage play *Once and For All We're Gonna Tell You Who We Are So Shut Up and Listen*. His most recent productions are *£¥€\$, Funeral*, *Are we not drawn onward to new erA* and *Thanks for Being Here*. His performances have received several international awards and are performed all over the world, both in their original form and in remakes. Devriendt has been teaching masterclasses in drama at the Drama Department of the Conservatorium Antwerpen, Toneelacademie Maastricht and the Zurich University of the Arts.

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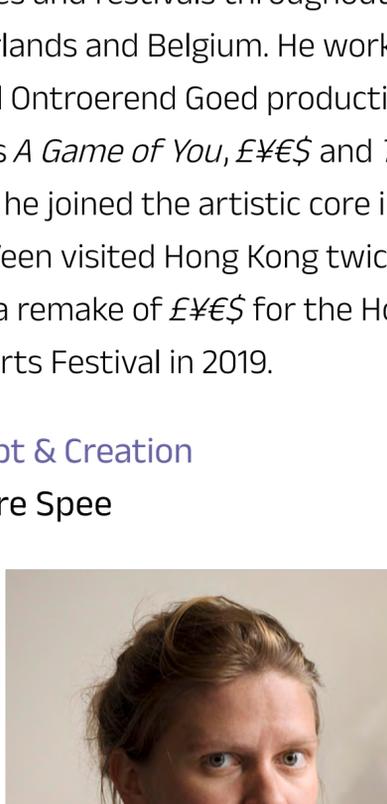
Karolien De Bleser



Karolien De Bleser (born 1980) graduated as an actor from the Royal Institute for Theatre, Cinema & Sound in Brussels in 2004 and went on to get another degree in Theatre Sciences. She worked for different companies, including Theater Zuidpool, and is part of the artistic core of Ontroerend Goed, where she has been working and co-creating since 2006. De Bleser is one of the founding members of compagnie barbarie, where she has been creating, playing and directing new work for more than 15 years now. She also mentors young creators as a coach or director on numerous projects.

Concept & Creation

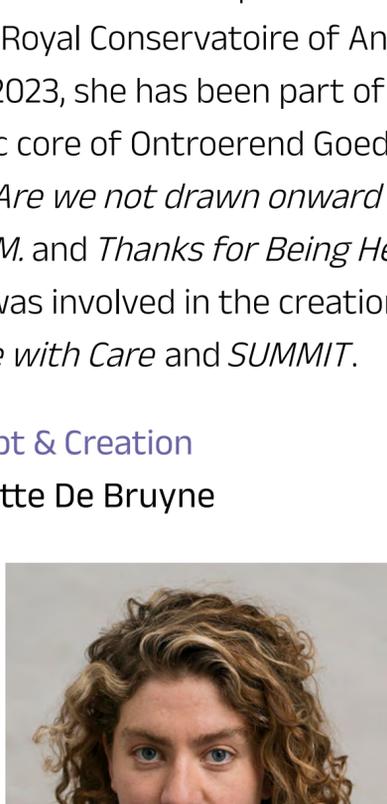
Samir Veen



Samir Veen started acting at a young age and has participated in more than 40 film and television productions. He graduated from the Academy of Performing Arts in Maastricht in 2016, and has since been acting and writing for a broad range of theatres and festivals throughout the Netherlands and Belgium. He worked on several Ontroerend Goed productions, such as *A Game of You*, *£¥€\$* and *T.M.*, before he joined the artistic core in early 2023. Veen visited Hong Kong twice to direct a remake of *£¥€\$* for the Hong Kong Arts Festival in 2019.

Concept & Creation

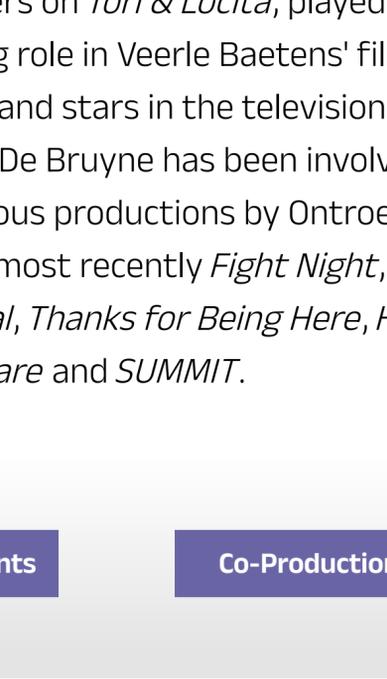
Leonore Spee



Leonore Spee (born 1994) is a theatre maker, musician and writer. Together with Sascha Bornkamp, she founded Teletext, which creates music and theatre, develops audio tours, and initiates literary projects that combine their love for language, history and electropop. In 2024, Teletext published *The New Antwerp Songbook*, a contemporary edition of the *Antwerp Songbook* from 1544. Spee is a lecturer at the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp. Since 2023, she has been part of the artistic core of Ontroerend Goed. After *£¥€\$, Are we not drawn onward to new erA*, *T.M.* and *Thanks for Being Here*, Spee was involved in the creation of *Handle with Care* and *SUMMIT*.

Concept & Creation

Charlotte De Bruyne



Charlotte De Bruyne (born 1990) started acting when she was 12 at the Kopergieterij youth theatre company in her home town of Ghent, Belgium. This is where she met the internationally acclaimed theatre company Ontroerend Goed, where she is now a core member. She made her debut on screen with *Little Black Spiders* by Patrice Toye. Other films and series include *Flying Home*, *Achter De Wolken* and *The Twelve*. She worked with the Dardenne brothers on *Tori & Locita*, played a leading role in Veerle Baetens' film *Het Smelt* and stars in the television series *Juliet*. De Bruyne has been involved in various productions by Ontroerend Goed, most recently *Fight Night*, *Funeral*, *Thanks for Being Here*, *Handle with Care* and *SUMMIT*.

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- ◆ Prizes for Outstanding Senior Secondary School Students;
- ◆ Medals for Outstanding Performers at Public Examinations;
- ◆ Awards for Self-improvement for Working Adults; and
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Register for two selected
performances or rehearsals of
the 2027 Hong Kong
Arts Festival IN ADVANCE

截止報名日期 **30/4/2026**
Application Deadline

◆ 中學生 Secondary \$80 ◆ 大專生 Tertiary \$120
yfs.artsfestival.org

Facebook, Instagram, YouTube icons and HKAIFYFS

Details and Online Application

Plus



54th



香港藝術節
HK ARTS FESTIVAL
2026

演出內外 更見精采
MORE THAN
GREAT
PERFORMANCES

Details and Online Application

About the Hong Kong Arts Festival

Launched in 1973, the **Hong Kong Arts Festival** is a major international arts festival committed to enriching the cultural life of the city. In February and March every year, the Festival presents leading local and international artists in all genres of the performing arts, placing equal importance on great traditions and contemporary creations. The Festival also commissions and produces work in Cantonese opera, theatre, music, chamber opera and contemporary dance by Hong Kong's creative talent and emerging artists; many of these works have had successful subsequent runs in Hong Kong and overseas. The Festival also presents "PLUS" and educational activities that bring a diverse range of arts experiences to the community as well as tertiary, secondary and primary school students. In addition, through the "No Limits" project co-presented with The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, the Festival strives to create an inclusive space for people with different abilities to share the joys of the arts together.

The HKAF is a non-profit organisation. The total estimated income for FY2025 / 26 (including the 54th Hong Kong Arts Festival and 2026 "No Limits") is approximately HK\$159 million. Current Government annual baseline funding accounts for around 12% of the Festival's total income. Around 24% of the Festival's income needs to come from the box office, and around 44% from sponsorship and donations made by corporations, individuals and charitable foundations. The remaining 20% is expected to come from other revenue sources including the Government's matching grant scheme, which matches income generated through private sector sponsorship and donations.

Full Organisational Profile:

<https://www.hk.artsfestival.org/en/about-us/index.html?>



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Committee and Staff List



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Updated February 2026

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