



HAY
FESTIVAL

ANNUAL
REVIEW

2023



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HAY FESTIVAL IN 2023



As a charity, we believe that ideas can change the world and that everybody has a right to inspiration and creativity.

By connecting communities through culture, Hay Festival events and projects have this at their heart. At the start of 2023, in an interview with *The Guardian*, I spoke about how 2023 would be the year that Hay Festival reached further than ever into communities with programmes offering 'something for everybody'. We have kept this promise at the forefront of our work.

Time and again over the past twelve months we have heard about the transformative power of words. At our spring festival in Wales, Dua Lipa and Stormzy explained how books began their creative journeys; at Lviv BookForum in Ukraine, we heard writers on how reading was a lifeline to their sense of self; and just last month as Scribblers Cymraeg toured Wales, we saw young people sparked to creativity through free workshops led by some of our best poets.

2023 was a year when culture felt more essential than ever. As global conflicts raged and new technologies amplified divisions, culture provided an essential space to exchange ideas, build empathy and offer some much-needed hope.

With new partners and projects widening access to Hay Festival content like never before, we were rewarded throughout the year with high attendance and engagement across our events and projects. What follows here is a snapshot of this work from across the world.

None of this would be possible without our supporters: our communities of artists, partners, sponsors and collaborators all over the world; our treasured Friends of Hay Festival, Patrons and Benefactors; our brilliant team of Haymakers, including the audiences and volunteers who make every event so special.

It is my privilege to lead this organisation into the next chapter. I thank you for that opportunity and look forward to all that is ahead for us.

Julie Finch

Julie Finch, CEO, Hay Festival Foundation Ltd

OUR YEAR OF ACTIVITIES



Hay Festival Scribblers Tour, Wales
6–16 February 2023



Hay Festival Scribblers Cymraeg, Wales
6–10 November 2023



Hay Festival, Wales
25 May–4 June 2023



Hay Festival Winter Weekend, Wales
23–26 November 2023



Hay Forum Dallas, USA
9–10 September 2023



Hay Festival Querétaro, Mexico
7–10 September 2023



Hay Festival Jericó, Colombia
20–21 January 2023



Hay Festival Medellín, Colombia
24–26 January 2023



Hay Forum Moquegua, Peru
8 November 2023



Hay Festival Arequipa, Peru
9–12 November 2023



Hay Festival Cartagena de Indias, Colombia
26–29 January 2023



Hay Festival Segovia, Spain
14–17 September 2023



Hay Forum Seville, Spain
5–7 October 2023



Lviv BookForum, Ukraine
5–8 October 2023

OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

315,395
tickets sold

1,111
events

2,018
artists
featured



15,081
school
pupils
reached

975,000
unique website users

6,700,000
website views

406,664
social media followers



44,087,811
social media impressions

THE YEAR IN REVIEW



We began the year in celebration as we marked our 18th year in Colombia with a trio of events in **Cartagena**, **Jericó** and **Medellín**. More than 180 artists from 21 countries took part, including literary stars, Nobel Prize winners and acclaimed performers. The programme gave voice to some of the biggest issues of our time – from the crisis in democracy, increasing inequalities, and the climate emergency, to the role of culture in the spread of new ideas – while showcasing an array of award-winning fiction and non-fiction. **Hay Joven** events for students and **Hay Comunitario** events in the barrios offered free access to Festival content more widely.

In February, Hay Festival brought five award-winning Young Adult (YA) writers direct to thousands of Year 7–10 school pupils across Wales with free workshops. Now in its twelfth year, **Hay Festival Scribblers Tour** aims to engage and encourage the next generation in storytelling and conversation, inspiring empathy and creativity. Compèred by YA novelist Jenny Valentine, sessions featured novelist Maz Evans, prize-winning poet Matt Goodfellow, sci-fi writer Femi Fadugba and bestselling author Caroline O'Donoghue at five Welsh universities, offering pupils a chance to visit their nearest university and experience a taste of life on campus.

Also in February, as anticipation grew for our spring event in Wales, we unveiled a new partnership with the Eurovision Song Contest to mark its UK return, inviting our audience to champion their favourite literature in our **Eurovision Book Contest**.



“It all started with books for me. I’m really excited to pass on this passion at Hay Festival and inspire the next generation of storytellers”

Stormzy





“I’m thrilled to share stories with some of my favourite authors and soak up the inspiration alongside my fellow book-lovers”

Dua Lipa



Celebrating great thinkers across disciplines, it was our honour in March to unveil the recipients of our annual **Hay Festival Medals**. Awarded annually since Britain’s 2012 Olympic year, the medals draw inspiration from the original Olympic medal for poetry, and were given this year to Mererid Hopwood (Poetry), Alice Oseman (Fiction), Serhiy Zhadan (Songwriting) and Salman Rushdie (Prose).



Hay Festival is a convener of writers, readers and – crucially – creative opportunities. As one of Wales’ largest cultural institutions we are proud of our Welsh roots and take our responsibility to the creative landscape of Wales seriously. In April, we were delighted to relaunch **Hay Festival Writers at Work**, a creative development programme for emerging Welsh talent with the support of Literature Wales, funded by Arts Council of Wales, with the participants joining us at our spring event.

Hay Festival Wales took place 25 May–4 June, bringing thousands of writers and readers together over 11 days of programming to inspire, examine and entertain. This year’s programme launched the best new fiction and non-fiction books, while offering insights and debate around significant global issues, world class comedy and music, and a vibrant programme of pop-up events, workshops and activities for all ages. With footfall up by 37% on 2022 and ticket sales up by 17%, many first-time festival-goers travelled from all over the world to experience the Festival and see the events.

Once more, Hay Festival Wales opened with our free **Programme for Schools** with 7,500 pupils (primary and secondary) taking part in the live programme while over 21,000 joined in digitally. In addition, 43 libraries took part in streaming free events via the British Library and the Living Knowledge Network across the UK; and thousands more watched online with the Online Festival Pass.

An extraordinary quintet made up our Hay Festival 2023 **Thinkers in Residence**, a group of writers and readers hosting events throughout the week questioning norms, finding new perspectives and challenging us to action, including Everyday Sexism founder Laura Bates, #BookTok star Jack Edwards, curator Will Gompertz, historian David Olusoga, and award-winning writer and academic Charlotte Williams.



Over the summer, the conversations continued online with events available to replay through our **Hay Player** archive and highlights shared via our media partners, the BBC, Sky Arts, TikTok, the TLS and others. Meanwhile, our **Book of the Month** project continued to invite audiences to engage in contemporary literature.

In September, three Hay Festival events drove the conversation across Mexico, Spain and the USA. We marked our eighth year in Mexico with **Hay Festival Querétaro** showcasing 151 artists over four days in a space where imaginations are free to roam. Alongside this, we once more partnered with the Wild Detectives bookshop in Texas for **Hay Forum Dallas**,

bridging the North to the South with cultural exchange. And then to Spain, where **Hay Festival Segovia** explored the way we live now with conversations, exhibitions and performances throughout the city, plus a strand of new work encouraging the local prison population to engage in literature with special workshops.

Hay Festival Querétaro also marked the culmination of activity for writer, poet and spoken word artist Hanan Issa, the recipient of our **2022/23 Cymrawd Rhyngwladol Hay Festival | Hay Festival International Fellowship**. Funded by Arts Council Wales, the Fellowship supports a writer in Wales in attending Festival editions around the world while developing a writing or research project. Open to exceptional writers of all ages, it provides a unique opportunity for career development, while increasing Wales' artistic profile internationally.

Next, an act of cultural solidarity in defence of free expression: our collaboration with Ukraine's largest book festival, **Lviv BookForum**, continued in October as we joined them as digital media partner for their 30th edition, supported by Open Society Foundations. Aiming to create a civic space for a free and tolerant exchange of ideas between writers and readers around the world, the hybrid programme blended 50 writers and thinkers in 30 conversations encompassing art in times of conflict, memory, gender equality, loss, corruption,



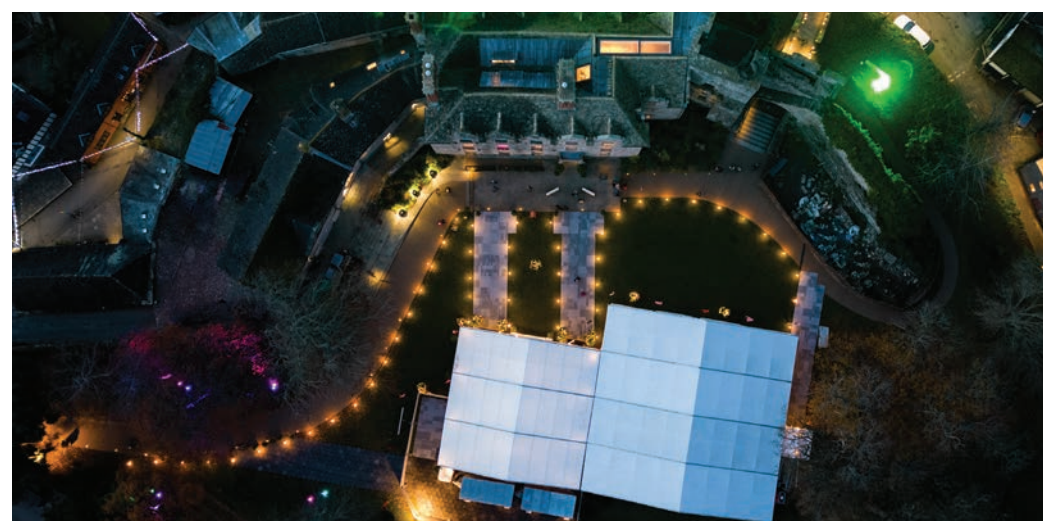
“Lviv BookForum discussions are a great intellectual challenge. The opportunity to outline the time in which we are together. And it is beyond important that for the second year in a row, the partnership with Hay Festival will allow viewers from all over the world to experience this atmosphere”
Oleksandr Mykhed





“It was such an exceptional thing because Hay Festival is a really unique project that is local to us”

Riverside Primary School



imperialism and hope. Meanwhile, in Spain, the first ever **Hay Forum Seville** took place, opening a new chapter for our charity in Europe.

At the start of November, events in **Arequipa** and **Moquegua** brought Hay Festival inspiration to audiences across Peru with 150 artists taking part in events over four days. Meanwhile in Wales, a newly-expanded **Hay Festival Scribblers Cymraeg** invited Year 7–9 pupils to get creative in Welsh in Swansea, Aberystwyth, Cardiff, Bangor and Wrexham with workshops hosted by poet Aneirin Karadog (Bardd Plant Cymru 2023–25), writer Nia Morais and singer-songwriter Casi Wyn.



Under our mission to develop opportunities for writers to bridge global divides, we were delighted to celebrate the shortlist and winners of the **Eccles Centre & Hay Festival Writer’s Award 2024** throughout November. Given annually to two writers in the early stages of a new book relating to the Americas, the £20,000 prize is now in its 13th year.

A year-end wonderland of ideas, **Hay Festival Winter Weekend** took place in Wales at the end of November with the support of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Seventy acclaimed artists took part in over 60 events, many hosted in a new Festival marquee erected in the grounds of Hay Castle.

And as we closed our year of activities, we offered a promise of next spring, previewing enhanced programmes for our first Festival events of 2024 in Colombia and the UK with programme launches for **Hay Festival Scribblers Tour**; **Hay Festival Cartagena, Medellín** and **Jericó**; and early-bird events for **Hay Festival Wales**.



VOICES

CINDY HERRERA

HAY FESTIVAL CARTAGENA

Cindy Herrera was a guest writer at Hay Festival Cartagena in January 2023 and is returning in 2024. She describes her part in the outreach programme, working with children in disadvantaged communities.

What fills me with hope for the city of Cartagena is seeing how children respond to the workshops we run during Hay Festival. These young people are at the edge of society, from poor families, with little chance of a good education.

As part of Hay Festival's outreach commitment, we worked this year alongside neighbourhood groups and I can hardly describe how wonderful it was. We hope in 2024 there will be even more active and collective participation, because this is something that the people of Cartagena embrace. That link with the next generation is woven into our cultural fabric.

Children are incredible human beings and I learnt so much about them in the workshops, as I wondered what they were thinking while they expressed themselves through dancing, painting, listening to stories and asking questions. Giving them access to books through Hay Festival is one of the most important things I have ever done. To see them happy every time we tell them a story, and when they are telling theirs, is priceless.

They are always very attentive. The fun thing about the workshops is that each child lives in a world completely different to ours. For example, I met Julito, a fantastic boy, who was aggressive to his classmates, but during the workshop, he was kind, he played, he painted, he helped the others, and he tidied everything up at the end. His level of concentration and participation was so great that this previously violent boy was asking for butterflies and flowers to decorate his work. He was beautiful!





Hay Joven workshop with Claudia Arroyave at Hay Festival Cartagena 2023.

Our children all over Colombia need opportunities like this. Where education is open, fun, holistic, it can only do good. At that age it is a bridge to a future outside of violence and inequality.

Taking part in the workshops added to my experience as a guest speaker at the Festival. 2023 was my first time, but I had been a helper from a young age. At that time I thought the literary world was foreign and not for people like me. But when I went on to study literature, I decided it would be entertaining to see flesh-and-blood authors on stage defending their work, and that's how I became interested in getting involved.

I never imagined I would set foot on the Hay platform as a writer, but then I was asked to interview authors Alia Trabucco Zerán (Chile), Brenda Navarro (Mexico) and María del Mar Ramón (Colombia). It was challenging, but all three were so generous in sharing their thoughts with me and the audience. It was the first time my family and friends had attended Hay Festival, on a sunny Sunday morning, and I could see the pride and delight in their eyes.

I have grown professionally and emotionally through this experience. It has taught me so much and made me realise what I have to offer in my writing.

Community is at the heart of Hay Festival and its programme and outreach work can bring huge benefits, with ripples that reach to all corners of society.

VOICES

SOFIA CHELIAK

LVIV BOOKFORUM PARTNERSHIP

Hay Festival supports Lviv BookForum in Ukraine by contributing international writers and streaming the entire programme free online. This is part of a global partnership to bring Ukrainian storytelling to a wider audience, supported by Open Society Foundations. Sofia Cheliak, Programme Director of Lviv BookForum, explains the impact the partnership with Hay has had.

Our co-operation with Hay Festival started at the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022. Even before then, there were reports of a Russian attack and my team and I decided that our role at Lviv BookForum had to be a platform for spreading the truth. The Hay Festival team supported us, and we started working together to spread information about what is happening in Ukraine, to become an organ for writers to work together for the arts, ideas, culture and democracy.

Before the start of the war, we had a very extensive network of partnerships all over the world, but never in my wildest dreams did I think we could work with Hay Festival, which we all admired as one of the most prestigious in the world.

The Revolution of Dignity in 2014 (also known as the Ukrainian Revolution) and the beginning of the war completely changed my life and vision of my future. I decided to try to be as useful to my country as possible, and in 2016 I started to work for Lviv BookForum. My duties include devising the themes of the festival, producing the programme, and communicating with partners and donors.

There is so much literary talent in Ukraine, and to be part of something that helps foster it is both an honour and a dream. Our storytellers are the holders of truth, now more than ever.



Sofia Cheliak with Emma Graham-Harrison and Victoria Amelina at Hay Festival Cartagena in January 2023. Victoria Amelina was fatally wounded in the Russian attack on Kramatorsk in June 2023; events commemorating her life and work took place throughout Lviv BookForum 2023.

This year, 2023, was Lviv BookForum's 30th anniversary. Events streamed live, free to the world, made possible by Hay Festival, have given us huge reach and visibility. Ukrainian writers are finally getting the attention they deserve.

We were amazed by the number of people who came to the 2023 festival. For our audiences, who are living in a full-scale war for the second year, it became a great opportunity to buy books, listen to favourite authors, and discuss difficult questions. More than 20,000 people attended our events, which shows that Ukrainians are interested in their culture, and in particular, history, philosophy and classical literature.

Our partnership with Hay Festival, benefitting from their experience and the global network they have developed over the years, helped us in turn to transform our activities and work at this most challenging time for the state of Ukraine.

Our goal is to become a global platform that gathers writers and thinkers together to understand, debate, research and convey the narratives of colleagues, confirming their opinions, or challenging them. We want Lviv BookForum to be a safe place for the exchange of opinions, protection of human rights, freedom of speech and the development of literature.

VOICES

BETH WILLIAMS

2023 HAY ACADEMY

Beth Williams, one of 30 Hay Academy students at Hay Festival Wales, describes her experience at the Festival.

Hay Festival was always on my list to visit, but living so far away in Caernarvon, north Wales, I didn't get a chance until I became a student at Cardiff University, studying English and Journalism. I was in my final year when I heard about the opportunity for students to work at the Festival and gain experience of a major, 11-day-long event.

My preconception was that the audiences would be older people listening to intense talks on intellectual topics. That was soon dispelled when I arrived – there was such a buzz about the place. There were actors, musicians, comedians...and all ages and types attending. It was lovely to see families and children enjoying themselves.

I and two other Cardiff students were told we would be supporting the media centre, attending several events each day, collecting video content, posting on social media and interviewing speakers for TikTok. We were well briefed in advance – the word 'stamina' crept up again and again. It was impressed on us that this would be an intense, fast-paced operation, with long hours and plenty of multi-tasking.

It was good to have that honest conversation in advance, and indeed it was a massive crash course in communications, but I surprised myself in that I managed to stay calm. Everyone was so helpful and supportive, I felt that my contributions were valued, and I was treated as a member of the team. I learnt so much, and going to events gave me back my love of books, which I had lost a little after three years of study. A highlight was listening to children's writer Jacqueline Wilson talking to a full tent of readers enthralled by her very presence.





Hay Academy students at Hay Festival Wales.

And I would never have imagined walking round the site with Dua Lipa! It was such a change from my student journalism, editing the university newspaper, where I didn't get to meet any famous people. Although I was at times panicky underneath, I learnt to stay focused – and discovered that the stars get nervous, too. Being a Welsh speaker helped in a TikTok interview I did with Fflur Dafydd, the novelist and screenwriter. She was tense at first but visibly relaxed when I started talking to her in Welsh.

To be plunged into such an exciting environment, where everyone was professional and friendly, and helped each other, was an incredible experience, and I am sure the skills and strengths I gained from it are of benefit to me now, on an apprenticeship with the BBC. All being well, at the end of two years I shall have an NCTJ Senior Journalist qualification – and a staff job!

VOICES

GWENAN THOMAS

SCRIBBLERS CYMRAEG

Gwenan Thomas, Head of Welsh at Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Rhydywaun (Rhydywaun Welsh Comprehensive School), describes the transformative effect on children of the Scribblers Cymraeg tours.

We are a Welsh-medium school and I couldn't believe our luck when we got tickets to take Years 7, 8 and 9 to Cardiff University to hear Welsh writers and performers. I knew about the Scribblers Tour in the English language, but this was a chance for our children to learn about the importance of Welsh literature and writing in Welsh.

None of us knew what the day would be like, though I must say the communication with Hay Festival in advance was excellent. From the very first contact the team were so friendly, knowledgeable, professional and efficient. Even when we got stuck in traffic they reassured us that we would not miss anything.

Our school is in a deprived area and many of the children lack confidence. They didn't know if they would be brave enough to contribute. Fast forward to the session with poet Aneirin Karadog, who asked them to shout out words that he would turn into a poem. They were flabbergasted when he started rapping with their words. "How can he hold so many words in his head?" asked one pupil.

They were thrilled, too, by the wonderful singing voice of Cafi Wyn, who performed a song using poetry they had written. "We learnt today that you can turn poetry into songs and that it's alright to change the words if you need to," was one reaction.

The session with Nia Morais set their imaginations on fire. They were asked to write a story in a scary setting, and one child wrote afterwards, "Today I learnt to write a campfire ghost story with Nia Morais and that horror happens in your mind!"



Students at Scribblers Cymraeg in 2023.

Our ethos at the school is to extend opportunities for our pupils and that includes going beyond the classroom, to stretch their horizons. Just being in a lecture room was an experience for them. They had never been to a university and most would not think that would be an option for them in the future. If they do become students, they will be the first in their family to do so.

Even eating our packed lunch in the university canteen was an eye-opener for them. "So if we were at university, this is what it would be like?" asked one. For me it was wonderful to be back at the university where I graduated.

The rest of the day was spent in workshops and talking to the writers who mingled with us all. They were so good with the children, so interested and encouraging. Their passion came through. On the bus journey back, and for days after, I heard them singing and chattering away about the day: "Do you remember when Casi Wyn..."; "How can she do it?" "After today, I know how to be a young poet." Another said to me, "We learnt how easy it is to rhyme – it really isn't difficult to write songs and poetry and it can be fun!"

They really couldn't get over the excitement of meeting those Welsh artists, and also learning from the university session that this was a path to consider. "Miss, do you really think we could go to that university?"

"Yes," I replied emphatically. "This is the future!"

Thank you, Hay, from the bottom of my heart, and from the pupils.



“Hay Festival Cartagena de Indias gives time and space to conversations and points of view that are disruptive, uncomfortable yet very necessary in order to bring us closer as a society to the ideal of justice, equality and liberty.”

Catalina Vela, imaginacartagenalab.org

“It has been very interesting to see how the Hay Festival in Cartagena de Indias, over the course of these eighteen years, has linked up through conversation with the city’s residents, how it has helped to form criteria, to set benchmarks...The festival is joining up, more and more, with the different parts of the city, both the centre and the periphery, and with different audiences.”

Teresita Goyeneche, Colombian writer

“Each Hay Festival that I am involved in is more appealing and engaging than the last, and that makes it a stairway to heaven. Congratulations on having created something so special and thank you with all my heart for having given science a space.”

Antonio Martínez Ron, writer and scientist
(Hay Festival Querétaro)

“The tireless work of Hay Festival Arequipa is an incentive for all of us. We are infected by your faith in words and people and in that sense we Peruvians especially love you for your permanent commitment to Arequipa and Moquegua. I always think that only these spaces of reflection can save us. Thank you very much for this effort. It encourages us a lot.”

Alonso Cueto, Peruvian writer





THANKS TO OUR MAJOR FUNDERS

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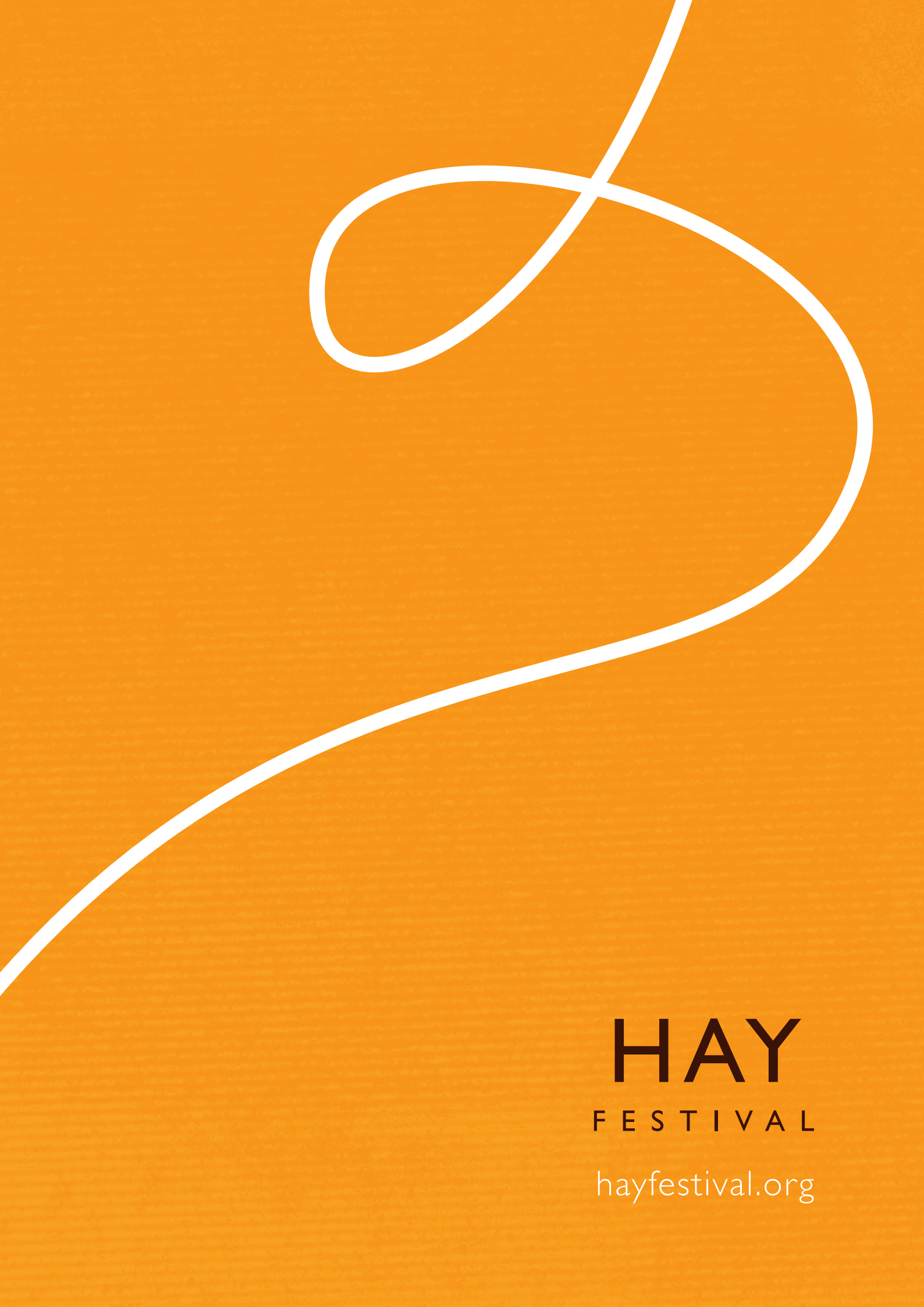
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