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Music in the air ...

Reach up into the blue, as our programme cover invites. We have assembled an all-star line-up, and welcome you warmly to Oundle for an energising Festival experience.

open-air

Courtney Pine, saxophonist and jazz legend, and recently voted one of the top ten greatest Black Britons, fronts the line-up at this year's jazz and fireworks spectacular. 'Stranger on the Shore' Acker Bilk with his Paramount Jazz Band follows on, inviting you to dance under the stars at Oundle's annual big night out. The grounds of the Creed Chapel in the picture-postcard hamlet of Ashton provide an idyllic location for family-friendly panto-style productions by Oddsocks and Illyria.

warm air

Besides the fine weather we hope for, we feature other brilliant performers, as well as Courtney Pine and Acker Bilk, whose music is their breath – both instrumentalists and singers.

The members of Euph4ria, all girls, sport euphoniums and tubas, whilst virtuoso Piers Adams with his group Red Priest will ensure you never again associate the humble recorder with the anaemic wailing many of us produced at primary school. Other outstanding young wind and brass players featured this July are trumpeter Alison Balsom in concert with organist Jonathan Scott, and the Galliard Ensemble whose mastery of the wind ensemble repertoire has left critics gasping. Claire Martin is the BBC Jazz Awards Vocalist of the Year.

No fewer than three choirs contribute to this our twentieth Festival: Salisbury Cathedral Choir (girl choristers and lay clerks) offers an inspiring selection of anthems and canticles from the cloistered world of 'quires and places where they sing'; the Choir of Gonville & Caius College Cambridge explores the glories of Tudor polyphony at historic Fotheringhay Church (where two handblown 'Early English' organs are in residence); Armonico Consort appears with world-famous percussionist Evelyn Glennie in a programme of thrilling choral masterpieces and a new commission.

air 'breath'd out from panting bellows'

As ever Oundle will prove a magnet for a unique group of wind players: young organists will gather here and in Cambridge from all over the world for tuition of unparalleled quality; our summer schools now span three weeks. Their distinguished tutors play celebrity recitals, which should win new friends for 'the king of instruments'.

take the air

Chiao-Ying Chang's virtuoso pianism, cultural excursions, art exhibitions, an atmospheric film, and Festival Eucharist with glorious music complete the scene, tempting you, we hope, to take a stroll through various art forms – and to be a little adventurous.

'Music is the only noise for which one is obliged to pay', quipped Alexandre Dumas, and so we should like to express

our sincere thanks to our sponsors, to trust funds and individual donors – and to our audiences who have already expressed confidence in our 2004 Festival.

We hope you will enjoy your visit. 'There is music in the air' at Oundle this July!

James Parsons and Patricia Ryan

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