

# EVENTS

## How The Light Gets In Festival at Kenwood House

SIMONE HALFIN

Kenwood was the venue for a glorious sunny weekend hosting How The Light Gets In Festival and transforming it with colourful lights, billowing tents and stalls – all backed by the sound of live music and animated conversation. Walking round to the back of Kenwood House, and looking down on such an unusual scene was really uplifting.

The theme of this year's festival was 'Error and Renaissance' and numerous speakers uncovered the errors in our thoughts and actions that have led to the current state of the universe. It sounds a bit bleak, but the multitude of ways the participants addressed what we should have done and, more importantly, what we can do now, was fascinating.

Of course my favourite tent was the 'Inner Circle' where you could wine and dine and discuss ideas and thoughts with world-leading speakers, actors, and colleagues which was very stimulating.

A discussion addressing the comment 'real life is an interference' provoked a heated debate with actress Sophie Ward imploring us

to enjoy each other as we are not born to live alone, and we all need people. 'Can you be independent not living alone' merged into a discussion on loneliness and how, during the pandemic people helped and supported each other. The concept of choice during covid was so restricted it changed our way of thinking radically.

At a panel debate entitled 'The New Renaissance' David Aaronovitch maintained 'academia was in need of new ideas, have things got worse? And are we more scientifically literate?' Difficult questions to answer.

A philosophical debate of 'the good, the bad and the ignored' discussed the topic of whether action or inaction (failure to act in crimes of neglect or failure to take action on climate change) were more morally culpable. The celebrated philosopher Peter Singer, from his zoom screen in Canada, stimulated animated discussion on whether the distinction/asymmetry between wrongful agency and inaction were here to stay, given that political decisions could more easily remove individual decisions to do the right thing than not to take



Photos: Sam McMahon (@kiwimcme)

wrongful action. We can more easily take responsibility for what we do, than acquire responsibility for the consequences of all the things we fail to do.

A capacity audience appreciated Denis Noble, an erudite, entertaining and highly articulate, brilliant 85 year old Professor, physiologist and philosopher of biology, who had succeeded (among many other accomplishments) in learning sufficient mathematics by studying to refine understanding the views of heart function from his biological research to develop the first mathematical model of how the human heart functions, back in 1960 and develop principles of biological relativity. He considers the genome more like a 'set of organ pipes' than a blueprint for life – and his 10 Principles of Systems Biology clarify our understanding of this confusing (for many of us) subject. In his spare time, his playing classical guitar led to his leading

role in founding the Oxford Troubadours, who have performed widely in several countries. He argued convincingly that free will is an illusion.

At a philosophy lunchtime session, Rana Miller discussed the future of China and how its future will define ours with participants from China and Hong Kong pointing to how the increased surveillance of Covid could have contributed to civil liberties being further eroded and contrasting problems of youth unemployment and changing demographics – as we all get older – as well as how Hong Kong's decrease in influence might have been reduced by its potential economic role.

The need for more awareness of difficulties caused for some by differences in Race and gender was raised by several participants – however I liked the philosophy, set out by one of the presenters, of 'encouraging people to disagree, whilst maintaining courtesies and mutual respect'.

'Tea and Prosecco' was also very well attended, with an animated discussion, led by Mary Anne Sieghart, about the position of women in society, and whether women made themselves unpopular by being too forward. I can't say I agreed with this discussion!

If you just wanted to chill and listen to music and watch comedy, or just sit in the sun and have a drink that was OK too. The music and acoustic sessions got more and more popular as the drink flowed and the evening darkened, and by Saturday night groups were dancing outside the tents.

The children and young adults weren't left out – they had their own space with events such as juggling, print making and a talk on the philosophy of games.

Finally, I had a fascinating discussion with a fifty-year-old Swede who had already made arrangements to have his body frozen as soon as he died.

All in all, it turned out to be a very interesting weekend!



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