



All fired up for festival

**By CARLY CRUMMEY and
MICHAEL WASHBOURNE**

A THEATRICAL and pyrotechnics spectacular marked the opening of the Perth International Arts Festival last night — one day after the launch was cancelled because of bad weather.

A near-naked man sporting a crown, an over-sized four-poster bed and a clapped-out car towing a caravan skimmed the surface of the Swan River while fire danced off floating platforms and fireworks burst in the sky.

On Friday night, about 20,000 people were left in the lurch, with crowd members complaining they had waited for more than an hour before being told the performance was cancelled due to strong winds.

But last night the show went on, with thousands of people lining the grass banks between The Narrows Bridge and the Perth Exhibition Convention Centre.

The Paterson family from Noranda crammed on to their picnic rug for the event, with mum Melinda describing the 40-minute display as magic.

The free Lotterywest Festival celebration will be repeated today from 9pm.

Meanwhile, on Perth's Esplanade, the strange-looking construction taking shape is the Beck's Music Box.

Custom-built for the Perth International Arts Festival, — the Music Box will host musical acts from around the world, as well as cabaret and comedy.

The Music Box will be a key feature of the festival for at least the next four years.

Described as an "open-air playground", the venue will hold 1200 people and is expected to attract more than 25,000 patrons during this year's festival.

The growth of the festival has forced organisers to move from the Perth Concert Hall to the big and unique venue in the heart of the city.

"The Music Box has now got a

relationship with the river and it's also got a really good location on the doorstep of the city," PIAF artistic director Shelagh Magadza told *The Sunday Times*.

Ms Magadza said the festival would again provide economic benefits for the city.

She said the festival had developed a reputation for having one of the best contemporary music programs in the country.

"Over the course of the past 50 years, (the festival) has been significant in bringing some of the best acts from around the world to Australia," she said.

"The local arts sector also benefits, as we employ more performers, technical people and other behind-the-scenes staff, such as set constructors, than we normally would."

The Music Box will remain for the duration of the festival, which ends on March 9.



WATER WORKS: The launch of the Perth International Arts Festival on the Swan River foreshore, last night near the Narrows Bridge.
Picture: JODY D'ARCY



FREE EVENTS

- * Lotterywest Festival
Celebration **Water Fools** —
Hotopie: The Swan River is set
ablaze tonight by a French
spectacular for the whole family.
From 9pm, Perth Foreshore, end
of William St.
- * Lotterywest Floating Films — **My
Neighbour Totoro:** Applecross,
Friday Feb 29, 7.30pm, at Jeff
Joseph Reserve). Bayswater,
Saturday March 1, 7.30pm, at
Riverside Gardens, Milne St. Hillarys,
Sunday March 2, 7.30pm, at Hillary's
Boat Harbour, South Beach.
- * **Madama Butterfly:** Friday Feb
22, 8.30pm, at Supreme Court
Gardens.
- * **Dirk The Mechanical Tramp**
Murray Street Mall, UWA.
- * **Le Kiosque** Forrest Place,
Lotterywest Floating Films.
- * **Visual Arts** — all free.
- * **Festival Forums.** Today from
1-3pm at the Playhouse Theatre.
Feb 22 from 1-3pm at King Street
Arts Centre.
- * **Perth Writers Festival.**
- * **Beck's Music Box After Parties.**
www.perthfestival.com.au