



Below right: Metal founder Jude Kelly OBE; Chalkwell Hall — Metal's new Thames Gateway home; the scale model in situ.

performing arts and creative industries in connection with London 2012.

"A big, white marquee isn't the most aesthetic solution when your event is in the middle of a beautiful park, and that's what inspired us to design a semi-permanent, 'organic' bandstand stage that complements the natural environment," explained McLoughlin.

"We approached London-based architects and Royal College of Art graduates Jaime Bishop (Fleet Architects) and Cassion Castle (CCA) who were willing to look at the location and the project has been full-on ever since."

Sitting on top of a permanent earthworks mound, the 16m wide modular stage will essentially be built from reclaimed wood and erected whenever the park hosts an event.

"The stage is being designed specifically for the task in hand with a low-fi, anti-tent feel," said Jaime Bishop. "It will have integral space for lighting and an acoustically-isolated, ground-stacked PA, and offer quite a sizeable area for performance."

"Choosing a very simple, 'democratic' material such as wood and coupling it with polycarbonate and other low-tech elements complements our approach to elevate banal or everyday materials. Being wood-based, it's also very easy to adapt."

Fully aware of some horror stories connected with unstable stages in the not-too-distant past, Bishop is

confident of the safety of this creation. "By the nature of the materials used, this stage will be heavier and sturdier than the aluminium alternative," he insisted.

"The beams will be thoroughly stress-tested our engineers at Structural Workshop who have had experience with temporary structures at several festivals including *Glastonbury*."

DEADLINE

Cassion Castle's experience is helping the team meet its looming deadline. "Not only has Cassion designed some fantastic buildings," said Bishop, "but he also acts as the contractor, which means we have a joined-up process that gives us control all the way through."

McLoughlin added: "To ensure that all our plans are as practical as possible, we're also working with theatre design consultant Michael Vale, as well as harnessing local technical support from lighting designer Andy Barak-Smith of It's All Done With Mirrors and Maple Studios owner/sound engineer Glyn Morgan." The team has also received acoustic advice from leading engineering group Buro Happold.

The results of the team's labours will be reviewed when we visit the *Village Green* festival on September 26 for an October issue update.

TPI

Photography by John Levy & Mark Cunningham
www.metalculture.com



PARK LIFE WITH THE METAL GURUS

BUILDING A SEMI-PERMANENT, 'ORGANIC' STAGE IN A THAMESIDE PARK IS THE LATEST INITIATIVE FROM PROGRESSIVE ARTS ORGANISATION, METAL. MARK CUNNINGHAM REPORTS...

Currently operating from offices in Liverpool and Southend-on-Sea, Metal — an organisation representing the whole spectrum of artistic disciplines including visual and musical arts — was established by Jude Kelly OBE, artistic director of the Southbank Centre.

Looking for a new opportunity to experiment with artistic endeavours, free of commercial pressures, Kelly originally found a virtually derelict building in West Hampstead and encouraged artists of all types to make it their creative 'laboratory' home.

Further down the line, with similar aspirations in mind, Metal acquired a base in Liverpool with the aim of using art forms to regenerate the area.

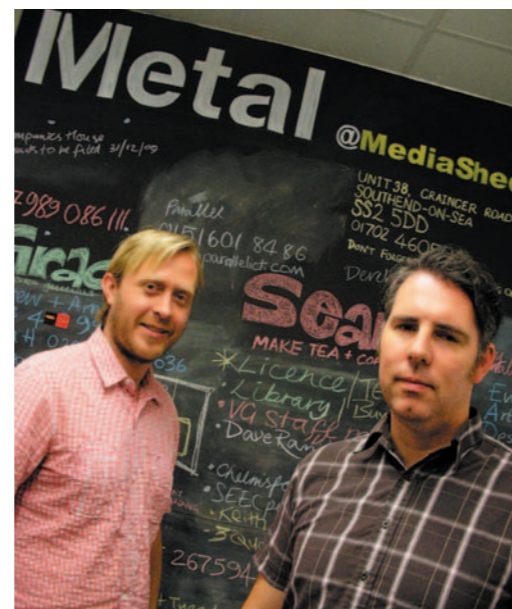
The success of the project led to a request from the Arts Council for Metal

to repeat the formula within the Thames Gateway region, and Southend-on-Sea Borough Council offered Chalkwell Hall, a large house that had remained largely unoccupied for 40 years.

"It's ideal," said programme development manager Sean McLoughlin, of the building which sits in the middle of Chalkwell Park, against the nearby backdrop of the Thames. "The house will have been completely renovated and opened by September."

By which time, one of the first major projects undertaken by Metal Southend will also reach fruition.

The design and build of a new, resident performance stage in Chalkwell Park will make its debut at the 2009 *Village Green* festival — an event that has gained the approval of the Cultural Olympiad, the body which seeks to showcase excellence in the



Above: Sean McLoughlin (centre) with architects Cassion Castle and Jaime Bishop with the model stage in Chalkwell Park, and with Bishop at Metal's Southend HQ office.

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