



Newbury Spring Festival



How to be a Young Critic

Supported by



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Introduction

Young Festival Critics Scheme

Young Festival Critics is an exciting scheme enabling young people between the ages of 15* to 25 who have an interest in the arts, live music and writing to explore new experiences and develop their writing skills.

If you are 15* to 25 and if you write a review of an event you have attended at the Festival, telling us what you thought of the performance you could win a cash prize - **£100 first prize with two runner-up prizes of £50.**

What's more, there are 9 events in this year's festival which are free to attend for Under-25s.

This year's judges are:

Jessica Isaacs - Head of Production, BBC Radio 3
Kate Green – Deputy Editor, Country Life
Trish Lee – Arts Editor, Newbury Weekly News
Rebecca Johns – PR Manager, Premier

We ask critics to focus on writing meaningful observations, thinking about the relationship between the performing arts and reviewing.

The Festival offers a world-class programme of events and includes new and well-known work performed in some amazing venues around Berkshire.

Book your tickets for Festival events by calling the box office on 0845 5218 218, or in person at the Corn Exchange, Newbury RG14 5BD.
Please note, if you book your tickets over the phone you will be charged a £1 booking fee.

*If you are aged 15 you will need to be accompanied by someone aged 18 or over.

**Tickets are subject to availability. Proof of age is required when free tickets are collected. Please note, these tickets can't be posted to you.

This guide describes the do's and don'ts of writing a good critical review and tells you how to format your review.

Edward Seckerson, journalist and broadcaster, whose work as a critic has included Chief Classical Music Critic for *The Independent*, Chief Classical Music Critic for *The Sunday Correspondent* and Classical Music Critic for *The Guardian*, describes the art of criticism:

'Criticism is still so misunderstood. Is it good or bad, the best or the worst, we critics are asked - and no matter how many times we care to explain that things are rarely black or white and it's the shades of grey in between that make something interesting or not the most sensational quotes will always make their way on to the hoardings and the well written, well balanced, review will more as not be put to one side.

For me the opinion has always mattered less than the way in which it is expressed and in an age where the most outspoken among us don't always feel it is necessary to substantiate their views in any thoughtful, meaningful, way it's great that schemes like Newbury's Young Festival Critics are giving a platform to budding young arts enthusiasts with something to say.

Sharing the experience of a play, a film, a concert, or piece of art or literature is what it is all about. The best critics make us feel part of that experience whether or not we were there ourselves. I like to think that doing so is an art in itself."

You can read reviews written by Young Festival Critics here

Guidance in brief

- When you've been to a performance you will have 48 hours to submit a review.
- Your review must be between 200 – 250 words (no longer) and submitted in the correct format. (See page 5).
- Email your review to alex@newburyspringfestival.org.uk In the subject line put 'YFC Review' and the name of the event.
- Reviews will be judged by a professional panel and will be posted on the Newbury Spring Festival website.
- The three reviews judged to be the most well written will receive a cash prize. £100 for the winning review and £50 for the two runners-up.
- [You can see a full list of the events that you can review here](#)

Collecting your tickets

If you have booked tickets to see a performance over the telephone, your tickets can be collected in advance of the event from the Corn Exchange, Newbury, or at the venue where the performance is being staged. Please pick up your tickets 20 minutes before the start of the event. If you have booked a free under-25s ticket, please ensure you have some identification that can prove your age, preferably photo ID.

The prize draw

We will submit all the outstanding reviews to a panel of experts who will be responsible for choosing the top three. We are fortunate to have some prestigious judges. Winning reviews will be announced and published on the Festival website.

How to submit review

As the Festival is only two weeks long you will have 48 hours from the performance to send your review to us. Please email it to alex@newburyspringfestival.org.uk. In the subject line put 'YFC Review' and the name of the event. Your review should be between 200 and 250 words.

How to format your review

Font size 12

Name of concert [bold]

Date, venue [bold]

Review 250 words... Review 250 words... Review 250 words... Review 250 words...
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Review 250 words... Review 250 words... Review 250 words... Review 250 words...
Review 250 words... Review 250 words...

Your name, your age [bold]

If you would rather not put your full name just put your initials i.e. **HP, 21**

Social Media

If you'd like to share your thoughts about your experience, e.g. 'On my way to the @BBCBigBand performance @CornExchange writing a review for #NSF2019' find us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Please use the hashtag #NSF2019 @NewburyFestival

[@NewburyFestival](https://twitter.com/NewburyFestival)



[NewburySpringFestival](https://www.facebook.com/NewburySpringFestival)



What happens to accepted reviews?

Once you have submitted your review we will read it and ask you to amend it if there are errors, or it's too long/short, or we don't feel it fits within the guidelines.

Once it's accepted we will email you with a link to where we've posted it on our website. You can then share on social media if you would like to.

Reviews will not be accepted if there are typos. Please make sure the fundamental information such as the event name, venue name, date etc. are correct.

How to write a review

Top tips

Please read this guidance carefully and submit your review in accordance to the guidance. The most important thing to remember when writing a review is be objective.

To do and what not to do, that is the question!

Please do	Please don't
Assess the work.	Assess the organization.
Be descriptive.	Tell the story.
Contextualise the work you are seeing – set the scene.	Make it too long.
Analyse the work.	Be negative or dismiss the work – be constructive.
Provide evidence to support your comments.	
Read about the company – this can be done after you have seen the productions.	
Make it factual.	

What *Not* To Do!

An Example of a Bad Review:

Jazz Night

Venue in Newbury

"I went to see a pianist for the Newbury festival. I didn't enjoy it as I don't like jazz. People were laughing and getting into his music but I found myself yawning and looking at the ceiling. I don't recommend you go and see this."

HP

Why is it bad?

It doesn't say who the performer was, or where the performance was held, or set the scene. It offers nothing positive to the reader except for a chuckle at how terrible it was. The reader doesn't care if you like jazz or not, they want to know why the event was part of the Festival's programme.

How to make it better?

Even if you didn't enjoy the event you can still appreciate it for its worth and be critical:

"Although Jazz would not my first choice of production. I could see the 'jazz-enthused' audience were appreciating the technique and gusto of the musician"

What To Do!

Here's an example of a well written review from a previous year:

Berlin Symphony Orchestra St Nicolas Church

An outstanding concert with the internationally acclaimed Berlin Symphony Orchestra playing Weber, Prokofiev & Beethoven. Held at St Nicolas Church in the centre of Newbury, I felt extremely lucky to have this rare opportunity to see an orchestra of this size and calibre in such an intimate setting. Agata Szycmczewska, violin, captivated the room from the moment she stepped on to the stage. She played with great skill Prokofiev's masterpiece.

When the final movement finished, you could hear a pin drop. The church which had been so full of sound became completely silent. It was very powerful and the audience were clearly moved. Having not been to a concert like this before, it's awakened a new passion in me. I will be sure to look out for more events of this kind.

(Reviewers name and age)

Other Points to Consider

The venue

Describe the venue. Is it an unusual space? What is it normally used for? Is this performance in keeping with other Festival events? What is the acoustic like? How many people does it hold?

The key performers (conductor, actor, lead performer)

It is worth researching a quick biography of the key people involved. You can find links to most performer sites from the Newbury Spring Festival events pages. Knowledge will contribute to the context and validity of your review.

The performers

How are they positioned on stage? Explain what you can see. How many of them are there?

The stage

The stage will be the first thing audiences will see - how is it set up and arranged? Does it do the performers justice i.e. is it simple, so as not detract from the performance?

The atmosphere

What is the audience's reaction to the event? Was it too long, too short, or just right? Were there any unwanted distractions? Did the audience seem to enjoy it?

Is it OK to say you didn't have a good experience?

The events at the Newbury Spring Festival have been programmed because of the reputation and the quality of the performers. It is important to bear that in mind when you are reviewing. The event or genre may not be of your taste, but it will be of good quality.

If you haven't enjoyed a performance this will make a review more difficult to write and you will need to put a lot of thought into your response. It is OK to state if the performer has had, in your opinion, an off night, or you have had a poor customer care experience.

Here's an example of a review from someone who, although the event wasn't to their taste, could still appreciate the quality of the performance.

Berlin Symphony Orchestra St Nicolas Church, Saturday 26th May

An outstanding concert with the internationally acclaimed Berlin Symphony Orchestra playing Weber, Prokofiev & Beethoven. Held at St Nicolas Church in the centre of Newbury, I felt extremely lucky to have this rare opportunity to see an orchestra of this size and calibre in such an intimate setting. Agata Szymczewska, violin, captivated the room from the moment she stepped on to the stage. She played with great skill Prokofiev's masterpiece.

I'd never experienced a concert like this before. I now feel I have a better understanding of classical music and orchestras and I can make an informed choice when considering booking events in the future.

Review structure

Here's a suggestion of how you should structure your review.

Order	What	Answer
Event name	As in the Festival guide	Berlin Symphony Orchestra, St Nicolas Church.
What was it about	One sentence	An outstanding concert with the internationally acclaimed Berlin Symphony Orchestra playing Weber, Prokofiev & Beethoven.
Set the scene	Where are you?	Held at St Nicolas' church, in the centre of Newbury. I felt we were very lucky, as it's so rare to be able to see an orchestra of this size and calibre in such an intimate setting
Artists	Who were they and what impact did they have?	Agata Szymczewska, violin, captivated the room from the moment she stepped on to the stage. She played Prokofiev's masterpiece beautifully.

Anecdote	Support your statement	Once the final movement had finished you could hear a pin drop. The church which had been so full of sound became completely silent
Wrap it up	This is where you can put your personal opinion	Having not been to a concert like this before, I feel it's awakened a new passion in me. I will be sure to look out for more events of this kind

What makes a great critic?

- Critical does not mean to criticise. A clever reviewer is objective and offers a constructive criticism not an over-enthusiastic or damning one.
- An eye for detail – think about the whole experience, from collecting your tickets to the venue, the staff, technical and sound as well as the performance.
- If you're seeing a musical or theatrical production, a description of the event, not a synopsis of the story.
- An understanding of the audience both at the event and those who might read your review.
- Don't use unnecessary, complex words but love the language you are using.
- Write clearly and stick to the format.
- Engage the reader, make your review enjoyable to read. Consider the tone of your writing. Make detailed observations and if it's appropriate - be funny.
- Point out the strengths and weaknesses (if there are any).

Review check list

- Be clear & concise – always try and shorten your sentences.
- Make sure it reads well and flows between sentences. Go for a short, punchy sentence rather than a long one with too many adjectives. Punctuation needs to be accurate.
- If you are criticizing some aspect of an event, make your point concisely.
- Verbs - Use active not passive verbs
e.g. The sound was heard by several people = passive
Many people heard the sound = active
- Accuracy - if you're quoting someone make sure the quote is correct. You can double check the spelling of names against the Festival's website. Don't use text speak!
- Be compelling – grab the reader's attention. Create a headline for the first sentence and make it snappy.
- Try not to repeat words to describe the event. For example, 'Brilliant musician in a brilliant venue'.
- If you're reviewing more than one event, try not to use the same descriptive sentence in your reviews.

And Finally

YFC's Terms & Conditions

- You must be aged between 15 and 25 years old to enter the competition.
- If you are 15 you must be accompanied by someone over the age of 18.
- Your review must be your own work.
- Identification is required if collecting a free ticket.
- Your reviews must be constructive not destructive and within the guidelines of 'how to write a review'.
- You must submit your review within 48 hours of seeing the event.
- Reviews must be between 200 and 250 words (maximum).
- If you are under 18 and you are a prize winner you will need a parent or guardian to agree in writing that you can accept the money.
- If you are a prize winner you will need a UK bank account.
- We reserve the right to edit reviews before they are posted online.
- By entering the Young Festival Critics scheme you accept these T&C's.

Data Protection

For details on the Festival's Privacy Policy, visit
www.newburyspringfestival.org.uk/about_us.htm

Thank you for taking part in the Young Festival Critic Scheme.

We look forward to hearing about your experiences!

The Festival team

Newbury Spring Festival Administration Office
33/34 Cheap Street, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 5DB T: 01635 32421