

Press release

For immediate release

Showcasing Portland's biodiversity: b-side Festival adds to its bumper cultural line-up as Weymouth and Portland named Towns of Culture

As Portland revels in its newly awarded title, the festival has announced two more unique installations coming to the isle early September

Portland is an area known for its character, its community and its amazing contributions to the UK's cultural scene. In the week that it was awarded the Towns of Culture title alongside Weymouth for 2025, two additional unique artists have been announced for Portland's b-side festival, which returns for its tenth edition from Thursday 5th - Sunday 8th September.

From Romanian song and dance reshaping the way people perceive and fear outsiders, to art that explores the migratory behaviours of seaweed, the latest announcements uniquely reflect the festival's 2024 theme of 'Who Do We Think We Are?'

Dan Babei - Bat-Man and the Na-Na's

Romanian-born resident of Portland Dan Babei's mission is simple; to challenge people's fear of the unknown and the unfamiliar, in this case using bats as a representation. Tackling misinformation and seeking to educate and entertain in equal measure, Dan's b-side contribution will start with a dusk/night-time walk, led by an expert in all things bats, around the paths of Chesil Cove, where the creatures in question can often be spotted. Audiences will be taught about the misunderstood animal and why people need to protect rather than fear them.

Following the educational first half of the performance, Dan's band, the aptly-titled Bat-Man and the Na-Nas, will perform some traditional Romanian songs around a campfire, and will delight audiences with a traditional Transylvanian dance, which they will be invited to join in with.

Dan Babei, Artist, said: "Bats are the inadvertent symbol of my country and my people as they are related to Transylvanian vampirical folklore. Bats are on the fringes of society, mysterious, only appearing on the edge of night and so they are feared and misunderstood by many. I relate to the way bats are treated as 'other' because of a lack of understanding, and like me, they have made Portland their home. Being an immigrant feels a bit like being a bat sometimes, especially as a Transylvanian man; it's the first thing I'm ever asked about - can I do a cheesy impression of a vampire and can I turn into a bat - so this piece feels equally poignant and personal for me."

Maddison Collymore - Seaweed Explorations

Also contributing to the festival's natural influences is Maddison Collymore's Seaweed Explorations. A b-side bursary funded project, in partnership with CODA Music + Arts Trust, exploring the nature and beauty of seaweed, the piece will see sustainable processes such

as printing, dyeing and anthotype (creating images using photosensitive material from plants) used to create a range of artistic experiments documenting the seaweed varieties collected from Portland's shores. The project also involves research into the biological properties, migratory patterns and ecosystems of the plants in order to identify and develop work around the various species.

Seaweed Explorations is a project facilitating Maddison's broader exploration of place, belonging and alternative living methods, in line with this year's theme of migration and identity.

Maddison Collymore, artist, said: "Seaweed Explorations looks to redefine notions of care, support and cohabitation through the study of diverse life forms and their systems and I'm grateful that this has been able to happen through b-side's bursary funding. The piece will offer visitors to and residents of the isle a unique perspective on what it means to nurture our environment and how we can use nature to further our understanding of human behavioural patterns."

The b-side festival's cultural impact, and it's support of emerging creative talent, has been widely recognised, with Weymouth and Portland being awarded the prestigious Towns of Culture title for 2025. Dorset Council's grant of £30,000 will support a year of cultural activities, and provide more opportunities for community engagement and artistic expression.

Rocca Holly-Nambi, Director of b-side, said: "Portland is an isle of incredible natural beauty and the wildlife present here perfectly reflects this year's festival theme of "Who Do We Think We Are?" through inviting audiences to consider the migratory patterns and behaviour of nature as a reflection of our own navigation of place and home. We are so grateful for the recognition of Portland's contribution to culture and we hope that in showcasing the talent and nature present here, we can continue to showcase the very best that Dorset has to offer."

For more information, please visit the b-side website <https://b-side.org.uk/> and Follow b-side festival on Instagram [@bsidefestival](https://www.instagram.com/bsidefestival), Twitter [@bsidefest](https://twitter.com/bsidefest) and Facebook [@bsidefest](https://www.facebook.com/bsidefest).

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