

The launch

The eyes of the world were on Liverpool for the start of the 08 celebrations. And the people of the city showed them just how to throw a party...

Friday 11 January 2008, and the nation's airwaves were buzzing with one story – the start of Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture.

It was a landmark event for Liverpool. An event which gave the city the chance to shout out to the whole world – it's our time, our place.

More than 300 million people worldwide witnessed the extraordinary '08 opening weekend. It was beamed to audiences across the globe, led by a cast of over 1,300 performers - from schoolchildren to ex-Beatle Ringo Starr.

Power to the People

First up was the People's Opening. More than 40,000 people gathered on St George's Plateau for the event on 11 January. Using the magnificent St George's Hall and various rooftops in the city's cultural heart, the jaw-dropping 50-minute spectacle cleverly played on the building works of the 'Big Dig' to create the 'Big Gig'.

Hard-hatted musicians and flak jacket aerialists swinging from cranes, crates and 40 foot screens wowed the crowd throughout the stunning sound and light display.

It was an event which declared that 'ordinary people' would be at the heart of the Capital of Culture celebrations. Over 700 performers, including school children, community choirs and poets joined dozens of celebrated Liverpoolians from Alison Steadman to David Morrissey, Ken Dodd to Claire Sweeney and Les Dennis to Marc Almond.

And to round-off the night, one of Liverpool's most famous sons, Ringo Starr provided a rooftop finale with his new autobiographical song – Liverpool 8.

Music to our ears

The following evening the spotlight switched from the city's pre-eminent Victorian venue to its 21st century equivalent - the brand-new ECHO Arena Liverpool - for Liverpool - The Musical.

The sell-out concert kicked-off at 20.08hrs on Saturday, January 12. And it had to be seen to be believed. Integrating spectacular live performances and film, the show featured a once-in-a-lifetime cast including: Vasily Petrenko and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Ringo Starr, Echo and The Bunnymen, The Farm, The Wombats, Pete Dinklage, Dave Stewart and, of course, the people of the city.



Also part of the 100-minute concert was evocative footage of the fall and rise of Liverpool from the vast riches of the British Empire to the Blitz and the £5bn redevelopment underway today. Every minute of the show underlined the city's claim to be the 'Creative Centre of the Universe'.

It was the perfect start to Liverpool's year as Capital of Culture. And when the dust had settled on a truly magnificent weekend, there was a strong feeling in the air that 08 was indeed going to be great.



The launch weekend – the numbers

- 300 million** – the size of the global audience which tuned in
- 55,000** – the number of man-hours needed to create and build the shows
- 50,000** – the number of people who attended the events
- 1,300** – performers who took part in launch weekend
- 1,200** – news items about the launch in national and international media from countries as far afield as Antigua, Australia, China, India and USA.
- 370** – the number of staff required to build and man the shows
- 308** – the number of worldwide journalists who covered the launch
- 194** – the weight in tonnes of staging, structures, lighting and speakers
- 164** – the number of nations which google'd 'Liverpool08' during week of the opening
- 54** – the number of kilometres of cabling used
- 40** – the number of aerialists who performed in the shows
- 6-78** – the age range of performers involved in opening weekend
- 2** – artist directors – Nigel Jamieson and Jayne Casey – who devised the opening weekend
- 1** – The size in square kilometres of the performance space used for the People's Opening

