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Presse Release

... like a fairytale: Wolf, Truth and Audacity at the 55th moers festival **Five days of sonic âventiure, international impulses, and a return to the heart of the city.**

Moers. The federally funded moers festival, taking place from 21 to 25 May 2026, today presented the programme for its 55th anniversary edition in the Rococo Room of Moers Castle. Under the motto "... like a fairytale", around 200 artists from over 20 nations will provide exciting auditory impulses this Whitsun, once again bringing musical audacity to Moers. This year, the festival bears the subtitle "Jazz festival for Little Red Riding Hood, clapping frogs, escapism and: Âventiure" and, for the first time, will return to the heart of Moers city centre on the Kastellplatz.

Under the guiding motif "... like a fairytale", the moers festival 2026 explores the power of storytelling. Fairytales are not merely reduced to the great European tradition but are understood as an artistic means of engaging with the complexity - and, unfortunately, the brutality - of our time. This subject is interpreted with radical artistic force through two semi-staged major productions: Gellert Szabo's Ideal Orchestra and the music theatre piece "Märchenhafte Klangschaften" by the Chroma Kollektiv, both of which translate the search for truth and the escape into fiction into powerful sonic landscapes.

"The 55th moers festival aims to provide its audience and all participating artists with five days of sonic âventiure and escapism – an escapism capable of both enchanting us and disenchanting reality," says festival director Tim Isfort, explaining the reasoning behind the motto. "Because today, quite a few 'fairytale uncles and aunts' are propagating their own 'truths' in politics, social media, and increasingly autocratic systems. The 'Big Bad Wolf', it seems, is still lurking everywhere today."

Return to the City

The previously announced relocation to Kastellplatz, in the immediate vicinity of the festival's origins in the castle courtyard (Schlosshof), serves as the spark for the longest and most intensive edition in the festival's history: for the first time, the anniversary programme will span five days (21 to 25 May 2026). Furthermore, camping returns to the Freizeitpark: on the "Ballonwiese" - close to the plaza there, yet only a short stroll from the main festival action - a cohesive festival site is being created that combines short distances with the characteristic **moers festival** sense of community.

The festive opening will be performed by the WDR Big Band, conducted by Vince Mendoza (US). Together with South African jazz pianist Nduduzo Makhathini, they will fill the Kastellplatz with sound in a large-scale line-up on Thursday (21 May), the nationwide "Day of Action for Solidarity in Diversity".

Spotlight Countries: USA and “?Africa”

The decision to focus on the USA as a spotlight country in 2026 is rooted not only in the exceptional selection of pioneering artists from the current US scene, but also in the marginalisation of Black culture under the current US regime and the ‘fairytale’ spun by the incumbent US president, which reflect the festival’s theme of fiction versus reality in a unique way. Renowned figures travelling from the USA include the saxophonist Lakecia Benjamin - recently nominated for a Grammy - and the New York ensemble Yarn/Wire, consisting of Russell Greenberg and Sae Hashimoto (perc) alongside Laura Barger and Julia Den Boer (p). Afro-American jazz, with its roots in Chicago’s AACM, is also represented through formations led by Nicole Mitchell (Nicole Mitchell’s Black Earth Sway), Tomeka Reid, and Joy Guidry. In a similarly strong parallel, the festival continues its “?Africa” series with a focus on the region of Togo, Benin, and Ghana: around 20 artists, including the Anagoko Family (Benin) and Nana Benz du Togo, will bring traditional Serepewa music, Voodoo culture, and West African storytelling traditions to the stage in a dozen different festival settings.

100 Years of Modernism: Hommage to Morton Feldman and György Kurtág

Two luminaries of music history will turn one hundred years old in 2026. The Moers Festival is dedicating a thematic focus to the American composer Morton Feldman, centred around an ‘immersive’ performance of his work “Rothko Chapel”. Feldman’s work also finds a playful connection in the youth project “Peter, Little Red Riding Hood and the Kind Wolf Morton”. Congratulations will be offered to the Hungarian composer György Kurtág, who has just turned 100, by his son, György Kurtág Jr., and the cimbalom master Miklós Lukács. Furthermore, Kurtág’s characteristic chamber music fragments will be heard throughout the entire duration of the festival across the “Unimoersum”.

Crossing Borders: Collaborations and International Impulses

The partnership with the British Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (hcmf//) will be intensified in 2026 through the project Xperimental N-Counters (XN). In joint workshops led by Heather Roche and concerts such as the noise trio Erosion Control or the duo Shahbaz Hussain & Helen Anahita Wilson, British experimentalism and global influences merge to create new, unheard-of soundscapes. XN is funded by the Gesellschaft zur Verwertung von Leistungsschutzrechten mbH (GVL) and Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL), with support from the Goethe-Institut London.

Fairytale discoveries can be found in every corner of the world: the Indonesian duo Senyawa will explore the boundaries of voice and instrument in five different constellations. A technological counterpoint is provided by Moritz Simon Geist with his performance TRIPODS ONE: he lets robots create music, exploring the tense interplay between mechanical sound generation and electronic structures. Further impulses arrive from Brazil with “So Says the Drum” (Bella Comsom & Bruna Cabral), Iceland (Lilja Maria Asmundsdottir) and Egypt (The Dwarfs of East Agouza). These are joined by international formations such as Gordon Grdina’s RU’YA feat. Ghalia Benali (CA/TN/TR/IR/AU/DE) and Witch ‘n’ Monk (UK/CO). The current 19th Improviser in Residence, Evi Filippou, bridges the gap between composition and experiment with her eight-piece ensemble InEvitable extended (GR/PL/DE/JP/FI/GB). This top-tier line-up – Evi Filippou (vibr, perc, voc), Zuzana Jasinska (voc), Robert Lucaciu (db), Keisuke Matsuno (g), Arne Braun (g), Jim Hart (dr), Darius Wankel (dr) and Daniel Glatzel (sax, cl) – guarantees virtuosity, wit and the pure joy of playing.

Sessions in the Schlosshof & Freysinn in the Röhre

For the 55th festival anniversary, contemporary improvised music returns to the Schlosshof (castle courtyard) after half a century. Just like in the festival's early days, the courtyard of Moers Castle will become a place of direct encounter and free exchange. During the moers sessions, the boundaries between stage and audience blur as artists from the main programme revive the spirit of free jazz in spontaneous formations. The sessions will continue to be curated by jazz musician Jan Klare.

Another highlight of improvised music is the Freysinn sessions in the "Röhre", creating a 'festival within a festival' that invites sonic adventure: free and uncurated, artists come together on stage to spontaneously make music and experiment. The Freysinn sessions will be opened on Thursday evening by local musicians Jan Krause (g), Fabian Deschler (sax), and Johannes Schierhorn (dr) performing as "Kraus'sches Deschelhorn".

A Cosmos of Short Distances: The "Unimoersum" around Kastellplatz

The main stage on Kastellplatz transforms Moers city centre into a compact festival hub. The action branches out into the Schlosshof (castle courtyard), the churches of St. Josef and the Evangelical Stadtkirche, as well as the Alte Landratsamt, the Schlosstheater, and the Peschkenhaus. A special meeting point is being created on the lawn by the Pulverhaus: under the title "Where the Wild Frogs Clap", free children's and family programmes as well as workshops will take place during the day, before the area transforms into a concert stage in the evening. The "Röhre", the Bollwerk 107, and the skate park in the Freizeitpark further extend the reach of the "Unimoersum".

A Festival Village for Everyone

The link between the city and the music is formed by the extensive festival village. This year, the colourful market not only surrounds the ticketed stage on Kastellplatz but also extends as a vibrant promenade from the Evangelical Stadtkirche through the 'Kleine Allee' into the Schlosspark. Visitors can look forward to international delicacies ranging from savoury to sweet, with a wide selection of vegan options to suit every taste. The culinary offerings are complemented by a diverse non-food market: the range extends from bespoke jewellery, handicrafts, and gemstones to vintage and second-hand fashion, accessories, and modern art. The festival village is designed as an open meeting place: admission is free for all guests and does not require a festival ticket.

Tickets: Pay What You Can!

Regular ticket sales have been underway since February, following the successful introduction of the "Pay What You Can" solidarity pricing model in 2025: tickets are available for 45, 87, 129, and 172 Euro - buyers decide for themselves which price category best suits their financial means. Every ticket category is valid for all festival days and venues. Furthermore, a "Silent Heroes" ticket is available (300 Euro): in addition to admission to a secret concert and a free camping spot, it includes access to the backstage catering area and a 2026 festival shirt.

Camping at the moers festival is only possible with a campsite ticket. For "Silent Hero" ticket holders, the campsite ticket is free of charge but must be booked separately. The campsite ticket costs 30 Euro and is available exclusively in combination with a festival ticket.

Tickets for the 55th moers festival 2026 are available at: tickets.moers-festival.de

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Programme / Line-up

The programme, including a full list of acts, artists, instruments, and nationalities, is attached to this press release. Subject to change.

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About the moers festival

The internationally renowned and federally funded moers festival has taken place annually at Whitsun since 1972 and has been organised by Moers Kultur GmbH since 2005. Over five decades, the festival has continuously opened up and expanded from its origins as a pure New Jazz festival; in 2025, it bore the subtitle "Jazz festival for Music / Togetherness / Freysinn and: Sonic Peace!". Additional formats, institutions, and series—such as the moers sessions (morning sessions and projects), the Improviser in Residence (since 2008), the discussions (since 2017), rotating youth projects (since 2018), and hybrid formats (@the same time or the VR moersland, since 2021)—further extend the festival's cosmos.