

The starstudded Ben Hur Live premiere in Rome

A spectacular magnificently **reconstructed arena that seats 2400 spectators** per show is to witness the live staging, breathtaking from all reports, of **Ben Hur**, the immensely successful **Hollywood saga and blockbuster** loosely based on an **1880 book of the same title**. This live show opens at the **Nuova Fiera di Roma**, which appears to have taken with a vengeance to such sensational **live shows featuring man and machine**, beast and humans in drawn connections **from prehistoric times** to today, on September 29th. 2011.

Ben Hur Live that first opened in London's Arena in 2009 has since captivated fortythousand spectators in the UK and a further 100,000 in Germany and Switzerland in its eight week run) and fetched its team of extravaganza experts accolades from press and public alike. Among the star attractions of this actionpacked drama is a high speed chariot race that thrills the adult as well as the child. The public is made to feel as though it is in the **Circus Maximus of the day with history and historic scenes whirling round** whether in the form of **battle scenes or fullfledged naval combat on a sea of sheer thick fog**. From the **Sermon of the Mount to Jesus's crucifixion**, it's all there as elements of the nativity story go hand in hand with a chariot race and strands of a love story intertwine with Ben Hur's conversion.

The narrative is a tightly constructed epic story that incorporates elements of the age-old and new in its traditional storyline of **love and hatred, friendship and enmity, revenge and eventual redemption**. Although we had **Sidney Alcott's controversial silent movie of 1907** based on a Ben Hur theatre production and the **1925 Fred Niblo silent movie version** (the first film with colour sequences), most of us remember Ben Hur thanks to the **1959 William Wyler film starring Charlton Heston** in the title role.

The Ben Hur Live we are soon to see has won acclaim for its **scintillating score composed by Stewart Copeland**, foundermember and drummer of the band **The Police** who has to his credit some **sixty soundtracks for television and film**. Hailed as an epic drama with the pulse and vibrancy of a rockopera, the spinetingling melodrama of Hollywood blends with moments straight from the realms of Greek tragedy. Closeknit sequences as in a Westend musical keep up the momentum. Directed by Philip McKinley famed for his Broadway successes **The Boy From Oz, Hair and Spiderman**, Ben Hur Live is the one worth watching out for. **Marc Fisher's stage design and sets** ought to be worth their weight in gold, with the reputed designer having made a name for himself internationally in the **Beijing Olympics Ceremonies of 2008** although in the pop and rock music world he is remembered for his work on **U2's 360 and Pink Floyd's The Wall**. **Patrick Woodroffe**, believed to have worked **magic with his lights** on these Ben Hur sets, is a past master at his art, having enlivened the rock concerts of **stage mesmerists Michael Jackson and the Rolling Stones**.

Those into Hollywood actionpacked stunt scenes choreographed in the manner of a dance drama would be on the edge of their seats when it comes to the **Rick Sordellet directed fight scenes** for it is he who has shaped the incredible sequences in **Lion King and Tarzan**. Like most live shows of its status and more, Ben Hur Live is expected to score hugely on account of its **costumes** which come straight from the designing hands of costume designer **Ann Hould-Ward** celebrated for costumes both **beautiful and beastly in the famous musical**.

With **horses playing the lead in the chariot race**, Ben Hur plans on harnessing the services of **camels, birds of prey, donkeys and goats** in its various performances as an integral part of the action and narrative. The company prides itself on its **ethical attitude to all creation** with the utmost care given to **the live show's performing animals**, their accommodation and transportation. Both animal experts and trainers have been advising the show managers, as animal rights groups, provided access to the working sessions, monitor the events as external observers.

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The Lewis Wallace book *Ben Hur* published in 1880 describes the life of a Jewish prince Judah Ben Hur in 1 A.D. Condemned to the galleys after an attack on the Roman governor of Judea, he plots **an uprising against Rome's occupation**. He supposedly wins a chariot race against a **Roman called Messala**, his one time friend turned opponent. Ben Hur **encounters Jesus and is converted** by his teachings and gives up his violent political plans. **Wallace** (1827-1905), a **politician** of status having been Senator for Indiana, and Governor New Mexico, was the **US Ambassador of Turkey till 1885**, a time when his book was successful.

The starstudded **Ben Hur Live premiere** is to take place on 29th. September this year with the official public launch on the 30th. of the month that hath thirty days. **The ticket sales** (E.32 to 122) **have commenced and are available online** at www.benhurlive.com [1] and www.ticketone.it. **Six shows a week for two months** of a show that promises to take live entertainment and theatre culture to new heights ought to satisfy Rome's public starved for wholesome family entertainment.

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[1] <http://www.benhurlive.com>