

## **REPORT OF MORAY'S FIRST ARTS CONFERENCE**

### **'CHANGING LIVES' – HELD AT GLENFIDDICH DISTILLERY ON 15<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2004**

**Eddie Aldridge OBE**, Convener of The Moray Council, welcomed everyone to Moray's first ever Arts Conference. Approximately 80 delegates from a wide range of organisations and backgrounds were in attendance. Mr Aldridge then went on to introduce the Chair for the day, **Mr Bryan Beattie**, Expert Adviser to the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport.

#### **1st Panel Session**

**Nick Feame**, Arts Development Officer for The Moray Council, opened the session by setting the context for the Conference. He described how there has been a change in focus in the role of the Arts and that there is now more of an emphasis on development than 'events and entertainment', so helping to enable, facilitate and empower groups and individuals. He went on to say that Arts Development has an important and increasingly central role in addressing issues of inclusion, community learning and personal development.

He demonstrated how far Arts Development has come since taking up his appointment by talking about the writing of The Moray Council's Arts Development Strategy and its key strategic objectives concerning participation and working with young people. He added that tangible evidence of The Moray Council's commitment to Arts Development was the fact that this Conference was taking place. The Strategy has enabled The Moray Council to access considerable sums of money either directly or through partnerships to develop new initiatives and to take on staff; namely 3 Arts Development Workers, a Cultural Co-ordinator through the Scottish Executive and a Youth Dance Development Worker through New Opportunities Funding.

The Moray Council is now in a position to deliver high profile projects such as bringing the Royal Shakespeare Company to Forres for a week in 2002 which was so successful they asked if they could include Forres again in their 2005 tour (due back in April). Funds for the Cultural Co-ordinators Programme via SAC and Scottish Executive funds, enabled a Theatre In Education (TIE) company to be set up under the auspices of the Local Authority. 'Dr Dog' (which Nick adapted to a play from Babette Cole's book) had a very successful run round all Moray schools; two sell-out shows at the Lemon tree, Aberdeen and performances at The Hub Conference and The Highland Festival. Further funding through HPF has enabled a further, month long tour to take place in September.

Nick mentioned how the achievements of the Arts team are being recognised using their recent 'Big Draw' £500 award, for 'Putting Artists on Trains', as an example. He described how until recently, The Moray Council was in the bottom 5 councils when it came to spending on the arts but that Arts Development was included in a recent HMIE

inspection and came out very well. He went on to quote "It's not the size that matters, it's what you do with it!".

Nick concluded by giving a brief outline of what delegates could expect from the day and handed over to Tina McGeever of Out of the Darkness Theatre Company.

**Tina McGeever**, Director of Out of the Darkness Theatre Company, gave a Power Point Presentation on the work of the Company. She described how it all started within The Moray Council with whom it still enjoys strong links. It received Lottery funding in 2002 which financed the employment of a full time Arts Worker and has also had funding from Europe. OTD are a SQA Approved Centre for Training and professionals are brought in on a regular basis. Regular workshops are held and they tour Moray providing Quality Professional Theatre.

Tina went on to describe how accessible and inclusive their training is and how they are community based and encourage social inclusion. They have forged strong community links and they challenge the perceptions that people have about disabilities. The attitudes of people, other agencies and funders are challenged by OTD and they enable change through training, supporting other groups/organisations and working in partnership.

**Andy Fairgrieve**, Project Manager of the Glenfiddich Artist in Residence Scheme described what the 'Artist in Residence Scheme' was all about. It was established in 2002 and up to 8 artists, who are at the heart of contemporary art in their country are drawn internationally to take part. Leading Contemporary Art Galleries put forward these artists and a good mix of styles is normally achieved. They are not there to produce work for William Grant but are given space to develop their own work in their own time which Andy compared to the whisky maturing process. The scheme proves that you don't have to visit London to experience high quality art and that it is challenging perceptions of Scotland in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The scheme was originally partly funded by Arts and Business Scotland but is now solely funded by William Grant & Sons who provide £100,000 per year sponsorship. It is seen as a long term investment which brings a focus to Moray and it is publicised throughout the year in Tourism, Trade and Arts Literature.

Andy went on to say that in the high summer season, Glenfiddich Distillery attracts approximately 1000 visitors per day. The Gallery adds value to the visit and at the same time, people visiting the gallery are encouraged to visit the Distillery. Good relationships are the key to creating a local infrastructure and Glenfiddich has changed the perceptions of artists in Moray through these relationships. Most people entering the gallery expect to see 'Stag, Heather and Weather' type paintings and are surprised when confronted with high quality contemporary art. Andy said that good links have already been

established with The Moray Council Arts Development Team, Moray College and Grays School of Art.

Andy finished off by reflecting that when you're having a dram in company you drink to your friends whereas when you're having a dram on your own, you drink to absent friends!

**Caroline Docherty**, Head of Planning and Area Development at the Scottish Arts Council then took the floor. She started off by saying that the 3 aims of the Scottish Arts Council are: increasing participation in the Arts; supporting artists to fulfil their potential and create business and placing arts and culture at the heart of learning. She went on to say that the Scottish Arts Council receives £67 million per year funding from the Scottish Executive and the National Lottery.

The Scottish Arts Council promotes Scotland's Arts and Artists, promotes social inclusion and advocates the importance of the arts at a national level. She quoted the First Minister's St Andrews Day speech in which Jack McConnell said "I intend that this country – our devolved government – should have – in the words of Jude Kelly – the courage and faith to back human imagination, our innate creativity, as the most potent force for individual change and social vision".

Caroline then focused on the Scottish Arts Council and Moray and described how the partnership with the Council goes back 10 years. In the 1990s the SAC funded an Arts Officer. This was followed by funding through the Local Authority Partnership Fund for a three year programme of arts development. Since then there has been a push on education and a Cultural Co-ordinator has been put in post. She went on to say that ambition and confidence has grown in Moray and a lot more is happening with regard to youth groups, building on experience, increasing the range and quality of work, the establishment of The Buckie Festival and the success of the Royal Shakespeare Company's visit 2 years ago. She said that the SAC has contributed to North East Arts Touring (NEAT) which has drawn in cost-effective and ambitious touring work. They had also provided money to enable artists in Moray to work internationally as well as helping local playwrights and dancers to travel abroad. It was very encouraging to see local galleries like 'Just Art' in Fochabers celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary recently. Financial help was also given towards Moray's involvement in 'Scotland at the Smithsonian' – a prestigious international festival which was attended by the Keith Kilt School and Fochabers Fiddlers.

She said that three important issues were to look after your artists; keep investing in quality and realise the importance of political leadership. Finally, Caroline made it clear that the Arts wasn't a quick fix and compared it with the whisky distilling process – both need time, patience and long-term investment.

Questions from the delegates were then invited. An artist, living close to Glenfiddich Distillery commented that the 'Artist in Residence Scheme' has made a huge difference

to living in the area since it began in that she no longer feels isolated. She described it as a breath of fresh air and she is now able to discuss ideas with other artists.

Andy was asked about the selection process for choosing artists to take part in the scheme. He replied that there was a process that involves lots of publicity and that only reasonably well-known artists were considered.

Councillor Alasdair Urquhart congratulated the Arts team on organising such a great event and said that he would politically support further funding for the Arts Workers who are currently on short-term contracts. Caroline Docherty commented that the current posts were funded through the National Lottery and that they were currently trying to redistribute resources as much as possible. She stressed that the SAC are listening to Local Authorities and would continue to support Arts Development in Moray.

So to the main speaker, **John Byrne**, Artist and Playwright who kicked off by saying that hearing a review of 'Troy' on the radio that morning made him think about the complexity of story-telling. He continued by saying that he first came to the area at the age of 10 in 1950 on a school trip and stayed in a school in Lossiemouth. He particularly remembers Pluscarden Abbey, where one of the Brothers on speaking to him, prophecised that the gable end, then in ruin, would be rebuilt by 1970 – which of course it has. Since then John has always felt drawn to Moray describing it as a wonderful place with a certain resonance and a great place to work.

He believes that he is lucky because he has always done what he does – i.e. drawing – initially without making a penny. He said that he was an artist without realising it and will be until he drops. He continued by saying that when he learned to write it changed his life and that by the age of 9 he was writing parodies and newspaper articles for children. He said that his parents started taking him along to the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow and that he slept through every production while at the same time being taken in by the atmosphere of the place. Later on at the London Apollo he watched 'Forty Years On' by Alan Bennett and hearing the audience laughing made him think that he too would like to be able to make people laugh. It took about 10 years for the penny to drop and in the meantime he became a secret writer.

John then spoke about how some time later he had a conversation with Tom McGrath who he asked how he went about getting a play published. Tom told him that he had an influential friend and soon after the Scottish Society of Playwrights (SSP) got in touch. As a result of this he put on 'Writer's Cramp' at the Edinburgh Festival which he managed to finance from a portrait commission.

He went on to say that he considered himself to be very lucky as he had the faith to do things on a shoe string. He said that he felt that artists must have an in-built naivety that they can make things happen in order to produce work.

John believes that the theatre was the first time in his life where he felt he had found a home. He left its confines for a while but on returning he once again felt that rush and the comfort, security and safety. There, in the theatre he feels that the parameters of his world are boundless and compared it to being back in the womb.

Rather amusingly, John went on say that he feels lucky that he has 2 hats; neither fits exactly and both are worn at a jaunty angle! A delegate then asked John if in his experience successful artists had to be naïve enough to think that they could make anything happen. John answered him by saying that they were masquerading a lot of the time, that it should be visible in their work and quantifiable in the way they are themselves. He added that you should be able to spot a phony a mile away!

John said that in order that he can produce good work, he must have total solitude. He feels he had an advantage when he first moved to Easter Ross because he didn't know anyone. He knew he had a cousin in the area but deliberately avoided him until he bumped into him one day and now they are good friends. He loves the fact that you can 'hear' the quietness of the area and feels no connection with London whatsoever. It was exciting for him in London to start with but returning to Pluscarden Abbey was a transforming experience. He then made quite a thought-provoking comment – 'if you have no choices or no money you need company'.

John admitted that he likes to spend a lot of time on his own and always has a desire to work. He has no conscious intellect and believes that what he has is a gift. Another member of the audience then asked John how he felt he had developed since leaving art school. He answered by saying that he completed art school in 1962 knowing he wanted to be a painter and camped outside the Colquhoun and McBride Gallery until he convinced them to give him a show.

John said that being an artist nowadays is a lot easier than it was in 1962 so after he married he put art aside and worked with Scottish TV. He then moved onto more figurative stuff and had a summer show at the Royal Academy. He feels that nowadays in art school, nobody can draw and went on to slate orange boxes surrounded by barbed wire which was supposed to be art. Also, many more people are going to art school nowadays – 10,000 compared to about 500 in his day.

He went on to talk about the National Theatre in England saying that nothing they performed was produced in Scotland and that as far as he knew they had never toured. He added that the Scottish National Theatre will not have a building and that this is the right way forward.

A member of the audience involved in dance said that he feels he is so caught up in the world of funding and filling in applications that he doesn't have time to pursue his art. John replied that he feels our artists need to be looked after and felt privileged because he can get others to do his administration for him. He added that although he is described as an artist, he doesn't see himself as such and feels the word is much mis-used.

John again jumped back to his childhood and said that during this time his household received 27 newspapers and magazines every week. He read them all cover to cover including publications such as 'Woman's Own'. There were only ever 2 books in the house, the Bible and a children's book about rice pudding which he gained great inspiration from.

John was asked what comes first – art or writing? He said that they come simultaneously and writes from what he described as a film unspooling in his head. He has to know his characters, give them names and believe in them before this can happen though.

John once tried to write a detective novel thinking it would take him two months but it took him 9 years after which he just threw it in the bin and as a result he has great admiration for people who can write fiction. All the characters he uses are based on his own experiences but nobody ever seems to recognise themselves.

His definition of art is 'Experiences of Life' and he considers that a real, genuine work of art will tell you it's a work of art even though the initial response may be hatred of it.

He continued rather controversially by saying that as a result of being brought up with Irish songs and folklore he has a dislike of the Irish and tentatively asked if there were any Irish in the audience. He plans to tour Ireland to try and find out what he doesn't like about them.

A lady in the audience thanked John for the inspiration that his talk produced and said that she now feels more confident about following her creative urges and won't now be afraid to knock on doors.

Another delegate said that after teaching for 25 years she took the brave step of leaving her job and now the work is pouring out of her. John agreed that it takes guts.

Unfortunately, all too soon John's time was up and after initially feeling apprehensive about talking in front of such a large audience, you got the impression that he genuinely felt disappointed about having to stop and that he could have gone on for a lot longer.

### Second Panel Session

**Jacqueline Bennett**, Arts Development Worker for Moray Central, introduced the second panel session entitled 'Changing Youth'. Giving a brief insight into the role of the Arts Development Team in relation to young people across Moray, Jacqueline then invited the other members of the panel to describe the projects they've been involved in.

John Todd, Detached Youth Worker with The Moray Council, described the background to the Hythehill Project and about the building up of relationships with the young people. He explained how 'The Happening' was held in the grounds of Hythehill

Primary School, a target of severe vandalism and how no vandalism has occurred since the event took place. He said that it demonstrated in a positive way how beneficial the arts can be to young people.

Craig, one of the young people involved, was asked about his experiences prior to the Hythehill Happening. He replied that he used to hang around the streets and as soon as an incident occurred the police would automatically blame him and his friends and they would get thrown in the back of the police van. The reason that he and his friends came to 'The Happening' was because they were bored and had nothing else to do. The main attraction for them was the dance element.

John went on to say that he didn't think the arts would attract young people in the beginning but his views have now changed. Once the young people experienced the dance, it was very easy to attract them to the event. The feedback from all over Lossiemouth has been very positive.

When asked how they would like to continue Craig and Katie (another of the young people) replied that they are organising their own event next Saturday.

John concluded by saying that his job has been made a lot easier thanks to the project which has resulted in fewer incidents taking place.

**Catherine Hall**, chairperson and volunteer with Total Jam, started off by saying how far the group has come since its formation almost 3 years ago. She commented that it was sometimes quite frightening as well as amazing how much the group has grown and progressed in that time. She explained how the idea for the group had come about. Word got round that someone was giving free guitar lessons in the back of a record shop in Buckie. Before long, more and more young people started attending which resulted in a small fee being charged. The demand was so high that Total Jam was born the aim being to make music tuition affordable to all.

Catherine said that they have faced a few problems over the years, namely seeking suitable accommodation, securing funding to pay for this, buying equipment (they didn't want anyone to be prevented from coming along just because they didn't have an instrument to practice on) and tuition fees. However, the group has worked hard and has been most successful in obtaining grants. Membership has now grown to almost 80 and their current premises have allowed them to take on new tutors due to the quality space available.

Catherine admitted that the whole experience has been a huge learning curve. It has also been worrying, frustrating, yet immensely satisfying to be involved in helping set up such a group as theirs from scratch. She finished by saying that it has been hard work but really worth it when you can hear the difference in a young person's playing in a few short weeks and see their confidence grow each time they achieve something new. This is what makes it all worthwhile and she hopes to remain part of the group for many years to come.

The next panelist, **Bryan Beattie**, in his capacity as Expert Adviser to the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, started off by briefly outlining the remit of the newly announced Cultural Commission.

He said that through this Commission each citizen in Scotland should have access to cultural activity (with an emphasis on young people) and that the rights and responsibilities of artists and the creative community would be considered. The Commission will therefore be asked:

- to provide guidance and advice on initiatives which affect the wider objectives of Scottish Government;
- for specific guidance on how cultural bodies should relate to other Scottish Executive policy areas, in particular education, enterprise, sport, tourism and major events;
- for specific guidance on the responsibilities of other public sector agencies and local authorities;
- to comment on guidance for the private and voluntary sectors in this regard;
- to assess the merits and potential of cultural planning in this regard.

He added that the commission will acknowledge the full cultural ecology of Scotland and that the scope of the Commission's work will embrace all branches of the arts; the creative industries (including screen and broadcasting); museums and heritage; galleries; libraries; archives; architecture and relationships to events, festivals and sports. The Commission will consider how to achieve best value from existing resources and how to use public spend to lever growth in the cultural and creative industries. Its recommendations will be to develop national and local programmes in arts and culture aimed at achieving excellence; to actively promote young talent by increasing links between public support and commercial enterprise; to strengthen the link between art and culture and the promotion of tourism and economic growth and develop Scotland as a creative centre for film, TV and new media.

### Workshop/Demos

After lunch and the optional distillery tour the delegates were split into three groups and had the opportunity of attending each of the 20 minute workshops.

Everyone was amused by the antics of the Clown Doctors in the **Hearts and Minds Workshop**. They fidgeted and misbehaved while **Magdalena Schamberger** explained what Hearts and Minds and Clown Doctors was all about. She explained that Hearts and Minds is a registered charity which was established in 1997 to promote the quality of life of people in hospital and hospice care. She said that it achieves this aim by delivering participative arts-in-health programmes: the Clowndoctors programme for children and the Elderflowers programme for elderly people with dementia. Both programmes use the performing arts as a starting point for communication and an outlet for creativity, aiming to contribute to the emotional, mental and physical well-being of participants. Once Magdalena had finished, the Clown Doctors asked everyone to close their eyes

and woe betide anyone who they caught peeping. Red noses were handed out and while keeping eyes closed everyone was ordered to put them on. Eventually the instruction was given to open eyes, and seeing everyone wearing red noses created lots of laughter and embarrassment and led to photos being taken of unsuspecting delegates.

Everyone then trooped along to the next workshop where **Robert Livingston**, Director, gave a very interesting and informative power point presentation on what **HI~Arts** is all about.

He explained that it was founded in 1991 in order to deliver arts development roles on behalf of Highlands and Islands Enterprise. They are dedicated to arts development and employ a staff of 15 who are based all over the Highlands and Islands area. HI~Arts is an independent company limited by guarantee with charitable status. Their Mission Statement is – “HI~Arts will work in partnership to give a vital and sustainable cultural environment for all people in the Highlands and Islands”

Robert said that it is core-funded by the Scottish Arts Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise and its programme of work is defined through an annual contract with HIE.

He then went on to list some of the projects that HI~Arts has been involved in for instance Artsplay, Screen Machine, Visual Arts marketing, Crafts web page, Audience Development and so on.

With regard to Music Development Robert said that the MIDAS website has been established and current projects are SAC Music Awards Scheme, Creative Media centres, or 'Hubs' and a project in Social Inclusion Partnership areas. Plans for the future include continuing to develop a network so that new talent can engage with the music industry.

Robert then went on to talk about development of Festivals Forum, On-line ticketing and Screen Machine 2. He continued by saying that Peter Urpeth took up the Writing Development post in April 2004 for a minimum of one year. He is shared with Moniak Mhor but employed by HI~Arts and will be setting up mentoring schemes, promoting residencies and developing a web-site.

He finished up by talking about the Four Devolved Schemes which are categorised as Makers, Visual Arts, Music and Writing. Each award will be up to a maximum of £500. Check out [www.hi-arts.co.uk](http://www.hi-arts.co.uk)

So to the 3<sup>rd</sup> presentation, **Hythehill Project Video/Dance** in association with **GOAT**. This refreshing workshop was led by the young people themselves with guidance and support from GOAT, the award-winning video-dance specialists. Having worked with GOAT for over 5 weeks, developing their skills in the relatively new art-form of video-dance, the young people were proud to showcase their work to a captured audience. With all equipment used right at hand, the surprised onlookers were then invited to have a go themselves!

The delegates then went and had a well-earned coffee break!

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Panel Session

Fiona Herd, Arts Development Worker for Moray East chaired the panel and introduced the first speaker, **John Cushine**, Chairperson of Buckie Festival and Chairman of Buckie and District Round Table. John began by saying that before being so heavily involved in the Festival he didn't attend any of the events because he thought they would be arty and boring. But, after talking to people who did go he realised that he had been missing some great entertainment and that is one of the reasons why he was encouraged to become involved. He said that he was proof that word of mouth really does work.

He continued by saying that the Committee arranged for Dave Anderson to bring the Hoagie Carmichael Show 'Stardust' to Buckie in April. Audience numbers far exceeded expectations and extra tables and chairs had to be set up as people kept on arriving.

He said that in the past, community events have been run by businesses for businesses. He feels that the perceptions of local people have to be changed because the Buckie Festival is different. Its Committee is made up of businessmen, housewives, teachers, unemployed people and the Moray Council Arts team who have been invaluable in providing help and advice.

John hopes that this year they can build on the success of last year and are about to embark on a television advertising campaign covering the area between Inverness and Aberdeen. These are big plans and should give the people of Moray lots to talk about. The more the festival is talked about the higher the turn-out will be and tourists to the area will be targeted also. He finished off by saying that it should make people aware that the Festival is here to stay and it's an experience that won't be forgotten.

This year's Festival takes place from Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> June until Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> July. Check out [www.buckiefestival.co.uk](http://www.buckiefestival.co.uk).

Fiona Hay, Arts Development Worker, West, then introduced **Sarah Naim Anderson** of **SAYI** which stands for 'Speyside Activities Youth Initiative' which started in February 2003. Sarah began by saying that the committee consists of local community development workers, parents, youth workers and volunteers and that their main motivation is to keep their drama group going and provide taster workshops for youth in Speyside. She said that they have organised many events including Design A Logo Competition, dance workshops, drama, costume, story-telling, live bands for primary schools, karaoke, theatre trips, nature clubs and interactive story-telling.

The difficulties that they face are a lack of time, volunteers and venues outside Aberlour and that in the future they hope to employ a youth worker. They would also like to have more time for planning, programming, advertising and organising plus have acquire their own mini-bus.

She went on to say that SAYI benefits the community by pulling on local skills and providing events for children to attend in what is a remote part of Moray.

The most memorable things that Sarah has witnessed is the response of the children at the nature club, the good feedback from parents, positive comments from teachers and witnessing the enthusiasm. The drama group has built up the confidence of the children taking part and has increased their self-esteem.

Sarah concluded by saying that she herself had gained experience of what is required to be done behind the scenes when organising events, gathering material, motivating people, the experience of delivering something and of being recognised!

The final panel member, **Cathy Collins**, an active member of the **Speyfest** Committee began by explaining what Speyfest is all about. It's a 4 day Celtic Music Festival held in Fochabers, run by around 30 volunteers featuring local, national and international performers. She added that in past years the events have mainly catered for adults but this year there will be much more available to provide a better experience for younger people. They hope to provide dance classes leading to a performance, art workshops, drama, story-telling and archery and demonstrate that there is more to Celtic art than just music.

She admitted that being an organiser is very hard work with lots of late nights and early mornings but the buzz experienced during the event is well worth it!

Speyfest takes place at the end of July and beginning of August. Check out [www.speyfest.com](http://www.speyfest.com).

**Bryan Beattie**, as Chair did his summing up of the conference saying how inspirational and stimulating it had been. Then everyone finished off their day with a well-earned dram of Glenfiddich Whisky!

\*\*\*\*\*