

HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS THEATRE NETWORK MEETING 28 October 2004

Present: Nick Fearne (Dogdaze Theatre), Sarah Egan (Grey Coast), Jenny Hardy (Adventurers' Unlimited), Dave Smith (Arts in Motion and Right Lines), George Gunn (Grey Coast), Alastair McDonald (Theatrecollective), John McGeoch (Arts in Motion), Muriel Ann Macleod (Theatre Hebrides & Theatre Network Development Officer, HI~Arts), Maggie Dunlop (Theatre Network Information, HI~Arts).

Apologies: Tina McGeever (Out of the Darkness Theatre Company), Laura Pasetti and Ian Thomas (Charioteer Theatre Company) Lara MacDonald (Dogstar Theatre Company), Euan Martin (Right Lines), Mike Rowell (Ballet West), Alasdair McCrone (Mull Theatre), Alastair Satchel (Perhillion Theatre Company), Grace Barnes (Skeklers Theatre Company), Frank McConnell (Plan B & Dannsa), Simon MacKenzie & Janet Ward (Tosg), Philip Howard (Traverse Theatre), Jackie Goode (Goode for a Giggle), Ally MacLeod (Roadrunner Theatre Company), Shona Macmillan (2007), Nikki Axford (Pitlochry Festival Theatre), Matthew Zajac & Hamish MacDonald (Dogstar Theatre), Clare Pencak (Tabula Rasa) and Eric Tessier-Lavigne (Tartan Chameleon).

Shona Macmillan confused the date with 26 October, but was able to look around Arts in Motion's facilities and was very impressed.

Muriel Ann welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked each member to give an update on their activities.

NETWORK MEMBERS' UPDATE

Dogdaze Theatre Company

Nick told the meeting that Dogdaze is a new company founded through Moray Council's Culture & Leisure Dept. as a Theatre in Education company. Its first production was Dr Dog, an adaptation of Babette Cole's well-known children's book, which toured to primary schools throughout Moray in March and to Shetland, Highland and Edinburgh in September this year. Funding came from Moray Council's Cultural Co-ordinators, Healthways, Shetland Arts Trust, WHALE in Edinburgh and HI~Arts (for the September tour). Most of the funding came from 'health' budgets as the play was delivering a 'health message'.

Adventurers' Unlimited

Jenny said they had been busy archiving paperwork from the last 12 years. Also doing storytelling as part of Martinmas. There will be a schools' tour Jan-March 2005.

Theatrecollective

They are submitting an application to the Highland Producers' Fund for a writing project on Caley Thistle (Inverness's football team). Also working on the Norman

MacLeod project and preparing for the 10th anniversary of the Highland Festival next year.

Rightlines

'Who Bares Wins' is set to start rehearsal, using the Arts in Motion facilities – 8 November - and will open on 27 November in Invergordon Arts Centre. Has had publicity in The Sun newspaper and will be featured on Fred Macaulay's BBC Scotland Radio Programme on 29 October. Fundraising for 'Watching Bluebottles' from Awards for All, Moray Council and HIPF.

Arts in Motion

John said that funds have run out now for the company and he is applying to the Lottery and RACE (Ross & Cromarty Enterprise). The company needs £100,000 to complete the refurbishments: heating is poor and the toilets do not reach public standards.

He is working on Dave's show (Rightlines) and archive work. John is trying to do his own work and has applied for a NESTA fellowship and Creative Scotland for an artist's award. Other projects include: a youth project with Wendy Saunders, using Millennium money; the Nub Ball in December which will feature a film festival with an 'Oscar' ceremony; preparing for the children's entertainment at Gleneagles at Xmas/New Year (it costs £30,000 to stage and John would like to have it running at Arts in Motion from Hallowe'en till Xmas for schoolchildren and children's groups to do workshops, shows, parties etc. and is applying to HIPF for this); developing 'State of the Art' and a 'Rant' with John Harvie, Dave, Brian & Andy Thorburn to show in May or June – not to be toured, Evanton and 2 other places; an SAC application for 'Jesters Must Be Done' – a children's show with musician Sue Drever, Commedia style for primary and playgroup children.

Finally, John would like to concentrate on his own work as an artist (film) and leave the running of the company to someone else.

Theatre Hebrides

Working on 'Callinish Stoned' with Kevin McNeil. Angus Peter Campbell is to write a play in Gaelic on the politics of the Free Church in the Western Isles. Also taking on the second stage of the HI~Arts' project ArtsPlay once funding is in place. Working on a Creative Arts Tai Chi project on health (Lottery funded) with young adults who have suffered oppressions, excluded from school etc to create performance work. Are also applying to the Lottery for equipment.

Grey Coast

Core funding is running out – end of March 2005. The company is about to submit a 3 year plan to Highland Council. 'Song of Sutherland' will take place in February. Working on a play about the Alex Harvey Sensational Band – a SAC playwright's

commission. Continuing to work with Thurso College for the BA in 2006 and collaborating on a summer project with the students - touring along the Sutherland coast. Has submitted an application to the HIPF for 'Oedipus North' project, which if successful will open in Lyth next June.

Sarah added that they were developing the 'Magnus' Project and applying for European funding. It will have community and artists involvement. Sarah also talked about the Caithness Arts Study: 100 pages, not a strategy, written by Ian Brown and paid for by SAC for the Highland Council. It hasn't yet been presented to the Councillors. The Caithness Arts group is a voluntary body made up of 3 members of Grey Coast and various other arts bodies.

Theatre Network - Company Members and Business Plan

A constituted Theatre Network company need 8 directors; so far Ian Brown, Dolina MacLennan and Muriel Romanes have agreed to become directors – Jim Gaitens is being approached, as well as Arts & Business for a 'business' director. Two theatre company people can also be on the board and it was agreed that Sarah and John would join – other companies would also join on a rotating basis – yearly. Meetings would probably be in Inverness.

SAC needs to see a Business Plan (aspirations for next 3 years) and Muriel Ann is to meet Jaine Lumsden on 24 November to present it. A working party will meet on 12 November to write a draft, using other companies' own business plans.

International/ European Collaboration Opportunities – Northern Periphery

Muriel has identified a Swedish partner to work with the Network. It doesn't have to be separate companies that can take part, but can be an amalgamation of people and projects from HITN. The Northern Periphery is about a bigger pot of money for HITN to get beyond the 'tartan ceiling'.

Alastair asked if the Network could not 'dovetail' into Grey Coast's Magnus project, but that is not possible as that project has been running for some time. Also, the aims of the Northern Periphery project are entirely different.

Promoters in the Highlands & Islands

There followed a discussion about promoters – Muriel Romanes of Stellar Quines had commented that some central belt companies are unhappy about promoters and how they operated. Some companies are putting together a proposal to seek funding for an infrastructure of venues and promoters in the Highlands & Islands. Muriel felt that promoters should be paid.

NEAT (North East Arts Network) has funding to buy in shows – NEAT is a consortium of Moray, Aberdeen and Aberdeen-shire councils who get funding from SAC and Esmee Fairbairn.

PAN (Promoters Arts Network) is completely different, as its members are predominantly voluntary – some are funded through SAC and by the local authority, some do not receive any funding.

It was pointed out that it is just as difficult & expensive for H & I companies to perform in the central belt.

PAN is changing – Sandy Anderson is giving it 'a shake up!' It's becoming a stronger organisation. HITN has to continue producing to keep up the profile in the Highlands & Islands/PAN. It was suggested that HITN should become a member of PAN and go to meetings.

Highland House & Festival of Highland Theatre

HIE is interested in the concept of Highland House – there will be 2 new venues at the Edinburgh Fringe next year and HIE wants to book them to showcase H & I work.

2007 money could be accessed for this – on 11 November, Fiona Hampton, 2007 Project Manager goes to her board to agree events, so it is important to set up a meeting to discuss the Festival of Highland Theatre as part of 2007. Also to speak to Vicky Featherstone of the National Theatre for funding – it is important for the NToS to engage with HITN. Vicky is attending a NEAT meeting on 6 November so could be approached then.

Judi Menabney, Principal Cultural Officer of the Highland Council has been approached re the Festival; and George is meeting Fiona Hampton on 12 November and will sound out the proposal with her.

Four companies (possibly Grey Coast, Arts in Motion, Theatrecollective and Theatre Hebrides) could be commissioned to produce work for the festival – it could then tour and end up at Eden Court, where there could also be workshops, discussions, readings of new plays, work of students from North Highland College and a Playwrights' Studio – all in the new Eden Court. It could cost around £250,000. The Festival could be sold on to other festivals.

It needs to be a thought-through project with youth theatre, new and old work ('the best of'). And decisions need to be made now on what work will be presented. A small working group will brainstorm this proposal along with the Business Plan on 12 November.

Member Consultation

Members were asked to brainstorm the questions:

- What does your company want to achieve in the Highlands & Islands in the next 3 years?
- What kinds of support do you need to achieve these

Muriel Ann will collate the responses and document them for the next meeting and for those members of the Network who did not attend this meeting.

The main thrust of the brainstorming was that Marketing was a very important aspect; funding needs to be found for a permanent Network development officer. Also to access European funding to get foreign companies to come to the Highlands & Islands and be reciprocal.

Date of Next Meeting

3 December 2004 at 2pm at Arts in Motion, Evanton Industrial Estate, Evanton.