

HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS THEATRE NETWORK MEETING 21 January 2005

Present: Jackie Goode (Goode for a Giggle), Alasdair McCrone and Tony Cox (Mull Theatre), Jenny Hardy (Adventurers' Unlimited), Dave Smith (Arts in Motion and Right Lines), Claire Pencak (Tabula Rasa), Ian Brown and Dolina MacLennan (HITN Board Members), Muriel Ann Macleod (Theatre Hebrides & Theatre Network Development Officer, HI~Arts), Maggie Dunlop (Theatre Network Information, HI~Arts), Robert Livingston (Director, HI~Arts), Alastair McDonald (Theatrecollective), Janet Ward (Tosg) and Nick Fearne (Dogdaze Theatre).

Apologies: Sarah Egan and George Gunn (Grey Coast), Tina McGeever and Sheila Livingstone (Out of the Darkness Theatre Company), Ally MacLeod (Roadrunner Theatre Company), Euan Martin (Right Lines) and Eric Tessier-Lavigne (Tartan Chameleon).

There was a correction made to the previous minutes: Wigtown is the book town of Scotland and not Dumfries.

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

NETWORK MEMBERS' UPDATE

Goode for a Giggle

Continuing with murder/mystery productions throughout various hotels in the Highlands. Needs to find new actors. Also works with Roadrunner Theatre Company.

Rightlines

Working on Watching Bluebottles which will tour for a week in March. Who Bares Wins was such a success that it will tour again – hopefully later this year. Also working on a radio piece with characters from Accidental Death of an Accordionist and looking for funding for it.

Arts in Motion

Working on 'State of the Arts'. Looking for interested organisations to use the facilities at Evanton. Bench tours may use the space for their forthcoming productions.

Tabula Rasa

Teaching children in Sutherland. Collaborating with St Magnus Festival for work in 2006 and with John Clifford for a production in 2007.

Tosg

Just completed a 5 week tour of a children's show 'Coile na Ceilp' in the run up to Christmas. There will be 2 productions this year: one children's show in the summer

and an adult's show in the autumn. SAC funding has just been confirmed for the next 2 years. Also looking to put on drama workshops.

Adventurers' Unlimited

Touring various productions to schools.

Dogdaze

Has received Highland Producers' Fund assistance for 'Othello' – a 4 man one hour version for schools in February.

Theatre Hebrides

Working on many funding applications including New Opportunities Fund for ArtsPlay in the Western Isles. Working with Kevin McNeil on the commission of Callanish Stoned and looking for funding for a Gaelic language project with Angus Peter Campbell on the emergence of the Free Church in the Western Isles. Also community theatre work.

Mull Theatre

Preparing this year's programme. Plans include touring Lonesome West and a new writing project with Peter Arnold, Mull's dramaturg, a stage version of Katie Morag and Cypress by Peter Arnold. Working on a lottery application for a project involving children and families. Also putting on circus and clown workshops in the summer. Still looking for new premises for the theatre and looking at a site just outside Tobermory. Alasdair introduced Tony Cox who was on the Board but is now working for the company.

The two newly appointed board members introduced themselves:

Ian Brown – a freelance arts consultant, whose most recent work was the Caithness Arts Study. (If anyone wants a copy of the study, they can email Ian and he will send it electronically. His email is ijnbrown@hotmail.com)

Dolina MacLennan – an actor with wide experience in TV and theatre with such companies as 7:84, Tosg, Theatre Workshop (is also a Board member of Theatre Workshop). She has worked in theatre for the last 50 years.

Network Set Up and Business Plan

Muriel gave a presentation on Power Point which is attached. Also included is the budget for the business plan.

The business plan needs to be completed in the next 2 weeks for presenting to SAC. The Aims and Objectives have to be agreed as once they are set, they can't be changed. Muriel is looking for general feedback.

Integral to the business plan, the Network will initially undertake the following four projects over a 3 year period in support and development of the companies -

- n Northern Periphery collaborative project with Norway and Sweden
- n Festival of Highland Theatre 2007
- n Marketing Support Initiatives
- n Theatre Masterclass Training programme

Claire Pencak commented that the title of the network should include the word 'Dance'.

Going over the budget, Nick Fearne added that Moray Council could be asked to contribute to the Local Authority funding.

SAC & HIE will be asked to contribute £100,000 for the first year: this breaks down as £80,000 for the Producers' Fund and £20,000 for the Network.

It is planned to have 2 people working job share, each with a specific project. One will be in the HI-Arts office and one in a rural location. HI-Arts can contribute in kind support.

Thebooth – Online Box Office

Robert gave a presentation on the new online box office which is situated in HI-Arts. On its official launch on 14 January, 500 tickets were sold in the space of 2 hours for Moray Council's RSC visit in April. The 2 plays are now sold out after 5 days of tickets being offered. This was due to word of mouth and local adverts, as the official posters had not arrived from RSC!

Theatre companies can have their websites linked to thebooth, especially if they are on tour. Tickets could be booked on companies' own websites. It is possible that an Admin Unit will develop which could be useful to companies for the proposed Festival of Highland Theatre, i.e. for booking accommodation etc. See the website: www.thebooth.co.uk

Northern Periphery

Not much progress since the last meeting – still looking for companies working in rural areas. 2 partners have come forward from Sweden: Profiteatern and the Robert Herrala Projektledare, Vasterbottensteatern. Still chasing 3 companies from Norway. Dolina and Robert said they could maybe help with that. There are 2 stages to progress: the development of the project and then an introductory meeting for the partners. This would be a meeting in Copenhagen of 6 artists from each country.

Festival of Highland Theatre

George Gunn of Grey Coast met with Vicky Featherstone of the National Theatre of Scotland (NToS) in December. She is very supportive of the concept and wants to come to the next Network meeting. It was agreed that the Board needs to meet with

Vicky as soon as possible to ensure engagement with NToS. NToS needs to take seriously the work by Highland companies, as what has been produced in the last 12 months has been extraordinary.

Muriel is to meet with Fiona Hampton of 2007 Year of Highland Culture on 25 January in Stornoway and Robert is to meet her the following day in Inverness to discuss the festival and gain her support. Robert questioned how far 2007 will be proactive to seeing events happen? Will they get good quality product? Highland Council's buzzword for 2007 seems to be 'community', but events have to be professional. It was felt that 2007 needs a Highland product which will visit the rest of the country.

Alastair McDonald told the meeting of an advert he saw in last week's Scotsman: Highland Council were advertising for tendering for events for 2007 and looking for an events manager. He suggested that HITN could put in a tender. Bill Trickett was the contact name.

Muriel has received only 4 proposals from companies for the festival – some are still to come. She also wants companies to cost for 4 weeks; 1 week in Edinburgh and 3 weeks touring.

Muriel had contacted Colin Marr of Eden Court, who is keen on the idea but he envisages the festival taking up only one space in the new building. There is a need to clarify the wide range of work which is on offer.

Cultural Commission

The 2nd stage of consultation is in progress and consists of a series of 60 odd questions. HITN have until the end of the month to finalise its response by the working group consisting of Alastair, Jenny, Muriel and George.

HITN Board Membership

Sarah Egan can now no longer be on the Board as she is leaving Grey Coast. Muriel, Alastair McDonald, Alasdair McCrone all felt they couldn't join, as they were all too busy. Nick asked if he could join, even though he is a Council employee. It was decided to email the Network and ask for nominations.

Highland House

This idea has been proposed to 2007 as a potential project. Robert is investigating the possibility of having a Highland presence this year, but it is a chicken and egg situation: the Pleasance cannot commit until they know the product and companies don't know yet what they could offer. Companies are encouraged to make proposals for a 2 hour slot – contact Robert either by phone or email.

HI~Arts will pay venue and marketing costs and companies will receive box office takings.

Adventurers' Unlimited are looking at another venue in Edinburgh, as its show would not fit in to the Pleasance, but it could still come under the Highland banner.

AOB

Muriel will document HITN work (last 12 months) for NToS. She is still collating material for the promotional video – very good quality received from Claire Pencak of Tabula Rasa.

It was agreed to have meetings every 2 months – perhaps the venue should be in Oban for the next meeting?

Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 7th April at LivingWell Health Club, Inshes, Inverness at 2pm