

Arts in Motion Adventurers Unlimited Ballet West Charioteer Theatre Company Dannsa DogDaze  
Dog Star Grey Coast Theatre Company Goode for a Giggle

## Highlands and Islands Theatre Network

Mull Theatre Out of Darkness RightLines Plan B Perhilion Roadrunner Skeklers Tartan  
Chameleon Tabula Rasa theatre collective@highland Theatre Hebrides Tosg  
Zenwing Puppets

### Minutes of Members' meeting 31 August 2005 at Moray Firth Training, Inverness at 2.30pm

Present: Ivan Cutting (Pride of Place consortium – Eastern Angles, Guest Speaker), Ieuan Hardy (Adventurers Unlimited), Laura Pasetti and Vivien Maule (Charioteers Theatre) Jackie Goode (Goode for a Giggle) Arthur Donald (Tosg), Muriel Ann Macleod (HITN Development Officer / Theatre Hebrides), Ian Brown (HITN Chair), Maggie Dunlop (Funding & Liaison Manager, HI-Arts), Robert Livingston (Director, HI-Arts) Euan Martin (Right Lines) Colin Marr (Eden Court Theatre), Vicky Featherstone (National Theatre of Scotland), Stuart Brownlee (HITN Marketing & Information Co-ordinator).

Apologies: George Gunn (Grey Coast Theatre Company), Nick Fearne (Dogdaze), Ally Macleod (Roadrunner Theatre Company), Claire Pencak (Tabula Rasa), Alastair McDonald (theatrecollective highland), Alasdair Satchel (Perhilion), Mathew Zajac and Lara MacDonald (Dogstar), Grace Barnes (Skeklers), Karrie Marshall & Chris King (Zenwing Puppets) Dolina MacLennan (HITN Board Member).

Ian Brown (Chairman of HITN) welcomed everyone to the meeting, with a special welcome to our guest speaker Ivan Cutting, and invited the members present to give an update on their work.

#### 1. Network Members' Update

TOSG - Arthur has recently been appointed as Youth Drama Development Officer with a specific remit to develop Scottish Gaelic Youth Theatre. Simon MacKenzie (Artistic Director) is currently in Ireland on a three week Gaelic/Irish exchange programme.

Adventures Unlimited – Just finished a contract with Historic Scotland at Fort George. Now looking to develop future work & work with schools.

Charioteer Theatre – Have put in place their most recent theatre laboratory on "Midsummer Night's Dream" to be held at Elgin Music Centre between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2005 – fully booked. Stuart Brownlee (HITN Marketing & Information Co-ordinator) will be attending on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> September as a silent observer.

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Goode for a Giggle – Performs Murder Mysteries for a range of audiences in a variety of venues. Just finished a stand up comedy slot at the Fringe as part of the “Raging Haggis” session at the HI~Arts Highland Showcase at the Smirnoff Baby Belly venue, thoroughly enjoyed it, with audiences ranging from about 16 to 28 in numbers.

Zenwing Puppets - Karrie and Chris sent a message that they had e-mailed to Robert Livingston via Jackie Goode to be read for members:

“Hi Robert,

We just wanted to say a huge ‘Thank You’ to Hi~Arts for such a fantastic experience at the Fringe Festival in Edinburgh these last 4 days. Chris and I really enjoyed working with John Burns, Jackie Goode and Paul (Vladimir!), and the experience of being part of the Fringe was wonderful, sometimes nerve-racking, good fun and a great learning opportunity. We’ll write a fuller report soon to send to Hi~Arts via John Burns; meanwhile, we want to convey our appreciation for the opportunity provided. Having just completed our summer tour we know how much work and expense goes into organising and hiring these events. May we also say a big ‘Thank You’ to John Burns for all his work, his constant support and never ending supply of flyers to hand out! Paul was a great compere, and we wouldn’t have missed this for anything!

Thank you again, and here’s to more of The Highlands and Islands arts and performers being out there doing even better and bigger things!!  
Karrie & Chris.”

HI~Arts Robert and Maggie - *thebooth* has just sold its 10,000<sup>th</sup> ticket, with a ‘tickets sold’ value in excess of £250k, and with the number of shows and promoters exceeding all targets. Screen Machine 1 has just been hooked up at the Bught Park to provide a continuing Eden Court cinema presence during its current closure for refurbishment,

Theatre Hebrides – attended the Highland Showcase at the Fringe. Have been performing at Highland games and shows. Have commissioned Kevin MacNeil to write a piece about the Callanish Stones, aiming for March 2006 performance. Currently involved with ‘Video Head’ project for young people and also involved in the development of a 16+ drama group in the Western Isles. A.P.Campbell commission for 2006/07 on the history of the Free Church. Working with Western Isles Enterprise to develop theatre into the community through a 2 year project around the ‘market(ing) space’ idea, run by the theatre company.

Right Lines -Going to be re-touring “Watching Bluebottles” in November throughout the H&I’s. Currently working on a musical as part of the ‘Highland Quest’ Musical challenge. Also developing a commission through Moray Enterprise, Forres, for a comedy show on ‘business startup’.

Eden Court - Busy programming events in a wide range of different venues, with new challenges, keeping Eden Court presence during refurbishment 'down period'. Have received 42 applications for the 'Highland Quest' Musical Challenge.

NToS – Currently busy working to create and put in place a programme of activity for the next year, starting from the end of October for 2006.

## 2. Update on Network Company

Network development – the Memorandum and Articles of Association and accompanying paperwork is now with Companies House for incorporation. All core and support funding for HITN is currently being managed by Hi~Arts on its behalf at the moment but it will be transferred over once HITN incorporation and bank accounts are fully in place. The £50 membership fee will start when this is all in place and HITN has a company registration certificate and number.

## 3. Reports

### i) The STAFF (Scotland's Theatre Arts Festival and Forum) project

Ian Brown gave an explanation of the development of the idea and make up of the group taking it forward. The original idea had a H&I's only focus, which was subsequently felt to be too inward looking/narrow and raised issues of how a festival of that kind would/could relate to the wider theatre community and national companies. The idea then evolved into a festival for Scotland and beyond built around the core of H&I's companies and their work. The idea has therefore moved back to be more akin to the original idea of a Highlands & Islands Theatre Festival (HITF) – minutes of the STAFF meeting of 24 August 2005 were tabled. The HITF idea is now based around the core involvement of H&I's Theatre Companies, in interaction with artists from outside the region, involving work with the community (e.g. a community play or plays), work with young people, and be a place/space where thinking takes place about theatre and associated art forms – perhaps in the way of a 'festival retreat' (e.g. timed to provide space for reflection, debate and creation following the Edinburgh Festival). Also seeking to follow through links with the Nordic and Baltic countries, Sweden and Norway in particular.

Vision – ***“Celebrating the best of today's theatre in the Highlands and Islands; offering a forum to learn, create and debate.”*** - there is a positive ambiguity in the first part of the Vision Statement, to reflect the desire to focus on the best of Highlands & Islands theatre of today as well as the wider ambition of celebrating and learning from the best of today's theatre from outwith the H&I's, performed in the H&I's. The Forum element is equally important, acting as a marketplace for creativity.

Aims –

1. ***“To celebrate, share and promote the highest quality theatre and build links between the Highlands and Islands and national and international practitioners.”***
2. ***“To create opportunities for the involvement of the wider communities, including young people and children.”***
3. ***“To provide space for Scotland’s theatre community to learn, debate, innovate and create.”***

It was intended that HITF would avoid the difficulties faced by the Northlands Festival model, where the community perception was one of imposition from outside the area. HITF will explore and celebrate the way in which professionally developed theatre feeds into the community.

HITN has been encouraged by the level of support for the whole idea of a Highland Theatre Arts Festival and Forum and is now seeking to set up the existing working group as a formal Festival Implementation Group (FIG), reporting directly to the HITN Board and its Membership. We are now just 2 years from tomorrow (1 September) as a possible launch date for such a festival. As this must in the end be a Member and Artist driven enterprise, it is recommended that an ‘executive producer’ be put in place at the appropriate time to liaise with FIG and the HITN Board as well as with the artistic direction input of the companies involved and bodies such as Eden Court and NToS.

Members were asked for comments – (VF) – has to start out small and specific to allow it to be brave, ambitious and mad, developing into something of meaning and sustainable. (RL) – appropriate that the strap-line of STAFF remains to express the ambition of the festival, HITF. Once re-opened, Eden Court will be the biggest performing space in Scotland, and the HITN is already in place, so much of the required infrastructure and networking activity is already in place. Beginning to see HITF as something akin to a scaled up version of the ‘Blazing Fiddles’ Autumn season in Beaulieu, where everything during that week is unashamedly and obviously ‘blazing fiddles’! (VF) - the model doesn’t seem to be that dissimilar to the best bits of the National Student Drama Festival. (IB) – This is all about building the self-confidence of Highland Theatre in the year of 2007 celebrations and at the same time as the re-opening of Eden Court Theatre. HITF will operate on 3 levels – community involvement, national and international. (MD) - the forum, masterclasses and UHIMI links are key components.

The Members endorsed project development and further work by the Festival Implementation Group, with a view to then looking at the practicalities of raising the money. The ‘Saltire’ type journey of performances in the build up to the main festival was described. (JG) – reflected on comments she had received while at

the Edinburgh Fringe along the lines of 'have you got theatre in the Highlands & Islands?' There is a HND in Drama at Inverness College and one of the legacies of a HITF must surely be to ensure that folk stay in the Highlands & Islands creating and performing.

(CM) – with the ongoing development of Eden Court and ideas around a HITF we have a vibrant theatre community. But, we need to ask ourselves 'who is the audience going to be, how long are they going to stay, will they attend workshops. etc.?' We need to be clear about the 'why, how, where from, critical mass, programming (the detail of content), and what makes it all worthwhile'. (AD) – we must be interested in how youth development happens throughout and as a result of a HITF. (RL) – what is the USP, the main theme? Suggest that it might be 'companies that have work that has regional distinctiveness' (e.g. whether from Grey Coast Theatre or a township in South Africa).

Members approved the developments on HITF as described. Members will be kept informed.

#### **ii) The Northern Periphery collaborative project with Sweden**

This is a collaborative project (see Minutes of 17 June 2005, Section 3ii for a fuller description of the project) involving 15 artists from Sweden to come across to the H&I's and vice versa. Unfortunately, by the time the guidelines had been studied, contact made and the project costed, the Northern Periphery Programme had closed this strand of funding, which will open again in March 2006. However, the Swedish companies have indicated their willingness to pay their half of the total project costs of £48,6000. Presently HITN is looking at other possible funding options, such as the British Council, HIE, DTI. It now looks more likely that the project cost would be reduced to £33k, accommodating only 10 artists from each partner. There is currently a funding shortfall of c£6-7k to be found from other sources. Looking to perhaps bring a third country, probably Finland, into the programme in March 2006. Project needs to be, collaborative, artist led and have core measurable outcomes.

(JG) – sought clarification on who the artists would be and how they would be selected. It was confirmed that the project would be open to artists, directors, writers and open to all companies to bid in. HITN Board will decide. This is an exploratory project and anyone can express a willingness to participate. There will, of course, be some constraints, such as when it takes place, the availability of participants, and where it will happen (e.g. at this end the location is Ullapool). Selection criteria of the participants has still to be decided. It may be focused on a balance of our skills against the Swedish participants skills. We are aiming for as wide an involvement and inclusion as possible. We will identify any problems and sort them out. Disappointment for some will be inevitable. The end of November 2005 and February 2006 are the Swedish preferred options in terms of when the exchange could happen.

### **iii) Marketing and Information Co-ordination**

(SB) – introduced himself and explained his role within HITN, indicating that he was working on meeting with as many of the member companies as possible to find out about the nature of each company, the type of work produced/performed, venues used, marketing and promotional activity, ambitions for the company and what they think HITN can do to support them. So far SB has met with 13 companies. SB will prepare a draft marketing plan for HITN for the end of September 2005 which will then lead on to the development of HITN branding/logo's etc. SB will also be looking at the HITN web-pages on the HI~Arts website with a view to updating it. A collection of marketing and promotional material from the companies has been started and it would be helpful if any member company who has printed, audio-visual or electronic/digital promotional material gets in touch with SB with a view to adding copies to this HITN central resource.

### **4. AOB - None**

**The next HITN Members' meeting will take place on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2005, at 2pm in the LivingWell Health Club, Inches Retail Park, Inverness (01463 663700).**

### **5. Guest Speaker**

Ian Brown introduced Ivan Cutting, Artistic Director of Eastern Angles and Chairman of Pride of Place. (Pride of Place is a consortium of English regional theatre companies who specialise in touring to and creating theatre in rural areas, including: Chalkfoot, Eastern Angles, Forest Forge, New Perspectives, NTC, Oxfordshire Touring, Pentabus, Proteus, Third Space. Pride of Place is running a theatre festival in March 2006 in Suffolk [www.easternangles.co.uk](http://www.easternangles.co.uk)).

Eastern Angles – formed in 1982. Undertook a Northeast Scotland tour with work based on the herring fishing (SAC funded). The company tours rural East Anglia. Started as a community theatre company and tailored their product to village hall audiences, with telling local stories, songs, etc., and aiming to give people a 'good time'. Audiences in the 1990's had grown up and the company worked to push the boundaries with established audiences, building a relationship of trust. Were very aware that the company was visiting a community's space rather than communities visiting them and saw the need to respect this relationship. All shows are new writing, tailored to audiences, and aim to remove barriers (e.g. language used, etc.). Doing one night stands in Village Halls is one aspect of their work and their production values include making and keeping the audience not quite sure what their going to get. Sight lines are important and have found that any more than 60-70 of an audience reduces the overall quality of production and experience. The company has its own raked seating which it takes out on tour. Produces a Spring show each year, one-night performances in local Village Halls,

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an Autumn show of 2-3 nights in larger Market Towns, with own box office, and a Christmas show in the company's own 120 seater venue. Also sometimes produce site-specific shows, e.g. in Tythe barns, which are physically long and thin, fire stations, churches, etc. The company has a belief that because it is regional it does not get the attention it deserves.

Pride of Place – the consortium aims to embrace a sense of place in the work they do. The consortium produces a festival in March/April every two years where each member company brings a show. The Consortium purpose is to increase the profile of the individual works and also for the professional development of its member companies. The Consortium is ACE supported, with a Training budget to go and see and learn from other work outwith the region. The companies have areas of common interest, such as cultural diversity issues, exploring why black writers and artists don't come out to rural areas and ensuring opportunities for wider collaboration happen more often – this needs to be developed. All the companies involved are different and bring this difference to the Consortium.

See [www.easternangles.co.uk](http://www.easternangles.co.uk) for information about the 2006 Pride of Place Festival.

See also the following websites for further information about the Pride of Place Consortium Member Companies:

Chalkfoot	<a href="http://www.chalkfoot.org.uk">www.chalkfoot.org.uk</a>
Eastern Angles	<a href="http://www.easternangles.co.uk">www.easternangles.co.uk</a>
Forest Forge	<a href="http://www.forestforge.co.uk">www.forestforge.co.uk</a>
New Perspectives	<a href="http://www.newperspectives.co.uk">www.newperspectives.co.uk</a>
NTC	<a href="http://www.ntc-touringtheatre.co.uk">www.ntc-touringtheatre.co.uk</a>
Oxfordshire Touring	<a href="http://www.ottc.org.uk">www.ottc.org.uk</a>
Pentabus	<a href="http://www.pentabus.co.uk">www.pentabus.co.uk</a>
Proteus	<a href="http://www.proteustheatre.com">www.proteustheatre.com</a>
Third Space	<a href="http://www.farnhammaltings.com">www.farnhammaltings.com</a>

Ivan was happy to help try and ignite discussion around the festival idea, sharing what worked/didn't work. For example, they struggled to get ACE on board, and other funders, and found that it was crucial to have something that will specifically attract these and similar bodies to come on board; Friday workshops turned out to be hard to sell – need genuinely different workshops; Sunday morning conference – difficulty getting the actors to attend – can't automatically assume actor's allegiance. Issues around the festival – not all companies bought fully into the idea. Pride of Place does not have any staff, just the companies own resources each company takes it's turn to run the festival. For the next festival in 2006, they have an international company from Canada, Ghost River Company, appearing which will give the festival that something 'extra special' and be a key selling point for attracting support and new audiences. The 2006 Festival will be centred in Woodbridge. Consortium works because they all bring the show they have out at

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the time. Rural is a state of mind and not a post-code. Not acting as artistic director. Re-launch festival every 2 years but avoid the summer period. Where next for pride of Place? – workshops on back burner. In 2006, they plan to start with the conference element on the Thursday night in Ipswich, with a series of seminar sessions and discussion points, followed by performances and talks and events in Woodbridge on the Friday and Saturday. With regards to ticket pricing for the festival, they price it quite cheaply so that people can afford to see 3 or 4 shows. Ivan is passionately interested in the place of the market town in theatre, it is all very well talking about and promoting metropolitan centres of excellence on the one hand and the merits of touring local Village Halls on the other, but what about the mid-scale market towns of c10k population, which often lose out on access to art and culture? Experiment with space and where things get performed. Passionate about art that is created in rural areas, bringing a sense of confidence, and raising the profile of these areas. Ivan considers that the PoP concept is a similar vision to STAFF. He commented that in England and Wales, however, regional = parochial, and he believes that there is a better chance here in Scotland to combat this viewpoint.

(RL) – commented that in recent years, investment in Village Halls has meant that small/medium towns have lost out, e.g. Dingwall, Tain, Dornoch. Confirmed that the PoP festival was a re-launch every 2 years. (IC) – confirmed this was the case, and that they deliberately avoided summer months, usually aim for either the weekend before clocks go back and just before Easter – their region's shoulder tourist months. It was noted that HITN only has 2 core funded companies – all companies in PoP are core funded. (AD) – commented that on Islands, for example, with a population of 150, they maybe get an audience of 50 which proportionally is great, but still doesn't seem to help in meeting SAC core funding criteria. It was commented that Theatre lacks a showcase festival and Ivan remarked that mixing in international companies, adding pizzazz, was what will make people come.

(RL) – wondered if there was a danger of losing focus for HITF if take outwith Inverness too far. Maybe need to consider the Pitlochry approach 'stay 5 days, see 5 plays', and the 'hot house' feeling of the Scarborough model. Have to push audiences/participants all together, creating a real sense of buzz – celebrating the joy of being there. It will be interesting to see what impact the Blas festival has, which is totally dispersed across the region, we need to see how this turns out.

In answering a follow up query on Workshops, Ivan confirmed that drama schools were circulated, but didn't come, not really on their agenda. What need to do is to tie them in – best version can be seen with something like the Aldeburgh Music Festival, where students help out (paid) and take part – giving an incentive to come.

(VF) – focused, themes – what would make this so unique that SE would support, suggest make it a festival for theatre for young adults. Contact Theatre,

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Manchester – for young people, defined as up to 35 years old. A lot of the area of interest lies with young people. Eden Court outreach work – build on.

(RL) – all this fits into the bigger picture of what encourages young people to return to / stay in the H&I's.

(IC) – spoke of their experience with the 'East Anglian Psychos' event for 16-24 year olds, which was a show exploring the theme of 'should I stay, should I go' – performed in night clubs. It turned out to be a bit of a nightmare, they took theatre out to where people are, e.g. nightclubs, but found out that for that age group they want to travel to the big city/town for their entertainment and not to have the show brought to them. (MAMacL) – for that age group experimenting with using texting/AV to market/advertise shows was a good way to make contact.

(CM) – we have worried for too long why our young people are leaving, we should be asking instead why are the H&I's not getting other people's young people? There have been recent increases in the number of people from Eastern Europe coming into the H&I's, e.g. there are c2k Poles in Inverness at the moment. We need to aim for a melting pot feel - we have it happening, you need to come here to experience it. (RL) – this whole idea could be seen as a step in the maturity of Inverness in its own perception. Maybe we do need some dispersion around the region – the 'saltire' or journey into Inverness idea as a build-up to the main event is sound. The 2005 Belladrum Tartan Heart Festival was preceded by a fringe elsewhere giving a sense of build-up to the main festival. It was commented that we should not be afraid of selling Inverness, it is after all the biggest northern city in the UK, even better than Edinburgh as it is further north! The Galway Festival model was mentioned and the draw that it has created, with its economic structure being geared around festivals – HITN should explore how it works and how it helps the local economy. (JG) - Inverness is becoming slightly more cosmopolitan and we do have things to offer up here, its just that not everyone knows about them yet! (VF) - NToS would not want a festival created that does nothing to help H&I's theatre companies to develop, to become core funded, etc. It should be a festival with artistic drive, that supports the work and makes the work happen. When people discover things for themselves that's when it works best.

Ian Brown thanked Ivan Cutting for sharing his experiences with the HITN Members and for the Members attending and participating in a very useful and enlightening dialogue. The meeting closed at 16.30.

**The next Members' Meeting will be held on Wednesday 2 November 2005 at 2pm, at LivingWell Health Club, Inches Retail Park, Inverness (01463 663700).**

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