

Ardfern and Craobh Arts Festival 2004. Annual Report



The Geodome in Ardfern



Carnival procession on First Sunday of the Festival

The 2004 Arts Festival took place in the last week of July, and consisted of 30 events, 14 exhibitions, and included painting and crafts, music in a wide variety of genres ranging from classical to Hip-Hop, drama, poetry, literature, workshops in 9 different disciplines including for the first time, - dance.

Over 90 volunteers took part with tasks ranging from curators, to stewards, to haulage of chairs, painters of scenery, and many, many amazing other acts of selfless community contribution – to all of these our enduring respect and eternal gratitude.

Our exhibitors and performers were more professional, better-known and of a higher standard than ever before. The skills of local participants had noticeably improved both in quality and presentation of artworks, in sound and music production, and in front of house presentation. Our signage, parking and general provision of joined-up services were more coherent, resulting in the delivery of a truly eclectic and professional festival that can stand shoulder to shoulder alongside some of the more established festivals in Scotland.



Wavyline Gallery in Craignish Village Hall

Our greatest pleasure is derived from encouraging new exhibitors and performers from within the community, and this was evident yet again, in that we had many first-time Craignish entrants into the Church Gallery, the Wavyline and most notably, the beautiful 'Big Painting' exhibition at 'Aarhus' which displayed the results of an earlier series of workshops run by Lizzie Rose. 'Elementals Live!' And 'People', Viv Dobbie's new play, also provided a terrific opportunity for young musicians and actors to gain experience of stage-craft and of performing in front of a live audience, and what barn-storming nights they were. "People" has since been re-written and is to be performed at this years' Edinburgh Festival Fringe under the new title of 'Fourplay'.



Bazooka Arts Children's Theatre Workshop Performance



Bob Kingdom, in his role as Dylan Thomas

"I think that you are all going forward extremely well." - comment taken from Feedback form

We are also very proud of our achievement in delivering new art forms to first-time audiences, and perhaps turning them on to something new for life, or widening horizons, as art allows people to see their world in a different way. The Classical Concert, the Poetry night, and Bob Kingdom's powerful monologue on Dylan Thomas in particular, were good examples of events that increased their audiences, of whom a good proportion were first-time comers to that type of event.



12th Century Craignish Castle – venue for Classical Concert by Balgray Piano Trio



Poetry Night in the Shed – continues to grow each year

In a peripheral rural area, with its associated problems of transport and economics, we believe that Elemental Arts has, through this festival, outstandingly achieved its aim of delivering high-quality art to this community, yet again.



Croft No. 5

From feedback forms:
'What were your favourite bits?'

'Diversification of contents' - visitor from Hartlepool.

And yet...

The Festival remains fraught with problems. These problems have been apparent from year one, and we have consistently sought to solve them. Solutions have been found to some of these, as individual Elementals have acquired new skills in marketing, applying for funding, administration and book-keeping. We have been fortunate in that we have enjoyed continuity of management, so that we have been able to grow and enrich our experience year on year, and what a wonderful team we are. New members have joined steadily also to enrich our pool of information and expertise, and making new friends and getting to know people better has been very rewarding for all of us. And yet the burden of work is so vast that it has become untenable. Those who have put in months of winter meetings, written letters, researched finance, applied for grants have done so at their own expense and in their own time – mostly at the expense of their businesses, and at some cost to their personal lives too.

It is unlikely that there are many others in the community who are as dedicated as we have been, and we cannot expect anyone else to make this kind of sacrifice, so a new way needs to be sought.

We had hoped that with some increase in our marketing budget, and with word-of-mouth from successes in previous years that the numbers attending the festival would have vastly increased – yet we appear to have hit a ceiling. Whether this is due to feebleness of marketing or that mid-Argyll is not a competitive enough area against such well-known destinations as “Balamory” or whether we lack the accommodation or other infrastructure to encourage new visitors - or a combination of all of these- is something that we lack the expertise to evaluate. But numbers were disappointing.

We had also attempted to reduce the workload this year by reducing the length of the festival to 9 days instead of 18 days as in the previous 3 years. Perhaps one of

the factors in lower attendance figures was the fact that we tried to cram so much more into this shorter period and exhausted the possibilities of people being able to attend all the events that they may have wanted to attend.



Orchestra Macaroon on opening night



Misha of Croft No 5

The big music events were particularly disappointing. The bands, the huge lighting and sound infrastructure that they require, which includes hospitality, make them staggeringly expensive. We could not attract the crowds that would make them pay. And yet, when we got our feedback forms back, and listening to remarks from our community, they did not often figure as one of their highlights.

Consistently, the most popular events, in feedback were the Wavyline Gallery, the other galleries and the Iascene Theatre Company. The Sunday Market, the various workshops, the classical concert and the Sculpture Walk also received many positive mentions. Audience figures were also a little down for the big live music events, whereas for the more “high art” events they increased dramatically – particularly for the Balgray Piano Trio, the Hastetone Gospel Choir and the poetry night – by as much as 30%.



Violinist at lunchtime Concert in Dome



Lunchtime concert of Gospel – a full daytime audience

This suggests that maybe we should stick to what we are best at – Art. We are, after all, artists. In order to sustain this level of voluntary commitment, the artists must begin to see a return for what they do. We must begin to use the combined strength, and reputation of Elemental Arts to benefit our own careers ...”to support and inspire each other”, as our constitution says. The name of ‘Elemental Arts’ is now widely known both in Argyll and with the Scottish Arts Council – we can achieve anything we would want to do, provided it meets any grant criteria, of course.

“I reckon that you have all worked incredibly hard and have done really well-congratulations!” – **Excerpt from Feedback Form**

There is the opportunity, this year to run a greatly scaled down festival with only exhibitions and workshops – after all, the Wavyline increased its turnover yet again, to the benefit of both its exhibitors and the festival as a whole. This is what we do best.



Charm Necklace by Namaste McLardy



Porcelain Vases by Antonia Lindsay MacDougall

Properly it should be up to those who make the most money from them to run the big bands, or for those who are bonkers about live music. But summer is too busy a time for everyone. We have already built up greatly successful relationships with other groups who use our infrastructure to run events of their own –Argyll Food Producers Direct’s Sunday Markets, Horse-Riding display, pre-school group’s Teddy Bear’s picnic, and I suspect the poetry night could take on a life of its own. Cultivation of other groups has resulted in the drama group looking into running their event themselves. We will continue to persuade the local businesses that Art Pays, citing from the many Economic Impact Assessments (Dumfries and Galloway, Association of Festival Organisers, Arts Council) to persuade them to hire a band for their bars.

Having attended the Hi-Arts Conference on audience development this year, it seems we are doing many things right. We have cultivated a great relationship with the local press and the Tourist Office. We have timetabled events in a family-friendly way. But we took on too much. All the other festivals we have looked at, from the 80

or so in Dumfries and Galloway, to the 20-odds on Skye alone, do not often consist in longer than a weekend.

Conclusion:

Thus, our mission is to re-trench, to get back in touch with our roots as artists, to regain the passion and pride in our work and our place and above all to continue to manage a wonderful festival in a way that is appropriate to its situation and sustainable.

By casting a long hard look at both our successes and our failures, we believe we will put the Festival on a firmer footing for the future, while allowing it to remain vital, creative, and of its community.

This year, we are holding as many as 16 exhibitions, while raising the standard overall, by providing a “grant” from our own funds of £50 towards the cost of any exhibition.

We will increase the marketing expenditure yet again whilst at the same time bringing in some professional marketing advice. Also see the Scottish Arts Council Publications on marketing and Audience Development.

Massive savings will be made by not hiring a venue and lighting and sound, or big bands.

There will be many new workshops this year, including drama from Ardfern, and the frightfully fashionable knitting.

We intend to hold an opening night “spectacle” – lights and art in the landscape – much more involving and appropriate than going to see a band and getting drunk!

Some of the easy free events will take place anyway, for example, Poetry, and walks.

At the end of this year we will be able to evaluate whether we can go back to being bold again, when we get our village hall back, or whether this is the way ahead.



Croft No. 5

Addendum

Ardfern and Craobh Haven Arts Festival 2004 consisted in:

Exhibitions:

1. Wavyline Gallery at Craignish Village Hall
2. The Church Gallery at the Church
3. Mean Machine at the Anchorage
4. Studio 2 – Jock and Jessica Bevan
5. Crafty Kitchen – photography by Tony Tucker
6. Galley of Lorne Hotel – members exhibition
7. Collaig Pottery – new work in porcelain and metallic glazes
8. Aarhus – Big Paintings –from winter w/shop
9. Smithy Byre, -Rococo Art-photography and prints
10. Lunga Gardens Bonsai Gallery – Bonsai and Carvings
11. The Green, Craobh Haven – Alison Lyons
12. Lord of the Isles Bar – local photographers
13. The Cabin – Alan Mills and Fraser McIver
14. The Giving Tree – exhibition of Craobh Residents and visitors

Events: (and estimated audience attendance)

1. Wavyline Gallery and Preview (280)
2. Orchestra Macaroon (130)
3. 5-Rhythms Dance Workshop (12)
4. Highland Ceilidh (95)
5. "Fat Sunday" Market (450)

6. Bob Kingdom "Dylan Thomas – the Return Journey" (66)
7. Drop-In Basketry (30)
8. Pottery Workshops for all ages (70)
9. Iascene Theatre Co 1st Night (135)
10. Beginners Basket-Making (8)
11. Beachcomb sculpture(46)
12. Riding Display (67)
13. The Joy of Singing - Concert (52)
14. Jewellery Workshop (10)
15. Bazooka Arts – Drama Workshop (19)
16. Poetry Night (52)
17. The Enchanted Garden –performance (65)
18. Elementals Live! – new music – (165)
19. Teddy Bears Picnic (50)
20. Painting Competition (25)
21. Iain Mitchell book promo (50)
22. Croft No 5 + Aurora (280)
23. Lazy Sunday Market (400)
24. Balgray Piano Trio (60)
25. En Plein Air Painting (10)
26. Hastetone Gospel Choir (75)
27. Iascene Theatre Co 2nd Night(200)

Elemental Arts consists of:

Antonia Lindsay-MacDougall – Chair
 Lizzie Rose, - Secretary
 Namaste McLardy- Vice-Chair
 Jo Lesley-Treasurer
 Aidan Lindsay-MacDougall – Fundraising Team Head
 Tony Gill –co-Worker
 Pip Weaser –co-Worker
 Claire McNiven-co-worker
 Rachel Rogers – co-worker
 Frances Drewery – Co-worker
 Marianne MacPhail – co-worker
 Rosemary Turner – Iascene Drama Liason
 And many others....

Analysis from feedback forms which were distributed at events and venues:

How did you hear about this Festival?

1st Word of mouth 2nd Locally 3rd Leaflets & Signs on main road
 4th Tourist Information, Notices & No avoiding it

Some of the feedback;

Signs on main road
Local advertising
Word of mouth
Leaflet
Been before, saw road signs
Passing signs
Leaflet at Holiday accommodation
Grapevine
Notices
Leaflets at tourist information

What were your favourite bits?

1st Wavyline and other Galleries 2nd Iascene Plays 3rd Balgray Piano Trio
4th Concerts & Sunday Market

Some of the feedback;

Iascene plays
Exhibitions
Wavyline and Church gallery
Sunday Markets
Balgray Piano Trio
Musical concerts
Plays
Jewellery
The Dome
First Night
Baskets and Basket making
Poetry night
Dome events
Childrens activities
Beachcomb Sculpture walk
Drama workshop
Paintings
Lighting affects in the dome
Aurora
Diversifiacation of contents

What could we do better?

1st Nothing but praise 2nd Local musicians, Signage & Parking 3rd Various

Some of the feedback;

Larger signs for venues
Signage in Craobh haven
Parking
Local Musicians
Nothing
Smaller sculptures/pictures
Advance publication of dates
More posters
'I think that you are all going forward extremely well'
More comprehensive leaflet
Spread the word further

Where do you come from? (a) Here, (b) Hereabouts, (c) Far away

1st Here 2nd Far away 3rd Hereabouts

Some of the feedback;

Here and Hereabouts
London
Far away
Taynuilt
Cairndow
Glasgow
Nottingham
Aberlour
Newcastle
Edinburgh
Hartlepool

Aims and objectives for Ardfern and Craobh Haven Arts Festival 2005

Audience development

Late night opening of galleries on Thursdays to allow working people to attend.

More comprehensive brochure with artists résumés, photographs of work.

Financial assistance from Elemental Arts to encourage better presentation in venues.

Support and encouragement for others wishing to put on other fundraising events during the festival.

More co-ordinated signage, posters and publicity to create a branded look which is immediately identifiable and attractive to our target audiences.

