

1 Festival

Ian

From: Eleanor Livingstone [eleanor.livingstone@virgin.net]
 Sent: 25 October 2004 09:13
 To: Ian
 Subject: Re: Cultural Commission Meeting for Festivals, Events and Parks - 4 October 2004[Scanned]

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Cultural Commission:
Meeting for Festivals, Events and Parks on 4th October

With apologies for the delay, here as requested is a page of my more considered responses to the issues of access to culture and funding, in particular of course re poetry and StAnza. In case you can't read the attachment, I'll annex it below as well.

Best wishes,
 Eleanor Livingstone
 Communications Officer / Artistic Director Elect
 StAnza: Scotland's Poetry Festival

Cultural Commission

Meeting: Festival, Events and Parks, 4th October, 2004

The StAnza poetry festival is firmly established within, and part of, Scotland's Poetry Town, St. Andrews. Building on local support, we attract an audience from Fife, Scotland and beyond. Tessa Jowell, UK Secretary of State for Culture, recently argued that engagement with culture can help alleviate "poverty of aspiration", and that all people should have access to art. For poetry to reach a wide audience in Scotland, events must be taking place across the country, not just in cities and big towns. StAnza is local, small town rather than city based, but aims to have a role in poetry locally and also on a wider Scottish, UK and international basis. To reach these audiences, we need national funding. It would be unrealistic to expect local government to fund culture intended to have more than local benefit, and whose benefits to its region might not be proportionate to its requirement for funding support. Moreover if funding was regional, smaller regions receiving smaller arts budgets would be hindered in supporting festivals like StAnza. And the willingness to fund excellence in the arts varies hugely from region to region: without a central structure for funding in some regions local access to excellence in the arts, would be restricted.

Education in, and therefore access to, culture and the arts has to start with children. In the run up to each festival, our Poet-in-Residence for Children visits local schools, meeting with and reading to children. During the festival we offer a variety of readings from children's poets, and also children's poetry workshops, a children's poetry competition and a poetry party. The children bring along parents and other adults, which gives them access to poetry at the festival. We also try other methods to introduce poetry to a wider audience and to make it more inclusive, such as free events. We have learned that people for whom a poetry festival and poetry readings are new experiences are more inclined to attend free events, and if they enjoy them to come back. We also hold events in a variety of venues, including venues which are routinely open to the public - museums, a library, an art gallery - to encourage inclusiveness. And St. Andrews Poetry Town now hosts poetry events throughout the year.

Creativity starts with art being available. Tessa Jowell also wrote that "excellence has to be kept at the heart of cultural subsidy." While there is a place for enabling creativity, which StAnza recognises and addresses by providing workshops and master classes, creativity also requires people to have the opportunity to experience variety and excellence in any particular art form. StAnza is a celebratory rather than academic poetry festival, and we provide a wide range of styles and forms of poetry in readings and other events. And creativity can benefit from insight into the creative process, which StAnza addresses by providing lectures, discussions and meet-the-artist sessions.

However for art to be dynamic and developing, it must be allowed to experiment. Funding must not always follow success. So we bring to StAnza established poets alongside less recognised poets whose work is more experimental or challenging and

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might not appeal to as wide an audience. We make available work which people might not ask for, but might appreciate all the more for it being unexpected. We make excellence available to both niche and general audiences. To quote from a Poetry Scotland review for StAnza 2004, "Nowhere else in Scotland (and few places outside Scotland) could anybody encounter such a wealth of poetic talent gathered together", and we hope to continue receiving the funding to enable us to provide such wealth of poetic talent to locals and non-locals alike.

Eleanor Livingstone

Communications Officer & Artistic Director Elect

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