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23 SEP 2004

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The Cultural Commission  
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Dear James

I am writing in response to your request for views concerning art and culture in Scotland. Personally, I believe that, in the central belt of Scotland, we are extremely fortunate to enjoy a vibrant cultural scene and there is never a shortage of events to attend. Having said that, one tends to wonder whether it is a completely different picture in, for example, the village of Helmsdale.

The more that I thought about the Cultural Commission, I found that all avenues of thought ended up at the need for more financial resource. So the points that I am going to make tend to lean heavily on additional financial resource and that can only be achieved if the Scottish Executive are prepared to table more money, or, indeed, if we can persuade big business in Scotland to table more money. The following points come to mind:

- I could produce evidence of extensive personal endeavour by many of the "great and good" in Scotland in helping to organise cultural events. So many of these events need just a little money to encourage a further event the following year.
- Scotland already has the finest "craft" industry in the world but hardly anybody makes a living from this. These people need financial help and encouragement and this has to be radical and in cash. The question is, "what is a serious level of turnover" to preclude what one might call a hobby. We should think about giving £5000 pa to be paid to every registered craft business that can show a minimum turnover of, say, £10-15,000 pa.
- The Scottish Arts Council has a very broad remit and has done an extremely good job over the years but, historically, has been blighted by Scottish Opera and Scottish Ballet. Perhaps there should be a subsidiary organisation entitled, "Art for All" which would deal with the many hundreds of requests for help up to, say, £10,000, which would be properly staffed, properly led, and give a generous budget for a speedy response - this comes down to money.
- A very strong "lean on" from the Scottish Executive to the top 200 companies in Scotland to promote the arts and culture, generally, with more cash but with other means of support also being considered, such as attachment of staff. Some companies do a lot but much more is required if we are to see a cultural environment that embraces everybody.

Generally, however, I feel that we are particularly fortunate living in and around Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Yours sincerely

  
R M Entwistle