



Highlands & Islands Audience Development **CONFERENCE NOTES**

**PROFESSOR IAN BROWN: KEY NOTE SPEECH TO THE CONFERENCE:
“DEVELOPING AUDIENCES, DEVELOPING ARTS, DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES”**

**AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE
18TH MARCH 2005, INVERNESS**

In the period 1972-76, the Chair of the Traverse Theatre was Tom Laurie. Tom had been a founder member of Cumbernauld Theatre Group in 1961 – and that wasn't yesterday - and helped develop the Cottage Theatre there, which gave rise to the present Cumbernauld Theatre. So he had come to the Traverse with a lively reputation and a capacity to think in fresh ways.

In those days, the Traverse was still a club, even after the abolition of the Lord Chamberlain's role as theatre censor in 1968. By then, though, it was a club not for censorship reasons, but to avoid building licensing requirements its Grassmarket premises couldn't meet. The Traverse used to have, as it still does, striking posters for each show. We all have posters for shows, of course, but Tom shocked Chris Parr, his Artistic Director, by asking why the Traverse had posters at all. 'We're a club', he said, 'we know who our members are. We can reach them through our season brochures. We can reach them by highly targeted direct mail shots. Why do we need posters?' In some sense, in Tom's view, the posters were there for the satisfaction of the directors and playwrights and company, not because they served a purpose in reaching audiences. They were there because they looked good on folks' walls, the walls of students and club members. But whether they served a real marketing role, whether they reached a new audience is to be doubted. At least, Tom Laurie doubted it. But the Traverse didn't do away with posters then. It continued and still, now it's a public theatre, still continues to produce posters because that is what theatres do.

I start with that true story of Doubting Thomas Laurie for two reasons. One is that it reminds us how much our methods of promotion, of publicity and reaching out to our audiences can be determined, however lively and creative we are, by what we've always done. I also mention it to remind us that publicity and audience development are not the same thing. Actually there is a case to be made that the provision of posters - even for a club theatre - serves an important role that has nothing to do with the attraction of audiences to the show, to publicising it. What those posters were about was creating a community brand. A sense of the Traverse then as being cutting edge

and its audience a community was imaged forth in its posters. Club members could see that what they were supporting - not just by ticket sales then, but by their annual membership fees – existed and was sharp, alive and vivid. The function of the posters – maybe oddly – wasn't, arguably, particularly publicity at all in this case. It was a way of reaching out to audiences' self-image, asserting an identity, if you like selling, not individual shows, which could be sold better by other means, but the Traverse Theatre itself as a brand or identity audience members could buy into and belong to.

I know what I am going to say now is probably, therefore, pretty old hat, but it may be worth re-saying for all that. Audience development is not the same thing as publicity, though it may draw on publicity. It is not the same thing as promotion, though it may be served by a promotional campaign. It is not the same thing as Public Relations, though it can be supported by PR. By the rules of rhetoric, I should now announce what Audience Development actually is. Hey presto, folks, Audience Development is such and such. But I don't believe in 'Hey presto' answers. I know all of you work wonders every year in reaching out to audiences, but I'm not, unlike you all, a magician.

In its current Audience Development Strategy, however, SAC offers not a simple magic formula, but a vision. And maybe a vision is better than a supposedly magic definition. What SAC says is as follows:

We see audience development as a planned and targeted management process which involves programming, education and marketing (underpinned by research and evaluation) working together to deliver an organisation's overall objectives. (p. 2)

You know, I used to be Drama Director at the Arts Council in London. I joined ACGB as a practitioner, a playwright and regional arts centre director, and I found myself being obliged to write sentences in which my 'vision' was expressed in words like 'a planned and targeted management process'.

It's a language that has been around the arts for over a quarter of a century and more during both Labour and Tory years. I bet the people who drafted this paragraph still felt a groan in their hearts when they knew they had to use these words to express something about the joy of the arts and reaching out to folk to share that joy. But we all live in world where we need to reach out not just to audiences and artists, but a variety of people who don't speak our language and would not understand, or wish to understand it, if we did use it.

So, it is a fact of life, dislike it as we may, that we have to - and have had to for many decades now - find a means of communicating exciting ideas in documents that reduce ideas to management-

speak. But don't let us kid ourselves for a moment that that means that the management-speak doesn't mean anything or that what they mean isn't exciting or that it undermines the joy of the arts, and their creativity. What we are saying here, translated back into arts language, is this. Audience development is getting sorted out to make sure that, taking account of the arts we love and promote, we work in an organised way, tying in with young folk and life long learning, self-critically knowing our current and future audiences, so as to do what we really want as arts providers. In short, what audience development is about is making sure that we get over to others and draw them into the great things the arts have to offer in all aspects of life.

Well, you might say, isn't that what we're doing now? The answer is 'Probably', but are any of us doing it enough and in enough ways? One of the most startling statistics I have read in the last few months, even in the last few years, is in this Strategy document. At page 3, point 4, we find the following:

Recent Scottish Arts Council commissioned research into visual arts attendance identified [the proportion of the population actually attending and the proportion of the population with a stated interest] as 25% and 50% respectively of the adult Scottish population.

Just think of that, half the population would like to go to see visual arts events of one kind or another. That's a terrific proportion; but only a half of them actually go. Half of those that fancy going, don't. That's some gap to fill. I am sure the proportions and the gap between actual and potential arts event visitors - or even those who read and those who want to read - will vary depending on the art form, but I am also certain that similar gaps exist in all art forms. There may be all kinds of issues involved here, like distance from provision, or difficulties of age - whether young or old - or the existence of material richness alongside time poverty for professionals. But those factors can't in themselves account for the fact that pretty well twice as many people want to enjoy things in the arts as do.

The Strategy identifies some other factors that may lead to this result. It observes, for example:

A persistent belief in the innate desirability of their work is still a barrier to effective marketing and audience development in some organisations. This is compounded by a reliance on short-term publicity and promotion, and an under-investment in marketing (the bulk of expenditure is directed at creating the work). All of these factors combine to make audience development the sleeping giant of arts management... (p. 7)

Put at its briefest, sometimes what we are doing is so great we forget that we need to make sure everyone knows how great it is. We need to go beyond those who know and desire what we do -

and whom we know - and develop a wider audience, one to develop for the future, theirs and that of the arts.

In understanding how great what we are doing is we should not just think about the experience of the arts events itself. The arts in that model all too often become seen as an add-on to the important things of life like employment and economics. Yet the fact is that the arts are critical in many ways to just those 'important' things like employment and economics. In developing our audiences, we also need to develop the understanding of those audiences, including our funders, especially those in some local authorities, who see the arts as a luxury or a frippery, that the arts are rich not only symbolically.

Let's have some facts on this. The arts have an impact on the economy and jobs in the following ways:

- Direct income: that is, income (wages, salaries and profits) paid to employees and proprietors of theatres, galleries and so on
- Indirect income: that is, income (wages, salaries and profits) paid by the suppliers to the theatres, galleries and so on of goods and services (and the suppliers of the suppliers)
- Induced income: that is, income paid as a result of the re-spending of income earned directly and indirectly
- Business development: that is, new business attracted to - or old business retained in - a region because of its cultural life
- Artist employment: that is, direct employment for artists otherwise not likely to be employed in a region.

Often these factors are lumped together and called the multiplier effect. This can be expressed as a ratio showing the economic impact of the sum spent on the arts in the first place. These ratios certainly show the importance and impact of the arts in developing the communities audiences live in. Let me offer three examples.

In June 2003, a Report on the Economic Impact of Dundee Contemporary Arts (DCA) was produced. It provided some hard figures on the DCA's net economic impact and multiplier ratio. The DCA core payroll was, then, £561,507. Its net impact on the Tayside economy was, then, £3,620,000. Those of you quick at mental arithmetic will be ahead of me in working out that that provides a multiplier ratio of 6.4469365:1, but why don't we just round it up to 6.5:1. Obviously, DCA is not every arts centre, and it was designed to regenerate a neglected area of a city. But don't

let anyone tell you the arts are a luxury or a drain on anyone's resources. Never believe it. Don't let them believe it. And the arts affect tourism figures too. The same report tells us that DCA's net estimated off-site tourism impact produces

	Dundee	Tayside
Visitor Nights	2,000	2,125
Visitor Days	3,000	3,250
	5,000	5,375

In other words, DCA brings over ten thousand people a year to Tayside who otherwise would not visit, with all that spending power in local petrol stations, hotels, restaurants, shops and so on.

My second example relates to tourism and comes from John Myerscough's pioneering 1988 study, *The Economic Impact of the Arts*. There, he shows that when people visit as tourists to follow their interest in arts and heritage it is simply not the case they would come anyway. He did the sums and found out the following percentages:

	<i>Would have come anyway</i>	<i>Arts-led tourism</i>
British Tourists		
London	44	56
Elsewhere	43	57
Overseas tourists		
London	32	68

In other words there is a consistent pattern: between three-fifths and two-thirds of tourists are attracted by arts events of one kind or another. They would not otherwise come.

My third example brings these more general figures home to arts provision in rural areas of Scotland. In 2000, Pitlochry Festival Theatre closed for half its summer season to allow refurbishment. Until then, the local businesses, hotels and shops, thought that their town was essentially a tourist town and the theatre a bit of an add-on. In that summer, by their own figures, the Pitlochry economy lost at least £4 million. At least £4 million, probably more. The fact that Pitlochry Festival Theatre has now opened a winter season, running this winter for the second time, has demonstrated even further the impact of the arts on a local economy. An economic analysis has suggested that the difference to the local economy arising from Pitlochry's winter season, a traditionally quiet tourist time, has been between £661,033 and

£1,636,327, between two-thirds and one and two-thirds of a million pounds. This is not chicken feed.

I know that not every one in this space is dealing in such large organisations, but the point I am making is that, whatever the size of your operation, you have a potential proportionate similar effect. The arts are not an extra and, in developing your audience and in speaking to the specific audience of those who fund our work, we have to make that point.

Let me go further, though. Last year, I completed a report with my colleague Roger Tomlinson: an arts study into the provision of and potential for the arts in Caithness. We were so struck by the range and depth of arts activity in that region that we called our report, *Revealing the Vision of Caithness*. Much of the scale and methods of provision in that area is exactly comparable to that many of us are used to in smaller Highland arts operations. What the report has shown – and it has been taken on board not only by local arts providers, but by local councillors – is that a co-ordinated approach to arts, tourism, education and economic development is essential today for the fulfilment of the potential of communities. This co-ordinated and holistic approach not only allows a better understanding of the inter-related ways in which audiences can be developed by arts providers, but it allows a variety of ways in which audiences can come to understand the broader importance of the arts developed in their areas. To put it simply, Caithness has much the same population as Orkney, more archaeological sites and a wide variety of year-round arts activities, and yet is still known to many as the place you drive through to get to Orkney. By developing new audiences, both local and international, for what is available in Caithness, arts providers there will not only help their communities by attracting folk from further afield. They will enhance local audiences', and potential audience's, understanding of what the benefits are to be found in their own community in terms of both the arts and related economic multipliers.

As the SAC Strategy notes:

Audience development begins with a clear understanding of the attitudes and perceptions, positive and negative, of attenders and non-attenders. (p. 9)

This is often understood in terms of our need to sustain and grow our audiences in new areas of potential. Otherwise, we will always play performances, show exhibitions, deliver literature to the same group, and, as they age, our audience may peter away. Certainly, there is no doubt that promoters in our region know their audiences well. The difficulty is to get to

know our non-audiences well and to draw them in for their sake and the sake of the future of the arts we all care for. Highland promoters are renowned for their personal contacts and sensitivity to what their audiences want, but the challenge is to go beyond these existing audiences.

One of the ways to refocus our thinking is to take on board the kind of data I have tried to provide this morning. We need the confidence to see that our arts provision is a key element in the broader development of our communities and to open up the eyes and minds of those not in our audience to this fact. This may mean arguing for the new understanding of the power of the arts within communities to add both spiritual and economic wealth. It also means finding allies we have not been used to working with, or not in the way I am outlining. Thus, we can secure the future of the arts through our recognition of their role in a holistic vision of the nature and future of our communities. It is from our recognising the central importance of what we do for a far wider constituency than the world of the arts themselves and those who currently enjoy them that we can see how to build new alliances and develop the new audiences that will ensure two key things. One is that the arts go from strength to strength, enriching our communities in a wide variety of ways. Second is that we convince new audiences of the value and joy to be derived from the arts.

Ian Brown

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