

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by EULEA KIRALY – 2004 Churchill Fellow

To study the use of theatre for community building

*'The drama is about vision, about seeing people ten years on.
It's about providing them with a building block that will help them make the transition.'*

Governor John Lonergan
Mountjoy Prison, Dublin

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Signed Eulea Kiraly Date 28 October 2005.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report reflects on my observations gathered on a 2004 Churchill Fellowship which allowed me to visit the United States, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. My study was about the use of theatre for community building, specifically looking at:

- Artistic and social sustainability
- Relationships between professional artists, community and supporting organisations
- Achieving excellence in both community processes and artistic outcomes

While my primary focus was on theatre, my trip often saw me at multi arts centres, which also gave me the opportunity to seeing other art forms being used in a community context.

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2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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To investigate the use of theatre for community building

Highlights

- **Soujourn Theatre Summer Institute** – a six day learn-by-doing workshop led by one of America's most respected theatre facilitators, Michael Rohd, whose commitment to creating community/civic dialogue was inspirational.
- **Alternate Roots Annual Meeting** – This week long gathering of community artists from across the Southeast region was a real buzz. There I met a range of practitioners from students to high level strategists, including two Afro-American theatre companies from Knoxville and New Orleans.
- **The Edinburgh Fringe Festival** – ten days at the world's largest cultural event where I saw 21 performances which examined a range of social issues from racism to war crimes.
- **New Belfast Community Arts Initiative** – an extraordinary consortium of arts and community organisations who are using the arts to realise the hope of the 1999 Good Friday Peace Agreement. Strategic leadership by Conor Shields and strong partnerships earn New Belfast one of my 'best practice' stars.
- **Dublin Theatre Festival and Dublin Fringe Festival** – For over four weeks I worked as a volunteer for both the Theatre Festival and Crooked House Theatre Company who had a show in the Fringe Festival. I also saw another 18 performances covering a range of community issues.
- **Mountjoy Prison, Dublin** – For nearly 20 years, the Mountjoy Prison has had a drama program, managed by dynamic prison officer John Dooley and supported by visionary prison governor John Lonergan.

Lessons Learned

- **It's a vision thing** – A clearly articulated and passionately held vision was central to those producing outstanding community theatre.
- A strong **strategic plan** ensured that resources could be garnered to make the vision become a sustainable reality in ever-changing economic and social environments.
- **Partnerships** with other community organisations, funding bodies and artists are central to reaching the widest number of individuals and to sustaining the benefits of any particular artistic activity.
- **A sense of place** and local identity was a characteristic of the most outstanding work.
- **Only the best will do** – It is essential to engage the best artists available for undertaking community theatre work in terms of drama processes and final artistic outcomes. Anything less undermines both the individual's and the community's sense of achievement and empowerment.

Dissemination and Implementation

- 6 progress reports published on www.artshub.com.au as I travelled.
- A 'show-and-tell' evening will be held within the next two months to share the information with Canberra based artists and community leaders.
- Opportunities will be sought to publish articles in professional journals and present a paper/workshop at the 2006 Regional Arts Australia conference in Queensland
- Reports will be sent to both artsACT and the Australia Council for the Arts. I have been invited to address the ACT Cultural Council later this year.
- A special report will be prepared for Chief Minister Jon Stanhope, the ACT Minister for the Arts and for Corrective Services re the development of an arts program for the new ACT prison.
- The development of international community arts projects at Tuggeranong Arts Centre, especially those involving young people and opportunities for training.
- Advocate for Michael Rohd, Conor Shields and Mountjoy Prison staff to address Australian conferences and visit Australian policy makers.

3. PROGRAMME

11 July – 7 October 2005

11-16 July Portland, Oregon USA

- Soujourn Theatre's Summer Theatre Institute at Lewis and Clarke College with Michael Rohd
- JAW/West Playwrights' Workshops and public readings at the Portland Centre for the Performing Arts

3 - 8 August Washington, DC USA

- Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company with Tom Prewitt, Associate Artistic Director/ Education and Outreach
- DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities with Rachel Dickerson, public art consultant
- Manna, Inc, a community development and housing regeneration initiative with Rev. Jim Dickerson, founder

9 - 14 August Asheville, North Carolina USA

- Alternate Roots Annual Conference of artists from the southeastern states who work with the community included meetings with
 - Robert Leonard and Ann Kilkelly from the Theatre Arts Department at Virginia Tech
 - Linda Parris-Bailey and other company members from Carpetbag Theatre based in Knoxville, Tennessee
 - Carol Atlas, now an arts consultant, formerly at Appalshop and the Ford Foundation's Animating Democracy project
 - Dozens of other community theatre makers from across the southeast

14-19 August Dundee, Scotland

- Dundee Rep Theatre with Steve Small, Associate Director. Attended performance of the community production of *The Ballroom of Romance*.

21 – 31 August Edinburgh, Scotland

- North Edinburgh Arts Centre with Johnny Gailey, Drylaw Artworks Co-ordinator
- Edinburgh Fringe Festival 18 performances
- Edinburgh International Festival 3 performances

1 September Mold, Wales

- Clwyd Theatr Cymru with Tim Baker, Associate Director responsible for Clwyd's theatre for young people program

5-12 September Newbridge, County Kildare, Ireland

- Crooked House Theatre Company with Peter Hussey, Artistic Director
- Kildare Youth Theatre
- Riverside Arts Centre with Marcella Bannon, Project Manager and Sinead Redmond, Assistant Project Manager
- Fluxus Dance Company, including a performance of *Divine Normal* about Gaelic sport held at Croke Park Stadium in Dublin

13 – 18 September Dublin, Ireland

- Dublin Fringe Festival – 10 performances
- Kilmainham Gaol – Irish history museum
- Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin Writers Museum, Chester Beatty Library, Irish Film Institute, the Fire Station Artists Studios

19 – 23 September Belfast, Northern Ireland

- New Belfast Community Arts Initiative with Conor Sheilds, Programme Director and numerous other staff
- Prison Art Foundation with Mike Maloney, Development Officer
- The Beat Initiative carnival warehouse and training facility
- The Vine Community Centre with youth worker David Surgenor and Linda Gibson, Director
- *The Black Out Show*, a performance at the Belfast City Hall developed by Red Lead Arts from community stories of WW II

24 September – 7 October Dublin, Ireland

- Axis Arts and Community Centre, Ballymun – Ray Yeates, Director; Mark O'Brien, Local Arts Development Officer and Roísí McGarr, Programme Manager
- Upstate Theatre Company, Drogheda – Declan Mallon, Drama Development Officer
- Mountjoy Prison – Officer John Dooley and others including director Mabel Troy, documentary maker Jim Cahill, and Governor John Lonergan
- Dublin Fringe, further 8 performances including one by Calypso Theatre Company's *I have before me a remarkable document given to me by a young woman from Rwanda*
- Dublin Theatre Festival as a volunteer and to see 4 performances

4. MAIN BODY

The starting point for my Churchill journey was a lifetime of making theatre – initially in secondary schools, then as a free lance professional running my own company and, most recently, working with various community groups and on community issues. In 1999 I was invited to direct a play for Tuggeranong Community Arts in their shiny new arts centre down on the lake in the southern suburbs of Canberra. It was the beginning of a rewarding relationship. I then joined staff in a 5 week professional development project run by Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company and within months took up a part time position as the Centre's theatre development director. Just before that contract ran out, the position of the community cultural development officer became vacant and I was successful in my application for this permanent, full time position. Along with the broader responsibilities of this role, I continued to direct or develop plays with other community groups or fellow artists who worked with community. This work was enormously satisfying, especially in terms of watching all kinds of people making discoveries, assisted in various ways by what we'd gone through in developing the play. However, at the end of each production, some people wanted more – more opportunities engagement in these life affirming processes.

My Churchill Fellowship began as a quest to meet those needs, to answer the question – How do I keep the 'goodness' going?

Arts and Activism in America

In a country where words like 'freedom' and 'democracy' have almost lost their meaning from overuse or mis-use, it was refreshing to see that theatre, and the arts more generally, being used to re-establish genuine civic dialogue.

Sojourn Theatre

A major exponent of the use of theatre to support such dialogue is Michael Rohd, the founder and artistic director of Sojourn Theatre Company. Based in Portland, Oregon, the company develops original work and adapts classic texts, aiming for 'an aesthetic that is history conscious, politically inquisitive and strikingly physical.' They are also committed to collaboration. Since the company formed in the late 1990s, they've worked with dozens of schools, local and state governments, community organisations and individuals across the US. The most recent is *Witness Our Schools*, a two year project which gave educators, students, parents and government a opportunity to participate in the creation of a performance that was part of a larger dialogue about community aspiration and possible ways of achieving that. This project was supported by the Ford Foundation's *Animating Democracy* funding and was very well documented and evaluated. More details of *Witness Our Schools* and similar projects can be accessed through the website at the end of this report.

Sojourn Theatre was created while Rohd was doing his MFA at Virginia Tech University, but his impressive resumé includes work as an associate artist with Cornerstone Theater Company in Los Angeles and with Ping Chong in New York. Before forming Sojourn, he was the founding artistic director of Hope Is Vital, an international theatre and community dialogue resource established in the mid 1990s in response to the need for HIV education. His book *Theatre for Community, Conflict, and Dialogue* is a result of this work and is one of the clearest workshop manuals I've ever read, especially in its capacity to take the work from exercise to content. Influences include Augusto Boal, Viola Spolin, Dorothy Heathcote and educational theorist Paulo Freire.

The course was a stimulating way to begin the fellowship, and I recommend it to all community theatre practitioners of any degree of experience or training. Given Rohd's influences, much was familiar. I was especially pleased by his capacity to shape every single exercise so that it contributed to the final outcome. What surprised and delighted was his utter commitment to genuine dialogue – the essence of democracy. His clarity of intent, transparency of process and respect for all participants was an inspiring example to any teacher/director/workshop leader. In particular, I enjoyed our exploration of the continuum of engagement processes from complete community consensus through to traditional artistic hierarchy. It was a relief to realise that any project – from the first spark of an idea to opening night – is likely work all along that continuum. Extensive notes were taken during the workshops and will be a valuable resource for me over the next few years.

One of Sojourn's trademarks is their work in public spaces. I'd suggest that this is both practical as well as philosophical, because Sojourn is still a young company without a theatrical home. Only this year has Rohd and managing director Alisha Tonsic come on to full time salaries. Like most actors around the world, Sojourn performers still work on a contract basis project by project.

JAW/ West with Portland Center Stage

As well as our 9 to 4 workshop program, most of our group were also involved in the creation of *Divine*, a 12 minute site-specific work created for Just Add Water/West – a playwrights' festival running concurrent with our workshop. This was of particular interest given my involvement with the Australian National Playwrights' Centre over the years and my work as a dramaturge. JAW/West is hosted by Portland Center Stage, the city's largest professional theatre company in their home, the Portland Center for the Performing Arts.



The foyer of the Portland Center for the Performing Arts, site of our performance of Divine

As well as a week of workshops and the final readings by professional actors, this year's conference also included a Saturday afternoon 'market place' for local theatre companies (and there are dozens in the Portland area) and several site-specific new works commissioned for the venue. Our site was the impressive foyer of the new theatre – some three dozen balconies surrounding a glass-domed rotunda. *Divine* was a movement piece derived from a vocabulary developed by the participants and shaped by Rohd. At our first rehearsal, each of us was interviewed on the subject of faith and excerpts were woven in to an original score that had been created for the piece. It was a great opportunity to put into practice what we'd learned during the week.

Telling personal stories in the national capital – a week in Washington, DC

I arrived in Washington during the dog days of August when the city is traditionally abandoned by legislators and lobbyists who leave it all to the tourists. Up at the Lincoln Memorial, cobwebs had gathered in the corners of what is arguably this country's most sacred shrine and near its steps ice cream vendors were doing a steady, sticky trade. Nearby, sellers of regimental badges and bumper stickers were parked in the shade near the elegant Vietnam War Memorial. This long, simple wall of black granite is engraved with the names of all 58,226 Americans who died or were missing-in-action in that conflict.

Over in suburban Alexandria, Virginia, an ex-Marine who served in Iraq was in rehearsals for his first play about his experience in America's most recent war. Sean Huze, an actor from Baton Rouge, signed up in a fit of patriotism on 12 September 2001 and was part of the original invasion force. His play *The Sand Storm: Stories from the Front* is a series of 10 monologues telling the story from the soldiers' point of view. Huze was honourably discharged from the Marines in March this year and has become increasingly involved with Operation Truth, a non-partisan group of veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan whose aim is to keep the soldier's concerns at the forefront of public awareness. *The Sandstorm* is Huze's major contribution to that mission.

Though I had to cross the Atlantic to hear them, other Americans were telling stories that you won't get on CNN. In Edinburgh I saw several plays about war, most notably in Peter Morris' play *Guardians*, a play about the imagined inner life of the American soldier Lynndie England who was involved in the prisoner of war abuse at Abu Ghraib. Two other plays had used verbatim theatre techniques for telling stories of people behind bars. *The Exonerated* told the real life stories of Americans who had been wrongly convicted of crimes and been imprisoned for years before finally being cleared. These powerful narratives were told simply by a mixed cast of well-known actors and the actual people who lived them. Not surprisingly, this moving performance was a sell-out at the Edinburgh Fringe.

Woolly Mammoth – a professional company, a community program, a new theatre

I'd gone to Washington to see Woolly Mammoth theatre, a 25 year old company whose mainstage program is entirely of new works – an artistic approach that earned them the *New York Times* tribute of being 'the most exciting theatre in Washington'. Earlier this year, the company moved into sparkling new theatre just a few blocks from the Capitol. Until then, they'd had been operating out of much less glamorous circumstances in the northwestern quadrant of the District of Columbia and had a 14 year history of working closely with the community who lived there. In 2001, Woolly Mammoth produced *Invisible City: 14th Street, where Washington meets DC*. The commissioned play was supported by the Ford Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts and the result of partnerships with numerous neighbourhood community groups. It was derived from months of workshops, interviews and research and the production featured both professional and community actors. I was excited about catching up with Tom Prewitt, Senior Associate Artistic Director in charge of Education and Outreach as the second installment of Woolly's community play building program, *The Anacostia River Project* was scheduled for production later this year.

Unfortunately, the mood was glum in the swish new building because of a recent management decision to suspend their community program indefinitely. According to Prewitt there was a half million dollar budget overrun in the fit-out of the new theatre building and the first show in the new space did not make budget projections. The Anacostia project will go ahead as *The Other River: Ripples & Vibes from DC's Southside* to be presented at the Town Hall Arts and Recreation Centre in January 2006. At present, there is no timetable for the resumption of the community work after that. Likewise, their Art of Playmaking program for schools has been radically downsized from seven classes in five schools to two classes in two schools.

New homes in the old neighbourhood – Manna and the urban regeneration of the Shaw district

In one of those remarkable 'six degrees of separation' experiences that are the real gift of Churchill fellowships, I had the good fortune to spend a morning down in the streets of the Invisible City. In the days of segregated Washington, Shaw was a black neighbourhood, and by the 1920s, a middle class one. Duke Ellington and other jazz greats got their start there in the elegant Whitelaw Hotel. Unfortunately, the area exploded in the summer of 1968 in response to the assassination of Martin Luther King. Riots and burnings turned it into an urban war zone.

I went there to meet Reverend Jim Dickerson, an activist who's spent nearly 30 years working with the local community to reclaim their neighbourhood. Rev. Jim was involved in the early Civil rights movement in the 1960s and left his native Arkansas on a spiritual and social quest that led him to Washington. In the Shaw district he established New Community, an ecumenical, multi-racial church in a burnt-out Victorian boarding house haunted by drug dealers and homeless people. The group 'put legs on the prayers' by establishing Manna, Inc, an affordable housing program which began to buy up and renovate the dilapidated houses in the area, including the old hotel. The innovative

financial structures which allow people on low incomes to buy their homes are as remarkable as the physical transformation. The program has been so successful that the community's latest challenge is how to deal with the coming wave of gentrification and escalating property prices.

Lest the arts connection seem tenuous, enter the Reverend's daughter, Rachel, a visual artist who helped establish the Centre for Community Based Art under the auspices of Manna. Their most recent exhibition, *The Shaw Redemption*, was the culmination of a year's activity including after school workshops, three different public murals and a stunning photographic exhibition by both children and adults. While I was visiting, a group of teenagers were busy with a video documentary about local primary schools. One of Manna's latest concerns is the future of the long abandoned Howard Theatre. This lovely old landmark is soon to be redeveloped and the folk at Manna are keen to see it used as community resource and education centre.

Ms Dickerson is now a consultant with the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities and is responsible for the District's public arts. She was most excited about a series of public artworks commission for new community recreations centres across the city. These commissions for smaller scaled works were aimed at giving emerging artists an opportunity to 'get some runs on the board'.

Though Washington is usually seen as a city of 'suits', the Commission's recent *Party Animals* and *Pandemonium* exhibits were a hugely successful way of making art fun and accessible. Last year it was 150 life-size pandas (a favourite at Washington's zoo) created by a diverse group of sculptors and placed all around the District of Columbia. Two years before, it had been 200 donkeys (pictured right) and elephants, symbols of the Democratic and Republican parties.



Image supplied by DC Commission

Alternate Roots Annual Meeting

While I'd heard about this conference before leaving Australia, I had not booked in until I'd been encouraged to do so by theatre makers I'd met in Portland. American educators, activists and artists are keen on professional development and the good ones never stop training. I figured such an opportunity was just what credit cards were made for and headed off to a wooded retreat in the Appalachian hills of western North Carolina. Alternate Roots was founded in 1976 by a group of performing artists specializing in original, community based work. It aims to increase opportunities for the on-going exchange of work, skills, critical analysis and information within the south east region of the US which stretches from New Orleans to Washington DC.

As well as being the opportunity for skill building and networking, the five day event was also the AGM of the organisation. *Uprooting Racism* was the theme of this year's meeting, so most of the workshops, performances and discussion groups focused on the issue. It has also been a concern for the organisation itself. In response to an internal audit a couple of years ago, Alternate Roots works hard to ensure that racism is not a structural issue as well as a social issue. At the moment, all paid staff are Afro-American, their grants program is focused on racism and their youngish regional executive committee reflects both the membership and southeastern demographics.

Carpetbag Theatre Company – artists and activists

One of the most enjoyable parts of Alternate Roots was the nightly performance of works-in-progress. Afterwards, audience members could choose to go to one of the critical response sessions that followed, using Liz Lehrman's artist-focused process. Among my personal favourites were the work of Latino women who lived across the border in Mexico, a piece based the life and work of New Orleans poet Everette Maddox and an excerpt from *Southern Sankofa* by Carpetbag Theatre Company (pictured below). One afternoon during the siesta hour, I sat with members of the company to talk about their history, their processes and their future.

Carpetbag was formed over 30 years ago on the campus of Knoxville College, an all-black institution in the hometown of the Tennessee Valley Authority and just across the hill from the Oak Ridge atomic energy laboratories. It was part of a larger effort to validate Afro-American cultural experience. Their mission 'to give artistic voice to the underserved' has seen them creating original work drawn from substantial research, held in music and liberally laced with humour. For most of its existence, Carpetbag has been led by writer, director and performer Linda Parris-Bailey. Like many of their ensemble company contemporaries, Carpetbag also offer workshops and residencies to community organisations who wish to use creative activities for empowerment, skill building and information gathering.



Carpetbag are currently in a state of major change brought on by the loss of long time company and board members and internal difficulties at Knoxville College. Parris-Bailey is just back on board after a 12 month sabbatical. In her absence, the company was managed by Marquez Rhyne, the 'boy wonder' who has looked after everything from programming to funding applications – and is a very fine performer. Like many small companies everywhere, Carpetbag is light on infrastructure and Rhyne gives his job description as "keeping all the plates spinning at once".

Though music, humour and strong narrative give Carpetbag work a deceptively “feel good” quality, Rhyne sees their work as essentially political. “Folks are always going ‘**Are you artists or are you activists?**’ Well, we’re both,” he explains. “Ensemble members since the 70s have been creating new work, telling their stories when nobody else was concerned about them. That’s political in and of itself.”

But finally, any gathering is really about the people you meet. I had the pleasure of a long porch conversation with **Caron Atlas**, a New York-based consultant who works to strengthen connections between community-based arts, policymaking and social change. She’s had many interesting jobs, including several years with Appalshop, a multi-disciplinary arts and education center in the heart of Appalachia.

Appalshop began an economic development project of the federal government’s War on Poverty over 35 years ago. The idea was to recruit a group of Appalachian youth and train them in media skills with which they could ‘escape’. Instead, they decided to use the media (film, video, literature, theatre and now radio) to tell their stories in ways that no one else had done. Now their nationally recognised centre covers everything from the documentation of traditional arts to the exploration of social issues that exist in the region today. Part of the Appalshop stable is Roadside Theater Company, whose work with Appalachian stories and music is well documented on various websites.

At the moment, Atlas is just finishing off some work with **Animating Democracy**, a program supported by the Ford Foundation and managed by the Americans for the Arts Institute for Community Development and the Arts. Since 1996, this remarkable program provided funding and significant other support to arts and community organisations who wished to engage in civic dialogue through the use of the arts and culture. Among the list of companies who have participated were some I’d already encountered – Sojourn Theatre before they settled in Portland, Cornerstone Theatre in LA, Liz Lerhman’s Dance Exchange, the Urban Bush Women from New York and Junebug from New Orleans, who were also at the conference.

The Animating Democracy program was remarkable in that a sizable part of the budget was put aside for documentation and evaluation of each project. As well as internal audits, each project had up to three external evaluators who looked at the work from various points of view such as artistic outcomes, community development and artistic outcomes. In August, Animating Democracy recognised 12 outstanding organisations across the country through its **Exemplar Program**, which provides two years of support totaling \$150,000 to be used for operations and programs that sustain and advance outstanding work. Sojourn Theatre were among the recipients. Detailed project descriptions can be found at the Arts USA website listed in the appendix of this report.

An equally valuable resource for keeping abreast of community arts in the United States is the **Community Arts Network** website. It has an excellent reading room with new articles going up each month. Any artist considering a trip to America should spend a few hours – well days, really – on this site.

Scotland

In my preliminary research on community theatre practice in the UK, **Dundee Rep Theatre** had come highly recommended by staff at the Scottish Arts Council. It has the only professional ensemble in Scotland and a number of community outreach programs. I'd been in email contact with Director James Brining and community director Steve Small for several months and was really looking forward to the visit. This was especially true because the community company was to be in the final week of rehearsal for their big show of the year and I had hopes of speaking with participants as well as the professional artists. I arrived on Monday afternoon, but unfortunately Mr Small was under considerable pressure and could not see me until after the show opened on Thursday evening. As fate would have it, one of the community actors had a heart attack on stage before us on opening night. This necessitated a new rehearsal on Friday so our scheduled appointment that morning was cancelled. I did manage to get another ticket for the performance of *The Ballroom of Romance* that evening and returned to Edinburgh on Saturday morning, having made no real contact with Dundee Rep at all.

Since I've returned, Mr Small was able to provide more detail about the production by email. The community company for this show were incredibly mixed and included 'trained actors who had given up acting professionally, people with mental health issues, veterans of the group, a young man doing his last show before going off to drama college and a lady in her seventies making her stage debut,' he explains. 'Nobody has to audition to be part of this group and everyone who wanted to was included on the stage.'

The group began working on the play in May, meeting once a week for two hours with occasional weekend rehearsal and more intensive rehearsals as opening night approached. 'We read the script through a couple of times, then asked people to read for a part that they wanted. Everyone who wanted to read for a part got a chance to do so,' Small says.

Like Tom Prewitt at Woolly Mammoth, Small found the work challenging. Both directors cited time keeping and attendance by group members as major problems. 'They didn't know me and were very wary of me,' Small explained. 'However having said that, after a while they began to trust me. Once they did and they saw that I was going to stick with them and once they got a reaction from the audience, we were away.'

The community company is funded by the Scottish Arts Council and Dundee City Council and any other trusts, foundations, donations the company can resource. Much of their work has been about life in Dundee or the history of Dundee, though this was not the case with *The Ballroom of Romance*.

The Edinburgh Festivals

However the real story in Scotland in August is about festivals. And the emphasis these days is on the plural. While the Edinburgh International Festival might have been the originator of this cultural extravaganza, the Fringe is the largest single arts event anywhere in the world, this year selling over 1.3 million tickets to 26,995 performances of 1,800 shows. Add to this an increasingly successful Book Festival, the longstanding International Film Festival, a jazz festival, the Edinburgh Tattoo and a brand new festival of visual art and you could be on the verge of cultural overload. And for something that's only a little bit different, there's the Festival of Spirituality and Peace and, in this year of the 700th anniversary of the death of William Wallace, a Festival of Politics based at the newly opened Scottish Parliament.

I'd booked only two International Festival tickets from Australia, *The Synge Cycle* (the complete works of the writer of *The Playboy of the Western World*) by the Druid Theatre of Ireland and *The Prayer Room*, a world premier by Scottish playwright Shan Khan. Sifting through the 653 theatre shows (37%) in the Fringe program was a major challenge.

In ten days I saw 21 plays and 2 exhibitions. I managed to avoid the real duds, went to only one show that was 'ambitiously marketed' and saw some great theatre, especially in the political vein. I saw plays about Aubrey Hepburn, child abuse, HIV aids, life in the US Air Force entertainment corps, at least four about war and a very silly play about crossed phone lines.

When the Festivals are on, every available venue is used – or created. The most atmospheric was the Smirnoff Belly Cave, a cellar somewhere in the bowels of the Old Town. There I saw *Enola*, the story of the development of the atomic bomb from the prospective of a girl named Enola Gay growing up at that time. **Once you get politics in the air, then everything takes on the smell of it.** The London based group, Curious presented *On the Scent*, a moving olfactory theatre performance for an audience of four which took place on the hour in a small inner city flat. Though I'd gone expecting little more than a sensory experience, there were three exquisitely crafted monologues in the lounge room, kitchen and bedroom. The kitchen, featuring pork chops, popcorn and shots of tequila all around, was told by a young woman who had grown up in Los Alamos, New Mexico. When the actress clipped a hank of hair and singed it in an open flame, we got the message.

And as a community theatre maker, I couldn't miss *Children of the Sea*, a **work created by and for children and young people left orphaned and homeless after last year's tsunami.** While the production involved big name performers from Sri Lanka and Indonesia, the heart of the work was held by the extraordinary girls who had participated in confidence-building art workshops over the past few months. Held in the grounds of the Royal Botanical Gardens, the work used Shakespeare's tempest tossed *Pericles* as a starting point. I understand that there are preliminary discussions about bringing this magical performance to Australia next year, so I'd encourage anyone involved with such decision making to pull out all stops to bring this hope-filled work to our benign shores.

North Edinburgh Arts Centre

My other official stop in Scotland was the North Edinburgh Arts Centre, located in the portside area of Leith. It's where the leafy suburbs meets the tough working class docklands, and to make for an even more interesting social dynamic, add the new ocean view apartments going up in the old shipyards. The £3 million art centre was opened in late 2002 to meet the needs of the marginalised communities in the area. As well as a 150 seat theatre, it has studio spaces, gallery, recording studios, café bar and garden, but is curiously closed and rather hidden behind the local library. There I met with Joanna van den Berg ArtZone project co-ordinator, Mareike Holfeld, the audience development manager and Johnny Gailey who was responsible for the Drylaw public art project. Gailey also works as the co-ordinator of the Opt In for Art education program at the Fruitmarket Gallery, a prestigious contemporary art space in the heart of Edinburgh.

While it's still early days at the Centre, they are quickly developing a city-wide reputation as being the venue for performances for children, based largely on touring shows rather than home-grown product. There has been one experience of making a big community show in the early days, but not much since, despite the community's enthusiasm for it. A multi-media performance is scheduled for the end of the year based on memories of WW II, but at the time of my visit, no director had been appointed.

Clwyd Theatre Cymru – Mold, Wales

On my way from Edinburgh to Dublin, I had a brief stop-over in Chester – a delightfully English town complete with 400 year old Tudor shops, Roman ruins and barge filled-canals. I was there on the advice of Tim Baker, whom I'd just missed at the Lewis and Clark Summer Theatre Institute back in Portland.

He is the Director of the Clwyd Theatr Cymru Theatre for Young People, which is part of the overall Clwyd Theatr Cymru structure. Clwyd is remarkable in that it is a large regional venue, a mainstage production and touring company and a TYP company all rolled into one.

Baker has been at Clwyd since 1997 and helped shift the old theatre-in-education concept to link Theatre for Young People more closely with the overall vision of the theatre as part of a long term audience development plan. It currently includes three related strands of activity:

- performances for young people in both English and Welsh;
- support activity (workshops, actor visits, support material, pre/post performance sessions, etc) related to performances in both the main theatre and the Theatre for Young People; and
- participatory activities for young people, which encompasses a wider arts brief, involving young people in arts activities across the spectrum, including weekly drama workshops, summer schools and an education 'gallery'.

As Baker's workshop in Oregon was about creating new work with young people, we had a long conversation about writing as well as directing – the former being well out of my comfort zone at present. While he offered various exercises to do with the group at hand, his final word of advice was the best to be given to any would-be writer – just do it!

Ireland

At this point, I'd been on the road for eight weeks and had reached a point of travel weariness that other Churchill fellows had warned would hit me on return. The budget was looking tight and I had five weeks to go. Fortunately the ferry ride was smooth, the Irish hospitality warm and professional doors opened wide.

An hour southwest of the Dublin quays, the River Liffey runs sweet and clear through some of the finest horse breeding country in the world. It also runs by the four year old **Riverbank Arts Centre** in the old garrison town of Newbridge. Because of its origins, Newbridge is lopsided, with most of the shops and pubs (all 37 of them!) running up one side of the main street. Since the garrison was abandoned in the 1920s, buildings have appeared on the other side, but they tend to be larger civic buildings. Riverbank is one of those –separated from a pleasant riverside park by only the library. Its connections with the library are strong with both the County Kildare Arts Officer and the county librarian in the new building. The Centre is looked after by project manager Marcella Bannon and her assistant Sinead Redmond who are responsible to a board.



The multi-arts centre reminded me of our own lakeside centre in Tuggeranong, but I did look longingly at the spaciousness of the centre which is still developing its programs. Like North Edinburgh, Riverside finds its strength in programs for children from pre-school to high school. Programs for young people include work with local bands and through Kildare Youth Theatre.

Riverbank is also the home of **Crooked House Theatre**, a small independent theatre group who created Kildare Youth Theatre and have a three year residency in the Centre. The residency gives them a couple of desks in a larger office, access to rehearsal space when it's available and a special box office split arrangement for productions. Crooked House was founded by its current artistic director Peter Hussey, who has a strong background in adult education and well as a lifetime's commitment to theatre.

Hussey has a gift for drawing together talented young people to share his passion for theatre making. While the company is largely un-funded by local or national agencies, the residency allow the group to function on the shoestring budgets well-known to the majority of independent project companies in Australia.

I was there the week before they opened *Room Rage* and was put to good use in a production role. The family of one of the young actors offered me a spare room and lent us a sewing machine. It was great to be still for a week and be part of a team actually making theatre after weeks of talk and watching. The play, a highly physical version of Euripides' take on the Hippolytus myth, was to be one of 130 shows in the three week long Dublin Fringe Festival.

A scene from *Room Rage*
Photo by Adrian Melia



The **Dublin Fringe Festival** differs from Edinburgh and Adelaide, both open access affairs, in that it is a curated event which provides varying levels of support for the artists involved. Artistic director Wolfgang Hoffman had put together a strong program including some excellent contemporary dance. The Fringe opening event was *Rumble*, a much hyped hip-hop performance from Germany, very loosely structured on Romeo and Juliet. But for me *At Swim, Two Boys* by Earthfall Dance from Wales was a richer theatrical experience. Their lyrical interpretation of Jamie O'Neill's novel set during the 1916 Easter rising matched form to content on a sprawling water covered set at the Samuel Beckett Theatre on the campus of Trinity College. Two weeks later, the Beckett was also the venue for *Knots*, a vivid look at the complexity of love and marriage by another Irish dance company Coiscéim. With its high production values, sharp analysis of Generation X relationships and delightful accessibility, the production took out the Fringe's Best New Production Prize. The company of six included Australian dancer Robert Jackson.

With a week of the Fringe behind me and a week yet to come, I headed north to Belfast – to another world.

New voices, new hope, new ways of perceiving and being . . . New Belfast

I'd put aside one week in the five I'd planned for Ireland to spend in the north with the **New Belfast Community Arts Initiative**, and as every day passed, it became clear I'd underestimated the wealth of community arts practice in this city of just under 300,000.

Of course, what makes Belfast such a potent place for this work is the delicate peace being cultivated after 30 years of 'The Troubles'. When the Good Friday Agreement was signed then ratified by the populations of both Irelands in 1998, the people of the city began to take steps to rebuild their tattered community. It's not been easy going. The week before I arrived there had been an eruption of violence between rival Ulster gangs; but in the week after I left, the IRA announced the complete decommissioning of their arsenal. Interestingly, people on both sides of the fence tell much the same stories and are united in their desire for peace, despite the final rumblings of violence from the rival paramilitarists.

The New Belfast Community Arts Initiative (New Belfast) was created from a consortium of ten arts and community organisations. Their aims include the use of community arts to reconcile fragmented communities, sharing skills and resources and challenging sectarianism and traditional territorialism through cross-community contact and a focus on common aspiration and shared humanity. Like many arts organisations across Ireland, New Belfast was given a huge leg-up with support from the European Union, in particular, its Programme for Peace and Reconciliation.

My primary contact with New Belfast was Programme Director Conor Sheilds – a musician with a solid academic background in politics and sociology. A self-proclaimed 'opportunist', Sheilds is a sharp strategist and had just commenced MBA studies at the London School of Economics when I arrived. He is also the able leader of a committed, energised team of coordinators who look after the eight projects that range from poetry to digital media, including special disability and youth projects.

New Belfast now reaches over 140 schools and community groups all over the city and work closely with the local contacts. During the week I was there, one of the coordinators received a call from a local venue coordinator suggesting that she postpone the workshop due to start that evening. Word on the street was that there might be trouble near the local police station that night, so none of the young people would be there.



New Belfast carefully balances access between the rival sectors. These are generally tightly geographical and sometimes vividly marked with banners, colour-coded curb stones and huge murals. Along the dividing lines between Catholic and Protestant areas, such as Falls Road and 'the Shankill' there are 3 – 4 m concrete and metal 'peace walls' which separate the neighbourhoods.

One of the New Belfast projects works closely with local community groups who wish to replace the blatantly violent paramilitary **murals** with new versions designed and painted by community members, often women and children, working with a professional artists. According to project co-ordinator Tracey McVerry, the levels of community consultation are extensive, especially when the aim is to replace an existing militaristic mural.

Another highly visible New Belfast program is **Poetry in Motion**. Workshops are conducted around the city and result in annual publications. These range from traditional anthologies such as *The Lonely Poets Guide to Belfast* to graphic post cards *You Can't Eat Flags for Breakfast*, to bus panels and free pulp print magazines. I had the privilege of accompanying coordinator Mark Madden, himself a lively performance poet, on his initial visit to a new hip-hop poetry group being run at a local community centre just metres down the road from the infamous, and now abandoned Crumlin Road courthouse and gaol.

On the invitation of youth worker David Sturgeon, I returned the next day for a full tour of **The Vine Centre**, a brand new community centre built with a crèche, art rooms, computer suite, demonstration kitchen and meeting rooms. I also met the Centre director Mrs Linda Gibson, who was also a deaconess with the local Presbyterian Church who had built the centre with the help of local, national and European funding. Her ambition to provide her community with 'nothing but the best' had been realised in terms of the building and now they had the on-going challenge of filling it with activity. Thus the importance of the partnership with New Belfast.

She spoke with some sadness of how, as Loyalists, her community could not relate to traditional Irish cultural expressions such as dance and music because of their links to Nationalist identity. 'We don't have much culture', she said, 'except the Orange'. This cultural void is also recognised by New Belfast, who offer the arts to young people as an alternative to drugs and paramilitary gangs.

Other artforms include the This is Me **multi-media digital** project, the Masque project (centered on **carnival and street performance**) and Trash Fashion. This **creative recycling** program is about to become one of the innovative social businesses that the organisation has planned for next year.

The Belfast Wheel **sculpture** project (pictured at right) involved 12 community groups from all over the city creating a panel of a 2m tall bronze 'map'. It has been erected in a small park near the CDB at the intersection of main roads which separate various neighbourhoods.



The organisation has administrative offices in the inner city Cathedral Quarter but conducts all its activities in local community centres. At present, they have no theatre program as such nor do they have any programs that work with 'mixed' groups. They are currently in the process of trying to secure an old bank building across the street from their offices for a new arts centre on the 'neutral' turf of the inner city.

The Cathedral Quarter has seen considerable revitalization in recent years and has been designated by the city council as an arts district. There are a dozen or so organisations just minutes away and I had the opportunity to meet with several. This included Mike Maloney, the development officer of **Prison Arts Foundation**. Maloney is an Australian ex-pat and graduate of Charles Sturt University in Bathurst. Since then, his long and interesting journey saw him create the **Belfast Community Circus** which is still thriving, and travel to Sarajevo to work with the traumatised community there. Around the corner are the **Linen Hall Library** and the **Community Arts Forum**, a networking organisation for the sector.

There was not much time for sightseeing, but one evening I did get a look at the spectacular Belfast City Hall. This ornate Victorian edifice takes up an entire city block and is the hub of the city's bus interchange. I was there one evening to see *The Blackout Show* by Red Lead Arts. It was the third contact I'd had with **productions drawn from the community's experience of World War II in this 60th anniversary** of its end. This one took the form of a radio show from the period and included songs, personal accounts of soldiers and the folks back home, ration book recipes and Aggie/Maggie comic exchanges. The slick production, which was free to anyone who wanted to attend, was performed by professional actors and well-received by its older audience.

On my last morning, I went with New Belfast Masque co-ordinator Sally Young to the vast warehouse of the **Beat Initiative**, a community and carnival production company who run training workshops, co-ordinate two major events each year and hire out their resources to other community groups. Australians interested in this kind of work would do well to contact the Beat about a secondment for they are well connected with festivals and communities all over the UK.

Upstate Theatre Company, Drogheda

Down in the Republic, the Upstate Theatre Company based in Drogheda is working across the border counties to look at ways of easing tensions between Catholic and Protestant communities in the south, again supported by the EU 'peace fund'. While their quest is essentially aesthetic, the political and social context in which the work is created provides a rich starting point. Artistic Director Declan Gorman has written and adapted work drawn from ancient myth and set them against contemporary realities such as the major waves of migration now coming into Ireland from Eastern Europe.

The company works across four separate but intergrated strands including Live, the professional touring company; Local, the community animation program; Learning, the mentoring and training strand; and Upstate Lab, the innovation and development activity. I met with Declan Mallon, Drama Development Officer who spoke with me about the company's recent and upcoming work in the Local strand.

Back to Dublin

Any fantasies I may have had about taking it a little easier at the end of my Churchill adventure were just that. The plan had been to spend the final two weeks as a volunteer for the **Dublin Theatre Festival** – see a few sights, catch a few shows. As it turned out, this smaller but more focused event delivered more quality international theatre than did the Edinburgh Festival so I was out every night.

Just two days before I left the country, I was blessed by one of those primal theatre experiences that literally changes the way you breathe and renews all belief in the power of the art form. ***The Story of the Bull*** is a new work created for the Festival by Michael Keegan-Dolan and the Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre. Based on myth of Táin Bó Cuailnge, the raucous work tracked the battle between the urban Maeve and the rural Cullen family as they battle for possession of the most valuable bull in the country. With multiple violent murders, full front nudity and utter family dysfunction, it might have been *Hamlet* by Quentin Tarantino, but it was so full of music, humour and political savvy that *The Bull* was more like *Southpark* by Pina Baush. Riverdance and the Irish – well, universal – obsession with real estate were given repeated lashings. To festival directors across the country, do whatever it takes to get this multi-talented company – and their peat covered stage to Oz!

Back at the Fringe Festival, an equally well conceived and well executed work about Irish identity took out my ‘favourite’ award. *Tumbledowntown* was a devised piece by Performance Lab @ Roundabout Theatre, a youth theatre group, which set was in an abandoned council flat in **Ballymun**. The flats – four 20 story towers and a dozen or so smaller blocks – were built in the 1960s in response to a housing shortage, but as things often go, community amenities did not follow the housing and Ballymun became synonymous with 20th century social ills. Director Louise Lowe, along with a visual artist and sound designer, worked all summer with local young people to create a poignant installation and powerful performances that won them the Spirit of the Fringe prize.

They told stories of abandonment, unwanted pregnancies and drug addiction with relentless integrity, but also found space for ordinary stories of growing up – of a place filled with love, loyalty and hope. In a final scene, two young women led us out to a balcony with a view of lights twinkling in the pink dusk to remember school days and Christmases past. As they speculated on their futures, a hazy moon rose between the cranes and scaffolding; because Ballymun is now the largest urban regeneration project in Europe. This time the community is very much a part of it all and increasingly articulate about expressing their needs.

One of the first buildings in the redevelopment was the **Axis Arts and Community Centre**, now seen as the symbol of community engagement and local culture. For a couple of years, it languished, literally in the shadow of one of the huge towers. But in the last month or so, the block was demolished and the new centre director Ray Yeates is optimistic about the future. The centre has a theatre, dance studio, recording studios and gallery space as well as meeting rooms and offices for community groups that had been located in the old tower blocks. They are also next door to the new Ballymun Civic offices.

I had three stimulating visits to Axis – the first for *Tumbledowntown* and the second was for a reading of a new play by Dublin playwright Colm Maher. On the final visit I met with Yeates, Programme Manager Roísí McGarr and Local Arts Development Officer Mark O'Brien. He was probably the closest as I'd found to my own position of community cultural development officer at the Tuggeranong Arts Centre. Likewise, O'Brien's and Yeates' theatre backgrounds paralleled those of myself and TAC's director Evol McLeod. The prospect of some international exchange seemed entirely possible for our respective staff or young people.

A society should be judged not by how it treats its outstanding citizens but by how it treats its criminals. ~ Dostoevsky

Colm Maher's play *My Short Life* was one of several close encounters with those who live on the wrong side of the law. My first full day in Dublin had included a visit to Kilmainham Gaol, arguably the birthplace of modern Ireland, with strong connections to Australia through the hundreds who were transported from there in the 19th century. Years later, the summary execution of thirteen hapless rebels of the 1916 Easter Uprising turned them into martyrs and led to the creation of an independent Ireland five years later. The gaol is now an outstanding museum, and an hour with a knowledgeable guide was an effective baptism in the last 200 years of Irish history.

The second encounter was a Dublin Fringe piece called *Doing Time: Through the Visiting Glass*. Ashley Lucas is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama who is doing doctoral study in California. She is the child of a prisoner, and when her father was denied parole for the third time, she felt a need to speak with others who had also felt the isolation that her family had experienced for the past 10 years. Her play, based on interviews, letters and research, is about **what prisons do to the families left behind**. It uses comedy, pathos and music to table the facts (America has 5% of the world's population but 25% of the world's prisoners, the vast majority of whom are Afro-American males.) and give us a glimpse of these marginalised members of every community.

Then in the final week of the Fringe, I went to opening night of *The Masterpiece* inside the grey walls **Mountjoy Prison**. Like the Croke Stadium, Trinity College and the Guinness brewery, the gaol is in the middle of town, jammed next door to houses, shops and the local hospital. Several years ago I co-directed a production of Jim McNeill's *The Chocolate Frog* which we performed at Goulburn Gaol. The English architecture was nearly identical, but when I returned there the next day for a personal visit, the atmosphere was completely different. Officer John Dooley (aka production manager for Mountjoy shows since 1986) took me on to the floor of the prison where I was neither the perpetrator nor the object of voyeurism. It was a timely visit given the ACT is about to build its own prison over the next two years.

As it turned out, the following day was the launch ***The Drama and the Joy*** at the **Irish Film Institute** in Temple Bar. The documentary by Jim Cahill followed the 2004 production of Martin McDonagh's *The Lonesome West* from pre-show planning to post production blues. After the launch, I was privileged to speak with the prison's visionary governor John Lonergan and Domnall Creamer, a prisoner who has been involved with several productions during his six year sentence.

Creamer, who is due to be released next year, said that he and his fellow inmates are 'grateful to be given the opportunity to express ourselves in a positive way'. He was also clear about the part that the process had played in his rehabilitation, 'I can summarise it in one word. The drama has taught me tolerance.' His governor would be delighted at these observations. For Longergan 'The drama is about vision, about seeing people ten years on,' he says in the documentary, 'it's about providing them with a building block that will help them make the transition.'

So between an exquisitely realised artistic outcome and an unsolicited acknowledgment of the value of the process, Ireland provided a perfect ending to my Churchill travels. I've come home, with both aspiration and *raison d'être* shining brightly as any spring morning in Canberra.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Rather than coming home with an answer to each of the questions I'd set, I've drawn five generalisations from which organisations and individual artists can draw their own particular answers.

- **It's a vision thing** – A clearly articulated and passionately held vision was central to those producing outstanding community theatre. Such vision provides focus during 'busy-ness' and guides action. It also becomes the 'rock' on which artists and community can rest during periods of difficulty or change.
- A strong **strategic plan** ensured that resources could be garnered to make the vision become reality in ever-changing economic and social environments. While there are many talented artists and 'worthy' causes around the world, the organisations with strong strategic leadership were able to achieve the greatest outcomes over time.
- **Partnerships** with other community organisations, funding bodies and artists are central to reaching the widest number of individuals and to sustaining both social and artistic benefits of any particular activity.
- **A sense of place** and local identity was a characteristic of the most outstanding work. While the artistic/theatrical form varied enormously, at the core of all the work was a questioning of what it means to live here and now.

While 'place' was important to the artistic endeavour, venues as such seemed to have various effects on the quality of work. Two of the most outstanding companies – Soujourn and New Belfast had no theatrical home and did most of their work in community venues. Dundee Rep, Clwyd Theatr for Young People and Woolly Mammoth all had venues, but in the case of the latter, the venue actually interfered with the community work. At Axis and North Edinburgh, the venues are just beginning to look at their capacity to support local theatre making and for Crooked House, the 'residency' is a source of acknowledged but unresolved tension for both the company and Riverbank Art Centre.

- **Only the best will do** – It is essential to engage the best artists available for undertaking community theatre work in terms of drama processes and final artistic outcomes. This 'best' refers to both artistic skill and sensitivities and also commitment to community work. An artist who would rather be working somewhere else will produce only mediocre work, regardless of skill. Anything less than 'the best' undermines both the individual and community sense of achievement and empowerment.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Dissemination and Implementation

- Six progress reports have already been published on www.artshub.com.au over the 13 week extent of my travels. This comprehensive news and jobs website has over 35,000 readers each week.
- Opportunities will be sought to publish articles in professional journals including *Artwork*, a national journal of community arts, *Lowdown*, youth performing arts magazine and others as appropriate. I will also and present a paper/workshop at the 2006 Regional Arts Australia conference in Queensland in other forums as opportunity arises.
- Copies of this report will be sent to both artsACT and the Australia Council for the Arts.
- A 'show-and-tell' evening will be held in November to share my experiences with fellow artists, community development workers and decision makers, including members of the ACT Legislative Assembly. This will include a display of books, programs and other material collected on my travels.
- Other speaking engagements as they come to hand.
- A special report will be prepared for the ACT Minister for the Arts and for Corrective Services re the development of an arts program for the new ACT prison.
- I will advocate for Michael Rohd, Conor Sheilds and Mountjoy Prison staffers to address Australian conferences and visit Australian policy makers.
- Opportunities may arise for the development of international community arts projects at Tuggeranong Arts Centre, with a particular focus on allowing young people to 'explore the world' through the arts. There was strong interest in such partnerships from North Edinburgh Arts Centre, New Belfast Community Arts Initiative, Riverbank Arts Centre, Axis Arts and Community Centre and Crooked House Theatre Company. This might include visual arts, digital media including filmmaking, street dance and an international co-production of a new play.

7. FURTHER READING

For those interested in learning more about the organisations visited or this area of study, the following websites and books are recommended.

In the United States

www.alternateroots.org

www.appalshop.org

ww3.artsusa.org/animatingdemocracy

www.communityarts.net

www.mannadc.org,

www.sojourntheatre.org

www.woollymammoth.net

In Great Britain

www.clwyd-theatr-cymru.co.uk

www.dundeereptheatre.co.uk

www.fruitmarket.co.uk

www.northedinburgharts.co.uk

In Northern Ireland

www.caf.ie

www.newbelfastarts.org

www.belfastcarnival.org

www.newbelfastarts.org

www.prisonartsfoundation.com

In the Republic of Ireland

www.ballymun-nc.ie/flagship/160

www.calypso.ie

www.crookedhouse.ie

www.riverbank.ie

www.rough-magic.com

www.upstate.ie

An Outburst of Frankness – community arts in Ireland, edited by Sandy Fitzgerald is the lively transcript of two CAF forums and a series of essays by some of the most articulate practitioners in a packed field. Published by tasc@ New Island.

Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate--The Essential Guide for Progressives by George Lakoff published by Chelsea Green Publishing Company. Linguist Lakoff analyses the result of the 2004 US presidential election with some significant parallels to contemporary Australian politics. A slim book with big ideas about the power of language.

Theatre for Community Conflict and Dialogue: The Hope is Vital Training Manual by Micheal Rohd published by Heinemann Drama. Though Rohd has modified many of the exercises in the book since its publication in 1998, it is still very useful resource for the drama facilitator.

These three volumes are available through Amazon.

Theatre and Empowerment – Community Drama on the World Stage edited by Richard Boon and published by Cambridge University Press. Contains some excellent case studies but is a hideously expensive hardback £45. Might be worth talking to your local or institutional librarian.