

4 A FESTIVAL of arts, culture & faith

thePROJECT...

GRAHAM MAULE is one of the folk who've been asked to advance the setting up of a festival of arts, culture & faith in Scotland. Here he reveals a little of developments.

Many of you will have heard of or attended the wondrous Greenbelt, the annual festival of Christian arts in Cheltenham. Over the last decades, Scotland has only occasionally been blessed by similarly adventurous, intelligent adult explorations of faith and all that it touches. However, a groundswell of opinion has been growing in the wee diddy nation above the Tweed.

In August this year, Greenbelt Festival hosted a conversation for anyone interested in exploring the possibility of 'doing Greenbelt in Scotland'. From this 'the PROJECT'... a Scottish festival of Arts, Culture & Faith was born. Around 30 people attended and there was enough interest to arrange a second exploratory meeting in Perth. So in November, another group of around 30 (mostly different people from the first meeting) met to take things a step further.

IDENTITY & SPIRIT

It was clear at both meetings that any future event in Scotland should have its own identity, should grow out of Scottish culture and concerns, and not merely attempt to imitate Greenbelt.

Certainly the 'interfaces of engagement' would be primarily those mapped out by the likes of Greenbelt and others: arts – faith – theology – ecology – politics – philosophy – spirituality – justice... or basically celebration, inspiration, irreverence, laughter, tears, questions, argument, friendship, shivers up the spine (add your own noun to the list).

Whatever ends up coming to fruition, while initially inspired by the spirit of Greenbelt, we'd also learn from other Scottish & European models such as Street Level, Carberry Festival, Kirchentag or even the Edinburgh Festival, The Mod, Celtic Connections, etc. A distinct Scottish nature would be developed, responding to the specific conditions, context and needs of this place and time.

All felt that the event should also possess some of the positive values associated with Greenbelt, such as its breadth and depth, in terms

of audience and contributors; its spirit of irreverence, experimentation and daring to ask difficult questions; its independence from any single organisation; its tolerance of difference and its attempts to be inclusive; and its cultural engagement.

So GB will be seen as a 'sister' festival and a willing source of advice, experience and support to the PROJECT.

Of course, a simple cloning of Greenbelt is a great temptation, but would that be healthy? Would Greenbelt be easily translatable into a Scottish context (amongst other things, it tends to rain in Scotland!). There was discussion about what the next step might be, and a strong consensus that it would in reality take a couple of years to get any larger event underway. So we reckoned we should aim for a bigger event at earliest in 2011. This would also recognise that there is much groundwork to be done in the meantime.

One of the unexpected outcomes of Greenbelt over a period of around 40 years has been the creation of a community of people who are personally invested in the festival – they run things, they make things, they volunteer, they look after the toilets – about 2000 of them every year. And one of the great benefits of doing something in Scotland would be to create a similar community of like-minded people engaged in the task of realising the PROJECT.

THE NEXT STEPS

So we reckoned the initial stages should be as follows:

a) Creating community & fleshing out

Developing a community of like-minded folk who might participate in, publicise and enable any potential event/s, larger or smaller, in Scotland over the next two years is seen as highly desirable, indeed highly necessary. So in this interim period, we'll plan a series of small events, maybe 2 or 3 a year which will act as a forum for further discussion (consultation) but also, more importantly, be small-scale models of the kinds of forms and activities (concerts, workshops, exhibitions, etc.) that a potential larger event would contain... in other words, time and space where people will be able to talk, explore, plan and celebrate together.

The aim is to grow organically, encouraging as wide a constituency as possible to get involved. During the process we will start building a volunteer base of people with skills to be able to contribute to a larger 2011 event. So we'll have time to discover what a bigger event might look like – whether it would be in a greenfield or urban location (or a hybrid of these), the time of year it would happen, how many people might come.

c) Creating partnership & organisation

The 2009-2010 period would give us time to begin to create partnerships with sponsors and funders, to create a small organisation

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that has a bank account and a constitution. Thus acknowledging that creating such a large festival event is not an undertaking unfraught with difficulties and challenges, and given it's also difficult yet to have any clear or predetermined shape or consensus about its form, length, breadth, geography or season, perhaps cautiously, but also hopefully wisely, we reckon we might learn to walk before we start to run.

PROCESS & PEOPLE

The Perth meeting tasked Dot Reid, Graham Maule and John Cross to identify people who would be on an initial interim Steering Group.

There was some concern that the PROJECT shouldn't be owned by larger organisations or become institutionalised. So the brief was to identify people in terms of their interest and ability to take things to the next stage (and not in terms of being 'representatives' of organisations). The remit of this interim Steering Group is to organise a couple of events in 2009 to bring people together and to help think through the possibilities for the future.

WHO MIGHT LIKE IT?

So perhaps obviously, the PROJECT is for those interested in a deliberate exploration of the arts, culture and faith. We would hope to make it a comfortable place for insiders, outsiders and maybe especially those at the margins of the Church.

The festival would primarily be targeted for adults (young and not so young), but importantly, there would be an inclusive provision for children and families.

INTERESTED?

So if you are one of these people, you might like to register your interest, keep up-to-date with developments, find out about the small events in 2009 & 2010, and basically... join us. To do this you can:

Sign-up to **'the PROJECT' Email list:** gmaule@mac.com.

Join **'the PROJECT' Facebook group:** <http://www.facebook.com/groups.php?ref=sb#/group.php?gid=35661837167>

Or visit **'The PROJECT' Google website:** <http://sites.google.com/site/theprojectscotland...> (you'll need to create a Google password).

Here's looking forward to welcoming you as a Projectile!

NEIL GLOVER IS 'HALFWAY TO HEAVEN'...

Ex-Wild Goose Worship Group tenor, NEIL GLOVER, is currently a minister on the south side of Glasgow and he's recently launched an interesting website which he describes thus...

" 'Halfway To Heaven' is a place for interesting thoughts needing to find a public outing without being commissioned by a publishing house, refined over the course of a fourteen day retreat, or escaping the self-consciousness that suppresses our most innovative inklings.

The site emanates from the liminally titled Halfway in Lanarkshire but has grand plans to host the ideas of anyone 50% of the way to paradise, no matter their current location on planet earth."

You might not agree with every point of view on it, but it's certainly worth a look: <http://www.halfwaytoheaven.org.uk>

BE SICK OF THE CHURCH

...or *'Health Tips For Nauseous Ecclesiastics'*

... or again, a wee reflection from the aforementioned NEIL GLOVER.

Be sick of the Church when the cross road between Word and world is abandoned.

When attacks are launched from safety and the flesh wound is far away.

When divine words are embezzled to bless gut prejudice; when opponents are denied the journey that got them there.

Be sick when we say
"This is the only issue."
Be sick when we say
"If this doesn't go our way, then we leave."

Be sick of the place
of the acting
of the weightless words.

Be sick
when meaning is twisted
and context is censored
and soundbite stands for the whole.

Be sick when one Shibbolleth decides the tribe.

Be sick when silence is confused for peace,
when indignation is craved and savoured,
when the bile is disappointment with ourselves.

Be sick and sick again,
but discover the soreness is not long gone...
no other way but this.