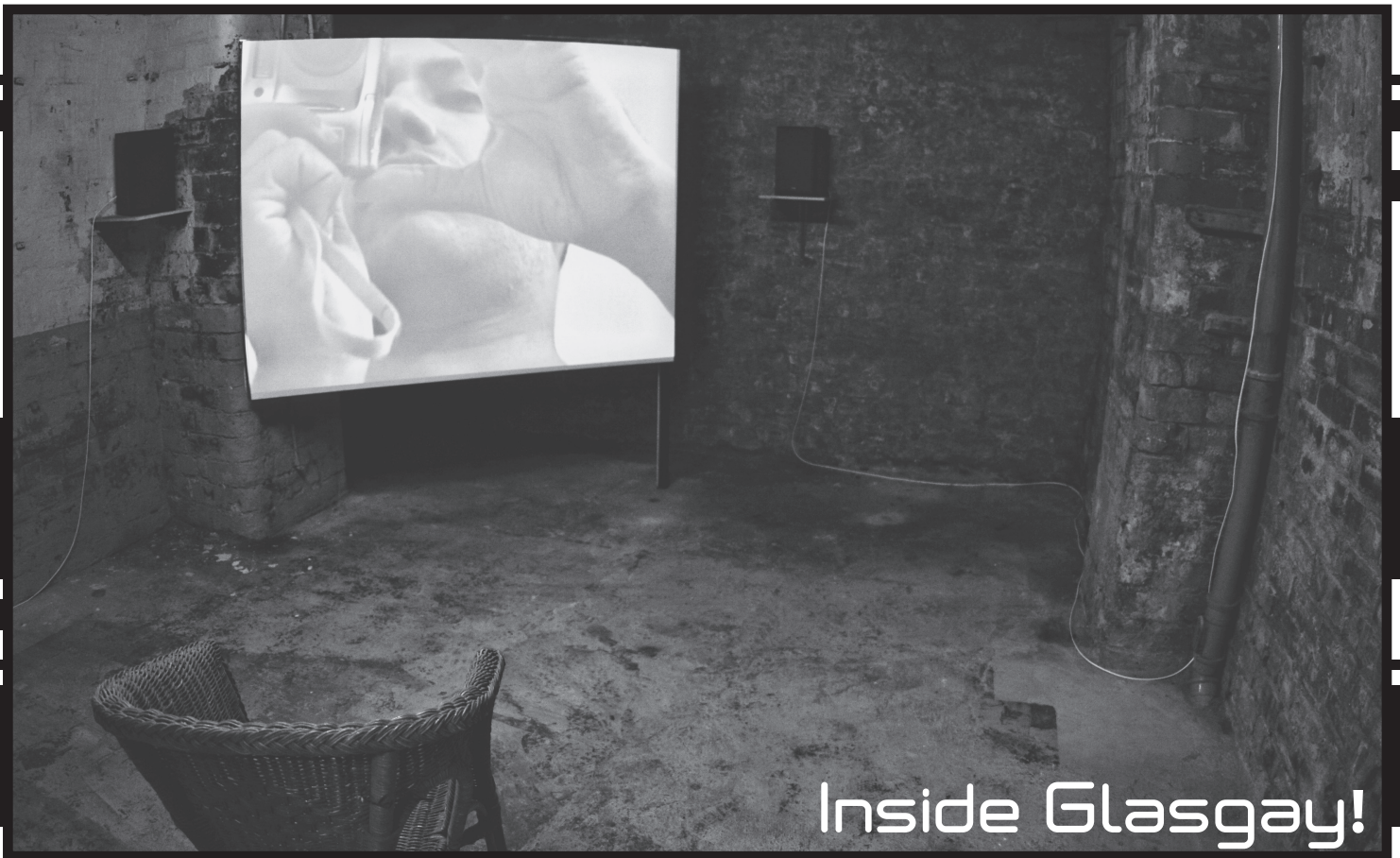


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Pride of Glasgow:
Speaking to the artists of the Glasgay! Festival



Inside Glasgay!

In 1993, a small, independent arts festival was founded by Cordelia Ditton and Dominic D'Angelo in order to celebrate queer culture and promote gay rights in Scotland. In 2009, the same arts festival is the biggest of its kind in the UK. With thousands of visitors each year, working with venues all over the city, securing a large amount of public and commercial funding and a projected turnover of over a quarter of a million pounds.

The Glasgay! Festival is a cultural phenomenon, encompassing theatre, visual art and music by some of Scotland's best talents, as well as a host of young, emerging artists being given their chance to perform on a grand stage. Here, qmunicate speaks to some of this year's artists biggest contributors, as well as the festival's director on how they became involved with Glasgay!, its successes and its controversies, and above all else, why it is such an integral part of Scotland's LGBT culture.

In 1979 a referendum was held amongst the QM membership to determine the future of the Union. Should men be allowed to become members? With a majority voting in favour of equal membership, the Union changed forever. Within three years the membership had elected the first male President of the Queen Margaret Union. He was Dominic D'Angelo, who would later go on to found the Glasgay! Festival. Currently working for the UK's Department of International Development (DFID) in Afghanistan, D'Angelo reflects on his time as President, and how it shaped what would become the Glasgay! Festival years later.

“ Did the QM give birth to Glasgay!? Actually, it's not that far-fetched an idea. Arriving as a fresher in a (gosh!) wet Glasgow in 1978, I recall within a matter of hours complaining to the SRC President about the less-than-gay-friendly content of its Week Nothing material. By the time I left University, I'd helped restart GaySoc (as it then was), been arrested for distributing 'seditious' material at subsequent Freshers' Weeks (acquitted) and generally annoyed people courtesy of the SRC, aiding and abetting the 'mixing' campaign to persuade GUU and QM to allow male and female members, editing GU Guardian, and becoming

QM President. And gained a degree at some point along the way. By 1993, when Cordelia Ditton asked how we might set about organising a lesbian and gay arts festival, I was running a freelance arts consultancy, publishing Gay Scotland magazine (RIP), and generally acting as a media rent-a-quote on matters pink.

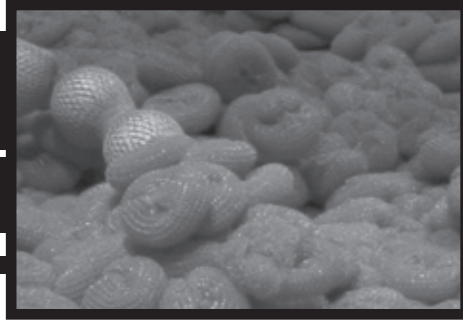
The QM connection? The success of the mixing campaign, and joining the QM as soon as it allowed male membership, reinforced in my mind the idea that it was possible to change deeply felt and long-held opinions – even in Glasgow. That just because people said something couldn't be done, didn't make it so, even at the cost of upsetting some (one lecturer warned me that the University “was out to get me” because I was causing it embarrassment).

It confirmed the need to do what you can at the time when you can do it, and that what you do may (but won't always) lead to far greater outcomes than you envisaged. Did Cordelia and I know Glasgay! would become the largest festival of its type in the UK? Of course not: we wanted the festival to make a statement, but above all, we wanted

Glasgay!

www.glasgay.com

Stephen Thompson
Director of Glasgay! Festival



Dani Marti
Artist: insideout
Exhibition Ended

“I’m enormously proud of the growth of *Glasgay!*; since I applied I think we’ve really succeeded in developing it from a bunch of touring acts into a full theatre programme.” Steven Thompson isn’t bashful about the success of *Glasgay!*, but then why should he be. He controls a £250,000 business, the biggest of its kind in the UK, so maybe he should be allowed a little ego. “What we’re attempting to do - and will continue to do - is to reflect audiences’ real lives.” He says as we turn the discussion to the festival’s mission statement, “it’s not as much anymore about ‘here’s me and my sexuality, now react to it’, it’s more of a celebration of LGBT identity and the identity as part of a more diverse society, about where LGBT culture intersects with mainstream culture”

The festival hasn’t been without its controversies, including, most recently, the well-documented decision by Glasgow City Council (GCC) to deny Dani Marti his allotted space in the Gallery of Modern Art due to the nature of his work. Thompson likens the GCC’s reaction to Thatcher’s infamous HIV advertising campaign depicting the dangers of HIV using graves and tombstones: “It was a major organisation’s attempt to make the wider culture fearful of liberal behaviour and what Dani did was celebrate that gay men can have loving relationships despite HIV - it’s not a death sentence.” But Thompson is proud of the reaction following the GCC’s decision; “it’s interesting that [it] had such a galvanising effect on the LGBT community, similar to the catastrophic effect Thatcher’s scheme had in the 80s. When you want the LGBT community to be strong and be political, they won’t hesitate to do so. The GCC were scared that the press would misrepresent the piece, and it was that fear that led to them misrepresenting it. To me what it did was show me that the value of *Glasgay!* has not diminished, the issues have not gone away and that we need to keep on providing a representation of the truth.”

And it’s this spirit that is motivating Thompson to make next year’s festival even more political. “Next year I want to take on the institutions that attack the festival and LGBT culture, take on the Daily Mail and the red tops and find a way to subvert the media that look down on us. As a festival, we’ve always been politically aware, but we might have to be more politically active next year.”

And what of the festival’s collaborators? Does he fear the backlash of once again becoming a politically active festival? No, not at all. “We’re building an economy of self-sufficiency using local artists. There’s a unique voice of Scottish artists; a persistent working class aesthetic; their works get to the truth quicker than large scale productions. Look at Little Johnny’s Big Gay Musical, which started life as a *Glasgay!* show and has now toured all over Scotland. We’re nurturing a seedbed of talent and new ideas which we can grow and send out to the mainstream.

Dani Marti may not be an instantly recognisable name, but his recent reputation certainly precedes him. The artist was commissioned by GoMA to produce a piece as part of the sh[OUT]: Contemporary Art and Human Rights series. However, following controversy surrounding the work displayed before his, Glasgow City Council allegedly pressured GoMA into denying Marti his apparently allotted space unless he agreed to remove parts of the piece.

The intended exhibit, ‘Disclosure’ became *insideout*, a more complex, intense exhibit that, whilst having found a home at 4 Parnie Street, suffers all the same for being there. But Marti is satisfied with the location of *insideout*’s residency, saying “It’s now a very underground show. The pity is we’ve lost the opportunity to show the two films at GoMA, and instead of the work and those issues being seen by hundreds of people at the GoMA space, now much less people will be able to see it.” Marti’s work is deeply engaging, a true example of how something seemingly so small can have such a huge effect. It just seems a shame that an exhibit which would have been so at home surrounded by other art, is so lost in dingy, leaking basements on a back street away from the city centre. It’s a true example of a surrounding impacting art itself, the emotional, incredibly personal videos of men talking about HIV, their sexuality and their experiences which make up the exhibit feeling undoubtedly more sordid and participation more voyeuristic than they would in GoMA.

But Marti seems to have accepted his work’s fate, and says he’d happily work with GoMA again, although there does seem to be some resentment still for the GCC Councillors who won the ear of GoMA’s directors. “It was wrong, the council said ‘Okay, let’s not show anything at GoMA that could be slightly pragmatic or could get the press attention. The problem we had was that it was part of a residency about human rights, about peoples’ rights. It was wrong for them to pull it; I had a responsibility to the group I was commissioned to work with as well as the wider gay community. That’s why I took the situation and informed the press.”

Marti’s decision to advise the press was an obvious decision, he argues; “GoMA and the City Council were scared about the press reaction from the Daily Mail and papers like that, but what we managed to do was engage with the intelligent press, and say look: ‘what the council is doing is not right; The GCC still got the backlash, but this time over something they had to take the blame for.”

“It’s cooling off now and I am so happy with the show. There’s so much sentiment, so much emotion in the show. So much intimacy. I only hope that maybe the Council will be more sensitive about censorship, - especially in regards to gay and queer issues - in the future.”



Louise Welsh
Writer: Memory Cells
Tuesday 20th - Saturday 24th October



Martin O'Connor
Writer & Director: Playing Houses
Tuesday 13th - Saturday 17th October

Louise Welsh is a best-selling author, award winning playwright and long-term Glasgay! collaborator. Having been a patron of the festival in 2007, she was then approached by the festival's director, Stephen Thompson to write a play for the 2009 festival and began work on *Memory Cells*; which is currently being performed deep in the bowels of the Arches.

"Glasgay is so important in today's culture, especially after the situation with the sh[OUT]! exhibition at GoMA, provoking such an extreme negative reaction." Welsh, is of course talking about this year's hot topic, Dani Marti's *insideout* exhibition. "I would hope that even with this Daily Mail culture we seem to be living in that people of any sexuality would feel empowered to go along to one of the show. It goes beyond the gay scene, whatever that is."

Welsh is quite candid about her feelings on the discrimination some aspects of gay culture experience., "I've never seen it personally, but it's depressing. It's there, and despite all the effort that goes into festivals like Glasgay, it's still there, people are still not willing to accept things. There's still a lot of homophobia that needs to be confronted in the West Coast of Scotland."

Surprisingly Welsh plays down the aspects of queer culture that seem linked with *Memory Cells*. "It's not as gendered as it may seem, it's more about the extreme situation that the characters are placed in and how it affects their relationship, rather than their gender relationship. It's more about a man and a woman, than men and women." And aside from these hints and a number of other tantalising adjectives which evoke a sense that the play will be fitting for its pre-Hallowe'en audiences such as "disturbing", "predatory" and "haunting", Welsh is reluctant to give away much of the play's plot outside of the programme blurbs description of the piece which reveals it to be about two strangers, one of whom knows more than the other, confined together in an underground chamber.

"I'm nervous, about the play. It's an intense process, moving an idea out of your imagination and into something concrete, seeing it come alive. I suppose it's human nature to be nervous, but I've got a great deal of confidence in the cast and director and in the piece as well, so it's very exciting"

Memory Cells runs from 20th - 24th October in The Arches, 7.30pm. Tickets are £8/£10 from www.thearches.co.uk

"This is the first full production I've ever done," confesses Martin O'Connor, playwright and director of the Glasgay! and Arches co-commission piece *Playing Houses*. "I'm kind of nervous, this piece is different, but the same. It's my first show with more than just me involved, but I'm approaching it as if it were the same; the same writing process which had me holed up in a house by myself for a couple of months, the same rehearsal process, just with more people this time."

For Martin and a number of other writers such as Matthew McVarish, Glasgay! is an unmissable opportunity. With Steven Thompson's philosophy of bringing in new, young artists, Martin and Matthew are putting on pieces of theatre on the scale of which many their age can only dream of. "I became involved with Glasgay! following my work with the Arches Live! Festival. Steven came along and saw one of my pieces for the festival a couple of years ago on sexuality and the body and really, really liked it. He asked me if I wanted to be involved and I have been ever since, more and more heavily with each year's festival."

For O'Connor, whose works attempt to explore aspects of the male identity, he's already submitted to the Glasgay! ethos of reinvesting in the younger generation, and with *Playing Houses*, carried out a series of workshops with youth groups and projects from around Glasgow to provide him with inspiration for the piece. "I think what Glasgay! does very well is give voices to those who don't have the chance to be heard very often; those who don't have the ability to speak up for themselves. That's why it was important for me to work with Glasgow's young people."

"Glasgow's unique because there are so many young artists who just want to make theatre, even if they have no budget and aren't going to make any money. Glasgay! taps into that group and gives them the opportunity to do something more," he says, beginning to sound ever-so-slightly like a press release, but considering he's spent his summer working alongside these young artists, perhaps it'd be insulting to doubt his sincerity.

"Glasgay! has changed in the last couple of years, and started to look at the wider issues of society. I think it can keep doing that; diversifying and dealing with issues not exclusive to the gay community, it can keep reaching people. It's about giving people the opportunity to judge for themselves, to reach out and say this is what we're really about."

Playing Houses runs until the 17th October in The Arches, 7.30pm. Tickets are £8/£10 from www.thearches.co.uk. Catch it if you're quick enough.