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Festival success for Papay Gyro Nights

REVIEW
Papay Gyro Nights 2011
Papa Westray

Live painting to music performed by folk band The Chair, and the folktales of storyteller Tom Muir, were the highlights of an international arts festival on Papa Westray.

Papay Gyro Nights saw residents of all ages and visitors witness cutting-edge short films, digital architectural videos, paintings, storytelling sessions and live music as their island was transformed into an art gallery with shows in unusual settings.

Curated by Ivanov and Chan of Land Art, Papa Westray, the idea originated in the ancient Papay tradition of the Night of the Gyros.

This tradition was last enacted in 1914, with a ceremony in which young boys of the island made torches which they set alight to entice the "gyros" out of hiding. The gyros derive from the Norse 'gygr', a giant troll-woman.

Older lads dressed as the monstrous gyros traditionally pursued the youngsters, hitting them with tope or tangles (seaweed).

The eight-day festival aimed to interpret the original traditions and rituals through work created during the festival, and through works which reflect the global community of which we are all a part.

It began with Dr Ragnhild Ljosland, of the Centre for Nordic



Artist Armando Seijo, left, created paintings to the beat of Orkney band, The Chair.

Studies in Kirkwall, telling stories about the trolls from her native Norway, and an Orkney fairytale and a torchlight procession to a bonfire at the Old Pier.

During the week, there were several showings of short films from Iceland, London, Argentina, China and Norway, with continuous showings of architectural designs from Norway, Japan and New York.

Visual art adorned the walls at Land Art's gallery at Tredwell, including bold abstracts from Sanday-based artist Brendan Colvert.

Composer James Hesford released a single, *The Entire Population of Papa Westray*, commissioned by Land Art. The starting point for his improvised piece was memories of evenings playing with local accordionist Margaret Rendall, at Papay pub nights.

Hesford took the notion that many Scottish tunes are named for people, and each of the 70 Papay residents gets four bars each in his composition.

London-based artist, Armando Seijo, arrived armed with brushes and oils, to paint live performances from Satfishforty and The Chair on a vast canvas at the front of the hall, capturing players and observers.

Seijo immortalises live events outside the studio, reacting to the mood and people. During a storytelling session from Tom Muir of Orkney Museum, we weaved our own images as he told dark and supernatural tales about the devil, an ogress, a witch and a saint. Behind us we heard Seijo painting furiously and later saw his interpretation of the tales, adding a rich dimension to our experience.

Another coup for the festival

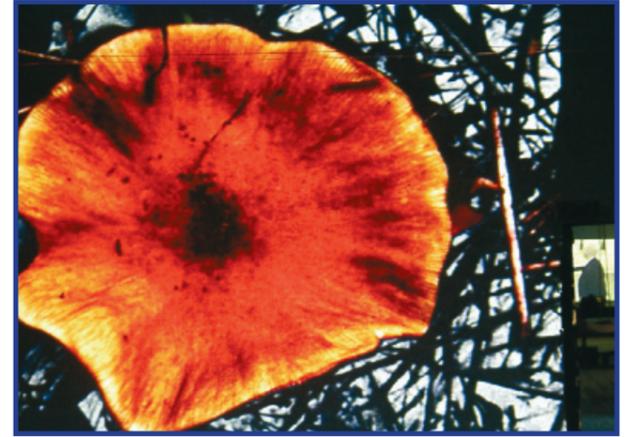
was a screening of the Thai feature film, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul.

Winner of the 2010 Palme d'Or at Cannes Film Festival, and selected for the London Film Festival, the Papa Westray screening was ahead of its DVD release in the UK. This poetic film depicts the final days of Boonmee in the forest with his family and family ghosts.

Fish and chips and more screenings rounded off the festival, which had brought the community together to celebrate their island life during an experimental week.

Three art prizes named after the Neolithic farmstead on Papay, the Knap o Howar, were awarded by all the islanders. The Festival Prize went to Armando Seijo, the artist in residence.

As Ivanov said: "The people



Work by Antonio Nodar.

(Pictures: Ivanov and Chan)

of Papay have taken him to their hearts."

The architecture prize went to Multiplicities of New York for a tower house designed for Inner Mongolia. Its broch-type structure, to withstand the challenging weather, had a resonance for the harsh environment of Orkney.

Wu Jungyong of China took the short film and video prize for his animation.

Ivanov and Chan have pulled off a remarkable feat by staging their first major Papa Westray festival, without funding.

They said: "For us, Papay Gyro Nights 2011 is not finished yet—now we're editing all materials for publishing a video catalogue, and for the next few months we

will be promoting the festival, and all artists who took part, in Hong Kong, London and Berlin, and establishing a festival exchange programme with similar festivals worldwide.

"The work for Papay Gyro Nights 2012 has started already, and some very exciting art proposals have started to arrive for Papay, together with visitor enquiries.

"Once again, thank-you to everybody who could make it to Papay for Gyro Nights 2011 — to artists and to all visitors — they may have come to Papay as strangers, but they left as very good friends, and are always welcome back."

CT

The power of four

REVIEW
Nephele Ensemble
St Magnus Cathedral

On Tuesday, February 21, the Orkney Arts Society hosted a chamber music concert in the Cathedral, featuring the Nephele Ensemble, a flute quartet.

As usual on a week night, there was a disappointingly small audience, but it is hard to fault people in Orkney for wanting to play, rather than listen to music. Mondays: Festival Chorus; Tuesdays: Country Orchestra; Wednesdays: Cathedral Choir; Thursdays: Strathspey and Reel; these are only some of the musical events on offer.

This is not to mention drama, sport and other hobbies, which include the ever-popular committee meeting.

The concert opened with a charming work by Gossec, which set the tone of the evening. By this, I mean that the performance and the music was of a very high standard.

This was followed by a short introduction by Jessica Beeston, the viola player, telling us about some additions to the programme. These talks have become a welcome feature of most of these concerts, giving us insights into the music, and on this occasion giving the flute player a chance to catch her breath.

The next work was Mozart's *Quartet in D major KV285*. I think that for most people this was the highlight of the evening. The flautist Nicola Smedley was on fine form, playing with beautiful tone, and finely controlled breathing and phrasing. The string trio provided a robust accompaniment which enhanced but never overwhelmed her. The *adagio* was especially moving,



The Nephele Ensemble, above, impressed at the St Magnus Cathedral.

Right: Jessica Beeston on viola. (Pictures: The Orcadian/Orkney Media Group)

with its long lyrical lines and pizzicato accompaniment, which sounded simple and most definitely is not!

The first half of the programme finished with an effective arrangement of a Fauré piano piece.

The second half of the programme was a different kettle of fish.

The main work was by the English composer Nicholas Maw. We were told, in the long introduction by the violinist Samantha Wickramasinghe, that the quartet had shut themselves in a room in Blair Castle, courtesy of the Tunnell Trust, for eight days to practise enough to do justice to this difficult work.

Whereas the previous works had been mainly flute with string accompaniment, this work gave the string players a chance to show off their marvellous

technique, both individually, and as a string trio.

The lyrical tone of the viola and the versatility of the cellist Rebecca Hewes were brought to the fore.

The concert finished with an arrangement of Gordon Jacob's light-hearted *Four Little Pieces*.

A local interest note is that Jessica Beeston is the daughter of Michael and Janey Beeston, and it was great to see the Bond relatives out in force to support her.

Although it is not always possible to come to these concerts, would we ever be able to attend a final rehearsal?

This would be invaluable experience especially for senior music students, who would be amazed at the attention to detail involved in the rehearsing of music, to get it to such a high standard.

Jean Leonard

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