

From THE WEAKEST LINK to THE STRONGEST LINK

An innovative cultural project in Liverpool's Chinatown has created the antidote to Anne Robinson's controversial games show "The Weakest Link".

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'Games For The New Years - A DIY Guide To Games For The 21st Century'

by Bill Harpe.

Programmes such as The Weakest Link and Big Brother rely on elimination by a process of weakness or failure. But a series of games devised by the artists at The Blackie (Connecting artists and communities) reveals games where there are NO losers. And The Blackie has now produced its own DIY Guide To Games For The 21st Century. This step by step guide is both philosophical and practical and illustrates both how to play and invent games, and as project co-director and author Bill Harpe says : "These games will challenge players - but they involve the challenges of co-operation rather than the challenges of competition". These games are no instant invention. They have been explored and created over more than a quarter of a century, and have been played for enjoyment by children and adults as well as used for training and retraining of artists, teachers, social workers, and government officers. The games have promoted conviviality between players of different ages, backgrounds, races, genders, abilities and disabilities.

Bill Harpe said: 'Play and games over many millennia have been experienced as occasions for creativity, co-operation, and friendship. In our times game shows have always been popular features on radio and television, from Take Your Pick and Double Your Money to The Generation Game. But over the years they have become more and more competitive and combative. Many people cringe at shows such as The Weakest Link because of the deliberate rudeness.'

'Games, like food, are important to our lives. We have become increasingly aware over recent years that the food which we are encouraged to eat may be bad for our health. We now know that "we are the food we eat". It is equally true that many games which we are encouraged to play or watch are bad for our development. "We are the games we play" should be an idea which comes of age in the 21st Century.'

The Blackie (Connecting artists and communities) is a community arts venue in the heart of Liverpool's Chinatown, just next door to the Chinese Arch. It was established in 1968 as Britain's first community arts project and hosts playgroups, community groups, and a cultural programme of arts workshops, youth projects, residencies, performances and exhibitions with the emphasis on cultural diversity and shared experience. It is open 362 days a year from 10am-midnight. Games - artist-led,

multi-culturally inspired and disabled friendly – have been played at The Blackie since it began. Bill Harpe Bill Harpe has worked as a freelance dancer, choreographer and producer and as director of a Commonwealth Arts Festival. He directed the programme of opening celebrations of the Metropolitan Cathedral in Liverpool (including the creation of a Choreographed Mass). Following this, he worked in Zambia, celebrating the third anniversary of the country's independence with a touring production of a Greek tragedy (Aeschylus; Oresteia) using Zambian music and dance.

On return from Africa, Bill became co-founder of The Blackie, Britain's first community arts project, and has continued to work there as both artist and administrator. His work focuses on the arts and participation. He has directed four outdoor Festivals of Games in Liverpool city centre, as well as travelling round the UK and to Ireland, Denmark, and Jamaica to lead games and talk about games. He has written on dance and cultural issues for The Guardian and for magazines and periodicals in the UK and abroad. He was also granted a 'working sabbatical' to contribute to cultural policy and strategy at the Greater London Council.

The two texts below describe the familiar game of musical chairs, and an upside down version of musical chairs which is included in "Games For The New Years - A DIY Guide To Games For The 21st Century" as a creative and co-operative game. The text relating to this game is on page 17 of the book, and photographs of the game being played outdoors are on pages 12 (lower photograph) and 13 (both photographs) of the book.

The text relating to the game and the photographs also feature in the portfolio summary of the book.

A) MUSICAL CHAIRS from 11 players competing for 10 chairs to 10 players competing for 9 chairs to 9 players competing for 8 chairs to 8 players competing for 7 chairs to 7 players competing for 6 chairs to 6 players competing for 5 chairs to 5 players competing for 4 chairs to 4 players competing for 3 chairs to 3 players competing for 2 chairs to 2 players competing for 1 chair to 1 player

B) UPSIDE-DOWN MUSICAL CHAIRS from 11 players stood on 11 carpet tiles to 11 players stood on 10 carpet tiles to 11 players stood on 9 carpet tiles to 11 players stood on 8 carpet tiles to 11 players stood on 7 carpet tiles to 11 players stood on 6 carpet tiles to 11 players stood on 5 carpet tiles to 11 players stood on 4 carpet tiles to 11 players sharing 3 carpet tiles

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