

PROGRAMME

All of the foregoing on the subject of those working at the Project, and on those involved and participating in the activities of the Project - and all of the emphases on equal opportunities policy and practice and on positive action in areas where individuals and groups are discriminated against or disadvantaged - all of this would be irrelevant if the cultural events and activities, the programme itself, did not express, embody, give voice to, and manifest the talents, energies, and aspirations of these individuals and groups, as well as providing a historical context and background for such expression (a context and background which has often been "written out of" conventional cultural history). Something on the range of the Project's programme has already been briefly referred to under section 2) of this review, and this range itself has relevance to both equal opportunities policy and practice and to positive action. Individuals and groups discriminated against or disadvantaged are directly represented, through works, performances, exhibitions, etc. in the programme itself, for example:

1. an emphasis on women's cultural contribution... through the events and workshops of "Sisterhood Is Powerful" in the '70's, to the exhibitions, events, and workshops of "Sister To Shakespeare" and "Every Witch Way" in the '80's.
2. an emphasis on black culture... from the performances and workshops led by The Last Poets ("Blessed Are Those Who Struggle", etc) in the '80's.
3. an emphasis on the needs of the unemployed, providing a base for socialising and a mix of sport and art (many unemployed young men would not venture into an arts only project) where the attractions of snooker or keep fit may lead on to the attractions of arts based activities, for example the creation of a photographic exhibition of city portraits by Vanley Burke in partnership with a team of mainly unemployed young people (an exhibition which formed part of the Project's Twentieth Birthday Celebrations and which is due for further exhibition).
4. an emphasis on creative opportunities for young people from areas of urban deprivation.. with holiday projects and other projects throughout the year bringing together a range of the making arts and the performing arts under the banner of a common theme ("The Roaring '20's", "Ever Increasing Circles", "Play on Words", "Summer in Blue" etc.).
5. a contribution to the exploration of projects for and with people with disabilities...from inflatables specially designed and built for people with disabilities in the '70's to the prize winning cartoon film in the '80's created in partnership with people with disabilities and subsequently toured to centres for people with disabilities... and reference has also been made earlier to the ramp and special toilet facilities in the semi-basement which make it possible for those requiring wheelchair access to be involved in workshops, conferences, and performances at this level in the building.

Finally, the programme itself is not a static, or limited to one place or space. The exercising, among other factors, of an equal opportunities policy as regards both programme and audience/participants means that events are toured and presented in a variety of venues and settings where groups or individuals who are discriminated against or disadvantaged will feel at home. The Last Poets, as part of the "Blessed Are Those Who Struggle" programme, visited the Black Media Group, the Black

Women's Centre, the Charles Wootton Centre for Further Education, the Charles Wootton Technology Centre, Liverpool 8 Law Centre and South Liverpool Personnel, Merseyside Caribbean Centre, Rialto Community Centre, The Methodist Centre, and University School. The Black Theatre Cooperative were presented by the Project, in workshops and performance, in a church hall at the heart of the "Liverpool 8 triangle". The film "Money Can't Buy..." was created as a result of residences in schools and residential centres for people with physical disabilities in Merseyside and the North West. The recent summer tour took a communal sculpture project. ("Rainbows Unlimited") to community centres in the region. And other tours have taken the Project and its workshops, events, and exhibitions to areas of social and urban deprivation in Belfast, Jarrow, Sheffield, etc. The emphases in this programme overall are on accessibility, quality and participation. The boost given to confidence - the pathway to empowerment for those disadvantaged or discriminated against - through such a triangular combination is both tangible and contagious. Young people are given confidence when their creative work appears on TV (two workshops from the recent project "The Roaring '20's" were filmed for BBC Children's TV). Young women are given confidence when the exhibition they have created, "Not Just Sitting Pretty", is exhibited in other venues in Liverpool and Leeds. It says something when two local artists, the potter Leslie Roberts and sculpture George Swabey, are exhibited alongside the works of John Latham and Judy Chicago, as they were during the Project's Twentieth Birthday Celebrations. It says something when two young dancers, both black (one from Leeds and one from Liverpool), can appear in the same programme as Molissa Fenley in the Project's contemporary dance event, "Going Solo". It says something when the "Caribbean Times" can write of "Blessed Are Those Who Struggle" with The Last Poets... "much credit goes to the Project.. who not only succeed in hosting a superb show over three evenings, but also introduced and cemented the group with the black people of Liverpool 8". In fact, this last event was created on an "open door" policy - all those black artists who wanted to perform in one of the three shows were invited to do so - there were no auditions - the one requirement was that performers should rehearse their work (including technical rehearsals) to the highest level of performance they could achieve. As can be seen from above outline, some events have a particular focus - all the performers in "Every Witch Way" were women - and all the performers in "Blessed Are Those Who Struggle" were black - and such events have a special place in the overall programme of the Project. Other parts of the programme may have their own focus, but a more diverse input - the Project's contribution to the International Garden Festival involved Indian dancing and African dancing alongside disco dancing, and African drumming alongside murals - popular forms have been mixed with the traditional and experimental arts, for example "Cultural Bingo" mixed real bingo and real prizes with music, song and dance, while "Close Encounters of the Disco Kind" mixed a conventional disco with cabaret inspired both by "Top of the Pops" and modern American dance. In some respects it is this "mixing" which is at the core of the Project's equal opportunities programming. The aim is not simply to provide a space and an audience for artists from groups discriminated against or disadvantaged - and to attract an audience and participants representative of these groups - though this is certainly one aim, and it is an important part of the Project's commitments. But it is the "mixing" - the cross currents, cross overs, and the cross fertilisation - which provides a different challenge. We may all recognise - and respect - those cultural forms where we can immediately recognise our own roots. The test comes when we are confronted by forms which seem - at least at first - to be outside our own experience and traditions. It takes time to accept the equation of singer songwriter Peggy Seeger, "Different Therefore Equal" (the title of her LP focusing on women's rights). Tolerance, for example, between musical forms has never been easy - those committed to one particular popular musical form are often dismissive of other's enthusiasms, and those committed to an enthusiasm for the symphony orchestra often both embrace and dismiss musical forms from other cultures by classifying them as "exotic" or anthropological. This is not, of course, to argue that everyone should like everything equally - but rather that we share a responsibility to provide both the space and the respect for that which seems to be outside our own body of experience, and particularly so when the experience we are reviewing has its roots in the experience of individuals and groups who are discriminated against or disadvantaged. It takes time to

reach such acceptance - within the context of an ongoing cultural programme it takes ongoing contacts and ongoing interaction. Within the context of the Project it is the ongoing nature of this contact which enabled, for example, young people accustomed to play projects, and discos, and film shows to attend a weekend of performances by performance artists (mainly women) and to give them the space and the respect and the time which was needed for involvement and appreciation. In the end some 50% of the attendance for this event, "Blind Dates", was provided by young people from areas of urban deprivation - and they emerged at the end with enthusiasm for these artists and their work which was developed through personal contact with the artists as well as through their works. The Project has been described as a "sports centre of the arts" - where it is possible to experience the work of some of the best of today's artists - where it is possible to work and train alongside these artists - and where you can come along and do your own work or training. It is this balance of "doing" with "viewing" which is also at the core of an equal opportunities policy. The arts themselves are languages, and if those who are discriminated against or disadvantaged are to speak these languages and express their own experiences and aspirations, then they need accessible and welcoming centres where they can discover and develop their voices in congenial company. The Project has sought over 20 years to provide just such a congenial company for such expression - believing that it is at the root of any equal opportunities programming policy aimed at combating discrimination and disadvantage to provide equal opportunities to "do" and to "view".

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