

THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL

SPECIALIST ADVISER ARTISTIC EVALUATION - MUSIC

Organisation/Venue: Fèis Rois

Title of Event: ETAS Primary School Visits

Type of Event: Stepdancing classes conducted in Strathconon and Cuill Primary Schools by Frank McConnell.

Date of Visit: 24 February 2004

This report has been commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council to evaluate the artistic quality of the production named below. It has been prepared by either a specialist Advisor, or a Council Officer, as indicated at the end of the form. The report will be circulated to the organisation which produced the work, to the management of the venue if the venue is core funded by the Scottish Arts Council.

The report may be made available to Scottish Arts Council Officers, Council and Committee members, and specialist advisors as appropriate. It will be taken into account in assessing the work of the producing company in relation to applications for funding to the Scottish Arts Council. It may also be used by the Council to report on the overall performance of its Core Funded organisations.

Evaluators should enter their rating under each section, explaining briefly their reason for the rating with reference to their comments under each section. Ratings should be given in accordance with the following:

Very Poor –standard falls well below what is acceptable

Poor- not attaining acceptable standards of conception or presentation

Competent– routine rather than especially interesting

Good –well conceived and executed.

Excellent –conceived and executed to a high standard.

Rating for this event is ‘good’

Comments

Strathconon and Cuill (Alness) primary schools were visited as part of on-going classroom instruction being provided by Fèis Rois under the ETAS (Enriching the Traditional Arts in Schools) scheme. The scheme is nearing the end of its current three-year cycle, and fresh funding is being sought. The scheme provides traditional music and dance instruction in both primary and secondary schools.

ETAS is administered by the Fèis Rois education officer Julie Fowlis. Schools can choose between two separate options: 1. four classroom visits, each lasting an hour, spread over contiguous weeks; 2. a single hour-long visit featuring a band performance, exhibiting a variety of traditional instruments. Instruction is delivered free of charge, and schools can choose between Gaelic song, group music making, whistle, singing for children and stepdancing.

Instruction on this occasion was provided by locally-based stepdancer Frank McConnell. This was the last of his four visits to each of the schools, and the children were already well-versed in the basic movements. In both schools the children participated with obvious enthusiasm, and reacted well to the instruction and to the music provided on tape. In Strathconon, in particular, the two staff present were very pleased with the visit. Being a very small rural school (total enrolment 7), they have very little access to peripatetic teaching, and greatly value the input of visiting teachers.

In Alness Frank taught two large classes of P6/7 children. Again the children clearly enjoyed the visit, and both boys and girls participated with gusto. Some children were already receiving Highland dance tuition locally, and showed considerable skill in the steps being demonstrated. Frank also provided useful instruction in listening to music, distinguishing musical phrases, and counting parts. His approach was well thought-out, and his teaching style was both friendly and encouraging.

Frank visited two schools in the morning, with a third visit scheduled for the afternoon. This has the advantage of providing a full-day's employment, although it does involve a considerable amount of driving between schools on any given day. Other instructors on the scheme have been Adam Sutherland, John Somerville, Fiona Mackenzie, Brian O'Headhra and Carol Anne MacKay, all of whom are well-known musicians and instructors based in Skye, Lochalsh and Ross-shire.

Both Julie Fowlis and Rita Hunter, manager of Fèis Rois, point to the administrative difficulties in ensuring availability of busy working musicians as instructors, and Rita has mooted the possibility of salaried residencies for instructors as a solution. These would have the advantage of providing instructors with guaranteed work for a stipulated period, while easing the administrative burden on ETAS. Rita feels that there is undoubtedly growing demand for classroom instruction of this type, and that the scheme has proved very worthwhile.

Fèis Rois also runs the Traditional Musicians in Schools (TMIS) scheme, which by December of 2003 had reached almost 7000 pupils in 125 schools across the country. The scheme is co-ordinated by Marcus Logan at Fèis Rois, and is currently targeting schools in South Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway, and Angus. The object is to introduce pupils, mainly in social provision areas, to traditional music and dance by way of hour-long teaching sessions, supported by teachers' packs with locally-relevant information. Rita Hunter makes the point that there might be administrative advantages in merging ETAS and TMIS into a single education scheme.

From my observations, the quality of teaching at Strathconon and Alness was first-rate, and the response of the children was very positive. Although ETAS can not provide on-going music instruction at an individual level, there are, nevertheless, clear benefits in introducing children to traditional music and dance at an early age. There are benefits, too, for instructors, who gain teaching and administrative experience, while supplementing income from performance through classroom work. In this respect Fèis Rois has done a good deal to bolster the Highland musical economy.

3. Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding (if applicable)

Following is an extract from the Scottish Arts Council's conditions of grant for funded organisations:

“The company should acknowledge Scottish Arts Council funding in press releases, at launches, on all published materials (including leaflets, brochures, programmes, posters, notices display and exhibition materials, websites and advertising). Acknowledgement of the Scottish Arts Council grant must also be made in any secondary or indirect products arising from the revenue funding such as recordings, publications, video, broadcasts, and computer programmes etc. “

The Scottish Arts Council is fully acknowledged in Fèis Rois literature, including its website and newsletter.

Name: Iain MacInnes

Date: 9/3/04

Advisor **? X** Scottish Arts Council Officer **?**

(Please tick above as appropriate)