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A Change of Time II

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National Festival 2002

THIS TIME last year the Bahá'í journal reported that something very special had happened in the seaside town of Scarborough, "A Change of Time", the National Festival, had been more exciting and enlightening than anybody had expected. This year, as over 1000 Bahá'is and their friends, including more than 130 children and junior youth, arrived for "A Change of Time II" the question was, could they match it?

Without a doubt the answer was yes. It was a different event from the previous year's Conference; last year "A Change of Time" explained how the Five Year Plan was going to change the UK Bahá'í community, this year we were asked to reflect on, and enjoy, the successes of the last year.

The event got under way on Friday night with music from Northern Ireland band, Zarb, and a long set from professional comedian Omid Djallili, igniting the joyous atmosphere that was to become characteristic of this National Festival.

For those Bahá'is who have been too busy in their service to the Cause to have paused and pondered on what achievements have been made to warrant the calling of a national festival, Saturday morning started with a presentation from Auxiliary Board Member, Viv Craig, of highlights and stories from activities in the UK and beyond, inspiring an optimism that many more great things are definitely possible with most of the Five Year Plan still ahead of us.

Italian National Spiritual Assembly member, Giuseppe Robiati, gave a stylish presentation using audio visual aids to describe "A vision of a new world order as a service to the world", explaining how the core activities of the Five Year Plan are managing to address the needs of society and why more and more people of the world are likely to desire closer involvement with these activities as the plan progresses.

Arguably the most popular feature of the Festival



The Persian cafe – a highlight for many



The Council for England stall



A work in progress at in the gallery

arguably the most popular feature of the evening was the showing of a new video called “Ordinary Heroes”. This professionally produced video consists of three parts, interviewing more than 80 Bahá’ís about their personal relationship with the Faith as an individual, as a member of a community, and in relation to the institutions of the Faith. Each part was shown in a different section of the programme and helped establish a strong sense of identity for the viewers, any UK Bahá’í could have been shown on that big screen giving personal views from their own corner of the Bahá’í community, but seeing them all together added to that sense of a large number of individual candles revealing one greater light.

Although the main programme was often interesting, it was never heavy. The presentations were all easy going and there was plenteous free time on offer for exploring the bookshop; the exhibitions, some of which were fun and interactive; a well prepared tranquillity zone; and a gallery of work by Bahá’í artists, some professional and some amateur.

For many the social highlight of the Festival was the Persian Café, a room that had been transformed with Persian rugs and ornaments into something closely resembling a Persian tea room. This provided a decorative and calming environment for people to chat and socialise.

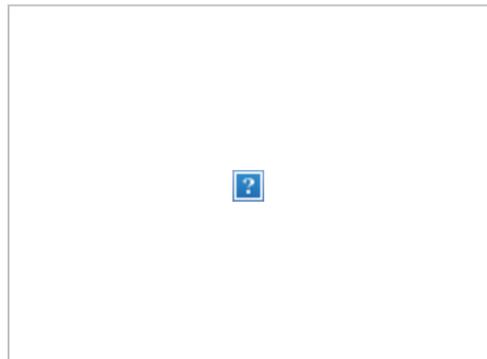
The only official talk on Saturday afternoon, which was placed in the middle of much impressive artistic content, was Barney Leith presenting the Message of the Universal House of Justice to the World’s Religious Leaders, focusing on giving the exciting news of how well this message had been received by the religious leaders of the UK.

Offered as a satellite event to the main festival, a special panel discussion was held on the topic of Social Cohesion with special guests MP for Scarborough and Whitby Laurie Quinn, anti-racism campaigner Steve White and the National Bahá’í Secretary Barney Leith, all chaired in Question Time style by Rob Weinberg.

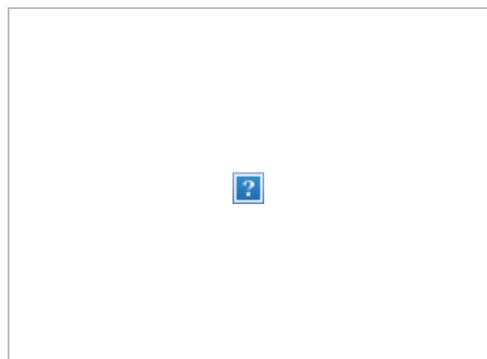
Over the years our National Bahá’í Conference had developed a good reputation for showcasing some great performing arts on the Saturday night and this year was no exception. “The Solace of the Eyes”, a play performed mostly by Sarah Clive from behind a veil with additional use of puppet theatre and clever lighting, carried the audience through the life of Táhirih from her early childhood to her famous martyrdom. Our deeply moved souls were then raised from their silence with music and singing from several very talented artists, colourful Bollywood dancing and an impressive display of drumming and breakdancing. For die-hard party people Saturday night ended with an 80’s disco (it had started on a 70’s night but the DJ managed to



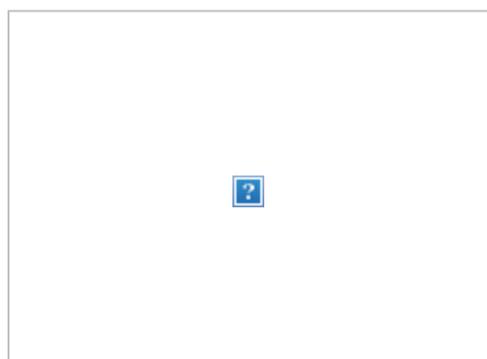
The arts were strongly represented



Silvia Miley encourages year of service



Kai – Richard Leigh, Emma Lewendon and Anne Sparkes



The European Bahá’í Youth Council Forum stall



was advertised as a 70's night but the DJ's were too young to know the difference).

How much information do you need?

The quality of the artistic performances was high throughout the weekend, for both the entertainment and the devotionals, and while we were blessed with some well known Bahá'í artists it was also a treat to have many less-known faces performing.

The main programme was pulled off with at least the same level of professionalism that had been so impressive at the first "Change of Time" conference thanks to scores of volunteers working hard behind the scenes to bring everything together neatly. Virtually every presentation made good use of modern audio-visual tools until Sunday morning when the National Spiritual Assembly, in the second part of a presentation called "Who is Writing the Future" invited some Bahá'ís from across the UK onto the stage to be interviewed about how they had managed to implement the core activities of the Five Year Plan in their localities, the stark contrast of this well-lit and multimedia-free discussion underlined the simple reality and practicality of these successes.

As the Festival drew toward its close the people on stage got progressively younger in a series of artistic presentations that reached their finale with a colourful carnival-style parade of children playing drums, wearing tinsel and carrying decorated banners with Bahá'í themes that they had created during the weekend.

"A Change of Time II" was not just a conference of amazing and inspiring talks, nor had it only been the kind of festival that really proved that Bahá'ís know how to have fun – what it did do was facilitate the understanding that we are a community succeeding in our activities and with every right to feel happy about our progress so far in the Five Year Plan. For most who attended the Festival this year, I believe the strongest memory will be that of an atmosphere of joy and optimism which will hopefully inspire even greater achievements in year ahead.

James Herbert

