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The Mixed Bag Company

The Mixed Bag Company Heinesen Faroe Islands Project – August 21-31

‘Everything Is Still Nascent’

(Extract from a poem by William Heinesen which is inscribed on his head stone which stands close by the grave of Eskil Ljungberg, Knight of Bahá'í)

The Universal House of Justice has received the email letter of 9 May 2003 written on behalf of ...and it was delighted to learn of the forthcoming artistic presentation that will be held as part of the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the Faith on the Faroe Islands. The creative nature of this endeavour is warmly appreciated, and it was noted with pleasure that your group is working in close consultation with the friends in those Islands, as this will, without doubt, enhance the effectiveness of the project and infuse into it a generous spirit of love and unity.

Be assured of the heartfelt prayers of the House of Justice at the Sacred Threshold that the bountiful favours of the Almighty may surround the believers in their efforts to share the Teachings of the Blessed Beauty.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
The Universal House of Justice

To take a team of artistic, pragmatic and colourful individuals on a ten day tour into as many islands in the Faroes as is realistically manageable, and stir up from the unconscious deep of these islands and islanders an infectious warm current that will act as a generator to further advance the Oneness of Humanity.

ABOVE RIGHT IS THE brief we gave ourselves along with a dual itinerary that meant that the Mixed Bag Company (MBC) split into two on the first full day. The show/workshop team left for the other islands and the remaining members stayed in the capital Tórshavn to manage the Tranquillity Zone. These members met with the Local Spiritual Assembly and later informally with Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi.

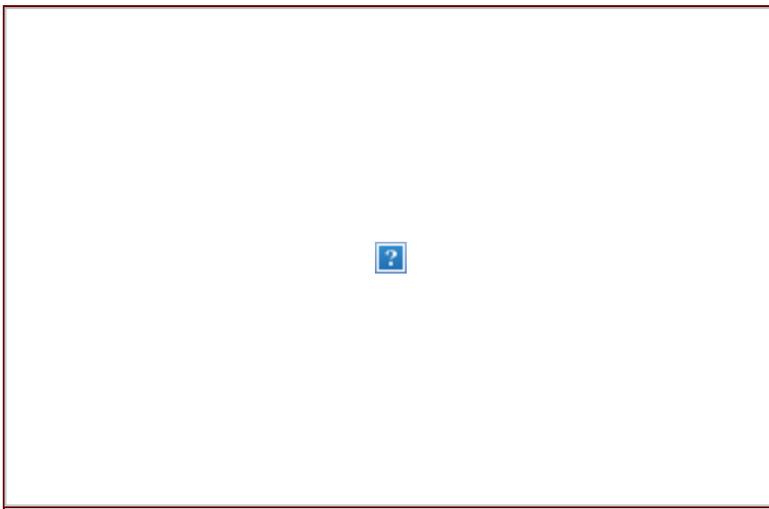
The Tranquillity Zone, which was the one activity that the local community had expressed an interest in, became the focal point at the Bahá'í Centre each evening. After each nightly session, the evening developed into a type of unity feast with great fellowship, stories, songs, rapturous laughter and food which allowed guests to experience Bahá'í-hospitality. We had prepared and printed bookmarks with Bahá'í prayers in Faroese for distribution. Each day The MBC went about their task individually or in groups. Some played in old folks' homes, and in the local cafes in Tórshavn. Some went to Kindergartens to give singing lessons, some to visit local Bahá'ís and some befriended locals and overseas visitors who in turn attended the TZ each evening.

Three music drama shows and seven workshops, using extracts from the book ‘The Tower At The Edge Of The World’ by the internationally acclaimed Faroese author William Heinesen (permission to use the book given by his son Zacharias Heinesen), were staged in the Faroese language on three islands (including one all day workshop). Last minute phone calls found favour with the schools, who either abandoned their curriculum to spend a whole, or half a day with the MBC. In most cases the pupils stayed behind after school to spend time with the performers.

On one island the entire school year met up in the cafe late into the evening with the MBC. All the school Principals invited us back for the next year, and all the pupils wanted us back too!

One MBC member was extended an invitation to return to TÃ³rshavn to give music software workshops over a week at the Teacher Training College in the capital. The original music for the show and for the workshop is at an advanced stage in negotiation to be published on the Faroese own publishing label Ã“TUTLÃ“. One member has been asked by a renowned Danish composer who lives in the capital to compose the music for the annual sea cave festival in 2004. The main arts centre for the islands offered to stage the show, publicised the event on the web and at all their outlets in the capital (they liked our free admission charge!). The management invited us back next year with the full show. We were given their best sound technician to work with.

Probably the highlight of the ninety minute programme was the performance from 15 kindergarten children singing in Faroese and then in English the prayer of Ã“AbduÃ“l-BahÃ“i, Ã“My Home is the home of peaceÃ“.....Ã“” arranged to a traditional Gaelic melody by one of the MBC. The proud parents were all taking photographs whilst their children sang most beautifully in the most important state of the art theatre in these islands. The MBC were given hospitality in the family home of the only Faroese member in the group. Four generations of the same family and their close friends came and spent two heart-warming evenings together singing and dancing.



The Mixed Bag Company: Susan Brown, Christina St Clair, Morag Donald, Ursula Ghodrat, Jeremy Herbert, Maureen Hunter, Rachael Kerr, Mike Kirkpatrick, Niaz McGuire and Sean Morrissey with friends in the Faroe islands

The MBC received good media coverage both on the radio and in the newspaper, which included a front page spread in the main newspaper with the article being continued on the centre page. The main item of interest was the MBC hip-hop dancer who received almost iconic status from the kids in the capital, signing autographs and being given lucky charms of whale teeth! A number of well known people in the capital were aware of our presence and one eminent musician who

plays first violin in the Faroese Symphony Orchestra played the William Heinesen viola concerto in the BahÃ“iÃ“ Centre at the International Evening.

The first time The MBC actually sat down and ate together was on the last Saturday after performing music in the public square at TÃ³rshavn. Then all MBC members walked out to the edge of town and gathered at the graveside of the Knight of BahÃ“iÃ“uÃ“llÃ“h, Eskil Ljungberg, to say prayers.

An enquirer, who had attended the TZ each evening, brought four generations of her family in the evening to a party in a very well attended International Evening. As well as several people born and bred in Faroe, several countries were represented: Kenya, Ireland, Iceland, America, Eastern Europe, Greece, England and Scotland. Dishes from various parts of the world were served, after which the evening of music began, stories were shared and the laughter continued.

A book on Ã“AbduÃ“l-BahÃ“iÃ“’s visit to Edinburgh in January 1913 was presented by The MBC to the community for their 50th year celebration. The love, warmth and care between everybody was quite unprecedented, as far as this writer has witnessed, in over 27 years of being involved in the BahÃ“iÃ“ Faith and on a number of projects. A Faroese BahÃ“iÃ“ told us that there had never before been such a gathering at the BahÃ“iÃ“ Centre. Two members of The MBC are presently endeavouring to pioneer to the islands. The Local Assembly secretary has accepted The MBC invitation to come to Scarborough to be a part of a presentation on the Faroe Islands and their significance.

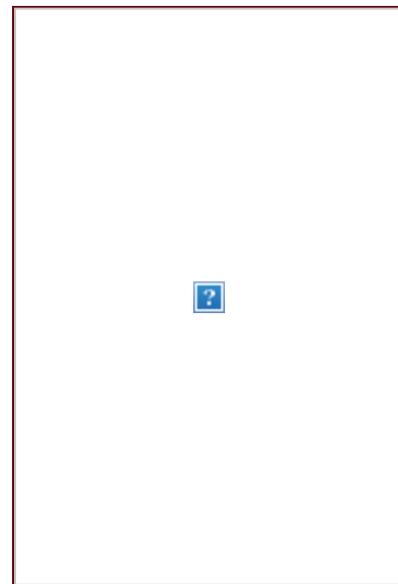
From the outset, the organisers felt very strongly that this project should be a gesture of friendship from the Bahá'ís to a predominantly Christian community. The "unity of the religions" was the principle of Bahá'u'lláh that seemed to be most relevant in this particular context.

It felt important to have a strand of the project that was quite separate from religion. It was not until we were there in Faroe, with a warm rapport established between The Mixed Bag Company and some of the most prominent figures in the islands' cultural life that we realised just how far the Heinesen Project (based on a book by William Heinesen, the renowned Faroese author, poet, painter and composer of music) had facilitated the gathering together of the Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í parts of Faroese society, both in the Nordic House where the main performance of The Mixed Bag Company was staged on August 29, and in the International Evening held at the Bahá'í Centre Tórshavn on August 30. Both events were well attended by members of the public.

All in all, the feeling of many of the Mixed Bag team at the end of our ten days in Faroe was that the project has become the beginning of a process rather than a sequence of events. We agreed that we were there for our own personal and spiritual development – which seemed to fuel all the events taking place and the way we interacted with the local Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís alike.

One Mixed Bagger said, "On a very personal note I felt from the beginning of the trip that I was falling in love with a place – a strange sensation for somebody who always thought of herself as a world citizen – comfortable wherever in the world. This was special, it felt like coming home. I then realised that 'home' is not a certain place at all but a feeling, which is born from many different impressions ... being on the islands as a spiritual 'birth helper' would be an amazing experience."

We feel that shifts in consciousness have definitely taken place both within and outside Faroe in terms of awareness of the islands' spiritual significance. We hope to carry this impetus forward in a second phase of the project to be undertaken next summer in Scotland, – at the Edinburgh International Festival – Faroe, where we have been invited to return, and then in Norway, Denmark and Iceland. Meantime, we plan to share this message at the National Bahá'í Festival in Scarborough and to perform extracts from the Show.



The resting place of Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, Eskil Ljungberg

The Mixed Bag Company

