

Edinburgh Reporter chats – Eddie Harrison

✘ You may have read [The Edinburgh Reporter's article](#) on the [Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival](#) which began this month and runs until Monday 24 October 2011. Eddie Harrison, Director of the film strand, took on the role after being a journalist and writer for 13 years and having being involved with the festival since it started. The Reporter spoke to him to find out more about his position, the festival itself, and how times have changed in the film industry.

What are your general thoughts about the festival as a concept?

I respond well to the idea of the festival and festivals in general. I believe the arts have a real influence on helping us to understand life, and I feel all art is nutritious; it's healthy to enjoy it and it has a positive effect on people.

How would you summarise the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival in one sentence?

It's about challenging people's perceptions of mental health by presenting positive attitudes in an attempt to get rid of the stigma surrounding it.

What has been your film highlight of the festival so far?

I've enjoyed all of it, but my two highlights I believe have yet to happen! The jewel in the crown for me will be the [award ceremony](#) next Monday. I was a part of the judging panel who watched over 100 films and had to pick out the very best. It was simply inspiring to see film makers flying in from all over the world sharing different stories from different backgrounds – it's brilliant when you see it all come together.

My favourite film this year is also yet to be shown but I always look forward to watching it. '[Local Hero](#)' makes me feel like I'm taking a holiday, in an odd way. It makes me feel proud to be Scottish and it truly did change me when I first saw it aged 13. It's a positive film, and one that brings back many memories. It's interesting to see no one with a mobile phone in their hand and none of the technology that we have today. There's a sense of nostalgia each time I view it. It's on in The Filmhouse on Sunday 23rd October at 3:15pm.

What is the most important thing for people to take away from viewing the films at the festival?

It's not just about one film or event. There are a number of elements making up the festival but I'd encourage people to go to one or two films to experience different cultures and 'categories' that people are sometimes placed in. Most people find a lot of the films eye-opening and they realise just how varied people's lives can be. It's a liberating experience listening to war veterans and dementia sufferers talking about their endeavours.

What, if any, has been the biggest change in film making developed since the festival began?

The biggest change has to be the transition to digital that has developed since some films were first produced. The film used to have to be sent to London and it took an age until it could be watched, but now everyone can express themselves through their phone by making their own film and telling their own story directly, at any time. They can describe their own condition in an instant and its only possible through new technology.

The digital change is an exciting one. Everyone has a voice but with a mobile they can let that voice be recorded, edited and published on YouTube relatively easily. The lack of distribution barriers has made it much easier to express

yourself. Crooked Beauty is an incredible production that publicises the effect of expression well; it's a beautiful film which has come about as a result of something terrible happening to the central character.

What has been the reaction to the festival this year?

On a general note we have felt a positive response, particularly towards the showing of 'Away from Her', a story that deals with Alzheimer's. There was a panel session with two people suffering from dementia. They were such eloquent speakers and the nods from the audience showed people responding well to what they were saying. When you do these kind of events they really do blow the cobwebs away, and many do consider them to be life-changing experiences. The audience gets a brilliant opportunity to see something that they haven't seen before – it's truly eye-opening.

What would you like to achieve at next year's event?

We definitely want to reach more people who were perhaps not 'represented' as such this year. We don't necessarily want a greater volume of people but we want to make it as universal as possible by getting a greater variety of people's stories out there from different groups across the world.