

Tradfest: Songs of Peace and Protest/ Hope's Beautiful Daughters.



Tradfest, the festival of traditional arts which finished at the weekend, put on a day of musical events based on campaigning and social justice as part of its programme which incorporated 'Songs of Peace and Protest', a singing workshop.

They also staged a concert entitled 'Hope's Beautiful Daughters' which celebrated music relating tales of struggle and peace.

Donald Smith, organiser of Tradfest, spoke to The Edinburgh Reporter about the festival's success and its significance. We met him at Teviot Row House, part of Edinburgh University, in the imposing wood -panelled debating chamber.

Penny Stone, a singing tutor, ran the workshop. The two and a half hour long evening concert consisted of 6 sets of performers: Karine Polwart, Isla Ratcliffe, Katarina Juvancic with guitarist Dejan Lapanga, Brian Miller and Charlie Sloane and Star Band. The show was curated by Karine Polwart and Arthur Johnstone.

The singing workshop **Songs of Peace and Protest** was intimate and informal. Seven of us gathered round in a circle with Penny, who had picked the huge high-ceilinged chamber as the venue due to its excellent acoustics, and soon it was filled with beautiful music. After the introductions, Penny started off with some stretching exercises to loosen the muscles, followed by much humming. She then got the group to warm up their vocals by joining in with a song, the different parts singing responses to her part. This she said represented a

call and answer. The type of song was excellent during protests because you can get an answer out of people without them even knowing the lyrics. She then proceeded to teach the well-known song 'We Shall Overcome.' The anthem for the American civil rights movement in the 1960s, she explained, is still used today by different protest groups. Penny taught the technique of harmonising through this piece, with different sections of the group taking the melody and the harmony. The group harmonising began with singing the harmony in one note, and then changing to another note.



Hope's Beautiful Daughters included songs of social and political intent. An audience of around 35 attended the event in the Debating Hall at Teviot Row. Polwart explained that the intention was to make it feel like someone's front room. Her beautiful voice with a strong Scots lilt took over the chamber with the first song 'It's Not What You're Born With'.

This song expressed on the idea of making a difference to society through one's talents. Her next song called 'Better Things' was written for a CND event, and discusses how the money that went to the Trident nuclear base could have been



used for better things.

Most of the audience would not be described as young. Polwart explained that young people tend not to be actively political as the current generation is not as politicised these days as people once were.

However, the next musicians on stage was 16-year old Isla Ratcliffe from Edinburgh Music School with her song 'Death Row'. Isla, who wore a black T-shirt emblazoned with the words Troy Davis. Isla has just won a national Amnesty International competition with the song which is a moving account of death

row inmate Troy Davis, who vehemently protested his innocence until the very last.

The piece represents miscarriages within the justice system. Third under the stage lights was Katarina Juvancic, a young alternative and folk artiste from Slovenia. With pixie-like looks, and a long black and white figure-hugging dress, she made an impact with her strong voice and powerful themes to her songs which drew on various aspects of herself as well as on anthropology and collecting people's stories.

She discussed the protest movement she is a part of in Slovenia, and how the artistic community rose to meet the challenge of the problems caused by economic crisis and injustices which resulted from it. Juvancic performed five songs, some in Slovenian and others in English. Many of these were based on strong women's voices.

She said: – "They are not heard enough and I want to empower these women, as well as myself, and I want the world to see them as empowered, because they're struggling with hardships. Society sees them as victims but they're not, they are survivors and I want to pay tribute to their courage." She feels the role of activists is to 'transform the pain of society into something beautiful'.

The festival was organised by Donald Smith who is also a director of the Storytelling Centre. When asked about the success of the festival, he said: – "I think it's a good time because the weather is beginning to improve, and the old idea of mayday and Beltane fits in with the performances in the open air. It's not just a music festival. The idea was to involve all the arts inspired by tradition. The timing and variety of arts were the crucial difference from the festival's predecessors, the Edinburgh Folk Festival and Ceilidh Culture. People really like the variety and mix of things."

On the festival's significance, he said:-“This is marvellous. It is all about the artistic values of being a community and supporting each other, and we need that now more than ever, the way the world is now. In traditional culture people celebrate community, humanity, and the wisdom in that. It is also politically important and we stand up as a community for the most victimised people.”

Smith concluded:-“Traditional arts aspire so that people are more fulfilled when they work together in a community, despite class divisions. They make everybody feel a part, and traditional culture celebrate song/society, and that is shared. There is a great sense of joy in the traditional arts, a celebration of life, the world and nature, compassion and friendliness. And we're celebrating the beginning of spring.”