

Festival of Politics – Harry Benson CBE at Holyrood



Harry Benson CBE is a rare breed. He inspires adoration from press photographers across the world, but none more so than here in Scotland where he was born.

He started his working life with the Hamilton Advertiser until he got a commission to go to the USA with an up and coming pop group, The Beatles. He did not come back, so it was lovely to have the opportunity of seeing him in Scotland last week.

Although he did not want to go to America in the first place he said it was probably a good thing : “It’s just as well I did go, otherwise this room would be half-empty tonight!” It is clearly a good thing that he did as he met his wife of many years, Gigi, there too. She has assisted The Scottish Parliament with the staging of the exhibition.

As a photojournalist he was one of three people allowed access to visit the murderer Peter Manuel in Barlinnie. That of course did not happen by accident, although he is so modest that he would like you to think that it did.



This is a man in his eighties who is still producing a body of work. He told The Edinburgh Reporter : “I just produced ten pages on Trump for Time Magazine last month you know!” During his two or three days at Holyrood he sat down in the Debating Chamber with Deputy Presiding Officer Linda Fabiani MSP and ran us through a slideshow of some images.

The images he has taken over the years are a kind of

documentary of the last decades of US history and include images of Ku Klux Klan figures as well as politicians and civil rights activists.

All of the Presiding Officers at Holyrood have had their photographs taken by Benson, and we can only imagine he may have had Ken Macintosh posing for him during his visit.

When the image of John F Kennedy with De Gaulle pops up on screen, he giggled and explained that he had been chasing Kennedy all day and then suddenly here he was with the French President. He exclaimed : “Yes, that was not a bad day!”



In the foyer of Holyrood at the moment there is a large retrospective exhibition of some of his best known photos which include images of The Beatles in the US, Bobby Kennedy's wife Ethel just after her husband had been shot and President Reagan and his wife Nancy who kept the Chilean president waiting while they posed for him in the White House.

Charming, self-effacing and wonderfully down to earth, Harry Benson was fabulously entertaining during the early evening event last Saturday, a forerunner to the Festival of Politics which is on now at Holyrood. [More details here.](#) Be quick it ends on Sunday!

And you may have missed the opportunity of hearing Harry Benson speaking but you can go along anytime to see his photographs. The exhibition is free at Holyrood.