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National Conference 2001

'A Change of Time'



National Conference 2001

SOMETHING very special happened in Scarborough this year. It was written all over the faces of the friends. It was evident in the quality of presentations and performances. It was manifest in the efficient and loving way that more than eighty volunteers carried out their tasks. The first National Bahá'í Conference of the Five Year Plan, and of the Fifth Epoch of the Formative Age, demonstrated that this truly is "a change of time". From the opening session on "Art and the Bahá'í Faith" on the Friday

Ken Finn and a cast of thousands

night, one could tangibly feel that this was going to be a different kind of conference.

Saturday morning got underway with a performance of “Century of Light”. Written by Canadian Ann Boyles for the Inauguration of the Mount Carmel Projects in May, this was a rehearsed reading with images and sound, directed by Arlette George, depicting the processes which shaped the 20th century both inside and outside the Bahá’í community.



Members of the Continental Board of Counsellors, Mr Shahriar Razavi and Ms Larissa Tsutskova, then pointed us firmly in the direction of the future, with a detailed analysis of the overarching themes and goals of the Five Year Plan. The need for individual, community and institutional action was emphasised and beautifully illustrated by the eloquence of these devoted representatives of the Learned arm.



Aside from the main sessions, there were so many other things to do, and see, and explore. Arthur Lister of Scarborough had organised an art exhibition where local painters exhibited alongside Bahá’í artists. This was a great attraction and the work was widely appreciated. Elsewhere, a full range of workshops to provide for all interests explored the themes of the Plan. Tranquillity Zones were packed out, and the Association of Bahá’í Women Artists presented a brilliant piece of theatre called Yellow, written and performed by

Arabella Velasco which explored the challenges facing a woman who has recently given birth. David Woolcombe gave an informative introduction to the work of Peace Child International and the role of children in governance.

Potter Peter Lee proffers a pot

Saturday night kicked off with specially composed music on the Conference theme by four young Bahá'í musicians, followed by the inventive theatrical tribute to Rúhíyyih Khánum, *A Life So Noble*, written by Beverley Evans. First performed back in May at the Arts for Nature event at London's Canada House in the presence of HRH the Duke of Edinburgh, this cleverly conceived and beautifully acted piece connected the Conference with one who had devoted her entire life to service, in the face of huge tests and challenges. A standing ovation for the excellent cast and crew was the only appropriate way to say thank you.

Photographs

1. *Ken Finn and a cast of thousands*
2. *Peter Maguire, Seb "Superman" Lopez, Payman Beint, Jenny Ward and Sam Kayani - aka "Power of Three"*
3. *Potter Peter Lee proffers a pot*
4. *Beverley Evans, in "A Life so Noble"*
5. *People bought books ...*
6. *... and people sold books*



Beverley Evans, in "A Life so Noble"



People bought books ...



... and people sold books.



***Something very special happened in Scarborough this year.
It was written all over the faces of the friends.***

For those who survived the late night revelries all around the Spa Complex, Sunday morning was a creative celebration of the Word of God, set to magnificent music by Richard Leigh whose youthful Hidden Voices choir and musicians from Northamptonshire had travelled especially to Scarborough to perform. Richard's settings of the Hidden Words and other texts are ethereal, haunting and soul-stirring and the visual accompaniment of real-time video of the sun rising over Scarborough bay that morning brought tears to many eyes and lumps to many throats. This truly was an open and accessible experience of Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár, of the kind we have been asked by the Universal House of Justice to offer to our wider communities as a fundamental part of the Five Year Plan.

Counsellor Larissa Tsutskova then spoke beautifully about the individual's responsibility to act systematically in winning the goals, reminding the audience of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm's hope that the Bahá'is might offer people prayers and the knowledge of life after death to give comfort and something to hold onto in the world's

dark days.
The
National



Bryony Devine, a 17 year old youth, had her hair shaved off on November 5 to raise money for



continued the Sunday morning session with an informative overview of the External Affairs work and the need to enter a learning mode. A particularly effective analogy was given by Peter Hulme who likened our struggles to understand and implement the Divine Plan with the confused and ugly building site which preceded the efflorescence of the terraces on Mount Carmel. The National Assembly also commissioned a powerful audiovisual presentation which highlighted the contrast between the decay of the Old World Order,

and the promise of the future enshrined in our children.

After a painfully funny comedy sketch from Inder Manocha depicting one believer's struggle with systematising his activities, the children were next on stage, placing letters and objects they had made into a Time Capsule which will be opened at the end of the Five Year Plan. "What will we be like in five year's time?" asked compere Sean Hinton. One bright child shouted, "Older!"

The Conference came to a grand, if not slightly wild, finale in the afternoon with an exuberant, funny and creative session "Monkey Tennis", presented by the youth. Their enthusiasm and energy was infectious and their rapping nothing short of miraculous. This is a generation to watch, if only for Sebi "Superman" Lopez's unrestrained dancing. No conference would be complete without a rousing reprise of We Are Drops, albeit this time with rapping over the top of it!



This was a Conference which made a start at opening our experience up to the wider world. Two things were evident in respect to this aspect of the growth process. The first is that the language we use and the topics we address must strive towards inclusiveness. The second is the extraordinary contribution that relatively new Bahá'ís made to the success of this event.

We need not fear growth when it is so evident that it brings with it unimaginable talents and capacities that can only assist the community to grow further.



As we poured out of the Spa Complex to wend our weary ways home, a rainbow appeared over the clifftop castle. Surely Bahá'u'lláh was watching over this event with delight at the capabilities and potentialities of his British followers. When He writes about the conversation of the beloved of God being informed with such power that the atoms of dust beneath their feet will be thrilled by its influence, He could well have been anticipating this Conference. Every atom in the Spa Centre seemed to be thrilled. And this was just the first of five such

conferences to be held during this Plan. We can only wait with bated breath to see what the next instalment will hold.

Rob Weinberg