

## Countdown to Lyme Regis ArtsFest 2010

In a series of twelve interviews, Anthea Simmons meets some of the movers and shakers involved in the upcoming ArtsFest 2010.

**Sally Holman** is the co-founder of ArtsFest and the driving force behind the events and workshops which foster interaction with the arts. She is a passionate and tireless advocate for the role of art in society and the community.



### **What's the history of your involvement in the Arts?**

I was very fortunate as a child. I was given lots of opportunity to participate in Art and Sport and I have loved and been involved in both ever since. Mine was a musical family and in learning the piano I also learned an invaluable lesson about dedication and the vital importance of time invested to master a skill and develop a talent. I was exposed to the Arts in the widest sense and encouraged to explore and expand my interests, particularly literature while a student. I went to Durham and opted for a Newcastle degree because Newcastle was somehow more exciting and open, full of artists and fashion designers who became my friends. I did a course in Geography Arts which encompassed the concepts of social integration, community, ecology and the environment...and

through it, I became more interested in philosophy and was influenced by Herbert Read's 'Education Through Art'

I went into primary education and worked in Brighton, expanding kids' horizons through painting and music. When I moved to Bournemouth, I did a course in printmaking whilst working. Photolithography was just being developed and I got really stuck in to the whole smelly, hands-on process. It all felt really avant-garde, individualistic. A real freedom to play and experiment.

By then I knew that I wanted to do practical stuff and leave the academic, theoretical world. Education in the '60s was a really exciting field and I got caught up in the whole learning process, valuing the WAY children learned, the process, as much as the work they produced as a result and , increasingly, my role developed into one of training and advising teachers about how children learn.

I am particularly interested in how the arts inform each other and I have worked across all the disciplines – a combined arts initiative at Dartington College, I ran a choir of over 100 eight to eleven year olds and my sabbatical to work with Joan Russell, who was at the forefront of dance education. I would have loved to have taught dance. There is something uniquely powerful about dance vocabulary and experience which somehow unites mind, body and spirit and provides people with an immediate and intense conduit for self-expression.

I really believe that it is vital not to compartmentalise the arts. Art in all its forms should be integral to our lives as individuals and as a community. It's an inspirational thing, it's about challenge - facing challenge and facing change.

Currently, I immerse myself in my precious pottery classes at the Town Mill Pottery with Don Hudson and Berey Pealing, my escape!

### **What are your main sources of inspiration?**

I am inspired by people by practitioners. That's why I like the workshop approach. I think everyone gains inspiration from seeing real artists, real musicians, real dancers sharing and explaining their practice. And I am inspired and driven by the sense of self-worth participation and performance give people, so I see it as my job to reach out to as many people as possible and give them the chance both to take part but also, crucially, to enable practitioners to offer their passion and expertise. Living fully, being aware and alive, getting a real taste for inspiration and creating, and where better to do that than Lyme?

**'If you had an unlimited budget, what would you most like to see hanging on your wall and which gallery would you be happily confined for a week?**

I don't really want to own art for myself. What I would love to do is to help set up a big art gallery and centre in Lyme. A space for the community, putting art at the very centre of Lyme life.

In the meanwhile, I would happily spend time in Tate Modern, and glad I had the chance of being with Mark Rothko's 'Blue Divided by Blue' for a while.

### **How did you come start ArtsFest?**

I met Chris Wicking through personal development courses and one day, over 7 years ago, he was enthusing about his visit to Arundel Open Studios and how great it was to be able to visit artists and talk to them about their work, with street theatre to attract people. We just said 'couldn't we do that here?' and that was the start of it all! Chris ( a graphic artist, owner of the Coombe Street Gallery) was the catalyst for the open studios and I organised the rest. He already had contact with many of Lyme's artists over many years. I had connections to the arts community, so it was really a question of 'what can we have for ArtsFest?'

Next, Hugh (Dunford-Wood) came along, fresh from setting up Oxford Open Studios and he contributed his enormous energy and creative approach, got that whole driftwood boat project of the ground. It was marvellous! All those kids creating work from a mountain of driftwood. The boats were displayed in shops and businesses throughout Lyme, a precursor to the Art Trail, in effect. The talented ArtsFest team grew around us.

Jude Allen , the Cultural Development Officer for West Dorset came on board enthusiastically and we got Arts Council funding and had about 25 artists involved in that first year. The next year, having witnessed its success, everyone wanted a piece of the action...not surprisingly!

Chris Wicking gave it his all for several years, doing all the publicity and advertising , and then he handed it on to Laurence at LymeNet.

Funding issues make it a very different challenge now, but I think it's good in a way. The whole event becomes entirely the result of people's creativity and that will make us stronger.

### **Where would you like to see ArtsFest go from here?**

I don't want to impose my vision on it, because that might limit the possibilities and smother the flair and imagination of others. I just want to see it maintain its integrity and vitality. Obviously, I want to see us providing as many opportunities for interaction as possible. I am pleased to see more links forged with surrounding areas, Charmouth , for example, and I am also glad to see the literary aspect enjoy a resurgence. It was there in the past. I know many people

have never forgotten Ann Jellicoe's amazing one-woman show of her community play 'The Western Women'.

But the bottom line is that if we find it within ourselves to offer art and participation to the community, we won't have to sell out and we will be inclusive. ArtsFest really is as pure and as simple as 'What is offered'.

**What do you think will be the highlight of this year's ArtsFest?**

Well, I really would be setting myself up for problems if I singled anything out in particular. That said, I really love all those events which allow people to just have a go – The Big Draw at the Aquarium, for example, and postcard art at the Museum, and the dance Treasure hunt for the Peal of Dorset. I love Chelsea Davine's work at the Boat Building Academy. It is very powerful emotionally. I looked at those paintings and I FELT Monmouth Beach. Christine, Michael, Brian, ...I could go through them all, featured in the brochure. I love seeing how they develop from one ArtsFest to the next. I am looking forward to your poetry workshop, too. Then there are unmissable events like Gail's 'From the Absurd to the Ridiculous' at the Jam factory, the Slovenian Male Voice choir visiting to give a concert at St Michael's, LymeLit Night at the Marine Theatre and Hugh's showing of the Picasso film. I could go on...it's all good, it's all out there. I would just urge people to take full advantage of what's on offer.