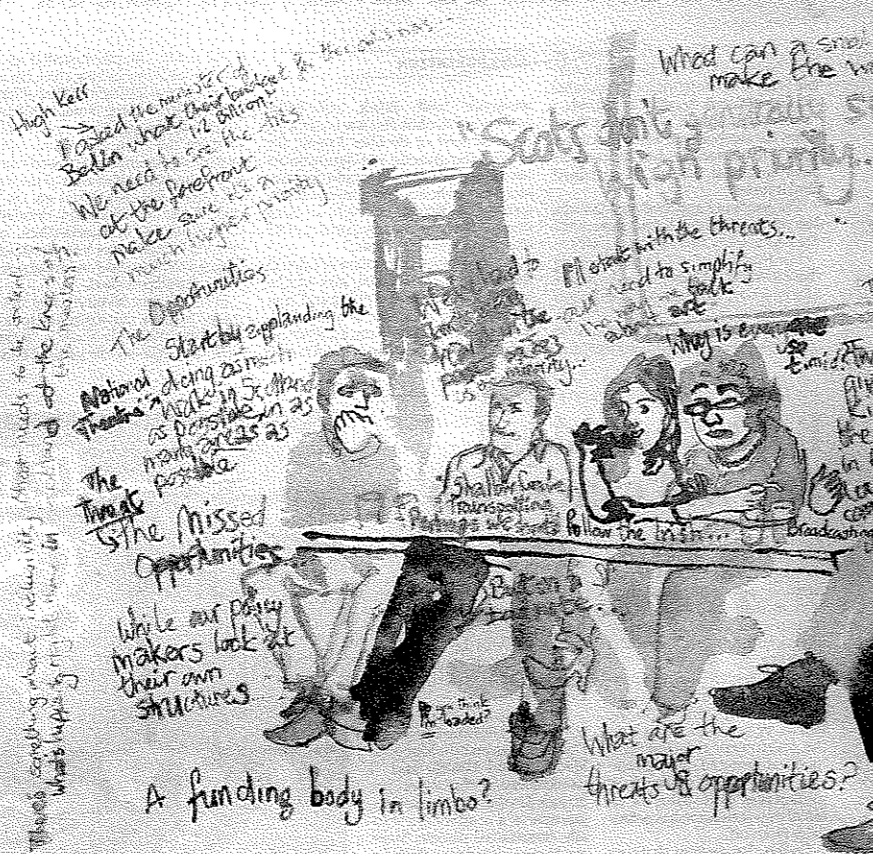


# The Scotsman Arts Debate



"BITCHING and whingeing" - those were the words used by Richard Holloway over the criticism aimed at Creative Scotland, the arts agency he is tasked with constructing. The words of the normally philosophical Holloway rang round Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre, in the closing minutes of the Scotsman's latest debate - on the Arts in Scotland. Creative Scotland's backers say that despite stumbles in Parliament and growing questions over its cost, it must go through. Critics say there's still time to pull the plug on a pointless exercise. It dominated the debate chaired by The Scotsman's theatre critic and columnist Joyce McMillan. Along with Holloway, our panellists included the National Theatre of Scotland artistic director Vicky Featherstone; the Stand comedy club and newly elected Fringe board member Tommy Sheppard; the jazz saxophonist, composer, and orchestra leader Tommy Smith; and Colin Marr, director of the Eden Court Theatre in Inverness. The debate also ranged from the how-much and why of arts funding, through the number of Scots queuing to express their artistic yearnings through stand-up comedy, to the new jazz courses at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. It stretched from attacks on BBC coverage of the Edinburgh festival, to the threats to Edinburgh's status as a Unesco world heritage site, and the "disgusting" impact of a proposed 17-storey hotel on the city's skyline.

Left to right: Colin Marr, Tommy Smith, Vicky Featherstone, Joyce McMillan, Tommy Sheppard and Dr Richard Holloway. Right, a sketch of the debate by Jenny Soep. Pictures: Jane Barlow



# "There's a need for more money

**JOYCE McMILLAN:** Scots still really don't seem to see arts funding as a high priority. Despite the high level of achievement. There might be a surge in arts funding in Scotland riding on the back of independence, but how far do Scots want to be on some kind of agenda which is about being indigenously or distinctively Scottish? Artists in Scotland have often insisted on their freedom being nothing to do with Scotland at all and have not even written in any remotely Scottish kind of language. How Scottish do the arts in Scotland have to be in order to get their funding?

## THE SCOTSMAN DEBATES



**Tim Cornwell**

**VICKY FEATHERSTONE:** It's been a baptism of fire setting up and running the National Theatre of Scotland, then shifting from the Scottish Arts Council to be funded directly by the government. There have been a lot of benefits - we can speak directly to the ministers - but it does mean there's a massive gap between the national companies and the rest of the theatre sector. That's a big issue. The theatre sector requires that the body that looks after them will lobby in the same way I'm going [directly] to Linda Fabiani saying the NTS needs more money. For me, with independence, there are flashlights going off. I don't know what would happen if we [the NTS] felt the need to create work that really demanded questions of the way that the country is being run.

**TIM CORNWELL:** I was elected, they asked for a kind of 'command performance' for the opening of the Scottish Parliament. In a way they thought *Black Watch* was a mascot production, partly because of the traditional strength of the SNP in areas where the army recruits strongly. After some agonising discussion, I know that the NTS management team said yes. Where are you drawing the line as you make that decision? **VF:** The irony was that we made *Black Watch* under the Labour government that had gone to war, so we thought it was really radical. Then that the country is being run. **JM:** Can I ask how you dealt with a specific issue? Soon after the SNP were

a great reminder of what a nation is. He said, 'This is about the opening of parliament that we have fought for, for so long'. **RICHARD HOLLOWAY:** Can I come in on the Scottish dimension too? It is fraught with possibilities and with dangers. Politicians - we elect them to do their particular job, and I would be worried if the artistic community in Scotland lost its critical objectivity of power. All power needs constantly to be criticised, whether it's the power of an independent nation or a devolved nation. I would hate the 'Sovietisation' of art. There's a danger that Scotland is getting so small we might get suborned. I want Scotland to be able to raise taxes because I would like to have a more imaginative taxation policy for artists because it's one of the creative fiscal tools you can use to make art happen and support it. Please, always protect that right to bite the hand that feeds it. The ultimate hand that feeds you is government. **TOMMY SMITH (TSM):** Edwin Morgan, the great Scottish poet, was born in 1920, Glasgow. I was talking to him about funding one time and he said to me, 'It costs nothing to write a wee poem'. I was looking at his pencil, marked Edwinmorgan.com, and he said to me, 'My pencil never crashes'. A very clever man. I'm from a very poor background, I did the circuit of all the housing schemes. There are lots of people out

there who have a spark or something, but to get out of those situations they need something to take them like music, or theatre, or sculpture, art. There's never enough money. I have never made enough money. I have a record company, direct a jazz orchestra, I have 23 albums, people give me suits and saxophones, free reeds, but am I loaded? Do I have debt? I have a huge amount of debt. If I am one of the better jazz players, then what about the rest of them? We do need more money, but I would never ask for it from politicians because they just pass it on, pass the buck. That's what I've found. **JM:** What are the opportunities for people in Scottish arts? **TOMMY SHEPPARD (TSH):** One of the opportunities is the talents of the people. We try to get people involved in stand-up comedy, we provide a beginners' night every week. Ten people turn up every week to have a go and there's a three-month waiting list. There's that pool to draw from, and the bigger the pool, the better the chance to get another Frankie Boyle. The volatility of politics is an opportunity. It may be more productive to press the case for public support for the arts, for public priorities in the arts. **TSM:** For 20 years I have been trying to get jazz education in further education colleges in Scotland. We are 30 years behind Europe and 60 years behind America. We have been to all the politicians through their various

parties when they had power and none of them were ever able to help us because the people running the universities were biased against improvised music, which they thought was associated with late nights and drinking and drugs. Just two weeks ago, we had the news that we are going to launch a full-time jazz course in Glasgow, at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, which was a huge milestone. **JM:** The issue of the threat to Edinburgh's Unesco World Heritage status really seems to me to be a very serious matter, because it's as if the short-term economic development is being allowed to trump a long-term asset to Edinburgh that we can't afford to let slip away. **TSM:** You don't get away with that in Paris. What is different from their committees to ours? **JM:** If you talk about beauty in a committee, they think you are mad. **RH:** The stuff that went up in the 1960s was much worse than what's going up now. **JM:** We have had a pretty strong attack on the Creative Scotland process. **RH:** With hindsight, the way this has been done was the wrong way. We have been running the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) and Scottish Screen and trying to conceptualise and deliver this new body at the same time. It has not been easy, and it has not been helped by the fact that people have been blisteringly



# ...and a bigger slice of the cake"

critical about the fact we've been landed with something that is innately difficult to do. We have received a large amount of support for the idea of Creative Scotland in the parliament and the country at large. It's going to happen. **COLIN MARR:** We're half-way there and turning back now would be disastrous. Let's get on with it. The biggest thing we are suffering from is the hiatus and we've been suffering that for a long time. The funding argument has to be public. We don't get the funding because politicians don't think it's a vote-winner. The Scottish Arts Council does not make the argument public. They get criticised by the government if they do. **JM:** Is the SAC not able to act as strongly as an advocate as it should for the companies it's funding? **CM:** It was more vocal prior to devolution. I think they've been slapped by a government they are much closer to than Westminster. **TSH:** I wish Creative Scotland well. I think there is an argument that by bringing more things together you will perhaps get a bigger voice. But there is a difference between setting up Creative Scotland and giving a greater public policy priority to the arts. You've just got bigger rats in a bigger sack fighting over the same slice of the cake. There's a need for more money in real terms, there's also the need for a bigger slice of the cake. You wouldn't start talking about

developing sport in this country without the contribution that schools make to doing that. Why are we talking about developing theatre, about developing music, without looking at what youngsters are getting involved in at the very beginning of their creative energy? The biggest arts festival in the world is the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and it gets a pitiful amount of public support at the local or national level. Another important area is broadcasting. The debate is alive and kicking. It is scandalous the amount of coverage that BBC Scotland gives to the festivals. If you had the festivals in London it would be wall-to-wall coverage for three continuous weeks. Let's get some energy into broadcasting in this country. That's going to be a way of getting better attention for the arts. It's our mass media; the government is there to license and regulate it. Let's give it a kick in the right direction. **JM:** Isn't the lack of vigorous political support for the arts related to this lack of awareness of what's going on in the cultural sector? There's a presumption that people are always going to be interested in having 15 pages of sport [in newspapers]. **TM:** One person said artists in this country earn less than artists in other countries, and I have to agree with that. I earn most of my money with my own group outside the country. Some people say give artists a lifetime grant

to inspire them to stay in the country, so they don't go away to places like Berlin. That could be a good idea, but some countries have tried it and failed. The fundamental mistake, that happened way back, was that we shouldn't have given this country away in the first place. **TSH:** The whole of public policy needs to reprioritise on the arts. I think we need to have, as a society, a much higher concern and awareness about it. We all have to make the case; all of us who live and work here need to do a lot more in terms of ganging together and making the case for better public attention, better public priority. **RH:** This has been a very imbalanced discussion tonight because there hasn't been a politician. I have frequently found myself having to go on television to justify the policies of this government or the previous government. That's not my job. I think on the other hand we need a major dose of reality here. If government is going to put money into the arts, it isn't just going to need a mechanism to do it. It will be something that achieves that particular government's cultural policy. The previous government had a strong social transformation agenda. This government's main policy is to grow the Scottish economy. Until they grow the Scottish economy, all the bitching and whingeing that you're doing about getting more money won't make any

difference. You won't get more money unless Scotland earns more money. This government is cash-strapped. It struggles to get its budgets through. There is no way we are going to increase massively its contribution to culture. Sometimes the best strategy is not creating headlines and getting a kind of satisfactory orgasm out of an embarrassing argument, sometimes the best approach is to pick up the phone and argue behind closed doors. We have to follow the policies of this particular government, however long or short the arms-length factor is, because, ultimately, it's government money we are managing. The danger is what happens to all the small arts bodies struggling that don't have the access, that don't have that sex appeal, that glamour, that are not the National Theatre with a box office hit like *Black Watch*. Who is going to defend them, who is going to stand up for them? We are doing it, the Scottish Arts Council is doing it and Creative Scotland are doing it. I just wish we would all get behind the fact that this is going to happen and help us make it happen well. If you go on bitching from the sidelines, you will panic the government and we can't go back to the status quo ante because so many things have already unravelled. I came on this panel to celebrate the power for the arts to change the life of Scotland. Quangos don't do that. Artists do that. Let them deliver it.

**WHAT'S NEXT**  
THE Scotsman Debates are a series of eight public events running throughout 2008. The remaining debates are:  
INDEPENDENCE AND THE MILITARY: HOW WOULD IT WORK? Victoria Halls, Helensburgh, 24 September, 7pm  
Chaired by Ian Stewart, Scotsman Deputy Editor. Panellists confirmed: Angus Robertson, SNP MP; Clive Fairweather, former SAS deputy commander and military analyst; Jim Panton, Chief Executive of PoppyScotland (and former helicopter pilot); Helen Steven (an anti-nuclear campaigner for 40 years)  
IS SCOTLAND MAKING A MESS OF RENEWABLE ENERGY? Town Hall, Jedburgh, 14 October, 7pm  
THE MEDIA SCOTLAND WANTS, Mitchell Library, Glasgow, 24 October, 7pm  
PROGRESS BEYOND POLITICS, Albert Halls, Stirling, 4 December, 7pm  
TO ORDER TICKETS... e-mail scotsmandedebates@scotsman.com or write to: David Lee, Scotsman Debates, The Scotsman, 108 Holyrood Road, Edinburgh, EH8 8AS  
State which debate(s) you wish to attend, the number of tickets and please provide a telephone number.