

DeepSouth CS news from Dunedin and beyond

The cast and crew of *Jersualem, Jerusalem* have returned home to Dunedin after taking Mike Riddell's play about poet and Christian radical James K. Baxter from the Edinburgh of the South to the Edinburgh of the North.

What began as a week-long production at Dunedin's Globe theatre ended up just over a year later performing to rapt audiences at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, a success due in no small part to the determined vision of the playwright, and the director Rosemary Riddell.

The trip to the UK served to confirm what sold-out houses had suggested here: that the play's uncompromising witness to James K. Baxter's life and message is impossible to ignore. Despite being one of over a thousand theatre acts performed at the Edinburgh Fringe, *Jerusalem, Jerusalem* played for two straight weeks to good audiences, receiving a four-star review from The Scotsman, which hailed the play as "innovative and provocative". The best audience response came in Belfast, where the cast and crew did two performances, concluding with fantastic audience discussions. The tour was rounded off by a show at the Greenbelt Christian festival. Over-flowing the tent in which the performance took place, the audience gave the players a standing ovation, joining in with the concluding rendition of the hymn *Jerusalem*.

All in all, it has been a remarkable journey for the cast and crew of *Jerusalem, Jerusalem*. Where other productions have undertaken similar projects on a strictly professional basis, this play has been marked from the outset by a strong sense of community amongst those involved, giving integrity to their testimony to Baxter's message of restorative community. With the end

of this production of *Jerusalem, Jerusalem* Mike Riddell is already working on new projects: his novel *Insatiable Moon* is in the early stages of film production.

In response to the proposed development of the Wataki for Hydro-electricity generation, Oamaru artists Sister Mary Horn and John Mitchell invited about thirty artists to submit work that speaks into, and protests against, the plight of the river, its environs and people.

The exhibition features a huge range of visual arts as well as poetry and musical compositions. *Artists Against Aqua* includes Claire Beynon, Nigel Brown, Peter Cleverly, Bing Dawe, Donna Demente, Cilla McQueen, Ewan McDougall, Ken Larryman, Burns Pollack, Michael Smithers, Brian Turner, and Marilyn Webb. The exhibition opened at the Forrester Gallery, Oamaru, on Friday 26th September at 7:30pm, and runs until October 2nd. Also open during the week, the Forrester's weekend hours are: Sat, 10:30am-1pm; Sun, 1pm-4pm.

Mark these dates in your diary: from February 28th to May 16th, the Dunedin Public Art Gallery will host the only mainland exhibition of *Everyday Miracles: The art of Stanley Spencer*. One of the most remarkable religious artists of 20th Century Britain, Spencer's powerful paintings replay Biblical narratives in his native village of Cookham, the local residents taking the place of apostles, saints and angels. His bold, and sometimes controversial approach, fuses the everyday and spiritual. Well worth a trip south to see!

This is the first column of what is hoped will be regular arts news from Dunedin and beyond. If you have news of happenings in the Otago area that would be of interest to CS News, please contact John Dennison: ph 03 477 2339; dennison_john@hotmail.com

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I'm
rebellious
against
winning
and the
commercial
scene

Sue Spigel, 2003



Interview

Contemporary cathedrals of art, Sue Spigel

Early in 2003 two Australasian artists (a painter and a quilt maker) quite separately approached cathedrals in their respective cities to propose coincidental public art projects. Outside the Anglican cathedral in Melbourne (July - September 03) is a colossal triptych in progress by public landscape artist David Porter called the *Road to Jericho* featuring the good Samaritan story in an Outback context. The artist felt the Biblical message had much to say about contemporary issues of hospitality and prejudice in Australian society. In the Anglican cathedral in Christchurch (12 Sept. - 2 Oct. 03) as a lead up to the annual Quilt Symposium from 26 September is an exhibition of eight quilts called *Sacred Conversations* by Sue Spigel. Two



September 2003: Andrew Panoho lays the foundations for his new studio in Blenheim.

Sue Spigel interview continued

contemporaneous public displays of contemporary art in two major Australasian cathedrals.

Sue has been involved in the Quilt Symposium for eight years, as an exhibitor, teacher and retailer and won best of show during the last two Symposiums. "But I didn't go to the award ceremonies. I'm rebelling against winning and the commercial scene."

After 30 years working in the medium, her work has veered toward the deeply personal, 'art from the heart.' "I now produce my own designs, painting and dying my own fabric rather than using commercial fabric. I didn't want to put 'soul work' in front of judges in a hall with 200 works. My work is about other things now. I wanted my art to be in a sacred space where people could interact with it in a different way." A few years earlier there had been a display of children's art in the Christ Church cathedral, where she regularly worships and Sue approached the church for permission for the exhibition.

Originally from Detroit, Sue moved to New Zealand in 1976. Faith and art are inseparable to her. "I couldn't do my work without my faith, that's where it comes from. Creativity, imagination, being given these gifts, thoughts and ideas and being awake enough to grab hold of them are all important facets of my arts practice." It's a view reiterated by David Porter in Australia. "Like most artists, I'd say that all art is 'spiritual,' but I've never painted anything so literal or literary before."

JS

Letters to the Editor

Tribute not memorial

7 August 2003

I was interested to read your Director's comment which mentions the sculpture "A Tribute to Firefighters" by Graham Bennett. Could I point out that the work was never intended to be a 'memorial' - in fact we took great care not to use this term at any time during the sourcing, transporting and fabrication of the steel into the art work. Rather than being a 'souvenir' the steel was gifted by the City of New York to the City of Christchurch in the context of the World Firefighter Games held in Christchurch in October 2002 and the subsequent dedication of the newly landscaped Firefighters Reserve adjacent to the Central Firestation. There was always going to be an art work on that site and the relationship we developed with Firefighters, both here and in New York, gave the impetus for the steel and its use as the material for the art work. We also had strict criteria from the Office of Emergency Management in New York for the use of the steel. I have been dealing personally with the employees of the construction company at Ground Zero, the NY Fire Department and members of the Office of Emergency

Management, who have all shown enormous goodwill and interest in the project. There was a great deal of consideration and deep thought by both the artist and the City Council team involved in the Reserve development, considering the sensitive nature of the material.

In order for the true story to be documented I have initiated a book entitled "Journey - The Story of the Steel" by Rosa Shiels. This book is available here at CCC for \$9.95 - proceeds going to the Firefighters Welfare Society and the Burns Unit.

I hope the above brief summary is of interest to you. The project was a unique one and I have been fortunate to have visited New York twice over the last eighteen months and have been able to give books to the above people involved who helped us so much with the steel and its journey. We intend to mount a storyboard on the bridge railing which will give a short summary of the story so that the sculpture will be acknowledged as "A Tribute to Firefighters" and not a memorial of September 11th.

Marlene LeCren

Arts Adviser, Christchurch City Council

Allusive, art, outside the frame (edited)

August 2003

Len Lye is arguably New Zealand's greatest artist. Virtually unknown in New Zealand, he was famous overseas for ground-breaking work in direct-animation film and kinetic sculpture. That's his wind wand on the foreshore at New Plymouth. Recently I finished reading Roger Horrock's biography of Len Lye (a brilliantly easy-to-read, well considered and vibrant book to match Lye's personality.

The book talks about how Lye exercised his sensory skills. On Monday, for example, he would hone in and focus on sound, on Tuesday he would focus on touch, and so on. At the end of each day he would write down his discoveries. What emerged was a keen sense of things – motion, touch, energy, sound and colour.

I found a definition of art recently as I was reading Art and Soul by Brand and Chaplin (essential reading). It was a quote from Calvin Seerveld that emphasised an essential 'allusive' quality to art – art alludes to something outside the frame (of immediate reference) and is quite difficult to put your finger on exactly.

It gets me thinking about exercising my senses, developing an awareness. And when I think about it more, beyond our immediate frame of reference, I think about Brother Lawrence and the presence of Christ. Christ is there alright, but the first step is to notice him. And I remember C.S. Lewis describing Heaven as a place where everything is ultra-real, overwhelming, experienced a million times more than anything we're used to – it's a place alluded to by Earth.

In the end, it's art. I can't quite grasp it, but that's the way I like it.

Andrew Killick (writer and poet Tauranga)



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