



The Tyke Writer

INTERCHANGE NEWSLETTER

Issue 4/ August 2001

Word addicts keep going

Mark Cantrell profiles the group and sketches a brief history of the Interchange (Bradford Writers' Network)

QUIET in the cheap seats," Howard Frost growls. He turns to glare at the motley collection of writers gathered around the table.

Eventually they pay attention, like a bunch of unruly school children, and settle down to listen to the words of a fellow scribe.

This ritual takes

place every Tuesday in the downstairs bar at the Priestley Centre for Arts (formerly the Bradford Playhouse), when the members of the Interchange (Bradford Writers Network) gather for their workshops.

Don't let Frost's mock stern nature fool you, it's a friendly and informal group. Unusually, it deals with just about every form of the written word: poetry, short fiction, novels, theatre and film scripts, memoirs, journalism as well as catering for singer songwriters. The group is as eclectic as it is gregarious.

Interchange is one of several literary groups operating in the city. Members flit between them in an almost incestuous

excursion that helps to feed the vibrancy of the city's literary scene.

"We believe that no matter who you are, if you write then your voice, your input, your words matter," says member Ian Reed.

Frost agrees and adds emphasis when he says: "Interchange has always been about helping people find their own voice, value that voice, and help it to grow stronger by having a wider audience."

An audience is important to any writer, regardless of whether their main purpose is to develop their work for the performance circuit. The typical image of a writer is of someone working in isolation, sweating blood over piles of paper in their garret. Sometimes that image can be true, but for those who step

outside the musty room, they find a vibrant world of fellow scribes waiting to share their literary needs.

It provides an environment of support and positive criticism that helps the writer to develop. Even the process of reading work and gauging people's response can work wonders to develop a scribe's words as well as confidence.

Maintaining this kind of environment is of crucial importance to the group. So it has few rules; the main ones being that only constructive criticism is allowed and there is no self-deprecation. The onus is on the words and on honing them as close to perfection as is humanly possible.

At time, it seems anarchic and chaotic, but there is method

(Continued on page 2)

The Gift

This is not the life I
asked for
But the life that I was
given.
So I accepted it politely,
As one does with
unwanted gifts.
And I use it rarely,
But never to its full
potential.

David Riley

The Tyke Writer

Word addicts go on

(Continued from page 1)

operating within its lack of structure. Whatever the magic, it seems to work and has held the group together until it has become one of the longest established in the city.

Interchange was formed 15 years ago as

the Bradford Writers' Workshop. It emerged from an event called 'Poetry Live' that was organised by Nick Toczek and 'Wild' Willi Becket. Using the event as a focal point for attracting writers, they assembled the first motley collection to

form a permanent writers' organisation. To their delight, they discovered it worked.

Writing under her married name of Mellor, Alex Krynski wrote in the foreword to the group's first anthology, *Flakattak* (1993): "In no time at all [it] turned into the equivalent of AA. People could come and confess their addiction

to pen and paper and hardcore word processor punters could offload their guilt, helping each other to take control of their mutual habit." True to its aspirations of developing literature in the city, it has expanded beyond its weekly workshops to organise performance events at a number of venues.

Initially, it performed at the Love Apple Cafe, but in the Summer of 1998 the group moved to its current monthly venue at the Melborn. To mark this move, the group relaunched itself as Interchange.

Today, this is one of the group's main performance events and it takes place on the last Wednesday of the month. The second main event takes place at the Monkey Cafe Bar in Wakefield (in conjunction with the Black Horse Poets), on the first Wednesday of the month.

Both are open mic events, where performers can come along and take the stage by storm. All they are asked to do is arrive from 8pm to sign up. Performances begin at 8.30pm. These have become regular and

(Continued on page 3)

Responsibilities!

So take these words, these
Sorrowful words and let the
Anger be released within them.

Tonight out on the road on
My own, you know I can't stand
It any more.

When I was younger, all the
Other kids were with their mum
And dad.

But me, me all alone, I had a
Grandma but that wasn't the
Same.

So now I'm older I understand,
Everything is loud and clear. So
Now I will make them tell me
The truth by taking civil action.

* * *

NOTE: Kissemee is the daughter of Donna Daniel and the granddaughter of Felicia Daniel, names that will be familiar to some members of the

Interchange group.

Last year, in support of the Donna Daniel Campaign, the group held a benefit performance at the Queens pub on Lumb Lane.

For those who don't know, Mrs Daniel is trying to find out what happened to her daughter. She was declared dead by the authorities in Kent in 1993. Mrs Daniel only learned through the salvation army that someone who *might* be her daughter had been discovered dead. That was in 1997.

Official documents gained by Mrs Daniel point to significant doubt about the identity of the deceased. To top it off, the coroner and his assistant who handled the inquest were prosecuted for fraud during the time.

Mrs Daniel has been investigating, campaigning and battling through the courts to find the truth. Now Kissemee is to take her own civil actions to find out what happened to her mum.

The above poem relates to this.

(Continued from page 2)

well-attended venues on the city's arts scene.

Along with the regulars, the group has organised a variety of one off events and taken part in festivals throughout the district -- and further afield.

In 1999 six members of the group -- calling themselves 'The Bradford Six' -- self-published their work both in book and audio CD format. Not content with a UK audience, they took *Release* to the States to perform in cafes, bars and festivals.

Later in the same year, the group supported member Karl Dallas in a multi-media celebration of the Russian October Revolution.

Despite some misgivings about the 'political' nature of *Red October* (as it was called), the group was inspired to help stage the event by the selection of literature.

To music and a back-drop of computer-generated slides, the performance included works by Akhmatova, Bertholt Brecht, Hugh MacDiarmid, Mandelstam, Mayakovsky, Lenin, William Morris, Pasternak, Yevtushenko and J B

Priestley's *They Came To A City*.

The centrepiece was a dramatised performance by Karl Dallas of Alexandr Bloc's controversial poem *The 12* (1918); a warts and all depiction of a squad of Red Guard patrolling the streets of St Petersburg, who find themselves following the figure of Christ bearing the red flag of workers' revolution.

It was a challenging performance, for which the 'actors', particularly Dallas, benefited from the theatrical experience of director Howard Frost.

"It's always a challenge to do a one-man show," Frost said at the time of rehearsals. "The challenge has been to create something worth watching for its own sake without overtaxing the abilities of the actor. I think at the end of the day we'll both be able to say we achieved what we set out to do."

When the audience subsequently trooped out of the Priestley's Studio Theatre, both men, and the other performers, were indeed able to say just that.

With the turn of the century, the group decided to herald the New Millennium in verse with the Festival of 2000 Voices.

This was a year-long

event, taking in a host of specially organised events, along with the regular gigs. The aim, by the end of 2000 was to have that number of poets and writers

The Creation of Writing In Answer To Sue Mark Cantrell

A voice asked the question: what is creative writing?

I turned with a haughty stare and stopped short as I pondered. Truth is my addled brain didn't have a clue. Quick, where's the bar - mine's a pint I'll just go over there and hide my head from Sue.

The answer was lurking in the shade of a sleepless night. As I lay there tossing and turning, seeking for the oblivion of repose, I heard that question throb anew from the depths of my subconscious.

I tried to ignore it, those haunting words, but in my head I heard the answer form itself in prose.

Forced from bed in the dead of night was an experience so new. Never have I been so forced by a nagging assemblage of words. Never have I woken from a night of pleasant slumber to leap out of bed, cry 'Eureka' and fill my screen with verbs.

But this night I did; blasted into action by that innocent slow fuse question-bomb of Sue's.

The answer is this: creative writing is whatever you want.

Anything filled with colour and light, a passage mulled with a sliver of personality, of thought or the merest echoes of a human soul.

No bloodless report, is creative writing, no passage where the author's essence must be expunged.

Over creative writing we have only partial control. It is wild and unbound. A sparkling effervescence of personality and spirit. A lightning strike of one mind to another, a merger of thought, a communion of the soul.

Are you now so answered? Is your mind put at rest? If so does that mean I can now go to mine?

EVENTS GUIDE

Word addicts go on

Interchange @ the Priestley

Weekly workshop that takes place every Tuesday from 8pm at the Priestley Centre for the Arts, Chapel Street, Little Germany. It provides a friendly and informal gathering where group members can share their work.

Interchange @ the Melborn

Every last Wednesday of the month on White Abbey Road, Interchange hosts an open microphone event for writers, performers and singer-song-writers.

Singer/song-writers please contact Interchange in advance, as slots for musicians are limited.

Interchange @ the Monkey Bar

Every first Wednesday of the month from 8pm at the Monkey Bar cafe on Northgate, Wakefield.

(Continued from page 3)

perform their works.

Each performer signed a 'performance book' to mark the event, along with a giant banner that was displayed on the last gig of the year.

As well as celebrating the Millennium, it was also intended to promote performance poetry as a distinct form, as well as find new voices.

Ruth Malkin, who organised the event, said: "I think of performance poetry as the popular form of the genre. Rather like the distinction between 'popular' and 'classical' music. The two can co-exist and just as in the music world there is some overlap. Funders of poetry and literary academics sneer at performance poetry, but they also reap the

rewards of its popularisation of poetry in general."

Alongside the Festival, the group was also working on its second anthology: *Love, Sex, Death & Carrots*. Published at the end of 2000, and formally launched at the

where talent is nurtured and developed. Fifteen years on from its inception, the group still shifts, grows, evolves -- just like the writers themselves. It's hard to imagine Bradford's already vibrant literary scene without Interchange.

In no time at all [it] turned into the equivalent of AA. People could come and confess their addiction...

"People have come and gone, some to extinction, some to glory," Kryszinski added in *Flakattak*.

"The workshop remains like a megalith, awesome and covered in graffiti."

Despite a change of name, the same can be said today.

first Monkey event of 2001, it presented a host of old hands alongside the new.

Highlights of a busy group. Along with these have been other one-off events as well as the activities of individual group members. Within this varied activity, the core of the group -- its very heart and soul if you like -- remains with the weekly workshop,

STOP PRESS: Following on from the immense success of Poetry in the Park last month, Karl Dallas is keen to repeat the experience. Be at the Boating Lake Pavilion, 15 August for a repeat performance. Details later.

Editorial contributions welcome, but will be edited for space and style. All contributions must bear the author's name, which may appear as a byline. All work is copyright to the original authors.

Editor: Mark Cantrell
Contact: Tel: 01274 541468.
Fax: 0870 1643314
Email: editor@soviet62.freemove.co.uk