



Chicago/Birmingham Sister Cities Committee News

December 2010

From the Chair

I'm ashamed to say that I spent 7 years at a high school directly opposite the Barber Institute and went there just once. On a school trip. The full extent of my folly was brought home to me last November, when Dr Ann Sumner, Director and Curator of the Institute, spoke at the Arts Club of Chicago on her favorite of the Institute's many treasures. Other cultural highlights of the last 6 months included an outstanding performance of Handel's "Messiah" led by Garry Clarke. And other highlights included visits by representatives of another of Birmingham's universities, and by schoolchildren from the EDGE partnership.



Rupert J. Ward, Chair

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Chicago-Birmingham Committee Contacts:

Chair—

Rupert Ward, rupertward@kpmg.com

International Programs Manager—

Ieva Dilyte, ieva.dilyte@cityofchicago.org

The Baroque Band

The Baroque Band was founded in 2007 by Garry Clarke, a baroque violinist who grew up near Birmingham, England and is a lifelong Aston Villa fan. In its short existence, the Band has built a superb reputation. November's edition of BBC Music magazine recognized it as one of just five U.S. music organizations that represent "the best of American baroque," and Chicago Classical Review has called its performances "period-instrument playing at its finest."

We were delighted to support the Baroque Band and Bella Voce, Chicago's premier chamber choir, in a period performance of Handel's "Messiah" early in December. Organized by committee member Alex Saunders, the concert was held in the beautiful surroundings of the Preston Bradley Hall at the Cultural Center. It attracted an audience of almost 250, some of them no doubt encouraged to attend by the Chicago Tribune's recommendation of the concert as classical pick of the week. We were especially pleased to be joined by alumni and faculty from the University of Birmingham including Professor Nigel Weatherall, Head of the College of Engineering & Physical Sciences, Professor Malcolm Press, Head of the College of Life & Environmental Sciences and Dr Edward Harcourt, Director, International Relations.

The event was supported by the generosity of the Palmer House Hilton Hotel, the Poetry Foundation, the Park Grill, WFMT, the Gene Siskel Film Center, the CSO, and the Chicago Shakespeare Theater. ●



The Barber Institute and Chicago

Situated on the University of Birmingham campus three miles outside the city center, the Barber Institute of Fine Art has been described by the Observer newspaper as "one of the finest small art galleries in Europe". Its fine collection includes key examples of the work of many of the greatest Western artists of the past five centuries. One of them is on display at the Metropolitan Museum in New York as part of the current exhibition 'Man, Myth, and Sensual Pleasures: Jan Gossart's Renaissance'. Gossart's 'Hercules and Deianira', on loan from the Barber Institute, not only forms part of the exhibition but also graces the poster and catalogue cover.

Professor Ann Sumner, Director and Curator of the Institute, visited Chicago the first week in November, a trip that committee member Caroline Cracraft helped organize. Professor Sumner had meetings with the Curator of the Loyola University Museum of Art, the Director of the Smart Museum, University of Chicago, and the President of the Art Institute of Chicago. Plans are underway for exchanges between the various museums, including bringing the Barber's German Expressionist works on paper to the Smart Museum, in return for their Chicago School works.

Professor Sumner also gave a talk to a crowd of more than 70 at the Arts Club of Chicago to launch the new Scala catalogue of the Barber in its Director's Choice series. She gave a similar presentation to a group of alumni of the University of Birmingham plus their spouses and guests. That talk, at the University Club, was followed by a private guided tour of the Art Institute of Chicago, and lunch at Terzo Piano in the new Modern Wing.

The catalogue that was the subject of Professor Sumner's lecture, Director's Choice, is available from Caroline Cracraft (carolinepcracraft@gmail.com) for \$15. ●

Birmingham City University

Birmingham City University boasts 24,000 students spread over 8 campuses around the city, and offers a range of courses provided by faculties including the strong Birmingham Institute of Art and Design (BIAD), the only Conservatoire of Music within a University in the UK, and a School of Media ranked 5th out of 79 in the UK by the Guardian newspaper.

The University already has links with Chicago; as reported in previous newsletters, students on a Masters program studying Real Estate Management spend a week on a study visit here. Over the past few months, senior representatives from the University have been visiting Chicago looking to build much more substantial links. This summer, John Kirk, Head of International and Business Development at the Faculty of Performance, Media and English visited De Paul University to discuss staff and student exchange in music, and Roosevelt University's Chicago College of Performing Arts (CCPA) to discuss collaborations with their conservatoires of acting and classical music. The Director of BCU's Birmingham School of Acting visited Chicago in November 2010 to conduct a workshop with over 40 CCPA students. And finally, also in November, Professor Jo Andrews, Head of International Development at BIAD visited Chicago to discuss student/staff exchange possibilities with UIC at their Chicago and Urbana campuses.



John Kirk

Further visits are planned to build on these first steps, including a visit from Dean Henry Fogel and Associate Deans of Acting and Music to Birmingham in the spring of 2011. And an ambitious convention featuring all five of Birmingham's universities is in the works for late 2011 to share, celebrate and promote the mutually beneficial educational links which can and do exist between Birmingham and the USA with a particular focus on the twin cities of Birmingham and Chicago. ●

Spotlight on Committee Members—George Bickford

George Bickford has been a member of the Birmingham committee since spring 2007. Seen here with Mayor Daley at the opening ceremony of the 5th Annual Chicago Sister Cities International Festival, George is sub-chair of the education committee and has actively supported all of the Birmingham committee's initiatives including Celebrate Birmingham in June 2008 and numerous of our fund-raising efforts.

George is the assistant dean of instruction at Harold Washington College, one of the seven City Colleges of Chicago. He has been located at the College in Chicago since July 1995. Prior to joining the administration at Harold Washington College, George was assigned in Wiesbaden and Mainz-Kastel, Germany with the overseas program of the City Colleges of Chicago since 1974. This program offered college credit and continuing education courses to active duty personnel assigned in Europe and the Middle-East until June 2003. During his tenure in Germany, George oversaw the financial and auxiliary operations of the program in Germany until assuming overall management of the program in 1990-2003.

George in fact spent a total of 25 years abroad in Germany, latterly with the City Colleges and formerly with the United States Air Force. ●



George Bickford with Mayor Richard M. Daley.

The EDGE Partnership Visit to Chicago

September 2010

Carl Smith writes...

"This would be the third group of Secondary school students from Birmingham to visit Chicago and they would find the city to be as amazing as their predecessors had.

"The group consisted of 14 students (2 each from seven Birmingham schools) and 3 teacher chaperones. After a weekend of sightseeing, Monday saw the trip begin in earnest as the group made its way to Walter Payton College Prep. There they were given their first introduction to the Chicago Public School system. Each Brit was buddied up with a Payton student and spent the day shadowing them to their classes, including school lunch. The teachers met with their American Counterparts to discuss teaching and curriculum matters.

"Tuesday saw the group divide their time between Hanson Park Elementary school and Charles Prosser Career Academy. These visits gave them something to contrast with the previous day. Again the group sat through classes and contributed to some. This time the teachers were also put to work. Mr. Dave Balanger, Principal of Hanson Park welcomed us before we were released into his school. I had a go at teaching 7th and 8th grade science, whilst my wife, Sally, helped out in Kindergarten. The third member of the group, Mr. Hugh Blackwood, spent his time helping out the English teachers.

"In the evening the group took part in a local rally and march against violence organized by Alderman Ray Suarez. Our presence at the event caused quite a stir and once the march was over many of the dignitaries and senior Police officers came over to chat with the group from the UK who were showing solidarity with the local residents. The day wound up with a blow out feast at the Old Country Buffet where one of the students celebrated her 15th birthday with gifts and cake.

"Wednesday saw us at Kelvyn Park High School. Again the students followed the timetable for the day experiencing lessons and school catering. Once



Edge visitors with Alderman Ray Suarez.

again I tried my hand at science teaching, this time biology to a senior class. The whole group finished the visit in the classroom of inspirational teacher Mr. Darren Tuggle where they shared ideas and experiences with his students. They also worked together on dramatizing excerpts from Kelvyn Park's forthcoming production of the Little Shop of Horrors. In the evening the group boarded the 'short bus' (apparently this is a local joke) of the Weird Chicago Tour Company for an interesting evening exploring sites of mass death, ghostly happenings and gangster related mayhem.

"Thursday morning saw the group decked out in their best school uniforms for a visit to City Hall and a meeting with Mr. Khaled J. Elkhatib, deputy director for International Relations at the Office of the Mayor. There Mr. Elkhatib explained the rather complicated American electoral system and answered the student's questions regarding the City of Chicago and its history. The group had brought some gifts for Mayor Daley and these were handed over. They included a monogrammed letter opener presented on behalf of the City of Birmingham, two books about Birmingham autographed and dedicated by author Carl Chinn on behalf of the EDGE partnership of school and finally a school tie and sweater from Four Dwellings School. In return Mr. Elkhatib presented the students with City

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of Chicago caps and pin badges plus a personal letter from the Mayor addressed to the Leader of the EDGE partnership.

“Friday saw the group return to Charles Prosser Career Academy where after a morning in class the group sat with the International Student Ambassadors to discuss the projects they have been working

“The visit was a resounding success...the British school staff shared their experiences and expertise with American classes.”

together on since last May when the Americans came to visit Birmingham. The final night of the visit saw everyone meeting up at the Buzz Café for an evening of music before saying their goodbyes.

“The visit was a resounding success. Once again the group enjoyed the hospitality of four Chicago schools, meeting and sharing with dozens of their American counterparts. The British school staff also shared their experiences and expertise with American classes. In addition Mr. Blackwood spent three evenings meeting and sharing with the staff and cast at

the Steppenwolf Theatre. I had spent a morning at a Seminar with Chicago High School principals where I had addressed the meeting on the purpose of our visit and the work of the EDGE partnership in Birmingham. This sort of collaboration between schools is virtually unheard of in Chicago and the Principals were very interested to learn how we group our schools together in collegiates such as the EDGE to share resources, expertise and ideas. The staff got to see the British students grew in stature and confidence as the week progressed. It was amazing to watch as our teenagers were completely unfazed as they held discussions with not only their peers but with teachers, politicians and other dignitaries during the week. A lot of hard work went into planning this visit and it would not be possible without the input from our many friends in Chicago. I would like to thank the Sister Cities group and the Principals and staff of the schools we visited, especially Chicago–Birmingham Sister Cities Committee member Ken Hunter and Jeff Bates of Charles Prosser who virtually put their life on hold for the week as they hosted us in their city. Hopefully I can return the favour in the Spring of 2011 when Prosser bring more of their students to Birmingham.” ●