

# Nods and Whispers

## The Celtic Neighbours Newsletter

No. 4 March 2014



*Sabhal Mòr Ostaig*

## A year of remarkable developments

### **TOSTA 2013 – 16**

#### **The pace quickens**

On 4<sup>th</sup> March 2014, one day in advance of the deadline, we submitted our completed application to the EC Culture Programme for 'TOSTA – a Voyage of Discovery'. If successful, this will be a two-year feast of international arts residencies, training and festivals that will develop alongside the inaugural voyage of the Basque whaling ship *San Juan* from Donostia in 2016 around the coasts of Europe, carrying her cargo of culture and her message of diversity to nine minority nations. Five co-ordinating partners and thirteen associates have been working towards this moment for nearly two years. More details on page three.

### **TIONAL 2013**

#### **A gathering to remember**

Over three days in June 2013, a hundred delegates from eight nations gathered in the inspiring setting of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Gaelic-language college on the Isle of Skye to share ideas, skills and experiences, and above all to develop new collaborations. We're delighted to say that more than twenty initiatives have already grown out of this meeting. Two of the fastest projects to 'go live' will be examined on page two, but a full list, an interim report and a gallery of superb photographs from Tional by the Basque artist Maider Oleaga can be found at <http://www.celtic-neighbours.eu/>

### **GRASSROOTS 2013 – 14**

#### **Soul and sustainability**

In summer 2013, the young Basque traditional band *Bitartean* made their first-ever tour abroad, playing to sell-out audiences across west and north Wales. They were supported throughout by our own almost-tame musical ambassador Meinir Gwilym, who returned to Euskal Herria with them in September, again playing to delighted audiences in four different venues. Meinir will now also be performing in Galicia in May 2014, *Bitartean* will be returning to Wales – and playing in Ireland too - this August, and then working in the studio with Meinir before returning home. Is this sustainability? It's a beginning.

# TIONAL – two early outcomes

## Poetry – and language

The pilot edition of a new digital poetry magazine, featuring work in many of the smaller European languages, will go live before midsummer. The brainchild of Dr Dave Clark from Universidade de Coruna and Myrddin ap Dafydd of Gwasg y Carreg Falch, it is being hosted by Afûk, the language support agency in Frÿslan. If the pilot receives a warm welcome, we will establish a permanent editorial board and look to regular publication.



Dave and his colleague Manuel Vilar from Museo do Pobo Gallego in Santiago are also currently organising a week of Welsh music and culture to be shared between the university and museum this May.

## Visual arts – and language

Two young artists, both native speakers from small rural communities, are currently working with farming families in Bro Cegir, near Machynlleth in mid-Wales. As well as recording and creating, they've been working with cattle and sheep, carrying hay and repairing dry-stone walls. "I'm a listening artist," says Naomi Heath from Llanafan in Ceredigion. "I don't want to make an exhibition about me, one that's my property. I want to reflect the feelings of the valley, and help create something everyone here feels part of." Her colleague Ciara O Flynn from County Kerry comments "this collaborative, reflective way of working has changed my view of life and my work. It's been a gift."

Ciara



Naomi

After a further period of working and living together on the remote island of Enlli, off the North Wales coast, in May, their work will be exhibited in the new Tannery Gallery in Y Tabernacl, Machynlleth, in September. Ruth Lambert of Y Tabernacl, who is curating the exhibition, commented "We're welcoming this initiative with open arms, and really looking forward to their exhibition this autumn. The two artists, and their subject matter, are both utterly genuine. There's no better word." We all hope that Ciara and Naomi will be able to continue their work in the West of Ireland in the near future, and later in the Hebrides.

# TOSTA – What’s it all about, then?

(an extract from our application)

*“TOSTA - A Voyage of Discovery” develops practice through European collaboration; high quality art-in-community interventions using interdisciplinary art to foster understanding and collaboration between Basque, Faroese, Frisian, Galician, Irish, Scottish and Welsh communities. These cultures are both separated and connected by their unique languages and the sea that washes against their shores; our strength is in our diversity.*

*The rebuilt Basque whaling ship the San Juan, carrying her cargo of culture and message of diversity around the shores of Europe in 2016, will become a sea-going platform where the arts and culture of these ‘minority’ regions interact, and a metaphor for our shared journey towards greater understanding and collaboration.*

*We will develop culturally interlinked artistic outcomes that explore common themes and reach for wide new audiences; train and support young community based entrepreneurs in innovative audience development; reinforce active collaborative networks at grassroots level; and influence at national/international level the use of collaborative methodologies in cultural policy. We will demonstrate the importance of partnerships between minority cultures through three integrated international work packages.*

*Eight artists will each work experimentally in another culture with local artists and communities. Their work will reflect shared seas, unique languages, and raise awareness of common European values and aspirations. The San Juan’s arrival in ports throughout our region will stimulate a series of community-led, centrally-supported festival events. Eight young community-based entrepreneurs, one from each nation, will train together to learn new cultural management skills, which they will put into practice in the development of audiences for both the commissioned works and the events taking place in the ports visited by the San Juan. Participation in this shared cultural journey will be stimulated and channelled through a vigorous interactive network of websites, networking sites, blogs and video diaries, created as part of the project and lasting into the future.*

## **Co-ordinating partners:**

Ealain na Gaeltachta (Ireland) - lead partner

Afûk (Frÿslan/ Friesland)

Celtic Neighbours (Wales)

Euskaltzaleen Topagunea (Euskal Herria/ Basque Country)

Proiseact nan Ealan (Scotland)

**Associate partners:** **Basque Country:** Albaola, Donostia / San Sebastian European Capital of Culture 2016. **Ireland:** An Óg, Aras Eanna. **Faroe Islands:** Thing Project. **Frÿslan:** Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism, ‘T Fiskerhuis. **Galicia:** Museo do Pobo Gallego, Universidade de Coruna. **Scotland:** Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Taigh Chearsabhagh. **Wales:** Galeri Caernarfon, Oriel Plas Glyn-y-Weddw, Theatr Felinfach,



*San Juan exhibition in the Albaola shipyard, already beginning to take shape*

## Lleisiau/ Voices

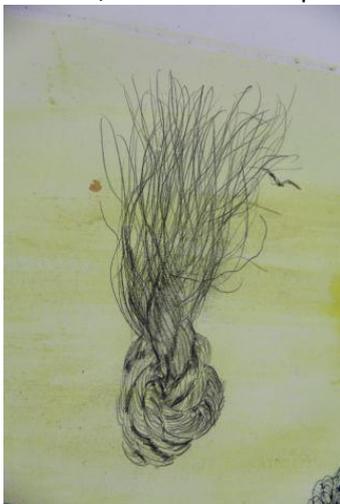
For the second year running, young people from An Óg in Dingle and Theatr Felinfach in Ceredigion have collaborated in devising a spirited and challenging drama, dance and music production. This time,



embellishing our gathering at Sabhal Mor Ostaig on Skye, 'Lleisiau' was uncompromisingly contemporary, exploring issues of language and multilingualism in a robust and often comic way.



Other young performers, including two classical pianists from Powys, a ceilidh band from the Hebrides, and rock musicians from Frÿslan and the Isle of Man, performed during the gathering. Poets, prose writers, radio and TV presenters and journalists all



contributed creatively to TIONAL as well as in our discussions. Visual artists exhibited photographs, drawings, sculpture and installations, and we'd like to thank all these talented people for their fascinating contributions. This drawing is by the Kerry artist Ciara O Flynn.

## Network building a-go-go

Creative Scotland, Bord na Gaidhlig and **trac** are currently working together to create a touring circuit across Scotland and Wales for traditional performers of all kinds. **trac** is also collaborating with Feis Rois to develop models of practice drawn from the Hebridean experience to enrich traditional music for young people in specific areas of Wales. Meanwhile, Celtic Neighbours itself is working with partners in the Basque Country, Galicia and Frÿslan to build a database of venues across the smaller nations of Europe that would welcome performers from other cultures, and also of promoters and funding sources able to offer support. An Óg in Dingle is developing a street-theatre and circus collaboration with artists and companies from Scotland and Wales for this summer, and also a co-production with a Finnish director. This will be based on Dylan Thomas' film adaptation of the Blasket Island classic 'Twenty Years a'Growing' by Muiris Ó Súilleabháin, and shown in 2016. Gwyn Jones, Director of Oriel Plas Glyn-y-Weddw is building links with the school of painters on Tory Island, Co. Donegal. Igor Otxoa in Euskal Herria is creating a 'Small Nations Orchestra' to perform in two Capital Cities of Culture – Donostia 2016 and Leuwarden 2018 – as part of their celebrations. As this newsletter takes shape, Naomi Heath from Ceredigion is travelling to North Uist to help Proiseact nan Ealan develop a multi-media project there.

We would like to thank the following organisations for their financial support, counsel and friendship over the past few months: **Arts Council of Ireland, Arts Council of Wales, Bord na Gaidhlig, Colmcille, Creative Scotland, Ealain na Gaeltachta, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Udaras na Gaeltachta, and the Welsh Assembly Government.**

The vision shown by Highlands and Islands Enterprise, encouraging and supporting us in the preparation of a year-long economic and cultural impact report on the Tional gathering and its outcomes, has been especially exciting and welcome.