

PASSION TRUST

Conference Report 2013

The second Passion Conference, hosted by the Passion Trust, was held at Woodland Grange in Leamington Spa on 2 February 2013. It brought together key speakers who perform and support passion plays around the country and two key speakers from EuroPassion in Holland and Belgium. It was a wonderful day of hearing from people who are experienced and passionate about putting on plays to bring the story of the Gospels alive through drama and community.

The first address was given by **Sir Jack Stewart-Clark**, producer of the 'Life of Christ' Plays at Dundas Castle, Glasgow, Uganda and facilitator of the Louisiana Penitentiary Play. It was fascinating to see photographs and film clips from the Passion Plays performed in such different contexts –football pitch, city gardens, prison yard. This address was a reminder of the unique potential of the 'Life of Christ' play to speak to people of all cultures, all backgrounds, all languages and all life experiences. The stories of tragedy, betrayal, forgiveness, love, second chances are for everyone.

This was followed by an address from **Suzanne Lofthus**, Director of Cutting Edge Theatre, Director of Auchtermuchty, Dundas, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Louisiana Passion Plays. Suzanne had a wealth of experience and rich perspectives on directing and shared stories from Louisiana and Scotland. She encouraged people to think about WHY they wanted to put on the plays and to work to connect with their particular audience. **James Burke-Dunsmore**, writer, actor and director of Passion Plays in Brighton, Leicester, London, Perth WA, Powys, Wiltshire, and Wintershall. He shared his passion for connecting with his audiences through new, hard-hitting and real encounters with Jesus. Acting Jesus, he needs to know he is connecting with each individual the audience, all of whom want real understandings and experiences from the actors. He encouraged everyone involved in writing, acting, directing to *dare to create* new vehicles, but not new content, and to realise that the permutations for creating a new script or a new performance are endless.

Other key speakers came from Europe to contribute to this conference. **Lex Houba**, leader and treasurer of EuroPassion, the world's largest organisation of Passion Plays including Oberammergau. Lex spoke about the 25th anniversary of EuroPassion in 2007. There was a meeting in Esparreguera, where EuroPassion was born in 1982 with Passion Plays, performed by 13 different Passion Play groups from Spain, Italy, France, Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. Each Passion Play played a scene in their own language and in their own clothes. He said this kind of meeting is due to be repeated soon and it was representative of the objectives of EuroPassion:

- The proclamation of the message of Christ by means of a performance of the Passion,

- The promotion of cultural and human relations between the Passion Play communities,
- The exchange of experience between the single groups and the discussion of points of principles about the interpretation of the Passion, without belittling the diversity of interpretations by the different groups,
- The promotion of any kind of religious theatre or sacral performances, whose most important interpretation is the Passion of Christ,
- The organisation of friendly and solidary relations between the single groups.

Also present from Europassion was **Hermann-Josef Christen**, who showed photographs and artwork from the EuroPassion Congress in Schönberg, Belgium, last year. It was particularly inspiring to see the art-work sent in from all round Europe on the theme of 'hands' that showed young people engaging with the themes of the Gospel in creative ways. Hermann-Josef explained that the Schönberg passion performance that took place on the final night of the conference was unique in its use of three levels: the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection was interwoven with the biblical story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus and a modern tale of tragedy, betrayal, forgiveness and healing. The Emmaus level dramatized the move from despair and hopelessness to belief that Jesus is alive today that results in hearts that 'burn within us' with a passion for sharing this story with others and this is actually happening in the hearts of people when they watch the passion plays.

Both Lex Houba and Hermann-Josef Christen extended a very kind invitation for all present at this conference to join them at the next EuroPassion conference in Austria in May 2013.

After lunch a series of more practical workshops were held. One of the Trustees of the Passion Trust, **Corinna Loges**, ran a workshop on fundraising, giving practical advice and support. There are new resources from this workshop on the Passion Trust website. **Dr Rachel Woods** ran a workshop on artistic direction and shared her experiences from the Passion Plays in Princes St Gardens, Edinburgh. Dr Woods encouraged everyone who had no theatre experience by sharing how she put on the plays without background in that field. She recommended getting in touch with other professionals and engaging people who have skills and expertise in different areas, so that everyone can work together with clear job descriptions. And above all prayer: "Do not go onto the stage of ministry without the backcloth of intercession".

This conference was, again, an exciting and inspiring day! Held at a busy time when preparations for upcoming Easter performances are well under way, it has focussed our attention and prayers for all passion plays and all people involved in them during the next few months.