

hightide

DECEMBER 2009 SCARBOROUGH'S ESSENTIAL GUIDE

The basement tapes: 30 years of Crescent Arts

Swansea standup:
Rob Brydon

AND: music arts theatre comedy
film exhibitions poetry food & drink

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It's the little things that make the difference, as they so cannily noted in *Pulp Fiction*. Crescent Arts has been beaver away for 30 years now and the opening of its archive has revealed a phenomenal body of work, built up fairly quietly but collectively making a big difference to Scarborough's cultural life. Stroll on the next thirty.

Elsewhere this month there's a rare chance to catch one of the hottest, and funniest, comedians on the circuit, Rob Brydon. We profile the slow burner who's finally hit the big time.

Cover pic: Crescent Arts

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This month

Game plan for change

Filmmaker uses computers to work with local residents

The basement tapes

Janis Bright on Crescent Arts, Scarborough's cutting edge studios

Swansea standup: Rob Brydon

Roger Osborne hails the Elvis fan from the Gower

FILM



Janis Bright on a European platform for Scarborough stories

Viewers always want the bad news, Scarborough filmmaker turned researcher Claudia Nye has confirmed.

Claudia took her interactive film *Barrowcliffe Stories* to the World Forum Theatre Festival in Vienna last month. The film can be halted at various points to allow the audience to choose different segments from the branching narrative.

The choices in Vienna were the same as audiences had made in all previous four screenings: the worst case scenario. Claudia said: 'The darkest Barrowcliffe made it again to the big screen, setting its social stigma in stone. The positive avenues, once again, did not make it.'

The research has confirmed to Claudia that other ways of telling are needed to present a true picture of estates like Barrowcliffe, that can engage local people and help foster social change. She has developed an interactive model based on computer games, called *Forum Stories*. This does not exclude the antisocial material but uses it in a way that aims to help the process of change.

At the conclusion of last month's festival, Claudia joined the main global players of Forum Theatre for a presentation and discussion on developing interactive material for social change. The group decided to support the development of a social enterprise that will work on two community based projects: Claudia's *Forum Stories*, and a play about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



Current Crescent artists: clockwise from left front - Jonathan Green, Ton Dawson, Simon Farid, Stuart Cameron, Helen Donnelly, Sue Timmins, Megan Owenson. Opposite: 2009 show *The Wild*

Janis Bright charts the opening of a very special 30-year history

Over here, a bloke in a bathtub jostles with a globe in a box. Crafted shapes suggest fruit baskets, but then the outdoor hovering grabs you eye. A Beano strip is a reminder of the day the group created a giant Dennis the Menace cartoon on the beach. Raku, prints, installations made of string, metal sculpture. Hundreds, if not thousands, of images plaster the walls of the area's most creative basement. This is the 30-year archive of Crescent Arts, and the walls are stirring up a crowd of memories.

It's the first time the record of creative output from this

collective of artists has gone on public show. The people, their activities and the work they have produced have all been carefully catalogued – but until now the stacked file boxes have remained closed.

Now the photographic diary, the press cuttings, the posters and all the rest are on display in the place where it all happens – the basement of the art gallery in The Crescent, Scarborough.

There are videos and slides of the very first Art Day, shown appropriately on some ancient machines dug out of the cupboard for the occasion.

Lately it's been fashionable to call this the 'artists' quarter' of town, but this splurge of images is a good reminder that Crescent Arts has been here right from its start in 1979. Back then, two men with an idea – Mel Noble and John Jones – got together with other like minded artists to create something that would be more than the sum of its parts. There would be artists' studios in the basement but the essence was to draw in local people, and the group would be steered to that end by a governing board.

That's pretty much how it is today, with currently seven artists in residence. Nowadays

The basement tapes



there's an administrator as well, in the shape of Stuart Cameron. He's been working on plans for the next phase of Crescent Arts, which will see the collective literally branch out into new territory.

The group has taken a lease on the old Ward auctioneers' building in Queen Street and will spend 18 months creating work and inviting the public in. Stuart admits taking on the very large space is a gamble. 'It is a risk, but like everything Crescent Arts has done, it's worth taking that risk. I know it will work out,' he says.

The project will build on this

year's successful Shoplift initiative where artists took over empty high street shops to put on quick shows and brighten up the area. 'That was great but it's a bit hit and run – you have to respond off the cuff as opportunities arise,' Stuart says. 'This will give us a decent amount of time to plan better.'

There will be more activities in the basement too. The group plans to make the most of its print resources, which include no fewer than three large presses that can handle etchings, lino and woodblock printing, as well as other techniques. Kiln firing, which was one of the activities on the

very first Art Day, also remains popular.

Those who want their imagination fired should get along to the archive show and remind themselves what art brings to our lives. Stuart sums it up: 'It's a phenomenal concentration of work, and a reminder that whatever happens is down to the people here. It's wayward and wandering, but that's the nature of the beast.'

Crescent Arts' archive show runs from Sat 5 to Sat 12 December, 10.30am to 4.40pm, free

Swansea standup: Rob Brydon

**Roger Osborne
on a visitor
from the Gower**



Pic: BBC/Baby Cow

I declare an interest: as not only a Welshman, but as an Elvis-loving man of Swansea, Rob Brydon is playing on home turf with me. One of the funniest men in Britain along, in my unbiased view, with fellow Taff Rhod Gilbert, Brydon has burst upon the nation through the hit TV show Gavin and Stacey.

It's been a slow burn rather than an overnight leap to fame though, and Brydon clearly feels that is in his favour. 'It's built up over time and I hope that means it will be more sustainable in years to come.' The Welsh have a reputation for being a bit dark and moody, and this was reflected in Brydon's first success, playing taxi driver Keith Barrett in Marion and Geoff. The monologues to camera about his ex-wife and her new lover were both heartbreaking and hilarious, a genuinely intelligent, poignant and funny mixture that put the rest of British TV comedy in the shade.

Since then Brydon has used his native wit to good effect on radio and TV panel shows. The behind-the-scenes Annually Retentive was a British version of the brilliant Larry Sanders Show, and stood up well in comparison, with Brydon's trademark worried expression in good use. Duelling wits with Steve Coogan made the movie A Cock And Bull Story another hilarious behind-the-scenes experience.

Through all this Brydon has kept his stand-up performances going. His latest tour started small, sold out and got bigger and bigger. Catch him at the Futurist this month.

Rob Brydon at the Futurist: Sat 5 December £17.50