

Birds of Paradise 25th anniversary speech

Fiona Hyslop – Cabinet Secretary

I wish to thank you for your invitation to this evening's reception to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Birds of Paradise Theatre Company. And thank you Patrick Harvey for hosting this event.

It's good to see so many of you here this evening to celebrate Birds of Paradise's long-standing work to advance disabled people's equality and participation in theatre and the arts.

I'm delighted that recent developments mean you will be able to continue to support and champion disabled people's participation in Scotland's vibrant arts scene.

I know you have lots of exciting plans ahead including continuing your preparations for your production of Robert [Softley-Gale]'s *My Left / Right Foot: The Musical*, at this year's Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

As a Government we are committed to tackling inequality and making Scotland a stronger, fairer and more equal place to live.

Culture has an important part to play in creating that fairer and more inclusive Scotland.

It's at the heart of everything we do as individuals and communities. It has the power to change and connect us. And it contributes to our health, wealth and success as a nation.

As many of you will know we are currently developing a culture strategy with and for the people of Scotland

In December we completed an open national conversation about the strategy to find out what matters to people about culture and what they want the future for culture in Scotland to be like. This involved extensive public consultation events across Scotland.

It was a privilege to attend and participate in many events – from Edinburgh and Dunfermline in the south to Skye in the north west – and it was good to hear a wide range of views, including the importance of increased diversity among role models across race, disability, socio-economic background.

The strategy will set out a vision and priorities for the future development of culture in Scotland, and will enable everyone, including disabled people, to have the opportunity to take part in or contribute to our diverse, energetic and rich cultural life.

More than anything, the strategy gives us an opportunity to promote [position] culture as a human right, where the right to creative expression, the right to participate and the right to earn a living from artistic and cultural pursuits is widely recognised across society.

We will shortly be publishing our engagement report which will shape early thinking on a draft Strategy which will issue for public consultation during 2018.

As Scotland's only disabled-led theatre company, your contribution to tackling inequality and advancing disabled people's rights is widely recognised – both at home and abroad.

For the past twenty-five years you have worked to promote access to and diversity within Scotland's cultural sector.

You have been committed to working with and employing disabled and non-disabled actors and practitioners and, literally, putting them centre stage – demonstrating the excellence of disabled artists and performers and that they are a vital part of the artistic landscape of Scotland

And you have created award-winning, critically acclaimed productions, such as *Wendy Hoose*, *Crazy Jane* and *Blanche and Butch*, that tell audiences new and diverse stories and helping to bring about positive change in the theatre and arts in Scotland.

In addition to these productions you also work with emerging disabled performers; provide bespoke Disability Equality Training; and help develop the skills of and increase the networking opportunities for disabled artists.

And we shouldn't forget the awards you have received, both here in Scotland and abroad too.

You received an award in 2016 for your productions of *Purposeless Movement*; *Role Shift*; *Wendy Hoose*; and *Urod: The Last Show*.

You were runners up in the Euan's Guide Accessible Fringe Award 2015 - for the production of *Wendy Hoose*

And you received a Moscow Golden Mask Theatre Award Nomination for your 2016 production in Siberia of *Urod: The Last Show*.

So congratulations to everyone involved with Birds of Paradise and to Patrick Harvie for hosting this evening's fitting reception to celebrate the Silver Anniversary of the Birds of Paradise Theatre Company.

I warmly congratulate Birds of Paradise for all that that you have achieved as an accessible arts company since 1993 - placing disabled artists centre stage and supporting the sector to nurture the next generation of disabled artist, performers and audiences – both at home and abroad.

I wish you continuing success – for the next twenty-five years and more - in creating world-class, innovative and accessible work by disabled and non-disabled artists, writers and theatre-makers, and in nurturing the next generation of disabled artists, performers and audiences helping ensure barriers to accessing and participating in Scotland's culture are broken down. Thank you.