

Monograph Review

TITLE: Celebrating Disability Arts [Available free of charge from www.artscouncil.org.uk, in print and a variety of alternative formats].

PUBLISHER: Arts Council England

COST: No Cost

REVIEWER: Steven E. Brown

Celebrating Disability Arts is an exciting document. In the introduction, Maria Engle, England's Minister for Disabled People, states:

Our dynamic and creative arts scene is something this country can be proud of. It is timely then, in the European Year of Disabled People, that we celebrate the quality and vibrancy of disability arts. This publication from Arts Council England seeks to do that – to raise the profile of disabled arts practitioners, to leave a legacy and to mark the achievements of the past four decades.

About a dozen artists and art groups are among those discussed and profiled in this brief (about 30 oversized pages) monograph, that celebrates thirty years of developing disability arts by companies and individuals. Most of those profiled I have not encountered previously, like Minika Green, a singer with a mobility disability; Maria Oshodi, a writer-performer who's blind and helped create the first performing arts company in the United Kingdom, Extant, managed by blind arts professionals; and Heart 'n Soul, a musical theater group and more, including DJs, tutors and a technical crew, all of whom have learning disabilities. Descriptions of these artists and the others described would be skewed in any brief review, because almost all these performers are engaged in multiple artistic and activist mediums. So it comes as no surprise that one of the artists is Johnny Crescendo, a rock and rolling musician with a mobility disability who's been in the United States many times. He helped created DAN, the Direct Action Network, modeled on the U.S.'s ADAPT.

What makes this document so appealing is its combination of text, written by Allan Sutherland, exploring the disability arts movement, both historically and contemporaneously; written and pictorial profiles of artists; and the vibrancy of the coalition of disability arts in the United Kingdom that's clearly represented in this document.

In the mid-1980s, Anthony Tusler, of California, in the U.S., assembled a show that celebrated disability and the arts and published a booklet about it called *Disability and the Arts²: An Exhibit Confronting Our Attitudes and Experiences* (Rohnert Park, CA: Sonoma State University Office for Students with Disabilities, 1985). That was a groundbreaking document. The first of its kind that I know about in the U.S. This publication is similar. It will clearly alert anyone who is unaware of the disability arts scene in the U. K. just how active it actually is. For those of us who have known about its existence, but not who all the players are, this is a wonderful find and will complement any library, be a useful class tool, and a fun read.

Review: Music

TITLE: Angryfish, Eight Men Called No, and Barbed Wire and Pot-Holes,
(Available from www.angryfish.co.uk).

REVIEWER: Steven E. Brown

Robin Surgeoner, aka, the Angryfish, is an English activist who likes to rock'n'roll. His short play CD, Eight Men Called No and the full-length Barbed Wire and Pot-Holes, are meant to be played loud. Barbed is also the story of a man's awakening from being a person with a disability to being a member of an oppressed group and learning what he can do to change the world for the better. It's the first complete story CD I'm aware of by a person with a disability about the disability experience. Lyrics from one song, "Free Our People," are included below. Check it out.

There are people - everywhere
Living their lives without a care
There are people everywhere - everywhere
Living their lives without a choice

CHORUS

I hear you asking - if this is really true
Surely we all have the right to do what we want to do
Please don't be surprised - how could you realize
It's sometimes hard to see the truth before your eyes

Basement Billy ain't got a view

His rooms got windows, but he ain't got a clue -
That the drugs they claim are helping - helping him to survive
Have really shut his mind down and are killing him alive

CHORUS

Freaky Freddy's got his hands inside his pants
Do you think he chose this and composed his scary rants
Or the scarring down his cheeks from endless acid tears
Or could it be that he has been locked away for countless endless tears

They might have been beaten - if lucky only raped
If you're here celebrate cause you've escaped
You have the power to destroy their ivory steeples
You have the power to join in and FREE OUR PEOPLE