

Report on North American Festival of Wales,
Richmond, British Columbia,
August 28-31, 2003

Introduction

Planning began in June 2001 after Phoenix had withdrawn their offer to host. Lynn Owens Whalen and I took it upon ourselves to fill the gap by proposing Richmond as the venue at the 2001 meeting in San Jose. The Board of trustees accepted the proposal and also that this would be the first North American Festival of Wales and also that the sole responsibility would be the WNGGA, i.e. there would be no local society co-sponsor.

The purpose of the WNGGA is to preserve, develop and promote our Welsh religious and cultural heritage and our religious and cultural traditions, including but not limited to the Gymanfa Ganu, and to do all things necessary and proper and enhance the same. Clearly the new concept of the North American Festival of Wales must support this purpose. The intention of the Richmond planning committee was to follow the recommendations of the NAFOW Strategic Planning Committee (to that time). Additional suggestions are also in his report.

Planning

The Executive Planning Team of 9 people was Chaired by Alan Upshall (WNGGA Past President at the time to the Festival) and Lynn Owens Whalen (WNGGA President at the time of the Festival) and also on the committee was WNGGA BOT member Gerri Baker Parry. The remaining members of the Executive Planning Team (EPT) were WNGGA members drawn from the Pacific Northwest. The team members with responsibilities were:

Alan Upshall	Sponsorship and Entertainment
Lyn Owens Whalen	Catering and Tours
Neville Thomas	Seminars
Helen Steinle	Treasurer
Philip Humphries	Eisteddfod
Gerri Baker Parry	Marketplace and Films
David Lintern	Sunday Events
Don Murray	Marketing and Publicity
Gaynor Evans	Secretary

This EPT was supported by Support Leaders who were delegated a sub responsibility for a section of the Festival, each reporting into a member of the planning team.

Kathy Thomas	Banquet
Sue Wagner	Intersession meal
Mary Lewis	Tea Room
Ellen Webber	Budget
Evans Paschal	Festival booklet and Advertising
Larry Mitchell and Kathleen Ritchie	Decorations
Tom Gething	Informal Singing
Brian Parry	Logistics
Rob Lintern	Web Site
Wilf Owens Whalen	Tours
Huw Upshall	Technical Support

Jeff Owen Grand Concert
Cynthia St. Clair
and Eifion Williams Publicity

The planning team are proud to have produced the First North American Festival of Wales and to have been so remarkably successful not only financially but also in creating a very high quality program displaying the very best of Welsh performers, speakers and heritage.

Review:

The EPT embarked upon the planning with the following premises:

- *That the Festival must be of high quality. Contributors should be first rate, even if there were fees involved*
- *The planning would minimize logistical problems for Festival Attendees*
- *That we would try to engender a youth theme to the Festival, with new and interesting features to appeal to our delegates and to hope to attract a younger group of people.*
- *That we would find money to support artists*

- *To realize a significant profit.*

Premise 1: *That the Festival must be of high quality. Contributors should be first rate, even if there were fees involved*

We went out of our way to attract good and professional people. We were rewarded with excellent concerts, seminars and Gymanfaoedd.

Mabon was a great success. This was our attempt to stretch the boundary of Welsh music and to appeal to the younger element and it worked. They were great and did exactly what we asked of them. There was some small disgruntlement at the Mabon concert on the opening night but we deliberately put them there to set the tone for the weekend and as a balance for our other concerts. We needed to make sure that there was something for everyone at the Festival. One person demanded his money back for the Mabon concert but he never came to see me. Our 'after banquet' concert was, deliberately, a total contrast to Mabon and it worked. Bronn Journey and his co performers could not have produced a better light entertainment program. Again, quality professional people, up to the standard of the price of admission. The Dunvant Choir, a 'top five' Choir from Wales, and International singer Jason Howard combined to produce an outstanding and unique concert on Saturday and it was the pinnacle of the Festival. It was excellently received. Three contrasting concerts... three standing ovations. We could not have planned it better.

Seminar speakers, were selected on the basis of their expertise, knowledge and balance for our program. We went again for the best we could find, from the genealogy expert at the National Library of Wales, to the winner of Welsh books of the month author, to innovative teacher of the Welsh language, to the top breeder of Corgi dogs in British Columbia and so on.

We also went for quality for our Sunday activities. Our goal was to bring new people into the mix and so we invited a minister from Wales. He did give an excellent well received sermon. The Gymanfa Director, Haydn James, directed probably the best Gymanfa sessions in a long time.

Special music: several people were disappointed that we did not have the Duvant Choir on stage for the special music. This was deliberate. We wanted to display the quality of our eisteddfod competition by presenting the winners. There have been complaints in the past that the special music and Gymafaoedd were becoming too much like concert entertainment. Our special music was that: crisp and fitting for the occasion. The final special piece with Jeff Howard playing the organ solo rounded it off very well.

On the strength of a professional recommendation and hearing him play, we employed Jeff Howard as our staff pianist for the weekend. It was one of our best choices. He was expert at the semi professional eisteddfod; accompanied Jason Howard excellently in the concert and was brilliant in the Gymanfa. In many ways he was the find of the weekend.

The Eisteddfod competitions were excellent, especially the Semi Professional competition. By presenting a competition with a significant prize we were able to attract strong competitors.

As well as hiring Mabon we innovated with the open-air concert at the City Hall as our opening ceremony (and the local TV and press were there) and we followed this by a Salmon BBQ which was very well received. We reduced the number of tours to one per day. This made sure that each was profitable. We introduced Welsh movies, which attracted over 60 people to the two showings.

Premise 2: The planning would minimize logistical problems for Festival Attendees

Because we located the Festival in Richmond, suburb to Vancouver, primarily because of cost, we anticipated several logistic problems, especially since we had to use several sites. We worked closely with the hotel, local venues, and transportation company to make sure that the services for those who found difficulty in moving around were suitable. The most expensive was the shuttle service for the Concert. We built \$5 into the ticket price to help cover the cost. We added \$3 per head to the hotel room cost to cover the cost of shuttle back and fore to the Gymanfa location. We intended all seminars to take place in the main floor conference rooms. We were not able to achieve that. Our signage was very decorative and well dispersed and in addition to the Festival booth in the market place most times we had information available in the hotel lobby. We achieved our purpose and there were very few complaints of on the ground technical difficulties from the attendees.

Premise 3. That we would try to engender a youth theme to the Festival, with new and interesting features to appeal to our delegates and to hope to attract a younger group of people.

We were totally unable to create the youth theme.

- *We invited a youth choir from Wales, Ysgol Gerdd Ceredigion and offered them significant financial support (\$18,000 of which \$9,000 was sponsored) but they declined indicating inability to raise money to support a tour. We also offered to help them arrange a tour and to find hosted accommodation to reduce their costs. All to no avail.*

- *Our youth Eisteddfod competitions (choral and Solo) were unsubscribed and we had to cancel*
- *Our attempts to attract a youth rugby team either from Wales or locally were unsuccessful*

Given these disappointments we were left with no option but to create an imaginative program that displayed some of the many different aspects of Welsh culture using performers at the younger end of the age spectrum and who had not been seen at the weekend before, i.e. variety and new faces.

Premise 4: That we would find money to support artists

Because of our demand for quality we made extra special efforts to ensure that we could pay for it and we worked hard to obtain sponsorship at any level.

- We recruited heavily and raised money aggressively. On behalf of the WNGGA and the Festival I visited Wales twice to sell the change in name and concept and to raise the level of visibility of our event within the North American Welsh scene. I met with representatives of the Wales Tourist Board, Welsh development Agency, Welsh Assembly, Wales International, and British Council. Not all contacts were productive.
- In addition we decided to bring local societies into the fray in two ways: by requesting an interest free loan (which was paid back as soon as we had enough money) and by encouraging them to sponsor an activity. Each did so and received much publicity in return. Puget Sound Welsh Sponsored the After Banquet Concert; Victoria Welsh Sponsored the Welsh Language Seminar; the Vancouver Welsh Society sponsored the Multicultural Tour by providing lunch; the Welsh Association of the North West sponsored the John Baker Seminars
- We convinced a Vancouver businessman to sponsor the Dunvant Choir.
- We encouraged local business, which did not wish to sponsor, to bulk buy grand concert tickets for guests and staff.
- We changed the sponsorship direction of the Wales Tourist Board by attaching their support to Jason Howard, rather than general for the Festival. That made it much easier to sell.
- The Welsh development Agency followed with direct sponsorship of Mabon
- The Welsh Books council gave \$1000 in return for market place space and general publicity.
- We were generously supported by David G. Morris for our Eisteddfod prize.
- Gymanfa Director Haydn James was sponsored by Col. Alf Reese
- We encouraged home institutions to support seminar speakers (successful with National Library of Wales for E. Baskerville, UWIC Cardiff for Terry Breverton.).
- Publicity was rewarded e.g. for their willingness to print all our festival articles through the year, Y Drych and Ninnau received free market place space, and Yr Enfys and the Celtic Connection a free half page brochure advert and market place space.

- CBC radio received free logo recognition on our print materials for their free radio advertising during the month of June.
- The Welsh North American Chamber of Commerce sponsored their seminar and Annual meeting and also co sponsored the reception.
- Four seminar speakers generously self financed (Ron Rees, Rhiannon Acree, WNACC and WTB)

The sponsorship generally covered all of the expenses of the invited guest, allowing maximum return from ticket sales. In return for the sponsorship we gave businesses free market place space and a free half page or full page advert in the program book. WTB and WDA also had logo recognition on posters and publicity. The local societies received the same.

Others received full recognition, David Morris for example presented the prize to the winner.

Sponsorship is critical to the success of the Festival.

Our fund raising efforts were rewarded by achieving a total of \$65,000 (Can) most of which was targeted to specific people.

We were unfortunately not able to raise sponsorship for the minister, and he therefore cost us accommodation and air fare. The collection at the very well attended Sunday Service however, covered all of the costs. One can question whether we should have invited him but we took the risk of finding sponsorship. He also was a new face to the congregation. It is important that we have different people each year.

Premise 5: To realize a significant profit.

The provisional accounting has shown that we realized a **profit of \$35,898.66 CDN.**

To date the WNGGA **has received \$19,126 cash (US).**

In obtaining this profit we have also:

Paid \$142.81 US for the NAFOW internet web site hosting (good to 2005)

The hotel bills for WNGGA responsibilities in Richmond:

4,075.11 CDN Richmond Inn

900.73 CDN for Hilton Hotel

Converts to \$3,682 (rounded off) US

Total cash and equivalents already to WNGGA = \$22,951 US

In addition this profit:

- Covered the cost of the Festival of Wales Recipe Books
- Covered the costs of the Festival of Wales T-shirts and Hats

- Covered the costs of decorations and logo that have been transferred to the Buffalo committee.

For these last three items, any revenues generated by sales in Buffalo (and beyond) are all profits to future venues.

From the profit, **the three local societies (Puget Sound Welsh Association; Vancouver Welsh Society and Victoria Welsh Society) share \$8989.53 CDN** as part of the agreement for their loan of seed money (which was all repaid).

The two Richmond bank accounts are still open since we are awaiting final approval for GST from the Canadian government. **The US account has \$1006.56 and the Canadian account \$119.64. We estimate that we owe the Canadian Government \$1800CDN.**

Comments to finances:

Our budget and plan was sound and have been previously circulated to the BOT. Our event management solid. When we realized about 5 weeks before the festival that we were not going to see the spike in registrants that we were expecting so that we would reach 800, we quickly stopped spending and revisited items. Publicity budget was put on hold. Hotel AV cost was cut by 2,000 and Shuttle service was reduced. All together we saved about \$10,000 in the budget numbers.

Part of our budget also was a cash back account from the hotel (\$2 per room) and with the reduction in numbers this declined also. We found ourselves using the sponsorship money to support the Festival. The reason is the fixed cost. Our budget was such that about 600 registrants covered the fixed costs and the profit would come from the last 200 and Grand Concert. The registrants did not arrive and I have already commented on the Grand Concert. Those 200 registrants would have put about \$50,000 on our bottom line. Had we made 800 registrants we would have made about \$40,000 profit. Had we got close to the average of the last 5 years (approx 1,000) we would have madean awful lot on money.

Other comments:

Attendance:

This was a major disappointment. Despite our efforts throughout the year, there were only approximately 650 registrants, 150 below our pessimistic budget figures. Inside this, all our concerts were well attended and we drew some people in off the streets. Also our seminars, some that we had placed into smaller rooms because of number prediction ended up as standing room only (Lloyd George seminars). We ran 26 seminars which competed with the eisteddfod on Saturday Morning. Our suggestion for the future is to run no more than 20 seminars and to raise the prominence of the Semi-professional eisteddfod competition. This, while attended by only about 80 people, was an excellent competition worthy of a much greater appreciation.

Our biggest disappointment was the attendance at the Grand Concert. There were only 1108 paid ticket attendances resulting in low revenue.

Attendance at the Church service attendance was unexpectedly high with over 400 chairs filled, and the Gymanfa attendance was as expected at approximately 750 in each session.

Publicity

We spent a significant sum of money on publicity and the professional creation of documents. Part of the philosophy for the changing to the North American Festival of Wales was to recruit new people to our event and hopefully into membership. These people need to be reached and the only avenue is by publicity, radio, TV, newspapers, internet and posters. We contracted a professional designer to create the well-accepted, and now recognized, logo. This will save future years money. The designer created our document formats, which will also save future years money. We made banners and other publicity and presentation materials that were deliberately made generic so that they could be transferred year to year. These have already been passed on to HQ. With these materials we not only targeted the WNGGA Welsh but also the general community. Even our articles in the North American newspapers (especially Ninnau) were formatted so that there was consistency in presentation. This was well done by Ninnau.

Hotel

Selection of the host hotel is critical. We did well because the hotel were with us all of the way. We had all rooms for meetings throughout the two years given to us free, including tea and coffee. During the festival itself, the hotel staff acted like extra volunteers. They moved our equipment around; they set all the rooms up they responded to our requests immediately, all without extra fees. Unusually for hotels, they worked with us for catering and allowed us to sell tickets for the banquet, intersession meal and barbecue, right up to the meal time. I have never seen that before. The hotel was fully staffed at all times. (I was approached in the middle of the banquet to be told that this was the best banquet meal that has been prepared in many years). Our point people at the hotel were superb.

Contracts.

We did not write one contract with performers. Only one group failed to live up to theirs, the Dunvant Choir and we have written to them expressing our strong displeasure. An email agreement should be equivalent to a contract (even legally) so there has to be discussion about the demand for a written contract. The Dunvant choir is the first group that I have ever worked with that has not lived up to its agreement. Should we insist on written agreement? What would we realistically do if a group broke that contract as opposed to breaking an agreement? These questions need answering by the BOT.

We did have written contracts with all of our suppliers and facilities. All of these groups performed at the highest of professional levels. It was a great pleasure to work with them all. Ticketmaster was the only one that could not get the sums right. We had to work it out for them.

All documents relating to planning and budgeting and strategies have been sent to the WNGGA through special mailings and though reports to BOT meetings. All surplus materials have been shipped to HQ for transfer to Buffalo for 2004. All that remains is for the Canadian Customs to complete the GST accounting. Once that is done the bank accounts will be closed and any remaining money disbursed.

Respectfully

Alan Upshall
Chairman, North American Festival of Wales, Richmond, 2003.

Addendum to report:

In July 2004 we were able to close the books following resolution of Canadian GST issues. We sent \$1336.52 more to WNGGA. The total profit (distributed and payments of accounts in Richmond on behalf of WNGGA) to WNGGA was \$24,287.33 US, in addition to the extra items listed above.

Alan Upshall

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14 April 2004

Dear Alan:

On behalf of the Welsh Society of Vancouver I would like to thank you and your 2003 Richmond/Vancouver Festival of Wales Committee for the event's success and especially for the benefits that have accrued to our Society from our participation in the Festival. The sum of \$2991.55 we received as our share of the Festival's proceeds is especially welcome at this time as the society is facing some unforeseen building repair costs.

At our last Executive Meeting members expressed their appreciation of your efforts in assuring the success of the event despite the lower than expected turnout. As an Associated Welsh Organization of the WNGGA we very much appreciated the opportunity to support the North American Festival of Wales and, together with the Puget Sound Welsh Society and the Victoria Welsh Society, in each contributing seed money to the Festival Committee, money which was later returned to us in full.

We were also delighted to host a lunch at the Cambrian Hall as part of one of the tours and also in providing four members of the Welsh Society - Gaynor Evans, Don Murray, Lynn Owens-Whalen and Neville Thomas - to the organizing committee, in addition to the many more members who volunteered their services to ensure the Festival's success. The Society is pleased that the North American Festival of Wales came to our city and that we were able to support the WNGGA in promoting Wales and Welsh culture in North America.

Once again, thank you. We very much appreciate the experience we gained from the new format of the 'National', now the North American Festival of Wales. I assure you that the Welsh community in

Vancouver will have fond and positive memories of the 2003 Richmond/Vancouver Festival of Wales.

Yours sincerely

Jane Byrne
President, Welsh Society of Vancouver.