

Scots funding body cooks up a new storm

DAVID KETTLE

Scottish arts funding body Creative Scotland (CS) has come under fire for using public money to finance a commercial tv cookery programme. The 20-part series *Country Show Cook Off*, commissioned by BBC2 from Scottish commercial broadcaster STV, received £14,900 of funding from CS as part of an award of £170,000 given to STV over three years.

This follows a controversial announcement of funding changes from CS earlier in the year that will move 49 arts organisations away from fixed, yearly funding and on to support on a project-by-project basis. This change provoked widespread alarm in the Scottish arts community, as well as fears that, with its new powers to decide which specific projects would receive its support, CS would effectively become artistic director of Scottish culture. In a partial climb-down at the end of June, CS admitted that the funding changes had been rushed through and extended fixed funding from March 2013 until September 2013.

John Harris, artistic co-director of the Red Note Ensemble, one of the music groups affected by the funding changes, said he was cautiously optimistic: 'Things have got clearer for us since the original announcements. There have been some changes that have given us a bit of breathing space, and while we're not 100% certain that we know how it's going to go, we're more confident about it than we were.'

Scottish culture secretary Fiona Hyslop welcomed the changes and the extra time. But speaking in Edinburgh in August, she accepted concerns that the funding changes would mean CS making key culture decisions, saying: 'I am passionate, and I feel very strongly, that it is not for administrators, bureaucrats or governments to tell artists what to do.'

The revelation about CS's funding of the tv cookery programme provoked a vitriolic article by commentator Kenneth Roy in the online cultural magazine *Scottish Review*. He wrote:

'Why do they need public support to turn out routine commercial tat? If there was surplus cash to splash around, celebrity chefs in their vintage van might just about be excusable as a fluffy extra to the core activities of Creative Scotland. But there isn't. Budgets are stretched, fine companies are struggling for survival, important artists feel unwanted in their own country.'

Defending the support, a CS spokesperson said that the grant was given as part of a wider drive to stimulate tv production in Scotland, and stressed that it was not for CS to decide which specific tv projects received its money. However, commentators have pointed out that this is at odds with CS's wider funding changes, which will enable it to choose the specific arts projects that it funds.

In the midst of this turmoil, CS has started a search for a new media relations and PR manager. One of the role's key responsibilities is 'communicating our successes to a range of media'.

New College scholar scoops major organ prize

CLARE STEVENS

Ben Bloor, 20, organ scholar of New College, Oxford, has won the senior category of the second Northern Ireland International Organ Competition (NIIOC), held in Armagh 20-22 August. Born in Derby, Mr Bloor was a chorister at Derby Cathedral and organ scholar at St George's Chapel, Windsor. He is now in his second undergraduate year at New College.

In addition to the £1,000 NIIOC cash prize sponsored by Allen Organs he will receive a professionally recorded CD and online promotional package and will give hosted recitals in Westminster Abbey, Trinity College Cambridge, Christ Church Cathedral Dublin and St Anne's Cathedral Belfast. A recital recorded in St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral, Armagh, was broadcast on 2 September on BBC Radio Ulster and will be

followed by other showcase opportunities under the auspices of the competition.

Runner-up and winner of the NIIOC Bach Prize of £200 awarded in memory of Northern Irish organist William McDonald was London-based Martyn Noble, 21, who has just taken up the post of organ scholar at Southwark Cathedral after completing a year at St Mary's Church, Battersea. Third prize went to Tom Etheridge, 18, of Eton College, organ scholar-elect of King's College, Cambridge, and Michael Papadopoulos, 21, of Trinity College, Oxford, was highly commended by the judging panel, which was chaired by Professor Kimberly Marshall, professor of organ at Arizona State University, assisted by David Hill, chief conductor of the BBC Singers, and Mark Duley, organist of the Collegiate Church of St Nicholas, Galway.

The NIIOC is unique in offering an important performance platform and competition experience specifically to organists under the age of 21.

'I don't think there is anything like this anywhere else in the world,' said Professor Marshall. Reflecting on his experience, Ben Comeau, winner of the 2011 senior



competition, said that in addition to the value of the cash prize and performing opportunities 'what really struck me about the competition was that it involved far more than just playing in front of the judges. The whole trip was filled with various performances, informal discussions about music, and still enough space to relax in the surprisingly chilled environment.'

The competition also features two categories for young players. First prize of £300 in the intermediate category 2012 went to Martina Smyth, a student of the Royal Irish Academy of Music, Dublin, with Catherine Oliver highly commended, and first prize of £200 in the junior category was jointly awarded to Ellen Mawhinney and Richard Carey, both from Belfast.