

## **Speech to Everyday Creativity Conference**

### **Lord Steve Bassam**

A few months back I received an intriguing email from Nick Ewbank asking if I would be prepared to say a few words at the opening of today conference.

Nowadays I tend to be a bit selective about where and when I agree and accept speaking invites. They have to conform to a number of criteria, roughly in this order. Do they come from someone I know, is it local, does it help the City I love to live in, does it speak to values I share and finally is it subject of interest, something I know about.

Sometimes if I am being a touch bloody minded I invent a mystery criteria which enables me to say NO.

So this invite ticked four of the five boxes – leaving just one big gap ... I thought ... But I know nothing about ‘everyday creativity’, what is it?

So looked at the draft programme and thought some more.... Then I realised that although I don’t see myself as a ‘natural creative’ – I no longer play a musical instrument, I don’t paint or draw or sculpt, to hear me sing would distress even the most generous of audiences.

I’m not a stand up comic(though politicians like to think they are). I don’t knit, or sew, or make quilts. I do take photographs ...but badly. According to my family my culinary skills though brave are suboptimal.

My decorative eye is less than perfect and even though I went to a secondary modern school my metal work and woodworking

talents and technical drawing abilities were undiscovered, dormant if you like, by the time I left.

But I do like to think of myself as someone who appreciates the arts in their many forms and media. I am someone who would happily spend whole days in a gallery or museum. Go to a festival for a weekend. I love performance and music and books and literature and the spoken word .... Just so long as I am not the person providing any of it.

Then after some more reflection I realised I was missing the point.

Inside all of us there a creative person seeking to reach out and seek new experiences, find other ways of expressing our feelings and wants and desires. I like writing. I probably don't do enough of it, but I know that when I do I take pleasure from seeing the written words in front of me.

I really like talking – I would be a poorer politician if I didn't. I enjoy debate and discussion and humour and making things happen.

All of these things are the very essence of creativity and they are everyday. My mother was a maker. She excelled at singing, she could knit, sow, crochet, grow things, bake and cook. Make an arrangement of flowers brighten a room or a church. She loved performing whether it was the piano or amateur dramatics and she loved a good argument. But she never considered herself an artist .... But she was an everyday creative.

So what I like about this conference and its programme, is that it raises the prospect of the ordinary, the obscure and the abstract all that is human nature, that is the essence of creativity being recognised for what it is – namely art in its most democratic form. Something that we can all experience and feel a connection with and too. Something that is not rarefied or elite but part of the

everyday, within our compass of understanding. All about us as a collective entity.

Finally I simply ask what better place to hold such an event?

The place where anything can happen and often does, or as Keith Waterhouse once put it looks as though it is 'helping the police with their enquiries', where the fringe is often the mainstream and the mainstream the fringe, a city that currently brands itself as never knowingly normal. I give you - Brighton and Hove the south's cultural capital.