There was a big May day march that ended up at Calvin Hall and a number of performers got up and sang songs and did comedy and routines. If you're talking about workers' culture as oral culture, there wasn't much of that. This was an attempt to meld traditional forms of theatre (using people's own language) with popular culture. There was a group called the Miss Jewels who are five women from London, and they do Rap (talking) and a capella versions of popular songs and comedy routines. It's very much like street theatre, but it was in a place called the Third Eye (or I aye), which is an artists' resource centre, bookshop, theatre, café and bar. It's a centre for progressive artists in the town.

Did the festival succeed? In other words, did it manage to attract a group of people who otherwise might not go to the theatre?

It really did. I noticed it most at a production of Wildcat, which is a breakthrough from 7:84 of Scotland. They decided that they wanted to do full-scale musicals. They used humour, theatrics, drama and every kind of device they could think of to get people's attention. They used a full band. Their production was called "Business in the Backyard" and it was about Nicaragua and El Salvador. And it was one of the most stunning pieces of theatre that I've ever seen. It was in one of the very large theatres and they were filled every night. And they weren't the usual theatre audience or even the peace movement. It was a very disparate audience. They packed the place because they didn't understand the notions of entertainment, excitement and drama. It had a political message about Central America, but people were willing to pay to hear it because it was also a good night out. The evening that I saw the performance the ambassador from Nicaragua was brought up on stage and presented with a cheque for £10,000 which was raised by a trade union. It was a brilliant use of theatre for bringing an issue right home.

It was much less like any political theatre that I've seen in Canada than it was like what I saw in Brazil. It was around carnival time and they pull musicians from the street, and it's large-scale with colour and dance. It puts across a political message and it's entertaining at the same time. The Wildcat people seem to be onto something.

How important was the fact that this festival was in Scotland, with its local traditions and a sense of being different from England? How important was this for the festival?

It seemed most important within the arts community itself. Because the people who produce art and theatre are unemployed. There is a massive depression, massive unemployment in Scotland right now. Scotland acts as a colony for the English. Because they're so swamped by the English product they're starting to understand their differences from the English theatrical traditions and to pin-point their own audiences and issues. It seems that the cultural community is taking the lead. It's a very progressive arts community.
Who put up the seed money for the festival? Did the unions make a contribution? The money was put up by the District Councils, the Scottish Arts Council, regional arts councils and the Scottish TUC. This year they've also got funding from business. But it all adds up and the unions funded themselves.

Were people worried about the effect of the Nato exercise? I didn't hear much about that. In fact the only controversy seemed to be an attempt to encourage community involvement beyond central Glasgow. There was an attempt to pull the housing schemes around the city into the festival, but the community groups argued that they didn't get an adequate share of the pie. People on the outskirts of the city find it difficult to get into the centre to see performances. It think that this problem of underfunding will be put right next year.

The festival is only three years in operation and people are still learning. There were things going on throughout the city but the things in the centre got the highest funding.

What's women's theatre and feminist theatre very strong at the festival? One of the most beautiful pieces I saw was a production of "A Raisin in the Sun". It was done by the Black Theatre Co-op and the main roles in that were for women. Then I went to "Under Exposure" and "The Dochertyies". They were both on the same night and all of the roles were by women. The production of the Mint Jewels was about one of all women. Looking through the programme, there were a lot of roles for women and women's issues were really up front. It was a shock to me because if you go to the theatre in your city you're lucky to see a woman or two. Even in "In Times of Strife", which was written in 1927, it was the women who had the dominant roles. I don't think it's an accident that Ferilith Lean, who organized the festival, is a feminist. It's certainly shown in the kind of programme that came together.

Was there any gay or lesbian theatre? I didn't see everything, but I didn't see any gay or lesbian theatre.

What about minorities? Was there much ethnic theatre? The Black Theatre Co-op was there. The Theatre Centre, from London, is a black theatre group. I should tell you about "The Dochertyies" because you're Irish.

Mrs Docherty decides to have a family reunion and she sends a letter out to all the other Docherties all over the world, inviting them to come back to Ireland for a reunion. The play is set in the waiting room at the airport where she goes to meet them. And the first Mrs Docherty arrives and she comes from the Caribbean and she's black. The second is from Africa and she's black. The third arrives from London and she's black. This is a surprise for Mrs Docherty. The cultures of the black women are completely different and they start arguing with each other. So the issue of this kind of difference is addressed. Anyhow, they end up realizing that they are all Docherties and they figure out their past. In the days when ships went to pillage the rest of the world, some sailors like the good-hearted Docherties didn't like exploiting the colonies so they jumped ship and made their homes all over the world. It was a fabulous play about people who preferred to stay instead of being part of the exploitation of these places. That play was done for schools, incidentally.

The same evening there was a play by the same company. It dealt with a British photographer, a sports reporter for an English paper. She is sent to South Africa to cover a soccer game. While she's there she befriends a young Capetown girl who is a soccer fan. The play dealt with our complicity with the South African situation and the realization by the reporter that soccer is a way of legitimating and validating the regime. It was very poigniant and beautiful. They used a lot of innovative techniques - backlit projection, audio sound - to compensate for the low budget and the fact that they can't afford costumes and props. They use technology on the stage and I thought it was very a economical production, dramatically powerful and highly portable.

You obviously see great possibilities in this kind of theatre and this kind of festival. Because it makes theatre available to people other than the traditional theatre audience (three out of every 25 Canadians). You know, the people who can afford the ticket and the clothes to go to the traditional theatre. The majority of the people are being cut off from what I think is a very important tool for understanding who they are and where they fit in the world. I would really like to see more theatre workers put their minds to developing cost-effective, powerful, portable, human-scale theatre. A theatre that people can get their hands on and use.

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Catherine has just completed a multimedia drama - "Clown Boys" - about life in the nuclear family in a nuclear town. She is co-chairman of the Arts and Media Committee of the Metro Toronto Labour Council and a member of the Artist Union.