

BURNS HOUSE MUSEUM

The Welcome Table by Timorous Beasties



The influence of Robert Burns' work has spanned the centuries and crossed generations. In 2009 East Ayrshire marked the 250th anniversary of the poet's birth with two major exhibitions, *Creative Burns*, at the Dick Institute in Kilmarnock. An important aspect of *Creative Burns* was the commission of new work by four contemporary artists exploring the impact of Robert Burns' legacy on their own practice.

Timorous Beasties are a Glasgow based fabric and interior design company who produced *The Welcome Table*. The company name is taken from the first line of the Burns' poem *To a Mouse*. *The Welcome Table* references many aspects of Burns' life, work and legacy. To create a starting point for the table-ware imagery fourteen 'weel-kent' faces from Scotland's vibrant cultural sector were asked to share their favourite Burns poem and comment on its significance to them.

Alex Linklater
Freelance
Writer

*Ca' the Yowes to
the Knowes*

"This is maybe me confessing to the cheesy one. I was going to select something more 'original' but, what the hell, my mother used to sing this so beautifully — she had a voice like a Scottish Joan Baez — and no other Burns song has gone as far into me as "Ca' the Yowes to the Knowes." The words should be those of the so-called 'First Version' — the final verse of which goes, "While waters wimple to the sea/
While day blinks in the lift sae hie/
Till clay-cauld death sall blin' my e'e/
Ye sall be my dearie." Burns himself didn't think much of this first re-writing, but I think it's the perfect example of him recovering a sentimental old Scots song and, with a few deft tweaks and augmentations, transforming it into poetry. He changed the single voice of a shepherd into an equal dialogue between a man and a woman.

The kailyard sentiment remains, but now charged with a real erotic exchange, sudden plunges of emotional depth (carried chokingly by the tune), and the one thing to be said about love that bears repeating, which is that it is pledged against death. If you can stomach the cultural cringe, it's also got one of the best group-singing choruses in the Burns oeuvre."

Paul Simmons
Co-Founder of
Timorous
Beasties

*Green Grow the
Rashes, O*

(no commentary given by contributor)



**Andrew
O'Hagan**
Author

Love and Liberty

"The poem I choose is 'Love and Liberty', sometimes called 'The Jolly Beggars'. Song and drink and a quantity of food are good for starters, but liberty is the glorious feast. In company a man might find his voice, which is one of the meanings of democracy, as taught by Robert Burns. He is a poet who kept no school and dwelt in no academy, yet he tutored his fellows into life from his seat in a rowdy pub. Let's praise his consuming spirit."

Liz Lochhead
Poet

*Holy Willie's
Prayer*

"It is impossible to pick the Burns poem which means most to me, as, like all great poets he speaks at different times to all our different moods and parts. But I decided to pick Holy Willie's Prayer, above even my favourite love song, Mary Morrison or the eternal favourite Tam O Shanter. Why? Because it is a dramatic monologue of absolute genius which so perfectly and so comically captures the voice of a real squirming individual. It's the LIFE in it, the way it actually goes far beyond Burns' undoubted anger and scorn for hypocrisy."



Jacqueline Farrell
Sweet Afton

"The first reason I chose this is because it reminds me of learning Burns in primary school and as a wee girl I liked the beautiful description of the area where I lived, sweet flowerets, whistling blackbirds and a murmuring stream. It made Cumnock and the surrounding areas sound that wee bit more romantic! I came to it again as an adult and I realised how full of love it was. His love for Mary is so strong and his final line 'Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream' paints a lovely tender image."

**Stuart
Cosgrove**
Channel 4
Journalist and
Broadcaster

Pretty Peg

"It's a poem about the power of memory. Everyone has a moment in their life that is burned into their mind through their heart, it can be love for a place or a person or an experience that stays with them forever and even when their memory begins to fade can never be erased."



BURNS HOUSE MUSEUM
CASTLE STREET | MAUCHLINE | KA5 5BZ
T: 01290 550045



eastayrshireleisure.com

Kirsty Wark
BBC Television
Journalist

Halloween

"I like this poem because it evokes memories of my childhood in Ayrshire when Halloween was such an exciting night and we would go guising from door to door."



Alistair McAuley
Co-founder of
Timorous
Beasties

*A Man's A Man
For A' That*

"From when I heard it sang by my friend Kenny MacKay at one of our studio Burns Suppers it came across as such a beautiful call for equality and recognition of what is important in people. It's also a belter of a song."



Hardeep Singh Kohli
Writer, presenter
and comedian

*Such a Parcel of
Rogues in a
Nation*

But pith find power till my last hour I'll mak this declaration We're bought and sold for English gold Such a parcel o' rogues in a nation.

"Some people write Burns off as merely a romantic poet and a songsmith but work like *Such a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation* shows Burns to be passionately political when it comes to the constitutional future of the Scottish nation. Scotland and the Scots seem to historically blame the English for everything. Burns manages to rise above such petty politics to see the whole issue in context. He blames the Scots for selling their ain folk out; and the price was paid in English gold. This searing political insight was some two hundred years ahead of its time. Scotland's destiny rests in Scotland's hands."



James L Hempstead
Author of
'*Robert Burns
Cronies,
Colleagues and
Contemporaries:
A Comprehensive
Book on Those Who Influenced the
Life of Robert Burns the Bard of
Scotland*'

Ye Banks and Braes

(no commentary given by contributor)



Edwyn Collins
Musician

Ae Fond Kiss

"This is a broken hearted man, making his farewell. But he does it graciously, with no bitterness. He wishes her well. The language is elegant, but his pain echoes down the years."



Roderick Buchanan
Artist

*Death and
Doctor
Hornbook*

"I was always fascinated with the personification of 'Death' and the protagonist's willingness to draw a knife on this guy that was 'Lang Scotch ells twa' (whatever that meant). I was always getting chased at school and fantasized about sticking up for myself. Anyway, the last couplet sums up my whole view of the universe really, you can substitute 'Life' for 'Death' at the moment and go back to the original when I'm dead."



John Hutcheson
Taxi Driver and
Burns Enthusiast

Tam O' Shanter

"My choice of Burns' poetry would be Tam O'Shanter. It is such a vivid, descriptive poem that the characters in it come to life. It takes you through the full gamut of emotions. It's funny, scary, satirical, gentle. It is Burns' masterpiece."



Grant Morrison
Comic Writer

To a Mouse

"This was the first poem that I memorised when I was a child; in fact it was my party piece. However I can't remember any of it now."

