



GALHA NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GAY & LESBIAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

Issue #13

50p / Free to members

July 2010

IDAHO WEEKEND A TRIUMPH

The IDAHO weekend began with an extremely well-attended meeting at Conway Hall, where many members of the public joined the GALHA audience to give an enthusiastic reception to Leo Igwe, the distinguished Nigerian humanist.

Leo was supported as speaker by Reverend Rowland Jide Macaulay, founding Pastor of the House of Rainbow Metropolitan Community Church, Lagos, Nigeria. Both speakers, each from a different perspective, passionately condemned the homophobia rife in Africa today.

Leo quickly identified the source of this homophobia: 'Religion is a dominant and driving force of the wave of homophobia sweeping across Africa. Religion is being used to justify attacks, hatred, persecution and torture of gay people. Religion is being used by African people and politicians to block efforts to decriminalize homosexuality and recognize gay rights as

human rights.' Fundamentalist Christian and Muslim clerics were largely responsible.

Leo recalled that at the 2007 public hearing on same-sex marriage bill in Nigeria, a Muslim scholar said that there was no debate over homosexuality in Islam. Because under sharia law, gay sex was an offence punishable by death. He suggested that the few gay people in the country be identified, rounded up and be killed to save others from being corrupted. Fortunately, Leo knew of many Muslims who did not share this bigotry and wanted homosexuals to be treated with love, care, respect and compassion. 'There is a need for religious reformation in Africa,' he went on. 'Religion

as practised in Africa is at a primitive and medieval stage. Most Africans still observe Christianity and Islam as they were brought and introduced by western missionaries and Arab jihadists. Africans practise religion in a way that holds back their society, hampers intellectual and moral progress, and trumps human rights. And this situation must change.'

After the showing of 'Suddenly Last Winter', the other IDAHO event of the weekend, Leo was presented with the Nordic Rainbow Humanist Award by Ian Stewart of the International Lesbian and Gay Cultural Network. He was applauded by an audience of about 200.



Sue Robson speaks for GALHA at One Law for All rally



At a rally in central London on 20th June, GALHA's Sue Robson put the Humanist case against the spread of sharia law in the UK. A hostile band of islamists carrying their 'Sharia will dominate the world' banners was also in attendance. The hundreds present heard Sue declare in a passionate speech "We Gay and Lesbian Humanists stand shoulder to shoulder with everyone here today. This is a human rights issue. Here in the UK, it's an egalitarian issue, it's a feminist issue. One Law for All!"

Vice President Dr Evan Harris an election casualty

Long a valued supporter of GALHA and with an impeccable gay rights voting record, Evan was defeated in the election by less than two hundred votes. He lost to Nicola Blackwood, a member of the Christian Conservative Fellowship. Formerly Liberal Democrat science spokesman, Evan is predictably despised by fundamentalists for his campaigning on abortion, assisted suicide and stem cell technology.

He has also raised concerns about faith schools and the teaching of 'intelligent design' in classes as an alternative to evolution. His opponents conducted a dirty campaign, with one of their smear leaflets describing him as "Dr Death". One Christian group said his defeat was the "most significant individual result of the election".

GALHA commiserates with Evan and is glad to see him determined to return to parliament, where his brave, rationalist voice has been so valuable.

Evan received an award from GALHA when he was the honoured guest at the 2005 annual lunch for his support of gay and humanist issues.

Editor's Notes

The New Government

On the face of it, the new coalition government is good news. We have in David Cameron a prime minister who insists that he now fully supports LGBT rights, his vote for the retention of Section 28 long behind him. To show us he means business, he dropped Chris Grayling as potential Home Secretary following his B&B gaffe, and the replacement, Teresa May, dutifully announced her own change of mind on Question Time, though her teeth seemed somewhat gritted. Better still, we have in Nick Clegg a deputy prime minister who has publicly described the Tories' homophobic allies in Europe as 'nutters' and set out his LGBT rights agenda, before the election that is. He wanted action on 'marriage' for same-sex couples, a reversal on the ban on gay men to give blood and guaranteed asylum for gays fleeing persecution. Most interestingly, he wanted to force all schools – including faith schools – to implement anti-homophobia bullying policies and teach that homosexuality is 'normal and harmless'. We agree with Nick!

However, the coalition government has introduced an Academies Bill which would so deregulate the schools system that any reform of faith schools would be extremely unlikely. They will join existing religious academies, which do not need to follow the national curriculum and are free to teach creationism as a valid alternative to evolution and offer sex-education not worthy of the name. Even more serious, it will be easy for state community schools to become academies with a religious sponsor

and thus effectively become religious academies. Writing in the Guardian, Andrew Copson, former chair of GALHA and now Chief Executive of the BHA, said: 'We should all be deeply concerned that the education of the youngest in our society will be severely and permanently affected by this bill, which would lift many state-funded "faith schools" into a largely unregulated sector and increase the public funds spent on them, with no public consultation and no entitlement of children to the sort of balanced education parents expect and wider society should demand.'

Humanism and music

Music has turned out to be something of a theme in this issue. We're spotlighting two distinguished musician members and reporting that singer and song writer Darren Hayes is to be the honoured guest at this year's GALHA lunch. There are of course a number of humanist anthems. The most well-known, and probably the best, is Lennon's 'Imagine' with its moving vision of people 'living for today' in peace and harmony, sharing in 'a brotherhood of man' - and with 'no religion too'. There is also 'None of the Above' by the Strawheads, promoted last year by the BHA, and 'Faithless', by the rock group Rush, which ends:

*I don't have faith in faith
I don't believe in belief
You can call me faithless
I still cling to hope
And I believe in love
And that's faith enough for me*
Malcolm Trahearn

Pride 2010



GALHA's presence at local Prides this year started with Birmingham over the May bank holiday. Paul Allen was assisted by Tyrone Curtis, Ifor Griffith and Adrian Bailey, Chair of Birmingham Humanists. Further stalls are planned in London, Brighton and Manchester.

Above left: Tyrone discusses a point with an interested enquirer

Above right: Ifor examines a point, Adrian looks on in his 'Condemnation' t-shirt



Join GALHA's Facebook Group

Do you have a Facebook account? If so, you may be pleased to know that GALHA now has its own virtual community online. Login to Facebook at www.facebook.com and search for "GALHA".

OUR THANKS

To Alan Trevethan for his work in manning the bar at our London events. This allows committee members to circulate among interested members of the public who respond to our advertising. Alan is also a pillar of the Kent and Medway Humanist Group.

To the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE), which donated a magnificent £500 to help defray GALHA's expenses in bringing Leo to London. Our warm thanks to them, to the BHA for fundraising, to SPES for donated facilities and to the individual donors.

Two GALHA members with distinguished careers in music

Bryce Morrison

Bryce, professor of keyboard literature and performance at The Royal Academy of Music, is considered one of the world's leading authorities on piano performance. He has given master classes world-wide and been a jury member in a great many of the most prestigious International Piano Competitions. His publications include, notably, a much praised biographical study of Liszt, hundreds of annotations of all major record labels and superb criticism for Gramophone magazine. His broadcasts for the BBC include thirty contributions to 'Building a Library' on Radio 3. He has made extensive input to the most recent edition of Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, holds five degrees in music and literature and was recently awarded an honorary ARAM at the Royal Academy of Music.

James Stevens

James is a composer, whose wide interests include serious contemporary concert works, film music, jazz, TV scores and musicals. He studied initially with Benjamin Frankel, described by James as 'incomparable', and then in Paris with Darius Milhaud and the legendary Nadia Boulanger, who admired his music. He went



on to win a number of international prizes. In the days of the Third Programme his works and many BBC commissions were frequently broadcast - until he courageously 'came out' in a TV programme, with dire consequences. After that, all of his work was rejected, even his Buddhist requiem, Celebration for the Dead, winner of an international award and described by Yan Pascal Tortelier as a 'masterwork'. In 2000 came his magnum opus The Reluctant Masquerade, a piece about the life and work of Yukio Mishima, Japan's greatest writer since WW2, and gay. This work explores time and human nature and is available on www.pristineaudio.com.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

All meetings will now be held with disabled access on the ground floor of Conway Hall.

FRIDAY JULY 9TH, 7.30PM. - FREE PLAY - THE BATTLE FOR DOVER SOUL.

Fire and Brimstone Productions * present a re-enactment of a controversial landmark court case about the teaching of intelligent design v evolution, which took place in Dover, Pennsylvania in 2005. The play marks the 75th anniversary of the "Scopes Monkey Trial" verdict, which addressed similar issues.

*Fire and Brimstone Productions, founded in 1999, is a group of secularists/humanists and their friends.

AUGUST-NO MEETING.

3rd - 5th SEPTEMBER - GALHA CONFERENCE WEEKEND and AGM

GALHA returns to Brighton after an interval of six years to the comfortable and well appointed Imperial Hotel. Weekend features include an entertainment by Brett Lock and Ted Brown, who will reprise their fascinating Vinyl Closet presentation, and an excursion to Arundel. The AGM will take place at 10.30 am on the Sunday. See website for further details and booking form.

FRIDAY 8TH OCTOBER, 7.30PM.

FREE THOUGHT AND CENSORSHIP. A TALK BY JULIAN BAGGINI, EDITOR OF THE PHILOSOPHERS' MAGAZINE.

WEDNESDAY 10th NOVEMBER, 7.30pm.

A TALK BY Dr MATT COOK, SENIOR LECTURER IN HISTORY AND GENDER STUDIES, BIRKBECK, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Dr Cook will draw on new research to look back at the past century to consider the relationship between homosexuals and family life, and more particularly, parenting. (Please note that this meeting was originally scheduled for February 10th but had to be rearranged because of personal reasons).

December meeting to be confirmed.



Darren Hayes to be Guest of Honour at GALHA's 2010 Lunch

Singer-songwriter Darren Hayes has accepted an invitation to our lunch on 20th November. Of Australian origin, Darren first achieved fame in the '90's, when as part of the duo 'Savage Garden' he sold 23 million albums world-wide. Since then he has had a very successful solo career, releasing albums such as 'Spin', 'The Tension and the Spark' and 'This Delicate Thing We've Made'. He now has his own independent record label, Powdered Sugar.

OPINION

Out, Proud and Humanist - and fighting an election

Keith Angus, former GALHA treasurer, writes of his experience as a Liberal Democrat candidate at the election for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Diane Abbott's seat)

Electioneering and politicking is a strange old business. Doorstep canvassing isn't top of most peoples' wish list but it's part of the process I enjoy. Nothing gets you closer to the issues and the 'mood on the ground' than spending time and energy doing exactly this.

As a Lib Dem, the election got exciting on another level after the first Leader's TV debate three weeks before polling day. Suddenly "I agree with Nick" became the catch-phrase and there was energy on the campaign like no other. We were flooded with offers of help, and in Hackney North - a seat considered safe Labour - the odds on me winning were cut to 3/1 (they started at 100/1). Strangers were approaching me on the street wishing me luck and some wanted their photo taken with me, which felt odd. Then the Clegg bounce melted away in the final few days of the campaign. The support didn't turn into big electoral success (although I got over eleven thousand votes so I'm pleased) but then again the Lib Dems are in government, in coalition with the Tories.

I have to admit this didn't initially sit easy with me. But to see progression on civil liberty issues and on electoral reform (which won't go far enough, but it's a start) is really good.

As an out gay man, a Lib Dem, a humanist and a parliamentary candidate I



did wonder to what extent any part of me would cause a problem with another during the election campaign. But just like in any other part of life, I'm multi-faceted and as long as I'm honest then it won't cause me a problem. Besides I've never bought into identity politics insofar as a gay man necessarily represents the interests of other gay men in parliament. After all, one of the strongest advocates for gay rights was Evan Harris, the loss of whom to parliament I'm still in mourning for.

Anyway, it's back to normal life for me. Seeing friends, Sunday lunch at the pub, that kind of thing. Still keeping a keen eye on Westminster, of course.



The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence congratulate Leo and offer a blessing to Gustav Hofer and Luca Ragazzi, directors and stars of 'Suddenly Last Winter'.