



GALHA NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GAY & LESBIAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

Issue #16

50p / Free to members

January 2011

Darren Hayes: Star of Annual Lunch

This year's lunch, held at the Café des Amis in Covent Garden, was a sell-out success. Guest of honour was Darren Hayes, the famous singer and songwriter, whose career both in the band Savage Garden and as a hugely popular solo artist has won him a fan base of millions.

Speaking at the lunch, Darren recalled a difficult childhood in Brisbane in the 1980s and gave a deeply personal account of his struggles growing up gay and his passion for civil rights. He spoke movingly of the happiness he had achieved in his civil partnership. His partner, Richard, was also present at the lunch. Although not describing himself as a Humanist, he spoke of his support for Humanist principles. He put "respect for all people above race, nationality, gender or sexuality".

Awarding Darren a memento of the occasion (pictured), Mike Rickwood, acting Chair of GALHA said: "We are thrilled to have the chance to hear from someone of Darren's calibre and standing. This is a speech that will inspire anyone who values gay rights and human rights, Humanists and non-Humanists alike."

Darren chatted with many present and proved to be charm itself. He was keen to circulate and meet as many people as possible and be photographed with them. He later posted on Twitter: Had an amazing time speaking at the GALHA annual lunch today. Thanks to all for making me feel so welcome!

Also speaking at the lunch was Campaigns Manager Derek Lennard, who drew attention to the brave struggle of gay people for basic rights in countries like Jamaica, and stressed that GALHA would focus increasingly on the many countries of the world where LGBT people do not enjoy even fundamental freedoms, let alone equality. He also committed GALHA to fighting to reverse the scandalous vote by the United Nations General Assembly to remove the mention of killings based on sexual orientation from a resolution condemning arbitrary and extrajudicial executions.

Darren Hayes joins a list of previous distinguished guest speakers, who have included Stephen Fry, Angela Eagle MP, Polly Toynbee, Dr Evan Harris and Nikolai Alekseev.



Editor's Notes

Good news - mostly

A most welcome piece of recent news for the LGBT community was the reported success of an anti-homophobic bullying teaching programme at a London school. Stoke Newington comprehensive has developed lessons on gay historical figures, such as Alan Turing, who suffered persecution. It claims to have succeeded in 'more or less eliminating homophobic bullying' in its classrooms and playgrounds over the last five years. Now the school plans to share its lessons with hundreds of other teachers at other schools and train them in encouraging their pupils to 'educate and celebrate' being gay. The successful programme was the inspiration of music teacher Elly Barnes, whose declared aim is to 'eradicate homophobia from all schools' by giving staff the confidence and resources required to tackle the prejudice. And prejudice there certainly is, especially in faith schools. Members will recall an important feature written for this newsletter on the subject by Tony Fenwick, co-founder of Schools Out, to which GALHA is affiliated. Tony recently expressed his delight to me at the news from Stoke Newington: "Elly took LGBT History Month from the start - in 2005 - and used it as an opportunity to raise the profile of LGBT people and educate students about them in her school. This is exactly how we intended the month to be used. Now her efforts have paid off and the school had become a diversity training centre. This is real progress and one of a few acorns from which we hope many great oaks will grow."

Further good news is the phenomenal take-off of the 'It Gets Better' project. It grew in the US in response to the highly publicised suicides of a number of teenagers after being bullied because they were gay or because their peers suspected that they were gay. The movement's goal is to prevent suicide among LGBT youth by having gay adults convey the message that these teens' lives will improve. An online video channel on Youtube has been inundated with positive messages from adults of all sexual orientations - including President Obama, and now David Cameron



Elly Barnes photographed by Mark Weeks at LGBT History Month

as the movement goes global. One of the celebrities who have recorded a message is Darren Hayes, our guest of honour at the 2010 lunch.

Contrasting with this good news came shameful tidings from the UN, where a vote has been carried to remove a reference to sexual orientation from a resolution on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. The resolution urges States to protect the right to life of all people, and specifically calls on states to investigate killings based on discriminatory grounds. For the past 10 years, the resolution has included sexual orientation in the list of those discriminatory grounds. Countries voting in favour were overwhelmingly Muslim, but included, sadly, South Africa. However, condemnation of the resolution came from an unexpected source: the Association of British Muslims. Their statement said: 'Removing this clause at this time will send quite the wrong signal to those regimes that indulge in these barbaric practices, implying as it does that the United Nations is no longer concerned at the maltreatment of people because of their sexual orientation or considers it to be a lesser matter.'

We agreed totally and put out a press release welcoming the statement and calling on the British Government to do all it could to reverse the decision. GALHA has also combined with the BHA to initiate an Early Day Motion condemning the change to the resolution

Finally, it is reported in this issue that donations at the lunch were particularly generous. It should also perhaps be pointed out that GALHA committee members and supporters donate their time and energies completely gratis, apart from reasonable travel expenses.

Malcolm Trahearn

Financial Success of the Annual Lunch

We were delighted by the generosity of those attending the annual lunch in November. This event is a fund-raising one and like all GALHA events open to all and advertised as such. The donations topped £2000, mainly the result of a spectacular donation from a member of the public, who declared sympathy with GALHA's aims - thanks again, Christine! She is front right in the photo of Darren with some of his fans. The raffle at the event also raised a goodly sum, thanks to donated items from some of our VPs and from Darren himself, who donated an Alexander McQueen waistcoat that he has worn on tour and a number of signed CDs and DVDs. The final profit on the event after all expenses was £2,370.19.

Homophobia in the football world

The FIFA president, Sepp Blatter, has attempted to laugh off the problems which gay supporters may face at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

In Qatar, a Muslim country, homosexual acts are illegal. In fact in 1995 an American visitor who transgressed was sentenced to six months in prison and 90 lashes. When asked about the issues facing gay fans, Blatter, apparently joking, said: "I would say they should refrain from any sexual activities."

Commenting, the out-gay former basketball star John Amaechi said: 'FIFA has

endorsed the marginalisation of LGBT people around the world. Anything less than a full reversal of his position is unacceptable and if the FA and football and sporting associations around the world fail to acknowledge this insult, they too will be complicit.'

GALHA is watching developments.



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".



A NEW YEAR MESSAGE FROM MIKE RICKWOOD, ACTING CHAIR

GALHA has had an extraordinarily successful year. We've been getting considerably larger audiences for our public meetings and a far higher proportion of those attending have been non-members. We've been invited to speak to more outside organisations about the work we do to advance Humanism and promote human rights for the LGBT community and non-religious people in this country and around the world. And we made an important contribution to the hugely successful Protest the Pope campaign in September. In addition we contributed to consultations about the development of diversity policies in public organisations and issues relating to Equalities legislation. GALHA continues to punch above its weight.

Our membership has also grown and we've seen a significant increase in donations.

Next year we aim to build on these successes. We will focus on two key issues: the bullying of students (and teachers) in schools on the grounds of sexuality and the persecution of people across the world because of their religion and/or sexuality.

And we will use these campaigns to further our Humanist objectives. As LGBT Humanists we have a particular set of experiences which are relevant to both these issues, but we also recognise that we can be more effective if we combine our efforts with those of others who share these goals. So we will support the work of the Ugandan Humanist Schools, Humanist groups in countries like Nigeria and our LGBT friends in Moscow as well as like-minded groups closer to home.

We will continue to seek improvements in our finances through subscriptions and donations. But we also recognise that GALHA needs to be more diverse. So we will be working to involve more women and represent their interests more effectively. And we will seek to spread our activities more evenly across the country. To that end we will shortly be looking for volunteers to act as focal points for members and supporters to promote GALHA and help us achieve our objectives in the regions outside London and the South East.

The GALHA Committee and I wish all our readers a fantastic 2011.

Promoting the secular humanist perspective in the local press



Malcolm Trahearn

It's difficult to get letters published in the national press. In fact a search of the Guardian's archive will reveal only two official letters from GALHA in the last ten years. In a sense the private individual can be equally or even more effective in the letters pages of local newspapers. Local papers are generally short of copy and the chances of a well-written letter from a secular humanist perspective being published are quite high.

Where I live in Staffordshire, in the cathedral city of Lichfield, there is an abundance of clergy, many of whom can be relied on to make objectionable pronouncements from time to time. A local vicar who dared in his column in the paper to moralise on single mums and express his 'charitable' feelings to gays – the celibate ones – must have squirmed when my letter was published. An extract reads: *'Religious moralists like the vicar always seem to assume that people wilfully choose what by accident or nature they are. People very rarely set out to bring up children singly. That would be too tough an option. They end up doing so when for a variety of reasons an unhappy relationship ends. They then face an upward struggle. We should support them for their courage and self-sacrifice, not undermine them with moralising.'*

'The Church's condemnation of homosexuality is even worse in its effects. Down the ages, it has led to the most vicious persecution of maybe a tenth of human society. Through bigotry and ignorance a climate of prejudice has been created and fuelled, denying happiness to millions.'

Unknown numbers of gays died in Nazi extermination camps. Even now a worrying number of gay teenagers choose suicide rather than face the squalid playground bully. Rev Martin will say no doubt that there is strong scriptural authority for condemning homosexuality, and he would be right. That's the problem: his religion, like Judaism and Islam, is homophobic.' Ouch!

Rev Martin's boss, the Bishop, often has his sermons reported in the 'Mercury' and I am reluctant to leave his views unchallenged. He likes to claim Christians in our society are hard-done-by and to warn of a 'creeping secularism'. So I enlighten him in the letters pages: 'Secularists are hostile to privilege, not to religion as a private practice and would acknowledge its great cultural importance. It does religion no service to constantly play the persecution card.' Undeterred, at the time of the Pope's visit the Bishop praised the pontiff's words on 'God's plan for rescuing our planet', earning from me the question: 'Does the Bishop here refer to the Pope's claim that "the need to save mankind from a destructive blurring of gender roles is as important as saving the world's rainforests"?'

It might seem heady stuff for the local rag, but it's surprising how many people read and, in my experience, applaud what one writes. GALHA members and supporters who have not already done so might watch for an opportunity and take up their pens. It can be an effective way of advancing Humanism and promoting LGBT and non-religious rights.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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

**Friday, January 14, 2011 7:30 PM
PINK THERAPY?**

Over the years members of our community have had plenty of negative experiences of psychiatrists, therapists, and evangelical religious groupings trying to "convert" us to "become straight" or simply avoided the reality of our sexuality altogether. "Pink Therapy" is the largest independent therapy organisation working with gender and sexual minority clients, and tonight their Director, Dominic Davies will argue that our psychological and therapeutic issues can be addressed effectively by those who adopt a sexually affirmative status and do not see sexual or gender variation as problems in any way.



Friday, February 11, 2011 7:30 PM

That's another fine dress you've gotten me into.

Terry Sanderson argues that Laurel and Hardy were far more sexually subversive than most people realise. Illustrated with lots of hilarious clips of their bed-sharing and drag-wearing-and maybe the first same-sex wedding ever seen in the movies.

STOP PRESS

Unfortunately, we have learned that Ted Brown is very ill and may be unable to produce the next instalment of Vinyl Closet. We're hoping to reschedule later in the year when he is well. We'll circulate information about a replacement event in due course. We wish Ted a speedy recovery.

GALHA BACKS

EQUAL  LOVE

GALHA is backing the campaign group Equal Love, which is mounting a challenge in the European Court of Human Rights to extend the rights of gay and lesbian couples in the UK to full marriage and of heterosexual couples to civil partnerships. In a test of UK law, two groups of couples are involved, four same-sex and four different-sex. Campaigners will claim that the present state of affairs is discriminatory and that the government has an obligation to consistency. (Pictured is GALHA honorary VP Evan Harris speaking at an Equal Love conference.)



French Offer

Alan Gates, gay Humanist and member of GALHA, whose delightful poem was featured recently in GALHA NEWS, has made an offer some will find it difficult to refuse. Writing from France, where he lives, he said 'After attending the Brighton weekend I think a contribution to the life of GALHA I could make would be to offer to organise holidays to this region of France which has so much to offer. I live in Royan, which is on the coast about an hour south of La Rochelle. Many

visitors fly there (Ryanair all the year round from Stansted, other airlines in summer from places like Southampton) and rent a car from outside the airport. A French friend runs a gay-friendly hotel in Royan and I would be on hand to offer advice on what to see and where to go (one is spoilt for choice).'

Contact details from GALHA NEWS. There has already been interest shown in taking up Alan's kind offer.

(Scope for a future conference venue?! Ed)