INTERVIEW BY THOMAS DORAN WITH GERDA STEVENSON, April, 2012. (NEW YORK SALTIRE SOCIETY'S *SCOTIA NEWS.*)

1. Do you have a "need" to write? Or like some writers, you do it, but would rather do other, more "sensible" things (if only :)), Is writing both wonderful and terrible at the same time?

Yes, I do have a need to write. I always have something on the back boiler, and often on the front! If I haven't written something in a while, I get itchy. I usually have a poem or song on the go, which is a good way of keeping my hand in, if I'm not writing something more substantial. I write drama, poetry and prose, and over the last few years I've started writing my own songs – words and music, and am part of a trio of musicians – three women, and we call ourselves ***Madge Wildfire.***
(Remember her?A songstress of Scottish pedigree!)
I would definitely not rather do other more 'sensible' things! Writing is wonderful for me, although sometimes, like many things in life, it can be difficult, slow, and doesn't always flow. But mostly, I love the process. It's like going on a journey into the unknown. Regarding the place of 'sensible' things in my life – there are plenty of those, and, on reflection, I have to say I do value many of them. I'm a wife and mother, and very committed to my family. I live not far from my parents – my wonderful mother is the centre of our family - and my two siblings are nearby. Although my son's at university in Glasgow, he comes home quite regularly. We're a close family, and enjoy looking after one another. But carving out time for myself, and for my writing, isn't easy. My husband (who's also a writer – Aonghas MacNeacail, the Gaelic poet from Skye) doesn't drive, so I am the chauffeur. My daughter has Down's Syndrome. She is the most terrific company, and an inspiration in my life – both my children are for me - but nevertheless she needs support, which is time-consuming. So, when I get the opportunity to write, I have to maximize it to the utmost. I earn my living on various fronts – acting, writing and directing. I became an actor long before I went into writing, and, until the last 15 years, my acting work was the main earner. But for actresses, as we get older, the roles get fewer. (Which is why I founded ***Stellar Quines,*** *now Scotland's leading women's theatre company.) When I was awarded a Writer's Bursary from the Scottish Arts Council, I was given the opportunity to write for a sustained period, without worrying about trying to earn a living, and it was hugely beneficial to me. I completed a poetry collection (to be published in England next year by Smokestack Books), also several short stories - an on-going project for a book - and that was also when I wrote my play* ***Federer Versus Murray.***

2. Do you write things specifically with yourself in mind as an actor? Or do you find after the writing process is finished that you would be good for a part (or is it inseparable). Do producers or directors feel obligated to use you as a performer because they know you have written the script(s)?

The only drama I've written with myself in mind is ***Federer Versus Murray****. I wrote it for me and my colleague Gerry Mulgrew, the Artistic Director of Communicado Theatre Company, (of which I am Associate Director). Gerry and I have worked together for many years, and one play which we produced with Communicado, was Athol Fugard's brilliant two-hander,* ***A Place With The Pigs****. Since then, I always had it in mind to write something for us myself, and decided to do so as part of my Writer's Bursary. I've written a lot of drama for BBC Radio 4, both my own original work, and many dramatisations of great classic Scottish novels, such as Sir Walter Scott's* ***The Heart of Midlothian,*** *and Lewis Grassic Gibbon's* ***Sunset Song.*** *As the writer, I will make casting suggestions, and sometimes I play parts in these productions, but I don't necessarily write with myself in mind. I have good, robust relationships with my professional colleagues, and our approach is always open, honest and flexible – there's never any sense that I am 'owed' a part in play because I've written it. I'm a director myself, and it's paramount that the play, its themes and characters are being served.*

3. Have you written roles for yourself, only to be passed over for someone else?

No.

4. Did writing come out of your need to perform as an actor? Or is it all part of the same creative process.

It's all part of the same creative process. My father is a composer-pianist, and also a writer. My sister is a composer-harper, and my brother is a violin maker. We were brought up in a very creative atmosphere. Painting and drawing was my first passion. My mother (who was a piano teacher and a nurse), collected early editions of fairytales illustrated by the peerless Arthur Rackham and Edmund Dulac, and gave them to me for my birthdays, from infancy. I absolutely adored these books, and still do. I also wrote poetry as a child, and had a puppet theatre with a friend – my parents got a local joiner to make it for us, as a Christmas present one year. We made puppets and

wrote plays for them, inspired by my father, who came back from a concert tour in Germany once, with a box of exquisitely beautiful glove puppets for us, and a puppet play he'd written for this cast of lovely little characters. I was also a member of the local amateur drama club from the age of 12. In my teens I wrote a series of children's stories, and illustrated them some years later. Eventually this book was published – The Candlemaker and Other Stories. So, for me, creativity has always been the norm, and there has never been any separation in my mind between its various modes of expression.

5. Do you produce your own work? Is it easier to do so? Preferable? or is having some truly distanced eyes and ears pass judgment in the process from page to stage?

I researched and co-wrote a large-scale community drama with a local writers' group, of which I was a member, and I also structured, edited and directed this play. I enjoyed the process - we worked well as a group, and the production was a great success, forging all kinds of positive new relationships within the local community, and gaining interest in the national press. Although I had directed many plays before this, I hadn't actually directed my own writing until then. I think the experience on this project gave me confidence to direct ***Federer Versus Murray*** *myself. Originally, I had thought that my Communicado colleague Gerry Mulgrew and I would perform it together, and I would get someone else to direct, or we would possibly co-direct it ourselves. But in the end, I felt it might be better for me to direct and not act – to be on the outside, as it were, and cast someone else in 'my' role, so I asked the wonderful Maureen Beattie to perform the play with Gerry. They are both hugely experienced – the kind of actors who will ask crucial questions. Also, I sent the play to my friend the writer Liz Lochhead (our country's Makar – the Scots word for our laureate) who gave me some very useful comments. And David MacLennan, the producer of A Play, A Pie, A Pint lunchtime theatre season at Oran Mor in Glasgow, where the play was first produced, was very helpful with feedback. I think it's important to be open to responses from one's peers – people whose judgement you respect. As a writer/actor/director, I have to admit that occasionally I have found it difficult to hold back when someone is directing other actors in my own writing, but you <u>have</u> to restrain yourself! – drama is a collaborative art form, and it's vital to trust others in their designated roles as part of the process, with the proviso that they merit such trust!*

6. Did you find that your name as an actor helped get things read by producers?

Maybe it can help, initially, but there's such a lot of competition, and so many agendas going on out there, I don't necessarily think it makes all that much difference ultimately. I have a literary agent in London, and I think that is helpful, in terms of introductions.

7. Is Scotland an easy place for theater? The Irish of course have a well-known modern tradition, and the English go way back, but how is it different in Scotland - if at all.

Scotland's theatre tradition is an unusual one, which started with a bang, and resumed after a very long silence of centuries. We had the explosion of the astonishingly modern epic play ***Ane Pleasant Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis,*** *by Sir David Lindsay of the Mount, in the mid 16th Century – a major work of political theatre, challenging the injustices wreaked by the pre-Reformation controlling powers of Scottish society, including the deeply corrupt (Catholic) church. It's written in superbly rich old Scots language, which contains French resonances, and a Chaucerian earthiness – filthy, many prudes would say today! The play was seen at the time as heresy – copies were burned publically – indeed, it's fortunate that the text has come down to us. Then we suffered the fierce, cold blast of the Reformation, in some respects a force for democratisation, but nevertheless fundamentalist, with its Presbyterian anti-art (anti-life, I'd say!) agenda. This form of Protestant religion had, in my view, a spiritually crippling impact on Scottish culture, a legacy still apparent today, particularly in the West Highlands and Islands. Presbyterianism is burned into our nation's collective subconscious.*

I was in Ireland a couple of years ago, and in a local supermarket there, the woman at the check-out, hearing my accent, asked me where I was from." Scotland," I told her, " in Donegal for the poetry festival." "Oh, you're a poet! Now isn't that just grand!" she enthused. That would NEVER happen at a Scottish supermarket check-out!

Yet, in spite of the frequent manifestations of Presbyterianism, and its stifling of theatre for hundreds of years, the iconoclastic spirit of Lindsay's ***Thrie Estaitis*** *still survives, thanks, largely, to the visionary, pioneering Tyrone Guthrie, who released Lindsay's script from the dust of ages, and mounted an adapted, shortened version (cleaned-up, it has to be said – the Lord Chamberlain's censorship prevailing then, and the original is about 9 hours long!!), at the Edinburgh Festival, in 1948.*

It's no surprise, then, that there are roots within Scotland's modern theatre tradition reaching back through centuries to that great play: I'm thinking of the Unity Players in Glasgow, and, later on, productions which have made an impact, such as John McGrath's seminal ***The Chevioit, The Stag***

And The Black, Black Oil *with his brilliant 7:84 Theatre Company,* and the National Theatre of Scotland's ***Black Watch*** *by Gregory Burke. Social and political themes have been central to Scottish theatre for many decades - Ena Lamont Stewart* ***(Men Should Weep),*** *Bill Bryden (****Willie Rough, Benny Lynch, The Ship, The Big Picnic****), Roddy MacMillan* ***(The Bevellers****), Hector McMillan (****The Sash****),Tom McGrath (****The Hard Man****), John Byrne's* ***Slab Boys*** *trilogy, Donald Campbell's* ***The Jesuit,*** *Liz Lochhead's* ***Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off,*** *Rona Munro's* ***Bold Girls,*** *and all the many political cabaret-style plays from Wildcat theatre company, which evolved from 7:84.*

We sometimes forget that before these writers, at the end of the 19th and the first part of the 20th century, we have the extraordinary J.M. Barrie, and the prolific James Bridie - founder of the Citizens Theatre - important figures who - particularly Bridie - belong to a more English theatre tradition, although Barrie's ***Peter Pan*** *and* ***Mary Rose*** *have an underlying dark, supernatural story-telling quality, connected, I think, to his Scottish upbringing in Kirriemuir.*

Three fascinating, important plays emerged in the 90s – David Harrower's haunting ***Knives in Hens****, David Greig's* ***Europe,*** *tackling global politics, and Sue Glover's* ***Bondagers****, a very fine work – a kind of Scots language pagan hymn to the hard lives of the women who worked the land in the 19th century Scottish Borders. I recall being particularly taken, also, with Harrower's* ***Dark Earth****, about the unseen history beneath our feet at the Antonine Wall.*

Over the last decade, there's been a unique, and unprecedented development in Scottish theatre, at Oran Mor in Glasgow – a lunchtime theatre season called A Play, A Pie And A Pint. David MacLennan is the producer/artistic director at Oran Mor, and produces over 40 new plays there per annum. (MacLennan, along with my colleague Dave Anderson, one of Scotland's best-loved actor/writer/singer-songwriters, who now plays Jimmy in ***Federer Versus Murray,*** *ran the renowned Wildcat theatre company.) I think it's generally accepted that Oran Mor has become the home of new writing in Scottish theatre.*

There's a big energy in our small nation's contemporary theatre, and we've entered into a new chapter very recently with the establishment, at long last, of the National Theatre of Scotland. (I have sat on two separate committees campaigning for a National Theatre of Scotland in the past.)

8. Do you find that Scottish-based or Scottish written theater (with an obvious "Scottishness" that is) travels well, or is it perhaps considered too parochial?

Awareness of our planet's multiplicity of languages and cultures has become more heightened with

the advent of the internet. Writers everywhere increasingly employ the true voice of their characters. In cinemas we are now very familiar with foreign films and subtitles.
Scotland has three native languages – Gaelic, Scots and English - and we have debates in our national newspapers about them, particularly over the importance of nurturing Scots and Gaelic. During the Edinburgh International Festival, many people from Europe, Australia and America came to see ***Federer Versus Murray****, and we had no reports of any difficulty with the 'Scottishness' of the dialogue – I haven't written it in dense Scots, by any means, but it's definitely two characters speaking in their natural voices and accents. We had enthusiastic press response from the Netherlands and Ireland, and the editor of the respected American literary magazine* ***Salmagundi*** *came to see it twice, completely out of the blue. I had had no contact with this editor until then, and he offered to publish the play, which I'm delighted to say is going ahead, to coincide with its opening at 59E59 Theaters in New York. So I think the view of 'Scottishness' being parochial is an outmoded one, and parochial in itself.*

9. Have you written in Scots? And do you think there is an audience for Scots-language (dialect) theater? I know that some popular pieces of theater have been translated into Scots, and was curious as to the reaction.

   Yes, I've written in Scots - prose, poetry and drama. Here's a bit of Socratic playfulness I rather like, which you may have heard: Q: "What's the definition of a language?" A: "It's a dialect with an army."
   There's a view that Scots is not a branch of English, but that they are both branches of the same Indo-European tree. I use Scots when it feels right to do so, but by no means exclusively. There's a great appetite in Scotland for plays written in Scots, and there are many of them, but the best known, I would say, are translations of classics, (particularly Moliere and Goldoni). Our great poet, the late Edwin Morgan, created brilliant Scots translations, directly from the French (he was a fine linguist) of Rostand's ***Cyrano de Bergerac*** *and Racine's* ***Phedre.*** *I played the title role in the latter at the Edinburgh Royal Lyceum, and also took part in the original production of Liz Lochhead's superb translation of* ***Tartuffe.*** *There's a fine Scots translation of Shakespeare's Macbeth, by William Lorimer (who also translated the New Testament), and I've just received a draft of a new Scots translation of* ***Waiting For Godot.***

10. Do you think theater can affect language in a cultural sense then, in that regard, promoting Scots

as opposed to standard English. Simply put, will people come to the theater in numbers to see plays written in Scots.

Plays in Scots are certainly not perceived in Scotland as a threat, nor as some form of opposition, to Standard English. They're seen as a firmly established and vibrant part of our theatre tradition. The translations I've mentioned are all very popular with Scottish theatre-goers, and guaranteed to draw big audiences.

11. Is the theater world of Scotland too small to sustain home-grown writing and acting?

Well, I've succeeded in making a modest living in Scotland over more than three decades through my work as an actor and writer (and director)! Scotland has a long and amazingly rich, internationally recognized literary tradition. We have many active, excellent playwrights, who live and work here, some of whom are known beyond our borders.
It's not quite the same for the acting community – most well-known Scottish actors live in London, or in America, the nerve centres of celebrity . There are a few who do remain in Scotland, but that's not so common. Although I trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, where I've also lived and worked, I am very rooted in Scotland. While not being complacent (which is death to creativity), I am excited by the rich professional theatre work that can be, and indeed is being created here.
Take the current, all year-round activity under the roof of the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow: the Citizens' own productions rehearsing and performing there, two Oran Mor shows rehearsing there also, at any one time, and a number of small theatre companies which rent office space there, not to mention performances from visiting companies. The Tron, and the Arches in Glasgow are busy places, mounting their own productions and hosting the work of touring companies. There's Dundee Rep, which has a permanent ensemble; the Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh, which produces its own in-house work; we have new artistic directors (women) at the Traverse in Edinburgh and Perth Repertory Theatre - both these companies create their own productions, and there's a clutch of terrific medium and small-scale non-building based companies touring throughout Scotland. His Majesty's in Aberdeen, has been producing large-scale touring productions, and the Eden Court in Inverness occasionally tours its own work, as well as hosting that of other companies. We've seen the recent appointment of a Theatre Artist in Residence at Sabhal Mor Ostaig, the Gaelic College on the Isle of Skye, and there's the Isle

of Mull Little Theatre. The National Theatre of Scotland produces its own work, and also co-produces with many theatre companies from Scotland, England and abroad.
An artistic director of a Scottish theatre company was interviewed recently about leaving to take up another artistic directorship in England, and commented "…as you go higher up the career ladder, the opportunities to work on the kind of scale I'll be able to work on, with the kind of profile, get fewer and fewer. It's really hard in Scotland to say, 'Well, where do you go next?'"
That view, still quite prevalent, though much less so than in previous decades, implies that there's an intrinsic second-rate value in the Scottish theatre scene. That's not to say that it isn't hugely beneficial and revitalising to work in new places, to get out of your comfort zone, discover new influences – of course it is – but I wouldn't choose to do so for the reason I've just quoted.

12. Do you think there is any role for government funded arts organizations for writing and theater?

ANY role??? It's absolutely vital! Theatre in Scotland – all the work I've just listed – wouldn't exist without government investment.

13. If so, are the rules too strict. (I know there are many complaints of nepotism and clannishness in that regard). Does the vetting process keep certain types of work at bay? How is the content and type of material discriminated against (if it is) when funding comes from a government institution?

Art, like everything else, is prey to fashion and trends. There will always be artists who are 'flavour of the month,' or year/s! But on the whole, Creative Scotland (i.e. the expensively rebranded Scottish Arts Council – an absurd title, this new one, because everyone says "What's Creative Scotland?" and you have to say "The Scottish Arts Council!") - on the whole I would say that this arm's-length government organisation of ours does succeed in funding a fairly broad and varied spectrum of theatre, a system that gives Scotland's community of artists a freedom of expression which absolutely would not be the case if we had to rely on private sponsorship. Private sponsorship is much more likely to act as censorship. Business sponsors have their own needs in relation to targeting a market, and that will always be their agenda, running entirely counter to the artist's motivation. Unusual or challenging art will rarely, if ever, be supported from that constituency – i.e. the business sector. If we relied on private

sponsorship to support theatre, we'd see nothing but West End musicals on our stages. (Don't get me wrong – I love big musicals!) And these would be confined to the cities. The kind of theatre that's being created in Scotland, in the cities and touring to remote areas, would simply not happen, and you would have a de-professionalised, dormant theatre workforce that would end up relying on teaching in schools, colleges and universities to make a living, or, at worst, would be unemployed. Nothing wrong in teaching, of course – 'though why would you study theatre if there were no professional theatre companies to employ graduates? - but my point is that without government investment, you would not have live, professional theatre out there, asking questions, breaking boundaries, the work of skilled practitioners.

Scottish theatre organizations are also supported by individual trusts, here and there, and some business partners, so there is a role for non-state funding, but the bulk of our nation's theatre companies (almost all of which are not-for-profit registered charities limited by guarantee), get their financial support from public funds.

It all depends on whether you believe in the spiritually civilizing force of art as being fundamental to a nation's well-being. If you do, then your government surely has to make provision for it. I think modern Scotland, in spite of its historical anti-art Presbyterianism (which thankfully is eroding), does believe in the importance of art - including theatre - to all of its citizens.

14. Is there room in the theater for serious political discussions - or does it need to be put into an acceptable context (i.e. satire, comedy, music) - "A spoonful of sugar...". Purely political theater seems almost to be a "Soviet" concept in some ways - and dreadful to sit through (no one likes being lectured).

There has always been room in theatre for serious political discussion, in all kinds of forms and contexts. And there always will be, because the status quo will always be challenged. I think it's true that political theatre does tend to incorporate satire and absurdism, but that doesn't mean it can't embrace dialectic. Employing techniques and forms doesn't equate to sugaring the pill – in fact, this kind of theatre can be all the more potent. Great political theatre emerged during Stalinism – because of Stalinism – Nikolai Erdman's ***The Suicide,*** *for example – desperately funny, and very black. Think of the wonderful plays of Vaclav Havel, e.g.* ***The Memorandum.*** *The East Europeans, under Soviet dominance, had to find a way of speaking out subversively, through a disguise, a mask, using metaphor, which created a powerful form of absurdist*

political theatre; then there's John McGrath's popular 7:84 agitprop company, the latter based in many ways on the old music hall form. Think of Lindsay's brilliant ***Ane Pleasant Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis,*** *which is an epic ragbag, full of everything. And the plays of the great South African playwright, Athol Fugard* ***– Sizwe Banzi is Dead*** *is one of the finest political plays I have ever seen, an indictment of Apartheid – deeply moving, very funny, and also, at times, surreal. Then you have the naturalistic, and profoundly political plays of Arthur Miller, and Brian Friel's brilliant historical play* ***Translations,*** *which tackles the politics of language and colonialism. In Scotland, from the younger generation, we've had* ***Snuff,*** *written and directed in 2005 by Davey Anderson, son of Dave (around the same time as* ***Black Watch****), a powerfully disturbing play about political and personal paranoia, xenophobia and racism, with references to Iraq. And we have another important emerging playwright, called David Ireland – he's an actor, actually from Northern Ireland, but based in Glasgow, who writes the most bold, thrillingly knife-edged political plays* ***(****e.g.* ***Everything Between Us)****, huge debates, that spiral and twist, almost baroque, a style all of his own, hilarious and shocking. Political theatre is many things. Lecturing an audience is just bad writing.*

15. How political is the average Scot?

I don't know if I can answer that categorically. What is certainly true (borne out by the way Scots have voted historically, and by the results of opinion polls) is that most Scots want universal public services. Which is why our country has never been a stronghold of the British Conservative party. We prize our National Health Service, and our education system, and are trying to cling on to them. We have free personal care for the elderly. Unlike our English neighbours, our students do not pay tuition fees at university. If you asked Scots if they wanted to re-nationalise the railways (which Margaret Thatcher privatised), I'd bet on it that the response would be an overwhelming "Yes." I think there's evidence that Scots are predisposed to communality. There are many theories about this – that it's the legacy of our ancient clan system, that our monarchs were always Kings and Queens of Scots, not of Scotland. What matters to Scots is the community of people. In this context, it's interesting to contemplate the fascinating fact that in the Gaelic language there is no verb for "to own."

16. As an actor do you find comedy hard - you know the old saying "Dying is easy, comedy is hard."

I love comedy – it's like target practice, analysing the precise timing, what exactly elicits the audience's laughter, and how you execute the moment, technically. And, yes, it is hard!

17. Is coming to the NY stage something important, not only for you, but for Scottish theater in general. Black Watch did very well here for instance, and I'm not sure of the effect it may have had on the ability to get things done in Scotland (success in NY or London of course seems to be something to be desired, mainly because of the scope of the audience and the financial ability to help not only sustain but promote and encourage future works).

Interesting question!! Not all Scottish plays transfer easily to London – there is definitely a cultural gap. I can think of several that have been real hits in Scotland but have not done well in London. Creative Scotland (the Scottish Arts Council – remember?!!) has made international exchanges, connections and touring, a real priority. And yet, it's intriguing to note that the Scottish media hasn't always demonstrated a lot of interest in the event of Scottish productions touring abroad. I don't know why this should be. For example, the very fine Scottish actress, Joanna Tope was nominated for a Drama Desk Award in New York last year, for her part in the Scottish company Random Accomplice's production of ***The Promise,*** *by Douglas Maxwell. But our press hardly covered the achievement.*
I was keen to bring ***Federer Versus Murray*** *to the U.S., because a number of Americans responded so enthusiastically to it on the Edinburgh Fringe last year, leading me to think there would be an audience for the play out there. And now it has been published in America by* ***Salamgundi*** *literary magazine****.*** *This is definitely the kind of development that Creative Scotland is encouraging, but whether it has any impact on the Scottish consciousness I couldn't say! Nor can one say that international touring has financial benefits (other than strengthening future funding applications to Creative Scotland). It's incredibly expensive to tour to the USA – the stringent Visa application process is very costly, necessitating the hiring of an American lawyer to navigate the labyrinthine bureaucracy. It's the most time-consuming, stress-inducing administrative obstacle course that I have ever encountered in my life, and it goes on for months and months. We began the process last year, and only received confirmation of Visa approval the day before travel. And every company we have spoken to, including individual artists who have gone through this system, describe the same experience. Not to mention meeting American Equity's demands, hire of the venue, travel and accommodation costs. Then there's the pressure*

of selling tickets to simply break even. Again, we absolutely could not do this without investment from government funds.

18. New York these days (or at least Broadway) is all about the BIG show - and frankly, it caters to tourists in a very substantial way. Hollywood actors, regardless of quality are sought after with great determination. Mostly it's a matter of costs being so high, and people wanting a guarantee (as best as they can hope for) - good theater in NY seems to be Off Broadway and Off-Off Broadway (very respectable places to be of course). So, here's the question (finally, right): do you feel the need (personal or professional) to come up with the BIG idea - or does personal theater still have a viable place (financially that is).

I don't believe that artists ever start from THE BIG IDEA - the financial incentive, what will sell. That is to say, I know a lot of artists, and none of them would take this as their starting point. I'm certain that none of the great art which has come down to us through history began from such a basis. I mean, I doubt that Chekov ever sat down and thought: "What's THE BIG IDEA that I can sell?" Or Van Gogh? I don't think he ever sold a painting, though his Sunflowers and Starry Night are all over tourist posters, T-shirts and crockery now. There's no doubt that events – what's going on in the world – do inform your creativity, as an artist, and I certainly believe that they should do. But the prevailing celebrity and merchandise culture is a disease, a killer of art, death to the imagination. It's about nothing that is important or of any value, although it makes fortunes.

19. Are young people encouraged to take up theater as a way of life (for those inclined), or is it considered not a very smart move (being able to make a living at it).

Although celebrities are hugely valued, I think the arts are generally seen in Scotland as not 'real' work, and a high risk. But that may be changing now, because unemployment is soaring, due to the global financial crisis. It's an achievement for a young person of any background to secure work of any kind nowadays.

20. Are there drama clubs for instance in elementary schools or are the arts, like in America these days (which are being almost systematically de-funded from Elementary, Middle Schools and High schools) something mostly ignored in the school system.

We do have drama clubs in some elementary schools, and in our high schools, but these kind of groups and clubs are shrinking. The United Kingdom is going down the American road, and has been doing so for years – New Labour, under Tony Blair's leadership, was in many ways a continuance of Thatcherism. Schools now have Business Studies as a core part of the curriculum. In an economy that is driven by profit and competition, and that has introduced business models into all its structures, the arts are problematic. By its very nature, art is indefinable, non-quantifiable. It does not respond to being measured by such limitations. You cannot assess the spiritual wealth of a nation in terms of profit. Having said that, I think Robert Owen, a successful capitalist, and great social reformer, might not agree entirely with that last statement, were he alive today! He believed, in the early part of his career, at any rate, as a mill owner at New Lanark in Scotland during the 1800s, that the arts were fundamental to the health of his workforce. He provided education, dancing and music classes for all his workers and their children, set up infant childcare, and put in place many revolutionary social measures to enhance the welfare of his workforce. He always said that music and dance were central to his philosophy of social reform. Businessmen during this early period of the industrial revolution, when slave labour in Britain's cotton mills was rife, were intrigued and astonished to discover that Owen's New Lanark mill enterprise was the most profitable in Europe. The Co-operative movement is one of Owen's great legacies. Perhaps we should be teaching some Owenite thinking in British schools, rather than Thatcherite Business Studies.

21. Where do you think theater in Scotland is headed (if anywhere).

To attempt to answer that, we have to start from the context of where Scotland itself might be heading. We have a great opportunity before us - a referendum on the issue of Scottish Independence scheduled for 2014. An opportunity to ask ourselves: "What kind of a nation or society do we wish to be?" A chance to put our heads together creatively, and dare to come up with a vision from the horrible mire that we are all wading through at present – the swamp of sinking aspirations, social deprivation and hardship, an unpardonable mess created by the globally rampant, rapacious and morally corrupt, tax-avoiding, bonus-grabbing, controlling financial sector. Do we want to be responsible, creative, democratic, caring citizens, respecting our environment, represented by a government that will ensure we can be just that? Not if we continue to be led by the kind of government operating currently in London. In my view, the values of the

Conservative party, led by David Cameron, are pernicious. We will have no public services left if we go down that route. Although Scotland has a measure of devolution, it is still effectively a region of the United Kingdom, and, as such, we are limited in our ability to take bold initiatives. Many Scots still think of London as the mecca. I love London – it's a wonderful place – I had a tremendously valuable time training there, at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. But sometimes I recall Shakespeare's line in Macbeth, when Ross, referring to Scotland says: 'Alas, poor country, almost afraid to know itself.' I think there's a profound, collective psychological truth in that line. Most Scottish children grow up knowing little of their country's great cultural riches. It would be beneficial if we were able to invest in our own history, and look outward from that place with new understanding and confidence. There's an energy in Scottish theatre that is exploring such territory: David Greig's ***Dunsinane*** *responds in some ways to Ross's statement, which I just quoted. The plays we see at Oran Mor in Glasgow are full of vibrant debate and imagination – hugely varied in style, and packed with ideas. With Gerry Mulgrew's Communicado theatre company, we are constantly examining the contemporary world from our own Scottish perspective. And there are audiences for all this work.*

One of the things I love about the arts in Scotland - it probably has something to do with the size of our small country - is the way in which all the arts cross-fertilise: painters, poets, musicians, songwriters, novelists, dancers, playwrights and film-makers - not all of them Scots, thank goodness - people of various cultural backgrounds and nationalities - tend to have contact with and influence one another, which makes for vibrant interaction.

Rabindranath Tagore, the great Bengali poet wrote in 1940: "Love is kindred to art - it is inexplicable. There are other factors of life, which are visitors that come and go. Art is the guest that comes and remains. The others may be important, but art is inevitable."

I agree with Tagore. I think and believe there is hope.