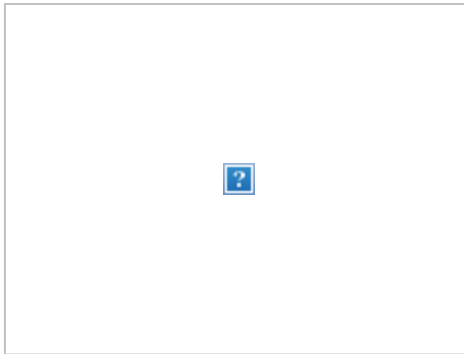




UK Community News

Prince Philip in tribute to Rúhíyyih Khánum

On Tuesday, 15th May, HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, joined around 150 diplomats and distinguished guests at a glittering event to pay tribute to the life of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum. The evening was arranged by Her Grace the Duchess of Abercorn and her Arts for Nature organisation, of which the Duke of Edinburgh is Patron. Rúhíyyih Khánum had been a founding supporter of Arts for Nature and took a great interest in its aims – to utilise the arts to encourage people of means and influence to make their contribution to preserving the world's natural beauty.



Prince Philip is introduced to Mrs Violette Nakhjavani by Mrs Guilda Walker.

The evening began with a dinner and viewing of a selection of the Duke of Edinburgh's private collection of nature paintings, in particular the work of Canadian wildlife artists. In addition, architectural drawings by the distinguished Canadian architect and Hand of the Cause of God, William Sutherland Maxwell, Rúhíyyih Khánum's father, were on view. Among the guests was Mrs Violette Nakhjavani, Rúhíyyih Khánum's devoted companion on all her travels.

The main focus of the evening was a magnificently conceived performance inspired by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum's life. Written by Canadian-born actress/writer Beverley Evans, the show entitled 'A Life So Noble' took four major aspects of Rúhíyyih Khánum's life and character and personified them in four women actresses, who told her story using words taken from her own lectures and writings. The actresses were supported by four other women – from Botswana, Macau, Bolivia and Iran – who wove a floral tapestry as the story unfolded, a metaphor for the rich and varied tapestry that was Amatu'l-Bahá's life. The actresses – West-End musical theatre star Maria Friedman, Beverley Evans, Sarah Clive and Kerry-Ann Smith – conveyed with extraordinary power and emotion the breadth of Madame Rabbani's achievements. There were deeply moving moments such as the scene depicting the passing of Shoghi Effendi when thousands of flower petals rained down on the stage from above. In direct contrast, Amatu'l-Bahá's great world travels were portrayed with wit

Cast of 'A Life so Noble' - 17KB

and verve, while a list of all her pets and favourite animals caused great amusement.

Among the other high points



were a setting of Rúhíyyih Khánum's own poem 'This is Faith', by composer William Lovelady, and excellent accompaniment from a quintet of young musicians from the Guildhall School of Music. The evening ended with Rúhíyyih Khánum's own voice speaking at a meeting in Belfast where she told the friends how much she disliked goodbyes.

The complete cast of "A Life so Noble" with director Annabel Knight (front row, right).

Every guest took away a gift brochure beautifully produced for the event by Peter Maguire and George Ballentyne, as well as a specially compiled anthology called Sacred Earth, and a copy of Amatu'l-Bahá's own book, Prescription for Living. Funds raised at the evening went towards the Mendelssohn on Mull festival which does much to integrate excellent musical performances with the stunning environment in which it takes place.

In his remarks at the end of a memorable evening, The Duke of Edinburgh who had clearly enjoyed the evening said that it was important that people had an emotional response to the needs of the environment, not just an intellectual one. He praised Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum's tireless work for raising awareness of the environment and her contributions to the network of Religions and Conservation. The Duchess of Abercorn told the audience that Amatu'l-Bahá had left the world a better place than when she had come into it, that everyone has a unique and creative contribution to make and that they, like Rúhíyyih Khánum, could contribute their thread to the rich tapestry of life.

Bristol Women's Festival

The Association of Bahá'í Women in Bristol, as part of their service project for the Ruhi Institute Book One, decided to participate in the Women's Festival at the Council House in the centre of Bristol.

This is an annual event run in coordination with the Equalities Unit and the Women's Forum, at which women from the surrounding area gather to celebrate International Women's Day. There are various exhibitions, workshops and classes ranging from Asian costumes to homeopathy.

We decided to set up a tranquillity zone and run half-hour sessions throughout the day. It took a whole day to transform the room given to us by the Council, and judging by the comment we received during the day, our efforts were pretty impressive.

We could not believe how receptive people were, nor how comfortable they were with the idea of sitting meditating and listening to the music. Our only problem was getting them to leave!

We have had many enquiries since the event and one lady has been attending firesides and meetings regularly. We would like to thank our tutor, Maryam Sabet, for all her hard work and endurance.

Doncaster Record Breakers?

Here is a photo taken at a recent class when Graham and Lesley Hodge from York came to take a musical session with the children.

Our classes have been running for about seventeen years at various venues. It is organised by a number of Bahá'í families from a wide area of Lincolnshire and South Yorkshire. It meets fortnightly on Sundays in Doncaster at the moment, with guest teachers from



the surrounding communities. It offers variety and informality, and being home based, a wonderful community meal as well (Behdad has a Pizza shop)! Is 17 years a national record for an informal Bahá'í class?

Rob Lawton

Finding Seekers in Hastings

Trying to catch some, I have a monthly gathering in my house, where people discuss a subject democratically decided upon the previous month. Examples of these are, fate; upbringing; more law less order; trust. I chair the gatherings myself, I also 'mind map' the proceedings. A Baha'i perspective to the subject is hopefully offered by any Baha'is present. I try to foster a safe enough environment for a "clash of differing opinions" in the hope that it brings about "a spark of truth". Not everyone who attends believes in God, and despite the diversity of views, we always end up laughing. After an hour and a quarter, we mingle enabled by the small spread, and music laid on.

After the gathering the mind maps get written up and sent to about forty people on my mailing list. People come and go from this list. There are some on it that never come to the meetings, but enjoy reading the mind maps.

I have permission from the group to add ideas to the maps, as I sometimes find it difficult to think of things to say while chairing and mind mapping. I try to ensure a Baha'i perspective is included, but also ensure other faiths' are as well ("God's Big Instruction Book" is invaluable for this). It is important to me that we do not evangelise. Our Faith's relevance to whatever subject we discuss is hopefully apparent, without us seeming pushy.

I also use my mailing list to inform people of other events, not necessarily Baha'i. People sometimes ask me to publicise theirs. Interestingly, the non-Baha'is that come to our events, have, more often than not, heard about it through my mailing list.

The gatherings are getting more popular: a friend travels from Uckfield an hour away. He says: "You don't get the opportunity to be exposed to such a diversity of views, in an environment that feels safe to express them." The meetings have been going for over four years now, and are subsidised by the Hastings Baha'is because they see them as a good advertisement for our Faith. We are seen to be pursuing an unfettered search for truth, and having respect for other people's views, which is rare in today's world.