

Gopa Nath, of Surtal Arts, on how funding cuts will jeopardise years of hard work



Friday, October 14, 2011



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AMONGST the madness of cuts, cuts and more cuts are we losing sight of the value of what we are severing? The funding cuts are emotive and effect large organisations, but, just for a moment, can we talk about how it will affect the small fish like Surtal Arts?

We all understand the financial challenges the city faces and we all need to make savings to balance the books. However, organisation like Surtal Arts face 100 per cent cuts from the Arts Council and Derby City Council which makes survival extremely challenging.



1.

The cuts have been brutal. The bigger cultural engines in the city may survive, albeit with reduced income. However, the real damage of the cuts has been inflicted on smaller companies and individuals and in particular on black minority led organisations (BME) (the West Indian Association, Racial Equality Council and Surtal) on the fringes with fragile balance sheets.

Surtal is the only BME led organisation in the city working at a strategic level in the arts to promote an alternative arts aesthetic that incorporates artists from the South Asian subcontinent and the British Asian community, which makes up 10.58% of Derby's population.

Therefore, by cutting plurality and diversity from the spectrum of culture funded by Derby City Council what message is it sending to the BME communities?

Surtal Arts prides itself on its work with young people (from all backgrounds and ethnicities), through education work and the production of two festivals (South Asian Arts Festival and Festival of Light), both of which bring communities together to celebrate and share the evolving culture of Derby. Both the festivals promote social cohesion through better understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity.

Every £1 that the city council invests in Surtal has brought in a further £6 to Derby's economy. Rather than looking at the bottom figure in their balance sheet, should we not consider the long term economic impact on community cohesion and the cultural economy?

Derby City Council's funding helps organisation like Surtal Arts to kick start the income generation process every year and the absence of that core funding will impact on the extra thousands of pounds we can raise by using the core funding as leverage.

Surtal has played a crucial role helping some of Derby's young people to become internationally renowned musicians and artists. Cuts will mean that our regular activities for young people will die away which, in turn, will affect young people with real talents from achieving their potential. At times it feel as though the culture of Derby is going back 17 years instead of moving forward!

Very little arts from a BME perspective is promoted in the city, with the removal of funding from small BME arts organisation we foresee a situation where there will be very little or no plurality in the cultural offer of the city.

Mainstream arts organisations have difficulties in engaging with BME communities and organisation like Surtal Arts often played a crucial role in brokering relationships

Cuts to diversity in the arts may cost the city dearly as a plural arts agenda is key to reflecting a true portrait of a thriving, inclusive city.

<http://www.thisisderbyshire.co.uk/Quad-CEO-Keith-Jeffrey-believes-ways-help-protect/story-13620596-detail/story.html>

Quad CEO Keith Jeffrey believes ways must be found to help protect Derby's cultural life



Friday, October 21, 2011



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I WANT to praise Derby City Council for the role it has played in a revitalisation of the arts over the last few years.

Derby City Council has been the catalyst for a wide range of activity that could not have been possible otherwise.



1.

Keith Jeffrey – "progress is being threatened".

The council's investment, vision, and a responsible attitude to risk, has brought Quad into existence and supported a wide and varied programme of culture through organisations like Dedá, Sinfonia Viva, and Surtal Arts.

Through Derby Live the council is a significant supplier of entertainment for the city, it directly supports festivals and through its organisational investment has given Quad, Dedá and Derby Live the capacity to deliver Festé.

I moved here with my family five years ago and we have loved every minute of our time here.

Derby people are the friendliest in the country. I'm a Geordie – so I should know.

We love the city, the parks, the Peak District and so on. My son even supports Derby County.

We have not regretted relocating and we intend spending the rest of our lives here.

Derby is a great place to live and that's made even better by our unique cultural life.

That is why I'm so puzzled by the council's funding proposals.

What makes Derby special to us and many families we know, is the colour and excitement of Derby's currently rich cultural offer. Festé, Format, Cinekids at Quad, dance classes at Dedá – none of these happen in Nottingham, they happen in Derby.

A head of steam has been built up in the city but this progress is being threatened by the council's funding proposals.

The question I am left asking myself after having invested in this success is why stop now?

We completely understand the massive financial challenges faced by the council. Cultural organisations have been planning for significant cuts in any case.

However, nobody had even conceived that a complete disinvestment was a serious possibility.

The proposals will end a number of activities, maybe even some organisations.

That is not a scare tactic – it is a matter of fact. A simple investigation of the finances will show how and where proposed cuts will have the biggest impact.

Quad will survive but we will have to stop delivering certain activities, those that are free are most at risk.

Ironically, it is these activities with the biggest social benefits, the activities where we mean the most to people, that have the biggest impact on the city.

I would like to reassure everyone that the city's cultural leaders are interested in working with the council to find ways of dealing with a new financial reality.

By definition we are creative and innovative. Give us a chance to come up with solutions that help the city as a whole.

We're part of this city, we live here, we work here – Derby is important to us and we want to be part of the solution to the massive issues this city faces.

A cultural life is an investment for a city that benefits the many, it is not a subsidy for a privileged few.

<http://www.thisisderbyshire.co.uk/Thousands-join-Bollywood-dance-fever-festival/story-13004074-detail/story.html>

Thousands join in with Bollywood dance fever at festival in city park



Monday, July 25, 2011



[Derby Telegraph](#)

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THOUSANDS of people broke into dances from hit Bollywood films as a Derby park hosted the city's fourth South Asian Arts Festival.

Saturday's event – this year dubbed Popcorn in the Park – is thought to have attracted about 11,000 people to Normanton's Arboretum.



1.

Jawani dancers

And many of them excitedly joined in as groups put together by organiser Surtal Arts performed dances from Bollywood, a form of Indian musical cinema.

The groups included youngsters from workshops held at Derby schools, including Littleover Community School and Murray Park School.

Surtal Arts choreographer Nisha Nath, 24, said a crowd of 3,000 watched the performance and that most of the younger audience members joined in when they heard songs they knew.

She said: "The songs were all recognisable and popular. The crowd went berserk."

Nisha, of Sinfen, said the crowd for the dancing came from all different cultures, which showed how popular Bollywood and other forms of Indian dance had become.

Her own dance group, Jawani, performed Indian classical dancing and bhangra.

She said: "There were Asian people, white people, black people in the crowd."

"Most of our marketing was actually done outside Derby, in places like Ilkeston, Duffield and Swadlincote."

"You don't need to understand Hindi to enjoy Bollywood dancing."

"Music is a universal language."

Dances came from the films *Tyar Ke Geet*, *Dabaang*, and *Om Shanti Om* – a smash-hit musical which has taken \$40 million worldwide and was later shown in the park on a big screen.

Nisha said about 11,000 people came to the festival in total, with about 5,000 there at any one time.

This would make it the most popular South Asian Arts Festival held so far.

The event opened with a show from talented teenage drummers using dhols – Punjabi folk drums.

There was also story-telling, free workshops and food and craft stalls, including face-painting and bracelet making.

Sarita Madara volunteered to help run the stalls and said the festival was bigger than the previous South Asian Arts Festival, which took place in the city centre in 2010.

The 24-year-old, of Almond Street, Normanton, said: "There was more for kids to do – interactive workshops for drumming and dancing.

"The choreography for the dancing was also brilliant.

"I think it was a good family day out and I'd volunteer again."

Surtal Arts is an organisation based at Derby's Quad arts centre.

It promotes South Asian Arts through educational projects, school clubs and community theatre productions.

<http://www.thisisderbyshire.co.uk/Lantern-parade-shines-light-city-s-diversity/story-13894355-detail/story.html>

Lantern parade shines a light on city's diversity of cultures



Saturday, November 19, 2011



[Derby Telegraph](#)

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PARENTS and children paraded with lanterns and then packed Derby's Market Place to see flame-throwers, dancers and musicians close the "best ever" Season of Light festival.

It was a vibrant and exciting finish to the month-long event, which celebrates the diversity of the city's multicultural communities.



1.

The annual Season of Light parade in Derby marched from The Spot to Cathedral Green. Pictured, top, are sisters Amber and Ashling Husband, aged ten and seven. Above, from left: Ewan Findlay and Tim Fullagher, both aged ten, of Park View Primary School, a stilt-walker and drummers.

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Around 500 people of all ages and backgrounds joined in, many of them schoolchildren who made their own lanterns in class.

They gathered at The Spot clock tower, in Derby city centre, at 6pm yesterday and paraded to the Market Place, led by stilt-walkers and drummers.

People from all ages and backgrounds followed behind, while onlookers took photos or filmed the procession.

Once at the Market Place, a number of local groups and schools took to a makeshift arena beneath the big screen and entertained the crowd with a host of impressive dance and music performances.

The procession then continued to Cathedral Green for the finale entertainment of fire sculptures and fire performers, accompanied by percussionist Sandeep Raval.

The willow lanterns for the parade were created by school children during workshops with lantern artists.

Among them were Gayton Junior School pupils Amber Husband, 10, and her sister Ashling, seven.

Looking on was their mother, Shona Husband, who said: "They've enjoyed making the lanterns and bringing them here with their friends. It's a nice experience for them."

Fellow onlooker Dev Singh Dosanjh added: "It brings people together and is nice for everyone."

Among those who performed were a group of Surtal Arts drummers, who recently reunited for the event.

Member Shakila Ahmed, 43, from Long Eaton, said: "We formed in February but had to split in the summer because of the cuts.

"We've only been back together for two weeks and had three rehearsals for tonight. I've loved it. There's a nice, feel-good vibe."

Elsewhere there was Bollywood dancing, with children from the crowd invited to enter the arena and have a go themselves.

Hardyal Dhindsa, chairman of Quad-based Surtal Arts, which organises the annual event, said: "All the different communities or religions in Derby hold festivals or events that involve lights.

"This month-long programme celebrates all of them and brings all the different communities together.

"Tonight has been fantastic. Everyone from the schools have done an excellent job.

"It's getting better each year. Look at the crowds – this is the best one we've had."

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