

PROFESSIONAL WRITING NEWS

November 2009

Festive spirits

Sometimes dubbed the Glastonbury of literary festivals, the annual gathering of writers, readers and assorted cultural icons at Port Eliot has a freewheeling charm all of its own.

Where else would you find *The Wire's* Dominic West dancing to Queens of Noize, novelist and broadcaster Marcel Theroux presiding over a literary pub quiz or philosophy guru Alain de Botton solving people's work problems live on stage?

As de Botton says, "Port Eliot is like messing about in a garden at play - and from this informality comes the particular zaniness and inventiveness that is the festival's hallmark."

One of Cornwall's most beautiful country houses, [Port Eliot](#) is just up the road from Falmouth, and this year's festival saw contributions from several MA Professional Writing associates.

Mini-marquee

The course even had its own mini-marquee, where current students and alumni read from published books and work in progress, with musical interludes courtesy of literary troubador [Kieran Haynes](#) and power-skiffle outfit [Zappopin'](#) (featuring alumni Luke Richards on harmonium and Tom Sharpe on banjo).

For the students - on both the full-time course and the distance-learning version of the MA - Port Eliot was not just a lot of fun but also a great opportunity to get up-close and personal with literary movers and shakers.

Interviews with many of these can be found on [profwriting.com](#), where a wealth of other writing-related news and resources includes a [live feed](#) from the Cheltenham Screenwriters' Festival, by Professional Writing student Jessica Mayne.



Zappopin' rock the Professional Writing marquee at Port Eliot

Summer inspiration

Two summer schools in Falmouth this year helped budding writers find out how to turn their talents into paid, published work.

Taught by tutors on the MA course, the Professional Writing Summer School covered areas ranging from telling compelling stories and creating convincing fictional characters to copywriting for business and pitching ideas for feature articles and books.

The Turn Your Life Into A Book Summer School focused on ways of using personal experience to write in both fictional and non-fictional forms. It was led by Sophie Parkin, who has drawn extensively on her own colourful life story for novels including *Dear Goddess* and *The Life and Loves of Lily* series.

Feedback from students on both courses was little less than rapturous. One wrote: "I have nothing bad to say about this week - informative, encouraging, helpful and never a dull moment... laughter, tears, everything. The tutors were all utterly respectful - no 'them' (published authors) and 'us' (wannabes) whatsoever. It was both inspiring and confidence-giving."

Find out more about MA Professional Writing at Falmouth and how to apply [here](#).

You can also check us out on [Facebook](#) or tune into our tweets on [Twitter](#).

BOGOF and fly!

Put a load of strangers in a room on a Monday morning and tell them to get a radio drama on air by the end of the week. That was the challenge issued to students on the first day of the MA course in October.

A pretty tall order. But with the help of seasoned writer and producer Paul Dodgson – whose credits include *Eastenders* for BBC TV and *Betjeman's Women* for Radio Four – the students pulled it off in style.

The show they came up with – a comedy called *BOGOF*, set in the aisles of a slightly surreal supermarket – was team-written in two days and then recorded by a group of professional actors before being edited and broadcast on Falmouth's very own radio station, [The Source FM](#).

Chris Osbaldeston, one of the students taking part, says: "For me, the format the tutors have used to introduce us, both to each other and to the course itself, has been an excellent way to get us working together as a team. To be honest it didn't really feel like work at all.

It felt as though I was on holiday with a group of friends I'd known all my life."

The broadcast version of *BOGOF* can be heard on a [Facebook page](#) specially set up for the project.

Pushing the boundaries

The MA Professional Writing has been awarded £20,000 to develop open-access learning resources.

Course Leader Christina Bunce explains: "This groundbreaking project, which we've named OpenSpace, is about making imaginative use of new technology to create materials that can be used freely and flexibly, not just by our own students but by people who have previously been excluded by institutional boundaries."

The initial aim is to develop a version of the MA's highly successful screenwriting unit and make this available worldwide under a Creative Commons Licence.

There's more about the OpenSpace project [here](#).

Where are they now?

In which we track down Professional Writing alumni, to the ends of the earth if necessary.

Nina Bhadreshwar (2005-6) is living in Scotland, where she continues to edit *The Real State*, an international underground arts and music magazine. Last year, she published *How to Survive Puberty at 25*, the extraordinary tale of how hip-hop both saved her and nearly killed her when, as an "overaged adolescent" on the run from anorexia and depression in northern England, she was recruited by Death Row Records in Los Angeles and became embroiled in "a living nightmare ending in abduction, conspiracy, gunfights, broken bones, broken hearts and death".

Kirstie Rushmer (2004-5) is campaign manager for [ninemillion.org](#), a United Nations Refugee Agency campaign to help bring education and sport programmes to the world's nine million refugee children.

Anusia Kotowicz (2005-6) has a screenplay in production with Casa Films. *Fog*, to be directed by Antony Meadley, is a psychological thriller with supernatural overtones.

Angus Mitchell (2005-6) is working at the leading brand consultancy Origin, where, he reports, "I'm happy to be in a creative environment where I can flex my linguistic skills with a good bunch of people."

Louise Cooper, 1952-2009

It's with great sadness that we report the sudden death of Louise Cooper at the age of just 57.

Louise was a remarkably gifted and versatile writer – both a highly regarded fantasy novelist and a prolific children's author – who contributed a great deal to the MA course as a regular guest speaker and project tutor. She was also a wonderfully warm and generous personality, whose loss will be keenly felt by many.

Our hearts go out to her family, especially her devoted husband Cas.

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