Memory Exchange: Weaving In and Out

An inter-generational music project about memories and the mills in Dundee

Spring 2016
Memory Exchange: Weaving In and Out is an inter-generational music project, using song and instrumental improvisation to encourage a school and community group to reflect on the theme of child labour and working conditions in the textile industry.

The idea of weaving is central to the theme and set-up of the project. The project is structured around the two groups developing their own threads around their research at Verdant Works and their memories of mills in Dundee.

In addition to learning one or two traditional Dundee mill songs, both groups have written and will perform their own songs about child labour and working conditions in the textile industry.

The two groups will come together for a site-specific promenade performance; weaving their songs and music around the machinery in the High Mill @ Verdant Works.
Songs

Community Group
A Bairn’s Tale
Half-Timer
Meh Grannie and the Mills
Warpers

St John’s RC Academy
All Day
Childhood
No Money
A Young Boy

Mill songs
The Dundee Lassie
The Jute Mill Song
The work o’ the weaver
A Bairn’s Tale

Written by Irene McArtney, Lesley McEwen, Marguerite McMichael and Margaret Rodgers to the tune of Wee, Willie Winkie

Runnin’ through the closie, then runnin’ up the stairs chappin’ at the lavie door, hopin’ naebody’s there tumblin’ intae grannie cleanin’ oot the grate Faither, he just huds’ the bairn it’s the kettle-biler’s fate.

Mither she worked the mull, Faither, well ye ken I’m aff tae the backies, greenie pole’s a den see auld Broon’s new car, like a big black crate Faither at the windie, it’s kettle-biler’s fate.

Mither, well she coughed a lot, then she went awa it maks me sad thinkin’ o’ her, tears come slowly fa smells o’ jute a oor the place, disnae help ma paw he sits and stares intae his beer, as blank as a fitbaw.

Brither is no happy, missed last nicht’s dicht gaen oot wi a lass, must hae got a date grannie looks ower meh dad, gaen tae the kirk Faither he juds huds the bairn, it’s kettle-biler’s fate.

Sister, she’s a bonny lass, aye combin’ hair no the colour that it looks ‘cos jutes aye in the air I’m hopin’ I’ll be like her when my time’s fur the mull I will be grown up then, only half day fur the schull.

Faither says ‘is grand ma lass’, but his eyes look sad ‘I’m still young,’ he thinksing, ‘the world is mad’ lookin’ at me, face wet wi’ tears says, ‘Ye mind me o’ yer maw, it’s kettle-biler’s fate.’
Half-Timer

Written by Marguerite McMichael to the tune of Queen Mary.

Half-timer, half-timer I’m very tired
my mither says wake up but it’s still dark ootside
I meet wi’ ma friends and we march doon the street
boots on the cobbles like the noise of defeat.

Half timer, half timer oor heeds are bowed low
the cauld air bites hard on oor fingers and toes
like troops on the march we advance to the mill
the bummer gaes aff the air outside noo still.

Half timer, half timer the noise in my heed
the clacking no fish wives but the deil and his deeds
I crawl under machines but my mind’s jist no here
but in sweeties and parks and wi’ things I hold dear.

Half timer, half timer ma half day is done
it’s denner at hame then scale an’ some sums
but the air will be purer the quiet will be bliss
an’ aifter ma maither wi’ tea and a kiss.
Meh Grannie and the Mills

Written by James Gordon, Jean Grant, Hettie Jamieson and Len Jamieson to the tune of Ae Fond Kiss.

In ae jute mill granny worked
six days oot o seven
clackin looms and flying stoor
no my idea o` heaven.

If ye missed the bummer in the morning
someone else would tak yer turn
a hale day’s wages lost
lost: financial disaster.

Only rarely did it happen
it was up to bairns tae say
‘Ma`s no in, she`ll see ye next week’
when the rent man knocked on Friday.

Mills being noisy places
sign language widely yased
deafness common among wimmen
hearing not the bairns they raised.

The only place for break and blether
denner time was the works canteen
you could meet up wi` yer workmates
find oot how their bairnies were daein`.

The hoose cleaned and stairs scrubbed
efter graft in the mill a` week
then a trip tae the washie
Guid Auld Days: what a cheek.
They laims are hungry, monster baists they a’ eat the beams we mak
the weavers feed them bits of yarn for mair they aye come back.

We warpers have tae feed them weel we beams o’ guid jute threed
sae morn tae nicht we’re warpin’ pair tae satisfy thur need.

Cawin’ on the warpin’ mill ‘s bad eneuch nae doot
it’s the lurkin eh’m thinkin’ o’ that fairly wears me oot.

Its hand o’er hand ‘n’ airm o’er airm
whiles pu’in’ aff the chain jist like a Tay swimmer lad it canna be lea’t alane.

The gafter needs it coiled doon nate
we leases laid oot weel it ready tae be beamed a lain it meal.
All Day

Written by Caitlin, Callan, Leighton, Mason and Oliver to the tune of Duncan Gray

Wha wants tae be a child working in the mills a’ day when you should be oot tae play this is what I’m sayin’:

wha wants tae work in the mills a’ day? Wha wants tae be a child shiftin’ bobbins in the mills a’ day when you should be kickin’ a ba’ nae doing that at a’ wha wants tae work in the mills a’ day?
Childhood

Written by Aimee, Arlene, Chloe and Molly to the tune of Strike Song

I just wanted to be child just like rich kids but a living I had to earn: money to go round no play for me I had to work all day.

Tired, hot, I wanted to be home in the mill: never alone how I wanted to go out have some fun with my friends but a day in the mill never ends.
No Money

Written by Callie, Josh, Nicole, Rhiannon and Sean to the tune of Dundee Once More

Ain’t got no money
and times are really tough
our porridge is runny
and I look a little scruff.

Got no shoes on out feet
there are rats everywhere
nothing to eat, no clothes to wear
we think it is unfair.
A Young Boy

Written by Bobbi-Lee, Harry, Jay and Kama to the tune of Dundee Jail

I was a young boy who worked at the age of six
I snuck into the mills as my mother was sick
we needed more money and we lived on bread and rice
we only had a small flat that crawled wi’ rats and mice.

Working the machines all day for only little pay
what kind of life is this for a boy of only six
what kind of life is this for a boy of only six
who is working the machines all day, for only little pay.

Machines were very loud, and we were a big crowd
it made it hard for me to work, I found it hard to work
I left that day with little pay, but many cuts and scars
I’d cry until I was so weak and could not talk no more.

Working the machines all day for only little pay
what kind of life is this for a boy of only six
what kind of life is this for a boy of only six
who is working the machines all day, for only little pay.
The Dundee Lassie

Traditional

I’m a Dundee lassie, you can see and ye’ll a’ways find me cheerfu’,
nae matter whaur I be
tho’ at time I feel doonherted, sad or ill
I’m a spinner into Baxter’s Mill.

My mither died when I was young, my father fell in France
I’d like tae hae been a teacher, but I never got the chance
I’ll soon be getting married tae a lad they ca’ Tam Hill
and he is an iler intae Halley’s Mill.

I’m chumming with a lassie, they ca’ her Jeannie Bain
she says she’ll never marry, her lad got killed in Spain
I often hear her speak about a place they call Teruel
and she is a winder intae Craigie’s Mill.
The Jute Mill Song

Written by Mary Brooksbank

Oh, dear me, the mill’s gaen fast
The puir wee shifters canna get their rest
shiftin’ bobbins, coorse or fine
They fairly mak’ ye work for your ten and nine.

Oh, dear me, I wish the day was done
Rinnin’ up and doon the pass is nae fun
Shiftin’, piecin’, spinnin’ - warp, weft and twine
Tae feed and cled my bairnie affen ten and nine.

Oh, dear me, the warld’s ill divided
Them that work the hardest are aye wi’ least provided
But I main bide contented, dark days and fine
There’s nae much pleasure living affen ten and nine.
Work of the Weaver

Written by David Shaw

We are all met together here to sit and to crack
With our glasses in our hands and our work upon our backs
And there’s not a trade among them all can neither mend nor mak
Gin it wasna for the work of the weavers

Chorus:
If it wasna for the weavers, what would you do
You wouldn’a hae cloth that’s made o wool
Ye wouldn’a hae a coat neither black nor the blue
Gin it wasna for the work o the the weavers

The heilan’ chiels, they mock us and crack aye aboots
They say that we are thin faced, bleached like cloots
But yet for all their mockery, they canna do wi oots
No they canna want the work o the weavers

There’s our sailors and our soldiers, we know they’re all a’ bauld
But if they hadna clothes, faith they couldn’a live for cauld
The high and low, the rich and poor, a’body young and auld
They widna want the work o the weavers

The weaving is a trade that never can fail
As longs we need a cloth to keep another hale
So let us aye be merry over a bicket of good ale
And drink a health to the weavers
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