



## Amplifying Artistry Series 2, Episode 3

### "Airdrie"

### Transcript

00:00:00 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Welcome to Amplifying Artistry; the podcast that turns up the volume on creativity in North Lanarkshire.

00:00:16 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Join us as we dive into the vibrant minds of local creatives, right here in the heart of Scotland. In this series, we'll be chatting with creative people who live or work in North

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Lanarkshire, exploring their unique stories and witnessing firsthand what happens when passion meets a revolutionary desire to create.

So whether you're listening during your daily commute, finding solace in these conversations at home, or simply seeking a moment of inspiration; in this podcast we hope that you'll identify with the people that you hear and the stories that we encounter.

By delving into the lives and experiences of North Lanarkshire's gifted artists and creators, we shed light on the transformative power of creativity. So, whether you're seeking a deeper understanding of yourself, a fresh perspective on your own potential, or simply a delightful escape into the world of creativity; Amplifying Artistry promises an enlightening journey that will leave you inspired, informed, and perhaps forever changed. So join us and coory in for the next wee while.

00:01:20 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Hello and welcome back to Amplifying Artistry. I'm your host, Scott Fleming, and we're on episode 3 now of Series 2, with 2024 truly kicking in the gear. And nowhere is that more evident than in the town of Airdrie. Now, locals to the area might be aware of some of the exciting developments happening there over the next wee while, but for the broader part of North Lanarkshire and beyond, we're excited to let you know about what you can expect from the town in the coming months. And that's what this episode is all about; shining a spotlight on the new ventures happening in Airdrie that you can look forward to. Later on in the episode we're going to be speaking directly to the citizens of North Lanarkshire to see how they feel about the developments, as well as hearing a fantastic musical collaboration that recently took place in Calderbank.

But now, we're going to kick off with a topic very close to my own heart. As many of you probably know, late last year the cultural sector of North Lanarkshire was hit with a shockwave as Motherwell Concert Hall and theatre closed suddenly following the discovery of RAAC in the roof. People were left wondering what the next steps would be, but thankfully work has been going on behind the scenes since the start of the year to transform Airdrie Town hall into the new primary, performing arts venue of North

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Lanarkshire. The Town Hall opened in 1912 and has remained a fixture of the arts scene in the constituency ever since. However, with the arrival of the COVID-19 virus, changes had to be made and the town hall was chosen to be a prominent vaccination centre, which it remained until December of last year. Now, the teams at the Concert Hall have worked tirelessly to bring the Town Hall back up to speed as a performance venue, fitted with technology better than the venue has ever seen before.

You'll hear more about that side of things later, but first we're going to hear from a couple of people with unique insights into the renovations. One of them is Craig Smart; our venues manager who's overseeing the project. And the other is someone you might recognise if you've ever found yourself at a North Lanarkshire pantomime. Ian "Sheepie" Smith is an actor who's appeared in dozens of pantos over the years, in Motherwell and now in Airdrie. This year's Easter Eggstravaganza, Rumpelstiltskin, will be the inaugural performance at the recently refurbished Town Hall, and here Sheepie talks all about it. Enjoy.

00:03:43 **Ian "Sheepie" Smith**

Awwriiight. Hello, it's me. It's Ian "Sheepie" Smith.

00:03:46 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Fantastic. So what can audiences expect from this panto?

00:03:50 **Ian "Sheepie" Smith**

So we're here at Airdrie this year, but this pantomime, as always, we kind of set the standard with Easter panto, it will be full of hilarious jokes that I need to write. There'll also be toe tapping tunes, and also this year there'll be some lovely magic.

00:04:10 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Fantastic. So, as you said when Airdrie Town Hall, so take us back to the moment that you heard about the closure at Motherwell. Was coming to Airdrie on your radar right away? When did you find out about that?

00:04:19 **Ian "Sheepie" Smith**

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So when we found out, it was obviously last year, and then we kind of found out obviously about the Christmas panto being at Ravenscraig, but I think we heard early January so it's pretty much straight after and there was a decision made that, you know, in North Lanarkshire it's important, if we can't do it in Motherwell, let's keep it in North Lanarkshire, and we couldn't do it at Ravenscraig, let's do it here at Airdrie Town Hall.

00:04:44 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah, absolutely. So now that you've been in and seen the venue, what are your thoughts on it then?

00:04:46 **Ian "Sheepie" Smith**

So I've just had a quick walk round and it looks like a lovely space. I know at the moment there's painters painting and stuff like that. So I think it's important to make it as big as what Motherwell was for the foreseeable, you know, you've gotta just push on. So we're looking forward to...it's quite exciting to be fair. You know, obviously I've been quite a regular to Motherwell Theatre since 2009, but it's quite exciting when you come into a new theatre space and new dressing rooms, and I think, you know, it looks great. Obviously, they've got the balconies and stuff like that. And I think in fairness, I think there's more seats (capacity) here than it is at the Motherwell Theatre. So you know, hopefully they'll be full of audiences come April.

00:05:34 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Definitely. You mentioned making it as big as Motherwell was, and I know that some of the tech guys told me that all the lighting equipment and sound equipment that they had at Ravenscraig for the panto has been brought to Airdrie. So that's now on the stage at Airdrie, so they won't be missing out on anything.

00:05:50 **Ian "Sheepie" Smith**

No, there's not literally, you know, from the Starbright aspect of it, we had to maybe change bits of scenery that we've always been able to fit into Motherwell. I think the stage is a bit different dimensions here. That's the only thing we've had to really change. You know, I just spoke to the Theatre Manager there from Motherwell and everything's

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been moved. You know, if that's going to be closed, move it here and let's build this up to be the new focal point for theatre and entertainment in North Lanarkshire.

00:06:23 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

So you've been, you said 2009 was your first Motherwell panto?

00:06:27 **Ian "Sheepie" Smith**

It was, yeah.

00:06:28 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Right, so what is it about North Lanarkshire that keeps bringing you back here for panto?

00:06:33 **Ian "Sheepie" Smith**

Well, one; I live here now as well. So obviously when I first started doing panto with Motherwell Theatre, I lived through in Edinburgh till 2016 I moved. So obviously I met my wife here who worked at Motherwell Theatre, so there's been quite a lot of ties and now, you know, that's coming on eight years I've lived in Motherwell and so, you know, there's more of a meaning for me with the whole thing that happened with Motherwell Theatre closing and stuff like that, because that's where I first established myself in the panto scene. It was important to me that Easter Panto, I was still in it, and I will be hopefully for the foreseeable, whether it be Airdrie next year, wherever it is in North Lanarkshire we've always planted herself here and that will never really change. It felt like a while, you know, I mean once we said that was Airdrie and you know, things were still a bit up in the air, now it's all systems go.

00:07:25 **Craig Smart**

Hi, I'm Craig Smart, I'm the creative resources and assets manager for North Lanarkshire Council.

00:07:30 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Lovely. So Airdrie Hall is currently going through a little bit of a mini renovation. Can you talk a little bit about that? What's the work that's been done so far?

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00:07:37 **Craig Smart**

Yeah, obviously the Town Hall has been closed for over 4 years in terms of a performing arts venue. Obviously it had a very important role within the community during the COVID crisis, it was a vaccination centre right up until the end of 2023 believe it or not. So we got the keys back, if you like, to the Main Hall etc, at the end of the year. So we're working hard to get it back to a performing arts venue, and for other events within the community. So we're hoping to open up at the beginning of April.

00:08:10 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Fantastic. And what's gonna be the first performance that goes in there?

00:08:13 **Craig Smart**

Well, it had to be something special, didn't it? So we're opening up with our Easter production with Sheepie who used to obviously appear at Motherwell's pantomime over the years so he'll lead on that. And that's just a, you know, a show that would be at Motherwell normally, but obviously it's gonna be at Airdrie Town hall. So it's a cracker to start with and it's quite a good run and it's selling really well as well.

00:08:32 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah. Brilliant. So what are some of the benefits then of the theatre space that comes with Airdrie that maybe you wouldn't maybe get with other venues?

00:08:38 **Craig Smart**

Yeah, I mean, it's a traditional Town Hall so it does have restrictions in terms of what you can do. You know, there's gonna be...obviously the situation with Motherwell closing due to the RAAC in the roof, Airdrie is going to be the number one performing arts venue under our control for North Lanarkshire Council, so you know, bearing in mind that has been closed for so long as a vaccination centre, it was needing a lick of paint, and you know, a lot of other things; the floor has been redone and things like that. So hopefully anybody that visits will get a nice surprise to see a bit of investment and thought to it reopening again.

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00:09:14 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah, absolutely. One of the things that I love about Airdrie Town Hall is that it's such an old building. So there's a lot more history there compared to a lot of other performance venues that you get.

00:09:26 **Craig Smart**

Yeah, absolutely, and that's something that's really important to us; to maintain that. Obviously the Rediscovering Airdrie Project that's about to be launched, but we see ourselves as a big role within that and obviously maintaining the heritage of the Town Hall is really important to the community. It's their hall, you know, we're just custodians to a degree, looking after it and making sure we give the public what they want.

00:09:45 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

You talk about the Rediscovering Airdrie Project, what can the people of Airdrie expect? How will this benefit them having such a great performance hub in their town?

00:09:53 **Craig Smart**

That's a good question. I think obviously Motherwell closing, a lot of people might say that's the reason why there's so many shows in here...it was always the intention to increase the programme with the Rediscovering Airdrie Project in mind. We can't fit everything that would come from Motherwell, anyway, we had a thought in terms of what could fit in here and that was a plan anyway, to be honest, it was a varied mix between the two venues. So I think the public will be really pleased of what we're putting on here. It's a mix of everything you would expect from children's shows, films that have been running all the way through anyway, and you know, bringing the community and allowing them to let the space out again, whether that be a wedding or an amateur show or dance show, things like that.

00:10:37 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah, definitely. Well, I was actually gonna ask about that then because Airdrie, similar to Motherwell, has sort of two auditoria within it that you can use for different events. You've got the downstairs Main hall and upstairs in the Lesser Hall. You talked about it a

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little bit with things like the cinema and the weddings, what are some of the variety of events that Airdrie can offer?

00:10:54 **Craig Smart**

Well, we try to make sure that it is something for everyone. So if you think of all the kind of medium of performing arts we will have ballet, we'll have tribute shows, you know, hopefully some well known comedians coming in, you know, and of course starting off with that major Easter production, that pantomime. I think it's a great start and it's only gonna get stronger. And the fact that people are getting a standing Complete Stone Roses gig; a tribute band, but it's nearly sold out for a standing show in the in the main hall, which is great, and it's been long time since we've done anything in a standing capacity like a rock concert. We've had the Proclaimers in the past and Hue and Cry and things like that. So we want to build up in that as well. So it's indeed a good programme. I think everyone would be happy with it.

00:11:36 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah, definitely. It sounds like Airdrie Town Hall really is gonna be a sort of cultural hub for North Lanarkshire and sort of fill the void, so to speak, leftover by Motherwell. So I think everyone's really excited to see where it goes.

00:11:46 **Craig Smart**

It's been such a long time, four years, that the public's missed out on what this building's here to offer, and don't get me wrong, the vaccination, of course was hugely important at that time, and it was great that we could offer that space, so we can't wait to open the doors again for getting these events running and, it's kind of a heartbeat of Airdrie a wee bit in terms of the hustle and bustle at night and people coming through the doors. So hopefully the wider community and businesses will enjoy it as well. So yeah, we're excited.

00:12:14 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Thank you to Sheepie and Craig for those interviews. You'll hear more of Sheepie's later on in the episode, but now I want to jump to another exciting development happening



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in Airdrie. The Rediscovering Airdrie Project will be kicking off very soon and we caught up with the project lead, John Paul Sumner, to tell us all about it.

00:12:33 **John Paul Sumner**

Well, thank you. Yes, my name is John Paul Sumner, and I am the project coordinator of the Rediscovering Airdrie Project and what that project is; is we're trying to find out a little bit about the people and the places in Airdrie. It's funded by Historic Environment Scotland and also by the Heritage Fund and also by North Lanarkshire Council. And what we want to do is find out a little bit about the people, about the places, about the history and the stories of the town of Airdrie.

00:13:08 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Fantastic. So what kind of things can people expect from the project?

00:13:14 **John Paul Sumner**

Well, I'll tell you. See if you go to Airdrie Library and you're in the stairwell there, what you'll see is a lovely piece of stained glass and what that stained glass depicts; on one side it's got a depiction of the world of literature, and on the other side it's got a depiction of the world of science, and particularly astronomy, and it represents some of the ideals that we were wanting to talk about in the Rediscovering Airdrie Project. In the 1950s, there was a project that was done here and what it did was it looked at...it was a project about Community, self examination and portrayal and how do people define themselves, and it culminated in an exhibition which was called Discovering Airdrie. And so now, just over 70 years later we're going to be *Rediscovering Airdrie*. I mean, a lot of people might not know it, but actually on the roof of Airdrie Library is an observatory for observing the stars and the planets and the solar system. And it's actually one of only four public observatories in Scotland. But not only that, it's the smallest, but it was the first one, or it's the it's the oldest surviving one. And so, what we want to do is celebrate this asset that the town has got, to enthuse people about places like the Observatory and other places, and to get people involved. So, for example, what you'll see over the course of the summer is; you'll see us out on the streets of Airdrie, and we're gonna have telescopes, and we'll do a little bit of street Astronomy, and we'll talk about our

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place in the world and our place in the universe and looking out and doing a little bit of maybe looking inwards as well to discover who we are and what are our values and what makes us unique. And to really celebrate what we've got here in Airdrie. So over the course of the summer, you'll see us out on the streets, we're going to be celebrating the great heritage and culture of Airdrie and its great heritage of literature and performance and art. Airdrie's been a great cauldron of artistic creativity. We're gonna be celebrating our history of Scots language, and we're gonna be doing some literature and some poetry.

00:15:51 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Would do you think the wider benefits will be on the town from a project like this?

00:15:55 **John Paul Sumner**

Well, the idea is that, you know, through discovering this great heritage, a great history, we're going to bring in people who are going to discover more of what Airdrie has to offer. We're also going to enhance our own lives by celebrating what we've got. We're going to celebrate the built heritage. And develop our sense of pride in the actual buildings and the actual centre that we've got there. And hopefully over time this will help bring in investment. It'll help with education and the idea is that it will develop upon what Airdrie's already got and bring it out to the fore and to celebrate it.

00:16:34 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah, Airdrie Town Hall as well is going through a refurbishment at the moment to make it more of a cultural hub of North Lanarkshire. So there's a lot going on in the community.

00:16:42 **John Paul Sumner**

Yeah, there's lots going on in the Town Hall, lots of performances. It's the place to be at the moment. You'll find us down there in the summer as well and it's really going through a renaissance at the moment.

00:16:56 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

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Yeah, absolutely. And so for people that are maybe listening that would want to interact and engage with the project, is there any ways to go about that?

00:17:04 **John Paul Sumner**

Yeah. As I say, you'll see us on the streets. What we're looking to do is we also want to we want to create a modern oral history so we can actually hear people's stories, so we can actually hear firsthand what people's experiences were. So we are going to be running some social history training sessions so you can learn yourself how to collect information. And we're also going to be running some sessions where we're going to invite people to come in and to tell us about their life experiences. And so yeah, you can find us on Facebook; we're on the MyAirdrie Facebook page, and you'll see regular updates, and we've also got a web page so you can find us at the North Lanarkshire Council webpage and you just type in Rediscovering Airdrie and it will come up.

00:17:53 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Thank you for that, John Paul. If you would like to get involved in any of those projects, then please do follow the links. Now, moving on to something I'm very excited to let you all hear. We at the Council's Arts Development Team strive to deliver creative opportunities to communities all over the authority. And so, following discussions with the head teacher of Corpus Christi Primary School in Calderbank, we discovered a lack of creative outlets in the area due to limited transport access to major towns or cities.

To address this, the team introduced Scottish Opera to both Corpus Christi and Calderbank primary schools, aiming to bring their schools tour to Calderbank. Scottish Opera's annual primary schools tour supports teachers in delivering aspects of a Curriculum for Excellence, providing up to 100 primary, five to seven pupils with a chance to participate in a special performance day where they create their own 30 minute show with expert guidance. Both schools embrace the project entirely, with students and teachers alike fully engaging in singing, dancing and acting, the results of which...well, have a listen for yourself.

00:19:58 *\*Performance from children and Scottish Opera, they sing about Vikings\**

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00:20:14 **Angela Arbuckle**

So I'm Angela Arbuckle; I'm the principal teacher at Calderbank Primary.

00:20:18 **Kendall Craig**

And I'm Kendall Craig, and I am the Primary 6-7 class teacher at Calderbank Primary.

00:20:22 **Aaron Hawthorne**

Wonderful, so what has this experience been like for you?

00:20:22 **Kendall Craig**

Amazing actually.

00:20:25 **Angela Arbuckle**

It really has. It's been so good, I think because it's a one-off and you know you don't normally get an opportunity like this. So you do your school shows and the Christmas shows and things like that, but I think this is something totally different that they've not experienced and probably won't again.

00:20:43 **Kendall Craig**

And it's so special because obviously the people who come in from the Scottish Opera are so highly skilled that it's like, their addition to this this week has just made it even better.

00:20:57 **Aaron Hawthorne**

And so what's it been like teaching this material in the class using the resources and things, have the kids been engaging with it really well?

00:21:03 **Angela Arbuckle**

Really well, I think it was us actually more panicked; like, are we gonna be able to put this in this time?

00:21:09 **Kendall Craig**

And do it justice.

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00:21:11 **Angela Arbuckle**

But the materials and everything they send you and the lessons are so good, so well structured that actually it kind of teaches itself almost doesn't it? And all the additional materials that learn about the Vikings, learn about the Opera and things.

00:21:23 **Kendall Craig**

They've been really engaged with it as well.

00:21:25 **Aaron Hawthorne**

Excellent. And have you seen any sort of transformation at all with some of the kids, you know from when they were starting to learn it versus today?

00:21:32 **Angela Arbuckle**

Totally, I've got the five/six class, and I would say probably half of them are confident on stage and the other half not at all, and to say it's pushed them out their comfort zone is an understatement. Every single one of them have loved it and been so engaged, so enthusiastic and put everything into it that we're like that "I can't believe how good they are". Like, genuinely, genuinely in rehearsals we're blown away. So actually, to sit and watch them when they're doing this, it's goosepimple type stuff.

00:22:12 **Aaron Hawthorne**

And how's it felt to be working with these fantastic musicians?.

00:22:12 **Primary School Pupils**

It's really fun/It's amazing/It's been quite crazy/A different experience than we usually have in our shows.

00:22:20 **Aaron Hawthorne**

I mean, have you ever done anything this before?

00:22:21 **Primary School Pupils**

No.

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00:22:29 **Aaron Hawthorne**

Any other words to describe it?

00:22:32 **Primary School Pupils**

It was exciting/nerve-wracking at first, then it was fun/it feels quite surreal that it's actually happened/it gets your adrenaline up.

00:22:36 **Aaron Hawthorne**

Absolutely, it really does, doesn't it?

00:22:38 **Primary School Pupil**

Yeah, a special experience.

00:22:41 **Aaron Hawthorne**

Can't get any better than that!

00:22:42 **Primary School Pupils**

See our school, we're the only schools in North Lanarkshire or maybe the entire Lanarkshire that are actually doing this so we're very, very lucky.

00:22:48 **Aaron Hawthorne**

So how's it felt doing all this today? I mean, it sounds amazing, do you feel amazing?

00:22:52 **Primary School Pupils**

Yes! I feel absolutely amazing

00:22:55 **Aaron Hawthorne**

How long you been working this in your classrooms for?

00:22:57 **Aaron Hawthorne**

Six weeks? Oh my goodness. And has it been fun learning in the classroom? And what about working with Calderbank?

00:23:03 **Primary School Pupils**

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Yeah. It's very fun because we've got friends from that school.

00:23:08 **Aaron Hawthorne**

Fantastic. That is amazing.

00:23:12 **Primary School Pupil**

I'm grateful for having the opportunity to do this and work with the Scottish Opera and Calderbank Primary.

00:23:20 **Kendall Craig**

One of the boys had said during the week that when we'd been to Corpus Christi for a practise, he was saying "when everybody was singing together it was electric" he was like "it was brilliant" and these are your, you know, your boys who are really into their football and things like that, and maybe, you know, this sort of thing maybe isn't their cup of tea at all times, but no, I think that they really felt the energy and it's...yeah.

00:23:46 **Angela Arbuckle**

It's just been so nice actually to do something joint as well, because I think we've spoken about it on and off. But when you're in a small village, you've got the two schools. So this is our first opportunity really that we've done anything on this scale. So we're hoping to continue on from this and develop this a wee bit more between the two schools.

00:24:04 **Aaron Hawthorne**

Well, I was gonna ask; what's the next steps after this? So Scottish Opera have come in and done this.

00:24:09 **Angela Arbuckle**

And that's it; we really don't want to leave it at that. We don't want it to stop there, we want to definitely want to push on from this. So in fact, we're having a conversation today with Kate, the principal teacher here about doing maybe a forest schools thing where we can take all the kids down and do a wee bit of outdoor learning together so definitely want to build on it.

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00:24:56 *\*More performance from the kids\**

00:25:45 **Father Vincent**

I'm father Vincent Lockhart; I'm the Parish Priest here in Calderbank, Corpus Christi Parish.

00:25:53 **Aaron Hawthorne**

What have you just seen today?

00:25:54 **Father Vincent**

Fantastic. Absolutely amazing from two points; one is the shortness of the time that they had to prepare and the quality of what was presented was really fantastic and really an immense sense of gratitude to Scottish Opera for coming out here today to do this and also for the schools, both the schools coming together, I think that's a great aspect as well.

00:26:20 **Aaron Hawthorne**

Fantastic, and incredible to have the two schools coming together as well and creating one big community for them.

00:26:25 **Father Vincent**

Yeah, yeah.

00:26:26 **Audience Member**

I was supporting my granddaughter and this was the best performance I have ever seen, I'm over the moon, delighted, and it has made me super proud of every kid in there that took part and they were phenomenal. They were right into it as much as I was.

00:26:57 **Aaron Hawthorne**

What does it feel like to have that going on here in Calderbank, a national organisation coming in and doing that?

00:27:04 **Audience Member**



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Mind blown. It's phenomenal. The time that people have took to put this thing together, it was fabulous.

00:27:11 **Aaron Hawthorne**

Oh, it was, wasn't it? I don't think anyone will disagree with you. It was utterly amazing, wasn't it?

00:27:18 **Audience Member**

And the kids enjoyed every moment, they were in the moment.

00:28:17 *\*More performance from the children\**

00:28:50 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

You may remember me mentioning earlier that we would be speaking to the citizens of North Lanarkshire directly. Well, anyone who frequents the Airdrie High Street may have spotted myself and one of my fellow arts tutors, Rhona, there recently, shoving a microphone in the face of anyone who would let us. But that's right; we were on the street talking to you all face to face and getting your thoughts on the developments at the Town Hall. Come with me to hear what everyone had to say.

00:29:16 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

So I don't know if you're aware; Airdrie Town Hall is currently going through a bit of a renovation.

00:29:21 **Airdrie Citizen 1**

I did not know that, no.

00:29:21 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

So the NHS have been in for the past four years, it was a vaccine centre, so they're renovating it right now, turning it into more of a cultural hub of North Lanarkshire. So there's going to be a lot more events in, a lot more shows, concerts, stand up comedy, that kind of thing. So were you aware of that?

00:29:36 **Airdrie Citizen 1**

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I wasn't actually aware of that, no, I've been living under a rock.

00:29:38 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

That's alright, not a lot of people have been aware of it. So how do you feel then if it Airdrie is getting transformed in that way?

00:29:45 **Airdrie Citizen 2**

I think we need it and enough point having a big building if you're not gonna use it for something to slow down. You need something for the younger one as well, you know what I mean? Like teenagers, things like that, as well as yourself and upcoming families.

00:29:59 **Airdrie Citizen 3**

Absolutely, as a sales shop, anything that brings footfall to the town is going to be beneficial. So if different events bring people to the town, bring people into my shop, it can only be beneficial, so as far as the wider community is concerned, there isn't a huge amount that's going on in Airdrie these days, you have stuff at the Excelsior Stadium sometimes, but apart from that there isn't a huge amount. So anything that reinvigorates the town can only be a good thing.

00:30:28 **Airdrie Citizen 4**

100% yeah, I've been to a few gigs down in Motherwell, so it'll be good to have it closer to home.

00:30:35 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah, absolutely. And I know that they've transferred a lot of the sound and lighting equipment over from Motherwell, so it's going to be the same sort of experience in terms of from a technology point of view.

00:30:43 **Airdrie Citizen 4**

Yeah, because Motherwell did look good, you know, I mean with their lights and stuff and they could always put on a really good show. So it'd be good to have that here.

00:30:51 **Airdrie Citizen 5**

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I think that's what we need in Airdrie is somewhere for the bands and whatever else, and the young kids to go to as well, for everybody.

00:31:00 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Would you be more encouraged to spend a lot more time there?

00:31:02 **Airdrie Citizen 5**

Yeah, absolutely, yeah, because it gives you something decent to go and do, especially with the tribute shows if they bring them in.

00:31:09 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Good. So then what do you think it would do for Airdrie to have a venue like that on your doorstep?

00:31:16 **Airdrie Citizen 5**

Hopefully bring people in. Hopefully it would boost the visitors coming in. We need something like that. Just somewhere to go, at least you know that you don't need to travel away to Glasgow.

00:31:27 **Airdrie Citizen 4**

I think there's a lot of upcoming bands and stuff and some really good artists and things in Airdrie, so it'd be good to give them somewhere to go. In Airdrie, there's just tonnes of us. There's about 3 studios, there's like drama schools, music schools, there's just tonnes in there and it's just letting people outside of Airdrie know that we're here and ready.

00:31:48 **Airdrie Citizen 6**

Any improvement towards this town is great because over the years the high streets just been dying with the amount of stuff that's online now. So people are going into stores less and going out less so any type of improvement is good of course. I seen there was events going on recently with the observatory and stuff and I wanted to attend them so aye, anything that's going on with that kind of stuff, even with the library and stuff as well, because I feel it's important for, you know, young people to have a place where

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they can go if they don't have, like Internet and stuff to even just write a CV to get a job. It's those kind of things that essentially can be the lifeline of an impoverished area.

00:32:30 **Airdrie Citizen 1**

I think it's good if it's focusing more on shows and stuff like that. As a musician myself, it'd be nice to go in and see stuff in that hall.

00:32:35 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah. So you'd be up for using the services in the Town Hall?

00:32:38 **Airdrie Citizen 1**

Totally. Yeah, absolutely. It's a nice place. I've seen a couple of shows in it. I've always wanted to put one on myself. So like, if it's open to that now and it's going away from the whole medicine vibe then it would be nice and it would show that things are on the mend.

00:32:52 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Absolutely, so you're interested in it as well from a performance point of view?.

00:32:57 **Airdrie Citizen 1**

Absolutely. Yeah, it's probably the biggest hall in Coatbridge and Airdrie, isn't it? I can't think of anywhere else. So it's nice to know that the king has returned.

00:33:07 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Now to get deeper understanding of the behind the scenes work, here's two members of our tech team, Kev and Mick, to talk about their own roles within the larger Town Hall renovation project.

00:33:18 **Kev Elliot**

Well, on the stage we've added some trusses, on the stage we've got some hemp flying. So the hemp flying is basically a load of ropes that go into a bar and you use manpower muscle to lift it up and down, but we've replaced some of them with actual trusses and hoists that can take a tonne instead of trying to lift it up yourself, so now if a touring

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company comes in we can just fire their lights and, no bother, without any hassle. So it's a semi improvement on the 100 year old building that we have here and the 100 year old technology.

00:33:57 **Mick Pettigrew**

Well from a sound point of view, we've redeployed a lot of the speakers that were used in Motherwell Concert Hall because we obviously don't have any information on that, whether it's going to reopen or what's happening with it, so the good thing about that is it's enabled us to use quite a lot of the good equipment from Motherwell Concert Hall and improve Airdrie's overall listening experience...couple of new subs, we've also got new delay speakers for the balcony area. We've got a new foyer system.

00:34:26 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

So for the people of Airdrie, why would they be excited about Airdrie Town Hall getting renovated in such a way?

00:34:32 **Kev Elliot**

The venue that's within Airdrie will be getting utilised to a better capacity than it has been for...well since I've worked, I've worked in the venues for about 20 years and it's been underutilised. Now since the Concert Hall is defunct, most of the things that would be in the Theatre will be in the Main Hall and hopefully we'll maybe start to put some smaller gigs on in the Lesser Hall like acoustic gigs, comedy nights etc, along with the digital cinema that we have within the Lesser hall.

00:35:03 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Talking about the different events; shows, concerts, stand up comedy, what are some things that you're looking forward to then from a sound point of view about the variety of events that we can have?

00:35:11 **Mick Pettigrew**

It'll be interesting to see how things sound with the new PA system in here, I think it'll sound a lot better, especially for bigger rock'n'roll gigs, that kind of thing; full band set

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ups. We've always done am-drams and things like that but we've never had the same equipment for those am-drams, so I'm sure we'll see a big improvement for them as well.

00:35:29 **Kev Elliot**

It's designed acoustically slightly differently than a modern building, a big box, so it's meant to be for people just speaking, that's not being amplified in the first place. Once you amplify it through the speakers then it will get a bit awkward sometimes.

00:35:43 **Mick Pettigrew**

We're able to use some of the signal processing from Motherwell in Airdrie, that's never really been used in here before and that allows you to EQ the room properly and set up the delay speakers properly. It also gives touring engineers a bit more of a control over the system when they come in as well; makes it easier to tie their people in, so hopefully things will be a lot easier. That's kind of one of the only good things about Motherwell closing is being able to improve Airdrie.

00:36:13 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

After that, you'll hear the rest of her interview with Sheepie talking about his love of North Lanarkshire audiences.

00:36:19 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Absolutely. So a lot of the audience maybe will be new that haven't seen panto before, but then a lot of the audience will be the ones that been coming to panto for years, they'll know you. How important is it to have that rapport, that relationship with the audience as the comic?

00:36:31 **Ian "Sheepie" Smith**

Well, you know, this is a thing. That's why I always, you know, keep coming back, even if it is Easter, you know, I proposed to my wife on the Motherwell stage, it's a bit like family. The rapport for me, it's special, especially Motherwell Theatre, it was such a lovely theatre. It was quite intimate and you could see a lot of the audience and things

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like that. So I've always found it, you know, important to make audiences laugh. That's my main job really. And you know, there's that thing, that warmth. I think even last Easter panto at Motherwell, coming out, people do know me so, you know, there was a message I got last year; she was really, really lovely and it was from, I think a mum in her 20s or something that, and she's basically said she started coming to panto with the school, so that shows you how long I've been here, and she's now taking her child to the panto. And it's lovely to get messages that whole families come and I think that's an important thing we do for Easter as well; it's for all the family. There's nothing better than when you see children, their mums and dads, and their grannies and granddads, they come as a group.

00:37:51 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Definitely, it's very generational; panto.

00:37:52 **Ian "Sheepie" Smith**

You know what I mean, we try and cater for all. So if there's songs and they obviously there's magic this year that hopefully kids will be like "wow, magic on stage". Motherwell will always be really important to me and now, obviously Airdrie will because you know, depending how long Motherwell's theatres closed for, this is gonna be the new hub.

00:38:11 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

I think one of the great things about panto as well is that for so many people in the audience, there's a really good chance that that's their first ever show, their first ever time at the theatre. So you are essentially performing to maybe the next generation of panto performers and stuff.

00:38:23 **Ian "Sheepie" Smith**

Massively, you know, and it's important to lay down that foundation; this is what you could do. You know, I've done a lot of teaching and I've done my panto workshops around North Lanarkshire and that's what I say to them. You know, a lot of people say you have to move to London, which obviously a lot of auditions are because that's where the epicentre of the industry is, you know, in the United Kingdom, but there's so

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much more opportunities, I would say now; auditions-wise, youth theatres, there's so many you know, youth theatres now in North Lanarkshire. Another amazing message I got was a kid dressed up as me with my dungarees and my cap to the side for fancy dress at Halloween. That's an amazing thing to see. I'm a different person on stage as you can probably hear from my voice this is my normal voice. That me now; husband, father, but when I do pantomime my alter ego comes out and stuff like that. I do love it obviously, cause I've be doing it that long. I wouldn't be doing that long if I didn't love it. And the thing is as well, the audiences; every show is different in pantomime. We try and make it the same, but some things go wrong, and you just gotta go with it. It's live theatre, so, that's another thing that I love, you know, to improvise. And yeah, probably audiences I've seen, I do quite a quite a bit. And you'll know as well.

00:39:46 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Definitely. So, final question, Airdrie, the Town Hall's been around for years, one of the bands that reportedly played here back in the day was The Rolling Stones.

00:39:56 **Ian "Sheepie" Smith**

Ohh wow.

00:39:57 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

So you'll be on the stage that's been strutted by Mick Jagger. Can we expect any inspiration from the front man in your performance?

00:40:03 **Ian "Sheepie" Smith**

I tell you what, I'll be strutting, I'll be pouting my lips, I'll be clapping my hands. Yeah, you know what, I didn't even know that. So I think the more like we're rehearsing here as well, before we open and stuff like that. So it'll actually be quite good just to sort of learn about the Town Hall and things like that. I think I did that at Motherwell Theatre, learn how many panto legends were there before me and people who performed there. So it's actually gonna be quite refreshing to find out who's been on that stage. I think I've only been here once to see a show and that was like a gig, and it felt really nice and



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intimate. So I think, you know, all we ask for the audience is come here happy, get involved and you'll have a great time.

00:40:47 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

And that brings us to the end of an admittedly jam packed, but hopefully highly informative episode. We hope you're all as excited as we are about the fantastic developments happening right in the heart of North Lanarkshire and we cannot wait to see you there.

Amplifying artistry is a podcast by the North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development Team To find out more about the team and the work that we do, visit [www.culturenl.co.uk.arts](http://www.culturenl.co.uk.arts).

This episode was produced and directed by Aaron Hawthorne for North Lanarkshire Council. This episode was edited, hosted and facilitated by me, Scott Fleming. You can access a transcript of this episode at [www.culturenl.co.uk/amplifyingartistry](http://www.culturenl.co.uk/amplifyingartistry). All interviews and audio excerpts have been included with kind permission from the participants. You have been listening to Amplifying Artistry. See you next time.

***END OF TRANSCRIPT***

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Transcript generated by Artificial Intelligence and edited by Scott Fleming.

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