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14 April 2010

## Dancing to Darwin as arts meets science

Evolution, ballet and dancing birds were explored in a unique fusion of art and science at the University of Sheffield yesterday (Tuesday 13 April 2010), as part of the 2010 Arts-Science Encounters programme.

The event, entitled `Dancing to Darwin: The Comedy of Change,´ featured a talk from psychologist Professor Nicky Clayton about the evolution and development of cognition in animals and humans, the creation of the ballet, and how scientific ideas come to inspire the movement, energy and musicality of dance – particularly in birds.

More than 120 people flocked to the University´s Humanities Research Institute on Gell Street to listen to Professor Clayton´s research, which studies the dance of the Blue Manakin bird, described by her as `a taste of avian tango,´ and the ballet-like courtship dance of the Lawes's Parotia - a six-plumed bird of paradise.

At the event, guests were given an insight into the social behaviour, intelligence and dance credentials of members of the Crow family (Corvids) in a variety of species including Jackdaws, Rooks and Jays.

The event provided an apt taster for the forthcoming Lyceum production entitled `The Comedy of Change,´ which is the result of a unique collaboration between Professor Clayton and the Artistic Director of Ballet Rambert, Choreographer Mark Baldwin. The production, which is being shown at Sheffield´s Lyceum Theatre between 28-30 April 2010, commemorates the 150th anniversary of Charles Darwin´s momentous publication 'On the Origin of Species' and blends dance and science using a specially-commissioned score by renowned British composer Julian Anderson.

Dancing with Darwin is one of several events being held at the University as part of the 2010 Arts-Science Encounters programme running from March until June 2010. The Encounters provide arts and science researchers at the top of their profession, as well as performers and artists, the chance to share their knowledge on a whole host of topics ranging from theatre, dance and poetry to anthropology, psychology and mathematics, with the aim of demonstrating the constant overlap between the disciplines of art and science.



Dr Jessica Dubow, from the Department of Geography at University of Sheffield and co-director of the Arts-Science Encounters, said: "The 'Dancing to Darwin' event represented everything that Sheffield's Arts-Science Encounters is about - how all forms of creativity share the same roots in curiosity, wonder, and exploration. Last night, the science of bird behaviour came together with the beauty of dance in a wonderful mix which showed just how exciting real interdisciplinary thinking can be.

"The upcoming events, which range from talks about Kandinsky and animals to human science and cultural memory, and from technologies and politics to the art of mathematics, promise all sorts of other wonders."

Notes for Editors: The Arts Science Encounters events are free and open to the general public. For a full list and further details on all the upcoming events please visit: <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/english/arts-science/events.html>

The University of Sheffield has also developed an Arts-Science Network for scholars interested in pursuing such crossover research. The Arts-Science Network can be used as a basis for finding new research partners, generating new projects and grant proposals, and linking up with similar initiatives taking place in the UK and internationally.

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