

## **Manifest 2004 Provides Showcase for Christian Artists**

As star differs from star: the splendour of creative diversity.

This was the theme for a weekend festival that celebrated many art forms produced by Christians from many denominations and all walks of life. Visitors had the opportunity to hear all types of music from rock to classical to jazz, to see art and photography exhibits, hear lectures and poetry readings, participate in workshops and cooking classes, see films and interact with artists.

The festival is planned and hosted by the Vancouver Arts Network, a network of Christian artists that is the brainchild of founder Rob des Cotes, who also happens to be a pastor of a new Mennonite Brethren church plant called Imago Dei.

“As a pastor and an artist, I recognized how isolated you can feel as an artist in the church,” des Cotes says. “The goal of Manifest is to explore what artists see spiritually and many artists have a sense of being called by God to use their gifts.”

One of the artists participating in this year’s Manifest was Gareth Brandt. Brandt is a poet who also happens to teach in the youth ministries department at Columbia Bible College in Abbotsford and attends Emmanuel Mennonite Church. Brandt’s poetry reading/workshop called “Lost Boy” was an opportunity to explore transitions in life and how poetry helped him express the trauma of childhood abuse.

“I live my life more in poetry than prose language,” he began. “All art is autobiographical, we cannot separate life from art.”

Brandt wrote most of his poetry during adolescence and “post-35” explaining that in his 20s when he was getting married, starting a family, working on education and establishing a ministry, his life was lived more in the exterior than the interior. But reaching “midlife” he realized that for the first time he had as much to look back on as he had to look forward to, which gave him a unique perspective on his own life. One poem begins “I like this place, I can see both ways” reflecting this experience.

Much of Brandt’s other poetry reflected on the process of dealing with childhood sexual abuse: denial, fear, pain, safety, anger, and eventually healing. Much of his poetry uses biblical imagery or reflects the geography of places he has lived. Brandt reads his poems with great emotion and his reading drew appreciative murmurs from the group attending his workshop.

It is exactly this kind of response that des Cotes says artists create for the faith community.

“If we only appreciate God intellectually, we miss something,” he says. “But when we watch a dance or see a painting, (or hear a poem) there’s an opportunity for an emotional response. So much of faith is in the realm of mystery, we can only reach God so far with our understanding.”

Brandt agrees. “People have profound spiritual experiences but are often unable to articulate them or put them into words. Poetry (and other artistic expression) is language that helps to give voice to what is within, to what otherwise would not have a voice. It is heart language.”

Brandt’s reading/workshop ended with a time of interaction and afterwards several people thanked him for the experience.

“Your poems have so much emotion,” one participant said. “It’s totally engaging.”

Manifest happens annually in the fall. For more information visit: [www.manifestarts.com](http://www.manifestarts.com)

- Angelika Dawson (Canadian Mennonite November 2004)