

Press Release

Ruth Ewan: *Did you kiss the foot that kicked you?*

Monday 8 October – Friday 12 October 2007

www.balladofaccounting.org

London's commuters may or may not notice the sudden presence of over one hundred musicians along their routes to work this October. The subtle performance during rush hour is a new artwork by Ruth Ewan, commissioned by Artangel as the first of the four Jerwood/Artangel Open commissions.

Ruth Ewan's work is based on the song *Ballad of Accounting* by the late English singer, songwriter, socialist, actor, playwright and record producer Ewan MacColl. MacColl wrote *Ballad of Accounting* in 1964 as a summing-up song, an accounts sheet of life.

*Did you stand aside and let them choose while you took second best?
Did you let them skim the cream off and then give to you the rest?*

Ballad of Accounting will be slipped into the diverse musical repertoires of over 100 musicians and performed across the City of London. Commuters journeying to work may encounter the bold brass sound of the Oompah band on Waterloo Bridge, a delta blues adaptation at Marble Arch tube station or the unusual distorted sounds of a vocal looping pedal at Canary Wharf.

Ruth Ewan developed this work in response to Government records released in 2006 through The National Archive which show that from 1932, security service MI5 held a file on MacColl. One report claims that he was 'a communist with very extreme views' who needed 'special attention'. The file also states, as a cause for concern, that MacColl had 'exceptional ability as a singer and musical organiser'

'Ballad of Accounting' suits busking precisely because it expresses the ambivalence and frustrations felt by many street performers. The song communicates the agitated excitement of closing the gap between culture and everyday life, of talking directly to the audience, of making an unmediated impact. At the same time, the song's urgent tones communicate an anxiety that no one is actually listening. Recalling his street performing days, MacColl above all remembered the 'blank apathy...harder to take than abuse.' Stridently provocative, *'The Ballad of Accounting'* buttonholes and interrogates the silent majority passing by.

Ben Harker

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Notes to Editors

1. Ruth Ewan's *Did you kiss the foot that kicked you?* was commissioned by Artangel and the Jerwood Charitable Foundation, supported by the National Lottery through Arts Council England in association with Channel 4 and produced by Artangel Interaction.

2. Ben Harker is the author of *Class Act: The Cultural and Political Life of Ewan MacColl* (London and Ann Arbor: Pluto, 2007).
3. Artangel has pioneered a new way of collaborating with artists and engaging audiences in an ambitious series of highly successful commissions since the early 1990s, animating different environments with compelling experiences for a large and disparate public. Artangel Interaction develops projects and events that extend opportunities for collaboration and participation. www.artangel.org.uk Artangel is supported by Arts Council England London, The Company of Angels, the International Circle and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.
4. The Jerwood/Artangel Open, launched in the summer of 2006 in association with Channel 4 and Arts Council England, received almost one thousand proposals each conceived for different sites and situations around Britain.