

The 2007 Festival

After a slight glitch in 2006 when unfortunately there was no festival we were delighted that the 2007 Southern Counties Drama Festival proved to be so successful. The Barn Theatre in Oxted, the home for the Festival for the past nineteen years, boasted an almost full week of entries including a matinee on the Saturday. Throughout the week the Festival played to good houses, and in turn the audience each evening were treated to some excellent productions with some fine individual performances.

Mike Tilbury, the adjudicator, gave constructive, yet honest adjudications each evening, which the participating groups found useful. They all went away having gained from the experience and are looking forward to competing in 2008. Mike also praised the organising committee for their sterling job in bringing the Festival back to life. We were delighted that the winner, St Paul's Drama Group, went on to win the Divisional Final. The Festival attracted a record number of youth entries and the 'home team', The Young Oxted Players, were delighted to win the award of best youth group.

There was a lovely atmosphere all week; the introduction of foyer music each evening by local musicians helped to set the mood for the audience as they entered the building and made their way to the bar. The Barn Theatre's dedicated Theatre team, both on the technical side and Front of House, made sure everything ran smoothly and professionally.

The 2007 Festival was, in fact, the 56th Annual Festival of One Act Plays and formed the first round of the All England Theatre Festival. For many years the Festival was affectionately known as the Betchworth Festival, the name some people still use today. The present name is a bit of a mouthful and perhaps does not reflect the warmth and affection that the old name evoked. The Festival Committee would like to introduce a more suitable name that reflects the character of the revitalised Festival. They have already had some suggestions but would welcome more ideas before making any final decision.



Foyer Entertainment

Mike Tilbury GODA
Festival Adjudicator 2007
summing up on the
last night



the festival review

The "host" society, The Oxted Players opened this year's Festival with **Out Of Tune**, a production that they had to put together, cast and rehearse in one week, due to their intended play having to be cancelled when the leading actor had to drop out. It was an incredible feat, perfectly staged, with the Director, Chris Hepher, taking the male lead. Set in 1940 it was a good example of "class" differences.

Merstham ADS staged **What's for Pudding** of which the Adjudicator commented that it was a good attempt but needed more "cue bite" and more pace as it became rather plodding.

Sevenoaks Players entry was a solo performance by Keith Blackwell in **Krapp's Last Tape** where an old man recalls the regrets of his life. The Adjudicator considered it to be an intelligent and highly successful production.

Tonbridge Theatre and Arts Club play was **Remember Me** set at a wedding reception where two ladies meet again after 30 years and find they still hate each other. The Adjudicator said this was an excellent and confident production with great off stage sound effects of the reception.

St. Paul's Drama Group from Banstead staged **Lunch Girls**, a 1983 play well updated with the use mobile phones. The set has four sections, basically a desk or a table in each of the homes of four women. They are trying to arrange a lunch date by phone, with frequent cancellations or postponements due to the circumstances of their lives. The Adjudicator described it as a perfect insight into suburban life, with perfect timing so essential for comedy, and excellent sound effects.

The actresses were Helen Jerome, Stephanie Adam, Alison Sheppard and Sara Watkins, who played Vee, and won the **Award for Best Actress**. The **Adjudicator's Special Award** went to Peter Magyar for the sound effects and the play was the overall **Winner of the Festival**.

Oxted Operatic Society's **The Red Balloon** suffered from being played in front of the traverse curtain, giving insufficient depth for the actions. This, said the Adjudicator resulted in all the cast having to work in a straight line, and with the black curtains so close and dark costumes, the result was very drab.

The following six plays were performed by Youth Groups on Friday evening and Saturday matinee. Heathfield Drama Club

performed an abridged version of **Romeo and Juliet** compressing the 3 hours of the original into 35 minutes.

Croft Drama Group presented **Feather Boy**, a play partly set to music, to which the Adjudicator commented there was not enough light and shade in the production. It was rather static and stronger voices were needed for some of the roles, but the personification of older people was well done.

Flatmates, presented by the Young Oxted Players, had a good set with an outside view, good furnishings and all the clutter that might be expected of 3 University students sharing a flat.

The Adjudicator commented that it was a production full of interest and one of the students, played by Jo Cox, won the Award for **Best Young Actress**. Other students were Ben Atterbury, Richard Eves and visitor Catherine Biles, with Patrick Haywood as her boyfriend. The production was the overall **Youth Production Winner**.

Tunbridge Wells Drama Club presented **Laundry Girls** of which the Adjudicator said it needed more pace.

Capricorn Theatre Company staged **Shut Up** for which he said it was a good attempt with several hits and misses.

Heathfield Drama Club presented **Five Kinds of Silence** in which Bill, who is mentally disturbed, controls his family to a fanatical degree. The Adjudicator said he had reservations about this play being suitable for young people in view of its contents, but awarded Dan Edwards, who played the part of Billy the father, the **Best Young Actor**.

Last year The Hawth, at Crawley invited aspiring playwrights to enter a competition at the Theatre and Oliver Cownden's **4 Minutes to Love** was certainly the best submitted. It was the entry by Reigate Amateur Theatrical Society and won the Award for **Best Stage Presentation**. The setting is a Speed Dating Café where men and women meet and have 4 minutes to get to know each other. Ben Hilder, who played James, took the award as **Best Actor**. The production was also awarded **Runner Up of the Festival**.

The final play was Woldingham Players in **Knightsbridge** of which the Adjudicator said it needed a lighter touch, but the comedy was handled well. He considered the central arch a good device, but two free standing doorways for entrances spoil the setting of period furniture.

Derrick Graham

Colin Dolley GODA

The Adjudicator
Southern Counties
Drama Festival 2008



Why don't we enter a festival?

By Colin Dolley GODA

Perhaps in your society a lone voice asks rather tentatively: "Why don't we enter a Drama Festival next year?"

Is this query greeted with enthusiasm or talked down with such responses as: "Festivals are all pay out and nothing in return" or "We're happy as we are." "Our audiences love our productions." "We don't need anybody to tell us how good we are!" "What would we get out of it anyway?" "All that work for one night!"

How often have such responses silenced that lone voice?

Clearly some arguments are required to melt the icy responses from the committee:

Festivals provide an exciting learning experience. There should be helpful, constructive comments from a well-qualified, independent adjudicator - unlike family and friends on home territory.

In addition to the adjudicator's constructive assessment, much will be learnt by watching other festival entries - facets of production, staging, lighting, effects, plays, acting technique, introductory music etc. All this provides funded experience and can be called upon for any future productions.

By entering the festival, each society becomes part of the festival that means measuring up with other enthusiasts who share the love of theatre. That insularity which, regrettably, is a feature of many local societies is broken down. Within a short while, teams often become friends and not rivals - and from such friendships practical help may well emerge.

Many societies have a regular programme of home productions that must, of necessity be audience pullers. This is understandable, but to grow artistically your actors need to keep fresh by trying new, unusual or less

accessible plays. This is where the festival can come into its own. Get out of the boulevard comedy rut and try a Beckett, Orton, Pinter or Tennessee Williams, try the unknown play, the original play, the compilation of poetry, words and music. There are so many possibilities.

Maybe there are those who wish to direct for the first time or there is an influx of new untried members. Why not allow them to flex their creative muscles at the drama festival? They will learn so much and that can only benefit the whole society in succeeding years.

The production may only make one appearance - although if there is another festival in the area it could be entered there as well - but some actors, for personal reasons, may prefer the one night stand rather than a week-long run in the home production.

I have not in these arguments for entering a festival, listed: to win the festival trophy! In my experience teams who are desperate to win rarely succeed; a sense of frenzied angst is apparent and the production is nervous, tense and uneasy. However, should the production do well, then the success can be used in publicity material through local press, radio and in future programmes - all adding to the kudos of the group.

Having used these arguments for entering a festival, your lone voice may still have to quell the strident voice of the Treasurer! Yes, it does cost money, but surely it is money well spent, an investment into the future development of the group. The profits from the money-spinning home production could go to finance the festival play.

If the committee is forward-looking it might well say "We'll give it a try next year." That decision could well be a pivotal point in the history of your society.

Perhaps we will meet in 2008 ...



What is GODA?

The Guild of Drama Adjudicators is a national organisation that provides professional adjudicators for drama festivals. The Guild has high standards of entry, but most members have experience of amateur theatre and understand the particular challenges of staging a play in festival conditions.

Colin Dolley is a Member of the Guild of Drama Adjudicators. GODA are the mainstay of amateur production adjudications. Further details about GODA can be found at their [web site](#) or by contacting the Secretary on 01707 326488.



The All-England Theatre Festival is the only national eliminating Festival for One-Act plays in performance, founded in 1927 by the British Drama League. It provides an opportunity for amateur theatre groups to measure the standard of their work and learn how to improve it; to see the work of other groups; to play in varying conditions before widely differing audiences; and to receive constructive criticism from an experienced adjudicator.

In England the four Areas, Central, North, East and West, each stage three rounds to determine who will compete for the John Maude Trophy in the Final. The 2006 holders are St Ursula's Players, Bristol with Act I of "Me and my Friend" by Gillian Plowman.

The English winner competes in the All-Britain Final with teams from Scotland, Wales and N. Ireland for the Howard de Walden Ewer Trophy. Recent British Finals have been held in Aberystwyth (2004), Coleraine (2005), & Perth (2006).

The 2007 British Final was held in Solihull Arts Complex, West Midlands on Friday & Saturday 29th & 30th June 2007. The winners, who were from the English Central Region, were Total Arts Community Theatre with "Find Me" by Olwen Wymark. The Adjudicator was Scott Marshall.



The Southern Counties Drama Festival

Will be held at the Barn Theatre, Oxted

MONDAY 25th FEBRUARY - 1st MARCH 2008

Details: e-mail sc.df@btinternet.com

Tel: 01959 561811



Open Afternoon

Sunday 29th July 2007

Barn Theatre at 2pm

MIND THE GAP