

Tnoda TODAY ★

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Be inspired by amateur theatre



Lockdown?
Ok, a new direction

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NODA Today

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Contents

17

NODA Long Service Awards

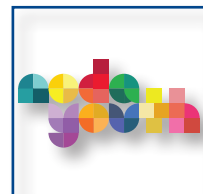
“A NODA youth award isn’t just a reward for three years’ service, it’s an investment in one of your society’s greatest assets”



20

NODA Youth

Useful contact and resources, plus youth news from your region



26

Lockdown Education

Find out how societies have been helping with arts education during the lockdown



31

Alistair Brammer

From Exmouth to ‘Saigon’. Discover this West End and Broadway superstars amateur theatre origins



42

CAMS 125th Anniversary

February this year, well known institution, Cupar Amateur Musical Society (CAMS), celebrated its 125th anniversary.



44

NODA Theatre Summer e-School

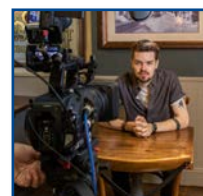
All the details of available courses for this year's Theatre Summer e-school



54

Cover Story Lockdown? Ok, a new direction!

Godalming Theatre Group making use of the local pub to film their latest play TWO

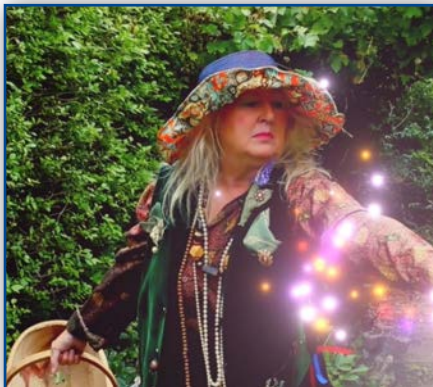




Welcome

Michael Hastilow
Chairman of Trustees

It seems most apt that the lockdown and isolation are coming to an end in spring, a time when all around us starts to burst back into life. Let us hope that this time it stays that way.



In preparation, the pantomime website is up and running and we can look forward to a joyous pantomime season later in the year. Many societies have deferred their major productions until 2022, but I know that members cannot wait for the rehearsal room to re-open so I anticipate there being much activity in the latter part of this year.

Some things will not be the same, at least for this year. Summer School have felt that it will be better to defer a residential gathering until next year, when we can all come back in style and where social distancing will be a past memory. There will, however, be a virtual school whose pathways promise to make for an exciting week, just look at pages 44 and 45.



We can still reflect on some of the forced benefits of the lockdown, societies venturing into Radio Plays; an art form we often overlook. We have seen filmed versions of the work of our societies, from all parts of the United Kingdom, opening up to a wider audience and you will be impressed by the reports on NODA Youth Societies.

There have been celebrations too, with societies celebrating 100, 125 and 140 years along with individual members achieving their century. There have been some sad occasions too. Among those we will miss is Judith Smith who was, in addition to being a Regional Representative for many years and her region's awards secretary, Chairman of our Regional Representatives committee and, Sue Pomeroy, who was a long-term Regional Representative in the South West. Both will be missed by many of us.



We are still planning for the National Conference to take place in Durham on Saturday 11th September, and once hotels are open, we can finalise the detailed planning for the event where Gordon Richardson will finally be installed as President. Watch out for an announcement late May.

Finally, stay safe.



More non – travels with the chain

Dear Members,

After what I think can be fairly described as an ‘annus horribilis’ for just about everyone in the country, we now have a roadmap to remove all restrictions and a vaccine to hopefully keep us all safe and remove some of the pressure on the NHS, so hopefully ‘Normal Service’ will be returned as soon as (safe) and possible!

I fully understand that circumstances have prevented you from pursuing our shared hobby in the way that you would, I am sure, have preferred, as for the last 12 months (and counting) we have all experienced dark theatres and severe restrictions! This has, as you know all too well, meant that we have been unable to take part in rehearsals or face to face committee meetings, or socialise with our family, friends and colleagues, and have missed the friendship, camaraderie and support that I think we all value so highly, not to mention performing which in turn has, of course, reduced your society’s income. However, just like you, we still have many financial obligations, but by careful housekeeping and excellent management we are in a better position than many charities.

Of course, hopefully, as we are now at the beginning of the end as the vaccine is being rolled out across the country. I am not going to tempt fate by even suggesting a timescale – just hoping that we can look forward to theatres opening and being able to meet friends and family again in the not-too-distant future, and to some sort of normalising of our lives and hobbies including meeting real people again! I have received my first (apart from a play in October) invitation for ages to attend a production in June – and I am so looking forward to that – just as I am sure you are looking to starting rehearsals and productions.

As an association, and very probably like yourselves, we have been working hard on the general housekeeping of the Association, continuing to meet virtually, and taking the opportunity to learn new skills (not the least of which being taking part in Zoom meetings!) and to ensure the best, and most effective way of the running of the Association during and after the pandemic. We have also launched our exciting new pantomime website. Do take a look and let us know what you think! After all, they do say, laughter is the best medicine, and although I think I would prefer to put my trust in the vaccine, a good laugh would, I am sure do us all a power of good!

It has been simply wonderful to see the many, varied and hugely innovative ways that societies have continued to meet virtually and so maintain the NODA Family, with all the social benefits that ‘just belonging’ brings. The friendship, camaraderie, tolerance, and that invaluable sense of belonging and community has manifested in so many different ways: from virtual quiz evenings and get togethers, progressing to play readings and virtual performances, with many people writing and performing their own very witty, both musical and poetic comments on the current situation and its effects. I am so sorry that circumstances have prevented me from being able to meet many more societies, but thank you for your support over the last 12 months, and your continued support in the future and I hope to be able to get to meet many more of you ‘in person’ before the end of my 2-year presidency in September this year. Do stay safe and look after yourself.

Christine Hunter Hughes,
NODA National President



NODA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of The National Operatic and Dramatic Association, Charity No 1171216 will take place on Saturday 11th September 2021 at 2.30pm at The Radisson Blu Hotel Durham DH1 5TA.

The Meeting is called in accordance with Rule 11 of the Association’s Constitution: to receive the audited annual statement of accounts, the trustees report, reports on the number of members, the proposed rates of subscription, elect nominated Trustees, Honorary and Life Members, appoint the appeals committee, elect the auditors for the ensuing year and receive any other business of which due notice has been given.

To ensure the smooth running of the meeting, any resolutions to be considered at the meeting should be sent to the Chairman of Trustees Michael Hastilow at 15 The Metro Centre, Peterborough, PE2 7UH or by email to michael.hastilow@noda.org.uk to arrive no later than 12th August 2021.

Who's who on NODA Council

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[nationaloperaticdramaticassociation](https://twitter.com/NodaTweets)

Twitter - @NodaTweets

Instagram - @NodaPics

Councillors' Chat

A quick note from your Regional Councillor



Tessa Davies - East Regional Councillor

Even though life has been difficult in lockdown, I have been very heartened to see the activities of many of our East Region societies to keep in touch with their members. Yes, quizzes and singalongs have been a large part of these efforts, but at least three societies in the East have written and performed online pantos or nativity plays. The technical expertise, that they have had to learn, and the enthusiasm they have shown is tremendous.

It's clear that the 'warrior' spirit is alive and well in NODA East!



Nanette Lovell MBE - East Midlands Regional Councillor

I am writing to you having just watch Andrew Lloyd Webber on TV talking about launching his new musical *Cinderella* in July this year, so hopefully we will see our stages full again in the near future. It has been a tough time for everyone in the industry, a friend of mine, who is a well know West End director and choreographer, has been working in a local supermarket. He did direct a pantomime with two well know stars in December, only for it to close after two days.

In the meantime, my best wishes to everyone - keep smiling and stay safe.



Pam Armstrong - London Regional Councillor

In these days of sat nav who would have thought a road map would be so significant to us all, but this particular road map is now leading us all to the brighter horizons we all dream of.

Throughout these pages you will see wonderful examples of how imaginative and innovative you have been in keeping live performance going - this has been so uplifting to spirits, and we all know how important this has become. Let's make 2021 a year to remember - for all the right reasons. The curtain is about to rise on our stages!



Peter Oliver - North Regional Councillor

Here in NODA North, we are pleased to say that our first virtual performance awards went extremely well, receiving some excellent feedback from members and we were so pleased with the overall outcome. A big thank you to Jonathan Mellor, from Tyne Audio, who brought the event to reality and showcased such a professional event. I would like to send out a big thank you to all societies' committees for working so hard over the last year keeping their members engaged in so many virtual events, which in turn is keeping our industry alive. As we move through the government's road map towards some form of normality, we hope and pray that the curtains will finally open for us to see some fantastic performances.



Leslie Smith - North East Regional Councillor

Once again, here in NODA North East, have had to cancel our Gala Weekend, something which we all will miss. Please do join us for our Virtual Gala Weekend 2021, which will be much bigger and better than last year and you should all have received the details.

We can now all look forward to the end of lockdown and getting back on to the stage.

With very best wishes, stay safe, stay well.

Andy McNicholas - North West Regional Councillor

With the roadmap out of restrictions, we now have more of an idea of when we may be able to return to rehearsals and it's reassuring to hear, at the virtual district meetings we've been holding, that so many societies are cautiously planning for a return to theatre later this year, with many choosing Panto to celebrate their return.

I'm sure having a social life and being able to return to our much-loved hobby is going to be a shock to the system, I personally can't wait!



Stuart McCue-Dick - Scotland Regional Councillor

With each passing day and each dose of vaccine given, the light at the end of the tunnel is growing brighter.

NODA Scotland members continue to amaze me with the range of activities they have been undertaking and their continued enthusiasm as we eagerly await our, "beginners act 1", call to return to the stage.

If all goes to plan, we are hopeful we will be able, once more, to return to Peebles Hydro in October for our annual conference – watch this space for further details.



Kay Rowan - South East Regional Councillor

Subject to the tests being met and the data continuing in the right direction, the countdown has begun to the return of full rehearsals and staged productions! I am sure you are all raring to go. Excited to be able to meet up with friends again. Excited to start learning those new lines and notes and what about those dance steps? Now is the time to start getting fit for those dance routines! Let us not forget the techies, no one to light, no one to mic up, no props to make, no tabs to pull. I hope everyone in the South East has kept fit and well and thank you to those amongst us who have been going the extra mile and working towards maintaining our health, safety and well-being.



Graham Liverton - South West Regional Councillor

It has been a very difficult and frustrating time for all of us and I hope your societies have held up well. My deepest wish is to see the back of this COVID-19 pandemic – and with the vaccines being given out, we hope to see things getting back to normal. Therefore, we look forward, not back! I cannot wait to see us all back on stage where we rightfully belong! It came as a great shock that Sue Pomeroy died on March 3rd, after a short illness bravely borne. Sue was our regional Membership Secretary and Rep for District 9 and was well respected throughout the Southwest, she will be greatly missed and I send, from all around the NODA family, our deepest condolences to Tony and the family, may she rest in peace.



Sharon Davies - Wales & Ireland Regional Councillor

I have spent the weekend enjoying the sunshine and watching the buds on trees and flowers start to come back to life, and in England, at least (at time of writing we still await the Welsh ministers' plan) there are signs of life starting to return to our entertainment industry. It would seem that there is light at the end of the tunnel, (and it's not a train coming the other way). I have missed the crowded theatre foyer and auditorium, the camaraderie, the laughter and the music. I know that it will be difficult to resume rehearsals and performances with the restrictions that may be in place to start with, but we are a resilient lot and I know the theatre community can work together and pull it off!



Ian G. Cox - West Midlands Regional Councillor

There is growing excitement and eagerness from society members, families and friends for the return to planning rehearsals and performances following the recent positive news.

Societies and groups are to be commended for the innovative ways they have embraced technology in order to keep their members together; Zoom and the like, have become the norm. Zoom will be used by the regional team for our West Midlands AGM on Sunday 25th April, and we look forward to you joining us. All being well, it will be possible to get together again soon. Meanwhile, stay safe.



The triumph of *Titanic the Musical*, our last voyage

NODA East Midlands



Photo by EKR Pictures. Cast of *Titanic The Musical*, November 2019

Charlotte Gratton looks back to the last pre-Covid production by Chesterfield Operatic Society, pondering what makes *Titanic* such a good show.

The pandemic has brought amateur dramatics to a halt. This time last year, Chesterfield Operatic Society was in the midst of casting for *Carousel*, sadly the show had to be postponed and ultimately cancelled. They shared the iconic message 'You'll never walk alone' with their members and followers with a lump in their throats, knowing the real struggles so many were facing because of COVID-19. The society, like many others, still faces the uncertainty of not knowing when they will all be together again to rehearse and perform on the Pomegranate Stage in Chesterfield.

However, the pandemic has brought time for reflection and they look back with fondness at the last show they performed. A show which attracted a company of 46, including a society record of 24 men, outnumbering the women aboard. *Titanic the Musical* was a masterpiece, filling everyone with emotion - from the reviews left by their audiences to the whole cast and production team.

Nick Stacey, Musical Director for *Titanic the Musical*, said, "It's always difficult approaching a musical that is relatively unknown. But maybe that's a good thing. You

aren't swayed by trying to emulate previous productions or in a constant battle to make every scene different to how it has been played before."

So why? Why was our production of *Titanic* in November 2019 so special? This is a question I kept asking myself. Was it the music and libretto? The cast and crew? The band? The sense of camaraderie? The fact that the story was based on real lives lost in such a tragic way?

Eventually I decided to just accept that there is no real answer to this question. The feeling that every single person who was involved in that production experienced, both during the rehearsal period and on stage, was something that you only feel a handful of times during one's life.

I have decided that trying to over-analyse it is pointless. Just accept it for what it was. An absolutely phenomenal production which wouldn't have been the show it was had it not been for every single person who was involved. A very special time.

Jon Bennett, who played Thomas Andrews, said, "Titanic was a great success because of many things; the whole cast, whatever their role, understood their part and especially of the character they were playing and felt the emotions that that person went through. It was directed and produced so well and very



cleverly lit for all scenes. The music was fantastic, but most of all it's the one time, in all my years at Chesterfield Operatic, that I felt everyone taking part in it came together to give the most amazing performance, giving true feeling and an understanding of the whole production."

Josh B, a member of the audience, said, "I went to see *Titanic* twice and both performances were magnificent. A large cast of extremely talented people performing to an exemplary standard. Incredible opening and closing songs involving all of the cast - incredibly strong with the sound generated being a feat to behold. It was very brave to perform a lesser-known score; but it worked fantastically with many people sat close to me brought to tears! The cast were kitted out with fantastic costumes to perform in front of the audience whilst moving around a very well designed set reflecting the story well."

Sarah Morrell, Chairperson of the society, said, "A musical that spans the ages in characters is the perfect musical for an amateur society. The sense of belonging and family this brought to the society will be forever remembered by everyone involved."

The society continue to come together in sharing cherished moments on the stage through social media.

New Society is born - in the midst of a pandemic

NODA London



Matthew Pimm is a brave man - some would say foolish. When almost all theatres had been closed for over six months, and the amateur and professional outlet for the arts was looking grim, he formed Festoon Theatre Company (FTC), which covers the Shepherd's Bush, Chiswick and Hammersmith areas.

"I had been looking for the right time to launch a new society, and with big cast productions looking to be on hold long-term, I decided to take the plunge."

Small, tight cast productions are not seen much on the amateur circuit and Festoon

wanted to give musicals with small casts (twelve and under) a new voice.

"Being an avid theatre goer, I have always had a list of shows I would love to be a part of creating. In the amateur world there are lots of places you can go and do big, well known, ensemble shows, but often the smaller, more niche venues are overlooked," Matthew adds, "bigger ensembles often mean a bigger audience, so smaller shows will have us performing in more intimate and unusual venues too."

Because it can be challenging for established companies to appeal to new members. FTC's focus is to appeal to all ethnicities and is driven to cast shows as diversely as possible.

"My ultimate goal is to have an extremely diverse membership base. Not only will this open up the potential show options, but will allow for shows that may be written with a traditionally white cast, to be reimaged with a cast who may not ever have seen themselves in those roles."

Alongside Matt as resident director, is Cristina Duffy who will be working behind

the scenes and as resident choreographer. George Wheatley completes the Festoon core trio as the resident musical director.

According to Christina, *"The exciting part for us is bringing a society to an area in London which is relatively untouched by amateur theatre. Shepherd's Bush, Hammersmith and Chiswick are bursting with talent and hopefully Festoon can be an outlet for that."*

With COVID-19 changing the way everyone communicates, Festoon wants to incorporate virtual rehearsals with person to person.

"The past year has shown us how powerful and inclusive technology can be. The aim, of course, is to get people back together performing on the same stage and rehearsing in the same room, but we can certainly use Zoom/virtual platforms in addition to streamline rehearsal schedules," Christine says.

Festoon Theatre company will be revealing their debut musical shortly and hoping to get into the theatre by the end of the year. Watch this space!

Winston's 90th Birthday

NODA Wales & Ireland



Many members of NODA who attended The National Conference in 2008 and 2009, will have met Winston Johnston, who attended as President of AIMS (Assoc. of Irish Musical Societies) and

addressed us at the AGM. He celebrated his 90th birthday on 19th January, which was of note in this time of not much happening in our world of amateur theatre! Actually a 90th birthday is of note at any time especially when the celebrant is still working for his hobby - he is still Honorary Treasurer for AIMS Northern Region.

His musical history is a long and varied one, having started out singing in Belfast church choirs, Studio Opera Group, Philharmonic Society and Male Voice Choirs - most recently Donaghadee Male Voice Choir with whom he has travelled the world. In his youth he regularly won awards at Festivals across Ireland.

In 1969, he moved to Bangor and joined the West Church performing group Spectrum and a few years later Bangor Amateur Operatic Society, with whom he performed many shows and pantomimes - notably playing Sid in *The Pajama Game*, Mr Twimble in *How to succeed in Business without really Trying* and blowing amazing

'smoke rings' as Pickering in *My Fair Lady*. He served on BAOS's committee and acted as Honorary Treasurer for many years. When AIMS was formed Winston became the society representative for their meetings and shortly after, became the Northern Ireland region Chairman (for 23 years)! He is proud that his region established an annual fundraising concert, called *Cavalcade of Song*, involving member societies. He had the rare honour of serving two, 2 year terms as President of AIMS All Ireland and formed strong relations with NODA during his presidencies.

Throughout all this Winston was also an active member of the Masons, he sailed and was Treasurer of Quoile Yacht Club and attended 2 Commonwealth Games as Captain of the Clay Pigeon Shooting Assoc. He has led a very busy and interesting life and, although retired from much of his work, has maintained interests and has friends from every area of his life. We join together to wish him belated 90th birthday wishes and Many Happy Returns!

A dip into the archives

NODA Scotland

I joined Dundee Operatic Society nearly 30 years ago, at the insistence of the then MD, Keith Milne. I joined to sing, have fun and relieve the stresses of the day job and family life. That didn't last – I soon found myself on the committee and helping to organise our contribution to a promotional 'Hobbies' exhibition at Dundee's Caird Hall – including musical interludes in the Marryat Hall, swiftly followed by the need for a programme for the coming 70th Anniversary show; and then a newsletter was thought to be a good idea... Some of you will recognise this!

Out of a concert in 1992, where a previously unknown Record Book of the first three years of the society kept by Arthur J Millar, the driving force behind the resurrection of the older societies (from 1872 onwards), was presented to the company by his son, Ronald, and with the Hobbies exhibition in 1993, came the knowledge that we had a small archive of material that had been handed down via committee members over the years. It was thought there were some scrap books, a few scores, one or two old photos. My love of local and family history was ignited once again. Wouldn't it be great if we could showcase some of these memorabilia at the 75th Anniversary celebrations that were already being planned? Challenge accepted!

So, it turned out that we had quite a collection of material – original attendance registers, minute books, published accounts, some cartoons, printers' blocks, some 16mm cine film in cans and printers' proofs of early programmes. It transpired there were some photos at the City Archives which turned out to be of shows in the 1930s. There was also a set of display boards from the 80s and some photograph albums, from the 30s and 70s.

Over the years, I appealed for more from company members and occasionally through the press. At Peebles, I chatted with Eileen Merry (NODA Archivist for many years) and others to try and get a feel for what folk wanted from this (which

was, ever the divas, "Where are the photos of ME?!!").

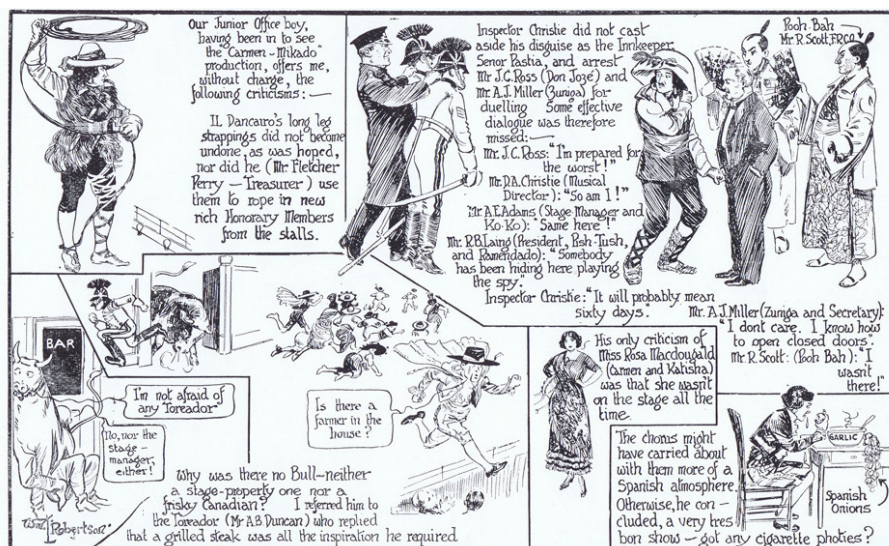
In 2010, we received a box of memorabilia from Arthur J Millar's family which gave us some fantastic photos and press cuttings from the early years. In 2014, the society was told that the storage space in the rehearsal rooms at the church we'd been using since forever needed to be cleared. What a treasure trove emerged! I managed to rescue a number of items and brought home many boxes of scores and other music, a painting initially thought to be DOS performing at King's Theatre (which turned out not to be, but did include some of the folk who performed with the society in the early years), some very doubtful and ancient makeup and hair pieces, and some mops from a production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. There was also a working carousel and some wooden swords, but someone else took those to recycle.

Social media arrived and with it the ability to easily get our name 'out there' and in 2015, I set up the Dundee Operatic Archives page on Facebook. It will probably never 'go viral', but folk seem to like seeing the photos and to reminisce. It seemed a small step to set up and publish a website to take the archives to a wider audience, in the same way I had done for my own family history research. In doing

this, I wanted to know more about the people who established the society: who they were, what was their history, what was the social background to the early shows? I won't dwell on the early deaths of a couple of performers – the 26 year old leading lady who died of puerperal fever (her son survived), the cheery and loveable chap who was a gifted producer and stage manager, but who succumbed to a heart attack at the age of only 40; but will mention that Dundee Operatic Society has several members, over the years, who have gone off to 'live the dream' of performing professionally; and has fielded 3 National Presidents, each one taking up the office twice! – Arthur J Millar 1961-3 and 1974-5, Alistair Gordon 1973-4 and 1976-8 and Robert T (Bert) Lumsden 2008-9 and 2013-14.

So, my job is just beginning in some ways; there is still a great deal of information to process. But come and see what there is at the website – the early programmes ("late train for Newport and Tayport at 11pm"), the many column inches of critique from the local newspapers ("Brilliant Amateurs, By Our Musical Critic"), those amazing cartoons of rehearsals for the first Carmen, the Patrons, the Egyptian Dancing Girls from the 1929 production of Merrie England, Sylvia Taylor's account of seeing a production from a box at the King's in 1934. Oh, and did I mention the 1932 programme cover drawn and SIGNED by local painter of some renown, J McIntosh Patrick?

Pat Carson, DOS Archivist





GREAT NEWS!

We have teamed up with **NODA** to produce a national weekly radio show that is 100% devoted to the amateur theatre scene.

Find out more now at
boxofficeradio.co.uk

Join the thousands of other musical theatre fans across the UK and listen to all your favourite songs from the musicals and movies you love.



amazon alexa



Find us online,
via the **FREE** app
and on smart speaker



The performance awards go virtual

NODA North



The NODA North Youth and Performance Awards are usually held every September, as a large, glamorous evening at the Grand Hotel Gosforth Park in Newcastle.

The 2020 Awards were meant to be no exception, with the date set and booked ready to celebrate another wonderful year of amateur theatre in the region. Of course, like most things last year, the event ultimately had to be cancelled due to the pandemic. With theatre groups all at a standstill, and the end of the year looking all the more bleak, it was decided that the Performance Awards 2020, were to be held virtually on Saturday 12th December 2020. It was believed that all the performances held during the eight months previous to the pandemic deserved to be commemorated, as did their nominations, and a night of celebration was certainly well overdue.

The event was live streamed from The Tyne Theatre and Opera House in Newcastle – in a COVID-secure environment – thanks to the support and sponsorship from Tyne

Audio. The awards were held in two halves: The Youth Awards began first, followed by a short interval where audiences were entertained by singers Gary Walsh, Olivia Dixon and Grace Davison, before the Performance Awards were held in the second half of the night. The entire evening was hosted by North-East actor and writer Tom Whalley, who proved an entertaining and proficient compère for the audiences as they watched the evening's events via YouTube, the link to which was sent to all members prior to the event. Regional Councillor Peter Oliver, Vice President Gordon Richardson and President Christine Hunter Hughes began the evening and helped welcome members and societies from across the region as they tuned in. A short speech was also provided by NODA Patron Connie Fisher, which was read by Past Chairman Fred Piggford. NODA Council Members and Regional Councillors joined the night either in person from The Tyne Theatre, or by Zoom from the comfort of their own homes. Host Tom introduced the Councillors, regardless of their location, before they

proceeded to announce the names of their nominees and winners. All nominees joined the event via Zoom and were held ready for if/when them or their group were announced as the winners. If this was the case, their Zoom call was added to the live event, where they could chat to the host about their win and allow audiences to see some wonderful reactions. After a jam-packed night, the awards were drawn to a close with a moving rendition of 'You'll Never Walk Alone' from Gary Walsh.

Since airing live, the YouTube video of the Performance Awards 2020 has racked up almost 5,300 views. It is still available to watch on YouTube.

The evening proved an enormous success and was wonderful in bringing together members and societies from across the region at the end of a year where we've spent so much time apart. It was a true reminder of the joy, passion and pride that amateur theatre brings to our lives and the memories that make us all the more eager to return to the stage once again.

Pantomime Flashback

NODA East

2020 will be the first time in 52 years that The Lowestoft Players haven't performed their annual pantomime, so we thought we would take a nostalgic look back at over 50 years of pantomime magic to remember what we are missing in our Grand Finale gallery.

The Players have been so lucky over the years to have a fabulous wardrobe team that year upon year come up with the most spectacular and often outrageous costumes. Did you know that on average our pantomime dames wear at least 12 different costumes every performance? Here are just a few of the creations that have graced the stages of our first home at the Sparrow's Nest Theatre and, in recent years, the lovely Marina Theatre.

Did you know that every one of the Players' pantomimes has finished with the same song... 'Pantomime'? It has become their very own anthem to which our regular audiences sing along with us.

"It's entertainment's greatest show, so long live panto, long live pantomime!"

So, we look forward to dusting away the cobwebs as the rehearsal studio resounds with song, dance and laughter as we prepare to celebrate the *Magic Of Live Theatre* with the Lowestoft Players rescheduled pantomime *Beauty And The Beast* booked to appear in January 2022, at the Marina Theatre in Lowestoft Suffolk.



The Players have been so lucky over the years to have so many great double acts... the notorious Ugly Sisters who have teased and tormented poor Cinderella in the many fabulous costume creations courtesy of the Players very own wardrobe team.



Helston celebrates 45 years of panto... in lockdown

NODA South West

Cornwall's Helston Theatre Company explains how they managed to enjoy their special panto this year and share their secrets of lockdown!

Like many groups, Helston Theatre Company has continued to try to engage with their members virtually; including a "Getting to Know ..." feature, where a particular member of the company is questioned about themselves and our shared hobby. They also have to provide photographs of themselves in previous productions – ideally from a long time ago!

January 2021 should have seen them staging their 45th anniversary panto. They had spent a lot of time drawing up plans to create a Covid secure performance space in their hall where they normally perform, but with a greatly reduced capacity. They had planned to do a concert, panto and musical – all working within the rule of six, but twice these plans have been delayed by the second and third lockdowns. So, instead of a new panto, this year has seen them celebrating 45 years of panto in Helston. Their members' Facebook page has seen them sharing photos, memoirs and includes a competition to recreate their favourite panto moments and a quiz. They've had a lot of engagement from their members, although the photos from the 1970s have reminded many of them just how old they now are!

Helston have also started a 100 Club to help pay for the rent on their storage facilities (scenery and costumes) and insurance and are encouraging renewal of membership even though they cannot give any information about future shows at the moment. The level of certainty means they are thinking they will just put their efforts into an open-air production in the summer. Here's hoping for them!

Paul Blaber
Chairman, Helston Theatre Company



Cartoons keep Compton Players smiling

NODA South East

It hasn't been a good year for Compton Players. We had started rehearsing for our 2020 Spring production when Covid struck. No more rehearsals, the show was postponed to the Autumn, then to Spring 2021 and now to Autumn 2021 (maybe).

However, when the lockdown began, one of our members, Dave Hawkins, embarked on a project to cheer us all up. Dave is multi-talented – as an actor, a writer (pantos his speciality) and a cartoonist – and he resolved to draw a cartoon a day until it was all over. Little did he know what he was letting himself in for. He produced 50 cartoons to cover the first lockdown, then another 50 to cover the exit strategy period. When the second lockdown happened in November, he started again and at the time of writing he's up to 31 in the third lockdown period!

We really looked forward to seeing them, wondering what he would think up next. Their arrival in our inbox every morning inspired us for the day. The cartoons were so well received that he has published the first 100 in a paperback book. The book is

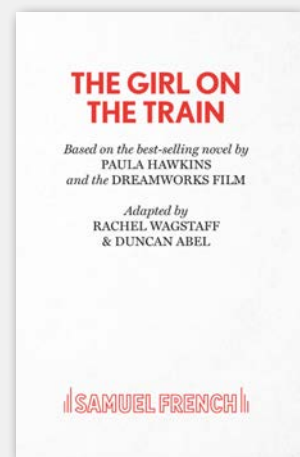
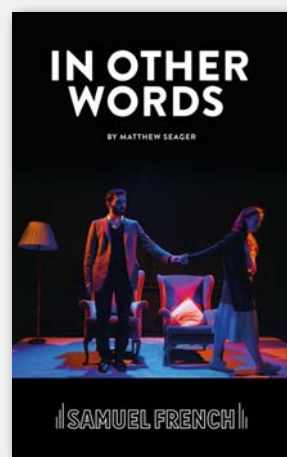
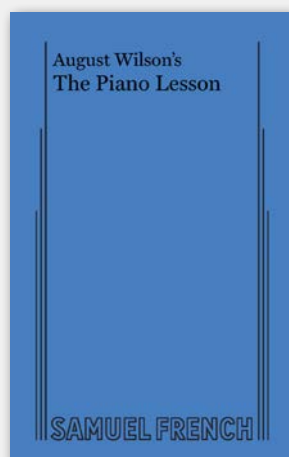
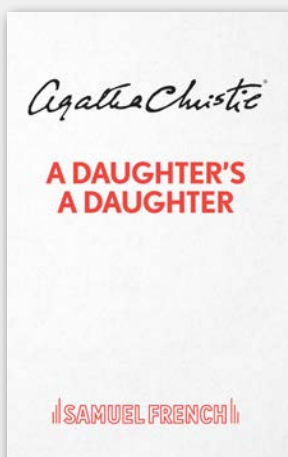


called *What Did You Do In The Lockdown, Daddy?* and is available directly from Dave at david@dragondes.co.uk

All profits from the book are being donated to the local foodbank.

We hope it's not too long until we can welcome back our loyal audiences to another opening, another show.

Images ©Dave Hawkins 2021



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CONCORD
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Tams

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10 Year Badge



15 Year Badge



20 Year Badge



25 Year Badge



30 Year Badge



35 Year Badge



40 Year Badge



45 Year Badge



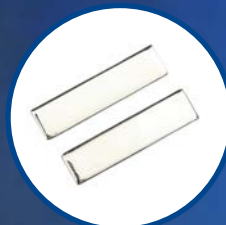
50 Year Badge



60 Year Badge



25 Year Medal



Silver Bar



50 Year Medal



Gold Bar



Diamond Bar



55 Year Pin



60 Year Pin



65 Year Pin



70 Year Pin



Individual Member



Society Life Member



Youth Award



Commendation
Award

“A NODA youth award isn't just a reward for three years' service, it's an investment in one of your society's greatest assets”

NODA North East

Each year thousands of us are proud to receive our NODA medals for 10, 20, 30, even 50 years of service to amateur theatre. But lots of adults in societies across the UK might be surprised to learn that junior members would be equally proud to receive an award from the organisation.

At least I assume the adults will be surprised, for I recently discovered how few groups actually give badges and certificates to children or young people.

I learned this sad fact from North East Region Rep, Sally Holmes, when she presented awards recently (via Zoom of course) to youngsters at the two groups I'm involved with.

Sutton's Green Hut Theatre Company presents NODA youth awards to junior members backstage at each autumn's pantomime, while KYDZ Keighley Youth Theatre invites Sally to present awards in front of the audience after shows.

Like all NODA Reps, Sally enlivens her presentation by speaking eloquently about the members' achievements and the wider importance of amateur theatre. This time she also highlighted that we were two of only a handful of groups in the region that give NODA awards to young people.

Why is this, I wonder? Do committees simply not realise under 18s are eligible? Do they miss seeing the words 'Youth Award Badge' when they skim down the price list on the NODA website?

I believe that in a few cases there's a more regrettable reason. Some societies still see child members as a hindrance, a begrudging necessity in order to get bums on seats for the panto or swell out the chorus in a musical. And some would say we shouldn't take seriously an award given after just three years' membership.

Yet to an adolescent or older teenager, 'just' three years can be a lifetime. In lives bursting with hobbies, homework and friends, it's often a miracle we keep young thespians even that long.

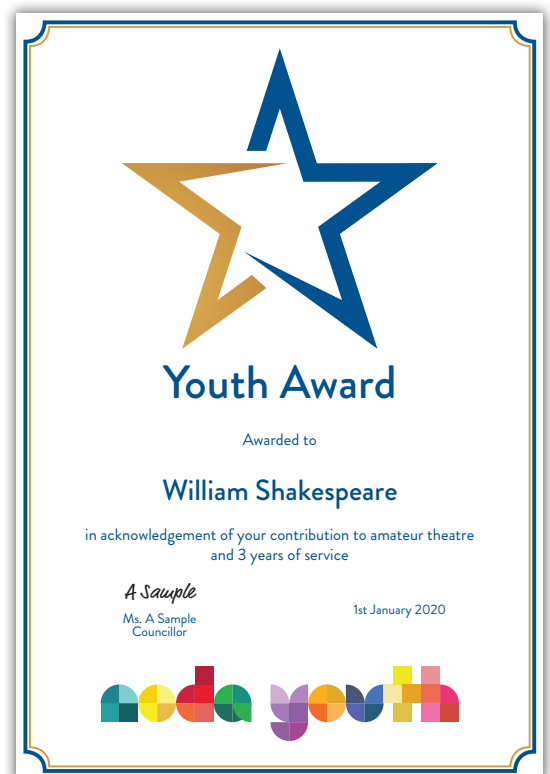
When our young people receive their award they are as proud as any adult. Their parents, the taxi service for all their rehearsals, are pleased as punch. The kids are excited for weeks before the presentation and they tell us months in advance that it's 'their turn' this year. And woe betide if we forget to apply!

Children qualify after three years' service, beginning from the age of eight. They can receive a certificate from 11 and a metal badge with certificate from 14. The costs are £4 and £8 respectively. It's easy to apply, simply fill in the form on the NODA website once your committee has confirmed the children have been involved for three years.

Believe me, it's worth the effort: for the child and for your society.

A NODA youth award isn't just a reward for three years' service, it's an investment in one of your society's greatest assets. It's an incentive for the child to continue for many more years - perhaps an actual lifetime.

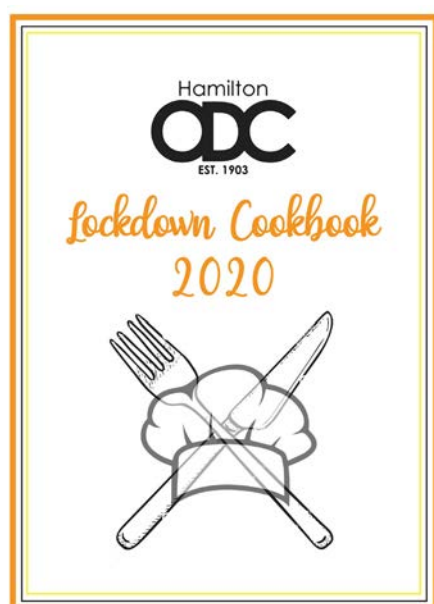
David Knights
Sutton's Green Hut Theatre Company and Keighley Youth Theatre



Hamilton ODC

NODA Scotland

No one expected the last year to be what it has turned out to be. However, we have not let that get in the way of the club being together. We have had a Zoom call every Tuesday night which has really helped, especially during the toughest times of lockdown. Many of our calls have been themed, and others have just been a general chat and catch up. Some of our members describe the Zoom calls as uplifting, fun, comfortable, enjoyable, refreshing, bizarre, friendly, chatty, outrageous and encouraging. We have not only had a laugh and a carry on, but we have looked back across the years and spoke about past shows, members who are no longer with us and shared some entertaining stories as well as pictures!



During the height of the first lockdown, we sent out a pocket hug to let our members know that no matter how hard it gets we are here. It put a lot of smiles on our members' faces and was another way of bringing us all together.

We have also fulfilled a gap to our members' Thursday nights with a quiz. Several of our members put rounds together to form many of our quizzes. Every week had a musical themed round as well as others ranging from general knowledge and history, to the club's previous productions and members' baby pictures. Our 2020 edition finished with a packed and very close leader board and our 2021 edition is proving to be the same.

For many years, the club has been giving back to charities in the local community and we have continued this during this uncertain time. So this got us thinking and we decided to do our own cookbook. Our members provided their brilliant recipes to make up the book full of delicious starters, main courses, desserts, home baking and cocktails. We were overwhelmed with the response to the cookbook so everybody who bought one was put into a raffle with the winner choosing the benefitting charity. The Dogs Trust was chosen in memory of our former treasurer Christine Seaton and we were delighted to contact them with our donation of £300.

Our donations did not stop there, as later in the year, we put together a Christmas hamper with all the funds going to a children's charity. We raised £400, which was enough to give 50+ children a present,

a hot meal and a safe place over Christmas. Both such worthy causes which we were delighted to raise so much for.

We also had our own virtual awards day where nine of our members received their NODA long service award at their door. Beverley Gardiner (10 years), Mhairi Thompson (15 years), Elizabeth Clements (20 years), Frank Bent (25 years), Emma Rodger (25 years), John McCulloch (40 years), Lindsay Mills (45 years), Joyce Tweedlie (50 years), May Weir (55 years)

We are always extremely proud to see our members get recognition of their time and efforts to our club and the whole amateur dramatic scene.

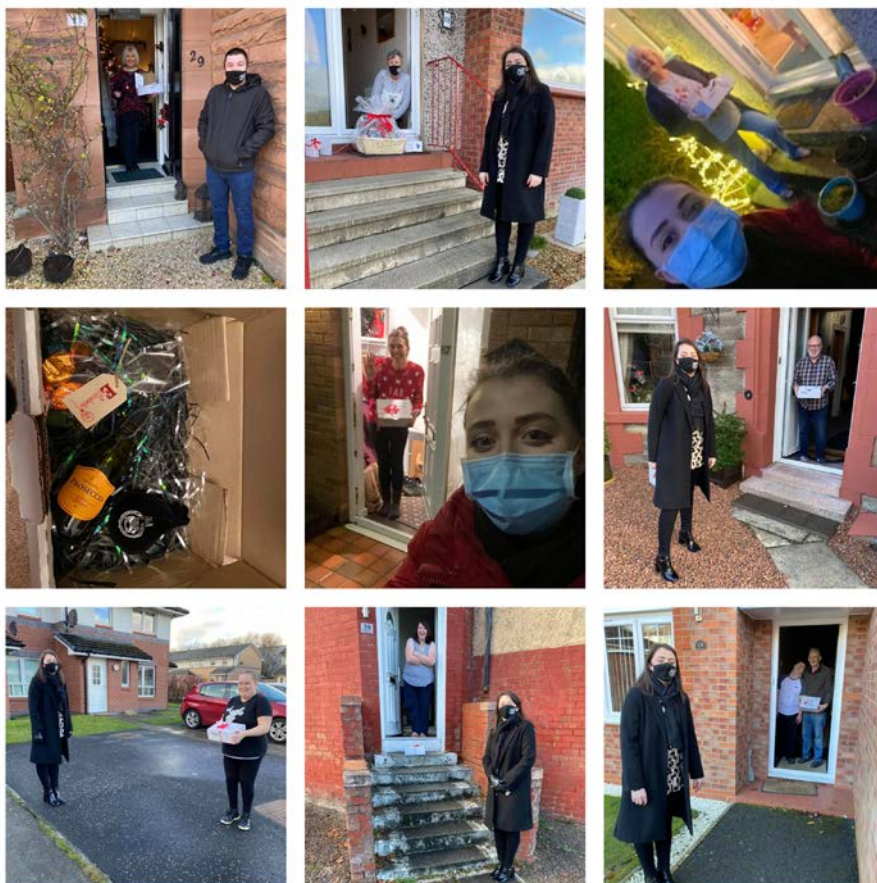
Our creative skills appeared once again to produce our own HODC merchandising range, with the aim being for our members to be able to take the club badge into their homes and out and about in the community. We had 3 items in our range which were club branded. We had face masks, coasters and, due to it being close to Christmas, baubles for the tree. Again, the response was overwhelmingly positive and continued to keep the club and all our members close together.

On the lead up to Christmas we were given an amazing opportunity to team up with Hamilton Business Improvement District. Hamilton BID supports local businesses and organisations to put them out there on all the relevant platforms. We were invited to do a virtual song to help spread some festive spirit which we accepted, and it was debuted on the 21st of December

2020, and reached 8,500 people. This was something new to a lot of us and it took a significant amount of preparation in the background, but the reaction we got from people close to the club and those in the local community was phenomenal. It gave our members the much-needed opportunity, although virtually, to sing and perform together. It was the start of what we hope will be a great relationship between Hamilton BID and ourselves which will open more opportunities for the club and place us right at the heart of the local community.

We are incredibly pleased that during the tough times we are facing with COVID-19, that it has not stopped us being active as a club. We are excited at what else we can do and continue to keep everything crossed that it will not be too long until we can get together in person again. And furthermore, hope that we can rehearse and perform for audiences again as soon as possible, as well as support all of the other amazing clubs.

Christopher Costello,
Marketing Manager, HODC



The Green Room - Stagedoor Productions

NODA North West



The term 'Green Room' is one familiar with many performers as we all know it as the room used before, during and after a performance whilst not on stage. For Bolton based theatre group, Stagedoor Productions, they have used the Green Room for other, inspiring reasons.

Stagedoor Theatre Productions has set up an online social club to keep in touch with people who have a common interest in the arts and theatre during the current coronavirus restrictions.

The Green Room has been set up by Chris

Anderton who runs Stagedoor Theatre Productions. Chris wanted a way of bringing people together during lockdown who had a common interest in theatre. During the lockdown, the online social club gained many participants who came together online to enjoy each other's company.

The Green Room's online meetings give people who may be lonely or feeling a bit low due to the current situation in the theatre world, a chance to speak to other people, enjoy quizzes, take part in yoga or simply enjoy a bit of company for the evening.

We are all missing the theatre and shows and it's important for us all to keep each other's spirits high and focus on the end goal of getting back into the theatre when it's safe to do so.

The Green Room's next meeting will be announced on their Facebook page [@stagedoorgreenroom](https://www.facebook.com/stagedoorgreenroom).

Useful contacts and resources

NODA Youth Coordinators

National Youth Coordinator	Mike Mullen	mike.mullen@noda.org.uk
East	Zelda Rolfe	zelda.rolfe@noda.org.uk
East Midlands	Amanda Hall	amanda.hall@noda.org.uk
London	Annie Hertler-Smith	annie.hertler-smith@noda.org.uk
North	Michelle Coulson	michelle.coulson@noda.org.uk
North East	Jo Sykes	jo.sykes@noda.org.uk
North West	Kit Phillips	kit.phillips@noda.org.uk
Scotland	Neil Hartley	neil.hartley@noda.org.uk
South East	Mike Mullen	mike.mullen@noda.org.uk
South West	Jo Wilson-Hunt	jo.wilsonhunt@noda.org.uk
Wales & Ireland	Matt Hampson	matt.hampson@noda.org.uk
West Midlands	Emma Laing	emma.laing@noda.org.uk

Safeguarding and Child Licencing Support

NODA Head Office - Rob Williams

rob@noda.org.uk - 01733 374 790

Child Licencing Support - Scotland

Liz Daniels

liz.daniels@noda.org.uk

**If you think you or a child is in immediate danger and needs urgent help,
please call the police on 999**

For non-urgent queries the best place to start is always with your Local Authority - their contact details can be found online or by calling your County Council / Borough Council.

For more advice or training

NSPCC - www.nspcc.org.uk

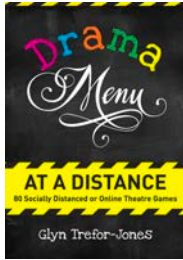
NNCEE - National Network for Children in Employment and Entertainment
www.nncee.org.uk



NODA is now in partnership with the National Association of Youth Theatres.
Take advantage of specialist factsheets and member discount

Visit noda.org.uk/youth for more information

Working online and socially distanced



Drama Menu at a Distance

Nick Hern Books - £8.79

An essential recipe book you need to eliminate the challenges of planning lessons and workshops in the 'new normal' and leave you with more time for playing

Musicals for young performers



Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat

The Musical Company



Cats

The Musical Company

Safeguarding Training

NSPCC Learning

NSPCC Learning - Online

Costs Vary

- Introduction to safeguarding and child protection
- Protecting children in entertainment (ideal for chaperones)
- Trustee Safeguarding

learning.nspcc.org.uk

First Aid Training



First aid at work - 3 day course

St John's Ambulance or other recognised providers

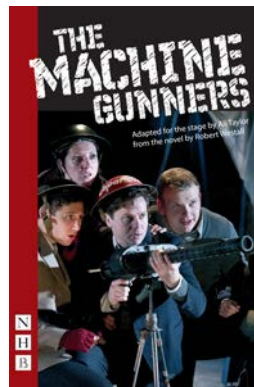


MHFA England

Youth Mental Health First Aid

mhfaengland.org

Great parts for young performers



The Machine Gunners

Nick Hern Books

Online Resources



Shakespeare Learning Zone

rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone

National Theatre Learning

National Theatre Learning

nationaltheatre.org/learning

Musicals for young performers



The Wizard of Oz - Young Performers

Concord Theatricals



Chicago High School Edition

Concord Theatricals

Rehearsal warm ups



Drama games for rehearsals

Nick Hern Books - £5.99

This essential 'go-to' book will provide you with a host of original and illuminating games, perfect for the play you're rehearsing, be it Shakespeare or Greek tragedy, a Restoration comedy, physical theatre, Modern Naturalism or even a brand new play.

Musicals for young performers



We Will Rock You young@part

Theatrical Rights Worldwide



Grease young@part

Theatrical Rights Worldwide

Encore Junior Theatre - special year takes a knock



To say that 2020 and the start of 2021 have seen challenging times for theatre is an understatement and for Encore Junior Theatre, it has been no different. However, our amazingly resilient and talented young members have taken it all in their stride and, thanks to their commitment and enthusiasm, we have still been able to enjoy a fun-filled and successful year.

When the first lockdown struck back in March 2020, we had just begun rehearsals for our 5th anniversary production of *Seussical the Musical*. Most of our productions have been junior versions of well-known musicals, but this was to be our second full scale musical: following the success of our award-winning production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* in 2018.

Unable to meet at our venue on a Monday evening, we moved to Zoom sessions for the summer term. Online sessions are not

the ideal medium for the performing arts and they come with challenges of their own, especially for a company that loves to sing, but we all found our way through with sessions covering new dance routines, vocal exercises, script work and even managed to learn some new songs.

By far the most successful activity, was working in small groups on radio plays. Each group was given the same partially written script and a set of basic rules to follow. They then had to finish writing the script, cast, rehearse and perform the play. When they performed, they were not visible to the rest of the group which meant that they had to rely on the spoken word, atmospheric music and their own sound effects to tell their story. The final products were amazing, all different but all really enjoyable to listen to.

We started the autumn term with much excitement.

Having to abandon *Seussical*, we started work on two Roald Dahl plays, *Charlie & the Chocolate Factory* and *The Twits*, chosen because at that time we still weren't allowed to sing, although we hoped that by the time we came to perform them this spring, we would be able to add in some singing and dancing. Having to work in separate bubbles was both different and exciting. We had to be creative with casting, were unable to move between tutors and couldn't bring in other adults for backstage help.

Each group worked with one tutor the whole time and the plan was that they would, as a group, design and make their own set, costumes and props. Unfortunately, trying to do any activities that required continuity from week to week proved extremely difficult with so many of our juniors being sent home from school to self-isolate each week.

Apart from the last couple of weeks of term, we have spent the rest of the time back on Zoom. Zoom sessions are not for everyone, especially after a day of home online learning and we understand the stress a lot of young people are under at the present time. The last thing we wanted was to force our juniors to take part in something they weren't comfortable with, so for this term we decided to move away from mandatory sessions, instead offering workshops for those who wanted to carry on with online sessions and a break for everyone else.

Week one of our workshops saw makeup artist Matt Pimm taking our participants through a *Cats!* makeup session in which they transformed themselves from human to Mr Mistoffelees in an hour! In week two, we welcomed Auriol Hatcher for an absolutely exhausting, high energy *Mamma Mia* dance workshop.

Week three brought about a complete change of tempo when Sean Carey, actor with Mischief Theatre took us through some scenes from *The Play That Goes Wrong* and *A Comedy about a Bank Robbery*, instructing our juniors on the

ways to get the comedy out of the written material and sharing anecdotes about his career in the theatre.

It was back to dance for week four, when dancer and choreographer, Scott Coldwell, taught our juniors to do the Charleston and thrilled them with stories about his career working with people like Cheryl on *X Factor*, and more recently with the pro dancers on everyone's favourite TV show, *Strictly come Dancing!*

Our final fabulous workshop was Disney themed. West End performer Oliver Lidert who has played Mustafa in *The Lion King* and the Genie in *Aladdin*, taught our juniors the movements of the different animals in *The Lion King* followed by a masterclass in acting through song as the Genie.



It's been a tough 12 months and we've all been a part of social history that we would have preferred never to have happened, but we have made the best of it. Most importantly we have managed to keep performing arts in the lives of many young people.

Karen Bulfin
Director Encore Junior Theatre

Keeping the traditions going – Christmas shows with Yew Tree Youth Theatre!



Every year for the last 15 years, Yew Tree Youth Theatre has performed Christmas Shows - adaptations of well-known stories or brand new festive treats. Every member of the company (usually about 100 young people aged 6 – 22) is on stage, all have lines and their moment in the spotlight. It's a celebration of everything that is good about youth theatre, creativity and performing.

Obviously, Christmas 2020 was a little different, but we were determined to make something happen. We moved locations into an open, airy room in a local community centre and, instead of all being in the same place at the same time, we brought one company in at a time to perform their plays to an audience who were not in the building. Keeping COVID secure at all times with the amount of people in the room, distancing and cleaning procedures, we streamed their creations that had been written and rehearsed in person and online via our Facebook group.

Stories such as *Alice in Wonderland*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *The Princess and the*



Credit Michael Godsall

Frog and Cinderella were all beamed out to rapturous appreciation from family and friends ensuring our traditions were upheld despite the challenging theatrical landscape of the times!

I'd like to leave you with the final lines of our adaptation of *Peter Pan* by the oldest company of actors (16 – 22 years). This was written by one of the young people in the cast and I think is a wonderfully heartening thing to see young people coping with the world they find themselves in,



Credit Michael Godsall

"Defy the expectations of the real world. Do it. Go on. Break out of the box you've been shoved in. Get out: Kick, scream and run. Do more than is ever wanted of you, and do so much less. Disappoint people. Astound people. Do everything and nothing. Be the light and the dark. Don't be nice. Do what you want, and be kind to the world (and YOU, you're a key part of the world)".

Sarah Osborne,
Director, Yew Tree Youth Theatre

Project Theatre, Falkirk



Founded in 2008, we are a performing arts organisation and registered Scottish Charity who aim to promote youth involvement in the creative and performing arts across the Falkirk area through workshops, productions and other events and initiatives. Project Theatre was formed through grassroots organising and community spirit and works as a non-profit organisation. We pledge to be involved in the community (especially with young people) in as many engaging and positive ways as possible.

Under the artistic direction of our founder Jamie O'Rourke, our growing organisation's projects are divided into these areas: classes, Youth Theatre, Dance, Film & Digital, Music, School Holiday Activities, Collective & Creative Learning. We provide performing arts training and performance experiences with the power of potential at their heart. Our diverse organisation has a committed following and is always seeking to build on this audience through innovative audience development and educational work.

Over the past year Project Theatre have continued to operate and hold as many classes as possible via online platforms as well as having some face to face sessions, as and when it was allowed, based on the Scottish COVID Tier system. Project Theatre felt a responsibility as a youth charity, particularly when schools have been off, to provide educational creative opportunities for our young people. They also believe, for the development and well being of all our young people during a pandemic, the process is priority above the finished product particularly since in these circumstances we cannot and should not expect to have all of the skills, resources and time available to us in usual circumstances.

During 2020, Project Theatre has worked with over 60 young people, 11 regular and freelance staff and our team of 20 volunteers over 18 different activities; these have included 5 outdoor sessions in a local park and town centre during the summer months. The Project Theatre social media audience and website visits grew dramatically throughout this time, as they created 13 performances for screen with a collective reach of around 2400

views on both YouTube and Facebook platforms.

When they were not around the local parks and city centres making use of the available space, the group held over 45 in-studio classes/rehearsals before lockdown and full face to face restrictions were put in place. This did not stop the group and as I have mentioned the group then moved online and enjoyed around 60 online sessions from classes, workshops and rehearsals to staff and volunteer meetings, fun quiz nights and a mindfulness relaxation video.

The most recent workshop that Project Theatre has put together was with a very special guest from *SIX The Musical*. Hazel Karooma-Brooker joined the group via an online Zoom workshop on Wednesday 24 February. After a brief introduction from Hazel, the very starstruck cast took to the floor for a warm up and were then taken through the choreography to one of the dance routines from the show - over an hour-long session.

Hazel was very keen to be involved in the workshop and provided the following statement:

"I'm really excited to be doing this workshop with Project Theatre. I love teaching dance and especially the SIX material which I adore. I'm so thankful for the opportunity. I feel especially blessed, these opportunities wouldn't come my way if it weren't for my involvement with the show and the fact that so many people are in love with SIX too. I feel it's particularly crucial for as many theatre professionals as possible to be linking up with youth theatres, charities and the like - not to mention that it helps us as well, and there's absolutely been more of it from everything I've seen and been involved with. I think it's so necessary to be getting a little theatre into our lives as much as possible. And with some MT pros even starting their own online theatre schools, it's never been more important for everyone to be linking up and sharing their experience and knowledge, especially with the generations coming up who will be the future of theatre. I've been hit by the pandemic as much as most from this industry, but I'm very lucky that I was away just before it all started and was able to just run home to my parents (ha-ha!). It's been gutting to see the way it's all been handled,



Hazel Karooma-Brooker in *SIX The Musical*



especially with so many shows trying to pick-up, only to get shut down again. Sometimes it feels like this will be the end of theatre because of how much we've been let down, but I think people underestimate how much we all love and need theatre. We'll all be back the second we're allowed - I don't think they could stop us, even if they wanted to. Theatre people are a force to be reckoned with!"

Neil Hartley, Scotland Youth Coordinator

How we pulled off a full-scale music video against all the COVID-odds!



In August of 2020, with COVID-19 restrictions now becoming a regular part of our daily lives, we, along with many other youth theatre groups, made the difficult decision to postpone our planned production of *Annie Jr* which was due to be staged in December 2020. However, we were determined to keep our young members connected and provide them with some much-needed escapism and excitement in these turbulent times.

We call ourselves Team Wings and we are a group of 5 adults who set up Wings Youth Theatre in December 2018. Our overriding passion has always been to give children the opportunity to gain confidence, self-esteem and have a lot of fun through singing, acting and drama in a safe and supportive environment. Little did we know when we welcomed our members to our very first rehearsal, that, just over a year later, we would be facing huge hurdles just to get the youngsters in the same room as each other, let alone doing any kind of performing!

As soon as COVID-19 dictated that a performance in front of packed audiences was an impossibility, our enthusiasm for facilitating performance for our young local members was to be tested to its limits. But we were adamant that we would not be deterred by the simple matter of a global pandemic! After many hours of Zoom, WhatsApp & socially distanced discussions, many of which contained the phrase, "No, we can't do it that way, because of Covid", we finally came up with a framework for our music video, *Sing*.



The ending of lockdown #1 meant that we were, happily, able to run weekly rehearsals again (albeit with restricted numbers, in a socially distanced, masked manner). At the first of these rehearsals, the youngsters embraced the music video plans wholeheartedly and threw themselves into learning the song, rehearsing their scenes, and even making props for the video. We were so proud of their positive, adaptable and imaginative attitudes. They gave us some brilliant ideas and suggestions, many of which have made their way into the final cut.

The project culminated in two weekends that had the buzz and excitement of a full-blown theatre show week: A day of recording vocals in a makeshift studio (AKA the local village hall) was followed by two jam-packed days of filming at multiple-locations across Mid-Sussex. Against a backdrop of regular hand-sanitising, mask wearing and social



distancing, our young members rose to the challenge and we at Team Wings couldn't be prouder of the final result and what they've achieved; transferring their skills from stage to screen. As the leaders of this group, we are also so incredibly grateful to these youngsters for making our own "COVID-19 experience" infinitely more bearable by allowing us free-reign with our bonkers video ideas and executing them for us so spectacularly.

Wings Youth Theatre hope that those who watch the video, will be carried along with the escapism and feeling of hope, joy and friendship which it brought to us and to the cast and crew in its making.

Theatre is Wings' passion and they yearn for its return, but in the meantime the camera has been their friend and for that, Wings Youth Theatre will be eternally grateful.

‘Stir Up Shakespeare’ – A Lockdown Legacy Project

NODA South West

Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments;
Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth;
Theseus, Duke of Athens, A Midsummer Night's
Dream 1:1

Brownsea Open Air Theatre launched a Shakespeare outreach project for young people, during lockdown.

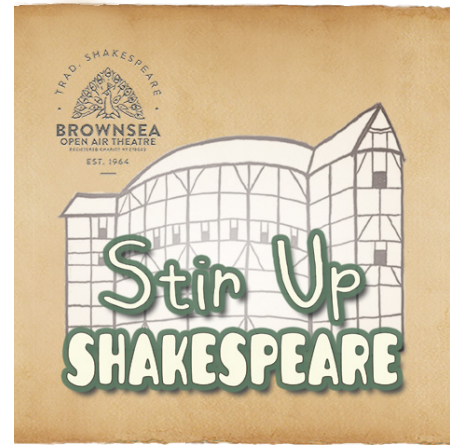
With the pressure on parents, teachers and children during the long winter lockdown, Brownsea Open Air Theatre launched ‘Stir Up Shakespeare’, an outreach project with the simple aim of helping to relieve the strain. This is an activities project with a genuine purpose: enabling young people, children and their families to keep busy with stimulating and creative projects, using materials readily found at home and to enjoy working on Shakespeare-related topics without the pressure of the academic curriculum. With so many families desperate for non-school-based material, but anxious to fill the time productively, *Stir Up Shakespeare* is BOAT's contribution to the community. If just one family row has been averted, *Stir Up Shakespeare* is already a success!

Stir Up Shakespeare is an online resource. Contributors include: theatre professionals, teachers, artists and other members of the Brownsea theatre community. The initial material is based upon *Romeo and Juliet*, with further materials in the pipeline to eventually include all the major Shakespeare plays. Broadly targeted at the 8-13 age group, but including more challenging projects for older students and simple activities for the younger ones to share, *Stir Up Shakespeare* offers a broad range of activities (through which families can absorb some information about Shakespeare, his life and works) each demonstrating some connection to real tasks in live theatre.

The benefits of *Stir Up Shakespeare* extend beyond young families: members of BOAT who were isolating or isolated at home, came forward to focus on practical and thoughtful activities, using their personal and professional skills and experience. This group continues to grow and the library of Shakespeare and theatre-related resources which it creates will grow with it. With its appeal to families, schools and the theatrical community, and the continued development of theatre-related online resources, *Stir Up Shakespeare* is an outreach project with an extremely promising and positive lockdown legacy.

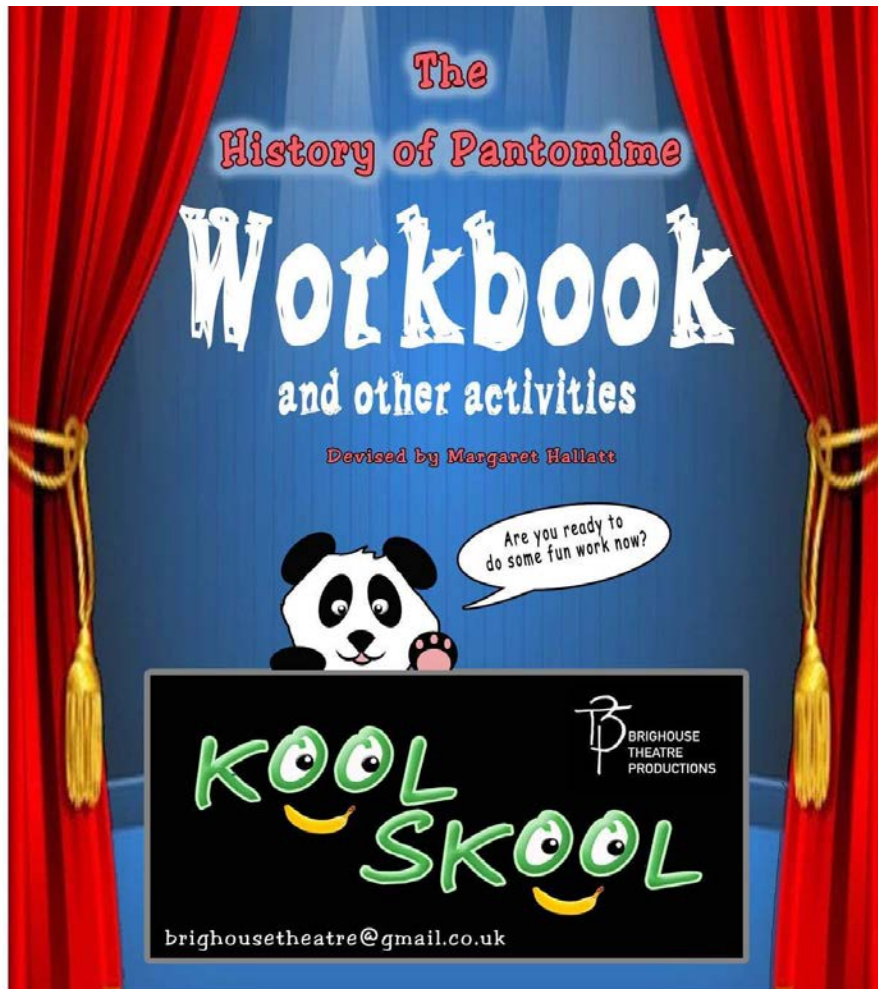
Stir Up Shakespeare activities online can be found via: www.brownsea-theatre.co.uk/stir-up-shakespeare/

Sylvia Coates



Brighthouse Kool Skool project

NODA North East



Brighthouse Theatre Productions (BTP) are an amateur dramatic company based in West Yorkshire. We recognise that, due to the ongoing COVID pandemic, we have been robbed of twelve months of live theatre.

Our greatest fear was that there would be a gap in the lives of children at exactly the time when fun and enjoyment would be beneficial to their wellbeing. The proposed solution was a project specifically aimed at 'plugging that gap'. The funding was provided with unanimous support from the BTP Committee. In essence, what was proposed was an interactive, online, lesson describing the evolution of what we now refer to as 'The British Pantomime'.

This would include excerpts from historical footage, supplemented with freshly recorded comedy sketches by players from BTP. We were keen to ensure that we did not lose contact with our potential future theatrical audiences and contributors, while being mindful of creating a valuable educational resource. Early engagement with a number of Primary School Head Teachers indicated that such a project would be greatly valued.

The Nature of the Resource

The action begins in a classroom where two insubordinate students and a comically didactic teacher are discussing the origins of pantomime. A narrated montage of photographs and videos follows, describing panto's evolution through the centuries - from its roots in Italy right up the stem, to its flowering head, where it becomes embedded in UK culture.

The viewers are then instructed in the essential elements of a pantomime, through sketches and scenes, acted out by BTP using 'green screen' technology to create the scenery.

It is not just the 'learning' that is interactive, because, as in 'live' theatre, the children are invited to be a part of the action and subsequently, the audience. There is a pause break, following the History Lesson, to give the class a chance to complete workbooks provided. These contain exercises, quizzes and practical activities about the lesson they have just engaged in.

We cannot overstate the challenges that our schools and parents have had to overcome in these last twelve months. If we are to keep our children theatrically engaged, we have to reach out during these challenging times. Whilst COVID has adversely affected the delivery of this project, an early spring delivery date is still being pursued. We have already received an enormous expression of interest from schools in response to our project. If you or a school near you are interested in receiving this FREE project, please contact brighthouse@theatre@gmail.com

Sean Brennan & Damian Shalks

Did you know that
Sean Brennan &
Damian Shalks are
also pantomime
writers?

Dick Whittington
script is available
through



Panto Scripts

pantoscripts.org.uk

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stream.theatre is proud to be making its technology available for amateur dramatic societies, schools, community theatre and more via its new tool - ShowShare.

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ShowShare is a new one stop solution that allows organisations to stream their productions. With a dedicated team to help at every step of the way, ShowShare makes streaming secure, straightforward and affordable.

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Here is a small selection of popular titles available for you to put on and stream through ShowShare*



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3

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4

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ShowShare will assign you a team member to guide you every step of the way. They can help you with artwork, provide a direct booking link for your show and send you sales reports.

For more information and to start streaming, organisations can

visit www.showshare.co.uk



Alistair Brammer - from Exmouth to 'Saigon'

Alistair Brammer is a well-known star of both Stage and Screen, most notably leading roles in both the West End and Broadway and in the BBC's long-running TV drama series - *Casualty*. However, Centre Stage, Exmouth – a leading youth Theatre Group in the South West and affiliated to NODA, had a big hand in starting this all off. We asked Alistair how it all began...

How did it all start for you?

I must have been 15 and my friend Lucy Green (whom I'm still friends with now) invited me along to see her in a Performance of *Oliver!* by Centre Stage in Exmouth, near to where I'm from. I had no idea what it was all about or what was likely to go on really, as my family had no real experience of drama or musical theatre. But I was absolutely mesmerized by it – I couldn't believe what they were all doing and how cool it was – I was hooked! The following week there were auditions for their next production – *The Pirates of Penzance* and I went along. I sang 'Happy Birthday' – which is not as crazy at it sounds as it is musically really good for singing intervals and I got the part of Samuel – the Pirate King's sidekick and I was in!

When did you know it was what you wanted to do forever?

I really enjoyed what I was doing as I did more productions and found all of it so interesting – but I guess that moment came the following year. I had been cast as Marius in Centre Stage's Schools Production of *Les Misérables*. It was also the 20th anniversary of the London Production and they were also inviting kids from the schools' edition productions



going on at that time to send in audition tapes, which I did. Of the 1000 entries, only 35 were invited to London and I was one of them! It got even crazier when I was cast as Marius for the anniversary production in London – at 16 and within a year of starting. I remember standing on the stage of what was the Queen's Theatre and looking up and thinking "I could do this...." and then 4 years later I was cast as Marius in the London production in the same theatre – I'd come full-circle. It was truly amazing – and quite mad!

What support did you get from Centre Stage?

Centre Stage were my preparation for the Industry as I didn't go to Drama School and had only started at 15. They sparked my interest and were my training. It was Centre Stage Director Mark Worsley who drove me up to London for the audition for *Les Misérables* too.

After the schools' production in London, my performances were back as an

amateur. Centre Stage introduced me to a real mix of different genres – from Rogers and Hammerstein to Gilbert and Sullivan, Cole Porter to Schönberg and Boublil. I was rehearsing for *The Scarlett Pimpernel* at the Northcott Theatre, for a musical society in Exeter, when I got a call to play understudy Joseph in the UK Tour of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. The following day I took a train to Edinburgh to start rehearsals!

I would like to thank everyone at Centre Stage for kick-starting my interest in what is now my job. I'm pretty sure I need to thank Graham Liverton too, whom is the NODA Southwest Councillor and also my mum's cousin! I'm sure he helped somewhere – including setting up this interview!

What have been the highlights of your career so far?

There have been a quite few.

The 25th anniversary performance of *Miss Saigon* (which was on TV on Boxing Day) saw me reunited with the original Chris, Simon Bowman – who was my Jean Valjean when I started on *Les Misérables*. I also got to perform with Lea Salonga, the original Kim which was a real thrill. Most people do not realise how big a star she is in her home country of the Philippines and she was also the voice of the original Princess Jasmine in *Aladdin*.

I guess Broadway was a box I never thought I'd tick. After I'd been a leading man in the West End as Chris in *Miss Saigon*, I got back from my honeymoon to a request to perform the part on Broadway! Playing an American character in an American themed musical about a key event in



American History wasn't what I expected, but Cameron (Mackintosh) was keen for me to do it. My wife, Rachel gave up her job and we lived near Times Square for a year. Broadway audiences are much louder than West End ones and coming out of the Stage Door to 150 people whooping and cheering you every night, as a British actor was amazing.

The real highlight was working on the National Theatre's production of *Warhorse* at the New London Theatre. There was such a sense of camaraderie and a lack of egos with a team of straight actors and dedicated crew. I also met my wife there, who was the in-house physiotherapist (the show is very demanding physically, particularly for the puppeteers) and the rest I guess is history!

What advice would you give anyone considering a career as an actor?

Never stop learning. Read and see everything you possibly can and never assume you've learnt enough. I did an episode of the sit-com *Vicious*, with Sir Derek Jacobi and Sir Ian McKellen a few years ago. You'd think with all of their many

years of experience they'd know it all, but they were so curious all the time about what was going on and why in order to learn and improve what they were doing. Sir Ian even came and saw me in *Miss Saigon* as he wanted to learn more about musical theatre! Be critical too and specific about what you like and do not like in all you've seen.

What have you been doing in lockdown?

I was performing in *Wicked* and went to work as normal on the day that we now know all the theatres closed. We were kept in our dressing rooms until 7.15pm (we were normally out by 6.30pm) before all being called to the stage and told to go home – and that's the last time I've been on a stage. At the time, we were living in a 2 room flat in Victoria, but, with the help of my brother-in-law's van, were able to relocate home to Devon before full lockdown and for summer. It has been great to spend quality time with our 17 month old son – Sully (Sullivan) and there have been some real highs and lows over the period, but I'm a positive person and want to take all I can from this experience. I was offered a teaching role at the ICMT

in Belfast in the Autumn which has been a completely different experience for me, but one I'm loving as it is so inspiring. Acting through song I particularly enjoy, where I assist students in their performance of a new song each week.

What's next?

Who knows when theatres will reopen, but I do want to get back into acting. COVID-19 doesn't stop you dreaming! I'd like to do some more screen work if I can and I'd also love to play Judas in *Jesus Christ Superstar* one day. What you do depends on where you are in your life – sometimes you are looking to push your career and do something more edgy and other times you just want to spend time enjoying doing something in a production that is really good (as I've done with *Wicked*) or to stay in one place for a while.

Our second child is due in a few weeks too, so that is really the next challenge I'm sure!

Interviewed by Matthew Heaton,
NODA South West

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NODA East

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H.M.S. PINAFORE
or "The Lass that loved a Sailor"
(By permission of Mr. R. D'Oyly Carte.)

ON THE FIVE NIGHTS,
Tuesday, Wednesday,
Thursday, Friday, and Saturday,
April 5, 6, 7, 8 & 9.
at 8 p.m.

SPECIAL MATINEE SATURDAY, APRIL 9th
at 2.45 p.m.
(Doors open at 2.15; See Prices below.)

Full Company and Orchestra of 75 Performers.
Under the Musical Directorship of Mr. G. E. BOWEN, L.H.A.M., A.R.C.M.
Stage Manager Mr. WALTER H. MUNDAY.

Costumes and Wigs by Messrs. B. J. Simmons & Co., Covent Garden,
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ADMISSION—

Front Seats (Numbered and Reserved) 5/9 Tax included
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Third Seats (Unreserved) - - 2/4 "

MATINEE: Children (under 14) Half-price to all Seats.
Doors open at 7.30 each evening. Commence at 8. Carriage at 10 p.m.
Plans and Tickets only at Messrs. J. H. Clarke & Co.,
High Street, Chelmsford.
Ticket Vouchers from any Members of the Society.
Bookings open March 16th. Book early to avoid disappointment.

SPECIAL LATE SERVICE OF NATIONAL BUSES
leaving Springfield Road Corner at 10.30 p.m., as follows—

In November 1920, an event took place that was to bring a profound change in the theatre scene of Chelmsford. A public meeting at the town's Corn Exchange in Tindal Square led to the formation of the Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society (CAODS) which is now celebrating 100 years of being the town's, now the city's, leading musical group.

CAODS's first production was Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera, *HMS Pinafore*, staged from 5 to 9 April 1921, at the long-since demolished Empire Theatre in Springfield Road. Unfortunately, the Coronavirus pandemic has meant that, along with last autumn's production, the show the society was planning for April 2021, which would have marked the centenary, has had to be postponed. Only one other event has prevented CAODS

from putting on its shows and that was the Second World War.

The society's opening production was to receive critical acclaim. It was described in one local newspaper as 'un beau debut' and "which invited comparison with professional presentations". And professionalism has been the hallmark with which CAODS has strived to stamp its 174 musicals over the last century.

In 1925, CAODS moved the venue for its shows from the Empire to the Regent Theatre. Built as a music hall in 1916, the Regent's auditorium, which seated 1000 patrons, came complete with boxes and an extensive balcony. The dressing rooms and backstage facilities were far less extensive. For the cast, it was very cosy and stage crew had to store props and scenery in an outside passage at the back of the theatre. And if the director required members of the cast to enter from front of house, they had to do so, in full costume, via the street through a busy shopping area as they made their way from the stage door to the front entrance.

After the war in 1947, still at the Regent Theatre, CAODS resumed its run of shows with *The Desert Song*. The society also extended its repertoire by staging plays. But unlike musicals, the plays did not attract sufficiently large audiences to make them pay and so were discontinued. However, the immediate post war years were good for musicals with shows like *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel* and *South Pacific* crossing the Atlantic and becoming available to amateur societies.

In the meantime, the society had found a new home at the Civic Theatre in Chelmsford's West End. The auditorium is about half the capacity of the Regent, but backstage facilities are much more extensive.

In recent years, there have been productions of *Old Time Musical Hall*, reviews and concerts, mainly as fundraisers, to enable the society to continue to stage two musicals a year.

In 1968, CAODS staged *Oliver!* which attracted a large number of children. After the show, it seemed a pity to let all that young talent drift off, so a junior section of the society was formed which, in 1972, became independent adopting the name Chelmsford Young Generation Amateur Musical Society (CYGAMS). The two societies still retain close links.

CAODS has brought to Chelmsford a wide range of musical productions, ranging from the old favourites like *My Fair Lady* to new shows hot off the stages of London's West End and New York's Broadway. These have included *Jesus Christ Super Star*, *Copacabana*, *The Witches of Eastwick*, *Legally Blonde* and *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*. CAODS is proud to have a number of NODA awards for best musical in the Eastern Region. The society also won a Chelmsford City Council Panic Award, a celebration of local live entertainment, for its production of *My Fair Lady*.

To kick off its centenary season CAODS staged Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's hit musical *Evita* last September, and just managed to bring to the city, in February 2020, *Shrek the Musical* before the onset of the Coronavirus lockdown.

CAODS has been fortunate over the years to engage the services of some excellent professional directors. Phyl Payne joined the society in the post war years. In 1973, a new inspirational director, Ray Jeffery, was engaged for *Kismet* and he has been responsible for the success of most of CAODS shows until 2009. In that year, Sallie Warrington made her CAODS debut with *Chess* and continues to bring her directing skills to the society. Both Ray and Sallie are brilliant directors who have helped ensure CAODS maintains its pre-eminent position in the region's musical theatre.

The society hopes that it will be back on stage in September 2021 with *Sweet Charity* under the direction of Sallie Warrington. And in March 2022, director Ray Jeffery takes the helm for *Kipps - the new Half a Sixpence Musical*.

A week's trip down memory lane

NODA North



Spittal Variety Group's last pantomime, *Dick Whittington*

Spittal Variety Group's last performance onstage was their pantomime in January 2020. Like the rest of the world, little did they know what was just ahead of them!

2021 was to be the group's 60th anniversary year, having been formed in 1961. To mark the occasion, a spectacular performance of *Cinderella* was planned for January 2021. Of course, the pantomime was postponed, and members now have everything crossed for what will be an even more memorable performance in 2022.

Like all amateur theatre groups around the country, Spittal Variety Group's members were left disappointed and sorely missing each other. It was especially realised how much so in the lead up to Christmas, for not only was the pantomime going to be a great miss for the group, but also for their

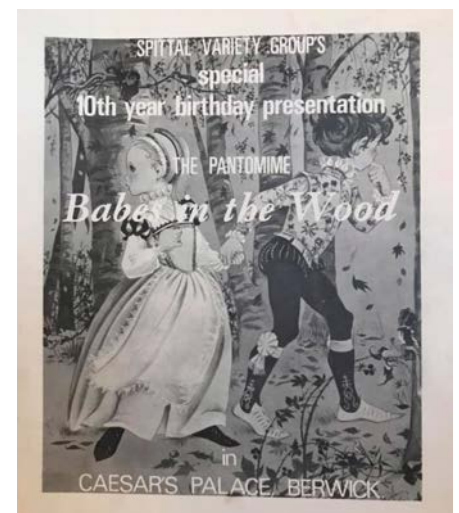
audiences in Berwick Upon Tweed and the surrounding areas.

So with this, thoughts turned to how else this usually significant week could be marked. While they couldn't perform, members and audience could instead be taken on a trip down memory lane from a time when they could. Members were all asked for pictures from their pantomimes through the years – anything from photos, to programmes to newspaper cuttings. During their would-be show week of 18th-24th January 2021, a different pantomime was picked for each of the eight days, and a variety of pictures from the different performances of that pantomime over the years were posted on the group's Facebook page. Photos of productions, casts, rehearsals, posters, dressing rooms, past members, it was all there! Spittal



Variety Group saw a great reaction to the week, with their most popular post boasting a fantastic 6979 views.

To finish the week off, an online raffle was organised with money and prizes donated from Spittal Variety Group itself, as well as several local businesses who have supported the group in the past. By the Sunday afternoon, which should have been the last performance of *Cinderella*, 750 tickets had been sold, and a live draw was held on Facebook to announce the winners. The venture had raised some much-needed funds, but more importantly, raised the spirits of all those involved. The week was a chance to remember the joy that our hobby brings and to look forward to the times ahead when more memories can be made.



Success for BrassNeck Theatre's 140 Campaign

NODA North East



BrassNeck Theatre's production of Spamalot

BrassNeck Theatre have joined forces throughout lockdown, socially distanced of course, to fundraise for the huge renovation programme at the theatre they have performed in for years.

Yeadon Town Hall have had fantastic community support for their renovation programme and, as they reach their 140th anniversary, it seemed fitting to have '140' as the theme for the popular theatre company's fundraising campaign.

Chairman, Tom Kyle, tells us:

"BrassNeck have continued to meet, at a distance, throughout this trickiest of years. We've managed to keep in touch with each other on Zoom, or through our social media, to socialise and help each other and our supporters, over the last few months. This continues, but with the third lockdown we wanted a new challenge for the New Year to support our friends at Yeadon Town Hall and acknowledge their fantastic 140th anniversary."

He goes on to say:

"Our friends, family and supporters have really got behind our '140 for 140' fundraising campaign with many BrassNeck members taking on fantastic 140 challenges! There were lots of 140km runs or walks during January and February and there's also been a Family Kitchen Disco, 140 'Keepy Uppys' and more! Our target doubled to an ambitious £3000 and we have now raised well over that and the donations continue to roll in. It's been incredibly uplifting for the team to have this support and connect with our supporters and we have much to thank them for."

This is echoed by the CEO at Yeadon Town Hall, Jamie Hudson, who adds:

"We're so grateful to the BrassNeck team for all their support over the years, and particularly during these tough times when we need the community's help more than ever. It's been incredible to see everyone taking on such creative (and, in some cases, gruelling) challenges, all to raise money for

Yeadon Town Hall. We know our audiences are missing BrassNeck's fantastic shows and we can't wait to welcome everyone back on to our stage as soon as we're able."

This fantastic venue and Town Hall is based in the centre of Yeadon, a mill town on the outskirts of Leeds and is now managed by a Community Interest Company, headed up by Jamie and a team of fantastic volunteers.

Jamie continues:

"We've transformed the Town Hall into a community-based cultural hub, offering a huge range of events, live music and theatre shows for the local and wider community."

You can follow BrassNeck Theatre and get regular updates on their fundraising successes by checking out their website www.brassnecktheatre.com

Can you believe it's been almost 25 years of BillBoard Ensemble?

NODA Wales & Ireland

BillBoard Ensemble, founded in 1996, has been entertaining the people of Barry and surrounding areas for 24 years in 2020.

Predominantly performing at the Barry Memo Arts Centre, Barry's premiere amateur dramatics company brings you West End vibe productions for a fraction of a West End ticket price. Jonathan Coombs, founder and director of the company, has said: "There is nothing amateur about BillBoard. We are extremely lucky to have such an outstanding amount of talent across both our adult and junior section!"

Often staging firsts in the Vale of Glamorgan, BillBoard have wowed local audiences with hit shows such as: *Anything Goes*, *Crazy For You*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *The Wedding Singer*, *Legally Blonde* and the NODA award-winning *Made in Dagenham*.

In addition, BillBoard has an outstanding track record of producing festive fun at their annual Christmas pantomime. Often selling out, the pantomimes include both the adult and junior sections, and are bursting at the seams with well-known songs, tons of laughter and jokes that still work after so many years! (Oh, yes they do!)

Due to the coronavirus, rehearsals have been cancelled and productions have been rescheduled for 2021. Being so used to seeing their "BillBoard Family" at least once a week, the adult section have been coming together almost every night for a virtual quiz and sometimes a little sing-song. The junior section have also been virtually rehearsing and participating in a weekly quiz.

"BillBoard will bounce back better than ever for our 25th Anniversary celebrations in 2021", says Jonathan Coombs.

But it isn't all doom and gloom.

We are very proud to announce that following the NODA Awards announcement on the 27th June, BillBoard Ensemble won three Best Individual Performance Awards for the leading ladies



in 9 to 5 *The Musical* (Rebecca Hennessey, Angelique Duff and Lois Banks) and Best Pantomime for *Cinderella*.

BillBoard is a non-profit organisation, any profit made from shows is ploughed straight into the next production! BillBoard are extremely proud that they continue to receive such raving reviews from NODA representatives.

Both sections of the company were very happy to be able to release music videos during the week that their original shows were meant to go ahead. You can view these videos across their social media platforms

Although restrictions have eased, it is with a heavy heart that we are not able to put on our pantomime for 2020. But fear not

we have partnered up with *It's Showtime*, with Ryan and Jodana on BroRadio, and are looking forward to premiering a pantomime via radio broadcast.

More details to be announced closer to the time.

With almost 100 members, spectacular scenery and costumes, large orchestras and an abundance of talent, a BillBoard production is a feast for the senses.

As always, BillBoard Ensemble is humbled by the unbelievable amount of support from their local community. Without our amazing audiences, we wouldn't be able to continue to do what we love! Thank you all so much and we look forward to seeing you in 2021 for our 25th anniversary celebrations!



Panto Scripts

Whether you are looking for
something traditional like
Jack and the Beanstalk or Cinderella,
or something a bit different like
A Sword in the Scone
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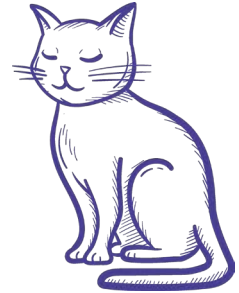




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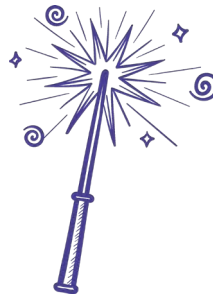
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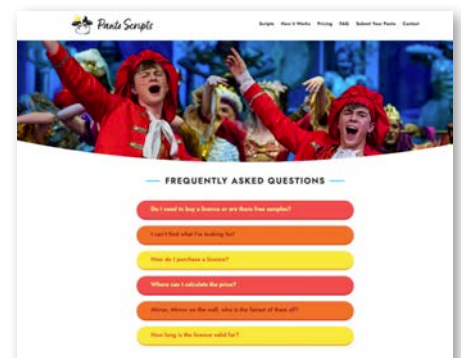
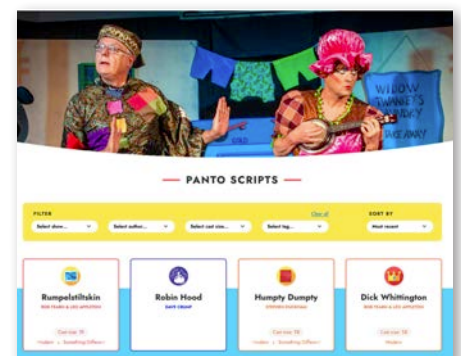
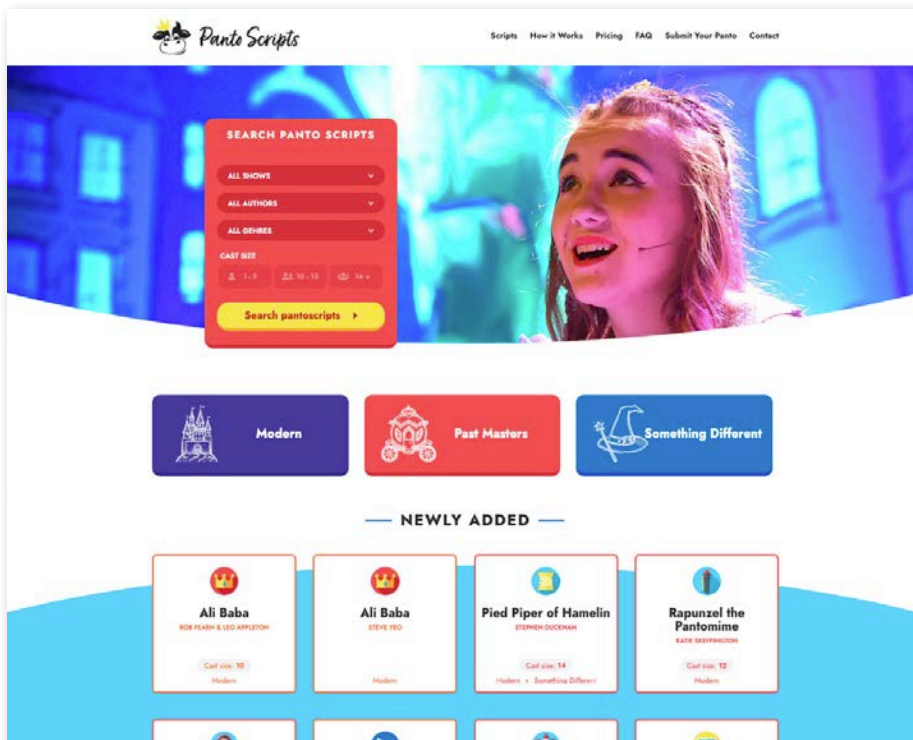


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Wadhurst President and Ladderman steps down

NODA South East



WDC Ladderman Trophy

The 'Ladderman Trophy' was a fitting tribute presented to John Bush ('JB' to all at Wadhurst Dramatic Club), stepping down after 7 years as President of the East Sussex club at the February 2021 AGM. The hand-crafted ladder, poised for action under a proscenium arch, recognised his huge contribution to the club over almost 50 years and more than 80 shows, as JB was most often found up a ladder, even as an octogenarian, tweaking lights, adjusting scenery, mounting a screen or

moving backcloths. The unique trophy was conceived and executed by club members in appreciation of his commitment and expertise.

Long term member, Heather Woodward, looked back at his dedication,

"The Music Halls I devised with Hugh Orchard certainly challenged JB - and he always rose to the occasion. Helping with the rising man-sized balloon was one! I remember especially the backlighting for a shadow drama. "I can't do it."

"Oh yes, you can," replied Hugh and, of course, he did.

Another huge success was the *Son et Lumière* in the Parish Church (2000). He set up lighting outside, beyond the altar windows. Gradually, as we listened to the *Bruch Concerto*, the lights dimmed until only a small part of the stained glass was lit. Very moving. Quite a few sniffs and hankies!

He created increasingly sophisticated lighting and sound systems in the hall, a godsend for the Dramatic Club and for Wadhurst. He always worked hard to support stage managers and props. *"Every Dramatic Club needs a John Bush."* Catherine Whitehead, Chair of the club for most of John's years as President, tried to sum up his talents in verse:



John and his wife Ann, celebrating their 50th

*To our retiring President, JB
JB lights up our lives
He also lights up the stage
He never misses a cue
(unless he gets the wrong page)
From Steaming to Hairspray
His contribution's vast
Why he's even been spotted
On stage in the cast*

*He climbs every ladder
He even sorts out sounds
He changes bulbs and whatnots
In knowledge he abounds*

*He's mended toilet doors
Made heaters work and mics echo (echo,
echo)*

*Put up screens, moved backdrops
Even made stage fires glow
He's a fundamental part
Of Wadhurst Drama Club
He'll even join the cast
Convening at the pub
Our President's retiring
He has carried off with flair
Almost 50 years and 80 shows -
He's our light man extraordinaire!*



Musical Theatre Grandee achieves her century!

NODA South West



100th Birthday for SALOS and Southwest legend, Pat Donovan!

2021 marks the 100th birthday of one of SALOS Musical Theatre Company's much-loved figures, Pat Donovan, who directed shows for the Swindon society for an amazing 43 years! A founding partner of the Sutton School in Brighton, Pat first directed *Carousel* for SALOS in 1962, when the society's shows were staged at The Playhouse. Over the following 43 years, she directed many memorable shows including *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Showboat* and *The Music Man* as well as old favourites such as *South Pacific*, *Oklahoma*

and *My Fair Lady*, sometimes two or three times!

Through her love of theatre and the performing arts, Pat has nurtured hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of budding actors and singers in Swindon, Bath, Stratford and Poole, where she also directed. She first performed in her home town, with Brighton and Hove Operatic, before directing for Worthing Operatic from 1947 until 1960. She was also instrumental in the creation of a Department of Drama and the Arts at the University of Bath in 1974, where her husband, Alec Bishop, lectured in Mathematics. Upon her

retirement from the University, she was awarded an Honorary Master of Arts Degree, in recognition of her outstanding contribution.

Pat is an inspirational character and her indomitable spirit was demonstrated in 2002, when she slipped whilst directing children in the SALOS production of *Oliver!*, at the age of 81. She continued without comment until the end of the rehearsal when she decided she should visit A&E and found out that she had broken her hip! Never one to miss an opportunity, Pat discovered that one of the nurses owned a bull terrier who was subsequently cast in the role of Bullseye. Pat also founded the M4 Theatre Company which produced shows including *A Little Night Music* and *7 Brides for 7 Brothers* in Swindon, Bath and Poole, raising money for charity. Instead of receiving birthday gifts, Pat is once again raising money for charity by doing a sponsored walk, which will be filmed by ITV Meridian on her special day. Anyone wishing to donate should visit justgiving.com/fundraising/pat-bishop2

Pat's last show with SALOS was *Singin' in the Rain* in 2005, but she has continued to direct annually for Poole & Parkstone and would have done so last year had COVID not intervened. Truly amazing!

Any past members of SALOS who would like to know how they can recognise Pat's 100th birthday should contact SALOS on 01672 512396 or email salos_swindon@hotmail.com.

A4B Borough Theatre Outstanding Service Bernie Award for Dee

NODA Wales & Ireland

Dee McIlroy has been awarded The Bernie Award - a lifetime achievement award for outstanding service to The Borough Theatre Abergavenny.

Dee, as a member of many organisations, has performed many roles in productions and with AAODS, has spent over 30 years on stage and as a director.



CAMS 125th anniversary

NODA Scotland



On 12th February this year, that well known institution, Cupar Amateur Musical Society (CAMS), celebrated a wonderful landmark when it reached its 125th anniversary.

The company can trace its origins directly to a performance of Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore* on the evenings of 31 January and 1 February 1896, followed very closely by a meeting on 12 February, which led to the formal constitution of Cupar Amateur Opera Company. The *Fife Herald & Journal* on Wednesday 5 February 1896, pronounced, with no false modesty, "Two brilliant performances of *Pinafore*," and went on to state that "Hardly a town in Fife – to say nothing of Perth, Edinburgh and Glasgow – was not represented in Union Street Hall that Friday and Saturday evening. A special train even ran from Kirkcaldy."

The status of the company from the outset was exemplified by the initial eye-watering list of Honorary Patrons, including two Earls, various Members of Parliament, and a future Prime Minister, H. H. Asquith.

The tradition of amateur musical entertainment in Cupar was born, and, discounting wartime interruptions, has had an almost unbroken history up to the present day. Earliest performances took place in the Union Street Hall, subsequently named the Musketeers' Theatre, and latterly the Regal Cinema until the 1960s, where it moved to its current home: the Corn Exchange.

Following a break during the Great War, the company reformed. A sombre indication of the impact of the war is found in the company's Minute Book, recording the death of five company members – a shocking toll in such a small company, but no doubt replicated throughout the country.

Modern audiences may be amazed to learn that, right up to the 1950s, the audience would regularly demand encores mid-performance, to the extent that, for the performance of *The Gondoliers* in 1956, there was the plea in the programme:

"There are some instances where encores interfere with the continuity of the story, and the audience is asked not to break the continuity by insisting on them".



A significant feature throughout the company's history has been the continuity of family involvements. In the first 40 to 50 years, we see familiar Cupar names such as Robertson, Watt, Peattie, Innes and Pagan. Mr James Watt was President in 1924, and his son, also James Watt, played many character parts in the 50s and his niece, Fay Caird, is a current long-standing member.

In 1950, Robin Robertson was honoured for his 50-year association with the company and, almost exactly at that time, we see the first principal appearance of one Jack Smith, a much-loved company member and fine singer, who continued his connection with the company for a further 50 years. The 1950s and 1960s see the first mention of company stalwarts, Bill and Mary McAra, John and Barbara McManus and, perhaps most remarkably, Jean Barclay. From a principal role in 1964, Jean, now into her tenth decade, continues to fulfil the vital role of prompter almost 60 years later. Also worthy of mention is the contribution of Kate Doig (Houston) who first appeared on stage in *The Mikado* in 1964, and moved from a performer to fulfil the position of accompanist and more recently as musical director.

Other on-stage personalities have included Ishbel Ford with her outstanding soprano voice, Elma Low, a Cupar favourite for many years and Eric Towns whose most notable role was Reb Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof* (twice!). Several cast members have fulfilled comic/character roles over the years, including Dick Greig and Sandy Green and in more recent years, Alice Cowieson, Raymond Young and Ruth Anderson. Linda Greene (both as performer and producer) and her daughter, Anna Kernahan, undertook many principal roles in the 1980s, 1990s and beyond. Coming more up-to-date, we have seen the emergence of Andrew Doig (son of Kate), Helen Knowles-Venters and Neil Jarrett topping the bill.

Dames' donations

NODA North West



The society is fortunate to have amongst its current membership, a number of performers who have graced the stage since the 70s and 80s such as Joan Wood, Allison Lumsden and the aforementioned Fay Caird, to name but a few!

One company member and one of the most popular CAMS member ever was Giff Mentiply, who could sing, act, dance and do comedy. Such a star. The company was bereft at Giff's untimely and sudden death a few years ago.

For so many people associated with the company, both on and off stage, Cupar Amateur Musical Society has been not so much a hobby as a way of life. The absence of a show in this year's calendar is a great loss to us all. How sad it is that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the company's century and a quarter performance of Shrek the Musical, has had to be cancelled along with various other events to celebrate this magnificent landmark. However, an achievement of 125 years is surely something to be celebrated and the company are planning to welcome back all its supporters in February 2022 with the Elvis Presley-based show, *All Shook Up*.

Anyone interested in joining CAMS can email the secretary at cuparamssecretary@gmail.com

Sandy Green, CAMS Historian and Archivist



The North West's District 6 Rep, Jim Briscoe, is no stranger to transforming himself into a Pantomime Dame. At the start of the first lockdown, he used the opportunity for a charitable cause as he walked the coastal route of Anglesey in his back garden to raise money for the NHS. Now he talks about his continuing efforts to raise money and encourages other 'Dames' to do the same...

"About six years ago, a good friend of mine, Si Foster, a 'fellow Dame' from St Helens, posted on his Facebook page that he was again running his 'Dames' Donations.' The venture is a simple one - he collects gifts/selection boxes for the children hospitalised in Whiston Hospital Children's Ward leading up to and over Christmas. I thought this was a brilliant idea and contacted Si to see if he would mind me doing a similar thing for the Children's Ward at my local hospital, Southport and Ormskirk Hospital. The reply from Si was simple, 'US DAMES HAVE GOTTA STICK TOGETHER... JUST DO IT!' That was six years ago; it has now become an integral part of Christmas for me and for my society Ormskirk Pleasure Folks and for my role as its dame!

But, with everything that has gone on this year, and our panto being cancelled, I was unsure if I should or could 'run it' again this year. After a couple of messages from friends asking if I was running it and then an email to the Children's Ward to seek permission, the decision to run it was a no brainer!

Things would be different this year due to COVID-19. We would not be allowed on the Ward nor in any rooms, but we could

be allowed to visit the Children's A + E. We would have no actual contact with the children and would not be allowed to actually hand over any gifts to any of them, which is always the highlight of our visit! We also had to arrange the visit a week earlier than usual because the gifts had to be quarantined for seven days before distribution.

What made up for the lack of contact with the kids, was the unexpected welcome we got from the Front Line Workers as soon as we entered the foyer to the hospital. Their smiles, their tears of joy, their clapping, the cheers from staff and visitors alike and the numerous requests for photos, made this such an emotional time. This continued throughout the hospital. At one point, we had to use a service lift to get to our destination. As the lift doors opened, we were met by a young nurse who was exiting the lift with a trolley. When she saw us, she just burst into tears. I'm sure if we could have hugged, we would have and the lovely words that poured from her are words that I will never forget.

The success of this type of venture is all down to those people that support the cause and, if I'm honest, I wasn't sure how things would pan out this year, but I need not have worried. The support was tremendous and we probably had more donations than ever before, so thanks to everyone who supported us!

And finally, a BIG THANKS to all those NHS FRONT LINE WORKERS - you have done an awesome job!"

Nurse Hettie Harpic



The committee for NODA Theatre Summer School has, after much discussion, decided that 2021 will not see a physical Summer School. Whilst the government has formulated the roadmap out of lockdown, we can now see the light at the end of the tunnel, although, by the beginning of August, things may not be fully back to normal. Whilst the vaccine roll-out is continuing successfully, not everyone will have been offered or had the vaccine and, those who have been shielding for the past year, may possibly not feel fully confident about mixing with large numbers of people in a social environment.

Taking everything into consideration, we feel that for 2021 it would not be prudent to hold a physical school. We had hoped that we would all be together this year, but the health and welfare of students, tutors and staff has to be the prime consideration.

So, having learned valuable lessons from last year we will be offering a new and improved NODA Theatre Summer e-School running from Monday 2nd – Friday 6th August. The launch of the e-school will be on 6th April with full details in this magazine and on both the NODA website and the Summer School Facebook page.

Bookings will open on 4th May, but please ensure that you read the terms and conditions thoroughly before you book.

We are sorry that we are not able to go ahead with our original plans for this year, but students, tutors and NODA staff will, I am sure, appreciate what a difficult decision this has been. However, we will be back in 2022 with whistles and bells and all guns blazing, sharing the joyful experience that is NODA Theatre Summer School.

Jacquie Stedman
NODA Theatre Summer School Chairman

Building on the success of last year we are delighted to bring you an e-School that is bigger and better than 2020. You have a choice of full week pathways and shorter courses. You can also choose to concentrate on a particular discipline for the whole course or pick something that is more eclectic. Of course, in addition to the day time activity, there will be an array of evening activities too!

2nd - 6th August 2021

**5 day pathway
£130**

**2 day pathway
£55**

The timings of all days on all courses will be

Optional Morning Mindfulness 9.00am – 9.15am
Mornings 9.30am – 12.00pm
Afternoons 1.15pm – 3.45pm
Evenings 6.30pm – 8.00pm

Booking opens noon 4th May
noda.org.uk/summerschool

"I was inspired and stimulated after months of self isolation. I regained my enthusiasm for live performance and the interaction, albeit virtually, with old and new friends gave me a sense of well-being that in these strange times was beginning to fade. I have gained the confidence to go back to my society and find a way forward in these troubling times and think 'outside the box' in order to survive!"

-NODA Theatre Summer e-School 2020

Making a Musical - 5 day pathway

Guided by our experienced tutor, you will explore character, storytelling, devising, writing song and text, performing and directing. Together, the group will pool resources and skills to create a unique piece of musical theatre. We will also include an opportunity to develop your vocal and movement skills. Whether you're a musician, a singer, a director, a writer or an actor, there will be plenty to gain from this unique, practical online learning experience.



Nuts and Bolts of Playwriting - 5 day pathway

Writing plays is a fascinating element of the world of drama. Everyone has their own unique voice, but the tools for writing a play are the same. This week-long course will offer you practical, hands-on exploration of all the components that make a play. You will explore a rich array of approaches to writing in practical workshops, giving you opportunities for writing, sharing and receiving feedback from your highly experienced tutor.

Drama Pathway- 5 day pathway

In this year's Drama Pathway, you will dive into the range of disciplines and opportunities on offer to our students in a glorious fusion of workshop experience. During the week you will focus on Greek theatre, directing new writing, pantomime, physicality for actors, mask, mime and puppetry, and the total theatre of Berkoff. A fabulous array of tutors will offer a practical learning experience throughout the week in workshops and discussions.



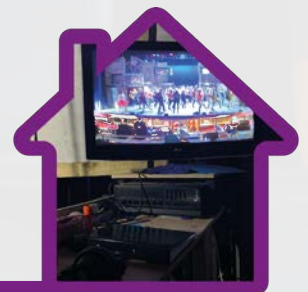
Musical Theatre Pathway- 5 day pathway

In this year's Musical Theatre Pathway, you will experience all elements and disciplines on offer to our students in a fantastic mega mix of classes and workshops. During the week you will focus on circus themed musicals, forgotten musicals, acting through song, scaling the heights (voice technique) and choreography. A top flight team of tutors will offer a practical learning experience throughout the week in classes, workshops and discussions.

Backstage Pathway- 5 day pathway

In our Backstage Pathway this year you will explore and develop skills to help create work in the virtual world, the real world and the hybrid world in between. The lockdown of 2020/1 has introduced societies and artists to a whole new world of ways to get their creativity out there. Now that this Pandora's box is open, it's not disappearing anytime soon. During the week, you will be made aware of the huge range of digital opportunities available. You will learn techniques and skills to film on Zoom, record radio plays remotely, technically support online events and performances and produce hybrid events where streamed and live content work side by side.

An impeccable crew of tutors and experts will offer a practical learning experience throughout the week in the form of classes, workshops and discussions



Promotion and Marketing - 2 day pathway

When the work you produce is great, it's a travesty if it doesn't get the audience it deserves. This short course will, practically, help you think about how to market your society and the productions you create. The course will take you step-by-step from branding your society through to designing your marketing materials, to how to make the digital opportunities of social media and algorithms work for you! A perfectly formed team of tutors will develop your knowledge about the possibilities and help build an audience worthy of your work.

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Love on the Beach

Male 2 Female 6

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"One of the funniest shows for a long time."
"Excellent, cried with laughter."

Now enjoying success around the world



Love on the Beach

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By
RAYMOND HOPKINS

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Looking for Love

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From Stage to Silver Screen

NODA East Midlands



When East Midlands Regional Editor, Alex Wood, received a glowing review of a pantomime which had been filmed during the summer, using the Lincolnshire countryside, he just had to ask writer Kei Bailey about the experience...

As resident pantomime writer for Heckington Players, July normally sees me at my laptop, feverishly creating a world crammed to bursting with cheesy jokes, camp villains and more sparkle than Elton John's Christmas tree. However, last year turned out to be a little different for me...

Heckington Players have been entertaining their community for over 30 years and the highlight of their yearly calendar is the annual pantomime which regularly draws in over 1200 audience members. At the time of the first lockdown, the society was busy rehearsing Amanda Whittington's *Ladies' Day* and, sadly, this had to be postponed. However, the committee and members were hopeful everything would be 'back to normal' by the Autumn so pantomime rehearsals could begin.

Unfortunately, as the months passed through lockdown #1 and beyond, it became increasingly clear that the tradition of Heckington Players' annual panto was in jeopardy and eventually the difficult decision was taken to cancel our January 2021 production.

But instead of admitting defeat, the society decided to evolve and adapt

to the circumstances. The committee still desperately wanted to provide the local community with entertainment whilst providing their membership with an opportunity to flex their creative muscles. Thus, instead of writing a pantomime this year, I was tasked with writing the Players' first ever feature film.

The Quest for Lord Quibble's Custard follows the adventures of a quirky cast of characters across a mythical land known as Nonsensica. It began filming in August and continued throughout September; early pantomime rehearsals in the village hall replaced by location film shoots across



Lincolnshire. Part of my remit was to pen a piece that could allow the actors, director and cameraman to be socially distanced and Covid-safe throughout the film-making. This meant the number of actors in a scene were limited or actors were shot



in shifts, and almost all the scenes were filmed outside in the countryside.

For me, this was one of the highlights of the experience, a chance to explore all the wonders that our splendid county has to offer. Admittedly this may have been a different story if the weather had been bad, but Mother Nature was very kind and most days were spent in the glorious September sunshine.

As this project was a substitute for pantomime, I wanted to write something which was fun and family friendly and set in a similar kind of fantasy realm – a world of trolls and goblins, of witches and fairies. This provided great scope for the team to discover a variety of locations to film in. For example, the opening scenes for the sea trolls were filmed at Gibraltar Point, whereas the witch's apprentice began her journey in the magical hills with the Lincolnshire Wolds as a backdrop.

On Friday 22nd January, it should have been the opening night for their pantomime, but instead, Heckington Players premiered their first feature film on YouTube. So far, it has been watched by 589 households and the feedback and response from the regular audiences and wider community has been so positive. For me, nothing can replace the excitement and energy of live theatre, but in a year which has had more than its fair share of lows, the whole experience was wonderfully uplifting.

(In any photos where the actors are very close to each other, they are from the same household or in the same bubble.)

Tea at the Tali

NODA West Midlands



The Talisman Theatre Studio and rehearsal room was turned into small recording studio during the easing of restrictions in 2020, before going back to Zoom with the return of lockdown.

In the heart of the Midlands, the Talisman Theatre in Kenilworth has been doing its bit to keep theatre alive! Our last production at the Talisman Theatre was *Annie Jnr* presented by our Youth Theatre Group on March 12th – 14th 2020. At the time, there had been just 590 Coronavirus cases across the UK – but concern was growing. By 26th March the first ‘lockdown’ was enacted and it was clear our next planned production, *Mill on the Floss*, would not take place. Theatre life was on hold.

Undaunted by the unfolding crisis, a group of artistic and technical minds was formed, under the leadership of Talisman member Rod Wilkinson, with a mission in mind: if the masses cannot come to the theatre, then we must take theatre to the masses. And so *Tea with the Tali* was born within the spirit of Keeping Theatre Alive.

The idea was to present a weekly short audio play to be uploaded to YouTube and shared via social media and our website. The search started for suitable pieces and on Friday 1st May 2020, we went live with *The Plan* by Max Porter. Smith Scripts waived royalties for a number of their short

plays that we used throughout the year, in return of a donation to the NHS charities fund. Rod, along with our artistic directors Steve Smith and Stephen Duckham, have read well over 100 scripts to source the right ones.

On every Friday since, we’ve released a new short play, 34 in total, taking us up to Christmas. We had a short break whilst we streamed a panto and started again, in earnest, in early January.

More listeners than we could have ever hoped for

By the end of 2020, our 34 plays had had a total of 13,000 listens. Feedback has been really positive, from our members and more widely. Are we the only local theatre keeping theatre alive in this way? – we don’t know. We do know that as we come out of this ‘dark’ year, we’ll continue to use audio plays as a way to extend our reach.

Diversity

Content has ranged from; a celebration of VE Day, when our oldest members shared memories of war time in Kenilworth,

supported by the voices of our youngest members; To pieces by Shakespeare, Dickens and Oscar Wilde as well as others by lesser known and home-grown authors. We’ve had comedies, thrillers, intrigue, literally something for everyone.

Not only that, we have been able to involve a wide range of voices; not only many of our youth theatre members and regular actors, but also many older members who, for a number of reasons, are no longer able to be involved in main stage performances. Plus, we’ve been able to bring on first time directors. What a joy to be able to listen to such a wide range of talent.

Like many theatres and other community groups, the enforced closure gave us an opportunity to reflect. In particular, we realised we’re a rather “white” organisation, with very few black actors, technical crew, front of house staff, or regular audience members. As a result, we reaffirmed our commitment to diversity by writing a Statement and Action Plan which you can find on our website.

So, we were particularly delighted that our first play of 2021 was *Little Black Sandals*, by Philisiwe Twijnstra (aka Zulu Blue). This was as a result of our collaboration with the African Women’s Playwrights Network, who are hosted by Warwick University. We continue to work with them and are looking forward to another piece in Spring.

Learning as we went

In the beginning recording quality was variable, as we had no specialist equipment for the purpose. Recordings were made by Zoom meetings and edited afterwards. We also recorded via smartphones, iPads, laptops – whatever came to hand. We set up a mic stand with a stereo recorder owned by one of the ‘techies’ in our studio and we also purchased a used handheld recorder for £39 from eBay! Recordings took place in people’s houses, gardens and garages – restricted by the 2 households, maximum of 6 people rule in place at that time.

Before lockdown ‘2’ we managed to video one play. One of our aims for 2021, as restrictions are relaxed, is to increase the mix of video and audio plays.

Physical theatre based creativity in lockdown

NODA Wales & Ireland

Since the first lockdown in 2020, we have all been subject to a whole range of restrictions. At times we've been able to set up and use a COVID-secure studio in the theatre. We scraped together 4 microphones and used a small mixing desk to connect this to the stereo recorder. With this, we were able to achieve a reasonably good quality production. The equipment we owned, or had borrowed, only catered for 4 microphones and the space limited us to 6 people for Covid-safety. Unfortunately, it was not readily portable. Plus, we were only able to use technicians who had their own video editing skills, computers and software, so solving the equipment problem was going to be paramount to the long-term future of this artistic initiative.

Our incredible fund-raising team started to search out possible grants and our technical team drew up an equipment list! In early January this year, Warwick District Council awarded us a grant of £3,000. With this, we've been able to buy a number of pieces of new kit and we now have the foundation to make high quality video recordings, stream live events and create a high-quality sound, to complement our video capabilities. This will now enable the recording of larger casts for audio-only presentations, whether in the studio, on the main stage or even on location elsewhere.

Looking to the future

Rod says: "When I first came up with the idea, I thought we might be able to do a few plays as a means of still offering our acting, technical and theatre community something new until we could get back to normal. I didn't think nearly a year later we'd still be producing plays every week. So, although the news of being able to return to our theatre seems to be more likely in 2021, we are pleased to confirm we plan to keep 'Tea with the Tali' going as an regular artistic channel for the theatre and the local community." If you'd like to listen to one of our many short plays, please go to talismantheatre.co.uk



While the Coronavirus pandemic threatened to bring to a standstill all physical theatre-based creative activities across the UK, innovative members at the Swansea Little Theatre company grabbed the bull by the horns and shifted their creativity up a gear, in a bid to continue their productions and members' nights during the crisis.

At the very beginning of the lockdown, members from the company, based at the Dylan Thomas Theatre in Swansea Marina, moved their regular physical club nights to Zoom meetings and increased the frequency from monthly to weekly, providing valuable social contact for those who might be isolated and alone. These online sessions called for a new approach to the former in-house ones, so the company came up with an array of events from scratch nights, to script and poem readings, to quizzes.

Next came the bold step of mastering how to hold live public performances, online over Zoom. In Wales, the company were not allowed to access their theatre building, so this meant a cast and crew recording from their own homes. Director Clare Owen rose to this challenge and in September, SLT performed *Mental*, by Jo Brand and Helen Griffen, over two nights and to an audience of over 100 people located from Scotland to the USA. This impressive performance was followed with a second live online performance in November for Remembrance Day, *The Ashes of Your Sacrifice*, written by SLT member Eleanor McLeod and directed by Alison Saunders. This production explored the relationship between war poet Wilfred Owen and

his mother and was again received by an enthusiastic global audience. Then it was back over to Clare to direct the company's Christmas production of *Elves: Disaster in the Control Room* by Mollie Ottenhoff, in which a cast of 13 members played from home over two nights, to an audience of over 120.

In parallel, during the lockdown period other creative talents among SLT members emerged. Some members tried their hand at playwrighting and the challenge yielded several energising new scripts for actors to get their teeth into. The team progressed to recording the new scripts as audio and video plays – still entirely from home and using only Zoom, personal devices such as laptops and mobile phones plus free online editing software.

The pandemic marked an exciting beginning of SLT's dalliance in audio- and video-at-home production. Three of the plays by SLT members have now been released on the new SLT YouTube channel (also a lockdown endeavour providing a previously-untapped worldwide audience for the company) and a further four are in the production pipeline.

Furthermore, a series of video-at-home montages produced by Clare Owen have been released via the channel – *All the World's a Stage*, *Stage Write* and *The Night Before Christmas*, across which a staggering 90+ of the company's actors – young and old, isolating and shielding – got involved, brushing up on their acting skills and compiling costumes and filming backdrops in the confines of their own abodes!

While the pandemic has been a testing time for the physical theatre, no stone has been left unturned; seizing opportunities that have allowed members aged 8 – 80 remain creative and engaged. Swansea Little Theatre members are looking forward to returning to live theatre with an enhanced skills toolkit, an invigorated creative mindset and enforced production crew relationships.

Canvey drama group's COVID nativity play - an online lockdown play

NODA East



Cast & Crew Theatre Workshop, the Canvey based amateur theatre group, usually performs three live productions each year, but 2020, was a year that change all of that. It was a year that made us all think differently if we wanted to come together as a group as well as to entertain the public. The group had just finished filming a Zoom play on the 24th November 2020, when I approached the committee about producing *A COVID Nativity Play*, which was a tongue in cheek retelling of the Nativity story told in a time of a pandemic. The problem we had was that I wanted to release it to the public the week before Christmas, which did not leave much time to write the play, film it and produce the performance. All I had of a script was an outline and one or two scenes written.

Rob Simmons, our late Chairman and founder, had always said to me that he was proud that the group was willing to try different things, and to me the memory of his words were somehow guidance that this should be done. The problem we had was that we had no video camera, no recording studio, no experience, and, in Essex, we were under COVID Tier 2 restrictions, which meant that we were only allowed to meet outdoors. We did however have the

most important thing of all and something that drives all amateur theatre groups throughout the world: enthusiasm and a desire to let the show go on!

The actors themselves were shown the script, hot off the press, on the 1st December, and were cast that same day, with instructions to obtain their own costumes by the following week. The cast's second and only other Zoom rehearsal was on the 8th December, with filming due the weekend following that date. I had thought that maybe I could film it over the weekend with a green screen thrown over my garden fence, however the British weather is something that can never be relied upon, and I was fortunate that the group owned a large tent that I was able to erect in my garden. It was a rainy weekend, and quite windy on the Sunday, so was most definitely the correct thing to do.

The majority of the filming was done over this weekend and the actors turned up, one at a time to a published schedule, and only one actor at a time. This meant that the actors had to visualise where the other characters were so they knew which way to turn when interacting with them. At the time of filming, we had two of the cast self-isolating, so I had to recast one person

and the other lead character had to film his scenes in his house using his mobile phone and my green screen. The mobile phone filming was in fact a very good way to film and had the benefit of better sound quality as it was indoors, with no external sound of wind, rain or passing traffic. As this was going to be filmed remotely, I had provided detailed instructions of the type of shots needed, how the acting should proceed and other details regarding the technical aspects. This might not be possible for all actors, however, we had an experienced actor who knew what was needed and any technical problems were overcome.

The filming in the tent was actually achieved using an SLR camera which had a video shooting mode. The output from this fed directly in to a laptop as a video capture device for storing. Theatre lighting was also erected inside the tent, although this was only needed for the filming of one of the actors who was only available in the evening. Under daylight conditions, the tent allowed plenty of obscured light in, which produced good lighting. The theatre lights, of course produced a different colour to the scene, so had to be compensated for post processing as the character (one of the angels) did stand out somewhat. My inexperience in post-production colourisation meant that the finished article was not perfect, but I felt acceptable.

The post-production software was the thing that made everything possible and, although it was the free version of a purchasable professional system, was more than capable for the requirements of this production. In fact, I was only limited by my ability to use the tool. YouTube demonstration videos came to the rescue to provide the necessary training to give me an idea of how to achieve affects that were necessary, and soon I was able to discover how easy it was to position all three angels, who were shot separately, in to a final scene.

The main job of the post-production software was to remove the green screen digitally and replace them with



“backdrops”, which were copyright free images found on the internet. I also found that people who had copyright images, if contacted, were generally also happy for me to use their images in this production. Many images contained modern parts to them, for example, lights, gas pipes, electricity cables, but these could be “removed” using image editing software. The post-production software was also used to remove the rumble of nearby traffic, the patter of rain on the tent, and generally clean up the sound.

So, if you were thinking about producing a recorded performance, there is nothing holding you back, apart from your own imagination. Maybe try a simple skit, read a poem, sing a song, or just let your public know what you are doing and let them all know that you will be back, stronger than ever.

This play is available free to view on Youtube via our website CastAndCrew.org.uk or our Facebook page @CastAndCrewUK

The list of essential equipment that I actually used is quite small and most groups would be able to beg or borrow most of it, so monetary outlay should not be a barrier.

Laptop
USB Microphone
DSLR Camera
Camera Phone
Green screen
Free Post-processing software -
(Davinci Resolve)

Rail Britannia: The Movie

NODA North East

In May 2020, members of Dronfield Musical Theatre Group were due to perform a musical documentary telling one of the most amazing stories from the history of their town. Like everyone else's productions, it was cancelled, so were their proposed shows due in October and a pantomime in January this year.

But undaunted members now faced the prospect of their most ambitious project yet – a movie.

The production script, written by the group's chairman, Alan Powell, is being adapted for a film with the original people cast from the abandoned stage version last year.

Alan explains: “Before Christmas we devised a two act virtual show which mixed pantomime with song and dance and put it on

our new You Tube Channel. It was called *The Christmas Show Must Go On* and we raised more than £500 for Sheffield Children's Hospital.”

“With the experience gained from filming the Christmas show, we decided to be more ambitious and go for a full length production on film. Our musical documentary - called *Rail Britannia* - was an ideal choice because there are no script copyright issues and the score has original and traditional songs. Rehearsals by Zoom have started and we will start location filming as soon as it is deemed safe to do so.”

Rail Britannia tells the story of a decade in Dronfield's history when it produced more steel rail for the world's booming railway industry than anywhere else in the world. Thousands of workers descended on the small Derbyshire town from all over the

UK. Then ten years later, the works were abruptly closed and transferred to the North East, leaving what was described as a “ruined town full of ghosts.”

“We are currently looking for suitable locations around Dronfield and Sheffield,” said Alan. “It is an ambitious project but all our members are up for it and can't wait to get filming underway.”

The technical side of the production is headed by Gavin Ward – he usually plays the dame in the group's pantomimes – and the original songs are by regular cast member Tommy Jones.

Said Alan: “We are fortunate to have some very talented people we can call upon and this is a challenge everyone is excited about.”

Avocet Theatre Company - Coronavirus can't stop creativity

NODA London

Ben Coleman, chairman and co-founder of the group, which involves both adults and children ages 8-plus, says he is so proud of what they have achieved during this tricky time.

Like most other groups, we postponed two productions due to the pandemic and were due to be performing *Robin Hood: A Musical-Pantomime* in summer.

During lockdown, we have done two full length virtual productions raising money for the NHS and local food banks. Our motto throughout this entire period has been *Coronavirus can't stop Creativity*.

The first virtual production released in May, was when we staged *The Virtual Variety Show*. This involved over 30 ATC members and included over 30 brand new acts all created and filmed in lockdown. It was an incredible effort by everyone involved and featured relevant sketches, including a parody called *Musicals - In Lockdown*, where actors tried to stage elaborate and well-known musicals whilst stuck in their homes! There were also a variety of musical performances, dances and hilarious sketches. *The Virtual Variety Show* raised over £1,000 for the NHS and Avocet. The show has finished streaming, but a number of the acts are available to watch on the ATC website - **AvocetTheatre.co.uk** - and our YouTube Channel.

Following this, the adults of the group decided to film - over Zoom - the second episode of ATC's ongoing Web Series, *Acting Out*. The show is a comedy, filmed in the style of a fake documentary, which follows a dysfunctional amateur theatre group. All episodes of *Acting Out* are available to stream on our website.

The second virtual production happened over Christmas, when we created a festive variety show whilst raising money for local food banks. Once again following all government guidelines and all filmed during lockdown, the show was called *All Together at Christmas* (or 'A.T.C.' for short!). This again featured a whole host

of new acts including comedy sketches, musical numbers and dance routines. It also included a *Christmas Special episode of Acting Out*. The production was, once again, incredibly well received and we were delighted to support such good causes. The show is still available to stream on our website.

In between these shows, we have been keeping very busy. When lockdown started, we began running a daily *Taskmaster* challenge (based on the hit TV show of the same name) for anyone to get involved with.

Members of the ATC Committee would set tasks each morning in a special video. Then, during the day, people would submit their attempts. At the end of the day, committee members would choose their winners with personalised (and often comedic!) commentary for every entry.

We ended up with almost 250 people from all over the country joining the Facebook group and getting involved in the challenges. It was amazing to see families getting involved and it provided everyone with some much needed humour.

For our members, we have also been running what we have called *The Read Through Sessions*, where members read through scripts over Zoom. These scripts include past shows and possible future productions. It's also a good chance for everyone to have a bit of a sing along and play parts that they might not usually get to play.

On what would have been the opening night of our pantomime, *Robin Hood*, the committee created a virtual treat for our cast. This involved two characters from the show - Nurse Bedpan (myself) and the Sheriff (Gill Crowther) - accidentally joining each other's Zoom call for a discussion about the show. It then ended with the committee singing a parody song of 'Everything I Do, I Do It For You' which was in the *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* movie.

As well as our Christmas show, over the festive period, we wrote a special script which we offered to Primary Schools free of charge. This was to be an alternative to the traditional primary school Christmas show. Along with the script was instructions on how to film the show and how to release it to the public.

Our most recent venture is the creation of a podcast called *Treading The Boards - The Amateur Theatre Podcast*. Here, we discuss topics relating to amateur theatre with a different special guest each week. It's available on all good podcast streaming services including Spotify and Google Podcasts.

Alternatively, there is a video version of the podcast on the ATC website, the *Treading The Boards* YouTube Channel and Facebook Page (search for *Treading The Boards - The Amateur Theatre Podcast*).

As well as all this, we have been running family quiz nights, virtual games evenings plus general catch ups and check ins for people who just wanted a chat.

ATC has not charged anything for people to be involved in any of the virtual events we have done. Through fundraising and sponsorship - not to mention a successful few years - we have been able to cover all of our running costs.

With people financially struggling at the moment and mental health being such an important thing to consider, ATC wanted to keep everyone entertained, creative and connected over this tricky time.



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Lockdown? Ok, a new direction!

NODA South East



Godalming Theatre Group (GTG) wanted members to experience something close to a professional filmed production: auditions on camera, filming on location, call times, a shooting schedule, professional lighting, plus a sound man with a boom mic!

TWO, by Jim Cartwright was the perfect vehicle: a beautifully written two hander, set in a pub, with one man and one woman playing multiple parts (fourteen in total). However, with permission we transformed it to 14 actors playing the roles through duologues and monologues, thereby suiting social distancing.

Cast confirmed, there followed an online read-through in preparation for the live rehearsals. Then, new government regulations – the rule of six was announced... all plans scuppered? No! Undeterred, online rehearsals followed – challenging everyone; no moving around to explore lines, or finding different ways to play the scene!

By reducing the crew to just three – director, camera, sound, we could still film the scenes separately on location. We soon realised that early, meticulous learning of lines, is crucial for one take monologues and pick-ups for new camera positions; allowing the creative team to concentrate on the technical side. Filming set for two weeks tipped into a third one before the play was ‘in the can’.

The actors were superb: tackling new challenges head on such as continuity with

props and actions, performing multiple takes and indeed talking to camera for the first time! Very different techniques to stage work.

After editing, the film was available for viewing online for one day only, as per our digital rights. Free to watch, we encouraged donations to a local charity – Godalming Community Store. The effort, trials and tribulations were rewarded tenfold by the appreciation and generosity of our audience who donated over £3000.

I was extremely proud to direct this GTG project and would highly recommend *TWO* for other groups looking for either a Zoom or filmed production. It was a fantastic way to offer our members an exciting new challenge at a time when no live theatre performances were possible.



Gweek Players – what they’ve done, and whodunnit?

NODA South West



Cornwall's Gweek Players have certainly done plenty in lockdown, including a Village Hall murder!

As if having fortnightly play readings, *Gweek's Got Talent* (A series comprised of 15 minutes of poems, sketches etc

recorded and shared on YouTube), Christmas recipes (channelling their inner Nigellas) was not enough, Gweek Players have been rehearsing and self-filming an online drama written especially for the theatre group and set during the global pandemic. *The Village Hall Murder*, written

by David Ivall is available online free of charge from 1st March, (though there will be a link following the production for an optional donation to our chosen Arts Charity).

The cast and creatives have all been on a massive (and remote!) learning curve about lighting, camera angles, backgrounds/sets, costume etc as the production's demands are very different from the stage. Much has been done by trial and error, but they have been fortunate to have local expertise, in the shape of Emma Phillips and Mandy Rolleston who directed and produced this unique production.

To add to the excitement (even popular with cats – see the photo) – not even the cast knew who the murderer was and those who did were sworn to secrecy – the final scene, where all was revealed, being the last to be filmed before the launch on March 1st 2021.

Adapting to the new normal

NODA West Midlands

2020 has made Walsall Gilbert and Sullivan Society adapt radically to the 'new normal' of Zoom rehearsals. Thankfully, our society was able to do our big main show last year, but only managed one rehearsal of our new material before the initial restrictions of March 2020, fell upon the UK. Due to our society being a slightly older group, it took us a little while to get our Zoom rehearsals up and running. It had been a few months since we had seen each other in any capacity and there was one main element that I took away from our first virtual meeting.

The social nature of a society is so important. Pre-pandemic, we would see our fellow society members every week, week after week, even year after year. Friends share personal updates with one another, laugh with one another, chat about what happened on television last night over a bourbon cream with one another. I am sure there are other people in very similar situations to ours who found not seeing their society friends more difficult than expected.

Throughout our time on Zoom, I have tried to create a light and easy atmosphere that allows people to have a good time, whilst still getting important work done. We sing every week, a song that will feature in a concert when we are able to perform together again with an audience; we chat and share updates about our fellow society members; each week we do the obligatory 'Zoom quiz' that has become so iconic with virtual meetings.

A key goal is to laugh every week and we do! In lieu of any Christmas concert this year we created two virtual *Twelve Days of Christmas*, and posted them on our social media. The first being a standard version which featured as many society members as we could and the second being a compilation clip style video that utilised our own recordings of our own shows, extracts of dialogue and singing in the rhythm of *The Twelve Days of Christmas* over a backing track.

With many of our members not being technologically adept, they have done

very well getting to grips with all things computer and internet-based and now look forward to our weekly meetings. If not for these online virtual meeting spaces, we would have to wait until the pandemic was over, in order to meet and get any work done, so we are very thankful for these services.

2020 has been a strange year, but we made the best of a bad situation and look forward to the end of the pandemic. I see this circumstance as fuel and inspiration for creating better performances when we can; let our next performances be bigger and bolder, our voices stronger and louder!

Liam Simkins Musical Director of Walsall Gilbert and Sullivan Society

What a 'MAD' year!

NODA Scotland

When we cancelled our March 2020 production of *A Very Scottish Play*, like many groups, we expected to be back in our comfy theatres by the summer; not battling one of the hardest periods we have all faced. In a time when many had put thoughts of treading the boards again aside, Monifieth Amateur Dramatics got our thinking hats on and tried to make the best of the situation, embracing the new technology we had and the new normal. After two months of Saturday evening Zoom meetings, MADs new artistic director, Nicky, met with a dedicated team of Madlings in May and started producing episode one of *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Casting and rehearsals started in June with the episode released in October. With further restrictions being announced and no end in sight, MAD, with the help of many local businesses, turned Monifieth into a giant Hallowe'en walk. The event was a success seeing around 90 families taking part and many members of the public complimenting MAD.

When tier four restrictions prevented the planned *Promenade Panto* from going ahead, MAD put their heads together and quickly pulled a Zoom Panto out of the hat, oh yes we did! The four-part panto, based on *Jack and the Beanstalk*, premiered in November during the Monifieth Virtual Lights switch on, the three other episodes aired via our Facebook page and Youtube Channel. This led to several other Christmas productions including a live action *Elf on the Shelf* and a retelling of the classic *Night Before Christmas* poem. Dundee's *Comedy Girls* group collaborated with MAD to produce the comical *Rhyming Christmas Carol*, based on the novel by Charles Dickens.

Burns Night 2021, saw MAD once again embrace lockdown where we produced a virtual Burns Night, with several members recording recitations, songs and monologues. The evening was shared with two very special guests, local singer songwriter Laura McGhee and RuPauls Drag Race UK contestant (and ex MAD member) Ellie Diamond producing unique content for us.

Looking to the future, MAD are currently working on episodes two and three of *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *A*

Woman of No Importance by Oscar Wilde. With the success of our Hallowe'en walk and in collaboration with Monifieth Parish Church, we are now putting the final touches to an Easter egg hunt and have started working with the Dundee Transport Museum to produce soundbites for their new exhibits.

MAD have been anything but locked down by Lockdown and invite you to visit our website monifieththeatre.co.uk, our Facebook page or YouTube channel to keep up-to date with our antics.

Mat Hodson and Euan Smith



Whitehaven Youth of Theatre – making the most of COVID

NODA North West

For the first few weeks of the initial lockdown, Whitehaven Theatre of Youth were stunned into submission of all their usual meets, rehearsals and workshops along with hundreds of other theatrical groups. But then, they decided to Zoom. Not an easy task with a membership ranging from 7 to 17!

Whitehaven continued to work on pieces they had been rehearsing for their annual concert interspersed with a weekly quiz, scavenger hunts and were fortunate enough to have actors who had played in *We Will Rock You* and *Six* sharing their experiences with their youngsters. They even had a workshop all the way from New York with an actor originally from the UK. Then came the news we could all meet again – socially distanced – of course.

Off they went to rearrange rehearsal rooms so that they could make it happen. Their membership had to be split and the times reduced and adjusted so that everyone could meet together again and get the 'concert' back on the road. Parents

were informed and viewed a video showing the COVID-19 safeguarding procedures. There was even a marshal in the car park in order to accompany the children to and from the building safely as they were signed in and out. It was a huge undertaking, but worth it to be rehearsing face to face – or should that read – 'side to side'.

Christmas 2020, was a break that came with a certain amount of trepidation and they found themselves back in lockdown in the New Year. However, some of the committee members had been doing some proactive thinking regarding the Zoom sessions that could start up again with the kids, including combat and drumming workshops plus the usual warm-ups and cool downs.

2021 brings young actors invited from a variety of different professional theatrical placements to the screens of the youngsters. They are looking forward to Joanne Clifton of *Strictly* fame bringing her glitter ball and a jive workshop and are excited about a *We Will Rock You* workshop

from another local actor who has performed in West End musicals such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Matilda* and is currently in *Hamilton*, or will be as soon as the pandemic allows. Believe it or not, these young professionals (who were obviously out of work themselves) inspired the youngsters to volunteer 'performing' a short piece of their choice to share on Zoom. To date, they have had dances, magic tricks, poetry reading, singing and are eagerly awaiting one member to give them a guitar solo. Also, one of the young leaders has written a play based on Covid 19 with another one writing a song *The Rainbow Children* to be performed at the end of the piece.

All of this does not replace the usual meets of course, but it has kept them together as a group sharing a love of the performing arts. How privileged have they been to rehearse and perform together pre-COVID. Whitehaven really hope the curtain goes up very soon on their very own *Rainbow Children*.

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Never give up on your dreams

NODA Wales & Ireland

Back in August, Class Act Theatre Company were thrilled to be able to open again with Summer Workshops. Students and parents were so excited we were back, that by the end of September we had managed to begin rehearsals with all our groups, adults and young people. It seemed at last that we might be heading back to normal - how wrong we were.

We have rehearsed at our local High School for several years and had forged a great relationship. Occasionally, we have needed to move into a smaller space, when there were parent's evenings or other events, but this was to be expected.

Due to social distancing we needed to spread the classes over three rooms in order to follow the guidelines; the school did what they could to accommodate. In September, we were given the news that, due to exams needing to be social distanced, they would need to set up all the available space for exams. This meant the space we needed would not be available.

This brought me back to considering my dream of having a dedicated rehearsal space of my own, a pipe dream but still ... While scrolling through Facebook, I came across a local company advertising space to hire. Could this be my rehearsal rooms? I went along to have a look. It was the ground floor of a warehouse, basically it had been used as a dumping ground for years, it was a mess! I chatted a few times with the owners about maybe using it for a bit of storage. We talked about the potential I could see for it, but they felt the time and effort it would require was more than they could commit to while running their own business.

I couldn't get the place out of my mind, I was constantly planning the layout, dreaming ...

Eventually I decided that, although the timing was terrible with COVID-19 continuing to be a major worry, I just had to do something.

I put together a business plan and presented it to the owners. I asked them to rent the whole ground floor to me, I would do the refurbishments and make it a dedicated Creative Arts Centre with space



for my groups to rehearse, but also hire it out to other organisations.

Before I knew it I had a lease, the keys and a tatty old warehouse full of rubbish, no money, but big ideas!

I tentatively put the word out about what I was planning and the response was amazing! Before I knew it, I had provisional bookings for a ballet school, several exercise classes, singing groups and parent and baby groups. It was beginning to look like this could actually work!

We set ourselves a goal of opening January 2021. My son worked evenings and weekends on the refurbishment, staff pitched in with the decorating and there

it was, my very own rehearsal rooms: a beautiful dance studio, a meeting room, one to one tuition space and even a sound recording booth All finished just in time for Wales to be placed in Level 4 lockdown.

Class Act Studios is perfect, my dream realised, my own rehearsal rooms and a Creative Arts Centre for our community. We will open one day, for now its sitting empty just waiting for The Arts to burst back to life.

I may have spent every penny I had, borrowed a fortune and not slept in weeks, but I don't regret a thing. If there is one thing we learn in theatre it's 'Never Give Up On Your Dreams'.

Zoom helping to lift the gloom for Proscenium

NODA London



With a cast of two - 1M and 1F - we thought we would be safe to stage our production of *Old-World* by Alexei Arbuzov in March 2021, but lockdown restrictions prevented this as well as forcing us to cancel all our shows in 2020.

Old-World with a cast of two has very simple settings controlled by lighting areas of the stage. If we were able to use physical rehearsal facilities, we could rehearse and observe social distancing.

Before Lockdown 2, we were planning to rehearse in the homes of the team, but the development of the three tiers and then Lockdown 3 ruled that out. We have, however, rehearsed it via Zoom as much as we practically can.

We have achieved a lot in terms of understanding, character development and mood in this way and we now need access to physical rehearsal facilities. We are at least getting some artistic pleasure out of the enforced isolation.

We have set up fortnightly Zoom meetings, for members to log in for social integration and general intercourse and we alternate the social gatherings with something structured. We have also held several quiz evenings, which have been put together by different members of the company. Other structured events have been:

In November 2020, we held an evening of poetry and prose on the theme of Childhood, at which 11 readers took part and one other member logged on to listen. In December, over two meetings we performed a rehearsed reading to an internal Proscenium audience of *Old-World*.

Over two meetings in January, we held prepared Zoom readings of Alan Bennett's, *The History Boys*, as part of a programme

of reading plays we will probably never be able to stage.

On 12th February, in readiness for Valentine's Day, we held an evening of readings on the theme of Love and Romance, from the starry-eyed to the cynical. Twenty members signed up to take part.

These meetings are invaluable in keeping members connected and delivering some cultural achievement and enjoyment.

In spite of everything the past year has thrown at us, we have been encouraged by responses from members to the initiatives we are taking. Membership subscriptions have held up well and we have lost only those members we were expecting to lose: owing to home or business moves or departure for college courses.

While we have not been able to perform publicly, we have saved the associated costs (auditorium hire, rehearsal room bookings etc), and are therefore financially sound. Earlier in 2020, we made a one-off charitable donation of £500 to London NW Hospitals to show our support for the great work they have done to protect and treat us during the pandemic.

David Pearson
Chairman of Proscenium

Who's behind the mask?

NODA London

Although in the middle of a global pandemic, Radlett Musical Theatre Company hosted a number of initiatives to keep members and friends engaged during a difficult time including a classic "Guess who's behind the mask?" guessing game, based on the Saturday night prime time TV show.

We were not only inclusive to all age groups and gender, but we'd also included musicians, technical crew, committee members, prop managers, creatives and also our very own NODA representative, Mike Monk, ensuring that we included every area of our company and theatre.

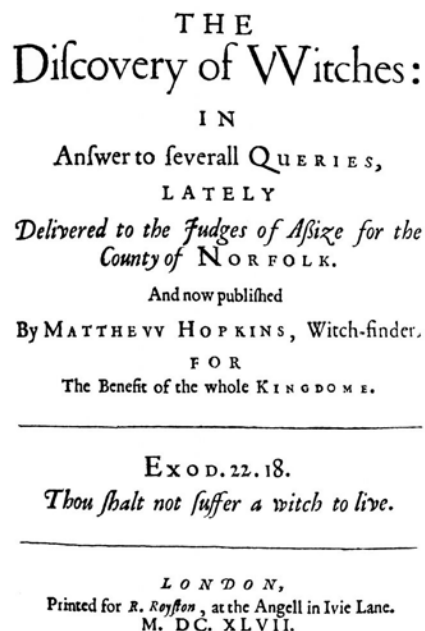
Each morning, we put up a cartoon character with clues about the individual and our RMTC family were asked to guess who was behind the mask. The Banker also included more clues and challenges throughout the day providing the opportunity to give out extra points which kept everyone interacting and engaged.

We revealed the person behind the mask when they "took it off" at the end of each working day and had a scoreboard with 'Leading Ladies' and 'Gentlemen' and those in the wings waiting to take on "the lead" on the scoreboard!

We also had a Valentine Cabaret (with a twist) on the 12th February this year. The evening saw leading ladies and gents sing a range of contrasting songs from musicals which were based on those characters' relationships. We also had Murder Mystery Nights written by our Publicity Manager Ben Molly and our Monthly Quiz Night hosted by Social Secretary Gorgia Dove - both events going down a treat.

We may not be able to perform in person, but the community spirit is truly alive in RMTC.

Lifelong friends write their first musical



The musical is called *Matthew Hopkins* or in our shorthand, “WFG” or “Matthew” We are, collectively, Mike Kempster and Nigel Courtenay. We have worked together for a lot of years, first meeting as teaching colleagues in Plymouth in 1994, and have written several pantomimes with original words and music.

My name is Nigel, and I wrote the script and the song words, Mike is the composer and arranger.

In 1997, I (Nigel) had an RTA which broke my spine and during the long, five-year, recovery period, we wrote *Matthew*. We have been writing ever since, changing, editing, altering, never quite satisfied with the result. Anyway, we have now decided it is time to allow the show to come into the daylight and see if what we think about the show is shared by anybody else!

We have wracked our brains about how to make people aware of the existence of the show, but never actually got around to doing anything about it: sadly “life” gets in the way. I still have the original script copy, I posted to myself, to preserve copyright, looking a bit battered after three house moves, but still intact. As I said earlier,

Mike and I had written several, successful, pantomimes and shows for our school and wanted to let our “hair down” and do something adult, not having to be aware of limitations like school musicians and child friendly dialogue.

The story of the show is about the rise and fall of Matthew Hopkins who was the self-titled *Witchfinder General*, who operated in the area around Manningtree, in Essex, in the middle 1640s. The show opens in 1644. Hopkins was a fraud who duped many people into thinking he had a list of all the witches in England and local councils paid him to seek out witches. It was thought at that time that angels could dance on the head of a pin and that witchcraft was a very real threat to the daily lives of the people. King Charles wrote a book about witchcraft and the Church preached sermons against witchcraft and witches’ practices. Hopkins operated in the area for about three years and was responsible for the deaths of at least twenty-three women. He had a band of “followers” who helped him “discover” and test the witches he found. His career was ended when he died in 1647, but he was also opposed by a clergyman called John Gaulle who, although he believed in witches, despised Hopkins for his methods.

The show does take some liberties with the story, in that Matthew dies at the end of a rope rather than in his own bed, but with interest from King Charles 1 and his Queen, comic gaolers and dramatic interventions from various characters, the story is riveting from start to finish.

The music is singable, with tunes that range from the saddest, when three people are about to hang, *Darkness hides the Dawning of my Ending*, to the darkly comic advice from the gaolers that there is *No Need to Walk Back* after being hung, or the observation, as Matthew and his cronies are about to pay for their crimes, that they need no help to find their way to the gallows, as in *I’m sure the way you know*. The King and Queen and Archbishop Laude have a manic comic song

and dance routine as they express their interest in the goings on at Manningtree. There are 24 musical interludes, some of them songs, some dances and some just short observations. There are 14 acting/singing roles and 7 small, acting/speaking/non singing roles, plus a chorus of whatever size you might wish. There are anthems, marching songs and sharp exchanges of dialogue within the show.

We are offering the show free of royalty, free of performance fees, free of script charges, (we will send a pdf of the script and the music and the producing company may then print as few or as many as required.) Orchestrations are also free, but until we know the composition of the band, individual parts will come later as required.

We would like to think the show will give a company the opportunity to create something original, particularly after the long COVID-19 layoff, whilst giving an airing to *Matthew* to see how good or bad the show really might be.

Send me an email and the first company to say they would like to do the show will have our permission to perform it, with our blessing and any help or advice we can give. Nigel Courtenay (Crabb)
ncc2078@btinternet.com

15. Darkness

Words: Nigel Crabb Music: Mike Kempster

Larghetto (♩ = c. 62)

Piano

Dark - ness hides the dawning of my end - ing...

Hours passing of this life I'm spend - ing... Soon will come the early rays of

You can't keep these two 'Merry Men' down - writers offer new musical comedy free of charge!

NODA East

The Ballad of Robyn Hood

So what did you do during lockdown... endless puzzles? Read a ton of books? Cleared out the house/shed/garage? While many of us agonised or got lost in box sets and Netflix, two talented men with time and furlough on their hands, found a way of getting back together to write a musical.

Okay, they do have form in such matters, having previously penned two successful musical shows. Their writing partnership began back in 2011, when Eastern region NODA members, Ian Cook and Ian Newton, decided to try their hand at writing a musical show. Their first, a comedy called *The Reunion*, was staged in 2013, by the Waveney Light Opera Group (WLOG) in Beccles, Suffolk and was a great success. It was watched by NODA representatives, the East Regional Councillor and the National President who was so impressed he awarded *The Reunion* the prestigious President's cup at the National NODA AGM later that year.

Buoyed by their success, the pair started work on a follow up and three years later, WLOG presented their second musical entitled *The Best Man*, which was nominated for a NODA award. Both shows have been picked up by Stagescripts and have been performed by several societies across the UK.

In 2019, the pair started work on show

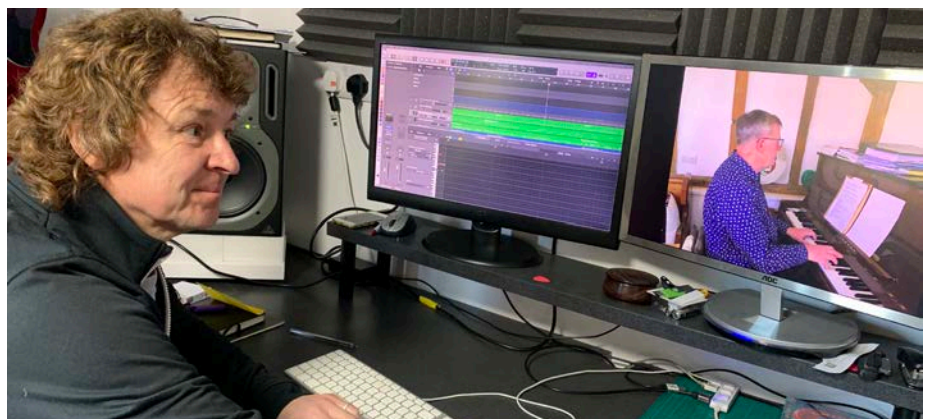
number three, Ian Cook said: *"We got off to a great start, but when the pandemic lockdown put an end to working together around a piano, new methods of writing had to be found."* After mastering Zoom, FaceTime and endless phone calls and emails Ian said: *"We worked out a way we could carry on using all sorts of tech, even virtually recording local singers to create backing tracks."* Twelve months of hard work later, they have emerged with another musical comedy, entitled *The Ballad of Robyn Hood*.

Aiming for and with fingers crossed for a hat trick of awards the two Ians have done it again. With laugh out loud scenes, interesting twists and a broad mix of characters, *The Ballad of Robyn Hood* is another 'feel good' musical. The music

is catchy and memorable with lyrics that carry the story line perfectly. Written for three keyboards, bass and percussion, a relatively straightforward costume and set requirement and the availability of rehearsal and backing tracks, this show should be a winner.

Given the damaging effect COVID-19 has had on amateur theatre, the writers Ian Cook and Ian Newton, have made a decision to offer *The Ballad of Robyn Hood* free of charge, for a limited period only, to NODA societies with the proviso that a donation is made to an NHS charity.

If you are interested in finding out more about the show and would like a perusal copy then please email: twoianproductions@gmail.com



Long distance composing - the 'two Ians' working on their new musical

Society Chairman awarded B.E.M

NODA South West



Phil Courage has been awarded the British Empire Medal for services to the Wiltshire Community, with the focus on the arts, disadvantaged children and the environment.

Those of us who know Phil Courage in the NODA South West area, know him as an active member of the local amateur dramatic community - he has produced and directed many plays, musicals and light operas and is much in demand.

He has been a stalwart member of the Bradfordians Dramatic Society for 40 years, in and out of the chairmanship, and providing technical support on virtually every show since 1974. Under his leadership, the society performed their first Shakespeare play, their first outdoor play with ever increasing quality and ambitious productions. He has been nominated for, and won, many awards for

his direction and technical achievements for the Bradfordians, as well as Trowbridge and Frome Amateur Operatic Societies. He is always one to extend his reach and push any group to look beyond their usual provision.

He has particularly excelled in producing shows for children, giving his productions a universal appeal. The truly remarkable thing about Phil is his willingness to embrace the ideas and ambitions of others. He will always go out of his way to support new young directors, and is always found in caretaking roles, as well as set building in a freezing barn, loading up trailers full of raked seating, emptying bin bags, and the myriad of mundane, unglamorous jobs that go unnoticed. Thousands of people have been entertained by his productions for decades and many young people now at drama school or working in professional theatre, owe him their thanks for opportunities to appear in top quality shows when they were children.

However, the most extraordinary thing about Phil is how diverse his skills, talents and interests are. As part of his career in teaching he became the course leader of the Special Needs Education Department at Chippenham College, where he taught woodwork and linked his teaching with his passion for theatre on many occasions. His students created hugely ambitious theatre sets in the college workshop, transported them to the venue, installed

them and were there on the opening night to see their creations revealed to the public. These young people were suddenly valued, recognised and applauded. Phil's career paints a clear picture of his commitment to ensuring young and disadvantaged people feel acknowledged in their local community. He assisted in a voluntary scheme to provide holidays for disadvantaged children and subsequently founded the **Wiltshire Children's Breakaway**. For the last 20 years, he has been the treasurer, organiser and group leader of this local registered charity which has provided holidays for over 900 children across Wiltshire, who come from families with high levels of deprivation and challenging personal circumstances. He is also a keen environmentalist and volunteers for the Woodland Trust, taking care of an area of woodland, and enlisting the help of others to support and train them in their work.

Phil's contribution to his local community has touched the lives of thousands, from his work with vulnerable children, young people with disabilities, local charities, environmental concerns and the Arts. All who work with him respect his calm authority, his ability to make things happen and his good-humoured approach.

Congratulations Phil for an award that is well-deserved!

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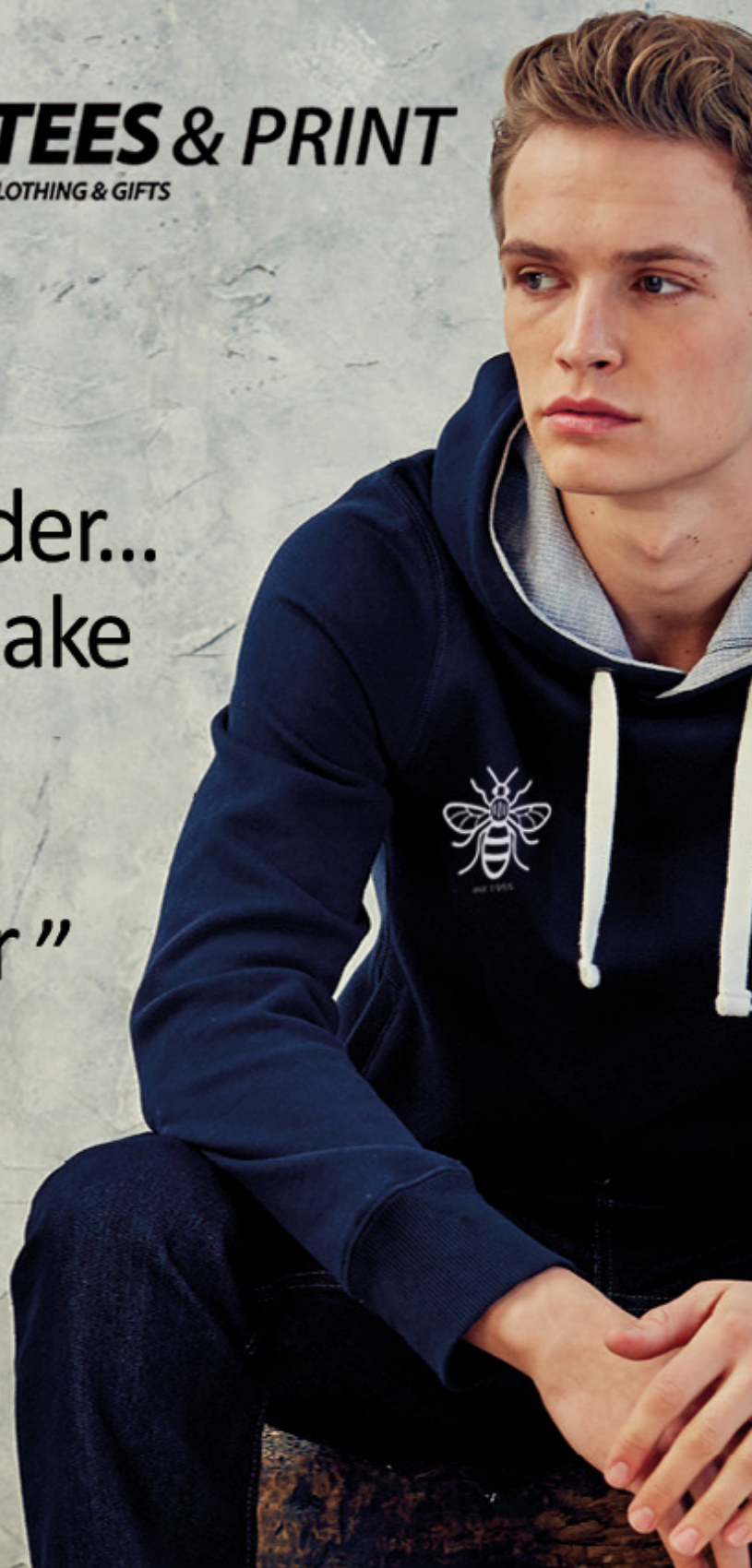
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Judith Smith – An Appreciation

NODA North East



A lifetime of involvement in theatre beckoned when Judith was born in Lancaster to highly musical parents. Her mother, Beth, played first violin in the orchestra and father, Les, conducted local orchestras including those for Lancaster Amateur Operatic Society where Judith often attended rehearsals.

Act One is set in Harrogate where the family moved when Judith was nine. At Harrogate International Music Festival, she would sing something from Ivor Novello in between all the contralto operatic arias – and win.

She took a job with National Savings whilst waiting to become a Queen Alexandra's nurse in the army (because their lace caps were the prettiest!). It was here that she met Charles, her first husband, whom she married in 1965, and had two children, Helen and Stephen, to join Charles's David, Mark and Aidan. All along Judith continued her love of theatre and was involved in Woodlands Drama Group and Harrogate AODS. She got her first leading role performing as Vera, in Novello's *King's Rhapsody*, at the Royal Hall in 1971, and was a founder member of Harrogate G&S. Charles's job was then transferred to a new department in Bradford...and so began Act Two in Baildon.

Their house was filled with music. Charles was a church organist and was not only Judith's husband, but accompanist and they were constantly rehearsing songs for the various concerts they did, regularly performing at Masonic 'dos' and a regular 'spot' in the lunchtime recitals at Dewsbury Town Hall.

The stage still took priority though and Judith joined Shipley Wesleyan Reformed AODS where she became really hooked on G&S, and met people who would remain key players in the rest of her life. She brought to life characters such as Phoebe, Mad Margaret and Pitti-Sing and her rich contralto voice also came to the fore in roles such as Katisha, Dame Carruthers and her favourite, the Fairy Queen. Judith was very proud of the fact that she performed in all 13 of the G&S operas and also worked with Bradford G&S, Halifax & Harrogate G&S and, with Bradford Players, won a standing ovation at the Alhambra Theatre for her performance as Mother Abbess, following this the next year by playing Bloody Mary.

In the 1980s, Judith was invited to join the Savoyards, a new society, and this became a way of life. She performed in Waterford, Florida, Budapest, Mallorca and at Todmorden Hippodrome. She was part of a successful world record attempt, performing all the G&S operas in 29 hours and 11 mins (including on a double decker

bus, a service station and swimming baths) and learning skills from people such as D'Oyly Carte icon, John Reed. Savoyards were also an essential support when Charles sadly died.

Judith was then asked by Aireborough G&S if she would consider directing and Act Three opened with a tale of directing, grandchildren and a new leading man when Graham Hardman, from Keighley, came on the scene.

They first lived in Baildon and then moved to Eldwick, marrying in 2002. Over the years they went to America singing and staying in Gettysburg, performing at the International G&S Festival.

Judith directed shows with several societies from Settle to Wetherby including some in Bradford and Leeds and even produced *Pirates of Penzance* with 120 school children. She loved to keep productions fairly traditional, but made sure she put her own twist on things with lots to do for principals and chorus alike. She would share the lessons she had been taught by John Reed, and others, and build up confidence, but woe betide a Yeoman who stepped out of sync or a *Mikado* performer who dropped their fan! Her final show was *Hello Dolly* at the Bradford Alhambra.

She became a NODA Representative in North East District 12 and held the position for 12 years until her death in January. She became the Chairman of the National NODA Representatives Committee, serving in this position for three years and also handled the Region's admin of Long Service Awards, in both cases working closely with NODA Head Office personnel. For some years, she also gave her time as an encouraging Chairman of the Region's Summer School sub-committee.

Judith loved her nine grandchildren and was very interested in gardening. She was fond of clothes and always presented herself in a smart manner and had a strong Christian belief in life. She laughed, loved and had a real zest for life and made a great and friendly contribution to everyone that she met. She was highly respected in the amateur theatre world where her expertise was second to none. True to form her funeral was a Judith Smith production – all music, readings and flowers being chosen and planned by her years before her death, to make sure it was done right!

She will be sadly missed by everyone in the North East region and by all who knew her.

Contributions from Judith's daughter, Helen Lever, and Graham Hardman

Sue Pomeroy

NODA South West



Sue was born and brought up in Bristol. She did not have an easy life as her father died suddenly when she was 10 yrs old and money was very short.

At 16, she started pre-nurse training and eventually moved to Southmead Hospital to train as a nurse.

In December 1964, with friends she attended a dance at the Spa Ballroom in Clifton. Also at the dance was the man destined to be her future husband, Tony. They met, danced and the rest is history.

During their courtship, Sue received her introduction to the then Bridgwater Amateur Operatic Society, as Tony was appearing in the spring production of *Brigadoon*.

They married on July 24th, 1965, in Hengrove, Bristol, on the day that Sue received the news that she had passed her final examinations and had become a State Registered Nurse.

They moved to Bridgwater where Sue worked in Bridgwater Hospital at Salmon Parade.

Two children, Kathy and David, arrived within the next three years and Tony suggested that Sue joined the operatic society. She was very quickly 'hooked'. A move to North Petherton in 1970, did not stop her involvement.

She progressed to singing solos in *Songs of the Shows* and taking minor parts in lib and score shows. In 1977, she took her first 'lead' when she played Polly Browne in *The Boy Friend*, a performance that earned rave reviews from the show's writer, Sandy Wilson. This was the first of many varied roles she played such as Maria in *The Sound of Music*, Miss Adelaide in *Guys and Dolls*, the title roles in *Mame* and *Hello, Dolly!* the beggar woman in *Sweeney Todd*, Bloody Mary in *South Pacific* and Ruth in the Centenary Production of *The Pirates of Penzance*, to name but a few.

Sue was not content to be a performer. In 1971, she was elected to join the committee of the society and spent many years as Vice Chairman, Chairman and finally, for the last few weeks, as a very proud President of the society following the death of Bill Young, who had been President for many years.

As she got older, she began to turn her mind to directing shows. She became assistant director/producer for shows often helping her good friend, the late Alan Calaminus. In 2010, as Alan's own

illness took its toll, she took a major part in co-directing *Jesus Christ Superstar* and then took sole charge for *Company* that autumn. She directed *The King and I* with her grandson, Ben, sharing the role of Louis and then she drew the short straw by directing *Annie* the first BOS show to be performed in the McMillan Theatre – a far cry from the traditional home at the Town Hall. Her husband, Tony, acted as MD in every show she directed and for many shows that she appeared in. Together they also devised *Songs Around the World* as a fund raiser in the manner of *Songs From The Shows*.

However, when she retired from directing, she could not resist returning to the stage with both Pinstripe and BOS. Perhaps her most memorable performance was also her final bow – Sister Mary Lazarus – in *Sister Act* when, at the age of 75, she had to learn to 'rap'.

One other major job she did for the society was that of Box Office Manager where she came into direct contact with the paying public.

In the year she took her first lead, she also started a new job – staff nurse in the operating theatre at the Nuffield Hospital in Taunton. She was quickly promoted to Sister and a few years later, to the post of Theatre Manager, a post she held until her retirement. The Nuffield organisation also used her expertise as a trouble-shooter, sending her all over the country to help other hospitals.

Outside of work, she was a member of the BBC Regional Advisory Committee and, after only a few months into that role, was appointed its Chairman. She also broadcast regularly for BBC Somerset on their Saturday Morning talk show. The Saturday after her passing, the presenter, Simon Parkin, broadcast a wonderful tribute to her as part of that day's show.

The annual Bridgwater Carnival is a major event in the town and whilst she was never a "carnivalite", she spent many years as a respected judge at *Carnival Concerts*.

In 2008, she was approached by the then Councillor for NODA SW, Gerry Branton, and persuaded to become NODA SW Representative for District 9 – basically the M5 Corridor from Bridgwater to Bristol – and she watched and reported on some 25-30 shows a year. She also became Membership Secretary for that organisation only giving up both roles when her illness struck hard at the beginning of this year. She also volunteered the services of her husband, Tony, as Treasurer of NODA SW, when

they desperately needed someone to take on the role. She did this 'on the spur of the moment' and did not even ask her husband if he wanted the role!

She also enjoyed singing classical music. When husband Tony taught at Wellington School, they both sang in the augmented School Choir and were very pleased to sing in the first performance in the South West of Karl Jenkins', *The Armed Man*, as well as many other events. Later, they were both invited to join the Taunton School Community Choir and especially enjoyed singing *Les Misérables* in a semi-staged version with youngest grandson, Alex, in the cast. Excerpts from both these productions were played during her funeral.



Sue in her final role as Mary Lazarus in *Sister Act*

In addition to all this, she found time to write. She penned the history of BOS – *But We Don't Do Opera* – for the Centenary in 2007, and was then invited by the late Brian Buttle to write his biography – *Adventures in the Playground*. She also published her own nursing story – *Just a Nurse* – and was well into a fourth book about her early personal life when time ran out for her.

Apart from this public face, Sue was devoted to her family and was very proud of what her children had achieved in their careers. She was also living her life again through her five grandchildren, all of whom she adored.

Away from the stresses of work and the operatic society, she spent any hours a week tending her beloved garden – the scene of many BOS parties! In 2019, she decided to open her garden in aid of St Margaret's Hospice and raised a lot of money for

that worthy cause. Little did she know that the hospice would be playing a vital role in her care less than two years later!

Also in 2019, she was honoured to be awarded the Somerset County Council Chairman's Award for Service to the Community at a reception held at the Taunton Rugby Club.

Her last formal task was to present the then BOS President, Bill Young, with his 70 year NODA Long Service badge on January 5, only 24 hrs after receiving her own pancreatic cancer diagnosis. From that day, her illness took a very aggressive hold of her as the tumours grew very quickly. She was too ill to start the planned chemotherapy in early February and her prognosis was reduced from the original 6-12 months to just a few weeks. She was determined to remain at home and would not go to hospital or to the hospice. Instead we opted for home care, helped greatly by daughter Kathy who took leave from her own nursing job in Bristol to care for her mum (and dad!). Her last weeks were very uncomfortable as we all struggled to control her severe pain and discomfort. However, her last few hours of life were very peaceful as the drugs finally kicked in.

We will remember her as a truly remarkable lady. She always claimed to have lived three lives:- her adored family, home and garden, her work at the Nuffield and her beloved Operatic Society and NODA.

Since her passing, the family have received many hundreds of tributes from friends and theatrical groups from all over the South West and a Facebook fundraising page set up in her memory has raised a fantastic £2,436 for Pancreatic Cancer Research. The family wish to express their heartfelt thanks for all donations and messages of support at this stressful time. Her funeral was held on 24th of March and the family regret that with the current limit of 30 attendees, they were unable to invite all those who would have wished to attend.

Rest in peace, Sue.

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