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Spring 2025 Edition
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A Magazine By NODA

Oh yes it is!
Pantomime
special

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Welcome

Welcome to the latest edition of NODA Today, another jam-packed edition of stories from across the UK. Here's just a taste of what you can look forward to:

The magical world of pantomime - from classic slapstick routines to fascinating museum exhibitions, explore the wonderfully chaotic tradition that lights up theatres every Christmas.

Still considering attending this year's NODA Theatre Summer School? Find out what courses still have availability so you don't miss out on this unforgettable summer of learning and creativity.

Join us this September, in Winchester, as we celebrate amateur theatre and the inauguration of Kay Rowan as NODA National President. It's a fantastic opportunity to connect, network and share in the joy of our amazing hobby.

It is that time of year where our member groups are renewing their NODA membership. Don't leave it too late to renew or you'll miss out on amazing benefits and support.

Enjoy this edition and thank you for being part of the NODA community!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ian G. Cox". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Ian G. Cox
Chairman of Trustees



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NODA Wales & Ireland

A passion for theatre and a vision for the future

Converting a Presbyterian Church to a modern arts centre

My journey into the world of theatre began through my two daughters. My eldest first discovered her love for musical theatre after performing in a school production. She quickly caught the bug, and from there, we took the next step by applying to a theatre academy in Belfast. As she got more involved, so did I. Later, as my second daughter found her passion for the arts, it became a family affair.

Through my involvement in the theatre company, our paths crossed with the Presbyterian Church and, from that connection, a unique opportunity arose—the chance to purchase the church building itself. We seized this opportunity wholeheartedly, recognising its potential not only as a space of historical value but as a home for the arts. In April 2022, we successfully completed the purchase and that moment set us on a path toward something much bigger.

I have always loved the theatre, not as a performer or singer, but as someone who deeply enjoys the experience of live productions, whether they are pantomimes or larger-scale musicals. My family's vision evolved over time and so did our ambitions for the church. The building, which will, when refurbished, hold a 220-seat working theatre, presented an incredible opportunity to create a



space where the arts could thrive. Since 2022, we have dedicated much work to transforming former church spaces into rehearsal studios, complete with pianos, TVs, mirrors and dance floors. I always believe that if you want to ensure children achieve

their best, you must create an environment that offers the best, and The Avenue Arts Centre most certainly provides a state-of-the-art, secure, creative and safe place.

Our long-term goal is to

modernise the building while fully respecting its historical integrity. As part of this vision, we plan to add a green room, more changing rooms, upgraded facilities and a glass auditorium facing onto the Lisburn Road, serving as a hospitality wing. Every detail has been carefully considered, ensuring we remain sensitive to the building's heritage while making it a functional, state-of-the-art creative hub. We've worked through every requirement with heritage authorities, balancing preservation with progress.

The dream is to establish The Avenue Arts Centre as a vital

community hub, with The Avenue Arts Academy at its core, focusing on amateur dramatics in Northern Ireland. We understand the immense value of theatre—not just for the performances themselves, but for the confidence and personal growth it brings to students. Our academy is not about producing the next big star, but about providing a supportive space where individuals of all backgrounds can learn, grow and find joy in theatre. With strong cross-community outreach, we are committed to making the arts accessible to all and breaking down the financial barriers to accessing the arts through

scholarships, low-cost tuition and Trinity Exam accreditation at no extra cost.

Of course, the passion for theatre doesn't stop here. As co-owner and Director of LaDuca shoes, the renowned Broadway and West End brand, the ambition continues to grow. The LaDuca team has exciting plans for growth in Australia and Europe. I look forward to the future and establishing meaningful industry connections that I will work to ensure will benefit everyone involved in the arts in Northern Ireland.

While this journey started with my daughters, it has become something much bigger—an opportunity to create a lasting legacy for the local arts scene, whilst ensuring the sustainability of a historic heritage building that will continue to inspire generations. We have already created so many 'magic' moments at the Avenue Arts Centre, but we have many more memories to make. We look forward to starting our refurbishment project, which will allow us to open up our space to many more arts organisations, who will have the opportunity to perform in this majestic venue on the Lisburn Road, Belfast and understand how special a place it is and one that we at The Avenue Arts Academy are privileged to call home.



Titanic – 2024

NODA West Midlands

From Dagenham to Wolverhampton

Manufacturing heritage takes centre stage



Wolverhampton company, Aldridge Trimmings, opens its doors to Bridgnorth Musical Theatre Company.

Who knew that Wolverhampton still holds a connection to the iconic Dagenham Ford factory's legacy? It turns out that Bridgnorth Musical Theatre Company's show director, Laura Davies, certainly did!

Laura, who also happens to be the Managing Director of Marshall Harmony, a recruitment firm specialising in the manufacturing and engineering industries,

recently discovered a hidden gem that beautifully ties together her two worlds.

"It's not often that my day job overlaps with my passion for theatre," Laura shares. "But this time, the synergy was undeniable."

During preparations for the company's latest production, Laura reached out to Jenni Austin, a client whose factory specialises in the intricate craft of car interiors. What makes this factory unique is its direct link to the work of the Dagenham

women, whose story of resilience and determination inspired the beloved musical *Made in Dagenham*.

"When I learned that Jenni's team continues the legacy of crafting car seats with such precision and pride, I knew we'd found the perfect setting for our show's photoshoot," Laura explains.

Jenni Austin, General Manager, recalls: *"When the film first came out, our girls commented that they were seeing the Escort seat covers we still make here today. So when Laura asked if they*



could use our factory for their photoshoot, it felt so apt. We even have an old Singer sewing machine that is being featured in the photographs. Jenni's girls have embraced this opportunity to show off their behind-the-scenes work complete with 60s hairstyles!"

The factory, based in Wolverhampton, doesn't just embody the spirit of skilled manufacturing ... it represents a commitment to preserving and continuing the art of craftsmanship.

From hand-stitching to detailed interiors Jenni's team carries forward the values of quality and dedication that the Dagenham women made famous.

Jenni and her team have graciously opened their doors to Bridgnorth Musical Theatre Company, providing the backdrop for the show's promotional material.

And there's even more excitement brewing...some of Jenni's team members might make a cameo in the production's opening video!"



Laura adds: "It's a privilege to shine a light on the incredible work happening right here in our region. It's proof that the heart of manufacturing is still beating strongly in Wolverhampton and it's an honour to incorporate that into our show."

This collaboration is not just a celebration of local talent but a powerful reminder of how industries and communities can come together to share and celebrate stories that matter.

NODA North

Celebrating 75 years

Music, laughter and cherished memories



Fatfield Musical Stage Society's 75th Anniversary Concert was a truly heartwarming celebration, filled with music, laughter and cherished memories. The society was overjoyed to welcome 91-year-old Audrey Lawton, one of their founder members, as the guest of honour. Audrey, who helped bring the society to life all those years ago, remains a dearly loved figure, with her support and enthusiasm still felt throughout the group.

Although she can no longer

attend rehearsals, Audrey's spirit has always been a warm and inspiring presence. She keeps up with every show and the society even performs at her care home to keep her close. When Audrey arrived at the concert, the room filled with joy "everyone was over the moon" she was there.

One of the most touching moments came when Audrey joined in singing one of her all-time favourites, "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man" from *Show Boat* – affectionately nicknamed

Fish among members. This song, a much-loved favourite from countless bus trips and gatherings, rang out through the hall, bringing back wonderful memories for all.

To top off the evening, Audrey was invited to cut the anniversary cake, a beautiful moment symbolising 75 years of love, friendship and music. The society presented her with a bouquet, a small token of gratitude for her role in creating and supporting our society for 75 years.

NODA North West

The Clockmaker's Daughter

Feel an instant connection

Have you ever heard a song from a musical that captivated you so completely, you had to explore the entire show—only to find yourself utterly obsessed? That was precisely the experience of the creative team at Manchester Musical Youth (MMY) when Musical Director, Kimberly Holden, first discovered *The Clockmaker's Daughter*, the poignant and uplifting musical by Michael Webborn and Daniel Finn.

"When I first worked on A Story of My Own with my singing students, I felt an instant connection to the song," says Kimberly. *"The melody and harmonies are simply breathtaking, filling you with joy."*

MMY is thrilled to have been granted the first-ever youth license for this remarkable production through Keddie Scott Associates.

"We are constantly looking for ways to challenge our talented young performers and this beautifully tricky score, staged in the intimate traverse setting, is proving to be an exciting project," says Dave, the Director.

With a talented 32-strong cast, MMY is working diligently to perfect the show's intricate harmonies and dynamic Irish-style choreography, crafted by company choreographers Sarah Binns and Bartlett. The *Clockmaker's Daughter*, playing The Renaker Theatre at z-arts, Manchester, promises to be a truly unforgettable production.



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BY SCOTT ORGAN

EMMA

BY KATE HAMILL

THE FAR COUNTRY

BY LLOYD SUH

FATHERLAND

BY STEPHEN SACHS

FORGIVENESS

BY MARK ST. GERMAIN

FRANKENSTEIN

BY ROBERT LEWIS VAUGHN

GRAVITY

BY DAVID MACGREGOR

THE HAPPIEST MAN ON EARTH

BY MARK ST. GERMAIN

THE LITTLE MERMAID

BY JACQUELINE GOLDFINGER

THE NAME JAR

BY SUSAN H. PAK

OUR SHRINKING SHRINKING WORLD

BY RICHARD DRESSER

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BY MATT SCHATZ

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BY KYLE BASS

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NODA South East

Gang show singathon

24-hour fundraiser



Basingstoke Gang Show completed its first ever 24 hour sponsored singathon last December to raise money for their 2025 show, performed in February.

Over one hundred cast, crew and alumni from past shows to present day (1980 - 2025) came together reuniting to sing hundreds of songs over 24 hours;

a true celebration of young and old Gang Show friendships with age ranges spanning eight decades.

There were plans to perform at a local shopping centre but, due to storm Darragh, it proved impossible and in true scouting style of 'Be Prepared,' the singathon moved to a local hall. Songs ranged from modern

day classics to sea shanties and Christmas carols. There was music from the Beatles, popular songs from the musicals and songs from previous Gang Shows.

Many singers attended sessions for a few hours at a time, but seven brave adults, stuck it out for the full 24 hours!



Panto Scripts

Whether you are looking for something traditional like *Jack and the Beanstalk* or *Cinderella*, or something a bit different like

The King's New Clothes
or *Sherlock Holmes*

there is something for every group

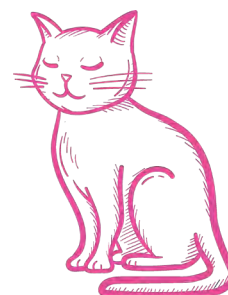
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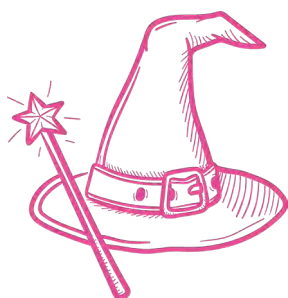
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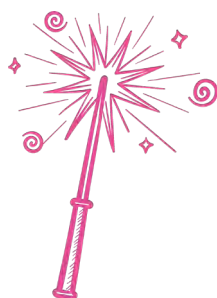
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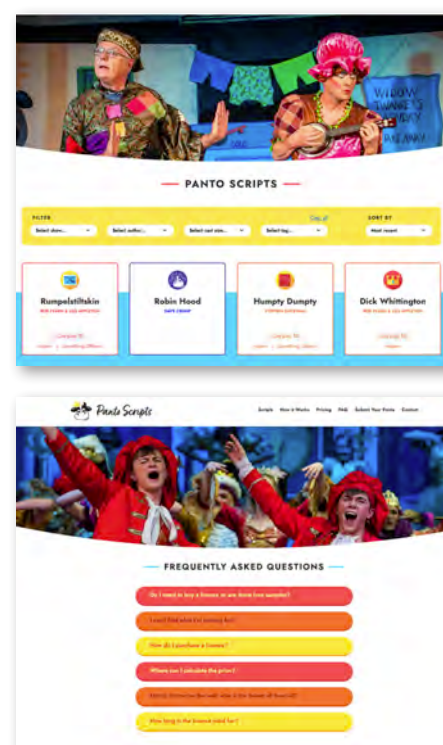
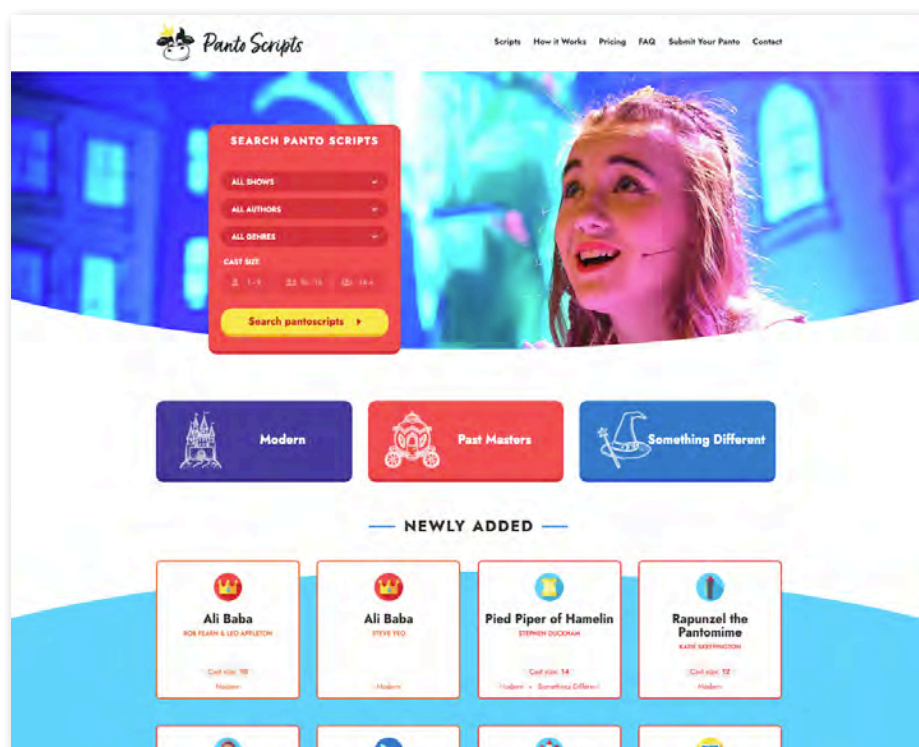


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Oh yes it is!

Local museum celebrates local pantomime society anniversary

When St Giles with St Mary's Pantomime /Theatre Society, in Pontefract, was contacted by its town's local authority run museum, they had no idea what would be involved in the next year of planning and research. Interested to see the society promoting its 75th year of performing in the town museum, curator David Evans got in touch to see if there was potential for an exhibition. Jo Sykes agreed to look into what might be interesting and useful for the museum to display and a veritable treasure trove of history was unearthed.

Pantomime was introduced to the Parish of Pontefract by the Reverend Jack Peel, who produced the first pantomime, in January 1950, as the St Giles Players – a later amalgamation

with St Mary's saw the society become St Giles with St Mary's Pantomime Theatre Society. Reverend Peel continued to produce the annual show until 1956, when he transferred to Kingston, Jamaica.

Despite some challenges in the 1960s, when the expansion of 'home entertainment' presented some difficulties, the society continued to go from strength to strength. From the 1980s, there was a period of stability and development under Barbara Arundell, who produced for 28 years, before her sad and sudden passing in 2011. Wendy Underwood, Society Life Member and fifty-year NODA medal holder, then took on responsibility of being producer/director until Jo succeeded her in 2016.

Whilst having been an active member for over 40 years, there were still many years when Jo hadn't been involved. However, Jo knew where to look for more information.

In 2023, the society lost its longest serving active member when Kebir Berry, MBE, passed away just days before his 60th anniversary of supporting the amateur stage. During his many years at St Giles, Kebir had pulled together a comprehensive archive of the societies history including programmes and photos from all the past productions. In exploring these files, Jo found old posters and tickets along with other memorabilia.

The programmes and photos were passed to the team at

the museum who decided on the themes they felt would be of interest to the public. This resulted in a huge 'scavenger hunt' which unearthed so many different things including make-up packaging from the 1950s, costumes dating back to the 1980s, along with props and other items from the society's history. A professional designer was commissioned to produce the artwork and the result was staggering. With themes around costumes, panto dames, Sunbeams, NODA awards, make-up, backstage and front of house, the exhibition celebrates the society and the many people who have been involved in keeping the society active in the town.

The exhibition was formally opened in November and the opening ceremony included performances by the society's Sunbeams and story-time with Dame Peggy and the Panto Fairy. The society has been delighted to see all the visitors enjoy what is on show including the interactive opportunities: a fancy-dress box, a themed letter hunt, a fabulous craft sheet to build your own panto theatre, screens showing videos of past productions and a chance to singalong to the society's own audience participation song '*Ponte Pantomime*', written by Society Life Member, David Hookham. Members of the museum's team came to see the society perform *Hansel & Gretel* in January, and more events are planned throughout the year.

The exhibition is in place until the end of October 2025, so if anyone fancies a trip to Pontefract (home of liquorice, mentioned by Shakespeare and the site of the castle where King Richard II is thought to have died) don't forget to pop in and see how this small community pantomime society has had a big influence on generations in the town.

Jo Sykes

NODA North East Youth Coordinator

Photo credit - Nick Singleton





Panto Scripts

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A Christmas Carol

Peter Denyer
 Rob Fearn & Leo Appleton
 Amanda Craib
 Helen Gard and Anthony Bevan

Aladdin

Bradford & Webster
 Leonard Caddy
 Ron Hall
 Long & Rawnsley
 Peter Denyer
 David Swan
 Stephen Duckham
 Peter Long
 Dave Crump
 Rob Fearn & Leo Appleton
 John Birchley
 Clarke & Clarke
 Colin Barrow

Ali Baba

Dave Crump
 Ron Hall
 David Swan
 Colin Barrow
 Rob Fearn & Leo Appleton

Alice in Pantoland

Eyres & Elder

Alice in Wonderland

Robert Marlowe
 Helen Gard

Babes in the Wood

Leonard Caddy
 Peter Denyer
 Stephen Duckham
 Long & Rawnsley
 Helen Gard & Jo Stokes
 Colin Barrow

Beauty & The Beast

Bradford & Webster
 Peter Denyer
 Stephen Duckham
 Ron Hall
 Peter Long
 Vicky Burns

Helen Gard & Jo Stokes
 Clarke & Clarke

Cinderella

Bradford & Webster
 Leonard Caddy
 Peter Denyer
 Stephen Duckham
 Long & Rawnsley
 David Swan
 Rob Fearn & Leo Appleton
 Dave Crump
 Amanda Craib
 John Birchley
 Clarke & Clarke
 Colin Barrow

Dick Turpin

Colin Barrow
 Dave Crump

Dick Whittington

Bradford & Webster
 Peter Denyer
 Stephen Duckham
 Long & Rawnsley
 Gail Lowe
 Dave Crump
 Vicky Burns
 Sean Brennan & Damian Shalks
 Ben Evans-Clarke
 Rob Fearn & Leo Appleton
 Clarke & Clarke
 Colin Barrow
 Tom Pieman

Goldilocks

Stephen Duckham
 Clarke & Clarke
 Ron Hall
 Long & Rawnsley

Goody Two Shoes

Colin Barrow

Hansel & Gretel

Ron Hall
 Helen Gard

Hercules

Clarke & Clarke

Humpty Dumpty

Stephen Duckham
 Ron Hall

Jack & The Beanstalk

Bradford & Webster
 Peter Denyer
 Stephen Duckham
 Ron Hall
 Long & Rawnsley
 Peter Long
 Rob Fearn & Leo Appleton
 Dave Crump
 Colin Barrow

King Arthur

Ron Hall
 Rob Fearn & Leo Appleton

Little Match Girl

Helen Gard

Little Mermaid

Ron Hall
 Colin Barrow

Little Red Riding Hood

Ron Hall
 Long & Rawnsley

Mother Goose

Peter Denyer
 Stephen Duckham
 Ron Hall
 Long & Rawnsley
 Colin Barrow
 Helen Gard

Oliver - A Christmas Twist

Rob Fearn & Leo Appleton

Peter Pan

Ron Hall

Pied Piper of Hamelin

Stephen Duckham
 Ron Hall
 Long & Rawnsley

Pinocchio

Long & Rawnsley
 Stephen Duckham
 David Swan

Puss in Boots

Leonard Caddy
 Stephen Duckham
 Long & Rawnsley
 Rob Fearn & Leo Appleton
 Colin Barrow

Queen of Hearts

Robert Marlowe

RapunzelBradford & Webster
Katie Skeffington
Amanda Craib
Helen Gard**Red**

Gillian Coley & Julie Salmon

Red Riding HoodStephen Duckham
Colin Barrow**Red Riding Hood and the Three Little Pigs**

Dave Crump

Robin HoodBradford & Webster
Stephen Duckham
Rob Fearn & Leo Appleton
Dave Crump
Chris Shinn & Julie Petrucci**Robinson Crusoe**Long & Rawnsley
Stephen Duckham
Robert Marlowe
Leonard Caddy
Vicky Burns
Colin Barrow
Ron Hall**Rumpelstiltskin**

Rob Fearn & Leo Appleton

Santa Claus

Colin Barrow

Scrooge The PantomimeDave Crump
Trevor Wakefield**Sherlock Holmes and the Hound of the Basketcases - The Panto**

Dave Crump

Sinbad the SailorBradford & Webster
Peter Denyer
Ron Hall
Stephen Duckham
Colin Barrow**Sleeping Beauty**Bradford & Webster
Leonard Caddy
Peter Denyer
Stephen Duckham

Ron Hall

Long & Rawnsley
David Swan
Rob Fearn & Leo Appleton
Clarke & Clarke
Jean Cator
Colin Barrow**Snow Queen**Peter Denyer
Ron Hall
Helen Gard
Colin Barrow**Snow White & The Seven Dwarfs**Peter Denyer
Stephen Duckham
Ron Hall
Long & Rawnsley
Rob Fearn & Leo Appleton
Colin Barrow**Snow White and the Seven**

Bradford & Webster

The Frog Prince

Stephen Duckham

The Kings New Clothes

Cheryl May

The Old Woman Who Live in a ShoeColin Barrow
Dave Crump**The Prince's Quest**

Bradford & Webster

The Princess & the Courgette - 18+

Colin Barrow

The Princess & The Pea

Colin Barrow

The Three Musketeers - The Panto

Dave Crump

Treasure IslandBradford & Webster
Helen Gard
Colin Barrow
Tom Pieman
Dave Crump**Wizard of Oz**

Leonard Caddy

2024**Most performed
Panto Scripts titles****1. Jack & The Beanstalk****2. Rapunzel the Pantomime****3. Cinderella****4. Robin Hood****5. Sleeping Beauty****6. Puss in Boots****7. Dick Whittington****8. Little Red Riding Hood****9. Beauty & The Beast****10. Snow White & the Seven Dwarfs**

Titles that audiences will know and love!

CLASSIC MOVIES ON STAGE!

Well-known titles attract audiences, and what better than these great stage plays based on classic movies to attract them?

KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS

The classic Ealing comedy voted number 6 in the BFI list of best British films of the 20th century!
6m, 2f (with doubling) Running Time: 2 hours

This black comedy is adapted by Derek Webb from the original novel by Roy Horniman, on which Ealing Films' *Kind Hearts and Coronets* was based. It requires strong versatile performances by the leads, but also has several interesting comic roles for other actors. The play doesn't require scenery as such, but swift changes of furniture and props are essential. Part of the fun of the piece is that the audience will be aware of the doubling up of the main parts, but many minor parts can be played by different members of the cast.



THE LADY VANISHES

17 actors, 13 with doubling - 9F, 8M (8F, 5M with doubling) Running Time: 90 minutes.



The classic 1938 Hitchcock film 'The Lady Vanishes' was based on *The Wheel Spins* by Ethel Lina White. It took various liberties with the plot, including a propaganda element involving Nazis. This stage adaptation goes back to the original novel and tries as much as possible to capture the 1930s feel of the original. Much of the comedy will be derived from playing up to the attitude of mid-war years in terms of character and accent. The play has been written so there is a continuous sense of action, moving seamlessly from one scene to the next as far as possible. The various different 'sets' are all on stage throughout, lit as appropriate.

THE INVISIBLE MAN

3m. Running time: 2 hours

The thought of invisibility – and the advantages it could bring to someone – is one which has captured the imagination of millions since the classic HG Wells' story was first published in 1897. *The Invisible Man* has been adapted many times for the screen, but rarely for the stage. This fast-moving, very funny adaptation has all parts from a vicar, to a pub landlady to a tramp and to the Invisible Man himself – fifteen characters in total – played by just three actors, and that, in itself, is the source of a great deal of fun.



derekwebb.co.uk

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NODA South East

Celebrating 50 years

Getting the whole village involved



Plumpton Pantomime Society celebrated a very special 50th anniversary by getting the whole village involved to perform a pantomime, which they even adapted themselves, and wove their Golden Anniversary into the storyline. They are one of the few societies that specialise only in pantomimes, spending almost all year on all the different aspects and details involved.

Their pantomime this year was a celebration of community spirit and community theatre. It was attended by Regional Councillor, Kay Rowan, District Rep, Susanne Crosby and the NODA President,

Graham Liverton (pictured, with some of the cast). *Once Upon a Time in Pantoland* was performed at the end of January, and was a mash up of all the favourite panto traditions. All the much-loved characters woven into a completely original fairytale – a perfect way to celebrate their significant milestone. As well as providing entertainment, the society donate their profits, every year, to various village organisations. Since its inception, they have been able to give well over £35,000 back to the village.



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NODA
For every stage

NODA North East

Harvey bows out

Takes his final curtain at 100 years old



Harvey with his son Alan, granddaughter Laura and great granddaughter Adie

Harvey Kay, a veteran panto actor, who has trodden the boards since the 1930s, has decided to take his final curtain call after reaching one hundred!

Great, great grandfather, Harvey, first took to the stage as a very nervous 8-year-old in the 1930s, at a theatre near his home town of High Green near Sheffield, South Yorkshire.

During the ensuing decades, Harvey played several roles in both pantos and musicals, including the Wizard in *The Wizard of Oz*, the Star Keeper in *Carousel* as well as starring in *Cinderella*, *The Sound of Music* and *Calamity Jane*.

Harvey decided to take his final bow at The Eppic Theatre in Sheffield with High Green Musical Theatre Society, where he received a standing ovation from both the audience and the cast.



Harvey with his children and spouses

Harvey added he nearly cried after everyone stood up for him at the end of each performance of *Cinderella*.

The former miner, who worked at Barrow Colliery in the South Yorkshire Coalfield, was promoted to Mine's Deputy before he took early retirement in his fifties.

Widower, Harvey, who used to play opposite his late wife, Agnes prior to her death in 2008, said he feels "lost" because he now has "nothing to do," he said, "well, I nearly cried, I nearly cried, but I didn't, it was tremendous."

Harvey has been saying each panto was going to be his last for a number of years, but this year he said, "This is definitely my last show, definitely because I can't see, I can't hear and I can't walk so that's it, that's me done."

Harvey, who has seven children,

thirteen grandchildren, a lot of great grandchildren, as well as a great, great grandchild, started performing at the age of eight.

It was through Harvey that his granddaughter, Laura Hall, aged forty, also took to the stage thirty years ago. She said she grew up watching him perform so it was natural that she should follow in his footsteps and join the same group as him. Laura, a primary school teacher said, "I remember going to see him around 1992, when we went to watch him in *Cinderella*. He's been in a lot."

For his final performance, Harvey was joined on stage by his son, Alan, granddaughter Laura and great granddaughter Adie.

Can anyone beat Harvey?

Les Smith
NODA North East
Regional Councillor

NODA West Midlands

'When you're evil'

The best panto villain song written!



Credit - Alan Wood

To say that playing the Wicked Witch of the West has been on my to do list for quite some time would be an understatement. In January of 2025, I got my wish to play arguably one of the greatest female villains ever written. Like all classic villains they need a song to go alongside the role and I had only one song in mind.

Aurelio Voltaire is a New York based musician who has a very unique dark cabaret style. His music has been in my playlists for years now and there is always one song of his that stands out to me above the rest. 'When you're Evil' is a song about how fun it is to be the villain and how the character singing the song is there in your everyday life. Every inconvenience, every little niggle you have, every thorn in your side reminds you that they are there

and always will be. This, of course is perfect not just for the Wicked Witch but also for pretty much every villain you can think of and THAT is why I needed to have this song in Oldbury Rep's pantomime production of *The Wizard of Oz*.

To obtain this song we need to go back to 2023, when we were rehearsing for our production of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. I was playing Silly Billy and Mike Hadley was playing the despicable Heinkel. I knew then that I wanted him to sing 'When you're Evil' but I wasn't sure how to go about getting in touch with Voltaire to obtain his permission. I emailed him a few times to see if he would respond but sadly, with his busy schedule and him receiving hundreds of emails a day, it fell by the wayside.

A year later, it is 2024, and I am scrolling through Instagram to see Voltaire is not only going on tour but he is going to be playing local to me! I immediately told my partner and we booked tickets to the gig in November. I was grinning from ear to ear as I finally got to see Voltaire live! My partner turns to me and says "You can finally ask him in person if you can use 'When you're Evil' in the pantomime! I know he will say yes, he's awesome like that." As I turned to look at him in utter disbelief, I began screaming as this thought had never even crossed my mind. Would he say yes? Could I pull off this epic song? There was only one way to find out.

November came around and I got to see the man, the goth, the legend that is Aurelio Voltaire not only perform but I also got to meet him in the flesh. I was nervous to meet him and his lovely fiancé Mayumi but I was also feeling sick from what I was about to ask him. The time came my stomach was doing cartwheels I said "May I ask you something?" A big booming smile always across his face, "Yes of course! What is it?" I explained the situation and that I would be portraying the Wicked Witch in Oldbury Rep's *The Wizard of Oz* and I would absolutely love to sing his song in it. A moment passed as he had taken in what I had just said. My heart pounded in my chest as the nerves turned to fear. He paused; the smile disappeared from his face as he turned to me as said.... "I would be delighted and honoured if you did."

NODA South West

How scary is your pantomime baddy?

Everyone loves a happy ending!

The relief washed over me. He said yes! I hugged him and couldn't stop thanking him. I had the permission to sing the best villain song ever! He followed up with *"on one condition!"*

"What's that?" I said trying to hold tears back.

"You have to film it and send it to me when you do, do it. I want to see!"

"Of course!" I said excitedly. I walk back over to my partner feeling more nervous than ever. Now I had to actually SING the song. Would I be able to pull it off?

The gig began and we had a wonderful night singing along and we also got to sing it on stage with the man himself.

January came and the houses each night for the show were either sold out or as close to. My song was not until the second act and I was as nervous as the witch around water. The time came and the words just began to flow. The song was a hit and people for a brief moment forgot that I was in fact the baddie of the piece.

I still to this day get asked about the song and who wrote it. If you wish to listen to this song yourself then please find *'When you're Evil'* by Aurelio Voltaire, on Youtube or Spotify. A massive thank you again to Voltaire for letting me sing it, and really hammer home that its always so easy *'When you're Evil'*.

Toni Bird – Oldbury Rep



A couple of years ago, Chris and Ashley decided that they would like to take their two daughters, Poppy and Ivy, to a local pantomime. They decided to see *Jack and the Beanstalk* produced by St Blazey AOS, a large local amateur group at the Keay Theatre in St Austell.

Unfortunately, it did not go well,

as within minutes Poppy aged 5, needed to be taken out of the theatre as she was scared by the baddy, a nasty elf called Snivelling, and got upset. Despite the best efforts of the front of house staff, who introduced her to some of the cast including Snivelling backstage, they were unable to persuade her back to the theatre. Not long later, Poppy was followed by her older sister Ivy who also got upset.

However, this story does have a happy ending like all good pantomimes. Sometime later in the year, Ivy said that she would quite like to be part of a show. Chris and Ashley asked around and decided to take her along to the auditions for a local show, not realising that it was the group that they had brought the children to the previous year. She came along to the auditions for this year's pantomime, *Dick Whittington*, and was successful in joining the junior chorus. Dad Chris said: *"Who would have thought after last year's experience, that Ivy would be in the show and Poppy would enjoy watching her big sister on stage and Ivy would have such a great time being part of the panto family?"*

So, you see pantomime baddies aren't that bad!!

NODA North

Relax, have fun, take risks and let go

All the ingredients for a great pantomime

Yet another year and another pantomime rehearsed, performed and celebrated by the Coquetdale Amateur Dramatic Society (CADS) – and this year, the company set sail on perilously cold uncharted waters on an unsinkable ship.

The hilarious production, titled *A Titanic Pantomime*, was written and directed by John Mawer and tells the interweaving stories of a selection of first and standard class passengers and the ship's crew, who embark on a voyage across the Atlantic from Liverpool to New York. The show is bursting with all sorts of stereotypical characters – two overbearing mothers, an authoritarian father, an archaeologist, an athlete, three penguins and the list goes on to include the obligatory heroes, heroines, goodies and baddies.

So, what kind of a mind could dream up this multi-layered concoction of plots? The answer comes in the form of John Mawer, the writer and director. John arrived in the Coquet Valley with his wife, Kirsty, and their young family in 2016. He has been writing scripts and directing CADS productions ever since.

It didn't take long for the family to settle into Northumberland life and John's 4-year-old daughter Xanthe started school in Harbottle. At the time, there were only 32 children in the school, all aged between 3 and 9, and every pupil was always encouraged to

join all the school's musical and drama activities. Over the years, this rich seam of acting talent has been invaluable to many CADS productions. Harbottle School was certainly the perfect place for Xanthe and her younger brother Louie to begin school life. In *A Titanic Pantomime*, Xanthe played a ruthless American gold-digger – and she attributes her highly believable American accent to her early days living in Boston.

John himself was born in Plymouth and was the son of a merchant seaman. He attended Birmingham University where, midway through his degree, he realised that his interests and passions lay in a completely different direction to the electromagnetic engineering course he had enrolled on to study. He joined a drama group and as part of that group he was encouraged to write his first ever pantomime entitled *Scrooge*. After graduating, John moved to London where, buoyed up by his pantomime writing success, he toured the pubs as a stand-up comedian by night, whilst holding down a succession of more menial daytime jobs to 'keep the wolf away from the door.'

As his stand-up comedian career developed, he became increasingly drawn towards impro(improvisation). This genre of comedy is totally different to stand-up comedy. It is completely spontaneous and non-scripted and involves small clutches of

people who bounce comedic ideas off each other to produce unique one-off comedy sketches and they perform these to audiences of complete strangers.

With this background it is easy to understand how John can write such unique pantomime material. His aim is to embroider the normal 'run of the mill' pantomime with assortments of interesting and/or obscure characters and he punctuates the plot with slapstick humour and quick-fire jokes.

When John starts work on a new script, he usually has a 'germ' of an idea in his head, this rolls around gathering further ideas. John writes every one of them down – regardless of how bizarre or 'off the wall' they might be. The idea for *A Titanic Pantomime*



was triggered, in part, by a throw away remark made by Stella, the Musical Director, about her penchant for Queen's music and soon, in John's head, a fat-bottomed girl became a fat-bottom gull. From that moment on, the cogs in John's head were whirring away and he was forever adding ideas to an ever-growing list.

From this large list of both inter-related and totally disconnected ideas, he formed a structure in his head and then wove the ideas together in such a way that the outcome was not predictable to the audience.

John admits that he never really enjoys writing the script so he must do it in short sharp bursts, usually when there is nothing else, he can do – like when travelling on long distance business trips! Even when the script is written, it

is constantly evolving while John decides whether it will work on stage. When September arrives and another new CADS season starts, the script will usually be 'nearly ready'

John and his Musical Director, Stella, choose the songs to accompany the script with great care so that they portray the perfect emotion for each scene, and they change the lyrics accordingly.

Since John took over as director, he has devoted the first few weeks of the new CADS season to teach stagecraft through drama games and improvisation in the hope that everyone – old timers and newcomers alike – can lose their inhibitions and just be themselves, and everyone learns that nothing is ever too silly.

After the read through and

auditions, the rehearsals begin, and John starts to direct his cast. In some ways, John finds this the hardest stage in the process because he would like every actor to put their own stamp on their character. However, it is also vitally important that every character interacts appropriately with the other characters in order to make sense of the story – this is always such a fine line to tread!

The last few weeks of rehearsing are both tense and intense – but although some would be scratching their heads and worrying about the duration of the 'first half', John always remains positive. After all, when in doubt you can always improvise – you just need to relax, have fun, take risks and just let go as this is pantomime!

By Julie Muller

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NODA Theatre Summer School

Thinking of attending this year's NODA Theatre Summer School?

What courses are still available?



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Working with an industry musical director and an industry director/movement director, students will be put through their paces learning about the ever exciting and increasingly popular world of actor musician shows.



Choreography

Choreography is a vital aspect of any musical theatre or pantomime. This course will provide both experienced and new choreographers with a toolbox of techniques and approaches. Over the week, you will cover a wide range of material and genres so there will be something for everyone, – from traditional dance, to Fosse to more contemporary styles.



Ensemble Ease and Excellence

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Introduction to Stage Management

The course is geared towards people with little or no stage management experience in the amateur arena, teaching and explaining professional practice and techniques. The course is also suitable for directors, committee members and producers who want to gain knowledge of the "nuts and bolts" of putting on a show to enhance future productions.



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When?

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2025

Where?

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How much?

£750

This includes accommodation,
food and your course

[noda.org.uk/
summerschool](https://noda.org.uk/summerschool)

NODA National Gala and AGM Celebration Day

Voco Hotel & Spa Winchester Saturday 27th September

The South East is proud to invite you to the highly anticipated NODA National Gala and Celebration Day. This exciting event, which promises to be a memorable occasion, will take place at the stunning Voco Winchester Hotel & Spa. This year's celebration marks the inauguration of Kay Rowan as the NODA National President, a milestone in the association's journey.

Set in a picturesque location on the edge of the beautiful South Downs National Park, the contemporary Voco Winchester Hotel & Spa offers an ideal blend

of luxury and scenic beauty, making it the perfect venue for this prestigious event. The hotel is conveniently located just five minutes from the vibrant Winchester City Centre, allowing for easy access to the best of the area.

The NODA National Annual General Meeting (AGM) will be held in the afternoon, where key announcements will be made, including the winners of the National Programme and Poster Competition for 2024. This is an exciting opportunity to recognise the talent and creativity within the NODA community.

Following the AGM, guests will enjoy a glamorous black-tie gala, featuring a spectacular musical theatre cabaret that will keep the energy high and spirits soaring well into the night. This is a chance to relax, mingle, and celebrate the achievements of the past year, while being entertained by some incredible performances.

Join us for this unforgettable day of celebration, inspiration, and networking with fellow NODA members from across the country!



The hotel



The hotel, recently refurbished, offers stylish, comfortable rooms to relax in. Accessible rooms are available – when booking, please select the option for the room requirements.

Why not extend your stay and check out some of the wonderful places Winchester has to offer, including: Winchester Cathedral, The Round Table in the Great Hall, The Science Centre and Plantetarium (next door to the hotel).

Getting there

By car

Turn off the M3 at junction 9, and follow the A272 and then turn onto the A31 at the roundabout. Follow for about two miles and take the first exit off the roundabout.

By air

Southampton Airport is 13 miles away from the hotel

By train

Winchester train station is just over three miles away from the hotel and a 12 minute taxi ride.

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Prices

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A three course meal and entertainment.

£55 each

Join us for the Gala Dinner with accommodation

A three course meal and entertainment.

Accommodation – Saturday night
Breakfast – Sunday morning

Single occupancy – £194

Two people sharing – £249

Fancy making a weekend of it?

Arrive on Friday night, spend the morning in Winchester and then join us for the Gala Dinner

A three course meal and entertainment.

Accommodation – Friday and Saturday night

Breakfast – Saturday and Sunday morning

Single occupancy – £333

Two people sharing – £388

Ready to book?

Bookings can be made via the NODA website by following the link below or scanning the QR code. The deadline for booking is 6th September 2025.

www.noda.org.uk/national-gala-2025



NODA East

Building skills, confidence and friendships

New youth group in a growing community



A jubilant cast of *Legally Blonde Jr.* Credit – DeeDee Doke

The village of Witchford in Cambridgeshire is a popular, pretty and growing community about 2.5 miles from the cathedral city of Ely. New houses are being built there, bolstering the existing housing supply of vintage homes and more modern builds, all of which provide a pleasant, predominantly residential settlement. A primary school and a village college reflect the community's offer to families.

Recently, the creation of a youth drama group, for primary-aged children through to the teens, has widened the community's value for families and swept open the

door for drama, music and dance opportunities for aspiring and fledgling performers.

In roughly a year and a half, the Witchford Amateur Dramatic Society Youth (WADSY) has staged two major productions, *High School Musical* and *Legally Blonde*, with a showcase being held this past March (2025). In July, WADSY will stage *The Little Mermaid Jr* featuring young performers ages 6 to 12, followed in December by *Chicago Teen Edition* for 13 to 19-year-olds.

And on Fridays, WADSY hosts workshop classes for both age ranges of youth performers.

So what, you ask?

WADSY was created in 2023, by Charlie-May Wallis, now 20, a talented and skilled dancer, singer and actor in her own right, as an extension of the existing but dormant adult WADS group. She has regularly performed with a variety of Cambridgeshire and Suffolk community theatre groups, but her idea was to create a local youth operation right in Witchford's own back garden.

They rehearse in the Witchford Village Hall, St Andrew's Church Hall in the village, Witchford Village College and down the road in the village of Haddenham

at the Arkenstall Centre, which has a good-sized stage and auditorium as well as smaller rooms for rehearsal and costume dressing.

"For younger people who have to rely on the parents, it's better for people who live locally that they have some place that they can just walk to," said Charlie-May.

"I've been that parent who has to drive backwards and forwards three to four times a week to different venues," elaborated her mother, Kerry Wallis, who is a WADSY board member. *"It's a long way from this area to Newmarket, or to Cambridge, so it was definitely something that we needed much closer."*

Not only was the distance between communities a core element of WADSY's reason for being, but total inclusion, a firm tenet of the adult group, was at the heart of the youth group's ethos. *"Everybody who wants to have a part will get a part. It's irrelevant whether you've been on stage before, whether you have additional needs or disabilities. It doesn't matter if you want to be on stage or help out backstage; we make a place for that to happen,"* said Kerry. *"Everybody gets a chance to shine."*

"We wanted a group that was focused on the potential of everyone," Charlie-May said. *"Everyone starts at this starting place and then we work with them so they're able to be the best that can be in the end."*

We wanted the kids to have fun with it, and we hoped that the audience would have fun by watching them. The whole thing is about enjoyment, and they (the performers) are up there on the stage because they enjoy it rather than because they're under some form of pressure," Charlie-May said.

The number of auditioners for *Legally Blonde Jr* in particular was so large that a number of parts,

large and small, were double cast to ensure everyone had a role. One role was played by a different young player at each performance to give everyone in the group a chance to shine. *"We had so many talented people, more than we expected to have,"* said Charlie-May.

For the two major productions, Charlie-May has directed and choreographed the action, and received support from nine passionate volunteers including her friend Zack-Rhys Wymer, 21, who has done *"a little bit of everything"* from stepping into a small role and stage managing as well as helping out with choreography.

In Charlie-May's future, she said, *"I'd love to set up a group that's tailored for people who have anxiety and complex traumas, and work with them, and offer therapy through drama."* Currently, Charlie-May is taking advanced dance training herself and doing a degree in Cambridge, at the same time as leading youngsters through their early stage experiences.

One young participant has rediscovered her voice and enjoyment of performing with WADSY after feeling uncomfortable with school productions. Courtney West, 15, played the lead role of Elle in

Legally Blonde, unleashing a big, beautiful voice and a talent for comedy. An avid photographer, Courtney likes studying art subjects at school such as textiles and 3D design. But referencing her theatre activities outside of school, Courtney explained, *"It's good to have something that doesn't have anything to do with school."* Doing theatre with WADSY, she said, has helped her become more confident and outgoing both on and off stage.

Courtney's mum, Sarah Jane West, became the group's child protection officer just weeks before *Legally Blonde's* opening and is a fan of all that WADSY has accomplished. She pointed out the sell-out performances and near sell-outs that this show achieved. *"I think that the community needs this,"* she said. *"Being so accessible and so inclusive has really shone through, and I think people are feeling it, it's being really well appreciated."*

"I wouldn't say it surprised me," Sarah Jane added. *"But it certainly warms me."*

DeeDee Doke
NODA East Regional Editor



Charlie-May Wallis in the centre with some of the cast. Credit - DeeDee Doke

NODA London

Taking *Kings and Queens* to Germany

Banbury Operatic Society stage performance in their twinned town



More of the cast and team enjoy the sights from the top of the Cologne Triangle.

Banbury Operatic Society (BOS) has a long history of staging performances for our twin town, and our most recent trip to Hennef, Germany, to perform our concert, *Kings and Queens*, was another fantastic chapter in this tradition.

Hennef is one of Banbury's two twin towns – alongside Ermont, France – and we have been twinned with Hennef since 1981. BOS has been part of the twinning association since its inception. Over the years, we have taken a range of performances to our

German friends, from full-scale musicals to concerts. Given the rising costs of transporting large sets, this time we opted for a concert-style production, which proved to be an excellent choice.

Our latest visit came about when the Banbury & District Twinning Association invited us to bring another show to Hennef, given how warmly received our previous performances had been. The production team behind *Kings and Queens* saw this as a perfect opportunity and planned the concert with the trip in mind.

Featuring a variety of well-known musical numbers with a royal theme, the show ensured there was something for everyone, with plenty of songs familiar to our German audience.

Organising an international performance is no small feat and this trip was a huge logistical challenge. A dedicated team coordinated transport, equipment and accommodation. While many of us travelled by coach, others made their own way by plane or car. This led to one worrying and (now) humorous

incident, where one of our cast members' train unexpectedly came to a halt, forcing him to disembark in the middle of a quaint German town where he found himself completely lost for an hour. Not speaking the language and with no clear idea of how to reach his destination, he frantically messaged the cast WhatsApp group, leading to a series of amusing but unhelpful suggestions! Thankfully, he soon realised that Uber still operated in the area and was able to get a ride to rejoin the group. The ordeal sparked much laughter among the cast and a firm personal resolution to learn at least a few basic German phrases before the next trip!

The Banbury & District Twinning Association and its Hennef counterpart, Verein für Europäische Städte-Partnerschaft, played a crucial role in arranging host families for many of our members, ensuring a true cultural exchange experience. Given that some of our cast were under 18, we also had to research child protection and licensing regulations in Germany—thankfully, one of our members, a native German speaker, was instrumental in navigating these requirements.

Performing in a new venue added another layer of complexity. While BOS had performed in Hennef before, this theatre was a new and unfamiliar space, meaning our technical team had to plan everything remotely through photos and conversations with the German crew—sometimes overcoming language barriers in the process! Our technical manager, Graham Simons, dedicated extensive time in the theatre, meticulously ensuring that the lighting was rigged and ready within an exceptionally tight schedule. Once on site, our tech team worked tirelessly under strict venue time slots, showcasing their dedication, problem-solving abilities and sheer expertise in overcoming the challenges of an unfamiliar

performance space. Another challenge was adapting the show for the trip. Some cast members from our Banbury performance couldn't make the journey, so certain roles had to be reassigned and some choreography had to be reworked. Our fantastic production team, led by Director, Amanda Anderson and Choreographer, Sophie Worrall, had anticipated these adjustments during the initial casting and rehearsals. However, as with any production, unforeseen changes arose along the way. Amanda and Sophie worked tirelessly while in Hennef, refining the staging to ensure the cast felt confident and that the show retained its intended impact, just as it did in Banbury. The cast also rose to the challenge, adapting their blocking to compensate for the smaller ensemble and ensuring that vocal harmonies remained strong—particularly in the absence of our wonderful MD, Chloe Cardin, who was unable to make the trip. The costume team also had a significant task, sourcing multiple versions of the same costumes to accommodate cast changes. This resulted in even more quick changes for some cast members who had taken on additional roles. In Hennef, this was expertly managed by our Wardrobe Mistress, Janet Bishop, whose extensive experience in directing previous BOS productions and trips to Hennef proved invaluable. As always, BOS demonstrated its adaptability and professionalism, ensuring the show remained polished, engaging and a true reflection of the society's talent and dedication.

We were treated like VIPs, not just by our wonderful hosts, but by many people in the town. Word quickly spread of the group from England who had come to perform. This became evident when a group of us went out for dinner and found ourselves in deep conversation with the waitresses about the show and



One of our youngest members, Milo, discovers the Banbury sign unveiled at the start of the twinning process—an event some BOS members were part of in 2011!

the logistics of bringing it to Hennef. Young children from the town would also ride past the theatre windows on their bikes whilst we were rehearsing, hoping, as one of our German hosts put it, *"to get a glimpse of the performers from England."* We're not sure these young people had quite realised that we were not, in fact, Sir Ian McKellen and Dame Judi Dench, but rather a random mixture of business people, teachers and office workers who love to sing and perform in our free time (but then again, isn't that what makes amateur theatre great!?). Despite this, it created a real buzz around the town and, over the course of the few days we were there, anticipation built for the concert. This undeniably added some pressure to us all but also fuelled our enthusiasm and excitement to perform for the people of Hennef after it had been so warmly received in Banbury.



A lot of fun (and teamwork!) went into re-blocking numbers for our Hennef performance.



'Herod's Song' proved to be a hit with the Hennef audience!



Ben and Sarah, two BOS members, soaking up the theatre atmosphere.

The audience's reaction to the performance itself was nothing short of phenomenal. They laughed, clapped and even sang along to familiar songs - '*Always Look on the Bright Side of Life*' was a particular hit! They also appreciated hearing new songs they hadn't encountered before such as '*Ex-Wives*' from *Six the Musical*, which was new to German audiences but incredibly well received. The warmth and enthusiasm in the theatre made all the effort worthwhile and the post-show celebration was filled with shared joy and camaraderie. We were also thrilled that our performance was featured in the local Hennef press, further showcasing the strength of our cultural exchange.

The trip wasn't just about performing; it was about cultural exchange. One of the most memorable aspects of the trip

was the incredible hospitality we received. For those staying with host families, the generosity was overwhelming, meals were plentiful and we were treated as part of the family. On our first evening, our hosts took us to a local restaurant where the portion sizes were nothing short of legendary! Those staying in hotels were equally well cared for, with hosts checking in regularly and offering lifts to and from the theatre. Another highlight was a group excursion to Cologne with our host families, where we explored the city with our German friends and enjoyed a meal at a traditional German restaurant. These moments outside the theatre strengthened the bonds between us and our hosts, reinforcing why these trips are so special. Many of us formed lasting friendships with our hosts, a testament to the spirit of the twinning association.

Bringing a show to Hennef is always a rewarding experience, and while the logistics mean it can't be an annual occurrence, we know we'll be back. The warm reception from our German friends reminds us why these exchanges are so valuable. We also look forward to hosting our Hennef counterparts in Banbury soon, where we hope to match the exceptional hospitality they showed us. This trip was a testament to the power of amateur theatre—not just in entertaining audiences but in fostering connections across borders. BOS once again proved that music and theatre are universal languages, bringing people together regardless of nationality. Until next time, Hennef!

Ben Coleman

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NODA Scotland

Supporting local charities with donations

Hawick Pantomime Group in the Scottish Borders



For over four decades, the Hawick Pantomime Group has been a cornerstone of community theatre in the Scottish Borders, bringing joy to audiences while fostering a spirit of giving back. Established in 1980, our group is dedicated not only to the performing arts but also to supporting local organisations and charities that make a difference in our town.

Following our successful production of *The Little Mermaid* in December 2024, we were delighted to provide financial support to Escape Youth Services and Hawick Guides in recognition of their invaluable contribution during our show week. Young volunteers from these organisations played a key role in our front-of-house operations, assisting with programme sales, guiding audience members to their seats and serving refreshments. Their enthusiasm and commitment enhanced the theatre experience for everyone and we were proud to

acknowledge their efforts through our charitable donation initiative.

The Hawick Pantomime Group operates an application-based system, allowing local organisations and charities to apply for financial support following their participation in volunteering. This approach ensures that those who actively contribute to the success of our productions are rewarded, reinforcing our commitment to community engagement and collaboration. Each year, we assess applications and allocate funds to organisations that play a meaningful role in our pantomime season.

Escape Youth Services has been a long-standing supporter of our productions, bringing around 90 young people annually to enjoy the magic of pantomime. This partnership is instrumental in making live theatre accessible to young audiences and inspiring them to participate in the arts. In 2023, we also provided financial

assistance to Escape Youth Services to support food costs for their summer programme, further demonstrating our dedication to community welfare.

Pantomime is more than a festive tradition—it is a celebration of community spirit, teamwork and creative expression. Productions like ours unite people of all ages, offering opportunities for learning, volunteering and personal growth. Our ongoing collaboration with local charities and organisations highlights the power of community-driven initiatives and their profound impact on young people.

As we look ahead to future productions, we remain committed to strengthening these partnerships and supporting the incredible work being done in Hawick. We encourage other organisations to invest in young people and find meaningful ways to collaborate, ensuring that our town remains a thriving and inclusive place for all.

On behalf of everyone at the Hawick Pantomime Group, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the young volunteers from Escape Youth Services and Hawick Guides for their dedication and hard work during *The Little Mermaid*. Your contributions did not go unnoticed and we are proud to support you in return. Here's to many more years of collaboration and community spirit, keeping the magic of pantomime alive!

NODA South West

Youth takeover!

Youth members outweighing the adults!

A few years ago Ottery Community Theatre's pantomime featured just a few older teens. Fast forward to our most recent pantomime, *The Pirate Princess*, and our youth members outweigh our adults!

But our juniors don't just pop on stage for the occasional chorus role – oh no they don't! This time our juniors were pirates, guards, messengers and cave creatures, with lots of costume changes, lines to learn, dances and songs to master. Then there was the endearing disco diva Ruby the Dragon with a challenging costume and the amusing but lazy Cabin Boy who formed one half of a popular comic duo.

Last year, Oliver relished his first Junior Dame role, Fifi Furball, in our panto *Three Blonde Mice*. *"I joined OCT after I saw my Mum in a play, because it looked fun. It's hard work but I love it. I get to wear some great costumes and I enjoy being on the committee and being involved in decisions like what the next panto will be. It's definitely built my confidence and I've made some great friends."*

Every summer our juniors step up to roles in our One-Act Play evening. Last year, saw them trekking across Dartmoor in a school trip that went horribly wrong and some of them joined



the cast of a 1920s murder mystery. Rehearsals have already begun for a moving, original piece, *Flaming Barrels*, due to be performed in July.

But it's not just on stage that our juniors impress us. We have juniors on the committee; creating our newsletters and contributing to important decisions; on the backstage crew and this year one of our juniors, Amber, co-directed the panto.

Panto is a huge commitment for anyone involved with 3 rehearsals a week for several months and while some adults take a week off work for the very intense performance week, our

juniors don't have that choice as school, homework and exam revision has to come first. We are a small community group without a permanent base and our juniors can also be found at set up weekend, helping build our theatre, painting scenery and helping consume biscuits!

Our influx of juniors has given us extra challenges – licensing more chaperones, finding space for changing rooms, purchasing extra biscuits...! But we wouldn't change it – their energy and enthusiasm is contagious and to see them grow in confidence is priceless. Can you tell we're proud of our juniors?

Long Service Awards

Celebrate your service with a long service award

First introduced back in 1930, the NODA Long Service Awards have become the 'must have' item for members. From badges to medals, there is something for all budgets. Show off your long service with the 25 year long service medal. You can add a silver bar for every 5 years' additional service up to 50 years, when you will be entitled to the 50 year gold bar and, at 60 years' service, the exclusive diamond bar. If you wanted something a bit less formal, then the long service badges fit the bill. A different badge for every 5 years of service.

Visit our website to see the full range of awards along with pricing.

How do I apply?

If you are a member of a group, the group will have to apply on your behalf. This can be done via our online application portal or by hard copy form. If you are a NODA individual or joint member, you will be able to apply directly for your award via the online application portal or by hard copy form.

What qualifies as 'service'?

The awards are intended for those who, week after week, attend rehearsals or spend many hours backstage, or on administrative work and whose services are essential/indispensable to putting on shows.

When does my service start?

Service starts from your first amateur/school show and from any age.

I have had several years out, how do I work out my service?

Your service does not have to be continuous, but you can only include the years you have been active. The only exception to this rule is the years your group were not active due to COVID-19.

I have performed with other groups, do those years count?

As long as your current group is a member of NODA or you are an individual member of NODA, you can include your service with another group as long as your current group is happy to confirm that service on your application form.

**5 year badge****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****60 year diamond bar****55 year pin****60 year pin****65 year pin****70 year pin****Individual member****Youth award****Commendation award****Group Life Member****NODA Achievement Award**

Order your awards online at noda.org.uk/awards



Presidential travels with the chain

The NODA National President continues his journey round the UK

It has been a busy time visiting all over the country and it's not only a pleasure but a great honour meeting so many members of the NODA Family.

My wife, Ann, and I have seen fantastic musicals, plays, concerts and of course pantomimes. At the time of writing this, we have seen thirty-three pantomimes and before you say it, oh yes, I have!

All those I have visited have made us very welcome and it's a real treat to witness. There is such a high standard of performance I feel that we are in the west end of London!

Being a member of NODA is a real sense of belonging; I see it everywhere I go. We belong to a wonderful organisation and to

see our new logo on nearly every poster and programme is just marvellous.

More and more are joining NODA so encourage more societies, that you know in your area who haven't joined, to become members as you and I know they will not regret it.

As I go around the UK, I am so impressed with our youth groups. Our younger members on stage are so confident and enthusiastic it's a great sight to behold!

As you know, no performance is possible without stage management, props, wardrobe or front of house, let alone the directors, choreographers and musical directors along with lighting and sound who all do a great job. So I want to say a big thank you to all of you for what

you are doing. By entertaining the public you are doing a great service to your local communities. Backed up by a super team at NODA Head Office, should you need them, they are there for you and that is what the NODA family is all about.

I look forward to meeting more of the family in my travels and if you haven't invited me yet, please do so but give me plenty of warning as bookings are coming in all the time.

I wish you, your groups and individual members all the very best and break a leg!

Graham K. Liverton
National President



TOADS Stage Musical Paignton – *Everybody's Talking About Jamie*



Second Thoughts – *Ten Times Table*



Class Act Drama – *A Midsummer Night's Dream*



Coleshill Operatic Society – *Beauty and the Beast: The Pantomime*



South Moor Musical Theatre Group – *Calendar Girls – The Musical*



StageRight – *20th Anniversary Concert*



Whitehaven Theatre of Youth – *Concert Evening*



Crash Bang Wallop Theatre – *Shrek*

Thinking of entering the Programme and Poster Competition?

NODA's annual Programme and Poster Competition is a very popular competition for groups and highlights the promotion of amateur theatre in the UK. Its purpose is to encourage high standards in programme and poster design.

Each region holds their own competition, using the criteria set out below, with the winning entries then put forward to the national competition. Trophies for the winners and runners up of the national competition are currently then awarded at the NODA Annual General Meeting.

Please note, until the end of June 2025, the 'Be inspired by amateur theatre' logo and NODA introduction block can also be used but will no longer be available for download. Any shows using this logo after that date will not be eligible.



Scan the QR code to download the full competition rules and logos

Whether you are staging a musical, an opera, a play, a concert or a pantomime, as the UK's leading amateur theatre membership organisation, NODA is here for every show, every rehearsal, every curtain call – here for our members every step of the way.

From just starting out to centre stage; village halls to professional venues; NODA exists to celebrate, connect, support and amplify amateur theatre and theatre groups across the UK.

We provide invaluable services, expertise and resources which help thousands of our member groups create and produce theatre that enhances lives and benefits communities everywhere.

Whatever your passion, level of experience or stage of life, we are here to help everyone enjoy the unique benefits, opportunities and sense of community that live performance can bring.

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For every stage

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NODA South East

Celebrating 75 years

Presenting a play's world première



Fairlight Players are celebrating their 75th anniversary with a special production. They will be presenting the world première of a new play, written especially for the group by acclaimed writer, Kate O'Hearn. Best known for her children's books, this is Kate's first foray into the world of the playwright. The play, called, *Gail Force 9*, was inspired by an experience that Kate had in 1991. During a severe storm, a cross-channel ferry became impaled on the harbour arm at Dover, blocking the entrance, and forcing five other ships to ride out the storm for eight hours in the English Channel. Kate was aboard one of these

ships and, she has drawn on this experience to create this new comedy. She has also thrown into the plot a nervous assassin, a seasick cow and a murder. Kate is co-directing the play with established director, Giselle Youseman. The cast is made up of a mixture of Fairlight regulars and some new faces.

The Fairlight Players, formed in 1950, are based in this small village, just outside Hastings. They have a 75-year record, broken only by Covid regulations, and have mounted two productions a year. They have an enviable reputation and a faithful following. From classic theatre such as

Pygmalion and *Blithe Spirit*, through farce and murder mystery to TV adaptations like *The Vicar of Dibley* and *Yes Prime Minister*, the group is never afraid of a challenge and manages to work miracles with a modest stage area in the local village hall. They have invested heavily in professional lighting and sound and therefore enhanced the quality of the audience experience. As well as entertainment, Fairlight Players always support a local charity and this time, appropriately, they will be supporting the Pett Level Rescue Boat Association.

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NODA North

Following in her parents' footsteps

The 'miracle' of performing



April has appeared on the stage from a young age, being in the chorus of Ponteland Repertory Society's *Wizard of Oz* in 2022, then as one of the two spoons in "Beauty and the Beast panto" in 2023. April was so excited about auditioning for the role of Susan for *Miracle on 34th St*, 2024, and was thrilled when offered the role.

April was diagnosed with Type 1

diabetes in January 2024, when she was still only 6 years old; because her diagnosis was caught early, she was in a catch 22 situation. On the positive side, April didn't experience DKA which is how most children are diagnosed with type 1 diabetes as they are really poorly. On the negative side, April getting diagnosed early means her pancreas hasn't completely shut down yet and getting her blood sugar levels stable is a constant battle.

April was worried that having diabetes would mean she wouldn't be able to do the things she enjoys doing. But with the support of everyone around her, she was encouraged to not let this stop her doing the things she loves or chasing down her dreams.

April was thrilled to still be able to audition for the role of Susan and over the moon when she was cast. She was nervous in the

beginning as it took time to build up her confidence with taking on such a big role and a bigger responsibility than she had to face before. She has never sung in front of an audience on stage by herself or in a duet and she had many of the same fears we all do, forgetting lines, not remembering to come on, getting a song wrong, but she had so much support and encouragement throughout, and all the hard work paid off.

It was a special show for both April and her mother Hayley Grant, as Hayley was playing Susan's mother Doris, so they were a mother/daughter duo both on and off the stage and they both really enjoyed every moment of it.

This show has been great for April. She can't wait to be back on the stage and is not letting her diabetes stop her from doing anything she sets her mind to, including learning the piano and her taekwondo classes.

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Feature – NODA North East

Aspirations, dreams and connections

An interview with Jack Wolfe

Leaders of youth theatre don't work to get accolades or public thanks, many never see any of their students' work on the professional stage, but anyone who heard the acceptance speeches given by Jack Wolfe (29) couldn't help but be moved by his references to the important role youth theatre played in his professional and personal development. 2024 saw Wolfe win Best Supporting Actor at the What's On Stage Awards and Best West End Debut Performer at The Stage Debut Awards and in both speeches gave Yew Tree Youth Theatre (YTYT) and its Director, Sarah Osborne, thanks for what it had done for him.

Red carpet award ceremonies are a long way from Wakefield in West Yorkshire where Jack attended Saturday morning drama lessons with YTYT and returned to after taking the National Youth Theatre Intake Course in 2011. Leaving Wakefield, Jack trained at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester. He then went on to graduate from Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts in London in 2017, the same year he understudied and played the lead in *Pinocchio* at the National Theatre. Theatre roles followed including *The Magician's Elephant* with the RSC in 2021. He made his television debut in 2018, in *Hetty Feather* and then played other roles, but he will no doubt be best known by our younger readers for his portrayal of Wyllan Hendriks in *Shadow and Bone*. This alone is a hugely impressive record of performances which included several award nominations and wins. Wolfe then took his award-winning role of Gabe Goodman

in *Next to Normal* which transferred to the Wyndham's Theatre to meet audience demand.

Meeting up with Sarah at the start of 2025, he took time to answer some questions posed by Jo Sykes, Youth Co-ordinator, NODA North East.

When did you realise that you wanted to make performing your career?

I didn't know that was an option to me for a quite long time. Whilst I really, really enjoyed and loved performing, it wasn't a profession I saw a lot of opportunities in. Where I grew up in Wakefield you don't see many people get to do it, but I always knew I wanted to perform because of the joy it brought me. Going to the National Youth Theatre and seeing people who had gone to drama school and taken things very seriously shifted things for me.

What was the highlight of your time on the amateur stage?

This might not be the answer people expect, but I find the early parts of the process very exciting and have always done so, ever since I was a kid. Finding out the play, learning about the role, beginning to feel the relationships is always the highlight of any production for me. Performing in "Oliver" [with ETC] will always be special as it was the first and I'd never done anything



on that scale. However going to Kendal with the Connections play "Shooting Trees" was a real highlight for me. "Sparkleshark" [by Philip Radley] was also a great opportunity to discover the depth of what appeared to be quite a simple play, but I remember discovering, with other people in the room, what some lines could mean and how text could be layered like that.

Can you tell us something of the process you undertook to secure the role in *Next to Normal*, a show you have said resonates with you?

The show resonated with me for a lot of personal reasons and I have loved the material since I was a teenager. I used to listen to "Next to Normal" on the way to Yew Tree classes so I was very aware of it for a long time. I had booked to see the production at the Donmar Warehouse as soon as the tickets were released. I'd moved to a new agent after "Shadow and



Jack Wolfe in *Next To Normal*

Bone" and she asked me which directors I would like to work with. I said I'd never auditioned for Anna Cooper [casting director at the Donmar Warehouse] and my agent said that it was good luck because they were casting "Next to Normal". I felt that was really cruel as I loved that show and I didn't think there was a world in which I'd get to perform in it.

Little did Jack know....

Jack went on to discuss the role with Michael Longhurst, the production's director, where Jack explained to him how he saw the role with Longhurst then being sufficiently interesting to see how that would develop in the rehearsal room.

Sarah explained to Jack about the role of NODA including the aims to promote opportunities for youth and she asked him what advice he would give to young people in NODA youth groups

keen to pursue a career in the performing arts?

I feel it is important to be open to different avenues and understand that there are other routes outside of drama school. Much of the most valuable things to me are the things I learned in youth theatre. I took these all the way through Mount View and still use the fundamental things we learned in Yew Tree. Also, explore other things you really want to learn and add them to your toolkit. Don't miss opportunities to see as much as you can and learn what you want to do and what inspires you.

Jack explained to Sarah that he felt that the theme of the conversation had been aspirations, dreams and the connections between adolescent self and adult self. He said that *"2024, was the most exciting year for him because he had been able to get in touch with his*

adolescent self in such a wild way and meet people who had been so influential on his development, including being part of the "Spring Awakening" reunion. He explained how important it had been to play a role he had always aspired to be particularly as he had seen the show in London as a teenager where the actors had signed his programme at the stage door, so to then find himself on stage performing with them was a dream come true. Working with the creative team of "Next to Normal" and meeting the original cast was also a wild thing to contend with."

Whilst 2024 was clearly a fabulous year for Jack, we all wish him well and hope that the future sees more dreams and aspirations met and connections made.

Jo Sykes
NODA North East
Youth Co-ordinator

PRIZE DRAW



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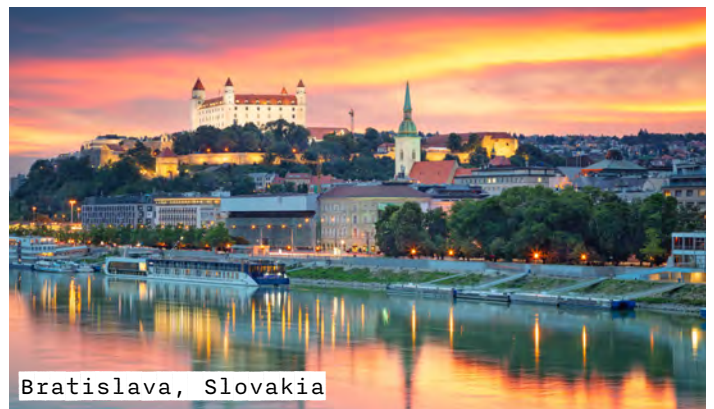
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NODA South West

Rising from the Ashes

The dramatic turn around of Exeter Little Theatre Company



Production team for Little Shop of Horrors including new Chairman, Isobel Court

Just 2 years ago, Exeter Little Theatre Company (ELTC) were in a desperate situation. The possibility of losing their company and premises was almost inevitable, had it not been for the incredible hard work of the new committee and dedicated members to turn things around.

Like so many amateur companies, the pandemic had a huge impact on the company. Their first venture back into the theatre was in April 2022, with *Calendar Girls The Musical*, but with illness amongst the cast and production team, three performances were lost. Coupled with low audiences following the pandemic, they saw a significant loss on the production.

The company began to lose

money prior to the pandemic. Many shows hadn't been selling as well as in the past, but by the AGM in July 2022, membership had reached an all time low and in 2021, and 2022, they tried to put on their annual pantomime without success. It was time for a big change.

With a loss of around £33k over the previous 5 years, the small committee of just 5 called an emergency meeting Dec 2022. The meeting was well attended by both past and present members. The committee explained the financial situation and asked for input. By January 2023, it was clear that the company needed to be taken in a new direction and therefore a change of leadership was necessary. The newly appointed

chairman and committee promptly set about putting together a programme of shows that they judged should sell well and that members were excited about, as well as carefully planning production budgets. The committee also looked at all outgoings including utilities and how their money was invested to make sure they were getting the best value.

Since then, every one of their productions have made good profits, with *Nativity! The Musical* being their most successful production to date; not only being completely sold out, but also for winning 'Best Comedy Production' at last year's NODA awards.

With their exciting programme of productions, as well as reinstating regular social events and workshops for members, their membership has now grown from just 20 to 140, ranging from junior members of 7 years old, to more mature members in their 70s and 80s. Their youth group has doubled in size and rather than losing money, it is now making a profit.

As of this January, the company have now recovered all of their £33K losses and, all of this in just 2 years, meet the target they'd set themselves a year early!

Last year, was ELTC's 70th anniversary which they celebrated with a summer ball in July. Now with the company firmly back on track, they are looking forward to a more secure future and who knows, perhaps another 70 years at least!

NODA Scotland

Anything Goes...in the bin

Group giving back to the community



Jim, Jane, Gavin, Cllr Barrett and Bekki

Perth Amateur Operatic Society (PAOS) is delighted with the success of their recent fundraising event organised in collaboration with Perth and Kinross Council Councillor, Liz Barrett. The event, a sponsored litter pick, saw 17 members of the society take to the streets to clean up their local community.

Despite the rainy weather, spirits were high as members donned their sailor hats and enthusiastically collected nearly 20 bags of litter. Among the interesting items found were a foot mould, clothes, cabbages,

numerous energy drinks and lots of empties! The highlight of the day was when two of the angels performed a spirited rendition of 'Blow Gabriel Blow' at the top of Kinnoull Hill, much to the delight of the onlookers from the hill race.

The event has raised an impressive £815 to date, which will go towards supporting PAOS to bring *Anything Goes* to the Perth Theatre stage in April. The society relies on annual fundraising to continue to support their show and concert performances in Perth.

Jane Taylor, PAOS Board Member, expressed her admiration for the society's commitment to both the arts and the local community, stating, "It's wonderful to see such enthusiasm and dedication from the PAOS members. Their efforts not only help to keep the community clean but also support the arts locally."

PAOS would like to extend their thanks to all the supporters of the event and hope to see many at Perth Theatre when they set sail in the SS America in April.

NODA North West

Somewhere beyond the sea

Taking method acting to new depths



Over the years, generations of our most well-known and beloved actors have all adapted an approach to getting into character. This is known throughout the industry as 'Method Acting' where, in order to become a character, an actor will go to immense lengths in order to become that person.

For example, in the 1989 classic *My Left Foot*, Daniel Day Lewis played a sufferer of Cerebral Palsy and spent the whole time on set in a wheelchair so he could understand the frustrations and challenges the character would be up against. Heath Ledger's portrayal of the Joker in *The Dark Knight* saw the actor imprison himself in a hotel room for months on end, not seeing his family and learning to deal with the pain of solitude and loneliness to portray the role. Even Gary Oldman got nicotine poisoning in his portrayal of Winston Churchill in *Darkest Hour* as he sought to replicate Churchill in every way possible, including his penchant

for a cigar.

So, how would you use method acting if the characters you were portraying weren't human, lived under the water and were fish? That was the challenge the young stars from Maryport AODS faced when getting ready to perform their next big show - *Finding Nemo Jr*.

In order to fully prepare for the show, Maryport AODS headed down to the Lake District Coast Aquarium in Maryport to learn more about our scaly friends from the dedicated staff there.

For example, did you know that all clownfish are born male? The blue tang fish (Dory from the film) is relatively harmless, but when in danger they can raise a pair of razor-sharp, venomous spines on either sides of their tail. And each arm on an octopus has a mind of its own!

Not only were the cast learning, they were also observing. They



watched how the fish moved in the water and observed their behavioural patterns.

Finding Nemo Jr will be a West Cumbrian première in June, this year, and the show is perfect for little musical theatre fans. Considering the dedication and the lengths that cast have gone to get into their characters, it is also bound to be a hit!



NODA South West

Let the people sing!

Over 600 auditionees to be a part of history

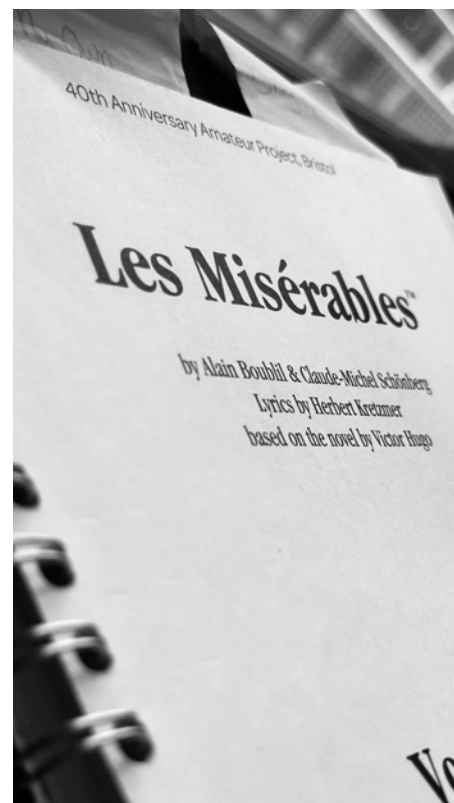
As I suspect most am dram supporters in the UK know, Cameron Mackintosh and MTI have released licences to 11 lucky amateur clubs across the UK to stage their own unique versions of *Les Misérables* in 2025, as part of the iconic show's 40th Anniversary celebrations. BLOC Productions is thrilled to be producing the Bristol Hippodrome production in August, in collaboration with Bristol Amateur Operatic Society, Bristol Musical Comedy Club, Bath Operatic & Dramatic Society and Weston Operatic Society. The SW is well represented in this exciting venture, with another UK amateur première production of *Les Misérables – Let The People Sing!* being staged at the Minack in May. I know the Minack production is already sold out, but you can still grab a ticket for our

Bristol Hippodrome production via the ATG website.

In Bristol, we auditioned over 600 people over seven gruelling weekends between November and January, and now finally have our cast of principals, ensemble, children and static chorus! Rehearsals have started and there was a tremendous buzz in the room when 150 fantastic singers (don't panic, we're double casting!) belted out 'One Day More!'

Although it's a daunting task, it really is a great privilege to be involved in this nationwide project. We'll let you know how it all goes!

Philip Hallworth
Chair, BLOC Productions



NODA Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of The National Operatic and Dramatic Association, Charity No 1171216 will take place on Saturday 27th September at 2.30pm at Voco Winchester, SO21 1HZ.

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, 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, Mr Ian G. Cox, at 15 The Metro Centre, Peterborough, PE2 7UH or by email to info@noda.org.uk.

NODApics

A few of our members' submissions to our Instagram page



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