

# TODAY

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Magazine By NODA

Summer  
season in  
a beautiful  
setting

**NODA**  
For every stage



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# Welcome

As we welcome you to the summer edition of NODA Today, I want to extend my grateful appreciation for your continued support and commitment throughout the year. It is your passion, creativity and dedication that make our amazing hobby so special.

This edition celebrates the many achievements of our members. from remarkable performances and innovative productions to well-deserved awards and anniversaries.

Being the summer season, it is great to see groups using the outside space and making the most of the British summer. That being said, panto season is just around the corner, why not have a look at our pantomime website for some inspiration for your next pantomime!

We look forward to you being able to join us for the inauguration of Kay Rowan, as the NODA National President, at our forthcoming Annual General Meeting in Winchester. Make the most of the opportunity to reflect on the past year and share ideas for the future of NODA.

Whether you are performing on stage, working tirelessly behind the scenes, or supporting from the audience, you all play a vital role in keeping the magic of live theatre alive. Here's to another season of creativity, friendship and shared achievement, on which I send my very best wishes for future success.



Ian G. Cox  
Chairman of Trustees



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NODA Scotland

## Celebrating 25 years of CAMPS

### A community arts journey in Cumnock and Doon Valley

CAMPS proudly marks its 25th anniversary this year, celebrating a quarter-century of creativity, community and connection in the heart of East Ayrshire. Established in 2000, by local residents, CAMPS, originally known as Cumnock Area Musical Production Society, quickly became the beating heart of musical theatre in Cumnock and the Doon Valley. Since its formation, CAMPS has grown into a thriving multi-arts organisation, empowering people of all ages through performance, learning, and shared experiences in the arts.

At the centre of CAMPS' success is Cumnock's Creative Arts Hub; our home since 2014. Each week, the

Hub welcomes over 500 people through its doors, acting as a vibrant hub for CAMPS' activities and a shared space for many community groups and local organisations. This partnership-driven environment fosters a powerful sense of togetherness and support—a reflection of our ethos as an organisation.

Over the past 25 years, CAMPS has built a comprehensive and inclusive programme of music and performing arts opportunities. Our flagship Perform MT group meets twice weekly, developing singing, acting and dance skills while preparing for two major musical theatre productions each year in local

venues.

Our commitment to nurturing young talent is demonstrated in CYMT—Cumnock Youth Musical Theatre—which serves young people from P1 to S4. With tailored sessions for Juniors (P1–3), Intermediates (P4–7), and Seniors (S1–S4), CYMT introduces children to the joy of performance in a supportive, engaging environment.

Adults aren't left out either—CAMPS Choral offers a space for singers to explore classical and contemporary choral works together every Thursday evening. For those who prefer a more informal musical setting, CAMPS



Connect includes our Community Choir and Just Jammin' sessions, where participants can sing, play instruments and connect in a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere. We also champion instrumental learning through EduCAMPS, which delivers one-to-one and group tuition in piano, vocals, and music theory, and is now expanding into drum kit, guitar, and bass. Meanwhile, our CAMPS Band brings together experienced musicians each week to play songs spanning the decades—reaffirming our commitment to lifelong learning and participation in the arts.

Everything CAMPS offers is underpinned by our four core values: Achievement, resilience, togetherness and self-expression. These values guide us as we create a true sense of family and belonging—not just in our programmes, but across our entire community.

None of this growth would be possible without the support of our generous funders, including The National Lottery Community Fund, The Robertson Trust and CVO East Ayrshire. With a dedicated Creative Director and two part-time Youth Arts Coordinators now on board, our passionate team of tutors and staff continue to bring our vision to life.

As we look ahead, CAMPS is excited to embrace the next 25 years of creative opportunity. We remain committed to serving the Cumnock and Doon Valley community through inclusive, inspiring, and high-quality arts programming.

Thank you to NODA for supporting CAMPS and for allowing us to share our journey on this very special anniversary year.

**Dale Parker**  
Creative Director



# NODApics

A few of our members' submissions to our Instagram page.





The Mel Brooks Musical

**THE PRODUCERS**

30 Aug 2025 – 21 Feb 2026

Garrick Theatre



The first major London revival of Mel Brooks' hilarious musical *THE PRODUCERS* transfers to the Garrick Theatre this Autumn following a smash-hit ★★★★★ sold-out run at the Menier Chocolate Factory.

Based on the classic cult film and teeming with Mel Brooks' signature humour, *THE PRODUCERS* takes no prisoners as it proudly proclaims itself an "equal opportunity offender!".

Down-on-his-luck Broadway producer, Max Bialystock, schemes with timid accountant, Leo Bloom, to create the biggest flop in theatre history – only to have it backfire spectacularly and with thunderous applause.

Patrick Marber directs a critically acclaimed cast, including Andy Nyman, Marc Antolin, Trevor Ashley, Raj Ghatak, Harry Morrison and Joanna Woodward.



★★★★★

*"Funnier than ever. See it and weep, mostly with laughter."*

Daily Express

★★★★★

*"A blast of a show! Irresistible, absurd and joyful."*

The Guardian



★★★★★

*"The jokes are rapid, the satire outrageous. How could it possibly fail?"*

The Independent

★★★★★

*"Come for the great gags and music, stay for the hotpants and giant spangled bratwurst."*

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NODA East

## This 'curious' role

# The hottest young male lead part of the moment for amateur actors



Kings Lynn Players - Logan Petterson-Cooper

For male actors, the dream dramatic role is often Hamlet, the brutal Stanley Kowalski in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* or perhaps the manipulative salesman Ricky Roma in David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

But a multi-faceted challenge for a young male actor has emerged recently in the form of troubled teenager Christopher Boone in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, a play first performed on the professional stage in 2012. Adapted by Simon Stephens from Mark Haddon's popular and much lauded book, the drama was released for amateur performance in 2023. Since then, community groups throughout the UK have eagerly jumped on the opportunity

to stage it with a number of productions having been staged in NODA East region and beyond over the last year.

The role of 15-year-old Christopher is complex. He is a maths genius and is highly intelligent. His family is broken. He may or may not be neurodivergent – neither the book nor the play puts a specific identity to his condition, but he shares characteristics such as not being able to connect with people through direct eye contact, difficulty with social interactions, sensory sensitivity, rigidity and resistance to change that are often associated with autism. And he has set himself the task of finding out who murdered his neighbour's poodle with a garden fork and why the

dog was killed. The play's action follows Christopher through growth and development as he gets to grips with his family situation, travels by himself from his home in Swindon to London and experiences more of life than he might have otherwise.

The actors who are lucky enough to win this role, in their community productions, say they go on significant life journeys of their own. Phil Chapman played Christopher in Haslingfield (Cambridgeshire) Little Theatre's staging in March this year, and he said that he gained "more understanding of myself" as a result. "I have OCD [obsessive-compulsive disorder, a mental health condition characterised by obsessions and compulsions that can be time consuming and cause distress or interfere with daily life], a generalised anxiety disorder, and I've always considered it a problem, something that was really wrong. But when I sort of thought about it, it is just the way I am and actually, I live my life as me rather than seeing it as something else.

What I took away from it was being able to conceive people as they are, rather than as people with a condition or disability," he said. "I like to think that when people watch the play, at the beginning, they see Christopher as having some sort of neurodevelopmental condition, and by the end, they see him as a person who can do things. This is their character, this is who they are. It's not some kind of weird force making people do the

*things they do."*

Chapman is an outlier when it came to playing this particular role; the University of Cambridge fundraiser is actually 30, in contrast to Christopher's 15. However, he said he *"absolutely could not"* have successfully played the part at the younger age. He laughed, saying, *"When I was 15, I didn't have OCD; it's something I developed later in life. I was very overconfident and quite cocky, and I think I probably would have approached it in a less mindful way!"*

Haslingfield's audiences responded warmly to the production. Chapman said two reactions touched him most: one woman approached him, took his face in her hands and then gave him a hug, *"which was really nice,"* he said. Another woman had been affected so emotionally that she could not speak when she first encountered Chapman and *"just stood there for a long time; she couldn't get her words out. Then she just said so quietly, 'Thank you.'"*

The King's Lynn Players in Norfolk faced a major upset early on in their production when the director who had been entrusted with bringing the play to the stage fell ill. To the rescue came Sarah Krill, who had been cast in the show originally but then took on the directorship. Krill and KLPs' Christopher, Logan Petterson-Cooper, had the *"sort of 'autistic discussion',"* she said, *"and I did think about getting somebody in to talk about it, and then I thought, no, that was not what this play was about. I think it should be about how Christopher, as a teenager, deals with things that everyday teenagers deal with. We didn't dwell on it (the question of whether Christopher was autistic). We were aware it was there, but we didn't make it foremost in our thoughts."*

One of the thorniest parts of the script is at the very end, when Christopher takes the audience

through his *"favourite equation"*, an algebraic computation that in the context of the play has helped him achieve a top score in his A level exam. Petterson-Cooper, who's 17, was able to master behavioural aspects of his character more easily than embedding the maths knowledge in his memory, he said. *"It's funny; I've never been the greatest at maths. But it was just being consistent. Like I would just be random places, like on the tube, just reciting maths. People probably thought I was a bit weird. Honestly, it was just repeat, repeat, repeat."*

*If you don't put in the work,"* he continued, *"you won't get it, but I just every day was constantly look at that script. It became a part of my day-to-day life."*

Christopher's math prowess, he acknowledged, was less relatable to him than other aspects of the character. But Christopher's triumph of ultimate achievement when he earns a top maths score was highly relatable, Petterson-Cooper said. *"It's that time for Christopher, where he's finally seeing his triumph. He's getting this realisation that if he can do this, he can do that, and he can live that life he wants - a very good life."* And in performance, Petterson-Cooper said, *"I think*

*the audience felt that as well. You get that feeling, I definitely think, the audience felt that power."*

Once the show was over, Petterson-Cooper said, he had to *"rebuild"* some of his own personal traits after working hard to take on some of Christopher's, such as *"to not look at people in the eye, to keep my head a certain way, to show my hands in a certain way"*. At the same time, in some scenes, he found he was able to drift from the conversation around him because *"he's so happy in his own mind, thinking about space and his pet rat and math, and he's so comfortable in himself, in his head, that he can stay there no matter where he is. That's his escape mechanism when he's struggling."*

But as deeply immersive as the role of Christopher is, both Chapman and Petterson-Cooper – as their counterparts across the UK will likely have done – have put the troubled hero back in his box for now and gone on to their next projects. For Chapman, it's a directing project at Haslingfield. For Petterson-Cooper, it's a role in KLPs' upcoming production of *Titanic*.

DeeDee Doke  
NODA East Regional Editor



Kings Lynn Players. Scenes are short, sets are minimalist and characters are many in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

NODA West Midlands

## A nearly 40 year run

# Will this be their last outing of *Cox and Box*?



The cast for the GWOS production of *Princess Ida* in 1986, included Jane Dodd as the Lady Psyche and Mike Faulkner as Prince Hilarion. Each of them introduced a friend to the society: Jane's sister, Judi, who was cast as Melissa, and Mike's friend Ian Walton, cast as Florian. Just as Melissa and Florian fall in love in the show, so life imitated art and Judi and Ian were soon married.

As the show approached, the usual issue arose of the nature of the entertainment at the after-show party. The problem was solved when Mike, Ian and Paul Thompson offered to perform *Cox and Box* at the party. At that time, the society's home was the Village Hall at Holt Heath, and those who remember it will find it hard to believe that the tiny stage there could have accommodated three men and the various props – bed, fireplace, window, hatstand, table and chairs – which the show requires.

Although this performance was intended to be a one-off, we were soon persuaded to enter the next Worcestershire Festival of One-Act Plays. Although we didn't win,

we brought back one trophy.

The show's next outing was at the Swan Theatre, Worcester, as part of a GWOS double bill with *The Sorcerer*. To attempt some measure of professionalism, we invited Judi Walton to direct the show, which she did in a discreet and efficient fashion, to the great benefit of our performances.

The disadvantage of the Worcestershire Festival, which is the first round of a national competition, is that one cannot enter again within five years. Until the pandemic, we made sure to enter every five years and won this first round several times.

In the meantime, we responded to invitations to perform elsewhere, including at the Norbury Theatre in Droitwich, at Tanworth-in-Arden and at the Buxton International Gilbert and Sullivan Festival, where we gave the show three times: in one year at the Festival Club at the end of the evening, the next year in the small Paxton Theatre and finally in the Opera House itself, with a full orchestra, conducted by James Newby.

This, and the Swan Theatre production mentioned previously, are the only times we have performed with an orchestra. Our piano accompanist has most often been Joy Reeve who has been wonderfully generous with her time and skill at a wide variety of venues.

We entered the Worcestershire Festival, as usual, in 2015. In this first round, we swept the board bringing home five trophies. The next round, in Ledbury, was less successful: we felt the adjudicatrix wasn't expecting a musical show and probably felt herself underqualified to judge it. However, the adjudicator who had given us the palm in the first round pulled strings and we were invited to perform at the "All-Winners Festival", of whose existence we hadn't known: it is for shows which have won their first rounds but have then been knocked out. This took place at Woking, the furthest we had ever travelled. We received a glowing written report and the Audience Appreciation prize, which we felt was worth more than any other prize.

The pandemic and illness in the cast imposed a temporary pause on our activities, but we returned to give two performances for Opera Worcester at the Coach House Theatre in Malvern in June 2025. Since the average age of the cast is now seventy-seven, we suspect no-one will want to see it again – we are content with a run of nearly forty years.

**Paul Thompson**

NODA South East

## Reimagining the classics

### Why it matters



One of the great joys of amateur theatre is the freedom to experiment—to take well-known stories and explore them in new ways. This year, the Compton Players did just that with our festival production of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Rather than retelling the story as a straightforward period piece, we reimagined it with a fresh setting and stripped-back staging, asking what does this story mean now, and why do we still tell it?

Reimagining a classic isn't about fixing what's broken—it's about uncovering new layers of meaning. Stevenson's novella may be rooted in Victorian anxieties about science, duality, and moral restraint, but the themes are strikingly relevant today. Our adaptation brought the story into a 1970's urban setting—an era of upheaval, disillusionment and shifting

identities—which offered a compelling backdrop to explore Jekyll's internal conflict.

Why do we reimagine? Because these stories endure not just for what they say, but for how they can speak to each generation. A new context allows us to draw out resonances that may not have been visible before. In *Jekyll and Hyde*, we were particularly interested in the tension between public persona and private self—how much of our identity is constructed, and what happens when the mask slips? These questions feel as urgent now as they did in Stevenson's time, perhaps more so.

There's also a practical reason: reimagining allows us to create theatre that is manageable, focused and engaging for modern audiences. A brisk one-act structure, stylised ensemble narration and a minimalist set

allowed us to keep the pace tight while maintaining emotional impact. By cutting away excess, we distilled the story to its psychological essence.

But most importantly, reimagining the classics lets us make them our own. As performers, directors, and designers, we aren't simply replicating someone else's vision, we are engaging in a living conversation with the past. Every choice we make breathes new life into the material.

I believe the classics deserve this kind of creative attention. They're not museum pieces—they're springboards. Our *Jekyll and Hyde* was just one example of how a familiar tale can still surprise, provoke and move us. And I'm already thinking about what story we might reimagine next.

**Pete Watts**



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NODA North

# Drama Geeks shine

## With BBC Spotlight and regional recognition



It all began with a spark of creativity and passion at NODA North’s youth performing arts group, Drama Geeks, as they prepared for their latest production of *Legally Blonde*. With a talented cast aged 11 to 17, the group—led by Principal Charlotte Reid—has been making waves in the local arts scene.

To nurture young talent even further, Drama Geeks launched a new initiative: the Drama Geeks Associates’ Class. This audition-only program is designed for children who aspire to a career in the performing arts. With professional teachers and a cohort of equally passionate peers, these young performers are thriving—honing their craft in a supportive, high-energy environment.

The production features a small, focused cast, giving each performer the chance to truly inhabit their roles across four performances. This immersive experience allows them to grow as actors and deepen their understanding of character development.

Charlotte Reid shared how the buzz began:

*“I contacted the Gazette about an article and they put it out across all the North East papers. I think having Dolly, the chihuahua, in the show helped with this—as they do a weekly article about an animal and it made the front page!”*

The story didn’t stop there. The article caught the attention of the local BBC, who reached out directly. Soon after, a film crew arrived at the Westovian’s

Pier Pavilion Theatre to capture interviews with Charlotte, the cast, and their parents. The segment aired the next evening on BBC Look North, bringing even more attention to the group’s hard work and talent.

The final performance will be attended by a regional representative and councillor, a testament to the growing recognition of Drama Geeks’ impact. With such priceless publicity and a dedicated team behind them, the future looks bright for these rising stars.



NODA North East

## Our youth event by the sea

### Getting a taste of a gala weekend

At NODA North East Gala Weekend in Bridlington in April, young people from around the region were invited to spend the day with us and experience some of what Gala Weekend has to offer.

There were 24 young people in attendance this year with participants having travelled from as far away as Wakefield and Skipton. Those attending had the opportunity to join workshops with other weekend participants including dance, stage combat and puppetry, along with bespoke sessions of drama and singing. Having the chance to work with experienced tutors is one of the benefits of hosting the Youth Event at Bridlington. Another is that the young people get to spend the day by the sea in the fabulous venue of The Spa. In the evening participants were able to stay and watch *By George – The Chip Shop Musical* by Woodhouse MTC having met some of the cast and crew during the day – as well as getting a close-up look at the set when they were invited on stage. They also had time to have a chat with Richard Sykes who had written the musical as well as taking a lead role.

It was a sunny day in Bridlington, so some young people spent their free time playing games on the beach and ensuring that they sampled the finest fish and chips and ice creams. Based on the feedback, the young people had a great day and are looking forward to coming again.

Now in its ninth year, the youth event is a great way to integrate youth into an adult event which is attended by nearly 700 members



from NODA North East. Adult participants can talk with the young people and learn what is available for youth and younger members can ask questions about NODA. They get the chance to meet the NODA National President, hear about long service awards as well as being updated on the Summer School offer by Sarah Osborne, Director of NODA Summer School. Graham and Ann Liverton spent their lunch time with the youth delegates and took the time to ask about their amateur theatre experiences as well as what they had enjoyed about the day.

It is also hoped that some participants will come back as adults and enjoy the full weekend.

**Jo Sykes**  
Youth Co-ordinator  
NODA North East





NODA South West

# A rewarding year in the South West

## Our biggest ever awards evening

2025's South West awards saw a new councillor, a new venue (to meet demand), a new organising committee and a new ticketing system - what could possibly go wrong?

In fact, very little! Over 425 people attended – a record number for the region and were treated to an excellent evening celebrating all that is good about amateur theatre in the South West! The new venue was Sandy Park, Exeter – home of the Rugby Premiership's Exeter Chiefs and they looked after the proceedings very well – nothing was too much trouble and the meal for so many people was excellent. A balloon sculpted photo area added to the effects, with multiple TV screens to ensure everyone could keep up with proceedings all the way through.

Events were hosted by new Regional Councillor, Matthew Heaton, with National President Graham Liverton and Past President, Nick Lawrence as guests of honour.

With 117 nominated groups, 54 awards were presented to winners from right across the region, in a lovely relaxed atmosphere of celebration which emphasised the success and recognition in receiving a nomination, just as much as an award.

An excellent evening was had by all. We'll be sending out a survey to see what people enjoyed about the event, and the evening, to see what we need to do to keep the awards process fun and fresh!

Matthew Heaton



NODA North West

## ... the hardest and most beautiful thing I have ever been a part of

### Songs for Southport



Question... what do you think when you hear... **Special Achievement Award?**

Personally I've always thought about 'longevity' ... in this case, people who have served and been involved in amateur theatre forever! People like our 2024 winner, Annie Dickinson, or Mary Forbes who won a couple of years ago, legends here in NODA North West District 6.

But this year, I hadn't received any nominations from my societies for this award, so, I decided to go completely against tradition and 'focus on what it said on the tin' ... 'SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD'!

But, when I thought about 'what I was thinking'... I really wasn't sure if I should or if I wanted to take us all back to the incident that not only rocked Southport, but the country as a whole!

This incident, and the loss of those 'three young angels' had sent shock waves across the nation,

but it was in Southport where it had been felt the most.

Out of that tragedy there came hope in many forms, but one particular occurrence, and one particular event, said so much and gave so much hope to others and affected me and many others in a really 'positive way'.

Southport Dramatic Club Youth Section were due to stage their summer musical at Southport Little Theatre just a few weeks after the incident. As a group of young people, they approached the production team and their society to advise them, that they didn't want to carry and stage their musical, it just didn't feel appropriate. However, those same young actors, showing great maturity and compassion, said they didn't want to waste an opportunity to 'ACHIEVE' something meaningful for the suffering people of Southport. Their aim - to forge a bond strong to help and support this broken, fragile community that had

been unexpectedly plunged into darkness.

From that meaningful aim, the concert *Songs For Southport* was born! In just three weeks, this young group of actors, supported by their directors, mds, choreographers, old cast members, chaperones, stage crew and their band met and created a genuinely meaningful and emotional concert that touched the hearts of so many, including mine!

I was invited to attend the concert, the atmosphere was different, as you can imagine pre show. I was told that I didn't need to produce a show report, but after the show I felt it a necessity. Things needed to be said about these amazingly talented, compassionate and considerate young people and their aims and outcomes! I didn't get chance to speak with them after the show, but I was able to visit the pit where I found the MD and some of his musicians in floods of tears - it

was that kind of evening!

When it came to write my show report, I got really stuck on how to end it meaningfully, that was until I came across a social media post from a cast member, which was perfect for what I wanted to say. I made contact with the 18 year old author and asked permission to use it, which she granted and which I'd like to share her wonderful words with you now...

*"This has been the hardest and most beautiful thing I have ever been a part of, and I could not be prouder of the cast and production team for setting aside something already so special,*

*and crafting something so different, with the same tenacity, thought and love, in only three weeks.*

*I said at the time, I would be so proud to be a part of something, however small, that gives people the ability to find a glimmer of light of what seems like eternal darkness and I feel like for what it's worth, we have absolutely achieved this.*

*At times like this, you have to find solace and hope in what you love and we have to push forwards as a community, in solidarity, that fiercely sings out: our voices will not be silenced.*

*Do not let actions full of hate stop actions full of love.*

*Sing louder, dance harder and shine brighter.*

*I could not have asked for a better cast. The compassion, intelligence and connection between everyone formed in such a short space of time was truly incredible.*

*Thank you all for trusting the process and sticking at it.*

*I will cherish this week forever."*

**Emily Bloom**  
18 years



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NODA North

## A legacy of love and dance

### Sue Abraham honoured

It is always a great honour and privilege for NODA Regional Representatives to present long service awards to our members. These awards reflect the dedication, passion and countless hours our members contribute to the wonderful hobby we all know and love—whether on stage or behind the scenes.

This year, a particularly special moment unfolded when Helen Abraham, Regional Representative for District 4, had the unique honour of presenting a 45-year long service award to her own mam, Sue Abraham, during Sunderland Theatre Company's May 2025 production of *Sister Act*. Sue's journey in the performing arts began as a dancer, training under the esteemed Gloria Daglish at Murton School of Dance in County Durham. Her talent and dedication led her to qualify as a dance teacher with the NCDTA. Over the years, Sue danced in numerous productions including *The Desert Song*, *Carousel* and was often praised as a beautiful "dream Laurie" in *Oklahoma*. She later succeeded Gloria as choreographer for several local groups, including Murton Theatre Group, where she remained a devoted member for over 40 years.

Sue's contributions extended far beyond choreography. She built scenery, served as treasurer, fundraised tirelessly, and supported every aspect of production. Most recently, she joined Sunderland Theatre Company, where she was warmly welcomed and affectionately dubbed the "top tea lady." In her 45th year, she returned to the stage in *Sister Act*, delighting audiences once again.



Helen, who followed in her mother's footsteps, began dancing in Sue's classes and later pursued her own path in directing and choreography. Now a NODA Regional Representative, Helen had the heartfelt privilege of honouring her mam's legacy in front of a community that has become like family.

The response to Helen's tribute on social media was overwhelming, with many sharing fond memories and kind words:

*"I remember Sue teaching me Will Parker's tap dance to Kansas City in her kitchen when I was fourteen. She is a true legend."*

*"Your mam was fabulous on*

*stage this afternoon! You can see she is a dancer... those lines."*

*"Love it, that's an amazing achievement."*

*"I always loved her as my teacher at dancing class—lovely dancer and lovely person."*

This celebration of Sue Abraham's 45 years in theatre is not just a recognition of time served, but a testament to the joy, inspiration and community she has fostered. A truly lovely memory and achievement for both Sue and Helen.

**Helen Abraham**  
NODA North

NODA Scotland

## Natasha's story

...just being on stage in general is my chance to escape my sight problem and be 'normal'



I am Natasha McNaughton. I am blind and have been for almost 3 years.

I joined OPUS in April 2024, for the *White Christmas* production. We rehearsed and performed on the stage at Brechin City Hall.

I went along to the first meeting after my mum told me about the society and the upcoming production. I went to get a better understanding of the show, I wanted to get a feel for the show as an audience member by listening to the society members read through the script allowing me to have the opportunity to hear the plot and the character descriptions. I also thought about potentially becoming a chorus member in the society as drama and musicals are a passion of mine.

After the read through, I asked Gordon and Liz if I could audition for the part of Susan Waverly, as I had absolutely fallen in love with the character. I had not expected to be lucky enough to get the part of Susan, I had wanted the part but was also grateful for the experience of auditioning. I was delighted when Gordon and Liz called to let me know I had been successful in my audition and was so happy to be playing Susan.

I remember walking into the hall and I was so nervous as I had never had a part this big before, I was worried I shouldn't be there. However, my show family made me so welcome. They congratulated me and put me at ease. The first challenge was thinking how am I going to navigate the stage? How will I

manage the stage entrances and exits without bumping into anything or anyone? I was very well supported by the cast, crew and production team during rehearsals and the show. Gordon and Liz helped me overcome the stage entrance and exits by keeping them to one place for each entrance and exit which I had to do independently to ensure I felt confident going on stage and coming off. We were also able to rehearse on the stage which allowed me to become more familiar and confident with the environment.

My fellow cast members were also accommodating by telling me initially where they would be during the scenes we were in together. This allowed me to listen for their voices so I would know the direction to look in when they were talking and react accordingly. I was able to use memory, my ORCam (a wearable device that speaks text to me and recognises some individuals and objects) and other cast members for learning dialogue.

This was a very enjoyable experience with the cast being fed lines and then figuring out how to bring the line to life through acting. All the challenges that I faced were made possible and fun, although there were a few wobbles, especially with tap dancing. However, it all worked out, as I was surrounded by my loving and supportive show family.

I received a lot of great advice about listening to certain beats

NODA West Midlands

## From Kidderminster Youth to the West End



in the music from Gordon. This helped me to have the confidence when singing but also to be able to apply a specific dance move at a specific time when there wasn't a lyric I could listen for.

Liz worked with me individually to help with the choreography, taking the time to help me understand the moves that were needed and using creative ways like letting me feel her feet so I could understand how my feet should move. It is difficult being severely sight impaired (blind) in a theatre setting. Memorising lines, where I should be, what objects are on stage with me etc all at once is tiring, but the theatre and the stage is my happy place. The best part of being severely sight impaired (blind) on stage is not being able to see the audience. Apart from the occasional audience participation of laughing or applause it is like they aren't there which makes the experience less nerve-wracking for me.

I perform on stage and enjoy it because I get a sense of reality and I get to experience being 'normal'. Susan has no need of a cane to navigate in day to day life, and she has no sight issues to contend with, being Susan or just being on stage in general is my chance to escape my sight problem and be 'normal'.

Daniel Richards (stage name is Daniel. J. Brian) was a shy boy at nursery and pre-school, not wanting to be in any little plays or nativities (although he would dance to the adverts on the television). However, he did eventually join his sister at his aunt's dance school, The Wendy School of Dance, every Saturday morning. He picked up the dance routines like a natural and stood out at the annual Christmas dance shows.

Moving on a couple of years, a friend of his parents, who runs a successful dance school in the Kidderminster area, asked if he would like to play Michael in her production of *Peter Pan* at a local theatre. He enjoyed performing with the group and so joined the group which was called Splinters Dance School. Here he studied ballet, tap and modern dance and was soon entering competitions and coming home with cups and trophies.

At the age of 15, Daniel was hand picked to play his first professional role as Robbie in *Robbie Rocket*, a new musical. He performed a song and dance

routine to 'Why God?' from *Miss Saigon* and came second. A fantastic achievement!

When he finished his two year 6th form studies at Birmingham Ormiston Academy, he auditioned for the Musical Theatre Degree at the Guildford School of Acting. He was offered a place which was accepted.

Daniel finished with a First Class Honours Degree. In December he was asked to play Jack in a production of *Jack and the Beanstalk* at Ludlow Assembly Rooms. He thoroughly enjoyed his first experience of 'pantoland.' (Oh yes he did!)

Since signing with an agent in 2023, he has appeared in various West End shows, *Mamma Mia* (cover for Sky) and *Les Misérables* (cover and playing the part of Marius). When he finishes his run in *Les Misérables*, his next job will be first cover for the part of Chris in the UK tour of *Miss Saigon* starting in Manchester in October 2025.

We wish Daniel all the best for the future.

# Have you heard about NODA individual membership?

For just £36 a year (or £45 for a joint membership), you can be part of something truly special!

Join our **Theatrical Services Directory** and connect with a vibrant community whether you're working, volunteering, studying in the theatre world, or simply passionate about supporting amateur theatre. From directors to chaperones, musical directors to lighting engineers, everyone is welcome here! Let's come together to connect, create and champion our fantastic industry!

As a member, you'll also receive: three copies of **NODA Today** per year delivered right to your door; access to the amazing **NODA Theatre Summer School**; plus you'll have **voting rights** at your regional AGM and the national AGM! Don't miss out on this incredible opportunity—simply visit our website to sign up!

Already an individual member? - Log into the NODA website and add your details to the Theatrical Services Directory!

**Visit our website for more information - [www.noda.org.uk](http://www.noda.org.uk)**



Scan the QR code  
to find out more  
about our individual  
memberships

# NODA

For every stage

Proud supporter of the  
National Drama Festivals Association



## Addressing issues at the highest level



Those of you with long memories may remember that I was Chief Executive of NODA from 2000 to 2007. Since then, I spent 15 years as Chief Executive of the Association of British Orchestras, and for the past three years have been a freelance consultant, advising a range of performing arts organisations.

I never forgot my happy years at NODA, so was delighted when Dale asked me to come on board as NODA's Policy & Public Affairs Adviser. It is a role Dale and I have put together to help NODA monitor and engage with what is happening in Westminster and in the devolved governments, in order to help raise the profile of NODA and its members with key decision-makers.

So what are the main issues of the moment? Well, the Spending Review just announced is a good place to start. Was there anything there that will help amateur theatre groups? In short, no.

The main headline was that the Department of Culture, Media and Sport was one of only five government departments that will actually face real terms cuts in day-to-day spending over the next four years. That is likely to mean that Arts Council England, which funds some of the venues NODA members perform in, will see its grant from the Treasury frozen for at least the next 3 years, while also being expected to find

efficiency savings. This freeze will in turn roll on to the organisations that the Arts Council funds through its National Portfolio.

It is important to note that the amount of Treasury funding that Arts Council England receives to distribute to National Portfolio Organisations is the same in this funding round as it was in 2008–2011, which in real terms is a 40% devaluation once inflation is taken into account.

The impact on performing arts organisations has at least been partially offset by the implementation of Theatre Tax Relief and, confirmation in last year's Budget, that this would be raised permanently to 40% of qualifying costs was welcome news. It is important that NODA members maximise their claims for Theatre Tax Relief, and the NODA office is a useful source of advice with access to specialist help.

But of even more importance to NODA members is what is happening with local authorities. Here, the impact of funding cuts has been even more pronounced, with a real terms cut of nearly 50% since 2010. The Spending Review showed a very modest annual growth of just 1.1%, suggesting a continued squeeze on what local authorities can spend on discretionary areas such as leisure and entertainment.

This matters to NODA members because they often rely on access to local authority venues for rehearsals and performances. The information Dale has shared with me has been shocking, with members reporting significant increases in hire costs, or full-scale closure of the venues that have traditionally relied on.

So why is this is happening?

Because alongside the steep cuts in central government funding, local authorities have been restricted in how much they can increase Council Tax. Meanwhile, they have seen huge increases in the costs of fulfilling their statutory responsibility to provide children's services and adult social care, which now takes up 70% of local authority expenditure. Something that the government's decision to increase both the National Minimum Wage and Employer's National Insurance has made worse.

So it is not surprising that hard-pressed local authorities have been seeking to make cuts in other areas of spending: Leisure and entertainment has been an obvious casualty.

Is it any better in the devolved nations? Sadly not. Cuts to culture and local government are just as deep in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In light of the gloomy state of the nation, NODA will be ensuring it forges strong connections with key stakeholders and other theatre organisations, to help ensure that the value that local amateur groups bring to their local communities and to the national arts ecology is recognised.

Do make sure you keep NODA informed about what is happening in your area, and also keep in close touch with your local MP and councillors and invite them to shows. If your local MP is particularly enthusiastic about amateur theatre, do let us know so we can follow up and maximise their influence.

**Mark Pemberton OBE**  
NODA Policy & Public Affairs  
Adviser



NODA East

## Under the 'clean' sea

# Theatrical magic waves its wand over clean ocean issues for Suffolk high school

The magic of theatre can highlight critical earthbound issues that need our communities' attention to applying practical solutions. Sometimes the magic is palpable, and it can work wonders in the hands of the right 'magicians'.

Such magic was evident in Farlingaye High School's 2024 production of Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, the beloved Alan Menken/Howard Ashman/Glenn Slater musical, which not only entertained its audience to a stunning theatrical standard but also deftly, imaginatively and gently raised their community's awareness of care for the ocean through their subliminal focus on environmental responsibility.

Plus, it brought together much of the high school community, a key element in the school educators' approach to the creative arts at Farlingaye.

*"We try and look at not just offering these arts opportunities as arts opportunities for our students but to make it part of their wider learning as well,"* explains Pippa Parks, Head of Drama at the Suffolk High School. *"We like our productions to be not just extracurricular but try and link them to what's going on in the world. So for 'Little Mermaid,' we collaborated with our Green Council, who are really active within our school. They do all of our recycling. They do litter picks. They promote reusable plastic,*

*so we don't sell plastic water bottles in our school anymore. All students can buy a Green Council water bottle, which we encourage. They're really active students within our school."*

The environmental theme was then carried out through the art department's creation of props and scenic design, from crafting 'coral' for the sea reefs in the story from single-use plastic bottles and cups *"and all things that had been thrown away,"* Parks says, *"not only to make effective scenery and set, but to also reinforce our message of how much plastic is dumped into our oceans."* The shells of beautiful turtle puppets were created out of the bottoms of plastic bottles

and then filled with single-use plastic wrappers, “and things that just get binned and not recycled,” Parks says. “We collected them in the school and put that into our production to show you how this stuff could go into our ocean, and we don’t want it to. Look at how beautiful our oceans and wildlife are.

Not only was it cost effective, but it also meant we were giving an important message to our students. And it was a whole school production; everyone was donating the recycling and then our students produced [the props and set] making them alongside our amazing art department.”

Even the show’s costumes were created with the environment firmly in mind. Often, Farlingaye borrows costumes from neighbouring community theatre companies as well as making or reusing garments from previous school productions. For *The Little Mermaid*, a former Farlingaye student, who has gone on to study costume for theatre and screen at University of the Arts London at Wimbledon, came back to design and create costuming for “our vision of promoting cleaner oceans”, Parks says. The student, Milly Brooke, designed evil Ursula’s attire completely from black bin bags. Her tentacles were created from Styrofoam swimming pool ‘noodles’ that had been destined for landfill from a local swimming pool. “She even used a sewing machine to make a corset out of bin bags!” Parks says.

“That was really incredible, it helped her with her course and reinforced our message as well,” Parks says.

For Milly Brooke, the show “was my first experience really working on a production and collaborating with actors and directors. I was challenged in attempting to create an octopus-skin effect on the entire piece. I started looking into plastic and how I could source and manipulate it to



From turtle puppets to costumes made with bin bags, the production endorsed responsible environmental and upcycling practices.



create the image we wanted.

The size of the costume was also a big factor to consider, trying to create something more like a sculpture than just a costume,” Brooke explains. “Overall, the project really gave me a new way of looking at costume-making and sewing, and that it can be a very sustainable and affordable art when thought about in a certain way.”

The production won multiple awards, including the pinnacle honour of the Councillor’s Cup, at the 2025 NODA East Awards. Farlingaye has also been recognised locally for its environmental achievements, with the school’s Green Council coordinator, Dr Tim Harrison, pleased about the “cross-cultural” opportunities provided to the school to help all “tie into the wider narrative, such as recycling”

and support engagement with improving the environment and the natural world. Linking *The Little Mermaid* with the school’s annual One Planet Week delivered a clear opportunity to emphasise “circular creations” and cement “this idea of upcycling,” Harrison said.

For Parks, the NODA East recognition came as a major surprise and entirely unexpected in this, its first year of membership. She says, “I think it’s really lovely for our students to see that their hard work is recognised, their talent is recognised – but it’s also a privilege and an opportunity and an experience to be part of the arts at this school.” Perhaps an example of the magic that theatre can deliver...

DeeDee Doke  
NODA East Regional Editor



## Presidential travels with the chain

### The NODA National President continues his journey round the UK

Since becoming president last September, the year is passing swiftly. Together with my wife Ann, we have travelled extensively throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, becoming very familiar with the motorways. I owe particular gratitude to Ann, who has driven me over 30,000 miles so far! Although I am able to drive, I must admit that I have a distinct dislike for motorway driving.

We have had the joy of attending 157 shows so far, with more yet to come. Witnessing the wonderful productions you have created has been an absolute delight, as each performance brings so much pleasure to its audience.

Every journey has brought new insights into the vibrant communities and passionate individuals sustaining the performing arts. From busy cities to quiet country towns, the spirit and dedication of each group are evident, making every mile travelled worthwhile. Along the way, I have met many remarkable volunteers and supporters whose

commitment ensures that each production not only entertains but also enriches the cultural tapestry of their localities.

This year, my presidency has coincided with the production of *Let the People Sing: Les Misérables* and the celebration of forty years of *Les Misérables*. Thanks to Cameron MacIntosh, eleven areas within the UK have had the opportunity to perform the adult version for amateur theatre. I have had the great pleasure of seeing these productions in Leeds, Cornwall, and Birmingham, and look forward to experiencing it in Bristol. Each performance has been truly awe-inspiring.

As the year progresses, I look forward to the many productions yet to come and the new talents sure to emerge. The landscape of amateur theatre is ever evolving, with every region offering its own unique interpretation and flair. It is inspiring to see experienced members working alongside

fresh faces, all united by a shared passion for the stage. It has also been wonderful to attend your regions' awards celebrations and weekends and to meet so many of you!

As we approach the latter part of the year, I encourage everyone to embrace creativity and collaboration. Let us continue to support one another, celebrate achievements, both big and small, and nurture the next generation of performers, directors and backstage contributors. The legacy of our art form rests not only in the spotlight, but in the collective efforts that bring each production to life.

Thank you for your kindness, hospitality and relentless enthusiasm. Together, we are not only upholding tradition but also building the future of amateur theatre across our nations.

**Graham K. Liverton**  
National President



Sutton Coldfield Musical Youth Theatre – *Everybody's Talking About Jamie*



Trinity Players – *Guys and Dolls*



Helston Theatre Company, with Redruth AMPS, St Austell AOS and Truro AOS – *Let The People Sing: Les Misérables*



Todmorden AODS – *Night of the Living Dead*



Exmouth Players- *Home, I'm Darling!*



The Bradfordians – *Shakespeare In Love*



CDDG Karnon Kidz Cornwall – *Frozen Jr*



Wales and Ireland Awards and Gala Dinner, with the Wales and Ireland Regional Committee



# Baroque'n'Roll

## A comedy drama with glorious music and very big wigs!

Baroque 'n' Roll is a romp through the larger-than-life lives – and glorious music – of three of the most celebrated composers of all time: Handel, Bach and Scarlatti, all born the same year, 1685, and who grew to become undisputed giants of baroque music.

Throughout the play we trace the lives and development of the three composers, played by the three leads – with all other parts, by and large comedy turns, played by a versatile mature women actor who is everything from an Irish waitress to a fortune teller, a scientist to a nurse, music critic to stage manager.



**All the music is available as mp3 or WAV files, already edited and covered by PRS/PPL**

*Much of the music is in the public domain and not subject to usage fees. The remainder (12.75 minutes) would be covered by a PPL licence for recorded music for professional use. Since Handel, Bach and Scarlatti are all out of copyright as composers, there is no PRS requirement. The one exception is Hey Joe by Jimi Hendrix which is in copyright and interpolated, and should therefore have PRS clearance usage of the recorded music. It would however be possible to rewrite that part of the script to avoid usage of the music itself. A full list of the music used and timings is at the end of this script.*

**Four actors (3M, 1F) Running Time: 2 hours.**  
Free downloadable perusal script from [Stagescripts.com](http://Stagescripts.com)

### Characters:

**Georg Friedrich Händel:** (30s to 70s) Rather portly, perhaps getting more portly as the play progresses. He is certainly full of himself, hardly a shrinking violet. Full costume or can simply wear black shirt and trousers with a large white Handel wig.

**Johann Sebastian Bach:** (30s to 60s). Serious compared to Handel in temperament. Black shirt and trousers with a large white wig or full costume if wanted.

**Giuseppe Domenico Scarlatti:** (30s to 70s) Black shirt and trousers with a large white wig or full costume if wanted.

**Woman:** The following parts are all played by the same woman actor: Nurse, Italian waitress, Music critic, Housekeeper, Fortune teller, Woman, Cockney waitress, Spanish woman, Stage manager, Art critic, Mrs Delaney, Irish waitress, Historian, German waitress, Nun, Scientist.

  
**derekwebb.co.uk**

*For a free downloadable perusal script, go to [Stagecripts.com](http://Stagecripts.com) and select Plays/Full Length/Comedy/A-C*

NODA Scotland

## Supporting members through training

“satisfying”, “rewarding”,  
“enjoyable”, “enriching”....

NODA Scotland built on the success of the training day held in June 2024, presenting further workshops in drama, dance and vocal music for like-minded people to help develop and enhance essential performance skills required for amateur musical theatre.

Workshops were provided by highly talented and experienced tutors from across Scotland, to lead each of the three workshops: Tri Cumming, drama; Lynne Bustard, dance and Chris Bensalem, vocal music. Tutors collaborated well and some amazing outputs were experienced from each of the workshops which were showcased at the end of the day.

Our evaluation has been very positive, from the 24 delegates who attended, indicating it had been a fabulous event working with a great bunch of people and with highly talented and experienced workshop leaders, to make the overall experience challenging and fun. Further feedback also indicated the day was well planned with final words of expression including “satisfying”, “rewarding”, “enjoyable”, “enriching” and “just great”.

In recognition of the encouraging feedback received, we hope to build on this and provide further positive experiences for our membership in the near future.



# 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.

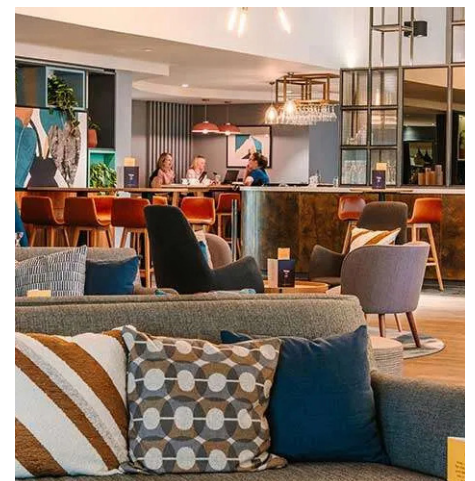
Set in a picturesque location on the edge of the beautiful South Downs National Park, the contemporary Voco Winchester Hotel & Spa offers an ideal blend

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, 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.

### what3words address

///clincher.magnets.plodded

## Prices

### Join us for the Gala Dinner

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](http://www.noda.org.uk/national-gala-2025)



NODA East Midlands

## Drama group celebrating 75 years

# All started with a pioneering group of 13 members



*Oh! What A Lovely War*

On a cold, November evening in Lutterworth, Leicestershire, in 1949, thirteen people met up with the drama adviser for Leicestershire to explore the possibility of forming a drama group in the town. This exploratory meeting met under the aegis of 'Lutterworth and District Drama Group' and such was the enthusiasm, that those present decided that a group should be established, with Wednesday being agreed as 'group night'. It had been pointed out that a drama group was formed back in 1924, but was short-lived. So, the beginning of 1950 would see the dawn of a new drama group.

A membership fee of 5 shillings was agreed and one of the enthusiasts was charged with finding a suitable play which would be staged in Spring 1950. The first play was *The Shining Hour* and the first performance

took place at the local Grammar School on 13 April 1950, with reserved seats costing 2/6d. That first production was staged under the group name 'Wiclif Drama Group' but by the second production in October that year the group name had been modified to 'Wycliffe Drama Group' (WDG). From the outset, the group rehearsed and performed in the school making the venue (now Lutterworth College) its permanent home.

The Festival of Britain was key in promoting amateur drama in Britain in the 1950s, with both full-length and one-act play competitions proving popular. WDG entered a regional competition in 1954, based in Rugby, and, much to the chagrin of its hosts, duly won the trophy. The group has never looked back since, consistently maintaining a high level of quality

in performance.

Competition success has been achieved at regular intervals by WDG with the group winning trophies for best full-length production in Leicestershire and Rutland as well as best pantomime. Needless to say, its actors and creative teams have also received individual awards along the way.

Talking of pantomime, WDG staged its first pantomime, *Aladdin*, in 1993, in response to popular demand and continues to stage its annual seasonal entertainment to sell-out audiences.

Two of WDG's most ambitious and successful ventures have been its participation in 2009 and 2011, at the international Edinburgh Fringe Festival with *Our Country's Good* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* respectively. Taking a large team of actors and crew on each occasion, the group attracted four-star reviews and high-acclaim in an environment judged against West-End standards and in competition with high-profile professional stars.

WDG has also been instrumental in staging variety concerts in aid of international, national and local charities. These include *Grand Variety Performance* (Mayor's appeal), *Concert for Haiti* (Earthquake appeal), *Best of British* (Cancer UK), *Sounds of Christmas* (Mayor's appeal) and *Concert for Lutterworth* on several occasions (Lutterworth Medical Centre and local charities). On a related theme, in 2000, WDG teamed up with

Lutterworth College and other performing groups in the town to stage *A Time and Space Oddity* which formed a major part of Lutterworth's Millennium celebrations.

WDG also continues to be a major part of Lutterworth's Christmas celebrations. Apart from the pantomime, it has staged its seasonal concert, 'Christmas Crackers', almost every year since 2000 and has taken a carol-singing team to various residential homes in Lutterworth every year since 1987.

So, with 75 years to celebrate and well over 200 shows to its credit, WDG continues to bring quality entertainment to theatregoers in Lutterworth. The group works hard to stage a wide variety of shows, maintaining the trend set by the earliest members, whether this be modern drama, the classics, comedy, farce or pantomime. The current membership gives thanks to the foresight shown by the pioneering group of 13 of the early 1950s and hope they are looking down and smiling on the legacy they gave us.

**Richard Hill**  
WDG Chair



Shining Hour

NODA North

## Too hot in the kitchen

### An unexpected kitchen twist



cake - thanks to an unexpected twist that no one could have scripted.

Midway through the second act, as the show's 'judges' Pam Lee and Phil Hollinghurst - played with uncanny resemblance by Anne Taylor and Gareth Lilley - belted out their duet 'I'd Never Be Me Without You,' the theatre's fire alarm suddenly sounded. The performance came to a halt as cast, crew and audience were swiftly evacuated.

Caprian's fire marshals handled the situation with professionalism and calm, offering a textbook example of emergency protocol. After a 20-minute pause and a thorough inspection by the fire service, the alarm was declared a false one and the show was cleared to continue.

In a moment of serendipitous timing, the next scene featured contestant Gemma - played by Lindsay Kellegher - dealing with a fictional oven fire on stage. The audience, still buzzing from the real-life interruption, erupted in laughter and applause at the uncanny coincidence. It was a moment of pure theatrical magic - art imitating life in the most unexpected way.

Caprian Theatre Company once again proved that the show must - and will - go on, even when life throws in a little extra heat.

The Caprian Theatre Company, known for championing new and exciting theatrical works, brought a slice of sweet success to the stage this May with the national amateur première of *The Great British Bake Off - The Musical*. The production, a heartwarming and humorous take on the beloved TV show, followed the dreams, dramas and doughy disasters of its fictional contestants.

The show was a hit with audiences, blending catchy tunes, heartfelt performances and a generous helping of comedy. But it was the final performance that truly took the

NODA North

## Work in the community

### Helping save lives in Newcastle



Newcastle Musical Theatre Company formed in 1897, has been a community-based musical theatre group, operating for over 75 years, and is the only amateur organisation still performing in the beautiful Theatre Royal, Newcastle Upon Tyne.

Their aim is *'...to improve the lives of the inhabitants of their area of benefit: Newcastle and surrounding areas, by performing works of opera and musical theatre'*. Another of their aims has been the donation of many thousands of pounds to local and national charities on an annual basis. Some of these have been: The Teenage Cancer Trust, National Blood Bikes, Chloe and Liam Together Forever Trust, Smiling Faces and many more.

Last year, NMTC performed *West Side Story* to packed houses, for which they were nominated for several Regional NODA Awards. Out of the profits made on the show, the Board of Directors decided that, instead of nominating several beneficiaries annually, as has been usual, they would try to 'repay' the community of Jesmond (where they rehearse twice weekly) for 'putting up with them' for over 15 years, by donating a defibrillator machine, to be sited at their rehearsal venue – the United Reformed Church in Haldane Terrace.

The idea was discussed with the church officials and in due course, following a resounding agreement, plans were put in place to research and take advice from various experts to

find the best and most effective machine for its purpose: saving lives where it matters. A Defibsafesafe 3, manufactured by WelMedical, was duly ordered in November 2024, from the British Heart Foundation.

In the meantime, the church committee had to apply to its Synod Committee for permission to site the defibrillator outside the main entrance of the church, as it is a Grade II listed building. This took some time, as much consideration had to be made: Colours of machines available, actual siting, sizes involved etc. However, some six months after the plan was put in place, we got the go ahead and Messrs Caretech Systems Ltd – Electrical Engineers, were contracted to carry out the installation.

With great help from Alison, the church secretary and Stephen, the caretaker, Liam from Caretech Systems installed the cabinet for the defibrillator on 19th May. He worked hard to drill holes for the cabling through stone walls two feet thick and coupled everything up. He finished the job and switched the unit on and nothing happened! After testing for power, including the main supply from the church, it was found the unit was just not 'powering up', therefore it must have been faulty!

Ken Allan, Company Secretary of NMTC – who had been the Project Coordinator, had then to begin the process of contacting all of the agencies involved to get to the bottom of the problem and resolve the matter at an early date.

This took some doing as Caretech

had to return to deconstruct the cabinet, it had to be repacked and returned to Ken's house to be collected and replaced with a new unit. The carrier couldn't collect and replace in one visit. The church had to be considered for reinstallation and Ian, from Caretech, had to be re-booked to carry out the work once again. Homer Simpson would have rightly said.... 'DOH!!!'.

However, this all came together in due course and the new unit, fully tested and in great working order, was formally handed over to the church and the community of Jesmond on Wednesday 25th June, at NMTC's final rehearsal, before their annual production of *Shrek The Musical*, which took place the following week. In the photograph of the hand-over ceremony, Rev Ryan Sirmons and Secretary, Alison Shiel, from the church, can be seen with NMTC President, Michael Avery, and Chairman, Pat Smith.

We all hope that the benefit delivered is successful and that this type of support will be ongoing for many years to come. Thank you NMTC – great work.

As a footnote, we were informed just recently that the machine had been used in an emergency. We pray it was successful.

NODA North West

## Academy recognised for provision on musical theatre



Droylsden Academy is a fairly new school based in Manchester, that prides itself in its dedication to the arts. They were founded in 2009, on the site of the former Droylsden School of Mathematics and Computing College for Girls. We are also proud that they are part of the NODA family here in the North West.

Earlier this year, the academy were proud to announce that they were presented with the

prestigious award of The MTI Award For Achievement In Musical Theatre Provision category at the Music and Drama Education Awards 2025.

This is the first year this award has been given, and the achievement alone just shows the dedication and contribution to all involved at the academy.



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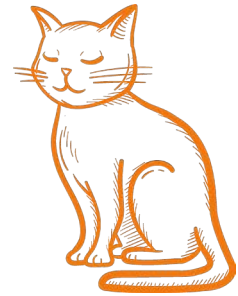
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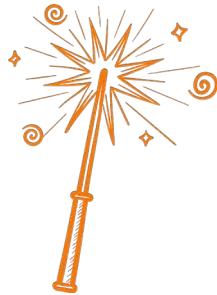
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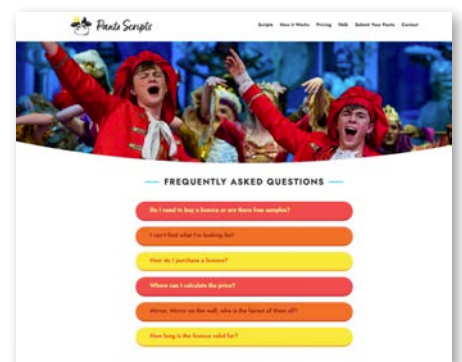
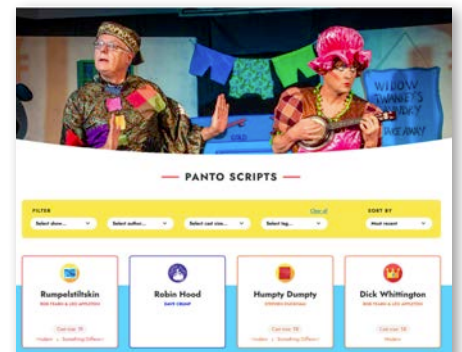
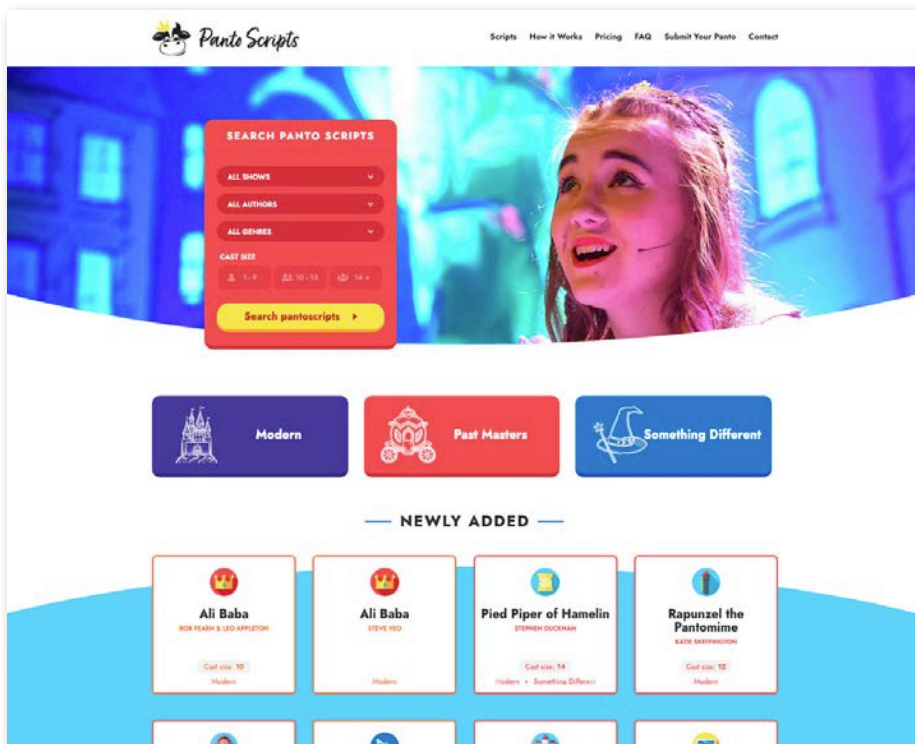


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NODA South East

## Don't let your child on the stage, Mrs Worthington

### But can they get two Mini Coopers up there instead?

I was recently reminded why I've dedicated far too much voluntary time to my hometown's community theatre scene. Not by stepping into the limelight, mind you, but by discovering my future career at 12 years old. Watching a local pantomime, I was mesmerised by a stunning black light sequence – an amateur production achieving pure theatrical magic with ultraviolet light and fluorescent paint. I had no idea that, just a few years later, I'd be working alongside the very people who created that effect.

That husband and wife team – who built the technical backbone of our local theatre scene (and whose children famously snored through dress rehearsals) – became the foundation of what is now a unique charitable organisation. Today, as chairman and a trustee of The Green 'A' Team, I'm proud to continue their community spirit and dedication. If you've heard of us, you'll know why we're named as such. If not, check out our website – it's a great story, and every bit of it is true.

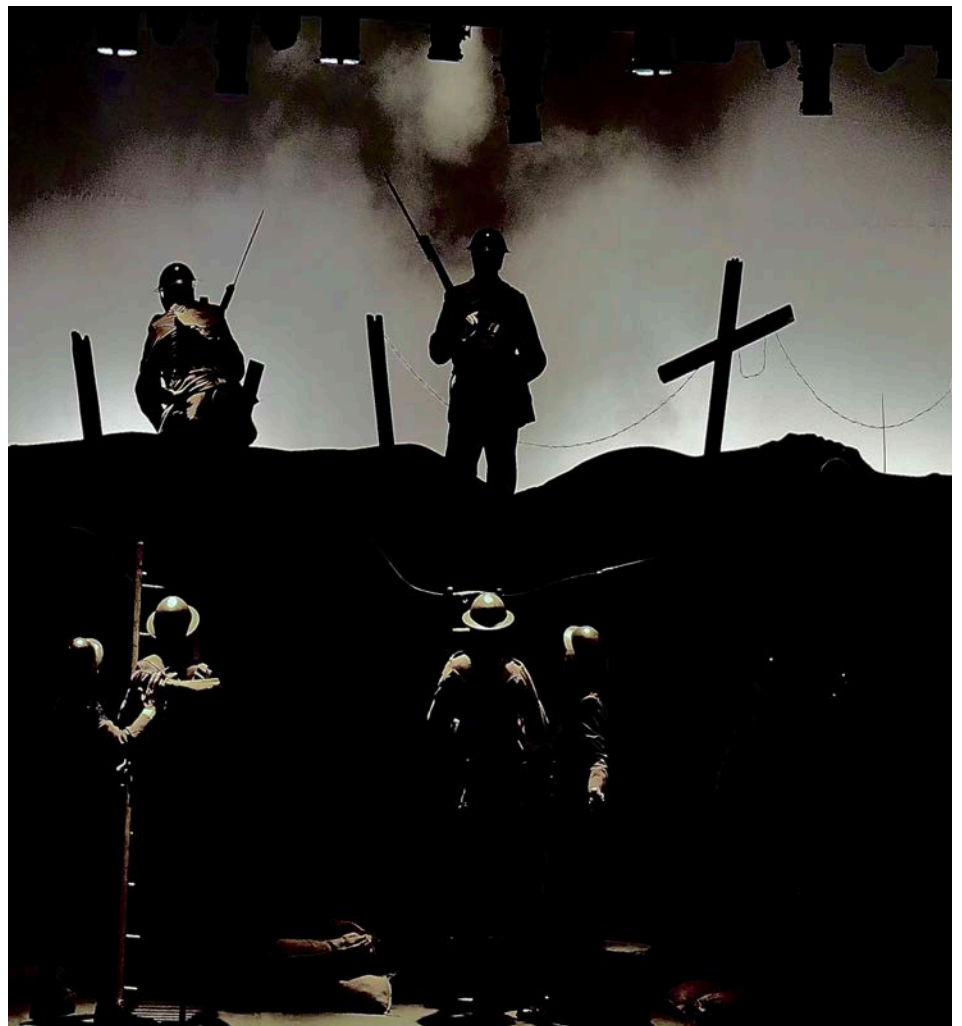
#### What we do (besides hauling cars onstage)

The Green 'A' Team exists to provide technical support to any charitable or non-profit organisation needing expertise. Our work spans theatres, churches, outdoor venues, fashion shows, you name it. Many of us, myself included, are professionals or ex-professionals in the industry, lending our expertise to ensure that the unseen elements of a

production (lighting, sound, stage management, special effects) are just as dazzling as what happens in front of an audience.

I'll admit, I once harboured the classic technician's disdain for actors. That changed when, as part of my theatre training, I was forced to attempt dance classes. Imagine a herd of techies in steel-toe boots lumbering

through choreography like the hippos in *Fantasia*, and you get the picture. It was humbling—but it also made me respect the art of performance. That respect is mutual in theatre: two hands, one leg, diverse or otherwise, no one cares – we've all got each other's backs. It's that ethos that makes theatre a home for those who might have struggled to be themselves elsewhere.



Photography Michael D Finch; Lighting Design– Luc Batory (former Head of Lighting at the National Theatre, London (Olivier Stage) for the Winton Players production of NODA award winning *Birdsong*.



### The volunteer crisis: a scene-stealer we can't shake

If you've ever tried recruiting volunteers, you'll know it's like finding a chicken with teeth. Sleep is lost, knees are metaphorically (and sometimes literally) bent, all in the hope of convincing someone to run a department or manage a budget. The struggle isn't unique to theatre - volunteering as a whole is suffering. People simply don't have the time.

We're fortunate to have received grants and funding, including a post-Covid recovery grant that helped subsidise costs for organisations trying to rebuild their audiences. But money alone won't keep the stage lights on. We need people. And for those who think theatre is only for performers, I'd argue the best creativity happens off the stage.

So, if you don't want to strut in the spotlight but still want to make something extraordinary happen, get in touch with your local society. Creativity doesn't just belong to the well-lit, amplified, and pyrotechnically puffed moments.

And as for that ultraviolet light trick? It's still stunning. Give it a go - you might even win an award for it. We did.

Michael D Finch Chairman  
The Green 'A' Team,



Credit - Michael D Finch - Lighting Design; Winton Players 'Allo Allo' the cinema scene the 'film' projector was a combination of a Pattern 252 effects projector with a snow disc, combined with a movement effect rotation wheel moving in the opposite direction with various gel colours attached to imitate the flickering of a film. The intimate actor lighting provided by two MRI6 12 volt PAR16 (birdies) just visible at the down stage edge.

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NODA Scotland

# Go, go, go, District 10

## District wide anniversary performance



At times, ideas come into my head and sometimes they are planted. The Brechin floods, well documented in the media, was the catalyst of what district 10 tried to achieve. A coming together as a district, a concert to fundraise for the disaster fund was suggested at an area meeting. A date was set to coincide with the 1st anniversary of the disaster and plans were formed. Unfortunately, the idea floundered due to society commitments in November, rehearsals, imminent shows and lack of time. This was not meant to be!

However, the seed was set. Why couldn't a district put on a show that would highlight talent, bring people together and be fun? A show was suggested to me by my friend Richard, an experienced MD and conductor of the Tayside

Symphony Orchestra. A concert style version of a well known and loved Andrew Lloyd Webber/Tim Rice *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. I was excited. Luckily, we obtained the rights to this show and, after discussions, plans were made:

- A short rehearsal period at a time when most of the societies in the district had finished their main production.
- No one under 16 years.
- All principals costumed
- A 14 piece orchestra. A real sing along happy show.

Then I approached Angus Alive about hiring the Reid Hall, Forfar, the most central venue for the district. They were delighted and asked if I could promote the show as a celebration of 70 years since the Reid Hall's refurbishment. Win!

Win! I thought.

I wasn't allowed to make public the plans until the touring professional company with Donny Osmond had finished in Scotland and I was delighted to announce it at my January district meeting. It then went on a back burner with promotion on FB, flyers and emails sent out to companies frequently.

We held the open day on Saturday 26th April. Over 25 turned up with lots of interest from others. It was a great start. Richard's and my vision was shared with our new team and positive vibes abounded.

We had 5 Wednesdays and 5 Sundays to put on the show. Sundays were for the chorus and Wednesdays were for principles initially, but nearer our dates we



all came together for band call, tech and dress. The show was looking and sounding good. Minimal movement, as it was a concert, but enough lighting and effects to make it a special. In my cast were friends, new friends, NODA individual members young and old and members of District 10 societies. A cast group was set up and lots of chat went on.

Yes, the idea and the show itself, I feel, achieved what I had hoped for: a collaboration of talent. However, despite our best efforts the box office returns were poor. We were up against youth shows in schools in District 10 and youth groups in other areas nearby and had to cancel the Saturday evening performance.

So financially not a success but is that everything? I hold on to the positive.

- On stage, 35 cast members and an orchestra of 14 musicians who all enjoyed the experience.
- Collaboration of the clubs in District 10 and beyond.
- A legacy of friendship within the group, attending and promoting each other's upcoming shows since *Joseph* finished.

My thanks goes to the following for the massive support they gave the project, Utopia Costumes, Grey events, Ryan Wink (Programme and poster designer), Angus Alive and my partners in crime Richard and Shannon. Would I do it again? Ask me in a couple of years!

Susan Kennedy



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Cover story - NODA East Midlands

## A summer season in a beautiful setting

### Opening the doors to an iconic performance space

Corky St Claire talks to the new general manager at Tolethorpe, one of the newest and largest NODA members, about the future and how NODA members can climb aboard.

I met Jay, the new general manager of Tolethorpe on a Friday night in July. It is four weeks since they opened the 2025 season and with *The Taming Of The Shrew* and *The Mirror Crack'd* up and running, tonight sees *Macbeth*. There are 3 productions in rep during the twelve week summer season – it must be a lot to coordinate? I ask Jay.

*“Yes and no. There are a seasoned team of staff supporting this extraordinary amateur venture. Between the in-house team and the amateurs and volunteers, like many amateur companies, we move mountains. It comes together*

*through hard work, good will and a following wind. It isn't as if this is a new project.”*

Tolethorpe has been going a long while now?

*“Fifty-seven years this year, forty-seven of which have been in this incredible setting. It's a unique*

*place.”* Jay explained.

We walk around the site. Aside from Tolethorpe Hall, dripping with gothic glamour with its trio of rehearsal spaces and the huge public bar, I see the 600 seat auditorium. We walk backstage, past the dressing rooms and workshop where the sets of the





other two productions for the season are kept. What does Tolethorpe offer the amateur actor?

*"What we offer is, I think, unique, says Jay. "Obviously, we can offer the chance to perform for anywhere between eight to fourteen thousand people, in any one production. We have between twenty five to thirty thousand visitors a summer. There aren't many stages in the country where that is available to community performers. But it's the little things as well – you will have a dedicated professional wardrobe team, free parking, a cast and crew bar, there is training available for all our actors and technicians and production teams, from cutting edge industry figures. We will look after you, we will love you and most importantly – we will feed you!"*

As we walk back up into the seven and a half acres of stunning parkland, I wonder how NODA members can join up with Tolethorpe?

*We welcome everyone. Entry for actors is by open audition in the*

*first weekend of September. All the information is on our website for the 2026 season of 'Twelfth Night', 'One Man, Two Guvnors' and 'Treasure Island' – we really do welcome people from all communities and backgrounds. We have some terrific actors here but we always – always – are looking for new faces and diverse talents, whether onstage or off. Please just contact us if you want to get involved. Yes we do ask a lot – rehearsals are usually three times a week from mid-March and the productions have 24 performances each through the summer – which is a lovely luxury usually afforded only to professionals but is also, we recognise, a big ask for amateurs."*

The Front of House calls are just going out and our time together is drawing to a close. Tolethorpe is a new NODA member and are there any final thoughts? I ask Jay.

*"Come try us! Throw your hat in the ring. Audition. Come and crew a show. Our doors and hearts are open. We will always be true to our core values of the amateur community, but we want to take Tolethorpe forward*

*into the future and we would love nothing more than if some of the East Midlands NODA community came and joined us on the adventure."*

So, if you are interested in being part of this amazing opportunity, check out Tolethorpe's audition pages on their website.

Corky St Claire



*The Mirror Crack'd*



Toilethorpe House and grounds



Macbeth



Taming of the Shrew



Taming of the Shrew



Macbeth

NODA North

## Youth groups flourishing

### A burst of youth in northern district town



Just 5 years ago, when I first took over District 6, in NODA North the youth involvement was generally limited to pantomimes, Von Trapp children and other roles within adult shows so it has been amazing to see academies and organisations embrace the talent of tomorrow.

Now in 2025, one town in the district not only has 2 academies but also groups reforming their own youth sections, all embracing themselves within the NODA family. Darlington, in County Durham, is quickly becoming a hub for junior performing arts. HC Vocal and Performance Academy and Darlington Academy of Performing Arts have not only put on 8 main shows between them

in the last year, but also provide workshops and holiday camps giving huge opportunities to over 150 young performers with ages ranging from 4-18. With both academies having their own venues, the range of classes is vast, allowing every member to hone their skills and to shine in full scale productions.

Not only is this providing great experience and opportunities for the youngsters but also acting wonderfully as feeder groups for the adult groups in the area, with many of the students going on to perform with larger societies. Most recently several of them took on main roles with Darlington Operatic Society in their production of *Everybody's Talking*

*About Jamie* and a large group head into the Dales to team up with Hudswell Village Players for a Musical Concert.

Other groups are also noticing the talent within their ranks, and it was great to see St Augustine's Repertory Society recently reform their own section, Youth Stars, with over 20 children in their recent Two Act drama evening.

So where has this boom come from? Where has all this talent been hiding? And what has motivated Individuals and local groups to drive this surge? I reached out to all 3 groups for a glimpse at their motivation.





DAPA - Darlington Academy of Performing Arts (DAPA) was founded in 2018, by husband and wife team, Paul and Joanne Mason, who shared a vision to make high-quality musical theatre training accessible to young people in Darlington. With extensive backgrounds in the performing arts, the couple recognised a lack of affordable options for aspiring performers and set out to create an inclusive, community-focused academy with no hidden costs. As parents themselves, they were determined to keep fees low, covering most rehearsal and costume costs through careful budget planning and absorbing costs helping to remove financial barriers for families. What began as a single weekly class, with just 13 students, has grown into a thriving academy offering over 12 classes a week to more than 280 students in just under seven years.

HCVPA, originally started out offering 1 - 1 tuition to students but, with pressure from the parents, it was decided to start up HC Vocal and Performance Academy. The aim was to create a nurturing and inclusive environment where every student, regardless of background, could explore their artistic potential and build self-confidence

through the performing arts. With support from other tutors we can now offer dance, music and performance classes covering all genres and deliver over 30 sessions a week to all ages.

YOUTH STARS, despite originally forming in 1990s, for many reasons, youth-only productions by STARS stopped, but thankfully this year the group reformed. The group rejected the idea of subs or fees focusing on core values of patience, respect and sharing. With ages ranging from 11-17, the community-based group work on tuition of stage direction, singing and dance and their 1st production was a sell-out, with the parish group looking at another full youth production next year.

The talent is so vast in the town and with huge productions like *Elf!* and *Guys and Dolls* all on the horizon, both academies often find themselves having to do multiple castings. A logistical nightmare, but again continuing the ethos of giving as many children a chance to shine as possible.

Each group offers something very different, but what is great to see is the number of young people involved. Not sat behind their screens, but creating friendships and learning. Not only new and exciting performing skills, but great life skills too. The future is certainly bright for the societies in NODA North.

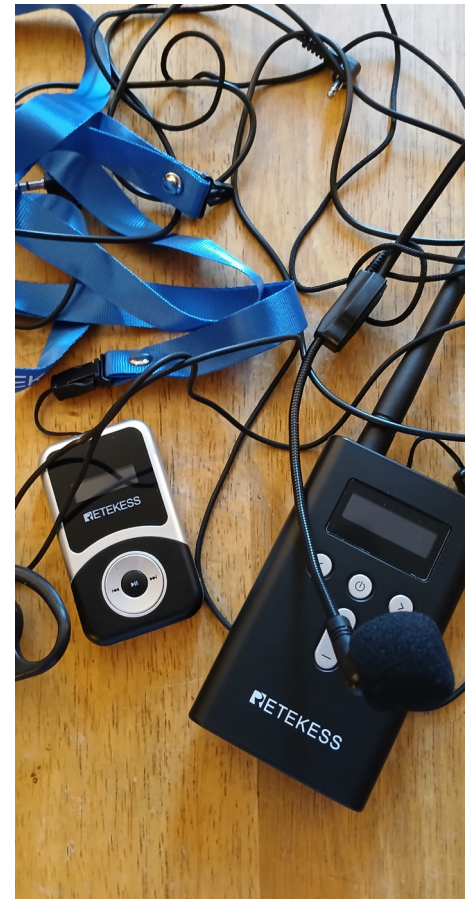
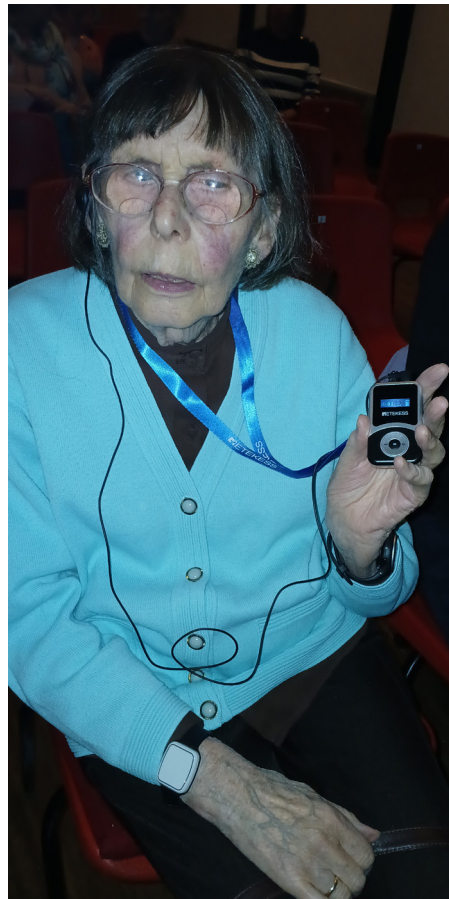
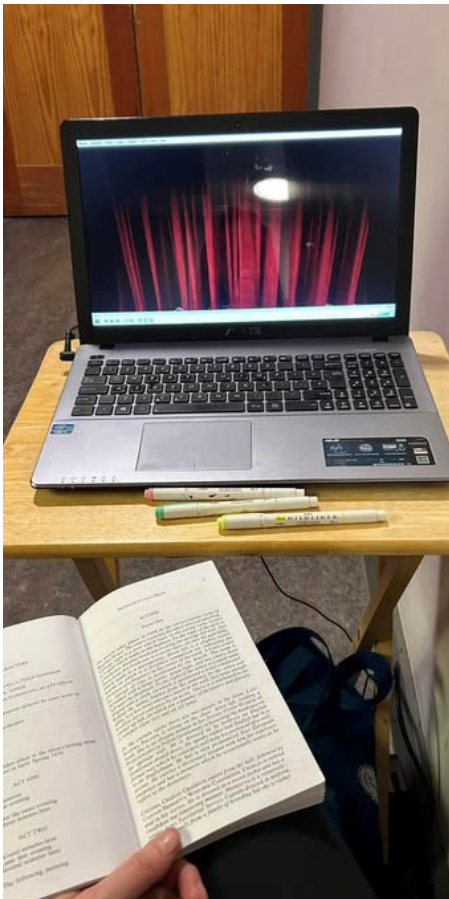
**John Holliday**  
NODA North District 6



NODA East

## Supporting visually impaired audience members

### Norfolk group offers sound advice



British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters are now regular sights at UK amateur theatre company productions, to both attract hearing impaired audiences to shows and to help bring clarity to those audience members about the action onstage. Now it is time for visually impaired theatregoers to have support to fill in their missing links when they attend a show, contend advocates for accessible theatre.

Too many people within local amateur theatre circles believe that helping visually impaired people to appreciate a stage show requires the services of a professional audio description

specialist. *"But I'm here to say that – how should we put this nicely – anybody could do it really,"* says Georgette Vale, an ardent advocate for making live theatre accessible to all.

*"Audio description has become a big thing in the professional world,"* explains Vale, who is a member of the Wymondham Players in Norfolk. *"They will get an audio describer in for most professional theatres. They'll also do audio description for museums and galleries and things like that. That's become commonplace, but not in the amateur field."*

According to the RNIB (the Royal National Institute of Blind People), *"Many theatres across the UK provide audio description. It's generally available at one or two performances for each production, and is delivered via infrared, radio or WiFi to a receiver that audience members usually book in advance when purchasing tickets."*

*Introductory notes describing the visual world of the show and its characters are often made available to audience members in advance of the audio described performance, which is usually immediately preceded by an onstage touch*

tour, where audiences can familiarise themselves with the set, handle costumes and props and meet some of the actors." An example of an amateur company offering onstage touch tours is Cambridgeshire's Shakespeare at the Towers [formerly at the George], which two years ago provided the tours for its production of *Much Ado About Nothing*, as reported by NODA Today.

The Wymondham Players first offered audio description in 2019, arranged by Vale, for their production of *Ladies in Lavender*. Appropriate equipment was hired in, and "it went down well", Vale says. Subsequently the Wymondham group bought their own audio description equipment, which includes headsets for individual audience members. She estimates a cost of a few hundred pounds for the audio descriptor box and perhaps five to 10 headsets with USB charging points.

While the audio describer does not need professional status, Vale points out that they must be able to keep ahead of the script to describe what is onstage, from dance to interesting set pieces or props. "The person doing the description has to be a bit ahead of the field. It's a bit of a knack getting the right word in at the right time," Vale says. "You might have to describe a dance routine, but you don't need to describe every step. The people that we've had have tended to fall into the trap of trying to describe every bit of minutiae, and find that they haven't got the space to fit it all in."

She shared an anecdote about describing a Buster Keaton silent film at a museum at which there was no centralised audio description equipment. Vale had to use what she calls, "the whisper method" to describe the action to visually impaired visitors. Because of the organ music that usually accompanies a silent film, "you've got to get the words in over the music," she says, "and then there's not going to be anything like sensibility of wording, etc. There were a couple of times when I was too loud because of the music and a couple of people (in the audience) turned around, but they realised what was happening."

Vale offers the following tips to optimise the audio descriptor experience for visually impaired audiences:

- Position the describer and the describer equipment in the sound booth for performances

- Bring the describer to four or five rehearsals before the show enters the performance phase "so they know what's coming and know best how to explain it".
- To guide visually impaired people through to their seats, stand next to them and ask, "Would you like to hold my arm?" That means that the visually impaired person is slightly behind, and the one with good vision is "just slightly in front". That way, the sighted person is in front and will be in a position to recognise barriers or steps first.

Vale is offering to support theatre groups that would like to introduce audio descriptor equipment and related volunteer services to their audiences. She can be contacted through the Wymondham Players website.

**DeeDee Doke**  
NODA East Regional Editor



Georgette Vale - Wymondham Players

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NODA North

# “So long, farewell”... after 56 years

## Derek Coleman retires



This year, WEOS Musical Productions is celebrating its 75th year, and sadly saying goodbye to their President, Derek Coleman, who has been involved in amateur musical theatre since 1969. The decision to retire from the position has been mainly due to ill health. However, Derek who has recently turned 80 will remain a cherished Life Member of the society.

Derek began ‘treading the boards’ in amateur musicals when he was persuaded to make up the male numbers in West End Operatic and Dramatic Society by his new wife Dorothy, (a member from 1964) following their wedding in 1969. The journey began and together they have given over a 100 years’ service to musical theatre and to WEOS.

Like many of us, Derek is no stranger to other societies and

in 1975, as his passion in musical theatre grew, so did his interest develop in performing in musical productions outside of West End Operatic and Dramatic Society, and in 1995, with a great deal of experience under his belt, Derek was appointed to the society’s committee. During his term of office, he has held the positions of secretary, treasurer, business manager and membership secretary, becoming chairman in 1999, when he transformed the society into West End Operatic Society Ltd, and finally becoming president in 2022.

Recently elected Chair of WEOS, Francesca Patterson, said: *“Derek has been a great supporter of amateur musical theatre and has contributed so much to WEOS, as well as performing in some of our annual musicals. I know his favourite shows with us were ‘Jesus Christ Superstar’, ‘Witches of Eastwick’ and ‘La Cage Aux Folles’ and he very much enjoyed working with professional Director, Martyn Knight. His experience on our board has been invaluable from when he was an elected board member in 1995, to becoming our president in 2022. We will be forever grateful.”*

Derek also brought his passion and experience to other societies when he became a North Regional Representative for NODA in 2001, for eleven years, combining the role with that of treasurer for six years.

Derek recalls his memorable moments with WEOS as being the first sell out show at the Theatre Royal Newcastle and winning the NODA National Souvenir Class Programme Competition for three years. He has been a great supporter of young people

within WEOS and delighted in watching new talent develop into professional stage careers.

Derek’s favourite professional show is *Les Misérables*, and he always hoped WEOS could have obtained the performance rights to stage an amateur production.

The skills and experience Derek’s working career brought have been invaluable in supporting his board roles in both WEOS and NODA. After leaving college, he joined the NHS as a regional trainee in hospital administration, gaining professional qualifications over a five-year period, working in many of the large hospitals in the region. He retired in 1995, from his last appointment as a director of human resources and operational services in Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

Happily, Derek knows that WEOS will continue to flourish and is in safe hands with the blend of experienced stalwarts and many hard-working younger members on the board of management.

There is no doubt that Derek and Dorothy will be supporting WEOS in the audience of future productions and he is particularly looking forward to their next show in April 2026, *Hello Dolly*.

Recently retired Chair of WEOS, Ruth Barber, commented that *“Derek’s contribution and efforts in driving and promoting amateur musical theatre and WEOS has been exemplary and all members of our society, and I’m sure those in NODA, wish him well in his retirement.”*



NODA Scotland

## Group awarded prestigious Inspiration Award

### Whilst celebration 30 years

The Ups & Downs Theatre Group, based in South Lanarkshire, has proudly celebrated its 30th anniversary with a year like no other, capped off by winning the Inspiration Award at this year's Pride of Scotland Awards in association with P&O Cruises. They have always held the belief that theatre should be for everyone, and now the rest of the country know this too. The group were recently honoured with the prestigious Inspiration Award at the glittering ceremony

in Glasgow, on 23 June 2025. A small group of representatives from the cast were delighted to accept the award on behalf of the club. The moment was captured and broadcast on YouTube and other social media outlets, with the hosts Sanjeev Kohli & Elaine C Smith praising not only the groups inspirational qualities, but also their commitment to nurturing confidence and friendship through the arts.

Founded in 1995, The Ups & Downs

are a unique youth theatre group that brings together young people with Down syndrome and their siblings to produce show-stopping musical theatre. The group has long held a special place in the hearts of its community, but this national recognition has highlighted what those involved have known for years: that Ups & Downs is so much more than a theatre group. It's a movement of joy, inclusion, and talent that raises awareness about the abilities of people

with Down Syndrome, a clear example of the quote 'you can't be what you can't see', which is so powerful for their audiences, especially young people, to witness the talent and joy this amazing cast bring to the stage.

The group was nominated for the Inspiration Award by supporters who were moved by the remarkable energy, love and professionalism that shines through in every performance. This year's anniversary show in March, showcased numbers from classic musicals through the last 3 decades.

Speaking after the win, President Lorna Leggatt, said:

*"We're absolutely thrilled. This award belongs to every young person who's ever stepped on our stage, and every volunteer, supporter and family member who makes it all possible. Ups & Downs proves that theatre changes lives... and not just for those watching."*

In true theatrical fashion, the celebrations are far from over. A special party will be held this summer for the full cast and supporters, where they'll be reunited with the award and relive the emotional highlights of the ceremony. Plans are also underway for next year's show, with the momentum and spirit of the award win already inspiring

new ideas.

The group continues to lead by example in the amateur theatre community, showing what can be achieved when accessibility, creativity and heart are placed centre stage. Their story is a reminder that theatre belongs to everyone and that sometimes the most inspirational performances happen when the spotlight is shared.

**Lorna Leggatt**  
President - Ups & Downs Theatre Group



## 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](mailto:info@noda.org.uk).

# Nanette Elizabeth Lovell MBE

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THE QUEEN has been graciously pleased to give orders for the following promotions in, and appointments to, the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire: M.B.E. To be Ordinary Members of the Civil Division of the said Most Excellent Order:  
For services to Young People and to the community in Northampton.

Nanette Lovell, former NODA East Midlands Councillor, was an incredible woman, with a vast knowledge of local and national musical theatre and a real love of NODA. Her methods may have been 'old school' but she was always extremely well organised and hard working. At the funeral on 1st July in Towcester, Robert Laurie (celebrant and close friend), spoke about Nanette as the elegant lady, the sharp and bright networker, the organised, loyal, supportive and encouraging career woman, the beautiful and lively entertainer, the loving and faithful friend, cousin and aunt.

Nanette was Northampton born and bred, growing up in Chaucer Street as an only child, although she had several cousins living nearby. She attended St. Matthews CofE school, then Notre Dame High School. She joined the Girls' Brigade and went to ballroom dancing classes, later entering competitions and picking up awards.

When school days were over, she went to work at The Town and Country Building Society (now Nationwide), and this is when she developed her lifelong interest in theatre and performance. She would regularly go to performances at the Repertory Theatre – now the Royal Theatre

– with Judy Maloney and Jenny Chandler, both lifelong friends.

However, never satisfied with just being a watcher, Nanette decided to try her luck in the wider entertainment world and auditioned successfully to become a Bluecoat for Fred Pontin at the Riviera resort in Weymouth. She was a real hit with all the holidaymakers, but her chief delight was taking part in the shows they put on – Variety and Old Time Music Hall. On her one day off, she regularly took herself off to Bournemouth or London to see the shows, cementing her love of theatre. For several years she spent the summer by the coast, and returned to Northampton every autumn, taking a variety of temporary jobs. Eventually, she returned to Northampton permanently, to take on a 'proper' job with the Northampton Education department, starting as a minutes secretary but soon taking on other roles and responsibilities.

Sally O'Neill, retired Headteacher at Lyncrest School and good friend of Nanette, shares these memories:

*"Nanette was the Chair of Governors at Lyncrest Primary School in Northampton and she supported Lyncrest for many,*

*many years. She knew the parents, pupils and staff very well and had a special interest in Special Educational Needs and Inclusion. When Lyncrest was awarded flagship status she insisted staff went to a London show to celebrate and we all remember what fun we had. She was in demand at other schools too, often joining governing bodies at the request of the local authority. She used to tell us that at one time she was on seven different boards of governors, but she seemed to take it all in her stride.*

*Nanette loved to talk about her work with the Young Carers Charity and she also put a lot of effort in to all these voluntary roles. They gave her a lot of joy too. In around 2018, colleagues from these organisations were asked to support an application with Lyncrest School for an M.B.E, Thanks to those letters of support, the application form was completed and was successful! When Nanette received the M.B.E she was so surprised as the whole process had been a secret! She was as high as a kite and told everyone she met! We were so pleased that she was delighted with her M.B.E which she richly deserved for her long years of service to education."*

On her return to Northampton,



the lure of the greasepaint was still strong and she joined the Northampton Amateur Operatic Company (now NMTC – Northampton Musical Theatre Company) and for a while, the Gilbert and Sullivan company. She also joined the Playgoers Society, formed to support the Royal Theatre, and latterly the Derngate too, and in time became a board member of the Royal and Derngate, as well as working front of house for a number of years at both theatres. It really was her passion.

She then moved on to join NODA, and became East Midlands representative, invited to visit many local am-dram companies, watching and reviewing their shows and eventually stepping up to take over as councillor, a role she held for 12 years. Her weekends were filled with travel to all parts of the region, supporting and promoting many groups, and arranging the Annual AGM and awards event in Loughborough. Quite an undertaking for someone supposedly retired! Whenever Nanette took on a project, it was never simply done, but always carried out wholeheartedly, followed through and completed in the best way she could. The Nanette Lovell Award for Best Play in East Midlands Region will continue to be offered every year, in her memory.

Holidays were always well planned and over the years, she visited many European countries and latterly enjoyed cruising in the Med, Norway, the Baltic and the Caribbean. Sounds ideal for Nanette – lots of entertainment, loads of people to meet (she was the queen of networking!), a chance to dress up every night and plenty of shopping opportunities! She loved buying gifts for her friends, as well as the occasional treat for herself.

These memories show a little of the full and active life Nanette led. She really enjoyed being with people, which makes it all

the sadder that she became so withdrawn towards the end, but she has left us all with so many memories, so hopefully she'll be a topic of conversation for a while longer! Robert also mentioned her celebrity friendships – Ken Dodd, Sue Pollard, Keith Harris, David Jason, Dick Emery, David Turner to name but a few.

Mindy Robinson recalled some highlights of Nanette's life, for instance in 2005, Nanette took part in *Wakey Wakey Campers*. A 1960's style holiday camp reality TV show. Nanette was a member of Northampton Amateur Operatic Company (now Northampton Musical Theatre Company) for 35 years. Mindy fondly recalled her prolific letter and card writing skills, the only person who ever sent Easter cards to her friends. Mindy spoke of Nanette as a vibrant, energetic and elegant lady. Mindy recalls Nanette being so generous, organised and easy to share a dressing room with and is sorely missed. Anthony Howes also spoke eloquently about how Nanette has supported him throughout his whole life and made such positive contributions to his stage career.

Robert also stated,

*"We all know that the last few years were particularly challenging for Nanette, with the isolation of Covid Lockdown, her health and mobility issues and the limitations of no longer driving, which all contributed to her decline and gradual turning away from her previously busy social life. Sadly, she became increasingly isolated and withdrawn, until she would see only a few remaining friends. I know that she would want to express her gratitude to Mindy Robinson, for her comfort through her final days, to Bonnie, her cleaner and carer, for all her help and support through these difficult times and especially to Andrew Percival, whose friendship over many years went above and beyond, helping her*

*with everything from shopping and lifts, to paperwork, dealing with NHS, carers, household maintenance, financial advice and being the emergency contact. We all feel that Andrew has been an absolute star and the best and truest of friends. We are all in awe of what you did to support Nanette and thank you wholeheartedly."*

Nanette's Life Celebration included an especially arranged reflective piece of music by David Rose, a sing-a-long version of 'Lullaby of Broadway' and tributes from many friends. As the song 'For Good' from one of her favourite musicals *Wicked* played, she took her final curtain. The service reflected Nanette perfectly, she would have loved it.

Robert said,

*"Nanette, may the light of love shine forth upon you – on those for whom you care and those who cared for you. May you be ever blessed with peace and understanding as you travel on, and may you come to the end of your journey in gentleness and in joy. Nanette has been a good friend to so many of us for so many years and she lived her life as fully as she could. Hundreds of people from all walks of life, shared moments in her life, she had taken on adventures and commitments, supported and nurtured others, achieved well deserved recognition and earned the love and respect of so many people. We've loved having you around, we feel privileged to have known you and you have enriched our lives enormously."*

Afterwards friends, family and colleagues shared stories and cake at The Walnut Tree. So many fond memories were shared, a few tears were shed, but lots of smiles and laughter too.

**Jules Jones**  
NODA East Midlands  
Regional Councillor

# Long Service Awards

## Celebrate your service with a long service award

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### 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



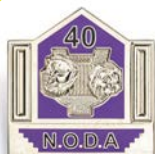
25 year badge



30 year badge



35 year badge



40 year badge



45 year badge



50 year badge



60 year badge



25 year medal



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