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A Magazine By NODA

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Shakespeare
on its head!

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For every stage



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NODA
15 The Metro Centre
Peterborough
PE2 7UH

T +44 (0) 1733 374 790
E info@noda.org.uk
W www.noda.org.uk

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Welcome

Welcome to the final edition of NODA Today in 2025, and my first as NODA Chair. Having spent the past six years as regional councillor for the North West, I'm looking forward to working with the NODA Board of Trustees to adapt our services to meet the ever-changing needs of you, our members and volunteers.

In this edition, you will discover wonderful stories from across the UK celebrating our fantastic hobby, including stories from our youngest performers through to our marvellous, long-serving members.

September saw the inauguration of Kay Rowan as NODA National President. On page 24, you can catch up with Kay's travels as she meets the people at the heart of NODA and shares in their achievements.

At the start of December, the 2026 NODA Theatre Summer School launched with 15 amazing courses. There are still spaces available on a number of courses so be sure to turn to page 55, to find out why this outstanding event is not to be missed.

Finally, I would like to wish you all a successful and very merry Christmas. I look forward to reading all about your magnificent productions and achievements throughout 2026.



Andy McNicholas
Chair of Trustees

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NODA North West

Thank you, am dram!

Changing the narrative



Amateur dramatics has been such an important part of my life and it's impossible to describe exactly the feeling performing on stage gives me, but I love it and it makes my heart sing.

I have been blessed to have been involved with some incredible shows over the years, but sadly, during the rehearsals for *Calendar Girls the Musical* (oh, the irony!) in 2022, I started to feel unwell (after having symptoms for 2 years that I now know to be of SBC that I now try and raise awareness for). In December 2022, I was diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer having never had cancer before. My world fell apart.

I didn't think that I would ever be able to get back on stage again, but in April 2024, I performed in *Shrek the Musical* at Todmorden

and this year, the year I made 50, I had the privilege of playing Mrs Potts with Blackburn Musical Theatre Company.

I am a big believer in a positive mindset, but I am so proud of myself. I am so grateful that these societies were able to see more than just my cancer.

I now want to show the world that you can still live for the things that make you happy, as well as living with incurable cancer, and how Amdram plays such a positive role.

I am looking forward to getting involved with Blackburn's next production of *Spamalot* and singing with meaning and joy "Always Look on The Bright Side of Life".

Being involved with amdram gives me a sense of self-worth and confidence, but it is so much more than just the performance aspect: I have found friends for life that now feel like family. The social aspect and sense of community is so important.

Focusing on hope, quality of life and "living with cancer" challenges the traditional "terminal" view and allows the narrative to change. It empowers me and others to see that I can have a good quality of life and live well with cancer. Being involved with my local Amateur Dramatics Society helps with improving my quality of life.

Dawn Marie Nicholls

NODA North

Storm Éowyn Strikes

But Morpeth's backstage heroes save the day

If you want to know what true theatre professionalism looks like, don't just watch the stage—watch what happens when the lights go out.

This year, Morpeth Pantomime Society was hit by Storm Éowyn during our Friday night performance. Near the end of the second half, the power cut out completely. No lights. No sound. Just a full house and a very real need to act fast.

And that's exactly what our backstage team did.

In the blink of an eye, they cleared the stage, secured the premises, and ensured every audience member could exit safely. Cast were guided, props were stowed, and the building was emptied with calm, coordinated precision. It was a masterclass in crisis management—and all done in the dark.

It's not the first time we've faced such challenges. Back in 2021, Storm Arwen forced us to perform entirely without power, relying on generators kindly donated by local businesses. Many societies would have cancelled. We didn't.

And this year, when Éowyn tried to steal the spotlight, our backstage crew proved once again that Morpeth Pantomime Society doesn't just survive storms—we rise to meet them.

Their resilience, professionalism, and sheer grit are what keeps the magic alive. They're the reason the show goes on and they deserve every bit of applause. So here's to the unsung heroes in black—who don't just work behind the scenes, but hold the whole thing together when it matters most.

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NODA Wales and Ireland

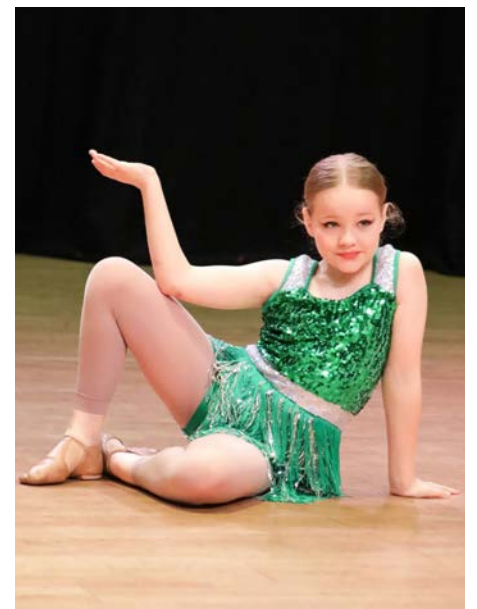
Family's latest star

Like a duck to water

They sometimes say that theatre runs in your blood and that is something that can certainly be said of the Evans family from the Glantawe Theatre Company in Wales and Ireland. They are now in the fourth generation of membership of the society and NODA. Following on from Great Grandad Denzil, Grandad Tony, Mum Lowri, the latest member of the family to be bitten by the bug is Gwen Evans-Paynter. Having joined the company three years ago, 10 year old Gwen has taken to it like a duck to water. Having already performed in a number of shows for her parent company, in the next few months, she is

performing in three different musicals for different companies appearing in *SpongeBob the Musical*, *Annie the Musical* and *Elf*, all before Christmas. On top of this she is a member of a local dance school and has won awards for solo, duet and group dances. In October, she will be dancing in the West End at the Shaftesbury Theatre in a review.

Theatre is certainly in the blood for this young lady.



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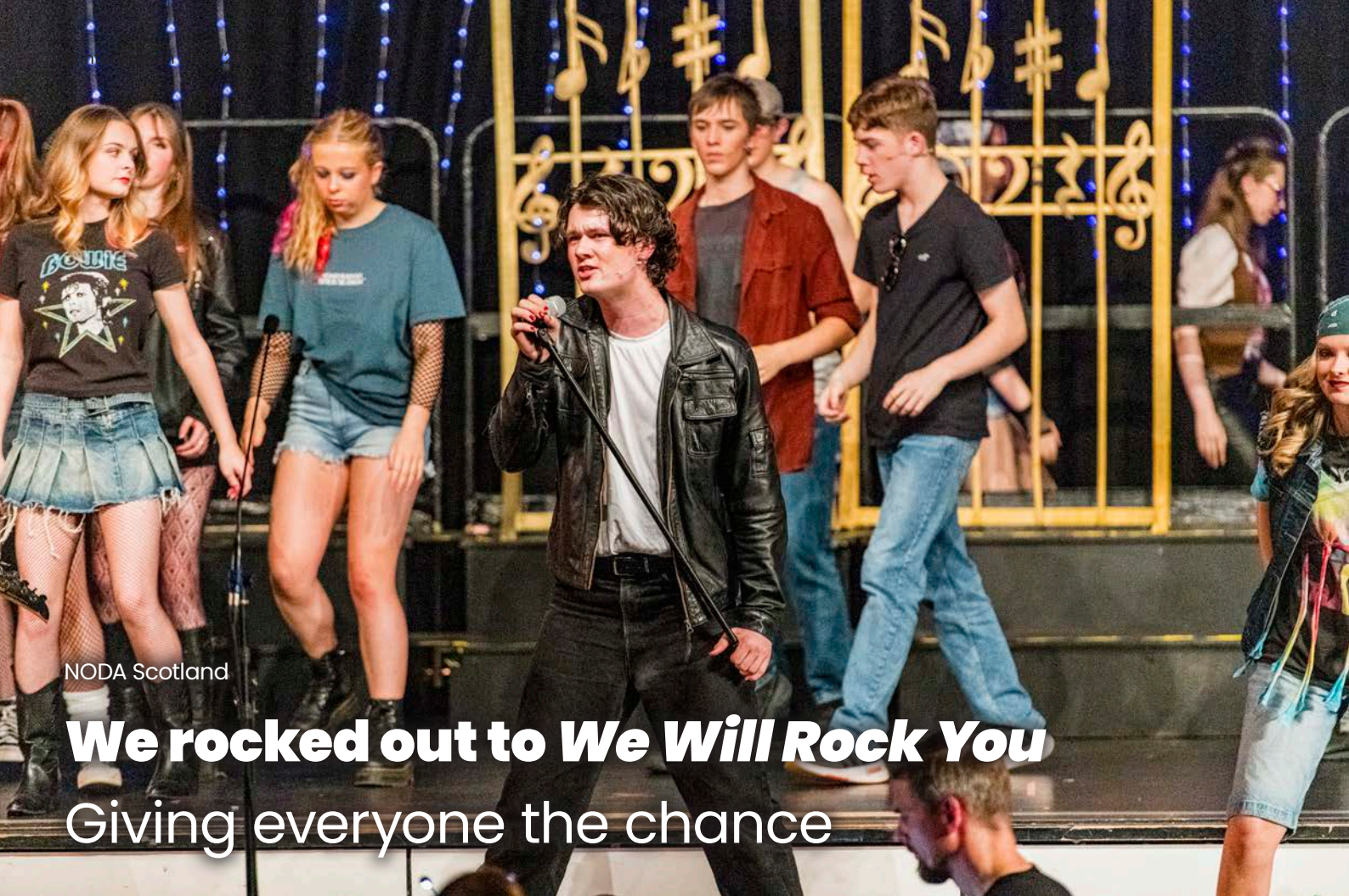
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NODA Scotland

We rocked out to *We Will Rock You* Giving everyone the chance

The final curtain shuts, and the applause slowly fades until all that's left is the sounds of excitement from all of Hermitage Academy's actors who have just completed their last performance of 2025's *We Will Rock You*.

Directed by Head of PE, Mrs MacKinnon, the show is packed with energetic dance numbers and emotional songs. It's surely one for the history books. The show's premise is an interesting one, following a group of the last rogue rebels battling their evil dictator who bans music and free speech entirely in a dystopian Orwellian society. Every song is from the 80s rock band Queen, ranging from highly powerful songs about love and loss, to vibrant Rock and Roll numbers!

A few of the cast members spoke about their experience doing the show. Elena was a part of the chorus this year and loved it! She shared, *"It's a lot of hard work but the end result is so worth it. The songs sound great and I love hearing all the harmonies come*

together."

The show was on a tight schedule: with just 5 weeks to pull together the whole performance, everyone involved had to be really committed. Even as the dates grew closer and closer, nerves stayed low and the cast was able to push through till the end.

Nathan played the part of Brit, one of the last rebels. It was Nathan's first time in a main role and he loved it. *"It's been such a great opportunity for me and I loved the environment and experience of being able to sing with such talented people."* He also talked about how lucky he was to have *"gotten this chance to show my love and drive for acting and singing"*.

Mrs MacKinnon was the director, and Mrs Frew the musical director. They have worked together for a number of years. The core duo have worked on every school show from *Little Shop of Horrors* to *Les Miserables*, *Grease* to *Miss Saigon*. That's not to say they do

it alone, many of the particularly showbiz inclined teachers and staff worked alongside them with music, costumes, microphones, set building and props. Help is needed backstage and Front of House and everywhere in-between. It's a huge team effort, but that's what you need for a dazzling stage show.

Chloe of S5, also enjoyed the experience. *"The school show is a very good opportunity for people to express themselves."* She added that even after the show is over, new friends become friends that last. She did have to admit that she *"likes her Sundays back"*.

We Will Rock You gave a chance to every senior pupil in Hermitage Academy to show off their skill and drive for acting, singing and dancing. Everybody involved had a fantastic time and Helensburgh can't wait for next year, to see even more of all the talented performers of Hermitage Academy.

Heidi Mackenzie

2025 in numbers

As we end 2025, we look back on the year

2555

**NODA member
show reports**

£44.5m

**NODA members brought in
to the UK economy through
ticket income
Apr 24 – Mar 25**

162

**new groups
joined NODA**

1.8m

**visits to NODA
website**

4900

**email enquiries
received by NODA
Head Office**

Most popular musicals

	Times performed
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	39
Sister Act	35
Everybody's Talking About Jamie	30
Shrek	26
Annie	24

Most popular plays

	Times performed
Calendar Girls	21
Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime	14
A Bunch of Amateurs	13
The 39 Steps	12
Unfriend	11

Figures based on number of NODA show reports

NODApics

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



NODA East

It's a story of the people, not about a ship



Crowds of passengers waved goodbye to well-wishers on shore. Photo credit – Jake Harvey Events

Spoiler alert: The song “My Heart Will Go On” is not part of the musical *Titanic*. But the stage musical is so much more: real-life stories of oceanic travellers of various social strata and crew, thrills, chills, tears and numerous touching, even beautiful and rousing songs, based on the 1912 tragedy of the Titanic sinking in which 1,500 souls were lost.

And like building and launching a ship itself, staging the 1997 musical poses an awe-inspiring challenge that is not for the faint-hearted. In Norfolk, King’s Lynn Players took the gauntlet and mounted an ambitious production in November, with a cast of 50+, dozens of period costumes, songs with complex harmonies, a variety of accents, demanding set piece and stage effects needs, plus period-appropriate props – armed with the knowledge that each role in the cast represents a real person. The audience experience of the story and the stories of those

aboard was uppermost in the mind of director Sharon Fox.

“Titanic is about the passengers and the crew, not about building a ship on stage,” Fox said in her programme notes. At the same time, she said, *“taking inspiration from the recent touring production, we have created a two-level set that gives a hint of the ship, without overwhelming the audience or the cast with loads of scenery. It was really important to me that the characters and the beautiful score dominated the audiences’ experience to create that balance.”*

Performer Tom Slater-Watson recognises and appreciates the overarching importance of all of the characters in *Titanic*. *“It’s quite rare that you get a show that is such an ensemble piece. There’s no lead role in this story. It’s a story about a lot of people,”* he said. Watson-Slater plays the role of James Ismay, the chairman

of the White Star Line company, which owned the Titanic ship. While Ismay was not personally responsible for the ship’s sinking, he contributed to decisions to cut the number of lifeboats on the ship. Ismay survived the ship’s sinking.

Of his character, Slater-Watson said, *“I have a bit of sympathy for him. He (Ismay) is sort of the de facto antagonist in the musical. I’m not saying he was necessarily a great person – I don’t know that – but I do think that he’s vilified, where I’m not entirely sure that it’s fair.”*

Considering that his character is among those who perished in the tragedy, cast member Jack, 15, who portrayed one of the ship’s young bellboys, explained that the scenario he faces looks so bright early on. He and the other bellboys *“think they’re going to make their fortune”* by going to sea on the Titanic, he said. *“He’s excited to be there and likes*

experiencing what's going on, even when the ship is sinking!" Jack said. *"He's just excited that he's actually in the action!"*

This kind of doomed character is different to anything Jack has done before, which he has enjoyed. *"He's quite a lively character in quite a dark situation,"* he explained. *"It brings a bit of light in."* He continued, *"I want to make him, like, relatable – everyone might know someone who is that kind of quite happy character and quite young. It's very emotional."*

Dorcia Bowden-Noble's character, the upper-class socialite Marion Thayer, survives the disaster. But before the peril of the ship's predicament fully sinks in amongst the characters, Bowden-Noble's character is fixated on being *"put out that suddenly, the first-class passengers have got to be sharing spaces with the second-class and third class passengers because before they would have been completely separated",* she says. *"Then they realise it's not just a delay of when we're (they're) going to arrive home. For a lot of it, they just think they're going to be delayed by an hour or a day."*

In Mrs Thayer's story, the lady herself, her son and husband are separated in the melée following the ship's collision with the iceberg. Later, mother and son are reunited. But the husband and father is lost. A harrowing scene for Bowden-Noble involves the song "We'll Meet Tomorrow", sung by her character and her character's husband. *"They just assume that they're going to see each other again and their*

separation isn't forever. But obviously it was," Bowden-Noble said.

"This is such a special show to be part of. It's not even just what we're singing, although the words are so powerful. It's the fact that every single person on the stage was a real person who was on the Titanic, everyone in the cast actually has a back story and a history," Bowden-Noble said. *"These are real people, and you have so many different stories going through. It really shows why these memories should not be forgotten."*

There are moments of joy in the show, countering those of sorrow. And not only do the people taking on the roles of real people need to reflect on life a century ago, the costumes must also exhibit familiarity with and attention to detail to that earlier age.

Local costumer, Judy Parsons, provided many of the garments worn by the cast. Others were hired in. Supporting the costume creation effort further was KLP member, Leslie Judd, who made the four bellboys' outfits as well as playing two onstage roles.

Initially, Judd was challenged in creating the costume because there was no pattern. *"The only pattern I could find was a picture of a pattern from the 1930s,"* he said. From there, he crafted the costume design and made the items, including their hats. And one of the finishing touches was securing gold buttons to fit on each jacket. The creation of White Star Line badges from embroidered cloth badges adorned the costumes further.

In addition to the costume creation, Judd said of *Titanic*, *"I've never had to learn so many songs in any show that I've ever done. It's kind of a double-edged sword, but it's great fun!"*

Just before the show opened in November, tickets were selling well. Mirroring the mix of nationalities and characters onboard the Titanic itself, KLP organisers reported that visitors from Ireland, Australia and South Africa would be filling the seats of King's Lynn's Corn Exchange as well.



Bellboy outfits made for the production

NODA London

It takes a village...

Working with young people



There is a saying that it takes a village to raise a child. There are times it seems to take a city to put on a youth production!

Every company needs its director, wardrobe, costume and props and back stage crew, but productions with young people bring their own challenges. An adult company will welcome a few members each year, and many people will have been part of the company for years and, on occasion, decades! MYCO (Musical Youth Company of Oxford) is a group of 55 twelve to nineteen year olds. Approximately a third of the group leave each year for college or university, or sadly, because of school pressure to prioritise exams. This can mean that each year the entire "feel" of the company changes! We work hard to assimilate the new members. We have a buddy system so that each arriving new member is met by a preassigned young person who is responsible for showing them where things are, helping them sort music, making sure they have someone to talk to in the break etc. We use icebreakers (I have now run

out of interesting facts to share about myself) and take time in rehearsals to explain what the conductor is doing and why watching them is crucial, and run games to help them learn the meaning of safety instructions such as "heads" .

Importantly, we run residential workshops every year. The young people arrive on a Friday evening for a BBQ and silly games. Team building is helped by Musicals Pictionary, by balancing on smaller and smaller pieces of newspaper while lifting others off the ground and by balloon games. Parent volunteers, with DBS checks, stay overnight to help maintain a small sense of calm and the next day is filled with workshops. The company is divided into four, based on age, and undertake a range of activities which have included everything from stage fighting to make up. We rely heavily on past members who are now working professionally, to help lead these. In the background is a group of committee members, and parents, making sandwiches and snacks while keeping an

ever-growing list of dietary requirements.

It's exhausting, but at the end of it the group is on its way to being a company.

What do you do when someone doesn't appear at rehearsal? In an adult group you often assume they have forgotten, been held up, or had other things to do. If a child doesn't appear the situation changes... do parents need to be informed? Whose job is it to look for them? Recently a teenager didn't turn up, with her last known contact to her parents saying her phone was running out of battery. Two adults had to leave the rehearsal in their car to look for her! Luckily, thanks to a kind stranger, all was eventually well, but we needed the adults at the rehearsal, who were separate from the creative team, to take charge of the unfolding events.

In addition, there are the challenges of teenage self-image when it comes to costume and make up. Positive support and feedback, together with liaison with the costume team, are definitely required, together with adults prepared to sit with a young person who is overwhelmed by the sheer noise and bustle of a busy rehearsal.

It's not a village, but a city of people and one for which I am inordinately thankful as they allow me to do my job. Here's to *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* at the Oxford Playhouse in April 2026, to which so many people have contributed!

Julie Todd
 Director *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*
 Resident MD for MYCO

NODA South West

Being nearly eight!

The challenge of adults playing children

It is mid-October, and here we are sitting patiently waiting for the start of a production of *Blood Brothers (the play version)* by Willy Russell. The surprising aspect is that this is a youth production of this gritty Northern drama, from Carnon Downs Drama Group: a quiet, bucolic village in Cornwall. A challenging choice. The story starts in September 2024, which is when the Logan Fox (17), approached the committee stating that he wished to direct a play. The committee agreed and the play was chosen. Normally, the challenge for adult actors is to make themselves believable, as 7 nearly 8-year-olds, teenagers as well as the adult versions of their characters. For this group it would be somewhat different. Part of the support available was a workshop from NODA delivered by Jo Wilson-Hunt, the Youth Co-ordinator for the South West region.

The workshop took place in July and was opened up to other young people from groups in the area. In the end, three other groups sent young people along and it was great to see them all working together very quickly. The first part of the workshop comprised a number of warm up and more general games and exercises.

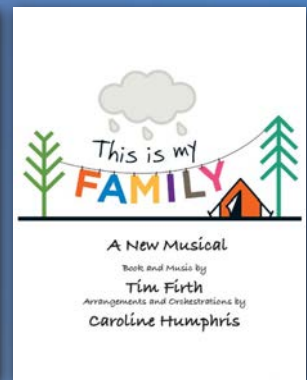
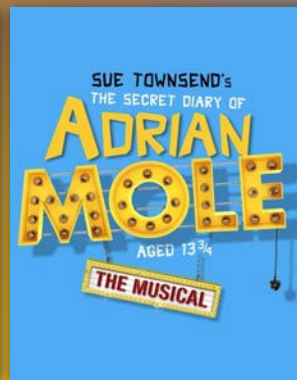
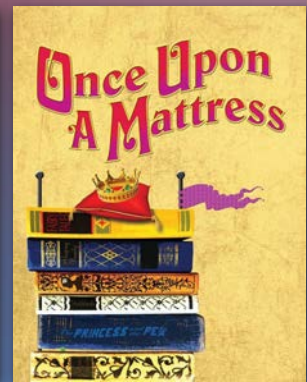
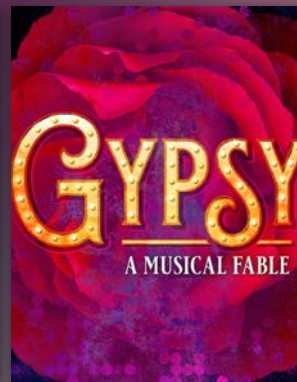
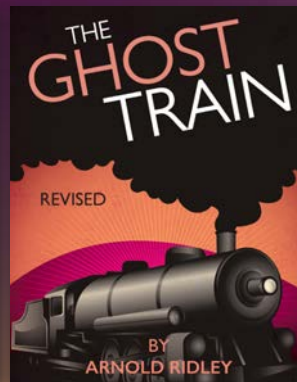
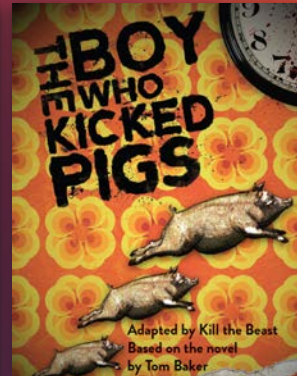
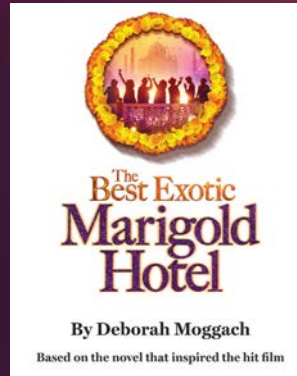
The second half of the workshop focussed on *Blood Brothers*, both the Liverpoolian accent and



latterly, a masterclass on Mickey's "but I'm not 7, I'm nearly eight" soliloquy. It was magical to see Jo sit down with Joseph on the floor of the hall and show him how to become a 7 year old and demonstrate how to use the text to add emotion and interest using pauses, pace and physicality. She initially worked with Joseph, but then everybody had the chance to have a go working in small groups.

Everybody attending the workshop had an enjoyable, positive experience and the performance we watched in October benefited from the ideas and techniques gained on that day.





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NODA West Midlands

Lighting the stage

Supporting groups across the West Midlands

The magic of theatre and especially musical theatre has captured my imagination from a very young age, and how a stage is such a versatile space. It can be a pantomime one night and a ballet the next, all whilst taking an audience through magical adventures and giving the enjoyment along the way.

Growing up with a mother and father both of whom were so closely involved in the local operatic society, helped to put me straight in the middle of get ins, rehearsals and helping out backstage on shows.

However, my interest was piqued when I discovered how a lighting desk could control so many things even back in the 1980s. Alongside this, I started to learn the endless possibilities of how filters could create various states, further hooking me in to how creative I could become with it all.

I asked many of the seasoned volunteers in the local groups, if I could help them and got involved in as many shows as possible. I am not sure the taxi service approved but they were very willing and encouraged my discovery.

As the son of an accountant, I also grew up with a business head on my shoulders, and the dream of having my own business came to mind. It's from these humble beginnings that The Lighting Factory was born.

Throughout the years, I saw various openings and



opportunities where I could purchase equipment and hire it back out to local groups to meet their requirements.

This started to grow as more companies asked for hires, and technology moved forward. With moving head lights and computerised lighting desks becoming a requirement, I worked hard to buy these items and then offer this to the local companies.

This continued work took me across the world from Universal Studios, Broadway, many of the West End theatres, to many European countries, where I built my experience, training and knowledge in theatre lighting and event management.

This event experience led me to a Project Management position with Aggreko, within the event team, where I now spend much of my working day planning and managing the temporary power installations for major sporting events around Europe.

Fast forward to today in the world of theatre and The Lighting Factory is proud to supply lighting and other services to over 30 theatre companies across the Midlands, while designing lighting for over 70 different shows a year. We are so very lucky that so many companies put their trust in us, and I can create so many different looks with our equipment. When walking around a foyer in the interval or at the end it gives a lovely feeling to hear the lighting get a mention.

With the support of my wonderful wife Mel, and an amazing friendship circle, we work as a strong family group to bring light to thousands of people every year across the Midlands. I am so proud of where life has taken me over the years, and it is wonderful that at the end of a long day we can see people walk away from a sporting event, or a theatre, with smiles on their faces and laughter in the air.

NODA North East

Developing and using new skills

Making the most of the gala weekend



Opportunities for using puppetry in productions are on the increase and in NODA North East, we are always delighted to promote opportunities for learning new skills. Mark Edwards has worked in education for over 35 years and has used puppets throughout his time as an educator. For the last ten years, he has developed puppet workshops for young people and adults having originally developed an interest through a NODA Summer School course. Mark explained that the Summer School course tutor was Corina Bona, who he found very inspiring. He explained that: *"We learnt so many different techniques including how to make simple puppets. Our giant puppet was legendary at the show piece at the end of the week."* Mark has

directed musicals for a number of local amateur operatic societies for over twenty years and 2024 saw him direct, for the first time, a production of *Avenue Q* – the dream production for any puppeteer. His puppet workshop company, Puppet Power North, offers affordable workshops for youth groups, schools, colleges, musical and dramatic societies and also has a full set of *Avenue Q* puppets to hire.

For the past three years Mark has delivered workshops at NODA North East Gala Weekend to help participants explore puppetry. For the 'Introduction to Puppetry' course, those attending created a simple puppet in groups then learnt how to move it. Then they explored how to bring a muppet type puppet to life. The workshop

was open to those with any level of experience and was for performers, production team and enthusiasts of all ages and abilities. Mark also delivered sessions for those who wanted to develop their skills further and we are looking forward to him coming back in 2026 for the fourth year.

Two of the Gala Weekend workshop participants have put the skills they used to positive effect. Chris Harrison knew he would be directing the play *Goodnight Mister Tom*, by David Wood, in October, and he attended to get ideas for how Mister Tom's collie dog, Sammy, could be delivered. Also on the course was Sophie Barnett who thoroughly enjoyed the puppetry even though this was an element



of theatre she had never explored before. When she secured the role of Sammy's puppeteer, in JABA Inc's production at Ossett Town Hall, both Chris as director and Sophie as performer were able to draw on the skills they had learned in Mark's workshop.

Sophie explained that: *"Puppetry was something that I've wanted to try and getting to do a workshop at the North East Gala Weekend really opened up this idea. At the time, Chris told me he was hoping to put on 'Goodnight Mister Tom' and asked if I was interested in auditioning for Sammy's puppeteer. It was hard physically, but ultimately very rewarding. I will definitely be doing it again with hopefully less floor work."* Sammy was beautifully created by Steve and

Paula Fealy. Director Chris was delighted that the production, and Sophie's performance, were positively received by the audiences. Chris explained that he took on board Mark's advice to *"keep the puppet alive - to make it real."* Chris said: *"I think keeping Sammy alive was definitely achieved by Sophie as a lot of feedback was that after the initial recognition that there's a puppet, which quite often got a chuckle, the audience just saw Sammy the dog and forgot all about the puppeteer"*.

Mark is returning to NODA North East Gala Weekend in April 2026 and will be bringing 'Introduction to Puppetry' to a new audience, including NODA Youth Members, but also adding a new session 'Developing Your Puppetry Skills

– Going Solo!' which will allow those attending to develop a deeper understanding of the skills of puppetry including the use of inanimate objects to explore breath, weight and intent, and will culminate in using puppets to create some short, improvised scenes.

NODA North East is thrilled that those attending Summer School are prepared to share their learning through workshops at the Gala Weekend, and that Gala Weekend participants can then use these skills in local productions.

Jo Sykes
District Rep and Youth
Co-ordinator, NODA North East

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NODA
For every stage

Addressing issues at the highest level



Following my report on the political landscape across the UK in the last issue of NODA Today, it's time for a quick update following this Autumn's party conferences.

I was able to attend the Labour party conference on behalf of NODA. What was interesting was just how gloomy the mood was for a party sitting on a majority of 147 seats in the House of Commons. But that majority is already down since the General Election in 2024, because of suspensions, resignations and the loss of two seats in by-elections, one to Reform and the other to Plaid Cymru.

Labour is clearly rattled by the rise of Reform. This has led to a ramping up of the rhetoric on immigration, and rather unconvincing waving of the union flag. Of the Conservatives and Lib Dems – there was barely a mention.

Often the real business of party conferences takes place at fringe events and there was a whole suite of events in the Creative and Cultural Industries Pavilion organised by industry body Creative UK.

The majority of these events were not of direct relevance to NODA members, though one on the health benefits of participating in the arts, chaired by former newsreader Angela Rippon, was informative and entertaining.

While focused on dance, its central thesis that dance is good for you would be equally applicable to theatre.

Another I attended, on "How nurturing creativity supports individual growth, future leadership and economic impact" featured Jonathan Davies, Labour MP for Mid-Derbyshire. In response to a question from me on NODA's concerns about decreasing access to affordable spaces for rehearsal and performance, he replied that he was a huge fan of amateur theatre and had been the recipient of a NODA award! He then suggested that the government's Pride in Place Programme could be a mechanism for NODA members to engage with their local authority on reviving cultural spaces.

The programme, which will invest £1.5 billion, delivering up to £20 million of funding and support over the next decade into 75 places across the UK, aims to *"help build stronger communities, create thriving places and empower local people"*. You can find further details on the NODA website.

The programme prioritises investment in community facilities, giving local people *"greater control over the spaces that matter to them. Refurbishing or taking ownership of underused but valued buildings enables communities to create welcoming places for connection, support and shared activity... this new funding will enable communities to regenerate valued local spaces and community assets, bringing them back into use. From disused churches and youth clubs to overgrown parks, undervalued social clubs and shuttered civic*

buildings, we will encourage communities to own and run these spaces themselves".

Neighbourhood Boards have been appointed, and their Regeneration Plans had to be submitted to the government by 28 November. Funding will start to roll out from April 2026.

We will see further government activity in the coming months. First off, there will be publication of Baroness Hodge's long-awaited review of Arts Council England. And just out is the government's response to the outcome of the Curriculum and Assessment Review, which we hope will confirm its commitment to putting creativity back at the heart of the curriculum. And of course, we have had the Budget. I will write a report on these for the next issue of NODA News.

Once again, do make sure you keep the NODA team informed about what is happening in your area, and that you keep in close touch with your local MP and councillors and invite them to shows. Finally, if your local MP is particularly enthusiastic about amateur theatre, do let us know so we can engage with them on the work of NODA and its members.

Mark Pemberton OBE
NODA Policy & Public Affairs
Adviser

NODA East Midlands

120 years of musical theatre magic

Celebrating in style

Chesterfield Operatic Society (COS) marked an extraordinary milestone this year as it celebrated its 120th anniversary, making it one of the longest-surviving musical theatre societies in the United Kingdom. From its very first performance of *The Mikado* in 1905, to its most recent production of *Everybody's Talking About Jamie* in 2025, COS has delighted generations of audiences and provided a creative home for countless performers across Chesterfield and beyond.

To commemorate this remarkable achievement, members past and present gathered at Technique Stadium for a glamorous celebration inspired by the Roaring Twenties. The event brought together decades of talent and memories, as guests raised a toast to the society's proud history and bright future. The evening was filled with warmth, laughter and nostalgia. Attendees enjoyed a beautiful meal, followed by live entertainment that showcased the musical passion at the heart of COS.

One of the highlights of the celebration was the presentation of NODA awards, honouring long-serving members who have dedicated many years to performing and supporting the society. The awards were presented by NODA representative, Joyce Handbury, whose words celebrated the enduring spirit of amateur theatre.

Adding to the excitement of the evening, guests participated in a fundraising raffle to support the society's ongoing work. The raffle was particularly special this year,



as Chesterfield Operatic Society (COS) has recently been granted charitable status—a significant step that will help secure its future and allow it to continue inspiring audiences for many more years to come.

For 120 years, Chesterfield Operatic Society (COS) has stood as a cornerstone of the local arts community, uniting people through a shared love of musical theatre. With a rich history, a dedicated membership and a commitment to nurturing local talent, COS looks forward to many more years of performance, creativity, and community spirit.

As the celebrations came to a close, one sentiment was clear: Chesterfield Operatic Society (COS) isn't just a group—it's a family. And after 120 years, the show most certainly goes on.



NODA North West

Going the extra mile

That right there, thats a moose!



Gander, Newfoundland, Canada. If you were a frequent flyer in the 1950s, the town may be familiar to you as a refuelling stop on the edge of the Atlantic. From then, until 11 September 2001, the town was almost unknown to the vast majority of the world. When the Terrorist attacks of 9/11 hit New York, planes crossing the Atlantic were forced to return east or land in Gander and St John's on the tip of the north American continent. The story of *Come From Away* documents the extraordinary actions of the local community in housing 7000 people from around the world in the days that followed until American airspace was reopened.

TMTC are delighted to be one of the first groups to be granted the licence for CFA which was performed in October 2025. Like many musical directors, Michael J Scott was keen to get his 'regular players' on the bill for the show. A phone call to long-time drummer and good friend Ste Jones turned into a conversation about what Gander was like today and, after a few clicks on Air Canada's website, and a few more months

to wait, they landed in Montréal for connecting flights in August 2025. What followed was an amazing three day visit to a very special town whilst also attending two performances of the show during its summer season on location in Gander.

Those who know CFA will know there are many mentions of local places in the script. We started our adventure 'checking out the sights' of Gander including Tim Hortons, Shoppers Drugstore, the World Trade Center memorial and Gander Academy. We then were invited to join the cast and band at the theatre for a matinee performance with the band where Ste was locked in the drum room with all-time drumming legend, Romano Di Nillo, and Michael enjoyed a spot in the pit with an adaptive headset mix of all the instruments, voices and clicks. After the show, we chatted with the cast including Broadway superstars Astrid van Wieren and Ben Power, the whistle player, who was born on the Wirral! In the evening, we took our seats in the audience for a moving performance of the show, followed off by a trip to Legion, where we were both 'Screeched' in as official Newfoundlanders by none other than Beulah Cooper herself (a significant character in the show) and Brian Mosher, who was portrayed as Janice Mosher in the show. Getting to meet the actual people on which the show was based was a real honour. A couple of hours of Irish-inspired music and local brews later, we made our way back to the Comfort Inn, where Beverley Bass and her entire crew were accommodated during their unscheduled stopover in Gander.

Day two saw Ste negotiating us

a hire car for a road trip around the region. Newfoundland is vast, picturesque and varied with dense forests giving way to open plains and small fishing villages. As the show tells, it certainly is remote. First stop was the Dover Fault (where Diane and Nick fall in love during the show) and then on to the communities of Lewisporte and Appleton. We passed the Salvation Army camp, various legion clubs and kept our eyes peeled for moose! We also visited Gander Airport where there was an excellent exhibition about the history of the airport and the show with Michael playing show tunes on the CFA piano in the arrivals hall, much to the delight of a party of American tourists. Day four started at the North American Aviation Museum, the airport's heritage is fascinating and diverse, before picking up a few souvenirs and heading back to Heathrow via Toronto.

Our visit to Gander not only provided us with an amazing musical experience and the chance to meet the cast and creatives of the show in their hometown, but also to experience the legendary Newfoundland hospitality first hand. We spoke to locals, young and old(er) and felt thoroughly welcomed into the community. In NFL, you arrive a stranger and leave a friend and we hope our enthusiasm for all things Gander shines through our upcoming production.





Presidential travels with the chain

The new NODA National President begins her journey round the UK

It seems incredible that I have reached the two-month mark of my presidential year. Things began at full speed with a fantastic Awards Day at Gosforth Park in Newcastle, followed almost immediately by four memorable days in Peebles for the Scottish AGM and Celebration weekend. Since then, I've attended twenty-three shows, a NODA Council meeting, also awards evenings and, as I sit down to write this, December has arrived.

What a journey it has been. From intimate village halls to impressive theatres, from a tiny cast bringing *The Little Mermaid*

to life to a large company delivering a powerhouse production of *West Side Story*, every visit has been a joy, an honour and an absolute treat.

But theatre isn't something we keep for ourselves—it belongs to our families, our friends, our audiences and our wider communities. The lessons it teaches us—how to communicate, grow in confidence, manage our time, truly listen, solve problems, collaborate and, above all, nurture empathy—reach far beyond the wings. They are skills that shape our lives on and off

the stage.

I truly hope I'll have the chance to join many of you at your productions throughout 2026—so get those invitations in early!

Please do keep sending me details of your upcoming shows for the New Year. My diary is filling quickly, but I will do my very best to visit as many of you as I can.

My heartfelt thanks to every group that has welcomed me to share in the art we all love.

Wishing you all a very happy new year.



SCOADS - *Carousel*



Kings Lynn Players - *Titanic*



BATS - *Come From Away*



Swansea AOS - *Annie*



CLOGS - *Elf The Musical*



BACCES - *Dick Whittington*



St Davids Players - *The Pirates of Penzance*



Drama Geeks - *The Little Mermaid Jr*

1-ACT WINNERS!

Winning 1-act comedies and dramas for next year's festivals



YOU AND ME BOTH

Comedy. 2m, 2f. Running time: 50 mins.

Gareth and Daisy have been invited to stay for free in a holiday cottage – a renovated barn – by the affluent owners, David and Fleur, who live next door. The trouble is Daisy knows David all too well: she used to be his wife, until he had an affair with Fleur. Now they are expected round for dinner and Daisy is beginning to worry what her ex-husband might let slip. While next door, in David and Fleur's house, they have just received some very worrying news from an unexpected quarter. And so, the stage is set for an hilarious comedy of personal relationships

NO SMOKE

Drama. 2m, 4f. Running time: 45 mins.

School student Ella has a crush on Paul Taylor, her violin teacher. Her mother sees a post about this on Ella's Facebook page and, after discussing it with her friends which just amplifies the perception she has of this out of proportion, she reports Paul to the Police. Events snowball quickly, both emotionally and physically, but is Paul guilty or innocent? Surely there's no smoke without fire.



HEAVEN'S PARADISE

Drama. 2m, 2f. Running time: 45 mins.

After a failed business venture, Ann and Michael Hampton decide to take a recuperative break on Lundy Island. While there, Ann becomes totally fascinated by the history of the Victorian owners of the island - the Heaven family; leading to consequences that neither of them could foretell...

LOSING IT

Comedy. 1m, 1f. Running time: 45 mins.

Jack is an actor who's lost for words. Now he's also lost his leading lady – and the way things are going, he's also losing the plot and he feels he might be on the verge of losing his mind too. Things start off well enough until it's clear that Jack's other actor has not turned up. His attempt to keep the play going soon gets too much for one member of the audience who begins remonstrating with him then gets sucked into appearing in the play herself...



derekwebb.co.uk

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NODA South East

It's a big, bright, beautiful world! All in the hands of youth members

Credit - Sarah Widdowson Photography

Uckfield Theatre Guild Youth section brought *Shrek The Musical Jr* to audiences at four performances in Uckfield in October, with 44 performers on stage ranging in age from six years to Isabella, the oldest performer on stage, aged 18.

In a first for the society, the direction, stage management and other production aspect were left in the hands of teenage youth members. Meredith, aged 16, made her directorial debut, as well as designing costume and managing many wigs. Katie, only just 16, was the technical and stage manager. Jesse, playing the lead role, was also the musical director; making decisions about harmonies, groups and microphone allocations. Evie, who played Papa Ogre and Papa Bear, oversaw props. Abi, was Peter Pan and a Duloc Dancer, was the choreographer. She had assistance from Poppy (Wicked Witch and Pied Piper) and Sam (featured dancer) with the tap dance for the Morning Person dance break. Even the tech team was made up of teens James and Luca on lights and projection. Eden, at nine, was the youngest



on the production team!

The youth team were supported by UTG youth leaders and the expertise of Off The Wall Entertainment Ltd, who not only provided the technical expertise and hardware, but also support our youth who are interested in stage design, stage management, sound and lighting.

Audiences were delighted and amazed at the finished result, with many booking to come again. Comments on social media included, 'Absolutely amazing children, costumes were stunning', 'Top notch show, gave the whole audience a lift,

enthusiasm and team spirit really showed', 'Such talented young artists...Well done all of you for such a great show, you should all be very proud', 'Utterly spellbinding' and 'I couldn't stop smiling'.

At Uckfield Theatre Guild, we love to include our youth in all aspects of theatrical productions and give them as many opportunities to perform as we can. With us they learn stagecraft, backstage etiquette, production and creative skills. We are hugely grateful for all of the support we get to enable these opportunities to our growing youth section.

NODA North

NODA North celebrates in style

Rolling out the red carpet



Credit - One Imagery Photography

The red carpet was rolled out, the guests arrived in true glamorous style and the Gosforth Hotel was again the venue for NODA North to celebrate another amazing year of talent with its Annual Awards Night.

With over 700 guests split over two ceremonies, Youth and Adult, the Annual Awards event went without a glitch as hundreds of awards were presented to members of societies from the Yorkshire Dales right up to the Scottish Borders.

Newly appointed President, Kay Rowan, joined the celebrations and it was wonderful to hear a lovely tribute from her to our region and NODA in general. It was an absolute honour to have her travel up North to join us for the 12 hours of awards. To quote Kay, and it is so true, *"These awards represent the hard work, late nights, teamwork and creativity you've poured into your performances this year."* We couldn't agree more.

Tom Whalley was our host for the evening following huge accolades from previous years and his energy and fantastic humorous approach provided the attendees with great entertainment.

In addition to the many awards handed out on the evening, it was also a chance to recognise some amazing contributions to our region with the Joyce Lonsdale Award being presented to Dan Brookes, of Crash Bang Wallop Youth Theatre, for his amazing commitment and hard work for the group as they celebrate their 10th anniversary. Past President, Gordon Richardson, awarded the Youth Unsung Hero Award to a very special young lady, Daisy Wall from Nunthorpe Players. Testimonies for both awards were both very emotional and motivational and true recognition for such dedication to Amateur Theatre.

The whole event was a roaring success with comments being



made about how well it was organised from the invites to the presentation and the committee would like to thank our secretary, for her hundreds of hours working making the main event of our calendar go off in such style.

Whilst not everyone could be a winner in the afternoon or evening, what was great was to witness the support and mutual appreciation around the room.

Huge thanks to One Imagery Photography for capturing some memorable moments throughout the day. Thankfully, they had stopped working by the time the dodgy dance moves surfaced. The celebrations continued well into the night as everyone enjoyed a night down from scripts and choreography and had a chance to mingle with all the wonderful societies in our region. The planning for 2026, has already begun

NODA West Midlands

Creating the magic

Inspiring costume design

My name is Evie Rice and I played the role of LeFou. Additionally, I was the costume designer and maker for select costumes in Script Youth's production of *Beauty and The Beast*. To be more specific, Belle's town dress, Belle's ball gown and the Beast's ball costume too. I created these pieces as my final project for my Year 14 Production Arts course at BOA Stage and Screen Academy.

I have never been so inspired for a project knowing that for the first time my costumes will be seen and used on a stage as big as the Crescent Theatre Birmingham. I got the opportunity to pour my heart and soul into the designs of these costumes, drawing what I had dreamed they had looked like when I watched the films as a child. What inspired my work, was combining both the animated film, live action and original Broadway production. I studied all three until I managed to combine all the elements I loved, then created my own and ensured every change I made had story and meaning behind it.

Using high quality gold satin, red rose lace, dark blue velvet to name a few, I really got to bring the design to life. I made all three costumes for the actors playing Belle and the Beast. Once the costumes were finished, I saw the magic they created when worn on the stage. I have now started my costume design course at Falmouth University and look forward to using my knowledge and experience one day again for Script Youth and beyond.

Script Youth give their members opportunities beyond performing, working on tech, choreography and in my case costumes. I couldn't be more thankful.





Turning Shakespeare on its head!

...who writes about a pirate battle? This is theatre. Show, don't tell.

It had been many years since our amateur youth company have had more than a few lines of script in a musical – let alone produced a play.

The idea of a Shakespeare based show came six years ago, when we were looking for plays to do with our youth company that not only challenged them, but gave them a chance to learn more than just 'the script.' Shakespeare has always been an area we, as a theatre, have wanted to explore more. Our thought was to take lots of the most well-known scenes from Shakespeare's plays and mash them up into a show. COVID put a stop to our plans and earlier this year, the idea was resurrected. This time, we had a search online for scripts around our ideas and came across an American script, written for a school class called *Shakesplosion*, written by Andrew Geha. This script merged every single one of Shakespeare's plays into one show, written for children – perfect!

Casting through chaos

So, we had a script, the next stage was casting the show. The show has 97 named characters, split into four acts; *The Histories*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *The Lovers'*

Tragedies, with some interludes in between. There was no way we would be able to hold auditions for all the parts, so holding a workshop audition day was the best way forward.

The workshop was all about getting everyone comfortable with Shakespeare while seeing how they worked together. We ran drama games focused on physicality and movement, got them shouting insults at each other, Shakespearean ones, of course, and introduced some basic stage combat techniques. It wasn't about finding the 'best' actors – it was about finding young people who were willing to take risks, support each other and throw themselves into something completely new. The energy in that room was electric and by the end of the day, we knew we had found our cast.

With the workshop complete and a cast of 24 young people, aged 11 to 18, we were ready for the off.

Rehearsals begin

We were planning on rehearsing the show over the school summer holidays and performing the first week back at school. Planning rehearsals was, well, interesting. Planning 24 cast, plus two

directors, costume teams and holidays made for a very colourful spreadsheet! But with the schedule complete, rehearsals began.

The first four weeks? Pure chaos in the best possible way. These performers went straight into learning stage combat – we're talking sword fighting, eye gouging techniques, the works and don't even get us started on all the planking. So. Much. Planking. Turns out building core strength is pretty important when you're trying to look commanding on stage.

Voice projection has been huge too. No mics for Shakespeare, so they have been learning to make sure the person in the back row can hear every word. Shakespeare based acting games were brilliant for getting everyone comfortable with really diving into character work – something most of them have never had to do at this level before.

What was amazing about this whole process is the cast weren't just being told what to do. They helped create this show; setting ideas, mood drawings, character backstories – it all came from



them and even the video design stuff has had their input.

The whole point was simple: let these young performers have fun doing something totally different while putting them completely outside their comfort zone. We wanted to throw them in the deep end and see what happens when they have to learn completely new skills.

The show itself

So, a little more about the actual show. The show is not performed in the full Shakespeare language, that is the thing that attracted us to this show. The section from Hamlet (performed in 12 minutes!) is the only section in complete Shakespearean language, all others are in modern English, with Shakespeare monologues interspersed.

Most of our performers had very little exposure to Shakespeare plays outside of GCSE English, let alone every single one, so it was fun to explore each title. We spent time in rehearsals breaking down the plots, discussing the themes, and working out which characters were heroes, villains, or somewhere gloriously in between. The cast quickly discovered that Shakespeare loved recycling his ideas – twins causing confusion, girls disguising themselves as boys, and lovers from feuding

families kept popping up everywhere!

With the cast members we had, we decided to also include a small amount of dance. This took the form of the 'off stage' pirate battle during Hamlet. Choreographed by one of the younger cast members, this pirate dance added a bit of light-hearted relief because as to quote the show – *“who writes about a pirate battle? This is theatre. Show, don't tell.”*

The comedy of it all

Shakespeare's comedy was a revelation for most of the cast. They came in expecting stuffy language and complicated plots, but quickly discovered that Shakespeare was actually writing rude jokes in the 1590s. The innuendos, the physical comedy, the ridiculous misunderstandings, suddenly Shakespeare felt accessible and, dare we say it, actually funny.

Performing the comedic sections required a completely different energy from the tragedies. The cast had to learn comic timing, how to play to the audience and when to let a joke breathe. Some of our quieter performers absolutely came alive in these sections, discovering they had a natural gift for comedy they'd never explored before. Watching

someone nail the delivery of a centuries old punchline and get genuine laughs? That never got old.

Shakespeare insults rehearsal

One of our favourite rehearsal sessions was Shakespeare insults. We printed out sheets of authentic Shakespearean insults and let the cast go wild. *“Thou art a boil, a plague sore!” “You scullion! You rampallian! You fustilarian!”* They were shouting these ridiculous, elaborate insults at each other, getting more and more dramatic with each round. What started as a fun warm-up became an incredibly useful tool. It got them comfortable with Shakespearean language without the pressure of “performing.” They learned rhythm, emphasis, and how to make old words sound natural. Plus, it was hilarious watching teenagers call each other *“spleeny, rump-fed maggot-pies”* with complete conviction. Some of these insults definitely made their way into breaks and became running jokes throughout the production.

The awkward bit: lots of murders

Here's something nobody warns you about when directing young people in Shakespeare: there are a LOT of murders. Stabbing, poisoning, full-on battles, more stabbing – Shakespeare was not subtle about his body count.

We had to have some very practical conversations about stage violence. How do you make a death look realistic without looking odd or forced? How do you play being stabbed without it looking silly? The stage combat sessions became essential here. The cast learned that theatrical violence is a carefully choreographed dance, it only works if everyone trusts each other completely.

Some of the younger cast members found the death scenes challenging at first. Being murdered isn't exactly light material for a 12-year-old. We took time to discuss the



context, the emotions behind these moments and made sure everyone felt supported. By performance time, they handled these scenes with amazing maturity and emotional depth.

Bringing it to life: using projection

With 37 plays to represent, our set design had to be flexible and imaginative. We couldn't build 37 different locations, so we relied heavily on projection design and minimal, moveable set pieces. The cast's input was invaluable here – they sketched ideas for how each section should feel, created mood boards and even suggested specific imagery for projections.

We used projections to establish location and atmosphere quickly. One moment we're in a Danish castle, the next we're in the Forest of Arden, then suddenly we're on the Scottish heath with three witches.

Changes between performances

Something magical happened between our first rehearsal and our final performances: the show evolved. The cast grew more confident, made bolder choices and started really playing with the audience. Jokes that got tentative laughs on opening night had the audience roaring by closing night. Emotional moments that felt a bit cautious early on became

genuinely moving.

We encouraged the cast to stay responsive to each audience. Some crowds loved the comedy and needed the tragic moments to hit harder in contrast. Others were so invested in the serious scenes that the comic relief became even more important. The performers learned to read the room and adjust, a skill that will serve them far beyond this production.

Line delivery changed too. What started as carefully memorised speeches became conversations. The Hamlet section, performed entirely in original Shakespearean language, went from feeling like a recitation to feeling like these characters were genuinely speaking these thoughts for the first time. That transformation was everything we hoped for.



The real learning: understanding stage and text

Beyond the sword fights and the spectacle, the deepest learning happened in how these young people developed their relationship with text and stage craft. Most of them had only ever performed in ensemble roles or musicals where movement is choreographed for you. Shakespeare demanded something different.

They learned so much about character: how someone speaks tells you who they are. They discovered that Shakespeare's verse has natural rhythm and breathing points built in, that

punctuation matters, that even the length of words tells you something about emotion. A character speaking in short, sharp words is in a very different state than one speaking in long, flowing sentences. The stage work was equally important. They learned how where you stand on stage communicates power and relationship. They discovered that stillness can be more powerful than movement, that a pause can be as important as a line. They learned to trust the text, trust each other and trust that if they committed fully to the moment, the audience would come with them.

The result

Honestly? It has worked! The stage combat has built trust between performers. The voice work is giving them confidence they didn't know they had. All this creative collaboration is teaching them things you just can't learn from just being told where to stand on stage!

Between the sword fights, the creative chaos and watching this cast discover they can do more than they thought possible, *Shakesplasion* shaped up to be something pretty special. And the best part? We have all had an amazing time doing it.

These 24 young people came in knowing Shakespeare as that difficult stuff from English class. They're leaving as performers who understand that 400-year-old plays can be violent, hilarious, moving, and yes, even cool. They've learned skills that will serve them in whatever they do next – whether that's more theatre, or just being more confident speaking in front of people.

Would we do it again? In a heartbeat. Though maybe with slightly less planking next time. Definitely!

Rob Williams
Director

NODA Scotland

Behind the scenes

Beauty and the Beast – the “panto”



The Johnstone Phoenix Theatre Group has been entertaining the local community of Johnstone and beyond with pantomimes since 1977, when we first tried our hand at the art of panto with Cinderella. Since then, we've proudly established ourselves as the "Johnstone Panto", bringing festive fun to audiences year after year – alongside our popular spring musicals.

This year marks our 47th annual pantomime and we'll be performing *Beauty and the Beast – The Panto* – a title we've only performed once before. What makes this year extra special is that two of our own members were invited to write the script especially for us, tailoring it to suit our club, our audiences and the strengths of our performers.

We asked one of our writers, Craig Inglis-McDonald, to chat about the process.

"Murray and I were honoured to take on the challenge. Having both written scripts separately for youth theatres, and having collaborated last year on Cinderella for the Johnstone Phoenix Youth Theatre, we were thrilled to be asked by the committee to create the next senior club panto. Needless to say, we were buzzing with excitement!

The process was both fascinating and fun. After the committee chose the title, "Beauty and the Beast", we set to work – easier said than done! That initial meeting kicked off five months of creative brainstorming, writing and editing, leading to the show we'll be performing this December.

We began with a long afternoon of ideas, fuelled, of course, by plenty of tea and biscuits, to develop the story, characters

and settings. The process came naturally to us: we share a similar sense of humour and a deep love of pantomime. Once the story was mapped out, we wrote and refined each scene, ensuring the pacing was right and packing in all the traditional panto gags we know our local audiences adore.

After a few read-throughs (just the two of us taking on every role!), we submitted the script to the committee for approval, which, thankfully, we received. The production team then began their work and following a meeting to fine-tune a few details, auditions were held and the cast was finalised.

The first full cast read-through is always an exciting moment. For the cast, it's when the story really comes to life; for us as writers, who were also auditioning and performing, it was equal parts excitement and nerves! Hearing our words spoken aloud for the first time was both thrilling and terrifying. Would the jokes land? Would anyone laugh? Luckily, the answer was yes – the laughter came thick and fast, and the cast brought the script to life beautifully. Phew!

Once the principal cast was set, the wider ensemble began rehearsing. We made sure every member had a chance to shine, with moments written especially for them. We also included a few personal touches, like a nod to one of our life members, Gladys E. Peden, who has been part of the club for over 50 years and missed only a handful of shows in that time – an incredible achievement! One of Gladys's beloved show-week traditions is making a 'tin of tablet' for the cast, so we've written that into

NODA South West

Panto in 24 hours

Let's make a challenge!

the script as a little Easter egg for past members in the audience to enjoy. It's touches like these that make this panto truly ours – a Johnstone Phoenix original.

As I write this, we've just completed our first full run-through, and it's been wonderful to see the story come alive on stage. The next step is the most nerve-wracking, performing in front of a live audience! Murray and I will no doubt be hiding in the wings, listening anxiously to see if the laughs land where we hoped they would... gulp!

It's been such a rewarding experience, and we were both delighted, and slightly stunned, when the committee asked us to write next year's panto as well. We're already brainstorming ideas and characters for the next story, but my lips are sealed for now. Oh yes, they are!"

As a club, we couldn't be prouder of everyone involved in this year's production: from our talented writers and creative team to our dedicated cast and crew, who have all poured their hearts into bringing *Beauty and the Beast – The Panto* to life. It's a true celebration of local talent, teamwork and community spirit – the very essence of what Johnstone Phoenix Theatre Group stands for. We can't wait to welcome audiences back to the Town Hall for another magical festive season filled with laughter, music and panto fun for all ages.

Craig Inglis-McDonald
NODA Scotland Regional
Representative - District 4



Trowbridge Musical Theatre has never performed a pantomime. We usually perform two big musicals a year, and that has meant an increase in outgoings and a continuing struggle to break-even on productions.

The committee have been working hard to think of new and exciting ways to fundraise for the society so we can keep on bringing high-quality amateur musicals to the county town of Wiltshire. Why not do a panto? Licensing costs could be low to none, and they are always a crowd pleaser and sell well...but where's the USP? Why not make it a challenge...rehearse it in 24 hours and see what happens!

Our initial ideas of rehearsing through the night were scuppered by venue complications and child performing regulations, so we decided to be kind and allow cast home overnight to rest, or continue learning lines. Whilst we cast the show, of mixed ages from aged 8 upwards, back in September, we didn't see them again until Friday 24th October bright and early at 9am. All blocking, choreography rehearsal and singing practise of 'Robin Hood' was done throughout that day, with regular coffee and cake breaks and we finished up around

10pm having blocked the whole full-length show!

We met up again on Saturday morning, did some polishing of scenes, ran a tech and a dress rehearsal and presto – we opened our first show at 7:30pm that evening!

We had another successful show the following day as a matinée, both shows sold very well and were extremely well-received. As performers, we really enjoyed hearing the crowd participation, something you don't always achieve with musicals and also had a lot of fun singing and dancing along to well-known songs like '500 miles' and 'Man! I Feel Like A Woman'. We even threw in some more modern hits, with the dame singing 'Dear Future Husband' by Megan Trainor.

The whole project was directed and driven by Robin Bailes, who also co-wrote the script, musically directed by Amy Emberson and choreographed by Anna Mazan, who is also co-chair of the society alongside Maria Matthews who was the show's producer. The accounts are still being calculated but did we make the profit we set out to achieve? "Oh yes we did!"...and would we do it again? 100% YES.

NODA East

Cinderella Goes All Inclusive

Company stages inclusive pantomime



Cinderella in rehearsals

A Bedfordshire playwright has driven a move for greater on-stage inclusivity by creating a pantomime featuring a wheelchair-bound *Cinderella*.

Two years after it was first written, Jonathan Goodson's *Cinderella Goes All Inclusive* was performed in October (2025) at the Luton Library Theatre by Goodson's own NODA group, Five Pound Theatre. Like the fairy tale prince's quest to match a glass slipper with the girl of his dreams, Goodson was on a similar mission, casting his eye far and wide to find the perfect march for the all-important role of the leading lady: he wanted a talented performer who also was a real-life wheelchair user to give the show a necessary authenticity.

And he found his match in Luton at the end of 2024: the omni-talented Julia Mark, whose

medical issues forced her into a wheelchair a decade previously, fitted the 'slipper' perfectly.

Rehearsals began last summer and went to the stage in the last week of October, at the Library Theatre.

To create this groundbreaking project, Goodson, who has five other scripts under his belt, was inspired by his profession and day job as a traffic engineer. "I've been in sort of local government roles for quite a number of years," he says. "I think accessibility is improving the visibility of making arrangements for people that find it hard to get around; it's much better now than it was 20 years ago." For instance, he adds, "Transport for London have certainly been pushing to make all of their bus stops accessible for a number of years."

To make appearing in *Cinderella* an accessible experience for Mark and future differently abled performers, Goodson says, the Library Theatre financially invested in and installed a ramp to the stage. The theatre itself is on an upper floor of its building and a lift is available to move people from floor to floor. "That's a nice legacy for the show, isn't it," Goodson comments.

To work with Mark herself, Goodson says that he had "quite a few conversations" with her about logistics and well-being "like, actually, how much stamina do you have? Can you rehearse twice week? Do we need to cut it back? Can your chair get in the lift?"

The script itself was designed to ease or eliminate accessibility issues. "She doesn't have a big

transformation when she goes to the ball or when she 'runs' out of the ball," Goodson explains. He elaborates, "The plot of this show is, it starts with the characters you'll recognise in the setting, and it goes off into fairly wild directions in terms of who ends up with who, and the whole thing is kind of deliberately thrown up in the air."

The turn-out to see the production was not as high as Goodson would have liked, he acknowledges. But he is hoping that the message of inclusivity for such high-profile theatre roles spreads far beyond the local community. And he is thrilled with the quality of skills and presence that his *Cinderella* brought to the show. "I got really lucky with my leading lady because I literally only made contact with the one person who was a wheelchair user that could authentically play the role. She can sing, she can deliver dialogue, play fast jokes. She's amazing and absolutely nailed all of it."

DeeDee Doke
NODA East Regional Editor



Jonathan Goodson - writer

NODA North West

To the stage crew

The unspoken backbone



Credit - Photojenix

It is a well-known fact that, without performers, a production cannot happen. However, it is rarely acknowledged that the true driving force behind the theatre running running is the stage crew.

Every Monday night, almost every week, the stage crew meets up to tirelessly and selflessly work on the running of The New

Mills Art Theatre and its upkeep without complaints or bother. People like Dave Provart, Stewart, Nick Peach and Keith Clayton continually show their enthusiasm towards such a huge task and do so with great care despite it meaning they have to give up large amounts of their own time. Terry Barber is the heartbeat of the backstage crew and a life member of the theatre. Their generosity and commitment has meant that time and time again productions have been put on, in our beautiful theatre flawlessly. Without them, no show could be done justice.

While largely unseen by the audience, they are the creators of the magic. Their dedication and hard work ensure each moment of a show is seamlessly executed with every single cue and every scene change done perfectly. The backstage crew ensure the actors shine and feel confident and assured that their show will be performed without fault. They are incredible volunteers who calm

the hectic atmosphere backstage with reliability and friendly familiar faces that are seen year on year.

Usually, they are the first in and the last out, setting up and closing down the theatre for any kind of show or performance. They call for 'act one beginners' and open the curtains and position the set. They close the curtains calling for the finale and reset the stage to do it all again the next day.

Without them the stage would be an empty shell with a couple of actors on it trying their best to run a show with no set, no lights or no sound. They are the true unsung heroes of the theatre, and they must know how much we appreciate them.

Thank you to the stage crew. You are truly the machine that runs the theatre.

Training Suggestions

NSPCC
Learning¹

NSPCC Learning
learning.nspcc.org.uk

Online safeguarding training for volunteers, chaperones and trustees



MHFA England

MHFA England
mhfaengland.org

Mental health first aid training - in person and virtual training

ACT | ACTION COUNTERS TERRORISM

Action Counters Terrorism Awareness
ct.protectuk.police.uk/act

Free venue counter terrorism training online. For venues small to large.



Panto Scripts

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

The King's New Clothes
or *Sherlock Holmes*

there is something for every group

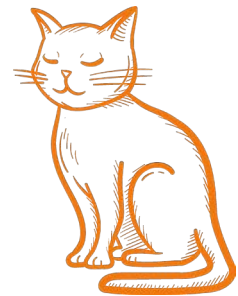
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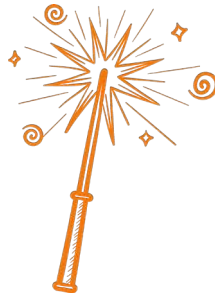
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something for everyone!



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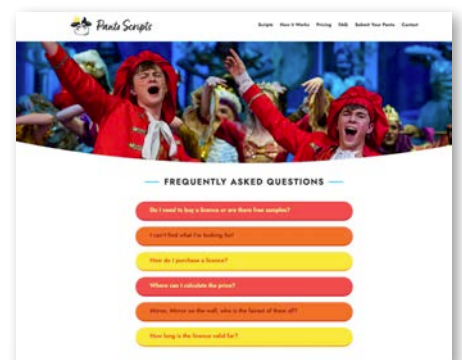
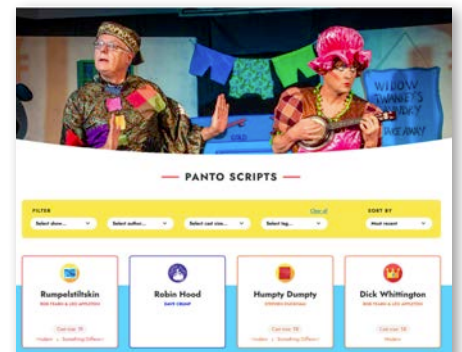
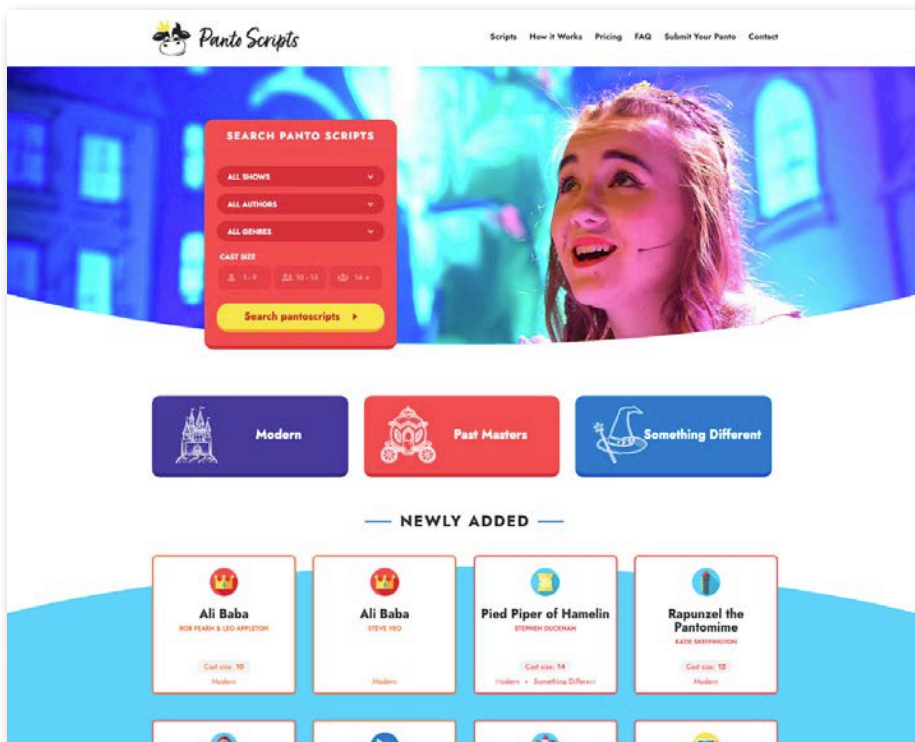


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pantoscripts.org.uk

NODA North East

Twenty years empowering young people

Promoting inclusivity and participation



KYDZ - Keighley Youth Theatre is a registered charity aiming to bring drama to children of the local community of Oakworth and Keighley in West Yorkshire. The group promotes inclusivity and encourages participation from a wide range of the youth community as well as providing a safe and supportive place for its members. The group devise their own material for their shows and often explore issues which are close to their hearts, as well as dealing with many of the challenges that young people face. Some of their hard-hitting story lines have included bullying, identity, friendship and family ties. The group was started twenty years ago, when it's Creative

Director, David Knights, heard that the local group he had been helping with, Holycroft Youth Theatre (HYT), was about to close. David took this opportunity to start KYDZ and together with his creative team has spent twenty-years building the group. Many of the Leadership Team have been members of KYDZ and this progression has allowed them to develop their management skills. David has attended NODA Summer School to develop new skills and another member of the team, Lynsey Fothergill, attended this year taking the 'How to Direct Plays' course which she then put into practice with a hilarious sketch all about the leaders of the group.



The group participate in workshops and also attend NODA NE Gala Weekend Youth Event at Bridlington. They have also built up a fine array of technical equipment which their tech team use to great effect in their productions. This gives the young people the opportunity to regularly work with radio mics and develop technical understanding.

For the twentieth anniversary the group put on a concert, Musical Mash Up, which was attended by NODA Vice-President, Les Smith; District Representative, Jay Cundell-Walker and Regional Youth Co-ordinator, Jo Sykes.

NODA Wales & Ireland

Taking an award winning play to the nationals

Representing Wales



During the concert there was an opportunity to celebrate all the productions and work which the group had been part of during their twenty-year history, including their many activities during lockdown when the group continued to meet online and also produced online films.

With a strong team and a great group of young people the group is looking forward to many more years to come.

Jo Sykes
District Rep and Youth Co-ordinator, NODA North East



Credit - Valentin Rotaru - VR Studio

PMA Theatre is an amateur drama group based in Old Colwyn, North Wales. The group has members aged 10yrs – 80yrs old. The group performs musicals, plays and other stage events throughout the year. The focus of the group is to help its members to gain confidence, develop skills and have fun doing theatre!

This year the group entered the Conwy One Act festival with an original play, *Echoes in the Static*, written and directed by Alyn and Robert Smith. Alyn and Robert are a teacher and GP respectively. In the past, they have focussed on making short films alongside their full-time jobs. Consequently, they approached writing and producing this play from a slightly different perspective.

After winning the regional Drama Association of Wales, One-Act Festival in Conwy, PMA Theatre

travelled to Cardiff to take part in the Welsh final, where they won.

On 4th July 2025, PMA Theatre took part in the British Final of One Act Plays, representing Wales against Scotland, Ireland and England.

The event took place at the Lichfield Garrick Theatre where the group received a warm welcome from their hosts. While they did not win, the experience was enjoyed by all. The one-act festival is a unique opportunity for drama groups to meet other amateur groups and to compete and receive constructive feedback. The opportunity to compete and to represent Wales at this prestigious event was a wonderful experience for all involved. The group looks forward to entering the festival again next year.

Feature article

Romeo Romeo, wherefore art though Romeo?

He's behind you!

Yes! It's that time of year again, when theatrical groups up and down the country are part-way through rehearsing for their annual pantomime.

But how did they get to this point? How did they decide on the pantomime chosen?

Pantomime script selection committees up and down the length and breadth of Britain have certain pressing criteria:

- Money is scarce and it's getting harder and harder to put 'bums on seats!'
- You want your show to sell tickets!
- Is your panto of choice more appealing than your local competitors?
- Will a traditionally themed panto sell more tickets than one with a fresh storyline?

Understandably, the 'Script Selection Committee' will often opt for the 'safe', tried and tested ones:

- Dick Whittington
- Cinderella
- Jack & the Beanstalk

Or if the committee is really daring, they may go with the less used but equally traditional ones:

- Three Musketeers
- Alice in Wonderland
- Rapunzel.

Pantomime authors have the exact same considerations to wrestle with when choosing their next writing project. After all, they're keen to provide companies with a commercial show.

Script writing partnership, Sean Brennan and Damian Shalks have regularly created pantos for Brighthouse Theatre Productions (BTP).

Brennan & Shalks eliminated the need to choose between the traditional and the novel with their latest show. They simply wrote one that is both!

What could be more novel than a panto based on a Shakespeare classic? Familiar characters and some less familiar, with a classic plotline which comes complete with all the traditional expectations of a family pantomime.

And so was born: *Romeo & His Juliet: A Family Pantomime*

WHAT? WHAT? WHAT?

You mean the classic boy meets girl, 'Love Story' - gone wrong? The one where the title characters fall in love despite their feuding families? But what about the '*He's behind you*' and the '*Oh no it isn't!*'? Don't worry - it's all there, and more.

Yes, but what about the original play's tragic ending and all that misery and gore?

Well... yes... of course, some bits needed reshaping. With a cut here and paste there and with a big 'Thank You!', to 'Sleeping Beauty' ... Hey, Presto! -we have a happy ending. The two bickering families - The Mozzarella (Montagues) and The Cappuccinos (Capulets), become united! No tears, no blood. Just fun, music, dancing and even a magic show and a 'silhouette

operation!'

How did it work?

Let us begin by looking at the original play by William Shakespeare:

The Characters

Romeo

The son and heir of Montague and Lady Montague. A young man of about sixteen, Romeo is handsome, intelligent and sensitive. Though impulsive and immature, his idealism and passion make him an extremely likable character.

Juliet

The daughter of Capulet and Lady Capulet. A beautiful thirteen-year-old girl, Juliet begins the play as a naïve child who has thought little about love and marriage, but she grows up quickly upon falling in love with Romeo: the son of her family's great enemy.

Friar Lawrence

A Franciscan friar, friend to both Romeo and Juliet. Kind, civic-minded, a proponent of moderation and always ready with a plan. Friar Lawrence secretly marries the impassioned lovers in hopes that the union might eventually bring peace to Verona.

Mercutio

A kinsman to the Prince and Romeo's close friend.

The Nurse

Juliet's nurse, the woman who breast-fed Juliet when she was a



baby and has cared for Juliet her entire life. A vulgar, long-winded, and sentimental character, the Nurse provides comic relief with her frequently inappropriate remarks and speeches.

Tybalt

A Capulet, Juliet's cousin on her mother's side. He loathes Montagues.

Capulet

The patriarch of the Capulet family, father of Juliet, husband of Lady Capulet and enemy, for unexplained reasons, of Montague.

Lady Capulet

Juliet's mother, Capulet's wife. A woman who herself married young, by her own estimation she gave birth to Juliet at close to the age of fourteen, she is eager to see her daughter marry Paris.

Montague

Romeo's father, the patriarch of the Montague clan and bitter enemy of Capulet.

Lady Montague

Romeo's mother, Montague's wife. She dies of grief after Romeo is exiled from Verona.

Paris

The suitor of Juliet most preferred by Capulet.

Benvolio

Romeo's cousin.

William Shakespeare's storyline: There has been fighting and feuding between two powerful families for as long as folk can remember. Recently it has erupted into bloodshed, and this simmering tension is not helped when a group of masked Montagues gate-crash a Capulet party. Romeo Montague falls in love with Juliet Capulet. Juliet was due to marry the Count Paris, her father's choice of suitor. To avoid this and with Juliet's nurse's help, Romeo and Juliet marry the next day.

Unfortunately, Romeo's good-natured attempt to defuse the rising tensions which had resulted in a street fight, actually made things worse by him accidentally

killing a Capulet – Juliet's cousin, Tybalt.

Romeo is banished. Juliet is beside herself and wants to see Romeo again.

The friar has a cunning plan which involves Juliet taking a sleeping potion to make it appear that she has died. A message telling Romeo of this plan fails to reach him, instead on his return he believes Juliet is actually dead and so he kills himself. When Juliet awakes, she sees Romeo has actually killed himself and so she does the same!

Now that is a tragedy.

The two warring families now are joined in grief and agree to cease all hostilities.

Brennan & Shalks translated this into a pantomime as follows:

The Romeo & Juliet Panto

Characters:

- Romeo – Principal boy
- Juliet – Principal girl
- Lady Cappuccino – Juliet's wicked, fortune-grabbing, stepmother
- Fairy Floss Tickle – Magically comical immortal
- Friar Burger – Comedy duo 1.
- Pastor Parcel – Comedy duo 2.
- Ronseal – Juliet's dippy female cousin
- Ben DiBus – Romeo's cousin.
- Nurse Risotto – Panto Dame, with a penchant for potty potions



- Count Down – Lady Cappuccino’s wet and wimpy nephew
- Lord Mozzarella – Romeo’s father & widower

The *Romeo and His Juliet: A Family Pantomime* storyline reads:

From the very start of the show’s Prologue, Lady Cappuccino lets it be known that she is going to make sure that she and not Juliet inherits Juliet’s late father’s (ie Lady Cappuccino’s husband’s) wealth on her eighteenth birthday.

In Verona, Mozzarellas and the Cappuccinos are fighting again. They are always fighting as they hate each other with a passion, although no one can remember why!

Juliet is due to have her 18th birthday and this is to be marked with a fancy dress masked ball.

At this party, Lady Cappuccino plans to get her hands on Juliet’s

inheritance by giving Juliet a love potion. This will make her instantly fall in love with the hapless sappy Count Down (Lady C’s nephew).

However, this plan fails when the love potion is drunk by the Nurse, Lord Mozerella, Ben-DiBus and Ronseal. We never really find out what shenanigans that leads to!

Romeo and Juliet fall in love without the need for any potion but when Lady C finds out about it, she banishes Romeo from Verona and forces Juliet to marry Count Down or she will imprison Romeo for ever.

After this forced wedding, Lady C gives Juliet a very strong sleeping potion to make it appear that she has died, and so, the nephew will inherit Juliet’s inheritance which she will then get him to hand over to her.

Romeo and others all see Juliet in the crypt and they all think she is dead.

However, with Fairy Tickle’s

help, the Nurse successfully removes the sleeping potion from Juliet’s stomach – shared with the audience by a silhouette operation where all sorts of random and amusing items are removed from Juliet’s tummy.

After the operation she is awakened eventually with a kiss from Romeo and in traditional panto style, they are married and live happily ever after.

And so, the tragedy initially penned by the Great Bard himself has been successfully re-worked into a very successful pantomime.

Are you interested in giving it a go yourself? It is both novel and an interesting reworking of a traditional tale.

This Brennan/Shalks pantomime script will be made available through NODA in the coming months. Watch this space or better still, the PantoScripts website – pantoscripts.org.uk



NODA South West

First youth workshops and performance

Introducing young people to stage performance



Chardstock Amateur Dramatic Society (CADS) reached an exciting milestone this autumn with the successful launch of its first-ever Youth Workshop and Performance. The event brought together a group of enthusiastic young people from Chardstock and the surrounding area to explore the magic of theatre in a fun, creative and supportive environment.

The workshop, held over several weeks, introduced participants aged 8 - 18 to the key elements of stage performance, including: voice projection, movement, improvisation, character building and teamwork.

Led by experienced CADS members and guest tutors, the sessions encouraged the young performers to build

confidence, express themselves and learn new skills both on and off the stage. The highlight of the workshop was a public performance at Chardstock Community Hall, where the young actors took to the stage to showcase what they had learned. The performance featured a lively mix of short scenes, sketches and group pieces, all devised and performed by the participants themselves. Families, friends and members of the local community filled the audience and gave the young cast a warm and enthusiastic reception.

"It was the young people themselves who asked if we could run something just for them and we were delighted to make it happen," said Kat Wilsher, Chairperson of CADS.

"Their enthusiasm and determination gave us the inspiration to create this youth workshop and it has exceeded all our expectations. The energy, imagination and commitment they have shown has been truly inspiring. It's wonderful to see the next generation discovering their confidence and creativity through the magic of live theatre."

The youth workshop was part of CADS's wider commitment to making theatre accessible to all ages and strengthening links within the community. By offering opportunities for young people to get involved, CADS hopes to nurture future performers, directors and theatre enthusiasts who will help keep local drama thriving for years to come.



Insurance for NODA members

Your questions

Did you know that over 80% of all NODA member groups arrange their Amateur Theatre Group Insurance in the UK, through NODA Insurance Services (NODA IS) who have been working with us for 25 years? They provide NODA members with amateur dramatics insurance that works behind the scenes to protect your productions and people. After decades of providing comprehensive insurance for theatrical and operatic communities, NODA IS has truly perfected its craft.

Here are some frequently asked questions NODA members ask NODA IS advisers in relation to their insurance.

Do we get a NODA member insurance discount?

Yes, you can get a discount of around 25% with evidence of a valid NODA membership number.

- o Audio/visual equipment
- o Microphones
- o Costumes & wigs
- o Sets & scenery
- o Props

Is there a limit to the number of events?

Yes, 5 events in the year. However, committee meetings and rehearsals are covered in addition to this, with no limit.

Can we extend theatre insurance mid-year for new members?

If new members join mid-year, you can extend your insurance to cover them. This does not extend to people over the age of 80, who can be covered for Public Liability but not for Personal Accident.

Does NODA IS cover props?

An increase in coverage for property, such as props hired in, can be provided for the duration of the performance. Anything hired in will be insured under temporary cover, for example:

Are we insured for cancellation of the performance(s)?

This coverage is known as Abandonment Insurance (performance cancellation). If the performance or production is cancelled because of unforeseen circumstances, Abandonment Insurance can cover you, but it doesn't cover the cost of ticket sales. This insurance is useful if you are putting on an outdoor production and adverse weather forces cancellation (abandonment).

Are animals covered on stage? For example, a dog playing Toto from The Wizard of Oz.

Yes. This would be a Public Liability Insurance policy which can cover damage or injury caused by the dog, but not injury to the dog itself.

Is Flying Performers Insurance available if performers 'fly' on stage?

Flying Performers Insurance is available for flying on stage. However, if the group needs to fly over the audience, we require further information. i.e. type of equipment being used.

Are buildings covered?

If a building is legally owned by the theatre company, and props are stored there, NODA IS can insure the building. i.e. shed, summerhouse, or outbuilding.

Can we arrange stage combat insurance for our production?

Potentially, yes, but you won't be insured against the risk of prosecution where the use of weapons is concerned, or if you can, it could be financially prohibitive. Your group can, however, be adequately covered for any accident or injury involving weapons. We strongly advise that, as a group, you check your existing insurance policy to

ensure adequate 'member to member' liability cover is in place, as in the NODA insurance policy that can include 'weapons on stage' insurance.

Can we get fundraising event insurance for theatre groups?

Yes, if it is something like a cake sale or jumble sale, but please notify your insurance broker or insurer before the event. Fundraising event insurance for theatre groups can be provided as part of your coverage.

Does the policy cover the group using pyrotechnics in their productions?

NODA IS can provide pyrotechnics insurance for amateur theatre

productions. If your group is responsible for the pyrotechnics, you need to check a range of factors:

- Get the venue's permission and their rules and requirements
- One person should take charge of the organisation and storage of the pyrotechnics with one back up person

Theatre Group Public Liability Insurance – does NODA IS provide this?

They can arrange this type of insurance which can cover claims from the public for injury or property damage as a result of

your theatre group's activities.

Is there such a thing as 'using water on stage' insurance (i.e. *Singing in the Rain*)

Cover is in force for using water on stage. However, you should check the following and inform us of the following:

- Has the theatre agreed to water being used?
- How much water is going to be used?



Call: 01823 250736

Get a theatre insurance quote today: nodainsurance.co.uk

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NODA North

A new look for NODA North

New faces on the regional committee



With recent retirements and fresh faces, the NODA North Committee has a new look.

Still under the guidance of Regional Councillor, Peter Oliver, three new faces have joined the committee, all of them bringing a youthful and energetic approach to the running of our small yet dynamic region.

Huge welcome to Alexandra Gilmartin, Stephanie Corbett and Joseph Arnott who have recently joined us and are straight to work visiting and meeting their groups within the region. All three are very experienced and well known, having been involved with groups across the districts. It's great to see how welcome they have all been made in their roles.

Sadly, Gordon Richardson, past NODA President and previous regional councillor has decided to take a break and we can not thank him enough for everything he gave to our region. Whilst staying on board with the National Council, we know Gordon will still be out attending shows across the area in between cheering on his beloved Sunderland FC and having some much deserved holidays.

We know how much Gordon loves our region and I know he will continue to support the new members and NODA North over the coming years.

NODA South East

From fantasy to farce

The journey of *Gail Force 9*



I always thought that nothing could beat seeing my name on the cover of a book: it was until I watched my work being performed. I was content writing children's novels and a bestseller published around the world. My latest proposed series went to auction but got a pre-empt deal so great, I couldn't turn it down. Having watched performances by the Fairlight Players, I started to get an itch and it grew until I wanted to write for the stage. Their stage. The story came from an event in my life – when an evening crossing between Calais and Dover turned into a nightmare. The rough seas evolved into a gale force nine storm so violent one of the ferries before us struck the quay at Dover leaving our ship stranded in the channel for over six gruelling hours.

However, I write fantasy novels for children. What made me think I could write a farce about secret love affairs, international intrigue and murder on a ferry in a storm?

The writing part was easy but, I did have to unlearn book writing and learn how to write a new kind of manuscript. After a few months, it was finished and I presented *Gail Force 9* to the Fairlight committee. I was ecstatic when they agreed to perform it it for their 75th anniversary with me as director.

The build up to the show was thrilling. The actors were such fun and the creative collaboration was glorious and the sets were outstanding. Suddenly, the rehearsals were over and opening night loomed.

I was a nervous wreck as the

audience entered. It was a sell-out, so the stakes were high. Suddenly my writing was on the line and it was out of my hands. But the actors knew what they were doing and I trusted them.

I held my breath when the play started and it was only when the first laugh struck that I let myself breathe and hope. More laughs followed and I went weak at the knees. The audience was laughing at lines I'd written.

The applause at the end was glorious! No book could ever replace that sound. Now I'm hooked. After my next book, I'll start working on another play.

Kate O'Hearn
Author - *Gail Force 9*

NODA North West

Dreaming big!

From 6 to 36 performers

All Saints Elton Theatre Youth first opened its doors in September 2022, with just six enthusiastic performers and what an incredible journey it's been since then! In just two short years, our group has blossomed into a company of 36 talented young people, producing three successful musicals along the way. Our only limitation now is the size of our current venue.

This Christmas, we're excited to be back on the stage at The Met, Bury, with a brand-new production that's particularly close to our hearts. Following the success of *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang Jr.*, we wanted to build on the strong character work our young people developed and explore a whole new creative avenue. So, for the first time, we ventured into scriptwriting and what an adventure it has been!

Our upcoming show, *Alice*, is an adapted and expanded version of Lewis Carroll's much-loved stories. The process of writing it was both challenging and rewarding, a true learning curve! We've added new scenes to ensure every member of our young cast has a moment to shine. At first, we weren't sure how the children would respond to a completely original piece, but they've embraced it with energy, creativity and boundless enthusiasm. Watching them bring these characters to life and even contribute their own ideas for



staging, has been nothing short of inspiring.

Looking ahead, the whole team at All Saints Elton Theatre Youth are already buzzing with excitement for 2026. Plans are in motion for

a Summer Musical Production as well as another Christmas show, perhaps one that showcases yet another set of skills! With this talented and passionate group of young performers, the sky truly is the limit.

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NODANorth

Director hangs up her magic wand

Glass slippers that are hard to fill!



For so many people, pantomime is their first experience of going to a theatre and witnessing the spectacle of a live performance. Get it right and it can cement a life-long passion for the stage. So it is surely not without some degree of trepidation that anyone would take on the huge responsibility of directing one.

Here at Tynemouth Priory Theatre, that responsibility has, for almost a decade, been in the capable hands of Beccy Gilmore. Now, after directing six, soon

to be seven, hugely successful pantomimes for us, Beccy has decided to hang up her magic wand.

Whoever takes over from Beccy will find a pair of glass slippers that are very hard to fill, for when it comes to directing the pantomime, Beccy never does anything by half measures. They say a pantomime cast becomes like a family but, in Beccy's case, that is literally true. Her husband, Andy, builds the wonderful sets and operates the sound; her son, Thomas, makes the job of stage managing what is usually our most technically complex production in the season look easy and her daughter, Sophie, supports back stage with props and wardrobe, as well as having made appearances on stage herself. Indeed, parents and their children have made regular appearances together on the Priory stage over the years.

It is Beccy's insistence upon including children and young people in her casts that make her pantomimes so special.

Despite all of the challenges and clerical complexities of having children involved in a theatrical production, Beccy's commitment to getting them onto the stage has incalculable value, not only to our society, but to those young people who get to experience the magic first-hand and know the thrill of performing live. It is that inclusivity, and Beccy's willingness to go the extra mile, which have made such a success of our pantomimes and why people keep coming back for more.

The art of pantomime is the lifeblood of theatre in this country. For our young audiences, seeing themselves reflected on stage can plant a magic bean that will grow into a life-long love affair with the theatre. We thank Beccy for her years of dedication to making a success of our pantomimes and look forward to her delighting audiences one last time with *Jack and the Beanstalk* from 9-18 January 2026 – oh, yes we will!

NODA North West

106 not out...just Rebuilding over 12 years



We are North Manchester AODS, created in 1919, and performing since 1920, with *The Mikado* being our very first show.

We have a long and proud history, performing at different venues across Manchester with our heyday being when we performed shows at The Palace Theatre in Manchester and Royal Northern College of Music. Great days! We have notable ex-performers, being a Dr Who from the 80s and an actress in Emmerdale. Things were continuing well, performing to packed audiences at Middleton Civic and Middleton Arena. In truth, our financial position was dwindling and when a previous committee allowed a single person to completely run all aspects of a show, our finances went from dwindling to heavily minus.

We were at a precipice and at an EGM in 2013, the membership voted to give the society a final effort to see if the fortunes could be reversed. With a loan being

given by a couple of members, a way forward was decided upon. The loan covered the debts but didn't add a 'plus' amount to be able to perform large scale musicals, in fact, very far from it; the loan needed to be paid back as soon as possible as well.

The committee decided that the way forward was to cease performing musicals and to perform very low cost concerts and low cost comedies. Much of our membership who wanted

to perform in musicals, quite understandably left, so we were left with those who were happy to perform in plays and concerts only. We were still at a low ebb, however. We did this, receiving small profit after small profit, whilst paying back the loan bit by bit.

Our 100th Anniversary came and went in 2019, and the next year came a brand new committee who decided it was stick or twist. A new 80 seat venue was found, who provided technical and set building facilities. A plan was created! The plan was to perform three Gilbert and Sullivan operettas and then to perform three American musicals from the 1950s and the like; unimaginable from the times of the 2013 EGM in reality.

We decided upon *The Black and White Mikado* with only minor interest anticipated, but forge on we would. Then.... COVID hit. However, because we had finalised the planning for the show, we were ready to go with auditions when lockdown was over. People were anxious to get back on stage and applied for auditions and to be in the



ensemble. The show was cast and we had a new membership who wanted to appear on stage in a musical production. Being a success, albeit in an 80 seater theatre, we performed *The Pirates of Penzance* with many of the ensemble from *The Mikado* and new members joined. With *Pirates* being a success and plays and concerts still being performed, we moved on to *H.M.S. Pinafore* and again, new members joined.

The first part of the plan being completed, we moved on, and performed *Oklahoma!* and extremely recently, *Guys and Dolls*, again fundraising and performing plays; *Guys and Dolls* being complemented not only for the show itself, but for the large male ensemble in the show.

We now stand at the point where we have to choose the final part of our plan, choosing our show for Autumn 2026. We haven't built up a nest egg exactly, after all we are performing in an 80 seat theatre, but we are plugging away and selling out all of the seats available, even with extra performances added.

It may be soon that we can upgrade to a bigger theatre that would see us in a position similar to where we were a couple of years before the fateful EGM.

We have a more than decent membership and attract principal performers of massive quality, with the actual shows winning different awards. Again, we aren't there yet, but things are very different to 12 years ago.

NODA East Midlands

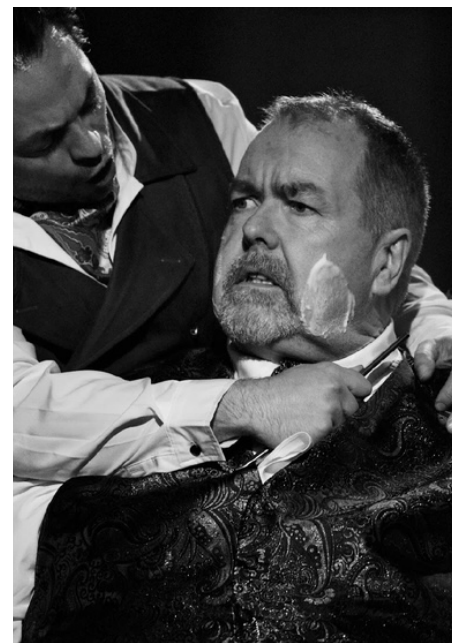
First step into musical theatre

A personal reflection

If someone had told me a year ago that I'd play Judge Turpin in *Sweeney Todd* with Skegness Musical Theatre Company, I'd have laughed at them. At 58, living with a disability (osteoarthritis) and no acting experience, the very idea seemed absurd. I'd only watched performances from the audience, never imagining I'd set foot on stage myself.

I was reluctant to audition: the apprehension, will I fit in, and if I'm honest, the voice in my head telling me I wasn't theatre material. But with a significant nudge from family and friends, I decided to give it a go. Walking into that first rehearsal, I was very apprehensive. Learning lines, understanding stage directions and acting – it all felt overwhelming.

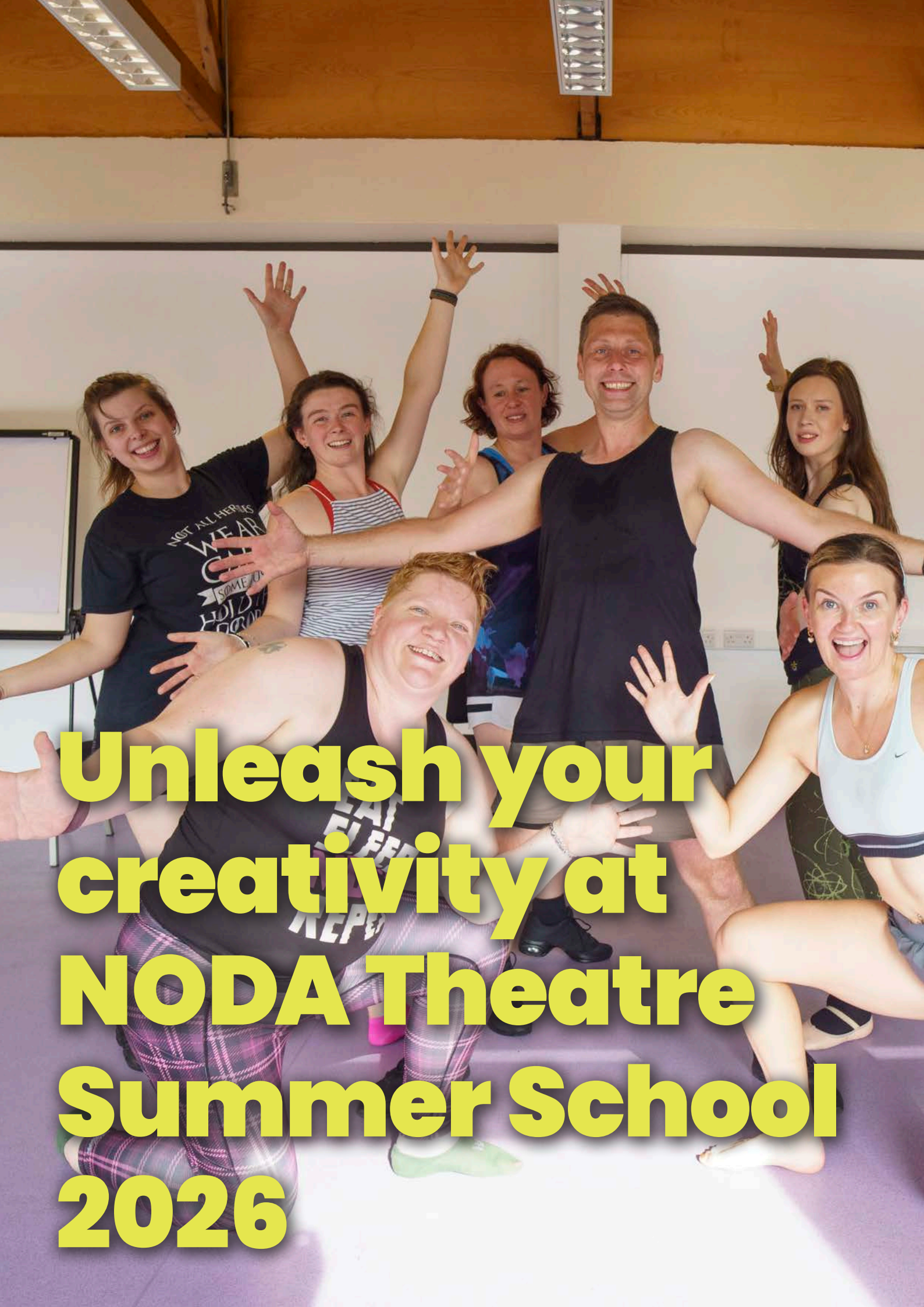
What I didn't expect was the incredible support I received. The Director, Andrea Hall, along with Musical Director, Peter Coughtrey-Wellsted, took the time to guide me. The very talented cast welcomed me with open arms, and I felt supported by friends and family every step of the way. Every challenge became a little easier with their help. Through the process, I discovered strengths I never knew I had and found genuine joy in being part of something bigger than myself,



a show that achieved great applause and success on every performance.

Taking part in *Sweeney Todd* has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. If you're thinking about trying musical theatre but have doubts, don't let fear or circumstance hold you back – you might just surprise yourself.





**Unleash your
creativity at
NODA Theatre
Summer School
2026**



So what is NODA Theatre Summer School?

NODA Theatre Summer School isn't just a week of training – it's a chance to step away from everyday life and completely immerse yourself in the craft you love. Led by inspiring industry professionals, the week gives you the kind of focused guidance that genuinely helps you grow, whether you're a performer, director, or technician.

You'll live and learn alongside people who are just as passionate about theatre as

you are. Being part of this fully residential school means more time to create, collaborate, laugh and push your skills further than you thought possible.

By the time the week ends, you won't just leave with new techniques and confidence, you'll walk away with friendships, unforgettable moments and a renewed excitement for the art that brought you there in the first place.

I'm interested, what next?

When?

The next summer school will take place between Saturday 1st August to 8th August 2026.

Where?

The school is held at Yarnfield Park in Stone, Staffordshire.

How much?

£775 (including a £150 deposit)
This includes your tuition, ensuite accommodation and all food.

How to book

Head over to the NODA website and check out the available courses. All courses are booked via the NODA website. Bookings cannot be taken over the phone or by post/email.

Anything else to know?

Whilst you select a single course for the week, there are additional evening courses available as well as social events throughout the duration.

2026 Course focus

Whilst some of the courses for 2026 have already sold out, there are some amazing courses with availability. There are courses for absolute beginners to those wanting to push their skills to the next level.

To see current availability, visit the NODA website.



Acting for absolute beginners

A course that takes you, regardless of your age, all the way to the beginning of how to act on stage – whether that be in musical theatre, plays or both. Starting from scratch, this course will take you through the basics of acting technique and how to apply it, to bringing a text to life. You will have a fun, practical week full of doing, learning and focussed work, allowing you to feel more confident to put yourself forward next time round.

During the week you will:

- Explore a wide selection of scenes working individually and with scene partners to best understand the world of the scene
- You will have a go at creating a character using voice and physicality and bring that to life from the page
- Work on some ways to put objectives in place and find the obstacles that are creating the drama
- Learn how to make bold choices and not just feel like your reading lines with no meaning
- Have a ridiculous amount of fun within a rehearsal environment where 'getting it wrong' is half the point!
- Learn from those around you in a safe workshop environment

This is a course for students who have lacked the confidence and experience to get up on stage and play a character but wish they could.

Make up for theatre

This full week of tuition introduces the fundamentals of theatrical make up and begins to explore a variety of techniques used to enhance the visual storytelling of a production. Building on the success of last year's short course, and by popular request, we are delighted to offer an opportunity to delve deeper into the magic of make up.

Throughout the week, you will develop a strong foundation in basic stage make up and progress to more advanced, creative applications.

The course will include:

- Basic Stage Make up: Understanding products, tools and techniques for stage lighting and performance
- Make up Illusions: Creating depth, highlights, and character definition through shading and contouring
- Age Transformation: Techniques to alter appearance and portray different ages using make up
- Gender Transformation & Drag Techniques: Exploring the artistry of gender expression and transformation in theatrical contexts
- Wig Dressing & Styling: Fundamentals of wig preparation, fitting and styling for performance
- Horror & Special Effects Make up: Introduction to prosthetics, wounds, scars and fantasy make up for stage and screen

By the end of the week, you will have a practical understanding of how make up can support and enhance character, narrative and aesthetic impact in live performance.

What other courses are available?



Set design

A practical and fun course for everyone who would like to develop their knowledge and skills in creative set design for performance whether that be for theatre, site specific, plays, musicals, operas or immersive performance. As part of the course you will work with performance texts to develop your ability to apply your creative and practical skills in a real-world approach.

During the course you will:

- Explore and develop your creative process
- Learn a range of practical design skills
- Develop your researching focus
- Develop your skills in effectively communicating your creative ideas
- And importantly you will have fun!

No previous experience or creative skills are required; the course is about exploration and having fun with the creative process.

Please note students might need to provide some materials/equipment for the course, but we will endeavour to keep costs to a minimum.

Acting for screen
Introduction to stage combat
Shakespeare – let's get physical
Welcome to the Moulin Rouge
We're just Wilde about Oscar



Starting a society, producing a show

Whether you're dreaming of starting your own theatre company or simply looking to understand the nuts and bolts of producing a show, this course offers the essential tools and insider knowledge to make it happen.

Through a blend of workshops, seminars and presentations from a variety of guest tutors, you will explore the full production pipeline: from choosing material and budgeting, to fundraising and managing creative teams. You'll also dive into the practical and legal steps involved in founding a theatre company. By the end of the course, participants will walk away with a practical toolkit, a personalised action plan and the confidence to launch their own theatre production or society.

Key topics will include:

- Understanding the roles and responsibilities of a producer
- Selecting and securing performance rights
- Budgeting, fundraising and financial planning
- Assembling creative teams and casting actors
- Venue negotiation and technical planning
- Marketing, PR and audience development
- Legal structures and registering your organisation

Designed for aspiring theatre producers, anyone curious about the behind-the-scenes world of theatre production and creatives who want to turn their passion for theatre into a sustainable and creatively inspiring venture.

Long Service Awards

Celebrate your service with a long service award

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

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

How do I apply?

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

What qualifies as 'service'?

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

When does my service start?

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

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

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

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

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



5 year badge



10 year badge



15 year badge



20 year badge



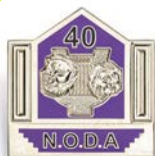
25 year badge



30 year badge



35 year badge



40 year badge



45 year badge



50 year badge



60 year badge



25 year medal



Silver bar



50 year medal



Gold bar



60 year diamond bar



55 year pin



60 year pin



65 year pin



70 year pin



Individual member



Youth award



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Performance Rights

NODA East
Assistant Regional Representative
Huntingdon/Bedford/Biggleswade

tessa.davies@noda.org.uk

NODA East
Assistant Regional Representative
Norwich/Fakenham/Lowerstoft

tessa.davies@noda.org.uk

NODA East Midlands
Regional Representative
Northampton/Wellingborough

jules.jones@noda.org.uk

NODA North East
Regional Editor

leslie.smith@noda.org.uk

NODA North West
Regional Representative
Warrington/Runcorn/Northwich,
Nantwich/Chester/Congleton

kevin.proctor@noda.org.uk

NODA East
Assistant Regional Representative
Dunstable/Luton/Harpenden

tessa.davies@noda.org.uk

NODA East Midlands
Regional Representative
Chatsworth/Bolsover/Matlock/
South Normanton

jules.jones@noda.org.uk

NODA East Midlands
Assistant Regional Representative
Blyth/Beeston/Nottingham

jules.jones@noda.org.uk

NODA North West
Regional Representative
Bury/Rochdale/Oldham/Ashton-under-Lyme

kevin.proctor@noda.org.uk

NODA Wales & Ireland
Regional Treasurer

sharon.davies@noda.org.uk

NODA contacts

Head Office Staff

Chief Operating Officer

Dale Freeman
dale@noda.org.uk

Marketing and Publishing Executive

Rob Williams
rob@noda.org.uk

Marketing and Membership Services Assistant

Liam Nixon
liam@noda.org.uk

Financial Controller

Michelle Callicott
finance@noda.org.uk

PA to the COO and Chairman of Trustees

Heather Knapp
heather@noda.org.uk

Finance Assistant

Rosie Harpum
finance@noda.org.uk

Regional Youth Coordinators

East

Caroline Ranson
caroline.ranson@noda.org.uk

East Midlands

Amanda Hall
amanda.hall@noda.org.uk

London

Gordon Bird
gordon.bird@noda.org.uk

North

Michelle Coulson
michelle.coulson@noda.org.uk

North East

Jo Sykes
jo.sykes@noda.org.uk

North West

David Wall
david.wall@noda.org.uk

Scotland

Neil Hartley
neil.hartley@noda.org.uk

South East

Susanne Crosby (districts 1-9 & 19)
susanne.crosby@noda.org.uk

Mark Allen (districts 10 - 18)
mark.allen@noda.org.uk

South West

Jo Wilson-Hunt
jo.wilsonhunt@noda.org.uk

Wales & Ireland

Matt Hampson
matt.hampson@noda.org.uk

West Midlands

Carl Cook
carl.cook@noda.org.uk

Regional Editors

National Editor

Rob Williams
editor@noda.org.uk

East

DeeDee Doke
deedee.doke@noda.org.uk

East Midlands

Position Vacant

London

Jacquie Stedman
jacquie.stedman@noda.org.uk

North

John Holliday
john.holliday@noda.org.uk

North East

Position Vacant

North West

Rob Gemmell
rob.gemmell@noda.org.uk

Scotland

Scott Jewell
scott.jewell@noda.org.uk

South East

Chris Horton
chris.horton@noda.org.uk

South West

Angus Sheppard-Hughes
angus.sheppard-hughes@noda.org.uk

Wales & Ireland

Dee McIlroy
dee.mcilroy@noda.org.uk

West Midlands

Dennis Price
dennis.price@noda.org.uk

NODA Council

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Kay Rowan

Chairman of Trustees

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