

TODAY★



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03/15



Welcome to the first edition of NODA TODAY in 2015. I hope that all NODA members had a good festive season and that your shows were a big success!

By now you may have noticed that the NODA logo strapline has changed to '**Be inspired by amateur theatre**', as we continue to refresh the NODA brand and hope to inspire the next generation of amateur theatre lovers. On p.4 you'll find an article from Chris Ingram, NODA's Chairman and Vice President, explaining the strapline change and how the logo and strapline will now work alongside the traditional NODA crest, including the impact this will have on our annual programme and poster competition.

Turn to p.18 for a great article from NODASafe on how to get the most out of your society's subscription by making sure you take our new online health and safety training course. This course is an essential resource that ensures that at least one member from each NODA society has up to date health and safety knowledge and training. Invitations to take the course were sent by email last year, so if someone from your society hasn't taken the course yet, read this article to find out more.

You'll also find articles from our regular contributors Utopia Costumes (p.17) and The Border Studio (p.19), along with our regional round ups from across the country and lots of other interesting articles for you to read between rehearsals for your spring productions.

As usual, if you have any feedback on any aspect of the magazine, please contact us on **01733 374 790** or email info@noda.org.uk. ★

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did you noda?



We've recently updated the free digital goodies you receive when you sign

up for NODA Updates, NODA's monthly email newsletter. It's a great resource for both members and non-members to find out all the latest news from NODA, including events, offers and training, as well as other news from the world of amateur theatre. If you haven't already signed up it's really easy to do so. Simply go to www.nodaupdates.co.uk, fill in your name and email address and click the sign up button. Once signed up, not only will you receive NODA Updates in your inbox every month but you can also download our updated range of free digital goodies as a thank you.



NODA recently secured an opportunity for all of our member societies to list their shows and activities on well known sponsorship website SponsorFinder (www.sponsorfinder.co.uk) for free. This is a great opportunity to find a sponsor for your society and/or your next show.

This exposure to potential sponsors would normally cost £45 plus VAT, but if you sign up by the end of May, your listing on the SponsorFinder website will be absolutely free. Once on board you will have access for one year and can change your messages and information as and when you need to.

For instructions on how to sign up and benefit from this offer, go to www.noda.org.uk/news/free_publicity_for_noda_members.

At last year's AGM we announced the winners of our annual programme and poster competition and we've now got our three winning programmes available to view online as ebooks, so that all of our members can have a look inside and see what it takes to be a winner in each category. To have a look, simply go to <http://issuu.com/noda.uk>.



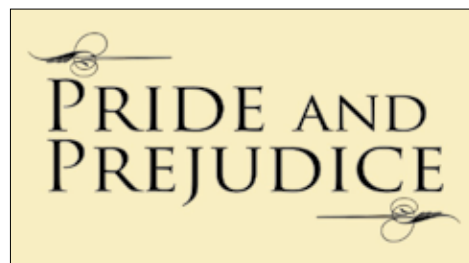
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A new image, but steady as you go!

Never has an image created the variance of opinion that we have experienced in NODA for some years.

It all started with the NODA crest, based on the tragedy and comedy masks, which we have used since shortly after the foundation of NODA. Alright, it has been added to - the laurel wreath and crown being two such additions - but it has also been badly abused in its reproduction over the years. It has been stretched, squashed and sequentially reproduced by photocopying et al, until it was no more than a blob on the page. Some societies have even redesigned and modernised it. Indeed some NODA regions have even been known to adapt it a little!

We introduced the NODA logo – the stylised ‘NODA’ in blue – initially with the strapline ‘Supporting amateur theatre since 1899’. Some members loved it because it was modern and fitted their image. Some members hated it because they liked the crest, which said everything about who we are and what we do.

We bowed to the traditionalists and retained the crest for use by member societies, but we agreed to use the logo for what would be known as corporate use in the commercial world. We never really succeeded. Many societies wanted the logo (“it’s modern and fits our image”) and some parts of NODA wanted the crest (“it’s traditional and everyone likes it”).

It was always planned that we would

occasionally change the strapline of the logo and we introduced ‘Professional support for amateur theatre’ some years ago, but to a very mixed reception. The play on words that interprets ‘professional’ as ‘of high standard’ and ‘amateur’ as ‘unpaid’ created ongoing discussion and dissent.

We looked at designing a completely new logo but this proved more difficult than anticipated, and despite asking for designs from both members of NODA and commercial designers there was nothing that stood out as the one.

So here’s what we are going to do. We are retaining our logo but changing the strapline to ‘Be inspired by amateur theatre’. Surely we can all agree to that! This logo will be used for all things corporate. Societies may stay with the crest to indicate their affiliation to NODA, or if they prefer, they may use the logo with the ‘Be inspired by amateur theatre’ strapline to indicate their affiliation to NODA.

You will already have seen the new strapline replacing the old one as we update our web pages and information, and hopefully the change will be complete shortly.

It does of course affect programme completion for the programme and poster competition, for which a condition of entry



for many years has been the inclusion in the programme of the correct crest (masks with laurel wreath and crown) with the words ‘Affiliated to the National Operatic and Dramatic Association’ in full.

In the 2015 competition (programmes for productions between January 1st and December 31st 2015) a condition of entry will be that either of the following must be included in the programme:

- ★ The crest with the words ‘Affiliated to the National Operatic and Dramatic Association’
- ★ Or the logo complete with the strapline ‘Be inspired by amateur theatre’

If a programme was made for a show early in 2015, we will allow the old strapline ‘Professional support for amateur theatre’ to be used if it was too late to amend this in the design, editing and printing process for that programme.

It is important that both the crest and the logo and strapline must not be amended, squashed, stretched or redesigned in any way. It is our **brand**, and just as in the commercial world NODA owns the brand and we determine how it should be used. ★

Chris Ingram
NODA Chairman and Vice President
March 2015



NODA Theatre Summer School, 1st – 8th August 2015

Technicians – this is your five minute call!

A passion for theatre isn't always about the applause. The most satisfying and rewarding roles for some can be out of the spotlight, through directing, designing or even writing a show.

It would be easy to make the mistake of thinking that a theatre summer school is all about performers, aimed at dancers, actors and singers who want to gather for a week of showing off. But that's where a week at NODA Theatre Summer School differs!

We offer courses for **all** areas of theatre and off-stage disciplines. In 2015, we're offering courses for dancers who want to broaden their skills in **choreography**, budding film makers with our **video production** course and lighting techs who want to take that first step into **lighting design**, and for those with a passion for both visual art and theatre who want experience with sets and costumes, there's our course on **design for the stage**.

So if your secret passion is for backstage disciplines, treat yourself to one of our inspiring courses. Visit our website at noda.org.uk/summerschool, explore the options and book a place for an exhilarating week working with top professionals in the business.

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Strictly a surprise for NODA Youth Councillor

NODA Youth Councillor Phil Barnett was recently given the surprise of his life when it was revealed he had been chosen to appear in The People's Strictly for Comic Relief in March, as part of the BBC's Red Nose Day celebrations. The show comes from the Strictly Come Dancing team and will feature six inspirational individuals who have been nominated by friends and family.

Out of the thousands of people nominated Phil was chosen to appear on the popular BBC dancing show, and here at NODA we couldn't be more pleased for him. Phil runs award-winning youth theatre group

Kidz R Us in St. Ives, which was set up in 1994 and has since raised over £2 million and staged 70 shows.

Stars from the show descended on Phil's theatre in St. Ives to surprise him. "It was really exciting," Phil explained. "I was kept away from the theatre all weekend whilst they worked with my youth group on the surprise and filmed me walking into a full theatre and our Kidz performing. Then one of the celebs and one of the pro dancers danced on and talked to me and told me I had been chosen."

The series will consist of four pre-recorded programmes. The first two episodes will introduce the contestants

and their achievements, the third episode follows their training and preparation, and the fourth episode will see all of the contestants take to the famous Strictly ballroom floor. Voting lines will open once all of the contestants have danced and the winner will be crowned as part of the live Comic Relief show on Friday 13th March.

Excitingly, Phil will be paired with Strictly professional Janette Manrara, who joined the programme in 2013. She reached the semi-final of the competition in 2014 with EastEnders star Jake Wood.

Congratulations to Phil for this achievement, which is a reflection of his sustained dedication to youth theatre. ★

Reviews Special

Here at NODA TODAY we've got two interesting articles for you on the topic of show reviews from two professionals involved in theatre. The first comes from Carrie Dunn, contributor to BroadwayWorld:UK, who looks into the fears we all have about show reviews. The second comes from playwright Peter Quilter, who feared one particular reviewer for his Broadway show *End of the Rainbow*.

Everyone gets butterflies when it comes to press night. But why?

Some reviewers have terrifying reputations, but as a general rule of thumb these are people who love theatre and want performers to do well. Even if they're critical, they tend to be speaking from the heart in a genuine effort to offer help.

"As an honest reviewer you're not a charity and you're not doing anyone any favours by being 'nice'," says one journalist who has reviewed theatre, music and comedy for a variety of national and international publications. "I think if you're performing you should be able to take it."

"Sometimes reviewers judge shows to different standards," suggests Liz, who's been involved in amateur operatics for over 20 years. "There might be a show with wobbly walls, basic lights and so on, but the production will get a good review because it's good for that particular company. Then you see a show in a bigger venue that is better but that'll get a bad review because it's not perfect. I think sometimes people forget people are doing this for a hobby."

"I used to genuinely be concerned about what reviewers thought," admits Joe, an actor on the local scene for many years. He takes a slightly different



view to Liz, though - he doesn't think reviewers should sugar-coat their words simply because of the amateur status of the performers and crew.

"I have seen review comments that are a bit harsh, but then if we ask a reviewer to come then isn't that their job?" he asks rhetorically. "We strive to be as professional as we can, so I actually really want to know how we stack up against the pros, and if that's the case, we have to accept the harsh along with the glowing."

BroadwayWorld:UK's chief reviewer Gary Naylor sees hundreds of shows a year - professional, amateur, fringe, West End - and he's quick to reassure performers that he's never there to look for problems. "Scary reviewers? Not me. I'm reasoning that our readers are theatre fans and want to see the best in shows," he says.

"From a personal point of view, the reviews are not the be all and end all and it depends on who's writing them - do I value their opinion?" says Liz, before concluding with a rather pithy truth: "It's nice to get good reviews and there is always a bit of a moment if they are not good - but ultimately it is the view of the audiences that count." ★

Carrie Dunn



Nothing really prepares you for having a show on Broadway. It's the scale of things more than anything else and the fact that everyone there wants success so badly. My Judy Garland play *End of the Rainbow* ran for six months in New York in 2012. It was a thrilling, heart-stopping, fascinating and hugely stressful experience.

When you're in previews, everyone keeps asking "Has he been in yet?" The "he" they refer to is Ben Brantley, critic for the *New York Times*. If he likes your show, you have a great chance of having a hit. If he hates it, the theatre could shut its doors by the following Saturday.

Luckily we had a great opening performance, followed by a party at the Plaza Hotel. By about midnight, you notice that all the producers are examining their phones because the publicist has sent them an advance copy of the NYT review. We got lucky and had a tremendous review from Brantley and therefore we had a marvellous party. But I've since heard



that if the review is bad, all you can hear is the sound of the exit door banging as the guests get the hell out of there and the waiters remove the champagne. On Broadway, an opening night becomes a funeral so easily.

My New York journey inspired a play I wrote earlier this year called *The Actress*. Actresses fascinate me. I've

been hugged by them, kissed by them, adored by them. They have also screamed at me, hated me and thrown things at me. Performers so often live their lives at a higher emotional level. When they're happy, it's like the sun will shine forever, and when they're angry or upset, you better run for cover from the storm.

This is not just true on Broadway or the West End either. I began my theatrical apprenticeship on the amateur scene in Colchester. It was a farce in a church hall with tea and biscuits at the interval, but we still had our divas! To be honest, I love a good diva. They bring some colour, sparkle and danger to proceedings. The

theatre wouldn't be half as much fun without a dash of ego and eccentricity.

I was on the amateur scene for several years, working my way up to lead roles, and then I took myself off to Leeds University to study Drama and launch a professional career. It was during my student days that I switched from acting to writing. A few years later, I was in the West End with my comedy *Glorious!*, which starred Maureen Lipman. Maureen has in some ways directly inspired the lead character in *The Actress* because she was the first actress I met who was so completely devoted to her work and to giving a great performance, and yet so emotionally vulnerable. Plus, through all of these things she was so funny. So although my play is not based on her, it always makes me think of her.

As I write this article, I'm in discussions for a fourth West End show and a second Broadway show. Part of me wants to hide away in a corner, lead an easier life. But the other part is so hungry for it. For the drama, the tears and the laughter, and to experience again that moment when the reviews come out. It's terrifying, but you certainly know you're alive. ★

Peter Quilter
www.peterquilter.net

The AGM and Presidential Gala 2015

As a registered charity NODA is legally obliged to hold an annual general meeting each year which all members (societies and individuals) are entitled to attend at no charge. It is at this meeting that NODA's annual accounts are presented, the work of the Association is reported and the Council is elected. It is also at this AGM that the incoming President is installed in office.

Over the years a significant social event has developed around the AGM, normally based on a two or three night stay in a four or five star hotel. The cost of attending is a significant sum of money – in recent years up to £250 per person for the weekend alone, and this does not include travel. There are a significant number of delegates who have normally been funded by NODA and this has resulted in a deficit for the event of up to £25,000.

It has been very noticeable in recent years that fewer members are attending by choice, as opposed to those who attend as a matter of duty (such as Council and some other volunteers) or those who attend because they are accompanying a 'duty' attendee. Indeed, at our AGM and Presidential Gala last year in East Grinstead we estimate that fewer than 20 such members attended. The event as it stands is clearly not attractive to our members and they are voting with their feet.

Council has therefore agreed a new format for the event in 2015, which will not only reduce costs to NODA but will also allow individual delegates to select accommodation to suit their own budget.

Chris Ingram, currently Chairman of Trustees and also Vice President, will be inducted as President at the 2015 AGM on Saturday 26th September in Leeds.

<i>Date</i>	Saturday 26 th September 2015.
<i>Venue of AGM</i>	The Carriageworks Theatre in Leeds, which is the performance venue used by the majority of Leeds societies (Saturday afternoon). The Carriageworks is within the city centre and only a short walk from Leeds City Station.
<i>Venue for Presidential Dinner and Ball</i>	The Queens Hotel, which is a four star hotel adjacent to the railway station, facilitating travel by train and which has full disabled access.
<i>Social event on Friday</i>	It is possible that a social event will be organised but this will be entirely self-funded and not funded via NODA.
<i>Workshops</i>	We are investigating the potential for running workshops on both Saturday and Sunday mornings to attract more young people to attend the event, especially from NODA North East.

Full details of our new AGM and Presidential Gala will be sent out later in the year, but there are significant changes in organisation:

- ★ Only the Presidential Dinner and Ball will be booked via the Association (NODA North East will be administering). The cost of this event will be no more than £45 per person.
- ★ There will be no special conference hotel venue, although special overnight (room and breakfast) rates have been negotiated with The Queens Hotel for both Friday and Saturday nights. We will supply details for a number of hotels to suit all needs, from four star to budget hotels and simple B&Bs.
- ★ All hotel bookings will be made directly by individual delegates with their hotel of choice.

- ★ The Presidential Dinner and Ball on Saturday evening is a social event and as such will not be funded by NODA for any NODA volunteer, whether council or regional committee member.

We live in a rapidly changing world, and as the leading umbrella organisation for amateur theatre in the UK we must respond to these changes rather than trying to do things as we have always done in previous years. Look at your own societies - very few are still producing the same shows and attracting the same members and selling tickets to the same audiences as even ten years ago!

Chris Ingram
NODA Chairman and Vice President
March 2015

Panto is as popular as ever!

In 2014, NODA was announced as the official partner of Panto Day, the annual celebration of both professional and amateur panto that began back in 2011. In 2014 Panto Day took place on Friday 12th December and surpassed all expectations.

Six partner theatres led the celebration in which over 100 other theatres got involved. Over two million tweets were sent, with #pantoday trending in third position at one point on the day, and there were 63 #pantopout pictures uploaded to the Panto Day Facebook page. Six new articles were added to the panto advice page, a docu-feature on music in pantomime was also released, and numerous blogs and videos were posted to celebrate and share pantomime goings on. Panto Day organiser Simon Sladen summed up the day: "Panto Day 2014 marks our biggest celebration to date! Thank you to everyone who took part and helped make the day such a success. We can't wait for Panto Day 2015 and are looking for extra special ways to celebrate our fifth anniversary."

As official partner to Panto Day 2014, NODA also helped to establish and promote the first ever National Survey of Amateur Pantomime, which was a 10 question survey aimed at better understanding pantomime in the amateur theatre sector. The survey was open for two months, and by the time it closed on 1st December, 175 amateur theatre groups, societies and organisations had filled it in online. By analysing these results, not only did we want to understand the role of panto for amateur groups, but we wanted to compare these results to the National Database of Pantomime Performance and thereby compare the professional and amateur sectors for the first time.

We discovered that in 2014 *Aladdin* was the most popular amateur pantomime production, with nearly 16% of respondents having put on this panto in 2014. Interestingly, the same was the case for professional pantomime, with *Aladdin* the most produced panto by professionals in 2014, with 46 productions.

The top three productions between amateurs and professionals were very similar. After *Aladdin*, amateurs' second



The cast of 'Aladdin' at the Palace Theatre, Kilmarnock. Courtesy of Imagine Theatre and Helen Ashbourne.

most popular production was *Sleeping Beauty* (12%), followed by *Cinderella* and *Dick Whittington* (8%) in joint third. Among professionals, after *Aladdin* the second most popular production was *Cinderella* with 39 productions, and *Jack and the Beanstalk* came in third with 35 productions. For amateurs, *Jack and the Beanstalk* was the fourth most popular pantomime.

Another interesting outcome of comparing the amateur survey with the professional was that 65% of amateur respondents cast a female in the role of principal boy, whereas only 10% of professional productions did the same, preferring a male cast member for this role. Only 7% of respondents in the amateur survey did not have a principal boy in their current pantomime, indicating the overwhelming popularity of this traditional role.

At NODA we were interested to discover that the split between those who write their own pantomime and those who purchase a script was very nearly half and half, with 48.5% of respondents indicating that someone from within their society wrote their latest pantomime, and 51.5% saying they purchased their panto script. Of those who purchased scripts, many who answered the question indicated that they get their scripts from NODA, or that they often get their scripts from NODA, if not every year.

Many respondents indicated that they vary who they purchase their pantomime scripts from on a year-to-year basis.

Other insights provided by the amateur survey include the fact that most respondents choose their pantomime title in January (26%), most societies who responded (24%) had between 31 and 40 people involved in putting on their pantomime production, and most respondents (53%) performed their pantomime to a paying audience between four and six times. Interestingly, of those amateurs who responded to the survey, the average ticket price per performance was £8.80. This amount is based on the average ticket price charged per performance as listed by respondents, which ranged from a high of £25 to a low of £3. This indicates that on average, tickets for amateur theatre productions are very reasonably priced, with many concessions offered for children and seniors.

After looking at these results, NODA Chief Executive Tony Gibbs asserted that: "It is reassuring that even in today's society, with so much choice in terms of entertainment, that traditional pantomimes are as popular as ever." ★

This article was originally published in *Sardines Magazine* in January 2015.



regionalroundup

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On behalf of the NODA East committee I would like to wish you all a happy, healthy, prosperous and successful new year. As Councillor, 2014 was a very busy year for me and my wife Maxine, coming to see many of your excellent productions, and I would like to thank everybody for the very warm welcomes that we received.

Although the recession appears to be taking an upturn, it is still a struggle to attract audiences to both professional and amateur productions. There is no formula to resolve this situation. All I can say to you is to keep up the standards that I have witnessed and once again, don't be afraid to price your tickets according to the cost of the production. Fixed costs, such as venue hire, sound and lighting equipment, set hire and licences are continuing to rise and should be reflected in the price of the ticket. It seems to me that our patrons believe that because we are amateurs, the productions that we put on are achieved for almost no cost. Whilst this may have been true in the distant past, it certainly is not the case now, and those societies that provide a breakdown of costs in their programmes have received positive and supportive feedback from the ticket buying public. Indeed, any reservations about price increases have been overshadowed by the high quality productions and talented performances that have been produced. It's also a good idea to make our younger members aware of these costs, as they have their fingers on the pulse of social media and can get the word out there much faster and to greater numbers of people than ever before.



One of the highlights of the year was the 'NOSCAR' night, an acronym for NODA Oscars, held in District 9 last November. This was an unofficial awards night organised by District 9 Representative Vicki Avery, where awards were given for individual performances and achievements amongst all societies in the district. It was a black tie event that was so well attended the audience had to be split into two sittings. The excitement and anticipation was tangible and the winners were overwhelmed with their awards. What impressed me the most was the networking between different societies that took place, and this reinforced my belief that as NODA members we are not in competition with each other but can make use of help and advice from each other. Congratulations to Vicki and all of the recipients on a very enjoyable and successful evening.

Here's a date for your diaries. The NODA East AGM and awards luncheon will take place on Sunday 10th May 2015 at the Burgess Hall in St. Ives. This has proved to be a very popular event so please book your tickets as soon as you can to avoid disappointment, as we have consistently sold out in previous years. The booking information leaflet will be with you very soon with a priority booking window for nominees. ★

Don McKay
Councillor, NODA East

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Special delivery of good wishes from Ray Cooney



Lindisfarne Players' next production is Michael Cooney's farcical comedy *Cash on Delivery*. Michael Cooney is the son of undisputed 'king of farce' Ray Cooney OBE and he has obviously been well taught. *Cash on Delivery* is a riotous mix of all the usual capers and mishaps that one expects from the Cooney pen.

Steve McCartney, long time member of Lindisfarne, has been a Cooney fan ever since he can remember and has previously successfully directed two Cooney farces for the group, *Out of Order* (twice) and *Run for your Wife*. This year Steve was lucky enough to be invited to one of Ray Cooney's summer garden parties and, never one to miss an opportunity, thought he'd chance his arm and ask Ray if he would like to come and see Lindisfarne in one of their *Cash on Delivery* rehearsals, hoping he could give some pointers to the cast.

As we arrived, with eager anticipation Steve had already set up the scene for Act I of the play. There was the usual sofa in the living room scenario and more doors than one would usually anticipate a living room to have, but then this is a Cooney farce and Cooney farces need a lot of doors. Talking of doors, look who just walked in. Ray arrived with his lovely wife of 52 years, Linda, and he made a point of introducing himself and Linda to each of us before we sat ourselves down in the rehearsal hall. Ray is 82 now but he's full of fun. "Actors first" said Ray with a wink, ushering us all through the door before he took his seat, telling the cast, "now don't be nervous."

Ray decided to sit himself in the corner with his notepad and pen and quietly observe the cast, who did a fantastic job of performing the first act of the play. Ray's response at the end of Act I was a delighted: "Well done. You're going to get a lot of laughs." He went on: "People often ask me what the difference is between comedy and farce. Farce is about real people in crazy situations. Comedy is unreal people in a real situation, for example, in an Ayckbourn play. Don't mix it up!"

It was fantastic to hear this advice from the great man himself and we were all hanging on every word he said. After all, this is a man who has been performing since he was 14 years old. He has been writing since 1959 and his play *Run for your Wife* ran in the West End for a record nine years. In 2004 he was given his OBE by Prince Charles.

I asked Linda what Michael is up to these days. He is probably best known now for being the screenwriter of horror movie *Identity*, starring Ray Liotta and John Cusack, and also the *Jack Frost* movie chillers. Linda told me that he is just about to start work on a pilot in the States, where he now lives.

And so, after posing for photos and signing autographs for the lucky cast, Ray and Linda went back to their home in Epping and Lindisfarne Players could relax and give themselves a huge pat on the back. ★

Kim Tobin

In Brief

Congratulations to Mel Barnes of Bury St Edmunds Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society, who was recently presented with a long service award to mark his 27 years with the society.

Singer, actor, committee member, Chairman, President and now President Emeritus, Mel remains the society's main NODA contact. NODA East Regional Councillor Don McKay and District 4 Regional Representative Julie Petrucci are always assured of a warm welcome from Mel, who is a great ambassador for BSEAODS.



Dusmagrik Young People's Theatre Company recently performed *CATS* and "special best wishes for a wonderful opening night and an enjoyable and successful run" were sent by Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber. He would have been proud of this production at Gorleston Pavilion Theatre.



Award-winning Ipswich Operatic and Dramatic Society (IODS) will be presenting Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Sunset Boulevard* at the Regent Theatre, Ipswich, from 20th – 23rd May 2015.

Stephanie Brown (lead roles in *Evita*, *Crazy for You*, *Titanic* and *Anything Goes*) will star as Norma Desmond. Jonathan Mudd (Jesus/Judas in *Jesus Christ Superstar* and the Devil in *Witches of Eastwick*) stars as Joe, and James Hayward (star of *Putting it Together*, *Follies* and *Sounds Familiar*, and also director of *Witches of Eastwick*) stars as Max.

It will be nice to see Stephanie and James together again after playing Guinevere and King Arthur in *Camelot*. ★



regionalroundup

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Spectres, Spies and Ships



Writer and director Pam Townsend writes about a blast from the past in her Northamptonshire village.

Spectres was performed last summer by Guilsborough Music and Drama Society (GMADS) as an 'aperitif' to the 2014 village festival, documenting events in the village from the Roman occupation to World War II. It was accompanied by an exhibition of background information and local memorabilia.

My aim was to bring to the stage a lively, informative and entertaining story of my village's murky, quirky past. Good drama needs a strong plot and colourful characters, and having read a local book on the records of the village, I realised these ingredients were there in abundance. With the able assistance of Angela Bumford, I began my research using various sources, including the memories of local people.

Guilsborough's past has links with many historical events and characters: the Battle of Naseby, James I's witch hunts, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, the sinking of the Lusitania, Shackleton's 1914 Antarctic expedition, a gruesome murder, two world wars and even a Nazi spy, enabling me to place the drama in a much broader context. The challenge then was to write a script which was chronological and an accurate reflection of the village's history, but

which could draw in and entertain an audience.

John Everyman, a traveller through time, was the narrator for the story and we had a chorus for some of the nineteen scenes, each of which reflected different genres. A thrust stage was used, with some entrances through the audience, which allowed us to seat 90 people on three sides. The space was intimate and we wanted them to feel part of the experience.

To keep the story flowing, the cast effected simple and speedy costume changes and the backstage area was run with military precision! Basic black was worn by all, but at least one character in each scene was able to wear a complete outfit, with over 100 costumes used. Sound effects and lighting also added to the atmosphere. A mix of taped and live music was used, and we were fortunate to have a one-man band in the form of Andrew Bassey, whose musical versatility provided an accompaniment for a range of scenes.

Our group welcomed the whole concept enthusiastically and their contributions were taken on board. Twenty actors were involved, each playing at least six roles. After four nights playing to full houses, plus performing extracts in the high street and our parish church at the festival, *Spectres* was judged to have been a great success.

GMADS is a relatively small group, working within the limitations of a village hall, but the welcome addition of some new members (several of whom had not trodden the boards before), together with a history exhibition, created a community project which was very well received.

It is certainly worth bringing your community's history to people's attention through the medium of drama. The process can be quite long but ultimately very rewarding, and you may be surprised at what you discover! ★

A very showbiz wedding

Heather Arnold and Andrew Wydrzynski of County Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society were married in Lincoln on 14th August 2014.

Instead of the other options available they chose to have their wedding at Lincoln Theatre Royal. It was all very showbiz, even down to the order of service, which was presented in the style of a theatre programme. This included the back story of how the bride and groom met, bios for all the principals and production team on the central pages, the various scenes the guests could expect to see, thanks and acknowledgements and, rather cannily, a couple of pages of adverts for businesses linked to this particular 'show'.

Best wishes to Heather and Andrew for a long and happy run. ★

★ NODA EAST ★ MIDLANDS ★ LONG SERVICE ★ AWARDS ★ PRESENTED JULY 2014 ★ TO DECEMBER 2015

Awards Secretary: Peter Beddall

★ 50 YEARS

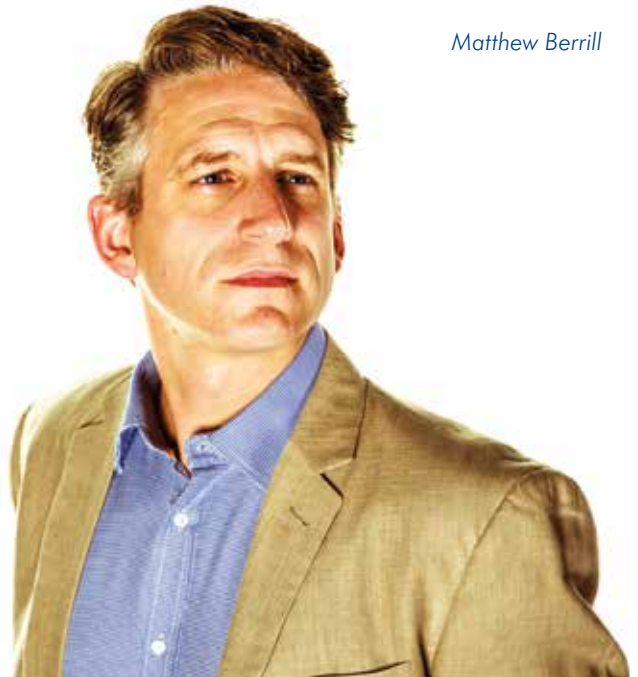
Kettering & District Theatrical Society Sheila Greenaway
Market Harborough Musical Theatre Joan Christine Prior
Northampton Musical Theatre Company Joy Eason

★ 45 YEARS

Stamford G&S Players Jean Hadlow

★ 40 YEARS

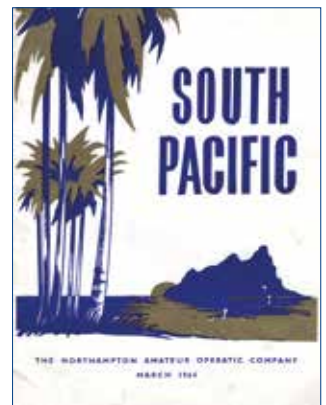
Erewash Musical Society Laurie Trott
Long Eaton Operatic Society John Woolley



Matthew Berrill

The Three Emiles

October's production of 'South Pacific' by Northampton Musical Theatre Company saw the reunion of three Emiles from the shows of 1964, 1979 and 2014. Matthew Berrill, the latest Emile de Beque, takes us back over the years.



I first met Cliff Billing when I joined the company (then Northampton Amateur Operatic Company) as a boy in 1981. Cliff played the part of Bumble and I shared the role of Oliver. I then met Bryan Hall the following year in the last production at the Northampton ABC in *The King and I*. Bryan played the King and I played Louis. I was also delighted to play alongside both of them in *Camelot* in 1983. This was NAOC's first show at the Derngate, Northampton's brand new professional theatre complex. Bryan played an excellent King Arthur, Cliff was a wonderful Merlin and I played Tom. I had such a wonderful time during those three shows that I caught the performing bug and I've been involved in amateur theatre in Northampton ever since.

I would never have guessed back then that 30 years later I would be standing on the same Derngate stage with Bryan and Cliff following the opening night of *South Pacific*, and with all three of us having played the part of Emile for the same company. Fifty years separated the first production of *South Pacific* and this year's production, and I had very big shoes to fill. But I was very proud to be performing with such a wonderful cast and in front of two gentlemen that have been so influential in our company's history over the years. ★

We're on Facebook!



NODA East Midlands now has a Facebook page at www.facebook.com/NODAEastMidlands. Check it out and 'like' our page.





regionalroundup London

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Councillor's Comments

2015 brings a new year and a new opportunity to raise the standards of your productions, bring in new audiences and generally raise the profile of this wonderful hobby of ours. So have you ever thought about running a training workshop or a singing masterclass?

Make-up, costume, dance, accents, audition techniques...if there are areas of talent within your society that need improving, why not consider a workshop? The application forms are on the website but if you need more detailed information please contact either your regional representative or me at jacquie.stedman@noda.org.uk. We can all improve, and if we are asking members of the public to pay to come to see us do our hobby, then what we give them should be the best it possibly can be. With NODA London's help, it can be! ★

Good luck with all your productions.

Jacquie Stedman

Councillor, NODA London

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Trial by Jury with a twist

When Kingsbury Amateur Operatic Society produced two short one act Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, *Trial by Jury* and *The Zoo* in 2004, they needed something to fill out the programme. One of their longest serving members, Vic Golding, came to the rescue by writing a prequel to *Trial*, with a through-sung plot about the plaintiff (Angelina) being left in the lurch by her erring fiancé and bringing a breach of promise case against him. The music

used was mainly Sullivan's and the lyrics Gilbert's, with altered words to suit the plot.

Last year Vic revamped the show, adding new characters and music, calling it *Jilted* and combining it with *Trial with a Twist (in the tale)*. The latter piece, with a surprise ending, added G&S music and new characters.

The society performed it in February 2014

at the Conway Hall in Red Lion Square and it received great acclaim. As a result of this, the Grimsdyke Hotel (former home of W.S. Gilbert) asked them to perform the two shows for their G&S charity in June. They were again very well received and raised £830 for the chosen charities.

KAOS has scores which are available to buy or hire. For further information please contact mail@kaosonline.org ★

Fifty years in panto

Arrow Players, based at the Church of St. Edmund the King in Northwood Hills, has been producing pantomimes since 1965. This year's production of *Jack and the Beanstalk* is therefore a significant milestone as it marks their fiftieth anniversary.

Making it a double celebration, their leading lady from the very first production is also celebrating 50 years with the society. Elizabeth Godden played the title role in their first panto, *Cinderella*, back in 1965, and has been



involved with the group in some capacity ever since, this year playing the role of Herald in *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Until 18 months ago she was their box office manager, and if not rehearsing, she still goes along to make the tea.

Completing the family connection, Elizabeth's husband Mike Godden has also co-written every show since 1984, along with Mike Warrwick. All five of their children have been involved in pantomime, with some of them also appearing with Arrow



Players, and her mother, Pauline Ambrose, used to be the society's choreographer. ★

Tips for Successful Line Learning



Georgette Vale, a member of NODA society Wymondham Players in Norfolk, takes us through her top tips for the very important, but often very difficult task, of learning your lines.

There is no right or wrong way to learn lines and everyone is different. People often ask me how I go about line learning so I thought I would set pen to paper - or in this case, fingers to keyboard - and share this with you. My qualification for writing this article and starting the debate is that I have a lifetime (so far) on the amdram circuit and my professional work in the field of sensory impairment involves a lot of teaching skills.

One of the things my experience has taught me is that **every year that goes by it gets harder to learn new things**. In my twenties I never had to work at learning lines. In my thirties and forties I had to make more of an effort and now I make sure that I put in a lot more time than I ever did.

We all know that it's important to learn our lines because **we don't want to look stupid in front of an audience**, but I think the second most important reason is as a **courtesy to other actors**. We all realise that other people rely on the cues that we give them, and without that the production won't work. Another reason for good line learning is the **flow of the rehearsal and ultimately the flow of the play**.

The right time to learn your lines is debatable. I find it most useful to start learning when we have done a couple of runs and I have a better idea of how the director wants me to deliver my lines and I know how my cues will sound. Line learning also goes hand in hand with characterisation. If you know and understand the character then that can help with line learning because you know why your character is saying what they are.

In the days before highlighter pens I used to underline my lines with red biro using a

ruler. For the last thirty years I have always felt that if my lines are not highlighted in pink then I can't learn them well. If I have a script sent to me in a word document then I like to **highlight my lines in bold font**. The most invaluable aspect of electronic scripts is that you can take them with you wherever you go on your tablet or phone.

Getting someone to read your lines with you is also invaluable, if you have someone who can do it effectively. If not it can be more trouble than it's worth. It is not something that can be forced on friends or family. My stepsons are very willing and good at it when they are available. You need someone who is able to do it fairly blandly - unless they are also in the cast and know how your cues are intoned.

Some people like **recording the script in audio version**, usually to play in the car. I don't always find this useful as there are always other considerations, such as having to concentrate on the road. Having said that I do have plays that I use recordings for, and rather than really listen to them I just let them wash over me, and this does help a bit.

I find that time spent on **public transport** is good for line learning. Train journeys are excellent for me as I just sit in a corner muttering to myself. For bus journeys I spend a bit of time at the bus stop working out which bits I am going to run through in my head when I get on the bus. Just be a bit careful - I have been so wrapped up in the play in my head that I have forgotten I am actually on a bus.

Prompts and prompting are essential parts of the learning process. The best prompters are in at the beginning of the rehearsal period so that they know the pauses and how different people like to be prompted. The most important advice I can give you, and urge you to insist on others doing it too, is to "take the prompt and get on with it." If you need a prompt - and we all do - don't panic or beat yourself up about it. Sometimes I see people who are mortified that they need to have a prompt, but most prompts are needed through momentary lapses of concentration and not through lack of learning. Perhaps the audience do notice that a prompt has been given, but if it is taken quickly they soon forget it.

On the day of the performance I have my own little routines. I like to know I have gone through my lines several times in the day. I like to get changed early and then pace around with my script in my hand. People always say to me it's "too late to learn it now", but I am not learning it at this stage. I am not even trying to remember what comes next, I am just reading it. It's each to their own at this point. ★

Size Matters!



Utopia Costumes' Ewan Campbell takes us through the essential measurements you need for your costume fitting and how to get the best results. Utopia is NODA's recommended scenery supplier for *The Slipper and the Rose*.

This is the time of year when many of us will be in the throes of our spring productions. Traditionally, a couple of weeks after rehearsals start the wardrobe team will appear with the dreaded tape measure in hand to take your sizes for your costume. We all know the scenario. Rehearsal night with the wardrobe mistress scurrying around grabbing people when they are not doing anything, and the minute the tape is lifted to take the first measurement the choreographer shouts for everyone to go through the dance again!

Generally speaking, time is not often set aside for costume measurements and they are taken when they can be or as people turn up. Or in some cases the last set of measurements that was recorded are used. I have known this to be as long as 10 years ago, and in some cases, at least two stones heavier!

We all have the measurements and sizes we think we are in our heads because we all buy clothes for ourselves. But people who make costumes use different kinds of measurements, so it's a good idea to take your sizes in the format they need. It is a good exercise and a way of helping you to be prepared for your group's wardrobe team.

It isn't a difficult thing to do and all you need is a **tape measure**, a **pen or pencil**, a **piece of paper** and a **trusted friend** who can keep their mouth shut if they have to. When taking measurements use either inches or centimetres but not a mixture of both, and take the measurements with light clothes on.

Measurements for everyone

Height: Do this without shoes on against a wall or door frame.

Head: The circumference measurement around the head taken above the ears.

Waist: To find your true waist, take a long piece of string or ribbon, put this around your body under your ribcage and slide it down until it will go no further. Tie it in a bow and take the measurement.

Hip/Seat: The circumference around the fullest part of your bottom.

Outside arm: The linear measurement from the shoulder bone to the wrist bone with the arm bent.



Ladies' measurements

Bust: This is the circumference around your back and over the fullest part of the bust. Take the measurement with your arms down. Your bra measurement is the circumference under your bust and the difference between the two is generally converted into the cup size. Someone who is a 32D, a 34C or a 36B could have the same circumference measurement, but obviously not the same fullness of bust. Check you are wearing the right bra size as this can make a big difference to both the fit of your clothes and your costume.

Girth: The circumference around the small of the back at top of the pelvis and over the stomach.

Waist to ankle: Linear measurement from your true waist to the ankle bone.

Waist to floor: Linear measurement from your true waist to the floor with no shoes on.

Nape to waist: From the base of the neck where you can feel the first bone of your spine, measure down your back to your true waist.

Gents' measurements

Chest: The circumference around your back and over the fullest part of the chest (over your nipples) with your arms by your side.

Inner leg: Linear measurement from the crotch downwards inside the leg to the top of the shoe. Normally it will be shorter than the trousers you wear.

Outer leg: Linear measurement from your natural waist down, from the outside of the leg to the top of the shoe.

Collar: This is the circumference of your neck over the Adam's apple. Add half an inch or 1.5 centimetres to work out your collar size.

Usual jacket size: Your usual size when you purchase a commercially made suit jacket. If you don't know this, your natural waist size will give you the size of jacket you should wear. If it is an odd number add one; for example, if your natural waist size is 38 inches buy a 38 inch jacket, but if it is 39 inches buy a 40 inch jacket.

Normal trouser size: This is your usual trouser size in commercially made trousers. This is not normally the same as your natural waist size, as the waist band of modern trousers sits above the pelvis and below the natural waist. Trousers that have a natural waist often require braces to hold them up.

We all have bits of our body we would rather not have and we all tend to be very critical of ourselves. Tape measures unfortunately don't lie or flatter – they tell the facts. Knowing what your measurements are before you get measured, good or bad, is a good idea. Getting the right measurements to the people that make your costumes gives everyone a better understanding of your shape, and this can influence the costume you will end up wearing in your show and ensure you look the best you can. ★

Make the most of health and safety training for NODA societies

Neil Maidman, Senior Safety Consultant with NODASafe, reminds member societies why it's so important to make the most of our online health and safety training course, which we launched last year.

We have said a great deal about what you need to consider to keep your show safe, and to assist you with that we have provided documents for you to use via our website (www.noda.org.uk/nodasafemembers) and this magazine. We are delighted to now be able to provide each society with online training, all as part of your membership subscription, so that you can develop the skills that are required to keep up with best practice in health and safety.

Most of what a society needs to do is common sense. I have heard this said to me many times when I have met members across the country and I wouldn't disagree with this at all, except that sometimes you can't rely on common sense being present. We often ignore too many risks, don't deal with the hazards around us or perhaps just accept risk as a norm. We all take short cuts and make compromises and sometimes that can impact on safety.

NODASafe has developed an online training programme that will help member societies become more conversant with health and safety principles and demonstrate in a practical manner how to deal with issues as they arise. The programme deals with the following:

- ★ Roles and responsibilities
- ★ Hazard spotting
- ★ Risk assessment
- ★ Accident reporting

It includes a series of short films to illustrate good practice for societies; for example, how to run an induction process before each show. This may feel like an additional task on a very busy day but it's so important for the prevention of accidents during your show. A checklist can be found on the website for this but the online training features a film demonstrating its use.



Putting up sets and shifting props and heavy items can be a real pain in the neck - literally! So we've looked at the issues that surround this and how you can risk assess for your production. Again, a short film within the online training will help you tackle this problem.

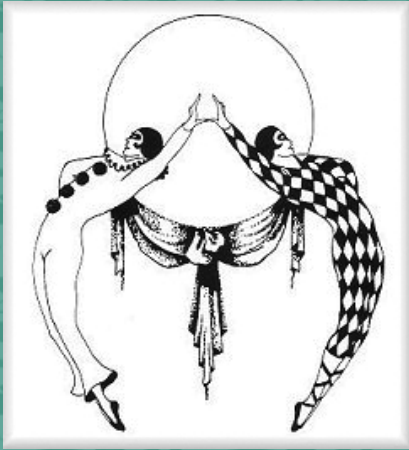
Working at height is something that you may or may not do during the set up of your show, or it may form part of your production. For example, anyone who has performed *Oliver* on a standard set will be up on gantries, so what precautions should we take? Simple tasks like marking out the edge of the stage and where steps lie, as well as having proper handrails, are often overlooked. I have a friend who wasn't briefed about an uneven set of steps in a pantomime production - there were no markings, no hand rails and no induction. She exited off stage via those steps and broke both her ankles. This was **totally** preventable by ensuring that a risk assessment was completed, that proper controls were put in place and that everyone was told about the hazard.

This is why it's so important to take our online health and safety training course. Before Christmas each society was sent an invitation email to take the course from a company called LearnUpon. This invitation was sent to the email address of the main NODA contact we have for each society, probably the society secretary, and this is your gateway to the free training. Within

the invitation is a link to click on that takes you through to the LearnUpon site that hosts the training where you can sign up and take the course, which is called **Introduction to Health and Safety**. Make sure you give us the correct name so that your details are correct on your certificate upon completion.

Please note: If you are the person who needs to take the course within your society but you did not receive the email invitation, please let us know at nodasafe@noda.org.uk and we will assist you. If the email invitation is forwarded to you by somebody else this will not work and you will not be able to take the course. This is because each email invitation to take the course is specific to the recipient. Therefore if somebody else within the society needs to take the course, let us know and the email invitation will be resent by LearnUpon to the correct individual.

In addition to the online training, there will be a series of training events in each region over the next 12 months. Details will be released via email newsletters and your regional reps. These training days will look at the process in greater depth, but in the meantime please take advantage of the free online training. I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our training events throughout the year. ★



A stage manager's tools of the trade

Graham Coulson, General Manager of The Border Studio, NODA's recommended scenery supplier for *The Slipper and the Rose*, discusses a stage manager's all important tool box.

Happy new year to one and all from the team here at The Border Studio and we wish you all well for 2015.

As we move forward into the rush of the spring musical season, I thought it would be good to look at an area of your job that sometimes requires you to be a magician. Yes, you are that individual who is the font of all knowledge and of course can conjure up anything and everything at a moment's notice. Of course I jest; no-one is that clever. Or are you one of those individuals who can eventually come up with the goods required? I am confident you are, otherwise why would you want to be a stage manager?

A key element of this job for me is that you have a basic tool box to hand whenever you move into the theatre. Those of us who are advancing the scale of life will probably remember that all you really used to need for the set build was muscles, gloves, a heavy duty hammer and of course six inch nails! I seem to recall in my youth - such a long time ago I hear you say - that if wing flats were permanent throughout the show then the best way to achieve this was to nail them to the floor. Nowadays if you did that there would probably be several penalties to incur, the worst of which being - yes you are one step ahead of me - that ray of helpfulness the duty manager or caretaker. That is a little unkind of me as most of the aforementioned individuals do give a great deal of support to ensure that the get in and the get out run as smoothly as possible.

So why do you need to have a tool box? Surely all the hardware that is required to build the set will be provided by the

contractor? Usually a basic hardware package comes with the set, but to be fair to the contractor their sets will have been designed and built to be flexible so that the sets can be used in most venues. However, that said, the contractors cannot cover all of the nuances of the varied venues that their sets may be asked to fit, and therefore it can be important to have a tool box.

What might be some key elements of the box? Well, perhaps the first two priority elements might be a bottle of gin and some valium! You see where I am coming from, but seriously, everyone will have their own ideas about which tools best suit their working style and most importantly, for me, that they are comfortable using them in the way they were designed to be used.

For me my top five bits for the box would be as follows: Certainly a hammer, followed by a multi-bit screwdriver (how many of you can remember the good old ratchet screwdriver - a real workhorse!), a

box of assorted screws, a spirit level and finally the small box that contains screw eyes, hinges and pin hinges. This box will of course vary in size depending on how long you have been a stage manager and will probably contain all sorts of curious things that you've gathered over the years.

Well, there we go folks - some food for thought. Just as each and every one of us is an individual, then so will your tool box be individual to you.

One final thought that strikes me is that I have yet to find something that could safely be used to prise some of the actors and actresses from a given spot that they seem to migrate to. Yes, that very spot that is in the way of you running most aspects of the show.

With every good wish for the coming season whatever you may be doing. ★

Aye
Graham





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Councillor's Comments

As I write these notes to meet the deadline for the magazine, the NODA North family are well underway with their pantos. Although

I admit that pantomime is not my favourite genre, I do enjoy seeing the various styles and variations on a theme in traditional pantos such as *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*. I even experienced a first by seeing a Halloween pantomime at the end of October called *Dracula – The Vampire Strikes Back*.

Each has the same standard checklist of a dame, evil entity, good entity, principal boy, principal girl and daft boy/girl. Pantomime, however, isn't an easy option to perform if done well and is as important a performance style as any classical musical production. The reason for this is that often it is the very first stage show a youngster may experience in their life, and if it is done well it may inspire that child for life. I remember last year seeing a production where a young girl of five or six entered the auditorium and was totally spellbound and at a loss for words at the magical world before her. Inspire children young and you may have an audience for life. Already signs to this effect are apparent, as in NODA North we have both a nine and 10 year old joining NODA as individual members – well done Sam and Oliver!

Pantos often 'employ' children in their ranks and indeed many productions have children involved these days. Although the legalities are constantly changing and many societies openly wonder if all the red tape is worthwhile, my answer is yes. We have a youth advisor in our region whose purpose it is to help you with any problems you may have. You will see a profile of Michelle in our region's pages and I do urge you to invite her along to any productions

involving children so that you can build up a good working relationship with her.

I myself love getting around seeing many of you in your productions or at district meetings in your areas. I still have an ambition to see each of our member societies and would urge you to invite me along. This year I have been to both the extremities of our region, with a couple of visits to societies in Berwick as well as a visit to the North Yorkshire Pennines to see Hawes Operatic Society perform *Aladdin*. Each society is important to NODA and I love to get to meet as many people as possible that share this great hobby of ours.

On my frequent visits I'm always on the lookout for a society or individual who goes that bit above and beyond in terms of excellence. With the third annual performance awards coming up in September, I already have an extremely difficult decision to make at the end of May as to who will receive the Councillor's Cup for adult productions and individuals, and the Shield for Youth.

I really find it an honour representing the North on Council down in Warwick on a regular basis. If you have any concerns that need addressing nationally please contact me either directly or via your regional representative. Finally, I shall also be attending Summer School along with a further (at the moment of typing) eleven people from our region in August. Each member is doing a course that will benefit them personally and will also benefit their societies.

I hope 2015 is good for you and your societies. ★

Gordon Richardson
Councillor, NODA North



Standing next to Regional Councillor Gordon Richardson is Caitlin Bannister, starring as the title character in Rainbow Youth's production of *Peter Pan* last November. Caitlin won the first District 2 youth award for her role as Iago in Disney's *Aladdin* in Rainbow Youth's panto back in 2012.

MEET THE NODA NORTH COMMITTEE

Over the next few issues of the magazine, we will endeavour to introduce you to members of the NODA North committee. We start with NODA North Youth Advisor Michelle Coulson.

Michelle Coulson – Youth Advisor

This January I was honoured to receive my 35 year NODA award at my own society's production of *Sleeping Beauty*. As with many young people, it was being involved with panto that first got me interested in performing all those years ago. I am thrilled to still be involved with pantomime and carrying on this age-old tradition.

As a performer my favourite roles have included many principal boys, principal girls and witches in pantomimes, as well as Gloria in *Return to the Forbidden Planet*, Bianca in *Kiss me Kate*, Baroness in *The Sound of Music* and Mrs Molloy in *Hello Dolly*, among many others. As well as

performing, for the last 13 years I have directed concerts, pantomimes, plays and musicals, and been a drama coach for a local children's theatre school. My directorial credits include many classics such as *Return to the Forbidden Planet*, *South Pacific*, *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Little Shop of Horrors*, as well as the North East amateur premiere of *Acorn Antiques the Musical*.

Last year I had the privilege of attending a conference for youth advisors, where together with NODA Youth Councillor Phil Barnett, we planned a way forward for youth representation and support within

NODA. I also attended the Directing Youth Theatre course at NODA Summer School, which not only gave invaluable training and helped me to develop new skills, but was also very enjoyable.

In the coming year I hope to build on the success of the youth workshop day we held last July. We received excellent feedback about this and plan to organise similar events. If you have any suggestions for another youth workshop or any other issues you wish to discuss, please contact me at michelle.coulson@noda.org.uk or get in touch with your regional representative. ★



President visits NODA North

Shortly after his installation as NODA President at the National AGM in September, John Barnes and his wife honoured NODA North with a visit. During his necessarily brief visit, John attended Darlington Operatic Society's excellent production of *Sister Act*. Chairman Julian Cound said of John's visit: "It was a fantastic opportunity to showcase the talent here in the NODA North region and to offer a warm Darlington welcome. The cast remained on stage after the final curtain to thank John for taking time out of his busy schedule to visit us."

Two nights later John saw Northallerton Musical Theatre Company's wonderful production of *Annie*. Originally from Yorkshire himself, going back to Northallerton was like going back to his roots. Secretary Maureen Willoughby said that the visit "gave the company a real buzz for the opening night and afterwards Mr. Barnes joined the cast on stage to compliment them. NMTC are celebrating their sixtieth anniversary this year so this really was the icing on the cake!". ★



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From your Regional Editor

After this edition of NODA TODAY I will be hanging up my boots as Regional Editor for NODA North East. Thank you for the 20 years I have enjoyed with you and now please support Tony Harris as I hand over to him for the next edition in July. ★

Julie Webb

Summer School Stories

Here's how some North East bursary winners fared at NODA Theatre Summer School 2014.

Linda McCraight attended Acting Masterclass.

"My room and home for the week was delegate accommodation, which was like a four star hotel. The welcome speech left us excited with anticipation and I was relieved to find there were lots of first timers there. All the exercises Dylan, our tutor, gave us to do were to help us build up layers of characterization, emotion and situation, and we learned how costume can create character and occasion. There were short workshops as well as social activities in the evenings. Summing up, it was exhilarating and challenging - not to mention hard work!"

Laura Whitlock from STOS attended Beginners Dance.

"Throughout the week we were pushed out of our comfort zones and covered the basics of dance. Everything was broken down into bite size pieces so that we were all able to pick up routines and understand how each movement flowed into the next. On Friday it was time for the showcase performance - a chance to perform and show people on other courses what we had been doing. It was clear to see how much people had enjoyed the week and this radiated out into the theatre. The day was topped off by a red carpet evening when everyone dressed up in their finery - a perfect way to end the week."

From Grenoside Pantomime Section, both Matthew Copley and Steve Atkinson attended short courses on sound and lighting.

Matthew summed up his time as: "A brilliant week. Both tutors knew their subjects very well, presenting the material in a fun, informal but effective way. We had the opportunity to experiment with equipment, some of which we would not normally have access to, which gave the opportunity to evaluate its capabilities."

Steve echoed this: "As a musician involved with home recording I've picked up a lot about sound and electronics. What I wanted was a class to pull the snippets together, fill the gaps and apply them to theatre. The sound course did exactly that, and as a novice the lighting course gave me a thorough grounding." ★

Leeds Children's Theatre: 80 years in the making

Leeds Children's Theatre (LCT) boasts the fact that it is one of the longest running theatre groups dedicated to the inclusion of children in theatre. In its long and bountiful time it has seen many stars tread the boards in the name of amateur dramatics. Great names like Angela Griffin have donned costumes and performed for the group, supported by a dedicated team of volunteers.

From humble post-war beginnings, when various schools came together to make a production, to the now prosperous society that LCT is today, children from around Leeds and the surrounding area keep coming back to see their performances.

LCT recently voted in a new Honorary President - someone who has been with the society for many years and directed countless productions, most recently *Pinocchio* in 2013. We are of course talking about Judith Daniel, a long standing member whose tireless efforts, not only in directing but also



doing makeup and helping with Saturday morning workshops, makes this a well deserved honour.

The society's November production of *The Railway Children* was directed by another hard working and long standing member, Ian Goodison, whose credits include *Tom's Midnight Garden* and *The Secret Garden* (must be a keen gardener!) to name but a few. In 2015, LCT will be celebrating its eightieth anniversary and will see a performance of *The Diary of Anne Frank*. There will also be a celebration party and old members

will be invited to come and share their memories with current members.

So, LCT has made it to 80 and is still as strong and as full of vigour as when it first began. With new members constantly pouring in, many waiting in the wings for their chance and some wise heads to guide them, here's to the next 80 years of making children laugh, cry and come back for more in the name of theatre. If you would like more information about LCT please visit the website at www.leeds-childrens-theatre.co.uk.

★



Courtesy of Ian Cornick Photography



Landmark anniversary for Leeds AOS

It only seems like a minute ago that Leeds Amateur Operatic Society (LAOS - The Musical Theatre Company) was celebrating its centenary, but this year is the society's 125th anniversary, making it one of the oldest amateur performing groups in the country. Producing two major shows a year, the society draws both performers and audiences alike from a wide radius around Leeds and often further afield.

The society was founded in Headingley in October 1890, and its first production of *HMS Pinafore* was performed in December of that year. The society moved to its long term home at the Leeds Grand Theatre in 1893. Following a successful performance of Ivor Novello's *Glamorous Night* in 1939, the society ceased producing shows until after World War II and officially reformed in 1948. In celebration of the Queen's Coronation in 1953, the society produced *Merrie England*, a show which has been performed six times

over the years, all of which were at some point of historical celebration.

In the 1960s the society purchased a swimming pool for the Silverdales Holiday Camp for underprivileged children, and around 350 children from Leeds still go to the camp for holidays every year. Raising money for different charities remains a key aim of the society and many different organisations have benefited and continue to benefit from activities and collections to support worthwhile causes.

In 1966 it was decided to enter *Song of Norway* into the Waterford International Festival of Light Opera in Ireland. The society was triumphant and swept the boards, followed by repeated success the following year with *The Count of Luxembourg* and third place with *The Vagabond King* twelve months later.

In its centenary year in 1989, the society went back to its roots and produced *100 Musical Years* at the Civic Theatre. Due

to its success, this production became a regular and very popular addition to the LAOS calendar for many years.

Most of the LAOS productions have taken place in the Leeds Grand Theatre and Opera House in the heart of the vibrant city of Leeds. In 2005 however, the theatre underwent major refurbishment and the society had to seek a new venue while the work was being completed. With their production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, LAOS became the first amateur group to perform at the West Yorkshire Playhouse and shows have been performed alternately at both venues ever since.

For its 125th anniversary year, the society performed *Aspects of Love* at West Yorkshire Playhouse in November 2014 and will perform *Hairspray* at The Grand Theatre in March 2015. A grand ball is also to be held in 2015, which is open to members past and present and to friends of the society. Here's to the next 125 years being just as successful. ★



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Councillor's Comments

Oh the joys of being a NODA Councillor! Last year I was delighted and privileged to attend some 77 of your productions, including 10 drama festival productions. At one of them, *Annie Get Your Gun* presented by Centenary Theatre Company, I was even introduced to a live snake! The variety and standard of the shows is breathtaking. Thank you for inviting me and please keep the invitations coming.



By the time you read this your society secretary should have received the nominations and booking form for the NODA North West AGM and awards weekend. We return once again to the Mercure Hotel in Piccadilly, Manchester, for the weekend beginning Friday 1st May. I do hope that you will join us for some or all of the weekend.

This year the youth workshops on the Saturday afternoon are both on the theme of the Disney musical *Newsies*, a recent Broadway hit packed with fantastic songs and dance numbers. Gary Jones-McCaw will be holding a dance workshop and Phil Barnett, the NODA Youth Councillor, will present an

acting workshop on the same theme. Last year Phil presented a workshop on 'Confidence for Auditions' for adult members on the Monday. This proved very popular so we will revisit the theme with 'Confidence for Auditions II'. Please bring along a piece you would like to work on.

I do hope that you will be able to join us for the weekend. It's a great chance to meet and socialise with like-minded people so please do come along! ★

Christine Hunter Hughes
Councillor, NODA North West

Fifty years of family and fun

It's been a family affair for the past 50 years on stage for Barbara Platt, as she's covered plenty of ground in Bolton area societies.

Barbara first joined St Philip's AODS aged 17, following her father's footsteps and spending 11 years with the company. Here she went on to meet husband David and had sons Andrew and Nicholas. She then moved on to Horwich AODS, spending 22 years on stage and on the committee, and encouraged her children to take part too, including third son Timothy. In fact, with daughter-in-law Hazel, for productions of *Fiddler On The Roof* and

Carousel there were six members of the family all on stage.

In recent years, Barbara has been with Bolton Premier Productions, where she also works front of house, and at St Vincent's ADS.

She said: "I am very happy at Bolton Premier and shall carry on as long as I'm able. I cannot measure the amount of pleasure and company I have had during these 50 years and thank everyone for their friendship. I hope my sons carry on and have as much fun as I've been fortunate to have."

How to get the most out of your director

Kevin Proctor, NODA North West District 1 Representative, shares his thoughts on how to improve your performance by best understanding your director's way of working, helping you both get the most out of your role.

Congratulations, you've been cast! As celebrated director Tyrone Guthrie said: "Good directing is 80% good casting." But that doesn't mean it's an easy task. As a performer, it won't take long to establish what type of director you're working with. The sooner you understand the director's way of working the better, as this will enable you to build a strong working relationship and will ultimately (hopefully) lead to a solid and well delivered production. Below are a few examples of the types of director you might come across.

The 'do as I say' dictator director: It's their way or no way.

This type of director is probably the most common in our field of amateur theatre. He/she will have a very specific view of how the process will unfold; they're not looking for ideas or input from the cast. Rehearsals are likely to be well-defined, blocking is well thought-out and the vision is tightly managed.

The 'let's make it up together' improviser director: Do what feels right for you.

This type of director comes to rehearsal with little to no blocking and few notes, but a lot of ideas and suggestions. The improviser director is keen on collaborating with the cast, who improvise the blocking between them and are encouraged to let the text come alive through improv. The improviser will supervise and will observe (without interrupting the actors' flow) and will occasionally tweak or request something a certain way. The input and involvement of the actor is key and necessary to the success of the improviser director.

The 'let's be creative, but I'm the boss' visionary director: Just tell me what you want me to do!

This type of director enjoys the creative process and wants to hear from actors,



A rehearsal of 'Hitchcock Blonde' by Altrincham Garrick, NODA NW District 1. Photo Rob Watson.

but ultimately is the one in control of the production. The best type of visionary director is able to effectively communicate their vision and bring everyone on board. Everyone moves towards the visionary's idea, bringing their own ideas to serve the bigger picture.

The 'fight me!' pushy director: Once more with feeling!

This type of director thrives on confrontation. They feel, rightly or wrongly, that the only way to get the right reaction out of a character is to push the actor. This should happen in a positive manner through question and discussion. The best pushers don't mind when an actor disagrees or pushes back - in fact it's often encouraged. The pushy director thrives when an actor moves beyond their comfort zone with a sense of achievement.

Once you've identified your director's style it's time to get stuck into your role. The first rehearsal brings everything into reality as up until now it's just been you and the script. Often, a director will use the first rehearsal to define the tone of the process, clearly stating what they expect from the cast and what the cast can expect from them. Some directors will put their expectations in a contract to be signed by the director and the cast, stating what they expect from the cast and what they promise to do for the cast and the production.

Whether written down or merely explained in rehearsals, here's what you should expect from a director and what they will expect from you. ★

What should you expect from a director?

- ★ To always start rehearsals on time
- ★ To separate the outside world and the rehearsal world
- ★ To stand by their word on expectations
- ★ To offer constructive notes for the good of the performance
- ★ To show and share enthusiasm for the piece
- ★ Trust

What should your director expect from you?

- ★ To attend rehearsals on time and ready to work
- ★ To leave any personal issues and problems outside (use rehearsals as an escape)
- ★ To respect his/her final choices and comments, whether you agree or not
- ★ To not take constructive notes personally
- ★ To show and share enthusiasm for the piece
- ★ Trust



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The show must go on!

Costumes on, actors in place, audience in their seats, overture starts and then the real drama unfolds. The sound of the fire alarm suddenly propelled into the theatre and it wasn't part of the act!

On Saturday 27th September Falkirk Opera were poised behind the curtain prepared to begin Act II of their cabaret *Generation X* when unexpectedly the fire alarm replaced the overture. Falkirk Town Hall staff, cast and audience were all evacuated safely as the fire engines raced to the scene.

Although it was a false alarm, the fire brigade performed their duties thoroughly and as quickly as possible, returning everyone safely within the theatre. Fortunately the rain had only dampened the cast's hair and makeup but not their spirits, and with the support of a cheering audience a flawless second half was performed.

Falkirk Opera would like to thank their audience for staying with them in the rain, the fire brigade for their promptness and Falkirk Town Hall staff for their efficiency, but have decided they will stick to creating their own drama in future! ★

Hazel Brooks
Falkirk Operatic Society committee member



Little Stars of Luxor

A recent edition of NODA TODAY featured an article from Kate Reinsch from The Border Studio that appealed for knitted blankets and teddy bears dressed in jumpers for Egyptian charity Little Stars of Luxor. The charity runs a nursery school for orphaned children but works in outlying areas where

extreme poverty exists and living conditions are extremely basic. Kate was touched by the poverty she saw on a visit to Egypt and thought how nice it would be for the children at the charity to have a blanket to call their own and a teddy to

cuddle under it, as most of the children don't even own one toy.

The idea of 'bear in a blanket' was to knit a jumper for the teddy in the same wool as the blanket so each child knew which pair was theirs. However, after Kate delivered the first batch the older children wanted them too and so she appealed for extra help. In response, Eyemouth and District Community Youth Theatre Group decided they would like to help. They began to knit squares for blankets and donated some of their own teddies to be dressed.

There is always a buzz at rehearsals, but the buzz was joined by the clackety clack of knitting needles. Some children learnt to knit just to take part. It took them a long time but nearly all 53 members produced at least one square and the adult volunteers got knitting too. In the end the group was delighted to be able to send two bin bags containing eight blankets, 16 dressed teddies, one knitted teddy, one knitted rabbit and a knitted scarf.

At our recent pantomime there was a presentation about the project and it also featured as a Christmas story in our local paper *The Berwickshire News*. ★

How Peter Pan Stole My Year

Heather Adams Officer of Ury Players gives us an insight into how the annual pantomime really can take over your life!

2012

I had volunteered to direct the company's 2013 panto and in December 2012 had a brainwave and decided we should perform *Peter Pan*. I love using ultraviolet lights and thought I could do something really creative with the flying to Neverland scene.

January to July 2013

Still keen on *Peter Pan*, I started looking for scripts. Our group has a distinct lack of men and no-one aged between 30 and 50 to fit the parts in the scripts I read, so I decided to write my own. Writing took me about six weeks and I waited for a month after I'd finished it to decide if I still liked what I'd done. Finally the draft went to my editor - my dad, who is a pun aficionado - for approval.

August to October 2013

Luckily, the script went down really well at the launch night and I was relieved to hear people laugh at my jokes! Double the amount of people auditioned than there were parts available for, which I realise puts us in an enviable position for an amateur theatre club. With a final cast of 40, rehearsals were sometimes more like crowd control than learning choreography!

After casting, I put quite a burden on the backstage team. They probably wish I'd never started... *"The flying scene is going to be ultraviolet so I need cutouts of the main characters for it, as well as London skylines. A wigwam would be nice. And a mast that Peter Pan can be tied to..."* Luckily for me they were totally up for it and I was spoiled by what they produced for me.

Then it was time to think about costumes. Thankfully I got to delegate this one. My able producer (my mum - it's a family affair) was sent to the costumiers to negotiate a good deal for us amongst all of the other pantomimes they had to provide costumes for.

November to December 2013

The rehearsals trundled on and we reached the point where we were all singing the panto songs in our sleep. Tickets went on sale at the start of November and we went into full publicity mode. Posters were put into every shop in town and all the surrounding villages, we had an advert on the local radio and at the cinema event in the hall, and we even had some pirates crash the Christmas tree switch on with flyers for the show.

When the big week finally arrived there were plenty of last minute glitches, adjustments and tantrums, but I was really pleased with how it went. We produced a bright, vibrant show with something to suit everyone and the cast seemed to enjoy themselves and revelled in the reaction from the audience. And my u/v scene looked awesome. In the end 2013 saw one of our most successful pantomimes in years. Whether it was the particular story, our reputation, word of mouth, good timing or, more than likely, a combination of all these things, we had 92% capacity over our five performance run, which is fantastic for us. And from the comments we got from our audiences I was pleased to learn that people thought my jokes were funny and that they really enjoyed the way it looked. Writing and directing was a huge task, but one that I (mostly) enjoyed, and I would encourage others to give it a go, as long as you're prepared to lose a year of your life! ★

.....
In other news, Ury Players recently celebrated their 60th birthday with a long overdue get together. Chair Freda Adams hailed the evening a great success: "It was lovely to see so many old faces back for a reminisce and a natter. May this success carry on for another 60 years!" ★
.....

Ury Players' birthday celebrations



Alan Scott Photography

1514 – The Musical: Hawick's Community Project

Deborah Lyons, Regional Representative for District 8, tells us the story of a new musical and the community project that brought it to life.

At the Battle of Flodden on 9th September 1513 every man between 16 and 60 who left Hawick to fight with the King died on the battlefield. When an English raiding party set up camp just outside Hawick in 1514, the strongest youths who were left at home rallied together to surprise and overwhelm the marauders, capture their banner and return home triumphant. In 2014, Hawick commemorated 500 years since this event.

I was asked at the 2013 Reivers Festival if I would consider directing their new musical project for the 2014 commemoration. I was intrigued and instantly agreed to take up the challenge. This being my first project in Hawick Town Hall, where the scale is much greater than the high school facilities I'm used to, I felt an element of trepidation. But from the first meeting the vision grew and ideas flooded in for both the cost and set design. I felt that if I could be inventive enough, I would be able to build much of the set from scratch to create the atmosphere within the village of Hawick in 1513. I can't give enough thanks to the many artistic hands who helped me to achieve the final picture, much of which I achieved from recycled materials.

It was also really important to have as many youngsters as possible involved, with a view to promoting a new community youth theatre group for the town. The amazing group of boys and girls put their hearts and souls into many weeks of rehearsals and achieved so much in the process. Many grateful thanks go to Reivers for their wholehearted support of this new project, which has been very much **About Community Theatre**. ★



regionalroundup

South East

Get to know your Regional Editor

Gregory Gower tells us the steps that led to him becoming Regional Editor for NODA South East.

From experiencing a very difficult period in my life when I was told I had an undiagnosed illness and would not walk again, to the sheer elation of subsequently being able to use my legs, in 1962 I was told that I had a strain of Multiple Sclerosis. I came to the conclusion that in many ways I was luckier than most people who suffer with MS, as many have died as a result of having this dreadful affliction.

In 1963 I began to write and this eventually became my saviour, my rope to hang onto to be pulled out of my personal quagmire. Writing became a hobby. After meeting a subsequent lifelong friend who was wheelchair bound and finding out he ran a printing business, my first publication for the charity NCH Action for Children was published.

I later became a columnist for the online newspaper *The Sussex Newspaper* and whilst writing for the newspaper I noticed an advert from Mithra Publishing Company looking for book writers. Luckily they were interested in the five stories I sent them and I was offered a three year contract. For more information on all of my published books, please go to www.bookworm.org.uk.



I have had the privilege of working as an editor for two other magazines in the past and this is where my experience of working as an editor comes from. For the Gilbert and Sullivan society of which I am a member (including Secretary for seven years, Vice Chairman for three years and Publicity Officer for 19 years) I was in charge of designing and collating the society's programme, and I have just been appointed their Press Officer and I liaise with local newspapers. In 2002, I took over as editor of South East News from Margaret Fields and by 2007 I was at the helm of the new and improved magazine.

My ultimate goal for this magazine was to make it a glossy magazine with a colour cover, and in December of that year this became a reality with issue number two. Ultimately I approached writers from outside the amateur

scene to write something that would interest the readers because I wanted to make the magazine a talking point amongst the members. Unfortunately, the cost of printing and publishing the new NODA South East News magazine soon became too expensive. As a result, NODA Chief Executive Tony Gibbs decided to cease production of all regional magazines and create one magazine to serve all of the regions, the most recent incarnation being NODA TODAY. ★

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Hippodrome Community Theatre Co: Our first year

Eastbourne's Royal Hippodrome Theatre has a long and rich history dating back to 1883, and during the 50s and 60s attracted many well known variety stars including Vera Lynn, Peter Sellers, Ken Dodd and Bruce Forsythe.

In recent times the theatre had been less well used, but in 2013, with the support of a new management committee, the Hippodrome Community Theatre Company was born. Our first undertaking was a Christmas season and the obvious choice was Irving Berlin's beautiful *White Christmas*. We held open auditions, attracting both talented amateurs and experienced professional performers, and assembled a fantastic cast. Our set and props were almost exclusively made up of recycled items, including a stunning white grand piano found in the bowels of the theatre. We received great reviews, and

with many patrons commenting that they had never been into the theatre before, attracted a new audience.

From this we hurtled straight into a youth production of Disney's *The Little Mermaid Jnr*. With a rehearsal period of just six weeks, our cast of 30 young people aged eight to 21 years old put on the most spectacular show, complete with a flying seagull and mermaid, pyrotechnics and lots of bubbles! The show was a great success, attracting 2,000 audience members over four days.

Once again we returned for the Christmas season, this time with *Christmas Cracker*, a show devised, written and produced by the Hippodrome Community Theatre Co, with director/choreographer Sarah Dormady at the helm. The cast of *Christmas Cracker* included three young performers who

have already graced the professional stage, as well as some for whom this was their first ever proper show.

Our backstage and front of house team are all volunteers and everyone involved in our productions shares the common goal of creating top notch theatre whilst having a great time. There is a real sense of team and family - we are really embracing the notion of being a 'community' theatre company. Eastbourne's amateur theatre scene is alive and busy, and we are delighted to have the support of other amateur companies in the town who have been so kind as to loan us scenery and props.

We have had a great first year and look forward to the future with optimism. As the theatre looks to establish a community interest company (which we will be a part of) we hope that it will once again become a thriving venue for professional and amateur shows alike. ★

Recognition for fundraising youth group

Seaford Musical Theatre Juniors (SMTJ) scooped the main award at the 2014 Spark Network Awards at the De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill, on 12th November, along with four other recognitions for its volunteers and social media project.

The Spark Awards celebrate the achievements of children and young people in East Sussex, and those who work with them. SMTJ was recognised for its ethos of confidence, creativity and consideration for others. Their recent achievements include an anti-bullying film, creative writing workshop, inclusive performances and a social media project.

The older members of the group brought the house down with their performance of a medley from *Grease* and the audience were enthralled with the video of their collaboration with Seaford band We Are Lions on the Little Love project, which



has had over fourteen thousand views on YouTube and raised funds for the Chestnut Tree House Children's Hospice.

In addition to this fundraising, top children's entertainer Tomfoolery, otherwise known as Tom Hunter (pictured above), recently visited SMTJ at the Barn Theatre in Seaford to teach them circus and clowning skills. This was part of his Charity Tuesday campaign to raise funds for Chestnut Tree House Children's Hospice, and he donated his fee to the vital support service for life-limited children and their families.

You can find out more about Tomfoolery's fundraising campaign at www.partytom.com. ★

A fond farewell

Tunbridge Wells Operatic and Dramatic Society's 125th anniversary in November 2014 was marked with a gala production of *The Merry Widow*. Not only was it a celebration for TWODS but it was also the occasion when Sadie Williams retired from the society after 67 years of continuous service.

NODA President John W. Barnes and his wife were invited to attend and he was delighted to be able to share a toast with Sadie Williams and wish her well as she retired from her position as Company Manager. ★

NODA SE Youth Day

Sunday 5th July - 10.00am to 6.00pm

NODA SE Presentation of Awards & AGM

Sunday 5th July at 2.30pm

Wessex Arts Centre, Alton, Hampshire
BOOK THE DAY IN YOUR DIARY NOW!

Further information will be circulated to societies at the end of February and will also be placed on the SE section of the NODA website.



regionalroundup South West

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Midsomer Norton-based youth theatre company Merriman Theatre Group recently wowed a sell out audience at Her Majesty's Theatre, London, as part of a national youth theatre gala.

Twenty six members of the company aged from six to 18 years old, who had starred in the company's own highly acclaimed production of CATS in the summer, recreated excerpts of the show to a fantastic reception from the packed audience at one of London's most famous theatres on Sunday 28th September 2014.

Merriman Theatre Group was one of 12 theatre groups and dance schools from across the country that was invited to perform in a celebration of theatre and dance at Her Majesty's Theatre. Their performance of the lively 'Jellicle Ball' from CATS, choreographed



by Nicola Paine, was given a rapturous reception as it closed the first half of the three hour event.

Merriman's director and founder Graeme Savage said: "They have really done themselves proud tonight. Appearing on a stage like this is a once in a lifetime opportunity and the experience is something that they can take with them into later life, whether they continue performing or not. It was fantastic to see them growing in confidence throughout the day as they became more comfortable with the West End stage, and to see the cast working together and supporting each other, which was a brilliant example of what Merriman is all about."

Founded in Midsomer Norton in 1998, over 400 young people have been part of Merriman over the years, developing skills in drama, music, singing and dance. Full details about the group, including information on forthcoming productions and how to join can be found at **www.merrimanthatre.com**. ★

Panto horse derby a big hit!

A great day out at Bath Racecourse on Sunday 14th September 2014 saw 22 panto horse runners, representing seven different societies, take part in NODA South West's inaugural pantomime derby. The race was won by Neigh-vita from the Centre Stage Exmouth stables.

Thank you to everyone who was able to support the pantomime derby. The day was very successful in terms of promoting NODA South West (including coverage on local BBC radio and television channels), and all the participants really entered into the spirit of the day with the costumes and

animals. We will be looking to make this an annual event and Bath Racecourse is certainly very keen to have us back next year. We will have a date as soon as the racecourse's fixtures are confirmed.

Now the event is established, we will also be looking for enough entries to go for the World Record in 2015, so please bear this in mind when the invitations come around soon. If you're interested or have any questions, please contact the event organiser Graeme Savage at **graeme.savage@noda.org.uk**. We're looking forward to seeing you there in 2015! ★

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Out with 'Operatic' and in with 'Musical Theatre'

Close to 88 years after being established, Axminster Operatic Society has changed its name. It will now be known as Axminster Musical Theatre after members voted for the change at a special meeting held recently.

Chairman Barry Marshall explained the reason for the change. "The name Axminster Operatic Society has been well revered for decades, simply known by many as 'The Operatic'. So, it has been a difficult and emotional decision to drop the 'Operatic' title because it no longer describes what we do. We have not sung

opera for years. Those who have seen our recent shows will have noticed a change in direction. Our shows are more up to date and attract an ever growing membership of young people. This year's show is rock musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*, a fine example of the direction we want to go in. So it is a fond farewell to Axminster Operatic Society and an excited welcome to Axminster Musical Theatre."

Visit www.axminsteroperatic.co.uk for more details about the society and their future productions. ★

100 years of service awarded

Trudy Dyke reports on an award for two of the South West's longest serving production team members.

Carol Applegate-Day and Ros Dolding were recently awarded 50 year medals for their continuous service in working with many NODA affiliated societies across the South West. The presentation took place during Polden Production's *Mother Goose* panto, for which Ros was musical director and Carol acted as both director and choreographer. The awards were presented by Trudy Dyke, NODA South

West Regional Representative for District 8.

Both Ros and Carol have worked with many societies in the region, both together and separately, and as well as working together at Polden Productions for the last 14 years on musicals, pantos and reviews, they have also co-directed *Brigadoon* and *Pajama Game* for Glastonbury and Street Musical Comedy Society.

Here's to many more years of serving musical theatre in the South West! ★

In Brief

The NODA South West AGM and workshop weekend moved to the third weekend in September in 2014 from its previous end of July slot. Although attendance was down a little as people adjusted to this change, the new venue of the Palace Hotel in Torquay was agreed to be a great one and the quality of the workshops was praised by all present. The AGM and workshop weekend in 2015 is likely to remain at both the new time and venue.

The NODA Summer School marketing course was highly praised by first time attendee Fliss Jonckheere from Barnstaple Musical Comedy and Dramatic Society. Although initially a little daunting, everyone's friendliness really helped and she learnt a great deal, which she was enthusiastically able to take back to her committee. Some of it has already gone into practice, including a bunch of nuns abseiling down the front of the Queen's Theatre in preparation for their recent production of *Sister Act*!



Peter Wheeldon Remembered

Last year NODA South West lost the services of the wonderful Peter Wheeldon. Peter had looked after District 11 (West Dorset) ever since it joined the South West when the regions were reorganised.

Extremely knowledgeable and warmly supportive, Peter endeared himself to his societies while not being reluctant to criticise when necessary. When Gerry Branton became President he also took on the role of membership secretary for the region. Once again his quiet efficiency and gentlemanly demeanour were a boon to all concerned. His death robbed us of a unique support.

We are delighted that taking on the care of District 11 is Martine Burt. She has a wealth of experience both on and off stage and will be able to give societies the support they need. We welcome her to NODA South West and wish her an enjoyable time as a regional representative. ★



regionalroundup Wales & Ireland

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Mayor and Mayoress
of Abergavenny

NODA President John
Barnes and Dee McIlroy

NODA President attends youth production of CATS

Abergavenny Juniors were recently honoured with a visit from NODA President John W. Barnes for their award-nominated production of Andrew Lloyd Webber's magical production CATS.

The NODA President was invited to meet the Mayor and Mayoress of Abergavenny, Councillor Martin Hickman and his wife Alison, who wore their cats' ears for the performance!

NODA Wales and Ireland Regional Representative Dee McIlroy thanked our National President for attending and was very pleased and honoured to welcome him to Wales.

In the President's speech to the cast after the show, he congratulated AAODS Juniors on a superb performance and encouraged the youngsters to continue with their stage work in the future wherever they move to. ★

Councillor's Comments

By now you will all know that I have stepped down from the position of Regional Councillor for NODA Wales and Ireland. Can I thank you all for your support during my time as Councillor; it was a pleasure to serve you.

My sincerest thanks go to members of the regional committee who served me well during my time as Councillor. Your work on my behalf and that of the region has been greatly appreciated.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my visits to the far flung corners of this vast region - surely the largest in the NODA empire. I have been extremely impressed by the work which has been presented across Wales and Ireland, and long may it continue.

I am now looking forward to a long rest and I hope that you will extend the same warm welcome to Derek Grattidge, who replaces me as Acting Councillor. I hope that he will derive as much pleasure from the work as I did. I shall continue to spread the word about NODA and its good work wherever I go.

I wish you all well in everything you do and I shall follow with great interest your progress as societies. ★

Pob hwyl,

Brian Sullivan



It's a busy life being a RATS performer!

Ralph Thomas, Regional Representative for District 4, takes us through a year in the life of Rhiwbina Amateur Theatrical Society.

It all commenced with a desperate search to locate the Memorial Hall on a cold dark winter's evening in January 2014. Sitting in the car park and observing the location I was forced to check my invitation for *Me and My Girl* by Rhiwbina Amateur Theatrical Society (RATS). I pondered how such a large production was going to fit in a hall no bigger than a standard size tennis court? I was soon to find out.

In his directing debut, Dan Collier-Roberts (or was it Doctor Who?) had transformed the small hall into a tardis. The full company production that ensued bubbled with extremely energetic choreography by Tracey Coleman, while in the starring role of Bill, Chris Powell shone and could have easily graced any professional stage with his girl Sally, who was played by Hannah

Todd. It was truly an evening to remember that silenced my earlier reservations.

This production epitomised the hard working ethos that radiates throughout District 4 societies. So often I attend venues where sets have been made in house and they really do serve their very demanding purpose. This certainly was the case for RATS's 200th production of *The 39 Steps*. The stage moved between the grandeur of the London Palladium and the Scottish moors effortlessly, onboard a steam train that appeared from nowhere in a puff of smoke and just as quickly sped away along the tracks. Simply theatrical magic!

In complete contrast and showing off their enviable versatility, *Avenue Q* was next on the list in October. This show was in contrast to *Me and My Girl*, with a set assembled the weekend before the production and discarded in a builder's skip the following weekend.

As societies are forced to tighten their

belts local set-making heroes are in strong demand, and here RATS is extremely fortunate. Sue Osmolska, Barbara Scale, Jeff Champney-Smith, Raynor Phinamore, Alan Blakoe, Kayt Gregory and Lucy Chiplin are just some of the backstage heroes that give this company a formidable presence in District 4.

At the time of writing this article I am preparing to attend the final production of the RATS theatrical year, *Out Of Order*, which is a little farce to round off an incredible year of theatre at Rhiwbina. No wonder they all look so happy! ★

NODA Wales & Ireland conference, AGM and gala awards

Sunday 24th – Monday 25th May 2015
The Three Counties Hotel, Hereford
Please book with Ian Hogg:

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Councillor's Comments

We are well on our way towards Easter and our West Midlands conference and annual awards evening, which I hope you will be able to support.

I am pleased that I no longer need to struggle with editing these pages and welcome Janine Graeme to the role. She has many great ideas for improving communication within the West Midlands but, like all such ideas, she needs your input to make them work. Please send to her any snippets of news. For this magazine we are looking for articles which you may have found interesting, as well as local news, new

shows, casting changes, technical problems, and long and devoted service. All is welcome, together with photographs, and hopefully a local newsletter can also be produced.

As Councillor I am particularly pleased to see that our West Midland societies are getting their fair share of new shows and in some cases getting to host the premiere of an amateur launch. I have also seen an increasing number of home grown shows, most of which are of a high standard. I look forward to seeing more societies in 2015. ★

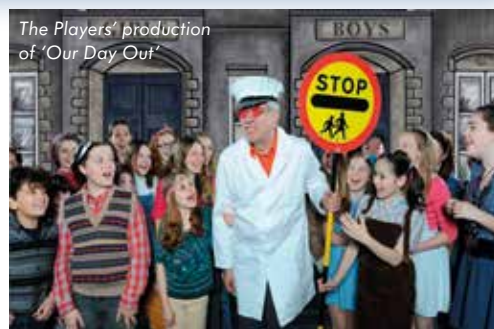
Michael Hastilow
Councillor, NODA West Midlands

A sign of the times

In a surprise move the Chairman of Malvern Theatres Trust, Robert Maskrey, has informed the venue's amateur company Malvern Theatre Players that their residency of 37 years is not to be continued. This brings to an end a tradition of amateur performing arts at one of the Midlands' major venues.

In a letter to the Malvern Theatre Players' executive committee, Robert Maskrey cited "reduced funding and the effects of a severe recession" and the need to "maximise the commercial use of the venues and reduce costs" as reasons for not renewing the residency agreement between the two organisations.

From the construction of the Assembly Rooms (now the Festival Theatre which opened with an amateur production of the play *School* in 1885), amateur productions have been a major feature of the programming policy at the theatre. Until recently, six major local groups performed a range of shows, such as grand opera, musical theatre, light opera and straight drama. The Malvern Theatre Players, who have enjoyed a unique and mutually beneficial residency agreement



with Malvern Theatres, survived by producing quality shows and reliably making a significant contribution to the venue's finances, in addition to providing opportunities for many thousands of local people to participate in the performing arts.

Since 1977 the Players have presented over 120 main stage productions, including 22 pantomimes. They have provided voluntary stage management and technicians for countless other amateur and professional shows, in addition to contributing over £1 million to general theatre funds. The most recent production by the Players was *Our Day Out* in February at the venue's Forum Theatre.

All is not lost however as the Players have arranged to transfer their residency to the adjacent Coach House Theatre, where they have already presented a number of successful productions since the new theatre opened five years ago. The recent extensions to the theatre, largely funded by members of the Players, together with other technical improvements, will give them a terrific opportunity to continue to provide high quality community drama and become more fully involved in the life of their new home.

Chris Bassett
Malvern Theatre Players

Your Regional Editor's 2014 Round Up



Birmingham Youth Theatre
prepare to go carolling

Well West Midlands, you sure have a lot going on. I'm your new Regional Editor and I'm on a quest to discover more about you. I had merely scratched the surface back in November when I started this journey but have found you are as diverse and as enthusiastic as I remember.

Our region has put on some amazing musicals, plays and pantomimes. I'd seen a few productions myself before taking on this role and I'd read reports on the website about so many others. You've truly been a tour de force entertaining the West Midlands.

Our regional Facebook pages are alive with adverts for dancers, singers and musical directors. If you are on Facebook and are not on one of the NODA district pages I strongly advise you to join. You never know, your dream role or dance partner may be a click away. They also shout out about the latest productions in the region.

While on my quest I've read a lot of good news, seen some sad news and witnessed true grit as you showed that 'show must go on' spirit in spades. From the Malvern Theatre Players being forced to find a new venue after years of supporting their theatre, to societies replacing leads at the last minute, and those saying goodbye to friends and theatre family who have gone to perform alongside dearly departed theatrical heroes and heroines.

Hard times you have faced, yet in true amateur theatre fashion you showed the West Midlands and your audiences what you are made of and your love

of performing shines brightly. Be it at Christmas with the folk you entertained carolling or with surprise flash mobs, I've enjoyed the pictures you've sent in so please keep them coming. Your Councillor is interested in producing a regular newsletter and the items I've been receiving are perfect for the format, so please keep them coming. It would be good to hear from regional reps in their own mini round ups. All news is good news and some may make it to these national pages.

Looking back at 2014 we celebrate nine of our members receiving their 50 year awards. There is also Commendation Award recipient Jenni Axtell, along with many, many more. Our strength is in our passion and production shots echo your stories in foyer displays and notice boards in venues across our region. I can't wait to see what you can do in 2015.

I have some news on Summer School as at the time of writing places are still available

on some courses. If you haven't booked on a course why not go to www.noda.org.uk/summerschool and see what's still available. NODA workshops are open to all levels and cover an array of subjects, so they are well worth taking the time to not just look at but also take part in. Many moons ago I attended one of the technical courses and memories of that week have stuck with me all these years. I have to say they are a great way to network with other societies and refresh and challenge your skills.

Which brings me to this year's West Midlands' Conference, Awards and AGM, which is on Sunday 19th April 2015. Delegates will enjoy a fantastic supper and meet National President John W. Barnes. There is also a copyright workshop this time - an important subject for all of our members, especially if you're planning a production or concert. ★

Janine Graeme
Regional Editor, West Midlands



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