

Tnoda TODAY★

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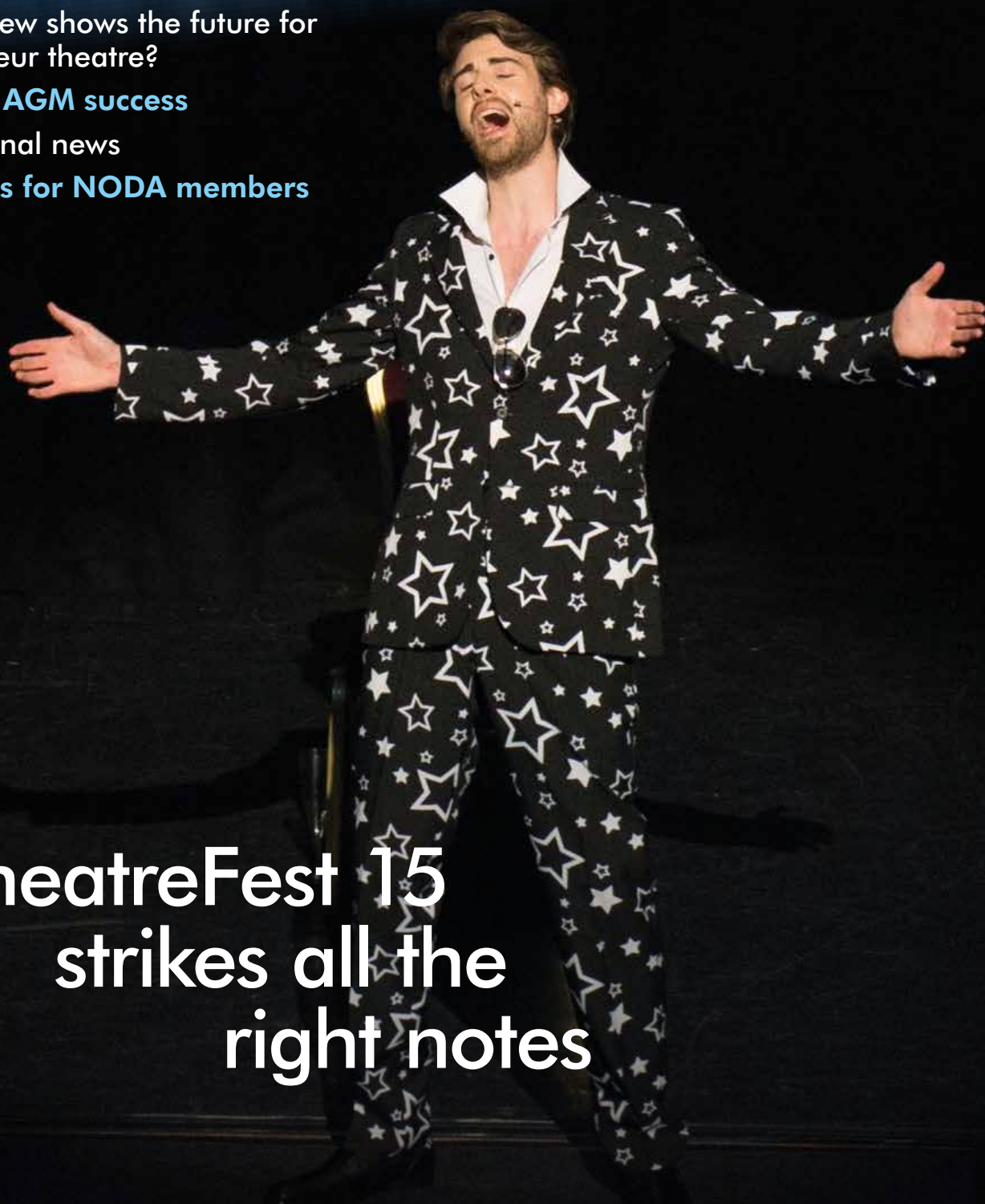
Be inspired by amateur theatre

Are new shows the future for
amateur theatre?

2015 AGM success

Regional news

Offers for NODA members



**TheatreFest 15
strikes all the
right notes**

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The theme for this end of year edition of NODA Today is ‘new work for the theatre’.

As all of us involved in amateur theatre know, there is a constant debate about which show, whether it’s a play or a musical, will attract an audience. As our article on page four discusses, there is one school of thought - especially when talking about musicals – that says we need to have more flexibility from rights holders to be able to perform the well-known shows that you currently find in the West End. The names that everyone knows are bound to bring in an audience – aren’t they? Will we always cover our costs with a well-known show? Maybe, maybe not?

And so to the brand new show, something that no one has heard of, and yet could be a fantastic show to be in, and to watch. It may overcome the first hurdle, which is the selection process within your own Society – “Let’s try X, I’ve heard it’s great” and everybody turns to you and says, “What? I’ve never heard of it. Besides, no one will come and see it”

If it’s a thought provoking play that doesn’t require much of a set and few props, then the discussion may turn to the production budget, with an argument that it will be fairly cheap to produce and so therefore the financial risk is not too great. But what if your choice of a brand new show is a musical with glamorous costumes and you regularly perform in a large theatre? Then the budget discussion will inevitably hold sway – how will we sell tickets when no one has heard of it?

Whether the considerations are artistic, financial, marketing concerns, or just a worry that members of your own company may not be that interested in appearing in a brand new work, this is an important debate. If we do not find a way to successfully produce new work for amateur theatre, then inevitably, we will struggle in the years ahead. If we keep recycling the same old shows and still struggle to get an audience, then doesn’t that tell us that the way forward has to be to find a winning formula to produce new work?

It is that need to find a way forward that was the main reason that NODA has worked with the Isle of Man Arts Council this year on TheatreFest 15, an initiative to support new work for the theatre, which resulted in many important lessons for us all. You can read about TheatreFest 15 in the centre pages. Let the discussion about new work continue, and we hope that you will join that debate.

Here’s to a fruitful and enjoyable 2016 for us all!

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?



The Reunion Perusal CD

By now you have no doubt discovered your free copy of 'The Reunion' musical CD with this copy of NODA Today, featuring songs from this new

NODA licenced musical comedy.

Back in 2013 two NODA Members from Suffolk, Ian Cook and Ian Newton, wrote the show which their society, the Waveney Light Opera Group, agreed to perform. By coincidence the then NODA President, Derek Grattidge, happened to be in Suffolk during it's run. He was so impressed by what he saw that he awarded the production the NODA President's Cup, saying of the show, "Music fantastic! Hilarious from start to finish! Haven't laughed so much in years. This is a must if you want to find a new musical!"

To date the show has been well received in England, Scotland and Wales and has played to many packed houses. Kevin Smith, who played Harry Machin in the Scottish Premier said of the show, "We had the pleasure of securing the rights to The Reunion back in 2014 and approached the show with a little caution it must be said. No-one knew the story or the songs or how it would be received by our membership and our audience. We were able to review a perusal lib and listen to a copy of the soundtrack before rehearsals started which



was a great help. NODA were very helpful through the whole process.

The Reunion was written specifically to appeal to amateur groups with a well balanced cast, simple staging, costumes and memorable songs to suit all levels of singing ability and ages. The show has been written for a seven piece orchestra, full band parts can be hired and the show is also available as professionally recorded backing tracks.

For further information, or further copies of the CD please contact Dale Freeman at Peterborough Head Office on 01733 374790 or email - info@noda.org.uk

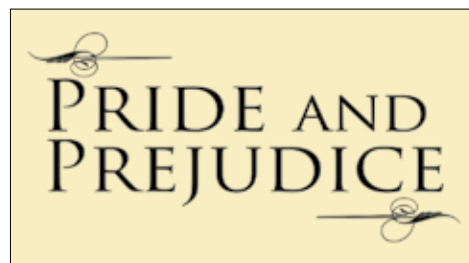
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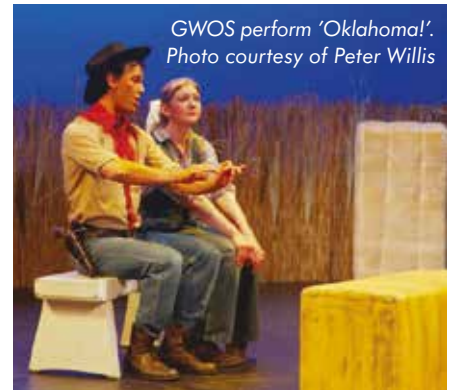
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Downfield Musical Society production of 'Spamalot'. Image © Gordon Hogg



GWOS perform 'Oklahoma!'. Photo courtesy of Peter Willis



Tracy Turnblad from 'Utopia Studio's Make Up Masterclass', NODA Today, November 2014

On with the new shows?

Are we now living in a golden age for musical theatre? Tickets sales are up in the West End and national tours seem to be getting bigger and better. Original shows are still being produced and some finding their feet, cheap jukebox and stunt cast shows are on the decline and intelligent biographical shows are stepping up to the plate. This coupled with imaginative revivals make it heaven for the theatre going public.

But what does this mean for the amateur theatre scene? Are all new shows coming up for release suitable for amateur companies and are we putting enough thought into choosing new shows above and beyond that fact that it is a name and therefore will, hopefully, sell.

More companies are choosing brand new named shows so they can be the first in their region to perform it. Is a premier

the ultimate prize? Are committees really going into depth to see if their core membership can fulfil the shows needs, artistically and technically. And more importantly is there an audience in your area for that show?

Titles like Legally Blonde, Hairspray, Rock of Ages, Sister Act and 9to5 all sound like brilliant draws but all come with their own set of issues that some may overlook just to be able to perform a new show. A lot of societies performed Disney's Beauty and the Beast thinking it would be a money spinner but some found it wasn't and the costume, set and technical budget crippled them. Do committees look at Legally Blonde and understand that they need a triple threat female lead? Rock of Ages needs a cast of primarily rock singers? Hairspray a culturally diverse cast of strong dancers? And Sister Act leads to the unanswerable question of do you need an actress who is black for the lead? Are certain shows really right for amateurs to perform knowing how

high the standards need to be?

It would be interesting to see if the history of the shows are taken into consideration when the title is chosen. Did it do well professionally and did it open in the West End? Did it tour successfully? In a time when most societies don't have a wealth of cash in the bank and every decision is a critical one is it wise to grab a new title when there are older shows that can be revived successfully. Is there a built in audience for Hairspray and if so does that audience match the people who generally see your shows? Will the older generation of audiences grow tired of societies putting on modern shows when they might hanker to see Oklahoma or Fiddler on the Roof. Are older shows easier to market and get bums on seats?

Can amateur theatre have that level of honesty with ourselves or is the promise of a shiny musical too much to ignore? Are new shows really the future? ★

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The NODA AGM at Carriageworks Theatre, Leeds was very well attended, with Chris Ingram installed as NODA National President for the year ahead, and Fred Piggford appointed as Chairman of Trustees for an initial term of three years. The accounts for 2014 were presented, with a copy of the Annual Review now available online at www.noda.org.uk

Olive Melville, President of the Association of Irish Musical Societies (AIMS) was a special guest at the AGM and spoke about the close links between the two associations.

The results of the national Programme and Poster competition were announced, with a full list of the winners on the NODA web site.

The AGM was followed by a Presidential Gala at The Queens Hotel in Leeds where guests were treated to live music by the Joe Loss Show Band, who are well known to NODA members in the North East region as they regularly perform at the NODA North East regional conference.

The 2016 National AGM will be held in the West Midlands – further details will be announced in a few months time.







regionalroundup East

60 year Long Service Award in Norwich

At the recent Annual General Meeting of the Norfolk & Norwich Operatic Society, Audrey

Fiddes was presented with her Gold Bar with Diamond by the President, Helen McDermott, to mark 60 years of unbroken service to amateur theatre.



Audrey began her association with the amateur movement in 1954 partly by accident. Living in London at the time, she went along to an evening institute to join an art class only to find there were no vacancies. On her way out she was attracted by the sound of singing in another room and after making enquiries duly joined her first operatic society where she remained for the next four years taking part in musicals and playing principal roles.

In 1958, Audrey (Chapman as she was then), went to live and work in Edinburgh and lost no time in becoming a member of the Southern Light Opera Company performing in the King's Theatre. Initially, a chorus member, her talent was soon discovered and she was invited to audition for the lead role in *The Merry Widow*. The audition proved successful and she was delighted to be given the part – quite an achievement in her very first show – the first of many. The company asked her to develop a drama group which she directed and she involved members in all aspects of performance including painting their own scenery. During her 14 years in Edinburgh, Audrey was also a member of The Jasons Drama Group taking part in their Festival Fringe productions of musicals and Scottish plays.

In 1972, working in the Civil Service, her career development meant transferring to Norwich where Audrey immediately set out to find an amateur groups in the city. She auditioned and was accepted for membership of the Norfolk & Norwich Operatic Society taking the second lead in *The DuBarry* at the Theatre Royal in

Norwich. Over the last 43 years, Audrey has appeared in many musicals playing principal/character roles including Nellie in *South Pacific* but always happy to be in the chorus. Audrey was heavily involved when the N & N Threshold Theatre Group formed becoming Chairman/Director for its first 8 productions.

Other societies in Norwich attracted her including Norfolk Amateur Light Opera Society for whom she played Anna in *The King and I* and Eliza in *My Fair Lady* at Norwich Theatre Royal. She also played in a number of shows with Dereham Operatic Society and later went on to direct one of their pantomimes - *Goldilocks*. In 1976, John Fiddes joined the N & N O S as a chorus member in *Camelot* and their meeting led to Audrey and John marrying the following year. Both are still very active within the Society as Committee members, Audrey being Vice Chairman, a post she has held for a number of years. ★

Congratulations and well done Audrey.

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Waterbeach Community Players (NODA East District 4S) and designer Dave Hingley are winners of the NODA National Poster competition.

Dave's poster for Waterbeach's production of Alan Ayckbourn's *Communicating Doors* turned out to be a real winner.

Dave and his partner Vicki travelled to Leeds to the NODA AGM and Poster & Programme presentation to collect the award.



Viva's Trip to the Shaw Theatre, London

Since it was founded by Dan Schumann in the mid-nineties, Viva Youth Theatre, based in Soham, Cambridgeshire, has performed in a wide variety of venues. Apart from the usual school halls and local theatres, National Trust properties, Ely Cathedral, the Edinburgh Fringe and even off-Broadway have all hosted Viva productions. For a long time Viva had toyed with the idea of hiring a professional London theatre and transferring one of our shows. This year we finally managed it with our production of 'Oliver!', scheduled for the beginning of March.



For the 50-strong cast, instead of the usual end-of-show celebrations when the curtain came down on the Saturday night performance at the Brook in Soham, it was an early night before boarding the coach at an unseemly hour on Sunday morning bound for the Shaw Theatre, next to the British Library on Euston Road. On arrival at the Shaw late morning, they found that the stage crew had already been hard at work for hours. The team had dismantled the set and travelled down overnight, along with props and costumes, and were busy getting the stage and backstage areas ready for a brisk tech run.

The cast were soon acclimatised to the geography of the Shaw and the logistical requirements of working in a professional theatre, exploring the bowels of the theatre where dressing rooms had already been allocated, and getting used to the rather tortuous route to the wings.

'My family keep calling it my London debut, one of the best experiences for me.' Rhiannon

The tech run worked well, with the cast easily assimilating the necessary changes from the performances at the Brook. Our regular venue does not have a very high stage, whereas the Shaw gave much more comfortable head-room, much to the relief of Jack, one of our taller members, as he crossed the bridge in the climactic final scene.

There was a short break – barely half an hour – between the tech and the performance. That performance was enormously liberating for the cast, who showed, as well as the huge talent already shown at home, great adaptability in adjusting to the quite different environment they found themselves in. The neutrals in the audience were suitably impressed by what they saw and our young

performers were rightly proud of what they had achieved.

The whole operation was costly, risky and labour-intensive – the stage crew still had a lot to do after the show. We

'It was a wonderful experience. I will never forget it.'

Lauren

felt strongly that Viva's young performers would benefit hugely from performing in a space like the Shaw – a London theatre. Indeed, it was worth the risk, the expense and effort. The whole day was magical. Everybody involved had the time of their lives, learnt much and had a day we are sure they would never forget. Viva has always believed that fusing the worlds of professional and amateur theatre is vital, and raising the aspirations of our members is central to our work. This project certainly achieved these aims and we will no doubt make a London return sometime – after a good rest, of course. ★

David Tickner

Stane Street Players who are recent NODA members recently celebrated their 40th Anniversary.

Celebrations were held on Saturday 27th June 2015 and members past and present attended and celebratory certificates were awarded, including an award for the oldest member John Saunders and the youngest member Austin Shreeve who was due on 1st August

The group was founded in Marks Tey in 1975 and their first production was the Panto "Snow White"

The group are now based in Earls Colne and will be performing the same Pantomime again this year.

Their next production is "The Vicar of Dibley" to be performed in both Halstead 2/3rd October and Earls Colne 9/10th October.





regionalroundup East Midlands

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Carlton Operatic Society were pleased to welcome Nanette Lovell (NODA East Midlands Councillor) to the first night reception for their production of "Legally Blonde - The Musical" at Nottingham Theatre Royal in May. Before the show, Nanette presented NODA Long Service Awards to three members of the society.

50 year award to the Society's President, John Garner.

During his fifty years John has performed on stage and also served as a committee member, treasurer, general secretary, chairman, and since 1995 as President of the society.

60 year award to Christine Kilbourn who has performed in numerous shows, served on the committee and for many years was also the society's Choreographer.

60 year award to Jim Blackmore who has performed in many shows, often playing principal roles. He too has served on the committee, and was until recently registrar for the society.

Congratulations to them all for their dedication to the theatre, and to Carlton Operatic Society in particular. ★

Planet Rock – by The Young Performers

Leon Wade tells the story of The Long Eaton youth group, breaking new ground by transforming a rock classic into their own stage show

The Young Performers (YP), based and performing at Long Eaton's Duchess Theatre, have been celebrating their 30th year with something very different from the normal summer concert.



Back in February Victoria Garavan and I (two of the YP's leadership team) were with Rick Wakeman at a concert he was performing at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London. In conversation, we asked if he'd give thought to the idea of the YPs doing an arrangement of his classic 1974 album 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth'. Well, he thought about it (for, literally, a few seconds) and the answer came, 'Yeah, go for it. Do what you like with it! There's only one problem.....there's no actual score for you to work from.'

So, over the next few months, having worked out some vocal parts and learning the basic structure for rehearsal purposes, I (as YPs Musical Director) completed an original 16 piece orchestration by ear, bar by bar (all 898) along with narration, six solo items (the

original four plus two added to the latest album) and choral parts for all 38 YPs to sing in full harmony.

Possibly the biggest challenge for the YPs as a whole was learning an album which very few members had heard before and learning a style of music which is very rarely performed by young people – that of choral prog-rock!

However, the result was a resounding success, especially as, until the start of the band call, technically, no-one had ever heard this particular arrangement and orchestration (not even myself or Rick!).

The show (Planet Rock!) was performed in June for three nights, and the proceeds of the shows (£1300) were donated to the charity fund of the Grand Order

of Water Rats of which Rick is King Rat this year. The YPs have built up a close relationship with the GOWR and have performed with them in three Charity Variety Shows in recent years and thought this was a nice way to say 'thank you' to the GOWR and Rick for their support.

The YPs were delighted to be supported on the Friday night performance by Rick himself, along with fellow water rats and close friends of the YPs; Keith Simmons, Bernie Clifton, Ian Lavender and Duggie Brown. After spending time with the group after the show, Rick's parting words were, 'If you want to do any other albums or works of mine in the future, all you have to do is ask and I'll be honoured!'.so look out for another project soon (maybe!). ★

www.theyoungperformers.co.uk

★ **NODA EAST MIDLANDS** ★
 ★ **LONG SERVICE AWARDS PRESENTED** ★
 ★ **JANUARY TO JUNE 2015** ★

★ **Members are reminded that there is a variety of ways by which NODA can reward your service to amateur theatre. For details of the badges, medals and pins available contact head office or your regional councillor. Oh – and always a reasonable amount of time (six weeks) for the award to be delivered.** ★

★ 60 YEARS	★ 50 YEARS	★ 45 YEARS	★ 40 YEARS
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The NODA Theatre Summer School launched on December 1st and bookings have been going really well. Last year, by the end of December, we had filled 6 courses so be sure to apply as soon as possible if you wish to attend. This Residential Theatre Summer School is one of a kind and somewhere you can either hone your existing skills or learn new ones in a atmosphere of enthusiasm, hard work and FUN!!!! So don't delay – go to www.noda.org.uk/SummerSchool for an application form. You can also check out our Facebook page and follow us on Twitter. I look forward to seeing you there, I can guarantee you will have an absolutely brilliant time! ★

Jacquie Stedman

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Feelgood Academy

A New Musical

Ever thought it would be nice to write a new musical, but completely overwhelmed by how to go about it? In February 2014 NODA London were contacted by Steve Jones, who was doing just that. We caught up with him to see how the venture was progressing, and were delighted to hear that it is now being performed. Here's what it's about:

Feelgood Academy is an exciting new British stage musical created by Penny Lane, Glenn Keiles and Steve Jones. The idea was originally hatched in early 2011 and by early 2012, the musical team was together working on songs and compositions. By mid 2012, the script writer had been found and work started on the story and characters. Towards the end of that year, a Director and fundraiser were brought in. Early in 2014, they were gearing up for a showcase in London after working on the script, music and lyrics, reads-through, casting, fundraising and loads of marketing since the show's conception in 2011.

The showcase at Stratford Circus in London was a great success, with three sell out performances. They invited Producers and Investors and found a Producer in the form of Adam Paulden of Paulden Hall Productions. Adam is now working with the team to promote the show to amdrum groups and schools with a view to developing an audience for

this new musical and to give it a long life. In a year or two, they will start looking at a professional tour and a London run in a theatre with 400-500 seats. There is also a video from the Stratford Circus showcase of the full performance and a video of the songs from the show.

*Synopsis:
At Feelgood Academy of Performing Arts, competition is tough. Students work hard and play hard.*

The Musical follows the paths of two friends, as they struggle with the high demands placed on them, and try to be true to themselves and their dreams.

As their final term starts, Amanda, Lucy and their friends are thrown into a competition for a place in a popular reality TV show that aims to find the next star of the huge Gothic West End musical, Motharotti.

Everyone feels the pressure, but Lucy's lack of preparation leaves Amanda on her own to represent the school, and save it from financial ruin. Can Amanda overcome her issues, fight the voice in her head and sing to save her school?'

With a gripping story and songs, from upbeat fully choreographed romps to heartfelt ballads, Feelgood Academy tells you what dreams really cost and why they're definitely worth fighting for. The show is a hugely entertaining look at the issues teenagers deal with everyday, trying to make sense of their world.

Feelgood Academy deals with issues any performer understands and it is particularly relevant to teenagers and anyone who is uncertain about their ability to do what they love.

The first performances are now booked for next year and the authors are really looking forward to seeing how the show is interpreted and performed by schools including the Pauline Quirk Academy. Their Hemel Hempstead school will be the first to produce the show next July at the Watford Palace theatre. Two Summer Schools have been held where students were taught by the music co-writer, Penny Lane and Director, Owen Smith for a week before performing Feelgood Academy for an audience of friends and family.

Author Steve Jones says "The next stage will be very exciting and lots of hard work but we can't wait to see how Feelgood Academy develops."

To find out more about Feelgood Academy, visit the website feelgoodacademythemusical.co.uk where you can sign up to receive the latest news about the show. There is also information on the site about licensing the show. If you're intrigued by something new that has already been on a (small) stage in London and developed for AMDARMs and schools, you can read about our licensing deals at feelgoodacademythemusical.com/license-the-show or email Steve at steve@rumko.co.uk ★



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NODA North Awards Evening



Councillor's Cup Winner, South Shields
Gilbert and Sullivan Society

The 3rd annual Youth and Performance awards were held in the Rainton Meadows Arena on the evening of the 12th of September and attracted an audience of almost 600 nominees and their supporters. Awards for best individual performer and best youth productions as well as youth 'rising star' were awarded followed, after a hot buffet, by the awards for best individual, best musical production and best production (concert/play or panto) in the adult category.



Charlotte Potter,
Individual Winner,
Middlesbrough
LT Youth



Sam Scott, Winner
of District Rising
Star Award

Presenting the awards was past President Fred Piggford, now Chairman of the board of Trustees of NODA who was accompanied by his daughter Justine. Also present was Ian Wells (past President) and his wife Hazel.

The atmosphere was electric and it was reiterated to all nominees they were all winners – although only one could take home the award in each category. Amongst the winners of 'rising star' in the youth was Sam Scott who at 10 years old is what is believed the youngest Individual Member of NODA nationally.

Interactive Audience Participation

Performing with the Castle Players – a community theatre group from Barnard Castle, County Durham, who perform outdoor Shakespeare in the grounds of The Bowes Museum every July, it was lovely to recall that one of the nicest aspects of playing in the open air is the immediate connection you can have with your audience.

This year saw the Players' 26th open-air show, and the event was testament to the group's honed skills, with a team of over 50 people involved on stage, backstage and front of house creating a production that attracts audiences of well over 2000 to this small market town every summer.

Our director had set this year's production – "The Merry Wives of Windsor" – in the Edwardian era, with a cast of Suffragettes and music hall chorus adding colour and life to the farcical shenanigans of Sir John Falstaff and his cronies. We were fortunate in having a particularly strong performer play the lead role of Falstaff – Gordon Duffy-McGhie, a trained actor, who still tours his own one-man shows as a professional but is gracious enough to join our merry band of amateurs as relief from a desk-bound day

job. Gordon's ease with his audience and skill with the complexities of the text ensure that those watching feel comfortable and laugh freely at the most obtuse and whimsical of Shakespeare's often convoluted verse and wordplay.

The first half of the show takes place in broad daylight, which means that as a performer you can (if you choose) catch the eye of every single audience member. The warmth and generosity of that audience is palpable and a huge encouragement.

The downside of being outdoors is, of course, the weather - and the fact that our complex sound and lighting system is dependent on a generator for power. But, as was proved, even those more challenging aspects of outdoor theatre can be a bonus when it comes to having an audience on-side. On Wednesday night, the start of the show coincided with ominous claps of thunder, and the rain started, continuing steadily as the evening wore on. By the time we were well in to the second half, with technical equipment at capacity and nearing the final *coup de théâtre* involving UV light, the rain proved too much for the 'genny', and the power went. We were all plunged in to darkness.

Without faltering, Gordon, who happened to be on stage at the time, turned to the audience. "Anyone got a coin for the meter?" was his first quip.

When it became clear the technical hitch had not been immediately resolved, he turned again to the audience. "Shall we just carry on?" he asked. Through the rain and blackness came the resounding response: "YES!!"

"Right," he continued, playing with ease to the gallery, "Get your phones out."

And they did. Every audience member who possessed a mobile phone obligingly turned it on, and there was, unbelievably, enough light to see by. The show went on.

And when the power DID come back, you can imagine the cheer that resounded both from the audience and those of us waiting in the wings. Our UV-enhanced scene with the fairies at the end was as magical as ever – and the resounding applause at the end of the show was, I know, not just for the fact that our acting had perhaps been passable. It was because we had been through this together, and had worked together as audience, as backstage crew and as actors to create a living, breathing shared experience - which is the reason live theatre is better than anything I know.

Jill Cole (Mistress Page in 'The Merry Wives of Windsor', 7-11 July 2015 ★

Winner of the Councillors Shield for Youth was 11 year old Caitlin Bannister for her role as 'Susan Waverley' in Fatfield MSS's "White Christmas" (runners up were 14 year old Hannah Elliott as 'Dorothy' in West End MTC's "Wizard of Oz" and Middlesbrough LT Youth for their production of Les Miserables SE)

Winner of the Councillors cup for Best adult production was South Shields G&S society for their production of "Jesus Christ Superstar" (runners up were Dryburn TW for their production of "Avenue Q" and Felling for their production of "Chess").

Judging by the meltdown of Twitter messages and Facebook post which continued for three days solid the event was once again well received and a regular event on the NODA North calendar. Well done to all for making the North proud.

All photos by kind permission of www.stagedoorphotography.co.uk ★



Members of Felling



Caitlin Bannister, Winner of District Rising Star Award

noda

Theatre Summer School

Passionate about Theatre

Have you ever been to NODA Theatre Summer School? If not, you're missing out on a great way to learn new skills, refresh old ones, and have a fantastic time in the company of like-minded people for a week at the University of Warwick.

Details of the 2016 NODA Theatre Summer School are now available on the web site. You can also see what previous students think about the 'Summer School Bubble' on Facebook.

First timers are always made most welcome!
Don't forget that you can apply for a bursary (subject to the usual conditions)



THEATRE *fest* 15

MANNIN ISLE OF MAN



TheatreFest 15 strikes all the right notes

The inaugural TheatreFest 15 weekend has been hailed a success. Described by the Isle of Man Arts Council chairman Geoff Corkish MBE MLC as 'an historic occasion' and 'a great

collaboration' of amateur and professional artists, TheatreFest 15 offered audiences a uniquely compelling mix of new works over two electrifying evenings at the Gaiety Theatre.

TheatreFest 15, a partnership between the Isle of Man Arts Council and the National Operatic and Dramatic Association (NODA), is a five-year project to encourage and promote new work for the theatre and a legacy outcome from the successful Island of Culture 2014 celebrations when the idea was first mooted during the National Drama Festivals Association's (NDFA) 41st British All-Winners Festival of Plays.

The weekend saw a world première of the musical comedy *Jimmy Mac*, the raw passion of the thought-provoking piece of devised theatre *Invisible Chains* and the engaging love story *For Tonight* make up a programme which entertained and challenged in equal measure and which, in the words of NODA chief executive Tony Gibbs, was 'an excellent springboard for the future.'



He continued: 'TheatreFest 15 brought about engagement with the wider community through participating in new work, including people who previously had never been on stage before. Similarly the programme attracted a wide range of theatergoers, clearly with an appetite to be part of something very new and very special.'

Ahead of the TheatreFest 15 weekend was a puppetry workshop delivered by professional puppeteer Corina Bona which attracted an eager young audience, while the one-act play-writing competition (deadline December 31 2015) is continuing to attract high quality entries.



'In short,' said Mr Gibbs, 'TheatreFest 15 is already more than fulfilling its aims.'

'What was especially exciting about the whole weekend was that there was an international element which added to the excitement with *For Tonight's* composer Spencer T Williams having flown in from California and the show's musical director Drew Wutke from New York. Closer to home *Invisible Chains'* director Bev Clarke had come from Merseyside to direct and of course there were visitors, cast members and musicians from England, many of whom had never been to the Isle of Man before. All of which made for a heightened sense of occasion.

Isle of Man Arts Council vice-chairman Michael Lees shared Tony Gibbs' sentiments. 'I thought the whole weekend exceeded expectations, with three very different productions showcasing writing and acting talent of the highest quality.'



'Importantly there was a true sense of community, with tremendous support not only from the audiences, but also from the Gaiety Theatre, our sponsors, our media partners Manx Radio, the local press and the TheatreFest 15 production team, Stage Door Entertainment.'

'Bev Clarke's *Invisible Chains* was a triumph of community theatre, remarkable in that among the cast were people who'd never acted before. The ensemble came together magnificently on the night to give us a deeply moving theatrical experience about slavery and refugees that I was proud to see enacted on the stage of the Gaiety Theatre.'

Invisible Chains' director Bev Clarke said: 'The two most important things for me as a director were that the audience engaged with the performance'



and it captured them in the moment and even if the subject was difficult to watch, people were drawn in and moved by it. The second thing was that the participants - some of whom had never performed before - were totally committed to the piece and enjoyed being part of the whole process. At the end of their performance the cast were ecstatic and just loved being part of this challenging drama. They gave everything they had and their performances were totally believable.'

For Tonight was making its British Isles debut, prompting its composer Spencer T Williams to say: 'The team took an unknown and unheard musical and made magic,' while *Jimmy Mac* had never been performed before, which moved the show's writer Stuart Brayson, who wrote *From Here to Eternity* with Sir Tim Rice, to comment: 'Seeing a dream come alive is pretty cool.'

Mr Lees continued: 'Combined these two shows gave local artists a unique opportunity to work with West End professional cast members along with directors and composers from the UK and US.' He added: '*Jimmy Mac* was a musical in the making. It may have many rewrites and recasting before or if ever it reaches a professional stage but the Isle of Man will always be where it began.'

Among the audience was NODA president Chris Ingram who said: 'I was very impressed with this first year of TheatreFest 15 and thought it was an excellent programme with high quality performances in the most beautiful Gaiety Theatre,' while local artist Michelle Jamieson, who performed in all three productions, was moved to declare: 'So proud to be part of a piece of history.'

Mr Gibbs continued: 'Many lessons were

learned that weekend about producing new work that we'll be sharing with NODA members across the UK and which will shape future TheatreFest 15 programmes. Already we're developing plans for 2016 which might include taking TheatreFest "on the road", using other performance spaces around the island in addition to the Gaiety Theatre.

'For 2016 the format may well change, as may the venues, but what will, I'm sure, be a constant is the Island's warmth of welcome, audiences' unflinching support for the performers willing them to do well, and the enthusiasm, dedication and collective passion to create new work for the theatre that this partnership between NODA and the Isle of Man Arts Council will continue to inspire throughout TheatreFest 15's five-year life span.'

www.theatrefest15.com



THEATREfest 15
MANNIN ISLE OF MAN

Lessons learnt from TheatreFest 15

There will be a more detailed article in a future edition of NODA Today to explain how we can all take the lessons learnt from TheatreFest 15 to help us embrace new work in the future. In the meantime, here is a summary of the main outcomes with some food for thought –

Outcomes

★ NODA's profile and reputation was raised as an advocate for new work, with significant media coverage in the UK and on the Isle of Man including Bay TV, Manx Radio, The Stage, Sardines, Manx Independent, The Courier, Manx Tails, Gallery magazine, plus numerous online media platforms and social media.

By doing something different such as a festival of new work, this could create massive PR opportunities to raise your profile.

★ NODA worked with a range of partner organisations including the Arts Council, Stage Door Entertainments (an Isle of Man based production company) The Gaiety Theatre, a local choir, and most importantly, members of several amateur theatre companies.

By working with others, and perhaps with NODA co-ordinating it, would you and your Society members take part in a regional festival of new work on a genuinely collaborative basis?

★ TheatreFest 15 social media, including references to NODA, consistently out-performed NODA social media during the period August – October 2015

TheatreFest 15 definitely engaged with younger people both in terms of participants and audiences.

Is new work one way to attract younger people to amateur theatre?

★ 120+ participants (amateurs) took part in three shows including 15 people at TheatreFest 15 who had never before been involved with amateur theatre. The feedback indicates that some of the appeal lay in working with visiting directors, musical directors, and some professionals.

Perhaps this is a formula that can be extended in planning your next production?

★ The content of TheatreFest 15 provided variety and choice, with a puppetry workshop, a premiere of a full length comedy musical, a concert version of a musical, and a cutting edge devised piece of drama which created quite a lot of controversy due to the content of modern-day slavery, trafficking and child prostitution.

A festival is the ideal format to provide variety and to take a chance. Could this approach be reproduced in your region?

TheatreFest 15 Social Media

Twitter (TheatreFest 15)

Followers	Impressions	Frequency
September		
502	24,200	48.2
October		
560	10,800	19.29

*NB @NODATweets Top Tweet and Top Mention during the period were both for TheatreFest 15

Facebook (TheatreFest 15)

Likes	Av Reach	Av People	Av Post clicks
219	653	31	1054

With relatively few followers on Twitter and Likes on Facebook, the TheatreFest 15 social media reached a lot of people. Perhaps the success was due to activity being for a specific project over a short period of time? Is there a lesson there for all of us?

Ideas

Although TheatreFest 15 took place on the Isle of Man, could NODA plan a similar festival of new work in your region?

Not taking into account rehearsals, TheatreFest 15 started with a puppetry workshop on Sunday 4th October followed by two x 45 minute productions on Friday 9th and a full length show on 10th.

Could a similar format work out as an extension to a NODA conference, specifically to showcase new work?

Overall

Brand new work can attract new people to take part as well as an audience who will buy a ticket to see it.

There was an appetite among participants and audiences alike for something different, and in the case of the devised theatre, something very thought-provoking and serious.

If you have any questions or thoughts about how this approach to showcasing new work might work for you and/or in your region, please share your thoughts with us by emailing info@noda.org.uk or @NODATweets on Twitter.



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Jo Sykes - Youth Adviser NE South

Jo Sykes has been a member of St Giles Panto Society in Pontefract since the age of 11. She has played principal parts for the last 28 years, been Society Secretary for 20 years and loves being part of the society 'family' with her young daughter and husband. Jo is also performs with 5 Towns Musical Theatre Society. Professionally Jo works in the public sector (crime reduction) and is also an independent member on the Police and Crime Panel for West Yorkshire. Jo firmly believes that Amateur Theatre offers many opportunities for young people and is looking forward to meeting many of the youth societies across the Region.



Kathryn Mitchell - Youth Adviser NE North

Kathryn has been performing since she was two years old, predominantly within musical theatre but also in plays, television and film. She is an active performer in the region with Buttershaw St Paul's AODS and Keighley Playhouse and as *Kitty LaMare* at 1940s and Vintage Weekends around the Country.

Her first experience as a choreographer was with Bradford University students for their 2002 production of *The Boyfriend*. She has also assisted at Buttershaw St Paul's with both their Senior and Junior sections and choreographed for Bradford Youth Players production of *Fiddler on the Roof* in 2009, also directing *Rent* for them the following year.



David Lockwood - District 8 Representative

A now retired journalist and theatre critic with the Huddersfield Daily Examiner, David has been heavily involved in Amateur theatre for 42 years. He has performed or been involved in the production side for over 80 shows during that time, appearing with most of the Societies in Huddersfield as well as having worked with companies in Halifax (Light Opera and Amateurs), Brighouse (Light Opera), Bradford (Idle and Thackley), Leeds (Light Opera and Lidos) and North Manchester Opera. ★

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Summer School Snippets

More than 20 students from the Region attended the Summer School at Warwick and following is a selection of comments we have received.

Mark Daniels (Beverley Musical Theatre) – Lighting Design Bells and Whistles

I was totally blown away by the course and brought away so much more than I could have ever have wished for. Amateur theatre will continue to thrive and blossom in the years ahead whilst NODA supports the concept of the Summer School and gives people the opportunity to learn new skills.

Elizabeth Christine Ingham (Haworth West Lane Baptist AOS) - Directing Musical Theatre

The tutor, Susie Dumbreck, shared her professional expertise and provided many practical tips that would enable us to share our vision with the cast but then have the confidence to allow a scene to evolve. Directing was beginning to be less terrifying and in fact enjoyable!

Jay Cundell Walker (IM, Keighley AODS, Guiseley AOS and Skipton Musical Theatre Company) - Actors Toolbox 1

All of us grew and developed as actors, directors and as a 'company'. We will now need to use that team spirit to help us to go back to our companies and inspire the reluctant, the less committed

and sometimes the downright stubborn to embrace new approaches.

Jennifer Newton-Smith (Chapelton and District AOS) - Stiles and Drewe

Our group had vocal (and physical... jogging) warm-ups together each day, looked at developing character, physicality and also explored the rehearsal process, both as an individual performer and as part of an ensemble.

Carla Jane Wade (STOS Theatre Company) - Top Hat

NODA is such a wonderfully supportive place, just knowing that no one was there to judge me or put me down made it so much easier to go out and do it. The organising committee for NODA Summer School should be very proud of what they achieved.

Chris Cundell (IM, Keighley AODS and Guiseley AOS) - Pantomime

I have to say that the course did not disappoint – and Nigel Ellacott proved to be an excellent all round course tutor whose practical skills earned over a lifetime in the professional business presented a complete picture of the pantomime world. ★



Surprise Diamond Presentation

Hessle Theatre Company stalwart Shirley Watts was surprised and delighted to be presented with the NODA 60 year Diamond Bar following a performance of *Into The Woods* at Hull Truck Theatre in July.

Shirley joined Hull Amateur Operatic Society (now Hull Musical Society) in 1955 and appeared in its production of *"Annie Get Your Gun"* in November of that year. She remained exclusively with Hull until the summer of 1962 when she joined Hessle Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society (now known as Hessle Theatre Company) and appeared in its production of *"The Merry Widow"* in March 1963. She remained with both societies, performing in two shows a year, until 1966 when she left the Hull society to devote all her time and energy to Hessle. This she continues to do, most recently playing the part of Mother Superior in the society's production of *Sister Act*.

Altogether Shirley has appeared in 65 musicals at Hull New Theatre, 11 for the Hull society, 1 for Northern Theatre Company and 53 for Hessle. These figures do not include appearances in plays, pantos or any other productions at Hull Truck or Hessle Town Hall. She also produced a pantomime and co-produced three with her husband Gordon.

In addition to being a performer she served on the Hessle Committee for a number of years, being Operatic Secretary for a long period and, if not on stage, prompts and makes the tea!

Shirley is pictured with North East Councillor David Streeter (R) and District 3 Representative Tony Harris (L) and members of Hessle Theatre Company ★



Mike Cook, Action Stills

125th Anniversary Celebration

LAOS Musical Theatre Company's 125th Grand Celebration Dinner and Ball took place at the Queens Hotel, Leeds on Saturday 16th May. The event took three years in the planning by the society's President John Fairfoot, his wife Janet and the Ball Committee.

The cabaret was given by The Westenders (from London's West End), there was dancing to The Nightjars and entertainment from table magician Seb Walton.

It was a wonderful evening, bringing together Members from today and yesterday, many of them travelling from far and wide (including Dubai) to be present. ★

Pictured are L to R Christine Castle, Regional Representative District 9, John Fairfoot, LAOS President, NODA President John Barnes and his wife Judith, Janet Fairfoot, David Streeter, NODA North East Regional Councillor, and Judi Johnson Hart.



regionalroundup

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Work has begun in earnest for the NW Awards' weekend – so save the date for what we hope will be another highly successful weekend on Saturday, April 30 for the youth awards and Sunday, May 1 for the AGM

and adult awards, plus an informal, casual dinner on Friday, April 29, once more at the Mercure Manchester Piccadilly Hotel.

Due to the decreasing attendance at the workshops we have decided not to run them for the 2016 weekend, giving you more opportunity to get out and about in Manchester – taking in the many local cultural and artistic sites or simply to indulge in the city centre's shopping destinations.

It will also allow more time for networking,

speaking to the North West Committee and visiting trade stands.

Again, a 24-hour stay, with lunch, celebration dinner, bed and breakfast costs £99 per person, or £37 for the dinner each evening. We hope you agree this is good value for money for a four-star city centre location. Booking will be first come, first served, with just 500 tickets available each night.

This is very much your event and celebration as our members, so please do tell your regional rep or myself if there is anything you would like us to include.

Finally, a huge thank-you to all the societies who invite me to their productions. I always feel so very privileged to see such a wide range of such excellent theatre – no wonder we have such a great NODA NW celebration weekend. Thank you! ★

Christine Hunter-Hughes

Two Cumbrian societies joined forces to commemorate the First World War – with almost £10,000 of Lottery cash. Cockermouth Amateur Dramatic Society and Workington Playgoers staged Tommy's Story, a new play written by CADS member Beryl Balance, thanks for £9,900 from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Set in working class West Cumbria during the Great War, Tommy's Story used war poems as voice overs between scenes and working in period music, played by an orchestra, for incidental moments and a music hall scene.

Beryl said: "With the live orchestra I wanted, there was no way we could afford that, so I went back to the drawing board with stage manager Jackie Burd, who suggested writing our own script."

The groups were fortunate to complete a successful application from the Heritage Lottery Fund, with the money covering the whole package of the production; meaning tickets to the

production had to be free, that war memorabilia had to be displayed in the foyer, and education packs had to be made available for schools.

Collection buckets at the performances, held over two weeks at Dean School and the Theatre Royal, in Workington, as well as the sale of professionally-produced DVDs of the show raised £2,000 for Help For Heroes and the Royal British Legion's Poppy Fund.

Beryl said: "I was delighted how well the play was received in both venues, and was extremely moved by the reaction of the audience each night; people came up to me in tears, men as well as women saying how good it was and that it should be shown over the country and in schools.

Tommy's Story was not exactly a play to enjoy, as it dealt with the horrors and heartaches of the First World War. However, I think it was appreciated and brought home some of the horrors of that dreadful time." ★

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Queen's Award Joy for Pendle Hippodrome

Volunteers at a theatre owned by its performers have been honoured by the Queen.

Pendle Hippodrome Theatre, in Colne, Lancashire, has received the Queen's Award For Voluntary Service – a title with equivalent status to the MBE presented to individuals.

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service is the highest award given to volunteer groups in the United Kingdom, given for outstanding achievement by volunteers who devote their time to helping others in the community, improving the quality of life and opportunity for others.

A spokesman for the theatre, home to NODA societies Pendle Hippodrome Theatre Company and Pendle Hippodrome Youth Theatre, said: "There are more than 8,000 registered voluntary organisations in Lancashire.

Pendle Hippodrome is one of only 38 such organisations to be awarded The Queen's Award in more than 13 years."

The official presentation took place at Lancashire County Council's offices in Preston, attended by Pendle Hippodrome's board of directors, and representatives of the theatre company and youth theatre.



The Queen's representative in Lancashire, Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire Lord Shuttleworth presented the English Crystal and certificate signed by Her Majesty The Queen to theatre chairman Kevin Mason.

He also attended the Pendle Annual Stage Awards, hosted by the theatre, for a local celebration in front of many of the volunteers to earn the award.

Pendle MP Andrew Stephenson nominated the Hippodrome for the award, and a representative of the award visited the theatre, before passing

the nomination to a national committee for recommendation to The Queen.

Three operatic societies bought the almost-derelict Pendle Hippodrome Theatre in 1978.

It was painstakingly restored by volunteers to its full Edwardian glory over more than eight years, reopening to the public in 1986.

It's since been run on an entirely voluntary basis, with no outside funding or paid staff. ★

HMS Pinafore Sets Sail on the Wirral

A new slant on a light opera staple has set sail on the Wirral. West Wirral Musical Society has given new life to Gilbert And Sullivan favourite HMS Pinafore in their latest production.

They've revamped the show, which as a short production is often paired with the duo's Trial By Jury to make a complete night of entertainment, to create HMS Pinafore – The Full Story.

With the addition of three new comic characters, Dahlia, Daphne and Marigold as additional cousins of Sir Joseph Porter – each in love with the sailors on board Pinafore to create some additional light romance, as well as expanding the role of Hebe, the society also added G&S numbers from other shows with an aim of creating an 'entirely fresh yet seamless and entertaining addition to the original story.'



Philippa Hipwell, from WWMS, said: "We are blessed in our society with very talented ladies, and deliberately enhanced their involvement in the show, which in its original form has six excellent parts for men but only three for women, with Hebe only having one line of dialogue and no song of her own."

New moments in the show, which ran at Westbourne Hall, West Kirby on the

Wirral, included a cheeky scene between the new sets of lovers, the fainting of Daphne at the sight of the sailors, and the 'light and frivolous touch' of a new opening scene where the ladies were dressed in underwear and negligees.

"We received many compliments on the show and on the new scenes – which several people said fitted seamlessly into the traditional story," Philippa added.

"Our enjoyment of the fresh approach to the story came across to audiences too, which commented on our enjoyment and energy on the stage.

One or two people said that while they enjoyed the extra scenes, they still preferred the traditional story, but on balance we all felt it was a successful enterprise, giving the ladies much more involvement in the story, more characterisation and giving our talented soloists opportunities to shine." ★



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NODA Scotland Website and Facebook

The NODA Scotland Web Manager will be delighted to receive contributions to the NODA Scotland section of the website. Here you will find all sorts of useful information including news and show listings which can be submitted as far in advance as you have made plans.

Don't forget we also have a very active Facebook page – please spread the word about this to your members.

Items for inclusion on either the website or Facebook page should be emailed to stuart.dick@noda.org.uk ★



Royal Visitor Meets Big Bad Wolf

Big Bad Wolf, the children's theatre company in District No 3, were honoured and delighted to welcome HRH Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex, to their rehearsal on Thursday 2 July in the Dobbie Hall, Larbert. The excited youngsters gave a powerful performance of one of their numbers from their coming show, *All Shook Up*, and also displayed their varied talents in excerpts from their previous production, *Peter Pan*. Prince Edward showed real interest in the company and chatted to many of the 70 youngsters drawn from all over the Falkirk area. Everyone had a great day! ★

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Anne Ballantyne

It is with great sadness that we record the passing of Anne Ballantyne who made an enormously significant contribution to the amateur musical theatre as a director and performer and who was a kenspeckle figure both north and south of the border.

Memories from society folk who worked with Anne have included those of Bob Johnson of Callander Amateur Operatic Society. He recalls:

She was "a bit of an event" in her own right. She was probably the toughest work colleague I ever worked alongside. But she produced very successful shows – and she knew she could pull it off every time. What made Anne such a huge success was her attention to the finest details and I definitely learned more about stagecraft from her than anyone else. I feel her voice ringing in my ears, "Don't talk to the back of the stage"; "act to the clock on the back wall"; "fill that space"; and finally "don't just look at that fallen object and toe it around – pick the bloody thing up and deal with it". The one which always raised a smile was "Teeth and tits girls, teeth and tits". She was indeed a one-off!

We wish to welcome you to Munchkinland!



Over 300 Edinburgh children audition to be Munchkins!

The Southern Light Opera Company is the oldest theatre company in Edinburgh and since 1897 has been at the front of the musical theatre scene of the city, but nothing could have prepared the SLO for what happened on 5 September 2015.

With the huge success of *Oliver!* in March 2015, both artistically and at the box office, the SLO chose to harness the feel-good factor and buzz associated with presenting a show with lots of children in it. At a Special General Meeting the membership agreed that the RSC version of *The Wizard of Oz* would be company's production in 2016. Southern Light famously presented *The Wizard of Oz* in 2007, which marked the beginning of a period of gentle 'rebranding' of the company in a move away from light opera to more family based musical favourites popular with audiences young and old.

With the planning well underway for the major production the process of recruitment of a cast began in earnest. Of course in *The Wizard of Oz* there are Munchkins and as the Southern Light now

has great experience in staging shows with children and young people the draw to the company was huge! Over 330 children registered for the auditions which were held at The Studio at the Festival Theatre on 5 September. A well organised operation was put in place using the skills and experience of many company members who volunteered to assist with duties such as registration, crowd control, dance demonstration and other jobs associated with an event involving so many people.

The production team of Andy Johnston (Director), David McFarlane (Musical Director) and Louise Williamson (Choreographer) introduced the audition session before launching into teaching the potential Munchkins the ever popular *Ding Dong the Witch is Dead!* In the end 80 children, aged between 7 and 12, were selected to be in the cast of *The Wizard of Oz* at the King's Theatre in February 2016. Once again, the SLO will journey to Oz for an unforgettable adventure!

To Oz? To Oz!! ★

Southern Light presents *The Wizard of Oz* from Tue 23 to Sat 27 February 2016.
edtheatres.com/wizardofoz 0131 529 6000

Glenrothes Youth Success

Glenrothes Amateur Musical Association Youth (GAMAYOUTH) were awarded the prestigious Mary Leishman Foundation award at the recent Fife Local Heroes Awards. The award recognises contribution to music and the arts in Fife. The awards committee were impressed by the management of the group and the ethos of a low cost, no audition entry society, allowing access to performance for all young people regardless of abilities or financial limitations. Liz Melvin, Group Convener, said "We are delighted to be recognised by the Foundation. At GAMAYOUTH we believe that, in addition to developing performance skills, personal development and learning respect for others is of equal importance." ★

The flight of the stage struck egrets

Why egrets – a species of heron not much disposed to human interaction – should be seen in the small New England town of Eastwick is something known only to the author and composer of the *Witches* of that place but – like the famous stage direction, "Exit, pursued by a bear", it is one of the head scratching moments for directors of amateur theatre. However, when the Dumfries Musical Theatre Company staged this show a couple of years ago we turned to our favourite ornithologist (aka the stage manager) for help.

Our little flock of egrets was hatched in late March and fledged just in time for their stage debut at first dress in the Theatre Royal, Dumfries, in April 2013. They very quickly became very well-liked and respected members of the company

– particularly by the director – since they turned up on time, were word perfect from the start and always stood in their key light. However, all good things come to an end and when their moment in the spotlight was over they all thought it was off to the great nesting ground in the sky. However, word of their acting prowess had clearly spread and pretty soon they were flying off up to help the Opus Theatre Club in Brechin – a part of Scotland rarely visited by these birds of warmer southern latitudes.

They enjoyed retirement in the warm summer weather, sunning themselves in the garden, often gazing into the fish pond, being chased by a (very bemused) cat and sometimes a couple of them accompanied a member of the company

on talks to local clubs and church groups where they patiently endured being stroked and caressed, and never once pecked anyone!

But the roar of the greasepaint and the smell of the crowd was too strong and this year they once more hit the road to strut their now familiar stuff in Stafford. Again they were unfailingly punctual and did what the director told them, and as a reward were allowed a little 'me time' in the garden. And now these veterans of the stage are off to Preston. They will never return to their hatching ground but all of their surrogate flock at the DMTC wish them well and are proud to have given these talented and charismatic birds their first big break. Break a leg guys, we are proud of you! ★

Mary Buckley, Dumfries Musical Theatre Company



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My name is Jackie and I am very pleased to be the new Youth Adviser for the South East

Region. I have been involved in amateur theatre for over 30 years - being a member

of BROS Musical Productions (formerly Bognor Regis Operatic Society) since I was 16. I started as a performer and then about ten years ago crossed over to 'the dark side' working backstage as a Deputy Stage Manager which I love. I have been lucky to have worked as a DSM for two professional panto seasons at Bognor in 2012 and 2013.

In January 2013 I set up my own theatre company with my daughter Abigail, called Knightstar Productions. Our aim is to produce high quality productions whilst being inclusive and giving everyone a chance to shine, but above all else to ensure that everyone involved has fun and enjoys the world of musical theatre. We have produced three major productions to date - 'The World Goes Round' with an adult cast, 'Honk' with a youth cast and then we combined adults and youth for our review show last Easter. We also run youth workshops and a Summer School for youngsters aged 7 to 16. What I love about working with youngsters is watching them grow in confidence, make new friends and learn to love the world of theatre. We had youngsters come along for our production of 'Honk' who had never set foot on a stage or performed in any way before - and now they are 'hooked' and say they can't imagine their lives without it - that makes me happy and confident that I have achieved what I set out to achieve with Knightstar Productions.



In my new role as Youth Adviser I would like to create a good communication network between all the Youth Societies - including using social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. I would also like to see us meeting up during the year for meetings, workshops and social events. If you have any ideas along these lines then please do get in touch. I hope to visit as many of you as possible during next year and very much look forward to seeing some of your productions.

I look forward to hearing from you and meeting you all soon.

My contact email is: jackie.kenyon@noda.org.uk

Councillor's Comments

You will see from all the contributions printed above that NODA is alive and well in the South East. We would like to enliven it even more but need your help. Tell us how we can give you greater support - what sort of workshops you would appreciate - what sort of district meetings would you like. Contact either myself or your regional rep or your new Youth Advisor.

I have visited many societies over the past year and look forward to meeting many more over the next one. Enjoy all your theatrical adventures. ★

Kay Rowan
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Manor Theatre Group at 35

2015 is Manor Theatre Group's 35th anniversary year, and it is a year that will go down as one of the most successful in their history.

Starting strongly outside their comfort zone in April with the murder mystery drama "And Evermore Shall Be So" by Norman Robbins, the Group then proceeded to one of their finest productions to date, "The Importance of Being Earnest" by Oscar Wilde in July 2015.

To make things even more interesting for their special anniversary performance, the group took the much beloved classic to new heights by staging the Saturday night production outside in the garden of their usual performance venue: into the gardens of North Heath Hall in Horsham.

Leaving behind the usual comfort zone of the proscenium arch and raised stage, this production of Earnest had wings that were gaps in the bushes, a much larger stage space, and for the first time: microphones!

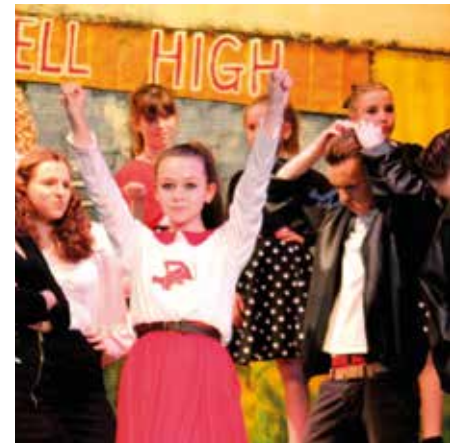
The production was fast paced, leaning strongly towards the largely farcical nature of Wilde's celebrated work. No character was too big or too small for this theatre group. From the regal nature of Jack Worthing (Jonathan Hope) brilliantly contrasted by the eccentric and charismatic Algernon Moncrieff (Dennis Manning); reflected in the patronising but heartfelt Gwendoline Fairfax (Suzanne Cottingham) to the

girlish, slightly manic Cecily Cardew (Kathryn Felton) the main four brought energy and humour to each scene. They were expertly supported by the haughty Lady Bracknell (Laine Watson) the bumbling Dr Chasuble (Andrew Bates) and the nervous Miss Prism (Mandy Lovell). Not to forget Manor's attention to the characters other may overlook: the servants Lane and Merriman (John Oade and Julian Tiley) were played with wit and terrific comic timing.

Craig Bunce was Manor Theatre Group's director for this production, and his hard work, along with the support of the technical crew is clearly demonstrated in this celebratory production. New challenges lay along the way for Manor, in one of their biggest and most adventurous production efforts to date.

The audience were encouraged to bring picnics, blankets and their own chairs to sit in the gardens, giving the whole atmosphere a feel of proms in the park. Minimal set was used against the striking large hedge backdrop, and the vivid colours of costumes stood out well against the greenery. The stage was also accessorised with flowering plants to add colour and texture, while not distracting from the action.

A triumphant production, performed as the sun set over a clear July day. Amateur theatre proving that you do not need the largest budget or the grandest set to make a highly successful outdoor production a roaring success. ★



Success in Seaford!

Seaford Musical Theatre Juniors (SMTJ) have been named as finalists in the Sussex Life Awards 2015.

Seaford Musical Theatre Juniors (SMTJ) have been named as finalists in the Sussex Life Awards 2015.

The winner will be announced at a black tie award ceremony on the 1st October at the Brighton Hilton Metropole.

The finalists have been judged to be committed to making their community a more pleasant place to live.

With no other charity community theatre company for young people in the area, SMTJ was created in 2011 to offer a low to no cost performing and creative arts section for 6-18 year olds. The group has nearly 100 members who are supported in performance based learning, leadership skills, achieving volunteering and arts awards, film-making and much more. The judging panel recognised qualities that ranged from artistic achievement to commitment to tackling barriers to inclusion.

Members from SMTJ perform regularly at nursing homes, schools, fetes, award ceremonies and many other events on a voluntary basis. ★



Kent Drama Awards Success for CODS

Cranbrook Operatic & Dramatic Society were overwhelmed to receive multiple nominations at the recent KDA Awards. In total winning: *Best New Festival Director, Best Play, Adjudicator's Special Award for Imaginative Stage Make-up, Best Actor in a Supporting Role, 2015 Lifetime Achievement Award and the Poster Competition.*

The Wind in the Willows Director Alison Withey-Harrison said, "This was a massive achievement for CODS. The play had so many unexpected challenges right up until the end of the production. There were times when I actually thought *The Wind in the Willows* was never going to happen. I am very grateful to everyone who pulled together and worked so hard to make it happen. ★



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NODA South West Annual Workshop Weekend!

Another great September Weekend at the Palace Hotel in Torquay!

NODA South-West held another successful Annual Workshop Weekend at the Palace Hotel in Torquay, from Friday 11th to Sunday 13th September 2015. It was a great weekend at a lovely venue, allowing those present to enhance their range of theatre skills in a relaxed and friendly environment and make new friends and meet old ones. We even fitted in the Annual General Meeting too!

The event, including Saturday's Presidential Dinner was attended by Noda National President, Mr. John Barnes and his wife Judith.

Thank you to all of the tutors and the organisers for another wonderful event and we look back to returning next year.

In 2016 our Workshop Weekend will be held from 2nd – 4th September and will again take place at the Palace Hotel, Torquay. After the success of their previous visits, we hope to include tutors Cathleen McGorran and Dane Preece. We look forward to lots of members joining us then. These workshops are not limited to members from the South-West Region and further information can be obtained from the Regional Councillor.

Deposits and arrangements for staggered payments can be made by contacting the South West's Treasurer, Adrian Vanstone ★



Courtesy of The Palace Hotel

Michael Simpson

– 30 years a Representative!



Still a NODA Representative after 30 years and across two regions, Michael tells us what he's enjoyed most and his hopes for NODA's future.

I started my long and varied association with NODA back in 1962 when I joined the Waterloo and Crosby A.O.S.

During my time in the North West I became Ticket Secretary, Membership Secretary and eventually Chairman - a position I went onto hold for about 20 years. It was at some point in this period I was approached by the then Regional Councillor, Brian Harper to become a NODA Representative (or 'Rep'). This position I continued when I moved to the South West in 1998, a duty I have thoroughly enjoyed for the last 30 years. 4 years ago I was also made an Honorary Member of NODA.

I also became Chairman of Plymstock A.O.S. (now Sounds Musical Theatre Co.) shortly after arriving in Plymouth and remained so for 10 years, until I retired. I was privileged to be made a Life Member, as I was by my home society in the North West.

Being a NODA Rep for so long, I have seen many changes in the standard of performances and I have seen countless superb shows. I hope that over the years I have helped and advised Companies when asked. What I have gained are so many friends, which makes this wonderful hobby so captivating.

My final comment is to all societies - NODA is there to help. Please use it! ★

South West Show Reports

Even though show reports have not been published in the magazine for sometime, there are two easy ways to still see them:

- ★ Via the NODA website: www.noda.org.uk/, select 'Regions', 'South West', 'Show Reports' and then 'View and Search All Show Reports'. You can then browse what has been published, or search by name, date or district at your leisure.
- ★ A twice yearly electronic publication of all of the show reports is issued by the Regional Editor via the District Representatives, for those interested to have. Please ask your District Representatives if you would like to receive a copy!

New Regional Representatives in the South West!

For some time now our Councillor has been covering a number of Districts which have been without a Representative. We are pleased to announce that two new Representatives have been co-opted to the Regional Committee.

- ★ Dee Way has taken on District 14 (Bath & surrounds) and
- ★ Sylvia Coates has taken on District 11 (West Dorset).

We welcome them both and hope they enjoy their time with us.

South West's Presidential Visit

The National President, Chris Ingram, visited the South West Region recently. He and his wife, attended the Dress Rehearsal of Yeovil Youth Theatre's production of "Annie" and the First Night of Axminster Musical Theatre's "Guys & Dolls". We thank Chris & Mary for making the long trip from Yorkshire to represent NODA. ★

NODA South West Awards Evening 2016

A date for your diary - we will be celebrating the best of the South-West on Saturday 5th March 2016. In order to accommodate the number of members attending we will be returning to the City Centre Marriott in Bristol and will be joined by the National President, Chris Ingram and his wife Mary.

As before, nominations will be announced on 9th January via the NODA South-West Facebook page and on the South-West section of the NODA website. Because of the popularity of this event we are putting a limit of a maximum of 10 persons per society. We might have extra spaces nearer the time. Bookings, using the form which can be downloaded from the website, should be sent to the Councillor. ★

And finally... your thoughts on Audience Behaviour

Do you agree that it is time to remind audiences how to behave? Matters have declined from the noisy wrapping papers and irritating texting to noisy conversation and ludicrous yelping and clapping along. I was recently treated to the audience of "Sister Act" standing and cheering because the music went up a key! A friend of mine attended a performance of "Blood Brothers" during which a couple held such a loud conversation that after a lot of complaints from other audience members the theatre staff had to remove the people from the theatre. How the actors were not distracted is surely a miracle. Amazingly sitting in the dress circle the family in front of me opened a picnic-basket and proceeded to eat their supper. Standing ovations no longer mean that the performance was exceptional, but are obligatory for members of the company's families blocking the view of members of the audience who cannot stand easily or are too short. While most of the productions I get to see deserve praise these over-the-top reactions surely give the cast the wrong impression as to how successful they have been. Any thoughts? ★



regional roundup

Wales & Ireland

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NODA Theatre Summer School Video Production Course 2015

Dee Mc Ilroy, District 3 Representative, reports on her tenth course at NODA Theatre Summer School

Ready for another challenge, I browsed the NODA website and there it was, something to take me right out of my comfort zone, a video production course with Scottish BAFTA awarded Tutor Ian Bustard. Always fascinated by the world of film making having seen *Sunset Boulevard* and marvelled at those incredible Paramount film studios and just taken part in *Singin' in the Rain* with the birth of the talkies, I just had to apply.

Nothing could have prepared me for this incredible week! It was hands on from day one using cameras, sound, script writing, interviewing, and as generous spirited NODA Tutors allowed filming in their lectures, we witnessed the progress of talent through the week and there are so many unaware talented people there, being part of it was very special. I cannot speak more highly of this week and thank all the NODA Theatre Summer School Team who made it possible for me and all the students

Make next year the year you experience one of the courses, you will never regret it.

A unique place where people are passionate about theatre! ★

St. Peter's Players

Winners of the District 4 Best Youth Production Award 2014 for *Aladdin*. A charitable organisation promoting community theatre, and raising money for charity while delivering an all-encompassing theatrical experience, within the Cardiff community. I am proud to represent this company on behalf of NODA Wales and Ireland this is a letter from their secretary.

It's been 30 years since St Peter's Players took to the stage to entertain people with their energy and enthusiasm.

The annual traditional pantomime, has continued to draw crowds with fun for all the family, this group has a true sense of community. In 2002, we adopted Woodlands, a local high school that caters for children with learning difficulties as our charity. Over the course of 12 years, through our productions, we have successfully raised over £10k used to enhance drama related activities helping young people build confidence. We have given financial support, staff training expertise, new

equipment to help in nurturing acting skills and provide opportunities for these young people to perform in front of paying audiences.

And it hasn't ended there. To date we have raised £18.5k split between Woodlands and a number of other worthy causes which mean something to our members, HCPT, Marie Curie, Latch to name but a few. The charity "2 Wish upon a star" is our main focus for the next year due to focus on families who have lost children. Our young members are the lifeline of our group and this worthy cause seemed so fitting in what we strive to achieve. We have also started a project with a local school, which is St. Peter's Primary.

We're not a financially rich company by any means, far from it, but we are rich in spirit, to nurture young talent, support worthy causes that uphold our values and bring our energy and enthusiasm to the audiences that keep supporting us.

Lisa Davies



Avenue Q comes to Abergavenny!

In July 2015, VIG Theatre Company performed the Broadway & Westend smash hit musical, *Avenue Q*, in Abergavenny Borough Theatre. The company, who have won two NODA awards in as many years, tackled the challenging musical with a cast aged between 14 & 30.

Avenue Q is a "coming of age" parable set in New York's Alphabet City with one slight twist...most of the residents are puppets! Puppetry is a surprisingly difficult skill which the young cast achieved with aplomb.

Princeton, a fresh-faced college graduate is ready to face the world. He rents an apartment on Avenue Q from Gary Coleman; yes, THAT Gary Coleman, and starts to meet his neighbours.

The team of characters, both human & puppet, are rude, crude, but completely loveable & some are just so very sweet. This comedy musical had audiences roaring with laughter with the cast desperately trying not to laugh along with them! ★



Congratulations Mia Jae Lewis!

This young lady is going places, just fifteen she wowed the audience as Jenny in her first production for STC Musical Society, their outstanding *Aspects of Love* came to the The Dolman Theatre Newport earlier this year

Mia was also Winner of the Best Youth Performance in the Gwent Drama League Awards a fantastic achievement. Mia even found time to make a photograph collage of the show for the society and presented it to Director Sharon Davies with guest NODA Regional Representative Dee McIlroy congratulating Mia. ★

regional roundup

West Midlands



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Councillor's Comments

Holidays are long since gone and are now mere memories on a Facebook page. The new season is well under way and soon it will be (Oh yes it will) the season of pantomimes.

The articles in this issue reflect the scope of talent amongst our members, our regions firsts were discussed in the last issue and we see more here. We have an example of the enjoyment to be had by improving (or maintaining) our skills by attending the NODA Theatre Summer School which is a timely reminder that the 2016 Theatre Summer School will be 30th July to 6th August 2016 and that the launch will be on 1st December.

We have changes in the Regional Committee; Jean Beard, has decided to retire from the position of Regional Membership Secretary, ending some 28 years of formal service to NODA in the Midlands and West Midlands, she will be missed from our committee meetings and I personally wish to express my gratitude for all she has done, she will still sub for local reps on occasion. Paul Douglass will add the role to that of Regional Rep for district 9. ★

Michael Hastilow

Councillor for the West Midlands and Vice President of National Operatic and Dramatic Association

West Bromwich Operatic Society set up a fund to send one of their members to the NODA Theatre Summer School as a tangible reminder of the legacy of John Richards, This year the Society sent Laura Wynter, here is her report.

I enrolled on the Musical Theatre Workshop course - Stiles and Drewe, where we looked at the works of Anthony Stiles (lyrics) and George Drewe (composer). The focus and emphasis of the course was to look at "the process" rather than the performance and how to approach the music and text with a deeper understanding during rehearsal. This involved looking at how to develop the character you are portraying by exploring their emotions and discussing how they would react within the scene. Our tutors for the week were Dane Preece (MD) and Simon Greiff (Director). Their extensive knowledge of musical theatre engaged, informed and captivated all of the students to think differently and to broaden our own knowledge and understanding of text and song working together.

At first I was a little apprehensive, this was my first year ever coming to NODA Summer School



and I wasn't sure that this was the right course for me. Coming from a singing background I always feel more comfortable focusing solely on the voice, but as the week went on I realised that there was so much more I could achieve and information I could tap into from our tutors and the other students to better my musical theatre and summer school experience.

On the Friday afternoon, we showcased songs learnt during the week, the course allowed me to gain new skills that I will utilise as I continue on this musical theatre journey. I would highly recommend NODA summer school to anyone wishing to develop and extend their skills and knowledge and also for anyone who would love a week away from home to socialise and make new friends with likeminded people who LOVE musical theatre. I really enjoyed my time and will definitely be going back again. ★

Laura Wynter

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'With One Look'

Staffordshire sets the stage for a run of West Midland firsts.

Being granted the licence to perform Andrew Lloyd Webber's 'Sunset Boulevard' was the real icing on the cake for The Burton Musical Theatre Company earlier this year, which reflects the current trends and ambitions of its members as Chairperson Angela reports saying "Sunset Boulevard' was a fantastic start to a very exciting year"

'Sunset Boulevard' was a challenge from start to finish for all parts of the Society. Steven Foster, our accomplished Director, took up the mantle assisted by Mike Mear. Our Musical Director, David Blackwell stated on several occasions that, apart from some numbers in 'Chess', 'Sunset Boulevard' was one of the most musically challenging scores he has taught us particularly the opening number.

Societies currently in rehearsal will know exactly what I mean! As he said in his comments in the programme 'one of the elements which make this show so complex are the frequent time changes, 162 in the first chorus number "yes 'Let's have Lunch'!".

Our stage crew built a magnificent set, including a very ornate sweeping staircase, and the use of black and white film, which was a first for us, and was used to very good effect. The orchestra, props and lighting were excellent and all help to create the overall atmosphere, sweeping our audience into the world of 'Sunset Boulevard' and Norma



Desmond played by Sharon Plummer and Joe Gillis by Lee Smith who were joined by our dedicated chorus of 25.

For other societies, in rehearsal Sharon would definitely advise any budding Norma Desmond to ensure they have very good help from wardrobe. The costume changes, in some instances, are ridiculously quick and coping not only with the demands of the part but also costume changes which were a challenge well risen to.

As the first Society to perform 'Sunset Boulevard' on the British mainland we

were particularly pleased that Robert Berry from the Really Useful Group came to see the show, he joined many other societies who travelled long distances to see what we had done. We would like to wish all companies the best of luck.

Our next production is Mel Brooks Comedy 'The Producers' very different to 'Sunset Boulevard' but equally as enjoyable and again a first in the Staffordshire area. www.burtonmusicaltheatre.co.uk ★

Angela Wynne
The Burton Musical Theatre Company



Singing our Support

Nine ladies from Great Barr Musical Theatre Company took time from their weekend to support McMillian Nurses with a few songs from their repertoire, one of which was performed with an X Factor finalist. ★

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