



FEATS NEWSLETTER

MAY 2010

Congratulations all round to the FEATS 2010 team! Apart from the weather – and, I assume, they just did not get their order in early enough – everything went swimmingly. As our adjudicator, Jan Palmer Sayer said: “it feels like a festival ought to feel.” She praised the festival organisation as being “incredible” and FEATS as a “vibrant community which chooses plays with great intelligence”. She had, she continued, enjoyed a “most gripping and fascinating week (sic) of theatre”. We for our part enjoyed her interesting, constructive and funny adjudications.

A few ‘old’ faces were missing, which we regret, but it was encouraging to see so many new ones. And it was wonderful to see so many people in the audience every night. I, for one, really appreciated the fact that David (neat bow tie collection!) merely announced the running order each evening and then used the time after the performances and before the adjudication to give out various bits of information.

Apart from some very good theatre on the main stage, the standard of offerings at the Fringe was also very high with several strong performances and informative, fun workshops.

Full marks, too, for the Organising Committee’s initiative in hosting a “green” FEATS. The carbon footprint was calculated for groups’ travel and a donation corresponding to this amount is being given to install solar panels in a country school in India so that the children will no longer have to use polluting kerosene lights.

Oh, you might be interested in the results:

1st Place: The Founders’ Cup	NWTC, Luxembourg	<i>Jolly</i>
2nd Place: The Centennial Cup	ECC, Brussels	<i>The Red Death</i>
3rd Place: The Taché Diamond Cup	GEDS, Geneva	<i>Shakers</i>
The “Blackie” for Best Actor	NWTC, Luxembourg	<i>Timothy Lone</i>
The “Blackie” for Best Actress	ESOC, Darmstadt	<i>Melanie Zander</i>
Grand Duchy Award for Best Stage Presentation	de WAANzin, Ghent	<i>Sister</i>
Marcel Huhn/Bruno Boeye Stage Management Award	ESOC, Darmstadt	<i>White Liars</i>
Best Original Script	BATS, Antwerp	<i>Oh, my God!</i>

Adjudicator's Discretionary Award **BATS, Antwerp** *Erik Tytgadt &
Tom De Bekker*

Nominated in the various categories – and I hope I have omitted no-one - were:

“Blackie’ for Best Actor: **Masoud Janjaz** Entity Theatre, Munich
 Andrew Carey-Yard N.E.A.T., Stuttgart
 Mathew Kovacs N.W.T.C., Luxembourg
 Ingemar Mikander E.C.C., Brussels

“Blackie” for Best Actress: **Christine Probst** N.W.T.C., Luxembourg
 Isabel Vandersteene de WAANzin, Ghent
 Rowan Cody G.E.D.S., Geneva
 Annika Groeneveld InPlayers, Amsterdam

Grand Duchy Award: **G.E.D.S., Geneva** *Shakers*
 N.W.T.C. Luxembourg *Jolly*
 E.C.C., Brussels *The Red Death*

Discretionary Award: **Erik Abbott** of N.W.T.C. for his direction of *Jolly*
 David Jayne for the compilation of the FEATS programme

Stage Management: **I.T.G., Brussels**
 ESOC, Darmstadt

Once again I am indebted to **Annie Dawes** for her report on all the plays:

Tagora, Strasbourg *Late Entry* by **David Tristram**

The curtain opens, accompanied by beautiful original music, showing a chair placed downstage almost centre, a table and a lamp. The homely and drably-dressed actress in the chair, Sara, has to shuffle to get herself into the pool of light but something about this move tells us that this action is deliberate and part of the play, and not just a technical glitch, so we feel better about it. Sara proceeds, after a magnificent pause, to regale us with a mindblowingly mundane monologue, delivered in all the accents of the British Isles and then some. At the end of the monologue, Mike takes the stage. He is dressed in a white jacket with a red bow tie and a 'snazzy' waistcoat, looking every inch the professional UK adjudicator he is. He presents his assessment of the play we have just seen, stating the obvious and giving 'full marks for effort'. "Bollocks!" yells Sara to the adjudicator from GONADS (*sic*), and flounces from the stage. In longer than it should take to get changed into a wedding dress with red Spanish bits(?), Sara is back, regaling Mike with every reason why she should be the winner of the drama festival she is competing in. We don't know what to believe - whether she directed and stage managed herself, whether sound and lighting crews even exist, whether she has a child at all, Sophie, who is very

disadvantaged and who wrote the script. However Mike is humbled and the adjudicator's award is given to Sara, who gives a very moving account of her life when she was bullied and made to feel inadequate. Mike's parting shot of "No chance of a quick shag, I suppose?" about sums up the level of this very funny play which kept us guessing and laughing all the way along. A propitious start to the festival, we all agreed.

Entity Theatre e.V., Munich, *The Exception And The Rule* by Bertolt Brecht (translated by Tom Osborn)

Two white-masked, black-garbed characters spookily and dramatically open the play and lead us through the storyline, with particularly well-chosen songs given new and more appropriate lyrics. They provide a welcome entertainment in between the brutal scenes happening on stage. The story tells of a Merchant who must cross the Yahi Desert to reach an oil field where he is to do business. He hires and takes with him a Guide and a Porter, both of whom he drives relentlessly; their class differences are apparent. After the Merchant fires his Guide, the Porter almost drowns in the raging torrent of a river to be crossed (Chorus accompaniment of 'Proud Mary' tune, new words), the tumultuous waters being effectively created by actors waving billowing fabric. Using the whole bare stage, the cast's energy levels are certainly put to the test. Unfortunately the lighting bleached out the pictures projected on the back wall, but perhaps this also gave us the impression of baking sunshine in this desert setting. Devices such as the little white tent, lit from inside, are very effective. The story continues with the Porter offering the Merchant a drink from his own water bottle when water supplies are low and they are themselves lost. The Merchant mistakes the water bottle for a stone with which he believes the Porter intends to kill him, and so the Merchant shoots the Porter dead. (Chorus accompaniment of 'Wait a Minute, Mr Postman'). Alone and without any protection, the Merchant becomes more afraid and desperate. The eventual court case of the murder of the Porter affirms that the Porter put up with a great deal of mistreatment from the Merchant because he was afraid of losing his job. Red-swathed judges deem the case dismissed as the Merchant was justified in shooting the Porter, and the Porter's widow loses her claim for compensation, showing that class differences between rich and poor will always culminate in the poor losing out and the rich being always exonerated. We are told that the moral of the tale is 'Whenever you have recognised an abuse, put it right'. With its large cast (of 11), its clever use of lighting and its moments of great creativity and boundless energy, this play captured our attention throughout and left us plenty to think over. Masoud Janbaz, playing the part of the Porter, was nominated for the Blackie Award for Best Actor.

ESOC Theatre Group, Darmstadt *White Liars* by Peter Shaffer

A round of applause greeted this production's chunky set, representing the rooms of a fortune teller at the end of a deserted pier on the English coast. Indeed, admirable as it was to see something so solidly constructed, one wondered whether the fortune teller's accommodation shouldn't have been just a little less solid and somewhat more romantic, but the whole audience was in awe of the expertise shown by this group in transporting, setting and striking such a hefty construction. Indeed, ESOC was awarded the Marcel Huhn/Bruno Boeye Trophy for Stage Management. In this play set in the Seventies, Sophie Lemberg presents herself as a baroness of the Holy Roman Empire, plying her end-of-pier trade as a fortune teller. One day, two young men visit her to have their fortunes told - Tom, a blond-haired, velvet-suited budding musician in a rock group called the White Liars, and Frank, his bearded, long-haired manager. Frank bribes the Baroness to change the reading of Tom, so as to persuade Tom to leave his (Frank's) girlfriend alone. The Baroness, well oiled and ready to comply for a monetary consideration, uses Frank's set of notes on Tom's working class background and difficult childhood. The play moves swiftly and expertly through a series of twists and turns, at the end of which we find that no-one is who we thought they were, and all three characters are left feeling wrung out and disillusioned. The Baroness is really Sophie Plotkin, the daughter of a deli owner and his gypsy wife; Tom had completely fabricated his working class life to aid his music career; and Frank's love interest is in actual fact not the unfaithful girlfriend but Tom himself. The great energy and cracking pace of this production held us riveted and wanting to know how the plot unravels for all the characters, expertly and entertainingly played by all three. Melanie Zander playing Sophie, Baroness Lemberg, won the Blackie Award for Best Actress.

**BATS (British American Theatrical Society), Antwerp *Oh, my God!* by Daniel Sossi
[original script]**

A sombrely-lit stage with flown church windows and an ecclesiastical lectern, plinth and pair of candlesticks form the setting for this production. Pious (and not so pious) nuns discover through a secret inscription in a biblical verse that God herself is coming to earth and will visit this very monastery. This is of course a momentous occasion and we all know that things will never be the same again. A certain nun (was it the one given to wearing a red feather boa and high-heeled shoes?) asks if someone has sinned will they be punished when God visits? A holy gift is prepared for the Visitor and is shown to the nuns in a special box which emanates holy light whenever it is opened. The scene then changes (although perhaps not decisively so) to heaven where we find God discussing the forthcoming visitation with her Angel. God, in her white satin Elvis jumpsuit and pink fluffy bedroom slippers, has cold feet and wonders why she's agreed to go. Will they like her? "Oh Gawd!" exclaims the welsh-accented Angel, to our complete delight. "You're God for Chrissake!" says the Angel, and God is persuaded. The nuns, the Angel with a mermaid wig, and the very authentic looking Monk wore perfectly designed costumes which befitted the characters admirably. In contrast, the Priest wearing a plain dark suit puzzled me, but not unduly. The nuns' rendition of 'Kumbaya' got a round of applause but the Adjudicator couldn't work out why, either. (Tom seems to know but it's something to do with his misspent youth attending summer camps). The scene of the Priest giving the sacrament to the kneeling Monk was bursting with double meaning which most of the audience found extremely funny, and the Don Luscombe Discretionary Award was presented to the two actors (Tom De Beckker playing the Priest and Erik Tytgadt playing the Monk) for their performance. (Note to the organizing committee: Check that these two handsome men are indeed safely back home in Antwerp, and that the Adjudicator hasn't managed to smuggle them home to England in her suitcase... !!). The spot-lit cameo confessions deserved the audience's applause for their effectiveness. The storyline continues with the theft of the valuable gift and even the murder of one of the nuns, Sister Matic. A detective arrives to the signature tune of the Pink Panther and his assistant works out the significance of white feathers at both crime scenes, incriminating the Angel in both cases. She had wanted to show God that Earth was not a place in which she would be happy, and therefore she would return to heaven to be with her - forever. God does indeed decide to return to whence she came, resurrects the murdered nun and in true 'Sister Act' fashion we are regaled with a spirited rendition of 'I Will Follow Him'. A romping, irreverent riot of naughtiness, this play won the DAW-Verulam Award for Best Original Script.

NEAT (New English American Theatre), Stuttgart *At Home at the Zoo – (Act 1) Homelife*
by **Edward Albee**

The simple set of a single sofa downstage centre coupled with unobtrusive music and tranquil birdsong is all that is needed for us to concentrate on the duologue between Ann and Peter, a married couple who have reached the moment in their life together when "We should talk". Communication, however, is not something these two articulate people are able to achieve and, although they talk and talk, their individual loneliness within their relationship becomes evident. Despite their emotional needs, their monologues refer to physical concerns - his unwanted circumcision which he thinks is reversing(?), her pondering on the removal of her breasts in order to avert cancer. Peter shares a secret about an ugly sexual encounter in his student days which, now that Ann longs for him to be 'bad' instead of good in bed, has resulted in his never again wanting to hurt anyone physically. The play reaches a crescendo with a physical smack in the face, slight chaos ensues and gradually disperses, leading everything back to normal and as it was before, with nothing resolved. But they had talked - and about topics never before mentioned and never written about so sensitively as here by Mr. Albee. The gentle sensitivity and expressive, silent body language of the actor (Andrew Carey-Yard) playing Peter contrasts with the lively, perkiness of Susanna Thielecke, who plays Ann - the two combining to give a mesmerising performance of this prequel to Edward Albee's 'The Zoo Story'. Andrew Carey-Yard was nominated for the Blackie Award for Best Actor.

ECC (English Comedy Club), Brussels *The Red Death* by **Stephen Chellens [original script]**

Before the curtains open, spooky whispering warns us what to expect, then a ringleader character bursts on to the stage and invites us to join his ghoulish world. The year is 1889. We are living in London in the time of Darwin, Dickens, Brunel and ... Jack the Ripper! The stage is then filled with thirteen (!) circus acts from the Victorian era. The music is good and lively, the back projection and lighting sets the scene for these tormented souls in the midst of a gothic horror story. The red plague is feared by a Prince who locks himself into his castle for escape, but he is chased by the plague throughout every room in the castle, each one differently designed and containing a new horror worse than the last. Hideous murders have taken place in the history of the castle and memories abound in every room. As we pass from one to the other, we see a girl burned to death before our very eyes with a wonderfully created raging fire, a

bridegroom killed in a coach crash en route to the church, a noisily snapped throat makes us all jump and recoil in horror. Tableaux abound, change and reform, all led by the ringmaster. Overpowering music, beautifully changing cyclorama colours, imaginative use of masks, innovative choreography all help to describe the seven hideous rooms until - Everyone eventually meets their end at the hands of the Red Death. Choreographed tableaux fleetingly performed behind a mirror frame were beautifully done, the pace never let up, the audience gasped and loved it. This well conceived, well rehearsed, well performed piece gained two nominations. The production was nominated for the Grand Duchy Award for Best Stage Presentation, and Ingemar Mikander playing Jonah was nominated for the Blackie Award for Best Actor. The production was very appropriately awarded the ECC Centennial Cup for 2nd Place.

NWTC (New World Theatre Club), Luxembourg *The Old Neighborhood – Jolly* by David Mamet

'We Are Living In America' blasts out across the auditorium, the lights come down and the curtains flash open to show a brightly lit tableau totally downstage centre where the actors are captured in mid-conversation around a cleared dinner table. The dialogue is full of unfinished sentences and disjointed delivery; it's frantic, excited, repetitive. The realistic style of communicating shows us that these people know each other intimately and we eventually glean that Jolly and Bob are siblings; Carl is Jolly's husband. The discussion revolves around their childhood, their reminiscences, their difficult relationships with their parents and step-parents. Jolly feels she was unloved and unwanted. With great energy from Jolly's character and with a quieter, more introspective delivery from her brother, we learn about Jolly's now-tranquil and stable home life with her dull husband and about Bob's impending separation from his wife. Jolly is a tough, hard-mouthed woman who is obsessively furious about her late mother who remarried outside of the Jewish faith. She says, "One thousand generations we've been Jewish, my mother marries a 'sheigetz' and we're celebrating Christmas". We are then privy to family Christmases that Jolly and Bob remember, together with anguish over Christmas presents they received and didn't want, and the complications that followed, together with presents they would love to have had, but never did receive. The immensely complicated dialogue is thrilling to listen to and it is delivered with a pace which never lets up. We are whipped along in this intimate world of shared memories. The play ends with the same tableau and we are stunned, having been privileged to watch a production that was simply fabulous. Erik Abbott's direction of 'Jolly' was nominated for the Don Luscombe Discretionary Award. The production received a nomination for the Grand Duchy Award for Best Stage Presentation. Christine Probst, playing the part of Jolly, received a nomination for The Blackie Award for Best Actress. Timothy Lone, playing Bob, was awarded The Blackie Award for Best Actor. The production won the Founders' Cup for Best Production (1st Place).

ITG (Irish Theatre Group), Brussels *Come On Over* by Conor McPherson

For the introduction to this play, we have drumbeat music over dark curtains, which open to reveal a bare stage, with two wooden chairs set on the apron. The actors, one male and one female, sit in silence, their heads covered in hessian sacks with holes cut for the eyes. In highly emotionally charged performances, the characters Matthew and Margaret tell two separate stories. His is of the discovery in a churchyard of the body of a thirteen-year-old girl; hers are memories of the death of her husband from leukaemia. He recalls his African child lover who stabbed him in the face; she remembers the scent of a man's pullover and walking with him in the rose garden. We begin to understand the connection between the two characters - they had been childhood sweethearts before he left to become a Jesuit priest who investigates miracles for the Vatican; she is now widowed and runs a rural bed and breakfast. When he is sent to see the 400-year-old remains of a girl found in their home town, their worlds collide. At the point when she is recalling their sexual encounter, she removes the sack and we see her very expressive face. He tells her to put it back on. She calls him a coward, but she complies. Matthew's reminiscences about the dead girl continue to the point of upsetting him. Margaret holds him in her arms and he leans in towards her. The curtain closes and the lights come up. We have been transported into their world and now we have been returned home. This production was runner-up for the Marcel Huhn/Bruno Boeye Trophy for Stage Management. Brian Hartnett playing Matthew was nominated for the Blackie Award for Best Actor.

InPlayers, Amsterdam *In Yonder Green Glen* by Svarupa [original script]

A single backdrop showing a sepia-coloured mediaeval Italian street scene tells us exactly where the story is taking place, and also brings the action downstage closer to us. A large cast (ten in all) whisks us

briskly through a romp alive with all the characters of Commedia dell'Arte, and it is easy to see whence evolved the early origins of our English panto. This is a play within a play, as modern day actors playing the traditional roles take on, not only the personalities, but the lifestyles of the mediaeval characters. Thus we have offstage and onstage romances, intrigues, pursuits, even duels to the death plus plenty of lewd horseplay and innuendo. The costumes are a riot of colour and fun; the music and bawdy lyrics a delight (especially the song performed by Il Dottore), and the mediaeval masquerade sheer enchantment. In an immensely complex storyline, with intrigue, plots and ploys twisting and turning all over the place Pierrot ultimately perishes by the Spaniard's sword but Il Dottore's patent medicine does the trick - that, and the kiss of life from Columbine. Flavio has earned the love of Isabella. We then find that Pantalone, whom Flavio has known as his father, is also Isabella's father, but Flavio is not his son because Il Dottore is his natural father, so all is well. With sung couplets, the story is tied up, every boy has his girl, that is apart from Pierrot, shedding the tears of a clown. The whole ensemble is to be congratulated for a most entertaining production. We had great fun just watching - and even that was exhausting! Annike Groeneveld, playing the part of Il Dottore, was nominated for the Blackie Award for Best Actress.

**Theater De WAANzin, Ghent *Sister of* by Lot Vekemans (translated by Dirk Crommelinck)
[original script]**

Such was the impact of the opening to this play, it is hard to believe that this production was performed on a stage bare of scenery or props, apart from four floor-standing bowls of flame surrounding an ice-covered acting area and five 'icicles' melting from above. The use of side and back lighting on the single, solitary figure standing in the centre of the stage is almost the only movement in the play. Gradually we make out the form of a woman. She is standing motionless on the ice in the half-light, partially silhouetted, and surrounded by the flames and, it seems, standing in the dripping water. She is silent. The silence continues. It is wrecked by a sudden howling, which we realise is coming from the girl herself. She is hearing the hounds that are coming for her. She has been dead for many centuries. She begins to speak and we hear the story of her family, who all died before she. Gradually we learn that she is Ismene, sister of Antigone, Eteocles and Polynices, and daughter of Oedipus. She is not the one we all remember, she is not brave and clever like her sister Antigone. She is ashamed of her lack of accomplishment during her lifetime. Ismene tells the story of her parents' demise, the battle of Thebes, her brothers' deaths, her sister's braveness..... It is a harrowing account and all the while the lighting moves imperceptibly around her, perhaps marking out the course of a day in the endless time that passes. "But", she says. "Time means nothing when you don't grow old or get younger". The static pose is held continually by this most capable actress and we are in awe of her huge feat of memory and her colossal stamina. Isabel Vandersteene, playing Ismene, received a nomination for the Blackie Award for Best Actress. The production was awarded the Grand Duchy Award for Best Stage Presentation.

CATS (Combined Amateur Theatrical Society), Rheindahlen *Wedding Day* by John F. Glen

A wedding day in a typical English family household, with all the accompanying moments of panic, doubt, reminiscence, jubilation, hope..... The central character is Annie, the bride's grandmother. Through her, we learn the family history - Annie's childhood, her romance and then marriage, losing her husband in the war, the birth of her daughter (the bride's mother, Helen). We are also shown, in flashback, Helen's childhood birthday parties and also Helen's wedding day, to John. We delight in John's first meeting with Annie, in which he is terrified of being interrogated by his future mother-in-law and of saying the wrong thing, but his worries had been unfounded. We see Lynn, the bride-to-be, and her fiancé arguing over nothing, and now Lynn is having doubts about her forthcoming wedding. It's her grandmother who talks to her and comforts her, encouraging her to follow her heart and try again. This is altogether a very cosy production. We feel comfortable with all the emotions portrayed, even Annie's anger at her husband for leaving her on her own when she loved him so much. Finally the stage flat standing centre stage is used for a purpose other than hiding the myriad characters in the play - a church window is projected onto it for the wedding scene, with the minister standing on the until-now unused plinth in front of it. We had all been wondering about this plain piece of set, which seemed to serve no great purpose. However, Annie's little corner with her favourite chair and side table adequately showed us where we were. At the end of the Big Day, which has gone perfectly, Annie relaxes back into her favourite chair. Although we are now in the present day, Ted comes to visit her, tells her that he's always been with her, that he has seen everything the family has done together and that he is very proud of them all. Helen brings a cup of tea for her mother but she is too late. Peacefully, happily and willingly, Annie has finally rejoined her Ted.

conference dinner in the evening. From 'bums on seats' to choice of play or building a winning set, this conference should be of great interest to all. Information from www.lighthouseattheatre.co.uk

=====

And in case you had thought about one of the courses which I mentioned in the last Newsletter; but have not got round to doing anything about it, here are the contact details again.

3. **Aberystwyth University Wales.** Two Courses will be held between 15 and 21 August 2010 One course will be ACTING THE BARD tutored by Richard Cheshire, the other THE WORK OF HAROLD PINTER tutored by Peter Wooldridge.

For full course details contact:

Gary Thomas, DAW, The Old Library, Singleton Road, Cardiff CF24 2ET

(Tel) 029 2045 2200 (Email) gary@dramawales.org.uk. (Web) www.dramawales.org.uk

2. The **23rd European Theatre Summer School** will take place this year from 24th July to 1st August at the Centre d'Accueil Clairefontaine, on the border between Luxembourg and Belgium.

More information at www.munsbach.org. Coordinators : John Brigg, 1 rue T. Eberhard, L- 1451

Luxembourg (tel. home +352 446 680 ;mobile +352 691 636 631 ; fax +352 26 488 610 ; e-mail :

jbrigg@luxconsult.lu) or Nola Dutton, 22 South Parade, Northallerton, N. Yorkshire DL7 8SG, England

(tel: +44(0)1609 773 500 ; e-mail : Nola@DuttonsOnLine.co.uk)

3. **NODA** – National Operatic and Dramatic Association – in Loughborough, UK

This year the Summer School runs from 31st July to 6th August in Loughborough (UK). The courses

offered cover Musical Theatre ; Drama Performers ; Production Team Training ; Technical Team Training.

More details on www.noda.org.uk

I know that the GEDS team is hard at work preparing for **FEATS 2011**, with adjudicator Tony Rushforth, which will take place in the Theatre in Meyrin which we used the last time Geneva hosted the festival. If you remember, the hotel is only a couple of minutes on foot from the theatre and there is a frequent shuttle bus from the airport to the hotel. Also, there is now a tram service right into the centre of the city. So save the dates: **10 – 13 June 2011**.

Another set of dates and venue to ponder are 23 – 30 July 2011 and the Beau Séjour Theatre, Guernsey, Channel Islands for the **British All Winners Festivals**.

Thanks again to the entire crew, to all who took part in any way and to those who attended FEATS 2010 for making it such a fun weekend. It only remains to wish you all a good summer. Out with the buckets and spades – or the brushes and paint pots. Whatever you are doing, take care and do not forget the sun cream.

