

# FEATS Newsletter

## June 2019

Well, many congratulations to the entire team of Entity, Munich for the organisation and smooth running of FEATS 2019. It is always good to have a new venue for the festival and the small, leafy town of Ottobrunn about an hour from Munich, fitted the bill admirably. Perhaps the only downside was the distance between the airport and the town and then the distance between hotels and the theatre. That said, the terrain is flat, so easily walkable and the transport system is efficient. Added to that, there was 'proper' FEATS weather to welcome the many FEATSgoers who found their way over the Ascension weekend to Ottobrunn. It was good to catch up again with old friends and to make new ones. On Friday a few of us joined the guided tour round Munich which was led by a group of youngsters from a local school. They had really worked on their presentations of the various landmarks and their English was excellent. Just a pity there were not very many participants from the FEATS groups !

We enjoyed some very good theatre though there were several productions where the director had apparently not checked sound levels meaning that we, the audience, were unable to understand exactly what was going on. Adjudicator Jan Palmer-Sayer had the advantage over us as she was already familiar with the scripts having read them all several times as part of her preparation for her nightly adjudications which were both instructive and entertaining. In her final summing up of the weekend she said it had been « a fantastic four days, a veritable feast of a festival » and that FEATS was « the jewel in the crown of theatre festivals ». She also told us that, although she rarely gives high marks, the top three groups would be eligible for entry to the All-Winners Final in Woking as they had all scored over 80%. !

And here are the results :

	<u>Group</u>	<u>Play</u>
Founders Trophy for Best Production	De WAANzin,Ghent	<i>Dekalog 10 :</i>
ECC Centennial Cup - 2 <sup>nd</sup> Place	GEDS, Geneva	<i>Metamorphosis</i>
BATS Trophy - 3 <sup>rd</sup> Place	Semi-Circle, Basel	<i>Playing with Daisy</i>
Blackie for Best Actor	GEDS, Geneva	<i>Gabriel Bird</i>
Blackie for Best Actress	GEDS, Geneva	<i>Masha Neznansky</i>
Grand Duchy Award for Best Presentation	Semi-Circle, Basel	<i>Playing with Daisy</i>
Marcel Huhn/Bruno Boeye for Stage Management	Semi-Circle, Basel	<i>Playing with Daisy</i>
DAW- Verulam Award – Best Original Script	ACTS, Stuttgart	<i>Past Present Past</i> by Stuart Marlow
Don Luscombe Award – Adjudicator's Discretionary	EDG, Salzburg	Hellmut Hoelzl for costumes

The nominations were as follows :

### Blackie for Best Actor

<u>Nominee</u>	<u>Group</u>	<u>Play</u>
Marnix Van Hamme	De WAANzin, The Hague	<i>Dekalog 10 :</i>
Dabiel Regelbrugge	ACTS, Stuttgart	<i>Past Present Past</i>

### Blackie for Best Actress

<u>Nominee</u>	<u>Group</u>	<u>Play</u>
A.J. Klein	EDG, Salzburg	<i>Romantic Fools</i>
Zuzana Cox	Semi-Circle, Basel	<i>Playing with Daisy</i>

### Grand Duchy Award for Best Stage Presentation

GEDS, Geneva	<i>Metamorphosis</i>
University Players, Hamburg	<i>Somewhere In Between</i>

### DAW- Verulam Award – Best Original Script

All the original scripts were mentioned, but the Hamburg script had to be disqualified as it did not arrive within the set time limits.



stern-faced office manager arrives to find out why Gregor is not at work, but flees in the usual screaming panic. It is then decided that a professional entomologist be called upon, maybe he could teach Gregor to sing properly? But, although the entomologist and Gregor converse together in bug language, singing is not going to be the way forward for Gregor. However, the learned professor does have a suggestion. It could be that Gregor's problems are caused by extreme sexual self-abuse and that having sex would sort him out. Meanwhile, Gregor has discovered the packet of biscuits and, in true bug style, has snuck into the packet and scooped the lot. Choking on a cookie, Gregor provides the whole cast with the perfect opportunity to perform a hilarious group Heimlich manoeuvre on him whilst he is rolling around the floor in the final throes of asphyxiation. As Gregor recovers, it is agreed that the town prostitute, Ernestine, would be the perfect go-to girl to sort Gregor out. Apparently she'll sleep with anyone, as Father assures us, much to Mother's horror. Played by the same male actor as the office manager and the entomologist, Ernestine arrives - over made-up, in slinky green dress and long blond curls. She is a girl who is ready for anything, but Gregor is a step too far and their union is not to be, despite pleas for just letting nature take its course. All the while, the Narrator assures us of the "complete power of the narrator", much to the annoyance of our hero, Gregor, who wants life! adventure! to become an accountant! Ernestine wants to become a man! They all set upon the Narrator as the need to realise their inner desires takes hold, and they are no longer willing to be controlled by "a weird man on the edge of the stage". Absurd in the extreme and delightfully entertaining, this frenetically paced production had the audience on their feet to cheer and applaud. We had enjoyed crazy scenes of Gregor hiding in and then crashing out of the rapidly disintegrating wardrobe and episodes of desperately enthusiastic song and dance routines. Without final bows, we hope the cast and crew of this outrageously funny production realised the warmth and appreciation with which their efforts had been received.

## English Drama Group, Salzburg *Romantic Fools*, by Rich Orloff

This production comprises four short plays from the collection, all of which are concerned with the relationships between men and women and, often, the misunderstandings and challenges that are involved. As an introduction, we have a male versus female dialogue across the stage, both actors dressed aptly in enchanting Austrian traditional costume. In fact, the costumes throughout are bright, colourful and attractive, adding hugely to the enjoyment of the production. In the first playlet, assuming her blind dates cannot get any worse, a woman opens the door to tonight's suitor - a caveman. His long hair and beard hide a lively and expressive face and his shocking pink fur tunic just about hides his modesty. His stooping gait means that he never stands taller than about 3ft (sorry, 0,9m) and his speech is reduced to grunts and growls. Hunter-gatherer that he is, he has brought her a bunch of flowers and a plucked chicken. He wields a massive club, used to huge comic effect as it squeaks whenever brandished, which is often. A very lively scene ensues where it's altogether obvious that the caveman wants his basic needs satisfied (squeaking club working overtime) and cannot understand why satisfaction is withheld when he has provided her with romance (flowers) and sustenance (chicken). All this without a word of script from him, apart from his indecipherable name. However, in the end, the woman decides that he's not so bad after all and, to his obvious joy and delight, she jumps up into his arms, presumably to be carried off to his lair, club squeaking wildly. We are then invited to visit a swingers' club, where a novice female would love to have the courage to join in but it's all very confusing when everyone has names like Who or What as in "Tonight I see Who's on top, Why's on bottom, and I Don't Know is doing What". And later - WOMAN: What is that person's name? MAN: No, What's over there. WOMAN: Two people doing I don't know. MAN: Only one person's doing I Don't Know. WOMAN: Well, the other person's helping! This scene is absolutely hilarious and confirms the adjudicator's observation that a FEATS audience just loves low comedy. Next we have a restaurant scene, with a nervous man and his girlfriend enjoying a massive bowl of spaghetti with tomato sauce. They are seated at a table for two that has a floor-length chequered tablecloth. His idea is that this would be a novel way to propose, with the engagement ring hidden in the spaghetti, but the plate of pasta is so large that he worries she will never get through it. Finally she has eaten enough, with him asking her how is the spaghetti at every mouthful, and whether she's found anything crunchy in it yet. Not able to contain himself any longer, the man blurts out a marriage proposal. Her responses give him cause for concern at first, but finally she says "yes" and he actually dives head first into the bowl of pasta searching for the ring. The happy couple hug and kiss, oblivious of the fact that they are both covered in tomato sauce. What fun! (But would a sensible girl agree to marry a man who came up with such ideas? :-)

What a beautiful bride we are introduced to in the next scene. She is all ready for the ceremony, dressed in the most gorgeous cloud of pink and white tulle, with her dark hair smoothed into a chignon under the matching veil. Her voluminous gown alone must have taken up all the available space in the allocated storage space backstage. But she is unhappy and constantly dissolves into tears. Her husband-to-be manages to force his way into the room, which we learn is the ante-room of a wedding venue, where all 134 guests are waiting excitedly for the ceremony to begin. Unhappily, our bride is convinced that all marriages end in divorce and, because she loves her fiancé very much, she cannot bear the thought of having to divorce him. So as to pre-empt the inevitable, they start to plan their divorce, even to the extent of sharing out all their belongings. But the organist has struck up Here Comes the Bride, which seems to have the effect of reversing the couple's incertitudes and they go ahead with the wedding after all, the groom trailing his over-long tails behind him. Four plays for the price of one - great entertainment value, and beautifully bright, cheerful and colourful throughout.

## New English American Theatre, Stuttgart *Graceland*, by Ellen Byron

The play opens to a graffiti-covered wall where fans have left messages and paid homage to their idol, Elvis. We learn that this is the entrance to Graceland, the late Elvis Presley's Memphis Tennessee mansion, where two stalwart fans are contending the honour of being the first to enter the newly opened former residence of the King. Bev and Rootie are complete opposites to each other - Bev, with her shiny peroxide curls, rather more privileged and knowledgeable than Rootie, who is naïve and uneducated, but both have a fierce passion for their idol, and both are equally determined to be the first to enter those hallowed grounds, even though there are still a few days to go before the gates open. The scene is adequately set with camping-out materials, wondrous avocado-green cool box, blankets, little tent, etc., and, as the girls' stories unfold, the lighting shows dawn breaking over the King's estate. Bev confesses that her pleasure in her marriage has suffered because of her husband, Ty's, boring stories but daydreaming about Elvis has taken her mind off them and, she thinks, saved her marriage. Rootie tells us, very philosophically in her gentle Southern accent, that there are only three things a woman should make:- dinner, bed and out. However she earns our sympathy with her sad tale of losing her brother, Beau, in Vietnam, then making an unhappy marriage with his best friend. It is for the memory of Beau, from whom she gained an encyclopaedic knowledge of all things Elvis, that she needs to be first in line to visit Graceland. A competition of who knows the most Elvis facts doesn't solve the problem, neither does playing tic-tac-toe, nor the thoroughly enjoyable

medley of Elvis hits the duo treat us to. Their argument over whether or not the King recorded Shake, Rattle and Roll gets us thinking, but I looked it up and Rootie's right, he recorded it in 1955 and 1956 - for those of you still trying to work it out. Finally, when the girls' rivalry turns to shared confidences - and also shared shiny peroxide curls - Bev is moved to defer the place of honour to her companion, bestowing upon Rootie her treasured Elvis cushion and even allowing her to use her tent. *Blue Moon* closes this happy scene.

### The University Players, Hamburg *Somewhere In Between*, an original script by Nick Plummer

\* Please refer to my earlier paragraph referring to inaudibility and lack of clarity, as my comments also apply to this production.

A truly surreal piece, this production recalls time and again the inventiveness of René Magritte, from the lone white clad figure who remains motionless in front of the closed curtains throughout the interval, wearing a white hood hiding the face, to the set décor of paintings on easels of similarly hooded figures (Magritte's *The Lovers*?) and the suspended green apple in a frame, perfectly lit against a black background. A pile of charred frames, reduced to ash, rests DSL, the significance of which eludes me. With a cast of only six actors, the stage seems always alive with activity, although not always comprehensible to me. The costumes suggest a time in the future, all characters wearing imaginatively designed combinations of tunics and trousers in only black and/or white, with black crack lines painted on their white faces. Mostly the actors speak quite clearly, but the subject matter was beyond my comprehension and therefore failed to engage me totally. The visual quality of the piece, on the other hand, is mesmerising and captured my interest from start to finish. That being said, I ascertained that we were moving in pharmaceutical circles and that the central character, Addison, had been rewarded for her efforts and given a revolutionary substance, in the form of skin patches, that will allow her to perform to the highest standards of excellence. Eventually all the characters are slapping on patches, amongst talk of retrograde amnesia, selective memories and the fact that we are only capable of dreaming of faces we have seen before, which is a much discussed and very interesting concept. With apologies to this group for my dismal understanding of this play, but I found it almost impossible to follow. Nevertheless, the visual quality of the piece was captivating and held the audience's interest throughout. In advocating that it is never a waste of time to take recreational substances, the play gives us much food for thought, over-abundant use of smoke machine, a gunshot in a blackout, a bowler-hatted wise old man (Magritte again), a pregnancy, a child arsonist ..... then the play ended.

### Theater de WAANzin, Ghent *Dekalog 10: Thou Shalt Not Covet Thy Neighbor's Goods*, a film scenario by K Kieslowski/K Piesiewicz, adapted by Dirk Crommelinck

This high-energy production is also high on entertainment value, as the ten-strong cast frantically relate the story of two sons, Jerzy and Artur, who inherit their father, Wortel's, stamp collection. The legacy is a disappointment to them and there follows a series of strategies to regain the most from the situation. We open to a stage full of traffic cones strung with black and yellow tape and two simple flown panels, one reading "Thou shalt not covet" and the other showing stamps. Bells peel out and nine disparate and modestly dressed people line up. Most of the action of the play is carried out by the whole company, to great comic effect as they stampede in crocodile formation around and through the cones. The storyline is easy enough to follow, although convoluted, but the enjoyment of the piece comes principally from the delightful visual comedy moments with which the play is interspersed. For example, the frantically performed three-cheek kiss between each and every member of the cast, miming serving vodka from the fridge by passing full glasses along the line, one of the brothers trying to lift his stolidly planted wife into the car. The storyline surges on, and we follow happily, enjoying the fast-moving ensemble playing which uses the whole stage and, often, the wings too when the crocodile files off and then back on again, bringing with it another cameo part actor. At one point, this is the most ill chosen personage of the Stage Manager to play the part of a small boy.

It transpires that the inherited stamps have been sold off to a philatelist at a fraction of their worth. Frenzied activity ensues to try to regain the lost fortune. But, as said before, it's the physicality of this piece that we enjoy so much and not necessarily its narrative value. One of the brothers (played by a shaven-headed actor) is a rock band legend, the Narrator commenting on his long greasy hair. A running gag is the fact that a woman is owed 220 zloty from the inheritance, she forever having to correct a brother from referring to the debt as 200 zloty. A mimed guard dog is tugging on its lead, so realistically I can see that it's a large German shepherd. I can no longer recollect the significance of the fish tank full of dead fish, showing that the air is unbreathable, but the scene is included there somewhere, together with the sexy Nurse in full uniform prompting a group hump from the whole company. As with this and all other ensemble scenes, the company moves as one person, perhaps signalled by the leader, but all then moving as one in total coordination, weaving around the stage full of obstacles to portray different settings for the story. So, could the stamp that's worth millions be recovered and traded for a kidney to save one of the brother's daughter's life? But during the surgery, the stamps were stolen and the brothers blame each other for their loss. Never mind, all to the Post Office to buy a new series!! Hooray!! The bells peel out again and the company celebrates with three kisses each all round. Huge cheers from the audience, who have been loving every daft minute. (I have been working on this maths puzzle, but can't come up with the answer. If two people kissing each other three times makes six kisses, how many kisses are carried out when nine people all give each other three kisses?)

### Anglophone Collaborative Theatre, Stuttgart *Past Present Past*, an original script by Stuart Marlow

\* Please refer to my earlier paragraph referring to inaudibility and lack of clarity, as my comments also apply to this production.

Here we have a very subtly lit stage, so subtle in fact that the projection on the windows at the rear of the stage could not be sufficiently made out from seats midway back in the theatre. Scene changers being silhouetted in front of the lit windows always irritates me, maybe it doesn't matter to some theatre directors. A lengthy duologue in unnatural conversation between two young women tells us that the story concerns Elke, a great grandmother of one of them, who in 1932 in Stuttgart was instrumental in promoting female hygiene (?). (The unusually dim lighting didn't help with my understanding of the play, rather like having to have your glasses on so that you can hear well.) So, Elke was planning for something big but

anything radical was being abolished, resulting in riots. We understand that communist propaganda is blamed for anti-Jewism. We hear letters being read that were exchanged between Elke and Margaret, an activist in England at the time. Return to the two girls, who are sorting through books and papers and trying to resolve an inheritance issue, some of which right-wing and massively unsympathetic Uncle Josie wishes to seize, whilst asking his niece Sophie, "Did you realise how close your mother came to you being aborted?" Who says that to anyone? It made me squeak out loud. We have a powerful scene where the character of Wolf Friedrich is facing us DSC and is forced, totally against his better judgement, to give a Nazi salute. Having been awarded the DAW-Verulam Award for Best Original Script, the play obviously makes for a good read, so I wish I could have understood it better. The part where the girl discovers something interesting in newspaper cuttings seems to make for an intriguing twist - if only I could have heard and understood the dialogue and so followed the story.

## Semi-Circle, Basel *Playing With Daisy*, by Eleanor Fossey

What a very fitting song with which to open this play, Paul Simon's Bookends, which goes:

Time it was  
And what a time it was,  
A time of innocence  
A time of confidences

The curtains open to audience applause on a sunny park scene, cheerfully lit, with a brilliant blue sky. Pathways lead through bright green grassy patches, drifted fallen autumn leaves lie in heaps, and municipal street furniture including a park bench, litter bin and "wet paint" sign tell us where we are. A mature woman, Esther, silently enters and sits on the bench, delighting us with her sensual approach to her bar of chocolate which she sniffs in anticipation, licks suggestively and finally eats with relish. She is dressed frumpishly in a red and white spotted shirt and black trousers. Her face is unmade-up and her hair is tied back artlessly, reflecting her staid and stodgy character. From the audience SR, another woman, Daisy Bell, enters. She is dressed in the same polka dot fabric but her clothes are younger and brighter. She has her hair in bunches with a red headband, red earrings and bright red lipstick; her face is vibrant and her attitude bright and sparky. She is bubbling over with personality. Where Esther moves slowly and self-consciously, Daisy is vivacious and spirited. Daisy is everything that Esther is not. The women strike up a conversation, a little reluctantly at first, perhaps, on the part of Esther, who tells Daisy that she is waiting for her mother. We feel that the conversation is a little unnatural, not quite realistic, kind of stilted but bright, we can't quite put a finger on this. But we slowly realise that Daisy knows Esther and then the penny drops - Daisy is Esther's invisible imaginary friend from her childhood who she hasn't seen for a long time. In fact, they haven't seen each other since Esther's overbearing mother put an end to their "friendship" all those years ago. We learn that Esther was always getting told off for things that Daisy Bell did or told her, Esther, to do. But Daisy Bell took the blame for everything. From "Daisy Bell doesn't want cabbage, she wants baked beans" to painting your fingertips with nail varnish so as not to leave fingerprints when stealing from other people's property. We are enchanted, and a little horrified, by the delightful scenes played out by these two characters as they re-enact Esther's naughty childhood, together with her mother's reactions.

We learn that Esther used to love visiting her Auntie Vi who encouraged her friendship with Daisy Bell, unlike Mother who tried to rid her of her friend and who was always watching. As the two women re-live Esther's childhood, they have a wonderful time reminiscing how they used to play on the roundabout in the park - this very park was where they used to come to play when Esther was little. We, the audience, can hardly believe that there is no roundabout on stage, but a complete roundabout-sized gobo projected on to the park grass that the "children" spin around on. Occasionally, the childhood memories turn harsh and hurtful with Daisy saying somewhat chillingly, "Didn't you ever wonder where I went? You need me, Esther, you just don't know it yet". Undeterred, Esther hears the icecream van and goes to buy an icecream cornet - just the one. (Where had that been stored backstage?!). Unfortunately, it's not a success and ends up, mostly, in the litter bin. Continuing the replay of little vignettes from Esther's childhood, Daisy produces Esther's pretty pink Princess skipping rope from the large patch pockets on her red spotty dress. It had been lost years ago but, in playing with it, Esther gets tied up and the scene turns unpleasant. We hear that Mother always listened to her church-going "happy clappy" friends and condemned Auntie Vi to hell, so Esther tied Mother up and lit a fire under her. Blaming her evil-doing on Daisy meant that Esther had not been held responsible for her actions and so Daisy had kept Esther out of Juvenile. Mother also got rid of a boyfriend of Esther's (wonderful re-enactment here of Mother always watching). The police, doctors, church all made Esther give up Daisy on the day of Auntie Vi's funeral. Mother will always be watching unless Esther becomes invisible too. How dark this play suddenly turns! A bloody bag is produced from Daisy's patch pockets. Daisy has used a knife to prevent Mother from being able to keep a continual watch over Esther. Esther is distraught as she realises she will be blamed and says, "I know, we'll just tell the truth", but the hideous realisation sinks in. Daisy has covered her tracks well - her fingertips are painted with nail varnish so as to leave no fingerprints; the icecream man will remember that Esther bought a single icecream, so she cannot say she was in the park with a friend. Daisy is overjoyed with her ploy and starts chanting, "Daisy did it, Daisy did it". Esther takes over the chant as the cyc changes to blood red and Daisy retreats USL out of sight, accompanied by a strangely eerie rendition of *Daisy, Daisy, Give Me Your Answer Do.....*

## The New World Theatre Club, Luxembourg *The Ripple Effect*, by Robert Scott

Three gun shots ring out, dramatic silhouettes show up against a red cyc. Eva has just shot a man. No disputing it, there he lies, slumped on a chair, dead, and she with the gun still in her hand. Nicola, Eva's sister, asks her why. "Because he didn't even remember my name", she replies. Eva calls the police and gives herself up. She is extremely cool about it all, asking her sister whether she should put on eyeliner or not. We go back to just before the shooting. Nicola acts as Narrator. It's apparent that Eva and the man, Timothy, are on a second date but they don't know each other too well and it's dubious that Timothy remembers having met her before. She puts some very strange questions to him and makes him feel uncomfortable. With the Sister/Narrator, Nicola's, help, we are guided into the next scene which shows Eva getting ready for her date with Timothy. As Eva leaves the room, her phone rings and Nicola answers it, taking details of Timothy's address and, at the same time, finding a gun in Eva's handbag. "That's not the sort of protection you take on a date Eva." Eva's

reasoning comes tumbling out and she admits to her sister that Timothy is someone who is responsible for her having suffered all these years - we don't yet know why. Of course, Nicola pleads with Eva not to carry out her plan with the gun, but Eva is adamant that she will end it tonight, once and for all. Nicola narrates again and we are with Eva and Timothy on their first date - a blind date set up for them to meet in a restaurant. Timothy shows no reaction to hearing Eva's name, a name that, we're told, should be etched forever on his mind. Eva's first-date conversation is somewhat unusual, talking about a restaurant he isn't familiar with and asking him how many pairs of shoes does he think she owns. (18 is the answer). Lights dim and we see Timothy sitting centre stage. He is telling us of his past life losing his job, his wife, imprisoned for violence, alcohol and drug abuse, heart attack, then the decision to become clean. The scene changes to Eva and Nicola seated at the table. Nicola is telling her sister about Mark, her new fiancé. It seems that Nicola helped Eva through a tough time and it has taken Eva a while to get over this, having taken to alcohol and drugs to try to "numb the pain". Eva sees everything as the result of fate and destiny; Nicola prefers the "chaos theory". Eva agrees to be Nicola's Maid of Honour at her wedding to Mark. We slide back in time again and it appears that both Eva and Timothy are using the same drug dealer. Nicola finds Eva having taken an overdose of pills. Eva is blaming herself and Nicola for what happened to Gavin (first time I'd heard his name). Eva thinks it was all down to fate, Nicola thinks they were just random acts that led to the event. Eva says, "Every action has a consequence". This is the ripple effect of the title. All actions lead into each other. Nicola often comes to talk to us, the audience, and now she says, "You've seen how it ends, but every story must have a beginning." The next scene shows Timothy staggering on to the stage, bottle in hand. He is talking on his mobile, trying to hit on some drugs. Eva and Gavin enter, happily chatting. In two seconds, Eva has seen some shoes in a shop window, decides she must have them, and wheedles the money out of Gavin. In an altercation where Timothy asks for money that is refused him, Gavin gets stabbed. Eva's mother's necklace is taken by Timothy but then thrown back at her. Previously (you get the picture now), Gavin and Eva had agreed to go to Pandora's restaurant. They were also held up and made late by an emergency call from Nicola so, you see, Nicola also had a hand in the random events that turned into becoming their destiny. Some quotes from the very end of the play: "Trying to find another outcome". "Playing the story backwards and forwards". "Her mind sifting back through all the what ifs". "Let's make this a night we'll never forget". "I wouldn't have it any other way". Some notes on the staging of this play: The director has the cast remaining on stage throughout, even for scenes that they are not appearing in. Some audience members found this distracting. I rather like it. Also on stage left throughout the production is a musician, live musical interspersions always bring something extra to a production. The cyc changes colour very effectively with every scene change.

### ECC, Brussels *The Impotence of Being Frank*, an original script by Joe Wilde

On a darkened stage, a couple (Mary and Frederick Grass - apt name!) arrive outside a house, apparently to collect their friend for an evening out together. They find him slumped next to a glass of whisky and a bottle of aspirin and a suicide note. They manage to rouse him and he admits to having written the suicide note for someone else. Reading in a newspaper about the death of Ernest, they decide to tip off the police anonymously. With much confusion of identities and actions, the play romps on through a crazy police investigation. The style of the writing throughout has a staid, Victorian flavour about it, but of course cannot possibly achieve the distinctive wit of "a trivial comedy for serious people", even though at one point the line "a humbug!!!" is uttered.. The comedy is riotously fast-paced, helped along by such wonderful characters as PC Beasley, a loyal and well-meaning sidekick of the Detective Inspector, and Mrs Mulligatawnay, Frank's mother, who knits blue baby booties throughout the interrogation whilst sitting astride her exercise ball, dressed in shocking pink gym gear. The police investigation of the scene of the crime is carried out using a rolled out sheet of black paper, with the body shape marked out in white. Love it! Frank remains cool and calm throughout the interrogation, whisky glass held aloft. The dialogue is sharp, snappy and fast moving so please forgive me for not having followed all the twists and turns of the plot, the running gag about the importance of the open window being a case in point. The DI (in his odd socks) is so brilliant that he is able to determine the identity of the mystery caller by the unique combination of his nose and cough, even when "leading a red herring up a garden path". Finally all the suspects are invited to the police station, resulting in a Poirot-style gathering of all concerned for the Detective Inspector to reveal the denouement - at great length and very entertainingly. In his inimitable way, he proves to us all that the window, open or otherwise, is not suspicious and that the perpetrator came in through the door. In an amazing twist, we learn that Frank was writing the note for himself - as he is in fact Ernest; Frank and Ernest being truly identical twins who often switched places with each other, and Ernest had died of natural causes so - finally! - we get to hear of "the impotence of being Ernest" although, it is announced, that "the impotence of being Frank is better than the importance of being Ernest". (We'd all been waiting for that one).

### Tagora, Strasbourg *The Elephant Calf or The Provability of Any and Every Contention*, by Bertolt Brecht

A colourful and brilliantly lit stage greets us for the opening of this absurdist piece. We are in the jungle somewhere in colonial India, I should imagine. The animal and bird sounds are deafening, and it appears that three khaki-bedecked British soldiers are gathered at the bamboo bar to enjoy a drink and an entertainment from the concert party. The stage area has been set up under the trees, and we can see the theatre from the side. We can also see both behind and in front of the curtain. With the subtitle of *The Provability of Any and Every Contention*, the play-within-a-play sets out to prove that even the impossible is possible and every thing can be proven. The Elephant Calf is accused of killing his own mother who, surrealistically, appears alive and very well in the concert party's presentation. The Banana Tree, who is responsible for carrying the story and showering the audience with erudite explanations throughout, is there as judge of the jungle to prove the Elephant Calf's guilt, and the proceedings are overseen and judged by the Moon. (I have to insert here the fact that, when I first heard the line, "If you want to see something that makes sense, go to the urinal", it sounded to me like a suggestion to look to your own bodily appendages if you want to "see something that makes sense". But I soon started wondering if Brecht was referring to Marcel Duchamp's 1917 artwork, "Fountain". Does anyone have any opinion on this?) Throughout the totally disorderly proceedings, the shout of "Curtain!" often rings out and everyone withdraws either to the bar or to their backstage area behind the curtain. The concert party's performance is frequently held up by shambolic activity, such as the Elephant Calf pulling off the arm of Moon, leaving a gory, bloody stump, or Mother giving her monologue which the onstage audience greet with tumultuous applause. Rule Britannia rings out, but Elephant Calf and Moon manage to tie Mother up and pull her back and forth with the cord. If he is able to pull her out of the circle which has been drawn on the

ground, then Elephant Calf is her son, which proves that he is not a murderer. However the accusation sticks, much to the Elephant's wrath and he attacks the Banana Tree. After a charming song and dance routine, the concert party's play is over but the soldiers don't think they've had good value for money and want either for the play to go on longer or to have their money back. The Banana Tree admonishes us with the prophetic line, "Now we shall see whether this was fine theatre good or bad, my fine fellows." Well this audience enjoyed it and thought it good value for money, even if totally incomprehensible, as was to be expected.

## ESOC Theatre Group, Darmstadt *Bolero*, by David Ives

A darkened stage, a rumpled double bed, a monochromatic set. Westminster chimes ring out and we learn that the time is three o'clock in the morning. Moonlight is streaming in from a high window, lighting the bed where a woman suddenly sits up in panic, awakened by something she hears. Her male companion wakes to comfort her. "It's just the wind", he says, and performs a soothing ritual to help her back to sleep. This happens time and again, the woman is frantic with fear. The man is beginning to lose hope that he will ever be able to comfort her. (I must try some of those breathing exercises with arms above the head.) The woman is sure she hears voices and goes to listen to them against the fourth wall. The man is concerned about staying awake all night, the woman is more concerned with God and condemnation. We will never know what torments her so except that she is convinced that the world is about to fall down around her ears. The woman continues to listen at the "wall". She can hear breathing and then a loud bump. Now she (and we) can hear a female voice, moaning. The man tries to wave this off as being normal bedtime noises. But now the woman on the other side of the wall is crying and, finally, we hear a muffled "Help me". The man and woman are at odds as to what to do, the woman insistent that they should help, he not so much. They are talking over each other in a perfectly natural way, but not making any decision. Suddenly we hear shouts, "Open up in there. It's the police!" There's a blindingly bright light accompanied by a thunderous crashing noise. Finally what she has dreaded has happened and the sky has fallen in on her, punishing her for her transgressions.....

It is noteworthy that all three winning productions scored over 80 points each (out of a possible 100), and therefore all three are eligible to enter the British All Winners' Drama Festival taking place in Woking, England, from 14th to 20th July 2019. In writing this report, I don't intend it to be a critique, but rather a straightforward account for those FEATSGoers who were unable to be there this time, in order to give some idea of what was enjoyed.

Feel like making a comment? Write to me at:- [annie.dawes@orange.fr](mailto:annie.dawes@orange.fr)

CONGRATULATIONS to Chiara Venturini of ATC, Brussels whose play *Accelerated Intimacy* won the Best Original Script Award last year. The NDFA (National Drama Festivals Association) has awarded her **The Derek Jacobi Award for New Play Writing 2017-2018**.

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The main problems experienced by the Entity Organising Committee were the late arrival of Original Scripts, late changes to scripts and late sending of technical requirements for the teams. The technical team also found that several groups had not studied the technical package properly. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT PARTICIPATING GROUPS REALLY STUDY THE TECHNICAL PACKAGE !!!!

As you all know, it has been decided to limit the number of Original Scripts to a maximum of four per festival. It would be of help to the Organising Committee to know if a participating group is considering entering an Original Script when they reply to their invitation to take part in a festival. As the choice of Original Scripts, in the event of more than four being proposed, will be made by random draw, groups will need to have a backup production if their proposed entry is not accepted.

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If you are looking for a fun and instructive few days immersing yourself in theatricals, check out one of these summer schools.

### **Saturday 20 July - Sunday 28 July, LEATSS, Theatre Summer School**

LEATSS, Theatre Summer School, Saturday 20 July - Sunday 28 July. Centre d'Accueil, Clairefontaine (near Arlon), Luxembourg. LEATSS is a collaborative, project-based, week-long, residential summer school for actors, directors and music theatre singers. For more information: [www.leadss.lu](http://www.leadss.lu).

### **Monday 29 July - Saturday 3 August, Drama Association of Wales, Summer School 2019**

Drama Association of Wales (DAW), Summer School 2019, Monday 29 July - Saturday 3 August. This year's theme is 'Seriously Funny' with tutors from the Royal Shakespeare Company and will include sessions on acting, clowning and singing. For more information: [www.dramawales.org.uk](http://www.dramawales.org.uk).

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A very happy, restful and safe summer to you all !

## What's on in the theatre.

<u>When</u>	<u>Who</u>	<u>What</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>Contact</u>
<u>JULY</u>				
14 – 20	All Winners' Finals in Woking, Surrey		Rhoda McGaw Theatre	0844-841-7643
<u>OCTOBER</u>				
11-13, 18-20	FEST, Frankfurt	<i>Detainee</i>	Information at	<a href="http://www.festfrankfurt.org">www.festfrankfurt.org</a>
17-19	NWTC, Luxembourg	<i>Crime Scene Improvisation</i>	5 av. Marie-Thérèse	www.nwtc.lu
<u>NOVEMBER</u>				
6 – 9	ESOC, Darmstadt	<i>Puss in Boots</i>		<a href="http://esoctheatre.org">http://esoctheatre.org</a>
7-9, 14-16	Semi-Circle, Basel	<i>Six Short Plays</i>	Theater Arlecchino	<a href="mailto:info@semi-circle.ch">info@semi-circle.ch</a>
21 – 24	Village Players, Lausanne	<i>What the Dickens !</i>	CPO	villageplayers@gmail.com
29, 30	FEST, Frankfurt	<i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf</i>		www.festfrankfurt.org
<u>DECEMBER</u>				
1 ,6 - 8	FEST, Frankfurt	<i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf</i>		www.festfrankfurt.org

2020

May 29 – 1 June FEATS 2020 at Theater aan het Spui, The Hague with Ben Humphries as Adjudicator.

For information regarding events by Youth Music Theatre, go to [youthmusictheatreuk.org](http://youthmusictheatreuk.org)

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