

FEATS NEWSLETTER

May 2005

Congratulations to all the Hamburg team who did such a magnificent job on FEATS 2005. Even the weather gods looked kindly on us for most of the time – much to the amazement of more than one resident of the city! With a full Fringe programme, the party which went on until 6.00; two excellent workshops, a guided tour, not to mention some good theatre in the evening, everyone had a full and thoroughly enjoyable weekend. It was encouraging to see that so many people had made the journey and they were rewarded with a high standard of productions. This time we managed to compile a list, not just of the winners, but also of those who were nominated.

The prize-winners were:

**1st Place: Kast Cup
for Best Presentation**

ECC, Brussels, Belgium with *The Underground Lovers* by Jean Tardieu
translated by Colin Duckworth

**2nd Place: The Mervyn
Briscoe Award**

NEAT, Stuttgart, Germany with *Old Times* by Harold Pinter

**3rd Place: The Taché
Diamonds Award**

TIE, Brussels, Belgium with *Gum & Goo* by Howard Brenton

**Nominated for Best Actor
“Blackie” Award:**

A. Dummy (ECC) as The “Protector”
Tim Hancox (GEDS) as the Waiter in *My Irish Friend*
Richard Thayer (Tagora) as the Landlord in *Two*
Martin Wright (Tagora) as Mr Iger in *Two*.
John Stephens (TBP) as Leo in *I Can’t Remember Anything*
Patrick Griffin (TIE) as Phil in *Gum and Goo*.

WINNER:

Colum Hatchell (ECC) as **He** in *The Underground Lovers* by Jean Tardieu

**Nominated for Best Actress
“Blackie” Award:**

Helena Janczewska (ECC) as She in *The Underground Lovers*.
Trish Osmond (CATS) as Mrs Connelly in *Womberang*
Sue Wyatt (CATS) as Rita in *Womberang*
Philomena Beital (NEAT) as Kate in *Old Times*
Greta Redmond (NEAT) as Anna in *Old Times*
Bridget O’Loughlin (Tagora) as the Landlady in *Two*.
Margot Nisita (TBP) as Leonora in *I Can’t Remember Anything*
Siân Docksey (TIE) as Michele in *Gum and Goo*.

WINNER:

Debbie Roche as **Dolly** in *Womberang* by Sue Townsend

Best Stage Presentation

CATS,Rheindahlen for *Womberang* by Sue Townsend

The Grand Duchy Award: ECC, Brussels for *The Underground Lovers* by Jean Tardieu
NEAT, Stuttgart for *Old Times*
The Bonn Players for *I Can't Remember Anything* by Arthur Miller

WINNER: **Stockholm Players** for *The Fall of the House of Usher* by **E.A.Poe** adapted by **Harvey/Trodden**

Stage Management: The Marcel Huhn – Bruno Boeye Trophy ECC, Brussels for *The Underground Lovers* by Jean Tardieu
NEAT, Stuttgart for *Old Times* by Harold Pinter

WINNERS: **BATS, Antwerp** for *Ghost Writer* by **David Tristram** adapted by **BATS**

Best Original Script: Marq Riley (Out of Attica, Athens) for *Oslo*
The DAW – Verulam Award Katarina Trodden (Stockholm Players) for *The Fall of the House of Usher*

WINNER: **Charles Slovenski** for *My Irish Pal* performed by **GEDS**

Anthony Cornish Discretionary Award: “The two lovely ladies” who looked after the adjudicator before the performances.
NEAT for the creativity of their investigations prior to their production.
Marq Riley (Out of Attica) for his courage in writing, directing and acting.
CATS for Mrs Lovett’s appearance with her mop and bucket in *Womberang*.
CATS for the way they took the audience by storm with their dialogue
TBP for their research and understanding of the script in *I Can't Remember Anything*.
GEDS for the exit of the waiter in *My Irish Pal*.
The visual effect of Stockholm Players’ *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

WINNERS: **TIE for the artistry and creativity of Gum & Goo by Howard Brenton and for their bravery in putting such a young cast on a bare stage.**

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Having suddenly realised about a week before FEATS that I had not thought about persuading, inveigling or generally finding someone to write their impressions of the plays, it has fallen to me to do it. So, here are my thoughts as written down immediately after each play. As you will see, I mostly agree with Russell...

FEATS 2005 began with **NEAT** of Stuttgart’s production of Harold Pinter’s *Old Times* and, as with many Pinter plays, the audience is left unclear as to what was really going on. Is the visiting Anna real, or is she merely a figment of Kate’s imagination? The drab unicolour tan furniture quickly set the scene of the drab unicolour lives of Kate and Deeley, but I felt that the acting was often rather wooden, especially from Kate. Perhaps this was intentional on the part of the director. The play, however, livened up with the singing sequence. I thought this would make a good radio play. (See how wrong I was! Both actresses were nominated for the “Blackie” and the play received the 2nd Place Mervyn Briscoe Award.)

There followed **AATG’s** adaptation of John Fryer’s *Frankenstein* – an extremely challenging play with its many short scene changes which, unfortunately, did not always run smoothly. The set appeared to be a little too large for the stage leading to crowding, especially in the first and last scenes and there were some lighting problems which left characters underlit. Victor played with great enthusiasm but needed to slow down on some of his speeches; and, having once established

his cracked voice, the monster would have grated less had he resumed his normal voice. Still, AATG was extremely courageous for tackling such a difficult piece and making such a good showing of it.

The first night ended with **Tagora's** production of Jim Cartwright's *Two*, a play actually written for two actors who take all the parts. When I saw that Tagora had chosen to cast all parts separately, I felt it was a pity as it takes away the challenge of the original. However the result was extremely successful with good pace from the landlord and landlady and some lovely cameo parts: the old lady, Mr and Mrs Iger and Moth – what a mover! The stage was very effectively set with the back projected (?) bar optics and window.

Marq Riley's (**Out of Attica**) self-written, directed and acted *Oslo* was up first on Saturday evening. The remains of a heavy party were cleverly portrayed with what must be the ultimate 'set in a suitcase' consisting of blue balloons and a blue blow-up chair. But where were the lights? I know the text mentioned months of darkness in northern lands, but the audience needs to see what is going on: "if you cannot see the actor's face, you cannot hear him". Which was a pity as there was some good writing. More pace was needed in places as well as more light and shade of the voice, but it is almost impossible to direct oneself, even for the seasoned actor which Marq is.

CATS' Womberang by Sue Townsend had us all roaring with laughter right from the start. We have all seen the colourless, cheerless hospital waiting room which met our eyes as the curtain opened. However the placing of the secretary's desk and, later, the chairs which the patients moved to centre stage, meant we frequently missed seeing actors' faces and led to some awkward traffic problems. What a pity we lost some of the lines because characters spoke over laughter. The rapid pace dropped a little as Mrs Cornwallis entered, but this was partly due to the fact that she had to edge her way from upstage round the chairs and the wonderful corset-clad, dancing Mrs Connelly. There were some really strong performances, both from Rita and her side-kick Dolly who gave back as good as she got. Unfortunately the play overran the allotted time by quite a way and CATS incurred penalty points which almost certainly cost them one of the 'pots.'

Even before the curtains opened on **ECC's** *The Underground Lovers* by Jean Tardieu, (translated by Colin Duckworth), we knew we were off to London from the beautiful gobo representations of Tower Bridge and Big Ben which appeared one either side of the proscenium arch. When they opened the simple set made obvious that we were in a busy Underground station full of faceless people, cleverly portrayed by the use of white face make-up. There were well-choreographed moves – everyone moved together when the train stopped - and good ensemble playing throughout. The 'gobbledegook' interpretation scene was very successful and although the pace dipped a little at the beginning of the train journey, it picked up again as He tried to reach She through the crowded train. The whole cast must have practised remaining perfectly still for ages, their holding of the same position was excellent (especially A. Dummy as the "Protector"!)

An enthralling piece of theatre.

Having seen the exuberant performance put on by **TIE** last year, we were all interested to see what they would come up with this year. And we were not disappointed. All they had were an extra spot at each corner of the stage, a smoke machine and three talented young actors. *Gum and Goo* is a disturbing play about what can happen to young people when they are not listened to by the adults who are supposed to be caring for them; about taunting and bullying when they get out of hand. Although partly played in the dark, we were able to see the speakers' faces in the well-rehearsed and synchronised torch light which added a further nightmarish dimension to the action. The strident music was well chosen, if a fraction too loud for my ears. (I know shock and horror were being portrayed, but nevertheless...) The adults could have been a little more 'larger than life' as a contrast to the young people. But if the actors of TIE are anything to go by, we have no need to worry about future of FEATS.

The costumes and the cluttered, unmatched kitchen furniture served **TBP's** *I Can't Remember Anything* by Arthur Miller well. There was a good contrast in characterisation between the sprightly Leonora and the arthritic Leo. Here was another play which left the audience guessing: can Leonora really not remember anything, or is she just playacting to retain some company in her old age? This is a sad little tale of old age with flashbacks to happier, friend-filled times, though we learn that Leonora has always been lonely. The pace dropped at one point but the dance certainly brought back a bit of youth to both characters.

GEDS offering was the first act of Charles Slovenski's *My Irish Pal*. It might have been better to have cut the references to the Escalade in Geneva as only a few members of the audience would have understood them. However, the crowd noises for the race were good. Again there was a good set indicating several venues, but unfortunately the many changes tended to slow down the action. There was a lovely cameo from the waiter. This year was the FEATS year of dance as once again, there was a dance sequence which, again, livened up the action. Although this was just Act I and it stood alone, the audience was left with questions: how does it end? Do the two 'live happily ever after' or does the drink win, or AIDS?

The last night of FEATS came all too quickly and the **Stockholm Players** took us straight into a sense of foreboding with their very effective use of levels and the excellent and complicated lighting and sound plots. The last both on a sound track and live from the chorus who, further, created the dark forest, the never-ending corridors of the doomed house and its final fall with well choreographed moves. The visual effect was stunning, but, unfortunately, the action was sometimes a little flat, needing more levels of mood. Should the lights have been a little brighter as the friend leaves to symbolise the end of the evil?

It was all too clean for **Entity's** *Mr Nobody* by Philip Ralph. There was no dirt and not much clutter in the attic storage area where Jean has set up her meeting with Mr Nobody. Not only that, Mr Nobody himself was far too clean. At first I felt he was sometimes playing a little too much the archetypal theatrical drunk, but as the play unfolded I decided that this was deliberate. I was sure that Mr Nobody knew exactly who he was and that he really was Claire's husband but had no interest in returning to a poor relationship. However, this was another play which could be played several ways, leaving the audience with unanswered questions. Was he, or was he not Claire's husband? And would he eventually go back to Claire? An intriguing play.

BATS adaptation of Act II of David Tristram's *Ghost Writer* brought FEATS 2005 to a close. This is a spoof murder mystery with its cast of exaggerated characters: the camp actor, the aging ham; the would-be eternal Juliet and the ingénue all met together in the – supposedly – mean garret of the struggling playwright. Again it was all too clean and tidy. The dead wife's red costume was good, but the men's costumes were too conservative and could have been far more in keeping with the characters. It was a play which should have been fast and furious, bordering on the farce and leaving the audience breathless. Unfortunately, the only really O.T.T. bit was the hellfire effect at the end, and it had the audience laughing.

All in all I felt we enjoyed a high level of theatre at FEATS 2005. Congratulations to all the groups who played!

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For those of you who are not really sure how teams are chosen to participate in FEATS, there follows an explanation lifted from the website (with the blessing of the webmaster.)

“The FEATS list system was introduced in 1993 with a view to ensuring a more even participation by groups.

It works by maintaining a three-list “table”, in which the top four groups in each list are given preference in the selection process, groups further down the table being asked if they are willing to be called as reserves at a later date. A team that *does* take part is moved to the bottom of the list for next year's selection.

Thus, it is not a merit list, but a rota based on participation in FEATS.

Over the years, as groups' activities have changed, as new groups have been created and old ones have faded out, the spread between the three lists had become uneven, with the consequence that certain groups were taking part in FEATS more than others (as a result of coming in as reserve, sometimes at very short notice).

The FEATS Steering Committee has therefore undertaken a review of the lists. The aim was to ensure an even spread between those groups who take part in FEATS on a regular basis and those who participate less frequently – for lack of resources, geographical reasons or other.

The lists published below – in alphabetical order, not according to the groups' current position in the rota – will be implemented for inviting participation in FEATS 2006.”

<u>List A</u>	<u>List B</u>	<u>List C</u>
Entity, Munich	ACTS, Stuttgart	AATG, The Hague
GEDS, Geneva	ECC, Brussels	ATC, Brussels
ITG, Brussels	FEST, Frankfurt	BATS, Antwerp
NEAT, Stuttgart	Hamburg Players	BSS, Brussels
Oslo Shakespeare Company	In Players, Amsterdam	CATS, Rheindahlen
Round Tower Players, Luxembourg	Out of Attica, Athens	ESOC, Darmstadt
Semi-Circle, Basel	Tagora, Strasbourg	OADS
The Bonn Players	Theater de WAANzin, Ghent	NWTC, Luxembourg
Village Players, Lausanne	TIE, Brussels	Stockholm Players

At his entertaining and informative workshop Russell Whiteley led us into the workings of the adjudicator's brain as he, or she, assesses a production in festival. For all who are looking to put on a performance for a future FEATS, or indeed, any production at all, it might be interesting to peruse the following which I reprint with Russell's permission.

GODA (Guild of Drama Adjudicators) have clear guidelines for their markings, taking into account Stage Presentation (15 marks); Direction (35); Acting (40) and Dramatic Achievement (10), giving a total of 100 marks, to which FEATS has added a further 10 marks for 'Innovation'. Each post has a scale of marks:

Stage Presentation

0 – 5 Poor

- The settings and furnishings are inappropriate
- There is little understanding of the interaction of design skills
- The use of lighting and sound is inappropriate and there are problems with the execution
- The use of costume and make-up is inappropriate to the text

6 – 9 Poor with redeeming features: Fair: Moderately good

- The settings and furnishings are just acceptable but unimaginative
- There is some understanding of the interaction of design skills
- The use of lighting and sound is pedestrian and there may be problems with the execution
- The use of costume and make-up is just acceptable

10- 12 Moderately good: Good: Very good

- The settings and furnishings demonstrate appropriate creativity
- There is very good understanding of the interaction of design skills
- The use of lighting and sound is creative and appropriate in creating atmosphere and mood. They are executed successfully
- The use of costume and make-up communicate the characters successfully to the audience.

13 – 15 Excellent: Outstanding

- The settings and furnishings enhance the production very creatively and indicate 'place' with great immediacy
- There is an excellent understanding of the interaction of all design skills
- The use of lighting and sound underpin the production very creatively to create mood and atmosphere. They are created with great precision
- The use of costume and make-up have a strong impact on the audience and communicate the attributes of the characters immediately and accurately.

Direction

0 – 15 Poor

- There is a lack of creativity and little understanding of interpretation of text
- There is little evidence of the creation of an ensemble piece
- The use of stage groupings and movement of the actors is inappropriate and lack indication of motivation

- Pacing is inadequate and there is very little attention to the shape of the piece

16 – 20 Poor with redeeming features: Fair: Moderately good

- There is some creativity and understanding of interpretation of text
- There is some evidence of the creation of an ensemble piece
- The use of stage groupings and movement of the actors is reasonable and show some understanding of motivation
- Pacing is reasonable and there is some attempt at shaping the piece

21- 29 Moderately good: Good: Very good

- There is a creative approach to the understanding and communication of text
- There is evidence of the creation of an ensemble piece
- There is good command of stage groupings and the movement of the actors displays a good understanding of motivation
- Pacing is appropriate and the shaping of the piece is confident and successful

30 – 35 Excellent: Outstanding

- There is an extremely creative approach to the production and the text is interpreted with depth and insight
- The creation of an ensemble playing is secure and excellent
- There is excellent command of effective stage groupings and the movement is underpinned by a very firm understanding of motivation
- Pacing is relentlessly secure and the shaping of the piece demonstrates an excellent understanding of theatrical dynamics

Acting

0 –16 Poor

- Characterisation demonstrates a superficial approach and communication with the audience is fleeting
- There is little obvious support between members of the cast
- There is a limited command of appropriate movement and/or vocal skills
- There is a lack of confidence and hesitancy in the performances

17 – 23 Poor with redeeming features: Fair: Moderately good

- Characterisation is adequate but not sustained. There is some awareness of audience
- There is evidence of some support between members of the cast
- Command of appropriate movement and/or vocal skills will occasionally be demonstrated effectively
- At times the actors communicate some confidence in performance

24- 31 Moderately good: Good: Very good

- Characterisation is secure and demonstrates creativity in realisation. Performers are very aware of audience
- There is evidence of positive support between members of the cast

- There will be a positive command and control of appropriate movement and/or vocal skills
- Actors will perform with confidence and skill

32 - 40 Excellent: Outstanding

- Characterisation is created with sensitivity, originality and flair. There is a thorough awareness of audience
- The support between members of the cast demonstrates commitment and a high degree of understanding of ensemble playing
- There is a complete command of appropriate movement and/vocal skills
- The actors demonstrate an excellent understanding of theatre skills within their totally convincing performances

Dramatic Achievement

0 – 3 Poor

- Very poor communication with the audience
- Inadequate realisation and interpretation of the text
- Little or no dramatic impact
- Very little interaction between the actors

4 – 6 Poor with redeeming features: Fair: Moderately good

- Reasonable communication with the audience
- Just acceptable realisation and interpretation of the text
- Adequate dramatic impact
- Occasional interaction between the actors

7- 8 Good: Very good

- Good/very good communication with the audience
- Secure, confident realisation and interpretation of the text
- Creative and confident dramatic impact
- Good/very good quality interaction between the actors

9 -10 Excellent: Outstanding

- Highly developed understanding of theatrical communication
- Sensitive and imaginative realisation and interpretation of the text
- Expertise of the company is obvious in the creation of highly effective dramatic impact
- Generous, unselfish and theatrical artistry ensures positive interaction between the actors

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And, talking of **GODA** there is what looks as though it will be a very interesting **conference** 'to examine the future of the Festival Movement', at the **Crescent Theatre, Birmingham on 24th September 2005**. Topics include the marketing of festivals, plenary sessions on forging links between the amateur and professional theatre and also topics such as child protection policy and ethnic minority involvement, as well as sessions where delegates can share experiences and conclusions. There will be a tour of the theatre and its extensive wardrobe. Cost for the day,

including a buffet lunch, wine and refreshments is £ 49. For application form please contact Russell Whiteley, 41 Church Lane, Normanton, West Yorkshire, WF6 1EZ, or telephone +44 / 1924 – 893361

IMPORTANT: Please make sure that if your group's FEATS contact changes, you inform Angela Dodds, FEATS Permanent Secretary (**Secretary_[at]FEATS.org**) of the new details so that we do not lose contact with your group.

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The Drama Association of Wales (DAW) is once more organising a Theatre Summer School at the University of Wales, Lampeter, from 7th – 13th August 2005. This year there is a choice of two courses: 'The Actor and The Body', "based on a technique originally created by the French master Etienne Decroux so that an actor could have complete control over his or her physical abilities in order to create a deeper artistic expression". The course will include classes in technique, improvisation, repertoire (pieces created by Decroux) and composition.

The other course, 'From Page to Stage' will look at Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*; Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*; Mary Beth Henley's *Crimes of the Heart* and, possibly, scenes from Neil Simon, Edward Albee and David Mamet. There will be accent workshops in Standard American and South American accents.

Cost £360 with tuition, accommodation and full board.

For further information contact DAW, The Old Library, Singleton Road, Splott, Cardiff, CF24 2ET, Tel: +44 / 29 2945 2299 or by e-mail at [aled.daw_{\[at\]}virgin.net](mailto:aled.daw@virgin.net)

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And now, after the splendid weekend in Hamburg, onwards and upwards - sorry, southwards – to Luxembourg for the **30th Anniversary of FEATS. FEATS 2006**, with Mike Tilbury as adjudicator, will be held from **2nd – 5th June** in the Centre des Arts Pluriels (CAPe) in Ettelbruck about 30 kms north of Luxembourg city. The theatre is situated in the centre of Ettelbruck, within two minutes walk of numerous cafés and restaurants and some 400 parking places. The 450 seat theatre is housed in a spacious, modern building which also contains a small, 120 seat theatre which will be used for the Fringe as well as a large space where the party will take place. There are hotels of various star ratings and also camping facilities within a radius of about 6 kms

THEATRE DATES FOR 2005

<u>WHEN</u>	<u>WHO</u>	<u>WHAT</u>	<u>WHERE</u>	<u>CONTACT</u>
<u>June</u>				
17 – 19	BSS, Brussels	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	Corroy-le-Château	tickets_[en]shaksoc.com
<u>July</u>				
1 and 8	Tagora	<i>Bond Does It Again</i>	Laiterie	www.kastor.net/tagora
<u>October</u>				
12 – 15	ECC, Brussels	<i>My Night with Reg</i>	Studio Theatre Schaarbeek	http://users.skynet.be/am269035/ecc
<u>November</u>				
14 – 19	NWTC, Luxembourg	<i>A Christmas Carol</i>	Abbaye de Neumunster	www.nwtc.lu
22 – 26	The Bonn Players	<i>The Constant Wife</i>	Wohnstift Augustinum Bonn	www.bonnplayers.de

PLEASE SEND ANY CHANGE OF GROUP CONTACT TO: [Secretary_{\[en\]}FEATS.org](mailto:Secretary@FEATS.org)

AND ANY INFORMATION FOR INCLUSION IN THE NEWSLETTER OR ON THE FEATS WEBSITE TO: [Editor_{\[en\]}FEATS.ORG](mailto:Editor@FEATS.ORG)
[Webmaster_{\[en\]}FEATS.ORG](mailto:Webmaster@FEATS.ORG)

OR BY ORDINARY MAIL TO: Sue Seth
Ancien Presbytère
F – 32350 St Arailles