

FEATS _____ Steering committee

Geneva, 6 November 2010: minutes

Present: Andy Ing (ECC, chair), Deborah Fulton-Anderson (NWTC), Gill Atkinson (stage manager), Pat Arn (BATS), David Mark (FEST), David Crowe (secretary), Wendy-Jane Jones (FEST), Evonne Dunne (AATG), Jane Easton (GEDS), John Newsome (GEDS)

The meeting began at 14.02 on 6 November 2010 with Andy Ing (ECC) in the chair.

1 Apologies for absence

Sue Seth (newsletter), Tony Broscomb (NDFFA liaison)

2 Minutes of the meeting held in Bad Homburg on 16 May 2010

The minutes were approved on the proposal of Pat, seconded by Wendy. There were no matters arising.

3 Reports on

- NDFFA/GODA. Tony's report was presented in writing (see meeting documentation).

Deborah gave feedback on the 2010 All Winners Festival, in which NWTC won the stage management award. She thought that their experience of FEATS, and its general high level of organisation, had stood them in good stead.

The organisers of the 2011 All Winners Festival, to be held in Guernsey, have agreed to accept an entry from the FEATS winner, although the closing date will, strictly, have passed before the winner of FEATS is known.

Tony had also notified the committee of his resignation as liaison with NDFFA. Andy expressed regret on behalf of the whole committee. David was requested, as secretary, to send some formal words of thanks to Tony for his helpful input over the years. The general feeling was that no replacement would be sought immediately, it being difficult to find anyone with the same close relationship both to FEATS and to the UK amateur theatre world as Tony has. The possibility of approaching Tony from time to time for specialist advice was welcomed.

The secretary sent the following message to Tony shortly afterwards:

Dear Tony

The FEATS steering committee has mandated me to write to you to acknowledge – with regret – your resignation from regular participation in its activities. And, needless to say, to thank you for your contribution, in various capacities, throughout the years.

If I have been slow in doing this, it is partly due to a very busy personal schedule since the last committee meeting (including a week's holiday); but mainly to a desire to do justice to a message such as this, and not be content with dashing off a few lines.

As you know, I am a relative newcomer; but, like those who have been around FEATS for a while, I now know you as someone who can be counted on to take a sensible approach to things: someone who will provide sound advice when needed, but who also knows when not to interfere – a rare quality. In recent years I have realised that your continuing involvement in FEATS is part of the cement that has held the loose federation together for so long.

After your return to England, despite the barrier that still separates Britain from the Continent, you maintained your connections with us, editing the FEATS newsletter for many years. You have also performed invaluable service as our eyes and ears in NDFA. We thank you both for the titbits of information and for the more in-depth analysis of the hot topics under discussion in the world of amateur theatre in the United Kingdom. I shall long remember reading your account of selecting GODA adjudicators, which gave a valuable insight into the responsibilities involved.

The steering committee hopes that you will stay in contact with FEATS for many years to come, and that if the occasion arises you will still be available to give us the benefit of your experience and advice. We wish you and Ann all the best, and look forward to seeing you at FEATS – or elsewhere – in the future.

Yours sincerely

David

David Crowe
FEATS secretary
on behalf of the FEATS steering committee

- The newsletter

Little to report. Sign-ups via the Web site continue to trickle in.

- The Web site and database

David C reported that the promised database was now on-line and functioning. Deborah said she welcomed it, and expressed approval in particular of the search facility. One person had suggested that the presence of the “log on” box was confusing. David said it was an as yet unused function of the Web site and could easily be removed or made less conspicuous.

He obtained the agreement of the committee to contact all the FEATS groups and ask each of them to check their own entries in the database, some mistakes having been introduced by the various manipulations of the data. [This was done shortly afterwards, and the feedback was very positive.]

4 Report on FEATS 2010 (Bad Homburg, 13-16 May 2010)

A very full written report was submitted by FEST. David M explained that the aim had been to get as much as possible down for the record – looking towards FEST’s own future use, in addition to helping with preparations for FEATS in Geneva. Commenting on sponsorship, he said it had been difficult this year, with many companies feeling the pinch. What sponsorship they had had was given more as a favour than for sound commercial reasons. He suggested that it might be worth looking for longer-term commitment from sponsors – support for the festival over a number of years, not just for one local FEATS. This would necessarily be the responsibility of the steering committee.

He said that contact with the local authority had been important, offering resources and guaranteed press attention.

Suggestions for the future:

- ◆ Make the most of local audience potential.
- ◆ Bear in mind continuity from one year to the next.
- ◆ Greater awareness of long-term public relations issues on the part of the steering committee.

David M also mentioned the recurring problem of groups not having read the data package. Gill stressed the importance of having sufficient technical expertise in the host group. The idea of allowing first-night technical crews to view the theatre the previous evening – to avoid the disadvantage of going into the theatre “cold” – had worked well.

Andy, on behalf of the steering committee, said what a positive experience FEATS 2010 had been, and what a pleasure it was to work with an efficient team.

5 Handover of chairmanship from ECC to FEST

Wendy-Jane Jones (FEST) took over the chair, and proposed a vote of thanks to Andy.

6 Report: preparations for FEATS 2011 (Geneva, 10-13 June 2011)

Jane supplied brief background notes. She said that a strong GEDS team was in place, and that the organisation was largely based on their experience in 1999. A bank account had been set up in euros to facilitate payments from the euro-zone. The fringe would be held in the theatre complex, as would the party, which would take the form of a sit-down meal. David M recommended encouraging party-goers to book early by offering a reduced rate to those who did so.

The adjudicator was to be accommodated in a separate hotel. The upper limit on play length would be set at 50 minutes.

Wendy thanked Jane for the lunch, and said she was looking forward to FEATS in Geneva.

7 Report: preparations for FEATS 2012 (Antwerp, 25-28 May 2012)

Pat reported that a full organising committee had been set up and was meeting monthly. BATS' favourable experience of Bad Homburg had created a lot of enthusiasm among younger members. In addition to the fringe, FEATS Antwerp would be staging a FEATlets competition for youth groups.

8 FEATS lists: possible revision, followed by selection of groups for FEATS 2011

On the basis of the lists, the groups to be invited to FEATS 2011, together with reserves, were selected. Jane had offered the Zurich Comedy Club a chance to take part, so with the steering committee's agreement they were added to list A.

The lists should be re-examined at a future meeting with a view to improving the distribution.

9 Signature of amendment to FEATS rules concerning original scripts

The revised version of the rules – incorporating the changes to the definition of an original script – was signed by the members of the steering committee.

10 FEATS steering committee accounts

David C presented a statement of the bank account set up on behalf of FEATS, now enriched by the Bad Homburg entry fees and the final transfer of funds from the previous account held in Angela's name. The committee agreed with his suggestion that presenting the accounts once a year, at the autumn meeting, would be sufficient. He said that on-line access to the account would be arranged for Wendy shortly.

11 Trophies

- Replacement of missing plaques using steering committee funds

Wendy explained that several winners' plaques were missing from the trophies, some having dropped off, others never having been added. After a short discussion about how to organise their replacement, Deborah suggested abandoning the plaques all together in favour of a "board of honour" – a movable display panel bearing all winners' names which could be set up at each festival. She agreed to investigate the possibilities and get an idea of prices.

- Reminder to winning groups to bring *clean* trophies to Geneva

Jane and team please note!

12 Any other business

David C took the floor to draw attention to a particular concern he had. After a full "cycle" of attending steering committee meetings (since taking over the Web site after FEATS in Bad Homburg 2003) he had learnt a lot about the functioning of the steering committee and how FEATS worked from one year to the next. This insight, however, was denied to those whose groups were not represented on the steering committee and had not hosted FEATS. There was a real risk of the steering committee appearing remote and of "outsiders" having a distorted impression of its responsibilities, its acts, and the rationale behind its decision-making. Perhaps there might be ways to improve transparency, such as allowing observers at steering committee meetings or publishing short reports of the

meetings. He asked the committee to reflect on this with a view to discussing it in more depth at a future meeting.

Wendy thanked David for raising the issue and said it deserved consideration.

13 Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting was fixed for 2 April 2011.

The meeting was closed at 16.50.