

# FEATS NEWSLETTER

June 2026

Well, the weather gods were really on our side for FEATS 2026 in The Hague! It was so good to see friends met at previous FEATS and make new friends. It was also extremely encouraging to see the theatre more or less full every night. And a good number in each audience were attending for the first time. Congratulations to the AATG team for all their hard work in enrolling so many volunteers and advertising the event so well. Congratulations also on the swift and calm handling of the medical emergency which occurred on the first night. (Happily the victim recovered), and well done to the actors of ITG who managed to pick up the thread again once the emergency was over.

We had a full weekend of good theatre both on the main stage (if with, perhaps, 'too much profile') and on the fringe, as well as workshops and guided tours. AATG had produced a very impressive programme, packed full of information. It would, though, have been good to indicate where groups playing on the fringe were from. Perhaps just a plain typed page at the venue? The Forum was well attended as was the ever-popular Skit first introduced and directed twenty years ago by FEATS stalwart Martin Kirk, not with us this year in body through ill health, but certainly with us in spirit.

FEATS has a strict set of rules which are conveyed to the groups as part of the technical pack. Infringement of these rules leads to disqualification from some awards. The rules are not just for show, they are there to ensure that each group plays under the same conditions and are for the safety of all. Unfortunately three groups had to be disqualified from some awards because of non-compliance.

The Winners were :

\* Denotes nomination for the award.

The John Kearey Award (Best Production)	Hamburg Players	<i>Escaped Alone</i>
Second Place	ITG, Brussels	<i>Love in a Glass Jar</i>
Third Place	Semi-Circle, Basel	<i>Another Moon</i>
Blackie Award for Best Actor	Antony Sullivan	Semi-Circle, Basel
	Jack Goldsworthy*	GEDS, Geneva
	David Parrott*	LWTC, Lucerne
Blackie Award for Best Actress	Veronika Reis	FEST, Frankfurt
	Nora Farrell*	Hamburg Players
	Moebh Butler*	ITG, Brussels
Grand Duchy Trophy (Best Stage Presentation)	LWTC, Lucerne	<i>Doubles</i>
	EYT, Brussels*	<i>Zero for Young Dudes</i>
	ITG, Brussels*	<i>Love in a Glass Jar</i>
Marcel Huhn & Bruno Boeye (Stage Management)	ITG, Brussels	<i>Love in a Glass Jar</i>
	Semi-Circle, Basel*	<i>Another Moon</i>
	Hamburg Players*	<i>Escaped Alone</i>
William Valk Award (Original Script)	WILDe Theatre, Rotterdam	<i>Tell them we waited</i>
	GEDS, Geneva*	<i>Hamlet Draft I</i>

Sonny Pathak (Adjudicator's Discretionary)

WILDe Theatre

*Picking up of Liam*

GEDS, Geneva\*

*Backward exit*

EYT, Brussels\*

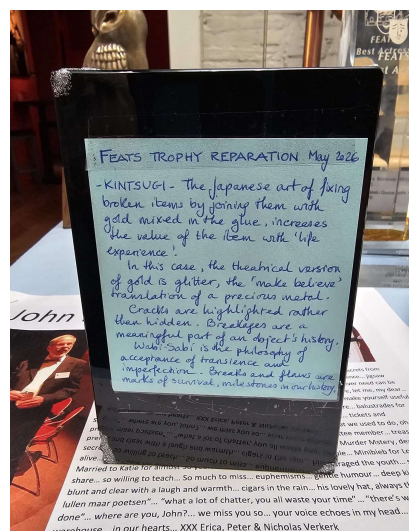
*Crucifixion scene*

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The trophy for Best Production has been replaced as there was no more room on the old one for the winners' names. The new one, dedicated to John Kearey, is a beautiful hand-crafted depiction of theatre masks carved out of reclaimed wood. It also has a tag on the base which, apparently, will allow one to see the winners' names on their smartphones !

The Grand Duchy Trophy was, unfortunately, damaged in transit and has now been repaired using the ancient Japanese art of Kintsugi whereby broken objects are mended by adding gold to the glue. An explanation now accompanies the trophy.



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As ever I am indebted to my good friend and longtime FEATS travelling companion, Annie Dawes, for her excellent, informative and detailed résumés of the plays. Happy reading !

## Report on Productions at FEATS 2026 The Hague, Netherlands

**Friday 22 May - First Night**

***Love in a Glass Jar* by Nancy Harris  
The Irish Theatre Group (Brussels)**

This two-hander opens in memorable fashion with the unmistakable sound of a loo flush, swiftly followed by a rendition of "Stranger in Paradise" - a song which later proves to be a quietly poignant clue to the emotional heart of the play.

The action unfolds against rich red mid-tabs, with Andy Warhol's iconic *Marilyn* print hanging proudly above the bed. The set instantly evokes an anonymous hotel room: the corner bath tucked discreetly behind a faux-wood partition, the over-dressed bed complete with its mountain of entirely impractical cushions. Although suitably atmospheric, the Adjudicator did wonder whether the room might have benefited from feeling slightly more clinical, given the subject matter at the centre of the story. Patrick's nervous energy is palpable from the outset. He raids the minibar, awkwardly attempts seductive poses across the bed, yet clearly lacks either confidence or conviction. He is waiting for someone - and eventually she arrives.

Their initial exchanges are wonderfully circular and hesitant, full of conversational dead ends and awkward probing. Eventually we discover that her name is Eve, not Colette, and that the pair have never actually met before. Which immediately raises the question: why are they here together? Eve, primly dressed and armed with an arsenal of awkward jokes, does not remotely resemble the stereotypical hotel-room call girl Patrick may have been expecting. Their rapid-fire dialogue darts between memories, insecurities and emotional confessions, while still carefully avoiding the real reason for their meeting.

Gradually, however, clues begin to emerge. Eve's overnight bag contains an increasingly curious collection of props - most memorably a wodge of girlie magazines - and finally the audience begins putting the pieces together. Is she a therapist of some kind? Her sensible clothes and restrained demeanour hardly suggest it.

Then come the sterile specimen cup, the syringe and the catheter, all carefully produced from her online-purchased fertility kit. At this point, the penny finally drops. Patrick is to be a sperm donor for Eve, a single woman determined to have a child without emotional entanglements or long-term obligations.

From here, the play becomes less about the practicalities of conception and more about two lonely people carefully circling one another emotionally. With hesitant honesty, they reveal the paths that have brought them to this strange hotel-room encounter. Patrick's tentative invitation to dinner is gently but firmly refused, and his discovery that he is not Eve's only potential donor leaves him comically and disproportionately wounded. Eventually, clutching the magazine featuring "the hairy bird", Patrick retreats to the bathroom to complete his task. While his increasingly high-pitched comments drift through the door, Eve delivers a touching monologue about the choices and disappointments that have shaped her life. She reflects that her sisters would probably think her the odd one out - that it would somehow seem more normal to "get drunk and shag a stranger" than pursue motherhood this way - while Patrick ruefully muses on ageing and the uncomfortable truth that you don't get any faster "in any department".

What could easily have become merely a quirky premise instead develops into something surprisingly tender, funny and human. Beneath the awkwardness and comic embarrassment lies a thoughtful exploration of loneliness, connection, and the complicated ways people try to build a future for themselves.

*Love in a Glass Jar* was awarded The ECC Centennial Cup for Second Place.

Maebh Butler playing Eve was nominated for The Blackie Award for Best Actress.

*Love in a Glass Jar* was nominated for Best Stage Presentation.

The Irish Theatre Group (Brussels) was awarded the Marcel Huhn-Bruno Boeye Memorial Award for Best Stage Management.

***Hamlet Draft 1* by William Shakespeare an original script by Gary Bird  
Geneva English Drama Society**

A fine olde English romp from beginning to end, this production presents the tale of Hamlet as though drawn from a manuscript discovered at a Derbyshire rummage sale - believed, we are told, to be the long-lost first draft of Shakespeare's immortal classic, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*.

The addition of a mellifluously voiced Narrator was inspired. A cast of ten charge exuberantly through the storyline we all know and love, employing sandwiches as weapons to great comedic effect. One by one, each cast member is fatally stabbed or poisoned, with more than one murder committed through the theatre's side masking curtains - or "arrases." In an inventive twist, the players somehow all manage to kill each other, with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern even drawing swords on one another. From memory, I believe their deaths are not actually shown on stage in Shakespeare's final version, but merely reported. Never mind - the result here is uproariously entertaining and, although Shakespeare's eventual text may have become considerably wordier, we are assured the ending remained much the same.

With cleverly suggested costumes and wonderfully constructed crowns, the cast are clearly having a blast - and so are we. There is excellent physical comedy throughout, with many delightfully inventive moments, earning this production a nomination for the Sonny Pathak Discretionary Award.

The true star of the production, however, was the lighting of the cyclorama, which shifted subtly yet completely with every scene change, often almost imperceptibly. Aside from the occasional chair, the stage remained entirely bare, giving this energetic cast free rein to make use of every inch of it.

The teamwork of this exceptionally talented ensemble brought *Hamlet* to the masses in the most enjoyable way imaginable. I suspect I shall never watch Shakespeare's finished version in quite the same way again.

**Hamlet's reverse moonwalk was nominated for the Sonny Pathak Discretionary Award.**

**Jack Goldsworthy playing Horatio was nominated for the Blackie Award for Best Actor.**

***Hamlet Draft 1 by William Shakespeare* by Gary Bird was eligible for The William Valk Award for Best Original Script.**

### ***Outdoor Pleasures* by Jean McConnell**

#### **Tagora (Strasbourg)**

What a beautifully vibrant colour palette we were treated to in our third play of the evening. The full projected backdrop of an English stately home - rolling lawns, manicured grounds and a brilliant blue sky - positively glowed, creating the perfect setting for an open-air performance of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. I particularly loved the little cut-out bright green cartoon-style bushes standing here and there.

That, at least, is what Deirdre and her elderly, wonderfully curmudgeonly Aunt Tottie have come to enjoy, picnic in tow. Matching the vitality of the colourful backdrop, Deirdre is dressed in a striking flame orange outfit, while Aunt Tottie is attired much more soberly in tweeds, felt hat, cardi and sensible shoes.

For most of the play, the pair are occupied with setting up their picnic, battling unsuccessfully with opening a champagne bottle, and generally trying to get themselves comfortable. All the while, Deirdre keeps reassuring her aunt that they have secured the perfect viewing spot - only to discover that the performance area has actually been moved to another lawn altogether. You can imagine her frustration after all that effort when she realises they have to pack everything up and relocate. What follows is a masterclass in striking a very proppey set at speed, as the two women make their exit in opposite directions: Deirdre charging off in pursuit of Shakespeare, deckchairs under her arms, while Aunt Tottie nimbly skips away in the opposite direction clutching the champagne bottle.

Their picnic was never destined to be a peaceful one, with interruptions from aircraft noise, the weather, uncomfortable seating, food, and the surrounding audience. Yet it's the growing tension - and affection - between the two women that makes the play such an entertaining and sharply observed comedy about family obligation, patience, and public behaviour.

**Saturday 23 May**

***Here Comes the Sun* by Heli Pärna  
Cross-Gartered Players (Brussels)**

The play opens with three very drunk young men entering noisily through the auditorium and making their way unsteadily up the steps to the stage apron in front of those rich ruby red curtains. Their behaviour immediately establishes the atmosphere of a stag night in Amsterdam (not that we would know, Madame Adjudicator). One of the men appears so intoxicated that it is surprising he manages to remain upright throughout the scene. The three characters are close friends, and the occasion is the impending marriage of one of them. As part of the celebrations, the other two have arranged and prepaid for him to spend time in a brothel. Although encouraged to enjoy himself freely, the groom-to-be shows reluctance from the outset, explaining that he loves his fiancée and has never been with anyone else.

When the red curtains part, the audience is introduced to Nina, the woman waiting for him. Once inside the room she removes her skyscraper-high red strappy shoes, a small detail that immediately alters the atmosphere from public performance to private encounter. The set for Nina's room is simple but effective, consisting mainly of a bed and a few pieces of furniture against a plain black backdrop. The lighting keeps the focus entirely on the two characters and their interaction.

As the play progresses, the relationship between the pair develops through conversation, music and dancing rather than physical intimacy. They exchange stories about their lives and play innocent games together. The young man attempts to convince himself that physical attraction might develop if he tried to pursue something with Nina, but he realises that this is not the case. Through their conversations he begins to understand that, although he cares deeply for his fiancée Helen, he is not truly in love with her and is proceeding with the marriage more out of duty and fear than genuine commitment.

Nina challenges his thinking directly, telling him that by continuing with the wedding he is denying both himself and Helen the freedom to make honest choices. Although she repeatedly encourages him to leave, he remains with her, gradually recognising his own cowardice. Nina herself delivers a long solo speech in which she reflects on how people see only her body and never the person beneath the surface. One of the gentlest moments of the production comes when he is braiding her hair, emphasising the emotional rather than sexual nature of their connection.

Eventually, he suggests that they leave Amsterdam together and begin a new life elsewhere. Nina reveals that she is studying philosophy, adding another dimension to her character beyond her work in the brothel. The pair dance together and embrace as dawn approaches. When morning arrives, he departs with the promise that they will meet again at the station.

The final scene, predictably and indispensably, uses the song, "Here Comes the Sun" as the two characters meet at the station. At the same time, wedding vows are heard, creating a contrast between expectation and possibility. The pair turn to one another as the play ends in blackout.

***Zero for the Young Dudes* by Alistair McDowell  
English Youth Theatre (Brussels)**

This dystopian play is set in a strict summer camp where young people live under rigid routines and unquestioned authority. As rumours of rebellion spread, the campers begin to challenge the system controlling their lives, exposing the frustrations of a society built on fear and conformity.

Through dark humour, tension and surreal imagery, the play explores themes of control, rebellion, youth identity and fear of the future. Repetitive dialogue and an oppressive atmosphere effectively convey the emotional pressures faced by the characters. While written for young performers, the play raises wider questions about authority, freedom and the right to shape one's own future.

Demonstrating their usual skill in handling large-scale ensemble work, this talented young cast seamlessly guide the audience through the camp's many scenes and episodes. Movement sequences are fluid and highly disciplined, with polished entrances and exits throughout. The 18-strong cast, dressed in monochrome fatigues and military-inspired costumes, perform against a stark black backdrop and largely bare stage. Effective lighting and chilling air-raid sirens enhance the atmosphere.

The opening tableau is particularly striking, with bodies strewn across the stage under blood-red lighting. Throughout, the production delivers a series of memorable images: synchronised marching soldiers, a vivid imagined escape, a hilariously rapid-fire cameo from the "gabbling girl", and a commanding guard overseeing a prisoner whose speech is punctuated by the bounce of a tennis ball. The classroom scene, in which campers copy propaganda and are denied sex education, reinforces the camp's oppressive ideology, while a girl's falsely cheerful letter home highlights the culture of deception.

Inventive use of minimal props keeps the focus firmly on the performers. Recurring grenade imagery, blindfold games, scenes of punishment and bloodshed, and a powerful crucifixion-like tableau all contribute to the production's unsettling atmosphere. The final moments, in which death comes suddenly and collectively, provide a shocking and memorable conclusion.

*Zero for the Young Dudes* was nominated for The Grand Duchy Trophy for Best Stage Presentation. The crucifix-style lift in *Zero for the Young Dudes* was nominated for The Sonny Pathak Discretionary Award.

### **The Venona Decryption by Jesse Waldinge The Madrid Players**

*The Venona Decryption* is based on the secret American and British code-breaking operation that decrypted Soviet intelligence messages during and after the Second World War. The project uncovered evidence of Soviet espionage in the United States and Britain, including spies linked to the atomic bomb programme and key government institutions.

The play opens with a voice-over setting the historical context and introducing Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, the married couple convicted of espionage in the United States. On the evening of 19 June 1953, they await execution for passing secrets to the Soviet Union.

The action unfolds entirely within the office of FBI agent Robert Lamphere, supervisor of the Soviet Espionage Section. As the hours count down, his secretary, Meredith Gardner, passionately urges him to seek clemency for Ethel Rosenberg. Despite public protests and widespread appeals for mercy, Lamphere remains steadfast. We learn that the Rosenbergs could save themselves by confessing and cooperating with the authorities, but they refuse to do so.

As Meredith describes the grim reality of execution by electrocution, the audience becomes increasingly invested in the couple's fate. The dialogue between the two characters is compelling and thought-provoking, with tension mounting steadily as the final moments approach.

The production's staging is simple yet highly effective. Downstage centre, on an otherwise bare stage, sits a modest office comprising a desk and two chairs - everything needed to establish the austere, business-like atmosphere of the FBI. Carefully focused lighting ensures that attention never strays from the unfolding drama. The set's simplicity serves the play well, allowing the performances and the moral questions at its heart to take centre stage.

As the clock ticks relentlessly onward, a telephone call brings news that, out of respect for the Jewish Sabbath, the executions have been moved forward. Hope lingers that a last-minute confession might bring a reprieve. The telephone rings once more. The play ends.

Sunday 24 May

***Escaped Alone* by Caryl Churchill**  
**The Hamburg Players**

Our attention is immediately captivated as the play begins. The main curtain rises slowly to reveal a backyard scene set against a perfect peach-coloured cyclorama. Two simple garden fences stand upstage, angled slightly to create a central entrance to the downstage acting area: a small patch of artificial grass where the women spend a series of afternoons chatting in a suburban garden. One delightful detail is that the knitting of one of the women grows progressively longer as the play unfolds. Their conversations seem entirely ordinary, touching on memories, television, health, family, and the routines of daily life. Yet these exchanges are repeatedly interrupted by eerie monologues from the latecomer, Mrs Jarrett, who recounts surreal and terrifying visions of social collapse, environmental catastrophe, famine, and apocalypse.

As the play develops, the other women gradually reveal their own private fears and traumas. One struggles with an overwhelming fear of cats, another suffers from severe agoraphobia, while a third reflects upon having killed her husband many years earlier. These intensely personal confessions sit alongside Mrs Jarrett's larger visions of catastrophe, creating a compelling tension between the everyday and the apocalyptic. Throughout the play, casual garden conversation is juxtaposed with the latecomer's accounts of global breakdown, suggesting that ordinary life persists even in the shadow of disaster.

The four women rarely leave their chairs, yet the production feels vibrant and alive through their quick-fire dialogue. They finish each other's sentences, overlap, interrupt, and chatter incessantly, while Mrs Jarrett's monologues paint increasingly bleak pictures of devastation on a global scale.

My notes from this production are extensive. The dialogue overflows with vivid images drawn from the women's everyday lives, and I intend to seek out the script so that I can savour the writing at leisure. One moment, however, will stay with me forever. The women rise from their garden chairs and joyfully parade around the stage, reminiscing about their younger days. (The script specifies that all four actresses should be in their seventies.) They launch into a spirited rendition of the 1960s hit *Do Wah Diddy Diddy*, accompanied by Sally, who expertly strums an air-guitar watering can. For a brief moment, the stage is filled with exuberance and nostalgia. Yet before long we are returned to Mrs Jarrett's disastrous visions, each monologue more hellishly nightmarish than the last.

*Escaped Alone* was awarded The John Kearey Award for Best Production.

Nora Farrell, playing Vi was nominated for The Blackie Award for Best Actress.

The Hamburg Players was nominated for the Marcel Huhn-Bruno Boeye Memorial Award for Best Stage Management.

***Tell Him We Waited* by Thomas van Eijl**  
**WILDe Theatre (Rotterdam)**

We are in a bus station with two graffiti-scrawled, white-painted brick shelters and their familiar uncomfortable-but-practical bench seating. Litter and, incongruously, two full black bin bags complete the set. Otherwise, there is a large bare acting area against a black backdrop.

A young man, Everett, is attempting to repair a bicycle. A lively young woman, Violet, arrives. They appear to know each other. Everett continues to struggle with the bike. "Is it rusty or just stubborn?" he asks as the lock refuses to budge. The action is fast and snappy. They quarrel, they philosophise, always at breakneck speed. They are waiting. For what, we do not know. Perhaps for George; he will know what to do. To pass the time, they play a game of noughts and crosses on the wall of the shelter. In this particular game, there can be no winner. Their conversation flows naturally, pauses authentically. They decide to wait. Violet reads a book, Everett scrolls through his phone. They wonder whether they should simply leave. They remain.

Now they are angry with George. No real time or place had been agreed for their meeting. Could it be here? Are they in the right place? At the right time? We watch them passing the time, even the eating of cereal bars becoming part of the ritual of waiting.

At great speed, a smartly dressed young man arrives and charges straight across the stage. He is Paul and, following him, is Liam, weighed down by enormous black backpacks. It appears that Liam's entire purpose is to serve and wait upon Paul, responding instantly to his every sharp command. The physical comedy of this sequence earned repeated bursts of applause from the audience.

The day ends beneath a cool blue lighting effect. They are tired of waiting. "There's nothing wrong with waiting if nothing happens." Liam is eventually bullied into speaking about waiting, and the resulting passionate tirade draws some of the evening's strongest audience response. Paul departs for an appointment and quietude returns.

A Postman arrives with a message: George is not coming but will meet them at the same time tomorrow. The Postman unlocks the bicycle with ease and wheels it away. Everett and Violet wonder what to do now.

"We could leave."

"Think of the neighbours."

"Tell them we waited."

The play ends.

*Tell Him We Waited* is so clearly indebted to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* that it is difficult not to read it as a contemporary reworking of Beckett's ideas. The parallels are striking: Two characters waiting for someone who never arrives; uncertainty about where they are, why they are there, and whether they are waiting correctly; conversations that oscillate between banality, philosophy, irritation and humour; the arrival of a master-servant pair (Paul and Liam echoing Pozzo and Lucky); a messenger arriving at the end to announce that the awaited person will not come today but might come tomorrow; the play ending with the possibility of leaving, but no actual departure; dialogue that frequently circles back on itself.

The characters spend the entire play waiting for George, despite there appearing to be no firm arrangement with him. This suggests that the waiting itself is more important than the person being waited for.

The line, "There's nothing wrong with waiting if nothing happens", captures one of the play's central paradoxes. Waiting feels meaningful when we expect something significant to occur, but if nothing happens, was the waiting worthwhile? The play is fascinated by the ways people fill empty time: games, reading, eating, arguments, speculation and storytelling.

This inability to act is embodied most clearly in the locked bicycle. A bicycle is a vehicle of movement and escape, yet Everett cannot free it. Only the Postman can unlock it, and when he does, he immediately takes it away. The image suggests both dependence on outside forces and the arbitrary nature of obstacles that seem impossible until viewed from another perspective.

Paul and Liam form a comic but unsettling double act. Liam exists largely to serve Paul, and the audience responds strongly when he finally speaks openly about waiting. As in *Godot*, where Lucky's famous speech erupts after prolonged silence, Liam's tirade provides both release and revelation.

The unwinnable game of noughts and crosses offers another potent image. If victory is impossible, then the activity itself becomes the point rather than the outcome. This mirrors the characters' predicament. They remain engaged in a process whose goal may be unattainable, yet they continue all the same.

The title and final line are perhaps the play's most revealing elements: "Tell them we waited." Waiting becomes an act in itself, almost a duty fulfilled. The preceding exchange - "We could leave." "Think of the neighbours." - suggests a concern with how one's actions are perceived and remembered by others. What matters is not whether George arrives, but that somebody knows they remained faithful to the task.

Ultimately, the play seems to ask whether modern life consists largely of waiting: for opportunities, careers, relationships, success, fulfilment, or meaning itself. George never appears because the object of our waiting is often less important than the habits, routines and identities that waiting creates. Everett and Violet may never meet George, but they can truthfully report: they were here, they stayed, they waited. That is both the joke and the tragedy at the heart of the play.

*Tell Him We Waited* by Thomas van Eijl was awarded The William Valk Award for Best Original Script. The fireman's lift given by Paul to take Liam offstage was awarded the Sonny Pathak Discretionary Award.

### ***Another Moon Called Earth* by Tom Stoppard Semi-Circle (Basel)**

The first thing to catch the eye in *Another Moon Called Earth* is the set. A large blue cyclorama fills the background, dominated by a shining moon that watches over everything that follows. The play opens to "Fly Me to the Moon," which might seem a little obvious, but it immediately creates the right atmosphere. We are in a world where people dream of escape, even if they never leave their rooms. One side of the stage is Penelope's bedroom and the other Bone's office. Penelope's bed is beautifully dressed and so is she. She looks entirely comfortable there, which is important because she has apparently been confined to it by a psychosomatic illness.

Her husband, Bone, meanwhile, is trying to write a history of the world, a task that seems both grand and faintly ridiculous. Much of the humour comes from the contrast between his lofty ambitions and the interruptions that constantly derail them. Penelope repeatedly calls for him to come and help her. He ignores her until she finally cries out that she is being raped, at which point he bursts into the room in alarm. It is a shocking joke, but one that perfectly establishes the strange rhythm of their relationship.

The moon landing footage becomes the emotional centre of the play. Bone dismisses it, but Penelope is fascinated. The day a man walked on the Moon was the day she took to her bed, and she cannot stop thinking about what he might have seen. More than once she says she wants to look at his face to see if it shows what he has seen.

There is a mystery surrounding Pinkerton, Penelope's companion. Her absence hangs over the action until the concierge arrives with the news that she has fallen from a window. The ensuing conversations are classic Stoppard: funny, absurd and slightly macabre. A discussion about the practicalities of taking one's own life somehow manages to be both comic and unsettling at the same time. The concierge's deadpan observations also provide a welcome antidote to Bone's tendency to take himself rather seriously.

Albert, the supposed doctor, is another intriguing figure. Nobody seems entirely convinced of his qualifications, yet he drifts in and out of Penelope's room, playing games and maintaining routines. Their games of battleships, which Penelope consistently wins, have the quality of a ritual rather than a pastime. Much of the play feels like that: people performing familiar roles while quietly questioning whether those roles still mean anything.

The final image, played in silhouette, is a beautiful one. As the figures become shadows beneath the ever-present moon, the play ignores answers and settles for questions. What does it mean to really see something? Can a life spent in one room still be a life of exploration? And what happens when the greatest journey in human history inspires someone not to move, but to stop?

Perhaps the play is less about the Moon than about the distance between people, between dreams and reality, and between the lives we imagine and the lives we actually live.

*Another Moon Called Earth* won The BATS Trophy for Third Place.

Anthony O'Sullivan, playing Bone, won The Blackie Award for Best Actor.

*Semi-Circle (Basel)* was nominated for The Marcel Huhn-Bruno Boeye Memorial Award for Best Stage Management.

### Monday 25 May

#### **Sorry, Wrong Number by Lucille Fletcher Frankfurt English Speaking Theatre**

Wonderfully atmospheric music straight out of a 1940s mystery thriller sets the tone for this fiendishly suspenseful play from the very beginning. The centrepiece of the set is a luxuriously furnished bed, beautifully lit, in which sits a well-to-do woman, Mrs Stephenson. Coincidentally, for the second time at FEATS this year we have a bedridden lady as the central character, but this time Mrs Stephenson's disability appears entirely genuine. An old-fashioned black telephone by her bedside immediately places us in the 1940s. The rest of the stage remains in darkness, with spotlight areas illuminating the other characters as they appear.

Mrs Stephenson's first call is made to her husband's office. Concerned that he is late coming home, she asks the operator to be connected to him. Instead, she is accidentally connected to another line and overhears two men discussing plans for a murder. Returning to the operator, she tries to persuade her to trace the call, but this proves impossible. As the implications of what she has heard begin to sink in, Mrs Stephenson starts to panic.

She telephones the police, then another operator, and eventually speaks to the chief operator, desperately trying to convince someone to take her seriously. Although the police promise to investigate, they seem far more interested in their lunch than in her fears, leaving us with little confidence that they will do anything at all. During these conversations, she gives her address and we gradually realise that it matches the location described by the would-be killers.

With the sound of screaming steam trains and effective spotlighting that brings the various characters into view around her, the atmosphere becomes increasingly tense. Mrs Stephenson makes call after call in a desperate attempt to thwart the criminals' plan. When she tries her husband's office again, she gets only the engaged tone. Then her telephone rings.

Nervously, she answers. It is an operator with a telegram supposedly from her husband. He has been unable to contact her because her line has been constantly busy and now work is taking him away for the entire night. We can almost feel her icy fear. She is alone, disabled, confined to her bed, and running out of options. In desperation she even telephones the hospital to try to hire a private nurse to stay with her.

While she is speaking, she hears a faint click from an extension phone elsewhere in the house. She slowly replaces the receiver.

Someone is in the house.

Once again she calls the operator, but it is too late. Whoever was listening has put down the extension phone and is now making their way upstairs. Frantically she rings the police, only to hear the chilling response: "Sorry, wrong number."

The spotlights illuminate the police and telephone operators, but Mrs Stephenson and her bed are left in darkness. A shadowy figure looms over her and carries out the very murder she has spent the entire play trying to prevent.

Veronika Ries playing Mrs Stephenson was awarded The Blackie Award for Best Actress.

***Doubles* by Michael Frayn**  
**Lucerne World Theatre Company**

What a superbly designed set awaits us as the curtain rises. Unmistakably, we are in a holiday hotel room that looks exactly like countless hotel rooms we have all stayed in. However, instead of seeing just one bedroom, we are presented with two adjacent rooms, identical in every respect.

The central partition is cleverly suggested without obstructing the action in either room. Two simple six-panel room dividers stretch across the stage to form the back walls of both rooms, with the entrance door and bathroom door positioned upstage, one far left and the other far right. The beds are arranged head-to-head and, in fact, one room is a complete mirror image of the other, right down to the bedside furniture, table lamps, trouser presses and clothes rails, every item meticulously placed at precisely the opposing angle. It is all deceptively simple yet extraordinarily clever. One can only imagine the complicated network of gaffer-tape markings hidden on the stage floor.

The action proceeds in the same mirror-image fashion, with both couples unknowingly duplicating one another's behaviour. They read, and laugh at, the hotel's notice about "chuck-out" times; in one room it is the wife who unpacks and organises their belongings, while in the other it is the husband. At one point they simultaneously peer into the mirrors mounted on their dividing walls, appearing to gaze nose-to-nose with their own reflections. Both couples speculate about the previous occupants of their room. This wonderfully choreographed sequence continues until one person from each room leaves at the same moment and the two meet in the corridor.

Now aware of each other's existence, they begin inventing names and stories about their unseen neighbours. Are they Nigel and Nigella Pratt? Sharon and Kevin? The confusion becomes increasingly tangled until we ourselves are no longer entirely sure what anyone is called. Matters are not helped when one couple jokingly shout out "Sharon!" and "Kevin!", convincing the others that these must be their names. It is delightfully inventive and very funny.

As the evening progresses, the neighbouring couples become increasingly conscious of one another's presence. Sounds through bathroom walls, attempts to eavesdrop, misunderstandings and mistaken assumptions all contribute to the growing farce. Even the arrival of a mosquito becomes an opportunity for comic confusion, as innocent events in one room are interpreted very differently in the other.

The night brings further misunderstandings. A late-night trip to the bathroom, made difficult by an unfamiliar room layout, triggers a sequence of accidents and disturbances that finally bring the neighbours together face-to-face. Tempers flare briefly but, by morning, the two wives find themselves sharing confidences from their separate balconies. Their husbands return from their bathrooms and both step out on to their balconies to check on their cars. Naturally apologies are made with the explanation that the bathroom wasn't where it was the night before. It's agreed that bathrooms should be standardised - Brussels should look into it. They get on so well, they are even finishing each other's sentences.

The comedy continues to build from the simplest of situations. Ordinary hotel-room inconveniences become major complications, while increasingly elaborate efforts to avoid awkward encounters only make them more likely. Beneath all the laughter lies a gentle observation about marriage, communication and the assumptions we make about other people.

In the end, both couples seem exhausted by the effort of avoiding one another. As they sit quietly on their beds, defeated by circumstances that have spiralled far beyond their control, the lighting fades and the curtain falls.

*Doubles* was awarded The Grand Duchy Trophy for Best Stage Presentation.  
David Parrott playing Laurence was nominated for The Blackie Award for Best Actor.

**Private View by Vaclav Havel**  
**Noordhaus International Theatre Company (Groningen)**

As the curtain slowly rises, it reveals a residence of extraordinary elegance and conspicuous wealth. Against a backdrop of black panelling is installed, in place of honour, a magnificent statue of the Gothic Madonna, dramatically displayed and bathed in its own perfect light, which seems to suffuse the entire apartment with a luminous grandeur.

This exquisite apartment is the home of Michael and Vera, lovingly redesigned and refurbished by Vera - a fact that Michael takes every opportunity to impress upon their gauche and unassuming visitor, their old friend Ferdinand Vaněk. He has arrived for a private viewing - the vernissage (or *vernisáž in Czech*) - of Vera's handiwork.

We are told that the room's many antique treasures have been painstakingly sourced and acquired at considerable expense. To the audience's eyes, however, the stage appears almost bare of ornament, yet we are left in no doubt as to the grandeur of the setting: the rococo clock with its booming chimes, the monumental church confessional purchased for many thousands of crowns, and, not least, the centrepiece, the luminous Gothic Madonna.

This concatenation of antique artefacts - *concatenation* being a word used in the play and promptly adopted as my word of the day - fails to impress Ferdinand. He and his wife lead a simple life. He has a modest job; they have all they need in each other and harbour no ambitions for anything more.

Michael and Vera, however, are determined to improve him. They repeatedly offer to help him progress to greater things, while constantly reminding him how fond they are of him - indeed, that he is their very best friend. Their conversation circles endlessly around the same theme of improving their friend: persuading Ferdinand to redesign his flat ("you need a place with a face"), encouraging his wife to enrol on a culinary course ("it would put her back on her feet"), suggesting he take her out, urging the couple to start a family and coaxing Ferdinand back to his abandoned writing career. Their increasingly intimate attempts to show him what a fulfilling love life they have are the last straw.

With the dialogue becoming evermore circular and oppressive, Ferdinand is worn down by their relentless well-meaning interference and he attempts to leave. This is no small discourtesy, given that he has been plied with several glasses of imported bourbon and offered platters of exotic delicacies such as *grumples gratinées* and *woodpick*. Vera's response is swift and dramatic: she collapses into a tantrum, throws his carefully chosen roses back at him, and accuses him of ingratitude.

And he hasn't even seen their electric almond peeler yet.

In submission, Ferdinand replaces the roses in their single vases, they all sit down to play Michael's imported records, he is staying.

It is an uncomfortable ending. By now we understand that the food and drink are part of the satire. Michael and Vera have overwhelmed Ferdinand with displays of prosperity and cultivated taste: imported bourbon and records, and a succession of exotic delicacies valued less for their flavour than for what they signify. These are trophies of consumerism masquerading as hospitality. As remarked in the programme notes, certainly the recent sudden change of their country's political regime could not have anything to do with it?

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Annie Dawes

Comments, queries and criticisms welcomed.

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The U.K. National Drama Festival takes place in Bromsgrove from 30<sup>th</sup> July to 2<sup>nd</sup> August. For information go to [www.ndfa.uk](http://www.ndfa.uk)

## WHAT'S ON IN THE THEATRE

When	Who	What	Where	Information
<u>June</u>				
6 – 7	Madrid Players	<i>Jerusalem</i>	Urban Teatro	<a href="http://www.madridplayers.es">www.madridplayers.es</a>
5 - 6	NWTC, L/bourg	<i>Every Brilliant Thing</i>	ISL Drama Studio	<a href="http://www.nwtc.lu">www.nwtc.lu</a>
11-14	Semi-Circle, Basel	<i>Steel Magnolias</i>	Häbse Theater	<a href="http://www.semicircle-basel.com">www.semicircle-basel.com</a>
12 – 14	FEST, Frankfurt	<i>The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)</i>	TBA	<a href="http://www.festfrankfurt.org">www.festfrankfurt.org</a>
17 – 21	Bonn Players	<i>Waiting for God</i>	Brotfabrik	<a href="http://www.bonnplayers.de">www.bonnplayers.de</a>
16-26	ATC, Brussels	<i>Bench Together</i>	Warehouse Studio	<a href="mailto:info@atcbrussels.be">info@atcbrussels.be</a>
19 – 21	AATG, The Hague	<i>A Night on Broadway</i>	Goerderaad Sport	<a href="http://www.aatg.nl">www.aatg.nl</a>
31	LEATS, L/bourg	Summerschool workshops	Clairefontaine	<a href="http://leatss.lu">leatss.lu</a>
<u>July</u>				
3-5;10-12;17-19	Entity Players	<i>Macbeth</i>	Theatron, Westpark	<a href="http://entitytheatre.com">entitytheatre.com</a>
31	LEATS, L/bourg	Summerschool workshops	Clairefontaine	<a href="http://leatss.lu">leatss.lu</a>
<u>August</u>				
1	LEATS, L/bourg	mmerschool workshops	Clairefontaine	<a href="http://leatss.lu">leatss.lu</a>
<u>September</u>				
18-20 ; 25-27	FEST, Frankfurt	<i>A Doll's House</i>	Kulturhaus, Frankfurt	<a href="http://www.festfrankfurt.org">www.festfrankfurt.org</a>
<u>November</u>				
4-8, 11-15	Entity Players	<i>The True Tragedy of Richard III</i>	Pepper Theater	<a href="http://entitytheatre.com">entitytheatre.com</a>
5-7 ; 12-14	Semi-Circle, Basel	<i>Fireside Tales</i>	Theatre Bau3	<a href="mailto:semicirclebasel@gmail.com">semicirclebasel@gmail.com</a>
19-22	V.P. Lausanne	<i>Six Characters in Search of an Author</i>	TBA	<a href="http://www.villageplayers.ch">www.villageplayers.ch</a>
<u>December</u>				
10-15	Tagora	<i>Hashtag Cindy</i>	TBA	<a href="http://tagora.eu">tagora.eu</a>

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