

Midyear 2020

scene

the
lockdown
issue



The magazine of Scottish Community Drama

What did you do in lockdown?

For many of us it's been the chance to read new plays, develop our Zoom skills, maybe even try our hand at play writing.

Rik Kay's creativity led in other directions, making 75 sculptures out of play-doh and posting the pictures on facebook.

If plays are more your thing, read on. In this issue we've focused on new plays, recent play writing competitions and advice from established playwrights on how to get started.

If you want more play-doh, let us know, there is always the next issue.



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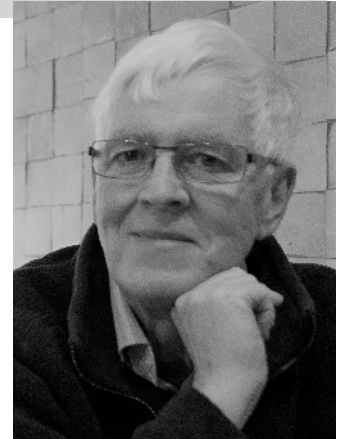
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We always welcome news or opinions, please email letters or articles to the Scene Editor at scene@scda.org.uk

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Cover With no festivals or club productions over the past few months, we hope you've taken the opportunity to read some scripts ready for next year's festival.

Chairman's Musings



Hello

It seems like forever since I last penned this item for the spring edition of Scene. At that time, (the end of 2019) few had heard of the virus that has come to dominate our lives. For SCDA the pandemic has meant the cancellation of our festival after the first, district round, the visit to the Czech Republic and the planned visit of ImageWest, who were going to help us reinvigorate our communications.

Not all the changes that resulted from the lockdown have been bad, and some are likely to persist, even after the virus has become much less of a threat. One of these is the holding of virtual meetings. Zoom, whether you love it or hate it, has changed our lives; and the ability to meet with participants from anywhere in the world and at a very low cost, has been a boon. The Executive Committee has had more virtual meetings, including a social get-together where talking shop was banned, than is usual, and we feel that, even after life has returned to whatever becomes the new 'normal', we will keep using this type of meeting for at least some meetings.

Clubs too have used Zoom in all sorts of ways to keep drama related activities going, including play readings, rehearsals and even performances.

Our Drama Adviser, Carole Williams has made great use of this vehicle to host social meetings, and to deliver workshops. She has also used Zoom to record interviews with two artistic directors, Richard Nisbet of Shakespeare-at-Traquair, and Dominic Hill of the Citizens Theatre Glasgow.

And while ImageWest cannot be here in reality, they will work on the communications project using virtual technology.

Right now, we are planning to hold the One Act Festival in 2021 as usual, but we are mindful of how much things could change so are planning flexibly. Time, as they say, will tell!

Tony Flisch
chair@scda.org.uk

Welcome

To new Individual members

| | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| Grace Currie | Orkney (Northern) |
| Christopher Hewet | Moray (Highland) |
| Amy Hanson | Fife (Eastern) |
| Martin Foreman | Edinburgh (Eastern) |
| Joseph Yeardley | Edinburgh (Eastern) |
| Sheila Gilmore | Ayrshire (Western) |
| Steven Johnson | Ayrshire (Western) |
| Barry Robertson | Ayrshire (Western) |

To new Clubs

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Edinburgh University Theatre Co. | Edinburgh (Eastern) |
| U3A Three Brethen Galashiels | Edinburgh (Eastern) |
| Stanley Drama Club | Ayrshire (Western) |

To new Life Members

| | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| William Burns | Wigtown (Western) |
| Christine Barron | Inverclyde (Western) |
| Ian Mathewson | Ayrshire (Western) |
| Mike Drever | Orkney (Northern) |
| Inga Drever | Orkney (Northern) |
| Robert Ross | Orkney (Northern) |
| Iain Campbell | Orkney (Northern) |
| Bill McKenzie | Aberdeen (Northern) |
| David Withington | Edinburgh (Eastern) |
| Tony Flisch | Stirling (Eastern) |
| Lorna Flisch | Stirling (Eastern) |
| Ron Nicol | Fife (Eastern) |
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Scene is a bit different this year

The summer edition of Scene normally covers the results of all the festivals for 2020, but of course due to Covid-19 all but a small number were cancelled. We decided to combine Summer and Autumn into a bumper issue. So what do we do for copy? The Scott Salver and Geoffrey Whitworth Competitions were judged so we thought, why not make it a playwrights issue which we hope you will find interesting.

We are hoping to announce a new Play on Words Competition in 2021 so perhaps all you budding playwrights will get some valuable advice from some well known authors throughout the magazine.

We are also interested to hear what you have all been doing during this lockdown period to keep your clubs going, so let me know for future issues.

Editor.

However, if this is the first time you've picked-up a copy of Scene, we hope you enjoy it. If you'd like to get your own copy four times a year, it's one of the benefits of becoming an Individual Member of SCDA. Go to our website: scda.org.uk for more information.



Festivals in 2021

As the months roll by and we come through the various stages of the Coronavirus epidemic which led to the cancellation of our Festival, thoughts turn to our One Act Play Festival in 2021. District and Divisional Festivals are still scheduled for the end of February and March respectively while the Scottish Final is booked for Kirkwall, Orkney from 23rd to 25th April 2021. The UKCFFF are also intending to hold a British Festival in Rhyl on 25th and 26th June with representatives from each of the four countries.

While it is impossible to know what restrictions may still be in place next year, SCDA wish to plan with a view to keeping our Festival alive. We would like to ensure that any group who wish to participate in the One Act Play Festival next year can take part by introducing an increased degree of flexibility as required.

The National Executive have had discussions regularly over the past few months and a group including all four

Divisional Chairs was set up to consider various options and scenarios by which a safe, enjoyable Festival could take place. The debate also included a contingency plan should the Festival commence with the necessity for further rounds to be cancelled.

Subsequently, a questionnaire has been circulated to ascertain the intention of member clubs to enter next year's competition and also the potential availability of venues open to organising Districts and Divisions. The possibility of submitting an entry to be adjudicated by video is also being explored if public performances cannot take place. We may be facing a continually dynamic situation but planning and preparations will continue over the coming months and as long as there is a will then 'the show will go on'!

Carolyn Harrison
Festival Convenor.

Make a fresh start with Carole's help

As we head out of lockdown it's a good time to explore how we approach performance and rehearsal and adapt to new ways of working.

Carole Williams is SCDA's National Drama Advisor. She offers a wide range of challenging and fun workshops to develop your performance and directing skills.

Workshops are supported by SCDA and can be tailored to your individual needs.



Confessions of an Emergency Panellist

Ever wondered what would happen at an SCDA One Act Festival if the scheduled adjudicator didn't make it for some reason? Is the festival cancelled? Of course not. The standard emergency solution is to have a reserve adjudicator in place. Problem solved. The show goes on.

However, many years ago, Edinburgh District tried and have continued a different approach – the appointment of a three person emergency panel. Its members are mostly drawn from local clubs, with the important proviso that they can't be involved if their own club is competing in that festival. Consequently, panel members can change from year to year. I've enjoyed the honour and privilege of being an emergency panellist at recent Edinburgh District Festivals and would like to reveal all... well nearly all.

What does our task entail? Is it easy? All we do is turn at the theatre for every performance, sit back and let the adjudicator do all the work. Something like substitutes at a football match who never get sent on to play. Far from it. Basically, we do everything the adjudicator does. We read all the scripts in advance, assessing their strengths, weaknesses and challenges, before deciding what each of us is looking for. Of course, distributing multiple scripts (12 at this year's Edinburgh round) between three people can be a logistical headache. While working our way through those bundles of scripts, we are consistently impressed by the incredible variety of plays chosen and have noticed that youth teams rarely go for easy options. One observation we all make every year – too many photocopies!

Next, after each performance, we decide and write down our marks for acting, production, stage presentation and dramatic achievement. Now how many times have you heard the adjudicator remind everybody that they're only expressing one person's opinion? So how do we merge three opinions into one? By adhering to the marking system. For example, we're about to decide our acting marks out of forty. We begin with an overall consensus which is often broadly similar, with the odd stretch. Perhaps we've agreed that the acting was good, but how good? Time to consult the invaluable GODA Mark Descriptor Guide, issued by SCDA for adjudicators at all festivals, detailing specific marking criteria for each category, ranging from "poor" to "outstanding". For acting, the marking range between "good" and "very good" is six, so we decide if our mark is at the highest, middle or lowest end of that range and a compromise is reached. If not, we total our different marks and divide by three to reach an average.

Now for that crunch question – do we always agree with the adjudicator? Considering that teams and audiences are occasionally not in harmony with the adjudication, you won't be surprised at an answer of not always. Take the



top three places. Both adjudicator and panel may choose the same three teams, but not necessarily in the same order. A team we mark highly can miss out on the silverware, whereas another team favoured by the adjudicator doesn't even make our top three.

But the adjudicator has made it (thankfully for us!) to the last night and we've done our bit simply by being there. Our marks and final placings are not required and will remain our secret. Only then do we enjoy one considerable perk – we alone get to choose the Best Moment in Theatre award.

One last question – have I ever needed to join my fellow panellists in deputising for a missing adjudicator? Never... but nearly. Flashback to the first night of one Edinburgh District Festival. The three of us are seated and ready at the Church Hill Theatre fifteen minutes before curtain up at seven. At ten minutes to seven we're informed that the adjudicator hasn't arrived yet. Five to seven – still no adjudicator. Seven o'clock – the District Chairman announces to the audience that the curtain is going to be delayed. Five past seven, the audience is restless, the Chairman is worried, and for the emergency panel, squeaky bum time is looming. Ten past seven – hurrah! – an apologetic delayed-by-traffic adjudicator materialises and the emergency panel are left pondering what might have been.

Alan Richardson

Geoffrey Whitworth Competition

Having spent many years adjudicating more than 280 drama festivals across the British Isle and beyond, I was delighted to accept the invitation to judge the prestigious Geoffrey Whitworth Playwriting competition.

Of course we will all remember 2020 as the year of the lockdown which meant that many drama festivals were aborted with the result that many new plays did not actually make it on to the stage – and these must have included many of the scripts submitted for this competition.

From my personal confined lockdown the stream of scripts I received came at an opportune time as the studying of them kept my brain active.

The Plays

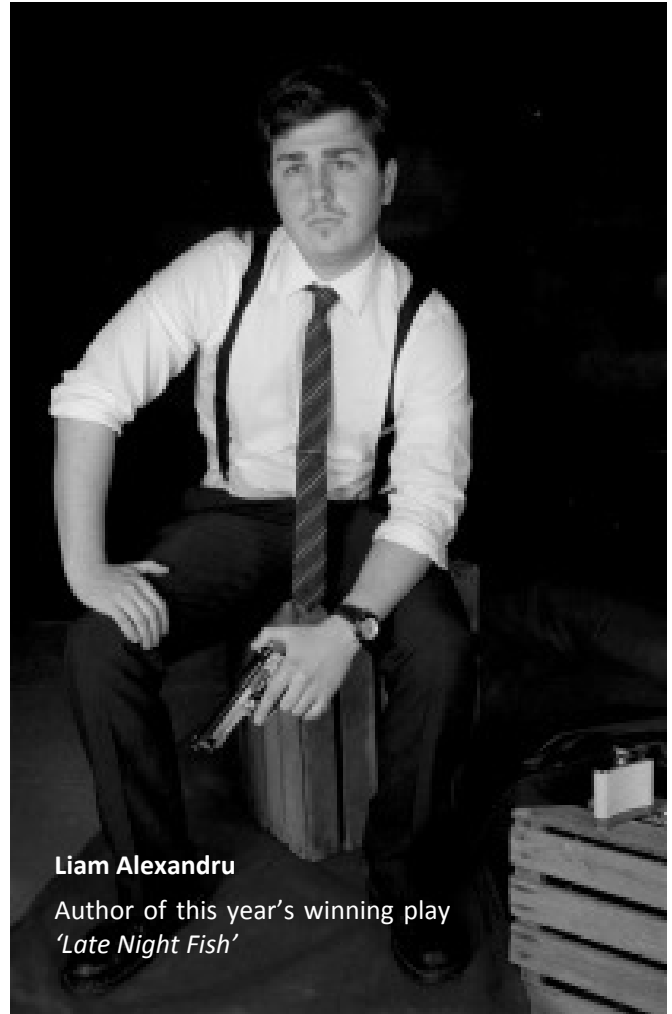
The 28 submitted plays covered a whole range of genres, styles and themes. The subjects included family relationships, mental trauma, environmental issues and sexual abuse – but to counterbalance those heavy issues I am happy to record there were a goodly numbers of sparky comedies. To quote the playwright John Mortimer, 'Comedy is vitally important in despairing times.'

The quality of the work varied but all reached a satisfactory standard.

Judging the Plays

In my professional experience as an adjudicator I have assessed many original plays. The main areas I consider when evaluating new work include: Plot, Themes, Setting, Characters, Dialogue, Style, Structure, Length, and Originality.

(All these areas are expanded in my article "What I Look for in Assessing a New Script" which is available on SCDA's website, [scda.org.uk /playwriting advice](http://scda.org.uk/playwriting_advice)).



Liam Alexandru

Author of this year's winning play
'Late Night Fish'

Finally and perhaps most importantly I ask myself: Was I engaged with the characters? Did it touch me emotionally? Did it make me laugh or move me or make me think?

In all my comments on the plays I have included some constructive suggestions, which the playwrights may like to consider.



Final Thoughts

1. During the 2020 lockdown will the confined writers have all been busy on new scripts which might well mean there will be a bumper entry in 2021 competition?
2. Most plays submitted had small cast numbers. It would be good to see scripts containing more roles for actors. Most professional theatres are financially constrained from staging large plays but the amateur theatre has a greater freedom in this area.

Colin Dolley

Scott Salver Competition 2020

This season's annual Playwriting Competition for original scripts receiving their debut performance in District Festivals across Scotland attracted 10 entries which were assessed by our enthusiastic reading panel members independently marking and grading under various artistic categories with the variety of subject matter and writing styles reflecting the amount of thoughtful creativity achieved by each participant.

'Ash' by Anne McIntyre

Warm congratulations to first-time winner Anne McIntyre from Castle Douglas whose play was presented at Stewartry District Festival.

A dark comedy with an original plot centred around a dodgy scheme to use crematorium ashes in the manufacture of beauty products.

The complex narrative cleverly unfolds through a number of scenes - the dialogue remaining sharp and amusing with well drawn and believable characters. The device of actors addressing the audience leading into scenes worked well. Some advice on staging and transitions might have assisted and Lewis' sudden turn to physical violence seemed abrupt but the conclusion was both fitting and amusing.

An excellent piece of writing demonstrating a natural flair for comedy.

'Adrian's Wall' by Bob Davidson

Deservedly achieving runner-up position was 2018's "hat trick" winner Bob Davidson from Luncarty, whose play was premiered in Perthshire District.

Another original idea with a narrative structure which works well weaving skilfully from political views to shared nostalgia, personal and sometimes painful memories peppered with humour. The settings of bare flat, car



journey and border picnic provide scope for a variety of stage pictures. A perfect ending with Adrian having figuratively built an open wall at the Scottish Border and literally dismantled the walls confining him to his flat.

'The Last Box' by Russell Adams

Gaining third place was previous winner Russell Adams from Stonehaven, whose play was staged at Aberdeen District Festival.

An assured piece of writing with coherent structure as Ethel packs the last box prior to removal - cherished items evoking key memories and flashback scenes of her life with late husband Ted including marriage, enduring the three day week and her son's funeral with loyal friend Rosie returning the dialogue to the present.

Excellent clearly drawn character relationships with strong narrative and stage setting well utilised.

'Numbered with the Dead' by Isabella Rae

Coming in at fourth position was Cambuslang based Isabella Rae whose play was produced for Glasgow District.

A well written comedy romp with broadly drawn well differentiated characters based on the familiar scenario of ghosts interacting with the living in this instance attempting to thwart the conversion of a boarding house to Care Home use.

The new owner assuming the ghostly spirits are squatters calls the police who conclude the lady requires medical help. Finally on her way to locate a priest she meets with a fatal accident and predictably becomes a ghostly figure herself.

Some comments on the remaining plays entered:

'Em-Pathetic' by David Carswell from Dunoon.

Ironic black comedy cleverly structured and easily staged revolving around the meeting of three psychopaths resulting in tragic consequences. Characters clearly drawn achieving maximum impact.



as the two women relate their past life stories fused together in the bag.

'Forget' by Faye Sutherland from Thurso.

Clearly established characters with traumatised, edgy Martin and calm, caring Anne emphasising the escalating yet intriguing tension leading to the explanatory flashbacks. Slightly repetitive and contrived dialogue and movement.

'Onwards and Upwards' by Ruth Stevenson from Jackton.

Powerful storyline about the author's life with genuine personal triumph over adversity spanning 35 years covering careers, relationships, illnesses and successes. Episodic with large cast, voiceovers, songs and multiple settings. Radio play style requiring editing.

We thank all our writers who entered this year and hope you enjoyed the thrill of seeing your latest work come alive on stage.

Every script is worthy of future production and reading copies may be borrowed from our National Library at Summerhall in Edinburgh.

Stephen Lambert
Playwriting Convenor

'Forgotten People' by Graham Macdonald from Kirkwall.

Convoluting plot involving ghosts from various periods of history visiting a drug overdose victim. Each relates their story and reasons for not "walking into the light". Well written with touches of humour.

'The Lift' by Catriona M Prodger from Tibbermore.

Novel idea of Tom talking to a lift on his way to detonate a bomb. Challenging staging with opportunities for tension and more time to develop characterisation lost by indulgent conversation. The final resolution required improved clarity.

'Bag For Life' by Nick Fearne from Dingwall.

Beautifully written short piece with carefully crafted rhythmic structure, humour and poignancy



Eastern Full length Festival

I had the privilege of adjudicating the Eastern Full Length Festival during 2019-2020. The experience proved to be memorable in seeing a vast array of productions. There were examples of extremely high standards of production that used space exceptionally well.

If this is the level that companies are working to then there is much to be learned from the Eastern area in how to achieve high standards of theatre.

The productions were spread over the period March 2019 – January 2020. The first production was Edinburgh People's Theatre with *'The Cemetery Club'* by Ivan Menchell. The setting and costumes were aesthetically pleasing with strong attention to detail. A production that was enhanced through strong direction and acting coupled with the effective use of sound, lighting and slick cueing.

Next I saw Edinburgh Theatre Art's production of *'Fondly Remembered'* by Gareth Armstrong. Overall, this was a very strong production where the characters kept us engaged throughout. Performances were of a high standard and made this a rewarding evening of theatre.

Leitheatre's production of *'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof'* by Tennessee Williams took place in the Studio at the Festival Theatre. This challenging piece incorporated live music and the setting was very well realised. This was a very strong production indeed. An engrossing piece of theatre.

'It Runs in the Family' by Ray Cooney was produced by Edinburgh People's Theatre. This was a very fast paced production throughout with the action slick and relentless as required. There was a high standard of teamwork from those onstage and offstage. A highly enjoyable evening of theatre.

A visit to Portobello was made to take in EGTG's production of *'The Lark'* by Jean Anouilh - a contemporary

retelling of the story of Joan of Arc. This production took place in the environment of a church. The audience, seated on pews, were treated to an engaging piece of storytelling. Through high standards of directing and acting this was a very rewarding experience in a unique venue.

'Suddenly Last Summer' by Tennessee Williams was Edinburgh Theatre Arts second production and proved the adage that the overall outcome could be greater than the sum of its parts. This proved to be an engaging and powerful piece of theatre with very high standards of performance and direction.

KADS' production this year was *'One Man Two Guvnors'* by Richard Bean. Again, this was a production whose outcome was greater than the sum of its parts. This farce was superbly driven by the actor playing Frances and the engagement of members of the audience, provided a rewarding evening of theatre where laughter was in abundance.

A journey was made to The Biscuit Factory in Edinburgh to see EGTG's production of *'Catch 22'* by Joseph Heller. The unique space of a derelict factory was transformed into a performance area. The barren nature of the performance space with minimalist props forced the focus on the characters and their stories. The production was slick, and the pace throughout fast and relentless with the incorporation of fluid choreographed scene changes. There was a plethora of creativity and innovative ideas in this highly commendable production.

Aberdour's entry was *'Steel Magnolias'* by Robert Harling. The production took place in the local Primary School and here the challenges of the playing space were suitably dealt with by the company. There were sustained performances throughout the piece engaging the audience through humour and pathos.

The final production was Livingston Player's production of *'Stepping Out'* by Richard Harris. This is not, by its nature, an easy play to put on. The emotional journeys of the characters were very well realised. The dancing at the start was suitably bad but progressed to give us a delightful night of theatre with a polished tap dance routine finale. This very effective ending resulted from a great team effort from the performers, director and choreographer.

The winner was EGTG with *'Catch 22'*.

Dave Bennet



Suggestions for Beginner Playwrights

We were relaxing with a drink one Saturday, when for some reason we started discussing 'Hamlet'. I remarked that things might have worked out better if he'd told his father's ghost to get lost. The thought festered and that was it – the birth of 'Hamlet, Prince of Dennistoun'. Nothing like Shakespeare's Hamlet, of course. My Hamlet was more intent on an easy life and avoiding going into battle with Fourteenbras, the warrior princess from Easterhouse.

So you want to write a play, or even, you have to write a play because your club's too hard up to afford royalties or maybe none of the catalogues has a play to suit the seven, ninety-five year-old women in your club. What to write about?

I've lost count of the number of times I've been asked where I got the idea for a particular play. The answer is very often, "I can't remember," probably because it started out as one thing and then was totally transformed into something with no resemblance to the original idea.

My Hamlet was in the 'what if' category. It doesn't matter if you lead a dull life or an exciting one. Everybody's life is full of small events that can be transformed by 'what if' into a totally different outcome if you use a bit of imagination and maybe change the characters. I've used:

- What if a bigoted father discovered his daughter's boyfriend was of 'the wrong religion'? ('NO SURRENDER')
- What if The Grim Reaper arrived in a doctor's waiting room? ('LAST CALL FOR CARROT CAKE')
- What if Goldilocks was on probation for burglary? ('THE CRASS MENAGERIE')

Some years ago, I became fascinated with my family tree. I happened to read an article about the 1848 bread riots in Glasgow. At that time, an influx of Irish weavers had led to falling wages for the local weavers. This led to conflict between the two groups. A number of my ancestors had been Irish weavers and ended up in Bridgeton. This led to a play about women in two neighbouring families of weavers, one family from Ireland, the other from Glasgow, and how they were affected by the riots.

It also led to an interest in writing about ordinary families caught up in larger historical events. History provides a very rich seam of subjects but don't tackle it if you don't fancy doing plenty of research – luckily that's within easy reach via Google.

The old advice to 'write about what you know' is still good, though I'm wary of it since an adjudicator once sneeringly remarked that the events in one of my plays 'would never happen in real life'. I'd have loved the chance to be in the dressing-room afterwards and put him straight, since the play had been based on some of my experiences as a social worker. I suppose it can be true that life is stranger

than fiction, so by all means, use your family and work experiences as themes – but remember to make sure nobody can sue you!

Now you have a theme, but more is needed – a setting, characters, a plot.

I once attended a workshop run by David Greig. I remember he advised us to try to set plays in more interesting areas than somebody's living room since these plays were too common. This is another suggestion which can get your imagination going. What can I do up a mountain, at a swimming pool, in Hell, in Heaven?

Your setting may be partly dependent on why you're writing the play. If it's for a writing competition, you might be able to give free reign to how opulent the set can be, and similarly if you're writing for performance by a club which has plenty of money and backstage helpers. However if the club budget is tight you'd be wise to consider something more basic.

Once you have a plot, you'll know you need characters for certain purposes. Could you have a 70-year-old female shoplifter or does it have to be a teenage boy? This is your play so it's your choice, and another chance to be imaginative. What kind of person would this shoplifter be? How would he/she talk? Picture the person's life and previous experiences. Lastly, would you enjoy playing this role, because it helps if the cast enjoy their characters – rehearsals are much more satisfying and productive. It might also avoid a script full of boring people.

As regards the plot, you may be a person who's more comfortable making a detailed plan before writing. Or, you may prefer to start off with the idea and some characters, and then see what they get up to. I prefer this because it leads off into all sorts of surprises, for me as well as for any reader. I would suggest, though, that it's often best to have an ending in mind so you don't end up with a cop-out, the 'it was all a dream' scenario.

Finally, enjoy yourself. If you don't enjoy what you're writing, how can you expect the audience to enjoy it?

Isabella Rae



Into the Spotlight

I didn't do drama (apart from a school production of *Merrie England* in which I was chorus) till I was nearly thirty. I played football and cricket in my twenties, and was obsessed with bridge, which I picked up at Uni and played throughout my first career job in Paisley. In 1968 I got a job in Newton Stewart at the Douglas-Ewart High School, and within four years I was married and had my first child. My passion in life was still bridge.



In 1970 the course of my life changed dramatically. There was a local pantomime put on which was written by Jack Maltman and produced by Elsie Robertson, both teachers at the school. In fact the whole thing was school-based; the chorus, dancers and most of the cast and production team came from the Ewart. I had a minor part in it, and played a character called Hank. The panto was a resounding success, so much so that there was another the following year, and this time I played the villain who was called Sir Jasper. I reckon it was Sir Jasper who changed my life.

There should have been another production the following year, but it was inexplicably cancelled. I think it was something to do with the choreographer being unavailable and they couldn't find a replacement in time. As a result continuity was lost and there was no pantomime for four years.

Then in the summer of 1975 two local worthies, Jim Neil and Jack Deacon, who were both ex-provosts, approached me with a plan to revive the pantomime; and they wanted me to produce it. To this day I don't know why they chose me. I had no qualifications for the job, and very limited experience other than a couple of acting roles. They said that if I organised the actors they would do everything else.

And this is what happened. The two ex-provosts organised the admin and production team: choreographer, musical director including a band, costumes mistress and set designer and builder. I chose a script, (it was *Jack & the Beanstalk* by P H Adams and Conrad Carter), held auditions and lo and behold, we had a cast. It included a local newsagent called Jack Milroy who was a born comedian like his namesake.

Meanwhile the ex-provosts had organised the supporting cast: over thirty schoolgirls as chorus and dancers, plus a gentleman's chorus which included a dental technician, a police inspector, a headmaster, a dentist and a priest. They even persuaded some ladies from the local church choir to stand in the wings as offstage chorus! The music was provided by a 13-piece orchestra. The eventual number onstage was eighty

five, supported backstage by an additional thirty-odd.

A date in February was set for the opening night and we were off. The ex-provosts decided to call the company The Community Players. I have no recollection of the weeks of rehearsal; I had decided from the off not to take a part, but the cast performed wonderfully well and played to capacity audiences over five nights in the McMillan Hall. There is no surviving copy of the script but I still have a copy of the programme (price 5p): the giant was called Snufflegobbler and there was a character called Odorous Egg. It was my first experience as a producer, and I loved the whole business from beginning to end - I was hooked.

The following year was equally successful. We did our first *Cinderella*, script by Ronald Parr with music by Arthur Sullivan. Same big cast and production team, and the first appearance of a couple of twenty year-olds who were to become stalwarts: Jim McDowall as Buttons and Jeanette Donald (later Ramsey) in the title role.*

The panto became an annual event, and simply snowballed. The club branched out into 'serious' acting, and took part with some success in the SCDA Drama Festival. We attracted some very talented actors who went on to do drama at college and beyond. One of them, award-winning actress Kate Dickie, has screen credits including *Red Road*, *Game of Thrones*, in which she played Lysa Arryn, *Prometheus*, *Star Wars – The Last Jedi*, and, most recently, *The Nest* and *The English Game*.

I wonder if Kate recalls that her first major role was in *The Paisley Shawl*, in the Ryan Theatre, Stranraer?

a playwright and publisher's tale

In the mid eighties I wrote a suite of six pantomime scripts for the club which were performed in successive years: *Aladdin*, *Ali Baba*, *Cinderella*, *Dick Whittington*, *Jack & the Beanstalk* and *Babes in the Wood* (later *Robin Hood & the Babes in the Wood*). In 1996 I sent them all to Harry Glass who ran a successful publishing company in Cumbernauld called Pedersen Press – and got published! One of the first scripts I sold was a new version of *Sleeping Beauty*, which was premiered in 1997 by the Auchtermuchty Theatre Club. I remember going to see the production with my wife, and saw my own work being performed.

It's something that playwrights never forget, and it was a thrill to see characters I'd created being played out by real actors. I thought the whole thing went really well (but then I'm biased!).

The next step was to form my own online company, Wonderful World of Panto, in 1999. For this I enlisted the help of an old friend, Cameron (Camy) McGregor, of Kirkcowan, who had just set up his own website design company, Kirkmoor.com. Two years later (by this time the company had become Spotlight Publications) I was joined by Mark Rees who was writing 1-act plays for Lochside Youth Theatre of Castle Douglas. The first two plays he submitted, *Rain On Me* and *Teen-People*, have proved to be very popular and are still in demand. Mark later moved to Hull and had a very successful career as Artistic Director at Hull Truck Theatre. **

A major problem for pantomime writers is that after you've done the Big Eight, Ali Baba, Aladdin, Babes, Cinders, Dick, Jack, Sleeping Beauty

and Snow White, what then? Sinbad is a good option as the plot is flexible: you can send Sinbad on quests almost anywhere, and the locations are always exotic. I've written three: In 1999 I wrote an original story based on *Brigadoon* and called it *Stramash - A Highland Fantasy*, in which the hero is propelled into a highland village in 1850 during an election (topical, because we had just got a devolved parliament). The pantomime was premiered by Accent Players in Campbeltown. Other original stories I attempted were: *Geronimo!* (2002), *Rob Roy the Panto* (2004), *The Scarlet Pumpnickel* (2004), *Viva Zorro!* (2005), and *Caradoc The Legend of King Zog's Treasure* (2007).



In 2005 Ron Nicol, well known as both writer and SCDA adjudicator, submitted a number of plays and pantomimes, all of which were published over the next few years. His pantomimes and quirky plays, among them *Pig Tale* and *Wolf Tale*, remain very popular today.

After that, the company, like Topsy, just grew. The number of writers increased exponentially, and by 2012

we had over twenty, including Robin Bailes, Craig Hewlett, and Simon Davis. The last few years have seen a remarkable rise in the number of female writers: Nancy McPherson, Claire Scott, Gill Morrell, Joy Davis, and, more recently, Susan Mosley and Cheryl Barrett.

But the biggest change has been the advance of technology, especially via the internet. The last ten years have seen a huge increase in the use of electronic scripts. Drama clubs and societies now prefer to buy a master script from which they can make as many photocopies as they choose. Clubs can receive invoices and scripts via email attachments, and pay via bank transfer. We can send scripts all

over the world from the UK, and, provided there is a wifi connection, from holiday venues including cruise ships. Spotlight has had customers in Australia and Canada, particularly British Columbia and Ontario; any place in fact where there is a strong pantomime tradition. Expat groups have turned up in Beijing, Kuala Lumpur and Dar Es Salaam.

At the time of writing the country is in lockdown, with little or no activity on the dramatic front. Theatres are closed, drama clubs have shut down and publishers are reduced to a trickle of orders.

But the crisis will pass, and hopefully in the near future, normal service will be resumed.

* Both took part in the company's (now the Newton Stewart Players) 44th production *A Christmas Carol The Panto* in December.

** Mark sadly passed away in March.

Dave Buchanan.

CHILD'S PLAY?

Over the last forty years I've written sixty plays, many created with young people in mind. My youth plays are frequently produced, several have been successful in SCDA Play on Words and some have appeared in Scottish youth finals. It's a challenge to write for young people, and there's a special delight in watching children's faces light up. I treasure a comment from one director who said "your imagination, creativity, and love of your characters allowed us to let our imaginations run wild".

Don't be over-concerned about whether your play is to be performed by young people themselves or by adults. I expected my adaptation of "The Snow Queen" to be played by adults for an audience primarily consisting of children, but most of the 150 world-wide productions have been by schools or youth companies. I initially wrote "Pig Tale" and "Wolf Tale" for young players, but there have been many successful adult productions. If both young and old, no matter what their age, find something to like about your work you could be onto a winner.

Estimate your intended age group and write appropriately. As children become sophisticated young adults their tastes, speech patterns and use of language change. What excites them? What do they read, or watch on TV? As my three children grew up I told them invented stories, getting used to frequent disdainful cries of "Oh, Dad!" but absorbing what gained a positive reaction. I carried on the process with my grandchildren - who tend to be more polite with their responses than were their parents!

Involvement with youth groups provides opportunities to try things out. My wife Norma has been involved with amateur theatre companies of all ages for many years. She tries out sketches and short pieces with her drama



'Snow Queen' Bas Bleu, Colorado

classes for ages eight to sixteen, and lets me know the reaction. Her improvisation sessions frequently produce excellent ideas for potential plays.

Schools and youth drama groups are always on the lookout for new material, but these groups can range widely in age, most have more girls than boys, and some have a large number of members. All need to be involved in some way. Create a larger number of female than male characters, particularly leading ones, or roles which can be played by either boys or girls. Include parts for all ages from teenagers to tiny thespians. Write scenes involving discrete groups of characters which can be rehearsed

separately. Demands of costume and scenery can create a challenge and involve those who work backstage, while atmospheric scenes can be enhanced by lighting and special effects.

Small cast plays can also be effective. In "The Edge" two teenagers explore emotionally charged and difficult issues in a realistic way. "Friends and Neighbours" deals with racism and knife crime and has a cast of five. Sensitive topics can provoke unexpected reactions from adults, however. One parent withdrew her children from a group rehearsing "The Edge" when she discovered that the underlying subject-matter was child abuse and involved the suicide of one of the characters.



'Childe Rowland' StageNorth

Let your imagination run riot!

Subject matter can be wide-ranging. Young actors and audiences respond to realism and fantasy, drama and comedy, mystery and horror, but that essential connection which will activate their imaginations as well as entertain them needs to be found. The plot must grip them, they must be able to care about or identify with characters, and the outcome must satisfy them. The theme doesn't need to be a modern one. My one-act and full-length plays based on folk tale heroes Childe Rowland and Molly Whuppie both feature large casts and have been well received.

There's no guarantee the desired response will be forthcoming. The size, composition and age range of an audience will influence how your play is received. Sometimes everything comes together while occasionally it doesn't get off the ground, although grown-ups will typically applaud out of politeness whether they like what they've seen or not. Children



'Jabberwock' Yocum Institute

Championship win – against over fifty in the USA.

Send performing companies your best wishes. Directors will often share their experience of working on your play. Go to a performance to assess audience reaction. Some publishers inform you as soon as they issue a new license, others don't. It can be a boost to hear about a showing within striking distance – and a let-down to discover it took place months ago! Be aware that some publishers emphasise certain genres over others in their catalogues and publicity, and youth plays can be overshadowed.

Writing for young people isn't child's play, but it's incredibly satisfying. Get in touch with that part of your brain which retains childhood memories. Remember the saying that "Growing old is compulsory. Growing up is optional". I suspect I've never grown up – and I don't intend to!

Ron Nicol



'Pig Tale' Dalgety Players

and young adults usually won't, and they're not afraid to let you know if something isn't working! If there's a degree of positive consistency you'll know you're on the right lines.

The publication market is difficult to assess. Although Samuel French had snapped up "The Snow Queen" they declined "Beware the Jabberwock" as they didn't think it would sell in Britain. However, they forwarded it to their linked company Baker's Plays in Los Angeles, who took it on board. French's sales forecast proved correct, with only five productions in the UK – one being Fintry's 2012 Scottish Youth



'Jabberwock' Weymouth

Read your way to success



I'm probably unusual in being an individual member of SCDA, unattached to any local society. I joined after attending the national one-act plays final in Stranraer last year. We were holidaying in Galloway and the event made the perfect night out. Sitting behind adjudicator Ben Humphrey, who was assiduously taking notes, we enjoyed the excitement of the occasion and the energy and focus of the youngsters' performances.

In his helpful video about how to choose a play, Ben advocates reading plenty of scripts. I think this is a great habit to have, whatever part you play in drama.

As a playwright, I've had three of my scripts performed publicly over the years but my full-time career always took precedence. Now I've gone freelance,

I have more chance to develop my writing. By reading a wide range of play-scripts, I see how others have created their stories and staging. This helps me find the right voices, styles and techniques for my own work.

You have to be careful how this works. I became rather too fond of using the 'beat' stage direction to indicate a

short pause and had to delete most of these. Every playwright needs to fight off the tendency towards control freakery. It's vital to enable the director and cast to contribute their own layers of interpretation and creativity.

The SCDA library is a wonderful specialist resource and I have been happily browsing its shelves over the past year. You will always get a friendly welcome to this Aladdin's cave of theatrical ideas, in Edinburgh's Summerhall complex. I usually borrow one or two classic texts and a stack of fairly new plays I haven't come across before.

Among the gems I've found, here is a recommendation:

How to Be Happy, by David Lewis (3 female, 2 male parts)

This play features some well-observed bickering between a formerly married couple and their respective new partners. I loved the idea of a former self-help guru turned miserable struggling novelist.

There's a golden moment when Paul's ex-wife, Emma, quotes her new husband. The twist is that Graham is merely reflecting back a mantra that was originally a chapter heading in Paul's book about finding happiness.

The core technical conceit of the play also works well. The two households own the same model of sofa, so instead of cutting from one location to the other, cast members share scenes and the action plays out in counterpoint.

With the dialogue sometimes offset in different columns, these overlaps can be tricky to read but they no doubt make for a rich and interesting theatre experience.

Within the relationship conflicts, there are some discussions of global and political issues. These are not subtle, but add a pinch of thematic spice. They're couched in general enough terms to endure beyond the world of 2011, when the play premiered. You can find a review of the Orange Tree Theatre production at:

www.ayoungertheatre.com

Adrian Ross

You're welcome to connect with Adrian on LinkedIn.

Forfar Dramatic in Lockdown

The last few months have been as challenging for Forfar Dramatic Society (FDS) as it has for every other amateur theatre group, but it has had its upsides. Over the period of the lockdown FDS worked hard to keep in touch with members and supporters of the club and provide opportunities for active engagement for those who wanted them.

That meant a significant increase in social media activity with daily posts – incorporating a mix of puzzles, quizzes and updates. With members, the primary activity was creating, rehearsing, recording and sharing a series of short plays. These two strands of work were linked at the beginning and end.

The Club's social media channels offered a vehicle for crowd sourcing the play scripts. Scenarios and first lines were posted with followers invited to generate the scripts by contributing lines of dialogue. The project ended with twelve short plays being shared online via Facebook and the club website as part of the "FDS Film Fortnight", which also featured some earlier work by members of all ages.

In between times, members were involved in polishing the scripts, performing, editing the video and adding effects. Along the way they developed both their performance and technical skills.

And it won't end there. The project has demonstrated FDS's capacity to devise and write scripts. The plan is to do more of this over the next few months. Conventional rehearsing and live performances are unlikely to be viable for some time to

come and so the club will focus on radio plays and more film work.

The activity to date has kept the club in the public consciousness when it would otherwise have been invisible; numbers liking and following the FDS social media channels have increased and feedback has been positive. It has also kept members "theatrically" active and in touch with each other – both important objectives during a very difficult time for everyone.

Graham Hewitson

Note - The films produced are still available at <http://www.forfardramatic.com/film-archive/>



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Acceptability in theatre,

What are the limits of acceptability in theatre? When people debate this their threshold for acceptability is often defined by their perception of what other people may find unacceptable.

For amateur theatre companies, such an approach to pondering the acceptability of a future production can lead to the frustrations of “theatre by committee”. This is where the selection decision isn’t based on committee members’ own views but instead will often rely on assumptions on how somebody else (i.e. some unnamed random individual) may hypothetically take offence at the proposed piece.

Theatre by committee can be a significant barrier to staging provocative theatre which tests the boundaries of acceptability. The safe line taken by committees can result in decisions that are biased toward sure-fire “bums on seats” hits but which won’t offend even the most straight-laced and innocent of theatre goers.

Such an overbearing concern on acceptability is unfortunate because it forgets that the history of theatre is built on ground-breaking pieces which, in their day, were considered to have pushed the boundaries too far. Four examples are:

- A Doll’s House
- A Taste of Honey
- Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?
- The Birthday Party

We could go further back in time to Greek tragedy, where theatre goers must have been slightly disturbed during Medea when the title character murdered her own children.

When these plays debuted, they all had their fierce critics. Each received savage criticism, which wasn’t so concerned with the quality of the dialogue or the believability of character development, but more so about the outrage they’d apparently caused. To whom they’d caused outrage was never quite clear, but nonetheless the press took each of these plays to task for the offence they’d allegedly provoked.

But each of the plays I’ve mentioned, is now considered to be a classic. And not just a classic, but each is a milestone in the development of modern theatre. And each play is still performed with regularity on Broadway and on the West End, which is a testimony to their enduring legacy.

So, is it a case of outrage always wins in the end? No - it’s not that simple. Shock-value without substance is superficial. New plays that aim purely to shock may achieve short-term success due to their titillation value, but they rarely gain more than a footnote in the annals of theatrical history.

There’s another crucial factor common to the above plays, a factor which explains why their appeal goes on through the generations. And it’s not only down to the quality of the plays’ dialogue. It’s the human factor.

Although each play undoubtedly made some audience members seethe with rage, other theatre goers were moved by the underlying struggles the characters were facing. The shock factor in each of these plays has the dual purpose of seizing the audience’s attention while at the same time shines a spotlight on the situation the characters are grappling with. The shock is real and that’s crucial.



pushing the limits

I was faced with difficult decisions on whether or not to persevere with a play I was writing which centred on certain political controversies. I was worried it could have a polarising effect on the audience. In the end, I chose to focus primarily on the human factor by portraying how these issues could destroy people. The underlying messages of the play could be taken or left by the audience, but what I emphasised was the corrosive effect these issues had on the once loving relationship of the play's central characters. In the end we won two awards for the play and there was no backlash on the controversies that remained within the dialogue.

Even staging can test the limits of acceptability. Traditionalists may balk at changes to a traditional proscenium arch presentation. I recently staged a play in the round. The play was already controversial enough with its themes on sexual boundaries. With this play it may have seemed risky taking the actors off the main stage and placing them right in the heart of the audience. However, the staging meant the audience could immerse themselves with the unfolding events and allowed them to see close-up the torment and pain in the actors' eyes. In turn, being surrounded on all sides undoubtedly helped to drive the actors on as they had nowhere to hide. Bringing this controversial piece closer to the audience, and bringing the audience closer to the piece, helped make the experience all the more real.

The debate on acceptability often hinges on the question of – “who is it that decides what's acceptable and what's not acceptable in theatre?”

My advice is that there are three parties to trust, but ultimately there's only one person who should decide what's acceptable.

Firstly, it's important to trust the playwright. The best playwrights have the ability to shock while at the same time exposing the heart and soul of the characters. If you select a great playwright you're off to a good start!

Secondly, trust the audience. Tell them in advance that the play contains scenes which some audience members may find upsetting. Say this in the publicity but leave it at that.

Thirdly, trust yourself. If you've read a script and it's gripped and moved you, then it has the potential to affect the audience in the same way.

When I choose a play to produce, I go by the scripts I fall in love with. Typically, it's because of the human

factor – a character's plight which resonates with me. I've often found myself in the situation where I've fallen in love with play only to develop reservations due to some element which may cause offence.

One play I've directed is a good example. After I initially decided on “The Goat, Or Who Is Sylvia?” by Edward Albee, I soon had concerns about how an audience might react to the play's overt themes on bestiality. The first rehearsal assuaged my concerns as the actors and I quickly got into some great discussions. But what we were talking about was everything else in the play other than the bestiality (and the incest!). Instead we were intrigued by the huge range of questions the play posed: was there justification to the extreme reactions of Martin's friends and family when faced with the news of his affair with the Goat?; could Martin change his ways if his love for the goat was genuine?; did we feel pity for this broken, sobbing man as he cradled the mutilated body of his beloved goat at the play's shocking climax. Nobody walked out during the play and no one complained to me about the content. What we got afterwards was lots of interesting discussion with our audiences, on the same questions the actors and I had been exploring during rehearsal.

You may be in the position of considering a play to produce but you also have a sensitivity about what some audience members might think about the play. My advice is not to let this hold you back. As I say, trust the playwright, trust the audience to be grown up about it but, most importantly, trust yourself. If you love the play, do it.

Jamie Drummond



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The Cast's the Thing

Writing plays is a quirky activity and there seems to be two ways of going about it.

The first approach, taken by Pinter, Beckett, Stoppard et al, is to have an idea, write a play and sit back as the world of producers and directors beats a path to your door. When you're well known for being good at it, it's all so simple. It's brilliant – the writer doesn't need to think about anything other than crafting a theatrical gem. Shakespeare didn't need to worry about overburdening his actors with all those lines. They were just what Hamlet needed to say. Arthur Miller didn't worry himself about his actors producing convincing tears. A cast of twenty-six could be easily found if that's what Tennessee Williams needed. But, simplistically, if you write a small play and don't have much of a reputation beyond your own community, casting your 'masterpiece' is not as straightforward.

The second approach, more available to mere mortals such as myself and, I suspect, to most amateur playwrights, is to create a drama that recognises the mixed abilities and limitations of our friends and colleagues in our local drama club. In this way the subject and style of the play is informed by the possibility of casting it rather than by the dramatic necessities of a potentially more difficult piece. This can lead to writing a perfectly good play that can entertain audience and cast but it's not always entirely satisfactory for the playwright. Whilst the writer may want to emulate Pinter and Beckett (or at least to try), with the best will in the world, not all amateur actors

can do justice to *Godot* or *The Caretaker* and the ambitious playwright can find it well nigh impossible to cast a more challenging piece. Difficult to cast plays are written but filed under 'Someday'; that mythical day when the drama gods produce the dream set of actors and the play can be produced.

Networking with other drama groups would be a possible answer as it would widen the number of potential actors which, I suspect, would reduce the casting problem. Having several am dram clubs in close contact with each other would allow for a transfer policy, with actors from one club helping to fill parts in another club's production. A new play could therefore

be comparatively easily read by several clubs and cast from a 'city-wide' group of actors. This 'cross-pollination' would seem very positive from lots of perspectives but isn't easily available in smaller, 'one club' communities.

It also doesn't really take into account the insecurities with which many writers struggle. Writing is a fairly solitary activity and presenting your work to the scrutiny of others can be quite daunting. The easiest option is to stick with the folk you know, with the local club where you might have some sort of track record and where immediate ridicule can be minimised. It's quite a leap to present your script to the criticism of a wider community who are less well-known.

At this point I suppose I should really be coming up with a solution, or at least suggestions. (Or, maybe, just a list of the plays I'd like to offer to other clubs.)

Playwrights could submit their new work, or a brief resume/abstract, to Scene which could publish a page of 'Available New Plays'

Each District or Division could set up 'Play Exchange' of email contacts and, if planning for each year's Festival cycle could be co-ordinated, new plays could be made available to the clubs within the 'Exchange'. Perhaps there would be a two step system with the writer's local club having first call on a new work and only if it can't be cast locally would the play be offered to other clubs.

Just a thought.

Drew Young



Cressrelles Publishing

'A Quiet Night In' by David Walker

One Act Comedy, cast M+2F

A Farmer and his wife are stuck indoors on a very rainy night, trying miserably to pass the evening together. Suddenly, their dull evening is disturbed when two animal rights activists burst in. To draw attention to the Institute for the Release of Animals they have freed 38 budgies from the local pet store and are awaiting the arrival of the police and media to cover this sensational news story! Unfortunately, they made a major, and ultimately fatal, mistake as the police arrive in large numbers and they are all heavily armed!

Running time 35 minutes.

'The Rocking Chair' by George Taylor

One Act Ghost Story, cast 4F.

Mary has recently buried her abusive husband, but is looking forward to providing her beloved granddaughter with the wedding she herself had missed out on. Whilst gossiping and swapping ghost stories with her neighbours, Mary reveals that she is using her late husband's bequest for a headstone to pay for the wedding. If Mary had bought a headstone for the grave of her unlamented husband, then his empty rocking chair might not seem so threatening.

Running time 40 minutes

'Acting Peculiar' by Naomi Sinclair Once Act comedy, cast 4F

In this riotous comedy, the local am-dram group is rehearsing a village comedy. In the absence of the men, the ladies are being directed by a proponent of method-acting. But, as Shakespeare might have said, "there's madness in their method"! Costumes from the previous year's

play prove useful in ridding the ladies of their demanding dramaturge!

One of our series of Script-Held Plays, in which the cast can carry their scripts as part of the performance. Ideal for less experienced actors or where there has been insufficient time for full rehearsals.

Running time 40 minutes

Stagescripts Ltd.

'Chairs' by Ron Nicol

One Act Comedy, cast 6F + 1 extra

Set in the staff room and corridors of a small Further Education College with notice board, bookcases, small tables, refreshment area and bizarre collection of chairs. Ringing bells and light fades indicating passages of time. Easily sourced personal props.

In her efforts to foster better communications between college staff Marion, an enthusiastic newly appointed lecturer, enlists the help of colleague Kath to re-arrange the staff room chairs hoping to encourage improved conversation but resulting in the inevitable arguments over favourite seats progressing to resignations and even a nervous breakdown.

Guaranteed to generate wry smiles with a touch of poignancy. Some lovely stereotypical character parts.

Running Time 35 mins.

'Flushed Again' by Ron Nicol

One Act Comedy, cast 3F

They're back! Those girls - innocent Meg, fiery Jan and down-to-earth Tara - from Ron's award winning play "Flushed" return in this equally hilarious farcical sequel which finds our friends once again trapped in the same Ladies Room.

It's Jan's wedding reception and feelings run high when she accuses Tara of being

previously involved with her new husband Mike.

In their attempts to gain rescue a series of mishaps occur involving a dress malfunction, faulty wiring, leaking pipes, a rat, pieces of wedding cake and even the horror of body parts blocking the loo. As rescue nears - the lights go out and all the pipes burst!

(Note that having been school chums the ladies should ideally be around the same age).

Running Time 45mins.

'The Man Who Collected Women' by Ron Nicol

One Act Drama, cast: 2M + 5F

Based on Conan Doyle's "The Illustrious Client" this shortened version admirably captures the essential elements of the original plot.

When unscrupulous Austrian Baron Gruner, an expert in Chinese Pottery, persuades impressionable heiress Violet de Merville to marry him Lady Hilda Damery seeks help from Sherlock Holmes who enlists the assistance of underworld contact Annie Johnson and Gruner's discarded mistress Kitty Winter to investigate his shady background and prevent the marriage taking place.

Despite being severely assaulted by Gruner's accomplices the net tightens, Holmes breaks into the Baron's home stealing his diary of conquests and returning to confront the villain who receives justice at Kitty's hands.

Setting is Holmes' rooms at 221b Baker Street which can be simply or elaborately furnished with highbacked chairs, table and sideboard of the period.

Running Time 35 mins

Scripts can be obtained through the discount scheme for SCDA Members - please contact Brenda Williams at our National Office for details. Geoffrey Whitworth and Scott Salver scripts can be borrowed from our SCDA National Library at Summerhall Arts Centre.

Killin DC, locked down but not out

Like many groups around the UK, we were gutted by the cessation of the Festival season, closely followed by lockdown. Once we'd settled down into a different routine, some of us thought, why can't we still "get together"? We'd seen others doing it...let's give it a whirl! So we started off gathering interest, had a Doodle poll to establish a time that suited everyone, and we were off!

We started with Skype as we knew that best; a move to Zoom followed. Each platform has its merits but a paid subscription to Zoom proved its worth. Simon Smith & Cresselles Publishing regularly were updating us with scripts that were available to read, and we used a few of these to have virtual play-readings. We also took Ben Crocker, one of our favourite pantomime script writers, up on availability of his scripts for private readings. When we were short of numbers, we invited some SCDA friends from around the country to join us. All the readings were private, but we did have a tendency to dress up! Some

social meets evolved, where some drinks were partaken, with all the jokes about whose round it was next! Not as much fun as going to the pub but needs must.

Killin Drama Club wouldn't be Killin Drama Club if we didn't add a mention of our Killin Comedy Festival! We had previously sent out an appeal for "raffle ticket money" and were very grateful to those who responded. However, we were missing the interaction so, having cut our teeth with Zoom, the virtual KKF entered the planning stage. With a home written contribution from KDC; two pieces courtesy of Lazy Bee Scripts, performed by Peter and Lynn Rickard from Thornhill, and Ury Players, we had a good starting point. Our friend Sharon Wadsley from south of the border joined us with some poetry. Then, lo and behold, a request to Pam Ayres to use a short piece we had seen on YouTube, resulted in us being given another piece for our video, performed by Pam in her garden in early lockdown. Thank you Pam Ayres.



Our finale consisted of a bit of nonsense performed by members of KDC and also from the Executive of SCDA. KDC thank all those who took part and all those who donated. £360 has been passed to SCDA.

There's still time to watch the KKF video – just search for Killin Drama Club on YouTube.

Lesley Syme

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Still playing his part, 70 years

When Morna asked me to write an article for 'Scene', my first thought was 'in what form or theme should I use, after all 70 years of material is a mountain?' Historic, personal, reminiscences, or a bit of each. The latter won. So here goes.



In 1948 after playing Mr Wickham in 'Pride and Prejudice' in a Dunfermline High School production I was invited to come and visit a newly formed club The Randolph Players. This was the start of a life time of the stage. The club producer was one Grace P Hunter a fanatic supporter of SCDA. (The premier

award at Fife District is named after her). My introduction was being told by her that 'I was unlikely to be cast in a play soon but to attend rehearsals and 'watch, learn and listen'. She laid stress on speech and movement, which was also to help me in professional life when having to present conference papers and as a visiting University lecturer. Still at school I received a call to play a small part in a SCDA festival play as there had been a late call off. The part was as a slave boy in a play called 'Cats of Egypt'. As the programme was already printed my name would have to be penciled in. I have been a collector of theatre programmes for years and have found that the one for the festival that night was in January 1949. My first festival was, therefore, 1949 and not 1950 as I had thought. The cast of that play contained three actresses who were to become well known in the professional theatre, Ellen Mackintosh, Mary Helen Donald and Sheila Young. My first three act was in 1950 as Archie in 'The Shop at Sly Corner' where I was strangled on stage, as my son said 'you got your choking on stage early'! A series of festivals and 3-acts followed and then off to National Service. While in Germany our large RAF station boasted a first class drama club and I acted and part produced 3 full length plays which we performed at bases in West Germany-between keeping an eye on the Russians watching us.

In 1958 I went to work in Perth and Joined Perth Drama Club. This was to change my life! Perth was a

well established club presenting 4 full length productions between October and April as well as one acts, concerts, village halls etc. The club had its own club rooms and workshop and over 600 season ticket holders each having two seats and advanced booking. The club also had a good relationship with Perth Rep and often supplied extras for shows. This was a golden age for amateur theatre before the coming of modern TV. The club had many talented members among them Alex Reid who went on to be artistic director of Scottish Opera, John Scrimger Musical Director Perth Theatre and regular performer at Pitlochry and two members who joined the professional ranks via Perth Rep.

In 1960 a newly qualified primary school teacher joined the club, a talented and popular actress who soon became one of the leading ladies. We acted together in several plays and in 1963 Glenda and I married and had 54 happy years together. Our family of one son and two daughters all followed their parents onto the stage and on at least one occasion all five of us were on stage in the same production. My elder daughter is a playwright and her play 'Hindsight' was awarded 'best drama' prize at this year's Edinburgh Fringe. It all started with a love of theatre!!

Returning to live in Fife it was back to festival with Randolph and then helping to found a new club Dalgety Players now a thriving club with members of all ages

In 1983 I was asked to take over a pantomime production (sounds familiar) when the director had left after problems with the cast and so began a long association with pantomime which I produced and directed for very many years and still am involved, now mainly as house manager.

In 1985 I was asked to produce 'the Masque of Dunfermline' in honour of the 150th anniversary of the birth of Andrew Carnegie. This was to be an all-inclusive production with local clubs. Each club was to be given a one or two 15 minute historic pieces to perform under their own producers with the scenes linked by narrators.



after “Mr. Wickham”

(I wrote the narration and with Glenda and another actress were the narrators). Historic Masque is a rather unique form of theatre and allows everyone to participate. The Dunfermline Masque involved 5 drama clubs and 4 musical societies. A later masque of Dalgety Bay included not only the Drama club but other organisations such as scouts, guides, ATC, church group, and the assembling of a small group of musicians. I also wrote and directed a pageant as part of the centenary celebrations of the Forth Rail Bridge.

Now for a few random ramblings.

In 1960 The Perth Gaelic Players requested help from Perth Drama Club for their entry in the Gaelic Drama Festival, a 3 night festival in the Lyric Theatre Glasgow .

Our Producer Maurice Winton with the help of an English translation of the script took on the directing and I was the stage manager and also given a small non speaking part. (Try listening for your entry cue in a foreign language when you have to come on from a blind entrance). However, all went well and we carried off 4 trophies including the winning play! There were two notable results after this; (1.) The festival was the last show and demolition of the Lyric began the next week. (2.) One of the prizes was that the winning play would be broadcast by the BBC. There followed two nights of rehearsals at BBC Glasgow. The Production team was driven there and back from Perth by a celebrating and slightly inebriated author. He did, however, insist on writing in a line for me in the broadcast and I still remember it. This wasn't the end, however, and a party was held in Maurice's house on the night of the broadcast which finished at 6am when the whisky ran out !

Lighting. Arriving for our technical and asking about front of house spots and being told 'there's three, two are not working as the council can't afford to replace the bulbs.'



At a Divisional I spoke to the electrician and said that the play required several special lighting changes. His answer 'You'll be lucky' This at a professional theatre.

Adjudicators. This is not an easy task as I found out many years ago when asked to adjudicate at various festivals over many years. One thing you know is that you will be popular with at least one club! There are many very excellent adjudicators but there have been times when it has been obvious that homework has not been done before the show. Some still seem to base their judgements on whether they like the choice of the actual play. A well-known adjudicator (no longer with us) confided in me when I was acting as his steward that he could not stand Scots plays. I managed to stop myself as the Scots historical play on the programme that night was written by me! In a district festival the adjudicator many years ago refused to adjudicate the play because he found the content unsettling. Grace Hunter was livid and the row reached the press. Finally, the death knell is when the adjudicator says 'when I did this Play ...'. I could go on but I won't.

I have written in the past about the wonderful range of good Scots plays from serious themes to hilarious farce. Not only are they good fun to do but audiences love them. Hopefully they will stage a comeback.

Finally age is no barrier in working in theatre. I was invited to take part in a new play celebrating 200 years since the discovery of the tomb of Robert the Bruce. I was 84 at the time and delighted to play and to cue-in the mystery guest singer, Barbara Dickson. A year later I took over our Youth entry after the producer withdrew (familiar). So to all you actors and crew it is never too late - just keep the faith and remember the 'C' in SCDA stands for 'Community' and not 'Competitive'.

Peter K Franklin

P.S. I still have my lapel badge from when I joined SCDA



Eastern Division Youth Festival

Give us a stage and we'll perform!

Nearly seventy young people were provided with an exciting opportunity to appear on stage at the Regal Theatre, Bathgate on Saturday 14 and Sunday 15 March at one of the last SCDA events to be held prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic lockdown.

The three storey Category B listed art deco former cinema featuring ornate plaster work, terrazzo tiling and stained glass windows designed by Fife based architect Andrew David Haxton in 1938 proved a splendid venue for this lively event adjudicated by SASDA member Gavin Orr. Gavin runs his own production company, has been a radio presenter and directed children's theatre since 2004.

Mill Youth Theatre who presented three plays during the weekend devise theatrical performances based in several locations across East Lothian. Over the past three years they have quickly grown from only 8 members to over 100 youngsters participating in weekly workshops and have performed in such diverse places as skateboard parks and the grandeur of Cockenzie House.

Their involvement with the NT Connections Stage writing Festival led to appearances at Edinburgh's Lyceum and Traverse Theatres. Their belief that through youth theatre, young people can gain confidence, explore social and political topics and possess the freedom to express themselves in a safe and supportive environment.

Their first presentation Tom Well's "*Stuff*" which focused on the highs and lows of organising a successful party covered hard hitting topics.

Good pace with characters easily distinguished, props strategically placed and humour well delivered marred only by some throwaway lines and occasional masking. Enjoyable audience participation in the "*Stuff*" song.

St Kentigern's Youth Theatre from West Lothian are based around an after school club allowing students to develop their artistic skills outwith the standard curriculum. The group who stage a biannual school show were founded by talented drama teacher Amy Hanson, well known to SCDA supporters.

The group provided a taste of the classics with "*A Thirty Minute Julius Caesar*" abridged by Bill Tordoff from William Shakespeare. This exciting large ensemble piece featured effective mood lighting and front of tabs crowd scenes with an interesting rock music selection and choice of formal suits with subtle accessories providing the

modern slant. Principals excelled with Caesar possessing an impressive stage presence.

"*Red*" by Somalia Seaton presented the Mill YT cast with a challenging and heartfelt storyline focusing on mental health issues. Effective technical work with well choreographed music, lighting and effects, and a simple rostra providing varying acting levels. A hard hitting and skilfully rehearsed piece with strong performances from the lead players and chorus members achieving the relentless pace required.

John Godber's "*Bouncers*" provides a well crafted powerful script containing many adult themes and basic stage settings placing emphasis on the acting abilities of this mixed gender cast. Technically effective with adequate costuming, period music and fast flowing scenes. Characterisation and accents were first class with Eric's monologues exceptionally well delivered. Generated lots of audience laughter from a talented quartet of players.

Another thoughtful script on peer pressure and the associated difficulties of growing up on a city estate were well conveyed in "*It Snows*" by Bryony Lavery, Mill Youth Theatre's final offering of the weekend. Imaginative music choices, effective lighting and appropriate costuming blended well together with free flowing pace. The builder Dad and housebound Mum sequences worked well and the two leads playing Danny and Caitlin were excellent. Memorable "city of stars" dance number.

It should be noted that voice projection from all five teams was impressive.

Certificates were presented to cast representatives prior to the awarding of trophies:

Millennium Trophy (Winners)

"Red" by Mill Youth Theatre, Haddington

Ovens Quaich (Runners-Up)

"Bouncers" by St Kentigern's Academy

Peter Gordon Trophy (Best Moment)

"Bouncers" by St Kentigern's Academy

Stephen Lambert

Pictures from the festival are on the back cover

Northern Division Youth Festival



This year I was given the opportunity to perform and compete in the 2020 SCDA Aberdeen District and Divisional rounds of the festival. With the current situation regarding Covid-19, I am extremely grateful that myself and the rest of the team were able to showcase our hard work not only once, but twice. The SCDA One Act Play Festival truly is one of a kind. It allows young budding actors to meet and converse with other young people of a similar age and similar interests from not only their local community but from across the whole of Scotland. Furthermore, with the event showcasing one act plays, the audience are left satisfied knowing the whole story rather than confused by the piece of theatre they have just witnessed.

The Divisional of the competition, held in Brechin City Hall, was a fantastic event. Carnoustie Theatre Club, Blairgowrie Players and Stromness DC competed with my club, Ury Players from Stonehaven. Every member of SCDA Aberdeen, the competing clubs and Brechin High School were a friendly and encouraging face which helped ease the pressure and anxiety around performing. Being

present in such an uplifting environment provided extra motivation to perform to the best of my abilities.

One of my favourite memories from the event was after each team had performed, whilst returning to their seats in the audience, the audience would clap for them once again. This was a big confidence booster and gave me a sense of pride in the work I had just showcased. The adjudicator, Russell Boyce was supportive with his feedback, which was also encouraging. It was clear his aim was to further build on our acting skills and stage presence, his feedback was deemed extremely useful from all the teams involved. The after party was a fun way to end the day. It provided us with an opportunity to properly converse with the other teams and congratulate everyone on all their hard work, which definitely paid off.

Joanne Murray
Ury Players -Youth



Eastern Division Youth Festival

'Red' by Mill Youth Theatre, Haddington



'It Snows' by Mill Youth Theatre, North Berwick



'A thirty minute Julius Caesar' by St. Kentigern's Academy



'Bouncers' by St. Kentigern's Academy



Pictures by Walter Hampson