

Winter 2025

scene

My Brother's Gift



the magazine of
Scottish Community Drama





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Drama Association**

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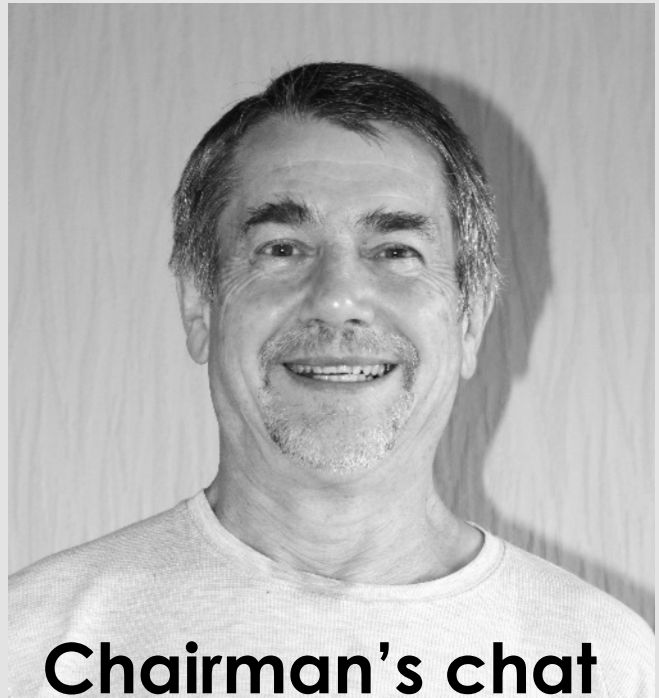
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Cover picture

Kirkintilloch Youth's production of 'My Brother's
Gift' which won this year's Youth Final

Photo by **Tony Flisch**



Chairman's chat

How did that happen?" That's my first reaction to finding myself in the role of SCDA Chair, for what will be the Association's Centenary year – something we'll all be hearing a lot more about in the coming months. That thought was quickly followed by "How on earth do I step into Carolyn Harrison's shoes?"

It may sound like a cliché, but Carolyn will undoubtedly be a 'hard act to follow'! She has steered the Association through five challenging years, taking on the role of Chair back in 2020, when we were all in the throes of lockdown. We owe her a debt of gratitude for her wisdom and leadership throughout that time. All I can say is that I'll do my best to follow her example as we steer the organisation into the next 100 years, building on the solid base we have in place. Thanks Carolyn!

Aside from the business of the AGM itself, a busy – and enjoyable – weekend in Stirling offered opportunities to socialise with friends old and new, along with the excellent acting, directing and technical workshops. Huge thanks are due to Carole Williams for engaging the professional tutors, and others for their efforts in putting the whole weekend package together.

Meanwhile, as pantos make way for the One Act Festivals, best wishes to everyone involved in rehearsals and performances. I look forward to doing all I can to support the Association as SCDA Chair in our Centenary year, building on the achievements of the past as we look to the future!

Best wishes to all for the
festive season, and for
an exciting year ahead!

Robbie

Welcome

to new Individual members

Hazel Lafferty	Glasgow (Western)
Andrew McVie	Glasgow (Western)
Cameron Melville	Glasgow (Western)
James Wakeman	Glasgow (Western)
Al Brown	Edinburgh (Eastern)
Alyson Topping	Edinburgh (Eastern)
Nicola Balfour	Stirling (Eastern)
Stuart Aitken	Aberdeen (Northern)

to new Patrons

Graeme Ferguson	Fife (Eastern)
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to new Club members

Abbey Theatre	Angus (Northern)
Off Script Drama	Perthshire (Northern)
Lundie Theatre Group	Fife (Eastern)
U3A Playreading	Edinburgh (Eastern)
Broadsword Theatre	Edinburgh (Eastern)
Moffat Theatre Trust	Stewartry (Western)
The Little West End Theatre	Edinburgh (Eastern)

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Thanks also to our Patrons for their continued support.



2026 is a very special year as our Association celebrates its 100th birthday. There are many plans and suggestions in the pipeline, both to celebrate this milestone and to look back over the past century.

Gala weekend

We plan to hold a gala weekend toward the end of the year with a dinner and a performance of the very first Scottish Final winning play '*Campbell of Kilmhor*' and perhaps snippets of various other winning productions from the past 100 years, (not necessarily by the original casts!). There will be special centenary merchandise that can be purchased from our website. We are also hoping to hold another *Play on Words* original playwriting competition, so authors get your ideas flowing.

As part of the official launch of the National Script Library in Stirling, we plan to feature a 100 winning scripts. We also hope to have a yearbook with an archive display and a gallery of historic photos at the Scottish Final in Pitlochry.

Keep your eyes on all our communication channels for further information.

Centenary celebrations

Archives

Now that we have space in the Library, we are also taking the opportunity to formalise our archives, making sure they are catalogued and safely preserved for the future. We recently met with Rachael Muir, Survey Officer with the National Records of Scotland to review what we have, both Nationally and from Districts and Divisions. We would love to expand the collection with records from all over the country, such as old photographs, festival programmes, committee minutes, redundant trophies and any other SCDA memorabilia. So please look in the loft and let us know what you can find. Old pictures can be scanned and included in a photo gallery on our website. Other items can be given a new home in Stirling, or if you can lend them we can take copies for the archive.

Oral history

We would also like to record memories of plays and festivals from our older members as an oral history project. So anyone interested in taking part, either with giving us the memories or collecting them, please get in touch.

Morna Barron
secretary@drama.scot

Youth Workshops

See workshop pictures
on the back cover

And just like that... our national youth workshop programme has ended.

Following the success of our 2023 workshops, there were two recurring suggestions in the feedback - (1) we should allow participants to choose a specialism to move on from taster sessions and - (2) we should create something that could be shared by the end of the weekend. The second request was a tall order as it takes much longer than 9 hours for a group who don't all know each other to create something audience-ready from scratch!

We wanted to keep the same team of tutors but the first stumbling block was that the lovely Caitlin who ran our musical theatre workshops in 2023, was in the cast for the summer programme at Pitlochry Theatre (you may have seen her face on the poster for Nessie?). We decided that I would step in and hand over more of the running of the events to local teams.

The tutors agreed to take on the challenge of making something within the very tight time-frames. They decided that incorporating as many of the ideas offered by the group was more important than the impossible task of having any kind of polished performance. Using all their experience in devising with young people, they knew that a common starting point was needed and commissioned 3 original pieces of music.

Each group chose the piece of music with the most creative potential for them and after more discussion in small groups, narrowed it down to 2 or 3 ideas. The tutors made the final decisions over lunch on how to move forward in the afternoon. Neal had a really challenging task of combining general teaching of sound and lighting with immediately applying them to a story - I am sure there are not many adults who could manage this in the time we had. Sharon focused on telling stories using movement and Carole worked on storytelling through songs and spoken text. By the end of day 1 each of the specialist groups shared material and ideas.

The tutors then burned the midnight oil pulling everything together into a short performance. It didn't need to make complete sense. In fact, the bizarre was sometimes more enjoyable and we found ways to incorporate different concepts. There did however have to be some kind of beginning, middle, and end.

All the groups chose the same piece of music because it was the most dramatic. However, what was finally created was completely different in each location.

We began in Carnoustie where the music inspired the young people to explore the famous Christmas day truce in 1914 where a game of football took place. The technical group had lots of scope to create the environment that allowed the movement group to tell the whole story without words. The text group created a song with a strong anti-war message which was both touching and powerful.

Moving on to Thurso, there was a much larger group who went down a completely different road and created a performance about pirates and bees. The text group wrote a sea shanty and collaborated with the technical team to create an advert with the auditorium re-imagined as cinema. With the movement group enacting pirate battles and the movement of the ocean as well as a bee attack it was great fun!

Our third visit was to Dunfermline and the group settled on a game of chess as the structure for their performance. This gave the technical team the challenge of creating a chessboard that could be lit for an audience on three sides. They rose to the challenge with thoughtful ideas around chasing impossible 'prizes' and whether anyone is ever really satisfied.

Finally, we went to Orkney where we had the largest group. Influenced by the Traitors, the group created an historical fictional battle between Shetland and Orkney and a current day 'Annual Island Games' where they competed for the Golden Viking Helmet. Orkney found a traitor who they banished into the sea to be consumed by a sea monster. You can imagine the fun to be had with all the specialisms on this one!

Once again, we were completely blown away by the creativity and generosity of the young people we met on our travels. It was a definite highpoint seeing young people being hands on from a technical perspective with minimum intervention – it can be done! Both the movement and the text groups really pushed themselves to find ways of telling the stories they wanted through performance.

Everyone participated with energy and enthusiasm regardless of previous experience and we enjoyed seeing new friendships form. We also need to thank all the local helpers – none of this would happen without their commitment. It was such a joy to deliver this programme again and we hope to produce something new and fresh for 2027, just give us a bit of time to recover from this one!!

Carole Williams

SCDA National Drama Advisor

Reserve adjudicator training

When it comes to planning festivals across the country, our District, Divisional and National committees are all faced with the same question – “who shall we get as our Adjudicator this year?” With that, comes the inevitable follow-up task of finding a suitable Reserve Adjudicator; someone unaffiliated with any of the competing clubs, with the knowledge and ability to provide appropriate and constructive feedback to the teams, if called upon.

In order to try and increase that pool of Reserve Adjudicators, SCDA has been offering members the chance to undertake ‘Reserve Adjudicator Training’, led by Dave Bennet who, as a GODA (Guild of Drama Adjudicators) Adjudicator and the Chair of SASDA (Scottish Association of Speech and Drama Adjudicators), brings with him an abundance of knowledge and experience.

Kicking off in May 2025, five of us joined a Zoom call with Dave to start our Reserve Adjudicator journey, not quite sure what to expect or what exactly he would get us to do. Broken down into three online sessions, we would be put through our paces, creating written adjudications and given the opportunity to deliver a “live” adjudication to each other, learning from one another and getting valuable feedback from Dave on what we did well and where we could continue to develop our skills. This would then culminate in us attending the SCDA Scottish Youth Final at the Byre Theatre, St Andrews in June 2025, where we had the responsibility of adjudicating one of the competing plays, allowing us to put what Dave had taught us into practice.

With all of us having significant experience with the SCDA festivals, we were no strangers to being on the receiving end of adjudications and understood the breakdown of the four categories – Acting, Direction, Stage Presentation, and Dramatic Achievement.

In our very first session, we each shared our experience with competing in festivals and discuss what inspired us to undertake this Training. Dave then took the opportunity to give his perspective on what he looks for when he is adjudicating a play; first and foremost (and something that some of us may find difficult to do), you are not adjudicating the play, but the production. It is important that any feelings you may have of a play (positive or negative) do not form the basis of your adjudication. At the close of the first session, Dave surprised us with some homework – read the script and watch recordings of two different productions of the same play (*‘The Twelve Pound Look’* by J. M. Barrie) and make an attempt at adjudicating each, providing comments as per the GODA Marking Scheme and try and assign marks against each category.

One week later, we were back on Zoom again, nervous to discuss our thoughts on the assigned homework. Taking each production in turn, and the marking scheme section by section, we went round the group and provided our first high-level attempt at an adjudication. Talk about a baptism of fire – acting in a play is one thing, but standing up (well, sitting on a Zoom call – but you get the idea) and giving feedback on someone else’s production is a whole other ball game. However, in this

environment, everyone had the ability to talk without judgement or fear of repercussions. What was most interesting in this activity was that whilst some of us may have been of a similar mind, looking for similar things, others were looking at different things and therefore picking on things that maybe other people missed. It really highlighted how differently people can view the same production. Sidenote...a few of us had a small confession to make – as we were watching online recordings, it was all too easy to hit the “Pause” button to allow us to catch up on our notes before hitting “Play” and moving on.



Carolyn, Lee & Ross report on training courses held over the summer

Once again, this session ended with homework (not so much of a surprise this time); this time, it was using a play that Dave knew extremely well...having won the British Final with it back in 1999 – *'The Dumb Waiter'* by Harold Pinter. The expectation this time was higher than before – again, read the script and watch the production (without hitting the “Pause” button), make your notes, but then provide a one-page written adjudication, i.e. the kind we were all used to seeing at the close of a festival. These were to be sent to Dave for his review in advance of the third and final online session

Again, one week later, we joined our final online session – in the most nerve-wracking session so far, we, one by one, delivered (as realistically as possible) our public adjudication to the group – the idea being that we were standing up at a festival and delivering it like it was the real thing.

There were a lot of similarities across the board – but again, there were also some real differences; this again, highlighted the individuality of adjudicating, both in terms of style and feedback. This session was really valuable in letting us listen to and learn from each other, and having Dave deliver his feedback on all of our “performances”.

At the close of this third session, we were advised of the final stage of our training journey – no spoilers here as we have already told you what that was...adjudicate a live production at the SCDA Scottish Youth Final and then stand up and deliver our public adjudication at the close of the festival, i.e. with no real time to consolidate our notes etc.

So, on 21st June 2025, we descended on the Byre Theatre in St Andrews, ready to adjudicate Beath High School's production of *'We Ain't Movin'* by Travis Alabanza. The homework previously assigned by Dave had allowed us to prepare as best we could – but it has to be said, to do it live is much more stressful. Another side-note - a key piece of kit for any adjudicator, if not provided for you, is a good light (but not one that is

distracting to the performers). It is safe to say that some of us struggled to make and then read our own notes, as a result of sitting in the dark. First world problems.

At the close of the festival, after the winner was announced, our group of trainee-Reserves gathered in a side room at the theatre, ready and primed (or as ready as we could be) to deliver our adjudications. Thankfully,



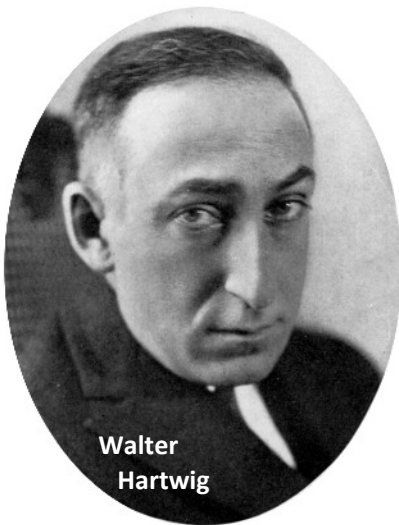
we were not delivering our comments to the teams or the general audience. With Dave Bennet in attendance to hear our thoughts and critique our style, there was extra pressure as the final's actual adjudicator, Paul Dougall, entered the room and listened to our comments before having some discussions with us around our comments and our marks.

With the last word spoken, so came to an end our Reserve Adjudicator Training – these sessions were extremely valuable and gave us a real appreciation for what is expected of adjudicators, the amount of preparatory work involved, and also the nerves involved in standing up and critiquing performances almost immediately after they have left the stage. We would encourage anyone with an interest in adjudicating, who may not initially know of a route to get experience before jumping in at the deep-end. It will provide you with the knowledge and skills required to hopefully allow you to take the plunge and one day become a Reserve Adjudicator. And who knows – you may see some of us sitting in audiences in the future with our notepads and pens, taking on the role of Reserve Adjudicator.

A Letter From America

When Geoffrey Whitworth returned to his desk in January 1926, there was a letter from America. It was addressed to him as the Secretary of the British Drama League. The sender was Walter Hartwig, organiser of the Little Theatre Festival in New York, inviting an English drama club to take part in the festival.

Geoffrey Whitworth's name may be familiar. The trophy presented at the British Final for the best new one-act play still bears his name. Although Walter Hartwig is largely forgotten, his letter was the seed from which the SCDA and our One-Act Festival have grown and flourished for nearly a century.



Walter was born to a German-American family in Milwaukee in 1879 and, like many stage-struck youngsters, his father steered him away from the theatre and into accountancy. However, he used this to get a job as Business Manager at New York's Lyceum Theatre and then moved sideways to work as a stage manager. In his free time, he acted with local amateur groups and in 1920 became the moving force

behind the New York Drama League. His big idea was to organise a competitive festival of short plays for amateur clubs, known as 'Little Theatre' groups.

The Little Theatre Festival

The first Little Theatre Festival was held in 1923. Hartwig hired the Nora Bayes Theatre on Broadway for a week. Twenty clubs from around New York were entered with four performances each night, Monday to Friday. Clubs paid \$150 to enter (about £1500 in today's money) and in return were given 95 tickets with a face-value of \$2 for the night of their performance. The three winners were announced on Friday night, each winning \$100. They reprised their performances on Saturday, when the winner was chosen and awarded the Belasco Cup, donated by the famous actor-director David Belasco, who Walter knew from the Lyceum.

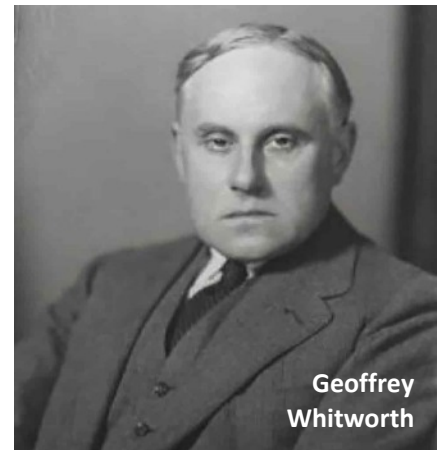
The winning play, *'The Little Stone House'* from the East-West Players was chosen by a panel of five judges who awarded marks, 50 for production, 25 for acting, 15 for setting and 10 for choice of play. The 1924 competition attracted clubs from much further afield and was won by the Little Theatre of Dallas from Texas. The Dallas club won again in 1925.

Until Walter Hartwig wrote to Geoffrey Whitworth, competitive drama had never been part of the British Drama League's agenda. The BDL had been formed in 1919 and was largely focused on campaigning for a National Theatre and encouraging new, morally-uplifting, plays to replace the Victorian

melodramas regularly performed by amateur clubs.

Huddersfield go to New York

With the New York festival in May, Whitworth put out a general call to BDL members. Seven clubs replied, from Lancaster to Bournemouth, and Mr W. Darlington, the drama critic of the *'Daily Telegraph'*, was engaged to travel around and judge their performances.



He chose the Huddersfield Thespians' production of *'St. Simeon Stylites'*. While the Little Theatre Festival would provide hospitality in New York, the team had to raise around £600 for their travel costs, (around £30,000 in today's money). The New York festival took place in the Bayes Theatre over the first week in May. Huddersfield Players were selected as one of four best performances, winning \$200 and reprising their play on the Saturday evening. The Little Theatre of Dallas won for the third time with their production of *'El Cristo'*. Apart from finding New York very expensive, the Huddersfield team were amazed by the dirty streets and commented that "the potholes on 42nd street wouldn't be tolerated in Leeds or Huddersfield."

As we prepare for SCDA's centenary next year, Steve Barron investigates how it all got started

The success of the trip led BDL members to demand a more organised process for selecting a British entry for the following year. The country was divided into six areas, with a meeting in Glasgow on the 4th June 1926 to form a Scottish area committee. This took the name of the Scottish Community Drama Festival. Thirteen members were elected to the committee, mostly from Glasgow and Edinburgh. The Duke of Montrose was elected President and Mrs A.C. Crichton M.A. appointed secretary.

The first one-act festival

Preliminary festivals were held around Scotland in November 1926 with the best four productions competing at a Scottish final on the 9th December at the Lyric Theatre, Glasgow. Entries needed to have at least three speaking parts and not exceed 40 minutes in length. Apart from coverage in local papers, BBC Scotland invited Mrs Crichton to give a 20-minute radio talk on the upcoming festival. Entries had to be received by the 11th October, together with a fee of £1-1s.

A London theatre director, E. Martin Browne, was appointed as adjudicator and travelled around the six preliminary festivals. In total, there were 35 entries: ten in Glasgow, nine in Dundee, eight in



The Welwyn players with the Belasco Cup

Perth, six in Edinburgh and one each in Aberdeen and Dumfries. The most popular play was J.A. Ferguson's *'Campbell of Kilmhor'* with no less than five entries. The Inland Revenue accepted that the festivals were 'educational' and exempted the tickets from entertainment tax.

The four plays selected for the final in Glasgow were the Perth Scottish Players with *'Managin' John's mither'*, the Blairgowrie and Rattray Players with *'Campbell of Kilmohr'*, the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution Dramatic Society with *'E. and O.E.'* and the Dumfries Guild of Players with *'The Ne'er-dae-Weel'*.

Blairgowrie and Rattray Players were the winners and in February 1927 joined teams from Leeds, Liverpool, Bristol, Birmingham and Welwyn Garden City for the British Final in London's New Theatre. A panel of three adjudicators, led by Miss (later Dame) Sybil Thorndike

declared Welwyn Garden City Theatre Society's *'Mr. Sampson'* as the winner, with Blairgowrie in second place. As well as an invitation to New York, the Welwyn team received the Howard de Walden Cup which is still presented at British Finals today.

Three months later, Welwyn's production of *'Mr Sampson'* won the Little Theatre Festival in New York. The cast returned with the Belasco Cup, giving a performance for their fellow passengers on the Anchor Line's *Tuscania* on the way home.

The birth of SCDA

The first Scottish Community Drama Festival had been organised by a committee of BDL members in Scotland. The festival had been a great success and in June 1927, they decided to formalise the committee as a separate body, the Scottish Community Drama Association. Dr C. Bernard Childs was appointed Chairman and Mr. D. Glen Mackimmie, the vice-chair.



The Huddersfield Thespians

How the SCDA got started

..... continued

The areas holding preliminary festivals were increased from six to seven, with new committees in the Highlands and Borders and the Dundee and Perth festivals merged.

In total, there were nearly 50 entries to the 1927 festival with local panels selecting 20 productions for the professional adjudicator, Mr Norman Marshall. He travelled to the Area Finals in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dundee and Ayr to choose four plays for the Scottish Final in Glasgow's Lyric Theatre on the 14th December. These were Ardrossan and Saltcoats Players with *'The Old Lady Shows Her Medals'*, the Belmont Dramatic Society from Aberdeen with *'The Philosopher of Butterbiggins'*, and two Glasgow clubs, Kelvinside Academicals with *'The Dover Road'* and The Locksmiths with *'The Mask'*. The adjudicator, Mr William Armstrong of the Liverpool Repertory Theatre, chose *'The Old Lady Shows Her Medals'* as the winner. The following night the Ardrossan and Saltcoats Players got special permission from the playwright, J.M. Barrie, to broadcast their production on the wireless.

The British Final returned to the New Theatre in London on the 6th February 1928. There had been 147 entries to the early rounds of the competition, a third from Scotland. The Ardrossan and Saltcoats Players joined the winners from the five English areas. They won and brought the Howard de Walden Cup back to a Civic Reception. However, their biggest challenge was to raise funds to

travel to New York. The Duke of Montrose, as SCDA President, launched the appeal and the playwright, J.M. Barrie, was first to send a cheque for £10. Over £1000 was raised, including donations totalling £70 from drama clubs around the country, which allowed the Players to set sail from Greenock on the 28th April.

Winning the cup

The Ardrossan and Saltcoats Players triumphed in New York, beating 19 American companies to win the Belasco Cup for Britain for a second year. They toured their play to Montreal and Toronto before heading home at the end of May. On their return, they were paraded through Saltcoats on a charabanc led by a pipe band. Over the following months, the Players toured their production around Scotland. Over 50,000 people saw the play since its debut in Saltcoats.

Despite the success in America, the cost of sending a team to New York every year became prohibitive as the economy fell into depression. The BDL decided to break the link

and push back their festival schedule by three months. The preliminary festivals were held in January and February, leading to a Scottish Final in March 1929 and a British Final the following month.

No doubt many American clubs were relieved that there was no British entry to the Little Theatre Festival in 1929. The competition was won by another J.M. Barrie play, *'Shall we join the Ladies'* by Walter Hartwig's home club, the Garden Players of Forest Hills. The first New York winners since 1923. A few months later, the Wall Street Crash sent the U.S. economy into freefall. There was a festival in 1930, though with reduced entries, and the 1931 festival was postponed. Walter Hartwig tried to get it going again the following year, but the moment had passed and the Little Theatre Festival never reappeared.

The New York festival had lasted only eight years, but our One-Act Festival and the Scottish Community Drama Association are part of its legacy. Walter Hartwig died in 1941. We have a lot to thank him for.



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The 2025 Youth Finals

Elisabeth Higgins reports on Stromness Academy's trip to the Byre

'Everything you wanted to know about your teachers but were afraid to ask' is a comedy written by Jason Pizzarello. It humorously highlights the stereotypes



about teachers in short scenes with different settings and characters. I really enjoyed performing the show and I gained confidence since I had never done such a big show before. I also regained my love for performing and theatrics even though there were some tough setbacks.

Making our journey to St Andrews was interesting to say the least. Our boat, which should have taken 7 hours, ended up taking almost 16 hours. We were supposed to arrive in Aberdeen at 7am, however we arrived at 14.30. We were completely stranded a mile out, due to limited visibility caused by thick fog. Everyone was stressed due to how we were going to miss our technical rehearsal because it would still take two hours to drive to St Andrews. In fact, at that rate, we were going to miss the start of the show. However, the lovely people at the SCDA reorganised the whole event so we could have a brief rehearsal and scoff down some lunch/dinner they provided.

We cannot express how grateful we are for them and the other competitors.

We all worked tirelessly for months to perfect our show, so it was an amazing accomplishment for us all and we were all amazed at how efficient we became at running the show. We did lose a few of our original cast members; however their replacements seamlessly incorporated themselves and took to their parts like wildfire, meaning the show functioned like a well-oiled machine. My favourite scene of the show was the boxing scene, due to how full of life the scene is, and the technical aspects really brought the scene together. I especially enjoyed how we were all on stage, because we were feeding off each other's energy, which I thought made it one of the funniest scenes. For example, the frail teacher becoming so bloodthirsty she must be seized and taken off stage.

I really enjoyed performing in the play and meeting new people through the process, whether that being through forming closer bonds with the cast members or other participants in the competition.

I'd also like to express our immense gratitude to SCDA, for looking after our bairns as though they were your own - I was deeply touched by the accommodations made for us following our delay in Aberdeen. Thank you



at the Byre Theatre, St. Andrews

Thoughts on the youth final from cast of Beath High.

"I was so surprised when we got into finals, not because I didn't think we'd manage it but because I never expected them to call our name. I was thrilled, and the day went really well. Obviously there were a lot of nerves, but it was more after our performance we were all a little sad by the fact that it was over, but also just so proud we'd accomplished it as the first Beath team ever to make it. I could not be prouder of my cast to say that we managed to do that. My favourite part was definitely the performance, as it is what we'd been working up to this entire time and it just felt as if we'd finally done it."
– Hazel



first stage felt like a dream, but going all the way to the Scottish Finals was one of the happiest moments of my life, so thanks to everyone who made this experience one in a million" - Owen

"Getting all the way to the Scottish finals was a dream come true especially with a show I love so much and hold very close to home. I feel like I can relate to the play so getting to the final with that was the best thing ever.

My favourite thing about the Scottish Finals were performing and getting to do the tech rehearsals. I also enjoyed getting to introduce the members of the platform party. Even though we didn't win we are over the moon with second place, and that better than

everything as it's the first for our school to ever get to the Finals. After last year when we just made it to Fife district, I'm so glad it happened and it was this script. I loved working with the cast and getting to make our own TikTok account, as well as what goes on in rehearsals. I also loved meeting so many wonderful and talented people

But we would have never got this far if it wasn't for our amazing director Miss Hanson and taking all the time for this play. I miss doing it so much but I will keep the script and this experience is something I'll treasure forever, so to the SCDA, thank you for having us and making us feel so welcome, and thank you again to our director Miss Hanson." – Rio

Pictures by Tony Flisch

"Getting all the way to the Scottish Finals never really felt possible, especially since we're the first Fife team to do it in so many years, but I loved every bit of it. It brought me closer to my fellow actors in a way I'll never forget and truly cemented the show/event fondly in my memories.

The day itself was great – getting to chat with the other teams, giving everyone stickers, messing about in the changing rooms – but my favourite part of all was getting to the bows and knowing, no matter what, me and my teenager friends from Cowdenbeath, Fife were some of the best child actors in Scotland." – Milo

"The Scottish finals was a great day, full of loads of fun. The staff and everyone who helped out at the event were so helpful and kind. Getting past the



A Life & Times on the Stage

Most of you will be familiar with the name, Mike Tibbetts. He is the playwright who penned that most memorable and moving masterpiece, *'The Dancing Fusilier'*, British final and prestigious Geoffrey Whitworth award winner back in 1997. He has penned over 20 one-act plays and won numerous national playwriting awards, including A Geoffrey Whitworth hat trick! No small feat!! Other plays you may remember include *'Funny, You Don't Laugh Jewish'* and, *'Little Bro Morning, Big Sis Afternoon'*, both festival favourites.



His interests are all encompassing and his canon of work eclectic. What is in common with them all is the quality of writing. Mike has an enviable ability to tell a good story and bring the audience on a journey which will invariably have many interesting twists and turns along the way. I asked him what his secret was:

"As a writer, storytelling gets complicated, and there's a truth in the statement, 'never let the truth get in the way of a good story'. What I have discovered is that when you tell a story the way you tell it actually replaces the original story you have in your brain and what you get is story-creep. Some stories I have told, my wife has said, 'you do know Mike, that never happened?' From having a love of stories and telling stories you generate your own stories."

Mike's wife, Pam, is his editor and he trusts her opinion implicitly. She produced *'The Dancing Fusilier'* and he said the success was far more down to her than in the original writing. He went on to explain that late in life, his dad opened up about his war experiences and the resulting piece was a heartfelt tribute to him. He added, "The greatest compliment I have ever had was after the first performance in the Mitchell theatre in Glasgow a total stranger came up to me and said - How did you know my story?" Truly an affirmation of Mike's meticulous research and writing skills.

As with most of us, Mike's interest in performance started early in life at primary school. He recounted his

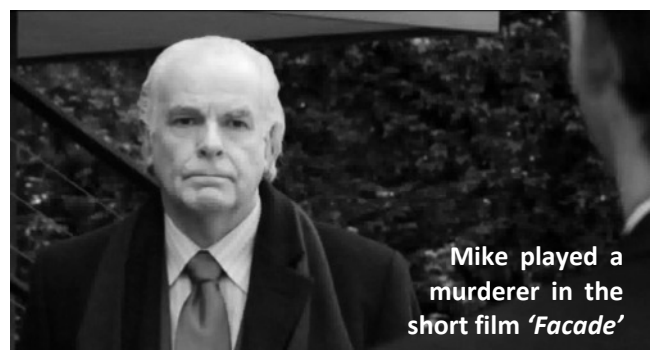
first 'acting job' was as the Gingerbread Man in a school production as he had the right hair colouring! After that, a series of performances throughout his life from starring in the *'Humperdinck'* opera, *'The Mikado'* at Lancaster, and onwards to Drama clubs at University. After a move to London he was soon starring in radio plays for the BBC. The family later relocated to Scotland where he joined Kirkintilloch Drama Club and subsequently was instrumental in restarting the Aberdour Drama Club when living in Dollar.

In 2010, at the age of 63, after 17 years working for Scottish Enterprise, and with persuasion from his wife, Pam, Mike applied for the post-graduate course in acting at the Central School of Speech and Drama, and he got in, (as he wryly said, "That wasn't supposed to happen!"). They moved to London and since then Mike has made a career as a professional actor. See him in the 2016 remake of the film *'Whisky Galore'*, cast as the captain of the ship that sunk! He, fortunately, survived! Great film, BTW!

Mike is a huge supporter of our organisation and he shared the following thoughts with me.

"I think SCDA is one of the best things that's happened, particularly for young people in Scotland, I am always encouraged when I go to festivals and see young people in the audience, just as we were. Our generation were brought into it by our parents, who were into theatre. It is so important that young people have the opportunity, not just in terms of artistic exposure but their self-confidence, getting up on stage in front of several hundred people and speak up and say their lines".

On acting at festival, Mike said "Unique and individual performances abound at our festivals." He added, "The huge thing about acting on stage is the audience understands truth when they see it and they respond to that. The plays that win festivals are innately truthful. What the theatre world strives for is how to make the performance true on stage."



Mike Tibbetts in conversation with Paula Gibson

I asked Mike what he was working on currently and he told me a fascinating story about an event he writes annually for fellow thespians and friends in Cumberland. Some years ago when visiting, Mike noticed an old sandstone building in their garden and mentioned how it would make an excellent theatre. No sooner said than done and the following year and every year since the custom-built wee theatre hosts a new Mike Tibbetts piece to a regular and enthusiastic audience. Amazing what can be achieved when there is a will, determination and an old outhouse in a garden in Cumberland! Finally, what were Mike's thoughts on the future of SCDA and if he had any ideas about how we should celebrate our centenary next year.

"I think the SCDA has always been important to community life in Scotland and it has the potential to be even more so in future.

The fact that the association will celebrate its centenary next year is ample testament to its endurance and longevity and while this will undoubtedly continue into the future, there are clear challenges as well as valuable opportunities.

To outsiders, community theatre is often badly misunderstood. "AmDram" is popularly dismissed as trivial, self-indulgent and largely irrelevant to mainstream cultural life. On the inside, however, we know that the many clubs in Scotland make a very significant and sometimes vital contribution. Look at the number of club members who have gone on to professional training and successful careers as actors. Budding playwrights in Scotland have virtually no chance of getting their work seen by professional producers but the SCDA's active support of new writing opens up priceless avenues to see exciting and important new work realised on the stage.

The biggest challenge, of course, is to see a healthy flow of new young people coming into the association. The SCDA has a long tradition of members infecting their children with the "bug" of acting and stage work and the Youth section is the powerhouse of this part of the SCDA's contribution. It is a simple fact of modern life, however, that young people eventually leave home and often lose close touch with the communities in which they grow up.

This loss of contact, however, presents a major opportunity for the SCDA. Young people from elsewhere moving into Scottish communities could

forge new links with their neighbours by going along to an SCDA festival and perhaps even joining a society.

Youngsters who have honed their skills and experience in the SCDA Youth Festivals will have a great deal to offer a new club elsewhere and would be welcomed with open arms.



There is much discussion of mental health problems in modern society with growing loneliness and isolation. Whether it is by tearing tickets, serving tea, hammering a set together, membership of an SCDA club has the potential to help someone feel a valued part of something worthwhile and fulfilling.

The biggest challenge, though, is to get the SCDA recognised for the valuable and remarkable Scottish asset that it is. The centenary celebration should offer a wonderful platform on which to base a publicity campaign. Why doesn't the SCDA commission an author to write a history of the organisation?

Why not a non-competitive gala super-festival to showcase snippets from the best work of SCDA clubs over the years? Invite clubs to offer scenes and pieces from their historic repertoires, select the best and mount a massive evening's celebration of what the SCDA has – and can – achieve. Film it and sell the DVD or make it available for online streaming. Get the media interested, such as Channel 4 or Sky Arts. Suggest a documentary on mainstream TV and if a prominent local personality like Joyce McMillan could be persuaded to offer herself as host presenter, the pitch would be powerful."

Food for thought, Mike, and thank you.

'Night Shift' a library find

It's probably more usual to find a play that you like, then cast it from your club members. With our one act competition play having only 2 of a cast, there were some of our members remaining who would like to be in a play - 4 ladies in fact and no longer in their 'first flush of youth'. A few websites allow search on cast numbers, some easier to use than others. Three weeks after starting the search we still had nothing that would fit the age range and which appealed to us. I remembered I had a copy of the SCDA library database which held information about the plays in the SCDA Library. A few searches for plays with a cast of four females came up with some possibilities. The problem was that the library, having recently moved to Stirling, was in the process of being reorganised and I was really fortunate in being allowed to visit with co-producer Lorna to see what we could find.

We unearthed a few possibilities and set them aside. The last one remaining play in my search list was 'Night Shift' by Peter Whiteley which had not been published in the usual way but had been entered in the SCDA 'Play on Words' competition in 2002 along with 94 other plays! That's right! Ninety-five entries in the playwriting competition! These plays are not on the shelves but are stored in a tall vertical pile of cardboard boxes.

We took our finds home and started reading with nothing appealing at all until I turned to the A4 typed photocopy of 'Night Shift'. It more or less fitted the demographic of the cast, was amusing and distinctly original in its plot. The ending too, was enigmatic and offered all sorts of possibilities, so we reckoned we had found our play. I quickly discovered that neither the

email nor the physical address on the script were in current use. Some online searching resulted in an address that looked promising, though no email was available. I can't remember when I last posted a physical letter but found some paper and an envelope, bought a stamp and sent it off, not entirely hopefully.

Three days later, on Hogmanay, I received an email

Tony

I just received your letter regarding my play, 'Night Shift'. I'm glad you like it.

I wrote it, not for my little company of players, Tain Royal Academy Players, but for a local WRI group and, for some reason, I never saw it performed.

I have absolutely no objection to you performing it. You also have my permission to video or record it. There will be no fee for either.

However, my copy of the script is on a laptop I stopped using years ago and I would be grateful if you could send me a copy of the script and also the recording you make.

I could send you a 'permission to perform' document which you may need.

Best wishes

Peter Whiteley

It seemed then that the copy I retrieved from the SCDA library was in fact the only one in existence, and as Peter no longer had a copy of the play, I had to send him a copy of the copy. We worked hard in rehearsals and Peter said he would try to attend our performance, which would be the world premiere, twenty-three years after it had been written.



Tony (left) led a Q&A session with the cast and Peter (right) after the performance

How a chance find in the SCDA library unearthed a forgotten script and reconnected old friends

As the play was quite short, we decided to bill it as “A Play, Pakora and some Plonk” and to offer a Q&A session afterwards just to fill the night out a bit.

Unfortunately, Rosie who played Doreen was taken ill on the last night and poor Lorna had to read the part in an ill-fitting costume. Happily, the audience entered into the spirit and applauded loudly.

Peter, who had grown up in Bishopbriggs, attended all three performances and brought his wife Cynthia Rogerson and some of his family too. During the celebrations after the last night performance, Peter told me that it had been one of the best experiences of his life! He is currently writing another play with our cast in mind. We’re looking forward to seeing it.

Peter had asked that instead of paying him, FADS should make a donation to the ‘Highland Hospice’ which of course we duly did

Tony Flisch



A letter came out of the blue. It was from Tony Flisch of Fintry Amateur Dramatic Society. I didn’t know Tony, but I knew of the Fintry club. I had seen them perform at a couple of Scottish Finals and knew they had a great reputation. So, I was delighted when Tony suggested that they would like to perform one of my plays, ‘Night Shift’, for 3 nights.

I wrote ‘Night Shift’ in 2001 when a local SWRI group asked me to write a 30-minute play for four women. At the time, I was writing one act plays for a couple of

groups at Tain Royal Academy where I taught. One group, Tain Royal Academy Drama Group, was for pupils of all ages. The other group, Tain Royal Academy Players was an adult group consisting of teachers, parents and former pupils.

This meant that I could write plays for the people I knew and was aware of their particular talents. But this was a different scenario all together. I knew only one of the potential cast and had never seen her act.

Anyway, I put pen to paper and started thinking of situations and characters I could put together in a play. The SWRI group had specified they wanted a comedy. I came up with a quartet of ‘bag ladies’ who met every evening on a piece of waste ground in a city somewhere. I thought to give each of the characters a different back story which they could share with the others.

The more I proceeded with the plot, the more ridiculous and outrageous these back stories became. The ending proved difficult until I decided that the women would exit the stage to pursue their respective (though not always respectable) nighttime employment.

So, as the FADS performance dates approached, hotel rooms were booked, and my wife and I set off down the A9 from our house near Dingwall to spend a long weekend in the Glasgow area.

We received a very warm welcome in Fintry where I had been asked to take part in a Q & A session after each performance.

I hadn’t seen the play performed and when Tony got in touch, I had to ask him to forward me a copy because I couldn’t find it on any of my old computers. I thought I’d better read it before I got to Fintry!

I was very impressed with the production and stage presentation and the little added touches the cast and director had included. All 3 nights were sold out to appreciative audiences.

The most amazing thing that happened that weekend was I was approached by an old school friend whom I hadn’t seen for 44 years. We had been best friends at school and beyond but lost touch with each other. He and his wife didn’t know the play they were going to see was written by someone they used to know until they saw the programme. We’re now communicating regularly. Thank you Fintry for that reconnection!

Peter Whiteley

Early drama memories

Well that's it for another year !!

Having just written and produced a short one-act play for a very young and enthusiastic cast in this year's Youth Festival, the discussion afterwards turned to their first ever festival. I was asked by one of the cast; *"How many festivals and plays have you been involved with in your theatrical career?"*. Well at 92 years old and still active that's quite a question. As I have a large collection of theatre programmes and scripts I thought I would give it a go.



Peter Franklin

In researching , however, I was prompted to also note some thoughts about SCDA festivals from the early years. My first being in 1949 although I had been in a youth festival the previous year. I was called in at the last moment to substitute for an ill player, (one line).

From the late forties to the 1960s, SCDA was in its heyday. Dunfermline was a separate SCDA district with its own District Festival in the Carnegie Hall. There were other festivals for example the annual Co-operative Society Fife festival, HMS Caledonia a Navy Drama Festival, Young Farmers Festivals etc.

The SCDA festival could run to 4 nights and the names of the clubs make interesting reading. These include Dunfermline Dramatic Society, Randolph Players, Craig Players , HMS Caledonia, Auchterderran, Beath High, Kelty

Girls Guildry, Carnegie Youth Centre, Young Farmers Clubs among others.

The standard was very high. In my first festival play three members of the cast went on to have very successful careers on the professional stage. One with a regular radio show and at the RSC at Stratford on Avon. Another on TV and a third on TV in Canada.

As can be seen, many of the clubs were community clubs following the C in SCDA with many of their entries in Scots which was very popular with the local audiences. How many of these clubs have survived and enter SCDA festivals?

There was also a Fife Full-length Play Festival which always had several entries, (I remember being in the winning team on two occasions) .

After National Service, I was back to Dunfermline and immediately asked, with 7 days notice, to take over a part in Carnegie Hall because a cast member had to withdraw. Sounds familiar!

In 1958 I moved to work and joined Perth Drama Club. My first part was in a SCDA three-act entry. This club performed 4 full-length plays every season from September to April. The club eventually owned its own club rooms and had a loyal following of nearly 600 season ticket holders. This allowed the club to take theatre premises in Tay Street. Their regular audiences increased to around 1000 for the week, reaching 1400 one season. I can confirm the figures as I was club treasurer at the time.

The fact that Perth also had the Perth professional theatre meant that theatre-going was part of the local psyche. There was good relations between the two, with Perth Drama Club often being called upon when numbers of extras were required by the Rep.



Peter Franklin looks back on his 75 years taking part in community drama in Fife

Two club members became professional actors with Perth Rep. Two others, Alex Reid went to Scottish Opera and Grahame Fulton to the BBC.

In 1966 I moved back to Fife and rejoined Randolph Players. Times and society were changing and the number of clubs declined as TV became universal. Dunfermline District amalgamated with the other Fife Districts to form a single district.

In 1970, the Fife Festival was held in the Philp Hall and had only two entries plus a non-competitive one. Randolph Players kept Fife alive at District and Divisional level.

Another casualty with the loss of so many small local clubs was the decline of plays in the Scots language, which unfortunately continues to this day. Sometime ago I produced a 3-act play in Perth and had to include a glossary of some of the Scots words with explanations. Also at this time, casts became smaller and two-handers became popular and very competitive in festivals. This meant many young players did not get the chance to experience the fun of festival. I wrote an article about this in Scene some years ago.

However, Fife fortunes revived when the festival moved to Buckhaven where it remained for over 20 years. (I remember being on stage the very first night). After a forced move, it was back to the Philp Hall and now to the new venue of Leslie Town Hall.

To sum up, the amateur scene was kept alive by clubs putting on plays at village events, charity shows, OAP homes etc. during the hard times.

Adjudicators

In the early days, the standard of adjudicators varied greatly.

Some were good but some were not. For example, one (a well known radio personality) refused to adjudicate a play because he was horrified by the content. Another criticised the non appearance of a character. The said character was not in the updated published script of that play as submitted to her. On one occasion the adjudicator had a fierce argument with a member of the audience during his adjudication. Choice of play was given too much prominence and influence leading to marks for choice being removed from the adjudication.

The early days of Fife drama were dominated by two very strong personalities

Grace Hunter was the founder of Randolph Players. 'Miss Hunter' as she was always known was SCDA to the core and fiercely promoted and defended it. Jenny Greenaway was SCDA Kirkcaldy's very prominent drama monarch. Both ladies were very formidable and constantly trying to outdo each other. Who won? Well the winning trophy in Fife District is named after Grace Hunter.



Now back to the original question. What was it? Oh yes - *"How many festivals and plays have you been involved in your theatrical career?"*

One-act plays in SCDA festivals, acting and latterly producing or both	...	...	...	52
Three-act plays, acting and directing, including SCDA festivals	...	...	...	40
Masques - writing, acting and directing	...	...	...	4
Pantomimes, mainly directing	...	...	...	20
Plays written and performed in SCDA festivals	...	...	...	3

These are all I can have noted down but there may be others.

Note - The most memorable event in my theatre career was meeting Glenda, my late wife of 54 years, when she was leading lady in Perth Drama Club.

No wonder there is drama

On those final few moments before the curtain goes up, when the audience is settling down, when the actors are self-absorbed, backstage becomes eerily quiet. Well, except for the muttering of actors repeating the only lines they can remember and sound of the Director opening their drink of choice, it struck me that across the country, on a regular basis, in all seasons and in weather the cat refuses to go out in, seemingly ordinary folk chose to step from the real world into a make-believe one.

A world which is both real and unreal; that both exists and doesn't exist at the same time, well. At least until the house lights come up and what inside the box is revealed. The theatrical stage the equivalent of a Schrodinger experiment.

A closed, controlled, environment that is open to all. Where reality is reflected and suspended. The set is fake, the props are fake, the lighting is fake and so is the light. And a spoiler that's not a spoiler, the drink in the glass isn't what it seems either. It's all controlled and yet its more real than the real world.

Left is right, right is left, up stage is down the back, down stage is up the front, flats are upright, and the apron isn't a piece of cloth covering grandma's skirt. Someone (*Nobody really knows*) once wrote that the whole world is stage (*and has been dining out that line ever since*), he should have written the stage can be the whole world. And that's just describing the mere bricks and mortar of the building with its foundations in the real world but

which at the same time, contains all of known existence, and where you can have a seats up with the gods.

What about the civilians who walk through the portal of disbelief to become someone else? Or try to (*you know that's true*)

Wenches become pious housewives and pious stay-at-home folk become rogues and wenches. The dead still talk and walk, often in riddles. Which is annoying because the dead have all the answers. Young men stoop to become old men, old men prance like young stallions.. Where there often is more drama backstage than on stage, which makes all Directors cry into their non-drink. (*At least that's what they tell us*).

Where whispers are louder than thunder and talking aloud to oneself, or even to a skull, is considered a talent rather than a sign of schizophrenia. Where it's poor form not to go into the spotlight.

Gender swapping? Don't they know that has been de rigueur in Theatre land since the 16th Century?

Women play at being the best boy, men play at being the old Dame. Someone always plays the Ass. Doctors play patients; upright citizens become fraudsters, liars, and Priests. Fraudsters, liars, and Priests play themselves. Accountants feel more fear than finding a misplaced decimal point. Teachers learn and students don't. Methods are employed when regular acting just isn't enough.

And where Ghosts are real.



A view from the wings by Graeme Ferguson

All dancing along the narrow mobius strip between the proscenium strip and 3 solid walls, and the one which isn't, but which is also possible to be broken. A 2D backdrop pretends to be a 3D image. Where tradition dictates that the threatening shout of "*break a leg!*", that should have you in front of a Judge, is but a form of endearment directed at people whom we like. (*Whether its panto or not*)

The curtain up is pulled aside to reveal a new world. A world we built with cloth, carboard, 2 by 4's and duct tape. A place where they have never been but is instantly recognisable as here, but not here and they believe it is real.

Backstage the muttering cast finally bonds, after months of rehearsals, with the shared panic of trying to recall what their first line is. And the realisation that although it's their name in the programme, the real star of the show is the duct tape which is literally holding the show together.

Maybe it's because we all enjoy being in the one place you can cry, scream, and die dramatically night after night and still live to hear applause, rather than being arrested for disturbing the peace.

Maybe it's because we all know deep down that stepping into someone else's shoes (*sometimes literally, hiring costumes cost money*) we gain a deeper understanding of different emotions, backgrounds, and real-life experiences of others, meeting people from a different backgrounds, hearing and sharing stories, fostering a sense of one stage, one world. Gaining a little more compassion that makes us just a little bit better at playing a real human and hopefully passing that lesson onto to those watch us.

After all the world is but a stage, With its grand entrance and dark exit. And all of us merely players (*it's that line again*) in our own full-length show. Where the next line,

next move, next cue Isn't scripted, isn't rehearsed, isn't even remembered and is lost as soon as uttered.

We search for the Director, but they've left the building, or perhaps they never existed. The walls are gone, the props misplaced, the spotlight flickers like a dying star. And maybe that's why we choose to leave the "real" world, and the cat, behind. To dance and play in the box of existence we built out of cardboard, duct tape and hope. Where clarity about life can be found. Where what happens on stage is real, and behind the 4th wall is pure illusion.

No wonder there is drama, (*and not enough footnotes*).



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Waves of Faith and hope

An inspiring show from new SCDA members, the Ukrainian Amateur Theatre in Dundee

When war drove Ukrainian director Varvara Mishyna from her homeland to Scotland in 2022, she carried with her not only the pain of displacement but a fervent belief in theatre's power to heal. Today, as founder and artistic director of the AUGB Ukrainian Amateur Theatre in Dundee, Varvara brings that conviction to life. Her landmark production *'Robinson: A Musical Journey'* premiered this June as part of Refugee Festival Scotland, reimagining Daniel Defoe's classic tale through the eyes of those forced from home by conflict.

A Personal Crusoe

For Varvara, this musical is more than a creative adaptation—it is a living family legacy. On stage, Robinson himself is played by twelve-year-old Oleksandr Ihnatenko, whose own grandfather, a Ukrainian actor, once embodied the castaway. In Oleksandr's performance, we see a deeply personal resonance: this isn't just fiction, but a mirror of his family's—and his nation's—desire to survive and rebuild.

Opposite him, Matvii Lyamin assumes the role of Daniel Defoe, acting as both narrator and sympathetic

chronicler, guiding audiences through the story's emotional landscape. Anastasiia Kuzminova brings warmth and quiet strength to "the Beloved," the story's central figure of hope and home. In her role, she embodies all the women waiting at shorelines—eagerly scanning each sunrise—for loved ones returning from distant journeys, voyages, and wars. And Adam Ptushkin delights as Friday, infusing the stage with playful curiosity and solidarity.

Immense Honesty on Stage

Under Varvara's direction, these young performers deliver astonishingly mature portrayals. Ihnatenko's Robinson teeters between fear and defiance, his voice cracking with genuine vulnerability before soaring in moments of triumph. Lyamin's Defoe is both authoritative and tender, his narration interwoven with lyrical asides that invite the audience's empathy. Kuzminova and Ihnatenko create scenes of genuine connection—each stolen glance and shared duet crackles with authenticity.

Their collective sincerity transforms what could be a mere period adventure into a powerful allegory for modern exile. The bilingual script (English and Ukrainian performed side by side) allows every member of Dundee's diverse community to find a point of entry. It also reflects the dual identity many refugees must navigate: speaking in one tongue at home, another abroad, yet always carrying both in their hearts.

From Dnipro to Dundee

The production's journey has been one of extraordinary collaboration. When Varvara first called Ukrainian theatres in Dnipro seeking guidance on props, she expected advice—what arrived instead was a gift: handcrafted set pieces forged under blackout conditions to support these young artists. Polish composers contributed original music, while artist Maria Lyamina transformed these elements into a living world onstage.

A Finale to Remember

As the final notes of the closing song echo through Westgait Church's vaulted space, there is scarcely a dry eye in the house. It is not just a finale but a renewal, inviting everyone—cast and audience alike—to believe in second chances.

Through *'Robinson : A Musical Journey'* Varvara Mishyna and her cast remind us that, even in the darkest storms, the human spirit—like those dancing waves—will always return to the horizon of hope.





**Robinson -
A Musical
Journey**



YOUTH WORKSHOPS

ORKNEY - the sea
monster approaches



THURSO - the sea and
the waves

Pictures by
Carole Williams

DUNFERMLINE - the
workshop group

