

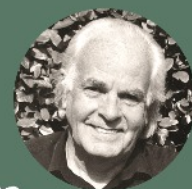
Autumn 2023

scene

Kirkie
again



the magazine of
Scottish Community Drama



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SCENE No.175

The magazine of the
**Scottish Community
Drama Association**

Scottish Charity No. 021397

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Scene magazine

Copy date for next edition : 4th January

Retail price for non-members : £5

Editorial Statement:

We always welcome news or opinions, please
email letters or articles to the Scene Editor at
scene@drama.scot

The editorial committee reserve the right to edit
or not print items submitted to Scene.

*Printed by Monument Press,
42 Abbey Road, Stirling FK8 1LP
01786 474763 info@monumentpress.co.uk*

Cover

Kirkintilloch Youth's cast of 'Teechers', winners of
this year's National Youth Final in Nairn.

photo by **Rob Coffey**



Chairman's chat

Autumn is an exceptionally busy time of the year for lots of clubs and Districts with preparations well underway for end of year shows and pantomimes. Some are also frantically reading scripts with a view to choosing their play for the One Act Festival next year, always the most challenging aspect!

Districts and Divisions are currently holding their AGM's and electing new officer bearers for the coming year so it is a time of excitement and change in SCDA circles. The committee members and office bearers across the country work exceptionally hard on behalf of SCDA and we are extremely grateful to all our volunteers. Regardless of whether you have been elected for the first time or standing down from our committees we thank you sincerely for your efforts.

We also have our National AGM coming up in November and we look forward to seeing as many members as possible there in Perth. It's a great opportunity to meet people from other clubs and to hear what's happening first hand in SCDA and our plans nationally for the coming year.

Talking of networking opportunities, Carole and I were lucky enough to attend an event in Edinburgh recently hosted by Federation of Scottish Theatre. We met lots of interesting people there from all aspects of theatre life and the most amazing thing was that so many of them knew about SCDA or had even taken part in our One Act Festival. It just goes to show that involvement in drama in earlier formative years can lead to a lifelong interest or even a career. Be proud of what you are achieving and let us know what you are doing so we can shout it from the rooftops!

Carolyn

Welcome

to new Individual members

I. Kemp	Orkney / Northern
I. Robertson	Edinburgh / Eastern
S. Lyall	Moray Firth / Highland

to new Club members

New Laigh Kirk Drama Group	Glasgow / Western
Taynuilt & District D S	Argyll Kintyre / Western
Campbeltown Grammar School	Argyll Kintyre / Western
GAMA	Fife / Eastern
Shetland County Drama	Aberdeen / Northern

to new Life members

P. Rickard (Joint)	Stirling / Eastern
J. Hughes	Fife / Eastern

Thank you

for your kind donations

Dolly Nicol

Thanks to our Patrons for their continued support.

Help us grow our membership

There is absolutely no doubt that many organisations have had to re-evaluate and adapt significantly following Covid. Sadly, some clubs have failed to recover from lockdown closures in addition to the difficulties of finding venues and now cease to exist.

For many years SCDA was extremely lucky to benefit from an annual grant of approximately £53,000 from Arts Council Scotland. That funding was unfortunately discontinued several years ago and since then SCDA has become a completely self-funding membership organisation. We rely on membership income, fundraising, donations, Festival and competition entry fees and sponsorship which has been increasingly difficult to find over recent years. We are very grateful to have a very loyal membership base with a large percentage of our members having paid subscriptions for a significant number of years.

Time and time again we hear people expressing their gratitude for the years of pleasure that SCDA has given them. As an organisation we are always looking for opportunities to raise our profile and are constantly striving to increase the benefits of membership both for individuals, clubs and to make membership generally more attractive.

Unfortunately, our membership numbers have been slowly declining over the past decade. We have planned several initiatives over the past few years such as Youth Summer School, Director's Course and reserve adjudicator training. We have enthusiasm and ambition to

provide many similar events for our members but the simple arithmetic dictates that the greater the income we receive, the more we can reinvest in developing our loyal membership.

So, what can YOU do to help SCDA in our mission? You can help promote membership in your area by encouraging friends and individuals in your clubs to take out membership, life membership or become an SCDA patron. Perhaps committee members haven't considered becoming members. If you know of clubs in your area who are not members then please let them know about us, our new website and publicity options on our social media channels.

We were delighted to see the return of our One Act Play Festival after Covid with various rounds attracting a very enthusiastic, appreciative audience. The standard may be as high as previously, but entries have been in very gradual decline, and we would love to see more clubs entering our Festival as a celebration of drama. It is a fantastic, enjoyable opportunity to meet new friends, chat with like minded club members and to seek creative inspiration and new ideas. Please get in touch with your neighbouring drama clubs to see if they might want to take part, even on a non-competitive basis.

As an organisation our ethos is to promote drama in our local communities where clubs can collaborate to support and assist each other. With the help of our loyal members SCDA can exist to flourish with the resources to bring joy to our communities for many years to come.



The 'Van' on stage

Tish Howard's 3-year struggle to stage Alan Bennett's *'The Lady in the Van'*.

I have been an Alan Bennett fan for quite some time and ever since directing *'The History Boys'* with Studio Theatre Group in 2016 it has been my ambition to do *'The Lady in the Van'*. This finally came to pass in May of this year, but not without many stumbling blocks along the way. STG first planned for this production back in 2020, and no prizes for guessing what scuppered that! Once theatres were allowed to open up again, albeit carefully, in 2021, I tried again. However, 2021 also marked the 50th anniversary of the club, and the committee decided that a large cast play was a more appropriate celebration and we ended up performing *'The Merchant'*, Charles Barron's modern take on Shakespeare's *'Merchant of Venice'*.

Come 2022, I tried again. We were aiming to use Culter Village Hall as the venue but struggled to find suitable dates. The hall is usually only available for a full week during the school holidays but a couple of the actors that I had in mind were teachers – and where are teachers during the holidays? Answer:- somewhere else! Between venue problems and actor availability Studio ended up not having a main production.

Come 2023, I tried again! Still no suitable dates for the village hall but as luck would have it we were able to find a week that worked in Aberdeen Arts Centre, a venue that we used to call home before the ever increasing hire costs drove us away. Now we had to think of the practicalities of getting quite a tricky piece to the stage!

The first problem that we encountered was that the cost of the performing rights seemed to be totally prohibitive. I imagine other groups have encountered this now that Concord covers the rights for plays held by Samuel French. Back in the day, there was a fixed rate depending, usually, on how recently the play had been released for performance. Now Concord base the fee on the venue size. Culter Village Hall seats about 100, but the Arts Centre 350. The fee we were quoted for three performances was almost £900, which would have been impossible to afford. However, we fixed that by getting written confirmation from the venue that ticket sales

would be restricted to 150 per night (more than enough for us as Aberdonians don't 'do' plays, only stuff that has songs in it!) This ploy pretty much halved that cost – problem solved!

Next I had to find two actors that at the very least sounded like the man himself, and preferably looked at least a bit like him. That proved much easier than I thought it would as during the weeks of rehearsals, Brian and Steve gradually metamorphosed into Bennett the writer, and Bennett the public persona.

Problem number 3 was the biggie – the set! First of all there pretty obviously has to be a van. There also has to be a Reliant Robin. As the set was originally designed for Culter, which has quite a small stage and absolutely no wing space, it was never going to be real. I intended that everything big should be a cartoon style 'cardboard cut out' with only the writers desk and assorted chairs being proper furniture. The rest of the stage was going to be taken up with an ever increasing pile of rubbish. When we made the move to the larger venue a few things had to change. The van, although still not trying to pretend in any way, to be a genuine Bedford van, had to become three dimensional. It was built round an 8'x4'x1' piece of steel deck pushed on by off stage crew and accompanied by the appropriate sound effect. Although made of framed hardboard the door incorporated a sheet of metal so that when assorted characters banged on it, it made the proper sound. The Reliant Robin, however, remained a cardboard cut out, or rather a large sheet of polystyrene insulation board attached to the wheel chair, which later appeared as itself in Act 2. Honestly, it worked; it got a round of applause every night!

We also added a street lamp, very similar to the one outside 23 Gloucester Crescent, as set dressing (thank you Bon Accord Theatre for the loan thereof!) By the end of Act 2 the pile of rubbish along the back of the stage was sufficiently large for Miss Shepherd, wonderfully played by Belinda Findlay, to disappear behind it at the end with the help of audience blinding lights. Well, it was a long time coming but was definitely worth the wait. Cast, crew, and I'm glad to say audience, found it a thoroughly enjoyable experience. I personally had great fun releasing my inner teenage thug!

Four Youth Summer Schools

SCDA has been considering for some time how to support and encourage community drama activity for young people. In March 2021 Carole Williams, National Drama Advisor, set up a Youth Drama Leaders network and through a series of online meetings was able to get a sense of the challenges and opportunities at a local level.

One of the outcomes was that SCDA agreed to develop a national project in 2023 for youth members. The challenge was to choose from all the good ideas, so we decided to survey members to help us to prioritise. It was very clear from the response that a series of 2-day summer schools in different locations around Scotland was the most popular. SCDA are very committed to the future of drama in Scotland and made sure that as many young people as possible could come along by keeping the cost to attend as low as possible. This paid off with approximately **100** young people benefitting.

Carole quickly set about the task of finding tutors to help her design and



nearby community space – the weather was very kind and we enjoyed the short walk between each workshop.

Our second summer school was in Kyle of Lochalsh at The Skye Bridge Studios where we had a very warm welcome from the staff although not the weather. After a short break we picked things up again at Dunfermline High School where we had a large group of young people – shout out to the fantastic staff in the school who were brilliant throughout. Our swansong was at the Kirkwall Theatre in Orkney where our biggest group worked their socks off to get through everything in a day and a half so that we

could get the plane back on Sunday afternoon.

Alongside the drama workshops, we wanted to foster a caring and nurturing space using respect and kindness and our themes. We used recycled materials as much as possible and where we had to use new, we tried to always select the greenest option we could.

deliver the workshops. Enter stage left Caitlin Forbes (Musical Theatre), Neal Clark (Technical Theatre) and Sharon Mackay (Acting and Performance). All 3 had been members of SCDA clubs before training at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and they all now work professionally in theatre, tv and film as well as teaching.

“Loved the energy and enthusiasm of the youth who attended as well as that of tutors. A great weekend and a privilege to be involved. Would I do it again - you bet!”

It was quite a daunting task to find a venue in each Division that would provide 3 different spaces and was also in a location where we could offer the opportunity to as many different clubs as possible from Stornoway to Orkney and Forfar to Dunfermline. We eventually settled on The Dibble Tree Theatre in Carnoustie where we were also able to spread out to a

Carnoustie



Kyle of Lochalsh



. . . and a lot of balloons



Caitlin,
Neal &
Sharon

There are so many highlights it would be impossible to mention them all here but here are some to whet your appetite

- The enthusiasm of each of the individual groups as they threw themselves into the Acting through Song workshops to the soundtrack from Nine to Five. Some may even have been a bit too convincing as the evil boss
- The amazing shadow puppets that were designed, created and performed using a large sheet and torches. Each story inspired from local newspapers, completely unique and equally stunning.
- The job of being able to play games with big groups – grandmother's footsteps and the mime Chinese whispers stand out but who could forget the appetite for 'moo offs'
- The balloon armchairs, designed and built using only 20 balloons, string or tape and the optional cling film. Almost every group managed to create something that could be sat on for the required 30 seconds and then reuse them in tableaux and short scenes. A mention also needs to go to the adult

volunteers in Highlands who also took up the challenge and almost didn't finish their build due to their high level of design and engineering.

"A worthwhile course, where else would you get professionals training you for the amount paid, exceptional value"

The Musical Theatre workshop was particularly popular in the Highlands and throughout

the whole project we ensured that young people had the opportunity to ask questions of the tutors about what it is like to train and/or work in the creative industries. Neal is hopeful that he encouraged some interest in technical theatre so if any young person wants to get involved in sound or lighting let's all encourage it, we need them as much as we need performers!

Thanks to the wonderful tutors we look forward to working with you again in the future.

Some comments from leaders were:-

"I thought it was a great weekend, and certainly has caused a lot of chats this week with the kids with evident increased drive as a result!"

"Just the right amount of activities to keep us engaged, we are already using what we learnt for our Christmas panto!"

"A great success enjoyed by all, one girl asked if we could do every week!"

"Already young people asking when is the next one!"

We had quite a few individual bookers for our Highlands Division and are very happy to report that this has boosted the membership of one of the local clubs. We hoped that we would be able to link young people up with their local clubs and it is wonderful to hear that this has been the case in at least one location.

We hope that the experience will have an impact on everyone who participated whether that be in developing skills or confidence. But mostly we hope that they were able to create memories and make new friends. Good luck to the Drama Llamas – the WhatsApp group created by the young people who came along to the Highlands event.

As always none of it would be possible without the dedication and commitment of all the local volunteers who managed the events and also made sure there were lots of snacks and drinks for everyone.

See you down the road.

Carole Williams



Staging 'Everyman' . . .

Robin Smith's challenge to celebrate nine centuries of St. Fillans church in Aberdour.

How to find, cast and produce a celebratory, community production of a play that befits the surroundings of an ancient church – that was the challenge we were presented with at the beginning of the year.

The beautiful and atmospheric St. Fillan's Church in Aberdour, believed to be the oldest in Scotland, was founded in 1123. As part of their 900th anniversary celebrations this year, the church wanted to arrange a number of community events and asked Aberdour Players if we could contribute in some way.

Thinking caps on, we considered a few options and 'Everyman' seemed to fit the bill. It's a medieval morality play written anonymously, in Olde English, in the 15th century. We looked at several translations (there are lots!) before homing in on an adaptation by Kerry Frampton, which had been performed at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2013. It uses music and comedy to turn the serious subjects of life and death into something highly entertaining.

Casting

The script offered flexible casting, which meant we could involve every one of our available members...but needed more! To fill all roles and involve others in the community we called on friends at Leslie Amateur Drama Club (LADC). LADC are temporarily 'homeless' until their local town hall becomes usable, so some of their members were happy to help. We needed some singers too...luckily, our club secretary Tony Pearce happens to run a choir in the village, a few of whom agreed to take part and complete the casting.



'Riches' and 'Goods'



David Nicholson as 'God'

The script we used takes a Brechtian approach, with much breaking of the fourth wall and interspersing each episode of the main story with *Lazzi* – comedic routines originating from Comedia Dell'arte. These were performed by three Undertakers – played by our own Amy Hanson alongside guests from LADC, Chris Gray and Diane White - who served to provide continuity to the production.

The title role was taken by new member Cameron Forbes, with the existing club members taking remaining parts: God, Death, Friendship, Ex-Wife, Goods, Riches, Strength, Beauty, Good Deeds - along with LADC's Margaret Kinnear as Kindred. We were appropriately billed as 'Aberdour Players and Friends'.

Rehearsals

Rehearsals began in May and - with the odd break for holidays - ran through until our performances at the end of August. The separation of episodes and *Lazzi* meant we could rehearse the two elements independently, and luckily, we have two access to rehearsal rooms. The arrival of new members Craig and Christina Dowers (formerly of Kilmardinny Players) proved timely. Christina directed the Undertakers' *Lazzi* while the rest of the cast rehearsed simultaneously in the room next door. Craig took on sound and technical matters.

at St. Fillans, Aberdour

Completing the production team was Sarah Belle, a local milliner who works professionally in theatre costume. Sarah not only came up with some great ideas, but was able to source them, along with inventive props in keeping with the tone of the production and requirements of the script.

Moving to the church itself for later rehearsals, it was great to see the whole piece coming together. We had some concerns about acoustics, but these would later prove unfounded as the reverb in an empty church was much reduced with a full audience.

Production

To ensure good visibility for all, we brought in two stage deck platforms and limited the number of tickets. No special lighting was possible – or needed, with a fair amount of action taking place in the auditorium (actually, the nave) itself. We offered just 90 tickets for each of the two performances (a Friday evening and Saturday afternoon). These were free, with donations welcome.

After much hard work we really didn't know how it would be received, as much of the action depends on the audience – but we needn't have worried, as they got involved from the outset. Our Undertakers welcomed arrivals in sombre fashion, as if to a funeral, which enhanced the effect of the slapstick as soon as the show got going. The characters of God and Death set up the first couple of Episodes before Everyman was revealed to be sitting in the audience, busy on his phone (Cameron was

Amy & Chris



delighted to have fooled people into 'tutting' about this before his true identity was revealed!).

The remaining Episodes then alternated with the *Lazzi*, as Everyman tries to engage elements of his past with his forthcoming encounter with Death, and the Undertakers demonstrate in turn each of 'Seven Things That Make Us The Same'.

The songs turned out to be a real hit, with original music written and arranged by Tony Pearce - many of us were humming the tunes long after the show had finished! The sell-out audience were generous with both their applause and donations (the latter shared with the church), and the whole team found the process and performance something we could be very proud of – a community venture for a community audience, to celebrate a very special 900th anniversary.

Have you got a trophy in the attic?

SCDA's trophies are one of the few tangible links to the clubs and actors who have appeared in our festivals over nearly a hundred years.

We don't even know how many SCDA trophies there are, but probably about 250. Of these, around 130 were awarded at the various rounds of this year's One-Act and Youth Festivals, but as districts have folded and full-length festivals have gone out of fashion, many trophies are sitting unused.

A few may be valuable in monetary terms, but all have a story to tell about their donors and past winners.

From Falkirk's *Porteous Salver* to Arran's *Millhill Players Trophy*, they bring back memories of the people and clubs who made our Association.

We would like to make a trophy list and record these memories. Many thanks to Joy Talbot for telling us about Skye District's trophies and sending in photos.

If you have trophies in the attic, let us know. Even better, take pictures of them and send them to secretary@drama.scot.

Morna Barron



Behind the 'Beaches of St. Valery'

**Paula Gibson talks to Stuart Hepburn
about the romance that inspired
a winning play**

Stuart Hepburn is a senior lecturer in contemporary screen writing at the University of Stirling. His ability to engage audiences through his imaginative and compelling storytelling has been recognised on screen in such TV classics as *Taggart*, *Rebus*, *Hamish Macbeth*, *Monarch of the Glen*, *Foyle's War* and many more. He also penned '*The Beaches of St. Valery*', the play which won our Scottish final this year. This last the reason this piece is being written. I chatted to Stuart just before the Kirkintilloch Players travelled to Belfast to take part in the British final.

I asked him how the seeds of this fascinating story had been planted.

He said he had been listening to a broadcast on Good Morning Scotland back in June 2000 with Iain McDonald reporting on the emotional pilgrimage of some WW2 ex-servicemen from the 51st (Highland) Division to the coastal town of St.Valery-en-Caux in Normandy where 60 years before, thousands of their comrades had been sacrificed and many taken prisoner. At the same time the 'Miracle of Dunkirk' overshadowed the tragedy of St.Valery and very little mention was made of the plight of the 51st Division. MacDonald spoke emotionally of the Scottish surrender to German forces. 9000 men were marched off to spend four years in captivity in Polish POW camps. At the end of the piece he recounted the story of a trio of soldiers from the Uists who had escaped, stolen a boat, made it back across the English channel to fight again. There Stuart's interest was piqued and he knew he had to delve deeper.

A story of daring do!

After the radio broadcast Stuart contacted Iain McDonald personally who told him of another story of derring do, escape, bravery and sacrifice which was to become the basis of the plot for the play.

In the column of prisoners, Arthur Fraser from Inverness had been thrown a parcel of old clothes by a French farmer's wife and had escaped into the surrounding

woods, disguised as a peasant aided by a local French girl. More remarkable than this, he had been hidden by the French girl's family in Northern France for a year and then escaped across the Pyrenees and down to Gibraltar. Arthur rejoined the army as an officer and after serving in Burma, he was demobbed in late 1945 and returned to France to meet up with the daughter of the family with whom he had stayed. The young couple, fated to meet through the horror of war, returned to Inverness and were married in 1947.

Even more remarkably the Frasers were still alive and living in Culloden where they agreed to talk to Stuart.

He discovered the entire family had been decimated by the events of the war. They had been betrayed by a British soldier (who was later shot after the liberation) and Helene's mother taken to a labour camp in Silesia, her father was arrested and died in a concentration camp. Helene herself had been captured by the Gestapo, tried and imprisoned for 16 months. She survived and returned to Auchel in time to see the retreating Germans being shot by the resistance, children throwing sticks at them and collaborators being tied to lampposts with bed sheets and having their heads shaved. Her mother walked hundreds of miles back home from Silesia at the end of the war and was awarded the Legion d'Honneur by General de Gaulle, her father was awarded the Croix de Guerre posthumously for his bravery.

To quote Stuart, "It was a story of love, death, drama immense courage and hope."

Surely the makings of a cracking adventure film, wouldn't you think, and all terrifyingly true?? Thereby hangs another tale, as try as he might he could not interest any of the major film companies in the story. At one point he was told war films were no longer in fashion in spite of the recent success of '*Saving Private Ryan*' (1998), and a company invested £120m in the TV adaptation of '*Band of Brothers*' in 2001. Not only that, no-one wanted to finance a screenplay. One response was, "Does he have to be Scottish?"

Of roughly 50,000 screenplays registered with the Writers Guild in America 150 movies are produced each year. So an unproduced screenplay has a 0.3% chance of being made into a feature film by a studio. A statistic that will bring any budding screenwriter banging down to earth with a resounding thump!

Although the project was mothballed for a few years Stuart never lost his fascination with the story of the 51st and he continued to research extensively. The idea of writing a play became a reality and characters formed. The main protagonist Callum's, (AKA Arthur's), story told through a series of letters to his brother, the journey beginning before the war in the hills of Tomatin where the A9 is being built. The journey continues south and to France, St. Valery, then Spain and back to Inverness.



Stuart said, "Ultimately, the hope was that for the viewer it may also be the road to some sort of understanding of what it was like for an 18 year old volunteer to embark on that journey, I was going to take this character from a callow youth in 1938 to a battle-hardened de-mobbed officer 8 years later".

Flawed Hero

He continued, "I have plucked my flawed hero from his highland home, transported him to Europe, made him witness the deaths of his friends, showed the flowering of first love, the birth of his child, and a reconciliation with

his long lost brother. I can only hope that the interesting bits are interesting enough, that the little surprises are followed by a bigger surprise, and that the biggest surprise of all is at the end".

I asked Stuart, at the end when his play script had finally been completed and Shirley Angus and the Kirkintilloch Players were in rehearsal if he had any part in the direction or how he envisaged the play being performed. He responded thus,

"Oh no, no, no, I'm an actor, I know what it's like when the writer comes into the room, you get the fear, I have no wish to interfere, it is a destabilising thing."

"You must be very proud of this piece of work", I said. He replied, "I am a shy guy, not good at taking praise but I am very very proud of it. I am as proud as punch".

We know Kirkie did him and Scotland proud in Belfast and there is no doubt that play will be seen again many times, it is such a compelling piece of writing, an absolute winner.

As a postscript, I asked him if he had any other projects in the pipeline and he told me he was working on a play about Hedy Lamarr. Really??

He said, "She was the most beautiful woman in Austria and also a genius; an electronic whizzkid. Trophy wife of an Austrian arms dealer at 17, She left him, met Jack Warner in Paris and he took her off to Hollywood. A renaissance woman, married six times who sadly ended up an alcoholic recluse."

What a story!

And as a PPS. I asked what other plays he might have that would suit our membership,?

His response; "The best thing I've ever written is *'The Empty Charcoal box'*, produced as part of the 'A Play, a Pie and a Pint' series." He continued, "It's a three-hander, semi- autobiographical about my childhood in Glenrothes". Available to any theatre company who would like a reading copy.

Sorry, I just have to add my own personal favourite, also written by Stuart, and also a PP&P production, *'Chic Murray: A Funny Place for A Window'*.

Stuart says he is not at all precious about his plays and he added his dealings with amateur companies have been very professional so do feel free to get in touch with him for other gems he undoubtedly has squirreled away in his personal library. I have to say it was an absolute delight talking to him. He is a truly intriguing person, and modest with it! Looking forward to seeing his latest creation come to life at future festivals.

The Youth Final

The Scottish Youth Final returned to Nairn this year. I arrived early and got to see the buzz building in the foyer as everyone arrived, looking forward to an evening of theatre. It was also great to see that people who had no connection to the competing teams had travelled from all over the country to come and support our Youth Final. I'm sure those that made the journey will all agree that it was a worthy trip as we were treated to three excellent performances.

First up was Kirkintilloch Players with *Teechers* by John Godber, the play is a well known one and like all Godber plays the demands on the cast are high. It requires great commitment to ensemble playing, with actors playing multiple roles and a lot of quick scene changes which happen in front of the audience. There isn't a moment to relax during the near 55 minute production which tells the story, from the perspective of 3 students, of a bright eyed new teacher arriving at a comprehensive school. There are some brilliant moments of comedy and drama in this script as the students realise how much their teacher has meant to them.

Next up we had Killin Drama Club with *Round the World with Class Six* by Nick Warburton. Set in a school with a well behaved class who are bored of going through the motions of their class routine day in and day out. This all changes when a supply teacher turns up and sets them an unusual task! They have to reenact Sir Francis Drake's circumnavigation of the globe. Once again this script demanded a great deal of ensemble playing and commitment from the actors as they transformed their classroom into a ship. It also required a great deal of discipline and impeccable timing is needed in the opening routine which highlights the monotony they face every day.

Finally, we had Blairgowrie Players with *Macbeth* by Geoff Bamber. The play is a retelling of the classic Shakespeare play but with updated language. It is full of jokes and

mixes some modern references to the traditional tale, such as the witch with a dodgy sat nav! It has a huge cast of characters which is never an easy thing to deal with and an incredible number of sound cues. An entertaining play that the actors and audience are sure to enjoy.

Once all three teams had performed it was over to the highly experienced Russell Boyce to offer his adjudication. Before he started he asked all the actors that had performed that evening to stand so the audience could show their appreciation, a very well deserved moment for all the entertainment the actors had provided. In his adjudication of *Teechers* Russell praised the slick direction and seamless transitions between the scenes. He praised the cast for showing a strong understanding of voice, movement and characterization. For *Around the World with Class Six*, he praised the set and the creativity of the director. He was also highly complimentary of the actors commitment to their roles. Then for *Macbeth*, Russell Boyce praised the director for milking every bit of comedy from the script and the sound team for their creativity. He also praised many of the performances of the actors who again demonstrated great commitment to their roles.

Finally came the platform party, which was once again live streamed to the world via the SCDA Facebook page. All three teams sent a representative to receive a certificate in recognition of their achievements. Then it was over to Russell Boyce to announce the awards. First up was the Colin Peter trophy for Creativity which went to Blairgowrie Players. Then the Quidi Vidi Trophy for first place which went to Kirkintilloch Players.

It was then onto the party, where the youngsters from all three clubs celebrated a very successful Scottish Youth Final!

Lee Dunn

Killin Drama Club

My time in the Scottish youth one act play competition was unlike anything else that I had experienced. The competition as a whole was so exciting and everyone at Killin Drama Club enjoyed it. It certainly had its ups and downs from makeup mishaps and costume disasters but it really brought everyone together. Our first round was in Fintry and we were all so excited as it was our first time doing anything like this. Apart from one minor issue involving a bottle of foundation and a white school shirt everything went well. After a few weeks of rehearsals it was on to division at Bathgate.



Lee Dunn and the teams report on a very successful Youth Final in Nairn



It was a fun filled day of rehearsing and chatter among cast and crew. It was amazing to perform on such a big stage and we were all delighted that we were going through to the finals. We rehearsed for months and we all became very close friends. We did a few more performances such as at the Killin Comedy festival and we did a fundraising performance in Killin. As the competition date drew near we continued to rehearse together. At the final rehearsal, in an unusual location (our village Church), we had some fun to prepare us for the show. Finally the competition date arrived and we travelled up to Nairn. The day started with getting ready, and an impromptu swim in the sea, followed by tech rehearsals, photos and a delicious lunch. Then it was time to get ready for our performance and watch the other teams. We all had a blast performing our show and we would all do it again and again if we could. The other shows were fantastic and we were delighted for Kirkintilloch. We then met with the other casts for a party and made some great friends with-in the other teams. It really shows how drama can bring people together.

Lieke van de Coterlet

Kirkintilloch Players

My experience competing in the festival was very enjoyable to say the least. When we first began rehearsing for the festival I, personally, did not enjoy it as much as other things that I had done in the past with the Kirkintilloch Players. This was since I, and some of the other youths in our cast, had done mainly musical theatre performances before, and the festival play, which was to be scrutinised by an adjudicator, not just enjoyed by an audience, felt more serious and less fun than my acting endeavours in the past. However, as time went on, I grew to love performing our play.

'Teechers' by John Godber is a funny yet poignant play about school life from the point of view of both staff and pupils. I liked performing the play itself, due to its many comedic moments and its important underlying message that the school system is not fair, and benefits some people far more than others, but I also loved the competitive aspect of the festival. It added another level to performing as a good performance in each round, excluding the final, guaranteed that we would get to perform the play again and would get to go on a trip away.

Both our trip to Dunoon for the Western Division Finals and our trip to Nairn for the Scottish Finals were very eventful. The former involved a stressful situation in which one of our directors, who had primarily organised the trip, took ill and could no longer come with us. Thankfully, other members of our team stepped in, taking responsibility for us seven teenagers, which is not a situation I ever hope to find myself in! The latter trip to Nairn did not include such a mishap but was still action-packed with late nights and even some group dips in the sea, due to a couple of particularly keen bathers!

I recall some cast members saying that they weren't even too bothered about winning because the trip away had been memorable enough. Although, this is something I cannot claim to have felt myself due to my inherent competitive nature! Thankfully, we managed to win the Scottish Finals and the feeling of doing so was one of immense happiness and relief!

Despite my initial doubts about performing in this year's festival, it turned out to be a fantastic experience and I cannot wait to audition to compete again next year!

Cameron McAuley



Blairgowrie Players

Stepping into the limelight of the SCDA Scottish Youth Final in Nairn was a surreal experience for the members of our youth team. We were all excited and apprehensive about the prospect of showcasing our rendition of *Macbeth* on a floor stage. However, as the curtains finally fell on that momentous night, we were left with a profound sense of achievement and camaraderie that made the entire journey worth every ounce of effort.

The first encounter with the unconventional stage setup left us feeling a tad bewildered. It was our inaugural appearance in the finals, and the floor stage presented an entirely new challenge. Nonetheless, the thrill of participating in such a prestigious event soon replaced our initial hesitations. Following dedicated rehearsals and the unwavering support of our cast and crew, we gradually acclimated ourselves to the peculiar stage arrangement, making it an integral part of our *Macbeth* adaptation.

The staff at the SCDA Scottish Youth Final played a pivotal role in easing our anxieties and making us feel at home. They offered invaluable guidance, ensuring we understood the intricacies of the show. Their professionalism and encouragement paved the way for a smoother performance, alleviating any lingering doubts we had.

As the final performance day approached, a newfound sense of comfort settled upon us. The collective effort put forth by our talented cast and crew bore fruit, and our *Macbeth* play evolved into a powerful and captivating production. The seamless synergy among the team was evident in every scene, and the emotional depth each member brought to their character left a lasting impact on the audience.

The night of the finals proved to be an unforgettable experience. The adrenaline rush and anticipation backstage were palpable, and as we stepped into the spotlight, the atmosphere crackled with energy. With the support of our fellow performers and the audience's enthusiastic response, our nerves dissolved, and we immersed ourselves completely in the world of *Macbeth*.

Being part of such an incredible cast was an honour in itself. The camaraderie and bond that formed between us during rehearsals and performances enriched our journey and made it all the more rewarding. Working together as a team brought out the best in each of us, and the sense of accomplishment after each act was unparalleled.



Competing in Nairn provided us with a unique opportunity to perform in two vastly different settings. Embracing the challenge, we allowed ourselves to grow as artists, honing our teamwork and adaptability skills. The hard work, dedication, and the support from those around us culminated in an exceptional performance that we can all be immensely proud of.

The joy and satisfaction we experienced that night are unforgettable. We relished every moment of the competition, cherishing the memories created alongside our friends and teammates. The applause, the laughter, and the heartening feedback from the audience will forever be etched in our minds.

Looking back, the SCDA Scottish Youth Final in Nairn was nothing short of a remarkable journey. It tested our mettle, allowed us to push our boundaries, and taught us the true essence of teamwork. The opportunity to participate in such an esteemed event will forever be cherished, and we are immensely grateful to everyone who supported and believed in us.

As we bid adieu to the finals, we carry with us not only a trophy but also a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment that can only be achieved through collective effort. It was undeniably an experience of a lifetime, one that has left an indelible mark on our hearts, igniting a passion for the stage that will continue to burn brightly in our future pursuits

Honor Wood

There are more pictures of the teams on the front and back covers. Thanks to **Rob Coffey, Richard Gerring** and **Michal Suchomski** for the photos.

Goodbye to old friends



Douglas Currie BEM

Douglas's drama life started as a child when he was given a model theatre by an aunt. He joined the drama club at school and then the Mercators in 1947, when the club was for former pupils of the four Edinburgh Merchant Company schools.

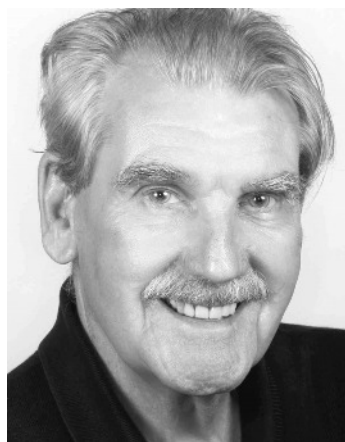
He began his long involvement with SCDA by taking part in the Summer Schools from 1956 to 1961, in the company of old SCDA stalwarts, Bill Graham (Falkirk) and Alan & Dolly Nicol. He became the Edinburgh District secretary in 1966, then from 1970 served as Eastern Division chairman for 14 years including many years on the General Council. He brought his enthusiasm and energy to helping organise many Scottish and British Finals in Leith Town Hall in the 1970s.

In 1972, Douglas organised a show in the Edinburgh Fringe with a composite cast from all local SCDA clubs. The following year Eastern & Western Divisions each staged a play, and he was part of the management team for the three-week run. In 1976, Douglas ran the Box Office when SCDA staged *'The World's Wonder'* with a composite cast including past National Chairman, Jim Whitcomb.

He took part in many One Act and Full-length Festival plays with the Mercators, until covid put a stop to it in 2016, and the club, including Douglas and his wife Rosemary, regularly performed at the Killin Comedy Festival. His support for SCDA knew no bounds, he was our main Librarian at Summerhall for many years and seldom missed a Scottish Final or British Final in Scotland or any national event. He told the tale of Princess Margaret nearly choking him with her cigarette smoke at the Golden Jubilee celebrations at Pitlochry.

In 2009 he was presented with the Edinburgh Playhouse/Evening News Spotlight Award which recognises the efforts of one selfless individual who has worked tirelessly in the field of amateur dramatics in the city. The judge's decision was unanimous as they read of his 60 years dedication to amateur theatre. He then received his BEM in 2012 for his services to drama and education – a truly worthy recipient. Douglas will be truly missed by the Association and we send our sincere condolences to Rosemary and the family.

Morna Barron



Don Arnott

Donald Willis Heriot Arnott was born in 1932. He got the theatre bug in the early 70's, being involved with the Juniper Green Players and Edinburgh People's Theatre. In 1976 he was in the cast of the SCDA's Golden Jubilee composite production of "The World's Wonder" where he met many Leittheatre members. Soon afterwards, and while helping to build a set for Leittheatre he became a member of the club and over the years played many characters.

Being a full member of the Institute of Marketing, Don took an interest in marketing for Leittheatre and became their regular Business Manager for the next ten years as well as serving on the committee in various roles, including President and Secretary. Don's directorial debut for Leittheatre came in 2006 with *'Willie Rough'*, Bill Bryden's play set in the shipyards of Greenock around the outbreak of the First World War. Don

was always keen to promote Scottish life and the Scots language. He was involved in a number of Scots language plays for the SCDA One Acts and Edinburgh Festival Fringe productions.

Don had a long connection with SCDA and served in various positions including as Edinburgh District Chairman for many years. His enthusiasm and energy for amateur dramatics was endless and his annual holidays with family and friends invariably revolved around travelling to SCDA District rounds and the National and British Finals. Don also had a long association with St Serf's Players in Edinburgh through his wife Rona. He played one or two memorable pantomime characters but was usually to be found helping front of house and promoting amateur dramatics to any audience members he could engage in conversation.

Don's last appearance on stage was in February this year at the SCDA Edinburgh District One Act Play Festival when he was invited to present the winning teams with their trophies.

Alison McCallum

Challenging dementia with ‘Maggie May’

Carnoustie Theatre Club runs a three- to five-year rolling programme where people take slots to produce plays and our annual pantomime. I was down for the May 23 play and started looking for something in September 22. I was aware we had done a lot of comedies recently so wanted to stage something with a range of emotions, a play that would make you laugh and cry at the same time, something with a serious theme, and oh my goodness, *Maggie May* by Frances Poet fitted that bill perfectly. But was our club up for the challenge?

Maggie May was first performed at Queen’s Theatre Hornchurch on 13th May 2020. The play was originally commissioned as part of Every Third Minute – a festival of theatre, dementia, and hope – which was funded through a Celebrating Age grant from Arts Council England and The Baring Foundation. It was co-produced by Leeds Playhouse, the Queen’s Theatre Hornchurch and Leicester’s Curve theatre.

They commissioned Frances Poet to write a play that told a positive story of life after diagnosis, for people living with dementia and their supporters. Frances got much of her inspiration from the people attending dementia-friendly activities at Leeds Playhouse. She committed to engaging with the people taking part, listening sensitively and carefully to find the essence of Maggie (the central character facing this devastating diagnosis) in the real-life stories of people living with dementia and those supporting them.

I explained to our committee that if we were to put on a ‘dementia friendly’ production then there were some vital (but tricky) components we had to include, if not we were then just putting on a play about dementia, and I didn’t want to do that.

Maggie May hadn’t been written simply by meeting a group of people and incorporating their stories. This was

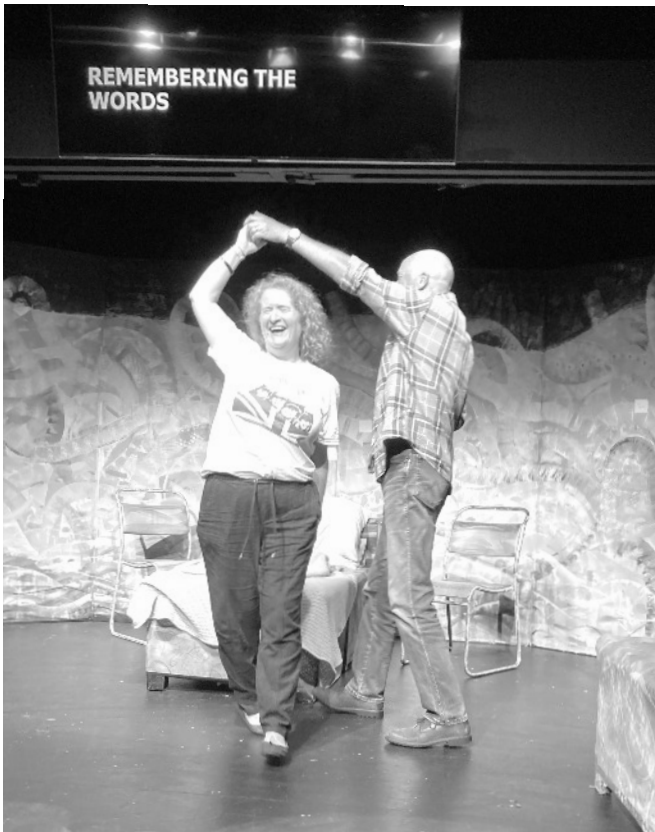
a highly collaborative process in which people living with dementia, and their supporters, had a significant input at every stage. Attempts had been made to ensure the piece is fully dementia-friendly, including the integration of singing and elements of repetition to enable all audiences to follow and enjoy the narrative. Maggie’s assessments and scene headings are projected to act as a visual prompt through the scene, guiding an audience member who might otherwise struggle to follow its thread (we mounted a large monitor above the stage and then played scene titles accompanied by Maggie’s voiceovers)

Early meetings involved discussions about how colour could be a useful way to identify a character (each of our five characters chose their own key colour when pulling together their wardrobe changes). How music might support engagement, giving joyful breathing space to an audience having to work hard to hold on to a story. (we had a fabulous singer playing Gordon whose heartfelt, confident, relaxed singing and dancing brought a smile to everyone’s faces)

The committee got fully behind my aspirations and then, when I started speaking to my backstage team, I realised we were all committing to this very special play. The cast were picked from current members, and it was one of those moments when you realised you had the mix of people to match the parts perfectly. No weak links in this cast. Maggie was played by Susan Murphy who gave an outstanding, emotionally sensitive, performance in a role that was barely off stage. Gordon, played by George Docherty, sang his way beautifully through the songs of their youth to reassure Maggie whenever the dementors started entering her mind. Nikki Doig played best friend Jo and was the perfect strong, comedic foil to Maggie and Gordon, lifting the mood and pace whenever she appeared on stage. Mike Burns, playing Maggie’s son, and his girlfriend Jo, played by Kim Brymer, together showed with great skill the impact this terrible disease has on everyone in the wider family circle.

Everyone backstage collaborated to solve problems like, post- it notes falling from the sky, Harry Potter’s dementors creeping on from the edges of the stage, a toolbox that lights up Maggie’s face on opening, how to create 5 different locations on our small stage quickly and smoothly. Dick Gibson came up with the great idea of the cast moving 3 large square stools around the stage in-between scenes, making different shapes/combinations to suggest hospital beds, sofas, separate seating arrangements in various houses.





Each stool had a hidden shelf for props to be collected and stored by the cast as the story unfolded. Janie and Peter White our experienced backstage team labelled the boxes A, B and C and ensured all props were set up in the correct boxes at the start of each act and the boxes were positioned correctly. Irvine Murison on lights and Brian Gordon on sound painted a visual/sound picture that reflected Maggie's inner turmoil. We are also very lucky to have a professional artist in our membership so Peter Flynn took on the task of painting the set with abstract images reflecting the turmoil in Maggie's neural pathways.

Maggie May is designed to be watched by the broadest possible audience, raising awareness for an audience that aren't directly affected by dementia, and offering a mirror for people living with dementia and their supporters alike. We wanted to stay true to the original motivations and contacted Lorraine Young of Carnoustie Memories to see if we could work together on sharing the important messages the play contains. Lorraine and her group are committed to making Carnoustie a 'dementia friendly community' so immediately engaged. We agreed the Memories groups – apart from Carnoustie Memories there is a Golf Memories (it's Carnoustie after all!) and Football Memories- would man an information stand in the Dibble Tree Theatre foyer. This was hugely successful with people chatting to them before and after each performance. We also decided to add in an extra relaxed matinee performance to allow members and their supporters to enjoy an afternoon at the theatre without worrying about disturbing normal theatre etiquette. We sent Lorraine a summary of Frances Poet's play writing

process, for her to share with all the families, and invited her along to the Dress Rehearsal to preview the content. On the day, we left house lights half dimmed in case audience members needed to leave at any point during the performance. One or two did but were met by Lorraine in the foyer who – safe in the knowledge of the play content – chatted to them and then encouraged them to trust her and go back in to experience the uplifting ending. They did come back in and were happy they had made the right choice.

This beautifully written play by Frances Poet was a challenging, emotional journey for everyone on and off stage but worth every single minute. It brought out the best of our club, drawing us all together in a shared aim to do the absolutely best job we could do. It was incredibly well received by audiences, hooked in from first page to last as they watched an ordinary family work their way through the highs and lows of their situation. But perhaps most importantly we embraced families in our community who are often isolated by this terrible disease. As a club we are going to work with Carnoustie Memories to include their members in future productions whenever possible.

Frances Poet surprised us by appearing in the Dibble Tree for one of our performances. She was enthralled to see this play being done in Scotland with some Scottish accents, but even happier to see us staying true to the play's concept of working with the dementia community. This play will stay with many in the Carnoustie community for years to come. Thank you, Frances, for providing us with this unique, beautiful script.

Carolyn Cheape



play. reviews

In this issue we focus on the top plays from our playwriting competitions

Reading copies are available from Morna at
secretary@drama.scot

'Even Numbers' by Tony Domaille

Winner 2023 Geoffrey Whitworth Competition.

Cast: 1 Male 2 Female

Running Time: 40 minutes

Mary-Ann Twomey, a serial killer, has poisoned five people and her barrister Ella Conway needs to know if she is defending someone who is insane or just plain evil.

Psychiatrist Dr. Vincent must make an assessment and discover the truth about what drove Mary-Ann to murder. In an interview Mary reveals her obsession with even numbers - she has two of everything in her flat and hopes to have the same in prison.

Later Vincent uncovers the reasons for her evasiveness concerning her childhood - she has taken on the personality of her deceased sister Ann (her adopted name Twomey means Two me) and in the final scene it's obvious that Mary's dual conversations with herself could yet lead to further killings.

An ingenious and inventive piece of writing thoroughly deserving of its trophy award.

Scene: Prison consulting room and a secure cell.

'Brick By Brick' by Cameron Forbes

Runner-up 2023 Geoffrey Whitworth Competition and Scott Salver entry.

Cast: Seven characters plus chorus

A challenging and powerful piece of theatre which explores the difficult subject of a broken, abusive family seen through the simplistic eyes of a child receiving counselling.

The brutal language is lightened by the encouragement to boo and hiss the villain and there is a lot to interpret in the scenes with the chorus effectively used for narration and placards providing visual stimulus.

Bold and thought provoking play for an ensemble cast.

'The Box' by Drew Young

Highly Commended 2023 Geoffrey Whitworth Competition and Scott Salver entry.

Cast: 2 Male 1 Female

C and J, a married couple, are moving home and awaiting the arrival of the removal men.

The couple reflect on a box which had been partly hidden in their attic and the memories represented by the contents which raise questions concerning their marriage. The couple repeat part of their conversation prior to the

box being opened but this time agree to leave the box unopened with its memories undisturbed.

Confidently written piece with a clear tight structure to the narrative whilst effectively building tension providing an intriguing ambiguity to the play's conclusion.

'Death Duties' by Mark Davoren

Commended 2023 Geoffrey Whitworth Competition

Total cast requirement is four people with all roles gender neutral.

Car Park setting with coffin centre stage and everything else imagined around it.

Sam, a funeral undertaker driver can't believe his day could get much worse when he discovers someone has driven off with his hearse from a supermarket car park leaving the coffin behind which is just about to get ticketed by Jo, an overly zealous traffic warden, for being illegally parked in a disabled bay.

As the manic confusion intensifies they are joined by Al, an officious vehicle recovery person who has been summoned to collect the illegally parked coffin and Nicky who borrowed the hearse to transport some wardrobes from IKEA.

When matters are finally resolved with all penalty charges being dropped and Jo, Al and Nicky departing thoroughly ashamed - Sam reveals to the audience that the occupant of the coffin was his own Dad. Fast moving conversational one liners throughout heighten the comic effect

'Victim' by Brenda Read-Brown

Commended 2023 Geoffrey Whitworth Competition

Cast: 4 Male 3 Female preferred with two voices off.

Brian Livingston, an airline pilot, encounters Stella Banks, who is attending a sales promotion course, in a hotel bar and as their relationship develops and the audience learn more facts about their backgrounds the action progresses to her bedroom.

Two months later Brian has a visit from the police accusing him of raping Stella and he is arrested. He later learns that she had confided about the incident to her friends Amy and Stella who felt obliged to report the alleged rape commencing a seemingly unstoppable chain of events culminating in a guilty verdict carrying a five year sentence from the jury at his trial.

It's his word against hers but with two shattered lives - who emerges as the real victim?



Wonder Fools Festivals

Positive Stories For Negative Times first came on to my radar in 2022. Having resurrected my school's Drama Club after COVID-forced closure, I was on the hunt for a suitable play for a large, flexible number of young first-time actors to enter into the following year's SCDA festival.

A chance comment online led me to the Positive Stories for Negative Times script anthologies. Positive Stories For Negative Times is the brainchild of theatre company Wonder Fools and is supported by Creative Scotland, The Gannochy Trust and The Hugh Fraser Foundation. Created during the depths of the pandemic to address the issue of young people not being able to access theatre spaces and creative activities during lockdown, it has grown into an international success with hundreds of performances across sixteen countries.

Wonder Fools commission professional playwrights, such as Douglas Maxwell or Robert Softley Gale, to write short plays or devising structures for young people with a lot of flexibility in how they could be presented. Initially, the plays were envisaged as work that young people could do online or with social distancing, keeping their youth theatres or drama clubs going even through the isolation of the pandemic. The scripts are also developed in conjunction with a board of young people to ensure they are really in tune with the interests and mindsets of their target audience of kids and teenagers.

Anthology of scripts

Groups who take part are sent the script of their choice and create a work from that, whether a full production, devised piece, short film or something else entirely.

At the end of each project, they publish an anthology of the scripts – a great resource for those considering youth entries into the one-act festival!

I chose a play from their second season anthology, but while chatting by email with Wonder Fools about it, they offered to keep in touch with me about a third season of the project in 2023. Always with an eye on an opportunity, I enthusiastically agreed, but was shocked when the increased scale of the third season was unveiled

Wonder Fools had arranged to take over four of Scotland's most prestigious theatres – Ayr Gaiety, Perth Theatre, Inverness' Eden Court and Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre – to put on weekend festivals for selected groups to showcase their work on the new season's plays. Even better still, they were offering bursaries to groups who might otherwise struggle to get involved. Our school Drama Club applied in a flash and were over the moon to be accepted to perform at the Traverse, the very theatre that launched so many classics of the Scottish stage.

Our chosen play was *"The Day The Stampers United"* by Sara Shaarawi, a tale of a revolt arising from poor working conditions in a delivery warehouse, and we were even afforded the opportunity to meet Sara in an online workshop. She was thrilled to hear we had a cast of nearly forty young people involved and came along to see our performance. In addition to performances, the weekend also featured workshops in moviemaking, song writing and writing for the stage, as well as a Tik Tok scavenger hunt to encourage young people to meet new friends

We enjoyed the chance to see performances from other groups – an incredibly cute production from a very young Lyceum Youth Theatre group, and a rehearsed reading from a group of "Emerging Artists" – college and degree students, as well as recent graduates in theatre. Coupled with our own group of high school kids, it really gave a sense of the breadth of theatre work for young people happening in Scotland. By taking out the competitive element, focusing on celebrating the creativity of those involved by removing the need for a fully mounted production, and adding the workshops and social opportunities, it's an interesting alternative to our SCDA model. We loved our involvement and would definitely recommend it to other clubs with youth members!

Amy Hanson



Welcome back Laigh Kirk

Hi , Our Drama group started on Tuesday 2nd August. The Laigh Kirk in Kilmarnock had a very successful drama group many years ago. I knew we had a venue and stage in the Laigh Kirk Halls and so applied to our church informing them of my vision of restoring a drama group and to my delight Tuesday nights was available. It is very early days we are reading through scripts provided the SCDA library in Edinburgh also Lazybees scripts. I have a whodunit sketch that we are reading through and some of the group are keen to put pen to paper as script writers , so watch this space .

We have around 20 registered only 2 male however , so if interested in performing they are almost guaranteed to be on stage. We are meeting tonight , so I will ask for some photos to forward to you . As part of the New Laigh Kirk Church, I have been asked if the group would like to be involved in the nativity this Christmas Eve. This may well be our first performance with an audience.

Very Best Wishes
Ann Burley



Let Carole make your rehearsals fun



As winter approaches, many of us look forward to beginning rehearsals for our Christmas shows and festival plays. But as the weeks go by, it can all become a bit repetitive and predictable.

Our National Drama Advisor, Carole Williams, offers a range of workshops and exercises tailored to your individual needs. She can bring some fun back to your rehearsals and improve your skills in the process.

For more information,
contact Carole at nda@drama.scot

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Geoffrey Whitworth competition

The Geoffrey Whitworth competition had 18 entries this year from Scotland, England and Wales. Once again it was a pity there was nothing from Northern Ireland, maybe next year.

It had been agreed by the UKCFF that we would once again use the SCDA Play on Words marking system. The scripts were read and marked. The marks were collated and the top nine were sent to Colin Dolley our final judge to find a winner. All entries received written feedback on their work.

The final plays submitted covered a wide range of genres, themes and style. Indeed, there was a play for all seasons.

Judging the Plays

As in previous years the main areas Colin considers when evaluating new work include: Plot, Themes, Setting, Characters, Dialogue, Style, Structure, Length, and Originality. Finally, and perhaps most importantly he asks himself: "Was I engaged with the characters? Did it touch me emotionally? Did it make me laugh, or move me, or make me think?"

Colin sent detailed feedback for all nine plays but commended 'Victim' by Brenda Reid-Brown. Colin said The subject of the play is a false accusation of rape, an important theme today. The dialogue is quite credible although the developing situation is somewhat rushed and lacking in nuance and subtlety. The simplistic ending is somewhat disappointing and with more thought it might give the audience something more to ponder on this very promising script."

Also commended 'Death Duties' by Mark Devoren. Colin said "The opening image of this amusing play is of a coffin abandoned in a supermarket car park and it soon becomes clear that we are in the world of the extended black comedy sketch. The strength of the piece is in the dialogue. Writing a successful comedy is very challenging and there is much to admire in this original entertaining farcical play.

Highly Commended was 'The Box' by Drew Young (SCDA Entry). The issues at the heart of this engaging short play

are themes of memory, loss and unspoken emotion. The dialogue is sharp, lively, authentic and varied. The serious enigmatic core of the conflict is counterpointed by some underplayed touches of humour. As it stands, we have an original, intriguing psychological vignette.

Runner up was 'Brick by Brick' by Cameron Forbes (SCDA entry) This highly original play uses a broken Lego house as an image for broken relationships and although written for a youth company it addresses many adult relationship

themes in our society. The unique dialogue is sharp and edgy. In addition, there are opportunities for well-timed choral speech. This makes an arresting innovative script with a highly distinctive style. With complex human relationships at its heart, this could well have a wider appeal beyond youth groups.

However once again the winner was Tony Domaile with 'Even Numbers'. Colin said, "This thoughtful script seeks to explore the mind and background of a serial murder and what drove her to commit her heinous crimes. From the absorbing opening scene, the situation is immediately created and the characters

have a well-established veracity. The psychologist has the right cool professional manner while in contrast Mary-Anne is emotionally edgy. The third character of the barrister furthers the pressure of the situation whilst adding some touches of humour to the script. There is an authenticity in the dialogue which has a natural rhythm with a good variation of pace and build to key lines. The text has a natural shape with a subtle build of urgency reflecting the growing need to discover evidence of the truth. Overall, this was a successful, compelling, thought-provoking new script."

I was fortunate to see the rehearsed reading of the winning play 'Even Numbers' performed by Theatre Three at the British Final in Belfast in June. This was an excellent play beautifully performed by three very talented actors. A dark comedy that I seriously hope I will see in some of our festivals next year.



Morna Barron

The British at Belfast

Morna Barron reports from a celebration of top class theatre productions in Belfast.

On a lovely sunny day we set off bright and early for the long drive from Fordoun to the Cairnryan Ferry and onwards to Belfast for the British Final. We had decided to go a day early so we could visit the Titanic Experience and it was certainly well worth the visit on the Friday morning.

The Mac Theatre was buzzing quite early as some of us chose to have a theatre dinner prior to the start of the festival. It was a very unusual Japanese 'Bento box' idea which made us feel truly on holiday.

Theatre 3 Newtownabbey was the first country to perform with *'Something for the Ducks'* by Jean Lennox Todie, a simple but amusing play. Two strangers meet at a duck pond in the grounds of a senior citizen housing complex. They are in their seventies and find that there is still much to enjoy about life as they put their moves on each other in a minuet that is beautiful to behold.

Second country to perform is our own Scotland with Kikintilloch Players *'The Beaches of St Valery'* by Stuart Hepburn. Once again Kirkie did us proud, the tale of 'St

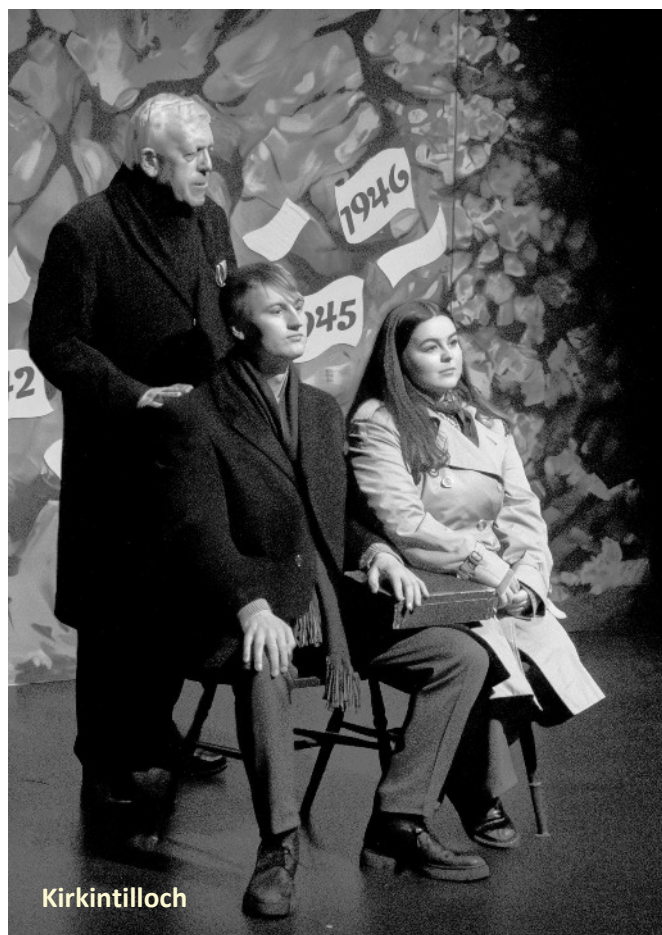
Valery' was really appreciated by all. The story of the 51st Highland Division was again expertly told and the cast got a long and appreciated applause when the lights faded out.

Now was the time to hear what the adjudicator Imelda McDonagh had to say. She was certainly well equipped for the job being a multi-award winning director and actress. She is currently President of the Association of Drama adjudicators and has adjudicated various festivals throughout all of Ireland. She started by saying how honoured she was to adjudicate the cream of British drama. She had felt the warmth and friendly rivalry between the groups before the festival had started. The four themes themselves were of great interest – loneliness & interaction, - surviving war – immigration and depression.

On to comments on Newtownabbey's *'Ducks'*. She loved the simple set and the small signs of Autumn with leaves scattered around. She felt the lighting could have been a bit more subtle to emphasise the loneliness of the pair. However, the director captured the unfussy text with some lovely beautifully played comic timing. Imelda praised the attempt at the accents but felt both could have been vocally louder at times. There was a lovely rapport between the two actors and the play had charm, humour and gentle comedy throughout and was a joy to watch.

Imelda then moved on to the *'Beaches'*. This was a story of true courage and love in spite of circumstances. She loved the set and the background projection. The stage had been well used and the technical lighting and sound had enhanced this production. There had been some great moments, the war scenes in particular worked very well. The balance of narration and scenes were smoothly handled. Imelda praised the cast on their timing and said all three gave well rounded performances. It had been a visual and engaging performance with splendid team work from performance to technical detail. This evening had been a brilliant start to the festival.

There was no 'civic' reception as such but a great 'Welcome to the teams' reception in the Mac on the Saturday morning hosted by Mac Pollock, UKCFFF Vice Chair. AUDF's President Dan Gordon, who is a professional actor opened the event with some great anecdotes from his acting days and got the morning off well. The four teams introduced themselves and passed on gifts to each other in the traditional way. The afternoon was spent at the rehearsed reading of the Geoffrey Whitworth winning play *'Even Numbers'* by Tony Domaille.



Saturday evening opened with Total Arts Community Theatre with '*A Sudden Burst of Rain*' by Sami Ibrahim. Basically a story on immigration told through narration and dialogue. Stunning simple but effective set and some individual good performances.

Second was a bright simple play by The Unknown Theatre Co. from Wales, with '*A Super Happy Story (about feeling super sad)*' by Jon Brittain & Mathew Floyd Jones. This is quite a hilarious play about depression and through music and comedy explains it is OK not to be OK. A great end to the evening.

Imelda started her adjudication of TACT saying that there was a good set full of thought and imagination. It was a strong ensemble piece with good fluidity and imagination. However vocally at times it could have been stronger and some characters need more depth. Overall good team work. On the last play Imelda thought it was immediately engaging, an visually lovely from start to finish. Some dialogue was a bit rushed and there needed to be more variety of tone and pace. She thought the cast played with sincerity and conviction and this was a lovely end to the whole festival.

Tension was high as we waited for the platform party and the announcement of the trophy winners. The friendship quaich was handed over to our own SCDA Chair Carolyn who invited everyone to Perth in 2024. Then Imelda summed up saying it had been a privilege to see such a high calibre of productions and she had appreciated the warm welcome she had received. The winners of the Howard de Walden trophy was once again TACT.



YOUTH FINAL



The cast of Killin Drama's production of *'Round the World with Class Six'*

A full house enjoyed a great day at Nairn's Community & Arts Centre

The cast of Blairgowrie Players' production of *'Macbeth'*



photos by Rob Coffey

