

A
Registered Charity
Number 1071518

News & Review

January 2016
Issue 1
Number 31

ALL-ENGLAND THEATRE FESTIVAL

Reaching out to drama groups throughout England



England

It's that time of year again and teams throughout England are ready to start a new round of festivals for the 2016 season. First round organisers will be hoping that their planning will guarantee a successful event - one that both teams and adjudicators will want to return to in future years.

As usual I am excited and can't wait to get started, notwithstanding the hard work and commitment that is about to begin. The first round festivals will take place from February to early April and I would love to see as many teams as possible, of all ages and abilities, take part. This is a great opportunity to meet like-minded people, share, learn and improve. I have been taking part in festivals for over forty years and am still learning. Why not go onto our AETF web site and find your nearest festival? It may still have spaces if you would like to compete, or you may just want to go along as a spectator and witness the work of the many talented groups performing a wide range of repertoire.

I had a wonderful time in 2015, both as a festival attendee and as a performer. It was a joy to be



TACT performing 'The Tale of Tilly Miller' by Peter Machen

part of my own group's production of *The Tale of Tilly Miller*, which went on to represent England at the British Final after gaining awards at all rounds of competition (including the John Maude Trophy at the Grand Final in Harrogate). However, success didn't always come our way. When we (that is Total Arts Community Theatre) first started entering festivals, we didn't win many awards at all and were just pleased to get a mention. But we loved the atmosphere, the sharing, the learning and the

meeting up with old and new friends. Even now, despite having chalked up several English Final successes, we have only managed to win the British Final once so there is always room for improvement. Talking of last year's British Final, what a magnificent job our colleagues in Eastern Area made of its organisation. The wonderful weekend at South Hill Park, Bracknell will remain in the memory for a long time.

Stage Writes, which was funded by the Heritage Lottery to establish a record of amateur theatre memories, had a very good response and still needs to continue to collect more memories and stories from anyone involved in the theatre both past and present. (stagewrites.org.uk)

The Trustees of the All-England Theatre Festival are a group of people who give up their time to support the one-act play festival. They represent all areas of the country and are always keen to improve the constituent elements of the festival and secure a flourishing future for it.

We continue to produce our twice yearly newsletter (Ian Clarke is the new editor). Thanks to Jean Cunnington, our brochure continues to provide a plethora of information about the AETF and all its events.



The cast and crew of 'Tilly Miller' at South Hill Park Arts Centre for the 2015 British Final

Our membership scheme is open to individuals, families and groups who wish to support the AETF and we hope that as many of you as possible will decide to take up this membership in 2016.

The English Final will be hosted at Maidenhead in June by our colleagues in Eastern Area (no let-up for them this year) while the British Final will be held in July at the Sher-



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man Theatre, Cardiff. Both events will be entertaining and exciting so book early to avoid disappointment.

If you've not done so before, why not get involved in the AETF in 2016? There are roles for everyone (irrespective of age) – directing, backstage, front of house and on stage. Together, let's make the new season one to remember.

Sue Fortune - AETF National Chairman



Northern Area

There seems to have been barely time to catch one's breath since the curtain came down on the superb British Final at South Hill Park, Bracknell. Close season? What close season? Those of us intimately involved in the minutiae of festival organisation are soon nudged out of our brief winter hibernation by its demands.

All our seven first round festivals in the North are in various stages of readiness for the 2016 season. Sadly, we no longer have the organisational resources to run what used to be the norm – namely a quarter final level of competition. We fully understand that this brings with it inequities of competition in comparison with two other AETF areas, but unless we can nurture a younger generation of festival organisers and administrators the current situation must perforce continue.

This year our 'mega' semi-final for the winners of each preliminary round takes us to Port Sunlight, the garden village on the



Keith Burton - Pateley Bridge Dramatic Society - receiving the winner's trophy at last year's Nidderdale Festival.

Wirral founded in 1888 by William Hesketh Lever to house his soap factory workers. Our venue will be the delightful and lovingly run Gladstone Theatre, originally opened by Prime Minister William Gladstone as an assembly and recreation hall

including canteen) but which is now a splendid, 400 seat plus, auditorium for amateur and professional performances alike. Do come along on the Bank Holiday weekend of 30th April and 1st May to support what promises to be a magnificent show-piece for the very best one-act drama north of the Dee and Humber.

On a sad note, my own festival, the Nidderdale and District, lost one of its closest friends in 2015. David Crumpton was an avid supporter and connoisseur of amateur drama across North Yorkshire. He was a fount of knowledge about all forms of repertoire and would happily regale anyone queuing at his checkout in Waitrose, Harrogate, where he worked, with his

thoughts (often trenchantly expressed) about recent amateur productions he'd attended. His big personality and infectious enthusiasm will be sorely missed, but his legacy of support will linger on in a memorial trophy we are commissioning in his name. This will be presented for the first time as an adjudicator's discretionary award at the Frazer Theatre, Knaresborough, where the Nidderdale Festival will be held in March. We hope our Northern Area festival fare across the board in 2016 will encourage and nurture a new generation of enthusiasts like David.

It remains for me to extend my warmest wishes to all those entering and supporting our Area events during the forthcoming season. Enjoy yourselves.

Ian Clarke - AETF Vice Chairman and Secretary, Northern Area



The Gladstone Theatre, Port Sunlight



Central Area

Our 12th Central Area AGM took place on the 27th September in Solihull. As is the case with so many organisations, it is the older generation who seem to attend these occasions (and even those are reducing in number). We were able to report to the AGM that the trustees, following their symposium in January 2015 about where they thought the AETF would be in five to ten years time, had come up with a 'five year plan'. Some more preparatory work is needed and then the plan can be published.

Last year we had a festival season which was splendid as far as artistic and organisational standards were concerned (the only downside being the relatively small audience attracted for the semi final) We certainly approach the new season with great optimism. Venues for the three quarter-finals are booked, as has been the Mitchell Arts Centre in Stoke-on-Trent for the semi-final. Your support will be the driving force that maintains the momentum of success.

As I write this in November I have heard on the grapevine that some preliminary round festivals are already filling up with entries. I hope that you have all been successful in your applications. Remember, there are nine such festivals within

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Central Area that you are able to enter as springboards for progression to the AETF proper. Although Central Area has no direct control over these preliminary round events, all have members who are part of the AETF organisation and our catchment is, therefore, surprisingly large.



The cast of Broseley Amateur Dramatic Society in 'May We? - Oui Mais'

Being a follower of the festival scene is thought by some to be very time consuming. In fact, if you follow the AETF festival within Central Area, your commitment will be for a

mere three days during which you will have the joy of seeing sixteen plays! Just a suggestion, but why not try to organise a party of supporters and enjoy a friendly debate about the merits of the plays you've seen and the adjudicator's deliberations and judgements.

I make no apology for blowing Central Area's corporate trumpet. We are the AETF entity with largest number of individual members. This not only shows that there is a great sense of belonging to the festival scene within the Area but it also has a significant impact on the AETF finances each year. Thank you all for your support. Please do keep it up and don't hesitate to contact your local organising committees if you wish to contribute more actively to the festival scene.

Jean and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible during the forthcoming year at your own preliminary round festivals and at the later AETF stages of the competition.

Roger Cunningham - Chairman, Central Area



Western Area

The Past Year.

A few more words recapping one piece of our history. Keen students will recall that our Area Final, held at the Barrington Theatre, Ferndown, Dorset, was an artistic success and a grave financial disappointment. The theatrical content of that day is reflected in detail on the Western Area pages of the AETF website. One of the positives of that day was that Ferndown Drama Club, our host society, were so enthused by it all that they expressed an interest in future participation. This Area's committee members will help them get started if they need our assistance.

The Year Ahead.

Energy Required. Our theme this year is going to be 'we won't give in!' In this year's AETF Annual Report and Accounts we mused on two problems that affect the other three Areas as

well, namely a declining interest in competitive drama at grass-roots level and a dearth of administrators from the younger generation. Of course, we could just shrug our shoulders and say: 'Ah well, that's the way of life these days,' but that WOULD be giving in. One certain prediction is that, if the time ever comes when local communities cease to actively participate in the arts in general and in theatre specifically, it will be too late to try to resurrect the expertise and ambition. The main loss would be to the younger generation, whose involvement in the camaraderie and gentle disciplines of pantomime, dance, theatre etc. directly contributes to the acquisition of life-skills. The article referred to above contained our views on how to address these concerns, but we would certainly welcome suggestions from the other Areas, especially if these are based on measures they have already put in place. The way ahead certainly demands more work than the traditional, narrow focus on organising 'the next festival' as efficiently as we can. It needs dedicated endeavour to generate an active crusade wherever it is required. It means agreeing a list of values and devising a programme of action involving skilled presenters dedicated enough to spread the word. If the AETF is to thrive, a sustained and concerted effort of this nature is probably required in all our Areas.

English Final, 2017.

We are looking forward to it and research is, of course, already under way. Theatre availability and size, prices, sponsorship and accommodation are the ingredients that we are all aware of and will need to carefully consider. We are currently looking at venues in Bridgwater, Bristol, Frome, Taunton and Teignmouth and hope to reach a decision at our January committee meeting.

Finally.

The concept of a Five Year Plan at national level sounds promising. Does it or could it address elements of the above problems? To whatever degree, one hopes that it might be either a model that applies throughout the AETF or one that can be modified at Area level as a blueprint for our continued existence.

Dennis Dunford - Chairman, Western Area



Eastern Area

Arrangements are now well advanced for the preliminary round festivals to be held in Spring 2016 and I thought this might be a good opportunity to reflect on the wealth of one-act drama history encompassed by the five remaining festivals in Eastern Area.

The **Cambridge Drama Festival** ("CDF") was instituted by Cambridge City Council in 1968 but became independently financed and administered in 1992 entering the All-England Theatre Festival until 2013 when it took a sabbatical due to budgetary constraints. The festival had planned to return to the AETF fold in 2016 but the Eastern Area Final had already been finalised and pre-dated the CDF, so we look forward to the latter's return in 2017.

The **Elmbridge Drama Festival** ("EDF") has been based in the Walton Playhouse (now Cecil Hepworth Playhouse) since its

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inception 54 years ago. At the turn of the 20th century the building housed the generators for the Walton Film Studios, at that time one of the leading silent movie studios and referred to as "Little Hollywood". Spatial constraints and a failure to embrace the introduction of "sound" resulted in the demise of the studios but the remaining generator housing was converted into a theatre in 1924 and opened by the renowned actress Dame Ellen Terry (the leading Shakespearean actress of her time).

The EDF celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2011 and the Cecil Hepworth Playhouse will host the 2016 Eastern Area Final.

The **Maidenhead Drama Festival** ("MDF") celebrates its 69th anniversary in 2016. After being based in Maidenhead town hall for many years, the festival relocated to the newly constructed Norden Farm Centre for the Arts in Spring 2001. This delightful venue, on the site of an old dairy farm, includes two original listed buildings, a Georgian farmhouse and an 18th century long barn. The plan to have a purpose-built arts centre in Maidenhead was a long time in gestation but lobbying of the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead town council in the early 1970's led to Maidenhead Arts being set up in 1978 as an umbrella organisation of local arts groups committed to this vision. The site was "gifted" to the Norden Farm Trust by the Council as a planning gain for housing development on the farmland in 1992 and funds were sought (both from the Foundation for Sport and the Arts and the Arts Council) for lottery funding which resulted in a Lottery award of £5.3 Million in January 1998. This enabled the development of a new, 280 seat main theatre ("The Courtyard"), a 100 seat studio theatre and other arts spaces, together with a bar and cafe. AETF supporters will be able to enjoy this delightful venue as it will host the 2016 English Final on Saturday 4th June. The Maidenhead Drama Festival and AETF Eastern Area committee look forward to seeing you there!



Norden Farm Centre for the Arts, Maidenhead, the venue for this year's AETF Grand Final

The **Southern Counties Drama Festival** ("SCDF") previously ran as The Betchworth Festival and has been an important part of local amateur dramatics in Surrey and Kent for many years. Traditionally the venue moved around (different groups hosted the event each year) but as time moved on standards of technical facilities were found lacking in some of these venues, which were, in the main, church halls converted for theatre use on the morning of the technical rehearsals. In 1989 the festival risked being cancelled due to lack of a suitable venue and available technicians. Thankfully, the Barn Theatre, Oxted boldly offered to provide both, not only for that year but on a permanent basis. The festival was a success and since that time The Barn has been home to the renamed Southern Counties Drama Festival, under the auspices of the Festival Committee.

There was no festival in 2006 and the Festival Committee indicated its unwillingness to carry the event on in 2007. This put the festival's future at risk. However, the Barn Trustees, under the leadership of the then Artistic Director, Martin Patrick, quickly assembled an enthusiastic and experienced team to fulfil the committee obligations and re-launch the SCDF which now boasts the highest number of participating groups (many based in the Barn Theatre) and best attendances in Eastern Area.

The **Waltham Forest Drama Festival** ("WFDF") is another relative newcomer and was started in 1981 by Roy Seammen, himself a drama adjudicator. The current president is ex local boy Derek Jacobi who always supports the festival and has (in past times) attended the event and presented a talk.

The festival welcomes groups from Essex, Hertfordshire and East London. Some of its past participants have subsequently moved on to appear in roles in 'EastEnders', notably Ricky Groves (who played the soap's Gary Hobbs for 9 years). James Payne, who was a member of a youth group, used to frequently write plays for the festival and now writes episodes of 'EastEnders', 'Mr. Selfridge', 'Death in Paradise', 'Hustle', 'Hollyoaks' and many other television series. The WFDF can thus rightly claim to be a fertile breeding ground for the performing arts!

I look forward to an exciting festival season and wish festival organisers, participating teams and audiences alike a rewarding and enjoyable experience!

Ian Thomas - Chairman, Eastern Area



Another view of Norden Farm Centre for the Arts



Treasurer's Ramblings

I do hope that you all had a good Christmas and enjoyed a festive start to the New Year. My ramblings at the start of the 2016 season will not dwell on points I've raised in the past which have not elicited much in the way of response from you, our loyal reader.

Our electronic issue of the Newsletter at the end of last season was a financial saving (good news for me!) and we hope that it

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reached a wider readership than our more usual hard copy issue.

Still on a positive note, our membership scheme remains an initiative which the AETF wants to promote further, and we need your support to encourage its continued expansion. Application forms can be downloaded from our web site. I would like to thank all members (corporate or individual) who have kindly included a separate donation with their membership subscription. Each of these donations will, as was stated in the last Newsletter, be used specifically to raise the profile of the AETF.

The AETF again gave financial support totalling £1,000 to our winners during last year's festival season. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Eastern Area who did such a fantastic job with fundraising for the British Final at the Wilde Theatre in Bracknell that £4,000 was made available to the teams who took part.

As you are probably aware the trustees had an additional meeting last January. Its overall task was "to look at where the AETF should be in five to ten years time". No doubt you will be hearing some concrete outcomes from that meeting in due course, but I can at least tell you that a five-year plan is being developed in an attempt to move us positively forward. Critical to this will be our need to become more savvy in generating financial backing, more up-to-date and literate in our use of social media and much more expert in marketing ourselves in a way that will at least halt the worrying decline in participation in all facets of one-act festival activity.

A reminder to our members that our twice-yearly Newsletter and our annual report are the vehicles that the trustees have at their disposal to keep you all informed of progress within the organisation. We hope this material will generate feedback from you. Your thoughts and ideas will always be welcome and could well be the spur that we need to focus attention on overlooked but important facets of festival organisation. You are also probably aware by now that the AETF has a new webmaster for our website www.aetf.org.uk. The object of the website is not just to be a source of information. It is something that can be used by all members and groups who wish to take a more active role within the AETF and promote themselves. All you have to do is contact the webmaster. Each Area has a page solely for its own use, though please run any input intended for this particular space past your Area Secretary first.

Roger Cunnington - AETF National Treasurer.

INTRODUCING OUR GUEST CONTRIBUTOR AUSTIN HAWKINS

We are delighted that Austin Hawkins has given his kind permission for us to print the following articles, 'Language, Timothy!' and 'To prompt, or not to prompt', both of which cover subjects which have a particular resonance for amateur theatre. Austin is a former journalist and biographer who, 'in later life', has turned his creative writing talents to fiction and the theatre. His one-act play 'Dress Down Friday' represented Devon and Cornwall at the AETF

Western Area Semi Final in 2013. We hope to print more of Austin's articles in future issues of our Newsletter.

Austin Hawkins



'LANGUAGE, TIMOTHY!'

Fetch up at the Royal Court Theatre, London for a play by, for instance, Simon Stevens and you might find yourself sitting amongst an audience many of whom will go home feeling rather cheated if the dialogue is not peppered with expletives; keeps it 'edgy', modern and cutting edge, you see; the 'f' word every other line, maybe the 'B' word, the 'S' word or even the occasional 'C' word, just to ensure that the audience are constantly reminded and clear about the gritty nature of the characters being portrayed. But surely we have now reached the point where there is no longer a 'shock of the new' element about explicit language or that it can be considered a useful catalyst for selling tickets (except perhaps to students, some of whom have a little more growing up to do). Perhaps the reason that older people seem to be more circumspect about explicit language in theatre is that they've "heard it all before" and don't feel any excitement about the notion that it has shock value. Certainly it is usually older people, hailing as they do from a more deferential era, who are the ones heading for the exit during the interval.

Out in the provinces (say the sticks of rural Somerset, Devon or Dorset) the same play might well ruffle feathers with just too many of the audience inwardly wincing at the directness of the language or the adult subject matter. Some will leave at the interval, if not before. Thus it seems that people in cities seem to be more able to accept 'language' if it's an authentic part of the story, whereas in a 'country' area they will be distracted by, and disapproving of it regardless of context. Their view might be that the play shouldn't have been chosen in the first place.



Of course, we shouldn't shy away from plays that deal with 'adult issues' and / or are liberally sprinkled with strong language, but there is the obvious caveat that this content should be made clear both in the advance publicity and at the venue.

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When crafting my one-act play *Dress Down Friday*, I was presented with something of a dilemma on both issues. It has a rather adult theme - a meeting between a young street-walker and her potential client. Although there is no nudity or overtly sexual dialogue, I needed to illustrate their very different backgrounds by contrasting dialogue. Sharon, the main character, might, by virtue of her work and background, be predisposed to utter expletives. At some points in the script she is wound up and angry and might well be expected to 'swear like a trouper'. But I wanted to avoid peppering her words with expletives to the point that might make some people in the audience uncomfortable or distract them from the substance of the lines.

Although the play seemed to find favour with audiences over a number of performances and reached the Western Area Semi Final of the AETF, I'm still not sure to this day if I got it right. When I sent it to a publisher the response was: "Perhaps not for us" as well as another comment that implied there were not enough verbal fireworks. Fortunately I had received much favourable comment about the play and only one adverse comment which was, indeed, that Sharon did not spout the kind of expletives that perhaps would have accorded with her back story.

My local theatre is careful to put on the box office window the notice: "This evening's play includes strong language." Despite such warnings some patrons will still leave in the interval muttering: "It's not the sort of play we like to sit through really". Comments like this make it fairly clear that they probably don't sit through much post watershed TV drama either. But there is a difference between viewing or listening to drama containing adult themes and explicit language in the privacy of one's own sitting room and doing the same thing in the company of friends and neighbours in a public arena.



Over my ten years as a 'front of houser' in amateur theatre it's sobering to note that, although I've witnessed many people leave because they don't like the foul language coming from the stage, I've never yet encountered anyone leaving because: "Well, there's just not enough swearing this evening." It's all a matter of authenticity competing with acceptability.

Austin Hawkins

TO PROMPT OR NOT TO PROMPT?

Can you recall seeing those old illustrations of theatres in Victorian times? A row of limelights across the front of the stage and there, in the middle, a curious little three-sided box concealing the prompter, an individual ever ready to come to the aid of an actor who had "dried". With only a head visible he

or she must have appeared to the actors on stage to be the result of a decapitation!

I am one of those faint hearts who, having a very patchy memory for words, has never ventured to 'tread the boards' for fear of emulating Bill Kerr, who played a reluctant actor on radio in Tony Hancock's mythical "East Cheam Repertory Company." Kerr's character makes his entrance and stutters out: "Prompt". Hancock stage whispers: "Ello, Mum". Kerr says the line and then repeats: "Prompt". Hancock again: "Ello, Dad". Kerr duly stutters "Ello Dad" and once again: "Prompt." At this point Hancock, seething with frustration declares: "He's had three weeks off work to learn this, now take the book and read the thing."

I had the privilege of having the experienced director Anna Reynolds preside over a one-act play I had scribbled. She was someone who wasn't enthusiastic about having any writer carry out 'back seat' directing and suggested that I kept away from her rehearsals. But I did put in my 'six pennyworth' when it became apparent that one of the actors was struggling to learn a very wordy part. "Well, you'll have a prompt, I suppose", I said. Rather to my surprise Anna exclaimed: 'Definitely not!' Her point was that the absence of a safety net concentrates the mind on the absolute need to be 'off the book' and fluent.

Most professional companies do not expect to provide a prompt during performances. They rely on the actors to know their lines, support each other with a feed or, if needs be, 'wing it' with an ad lib or two. In amateur theatre, however, there is more excuse for needing a prompt. After all, a really wordy part is particularly challenging if the performance takes place after a long day of being mentally stretched in the daytime job.



I think it was the acerbic Sybil Thorndyke who, hesitating over the next line, heard someone whispering it from the wings. With her usual commanding self-assurance she is said to have uttered audibly: 'We know the line dear, but which of us is meant to say it?' The story reminded me of the partially deaf actor who was wearing a dense costume wig. Each time she 'dried' she stepped to one side of the stage, lifted the wig and loudly asked for the line.

These days technology has reared its head, but it is not always successful. I was intrigued to read that Michael Gambon, on finding that he could no longer trust his memory, reluctantly had to announce his retirement from live theatre.

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He had tried using an earpiece through which he could receive a prompt but he found that ambient noise from the stage or auditorium made it difficult to pick up certain prompt lines relayed through the earpiece.

An actor friend who was cast in the adventurous 'Picasso at the Lapine Agile', told me that the director had allowed the actors to indulge themselves with a little improvisation. At one point a fellow actor 'dried'. He marched off stage, dragged on a rather startled lady who had been sitting at the prompt's desk holding the book and addressed her with the following request: "Would you be so good as to tell us what the next line is, please?" She did so and then beat a hasty retreat back to the desk.



The paying audience may well have a collective image of the prompter as someone who meekly turns the pages of the play at the side of the stage while trying to master cable stitch. We, of course, know better. A competent and committed prompter is one who studies the script, gets involved from the earliest rehearsals, notes the play's verbal minefields, difficult moments and pregnant pauses and is able to suggest memorising strategies for the trickier passages.

Now, there were a couple of other points I wanted to make.....
'Er, prompt!'

Austin Hawkins



FESTIVAL STATISTICS

All festivals making up the AETF family provided returns this year. These events comprise all independent first round festivals and our own AETF-organised events. Although some people continue to regard the gathering of statistics as a pointless exercise the information provides empirical evidence of how the festival movement is doing over time. They also provide the data necessary to prove that we are continuing to support local community life and honour our overall aims. I will analyse last year's returns under two headings.

1. PERFORMANCE STATISTICS 2015

- Every festival provided a return.

- Within the AETF family there are 29 independently organised festivals and 19 AETF-organised events (preliminary, quarter final and semi final rounds together with the Grand Final). Of these 48 festivals 5 were not scheduled (sadly they were all AETF events) and 2 were cancelled.
- There were 132 performance evenings/matinees. These took place in 41 venues across the country. 322 groups took part with an aggregate cast and crew of over 3,200. These groups were watched by a total audience of around 8,800 who provided an income of approximately £65.5k.
- A number of independent festivals used our programme covers for their events thereby helping to promote the AETF as a whole. A number of independent festivals, however, did not include our small advert in their programme or bother to display the AETF logo.



2. PLAY STATISTICS 2015

These are based on returns from preliminary round festivals only.

The most popular authors this year were: -

- David Tristram (5 titles performed across 10 events)
- Nick Warburton (4 titles performed across 4 events)
- Les Clarke (4 titles performed across 4 events)

No play stood out as being a clear front-runner in terms of the number of performances it received.

- No play was performed at more than three different preliminary round festivals.
- Many groups performed the same play in two or three different preliminary festivals.

Although there were 51 original plays recorded in programmes, I suspect that this is an underestimate of the amount of original work performed.

Participants in our 32 preliminary round festivals performed 263 different play titles (compared with 302 last year) of which 51 were original plays (compared with 53 last year). In aggregate the work of 189 different playwrights was used.

41 of the 263 performances were monologues or two-handers, 36 were three-handers, 104 had between four and seven roles and 82 had 8 roles or over.

191 of the 263 groups performing elected to advance to later rounds of the AETF competition if selected (the figure last year was 219). 38 adult groups and 34 youth groups did not (the figures last year were 41 and 42 respectively).



SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

I would like to thank event organisers for ensuring that we received both a copy of the programme and a completed 'stats form' from each festival. Please continue the good work in 2016. As I mentioned earlier, without empirical evidence we cannot satisfactorily monitor our performance from year to year.

Our total audience of nearly 8,900 was some way down on the figure for our peak year (12,900) but given the national, downward trend in participation, we can say (with some pride) that our commitment to amateur drama within the community still bears fruit. Our future aim has to be to reverse the decline in festival participation and breathe new life into festival drama. This is a cornerstone of our 5 year plan.

The new season is upon us. Here's hoping that we will harvest a bigger and better crop of festival entries in 2016. Yes, time and money are tight, but with the continued support and good will of all our affiliated events we hope for a surge in participation in the year ahead.

Roger Cunningham, AETF National Statistics Co-Coordinator.

THE AETF MEMBERSHIP SCHEME

This important subject is, not surprisingly, discussed regularly at our twice-yearly trustee meetings – in particular how we can increase the number of people who subscribe to it. Those of you who follow the AETF nationally will have noticed that we have recently lost a couple of preliminary round festivals. This is usually explained by the fact that groups are unable to commit time and money to a process that may involve their progressing through several rounds of competition. This is a great shame since festival participation is a learning experience which widens artistic horizons through positive feedback from adjudicators and exposure to the work of other groups. As our National Chairman points out on the opening page of this Newsletter it also fosters comradeship and new friendships. It is accepted that times are hard for everyone but why not cement the sense of belonging that the festival movement is committed to achieving by joining the AETF yourself, or encouraging a friend or local society to do so.

The latest application form can be downloaded from the documents page of our website www.aetf.org.uk. The form itemises all the many advantages that membership confers. Rest assured that your subscription will help guarantee the future of the AETF.

Roger Cunningham



THE WIT AND 'WISDOM' OF PLAYWRIGHTS

George Bernard Shaw

I often quote myself; it adds spice to my conversation.

(to Winston Churchill) I am enclosing two tickets for the first night of my new play; bring a friend – if you have one. (Churchill is alleged to have replied: Cannot possibly attend first night; will attend second - if there is one).

Bertolt Brecht

Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it.

From the cradle to the coffin underwear comes first.

Anton Chekhov

Any idiot can face a crisis – it's day-to-day living that wears you out.

The task of writers is not to solve the problem but to state the problem correctly.

August Strindberg

Not everyone is capable of madness, and of those lucky enough to be capable, not many have the courage for it.

Samuel Beckett

Ever tried? Ever failed? No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.

John Osborne

It is easy to answer the ultimate questions – it saves you bothering with the immediate ones.

I never deliberately set out to shock, but when people don't walk out of my plays I think there is something wrong.

Noel Coward

Never trust a man with short legs – his brain's too near his bottom

Sean O'Casey

All the world's a stage and most of us are desperately unhearsed.

FROM THE EDITOR

Your comments and suggestions about the content and presentation of the Newsletter are always welcome. If you would like to provide copy for future issues, do let me know and I shall do my best to oblige. Happy reading. Happy new festival season.

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