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ALL-ENGLAND THEATRE FESTIVAL

Reaching out to drama groups throughout England



*The only countrywide,
competitive festival
of one-act plays.*

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'Briardene', Silver Hill, Pa-
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England

It is a very great honour to be the new chairman of an organisation with such a long and distinguished pedigree as the AETF. In one sense I feel a complete fraud since I only stumbled on amateur theatre at the tender age of 52 when my wife ordered me to find something to occupy myself following early retirement. At that time I barely knew my Bond from my Brecht or my Pinter from my Priestley. The wonderfully hospitable Woodlands Drama Group in Harrogate provided an immediate outlet for my meagre acting talents and, much later, indulged my passion for the Russian repertoire by performing my own translations of works by Chekhov, Gogol and Ostrovsky. 16 years later Woodlands continues to furnish me with opportunities to direct and perform (or rather 'hide conspicuously' in public), sometimes at the Nidderdale Festival, of which I have been Chairman for over 6 years.

I am fortunate indeed that Ian Thomas of Eastern Area has become AETF Vice Chairman. It quickly became evident when Ian became a trustee some years ago that the AETF had acquired a clear-thinking and highly articulate business brain. In that time Ian has more than fulfilled our high expectations having organised the fantastically successful British Final in Bracknell in 2015 and masterminded our first ever 5 year business plan. The latter will certainly be the focus of much of our attention in 2017.

I would like to pay tribute here to my predecessor as National Chairman, Sue Fortune, who has done more for festival drama as performer, director and organiser over the years than I could hope to achieve in two lifetimes. She has been an inspiring example. The saving grace of her departure from the Executive Committee is that we shall still benefit from her organisational expertise within Central Area (and continue to witness her acting prowess with Total Arts Community Theatre - TACT). It is our great good fortune that the Fortune

dynasty lives on at the apex of the AETF with the appointment of Rebekah, Sue's mega-talented daughter, as the first ever incumbent of the post of Public Relations Officer. Many of you will have witnessed Rebekah's work as actress, writer and director for TACT. If you have, you'll realise how fortunate we are to have her on board (you can read Rebekah's personal profile elsewhere in the Newsletter).

May I also extend a very warm welcome to our other new trustee, Carol Hennessy from Eastern Area. Carol organised a splendid Grand Final at Maidenhead last year and is another great asset for the AETF team.

This year sees the 'travelling caravan' that is our flagship event descend on the brand new McMillan Theatre in Bridgwater, Somerset, courtesy of our hard-working colleagues in Western Area who are busily seeking a sponsor for this, the Grand Final.



The magnificent Mcmillan Theatre, Bridgwater
- interior view

On behalf of all my colleagues on the AETF Executive, I thank you for your continuing support of this unique, countrywide competition. May you find much to inspire and delight as the event unfolds during the new season. Rest assured that we shall be doing our damndest to ensure that the festival continues to provide the principal outlet for competitive, one-act drama in England

I wish you all a happy and healthy new year.

Ian Clarke – National Chairman.

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INTRODUCING OUR NEW PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER

Rebekah Fortune joined Total Arts Community Theatre (TACT) of Tamworth almost forty years ago, progressing from junior youth theatre to eventually becoming Director of the Adult Group. She trained as an actor and has a BA in Acting and an MA in Shakespeare and Classical Theatre. Because she was ineligible to perform for TACT whilst she was a professional actor she turned to directing them. This seemed to be a marriage made in heaven as she has directed ten productions for TACT that have reached the AETF Grand Final and five that have reached the British Finals. In the past ten years Rebekah has won over thirty 'Best Director' awards.



Having retired from acting several years ago she now directs feature films and says that the only theatre she ever wants to direct again is with TACT. Her passion is ensemble theatre which incorporates a highly visual and physical style. She is a great champion of the AETF and has confessed that if she ever had to collect an Oscar or be at a British Final with TACT she would collect her Oscar via Skype.



Northern Area

Having already penned the National Chairman's remarks, I shall be as succinct as possible in this, the Northern Area slot.

It would be idle to pretend that we are the AETF unit in rudest health. The absence of a divisional structure means that much of the organisational work is vested in a handful of 'old hands' whose enthusiasm and expertise remain wholly admirable, but who see little prospect of handing the baton on to a new generation. Yet, while some of our festivals struggle to make it even to the starting line, others show undiminished energy and an enviable ability to attract high quality entrants across the age-ranges and vibrant exciting repertoire. Who knows, maybe

2017 will see us break our millennial duck and witness a Northern Area finalist travelling home from the Grand Final with the John Maude trophy.

This year our Area semi final relocates from the spacious Gladstone Theatre on Merseyside to the more intimate venue of Saltburn Community Theatre. This delightful and much-loved facility, perched high above the magnificent sands of the Cleveland coast, is the home of Saltburn '53 Drama Group who are not only the most welcoming and well-organised of hosts but who also run one of the best and longest established AETF preliminary rounds in the North. The theatre began life as a primitive Methodist church and school in 1904. The architect was John Baines, a prolific Scottish designer of churches in the Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau style. The building is now Grade II listed and is one of the key features in the Saltburn landscape. The auditorium, which seats 150, is a splendid performing space. Please put the dates (5-6 May) in your calendar and come and make a weekend of it at sun-kissed Saltburn-by-the-Sea. You'll witness three sessions of the best one-act theatre in the North of England and have the opportunity to explore nearby Whitby, Scarborough and the North York Moors National Park. Will we see you there? Of course we will!

I am constantly reminded by my AETF colleagues that Northern Area is earmarked to host the British Finals in 2019. Harrogate Theatre having belatedly given the thumbs down to the event because of plans for refurbishment, the hope is that the splendid Gladstone Theatre, Port Sunlight will open its arms to us instead. Watch this space.

Have a wonderful festival season and thank you, as ever, for your support.

Ian Clarke – National Chairman and Northern Area Secretary.



Saltburn Community Theatre - venue for the 2017 AETF North Semi Final

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Central Area

As I put pen to paper in early November the grapevine is buzzing. I know that my own preliminary round has already reached its complement of entries and several others are similarly filling up.

As I mentioned in the last Newsletter, the Nottingham One-Act Festival is no longer a constituent element of the AETF. Its governing body, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Drama Association (NANDA), remains a member of the AETF but has decided to move its event to June in the hope of building a much bigger audience base. We wish it well and look forward to hearing how things pan out. Notwithstanding the situation in Nottinghamshire, I am happy to report that Central Area remains in a vibrant state and we look forward to seeing how the winners of each of its eight festivals perform once they reach the AETF proper.

Our thirteenth AGM took place on 25 September in Solihull. Sadly, it was (as we have become accustomed) not well attended. Rebekah Fortune, having moved back into the Area, has joined the Area Committee as county representative for Derbyshire. Whilst this may not result in a festival being set up just yet, it does mean that we have a foothold in the county. Only Lincolnshire is now without a representative and a festival. If anyone reading this is interested in acting as the AETF's contact in that county, do please make contact with me.

We wish Ian Clarke well as the new National Chairman. He will have the onerous responsibility of hosting the British Final on behalf of Northern Area the next time that event is held in England (in 2019). Central Area will have that honour in 2023 and I can say that considerable thought is already being given to our hosting of this event.

Overall, we were quite happy with last year's festival season. It was decided at our AGM to continue with three quarter finals and we look forward to a splendid semi final at the Abbey Theatre in Nuneaton.

Your support as always will be what ultimately makes the festival season a success. I make no apology for repeating the mangled quote from Polonius which appears on our membership application form – 'BOTH A FOLLOWER AND A MEMBER BE!' Being an active follower of the festival scene is not time consuming. It takes a maximum of three days of your life (not counting the preliminary round) and you will see sixteen plays (six in both the quarter and semi finals and four at the Grand Final). You will not regret it.

I make no apology for blowing the Central Area trumpet over our AETF membership, which is the highest of any Area. It shows that there is a great sense of belonging within the Area. Thank you for your support as AETF members and as proselytisers on behalf of the membership scheme. Never be afraid of contacting our organising committees to find out how you might give further support if you feel at all able to do so.

I hope you are all looking forward to the new festival season as much as Jean and I. We both hope to see as many of you

as possible during the forthcoming year at all levels of competition.

Roger Cunnington - Chairman, Central Area



Western Area

Preamble

Here we are at a time of year when we traditionally reflect on the past and consider what we might achieve in the future – looking back and ahead - no bad idea for any of us who contribute to amateur theatre as a whole and the AETF in particular. The bulk of what follows is to do with that concept but, before I start, may I wish a happy and fulfilling New Year to all who will organise, support or participate in festivals over the next few months.

Looking Back: Where's The Initiative?

In the Newsletter of one year ago, both the English Trustees and the Western Area considered the possible state of the AETF in the longer term. The National Chairman quite rightly urged participation in the 'nearest Festival to you' – a rallying call for 'new blood' to attend and support. Since our Newsletter readers are already committed, how do we get those outside our fraternity to do the same? There was a subtle and underlying suggestion that the people we have should do more than they currently do - a call for more focus and a fresh surge of endeavour. Western Area approached much the same concept by addressing the twin problems of a. an erosion of grass-roots interest in the festival movement and b. the dearth of younger administrators coming forward to 'take the reins'. We also called for other Areas to comment and/or give suggested solutions and for the National Committee to give a lead. It is hoped that the invited Area comments will appear in January's Newsletter. In last January's publication other Areas seemed to suffering the same dwindling interest. Northern Area reported that they do not have quarter finals any more. Our own Southern Division have had only two competing groups, Dorset only one and Wiltshire only two which thus made separate quarter finals meaningless.



The McMillan Theatre, Bridgwater

The solution was to combine the five into one quarter final. Eastern Area reported that one of their five festivals had the highest number of participating groups: it would have been instructive to know how that compared with past numbers. The

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erosion of interest and participation is a national problem which begs a national focus – a crusade if you like. We hope that the new AETF 'Five-Year Plan' will address the problem.

Ahead: Here We Go!

The festival season is nearly upon us and we hope to run preliminary rounds in all but two of our nine counties. This should, on past trends, produce some fifty or so entries. Looking further ahead we hope to re-generate preliminary rounds in Cornwall and Gloucestershire and re-establish the Southern Division Quarter Final, currently held in conjunction with Mercia Division. Southern, Mercia and Western Divisions will hope to do better than last year when they all lost money. Although Wessex Division managed to show a profit, the need to cover three Divisional losses resulted in the Area showing only a tiny profit. If this downward trend is not reversed, there won't be money either to cover local losses or the annual levy to the National Committee. Please take note and support us!

Ahead: AETF Grand Final 2017

Western Area will proudly host the AETF's flagship event on Saturday 3 June for which we have booked a state-of-the-art venue - the McMillan Theatre, Bridgwater, Somerset. Paul Fowler, the current GoDA Chairman, has agreed to be our adjudicator. The event brochure will be out in early January and will contain details of the afternoon buffet, local accommodation, ticket booking, how to get to the venue and local and regional attractions. The latter include shopping 'Valhallas' such as Clarks Village and Cribbs Causeway. Come to smiling Somerset and be made thoroughly welcome.

Dennis Dunford, Chairman, Western Area
assisted by Ron Roberts, PRO.



Eastern Area

At the end of a tumultuous year, arrangements are well advanced for the preliminary round festivals to be held in spring 2017.

Theatres and adjudicators have been booked, invitations issued to prospective groups, stage managers, technicians and front of house teams assembled, etc – and all of this coordinated by a small but dedicated team of unpaid, under-rated and unassuming volunteers without whom the five festivals comprising the Eastern Area AETF simply wouldn't take place. So, I'd like to take this opportunity to offer my thanks and congratulations to the following key people (and their colleagues) who do so much for so little reward:

Cambridge

Keith Phillips

Chris Avery

Elmbridge

Margaret Watford

Ken Wilson

Maidenhead

Carol Hennessy

Jim Yates

Southern Counties

Peter Calver

Waltham Forest

Elaine Elliott

Margaret, Ken, Carol, Peter and Elaine also sit on the Eastern Area (with Liz Thomas and Graham Smerdon) and Carol and Liz represent the Area on the National Executive. I thank them all for their invaluable contribution to the work of these committees.

The Eastern Area 'band of brothers' (and sisters) welcomes new recruits to join an enthusiastic and knowledgeable team of volunteers so do please contact me if you are able to offer a little time and plenty of enthusiasm – particularly if you are proficient in social media skills (website, Facebook, Twitter, etc) as this is one area in which Eastern Area lacks expertise.

Concurrently with planning for 2017, the Cambridge festival has already begun preparations to celebrate its Golden Anniversary as a one-act drama festival in 2018. Like so many drama festivals throughout the UK, Cambridge has seen the costs of staging the festival rise sharply, almost doubling in ten years, compounded by a gradual decline in income over the same period because far fewer audience members support the event – and this in a city full of intelligent young people who, one might have imagined, would help sustain a large audience base. The impact of rising costs and diminishing audiences has been a significant decline in the festival's reserves and Cambridge has bravely faced up to this by announcing an exciting opportunity to become an 'Angel' or 'Backer' and help the Cambridge Drama Festival 'Go for Gold'. For more information on this fund-raising initiative please contact Chris Avery (averycm@ntlworld.com). I applaud Cambridge for this initiative and wish them every success in raising sufficient funding to secure their future.

Finally, I wish everyone a rewarding, healthy and enjoyable year in 2017.

Ian Thomas, Chairman, Eastern Area



Treasurer's Ramblings

My ramblings at the start of 2017 dwell initially on the demise of five of our quarter finals. As National Treasurer I naturally viewed them as sources of prospective income for the AETF though, due to poor audience support, that potential was not

always realised. Some say that the loss of these quarter finals has had a detrimental effect on the spirit of the festival and has reduced learning opportunities for performers and supporters alike. Do you agree? As always, loyal reader, your views are welcome.



The membership scheme is an initiative which AETF trustees want to promote more vigorously. You can help here by direct support and by spreading the word. Application forms can be downloaded from the website. I would like to thank all existing members for their vital support, especially those who have had the



generosity to augment their subscriptions with donations. This additional source of funds is starting to build up and will, as promised, be used to support specific promotional activity for the AETF. When the trustees meet in January to discuss our 5 year business plan, we intend to flesh out our proposals in this vital area. We are also discussing how to make AETF membership more rewarding (and thus tempting).

Ian Clarke, our editor, would love to hear from you – articles and ideas will always be welcome and may spur the trustees on to even greater endeavours on your behalf. Equally, Jean Cunnington our webmaster (www.aetf.org.uk) is willing to add any news and information you may wish to display on your Area pages. Our web site is not intended to be a dutiful repository of facts provided by the great and the good of the AETF. We would like all members to feel they can input to it.

Finally, an exciting piece of news! After a many years of search the AETF has a Public Relations Officer, Rebekah Fortune. As you will have read elsewhere in this Newsletter she is steeped in all aspects of theatre and wonderfully well-qualified to fill this important position. The future is looking bright!

I wish you all a happy and healthy New Year.

Roger Cunnington, National Treasurer

PLAY-WRITING COMPETITIONS - TWO PERSPECTIVES



Have you ever wondered how those who judge play-writing competitions assess the work sent to them? Have you, perhaps, spared a thought about how those who have been so assessed re-act to the feedback given? The following two articles provide a perspective - one by a distinguished adjudicator of many year's experience, the other by an amateur playwright whose work is well known in the

South West of England and who is one of our regular columnists.

What I Look for in Assessing a New Script

by Colin Dolley GODA

For some years I have been on the judging panel of the George Taylor Award for new plays entered in the National Drama Festival Association Competition. Recently I was asked to judge the Nationwide Manx Arts Council new play competition. Before the first performance of the winning play, 'Morning Star' by Stephen Harper, I was asked to give a short talk about the qualities I look for in a new play script. This is a brief summary of that talk which might have a wider interest.*

Eight Elements

1. Plot

Is there a narrative storyline to form the basis of the script? In all plays – from high drama to farcical comedy - there should be a sense of conflict which marks out the plot.

2. Themes

Beneath the plot there should be recognisable themes (i.e. What is the play really about? This may cover some of the

myriad emotions in the human condition - love, hate, revenge, guilt, grief, jealousy, sexuality, vulnerability, humour). *Romeo and Juliet* is not just a love story but is concerned with marital and family distrust, teenage angst, dawning sexuality, the generation gap, conflict, anger and death.

3. Setting

Has the play a sense of place and time? Time was when a play – especially a one-act play - was given a single setting (e.g. *Lady Audley's drawing room one morning in spring*). But in recent decades plays have been given multiple settings - moving through various locations using stylised scenery and imaginative lighting and sound to trigger the audience's imagination to accept a change in time or space. If this is accomplished effectively audiences will create each new scene in their mind. However it is achieved there should be a sense of time and place.

4. Characters

Vital to the success of a play are the character depictions which should be well-rounded and hold our attention. Each character will have a back-story which will be revealed gradually as the plot unfolds. A well-written play will have a subtext and in this area the audience will begin to feel what is under the façade of the characters: their passions, fears and emotions. Having created the characters the playwright has to develop the relationships between them, to explore the shifting group dynamic as each new person appears. This will determine how the plot unfolds.

5. Dialogue

The language should suit the characters and their situation. Beyond the individual speeches there should be rhythm in the dramatic flow. This might be smooth and poetic or fractured and abrasive depending on the scene of the play. In many ways dialogue remains the most demanding aspect of play-writing. It is clearly allied to style.

6. Style

This can refer to such broad genres as tragedy, romance, high drama or comedy - and within those styles there are many subsections. Take, for example, comedy: the light comedies of Noel Coward, the black comedies of Joe Orton, the early domestic Alan Ayckbourn plays, the punchy social comedies of John Godber and the pure farce of Feydeau or Michael Frayne's *Noises Off* - each has its own distinctive style.

7. Shape

Like all creative work plays should have structure. The playwright needs to shape the work so there are shifts in mood, in tone and in character. There should be highs and lows with climaxes and development in the plot. The characters and the narrative should move forward. Without that journey, without shape, the play will be flat and soon lose its appeal.

8. Length

One frequent failing in new playwrights is to overwrite. There is a tendency to say the same thing two or three times for fear that the audience will fail to understand. Actually audiences are more intelligent than some new playwrights imagine. My advice is to write the play as you wish first and then go back, re-write and brutally cut out anything superfluous.

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Those are the main areas I look for in judging a new play which I only see as a script not an onstage production. I could add a ninth area and that is

Originality

Just occasionally we experience the excitement of finding a playwright who captures something entirely original in style, situation, shape, tone or character. Other positives to a new play might include an arresting opening and a strong conclusion. It has been said that a great ending can sometimes redeem a mediocre play.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, I always ask myself whether or not I was involved with the characters. Did the play touch me emotionally? Did it make me laugh, move me or make me think? If a play succeeds in all three of these aspects then you may well have a triple success!

Colin Dolley GODA - 2016



An extremely busy adjudicator and past GODA Chairman, Colin (pictured) has assessed more than 2,500 productions during the past 30 years. He has adjudicated National Finals in England, Scotland and Wales as well as the Ulster and All-Ireland One-Act Festival, the All-Winners Festival, and festivals in Europe. Last year he adjudicated the British Final at Stirling. He co-authored 'The One-Act Play Companion' (A & C Black, London) and edited the book 'On Being a Drama Adjudicator'. He is one of three judges on the panel selecting the winners of the Annual National Drama Festivals Association New Play-writing

Competition.

PLAY-WRITING COMPETITIONS AN AUTHOR'S PERSPECTIVE

If your background in amateur theatre gives rise to the notion that you could write a script at least as good as some of the plays you've taken part in (let's call it 'I could do that' syndrome) by all means put fingers to the keyboard but remember the golden rule - finish it. I sometimes come across people eager to discuss a half-written play, short story or screenplay which still languishes at the back of a drawer.

Once you've completed your play the next question will be: 'What will other people make of it?' This might spur you on to enter your new baby in a play-writing competition. As you drop it into the post box be careful not to feel any sense of entitlement that, because you've laboured away in a garret for many hours and your friend down the pub says the play reads very well, there is a prospect of it being commended or even ending up a winner. That kind of optimism is misplaced. There is a surfeit of excellent playwrights out there and the chances of success are small.

Most budding playwrights who enter competitions are more realistic; they merely want feedback - some well informed comments, perhaps, about the structure of the play, whether the dialogue is consistent with the period, how successful or otherwise they have been in their character drawing and how

'doable' the work is on stage - in other words, a few pointers on how to write a better play. Well, that's the theory, but it doesn't always work out in practice.

It is wise to remember that most competitions are adjudicated by one person and whilst the overall standard is fair and well-considered, a degree of subjectivity can creep in. There is, of course, the temptation to agree with all positive comments and dismiss with shock and horror any less-than-flattering feedback. You should seriously resist that kind of reaction and ask yourself, with as much objectivity as you can muster: 'Is this adjudication fair?' 'Does it include constructive advice and point out genuine weaknesses?' 'What can I learn from it?'

Having paid your entry fee, however, you are entitled to a response that is objective, well-considered and sets you up for a much improved re-write of your play. Although it might be sacrilegious to say this, ill-considered comments, personal views and prejudices are sometimes evident. I'll offer some examples:

I entered a play in a well-established writing competition. The work had already received several performances on stage under an experienced director, had been well-received and had reached an AETF Area semi final. Encouraged by the enthusiasm of cast, director and audience, I sent off the script for a reading. The adjudicator's comments started quite positively but they included some rather odd observations. I would not have objected to them had they not included factual inaccuracies and been based on erroneous assumptions.

At a one point in the script the two, rather disparate, characters find that they have something in common - they both play the flute. The script had them playing a few brief bars of music on the same instrument. This was dismissed by the adjudicator as being 'out of place and superfluous' and he referred to the episode as 'extended musical interludes... presumably to demonstrate the musical ability of the original players.' This came as news to the director and playwright because there is no hint of it in the script. Neither of these 'original players' could actually play the instrument and had to mime their brief 'performances.' In the script the subtext is clear - their shared interest in music changes the dynamic of their meeting. On stage they 'play' the flute for a mere twelve to fourteen bars (approximately 35 seconds of music in a thirty five minute production). These are hardly the 'extended musical interludes' referred to by the adjudicator. Another odd comment was that the younger character should have played a 'more commonplace instrument like the guitar' thus completely





missing the point made overtly and tacitly in the play about why she came to choose the instrument in question and why she was a more interesting character for not being stereotypical of her peer group.

A script entered in another competition produced feedback that was, quite frankly, useless. It seemed more concerned about a single typographic error and made no useful comments about the key elements I referred to at the beginning of this article. Another written adjudication suggested, without foundation, that I had contrived to introduce a couple of minor characters as a device to get around festival rules. In fact the play (including these selfsame minor characters) had been written and created as a video production before there was any possibility of it being selected for a festival and it went forward unaltered.

Another playwright who entered a writing competition received no feedback of consequence. The adjudicator was more concerned with peripheral matters such as the fact that the script listed the characters only by their initials even though their names did not appear in the dialogue. Another example was a prop that was said by the adjudicator to appear from nowhere even though the script stated unequivocally that the prop was being carried by one of the characters in a bag.

Before this starts to sound like serial peevishness let me say that I sympathise with the lot of play-writing competition adjudicators who have many scripts to consider and find themselves under considerable time pressure. All credit to them that they invariably select worthy winners and runners-up. However, I do feel that some adjudicators make instant and premature judgments in the face of such pressure. In these circumstances they are prone to inaccurate presumption and careless statements of fact, particularly if they are playwrights themselves and think: *'I wouldn't have written it like that'*. Let them always remember that the hapless writer has paid his or her entry fee in the expectation of constructive, objective and unbiased feedback based on a thorough reading of the text.



Austin Hawkins - 2016

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 Final in 2013. He is now a regular contributor to the AETF Newsletter.

Whilst the value of play-writing competitions is un questioned, an enthusiastic director and cast and the feedback of an informed audience provide by far the best measure of whether or not one's writing is headed in the right direction. You can bet your bottom dollar it is if directors want to know what else you have written.



THE GEOFFREY WHITWORTH COMPETITION

The AETF always encourages new writing and festival organisers are asked to flag up any such work in their programmes and draw the playwright's attention to the annual Geoffrey Whitworth Competition for which such a work would be eligible if it is receiving its first performance in that year's festival. Geoffrey Whitworth rules can be downloaded from our AETF web pages.

Many preliminary rounds do award trophies for a best original play and these do not have to be constrained by the Whitworth rules. The production may, for example, be doing the rounds of various festivals or have started off with a non-festival premiere at the company's own venue.

Ann Aplin, National Secretary



The AETF Trustees were asked by the organisers of last year's Totton preliminary round whether 'Eight' by Ella Hickson which had won their 2016 Festival but had not been an AETF entry, would have been a 'legal' entry according to our rules had the winning group opted to go through to the next round. The play comprises a series of monologues which offer a 'state-of-the-nation' portrait through the depiction of eight characters representing a generation for whom 'everything has been acceptable'.

We passed copies of this exciting and demanding new work around the Executive Committee and discussed it at our last meeting. Many and varied opinions were expressed. Some trustees felt that the monologues are only tenuously linked. Others felt that the individual elements were linked or could be made to link in performance. In the end we decided that the question did not reside in the qualities of 'Eight' but in the AETF rules. According to Entrants Rule 16 'Each entry must have a minimum of two speaking characters on stage'. It does not say they must be on stage at the same time. In these terms, 'Eight' is valid repertoire.

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Because of differences of opinion about the play it was, on balance, decided not to effect a change by the addition of 'at the same time' to the wording of Rule 16. A further reason was that it has taken years for the rules of all four home countries to be harmonized for the British Final. 'Eight' has therefore been given the green light for future performance at our festival.

Ann Aplin, National Secretary



RETIREMENT OF GODA HONORARY SECRETARY

Jo Crossley has retired as GODA Honorary Secretary after 11 distinguished years in post. She worked tirelessly on behalf of the Guild and will be much missed by national festivals across the land, the AETF included. We wish her a happy retirement. Jo is succeeded by Teresa Hennessy.



FESTIVAL STATISTICS 2016

Unfortunately five festivals did not provide figures for the 2016 season. All were independent preliminary rounds, one of which has also taken the decision not to be a part of the AETF next year.

This means that my analysis is based on an 85% return. I know I may be repeating myself but I feel I should emphasise why we ask our members for help in assembling this information. The statistics we gather are vital indicators of how the festival movement is faring. They show how we, as an organisation, are continuing to support local communities and honour our overall aims.

PERFORMANCE STATISTICS 2016

- Within the AETF family there are 27 independently organised festivals and 19 AETF events proper, a total of 46 festival events. Of these 5 (all AETF events proper) were not scheduled and 2 were cancelled.
- There were 137 performing sessions which took place at 39 venues across the country. 330 groups took part using a combined cast and crew of 2,897. These productions were watched by a total audience of 6,950 who brought us an income of £52,000.
- A number of independent festivals used our programme covers for their festivals. We thank them for this as it helps to promote the AETF as a whole. Sadly, a number of independent festivals did not include our small advert or the AETF logo.

The most popular authors were: -

David Tristram (four titles performed at five events)

Nick Warburton (six titles performed at four events)

Mark Wheeler (four titles performed at two events)

No play was performed at more than three different festivals.

Many groups performed the same play in two or three festivals.

There were 43 original plays recorded in programmes. However, I believe that many other 'local' authors were not given credit for their efforts.

286 different plays were performed (23 more than last year). 43 were 'original' works (eight less than last year). The work of 153 playwrights was represented (forty six fewer than last year).

34 plays were monologues or two-handers, 31 were three-handers, 84 had between four and six roles whilst 80 had over eight roles.

It appears that 40 adult entries (two more than last year) and 19 junior entries (fifteen fewer than last year) did not opt to go forward to the AETF festival proper.

My sincere thanks to all those festival organisers who took the trouble to submit returns in 2016. I look forward to having a 'full house' of evidence to analyse next year. Our future aim has to be the continuing development of community support for our festival. Without this we cannot survive. In 2016 there were potentially over two hundred and twenty groups vying for the honour of representing England at the British Finals. We hope this figure increases in the new season (the perennial constraints of 'time' and 'money' notwithstanding). With the crucial support of the many long-established first round events that continue to make such a vital contribution to our unique festival we have every reason to remain optimistic.

Roger Cunnington



YOUR COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS ABOUT THE CONTENT AND PRESENTATION OF THIS 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. I WISH YOU ALL A HAPPY NEW YEAR AND MUCH ENJOYABLE PLAY-GOING IN THE FESTIVAL SEASON AHEAD.

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