

FEATS Newsletter

June 2004



Thanks all round to the Antwerp organising committee for a very smooth-run and successful FEATS 2004. Even the weather, for the most part, played the game and allowed for outdoor activities such as wandering round the Saturday market, enjoying watching the world go by from a pavement café or learning about the city during the guided tour on Sunday. I believe there were about 75 participants at this latter event. The full programme of plays, fringe activities and workshops, the question and answer session by the adjudicator and the delicious Saturday evening buffet with pleasant, gentle live background music meant that there was always something to do during the weekend. It was good, as ever, to meet up with old friends again, though there were quite a few of the 'regulars' who did not manage to attend. What was heartening, though, was to see so many new people participating both on-stage or backstage or, as the essential part of the organisation as 'bums on seats'.

We all enjoyed the adjudications of Colin Dolley who, in his summing up on Monday evening called FEATS "probably the most festive festival I have ever been to" and a "fascinating festival with an amazing range of plays". He also commended all twelve directors for all their hard work in bringing their productions on to the stage, exhorting the companies to cherish all good directors.

For those of you who were not able to attend, here, a little belatedly – a couple of technical problems – is the list of prize winners. And, talking of winners, did anyone make a list of those who were nominated for awards? If so, I would be happy to receive it (editor@feats.org) so that I can publish it in the next newsletter. Thank you.

1 st Place: Kast Cup for Best Production	New World Theatre Company, Luxembourg <i>Footprints in the Sand</i> by Colin Crowther
2 nd Place: Mervyn Briscoe Award	Entity Theatre Workshop, Munich <i>Games</i> by James Saunders
3 rd Place: The Taché Diamonds Award	Irish Theatre Group, Brussels <i>Winners</i> by Brian Friel
"Blackie" for Best Actor	Michael Clark, Semi-Circle, Basel <i>Feeding the Ducks</i> by Michael Park
"Blackie" for Best Actress	Jan Horsborough, N.W.T.C.Luxembourg <i>Footprints in the Sand</i> by Colin Crowther
Marcel Huhn-Bruno Boeye Award for Stage Management	F.E.S.T., Frankfurt
The DAW – Verulam Award for Best Script	Stephen Challens, T.I.E. Youth Theatre, Brussels <i>A Slacker's Guide to Western Theatre (2004 – A Space Oddity)</i>
The Anthony Cornish Discretionary Award	T.I.E. Youth Theatre, Brussels

Again this year I 'persuaded' some of my (former?) friends of the Bonn Players to write a few lines on each of the plays. So, my thanks, in alphabetical, though not chronological order, to Gill Atkinson, Margie Cross, Kathleen Schroers and John Stevens for taking a night each.

Friday, 28 May

The Festival got underway with a bittersweet production of ***Winners*** by **Brian Friel** presented by the **Irish Theatre Group, Brussels**. The production moved smoothly between the impassionate factual reporting of narrators to the young couple acting out the last day of their lives (Maria Aitken and Colum Hatchell). Their characterisations were well-contrasted, spontaneous and compelling and provided a very moving theatrical experience, in which humour mixed easily with sadness.

This was followed by ***The Vampire Lesbians of Sodom*** by **Charles Busch**. This ostentatious, burlesque fairy tale was presented very entertainingly by the American **Theatre Company, Brussels**. Although somewhat uneven in pace, it had several great moments provided particularly by the two "vampires", Victoria DiMattia and Annette Kelly, and especially by Ben George as Ali/Etienne/PJ, who delightfully and unabashedly stole every scene he was in.

Ancestors in a War Zone, an original script by **Stuart Marlow** was produced by **ACTS, Stuttgart**. An ambitious, provocative and intriguing play about race, aids and South African education, the production included several very good characterisations. Atmospheric lighting and the use of projection were very effective. The weak dramatic structure made it difficult to access some of the ideas the play wished to communicate to the audience, with the play-within-a-play sequences succeeding best.

Saturday 29 May

Frankfurt English Speaking Theatre: *Anti! Anti!* by Anna Jane Rogers

In this original piece, we saw three people on their way back from a meeting of an anti-globalization organization. The action switched between the situation in the car, with some good interaction between the characters, and sometimes rather static flashbacks to the weekend. The transitions and episodic nature of the play posed the major challenge in the production, a challenge that was not fully overcome.

New World Theatre Club, Luxembourg: *Footprints in the Sand* by Colin Crowther

This well-conceived, beautifully executed and sensitively directed production was a lyrical, gentle piece focussing on the struggles of a terminally ill man trying to come to terms with his situation. An encounter with a legendary figure enables him in the end to find meaning and redemption in his suffering. The production was a rounded, harmonious whole – beautifully composed stage pictures, a dream-like, timeless set, excellent lighting, first-class performances and character development. A fine achievement by the Luxembourg group, and especially Jan Horsburgh as the Woman, and director Wendy Dunning.

AATG, The Hague: *A Memo from Jupiter* by Dennis Snee

Jupiter, king of the Roman gods has called an emergency meeting because Cupid has resigned from his post as god of love. This was a humorous piece of light-hearted entertainment, well planned and executed, with some good performances. The play achieved its aim of entertaining, but sometimes lacked sufficient pace.

Sunday evening, May 30

Mosact/Out of Attica, Athens were the first group to perform this evening with their contribution of an original script, ***Walkie Talkie*** written by **Erik, Lee, Marq and Vasili**. The play focused on the intrusion of the mobile phone in everyday life and the absurdities created in public situations when people appear to be talking to themselves. This was certainly a very unusual play incorporating some interesting screen

projections and acting techniques to support the chaos. Particular praise was given in the adjudication for the unusual ending of a solitary, ringing mobile phone lying on the apron.

The evening moved on to the **English Theatre Brussels'** production of **David Campton's *The Cagebirds***, a play focusing on the concepts of freedom, comfort and safety. This was a very well received performance with strong acting particularly from the Wild One, Abigail Greef, and Constant Twitting, Sarah Gibson. The set was interestingly designed indicating a prison cell rather than a cage, as often used for this play, and made good use of different levels for the bird perches in the confined space. Occasionally, it appeared the cast were playing for time, but otherwise an enjoyable contribution to the evening's entertainment.

Entity Theatre Workshop, Munich closed the evening with a highly enjoyable performance of ***Games***, by **James Saunders**. The cast of all-round strong actors ensured the audiences' attention was held throughout as this innovative interpretation unfolded. Sensitivity to the theme of the Vietnam war was carefully maintained and as the auditorium became part of the acting area and one was never sure where an actor would appear from next. The group were deservedly awarded second place for Best Production.

Monday May 31

TIE Youth Theatre, Brussels - *A SLACKER'S GUIDE TO WESTERN THEATRE (2004 – A Space Oddity)* by Stephen Challens

Congratulations to **TIE** for a well-deserved DAW-Verulam Award for best original script and for the Anthony Cornish Discretionary Award. A fun romp through a history of Western theatre from – can you believe it – the beginnings of early man already looking for an appreciative audience through twentieth century drama and musicals. To the delight of the audience nothing was left out. The performance had many wonderful moments, starting with the dramatic opening with the primordial screams of early man and a monolith descending to the opening musical strains from the film Space Odyssey 2001. It continued with a line-up of the evolution of man, a disgruntled Greek chorus, medieval passion plays and Morris dancing and a clever concept of a cricket match with Shakespeare's plays. This last segment was one of the few places where the play did lose some of its energy and could be tightened. The audience was also treated to many ingenious ideas for quick costume and prop changes, Chekhov's train, the perfect Pinter pauses as well as creatively re-vamped versions of late twentieth century musicals. Here the plea to the adjudicator with music from Jesus Christ Superstar was a true highlight. In sum, bravo for a fast-paced, snappy and entertaining performance full of vitality, energy, talent and lots of imagination. —

ESOC Theatre Group, Darmstadt - *PLAYING WITH FIRE* by August Strindberg

The title of Strindberg's "comedy-drama" already suggests the play's underlying motifs: the heat of emotion and passion fraught with danger. And indeed, it is an intense drama that develops between the three main characters, Knut, his wife Kerstin, and his friend Axel. As the curtains opened to this play the audience was drawn into a sitting room with its summer furniture and warm colours that set the mood for the play. The red-hot dress of Kerstin further accentuated the underlying theme. As the performance unfolded, it became evident that the players were word-perfect and enacted the drama with fluency and some emotional impact. Unfortunately, their delivery and performance did not sufficiently project a convincing slow shimmer dangerously ready to ignite at any moment. The crowded set effectively suggested the claustrophobic confinement of the characters trapped in the roles they must play. However, it also made it difficult for the actors to manoeuvre on stage. By placing the entire set farther upstage it might have given the actors more space and allowed their entrances and exits stage-left to look less awkward. To be sure, Playing with Fire is a demanding and challenging play, and the Darmstadt Players deserve recognition for taking it on at the 2004 FEATS festival.

Semi-Circle, Basel *FEEDING THE DUCKS* by Michael Park

For his well-sustained, convincing performance of Billy in Feeding the Ducks congratulations go to Michael Clark for receiving the Blackie Award for Best Actor. This is a black comedy that gradually and subtly develops between the two characters, Billy and Clare, who seem to have met by chance by the duck pond in a city park. In the Semi-Circle's enactment, the suspense of the play was essentially sustained and supported by good dialogue and delivery, as there is little dramatic action. It was particularly compelling how Michael Clark was able to bring out the emotions of Billy from within his character while never leaving his park bench.

The simplicity of the set suited the play perfectly with only a blue lit cyclorama, a park bench covered with graffiti and a trash bin surrounded with some strewn garbage to give the impression of a poorly maintained city park. Indeed, anything more would have been a distraction from the intense dialogue. The harmlessness of the situation takes on an alarming twist as it becomes clear what Billy's intentions are. The roles reverse as Clare describes her loneliness and we begin to see Billy's cunning as his grisly plans for revenge for his mother's humiliation by Clare's thoughtlessness are revealed. In this crucial segment, as in the entire performance, there developed between the two players an excellent rhythm of dialogue with precise cue bite and heightened suspense that carried the play and audience right along with them. The play ended with a chilling blackout as Clare's phone batteries die on her while she desperately tries calling for help when she realizes she has been indeed poisoned by Billy. Quite a dramatic ending to the FEAT's Festival 2004.

For those of you who will be in the U.K. at the end of July, or, indeed wish to make a special journey to a lovely part of Wales, NWTC, Luxembourg has been invited to take their winning production of *Footprints in the Sand* to the **All Winners Festival** in **Llandrindod Wells**. They will be performing on Saturday 31 July - final slot in the festival. Our best wishes go with them.

The full programme for the Festival is printed on the following page.

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Congratulations and thanks to Angela Dodds and David Crowe for all their hard work on the new "FEATS Fact Book" which contains all the information you would ever need on FEATS from its inception in 1976: which group played what and where; how many times plays and groups have appeared, etc. In fact, just about everything except what the Adjudicator eats for breakfast. And they could probably find that out for you if you really wanted to know...

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A safe and happy summer to all.

**National Drama Festivals Association & Llandrindod Wells Drama
Festival**
present

31st British All Winners Festival

The Albert Hall Theatre, Llandrindod Wells, Powys

Monday 26th to Saturday 31st July 2004

Adjudicator: Scott Marshall GODA

Programme:

Monday 26 July - 7:30 pm (Full Length play)

Halifax Thespians *The Salvage Shop* by Jim Nolan

Tuesday 27 July - 7:30 pm (Full length play)

In Yer Space *The Woman Who Cooked Her Husband* by Debbie Isitt

Wednesday 28 July - 7:30 pm (Full Length play)

Blackwood Little Theatre *Quartet* by Ronald Harwood

Thursday 29 July - 7:30 pm (One Act plays)

The Oldland Players *Three More Sleepless Nights* by Caryl Churchill

Wilstead Players *Patio* by Jack Heifner

Leonic Players *A Conversation of Sorts* by Les Littlewood

Friday 30 July - 7:30 pm (One Act plays)

Rule of Three Theatre Co. *4.48 Psychosis* by Sarah Kane

Halton Amateur Theatrical Soc. *Two Women and a Chair* by Michael Olsen

Kytes Theatre Group *Sparrows* by Charles Mander

Saturday 31 July - 7:30 pm (One Act plays)

De Caversmill Theatre Co. *LittleBro Morning & BigSis Afternoon* by Mike Tibbetts

New World Theatre Club *Footprints in the Sand* by Colin Crowther

Presentation of Awards for Full Length and One Act Plays will take place
after the performance and adjudication of the plays on Saturday night.

The Annual General Meeting of the National Drama Festivals Association (NDFA)
will be held at The Media Resource Centre, Oxford Road, Llandrindod Wells
on Saturday 31st July starting at 10:00 a.m.

Tickets: Adult £5.00 Youth (under 18) £2.00 per evening

Season Tickets: Adult £25 Youth £10 for all 6 nights

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