

# Drama Festival Update

Well what an interesting three days we had this year. We saw a wide variety of plays and acting skills throughout the week. My fellow judges and I had a real task ahead choosing between them.

On Friday we saw The Rollason Stage School with “Panto Safety”. An original play skilfully written by Sean Rollason for a group of young people aged around 10 years old. There was Peter Pan, Dame Trott, Aladdin and Abanaza doing their panto best with great costumes and some very well-known panto jokes. It was great fun. Eden Hewitt stood out as the Panto Dame. This group won The John Seaman Cup for the Best Original Youth Script.

This was followed by King’s Lynn Players “Kindertransport” a moving play about the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war which won the Best Adult Actress trophy (The Hathaway Cup) for Sophie Hobbs as young refugee Eva. This is a serious piece and the theatre was hushed throughout as they watched the harrowing scenes brought to life on the stage in front of them.

The evening was opened by the Deputy Mayor of Hunstanton, Cllr Amanda Bosworth.

On Saturday afternoon there were three plays to enjoy. The Rollason Stage School entered two youth productions with “War and Cake” by Rob Hockley, and “In Need of Care” by David Rowley. Both were strong pieces well-acted by their teenage casts and winning The Best Youth Actress Award (The Ann Munzer Cup) for Danielle Harrowing, for a her sensitive performance as Rita in “In Need of Care”.

Lastly there was an original script from Methwold Theatre Club with “Me and My Sister” by Burtie Welland set aboard a cruise ship with all its ageing romance and intrigue! This was a difficult piece, well-handled but a little difficult to hear at times.

Saturday evening was the highest standard of the week as far as I was concerned, with three excellent adult plays to enjoy. First there was “Morning Star” an original play by Steve Harper. This play dealt with the evils of the slave trade back in 1848 and gave us a fine mix of characters and pirates and twists and turns of plot throughout. It won both the Noda Cup for the Best Adult Original Script and the Technical award, (The Princess Theatre Cup) for set, lighting and costumes and sound effects. Next came “The Last Tango in Little Grimley” by David Tristram. A brilliant comedy which had the audience falling off their seats with laughter. It was very well acted by Boston Playgoers Society. They were new to this Drama Festival and deservedly won the Stagecoach Cup for the Best Adult Production. Last came “The Final Act of Henry Gladstone” by Peterborough Mask Theatre. Here we had acting of the highest calibre with extracts from various Shakespeare plays such as Julius Caesar, Hamlet and King Lear, when the ghost of an old actor tries to tempt the Stage Manager back into acting by getting her to join in with him and not give up on her talent. This won the Mudie Cup for the Best Adult Actor for Rich Baker as Henry himself and a best supporting nomination for Samantha Baker as the Stage Manager. This play won the Adjudicators Choice Award (The Shakespeare Cup).

We had another treat on Sunday afternoon when we saw “Old Charlie’s Party” a script by Mick Newbold performed by the Wilburton Theatre Group. A very polished young cast treated us to a party for naughty gnomes who got up to all sort of tricks to the surprise of the children whose garden they lived in. It was well rehearsed, the diction clear and loud so we heard every word. This excellent team performance won them the Williamson Cup for Best Youth Production.

Finally we welcomed Smithdon School with a modern interpretation of ‘Romeo & Juliet: Smithdon Style’. A talented and very large cast of young performers took over the stage and whizzed us through the play with breathless speed. Romeo, played by Sam Hudson took the honours as Best Youth Actor, receiving the Jim Farr Cup, although several of the others in the cast stood out, notably Finn Cruise as Mercutio, Thomas Wilson as Tybalt, Finnley Bennett as Benvolio, Taylor Smith as a sweet and gentle Juliet and Christy Bino as The Nurse.

Lastly we had Oscars Night where the audience was entertained by winners from the recent West Norfolk Dance Festival who performed their winning dances and received their awards. Then we were entertained by Mr John Harris at the piano while the judges deliberated over their final choices - not at all easy this year!

These awards were then presented by the Mayor of King’s Lynn and West Norfolk, Cllr. Carol Bower. She said how much she had enjoyed the event and she thanked Michael Williamson, Stephen Hayter of NODA and me, plus all the volunteers and the Princess Theatre itself for the part they played in the organisation and overall success of the whole event which she felt “was better than ever!” She looked forward to coming back next year.

Overall we judges Michael Williamson, Ann McKimm and Stephen Hayter saw a marked improvement in standards from all the groups entered this year and we also look forward to seeing them reach even higher standards in 2018.