

April in Stirling



So - this year's Scottish Finals found us in Stirling and the wonderful setting of the University. The Macrobert Centre was once again host, and the competing teams were fortunate to be able to draw on the skills of their technical staff and to experience the thrill of playing in one of the finest theatres in the country - although it's hard to believe that it is well over forty years old now. It's fairly recent refurbishment means, however, that it was a superb venue for our festival – and the seats are “comfy” too!

Our Adjudicator, Marie O’Sullivan is no stranger to Scotland, having adjudicated at Divisional level in the past. With experience of drama at all levels, she has directed previous British Finals competitors, and so was undoubtedly qualified to adjudicate her first Scottish Final. We awaited her comments with anticipation.

But to the plays.



Thursday

The festival opened with **Thurso Players - I Am Hamlet** by Richard James. This is a two-hander, set on the stage of a village hall. Tom has turned up to audition for the part of Hamlet in Simon's next production. Things are not all they seem however, and after initial concerns about Tom's total lack of knowledge of the play and some tentative attempts at reading for the part, it becomes clear that all is not as it seems. As with the theme of Hamlet, there is a link between Tom and Simon, and this link is the motive for Tom's eventual murder of Simon at the conclusion of the play. A strong play for two men, Marie felt that the play could have benefited from more thought about the setting and the creation of a greater intimacy than the full Macrobert stage lent the play. Both of the strong actors kept the pace up throughout the play, and the final parts of the play worked particularly well, with some inventive production touches.



Killin Drama Club played second – with **Swan Song**, by Vanessa Brooks. It was Donald's last day at work, prior to

his retirement, and his faithful secretary, Margaret was about to leave as well, having worked with him since she started with the firm. The passing of the day was marked with a large illuminated clock centre stage, and the clock moved forward at each change of scene. As the play (and the day) progressed, it became clear that Donald and Margaret's relationship was not simply that of boss and secretary. With the appearance of Donald's inebriated wife Mimi, we were given some indication of why this might be the case. The adjudicator said that on initial reading, she wondered how this play would work and felt that it had little to commend it. However, she was full of praise for the cast. Through careful characterisation and great teamwork, they were able to make much more of the play than appeared in the script. When all did not

work out as Donald and Margaret might have hoped, the audience's sympathies were with both of them, as a result of the strong playing and characterisation of both actors.

The final play of the evening was **Wind**, by Bob Davidson (who also acted in and directed the piece), given by **Birnam Institute Players**. This was a play highlighting the current concerns about the energy crisis and the effects of the pollution created by energy production. We met Mark and Gail who were making their own efforts to help the situation and to keep the bills down by attempting – fairly unsuccessfully; it has to be said, to produce their own energy. Bob's attempts to boil the kettle via "pedal power" provided one of the comedy highlights of the festival. Nevertheless, undaunted as such zealots tend to be, he and his wife Gail sought permission from the local farmer, Wullie to set up a windmill in the garden. The idea appealed to Wullie, who negotiates with Windgen to build a wind farm on the land. Enter Windgen in the persons of the thrusting business executive, and her minion. It is clear that their motives are financial – and the play comes to a conclusion with no wind farm and Mark being successful in heating a cup of tea via the power of the windmill in the garden. Marie felt that this play was a light comedy piece with strong performances from the entire cast – particularly Wullie, whose deadpan comedy delivery was a delight. It could have perhaps been improved with a little more thought being given to the placing of furniture and props and to stage presentation.



Friday

The evening opened with **Kirkcaldy Amateur Dramatic Society's** production of **Ae Fond Kiss** by Anne Marie di Mambro. In her flat in Glasgow, Lola, with some anxiety, waited for the arrival of an unwanted guest. Zed arrived instead. Clearly a virgin, although he declared he wasn't, - it fell to Lola to introduce him to the joys of sex. His friends were waiting in a nearby pub; and in constant communication by mobile phone, having financed his venture into the world of prostitution. His attempts to make love, encouraged by Lola, created many comic moments, although both characters harked back to earlier romantic encounters, both serious and unrequited. Ms O'Sullivan felt that both characters played their parts well – with Zed particularly portraying the gauche young virgin with a splendid sense of comedy. She would have liked to see better thought given to the setting (e theme which recurred during her adjudications for the festival), but one got the sense that she was less happy with this



production than many of the audience.

Carnoustie Theatre Club followed with **A Time for Farewells** by Damian Trasler. Alex and Sarah were discussing what appeared to be the breakdown of their marriage, and reminiscing about their married life together. It had initially been very happy, and we saw, in flashback, their early encounters, aided by their mutual friends. Alex's single moment of weakness when he strayed for an otherwise solid marriage was suggested as the reason for their marital breakdown. However, the denouement of the play revealed that in fact Sarah had "left" Alex when she died, and the final, very poignant scene saw Alex preparing to leave for her funeral. Marie felt that this team had captured the mood of the play well. She had been concerned about the difficulties of working with separate acting areas but felt that this team had overcome the difficulties of staging the different scenes very well and complemented them on their ensemble handling of a difficult play.



And **In the Blinking of an Eye**, we were with **Kirkton Players** and their production. Joyce and Madge were having what appeared to be a very up-market picnic where they were remembering their respective husbands and their own relationships. Madge's memories of her husband's encounters with "the polis" gave us a lot to laugh at, while Joyce's courtship and marriage to her husband appeared very poignant. But things are not always as they appear. Madge's husband eventually ends up having an affair with Joyce, who moves in with Madge and acts as a restraining influence between Madge and her extremely abusive partner. Yet both women have survived, and in a very humorous, but poignant ending they clear away the picnic things to reveal their pastoral venue is none other than Madge's husband's grave. The Adjudicator was very fulsome in her praise for this production, with particular emphasis on the director's skilful setting with her creation of a very intimate acting space, allowing both actresses to display their undoubted talents and to create a memorable production of a play which was very popular on festival circuits south of the border, but which she had rarely seen performed better..



Saturday

McGavin Drama Club gave **Mums the Word** as the opening play of the night. This piece had obviously been created by mothers who had given birth, to reflect their varied experiences of birth and their early years as mothers. A semi-circle of characters gave us intimate insights into their lives as mothers following a very realistic birthing experience. The comments in the programme that “This play contains strong language and nudity” must have given the douce playgoers of SCDA some cause for concern, but it was all done “in the best possible taste.” A very skilful cast brought the “trauchles” of motherhood to life and from the female members of the audience there were waves of sympathetic laughter and the vibes of “been there– done that.” I’m not sure of the male reaction! Our Adjudicator, however felt that there was very strong ensemble playing with strong direction and a lot of thought given to presentation and setting. Perhaps the award for the most courageous actress should have gone to she who appeared “in the scud” – not once, but twice!



The final offering of the festival was **Green Forms** by Alan Bennett – given by **Dingwall Players**. Set in an office in the late 1970’s this play allowed the two main actresses to introduce us, very skilfully, to the world of office protocol



and the domination of the world of business (pre-computers) by forms - their completion and submission. Alan Bennett created Doris and Doreen in his own very skilful manner, and in their interaction, we learnt a lot about office routine and their relationship. The mask slipped however, when the realise that the forms they have been discussing and shuffling about have in fact one element in common – then name of the person who has been associated with redundancies all over the country. Are they to be next? The veneer of pleasantries and camaraderie slips – to be regained before the entrance of the dreaded individual – who indicated that in future, office routine will be all about one thing – work! Marie felt that there was a great deal to complement in the play. It did, however, lack pace in the first half; pace which was so essential in a play of this sort. The team had picked this up in

the second half and showed what could be achieved by a skilful cast and director.

The Ninth Play



After a long wait, Chairman Gordon Hibbert introduced the platform party. Joy Talbot gave details of the Dunmore Trophy which was awarded to Carnoustie Theatre Club for their poster advertising their production of *Beauty and the Beast*. Stephen Lambert gave us his summing up of the leading plays in the Scott Salver (original play) competition. The winner was Nancy McPherson whose play *Fusion* had been performed this year by Kirkton Players. Then it was on to Marie O'Sullivan's summing up and the announcement of the winners.

Having seen all the plays, the audience had clearly made up their minds about the winners – helped, no doubt by Marie's very comprehensive adjudication. She certainly knows her stuff, and was honest about what she looked for in each play and how far she felt directors and actors had achieved this. In her summing up of the festival, she said how pleased she

was to have been invited to adjudicate her first Scottish Finals. She felt that the standard had been good and she was particularly pleased that we had experienced three nights of great entertainment. All too often, festival plays can be full of doom and gloom, but there had certainly been a great deal to laugh at and to enjoy over the three nights. Her plea was that we bring more comedy back into the One-act festivals. A plea fully endorsed by the audience.

And so to the awards:



The Glenn McKemmie Trophy (for the play best depicting Scottish Life and Character) was awarded to **Birnam Institute Players**

The **Grampian TV Trophy** (for Best Sage Décor) went to **Kirkton Players**

The **Donald T Farmer Trophy** (for the Best Theatrical Moment) was awarded to **Birnam Institute Players**

The **Connie Fisher Trophy** (for the Highest Marks in Direction) went to **Kirkton Players**

The **David Baxter Salver** (for Third Place) went to **McGavin Drama Club**

The **Jim Porteous Trophy** (for Second Place) was awarded to **Thurso Players**

And

The **Wheatley Tassie** (for First Place) went to **Kirkton Players** – a very popular winner!

And of course – everyone in the audience fully agreed with Marie's placings!!! I can reveal that although I agreed with her about the winner, I would have had slightly different placings, and my own list of award winners was not hers. Still – that's the One-Act Festival for you – and that's Adjudicators. The discussions will go on for weeks to come, but I'm sure all are agreed that the festival was a good one. The overall standard of plays was high and the three nights were very entertaining. Marie O'Sullivan was an excellent Adjudicator. She, I know will be going to Milford Haven on 6th and 7th July and I'm certain she will be cheering on Kirkton Players as Scotland's representatives at the British Finals.

Next year - as negotiations continue apace – Pitlochry, we hope. If you've found this article dull, boring or not to your taste, you know the answer. Be there in person next April to enjoy and comment on the best that the amateur theatre movement in Scotland can offer.

Wee Tosh
April 2012.

