

The 2015 One-Act Play Festival Special Edition

Welcome to a one-off, one-act play festival special of "Noises Off!" where we share the final marks of the adjudicator and the unedited thoughts of our Chairman. You have been warned...

Award	Winner (Explanation/Nominees/Worthy mentions)
Organiser's Award	Halton 'Crackerjoke Writer'
Lula Bula Award	Chris Jaeger, the Adjudicator (for his phone going off during the first play!)
Lyneham Cup for Stage Presentation	Command Performers 'Lifelines' (Henlow 'In Room Five Hundred and Four', Herculean Players 'The Allotment')
Director's Award for Innovation in Directing	Anne Artus, Command Performers 'Lifelines' (Jane Stokes, Halton 'Crackerjoke Writer'; Ellis Artus, Command Performers 'Driving Mr Diddy'; Rob Foylan, Adelphi 'Sad Angel')
Ralph Newble Award for the Best Comedic Moment	Andy Collis, Adelphi 'Sad Angel' (for the pink rabbit on the unicycle) (Halton 'Crackerjoke Writer' for the delivery of F**king Hell; Command Performers 'Driving Mr Diddy' for Mr Diddy joining in on the last line of the song; Henlow 'The Extraordinary Revelations of Orca the Goldfish' for 'what colour dishwasher? F**king orange!')
RAFTA Author's Award	Rob Foylan, Adelphi, 'Sad Angel'
Audience Award	Command Performers 'Driving Mr Diddy' (worthy mention: the B&Q Tangerine Team running the bar!)
Adjudicator's Award	Halton 'Crackerjoke Writer' (for the chemistry between Bunny and Ade) (Herculean Players 'The Allotment' and Adelphi 'Sad Angel'; both for chorus/teamwork)
Peggy Reading Award for the Best Young Performer	Not awarded (no eligible candidates)
Best Actress Award	Caroline Seraille as Annie in 'Lifelines' (Command Performers) (Anne Artus as Margaret in 'Driving Mr Diddy' (Command Performers); Carly Fielding as Edie in 'In Room Five Hundred and Four' (Henlow)
Best Actor Award	Randal Stokes as Ade in 'Crackerjoke Writer' (Halton) (Barry Garfoot as Bunny in 'Crackerjoke Writer' (Halton); John Ryder as Robert in 'Lifeline' (Command Performers))
Runner's Up Trophy	Command Performers 'Lifelines' (Third place: Command Performers 'Driving Mr Diddy')
Brize Norton Trophy for the Best Production	Halton 'Crackerjoke Writer'

Club	Play	Presentation (15)	Production (35)	Acting (40)	Overall Effort & Achievement (10)	Total (100)	Place
Halton	Crackerjoke Writer	13	32	34	9	88	1
Command Performers	Lifelines	14	31	32	9	86	2
Command Performers	Driving Mr Diddy	12	31	33	8	84	3
Herculean Players	The Share	14	30	31	8	83	4
Adelphi	Sad Angel	13	31	30	8	82	5
Henlow	In Room Five Hundred and Four	13	28	30	7	78	6
Henlow	The Extraordinary Revelations of Orca the Goldfish	10	29	30	7	76	7
Brize	The Little Box of Oblivion	9	28	30	7	74	8
Adelphi	Lobster Man	6	12	29	3	50	9



My darling RAFTAfarians!

So, it's over. The dust has settled, the bunting has been torn down, and we shall have to wait quite a while before we see so many attention-seeking performers vying for the limelight. Yes, the General Election is over! This is also my chance to indulge in a period of annual mourning for the passing of RAFTA's most bodacious One-Act Play Festival: the dust has settled, the badges have been handed back in, and we will have to wait another year before we all gather again to see so many attention-deserving performers graciously share the limelight. I love it when a Festival comes together!

So, some of you were there at The Defence Academy's Charles Grace Theatre for this year's One-Act Play Festival; those of you who were not able to make it along missed out on a real treat! Of course, such a great event could not have come to pass without an amazing amount of hard work from many people, so I will postpone my performance post-mortem until after I have noted a few votes of appreciation and thank you. Thanks go to:

- Shrivensham Station and the Academy Players for hosting us (Lucy Giles, I know that you have now moved on to Sandhurst: thank you for setting this up in the first place).
- Flight Lieutenant Lissy Mason for planning and coordinating a superb Festival and also for her cracking work over 3.5 years as Vice Chair (Flight Lieutenant Tom Goble has now been elected to that role, stand by for EGM Minutes from our Sec). Oh, and Lissy also deserves all of our thanks for having the patience of a saint in dealing with everyone's accommodation requirements in the face of surprise and disappointment when three-quarter-width beds turned out to be single beds...
- Daryl Bennett and Philip Goudal for their simply citrus beautiful bar: every break was Pimm's O'Clock and I for one loved the Tangerine Team at B&Q (Booze & Q????... A trip to the orange-aproned DIY store will never be dull again!).
- Karrie Breen for: persuading her company to print a fantastic set of full colour glossy programmes, which she also designed, at no cost to RAFTA (a charitable donation!); providing bounteous bouquets of beautiful blooms bringing bling to bear in the bar and elsewhere; putting a red-gazebo roof over the heads of the smokers; providing Daryl & Philip with cash-and-carried stock and barmaidly buxomness for the B&Q Citrus Bar; and working hand-in-hand with Lissy to provide welcoming smiles and the best bedrooms possible from a limited bunch.
- Julie Roche for being a 'maid-of-all-work', a tea-urn ninja and an absolute trooper despite having only recently come back into play following a bout of glandular fever (good stuff!).

- Christopher Bartle for the loan of the urn that kept us all well-hydrated with tea and coffee.
- Rob Tripp for providing the Adjudicator with a Major Domo service that would have made even P G Wodehouse's Jeeves turn green with envy. And for not once saying: "What do points mean? Prizes!"
- Rich Bratley for his local knowledge, calm temperament and vigorous vacuuming.
- Dom Gilvary, and his partner Adam, for setting up and running a superb disco and karaoke session in Kitchener Hall Mess on the Saturday night.
- Our President, Air Commodore Graham Russell, and our most active Patron, Gillian Plowman, for once more agreeing to present awards at our very own Oscar ceremony.
- Ali Kirkwood for volunteering to Stage Manage the entire Festival (yes folks, that meant that Ali personally ran every single familiarisation session and did all of the time-keeping!).
- Mitch Wilcox for being the tech guru and before that spending many weeks scurrying like a Viet Cong tunnel-rat through the bowels of the Charles Grace Theatre in order to make the theatre ship-shape and Bristol fashion in time for the Festival.
- Chris Jaeger, our GODA Adjudicator, for providing sharp, witty and entertaining Adjudications and for having the humility to 'fess up' to a phone faux pas (quite a crowd pleaser!).
- All of you wonderful RAFTAfarians who worked so hard over many months to bring 9 very different pieces of theatre to our stage in order to amuse, bemuse, abuse, accuse or simply awaken our slumbering muse.

Thank you!

Right, stopping to note that any omissions from those thank-you notes speak only to my selfish nature and not to the patient heart of my long-suffering editor, I shall now speak a little about the actual plays wot I saw at the weekend. Those of you who also saw them may share some of my thoughts or find them abhorrent (my thoughts, not the plays...); those of you who could not be there might appreciate the chance to vicariously visit the Shrivenham stage.

The weekend began with Brize Norton's 'Little Box of Oblivion'. As someone sat in front of me commented, I was sure that I had seen this play before at a previous RAFTA Festival, but for the life of me I could not tell you when or who had done it. And, as I am writing this, I am down in Northwood without my OCD-organised theatre files to provide me the answer to 'who did this last'. This 'hazy recollection' was good, as though the general concept of the piece was familiar, enough felt 'new' to intrigue and entertain me. I loved the xylophonic rendition of Blur's Parklife that opened the show; I had a lot of time for Kev Trethowan's put-upon newspaper-reader and I chuckled at various stages. Chris J (the Adjudicator) later suggested that there would be room to take the characters further to their extremes, enhanced with 'signposting' costumes. I would be interested to see how high the piece could be taken.

Up second was 'Driving Mr Diddy' from the Command Performers. Great use of absolutely minimal set: 4 chairs, a steering wheel and corrugated-cardboard painted as the front of a Honda instantly set the scene. The piece was small, but perfectly formed; short but sweet. In fact, Chris J opened his comments with: "I will tell you what was wrong with this in 2 words: too short!". That this play won the Audience Award by a country mile showed that 8 out of 10 RAFTAfarians agreed with the Adjudicator. Strong moments were: excellent timed physicality to show a 1-in-3 gradient, vomiting with volume, and the delightful moment when a bank robber joined in to croon with 2 elderly line-dancers. A fun and interesting script, I may well look out for other work by Mandy Barron in future.

The Sat morning session was rounded off with Halton's 'Crackerjoke Writer'. I really enjoyed this play; it appealed right from the one-man car-crash stand-up routine delivered by Randal Stokes as Ade. I loved the simple unifying colour scheme of the piece, I loved Ade and Bunny (Barry Garfoot's) range and depth of feeling and Pete Benson's strength of menace as Noah. This was a really interesting play where the team worked well to polish the myriad facets of a text that had much to give. Some great adjudication comments: Bunny had "pathos coming out of the pores of his skin", and "a very black comedy indeed". Strong all round, and when I heard that Chris J had awarded this 'Best in Show', I had no qualms with his assessment. Well done Halton!

Sat afternoon kicked off with the first part of a Henlow double-serving with 'In Room Five Hundred and Four'. The military theme of a young soldier about to return to the 1942 front line after his single night honeymoon was well-chosen for a RAFTA audience, and performances were solid all-round. I thought the hotel room was well put together, and I loved the 1940's hairdo worn by Carly Fielding as Edie. I thought Liz Stevens as older Edie conveyed the anguish of her loss very well. However, my extreme affliction of 'one-track-mind' syndrome dominated my emotional response

to the younger Edie who seemed to have no intention of 'putting out' on her honeymoon night; I did not warm to her. This reaction was compacted by her talk of spending much time with Harry's old friend (?) Albie; for me the text allowed the audience to speculate on the parentage of Edie's 'bun in the oven. I am still not sure whether my reaction speaks more to the fuzzy logic that surrounded the possible parentage of Edie's baby-in-waiting or whether my lack of distrust of Edie is a pointer to my need for some sort of misogyny counselling. But, the piece did do what all good theatre should do: it drove an emotional response in me.

Play number 5, also a Henlow production, was 'The Extraordinary Revelations of Orca the Goldfish'. This brought us back to raucous belly laughs, which was very pleasant. I agreed with Chris J that "What colour is the dishwasher? F**king orange!" was beautifully smashed out of the park by Chris Proctor as Henry. The play took us from reality to fantasy and back-again with astonishing rapidity, requiring its 2 actors to each produce a range of distinct characters. There were some great cameo-like moments, but I must admit to losing track at points, and so I could empathise with the Adjudicator's request to 'point' some of the fantasies more clearly. Also, any play that mentions hot oil massages tends to get my attention. Well done Henlow.

The final Saturday play was 'The Allotment' from Herculean Players, a play that sprang from the pen of RAFTA Fellow Gillian Plowman. I cannot pretend to have read all of Gillian's plays, but I have seen 5 or 6 of them and this play had a dark, pathos-filled element to it that runs through much of her work. Dark, but not Pinteresquely unhinged. The 5 Ladies of Lyneham (or should that now be the phrased as the 5 Herculean Honies?) worked well together to put forward a sympathetic but entertaining representation of troubled-minds working together to overcome painful past lives. Good use of a wheelbarrow as a pediment for Shakespearian soliloquy!

Saturday night brought an acceleration of the abuse of my liver (I had been running on Pimms since much earlier in the day: yay!!). Some chose to watch Eurovision, some chose to dance and diva on the karaoke. All enjoyed the cosy environs of the bar in Kitchener Hall Officers' Mess. Nuff said.

Sunday kicked off with instalment number one from the Adelphi Theatre Club, 'Sad Angel' by Rob Foylan (who deservedly took home the RAFTA Author's Award for his efforts). Sally Collis played the eponymous title role, looking suitably weary and down-in-the dumps to sell 'Sad' to us. The rest of the cast were also strong; I would much have preferred not to have seen Andrew Bullock's arse crack for the umpteenth time this year (it appears every time we rehearse for Animal Farm; I am beginning to wonder whether we can gain some sort of sponsorship for his builder's bum...). One of the undoubted highlights was seeing Andy Collis zip across the stage on a unicycle. Dressed in a pink rabbit onesie! Yup, that netted them the Ralph Newble Award for Best Comedy moment.

The penultimate outing was another Command Performers' production, 'Lifelines'. This play was longer than 'Driving Mr Diddy' and saw another outing for John Ryder as the well-observed Robert. An interesting concept when 2 (at first) strangers discussed their issue with relationships via the phone, the staging of the play managed to capture our attention even though the two lead characters never actually met each other. I loved the clear delineation of sex through set; Robert's kitchen with its matter-of-fact basic approach, augmented at time by McDonalds cup or pizza box were nicely set against Annie's (Caroline Seraille's) throws and 'arty-fartiness'. Both performers did a cracking job; I found myself on the verge of tears at the end of the play when it became clear that Robert and Annie would never get together. A good study in the lore of near misses.

The final play was Adelphi's 'Lobster Man'. I had not read any of the programme notes in advance of any of the plays, so I had no idea what was coming, though I did know that this involved Claire and Josh Hutin (I had enjoyed the Adelphi show that this family team had delivered last year; something about the disturbing psychosis had appealed to me). The silhouette of Cerys Humphries' Christa as the play opened, sitting with an electric guitar set against what looked like scaffolding or staging made me think instantly of some troubled rock star or groupie, a tale of a modern Janis Joplin perhaps? This was not to be. The play developed into a post-apocalyptic tale of survival and loneliness, threaded throughout with deathly lobster metaphor. Sadly, as much as the previous year's Hutin-strong Adelphi offering had sucked me in, this play just spat me out. I did not find anything in the script which spoke to me, which was a real shame, as a lot of effort had clearly gone into the play. The poor team also suffered from some horrendous technical glitches from a projected videoscape. This could have been amazing if it had not failed to work properly; I have no idea how much difference would have been made if this had worked as planned, and I take my hat off to Claire and Cerys for remaining as composed as they did in the face of major technical distractions (I am not sure I could have held my focus so well). However, I come back again to the text and for me it still did not speak to me; it did not

stir any emotions. It may well have spoken loudly to the Adelphi team who chose it, and to many others in the audience, but to me it barely whispered. The lesson that I personally took from this was that, no matter how competent your company, your choice of play counts for a lot; if theatre is about bringing text into action, try to find a text that speaks clearly. On the plus side, I did absolutely love the respirators that had been used to represent the Lobster Men; more than anything I have seen they breathed life into the colloquial military term 'face wellie'.

So, it really was a pick-and-mix type of weekend. Something for everyone, and a good mix of sweet and sour. As an actor, I was really heartened to see that the points awarded by Chris J for acting across the board were pretty tight and that acting was generally strong. I was also pleased to see that 'simple but effective' could yield the same sort of points for presentation as 'detailed and beautifully rendered'. It is all about interpreting the needs of the text, being bold and decisive and having an artistic concept that feels coherent. To me it says that any club that can muster up 2 actors/actresses and the sort of simple set that could fit in the boot of a car could come to our Festival and hold their own. The trick, of course, is finding a text that speaks to you, that you think will speak to others, and that you have the bravery to take from page to stage with simple love. It feels a little like a William Morris 'Arts & Crafts' approach to theatre: have nothing on your stage unless it is essential to the plot or beautiful to behold (or both).

Once again, a big thank you to all those involved in making OAPF 15 a stonking success, especially given the fact that until mid-December 2014, we thought we would be holding the Festival at Cranwell. The Festival will return to Shrivenham for OAPF 16 (if the Defence Academy will have us!) and our President, Air Commodore Russell has undertaken to shake the corridors of power a little to see whether a route opens up to return to Cranwell in the future. Perhaps we will see a return to year-on-year Festival venue 'flip-flopping' as seen during the Lyneham/Cranwell days or perhaps we will see Shrivenham become our more regular Festival home with Cranwell becoming a contingency plan. I genuinely do not know what the future will hold, but the Committee and I are keen to build on this latest successful Festival with a return to Shrivenham in 2016; that information should help you to shape your own plans. If you were unable to join us this year, speak to one or more of the clubs who did come along and pick their brains; ask them what they thought of the venue and what they learnt.

Andy

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