

Oxfordshire Drama Network

Newsletter



APRIL 2020

EDITOR'S BULLETIN

Well this is a 'COVID-19 experience' edition!

Luckily we had the AGM early this year before the Lock-Down - where we elected Karen Carey as our new chairman. We have since been using the wonders of modern technology for committee meetings!

A rather different issue this time, with just a few of the events which have re-scheduled dates. We also have the Pantomime/Winter Festival awards, & the judge's reviews of all the entries. Plus a couple of plays which snuck in just before the curfew also have reviews.

Let's hope the crisis will be over by the summer, but for now we hope you all stay safe.

Mike Davies



WHAT'S ON DIARY (details inside)

JULY

15-18 Sinodun Players

"A Daughter's A Daughter"

OCTOBER

1 - 4 The Henley Players

"Saturday Sunday Monday"

NOVEMBER

4 - 6 Jigsaw Stage Productions

"The Sound of Music"

DECEMBER

2 - 5 Dorchester ADS

"The Haunted Cabin"

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Page	
1-2	Chairman's Letter
2-3	Pantomime Festival Awards
4	Drama Festival News
5-9	Pantomime Festival Reviews
9-11	Reviews
11-12	Forthcoming Events
12	Your new ODN committee

Facebook www.facebook.com/groups/1324585987569767

Email: info@OxfordshireDramaNetwork.org

ODN website: www.OxfordshireDramaNetwork.org

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

Dear Members,

For my first message as Chair, I was anticipating writing how much I was looking forward to seeing fun photos of rehearsals in progress, the sharing of posters of forthcoming shows on the website and



social media channels, followed by glowing reviews of a job well done by your appreciative audiences. However, the current world events have cut rehearsals in their tracks, closed theatres and cruelly prompted the cancellation or postponement of our planned shows and events on which many have worked so hard.

In the light of this unprecedented situation, my message is simple. Look after each other.

Do what you can to keep in touch with your fellow members and make sure they are ok – theatrical groups are by nature very sociable so many of you may be finding isolation harder than some.

Although we are living through what feels like a bad B movie scenario, I would like to think that there are things we can do to make this a more positive experience.

- Encourage your members to read plays and come up with ideas for future productions.
- Plan social or fundraising events (for later in the year obviously) – give something for people to look forward to.
- If you have a show (like panto, for example) in the pipeline are there any props or costumes you can make a start on?
- Have a go at writing something – there are many online writing courses on offer at the moment, or simply have a go. Sam Birkett, of The Standlake Players shared a link to an online collaborative play writing project recently on the Facebook group page (<https://www.thepropsbox.com/whowikiwriters>). Why not have a go?
- Learn a new theatrical skill – writing could be one, or try out stage/costume design, learn an

instrument (there are loads of YouTube tutorials online), source or record sound effects, make a lighting plan

- Challenge your members with a creative project that they can work on at home (maybe with their children – paint a scene from a show or run a poster competition for a forthcoming show, for example) and maybe hold a show and tell event or exhibition.
- Organise your archives – many of your members will have personal photos taken on their phones, encourage them to send their best ones to a central resource – a Facebook group, a google drive, or someone within your group prepared to organise them into years and share them with your members – looking through old photos will always bring a smile.
- Now is also a good time to look at best practice guidelines for things like child protection, GDPR, Health and Safety procedures, licensing etc
- Investigate new marketing ideas – most groups will have a publicity check list where they advertise their shows online, places to put up posters, newspapers etc - this should be a fluid document constantly being updated but hey, we're all busy people and often it's this sort of thing that gets overlooked. Take a look at what other groups are doing online – and consider if it would work for your group. I recommend taking a look at Kennington Amateur Dramatic Society's Facebook Page – always run a brilliant social media campaign for their panto. (<https://www.facebook.com/KenningtonADS/>)
- Try out technology to virtually meet with your group – Facetime, Skype, Zoom, Houseparty are all great apps to meet up and keep engaged via video and audio (my drama group are already arranging events such as online play readings, quizzes and even a Eurovision night via Zoom – probably going to be total chaos but should be fun!). Failing that, set up a WhatsApp or Facebook messenger group which everyone can check into every day.

I'm sure there are many other things that can keep us occupied and if you have any ideas then please share them with the membership. That is what we are here for – to share information, be it about our shows or things that we think other groups might find useful. We are all creative people here – both on stage and off – and if we look, we will always find creative ways to get us through difficult times.

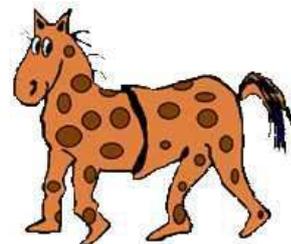
Stay safe everyone and hope to see you on the other side!

Karen Carey (Chair)

Pantomime / Winter Festival results

The Groups who entered the Festival were:-

St Peters Players
Kingston Bagpuize DG
Dorchester ADS
Abingdon Drama Club
Sinodun Players
Kennington ADS
Launton Village Players



AWARDS

Best All-Round Production **Kennington ADS**
Musical **Launton Village Players**
Best Costume **Sinodun Players**
Chorus Award **Dorchester ADS**
Best Front of House **Dorchester ADS**
Best Tech **Launton Village Players**
Magic Moment **Launton** (Under-sea creatures)
Also Nominated: *KBDG (Transformation of the Beast)*, *Kennington (Transformation of Cinderella dress & coach)*
Rising Star Under 18's **Harry Rowe** (Abingdon)
Also Nominated: *Hannah Peel (Kennington)*
Best Baddie **Eve Winterbottom** (St Peters Players)
Also Nominated: *Mike Lord (DADS)*, *Jon Crowley (Abingdon)*, *Adam Brimley (Sinodun)*, *Andrew Phelan (Kennington)*, *Lesley Watson-Burn (Launton)*
Best Cameo **Emily Eastham** (KBDG)
Also Nominated: *Charley Middleton (St Peters)*, *Rosemary Mills (DADS)*, *Lynne Smith (Abingdon)*, *Keith Yapp (Sinodun)*, *Hannah Peel (Kennington)*, *Marcus Lamb (Launton)*
Best Comedy **Fiona Huntingford Ledger** (Sinodun)
Also Nominated: *Charley Middleton (St Peters)*, *Rob Bateman (KBDG)*, *Maxine Briscoe (DADS)*, *Maria Crocker (Abingdon)*, *Andrew Phelan (Kennington)*, *Lorraine de Brun (Launton)*
Best Dame **Allen Dannfeld** (Abingdon)
Also Nominated: *Pete Welply (St Peters)*, *Ian Brace (KBDG)*, *Pete Smithson (Sinodun)*, *Andrew Phelan (Kennington)*, *Mark Hudson (Launton)*

(N.B. The "Also Nominated" names shown above are in performance date order.)

ODN Pantomime / Winter Festival - Awards 6th March 2020

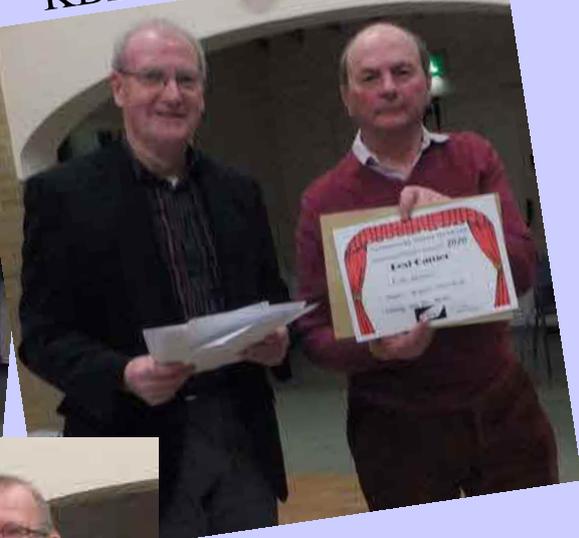
Launton - Best Tech



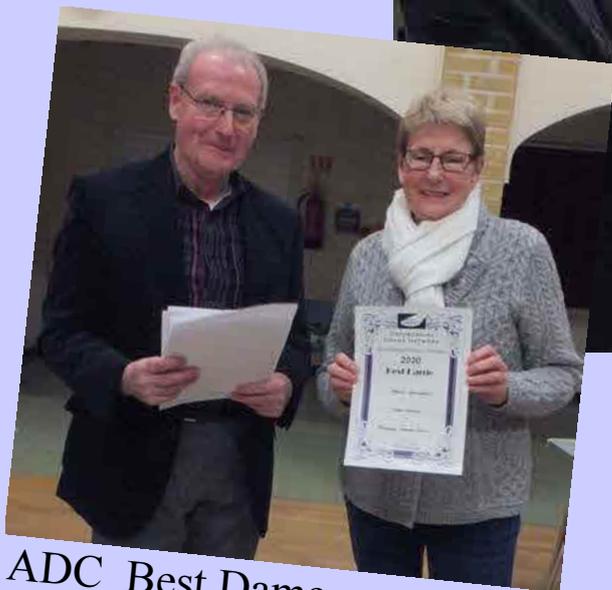
Launton - Magic Moment



KBDG - Best Cameo



Kennington
All-Round
Production



ADC Best Dame



Launton - Music



DADs - Chorus



St Peters - Best Baddie



DADs - Front of House

Drama Festival News

I'm sure this will come as no surprise, but we have made the unfortunate decision to cancel the ODN festival in June. Even if the current restrictions are lifted within the next 12 weeks, groups will have been unable to get together to rehearse, so it is with regret that we have cancelled our adjudicator, Louise Manders, and the Unicorn booking. We are looking at the feasibility of running the festival later in the year, but we are aware that many of you may have re-scheduled spring shows, or maybe starting pantomimes around that time, so this is something that we will need to consider carefully.



Pretty much all the spring/summer festivals have taken a hit this year – Henley, Maidenhead, Lighthorne, ODN and Banbury 75th Anniversary festival – and Wallingford will be making a decision on whether to go ahead with theirs in a few weeks. This makes me incredibly sad as I have always been a passionate supporter of festivals and have found them invaluable in honing my skills as a director. I love the opportunity of working in different spaces and meeting different drama groups and backstage teams – they are always very sociable events (particularly the post awards/gala evening party!) and I have made many friends over the years. The adjudicators have to follow a strict criteria, looking at all the different aspects of a performance and I have generally found their comments to be fair – there are times I haven't necessarily agreed with them, but they are often looking at it from a different perspective and sometimes will throw something in the mix that I haven't thought of.

I am also a personal member of the National Drama Festivals Association (NDFA). Much like the ODN, the NDFA is an umbrella organisation supporting and advising its' association of more than 37 independent drama festivals across the UK (both One Act, Full length and Youth festivals). Each year they hold the British All Winners Festival (BAWF) somewhere in the UK – whereby 12 winning one act plays, 3 full length plays and 3 youth plays are selected from their member festivals to battle it out to become the British All Winners. The criteria for selection is that the play needs to have scored 80 points or above, and have a recommendation by the adjudicator. So only the best plays are put through from all of the plays performed in their festivals. Didcot Phoenix were lucky enough to go on and win the BAWF in 2017 after first winning Lighthorne Festival in Warwickshire, and it was an incredible experience and honour to be among some of the most talented amateur groups in the UK. At last years', BAWF, ODN member group, Banbury Cross Players, went

forward also via the Lighthorne Festival and picked up Acting awards and the Backstage award for their production of "Contractions" which some of you may have also seen at the ODN festival last year. This years' festival was supposed to have taken place on the Isle of Man in July but has now unfortunately been cancelled like so many others.

I am on the organising committee for next years' British All Winners Festival which, for the first time in at least three decades, will be heading to the Midlands, to the restored Albany Theatre, Coventry, in what will be its City of Culture year. The adjudicator will be a former Chair of the Guild of Drama Adjudicators, Paul Fowler, GoDA. It is still in the planning stages but will include not only top-quality evening performances by the cream of UK's amateur theatre groups, but an exciting array of daytime activities based at the Albany, plus, hopefully, studio performances by youth groups and a whole host of workshops on theatre skills. The dates are Sunday 18th – Saturday 24th July 2021 and it would be great to see some of you waving the flag for Oxfordshire, so please put the dates in your diary. The Albany is a huge Art Deco Theatre with a great atmosphere and a massive array of technical kit to play with, so should be a fantastic venue for a true celebration of amateur theatre.

Some of you may be aware that the ODN Festival is a member of the NDFA and although we are not a competitive festival whereby winners are announced based on their score, the adjudicator does follow the GoDA guidelines and NDFA have agreed that a play from our festival would be considered if the adjudicator recommended it to go forward. From my point of view, it would be amazing to have one of our groups representing us in Coventry, so get your thinking caps on and please consider entering next time. Festivals offer a real educational experience in a celebratory atmosphere – you will learn so much from the experience whether you are onstage being adjudicated or a member of the audience understanding through the adjudicator's comments why certain things worked or didn't work.

All festivals rely on the participating groups to bring supporters along and this is so important – many festivals have folded due to lack of support – so if your group does enter a festival, please try and bring as many supporters as you can, not just to one festival but all the festivals you may enter. We are really lucky to have several festivals in the surrounding area but we all need your support to survive. Personally I enjoy seeing how a play evolves between different festivals as they take on board comments from the adjudicator and tweak the production in some way – it's great to see actors grow in confidence – and each performance is always so different.

Karen Carey

ODN Pantomime / Winter Festival - some photos

Launton - The Snow Queen



Kennington - Cinderella



St Peters Players - Snow White & The Magnificent 7 Dwarfs



Pantomime / Winter Festival Reviews

KINGSTON BAGUIZE DG **Beauty & the Beast**

by Lucy Kirkwood & Katie Mitchell
November 2019

This winter play rather than the traditional pantomime was very clever in its concept, with the story of *Beauty and the Beast* being told by two narrator fairies, Mr Pink (*Rob Bateman*) and Cecile (*Emily Eastham*) who were superbly matched and very believable, both of whom carried on a story of their own. The Rabbit (*Ruby Belcher*) was well cast, an excellent foil to the fairies.

The sets were effective and versatile and enhanced the story. Imaginative use was made of the auditorium.

All characters were well cast, well acted and believable. Edna – the ghost (*Sally Lacey*) gave a 'spirited' performance as a ghostly maid, thoroughly fed-up with the demands of the humans. The Father, (*Michael Lacey*) was brilliant and maintained his character throughout. The Beast (*Dan Sears*) was superbly played; loud and unattractive, but sufficiently appealing to Beauty (*Fiona Eaton*) who fell for his gentler side. They had a brilliant connection and chemistry. Her sister, Lettice was well-played by newcomer *Abigail Morgan*, as the long-suffering, 'invisible' sister compared to her favoured sister, Beauty. George (*Jack Marsh*), Beast's alter-ego is only seen briefly at the end, but was very appropriate as the handsome prince, when transformed from the Beast to immediately captivate Beauty.

The 'Thoughtsnatcher', a machine for reading people's thoughts was very clever and well deployed throughout with the associated sound effects. The concept of the lever to freeze the action was very effective. There was excellent audience participation including use of the 'Thoughtsnatcher'. All the sound effects were ingenious and appropriate. Delightful incidental music.

This was a good interpretation of this new version of the traditional tale and was thoroughly enjoyed by all, including small children who were entranced and listened intently, even though they were a little scared by the *Beast*. They picked up on a lot of the subtleties, throughout.

Congratulations to all

Nigel James

DORCHESTER ADS **Treasure Island** by Ben Crocker 20th – 23rd November 2019

Given the constraints of the stage and hall this pantomime made excellent use of all the available space. The ingenious projection of the scene onto the back wall of the stage told us all we needed to know regarding the location of the action.

Ian Brace, as Mrs Hawkins, the dame, anchored the show brilliantly, taking us from scene to scene. His mannerisms and affectations were just right. I would like to have seen him in different outfits as the action progressed. That is just a minor point, as his wedding dress was quite spectacular. Mrs Hawkins was ably supported by other principals including her son, Jim, (*Ross Wilkin*) and Squire Trelawney (*Mark Williams*), whose passion for 'spotted dick' gets him into all sorts of trouble, particularly with the malevolent Long John Silver (*Mike Lord*) who managed to manoeuvre ably with his wooden leg.

Romance between Jim Hawkins and Jenny Trelawney (*Rachel Winslet Morris*) was a charming moment and well cast. Apart from sea shanties and the audience song, theirs was the only song and dance in the show, which was a shame as there could have been opportunity for more songs, particularly as there was an excellent pianist present.

The supporting parts of Seadog Sam (*Kate Phillips*) and Seaweed Willy (*Amelie White*) really excelled with their cavortings with the kiss of death '**black spot**', eventually finishing off Billy Bones (*Maxine Briscoe*), whose dying scene was a sight to behold!

It was a touch of genius to mix the Women's Institute with the pirate ship expedition to Treasure Island. The troupe of Women's Institute members, were enough to strike fear into the hearts of anyone, including the pirates, being led by the indomitable Mrs Henderson (*Rosemary Mills*) who was a real tour-de-force. The pirates in drag, meet up with the ladies of the Women's Institute in a bake-off style contest. This involved messy 'crazy foam' and the slapstick scene could have been enhanced to make it more worthwhile. The hazardous voyage aboard the *Hispaniola*, the eventual landing and locating the treasure on the island was handled well, along with removing it from the haunted cave.

This was a well performed show, which was enjoyed by the enthusiastic audience.

Congratulations to all.

Nigel James

ST PETERS PLAYERS

Snow White and the Magnificent

Seven Dwarfs by TLC Creative
4th – 7th December 2019

I was unsure about the concept of this pantomime, being set in the Wild West, but was soon proved wrong as the excellent cast swung into action. The setting was good and imaginative, as were the scenes throughout, the changes, for which, were achieved efficiently.

Snow White (*Catherine McCosker*) was well-played and believable, opposite her nemesis Widow Blackheart. Blackheart was played superbly (a performance worthy of the professional stage) by *Eve Winterbottom*, who oozed evil from her every pore and her transformation to the hag was a sight to behold. The dame – Nanny Oakley (*Pete Welply*) gave a good performance but could have been a little more ebullient and forceful. Sheriff Charming (*Nick Fiddian*) was well-matched to Snow White being young, and good-looking with good stage presence. The seven dwarfs (of varying sizes and genders) were effective and very funny, but at times a little indistinct, which lost some of the humour.

Chief Shining Mirror (*Tony Bywaters*) and One-Eyed Slim (*Sean Hazell*) were good in their supporting roles. Tornado, the flatulent horse (*Nancy Hillelson & Zehra Kelly*) stole the show with their animal antics.

This production had masses of audience interaction, kicked off by Silly Billy the Kid well played by a relaxed *Charley Middleton*. Her interaction with the enormous red Stetson hat was a brilliant comedy moment. The children's chorus supported the principals well, with some very effective singing and dancing. They all appeared to be enjoying themselves and were fully engaged throughout.

Musically, the live band gave good accompaniment to the songs, which had some imaginative parodies of well-known numbers not least of which was '*Mineshaft five*! The songs were well delivered (particularly by Blackheart) The incidental music was very effective and linked the scenes well.

This was an enthusiastic, well-performed show, which was enjoyed by the keen audience on a packed first night.

Congratulations to all.

Nigel James

ABINGDON DRAMA CLUB

Snow White by Richard Wilson

10th – 18th January 2020

It was great to see a pantomime with an original script, with some new twists on an original theme. It was interesting to see how the company transformed the limited stage into the various scenes required for this production. Creative use was made of the auditorium and side exit to expand the playing area.

The production was well cast, with two dames, Miss Bunting (Allen Dannfald), housekeeper in charge of the disparate and downtrodden collection of peasants who were tasked with keeping the palace spotless. The other 'Dame' was the Evil Queen, played with menace and gusto by Jon Crowley. He was believable and frightening in all aspects.

Jessica Dunne had good stage presence in her portrayal of the lovelorn Buttons. Snow White (Grace Jastrzebski) was played with elegance and innocence. Her father, the King (David Farndon), whose confidence had been sapped by the magic of the Evil Queen, succumbed to the travesty of justice of his farcical trial, resulting in him being incarcerated.

Snow White's suitor was the Prince (Curtis Manners), whose narcissistic actions were a sight to behold, much to the adulation of the chorus, all of whom supported the principals and remained in character throughout.

Snow white is smuggled away to the cottage in the forest, home of and under the protection of the '*DOORFS*'. The Evil Queen hires 2 assassins Bodge (Maria Crocker) and Splodge (Holly Parker), who fail to finish off Snow White. So, she is pursued by the Queen in a very effective disguise as a beggar, complete with poisoned apple. The assorted residents of the cottage were believably played by the assortment of characters, together with the interloper *Wrath* (Lynne Smith). Wrath turns out to be the exiled Queen, driven out by the Evil Queen. All fail to recognise the Evil Queen and she is left alone with Snow White to do her foul deed. The Evil Queen is discovered and the *DOORFS* turn on her and she becomes a reformed character. Snow White is awakened from her lengthy sleep by a kiss from Buttons, who professes his undying love for her. All ends well. Snow White and Buttons get married, Dame Bunting gets hooked up with the Prince and the King reunites with his former Queen and the whole mood of the kingdom improves dramatically.

The lighting and sound was very effective, however, the singing was a little weak against the backing tracks and could have done with some boosting. The scenes were simple but ingenious.

An appreciative first night audience thoroughly enjoyed the show. Congratulations to all.

Nigel James

SINODUN PLAYERS, Robin Hood and the Babes in the Wood

by Alan P Frayne
January 2020

The scenery was stunning and the overall presentation of the pantomime was excellent. The lighting and effects were good and scene changes executed very slickly.

The opening scene was superb and set the standard for the rest of the show. We were introduced to the principal character who were well supported by a lively and responsive chorus who sang and danced brilliantly. *The Sheriff of Nottingham*, (Adam Brimley) evil though he was, could have had a little more menace to strike fear into the hearts of the peasants. *Little John* (Will Lidbetter) was played very well and was delightful in his simplicity. *Robin Hood* (Zoe Nelson) was the traditional thigh-slapping principal boy and was very believable in her role. She was ably supported by her *Band of Merry Men* who played their roles with conviction. *Friar Tuck* was played with appropriate solemnity by the doyen of the company, Keith Yapp. He was ably supported by Sam Francomb in his debut as *Brother Tucklet*. *Maid Marian* (Ellie Tandy) was appropriately sweet and duetted well with *Robin*.

Nurse Nellie Nickerlastic (Pete Smithson) excelled as the dame with an exhausting amount of costume changes and was anchor man/woman for the whole show. Other show-stoppers were *Snivel* (Len Pannett) and *Grovel* (Fiona Huntingford-Ledger) whose antics were hilarious and were the backbone of the show.

The highlights of the pantomime were the 'School scene', which was very funny and the dance of the *Bear* played by Barbara Wood, who seemed to pop up in all sorts of situations. The bedroom scene was a little too long and repetitive and its significance was not at all apparent. This could well have been truncated to reduce the overall length of the show.

The singing and dancing were just right, with modern songs. Special mention must be made of the scenery, music, props and costumes, which were excellent. It was good to see the youngsters from *Encore* taking part and becoming enthused about theatre.

Overall, a very enjoyable show, well performed and executed by all, with plenty of audience interaction, which had all the ingredients required for a successful pantomime.

Congratulations to all

Nigel James

KENNINGTON A D S

Cinderella

by Allan P Frayne

24th January – 1st February 2020

The show opened with a very giggly, almost hysterical, Fairy Godmother (*Amy Wilson*) setting the scene. Cinderella was confidently played by *Louise Cobb*, who I felt, could have been a little more innocent and naïve. Her confidence gave her the impression that she was not going to be a push-over for the two brutish sisters. The chemistry between her and Buttons (*Hannah Gordon*) was very good. The inept Buttons kept missing his chances to profess his undying love for Cinderella, with superb comedic timing. The bankrupt Baron Hardup (*Daniel Peel*) was a good foil for the overpowering, suitably evil new Baroness (*Fragrance Gaitara*) and her two excruciating daughters Grizelda (*Andrew Phelan*) and Gertrude (*Lewis Morley*). These two terrorised the life out of Cinderella and an unfortunate audience member called 'Jeff'.

Their costumes were something to behold and the wigs were extraordinary, if not a little misbehaved. These two were very well cast, very funny and certainly stole the show.

On the royal front, Prince Charming (*Sarah Duke*) was thigh-slappingly good in her believable performance and a contrast to the excessively camp and Alan Carr-esque Dandini (*Natasha Watts*), who made her presence felt wherever she was on stage.

Bodget (*Jennifer Briggs*) Leggett (*Leigh-Anne El-Barhdadi*) were well played and amusing in their interludes, however, it was unclear what the purpose was of these two characters. Also the haunted wood was not really needed as this only succeeded in lengthening an already long pantomime, which could have done with judicious editing.

There was some excellent dancing and singing, not least of which were Cinderella, the Prince, Buttons and Chambers (*Hannah Peel*). These were accompanied by a very competent and versatile band under the direction of *Alan Cobb*, although we could have done without the drum thud emphasising every punchline. Leave that to the actors!

The chorus was very effective in appearance, singing and dancing throughout and added greatly to the action. The scenes were very well thought out and the lighting and sound were brilliant. It was great to have the cast using of face-mikes. The absolute *Magical Moment* was the change of Cinderella's dress from rags to ball-gown, and the appearance of the coach from a black stage. Absolutely stunning.

The whole show was most enjoyable, excellently directed, with good audience participation (even if we did all get drenched by the water pistols).

Congratulations to all involved.

Nigel James

LAUNTON VILLAGE PLAYERS

The Snow Queen by Julia West

20th – 22nd February 2020

It was great to see another pantomime with an original script, with original songs. The settings were good and were ingeniously and slickly changed for the various scenes, by a very enthusiastic stage crew. The auditorium was creatively used and there was audience participation by the bucket load. The children in the audience were very wound up by the whole proceedings - as were the adults.

The production had a very large cast which gelled completely and gave a very good overall effect.

The principals were very well cast, starting with the opposites of the Summer Queen (*Amanda Houston*) and the Snow Queen (*Lesley Watson Burn*) the latter trying to entice the audience to 'boo' her, which was not easy when she presented an air of bonhomie in a beautiful silver costume. Kai, the Hero (*Dan Chilvers*) was played with great energy and was a good match for Gerda, the heroine (*Nicky Roberts*) who had a nice singing voice and duetted well with Kai. The dame, Helga (*Mark Hudson*) had good comedic timing, although could have been a little more outrageous in dress and actions, opposite the stiff and starchy Admiral (*Marcus Lamb*) who, when under the influence of the Snow Queen, was trying to be bad and evict Helga from her Sweet Shop. Great play was made of the 'sweet machine', which ended in producing sweets for the audience. The great comedy turn of the evening was the sailor duo Flotsam (*Miles Penhallow*) and Jetsam (*Lorraine de Brun*), with their *piece de resistance* the 'Toilet Roll Song', which involved not only the principals but the whole audience. This was great fun, even if it did involve the audience being drenched with water guns.

The various choruses were very appropriate and well performed, with the 'Trolls', recruited from the junior section of the company. The 'Northern Lights', who gave a delightful ribbon dance in Ultra-violet light. The juniors, as the under-sea creatures, were extremely effective also under UV light and certainly had the 'Ahh' factor.

The groups encountered on Gerda's way to save Kai from the clutches of the Snow Queen were the 'Flower Witches' and the 'Robbers' from whom Gerda was rescued by Caw, the Raven (*Charlotte Franklin*), with a cameo appearance of Rufus the Reindeer (*Dot Flanagan*). Gerda manages to save Kai and the Admiral from the grasp of the Snow Queen who was very effectively 'disappeared' by the 'Northern Lights'.

The whole production was well constructed and ably supported by a live band led by Steve Webber. The lighting, effects and sound were very good. The singing was enthusiastic and well performed. An extraordinary and brilliant array of costumes were produced.

The only down side was the panto was far too long and could have done without the Robbers scene which added nothing to the action, An appreciative audience thoroughly enjoyed the show, especially the children.

Congratulations to all. Nigel James

REVIEWS

BANBURY CROSS PLAYERS

Nell Gwynn by Jessica Swale

The Mill, Banbury, 13th-15th Feb 2020

Never ceasing to be amazed by Banbury Cross Players' eclectic choice of plays, I approached their latest production of *Nell Gwynn* with some trepidation. I had never heard of the piece and apart from the publicity blurb describing 'A bawdy romp' I was clueless.



Of course I needn't have worried, BCP came through again with a professional, competent evening's entertainment on a very cold winter's night at The Mill.

Playing to a first night full house, the play, written by Jessica Swale combines almost schoolboy humour in parts with the more serious issues of the day including resisting the resurgence of Roman Catholicism, English/French relations and women's role in society. Certainly enough to be going on with.

The production was directed by Claire Lester and opens with crowd players mingling in the audience, setting the scene for the rehearsal of a play on stage written by John Dryden (Jem Turner) who was shamefully treated throughout as a plagiarising twit. A bit naughty I thought.

Enter the leading actor, Charles Hart, played with some aplomb I may say by the talented Steve Ramsden. He offers the comely Nell of the title a few lessons in acting and she decides a life treading the boards is the one for her. From this point on she, being the first woman on the English stage, ascends swiftly to the pinnacle of her profession. This miffs one Edward Kynaston who hitherto had



cornered the market in playing ladies on stage. BCP veteran Nik Lester acted out this part so well I heard one member of the audience comment he would never look at Nik in the same light again, praise indeed.

Nell soon catches the roving eye of the King, and he sets about persuading the reformed lady of the night to become his mistress.

Joanne Sammons portrayed Nell so convincingly you could quite understand why the King offered to pay her £500 a year to shack up with him.

As King Charles II, Ian Nutt rose to the part shall we say, looking, sounding and acting totally realistically in the role of the Merry Monarch we all love.

As choreographer, Sharon Green moved her fifteen strong cast around with some memorable moves, especially the musical numbers. The clever Set, designed by Richard Ashby with Nik & Clare Lester, was a split stage simply garnished and enhanced by the lighting plot from John Hicks and Linda Shaw.



The second act was different altogether. The first half of Nell Gwynn consisted of mirth, bawdy songs and double entendre. However in Act 2 dark forces descended and more serious issues abounded. Gone was the pleasure seeking King, he was now addressing foreign policy and the religious issues of the time.

Major parts included many monologues, none so impressive as Chas giving his 'King's Speech' in which, dressed in full regalia including Crown, Orb & Sceptre, Ian was more deserving of theatrical acclaim than the film of the same name.

Katy Roberts played Charles' French mistress Louise de Keroualle and if Katy isn't fluent in French, she fooled me.

BCP are on top of their game with Nell Gwynn. Costumes, lighting and a brilliant accompanying Harpsichord player added to the enjoyment of the evening. Now I always try to balance a rave review with some, if minor, negative comment, but try as I might I can't, save to say it's getting difficult to park at The Mill.

Lance Bassett

HAMS (Hagbourne Drama Group

“Our Day Out” by Willy Russell



Drawing on his experiences of school trips, both as a teacher and a child, Willy Russell “Our day out” started life as a television play originally commissioned and broadcast by the BBC in 1977 and was developed into a musical for the stage in 1983. Both sad, humorous and true to life it tells the story of a group of underprivileged schoolchildren (the “progress” class) who are taken on a day's outing by their teachers. The children boisterously rampage through a roadside café, a zoo, a castle and a beach. It is a poignant look at the joys and agonies of growing up – the bullies, the teenage crushes etc -, as well as a sharp pointer to the depressing present and future for them. It is a story that is depressingly as relevant today as it was in 1977 with themes of social deprivation, prejudice and lack of education and opportunity.

The HAMS production was staged partially in the round – a set of stage blocks in the centre of the village hall arranged in an elongated rectangle became the school bus, a fair ground waltza and the castle, while the stage at the far end worked well as the head's office, sweet shop and cliff top. This worked simply and effectively with chairs being moved on and off the stage blocks to form the seating for the bus and the waltza fairground ride. All areas were well lit with some clever lighting design – which given that this is a relatively small village hall with limited resources, it is worthy of special mention. Costumes were all appropriate – school uniforms personalised with an edge of scruffiness for the boys and ‘let's see how short a skirt I can get away with’ from some of the older girls!

Having a large cast of mainly kids must have been challenging to rehearse, but I have to say they were brilliant – loads of energy and confidence, belting out the songs and were very focussed throughout. The adults had their work cut out to keep up with them! The actors made good use of the space and the pace was generally excellent throughout, with the action moving seamlessly from one scene to another. If I was to nit pick, there were a couple of moments that I would have liked to have seen

paced slightly differently to punch out the themes of the play – the cliff top scene where Briggs is trying to coax Carol away from the edge, for example, - just a few moments of silence would, I feel, have really highlighted Briggs' fear and anxiety and the moment of truth that hits him at that time, which leads to his change of attitude. The songs were well executed and supported by excellent live musicians, which is so much better than backing tracks. There were some great songs – ranging from the rousing chorus numbers by the kids excited by elements of the trip, to the poignant “I'm in love with, Sir” and “Why can't it always be this way” and my favourite “Get off my bus” delivered brilliantly with gusto by Martin Redhead as the grumpy bus driver with a soft centre (I'm sure he drove my school bus when I was a kid!)

The whole cast worked hard but there were a few stand out performances. I was particularly impressed by Kayleigh Neal's sassy performance as a Linda, troubled teenager with attitude and a crush on 'Sir' – her facial expressions and mannerisms were bang on throughout and I didn't see her slip out of character once. Meabh Foster gave a very strong and sensitive performance as Carol, a girl who doesn't want to go home to her abusive home environment and her song at the end was heartbreaking. Doug Amos was perfect as the stern, disciplinarian, Mr Briggs, who during the course of the play begins to realise that these kids were more than just trouble-makers. Also really enjoyed the cameo performances of Andy Stocks as the job's worth Lollipop man and Iain Duff's outraged zoo keeper when the kids try to smuggle out the animals.

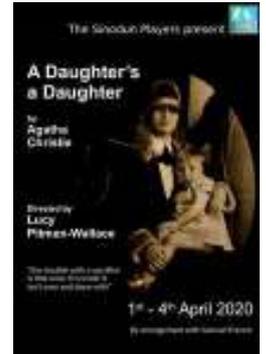
All in all, I thought that HAMS nailed this show – it was well executed and the audience were totally emotionally engaged as they went on the journey with the kids – laughing at the antics and the teasing, and shedding the odd tear on the realisation that the memories made on this school trip were likely to be one of the few happy memories that many of them will have of their childhood – there were definitely a few soggy hankies at the end (mine included!). Well done director, Mary Hands and her team at HAMS, it will be one that I will remember for a long time and I'm sure that all the kids involved will have some very happy memories!

Karen Carey

FIFTHCOMING EVENTS

SINODUN PLAYERS **A Daughter's A Daughter** by Agatha Christie

An intense family drama. Anne Prentice, a widow of 15 years and Sarah, her grown-up daughter, face the prospect of Anne wanting to remarry. The ensuing conflict and its bittersweet resolution highlight the limited choices an ordinary middle class woman felt she had at that time for the pursuit of happiness and fulfilment. Written by Agatha Christie under the pen name of Mary Westmacott, and not a murder mystery.



When: 15th to the 18th of July

Where: The Wallingford Corn Exchange.

Tickets: from Corn Exchange , Wallingford

THE HENLEY PLAYERS

**Saturday
Sunday
Monday**

by Eduardo de Filippo



Marital misunderstandings, a lover's quarrel, and generational conflict escalate as passions flare during the traditional Sunday dinner with family and friends. Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall adapt Eduardo de Filippo's sparkling contemporary Italian commedia dell'arte, which looks at the trial and tribulations of a well-off family in Naples in 1959.

When: October 21 - October 24 2020, 7:30 pm
PLUS Matinee: October 24 2020, 2:30 pm.

Where: The Kenton Theatre, New Street, Henley on Thames, RG9 2BP

Tickets: from the Kenton Box Office 01491 575698 or online at www.kentontheatre.co.uk

Website: www.henleyplayers.com

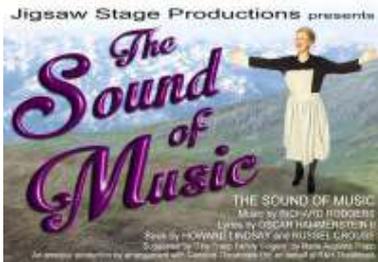
JIGSAW STAGE PRODUCTIONS

“The Sound of Music”

by Rodgers and Hammerstein.

The story of Maria and the Von Trapp family will delight you with it's award winning score, including,

'My Favourite Things', 'Do-Re-Mi', 'Climb Every Mountain', and 'Edelweiss'.



It tells the true tale of the world-famous singing family, from their romantic beginnings and search for happiness to their thrilling escape to freedom as Austria becomes part of the Third Reich at the start of WW11.

VENUES:

The Beacon, Wantage, Thur 5th to Sat 7th Nov

Tickets £15 (£13 conc) from The Beacon:-
www.beaconwantage.co.uk or tel 01235 763456

AND

Cornerstone Didcot, Dates to be announced

Tickets £15 (£13 conc) from Cornerstone:-
www.cornerstone-arts.org or Tel 01235 515144

DORCHESTER ADS

'The Haunted Cabin'

by Matthew Lynch

When Emily, Joe and Danny stumble across the isolated cabin on Shantler's Peak all is not as it seems. Strange noises and sinister apparitions plague the stranded inhabitants, who desperately seek a rational explanation. Will they survive the storm until help arrives, or just become the new eternal residents of the haunted cabin?

A sinister play with a twist that will fool your audience right to the end!

When: 2nd – 5th December 2020 - 7:45pm

Where: Village Hall, Dorchester on Thames

Tickets: £10 from Dorchester Co-op or
www.ticketsource.co.uk

Website: www.dads.org.uk



Your New Committee

Many thanks to all those who attended the AGM on 6th March.

Your new committee is as follows:-

Officers

Chair	Karen Carey	(Didcot Phoenix Drama Group)
Secretary	Becki Brewis	(Wootton Players)
Newsletter/Website	Mike Davies	(Drayton Players & Jigsaw Stage Productions)
Treasurer	Peter Brazier	(Didcot Phoenix Drama Group)
Membership Secretary	Sue Tibbles	(Oxford Theatre Guild)

General members

Mike Lacey	(Kingston Bagpuize)
Sue Hadley	(Drayton Players)
Sarah Ellner	(Kennington Amateur Dramatic Society)
Jess Ebberson	(Kennington Amateur Dramatic Society)
Teresa Miller	(Wootton Players)

We have held the AGM in Drayton for a few years now and would really like to move it around the county so that other groups don't have to travel so far. We would really like to encourage one of our member groups to host next year's AGM – the ODN will cover any hall hire expenses – so please email us if this is something you would like to do.

Email: info@OxfordshireDramaNetwork.org