

BACKCHAT

News from THEATRE NEW ZEALAND
Fostering Community Theatre in Aotearoa

December 2017/January 2018 Vol.40 Issue 6



Over one hundred people gathered on 19 November for the annual awards ceremony of Wellington District's Full-Length Festival.

Read about it in the editorial over the page.



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December is nearly upon us which means (hopefully) summer and theatres awash with pantos and other Christmas shows. As a relative newcomer to these shores (a mere seven years) I still find it hard to associate Christmas with summer: would my favourite Christmas story, Charles Dicken's wonderful *A Christmas Carol*, have worked had it been mid-summer? Would Scrooge's meanness have been quite as harsh had it been blazing hot outside?

Although now living in Wellington I have wandered the world over the past many years and one of the constants I have noted everywhere I've been is the presence of community (amateur) theatre. In the most unlikely places and in the most troubled times people will put on a play and people will go to see it. Whether it was in Fiji in the immediate aftermath of the 1987 Coups d'Etat or Pakistan during the difficult period following 9/11, the desire to put on a play both to self-entertain but critically to entertain others managed to overcome obstacles. In addition to Fiji and Pakistan I've had fun acting and directing in the UK, Australia, Africa and now, NZ. Wherever I've been one of the first things I've done is research local theatre groups and knock on the door. It's been a great way of meeting people, finding friends and having fun.

There are a number of constants around the theatre world. First (and probably fortunately) not everyone wants to act. As a shy, retiring person myself I manage to force myself on stage now and then but I've always been struck at the number of people who instead love to create a set, to rig lights or to collect tickets in the foyer - a huge "thank-you" to all of them. Secondly Shakespeare rules the roost everywhere in the world. Two of my most memorable theatrical memories both involve acting in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The first during a beautiful summer in Islamabad in an outdoor setting around a pool: the most perfect setting. But then a few years later on the smallest stage imaginable in a converted house in Beckenham, yet, thanks to the director's vision, equally perfect. A third constant is the relative lack of men. I once applied to join a group; as I walked through the door the

society secretary grabbed my arm and exclaimed "A man with a pulse - he's in!"

One of the many wonderful things about theatre is that it never sleeps. Even though TNZ's members might be winding down in preparation for summer already auditions are underway for the start of the 2018 season and rehearsals will soon be starting. That's certainly the case here in Wellington.

Community Theatre in Wellington retains the old "district" model which means that any member of TNZ based in the Wellington region is automatically a member of the Wellington District Theatre Federation (WDTF). This includes 'traditional' societies but also schools and smaller societies which come into their own during TheatreFest. Amongst our many 'traditional' societies nine or so join in our annual full length Festival. These nine in 2017 staged over 30 full-length plays. The playlist included Shakespeare, a good sprinkling of NZ playwrights, musicals (including a brand-new one based on the works of Lewis Carrol), and a NZ premier of an international play.

And that's one of the many great things about being part of WDTF, the chance to enter our own Full Length Play Festival. Entries are adjudicated by an ANZDA accredited adjudicator and are then eligible for the award of one of the highly coveted "Antoinettes". This year the festival covered 7 months and our adjudicator was Jillian Carpenter. The Festival concluded recently with our annual get-together at which Jillian announced not only the "Antoinette" winners in all of the usual categories but also awarded some "Certificates of Excellence" and a few "Magic Moments". The "Antoinette" for Best Overall Production this year was won by one of our farthest-flung members: Greytown Little Theatre for its magnificent production of Gary Henderson's *An Unseasonable Fall of Snow*.

So Community Theatre in Wellington is healthy and flourishing; a microcosm of Community Theatre throughout New Zealand and indeed the world. For all of us in the world of theatre here's to an enjoyable summer, a great Christmas and a superb 2018!

David Cox,
Member of National Executive

CONGRATULATIONS

The following members are worthy recipients of a **Meritorious Service Award**

Pauline Blair of Tokoroa Little Theatre: wardrobe mistress, props, prompt, committee member, working bees over 30 years including initially getting theatre refurbished and encouraging membership.

Doug Clarke of Riccarton Players: actively involved in theatre in Canterbury since 1964, sound, lighting, stage crew, props, set design & construction, special effects, playwriting and especially directing. He directs every genre as well as musicals and his productions of one act plays have reached the National Finals 8 times. Doug has also acted in over 60 productions and been a committee member since 1967. He has been President twice and secretary since 1988. Locally he has worked with at least 12 other societies and nationally he held the position of National Executive Officer of NZ Theatre Federation 1991 - 1995.

Pamela Etheridge of Tokoroa Little Theatre: involved with nearly all productions since 1981 in some way, wardrobe seamstress, make-up artist.

Ian Harding of Canterbury: average of 7 shows for 40 years focussing on production management, stage management & construction, lighting, sound, properties, wardrobe, fly-man, marketing, administration, venue technician. Ian takes his greatest pleasure working within schools and providing teaching opportunities for the young technical teams in Community Theatre.

Brenda Hayes of Canterbury Repertory Theatre: actively involved with 4 - 5 productions a year since 1970 on stage and backstage - SM, properties SXF, lighting and sound design and operation, graphics and Stage Director since 1985.

Rangi Ruru Girls School Christchurch is now a member and we welcome them.

ANZDA (Association of Drama New Zealand Adjudicators):
Three newly qualified adjudicators in the South Island have been added to the ANZDA list:
Lara McGregor, Annette Thomson and Laurence Wiseman. For their details contact the President Phil Peleton
phil.peleton@mac.com

New Zealand Theatre Month 2018 - Celebrate and Elevate



New Zealand Theatre Poster Competition

In association with next year's New Zealand Theatre Month there's to be a poster competition for a New Zealand work performed any time in 2017 and up to 31st July 2018. Community groups are welcome to send a digital picture of their poster for judging. The winner will likely receive \$1000. (Professional groups will also be judged in a separate category for another \$1000 prize).

And for one year only there's a search on for the BEST NZ THEATRE POSTER EVER!!!! Another \$1000 is up for grabs. Look through your archives to send in a photograph. Five finalists will be chosen and their submitters will each receive \$50. The winner will be chosen by People's Choice and \$1000 will go to the theatre of origin. If the theatre no longer exists then the money will go to the theatre nominated by the person who submits the winning poster.

----- More details to come -----

Colin Beardon, President of Playwrights Association of NZ (who are Theatre New Zealand Group Members), writes:

Looking for a new, exciting, well-written NZ play? Then why not pick one of the winners from the PANZ Playwriting Competition? This year two competitions were held, one for full-length plays and one for 10-minute plays (An evening of 10-minute plays is a great way to get people involved and try out new talent.) Descriptions of the winning plays are below. To find out more about them contact the author, or for the 10-minute plays contact playwrightsnz@gmail.com.

PANZ Long Play 2017 - Winners

Winner: **DTU** by Robert Gilbert (Tauranga) <robjgilbert@gmail.com>

The play is dedicated to the families of the 185 people who died in the Christchurch earthquake, 22 Feb 2011. Jack is a struggling paving contractor in Christchurch. His 20-year-old son, Charlie, lives in a world of gangs and drugs. Charlie is sentenced to a minimum of two years in the Drugs Treatment Unit (DTU) at Christchurch Men's Prison and is to be released from prison on 22 February 2011. That same morning, Jack is in the CTV building, filming a commercial for his paving firm. At 12.51pm a deadly 6.3 magnitude quake strikes the city.

Runner-up: **Family Trust** by Richard Prevett (Matamata) <playwright.mtm@gmail.com>

Widowed farmer Malcom clinging on to middle age, invites his adult son and daughter to a family meeting. The introduction to his foreign fiancée and proposed changes to their family trust does not go down too well, to say the least. But later when son and daughter have to deal with their own issues a united family defence is necessary to confront the enemy.

PANZ Short Play 2017 - Winners

First Place: **The Gift Shop** by Shona M. Wilson (New Plymouth). A light-hearted view of a woman's journey through grief and acceptance, following the death of her beloved spouse.

2nd Place: **Stuck** by Andi Podesta (Whangarei). Middle-aged Nicky finds herself stuck in a rut. Through a comic set of circumstances she discovers that true friendship is the only way free.

3rd Place: **Sidewalk Specials** by Sean J.D. McMahon (Wellington). A commentary looking at some of the social and local political aspects of street beggars on the streets of Wellington City.

Crosswords by Tim Hambleton (Dunedin). A married couple have an argument while they complete a crossword puzzle.

Once More with Feeling by Richard Prevett (Matamata). A moving retrospective glimpse of love past and present, through the lives of a theatrical couple as they face their final goodbyes.

About Felicia by Bronwyn Elsmore (Auckland). A vet encounters a client with a different spin on animal health.

Trash Talk by Gregory Dally (Clyde). After his employees dump on him, Rastus O'Munter cleans up.

Adriann Smith, a recent TNZ member, is doing a PhD in Performing Arts/Social Science from Otago University and she'd like other members to know about it.

Treading the Boards for Fun – A Passion for Amateur Theatre

Amateur/Community theatre activities are a social and cultural activity for many people. If there are 100 groups across NZ and the average society has fifty members that's at least 5,000 people who are actively involved in producing theatre, for no pay, right throughout New Zealand. The numbers attending these performances will be much greater and together the active society members and their audiences make up the large group of people who are interested in Amateur, or as it is now also called, Community Theatre.

Various local theatre societies have produced histories of their activities but any investigation of the experience of being involved in amateur/community theatre remains at the anecdotal level. This is where I come in. I am an independent researcher with a passion for theatre. Over the last two years I have interviewed 37 people and asked them why community theatre interests them, and what they do in the theatre. The answers are as interesting and varied as the people interviewed. I have transcribed these interviews, and I am busy organising them into possible papers/chapters. Among the things I am looking at are:-

- Learning skills - technical, communication, front of house;
- Actor and director training;
- The 'liveness of theatre', actor-audience interaction, the world of 'make believe';
- Social networking and social skills - communication, loss of inhibitions, friendship;
- The importance of leisure (theatre as a leisure activity) and the need to keep the theatres going - the finances etc.

What's On in December and January 2018

Howick Little Theatre	<i>Book Ends</i> by Roger Hall	to December 2
16th Ave Theatre, Tauranga	<i>Season's Greetings</i> by Alan Ayckbourn	to December 9
Detour Theatre, Tauranga	<i>Jack and the Beanstalk</i> by Norman Robbins <i>Exit Laughing</i> by Paul Elliott	January 16 - 21 to December 2
Rotorua Little Theatre	<i>Robin Hood</i> by Steve English	January 12 - 20
Tokoroa Little Theatre	<i>Let's Party</i> (song and dance of 60s/70s)	to December 9
Gisborne Unity Theatre	<i>The Bach</i> by Stephen Sinclair	to December 1
Dannevirke Theatre Co.	<i>The Vicar of Dibley</i> by R Curtis and P Mayhew	to December 9
Pahiatua Repertory Soc.	<i>Jekyll and Hyde, the Musical</i> by Frank Wildhorn & Steve Cuden	to December 2
Harlequin Theatre Masterton	<i>Bette and Joan</i> by Anton Burge	December 7 - 16
Greytown Little Theatre	<i>Book Ends</i> by Roger Hall <i>Star Child</i> by Oscar Wilde	to December 2 January 31 - Feb 4

Foxton Little Theatre	<i>Ghost Writer</i> by David Tristram	to December 9
Porirua Little Theatre	<i>Rock of Ages</i> book by Chris D'Arienzo	to December 2
Drama Christi	<i>Papa Panov's Christmas</i> by Leo Tolstoy	to December 3
Hutt Repertory	<i>A Kick in the Baubles</i> by Gordon Steele	to December 9
Havelock Theatre	<i>Murder at Checkmate Manor</i> by David McGillivray & Walter Zerlin	January 24 - Feb 3
Elmwood Players	<i>Goldisnowerellahood</i> by Bronwyn Elsmore	January
Canterbury Repertory	<i>Arsenic and Old Lace</i> by Joseph Kesselring	to December 2
McKenzie Theatre Co.	Junior Auditions <i>Charlie and the Chocolate Factory</i>	December 5
Globe Theatre, Dunedin	<i>The Lady Killers</i> by Graham Lineham	December 7 - 16

Send information about upcoming productions to info@theatrenewzealand.co.nz

An Innovative Start to the New Year

Star Child by Oscar Wilde is a story about a baby that falls from the sky and is found by two poor woodsmen. One of them takes it home and it grows up to be the beautiful Star Child who talks to the animals. Director Patrick Craddock says Oscar Wilde weaves both fantasy and reality into this fairy story and it will be a shadow theatre production.

The stage will become a giant white screen, illuminated with backlight. Most shadow theatre is with puppets, but this production will be with real actors. They will play their characters behind the screen. Some will wear masks and costumes to transform them into animals. The production will require two different groups of actors. As well as 'shadow play' actors who mime behind the screen there will be others who use their voices for the actors who are behind the shadow screen.

Patrick sums up the experience, "It should give a stimulus to all the team working with the play. *Star Child* is a play with both mime and voices, but neither the actors behind the screen nor the unseen actors voicing the script have to learn lines. I don't think there's ever been a theatre play like this in Greytown."

For Sale: from *Steel Magnolias* contact: peggyduncan2013@gmail.com of Greytown LT
3 hairdressing chairs (black and chrome) 1 basin attached to a seat, 1 chair with a dryer

Playmarket Accolades



At the annual end of year 'prize-giving' Renee won the 2017 Playmarket Award of \$20,000 for her significant contribution to theatre in NZ. Renée was born in 1929 and is of Ngati Kahungunu and Irish-English-Scots ancestry. She has described herself as a 'lesbian feminist with socialist working-class ideals'. Her body of work includes her acclaimed trilogy plays *Wednesday to Come*, *Pass it On* and *Jeannie Once*.

Her memoir *These Two Hands* was also launched at the Accolades. Renée was born grumpy and nothing

has changed. She is an avid and faithful reader, who enjoys cooking and gardening. Everyone, she says, should grow leafy greens.

Renée always thought she would die at forty-two but for some reason this didn't happen. Instead, at fifty she started to write plays and novels and at eighty-eight considers herself very lucky to still have most of her marbles. She has written eight novels and over twenty plays.

The Playmarket Award is funded by Creative New Zealand and administered by Playmarket. Previous winners of the award are Dean Parker, Gary Henderson and Jean Betts.



Editor Margaret Robertson
Technical Assistance Morris Robertson

Deadline for February/March Backchat **20 January 2018**

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