

# FEATS NEWSLETTER

## MAY 2008

Congratulations to the Stockholm Players for the great organisation of their first (and we hope not their last) FEATS weekend! It was good to see so many 'FEATSers' in Stockholm. And weren't we lucky with the weather! – For those of you who did not make it, the sun shone the whole of the weekend and we had summer temperatures. Mind you, a few of us stayed on for a couple more days. We avoided all the crowds but had to make do with a fairly substantial drop in temperature and some rain. I believe the temperature dropped to 6° on Sunday and there I was with all the windows open...

Apart from all the wonderful sights there are to see in and around the city



here is the group which enjoyed a walking tour of the city in real holiday weather -, we had theatre! The Dieselverkstaden theatre is friendly and allows all the audience to have a good seat, while the lighting equipment is very impressive. We were all amused by the Stockholm Players' version of a gong or bell to hurry us all into our seats (two blocks of wood banged together). We were greeted every evening by a suave Tom Howland, joined on the first



Tom Howland

night by Madeleine Sjöstedt, Stockholm's Vice mayor of culture and sports, who welcomed us all to the city; and on the second evening by the British Ambassador, Andrew Mitchell, who regaled us with tales of some of his experiences of treading the boards and almost gaining a nomination for the Adjudicator's Discretionary Award in the process!



Madeleine Sjöstedt



Andrew Mitchell

And, talking of which, Don Luscombe, long-time member of the Stockholm Players, has presented FEATS – and presented it to the winner on the last evening - with a replacement cup for the Discretionary Award. Thank you, Don. Also replaced is the 2<sup>nd</sup> place cup. This is now the E.C.C. Centennial Cup, presented – as the name suggests – in honour of the E.C.C's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary which is being celebrated next year. FEATS 2009 will mark the culmination of E.C.C's centenary celebrations.

Then we sat back and watched the plays. A mixed bunch this year. With six original scripts. At the end of each evening we were all interested to hear the comments of our Adjudicator



(Colin Dolley) and to see if his opinions agreed with ours. In his final adjudication he said, 'The FEATS Festival is unique'. He went on to mention the sense of celebration and of family and the fact that we all share a common theme: the love of amateur theatre. He continued by saying that the audience was always warm and generous and everyone wants each team to do as well as possible.

He went on to dispel certain myths, one being that comedy never wins a festival. He suggested that the reason for this is, perhaps, because very few comedies are performed at festivals... Further, the adjudicator's job is

watch a play and ask 'what are the challenges' and 'how far did the group achieve them?' The question of 'did he like the play?' does not arise. These are the results :

## Winners of FEATS 2008

Kast Cup for Best Production: <b>1<sup>st</sup> Place</b>	<i>Curtain Calls</i> , <b>The Bonn Players</b>
The E.C.C. Centennial Cup: <b>2<sup>nd</sup> Place</b>	<i>Eleemosynary</i> , <b>FEST, Frankfurt</b>
Taché Diamonds Award: <b>3<sup>rd</sup> Place</b>	<i>The Furies</i> , <b>The Hamburg Players</b>
Blackie Award for <b>Best Actor</b>	Caraigh MacGregor , <b>B.S.S, Brussels</b>
Blackie Award for <b>Best Actress</b>	Greta Redmond, <b>NEAT, Stuttgart</b>
Grand Duchy Cup: <b>Best Stage Presentation</b>	<i>The Parting</i> , <b>Entity, Munich</b>
Marcel Huhn-Bruno Boeye Trophy for <b>Stage Management</b>	<i>Max Dix, Zero to Six</i> , <b>I.T.G., Brussels</b>
Don Luscombe <b>Discretionary Award</b>	<i>Runaway</i> , <b>TIE, Brussels</b>
DAW-Verulam Award: <b>Best Original Script</b>	<i>Max Dix, Zero to Six</i> , <b>Vincent Eaton</b>

**Nominations** and please forgive me if I have missed anyone. Let me know and I will rectify in the next newsletter.

Blackie Award for Best Actor	Danny Strike, Entity, Munich Eduardo Aladro-Vico, ITG, Brussels Peter Ferrow, The Bonn Players Wander Bruijfel, AATG, The Hague
Blackie Award for Best Actress	The entire cast from Hamburg Players, i.e. Julie Spanswick, Lexi von Hoffman Ursula Schmidt Mathilde Berry-Graham Nora Farell Valerie Doyle The entire cast from FEST, Frankfurt, i.e. Sylvia Hoenig Antonia Kitzel

	Lea Dunbar
	Abigail Greef, The Brussels Shakespeare Society
	Stephanie Nemeth-Parker, Semi-Circle, Basle
	Kathleen Schroers, The Bonn Players
	Janine Lockwood, The Bonn Players
Stage Management Award	Hamburg Players
	AATG
	BATS
Best Stage Presentation	<i>The Parting</i> , Entity Theatre Workshop, Munich
	<i>The Cavern</i> , Semi-Circle, Basle
	<i>Max Dix, Zero to Six</i> , ITG, Brussels
	<i>Curtain Calls</i> , The Bonn layers
	<i>Going Underground</i> , AATG, The Hague

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During the FEATS Forum it was suggested that the criteria by which the Adjudicator attributes his marks should be published in the programme. I am not sure if that will be done in the future, but, here they are. It should be noted that this is the standard NDFA marking.

Acting	40 marks
Production	35
Stage Presentation	15
Originality, Endeavour and Achievement	10
Total	100 marks

To these, the FEATS committee has decided to add 10 points for Innovation

Several people asked me after the Forum if the question of limiting the number of original scripts had come up, or whether the use of multi-media had been discussed. Well, neither had, but they would perhaps have made interesting subjects for discussion... If you have an opinion, I would be more than happy to print them in the next newsletter.

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I found out last summer that I have a near neighbour (well, she only lives about one and a half hours away and in my part of the world that counts as near!) who was a former member of the FEATS community, had moved from Geneva to the U.K. but is now in the south west of France. Over lunch one day she said that she would be going to Stockholm and she accepted – without my having to twist her arm – to write the crits for me. As Anne Everett she won Best Actress in 1988 with the GEDS performance of *Bazaar and Rummage*. She is now known as Annie Dawes and I would like to thank her for the following:

This year's FEATS was always going to present participating groups with a great challenge. Not only does one automatically expect the highest standards of acting and staging, but sets and stage dressing too play an enormous part in the success of any production. Stockholm is such a great distance from all the other groups' hometowns that, if they wanted to bring a conventional set, groups would have to face a long, expensive road/ferry journey; if they

opted for a minimalist presentation, boundless creativity and imagination would have to be employed. Many of us remember breathtaking sets being transported by Stockholm Players in the opposite direction, and stories of customs officers being intrigued by a whole team of obviously dedicated sportspeople carrying hefty ski bags into western Europe in June! So we knew it could be done.

Now - let's see how they got on.....

### **DUBLIN CAROL (PART 2) by Conor McPherson - New English American Theatre (Stuttgart)**

A low key start to the festival here, with this two-hander set in a Dublin undertaker's workshop. The festive season is represented by a forlorn Christmas tree perched partway up a small stepladder. Coffin parts lie atop a very clean trestle table, there is some seating and a small drinks trolley. To indicate presumably that work is in progress, a very small red toolbox and a pot of paint is set underneath the trestle table. Minimal, yes - imaginative and creative ..... ?

The play revolves around John, the undertaker, whose heavy drinking is either the result of, or the reason for, his sad, wasted life. He is full of regret for having misused and abandoned his family. He receives a visit from Mary. We do not know for quite a while that she is his grown-up daughter. Mary has come to tell him that his wife, her mother, is dying and to try to persuade him to visit her and thereby resume contact with his family. John and Mary re-visit past events and rekindle painful memories. John's regret weighs heavily on him, but Mary brings moments of compassion and gentle humour to the proceedings, with a lightness of touch and depth of feeling that won Greta Redmond the Blackie Award for Best Actress.

### **THE PARTING by Tanika Gupta - Entity Theatre Workshop (Munich)**

Behind the gauze and in torrential rain, an enormous steam train explodes on the scene and departs from the station, various passengers arrive and depart, meet and bid farewell; some are left behind. Fortunately there is a weird but welcoming buffet bar on the station for all those who need to wait overnight until the next train. Four strangers are soon telling us their stories, encouraged by Sam, the old and very tired bartender. We gradually come to realise that the four men represent different stages in Sam's life, which is now nearing its end. Due to a miscellany of accents on stage, a stretch of the imagination was required here to understand that the Devonian barman was one and the same person as the US serviceman and the young Cranky. However, this production (a "God's waiting room" of a play) uses great teamwork and clever devices to tell its story - shadow characters from another time and place appear through the gauze, the bar is almost imperceptibly spun around to become a fully-usable kitchen corner, a fire blazes in the grate, and well-chosen music underscores the action. The image of Sam unhurriedly chopping carrots and dropping them into the soup pan will be a lasting one. The creation of this character won Danny Strike a well deserved mention in the nominations for Best Actor. This production was awarded the Grand Duchy Cup for Best Stage Presentation.

### **THE FURIES by Elena Kaufman (*original script*) - Hamburg Players**

What a rousing riot of a play! A gaggle of Greek Furies whirl through the play with matted locks, frightening make up, outrageous costumes, snuggling up to snakes and spitting spiders; the understandably nervous Fury-in-training, Deborah, is demure and simply attired in comparison. The storyline is secondary to the stunningly choreographic presentation of the piece as a whole, which started off very promisingly but did not quite live up to expectations. Debbie has descended into the Furies' underworld grotto, ostensibly to become an apprentice Fury. The suspicion that she is, instead, a spy from the real world throws the Furies into a rage, and mayhem is set loose, culminating in havoc being wreaked in the most nightmarish situation possible - a modern office setting. An absolute hoot from

beginning to end, this production with its exuberant ensemble work gained all the Furies a joint mention for the Blackie Award for Best Actress and the production was also nominated for the Stage Management Trophy. The production won the Taché Diamonds Award for 3rd Place.

**WHAT HAPPENED HERE - A RETELLING OF KING LEAR by Stuart Delves (*original script*) - The Brussels Shakespeare Society**

Not so much an original script as a rewriting of Shakespeare's play. Very imaginatively staged and presented, with some lively performances, notably from Caraigh McGregor who was awarded the Blackie Award for Best Actor and from Abigail Greef in the double roles of Cordelia and Fool, which won her a nomination for the Blackie Award for Best Actress. Her singing voice is heard only fleetingly - I, for one, would have loved to have heard more of it. Again, this production took my interest from the beginning. It opens with a TV games show with the three daughters (or at least two of them) vying for their father's affection and continues in a vibrant and fast-moving, if not always comprehensible, style. The film sequences were well done and provided a useful background to the story. An office chair provided a very mobile acting area, and a small amount of other furniture was all that was needed to dress the stage - the variously flown chandeliers could have been omitted. With overt sexuality, coke-snorting, and the violent and hideously bloody scenes being video-ed on a mobile phone, this was an enormously energetic production full of innovation and modernity.

**RUNAWAY by Stephen Challens (*original script*) - TIE, Brussels**

White painted road markings and screen projection are the only set components for this devised production, in which the seven actors provide all the props and stage dressing necessary from within their backpacks and bedrolls during the course of the play. With pertinent projected quotations and atmospheric music as an accompaniment, the young runaways reveal their histories thus far, sharing their fears, faults and fantasies; their neediness of others often driving them to desperation, emphasizing their abject loneliness within the group. However, the mood was far from desolate and indeed often gently humorous. This was a true ensemble piece, which also highlighted excellent individual performances. Only very much later was it explained to the audience that this group had been unable to present its planned production due to licensing difficulties, and had produced this piece in only a few short weeks. For this reason, the production was awarded the Don Luscombe Discretionary Award. It is always good to watch and enjoy this dynamic, enthusiastic group but this time we were even more appreciative of their commitment and vitality.

**ELEEMOSYNARY by Lee Blessing - Frankfurt English Speaking Theatre**

*eleemosynary* /el-uh-MOS-uh-ner-ee/, adjective: 1. Of or for charity; charitable; as, "an eleemosynary institution." 2. Given in charity; having the nature of alms; as, "eleemosynary assistance." 3. Supported by or dependent on charity; as, "the eleemosynary poor."

I couldn't resist looking this word up (though it is fully explained during the course of the play) and found that it had been the "Word of the Day" at dictionary.com on May 14, 2003. However Lee Blessing had discovered the word much earlier than that, as he wrote the play in 1987!

This play was written to be staged very simply and, with the use of platforms and very few props, it needs nothing more - provided the three actresses work harmoniously and sensitively, which in this production they most certainly do. Their unflawed teamwork won all three a joint nomination for the Blackie Award for Best Actress; the production was

nominated for the Grand Duchy Cup for Best Stage Presentation and also for the Stage Management Trophy. The production won the ECC Centennial Cup for 2nd Place.

A play featuring three generations of women makes for turbulent dynamics. The three completely different characters are all strongly portrayed - Dorothea, the grandmother, is willfully eccentric, Artemis (Artie), the daughter, is clever and independent although suffocated by her domineering mother, and Echo, the granddaughter, is highly sensitive and intellectually advanced for her age, with an obviously inherited streak of stubbornness. Echo has been raised by her grandmother and is gradually rekindling her relationship with her mother. Much of the story is told through telephone conversations between Echo and Artie, although emphasis is placed more upon the national spelling competition that Echo is desperate to win than on their day-to-day need to relate to each other. Echo's recounting of the final moments of the spelling bee was so expressive that we could just picture the little boy competing against her. Dorothea's calm insistence that Artie must use her pink homemade wings to fly and Artie's reluctant wing flapping made for a memorable scene in a play that, although somewhat painful in its truthful observations, was often humorous and always thoroughly entertaining.

### **THE CAVERN by Dilys Gater - Semi-Circle, Basle**

Again, a fascinating opening for this production, with dinner party clatter and conversations heard before the curtains open. A séance is in full swing, we hear cheerful chatter around the Ouija board, calls for hands to be held, squeals from female guests as inappropriate contact is made, then a louder scream and the séance is abandoned, the curtains open and one of the female guests, Anne, enters a dark cavern in which sits the serene figure of a woman, Jennet, dressed as from another century; she has been waiting for a very long time. It is gradually revealed that Jennet has been waiting for Anne to arrive, so that she may continue her journey to an unknown destination. Slowly, Anne begins to understand that she has died and that she is to take Jennet's place, waiting interminably for salvation. Throughout the course of the play, the two actresses maintain the tension and momentum necessary to retain our interest. Their clearly spoken dialogue makes it easy to picture the other unseen characters involved in the story. Jennet's transformation into devil's disciple is frightening and thoroughly believable, although the hellfire effect around Anne's legs, and indeed her reaction to it, could have been handled with greater impact. Mercifully, Anne is called from her nightmare by her husband's voice - all has been a terrifying dream. Jennet blows out one of the two candles and settles back into her original position, head strained towards the entrance of the cave, to await her next saviour. A chilling piece, deftly executed, this play was nominated for Best Stage Presentation and Stephanie Nemeth-Parker, playing Jennet, was amongst those shortlisted for Best Actress.

### **CELEBRATION by Harold Pinter - De WAANzin, Ghent**

De WAANzin is deservedly well known for commitment to excellence, coupled with boundless energy, and they always produce an exciting entertainment. Oh dear! Certainly a generous amount of energy was expended upon this production, especially in the Monty Python handkerchief-on-head style of monotonous bellowing. Sexual undertones in Pinter's plays are usually just that - undertones. Cross dressing, men repeatedly flashing their underwear, persons being used as pole dancer's poles together with various copulatory positions being assumed throughout overshadowed Pinter's words in this production. Indeed, to say that the script was thrown into oblivion is nearer the truth. When the menus were presented to the diners in the restaurant, I was appalled to see that they were actual photocopied pages of script, complete with highlighting and pencil scribbles. As the actors finished reading (!) each page, the page was torn off and thrown on the floor. To vary the presentation, some speeches were pre-recorded and played as voice-over, rather than just read from scripts. I will print my email address at the end of this review and I invite anyone,

especially a member of De WAANzin, to send me an explanation as to why the scripts appeared on stage at all, why the actors read their lines, why the script was torn up and thrown about and why this particular device continued for so boringly and insultingly long.

A simple set with chairs should have worked very well. Unfortunately, the military precision with which the cast first marched on to the stage fizzled somewhat in the musical chairs scenes. In fact the production came across as being under-rehearsed in several areas. Even with the artifice of one member of the cast "whispering" a signal, not everyone on stage moved simultaneously when they should have done, and there was too much fumbling for my comfort in the placing of chairs and actors around them, some actors even whispering to others and pointing where they should place themselves. The fading spotlight at the end was lovely - shame the actress moved away too soon. The audience did seem to be enjoying the comedy aspect of this production, but I think we were overdue a good laugh.

**MAX DIX, ZERO TO SIX by Vincent Eaton (*original script*) - The Irish Theatre Group, Brussels**

This play romped through the early years of Max Dix's life, from pre-birth to age six and won Vincent Eaton the DAW-Verulam Award for Best Original Script. With nothing much more on stage than a vertically slatted screen, the stage seemed constantly filled with dozens of people in a myriad of settings. The five-strong cast charged untiringly through the many different scenes, playing multiple roles - apart from Max, that is, who was played throughout by Eduardo Aladro-Vico and who was nominated for the Blackie Award for Best Actor. I appreciated the device of using three different actresses to portray the three different personalities that made up Max's mother. I am fully aware of the split personality mothers often present and, being a mother of sons myself, I also related to the relationships between the mother and her sons, and between the two siblings. The different scenes of Max's young life tumbled in front of us in quick succession, each one keenly observed and accurately portrayed. The pictures that I will remember most are the circumcision scene with the enormous scissors, baby Max in the play pen, the car journey (with big brother thumping little Max in the back seat), letters cascading through the letterbox, the three different faces of Mother portrayed as sliders, Max deftly throwing chairs offstage, and of course Max wearing waterwings, toddling around the stage and throwing himself without a care into the (screen projected) swimming pool. In my opinion, the creative use of the screen deserves an award all to itself. Indeed, the play received a nomination for the Grand Duchy Cup for Best Stage Presentation and was presented with the Marcel Huhn-Bruno Boeye Trophy for Stage Management.

**CURTAIN CALLS (A MASQUE) by Margie Cross (*original script*) - The Bonn Players**

With great apologies to the writer and cast, I have to say I did not follow the story of this play at all. There was such a lot happening and so many entertaining diversions that I lost the plot. The programme notes tell us that the play is about a touring theatre company; whilst waiting for their curtain call, the actors lose themselves in the roles they perform on stage. I am sure it was not the fault of the production that I was unable to follow the story, as the words were beautifully poetic and the acting more than adequate. Both Kathleen Schroers (Older Actress) and Janine Lockwood (Younger Actress) were nominated for the Blackie Award for Best Actress; Peter Ferrow (Older Actor) was nominated for the Blackie Award for Best Actor. The set was extremely interesting to look at, using multi-coloured boxes, chairs and other backstage paraphernalia. This production was nominated for the Grand Duchy Cup for Best Stage Presentation. The costumes were magnificent and the actors wore them with great ease. The play comprises several elements - the Harlequin/Poet's Muse and the Poet/Playwright, two pairs of actors - one pair older than the other (I got the significance here), the Director/MC, the Stage Manager/Time, and the Stage Crew/The Three Graces. The characters and their stories were woven together in a fascinating and always entertaining way, but the production was far too clever for me to be able to understand the

storyline. Having said that, it was thoroughly enjoyable to watch and beautifully staged, and was awarded the Kast Cup for Best Production: 1st Place.

#### **THE PUPIL by Tom de Beckker (*original script*) - BATS, Antwerp**

This play was soothing to the senses and easy on the eye, with its projected images of Capri, and it was a pleasure to listen to, with its many pieces of well-chosen music. A two-hander, this gentle play tells the story of a writer looking back on his life and, in particular, the time he had spent with an elderly, eccentric and fabulously wealthy Belgian widow. Fascinatingly, she had inherited her fortune from her husband who, we are told, had been the inventor of the safety pin. The writer and the widow take a mysteriously fateful inaugural ride on the Vesuvius chairlift which had been funded by the safety pin empire. I am sorry to say that no amount of internet research threw up any connection at all with safety pins and the Vesuvius chairlift. However, the reflections of the writer and the relationship of these two people are the more interesting aspects of this play. I did think, however, that there was too much dependence upon technical aids which, whilst useful tools for embellishing a theatrical presentation, should not, in my opinion, be used as the sole means of communication. I am also wondering why this playwright did not dramatise this production, rather than - it would seem - merely repeat the words of the storyteller from the novel, thus resulting in lengthy episodes where the actor smiles wistfully on stage whilst "his" older voice recounts his story. That said, this production afforded an imaginatively composed entertainment which I thoroughly enjoyed, and I found its pleasantly tranquilising effect quite mesmerising. It would now be most interesting to read the original novel by Harry Mulisch on which the playwright has based this play.

#### **GOING UNDERGROUND by Christopher Morgan - AATG, The Hague**

For this production, the audience was treated to an almost complete London underground carriage with yellow tubular steel fittings and grey seats, greyed-out windows, ripped posters, an authentic amount of litter and graffiti, and a good selection of ordinary people going about their daily grind. Interestingly there are two other passengers who remain silent, usefully acting as additional set dressing. Although many of this weekend's productions had gained from using simple sets with effective lighting plots, the audience appreciated this very substantial and practical set.

A variety of characters was portrayed, ranging from dear and dotty to depraved and evil, with all genres of human nature in between. None of the characters talks to each other, which is realistic on the Tube, but they all talk to us, or their mobile phone. In this way, we are privy to the innermost thoughts and anxieties of seven of the passengers. Julie Domaille (Tina) was nominated for the Blackie Award for Best Actress; Ben Evans (George) and Wander Bruijtel (José) were both nominated for the Blackie Award for Best Actor. By relating their stories to us without engaging their fellow passengers, these travellers through life offered us insights, sometimes hilarious sometimes painful, into their individual lives, hopes and dreams. I liked the use of slow motion for the characters who were not speaking, thus not distracting our attention from the one currently telling his/her story. I would have liked to have known why the arriving passengers were creeping slowly on to the carriage, rather than jumping on and pushing clear of the doors. However, the almost constant tube train noises and announcements were at exactly the right level, I thought, and the carriage was obviously moving because all the passengers lurched and swayed in perfect harmony! This journey could have lasted for much longer and I for one would have remained enthralled. The production was nominated for both the Grand Duchy Cup for Best Stage Presentation and the Marcel Huhn-Bruno Boeye Trophy for Stage Management.

**Annie Dawes (aka Anne Everett) - ex Geneva English Drama Society**  
**annie.dawes[at]orange.fr /**

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**Summer School** at the Centre d'Accueil Clairefontaine, on the border between Luxembourg and Belgium takes place from Saturday 26th July to Sunday 3rd August inclusive.

The Course follows the "Munsbach model" as developed at the original home in Luxembourg. This is an 8-day, intensive residential course (day attendance is also possible) with activity revolving entirely around project work for both directing and acting students. Tutors work with students throughout the day, the various projects interweave and ongoing work is shared. By the end of the week, everyone should have sampled something of the experience of everyone else.

For full information check the website at [www.munsbach.org](http://www.munsbach.org) or contact Nola Dutton or John Brigg at:

Nola{at}DuttonsOnLine.co.uk / (tel: +44 (0) 1609 773 500 ;

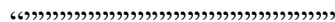
John Brigg at [jbrigg@luxconsult.lu](mailto:jbrigg@luxconsult.lu) / tel. +352 446 680



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The following is an extract from an article written by Catriona White of the Brussels Shakespeare Society about a R.A.D.A. workshop which she attended recently, led by Brigid Panet. It could be of help when starting to learn a part.

As an actor, ask yourself:

- Who am I? (How do I relate to the other characters in the play?)
- Where am I?
- When is it? (Season, weather, time of day etc.)

To establish how your character fits into the play, ask yourself (and be a 'text detective' to find out):

- What do I want - what is my aim?
- What strategies can I use to achieve that aim?
- What obstacles do I have to overcome in doing so?