



Newsletter Date:-
March 2011

Newsletter

Happy Birthday Joan Meyrick.

I first met Joan when our family moved to Thurso and I joined Thurso Players. Rehearsals were underway for "Robin Hood" and back in 1983 they were held in the bandroom of what was then the town hall. A small dynamic woman was directing her cast with vigour and enthusiasm, and I discovered that she was the writer as well as the director: in fact she had been writing pantomimes since 1976. Thurso Round Table had asked the Players to provide entertainment for a children's Christmas treat so Joan, with support and ideas from some of the Players, devised "Jack and the Snow Queen". Joan continued to write, direct and act and pantos became an annual event. She asked me if I would play Robin Hood – a both delightful and scary opportunity for a newcomer to Thurso Players! She made it all great fun and was full of ideas and inspirations. Years later, when I started writing and directing pantomimes, I always wrote in cameo roles for Joan and was awed by her tremendous dedication and attention to the smallest detail as she built her character.

Joan is a star! She has the "IT" factor on stage. Put her anywhere and you find your eye being drawn towards her. Alas, I never saw her on stage in her prime – I can imagine her interpretation of Madam Alcarti in Blythe Spirit- but she is such a talented actress I reckon if she had gone into the theatre professionally she would have been up there with Judi Dench and Maggie Smith. At her recent 90th birthday celebrations when we were reminiscing, Joan said to me

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"What is the IT factor?" Hard to put into words, but along with the hard work, insight, skill and inspiration that go into creating a character and performing, it is an ability to be still, to enter that magical space that is the acting area and to take the audience with you. Joan has IT!

Denise Imrie

I think one of Joan's greatest ways of helping the player was in writing her Pantomimes. We had such a good time with them. Joan would ask Betty, Sheila and myself to the house to vet them and we had a ball reading them together. The real point is that with no royalties to pay on the performances it gave Thurso Players the boost that they needed to start "doing up" the Mill Theatre. Then I think of Joan arguing quite heatedly with the backstage crew at one Theatre in Divisional as they didn't want the cast on stage yet, and Joan saying she was "part of the set". This was in Lady Aoi. She had to be in bed during the whole performance without moving. Joan was in one musical "My Fair Lady", portraying the Professor's housekeeper. A great friend and still a true star on stage and a pleasure to direct.

Ruby.

Joan Meyrick – just saying her name to anyone who knows Joan at all has the immediate effect of bringing a smile to their face! Anyone who has had the good fortune to work with her over the years in Thurso Players can testify to her dedication and wicked sense of fun!

It is often said that Joan only has to appear on stage to steal the show – I would prefer to say "capture our hearts" as was highlighted in the press report for "My Fair Lady" (1993), when as housekeeper she opened the door to Freddy during that well known song "On the street where you live" – quote "captured in cameo!" .

It really doesn't seem that long since Joan's 70th birthday celebration in the Mill, which took the format of "This is your Life" - clearly there is much to add to the Red Book and more to come. We love you Joan (and Tom!!).

Ruth

Joan has theatre in her blood. She's the only person I know who can do a tiny, non-speaking, walk-on part and steal the show.

Betty

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SCDA

Scottish Community Drama Association (SCDA) Caithness District

Open & Youth Festival of One Act Plays 25th and 26th February 2011.

Over the last few years Caithness has had two SCDA Festivals of One Act Plays, one Open and one Junior. Unfortunately over the years the number of entries for this Festival has been disappointing, so there have been usually a maximum of two entries at each festival.

This Year, sensibly, the two categories, Junior and Open were combined into one festival which ran over two nights at Thurso High School on Friday February 25th and Saturday February 26th.

On Friday a packed High School Hall was treated to two Junior Plays and one Open Play; on the Saturday, an “older” Junior Play and an Open entry.

As all the categories, Youth Festival, Junior, Intermediate and Senior, and The Open category, were to be adjudicated by the same person it was vital that this person had the necessary skills, experience and background to make a judgement on players with such a wide range of ages.

Fortunately SCDA provided us with Ron Nicol a “weel kent” face to Caithness, who has decided the outcome of the Youth Festival in Caithness on a number of previous occasions. Ron has extensive experience as an actor, writer, director and adjudicator. His theatrical accomplishments would fill the rest of this article, so suffice it to say we consider ourselves to be extremely lucky to have such an experienced and supportive adjudicator for our combined festival.

On to the entries themselves. First up on Friday we had Mount Pleasant Drama Club – Eden Court Arts Education. This was a Junior Entry in the Youth Festival. It was directed by David Hunter, a long time friend and supporter of Thurso Players, and our very own Christine Firth. It was called “The Box”, and had been devised and written by the group themselves. With a cast of 21, it told the story, in a nicely observed and well performed way, of the apprehensions faced by children moving from their familiar Primary School to the much larger, and perceived to be scary, High School. It was so well put together, with all the concerns about; getting lost, nasty teachers, bullies, injections and so forth, all resolved by sensible advice from the

“You’ll never ever get me on stage, I just want to help with the lights and maybe some backstage work”. Famous last words.

My first SCDA festival in 1992 saw Joan giving me my first line as a cheeky office boy in Chekhov “The Anniversary”. I say line, more like a brief statement. “The Deputation” that was it. Still incredibly nerve wracking for me though.

Edna Walford got wind that I’d been coaxed onto the stage and subsequently cast me in her Chekhov play “The Wedding” during the same festival, as a waiter with a whole sentence to say.

“The Anniversary” won the Caithness heat so it was off to Brora for the next round. I could get used to this I was hooked. So Joan has a lot to answer for.

I’ve been very fortunate to work with Joan many times over the last 20 years although sadly never in a scene together. Attention directors – Any play out there requiring a 35year old man and a ninety year old woman?

Thank you Joan. Many Happy Returns.

Glyn



current Primary Teacher, that the adjudicator suggested that it could be performed in Primary Schools to reassure those about to go to High School.

Next up was Thurso Players, Youth Festival, Intermediate Entry, "Round the World with Class Six" by Nick Warburton. This exuberant and sometimes educational piece, was directed with verve by Eric Maughan and played with enthusiasm and humour by a talented band of nine of the Thurso Players "junior" juniors. The performance generated waves of laughter throughout the hall, at both the delivery of a humorous script and also the physical antics of the "sailors" as they recreated Sir Francis Drake's circumnavigation of the World in 1577-1580 (in 20 minutes!). For such an ensemble piece it is difficult to single out any one performer over the rest, so congratulations to all involved in this delightful piece of theatre.

Then on to the Open Festival Entry, Michael Frayn's "Chinamen", directed by Audrey O'Brien and performed as a "nominal" two hander by Andrew Crawford and Donna Swanson. I say nominal as both had to cope with multiple roles and quick costume changes. The piece is set in a 70's dining room of an upwardly mobile couple trying to give the perfect dinner party. Unfortunately due to a lack of communication between the hosts, each have separately invited a husband and a wife who have just split up, along with the separated wife's new beau, leading to massive complications as the host and hostess try and keep the dinner party going, while keeping the estranged couple from meeting each other. Cue lots of exits through one door and reappearances through another door, as a different character. Both actors coped extremely well with this demanding piece and were able to convince us to suspend our disbelief and accept that we were, in fact, seeing more than just two actors on stage. Particular praise must be given to Donna in her role as the awkward, but really hip and trendy, young man, Alex. She proved that she could walk like a man, and indeed demonstrated that she was able to do other things as a man, but best not to dwell too long on this aspect! Well done all round to cast, director and backstage crew.

On Saturday first up was the Youth Festival - Senior Entry. This was a piece both written and directed by Thurso Players very own Renaissance Woman, Donna Swanson. It was developed out of a piece Donna had devised for last year's Junior Whoops Workshop. It is called "The Love of the Fishwives" and tells the tale of three families in Thurso, bound together by fishing and the sea. The play is very moving and atmospheric, utilising live music, splendidly supplied by Joanna Harper on the fiddle, songs, dance and projected images to

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tell the tragic tale of the lives of three wives, three husbands, their children, and their fate at the hands of an unforgiving sea. The play was acted, sung and danced excellently by the "older" junior members of Thurso players, playing roles much older than their actual ages. They were able to give real feeling and empathy to the well rounded characters and there was genuine emotion in the hall as the audience were drawn into the lives of the families. Congratulations to the accomplished cast and to Donna for both her inspired writing and direction.

The juniors in both plays did Thurso Players proud, and have built on the experience they have gained both at the Friday Night Junior Sessions at the Mill and at the annual Whoops Workshops.

Next up was the Wick Players Open Festival Entry, "The Bride to Be" by Peter Quilter. In a similar fashion to the Thurso entry, this was also a two hander taking place mainly in one room. It was a more contemporary setting and only involved the actors playing one character each, so in that respect was less frenetic. It focussed round a couple, a brother and sister, having an amusing conversation just before the sister embarks on her third wedding. This piece was nicely played by the two protagonists with much laughter at the lines and the physical comedy- a cup of coffee spilled over the wedding dress, the bride being caught in the rain and a broken mirror.

All five Plays were of an extremely high standard, so we sat back, awaiting the awarding of the Prizes. Just like at Oscar night all the competitors sat nervously in the audience, studiously playing down their chances of winning anything, avowing that they were just happy to have been able to take part.

Finally the results were in, and the winners were;

Caithness District Youth Trophies

Best Theatrical Moment (Junior Section Only) The Gunn Trophy - Mount Pleasant Drama Club for the atmospheric appearance of the four High School bullies in "The Box".

Winning Play Halkirk ADC Trophy - Thurso Players Y1, "Round the World with Class Six".

Open Trophies

Highest Acting Mark Calcott Innes Quaich - Thurso Players, "Chinamen"

Highest Direction Mark Margaret Sinclair Shield - Thurso Players, "Chinamen"

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Runner Up, Dr Ian Fell Trophy, and **Best Set outwith Winning Play**, The Old Mill Trophy -Wick Players, “The Bride to Be”

Winning Play, Adam Swanson Memorial Trophy -Thurso Players, “Chinamen”.

So a very successful Festival indeed and on behalf of the Players I would like to thank the Caithness District SCDA Committee, Ron Nicol, and all those on stage, backstage, front of house, sound, lighting, costumes, music, prompts and everyone else involved, for all their hard work in making the Festival the marvellous occasion it was.

We hope to see as many of you as possible at the next stage of the proceedings, the Highland Divisional Finals at the Assembly Rooms in Wick on 25th and 26th March. The Caithness Team will be performing “Chinamen” on Friday 25th March, along with the winner of the Highland Divisional Youth Festival. So please come along and support Thurso Players and all of the other SCDA entries at this prestigious event.

Philip



Pinocchio 2010

The curtain has lowered on Pinocchio and I have had a lot of spare time on my hands to reflect on this years show and I would like to thank everyone for the hard work and determination that made this years pantomime such a success

I have received a wealth of useful feedback both positive and constructive and think that this year's show was an amazing achievement for all involved, and again everyone pushed the limits to deliver a show that was beyond my expectations.

I would like to Thank The Production Team, Musicians, Set construction, Stage Crew, Wardrobe, Make up, Props and the extremely talented artists who painted the fantastically bright and creative Cloths that wowed our Audiences night after night. Also a big thank you goes to the front of house team who look after our audience.

As for the cast, it has been an honour to work with a fantastic group of talented and hardworking people whose creativity and dedication brought this production to life and entertained sold out audiences over 5 performances.

And finally the biggest thank you of all must go to Denise Imrie for giving us a pantomime to perform. Denise has never written anything that she has not gone on to direct herself and I feel very privileged that she displayed such trust in me to hand over her script.

Andrew Crawford



Opening of our Mill extension - Thank You

It was a happy occasion when Margaret Viscountess Thurso opened our new extension of the Mill. As usual we were graced by her presence and afterwards we were treated to a splendid buffet.

Thurso Players would like to offer their congratulations to Viscountess Thurso on the awarding of her OBE for her many years of service to the community.

Joy



Forthcoming Productions.

Dogstar TC play “Sweetness Sat.12th March 7.30pm.
(Professional Production)

“Strictly Sondheim” Wed/Thur/Fri/Sat 1/2/3/4th June 7.30pm.
(Players Production)

“Art” by Jasmin Reza an informal play reading led by Philip Arthur
Sat. 11th June 7.30pm.

“Whoops 15” Annual junior workshops 4th-16th July.
2 performances Fri 15th & Sat 16th July 7.30pm.

“I Am Hamlet” comedy/ thriller play to be performed late summer.
Date to be announced. (Players Production)

MsFits (Fiona Knowles) Comic one woman show. Wed 31st Aug.

“Puss-in-Boots” Pantomime. Thurso High School. December
Date T.B.A.

Key Holders

This is just a reminder to all Mill Keyholders that they are in charge of checking the basics when they lock up -

Are all the fire exits closed (*the one next to the kitchen has been left open a few times*)

Are all the lights out (*remember some one else may have switched lights on somewhere*)

Is the heating switched off (*the auditorium heating will cut out after a few hours but still costs a fortune to run*)

We have had some issues with passers by entering the downstairs part of the mill during rehearsals so it may be prudent to lock the door once everyone has turned up, but remember to remove the key from the inside of the door otherwise no one else who has a key can get in.

I will be arranging a refresher session for all keyholders in the near future, if any one else needs training please get in touch.

Remember you should not give your key to anyone who has not been trained or you will be held responsible.

Regards

John

Editorial

Once again my thanks to all those who contributed to this issue of the Thurso Players Newsletter. It is gratifying to have so much support. Please keep the articles coming in - joy@shelligoe.co.uk or via Lesley J. Write about your experiences, thoughts and views, and what about Thurso Players History? Last but not least, all our good wishes go to Joan.

Joy

Please Note !!

Will all members please note; especially in these days of electronic communication; that anything set up in the name of “Thurso Players” must be passed to the committee for sanction.

This is in accordance with Thurso Players constitution.

Lesley

Friday Night Workshop

Amazing! The opportunity to do these workshops has had a massive impact on the both of us. Working with the Junior Players has been an experience; watching each player grow in confidence and skill is gratifying but also so much fun. We have worked on skills like improving: monologues, improvisations, dance and team building skills.

Over the next coming weeks we will be working on a showcase - that every parent is invited to attend - where the up coming thespians will be showing these skills in a short performance later in the year.

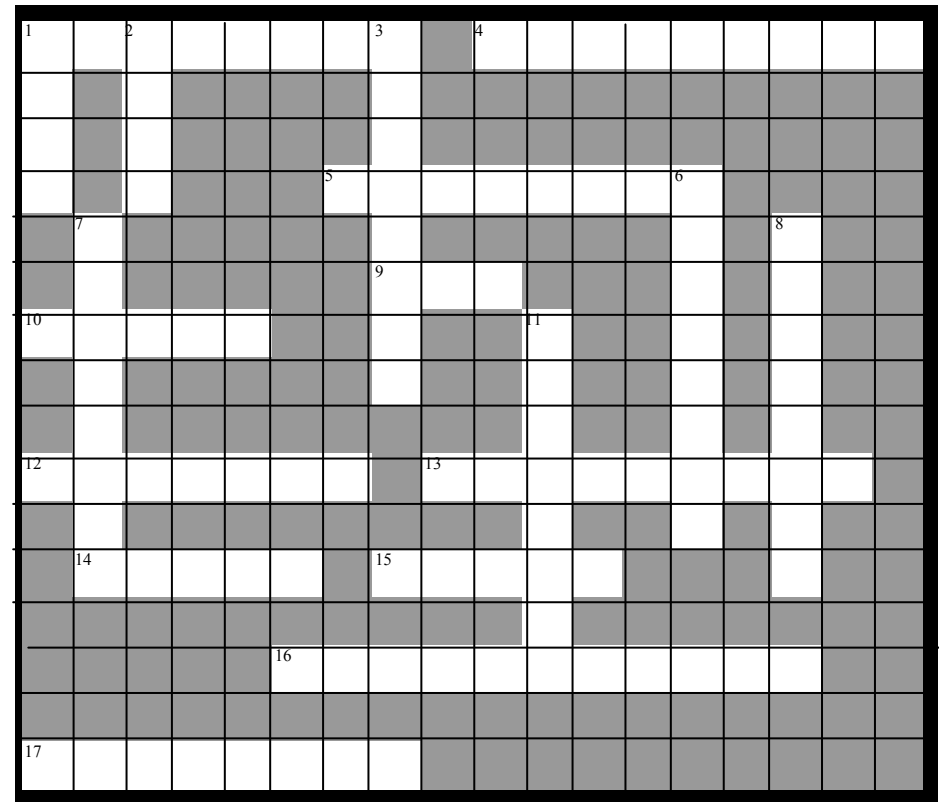
Some of the older players will also get a chance to do junior representing during the next couple of weeks to again further their leadership skills in drama.

We (Lizzy Ross and Brady Rae) have thoroughly enjoyed being junior reps and are truly thankful to have the opportunity of working with such wonderful, talented and enthusiastic kids.

Puss in Boots - Panto 2011

Early production work for Panto 2011 is going well. We currently have a script which has been read by a panel of experienced actors directors and musicians of varying ages. All agreed that the script is a good bare bones with a sound storyline. This gives me as a director a good feeling that with the ingenuity of a cast establishing their characters and audience interaction sections and the addition of a careful music element we will have a very good potential show for 2011. To aid communication updates on Panto information will be published from time to time on "The Mill Theatre" page in facebook for those of you who use facebook. I am also looking into creating pre-audition information for those interested in things like number of roles available and character outlines. These will be slightly larger documents or simple spreadsheets and I will arrange for those to become available over the summer months on the Thurso Players' website. If anyone has an uncontrollable urge to want to contribute to the creative process at the early stage please feel free to tell me and whether it be set, costume, music, props, etc. please contact me. John Glen 01847 851490 tazfan@btinternet.com

Thurso Players



ACROSS

1. Musical evening, in May
4. SCDA- Director Donna Swanson
5. John Firth's Job
9. To perform
10. Opposite to senior
12. To come first
13. Last years panto
14. What you perform on
15. ... workshop - Friday night
16. This years panto
17. SCDA- Director Eric Maughan

DOWN

1. One act plays
2. You smell with this
3. Singing in a show
6. Break a Leg
7. Like a cup
8. Use of a brush
11. SCDA- Director Audrey O'Brien