

EODL ONE-ACT PLAY FESTIVAL AWARDS PRESENTATION

Hosted by Studio Theatre Productions, Perth

November 15, 2009

Adjudicator John Lazarus

This Festival has been a treat. It has been remarkably well run, by Jeremy Dutton, Renata Seiler, Roberta Peets, my escort Rob Umpherson, and the rest of the committee. Smooth as cream cheese on Mylar. There were a couple of features that struck me that I'd like to comment on.

First, I'd like to tell you about the most motivational piece of writing I've ever read. In 1973, the Vancouver Playhouse production of George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* opened in Washington, D.C. Since nobody in the U.S. had ever seen a Canadian play, the New York Times sent one of their drama critics, Julius Novick. He wrote:

'Canadian Playwright.' The words seem a little incongruous together, like 'Panamanian hockey-player,' almost, or 'Lebanese fur-trapper'.

I cut that out and taped that to my typewriter. It kept me angry for a good long time, and helped motivate me to become a Canadian playwright. Well, those days are gone. I said this last night, but it's worth repeating: Out of nine plays in this festival, six are Canadian: three by two established playwrights, and the other three original pieces by members of the companies, all of whom then also participated in the plays, two by acting and one by directing. This represents, almost literally, a dream come true.

The second thing I noticed, perhaps connected to the first, is an evolution of sophistication. I don't want to make too much of this, but I'm heartened by the existence of Toto Too Theatre. These are exciting times in professional theatre, with all kinds of explorations of gender, ethnicity, politics and spirituality going on. I see Toto Too as a sign of enormous potential in bringing more of that kind of exploration into community theatre.

Generally speaking, I thought this was a very sophisticated festival. Don't mean to sound condescending, there's no reason why it shouldn't be sophisticated – we're all sophisticated people – but community theatre sometimes has the stereotype of being rather strait-laced and out of date, and I know that you're often up against a lot of pressures from factions in your communities. However, what with productions like *The Soldier Dreams*, *Deliver'd from NoWhere*, and *Ruby of Elsinore*, you guys are proving the stereotype itself to be hopelessly out of date.

Now we come to the hard part. Last night it started to feel as though I was deciding who does not get awards today. If you think you should have got an award, and you didn't, you're probably right. A couple of years ago I was doing a Sears high-school festival, and I said, "If you think you should have got one and you didn't, phone me" – and I gave out my phone number. Big mistake. Don't phone me.

Peterborough Examiner Award for Best Visual Production – For combined use of setting, signage, lighting and silhouette acting - *Worth It*, Dundas County Players and Shoestring Productions, Mountain.

Helen R. McGregor Award (Adjudicator's) – I thought about dividing this award among three participants, but then decided to stop being so precious about it and to honour the spirit of competition. However, the Nominees for this award are Tim Ginley and R. Keith Smith. The winner, for representing a welcome trend in community theatre of presenting new, original work, and also for writing a hell of a good script, is Moira Law, author of *Worth It*, Dundas County Players and Shoestring Productions, Mountain.

Peterborough Theatre Guild Award (Adjudicator's) – For a very funny performance, and for successfully fooling the Adjudicator and, I hope, other audience members, by means of a triumphant, sustained, masterful feat of what I'll politely call gender bending – Michael DeWolfe as Ruby in *Ruby of Elsinore*, Vagabond Theatre, Cornwall. I should add, there were no other nominees in this category!

Colin Mawson Award for Outstanding Contribution by a Student – This was close. The nominee is Aaron Beaudette, for his performance as Claudius in *Ruby of Elsinore*. However, the winner, for his backstage work as ASM, Sound Operator, and, I hear, supportive son of the Stage Manager, is Josh Lueck in *Mrs. C., You've Got a Lovely Scar*, Peterborough Theatre Guild.

Nancy Chajkowski Memorial Award for Costume Design – The nominee is uncredited: whoever created the costumes for *Ruby of Elsinore*. The winner, for two simple costumes that told us most of what we needed to know about the ladies wearing them – Monica Cleland, Barb McDerby and Cathie Raina, in *Roommates*, Kemptville Players Inc.

Now we come to the four awards for acting. In the area of acting, as in most areas here, there were too many good performances and not enough awards. I started a list of nominees, but it got silly. I started to worry that those who were going to feel singled out would be those who did not receive nominations. So forgive me, but I'm not going to list all the nominees in these categories. I singled out these winners as representative of a great many more.

Belleville Theatre Award for Acting – For a subtle and sensitive comic performance as an unsubtle and insensitive actor, who at least enters with conviction, Ian Stauffer in *This is a Play*, More Theatre, Manotick.

Mae Carmichael Award for Acting – For another paradoxical achievement: a graceful portrayal of awkwardness, in a character who is buoyed up by her dreams, Kate McDonough in *Ladies of the Mop*, Valley Players of Almonte.

Pauline Grant Award for Acting – For a cheerful and exuberant performance that sparkled, literally and figuratively, Joanna McAuley as Nola in *Would You Like a Cup of Tea?*, Studio Theatre Productions, Perth.

Nepean Little Theatre Award for Acting – For a nuanced, multi-leveled, perceptive portrayal of a man desperately trying to do and say the right thing in a difficult situation, Ken Godmere as Sam in *The Soldier Dreams*, Toto Too Theatre, Ottawa.

Penny Arril Award (Adjudicator's) – I wanted to honour this production, but I couldn't find a category to honour it in, because what makes the production so special is what's unique and unclassifiable about it: no one contribution, but the whole thing adding up to more than the sum of its parts. So this is an adjudicator's award for ensemble work: to the cast and crew of *This is a Play*, More Theatre, Manotick.

Academy Theatre Foundation Award for Best Director: The best theatrical achievement by a director. Again, the nominees were just about everybody. However, two that stood out, as nominees, were Marianne Mullen for *Ladies of the Mop*, and Joan Sullivan Eady for *This is a Play*. For the winner, this was one of those productions in which each of the performances was so strong that you figure it can't be just a coincidence. Geoff Gruson, for *Deliver'd from NoWhere*, Ottawa Little Theatre, Ottawa.

Ottawa Little Theatre Award for Best Production: For direction, minimal but effective design, and superb ensemble acting in an emotional and complex script, *The Soldier Dreams*, Toto Too Theatre, Ottawa.

[**Brighton Barn Theatre People's Choice Award**, (announced by Lee Jourard EODL Awards Chair: a tie between *This is a Play* and *The Soldier Dreams*.)]