

What's On

Your essential guide to Entertainment in Somerset and beyond

Original heroes

THREE brave local theatre groups presented play premieres in the final of Somerset Fellowship of Drama's 2006 Original Play Festival on Saturday.

Taunton Thespians, the St Gregory Players of Stoke St Gregory and the Roadwater Players of West Somerset all competed in the final at Ilminster's Warehouse Theatre.

Roadwater Players took the lion's share of the honours. Their hilarious *A Rex* for a Regina, directed by its author Geoff Best, won awards for both the best script and best production while Phaedra Rush took the title of best actress as Miss Braithwaite.

A Rex for a Regina is set in the mid-19th Century and focuses on the shenanigans of the first rehearsal of a new play (a comic verse parody of Sophocles' tragedy) on the bare boards of the Acropolis Theatre in London. Simon Passmore gave an impressive performance as the actor/manager Mr Du Barry while Mo Best found all the

comedy in her role as the hard-working prompt Miss Arbuthnot, as did Ray Eyres with his on/off performance as Mr Parsons and Brenda Mandziej as the impressively busomed Miss Fanshaw.

Jackie Evans, Patrick Daley, Jennifer Hand, Neil Wilson, Ben Lintott, Dennis Evans and Ben Horrobin all made significant contributions in this imaginative team-piece while the magnificent masks were created by Geoff Best.

This was a complex and unusual piece with some difficult dialogue for actors to learn but the well-drilled cast made it look easy, creating more laughter than any one-act play has a right to. Rarely has one come across such a buzz generated by a one-act play.

In Taunton Thespians' production of Lissa Gyll's coma drama, Mike Lord (pictured) was awarded the title of best actor for his lead role as Rob.

What happens when you go into a coma? Can you hear



what your visitors are saying? Free Fall imagines you can ... and plugs into what you are not supposed to hear as well.

The Thespians' production, stylishly directed by Martin Jevon and produced by Ron Roberts, is set in a hospital ward where Rob receives a visit from his wife Sarah and his brother Will.

Though Rob is unconscious we get to see his inner-self, thanks to an out-of-body experience presented as a double act involving Mike

Lord and John Burbery. The ever reliable John excelled in the multi- cameo role of 'Man' (the all-weather friend who is with you until the washing up is done) while Mike delivered his Free Fall speech with great stillness and chilling clinicality.

Jane Edwards gave full commitment to the demanding role of Sarah, dispensing some delicate dialogue with sensitivity. Mike Gilbert brought warmth and humanity to his contrasting role of Will, Rob's slightly younger brother.

In the St Gregory Players' production of *Stranger in The Night* by Virginia Hobart, Fran Wolfman and James House jointly won the Adjudicator's Award as bickering siblings Lucy and Robin.

These two, along with John Hembrow as Hector the critical father, and Pam Cox, as mum-who-likes-a-tipple Eileen, created a thoroughly believably dysfunctional family resigned to the prospect of having to spend

New Year's Eve together in their cut-off-on-the-moors Exmoor cottage.

Enter a mysterious stranger (Neil Morgan), whose penchant for party games helps them break through the years of familiarity and contempt to rediscover some of their long buried talents ... and even enjoy one another's company, if only for a while.

Director Arthur Cummins' polished production proceeded at a lively pace with considered movement and an excellent set concocted by Peter House, all atmospherically lit by Nick Bright.

And for good measure James House also injected a well-weighted delivery of Kipling's *If*, ever so slightly gabbled – just as the script demanded!

Audiences have another chance to see all three plays as they compete in the Somerset round of the All-England One-Act Play Festival at the Warehouse Theatre at 3pm on Saturday, March 11.



Nights with sax appeal

THE St Michael's Players of Galmington again offered a riotous and well received entertainment at two packed performances of their 'Old Tyme, New Time' cabaret-style concert.

From the sublime to the ridiculous, pathos to pathetic, and softly sung love songs to saxophone duets, the Players rang the changes with something to please everyone.

Compered by Ernest Smith with great aplomb, the audience tapped their feet, laughed (in the right places), joined in the singing and enjoyed mulled wine, nibbles and tea and coffee in between.

The two evenings raised enough to give £400 each to Taunton League of Friends and the Amani Children's Orphanage in Tanzania.

A former member of St Michael's choir, Stephen Goddard, and his wife, Julia, are planning to raise nearly £6000 through sponsorship by climbing Mount Kilimanjaro next March.

■ PHOTO: Linda Stockley (left) and Barbara Deer as 'A Couple of Swells!'

Singing for England

NEXT week hundreds of students from four schools in Somerset will take part in the recording of a charity pop single, being released to celebrate England's participation in the 2006 World Cup football tournament.

Pupils from Taunton Prep School will be laying down their tracks on Wednesday (March 8) along with students from The Castle School in Taunton.

Schools from Yeovil and Street are also taking part. The students will join tens of thousands of other teenagers from across the

country in performing a football chant which will be incorporated into a pop single.

The song, 'We are England', has been written and recorded by young English pop band Ricky, who enjoyed chart success last year with their debut single, *Stop Knocking The Walls Down*.

Profits from sales are being donated to the NSPCC.

The chant involves the repetition of the word 'easy', which has emerged in the last 12 months to become the most ubiquitous football chant in the land.

More than 200 English schools are involved with the project. Each school is recorded separately, before they are amalgamated using digital technology.

The chant will form the outro of the single.

The band hopes the collective number of voices will break the Guinness World Record for the greatest number of participants in the recording of a hit single.

The single is already available to be pre-ordered from the website of the HMV record chain: www.hmv.co.uk



Laughs in the aisles

IT is that magic moment when the bride, mother and father are about to set off for church on one of the happiest days of their lives.

Unfortunately for this hapless trio, they don't get very much further, for these three get tangled up in the merry mayhem of *There Goes The Bride*.

Taunton Thespians are staging this glorious comedy by Ray Cooney and John

Chapman as their next offering at The Brehouse.

There Goes The Bride, directed by Sylvia Fellgett, plays from Tuesday-Saturday, March 14-18, at 7.45pm, with a matinee on Saturday at 2.30pm.

Tickets are £9/£8 concessions on 01823-283244.

■ ABOVE: The *Calm Before The Storm* – Clive Linthorne as Dad, Kate Guest as the bride and Viv Sharland as Mum.

Village panto Youth celebrations

THE Cheddoners will be returning to Cheddon Fitzpayne Memorial Hall with their production of *Aladdin*.

The play, directed by Andrew Morgan, will be performed on Friday, Saturday and Sunday (March 9-11) at 7.30pm, with a Saturday matinee at 2.30pm.

A raffle will be held during each show in aid of Cheddon Church and the Children's Hospice South-West.

For tickets and further information, please call Stuart Triggol on 01823-413459.

MEMBERS of St Gregory Youth Theatre from Stoke St Gregory are playing a leading role in one of the world's largest celebrations of youth theatre.

Produced by the National Theatre and made possible through sponsorship from Shell UK, the programme Shell Connections gives 11 to 19-year-olds the chance to work on challenging new plays both on stage and behind the scenes.

Shell Connections commissions new hour-long plays for and about young people, written by some of the best contemporary playwrights, and enables schools and youth theatres from all over the UK and Ireland to produce them.

St Gregory Youth Theatre

director Liz Brown took part in the training weekend which launched Shell Connections 2006 at Theatre Royal, Bath.

She met and took part in workshops with Nicky Singer, Peter Tabern, Don Black and Debbie Wiseman, the authors of *Feather Boy – The Musical*, which she has chosen from the ten new plays on offer this year.

The group, who are currently without a home performance venue, will be performing it on Thursday, March 23, at Queen's Hall in Queen's College, Taunton (tickets £5 from Belinda Morgan on 01823-490981), then at a regional showcase at The Drum Theatre, Plymouth, on Friday March 31 (tickets £6 on 01752-267222).

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