

## Finding Your Adjudicator

Festival organisers and their committees will no doubt approach their next potential GoDA adjudicator through one of a number of routes: previous knowledge of that individual's work; recommendation from other festival organisers; observing an adjudicator at work when attending another festival; a desire to try a new name, possibly a recently appointed Associate Member; etc etc ...

One of the most useful sources is the adjudicator's own page in the list of members on the GoDA website (godauk.org). Here, the member's qualifications and experience, together with a list of his or her recent festival appointments, are laid out in a straightforward format. The adjudicator's contact details (and usually a photograph) are listed, making a first approach straightforward.

All GoDA Members, Full and Associate, have recently received a reminder from Council to ensure that their page is correct and - most importantly - up-to-date. Teresa Hennessy, GoDA's Honorary Secretary, says:

*"We are seeking to make our website pages as current and as professional as possible ... With material being updated on a regular basis, we look to ensure that each adjudicator's page provides an accurate record of assignments undertaken."*

The 2018 edition of the GoDA Directory will shortly be available to festival secretaries and organisers. Together with the website pages mentioned above, these two resources should be able to direct you towards finding the adjudicator for your next festival. Ed.

## Assessing Your Adjudicator

Festival organisers will be used to the procedure whereby they are asked to submit the results of the deliberations of their festival committee on the work of each adjudicator they employ. This is done by means of the standard GoDA Assessment Form, where the adjudicator is graded in respect of specific areas of his/her performance.

The information provided is of value in terms of assisting the maintaining of quality professional standards. Just occasionally, there may be points in the assessment report that require to be considered by the GoDA Council; and it is appropriate that any observations or concerns are given that consideration at the earliest opportunity. It is therefore important to ensure that the Assessment Form and any accompanying comments of the festival's organising committee are submitted promptly to the GoDA Secretary; if there are concerns raised, it is often difficult to address these if they are not received reasonably promptly.

Please let GoDA have your Assessment Forms, with your committee's comments, as soon as possible after the conclusion of your festival.

## Remembering ....

GoDA is sad to report the death of one of our Non-Practising Members, John Bromley from Richmond in Surrey. John was admitted to membership of the Guild in 1996 and took up non-practising status as recently as 2015.

We were also so very sorry to hear of the most untimely death of Lon David, a lady who, while not a member of GoDA, was so well known to many of us as a director of quite exceptional talent; her triumph as director of the winning entry in the British One Act Final of 2016 is especially memorable. She was a prominent member of the Drama Association of Wales.

## Not Only Festivals ...

While the adjudication of drama festivals is the main focus of the work of GoDA, there are other associated theatre skills on offer from GoDA Members. As stated in the introduction to the GoDA Directory:

*Most Members of GoDA are willing to adjudicate at speech and drama festivals and eisteddfods and to lecture on drama and various aspects of theatrical art. Members may also be available as directors of plays, operas, musicals and workshops.*

Over the coming months, the GoDA Council is planning to consider ways in which the skills, adjudicatory and otherwise, of the membership might be made more widely available.

## Tailpiece

*A cautionary tale submitted by one of our readers (names and other identifying features are removed to protect the innocent ...) Ed.*

Last week we entered \*\*\*\*\* Drama Festival – it was my third choice of play – I was refused a licence, belatedly, for the first choice, as a professional tour was within a fifty mile radius (what threat to them would two amateur drama festivals be?). However at a third attempt I cast my entry, 2m2f, only for the main actress to pull out as she had a bereavement. Re-cast, time running out, after many rehearsals new actress still having difficulty with lines. Comes the Tech – find that our own techies can only stand behind the resident ones – lighting not settled properly. Team all meet for lunch, on the way an actor trips up kerb breaks two front teeth, gravel in chin, bruised ribs and collar bone, four days before performance – he spoke with a lisp on stage.

Sufficient to say that the GoDA adjudicator was kind (two years ago at the same festival we won best actor, best set and best production)

Lessons learned.....

## Curtain Raiser

Welcome to the 2017 edition of *Asides*.

GoDA wishes to ensure that this annual newsletter, and some of the important information it contains, reaches as widely as possible across the amateur theatre spectrum. Please, therefore, feel free to photocopy these pages and pass them on to any and all of those to whom they might be of interest.

This has been a busy year in the deliberations of the GoDA Council, with a number of new initiatives under consideration. Not least of these is the ongoing work in setting up a range of practices under the general umbrella heading of Continuing Professional Development, with the purpose of ensuring that your GoDA adjudicator is ever better trained and refreshed in his or her practice. This process is being overseen by Jennifer Scott Reid together with Jill Colby (Professional Mentor) and Ben Humphrey (Information Officer).

Council has considered the subject of Equal Opportunities in respect of our response to the work we see; an appropriate Equal Opportunities statement is posted on the GoDA website (godauk.org).

GoDA has a new chairman: Jan Palmer Sayer, well known to many in the amateur theatre world, takes over the chair from Paul Fowler whose three year term of office has now come to an end. The office of Vice-Chairman is a one year appointment; the holder for the 2017-2018 year is Jennifer Scott Reid.

At the hand over of power, Jan thanked Paul Fowler for all his work as Chair, noting especially that in three years of dedication he has handled some sensitive issues with care, and has furthered the work of the Guild with other organisations. Paul's final report to the 2017 Annual General Meeting concluded thus:

*For my part it has been a privilege to serve as your Chairman for the last three years. I have learned a lot, been constantly surprised at the talent and human resources within our organisation, and have thoroughly enjoyed this fascinating role. Thank you for entrusting me with the chair – I hand it on to Jan Palmer Sayer after this meeting confident that GoDA is in good shape and moving in the right direction. And I am confident we will be able to celebrate our 75th anniversary in four years' time as a significant and healthy entity.*

## Useful GoDA Contacts

**Chairman: Jan Palmer Sayer** 9 Welwyn Road, Hertord, Herts. SG14 2 BD  
Tel: 01992 581375 e-mail: [jpsayer@yahoo.com](mailto:jpsayer@yahoo.com)

**Secretary: Teresa Hennessy** 21 Seymour Street, Cambridge CB1 3DH  
Tel: 07912 222564 e-mail: [secretary@godauk.org](mailto:secretary@godauk.org)

**Information Officer: Ben Humphrey**  
The Swan Theatre, The Moors, Worcester WR1 3ED  
Tel: 07905 915098 e-mail: [bhumphrey@worcester-rep.co.uk](mailto:bhumphrey@worcester-rep.co.uk)

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## And It's Hello From Me

I am delighted to have been elected Chairman of GoDA and I am looking forward to the next three years. We are constantly reviewing the work that we do and looking at ways in which we can improve. Currently, we are looking very hard at how we can support our Members' professional development, not just at the point of appointment but also as they continue as Full Members of the Guild. Jennifer Scott-Reid, Jill Colby and Ben Humphrey are currently looking at the issue and it will remain a priority for GoDA's Council throughout the year. Other items on our agenda are:

- Reviewing our selection process and how we prepare prospective adjudicators for that gruelling process
- Reviewing our marking system to better recognise the contribution made by all festival participants
- Reviewing what we can offer, not just to drama festivals
- How we can improve 'customer satisfaction'

At GoDA we are constantly asking organisers to rate the performance of our adjudicators. The vast majority of the Assessment Forms we receive are very positive, giving top scores in every category. But are there times when you wish you had mentioned this or that or had asked for something slightly different? We do our best to understand what is wanted and to deliver it every night, but festivals are all different and different organisers want different things from us – sometimes just assuming that we will somehow know what they want. We are flexible and we do aim to please, but do take time to discuss the following with the adjudicator, ahead of the festival:

- How long you want an adjudication to be
- Whether you want us to speak about all plays at the end of an evening or deliver one or more adjudications in the intervals?
- Whether any participants have any physical limitations or other factors which merit special consideration
- What you want us to do on the Awards night. Do you, for example, want three nominations in every category before the winner is announced? Do you want us to sum up the festival? Have you made it clear who is eligible for each award?
- Whether or not there are any other duties/functions that you would like your adjudicator to perform/attend
- Any special features of your festival that you would like upheld

This is by no means an exhaustive list but most of the points raised by organisers fall into one or other of the categories above. Talk us through any issues you have and we will do our best to make your festival go with a zing.

*Jan Palmer Sayer  
Chairman, GoDA*

## Let's talk about special needs ...

I had the privilege of adjudicating a very talented youth group at an AETF Drama Festival recently. The talking heads styled play was centred around a mental institution. One young actor gave an exceptional performance playing a mentally challenged inmate and I complimented him particularly in the way he held himself, the way he sat and maintained the action of curling his hands towards his body. Imagine my dismay when I found out later that, although my comments were well received by the team, the star performer had, in fact, special needs. The actor and his family were fine about the situation but I felt extremely embarrassed.

Theatre is a very open, inviting environment and nowadays – well – anything goes, particularly in youth theatre where the performers can experiment in a safe environment. We do not discriminate against race, sexual orientation or disability. However by stating this, we, as adjudicators, need to be more alert and ready to face the work of any challenged performer head on. At times, it is quite obvious that a performer has a disability of some kind; however, during this festival it appeared to be an accomplished piece of movement observation. In light of my experience, I now ask festival organisers to state in my contract whether there are any challenged performers taking part so that I am fully aware. I will also ask the organiser on the first night if there is anything I should be made aware of.

Some performers may not wish their disability to be highlighted; however this puts the adjudicator in a precarious situation. If the dialogue does not flow, if there is no individual inflection, if there is little interaction or focus or indeed inappropriate movement or dialogue between certain players, we will be compelled to mark low unless we are made aware of individuals' situations.

Drama Festivals have always been about expression and celebrating theatre in all its guises. However they are also a competition. Let's have open conversation about special needs before the teams perform so that everybody can enjoy their experience and the adjudicator appreciates and has a full understanding of the hurdles each individual, and indeed each team, faces.

*Bev Jenkins*

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## GoDA Selection Weekend 2018

### A layman's experience

On 30th September seven delightful, enthusiastic but understandably apprehensive aspirants for associate GoDA membership descended on the Barn Theatre, Welwyn Garden City for this year's GoDA Selection Weekend. As the current Chairman of the All-England Theatre Festival I had the honour of sitting on the selection panel as a lay member alongside Jan Palmer Sayer, Paul Fowler and Mike Tilbury, whose accumulated stage insights and expertise dwarfed my two decades of dilettante dabbling. Notwithstanding the Grand Canyon-sized knowledge deficit separating me from these illustrious colleagues, I was warmly welcomed as an equal on the selection panel. Teresa Hennessy provided friendly, ever-attentive and efficient logistical support to both panel and candidates. Derek Palmer and his Barn Theatre colleagues provided warm hospitality (including splendid catering) for panel and candidates alike.

The programme for the weekend was clearly the product of many years of fine-tuning and I was impressed with its rigour and the opportunities it gave all the candidates to give a rounded picture of their capabilities. As an adjunct to the first session of presentations by the panel (which took in the adjudication process, the marking system and the practice of mentoring) I was grateful to have the opportunity to tell the candidates what festival organisers are looking for when they engage an adjudicator (and lob in a soapbox plea for adjudicators to act as counsels for the defence of audience interests by addressing audibility issues with much more seriousness of purpose than they do!).

I was not party to the written work element (this included an introduction to one of a generous selection of plays and a write-up of the stage adjudication delivered on the second day) which accounted for 30% of the marking scheme. The oral elements of the assessment (making up the remaining 70% of marks) comprised an interview and an adjudication from the stage the following morning. The interview questions were designed to reveal the depth of theatrical knowledge of each of the candidates. I had not attended an interview (as victim or inquisitor) for many years and was quickly reminded how interview conditions can bring down the mental portcullis of even the most clear-headed souls (could you, on the spur of the moment, identify your favourite modern play and explain why it enjoys that status?).

The production for analysis by each candidate on Sunday morning was of Alan Ayckbourn's *A Chorus of Disapproval*, performed the previous night at The

Barn. It was a production that, to put it mildly, provided a wealth of opportunity for well-informed dissection (the director's decision to cut it provided candidates with further grist). All seven tyro adjudicators conquered their nerves and (aided by a ten minute warning bell) gave of their best before retiring to write up their adjudications.

The panel's final task was to draw the combined evidence of the weekend together. Some candidates gave stronger performances from the stage than their interviews prepared us for. Some emerged from interview with greater credit but gave less assured stage adjudications than might have been expected. Much detailed discussion ensued before the panel was able to finalise its recommendations for submission to the GoDA Council.

This was an instructive and hugely enjoyable weekend. I returned home with a better take on what makes a good adjudicator, an enhanced appreciation of what they put themselves through and a solidly reinforced conviction that I would only become one if electrodes were forcibly strapped to sensitive parts of my body. I was impressed by the courage, enthusiasm and obvious love of theatre of all the candidates who made the trip to The Barn and by GoDA's sensitive and skilled management of their weekend.

*Ian Clarke  
Chairman, All-England Theatre Festival*

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## Paying the Piper

Adjudication fees have always been a matter for negotiation between festival and adjudicator. There is no 'standard GoDA rate for the job'; however, there has always been a minimum level of fee set by the GoDA Council.

This minimum fee has, for some years now, been set at £85 (£75 in respect of Associate Members) for the adjudication of a session up to three one-act plays or one full-length play.

The GoDA Council has now reviewed this minimum rate and agreed a small increase: for Full Members the minimum fee is now £90 per session; for Associate Members the figure is £75. Festivals and adjudicators may, of course, negotiate a rate beyond these figures.

These new rates come into effect from the date of the 2017 Annual General Meeting of GoDA (September 2017).