

# City Players and Theatre Group take most festival prizes

**B**ETWEEN them the Nairobi City Players and the Theatre Group swept the board at this year's Kenya Drama Festival and provided the three winning plays which will be performed at the final shows tonight.

The City Players' entry *The Valiant* produced by Denis Patience was judged the best of the festival both by the adjudicator, Mr. Denis Carey, and the audience.

For her part in the play Nancy Roe was awarded the prize for the best actress.

She was presented with her trophy by the chairman of the festival committee, Mrs. Dorothy Patience, who won the title in last year's festival.

Rebecca Njau was awarded the prize for the best original play, *The Scar*, and became the first African author to win this award. The play, presented by the City Players with a cast from the Kenya Institute of Administration, was placed third by Mr. Carey.

Robert Young, who produced the Theatre Group's entry — extracts from *Waiting for Godot* — was awarded the prize for the most outstanding producer, and this entry also brought Bob Butler the best actor's prize and Graham Ramsden — who played a diminutive urchin — the award for the best supporting actor. Mr. Carey placed this entry second.

The award for the best supporting actress went to Anne Garbett in the Nairobi Amateur Dramatic Society's entry, *Family Album*, and the prize for the best decor went to Mary O'Hara who designed the African setting for the Nairobi Amateur Dramatic Society's presentation of excerpts from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Summing-up the last night of the festival — which consisted of *Family Album*, *The Valiant* and *Waiting for Godot* — Mr. Carey said that he did not wish to criticise the last two plays. There was the odd fault, but nothing of importance.

## Clearly audible

He added that it was noticeable in these two plays that every word had been clearly audible — which could not be said of all the entries — and both had been very exciting.

In *Family Album* only Miss Garbett and Winifred Ferguson, who also produced the entry — and then had to dash over to the Donovan Maule Theatre to take part in *The Reluctant Peer* — had been audible. Miss Ferguson had made the mistake, made by two other producers in the festival, of combining production with a leading role instead of guiding the play from out front, Mr. Carey said.

Of the festival as a whole Mr. Carey said he had found excitement in most of the entries. The festival was important and must be treated seriously. He praised the actors in the festival's three African casts for their sincerity on stage.



Nancy Roe (right) receives the award for the best actress from the chairman of the festival committee, Dorothy Patience, who won the title last year. Nancy Roe also won the award in 1962.



Bob Butler with his trophy as the best actor of the 1964 Kenya Drama Festival. He played one of the two tramps in "Waiting for Godot".



Denis Patience, producer of Nairobi City Players' "The Valiant", which was judged the best play of the festival by both the adjudicator and the season ticket holders, holds the challenge shield presented to him by his wife.

"I think it is important to go ahead with the festival and the more multi-racial it is the better — because we must all live together," he said.

The festival had been seldom depressing and often surprising — "It has been fun" — and it had shown an amazing co-operation between Africans and Europeans in putting on good productions.

## New spirit in the theatre

A SUBTLE change has begun to come over Kenya's amateur theatre movement, but this year's festival is no less alive in interest and, probably because of the change, more attractive to players and audiences. The adjudicator summed up the new spirit when, at the close of the first night, he remarked "Shakespearean comedy in an African setting, a play about the teenage menace in Britain and a classical myth brought up-to-date, added up to a wonderful evening". Coming from somebody as experienced as Mr. Carey, this is praise indeed.

He has played in and produced many Shakespearean plays, including *Crazy Gang* excerpts from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and he remarked how difficult it was to find something new for that occasion, which was a command performance. But the Nairobi African Dramatic Society succeeded in their version, with "something completely fresh and enchanting". Who ever heard of Shakespeare being played in African costume against a backdrop of Mt. Kenya?

Several amateur societies have closed their doors because so many people have left Kenya, and there is, regrettably, no Asian representation in the festival, but the African participation has increased in quantity, form and style. Of the nine entries, two are by African companies, while the City Players have put on a third with an entirely African cast. This is also an original African play, Rebecca Njau's poignant tragedy of village prejudice steeped in tradition, *The Scar*. One play entirely in Swahili has appeared this year, *Nakupenda Lakini*, by Henry Kuria, entered by the Tausi Dramatic Club.

How this society became stage struck is a captivating story in itself, for originally they were soccer players at Bahati. As they had no money to pay the expenses of "away" fixtures, they began to put on shows to raise funds. Like Bottom before them, they developed a love for play acting and soon became "translated".

# 'It was more alive with the spirit of a festival'

**T**HE final night of the Kenya Drama Festival at the National Theatre was — far more noticeably than on the previous two evenings — alive with the spirit of festival. For the first time for a very long time one could feel the complete rapport between actors and audience.

This was undoubtedly encouraged by the fact that the first production on the programme was a musical-in-miniature by Noel Coward, *Family Album*, presented by the Nairobi Amateur Dramatic Society.

Despite its apparent success with the audience, the adjudicator, Denis Carey, was not unduly impressed with this offering. Describing the play itself as Coward at his best, he was disappointed that the producer was also one of the leading players. This was the third time this situation had arisen during the festival, and on each occasion it had led to trouble. Had the producer been able to spend all her time "in front," he said many of the voice-level faults (which occasionally led to inaudibility in the singing) could have been rectified. Nevertheless, he complimented several individuals in the cast on their personal clarity — including producer, Winifred Ferguson.

## TOO CLEAN

On the other two plays — *The Valiant* by the Nairobi City Players; and excerpts from *Waiting For Godot*, by the Theatre Group — Mr. Carey said he was not prepared to comment beyond the fact that in the latter play Estragon's legs were noticeably and fascinatingly too clean. He found both productions very exciting.

Speaking of the festival in general, the adjudicator wished it had been possible to see all the plays before having to make any comments on any of them. He felt that by adjudicating in three separate sessions, according to custom, it was not possible to fix a standard by which the entries could be satisfactorily judged. He was, however, most impressed by the great fund of talent, and particularly commended the

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standard of design and production.

Mr. Carey expressed disappointment that there had been no Asian entries this year. A festival of this nature thrives on the blending of all talents of all races; and he remarks particularly on the exciting results obtained by African and European actors and producers working together for this year's festival.

## UNEXPECTED

In his distribution of awards, the adjudicator was, to some extent, as unexpected as he had been reticent in his comments. He was, however, at one with the audience on his choice of the winning play. *The Valiant* (Nairobi City Players) won both the Shield and the Audience Award. *Waiting For Godot* (Theatre Group) and *The Scar* (Nairobi City Players) were second and third respectively. These three plays will be seen again at two performances today at 5.30 and 9 o'clock.

The award for the best original play went to Rebecca Njau for her play *The Scar*. The best actor was Robert Butler (Theatre Group); best actress, Nancy Rowe (Nairobi City Players); best producer, Robert Young (Theatre Group); and the best decor award went to Mary O'Hare for her setting of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Nairobi African Dramatic

Society). The best supporting actress was Anne Garbett (Nairobi Amateur Dramatic Society) and best supporting actor, Graham Ramsden, who played the Boy in *Waiting for Godot* (Theatre Group).

Summing-up this year's festival from a critic's point of view, I would say that the keynote has been the quality despite the lack of quantity. Every entry had some merit. Some had moments of tedium, others moments of acute embarrassment; but even these were redeemed by either a good individual performance or a neat touch of production.

It has been, on the whole, a successful festival. But in order to make it as truly festive as this year's adjudicator would like it to be, I think its format should be re-thought, its rules reviewed and its purpose reappraised — and this should start now. There is a good case for widening the scope of this important event in Kenya's theatrical life, broadening its basis, and throwing away some of its outmoded ways and means.

For the sake of Kenya's embryonic theatrical culture I hope this will be done.