

# This must be the last one!

## Kenya Drama Festival a 'feeble marathon'



● A scene from the winning play.

### THEN COME THE AWARDS



● Nancy Roe, winner of the Best Actress award for her acting in "Men Without Shadows."



● Eric Royston-Prince looking at the Kenya Drama Festival Shield for the best play.

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The first, and immediate, conclusion to be drawn from the opinions of regular attenders and from the remarks of the adjudicator, Clifford Williams, is that this year's festival was a miserably feeble marathon — and ought to be the last of its kind.

"This year has proved," said Mr. Williams to me after it was all over, "that, after nine years of festivals of this kind, standards have not been raised by bringing out expensive adjudicators — much as we like coming."

An adjudicator, under the present system, has only about 25 minutes' direct contact with each group, during which time he has to try to make as many points, offer as many hints, give as much verbal help as he can cram into so short a time, and the consequence is that much is left unsaid, unaided and undemonstrated, and actors and producers get no chance really to benefit, as they do not have a chance to take in fully all that is being explained to them.

"They ought to pack in competitive festivals," said Mr. Williams; and he suggested that, instead, the adjudicator should have the chance to work WITH each group for a couple of days before any public showing, giving all the help he can.

### Failings

Then when the time for adjudication arrived he would be in a better position to judge more fairly, be more constructive in his criticism, and have a better understanding of the real potentialities and failings of each company.

"With a large entry, such as there was this year, how can an adjudicator be really fair?" he asked me. "You have the new and inexperienced groups side by side with the bigger power-driven amateur companies — all unknown quantities to an outside adjudicator — and they follow each other in quick succession.

Putting them into a rather false order of merit is a completely unreal process.

By  
**ROBERT BEAUMONT**

Clifford Williams' case for the complete revision of the system of prize-grabbing drama festivals in this country is, I think, a very strong one. And he neatly illustrated how lack of contact between adjudicator and performers can deceive the former.

He had praised fulsomely in his public adjudication from the stage the ensemble playing of one group which had a large cast and a mixed one. As he put it: "I got carried away by the excitement of seeing them playing together so well, and had really said all I had to say."

So, when it came to the private word, he was just wondering how to snare on his public remarks, when he noticed how the group had arranged itself to hear his pearls of wisdom. On one side of him was a solid mass of white faces, and on the other a solid mass of black.

So much, he thought, for my extravagant remarks about integration and ensemble playing! But the situation was heightened by a pompous remark from a white face, which, indicating the black group on the other side of him asked: "Have you any parti-

cular hints you could give them? After all, they're very new to it."

The question was, undoubtedly, well-intentioned; but it heightened the futility of competitive drama festivals. It also illustrated how amateur actors can so often be more concerned with the shortcomings of others than with their own — which helps to account for why they cannot properly assimilate the high-speed advice of visiting adjudicators. For, to Caesar's wife, Caesar's wife is always above suspicion!

The awards this year were:  
**Winning Entry:** Pullman Car Hiawatha — The Railway Players.

**Best Actress:** Nancy Roe in *Men Without Shadows* — Nairobi City Players.

**Best Actor:** Frank Price in *No Fixed Abode* — Nairobi City Players.

**Best Producer:** Eric Royston-Prince for *The Stolen Prince* — Hiawatha — Railway Players.

**Best Decor:** Davinda Lamba — for *The Stolen Prince* — Artists' Welfare Guild.

**Best Up-country Society:** Molo/Turi Arts Club — Lunch Hour.

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This year, Mr. Williams is back with us, a small, riveting figure, whose hesitant eloquence provides an entertaining epilogue to each evening.

Both he and the organisers of the Festival are faced with the problem of standards. Last year there were no African entries, and obviously it would be foolish to discourage the enthusiastic groups who entered this year by applying too rigorous standards of criticism.

But the fact remains that the African productions were dreary and Mr. Williams cleverly avoided saying so.

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Now there is no reason why we should have to make excuses for African theatre. Mr. Williams dwelt at length on the difficulties of using a second language, but I have seen productions of Shakespeare at the Alliance High School that were more articulate than many West End productions, and with the *Pot of Gold* this same school put all the European entries in the Junior Drama Festival to shame.

Whether my standards have slipped in the last two years, or whether Mr. Williams has become more intolerant, I am reluctant to say—but it struck me that in applying this double standard he dismissed some of the worthwhile entries too curtly, and waxed unduly eloquent over the least imaginative productions.

The first evening was not as tedious as Mr. Williams made out. *The Tricolor Suite*, presented by the Post Office Drama Society, may have been no more than a witty trifle—but it was witty, and despite some uneven playing in the supporting roles, it was notable for the relaxed performance of Wilfred Moore as the philandering hero.

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The third offering was the Artists' Welfare Guild production of *The Stolen Prince*, a visually elegant fairy-tale that Mr. Williams found too naive for his liking. It was adequately played, and Manzoor Cokar made a slyly enjoyable up-staging property man.

The second night opened with a local play, S. F. Bailey's *Going Up?*, which Mr. Williams dismissed out of hand.

Personally I found this allegory intriguing, though perhaps more fitted for a revue sketch than a play, and the actors of the Nairobi Arts Theatre, encased in a small lift, dealt expertly with the significant small-talk.

Machakos Training College unwisely decided to stage *Everyman*. This wordy, sententious play may have impressed our forebears, but to arouse our interest it requires a command of English that these players simply did not possess, although H. Jones made a very brave stab at the leading role.

A high spot of the Festival was the Nairobi City Players' presentation of *No Fixed Abode*. Against a superb set by Avril Alford, Frank Price gave

a hypnotic performance as the senile Grandpa, experiencing a moment of truth in a sordid doss house.

The other players were in sympathetic support, and Len Pierrepont's production was commendably taut.

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Mr. Inamdar saw fit to ask our indulgence for the Ralph Bunche Academy production, *Abraham Lincoln*, which prompted some remarkable indulgence on the part of the adjudicator.

This prosaic piece, which condenses the life of the President into four short scenes, was dreary in the extreme, and redeemed only by the playing of D. Kalatto in the title role—an actor who has a considerable stage presence.

The second offering by the Nairobi Arts Theatre was N. F. Simpson's *The Form*. Simpson is a fascinating playwright, a writer concerned with words as powerful forces, counters in an elaborate but logical fantasy.

Here, for the first time, I was in complete agreement with Mr. Williams in his assessment of the play, and with the expert way in which the actors dealt with Simpson's peculiar brand of lunacy.



## CRITICS' CORNER

# KENYA DRAMA FESTIVAL

By JENNIFER BUNGEY

THE 1962 Kenya Drama Festival is once more being judged by Clifford Williams, who has been appointed assistant director of the Stratford Royal Shakespeare Theatre since he was last here two years ago.

The Post Office Drama Society opened the festival with "The Tricolour Suite," a charade revolving around the affairs of Andre Garnier with the wives of three successive French Finance Ministers.

Wilfred Moore, as Andre Garnier, was singled out for keeping the action going, but the producer should have condensed the play into a shorter time. The set — covering several scenes — was quite well thought out.

"The Stolen Prince" was badly chosen by the Artists' Welfare Guild for an adult audience. The set and opening music aroused expectations of something more titillating than this pretty fairy tale.

### EASE

In Mr. Williams' opinion the tedium of the evening was only relieved with the Nairobi African Dramatic Society's presentation of "Rory Aforesaid." Based on a 15th century French farce, this provincial court scene transposed remarkably well to its modern African setting. The actors moved and delivered their lines with ease.

S. F. Bailey produced his own play "Going Up?" — the only locally written entry this year, and it received only a cool welcome from Mr. Williams. He criticised the complete inaction of the plot — five characters exchanging ideas (all is inevitable, everything has a beginning and an end, and everything goes round in circles) in an actual-size lift

in the centre of a blackened stage going up apparently indefinitely.

The actors and actresses appeared to be at ease in this situation, but it was too short a play to carry the repetition used to underline the ideas.

The medieval morality play "Everyman" was the choice of the Machakos Training College. That this was an all-female cast was not important but, with the possible exception of Everyman himself, there was not nearly enough drive in the production.

### GOOD SET

Frank Price gave an outstanding character performance of Grandpa in "No Fixed Abode," very well supported by the other four actors from Nairobi City Players. The set by Averil Alford excellently evoked the atmosphere of the doss-house.

Very few can have been prepared for the devastating condemnation by Mr. Williams of the choice of the Theatre Group, Nairobi, of "A Family Occasion." It did, after all, give a certain amount of scope on various emotional levels, but the placing of the cast was badly arranged and — as in a number of entries — arms were self-consciously evident. The set was pedestrian.

The inexperienced Ralph Bunche Academy offered "Abraham Lincoln." It was not always easy to hear the lines being spoken, but Mr. Williams felt that the hero, D. Kalatto, was a promising actor.

Wednesday evening closed with N. F. Simpson's "The Form," by Nairobi Arts Theatre — played as it should be with serious response to the most lunatic situations. Robert Butler and Robert Neil were highly commended.

# Final play of night again wins praise from adjudicator

**A**N original play, a medieval morality and a stage adaptation of a television play made a truly mixed bag for the second night of the Kenya Drama Festival at the National Theatre. As on the first night, it was the last play of the evening that earned the highest praise from the adjudicator, Mr. Clifford Williams.

This was *No Fixed Abode*, written for television by Clive Exton, and presented by Nairobi City Players as the first of their two festival entries.

Here at last was a play being acted with confidence, Mr. Williams said, and he rejoiced to find a group of players who had "got beyond the level of those funny little gestures actors make as a substitute for acting".

"By and large, we had a good team here," he said. But the group had been hampered by a certain sentimentality in the writing of the play, which was easier to overcome on television than on the stage.

## Original play

The setting — by Avril Alford — showing a men's doss-house was extremely good.

Of *Going Up?* written and produced for the festival by S. F. Bailey of the Nairobi Arts Theatre, Mr. Williams said he always welcomed a new play, but his welcome was not a very big one for this.

It reflected a modern tendency towards plays of mood rather than plot, but to succeed, the mood and talk had to be first-rate. Apart from a few clichés about the difficulties of living and the certainty of going up or down at the end he failed to see what *Going Up?* was about.

The acting had been generally good although the actors were somewhat at sea.

The medieval play *Everyman*, presented by the Machakos Training College, had been a bad choice because of the special problems it posed.

## 'Too genteel'

Mr. Williams said he was not referring to the fact that it was played entirely by women, because this did not affect the symbolism of the piece.

But it was a play which needed enormous gusto and magnificence and directness in its speech. Instead, the speech had been too pretty, too delicate, too soft and too humble, apart from H. Jones as *Everyman*, who had had something of the passion the play demanded.

Mr. Williams felt that something more could have been done by the same group had the production not been so genteel.

It was in some ways harder to do than Shakespeare, he added.

Tonight's plays are the second City Players' entry, *Men Without Shadows* by Jean Paul Sartre, *Abu Hassan Pays His Debts* by Ronald Hadlington and presented by The Orient Art Circle; and John Mortimer's *Lunch Hour* presented by the Molo-Turi Arts Club.



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# Drama Festival urged to be non-competitive

## RAILWAY GROUP GAINS TROPHY

**S**HOULD the Kenya Drama Festival become non-competitive?

This was the parting shot delivered by the festival's adjudicator, Mr. Clifford Williams before announcing the awards on Saturday.

He suggested that the event might achieve its purpose better if it became non-competitive.

### Mixed feelings

Being an adjudicator, he said, was not entirely a pleasant duty — it had problems.

"One is welcomed on arrival, regarded as something of an idiot during one's stay and thought of as a pleasantly receding memory after one has gone," he added.

The theatre was an interpretive art, and the players' interpretation depended on what was being interpreted. A poor work well acted was

By  
**Standard Drama Critic**

still a poor work whereas a good work modestly acted was still good.

A good work well interpreted was bound to result in excellence.

Of the 17 plays in the festival only six were "good plays", six were of the type which "rather depend" — not bad plays, but their suitability was in doubt for the groups which acted them. The remaining five were "poor material".

The real problem was to place exactly, not only the first three plays but all seventeen. It was impossible to be absolutely certain of the order of merit.

The real difficulty lay in keeping to the rigid system of marking required by the rules which failed to take certain factors into account.

For instance, some plays depended for their success on acting and others on direction.

Also in assessing the total result of a certain play against

another one was trying to compare chalk with cheese, because theatrical presentations differed not merely on merit, but on a large number of factors.

"It makes one wonder whether a competitive event is the best way to achieve the avowed aims of the festival," Mr. Williams said.

### Better way

A non-competitive festival would, for instance, allow the adjudicator to discuss freely all the problems which the competition rules forbade him to take into account. Also the greatest use of a good adjudicator was not merely to spend ten minutes talking publicly about the play and another 15 backstage with the company.

A better way would be for him to visit each company taking part beforehand and spend an evening with them discussing, rehearsing and advising.

"They will learn more this way," Mr. Williams said. "And when they come to perform with the audience's clear knowledge that they have been tampered with by the adjudicator, I do not believe the resultant entertainment will be any less."

Mr. Williams awarded the festival's Challenge Shield for the best entry to the Railway Players for their presentation of Thornton Wilder's *Pullman Car Hwaatha*, and the producer's trophy to their producer Eric Royston Prince.

### Deep enthusiasm

Passing judgment on the production on Friday night, Mr. Williams had said: "This is certainly one of the best produced plays I have seen this week and one of the best produced amateur plays I have seen for a long time."

It had been played with deep enthusiasm, which argued great confidence in the director and resulted in a co-

## MOMENT OF TRIUMPH FOR WINNING PRODUCER



Eric Royston Prince, the producer of the winning play, the Railway Players' entry, "Pullman Car Hwaatha", by Thornton Wilder, is handed the Kenya Drama Festival's Challenge Shield by the president of the East African Theatre Guild, Miss Kathleen Robinson.

Right, Frank Price receives the trophy for the best actor, which he won for the second year running. He appeared in the Nairobi City Players' production of "No Fixed Abode", by Clive Exton.



was unable to award the trophies for supporting actors or the prize for the best original play.

As many of the week's plays had depended on ensemble playing, with no part subordinate to another, the number of people who could be defined as supporting actors were few. He regretted that he could make no award.

There had only been one original play, *Going Up?* by S. F. Bailey of the Nairobi Arts Theatre. Mr. Williams was sorry he could not make the award to Mr. Bailey for he supported the new work.



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SHASHI KAPOOR  
NANDA  
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