

# 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.

THE predatory pleasures of the Kenya Drama Festival having taken people's minds off power politics for the last week, let us, now that it is over, consider what other values this year's festival might be said to have had.

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.

The prizes for the best original play and for the best supporting players were not awarded.

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# ON STAGE AT THE DRAMA FESTIVAL

By JENNIFER BUNGEY

**I**N his final summing up of Thursday's entries in the 1962 Drama Festival, the adjudicator, Clifford Williams, explained why he thought there had been some failure in Rurik Ronsky's production of Jean Paul Sartre's *Men Without Shadows* by the Nairobi City Players.

This is an argument on two levels — a realistic action basis overlaid with ideas, especially that life is built up on a series of decisions between alternatives. The imprisoned and tortured main characters strongly portrayed the realism, but there was not the indication of the second level.

As a Greek, Robert Kingston-Davies was most convincing — but this could not be said of the rather light playing of the torturers.

The prison setting by Sbish and Errol Trzebinski on one half of the stage was effective and even gave some hint of the idealistic plane.

## Colourful

It was regrettable that a better vehicle had not been found for the potential acting ability of Visho Sharma, the hero of *Abu Hassan Pays His Debts*. Mr. Williams considered that the Orient Art Circle's performance was vital, if not necessarily good. The setting and costumes were colourful.

The first up-country presentation this year was John Mortimer's *Lunch Hour* from the Molo/Turi Arts Club. The one criticism put forward was that The Girl (Diana Furse) should slow down her part; her words rattled out, but there should have been the underlying suggestion of what did not materialise in this lunch hour spent in a small hotel near King's Cross station.

John Lawson, in his brilliant portrayal of The Man, made us aware of this. The third character, Sybil Burns, gave good support.

# Riddle of the final choice

THOUGH he has given few indications so far of what his final choice is likely to be, the adjudicator of the Kenya Drama Festival, Mr. Clifford Williams, probably will spring some surprises when he gives his summing-up tonight.

The result is anybody's guess, but on Thursday the night's entries as a whole earned higher praise than on the earlier nights and, as before, it was again the last play of the evening which received the greatest commendation.

This was the Molo-Turi Arts Club's performance of *Lunch Hour* by John Mortimer, which Mr. Williams described as a tragi-comedy of ambiguity, counterpoint and tremendous irony.

It evoked the correct response — a mixture of laughter and compassion—from the audience. Only one more thing was needed to put it completely "in gear" and that was for the two major players to have been more aware of the real, rather than the imaginary, issues in the play.

The breakneck speed with which it was played robbed it of its real essence.

## Fine performance

Mr. Williams praised John Lawson for a very fine performance as the leading man and Diana Furse for a performance "not far behind him", but requiring some slowing down and gentler treatment.

The teamwork of the Nairobi City Players was highly praised in their second entry of the festival — Jean-Paul Sartre's *Men Without Shadows*.

"The acting revealed an extremely tight-knit ensemble," Mr. Williams said. The cast was well disciplined, on its toes and projecting well.

In spite of this, he thought the "whole thing a bit phoney". This was mainly because the group had not appreciated that Sartre was not writing a naturalistic drama but a didactic melodrama using naturalistic forms.

The actors had to realise that Sartre merely intended them to be mouthpieces for his arguments. They and the director had struggled manfully but had misconceived the idea behind the play.

The Orient Art Circle which presented *Abu Hassan Pays His Debts* by Ronald Hadlington, had been unambitious, Mr. Williams said.

"One cannot knock it for its good humour, its charm and innocence, but I cannot think what to praise it for either," he said.

There had been a strong, vital and ebullient performance from Visho Sharma in the title role and everyone else had been always reasonable, jolly and pleasant.

"But if the potential of these actors is going to be explored they must pit themselves against more stretching material than this play," Mr. Williams said.

Tonight the Turbo Amateur Dramatic Society will present the second piece by N. F. Simpson to be used in the festival — an excerpt from *One Way Pendulum* — and the final play of the week will be an excerpt from *The Browning Version* by Terence Rattigan with the Mombasa Little Theatre Club.