

SATURDAY - 17th October 1964

NAIROBI CITY PLAYERS

"THE VALIANT" by Holworthy Hall and Robert Middlemass

Cast:

Warden Holt	Wilfred Moore
Father Daly	Richard Gregory
James Dyke	Frank Horley
Josephine Paris	Nancy Roe
Dan	George O'Hare
An Attendant	Jack Longford

Scenes: The Warden's Office in the State Prison at Wethersfield, Connecticut

Time: About half-past eleven on a rainy night

Stage Manager: Jack Longford

Set by: Frank Horley

Produced by: Denis Patience

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 commendable 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 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 Tsuri Dramatic Club. How this society became stage struck is a captivating story in itself, for originally they were soccer players at Bahari. 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 "trained".

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

By ROBERT BEAUMONT

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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

THE 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 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

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.

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Two African plays praised by festival adjudicator

AFRICAN humour was capable of triumphing over even the most serious situations, the adjudicator at the Kenya Drama Festival, Mr. Denis Carey, said on Wednesday after watching the second night of the festival which included two plays written and performed by Africans.

First was *The Scar* by Rebecca Njau staged by students and staff of the Kenya Institute of Administration, with the assistance of the Nairobi City Players.

The play — a tragedy of a Kikuyu woman with modern ideas who defies tradition and superstition only to be finally defeated by her own actions — was both serious and interesting, Mr. Carey said.

The producers — Alan Simmance and Rurik Ronsky — had done an extremely good job, although the play was possibly more serious than it had appeared, because of the dominance of African humour.

Mr. Carey praised Tony Bresson for an excellent performance as a revivalist preacher, Elizabeth Nderito as a servant girl and Augusta Karanja for her performance as a dyed-in-the-wool Kikuyu gossip.

Great tempo

The other African play was *Nakupenda Lakini* — the first Swahili play to be seen by a Festival audience, and by Mr. Carey. It is a fragi-comic melodrama of violence.

Mr. Carey felt that more attention to detail could have been paid in the production, but it was, he said, the fastest play of the evening, delivered with great tempo.

He congratulated Michael Macharia for his performance in the leading role — a man who is tempted into crime in order to get enough money to be able to persuade his girlfriend to marry him.

There was also a special word of praise for Godfrey Graziano in a "character" study of a Sikh police inspector.

The other play of the evening was Benn Levy's *The Truth about the Truth* presented by the Nairobi Arts Theatre — "a fiendishly difficult play," Mr. Carey said.

It was well acted and "produced (by Robert Kingston Davies) far better than I could have produced it," he added.

Though it was not his cup of tea Mr. Carey praised the performances of Phina Simmance as a young actress and of Betty Stokes as her maid who practises witchcraft and manipulates the actions of her mistress and the playwright (Trevor Cooper-Tydemann) who hopes to interest her in his latest work.

UNDER THE CLOCK

Famous mark is missing

WHAT's happened to the most famous exclamation mark in show business?

Recent Press advertisements have been telling us that Nairobi City Players' Christmas production is to be Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma*.

But one tiny omission could have the producers sitting up at night spending hours on posters, programmes, etc — to put the celebrated exclamation mark after *Oklahoma!*

Normally I steer clear of the Nairobi entertainment world. I leave it strictly to my critical colleague Peter Macdonald.

However, *Oklahoma!* is an old favourite of mine and it is worth recounting the story of how the show began.

It started life in early 1943 as *Away We Go*. Before going on to Broadway, the producers started having second thoughts as the New York opening night became imminent.

American show business reporters were saying that it was the strangest musical comedy anybody had ever thought up for a sophisticated Broadway audience. A columnist quipped: "No legs, no jokes, no chance."

But all the co-producers could do at that stage was change to a snappier title, *Oklahoma!* (after a wife who came from those parts). Later, with a touch of genius, they added the exclamation mark.

It is a matter of history that *Oklahoma!* went on to become one of the greatest hits in musical-comedy history.

★

ADJUDICATOR IS HAPPY

THE second night of the Kenya Drama Festival at the National Theatre obviously gave the adjudicator, Denis Carey, a great deal of pleasure. Certainly it was a most varied and interesting programme.

The evening began with a new play by Rebecca Njau — "The Scar," presented by the Nairobi City Players. Set in Kikuyuland, its theme is a tragic one based on the emancipation of women

with (reasonably enough) a predominantly female cast.

Mr. Carey described it as "extremely interesting" and commented that the producers had done a very good job. In general he liked the acting, and particularly that of Tony Bresson as the Pastor and Elizabeth Nderito as Ruth in her prologue to the play.

As Mariana, Jerioth Gitau had great dignity, but, suggested the adjudica-

tor, she ought perhaps to have been older and harder to bring the full poignancy to the tragic ending. A hit with both Mr. Carey and the audience was Augusta Karanja as a village woman of ample proportions.

In a very brief comment on the second play, "The Truth About The Truth," by Benn Levy, presented by the Nairobi Arts Theatre, the adjudicator confessed that the play defeated him when he read it.

It was, he said, too long; and he was not sure what the author was getting at. Nevertheless, he congratulated the producer and the cast on making so much of it.

FASTEST

The final play of the evening was the Tausi Drama Club's production of "Nakupenda Lakini..." by Henry Kuria, in Swahili.

Remarking that, in its tempo, this was the fastest play of the evening, Mr. Carey wished, however, that more attention had been paid to the production and furnishings. The acting greatly impressed him, and he particularly referred to the effective use by the actors of their eyes and hands — tools of the actor which Europeans too often failed to use with such ease.

The adjudicator was again brief to the point of reticence in all his comments; but it was noticeable that his criticisms — although veiled by his winning personality — were more pointed than on the first evening.



Studio Jacqueline

THE 1964 DRAMA FESTIVAL

Nancy Roe, this year's Best Actress, receives her award from Dorothy Patience, Chairman of the Festival Committee.