



Mark Gale's review of 2008

WHATEVER else 2008 was in the year of Mid Sussex amateur drama, it was certainly the time of Mr W S for the shadow of Shakespeare spread profoundly over it like a warm embracing cloak.

For the rest we had to make do with the thin stock of the likes of 'Ello, 'Ello! The Darling Buds of May and thrillers that failed to thrill.

To be fair, though, there was a poignant Diary of Anne Frank at Burgess Hill Theatre Club, where 15-year-old Sophie Jones in the title role was an expressive spark of youth that drew tears and wonder.

Also raising the bar was a touching Voyage Round My Father at Henfield that was well worth the trip; and the feminist cause was well served by Memories of Water at Cuckfield, and My Mother Said, at Warninglid. Even more so by the Vagina Monologues in the Hurstpierpoint Festival, which has to be the bravest production of the year. I was lost in admiration for the sheer chutzpah of the three players. I have never believed it when directors have told me they can't do this, that and the other, because it will shock the

village. Bob Sampson grasped the nettle at Hurst, where so far as I know (and I lived there many years) minds are no broader than anywhere else, and was rewarded with full houses.

To get back to the Bard. As You Like It at Ditchling was something of a triumph for Sonia Stock who deserves all the plaudits. The Winter's Tale at Henfield, an outdoor production, was fortunate to be blessed with fine weather (on my night at least) and a disturbingly unbalanced Leontes in Graeme Muncer who made jealously seem like a clinical illness.

Give Me a Ring at Burgess Hill incorporated several key scenes from Shakespeare involving rings which gave audiences the flavour of plays as diverse as The Merchant of Venice and Richard III.

With musicals costing an average of £14,000 to stage, it's hardly surprising they are so few and far between.

Although I have never really liked The Hot Mikado it got a wonderfully slick treatment at Clair Hall, Haywards Heath, which had feet tapping. Later in the year Calamity Jane rode into town for the first time to shoot up the recession blues.

So the awards fall as follows:

Best Production: As You Like It, Ditchling Players.

Best Director: Sonia Stock, As



Sophie Jones winner of Best Newcomer award in Diary of Anne Frank Burgess Hill Theatre Club 2008



Best Director - Sonia Stock



Women with chutzpah: The Vagina Monologues

You Like It.

Best Actor: Graeme Muncer, Leontes, The Winter's Tale, Henfield.

Best Actress: Victoria Brewer, Rosalind, As You Like It, Ditchling.

Best Newcomer: Sophie Jones, Diary of Anne Frank, Burgess Hill.

Best supporting performances: Alan Carter, Jaques, As You Like It; Sylvia Foley, Madame Arcati, Blithe Spirit, Lindfield.

Best Musical: The Hot Mikado, Haywards Heath, director John Shepherd.

Best performances in a musical: David Villiers, Ko-Ko, The Hot Mikado; Katy Kinsella, as Katie Brown, Calamity Jane.

Best Design: The Diary of Anne Frank, Burgess Hill.

Best Costumes: As You Like It

Best Lighting: The Winter's Tale, Henfield.

Bravest production choice: The Vagina Monologues, Bob Sampson, Hurstpierpoint Players.



Graeme Muncer as Leontes in A Winter's Tale