

Aylmer Well Represented at Theatre Festival

19 March 2006

Aylmer Community Theatre's production of "When the Reaper Calls" by Peter Colley received several important awards at the Western Ontario Drama League Festival held March 13 - 18 in Owen Sound. The Festival is an annual event showcasing amateur dramatic talent within an area covering southern Ontario from Windsor to Burlington and Lake Erie to Georgian Bay. It features an adjudicated competition in addition to workshops and other learning experiences for participating theatre companies.

The entry of Aylmer's show into Festival was much anticipated and appreciated by the WODL membership. "Reaper" was given the highly-prized final night slot and performed before a sold-out house at the Roxy Theatre, a fully-equipped 400 seat auditorium which serves as the home of Owen Sound Little Theatre. ACT was delighted that Mayor Paul Baldwin and his wife Jacquie were able to attend the performance and lend their support on this exciting evening.

Aylmer competed against entries from Kincardine Theatre Guild (Marion Bridge), Theatre Kent (Marvin's Room), Theatre Windsor (Misery) and Theatre Sarnia (Jake's Women). Among the five competing groups, "Reaper" was proud to be ranked second overall, while the winner, Theatre Sarnia, continues to the Ontario finals at the Theatre Ontario Festival to be held in Sarnia in May.

Acting honours bestowed on Aylmer's production by adjudicator John P. Kelly included the coveted Best Actor award to David Bogaert for his role as the stoic "Harlan". His commitment to the character and his excellent sense of timing, so essential to comedic acting, were singled out by the adjudicator. A Special Award of Merit was presented to Jennifer Leack for the comic skills she brought to her performance as the pistol-waving "Colleen". She brought a sense of reality to her character which made her outbursts of energy all the more hilarious. She was also nominated for Best Actress.

The show garnered two technical awards in addition to the acting accolades. Master Carpenter Pierre Marchand accepted the Best Visual Production trophy for what was clearly the most beautiful set of the Festival. The award acknowledges the skills of Aylmer's team of set dressers, scenic painters, designers and construction people responsible for this richly decorated and highly realistic set. One of the most desirable technical prizes is the Best Coordinated Production Award, which is presented by the host theatre's stage manager to the most organized and safety conscious group in Festival. ACT's stage manager, Paul Evert, with the support of a highly competent crew, was instrumental in leading the team through the intricate load-in, set-up and tear-down process and proudly accepted the award.

John P. Kelly had additional comments for the group at the private adjudication which took place the morning after Friday night's performance. He gave particular praise to the choice of music, the numerous special effects and the high quality of acting in a well-rehearsed and disciplined company. He commended cast members Meghan Leitch (Officer McGuire), Mark Smith (Victor) and Barbara Warnock (Dora), and approved of the "search for reality" in their performances. He disagreed with some of the choices made by director Ron Sawyer in controlling the action in certain scenes, and while recognizing the beauty and practicality of the set, suggested it was too clean, and should have had a more lived-in look. He found the pacing slow in places, and felt the use of music during the

axe fight scene was “too cinematic” for live theatre. In the end, Mr. Kelly pronounced that despite any flaws in the production, it was still a totally entertaining show for the audience. For Aylmer Community Theatre, this was the ultimate tribute.

These comments are the opinions of an internationally known and very experienced director and adjudicator, and are the primary reason for attending Festival. It is an opportunity for learning, and serves to give ACT the tools and confidence to continue to represent Aylmer beyond our community with high quality and enjoyable theatre. In their first WODL adjudication last year, ACT received the awards for Best Director (Ron Sawyer) and Best Actress (Barbara Warnock), both Aylmer natives. Having built on those successes this year, there is good reason to expect further achievements in the future. Aylmer Community Theatre appreciates all the support it receives from its community partners as it strives to let people at home, and far and wide, realize that “Aylmer” means “excellent theatre”.

After a short respite, ACT has begun rehearsals on their next show, “Office Hours” by Aylmer favourite Norm Foster and directed by Barbara Warnock. Watch for this uproarious comedy to hit the boards at the fabulous Old Town Hall Theatre in early June.