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- Sections**
- Edinburgh
- West Lothian
- Midlothian
- East Lothian
- Scotland
- UK
- International
- Sport
- Business
- Politics
- Education
- Health
- Environment
- Transport
- Entertainment
- Technology
- Opinion
- Video archive
- Crossword
- Article Index
- Other Sections**
- Features
- Back Issues
- Supplements
- Other Sites**
- More News
- More Sport
- More Business
- The Scotsman
- Scotland on Sunday
- Heritage & Culture
- Living
- Dating
- Announcements
- Money
- Scotsman Shop
- Scotsman Hotels
- Fantasy Golf
- Photos Today
- SuperScotBingo
- Local Pages
- Edinburgh Festivals

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## Homegrown stars clinch Evening News drama awards

Published Date: 22 August 2008

By LIAM RUDDEN and MARK McLAUGHLIN

TWO of the Capital's best known amateur theatre companies were celebrating yesterday after winning Evening News Drama Awards for Best Musical and Best Play, on the 2008 Fringe.

Members of Forth Children's Theatre were left shocked and elated when, in their 30th anniversary year, they were presented with the inaugural Evening News Drama Award for Best Musical by BBC I'd Do Anything star, Niamh Perry, for their production of Jekyll and Hyde.

Director Claire Stewart said: "This play has been a total challenge for the kids as we're used to doing bright, happy-clappy musical numbers, but this year we wanted to explore something more dark."

Niamh said: "Amateur dramatics is where most of us start out. I was about 12 when I did my first amateur shows with the McMasters Stage School and Music Theatre for Youth.

"It's my first time at the Festival and I've seen a whole range of shows but I honestly couldn't tell you which were amateur and which were professional. They were all so good."

Edinburgh Theatre Arts were also winners – they picked up the Evening News Drama Award for Best Play for their production of Dennis Potter's Blue Remembered Hills. It was handed to them by Bullseye host Jim Bowen in a glittering ceremony in the Gilded Balloon's Library Bar.

Director Mike Duffy said: "I am absolutely delighted, and surprised in a way because we were doing a play that wasn't an obvious box office draw.

"Potter is most well known as a TV screenwriter but when I saw the play I always thought that it would be better performed on stage and I think we've just been proved right."

Clearly starstruck in the presence of Jim Bowen, Mike described the former-Bullseye presenter as "a legend".

After he handed over the award, Jim said: "I started in 'am dram' myself.

We never had any of the encouragement on offer here today, which is why awards like this are so important."

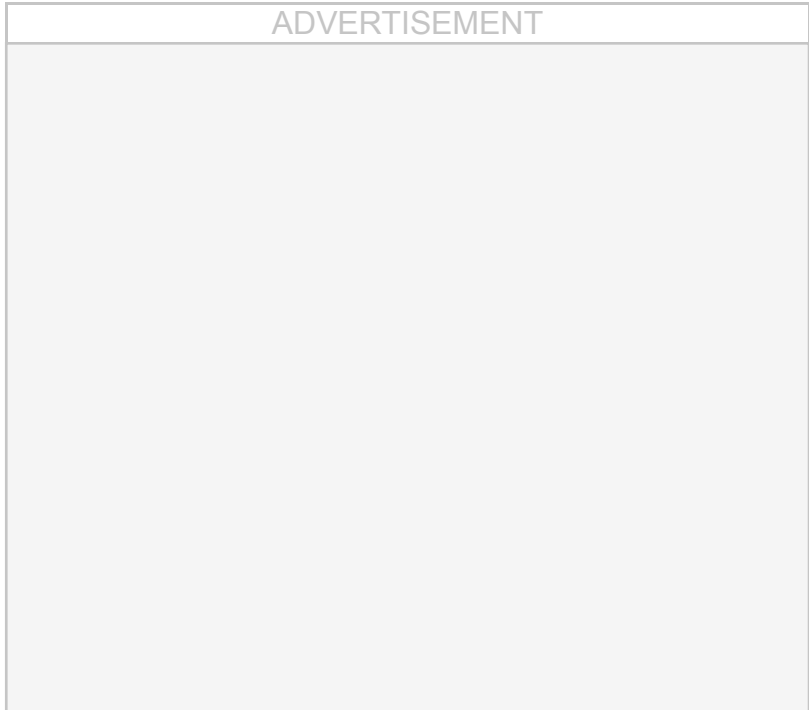
More than 100 actors, directors and producers from all 13 nominated amateur companies watched the presentation of the Endas, introduced to recognise the work of local companies during the Fringe, where coverage is often dominated by large-scale productions from across the world.

The runner-up in the Best Play category went to Leittheatre for their production of Rikki Fulton's A Wee Touch o' Class, while Edinburgh University Savoy Opera Group came second in the Best Musical category.

Southern Light Opera Drama received the first Evening News Theatre Critic's Commendation for their production of Black Chiffon, from Thom Dibdin.

SLO chairwoman and leading lady Elspeth Smith said: "I've read Tom's reviews for many years and I must say it's an honour to receive his commendation, but my fiercest critic is still my mother so I was even more delighted when she found our play enthralling."

The expert judging panel consisted of included Evening News theatre critic Thom Dibdin, Edinburgh Playhouse general manager James Haworth, actor Arron Usher, musicals producer Eleanor Brown, and Ron Cattell and Fiona Rogan of the Scottish Community Drama Association.



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Page 1 of 1

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