



Edinburgh People's Theatre (EPT)

60 Years on the Edinburgh Festival Fringe

The Beginning:

Secretary's Report to the AGM for Season 1958/59:

"We were invited last year to present a play in the YMCA Theatre during the Edinburgh International Festival of 1958. The play chosen was 'Who Loves Moraig' by Jack Ronder and directed by Jim Gallacher. The first act of this play had already won the Finals of the British Festival of Community Drama at Aberdare. The venture was enthusiastically received by Press and Festival visitors alike, and played to capacity houses throughout the three week run.

In September, we were delighted to hear that Sir Compton Mackenzie had agreed to become our sponsor."

Finance Report – Edinburgh International Festival 1958 – 'Who Loves Moraig':

August 25th to September 13th 1958 at 8pm

"There were 103 seats available in the Circle and 84 in the Stalls varying in price from 3/- to 5/-. Over the 19 performances ticket sales grossed £737-1/-. Programme sales brought in the princely sum of £48-9s-1d."

These figures would indicate that audience numbers during the run would have been circa 3,500.

The Journey:

In 1955, a young Alan Cochrane joined EPT after serving two years National Service in the Royal Navy. Alan was to become one of EPT's Big Guns. He performed in many EPT plays and later also became a writer and director. It was in 1958 he played the part of 'Hamish' in 'Who Loves Moraig'.

The following year in 1959, the Festival offering from EPT was 'Mr Bolfry' by James Bridie. Alan took the part of Rev McRimmon and acted together for the first time with a lovely young starlet, Maureen Cullen ('Mrs McRimmon'). A partnership made on stage was later to become one in real life as Mr & Mrs Cochrane.

EPT continued to produce Festival plays in the YMCA theatre over the years but it was in 1966 that they were honoured to present the World Premiere of the stage play 'Whisky Galore'. The programme notes described the production as *"distilled by our patron, Sir Compton Mackenzie, and blended for the stage by James Scotland"*.

Presenting World Premieres then became a bit of a habit for EPT and, over the next twelve years, ten further premiere shows were presented for the delectation of avaricious audiences.

Another first in 1969, was the performance of a play written by an EPT associate member. The President of EPT at the time was Bill Maconachie who persuaded his father William to write the Scots comedy 'Walk Into My Parlour'. The programme notes stated *"authorship of the play, which was submitted under a nom-de-plume to the EPT selection committee, was a well kept family secret until after it had been accepted"*.

The same year saw EPT present a late night revue 'Carry on EPT' which commenced at 10.45pm during the Festival run.

Then in 1971 ('Ne'er the Twain Shall Meet') and 1972 ('The Deil's Awa') were presented. Both these offerings were written and directed by Alan Cochrane and were well received. Alan then wrote and directed a further new play in 1974, 'Scots Wha Hae'.

'Operation Stork' by Reid Kennedy was premiered in 1975 and, in the same year, a further attempt at a late night revue was undertaken. 'Scotch and Soda' was described as *"a sparkling home brew of poetry, humour, song and dance blended to create a taste of Scotland for the international palate"*. Sadly, one reviewer was

less than impressed. It is probably not appropriate to include the review at this point, but it can be confirmed that the word “yuck” was involved. However, the general consensus was that a bad curry may have been to blame!

After 19 years at the YMCA theatre, EPT moved in 1977 to the Central Halls in Tollcross where Alan, once again, delighted audiences with a further offering, ‘The Campbells Are Comin’’. This won first prize in the full length play writing competition organised by the SCDA. Then James Scotland got a look in and EPT premiered his new plays ‘The Philosopher’s Stone’ in 1978 and ‘The Holy Terror’ in 1979.

Then in 1980, EPT moved to Lauriston Halls in Lauriston Street where they would perform on the Fringe for the next eight years before moving to St Peter’s Church Hall, Lutton Place in August 1988.

The first offering in this new venue was a rerun of the hilarious tale describing the time of the Edinburgh/Leith divide – now retitled as ‘Ne’er the Twain’ by Alan Cochrane. St Peter’s Church Hall became EPT’s main base for their Fringe presentations for the next twenty five years.

In 1993, the Scots Comedy presented was ‘Cock of the North’ by Andrew P. Wilson and directed by John Lyon. Alongside this, however, EPT took the opportunity to reprise their award winning production of ‘The Dumb Waiter’ at Diverse Attractions in Riddles Court. This had won Best Production, Best Performance and Best Set at the SCDA 1993 Drama Festival earlier that year.

The high standard of Fringe offering continued through the nineties, with the production of James Scotland’s ‘Cambusdonald Royal’ directed by Irene Beaver, winning first prize in the Evening News Capital Awards in 1994.

Then in 1995, EPT experienced a minor revolt from some new members from across the border who could not speak properly and were unsuited to the traditional Scots comedy. So in that year, alongside ‘Johnny Jouk the Gibbet’ directed by John Lyon, an additional late night production of ‘The Public Eye’ by Peter Shaffer was performed in the Roxburgh Halls.

The next year, 1996, ‘Walk into my Parlour’ was directed by Irene Beaver and ‘A Slap in the Farce’ was presented in Riddles Court, Lawnmarket under the direction of Margot Taylor. There was no rest for Irene as, in 1997, she was back directing ‘Ne’er the Twain’ at our St. Peter’s Fringe venue. Alongside this, however, the additional play in Riddles Court was another world first, an adaptation by John Somerville and Ronnie Johnston of ‘Sganarelle’ by Moliere.

Another prestigious award came in 1998 when EPT’s world premiere of ‘Hatches, Matches and Despatches’, written and directed by Alan Cochrane, was awarded a five star review and a Fringe First award from The Scotsman.

Paul Scott said in his review: *“About 12 years ago, Edinburgh People’s Theatre produced a popular Scots comedy by Alan Cochrane, ‘Ne’er the Twain’, about resistance to the amalgamation of Edinburgh and Leith. Now in their 40th year on the Fringe, they give us a sequel by the same author, set in Pilrig in 1924. We often hear about community drama. This is the genuine article, written and played by locals to the evident delight of a capacity audience from the same community.”*

This was also the first year EPT presented a Scots comedy for a two week run, followed in the third week with ‘Table Manners’ directed by Val Lennie. The third week also hosted a late night show ‘A Wake for Donald’ directed by Christine Dall. This made for a busy but fulfilling time, as all three productions were housed at our St. Peter’s venue.

Alan Cochrane, not one to rest on his laurels, was back directing again in 2000 with his brand new play ‘The Fairmer Wants a Wife’. One reviewer, Kerr McKinlay, wrote: *“Just as I was thinking they don’t write romantic Scottish comedies the way they used to, along comes Alan Cochrane’s witty new play to restore my faith in the genre.”*

There was a slight blip in 2001 when unforeseen circumstances unfortunately brought about the withdrawal of the planned Scots comedy. However, the continued involvement of EPT in the Fringe was uninterrupted as our production of ‘Woman in Mind’ by Alan Ayckbourn and directed by Bobby Moore was still able to go ahead.

Business as usual carried on in 2002 with the 2 week production of Reid Kennedy's 'Ghosts and Old Gold' directed by Irene Beaver followed by a week of Neil Simon's 'Plaza Suite' directed by Joan Hunter.

The next few years saw EPT revert to a single production of a Scots Comedy at the Fringe until another exciting new playwright burst forth from the ranks of EPT in 2006. 'Stooshie at the Store' was written and directed by Irene Beaver and was set in the St Cuthbert's Co-Operative Store on Bread Street, just before the company's centenary in 1959. Irene based the play on stories garnered from her own family history and a series of interviews with ex-workers from the Society. One reviewer stated: *"For the Edinburgh folk who have packed the Church Hall to the back seats, this is a journey of nostalgia and you can hear the murmurs of recognition with every mention of a well known character or a building now disappeared."*

For the third week of Fringe in 2006, an exciting double bill of 'The Last Tango in Newington' and 'The Dumb Waiter' was planned – unfortunately, the performing rights for the latter were withdrawn. Accordingly, EPT were very pleased to form an association with The Grads who performed 'Expect the Unexpected' - improvisation cabaret - to fill the vacant slot.

It was in this year on 8th August 2006, that The Independent published an article entitled '**Sixty fabulous Festival facts**':

"Fact 37: *The Edinburgh People's Theatre is the Fringe's longest running company, having put on a show every year since 1958. This year they will be presenting 'Stooshie at the Store', a pioneering work by Irene Beaver."*

The following year, 2007, John Lyon directed 'The Holy Terror' by James Scotland. This won runner up prize in the Evening News Drama Awards and elicited the following online review from Ken & Ray:

"Wholly hilarious! A real tonic to see a company take on the huge challenge of Scots Comedy and keep traditional Scottish Theatre on the Fringe. The acting, on the whole, was superb and in particular Stuart McEwan as the nasty, lecherous, phony minister; Iain Fraser as the wealthy, bad tempered, easily led jeweller and Mandy Black as his long suffering (?) nosey housekeeper are worthy of special mention. If you like a great laugh - whether you are Scottish or not - get yourself along to the 'Holy Terror'."

Then in 2008, Irene Beaver, further to her success two years earlier, wrote and directed a sequel called 'Stramash at the Store'. This time the play was set in October 1962, just before the State visit of King Olav of Norway to Edinburgh. This was another success for Irene, described by one reviewer as: *"a great piece of historical comedy"*.

Irene was back at it the following year writing and directing another new play 'Wha Wadna Follow Thee'. This play, about the homecoming of Bonnie Prince Charlie to Edinburgh on 17th September 1745, was presented for the first two weeks, followed by a revival of EPT's 'The Miser' for week three in 2009.

'The Miser' by Moliere had been successfully presented earlier in the year at the Church Hill Theatre and was an adaptation by another talented EPT member going under the pseudonym J J Mills (aka John Somerville). The production was under the direction of John Somerville (aka J J Mills).

Then it was time for John Somerville to turn his attention to 'The Honours of Drumlie' by James Scotland which he directed in 2010.

In 2011, Joan Hunter directed Victor Carin's 'The Chippit Chantie'. This was another award winning production, described as: *"Bright and breezy, the Edinburgh People's Theatre production of 'The Chippit Chantie' succeeds in finding both the laughs of Victor Carin's Scots comedy and the egalitarian heart beating in a play first produced in 1968."*

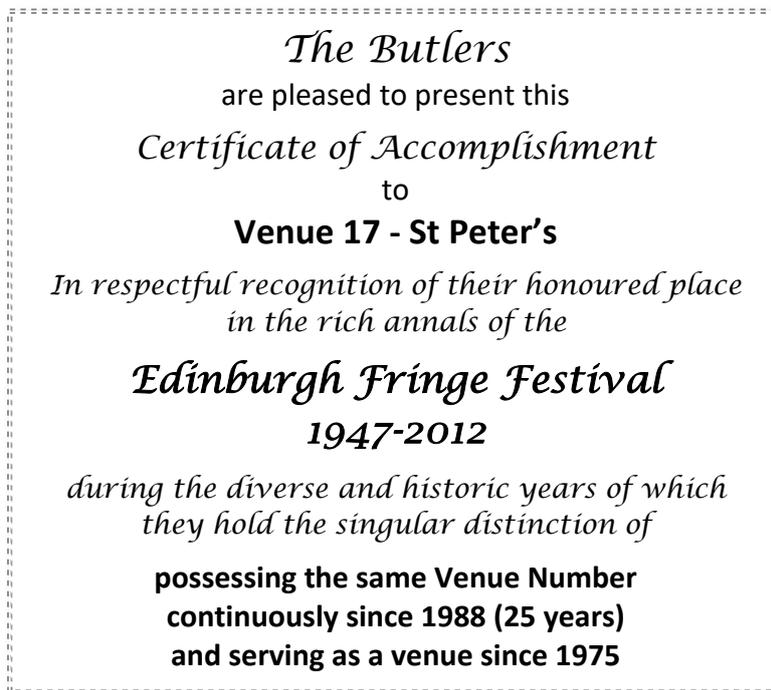
Thus it was at a glittering ceremony organised by the Edinburgh Playhouse that their General Manager, Gary Roden, presented the inaugural Capital Spirit Award to EPT for the production of 'The Chippit Chantie'. This new award recognised the company that, in the opinion of the judges, best captured the spirit of the Fringe.

It was also in 2011 that EPT took the opportunity to present, in the third week, 'It Takes Four to Tango With Panto' - a double bill of One Acts by David Tristram under the direction of Iain Fraser.

There were again two offerings from EPT for the 2012 Fringe - 'Ne'er the Twain' directed by John Lyon with the production of 'Sparkleshark' directed by Will McIver taking up the third week, direct from an award winning performance in the SCDA One Act Festival earlier that year.

By this time, Alan Cochrane was suffering from poor health and the company were very pleased when he was able to leave hospital to attend a performance of 'Ne'er the Twain'. Sadly, this was to be his last theatrical venture as he passed away on 7th October 2012. EPT will be eternally grateful to him, not only for his production of classic Scots comedies and his significant contribution to many other theatrical events, but also for his drive and enthusiasm which contributed massively to the success of the theatre group over the years.

There was another milestone in this year, when the following certificate was found attached to the door of St Peter's Church Hall:



However, after twenty five years it was time to move on and, the following year, Fringe 2013 saw EPT perform another Alan Cochrane play 'Hatches, Matches and Dispatches' directed by Joan Hunter in their new venue at Mayfield Salisbury Church Hall.

Another great success which prompted the following online review:

"What a really funny play. The Fringe has a wide range of material at any time, but this is the first time we have seen anything by this group (who appear to have the longest standing connection to the Fringe of any company). From the outset it was quick, slick and full of characters we knew! The cast were brilliant and the characterisations were really strong, believable and well acted. We laughed throughout, to the extent that the cast had to allow us to recover several times. Our first production by Edinburgh People's Theatre, not our last!"

The next offering in our new home in 2014 was 'The Sorcerer's Tale' directed by Irene Beaver which achieved another four star review.

A revival of 'The Fairmer Wants a Wife' by Alan Cochrane was EPT's 2015 Fringe Production and the company were very pleased when Maureen Cochrane agreed to direct it. This led to another highly successful run where the 'House Full' boards had little rest. One review concluded: *"The affection felt by all for the play is obvious, and leads to a production that is suffused with warmth and an infectious degree of fun."*

2016 saw the production of 'The Auld Alliance' by Alan Richardson under the direction of John Somerville and now, in 2017, EPT are looking forward to presenting Sam Cree's 'Wedding Fever' with Iain Fraser at the helm.

The Numbers:

You will be glad to know that the temptation to list all the EPT players over the years, broken down by age and sex, has been resisted.

However, it is interesting to note that of the 60 plays (including 2017) over the years, 23 were performed once; 12 were staged twice; 3 on offer three times and one ('Ne'er the Twain') has appeared on the Fringe 4 times.

The most prolific author was James Scotland (15) closely followed by Alan Cochrane (14).

Over the period, EPT have staged 17 World Premieres and one third of the plays presented were written by EPT members:

a) Walk into My Parlour	William Maconachie	(3)
b) Ne'er the Twain Shall Meet	Alan Cochrane	(4)
c) The De'ilds Awa	Alan Cochrane	(2)
d) Scots Wha Hae	Alan Cochrane	(2)
e) The Campbells are Comin'	Alan Cochrane	(2)
f) Hatches, Matches & Despatches	Alan Cochrane	(2)
g) The Fairmer Wants a Wife	Alan Cochrane	(2)
h) Stooshie at the Store	Irene Beaver	(1)
i) Stramash at the Store	Irene Beaver	(1)
j) Wha Wadna Follow Thee	Irene Beaver	(1)
k) Sganarelle (adaptation)	John Somerville/Ronnie Johnston	(1)

It should be noted that each of the plays written by Alan Cochrane in the list above, won first prize in the full length play writing competition organised by the SCDA.

The Present:

Now in our 60th year on the Fringe, and clutching our bus pass tightly for the journey ahead, EPT are proud to present 'Wedding Fever' by Sam Cree. This play was originally written for the late, great Jimmy Logan and was extensively performed throughout the UK in the 1960's.

The production will take place in Mayfield Salisbury Church Hall from Friday 4th August to Saturday 19th August 2017 at 7.30pm (not Sundays, Saturday performances will be matinee only at 2.30pm).

Tickets, price £12 (concession £10) available from The Fringe Box Office (0131 226 0000), Ticket Source (0333 666 3366) or direct from EPT website: **www.ept.org.uk/boxoffice**

There is a special offer on Monday, 7th August 2017 - two tickets for the price of one (full price only).

Gordon Braidwood