

SOUTHWEST SCRIPTWRITERS

Hon. President: Michael Jenner – writer of *Taggart*, *Dalziel & Pascoe*, *Heartbeat*, *EastEnders* etc
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Summer 2005

Welcome to our annual round-up of group events, activities and achievements.

Meetings since last September have attracted a rock-steady average attendance of 26 writers and actors – the same as for our 2003-2004 sessions. The biggest Tuesday of the year was 15 February when 36 of us squeezed into the Macready Room for a lively open workshop meeting.

Our 2004-2005 programme started on 14 September with a complete reading of **Virginia Bergin's** screenplay, *CLARKE*, which went on to be chosen for development at a **Moonstone International** Screen Lab. Since then, we've devoted entire evenings to work by **Barbara Compitus**, **Margaret Crump**, **Brian Jennings**, **Norman Eshley**, **Mark Brown** (via audiotape to Australia), **Daniel Cull**, **Andy Graham**, **Ed Viney** and **Heather Lister**. In June, Brian Jennings became one of the few writers to be taken up for development by the **BBC writersroom**, impressing the Corporation's usually impassive new writing team with his radio drama, *Aubrey*, which he aired at an open workshop meeting last year.



Resting by Kevin Cattell

As well as our usual open workshop and featured writer programme, we included several special events in the 30 meetings since last September. At the end of November, we welcomed **Training And Performance Showcase (TAPS)** co-founders, **Jill James** and **Ewart Needham**, to a screening of recordings of script-in-hand performances of extracts of **Ann-Marie McCormack's** television drama, *Gas and Air*, and my stage play, *Bacon Sandwich*, produced as part of TAPS' Full-Length Script Development Courses in 2003 and 2004. Jill, Ewart and Ann-Marie fielded questions about the work of TAPS and its script development process at the screening, which we presented in association with the **University of the West of England's Centre for Performing Arts** at UWE's St Matthias campus in Fishponds.



Coast by Richard Lambert

At a meeting in March, the group's chair, **Andy Graham**, gave a talk on script development, drawing on his scriptwriting experience and that of teaching play- and

screenwriting courses at the **University of Bath and Bath Spa University College**.

As usual, Andy's talk proved both popular and interesting, and you can find his

notes from the

evening by following

the link from the online version of this newsletter (

www.southwest-scriptwriters.co.uk/about/summer/2005).

Andy will lead another of his short Introduction to Film and Television Scriptwriting courses at Bath University in the autumn – contact the University's Division for Lifelong Learning on 01225 383 422 for further details.



Air Guitar by Peter Kesterton

In April we welcomed playwright and television writer, **Alan Pollock**, whose stage play *The Death of Cool* was produced at the Hampstead Theatre, and whose TV credits include *The Bill* and co-creation of the BBC2 series *Attachments*. Alan described the fickle business of writing for the small screen, and advised members that the best way to find writing work in TV or theatre was to already have a job in TV or theatre.

Also in April, we held a themed workshop session focussing on entries for **Hall For Cornwall's Opening Lines** and **BBC3's Last Laugh** competitions. Opening Lines proved popular, with several members completing short plays for the contest, a project that demonstrated Hall For Cornwall's commitment to new writing. There were also a number of takers for the BBC's challenge of completing sitcom scripts by established TV comedy writers including Paul Mayhew-Archer, Laurence Marks and Maurice Gran, and Carla Lane. Last Laugh's winning entries will be broadcast on BBC3 in the autumn.

Last autumn, **Mark Breckon's The Fun Factory** was one of the plays chosen in **Theatre West's** annual Search for a Script for production in the company's innovative season of

new writing at the

Alma Tavern. Mark also found success in

January this year when his play, *The Radicals* – a feature of our New Writing Festival in 2003 – won him a place on a short writing course at the **National Theatre**.



Living Doll

by Lesley Bown and Ann Gawthorpe

The 2003 New Writing Festival line-up scored again in the spring when **Eileen O'Haire's** play *The Breakaway Blues*, which placed seventh in our competition two years ago,

was given a regional tour by the **Laughing Orange Theatre Company**, taking in venues around the region including the Everyman Theatre in Cheltenham and Bristol's QEH Theatre.

Geoff Serle also enjoyed stage success with *Convoy*, his heavily-researched docudrama centring on the work of the Merchant Navy during World War II. *Convoy*, which Geoff developed through Southwest Scriptwriters workshop meetings, was performed in a co-production by **Clifton College** and the **Bletchley Park Trust** at the Redgrave Theatre in March.

In July, **Shiona Morton's** script, *Soundings*, became the first **Play for Somerset** and received a rehearsed reading at the **Strode Theatre** in Street. Shiona's success with *Soundings* follows the full production of her play *Baby Bank* at the Cheltenham Everyman last year. The cast of the Strode Theatre reading included Southwest Scriptwriter, **Lissa Carter**.



The Return by Didier J Desmedt

Southwest Scriptwriters has been represented on the small screen by the group's honorary president, **Michael Jenner**, who added *EastEnders* to his long list of TV credits in June; **Melanie Lawman** whose first episode of BBC1's daytime soap, *Doctors*, was broadcast last October, with another transmitted in May; and **Ray Brooking**, who has written many episodes of *Doctors*, and has his first episode of *Casualty* broadcast on 5 November.

We featured eight scripts in our **New Writing Festival** at the **Tobacco Factory** in July, which were picked from 22 entries by a team of readers appointed by **writernet** in London. Three of the nine writers on show only joined the group since last September, and three more of the finalists also had work performed at our Festival for the first time.



Fitting In by Gareth Manson

This year's overall winner was **Peter Kesterton**, with *Air Guitar*, a play centring on sibling rivalries between two brothers. **Venue** magazine described the play as 'on-the-button' in a review following *Air Guitar's* premiere at the Tobacco Factory on 23 July, adding that it's a 'script with a proper edge and relevance, which deserves to be brought to a wider audience.' Peter's play might well receive a full production in the New Vic Studio early next year.

This year's competition runners-up were **Kevin Cattell's** *Resting*, in which a pathological liar meets his match after some bravura performances; **Steve Lambert's** *Last Train*, following a pair of passengers getting in touch with their sexualities as they await the eponymous locomotive;

Lesley Bown and **Ann Gawthorpe's** *Living Doll*, centring on what happens when a middle-aged man breathes life into his late father's inflatable woman; **Richard Lambert's** *Coast*, which features an inflammatory collision of four characters on a beach; **Didier J Desmedt's** *The Return*, wherein a mother and daughter-in-law long for their absent son and husband; **William House's** *The Elevator Man*, tracking the angst of a 40-something woman as she dresses for a date with a man she met in a New York lift; and **Gareth Manson's** *Fitting In*, focussing on an ambitious teacher who finds that he needs to be more flexible when applying his high-minded principles.

Many thanks to everyone who helped to make this year's Festival a success. We were very pleased to be working again with many of the actors and directors from previous years as well as discovering more of the local dramatic talent. You can find programme information, press coverage and pictures from the Festival on its website at www.southwest-scriptwriters.co.uk/festival/2005.

The Festival was our last for the foreseeable future, although we might be able to revive the event after next year depending on the availability of funding. We're hoping to announce a major new project for the group in the autumn.

In line with Southwest Scriptwriters' constitution (www.southwest-scriptwriters.co.uk/constitution), the group's executive (John Colborn, secretary/treasurer, Andy Graham, chair, and Tim Massey, artistic director) is seeking re-election this September. If you're a paid-up member of Southwest Scriptwriters and would like to stand for election to any of the above positions, please tell us for which post you'd like to stand by emailing info@southwest-scriptwriters.co.uk before 31 August 2005.



The Elevator Man by William House

Our next meeting is on **Tuesday, 20 September 2005**, and we'll be sending out details of our early autumn programme in the week before the meeting. If you've got a script you'd like read next season, please email info@southwest-scriptwriters.co.uk.

See you in September,

- **Tim Massey**
Artistic Director