



Motion proposed by Robert Bettelheim at AGM 17 May 2011:

That the Woodhouse Players should not actively seek to perform plays at the Waltham Forest Drama Festival.

1. Despite the recent series of wins by the Woodhouse Players at the annual Waltham Forest Drama Festival, I believe that the Waltham Forest Drama Festival does not effectively meet the needs and objectives of the group.
2. Adjudications are often of mediocre value:
 - Cast have felt depressed by comments made, yet subsequently these actors have been awarded nominations or prizes.
 - Comments have been based on comparing the amateur production's values to a professional production.
 - Comments have varied in terms of how the space was used – when the production was clearly designed for a different amateur stage
 - Comments have sometimes made lighting suggestions when the equipment supplied by the Festival was incapable of supporting the suggestion
3. In my opinion the quality of adjudications is 'hit and miss' unfortunately more often casts and crews have felt that the adjudication was based too much on a parochial view of the adjudicator and little value could be taken from it and applied.

For example: after the adjudication for Bobby Gould in Hell, I was backstage where I overheard the adjudicator talking with technical crew from the festival concerning the acting and performances in the show. He was far more complimentary and encouraging of the actors that he had been in the adjudication – borne out by the awards. If only he had said some of that in the adjudication then perhaps the actors would have been less downcast, and would have been able to gain some insights and positive criticism from him
4. I would happily advocate a proposal that an independent expert be brought in to give advice on plays – such as was done with the recent monologue evening.
5. The alternative performance space of the Festival (insofar as it is used for the Festival) is in many respects less of a theatre than the Welsh Church Hall:
 - Audience numbers are often less than 20
 - Fire and Safety regulations preclude the use of some common theatrical equipment
 - Lighting is only moderately able to be customised for the performances
6. The discipline of producing a show which must 'tour' to an alternative venue, and be able to be set up and struck promptly, is almost only exercised for the purposes of the Festival. Other productions (such as *Kindertransport*) exercise a similar production challenge without the additional challenge of the Festival's rules.
7. The argument that the group needs to promote arts in the community is valid, but with such small audiences, by comparison to average audience attendance at the Welsh Church it is hard to see how performing in an under-attended venue so far from Leytonstone really meets that objective.

Except perhaps to illustrate our presence to other drama groups – however I suspect they know of us regardless.

8. There are significant logistical costs both in monetary and personal terms:
 - The Festival costs to enter
 - Licensed plays require additional performance dates
 - Inevitably a van must be hired, or a person must devote their time and vehicle for little reward
 - The cast and crew must be able to get to Chingford on a Sunday for the Tech, and then again for the performance – and they have to get home again.

There are other reasons to not attend, but I believe these are the major reasons.

9. I would be delighted if the Waltham Forest Drama Festival were a brilliant week of shows, widely attended and brimming with a wider community spirit and topped with thoughtful adjudications – but they are often not.

10. I believe that capacity, appreciative and returning audiences at the Welsh Church Hall should be a sufficient measure that our productions are of a high standard and reaching out to a wide community in a way that the Festival does not.

11. The Woodhouse Players is not a prescriptive group so this is not about insisting that any show does not attend the Festival, but that the decision to attend the Festival should be one made by the cast, crew and director of a show, and neither encouraged, nor discouraged, by the Committee. It will be up to the director of a production to ask the Committee for Festival contact details and allow the liaison to occur between the productions and the Festival directly. Costs for performing (if the show decides to perform) will be met by the Woodhouse Players.

12. Note: It is always possible to reserve a Festival slot if they have an early deadline and even pay for the entrance, and then withdraw – the larger costs are often only the logistics during the week of the Festival. (Van hire and personal commitments).

13. The Committee may decide not to schedule the double/triple bill slot at a convenient time to coincide with the Festival if that would best suit the needs of the group.

14. Instead of attending the Festival, it may be possible to schedule an additional small production slot which I believe would serve the group and the community far better than the festival attendance.

In summary – A vote in favour of this motion implies:

- The Committee would not prevent a production from going to the festival.
- The Woodhouse Players would cover costs of a production electing to go to the festival.
- A production attending the Festival would do so under the banner of the Woodhouse Players.
- The Committee will not necessarily consider the Festival's timeframe when arranging the production schedule for the year.
- The freeing of the constraint of arranging the production schedule around the Festival may allow for an additional production.
- If there is interest, the Committee will investigate inviting a drama professional to provide feedback on shows.