

ABERGAVENNY EISTEDDFOD 2006

Children and young people

Abergavenny Eisteddfod celebrated its fifth birthday on Saturday at King Henry VIII School. Hundreds of children and young people competed in singing, dancing, reciting and instrumental competitions, battling temperatures more suited to a day at the beach.

Youngsters and their families came from further afield than ever before: not only from Abergavenny itself but also from throughout Monmouthshire and from Brecon, Brynmawr, Cardiff and Swansea. New entrants were the Nidus Theatre Arts group from Cwmbrân and Ysgol y Ffin from Caldicot, both of whom are keen to return next year.

"The children really enjoyed their day" said Heidi Nicholson from Nidus Theatre Arts group. Even the few children that didn't get through in the solo singing did themselves proud and all gained a huge amount of performance and stage experience."

One of the highlights of the day was the disco dancing, with four groups on stage instead of the usual three, as the dance adjudicator was spoilt for choice at the preliminary competitions. There were two groups from Our Lady & St Michael's Primary School and one each from Ysgol Gymraeg Brynmawr and Ysgol Gymraeg Y Fenni. For the first time on an Abergavenny Eisteddfod stage, the audience was treated to a lively display of break dancing from OLSM children, interspersed with more "traditional" moves. Many members of the audience were heard to wonder how the children found such energy on such a hot day!

"The standard goes up every year - it's astonishing" was one of the adjudicators' comments. Not only the dance competitors, but all the competitors showed great energy. One of the last competitions in the morning was the instrumental ensemble, sponsored by Waitrose. Cantref Primary School won the coveted £100 prize, and Llantilio Pertholey Percussion group was a worthy second.

Best pianists of the morning, winning the Ted Waller prize, were Harry Jones and Kate Davies, and Best Unison Group went to Nidus Theatre Arts group from Cwmbrân.

At the end of the morning session retiring Eisteddfod Secretary, County Councillor Douglas Edwards, made a presentation to Mrs Bronwen Green, head teacher of Ysgol Gymraeg Y Fenni. Mrs Green was retiring from her post at the end of the school year, and had worked hard on behalf of the Eisteddfod to plan it and make it happen from the beginning.

The afternoon session, attended by young people at secondary school, saw four best performers invited to the stage in the Borough Theatre to perform in front of the evening audience. The four youngsters were: Elis Reed, (piano) and Gareth Robinson (trombone) both for the second year running; Agnes Jones (recitation) and Alexandra Davies (vocal). Agnes performed - in appropriate costume - a hilarious poem called "The Neanderthal's Diet" by her father Colin Jones, much appreciated by audiences in the afternoon and the evening.

Adjudicators for the day were: Ann Smith, classical music; Sarah Fowler and Pete Scaddan from the Music Studio, jazz and classical; Jane Blank, recitation and Chantal Williams, dance. Local piano teacher Judith Pendrous was the accompanist. Presidents were Mr Trevor Turner, a generous supporter of the Eisteddfod, Cllr Tony O'Donovan, Mayor of Abergavenny and County Councillor Alan Breeze, Chairman of Monmouthshire County Council.

The afternoon president was Graeme Nelmes of KHS, an enthusiastic advocate for the opportunities offered to young people through the Eisteddfod tradition. "The Eisteddfod wouldn't exist without the support of individuals like these and of our local authorities" said Eisteddfod Chairman Ceri Thomas, and we are extremely grateful to them all."

Evening Eisteddfod

Air-conditioning at the Borough Theatre meant that the audience was able to enjoy performances of the highest standard, at the end of a very hot day, in comfort!

The singers excelled themselves this year, performing arias by Mozart, Verdi and Puccini as well as lighter songs from musicals, including a very funny rendition of "If I were a rich man" from Fiddler on the Roof, by the young Llandeilo singer William Rees.

Champion soloist was tenor Aled Wyn Davies from Llanbrynmair. Aled enchanted the audience with a mesmerising performance of "Che gelida manina" - Your tiny hand is frozen - from Puccini's La Bohème. Second place went to John Davies, National Eisteddfod-winning tenor from Llandybie, who sang Macduff's Aria from Verdi's Macbeth. The elegant Gayathrie Patrick from Northamptonshire was third, singing O Don Fatale, from Verdi's Don Carlos, and fourth in a strong field was Marcus Hopkin from Blackwood, who sang the prologue I Pagliacci by Leoncavallo.

More competitors than ever before had attended the preliminary stages of the competitions during the afternoon, ensuring extremely high standards on stage in the evening, albeit after a somewhat delayed start. A number of talented young singers from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama made it to the stage, including William Rees, who won the Under 25 solo,

and Elin Pritchard, winner of the Song from a Musical, with Falling in Love from The Boys from Syracuse.

Sir Trefor Morris and County Councillor Alan Breeze were the Presidents for the evening, and guests of honour were Clive Howells from the Rotary Club of Abergavenny, Jean Bunning of the Usk Welsh Society and Newyddion Gwent and Ann Griffiths from the Lady Llanover Society, all generous supporters of the Eisteddfod.

Adjudicators in the evening were Andrew Greenwood (Instrumental, Welsh Solo and Champion Solo); Stephanie Benavente (Song from a musical and Under 25 Solo) and Huw Carrod (recitation and literature). Jeanette Massocchi and Rhiannon Griffiths accompanied.

In presenting the prizes to the Champion Soloist at the end of a thrilling evening, Clive Howells also handed over a cheque from Abergavenny Rotary Club for next year's Eisteddfod. "The support from Abergavenny Rotary Club has been wonderful" said Eisteddfod Chairman Ceri Thomas. "And what a great start to next year's fundraising!"

Eisteddfod Secretary and Treasurer Doug Edwards and his wife Edna were invited to the stage for a surprise presentation from members of the Eisteddfod Committee. Doug was retiring from the post of Secretary this year, having set the Eisteddfod up from the start and worked tirelessly with Edna to ensure its continuing success. "Doug will be a hard act to follow" said Ceri Thomas. "Fortunately we won't be losing his expertise altogether, as he's staying on as Treasurer, but his departure as Secretary leaves a huge gap. Job applicants this way please!"

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