

THE MANAWATU (NEW ZEALAND) INTERNATIONAL ONE-ACT PLAYWRITING COMPETITION 2010

COMMENTS ON PLAYS: GARY HENDERSON

1. MOSCOW TICKET: Div Collins

This script presents an immediate, intriguing conflict, and blends a forward-moving story with something more poetic, reflective, and mysterious. The author brings both strands together and resolves them in an unexpected way. The script bears several readings; quite difficult to grasp, but satisfying.

2. FOREIGN BODIES: Sally Sutton

This features funny, smart, beautifully observed dialogue. The three main characters are authentic and comic. The meteorite is a great symbolic moment. One weakness: even though Mum/Victoria is mentioned several times, I didn't feel that Vince's regret was driving the story, so Victoria's reappearance, while interesting, didn't feel like a satisfactory resolution to the story.

3. THE SECOND COMING: Jan Watts

This centres on an intriguing idea, extrapolating on a contemporary issue. The author drip-feeds information to keep the mystery alive while still keeping the reader/audience engaged. The opening feels a bit expository, using the common device of a newcomer who needs things explained to them, so that the audience can be brought up to speed.

4. TO THE TERRA: Tristan Domican

An interesting experiment in a Beckett/Waiting for Godot style of character, situation and cyclic dialogue. Moments of beautiful rhythm and strangeness in the dialogue, but I'm not so sure what it all adds up to. I suspect that the strange use of grammar, capitalisation and punctuation is a failing on the author's part rather than a deliberate subversion of the conventions of written English.

5. TO THE MOON AND BACK TO THE EARTH: Denis Edwards

A treatment of an interesting historical episode. The author presents a sweeping story by focusing on a personal dilemma, although I think the script would have been richer if the author had gone deeper into a smaller story.

6. AROUND THE KITCHEN TABLE: Isla Borrell

A fast melodrama. Oscillates a little disconcertingly between a dramatic saga and comedic family mayhem, with some very nice moments. Several possible conflicts were introduced - I think too many. The one which provided the resolution did not seem to me to be the conflict driving the story.

COMMENT:

It's always a daunting task assessing scripts and comparing them to one another, especially when each has its own valid style and theatrical vision. I'm a follower of the "no conflict, no story" rule of thumb, so I look for scripts that present a conflict, develop it, and resolve it - bearing in mind that "resolving" is not the same as "solving." I also look for characters that are unique and idiosyncratic, with distinct voices. I admire scripts that deliver on all these fronts, whether it be in a fairly standard way (I really enjoy simple stories well told) or something subversive and unexpected. I've chosen six scripts which I think achieve this to varying degrees. MOSCOW TICKET is the script which I think does so most successfully, with the others also achieving it, but with some weaknesses which I've noted. Each of the six scripts has a clear vision, and each could be built into an engaging piece of theatre. Congratulations to all the playwrights.