

THE ARTS SOCIETY SHREWSBURY YOUNG ARTS 2017/2018

Our Society has long been a very generous sponsor of projects to encourage an interest in the arts among the youth of today. This is important, because from today's youth will come not only tomorrow's artists, but also that wide body of interested people who in the future will maintain, preserve and enjoy our country's rich artistic heritage. Our annual funding for Young Arts sponsorship approaches £2,000, and is raised by selling raffle tickets at our meetings, supplemented by small surpluses arising from other society activities. As your Young Arts Representative, it has been my privilege to administer the fund. In general I have followed the policy established over 6 years by my predecessors in office Ann Jackson and my wife, Hazi Wallace, who moved away from spending large sums on funding a particular student to carry out a particular activity in favour of, in general but not exclusively, helping to fund clubs and organisations which enable many students to benefit from an artistic activity. I believe that this latter approach gives a better return on the money spent, and certainly increases the exposure of the society to the local community. The following reports on the projects that we sponsored last year and on those that we have selected for this year.

LAST YEAR

Make Your Mark Competition. This was a West Midlands Area(WM) organised competition for the purpose of identifying 14 pieces of artwork by West Midlands A Level students in order to mount an exhibition for 3 weeks from 8th May 2017 at the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists (RBSA) in order to showcase the talent of WM young artists to the rest of NADFAS over the AGM. The RBSA is an artist-led charity which supports artists and promotes engagement with the visual arts; it owns the RBSA Gallery in Birmingham. The competition was to be based on coursework by A level students in order to minimise extra work on both students and teachers in order to take part. YARs were requested to establish links with a School which offered Art at A level and to select 3 works to be submitted in digital form to the WM judging panel which would be chaired by the Head of the RBSA. The panel would select 14 works to be exhibited in the RBSA Gallery for 3 weeks from 7th May 2017 with final judging to take place on 8th May 2017 to determine the overall winner who would receive a glass 'Flame' made and presented by Charlotte Hughes-Martin, a well known artist who works in Ceramics and Glass. There would also be some monetary prizes, and all the exhibitors would receive certificates. SDFAS invited Ellesmere College to take part. We chose 3 images from the 8 that they offered to submit to the WM judging panel and I am delighted to report that the self-portrait by Jessica Martin-Jones was one of the 14 selected to go forward to the exhibition. This was no mean feat as the standard was exceptionally high.

Shropshire Youth Theatre (SYT). Formerly Shrewsbury Youth theatre, (SYT) was established in 1993 as a not-for-profit organisation to provide a professionally staffed youth theatre company for students from across the County. SYT prides itself on being the only youth theatre in the country to be run by an annually elected student committee who make decisions on everything from future performances to publicity and sponsorship.

SYT provides activities for children and young adults. The junior group (between 7 and 13 years) are taught basic performance and devising techniques and take part in a range of performance opportunities from annual sketch shows to street theatre events. Senior students (between 13 and 25 years) take part in a large scale production staged in Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn, along with various events during the summer term.

This year, the senior group did 'The Importance of Being Earnest', which was performed at Theatre Severn on the 5th and 6th of April 2017 and played to full houses. The standard achieved was exceptional and very enjoyable - indeed it was difficult to realise that this was a performance by student amateurs and not by a professional company. This year Shrewsbury DFAS (as was!) provided £500 sponsorship for the materials to build the stage set. In practice, this freed up (scarce) funding for professional tuition for the student team who devised, designed and built the set.

Shrewsbury Drapers Guild Textile Competition. For the past 20 years, the Shrewsbury Drapers Guild has run a textile competition, the cost of which has to be covered by sponsorship. There are separate junior and senior competitions: The Young Textile Design Competition was held on 6th to 10th June and was sub-divided into classes for key stage 3 and for key stage 4. The Senior Competition was held between 18th and 20th September. This competition was also sub-divided into a class for students aged between 18 and 22, and a class for adults. Shrewsbury DFAS has sponsored the monetary prizes for the 3 student classes (but not the adult class!) amounting to a total of £760. There was an excellent entry by students from a wide range of Shropshire schools and colleges. It is also worth mentioning that there are strong links between the Drapers Guild competition sub-committee and Shrewsbury DFAS, as both the chairman and some members, including the main competition organiser, are both Arts Society Shrewsbury members.

Queen's 90th Birthday Celebration Arts Bursary. This was not a standard YA project as it was the Society's main tribute to mark the Queen's 90th Birthday, so a special sub-committee was formed to manage it. As the result of funds raised by a summer event at Hodnet Hall hosted most generously by Sir Algernon and Lady Heber-Percy, the Society was able to offer support in the form of a £2,000 bursary to a young person educated in Shropshire. The winner, Callum Bles, a worker in iron who wanted to buy tools and materials, is an exciting and worthy winner.

THIS YEAR

Shrewsbury Bookfest Art Competition. Once again this is a Shrewsbury Bookfest year, and once again our major project will be to sponsor and manage an art competition for primary school children aged 9 to 11. The entrants will be required to illustrate a declared scene of their choosing taken from any of the six books short-listed for The Big Book Award 2018. This year, 31 Schools involving 1,258 pupils have signed up to take part in the Bookfest.

The main problem in running a competition of this type is that while art remains a required item on the syllabus, some schools do not have any art experienced teachers, while at the other end of the spectrum, there are schools with art departments. We have addressed this disparity between the 'Haves' and the 'Have-Nots' in two ways: on the one hand, we have sponsored an extremely well received Art training workshop for teachers led by Karen Howell, a very experienced Art and Design teacher, and on the other hand we have devised a judging system that guarantees that all schools that take part will win at least one prize. Initially the entries for each school will be judged in isolation to determine a 'School Winner' and a 'School Runner-up' for each school – essentially 31 sub-competitions. The School Winners will go forward onto the Short-List for the main prizes while the School Runners-up go into a repechage from which the best will be chosen to fill the remaining places on the Short-List. All Short-Listed entries will win a prize. The Short-List will then be judged to determine the overall 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th places who will also win monetary awards. This

system is a compromise between incentivising the many and rewarding talent, but it worked very well last time we ran this competition. Finally, The Shrewsbury Museum is again providing some sponsorship for our competition by providing accommodation free of charge for judging and administration, and will also host the public display of the Short-Listed entries after the competition.

The Future. Depending on the funding still available after the Bookfest, we may seek another small project later in the year. Now we are The Arts Society, we may seek to diversify into other artistic disciplines such as dance and music that we have not previously covered. We are also aware that there is strong support from institutions that offer 'A' Level Art courses in the County for a rerun of the Make Your Mark competition but with a much broader base so that they can all take part. Should such a competition come to fruition, it would be a major undertaking and would be unlikely to take place before next year at the earliest.

Jeremy Wallace

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