

The OLT National One-Act Playwriting Competition

*The seventh of ten exhibits
to be presented during
OLT's 100th Anniversary Season.*

Since 1937, this theatre has organized a competition to encourage new Canadian playwrights. Every year, with a very few exceptions, dozens of writers were inspired to create new Canadian plays. The winners watched excellent readings or productions of their work, and received constructive feedback, which encouraged them to continue writing.

Our Competition has played a large part in bringing Canadian stories to our stages, and to those of the world.



— The Play's the Thing, but ... Canadian? —

Where are the Canadian Plays? In the 1920s, not only were there few Canadian plays to produce, but there were few directors willing to take a chance on an unknown Canadian author.

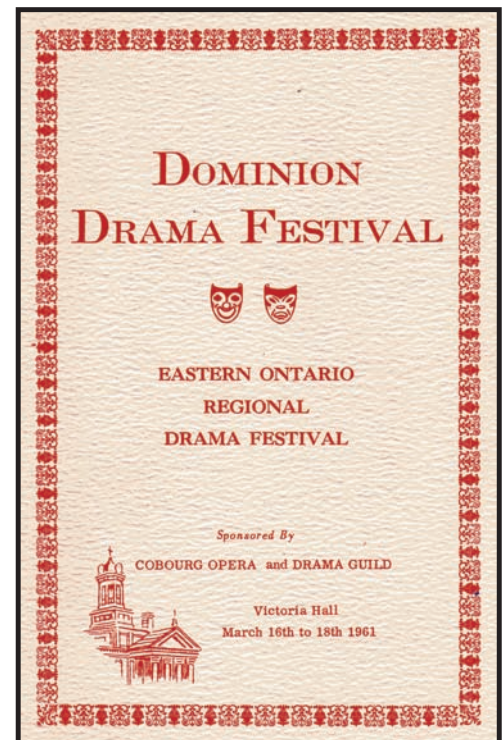
In 1932, Lord Bessborough, opening the first Dominion Drama Festival at the Ottawa Little Theatre, underlined the need for “plays by Canadian authors, ... with music by Canadian artists, performed by Canadian players”. Thus encouraged, a few Ottawa Drama League members began to write, discuss, revise and sometimes produce their own new Canadian plays. These early efforts resulted in the first Canadian Playwriting Competition in 1937, administered by the OLT Workshop Group. There were 13 entries that year, but over the next twenty-one years, more than 1,200 Canadian plays were submitted, and over 70 were produced on the OLT stage.

2013 closes our 72nd National One-Act Playwriting Competition, an institution that has encouraged numerous new Canadian authors - and their plays are a delight to experience.



The winning plays received full-scale productions until the demise of the Workshop in 1965. Here Madame Vanier, in 1960, presents the playwrights with their awards after the performances.

Basil Hutch's winning play, *A Man for Matilde*, went on to the Eastern Ontario Drama Festival in 1961, winning the Kingston Cup for the best production of a play by a Canadian.



The Competition Grows



Florence Fancott and Don Shepherd in Peter Dwyer's *Hoodman-Blind*, the play that won 1st prize in 1953.

Peter Dwyer later became Director of the Canada Council.

Photo: Tsin Van

Governor General Vincent Massey awards prizes to winners, including Peter Dwyer on right.

In 1937, the first prize was a production of the winning script. Later, first and second prizes of \$5 and \$3 were introduced, along with the productions.

Within a few years, under the guidance of expert chairmen, the Competition had become national in scope and was open to all Canadian playwrights, amateur and professional. Scripts became restricted to one-act plays. This form was felt best for developing a playwright's skill.

Manuscripts were submitted to an adjudicator chosen by the chairman. This adjudicator was a theatre expert, who brought wisdom and experience to the project. The manuscripts were judged "blind". The authors were unknown to the adjudicator, who gave individual, constructive criticism.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the winners were given full scale productions using all the facilities of the Ottawa

Little Theatre. Today, the winners receive a rehearsed reading of their play and a post-production briefing with a dramaturge and the director.

Some of the very able volunteers who chaired this Competition over the years were Gladys Watt, Marion Bray, Leonie Gardner, Lorraine St. Laurent and George Stonyk.



PRIZE WINNING PLAYWRIGHTS MEET THE GOVERNOR GENERAL—Three of the four top prize winners in the 1953 Workshop Canadian Playwriting competition received their awards from Governor General Vincent Massey following the opening performance at the Little Theatre last night. Left

to right are Aubrey C. Green of Winnipeg, Norman Williams of Toronto, the Governor General and Peter Dwyer of Ottawa. The other prize winner among the top four, Robert MacLeod of Toronto, was unable to attend the opening.

—(Dominion Wide Photo.)

The Powerhouse Behind the Plays

Mrs. Gladys Cameron Watt

The incredible success of the Playwriting Competition is mainly due to one dynamo, Gladys Watt, chairman for over 30 years. She arrived in Ottawa in 1937, was drawn to the Ottawa Drama League and began submitting plays to the Competition. Her plays won several honours, but when the competition needed a chairman, she offered her services. This eliminated her possibility of competing.

Her dedication was instrumental in changing the public's indifference to Canadian playwrights.

She fought hard to make each competition better than the last, pushing it to the national level, tirelessly publicizing it, selecting prominent theatre professionals as adjudicators, announcing the winners, overseeing the productions, and organizing the adjudication and presentation of prizes.



G.G. Roland Michener
presents Order of Canada

In 1959 she won the Canadian Drama Award and in 1963 she received the prestigious Margo Jones award for her "outstanding work in continual encouragement of live theatre". She won the Centennial Medal and the Order of Canada in 1973 for "a quarter of a century of service to playwrights as Chairman of the Canadian One-Act Playwriting Competition".

Today, the third prize of the competition is the Gladys Cameron Watt Award, and is sponsored each year by the Canadian Federation of University Women of which Watt was a member.



Mrs. Watt is being presented with the
Margo Jones Award at the White House by
Lynda Bird Johnson in 1963.

What Are the Odds?

The Playwrights Who Dare to Dream

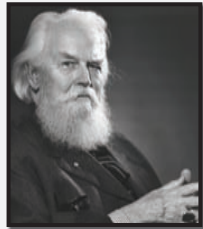
The One-Act Playwriting Competition is truly national in scale. Entries come in from every province and territory. The only restriction is that the playwright be Canadian. Over the life of the competition, more than 3,800 plays have been adjudicated. That's a lot of inspired writing!

These days the competition receives on average about 50 submissions a year, although in 2009 there was a peak of 121 entrants. Every script must be submitted anonymously, under a pen name.

In the past, one adjudicator read all the plays and selected winners and honourable mentions. Nowadays, three adjudicators judge the entries. The rights for the plays remain with the authors, although the OLT is given rights to a premier production or reading in the following year.

These plays continue to be produced not only in Canada but also in the United States, Europe and Australia. Many have been translated.

Meet a few of our winners.



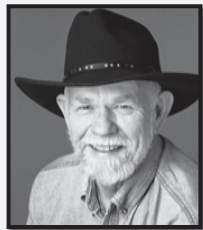
Robertson Davies won the competition in 1946 and 1947 with his plays *Overlaid* and *Eros at Breakfast*.

Photo: Karsh



Gordon Pengilly received Honourable Mentions in 1978 and 1994 for *Seeds* and *They Don't Call Them Farmers Anymore*.

Photo: Wes Raymond



Ken Mitchell won 1st prize in 1971 for *Heroes*, and received Honourable Mention in 1972 and Special Mention in 1982 for *This Train*, and *Gone the Burning Sun*.



Iris Winston took 1st prize in 2000 with *Last Duchess*, 3rd prize in 2007 with *The Florist*, and won the Sybil Cooke Award three times in the intervening years for *Let's Be Friends*, *The Other Side* and *Eraser Girl*. She also received Honourable Mentions in 2005 and 2006.

Photo: Lorraine Brand



Warren Graves won 1st prize in 1972 with *The Proper Perspective*.



Stewart Boston has won multiple times: 2nd prize in 1999, 2003 and 2006 with *Devil of a Job*, *The Panel from Hell*, and *Don't Say It's Suicide*, 3rd prize in 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2005 for *Gallery*, *Limbo*, *The Honourable Knight* and *Major Duties*. He also received two more Honourable Mentions, in 2006 and 2007.

Photo: Lorraine Brand



Erika Ritter's play *The Girl I Left Behind Me* won 1st prize in 1975.

Photo: Cylla von Tiedemann

The Real Prize — A Production!



Michael Meiklejohn appears (centre) in the 3rd prize winning play he also directed, *Workers of the World*, by Norman Walsh. In 1936, Michael co-founded the Workshop, an experimental group responsible for the One-Act Playwriting Competition. He was also president of the OLT, 1956 to 1958.

In Norman William's prize-winning play *Night of Storm*, Claude Jutra, later to become one of Quebec's foremost film-makers (*Kamouraska*, *Mon Oncle Antoine*), shares the stage with Florence Fancott, director and leading lady, 1949-1983.

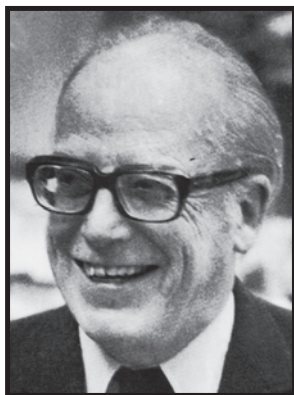
Photos: Tsin Van



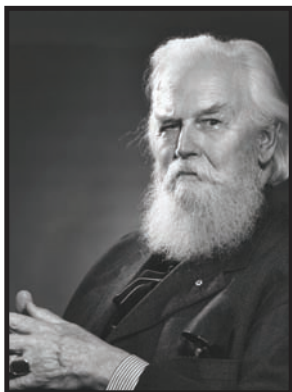
Several influential performers can be seen in the 1954 productions of winning plays of the Workshop's One-Act Playwriting Competition.

Two future OLT Presidents appear in this 2nd prize-winning production of *The Rehearsal* by Norman Newton. Anthony Tyler, President 1958 to 1963 appears second from left. Jane Murray appears far right, President of OLT for over 25 years, 1963 to 1989.

Choosing the Winners The Adjudicators



1954, 1965
Herbert Whittaker



1955
Robertson Davies

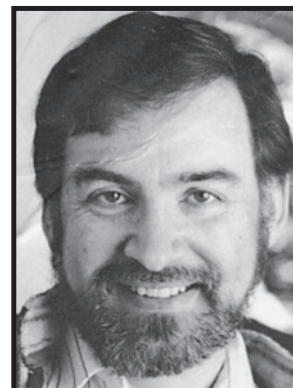
Photo: Karsh



1962
Dora
Mavor Moore



1987
Anne Chislett



1993, 1994
Rex Deverell

Just who are the adjudicators? Every year, outstanding, experienced theatre professionals are chosen to judge the scripts. The identity of the judges is kept secret until the announcement of the winners.

Over the years, the OLT has been extremely fortunate in obtaining the services of highly respected and qualified evaluators, for example:

1945 - 1948 — Charles B Rittenhouse, Montreal, director, educator

1949, 1950 — Sydney Risk, Vancouver, director, producer, drama specialist

1954, 1965 — Herbert Whittaker, Toronto, drama critic, author, director

1955 — Robertson Davies, Peterborough, novelist, playwright, critic, journalist

1962 — Dora Mavor Moore, Toronto, actor, director, teacher

1964 — Norma Springford, Montreal, Artistic Director Mountain Playhouse, co-founder of Playwrights' Workshop

1981 — John Wood, Ottawa, Artistic Director National Arts Centre

1987 — Anne Chislett, St. John's, playwright, Artistic Director Blyth Festival

1993, 1994 — Rex Deverell, Toronto, playwright

The adjudicators read every entry, write constructive criticism as well as an overall report to the chairman. Thus, the writers improve, they continue to write, and Canadian plays get more and more exciting!

What Drives the Playwrights?

A play is not a play until it is experienced by an audience.

In the beginning, the only prize was a production. Then, monetary awards were introduced. With the demise of the Workshop in 1965, a production was no longer guaranteed. The original first prize of \$5 had risen to \$100 by 1945, through the generosity of Mr. Harry S. Southam.

By 1958 the prizes were:

First Prize — The Birks Award, \$100 and a medal

Second Prize — Ottawa Little Theatre, The Dorothy White Award, \$75

Third Prize — The University Women's Club of Ottawa Award, \$50

In addition, all winners received Certificates of Award from the Ottawa Little Theatre Workshop.

The prize monies have increased over the years, and are currently \$1,000, \$750 and \$500. The third prize has been renamed the Gladys Cameron Watt Award and the Sybil Cooke Award for a Children's Play has been introduced. However, the most valuable prize for all has always been the constructive criticism of an experienced adjudicator or

resident dramaturge. This is still offered today to every author who requests it when they submit a play. In addition, for many years, the winners were invited to a Conference at the home of Clare Foley Coupal, to discuss the analysis of their play in depth.



Governor-General Vincent Massey presents the third prize for the 1952 competition to Elda Cadogan, for *Rise and Shine*, probably one of the most produced scripts of the OLT Playwriting Competition.

Even today you can find videos of current productions on YouTube.

From the Ottawa Citizen, Nov. 15, 1952 –
“Mrs. Cadogan’s talent is not limited to hitting on a funny situation; she backs it up with a real feeling for witty lines and a not-too-obvious play on words.”

— Laurette Thistle

— The Solange Karsh — Award

During the 1930s, while volunteering as photographer at the OLT, Yousef Karsh learned the impact of drama and artificial lighting. Here, he met his first wife Solange, a leading lady at the time. In memory of his wife, he commissioned the Solange Karsh Award, to be given to the first prize winner of the Competition, consisting of \$250 and an exquisite medal. This prize increased in value and continued to be awarded for 40 years until Karsh's death in 2002.



Karsh presenting
for the first time the
Solange Karsh medal in 1962
to Maureen Orton, the winner
of the 24th Playwriting Competition
with her play *5BX in History*.

Adele Townsend and Paddy Robertson
received their awards from
John Stanhope Reid,
High Commissioner for New Zealand.