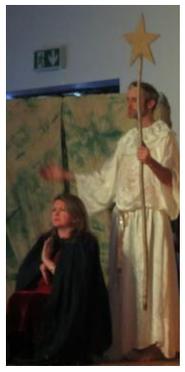




SteinerAcademyExeter Newsletter

Issue No 76 15th Dec

We wish you a peaceful and restful Christmas holiday!



Dates for your Diary

Wed 3rd Jan children return to school. Class 6 W remember your swimming kit!

The Right Kind of Drama

Well, there is certainly the *wrong* kind. Christmas can be a drama for all the wrong reasons, with people struggling with unrealistic expectations, too many demands, not enough time or money and a heavy cold to top it all.

Hopefully we have managed the run up to Christmas, indeed the whole term, with the right balance most of the time. Certainly this final week of term has been full of the right kind of drama, with class7's Midwinter Night's Dream, Class 3 parents' Paradise Play and the staff's rendition of the Shepherds' Nativity play. All give me the opportunity to embark on one of my favourite pastimes: extended metaphors.



Let's start with Midwinter Night's Dream. I have seen many Shakespeare plays performed in Steiner school over the years, often a comedy in class 8 (Y9), occasionally something darker in class 12 (Y13) like Othello or the Scottish play. Attempting Shakespeare with 12 year-olds, however, is a whole new level of challenge. How

well would they adapt to the strange rhythms and the many subtleties of the language, the staging and the humour? Would it lurch between the stilted on the one hand and pantomime on the other? Neither of these. The first act of the play was one of the best renditions of Shakespeare I have ever seen in a school in 35 years. The number of stand-out performances, the line-perfect delivery, the sense of fun and mischief, the beautiful yet simple staging and lighting were all remarkable. By the interval I think we were all utterly charmed. Having produced my fair share of plays I often apply another kind of critical test: look into the wings at the students not on stage. Are they fidgeting? Are they whispering, giggling, checking their lines, even, heaven forbid, checking their phones? Or are they watching their class-mates who are on stage, who are in the spot light, who are over-coming their own fears? What I saw was the latter, cast members off stage living every moment of what was happening on stage, carrying their colleagues inwardly all the time and with intense concentration.

The metaphor? Well, look at the title. Who in their right minds performs Midsummer Night's Dream in December? (Who in their right minds sets up a state-funded Steiner school in the middle of a cultural and educational winter?). Which Shakespeare play better combines beauty, whimsy, slap-stick, love and deep insight? (Which educational model better combines....I think you get the idea.)

Even act two of the play fed my metaphorical mind. It was work in progress. There were some wonderfully strong performances, but also cast members who were uncertain of their lines, entrances and cues, and a greater need for those cast members on top of their game to support those who were less so. It was much closer to what you would expect from a talented group of 12 year olds with an inspired director and class teacher performing Shakespeare on a cold night in December.

Like Act Two our school is work in progress. (Aren't they all?) Sometimes we fumble our lines and enter or exit through the wrong entrance, sometimes we have to prop each other up and apologise for shortcomings, but Vicki Watts' class 7 performance in the final week of a busy term, demonstrated just how far we have come and where we can still improve.

And one final metaphor? Indulge me. It is Christmas. In Steiner school, certainly in European and English-speaking countries, there is a strong tradition of performing three plays over the Christmas period, progressing from the Paradise Play (Adam and Eve being cast out of Eden), the Shepherd's Play (I think you know the story) this time patiently directed by Nicholas White and the Kings' Play (actually more about Herod than the kings). Two years ago we managed the middle of the three. This year for the first time, and thanks to the effort of Simon Berkley and a handful of devoted class 3 parents, we added the first of the three: a beautiful rendition complete with female God and devil, the former of which make it look perfectly normal that God would knit whilst presiding from her throne! We still await the Kings Play, with the madness of Herod writ large with all its contemporary messages on what is needed to overcome what, in Star Wars terms, would be called the Dark Side: not just the simplicity and good will of the Shepherds, but also the clarity of thought and integrity embodied in the kings.

Two thirds of the way with Christmas drama, two thirds of the way as a school when measured by the number of pupils, classes and staff. So on that note, a massive thank you and merry Christmas to all parents, staff and children who have got us two thirds of the way towards a maturity that will make sure that all future dramas are the right kind. **Alan Swindell Principal**

Governors meetings Autumn Term 2017

The Governing Body and our two committees meet each half term. Much of the "leg work" is done either at the Teaching and Learning committee chaired by Jenni Shute and the Finances and Resource committee chaired by Andrew Quayle. Governors are expected to attend at least one of these meetings which last approximately 2 hours together with the two Full Board meetings each term. Alan and Mark Evers in finance, provide us with the information we need to make the appropriate decisions. Our work is to monitor and hold the school to account and act as critical friends. As governors we are also charged with the strategic direction of the school and ensuring the best value in all that we do. As volunteers, but with a wide range of expertise, we work closely with Alan and the staff team who have the delegated responsibility for the day to day running of the school.

At the start of each academic year we have to elect the officers of the board for the coming year. Besides Jenni and Andrew I have agreed to step up following Lena's resignation and Liz Groves was elected vice chair. We have agreed to look outside the current board for a new chair from September 2018. The chair does not have to come from an education background but should have the skills and the personal qualities to get the very best from all those involved with the school. If you know of any possible candidates then please let either Alan or myself know so that we can have an initial discussion about what the post entails.

This term we have looked at the impact of resourcing for an expanding school not only the student numbers but a larger staff team, monitoring the progress of the senior students as they prepare for the first ever GCSEs to be taken, the challenge of accommodating the growing number of children with specific needs at a time when Devon like all other authorities has less money to distribute to schools for this purpose. This latter area is forecast to have a substantial negative impact on the budget and is a concern we share with all the other schools in the County.

I believe, but I may be mistaken, that we are the only state school in Devon to take children from 4 years old to 16 years old. It is a privilege and a substantial responsibility for all of us involved with the school to ensure that these children and young adults are afforded the best possible opportunities. I would like to take this opportunity to wish all the staff, students and parents a very happy Christmas. **Steve Jones, chair of governors**