

## CLIVE WOLFE ON THE WINNERS OF THE NATIONAL STUDENT DRAMA FESTIVAL

# Breaking the ice with new works at Swansea

But there were many fine moments in the rest of the Festival. A selection; the wheelchair cripple trying to reach the queue ticket machine in the DHSS office, in James O'Brien's zany, anarchic, savage comedy *The Lost Giro*, from the Polytechnic of Wales. (*Sunday Times* Playwriting Award and a BP company commendation for attack and daring); the hilarity of a mental patient acting out someone recovering his sight, in the Shena Simon College group creation *My Forgotten Man*, which was full of excellent concentration by the nine asylum inmates; the appearance of the huge army of rats in Stinger Youth Theatre's *The Piper's Song* (BP com-



**NIGEL LESTER** in *The Ghost Sonata* (Bristol Revunions), winner of the BP Visual Conception Award.

mendation for entertainment); the entrance of the remote controlled phallus in Hattie Naylor's *In Search of the Almighty* (UC London); the statuesque hands suddenly joining in the progressive madness, and the excellent new live music, in Middlesex Polytechnic's *Diary of a Madman*; the surrealist opening and closing images, daringly sandwiching a naturalistic play (bravely cast

using all who wished to be included), in Eric Prince's *One Fine Day* (North

The professional contribution to workshops, discussions and talks was again very large, with Peter Nichols and Julian Mitchell participating in a wri- John Wright's highly entertaining masks demonstration; the breathtaking entry by the Festival Technical Team in Michael Green's *Coarse Acting Competition*; the ticking off by Roger Rees (summarising with Glen Walford and Robert Hewison) for various instances of inattention to detail among the productions; the superlatively educational and moving TIE production of *So Clear in my Mind*, about a spastic, given by Roy Nevitt's Theatre of Fact - cruelly and shamefully to be disbanded in a month or so, due to the government's articide policy, yet so very effective that it would cause even Mrs T to intervene, were she to see the show.

The muddled goings on provoked by the Wapping dispute resulted in a highly stimulating sharpening of everyone's political conscience and produced anomalies like the tertiary picketing (on behalf of which workers' union no one could say) of their own colleagues' production by one previously successful university drama group and a heightened awareness of the true debt owed to the controversial main sponsors, as well



**HAKHEEM KAL-KAZEEM** remonstrates with **SEAN PERTWEE** (BP Acting Commendation) in *Breaking The Ice*. Photo: Allan Titmuss.

ters forum; Michael Billington, Jatinder Verma (Tara Arts), John Elsom and Glen Walford in a Question Time on the State of the Theatre; discussions chaired equably and wittily by playwright Shaun Prendergast; and further workshop contributions, on stage fighting, coarse acting, playwriting, directing, improvisation, voice, cabaret and much else, by Simon van der Borgh, Phill Burton, Mike English, Michael Green, Dorinda Hulston, Linda Maher, Clifford Oliver, Carole Pluckrose, Roger Rees, Joanna Scanlan, Philip Stafford, Huw Thomas, Glen Walford and John Wright.

Perhaps because of the picketing and political debating, a lively and informative forum on the Edinburgh Fringe, with William Burdett-Coutts and Richard Demarco, produced an enthusiastic decision to start a campaign for fairer venue and accommodation rents during the gigantic event, with a public meeting for all participants (Forum for a Fairer Fringe) to be held at the Arts Theatre in June. The New International dispute could unexpectedly produce

**EIGHT** of the 20 selected productions at the 31st Sunday Times National Student Drama Festival in Swansea achieved on over-all effectiveness, with pride of place going to new works

*Breaking the Ice*, by Jeremy Brock, from B.A.D. Theatre Company Bristol (BP acting commendation for Sean Pertwee) contained acting of the highest calibre from its Bristol Old Vic Theatre School cast, as did *Skylark* (Guildhall School Student Theatre Society), adapted by the solo actor Jonathan Lewis and his admirable pianist Jason Carr from Billy Bishop Goes to War. But equally satisfying as acting pieces were Andrew Plaice's *Under Control*, from Crewe+Alsager College - undervalued through, perhaps inevitable, comparisons with *Porridge* - and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Bretton Hall College: BP acting commendation for Peter Price as George).

The outstanding sensory experience

of the festival – with very strong close-to acting concentration – was *The Ghost Sonata*, from Bristol Revunions (BP Visual Conception Prize for director/designer Alison Woods), though the promenade device distracted from the narrative, reducing the enjoyment for anyone unfamiliar with the plot. *The Rape* (Franca Rame) was powerfully under-emotionalised by UC Swansea and *My Friend Julie* (Roade Comprehensive School) brought a breath of simple, honest fresh air that totally disarmed and delighted. (BP performance commendations for Julie Barwick and Gina Lander.)

as the (currently) non-controversial co-sponsors BP in Wales, Swansea City Council and HTV Wales. All this was calmly, neutrally and humorously reported, like everything else, by the excellent daily Festival newspaper *Noises Off*, edited by playwright Stephen Jeffreys, whose team of critics included *Sunday Times* Student Drama Critic Award winner (for the second year running) Katherine Way of Cambridge.

some variable and long-overdue reforms in Edinburgh.