

Tony Awards

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Lords, ladies and gentlemen, we would like to welcome you to the **Tony Awards!** Join *the guide* reviewer **Tony Flook** as he looks back at some of the many shows he's reviewed over the past year.

Perhaps the question I'm most frequently asked as a reviewer is, "Have you seen any good plays lately?" This got me to thinking about what I had seen in 2003 - more than 60 productions presented by around 30 non-professional societies in over 20 venues. And that's just in the area covered by *the guide*. The short answer to the question is: "Yes, I've been to many good plays this year". Sticking my neck right out, I've chosen a few of my particular favourites from the last 12 months. This is purely a personal selection and *the guide* cannot be held responsible if I don't mention all the excellent productions I've been to in the past 12 months! As there was no selection panel, it does not take into account the views of *the guide's* other reviewers.

There are no glittering awards to be given out by celebrities (sorry), just a brief mention of some of the numerous productions that deserved to be remembered. There were more top-rate major musicals this year than I can ever recall. We're fortunate to have so many high-quality societies in our area and I can't bring to mind a sub-standard show in the year. Several stood out and these are listed in the date order in which they were produced.

Epsom Light Opera Company got the season under way with a lively staging of the evergreen *The Merry Widow*. East Surrey Operatic Society gave a scintillating production of the non-stop tap-dancing *42nd Street*. Banstead & Nork Amateur Operatic Society pulled out all the stops for their 75th birthday show *Die Fledermaus*. The Opera Club of Reigate & Redhill's staging of the difficult but rewarding *Chess* could hardly be faulted. Crawley Operatic Society must be thanked for putting on a vibrant version of *Mame*.

Several musicals performed in smaller venues also come readily to my memory, most notably Dorking Dramatic & Operatic's exuberant *Godspell* and Nomads' imaginative interpretation of *Man of La Mancha*. There were fewer memorable comedies, but The Miller Centre Players' treatment of the anarchical *What the Butler Saw* and Epsom Players' *Play it Again, Sam* kept me laughing. St Marks Players also made an impressive debut at The Harlequin with *When we are Married*. Several serious dramas are worth recalling. RATS showed that *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* can still hold attention, years after its first impact. The Miller Centre Players' *The Memory of Water* and St Paul's Drama Group's *Quartet* were well worth seeing. *Amadeus* at Dorking Dramatic & Operatic's Green Room Theatre and *Agnes off God*, the debut show by new group, the Chase Theatre Company, were gripping throughout. One-act plays should not be overlooked. There weren't many in the top echelon locally (my best evening out of the area was at the Woking Festival) but *The Dumb Waiter* at The Miller Centre was Harold Pinter at his enigmatic best.

If I'm treading on dangerous ground with this selection, it would be suicidal to go further and pick out individual performances or other aspects of stagecraft from the hundreds I've seen this year. I'd like to thank all the societies that I've been privileged to see in action in 2003 and I look forward to watching them again in the coming year.