

## **CRAIG'S ALL-SINGING, ALL-DANCING AWARD Date : 16.10.06**

Craig Armstrong's huge contribution to amateur theatre in North Staffordshire has been recognised by the National Operatic Dramatic Society. The organisation, which is the main body for amateur theatre in the UK, has presented the director and choreographer with a medal to mark his 25 years of service.



Bank manager Craig, of Lightwood, said: "It's great to receive the award but it does make you feel old.

"My first major show was a production of **Carousel** with the **Stoke-on-Trent Amateur Operatic Society Youth Section** when I was 13.

"A friend of mine at Clough Hall Junior School got me interested in performing. He was a member of the Youth Section and I went along with him one night. I decided to join and I was there every Friday night after that.



"I think performing has always been in me. It's something I love.

"I've been doing choreography for the Youth Section for just over 15 years now but have never had any formal dance training.

"I've just picked up everything I know along the way - even now the children will occasionally turn round and tell me the correct term for certain moves. But I love choreographing things in my own way, though."



Craig, who is 38, progressed into directing six years ago with a production of **Oklahoma!** at the Mitchell Memorial Theatre.

That and other shows he's directed, such as **Godspell**, **The Hired Man** and **West Side Story**, have all won top prize at the Mitchell's Full Length Play Festival.

Craig said: "My key to directing is to make things look realistic. I was really pleased with everything which came out of those shows but the thing that makes me happiest is seeing the children improve over time.



"To watch someone come into the group as a youngster and grow up and get better is great. I always love catching up with those who have progressed from the group and gone on to other things.

"I work them hard but those who have returned to get involved again all say the hard work was worthwhile."

Another of his achievements is receiving the Laurence Hancock Trophy, an annual award presented by the **Stoke-on-Trent Amateur Operatic Society**.

Craig said: "It was nice because it was my first award for services to the Youth Section, so I was very proud."

The **Stoke-on-Trent Amateur Operatic Society Youth Section** dissolved earlier this year to become the **Stoke Youth Musical Theatre Company**.

And Craig is now busy preparing their first show, called Honk. He said: "It's a really exciting production based on the story of the ugly duckling."



"It's great to direct because I love shows that are a little different.

"There's going to be plenty of morals in there and a few tears too - definitely something for the whole family.

"My time with the group isn't over yet. I'm really proud to have been with them for so long and, hopefully, I'll still be around to receive my 50 years' service award."

Robert Clarke, spokesman for Stoke Youth Musical Theatre Company, paid tribute to Craig's achievements.

He said: "The NODA award is very prestigious and means a lot in amateur theatre.

"Craig has certainly put in the work to deserve it. He's very committed to the youth section and we're glad to have him with us.

"He does very well to juggle his youth section work with a normal job as well."

Craig's production of Honk will be on stage at the Mitchell Memorial Theatre, in Hanley,