

Ode to Owensboro

Crimespree Magazine loves Kentucky. Crimespree Magazine adores the organizers, volunteers, thespians and grips of The International Mystery Writers' Festival. Crimespree Magazine is going back next year.

There is nothing quite like experiencing a "first time" within the mystery community.

Your first book signing.
Your first e-mail back from an author.
The first time you run an author chat on the web.
The first time you meet an author.
The first time someone sends you an ARC.
The first time you go to a regional convention.
The first time you go to the big dance (Bouchercon).

When Crimespree Magazine descended upon Owensboro this June it was what will remain one of our truly memorable firsts. We spent five days at the festival immersing ourselves in mystery. Not the production of books. Not the art of writing, Nor even the cozy versus hard-boiled debate (which was featured) but the sweet words of mystery. They flew at us from beautiful sets in a modern theater and gothic sets in a haunted church. We were a captive audience as scripts were performed by graduates of the Firehouse theatre in radio form. We could not get enough. We did not have time to do it all.

We knew it was going to be magic from the moment we walked into The RiverPark Center for our press passes. "Can I help you?" came from every direction. Scattered amidst the lobby were fully constructed "sets". Intimate and cozy dens complete with books and comfy chairs for authors to sign their books and chat with fans. This was the first sign that Owensboro was going the extra mile to make this something special. The message was sent home three hours later as the lights ascended and we watched the opening scenes of "Columbo Takes the Rap". The last "broadcast" we saw was "Albatross", written by Lance Rucker & Tim Perrin and winner of the first "Angie" for "Best Screenplay". All productions ran as smoothly as sharpened skates on fresh ice.

Jon, Judy Bobalik and myself went to Owensboro expecting something special but nothing prepared us for how remarkable this event was. For fans of the written world the first festival saw luminaries James Hall, Stuart Kaminsky and Sue Grafton. Kit Erhmann was there. So too were the marvelous Levinsons (Bob and Sandra), our great new friends. T.V., Radio, Broadway, and Movies were all represented. I met William Link. I met Harry Anderson. I met the Firehouse players. I met many regional thespians with incredible talent. I met Zev Buffman, a man who said he was going to do this and did it. Imagine the scope. 12 productions each presented at least three times over 6 days. one month to build the sets, lay down the sound and two weeks to work with your actors. Fifty years of experience goes a long way but this is something new and grand.

Bar-B-Q for breakfast and Bourbon for dessert, constant stimulation and still we got home rested and rejuvenated. The event was such a success for Zev Buffman and the RiverPark Center that next year it will be extended to two weeks and offer 15 (up from 12 this year) plays.

If you are a fan of mystery I suggest you look at your June Calendar for 2008 now. Owensboro offers an encompassing mystery experience; books, plays, movies, exhibits, fellow fans. Everyone was comparing notes of what they'd seen & what they should go to next, including the actors and directors.

If you are a writer of books, I suggest you consider this experience. You're outlay will be minimal. Jon and I spent a total of 500 dollars for everything for a five day stay. There will be fans. 6,500 tickets sold in 07 and another 3,000 people took part in the workshops and presentations offered for free. And it is marvelous. Batteries will recharge.

If you are a writer of screenplays, get on it, now. The RiverCenter and The International Mystery Writers' Festival may have a home for your work.

The International Mystery Writers' Festival awards are named for Oscar, Tony and Emmy Award winning star Angela Lansbury. The Angie Awards, along with more than \$20,000 in cash prizes, will be presented in the following key categories in 2008

Best new work, \$10,000;

Most promising new writer, \$5,000;

Outstanding full-length screenplay or teleplay, \$2,500;

Best short mystery play (one act), \$1,000;

Best short screenplay (60 minutes or less), \$1,000;

Best work for young adult audiences (ages 12-18), \$1,000;

Best work for child audiences (ages 11 and under), \$1,000.

There is no entry fee. Full script submissions and synopses should be sent to:

Discovering New Mysteries

Attn: Kimberly Johnson, Festival Coordinator

The RiverPark Center

101 Daviess Street

Owensboro, KY 42303

See www.newmysteries.org for more information about the festival.

Chow for now but look for more in the coming months.

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