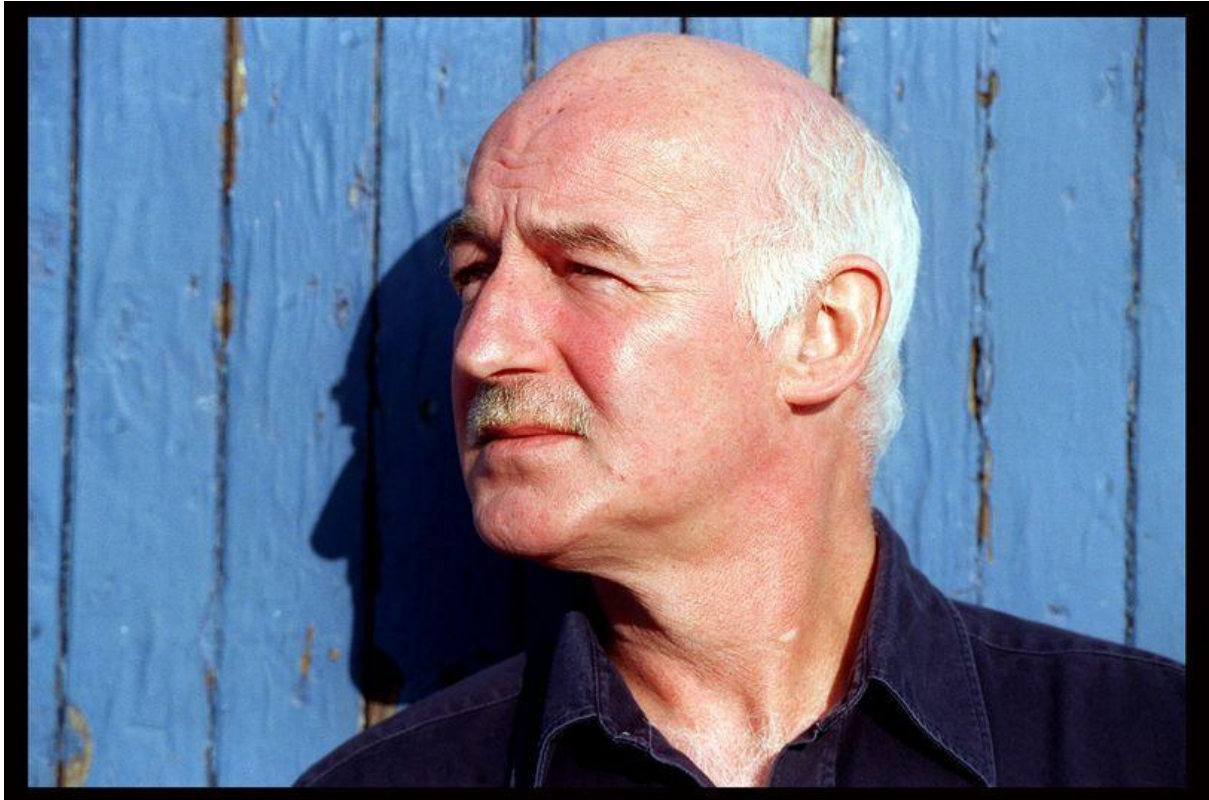


DAVE ANDERSON

An Appreciation

By Robert Harvey



DAVID 'DAVE' ANDERSON is a well-known Scottish actor, playwright, musician, singer, storyteller, songwriter, musical director and script writer. He is an all-rounder, but this is a description that somehow doesn't quite cover all the many creative strings to his bow.

He is one of Scotland's finest actors and theatre directors and plays not only the big theatres, but he also loves playing in small communities around the country where he could communicate with the audience. Dave believes that theatre should be a social event, and not just actors learning lines; everyone should be able to go and enjoy a play.

Dave was honoured in 2018 with a Doctorate from Glasgow University for his contributions to entertainment and the arts, on and off stage. Paying tribute, Professor Carl Lavery said of Dave's career: "Like the man himself, Dave



Dave (centre) in 2018 after being honoured by Glasgow University for his 'contributions to entertainment and the arts' with his brother Laurie and sisters Wendy, Lesley and Christine, all from Rutherglen

makes theatre that is warm, funny, generous, political, but above all, popular — in the true sense of that word — from and for the people.”

Dave was born on 1st. August 1945. As a boy he lived at 19 McCallum Avenue, Rutherglen. His family had a piano in the house which his dad and big sister Wendy played. His dad was self-taught. Dave had an uncle, Billy Anderson, who was a music hall entertainer whose stage name was ‘The Boy Wonder’. Sadly, he was killed in the Second World War. Dave’s granddad was also musical. While his mother was not a singer, she would recite poems at family parties. Everyone did a turn.

Before the family moved to McCallum Avenue, they lived in the old schoolhouse in Chapel Street. The family think it was owned by their grandpa’s spinster sisters, Chrissy and Maggie. Their parents had the upper flat, and another couple had the lower flat. However, a fire destroyed the property. Dave’s sister Lesley was just four years old when that happened. Their mum

had sent her down to the back garden to look up and see if there were flames coming out of the chimney. When Lesley came back and said “Yes!” mum threw lots of salt on the range and the children were put to bed. Lesley next remembers being woken up and being carried downstairs by a fireman. Everyone stood on the grass in front of the building, helplessly watching the flames as the fire brigade trying to put the fire out. She thinks her mum and dad did not retrieve anything from the house. The Anderson family were put up in Rutherglen Town Hall for around a year before being permanently rehoused at 19 McCallum Avenue. This was about 1947/8.



The old schoolhouse following the fire in the mid-1940s

There is a photo of the old schoolhouse online showing the fire damage to the property.

The photo can be seen on the Facebook page of ‘Rutherglen school pictures’.

There is also an impression of the schoolhouse drawn by local artist John Quinn on the same site.



Artist's impression of the old schoolhouse.
Courtesy of John Quinn



Dave's mother and father were always supportive of the Rutherglen community, and they received The Lord Provost Award at the City chambers for their community service in 1994.

Historic colourised postcard of Burnhill, Rutherglen, showing the old schoolhouse on the right.

Dave's father, also named David, was a professional footballer. He was an inside forward and signed for Alloa Athletic in 1936 from a junior team named Kilsyth Emmet. His career ended prematurely after he fractured his arm in a game at Broomfield Park against Airdrieonians.

Young Dave went to Calderwood Primary school and later Rutherglen Academy. He left school before the end of 4th year. Even back then he had a band, and they were playing a few nights a week at local venues and in Glasgow while he was still at school. Dave was the lead singer. He never wanted to go to university. 'Showbusiness' was his dream. Writing his own stuff, guitar over his shoulder, a travelling troubadour, the boy from Rutherglen knew what he loved.

Even from early childhood, Dave had an interest in music and has always been a songwriter. Every minute of the day thinking creatively, he also learned to play the guitar. He wanted to be Fats Domino, Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, Little Richard or even Jerry Lee Lewis. A rock star or a blues man, Dave recalls: "From a musical perspective, I had a great childhood, growing up in a home where everyone played piano and sang. I went on to play in various R&B and blues bands."

His first memories of the theatre were pantomime and variety shows. As a teenager he remembers going to dances in the Rutherglen Town Hall, and from time to time he still plays there. His parents were very traditional and always said he needed to get a real job, something to fall back on. His reaction was: “I have no intention of falling back.” Talking to me in July 2025, 80-year-old Dave smiled: “Later in life, I realised that, mostly, ‘falling back’ was what I was doing between lucky breaks.”

He had to earn money for himself though, for cigarettes and of course to give his mother a few pounds for his digs. Dave took various clerical white-collar jobs for four or five years. The money was poor but, more than ever, it showed him what he did not want to do with his life. It was a hard but necessary lesson.



Rutherglen Reformer advert for The Music House, 5th. February 1960

I vaguely remember a music shop on Hamilton Road (possibly the Music House?) in Rutherglen but don't believe I could ever afford an instrument out of there. I can't remember how I acquired my first guitar. I think I just got lucky and was given an old Hofner. First group I was in (we never said 'band' in those days) was 'The Dominators', named after our only amplifier. When we thought we were more grown up, we called ourselves 'Blues Anonymous' to indicate we were blues addicts.

Our grandpa loved his piano and he had a huge repertoire, mostly music hall and especially minstrel songs. The sound of grandpa, Dad and all the uncles harmonising together is something I'll never forget. He also wrote

songs. One was called 'The Lovely Firth of Clyde', which I'm sure my big sister Wendy recorded. Another one was called something like 'The Waltz My Sweetheart Wrote for Me. He played well enough to indulge some of the uncles' more maudlin choices: 'Galway Bay' or 'The Road and the Miles to Dundee'. Dad would often sit at the piano on the few occasions he had the house to himself. Wendy has a fantastic technique: very New Orleans, totally self-taught.

Big sister Wendy sang on the radio when she was just eight years old in a programme called 'Appointment with Cheer'. The pianist was Violet Carson, who famously played Ena Sharples in Coronation Street! Wendy was paid eight shillings as a fee.

She later won the Burns Cup two years in a row for singing a Robert Burns song acapella. Page 4 of the Rutherglen Reformer in 1955 reports:

"Four prize winners of the Rutherglen Clubs school competitions rendered Burns songs and readings, including Wendy Anderson for 'Bonnie Wee Thing' and 'Of A' the Airts the Wind Can Blaw'"

The purpose of the competition was "to encourage and stimulate a knowledge and love of the songs and poems of Robert Burns" the Reformer adds. "The competitions are open to all schools in the Rutherglen area, and there are three solo singing and elocution sections for children between the ages of 7 and 15 years."

Dave met a lady in July 2025 who also sang Burns songs and was a contemporary of Wendy's in Rutherglen days. She was absolutely certain in her recollection of Wendy singing 'Ae Fond Kiss' to an alternative tune written by her grandpa!

Wendy also performed at Rutherglen Town Hall in a variety show in the mid to late 1950s and with her wee brother and in gigs in local towns. Wendy did her repertoire of Scottish songs and other songs from musicals and accompanied Dave doing his rock 'n' roll. He never called it an Elvis tribute act but that's essentially what it was.

Dave still remembers the streets around his boyhood home:

If you turned right at the bottom of McCallum Avenue, you would find on your left, after about 200/300 yards, a park, a rectangle, the first half of which was a hemisphere of grassy mound, and the second a swing park. (I'm pretty sure that is, virtually word for word, what I wrote in a

primary school essay.) Anyway, that's definitely where my brother Laurie broke his collarbone. I do remember that. Further east was the laundry, the Gaelic football pitch, and was it the paper works with the ponds of toxic dayglow sludge? Beyond that was Cambuslang. Our group's first gig was at Cambuslang Miners' Welfare."

In the 1960s, when he was 21, Dave moved to Canada. His brother Laurie was already there, and he went on to become Dr. Laurie Anderson, Professor of Education at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. Sister Wendy also went to Canada and became a nightclub singer. Dave spent three years in Canada, picking up a variety of jobs by day and singing with his acoustic guitar around the clubs by night, loving playing 'the blues'.

In Montreal, Dave played in a coffee shop called Café Prague, which housed a piano that he thumped while attempting to sing like an old Black American. This attracted the attention of a group of young Quebecois musicians who recruited Dave and he briefly became a member of surely a rare breed: French-Canadian bluesmen. It helped that he could play the blues in guitar keys, hard to find among young guys in Montreal in the mid-1960s.

Way across on the west coast of Canada, in the seaport of Vancouver, Dave later joined another bunch of bluesmen, but guys whose first language was English this time. Dave remains proud that, when searching for a name for the group, he fought for and won 'The Goon Show' inspired Floon as the name of a blues band.

When he came back across the Atlantic Ocean, his next stop was London. He did odd jobs, stints as a painter and decorator, and played his music wherever he got a job, including clubs and restaurants. In those days, businesses could apply for a licence for an extra hour at night if they had live entertainment. Actor Alex Norton, who later became famous for taking up the lead role in 'Taggart', the Glasgow detective TV series, became a good friend of Dave's in London. Alex himself is a great guitarist. Never being able to afford to be picky, they both would play wherever cash was paid.

Alex had a gig as the host of Thursday night sessions in The Troubadour coffee shop/folk club on Old Brompton Road in Earls Court. His repertoire was mostly the Hamish Imlach songbook, complemented by being a fine guitarist. There was an element of an 'open mic' night though there was no actual mic (this was organic folk!) and Dave asked to play the blues one Thursday... and then the next, and the next. There was also a piano there, which set Dave apart from other performers. When Alex realised Dave wasn't going away, he asked him if he'd like to host alternate Thursday nights. This lasted about a year.

Dave never really thought of the theatre as he was much more interested in music but that all changed back in Scotland in 1973. He was invited by Alex Norton to see the 7:84 theatre group perform 'The Cheviot, The Stag, and the Black Black Oil', written by John McGrath. Dave interrupted his honeymoon on the Isle of Skye to go and see the show. This legendary piece of Scottish theatre tells the story of the exploitation of Scottish lands, waters and people over the centuries.

Alex had introduced Dave to 7:84 and it was a revelation to him. Before this, 'theatre' to him had images of drawing rooms, young men bounding through French windows barking, 'Anyone for tennis?', and the cast acting as if the hundreds of people for whom they were supposed to be performing weren't present in the building with them. Dave realised the theatre could be relevant, current and immediate. Trying to blend song and drama has been an ongoing challenge.

It resonated with Dave, and it changed everything. As Dave told me: "It wasn't until 7:84's founder, John McGrath, invited me to join the company that I started to act as well." It was a small group and Dave got involved in anything that needed to be done, including acting. He started to learn from his first part in McGrath's 'The Game's a Bogey' and John McGrath became a mentor.



It was in 1971 that John McGrath, his wife Elizabeth MacLennan and her brother David MacLennan, had founded the 7:84 theatre touring company. The name came from a statistic published in 'The Economist' in 1966 that stated only 7% of the UK population owned 84% of the wealth, hence 7:84. The expressed aim of 7:84 was to produce radical, popular theatre with a strong political message. Everyone engaged in politics and current affairs.

Poster for John McGrath's play The Cheviot the Stag & the Black Black Oil produced by the 7:84 theatre company.

Dave and his great friend David MacLennan shared a love of music, pantomime, and Scottish variety. In 1977, they worked together for 7:84 in a rock music play about the music industry called 'His Master's Voice'. Following its success, they wanted to have a more rock and roll and a less folky sound in their work. It was said that Dave Anderson was David MacLennan's 'brother from another mother'. Socially and working they were close and supportive of each other.

After amicable discussions with 7:84 co-founder John McGrath, they left 7:84 to set up their own production company, Wildcat Stage Productions.

The company's first production, in September 1978, was 'The Painted Bird' which addressed the subject of mental health. The two Daves were co-writers of most of all the company's shows. It was a huge body of work.



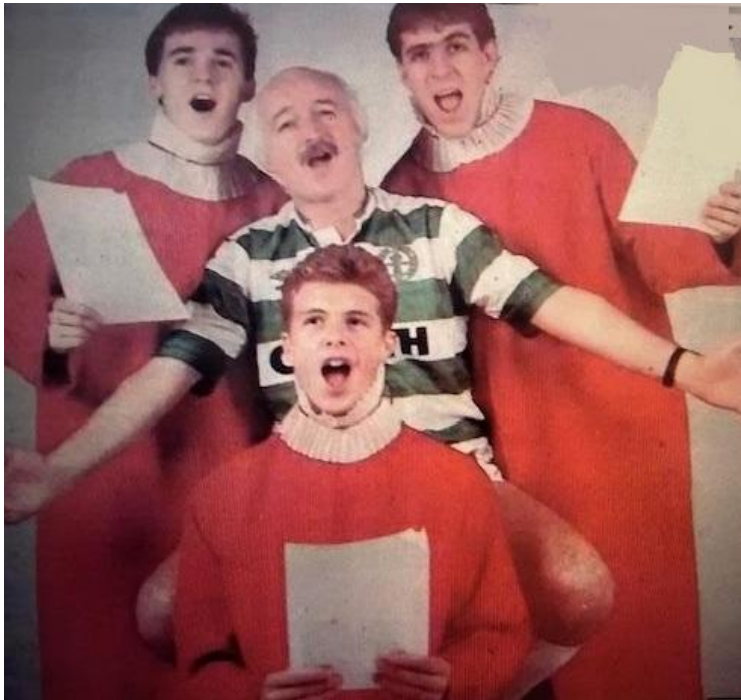
Dave Anderson and David MacLennan with the Wildcat Stage Productions touring truck, 1987

Image: Oscar Marzaroli

Wildcat Stage Productions avoided having 'theatre' in its title for the simple reason that Dave wanted to avoid any middle-class connotations about access to musical drama. He initially resisted 'Wildcat' too because he thought it sounded "a bit 1950s" as pop star Marty Wilde's backing group was called The Wildcats, but he was won over because of trade union strikes and unofficial workers' actions being dubbed 'wildcat'.

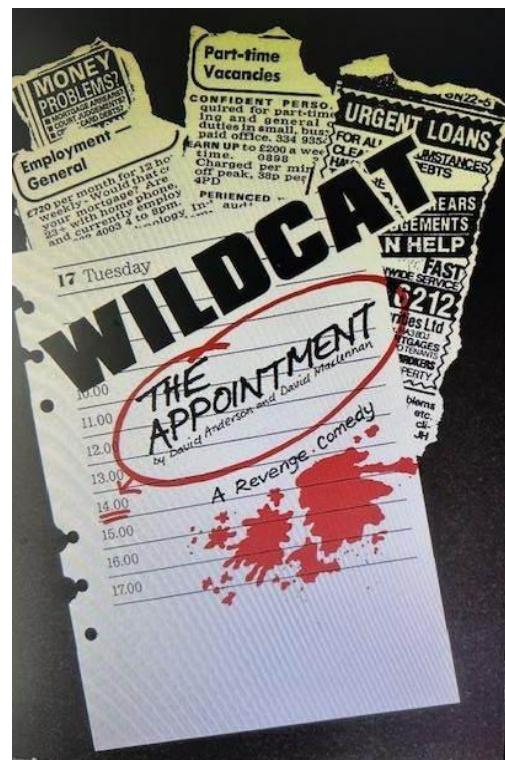
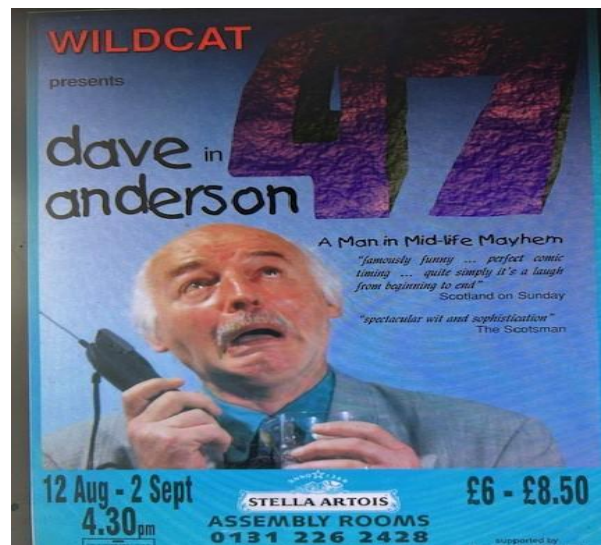
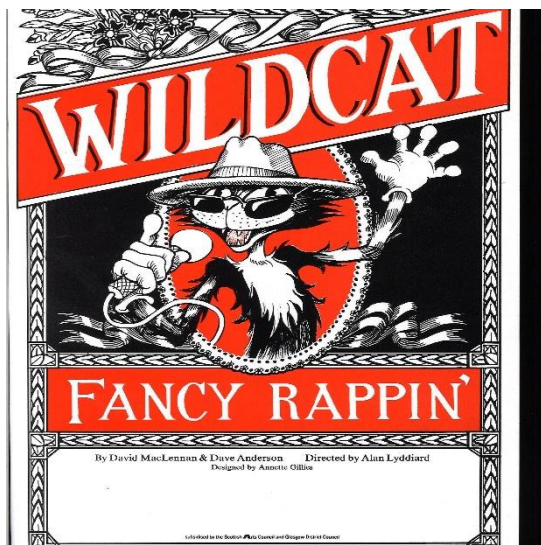
Wildcat's most successful show is probably 'The Steamie'. Written by Tony Roper, Dave Anderson wrote all the songs and music for the show, a magnificent achievement. In 1988, 'The Celtic Story' sold out at the Pavilion

Theatre for several weeks. Other large-scale productions used the King's Theatre in Edinburgh for 'The Silver Darling', and the Tramway in Glasgow for 'Border Welfare'. 'Dead Liberty' was produced at the height of the divisive 1983/84 strike by mineworkers and performed at miners' welfare clubs among others to highlight the issues behind the strike.



Dave with Celtic players Andy Walker, Mark McGhee and Derek Whyte in 1988 rehearsing for 'The Celtic Story'

After five years with 7:84, Dave was to spend the next two decades with Wildcat Stage Productions. This record of longevity was a fantastic achievement in such a competitive world.



A selection of Wildcat Stage Productions posters.

David MacLennan went on to start the hugely successful 50-minute lunchtime theatre season of plays 'A Play, a Pie, and a Pint' at Glasgow's Oran Mor venue until his death in 2014. Dave Anderson was always at the side of his friend and performed many different roles, including directing some plays. In 2024, it was reported that an astonishing 618 new plays had been performed up until then. It has provided countless opportunities for writers, actors and directors to develop their craft and try out new ideas. Productions are simple, rehearsal times short, and the subject matter diverse.

In July 2009 the Glasgow Herald published an article titled 'Lunchtime drama: Pie in the sky hopes come true': "Despite this higher profile, other lives for Oran Mor premieres is far from a new phenomenon. As far back as its very first season, four plays travelled elsewhere, from Radio 4 to Theatre Gayarre in Pamplona to Uppsala in Sweden. Further plays have been produced on BBC Radio 4 and BBC Radio Scotland."

So many new actors and writers were given their first opportunity to showcase their talents in such a creative atmosphere before a dedicated lunchtime audience who get a new play at lunchtime every week lasting no more than an hour and accompanied by a pie and a pint. In 2014, the BBC broadcast a documentary narrated by Peter Mullan about the Oran Mor.

The Christmas pantos gained legendary status with Dave Anderson playing 'The Dame'. The jokes were always topical. He is so popular that some of the actors at the Oran Mor call him "Uncle Faither", a term of endearment in Glasgow.



Rehearsing for 'A Play, a Pie and a Pint': David MacLennan, Dave Anderson and George Drennan
Image: BBC Scotland

Two books have been written about 'A Play, a Pie and a Pint'. Volume One describes six of the most popular and critically acclaimed plays from the phenomenal back catalogue.

Volume Two describes a further eight plays. Details of those books are given below.

Dave Anderson once ruptured his Achilles tendon while dancing on stage. He felt the intense pain and heard the loud snap. Being such a committed performer, though, he continued on through the pain. He was later taken to hospital and had a stookie plastered on his leg. Not to be deterred, the next night Dave still appeared and played his role on stage from a wheelchair! In 2018, Dave suffered a massive cardiac arrest. He fell ill during his stint playing the dame in 'The Lying Bitch and The Wardrobe' panto at Oran Mor in Glasgow. He thanks the NHS doctors in the hospital for saving his life during his ten days in hospital.

Three years later, Dave suffered a stroke. This was devastating as he lost control of his finger movements. Remarkably, he fought back successfully to relearn to play his beloved piano and guitar.

Dave Anderson's workload over the years could fill a book the size of 'War and Peace'.

He is known for playing Gregory's father in the film 'Gregory's Girl' and as the bank manager in the BBC Scotland sitcom 'City Lights' with Gerard Kelly. He was also in the film 'Local Hero' with his boyhood hero, Burt Lancaster.

He has numerous TV appearances in his long line of acting credits. They include the hit 'Taggart' Glasgow detective series for a number of years, the acclaimed Scottish comedy 'Still Game', the iconic 'Tutti Frutti', 'The Avengers', and 'Monarch of the Glen'.

Performing on cruise ships, Dave often got the same requests every night to sing, including Neil Diamond. But Dave is happiest when belting out Stevie Wonder or Ray Charles.

He performed in New York, in 2012, in Gerda Stevenson's award-winning play, *Federer v Murray* (you can watch a great interview about this play on YouTube).

Add in the hundreds of plays he has been involved in, the scores of music he has written, the hundreds of songs he has memorised, and it is such a great contribution to the arts and showbusiness.



Dave drew on his Rutherglen childhood experiences for his 2017 musical 'Butterfly Kiss'.

It's a short autobiographical musical show for a cast of three that is set in a Clyde coastal holiday resort (Girvan or maybe Troon?) in 1960. One critic wrote: "As always with Anderson, the richness of the show is in the songs, some of which are magnificent.

The one called 'My Old Man', in which 'The Boy' describes his relationship with his dad, is almost an entire social history of Scotland in the post-war period, packed into a few well-shaped verses. Katie Barnett joins the cast as chorus, and as the girl who heals the boy's broken heart with her 'butterfly kiss'."



Dave Anderson and Katie Barnett in 'Butterfly Kiss', drawing on Dave's childhood memories of Rutherglen

He has directed plays by Ian Pattison and co-written his very successful one-man shows with David MacLennan. This includes 'Mobile', about a man who lives in a wheelie bin.



Dave as Chic Murray in Dave Anderson's Christmas Bunnet Done It!

One of the highlights of Dave's career was when he won the 'Best New Musical' award at the Edinburgh Festival with his musical 'Tir Na Nog'. He made his Edinburgh Fringe debut more than 30 years ago, in a one-man show called '47'.

Dave is still performing. In December 2024, he totally sold out two nights of his one-man show about the

comic genius Chic Murray, 'Dave Anderson's Christmas Bunnet Done it!' He was always a huge fan of Chic's, and this was a gift of a part for him. He included a few of his favourite Chic monologues and one-liners including:

A man goes into a pet shop and asks how much the wasps are.

"We don't sell any wasps."

"Well, there are two in the window."

During the show Dave shared his personal and funny observations on modern-day life. He also performed the music and many of the songs that he has written over the years. It was a great performance.



Dave with members of the cast of Chic Murray: A Funny Place for a Window

Dave has enjoyed a long and varied career, but people today still recognise him mainly for his roles in ‘City Lights’ and ‘Gregory’s Girl’. These are the two that practically everyone knows. Ever since then he has always been offered slightly pompous, managerial characters! That is the last thing this boy from Rutherglen with the golden voice is. You won’t meet anyone more down to earth.

But just maybe his greatest contribution was taking his plays and music out into communities around Scotland, he wants to share the idea that the theatre is for everyone. Dave cares about communities, society, and having a good night out. There is a wonderfully written article online by Janice Johnson about the night Dave visited the Ayr Writers’ Club in 2014. The group was inspired by the imagination and creative genius of Dave. And all done with wit and humour as they took the opportunity to pick his brains on how to write and produce a play. During the Q&A, Dave also shared the story of his creative journey, from his early teenage days writing song lyrics. And his essence of theatre is about using the medium to convey powerfully passionate messages and addressing audiences more directly. “What a treat,” said Janice.

We will leave the last word to Dave about a life packed full of drama, music and comedy:

Most actors will tell you they prefer the social aspect of the theatre, with the audience contributing to the performance, which you just don’t get

with film. It's just you, the machinery and the director, whereas there's nothing like being on the stage.



Dave Anderson as Mr. McLelland in City Lights with other members of the cast.

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Acknowledgments and further information:

- Dave's sisters Lesley, Christine and Wendy and his brother Laurie.
- The www.puttingittogethercast.com Podcast interview by Brian O'Sullivan
- The www.akickupthearts.org Podcast interview by Nicola Meighan
- The www.jimandpatwestendchat.com Podcast interview by Pat Byrne
- Wikipedia – Lists of plays
[7:84](#)
[Wildcat](#)
- Various quotes and articles in the National Press
- Information on the two books about A Play a Pie and a Pint from [salamanderstreet publishing](http://salamanderstreetpublishing.com), Leith

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