

APPRECIATIONS 2025

SPEECH & DRAMA ADJUDICATORS

Timothy McCarthy MA, HDE, FTCL, LGSMD, FLCM, ALAM, PGCA

As always it was a personal joy and delight to be in Sri Lanka for the Lanka Speech and Drama Festival during the summer of 2025. I was delighted to visit the various centres in Jaffna, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Colombo. I congratulate the many students and teachers for all the fine work they presented, and to their parents and families for supporting them and giving their children this wonderful opportunity.

It is now both common and regular to award Gold Medal Distinction marks. This is a great credit to all involved who brought the festival to this wonderful standard. I would just remind teachers and performers to be careful and precise in their understanding of some Speech disciplines. Public Speaking is an opportunity for students to present their own thoughts and ideas on a particular subject. Please note that it is NOT an essay and do not mix it up with storytelling or characterisation. Story telling should have a clear structure and pattern with an introduction, the development of a problem and its quick resolution. Story-telling is not a drama or the occasion to express thoughts and ideas but a straight forward narrative of events. Finally, Nursery Rhymes should be taken from what is usually known as the Mother Goose Nursery Rhyme repertoire.

I wish to say a special thank you to Mrs. Shyama Perera and all her team at IIMSD for all their work in organizing and arranging the various aspects of the festival and for the kindness and hospitality afforded to me as I travelled around Sri Lanka. A particular thank you to Mrs. Shanika Fernando who accompanied me to every Centre and took such great care in running the various sessions. I brought home happy memories of a special time of the year and wish everyone well as they carry on this unique and important event.

Susan Mackay ALAM, LLAM, LLAM(TD)

It was a great privilege and joy to be back in Sri Lanka in the summer of 2025 after being invited to adjudicate at the Lanka Festival of Music, Dance and Speech. I was looking forward to visiting several familiar Centres and having a chance to meet up with some enthusiastic teachers I first met in 2023.

I was astonished at the sheer volume of entries for this year's festival and was looking forward to two months of watching students from all over your beautiful island performing to the best of their ability. I thought the standard of work last year was high but this year was even higher. Teachers, from the age of three you are facilitating these talented students to develop confidence, self-assurance and communication skills which are all so valuable in today's society. It was an absolute pleasure to chat with many of you, when time allowed, and hear stories of children who wouldn't have been able to speak aloud when they first arrived at lessons, let alone perform on a big stage, as they are required to do in the festival. Yet I saw so many assured performances this year. You are to be congratulated.

Parents, I am always humbled by the love and commitment you show your children. I would like to thank you all for giving them the opportunity to take part in this wonderful festival. It will be an experience they will never forget and also help them develop into self-assured well-rounded individuals with much to offer our troubled and struggling world. The future looks bright indeed.

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to all the staff who work tirelessly in and out of the office under the direction of Mrs. Shyama Perera. None of this would be possible without your dedication and hard work. Once again you have made this year's festival a joy to behold. On a personal level I would like to thank Shyama for continuing to develop the wonderful work Mrs. Joy Ferdinando started with such insight and passion. I'm sure she would be extremely proud of her talented daughter.

I arrived in Sri Lanka in 2023 to adjudicate a festival. However, I leave this year's festival with much more than I ever expected having made some lasting and precious friendships.

May I wish you all well in your preparations for the 2026 Lanka Festival.

Mr. Neil Stanley MA, BA Hons, PGCE, FRSA, MSTSD.

It was a privilege to be invited to adjudicate the Lanka Festival for Music, Dance and Speech for the first time in the summer of 2025. This long-established festival has a well-deserved international reputation. My fellow-adjudicators, Mr. Timothy McCarthy and Mrs. Susan Mackay have spoken so fondly of the festival and I would like to thank them for recommending me to the IIMSD. I would like to thank Mrs. Shyama Perera and her team at IIMSD for such a well organised festival, for their warm welcome, companionship and support.

In my first visit to the festival (and, indeed, my first visit to Sri Lanka!), I was so impressed with the diligence of the children and the commitment shown to the importance of speaking and listening by teachers and parents. Throughout this festival, I was able to witness the journey taken by these young people; from the three- or four-year-olds who bravely took to the stage for their first competition, right through to the confidence and poise demonstrated by older competitors.

It is so clear that parents and teachers understand the invaluable life skills nurtured by the festival. At its most basic, having the confidence to stand in front of a room full of people and speak is a skill so many people need in their adult lives; in business meetings, interviews and community groups. Seeing groups of children working together, supporting and encouraging each other, particularly in choral speech classes, was particularly pleasing. On a more personal level, the art of storytelling - of using the face and voice to bring situations and characters to life - is so wonderful to see. I know that when this year's competitors have children of their own, they will draw on the skills they have learned and pass on their love of stories to their own children.

Particular thanks must go to Mr. Timothy McCarthy for his hard work in compiling the anthology for this festival. Compiling an anthology is a painstaking and often thankless task. It requires a precise understanding of material that will inspire and challenge children of different ages, with a variety that will fire their imaginations. This anthology should be retained as an invaluable resource for teachers and children. It will encourage them to explore other work by the writers included and will give a clear guide as to the appropriate standard for each age group.

The teachers have worked so hard to prepare their children for the festival. It was pleasing to observe the thoughtful way in which teachers had selected own choice texts that drew on each child's strengths. Going forward, I would like to encourage the teachers to have the confidence to be bold and creative in the 'acting a poem' classes. These are a unique opportunity, extremely rare in festivals, to allow children to use their creativity, particularly through movement, action and use of performing spaces, to bring the words of a poem to life for an audience, moving from 'recital' to 'performance'. Similarly, public speaking gives children a delightful opportunity to explore their own personal interests. With the younger classes in particular, public speaking is at its best when the personality of the speaker is able to shine through.

Children, you have worked so conscientiously to prepare for this festival. It was a privilege to be able to meet you and to reward you with so many gold, silver and bronze medals. I hope that every one of you has gained confidence from the experience. Along with your other studies, competing in the festival will equip you with the skills you will need to become citizens of the world. Many of you learned a poem for this festival. By the time you read this Appreciation, the 2025 Festival - and the poem you learned - will probably be a distant memory. You will have already worked for school tests, sporting fixtures and many other activities that make your lives so busy. You might think that you have forgotten your poem; your poem, however, has not forgotten you. It will be buried, deep in your memory and it will stay there quietly for years. At some point in the future, perhaps your children or grandchildren will be learning a poem. Maybe they will be participating in the festival themselves. They will ask you, "Did you ever learn a poem?" You will pause, just for a moment, before replying, "Yes. Yes, I did." And then the poem that you learned way back in 2025, that you had not thought about in years, will come back into your memory, the words flowing from your lips. You will be transported back to 2025 and the poem that you learned - and thought you had forgotten - will return. It is a gift to the future you.

MUSIC ADJUDICATOR

Richard Deering FTCL, GTCL, LRAM, ARCM, PGCA

I have lost count of how many times I have had the privilege of adjudicating at the Lanka Festival, but my first visit was in 2002. However, every time I visit, I am forcibly struck by the raised standards of both teaching and performance.

During the 7 weeks of the 2025 Festival this sense of progress was more dramatically experienced with some truly astonishing performances by some highly talented youngsters that would make any community anywhere in the world very proud.

It was particularly heartening, and personally very rewarding, to have so many performers, teachers and parents, thank me for my efforts and I feel self-pride in being able to help so many exciting young performers to realise their potential and goals.

An enormous amount of gratitude must be heaped upon the teachers, throughout the country, for their unstinting efforts and an equal portion of thanks must be directed towards the organisers of this vast and complex festival for the detail and skill that has allowed us to all come together in the service of our art.

From a personal point of view, it was obviously very tiring, but the rewards and memories are unlimited, so I eagerly look forward to my next invitation to be with you all.

DANCE ADJUDICATOR

Jill Redford PGCA

I first had the privilege of adjudicating at the Lanka Festival in 2006, and I am delighted to return now for my fourth visit in 2025.

This festival continues to provide a wonderful platform for dancers of all ages and levels of experience—a place where they can perform, learn, and grow. It is always inspiring to see performers not only showcase their own talent but also observe, listen, and gain from the adjudication process.

I have been deeply impressed by the creativity and dedication of the dance teachers. The children and students are truly fortunate to have such passionate mentors guiding their journey.

May the Lanka Festival continue to flourish in the years ahead. My warm congratulations go to the organisers for once again presenting such a remarkable event.

As the saying goes, ***teamwork makes the dream work***—and here in Sri Lanka, at the Lanka Festival of Music, Dance & Speech, that spirit shines brightly.