

Congratulations to Colchester Sixth Form College – they did us proud.

Colchester had an invitation from its twin town of Avignon to participate in a unique occasion. The event was to commemorate the anniversary of the start of the First World War. The accent was to be on young people. Avignon invited students from its twin towns to attend.

On the 3rd February the Colchester party travelled to Avignon, comprising a group from Colchester Sixth Form College and representatives of the Colchester Twinning Society (CTS)

Nigel Hildreth, the college's director of performing arts, and his daughter Sarah, accompanied twelve lower sixth students from the college. The society's liaison officer, Lois Pertee and her husband Chris joined Valerie Francis, chairman of the CTS. Students and representatives of the Twin Towns of Wetzlar, Sienna and Diorbel (Senegal) joined them. All students stayed with local families and attended the school of their hosts. Their brief was to work on a production that would link with the activities surrounding the 1st World War. The productions took place on the 7th February in the Hotel de Ville.

The Mayor of Mayor and Mayoress of Colchester, Councillors Colin and Laura Sykes, visited the Commemoration from the 4th to the 6th February.

The occasion showed that the students were aware of the rawness of feeling some one hundred years later as they showed their own input into their performances, as well as the reaction expressed by interruptions from the audience.

The 1st performance was by the Italian students:

La Prima Guerra Mondiale L'Italia - The First World War Italy.

Their acts involved a series of sketches and reminiscences starting with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria on the 28th July 1914. The twelve battles of Isongo were mentioned, as well as the heavy losses suffered by the Italians and the use of poison gas which played a major part in the collapse of the Italian second army. We were shown pictures of doctors and nurses displaying great courage in looking after the injured. Their act culminated in singing songs from the 1st World War although we were not quite sure whether 'Na na, na, na' was correct!



The 2nd performances was by the students from Wetzlar.

They cleverly concentrated on the pacifists that were against the war. A few students acted some of the characters with audience participation shouting objections. We were also shown pictures of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. They formed an underground organisation called the 'Spartacus League', which printed an illegal newspaper called the "Spartacus Letters". They got the name Spartacus after the slave who led a failed revolt against the mighty Roman Army. In May 1916, the Spartacists went public and called for an end to the war. Liebknecht was arrested and spent the rest of the war in prison.



Also mentioned was Ifred Hermann Fried an Austrian Jewish pacifist and co-founder of the German peace movement and joint winner with Tobias Asser of the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1911. Another mentioned was Bertha Felicita Sophie Freifrau von Suttner. She was the 1st woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace prize. She was an Austrian novelist and pacifist. Finally they mentioned Romain Rolland who was a lifelong pacifist. He protested against the first World War in *Au-dessus de la Mêlée* (1915). Lastly they showed letters of German soldiers.



Performance by the Avignon and Colchester students.

It was good to see the students from the two towns on the stage together. Some Avignon students had joined in the orchestra playing the piano, guitar and violin. Both towns sang separately but joined together for the last songs. These were 'The long way to Tipperary' and 'Pack up your troubles' which were sung to rapturous applause and audience participation. It was a great performance and Nigel Hildreth is to be congratulated for his enthusiasm and hard work.



Avignon on left, Colchester on right



Avignon student on the piano. two others were playing the guitar and violin

Final performance in the evening

Our Colchester students performed in the afternoon and again in the evening – I assume because they were so good!

Performance by the students from Diorbel in Senegal

Their costumes were lovely and their performance vibrant. It was great to see them banging the drums (which I am sure have a special name) and their energetic dancing. Initially they were asking why they were expected to go to war. Obviously puzzling when they were in Africa but of course they were a French colony.



At the end we see the soldiers returning from the war. One is injured and there is much wailing when it was announced that a soldier had died. It was an interesting and lively performance.