

THE ROBIN HOOD THEATRE COMPANY LTD.



Chairman's Report to

The Annual General Meeting 9 February 2017

Introduction

This report covers the company year from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016. I report on the running of the company; our production programme; ancillary activities; and developing the building with a forward look to the coming year.

Running the Company

After the election of directors at the fifth general meeting of the company we assigned the following executive roles at our first meeting:

- Chairman – Geoff Morgan
- Secretary – Jean Baliol-Key
- Finance – Clive Harmston
- Artistic and Events – Jean Lebeter
- Design – Jackie Rogers
- Technical – Dave Baliol-Key
- Communications – Carolyn Drury
- Designated Premises Supervisor - Mark Lebeter
- Buildings – Michael Jeffrey

Brendan Haigh has continued as a non-executive member of the Board nominated by the Diocese of Nottingham and Southwell. The Board meets monthly.

Nobody was elected to replace Rachel Repper at the December 2015 AGM. The Board decided that we would also increase the number of Directors as the demands of productions and hirings plus the building development work was putting an increasing burden on the current Directors. Accordingly we appointed Martin Williams to the Board as FOH Director and Karen Peck as the Artistic Director with Jean Lebeter retaining responsibility for events including hirings.

Membership increased by 8% to 167 current members. The facility to pay subscriptions on line has proved increasingly popular.

The bi monthly newsletter continued to keep members informed of developments and changes together with e-mail despatches used for more immediate updates, audition notices, production notices etc. The website has been continually updated and maintained as a key communication channel to members and the world about our activities. We have made more use of the Facebook and Twitter links for immediate updates and pictures of rehearsals and activities this year.

Production Programme

The programme for the last season included the following main productions:

Date	Play	Comments
October 2015	Abigail's Party	The classic improvisation play from Mike Leigh was directed by David O'Brien with true 1970s style.
November 2015	The Pitmen Painters	Lee Hall's dramatization for the National Theatre of the true story of 5 miners from the north-east whose art appreciation evening class took them to greater things. Clive Harmston's direction won the NANDA Play of the Year Award as well as 2 Best Supporting Actor Awards.
January 2016	Ladies' Day	Local author Amanda Whittington's feisty comedy of four fish packers who go to Royal Ascot in the year it was held at York. Geoff Morgan directed our highest selling production of the year.
April 2016	Gaslight	Jean Lebeter directed this classic Victorian thriller for which we gained the Best Actress award in the NANDA competition.
June 2016	Brief Encounter	Emma Rice's adaptation of Noel Coward's romantic drama was a multimedia experience directed by Dave Baliol-Key as a spectacular season finale.

We are very pleased that audience numbers averaged over 90% for the season confirming that our marketing efforts and quality control are paying off. We decided that if directors and cast wanted to they could enter the NANDA Play of the Year competition. RHT had previously been a little cautious about this competition but the Board thought we should do more for our membership of this organisation and also gain the objective feedback that adjudication brings to assist our quality control.

In addition, we staged an Old Time Music Hall for two nights in May as a fund raiser and display of hidden talents. Also, we performed 2 Murder Mystery evenings for local organisations.

We gave readings to two new plays by local authors. "Extra Time" a comedy by member Ian Collinson was given a rehearsed reading to the Board who agreed that it should be given a studio style production in the new season. "Peter" a drama by Fiona Theokritoff was given a first reading for the author and will be given a rehearsed reading next year.

For the first time in many years we welcomed professional performers back to the stage through the Village Ventures scheme. We hosted Hark Hark a seasonal musical evening in December. In February we presented Tangram Theatre's production of "Origin of the Species" a highly interactive and entertaining piece about the life and works of Charles Darwin. Finally, in March we presented "Call Mr Robeson" a musical show about the life and politics of the singer Paul Robeson. Each was different and presented some technical challenges but all were well received. Audience numbers averaged 80-90 which was slightly disappointing as we expected greater attendance from the AKS villages but each show made an overall contribution to funds after the share for the scheme so the Board decided to participate for a further year.

During the year we ran workshops for new actors, lighting technicians and stage managers. This has already generated new cast members in the season's productions as well as enhanced the skills of our technical members.

Ancillary Activities

During the year, there were 38 hirings ranging from private parties to the local school and productions by Newark Amateur Operatic Society and Argent Theatre. We were also pleased to host the Wolfit Lecture and Showcase events given the theatre's association with Sir Donald. Hirings ranged from a couple of hours for one room to the whole building for the week. This has contributed nearly £3,000 to our income for the year.

Our bar and refreshment services have all made a healthy contribution to funds both during productions and for significant hirings. We were very grateful for the 200 Club's donation of a purpose made display freezer for the ice cream to enhance our ice cream sales. We experimented through the year with occasional Sunday pub nights partly at the suggestion of villagers but also as an occasion for members to socialise. The response has not been good enough to risk regular opening but we will continue to offer such occasions when we judge they are likely to be well attended.

Youth Theatre

The Youth Theatre has completed its second successful year. They meet regularly on Sunday afternoons and demonstrated their considerable talents and developing skills with summer and winter shows devised and performed by their members.

Developing the Theatre

During the year, we continued to make various modest improvements to the buildings. The understage radiators and associated pipework were replaced which seems to have had the extra effect of improving the heat levels in the auditorium. We have retained the elderly radiators for re-conditioning as they match those in the auditorium and plan to install them in the future as additional outputs increasing the rate at which the auditorium warms up. We also overhauled the sound system in the auditorium replacing all the components from microphones and amplifier to mixing desk and speakers. We now have the capability to support a wider range of shows as well as augmenting the on stage sound for those with poorer hearing. We also removed the dangerous external staircase leading to the old dormitory attics more recently used for wardrobe storage. The rooms were completely cleared of all costumes and other items and for the time being are only accessible by ladder.

We commissioned a review of our stage lighting system by relatively new member and qualified lighting designer John Leventhall. We already had concerns that the lighting was insufficient and this was highlighted by the adjudications. John reported that we lack any stock of profile spotlights and that we have insufficient lighting channels. He suggested some low cost remedies and also obtained six surplus profile lanterns from his contact at RADA. Work on this project continues into next year.

An enormous effort was put into clearing the garden areas along the drive at the front of the Theatre both by Vodafone volunteering teams and continuous efforts by members June and David Horton. The borders are not actually ours but our neighbouring landowner was pleased to give permission and joined in with some of the work. He also agreed that we could remove the enormous sycamore trees that were constantly clogging the gutters with leaves and seeds as well as breaking into the drainage pipes. This project also continues into next year.

Our Architect - Clive Brooks – worked steadily all year on the scheme to ensure that the partially completed extension building is made compliant with current building control standards. This has been agreed with Newark and Sherwood District Council and we subsequently agreed a sequence for the works starting with the relatively low cost or straightforward items that could be done by members. There are significant works adding up to £100,000 that we have been considering ways of funding. Clearly, we have some reserves to fund part of the work but not nearly enough for all of it. One of the difficulties in seeking grant funding will be

that there is no demonstrable outcome of this work, other than compliance, the building will still not form a studio theatre or community hall so alternative approaches are being explored.

Forward Look

The building

Over the coming year we shall be:

- Undertaking a maintenance programme of cleaning, painting, repairs and minor preventative works;
- Seeking the best way to complete all the compliance works on the extension building including work using members' skills and labour and modest withdrawals of reserves;
- Building a ramp from the emergency exit on the left hand side of the auditorium to make it easier and safer to evacuate an audience in an emergency and undertaking other minor development works as the opportunities and funding present themselves.

The programme

The current season's programme is underway and comprises:

Date	Play	
Sept/October 2016	My Mother Said	Charlotte Keatley's moving exploration of the relationships between mothers and daughters providing some challenging women's roles.
November 2016	Ann Boleyn	Howard Brenton is one of our major modern playwrights and wrote this original take on the most notorious English Queen for the Globe Theatre
January 2017	Ladies' Down Under	After the success of Ladies' Day, we could not resist Amanda Whittington's sequel presenting a unique opportunity for actors to recreate their original roles.
April 2017	One Man Two Guvnors	The National Theatre's update of the classic Comedia d'ell Arte play by Richard Bean takes us to the Brighton underworld. A range of strong parts and extremely funny.
June 2017	The Witches	A stylish adaptation of Roald Dahl's classic story will provide a chilling but thrilling family entertainment for the start of summer.

Our participation in the Village Ventures scheme continues. We have been allocated three theatre events:

- **February** "The thing that came from over there" by Gonzo Moose Theatre an extravagant Antarctic comedy;
- **March** "Manalive" a very adult G K Chesterton story recreated by two actors and puppets from company Box Tale Soup;
- **May** "Learned Friends" a behind the scenes court room drama written and performed by ex-barrister Ginny Davis.

Our New Works programme item for the year will be the musical Ton of Bricks co-written by Carolyn Drury. It will be presented by her Stroke of Genius company but feature many RHTC members!

Tickets for all shows are available either through the website or by phone (when members can easily obtain their discount) which means that customers can book their favourite seats for the whole season. We shall be upgrading the ticket system for the new season.

Hirings are already going well with bookings into mid-2017. We have welcomed Newark Amateur Operatic Society for the second time for their sell out production of "Rent" and one of the dance schools we saw two years ago will be making a welcome return.

The Youth Group

We shall be looking to improve the Youth Group's exposure by giving them longer performance slots next summer and winter and seeing whether we can involve them more in some of the main house shows.

Conclusion

This has been another busy year demanding a lot of work from members. We have continued to build up our financial reserves whilst undertaking modest development work. The audience response since we re-opened has been strong but we cannot afford to be complacent in our programme selection, production quality or customer services. We spend months choosing the plays for the next season and then manage the quality of productions from inception to performance. We are keeping production costs under control and managing our development programme cautiously. The Youth Theatre is running well. Hirings and wider use of the theatre building is holding up and the front and outside of the theatre building is looking better than it has done for many years.

Geoff Morgan

Chairman

The Robin Hood Theatre Company Ltd

16 January 2017