

THE ROBIN HOOD THEATRE COMPANY LTD.



Chair's Report to

The Annual General Meeting 8 February 2018

Introduction

This report covers the company year from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017. 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 sixth general meeting of the company we assigned the following executive roles at our first meeting:

- Chair – Geoff Morgan
- Secretary – Jean Baliol-Key
- Finance – Clive Harmston
- Artistic – Karen Peck
- Events – Jean Lebeter
- Design – Jackie Rogers
- Technical – Dave Baliol-Key
- Communications – Carolyn Drury
- Designated Premises Supervisor - Mark Lebeter
- Buildings – Michael Jeffrey
- FOH – Martin Williams

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

Carolyn Drury resigned from the Board in August and we were pleased that Rachel Repper agreed to take on the Communications and Marketing role.

Membership increased by 6% to 177 current members.

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 markedly increased the use of the Facebook and Twitter links for immediate updates and pictures of rehearsals and activities, especially in the latter part of this year.

Production Programme

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

Date	Play	Comments	Audience
Sept/October 2016	My Mother Said by Charlotte Keatley	This moving exploration of the relationships between mothers and daughters providing some challenging women's roles and was the first time Jean Baliol-Key had directed for RHT.	66%
November 2016	Ann Boleyn by Howard Brenton	This original take on the most notorious English Queen was a gloriously funny and dramatic production directed by Jill Morris as a first time for RHT. With a tremendous set designed by David Piper to show off the performance and challenge the lighting designers (to which they rose with aplomb).	84%
January 2017	Ladies' Down Under by Amanda Whittington	After the success of Ladies' Day, the sequel presented a unique opportunity for actors to recreate their original roles whilst welcoming one extra man to the cast and ending with a superb Sydney drag queens' extravaganza.	100%
April 2017	One Man Two Guvnors by Richard Bean	A range of good parts enabled strong and extremely funny performances with a dynamic set designed by David Piper. The production got some well-deserved commendations in the NANDA Play of the Year competition.	97%
June 2017	The Witches adapted from Roald Dahl by David Wood	In turns chilling and amusing this was a new venture for RHT into more family entertainment. Another dramatic set by David Piper working on several levels and with explosions to make the audience jump provided an excellent platform for some lively performances.	57%

We are very pleased that audience numbers were only slightly under last year's, averaging 88% for the season, confirming that our marketing efforts and quality control are paying off. We continued with the policy of entering the NANDA Play of the Year competition if the cast and director wished to. We are pleased to say that two of our actors in One Man Two Guvnors received special commendations and we were awarded the Front of House award recognising the sterling work of all our volunteers who welcome and look after our audience before, during and after the show.

For the second season we welcomed professional performers to the stage through the Village Ventures scheme. We presented:

- **February** "The thing that came from over there" by Gonzo Moose Theatre an extravagant and anarchic Antarctic comedy;
- **March** "Manalive" a very adult G K Chesterton story recreated by two actors with their own hand crafted puppets from the company Box Tale Soup;
- **May** "Learned Friends" a behind the scenes court room drama written and performed by ex-barrister Ginny Davis, who after the interval was pleased to answer questions from the audience about the issues raised in the production.

Audience numbers averaged 80-90 which was slightly disappointing as we expected greater attendance from the AKS villages and whilst each show made an overall contribution to funds after the share for the scheme, the booking and administration of the scheme is chaotic meaning that we had little control over what we presented. So the Board decided not to participate again.

Independently we presented Hambleton Productions' authorised tribute to Tommy Cooper "Just Like That" which was very well received with good audience numbers.

Ancillary Activities

During the year, there were 48 hirings (26% up on last year) ranging from private parties to community organisations such as the local WI and productions by Newark Amateur Operatic Society (Rent) and Stroke of Genius presenting a new musical "Ton of Bricks". We were also pleased to host the Wolfit Endowment Fund Lecture and Showcase events. Hirings ranged from a couple of hours for one room to the whole building for the week. This has contributed over £5,000 to our income for the year.

The King Bar and refreshment services have all made a healthy contribution to funds both during productions and for significant hirings. We arranged occasional themed Sunday pub nights as fund raising opportunities for members and villagers to socialise.

Youth Theatre

The Youth Theatre has completed its third 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. One was inspired by an Agatha Christie mystery and the second was an ambitious and chilling horror story using video footage integrated with the live action.

Developing the Theatre

The emergency exit ramp from the left side of the auditorium was completed over the summer and autumn of 2016.

During the year, we planned the start of works to make the extension Building Regulation compliant. The total programme will cost about £100,000 and we aimed for the first three items on the list to be undertaken by contractors over the 2017 summer. There were delays in starting these works and they were completed in the current year. They removed the poorly constructed mezzanine floors over the scenery dock; strengthened the wardrobe roof and put a door into the rear entry to wardrobe; inserted doors to the internal entrance to the Wolfit Room; and installed toilets in the dressing rooms.

John Leventhall and Mike Dobbs continued the upgrading of our stage lighting system. They secured a donation of 30 second hand lanterns from our regular technical supplier – Hawthorns. The lanterns came with all trappings and went straight into production use. They also reconditioned 6 of our older lanterns that had been declared useless and brought them back to working order. To top this they have also obtained, on permanent loan from another LTG member (The Courtyard Theatre, Chipstead), a higher grade lighting control board than was supplied with the lighting system installed before we re-opened. This means that we can have more sophisticated lighting designs for our productions and will meet the expectations of other companies performing on our stage.

The garden areas along the drive at the front of the Theatre and the car park weeds and hanging baskets have continued to benefit from the attentions of Vodafone volunteering teams and continuous efforts by members June and David Horton. The enormous sycamore trees that were constantly clogging the gutters with leaves and seeds as well as breaking into the drainage pipes were also removed during the summer of 2016.

Forward Look

The building

We have decided to revise the bar and kitchen layout as the bar servery was not easy to operate and at times the floor became very slippery because of the constricted layout. This includes installing new cupboards, sinks and worktops as well as replacing the old gas cooker with a smaller electric cooker. As a consequence we shall get rid of the unsightly LPG cylinders by the front door.

We have recently been alerted to the existence of several funding schemes that could enable us to complete the extension building including the compliance works. Capital funds are available from the European Regional Development Fund specifically aimed at rural communities and services. The County Council are offering three year revenue grants to support the development of social, welfare and cultural services. The East Midlands Chamber of Commerce is offering assistance with small business IT development including advice, training and equipment grants. We will be pursuing all these schemes to see if they offer the theatre a way to fund the completion of the extension building and bring it into full use.

The programme

The current season's programme is well underway and comprises:

Date	Play	
September 2017	Accidental Death of an Anarchist	A recent translation of Dario Fo's classic comedy about police corruption
December 2017	A Christmas Carol	The Derby Playhouse version of Dicken's classic Christmas tale in a seasonal slot.
January 2018	God of Carnage	The modern Olivier award winning comedy of manners by Yasmin Reza reminiscent of Abigail's Party.
April 2018	Single Spies	Alan Bennett's comedy double bill about Burgess and Blunt.
June 2018	Ghost Train	Arnold Ridley's classic 1950s comic thriller.

Our New Works Programme item for the year will be the comedy "Extra Time" written by Ian Collinson. We will present it for three nights in February.

We are welcoming back Hambleton Productions in March with their version of "Steptoe and Son"

Hirings are already going well with bookings into mid-2018. We have welcomed Newark Amateur Operatic Society for the third time for their sell out production of "Avenue Q" and Argent Theatre Company will be making a welcome return with "Sitting Pretty" in March 2018.

Looking a bit further ahead we have already committed to a production of "Oh What a Lovely War" in November 2018 to coincide with the 100th Remembrance Sunday. There will be a special production on the Sunday and we are looking into other ways of making this a significant marking of 100 years since the end of the First World War.

Tickets for all shows are available either through the website or by phone and members can now obtain their discount through either channel which means that all customers can book their favourite seats for the whole season. We increased the prices for the new season to £12/£10 to reflect rising costs and decided not to charge any administration costs for online booking as many theatres do.

The RHT Youth Theatre

We have a new Youth Theatre Leader for the new season who is already working to improve the group's exposure to a wide range of theatrical experience by involving them in different activities and encouraging them to participate in the main company's 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 preparing for some substantial building work. The audience response since we re-opened has continued to be 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. Our standard of front of house service was recognised by the NANDA award. 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 growing and the front and outside of the theatre building is looking better than it has done for many years.

Finally I should record the sad loss of our former Theatre Director Josie King who died in March 2017. She was involved with the theatre for nearly sixty years, taking part in the fund raising for the first re-opening in 1961 and taking over as Theatre Director in 1977 when Valerie Baker retired. When the County Council, as Trustees, closed the theatre in 2006 she encouraged the Company to take to the road keeping the name and reputation alive and funds building whilst we planned on how to recover the theatre. She was overjoyed when we re-opened in 2014 and flabbergasted when we named the King Bar in recognition of her devotion to the theatre and many years as its Licensee.

Geoff Morgan

Chair

The Robin Hood Theatre Company Ltd

5 February 2018