

**ELLERSLIE THEATRICAL SOCIETY**  
**PRESIDENT'S REPORT – 10 APRIL 2017**

## Introduction

In my report, I will take you through a review of the plays presented in 2016 with an overview of those being presented in 2017 followed by a report on the governance of the society.

But first a quote.

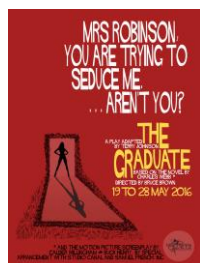
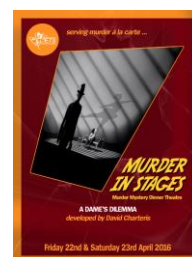
***"Drama is life with the dull bits cut out."*** Alfred Hitchcock

## Review of 2016



2016 opened with Julian Harrison directing **THE END OF THE GOLDEN WEATHER** by Bruce Mason. With an exceptionally talented cast and crew, the production was an envious success. The competition to attract an audience was plentiful with the inaugural Pop-Up Globe, Auckland Festival and the Fringe Festival. House numbers were disappointing.

Given the number of people who commented on the cancellation of the Murder Mystery Dinner in 2015 the committee decided to try again and added the evening to the annual programme for 2016. There were two performances and these were hosted by Dame Nivea Olay assisted by a number of volunteers. The evenings contributed a small profit towards the annual running costs of the society.



Main bill two was Terry Johnson's **THE GRADUATE** which was directed by Bruce Brown. A backlit hand-held 'sheet' was the perfect screen for some clever silhouette scenes, oh those positions, along with Bruce's great vision of an upright bed. Keith Harding designed some versatile furniture items inside a static set with doorways constantly revealing the unexpected.

Main bill three was **THE PIN-UP BOYS** written by Mark Rayner. Due to doctor's orders to keep his foot still David Charteris had to withdraw as the advertised director. Linda Pudney, who had been cast in the play, bravely took on the role of Director, relinquished her role, completed the casting and brought the play to life.



The main bill year closed with Noel Cowards **WAITING IN THE WINGS** directed by Rex Steele. With a cast of sixteen Rex did a superb job with casting which also included a late replacement of a lead actress. Coordinating rehearsals proved challenging with many absences. The set build team were joined by members of the Mens Shed Auckland East who, along with Bill Lehman and Keith Harding, are now regular and key members of the team.

An aim of the committee for 2016 was to finalise the 2017 programme early enough to present a **Taster Evening** before the year end. With little time to spare after the programme was set, six tasters were cast and presented to a small but appreciative audience. We have received a number of confirmed Playhouse Night bookings as a result and I was introduced to Michelle Reading who became our SM extraordinaire for the season of **Boys at the Beach** earlier this year.



The final event for the year was for the Ellerslie Business Association's Santa Parade held on the first Sunday of December. Congratulations to Renee Palmer and her large team of helpers who created and dressed *The Colours of Christmas*. We used the opportunity to hand out various flyers for ETS.

### The current year – 2017

The plays for 2017 were set within plenty of time to announce in the final newsletter for 2016. Well, that was the plan. On applying for the performance rights, we discovered two plays had already been taken by another theatre and alternatives were required.



We have just closed Main Bill One, *Boys at the Beach*, a New Zealand comedy which was written by Alison Quigan and Ross Gumbley and directed by David Charteris. David managed to garner a great cast despite no one turning up for the first audition.

Rehearsals are underway for Main Bill Two. This is *Festen*, Danish for 'Celebration', adapted by David Eldridge from the Danish screenplay of the same name. This is being directed by David Blakey.

Main Bill Three sees the return of The Ellerslie Festival of One Act Plays. Six plays have just been selected with two new plays in the mix.

The last main bill of the year will be Patrick Barlow's adaption of *The 39 Steps* from the novel by John Buchan, to be directed by James Bell. James directed this for Mairangi Players in Birkenhead in 2013 where the cast performed to packed audiences. We are anticipating good bookings.

### GOVERNANCE

**Budgets & Expenditure:** Rona Colbert will shortly be presenting some very sobering 2016 accounts. Production and administration costs have remained static since 2014 however with audience numbers down the ticket and bar sales were well down on 2015.

ETS received a major grant in 2016 in the form of reduced rent rates set by the Orakei Local Board. Other than this we did not receive any further operational grants in the 2016 financial year. There was a grant of \$1849.46 from the Auckland Council Community Group Assistance Fund towards the 2015 and 2016 publicity expenses although this was allocated in full to the 2015 financial year. In addition to grants we are exceptionally fortunate to get discounts and support from Brian Mott (our Auditor), Harcourts, Soar Print and Speedy Signs. ETS are exceptionally grateful to these people and organisations for their support. We are also certain our Patron, Desley Simpson, is instrumental in facilitating much of our Council support.

We have received a grant, for the 2017 financial year, from the Orakei Local Board for \$1500 towards the purchase of a second Apple MacBook and QLab software to run audio and visual effects on stage. We have also received an operational grant from them for \$3,000 towards our 2017 publicity costs.

There are three further grant applications in progress. One to Lion Foundation for \$13,000 to upgrade the lighting console and dimmer packs. One to Foundation North for \$3000 to replace the sound desk and one to the Mt Wellington Trust for \$1,500 to complete the purchase of the Apple MacBook and QLab software.

**Management:** We have struggled to meet the non-executive quorum requirements for committee meetings and have often held Executive Meetings instead. There is a motion in this evenings agenda to review the society rules around these quorum requirements and the restriction it places on successfully running the society.

David Charteris and Daryl Wrightson resigned during the year and Jocelyn McQuaid was co-opted back onto the committee. Roger Sawtell has advised he will not re-standing for election for 2017 as he will be moving out of the area.

On behalf of the society I thank all the 2016 committee members for your dedication and enthusiasm and for giving much of your spare time and energy to the productions you have worked on.

## **OPERATIONAL**

**Volunteers and Membership:** The number of financial members remains static and the income received from subscriptions provides a small contribution towards the costs of sending out newsletters and publicity material. The committee has discussed on several occasions, the option of reducing the number of posted newsletters to bring these costs down. While we have been reluctant to stop this physical reminder, it would appear, from the declining response to newsletters with audiences and audition attendees, that the money could be better spent. We will review this for.

**Health & Safety:** The committee researched the society's obligations under the new Health & Safety Act requirements. The upshot is that we are not a PCBU that is a person conducting a business or undertaking as we do not employ anyone, and are not directly required to comply with the act. Having said that, we are always working with the best possible practices and have implemented some changes to reduce hazards and the risk of potential injuries.

**Ticketing:** Our box office currently closes two days prior to a show, longer if before the weekend, to allow for tickets to be printed and couriered from iTICKET. The committee looked into removing the close off time by moving all the bookings and box office function online and trialling a ticket printer. This option required the installation or provision of a broadband connection to the theatre which unfortunately was price prohibitive. We noticed the council had recently installed a fibre connection into the building and so we asked if it was possible to piggy back onto this service, if it was an unlimited connection, but we were informed last week that this was not an option. We will continue to look at options for making this more effective.

**Publicity & Marketing:** The traditional methods of publicity and marketing are no longer working to bring in audiences. The incoming committee will need to address the falling audience attendance and look at options for increasing occupancy rates. There is a need to engage more successfully with our audience. The challenge is getting audiences to take the step between reading or seeing our shows are on to taking action and booking tickets. ETS is not alone in facing this challenge.

A special thank you to the Ellerslie Business Association and Magazine for their ongoing support of our theatre and productions.

We continue to promote and pre-sell 'Playhouse Nights' where we sell a full night at a discounted rate to a group who can then on-sell the tickets.

In 2015 ETS introduced an Annual Season Subscription for pre-purchase. This provided tickets to all four main bills for the year at a discounted rate, priority bookings and a half price glass of wine for each show. There were no subscribers. We promoted this opportunity again at the end of 2016 and it was taken up by two subscribers. We will continue work promoting this.

**Programme & Directors:** The ETS Programming Committee is appointed each year following the AGM. These committee members are required to read through all the plays submitted, research potential plays and open discussions with potential directors to see if they would be keen to submit a play for the following year. The outgoing Programming Committee has received several strong submissions for 2018. The current close off date is set for the end of July. With the frustrations of performance rights being declined by the time we get our programme finalised we are looking at bringing this date forward by three months in future.

Keep this date - ETS is planning to host the 2018 Tasters Night again this year and the theatre has been booked for three rehearsal evenings with the presentation being held on Saturday the 25<sup>th</sup> of November.

**Venue:** We often fantasise about ETS owning its own purpose-built premises or expanding the current facilities to obtain more storage space. We recently became aware of the vacant sports venue in Liston Park and will be taking up an expression of interest with the Orakei Local Board to see if this venue would be suitable as a theatre or at the least be a good option for storage space. Alternatively, if this venue is not viable, we will be looking into the option of expanding these premises to accommodate additional storage space for set build materials, minimal furniture and provide safer access to our wardrobe and props.

In the mean-time we are currently in discussions with the Orakei Local Board to see if we can obtain a Heads of Agreement to be recognised as the principal hirer of this venue, among other things. On looking through previous minutes it appears that this was set up some years ago, so we are looking for these documents in the archives. Within this agreement, we would be looking to secure better venue branding, fixed rent increases and become a party to venue improvements and changes.

I would like to thank Rona Colbert and our Patron Desley Simpson for continuing to facilitate our relationship with the Orakei Local Board and Auckland Council.

**Community Theatre Interaction:** ETS is a member of Theatre NZ and as a result of an initiative a few years ago, regular meetings were set up where committee and members of local community theatre groups could discuss common issues. These meetings stalled in 2015. I have been chatting to the presidents at Dolphin, Howick and Mairangi community theatres and we would be keen to get these meetings happening again under our own steam. There are a number of changes occurring in the way that our theatres are operating and it would be welcomed support to be able to discuss common issues and observations.

## **Summary**

Ellerslie Theatrical Society Inc. continues to be very healthy. Some hard work and important decisions will be required by the committee this year to maintain this status. Thank you to everyone involved with the productions and management of the society in 2016 as without you Ellerslie would not have a theatre.

## **Presentation Addendum**

The Management Committee are recommending two members for Life Membership this year. This is not taken lightly by the committee and is in special recognition of the outstanding contribution from an individual and the impact of their membership of the society.

**Paul Gapper** was relatively new to ETS when he took on the role of President to give John Charlton some breathing space. In addition to chairing the society he also set up guidelines for the Stage Managers and created job descriptions for this role and those of the Bar Manager. He was also instrumental in creating production budgets and reviewing ways of reducing general expenses.

**Renee Palmer** has been a long-standing member of the society. She has been on stage numerous times and supplied her beautiful and vast wardrobe for many productions, sometimes making the costumes as well. Additionally, she has conceptualised and produced many of the annual Christmas Floats entered as part of the Ellerslie Business Association parade. The society has been awarded many 'First Prizes' for Best Float as a result.

On behalf of the committee I am going to make a presentation to two members.

**Roger Sawtell** will soon be moving out of Auckland. He has been involved with the theatre and the committee for over 11 years and has more recently been the Technical Manager responsible for the electrical assets of the society. Roger has designed and operated the lighting for many productions, assisted at many set builds and has been a member of the Executive as Vice-President of the society. His pragmatism and calm considered approach to issues will be missed. The committee has pleasure in awarding Roger with an Honorary Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of his services to the society.

**Sue Spurling** has given her notice to resign as a member of the society. Sue has been a loyal member and active committee member until last year when she relocated from Auckland to Raglan. She continued as the Front of House and Hospitality Manager for ETS and commuted for special events and each play season. In addition to ensuring the cast were watered and feed during rehearsals she also catered for the cast and crew dinner for each play, managed a team of volunteers for kitchen and FOH duties, organised the wrap party and cast gifts for presenting, and created many of the displays for each play including the odd quiz. The committee has pleasure in awarding Sue with an Honorary Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of her services to the society.