

ELLERSLIE THEATRICAL SOCIETY
PRESIDENT'S REPORT – 16 APRIL 2018

Introduction

In my report, I will take you through a review of the plays presented in 2017 with an overview of those being presented in 2018 followed by a report on the governance of the society.

But first a quote.

I love that with a play, a writer creates the script, and then directors and actors pick it up and interpret it and bring it to visual realization. It isn't written, and then read by readers quietly, in the dark of spooky night, all alone. Seeing and making theatre is a communal experience.

JEN DIAMOND, "Interviews with Cohesion Playwrights Fellows", *DC Metro Theater Arts*, 2017

Review of 2017



2017 opened with David Charteris directing a New Zealand play, **BOYS AT THE BEACH**, by Alison Quigan and Ross Gumbley. The young and engaging cast shared the stage with a clever set designed by Keith Harding.

Main bill two was an English adaption by a Danish play called **FESTEN**, adapted by David Eldridge and directed by David Blakey. It was a tough story line that kept audiences completely riveted for ninety minutes.

Main bill three saw the return of the biennial **ELLERSLIE FESTIVAL OF ONE ACT PLAYS**. The six plays were **PERFORMING** written by David Blakey and directed by Daryl Wrightson, **THE PRIVATE WAR OF CORPORAL COOPER** written by John Broughton and directed by Jocelyn McQuaid, **CHOOK CHOOK** written by Fiona Farrell and directed by Chrissy Hodkinson, **HER STORY** written and directed by Mary Granfors, **SURE THING** written by David Ives and directed by Annie Whittaker, and **DOLORES** written by Edward Alan Baker and directed by Carl Drake.

The main bill year closed with Patrick Barlow's adaption of **THE 39 STEPS** directed by James Bell. An exceptional cast of four created a multitude of characters in well-coordinated lightning fast changes who at times played multiple characters simultaneously.

As both Production Manager and President I thank the numerous volunteers who spent hours throughout the year – researching, reading, programming and sourcing the performance rights for the plays; sourcing and making wardrobe and props; building and painting the sets; feeding, watering and catering for the cast, crew and audience; stocking the bar; coordinating the helpers for hospitality; selling the tickets, handling the accounts; directing the actors who appeared on the stage; supporting the director; designing the stage; dressing the set; lighting the set; designing and programming the cues to light the set and punctuate the story with appropriate sound; managing the show; coordinating the techs and stage crew, designing and putting the programme together; taking photographs and recordings; reviewing the plays and writing the newsletters; stuffing envelopes; putting up the billboards; and to those who support the theatre in whatever capacity is required. Phew. Making theatre really is a communal experience.

The plays for 2018 were set with enough time to create a draft Play Guide before the end of the year. With a flurry of phone calls, castings and rehearsals we were able to present excerpts from the four plays being presented for 2018 in a **Taster Evening** in November. Although the performance rights for one of the plays was still pending we went ahead, in the hope we would have a favourable outcome, and created a fun and enjoyable evening. A number of hands went up to volunteer to create sets, design lighting and get involved in some capacity for the plays ahead.



The final event for the year was for the Eilerslie Business Association's Santa Parade held on the first Sunday of December. Congratulations to Renee Palmer, her large team of helpers and a colourful cast of characters who created and dressed the float themed **A KIWI CHRISTMAS**. We took 1st Prize for the Best Float. With so many children and adults watch the parade, it was the ideal time to hand out the draft Play Guide for 2018, with a special mention of *The Witches*.

The current year – 2018



With only a week to spare before printing the 2018 Play Guide and the first newsletter for the year, we received a welcome email to say the performance rights for *The Lady and the Van* had been granted so we didn't have to fall back on Plan B.

We have just closed Main Bill One to a well-received adaption of Roald Dahl's, **THE WITCHES**, directed by Daryl Wrightson. It was lovely to feel the excitement and anticipation of the children waiting to see the show. The play sat well with the Pop-Up Globe season as we weren't competing for an audience.

Rehearsals are underway for Main Bill Two. This is the premiere of a new work by Ruth Mayo called **THE HOUSE OF ANGELS** being directed by Sian Davis.

Main Bill Three will be Bruce Brown directing the award winning English play **BEAUTIFUL THING** with the set being designed by Keith Harding.

The last main bill of the year will be Alan Bennetts play **THE LADY IN THE VAN** to be directed by Des Smith. I am waiting to see how we will be putting a van on the stage.

GOVERNANCE

Budgets & Expenditure: Rona Colbert will shortly be presenting the 2017 accounts. In addition to being very frugal with production and administration costs, moving a third of our mailing list to email newsletters, reducing postage costs, and introducing a raffle with each play, we managed to stay in the black last year.

ETS received four grants in 2017 and reduced rent rates set by the Ōrākei Local Board. There was a grant of \$3000 from Foundation North to cover the purchase of a new sound board and a grant of \$3000 from the Ōrākei Local Board towards publicity costs. A further grant of \$1500 was received from Ōrākei Local Board under another grant round towards the purchase of computer equipment and software for audio visual needs however this has been carried forward to the current financial year as the purchase for this value was only recently made. In addition to grants, we are exceptionally fortunate to get discounts and support from Brian Mott (our Honorary Accountant), Soar Print and Speedy Signs. ETS are exceptionally grateful to these people and organisations for their support. We are also grateful to our Patron, Desley Simpson, who finds time in her busy schedule to facilitate support for the society.

In a move to keep up with current trends, improve efficiency and provide a quicker means of reimbursing expenses we are moving towards internet banking. Before we can start this, we need to look at some small changes to our rules to accommodate this change of practice. This will come up later in the AGM agenda.

Management: Following the rules amendment at the 2016 AGM regarding the management committee meetings we were able to meet the quorum requirements throughout the year with ease.

The committee members elected at the 2017 AGM remained in place for the entire year and we co-opted Carolyn Loader onto the committee part way through the year.

On behalf of the society I thank all the 2017 committee members for your dedication and enthusiasm in the governance of the society and for giving much of your spare time and energy to the productions you have worked on.

OPERATIONAL

Participation in the creative processes of theatre is the best way to reveal the human being, and through this to understand one's self and one's society.

FRANCES BABBAGE, *Augusto Boal*

Volunteers and Membership: The number of financial members decreased slightly in 2017 and still only covers less than half the costs of sending out newsletters and publicity material. While we have managed to shave \$1300 off these expenses in 2017 we will continue to gather email addresses from the existing database members and see if we further reduce these costs in 2018.

The committee discussed ways we could increase our reach to volunteers and Charlotte Taylor headed an initiative to put a notice in Volunteer Auckland for stage hands and technical operators in time for *The 39 Steps* season at the end of last year. She had a great number of replies resulting in an increased pool of helpers to call on.

Health & Safety: Following research in 2016 that established the new Health & Safety at Work Act requirements did not apply to the society, we are always working with the best possible practices and have implemented some changes to reduce hazards and the risk of potential injuries. We have asked the council for assistance to contain one area of health and safety following a rat infestation in the props and wardrobe area and are seeking to remove the 'hump' over the defunct air-conditioning ducting in there as well. It's not ideal, nor safe, seeing those in their 70s and 80s climbing over this to get access to props and wardrobe.

Ticketing: Our box office was closing two days prior to a show, longer if before the weekend, to allow for tickets to be printed and couriered from iTICKET. We trialled printing our own tickets for the season of *The Witches*, with a loan printer provided by iTICKET and managed to keep the online booking service open up to an hour prior to the show. Although we were unable to obtain permission from the council to use the fibre connection already installed in the venue, we were able to connect to the internet with a mobile phone

to access the booking system and the trial went exceptionally well. It was an interesting season to select for the trial as the play attracted a newer audience and the majority booked online. We are now looking into costs to see if we can obtain an appropriate grant to cover the cost of a laptop and printer to continue printing tickets in-house.

Publicity & Marketing: The spend on this makes up approximately 25% of our theatre production expenses, 30% if you were to add in the newsletter costs. It covers printing the Play Guide, flyers and billboards for each play and the audition notices. We have decreased the number of flyers being printed, reducing the cost, as we are not posting out as many newsletters. Despite our expenses, our audience numbers are still decreasing, and I think it would be a good time to trial other methods of publicity, for example Phantom Billstickers. While trying to balance a frugal budget the old adage comes to mind that you can't sell a secret and we need to take this risk to spread the word better.

Thank you Jocelyn (McQuaid) for walking the streets of Auckland delivering flyers into cafes, banks, shops and letter boxes. I have to wonder if I got you a fitbit Jocelyn, how many steps you would clock up for each play.

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. We sold one Playhouse Night in each of the three seasons last year.

The Annual Season Subscription is still being promoted and we will look at making this more attractive, financially, to increase the uptake for 2019.

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 2019. In previous years the close off date was set for the end of July. With the frustration of performance rights being declined by the time we get our programme finalised we moved this forward one month this year and will see if this makes a difference.

Keep this date - ETS is planning to host the 2019 Tasters Night again this year and the theatre has been booked for three rehearsal evenings with the presentation being held on Saturday the 24th of November.

Venue: Over the past few years we have had some problems with security including other hirers getting onto the stage when it was booked for our sets. In one instance hirers destroyed part of the set and in another they threw our furniture into the wings. There have been several instances of people damaging the lights by unplugging them from the dimmer packs and plugging them into the mains. We also had one party who got onto the stage and did a considerable amount of damage including urinating into an unplumbed sink that was part of the set. Ōrākei Local Board has now taken steps to make the entire stage area secure, so that such incidents should not reoccur. This work has not been completed due to the recent season of *The Witches*, so we are yet to try it out. We do appreciate the considerable expense and effort shown by the board.

We often fantasise about ETS owning its own purpose-built premises or expanding the current facilities to obtain more storage space. Following the AGM last year, we presented our interest to the Ōrākei Local Board to see if we could assess Liston Park as a possible storage option however they advised us there were other plans in motion for that venue. It would be good to house all our materials in one place and we have a meeting scheduled for tomorrow morning to meet with Kev Carter, the Strategic Broker, Ōrākei for the Auckland Council, to discuss our needs (and dreams) for the current venue and another more pressing matter.

For the sake of disclosure, I am giving notice of a current situation with the venue which needs special attention to ensure the continuity of the Society and its activities.

One of the committee's aims in 2017 was to enter discussions with Ōrākei Local Board and Auckland Council to see if we could obtain a Heads of Agreement to be formally recognised as the principal hirer of this venue, among other things. The aim for this was to secure better venue branding, negotiate fixed rent increases, becoming a party to venue improvements and changes, and to have a formal acknowledgement of the original offer given by the Mayor of Ellerslie back in 1989 to take up residence in the venue to provide the local community with a theatre.

Unfortunately, this current initiative coincided with a change to the way the Auckland Council and Ōrākei Local Board were going to charge for the venue and apply any discounts and financial assistance from the Board towards our rent. We had been paying an agreed annual amount divided into twelve equal monthly payments. We were unable to obtain advance details about how this would affect the society financially. What we did know is that we were to apply to the Ōrākei Local Board for a grant towards our venue hire costs and this would be applied directly to the Auckland Council invoices. Late last year we were advised we had been awarded a \$10,000 grant from Ōrākei Local Board. However, we were still not advised how this would be applied and what, if any, the increase was going to be to our annual account. The Auckland Council booking year runs from July to June by the way. We have not shown this grant in our annual accounts as we neither receive nor spend it as it is moved internally from one council budget to another.

It appears Auckland Council are now invoicing us at rack rates for each individual booking (that is day, time of day and room within the venue) less a 50% discount and a proportion of the awarded grant. The monthly amounts invoiced to us have been inconsistent and the method in which the grant has been applied has not been clear.

While still waiting to see how this was going to work we recently submitted a new grant application to cover the July 2018 to June 2019 bookings. On Saturday Rona gave me the list of our requested bookings for this period as generated by Auckland Council, with the costs listed. The total figure came to just over \$41,300 and this appears to be after the Auckland Council 50% discount. Even with an accommodation grant from Ōrākei Local Board, which I understand is for a maximum of \$10,000, this is not an amount the society can accommodate. We will start discussions tomorrow morning with Kev Carter and take it from there.

Summary

Ellerslie Theatrical Society Inc. continues to be very healthy. Financially we managed to break even over the 2017 financial year, we have good working and contingency capital, productions are on track and the number of volunteers is growing with each play. Thank you to everyone involved with the productions, support and management of the society in 2017, you are our community and without you Ellerslie, and indeed the entire Ōrākei ward, would not have a theatre.

Now there's just a small matter of the venue to address.