

JULY 2023

AGM

The AGM, held on Weds 7th June, was attended by 19 members. Our President Howard Owen gave us a warm welcome and talked about the amazing contribution from so many people over the last 100 years and wished everyone well for the future. Howard was followed by the Chair's report from Pat Fitzpatrick:

“The Phoenix Theatre has had a fantastic year! We've put on some amazing productions and entertained some very appreciative audiences while showing off the many and varied talents of our members. I'm proud to be Chair of our delightful little theatre.

Last summer the Phoenix Theatre Singers presented, 'A Hundred Years of Song' to mark a hundred years of ROADS - Ross Operatic and Dramatic Society. This outstanding show went on to win the NODA award for the Best Concert. This is a fantastic achievement as it is the second year running that they have won the award in this category. The Singers Christmas Show is a regular feature in the theatre's calendar and, as usual, it was full of seasonal songs, sketches and recitations to herald the start of Christmas.

The Singers are currently rehearsing for this summer's show, 'Anything Goes'. I'm sure it will be up to the same high standard as previous award winning shows, and who knows, it may even be a contender for next year's NODA award.

In November an Alan Ayckbourn classic, 'How the Other Half Loves', directed by Graham Russell, required split second timing by the cast and ingenious set design, both of which were achieved to great comedic effect. It was a very slick production.

In March Richard Elgood and Richard Watson brought the world premier of 'Venice Revisited' to the theatre. This was a musical based on, 'The Merchant of Venice'. It demanded a very talented cast of actors and singers as well as some skilful set design, all of which we have in abundance at the Phoenix. It took a lot of hard work and commitment but it was well worth it. It was a very stimulating and successful production.

Last week I enjoyed, 'Murder in Company', directed by Renee Field. Although it involved a murder which took place during the rehearsals of an amateur dramatic company, I am assured that it is not a premonition of anything that is likely to happen at the Phoenix.

I'm pleased to be able to report that our Youth Theatre is going from strength to strength; so much so that we now have three groups meeting every Saturday. Last summer they put on, 'Fantastic Mr Fox', to full houses and the production was nominated for a NODA award. At the moment they are busy rehearsing for four performances of, 'Alice in Wonderland'. The children are all very enthusiastic and we are all looking forward to seeing them perform.

The Phoenix Theatre is also a popular venue for visiting performers such as, 'Our Star Theatre Company'. The very talented Peter Gill brings a variety of his one man shows to the theatre, the most recent of which was based on the work of Noel Coward. On one occasion he provided the piano accompaniment for Anita

Harris who delighted a full house with her singing and anecdotes culminating in an informal conversation with her audience.

Our cinema (Screen at the Phoenix) is also flourishing under the leadership of Graham Russell, who has introduced National Theatre Live to the programme of regular popular films.

In January, our black tie event to mark a hundred years of ROADS, took place at the Royal Hotel. This event was very well supported and it was great to have an excuse to dress up and celebrate together. A good time was had by all!

We have also been able to introduce some extra members evenings with a couple of very entertaining and amusing rehearsed play readings, under the guidance of Maurice Thompson who is also our technical expert. For our next member's evening, in July, we are planning a quiz night. I hope to see you all there.

Some of you may have noticed that we have had to increase our ticket prices by £2. It is the only price rise that we have had for a number of years. Sadly, the theatre, like everyone, is faced by higher energy bills so this has to be reflected in our prices. Some of our sound and lighting equipment has also become very antiquated and we have had to replace certain items which has brought our system more up to date, increasing efficiency and flexibility. However, we do now offer a complementary programme. This is partly the result of the practice of avoiding handling money during Covid and partly because not everyone carries money these days.

I would like to thank Catriona Pearson who, after many years as membership secretary, has decided to take a well-earned rest. In the past she has served as bar manager and she was also building manager throughout the last refurbishment. Over the years she has made an invaluable contribution to the theatre and we are all very appreciative of the time she has given. I'm sure we will continue to see her in the audience and at members' evenings in the future.

Lastly a big thank you to everyone who quietly works behind the scenes; stage managers, props, costumes, behind the bar, on box office, front of house, scenery construction, publicity, cleaning, sound and lighting and building management. Without you and of course our audiences, none of this would be possible. We need our volunteers so if anyone feels that they have skills to offer and they would like to contribute and become part of our team, we'd love to hear from you.

Finally, my thanks and appreciation must go to the Committee who give their time in so many ways to co-ordinate everything and make sure that all the productions in our theatre are as professional, enjoyable and successful as they can be.

I look forward to welcoming future audiences to the Phoenix Theatre where we will continue to entertain you to the same high standard that we have all come to expect.

Many thanks, to everyone who has contributed towards making our theatre the success that it is."

The committee were re-elected as follows:

Chair: Pat Fitzpatrick, Secretary: Alison Clarke, Treasurer: Amanda Barrett, Production Co-ordinator: Suzanne Hill, Publicity: Michelle Cooper, Building Manager: Maurice Thompson, Members without portfolio: Jacky Bedford, Mary Brigg & Alan Smith.

The treasurer reported that we are in a healthy financial position with a balance of nearly £48K in the bank.

Graham Russell (Newsletter Editor)

Production Co-ordinator's Column

The **Youth Theatre Summer Production of "Alice in Wonderland"** took place on 1st and 2nd July.

'**Murder in Company**' by Philip King and John Boland, directed by Renee Field, took place from **Saturday 27th May to Saturday 3rd June**. It was a great success, achieving 74% seat occupancy. Congratulations to Renee, her cast and crew for an outstanding production. There is a NODA review later in this newsletter.

The Phoenix Theatre Singers Summer Show, entitled '**Anything Goes**', ran from **Wednesday 21st to Saturday 24th June**. The show was considered one of the best ever performed by the Singers, due to the variety of solos, duets, comedy trios and magnificent medleys. The show was a visual spectacle with the cast changing costumes frequently. The second half opened with Ascot Gavotte, where everyone was dressed in black and white, going to the races, as in the musical 'My Fair Lady', from which the song was taken. We achieved 61% seat occupancy. Lower than usual, but thoroughly enjoyed by our audiences. Congratulations to Mary Brigg, her cast and crew.

Screen at the Phoenix will be showing three films in July -

Best of Enemies (NT Live) on Sat 8th, **Fleabag (NT Live)** on Sat 15th and **The Fabelmans** on Sat 22nd.

Members Social Evenings. The committee are planning a series of Members' Evenings in 2023. The next event will be a **Quiz on Wednesday 12th July** at 7.30 pm, organised by Mary Brigg and Michelle Cooper. Do come along for a fun evening with members and friends. The next **Members Evening** will be on **Wednesday 13th September at 7.30pm**. Content as yet undecided.

Our November 2023 production will be '**Crazy Horses**' by **Mark Norman**. Maurice Thompson will direct. There will be **Open Auditions on Monday 10th July and Tuesday 11th July at 7pm**. A reading took place on 5th June with 17 attending. Everyone found the play hilarious. There is a large cast comprising 7 men, 3 women and 3 either men or women. Performances run from Saturday 18th to Saturday 25th November, excluding the Sunday. Rehearsals will start on Monday 4th September and will mainly be on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Peter Gill will be bringing his show entitled, '**The Jerry Lee Lewis Story**' to the Phoenix Theatre on **Friday 28th July**. Tickets £16.

Ben Mowbray and Our Star Theatre Company will be performing '**The Invisible Man**' by **H. G. Wells**, adapted for the stage by Derek Webb, on **Thursday 28th and Friday 29th September at 7.30pm**. Tickets £13 (£10 students).

Peter Gill will bring his show, '**A Tribute to Rock and Pop's Piano Legends**' to the Phoenix Theatre on **Saturday 30th September at 7.30pm**. Tickets £16.

Suzanne Hill

NODA Review of Murder in Company

The setting is a village hall where a dramatic society are rehearsing a mystery thriller. The rehearsal proceeds with a number of difficulties until a mysterious death brings the situation to a head. The Phoenix Company brought to life a cleverly written dark comedy, in which almost everyone could have been the murderer. The audience are met by a good-looking village hall set, epitomising a well-used facility, typically perhaps in need of a little TLC.

Arriving early to the rehearsal are Alan (Tom Lee-Hynes) and Margaret (Jane Bovell) who appear to be having an affair, he expressing his love for her, she expressing some regret and that it must end. Both provided a powerful opening and in fact each player that followed had at least one equally powerful or moving stand out speech during the performance.

Ted the new caretaker was well played by Alan Chacon, a busybody stickler for the rules who had an apparent habit of eavesdropping on the conversation before making each entrance, including several interruptions of the rehearsal, hence a heavy suggestion that he could easily blackmail the two lovers. Margaret's husband Philip was a rude blustery bombastic director of their play and Les Davis captured the character well, turning into a Hercule Poirot character later on trying to solve the mystery death.



(Jane Bovell & Alan Chacon)



(left to right): Les Davis, Alan Chacon, Jane Bovell, Mia Field, Phil Field, Lucy Davies, Amanda Barrett & Tom Lee-Hynes

We meet Phoebe also well played by Lucy Davies, who we discover knew Ted the new caretaker from a long time ago and her eventual explanation of how Ted was basically to blame for her son's death was excellent. Doris (Amanda Barrett) was late to the rehearsal because she had been attacked on the way and suspicions are raised that Philip was the attacker as she was still holding a scarf belonging to him, that she managed to grab during the attack. Amanda's scene with Alan when he looked to settle her and they shared a bottle of brandy was played with a natural ease.



Phil Field as the play's stage manager Ronnie, was excellent, a somewhat light-hearted mischievous character and the bench routine (above) when 'standing in' was very funny. His final speech in Act 3 when at first entering worse for drink and then breaking down, was very well handled and moving. Mia Field as Patricia, the youngest in the cast, who earlier found the body and had doubts about the coroners verdict that it was accidental death, also displayed great strength, when explaining that it was too stressful to continue taking part in the play and with 2 weeks to go wanted to leave the cast.



Prior publicity for 'Murder in Company' confirmed that it was Ted the caretaker that was murdered, but my lips are sealed as to who did it! This was a well written piece by Philip King and John Boland, well directed by Renee Field which demonstrated a depth of experience in the whole company. Congratulations to all involved.

Bruce Wyatt (NODA)

(photos: Graham Russell & Ian Godsave)

NODA Review of Anything Goes

On a warm June evening the Phoenix Theatre Singers once again served up a concert with a great range of musical and other items, led by the talented duo of Richard Watson accompanist / MD on keyboard and Mary Brigg as MD / Conductor with 21 singers set in front of a sparkling star cloth. Linking some of the sections together MC Michelle Cooper provided a bright narrative and was completely at ease with the role. At a number of opportunities, the cast changed costume to provide a flavour of what was to follow and this was a pleasing result. Richard provided a musical opening of 'Younger than Springtime' from South Pacific and the first company number 'Anything Goes' was well arranged and sung. In fact, a medley from South Pacific which soon followed reminded us of the beautiful numbers created by Rodgers and Hammerstein. A well-presented contrast was then provided by Sue Nicholson providing an amusing carbon copy of Pam Ayres 'The Make Up Lady'. John Spencer and Derek Lunt sang 'Well Did You Evah' by Cole Porter and the 'Rhythm of Life' that followed providing some nice part singing.

The company then staged a very smooth and satisfying version of 'Whistle Down the Wind' and the men sang 'Pretty Women' who certainly perked up when one arrived courtesy of Michelle! Elaine Tomlins, Jenny Spencer and Suzanne Hill then sang a very funny 'Always a Bridesmaid'. Mary Brigg sang 'In the Wee Small Hours of the Morning' with great feeling and Richard provided some great accompaniment. Jayne Lunt and Natalie Smith provided good support throughout the act which concluded with a great Jersey Boys medley.

Act 2 opened with a very nice 'Ascot Gavotte' from My Fair Lady with the company suitably attired and Owen Fitzpatrick sang 'Somewhere' from West Side Story with a great deal of sensitivity which I enjoyed. The Best of Bond medley provided some nice light and shade and again was very well accompanied by Richard. This number introduced a rich vein of numbers; Sandy MacNeill singing an excellent 'Lady Marmalade' by Patti Labelle, Mary and Richard singing 'A Song That Goes like This' from Spamalot, followed by Michelle singing 'Me and The Sky' from Come from Away with great feeling. John Spencer also sang 'I Won't send Roses' with great sensitivity and Andy Doyle provided a great effort singing 'This is the Moment' from Jekyll & Hyde.

Along the way the Company sang a medley from Godspell and the ladies united, singing 'My Guy' from Sister Act, and Jacky Bedford provided a smooth version of 'Learnin' the Blues'. The company proved why we sing, with a number of the same title and the audience were invited to join in with the finale 'All You Need is Love', concluding the concert that deserved a bigger audience. I would like to thank members for their usual warm welcome.

Bruce Wyatt (NODA)