

Chairman's Report to The Court Supporters' AGM
13th March, 2017

It was with some slight surprise that I discovered this would be my fourth report to the Supporters AGM, but what is not surprising is that I can report another successful year in terms of our activities. Which is not to say that everything has proceeded smoothly in every regard, but in this setting we must surely expect the occasional dramatic moments. However the very able team which comprises your committee has risen to the challenges when they have arisen. We are of course in the very favourable position of supporting a winning team in the form of The Court's creative and administrative enterprise. For however you judge it: national recognition and support, growing attendances and local profile, the reactions of practitioners, or any other criteria you may choose to apply, whatever the yardstick The Court is held in the highest regard. And you, as supporters, make a not insignificant contribution to that success, a fact the theatre management both recognises and appreciates greatly.

Tonight of course we particularly acknowledge the service provided by our ushers, some of whom have given many long years of service as we will hear. We cannot underestimate the part they play in efficiently and graciously dealing with our patrons, not only for main stage productions but also in the Forge and with the sometimes livelier audiences at Scared Scriptless. The ushers of course are subject to certain standards and expectations including annual refresher training, and here I would make an appeal. If anyone recognises that they are no longer able to meet the requirements, perhaps due to personal mobility issues, it's a happier outcome all round if they voluntarily step down rather than have to be asked to hand in their badge. Fortunately there are always new candidates waiting in the wings and so the occasional vacancy will allow them to step into the role. While recruitment and training is our responsibility, and a special thanks to John McSweeney in that regard, the large task of scheduling teams is now handled in-house at the theatre although we provide payment for the staff member involved. Until recently this was the responsibility of Roanna Dalziel but with her new appointment as Literary Manager and assistant to the CEO, the task now falls to Annah Johnstone who is already proving a valuable asset. I must however acknowledge our debt to Ro who has served the supporter's committee hugely in such a variety of ways, and even now continues to do so. How fortunate it is for the theatre that her services are retained, albeit wearing some different hats, and we wish her well in those new roles. Liaison between our committee and the theatre which was her domain is now to be carried out by the newly appointed House Manager and we welcome Colin Swift into this position, looking forward to an equally happy relationship as we have come to expect.

One other major contribution the supporters make to the theatre is of course in the form of sponsorship, presently in excess of \$50,000 annually. I suggested in my report last year that we had been allocated a winner in this regard for 2017 and as we anticipate 'our' play, 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime' opening in just under a week, first indications are that my instinct was correct. I look forward to welcoming many of you to our gala night this Friday. Ross will by now have told you of the play that will bear our name in 2018, a choice that may carry a little more controversy with it. However I believe that we are here as an organisation to support new initiatives especially if they may not appeal to the more commercial sector. A vital theatre must at times venture beyond the safe, standard fare in its programming.

Our other 'shop front' of course is the provision of the coffee bar and as those manning this facility become more familiar with its workings, particularly the automated tills, so its efficiency increases. It is no small task to keep it well stocked and generally functioning smoothly and Wendy Carryer and her helpers deserve both recognition and our considerable thanks. Currently discussions are underway regarding our storage facilities and freezer space out the back as various aspects of the theatre's operation vie for the limited room available. I'm confident this will be resolved amicably for all concerned. The introduction of the pizza kitchen has markedly changed patrons' habits, particularly pre-show, and there are evenings it can prove difficult to find a table with the numbers dining. This naturally enhances general hospitality at The Court although it may slightly reduce our patronage at the Coffee Bar; time will tell.

One issue that has demanded our attention of recent times has been the role of our Membership Secretary. For many years Jay Pollock has attended to this with commendable skill and total dedication, and for this we are greatly appreciative. But it has carried its headaches, particularly in its conjunction with the theatre's Patron Base programme, and a small subcommittee has worked with Jay to attempt to resolve this. In addition she has indicated a wish to pass this role on and after her long and diligent service this is completely understandable. After various comings and goings we now believe we have a capable replacement ready to step into the position once the systems are clarified and running efficiently. This remains a work in progress.

While thinking of the specialist roles conducted within your committee I would want to pay tribute to the many hours David Sutherland has devoted to financial reporting and legal requirements. His understanding of such matters is invaluable and would defy mere laymen like myself. Just as an example he recently updated for us a possible base for the Performance Report required by "Public Benefit Entity Simple Format Reporting - Cash (Not-For-Profit)" The inclusion of the word 'simple' in that title would appear to me something of an oxymoron, suffice it to say David guides us through the various requirements, along with supporting our treasurer Aileen, with aplomb and we are most grateful. The administration of the Entertainment Book sales has also fallen to his lot and we would encourage you all to purchase these when they become available, another very useful fundraiser.

By way of encouragement I would also mention our Opening Night Suppers, greatly appreciated by audience and the theatre alike. Thank you to those who provide and those who serve on these occasions, if you are not amongst them please let us add your name to our list. Also of course we provide supporters with drinks and an opportunity to meet with the cast on the first Thursday of each main bill production. Then there is our annual quiz night, a great deal of fun along with a bit of a mental challenge and we are most grateful to those who provide our prizes for the evening. The suggestion has been made that we should perhaps organise another fundraising event through the year and we would welcome any suggestions you may like to make in that regard. Thoughts as to the content of our quarterly Court Cues are also invited, what or who would you like to know about?

Last, but by no means least, let me pay tribute to your incredibly hard-working committee overall. It is a privilege to work alongside such a dedicated team. I can assure you that the Supporters organisation is extremely well served by their unstinting and passionate devotion.

David Winfield