

AGM Chair report 2023

The year has come and gone so quickly. We have seen many wonderful shows throughout the year, some quite challenging and some appealing to a more diverse audience but ending the year with the hugely popular “Something Rotten”.

The Court received some unpleasant publicity during the later part of the year and saw the CEO Barbara George and the Chairman of the Board Tony Feaver resign. Steve Wakefield took on the role as Chairman and stepped in to fill the managing role until a new General Manager will be appointed in April.

We farewelled Dame Adrienne as our patron last year and were delighted to be able to appoint Ben Gough as our new Patron. Ben is leading the *APPLAUSE* fundraising campaign for the new theatre, and, at the HERO level, he and Penny gave the inaugural private donation. They are leaders of their generation in their philanthropy for the arts and beyond. It is therefore very fitting that Ben is our Patron in our new home in the central city.

We farewelled two committee members during the year. Allannah James, who diligently coordinated our ushers team for several years and Tony Feaver who provided his meticulous accounting skills overseeing our finances. Susan Rendall the Theatre Business Manager and Friends’ representative also resigned during the year. We will miss her relentless support and diplomacy. Brian Palliser our Honorary Solicitor turns 80 and is passing on the mantle. We are so grateful to him for standing by us over the last incredible five decades with legal advice when it’s been needed.

I would like to thank the committee so much for their work and dedication to our organisation. The Court Cues newsletter, the profitable coffee bar, the Friends events, the membership administration, and the financial records all require constant management by our committed team.

We continue to provide events for our members and this year our annual dinner with celebrity guest Penny Ashton, following her brilliant show *Sense and Sensibility*, was well supported.

Our commitment in raising funds for the new theatre continues and our pledge of \$250,000.00 towards a VIP Room is still progressing as planned. We held a very glamorous evening at Tūranga in August called “Play your Part”. This was organised by Carolyne Grant from the Applause (Fund Raising) team. All The Friends were invited to gin cocktails and mouth-watering nibbles. Ross Gumbley engaged us with his story of how we had arrived so successfully at this point with the new Theatre and the goal of raising the \$12 million. We were a little disappointed with the volume of pledges on the night, but we had only to look out the window and see the building for evidence of this success story. Pledges with wall naming rights are still welcome.

Our wonderful team of ushers continue to be the face of the theatre. Their professional friendly interaction with the patrons each night is the greatest advocacy the Theatre can have. During the year we hosted a light-hearted Ushers Awards night where ushers were rewarded for their prowess in varying ushering skills.

This year we have chosen to sponsor the Education Youth and Outreach Programme instead of our traditional sponsorship of a show. The Education Programme provides a wide range of programmes and scholarships. We feel this programme has huge potential and is largely unknown so our support in funding and getting it more widely recognised is most worthwhile.

The Friends have been joint sponsors of the new Theatre van, and our logo is proudly displayed on its side.

We ran two surveys during the year. An Ushers' survey and one for all members. From the survey of members, it appears that 41% of members are Friends because of the ticket discount, 25% for support by way of donations, 23 % to be eligible to usher, 8% for the events and 3% for the newsletter. From the Ushers' survey, that 88% completed, we learnt that 62% were there to support the theatre 36 % to be involved with the theatre and 25% to see a show for free.

Our ongoing strategy sessions keep us thinking and challenged about the best way forward for our organisation. We dedicate time at each monthly meeting to address these challenges. We are very aware that our role may evolve when we are in the new Theatre, and we wish to keep abreast of this and deliver the highest degree of support we can. Thank you all for your dedication to The Court Theatre as patrons, donors, and ambassadors.

We have high hopes that our very next AGM in 2025 will be held in the new Theatre. What a milestone.

Annie Bonifant
Chair
Friends of The Court Theatre