

## **Customer Forum Minutes**

**Wednesday 17 July 2013 – 10.30am**

### **Leisure Connection Staff Present**

**Jo Ditch** – General Manager

**Adrian Gilmartin** – Sales and Marketing Assistant

**Pauline Maxwell-King** – Functions Assistant

### **JD Recap**

- Claire McFauld sends apologies – she's away on annual leave and is unable to join us.
- We have been working towards the release of Season 21 on 22 July to Friends of the Grove Theatre and 29 July for the general public. Season includes a variety of genres including several current comedians, strong drama with both classics and modern adaptations, operas return in December, ballet from Russian State Ballet and Opera House, a mix of family shows and a range of live music.
- We are currently planning for financial year 2014. Looking over budgets and what sort of product is touring and what we would like to see at the Grove.
- This year we are opening up our pantomime to the community even more with Panto Factor and open dance auditions. Panto Factor is an online TV series that will follow the search for our lead role, Dick Whittington. Any one can audition for the chance to win this paid contract and be the star of our pantomime. Auditions are being held in September with a Grand Final held at the theatre on 26<sup>th</sup> September where the eight finalists will compete in front of a live audience. This year we are offering the chance to dance in our pantomime to everyone with open dance auditions on 15 September.
- We held auditions in April for our Summer Musical Project. This was extremely popular and this year sees our largest cast yet. We were very impressed by the high level of talent shown at the auditions.
- We held an open day for the new Grove Academy which again proved very popular. Every age group is now almost fully booked.
- The theatre has achieved Quest accreditation. Quest is a national quality scheme for the sports and leisure industry and helps us to evaluate our level of customer service.
- We have a strong film season this summer with some highly anticipated children's films.
- Jordan Croft left us recently and we are currently recruiting a new Head of Front of House.
- We are also creating a new post in order to focus more intently on the events and functions arm of the business.
- Natasha Ingall and Karen Windley will be returning to us this September when their maternity leave ends.
- Claire McFauld will be leaving the Grove Theatre on 16<sup>th</sup> August and we are currently recruiting for a new Sales and Marketing Manager.

### **Customer Comments**

**Would like to see the theatre making more use of the Don't Let Dunstable Die Facebook page**

A lot of research has been done into the correct use of social media and subsequently we try not to use sites such as Facebook as a direct advertising tool. We do post on Don't Let Dunstable Die's Facebook page regarding the fayres that we hold at the theatre and Grove Academy. We will look into other opportunities to promote the theatre on the page, particularly for season launches and the upcoming Panto Factor.

**This forum wasn't particularly well advertised and some attenders only heard about it through word of mouth.**

AG apologises for this. We typically advertise our customer forums on our social media sites and website, but unfortunately this time this was overlooked during the work towards the season launch.

**Is there no Opera della Luna production this year?**

Unfortunately, no. JD has been in talks with the company, but couldn't find a date that suited them and fitted with our current programme. It is important to not programme too close to the Ellen Kent opera productions in December. Ellen Kent books productions over a year in advance which therefore dictates our availability for other companies such as Opera della Luna.

**Don't Let Dunstable Die have suggested to the producers of the local feature film, Peterman, that they hold the premiere at the Grove Theatre**

This is something that would be great for the local area, especially as the film has been shot here. We will look into this further. If not for the premiere then perhaps for previews, or a specialist screening once the film has been released.

**Can you get Jools Holland back?**

The theatre lost money on his show previously. The show comes with specific criteria and costs which meant that tickets were priced at a high rate. We feel that these were too high for our region and we are currently in talks with Jools Holland to negotiate on price on a return visit. Perhaps Autumn 2014.

**Could you book Julian Smith?**

We would like to see the likes of Julian at the Grove. Unfortunately we don't have a strong jazz audience. This is one of our focuses, as well as drama audiences. We currently building audience development strategies to this end.

**Are you campaigning to ensure buses run during time periods to suit the theatre, with the introduction of the new busway?**

JD has been invited to a meeting in August with the council regarding the busway and the running times of the buses.

**The furniture in the foyers is looking tired**

Central Bedfordshire Council will be supplying the theatre with new furniture. Leisure Connection are responsible for maintenance and repair of equipment at the theatre while the council are

responsible for the replacement of items as required. This is included in discussion regarding improvements to the FOH areas. This also includes replacing the carpet in the Upper Foyer and designating a section as a dance floor with wooden flooring for function and event use; the Function Room to have a sprung floor, mirrors and curtains to hide these in order for the room to be used both as a studio and for functions; the Cloakroom in the Lower Foyer to be converted into a kiosk/café area to ease queue time at the bar during performances.

**Could DAOS use the Function Room as a rehearsal space?**

This is absolutely possible, as well as the Upper Foyer area and the stage when it is not in use. The Function Room is often used for education classes and functions during the day, while the Upper Foyer is used for Barnstormers Comedy Nights and by Hope Church so would need to book early to ensure slots are available.

**The Grove Theatre auditorium is great, very intimate. This creates a great space as both audience and performer**

We agree. Theatreplan, the consultants who designed the venue, are building a like for like venue in India as it has been so successful.

**There hasn't been a large touring production this year**

It has been very tough this year for the industry as a whole. A lot of producers have gone into liquidation and touring products are stopping. The Grove Theatre is classed as a mid-scale venue and a lot of the large touring productions will be taken to local competitors that have a larger audience capacity.

**Will you be getting the Star Trek film?**

The new Star Trek film is a Paramount film and unfortunately at the moment we do not have a contract with them. We are continuing discussions with them to secure a contract.

**Will you be showing any Shakespeare soon?**

It is hard to find good quality touring Shakespeare. It is something we are continually looking for. Our options are to get a smaller production in as a taster and build an audience and to live screen shows from London. To do this latter we need to get different equipment than what we currently use to screen films. We have been looking into this and are close to securing it. However, some venues in London are concerned that audiences will be split as there are also live screenings in Leighton Buzzard and Aylesbury.

**Will you be staging any more TV or radio shows?**

Our details are with the BBC. It is usually them who contact us. They are very keen to return and are very pleased with the venue. As of yet, we do not have anything booked in.

**Does the Upper Foyer get used for shows?**

Yes, the Upper Foyer itself is used for Barnstormers Comedy Nights once a month and recently has been used for Edinburgh Previews. The Function Room has also been used in the past for smaller,

more intimate shows. The problem we have with the Upper Foyer is lighting. During the summer months the lighter evenings mean we cannot stage a show in the foyer as light spills through from outside and causes problems with lighting a stage. The Upper Foyer is also often used for parties, wedding receptions and functions.

**The Grove Theatre has a seat on the joint town committee, but it is never attended.**

JD was not aware of this. She will contact the council to find out the dates of the meetings.

Forum closed: 12.10pm

*Date and time of next meeting*

***Saturday 5 October – 10.30am***