

Grove Theatre  
Customer Forum Minutes  
Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2017 – 1pm



**1 Life Staff Present;**

Rhea Yeung – General Manager  
Ellie Garrett - Head of Operations  
Helen Maile – Theatre Administrator  
Becca Henry – Marketing Manager  
Hannah Delaney – Sales and Marketing Assistant

**CBC staff Present;**

Hugh Jackson – Central Bedfordshire Council's Leisure contracts monitoring officer

**(NB staff comments noted by initials)**

**RY** – kicked off the meeting by thanking everyone for coming, today is national getting to know your customers day, felt very appropriate to share with everyone. To start off RY wanted to discuss Aladdin, and the great success that it was. Wraps have come down, much earlier this year than last (due to calculation errors) can now see the front of the building again. RY explained about the new pantomime company, describing some of the staging and special effects (15 foot fire breathing dragon). Evolution have been quoted to be number one in the UK for their productions, use a live band, and are very passionate. Some staff went to see St Albans pantomime, another of theirs, and we thoroughly enjoyed it. The 3D ghost scene was spectacular. Meeting with Evolution on 24<sup>th</sup> Jan, to discuss everything, marketing plans, tech requirements etc. The schedule this year has been slightly cut, instead of having 52 shows, will now be 43. This is to try and boost occupancy, Aladdin was only at 52%, better atmosphere if the audience is full.

Aladdin has become our highest grossing pantomime to date, and was 162 tickets away from Cinderella, extremely pleased with those figures. Lots of hard work went in so would like to applaud our team, and thank our customers for spreading the word, it definitely made a huge difference to the numbers.

10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary was discussed next, RY explained it will be a full day of events - Friday 21<sup>st</sup> April 2017. Education workshops and theatre tours in the morning, followed by a High tea in the afternoon featuring some entertainment. In the evening, go flat floor in the auditorium and have a party – band, DJ, Some past acts possibly. We will also be running some kind of exhibition in the foyer probably with some old items/details/photos etc. from the beginning of the theatre to now. We are working on some kind of cinema display, hopefully to help celebrate some of the acts past and present, again photo's etc. Proceeds will go to Wheelpower, 1life's chosen charity, and it is an excellent charity so we are very pleased we are able to continue supporting it. RY also announced we are going to be looking into doing another triathlon for them, possibly a longer one, with people doing a whole leg themselves instead of sharing it out.

RY requested if anyone has any comments/stories/experiences to share for 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary please send them onto HM – [grovesales@1life.co.uk](mailto:grovesales@1life.co.uk), we will then collate these to help in our celebrations.

Marketing are currently developing the next brochure, working hard, BH is very busy we've hardly seen her, so lovely she could join us today.

New Shows coming up – Easter Panto, Jon Richardson, and Strictly Murder – with Brian Capron, coming in July. RY reassured still have the old favorites, That'll be the day and Illegal Eagles of course.

Sadly Elton John tribute pulled whole tour, so have had to cancel that but we have scheduled in another film screening instead, hopefully he will come back next year.

Also looking at getting that'll be the day Christmas show for 2018.

More new shows - Cirque Enchantment, lovely family show, kind of Cirque du Soleil style. Customers commented on their confusion at this show, some thought was like Circus of Horrors, others thought it was a more adult show. RY to pass on feedback to producers.

New Children's shows too – The Bubble Man, Jurassic Adventures, and Mister Maker. We also have some classic films screening soon, Labyrinth and singing in the rain which will be paired with an afternoon tea. Vastly reduced our dark days, by 55% this year.

RY discussed new staffing in the building, Richard Shrubbs - new technical manager, is an excellent addition to theatre, started the day before panto, he survived and continues to bring new ideas.

As you may have seen we did some charity bucket collections over pantomime – 3 different – one for Medic detection Dogs, raised over £5300 over the entire run, excellent charity, hopefully we can continue to work with them. Another collection was for Wheelpower and another for Macmillan as Latte heaven's collection was stolen.

RY moved onto explain new links being made between our education department and ROH Bridge. To do with culture plus, CBC run a programme for 40 vulnerable learners, who work towards gaining arts awards, on an 18 month pathway, we are hoping to be able to help them after it has finished as well. Also developing links with library, which was something discussed previously, looking into displays, events and readings, especially as they are moving into the leisure center. Also hoping to have a board in the Leighton Buzzard Leisure Center, as well as working with the Leighton Buzzard theatre to develop some more close links, help each other out.

**EG** - told of some of our other community/charity work- children's party for kids out, excellent local charity who offer refuge care, and a giving tree, we are going to do this again this year starting much earlier. Any unwanted gifts, or any little presents you see in a shop, suitable for children, can be brought in to donate them to the children for Christmas. DLDD have said they will promote this on their page if EG can send some details through. Another customer also commented that the chairman of the charity is in Dunstable rotary, again more links with local communities. Also held a cinema screening for the children which was wonderful, meant a lot of the children could go to the cinema for the very first time.

**RY** - Informed the group that our cinema screen is one of the largest screens in Europe! Customer agreed it is magnificent and that much prefer coming here, sound, picture and general atmosphere is much better than in any cinema. Customer did comment on how the big black screen can sometimes be intimidating and wondered if we could get some kind of white curtains instead to cover the front of the stage/screen beforehand. RY said would look into it but not sure would work logistically.

**HJ** - informed the group of another screening that will be taking place here, run by CBC, about dementia. 21<sup>st</sup> Feb at 9.30am, called inside out of the mind. Health department have paid for the film to done and for the screening to be here, free Q&A session after.

**Comments:**

Customer - don't come to pantomime because cannot stand the flashing light up toys.

**RY** to discuss separate showing with no flashing lights with Evolution, could be a possibility for some time in the future, would like to be able to accommodate everyone.

Customer - seen a nice full page advert in the Stage magazine for sleeping beauty - wonderful.

Customer - saw some lads in the bar before panto, complaining that they had been dragged along; after they couldn't be more complimentary, thoroughly enjoyed it. Thought the cast was fantastic, all really good.

**RY** agreed, could not fault them, what with illnesses etc. they all powered through. Sarah has an amazing voice and was so lovely and friendly, and Kieran was his first time as a dame and loved watching him develop as the run went on. Customer agreed that it was always fresh to watch, saw it three times. **RY** thanked for the feedback as it is always lovely to hear.

Customer - live screenings/afternoon screenings of films are very sociable time, get to know everyone, lovely atmosphere, and don't know everyone by name but it is lovely to share an afternoon with these people, 'Little Club'. Have had some lovely live screenings with 150 plus people in, great atmosphere and really makes a difference.

**RY** commented on how we have a few more coming up that are slightly less well known, a little more stylized than some others, but still brilliant.

Customer – Does the better attendance for live screenings make a difference?

**RY** explained how this is marketing's great work have helped to draw those customers in. Makes a massive difference.

Customer – would it be possible if bucket collections could be projected on the screen to make more obvious what it's for?

**RY** – discussed the signs that are up, usually get the cast to announce when a collection is happening and who for, but don't usually do many after film so couldn't project.

Customer – requested Ladyboys of Bangkok, are they coming back? Seen they are on in Luton?

**RY** to investigate this, thought they weren't touring at the moment.

Customer – Is there any way to project onto the cinema screen some thank you's to local businesses for displaying our posters/helping us etc.? Would be a good/nice opportunity to do so and hopefully easier to change than a sign up.

**RY** is going to look into this, speak to tech and see if possible, brilliant idea and would be lovely to thank the local communities.

Customer - another town council board?

**HJ** - explained this was not his area as he is CBC not Dunstable town council, something would need to bring up with them.

Customer – Impressed with wonderful enthusiasm, very pleased to come back and see how many things have been implemented after talking about them all – Well done to the team.

**RY** thanked for wonderful comments and couldn't be happier with the team.

Customer - 'young lady' behind the bar calls her 'Dear', doesn't like it, please can we ask not to do so, makes customer feel uncomfortable.

**RY** to pass onto staff.

Customer - fantastic that we have opera boys booked in, is the event that happened previously that was similar, Louise Dearman ran, happening?

**EG** explained not currently penciled in, think they are resting it slightly, customer commented lots of those kinds of shows going around, so just no call for it currently.

Customer - Disabled toilet still being out of action?

**HJ** - works are being done, **RY** told group these are booked in for 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> Jan to get the roof fixed. Not a quick fix, needed to fix roof before re opening toilet, lots of works being done now, sprung floor in function room, once roof fixed also.

Customers requested a clearer notice, re other disabled toilets. Flush in the toilet hasn't necessarily been working properly for a while either.

**RY** to get Ken to check flush before re-open toilet. Customers commented that next time if we have this kind of issue, explain to customers exactly what the problem is, have it on the sign, as it just looks like we haven't bothered to fix it.

**EG** informed customers that Duty Managers have the information to tell people why and door staff should be explaining and pointing customers towards alternative toilets.

Customer - normal flushes don't always work either, very slow.

**RY** stated we have a gentleman called Ken working for us, who will be looking into this. HJ often picks up on things like this and is great to have an extra pair of fresh eyes to the building, should be less issues like this.

Customer - Hand dryers. "Pathetic amount of air coming out, don't dry your hands, takes too long".

**RY** commented hadn't heard before so something to look into. **HJ** stated that we could look into some pricings for new ones. Customer suggested Dyson air blades or similar would be more efficient, quicker and wouldn't need too many then. **HJ** commented not a no, if we can get some pricings will look into it.

Customer – On a busy evening in the theatre the bar is impossible to get too. Film starts late because of it, no proper cueing system.

**RY** explained this is something we have never been able to crack, happens in most theatres, short time frame, lots of people to serve, just cannot move quickly enough. Discussion was had into the bar design not being ideal, causing a bottleneck etc. **RY** will be discussing with the team, to some trials to see if we can make any improvements at all, very difficult though. Lots of suggestions made, opening upstairs bar more, separate place for interval drinks etc. **RY** to put them to FOH and see what works best. **HJ** suggested just starting the film on time, people would learn to get here earlier and stop serving once film starts. **RY** felt this was personally a good approach and will discuss with team. **EG** brought up merchandise stand was moved for pantomime which did help a little with the bottleneck in the foyer, customers acknowledged this was much better.

Customer – do we still sell ice creams?

**RY** informed yes, ran out of stock towards end of panto, sold much better than we thought, but have more now. Customer prefers our usual stock not the new ones, **RY** informed we were trying a new brand but we agree not as nice.

Customer commented on people rustling in the audience, knows it's not something we can really control but is very irritating.

**RY** told customer to come out and tell us if this is an issue, just very difficult.

Customers - difficulty hearing in some films, Inferno in particular. **HJ** discussed the ending of that film was very different, didn't enjoy. (fuming about this!) **RY** commented the sound in this film was particularly stylistic which made it difficult to hear.

Customer - when we will know next lot of live screenings?

**RY** - as and when they happen, keep eyes peeled.

Customer – Is Ellen Kent coming back?

**RY** - yes but not doing autumn tour this time, just spring/summer one – 1<sup>st</sup> May, La Boheme, and possibly will do a ballet in 2018 as well.

**RY** finished meeting by thanking everyone again and looking forward to seeing everyone soon.

Date of Next Meeting: Friday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2017 at 10am