

Grove Theatre
Customer Forum Minutes
Friday 19th January 2018 – 1pm



SLL Staff Present;

Rhea Yeung – General Manager
Ellie Garrett - Head of Operations
Helen Maile – Theatre Administrator
Hannah Delaney – Sales and Marketing Assistant
Helen Cleminson-Finch – Duty Manager
Heather Piper – Regional Contract Manager

CBC Staff Present;

Patrick Mills - Leisure Monitoring and Contract Compliance Officer

(NB staff comments noted by initials)

RY – Thanked everyone for coming. Introduced Pat - new client monitoring officer for the council and Heather - SLL representative.

Since last meeting has been quite full on - Very busy autumn season including Panto. Stats for panto: 2015 Cinderella into Aladdin we saw a decrease by 7%, this year increased by 28%. Massive occupancy lift, brilliant for the theatre and cast/crew. Those who saw it will agree excellent show! Book in early for next year, selling really well already - 12 and ½ weeks ahead of last year. Moving Panto Company has made a real difference, don't know who's in it yet but already selling brilliantly. MK and Stevenage both doing Snow white too, don't really get a say in which one we do, it's the companies decision. GC would be in a similar situation, just given the panto you are doing.

Customer Commented re Brian Conley in panto - £54 for tickets upstairs, plus transaction per ticket - Too expensive. Rather come here, need to push more price of tickets as are cheaper than most. RY informed of a big marketing scheme about freezing the prices and putting them up by 50p later in year, not massive but trying to stay affordable. Talks re pricing points with evolution, more important to get kids out into theatre. Goldilocks was excellent for the little ones, 2019 diary there are more, The Snow Queen is here tomorrow but that is for older people really. Allowed to be a lot more quirky and unique with marketing tact this year for panto, great experience and learnt a lot. Ready to push boundaries for next year, smash records again! Highest selling and grossing pantomime ever at the Grove. 71% occupancy at the end, adjusted schedule again slightly next year to reflect better selling days. Shortened the season for this one just gone, previously lots of 3 show days, didn't want to do that again so now only 2 shows. Customer voiced concern re MK doing the same as might lose people as some go to both. RY - Think we will be ok as different interpretations, but are trying to launch casting early, have contingency plans in place.

RY explained some staff are leaving Grove Theatre for bigger and better things – staff getting head hunted, sad but happy for them. Becca left just before Christmas, she was head hunted to work for a company in London. Connor has been head hunted by three different companies, but has opted for company called Light Fantastic.

Hannah is going off to follow her dancing passion, she has very kindly agreed to do freelance with us to help with continuity and training in the meantime. Application deadline is today for all roles, wait and see. Time of change but good to keep us on our toes. Customer commented that this was a testament to the efficiency of the theatre, training the team etc. – credit to RY that team produce what they produce. If team weren't cohesive in working together wouldn't get head hunted, led by

excellent and intelligent team leader RY. RY commented on the brilliance of the team – hard working, all about theatre, can't really work here and not be invested.

Customer asked why people don't stay – RY explained can't compete salary wise, and can't always offer for them to work in the specialist departments they enjoy. EG discussed being more of a training theatre, can get so far within job role, as much as would love to develop the progressions sadly isn't available.

Customer commented on an issue at a recent film screening - Coffee machine broke down, so no one to hand out tickets. Nearly offered to help dishing them out as cue so long. By that time was sorted and someone came back to help. Customer suggested maybe have a separate table for the collection tickets, away from box office. RY/EG - A possibility to do, would need to make it obvious to all this is where tickets are collected.

Customer also commented re the sound for Murder on the orient express – diction awful, couldn't hear very well but think that's the film - Stylized choice by the director.

RY used this opportunity to break some exciting news with cinema, we are getting a new projector. Should be going through now, for summer season. Bulb positioning will be brighter, easier to use for tech team. Several people say about the loving Vincent. Amazing film, moaning the fact it was only afternoon – EG - have added a Saturday matinee performance 3rd Feb 1:30pm. Question and answer after the film – let people know before hand, were not aware last time until the film started.

RY commented on the new furniture FOH, this has come from CBC, high chairs coming for around the poser tables, we have sofas, tub chairs, and a shelving unit for kitchen already. Booster seats are on their way also. These will be bookable, and we will have over 100 to offer. Will be a deposit of some kind for these as CBC have made a lot of investment. Major focus on theatre in the bid that is currently taking place. Key area for CBC 11-18 year age group, drawing them into theatre. Education is something we are passionate about here at Grove, worthwhile project, going to take 5 year plan to get to where would like but is an exciting time for the venue. Still offer something for all loyal customers and improved products but to engage with new demographic also. Something for all, every pay grade, something all can afford. Customer commented on the large polish contingent in the town, are there polish films/theatre? RY already looked into this but not currently touring, but looking into for future. Wide demographic in the area so should represent all community, polish community definitely part of our community so should be including everyone. Team already got the ideas.

Had some big names, Brian Conley, Jimmy Carr several times, Omid Djalili, Jack Whitehall, Tim Vine. Alan Carr came to watch pantomime and has been here to perform before, wants to bring new tour here soon. A lot don't want to come as only 780 seats but then when they come and see theatre they want to come back.

We also got some exciting education projects, education to change – RY and ladies in education department are rolling out programme, pick shows throughout season and offer to younger people for £5, we swallow the rest of cost, opera/musical/comedy etc. wide appreciation. May not understand so want people to broaden their minds, educating local area. Rolling out further and further once test has worked.

Working with Lancot lower school, helped launch online library each child wrote their own book, published online and we launched it here. BBC 3 counties and library were involved too. Helping them to also collate incredible arts based works so they can apply for arts mark accreditation, arts funding has been cut, don't have money or resources to put into this so it's something we are assisting with – idea is to test out, help them arts marks, we are arts mark supporter – collate the work/ fill out application/case study/submit it, silver gold platinum – 5 schools within Dunstable

who have it. Gives funding to put back into schools, our aim is to assist all schools in Dunstable with this, dream at the moment but working on it.

Currently deliver arts awards, Youth Theatre class have just done bronze level arts awards, all passed -earned UCAS points, if you don't particularly exam well can fall back on work you already done. Customer commented that Shakespeare festival here was brilliant. So innovative – way the children interpreted it was fascinating. RY- Second year we have worked with them, next year in already hopefully more evenings longer run.

Over panto bucket collections for hospice at home – local charity in Dunstable and Houghton Regis, care and respite for those who don't have any. All volunteers, had funding cut, had enough to keep them going for another year, used to get £10K a year. Next week to announce we raised £9729.00 over the course of pantomime. Down to generosity of all our patrons. Announced on stage this time, bucket collections so think that helped. Looking for another charity for next year. Lots of people asking for leaflets/ info re volunteering etc. so was great publicity for the charity also.

Customer commented that for the first time in recent years people now know where the theatre is. People didn't know where this theatre was, excellent work to help it grow. Still get people saying signage isn't good - Central beds council, looking at getting a big illuminated sign which should help.

RY finished off by discussing the new season – Sarah Millican – sold out, dance – Giovanni coming back, Audience with Ian and Oti, classics as always – That'll Be The Day, Christmas one this year – Nov time, Kids season – Teletubbies, Dear Zoo, Opera - Madama Butterfly 15th April, Ballet - Russian state ballet.

Comments:

Customer – Can we please have a change in hold music on the phone? Same for the whole time! RY - Having work done on phone system so should be able to change it soon.

Customer - Booking online – website not great, can't look at both circle and stalls at the same time, slow, gets stuck. RY – all singing all dancing website is in the long term plans. Can put it forward but it is costly. Will investigate, but will need help from external designer. Customer asked how to apply discounts online? Friends discount is auto applied when you log in. Before Becca left she stayed overnight to test it and took it offline to set it up. Code is only applied if there is a promotional code available.

Customer - Cold in auditorium, sits on the left hand side and is very cold, not sure about right hand side. Really cold, people commented lots and complained. Very cold, had gloves on. RY - Speak to tech make sure it is at the correct temp. Don't want people to be uncomfortable.

Customer - Toilets – cleanliness, always blocked as don't flush quick enough. Hand dryers not great either! RY - Cisterns have been changed, flush mechanisms weren't great. TD has looked into it and changed them. Toilets themselves are performing a lot better at the moment, should have helped. DMs should inspect the toilets at various points. Customer commented they used a disabled one downstairs, someone had obviously used it and was a mess, can't be helped but not always pleasant.

RY/EG- Door staff do toilet checks throughout shift, will give reminders.

Customer asked Pat – Why are you here? PM - Get more understanding on customer's perspective, facility. Pat monitoring visits, walk round highlight the need for anything that may come up. Hearing it from user's point of view allows to better coordinate with RY during regular visit each week.

Customer asked same question to Heather – HP explained she is from SLL, took over in sept. Customer asked why? HP explained Council made the decision to terminate

the contract with the original operators 1life, SLL already run other CBC sites and CBC couldn't re tender and procure a new supplier quickly enough so now taken over for a year. Interim until full procurement has happened. In process at the moment, a number of operators submitting 16th Feb, decision made and confirmed by beginning of April who that will be. Could be any one of those. Customer saw bid information, documentation for the bidders online so now understands what that is for. SLL would like to win it, but will be same staff whatever happens, if SLL aren't successful, staff would be transferred over again.

Discussion was had amongst customers re CBC specifically re change in councils recently and lack of interest in Dunstable specifically – PM discussed how Council are focusing a lot on leisure and culture, big on agenda. HP – they want to invest, positive rewards so can use to advantage. PM – investments are being made, Dunstable, Flitwick etc. CBC real focus on leisure. Dunstable LC has big community incentive – adult learning – day opportunities, special needs/specific needs. Citizen advice, more than just a gym, Central hub – this part of town vibrant. RY explained how would like to work closer with library as will be shared space, also wonder if we can share LC space for other things in the day time. Customer commented that current library is full of Leighton theatre info as is library theatre. RY looking to work together with them more closely as well (LB theatre), hopefully create something that can go across both venues.

RY discussed other ideas including guided walks at Houghton Hall Park, historic info. We have great access to all areas so looking for joint promotion opportunities around the local area.

EG announced Andre Rieu is doing another live screening – have been approached for dates this year so watch this space.

Customer made a comment re food and bar. Often see when customers ask for items we don't have it – RY thanked customer as this flags up that some training is required re product awareness, should offer alternative similar item.

RY also told of new partnership being developed with Weatherfield school – Education went last week and looking at different opportunities to work together.

RY thanked customers for their continual support and feedback.

Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 4th April 2018 at 10am