

Grove Theatre
Customer Forum Minutes
Thursday 10th January 2019 – 1pm



SLL Staff Present;

Rhea Yeung – General Manager
Ellie Garrett – Head of Operations
Helen Rudderham – Theatre Administrator
Samantha Garside – Sales and Marketing Manager
Jade Sharp – Head of Box office
Heather Piper – Contract Manager

CBC Staff Present;

Rupert Martin – Monitoring Officer

(NB staff comments noted by initials)

RY – Thanks to all for attending. Introductions made to everyone for new customers. Happy new year to all! October was last time got together so lots has happened, starting with pantomime which was truly amazing, had really good feedback and excellent show quality – 2 years ago moved Production Companies, now under same as St Albans - Evolution. 2 years ago we did Aladdin and finished on 43% occupancy, quite low. Last year for Sleeping Beauty we ended on 71%, this year for Snow White we ended on 84%, continual jumps and really excited about Peter Pan next year. Went to see it in Sheffield production, lots of fire/flying, going to spectacular! Had some fantastic feedback, nothing but praise from audiences. Since 2 years ago we have increased sales by 5619 tickets, huge for relatively young building still. Over the 44 performances there were none that really dipped this time. Customer commented was very funny – Herman personal favourite of most people.

Collected for 2 different charities over pantomime, the first was hospice at home volunteers and the second was for child who suffers with neuroblastoma who requires lifesaving treatment. For her we raised £1500, for hospice at home we raised £7771. £10K keeps them going for a year, so our patrons have made a massive difference to them.

At the moment there is a lot of scaffolding up at the back of the building. A new section of roof is being replaced, going on until March. Moving plant equipment off so can be operational and then putting it all back. Brilliant company – going a lot quicker than thought. Disabled bays are taken up but notices have been put out, can park in car park behind and still use the badge all been cleared with CBC council.

Today our techies are doing a get in for American Idiot. Just came out of the west end, will be rehearsing with us for this week and starting their regional tour here – historically we had week long runs earlier in career of grove, trying to build back up again. Trying to hit some different customer brackets. Selling really well and has helped to develop a lovely relationship with producers. We also have Avenue Q coming in May – not for children but excellent show, very funny. Every January looking to open a new show with them – looking at Buddy as a possibility for next year. Then again another one the year after, getting regular relationship with them.

Sadly we were broken into twice in November, took collection money first time and second time took alcohol. Culprit was reprimanded on second time though. We have put some different measures into place and police were really helpful on both occasions.

Had some of the favourites back, That'll Be The Day, Russell Watson, Jethro, Shakespeare Schools – didn't have enough capacity had to turn schools away, perhaps increase next year. Worked on what we could offer for children- stick man/there was an old lady who swallowed a fly/Bing – different scales of production, cater for different parent's needs. Trying to offer something for everyone. Highlight for RY was DMTC production of Spamalot, was hilarious – left with stomach ache and crying was so funny. Looking forward to their next production of CATS in October.

Looking forward we have Avenue Q, Jimmy Carr, Jasper Carrot, BBC 3 counties peoples awards again – incredible stories and very moving last time – looking at making bigger, further reach etc. Also got ballet coming up – swan lake/Wizard of Oz/Centenary Celebration Tribute to Dame Margot Fonteyn. Children's production company called KD theatre productions are putting on Alice in wonderland here, but also will be creating children's workshops to take into schools free of charge. Take small excerpts of the performance in, offer schools discount on tickets – raising awareness of the arts. We also run Arts awards in house, so children can come and do courses which accrue UCAS points towards their university place. KD productions are getting involved and want to promote that with us.

Speaking of our Education department, this year our summer project is 'Whistle down the wind'. 'Oliver' was a huge success last year and was best ever selling, feedback from children was very moving.

Staffing, we have had a few changes and are currently interviewing for few roles. Maternity cover for SG, Sales and marketing assistant as JM has gone onto next stage in career, he is staying on as casual team member as front of house though. Fantastic relationship with past team members, i.e. our old technical manager, deputy technical manager and our old senior technician are in working today. We are half way through interviewing for a deputy technical manager as well. Kate has taken up the role as education assistant, she has a wealth of experience, and looks forward to bringing arts into classrooms in the area. Finally Aine-Rose is now our box office apprentice, already a casual member of the team before but joins us on a more regular basis.

EG –Our recent runaway success for cinema was Mamma Mia 2, proved extremely popular with all age ranges. Last week we had one of the most successful live screenings ever with Andre Rieu. Based on strength of that have booked in his next set of concerts screening in august, this goes on sale 01/02/2019. Also had screening this week of madness of King George that went down really well. Good season of new titles too – Queen of spades and Don Quixote among them. There are a few coming up that we cannot announce but there will be a good mixture of drama/opera/ballet. Cinema in January – Bohemian Rhapsody has gone on to be an amazing success – golden globes etc. have been putting extra screenings on now, originally only had a few. Also have Mary Poppins and fantastic beasts 2 which has proven very popular. Just finalising films for April and May with some exciting titles coming up.

Comments:

Customer commented on the Film flyer - title of film is in green on black background, very difficult to read. RY will look at that for next time, quite small print too, need to be able to read more. Customer commented the white on black is super and can read, but the rest a little faint. RY/SG will try to make accessible to all.

Customer commented could advertise having induction loop more, and make sure it works consistently – only knew about it when went to lip reading course. Roll out some training as staff don't know how it works. Customer says doesn't work correctly always so need to look at it. RY - Brought in some specialist equipment for pantomime but will definitely make sure equipment is looked at. Customer couldn't hear reduced Shakespeare company at all.

Customer comment, why don't advertise in local library? RY - we have been in last year, have had similar comments in past, working on developing relationship with them. When they move into Dunstable centre we should be able to work together more, working closely with us on few things. Lovely and supportive so hopefully will see improvement then. Have collection box for library.

Customer commented on Shakespeare live screenings, did we advertise to local schools? RY explained that NT and RSC give free rights and content in classrooms. Have had slow build on live screenings – customer commented that people didn't know about them, but seem to now. Customer commented is better they think as can see the actor/singers faces, multiple camera's, feels like you are there.

Customer commented that would like some orchestral concerts. EG – we do have a live music event on sale next week, world champion brass band who hail from wales coming in June. RY - Also looking at putting together Grove Theatre orchestra. Our MD for panto teaches in our Eds department and is looking at creating something. Customer stated that LSO will come and do outreach with schools. EG- is working with music services, giving them space hosting music workshops over the year. Music school in Dunstable

closed so want to offer something else. Last year was first Orchestra Live here, worked with professional composer commissioning a piece and went into schools. Professional orchestra came in to perform it and went to each section and children had to interact with orchestra to get machine working - Doing same this year. Link - http://www.orchestraslive.org.uk/featured-projects/the-wish/?fbclid=IwAR2xGzi6rFRjq-T-UApQ0cJAtKI1rhVLOR_wjiWePODJ4g95AvwXS0lvUZw

Customer commented there is a composer who lives in Studham, did some music for royal wedding, and has composed for Caritas. Is definitely interested in doing things like this – Customer to provide details. London Mozart players also go out and do workshops. RY - Working with ROHB setting up creative network for schools. Drop in sessions, take all the hard work out of it and ROH give money to bring in facilitators and can give packages. If anyone has anyone they can put us in touch with please let us know.

Customer asked what happened to west end singers? CBC project, chairman's concert – let's hear it for the girls and here come the boys – RY - lady who organised it has links with west end. Looking at trying to pull on those throughout grove theatre orchestra, would like to have a gala night.

Customer commented on hand dryers still not very good/haven't been changed yet? RY- still looking into them, top of the list.

Customer loved panto and loved Andre Rieu. Also A star is born was wonderful. Discussion re sound being difficult to follow sometimes- stylised sound. Had some very good films and more to come. RY/EG- Any film suggestions/requests, try to take on all feedback. Customer asked how films work out financially? RY – do have to take a punt with certain film titles, try to go for the more popular ones but offer for all. Unless keep going online very difficult to advertise new ones on sale. Weekly email for Friday film - Customer doesn't receive this, JS to add customers to mailing list.

Customer commented mailing lists are strange sometimes, often sent lots and other times get none. JS explained how process works and sometimes opt in boxes become unticked online. Customer commented other venues have been putting adverts on the screens in their gyms etc. and putting flyers out – RY/SG to look at sending leaflets to Holiday inn gym – see if can reach Studham and surrounding areas. Items already in SLL sites.

RY discussed the difficult timeline as programme 18 months in advance, films fit round dates. Short lead in time, only 3 months and EG has to find gaps and fill in. Try to experiment with different times – screen Mary Poppins at 5pm, after school but then another one at 8pm if parents want to come without children. We had feedback that we were programming too far in advance, film companies swapped dates around so were cancelling and moving films so tried to change this and programme later.

Customer discussed the difficulty of the brochure, out of date as soon as printed – RY trying to big push on social media etc. discussion had re gazette, is print phasing out? Still a place for print now but how relevant will it be moving forward. Always open to suggestions for marketing. Suggestion of film schedule poster, bit like the live screening ones – suggestion of items outside the toilets might work, whilst ladies' wait.

Have put some leaflet racks on the bar, looking at different dead spaces at the moment.

Customer asked do we have notices downstairs saying ladies toilets upstairs? RY – announcements should be made and there should be some signs out. RY to check is being done.

Thanks to all for coming, appreciate all feedback we get. We will be getting a feedback machine in foyer – trying to make as easy as possible for customers.

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 4th April at 10am