

Grove Theatre - Customer Forum Minutes  
Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2019



**SLL Staff Present;**

Rhea Yeung – General Manager  
Ellie Garrett – Head of Operations  
Helen Rudderham – Theatre Administrator  
Fiona Smout – Sales and Marketing Manager  
Alicia Muscella – Sales and Marketing Assistant

**CBC Staff Present;**

Rupert Martin – Monitoring Officer

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

**RY** – Today is National rain day! New faces to introduce – Sam, marketing manager is on maternity leave so have Fiona covering currently, she has been fantastic so far, hitting ground running. Alicia is our new marketing assistant, she has been so keen with the social media side, developing our Grove voice and keeping it across all platforms. Education team are re-launching their FB page and Alicia has been great helping them.

Since we last met, incredibly busy. Lots of support for Dunstable centre – job fairs, interviews etc. for them. Megan (centre manager) has been working tirelessly, and it is going to be outstanding. The gym equipment downstairs has gone from foyer. We have still got sales team there and library box until the centre opens on the 13th May. We will be helping set up and with deliveries etc. Facility looks excellent! Talking to library about having a fun palace between us, DC and the Library – collaborate science and arts. Big free event for the community.

Lots going on with our Education department, had auditions for our Grove Production Project, 'Whistle down the Wind'. 67 young people signed up so far. Looking at a possibility of another 22 so will be huge project. Amazing opportunity for the children. Have sourced a great set with a motorbike on a truck, so should be spectacular.

Our academy class put on their annual show last weekend 'The Little Mermaid'. So adorable, usually just advertised to parents but will be lovely to invite audiences next time. Wonderful – planning next year's title now.

*Customer asked how DC will affect the Grove Theatre.* RY explained it will actually benefit us greatly as we will be able to use spaces and give the children experience of doing performances in different areas.

Megan (DC) and Carly from the Library are excellent and it will be great working together with them more closely, we can advertise for them and vice versa. Story reading groups – over here/over there.

Recently had our world book day. 924 young people from different schools dressed up as their favourite characters to watch. Our education department wrote and produced the show, keeping it at a low price point to ensure was accessible to schools.

*Customer commented how thrilled they are at amount of people coming through the doors currently. Films have sold really well. Shows have been sold well as well, having to get tickets quickly. Trying to persuade people to book for 'That'll Be the Day' in October, selling really well already.* RY – doing so well looking at have 2 nights in a row as a possibility. Have been really lucky with a lot of the shows, tributes have such a strong following.

**EG** – Jan–March Oscar season gave us amazing films, so lucky to squeeze them all in. Stand outs were; A star is Born, Fantastic Beasts and Mary Poppins, but Bohemian Rhapsody was by far our best seller. Over 5 performances we had 2660 people attend. Had first screening a while ago but people keep requesting it so final one is currently 12th April. Next season – green book, big Oscar winner this year. Fisherman's Friends is popular. Finalising summer programme, coming up in the next week or so.

Live screenings – Andre Rieu was biggest seller, 543 people and will be back in august. Madness of King George was a National Theatre production and had some great comments. All About Eve coming soon, did really well in London and proving to be popular here. Royal Shakespeare Company – As You Like It, Taming

of the Shrew and Measure for Measure. NT in line with 10th anniversary for live screenings looking to bring back some old ones. Already have Small Island booked in July. Looking at other titles to bring back also.

**RY** – So lovely to see so many people through the door. It's about non-users too, reaching other people. Lots of work behind the scenes to extend reach. When everything is open in the area will create more of a hub. Also working on collaborations with professional partners - Looking to work with full house theatre, small scale theatre for children, who work heavily with arts council. Going to co-produce their first mid-scale piece tour in 2021. They are going to teach us about funding, we will teach them about programming tour. Ethos behind it is work created by Central Bedfordshire, for people in Central Bedfordshire. Will give updates about how we get on with that.

Alongside this we are working with a company called Ground Works, commissioned by local youth hostels/councils etc. to work with young and vulnerable people. Create a film about domestic abuse. Trying different projects to promote artists/local artists/bring taboo topics to the forefront. One of our big initiatives is around health and wellbeing in children at school. By the end of 2019 schools must have wellbeing programme, so working on our programme we can take into schools and a training scheme for us to help the teachers and support the schools.

Internally some staffing changes - Jade is now working at New Wimbledon Theatre. Really enjoying it, learning different ways theatres do things. *Customer commented good training here shows moving on to better things.* RY - Brilliant to see someone flourish. Tom will also be leaving us – going to work in IT so different path for him. So have been doing some recruitment, great to see younger generation coming through, with different ideas about the future of theatre, really interesting. *Customer commented shame we are often seen as a stepping post.* RY - nice to know providing the next generation and we get new ideas from those who have left etc. Been really lucky with teams we have. Nice to create a network of support through different companies. Some of them come back and volunteer, i.e. lighting designer comes back and volunteers for us over GPP.

Shows coming up - Jasper carrot, Henning Wehn, Ruby Wax, BBC 3 Counties People's Choice Awards. They are releasing tickets to the public this time, highly recommend it to anyone, fabulous evening incredible to see what goes on in the community. Can go online and vote for people and local heroes you might know. CATS – looking forward to DMTC's production. *Customer commented saw Sister Act – hadn't seen any of DMTC shows for a while but was amazing.*

Buddy Holly story coming in January, along with a weeklong tour of Paddington. Interested to see how is translated. Peppa Pig will be back. Wizard of Oz ballet in October – matinee and evening. It is longer than the previous ones we have had but is aimed at the children too, same company who brought us Snow Queen. Coppelia coming soon, pure ballet might be a little bit old for little children.

Pantomime - dates are looking to change ever so slightly and extend into January. Finalising casting and should be able to announce in next two weeks. *Customer discussion re pantomime how good it is, excellent for children.* Relaxed performance – last year was first one. Opportunity to make it more accessible. Changed the timing of it this year to improve when schools can come as had this feedback from a few people, these have booked on already. Spoken to other theatres on how we can improve, had some feedback from parents. Had a theatre approach us as well for feedback on how they can put this kind of performance on.

#### **Comments:**

*Customer asked if have looked into booking Ukulele orchestra?* RY – Had them booked but dropped out sadly. Had a different group but not the same. Reignited the conversation, so hopefully looking to next year.

*Customer commented on delays at the bar.* RY - Looking at trying different techniques, shape of the bar makes it quite difficult. Have been hit with sickness quite a lot so staff numbers down. Quite high walk-ups for films too, staff accordingly but then suddenly lots more people come in. Footfall is definitely on the rise, getting more into the swing of booking in advance as allocated seating. Bar is always an issue though and will continue to keep trying different ways. *Customer asked re paying for drinks in advance?* RY – looking into this but till system doesn't link up to ticketing system. Something for us to look into. Trying to get more tills open but lost one in break in unfortunately so working around this currently. Very noisy foyer

when it's full and can be extremely crowded, do try to open doors ASAP. Try to separate kiosk – *Customer commented haven't got hanging signs yet.*

*Customer commented on often a muddle at box office.* RY - have tried separating orders/collections but one till for collections doesn't work as sometimes someone not doing anything and the other staff member rushed off feet. *Customer asked re E-tickets.* RY – would need scanners to police properly, we are looking at doing it after some training last week but need to be able to police that it isn't being shared.

*Customer made observation whilst sitting door B side, when come down steps the stairs disappear when you get to bend. Torches not being help in front of customer so difficult to see.* EG to pick up with Team. RY – design of the stairs not great but have added in bits to help, like foot lights/hand rails. Will pick up with FOH should be lighting customer not themselves. *Customers very late coming in – lights have gone down and have been trying to find seats on their own.* EG - Pick up with FOH to advise where to go. *Are staff trained to not bring people in mid performance?* HR- dependant on show and producer.

*Discussion re library and what is happening in town – super surgery/roads etc.*

*Customer asked re any opera coming?* RY - Russian state opera are coming in February next year.

*Customer asked re plays?* RY – Do have Right Place! Wrong Time!! in autumn. Just had Tinder, came over from Ireland but very marmite, quite low attendance. Better attendance with live screenings than with actually putting plays on. *Customer commented can be difficult to hear, unless diction is really good.*

*Customer re the favourite, awful noise in soundtrack and strange film. Discussion re certificates on film.*

*Customer asked any update re hand dryers.* RY - Gave a tour to head of SLL and discussed, told to get a quote.

*Customer asked can get a new website, as doesn't work on phone?* FS – can't be done quickly, looking into. Trying to make it user friendly in the mean-time. App has been updated – should be able to book using the app.

*Customer asked if Judy dench film, Red Joan is coming?* EG –Judy Dench in All Is True coming up soon but will look at Red Joan.

*Customer asked re association with BBC as had lots of talks, is that through them?* RY - No just through programming, approaching various producers. Find won't be any for ages and then loads at once.

*Customer asked how lost voice guy went.* People loved him.

*Customer commented couldn't get tickets for Jimmy Carr –* RY - friends should have had email for priority booking, opened up second date when got full. EG suggested would be worth box office team putting people on waiting list. Seats do become available and contact waiting list first.

*Customer asked re any Jazz/orchestra?* EG - Cory Band - brass band coming 23rd June. Currently world brass band champions. RY - doing our own Grove theatre orchestra event in 2020. MD from panto is working on it, such talent within Leighton Buzzard area, needed a long run in to get as much promotion as possible.

*Customers suggested Jazz session in upper foyer, Piano bar?* Something to look into – Rupert at CBC looking into piano funding etc.

*Discussion re brown signage up around town pointing to theatre.*

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> July at 6pm