

Wells Operatic Society Ltd.
Minutes of the virtual AGM and Members Social Evening
Friday 26th March 2021

7.30pm

Virtual Reception The Mayor, our President, Cllr Philip Welch attended.

7.45pm

AGM held virtually on Google Meet, 45 full members attended. The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for Absence: Kate Lynch

1. Minutes of the 2020 AGM

Held solely by the committee in light of the COVID 19 pandemic restrictions on the 20th March 2020 have been shared with members as a digital document.

2. Matters Arising – none, the minutes were agreed as a true record of the meeting

Proposer Jessica Errington

Secunder Nicholas Barlow

Due to virtual format of the AGM, the chairman will sign the minute book in due course.

3. Chairman's report

I present this report in this the 119th year of Wells Operatic Society Limited's existence. The society is registered at Companies House (registered number 1377655) and is also a registered charity (number 276308).

Our last properly constituted AGM was in 2019. The planned AGM last year couldn't take place because the pandemic had by then made it impossible. Instead, the committee met in a socially distanced way to, essentially, act as an emergency AGM and confirm continuation of the committee, confirm the postponement of all theatre activity indefinitely and to approve the year's accounts. Technically, this was a breach of the rules. A properly constituted and attended AGM has to take place each year, but we imagine and hope that no one is going to object to this, given the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic.

To some extent, therefore, I will have to cover some theatre progress over the last two years. I will leave Sharon to tell you about the last relevant shows and those planned for the future. And Niamh will give you a summary of the social activity that has taken place, and will be taking place. I can give you a summary of the main items that the committee has had to deal with.

However, I must begin with some very sad news. In 2019 we lost a much loved and former very active member (also a former committee member) in Maureen Brandon. I was lucky enough to be in a number of productions with her, principally pantos, when she appeared either in the chorus or as a principal. She was a lovely lady, and made a big contribution to theatre life, also supporting us when she was the Mayoress.

Last year we lost two more ladies who were wonderful members of the theatre. Lynn Jones was a long-standing committee member and our patrons' secretary. She did a fantastic job, continuing even through her illness until it became impossible. She was also an invaluable link to Wells Comedy Club via her son Ben. She is greatly missed.

And we also lost Anne Beechey. Anne appeared on the stage so often, in plays and musicals. She had a beautiful voice, and an extremely warm and supportive manner. She is such a big loss to the theatre.

And at the end of last year, Alfie Fricker passed away. A stalwart of the backstage crew, and a huge part of the team that oversaw the transition from the Regal Cinema to the Little Theatre, Alfie had a joke for every occasion. A lively and very funny man.

Finally, and so sadly this year, only two weeks ago, we lost Sharon Upham. Sharon had almost a thirty year history with us, taking principal parts, as well as chorus work, especially dancing, which she loved. She was a lovely, bright and cheerful member of pantos, musicals, reviews and plays. And she will be greatly missed.

Since the last AGM there have been no productions, and therefore business and activity have been very limited. However, we have taken the opportunity that this has presented to improve some of the facilities in the theatre building. As you know, in 2018 we secured planning permission to put a new publicity LED lit sign above the front entrance of the theatre, on the porch roof, and secondly to uplight the existing sign by the large tree at the front. We obtained an estimate for the work from a local firm (many were canvassed but few were interested). However, the estimate for the overhead door sign (with programmable colour) was prohibitive

On the other hand, we did receive a good estimate from Neil Bishop to lay the supply for uplighting the billboard sign by the tree (to be dug as a trench across the car park, from the workshop) and this work has now been carried out. We have been able to give the rehearsal room a thorough makeover. It has been repainted, the floor covering has been replaced, and dimmable LED lighting installed in place of the old strip lighting. The windows were repaired where necessary, and new curtains are being supplied and fitted. The colour scheme has been taken out into the hallway just outside the rehearsal room.

The auditorium has also been repainted and looks much brighter and cleaner. The front of house strip lighting there has also been replaced with dimmable LED lights, although the standard of dimming is not brilliant, and may require further work. The final touches are now being put to the auditorium painting by Aidan Mackay.

All of that work has been, as you can imagine, very expensive.

Pauline will be able to explain how we have been able to afford this in her report.

My personal thanks go to everyone who has served on the committee this year. Pauline, Ken, Lynn, Graham, Mike, Joe, Sharon, Niamh, Emma and Adam. Committee meetings have been very enjoyable and positive, and business has been shared out between us very fairly and very fruitfully. We get a lot of ongoing matters in our agendas, but sooner or later they are ticked off as completed.

Everyone makes their contribution, but I just want to bring your attention to 2 of the committee members who have stepped up to the plate in rather a big way. Niamh has been our meetings secretary for the last two years, taking over from Gerald, and has done a brilliant job. Sharon has taken over the other aspect of Gerald's past role, namely all the bookings and hirings of the theatre to outside groups, and has demonstrated a wonderful sense of tact discretion and fairness, balanced by great organisation and communication.

Generally speaking, and this is my personal observation only, it seems that we are now benefiting from a good influx of young enthusiastic and talented members. On the other hand, it may be that it is my increasing age that is causing me to see things that way

– I have to admit that even Graham Brown is looking good now that he has turned 40.

There are plenty of other youngsters who have put in a good shift for our benefit. They include the famous Nick 'the web' Barlow, Vicki 'props' Orman, and Norman 'the box' Cowell as well as Angelo you spelt-a- my name-a- wrong again-a Gianetti. Even in this last year he has regularly visited the theatre to check that nothing is going wrong, and to put it right when it does. But two people deserve special thanks. Doreen Grant has for many years been our Child Protection Officer, a position which she in fact helped to promote and create when it became a legal requirement. She developed our Child Protection Policy and set up the system for chaperones during shows, when required. She is now retiring from that role, and I would like to place on record our immense gratitude to her for having undertaken this position so efficiently for so long. And Norman the Box Cowell is also having to retire from his position as Box Office Manager. He has, in the performance of this task, charmed customers and members alike, barked at people for being noisy in the foyer, acted as the Customer Service Department, and kept producers and directors on their toes who might otherwise have forgotten deadlines. In short he has been invaluable to us, and his is an act which will be very difficult to follow. Thank you indeed, Norman.

And so we have come to a bit of a crossroads when it comes to some crucial positions within the society. As you have heard we now need a patrons secretary, and a box office manager and ever since Peter Beechey retired the role of Theatre Manager has been divided up between members of the committee, and it would be great to have one person, or maybe two, in charge of theatre management – heating, fire safety, cleaning, utilities, insurance and general building maintenance. In the next few days, we will send out to all members a full list of the duties of patrons secretary, box office manager and theatre manager with a plea for people to come forward and offer to help in some way with the work involved. Any member of the committee will be able to help expand on any part of the job duty descriptions. Please remember that the Society cannot function without people volunteering to take up some aspect of the administration of the theatre, and it can't just be left to a few people to sort this out. That just isn't fair. It has to be a team effort and everyone should expect to have to put a little bit back into the Society in order to take out what they do (i.e. enjoying what we have to offer as a theatre group). This also goes for volunteering for other jobs, such as helping on the bar, helping with front of house, assisting on box office from time to time and so on.

I am retiring from the chairmanship, and indeed from committee, today, and someone new will take that role. It will be for you to elect my successor, and I wish him or her every success. Post pandemic, we will face new challenges, but I am sure the spirit of the theatre will remain the same – one of great warmth and friendship, a community of all ages and ability, passionate about drama and music, staging and presentation, keen to entertain and to welcome and give members opportunities to highlight talent and enthusiasm. This is a wonderful community asset powered by wonderful people, and I hope it will continue to flourish. I feel very positive that it will.

That concludes my report for 2021.

NODA awards

Liz Carey, Jo Hartley Scammell, Angelo Giannetti 10 years

Graham Brown and Kate Lynch 15 years

Emma James 20 years.

Roy Bevan Award will be announced and presented at the next permitted Dinner Dance.

4. Members' Reports

- a. Shows of the past year were cancelled due to CV-19. Sharon Edmonds outlined proposals for the year to come;
- b. All 2020 social events were cancelled due to CV-19. Niamh McGrogan reviewed events pre-COVID and outlined possible social events to come.

5. Treasurer's Report and Appointment of Accountants

Every year when I go to see Giles Webb, our Accountant, we look at how much money the Society has in reserve and discuss whether we can afford to use some of our savings to improve the facilities in the theatre. Giles always makes the same stipulation – to make sure we have enough in reserve to carry us through in the unlikely event that we will be unable to put on any shows in the coming year. So when 2020 happened and we were unable to put on any shows we were in a position to continue to cover ongoing costs – heating and lighting, general repairs, insurance, accountants fees etc. There had been some expenditure on the shows that we had planned for the year but, as we intend to still stage these shows when we can, that expenditure will be carried forward and so ultimately will not be a loss to the Society. The tickets sold for Quartet were refunded and we also decided to cancel all membership fees for 12 months. Those of you that had already paid have had their membership extended for one year automatically and for those whose membership expired after lockdown we will be asking for renewals later this year when we are confident that we can reopen. There has been some income from the dance classes which resumed when they were able and there was a small amount of income from the bar but this was offset by having to write off quite a lot of stock that would have been out of date before we reopen. As a small business which had been forced to close we were eligible for grants from Mendip District Council. The first of these was £10,000 which we received in the autumn and is included in these accounts. Since January we have been granted a further £9660. Because we were confident that we were in a secure financial position, the committee took the decision to spend in the region of £10,000 on much needed renovations to the theatre, the sort of work that was long overdue but very difficult to carry out with the building in constant use.

Overall, our expenditure for the year was £26,131 and our total income was £14,675 giving a net loss of £11,456. We are still in a secure financial position, having current assets of around £80,000.

Full details of the accounts are on the noticeboard in the bar and members are encouraged to read them.

Recommend that Webb & Co remain as our accountants and business advisers.

Proposer Adam Lanfranchi

Secunder Catriona Eagle

Commend the accounts to the meeting and propose that they be adopted.

Proposer Ken Edmonds

Secunder Vicky Orman

6. President's address.

The Mayor, our President, Cllr Philip Welch. He offered thanks for the invitation to join the AGM and shared some personal anecdotes about select members. He shared his hopes for the reopening of the theatre once restrictions lift and that he looked forward to seeing the newly renovated auditorium.

7. Election of officers and Committee

- a. There has been one nomination for each of the following posts on the committee:

Chairman	Ken Edmonds
Vice-Chairman	Emma Russell
Treasurer	Pauline Perrin
Secretary	Niamh McGrogan
Patrons Secretary	Position vacant
Publicity Office	Adam Lanfranchi
Stage Representative	Graham Brown
Theatre Administrator	Sharon Edmonds

There have been 3 nominations for the positions of Committee members: Jo Scammel, Mike Scammel, Liz Carey.

Members were invited to challenge any of the above appointments.

Agree the committee as presented

Proposer Vicki Orman

Secunder Jacki Watts

8. *Date of the next committee meeting*

Monday 19th April 7.30pm, virtually.

9. *Any Other Business*

There have been no other issues raised in writing to the secretary before the meeting. There were two additional questions:

Richard Wright shared on behalf of Philip DeGlanville from the Somerset Fellowship of Drama, that the Phoebe Rees awards need adjudicators. Starting September 2021, this involves adjudicating 3/4 plays each year and writing a review for each. Attendance at the end of year meeting to agree nominations and wins is also expected. Those members interested should contact Richard in the first instance. Richard has been in this role

previously and enjoyed seeing other AMDRAM productions and getting to know the companies.

Glynn Webster offered to be more involved with the theatre. He was welcomed and will be invited to the next committee meeting.

The meeting closed at 8:45pm.