

The Castle Players' Chair's Report

A.G.M.

Tuesday 8th May 2018

Thank you all for coming to the Annual meeting. This is my first as Chair, stepping in at the end of May when Jane, due to unforeseen family and work commitments, resigned.

Initially I felt like I was drowning. Fortunately I had two secret weapons.

The first was the new structure of the Castle Players with a smaller board of Trustees and five Teams. Teams with specific remits, set out by the Trustees, all linked with each other but able to make decisions specific to their remit thus preventing some items being over discussed and others being forgotten. As well as allowing more of you to be involved in the running of the group in a more practical way. Production led by Laurence Sach, Marketing led by Chris Gibson-Bell, Programming led by Dawn Trevor, Community led by me and Membership Business and Sustainability led by Angus Wheeler.

This links to my second secret weapon- Angus Wheeler. Although perhaps not quite so secret as 'Ask Angus' is probably the most heard phrase in Castle Players throughout the year apart from 'who has the toilet key?'

Angus agreed to step in as Vice Chair until this AGM and has been an invaluable support to me over the last year. Fortunately he will continue as a Trustee.

This year has seen changes to the board of Trustees with several resignations, not least our treasurer and secretary. Others have retired- Simon Pell with his artistic vision and Christine Naseby with more contacts than Blackpool Illuminations.(although who ever really retires?)And some have discovered burning a candle at both ends doesn't work.

Losing two key roles within the board and trying to replace them highlighted the amount of work they did and the importance of sharing that load. I would like to thank both Chris Best and Teresa Wilcox for their hard work and welcome Genevieve Metcalfe, Heather Armstrong, Dawn Trevor, Jan Fowler, Bob Tarn, * Pause* here to add the names of the other volunteers who are now doing the work of just two people!

In terms of Productions, The Castle Players has been very busy. Our Summer Production Twelfth Night directed by Jill Cole was very well received and led to more new members who have decided to stay for the duration. This year's summer show directed by Laurence Sach, is our chance to tackle a second Shakespeare Tragedy. All members are also benefitting from the Acting Workshops run by Andrew Stainthorpe this year. A great way to hone your skill as an actor, learn some relaxation tips or the importance of warming your voice up properly for your day job! I am glad we are stretching ourselves and showing our audiences our versatility.

In the autumn we were able to Mentor Dawn Trevor as she directed the farce Black Comedy at the Witham. It is great to see that she feels able to put in a bid for a summer show. This year we are mentoring Laura Shaw in her production of Flare Path set during the Second World War. This Mentor initiative to share with new directors our vast experience and expertise will produce the summer and winter show directors of the future and is one of our long term aspirations: investing in our members.

Over the winter we produced two very successful shows. Mary Statsny directed two performances of A Christmas Carol and Laurence directed the winter tour of Oliver Twist performing at ten venues across Teesdale. Although both were successful, with only one production team, our resources were definitely stretched. However with the grant money from the Teesdale Area Action Partnership, Vaughan was able to purchase some new lighting equipment for our touring set. I look forward to seeing the effects of them for this year's winter tour the J B Priestley comedy When We Are Married directed by Laurence.

The Community group were also out and about performing their rehearsed readings to Care Homes and groups as well as supporting the Bowes Museum in their 125th celebrations, a Garrick Lecture and the Christmas Market. Not forgetting the Barney Meet Parade.

So on to our future.

Are we developing an ambitious artistic programme? I believe so.

Are we engaging with the Community? I hope so but there are always more ways we can be doing this and by being a member I would like to think you can let us know if you think of any.

Are we investing in our members? Our teams enable members to be involved throughout the year whether they want to act or not. Our New Director Mentor scheme will produce directors for the future. Mentoring any new members with the skills you have learnt in The Castle Players, will give priceless theatre skills to the lighting technicians, actors, set and costume designers of the future. Mentoring, I believe, is a key element to a sustainable future.

Here speaking of members, from the end of May data protection Laws will be changing greatly and this will apply to us as a group which is why we have been urging you to fill in and renew your membership details or risk no longer receiving information and, technically, no longer be a member. Personal data is just that – personal- and it cannot be stored by anyone unless you agree. It will be an annual thing.

Finally, are we building a sustainable future? Now in our second season of the new structure of the teams we have proved they work and involve more members. I feel we run a smoother ship and the Trustees can look forward to tackling some of those long term plans.

Sarah Fells

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