



Newsletter

March 2021

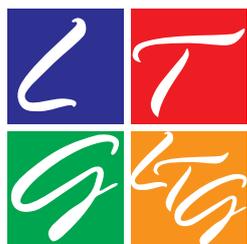
NORTHERN REGION

CENTRAL REGION

SOUTHERN REGION

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Little Theatre Guild of Great Britain

Vol. 35 No. 1 March 2021

The Little Theatre Guild represents 114 member theatres that control and manage their amateur theatre companies with an annual audience of over 650,000 patrons and a turnover of approximately £4 million.

Visit us at www.littletheatreguild.org

Articles for the LTG Newsletters 2021 - deadlines for copy: **10 May; 12 August; 6 November**

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The contents of this newsletter do not necessarily contain the official views of the LTG.

LTG Representatives

New LTG Reps - we welcome the following new LTG Reps. If your LTG Rep is changing please inform the LTG Secretary (details above).

East Lane Theatre - Jenny Loomes, jennyloomes@googlemail.com

Loft Theatre - Robin Boyd, gm@lofttheatrecompany.com

Updated email addresses

Stevenage Lytton Players - Bob Sage, bobbobsage1@gmail.com

Todmorden AODS - Barbara Evans, evansbarbara365@gmail.com

LTG National Conference 15 May 2021

In the last Newsletter I noted that fingers were crossed that we would meet in person in Southport. You will not be surprised to learn that in the current circumstances Margaret Mann and the team feel they have no option but to cancel the event. We know that a lot of hard work will have gone into planning the conference, for which the LTG committee are very grateful, and that Members will be very disappointed not to be heading to Southport this year.



But the LTG Committee ask you to keep the date of 15 May free for an online mini-conference. Rather than just hold an online AGM with elections, the committee want to make it a bit of an event. As well as an online open forum, Members will be asked to provide snippets of entertainment to show off what they have been doing in lockdown. More details to follow.

LTG Regional Conferences 2021

Decisions to hold National and Regional Conferences physically or online are difficult choices right now. Your National Committee has had many conversations on the subject and is doing its best to organise the fulfilment of its statutory obligations and to see friendly faces at least on screen.

At the time of publication, the following information is correct, but please do stay in touch for any changes.

Northern Conference – like Southport, the Carlisle Green Room were very keen to host the LTG Northern Region conference in the autumn, but they feel that in the current circumstances this is just not possible. We know they will be very disappointed as they wished to share with their Northern colleagues their 70th anniversary.

Central Conference – no theatre had so far come forward to host this event and the LTG Committee will consider if they can work with a Member to host a short online event.

Southern Conference – the Tower Theatre, Stoke Newington were hoping to host the S Region Conference in 2020. The LTG Committee were delighted to learn that they remain keen to do so in 2021. We all keep our fingers crossed that circumstances will allow this to take place as a live, in-person conference in late September 2021.



Diversity & Inclusion - Time for Change

LTG will be looking at its attitudes and practices around diversity in the coming months. The National Committee has set up a sub-group to look into the issues and will be asking you for your views in a survey. Here's a sample of likely questions:

Do you have an equality and diversity statement and/or policy? If so, would you share it with other members? If not, would you be interested in support from the LTG to help you write one?

Meanwhile, if you have a policy or mission statement that relates to diversity and inclusion and you would like to share it with us, please send by 15 March to central.secretary@littletheatreguild.org

The sub-group is: Jackie Blackwood, Melanie Brown, Debbie Hibberd, Kevin Spence.

Corrections and clarifications: In the December 2020 edition the image on page 5 of RSS in Marble Hill House should have been credited to Anne Purkis.

Chairman's Letter



Greetings, everyone. I hope you are well and able to enjoy little slivers of theatre life. We're only able to do that through technology rather than our customary convivial meetings, which is particularly hard on people like us who thrive on company and the camaraderie of shared purpose. I've been enjoying plays, readings and workshops online, even your AGMs have helped keep me

connected. Well done indeed to all our members who've made this possible, especially those that have taken on the challenge of the technology and made it possible for all their members to join in through phones and computers.

It's obviously, then, very sad that we cannot meet up in Southport in May and enjoy each other's tales of theatrical life. But the biggest lesson I've learned in the last few months is that every time I have to contemplate something bad and sad, I need quickly to think of something good. We all do – we have to make efforts to keep cheerful and optimistic. I'm therefore devoting the rest of my letter to a very pleasant event that took place in mid-January. Jenny Landreth's book *Break A Leg* was published in 2020, and I thoroughly recommend it. The sub-title is *A Memoir, Manifesto and Celebration of Amateur Theatre* and it is what it says on the tin. It is, however, framed around the fact that, although being involved as a child, Jenny had ignored the amateur sector for many years. She deliberately goes back to see how she feels about it now, and surprises herself with her discoveries about the wealth, breadth and sheer joy of what we do and achieve.

Anne Gilmour, Newsletter Editor, thought Jenny and I would enjoy a chat about the book and organised it. We certainly did! Anne and Jenny were both raised around Sutton Coldfield and chuckled their way through shared memories. Later in this newsletter you will find just a snapshot from a jolly conversation that rambled over much of an hour.

All good wishes for the forthcoming months, and 'see' you at our online AGM on 15 May. As well as the statutory business, we'll celebrate some of the technical skills you've acquired.

I leave you with Alexander Pope's words, "Act well your part; there all the honour lies".

Jo Matthews

Great News for the Sinodun Players at the Corn Exchange, Wallingford

Chairman and LTG Rep Gloria Wright was able to start 2021 with some great news, reported in *The Corn Exchange Times*. It was that "the Planning Inspector has comprehensively refused the A. C. Lester planning appeal which sought to develop the land behind Lloyds Bank by building eight residential units. In so doing, the Inspector has assured the immediate future of the Corn Exchange, which she recognised as important to the local community both in terms of its social and economic benefits". To support their case, LTG Chairman Jo Matthews wrote to confirm the vital role of the Corn Exchange as an entertainment centre of importance to Wallingford town centre for the benefit of the public.

While the Corn Exchange Board remain concerned about the possibility of future redevelopment, their immediate concern is the £83,000 cost of ensuring that their case was expertly represented at the Inquiry. Meeting this cost has drained their reserves and now they turn their thoughts to fund raising.

They are, however, extremely grateful to South Oxford District Council for their support during the whole appeal process because they have recognised the importance of the Corn Exchange both culturally and economically to Wallingford and the surrounding district. Gloria also notes that the process has confirmed how much the Corn Exchange is valued by everyone who uses it and especially thanks members, volunteers and supporters "for their active support throughout this process: the emails and letters you wrote to object to the development have been vital and heart-warming. We can't wait to welcome you all back to our wonderful theatre".



Celebrating Valentine's Day



And how did you celebrate Valentine's Day? Teddington Theatre Company (TTC) spent the entire weekend celebrating with *What's Love got to do with it?*, an emotion-filled anthology of love in all its many forms throughout the ages, from BC to the modern day. There were over 100 pieces for over 200 roles and readers, with 80+ live performances, giving 24 hours of content over the two days.

The event included both classical and modern plays, poems, letters, short stories and book extracts, as well as homegrown original works. The eclectic programme included "forbidden love across a millennium, the battle of the sexes, medieval naughtiness, filial love, bawdy 18th century romps, the comedy and tragedy of relationships, a child's first love of a pet or a teddy bear and much, much more".



The event was free to view and available for public viewing, either live or in recorded form, via TTC's YouTube channel www.youtube.com/c/teddingtontheatreclub, but small donations were very welcome via the 'donate' button on their website www.teddingtontheatreclub.org.uk.

LTG National Committee Meeting on 13 February

The committee met by Zoom, as you do these days, and covered a lot of interesting ground which included:

- Rights/permissions to record and/or livestream;
- Refurbishments in lockdown to take account of COVID-19 and the need for space;
- Grants received by Member theatres and ticket prices;
- Hires/Lets that can continue during partial lockdowns e.g. a theatre used by a local mental health group;
- Extending membership fees to cover an additional year;
- See It Safely – members using professional advice from UK Theatre on COVID-secure venues;
- The ambition to re-introduce the WOW factor when theatres open;
- The possible need for additional support of members' youth groups when lockdown ends.

Civic Theatres, A Place for Towns

A new AHRC-funded research project, led by Helen Nicholson at Royal Holloway, joint author of *The Ecologies of Amateur Theatre*, will look at the role of theatres in towns; see the full article in the 20–21 LTG Yearbook on page 17.



The first meeting of the team and advisers by Zoom took place on 12 February and was chaired by Helen. Representatives from Manchester Royal Exchange, the National Theatre, Tribe Arts, and Jo Matthews and Anne Gilmour from LTG took part, and an interesting discussion on the scope of the project ensued.

LTG theatres are at the centre of cultural life in many different kinds of town across the country, and this is often overlooked.

In the Spring, Helen will seek three or four theatres to become case studies for the research, but she would also like to ask every LTG theatre to contribute to the project via online focus groups and a survey.

The first focus group will be about what LTG theatres have done during the pandemic, to be held in late March/April. Further information will be sent to LTG Reps.

Zooming Tips x Ten by Jo Matthews

I have been delighted to be invited to Zoom in, to so many of your readings, plays, quizzes and general keep-in-touch events. It has been particularly good to see some of you offering opportunity to your non-actors, so they can be at home in a reassuring atmosphere for their stage debut! Some of my experiences have been more 'together' than others and I wondered if I might share a few of the tips I have picked up to help improve the experience for all.

Ed: You can read Jo's top ten zooming tips on the LTG Website.

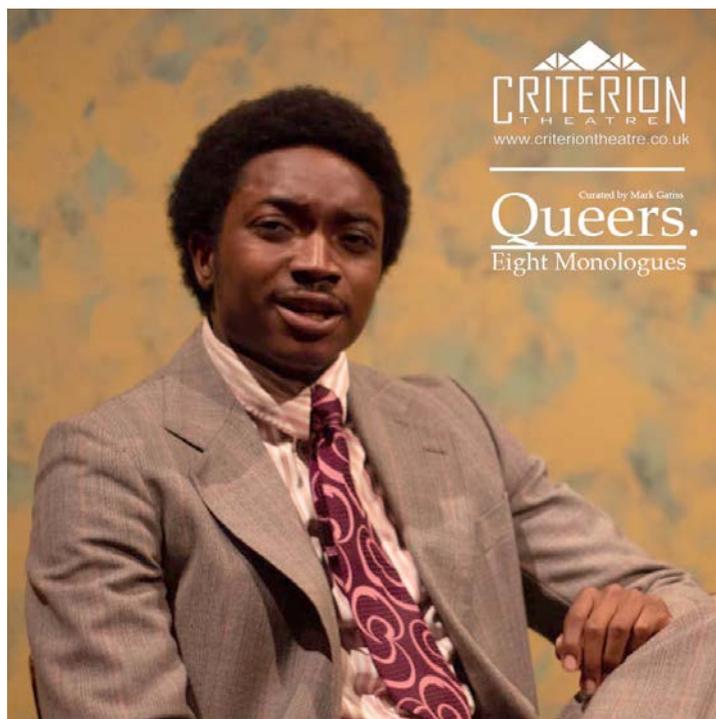
Criterion Theatre: Diamond Anniversary Year and City of Culture in the time of COVID-19

2021 is an important year for the Criterion Theatre. First, it marks sixty years since the Criterion Players purchased a Victorian chapel and converted it to create our wonderful theatre building. Second, it is the Coventry City of Culture year.

COVID restrictions have seriously impacted our planned programme for 2021, however, regardless, we are determined to organise a number of celebratory events. February 25th 1961 marked a very special date in Criterion history – it was the opening night of the first play to be performed in their new theatre building, *An Italian Straw Hat* by Eugene Labiche. And so, sixty years later to the night, we have decided to open our anniversary programme with an online performed reading of that very same play, in celebration of and in honour to the people involved in that opening performance.

The programme for the rest of the year so far includes two advertised plays, *Underneath the Lintel* by Glen Berger and *3 Women* by Katy Brand, which we intend to stage as soon as we are allowed to, if necessary to a restricted socially-distanced audience. In addition, we have a schedule of monthly online play readings. We are playing everything else a bit by ear, working flexibly around what is possible in the current circumstances and hoping we will be able to have an autumn season of plays to announce.

Over the course of the COVID-19 lockdown period since April 2020, we have adapted and changed as necessary, producing online performed readings (*Pressure* by David Haig, *A Christmas Carol* by Dickens), streamed Zoom-produced plays (*Edith in the Beginning* by Karen Forbes) and, in the brief respite we had in early Autumn, a production of *Queers* curated by Mark Gatiss, which was presented onstage in front of a small, socially-distanced live audience and subsequently streamed into people's homes. Audience and Member surveys have influenced what we try to do at this time. The most recent of these, completed by more than 70 respondents, indicated satisfaction with our online offering and that people



value online performances that have increased flexibility around when they can watch them. However, the most common response from these surveys is that, above all, people want to watch live theatre on stage and online versions are a poor substitute. We just all have to hope we can get back to producing this as soon as we can.

The year 2021 gives the Criterion the opportunity to celebrate the 60th anniversary of obtaining their own theatre at a special time for Coventry. During the City of Culture year, we hope to be able to present a programme of events that will celebrate our contribution, through its people and productions that hold such a special place in our city's creative development and heritage.

Anne-marie Greene

Artistic Director, Criterion Theatre, Coventry.



Break a Leg

Jo Matthews interviews Jenny Landreth



Earlier this year, Jo Matthews interviewed Jenny Landreth by Zoom; the Newsletter editor was in attendance. Jenny's recently published book *Break a Leg, A Memoir, Manifesto and Celebration of Amateur Theatre* was highlighted in the last Newsletter and a great read it is too. Last year, Jenny was interviewed on Radio 4's *Loose Ends* by Tom Allen who she later described as just delightful. It has been well received by *The Times*, *The Telegraph* ('the Chancellor should read this love letter to am-dram') and *London Review of Books* ('a triumphant mix of memoir, social history.... Shows us a vibrant world that is a crucial part of our culture'). Have you got your copy yet?

JM - Starting oddly at the end of your book, you say that *Break a Leg* was a catalyst for your realisation that you are first and foremost a writer.

JL - Yes, I did a drama degree and have loads of friends who went professional. I have often thought, 'what if?' But no, I'm lucky to be published and comfortable where I am. Plus I have a 'day job' that is creative – I work for a kids TV show. I'm settled, my face is on the back of a book, I'm happy with that.

JM - I felt completely at home with the book. I loved it! I've done all those jobs: acting, directing, stage management, in the sound box. There was one tiny moment when I heard about your book and thought with *The Ecologies of Amateur Theatre* and Michael Coveney's book *Questors, Jesters and Renegades* that there would be duplication. I was wrong – all three have great merit and come from totally different angles.

JL - I knew Michael Coveney would write differently. And Helen, Jane and Nadine's book is academic, but I love it, it's very accessible. Some academia is not very readable but theirs is great. The title of my book was going to be *Bad Rep*. It's a pun on the bad reputation of amateur theatre. But trying it out on people, they thought it would be taking the piss and revelling in it. Writing negatively is easy especially for a cynical Brummie like me. I realised I'd be constantly justifying, and I didn't want to start on that note.

JM - I love this quote from early on in the book, "There was a gang of us aged between maybe eight and eleven, the children of actors, playing fill-in ruffians in bustling Restoration market scenes, ready to run on then off again, not at all interested in the rest of the play because it was boring". It's now a little more regimented than in your and my day, but the excitement and fun is still there to be experienced.

JL - Absolutely. Especially for kids who might be socially struggling. School can be just one clique of friends. For me, I went to a Catholic school and had a narrow band of friends. I was a bit of an oddity – but not at the theatre, which was such a freeing thing.

JM - Indeed. 'Find your light', as you say. Another quote that intrigued me in the book is one from Charles Dickens, "Amateur Dramatics will be remembered for what it did to enhance the lives of the ordinary people".

JL - That's fundamentally what it is. It is engaged in by the ordinary people. A friend says it adds colour to ordinary lives. You might drive to your rehearsal in a limo but when you get there you're just one of the team.

JM - I didn't know about Stockport being a hotbed of political and cultural discovery, and Shaw and Ibsen. Stockport seems a little unlikely to be spearheading a new wave of thinking.

JL - Yes, and not London-centric. Small can have big import. As an old lefty, it ties in with my view of amateur dramatics as being essentially working class. The People's in Newcastle was part of that, and Maddermarket – remember the 'no bowing' and 'no cast lists' – part of the egalitarian beliefs and no-one gets big-headed.

JM - Moving on to the debate about the word amateur and whether we should be hanging on to it or adopting other words such as 'community'. You mentioned the *Manchester Guardian* calling us 'Independent Theatre'. Maybe that's a nicer title than amateur.

JL - Musicians and choirs seem to manage without the delineation and, of course, Americans say 'community'. I was saying let's reclaim 'amateur' as a word, but now I'm not so sure.

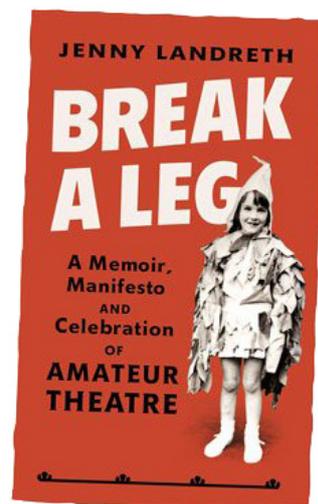
JM - It's interesting that defining us has proved difficult for the powers that be, but in ourselves we don't really have a problem. Perhaps LTG and NODA have been successful over the years because they directly serve their members, giving highly practical support and advice.

JL - Yes, supporting a group of people under a specific banner.

JM - You point out that the demise of the movement was hastened by the industrial revolution – taking people away from their locality. A horrible irony now is that we are stuck in our localities, depending on industry (technology) to keep us going and connected.

JL - It can be easier and better to be in amateur work right now as you can respond quickly, in a cleaner way. I did a couple of pieces for *The Telegraph* featuring people learning new skills like making films and editing, which they have the impetus to do in a way the professionals don't. Adding personal, not monetary value – such a freedom.

JM - Yes, when the first lockdown eased, we invited only our own members to our first attempts at re-opening. They can be relied on to support us hoping it will work. Professionals can only sell tickets.



JL - When I spoke to people for the book, they were mostly in a good position. They had funds to sustain their buildings and keep ticking over, so I thought good on you guys – you're robust and healthy.

JM - Some of our theatres were able to keep hiring out in the first lockdown, a welcome addition to finances. Another quote I really like, from Sybil Thorndyke, was that, "The real art of the theatre always was, and always must be, bound up with the life of the people of the time".

JL - that ties up with Michael Boyd, former Artistic Director of the RSC. He was saying they had led the way with docudrama when he worked with Nicholas Kent at The Tricycle. He found amateur stories better as they could respond locally and because of not having to be commercial and attract money.

JM - You list quite a few famous professionals who started with us. It's a pity so many will not now grace us with their presence! We don't ask much, just the odd appearance in a bar before a show, a chat for an hour at a get-out on a Sunday morning.

JL - Yes, whilst writing the book I hammered on a lot of famous doors and got nowhere. I really did beg, cajole, remind and nag. Then I thought, "NO, I give up with the whole blooming lot of you. I am going to stop hounding and harassing you. I'd rather feature some amateur stories. You famous get enough platform anyway".

JM - Which you do – you feature 'ordinary amateurs' Barbara and Hilary and their stories which are well worth the telling. I wonder if the famous feel they would be tainted by hanging out with us or are they really too busy?

JL - Nobody is that busy

JM - On suspending disbelief, you suggest that as amateur audiences will know the actors, it's extra hard to imagine Phil the plumber as King Henry. You ask the question, "Does that mean that whatever they do, they don't stand a chance?"

JL - The relationship is different with amateurs, perhaps we don't give ourselves up to it – is it ever going to be fulfilling? If you see someone famous in a play you're constantly battling – can you see Kim Cattrall in a Tennessee Williams and not just as Samantha in *Sex and the City*, or Kelsey Grammer as other than Frasier Crane? In both worlds you have those comparisons running in your head.

JM - You say you have learned to leave a play after the first half if you are not enjoying it – and not feel guilty. But sometimes the play blossoms out in the second half.



JL - I wouldn't leave in the second half of an amateur show but I would a professional. I find it terrifically liberating. And I'm doing it on behalf of everyone else who's not enjoying it. If a play picks up in the second half, well, someone should have come with a big red pen well before then.

JM - I agree with that. And sometimes the very famous playwrights are allowed to ramble on as no-one is brave enough to say the dreaded word 'cut'.

JL - Everything in life is 20 minutes too long except Caryl Churchill! I'm good with a red pen. I saw an Ayckbourn recently. marvelled at how succinct he was. It tinkles along. Everything he says is driving the play forward. It's spare, brilliant writing.

JM - You say you believe us amateurs to be a huge untapped resource – how can we harvest that?

JL - You sort it out! But it is a phenomenal thing – the huge knowledge you all have.

JM - The hunt for a 'Ron', [a character in *Variation on a Theme* (production image right) for which the director had real problems sourcing an actor] I really felt that. Very agonising for the cast.



JL - That was a real journey for me. At the start, it was just amusing. Then I came to appreciate that this was people's lives and they were really feeling it. I dodged the fact that they had chosen a very difficult play – and that in itself was a difficult choice for me.

JM - You mention *Calendar Girls*. Such a great success, and success for women writers is increasing too. Our stats show Amanda Whittington, Jessica Swale, Moira Buffini are played often. Even E Nesbit plays a part, with her popular *The Railway Children*.

JL - It helps that those women have an interest in amateur theatre. Jessica certainly wants her work to be out there as widely as possible. Having that second income stream can be a life-saver. It also keeps their work alive and has huge knock-on effects, keeping their name up there.

JM - James Pidgeon at Shoreditch Town Hall has created a wonderful resource for local people, as you say, with local people able to access and enjoy their own Town Hall. Pity more Town Halls don't do that.

JL - There's Battersea Arts of course, now on my patch. A Town Hall as an arts centre used by locals. It's crazy more aren't used in this way.

JM - When there's a couple of excellent young actors in *Variation*, you're tempted to say 'there's something better for you' – meaning they could hold their own in the professional world, but then you say you're not sure it is true? I have seen so many terrific Globe actors disappear in autumn and have to go temping. I'd say to wannabe professionals: go find your local theatre!

JL - It's hard, as nobody starts off trying to be professional but knowing they'll be a waitress. My mum has done a variety of roles – it goes back to what you were saying, Jo. You've done so many different things like directing, sound, props while professionals train for a narrow role.

JM - One of the truths you don't hide from is the show wasn't that good. While reading any book you can't help thinking how it will end – in the case of your book, I was thinking it will all be lovely as the difficult play casting and rehearsal period will surely turn out magically in the end.

JL - Thank you – it caused me a lot of soul searching. It was really hard as an outsider. I had long discussions with my Mother who was so protective of her theatre. "Don't put the theatre in a bad light". I wanted to serve the theatre and the journey the team was on was just as valid. Protect the play, protect the theatre? Probably more as I was brought up in Highbury. In the end I don't think I put the theatre in a bad light. On the last night I was thrilled and delighted.

JM - It helps that Highbury has a great reputation. I've been to two conferences there and they were so well organised. Everything was so informative and interesting, lovely people and such a warm welcome. They already have huge respect.

JL - It was fantastic to talk, a thoughtful conversation, thank you.

JM - Thank you so much, we loved the book!



LTG Hubs - time for a re-awakening?

Back in the mists of time – around 2010 – and following a need identified at relationship meetings for closer cooperation between LTG Member theatres, the LTG Committee encouraged the establishment of LTG Hubs. Checking my records, I note that The Questors hosted the first meeting of its Hub on 30 January 2011 – precisely ten years ago to the day that I type this article.

For new LTG Members, the usual format was for representatives from each Hub to meet at each other's theatre on rotation, usually on a Saturday afternoon, have a bite to eat and see the host theatre's evening show. Our Hub met around four times each year. The note of that first meeting covered: the pros and cons of moving from a club/membership theatre to a public theatre; areas for closer co-operation in the hire of props, costume and technical equipment; the exchange of marketing and publicity information; and issues around the operation of box offices.

In today's world, does technology such as Zoom mean that Hubs could and should be re-awakened to provide mutual support and co-operation between Members at this difficult time? Initial meetings will need to be virtual but, as we slowly open up, they could migrate to the occasional physical meeting. The S Region's occasional Zooms show that an exchange of experiences and concerns can be of considerable mutual benefit providing a real sense of 'we are all in this together; let's make the best of it' approach. I have posted on the LTG Website the list of Hubs first envisaged ten years ago to which I have added the new Members, although some Hub groups may need to be revised. Why not check out your Hub, contact the other Members and try at least one Zoom.

I look forward to a Zoom Hub report in the next LTG Newsletter.

Music Hall and Variety Day Sunday 16 May

A reminder of this important date from Dean Caston, LTG Rep for Rainham Theatrical Society (RaTS) at The Oasthouse and Vice Chairman of the British Music Hall Society. There will be online talks and events and members are encouraged to share posters. LTG Members are most welcome to join in and post memories of their variety music hall shows using **#MusicHallVarietyDay**.

The Oasthouse took part last year and their posts had over 3,500 views which helped to raise their profile and they plan to take part again. For more information visit www.britishmusichallsociety.com or e-mail deanjcaston@gmail.com



Obituary Column

Here we remember just a few of the LTG Members who have held a long or specific role in our Members' theatres. It is not comprehensive, but I hope it goes some way to mark the long service and love that people have for amateur theatre.

Dave Hawkes, Chelmsford Theatre Workshop. A member since 2000, he was an 'amazing and incredibly generous' actor who was 'always friendly' and a 'marvellous acting talent' with a great 'passion for acting and performing'.

Louis Lawrence, Apollo Theatre, Isle of Wight. An actor, he 'always seemed to have a smile and a kind word for everyone'.

Brenda Nicholl (Vice President), Formby Little Theatre. We will report more fully at another time on Brenda Nicholl.

Peter Boffin, Apollo Theatre, Isle of Wight. He was 'a super actor, especially in Greek Tragedy' and 'a really good advisor to us all when acting'. 'An absolute legend' and 'a fantastic actor, with such a mellifluous voice'.

Summer Productions in the Open Air

It's great to learn from websites and Facebook pages that plans for the future are gathering pace; in particular, plans for open air productions. Here are just a few that I have come across but do let the Editor know if your theatre is planning to go 'plein air', especially if it is for the first time.



The Maskers in Southampton are planning to stage their summer show *Much Ado About Nothing* in Townhill Park House in July. This is their cancelled 2020 summer production, and they plan to devise an audition process by Zoom. **Progress Theatre** in Reading plan to perform *Romeo and Juliet* in the Reading Abbey Ruins. **Richmond Shakespeare Society** are making tentative plans for not only performing *The Comedy of Errors* in York Gardens but also staging another one-off event at Marble Hill.

'PLAY WRITE' The Maskers Theatre Playwriting Challenge

The Maskers Theatre in Southampton announces a Playwriting Challenge. They seek one-act plays of between 25 and 40 minutes to be submitted by Sunday 4 April 2021. The full Guidelines and Terms are on the Maskers website, the LTG website and there are links on the LTG Facebook pages.

Submitted scripts should be no longer than 25 pages and on A4 paper, single spaced. By submitting the piece, you give Maskers the permanent rights to perform the piece and the author agrees not to publish until six months after submission to Maskers.

There are some useful tips to think about when you write the play on their website: www.maskers.org.uk/playwrite.php. Plays that could be performed in the open air will be particularly welcome. All submissions should be sent to playwrite@maskers.org.uk.



The Chesil Theatre Extension Is 'Go'

On 19 January, Chesil Theatre was delighted to announce that their plans for a much-needed annex to their historic premises (a 12th century former church) have been given the green light. Contracts have been exchanged for the purchase of a freehold parcel of land adjoining the Chesil Theatre allowing their development scheme to go ahead.

In addition to their annual programme of six main productions, they have increased their activities with sessions for two youth groups, drama workshops and training, student performances and regular use of their intimate auditorium for small-scale professional productions. Not surprisingly their building has begun to bulge at the seams.

The new annex will provide disabled amenities, adequate dressing room facilities, a new foyer/rehearsal space and a performance/community room. The wardrobe and props team are particularly pleased with their new purpose-built space as it means they no longer need to climb a near-vertical staircase to the upper floors of the tower to reach their stock.



Opening Up and Ticket Prices

The February LTG Committee meeting noted with considerable interest the report of former committee member Robert Gill (Barn Theatre, Welwyn Garden City) on the matter of ticket prices which he hopes might assist theatres in recovery from COVID-losses. Robert's full report is on the LTG Website and he is entirely happy to respond to any questions or queries you have by contacting him via the editor at newsletter@littletheatreguild.org.

Robert has looked at the average ticket prices for 2016 to 2020 using Yearbook information and notes they have risen from £10.11 to £11.27. This information only paints a very broad picture because of a range of 'hidden' factors such as students and members getting half price tickets. He also highlights that the min/max range of standard prices across theatres is consistent since 2016 and ranges from £6.50 to £18.00.

The overall picture between 2016 and 2019 is also consistent. The total number of productions went up a little from 818 to 821; total performances down a little from 6037 to 5831; attendance went up from 596,000 to 604,000; and, based on ticket sales, income went up from £6.4m to £7.1m. The 2019/20 season was not a full one and the data shows only 486 productions, 3359 performances, 394,000 attendance and a sharp decline in income to £4.72m.

In his report, Roger asks what will bring customers back to our theatres? He suggests that hygiene measures and social distancing, including bar and refreshment service, will continue meaning smaller audiences and reduced income. Plays will need to attract customers, while also being low cost with limited sets, and theatres might offer incentives such as reduced ticket prices although on balance he doubts this will help much. He concludes by noting that each theatre will need to work out its own strategy but the need to address customer comfort and safety is likely to be a high priority.



Theatres with a Significant Anniversary

Elsewhere we report on The Criterion theatre celebrating 70 years of life, but they are not alone in celebrating an important milestone. If your theatre is going to celebrate a significant anniversary, please let the editor know.

Carlisle Green Room celebrate 70 years of age and wanted to share this anniversary by hosting the 2021 N Region Conference. Not surprisingly, they feel that in these uncertain times a conference is not an event to which they can fully commit. Their website www.carlislegreenroom.uk/about/ tells their history and notes that the building they occupy was built between 1895 and 1896 as a coach house and stables. We hope to help them mark their anniversary later in the year.



The Lindley Players at The Playhouse, Whitstable – on Facebook, 'Dan off of the Archives' notes that this is the year they will celebrate 75 years. They plan to stage *Bravo*, to flagship their 'glorious' comeback. The group was formed in 1946 by Ralph Lindley at the request of the Vicar



of Whitstable. In 1980 they purchased the United Reform Church and began the conversion to a theatre, mainly carried out by the Members. Their opening production in 1983 was *A Voyage Round My Father* with playwright John Mortimer in the audience. We look forward to hearing more about how they will celebrate their glorious 75 years.

The Little Theatre, Leicester – looking to the future, they will celebrate 100 years next year.

To mark this grand event, they have announced a Centenary Challenge Project. This aims to extend and rejuvenate their theatre providing improved, more sustainable facilities and enhanced theatrical experiences for members, audiences and local theatre communities. They will include a new Studio, rehearsal rooms, wardrobe and technical workshop. Donations are being sought for this impressive project for which there is an excellent YouTube video (link on their website – www.thelittletheatre.net/centenary-challenge-announced/) and we look forward to following progress.



Members' Youth Theatres in 2021

From Kevin Spence



We are all living in unprecedented circumstances and, since our young people are our future, the LTG sees it as a priority to support our Members and their youth groups in whatever way we can.

As lockdown restrictions eventually ease and young people go back to schools, colleges and universities, it should be possible for youth theatre activities to start again.

The LTG National Committee wants to learn how theatres are planning to take forward the work of their youth groups. Questions that spring to mind are:

- Do you plan for youth theatre to just carry on and go back to normal as soon as possible – or do you see this as an opportunity for a 'rethink' about what you do and how you do it?
- Are you making plans to cope with anxiety and mental health issues presented by children and parents if they arise?
- Do you plan to have conversations with young people about how they see their youth theatre going forward?
- Are you making programming choices to attract young people and their families back as audience members?
- Are you in touch with local schools and colleges to offer appropriate curriculum support, when young people have lost so much study time?
- Do you see a relaunch as a recruiting opportunity? Will families be looking for new ways to get children involved in fresh activities to compensate for all the isolation of lockdown?

These are just some of the questions we would love to explore with you.

We can only do that if you let us know your current thinking on youth theatre activities. We will be in touch with you soon to let you know how we plan to gather the relevant information from you. In the meantime, feel free to email the LTG with your thoughts and ideas for the future.

LTG New Member - The Bancroft Players at The Queen Mother Theatre

LTG is delighted to welcome a new Member in the Central Region. They are the Bancroft Players whose home is The Queen Mother Theatre in Hitchin, Hertfordshire.



The Bancroft Players were formed in 1945 from the wartime Hitchin Entertainments Society. In co-operation with the Hitchin Urban District Council, the Woodside Open Air Theatre was constructed and opened in 1951 with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In 1956 they purchased St Anne's Hall for £800, but it was not until 1965 that it opened for its first public production as The Players' Theatre.

In 1977 an appeal was launched for £80,000 to build a new theatre. Sufficient funds had been raised by 1982 for work to get underway and in 1982 the Foundation Stone was laid. But what to call the new theatre?

The original idea had been to name it the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, but when Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother was approached for permission to name the theatre, she suggested the unique title of The Queen Mother Theatre. Hitchin, therefore, has the honour of the UK's only theatre bearing this name. In September 1983, the first play to be performed in the newly completed Queen Mother Theatre was *A Man for All Seasons*.

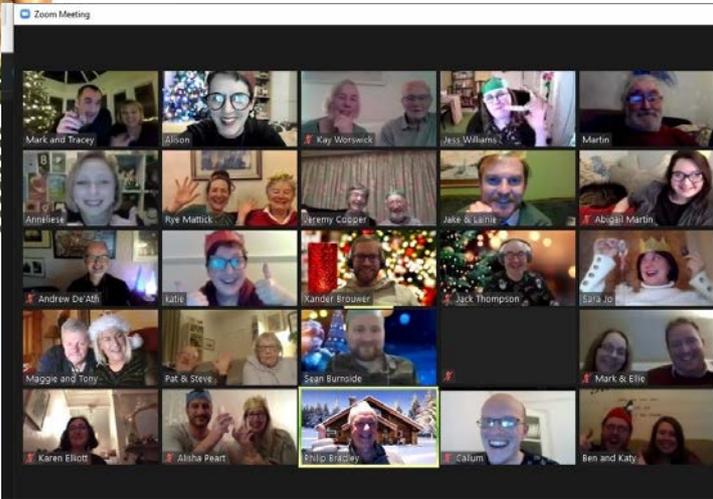
Since its opening there have been a number of developments and extensions, including the building of a studio and workshop, and, most recently, the foyer has been extended giving more space and improved box office facilities. The Big Spirit Youth Theatre for those aged 14 – 18 was founded in 1984 and regularly takes part in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. For those aged 8 – 13, there is the Junior Bancroft Players.

The Bancroft Players had hoped to celebrate their 75 years of existence last year. They hope to celebrate a little more in 2021. We look forward to learning more about and visiting this latest Member of the LTG.



What we did over Christmas

Many Members staged some very inventive and fun events over the Christmas season. Here is a small cross-section.



The People's Theatre staged their annual Christmas Carol Night by Zoom which included songs, readings and a festival quiz. The evening ended with a collective cry of Merry Christmas to their fabulous members, audiences, friends and supporters and here are just some of those who took part.

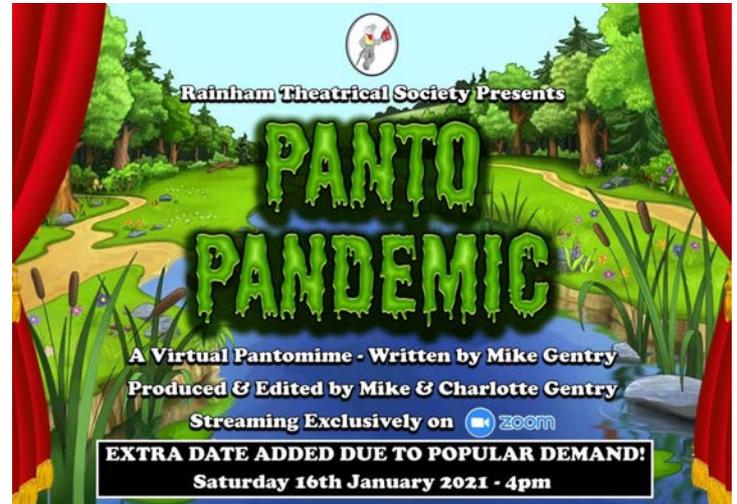
Looking back to past glory - a number of theatres posted images of past pantos including a great Dame from Doncaster Little Theatre.



Doncaster Little Theatre have also (perhaps rather bravely) decided to move *Alice in Wonderland* from December to 1 – 10 April. Fingers crossed that Alice can indeed come 'Out of Lockdown and into Wonderland'.



Southport Little Theatre ran a 'Buttons Up' Panto Costume Competition and invited Members to create the magic of panto in the comfort of your own home by posting a picture of themselves, kids, pets etc. dressed up as their favourite pantomime character or characters and to say why they liked this character.



Rainham Theatrical Society held a Panto Pandemic via Zoom, written by RaTS Member Michael Gentry and with a cast of 31. Each cast members recorded each line individually and sent them via WhatsApp to Michael. He received 611 videos which took 35 hours to prepare into the final film. Check their Facebook page for more information.

Several theatres posted an Advent Calendar in the lead up to Christmas. **The Playhouse, Whitstable** delved into their archives over the 20 days and on Day 18 found a delightful 1959 production of *Aladdin*.

