



Not another quiz question!
Tony Bannister outlines the current theatre management

No. 86

May 2020

**Wanted:
Vacancies at LLT**

**The Show
Must Go On!
Unless it really cant!**

Newsletter

Lockdown in the UK has scuppered a number of plans at Lewes Little Theatre, not only do we know little in terms of when the 2020 - 2021 season will kick off, the planned recruitment of two senior members of the management team had to be postponed as well. With minimal progress in terms of easing the lockdown, we are proceeding with this recruitment drive over the summer. The recently created position of Operations Manager and the position of Treasurer are seeking appointments.

If you are interested in more details of the positions, please see page six for brief overviews of the roles and contact details for Tony and Ian, who can take you through the roles in more detail. Please also pass this information on if you know anyone else who might be interested.

Lockdown continues, and though slightly eased, not enough for us to appropriately

and safely open the theatre. That being said, the building itself is attended and inspected every day by the Premises Manager. A small amount of bunting was put up to commemorate VE Day on 8 May as well.

The planned work to refurbish the windows at the front of the building has also had to be put on hold for the duration of the lockdown, though plans are being formulated to

facilitate the safe reopening of the theatre as soon as we can.

When we are able to, the theatre's reopening will likely coincide with the commencement of the 2020 - 2021 season. More details on the line up of productions will certainly follow but one thing is for sure; *Jeeves and Wooster in Perfect Nonsense* will be the first production back on the Lewes Little Theatre stage.

I hope you will remain safe, look after those around you and keep an eye out for the next production at LLT.

James Meikle

What's the difference between; oh not another lockdown quiz question!

During the Covid-19 lockdown we've all had our fair share of quizzes, so continuing the fashion, here's a quiz question for you: what's the difference between Lewes Theatre Club and Lewes Little Theatre? There are two answers – one is technocratic, the other is user-friendly. In order to avoid sending you to sleep, I'll start with the user-friendly one, though I'm afraid I'm going to have to use one of those modern-day terms that gets over-used: our 'brand', or our need to enhance 'brand awareness'. Lewes Theatre Club is the governing or overseeing body of the theatre, while Lewes Little Theatre is the brand we are known by and whose awareness we need to enhance.

That's why you may have noticed that the term Lewes Theatre Club is seldom used these days. If you're a member of the club, you'll see it on your invitation to the AGM, and on one or two official documents. But on anything to do with productions, or promoting the theatre to the outside world, it's Lewes Little Theatre. James Meikle has developed a deliberate brand identity by which the name always appears in Helvetica typeface and our posters follow a similar house style, even though they're all eye-catchingly different. So, if you're talking with friends, please use the term Lewes Little Theatre.

We need Lewes Little Theatre to be what people know us by, so that when they see Lewes Little Theatre, they realise Lewes has a theatre, and it's known as Lewes Little Theatre. (Am I ramming my point home just a little too strongly?)

'Twas not ever thus. Until about 2011, the theatre was organised and managed as a club, run by a committee of eleven voting members, including four theatre managers and an elected president, together with other co-opted members. They were elected by the membership at the AGM, and the theatre building had the legal status of club premises.

Under that status, only club members could buy tickets, which meant members having to persuade their friends to come and see plays – and often having to buy the tickets to stay legal.

That changed in 2011, when we got a public licence to run the theatre. It meant anyone could buy a ticket and the theatre was a privately owned but public facility, a bit like a cinema or football stadium. The old management system became increasingly unwieldy and began preventing us from responding with sufficient proactivity to the rapidly changing social, economic and regulatory environment in which the theatre was operating. Something had to change.

In 2018, a strategic review of governance and management was undertaken by a group led by Bob Leeds. Its principal recommendations were intended to bring us more in line with other charitable trusts of our size and type by separating the governance of the theatre trust (Lewes Theatre Club) from the day to day management of the theatre (Lewes Little Theatre). The former committee was replaced by a Board of (seven) Trustees elected by theatre club members. The seventh Trustee also acts as Secretary to the Board (this position is currently vacant).

The Leeds Review's recommendations were approved at last October's club AGM and are now in force. There you have the technocratic answer to the difference between Lewes Theatre Club and Lewes Little

Theatre; the club's members are still members and still elect the Board, and they continue to represent a major part of the theatre's overall audience base. The Board has three primary responsibilities: safeguarding the assets and financial welfare of the Trust; ensuring that reasonable arrangements are in place to safeguard the health and safety of all participants and users of the theatre; and ensuring the theatre is efficiently managed. They do this by means of appointing a senior management team comprising an Operations Manager, Treasurer and Artistic Director.

The senior management team (SMT) is accountable to the Board for the operational management of the theatre, and is responsible for the appointment and line management of all Heads of Department, such as Production Manager, Stage Director, Head of Lighting, etc. A list of current Trustees and SMT members appears at the end of this article. The amended constitution makes no provision for an elected president, but it is open to the Board to make an honorary appointment if they wish to do so. The Board have exercised this option and have appointed Joanne Cull as our first Honorary President. The President is invited to all Board meetings but has no voting powers. We currently have vacancies for an Operations Manager and Secretary to the Board. At present, their duties are being undertaken by the Artistic Director and Treasurer, but there is a limit to how

long they can continue this alongside their own jobs.

The Board's immediate priority is to recruit an Operations Manager at the earliest opportunity, and also a Treasurer to ensure a smooth transition when our current Treasurer, Ian Edwards, retires later this year. An advertisement for both posts appears elsewhere in this newsletter. Please consider them carefully, and if you think you would like to join the team, please get in touch for an initial discussion. Lewes Little Theatre is an exciting organisation to be part of. Come and join us!

Tony Bannister
Artistic Director

Honorary President (Appointed by the Board)

Joanne Cull

Name	Last Elected	Term Expires	6 Year Rule Ends
Estelle Carpenter	September 2017	2020	2023
Kristy Howell	September 2017	2020	2023
James Meikle	October 2019	2022	2022
Michael Palmer	October 2019	2022	2025
David Rankin	September 2017	2020	2023
Sue Tait	September 2018	2021	2021
Trustee/Secretary	Vacancy	N/A	N/A

Senior Management Team (Appointed by the Board)

Operations Manager	September 2017
Treasurer	Ian Edwards
Artistic Director	Tony Bannister

Wanted: Operations Manager and Treasurer

The Board of Trustees of Lewes Theatre Club is looking for volunteer candidates to fill the posts of Operations Manager and Treasurer. These are both senior positions within the new structure of the theatre and, as such, successful candidates would be members of the Senior Management Team.

Operations Manager

The Operations Manager will be responsible for the overall management of the theatre and will direct its operations in line with the policy decisions of the Board of Trustees.

Treasurer

The Treasurer will be responsible for the maintenance of the theatre's accounts and for regular budgeting and reporting as well as the implementation and monitoring of financial controls.

In the first instance, those interested in applying for these positions should contact James Carmichael (01273 474882) for further information on the theatre as well as job and person specifications and an application form. Completed applications should be returned to James by 1 June with virtual interviews scheduled for 8 or 9 June.

For an initial informal chat please contact Tony Bannister (07963941001) about the Operations Manager vacancy or Ian Edwards (07808810063) about the Treasurer vacancy.

The Show Must Go On - Unless It Really Can't!

Despite the current temporary closure, remarkably few performances have had to be cancelled in the 80-year history of Lewes Little Theatre. Christine Mason charts a few that were, and some that just about made it. It's impossible to describe the desolation a company feels when a performance has to be cancelled, let alone the theatre closing down altogether. When one thinks what might cause a cancellation – adverse weather, sickness, power cuts, fire, a structural fault in the building, and now a pandemic – it's a wonder anything ever reaches its final curtain, and yet the will to get the show on stage almost always seems to triumph.

One of the more dramatic cancellations at Lewes occurred during Lionel Green's 1966 production of *As You Like It*, when Roger Weston and Pearl Farley, playing Orlando and Rosalind, had a serious car crash on their way to the theatre towards the end of the run. The

audience was already seated when the announcement had to be made, while backstage the company sat in shock, and some in tears. Immediately plans were put in hand to

salvage the remainder of the run. A young girl, who had recently played Rosalind in a local school production was found, and as I was playing Celia, Lionel rehearsed us all Saturday morning, and she was very good indeed. The Saturday matinee performance went ahead with Lionel himself playing Orlando, and for the final performance that evening Roger Weston was able to appear, albeit with his arm in a sling. I cannot recall how the wrestling match between Orlando and Charles the

Wrestler was managed.

In 1979, Anthony Jenner's production of *The Gingerbread Lady* sadly failed to reach its closing performance. The irreplaceable Pamela Slade was playing the lead and had struggled for most of the week with a very high temperature, which finally overcame her with two performances to go. On the evening of the inevitable cancellation Anthony gathered his stricken company together and took them to Bridge House, his home next to Harveys Brewery.

Nick Betteridge's 1986 production of Ronald Harwood's *The Dresser* was in some jeopardy at a late stage of rehearsal, when Brian Cooter, playing Sir, an old touring actor-manager, became unwell with no chance of recovery before the opening night. Brighton's New Venture Theatre had staged the play some months previously, and the actor who had played Sir there, Derek Mason, agreed to reprise the role for Lewes. Derek arrived at his first Lewes rehearsal word perfect: I know, because

I was the prompter. It was a stunning production, and all turned out really well for the theatre, and actually for me too as Derek and I were later married.

One matinee performance that almost came to grief was Jean Anouilh's *Ring Round the Moon*. One of the leads, Carole Best, developed a persistent and heavy nosebleed during the interval. She was taken to A&E at the local Victoria Hospital (yes, we had A&E in Lewes then), where her nose was plugged, and she valiantly completed the performance after a considerably extended interval, and the evening show went ahead as normal.

In 1965, the Sussex Express & County Herald had a ringing headline that a production at Lewes Little Theatre had been saved from cancellation by the prompt action of people back-stage. This was Thornton Wilder's play, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, during which, as part of the action, the 'stage manager' comes on to announce that his team is taking over the play as the 'actors' have failed

to turn up. The local reporter took this as the unvarnished truth and wrote the story accordingly. The paper even had a poster in the town headlining this 'event', which one of the cast stole and it was paraded at the final curtain call. As they say, any publicity is good publicity.

With a large cast, players can be moved up a notch or shifted sideways in an emergency. *The Wolf*, directed by Maggy Williams in 1986, was a rather curious play within a play with virtually two separate casts. One evening two people were missing from the 'inner' play, and both Tim Frost and I were in the 'outer' play so filled in. I exchanged my maid's uniform for a rather grand evening dress and learnt the few lines the character had in the wings and managed to deliver all the right words in the right order, albeit with quaking knees. I had no idea what I was talking about.

The current hiatus is the first time Lewes Little Theatre has been closed for a pandemic, but it may not have been the first time plays

in Lewes were disrupted by pestilence. In 1558 at the height of the plague, the Borough Constables of Lewes paid for a visit from the Duke of Norfolk's Players. Also during Elizabeth's reign, St Michael's Church spent 20 pence on 'plays' for a visit from a bishop. Conversely in 1526 the Mayor of Rye paid 'the players of Lewes' two shillings. Who were they? What did they perform? Were they classed as 'rogues, vagabonds and common players' known for their 'lewd behaviour' as contemporary accounts would have it? Some might say that not much changes. Unless actually at death's door, most players will turn up for a performance, when under normal circumstances they would be tucked up in bed or nursing fractured limbs – cue Mike Manktelow who once dragged a broken leg round the stage. It is due to this spirit and company loyalty that so few performances have been missed over the years at Lewes.

Christine Mason

Become a Member

There are a number of benefits to becoming a Member at Lewes Little Theatre. As a Member you will receive a reduced ticket price - £8 rather than the usual £12 and for the matinee performances you'll pay £6 rather than the usual £8.

Members at Lewes Little Theatre also have the opportunity to participate in productions and help out with all aspects of the theatre's operations from set building to running the Anthony Jenner Bar.

All Members will receive the newsletter which is sent out two weeks before each main stage production.

There are four Membership options; Single, Double, Concession and Double Concession.

*Concessions are under 17s, full-time students or seniors.

You can join at any time but membership subscriptions become due for renewal in August.

Membership Form /renewal

Membership no.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Title	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Forename	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Surname	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Address	<input type="text"/>	
Postcode	<input type="text"/>	
Phone number	<input type="text"/>	
E-mail address	<input type="text"/>	

I would like to receive theatre news and updates by email

Membership options (tick one)

Single	£15	<input type="checkbox"/>	Concession	£10	<input type="checkbox"/>
Double	£25	<input type="checkbox"/>	Double Concession	£15	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please send to Lewes Little Theatre, Lancaster Street, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 2PX. Cheques payable to Lewes Theatre Club

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