

Dear Members,

I hope you have all managed to keep well since our last newsletter in July.

Well, what has happened since? In August the government at long last allowed the opening of theatres, and whilst initially there were conflicting guidelines for professional and non-professional theatres, following submission to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee (DCMS) by the Little Theatre Guild, of which we are a member, questioning the different treatment of professional and non-professional theatres, finally parity was gained, subject to the ability of being able to comply with Covid restriction guidelines. Of course that didn't mean we could open for live performances, but the relaxation in restrictions did give us a chance to look at what we could do.

We couldn't perform in front of a live audience in our theatre, but perhaps we could perform in front of a live audience virtually. Why not? So, once a risk assessment had been carried out as to how this could be done safely, the chairman of our production committee, John Winson, along with three of our actors, came up with a one-act play that could be rehearsed and performed, socially distanced of course! The play was *A Jolly Sinister Jape* by Elliot Strange, which was livestreamed using the Zoom platform on the 9th and 10th of October, which I hope many of you were able to watch. Indeed, we recorded 138 log-ins over the three performances, and assuming that more than one person was watching on many of the log-ins, we estimate we had an audience of perhaps over 200 people. That's excellent by my book, especially as this was our first virtual outing. My congratulations again to all of you who were involved in putting on the play and my thanks to all of you who watched it.

What next you ask? Well, I do know that potential plays for future livestreaming are being looked at by our production committee with read-throughs scheduled before a particular play, or plays, being chosen. Indeed, if you know of a play which you might think suitable for livestreaming and you think could be performed socially distanced, please email John Winson at jwinson1955@hotmail.co.uk

Full members, you will have already received an email recently from John inviting you to be a part of this exciting new initiative, a copy of which, as a reminder, please see below:

Dear Members

Greetings all, I hope everyone is keeping safe and well. Following our recent experiment to livestream a play at the theatre, and the positive feedback received, the management committee have decided to develop this initiative further.

It is the intention to produce a programme of streamed plays, safely directed to comply with social distancing and other legislation, for performances over the next 6-9 months, or longer, depending on the situation. This programme will be managed by the production committee, for agreement by the management committee, which is identical to our seasonal programme strategy.

Obviously there are only certain plays we can perform and they may have to be adapted to be Covid compliant. The plan is to have a series of self-formed teams or 'bubbles' to plan, manage and produce selected plays, and co-operate with fellow bubbles as we progress. Prodcom will of course offer support as required. I am keen to maintain the current impetus we have developed, so if anyone is interested in taking part, forming a bubble, suggesting a play or helping in any way, please email me on jwinson1955@hotmail.co.uk or call me on 07812 318893.

John Winson FIIRSM
Principal Safety Consultant
Transportation (Practices)
Tel 07812 318893

Kent Drama Association (KDA) Radio Play Festival 2021

Another opportunity to be a part of something creative!

Following the success of our own Play on the Radio Festival in May this year, the KDA has adopted the idea and is putting on its own festival in the spring of next year. Entries can only be received from theatre groups who are members of the KDA (*MLT is a member*) but each group can submit more than one entry. Therefore if you would be interested in entering the festival, please find copies of the entry form and festival rules attached alongside this newsletter, or alternatively download from the KDA website: kentdrama.org.uk

Please note that in order to monitor how many entries there might be on behalf of MLT and to make sure they are submitted under the MLT banner, all entries must first be submitted to the Production Committee by **Monday, 23rd November** in order to then be submitted to the KDA by the last entry date, Monday, 30th November. Please email your entries to John Winson at jwinson1955@hotmail.co.uk

Annual General Meeting

As I am sure you are aware, our annual general meeting usually takes place in November each year. However, due to the current Covid crisis we will be unable to hold this year's meeting at the theatre and rather than try to arrange this to take place virtually on the Zoom platform, the management committee has decided to defer the meeting by three months to February next year, as is permitted under the terms of our Articles of Association, in the hope a live attendance at the theatre is possible. Nevertheless, it may be, and is highly likely, that we will still have to hold the meeting over Zoom in February, but we will

inform you nearer the time as to our decision and the logistics involved if indeed it is possible at all. **The scheduled date is Tuesday, 16th February 2021.**

Grants and Rates relief

At the beginning of the lockdown, the government offered a coronavirus Small Business Grant Fund to help cover business costs through the uncertain times ahead. Not knowing whether we would be eligible or not, we nevertheless applied, and I am pleased to inform you, successfully. We subsequently received from the government £10,000.

Further to the above we have also, retrospectively, claimed small business rates relief on our business rates, and are looking to receive a refund in due course.

Membership

Just a reminder that all existing membership of the theatre, both full and audience, has been extended until we know when we can open again. At this point a decision will be made as to how long we extend the existing membership further and when we will look to send our renewal requests. Until then, please **do not** send any renewal fees.

In the meantime, those members who have access to a computer but have not yet signed up to the new electronic membership system, MemberMojo, our membership secretary would be grateful if you could do so. I realise it is possible that you might not think it worthwhile whilst we are not open, but it will make our membership secretary's life easier when we do open. Again, for those members who do not have computer access, we will continue to communicate in the usual way.

Should you have any questions regarding membership, please contact Carol Wrate, our membership secretary, at membership@mlt.org or send a letter for her attention to the theatre. Please note that any letters sent to the theatre may not be answered straightaway as owing to the theatre being closed, post is only picked up at infrequent intervals.

Wardrobe

A request from our wardrobe manager: if anyone has any clip hangers suitable for hanging skirts and/or trousers they no longer want and would like to donate to the theatre, please email our central mailbox info@mlt.org.uk with your contact details and we can arrange how to take these off your hands. Thank you.

DickensOneFifty

Many would say that **Charles Dickens** is the most important and impactful author of the last 200 years. Indeed, such is his influence on the popular psyche that his very name evokes a period of history, a time of bleak social injustice and living conditions. The word Dickensian has long since claimed its rightful place in the Oxford English Dictionary.

As most of you will know, Rochester and its environs made a significant impression on his early life. His novels are laced with references to the area, a significance only confirmed by the fact he returned to live in the region for the last years of his life.

This year, one hundred and fifty years since his death, **Alternate Shadows**, a local theatre company, has been producing a film to commemorate him. The film seeks to explore his life and work biographically, through the lens of some of the characters he created. **Dickens OneFifty** is an entirely voluntary collaboration of local, talented actors, both amateur and professional, make-up artists, theatre producers and film technicians working with the full support of the **Dickens Fellowship** and **Medway Council**. The production was only made possible with the assistance of the local community, businesses and institutions, including our very own **Medway Little Theatre**. Some of our members, including several youth members, appear in the film, and some members who are also members of **Alternate Shadows** have been very much involved behind the scenes.

Made under the difficult prevailing circumstances, the production of this film may be seen as a celebration of unity, friendship and warm cooperation. Perhaps such values that would not be lost on Dickens himself.

'No one is useless in this world who lightens the burden of another'

-Charles Dickens

Finally....

Should anyone have any news, anecdotes or items of interest they wish to share with us all, which we could put into our next newsletter, please email our central mailbox: info@mlt.org.uk

And, finally, finally, with another lockdown looming, stay safe and well over the coming few weeks and keep smiling!!!

Chris Loft

Chairman – Medway Little Theatre