



Minutes

Date: Wednesday 29 June 2022
Time: 8 pm
Venue: Cambridge Brew House, King Street, Cambridge

Present: Madeline Harmer (Chair), Jo Grantham (Secretary), Tom Greenhalgh, Emma Harpley, Megan Stickler-Sell, Laura Roberts, Andrew Taylor, Owen Chambers, Chip Colquhoun, Emma Colquhoun

Madeline opened the meeting at 8.05pm

Good evening everybody. Thank you so much for coming. After two years of having to hold our AGM on Zoom, it is a delight to be here together in the 'room where it happens!' (Hamilton in case the reference escapes anybody)

I would now like to hand over to the club secretary, Jo Grantham, to read any apologies.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from the following: David Bone, Chris Bright, Dave Brown, Jan Brown, Carol Bye, Graham Bye, Rachel Bye, Sarah Deboys, Georgia Derbyshire, Joanne Dodds, Peter Dodds, DeeDee Doke, Lucy Farrow, Tom Heald, Cat Nicol, Toni Ogilvie, Caroline Taylor, Pippa Taylor

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Megan Stickler-Sell proposed accepting the Minutes, seconded by Laura Roberts. The Minutes of the 2021 AGM were approved

3 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising

4 REPORTS

i) Chairman's Address

I would first like to thank you for coming tonight, and for showing an interest in how the club is run by the Committee on behalf of you, its members. This year is the 71st anniversary of the Pied Pipers and, rather than celebrate our 70th a year late, we have decided to wait for our ¾ century in 2026.

This has been my fifth term as Chair, and it has proven to be yet another challenging year as, although theatres are now open, audiences remain hesitant as Omicron is still spreading - including among casts. This has caused a real challenge for Directors, as cast absences have affected rehearsal schedules and actual performances, leading to role changes and, in the case of Grease, the Director herself having to go on stage to cover a role! I think that 'The Show Must Go On' mantra has been fully tested in recent times. Not just for Pied Pipers, but for our friends in other town groups who have found themselves in the same situation.

After two postponements, Grease finally reached the stage in September 2021. Even though some parts had to be recast, we were fortunate that our original creative team of Megan Stickler-Sell, Andrew Taylor and Emma Olley were available to stay with the show and I can't thank them enough for managing all the cast and schedule changes, frustrations, and challenges with such calm and good humour. The new cast worked extremely hard in a reduced time frame to bring the show to the high standard needed to present it to the paying public and I thank them all for that. They supported each other, worked as an ensemble, and developed real cast unity. I know that they all had a lot of fun along the way, and I think that their joy in the show was evident to the audiences. I was Front of House, and it was a real treat to see live audiences back in a theatre, singing along, laughing, applauding, and having such fun. Certainly, a tonic after the tough times of Covid and I feel a real sense of pride that Pied Pipers were able to provide it.

Our most recent show, which was staged in April 2022 was I Love You Your Perfect Now Change. It's a minimalistic, small cast show that relies on strong vocals and performance. We got this in bucketloads, with an amazingly strong, talented cast whose singing abilities took my breath away. They produced an outstanding show under the guidance of Tom Heald, a new Director, and Andrew Taylor. My sincere thanks go to Tom and Andrew who, yet again, had to manage cast absences due to Covid, and this presented particular logistical challenges when you've only got a cast of seven to begin with. Although I know from audience feedback that this small show was a huge success, ticket sales were lower than expected despite the sterling Publicity Campaign undertaken by Lucy Farrow and Emma Harpley. Thank you both. The ADC theatre and I have discussed this and ascribe it to show choice, ongoing Covid hesitancy, the closure of Park Street car park, and the number of shows being staged in a condensed period due to Covid postponements.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer my sincere thanks to all the Penguins who ran the stage for both shows – without them there is no show, and we are truly grateful for everything that they do.

Now, looking ahead, I am thrilled to announce Pied Pipers 2023 programme. In April we will be staging the wonderful, Rodgers & Hammerstein classic, Carousel, and I am delighted that the Creative team will comprise of Cat Nichol as Director, Ana Sanderson as Musical Director and David Mallabone as Choreographer. It's a big cast, challenging show that I am confident will be done justice in their very capable hands. Carousel was revived last year at the Open-Air Theatre in Regents Park after, seemingly, lying fallow for some years. Perhaps some of you saw the production and

were, like me, reminded of the wonderful score. I say reminded – it depends on your age – some younger performers and potential audience members may not know it at all, in which case I am particularly excited by the prospect of introducing this wonderful show to them. Details of an Introduction Evening and auditions will be published online and on Pied Pipers' website as soon as they are available. Cat was unable to attend this evening so I will now read her words about Carousel.

“I'm delighted to be directing Carousel for Pied Pipers. Carousel has been one of my favourite musicals ever since I saw Nicholas Hytner's National Theatre production way back in the 1990's and it's rarely performed now so it's great to finally get a chance to put it on! I'm also thrilled to be working again with Ana Sanderson and David Mallabone - we last worked together on Merrily We Roll Along and there are no two people I'd rather be beside to tackle this great piece of American musical theatre.

“Named best musical of the 20th Century by Time Magazine, Carousel has everything - a strong plot, complex characters, and some of the most beautiful and iconic music ever written, including the Carousel Waltz, If I Loved You, and You'll Never Walk Alone. That's not to say it doesn't have its challenges - domestic abuse and scenes set in the 'backyard of Heaven' being two of the big ones. Whilst musicals are always snapshots of time in a world that is constantly changing, the story of Carousel has in recent years attracted more criticism and controversy than most, to the extent that both the ending and some challenging lines have often been changed to make the show more appealing to a modern-day audience. But we don't intend to shy away from this element of the story - we're not here to judge but to tell the story of Julie and Billy. Ultimately, we want audiences to make up their own minds about the show.

“We will be keeping the setting of Carousel in Maine, USA however the year will be ambiguous - the key themes in Carousel are in many ways timeless and not being precious about the date gives us flexibility over several things, including costumes. We don't want the show to be 'pretty' - we want it to be gritty. Our characters have hard lives - we need to see that. But we also want to bring out the moments of joy, of tenderness, and of hope.

“We will need strong actors and singers to take on the lead roles and form the diverse ensemble - Carousel has both a challenging score and a challenging book and it's important that both have equal weight. Carousel is also known for it's many dance sequences and whilst David is brilliant at choreographing moves to suit all levels of dance ability, we'd love to have a few really strong dancers in the cast as well.

“We hope lots of people will be interested in auditioning for this wonderful show.”

You will be aware that we had to postpone the Wedding Singer, and I am glad to say that it will be our September 2023 production. The director will be Emily Starr who, as many of you will know, is a very talented and experienced Director - the sell-out Kinky Boots, being her most recent show.

So, 2023 shows the promise of a great year for the club!

I would now like to hand you over to Megan Stickler-Sell for the Business Manager's Report. Megan will take questions at the end.

ii) Business Manager's Report

The last year has found us taking steps to get back to 'normal' in a world where normal no longer exists. Trying to bring back crowds to theatre has been challenging for all in a world where even on the West End shows are closing due in part to low audience numbers. It has affected both of our shows this year, in the case of Grease where we chose to extend our run following what was originally due to be sell out performances in 2020, and in the case of I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change!, where our audience numbers began some serious considerations around how we, as the Pied Pipers, put on shows and what our audiences are asking for. The issue is still very much ongoing, so we welcome any contributions and suggestions from our loyal membership.

I would like to echo Madeline's words of praise for the sterling job our Publicity team have been doing and to our crews who have, at every turn, been met with, 'well how much are we talking about'? We are looking to start some fund-raising activities for the club to come together, we expect to host our first fundraising social in October.

We still have challenges to overcome and lessons to learn, but I'm confident that over the next year we can strengthen our bonds, come back together as a club and embrace our 'new normal' as we navigate this COVID recovery world.

iii) Accounts

Andrew handed out copies of the Accounts to the meeting.

Total balance has fallen by £2,650.23, from £19,234.91 to £16,584

We made a profit of £1,667.11 for the financial year on Grease. Including losses from previous years in which the show was affected by COVID-19, there was still a small profit overall, of £110.64

Very poor sales for I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change meant that we made a substantial loss of £2,453.50 on that production. We were particularly hit by the royalties, which the rights holders calculate in advance as a fixed amount, rather than being based on a percentage of the takings

We have paid a deposit of £500 on The Wedding Singer, which can be used against the hoped-for future production of this show, or possibly a different show from MTI

We have also paid £1,401.12 in advance fees for Carousel

Costume hire is showing signs of picking up again, and we have made a profit of £584.51

There was again a deficit on the Subscription account, of £549.46. The major costs on this are insurance and the NODA subscription, which was higher than usual this year because it is based on ticket revenues

Finally, I have to remind you that subscriptions are now due for 2022-2023: we have again kept these at £10 (£5 for those in full-time education)

Madeline opened the floor for any questions. Chip said he had heard one of the reasons Wedding Singer had not gone ahead was because there was no Musical Director and asked if Nellie Coss had been considered. Andrew replied that Nellie will be going to College in September and Madeline added that the Director had to pull out.

Chip mentioned that as no announcement has been made, he assumed that the creative team for Carousel had approached us. Madeline replied that she had been speaking to Cat who mentioned that Carousel is a show she would love to produce; Madeline informed the meeting that she brought the proposal to the Committee which was keen to finance the project. Madeline added that it is good for the Committee to choose a show then advertise for a creative team, but it is difficult if there is no-one who wishes to be involved. Madeline informed the meeting that this is the first show where no-one on the Committee is a member of the creative team. Chip noted the community aspect of the Club and Megan said that she feels this is an opportunity for the Club and hopes that we can persuade the creative team to work with us again. Emma added that a member of the Committee will be involved with the creative team as a production assistant. Megan pointed out that our process will remain the same as for any other production.

iv) Director's Report

Grease

Megan Stickler-Sell gave her report

A report I was due to have been making last year. Looking forward at the last AGM, I talked about how optimistic and excited I was to get Grease on the road (finally!) with our newly appointed cast. What transpired over the following months was relentless hard work, a lot of curveball challenges and most importantly a huge sense of community and fun. I find these reports usually include a lot of thanks to the cast and crew working on the show and certainly that is coming but I feel given the behind the scenes work that went into the show a glimpse behind the curtain may be more appropriate.

Grease rehearsals meant working through COVID restrictions, no more than 6 in a room and all socially distanced. With a cast of 24 and 8 weeks to get to the stage, I'm sure you can all appreciate just how daunting that looked. Those early rehearsals working in small groups our outside (whatever the weather!) with a few outdoor pub visits thrown in, I can now look back with fondness rather than the terror that someone was going to get COVID and that would be it for the show. Following our first full cast Sunday rehearsal, the inevitable happened we got our first positive case. This meant 2 weeks of online rehearsals, learning the hop and the hand jive in our own separate rooms. Really it is a miracle it came together. This was down to the cast in no small part, rehearsing in car parks, parks, pubs etc at every given opportunity.

Coming down to show week, we had positive on the tech meaning a change of spacing for the ensemble for the duration of the show, a false positive at the dress meaning a last minute song/choreography, followed by a missed show due to a family emergency (cue another last minute line/song/choreography learning). I couldn't be more proud of what we achieved with Grease and I hope audiences enjoyed it as much as we did.

I can't thank Andrew Taylor and Emma Olley enough for sharing the journey with me. Carol Bye as always for her spectacular costumes, I was thrilled to keep James Wright and Serena Povia for lights and sound and a special thank you as well to Sarah Deboys without who we would have been in danger of not having a set, she kicked off our tech team helping to formulate the most incredible group of people I could have asked for. Andrew Featherstone for allowing us to adapt his initial set design, Jamie Balcombe sourcing cars, lockers and just about everything in-between, George Bateman and Leah Ward with carpentry and finally Rachel Chapman who came on board to stage manage just 3 weeks before the show.

I'm bound to have forgotten someone so I apologise but I know without every single person giving their all, Grease would not have been the show it deserved to be. With everyone's enthusiasm, skills and commitment, we managed to showcase what a community theatre company can do, bringing people together – even in extreme circumstances.

I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change

Tom Greenhalgh read Tom Heald's report

"Generally, I felt that as this was the first time I had ever directed anything, I thought on the whole the show went very well (I have done little bits at Uni but nothing on this scale). I feel that the rehearsal process, if slightly stressful at parts, was on the whole very good. The show came together quite quickly and the cast and crew seemed to have an enjoyable experience being involved which was one of my main aims in starting out.

"I feel I have learned a lot and would definitely do some things differently if I were to direct something again. This was primarily due to my lack of technical knowledge, ie things like risk assessments and general technical theatre as a whole. Saying this, I found Lucy Allen extremely helpful as the stage manager. She was very patient with my lack of experience at points and was never hesitant in explaining things that I wouldn't have necessarily known otherwise. I never felt patronised by her and I could tell she was working with me and supporting me to make the show as best as it could be. Speaking not as the director of the show, I feel she has a fantastic ability to be authoritative without being rude or unpleasant. This is the second tech rehearsal I have seen her run and she managed to keep the atmosphere focussed but calm and she was never afraid to have a laugh. A very good quality in my book.

"Similarly, James was an absolute pleasure to work with. I basically gave him full reign on the lighting design which I think he enjoyed, as he could allow his creative juices to flow. However, he was very kind with explaining things I may not have known about and never had an issue with changing things in a way that would support the show as a whole. Both James and Lucy were present in the rehearsal from an early stage which meant that when we entered the theatre the get-in was very smooth and the cast were already familiar with them.

"With regards to the rest of the creative team, I enjoyed working with Andrew immensely. I was a little unsure how we would work together initially before we started rehearsals, but I feel we actually got into a good working relationship. I feel Andrew appreciated being allowed some independence for some music rehearsals and he gave me similar in return. However, we both worked quite well together and I did try to take on any suggestions he had on the show as a whole and he also always listened to my opinion on some music notes and either incorporated them or opened a discussion around this. Again, as someone who is far more experienced in putting on shows, he was very supportive and never made me feel patronised or talked down to. I would gladly work with him creatively again.

"I would also like to add how much I enjoyed working with Nellie Coss. She is a very talented young person whilst also being very sweet and easy to talk to. The cast have also spoken about how much of a help she was in the show and I have observed her working very well with Andrew and giving him some well needed support that I could not provide. I feel that the Pied Pipers should keep a very close eye on her in the future. I think she would be fantastic in another show and perhaps leading musical direction in the future.

“With regard to the Pied Pipers as a whole, I did feel very supported by both Tom G and Madeline in particular whilst being fully aware of the wider committee and the support they have offered. Again, I feel they always understood that this was my first time directing and supported in any way they could.

“This is the third Pied Pipers show I have done and I love working with the Club as I feel they have a real focus on community. I feel that when I’ve been on stage and now off stage I have been supported and therefore the relationships I have made with those casts have lasted after the show has ended, which is not true of so many other shows. As well as this, PP always put on really good quality shows. I would, if you would have me, hump at the chance to work with PP again both on and off stage.

“Directing wise, I would love to work on other shows but would be particularly interested in similar small and intimate shows in the future. I know you all have been not too pleased with the ticket sales for I Love You but I’m hoping you will still do smaller lesser-known shows in the future as I think it’s very important to provide this in the wider Cambridge Am Dram Scene”

5 MARTIN STEELE AWARD

Pre Covid, Dave Brown, a long-term member, would always attend the AGM and tell us about the origin of the award as he was on the committee at the time. In his absence tonight, I shall read Dave’s account.

“Martin was a young man who joined the club in 1983 and was an active member until his sudden and tragic death in a car crash. His parents wrote to the club to ask if there were any memorabilia that we could send them. A video of Martin performing in Half A Sixpence was sent to his parents in Devon and they were so grateful for this, and for the fun Martin had enjoyed as a member of Pied Pipers that they made a donation to club funds. The committee at that time decided that a lasting tribute to Martin would be fitting, so decided to commission an award from a wood worker in Northampton, to be presented to someone who had made an outstanding contribution to the club in the previous year”.

This year it is my pleasure to present the award to Megan Stickler-Sell, who went way over and above the expectation of a director or a committee member. Grease had a false start, and Megan generously stepped in and took over as Director. Just prior to the opening in Spring 2020, the first lockdown was imposed. The show was then postponed until Spring 2021, and again until September 2021. Megan stuck with the show despite experiencing a complicated pregnancy and soldiered on as Director following her son, Oliver’s birth in October 2020. So, for her tenacity, I would like to present this award to her.

6 PRESIDENCY

Madeline reminded the meeting that Sarah Phelps is our current President, and she is delighted to report that she has agreed to continue.

7 ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Tonight brings the end of the term for the current committee and I would like to thank them all so much for their hard work and commitment to the running of the club-on your behalf as members and on my own, as Chair. In these competitive times, when it has become increasingly more challenging to source good shows, to cast, finance and produce them, alongside dealing with a pandemic, it takes an energetic and innovative team to keep a club going. This committee very much works as a team, each fulfilling their designated role but helping others when needed.

One member of the current committee is not standing for re- election. Tom Greenhaigh has decided to step down after 4 years. The committee has valued Tom's commitment, energy, enthusiasm and innovative ideas. We thank him and will miss him as a committee member, but he will remain a friend.

The committee is now stood down and I call upon the outgoing Secretary, Jo Grantham, to take over at this stage to deal with the election of the Chair.

Jo informed the meeting that Madeline Harmer is the sole nominee for the position of Chair, so is elected unopposed.

As this year's Chair, Madeline moved on to the other positions:

Jo Grantham is the sole nominee for Secretary so is appointed unopposed

Andrew Taylor is unopposed as Treasurer so will continue in that role

Megan Stickler-Sell is elected unopposed as Business Manager

Lucy Farrow is the sole nominee for Publicity Manager so is elected unopposed

Emma Harpley is elected unopposed as Social Secretary

Laura Roberts is elected unopposed as a General Member

We have received one nomination as a General Member, so Georgia Derbyshire is elected unopposed

I very much welcome Georgia to the new committee and have no doubt that she will be an asset.

I look forward to working with this year's committee and to maintaining the high standards, the welcoming and inclusive approach and the vibrancy of our club. Thank you.

8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Megan proposed a change to the Club's constitution, namely Item 10 which states that "no new rules shall be enacted or any role rescinded altered or amended except at an AGM or at a Special General meeting". Megan proposed changing that to be by vote of the Committee at an appropriate Committee meeting rather than waiting a year for the AGM. Megan suggested emailing out the proposed change to the Committee and membership for agreement but without calling a Special General Meeting. Chip suggested having electronic voting for the membership on any proposed changes. Andrew pointed out that any change to the Constitution requires fourteen days' notice to the membership, which this proposal has not had. Madeline

understood that the proposed amendment was to make the changes immediate and not wait for one year after being agreed at an AGM. Chip asked if there is provision in the Constitution to allow electronic voting and is in favour of that being added. Chip proposed a Special General Meeting before the next AGM to have the option of electronic voting included in the Club's Constitution. Madeline suggested holding a meeting to review the Constitution. Andrew proposed the new Committee consider the Constitution and the provision for electronic voting.

There was no further business.

Madeline closed the meeting at 9.02 and invited everyone to stay on to raise a glass to the ongoing success of the Pied Pipers.