

**MINUTES OF STEVENAGE FESTIVAL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
FRIDAY 8 DECEMBER 2006**

Present: Robin Osterley (Chairman)
Ron Walker (Treasurer)
Carolyn Williams (Secretary)
Rebecca Hughes (Committee)
Hilary Spiers (Committee)
Ria Burgess (Committee, SLL, Gordon Craig Theatre)
James Suttle (Fusion)
Jim Keates (Stevenage Arts Society)
Howard Burrell (Patron)
Gemma Self (Dance Extravaganza)
Gill Hutchinson (Knebworth Players)
Chris Ripple (Parnassus)
Brenda Sutton (Stevenage Choral Society)
Adele Gibson (Stevenage Photographic Society)
Chris Thurston (Stevenage Photographic Society)
Pat Akihurst (Stevenage Coalition for Peace, Stevenage Kadoma Link)
Derek Thurland (Stevenage Male Voice Choir)
Wendy Merritt (Stevenage Ladies Choir)
Mary Sullivan (Stevenage Ladies Choir)

1. Apologies: Sarah Ellis (Committee, Fusion)

2. Minutes of Last AGM

The minutes of the last AGM on 19 January 2005 were agreed.

3. Committee's Report

Robin reported that it was generally agreed that the 2006 Festival had been an artistic, if not a financial, success. It was hoped that the proposal to move the Festival to the 'odd' years (with a mini Festival in 2007) would remove one conflict affecting attendance. He expressed thanks to the committee for their hard work putting the Festival together but added that the committee were already overstretched and would require more volunteer help for 2007, especially if more smaller scale community events were to be organised.

4. Notes of 2006 Festival Review Meeting

The notes of the Festival 'post mortem' meeting that had taken place on 6 October were agreed.

5. Treasurer's Report

Ron tabled a summary report of the income and expenditure relating to the 2006 Festival which showed that reserves had been reduced from around £12k to around £7k. This was after sharing losses with the groups concerned. If this had not been done then the Festival would not have been in a position to continue. Across all the performances theatre costs had been overspent by around £4k and ticket sales underestimated by £8k compared with budgets. The committee had decided to meet the shortfall in ticket sales but had passed the overspend on theatre costs back to the groups concerned.

A full set of audited accounts would be prepared when final figures were received from all sources.

There was a discussion as to why this Festival had lost money, when previous ones had not. Reasons suggested were:

- A general fall off in attendance for Arts events
- Difficulties in budgeting – it was argued that full details of theatre charges had not been available when the groups were putting their budgets together
- Lack of control over additional expenditure while in the Theatre. The committee would be discussing a 'buy-out' arrangement with GCT to try to address this.
- Lack of clarity as to what costs would be met by the Festival and what had to be met by the groups
- Ticket prices too low (undervalued, according to GCT), or too high (according to some of the groups). Need to take into account that people may want to come to several events – offer a season ticket?
- Clashes with sporting events
- Poor support in the local paper. Hilary said that this was a wider issue than just the Festival and she had met with the editor of the Comet. She would continue to press for better coverage of the arts in Stevenage. Alternative suppliers of publicity and printing services would be considered for future Festivals.

Some groups were unhappy at being penalised for cost overruns when they felt that they had had little control over the charges being made. Ron said that he would be happy to look again at particular cases outside the general meeting but there was not much room for manoeuvre, given the fragile state of the Festival's finances.

6. 2007 Mini-Festival

The meeting supported the proposal for a 2007 'mini' Festival. This would start with a week of small events commencing Saturday 16 June (Rock in the Park on Sunday 17 June) followed by a week of performances in the Gordon Craig from Sunday 24 June to Saturday 30 June and finishing with the Arts Society Summer Exhibition that was due to start in the Boxfield Gallery on 30 June. A smaller art and photographic exhibition would also run during Festival weeks in the Foyer Gallery.

A first draft GCT programme and list of potential small events were tabled. It was noted that the GCT programme would need to be finalised by mid January in order to appear in the theatre's advance publicity. Comments included:

- Concern that the 'Rock at the Craig' event might not attract the expected audience because of the non-smoking all seated venue. Ron said that he would discuss this with the groups concerned.
- Stevenage Ladies Choir felt that they might not be able to participate as they had another concert planned around that time. They would consider the possible options (concert with SMVC or participation in variety performance)

- Some groups were concerned that they might not be able to afford to participate if their costs were not met in full. Ron said that better budgeting and stricter financial control should help avoid a repeat of the current situation.
- Parnassus were keen to repeat their 2006 event in the same room at the Gordon Craig on Friday 29 June. Ria Burgess noted this on behalf of the Theatre (and would report back if there was a problem).
- Dance Extravaganza would take place on Tuesday 26 June, not Friday 29, swapping with the secondary schools concert. No representatives of the secondary schools had come to the meeting.
- Fusion would be unable to participate with a full show because of other commitments at that time

7. Election of Committee and Officers

In accordance with the Festival Constitution, all members of the committee retired. Robin Osterley and Jane Tobitt were not standing for re-election.

The following committee was then agreed unopposed:

Ron Walker – Chairman
 Carolyn Williams – Secretary
 Rebecca Hughes (Hertfordshire Music Service)
 Hilary Spiers (Small events and Publicity Manager)
 Ria Burgess (Gordon Craig Theatre)
 Gill Hutchinson (Events Manager)
 Sarah Ellis (Fusion)
 Mark Stevens (Archant)

Ron then took the chair and thanked Robin for his work on the Committee.

The position of Treasurer was unfilled which was worrying, given the need for strong financial planning and control. All present were asked to think about potential candidates to be co-opted onto the committee. Any further assistance would also be welcome if potential volunteers could be identified.

9. A.O.B.

There was no further business.