

**MINUTES OF STEVENAGE FESTIVAL GENERAL MEETING
THURSDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2009**

Present: Ron Walker (Chairman)
Carolyn Williams (Secretary)
Rebecca Hughes (Committee)
Hilary Spiers (Committee)
Gill Hutchinson (Committee & Knebworth Players)
Barry and Margaret Bristow
Sharon and Rachel Curtis
Paul Colwell and Marion Auer (The Focal Space)
Linda Friis (Lytton Players)
David Handley (Stevenage Symphony Orchestra)
Alan Pitt (Stevenage Loco Society)
Chris Ripple (Parnassus)
Heather Heritage (Stevenage Choral Society) – for end of meeting
Terry Smith (Stevenage Male Voice Choir)
Sid Lazarus (Stevenage Male Voice Choir)
John Clarke (Stevenage Male Voice Choir)
Louise Winstone (Stevenage Stagecoach)

Apologies: The Mayor of Stevenage, Councillor Sue Myson
Margaret Ashby
Alan Biller (North Herts Guild of Singers)
Margaret Brett (Stevenage Floral Art Society)
Glyn Hanton (Festival webmaster)
Lisa Hemmings (Committee, SLL, Gordon Craig Theatre)
Wendy Hunt (John Henry Newman School)
Anne McGrath
Robin Osterley (Stevenage Choral Society)
Mary Sabine (Stevenage Ladies Choir)
Gemma Self (Dance Extravaganza)
Mark Stevens (Committee & Archant Group)
Jane Tobitt (Committee)
Marcus Vere (Nobel School)

2. Welcome and Introductions

Gill Hutchinson took the chair to open the meeting as Ron Walker was delayed. Everyone introduced themselves and, where applicable, their organisations.

2. Minutes of Last AGM

Gill explained that there had been a break in the pattern of general meetings when the Festival switched from the even to the odd years. 2007 had been a 'mini' Festival and 2009 was the first full Festival since the last general meeting in 2006. Because the Festival was every two years, general meetings were biennial rather than annual.

The minutes of the last AGM on 8 December 2006 were then agreed.

4. Committee's Report

Ron then took over the chair. He explained that the Festival of 2006 had run at a significant loss which had been recouped to some extent by a successful one week 'mini' Festival in 2007. The Festival had therefore been able to go into 2009 with relatively healthy finances.

The 2009 Festival had been a great artistic success with many memorable Gordon Craig shows including the performance of 'The Armed Man' by the Choral Society and Orchestra, Dance Extravaganza, the schools' and wind bands' performances, the Old Tyme Music Hall by Lytton Players, West Side Story by Fusion, Knebworth Players' Agatha Christie mystery, Parnassus poetry and a very popular Last Night of the Proms. A new innovation had been a photography lecture by an expert wildlife photographer which had been very well received. The fringe events continued to be successful, in particular the talks by John Julius Norwich, Freddie Knoller, Ken Follett and Howard Burrell and the Songs of Praise event.

The Festival usually incorporated the annual Rock in the Park event but this had not taken place because of problems with the lakes at Fairlands Valley Park. It was hoped to restart this for 2010 and it would be included in the 2011 Festival.

Ron extended his thanks to everyone who had made the Festival possible, including the current committee, the staff of the Gordon Craig and all the participating groups.

5. Treasurer's Report

Ron tabled a summary report of the income and expenditure relating to the 2009 Festival. This showed that the Festival had started with reserves of £14,232. The Festival had incurred an excess of expenditure over income of £5283, which meant that it had finished with reserves of £8949. The committee took the view that this was an acceptable position and the expenses of all the groups had been met in full.

Groups had done extremely well this time in making their budgets and sticking to them. The Festival had also managed to agree a package price with GCT in respect of microphones etc, which had helped significantly in keeping costs under control. Ticket sales had on the whole been disappointing (with some exceptions).

Ron also tabled a report showing the income and expenditure broken down by performance. It was noted that the main loss (of £7570) had been incurred by the Fusion performances of West Side Story. It was confirmed that the committee had agreed in advance during the budgeting process to support a loss of around £5000 on this performance as it was a very expensive production to stage and the Festival also wanted to show support for Fusion and the work that it did with young people from the town. However ticket sales had been much lower than forecast, which was disappointing as the show was usually popular.

Some explanation was given in respect of the budgeting processes: the Festival asked each group participating at the Gordon Craig to prepare a first draft budget at an early stage, based on its anticipated costs. This allowed the Committee to pool these figures to take a look at the Festival as a whole – reliably low cost high sales events like the Primary Schools concerts allowed the Festival to take a financial risk on the high cost events like musicals. Fringe events were usually self supporting – the Festival had agreed this year to subsidise the fees charged by John Julius Norwich and Freddie Knoller in order to bring them to Stevenage.

It was explained that the Festival had for many years benefited from an annual subsidy (of £4000 per year) from Stevenage Borough Council. Going forward however the Festival had had to apply for a grant, along with many other organisations and it would not be known until the Spring of 2010 how much the Council would be able to afford to give the Festival in respect of the 2011 event. Until this was resolved, the Festival would not be able to take a view on whether very expensive performances could be included. Up to now the Festival had not sought any form of commercial sponsorship but it was possible that this could be investigated if SBC support was not forthcoming.

Ron went on to report that the vital cheque book facility offered by the Festival's current bankers, the Halifax, had been recently withdrawn so a new bank account was being sought.

It was also confirmed that Festival performances paid standard private hire rates for the Gordon Craig.

It was noted that the accounts had been independently examined by Anne McGrath.

Ron then asked the meeting to approve the accounts for the period 01/10/07 to 30/10/09. This was proposed by Chris Ripple and seconded by Sid Lazarus and the accounts were agreed.

7. Election of Committee and Officers

In accordance with the Festival Constitution, all members of the committee retired.

Nothing had been heard from Sarah Ellis of Fusion in respect of this meeting so it was assumed that she did not wish to remain on the committee. Ria Burgess (later replaced by Lisa Hemmings) from the Gordon Craig Theatre had also been elected to the committee but had attended no meetings so was also assumed to be uninterested in being an active committee member although the committee would keep in close contact with GCT. Mark Stephens of Archant had also been on the committee. He was willing to help the Festival with its Comet publicity as previously but did not need to be on the committee to do this.

The following committee was then agreed unopposed for the 2011 Festival:

Ron Walker – Chairman (proposed Gill Hutchinson, seconded Hilary Spiers)
Carolyn Williams – Secretary (proposed Ron Walker, seconded Chris Ripple)
Anne McGrath – Treasurer (proposed Ron Walker, seconded Carolyn Williams)
Hilary Spiers – Fringe manager (proposed Chris Ripple, seconded Ron Walker)
Gill Hutchinson - Theatre manager (proposed Carolyn Williams, seconded Ron Walker)
Rebecca Hughes (Hertfordshire Music Service) (proposed Gill Hutchinson, seconded Hilary Spiers)

The post of publicity manager remained unfilled. Anyone interested in this important role could be co-opted onto the committee at a later date.

8. General Discussion

The following points were made in the discussion of the past and future festivals:

- It is important to make ticket sales easier for groups – they need to be able to take away batches of tickets to sell. This is being discussed with the GCT. It may be necessary to have single price tickets (i.e. no concessions) in order to make this work.

- Parnassus wanted to reduce the cost of their event to a round £5
- It was noted that the publicity for the Gordon Craig events in the Festival programme had been insufficient (although much better in the Comet wrap). This had been due to an oversight leading to a page being missed out and would be corrected next time.
- Ron was working with the Gordon Craig to get the Festival a larger share of the theatre's publicity
- 2011 would be the centenary of the death of WS Gilbert and it might be an idea for a choral event to reflect this (not the whole Festival)
- Paul Colwell and Marion Auer ran the Focal Space, a local photography studio. They volunteered use of their studio for small arts events, which was very welcome.
- The new Lytton Players theatre was a long term project and unlikely to be available for 2011. Similarly the new Hertfordshire Music Centre buildings at Nobel School.

The Gordon Craig dates for 2011 have been confirmed as Saturday 18 June to Saturday 2 July inclusive. The fringe events will take place throughout June 2011 with a preference for the first half of the month for any event likely to split the audience with the Gordon Craig events.

For 2011 the following declared an interest in participating:

- Stevenage Male Voice Choir
- Stevenage Choral Society
- Stevenage Ladies Choir and North Herts Guild of Singers had also expressed an interest by e-mail although they could not attend that evening
- Stevenage Symphony Orchestra
- Knebworth Players
- Lytton Players
- Gemma Self had said that she would run Dance Extravaganza again, although she could not attend this meeting
- Sharon and Rachel Curtis (local singers, interested in getting involved, particularly musical theatre events)
- Stevenage Churches Together (could not attend meeting but wanted to repeat the Songs of Praise event)
- Parnassus
- John Henry Newman and Nobel Schools (although could not attend that evening)
- The joint art/photography/floral art display in the Boxfield Gallery would also continue

Ron then asked all the groups concerned to start thinking about what they might do in 2011. An updated participant agreement with all the relevant deadlines and requirements for 2011 had been given to all attendees and would be e-mailed to those unable to attend.

9. A.O.B.

There was no further business.