

**MINUTES OF STEVENAGE FESTIVAL GENERAL MEETING**  
7.00PM, FRIDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2021

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

Those present were:

Ron Walker (Chairman)  
Carolyn Williams (Secretary)  
Martin Sproat (Committee, Stevenage Choral Society)  
Tony Burton (Stevenage Writers)  
Jo Chrysandreas (Stevenage Ladies Choir)  
Gillian Grant (Stevenage Girlguiding)  
David Handley (Stevenage Symphony Orchestra)  
Karin Hunter (Stevenage Girlguiding)  
Divya Kasturi (Divya Kasturi Company)  
Dagmar Louw (ENH NHS)  
Michelle Lloyd (Stevenage Library)  
Nick Mallinger (SBC)  
John Prebble (Junction 7 Creatives)  
Chris Ripple (Parnassus)  
Julie Shaw (Parnassus)  
Mary Sabine (Stevenage Ladies Choir)  
Laura Viander (Stevenage Bellydancers)  
Nic Vaughton (Stevenage Ladies Choir)

**2. Apologies**

Tina Benson, Stevenage Town Centre  
Margaret Brett, Stevenage Floral Art Society  
Geoff Caine, SBC  
Kimberly Creak, Premiere School of Dance  
Ross Edwards, Lytton Players  
Julie Filler, Camps Hill Stars Cheerleader  
Anne Graham, Festival Treasurer  
Cllr Richard Henry SBC  
Lauren Moore, Stagecoach  
Cllr Margaret Notley SBC  
Zara Richards, Warriorz  
Paul Ruff, Gordon Craig Theatre  
Duncan Rutherford, Somewhere2Sing  
Andy Smith, Stevenage Photographic Society  
Hilary Spiers, Festival Committee Fringe organiser  
Chris Thurston, Stevenage Photographic Society  
Trish Washer, Festival Committee

**3. Minutes of Last GM on 15 November 2019**

The minutes of the last General Meeting on 15 November 2019 were reviewed and confirmed as a true record of that meeting.

**4. Chairman's Report on 2021**

Ron Walker tabled his Chairman's Report which is attached to and forms part of these minutes.

Clearly it had been a difficult year, with no Festival performances possible in June because of Covid restrictions, although some catch-up performances had taken place in October. Nevertheless, Ron extended his thanks to everyone who had worked hard over the year on all the planning and replanning, including the committee, the staff of the Gordon Craig (who had been particularly supportive), and all the participating groups.

## **5. Treasurer's Report**

Anne Graham could not be present, but Ron Walker explained that as the rescheduled Festival performances had taken place only recently, the final cost and revenue information had not yet been received. It had not been possible therefore to finalise the 2021 accounts prior to this meeting, although they were expected shortly. However, the Festival had gone into 2021 with reasonable levels of reserves (in accordance with our financial policy) and it was anticipated that the 2021 performances would break even, meaning that the financial position from that last reported in 2019 remained more or less unchanged. Thanks were due to the Gordon Craig Theatre for the flexibility of its bookings policy which meant that the Festival had incurred no financial penalties.

## **6. 2022 Mini Festival**

It was noted that some dates had been reserved at the Theatre for June 2022 primarily for some groups who had not been able to perform in 2021. It might also be possible to include some fringe events during the same June timeframe. Our main efforts however would be devoted to bringing back a full festival in 2023.

## **7. 2023 Festival**

It was noted that the dates for the 2023 Festival in the Theatre were currently Monday 12 June to Sunday 25 June.

It was expected that the Gordon Craig programme would need to be finalised by the end of 2022. The committee would be following up with the various groups to confirm their dates and any requests for dates should be made as soon as possible.

The booking for the Pi Gallery was yet to be finalised but would cover the Festival period. Fringe events could take place any time in June. The committee would be contacting all the groups to start putting the programme together and would be interested in any ideas.

## **8. General Discussion**

The following points were discussed and noted:

- Nick Mallinger explained that SBC had obtained Arts Council funding to regenerate community cultural activity which was being focused on enhancing Stevenage Day, initially in 2022, but, it was expected, continuing into 2023/4 if successful. For 2022 a theme of 'diversity' was being developed which would include a world music stage, arts installations, dance displays, flag making and a parade. Some of these were being organised by external contractors. Many of those present said they would be very keen to support this and it was suggested that Nick could communicate with people via the Festival if he wasn't already in direct contact.

- There was some discussion about the challenges of communicating information about the Festival (and about arts and culture events in general) around the Town. Social media worked well these days for that part of the population that was accustomed to getting information that way. It was noted that the impact of any social media post could be greatly amplified by other organisations and individuals sharing or commenting and this was agreed to be a very helpful thing that we could all do to support each other. In future perhaps some sort of 'What's on in Stevenage' app could be deployed (not just for the Festival), although it was noted that an app developed to promote Town Centre shopping was not widely known about so there was clearly work to be done to research this.
- It was suggested that, ideally, there could be a much greater visual impact on the town during the month of the Festival (e.g. large and small banners and posters, street decorations, banners from lampposts etc). This would need SBC involvement as there were potential challenges in terms of permissions, safe installation and de-installation as well as financing.
- There was some discussion of the success of 'Old Town Live' and it was agreed that if it could be repeated during June 2023 it would fit very well with the Festival. Nick Mallinger said that this event had been organised by a different part of SBC but he was trying to build connections.
- Junction 7 Creatives were very keen to be involved with the Festival fringe events and also with cultural events in general. John Prebble offered to work with Nick Mallinger to organise a group in the New Year to take an in-depth look at how to improve co-ordination and delivery.
- For 2023, Parnassus were considering an additional event in Revolution Records in the Old Town
- It was noted that Kimberly Creak from Premiere School of Dance was looking at organising a dance performance at GCT for dancers with special needs. This was generally thought to be a great move. Stevenage Bellydancers and Stevenage Guiding both had members/contacts who might like to be involved with this.
- Stevenage Symphony Orchestra was keen to do something in 2023.

## 9. Election of Committee and Officers for 2022/23

The chairman thanked everyone who had served on the Committee for 2020/21.

The following committee was then agreed unopposed for the 2023 Festival:

Ron Walker – Chairman

Carolyn Williams – Secretary

Anne Graham – Treasurer

Hilary Spiers – Fringe manager

Gill Hutchinson - Operations Manager

Christina Luchies - Hertfordshire Music Service

Martin Sproat - Webmaster

Glenn Walker - Designer

Lauren Yorke – Committee member (Stagecoach)

## 10. AOB

**Roy Mugridge Award** – Ron Walker explained that this award normally went to the best performer in some identified aspect of the Festival. As there had been no performances, this was not possible for 2021. However the committee had agreed (without her knowledge!) to award it to Carolyn Williams for services to the Festival.



## Stevenage Festival Chairman's Report 2021

At the end of my 2019 report I wrote, "I hope you will all join us for the 2021 Festival when we will entertain you again". Oh, how I wish we could have been able to offer you the entertainment we promised, but history will record that we were about to enter the period when Covid closed down all the entertainments that are such an important part of our life, stopping us from opening up our theatre to allow any shows to proceed.

Many of our groups were unable to gather together and participate in the arts that they enjoy and the restrictions made it impossible for most of our festival plans to be fulfilled.

We looked carefully, with the Theatre, at putting on shows in June 2021 under the restrictive guidance that was then in place. Even if we had been able to put on a show, it would have been with reduced content, very few performers and with an audience restricted to so few that it would not have been viable. Reluctantly, GCT had to keep the theatre closed, in common with many other entertainment centres in the country.

We must thank Paul and his staff from the GCT for the expert advice they gave us regarding the rules, we had to really rely on their knowledge on what we might be allowed to do and how we could comply with the guidance notes as they materialised almost day by day.

We did eventually manage to put on a couple of shows later in the year after the restrictions were largely lifted. It was a great relief that we did get some shows back on the road!

But, there is always a silver lining to all things: at least my report this year will be much shorter!

So what did we manage?

We turned our thoughts to what we could do, rather than what we couldn't. So, with the efforts of Stevenage Photographic Society, an on-line photographic competition was arranged in the Festival period on the theme of 'Stevenage Unlocked', seeking pictures taken during the lockdown and after. Senior and junior sections enabled us to present prizes to two winners. The winner of the senior section, [Kathy Grew](#), was also awarded this year's Roger Andrews trophy. And the junior winner, [Laura Haley](#), produced an image of great quality which may well have rivalled the senior winner.

In October we were able to present a Dance Extravaganza performance from Stevenage Dance schools at the Theatre where our Deputy Mayor was in attendance along with a happy and excited audience of family and friends. As usual, the quality of the dancing was of the highest level and that is despite all the difficulties experienced though the year in practicing and rehearsals. Well done to all those involved, a tremendous achievement.

Also, in October, the famous (or is that infamous) Parnassus gave us an evening of poems, songs and music. As always, a great time was had by all, including our Mayor. Good to see another show proceed. Parnassus have performed at every Festival since our inception and weren't going to let a global pandemic stop them performing in 2021.

And finally, later in October, Stagecoach was able to present their two shows to an enthusiastic audience including the Deputy Mayor. Stagecoach staff are to be commended for getting so many children of ages four upwards on stage with such a good standard of performance. A good-sized audience brought the theatre back to life in a year of difficulties, and it augers well for the years to come and the future shows that we are already planning.

We also managed to find some arts events that were continuing on an online basis, run by the Stevenage and Knebworth Arts Group, and advertised these to a wider audience under the

Festival umbrella. And we made a valuable contact with the Life Gallery at the Lister Hospital which, because of its unique location, remained accessible for hospital staff and visitors throughout the lockdowns.

But these things do not happen by magic: these events all need to be planned and delivered despite all the restrictions. I am indebted to the dedicated people prepared to make themselves available to make things happen. Well done to all.

I would estimate the hours of work put in this year by the committee to not put on a festival must have been twice that of a normal year! Plans were made and changed and altered and re-planned and re-arranged and cancelled and that all needs to be done against the background of the pandemic. Much of the festival work fell to Carolyn, I had a quick count up of the E mails she sent and there were over 300, and that is probably the tip of the iceberg, a fantastic effort which must be acknowledged.

For the same reasons this year's fringe never really happened, so we must pick up and plan for the future and hope we have many new ideas on the table as well as the tried and tested.

Last year I said that the arts raise up the spirit of us all. That comment has proved to be very profound given the chaos of life over the past two years. Never have our spirits needed to be lifted more than where we find ourselves today. The pandemic has beaten us down and it is with the help of the arts that our community can be raised up again.

I want to thank our whole committee, along with those running the various groups, who have been standing ready to spring into action given the right circumstances but unfortunately those came too late to save the majority of our festival this year.

Most of all I must reiterate my thanks to Carolyn, who as our secretary is involved in most if not every part of the running of the festival and therefore ensures we are able to deliver the professional package you saw in previous year and you will see in the future.

I hope you will all join us for the 2022 Mini Festival and the full Festival in 2023, when we will present more examples of Stevenage arts to entertain you again.

Ron Walker