

PRESIDENT'S REPORT JULY 2019 - JUNE 2020

As I began writing this report in the second half of 2020, looking back over the year from July 2019, little did anyone know what the coming year had in store for us. Firstly, there were the devastating bushfires along the eastern seaboard through the summer, then in late 2019 there was word that a new virus was emerging and spreading rapidly around the world. The Coronavirus spread quickly throughout the world and it became clear to Committee that our 2020 season of plays and musicals would be greatly impacted, however, we clung to the hope that everything would be fine here at the bottom of the world - unfortunately that was not to be.

Performances

In August 2019 we held another performance in our Hot Bakehouse Jazz season in our BlackBox Theatre this time with Wade Gregory, Rachel Howard and Brian Matthews, these three wonderful musicians work so well together and it is pure joy watching them. Our cabaret shows continue to be successful and draw a different audience than our plays and musicals thus widening STAG's reach into our theatre-going community.

As part of the Out in the Open Festival 2019 we presented The Laramie Project on November 8, 9 and 10 in our BlackBox Theatre. I had the great fortune to direct this very moving play with my daughter, Sian, as my assistant. The group of actors we assembled rapidly applied themselves to the task of creating many characters and switching from one to another with ease while remaining onstage for the duration of the story. This play is very different in presentation style and the whole production team worked tirelessly and passionately to bring it to life.

The George Awards were held at Westside on 8 February 2020. STAG was the recipient of nominations for their shows and received the following awards: Best Singing to Drew Walker and Best Cameo Performance for Aaron-David Palmer in Jesus Christ Superstar and Excellence in Artistic Design to Aaron-David Palmer for the program for Jesus Christ Superstar. Aaron-David also received a Music Theatre Guild Commendation for the Jesus Christ Superstar program.

As a result of the devastating summer of bushfires, the arts community throughout Australia stepped up and presented numerous benefit concerts and events. In February 2020 a sold-out bushfire fundraiser concert was held at Chapel on Maude combining the talents of 36 Degrees South Choir, GVCO, Shepparton Brass and Wind and STAG. \$3,300 was raised.

10 in Ten - March 2020. In the second half of 2019 the call was put out for playwrights to submit scripts based on the 2020 Shepparton Festival theme of "Evolve", we received 45 submissions, all plays were read and discussed by the Reading Committee and the final 10 were selected for presentation. Directors and actors were selected and rehearsals got under way with mentors available to assist first-time directors, if needed.

Unfortunately the threat of the Coronavirus pandemic was growing, increasing the concern regarding the possible cancellation of live theatre performances and social distancing restrictions being placed on the community at large. Committee made the very difficult decision to cancel the public performances of Ten in 10 with very careful observation of COVIDSafe procedures we filmed the dress rehearsal so that all involved could bring the event to fruition and see each other's work and have a permanent record of the plays.

The hilarious comedy Noises Off was planned for June 2020. The production crew comprising Aaron-David Palmer - Director, Gemma Marchant and Trish Deakin Co-Producers held auditions on 9 and 10 December 2019, with a cast selected rehearsals and building the two-story set were well underway in the new year.

Our major musical, Mamma Mia, was planned for September 2020, the production team consisted of Shannon Orlando - Director, Brian and Sharon Davis - Musical Directors, Cassie Willis - Choreographer, Co-Producers - Nicky Pummeroy and Mel Matthews, myself - Assistant to the Director. The information night was on 4 February and auditions and call-backs were held on the weekend of Friday 28 and Saturday 29 February and Sunday 1 March. We auditioned over 60 talented performers, selected the cast and held a "meet and greet".

As the pandemic continued to spread no live performances were permitted anywhere and after progressively cancelling our major productions, Committee took the final step to cancel/postpone the whole of our 2020 season and look to other ways of keeping our membership engaged. We moved from socially distanced meetings in the Shed to Zoom (on-line) meetings each month which will continue into the future.

As we searched around for something to occupy us artistically, John Head wrote a script for a "Zoom" film, Corona Star-19 was the result. The cast and crew were quickly gathered together and rehearsals began in mid May. The storyline was on a spaceship so no one had to leave home to rehearse. Each character was given an appropriate virtual background of their location on the spaceship, relevant costume, hair and makeup design. Filming took place and a link sent to people who subscribed and the film "went live" on Saturday 4 July. Viewing the film was free and people could donate to STAG if they so chose, which they did and quite generously. We made a profit of approx \$5,000. On the morning of the screening we had the great pleasure of presenting John Head with a very well-deserved STAG Life Membership.

Other Happenings

Winter play-readings were held in the shed in July and August 2019, these are always well attended and enjoyed by an appreciative group.

Steven Richardson, Manager for Victoria and Tasmania of Creative Partnerships Australia came to Shepparton and initially met with myself and Gemma Marchant then returned on 3 July 2019 to give a very informative fundraising presentation to members of various arts groups in the area. The presentation was full of clever and creative ideas.

Ruby Shannon, a STAG Member held a fundraising concert on 31 August 2019 in the BlackBox to help her pay for acting classes in New York, numerous STAG members performed for Ruby.

McGuire College Arts students came for a Tour on 14 October 2019, Gemma Marchant and I spoke to the students about performance, the importance of theatre and took some interesting and engaging questions from the students.

Fairley Leadership cohort visited on 23 October 2019 as part of their Power of Art day, Nicky Pummeroy and I entertained the group with a brief history of STAG then lead them in some entertaining and amusing acting exercises.

Our Christmas party was held on 29 November at the Shepparton Brewery this was organised by Nicky Pummeroy, the venue was ideal and all had a great time celebrating the end of another successful year for STAG.

Late January 2020 we commissioned Robert Baxter and Macy Hocking to paint graffiti images of past STAG shows on the front wall of the BlackBox, Aaron-David Palmer reprinted posters of past shows which will be pasted to the wall progressively to emulate the idea of posting promotional material on walls in laneways.

In March 2020 John Head applied for a grant through the Greater Shepparton Connected Community organisation for continuing improvements to our BlackBox Theatre complex. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic the awarding of grants was delayed.

Work continues on our greenroom development project, turning the old costume storage into a dressing room/greenroom for our performers. New shelves were built in the greenroom and the old props area was cleared out to make way for a toilet and make-up area. We have a great team of workers led Troy McKindley who have been able to make some progress.

Other improvements to the BlackBox Theatre have included the installation of additional lighting bars and making the bio box secure.

Sharon Geraghty continues to rationalise and organise the costume wardrobe.

It is still uncertain as to when we will be able to present any of the shows from our ill-fated 2020 season. 2020 has thrown many challenges our way making it difficult to navigate life for everyone as well as the STAG Committee, our "core business" is mounting live performances and holding gatherings which we now cannot do, fortunately we have been able to adapt to the new way, Zoom, of presenting playreadings, and performances. We will continue to do all we can to engage

our members in socially distanced events as we wait for the time when being live theatre will return with renewed vigour and determination.

I thank my Committee for their support through these difficult times and look forward to brighter times ahead.

FIONA KENNAN
PRESIDENT