



2021 Annual General Meeting Presidents Report

Good evening everybody, and a warm welcome to the 2021 HTG Annual General Meeting, including those joining us by zoom. I consider this event each year to be among the most if not THE most important night of the year. This is an evening where we can take stock of the past 12 months, plan for the next year, and enjoy the camaraderie that belonging to HTG brings. The strong attendance that we have experienced in recent years is I believe a reflection of the love for HTG amongst its members, as well as a guarantee that it's work will continue well supported into the future. I personally find the support expressed by your attendance here tonight to be the greatest affirmation and motivation in continuing to work as a member of the committee, knowing that that work is appreciated and supported. It's when we feel alone in our tasks that we get despondent, so I'm pleased to say that is in no way the case for Highlands Theatre Group. The awarding of tonight's Life Memberships to Bob Cady, Marilyn Cady, George Lawrence and Stan Henderson is further endorsement of the great work so many have done over so many years – congratulations to tonight's most worthy recipients.

The AGM is a night where we can bring our core membership up to date with the life of the group over the past 12 months. It's also a time where we can thank any outgoing committee members for their work, and welcome new members onto the committee to both learn about what is involved managing a theatre group, and to make their own contribution. To that end I would like to thank our outgoing committee members who have not renominated for the next 12 months. To Janette Daly, Sue McDonald, Peach Robb and Mark Davidson, thank you for all that you have done during your time as a member of the committee in this stint. In particular to Mark who for so long has done so much for the group, please enjoy some level of rest at least from regular meetings, knowing that your important work building the HTG archives and overseeing our properties will continue irrespective of your membership of the committee. To those of you who have never sat on the committee I would encourage you in future years to give it a go. Yes, it's lot of work that eats up your time, but seeing that work come to fruition through the joy in audiences faces at a successful show is well worth every bit of the effort. So, to those who have nominated for 2022 for the first or 20th time, thank you, but get ready to roll up your sleeves for what is going to be a very busy and rewarding year for HTG.

As with 2020, the last 12 months has been a challenge for HTG due to the impact of Covid. That said, I sit here proud that our group has been able to maintain a strong level of presence in the community, remain constantly active, produce three high quality shows, as well as many other activities that I will outline. And this despite also being deprived of a theatrical space to perform in. It just goes to show you that determination can overcome most hurdles.

Our year began in early February with a reunion of the 'Ladies in Black' cast and crew from mid 2019. It was a wonderful social night and evidenced the bonds that were made and have been retained. In particular for large cast shows we will make a habit of holding social occasions like this to both thank particular groups for their previous work and also to maintain that special bond that is created. In the near future we will hold a reunion for the 2019 'Anne of Green Gables' cast and crew to celebrate all that that show achieved in such adversity given the closure of the Mittagong Playhouse the night before opening.

Also in February, we held the first of two play reading nights for the year, with Jim and Mark hosting a reading of 'Shakespeare in Love'. As we had done with '12 Angry Jurors', apart from being worthwhile activities in their own right, play reading nights allow the opportunity to evaluate particular works. Those who participated in the '12 angry Jurors' reading very much enjoyed it, which resulted in us producing that play. The dozen or so participants of the 'Shakespeare in Love' night were also most enthusiastic about it and so it's definitely on our list of to do shows when we have a theatre again. Our most recent play reading night just a couple of weeks ago was attended by around 25 participants reading shows we had in mind for next year and proved a resounding success. Play reading nights provide an opportunity for aspiring directors to get a taste of leading an evening and giving basic directions to the participants many of whom experienced or hopeful actors. And finally of

course it is a low anxiety opportunity for the participants, especially newcomers, to get a taste of characterization and also of the spirit of Highlands Theatre Group.

And so to our first production of the year in May - the wonderfully performed and supported 'Nonsense'. Breaking all records for the length of a rehearsal period, Eloise, Maria, Hannah, Janette, Leesa and nine wonderful wannabe 'Little Sisters of Hoboken' worked themselves to extremes to put on a wonderfully silly but complex cabaret style show. Audience numbers far exceeded expectations for a lesser-known musical, which is a tribute to the quality of performance the cast and crew were able to pull together. What began as a show chosen for small halls because we had no theatre, was forced by covid to become a much larger production than originally planned, so congratulations to you all once again for adapting and excelling. We acknowledge publicly the wonderful support we received from Bowral High School in allowing us to use their facility at short notice, and also provide helpers from their Year 11 Entertainment course. Yes, a school hall doesn't provide the comfort and facilities that a dedicated theatre does, but given 'Nonsense' is actually set in a school hall, really we could not have had anything more perfect for the show.

In May we also turned our monthly Committee meeting into a broader 'Think Tank'. A larger body of Full Members divided into four groups to brainstorm and then report on Publicity, Sponsorship, the Constitution, and an update to our Audition Policy. The evening proved both quite fun and productive, and we anticipate repeating the process some time in 2022. Our new Constitution, an update of key policies, a short HTG history dating back to 1885, and Production Roles descriptions are on the agenda to develop in 2022 for inclusion in a comprehensive resource to provide new members.

In June we took theatre to Mittagong RSL and Moss Vale Services Clubs with great success. Jim and Mark and 12 pretty cranky jurors spent a relatively short rehearsal period preparing a top-quality drama. With audiences of only 40 in a small function room at Mittagong RSL the feedback was totally affirming of our decision to take theatre to an intimate environment. Audiences were totally engaged by the drama which again proved that theatre, if presented cleverly and with quality, can take place almost anywhere. Unfortunately, the final weekend was cut short by the covid lockdown, and our final two performances were cancelled – a blow for the cast and audiences alike. On a positive note, Moss Vale Services also proved to be a more than suitable location for theatre outside a theatre, with the club being incredibly supportive. So much so that we have scheduled our next production to be held there and are very excited about the possibilities it provides. As with 'Nonsense', congratulations to the cast and crew of 'Jurors' for a job really well done. The presentation night which took 4 months to get happening due to Covid also showed what a lovely bond this group has formed.

In August HTG was to be the host for a professional touring production of 'Margaret Fulton the Musical'. As well as providing a vehicle for the Highlands patrons to experience more theatre, we were also offered a percentage of the show profits in return for promoting, ticketing and ushering the show - a great deal for HTG and for the Highlands. Alas, covid took its second victim for the year and the show was postponed until 2022. Three weeks out we had sold over 250 tickets which we believe was as many if not the most sold for any show on the tour, and we believe we would have exceeded 4 or 500 in the end. Must disappointingly of all, with the absence of a theatre in the Highlands, the producer has been unable to find a venue on a suitable date to reschedule the show, and also for their next production which they were also keen to bring here next year. Once we have our theatre back, this and more will be possible, with HTG acting as a host for touring productions to complement our own and also benefitting financially.

'Jesus Christ Superstar' was announced in 2019, auditioned in February 2020, and has now been postponed 3 times due to covid. Worse, we were recently informed that the show has been withdrawn from availability for 2022 due to an impending 50th anniversary tour. We were over halfway through the rehearsal period with a great deal of work having been done, so again, a major disappointment. But with what was achieved beforehand, the near completion of the costumes by the team, the quality of both the cast and the band we witnessed here last Friday at the JCS commiseration postponement party, it WILL happen in 2023, and it WILL rock the Highlands. With apologies to the 'Nonsense' team, the rehearsal length record is going to be smashed again.

Our final significant activity for the year was the committee's decision to provide scholarships for members to attend NIDA summer workshops. Four members have applied and been approved to attend these in January - Nicole and Lani will attend a week-long director's workshop, Helen will attend a Stage Management weekend course, and Aidan will complete a four-day Lighting Design course. The re-institution of this practise can only be of benefit to the group as a whole in generally upskilling our members to be able to give back that which they've learned, to the benefit of HTG and the community.

But perhaps the most significant achievement of the year has been the development and passing of our new constitution. In taking this document from a more generic version specified by the government's model rules, to one that now reflects our own uniqueness, has been a dry but essential part of HTG's development. Brian has been working on this often-thankless task for over two years, and with Hayden's significant involvement over the last six months that work has now come to fruition. Thank you to Brian and Hayden for getting this done, to Steve Kelly for facilitating the process, and to the Full Membership for evaluating, commenting and ultimately approving this document. It will serve us well for many years to come.

Despite the setbacks of the past two years our group has continued to grow. Our core group of Voting members now number 46, total membership over 160, and our mailing list is now over 2000 strong. Thanks to Haydn our web site has never looked better or been more functional. We now have eftpos facilities, good quality HTG merchandise available at all times, a new online raffle system, new computers, equipment to stream meetings, and regular information shared through newsletters and social media. Our member pre-sale periods have proved a success and will continue in 2022, providing an initial sales boost for shows almost ensuring each one's financial success. In 2021 we offered members the chance to make a donation in addition to their membership fees, and many did, as you saw in the Treasurers report. People are generous if given the opportunity, and we need honour that generosity with nothing but the best efforts we can make. Speaking of generous, we also acknowledge the kindness of the Markavino family who agreed for us to keep a very large storage container on their property for a few months in 2012. I'm pleased to report said container has now been sold and moved to a new home, and the Markavino's were very grateful for the lovely hamper Mark took to them.

On the financial side, despite the covid and Playhouse setbacks we have maintained a strong level of security. We have diverted sponsorship income from the last 3 years to a dedicated account to use to build our long-planned storage facility. Huge thanks to all of our generous sponsors, in particular Ian and Leesa from Atworthy Advisory, and our principal sponsor Gibraltar Park, who have been so important in securing the financial base of HTG over the last three years. Sponsorship is definitely one area where further growth is possible – the business community are most generous, and the past two years has shown that performing arts is high on the list of the most vulnerable industries in a crisis. We can only, and I believe have, do our bit in our little corner of the world.

Finally, I would like to express thanks to the three people in particular who have worked with me on the HTG executive for the past three years. Most of you would be shocked to know just exactly how much time they spend on HTG work - often as much each week as one would expect to spend on their full-time paid employment. So, to Haydn, Barbara and Jim, thank you for all that you do in keeping the HTG boat upright and sailing every single week of the year.

And so on to 2022 - three exciting shows, more learning, more social gatherings, and more fun. Thank you all for being an important part of the life of HTG, and I hope you continue to be so, for ours is a very special community.

Steve Cheers - 7/12/21