

2022 PRESIDENTS REPORT

Welcome, and thank you members for making the time to attend the 2022 HTG Annual General Meeting. As I've said before I consider a healthy attendance at each year's AGM to be a strong indicator of the health of our group. Of course, there are many factors that prevent attendance, none more relevant than covid, so thank you also to everyone who sent through their apologies for tonight. The intention is always to keep the formalities brief and celebration of the year prominent.

2022 for HTG was a year dominated by three productions, which left little time for much else. After last year's tremendous effort remodelling the constitution by Brian Hayden and Hayden Burgoyne this was more a year of returning to some sort of normality as far as shows go. That said, a great deal of work was done this year by Hayden reworking the various policy documents that were and are due for renewal, and for this I thank him wholeheartedly. Such administration type tasks are time consuming and far from exciting, but essential in the running of well-structured and healthy organisation. I note that both Brian and Hayden have elected to take a break from the committee, so perhaps this grafting work has taken its toll. I am pleased and grateful though, that both have also offered to continue to work for the group as non-committee co-ordinators – Brian as Public Officer and Haydn on the Website and our digital assets.

In 2022 we undertook three shows, all very different in style, but with one key thing in common.

In May 'The Appleton Ladies' Potato Race' was an opportunity to be amongst the first to present a wonderful new Australian work. Even better was the fact that it was written and set in the Southern Highlands – and currently in film production. First time director Nicole Freeman threw herself wholeheartedly into the role, wonderfully supported by Helen Harvie as Stage Manager and a tremendous creative team, including Ron, Suzanne, Leilani, and Mary Dalton. Hard to understand if you weren't present but Helen and Lani's dancing scene changes were a highlight in themselves. With a wonderfully talented cast of five strong women the production was an unqualified success, even if it was with bated breath that we waited for the reaction of the Robertson crowd to 'their' story - would the potatoes be celebrated or thrown? We had nothing to worry about as it turned out, with audiences flocking to the show and enjoying every single minute of it. A triumph for everyone involved.

With a challenging gap of only eight weeks, we were back onstage in July with the Australian classic 'Mother and Son', again close to if not the first amateur performance in the country. The wordy script proved more than the challenge and were it not for the high quality and dedication of the seven actors involved it could have fallen very flat. But with commitment and talent and determination we again brought a wonderful story to life that delighted audiences both in the Highlands and for the first time in Goulburn, even if some of the Southern Table landers presumed we were actually presenting an interactive pantomime! I generally prefer not to single out actors, but the mammoth task undertaken by Juliet in attempting to digest such a massive and wordy role needs special mention, as does HTG debutante Richard's ability to catch and juggle wrong or missed lines and somehow help

everyone stay on at least some part of the track. Consequently, there were some truly hilarious impromptu moments – both onstage and a result of one particular committee member wondering as they unplugged it ‘I wonder what this lead does?’ Just as pleasing for myself as both Director and President were Pat and Jacinta stepping up in the roles of Stage Manager and costume coordinator and doing such a wonderful job. This despite for most of the run it taking them several hours to get to and from an isolated Kangaroo Valley.

Then in November came what was intended to be a simple way to finish off the year with something musical in ‘A Night of Musical Theatre.’ In part a nod to Mark Butcher and the past tradition of the Highland Proms, 27 singers were selected, and a programme moulded around their talents, and I think it's safe to say became much bigger than any of us initially expected. This in the sense of the amount of time and effort the creative team put into its preparation, and major thanks and congratulations go to Eloise and Hannah in particular for the massive commitment they made to helping the performers be the very best they could be. Also exceeding expectations was the reaction of the audiences from the beginning of the first performance to the end of the last, who cheered and applauded with enthusiasm one would expect at a Professional Sydney Production. Well done to everyone involved and certainly this is a format to revisit.

The factor that these three quite diverse productions had in common is that they all embodied a genuine spirit of camaraderie within the casts. It is a given that we always must strive to put on the highest quality shows possible, but it is also of utmost importance that we help HTG members have a positive and affirming personal experience in putting on a show, and then look forward to their next opportunity to do so. Again in 2022 I believe we have earned an ‘A’ in both areas, and for that congratulations must go to everyone who has been involved in ways large or small with the group. A new batch of lifelong friendships have been forged, and if for no other reason than this 2022 for HTG was a huge success.

With such a hectic schedule in this year there was little time for anything else. We did manage one play reading night which was conducted in a slightly different manner than previous events. Actors were invited to perform, with some limited movement and a script in hand, a play called ‘The Viewing.’ Another 15 or so members came to watch and evaluate the work for HTG performance. At the end of the night an extensive conversation occurred involving both actors and audience on the merits of the work or otherwise. Whilst on this occasion it was decided that the play was not one for us, the process was extremely positive and valuable, and one that we should revisit regularly in evaluating possible new shows.

Also of significant note was HTG’s sponsorship of Nicole Freeman and Lani van Diemen in completing a weeklong NIDA director's course last January. It remains part of the Committees brief to identify members with particular interest and ability and help them to cultivate it for the good of both HTG and the community. In the next couple of weeks there will be another opportunity for members to apply to attend NIDA courses over the summer.

A few other quick statistics from 2022.

- HTG attracted 30-40 new members who now tally 160
- Our Mailing list continues to grow and is creeping towards 2000
- Facebook followers have recently passed 1700 in number

- Our coffers continue to grow as indicated by the treasurer's report, in preparation for a major expense in the Welby Storage Shed. It continues to be a slow process and I have no interest in jinxing it, but I will simply state that we are now ready to lodge a DNA with council for the structure. Stay tuned.

Of course, the elephant in the doorway, room and entire building remains to be the lack of a performance space in the Southern Highlands. The lack of movement on the Mittagong Playhouse due to a lack of funding is a constant frustration for us, and I'm constantly torn about how best to approach the relevant authorities – in an aggressive or conciliatory manner. I am in no way convinced that our Council leaders understand the significant contribution theatre has made to the region and individual lives, nor the superhuman efforts HTG has made over the past three years to keep local performing arts alive rather than in a coma on the operating table. All three productions this year were presented in more than one venue, a fact we need to be very proud of. If there's one thing we have learnt about ourselves is that we have the skills to do almost anything.

A ray of hope remains the renovation of Bowral Memorial Hall, albeit primarily as a concert venue designed for acoustic music. Several of us inspected the facility's progress last week and it is the committee's intention to attempt to stage 'Pirates of Penzance' in the facility mid 2023. This would enable for the first time in 8 years a return to large cast musicals involving an orchestra, even if the building is not specifically designed for such. But we have proved over the last three years that we are versatile and can adapt to any space. It's inconvenient, but much more important that theatre in the Southern Highlands live on. And a return to a larger scale show will also mean another surge in growth and enthusiasm for our group – the effort will most definitely be worth it.

At this stage we have little more planned given the Venue constraints, so it will be for the new committee that convenes next week to start to work on further events for 2023. Certainly at least a play, several play reading nights and perhaps even finally the establishment of a HTG choir, which will make a debut of sorts this week at the Bowral Carols at Bradman Oval.

Thank you to the outgoing committee of 2022 particularly the departing Hayden, Brian and Aiden, and thank you to those new and continuing committee members who have nominated for service in 2023. If no one takes on these jobs the group cannot continue, so please know as President I grateful for every minute that members contribute to the growth and sustenance of Highlands Theatre Group. We are an integral part of the community, of that there is no doubt.

Thank you again for your attendance tonight, and I trust you will remain after the Committee Election to enjoy a celebratory drink to end one year and herald the next.

Steve Cheers
2022 President