



## MINUTES

### Brookside Theatre Volunteers Meeting

Tuesday 26 April 2016

*Present: Jai Sepple, Harri Sepple, Dave Watts (meeting chair), Dan Harrison, Sue Butcher, Chrissie Rawlings, Deborah Ridgwell, Linda Curson, Katrina Watts, Alison Leech, Sue Roberts, Hilary Wraight, Dean Carter (Event Technician)*

*Volunteers not present: Lennie Nova, Victoria Fowler, Viv Beaver, Jeannine Monk, Enid Hart, Rosie Coletti, Jeanette Martin (all Front of House), Nicola Bruce (Event Technician), Simon Power (Special Projects), Mike Higgins (Fund-raising), Liam O'Connell (currently inactivate as away at university)*

#### 1. Introductions

Introductions were made and the roles of current volunteers outlined.

Dave said that in addition to Front of House (FoH) duties and general support he had in recent months been tasked with building up the number of volunteers. We advertise various roles – FoH, marketing, cleaning, gardening, fund-raising, leaflet distributor, etc. via volunteer websites such as Charity.org and do-it.org, via the theatre website and elsewhere. Although our number has increased recently the theatre still needs much more help if it is to survive and thrive and Dave asked if everyone could consider whether they knew of any family or friends who might be interested in joining the team.

#### 2. Communication Channels

The Facebook Group is the main communication channel for volunteers. Volunteers were asked to respond to requests for support, even if unable to help, so that the writer of the message knows that people have at least seen and considered it.

Some volunteers have been having difficulty booking themselves in to work at events via the interactive calendar on the volunteering pages of the website when accessing via Apple products such as iPad and iPhone. Jai said there was an android app – Googlesheets – which could be downloaded which should solve this problem. Any volunteers unable to add themselves to the calendar should message Jai or Harri directly.

There is now a clipboard on the wall in the kiosk which is being used to alert volunteers to any new issues / developments. All volunteers on duty should review on arrival. A post show report form is also to be introduced to enable any issues arising at an event to be recorded and acted on as appropriate, e.g. problems with toilets, breakages, low stocks, comments from customers.

Jai confirmed that the Volunteers' pack which had been available on the old version of the website was currently being reviewed and updated and would be republished very shortly. It would again include a volunteer information form (emergency contacts etc.). Any volunteer who has not already completed such a form should do so and return to Harri. Volunteers are asked to familiarise themselves with the revised pack when published and also the terms and conditions of the theatre that are housed on the website.

### **3. Changes at theatre**

#### **New website**

Jai has recently developed an updated version of the theatre website which is now live and mobile responsive (i.e. designed to work well via smartphones). There is also a 'live chat' facility whereby people can ask real time questions on line. However, it was stressed that this is for customer use, and not for volunteer messages.

The website also links to a new blog which will feature news and articles about the theatre. Any ideas for content to Alison please.

#### **Box Office System and provider**

We have recently changed our box office provider and IT system. Previously provided by Essex Live, it is now run by thelittleboxoffice.com. It has better functionality and customers are finding it easier to book tickets online, reducing the level of telephone bookings. It also means that volunteers will shortly be able to scan most customers' printed tickets via a hand held device, with only a limited number of customers (e.g. those purchasing or collecting tickets on the night, or without printed tickets) having to go to our Box Office window. This will alleviate queues, and scanning tickets at the entrance to the auditorium (as is envisaged) will allow people to mingle in the foyer before their tickets are checked. Jai explained that this would bring us in line with other theatres and the expectations of the paying public. All volunteers will be required to operate the new system, which is expected to go live in May, and training will be provided. Harri reassured everyone that the system was easy to pick up.

#### **Front of house roles**

Although we have previously sought to have three FOH volunteers at each event (plus where appropriate a new volunteer shadowing the team) we are now looking to have four FOH volunteers plus one volunteer in the box office at each event. Harri's pregnancy means that she will not be available to cover the box office in future months. The revised volunteer pack will identify the different volunteer roles at events as well as identifying which jobs will be dropped in the event of insufficient volunteers being on duty. Jai said that he did not think we could operate without at least three volunteers on duty and if we could not secure the services of enough volunteers then events would have to be cancelled.

With Harri expected to be absent from many events in the run up to and following the arrival of her baby, and with Jai occupied with the performers and the technical presentation of events, one of the volunteers on duty will need to act as lead volunteer, coordinating the volunteer activities, acting as contact point with Jai for specific issues arising, and being responsible for completing the end of show report.

#### **4. Back office roles and functions**

##### Marketing

Dave explained that the theatre has no budget for marketing. Events are promoted via our website, emails to mailing list members, and social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Streetlife (a community based forum which volunteers are encouraged to join). Alison regularly updates other listings websites and feeds them material, and Sue R recently updated and expanded our database of local and regional media contacts (print, radio and online). We have secured some great publicity for, and reviews of, recent events, especially our in house production of 'Allo 'Allo (which people came from as far as Germany to see).

We have a new display board at the front of the theatre's admin block which is used to promote our events, and the council have recently allowed us to advertise for free in one of their older notice boards on Romford marketplace.

We also market via the distribution of our twice yearly published programme of events, plus leaflets and posters for specific events. Everyone is asked to help with programme, leaflet and poster distribution, by joining the regular leaflet drops around businesses in Romford town centre, by delivering to homes, businesses, libraries etc. in the area in which they live or with which they have a relationship, and by helping to promote the theatre by talking about it to people they meet, always having a spare programme or flyer to hand, and leaving positive comments on social media (and encouraging others to do so). Jai explained how 'liking' and inviting others to 'like' us on Facebook impacted positively on the theatre's presence/ratings on other websites. With a capacity of just 140 seats we should be able to sell out all our shows, but are rarely managing to do this, and poor sales are leading to the cancellation of some shows, which has a detrimental effect on our finances and reputation.

##### Gardening

Harri has undertaken a lot of work on the grounds in the past, but will be unable to do so to the same degree this year. Sue R will contact a local horticulture group to see if they can provide advice and support on a way forward to ensure appropriate planting for the area. It was pointed out that there was no money for plants and this needs to be taken into account.

##### 'Get ins' and 'Get outs'

Harri explained that help is often needed with many aspects of putting on a show, from the sourcing and making of props and costumes, to building and painting sets, providing technical support for event night shows, and subsequently taking down sets, returning costumes etc. Help with basic maintenance tasks such as cleaning is also always appreciated. Harri also mentioned that volunteers would by arrangement be welcome to attend rehearsals of in-house shows and offer feedback to her and Jai.

#### **5. New Season brochure**

Although many shows for the second half of the calendar year are already on sale via the website, work is ongoing to finalise the programme and arrange for it to be printed. Work on the 2017 programme of events is also underway. Although we are inundated with requests and suggestions for/from tribute bands we are looking to diversify our programme as much as possible. Jai and Harri would welcome suggestions of other acts which might be suitable for the theatre, and ideas for

future in-house productions of plays and musicals (other than current or recent West End shows for which the performing rights are unlikely to be available). We are hoping to concentrate more heavily on in house productions in future as these are much more lucrative. Jai said that we were also hoping in due course to host a Sci-fi convention and cinema nights. Harri said that it was not currently possible to host children's shows because of the lack of raked seating.

## **6. Promotional Events**

### **South Street - Sat 28 May and Sat 9 July**

Dave explained that Havering Council had agreed to allow us to use the spot outside Santander on South Street from 9.00 am - 5.00 pm to promote the theatre free of charge on these two dates (the first of which is the weekend before our in house production of 'Big'), with the possibility of other dates to follow if it is deemed a success. It is hoped that we will by then have our own gazebo and a new Brookside mascot will make its' first appearance.

### **Music in the Park – Raphael Park - Sun 24 July**

It has provisionally been agreed that we will also have a presence – probably within the Friends of Raphael and Lodge Farm Park's own tent – at this event and Dave is due to meet with them shortly to confirm details.

### **Havering Show – Harrow Lodge Park – Sun 28 and Mon 29 August**

We are also hoping to have a presence at this event and further details will follow.

We will need volunteers to help at all these events, handing out promotional material and talking to people about the theatre. The events will be added to the interactive calendar and everyone is encouraged to consider whether they are free to help on these dates.

We are keen to have a presence at other significant events in the borough and suggestions of other suitable events would be welcome.

## **7. Date of next meeting**

We are provisionally scheduling these meetings on a quarterly basis, so the next meeting is due to take place on 26<sup>th</sup> July. A decision as to whether to proceed will be made nearer the time depending on who is available and what there is to talk about.

Dave and Katrina will organise another social event similar to the recent event at the Mawney Arms, to take place after the run of 'Big'.