

President and Chairman's address

The Marlow Players Annual General Meeting 18th June 2024 8:15 pm
in The Studio

Welcome to everyone here.

This has been a busy and very successful year for the Players. Not only have we had a new and very dynamic organisational head in Sally Stafford, who will as Treasurer, present the annual accounts later this evening, but we have had new actors and a vigorous backstage crew. In large part this has been due to Jossy's recruitment of Alex and Ross and her facilitation of the Great Marlow School liaison, but in addition our publicity has recruited new members. We have a regular number of enquiries, and Hilary's responses are always prompt, positive and inviting. This year we retained Georgina and Sharon and Sarah, making enormous contributions, as we now have a new publicity and business sub committee, a new website manager and graphic designer for our programmes and posters(Tara-Lee Hollander) and a means of transporting the set at low cost (Pierre Hollander) and it would be marvellous if we could lure more new members into the Studio.

New eyes on our business and communications have resulted in larger audiences and very successful events.

The Committee of Gloria, Sally, Jossy, Andy, Hilary, and Alison have met regularly to plan ahead and there has been a full programme of activities.

The Marlow Carnival was an opportunity to showcase our talents by offering, in the open air, extracts from *A Bunch of Amateurs*, and a smallish audience stopped in their tracks to admire us. The stall was managed throughout the day, and we handed out several flyers advertising ourselves. We will have another opportunity this September, and I hope this will recruit.

With Gloria's direction and John's tireless backstage support we offered three performances of Murder Mystery "Radio " Plays during the Autumn: a mode of presentation which is becoming more popular with amdram groups. I think we were amongst the first locally, and the sound effects and energy of the actors and presenters make it a very entertaining evening. The fact that the scripts are largely home grown makes them particularly special. We had two private performances- for the Upper Thames Sailing Club and for the Royal Oak (who want us back!) and a public performance in Liston Hall. Each was a packed event.

We then moved to a staged performance at Great Marlow School of *The Importance of Being Earnest* , directed by Andrew Stafford. It was exciting to have five new actors. By the end of the rehearsal period I knew the actors were ready: the set was prepared by David Choules , Andy Scott and me on Saturdays (we now have new "toblerone" faces!); furniture was borrowed from a neighbour and the props were assembled by David as Stage Manager, and the costumes by Gloria. Cast worked hard to find props, and extra costume items and we all turned up to help at the Get In. Graham Evans did

wonders with the lighting and technology at the school: we all cleared and cleaned the stage and set out the auditorium and Sally Hilary and others managed the tickets, publicity and front of house- and the interval drinks, which included the performance and alcohol sales licence.

The set and lighting rig were athletically supported by Toby, who leapt from tower to ladder and shelf with enormous agility and willing energy, the technical rehearsal on Tuesday went like a dream, thanks to wonderful work by Alison, Graham and David and the cast and our Dress rehearsal and performances like clockwork, supported by drafted in helpers front of house and backstage. Georgina's massive cake and the sandwiches and muffins all in place and fresh each night, the atmospheric lighting , the exactly placed sound effects and the real professionalism of the cast delighted the audiences who were in larger numbers than the previous year, and the play was a social, artistic and financial success. The Get out went very smoothly, everybody working together and we finished up with a party at 8 Pound Lane, with thanks to Sally for her hospitality.

Hospitality was the watchword at our next event: the visit of Les Baladins at the end of May. To be honest, I was fearful that we would not have enough beds, that there would be difficulties with the stage , as GMS had a new, untried lighting system installed at Easter, and we would not have an audience. Three weeks before the show we had sold only three tickets.

How misplaced those fears were. Georgina led a persistent publicity campaign with assistance from others, and the trickle of tickets turned into a decent stream. With healthy door sales we ended up with a 60 plus audience, enthusiasm and close attention and a marvellous evening. Graham was in attendance throughout, as he sorted a working control board for the lighting system, mounted the tower to rig, sourced and provided our sound system when the Baladins technology wouldn't work. They and we and Great Marlow School owe him a huge debt of gratitude for being so competent, reliable and patient: truly professional. He also gave a lot of time to come in to the school beforehand. I also came in to check the stage and auditorium and Michael and his team did everything we asked. With the management and organisation at our end in capable hands we ended up financially in the black for the first time and I should like to thank the Marlow Town Council for their grant of £250 for this event.

The weekend was of course a wonderful success because Gloria in particular organised and cooked the Friday night supper to welcome our friends, who arrived, owing to problems with the English Border control one or even two hours late, the last arriving at Maidenhead at 10 pm ; she and Hilary provided the afternoon tea at the School and managed front of house; organised the party after the show hosted at Alison's spacious and beautifully lit home and then had us all to Sunday lunch. Gloria and John hosted 6 Baladins as well: what a marathon and how much we owe to them both. It was another team effort: before the event, with publicity, posters and programmes, with the get in and get out and the hosting, Players did an enormous amount to make this a stunning event, and Les Baladins knew it! Whether we can continue with this

exceptional feature of our Calendar remains to be worked out, as the date we booked well in advance for our return in 2025 has been cancelled by the Jean Vilar management and to date we have no substitute date or venue.

In our dealings with them, the staff at GMS, led by Michael Nesterovich have been totally helpful and accommodated all our needs.

I had hoped we might attract more of the GMS pupils and parents, and we worked to publicise in the school network. I gave two coaching sessions to support A Level Drama students in their Shakespeare monologues in the hope that this would open up a channel: so far this has not happened, but I shall persist!

We have our usual summer activities to look forward to: a poetry evening, a maintenance evening when the weather improves, and a maintenance weekend this year as the Studio needs painting externally, and open air performances at Hall Barn and at Wargrave, where Andy Scott was Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* a week ago, and the regular orchard performances at Hughenden Valley, to support Ross and Andy and Jossy.

Let's hope a few more new members will join us in the next year.

We shall start reading potential scripts for our next major staged show in July, and we hope to choose before the start of November, so that auditioning can begin and we can cast by the start of December.

In September we have the Carnival, a performance of another Murder Mystery at the Royal Oak and later on a date for a performance in Liston Hall.

In all this there has been in the background superb organisation and we must thank especially Sally Stafford, who took over the financial direction and all the other organisational work that Brian Couling had done for many years. We now have Health and Safety and Equal Opportunity and Safeguarding policies and Officers to implement them, with the certificates demanded by the Insurance Policy, new fire extinguishers and first aid box and the paypal, bank arrangements and publicity machine and the heating and lighting of the Studio have been reviewed to become more affordable. We have a programme and website designer and so much more. I know we are all really grateful for all this hard work.

Again, thank you to the Committee who have been very loyal and supportive to the Players

Andrew Stafford , President.