

Rococo Players

AGM 2022 - Chair's Report

It seems a very long time ago that we met for the last AGM and no-one could have foreseen the challenges that lay before us.

Early in March 2020, we held very successful auditions for our forthcoming production of 'Twelfth Night'. With an excellent turn-out, we were able to field a talented and enthusiastic cast who combined a healthy mix of old and new members, as well as a wide range of age and experience. We aimed to stage our production later in the year at two new venues, St Mary de Crypt in Gloucester and Chapel Arts in Cheltenham.

However, like so many other groups and ventures, our plans were thwarted by the Pandemic and in an atmosphere of ever-increasing uncertainty, we were forced to cancel our show for that year.

Many of us thought that 2021 would see the end of restrictions, but that was not to be the case. Early in the year, however, the committee took the brave decision to go ahead with the production, despite all the problems that Covid was raising.

With nearly all the original cast being available and willing, we met together in June for supper and a read through. Pauline, Martin and Adam joined the team and the cast was complete. Excitement was building and there was a real determination to soldier on, regardless!

Rehearsals started in September, initially in the newly converted "studio" at Chester House, then moving to a new rehearsal venue, here at the WI hall in Prestbury. Despite one or two gaps when cast had to self-isolate, rehearsals went ahead reasonably smoothly and the play began to take shape. One or two changes to the original cast were made along the way and we were delighted to welcome Hannah to the Rococo family. The group spirit was tremendous and we knew we had a successful show in the making. I would like to pay particular tribute to Jason Blackburn, who stepped into a leading role with only two weeks to curtain up. His professionalism, good humour and willingness to take a huge risk earned our respect, admiration and deep gratitude.

De Crypt and Chapel Arts were venues that provided interesting and atmospheric opportunities for staging, but both presented different challenges. We were warmly welcomed by the staff in Gloucester and were quickly made to feel at home.

We enjoyed the hospitality and space that de Crypt provided, especially when presented in the interval with chocolates and home-made cakes from the staff. It was a little disappointing that our audience numbers were fewer than we had hoped, but given the emergence of Omicron, it was a miracle we had an audience at all!

Chapel Arts provided a bright, airy performance space, but things had changed since our first visit there and we no longer had a Green Room. The cast were forced to change on the balcony! All credit to them as they had to sit in silence through all the performances. What professionalism you all showed!

I think it is fair to say that we made friends at all our new venues, including here with the Prestbury WI, and all have asked us to come back again.

Twelfth Night was a major success, not just for its wonderfully talented actors but also for the dedicated, caring crew who so capably supported them. John was an organised and thoughtful stage manager. Dave Bridges gave us lighting in spaces that were the most challenging I remember. Chris kept everyone on track with his understanding and sensitive prompting and Pat and Henry did a sterling job on props.

I would particularly like to thank Pat for her role as assistant, coming to nearly every rehearsal and supporting us all so lovingly along the way.

All this would not have been possible without the splendid committee who oversaw the production from beginning to end without ever a cross words or disagreement. John, our vice-chair built all the scenery and took care of the finances. I would like to thank him for his detailed financial report, and the excellent advice, support and friendship he always offers. Barry, our secretary, oversaw the lovely programme. Adam took care of the heavy work, over-seeing the logistics of staging a production at two different venues and Katie and Jaz provided the splendid publicity on social media that ensured we had an appreciative audience to perform to. Sadly, Jaz has decided to step down from the committee due to work pressure, but we would all like to thank her for her hard work over the last few years. Jaz, you have left a legacy to Rococo with your brilliant videos. Thank you!

And so to the future. On Monday the committee met for supper and champagne to toast the old and welcome the new. We all feel there is a momentum within Rococo and we want to work with that to build a bright future. We have invited ideas from potential directors and I am delighted to say that we have some very exciting proposals to consider. Once the committee has had a chance to consider these, we will let you know the outcome as soon as possible.

Watch this space!

Antoinette Wilson
Chair – Rococo Players
February 2022