

## Chairwoman's Report. Rococo Players 2023

2022 started with energy and momentum. Coming off the back of a highly successful production of *Twelfth Night*, there was a real sense of excitement and purpose. We had a Director already in place, who wanted to stage an adaptation of Turgenev's *Month in the Country*, and we were all ready to begin casting.

And then Mr Putin got greedy and invaded Ukraine. Suddenly, producing a Russian classic no longer seemed such a good idea, as anti-Russian feeling was running high, and we had real doubts as to whether it was viable or even moral to go ahead. Sadly, we took the decision to pull the plug and for several months we searched for a substitute play. Usually, a Director has a desire to work on a specific play and has the time to choose one that will be suitable for Rococo. Trying to find a play with appeal, a good story, varied interesting characters of both sex and above all, one that would sell well is difficult enough, but under pressure it was nigh impossible. In the end, the Director withdrew, and I suggested *Great Expectations* instead, as I was familiar with Neil Bartlett's adaptation.

We didn't have time to scout around for new venues, so we decided to return to St Mary de Crypt, knowing the space would work well for us and that we would be sure of a warm welcome. We weren't disappointed and we feel as if we have made good friends there in Gloucester.

Auditions went well and I was delighted to welcome back some dear Rococo regulars, as well as excited to meet some new members, Dave and Will. The production was launched at a garden party in August, where we sat outside in the sunshine, read through the play, and enjoyed a lovely paella, cooked by Chris.

A workshop session in Prestbury WI Hall started the process of using physical theatre to create an ensemble company. For many of us this was a different style and approach, and I was delighted how the company came together to own the process of creating the action.

Rehearsals were held at two new venues, the Cheltenham Junior Library, sourced by Barry and the Pittville Scouts' Hut, sourced by Adam. Both proved useful, especially when we found out how to heat the hall!

Just before Christmas we had a bit of a setback, as several people contracted covid and then the snow arrived. We had to abandon some rehearsals and pray for better weather next year.

All was fine though and rehearsals gained momentum as we approached the show. I was thrilled when Gareth Bass agreed to come on board as our technical director. His knowledge and expertise made light work of a very technically challenging show and the fact that he pre-plotted many of the cues at rehearsals, saved us hours during the Tech.

Our show ran for 4 days, and, for the first time, we introduced a matinee performance which was very successful.

For the first time ever, we were faced with a new problem, a week before the run all the tickets sold out for every show, although we did do our best not to turn away anyone from the door.

The splendid week was crowned by a lovely gathering in the Robert Raikes, and I was delighted that so many people turned up to help with the get out, tidy up and return costumes. It certainly made for light work!

I think the play was a resounding success for several reasons:

it was a story that people were familiar with and many studied it at school

We reduced the price of our tickets to encourage more people to come and see it.

Playing in one venue meant we didn't split our audience.

But mostly

Over the years we have built a reputation for first-class shows and wonderfully talented actors!

I am delighted that Adam Wright has agreed to direct our next production Queen Margaret and so we continue to go from strength to strength. More about that later..

I personally feel this has been a wonderful year for Rococo and, although challenging at times, one of the most rewarding I can remember.

Huge thanks and appreciation must go to a splendid committee, John, Hannah, Barry, Katie and Adam. We have met regularly and have never had a cross word. Our meetings are often very sociable affairs over a meal or a drink. We share the work and responsibility, so no-one feels over-whelmed and we make a great team. We are always eager to welcome new members so please do think about whether you would like to be involved.