

# **HEIDELBERG THEATRE COMPANY**

## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2017**

### **Welcome**

On behalf on the Committee I would like to welcome you all to the 2017 Annual General Meeting of the Heidelberg Theatre company.

As we complete our 65<sup>th</sup> year we can proudly reflect on a year that has been both successful and rewarding. To date we have produced 415 plays, including the season of the HTC Youth Production, The Adventures of King Arthur, which commenced on Friday and runs until next Saturday.

Our subscriber numbers this year are 616, which is a positive improvement on the previous year, which was 569 subscribers. We have continued to enjoy very high occupancy rates for the season ranging from 78.57 to 100%. This equates to a season average of 90.39%. We are pleased to have received favourable reviews and regular positive audience feedback during the year. As one of Melbourne's leading non-professional theatre companies we are very proud of the high standard that we are able to achieve, showcasing our best talent both on and off stage.

The Theatre Company has continued to maintain a sound financial position with adequate cash reserves to cover at least a year's operating expenditure.

### **Playbill**

The occupancy rates for our 5 plays in 2017 achieved great results. This is a resounding confirmation of both the playbill choice for the season and the respect we have achieved for the quality of our productions. The occupancy rates for each play were:

78.54% for Australia Day - by Jonathan Biggins - directed by Joan Moriarty  
100% for Pride and Prejudice - by Simon Reade, based on the novel by Jane Austen – directed by Tim Scott

92.6% for All My Sons - by Arthur Miller – directed by Chris McLean  
83.91% for The Club - by David Williamson – directed by Gavin Williams  
96.89% for Blood Brothers – by Willy Russell – directed by Bruce Akers

The Heidelberg Theatre Company continues to attract some of the best theatre talent available in Melbourne and we enjoy an ever increasing base of great people. Just as important is our dedicated and talented team who drive both the artistic and administrative needs of the company and as a result we proudly produce some of the best non-professional theatre in Melbourne.

The plays of the 2017 season will be covered by Jill Scott, Leslie Hardcastle and Rodney Charles with their appraisal of the 5 productions later in the AGM.

The HTC Youth group this year has been under the coordination of Ryan Purdey and Morgan Thomas Connor. The director of this year's production is Sam Howard. The group is performing The Adventures of King Arthur, written by, Erich Fordham and Ryan Purdey. The season opened on Friday night and runs until Sunday next weekend.

The rights for the 2018 season plays have been secured and the 5 plays as advertised in our playbill are:

Crossing Delancey	- by Susan Sandler
The House of Bernarda Alba	- by Federico Garcia Lorca
Private Lives	- by Noel Coward
Blue Stockings	- by Jessica Swale
Inheritance	- by Hannie Rayson

The December edition of our newsletter Prompts included a link to the HTC web site and the 2018 Playbill. Once you have clicked on to our website, you can click on the Playbill link and down load the Playbill, which includes to the booking form for next year's season, complete the form and then send in your subscription.

Printed copies of the Playbill were also handed out to all audience members during the season of Blood Brothers. If anyone has not received a copy or

2018 Playbill and would like one, or an additional copy for a friend, please collect one from the foyer today.

We will hear more about the 2018 season from the Directors later in the AGM.

## **VDL Awards.**

Our nominated play entered in the Victorian Drama League Awards this year was All My Sons.

We received the following nominations:

Best Costume design  
Wendy Drowley

Best Actress in a Minor Role  
Kate Manicom - in the role of Lydia Lubey

Best Actor in a Minor Role  
Gavin Baker - in the role of Jim Bayliss

Best Actress in a Supporting Role  
Claire Abagia - in the role of Anne Deever

We congratulate all of the nominees and also recognise the great work of Chris McLean as the director for this memorable production.

## **HTC Committee**

Elected unopposed to the committee at the 2016 AGM were Joan Moriarty Jim Thomson, Ryan Purdey, Melanie Belcher, Morgan Thomas Connor, Noel Purdey and Ken McLeish.

This provided 14 committee members. The rules allow for up to 18 committee members.

During the year Ken McLeish resigned from the Committee and we accepted his resignation. As a result, Tim Scott was co-opted to join the committee during the year.

The HTC Committee members for 2017 were:

Wendy Drowley - Vice President  
Bruce Akers –Vice President, Treasurer  
Brett Hunt – Secretary  
Joan Moriarty - Play selection  
Tim Scott – Set builders  
Noel Purdey- Maintenance  
Jim Thomson - Publicity  
June Cherrey- Tickets  
Maureen McInerney – Front of House  
Karen Wakeham  
Melanie Belcher  
Jenni Purdey – Membership  
Morgan Thomas Connor - Youth Theatre  
Ryan Purdey – Youth Theatre

The committee requested that I should continue as President and I accepted the invitation for the 2017 year. I am also grateful for the strong support of our two vice presidents, Wendy Drowley and Bruce Akers

Our secretary, Brett Hunt, has again this year managed to ably cope with the responsibility of handling the business of the committee, as he has done for the last 14 years. Brett always delivers his responsibilities with a blend of calm reliability and good humour.

I would also like to acknowledge the members of the Play Selection Committee. Chaired by Joan Moriarty, with a sub-committee consisting of; Wendy Drowley, Bruce Akers, Karen Wakeham, Maureen McInerney, Jim Thomson and Margaret Hassall, they set the direction of the Company by choosing the right variety of plays and directors which ultimately drives the success of the Company. Tim Scott also accepted an invitation to join the play selection committee this year.

The membership of the Heidelberg Theatre Company can be confident that their committee has successfully set the direction for HTC and guided the many talented people who have generously volunteered their time and skills to ensure that our great community theatre has developed and continues to maintain an encouraging artistic environment, whilst at all times ensuring responsible financial management and reinvestment.

## **Membership**

Our subscriber numbers in 2017 were 616, compared to 561 last year. This includes our 10 Life members.

Wendy Drowley

Bruce Akers

Lois Connor

June Cherrey

John Knorr

Fern Mathews

Maureen McInerney

Joan Moriarty

Toni Tyers

Chris McLean

## **Financial Matters**

Our Treasurer Bruce Akers, will provide a full financial overview later in the meeting of the 2017 year.

We are pleased to report that the Heidelberg Theatre Company has been able to maintain a financially sound position and we currently hold cash reserves in the order of \$187K, compared to \$171K last year.

Our revenue this year has been \$173K compared to \$187K in 2016 and we achieved an operating surplus of \$25K, compared to our \$26K operating surplus last year.

Our operating expenditure, before depreciation of \$11K, was in the order of \$137K, compared to last year which was around \$161K.

## **Bookings and ticket box**

Since the introduction of the online booking system 8 years ago, we have seen the acceptance and use by our no-subscription patrons grow each year. The ongoing maintenance and system enhancement continues to be coordinated by Toni Tyers, supported with great assistance from Bob Tyers.

The Box Office is capably handled by the dedicated team of Toni Tyers, June Cherrey, Fiona Campbell, Jenni Purdey, Brett Hunt and Carol Farr, who have once again ensured that the box office is run with flexibility and reliability.

## **Prompts, Programmes, Posters and Playbill**

The editorial task of producing our Theatre newsletter “Prompts” was managed by Ryan Purdey this year with assistance from Toni Tyers.

Our annual Playbill flyer, programmes and posters for this year’s plays were once again skilfully crafted by Chris McLean. In addition Chris also manages the HTC web and the HTC Facebook page.

## **Archives**

The history of HTC is in the capable hands of Wendy Drowley and Toni Tyers who have ensured that our archive collection has been catalogued and recorded using the many resources available to HTC

## **Foyer Artspace**

Our Artspace Curator Teresa Schipano has once again done a wonderful job in 2017 coordinating the foyer art displays including works from, artists from the ‘Thou Art Mum’ group in Diamond Creek, Mick Poor, Gordon Sonnenberg, Cat Jardine, Marie Mackrell, and Louise Anthony. We also exhibited a collection of furniture and props made by the late Neville Wilkie, and several costume displays coordinated by Wendy Drowley and Rhonda Huckle.

## **Publicity and Promotion**

During the year Jim Thomson coordinated the publicity responsibilities for HTC with assistance from Toni Tyers.

## **Important people**

As our resident photographer, David Belton has provided us with some great images for our programmes, front of house and archives again this year and his work is greatly appreciated and admired by all of us at the theatre.

The Front of House roster for each production has been co-ordinated by Jenny Gilbert and is delivered by a team of wonderful volunteers who willingly undertake the Front of House duties for each play season. Ensuring that there is always something to drink and biscuit or two, the FOH supplies are in the safe hands of Maureen McInerney and Sheelagh Belton.

Set designs this year have been created by Marie Mackrell, John Shelbourn, Chris McLean, Owen Evans and Bruce Akers. Set realisation and artistry has been achieved in the capable hands of Marie Mackrell, Mal Cother, John Shellbourn, and Brenton Staples.

Our talented team of set builders, led by Owen Evans, includes Tim Scott, Noel Purdey, Paddy Moriarty, Des Harris, Brett Hunt, Max Alawwad, Neville Wilkie, Doug McNaughton, Mal Cother, Norm Munks, Ian McCabe, Chris McLean and Jim Thomson.

There are always memorable collaborations which should be recognised and one such project this year was the Forte Piano built for the production of *Pride and Prejudice*, by the team of the late Neville Wilkie, assisted by John Rowe and Kristine Richardson.

Our technical and back stage crews included the talents of Deryk Hartwick, John Rowe, Michael Rowe, Melanie Belcher, Bobbie Parish, Rob Wanless, Mark Wong, Katrina Williams, Margaret Hassall, Morgan Thomas Connor, Craig Pearcey, Gavin Williams, Tamsin Mackie, Rhys Purdey, Harrison, Emma Jaeger-Pound, Stella Tehan, Harrison Rose, Jarrod Catt and many more.

Our properties have been arranged by Bronwyn Parker, Bobbie Parish, Karen Wakeham, Melanie Belcher and Bruce Akers.

Our extensive wardrobe and costume requirements continue to be managed by Wendy Drowley, Lois Connor, Cathy Christensen, Calypso Spendlove, Maureen McInerney and Emily Kennedy.

Our thanks and recognition also go to the Production Coordinators this year who were: Joan Moriarty, Jim Thomson, Maureen McInerney, Margaret Hassall, Joan Moriarty and Melanie Belcher.

We were also fortunate to have secured a group of talented directors this year including Joan Moriarty, Tim Scott, Chris McLean, Gavin Williams and Bruce Akers. We would also like to acknowledge the generous assistance that Chris McLean provided to Bruce Akers during the rehearsal period of the production of Blood Brothers.

## **Council**

The Heidelberg Theatre Company is grateful to the Banyule Council for the loan of their Phonic Ear Kit during the year. This facility is greatly appreciated by those audience members who are hearing impaired.

We met with the Council in January this year to discuss our lease status. Whilst we exercised our option back in 2013 for 10 years, the Council want to recognise our occupation with a document which is consistent with the standard community lease that they currently use. There are also some administrative details to correct in relation to the property title and the Council would like to see the Theatre available for use by other community groups. The proposal would be for a 10 year term and the commencement date to be agreed between the parties. We provided feedback to the Council at the end of February this with our requested amendments and a proposed commencement date for January 2018. We are still waiting for a response.

Accordingly we are working on the basis that our current term expires in 2023.

## **Turnham Avenue Development**

Despite 140 written objections, a petition with over 2,500 objectors and 15 opposing applicants who spoke at the Council meeting in June 2016 including the Heidelberg Theatre Company, the Banyule City Councillors approved an application for a Woolworths supermarket to be constructed at 44 Turnham Ave, Rosanna, wedged between our Theatre and the Rosanna Library.

As a result of the conditions applied to the planning approval, the matter was taken to VCAT in February this year for a 7 day hearing. The Rosanna Community group challenged the approval decision fighting many aspects of the proposal including the removal of native vegetation, a lack of building setback, a 36% reduction in car park supply against the planning ratios, poor traffic and truck access, retail fragmentation and impact to local amenity. With the severe flood on the site on 29<sup>th</sup> December, 2016 there were also challenges to the proposed basement carpark.

In order to defend their positions, both Woolworths and the Banyule Council engaged substantial legal representation and expert planning consultants to argue their respective cases. In order to assist the Rosanna Community Group and protect our community amenity in Turnham Avenue, the Heidelberg Theatre Company contributed \$5,000 towards the Group's fighting fund.

Despite the extraordinary effort and workload by the Rosanna Community Group, the Planning application was approved on 5th April 2017 and the Council has now completed the land transaction to Woolworths for the old Council office and car park at 44 Turnham Avenue.

Currently the office and car park is leased to the Level Crossing Removal Authority construction team. No dates have been confirmed yet for the construction for the supermarket.

## **Car Parking and level crossing removal works**

As a result of the construction works underway on the level crossing removal project, the railway car parking opposite the Theatre has been temporarily removed and will remain closed until late 2018.

There is limited street parking in Turnham Avenue however, the car park in front of the old Council office has been leased to the Level Crossing Authority and is now restricted as non-public parking and is controlled by boom gates.

There is still ample parking space behind the library and whilst there are signs nominating that many of the bays are reserved for the contractors working on the crossing project, Theatre patrons are permitted to park in those car parking bays when attending a performance at HTC. There is also additional parking on the other side of the railway line in Ellesmere Parade.

As a result of this disruption to parking, we have advised patrons to allow a little extra travel time in order to enjoy a sherry and a have a few spare minutes before curtain.

A further impact of the level crossing removal project is the temporary closure of the Rosanna train station. As a result buses are now running between Heidelberg and MacLeod stations and this arrangement is planned to be in place until the opening of the new Rosanna railway station which is expected to be in mid-2018.

## **Work Health & Safety**

We have been incident free this year. We have continued to include O.H. &S. reporting as part of the monthly committee meeting and as result we have managed to maintain a safe working environment and safe work practices for all our volunteer workers.

## **Community involvement and Charity**

During the year the Theatre has been regularly used by the staff of Rosanna Library and Banyule City Council. The theatre was also made available to Araluen for another Andy Griffith book launch and fundraising evening.

Preview nights were available to charity groups at the discounted rate of \$10 per ticket for groups of 50 or more. This offer was taken up during the year by several groups including The Soroptimists, Oxfam, Watsonia Probus, Eltham North Probus, Friends of Salt Creek, U3A Banyule, THE CHO!OR, and Greensborough Probus.

We have supported various groups, school fund raising initiatives and charities including Headspace Collingwood during the year by providing tickets to our plays.

Props and costumes from our extensive collection were loaned to several other amateur theatre companies around Melbourne during the year.

HTC has also continued to support the community radio station 96.5 Inner FM during the year.

## **Vale**

We said goodbye to following Heidelberg Theatre Company family members this year who have taken their final curtain.

### **GEORGE (RUSSELL) BISSETT**

On the 9<sup>th</sup> January we received the sad news of George's passing, following a stroke. George had for many years been one of HTC's most valued and recognised members and was a past recipient of the Bill Cherry Award. George was a mainstay in the Sound Design and Sound Production for many of our shows, and his creativity and expertise was recognised and acknowledged by the many awards he received. For many years he was a regular presenter on Inner FM show.

George has been sorely missed by many of us.

## **NEVILLE WILKIE**

On the 4<sup>th</sup> May, Heidelberg Theatre Company received the sad news of the passing of Neville Wilkie. Neville joined our set building crew after attending an HTC Open Day in 2008 and by the following year he was a well-known regular. Neville soon developed a reputation within the Company for his ingenuity in designing and creating specialised furniture and props. Examples of his excellent craftsmanship appeared in many of our shows and included creative items such a retractable dagger, a sniper 'rifle' and matching case, a water pump, an old theatre device for making the sound of rain, an old French fireplace, the 12th century king's throne that now adorns our foyer, beautifully crafted chairs and a 19th century piano-forte.

Neville had other talents. A skilled cello player, (he was a member of the Preston Symphony Orchestra), Neville's impeccable musical renditions could always be relied upon to add a touch of class to the 'HTC Capers' concerts that the Company ran during the Banyule Winter Festival. He often bought his own tools to set building and working bees, and would always be happy to loan a fellow worker a tool if the Company did not have one available. At the working bee morning teas, you could always rely on Neville to pull out a pack of tasty bikkies and put them on the communal table to be shared with the rest of the crew. Neville received the Bill Cherrey Award in 2014. It was a fine Sunday afternoon on 23<sup>rd</sup> April this year, 12 days before he died, that many of Neville's family and friends gathered to share a wonderful celebration of Neville's life, acknowledging how much we had all valued and enjoyed his contribution to our lives over the years.

## **DAVID SMALL**

In late July we were saddened to receive the unexpected news of the death of David Small. David was a long time HTC member, a great actor, an accomplished director and a major figure in Melbourne's theatre community. David joined HTC in 1983, stepping immediately into the memorable role of Henry II in 'The Lion In Winter'.

During his time at HTC, David acted in a remarkable 27 plays and directed 8. Among his most memorable performances were Sir Thomas More in 'A

Man For All Seasons', David Bliss in 'Hay Fever', Einstein in 'Insignificance', Ralph Nickelby in 'The Life And Adventures Of Nicholas Nickelby' and Jack in 'Brighton Beach Memoirs'. Among his directorial achievements were, 'Amadeus', 'Hobson's Choice', 'Burke's Company' and 'The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickelby'. This year is the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that memorable production. In recent years, David also took cameo roles in 'Arsenic & Old Lace' and 'One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest'; his last role at HTC was as the authoritative voice of the Judge in 'Twelve Angry Men'.

For many years, David served on the Heidelberg Theatre Company Committee and held many roles including Artistic Director, Publicity Officer and as a member of the 50th Anniversary Committee. He was very generous with his support of younger actors, many of whom remember him fondly as a mentor and valued his wise advice.

In addition to his time at HTC, David was an active member of the Victorian Drama League, serving as a council member, awards judge, reviewer and editor of the VDL magazine 'Theatre Craft'.

David also acted with many other Melbourne theatre companies to great acclaim, twice winning the Gold Award for Best Actor at the VDL Awards. For 27 years, David was a presenter on the local radio station Inner FM, presenting a fine range of programs spanning theatre and worship. David also directed four productions of the Annual Melbourne Passion Play at Doncaster.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> August hundreds of David's friends and family attended a memorial service which included beautiful tributes given by his daughters, grandchildren and Kevin Trask, celebrating a long life well lived. We all miss David's immense presence and influence.

## **ADRIAN CALLINAN**

HTC has also said goodbye to Adrian Callinan this year, an actor and patron of the company for many years. Adrian was the esteemed Principal of Macleod High School for many years, and a keen admirer of classical literature. He joined HTC in 1986, and acted in Burke's Company, 'Amadeus', in addition to lauded performances as Reverend Chasuble and Friar Laurence in 'The Importance Of Being Earnest' and 'Romeo & Juliet'.

respectively. Adrian will be remembered as a fine actor and a true gentleman.

## **MICHAEL BOND**

HTC was also sad to hear of the passing of Michael Bond this year. Michael was known around the company as one of the "young ones" from the theatre's early days at the venerable Rechabite Hall. Michael acted with HTC, learned the ropes, became a director, helped to start Saturday morning theatre classes for children and wrote three very well-received pantomimes for the theatre. Michael acted in 10 plays, directed 'My Fat Friend' in 1981, built sets and steadfastly served on the Committee, managing the lighting for plays for many years in the new theatre at Turnham Avenue. In recent years, Michael was a reviewer for the VDL and a director for the Encore Theatre Company and the Essendon Theatre Company.

## **DON VIDGEN**

We also acknowledge the passing of Don Vidgen. Don was a Life Member of the Heidelberg Theatre Company and was a driving force in the days when the Company was known as the Heidelberg Repertory Group, or the Heidelberg Rep. His involvement started in 1960 when he acted in his first play and continued into the late 1980s when he was very involved in the purchase and renovation of the bus depot in Turnham Avenue which become the theatre we occupy today. Don held many roles during his time with HTC, including Director, Actor, Set designer, set builder and very importantly as Secretary and then as Treasurer for many years. Don was honoured with a Life Membership in 1989 in recognition of his outstanding contribution to HTC.

## **CAROL VIDGEN**

We also acknowledge the passing of Carol Vidgen, just two weeks after the passing of her husband Don. Carol was also very supportive of the Theatre in our early days. In 1974 Carol undertook the huge task of Ticket Secretary, a role that she held for 3 years, and back in the 70s bookings were taken via the phone at their home. There are also great memories of many wonderful and happy Christmas parties at the Vidgen home.

Both Don and Carol are remembered as vital, energetic HTC members who helped establish the foundations of our young theatre company and enabled it to grown into the successful enterprise we are today.

## **Close**

On behalf of the Committee I am pleased to report that the 2017 year has been another good one for Heidelberg Theatre Company with our success measured with very good occupancy rates, positive feedback and deserved artistic recognition. As our 65<sup>th</sup> year draws to a close and we prepare to enter our 66<sup>th</sup> year in 2018, we can assure all members that the Heidelberg Theatre Company is in a strong position with sound a healthy financial position and with our many talented actors and workers we are artistically ready to accept the challenges in the year ahead.

We are very proud of the dedicated HTC members who willingly volunteer their talent and time to our thriving community asset, not only for the people of Banyule, but also for the greater theatre community of Melbourne. Our reputation for consistently delivering the highest quality non-professional theatre is well recognised and as result we continue to offer wonderful opportunities for involvement at all levels and ages, both on and offstage.

Our 2018 playbill promises to deliver both cultural diversity and great entertainment, whilst providing affordable live theatre that is accessible to a broad audience base.

On behalf of the Committee we thank all of those people who have generously contributed at all levels to ensure that 2017 has been another great year for The Heidelberg Theatre Company.

To our members and our appreciative audiences, we wish everyone a safe and happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

**John Gilbert**

**President Heidelberg Theatre Company  
December 2017**