



The Balally Players Theatre Company

Annual General Meeting

1 September 2020

[Via Zoom](#)

Chairperson's Report

Introduction

It is hard to believe that it has been a little over 12 months since we last met for our Annual General Meeting – between Covid-19 and the lockdown it feels like a decade has passed in the meantime! At our last AGM, the outgoing Committee gave us some recommendations on areas that needed to be addressed (e.g., container storage) and discussion from the floor prompted additional areas of concern (e.g., organization of the catering for 'Christmas at Marlay', and the need for better post-production planning). Along with the productions to be performed, the Committee took these as our priority projects for the year and set about designing and implementing our programme, which we centred around five strands: three primary (Artistic, Training and Social), supported by two secondary strands (Organisational and Marketing).

Artistic Strand

In the pre-Covid world of August last year, the Committee was ambitious in the breadth and depth of the artistic programme we would aim to deliver, which included:

- An evening of three one act plays in October 2019, two of which were new Irish writing by Company members;
- Successful outings in the Circuit, Glenealy and Bray Festivals of two of these one act plays, which resulted in us scooping the following accolades:

- Audience Awards for 'Waiting For You' in Naas and Coolgreaney;
- Directing and Adjudicator Awards for Aisling Uí Laoire in Skerries, Coolgreaney and Manorhamilton;
- Acting and performance awards for Hilary Madigan, myself, Máirín O'Sullivan and Brendan Phelan in Naas, Skerries, and Carrigallen;
- Costume merit award for 'I'm Not Laughing, I'm Screaming' in Glenealy;
- Performance merit award for Sinead McGinty-Donovan in Bray;
- Our long-running festive 'Christmas at Marlay' variety show, which was performed in Marlay Park House in December 2019;
- A full-length show, 'Alone It Stands', which was performed in the dlr Mill Theatre, in February 2020.

The arrival of Covid in March disrupted the remainder of our programme, cancelling some aspects, such as our annual Shakespeare show, but moving other aspects, such as our annual 'Page to Stage' evenings and our new Videography Project, online using platforms like Zoom, Facebook and YouTube. The real spirit of Balally Players shone through in this time as we all pulled together to stay in contact and keep the drama alive with five weeks of online reading sessions. The sessions covered excerpts from eight plays by writers ranging from Edward Albee to J. M. Synge, and even included a special 'Best Of' Christmas and Marlay Evening hosted by Mrs La Touche. Most importantly, the sessions gave the writers in our Company a forum to hear their works performed and I very much hope this is something we keep up going forward. Our Videography Project, led by Brendan O'Sullivan, also kept the creative juices flowing and saw the world premiere of "One Day At A Time", written and directed by Aoibhinn Finnegan.

Training and Social Strands

Coordinated by Carlotta Guizzardo, the Committee organised a number of theatre and social outings during the year and training workshops in voice and stage combat. We managed to have our Christmas Party in February, as has become the tradition, but our usually strong social scene was cut short by Covid. Thanks again to technology (Zoom and Kahoot) we were able to gather virtually for our ever-popular annual Pub Quiz online, and continue to keep our drama muscles flexed through online readings both of established playwrights and new writing from within the group.

Organisational and Marketing Strands

Underpinning the success of the artistic, social and training strands of the Committee's programme was a strong organisational and marketing effort behind the scenes both within the Committee and among the wider membership. In total, the Committee met 15 times during the year to track progress on the implementation of the programme, plan grant applications, both of which were successful, and continuously review the overall smooth running of the Company's activities. A key project for our organizational programme, as mandated at the last AGM, was the reorganization of the container, which is now in an orderly and accessible state.

Conclusion

It has been a difficult year for many of us and we have done extraordinarily well to get done what we got done, both before and during the current Covid-19 pandemic. Some of us have lost loved ones and we take a moment now to think of them and offer our sympathies to:

- Ciara O'Byrne on the loss of her mother, Reiltin;
- Barry O'Connor on the loss of his father, Enda;
- Jean Monahan on the loss of her son, Kevin;
- Una Twyford on the loss of her mother, Carmel, and brother, Aidan;
- Sean Daly on the loss of his father, Sean;

The successful delivery of the Committee's programme is due in no small part to the combined efforts of all our members, but I would like to conclude by recognising the efforts of a number of individuals whom I would like to "name and acclaim":

- Máirín O'Sullivan for her excellent marketing and communications throughout the year;
- Brendan O'Sullivan for his sound management of the Company's finances and his technological expertise supporting the Group's online activity this year;
- Carlotta Guizzardo for being our "Minister for Craic" on the Committee and organising all the workshops and training events, and the pre- and post-Covid social activities;

- Doris Cullen for being the grounded voice of reason and guiding hand of experience on this year's Committee;
- Mark Coen for keeping us all on track generally, and more specifically for greatly improving the catering arrangements and developing what I will call "The Coen Configuration" for managing a much-improved audience flow at 'Christmas at Marlay' this year;
- Barry O'Connor for his contribution to many aspects of the Company's activities, not least of which was the organization of our annual Pub Quiz;
- And finally, the directors, actors and production teams behind all our productions this year, both on-stage and online, without whom our programme would not have come to fruition. In particular, I would like to single out Mary Ryan, Dympna Murray and Pat Hand for their sterling (and largely unnoticed) work behind the scenes supporting many of this past year's productions.

Oran O'Rua
September 2020