



Godalming Theatre Group Annual Report to Members

Introduction (Denise Hodgkiss)

For my 6th Year in office I was so pleased that Peter agreed to act as co-chair. This has resulted in a seamless transition to take over knowing we are in such safe hands. Being chair of such a successful group is a real honour and very satisfying, but brings with it great responsibility – to maintain financial buoyancy, whilst allowing creativity and technical expertise to continue to flourish and progress further. It was certainly challenging to steer the group's survival through Covid, retain our reputation as an award-winning community theatre group against the backdrop of professional competition and of course nourishing our belief in the benefits GTG offers to the whole community to support the Arts.

60 years of Godalming Theatre Group is quite something!

Governance and Processes (Peter Flew)

Since joining Denise as co-chair in September, I have taken responsibility for looking at our policies and procedures to ensure that GTG is complying with the expectations of a registered charity and acts in line with good governance principles. This has included reviewing the constitution, a new version of which is in the AGM pack for members' consideration.

As a registered charity, we have three objectives:

- To encourage members to take an active interest in live theatre through participation in theatrical productions.
- To encourage the wider community to take an active interest in live theatre through visits to, and involvement with, GTG theatrical productions.
- To promote, maintain, improve and advance education in particular through the encouragement of the arts, including productions relating to the arts of drama, comedies and musicals.

All charities are legally bound to abide by their constitution document and the new version includes the improvements the committee have been working towards in the last two years. This includes ensuring that committee members have a good mix of experience, skills as well as time to undertake the work of the committee. This updated constitution extends the time a committee member can serve on the committee from four to nine years, and, during the AGM, we are asking for members to approve an extension for those who would normally have come off by now. This is because we don't wish to be suddenly reduced to a smaller than feasible number of committee members.



If you wish to know more about serving on the committee for a year 3 term or longer, please email chair@godalmingtheatregroup.co.uk at least a week before the AGM for committee consideration. All are welcome to come forward, but we are particularly looking to diversify the make-up of the committee in line with good governance principles.

We have also improved our safeguarding procedures: we have a named safeguarding officer and deputy (Peter Flew and Chris East) and a dedicated, monitored, safeguarding email address (safeguarding@godalmingtheatregroup.co.uk) for reporting concerns. We ensure all creatives are DBS-checked and safeguarding trained when the cast includes children (under-18s). This is on top of our excellent licensing arrangements for eligible, performing children.

At the start of each rehearsal period, everyone will be provided with a copy of our code-of-conduct, written to ensure everyone has the best time performing in our shows.

A highly successful 2023-24 season

Autumn 2023 opened with our hilarious play, Ladies' Day, directed by Mary Logan. This hilarious tale of fish factory workers having a day out at York racecourse was a delight; with a number of new cast members adding to the excellent depth of our regular actors. As well as delighting our audiences, our programme won a NODA excellence award.

At Christmas, we welcomed a new creative team to bring together the classic pantomime, Aladdin. Dan Bundy's energetic direction combined with musical direction from Lizzie Hales and choreography by Emily Owen created a treat for the packed out audiences in what was our last performance at the Ben Travers Theatre before it closed for refurbishment. We hope to be back there for our 2025 panto.

And last, but by no means least, Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's iconic school musical, turned West End smash hit, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. We were warmly welcomed to the Godalming Baptist Church which was transformed by the vision of director, Keith Thomas and a huge technical team. With musical direction from Steven Bean and the amazing choreography of Alison Chapman, this was a very special show. We welcomed a host of new actors, both young and young-at-heart, wowing audiences every time.

GTG 60 - Sparkling Sixty Soiree

Nine months of meticulous planning came together on Saturday 6th July when we celebrated 60 years of GTG in style. Even the weather was on its best behaviour and a wet day metamorphosed into a fabulous sunny evening as 130 guests gathered on the terrace of



Clock Barn Hall to raise a glass of pink bubbly in celebration of the GTG family. Cries of delight echoed as people who had not seen each other for many a year met up once again.

We were proud and delighted to welcome not only the five founder members of GTG, Josie Evans, Graeme and Dot Pullen, Terry Dionne and David Dray but also four generations of Desmond Holt's family including his son Mark and great grand-daughter Margot. Indeed, guests came from as far afield as Scotland, the Isle of Wight, and even Australia!

GTG members past and present joined friends, patrons and even some audience members for welcome canapes and drinks. Guests then enjoyed a two-course meal seated at tables named after key characters in GTG productions with a link to guests on each table. This was followed by a '60 years in 60 minutes' cabaret which took everyone on a nostalgic ride, revisiting iconic shows and significant historical events that shaped the world and much loved GTG.

Clock Barn Hall was decorated in bright pinks and chock full of flowers in all shades of pink echoing our GTG60 anniversary logo. Mannequins dressed in theatrical costume added to the ambience [thank you Denise and Carol]. A photobooth enabled guests to take home a reminder of the evening and the most energetic were still on the dance floor well after the midnight deadline.

We have received numerous messages of thanks and appreciation from guests who enjoyed the event very much. Thanks must go to the GTG events team Mad Gibb, Janet Goodwin, David Dray, Chris East, Brenda Baggott and Jenny Seddon who ensured this wonderful evening was such a success, to Isabel at Clock Barn Hall who allowed us to use their wonderful facilities and to Chris at Cutting Edge who worked with GTG to provide delicious food within our budget.

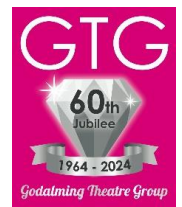
This event was heavily subsidised by GTG to ensure it was accessible to all our members, friends and patrons.

Here's to the future of GTG!

GYTG – Mad Gibb

Our youth group has been running for 27 years in its present format. Thanks must go to David and Madeleine for their consistent commitment to this valued area of the group. The feedback from past and present members is always so positive - a recent quote from a past member "I can't help but envy the kids who get to experience this sincerely joyful group today. GYTG is a truly special place that I will forever cherish deeply." *

Members have most recently been seen in *Kipps*, *Ladies Day*, all our pantos including the forthcoming *Cinderella* and of course *Joseph*. Group numbers are kept to a manageable level to ensure each youngster gets the best experience from their time with GYTG. Not only do they get to experience many aspects of theatre and performing arts but they are also the first port of call for main group productions when youngsters are needed.



Each year we lose a cohort of older ones as they move on to college and university and this year is no exception so from this September term we shall be able to take some new members. There is no weekly or termly charge, just the annual youth membership fee. If you know of anyone 12 years upwards who would benefit from being a GYTG member speak to David or Madeleine for more information.

*Full quote below:

"Returning to the Wilfred Noyce Centre this Wednesday, I was reminded of the profound impact GYTG had in shaping the person I am today. For six years, I had the privilege of entering a truly safe space where I was encouraged to be myself during such a formative period. Every week brought something new and exciting, challenging the group creatively as a team. The diverse opportunities provided to us elevated my confidence and honed skills that continue to serve me in my professional life. I am fortunate to have forged lifelong friendships within this group, making this Wednesday feel like reuniting with a second family. I am endlessly grateful to Mad and David for their unwavering support and guidance. I can't help but envy the kids who get to experience this sincerely joyful group today. GYTG is a truly special place that I will forever cherish deeply." Molly

Members, Friends Patrons – Joy Barnham

We currently have 66 Full Members (the highest since we introduced the membership scheme) and 43 friends/patrons. We've gained three new Friends this year and in addition received generous donations from them. The generosity of these people is a reflection of just how highly they regard GTG and appreciate the contribution it makes to the community. They bring many guests along and help circulate information about our productions.

Advertisers – Joy Barnham

This is our chance to thank the companies and organisations who regularly advertise in our programmes. We are very lucky to have had some give us their loyal support for several years: Rayners, K J Smith Solicitors, Emery & Orchard and Altitude. Between them they contribute £1200 per year which covers the cost of production, ensuring we make several hundred pounds surplus on sales. The advertising year is January to December so both the play and pantomime have been covered.

Box Office – Joy Barnham

Some people will have noticed that The Little Box Office has upgraded its website. It does provide a lot more functionality, including the facility to send a link for payment and



automatic release of tickets for those phoning in orders or having problems booking. Any feedback from users would be helpful as system upgrades will be made to improve user experience.

Front of House

After many years of faultless organisation, Joy has decided to step away from managing the Front of House operations. The committee will be working with each director to find someone to lead this operation on a show-by-show basis.

The duties include:

- setting up front of house to make it welcoming and attractive (and pack up afterwards)
- organising a front of house team of helpers for each performance ensuring they know the venue rules
- organising donations for, and preparing, the raffle for each performance
- greeting the audience and making them feel highly appreciated
- being amongst the last to leave to ensure everything looks ok for the next performance

Marketing and Publicity – Mad Gibb and Chris East

The addition of Chris East to the marketing team has been key to expanding our successful marketing campaigns this year. During this period, he and Mad focused on expanding GTG's social media reach and the enthusiasm and creativity of the *Joseph* cast significantly boosted these efforts. The creation of engaging mini-videos and high-performing posts resulted in the majority achieving views between 2k to 4k. While content is crucial, it proved that the active participation of cast, committee, and GTG members is essential to maximising its impact.

Direct community engagement remains a cornerstone of our strategy. Participating in local events and increasing our physical presence has consistently driven ticket sales and elevated our profile. Implementing post show audience feedback has supported our approaches to how we market specific shows. The success of our town centre production demonstrated the power of on-the-ground ideas, as evidenced by the '*Adopt a Brother*' initiative, which raised over £1100 through local business partnerships.

Market research conducted by Mary Logan revealed the Yvonne Arnaud as a key competitor. As a direct result of this information, we partnered with them to advertise each other's shows via social media and flyer handouts.



We continued to take advantage of free advertising in local magazines, running ticket competitions and collaborating with other groups.

We have recognised the invaluable insights provided by our members and the local community. Our next step is to develop strategies for incorporating their feedback into our show selection and marketing approaches.

2024-25 season

We have three amazing shows coming up:

First of all we have a very funny autumn play, *A Bunch Of Amateurs*, directed by David Dray. This hilarious comedy was brought to the big screen with Burt Reynolds in the lead role. This will be a real treat and tickets are on sale now.

Even though we have no Ben Travers Theatre, we still expect a sell-out pantomime on the sixtieth anniversary of GTG's first show. We are very grateful to Prior's Field School for inviting us to perform *Cinderella*, written by that popular scriptwriter, Jenny Seddon (see *Dick Whittington 2022!*). Director Denise Hodgkiss has a treat in store for you and she is doing all she can to have as big a cast as possible in such a small space. It has been a very long time since we had to turn people away from performing but needs must when space is so tight.

And as we enter 2025, we have a new logo and a new director. Maria Langford will be well known to those who saw the wonderful *Honk* she directed for Sunflower Productions at Worplesdon Village Hall last year. She will be directing the delightful *The Baker's Wife* from the pen of Stephen Schwarz (*Pippin* and *Wicked!*). A real treat, which is currently in the West End for a summer run at the Menier Chocolate Factory. This is a delightful show, with many wonderful character parts, and auditions are on September 8th.

Each show is the result of the hard work of dozens of people from the creative team, the cast, back stage, front of house and all the jobs, large and small, which somehow all get done. We have reached 60 years of producing high quality theatre for Godalming but we can only continue if we find enough people to help with all the jobs, large or small, which make our shows so special. So, please volunteer if you are not performing or persuade your friends or family to get involved too.

And finally... (Denise)

I am proud to be handing over the baton to Peter as chair and as well as saying thank you to the committee and membership for your support over my tenure. I feel confident that GTG will continue to adapt and improve, to drive innovation and be relevant on today's stage.

Denise Hodgkiss Co-Chair

Peter Flew Co-Chair