Minutes of the 74th Annual General Meeting of the Bancroft Players held on Wednesday, 26th June 2019 at 8.00pm.

The President, Frank Pratt, and approximately 50 members were present. Apologies were received from Joe Emler, Diana & Peter Linnett, Tom Power, Sam Powell, Emma Saunders, Jon & Alisha Brown, Audrey Hawkins, Julie Chamberlain and Jenny Rushbrook.

Les Edwards took the chair and welcomed all those present.

Minutes of the 2018 AGM were proposed and seconded by Elliott Bunker and Matt Gray and agreed as a true and collect record.

Reports *Treasurer* Mark Weatherbed – Mark introduced himself and stated that the accounts were be available at the year end i.e. June 2019. He hoped these would be finished in the next 3 weeks and would be put on the website for all members to view. He stated that as a charitable organisation both the members and trustees would be held liable for any debts which might be incurred. However the Executive Committee are considering changing the status of the organisation which would have the effect of exempting members from those liabilities. He stated that ticket sales were good in comparison to other years being in the region of £74,000 and he commented that budget costs had been well managed. There were areas of costings which he was looking at e.g. insurance of the buildings and the energy bring used. There being no questions, Mark was thanked for his work.

*Theatre Manager* Chris Lane – Chris reported on a successful year all round due to the dedication of all the people in each department, including the cleaning, administration, set building, bar, front of house, backstage, refreshments, technical and he thanked them all. He pointed out that the foundation of the theatre is the membership and there is always an issue on how to staff all the areas. Recent purchases have both increased the flexibility of the stages in both the studio and main theatre. A defibrillator has been introduced into the main foyer and training sessions have been held. Thanks are due to Maggie Hackney for arranging this, to the 200 club and local Round Table, for their contribution to the cost. We are currently trialling debit card and contactless transactions at the bar and thanks are due to Mark for initiating this; we are introducing an expanded wireless coverage to sue this reliably and I am in the process of choosing the best units to serve the whole theatre; this will enable the latest equipment with the most features on systems such as CCTV, security, video production and digital audio distribution. Currently one project to be implemented this summer is the replacement of the auditorium seating carpet. Several jobs are on the list to be carried out this summer and I anyone is interested please make contact. Maureen questioned the removal of old lighting equipment from the wardrobe; Chris and Mark are undertaking a complete audit of equipment etc and this will be removed. Edith commented that as LED lighting was used for Ann Boleyn would the old lighting still be needed – Chris responded that this will be checked during the summer. Elliott queried PCI compliance for the new systems and Chris reported that everything would be compliant. Chris was thanked for his comprehensive report.

*Artistic Director* Rory Reynolds reported that the year had been fantastic and much of the successful work had been due to both Nicki and David and the quality of work had been very high. There was some thought as to whether we were doing too many shows as we rely so much on the technical side and Front of House. He as delighted that Christine Neal was now the new Bar Manager and hoped that this would bring people together socially. He hoped to continue with the work we were doing; workshops could be advertised on a wider basis for example and this would be looked at again. He felt it was a privilege to work with such creative people. At this point representatives from Big Spirit – Lily, Violet and Charlie – spoke about the productions during the year including Belles of St. Clements, Oedipus and Antigone and the challenging musical Brenda Bly Teen Detective. The group was excited to see people of their age coming to see the plays and advertising them in local school was very effective.

*Juniors* Rory reported that the group was currently in transition; it would be sad to say goodbye to Alison Hudson but the group would be in good hands with Claudia O’Connell. A formal vote of thanks was given to Alison for all her work with the Juniors over the years.

*Production Manager Main Theatre*: Nicki Pope reported on a very successful season which also had a very high standard. She thanked everyone involved in anyway for their hard work and commitment. She acknowledged that due to stretched resources her supporting role had been hard at times. She thanked Rosemary Bianchi, Clive Hall and the set team, Keith Warren and Alan Bailes who was stepping down this year; Emma for her stage management role, Audrey and Julie for props, Charlotte and Christine, Sally and Maureen and Nicola Lester for help with wardrobe; Edith for bookings and allocating rehearsal space and Julian in promoting the productions. It is also u to members to take responsibility for the working of the theatre and not just acting in shows. It might be necessary to consider the reduction in productions for the future. Nicki was thanked for all her hard work over the year.

*Studio Manager:* David Lester – The themes of dementia, suicide, attempted suicide, terminal illness and assisted dying were key in all the plays in the Studio last season; however our diverse audience laughed and were moved. All four plays – The Father, Beacons, Constellations and Bea were sensitively and enthusiastically directed by Brian Seal, Vivien Kerr, Grace Reinhold-Gittins and David Lester. The Fringe contributed £6912 surplus (or profit) to the funds which is 16% more than last season. Studio is alive and well, but it must not take the audience for granted, particularly when it is close to a main theatre production. This season technical support was stretched but nevertheless gratefully received. In the new season shows will run for 5 nights rather than 4. Thanks are due to all those who volunteer in the bar, Front of House – an essential role – and all the technical, set designers, stewards and directors and casts. Questions from the floor concerned whether extending the nights would further stretch the F0H, technical staff etc. Charlotte commented that stage management were already struggling to cover the new season. It was suggested that David, Nicki, Rory, Julian and Mark met with Edith to go through the diary for the future 21/22 season and look at whether there was a need to cut back on productions. The coffee bar was also still an issue. Les commented that he was aware of all the discussion and would take this to the Executive Committee.

*Business Manager* Julian Newman-Turner Julian thanked everyone for their efforts. He commented on the difficulty in getting people/membership involved and how to do this. He thanked all the FOH staff and the coffee bar people, Keith Crook for proof reading What’s On; a big thankyou was given to Louise who built the website and was now stepping down. It was likely that the website would be even more important in the future and that he and Elliott would be taking a fresh look at the website with the aim that it would be managed by the theatre; 6th July was the Independents Day in the Market Square and the QMT would have a stall. He also thanked Mark Castell for doing a brilliant job with the bar rota. Currently the Box Office was available from 7-8 pm in the evenings but this was also an area which needed to be rethought; better signage showing people how to book if the box office was closed was a suggestion. Julian was thanked for his report.

*200 Club* Paula Downes reported on another steady year despite the sad death of four members; however 6 new people have joined. Paula was pleased to report that with help from the 200 Club contributions and the local Round Table the defibrillator as now been purchased and is sited in the foyer. Training is available and anyone interested should contact Paula – her address is in every issue of the newsletter. She was also pleased to report the purchase of new booster seats for use in the main theatre for use by any children attending the shows. £500 from the 200 Club was given for this purpose. This year it is hoped to purchase some new tools for the workshop and Dave Borner is sourcing these with the hope of purchasing a cordless jig saw. Paula thanked her loyal team of House Manager without whom no performance can take place – heartfelt thanks to all those involved.

*Chairman*  Les Edwards presented his report to member and congratulated everyone involved both backstage, on stage and in front of the stage for another very successful year. During the year we have been fortunate to welcome Christine Neal who has taken over Bar Manager from Frank Pratt and Mark Weatherbed as Treasurer who has formally taken over from Keith Crook and to whom we owe inestimable thanks for his many years of service. Thank you also to Louise who for many years has organised the website Financially the Society’s surplus is in the region of £25,000-30,000 which allows for routine maintenance and investment in new equipment; refurbishment of the foyer and extending the patio area are all high on the priority list. The Executive Committee Vision team, chaired by David Lester, have been meeting regularly and have put up ambitious plans for expanding the auditorium, rehearsal and performance space. The cost of this could be in excess of £2m and would take a few years to accomplish; however all these proposals will be fully examined and considered and potentially put to an EGM in some months time. Thanks also are due to David for his work in devising and arranging circulation of the survey to all members – the results will provide an invaluable insight for the way ahead. A further consideration which will be put to members in the next twelve months is the change in status of the theatre to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. This to remove the risk that current trustees are potentially liable for any debts/liabilities incurred by the Society. The initial negotiations for the lease of the building from the local council were set up by John Coxall; it is the renewal of this lease which has prompted this suggested change of status. There will likely be a further special meeting to discuss the pros and cons of this move. Major changes are therefore envisaged but I am sure we will continue to attract and maintain support for the excellent programme for 2019/2020 put forward by Rory and his team. My thanks to Vivien and all the committee and to those stepping down Zara and Charlotte and thanks also to Mark for his work on the bar rota.

*Election of officers:* President – Frank Pratt; Vice President – currently vacant; Chairman – Les Edwards; Secretary – Vivien Kerr; Treasurer – Mark Weatherbed; Artistic Director – Rory Reynolds; Theatre/Technical Manager – Chris Lane; Theatre Production Manager – Nicki Pope; Studio Theatre – David Lester; Business Manager – Julian Newman-Turner.

*Election of Committee Members :*  The following were elected – Matt Gray, David Borner for a further year; there are two vacancies and nominations have been received from Elliott Bunker and Christine Neal and both were duly elected to serve for 2 years.

*Presentation on the Vision project:*  David reported that this was a long-term plan with a current membership of David, Chris, Rory, Frank and Mark who report to t he Executive Committee. Chris stated that the membership and the building were the basis of everything and are the embryo of what will happen in the future. He also stated that the team had made several visits to other theatres of similar size and composition which had proved to be a very useful experience. It was the view of the team that, whilst the building has some limitations, it is key to think about the future role of the theatre as a ‘hub’ for all the creative work going on in Hitchin and the theatre; this needs to be inclusive and be a social centre as well. Mark pointed out that the theatre needs to look at ‘de-risking’ and revaluing the building in a controlled manner suiting the nature of the theatre itself. It is also important to improve the experience of the audience and members. The survey went out and over 50% responses were received; it is hoped that the results will go out to all members Comments from the audience included looking at the composition of the team and the need to be rigorous about ‘improving the experience of the audience etc.

Other issues included the need to secure the premises and the preparation of a Code of Conduct for all members and groups in the theatre. Chris stated that Alan Bailes has resigned and there is currently no one person to take over; in the meantime Chris has the overall experience of stage craft, Len will look at the crews and Alan will help with technical training. There were some general questions on the conversion rate of new members to actual active help in departments and how to keep people and improve their experience.

There being no further questions, Les thanked everyone for coming.

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm