



Derby Arts and Theatre Association (DATA)

Registered Charity Number 517836

www.derbyartsandtheatre.org.uk

Annual Report of the Chair to the Annual General Meeting on 18 October 2022

It is incredible when one realises that we have not had a DATA AGM since July 2019! In accordance with Charity Commission Covid-19 guidance, we decided it would be inappropriate and unnecessary to have an AGM in 2020 or 2021. Your Committee continued to meet, however – by Zoom or in person – to manage DATA's affairs.

The pandemic restrictions, coming on top of the continued closure of the Guildhall Theatre and Assembly Rooms, caused a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety for our member groups. It is gratifying that the vast majority have restarted their productions and concerts and I applaud their resilience. Certain sections of our audiences – especially the older element – have, in some cases, been nervous about going to indoor performance venues where people inevitably gather in confined spaces. Let us hope that confidence continues to build, although the coming winter may prove to be a testing time. The current energy and cost of living crises are bound to affect the amount of people's disposable income available to fund attendance at live performances. We must keep pushing the message that it is still a lot cheaper to see a live amateur performance than a professional one. Imaginative marketing and pricing policies will also help.

The Guildhall Theatre, Derby

Our main focus since 2019 has been the Guildhall Theatre which has been closed since January of that year. The Council's position remains that they are taking an holistic view of the repair and refurbishment of the building and that feasibility studies are in progress. These studies include looking into using adjoining buildings which are in the Council's ownership. However, funding will be a challenge and it is likely that the Council will be seeking grants from appropriate bodies. DATA has submitted its wish list of improvements including moving the bar to the adjoining building which would make the existing bar area available for additional dressing-room and storage purposes.

On your behalf, DATA has continued to press Derby City Council for a commitment to reopen the Guildhall as soon as possible. When, in October 2021, I asked Councillor Ross McCristal, the Council's then Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture, for a timescale, his response was: "In my opinion it is unlikely to reopen before 2025 but everything possible will be done to reopen the Guildhall as soon as possible inline with our aspirational vision for the Guildhall."

The most frustrating aspect has been the lack of communication from the Council. On 2 May 2022, I wrote to the Council's senior officer dealing with the project to point out that

we had heard nothing for over a year. His reply, on 16 May, was as follows:

“Apologies for not being able to get in touch to provide you with an update. As it stands the Guildhall is still very much a priority that is linked in to the wider picture for the cultural offer for the city centre. It is part of the bigger narrative involving other venues, funding applications and future opportunities for the UK City of Culture. A lot of work is going in to building the bigger picture that aims to put cultural activity at the heart of city centre regeneration and the aim is for the Guildhall to play a part in that. When we have more information we will of course get in touch again.”

In view of this very general, and not particularly helpful, response, I submitted a Freedom of Information request to the Council for details of the Guildhall scheme. The Council missed the first statutory deadline for the supply of the information and has now said that it will not be provided before 16 November 2022. I have submitted a complaint about this delay to the Information Commissioner's Office and am currently await a response.

In July 2022, we conducted a short survey to ascertain the interest from amateur groups in returning to the Guildhall when it reopens. Of the thirteen groups who responded, twelve said they were either likely or very likely to return.

Derby Assembly Rooms

Members will have seen in the media that Derby City Council obtained planning permission to demolish the Assembly Rooms and are in discussions with the University of Derby over the possibility of building a replacement for Derby Theatre on the site. Yes that means yet another feasibility study by consultants but, if the project actually happens (some may say that's a big 'if') then a new theatre plus a refurbished Guildhall would potentially transform not only the Market Place but also the whole of the Cathedral Quarter. A survey was undertaken by The Audience Agency in May 2022. We await further developments with interest but we're not holding our breath!

Becketwell Arena

One project which does seem to be progressing is the proposed Becketwell Arena on the old Debenhams / Duckworth Square site. This is a joint development by Derby City Council and St James Securities for various uses including a 3,500 capacity arena located on the site of the former Pennine Hotel, Pink Coconut nightclub and Laurie House offices. The arena design also incorporates a smaller performance space but details of this are yet to be revealed. Planning permission has been granted and ASM Global has been selected to manage the venue.

DATA Diary

Do please continue to submit your organisation's productions for inclusion in the DATA Diary. It is a free service as part of your very reasonable membership subscription. You can either do this yourself online by logging into the Diary system, or submit details to our DATA Diary Administrator – Dave Williamson – at admin@derbyartsandtheatre.org.uk The monthly Diary email has a wide circulation and events are simultaneously posted on the DATA Facebook page and Twitter feed for sharing through social media channels. Overall it's a very cost-effective and simple marketing tool. Huge thanks to Dave for his continuing work on the DATA Diary.

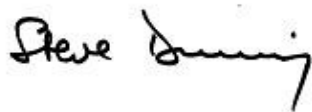
Eagle Awards

Following a consultation and vote, it was decided to restart the Eagle Awards from July 2022. There are two new awards this year: Equality, Diversity & Inclusion and Youth Production. For further information, contact Cheryl Mitchell at C.Mitchell@derby.ac.uk

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the officers and members of the Committee for their support and work over the past three years.

Don't forget, DATA is your Association; if you have any views or suggestions, please get in touch.

With all good wishes for your future productions.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Dunning". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Steve Dunning
Chair, Derby Arts and Theatre Association (DATA)
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