

Workshop and consultations with Membership of the Vagabond Players at the Bernie Legge Theatre

Monthly membership meeting – 22 members attended including the full board of directors.

Jeremy Heynen opened and closed the meeting. The monthly business took up the first 30 minutes.

Introduction: background on the Theatre Strategy and the scope of work.

Strengths of the Vagabond Players:

- The Society has charitable status.
- They are community based and the membership is open to anyone interested in volunteering and being involved in the theatre's activities.
- They have a dedicated space where they build sets, rehearse, store their props, do their administration, box office and concession.
- The building is provided by the City but all the interior work turning it into a theatre was done by volunteers - the seating, stage, lighting, lobby etc.
- The society looks after the interiors, repairs and upgrades as needed and when affordable.
- Vagabond Players are self-sufficient. They have a 50/50 lottery license and along with ticket sales this provides the operating revenues for the Bernie Legge and the productions.
- The Society is self-sustainable.
- They have a loyal patron base – and many subscribers are 20 and 30 year supporters.
- The Players have a good reputation for quality community theatrical presentations.
- They mentor and train young people interested in theatre work – lighting, set building etc.
- The tickets are affordable.
- The 5 shows annually – with matinee and early evening performances.

The Vagabond Players are members of Theatre BC (province wide alliance of all community theatrical societies) and also Community Theatre Coalition (lower mainland group of Theatres).

Weakness, Challenges and Threats were discussed altogether.

- The membership was cautious and nervous about the future – and the process of the review for a Theatre Strategy.
- With a new executive in place – communication and roles and responsibilities, delegation and information sharing has not been the best.
- There is an awareness of the communication challenges and the Executive is committed to work together.
- The success of the shows this season, has meant that the box office coordinator was working for many hours to get all the subscriptions completed this fall. Front of House Volunteers and the coordination of recruiting and engaging volunteers has been spotty, making the regulars work extra hours to meet demand.
- Challenge for the programming committee – is balancing the season to satisfy the regular patrons who come and like light hearted comedy against the new members who would like to try productions that are more challenging and attract new performers auditioning for parts which bring in a new audience. The pool of talent in New Westminster is bigger than ever.
- The Executive in trying to look to the future and what is needed to sustain the society.
- A threat is municipal interference that might affect the autonomy and independence of the Society. Now the theatre has very few days where some activity is not happening in the building. The summer months are the only dark days.

The exterior of the facility and the landscape

- Handicapped parking near the theatre is badly needed. Many older patrons are now using walkers.
- Lighting needs improvements especially during the winter months.
- The roof and gutters need cleaning.
- Stairs from the road to the front are covered in leaves and thus pose a danger for audience members arriving on a rainy evening in the dark.
- Grateful to the City for providing the building. Want the community to be proud of the work and the involvement of so many people in community theatre.

Opportunity

- Realize there is an opportunity to “blow their own horn” a little more and tell the story of sold out houses, volunteer hours of commitment and the benefit that a dedicated facility provides the members in making theatre.
- More information posted on the Facebook page so all members can be advocates for the Society.
- Vagabond Players are actively recruiting new members all the time.

Future ideas

- Summer theatre camps that would include a final performance – students and kids.
- Open Stage – like open mike – inviting independent artists who have a solo show or a two hander to workshop it during the summer months. Provide access to the theatre like a mini-fringe.