

President's Report 2024

From a performance perspective, the theatre had a slow start to 2024, as we were unable to open to the public until our bathroom renovations had been completed. Fortunately, our new and improved toilet facilities were officially opened in June, and we raced into action, ensuring that our usual quota of productions would be staged. Many thanks to Korstiaan Prins, who co-ordinated the renovations. Thanks also to the incredible volunteers who gave so much of their time to demolish the old bathrooms and build the new unisex cubicles. On behalf of the committee, I would like to acknowledge the incredible contributions of Anthony van den Berg, Murray Weal, Nigel Jackson, Ron van de Molen and Alan Williscroft. Thanks also to the team who helped with décor.

Our first planned show of the year, "Caught in the Net" directed by Paul Ferguson, was unable to be fully cast and the difficult decision was made to abandon the show. We appreciate all the time and energy the cast and director had devoted to rehearsals up until that point.

Sandra Clark and Ron van de Molen took on the daunting task of creating a rescue plan. They quickly fastened on a replacement play, "My In-Laws Are Outlaws" by Devon Williamson. This comedic tour de force left audiences rolling in the aisles. The superb multi-roling and mix of Russian and Irish outlaw accents added to the hilarity. Despite a stressful start to the production, Sandra and Ron were able to sculpt a skilful and successful show. Congratulations to all involved!

August brought two very different Arts on Tour shows to the theatre. The first of these was "Red Heavens", written and performed by Martine Baanvinger. This powerful drama portrayed the true story of Angelina Moleta, an Italian pioneering immigrant on D'Urville Island. The second show was "Across the Great Divide", a musical cornucopia featuring traditional and original folk tunes. The musicians played a range of instruments, creating songs that reflected their Celtic, Scandinavian and American roots. A toe-tapping event that attracted a range of ages.

September saw our second major production of the year: "Love Letters" by A.R. Gurney, directed by Korstiaan Prins and Robin Essex. The play was a huge critical success, as recognised in newspaper articles, emails and social media posts from audience members. Many reported being moved to tears, and some even said they needed to see the show again to 'process' their emotions. From a personal perspective, I was extremely grateful to be given the opportunity to play the complex and challenging role of Melissa. Many audience members travelled from far flung places to see our production, and apart from praising the show, the common question they asked was: "where is the audience?" The disappointing tickets sales engendered much discussion amongst the committee as we pondered questions such as: what is our purpose as a theatre, what is our role in the community, and should we focus our attention on crowd pleasing comedies? After lively

debate, we unanimously agreed that we were 'dramatic society', and as such we will continue to promote and stage plays with literally merit and more challenging themes, together with our regular comedies. We hope that in the future our members will trust that we always put on high calibre productions that are worth supporting, regardless of genre.

Our final production of the year was "Best of the Best", a ten minute play festival that celebrated local excellence in playwriting. The six winning plays from our Short and Festivals (from the first competition in 2008 through to 2023) were given an encore performance. As usual, it was refreshing to see new faces both on and off stage. For some of our members, the festival was a blast from the past and an opportunity to re-live some classic moments in our theatre's history. For others, this was a first opportunity to experience some (or all) of the plays. Either way, the feedback and response from audiences was overwhelmingly positive. Moving forward, we recommend that a future committee repeat the experience with the next six winning plays.

2024 saw a return of our Improv-ables troupe, who staged four madcap comedic shows from June to December, plus an additional private show for a local plumbing company. This corporate event allowed ample opportunity for plumbing puns and appropriately themed humour.

Friday Flicks resumed monthly film screenings once the theatre re-opened. Many thanks to Bob Blackwell and the Friday Flicks subcommittee. We are grateful to be able to provide this additional service to our community, and it's lovely to see such a range of movies being offered for our entertainment.

As well as our regular Friday Flicks, we also screened the locally made "Home Kills" movie in early September. This special event was completely sold-out. After the film screening, attendees were treated to a fascinating Q&A session with the film production team.

In October, we were delighted to hold a playwriting workshop with experienced local playwright, Richard Prevett. All of us that took part found it an invaluable experience. Richard generously provided us with a wealth of tips and advice and gave us ample time to ask questions and delve deeper into the creative process. Thanks, Richard, for running this workshop!

Despite a delayed beginning to our performance year, Matamata Dramatic Society managed to deliver a full and varied programme in 2024. Our hard-working committee are to be congratulated for all their efforts. We are lucky to have such a supportive and cohesive team who all share a genuine passion for theatre. We are sorry to farewell Greg Dunn, as he is stepping down from his committee duties. I am thrilled to say that it is not goodbye, however, as he will remain an active member of the theatre and will still perform with our Improv-ables troupe. Thanks, Greg, for your wonderful contribution to the

committee over the past four years. Many thanks, also, to our incredibly efficient Treasurer Korstiaan Prins. Whilst Korstiaan is remaining on the committee, looking after technical areas such as lighting, sound, and film projection, he has decided to step down from the Treasurer role. We are grateful for Korstiaan's dedication and accurate financial reports. His are big shoes to fill.

We were fortunate in 2024, as in previous years, to have the services of Lois and Graham Allen as our friendly Front of House welcoming team. I am sure we will all miss their warm, cheerful smiles as we enter the foyer for future shows. Lois and Allen had a knack of making everyone feel valued as a member of our theatre family, even on a first visit to the Little Theatre. Their contribution over the years has been immense, and their support and enthusiasm has been unwavering. Sadly, Lois and Graham are unable to be here tonight to hear our heartfelt gratitude and thunderous applause, but I felt it was important to acknowledge and honour the wonderful work they have done for us in the past.

Julie Taylor