

THE DOUGLAS CENTRE TRUST

operating as the cornerHOUSE Community Arts Centre

1. Chair's Report for the year ending 31st December, 2020

2019 was, arguably, the most successful year in our history. By contrast, 2020 presented us with unprecedented challenges.

At the end of 2019 we took the decision to increase our reserve specifically allocated to keeping the centre going when unable to generate income. We were thinking of some disaster befalling our ageing building, not a global pandemic. In practice, the pandemic stopped us earning, either completely or partially, from mid-March onwards. Nonetheless, we were able to successfully survive the year, by a mixture of opening to reduced audiences in COVID-19-secure conditions, reducing expenditure wherever possible and maintaining and extending our on-line presence.

We were also much helped by a generous grant from the government's coronavirus support fund, and by a successful start to the year, most notably through our annual pantomime.

A fairly small group of dedicated volunteers continued to work hard to maintain the centre and get it ready for use in the periods when that was possible. Our treasurer has worked wonders, despite shielding throughout this difficult period.

As always, we are indebted to our benevolent landlords, St Matthew's Church.

Thanks also go to Sloane Winckless, who again inspected our accounts without charge.

Jeremy Thorn

April 2021

2. Financial Report for the year ending 31st December, 2020

2020 was very much a year of two parts. By the time of shutdown on March 23 we had attained a surplus of £6 ½ k, largely due to the Pantomime. Our worst-case scenario for 2020 at that time was no income at all for the remainder of the year, mitigated by a target reduction in costs in the April-December period from £27k in 2019 to £10k in 2020, the latter being unavoidable costs. This would have resulted in a deficit for the year of £3 ½ k. Due to a huge effort by our volunteers to open the premises to the maximum extent possible during the periods of Unlock whilst still being COVID 19-safe, we eventually made a surplus for the year as a whole of just short of +£5k, despite incurring some additional costs due to re-opening. In addition to this result, our grant application to the Coronavirus Community Support Fund was accepted and we were awarded the sum of £10k towards our difficult situation and recognition that much of our activity helps vulnerable groups in our local community. Our hard work and the support grant has now left us in a stronger financial position for 2021 than we had dared hope.

David Itcovitz

April 2021

3. Report for 2020 on behalf of Regular Hirers

The regular hirers provide a significant amount of income to the cornerHOUSE as well as being a key aspect of the life of the building as a community arts centre. 2020 started tentatively for the regular hirers with everyone having to introduce measures to protect their users from the growing concerns about COVID-19. By the middle of March, Regular Hirers were unable to run their activities at all due to the first lockdown, which not only resulted in the cancellation of weekly classes but also productions that were being rehearsed by these groups.

While some Regular Hirers were able to make a brief return to the cornerHOUSE in the Autumn under the terms of government guidelines, this was short lived due to the restrictions of the tier system in place at the end of the year. Other Regular Hirers have been unable to resume their activities since that first lockdown in March and, as yet, it is unclear how many will now have the infrastructure to continue their hires in the future.

Aside from the financial impact and the potential reduced uptake for many regular hirer activities, we were sorry to learn of the passing of individuals who were involved in these activities at the cornerHOUSE, and we extend our sympathies to those groups in particular.

We are hopeful that the future will see the return of many of our regular hirers to the building and that the cornerHOUSE will continue to attract new hirers into the space.

David Lawson Lean

April 2021

4. Report for 2020 on behalf of the cornerHOUSE Internal Team

The Internal Team (IT) is principally concerned with three broad areas – the infrastructure and equipment, the volunteers who take on a variety of roles in running the centre, and the management of the licensed bar.

As the year started, activities in those three areas were running normally :

- infrastructure and equipment – routine maintenance work and minor improvements were undertaken by volunteers, with more significant jobs (and specialist areas like the electrics) allocated to contractors. A major piece of work on improvements to the toilets was about to be commissioned.
- The volunteer pool was working well, with enough people coming forward to run the events scheduled. Thanks are due to the volunteer coordinator and all the individuals volunteering – without these the centre would not be able to function. New volunteers are always welcome.
- The bar is a key support to the finances of the centre and again things were running smoothly with input from volunteers stocking the bar, and a contingent of volunteers coming forward to serve the public at events.

The outbreak of Corona virus in the early spring somewhat derailed all these areas. Throughout the rest of the year the IT was repeatedly readjusting activity to meet changing guidance and regulations.

An early decision was taken to halt the toilet improvement work; the significant cost was not supportable at a time when income was so unpredictable and overhead costs continued to be incurred. Significant and changeable work had to be done to the

building to enable activities to run when lock-downs were in force. Reducing capacity from 150 to 40, operating one-way systems, upgrading cleaning regimes, introducing sanitisation stations and working with regular hirers to help them meet requirements are examples of the work the IT undertook. Some maintenance and improvement work was possible, including internal and external paintwork.

The revised operating systems, short notice changes to events, and most significantly the need for many people to withdraw from volunteering for pandemic-related reasons, all put a strain on our ability to provide volunteers to match needs, and to keep them informed of changes to their duties.

The reduction in audience sizes and the uncertainty that events would proceed made managing bar stocks a lot harder than normal, and some lines ran short and others did not sell by their 'best before' dates. This made more work for volunteers, whilst reducing the bar's contribution to supporting the centre's finances.

All-in-all 2020 was a year with a lot of changes required of the IT; the experience will stand us in good stead for what is to come.

Ian Davies

April 2021

5. Report for 2020 on behalf of Comedy Events

Long-standing comedy partner Outside The Box and newcomer, and home-grown promoter, Whole Lotta Comedy both offered prospects of another good year of comedy at the cornerHOUSE. However the pandemic crimped these plans. Harry Hill had just started a three-night run when the virus caused its abrupt cancellation. The subsequent lock-downs, reduced capacity, and social distancing etc. have all played havoc with the ambiance and viability of comedy at all venues, including the cornerHOUSE. Limited events were possible, and proved popular, during tiering. Hopefully at some stage in 2021 we will be able to offer a more comprehensive comedy provision for audiences and prompters alike.

Ian Davies

April 2021

6. Report for 2020 on behalf of the cornerHOUSE Film Club

Before Lockdown 1, the Film Club operated as usual, showing 3 films in January and February.

We were able to be the first group to use the building in July, under COVID-19-secure conditions, having a limit on numbers and socially distanced seating. There were screenings twice a month as before but on different Sundays, giving time for cleaning.

This continued until November when restrictions again meant we could not meet.

On cornerHOUSE Online we had permission from the director, Claude Green, to offer the full length film, *The Doo-Dah Man*. Suggestions for Christmas films and other films available on public screening services are also offered.

With a membership of approx 90, the Film Club is thriving and looking forward to getting back to the cornerHOUSE.

Joan Scriven

April 2021

7. Report for 2020 on behalf of the cornerHOUSE Events Coordinator

- **Exhibitions**

From January to March, we installed three in house exhibitions before our closure. We then transferred the exhibitions to our website, resulting in twelve online exhibitions including our first Under 18's exhibition which featured a video of local street art in support of the NHS. As Covid restrictions eased we installed a further two exhibitions in house ending in December. Five *Meet the Artist* nights were held during the year with additional openings for smaller groups.

- **Poetry**

Only two Workshops and two Readings (minus the cheese!) went ahead.

To maintain contact with our poets online, David Loffman and Andy Moseley provided creative writing resources and exercises. In addition, details of poetry competitions were circulated and an online joint sea themed Art & Poetry exhibition was organised.

Workshops have previously been free events but our change in circumstances prompted a small charge of £4.00 through Ticket Source which will continue.

We launched the Lockdown 100 project, asking the cornerHOUSE community to share their Lockdown experiences in around 100 words. Hard copies were printed out and an e-version now resides in our website and is archived in the British Library.

- **Talks**

Mindful of putting on events that required minimal support from the cornerHOUSE we decided to pilot monthly talks. Valerie Nunn presented the first before we had to close and when restrictions eased Tim Harrison presented another. Other talks were rescheduled for 2021. Both proved popular and a small charge was made which will continue.

- **'Out of the Corner'**

They were able to hold one in house event before closure and then Shelley Stevens organised events throughout the year on Facebook and transferred the acts to our website.

- **Track & Trace/COVID-19 Compliance**

All the above events were prebooked and well attended. To ensure the safety of the public and cH volunteers a Track & Trace system was put in place with the addition of the QR code scanner on arrival. Hand sanitiser was available throughout the cH, a socially distanced one-way system was adopted and there was an expectation that masks were worn unless seated. There were no reported COVID-19 cases as a result of people attending the above events.

Many people asked if events could be streamed by video which is a consideration we have taken forward.

Nicky Newberry

April 2021

6. Report for 2020 on behalf of the cornerHOUSE Artistic Team

The Artistic Team acts on behalf of the cornerHOUSE Trustees in having day-to-day oversight of the booking of the cornerHOUSE facilities to ensure that any use falls within the Trustees' artistic remit for the premises. Its membership includes the cornerHOUSE Diary Manager. In addition, the Team fulfils the role as the Production Team for any theatrical productions the cornerHOUSE funds (known as 'inHOUSE productions'). One member of the Artistic Team acts as the main liaison between the cornerHOUSE and the production team of any show produced by an external hirer.

In January 2020 the Artistic Team oversaw the successful staging of the annual cornerHOUSE pantomime *Jack The Aladdin and The Faulty Thieves* (an inHOUSE production) and administered the audition process for the planned *oneACTS Festival* of short plays which is held every two years. These were prior to the first lockdown.

Subsequently what was possible to stage safely regrettably led to the long-term postponement of the *oneACTS Festival* and the cancellation of a number of other bookings for the year. There were opportunities to stage a handful of events as COVID-19 restrictions were relaxed between further lockdowns, including an evening of poetry reading, a performance by the South Side Theatre Academy and comedy nights from 'Outside The Box' and 'Whole Lotta Comedy'.

The Artistic Team continued to meet remotely each month (with a Summer break). Its focus for the remainder of the year was considering and proposing pricing structures for hire of the premises that might best attract future hirers in the medium term for small-scale shows that might be suitable as 'drop-in' productions as COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. With regard to safety of volunteers and audiences, the Team agreed that these shows – which would be staged at relatively short notice, be pre-rehearsed offsite, have very small casts, have short runs and require minimal on-site requirements for set-up, technical rehearsals and post-performance de-rig - would best allow social distancing (as necessary) both on stage and backstage.

During the year the Team kept in contact with directors of planned 2020 shows that had been cancelled as well as others who had previously made tentative enquiries about hiring the premises. This was in order to encourage them to consider staging 'drop-in' productions as COVID-19 restrictions were lifted and to ensure that there was the best chance of having a full programme of events ready to go once the cornerHOUSE was open once more.

Peter Brooker

April 2021