



December 2014

Dear Friends

Welcome to our new season!

I am pleased to report that we have had a very busy autumn so far, with good audiences for all parts of our programme.

We have also been busy with fundraising events and you will be pleased to hear that the production of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in September raised nearly £2,000 for the Friends. Added to the other events, including the regular Quiz Nights, the success of the Craft Fair raffle, and very generous individual donations, the Friends income this year is heading for a very impressive total.

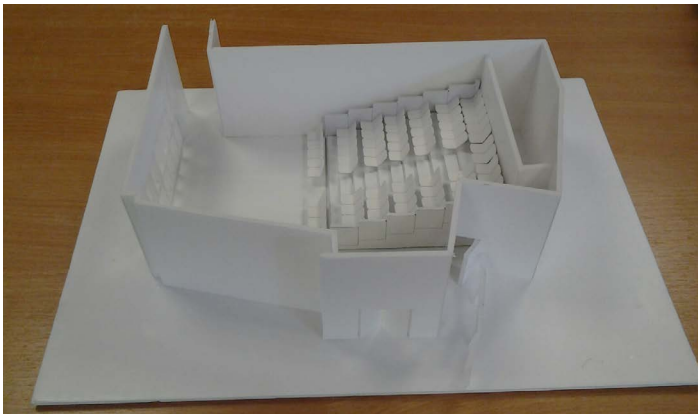
The Friends expenditure since the last Newsletter in August has been limited to a contribution of £7,500 towards our new safety curtain. There is a very good reason for that:

Our Next Major Project

We are about to launch a new major project for 2015: the creation of a small-scale performance space/second cinema screen on the first floor of the theatre extension.

What we are planning:

Above our office we currently have a large rehearsal room, with two smaller adjacent rooms which are no longer used as College music rooms. By removing the wall between the rooms, we will be able to create one much bigger room, big enough to put in a retractable seating unit, retractable cinema screen and demountable theatre and cinema equipment, subject to the usual building regulations approval and the inevitable fundraising required.



Scale model of the proposed small scale performance space on the first floor of the theatre extension

Why we want to do this:

There are a number of important reasons why we need this project.

Firstly, we need to protect our ability to show live transmissions from the Royal Opera House, the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company and others when they are offered - regardless of what other events may already be scheduled in the main theatre - as this is often a condition of booking.

Secondly, we would love to broaden our programme again, to regain the great diversity of foreign language and arthouse film gems we used to offer, but which have been struggling for their

place in our programme since the loss of our funding made it essential to increase our earned income by more commercial programming. We have also lost the sort of small-scale live performance that is often a starting point in the careers of actors, writers, directors and producers. We hope that this smaller additional space will give us much greater options.

Thirdly, we think that this new space will substantially help to secure our financial situation. We have overhead costs here of over £250,000 per annum and in the three years since the loss of County and District Council funding, we have achieved a great deal by way of increasing our earned income. But the energy costs continue to rise, as do the costs of running decent software for the box office, and there have been (admittedly very small) increases in staffing costs, and so we have to earn more to cover that additional expenditure.

We believe this project will do all these things, and more, without increasing the staff requirements. By operating in a mini-'multiplex' way, staggering start times and making best use of the people you see when you come to the theatre or cinema - in the box office, in the bar and in the control room - we will increase our income far more than our expenditure. We're very excited about the possibilities this will open up for Strode Theatre.

The Friends' part in the plan for 2015:

I hope very much that you will also be enthused by this plan and we'll obviously be in touch again once we have full approval and plans from the architect, the structural engineer and all the other professionals from whom we need an input.

I'm pleased to tell you that the Trustees of the Friends have already discussed the project this autumn and they are unanimously in favour. The Strode Theatre Board of Management, and the College Board of Governors are also fully in support.

We will need to work together on fundraising plans in order that the Friends can contribute one third of the total project costs which are likely to be in the region of £150,000. I have already put in one other funding application to a local charitable trust, and I have another application to submit in January. Any further ideas on fundraising would be gratefully received, and if you feel you would like to support an "Adopt A Seat" scheme, then we would love to hear from you.

In the meantime...

I hope very much that you enjoy Christmas and New Year, and that we might see you at the pantomime, Cinderella, one of the most important shows of the year at any theatre from the point of view of encouraging young audiences and raising funds through the box office.

With best wishes from all of us at Strode including Harvey, the theatre cat.

Liz Leyshon

on behalf of the Trustees

