GEDS AGM 2024

Minutes 29/10/24

Minutes of the Geneva English Drama Society Annual General Meeting, held at Emmanuel Episcopal Church, Tuesday 29 October 2024.

Present:

9 members of the outgoing Committee including Chair John Ward and 45 members:

Alexandra Shelest, Tamaam Madi-Nassar, Lance Newhart, Clàudia Baró Huelmo, Masha Nenzansky, Veera Valo, Lesley Sherwood, Olga Derenkova, Sandy Cunningham, David Pittuck, Caspar Rutten, Lucia Marino, Tim Hancox, Henny Bakker, Jenny Buffle, Mike Sell, Sue Sell, Ray Bach, Karen Robotham, Brian Allardyce, John Swaim, Yvette Stevens, Fatou N'Diaye, Josamine Bronnvik, Frances Favre, Jane Easton, John Newsome, Rick Vincent, Maroun Maalouf, Margareta Skold, Bill Lloyd, Mary Ahern, Gillian Young Gorton, Julian Finn, David McClenaghan, Debbie Erdley, Roger Williams, Margit Williams, Vivienne Talsma, Frou-Frou, David Lewis, Aline Dedeyan, Nathalie Stump, Howard Hornfield, Carolyn Hornfield.

1. Chair John Ward welcomed those present and declared the meeting open and quorate (10% of some 200 members) at 19:54. An attendance list was circulated.

A. Apologies for absence

2. Apologies for absence had been received from Susana Alvarez, Neil-Jon Morphy, Peta Tracey, Peggie Rimmer, Susan Mutti, Lily Papandropoulos, Debbie Smith, Brian Williams, Eric Biass, Paola Biass, Tim Goodyear, Pauline Goodyear, Viki Lazar, Pamela Walsh, Markus Nordberg, Ann-Marie Mendes, Siân Ackroyd, Malcolm Grant, Martin Gatehouse, Mary Stutard, Margaret Byskov, Veska Boteva, Andrew Brookes, Kathleen Roy Brookes, Christine Housel, Gary Bird, Beverley Rousset, Joan Cambitsis, Charles Slovenski, John Douglas, Elizabeth Douglas, Randy Grodman, Katie Klein, Bernice Dörig, Jennie Klein-Pils, Charles Gilson, Jo-Ann Bakker, Joy Waelchli, Dorothy Stevenson, Wendy Gray, Gabriella Pertli +2 from Lesley, Kate Richardson.

B. Adoption of the Minutes of the 2023 AGM

3. John Ward noted that the Minutes had been circulated shortly after the previous AGM and then attached to the papers for this meeting.

4. The Minutes were unanimously adopted (Proposed: Frances Favre, seconded John Swaim).

C. Matters arising out of the Minutes

5. None.

D. Report of the Committee

6. John Ward introduced the Report and asked for questions or comments on all sections of it in order. John mentioned it's been a successful year for GEDS in artistic terms with excellent playreadings and productions.

7. Bill Lloyd mentioned that the publicity for August Osage County was very scary, which nearly put him off, but noted it was a brilliant production. John Ward confirmed that many people have said this to him, and admitted the publicity did not capture the dark comedy aspect of the play, noting the committee learned some lessons for the future on that.

8. John Newsome proposed acceptance of the Report, John Swaim seconded.

E. Report of the Treasurer

9. Claudia was delayed, so Jane Easton presented the report as the treasury assistant.

10. Jane noted there was a slight loss this year because of transferred payable amounts from the previous season. This is a result of the very late arrival of bills from the English Church Hall for the last season. If these amounts had been paid last season, this season would have brought the society net profit.

11. Howard Hornfield noted that the bar brings in a third to a fourth of the profit, and therefore thanked the bar team for their hard work. JW pointed out it is due to the great work of Lance and his bar team, but our bar sales also increased as we can now run our own bar at the Esperance theatre.

12. Julian jokingly asked about running own bar at playreadings, to which JW pointed out that we are always looking for new places for playreadings, as Uptown is very expensive (even though cheaper than the English Church Hall). The merits of Uptown are that it provides a proper stage with a good light and sound set-up and with a collection of props and furniture, which other theatres would not have. As such, Uptown is a good training ground both for beginning actors and for people interested

in the tech aspect of lighting and sound. Jenny Buffle pointed out it also has a nice audience hall.

13. Sue Sell asked if we considered using Uptown for productions, which JW affirmed. The main disadvantages of using it would be getting in the set (via stairs), hanging the lights on the scarce rig and a very limited backstage area.

14. David Lewis reminded the committee of zoom readings held in Covid times and afterwards, which went quite well, and were cheaper than renting Uptown, and also allowed people to join from abroad. He asked if there is was a reason why they got discontinued. JW replied there was no conscious decision made to discontinue them and the committee previously tried to have them in the winter months when commuting is more complicated. Frou-Frou seconded that she enjoyed zoom readings and JW and Masha assured that the committee will try to find the space to put some zoom readings into the current playreading season.

15. The Treasurer report was proposed for adoption by John Swaim, seconded by Julian Finn.

F. Appointment of a Polling Officer

16. John Newsome and Julian Finn volunteered to be the polling officers, which was admitted unan.

17. Howard Hornfield thanked the leaving members of committee: Christina as Vice-Chair, Claudia as Treasurer, and Tamaam as publicity manager. The membership and leaving committee joined in thanking them for their work.

G. Elections of Officers and of Committee Members

18. Julian Finn declared that he had received single valid nominations for four of the positions of Officer: John Ward as Chair; Ann-Marie Mendes as Vice-Chair; Markus Nordberd as Treasurer, and Alexandra Shelest as Secretary. These were elected in turn by acclamation: unan.

19. John asked for eight committee members in order to have more work force in the future season.

20. Julian Finn had received valid nominations for eight CommMems. Lance Newhart, Masha Neznansky, Lesley Sherwood, Veera Valo, Nathalie Stump, David McClenaghan, Josamine Bronnvik, and Vivienne Talsma. These were elected by acclamation: unan.

21. John Ward as elected Chair took the floor. He welcomed the Committee to join him at the table and thanked the meeting, and Julian Finn and John Newsome as Polling Officers. He noted that we're very happy to have new faces on the committee as we need more hands for more jobs.

22. Claudia came late and thanked Jane for presenting the treasury report, as well as her continuous help with the treasury.

H. Election of an Audit Board

23. One nomination to the Audit Board had been received.

24. John Newsome pointed out that the statutes need to be changed to allow for only one auditor, not two as per the current statutes. Alexandra Shelest reminded the assembly that this matter was already voted upon in the last AGM, but unfortunately the actual change in the statutes was not yet made. The meeting agreed to continue with one auditor and the agreement that the statutes be changed before the next AGM according to last year's vote.

25. Jane Easton reported that she approached some people for the role of second auditor, but they have not been available. Tamaam proposed Ruprecht Simon as auditor, which Jane seconded.

26. As Ruprecht Simon could not be present at the AGM, the audit could not happen in person. However, he audited the GEDS accounts remotely.

I. Any Other Business

27. Jenny Buffle pointed out that she is incapable of getting into the members-only section of the GEDS website, despite trying to renew the password. Many other members reported having the same problem. John Newsome suggested all people with issues to email him for help.

28. Yvette Stevens congratulated all actors of the last season, but was worried by the loss and inquired if the society can do more in terms of publicity, as it is sad to watch the best performances, but see a small audience. JW responded that we do not make a loss every year, and last year we made a CHF 11k profit. Claudia added that, technically, this year brought a profit, which only appears as a loss because of transferred amounts payable from the previous season. JW explained that the society needs to make CHF 14K per year to break even, with the major cost being the barn rental. Jane added that the "profit" should rather be called a surplus, as it is the excess

income over these CHF 14K. All surplus goes into the GEDS account for years that don't make a surplus, which kept the society afloat in COVID years.

29. JW also pointed out that it's not only publicity selling a show and there are many factors, significantly word of mouth before and during the run. Tamaam explained that as an amateur society, we try to simultaneously offer a lot of inclusive events, but also to rent professional theatres for productions, which would technically require a full time publicity team. Especially after Covid, it is hard to attract audiences and to compete against all the other possible activities in Geneva, so professional theatres give a lot of cheap offers to their audiences, which we, as an amateur group, cannot afford.

30. Lucia Marino asked if we could do more instagram reels, to which Tamaam responded that also this takes many hours to put together, as it needs to look professional, or else it will be counterproductive. JW also pointed out that we make trailers and reels for some, although not all, of our shows. He re-emphasized that 90% of the sales are by word of mouth, and also due to such factors as the choice of play and whether it's been made into a movie recently. The committee is planning each season in order to have one big seller that will cover potential expenses for other more challenging, interesting plays.

31. Casper asked if there is a possibility to exchange with other societies on the topics of publicity and attracting bigger audiences, especially at FEATS, where one can observe which of the shows are more successful. JW replied that from the conversations he had at FEATS, GEDS has a bigger budget and bigger scale productions than most other amateur companies. John Newsome seconded that and said that we are a very rich society. Tamaam pointed out that all other English-speaking amateur theatres in Switzerland approach GEDS to re-share publicity posts, and pointed out that advertising in Geneva is very expensive. JW also mentioned that the committee is potentially planning a co-production with the Village Players in 2026.

32. Julian Finn came back on the previous point, confirming that the big seller is word of mouth, particularly in Geneva. He asked if the committee has considered decide what plays GEDS should do in a season and look for directors for those instead inviting proposals for plays. This could help find three shows that are in agreement with our finances, casting abilities, etc. JW replied that we sometimes used such an approach already, especially after Covid, when the committee assembled a long list of plays for potential productions, and both Betrayal and Shakespeare in Love are plays from that list.The committee uses this list if there is a lack of proposals.

33. Rick Vincent asked if there is still an absence of proposals, to which JW replied that for this season, we had enough proposals, but there could always be more. Some of the usual GEDS directors do not hand in proposals anymore, but new directors emerge. JW also explained that a subcommittee selects plays suggested for the season based on many factors such as artistic merit, sellability, etc.

34. Yvette Stevens asked if it would help to diversify the season with plays from different cultural backgrounds, seeing how international Geneva and our possible audiences are. JW agreed and said that we have been discussing this for future seasons, while the playreadings have already become much more diverse to huge success. There might be a big audience to be brought in with a diverse program, but this needs to be considered carefully, as it is a financial responsibility to the society.

35. Karen Robotham asked if we considered the Marens theatre in Nyon as an easier to reach alternative to Coppet. JW responded that we have not so far and Claudia pointed out that, although it is cheaper than Coppet, but it also has a huge stage with an orchestra pit, and few of our productions can use a stage that big. David Pittuck pointed out that orchestra pit can be closed. JW explained that as we struggle to fill huge theatres, we are rather looking for cheaper medium-sized theatres or order of 180 seats, but so far all theatres we considered offered technical difficulties. Booking theatres is becoming increasingly difficult, and soon the seasons will have to be planned 2 years in advance, which will result in us booking the theatres in advance and then find the shows to fit the theatres and the time slots.

36. Jenny Buffle asked about the availability of the Pitoeff. Veera replied that the Pitoeff is accepting bookings for 2026 next February, but also needs to know title already.

37. Jane asked if the committee looked into the City Bleu and JW replied that we are in the process of planning a visit there.

38. David Lewis used the opportunity to encourage playreading organisers to use the free rehearsal space over his garage. JW thanked him again for this useful and helpful resource.

39. JW thanked Lance and his team for catering the event and re-emphasized that GEDS operates through people getting involved.

40. There was no other business and Julian's traditional proposal to adjourn the meeting was accepted, with Tamaam and Claudia seconding.