

Chairperson's Report, September 2023

This year has been a time of excitement. Excitement at how far we have come and excitement at where our plans are going.

Since our last AGM in September 2022, we have been a hive of activity. We have had many companies returning at least once and most multiple times to use our studio! Companies such as

Fortwilliam Music Society,	U3A for various classes,	Babosh,
Studio Symphony Orchestra,	Theatre three	Dramatime
Ulster Operatic Society,	NISMAT	PM Big Band
Thunder Rolls	Cinemagic	LDN Wrestling
FTDA Irish Dancing Festival	Trim the velvet Irish Dancing Festival	Mencap NI
Dreamworld Productions	Queen Musical Theatre Society	
2nd Chance Ballet Company	Music First NI	DU Dance NI
Melissa Gordon photo shoots	Lambeg Players	Fleetwood Dreams
Stormont School of Singing	AUDF One Act Finals	Magic Circle NI
Bloomfield Collegiate School	Fairy Tale Stageshow Productions	
East Broadway	Abba Sensations	Belvoir Park PS

I have not included our own Academy and Adult shows, as I will be addressing them later.

We have many shows already scheduled in for the incoming year, not including our regular customers who use our studio as a rehearsal / teaching space. In fact, Roger is already needing Panto 2024 dates because companies are wanting to book that far in advance! There are only 5 weekends not booked in the first 6 months of 2024!

Last committee looked at modernising our logo and trying to merge both the Studio and Belvoir players logos to create some sort of synergy. Bex Dane initially created drafts and Sinead, has put in a lot of work creating mock ups for us to vote on tonight. We will hear more about it later.

The Green Room got a face lift over the summer to create a brighter light green that makes the room seem much bigger. We are going to be replacing the old furniture as well to make it a relaxing place to sit when off stage.

I would like to thank both Roger and Michael for their continued hard work and energy. There is never a quiet moment in the studio. Most of us don't see it during the working week – actually there is no formal working week, as visiting groups spill over regularly into weekends.

It is with regret that I have to formally announce Michael's retirement in March. However, Maggie is dusting off that long list of jobs Michael has been meaning to get to, but hasn't!

I know Michael would not want an all singing all dancing retirement bash – he probably won't turn up to it if we do arrange one, preferring the quieter life. Well Michael, you're here tonight and can't escape, so I would like to say just a few words.

Michael has accumulated a very impressive 41 years working in the theatre / TV world. He started as a member with Belvoir when the first McCooey's was in the Group Theatre. When the studio opened, Michael became a full-time employee of the company and has been part of the furniture ever since. He has 30 years touring with Belvoir under his belt, erecting and building sets, including our trip to Florida in 2000.

Always the man behind the scenes, he was forced onto the stage in Second Honeymoon to play the part of the ghost of McDougall, complete with kilt and bagpipes. If there are any photographs, please send them to me! They need to be put on the noticeboard. He seems to have got "the bug" because he was forced again onto stage as part of the crowd scene in The Auction at Killybuck. He then swore he'd never let it happen again.

Michael has won best set three times in the same festival year for three different sets, one for Belvoir and two for other companies that asked him to build their sets.

He also won a 2-week Stage Management/Scenic Design residential bursary at RADA with Richard Attenborough, was then made to recite 'If Music be the food of love' in a London Park, full of people. He did it with bad grace!

Michael, it is impossible to actually account for everything you have done. We will miss you, but in your own words to me recently, "I'm only retiring, I'm not leaving".

Our studio building continues to creak and groan with building arthritis. I have mentioned a face lift for the green room. We still hope in the future to completely renovate the backstage dressing rooms. The front wall has also had a face lift over the summer, and we would hope to look at the exterior of the building this year.

Our new website is live! Please visit at your leisure.

We are currently updating our policies, with the updated sickness policy coming into effect from 1st September.

We have purchased an Allen & Heath SQ7 digital console with associated stage boxes to upgrade our sound system and allow flexible mixing positions within the auditorium. Please speak to Karl if you would like that translated!

Our noticeboards in the foyer have all been updated, with shows we have done up to the present day. In the minor hall Claire Ashe has been busy volunteering to keep our photos current.

Questions have also been asked about rising ticket prices. The cost of living is extortionate! Our last SSE Airtricity bill was £1706.49 for the month of July and our gas bill was just shy of £500. This needs to be covered somehow! We are still super competitive compared to The Lyric (£15-£32), The Mac (£12.50-£27.50), GOH (£25-£36.50), Waterfront (£18 - £69).

So now to Belvoir Players. What have we been up to?

September began with the now traditional rush of excitement with the casting of our pantomime, Mother Goose, directed by our Adult Artistic Director, Mark McClean. Principals met every Monday and Wednesday, as well as joining the academy chorus for two hours every Sunday with Matthew and Wilson.

The senior academy met the challenges of putting together “Bring it On”, under Shane’s expert direction. This was challenging in both musical content and in choreography. Matthew was joined by Nikita, a cheerleading coach to create the spectacle of lifts we were in awe of.

Moana, our junior academy show in June brought sunshine and a feel good to Belvoir. Directed by Alex, it was colourful and enchanting and showcased how promising our future is!

This year our summer project was directed by one of our alumni, Dean Johnson, who has carved a very successful career in theatre in London and abroad. The Beautiful Game was a harrowing story of how friendships across the divide are made and ripped apart by the troubles! It was a show not to miss and I know there were those that came back to see it more than once.

Instead of the usual junior summer scheme, we trialled a two week start to finish show, along the lines of most other summer projects. Aladdin, directed by Alex, with a strong team behind him of Ellie, Serena and Sophie proved once again how talented our young people are! It was a show that brought humour and familiarity to our audiences.

Unfortunately, funding we applied for, for both these projects fell through after auditions and information regarding places being free had been advertised. Thank you, Jim for all your work in the applications. The lesson we have learned is to look at charging for participation in the future.

Academy has been celebrating many successes this year. A number of Belvoir children were successful in The Grand Opera House’s Summer Project auditions for Oliver! I am going to mention two in particular – Ryan Johnson, who was cast as Oliver and Ella Coey who was cast as Bette. Both held their own amongst the more seasoned youth talent.

Perhaps our most public accolade is not from current members, but from our Alumni, Ross White’s Oscar! Wow! Just think, someone in or Academy right now could potentially be our next Oscar winner!

However, the highlight of our current academy success has to be 6 NODA nominations for Addams Family. Directed by Shane, MD’d by Wilson and choreographed by Ophra Devitt. This in itself is remarkable! However, Belvoir went on to win two awards: Harrison Gordon won outstanding youth performance for Gomez and the show won outstanding youth production. A fitting tribute to Shane’s excellent directing, Wilson’s musical direction and Ophera’s choreography.

Our Academy continues to be oversubscribed, with approximately 40 on a waiting list!

The costume department as always is busy. They are now in every Monday evening with bookings from all across the province! This is on top of Belvoir lining up to be costumed out! They are unsung heroes in our company. None of the costume ladies, as they have become known, get paid – everything is done on a voluntary basis. Thank you all so, so much.

The Friday tech club also meets weekly under Karl's watchful eye.

The Adult Company have also enjoyed success. We came full circle with Widow's paradise in September, after a very successful summer tour. Immediately afterwards we started rehearsing for Mother Goose as mentioned before. This was a resounding success – what Belvoir panto has become known as! We had 95% attendance, which is phenomenal considering how the cost of living has gone up! We then went straight into rehearsing The Continental Quilt, which brought much hilarity to the theatre in March.

Then the summer show, Sam Cree's Strictly for the Birds toured Omagh, Enniskillen, Ballyearle, Armagh, Coleraine and Cookstown and finally back to Belvoir.

December 2023 will see Jessie's debut as a pantomime director. Beauty and the Beast promises to be a cacophony of sound and colour.

With our spring show and summer tour still to be decided, if you have an idea or would be interested in directing, please let us know.

Just like the academy, we have enjoyed some successes throughout the year, with Tony McGurk, Robert Mc Gregor, Chris Curry and Caroline Stone all being successful film and television actors! There are probably more, that I don't know about, and I apologise to anyone I may have left out.

All adults involved in panto, whether on stage or backstage must be access NI checked. Without this, they cannot take part. Belvoir covers all the costs and Caroline looks after all the applications as part of her role as Child Protection Officer.

We are considering doing more Musical Theatre with the adult group, alongside our traditional plays.

Fundraising will be a focus this year.

I have had a fun year working with a committee that has worked hard and given what they could to represent you. I thank every one from the bottom of my heart for your help and support.

I know the outgoing committee would like me to thank you, our friends and family, for all the support we have received. Yes, it's been busy, yes I've highlighted areas that need focussed on, but I have not highlighted the commitment and comradery you have given to the players. This is why we are still here. This is why we keep coming back. Here's to many more years in our own wee studio.