

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL SERVICES

EMPIRE THEATRE ANNUAL REPORT UPDATE 2007 – 2008

**Strategic Priorities: Prosperous, Attractive and Accessible City,
Corporate Improvement Objectives: CI01, CI04**

1.0 WHY HAS THIS REPORT COME TO THE COMMITTEE?

- 1.1 The report invites members of Culture & Leisure Review to note and comment on work ongoing within the Sunderland Empire Theatre and the monitoring systems currently in place in regards to the contract with Live Nation to ensure the highest quality of service is achieved within the Theatre.
- 1.2 The work of the Culture & Leisure Review committee in considering the past year's activity of the Empire Theatre will support the Council in achieving its Strategic Priorities of a Prosperous, Attractive and Accessible City. Through monitoring performance under the agreement the Council has with Clear Channel Entertainment for the management of the Empire, the Committee's work contributes to the Council's Corporate Improvement Priorities C101 (Delivering customer-focussed services) and C104 (improving partnership working to deliver 'One City').

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Sunderland Empire Theatre was opened in July 1907 and is the largest theatre in the region hosting major West End touring shows. The Theatre is now managed by Live Nation Venues on behalf of Sunderland City Council through a contract.
- 2.2 Live Nation Venues has agreed to manage and operate the Theatre under the terms and conditions of the agreement which was re-signed by all parties in March 2007, following the handover from Clear Channel Entertainment and the refurbishment. As part of the agreement Live Nation report on a regular basis to both Sunderland City Council (Community and Cultural Directorate) and to the Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust Limited (which is a limited company established to monitor performance and quality of the Theatre). See Appendix I for current Communications Map.
- 2.3 Under the agreement between the parties an agreed maintenance and management fee is paid on an annual basis to Live Nation in order to carry out the necessary functions of the Theatre.

3.0 CURRENT POSITION

3.1 PERFORMANCE 2007/08

3.1.1 During the period April 2007 – March 2008 the Empire Theatre has delivered over 325 shows. During the course of each year the Theatre as part of the grant agreement is required to present a balanced mix of productions covering a broad range of arts and entertainment. The programme is required to include the following:

- Dance
- Opera
- Musicals
- Drama
- Classical Music
- Christmas family show/pantomime
- Popular one nighters (comedy, rock, pop etc)
- Amateur operatic productions
- Amateur/charity/community events

3.1.2 Minimum programming requirements are necessary as part of the contract and a minimum of 280 performances each calendar year must be implemented.

3.1.3 Below is a list of selected performances along with attendance figures for the period April 2007 – March 2008. For a full breakdown of all performances please see Appendix II.

Show	Performances	Paid Admits	Total Admits	% Capacity
City Sings	1	1295	1348	67.4%
Jimmy Carr	1	1796	1806	90.3%
McFly	1	1928	1958	97.9%
Scooby Doo	7	8621	9195	65.68%
Riverdance	8	11319	11523	72.02%
Russell Brand	1	1723	1779	88.95%
High Society	8	3669	5199	32.49%
Abba Mania	3	1662	2232	37.20%
Godspell	8	2389	2750	17.19%
Elvis	1	926	1018	50.90%
Colin Fry & Tony Stockwell	1	1932	1932	96.6%
Frank Skinner	1	1947	1947	97.35%
Cinderella	52	53349	55827	53.68%
Morrissey	1	1892	1916	95.8%
Houghton Dance	1	671	675	33.75%
Bootleg Beatles	1	1254	1301	65.05%

NB Total Capacity per performance is 2000 (1858 seated, 10 wheelchair spaces 132 standing). Complimentary ticket figures are made up group concessions, 2 for 1 offers, press, guests, staff incentives, Trust members, competition winners and charitable donations. As standing seats are not sold for most events, 100% capacity cannot be reached therefore sell out is reached at approximately 97%.

3.2 FUTURE PRODUCTIONS

- 3.2.1 New shows for the forthcoming Summer 2008 season include *Joseph* starring Craig Chalmers from the "Any Dream will Do" series, *Fiddler on the Roof* starring Joe McGann, *Hello Dolly* starring Anita Dobson, Darren Day and David McAlister and Disney's spectacular *Beauty and the Beast*.
- 3.2.2 Birmingham Royal Ballet will also be returning to the Theatre in November and Sunderland Symphony Orchestra will also be returning to the Theatre for a second year with a *Last Night at the Proms* style Concert.
- 3.2.3 New shows include *Dolly* (based upon the life of Dolly Parton), *Alice in Wonderland* and returning with part two of the comedy series will be *Mrs Brown* (this adults only show will be handled in the same sensitive way as last years performance).
- 3.2.4 12,000 tickets have already been sold for *Aladdin* which is scheduled for Christmas 2008 and *Lord of the Dance* is now also on sale for October 2009.

3.3 EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

- 3.3.1 Live Nation continues to work towards delivering a wide and diverse education and outreach programme for the Theatre, through a variety of activity, including:
- Education Resource Packs, show related activity and workshops
 - Tours and Talks
 - Work Experience
 - Stage Experience
 - Coaches for Kidz
- 3.3.2 As part of their Education and Outreach scheme, the Sunderland Empire in conjunction with Live Nation Stage Experience presented a production of *Thoroughly Modern Millie* in August 2006.

Live Nation Stage Experience is an opportunity for 9-25 year olds to star in a professionally produced show and in 2006 over 140 young

people attended the summer school, and managed to present the show from scratch in under two weeks.

Due to the success, the project was repeated in 2007, with over 240 young people applying to take part. There is a charge for attending the project but the Theatre continues to encourage all young people to apply and offers sponsored places to those who would not normally be able to apply due to the cost incurred.

The growing success of the project has resulted in its continuation for 2008 which will take place in August with a performance of 'West Side Story'. Auditions took place in May 2008 with over 260 young applicants.

- 3.3.3 Theatre Quest and Arts and Kids Partnership – this is a project which involved the Theatre working in partnership with the Arts and Kids Foundation, The Bridges Shopping Centre and Farringdon Comprehensive School. To complete the project the pupils involved had to produce a selection of work, including set and costume designs and drama pieces based on a specially commissioned play.

The final workshops for the project took place in February, resulting with the pupils involved taking part in three drama workshops, a costume workshop and a set design workshop as well as visiting the theatre for a tour and show and completing work on the project during lesson time.

The final performance of the play took place in April and was very well received.

The Theatre have now been approached by Arts and Kids to work on a second project beginning in September 2008, working on a similar project with local primary schools. This will focus on linking current school bookers with new schools, hopefully encouraging them to bring groups to the theatre.

- 3.3.4 The Theatre is committed to education as part of their service delivery and have experienced and qualified staff on hand to deliver this element of their programme in which they aim to take the Theatre outside to young people who have not had the opportunity to take part in any element of the Theatre and to also encourage schools and young people to experience theatre at its very best.

3.4 SERVICE QUALITY

- 3.4.1 As part of the service quality and monitoring of the theatre all complaints and compliments are investigated and responded to accordingly. In all cases the appropriate action is taken and if necessary passed on to the relevant production company for comment.

For April 2007 – March 2008 a total number of 84 complaints along with 85 compliments were received to the Theatre. All complaints are attended to on receipt but in some cases certain complaints received are beyond the control of the Theatre and its staff.

Complaints include:

- Temperature in auditorium
- Disappointed with performance
- Too loud
- Patrons sat in wrong seat
- Unhappy with cast change

Compliments include:

- Hospitality and Friendliness of staff
- Brilliant performance
- Assisting with ticket mix up
- Thank you for Theatre Tour

3.4.2 As a further measure to continue to monitor and improve the services within the Theatre, Culture and Tourism also allocate a range of mystery visitors to the Theatre on a regular basis. The aim is to report on findings in relation to performance quality, customer care and health and safety issues.

3.4.3 During the period January – December 2007 a total of 23 visits were made to various performances at the Theatre. The majority of respondents were very satisfied with the Theatre, its staff and the productions, with some dissatisfaction reported with telephone booking procedures and the cost of refreshments. Mystery visits will continue to be undertaken to ensure that the standards of the Theatre are monitored and improved as appropriate.

3.5 EMPIRE CENTENARY 2007

3.5.1 To support the centenary celebrations of the Sunderland Empire in July 2007 a week long programme of events and activities were devised through a Centenary working group.

3.5.2 Programme devised and delivered included:

- Centenary Ceremony at Sunderland Minster
- Centenary Community Arts Project
- Much Ado About Nothing in Herrington Country Park (cancelled due to bad weather)
- Empire Theatre Open Day
- Talks by local historians
- Band in the Park

- 3.5.3 Despite bad weather affecting some of the outdoor programme the week was a huge success due to the partners involved in its delivery, in particular Live Nation and the Empire Chaplain.
- 3.5.4 The aim of the week was to commemorate the centenary but to also acknowledge the importance of the Empire Theatre in its heritage and its contribution to the cultural offer of the city. The idea was to take the Theatre to new audiences and raise its profile with audiences who have not attended for some time and it is believed that this was achieved.

3.6 DR GILBERT FUND

- 3.6.1 Dr Frank Gilbert was a local benefactor and music lover who on his death bequeathed a trophy and monetary fund to encourage the appreciation of music by young people in Sunderland. He was a well-known and respected patron of the Arts.
- 3.6.2 As part of the legacy left by Dr Gilbert the City Sings event has gone from strength to strength. The aim of the event is to fulfil the wishes of the late Dr Gilbert to encourage the appreciation of music by young people in the city.
- 3.6.3 The competition consists of two categories – Primary and Open (for tertiary and mixed age secondary groups). The theme for 2008 was based on City Sings at the Movies, with all schools encouraged to include at least one song from a feature film.
- 3.6.4 The winners of each category for 2008 were as follows:
- | | |
|----------|-------------------|
| Primary: | St Cuthbert's |
| Open: | Thornhill Singers |
- 3.6.5 Each choir received a prize of £150 from the Dr Gilbert Fund along with £150 from the School Governors Association with the overall winner, Thornhill School, receiving the Dr Gilbert Trophy plus tickets to attend Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.
- 3.6.6 The event for 2007 was also nominated for the Journal Culture Awards in 2007 for the best Sunderland event, alongside the Glass Dome Exhibition at the National Glass Centre and the re-opening of Monkwearmouth Museum. In an award ceremony held in Newcastle in March 2008, it was pleasing to note that the event was declared the winner.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Sunderland Empire Theatre under the management of Live Nation Venues and the current agreement with Sunderland City Council,

continues to provide an excellent service to the people of Sunderland and the wider region. Through the monitoring systems in place it is anticipated that the service will continue to flourish and enable the Empire Theatre to continue to be recognised as one of the region's leading Theatre facilities.

5.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report and to receive an update on the Empire Theatre on an annual basis.

6.0 APPENDICES

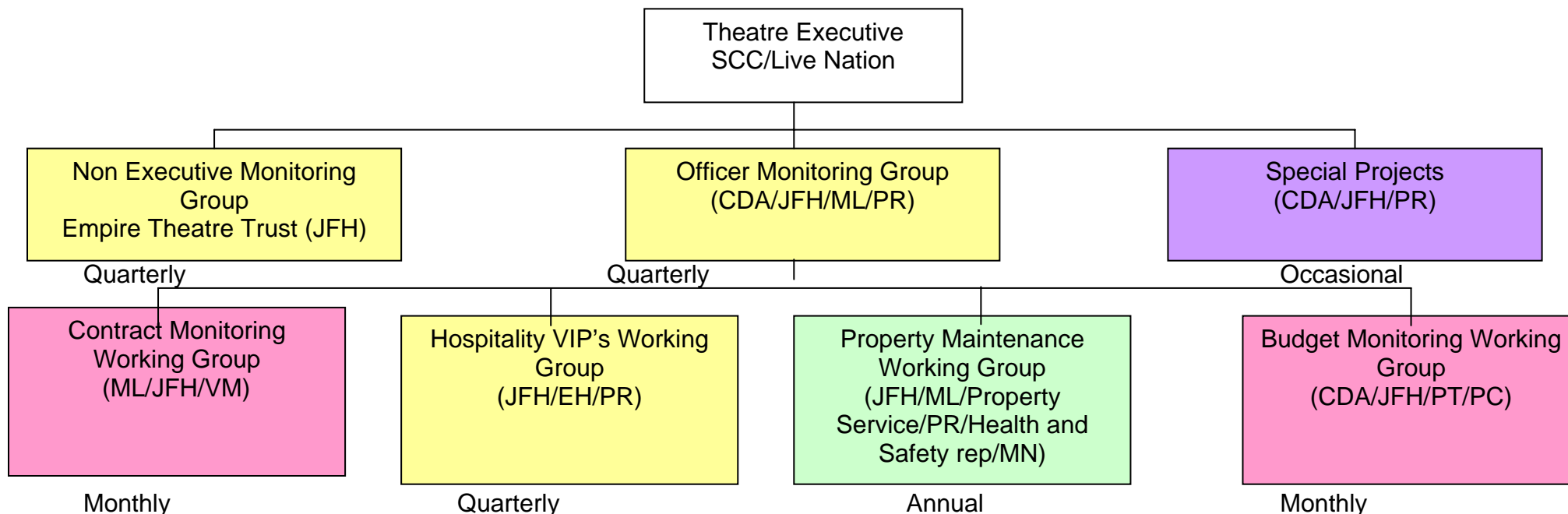
- 6.1 Appendix I - Empire Theatre Communication Map 2006
- 6.2 Appendix II – Annual List of Performances 2007 - 08



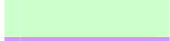

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 Empire Theatre Quarterly Trust Reports (April 2007 – 16 March 2008)

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EMPIRE THEATRE COMMUNICATION MAP



Key	
Monthly	
Quarterly	
Annually	
Occasional	

CDA	Chris Alexander	Head of Culture and Tourism
JFH	Jane Hall	Assistant Head of Culture and Tourism, Libraries, Heritage & Events
ML	Martin Lancaster	Support Services Manager
PR	Paul Ryan	General Manager, Live Nation
EH	Elaine Hannington	Events and Resorts Officer
VM	Vicki Medhurst	Cultural Heritage Manager
PT	Pauline Thompson	Budget Manager
PC	Philip Clasper	Management Accountant
MN	Mark Nicholson	Area Maintenance Manager - Live Nation

Empire Theatre Attendance Figures – April 2007 – 16 March 2008

Show	Performances	Paid Admits	Total Admits	% capacity
City Sings	1	1295	1348	67.40%
Mums the word	8	3260	3355	20.97%
Kings of Swing	1	498	514	25.70%
McFly	1	1928	1958	97.90%
Sooty's Magic Castle	1	466	499	24.95%
Variety Club	1	295	350	17.50%
Beyond the Barricades	1	1010	1031	51.55%
Jimmy Carr	1	1796	1806	90.30%
Starlight Express	23	13327	15033	32.68%
Meatloaf	1	301	544	27.20%
Sunderland Dance Festival	1	1160	1189	59.45%
Scooby Doo	7	8621	9195	65.68%
Derren Brown	1	1938	1940	97.00%
Footloose	8	6280	6482	40.51%
42nd Street	15	9830	10124	33.75%
The Chuckle Brothers	2	2011	2053	51.33%
Riverdance	8	11319	11523	72.02%
The Producers	23	11206	14388	31.28%
Viva - Kathleen Davies	1	472	472	23.60%
Russell Brand	1	1723	1779	88.95%
Oliver - Centre Stage	3	2885	2978	49.63%
High Society	8	3669	5199	32.49%
We Will Rock You	4	3618	4081	51.01%
Tweenies	4	3324	3441	43.01%
Lady Salsa	7	2898	4410	31.50%
Abba Mania	3	1662	2232	37.20%
Alice the musical	1	325	0	16.25%
Glenn Miller	1	636	663	33.15%
Puppetry of the Penis	1	678	730	36.50%
Rockin on Heavens Door	1	501	862	43.10%
Legends of Las Vegas	1	330	372	18.60%
Angelina's Star performance	5	3764	3885	38.85%
One Night of Queen	1	998	1051	52.55%
Mrs Brown's last wedding	10	3196	5814	29.07%

Elvis	1	926	1018	50.90%
Jethro	1	361	384	19.20%
Dancing Dreams	1	935	935	46.75%
Nabucco & Carmen	3	1898	2614	43.57%
BRB - Triple Bill	6	3067	3912	32.60%
Sunderland Symphony	1	504	510	25.50%
Godspell	8	2389	2750	17.19%
Dance Celebration	1	492	492	24.60%
Chubby Brown	1	1901	1913	95.65%
Colin Fry & Tony Stockwell	1	1932	1932	96.60%
Vampires Rock	1	673	792	39.60%
That'll be the day	1	816	920	46.00%
Christmas is coming	1	736	755	37.75%
Vivaldi's Four seasons by Candlelight	1	752	765	38.25%
South Pacific	7	8575	8694	62.10%
Frank Skinner	1	1947	1947	97.35%
Horrible Histories	10	5547	6167	30.84%
Dr. Dolittle	16	11176	11740	36.69%
Grumpy old women	1	736	754	37.70%
Cinderella	52	53349	55827	53.68%
SAOS - Carousel*	5	2319	2509	25.09%
Rotary Club Youth Music*	1	763	959	47.95%
Rockin' on Heaven's Door	1	778	828	41.40%
Ellen Kent's Nutcracker	6	5181	5516	45.97%
SALA Sound of Music	1	745	823	41.15%
Morrissey	1	1892	1916	95.80%
Shakespeare for Kidz	2	1171	1249	31.23%
Beyond the Barricade	1	980	996	49.80%
Derek Acorah	1	990	1005	50.25%
Circus of Horrors	1	762	786	39.30%
Big Time American Wrestling	1	1133	1145	57.25%
Songs of Sister Act	1	808	914	45.70%
Billy Fury Story	1	828	865	43.25%
The Gruffalo	4	2688	2712	33.90%
Oh! What a Night!	4	1867	2041	25.51%
Dave Spikey	1	985	1005	50.25%

Half a Sixpence	8	5056	5236	32.73%
Houghton Dance*	1	671	675	33.75%
Dancing in the Streets	7	3769	4404	31.46%
BRB - Triple Bill / Swan Lake	7	6556	6818	48.70%
Bootleg Beatles	1	1254	1301	65.05%
	326			