

EMPIRE THEATRE ANNUAL REPORT

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CITY SERVICES

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: SP1: Prosperous City, SP5: Attractive and Inclusive City

**CORPORATE PRIORITIES: CIO1: Delivering Customer Focused Services
CIO4: Improving Partnership Working To Deliver 'One City'**

1.0 WHY HAS THIS REPORT COME TO THE COMMITTEE?

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members of the work ongoing within the Sunderland Empire Theatre and the monitoring systems currently in place to ensure the highest quality of service is achieved within the Theatre.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Sunderland Empire Theatre was opened in July 1907 and is now the largest theatre in the region hosting major West End touring shows. The Theatre is now managed by Ambassador Theatre Group Venues (ATGV) on behalf of Sunderland City Council, under which ATGV acts as the operator, manager and provider of services at the theatre.

2.2 ATGV has agreed to manage and operate the Theatre under the terms and conditions of an agreement which was signed by all parties in March 2007. As part of this agreement ATGV report on a regular basis to both Sunderland City Council City Services Directorate and to the Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust Limited (which is a limited company established to monitor performance and quality of the Theatre).

2.3 Under the agreement between the parties an agreed maintenance and management fee is paid on an annual basis to ATGV, in which to carry out the necessary functions of the Theatre.

3.0 CURRENT POSITION

3.1 PERFORMANCE 2009/10

3.1.1 During the period 1 March 2009 to 31 March 2010 the Empire Theatre delivered over 341 shows. Performances included a balanced programme of productions which is detailed as part of the management agreement and includes dance, opera, musicals, educational, children's and a Christmas production along with local and community events.

- 3.1.2 Below is a list of selected performances along with attendance figures for the period March 2009 – March 2010. (For a full programme of annual performances please see Appendix II).

Show	No. Of Perfs	Paid Admits	Total Admits	% Capacity
Cabaret	8	5558	5718	35.74%
Disney's High School Musical	8	11571	11662	72.89%
City Sings	1	1380	1429	71.45%
Jimmy Carr	1	1779	1779	88.95%
Chicago	8	7804	7915	49.47%
Little Shop of Horrors	8	3273	3481	21.76%
Fame	8	5067	5611	35.07%
Singin' in the Rain	7	3838	4170	29.79%
We Will Rock You	21	34385	35102	83.58%
Stage Experience – Boogie Nights	4	2247	2447	30.59%
Annie	7	5290	5847	41.76%
Blood Brothers	8	5037	5078	31.74%
BRB – Sleeping Beauty	6	5659	5905	49.21%

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 2010 include *Hairspray*, starring *Les Dennis and Michael Stark*, *BRB with Romeo and Juliet*, *Ken Dodd* and the *spectacular festive production of White Christmas*.
- 3.2.2 Other major events for early 2011 are *Spamalot*, the national touring production of *Monty Python* fame and *Calendar Girls*.
- 3.2.3 The Christmas production in 2010/11 is the huge number one production of the Irving Berlin classic, *White Christmas*. This is replacing the pantomime production of *Sleeping Beauty*, and stars *Tom Chambers* and *Adam Cooper*. ATGV took this decision due to the overwhelming success of *White Christmas* in Manchester where it broke box office records for their Christmas productions. However the overall desire is for *Sunderland Empire* to deliver top quality west end entertainment and this is a great opportunity for the venue to shine out and deliver the very best in musical family entertainment.

3.3 EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

3.3.1 ATGV continue to be committed to delivering an education programme as part of their service delivery. Their experienced and qualified staff are on hand to deliver this element of their programme. The programme is diverse and varied and works to encourage young people to have the opportunity to experience the Theatre and also allows for ATGV to take the Theatre to an outside audience.

3.3.2 Elements of their education programme include:

- Education Resource Packs, show related activity and workshops
- Tours and Talks
- Work Experience
- Stage Experience

3.3.3 The Stage Experience Project has now been running for four years and continues to grow in popularity. *Boogie Nights* was delivered in 2009 and saw 187 young people aged between 9 and 25 apply for the project to take part either as a performer or as part of the technical team. From this 131 young people took part, which consisted of 101 females and 30 males. In 2009 the fee for the project was £175, a 3% rise from 2008. The fee covers the two weeks professional tuition, loan of costume and souvenir t-shirt. From the allocated places, 14 were sponsored, mainly from local businesses, individuals, Sunderland City Council and Sunderland College. There were 4 performances of *Boogie Nights* which included 1 matinee and 2,447 people attended during the course of the show. The 2010 show will be '*Oliver!*' and the project will run from 26 July to the 7 August 2010. Auditions took place in May and 153 young people will take part.

3.3.4 The Theatre has also once again participated in Heritage Open Days 2009, which took place in September and is the fifth year the Theatre has opened its doors to the public. 2009 once again proved a great success, all tours were fully booked and over the weekend 84 people were given a tour of the building and feedback was very positive. 2010 will also be seeing a series of backstage tours to the Theatre, which enables visitors to experience the workings behind the Theatre, as a one off opportunity.

3.3.5 In December 2008 the Theatre received a grant of £30,000 to participate in the Arts Councils theatre initiative, which has entitled 'A Night Less Ordinary'. The scheme launched in February 2009, aims to give away up to 2000 free theatre tickets to young people aged under 26 at the venue each year until March 2011. During the first year of the scheme 1319 tickets were allocated, which although short of the target was the highest performing theatre involved with the scheme within the North East and was well ahead of the national average (as the scheme overall has struggled to hit targets).

Continuing publicity and advertising through the Theatre's own and the official 'A Night Less Ordinary' website as well as targeted marketing through universities, colleges and youth groups will allow ATGV to continue encouraging interest in the scheme, in the coming year.

3.4 SERVICE QUALITY

3.4.1 As part of the service quality and monitoring of the theatre all complaints and compliments to the Theatre are investigated and responded to accordingly. In all cases the appropriate action is taken and if necessary passed on to the appropriate production company for comment. For March 2009 – March 2010 a total number of 118 complaints along with 114 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:

- Parking around Theatre
- Temperature in auditorium
- Legroom
- Booking Fees

Compliments include:

- Excellent Customer Service
- The kindness of staff
- Making us feel welcome
- Strong education links

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 main function of the Mystery Visitor is to visit Sunderland Empire at an allocated performance and report findings in relation to: -

- Performance quality
- Customer Care
- Health and Safety

3.4.3 All Mystery Visitors complete a 'Mystery Visit Report Form', which are reviewed and monitored with appropriate action when required. It has to be understood that this is not a scientific method and is based on personal perspectives but it can give a general feel for service and performances at the Theatre.

3.4.4 During the period March 2009 – March 2010 a total of 13 visits were made to various performances at the Theatre. The majority of respondents were very satisfied with the Theatre, its staff and the 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 DR GILBERT FUND

3.5.1 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.

3.5.2 The competition consists of two categories – Primary and Open (for tertiary and mixed age secondary groups). The theme for 2010 was based on City Sings

Goes International, with all schools encouraged to introduce one song that had an international theme.

3.5.3 The winners of each category for 2010 were as follows:

Primary: East Herrington Primary School
Open: St Robert's Singers

3.5.4 The quality of the performances continues to be of the highest standard and all performers were very well received. The adjudicating panel for the evening was chaired by Sunderland television celebrity, Lauren Leverne, along with the Mayor of Sunderland, Chairman of the Empire Theatre Trust and Music experts from region.

3.5.5 Each choir received a prize fund of £150 from the Dr Gilbert Fund along with £150 from the School Governors Association, with the overall winner, East Herrington Primary, receiving the Dr Gilbert Trophy plus tickets to attend a performance of '*Dreamboats and Petticoats*'.

3.6 EMPIRE THEATRE TRUST

3.6.1 The formal role of the Empire Theatre Trust as set out in its Memorandum of Association is "to promote, maintain, improve and advance education, particularly by the production of educational plays and the encouragement of the Arts".

3.6.2 As part of that role and the monitoring process the Trust has agreed to address a number of priorities in order to improve performance and assist in raising the profile and further promoting the Theatre. These areas include:

- Continued promotion of the Theatre to sponsors/businesses in the city/region
- Promoting the education programmes devised by ATGV
- Development of a Public Art feature on the fly-tower
- Further development and promotion of the City Sings project in conjunction with Children's Services

3.6.3 Members of the Trust continue to work with Officers from Culture and Tourism and ATGV to ensure the above issues are addressed and delivered.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Sunderland Empire Theatre under the management of ATGV 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 Sunderland Empire to continue to be recognised as one of the region's leading Theatre facilities.

4.2 The Empire Theatre continues to offer a first class service to the both the residents of the city and the wider region as well as attracting visitors from further afield. The Theatre works hard to deliver an innovative and varied programme of shows and performances, allowing the Theatre to be "The West End of the North East", thus improving tourism to the area and raising the profile of the city to outside visitors.

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

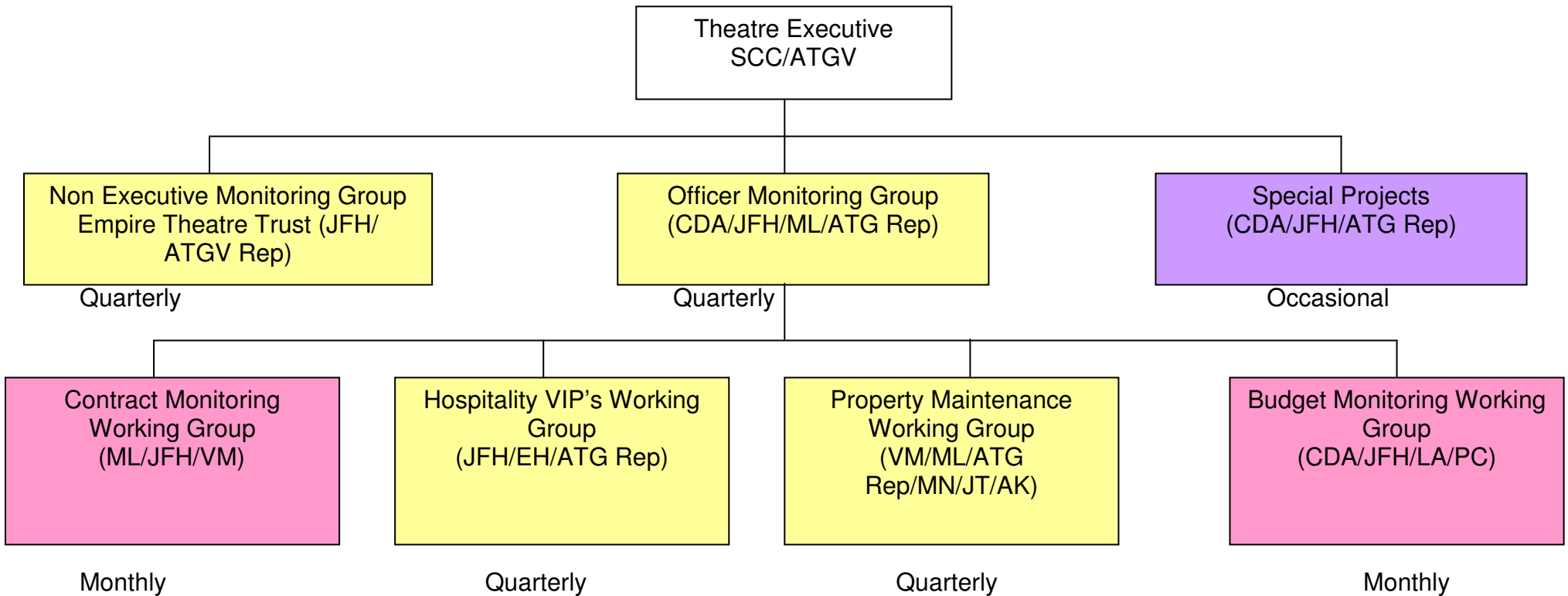
6.1 Empire Theatre Communication Map 2009 – Appendix I
Annual Performance List and Figures – Appendix II

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 Empire Theatre Performance Figures 2009-2010.

Contact Officer: Chris Alexander, Head of Culture and Tourism,
0191 5618420
Chris.Alexander@sunderland.gov.uk

EMPIRE THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS MAP



Key	
Monthly	
Quarterly	
Annually	
Occasional	

CDA	Chris Alexander	Head of Culture and Tourism, City Services
JFH	Jane Hall	Assistant Head of Culture and Tourism
ML	Martin Lancaster	Support Services Manager, City Services
ATG	Andrew Rawlinson	General Manager, ATGV
Rep		
EH	Elaine Hannington	Events and Resorts Officer, City Services
VM	Vicki Medhurst	Cultural Heritage Manager, City Services
LA	Lisa Armstrong	Finance, City Services
PC	Philip Clasper	Management Accountant, City Services
MN	Mark Nicholson	Area Maintenance Manager - ATGV
JT	John Todd	Building Services Manager, City Services
AK	Anne Kirk	Building Services, City Services

Appendix II

Show	Performances	Paid Admits	Total Admits	% capacity
Al Murray	1	1861	1861	22.90
The Tempest	2	775	817	19.05
Sally Morgan	1	1340	1343	33.45
Disney Live	6	6546	6546	54.85
BRB Triple Bill	6	3542	3592	36.40
Witches of Eastwick	7	9085	9141	33.34
Chuckle Trek	1	1246	1254	35.74
All The Fun of The Fair	8	4651	4696	32.00
Chicago	8	7804	7915	49.47
Riverdance	8	13600	13804	86.28
Little Shop of Horrors	8	3273	3481	21.76
You don't bring me flowers	1	293	325	16.25
Sponge Bob Square Pants	8	3299	3701	20.56
Fame	8	5067	5611	35.07
Joseph	12	6426	6598	27.49
Derek Acorah	1	512	536	26.80
Singin' In The Rain	7	3838	4170	29.79
Trish Robson School of Dance*	1	791	801	40.05
Bat the Symphony	1	399	547	27.35
Songs of Sister Act	1	564	606	30.30
Jimmy Carr	1	1779	1779	88.95
Scooby Doo	7	3621	3845	27.46
The Naked truth	3	1515	1643	27.38
Halfway to Paradise	1	588	618	30.90
Reaching for the Starts*	1	574	578	28.90
The Best of the Blues Brothers	1	490	513	25.65
Joe Longthorne	1	718	753	37.65
One Night Only*	1	668	680	34.00
Sunderland School of Dance*	1	1412	1484	74.20
We Will Rock You	21	34385	35102	83.58
Quadrophenia	3	2012	2129	35.48
Fullwell School*	1	1257	1257	62.85
The Drifters	1	655	673	33.65

Dreamboats and Petticoats	7	3918	4057	28.98
Wizard of Oz*	3	2739	2810	46.83
Dolly	1	334	357	17.85
Sunderland Symphony	1	839	879	43.95
Boogie Nights*	4	2247	2447	30.59
Abba Mania	1	788	858	42.90
Remember When	1	585	629	31.45
Milkshake – My first Concert	3	3172	3245	54.08
Elvis on Tour – The Legend Continues	1	515	559	27.95
Annie	7	5290	5847	41.76
Ken Dodd	1	1461	1500	75.00
80's Mania	1	385	451	22.55
Mrs Brown Rides Again	5	3480	3707	37.07
Blood Brothers	16	11550	11605	36.27
Colin Fry	1	1087	1096	54.80
That's Amore	1	335	367	18.35
Gotta Sing – Gotta Dance	1	346	376	18.80
S4K	2	784	850	21.25
Let's Zep	1	340	368	18.40
Nashville Nights	1	278	312	15.60
Kathleen Davis	1	512	517	25.85
That'll Be The Day	1	498	510	25.50
Roy Chubby Brown	1	1181	1191	59.55
Al Murray	1	1060	1087	54.35
Cacophony	1	715	855	42.75
The Rat Pack	1	679	728	36.40
Vampires Rock	1	745	784	39.20
Lord of the Dance	6	4921	6654	55.45
Evita	16	8429	8606	26.89
Sing-a-long-a Abba	1	387	421	21.05
BRB Triple Bill	6	2760	2959	24.66
Jane McDonald	1	1129	1133	56.65
Queen – A Kind of Magic	1	389	456	22.80
Tony Stockwell	1	378	400	20.00
Grumpy Old Women	1	840	855	42.75
Horrible Histories	5	4103	4376	43.76
The Sound of Music	23	35186	35764	77.75

Peter Pan	38	51301	53416	70.28
The Nutcracker	2	1766	1860	46.50
Youth Musical Spectacular*	1	368	564	28.20
Jimmy Carr	1	1809	1813	90.65
The Likes of Us*	5	1567	2043	20.43
Stomp	8	5127	5353	33.46
Circus of Horrors	1	702	742	37.10
Sally Morgan	1	1468	1496	74.80
Big Time American Wrestling	1	629	679	33.95
Beyond The Barricades	1	1089	1114	55.70
Chuckle Brothers	1	837	891	44.50
Rhod Gilbert	1	1890	1809	94.50
Bootleg Beatles	1	1511	1551	77.55
City Sings*	1	1227	1291	64.55
BRB – Sleeping Beauty	6	5659	5905	49.21
Jimmy Carr	1	1250	1284	64.20
Essence of Ireland	1	660	715	35.75
Ricky Tomlinson	1	722	761	38.05
That'll Be The Day	1	419	438	21.90
Kathleen Davis*	1	493	493	24.65
Caroline Oliver*	1	446	446	22.30
TOTAL	341	309911	322679	