

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL  
SERVICES**

**EMPIRE THEATRE ANNUAL REPORT**

**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 Live Nation Venues on behalf of Sunderland City Council.
- 2.2 Live Nation has agreed to manage and operate the Theatre under the terms and conditions of the agreement which was signed by all parties in March 2007. As part of the agreement Live Nation report on a regular basis to both Sunderland City Council (Culture and Tourism Section) 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 which to carry out the necessary functions of the Theatre.

**3.0 CURRENT POSITION**

**3.1 PERFORMANCE 2008/09**

- 3.1.1 During the period 18 March 2008 – 28 February 2009 the Empire Theatre has delivered over 320 shows. Performances include a wide ranging programme which is detailed as part of the current management agreement and includes dance, opera, musicals, educational, children's and pantomime along with local and community events.

3.1.2 Below is a list of selected performances along with attendance figures for the period March 2008 – February 2009. (For a full programme of annual performances please see Appendix II).

Show	No. Of Perfs	Paid Admits	Total Admits	% Capacity
City Sings	1	1380	1429	71.45%
Songs of Praise	2	0	3290	82.25%
Roy Chubby Brown	1	1676	1688	84.4%
Jimmy Carr	1	1824	1830	91.5%
SALA Abba	1	1176	1250	62.5%
West Side Story *(Stage Exp)	4	4241	4442	55.53%
Chitty Chitty Bang Bang	60	36495	38503	32.09%
French & Saunders	1	1883	1898	94.9%
The Word*	2	0	3100	77.5%
Barnes School Musical Festival	1	1374	1374	68.7%
Joseph	12	15940	16082	67.01%
Lazy Town	4	4241	4442	45.04%
Aladdin	53	43556	46268	43.65%

*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 2009 include *The Sound of Music*, featuring Connie Fisher, *Riverdance*, *Evita* and *Bloodbrothers*. *We Will Rock You* is also coming direct from the West End and this smash-hit 'rock-theatrical' is only touring five venues across the UK, making this a major coup for the city.
- 3.2.2 Another major event for 2009 is *Mickey's Magic Show*, which is a brand new Disney show. Other family shows returning to the Theatre which have been previous successes including *Lazy Town* and *Scooby Doo*.
- 3.2.3 The Pantomime for the Christmas 2009 season has now been confirmed as *Peter Pan*, and to date ticket sales have exceeded to over 15,000.

### 3.3 EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

3.3.1 Live Nation continue to be committed to delivering education as part of their service delivery and 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 Live Nation 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
- Coaches for Kidz

3.3.3 The Stage Experience Project has now been running for three years and continues to grow in popularity. *West Side Story* was delivered in 2008 and saw over 292 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 160 young people took part, which consisted of 114 females and 46 males. This year the fee for the project was £170, a 3% rise from 2007. The fee covers the two weeks professional tuition, loan of costume and souvenir t-shirt. From the allocated places over 20 places were sponsored, mainly from local businesses, individuals, Sunderland City Council and Sunderland College. There were 4 performances of *West Side Story* which included 1 matinee and over 4,400 people attended during the course of the show. The 2009 show will be '*Boogie Nights*' and the project will run from 26 July to the 8 August 2009, with auditions taking place in early June.

3.3.4 The Theatre has also once again participated in Heritage Open Days 2008, which took place in September, and is the fourth year the Theatre has opened its doors to the public. 2008 once again proved a great success and resulted in an extra tour being scheduled as part of the programme. All tours were fully booked and over the weekend 92 people were given a tour of the building and feedback was very positive.

3.3.5 In December 2008 the Theatre also confirmed that they had been awarded a grant of £30,000 to participate in the Arts Councils new free theatre initiative, which has been titled 'A Night Less Ordinary'. The scheme is running in over 200 venues across the country and aims to give away up to 618,000 free theatre tickets to young people aged under 26 in the next 2 years. In Sunderland the aim will be to work towards a target of 2000 free tickets.

The scheme was officially launched in February 2009 and received an incredible amount of interest from the press and the story generated a lot of publicity for the theatre. Over the first two weeks of the scheme we have been able to give out 265 free tickets, which has put Sunderland well on the way to meeting its annual target. Continuing publicity and advertising through our own and the official 'A Night Less Ordinary' website as well as targeted marketing through universities, colleges and youth groups will allow Live Nation to continue encouraging interest in the scheme.

### **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 April 2008 – March 2009 a total number of 99 complaints along with 101 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:

- Other people sat in seats
- Cold in auditorium
- Unhappy with cast change
- Technical Faults

Compliments include:

- Excellent Customer Service
- Excellent Staff and Great show
- Thanks for donation of tickets
- Excellent Box Office staff

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 the Empire Theatre at an allocated performance and report findings in relation to: -

- Performance quality
- Customer Care
- Health and Safety

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.

During the period January – December 2008 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 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.

### **3.6 DR GILBERT FUND**

3.6.1 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.

3.6.2 The competition consists of two categories – Primary and Open (for tertiary and mixed age secondary groups). The theme for 2009 was based on City Sings Goes Dancing, with all schools encouraged to introduce one song that had a dancing theme.

3.6.3 The winners of each category for 2009 were as follows:

Primary: Castletown Primary School  
Open: St Anthony's Singers

3.6.4 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, Castletown Primary, receiving the Dr Gilbert Trophy plus tickets to attend a performance of 'Fame'.

### **3.7 EMPIRE THEATRE TRUST**

3.7.1 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".

3.7.2 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:

- Improvements to car parking/access
- Signage
- Promoting the education programmes devised by LiveNation

- 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

3.7.3 Members of the Trust are working with Officers from Culture and Tourism and Live Nation to ensure the above issues are addressed and delivered.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSIONS**

4.1 Sunderland Empire Theatre under the management of Live Nation Venues 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 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 Empire Theatre Communication Map 2006 – Appendix I  
Annual Performance List and Figures – Appendix II

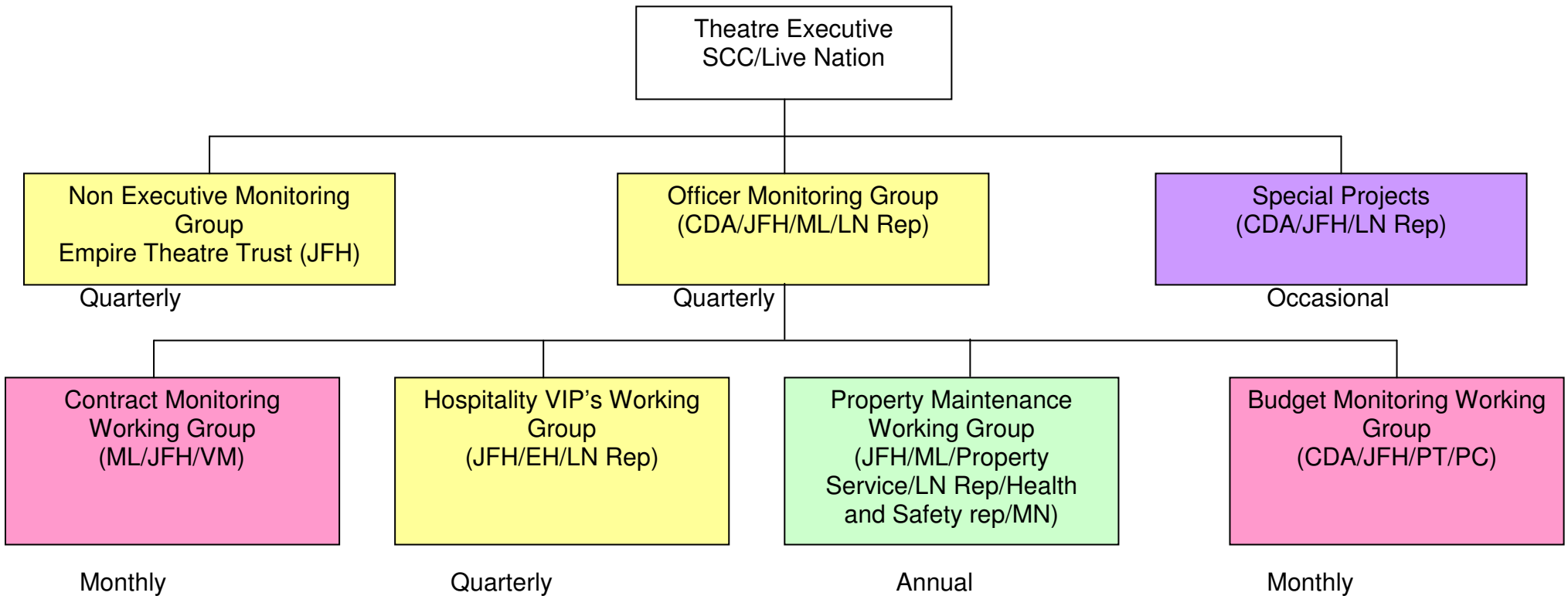
#### **7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

7.1 Empire Theatre Quarterly Trust Reports (March 2008 – February 2009).

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# EMPIRE THEATRE COMMUNICATION MAP



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
LN	Vacant Position	General Manager, Live Nation
Rep		
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

Appendix II

<b>Show</b>	<b>Performances</b>	<b>Paid Admits</b>	<b>Total Admits</b>	<b>% capacity</b>
Kathleen Davis Dance School *	1	444	444	22.20%
Pennywell Patch Dance School *	1	651	651	32.55%
French & Saunders	1	1883	1898	94.90%
Chuckle Brothers	1	1666	1678	83.90%
Sinatra	6	3936	4089	34.08%
City Sings	1	1293	1345	67.25%
Nashville Nights & Dixie Days	1	441	455	22.75%
ELO	1	457	481	24.05%
Ellen Kent Opera	3	2506	2695	44.92%
Chitty Chitty Bang Bang	60	36495	38503	32.09%
Jimmy Carr	1	1818	1818	90.90%
Sunderland Schools Dance Festival *	1	1287	1359	67.95%
The Word *	2	0	3100	77.50%
Dolly	1	460	523	26.15%
Joseph	12	15940	16082	67.01%
Trish School of Dance Show *	1	739	757	37.85%
Barnes School Music Festival *	1	1374	1374	68.70%
Alice in Wonderland	1	163	217	10.85%
Caroline Oliver School of Dance *	1	491	491	24.55%
Simply Ballroom	1	547	581	29.05%



Ken Dodd	1	1662	1668	83.40%
Fiddler on the Roof	7	2872	3846	27.47%
Remember When	1	602	609	30.45%
Letz Zepp	1	383	412	20.60%
Stage Experience - West Side Story*	4	4241	4442	55.53%
Lazy Town	8	7002	7206	45.04%
Hello Dolly	8	2929	3716	23.23%
Horrible Histories	7	1734	2231	15.94%
Sunderland Symphony - Last Night of the Proms *	1	937	980	49.00%
Puppetry of the Penis	1	185	186	9.30%
Good Mourning Mrs Brown	5	3611	4003	40.03%
One Night of Queen	1	980	1004	50.20%
Seven Brides for Seven Brothers	7	6172	6329	45.21%
Colin Fry	1	1488	1488	74.40%
The Rat Pack	8	3540	3672	22.95%
Elvis on Tour	1	617	639	31.95%
Our House	7	2128	2753	19.66%
Disney's Beauty & The Beast	7	5619	5944	42.46%
Over the Rainbow	1	610	663	33.15%
Buddy	8	3550	3672	22.95%
Flashdance	8	9097	9257	57.86%
Cinderella on Ice	7	4470	4782	34.16%
Songs of Praise	2	0	3290	82.25%
Ultimate 60s Show	1	312	363	18.15%

Roy Chubby Brown	1	1676	1688	84.40%
BRB Beauty & the Beast	6	5063	5230	43.58%
Vampires Rock	1	1032	1112	55.60%
Jimmy Carr	1	1824	1830	91.50%
Paddy McGuinness	1	1692	1697	84.85%
Shameen Karim Dance School*	1	934	934	46.70%
Ellen Kent Opera	3	2193	2322	38.70%
Tony Stockwell	1	546	560	28.00%
Kathleen Davis Dance School*	1	496	498	24.90%
The Drifters	1	817	889	44.45%
SALA Abba	1	1176	1250	62.50%
Muriel Harrison Dance School*	1	756	774	38.70%
Aladdin (5/12/08 - 31/12/08)	53	43556	46268	43.65%
Sing-a-Long Sound of Music	1	404	458	22.90%
Chinese State Circus	3	1071	1143	19.05%
Rockin On Heavens Door	1	631	669	33.45%
How Sweet It Is	1	1064	1097	54.85%
Youth Musical Spectacular*	1	552	728	36.40%
Copacabana*	5	3040	3334	33.34%
Cabaret	8	5558	5718	35.74%
That'll Be The Day	1	619	640	32.00%
The Tiger Who Came To Tea	2	807	917	22.93%
SingaLonga Joseph	1	349	383	19.15%

Ellen Kent - Swan Lake & Coppelia	6	3472	3923	32.69%
Beyond The Barricade	1	916	955	47.75%
Ellen Kent - Aida & Turandot	3	1416	2228	37.13%
Circus of Horrors	1	591	632	31.60%
Disney's High School Musical	8	11571	11662	72.89%
Kathleen Davis - Babes In The Wood*	1	442	444	22.20%
City Sings Goes Dancing*	1	1380	1429	71.45%
American Superstar Wrestling	1	597	635	31.75%
Solid Gold Country Legends	1	530	554	27.70%
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<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>234633</b>	<b>254851</b>	