

Well, that's another year over and one which, I am sure, most of us are happy to bid farewell. While I'd like to report on the last six months of sold out productions, festivals won and giant strides taken on the completion of our theatre extension, I would be in danger of growing a very long nose if I did. But while our little theatre has remained shuttered against the outside world (and sadly looks likely to remain so for the immediate future), it's not been all doom and gloom. Not giant strides then, but baby steps as we totter into 2021.

EMOTIONAL EMULSION

As the lockdown eased over the summer, a regular band of painting pixies paid

weekly visits to the theatre, transforming the new extension into a shining vision of white and magnolia as copious coats of paint were sloshed on in between socially-distanced coffee breaks. One even took to tiling and others risked life and limb up very tall ladders and scaffolding towers. It's proved a panacea for a pandemic that has kept us apart dramatically speaking - emotional emulsion for the soul if you will - and we hope to be allowed to restart again soon.

RSJs + TIMBER + FENCING

Although all building work was put on hold in March when we, like all theatres, were forced to bring the curtain down, the committee decided on a rethink over the summer. With no productions in

prospect taking up time and space in the theatre, it seemed a good time to embark on expanding our wardrobe capacity by creating an additional mezzanine floor.

Shortly after that decision was taken, we were fortunate enough to learn that one of our long-standing supporters, Elizabeth Batten, had left Studio a generous legacy that would cover the cost of the building work required.

A mighty RSJ came through the rehearsal room window (and thence through the opposite rehearsal room wall, but that's another story!) and by September, the floor was built and costume sorting began in earnest, giving us a glimpse of a rehearsal room clear of corsets, crinolines and Shakespearean doublet and hose and hopes that productions might one day take shape there.

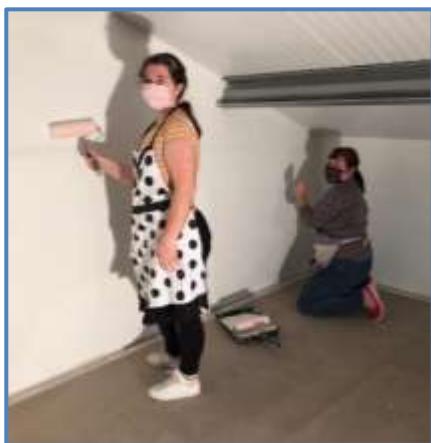
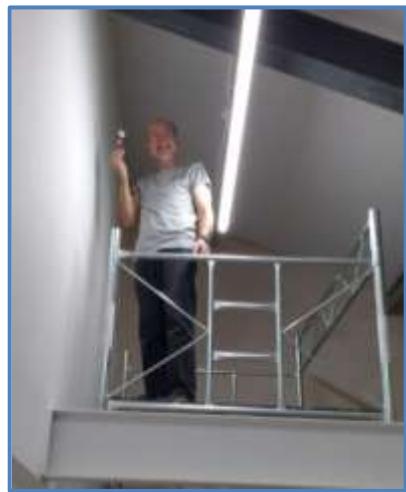
The go-ahead was also given to buy the necessary timber to fit out the new

workshop space with racking and shelves designed by our own Alistair Faulkner, giving every staircase, window frame, wall flat and door somewhere to live when not on stage.

Finally, a grant of £4,384.80 from Salisbury Area Board allowed us to install chestnut fencing along our boundary with a New Year planting scheme of beech, hazel, hawthorn and privet already in hand.

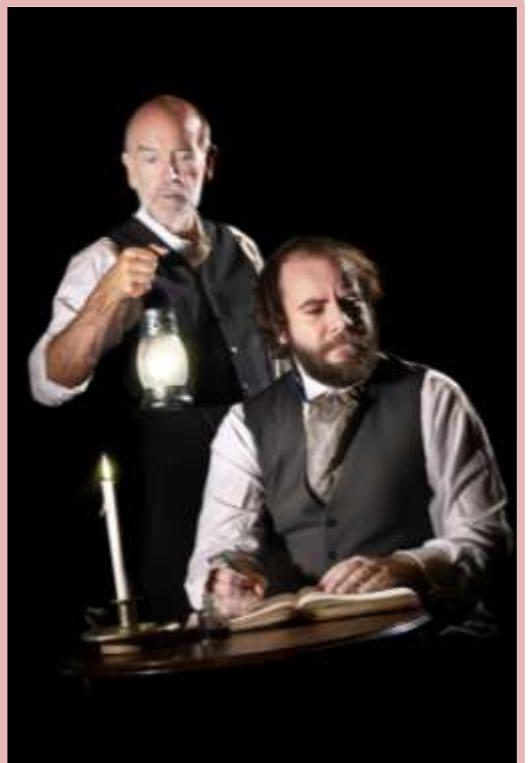
Having shaken all the leaves from Studio's money tree, we are grateful for the government's Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund (RHLGF) of £10,000, mentioned in the last VFTW,

to help us stay afloat financially and to make the building Covid secure for all its users now and in the future. Obviously, the sooner we can get back to doing what we most enjoy - and generating vital income to boot - the better.



SPINE-TINGLING TALE IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER

In the meantime, we have not been sitting on our dramatic laurels entirely. While our youth theatre have continued to meet online and in house when tiers and lockdowns allowed, our adult members have been more restricted in their use of the theatre. But in the summer, a sound studio was set up in the auditorium and a spooky version of Charles Dickens' classic ghost story The Signal-Man recorded. Inspired by Dickens' own experience of a traumatic train accident caused by a signalman's negligence, it's a haunting tale that's perfect for midwinter nights and features the voice talents of Alistair Faulkner and Kris Hamilton-Brain with Anthony von Roretz and Fraser Adams. Have a listen on youtube at youtu.be/O9PSREBykRU



NEW TREASURER

Just before the latest round of restrictions put Studio out of bounds again, we held a strangely surreal virtual AGM with members beaming in from their respective homes while chairman Colin Hayman and secretary Jill Redston plus a few brave souls (but presumably no more than six) went through proceedings from Studio's foyer. Cath Burrows, who has been our treasurer for the last three years and has done sterling work on the financial purse strings in tricky times, felt unable to continue in the role and stepped down. She will be much missed. Although there was no immediate replacement from the membership, the executive committee has since welcomed Simon Smith to its ranks as Studio Treasurer.



Such hidden talent. Who knew?

ROSEMARY DOES SATCHMO

The virus has thrown up curiosities and gems in the TV schedules from marvellous online theatre experiences to much-loved comedy classics from way back when. Tucked away in Talking Pictures TV's daytime schedule was America's The Late Show in the 1950s featuring our very own President, Rosemary Squires. Out Doris-ing Doris Day, she sang some up-tempo numbers and then went into a pretty mean impression of the great Louis Armstrong, performing Hello Dolly.

IN THE RED

Earlier this year, before the government's £1.57 billion rescue package for the arts was announced, professional theatres across the land lit up red to highlight the plight of the struggling theatre industry. Other arts venues, including Studio, joined in as a mark of solidarity.



At the moment, we have our hopes and plans pinned optimistically on the new season starting September 2021. If there is the slightest chance we can open our doors before then, you will be the first to know! Totton Festival of Drama, where we are the reigning champions, have pencilled in June for this year's festival, so we'll keep an eye on that. Until then, the healthiest of New Years to all of you. Be happy and above all, stay safe.