

Welcome back to the WAOS newsletter and a new decade with new shows and an update of our plans for our centenary show. Since our last newsletter both WAOS and WOW! have received NODA nominations for Best Show, rehearsals are well under way for our next show (Annie Get Your Gun in April) and we've started Production meetings for Made in Dagenham which plays in October. Witham Public Hall now has new tiering for the seating, new tills in the Bar and we've cleared out and re-stacked under the stage. Read on for more information.....

Annie Get Your Gun April 27 - 2 May 2020

The show was cast in November, including 2 'teams' of 4 for the children's roles. In total there are 39 cast members. Rehearsals are going well and most of the production roles are confirmed although we're still looking to confirm all the chaperones. We also need a Prompt (or 2) for show week - please contact Paul Goddard if you are interested in helping.

See the WAOS page at <http://www.waos.org/annie-get-your-gun/> for more details

A call for Tech and Backstage crew

We're always on the lookout for help backstage, Front of House and with Tech roles on Lighting and Sound. We will be running a training workshop at Witham Public hall on a date to be agreed, for anyone wanting to get more involved. Please send an email or call Paul Goddard if you would be interested to learn more and become a member of our volunteer crew, without whom the shows wouldn't happen.

[Paul S Goddard@Yahoo.com](mailto:Paul.S.Goddard@Yahoo.com) or
Tel: 07775 481 042

Sister Act - Best show yet?

Hopefully you all got the chance to see what many have said was our best show to date - Sister Act. We sold just over 92% of the tickets; it got nominated for Best Show (NODA) and we made a reasonable surplus, which has covered the loss we made on the previous show - so we've ended the year financially a little better off. We had a glowing review from NETG which concluded "This production was a big hit for WAOS in every department. With strong production and performance values, the whole company gave the audience a wonderfully entertaining evening in this popular, and crowd-pleasing, musical." The Braintree and Witham Times agreed, in a review headlined "Nuns Stun in Slick Sister Act stage Show".

For all the reviews and show information, see the WAOS page at <http://www.waos.org/past-shows/2019--sister-act/>

First Aid training

WAOS will be funding a 1-day 1st aid-training course in the near future. The aim is to ensure we have sufficient 1st aiders at our shows, now that we can no longer use St. Johns Ambulance due to cost. We are looking for a mix of people from Front of House, Back Stage, Committee and WOW!

Please contact Paul Goddard, as above if you are interested. We will have 12 places to allocate - at no cost to attendees.

Dates for your diary

Legally Blonde (WOW!)	17 Feb - 22 Feb
Annie Get Your Gun	27 Apr - 2 May
Made in Dagenham	26 Oct - 31 Oct

Barn dance (Spring Lodge) A Friday or Saturday in March to be confirmed. Keep an eye on your email or the WAOS Facebook page.

AGM (Spring Lodge)	23 Mar
Lyrics workshop (WPH)	17 May
Tech Workshop (WPH)	Date to be confirmed
WAOScars 2020 (WPH)	4 Sep

The Flames of Injustice – How to Write a Musical!

This may not be how Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber go about writing a musical, but so far it seems to be working well for WAOS. To celebrate WAOS' Centenary, we're in the process of writing and producing our own musical.....

A group of about 16 members met in the Barn at Spring Lodge over the weekend of 28th - 29th September 2019. Reassured to varying degrees by Stewart's assurances that we would have fun, the general mood was pleasantly apprehensive, verging on sceptical in some cases. I was ready to go with the flow but couldn't see how on earth we could come up with a decent plot for a musical out of the Witham Fires of the 1820s, the subject of a 1991 text made available online by local historian Janet Gyford.

Briefly, a series of fires was started in farmers' barns, outhouses, fields and crops in Witham and Rivenhall in 1828-9, against a national picture of rural poverty - verging on starvation - and unrest. James Cook, a 16-year-old cow boy living at one of the farms, was tried and sentenced to death although some of the later fires took place while James was in custody and the jury and prosecutor asked for mercy. To quote Janet Gyford, 'In this period the judge nearly always granted an instant reprieve after a death sentence, and reduced the penalty to transportation or imprisonment. But on this occasion he did not do so; he said he felt that "a severe example" was necessary to "put a stop to such national calamities", and that James Cook should therefore be hanged. James duly was hanged, on 27th March 1829, even though by that time, with others in custody suspected of the same or related offences, the fires had finally stopped. Another young man, Edward Potto, who was subsequently tried for arson and for sending a threatening letter to a landowner, was found guilty only of the latter charge - to the judge's vehement displeasure - and transported to Australia for life.

The egregious injustice in relation to James Cook was recognised in Witham with the planting of the James Cook Wood in an area of open land next to Oliver's Nurseries, on the way out of Witham towards Ulting and Maldon in 1993/4. (At that time I was much too preoccupied with my first ever WAOS rehearsals and show - *Brigadoon* - to take much notice, though I have walked around the wood a number of times since!) But would the sad story make a suitable subject for a 21st-century musical to mark WAOS's centenary, and if so how?

Our playwright and leader was Sarah Osborne, who quickly set us at our ease with ice-breaking exercises, done in pairs or teams, which thankfully bore little resemblance to the ones I remembered from work training courses. Amid much laughter we began to work in teams to develop themes, scenes and key characters. Most of the characters in the historical account were male, but we were concerned to ensure some important female roles, some comical scenes and characters and plenty for the chorus to do. We considered, but rejected, the idea of a split time-line – looking back at the events from a future date such as the present (or, as one team suggested, from the early 20th century viewpoint of Witham detective novelist Dorothy L Sayers), as having too much of a complicating and distancing effect. We also toyed with various ways of building up either the plotline – for example by introducing a villainous rival wanting James out of the picture – and/or the sense of a hopeful new dawn at the end. Ultimately, however, the consensus seemed to be not to depart too far from the historical facts. I may be proved wrong but I think the emotional force of the ending will feel closer to, say, *Carousel* than to *Jack the Ripper*, *Sweeney Todd* or *Cinderella*!

By the time we were working to identify individual scenes and song opportunities within the two Acts, the WAOS centenary musical was starting to feel as if it could not only happen, but be fantastic both to be in and to watch. Everyone had found the experience enjoyable and illuminating. We now look forward to the Lyric writing workshop on 17th May, again to be led by Sarah, where we will get to read the script she has written on the basis of our initial efforts and, as a group, to come up with suitable lyrics for the various songs.

The committee has identified a potential composer of the music, who has also expressed an interest in orchestrating it and we are in discussion about the professional fee and the deadlines. The plan is to have a complete score by the spring/summer of 2021 so that we can appoint a director and MD for our centenary production to be performed in 2022.

Stewart Adkins, Chairman

Why do we choose the shows that we produce?

This question is closely linked to “How do we choose our shows?” and is usually preceded by a comment that betrays disappointment with the choice. It is easy to understand how that disappointment emerges since each one of us has a very different relationship with musical theatre. The old hands that have been around many years may be nostalgic for the shows of their youth whereas the newcomers to musical theatre self-evidently have fewer roots and perhaps gravitate towards what’s on-trend.

Gilbert & Sullivan and Rodgers & Hammerstein are two famous partnerships that wrote almost half of the shows we performed in the 1970s and 1980s, around one third of those in the 1990s and 2000s and a quarter of those in the 2010s. It would be easy to conclude that WAOS was “old-fashioned” in those days and yet WAOS performed *The Boyfriend* in 1961 just 7 years after its West End debut in 1954, demonstrating a willingness to produce new shows.

The modern trend of promoting UK-wide tours after a successful, and by definition long, West End run of a show has perhaps lengthened the timelines for access by amateur companies. The closest that WAOS has recently got to producing a modern show was perhaps with *Sister Act, 9 to 5: The Musical* and *The Producers*, each performed just 10 years after their Broadway/West End debuts. What about *The Addams Family* (WAOS performed this in 2015) I hear you cry? This did open on Broadway in 2010 but was released in the UK to amateurs in 2015 before a professional UK show and only if a sufficient number of amateur groups signed up and paid in advance. I recall that WAOS paid around £4000 for the rights at least 12 months in advance.

This last point suggests that promoters are trying new ways to increase the public’s awareness of new shows as well as reduce their financial risks, often at the expense of amateurs who have to take an educated guess on what will sell. Of course, attracting an audience is not the only parameter WAOS has to consider, although if we consistently fail to attract an audience we wouldn’t survive for long! We also need to consider whether our members would enjoy a show and whether we could realistically cast it. (We would need a healthy dose of self-awareness before saying yes to *Starlight Express* where everyone roller skates on a special track!) We also need to have a fair chance of breaking even financially over the course of a few shows. This does allow us to win some/lose some while trying to reconcile competing claims between audience and members.

In answer to the original question, then? We consider what we think the audience will attend, whether the members (old and new) will enjoy it and how it may work out financially when considering the shows before it and after it. Looking at the big picture, with WAOS reaching its centenary in 2021/2, we haven’t been doing too badly.

Stewart Adkins, Chairman

Box Office – Janice Hawkes

After many years of service, Janice Hawkes has stepped down from the Box Office. We’d like to extend our grateful thanks for the excellent service Janice has provided for such a long time. It won’t be the same without you. At least for the time being, Donna Goddard will manage the Box Office for WAOS and WOW!

WAOS Committee

President	Keith Radley
Chairman	Stewart Adkins
Treasurer	Anita Goold
Secretary	Matt Waldie
Business Manager	Trevor Drury
Production Manager	Paul Goddard
Social Secretary	Emma Loring
Membership Secretary	Liz Chapman
Stage Manager	Ben Sawyer
Committee Member	Annette Maguire

General Enquires – secretary@WAOS.org

A Happy and dramatic New Year to you all – from The WAOS Committee!