

ANNUAL REPORT

Year ending March 2023

ludlow
assemblyrooms



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CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

It's always good to reflect on the year that has passed. Our last AGM was held just before our first fully professional pantomime season, and what a success it was – a packed out auditorium and the building buzzing with excited children and their families. This has set the model that we are repeating this year – with more shows this time!

But the pantomime was just one part of a busy schedule. Joel will talk in more detail about our programme, but it has been an exciting year with a diverse range of music, theatre, films and streams. The quality of our programme has been exceptional, and I want to thank Joel for that. I also want to thank Bill, as both Joel and Bill have been working together to enhance the joint offer of events and food to the benefit of both of us.

LARFE has delivered as usual, with a contribution of over £28k to our funds. This is a most significant and vital part of our fundraising efforts. We have also launched our Patrons' scheme and will be developing this further over the next year.

You, our Friends and Patrons, support us financially year in, year out, and for that, on behalf of the board of Trustees, I want to thank you all. Our thanks also go to our fundraising committee which works incredibly hard to run successful events each year. Our staff team are totally committed to our success and work so hard to achieve that. I want to include here Tracey, our Finance Officer, who left us this year after 19 years of employment and was one of those who just kept the wheels in motion. And Jolene, our Marketing Manager, who supported us well but then had an offer she could not refuse. But we are truly a volunteer-led organisation. I cannot thank our volunteers enough – they run the VIC, help with Box Office, sell in our retail space, steward our shows and events, run our bar, help in the office, manage some of our data reporting, produce our posters – the list is long. And they are great ambassadors for us. It might be said every year, but I think it needs saying: we would not be here without you all.

We are incredibly grateful for all the donations and bequests we have received. Particular mention needs to be made of two bequests: we received £150k from the estate of the late Renee McKibbin, and a £10k bequest from the estate of the late David Williamson. Some of these funds have enabled us to transform part of our building that did not benefit from the recent major refurbishment project into a high quality second studio. I hope you have managed to have a look at this and see the potential this space has for community usage and to enhance our income from private hire.

With the arts sector at large being in such an uncertain trading environment, enhancing our income from differing sources is key to our financial viability.

Ludlow Town Council has had a long commitment to the LAR, albeit with 22/23 year grants reduced from the previous year but still totalling some £12,500. This includes funds to support the Visitor Information Centre located prominently on the market square. The Trustees have always been very grateful to the Town Council for their support for us. Sadly, we have recently received notification that the Town Council has chosen not to award any grant funding for next year; we have written to the council to explain the significant impact this will have both on our revenue and our ability to source other grant funding. As the Town Council recognises and appreciates what LAR provides for Ludlow, we are hoping that they will reconsider this decision.

I want to say thank you to Joel, our CEO and Artistic Director, who is leaving us soon. Joel has put in so much effort and brought so much energy to the role, and has led on initiatives that I know will serve us well in the future. For this I thank him and wish him well in his future career.

In these uncertain trading times, we are not looking for a like-for-like replacement for Joel. This financial year represented the first full year of trading post-Covid. Undoubtedly, our audiences have changed. The trustees anticipated that the first full year would be different from past years and budgeted for a contingency fund to cover an increasing gap between income and expenditure. We are currently adapting to this changed fiscal environment. We will be reviewing what the organisation requires over the next few months. In light of this, we are currently putting in place an interim structure to lead and manage the organisation over the next few months. I am pleased to say that Steve Catanach, a volunteer, is going to run the business side of the Assembly Rooms, and Jess, our Marketing Manager, is going to hold the ring with our programming. They too are already bringing energy and effort to their roles. My thanks on behalf of the board of Trustees to both of them for stepping up to these roles.

Laura Johnston (Chair)

LARFE REPORT

Ludlow Assembly Rooms Fundraising Events

For the financial year April 2022 to March 2023, LARFE – your fundraising group of just six volunteers – organised a series of events which raised a record breaking £28,569 for Ludlow Assembly Rooms.

The annual Secret Gardens event and biennial Auction of Promises between them raised over £24,000 with the Progressive Lunches (ongoing), Coffee Morning, Bookshelf (ongoing), Winter Quiz and donations adding a further £4,297.

If you joined in the Progressive Lunch scheme and didn't complete it, please do so; those last unfinished 'progressions' could add thousands of pounds more to the total raised so far.

Please keep bringing in your books – leave them on the bookshelves in the main corridor or, if it's a carrier bag or box full, leave them under the staircase. LARFE check the shelf regularly to keep it topped up.

We were very sorry to see Peter Purslow leave the group for health reasons after 21 years. He had been an outstanding support as our treasurer and all-round active participant, attending every meeting, organising country house visits, and helping at all our events. He is a much missed colleague.

More members with ideas and organisational skills are always needed and most welcome to join us. Contact shauna@salt-works.co.uk for details or ask at Box Office.

We would like to thank the many Friends and volunteers who support our events in so many different ways. We couldn't succeed without them and very much appreciate their help in keeping Ludlow Assembly Rooms up and running. Thank you.

LARFE team:

Joan Birkett, Shauna Delaney, Chris Evans, Cy Jones, Andrew Pike, Dina Webb

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Firstly, I want to echo Laura in thanking all of you – our Friends, Patrons, supporters, fundraisers, volunteers, and staff team – for everything you contribute to this fantastic place. It was a busy and exciting year of activity, change, challenges, and opportunities – but I am surrounded by caring, passionate, skilful, knowledgeable, and can-do people that make my role in overseeing the programming and operations here so much easier. Thank you.

I also want to echo Laura by thanking those members of staff who left us during the course of the year – for their diligent service and for bringing their particular skill set to operations here. It can be unsettling in small organisations like ours when we lose a member of the team as everyone plays such a pivotal role in shaping the wide range of activities we deliver every day, yet we have been fortunate enough to recruit some excellent new members of staff, and our talented and dedicated team of volunteers play an important role too in filling gaps during times of changeover, allowing for greater flexibility in the short-term and organisational resilience in the long-term.

As I began planning the autumn season last year, it became clear that there was so much by way of artistic talent both in-house and local to Ludlow that we draw on and could continue to develop alongside – existing relationships to build on and new opportunities to explore. In particular, it was apparent that, in partnership with Jack Ludwig and Ludwig Theatre Arts, there was an exciting opportunity to bring a professional, traditional pantomime to LAR. This kind of large-scale, multi-show production allows us as a full staff and volunteer team to get our teeth into something that delivers huge benefits to local schools, families, and the community as a whole. It was a great success in every way and I am confident it will go from strength to strength each year.

In this way, partnership is key to LAR's success, and it has been a joy to foster closer links with others too such as with the Fringe festival, the piano festival, English Song Weekend, Borderlines film festival, and individual creators, producers, and organisations from a range of backgrounds, styles, and disciplines. In particular, Pentabus have brought various high-quality, visionary productions and activities into the building over the last year and I hope – as I know the board and wider team here do – that this collaborative partnership continues to evolve next year with more activity from this dynamic theatre company taking place alongside us here.

Quick breakdown of core activities (April 2022 – March 2023)

- 80 live events (129 individual performances), selling 12,024 tickets
- 23 live-streamed events, selling 1,793 tickets
- 129 films (252 individual screenings), selling 7,765 tickets
- Lettings gradually returning to pre-pandemic levels, although space for more
- Significant growth in email marketing lists, website use, and social media engagement

Live highlights

There were some stand-out moments, including firm favourites such as **Spooky Men's Chorale**, **The Manfreds** and **Showaddywaddy**; world-class folk acts including **Eliza Carthy**, **Leveret**, **Roddy Woomble**, and **The Jeremiahs**; some truly exceptional classical performances from the likes of **Sam Cave**, **Maki Sekiya**, **Sofya Gulyak**, and **Mid Wales Opera**; as well as, of course, the Christmas pantomime, **Jack and the Beanstalk**, which saw 3,868 people through the door, including schools and families that had never been here before.

Some new initiatives included the now regular **jazz and folk café pop-ups** in Bill's Kitchen, which have been tremendously successful; a variety of talks from adventurers like **Simon Parker** and **Bonita Norris**; and some exciting **Kickback** band nights in Oscars that have been well attended.

Thank you to all the artists, and to those contributing voluntarily to support in the programming, planning, and delivery of all this; there were many excellent performances throughout the year.

Cinema highlights include: **Elvis**, **Top Gun: Maverick**, **Downton Abbey: New Era**, and the sublime spread of films at **Borderlines Film Festival**, who we are now collaborating with us throughout the year. We continued to programme family films for the holidays and our Marketing Manager, Jess, has been working hard to build awareness of the amount we have on offer for children of all ages and their families. The most successful live-streamed event was **NT Live's Prima Facie**, although the **ROH's** streams remain popular (**The Nutcracker** performing particularly well).

It is encouraging to see many regular classes, lectures, and community-led initiatives return to **LAR** since it reopened, although there is still capacity for more, and it is a priority that we continue our marketing efforts and engagement with local groups to facilitate more of this, especially as we now have another excellent room in **Studio Two** available. It is also encouraging to see many organisations continuing and beginning to utilise our excellent box office ticketing service for

external events – another focus for growth and a way in which we can provide a useful, professional service for the wider community.

The Visitor Information Centre continues to be a fantastic volunteer-led resource for the town and brings many people through our doors, averaging over 16,000 enquiries per year; a huge thank to Rosalind and all of those volunteering there. Also, the expertly-curated programme of Exhibitions goes from strength to strength; thank you, Eliz-anne, for the outstanding art you bring to LAR through your hard work and engagement with local artists.

As well as the development of our wonderful new space, Studio Two, you will have noticed other spaces being refreshed and reconfigured thanks to the hard work of the core team here and some handy volunteers. We continue to explore better options for our spaces – especially the way the VIC-Shop-Box Office area is configured (a plan currently being devised in consultation with Steve Catenach) and the bar/area outside Oscars (a plan currently being devised in consultation with an experienced designer and the team here) – to ensure we give the best customer experience and journey through the building, but this is an area that requires some specific funding and support next year.

You may have noticed some minor branding updates, website improvements, and general marketing initiatives, including a greater presence on social media channels, which have together resulted in considerable improved traffic, usage of our digital spaces, and more online sales.

Looking to the future

At times when core funding and project grants are harder to come by, I must emphasise how vital it is that we have a strong fundraising team – and LARFE as ever has done the most incredible job this last year as Laura highlighted. It is also essential that over the next year we aim for higher levels of Friends membership and build on the recently launched Patrons membership. This will ensure we are able to develop key areas of programming, engage all areas of the community, and continue to operate the building with the wide range of equipment and resources required to be a successful venue for the arts and a centre that welcomes a diverse range of activity for the whole of Ludlow. Please do consider joining us as a Patron (annual or lifetime) if you can; the new 'Friends & Patrons' flyer also provides a menu outlining ways in which you can give towards specific items and projects, which may be of interest to all our supporters.

As I now look to delivering our second full-scale pantomime alongside Jack and Ludwig Theatre Arts (and accompanying Christmas show in the new studio for younger families) this year, I am also looking to pastures new, taking up a lectureship alongside some composition and research

opportunities in the New Year. I am grateful that already the trustees have recognised the ability of internal talent to hold the reins for the interim, and I am confident in the skills of everyone here and the wealth of resources available nearby to ensure LAR thrives into the next year and beyond. It has been a pleasure to serve as the Artistic Director and CEO here for the last 18 months; thank you for all your support over this time and for all you do ongoing to ensure this wonderful venue thrives. I hope you and all that operate within it continue to experience the warmth, fun, beauty, and exceptionally high standard of artistic and community-centred output that it offers.

Joel Baldwin (Artistic Director & CEO)

TREASURER'S COMMENTS

This year represented another of transition for the 'new look' Assembly Rooms, our first full year of operations since re-opening.

Auditorium income rose to £260k (from £102k) and bar sales to £52k (from £19k), whilst commission from Bill's Kitchen was £43k (plus a contribution to the building's central utility and cleaning costs). Fundraising and membership income also increased thanks to the hard work of many volunteers. However, costs also rose, especially staffing costs as we returned to full operations and were faced with a significant rise in national living wage and national minimum wage rates. This would have left us with a significant deficit, but a large legacy has enabled us to finish the year with a small surplus; it also ensures an adequate cash reserve to support the further growth planned for 2023-24.

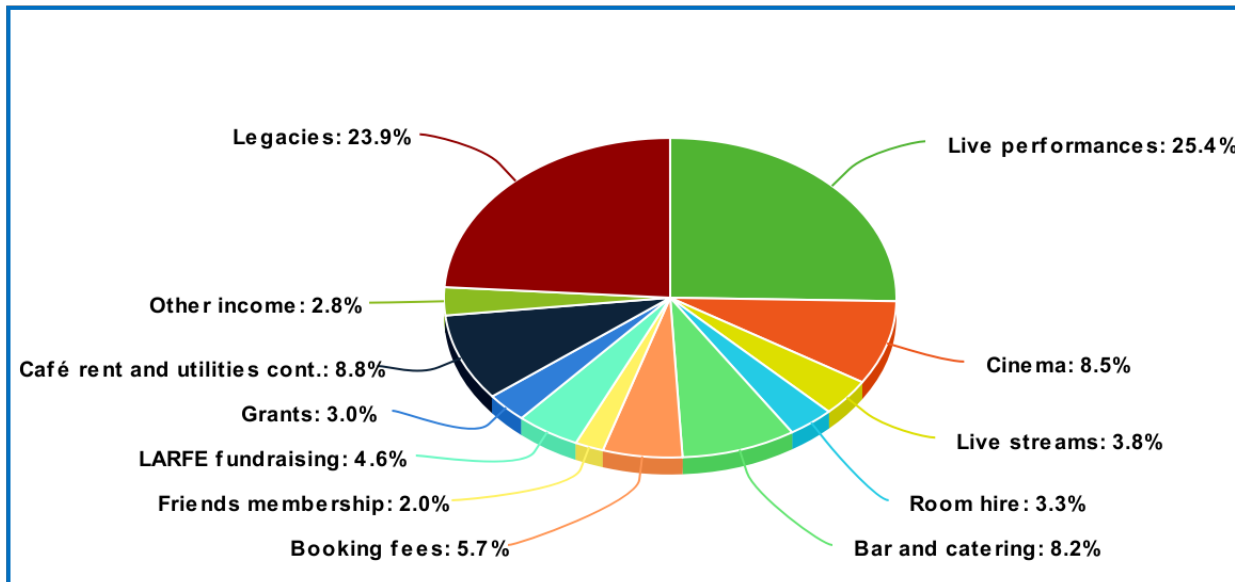
In fact, the New Year has been rather unpredictable to date, with a very quiet summer followed by stronger autumn sales. The Trustees consider that meeting our budget in these economic conditions will be very challenging – consequently we are exploring various routes to ensure a balanced budget is achieved next year.

Tim Hughes (Finance Officer)

INCOME & EXPENDITURE

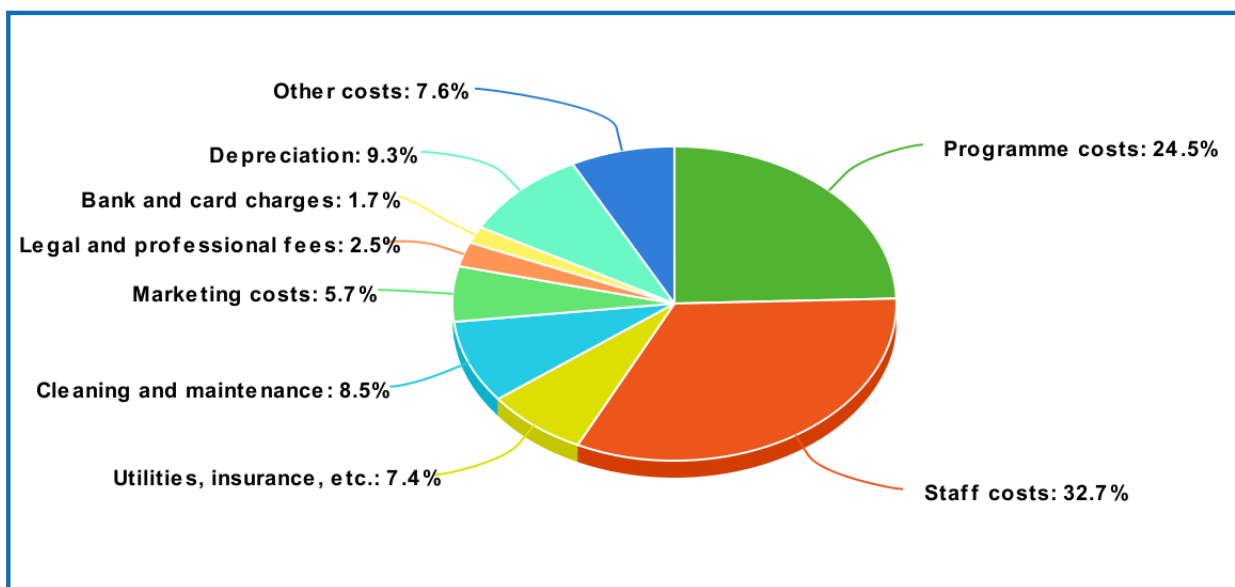
April 2022 - March 2023

INCOME



- Live performances
 Cinema
 Live streams
 Room hire
- Bar and catering
 Booking fees
 Friends membership
 LARFE fundraising
- Grants
 Café rent and utilities cont.
 Other income
 Legacies

EXPENDITURE



- Programme costs
 Staff costs
 Utilities, insurance, etc.
- Cleaning and maintenance
 Marketing costs
 Legal and professional fees
- Bank and card charges
 Depreciation
 Other costs

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