

EDITION 12: AUGUST 2021



BLOC Productions

BLOC

Bailiwick

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Editorial by Phil Hallworth

I am writing this as social restrictions are about to be relaxed and people are beginning to return to theatres. There should be much to enjoy in the coming months and I hope you will also enjoy this summer edition of **Bailiwick**, introduced by our Chairman who also writes about better things to come.

Ian Taylor returns to the pages with his personal show reviews and recommendations and theatre photographer Stewart McPherson shares the final instalment of his entertaining series of illustrated articles, this time reflecting on his love of photographing musical theatre for many years and of the people he's met along the journey.

Dickie Gourlay, BLOC's award-winning Lighting Designer, is this edition's Desert Island Shows castaway. Alex Turasiewicz and Chris Parslow steer us through a few interesting articles: the second part of "The John Cousins Years" in the History of BLOC series (including an interview with John), the conclusion of the article discussing the complexities of choosing a show, and a reminder about the links between BLOC and BMYP.

One of our distinguished Vice Presidents, Gerry Parker, provides a fascinating insight into the origins of both BLOC and The Hippodrome. This article is by way of an introduction to a new series of articles aiming to better acquaint BLOC members with key personnel at The Hippodrome; and to get that ball rolling there is a brief summary here of the entertaining "Evening with Ben Phillips" we held on Zoom a few weeks ago.

The edition ends with an update from our friends at BMCC and a few items of personal news from the BLOC family.

Happy reading and hope to see you all soon.



Chairman's Overture by Andrew Carpenter

With the country removing COVID-19 restrictions from Monday 19th July 2021 I detect a huge sigh of relief and immense optimism across the world of performing arts. Having been pretty much closed for eighteen months, the thought of being able to perform once again in front of full houses is both exciting and valuable to our finances and mental health. It was unfortunate however that we had to cancel our proposed November concert, but the low numbers able to take part made it artistically and financially untenable. We are delighted however to see other groups in the area getting ready for autumn productions and I'm sure we will all do what we can to support them.

I was hoping to share the optimism of life beginning to get back to something like normal with the news that football was coming home! We all know that, despite the gallant efforts of Gareth Southgate and his magnificent England squad, they fell at the last hurdle eventually losing to Italy on penalties. What they did do however during a four-week period was bring tremendous pride back to our country and an excitement that was palpable. The television figures of nearly 31 million viewers for the final were the largest since the funeral of Princess Diana and an indication of the importance of football to our nation. The football is now over however and it's our turn to pick up the mantle and provide the nation with something to feel good about as our theatres come back to life. You cannot deny that its sport and entertainment that provide our nation with that 'feel good' factor so as we come out of COVID-19 let's do this!



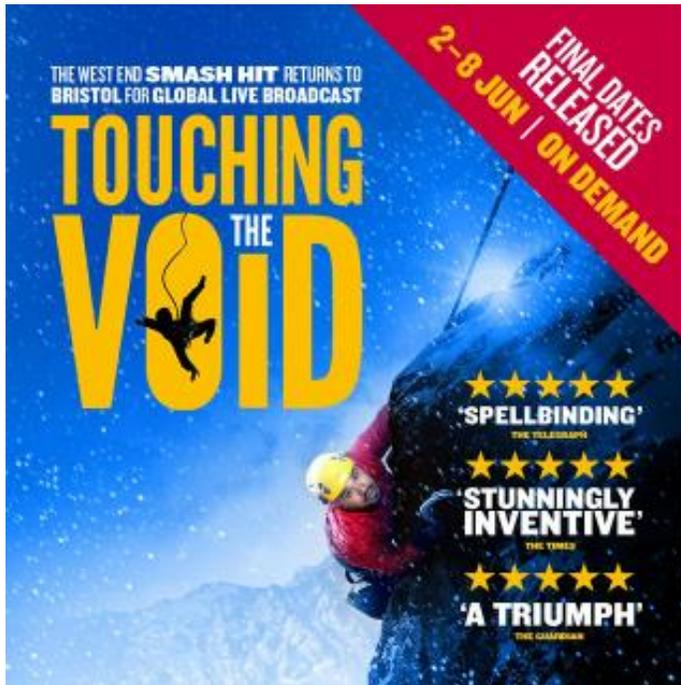
Your committee continues to work hard behind the scenes to ensure BLOC Productions is in fine fettle and in the best possible shape to prepare for productions once again at the Bristol Hippodrome. By the time we perform there in November 2022 it will be over four years since our last production in September 2018 that being the award-winning *Chitty, Chitty Bang Bang* of course. Most notably, we have changed our status and become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and I thank all those who attended our EGM recently to allow this to take place. In particular I would like to thank Graham Lewis, Phil Hallworth and Alex Turasiewicz for the sterling work they did to prepare the necessary papers in readiness for the EGM. We intend to put the finishing touches to our Single Page Plan management structure before year end leaving us ready and prepared to enjoy 2022 and the run-up to our November production and what we all love most –

LIVE MUSICAL THEATRE!

View from The Royal Box
(a.k.a. Ian Taylor's sofa)

My first socially distanced and “masked up” outing to the theatre in many months was at the Bristol Old Vic on May 28th. It was so good to be back inside a theatre again.

Touching the Void is a dynamic, bold and powerful piece of theatre. It follows Joe Simpson and Simon Yates who had to confront death in extreme conditions. After succeeding in becoming the first people to climb the west face of the Peruvian mountain Siula Grande, they get caught in a storm. Joe breaks his leg and is unable to return to safety. Simon tries to lower Joe down on a rope, but the extreme conditions leave Simon unable to see and forces him to make a life changing decision. The hypothetical question at the heart of the story is “what would you have done in Simon’s position?”



The staging is fast paced, inventive and chock full of daring set-pieces. Wooden tables and chairs are stacked to convey peaks and a metal frame represents the summit of the mountain. Actors are suspended by wires and the seamless music score (including Boney M) adds to the nail-biting tension. The physicality of the actors is astonishing.

The tempo shifts in the second half, where treacherous descent gives way to desperation and long, drawn-out suffering. If you don't know the story, I won't say any more. If you get a chance to see this production, it's recommended – though I don't think my heart would let me sit through it again. It's available to stream on the Bristol Old Vic website or you can go and see it in person when it returns in the summer.

My other recommendations are online and can be enjoyed from the comfort of your own home.

Romeo and Juliet streamed from the National Theatre (and available to view on Sky Arts / Now TV) is a revelation. Stripped back to 90 minutes and brilliantly acted by Jessie Buckley and Josh O'Connor as the eponymous lovers, it's marvellous. Purists may scoff at the brevity, but it really is a must see.

The play begins almost as a rehearsed reading with the cast assembled, sitting in rehearsal clothes surrounded by costume rails. The stripped back opening belies the complexity of what's to come and the director sets us off on an increasingly immersive, intensely theatrical and thrillingly cinematic journey.

There are modern touches too - Mercutio and Benvolio are in a gay relationship and Lord Capulet is now a Lady played imperiously by Tamsin Greig. The party where the lovers first meet is a rave where Juliet sings on stage. Romeo carries a ladder so he can climb to Juliet's balcony in a later scene.

Glorious, brief, brilliant and a wonderful introduction to the play if you've never seen it before. Highly recommended.



Also, whilst on the subject of Tamsin Grieg, you should try and catch the National's streaming production of *Twelfth Night*. She plays a gender reversed Malvolio to comic perfection. Stunning.

Finally, *The Show Must Go On! Live at the Palace Theatre*, is a concert which celebrates West End talent. 18 shows were represented: *Tina*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, *Everybody's Talking About Jamie*, *SIX*, *Hamilton*, *The Book of Mormon*, *Wicked*, *Matilda*, & *Juliet*, *Les Misérables*, *The Lion King*, *The Prince of Egypt*, *Come From Away*, *The Phantom Of The Opera*, *Mary Poppins*, *Mamma Mia*, *Back to the Future* and *Pretty Woman!*



It's a live concert and [free to watch on YouTube](#). It's for a very good cause, so just remember that when you're watching it. Pour a glass of wine (you might need it), sit back and enjoy (it's better with wine). Bonnie Langford and Trevor Dion Nicholas are the hosts (another reason for the wine). Please donate if you can (and after the second bottle, a nifty fast-forward or two, the concert is easier to get through). Watch once, donate some money and then delete afterwards.

Stay safe and keep well.

Ian x

P.S I am ridiculously excited about the new film versions of *In the Heights*, *Everybody's Talking About Jamie* and *West Side Story*, all of which look incredible.

P.P.S. I have tickets to several in-person performances over the coming months and so will let you know my thoughts in future issues. *Piaf* – Nottingham Playhouse, *Under Milk Wood* – National Theatre, ALW's *Cinderella*, *South Pacific* – Chichester, *John & Jen* – Southwark Playhouse, *Beauty and the Beast* – Bristol Hippodrome, *Carousel* – Regents Park, *Prince of Egypt*, *The Good Life*, Michael Feinstein in concert, *Private Lives*, *White Christmas*, Matthew Bourne's *Midnight Bell*.

BLOC Exposed (Part Three) *by Stewart McPherson*

“Where are we now?” The nostalgia edition

When Phil contacted me to produce my third (and last you'll be relieved to hear!) edition of my theatre photography trilogy, I wondered what would be a suitable and lasting final subject, and then I realised it was obvious. Both on stage and behind the lens so many people have passed through my life because of my involvement in “am dram”, and much of my life in Bristol since I moved here in 1985 has been mapped out because of those connections.

I photographed my first shows back in 1992 - over the ensuing twenty-nine years I have laughed, loved, cried, shared massive highs and some equivalent lows with so many friends. Our involvement in this world of theatre has brought so many of us new

paths, partners, husbands, wives, families and life changing friendships. We have seen friends come and go, seen new families emerge and I realised, as the years moved on, I have been able to photograph three generations of the same family in the same show!!

This edition is intentionally short on words but big on images - I urge you all, after the past year, and in these times of restrictions, to stop and look at what theatre has given you. I feel blessed, that in spite of some real lows, my involvement with so many amazing people has given me so much.

So, take stock, look at who and what you have gained by being a part of the am dram world, think of those you have met and lost along the way and I hope the following images help you to remember and maybe rekindle old contacts. Ask yourself where they are now, stay in touch, stay safe and hopefully see you all soon back on stage.









Desert Island Shows by Dickie Gourlay



First, a bit about my background and my role as Lighting Designer ...

I suspect like all members, the news of what the next show will be is always an eagerly awaited moment. Once it has been announced, for me it is usually “What songs are in the Show? What effects will be needed? What will the set design be like? Who is directing and what is their vision for the show?” I always feel that the lighting on a show is one of the most important aspects of the production (of course!). Getting the right ‘look’ for a show, a song or a particular scene is crucial for portraying the right image to the audience.

I actually started out ‘treading the boards’ – playing various roles when I was at school such as a ‘Snail’

in *The Insect Play* and ‘Tweedle Dee’ in *Alice in Wonderland*. I think for the benefit of all concerned I soon decided that, although I was drawn to the bright lights, I was in fact more interested in being involved on the other side of them and with all the technical goings on backstage, than I was in performing!

Contrary to some people’s thoughts (JC!), that the lighting design is a copy and paste of the previous year, one of the most enjoyable parts of the process for me is to sit down with the set design, the director’s notes, my thoughts and ideas and a blank plan – and to allow my creative juices to start flowing.

I always like to try out new ideas if possible. Whether that’s using the latest moving light or LED effect or just trying to light something from a position in the theatre that we’ve not done before to give it a different look and feel for a particular scene or song.

Time (like for everyone else) is the main thing we are up against. There is only so much access we can get on stage during the Fit-up, as other departments need their allocation as well – so there is only so much we can do with what we have available before the Tech Run.

Everything is carefully planned as much as possible in advance. Generally, we will have a Pre-Production session (in a warehouse) a day or so before arriving at the theatre, where any lighting towers or structures are pre-built to save as much time as we can once in the venue and which can then just be wheeled off the wagon and into position. Every lighting fixture gets labelled and is ‘addressed’ so we know exactly which lights are going where during the Get-In and theory means when everything is powered up, the lighting desk can instantly connect and talk to everything in the rig.

So, to my eight Desert Island Shows ...

West Side Story – 2004

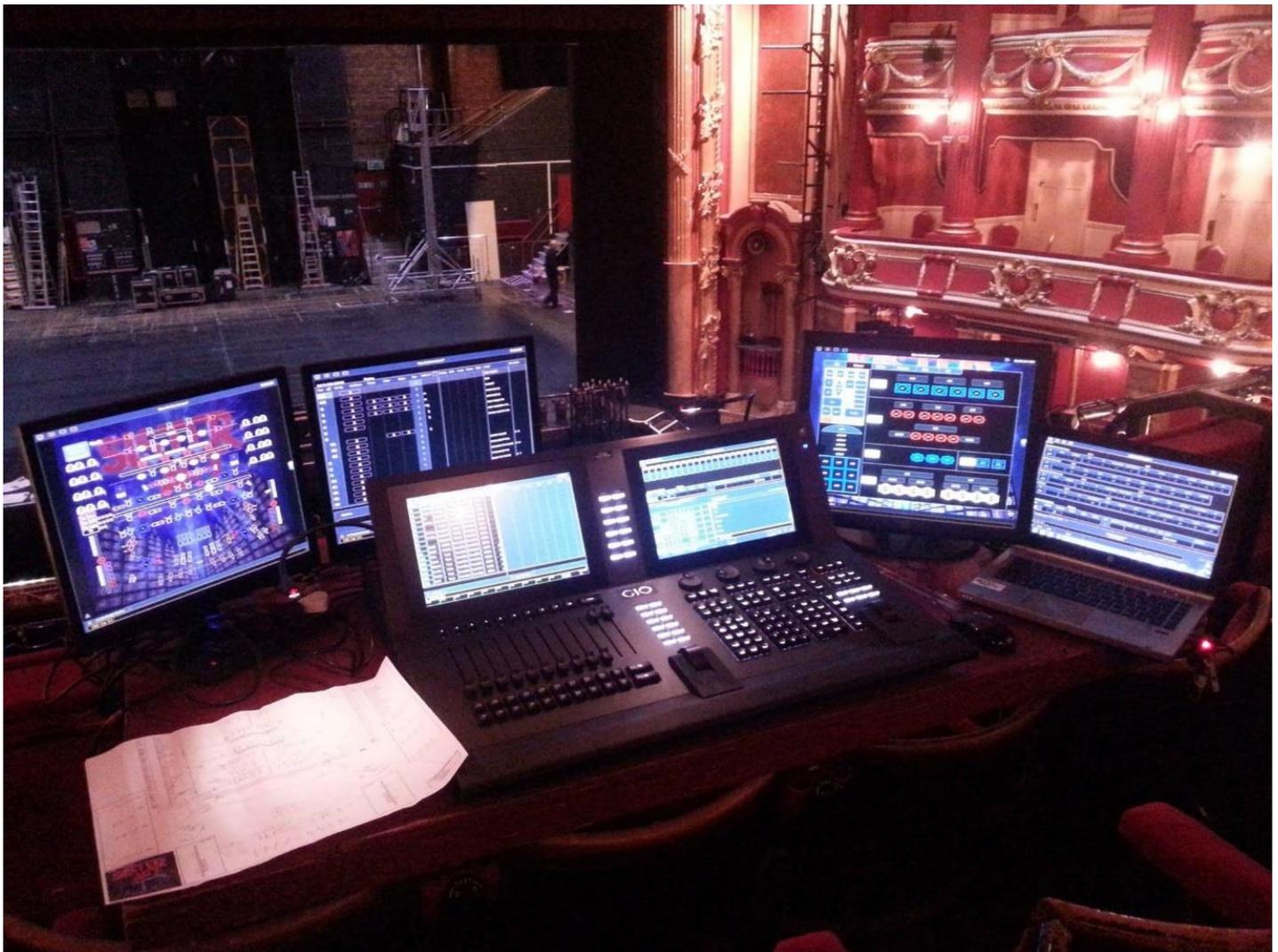
I used to co-design a lot of the shows done by Bristol Musical Youth Productions and this was one in particular that sticks in my memory. It's one of my favourite musicals and it has a lot you can do with it lighting-wise. Being a very dance-heavy show, we were keen to get in plenty of side-light. Traditionally this could be done with (black) lighting towers of some description hidden in the wings – however for this show, the set design contained a lot of Heras fencing and scaffolding so were we able to integrate silver towers at the side of the stage, but we had them rigged much more onstage than they would normally be so they were visible. This meant we could actually light the towers as well as the set and bring everything together.

The actors were also able to grab the towers and hang-off them as the 'gangs' fought and danced their way around the set.

Jekyll & Hyde – 2006

I did this with St Mary's Players at The Redgrave. It's a great show and the venue is very special to me. I was really pleased with the design for this show. The set was a joy to light and the music meant there was wonderful scope for dark and atmospheric lighting throughout. There was plenty of smoke, shadows and gobos (projected patterns) – perfect!

It was fantastic to have my work recognised by winning the Rose Bowl Technical Award that year for Lighting Design.



The Wizard of Oz – 2007

This was the first show I lit with BLOC so will always be on my list of memorable shows. Having only ever lit Gang Shows in the Hippodrome prior to this, it was an incredibly exciting prospect. The show was technically demanding so this coupled with my first full-scale musical in this venue meant the pressure was on! Excitement at times turned to stress and I can remember during the Tech Run thinking to myself that I am never doing this again! However, we got to opening night, the week went very well, and I've not looked back since.

Beauty & The Beast – 2010

This show had it all. Disney, great songs, dry ice, pyrotechnics, flying and some dark and moody parts of the story. This balanced with the happier brighter full chorus numbers meant it was fun to light. This has remained one of my all-time favourite shows and it was great to have the lighting recognised as part of our Rose Bowl Technical Achievement Award that year.

White Christmas – 2013

I didn't know anything about this show (apart from 'that' song) until it was announced we were doing it but by the end of the week I absolutely loved it. As well as the usual lighting equipment that had to be designed and rigged, we also had to give some thought to snow! For the end of the show we used

some fairly traditional snow machines dispensing dry paper-type snow for above the stage, but being given the green light to rig foam snow machines over the auditorium and outside the foyer on the canopy roof was definitely a crowd pleaser. We had two machines fairly near each side of the Pros Arch to cover the auditorium sides and a central machine rigged up in the Dome over the central Stalls. They covered the auditorium well and it looked great. The outside one was an absolute beast and when run on full, reached the taxi rank – much to the amusement of the drivers one night! Refilling the fluid throughout the week involved someone in a harness, climbing out of the Circle Bar window and onto the canopy. It all made for an enjoyable (and different) show week and very pleased to have been nominated for the Rose Bowl Technical Achievement award for 'Snowfall & Lighting'.



Sister Act – 2014

I think this probably has to be my all-time favourite show (it only just pips *Beauty & The Beast* and *Chitty*). I knew this show would be heavy on the number of lighting cues and we just couldn't do it all during the day on the Monday – so we spent hours setting up a virtual theatre on a CAD programme so that we could get as many cues recorded as possible beforehand. *Sister Act* ended up containing the most lighting cues we have ever had in a show and anyone on 'cans' (headsets) during the show will just have heard Sam pretty much constantly saying "LX Go" all the time...



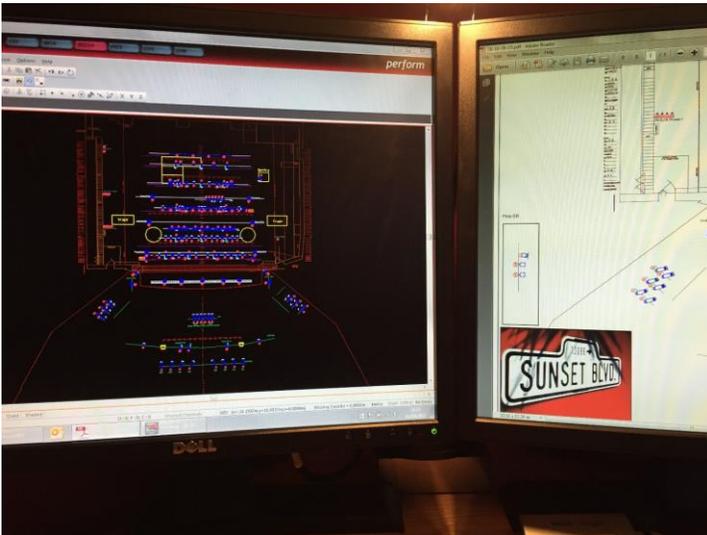
(it even had to be shortened to just “Go” in places to get them all in!). The music in this show was amazing and meant there was so much that could be done with the lighting. The set was covered in LED and there are not many shows where I can get away with a truss full of moving lights doing their ‘thing’ while being flown into full audience view. I have never heard so many (good) comments about the lighting on a show before as I received or overheard during that week. This was a show I could definitely have carried on and done for longer than a week. It was a credit to the whole LX Crew to be nominated that year for the Rose Bowl Technical Achievement for Lighting Design.

Sunset Boulevard – 2015



This was another show I wasn't familiar with, but the soundtrack was fantastic, and I listened to it countless times before the production week. I find it important to know the songs well and to build up a picture in my mind of what I want to happen during the numbers. The music will indicate changes in the mood and tempo and that coupled with the choreography means that when you're sat at the lighting desk plotting the show in the theatre on the Monday daytime, you already have an idea of what you want to happen at what points during the show. I always try and see as many full run rehearsals as possible as these are invaluable to make notes –

such as where people are on stage at a particular point, when they move, where they move to, what the set is doing, how do we want this part to look, etc. All this then comes together when plotting. After the Tech and Dress there is minimal time left to make adjustments, so knowing the show well and knowing what needs to be achieved for each scene before moving into the theatre is crucial. As there was minimal dialogue in *Sunset*, with most of the show being sung, the design concept for me for this was to heavily use Followspots for all the lead characters and where possible keep the general stage light levels low and subtle to reflect the action. This concept proved a problem initially as there were more than two lead characters in the show on stage at times and the Hippodrome only has two Followspots. Therefore, we added an extra two Spots in the corners of the Upper Circle which meant we could have four on at once when required but also gave me the option to light more from the sides (rather than straight on from the front) for some parts of the show which gives a more dynamic look and less flattening. The Followspot Cue Sheet for *Sunset* was one of the most detailed ones we've ever had as all four were operating independently and constantly moving between characters as the show went along. We weren't able to cue every change so each Spot operator had their own Cue Sheet to follow with Sam cueing where possible. Sight lines can also be challenging, and this was the case with the big staircase. As the top level was so high, the Followspots at the back of the auditorium weren't able to pick people up at this level and could only achieve this once they were about halfway down. Careful cueing was needed to ensure that the side ones in the Upper Circle did any pickups on this level or it was covered with something overhead and then cross changed to a front Spot when possible. These kinds of things aren't sometimes realised until we try to light certain areas for the first time, so it needs quick adjustments to be made during the Plot. There were some lovely moments in this show and a little haze and some dramatic lighting added so much.



Chitty Chitty Bang Bang - 2018

I was disappointed to learn we weren't now doing *Guys & Dolls* (hopefully that will be reconsidered for the future), however its replacement was an opportunity not to be missed! After looking at the script, *Chitty* was another show where two Followspots were not going to be enough. This time I decided I wanted all four to be as similar as possible, so the Crew had to get two extra Spots up to the back of the theatre and into the Spot Box. This all adds time on the Get-in and needs to be considered – particularly as the access to the Spot Box is via a vertical ladder and is not very big. I was therefore very glad to see it had been done when I came in on the Sunday after the Crew had worked throughout the night as part of getting the over stage rig up! The Spot Box for the week was apparently a 'little warm...!' *Chitty* was great fun to light. Plenty of colour and moving effects and some well-known songs to get plenty of cues in to.

If you could only take one show soundtrack with you?

Not an original choice but it would have to be *Sister Act* I think. As soon as the opening song starts it makes me smile and brings back memories of a great week. I know all the words and it's a great feel-good show.

Best bit of BLOC?

Apart from Anna Sutton's freshly baked brownies during the Get-in...? It has to be the Crew. From the in-house staff who are so helpful and will work relentlessly during our week to help us achieve our goals, to my fantastic Lighting Crew who are not only around during the show week and many rehearsals beforehand but also some of whom work throughout the night – as soon as the show which is in before us has left the building (normally around 1.00 or 2.00am) – to ensure that all the overhead lighting bars are rigged so they can be flown out to allow Set to move in early on the Sunday morning. Without this effort and hard work, to avoid knock-on delays with other stage departments, as a company we would never achieve getting the show opened by the Tuesday night.

Highlight of being with BLOC?

Firstly, it has to be the venue. Having the opportunity of working in one of the biggest theatres outside of London is a huge privilege. The stage is enormous – with a total of 65 flying bars available (but these have to be 'negotiated' with the Set!). Also, the quality of shows we put on is at a really high standard. I have read many reviews that make a positive comparison to us against professional shows and how we are indistinguishable. Certainly, having all the hard work and effort recognised by various Rose Bowl awards and nominations over the years is a great achievement for the Club.

Show I would love BLOC to do?

Anything apart from *Kiss Me, Kate* (sorry! – everyone has their least favourite show and that just happens to me mine), although the set design for our proposed version of this looked fantastic and was making it much more attractive. I would love to do *Guys & Dolls* and we nearly did! It hasn't been done by the Club for a long time and it's one of those absolute classics. It's a show that can cope with a large cast, has some great musical numbers and has some exciting lighting potential.

Luxury?

A Waitrose Delivery Pass. Show weeks are not possible without a regular supply of fresh pastries, cakes and the occasional champagne! The Monday plotting sessions are always powered by chocolate Hob Nobs and the rest of the week is kept going by Harbio. If that's not allowed then it would have to be a Wind-Up Radio (I love listening to a whole variety of different stations/programmes throughout the week).



The History BLOC 1996-2014 by Alex Turasiewicz & Chris Parslow

Part Two 2008-2014

2008 marked the 75th Anniversary of BLOC and for this they returned to a more traditional musical in the form of *Me and My Girl*. To celebrate this anniversary a number of articles appeared in the Evening Post, one of which was an interview by Gerry Parker with Kate Adie with the headline 'When Kate wasn't the leading lady.' The article tells of Kate's time with the club between 1973 – 75 when she took part in four shows - *Free as Air*, *Kismet*, *The King and I* and *Showboat* – a show BLOC could no longer contemplate doing. Kate had some interesting observations of her time with the club, "I would have loved to play the lead but I could never guarantee to be at every rehearsal and I always want to give a 100%... There was as

much fun to have backstage in the dressing rooms as there was on stage itself... there was always plenty of intrigue and gossip... There was lots of camaraderie but also a lot of rivalry especially over dressing rooms. We all wanted the best one. I admire BLOC tremendously as I'm always impressed with the amount of talent on view and the tremendous enthusiasm and hard work they put into productions. The members of BLOC obviously enjoy every moment that they are on stage and that sort of enjoyment communicates itself to the audience." Plus, ca change!

As to *Me and My Girl* Gerry Parker wrote in the Evening Post, "The audience left the theatre thoroughly entertained by a bubbly company... Colourfully staged with a full chorus always giving a 100% this was a production that went along with a swing and ensured BLOC's survival until their 100th!!"



We then had two shows that were musical theatre classics from the Rodgers and Hammerstein team – *Oklahoma!* and *The King and I*, but in between these came BLOC's first foray with a Disney Musical - *Beauty and the Beast*. Again, having chosen the show, the Company was faced with solving huge technical challenges. For instance, in the original stage show Lumiere had jets of flames when he was being the candle, which in a recent tour had been toned down to synthetic flames. Real flames create a huge amount of Health and Safety issues and a lengthy risk assessment just for that one feature. However, when it came to show time these challenges had, yet again, been mainly solved. The Rose Bowl was full of praise: "*Beauty and the Beast* is a show that demands dazzling and exciting spectacle and given the severely limited amount of time in the theatre, what this show needed was miracles. It got them. The technical departments achieved an unexpectedly high quality of spectacle and the final result was a tribute to the Company's dedication..." In a couple of days, BLOC had achieved what professional companies might take weeks to bring together and the Rose Bowl award for Technical Achievement was just reward for all the effort.



The King and I was BLOC's third production of this musical and the second time for Director John Cousins. As ever, the production had its own unique stamp and the Rose Bowl praised it for its "magical atmosphere to compliment the romance of the storyline. It managed to meld the elements of East and West... The production captured the visual spectacle breathtakingly making full use of the scope of The Hippodrome stage. From the moment the curtain opened to the final chorus, this was no amateur production, this was professional theatre at its best, in fact it was better than some professional productions I have seen.... I came away from the final curtain feeling I have been transported in to a languid unfamiliar culture." High praise indeed and repeatedly BLOC productions have been praised for being as good as any professional productions and sometimes even better!

In 2012, just as in 2019, *The Lion King* came for a long season at The Hippodrome which meant that The Hippodrome felt unable to offer us any week that year, so we got involved in a show celebrating 100 years of The Hippodrome. Peter Sutton writes: “*Thanks for the Memories* celebrated 100 years of The Hippodrome. As BLOC had been part of that history for more than 50 years and had also performed the 75th anniversary production we were approached, along with Vicki Klein, to do the updated celebration. It also meant that BLOC maintained its annual presence at the theatre as there was no autumn slot available in 2012 due to the forthcoming *The Lion King*. The performances were in July 2012 and it was felt that the gap until autumn 2013 was too long for members not having something else to be involved with. The result was *Westenders* at the Colston Hall in 2013 – performances that reflected some of BLOC’s earlier productions and the shows that BLOC dreamed to do in the future.”

At this time there was also a major change in the Committee. The main Executive of the Committee gave notice at the AGM in 2012 that they would step down at the AGM in 2013. So at one time Peter Sutton (Chairman), Chris Chapman (Vice-Chairman), Alison Sutton (Secretary) and Eric Arnold (who had been Treasurer for over 40 years) all resigned and Sue Donovan became Chair; with Craig Sillick as Vice-Chair, Helen Kempe as Secretary and Eric Arnold acted as Honorary Treasurer with Pete Jones stepping in as Assistant Treasurer until Graham Lewis was appointed.

White Christmas seems incredibly familiar as a story, often seen around Christmas time on television. It actually started life as a film and was, in fact, only turned into a stage version in 2000 and its first production in the UK was in 2006 at Plymouth. The show is only available for a limited period and in 2013 BLOC became the first company to perform the show at The Hippodrome,





winning a NODA technical award for the snow! The feel-good factor for BLOC created by this show was nicely completed when Faye Banks then won the Supporting Actor Rose Bowl for her portrayal of Martha.

For John Cousin's last show in this nineteen-year period, BLOC gave him the challenge of a really contemporary show with modern music, characters with lots of attitude, gangsters and nuns. This time coping with a very different problem - not Maria but Delores. BLOC performed *Sister Act* in 2014, only five years after it first opened in London and there had been a tour of the show in 2011 so it was relatively very fresh in many theatre goers' minds. It also had another potential difficulty as the film and the show had always had a black woman in the lead. Would BLOC be able to cast it and if there wasn't a member of the BME community to play it could it be played by a white actor? BLOC made the decision to go with a white actor and it worked

brilliantly. "Words cannot describe the Wow factor of this show..." These were the opening words of the NODA critique for *Sister Act*. It continued, 'from the opening number to the stunning finale this was one roller coaster of entertainment.' Not for the first time for a BLOC review it went on to say "this was more than a professional show; this one outshone any professional production. It deserves an Olivier!" These sentiments were echoed by the Rose Bowl that said: "*Sister Act* has to be one of the best musicals I have seen in a long time. It was a first class show that takes amateur dramatics to a new height."

So, during this period of its history, BLOC had reached new heights and was regularly receiving plaudits such as a "superb piece of theatre" or "BLOC has achieved the highest standard expected of them" or "the technical challenges were executed with great professionalism" or "a wonderful spectacle" or "BLOC created quite a magical experience" and frequently it was said "a

professional production that professionals could learn from.”

BLOC had enjoyed artistic success after artistic success and was, in 2014, in a strong position both artistically and financially. So how to follow *Sister Act*? However, this decision wasn't only going to be about the choice of show as other changes were being considered. But that's for the next chapter...

To conclude this chapter of BLOC's history, it seems only fitting to hear about this period - "The John Cousins Years" - from the man himself, so please read on and enjoy Chris Parslow's account of his interview with John. (Ed.)

The John Cousins Years by Chris Parslow

"I must have been doing something right for BLOC to have kept asking me back!"

John Cousins' first show for BLOC was as a guest dancer in the 1974 production of *The King and I*, returning as a guest dancer for the 1978 production of *Gigi*; he became and has remained a member ever since. He worked as wardrobe master for *The Merry Widow*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Oliver!*, and as assistant wardrobe master on *The Great Waltz*. He directed *Kiss Me, Kate* and *Hello Dolly!* in 1990 and 1991, he then appeared in *Hans Christian Andersen* in 1993 and *42nd Street*. John then directed a run of nineteen shows from *Anything Goes* in 1996 to *Sister Act* in 2014. John chose not to put himself forward to direct *Sunset Boulevard* and returned in 2017 as assistant director for *My Fair Lady*. The now twice postponed production of *Kiss Me, Kate* (again!) would have been John's 21st Hippodrome production as director/designer for BLOC, including four amateur premieres. For those of you keeping a tally, John has appeared in four BLOC shows, designed 15, costumed 29, and directed/staged two concerts.

Given the lockdown, I interviewed John via Zoom in January. We agreed to focus on discussing how things have changed for his role as director since 1990: technology, audience expectations, membership expectations, choice of shows, his 'stand out' or favourite productions, the challenging productions, the future. We started, though, with a more general discussion of being the director.

“When you take over the Hippodrome on a Sunday morning you enter a theatre with an empty stage, everything has to be brought in - the set, lighting, sound etc. You then have 35 hours before the Dress/Tech to create the magic for opening night. During those hours you have to be flexible and be prepared to make some alterations due to unforeseen tech problems. What we achieve in those hours is through amazing teamwork. Hours of discussions and meetings gradually come to fruition. You don't have the luxury of weeks of concentrated rehearsals, a week for tech runs, two weeks of previews where we can change and adjust the show. Just walking through the stage door brings back many happy memories. I love that weekend. It's tiring, but I love it. A production becomes your baby and you live with it for six months of your life. You will have many sleepless nights and you will query your decisions. During that period, it's not just about being creative, you may be required to act as



confidante, deal with production romances, and deal with bereavements.”

By 1990 productions were different. Back then, there were fewer if any touring companies. BLOC, like other companies, pounced on new shows as soon as they became available. This meant that sets and costumes were available for hire but most of these would look outdated and unacceptable to audiences now: lots of flying cloths and clunky sets. This means that there are greater technical demands on the director and the production team, although in their day they worked well: *“The ever-changing and skilful sets were handled swiftly and noiselessly; I greatly appreciated the constantly altered drapes.”* (Rose Bowl)

“Audience expectations for that 1990 production of *Kiss Me, Kate* were lower than they are now. We are now competing with West End productions and that is the standard of production that our audiences expect. We can’t compete on budget, but what we can achieve for the money is amazing and we give the professionals a run for their money. Touring companies do not have large casts so we can do crowd scenes (such as those in *Evita*) that they can only dream of. As a director, you need to be aware of what is going on in the professional shows and, somehow, assimilate that for BLOC.”

Increasingly, when choosing a show, there are no sets available, certainly not sets suitable for the huge stage at the Hippodrome. Even when sets are available, they may well need adapting. “The set for Robbie Burns’ recent production of *My Fair Lady* was the same one that we had used in 1989. Then the library was on a truck and could move up and downstage as needed; in 2017 it had to be static for health and safety reasons which caused the production team huge problems for fitting everything else in. Sam and I created eleven drafts of the flying plan before a working solution to all the problems was agreed by the production team.”



“In 2013, we were the first UK amateur company to stage *White Christmas*. This was probably my most challenging production. There was no set available. Scenic tried to cobble something together for us from their stock items, for example, the train in Act 1 was formerly the bus in *Summer Holiday*. It involved six months of bartering and negotiating to get what we had. There were no suitable backcloths for the final snow scene anywhere. After much googling I found two in the US which the committee agreed to, and James Hartland organised for them to be flown over. Even costumes weren’t available; we really had to source everything for that show.” As the Rose Bowl critic said, *“The backdrops having been shipped over the Atlantic were a highlight... I enjoyed the 1950s train interior and the army camp atmosphere in the opening scene... The snow falling behind the barn doors with fir trees and onto the audience was the icing on the cake.”*

“In some ways this is good because it means we can design and build our own sets which makes a show ‘BLOCs production’ not just a carbon copy of what you might have seen elsewhere.”

When I asked John what were his ‘stand out’ productions, “Hopefully, all of them!” was his response. “I’m learning all the time and can always see things that I could change or improve, even if it is too late to do so. Stand out productions, though, would be *Evita*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *The Witches of Eastwick*, *The King and I* (2011), *Sister Act*, and *White Christmas*”.



When pressed for a favourite – *Evita*. “I saw the original show in London and loved it: the music, the story and the staging. It is also a sensible

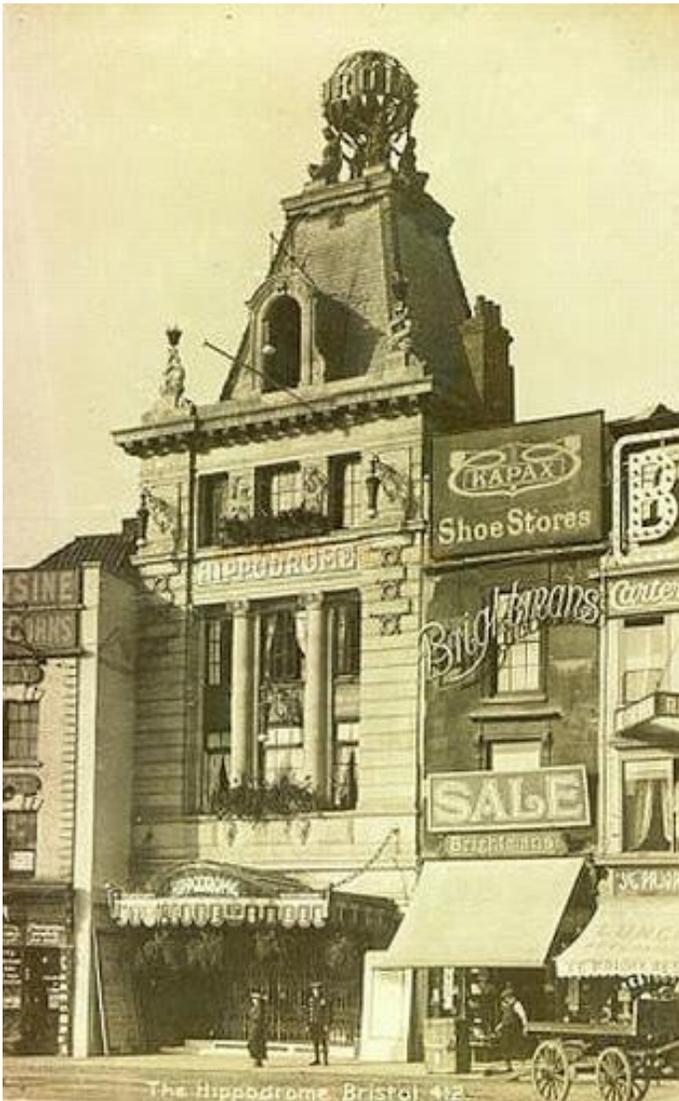
length! We were the first amateur company to stage it so we were able to iron out a number of the problems for subsequent companies.” As the Rose Bowl critic said, “... *the hired Robert Stigwood set was minimal in concept and very effective.*” John’s production of *Evita* won the Rose Bowl for Best Musical Production. The citation that went with the award said, “*This was a highly co-ordinated and professional production with meticulous attention to detail... The Director has my admiration and respect for tackling such an acclaimed work so successfully and for giving a very accomplished dimension to amateur musical work.*”

John went on to say, “BLOC has given me the opportunity to vent my creativity – for example, with *The Wizard of Oz* and the snow machine in *White Christmas*. Audiences may like familiarity, but the adjustments help make it a BLOC show. With *Kiss Me, Kate* one of the challenges is to make the book more acceptable to modern audiences.”

“I feel privileged to have been given the honour and chance of directing for BLOC at the Hippodrome, a position I totally respect. I will never ask anyone to do anything I was not prepared to do myself. I believe you have to show leadership and not just take things for granted.”

And, for the future? “As I get older, I see my position in the future is to encourage, assist, support where required. AM Dram will go through many changes, theatre is changing, shows are becoming more technical, the expectations of the audience are more demanding and costs go up. Amateur directors will have to become more imaginative and creative... I wish them luck.”

BLOC and The Hippodrome
by Gerry Parker



Bristol Light Opera Club and the Bristol Hippodrome both encountered quite a deal of opposition when they first came into being. When Oswald Stoll set about building a theatre where families could come and enjoy light entertainment (Music Halls in the early part of the 20th century, full of rowdiness and heavy drinking, were hardly the place to take the wife and children) there was a great deal of opposition from the owners of the already established theatres in the heart of Bristol.

The opposition was headed by the Livermore Brothers Horace and LCJ, whose People's Palace, which opened on Boxing Day 1892, stood in

Baldwin Street, only a few hundred yards away from Stoll's proposed Hippodrome site on St Augustine's Parade. In the event, Livermore's People's Palace was not to survive as a theatre, converting to a cinema in 1912, the same year as The Hippodrome opened its doors on December 16th. Since that date the People's Palace has gone through several internal metamorphosises to become the New Palace Cinema in 1928, the Gaumont Cinema after World War Two, the Ritzy and Creation Night Clubs, and a Sports Cafe. Architect James Hutton's facade, Grade Two listed, can still be seen virtually intact looking out over Baldwin Street.



The Empire Theatre which stood on the corner of Old Market Street and Captain Carey's Lane, from 1893 to the early 1960's, when having survived many up and downs in theatrical fortunes and the Luftwaffe's bombs, it succumbed to Bristol City's planning department and was demolished to make way for a roundabout and road leading to Cabot Circus and the M32 motorway. The Empire objected to The Hippodrome on the grounds that they were also known as The Empire and Hippodrome Theatre.

The Bedminster Hippodrome, which opened in August 1911, had a better case when it came to names, but never really secure as a theatre they like Livermore's People's Palace had become a Cinema by 1915.

It was an alliance between ambitious local councillors and the owners of business around the St Augustine's Parade site who posed the biggest threat to Oswald Stoll's ambitious plans. They argued that the proposed site, near where a great deal of the city's sewerage entered the harbour was a health hazard. Others who wanted the area cleaned up sided with Stoll.

For all the ups and downs of fortune between the wars, at one time The Hippodrome was forced to show films, as was her sister theatre, The Prince's in Park Row. Both by the end of the 1930's were owned by Stoll/Moss, which in the end proved to be the biggest threat to the Hippodrome's survival.

Before that, we must look at BLOC's beginnings. In spite of the fact that the Bristol Amateur Operatic Society founded in 1894 by Bruce Bedells was still flying high, and most local districts, small towns and villages in the area had thriving musical clubs, many presenting Gilbert and Sullivan Shows, a small group who met in 1933 in the Rotary Club House, Colston Street, felt there was room for a new society devoted to producing the best of Light Opera. The Cabot Cafe on College Green became their headquarters. The cafe is long gone but if you look up turning the corner from the Hippodrome into the bottom of Park Street you can still see the decorative facade on the first floor.

John A Edwards was appointed producer for BLOC's first offerings *Cox and Box* and *The Pirates of Penzance*. John's father and mother took on the roles of Stage Manager and Wardrobe Mistress; George Edward, no relation, was Musical Director and Herbert 'Bill' Mills doubled as Treasurer and Secretary. This gallant band, with as yet no definite audience, lavished £300 on that first production, and as if to underline the phrase 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread,' two days before the dress rehearsal at the Victoria Rooms they decided to take the new production to St Monica's Home for the Aged for a trial run. An inadequate generator providing the lights caused

further problems, but the evening was declared a success and the experiment was continued before the next few shows.

Just how this rag, tag and bob tail of a group persuaded The Duchess of Beaufort to become their first President, and the world-famous contralto Dame Clara Butt and her husband Kennedy Rumford to be Vice-Presidents is lost in time, but they did and their presence lifted the prestige of the newly formed club enormously.

All went well until 1935 when a small group waiting at the corner of Richmond Hill to go to London to inspect costumes looked across the road and saw their theatre, The Victoria Rooms, going up in smoke. Despite all the problems of playing in a Concert Hall, both 1935's productions *The Geisha* and *The Vagabond King* were staged in The Colston Hall. All that enthusiasm was not alas greeted by financial success, £140 loss being reported. 1936 was spent not in producing a show but in fund raising to get the club out of financial difficulties.

Princess Ida, 1937; *The Gondoliers*, 1938; and *Lilac Time*, 1939 were all successfully presented in The Victoria Rooms before Adolf Hitler declared War on September 3rd, forcing BLOC, along with so many other local groups, to disband for the duration. It would be seven years before they would reappear in 1946 with *The Rebel Maid*.

Whilst Adolf had put a temporary halt on BLOC's effort, the inefficiency of the bomb aimers of his much-vaunted Luftwaffe were inadvertently saving The Hippodrome from being converted into offices and flats. It had been more or less decided by the owners that The Prince's would continue as a theatre and the Hippodrome closed for theatrical business. In November 1940, when trying to destroy Bristol Docks, the Luftwaffe missed The Hippodrome just a few yards away from their target but destroyed The Princes and Coliseum in Park Row, leaving the Hippodrome as the only Stoll/Moss theatre in Bristol.

Just how BLOC and The Hippodrome came together is a story for another time.

***A Chance to Meet...
Ben Phillips, Theatre
Director, The Bristol
Hippodrome
by Alex Turasiewicz***



As part of an occasional online series of '**A Chance to Meet...**' during the pandemic, we had the opportunity to chat on Zoom with Ben Phillips, Theatre Director at The Bristol Hippodrome.

Ben is a local lad who on leaving school became a Civil Servant and then after various jobs joined Apollo Leisure, for whom he worked at Apollo Hammersmith, Grimsby Auditorium, Apollo Victoria and Sunderland Empire. During that time he worked with Kylie, Judi Dench, Tom Lister and Dame Shirley Bassey. He came back to Bristol for family reasons and after an exciting first six months it became one of the most challenging years in his career.

Since March 29th 2020 the Hippodrome has been closed because of COVID and out of 160 staff only three have not been on furlough. Ben made it clear that The Hippodrome will not open if there's

social distancing in place and he felt that BLOC made the right call to postpone this year's production, leaving professional Producers to take the significant financial risk.

Ben explained that programming is done three years in advance, so 2022 and 2023 is sorted as is most of 2024. He assured us that our place at The Hippodrome is safe as we do very well at the Box Office and because of this we should feel very pleased with ourselves. Our biggest threat is the effect that long running shows at The Hippodrome have on its planning.

His other main pointer for BLOC was regarding the choice of our show in 2022. Ben felt it should be a very commercial and popular show, possibly nostalgic, so we come back saying "Hello Bristol - we're here!"

Post COVID, Ben is very keen on expanding the Education work of The Hippodrome and encouraging diversity both within the staff and with the audience. Shows and their cast must reflect people's lives and their communities.

As well as giving us an insight into how The Hippodrome operates Ben also gave us some interesting bits of backstage gossip, especially concerning some of the 'riders' that artists had demanded as part of their contracts. No names were mentioned but there were some fascinating requests!

Ben hopes to be at The Hippodrome for ten years and it will be interesting to see the changes that occur in that time and the impact they will have on BLOC productions!

“Sounds easy, no?” Choosing a Show (Part Two) by Alex Turasiewicz

Once we have the Licence, that is not the end of our association with the License holders - they organise an enormous amount of control over the show and are very clear what we can and cannot do.

The first issue is billing:

All this information MUST appear and in the format stipulated, especially the size of font... and this is checked: *You agree to set forth the following credits on the title page in all programs, and on all house boards, displays, heralds, posters, fliers, and on all other advertising and promotion in connection with your production of the Play:*

For example, with *KISS ME, KATE* the comma is important and cannot be left off. Our own design team had to re-do their original idea as the comma had been omitted for aesthetic reasons. The Copyright Holders are acting as guardians on behalf of the writers and are therefore very protective both of their writing and their billing.

More detailed instructions:

Music and Lyrics by Cole Porter, Book by Sam and Bella Spewak. Authors' billing shall appear in a size not less than that afforded any other element of the production. All the Authors shall be billed in the same size of type, and no Author shall receive billing credit unless all the Authors are afforded billing credit. In the programmes, the credits shall appear on the title page thereof. The title page of the program shall contain the following announcement in type size at least one-half the size of the authors' credits: KISS ME, KATE is presented by arrangement with TAMS-WITMARK www.tamswitmark.com.uk

Not only is it about the billing of the writers, but it also applies in some cases to the billing of our

Creative Team, for example with *Fiddler on the Roof*:

- 1). *Your choreographer must be credited as follows: "Original choreography reproduced by".*
- 2). *Your Director shall be credited as follows, should he/she reproduce Mr. Robbins' original direction: "Original direction reproduced by*
- 5). *The type size and prominence of the credit to Messrs. Stein, Bock, Harrick & Robbins shall be at 1½ times the size and prominence used for credits given to the director and choreographer of your production.*

When BLOC did *Fiddler*, Naomi Jefferies, the choreographer, received the book with Jerome Robbins' choreography and initially it seemed that it had to be recreated exactly as is. When Graham Lewis contacted MTI we were told to see 'the manual' more as a guide than a bible, but some productions want to keep a very tight control on their works: *The Licensee agrees that all musical numbers of the work must follow the choreographic manual supplied with the rehearsal material.*

Indeed, it isn't only the choreography where there are strict guidelines – the text and score have to be performed as is, and any changes should be applied for in advance. So, if a scene is changed or a line rewritten - technically, they could close the show. *The Licensee shall perform and produce the said work strictly in accordance with the score and libretto (if applicable) and any changes to the Performance(s) according to the score and where applicable the libretto will render this licence invalid unless expressly otherwise agreed in writing between the parties. The integrity of the Work shall be preserved at all times.*

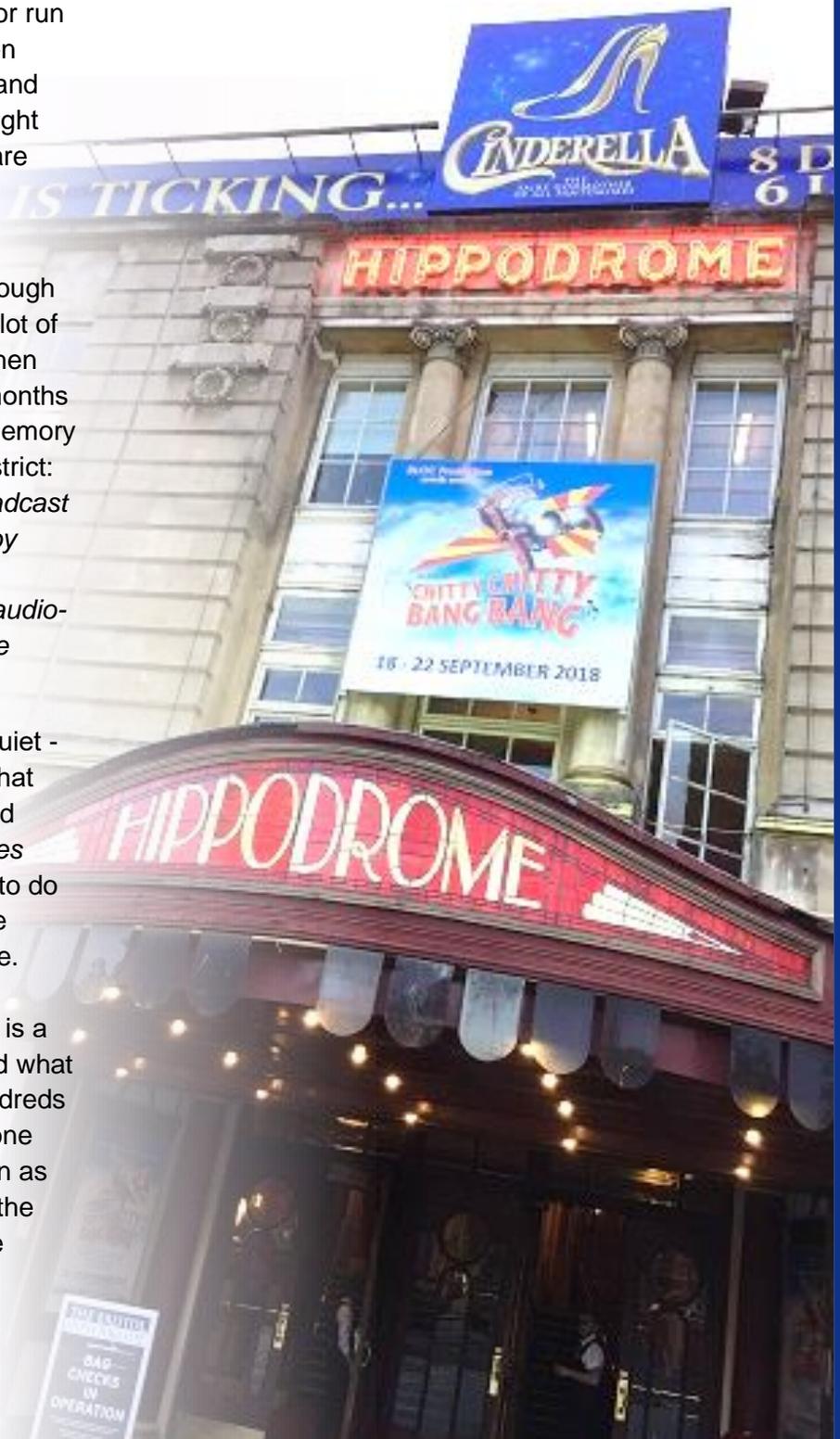
If we do ever change things - will they ever know? That's a risk one takes – especially playing *The Hippodrome*. The contract stipulates: *The Licensee agrees to provide to the Licensor two orchestral stall seats for each performance of the Work if requested by the Licensor and shall provide a copy of the programme of the Performance(s).*

We then have the cost of hire materials - this is separate from the royalties. For *Kiss Me, Kate*: Hire of rehearsal sets, period of hire and cost 1 set for 12 weeks & 3 months £740. Number of orchestral sets, period of hire and cost 1 set for 6 weeks £300. Postage and packing cost £48. Another £1000 before we start rehearsing!

Also, it is very clear that if the General Public are ever invited – such as at an open rehearsal or run through – permission has to be granted. Even Charity performances are often charged for and can't just be done as worthy as the cause might be. As well as safeguarding the works they are guardians of the financial interests of those involved.

Theatre by its very nature is transitory – although during this COVID-19 period it seems that a lot of shows are filmed to a high standard - and when you've worked on something for nearly six months it is only natural one would want to keep a memory of it. However, the Copyright rules are very strict: *The Licensee shall not have the right to broadcast or record or to produce or exhibit the same by means of mechanical recording or visual cinematography, sound film or television or audio-visual methods or any other existing or future process of reproduction.*

Often, I have asked 'Can't we film it on the quiet - they'll never know!' However, it's amazing what the Rightsolders find out and check. We had done a production of the school version of *Les Misérables* and everyone who had anything to do with the production was credited. There were literally hundreds of names in the programme. One afternoon a week after the show Weinberger's rang me. 'We notice that there is a credit for CCTV – what was that used for and what happened to the filming'. Amidst literally hundreds of names and credits they had spotted that one fact. Fortunately, there was a genuine reason as classrooms and gyms were being used and the CCTV acted as dressing room monitors. The wakeup call was that they looked at the programme and checked!



During show week we get interminable messages for the return of our books – not only their return but cleaned from all markings. It's always quite a funny sight seeing the musicians assiduously removing markings during the last show – it's a nightmare if the show is a sung through one as the responsibility to clean the orchestral parts then falls to the MD. Hence it is so helpful when company members return their parts on time and clean otherwise it can cost BLOC unnecessary charges! *The Licensee shall be liable to the Licensor for the value of the Materials or any part thereof if the Materials are damaged lost or destroyed howsoever caused and notwithstanding that such damage loss or destruction may be due to any cause beyond the Licensee's control.*

Last year a big question for us and many companies was 'What happens in the eventuality that we have to cancel a performance or show?' The Contract is clear: *that in the event of the cancellation of the production herein licensed, the Licensor shall have the right to charge the Licensee.*

Once the show is over, the rights have to be calculated and our accounts have to be submitted. This is very much a business transaction and there is no room for 'Creative Accounting' as they reserve the right to check our figures. It's made clear that any complimentary tickets, whoever they are for, will cost the Club – so that's why so few are given away. We have to pay for them. *The Licensor shall have the right to examine the Licensee's books of account regarding the box office takings. For the avoidance of doubt, any complimentary or reduced-price tickets given or sold by the Licensor to any person who is an Honorary Member of the Society or who have made a donation or paid a periodic or one-time subscription shall be deemed to have been sold at full price.*

All the calculations are made and we have to pay the royalties. This is not an insubstantial sum. For *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* for example, the Royalties were £45,400. So, combined with the Theatre

Charges of £68,750 we were committed to £114,150 before we even started directly on production costs!

Choosing a show – Sounds easy? **No!**

PS: We would love to hear your views about how we go about choosing a show and how best you feel your voice can be heard in this process. Please send your views to The Editor.

From Junior BLOC to BMYP by Chris Parslow

Bristol is blessed with a number of youth theatre groups. I have been working with one in particular, Bristol Musical Youth Theatre (BMYP), since 2006 as an acting and dialogue coach. BMYP aims to produce two shows a year, usually at The Redgrave Theatre, occasionally at The Olympus Theatre and, somewhat uniquely, once at The Bierkeller in Bristol for our production of *Starlight Express* in 2017.

More recent members of BLOC and BMYP may not be aware, though, that BMYP started out as Junior BLOC. The club was formed in 1973 at the time of the Bristol 600 celebrations and started performing regularly from 1976. The idea of forming a youth section of BLOC started during the production of *The Sound of Music* in 1970 when production officials realised that there are many shows requiring children, sometimes in significant roles, and that it would be a huge advantage to the club to have a trained pool of youngsters to call upon.

The aim of both Junior BLOC (and BMYP) was to develop the talents of young people in singing, drama and dance through the production of musical shows. Membership was, and is still, by audition and is open to those between the ages of 12 and 19, although nowadays that tends to be up to the age of 17 in reality because of exam

pressures. The club still aims to have between 30 and 40 members at any one time.

Junior BLOC was started by Sally Noble with Peter Milne as Chair. Others heavily included at this time included Lucille Villamayor, Sheila Edgell and Mavis Holdsworth. Over the years many other parents have helped with costumes, set building and working backstage. Many alumni of Junior BLOC and BMYP have gone on to become members of BLOC – I will spare their blushes for the moment, but more on that in a while.

A further group was formed in 1988, Mini BLOC (now just Minis). This was to satisfy the demand for 'something for the under twelves'. Over the years many members of Minis have progressed to BMYP and onwards to BLOC.

On January 1st, 1996, the Juniors split away from the adult club to form BMYP. This, as so often, had to do with finances. The Juniors wanted to be financially independent and in control of their own decisions. The new club was named Bristol Musical Youth Productions as they were no longer able to use the BLOC name, not being affiliated to the senior club. Peter Milne remained as Chair until 2000 when he retired and Sheri Kohn took over, a role she still holds today.

Sally Noble and Mavis Holdsworth were responsible for many of the early productions, with Chris Northam and Julian Edgell as musical directors, ably assisted by Pat Browne who did then what I do now. Vicki Klein took over as director/choreographer in 1998, with Sean Green eventually taking over from Julian Edgell as musical director; Sean handed over the musical reins to Kerrie Duce-Jones in 2009.

Those of you doing the maths will realise that 2023 will mark BMYP/Junior BLOC's fiftieth anniversary. During those 50 years a good number of junior members have gone on to become BLOC members, some have gone on to achieve success in the West End and beyond. Quite a few parents are still involved with BLOC both on stage and behind the scenes. Some

former members of Junior BLOC have also seen their children pass through the club and have served on the committee. There are many people I have not named, mainly for fear of leaving someone out. Before our next edition in the autumn it would be wonderful to hear from former members and parents, so we can collect your reminiscences of your time with the junior clubs for a further article and for the BMYP archive. It may even help us organise a party or a concert for 2023, and, hopefully, face to face and not via Zoom! No promises!

Please send any thoughts, reminiscences, anecdotes to me at chrisparslow5@gmail.com I look forward to hearing from you.

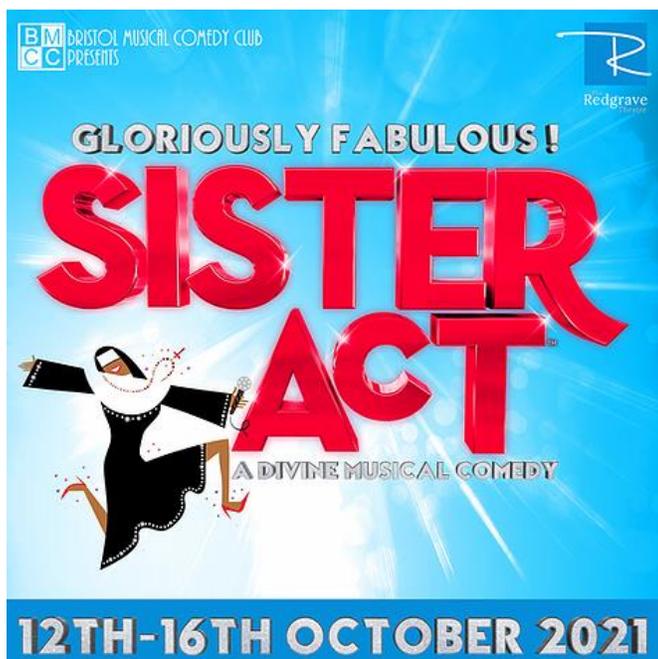
As a postscript, BMYP will be performing the junior version of Disney's *Aladdin* in the week commencing November 9th. We really need some more boys for the cast. If you have a male relative, friend or neighbour aged between 11 and 19 who you think might be interested in auditioning for membership, please ask them to get in touch with me.



News from our friends at BMCC by Rob McDonald

BMCC tries to plan ahead where we can and before COVID hit, we had set out our plans for the next two years - *Rent*, *Sister Act*, *Closer than Ever*, *Kinky Boots*. Since the pandemic took hold, we have spent a lot of time - like most groups - postponing shows and then postponing them again. We've Zoomed as a Group (before Zoom fatigue set in), we've planned things and changed plans. We have also spent some time (not too long of course!) celebrating our win in the Inter-Group Quiz hosted by BLOC!

Once the government set out the Road Map, we took the decision to press on with *Sister Act* - a show we have had our eyes on since BLOC's production in 2014. Our production team and cast has fully embraced the challenge of starting a show under COVID restrictions. It's been really good to see our company come back together (albeit in limited numbers) and we look forward to the time when we don't have to count people in and out of a rehearsal room or pray that the weather holds up because we are rehearsing outside. Tickets are on sale now - 12th to 16th October at The Redgrave. We would love for you come and spread the love around with us.



From the Wings

This is a regular column providing news within the BLOC family, with apologies for any omissions.

Alice Loney

Many congratulations to Alice Loney who married Ben Carpenter in Bath on 17th April, in the glorious sunshine.



Graham Lewis

Also congratulations to our Treasurer, Graham Lewis, who has become a grandfather for the first time. Fittingly, Olivia's birth was registered by BLOC's personal registrar, Sue Donovan! Whilst mentioning Sue, we all wish her well as she recovers from her recent hip replacement surgery.

**Mike Hemming**

In sadder news we have to report the death of Mike Hemming after a short terminal illness.

Not many of us will have known Mike, but he was the son of one of the founding fathers of BLOC, namely John Hemming, way back in 1933. Mike was an avid supporter of BLOC and with his wife Daphne was a Patron of the Club for many years after he retired from 'active BLOC service' in 1984. Indeed, Mike was first involved with BLOC on props from 1960-62, progressing to Property Master 1963-68, Assistant Stage Manager 1969, Stage Manager 1970-72 and Stage Director 1973-79. He was also Lighting Designer from 1974-1984. Mike came to as many shows as he could and often sent a personal note following his visit saying how much he enjoyed the show and how he still felt very proud to have been part of such a wonderful Club.