

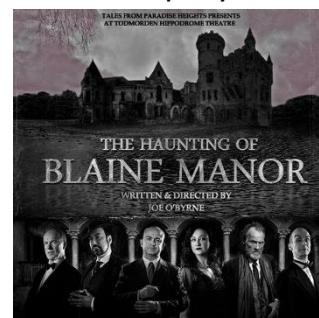
Hello!

I can't believe how long it has been since I've seen you all. When we pressed "pause" on rehearsals, back in March, I'm sure no-one would have predicted that we wouldn't be back this year! And yet, here we are at a "virtual AGM" in December with no firm news to offer you about 2021. Nevertheless, let's look back over last season. It may have been short - but it was very sweet!

A note to begin. I was going to just write about the society's own productions. But in the last couple of years at the AGM, I have reported on visiting productions as well. I think we all know that we need one to support the other and it requires a lot of man-hours and organisation to host these performances – especially on the part of me, the tech crew, the front of house team and the box office staff. So, I make no apology for filling up these pages with all the "other" stuff that happens at the Hipp. If you are so inclined, by all means, skip through and cherry pick the shows you are interested in. If you want to read it all – maybe take it in instalments!

However, please do take note of just how much we do. When you see it written out like this, it really is an astounding body of work for a group of volunteers! And remember – this is just HALF of a normal season. (Now you know why I drone on so long at the AGMs!) JNS x

We started our season on stage with a visit from a new (to us) theatre company called Paradise Heights. They brought the thriller, **The Haunting of Blaine Manor**, to the Hippodrome. Written in-house by Joe O'Byrne, who also appeared in the play and trekked the streets of Todmorden with publicity material, this was a period piece with a handful of actors, designed to chill. Unfortunately, we didn't attract a large audience, but those who came reported that they had enjoyed it. It turned the company, and us, a profit though and, as with all visiting productions, brought new audience members who fell in love with the Hippodrome.



Two weeks later, we were back – this time in the foyer with another visiting production. Postcard Theatre are a small, local, professional company who came to us hot off awards success at the Greater Manchester Fringe festival with **Pramkicker** a two-handed dark comedy. The actors Coral Sinclair and Tilly Sutcliffe gave a Q&A session too – along with their lovely director Jon-Mark Reid. I know Tilly loved bringing this project to the Hippodrome – and Jon-Mark was impressed with our beautiful theatre. Maybe they'll be back some time.....

Next (and also in the foyer) was our hilarious **Improv Evening**. We sold just over 50 tickets and the audience were delighted by the spontaneous shenanigans. The Improv group have barely had a chance to meet since and now their esteemed leader, Dan Clay, has moved out of the area.

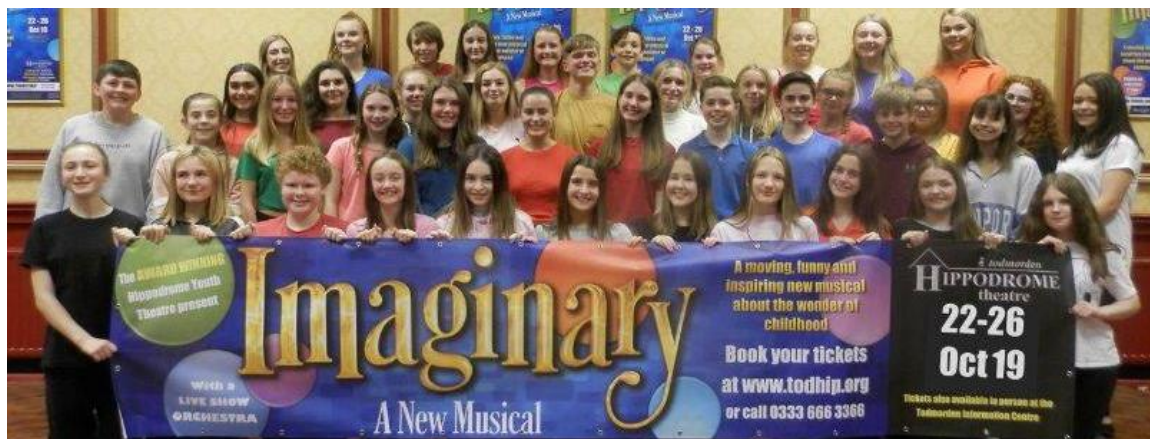


Dan is keen for the group to continue and, when life returns to normal, we hope he will be with us for one more Improv Night but then he will be handing over the reins.

I want to thank Dan – as I'm sure his fellow performers do - for his commitment and his organisation. One might think that an Improv group just turn up and wing it, but I know how hard Dan works to get the apparent chaos ready for an audience.

I am so glad you approached me Dan, with this idea. Thank you.

And then, in October, we moved onto the main stage for the HYT production **Imaginary**. This was a brand-new production, with a unique storyline, which relied on a big reveal just before the interval. It was a bold and colourful show with huge costuming and staging demands – and of course our large and talented HYT membership.



Unlike some other societies, we don't under-budget our Youth shows. They are given all the support of our adult shows – a production team of the highest standard (Martin Cook, Helen Clarkson, Alexandra Townend, Lisa Parker), a full, live band and all the technical backing they need. As always, our tech team (stage, lights, wardrobe, props) put in long hours – and there are sometimes heated moments and stressful nights' sleep – all in the aim of high standards.

Of course, whilst the behind the scenes preparation was going on, the members were rehearsing; learning songs, lines and choreography; attending the band call; trying on

costumes; they even got involved in the distribution of publicity. It really was a team effort – led by their director, MD and choreographers (who also pitched in with publicity, props painting and anything else needed).



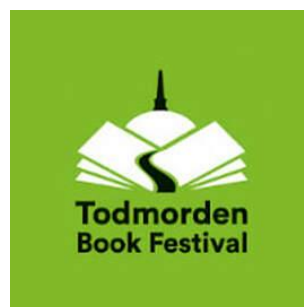
All of this meant, that when HYT took to the stage, the show was superb and really did belie the age of the performers. From the drone-like pupils, to the discipline-crazed teachers, right out to Imaginary land and back, this was a fun-filled riot of a musical!

We were immensely proud of the whole cast of this intriguing new show. They worked their socks off and the audience were delighted every night. Our thanks to each and every HYT member involved, to their wonderful production team and to all the adults who stitched, sawed, sparkled, and switched in support!

A glance at the balance sheet shows that this wasn't the best-attended HYT musical (Helen might tell us which one was) but we can't always do the same shows – it is right that we branch out and try new things: right for the production team, right for the tech team, right for the HYT members and right for our audiences. We owe it to ourselves to experiment and we are successful enough to cover the shortfall and wise enough by now to remember the years that HYT put a lot of profit in the coffers.

HYT took a break after Imaginary and were lined up for workshops in the Spring. These have been taking place online recently – we will be very glad when we can have them back in the building for their regular Monday slot.

In November, we hosted a return event - the **Todmorden Book Festival**. This is a huge event for the town and, although it's a very busy time for us at the Hippodrome, it's definitely a project worth supporting. This year we liaised with them to present the Poet Laureate - **Simon Armitage**, the **Wednesday Writers' Group Open Mic** night, the renowned historical author – **Philippa Gregory** (The Other Boleyn Girl, The White Queen, Tidelands) and TV writer – **Sally Armitage** (Last Tango in Halifax, Happy Valley, Gentleman Jack).





In and amongst the Book Festival, we again hosted the **Frou-Frou Burlesque Club's** annual Halloween performance. They love to bring their acts to the Hippodrome. The performers get so excited about things like our dressing rooms, the size of the stage, the décor – it's always a real buzz. Lady Wildflower is based in Todmorden and considers us and the Little Theatre in Hebden her home venues. The burlesque audiences like a tiple at the bar and a boogie after the show – so it's a good money earner for us.

Hot on the heels of Philippa Gregory came Tim Benjamin's Radius Opera, who brought **The Fire of Olympus** to the Hippodrome to close their tour. Another company to call us home, this is the fourth (I think) opera Tim has presented here. He used members of both the Hippodrome and the Todmorden Choral Society in his film of Olympus and employs local tech and production crew.



Our next booking wasn't a performance but a wedding! Gina has been with the society for almost 10 years and is somewhat of a stalwart: performing, helping front of house, and taking tech responsibilities. Andrew joined the society just after he proposed (on stage) and has quickly immersed himself in Hippodrome life – proving an invaluable member of the

bar staff and debuting as a performer in West Side Story.

Gina and Andrew were keen to celebrate their special day in a building they have both come to love and we were delighted to host. They have already celebrated their first wedding anniversary – and we all wish them many more!



Stripping the seats out of the stalls meant that the Hippodrome could venture into performance in the round for December. **Philip Pullman's Grimm Tales** had been floating around as an idea for quite some time, but we knew it would feel stilted and false up on our main stage with all that space between the performers and the audience.

So, I'm not going to lie, I took the wedding as an opportunity to push for Grimm at Play Committee..... And I am so glad I did. To move the stage, the seats, the tech and even the props and the costumes into the middle of our audience took a lot of blood, sweat and tears – and we should be





in no doubt that the tech team had their work cut out. However, by show week, it was clear to see that they had triumphed.

From the outset, we had an ensemble of performers prepared to step out of their comfort zone and play with these fairy-tale characters: to climb trees, become puppeteers, switch-gender and jump in and out of what felt like a very small box! The actors ranged from teens to pensioners, from HYT, plays and musicals – and we welcomed newcomer Steve to the cast too. It was, mostly fun – but there were lots of questions. Trying to visualise a new space and be confident



that all will work was tough and the actors (and even the tech crew) were very trusting! They brought their own inspiration and characterisation – they formed their story-based teams and supported each other. We laughed, occasionally cried, and were eventually ready.

Moving the seats to accommodate the central stage and still allow evacuation space reduced our capacity, so a matinee was added and when tickets began to fly we realised full houses were on the cards – a great feeling, even though we knew we played to less capacity than usual.



If you came to see Philip Pullman's Grimm Tales, I am sure you will acknowledge that we did something special that week. People have been kind enough to give me praise for what was up there – but I need you all to know that this was very much a team effort!

By the time our December performance is over, everyone is revving up for Christmas. We host the majority of the Todmorden primary schools for a **Christmas Film**. The success of this tends to rely on Carolyn, David, and our older members – although some years we are lucky enough to snag Aysa to project the film for us or Hannah to help out the ushers. This year, we turned a profit of £795 with Toy Story 4 – not bad for a couple of days work.



And, of course, it wouldn't be Christmas without a visit from DC Dance. I'm not sure how



many years they have used us for their dance recitals but, by now, we are all used to them bursting in with a riot of colour, an eruption of music, and talent ranging from toddlers to pensioners. The parents and grandparents packed the theatre to support their dancers and our Front of House team were kept busy with either hot drinks or sneaky whiskeys – sometimes both!

Then, we breathed for Christmas!...

To start the year in January, in came **St Joseph's Players** with their pantomime – first the tech crew, then the production team, cast, and wardrobe. This year, for their 68th year, they brought us **Sleeping Beauty**. Like TAODS, St Joseph's have fewer active members off stage at the moment and their tech crew is small. We have often helped each other out and this year was no different.



The pantomime is a time of year when we see a different set of faces in the audience and different local performers on stage – it's our theatre's equivalent of that festive visit from distant family. We are looking forward to having them back in 2021 when they will be celebrating their 70th birthday!

Next, in February, we staged **The Kitchen Sink**. This play about a Northern family, always struggling on the brink of calamity, was directed by Tilly Sutcliffe and Jack Wagman. Tilly and Jack are both trained actors and have worked with our HYT members, but this was their first stage play as directors at the Hippodrome. In contrast to both Imaginary and Grimm Tales, The Kitchen Sink was about real-life in all its gritty, messy and joyful moments. The tech team created a set that ran right through the orchestra pit, making the audience feel as if



we were almost spying on the family.

Janet Spooner and John Spooner were cast as the parents – Kath and Martin – struggling to make ends meet with an ever-diminishing milk round as their main income. Their newly adult children, Sophie and Billy, played by Hannah Sutcliffe and Theo Hewson Betts, have their own worries simmering under the surface and their friend Pete, played by Samuel Bell, both brings solace and adds to the confusion.



This production was detailed in every way possible – from the dirt on the kitchen cupboard doors, to the transition scenes packed with non-verbal interactions between the family – Tilly and Jack's quest for authenticity really paid off. The action was relocated to Todmorden and John did a great job of reeling off the milk-round route learned from local milkman Paul Fielden. The audience fell in love with this family that could have lived just down the street from us and there were tears aplenty for Martin as he let go of his beloved milk truck, ending his lifelong career.

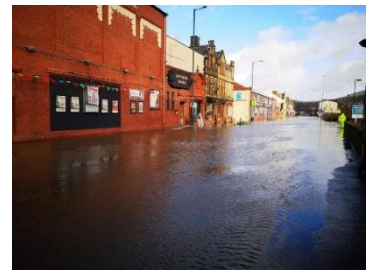


This was another ensemble performance – written with no lead character - but each of the five performers really shone. We were particularly proud to hear that Sam Bell has been offered a place at Bristol Old Vic to train as an actor – and wish him all the best as he steps out into a career in theatre.

It seems like a distant memory now, but you may recall that The Kitchen Sink was almost struck by disaster. Dress Rehearsal weekend was also the weekend of the floods.



We had to swoop in and move everything from the dressing rooms and, for what felt like the umpteenth time this season, we moved all the stalls seating up onto the stage. Luckily, the public areas of the theatre weren't affected – and thanks to the work of our committed members, we opened on time. The weather was still unkind though and audience numbers were surely affected by the fear of being stranded in the Hippodrome.



Another dance school visited in February, bringing another influx of satin, net, sequins, and ribbons. **Helen Wilman's School of Dance** has performed her bi-annual recitals with us for almost twenty years now. She uses the Hippodrome for the whole half-term week and performs two shows on the Saturday. Once again, this is possible only because of our dedicated tech team and our front of house workers on bar, refreshments, and box office. And – as with all the other visitors – they bring with them new faces, new performers, new audience and new money!



As you will have seen throughout this report, visiting productions like these make up a large chunk of our calendar and therefore provide a large slice of our income. Many of them return year on year, providing us with financial stability.



In the midst of the Spring madness, some of us attended the **NODA District awards** in Blackburn. We were nominated in a whole raft of categories, which is testament to the work and talent here at the Hippodrome (the full list is at the end of this report). On the night, we brought home four trophies. These were awarded to **Helen Clarkson for her Musical Direction of West Side Story**, **Martin Cook for his direction of Imaginary**, our **Lighting Team for their work on Imaginary** and **the HYT ensemble for Imaginary**.

Congratulations should also go to Liz Holland who rather swept the board with her production of *My Mother Said I Never Should* in Blackburn.

Martin, Helen and the HYT Ensemble all went forward to be nominated in the Regional awards in Manchester. Grimm Tales was also nominated for the North West Play Festival award. As with so many things this year, the awards are yet to take place and we don't know how or when they will be re-scheduled.

Finally (if we had but known...) we had a super visit from the **Ladies That Bus** with a heart-warming comedy drama, based on interviews chats and stories collected in 2018 on the 555 bus route from Lancaster to Keswick. Featuring our lovely and talented member Joyce, this is another local, small scale professional company who have heard of the delights of the Hippodrome. This was a profit share and was a sell-out – although, we had some technical costs to cover, so the profits weren't as good as for some other visiting shows. But we sincerely hope there may be more collaboration in the future.



And?

Then, there were none.....

The rest of this report should be filled with the glory of Guys and Dolls, the magic of Much Ado About Nothing, the Gang Show, the Hebden Bridge Burlesque Gala and maybe more.



But - we're at home. The theatre is dark. The kettles are cold. The piano is silent. The bar is empty. And for the first time I've written an actual, proper report!

It's made me realise that even in half a season, we pack in a LOT!

All that remains for me to say is thankyou – to every individual member that has contributed in whatever way to any of the above performances. I know some of you will have contributed to every single one; some will have done a sizeable majority; some of you may only have done one. It matters not – we are grateful. I am grateful.

Thank you x



Our NODA District Nominations for the calendar year 2019

Best youth comedy performance	- Rebecca Spooner Oogie Imaginary
Best female comedy play	- Emma Spooner Brenda Junior Imaginary
Best supporting youth performer	- Phoebe Farrington - Hound of The Baskervilles
Best supporting female musical	- Katy Atkinson Milo Imaginary
Best youth ensemble	- Emma Cook Velma West Side Story
Best adult ensemble	- Imaginary
Best set	- West Side Story
	- Steve Clarkson Imaginary
	-Hound of the Baskervilles - Andrew Rawlinson and the cast
	-West Side Story - Collaboration by TAODS based on a 1991 set design from John L Thomas
Best leading youth	- Ellie Spooner bIg Brenda
Best Male lead in play	- Ian Mackness The Man Pyrenees
Best female lead in musical	- Jade Schofield Maria West Side Story
Best Male lead In musical	- Chris Stott Tony West Side Story
Best choreography	- Emma Cook West Side Story
Best musical direction	- Helen Clarkson West Side Story with very special mention to Chloe Helme drummer
Best director of musical	- Justine Sutcliffe West Side Story
Best director of play	- Justine Sutcliffe Philip Pullman's Grimm Tales
Best Youth production off-stage team member	- Tom Tom Aysa Ryan Lighting team Imaginary
Best Youth Production team member	-Best Director Martin Cook
	-Best choreographer Alexandra Townend
	-Best Musical Director Helen Clarkson
Best youth production	- Imaginary
Best play	- Pyrenees
	- Hound of the Baskervilles
	- Grimm Tales
Best Musical	- West Side Story