



Digswell Players Members' Brochure



Digswell Players was founded in 1954. We are a very friendly, happy group of people of all ages. We put on one May play and one Pantomime each year together with our youth group "Expressions" who put on a show annually. Our talented group of youngsters put on the whole show themselves. We have a few social gatherings a year play readings throughout the year (which help us decide on the shows we do), a miscellany which is a lovely evening where members show off their talents with a fish & chip supper bringing your own drinks and nibbles. We also have a Christmas meal and trips to other local theatres - which all members are welcome to join.

Joining the Digswell Players is a wonderful way of meeting new and interesting people and an opportunity to learn new skills or rekindle old skills you haven't used for a while. It a nice hobby to take up and you can get as involved as you want to.

Introduction

“I’m not an actor” is a typical response when asked to help the Digswell Players. But whilst acting is an important part of an amateur dramatic group, many roles are equally important. The additional roles need to be filled before a production can go ahead. We need help with the likes of set construction and painting, making and finding props, providing tea/coffee for the cast and back-stage crew.

Can you paint or adapt furniture. We need people to assist with the box office (an online system you can run at home), run front of house on show nights, operate lighting or sound.

Set building is usually done on Sunday afternoons from about 2.30 to 5.30, which is when we also have rehearsals closer to the performances. At these, we need tea/coffee makers and washer-uppers to keep the cast going. Rehearsals are also on Wednesday evenings from 7.30 to about 10.00.

If you have a relative or friend involved, why not join them and us in putting the show together. I am sure we can find a role for all of you.

The Roles

Director

There’s good news_and bad news about the role of Director. The bad news is that the buck stops with you on pretty much every aspect of a show. The good news is that you will have the help and support of a fantastic team to help you.

You will be involved in the choice of play or pantomime, and ensuring that we can get permission from the licence holder to perform it. You will order copies of the script, and tell the treasurer to pay for these, along with the licence fee.

You will send out audition notices with details of the characters, to help people decide if they want to audition. You will run the audition, and make the decisions about who gets each part. Probably the worst job is telling the unsuccessful actors they haven’t got the part they wanted, but giving the news to the successful ones is great!

You will sort out the rehearsal schedule, so everyone knows when they have to attend, and you will block the play/pantomime i.e. work out all the moves, before rehearsals start. You will run the rehearsals, and direct the actors (the clue is in the job title!), so what the audiences will ultimately see will be your creation. The Players are a democracy, so everyone will throw in their ideas, but you are the final arbiter!

You will liaise with your set designer, constructions people, stage manager, costume designer, lighting and sound operators to decide what the stage will look like, and the effects you want to create.

You will be asked to write a piece for the programme, and on performance nights, a pre-show prep-talk is a good idea, but the actors will definitely not appreciate any last minute changes to what you want them to do!

A happy team is a successful team, so encouragement is a key part of your job, along with glowing with pride and satisfaction, as you sit at the back of the hall and watch the show you created unfold on the stage, giving pleasure to the audience.

Never directed before? Try reading a script, and if you can clearly see in your mind's eye how it should be performed, and you feel a sense of excitement at the thought of bringing it to life, then maybe this is the job for you?

Costumes

The first thing to say about helping with costumes is **You do not have to Sew!**

First off this role will involve getting together a list of who is playing what character in what scene, so you have a list of what is required costume wise. This part should be provided by the director or their assistant, but can involve you going through the script yourself if you want to. It depends on the director/assistant and how much you want to throw yourself into it. In previous years I've always been asked to provide this. Later on it will help to sit and watch a full rehearsal; to check those details are right. The costume helpers in Expressions always seem to spot things we have missed when they sit and watch a run through.

The exact nature of what is involved obviously varies from play to play, but also on type of production. For the May play it might be different suits of clothes for different settings, a lot of which may come from the actors themselves. For Expressions you will probably have people playing several different characters over the course of the play, and for Panto some very loud costumes combined with different chorus characters.

The next stage involves getting stuff together: We have a lot in the costume cupboards, including a lot of accessories and chorus line costumes in excellently labelled boxes; you can ask the production team, especially the individual actors if they can provide bits; do a trip to Primark to pick up some basics for the Chorus line (sets of matching green tights); ask parents for some staples like black t-shirt; or wander round charity shops looking for a few character bits.

Oh, and occasionally we might get something made. If you are doing costume and don't want to sew, you can again ask for someone who does, to help with an individual item (a dress for that extra large dame). There is usually someone who has offered to do a little sewing (– this could be you if you don't want to take on organising everyone's costumes).

In expressions we often have a team of two or three working on costume, who seem to have loads of fun while pulling things out of the costume cupboards at the back, and working through what is needed. (And they are always fantastic!)

(Tip: If the director does not like what you have put together, wait until closer to the show dates when she will be less fussy!)

Key skills: Organising a list of what is needed, visiting charity shops and picking some basics up from Primark.

Offers to do a little sewing are also very welcome.

Stage Management Assistants

You would need to attend all rehearsals. Your first job is to mark up the script with what items are where on the stage after any scene changes and when cloths on rollers need to rise and fall and when the front curtain opens and closes. You also need to note which actors start where.

This should allow you, the Stage Manager (SM) and your fellow SMAs to ensure that every scene is correctly presented, with actors ready to go and the front curtain is opened at the correct time. You use headsets to coordinate timings with the lighting desk. You must also make sure any risk mitigations from our Risk Assessment are followed.

In an emergency, you plan and carry out any emergency procedures in line with instruction sheets. e.g. First aid (for which one of our trained first aiders will be present)

A pantomime involves a lot more SMAs than the May Play which will tend to have a fixed set but the items on stage may move between scenes.

Stage Manager

In addition to carrying out the Stage Management Assistant role, the Stage Manager makes sure that the various tasks are split up amongst them self and the Stage Management Assistants. Once the final dress rehearsal is complete, the Stage Manager is in charge of the show. They also arrange for the sign-in sheet to be used in the kitchen and run a fire drill in association with the Director. The SM is responsible for the safe operation of any pyrotechnics and smoke equipment.

Publicity Manager

The Publicity Manager loads details of the performances onto Websites that list local shows and activities. They also arrange for paid delivery of printed leaflets to local houses and put these up in prominent places. They also send details to local newspapers along with photos from the dress rehearsals to encourage sales of tickets. This role can be very creative with the opportunity to chat with a local DJ on their show or use other innovative ways to publicise the shows.

Props (Company or Theatrical Property)

If you have always wanted to be a personal shopper then this is the job for you. If you don't find the props from our props store then you can go rooting round in charity shops and hobbycraft shops to your heart's content without spending your own money.

Props are all the small movable bits and pieces you see on the stage for each performance. The role of the Props person is to obtain anything from a King's throne to a 1980's mobile phone. We have an extensive props catalogue which you can rummage through and use, if you are crafty and like making things this is the ideal job for you because if it's not in our store then have a go a making it. We also have close links with other local theatres so you can borrow their props too.

In Pantomime the props extends to planning the provision of larger 'stage props' as against the smaller 'personal' props for the cast. This will involve co-ordinating the Constructios person who can make bigger units (e.g The Coach in Cinderella) or Trees or any other free-standing piece of stage furniture. In plays the provision of suitable furniture comes within the props remit.

Once you have obtained all the props required and they are to the director's satisfaction. Then your job is to ensure that the props are on stage in the right place at the right time during rehearsals and performances.

There are no lines to learn and no-one sees you (as you are dressed in black and usually the curtains are always drawn and the lights are down), it a bit like a magician.....and as if by magic all the props suddenly appear on the stage dah dah!!

Prompt

All actors hope to get through the play word-perfect, and most do, but in the event you 'dry-up', the prompt is a life - or should I say – play saver!

Once the rehearsal schedule has been drawn up, the director will decide when 'books down' will take place and that is when you should attend. However there are some actors who will get a grip of their lines quicker than others, so they will put their books down earlier.

In fact, the sooner the prompt starts attending rehearsals the better, in order to note on their script any additions, deletions and amendments the director may make to any words and actions. There may be some occasions when the director cannot make rehearsal and you can answer any queries that may arise.

It is important to know when to give a prompt and as rehearsals progress you will get used to the dialogue and so know when the pause is for effect, or, if the pause goes on for a few seconds, that your help is needed! This may sound like a hard thing to judge, but once you have sat through all the rehearsals you will get to know the script very well and be able to judge when a prompt is needed, or if, on the rare occasion, an actor jumps lines, get them back on the right track.

When you are prompt, you get to see the progress of the play from start to finish, you practically know the script off by heart – but you don't have to learn the lines!

Cast Refreshments

'The Plays The Thing' – but equally important are the cast refreshments!

What does this entail?

Digswell Players put on two productions a year – a play in May and a pantomime at the end of the year.

Once a play/panto has been chosen the Director will put together a rehearsal schedule – rehearsals take place in Digswell Village Hall on Monday and Wednesday – May Play and Wednesday and Sunday – Panto.

You should contact the Director and find out roughly what time they will be breaking for refreshments. It is best to get to the Hall about 30 minutes before this time to put the kettles on; get the mugs out and – most importantly – make sure there is a sufficient supply of biscuits! If you are covering the Tuesday rehearsal, please take sufficient milk. You can gauge how much will be needed by the size of the cast. Any unused milk can be put in the fridge for Wednesday's rehearsal. If more milk is needed contact the person covering that rehearsal to buy more. If you have to buy milk or biscuits, keep the receipt and Andy Barker, our Treasurer will reimburse you.

The mugs are in the cupboard in the kitchen and there is a crate containing, coffee, tea, sugar, biscuits, etc which is kept under the side of the stage.

You should ask the Director at which point in the script they are going to stop, so you can have everything ready when they do. Digswell Players are very well trained, they will come to the hatch to get their drink, and will return their mugs when finished.

Once the rehearsal starts again wash the mugs and put them back in the cupboard, put all the stuff back in the crate and tidy up the kitchen, so it is ready for the next users.

You are then free to leave – or sit and watch the rehearsal.

That's all there is to it – and it is always very much appreciated.

Constructions/Set Design/Building

In one sentence, these jobs involve producing whatever the Director asks for!

He or she will work with the Designer to work out how the Director's vision can be realised on the stage. We have light-weight polycarbonate flats which slot together to create walls, and canvasses which can be painted to create backcloths. B&Q do well out of us in the weeks before a production, as someone is always popping down there for another roll of lining paper, or some more paint, or a specific hinge, hook or whatever! All members are invited to come along and help with set building and painting, working to the Designer's plan

Over the years, requested constructions have varied from Cinderella's coach (collapsible) to a small corner shelf, and from a chandelier strong enough for someone to hang from it to a 'stone' garden bench (made of wood, and covered in 'stone' wallpaper). And lots of other things in between.

You obviously need to be handy with carpentry and other tools and – if you make something in your garage – you need to know how wide the Village Hall doors are, so you can get it in and on to the stage!

Sometimes you'll be making a door or window frame to fit a particular set design. Or fashioning a chair big enough for a giant, or a stool small enough for a fairy.

Tools and material (and a workshop) are provided, along with a great bunch of people to work with, the unleashing of any creative talent you possess, and the satisfaction of seeing your work in the spotlight!

Acting

To quote Spencer Tracy - Show up on time, learn your lines and don't bump into the furniture. If you are not clever enough to do any of the jobs above there is always acting.

Technical: Lighting & Sound

We have 'company' techs who oversee the equipping of the theatre with the best kit we can afford.

Lighting.

The lighting rig has moved on lately to include LED lamps and this gives us a greater versatility to light the sets.

It may be possible to learn to operate the lighting for a show . This will mean working with the play director to understand the lighting requirements of the piece and interpreting this into a suitable lighting plan within the capability of the rig.

A knowledge of stage lamps and how the system works is required to plan this.

Sound.

Recently we replaced the whole system with a modern rig. The mixer desk has 22 input channels and runs out through 3 amplifiers to 4 stage speakers.

The role of Sound Tech for a show will involve working with the show director to plan a sound 'picture' for the show and creating the appropriate sound effects. We use a Windows PC running 'Multiplay' to compile to sound program for the show. In addition we have CD players and can run sound from a mobile phone.

When we have musicians the Sound Tech will also be responsible for connecting them all to the stage interface and running the outputs through the mixer and balancing all the music and sounds together for the show. We have a number of Radio Microphones as well and the management of these is also the show Sound Techs job.

A working knowledge of sound technology and IT is required for this role.