

Wells Operatic Society Limited
Minutes of the Extraordinary General Meeting
Held on
Monday 22nd December 2014 at 8.00pm

Mince pies and mulled wine were served to members from 7.30pm

Chaired by Nick Furze and supported by Richard Wright the meeting was called to consider and vote on the proposal presented by the **Orchestra and Pit Development Group** –

“That the Society supports and authorises the Committee to proceed with plans to enlarge the current orchestra pit by extending it approximately 1.6 metres into the auditorium and providing a removable structural cover (also acting as a floor) for the extended area and creating a new set of entrance/exit doors to the auditorium to accommodate this when in use; and to commit the Society to providing from its own funds (existing or raised by future specific fund raising activities) the sum of £10,000 towards the cost of these works.”

1. **Attendance:** There were 33 voting members and 2 non-voting members present, (the total voting membership at 22/12/2014 was 125), and there were 4 apologies – Dave Collyer, Sylvia Guy, Pauline Perrin and Chris Spray. Details were recorded on an attendance sheet.
2. **Introduction:** Nick Furze welcomed all to the meeting and introduced the proposal outlining the main features of the project. It was noted that the committee has received the good news that the City Council Finance Committee (small grants budget) has approved the grant application for £1,000 for stage improvements, specifically the replacement of the wooden apron support beam with a slimmer metal version. This will give extra height in the pit, with little other effect. This small works is due to proceed soon and is not part of the evening’s discussion.
3. **Discussion:** Considerable valuable debate and clarification took place. Members were given the opportunity to share their views; NF and RW responding openly and with as much detail as they had available. Points included -
 - Concerns were raised over the physical removal, storage and replacement of the temporary seating (Roger Reeson). The structural quality and comfort of the detachable seating. The weight of the seats and audience over the new pit void (David Papworth).
 - How would the space be used in the most efficient way? (Mike Scammell) and how the pit could be made in sections that could allow part areas to be open? Several members commented on the increased flexibility (for both performers and musicians) this could bring. GE asked that the final plans could include options for opening just one side of the new pit, making sure the old and new pit areas were worked at the same level, and that the old pit cover and the new pit cover could be level – thus allowing the auditorium greater space, and possibly an extra row of seats for some performances.
 - Concern over the positioning of the new auditorium doors, and their structural impact on the building. (Rob Rogers)
 - Concerns about the overall development plan and making sure that any changes to the pit and seating would not restrict further development of the auditorium. (Sandra Marshall). The committee has a long term plan to improve the public’s comfort with new seating and decoration. (GE)
 - Dave Collyer was thanked in his absence for the work on costing, these were presented by NF: - According to the Quantity Surveyor approximately £18,000 would be need to cover the work of excavating the new pit area, building retaining walls and making good, producing and installing the

metal structural components and the new wooden pit top. A further £7,000 will be need to pay for electrics, carpet, QS and Architects fees and a small contingency. The project total should be approximately £25,000 not including the VAT. From the previous Arts Council application RW is reasonably confident a £15,000 grant would be available. This leaves the society £10,000 to find from our own resources. This in turn would be reduced by focused fund raising we might undertake.

- The project works time would be 8-10 weeks. Probably in the summer of 2016.
- On calling for the vote, Roger Reeson was concerned that the project was an expensive way to support the needs of the musicians, and he felt there were better ways to spend the money.
- Members expressed the need to work together (Jenny Hailes) to make the Theatre a better place for all of us to perform musicals and plays, a more versatile and multipurpose facility that would make us more attractive to performers and hiring companies as well as our own audience experience.
- Mark Wall stated that Health and Safety Regulations now required a 1.1 meter barrier rail around the pit. This new information will need to be investigated; part of the architect's brief will be to ensure we comply with all such regulations. If this rail is a serious problem for sightlines, we need to find a solution (possibly a glass barrier). If we are in breach of H&S regulations we must make every effort to comply quickly (Alan Hooley). The majority agreed that an appropriate solution preserving the sight lines without obstruction will be part of the design for the pit rail. Such a change should be made to the present rail to ensure safety, and compliance, since we are now aware that the present railing is inadequate.
- All these points were valid and important to consider, and will be investigated further by the Orchestra and Pit Development Group and full Theatre Committee.

4. **The vote:** NF asked if there were any more questions. RW then proposed the motion. With a show of hands 21 members voted for, 8 against and 4 abstentions. **The motion was carried.**

After the vote Mark Wall asked that he clarify his 'no' vote. He said he wanted to see how the new beam installed in the pit would improve the pit without the need for further works. It was suggested that as the works were not likely to start until the summer of 2016 a good trial period would naturally happen.

5. **Finish:** Members are encouraged now to consider fund raising events and activities. All suggestions should be passed though NF, RW or GE. Sarah Neale has already volunteered to run a dance performance evening.

The Orchestra and Pit Development Group must now consider the points raised above and plan the next step in conjunction with the QS and Arch and H&S regulations. They are now tasked to provide a time scale of events that GE can add to the Theatre diary. The next Orchestra and Pit Development Group meeting will be at the end of January. NF to confirm and advertise.

The meeting finished at 9.10. Thanks to all those who attended.