

President's Report
February 2012

2011 was again a very satisfying year as far as WLT's productions were concerned.

We started the year with *Two Weeks With the Queen*, co-directed by Shirley Sydenham and Bob Harsley, this was followed by *Not About Heroes* (which was our nominated production for the VDL Awards) directed by Shane Ryan. Our June production was *Come Back to the Five and Dime Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean*, directed by Peter Newling followed by our co-production with Heidelberg Theatre Company, *The History Boys* directed by Bruce Akers and *Play it Again, Sam* directed by Gaetano Santo finished off the year. Well, not quite. WLT also hosted *Play 6*, giving playwrights the opportunity to present their work to an audience. This event was once again in the capable hands of Shannon Woollard, with assistance from Maureen White and Ness Harwood.

As mentioned, *Not About Heroes* was our Nominated production for the VDL Awards. I am pleased to say that WLT received the following; Set Design – Silver Award to John Shelbourn. Costumes – Silver Award to Shane Ryan. We were also nominated for Lighting Design, Gordon Boyd and Sound Design, Jeff Saliba. WLT congratulates everyone involved in this fine production.

My thanks go to all the many people who were involved in staging our 2011 productions.

WLT was fortunate to have Jennifer Paragreen to review our 2011 season for Cues & News and we're very pleased that Jennifer has agreed to continue to review our 2012 productions.

We would also like to thank Francis Devlin-Glass, Marian Sinclair and Ray Hare who were our 'in house' adjudicators for our Cordell, Craven and Win Stewart Awards. We thank them for their time and commitment. And for agreeing to do this again for 2012.

Congratulations to Shane Ryan on receiving the Craven Award for Best Production, *Not About Heroes*, to Andrew Mayes for the Cordell Award for his role as Wilfred Owen in *Not About Heroes* and to Katherine Hubbard and Chris Perkins for their roles as Mona and Juanita in *Come Back to the Five and Dime Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean*.

It was also good to see so many others receiving nominations for all three awards.

Our fourth annual award, the Grahame Murphy Award for Excellence is chosen by the WLT Committee and was awarded to Roger Forsey in recognition of his technical expertise in establishing WLT as one of the most technically advanced community theatres in Melbourne.

You will notice that we have spent a lot of money on maintenance and technical upgrading during 2011. With the heavy rains earlier in the year, we experienced flooding on stage. A plumber was engaged to install baffles on our external air vents

and plug any existing leaks. Our heating system broke down which necessitated us hiring temporary heating for our winter productions. Unfortunately, the old system could not be repaired and we have had to install a new, and hopefully more efficient system. Our building is old and continuing maintenance costs are a fact of life.

We have also replaced the lighting desk with a whiz-bang new computerised system. This means that the operator can work both sound and lights and cuts down our need for an extra backstage worker. Finding backstage workers is always difficult, given WLT's long season, so the new desk will alleviate, in part, that problem.

Once again we have been fortunate to acquire the services of Craig Pearcey and Jason Bovaird to design our lights for the 2012 season. Both these guys are in great demand and we are delighted (pardon the pun) to have them with us for this year.

The installation of an audio loop means that an audience member with a hearing impairment can sit anywhere in the auditorium and be able to hear what's being said on stage.

Whilst on the subject of hearing, the introduction of boxes replacing cellophane bags for sweets has been a great success. The rustling of lolly bags, a cause for annoyance to both actors and audience is now thankfully, a thing of the past.

WLT's wardrobe has and is undergoing a huge make-over. Barbara Hughes has taken on this daunting task and when completed, the wardrobe will be a great asset to the company. Not only will we be able to find an appropriate costume easily, we will also be able to hire out costumes from our extensive collection.

It never ceases to amaze me the way our set designers manage to fit what they do on this stage and still manage to leave room for the actors! Last year we visited numerous places in Australia and the UK, we saw life in a WW1 trench and hospital, a well stocked American five and dime store, an English boys school and a New York apartment. Apart from the clever designs, there is the ever hard working and devoted set building team. These guys are here almost every Saturday afternoon during the year and do a tremendous job constructing the outstanding sets, for which WLT is so renowned.

We have revamped our play selection committee, for no other reason but to revitalize the group. Again, WLT has a reputation for presenting a varied season of interesting theatre and it's because of this group that we can achieve this. Our thanks to the out-going committee for their enthusiasm and good judgement and we welcome the incoming committee and look forward to seeing what the 2013 season will be.

My thanks also to Frank Page who's returned to editing Cues & News after a five year break. Frank has taken C&N to a new level with our very own electronic

eNewsletter, which we're also mailing via Australia Post, to those not online. It now goes out regularly on the 15th of each month.

A summary of the years events would not be complete without the mention of our new front gate, affectionately named the Cordell Gate. My thanks to Kerry Cordell for his skill and commitment in getting the job done and to those other members who risked life and limb to assist.

Our January working bees continue, with a small group turning up on Tuesday evenings to carry out all the little and not so little jobs that we just don't have time for during the year. It's also a great time to socialise and the shared dinner at the end of the evening is always a highlight.

And now to the committee, my thanks go to Shirley who is always there reminding me to do things and doing them for me when I'm not around. To Brian for his efficient running of the financial side of the company and to all the members, Barb, Bernadette, David, Bob, Roger, Pete and Linda. Being a committee member, not only entails attending our monthly meetings but also fronting up for working bees, front of house duties, social functions etc. The committee underwent training in first aid and responsible serving of alcohol. Because of current licencing laws, it is required that all people serving alcohol must have a certificate. It is our aim that all FOH staff will have both first aid and RSA training. David, Brian and Barb have also been trained on the new ticketing system which will be up and running in time for Compleat Female Stage Beauty. I sincerely thank everyone for their commitment and their support during 2011.

When I accepted the role of President last year I said I'd do it for one term. However, I have found the position challenging yet satisfying and I will see out another term. That said, I am concerned about the lack of hands on people within our company. It takes a great commitment to keep WLT running the way it currently is. Sure we get great casts and production teams but we really need to find people who will stay and become contributors to our group. The current committee and active membership are, dare I say it – ageing. We need to find a way to generate interest and enthusiasm from a younger group of people. We have a fantastic little theatre, and when you add all the financials, we are sitting on around the million dollar mark in assets, it would be such a shame to see that lost. We are one of the very few companies in Victoria who actually own their own theatre, we are not beholden to anyone and that surely puts us in an enviable position.

Now I don't want to finish my first report on a low. WLT is a vibrant, talented and active group. I think our foundation members will be looking down on us with great pride seeing what we have achieved over our 66 years. Let's hit the coming year with humour, commitment and enthusiasm.

Ellis Ebell
President