

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
CHICHESTER DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**CHICHESTER FESTIVAL THEATRE – 2020/21**

**INTRODUCTION**

This report reflects on the financial year 2020/21 of Chichester Festival Theatre (CFT), a registered charity managed by a Board of voluntary Trustees, including a CDC nominated Trustee, Judy Fowler, under the Chairmanship of Sir William Castell and joint Executive leadership of Kathy Bourne, Executive Director, and Daniel Evans, Artistic Director. Alongside this report, it should be noted that CFT's Trustee's Report can be found within the Statutory Accounts, attached at Appendix 1, and expands on the full picture of 2020/21, as well as the areas of focus detailed below.

**ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND FUNDING**

2020/21 was the third year of a four-year cycle of National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) funding from Arts Council England (ACE), aligned to CFT's four-year business plan 2017-2022. Due to the impact of Covid-19, ACE has extended the NPO funding cycle for an additional year to March 2023. Aligned to this, CFT has prepared and submitted to ACE revised business plans for 2021/22 and 2022/23 – both available on request.

Within the CDC/CFT monitoring framework, we are committed to sharing feedback from ACE annually. Due to Covid-19, ACE's feedback for 2020/21 consists only of a Risk Monitoring Assessment, attached at Appendix 2. CFT's risk score was deemed to be 6 – the upper level of Minor.

**CHICHESTER DISTRICT**

2020/21 has brought ever-more to the fore the vital relationship between CFT and the local community within the District. Serving and supporting our community was central to everything we delivered, while in turn, the Chichester community has been steadfast in their support of CFT. We are grateful to CDC for their continued, unwavering support throughout the last year, particularly in extending our current funding agreement to March 2023 and the stability that this supports as we continue to respond and move forward from the impact of the pandemic.

While the work of our LEAP department remains the backbone of our community engagement, the wider CFT team found innovative ways to support the community and local NHS services during 2020/21. We partnered with Chichester Scrub Hub to provide fundraising support and equipment to make scrubs for front-line workers, galvanising theatre costume makers to join these efforts; offered our accommodation on Broyle Road to NHS staff; volunteered our vans and furloughed staff to support UK Harvest in their efforts to redistribute food; and offered the Theatre as a space to be considered as a vaccine centre.

## CREATIVE PROGRAMME

Despite the immense challenges of 2020/21, we reflect with pride on CFT's creative output. With the doors of CFT closed, we turned to other spaces and opportunities to create work and connect with audiences. Being swift to adapt and adopt digital streaming opportunities, alongside being innovative in exploring how we could achieve presenting live productions and bring audiences back together when able to, allowed CFT to be industry leading in making work through 2020/21 and experience new ways of working that we will continue to build on as we come out of the pandemic.

Expanding our digital capabilities allowed us to broadcast three past productions online – *Flowers for Mrs Harris*, *The Midnight Gang* and *Beauty and the Beast* – offered for free and reaching global audiences of 144,000.

Embracing our location and building a model to present work outdoors saw us deliver a highly successful Movies and Music Weekend including a Drive-In Cinema in Northgate Car Park, partnering with Chichester Cinema at New Park, and a day of outdoor concerts which included Family Fun in the Park, headlined by actor Hugh Bonneville, followed by an evening Concert, supported by Chichester College students who were able to gain the practical credits needed to pass their technical theatre course, in a year when there were no other practical opportunities. We are grateful to CDC for their support of this weekend – it was a moving and memorable event to witness the community coming back together to enjoy live entertainment.

We made investment in the theatre to ensure that when regulations allowed we were able to open to socially distanced audiences, with Covid-secure procedures in place. October 2020 saw a sold-out and live-streamed concert *Celebrating Sondheim* and the opening of Sarah Kane's *Crave*, which broke new ground in its digital hybrid model of being simultaneously live-streamed alongside the live performance – a model which allowed performances and streaming to continue behind closed doors when the second lockdown curtailed the run, and allowed the production to reach 50 countries internationally.

Moving into Tier 2 in December 2020 permitted re-opening of the Festival Theatre with *A Merry Little Christmas* concerts, as well as a staged touring family production of *Dear Santa* in the Minerva Theatre. Chichester Festival Youth Theatre (CFYT) overcame all odds and their production of *Pinocchio*, rehearsed with full social distancing measures in place from September-December, opened triumphantly in December. Sadly, our move into Tier 4 closed our doors again on 26 December, but having digitally captured the production we were again able to stream it online, and offer this as an alternative to our audiences rather than simply cancelling.

Our doors remained closed to the public throughout the Spring, seeing the cancellation of two more planned productions, but we continued to offer events online including 'Facing the Music' Events hosted online with guests Sheila Hancock, Michael Ball, Patricia Routledge, Imelda Staunton, Giles Terera and Philip Quast.

In total, despite the challenges of 2020/21, CFT produced 96 performances or digital streams, seen by 16,087 people in-person at CFT and digitally by 153,721 people viewing online across 52 countries. Over 7,000 sales were directly from within the Chichester District which equated to £119,000 of ticket purchases. A detailed geographical analysis of where sales came from within the district can be found at Appendix 3.

## **LEARNING, EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION (LEAP)**

The impact of Covid-19 only elevated the importance of LEAP's work within the District. Although a number of planned events and activities were halted due to in-person sessions not being possible, the department was swift to move activities online and was innovative in finding new ways to stay connected with the community.

LEAP had a particular focus throughout 2020/21 on supporting vulnerable individuals and those at risk of isolation within the District. CFT Buddies, volunteers who usually act as companions to people who need support to come to the theatre, made weekly phone calls to 200 of our most vulnerable and isolated patrons. CFYT members created videos for local care home residents, who responded by creating their own videos. The 'Chatter Project', a new theatrical pen-pal project established in partnership with Age UK, connected adults over the age of 65 from Chichester, Selsey, the Witterings and Bognor Regis who were at risk of isolation and had not previously engaged with CFT; over zoom they shared stories and developed theatrical skills. A new digital initiative with Dementia Support, a CFT partner charity, hosted a Christmas Carol Concert with a twist including pre-recorded carols sung by CFT's Get Singing group and sing-along moments and readings. A new 'Elders Company' was established with older community members meeting weekly online.

An equal focus was placed on supporting young people and families through the year. A major project, Young Carers Connect, was set up and raised over £90,000 to provide 300 free laptops to local young carers to support their schooling and connect them with other young carers through a dedicated online creative activity programme. CFYT moved to online sessions with 430 young people taking part weekly, although numbers reduced in the last lockdown as online fatigue set-in. Five CFYT members read and recorded monologues devised by young people excluded from school, focusing on their individual experiences of lockdown as part of Farnham Maltings 'Making Theatre for Extraordinary Times' in collaboration with CFT and Act-On-It Arts Company. Michael Morpurgo read *The Butterfly Lion*, free online for families. 200 art packs were distributed to local schools and Arts Awards were offered digitally. Creative County West Sussex was launched in 2020, supported by Artsworld and with CFT as lead partner; this Creative Education Partnership is designed to ensure that better cultural resources achieve better educational outcomes for children and young people who are traditionally under-represented in cultural learning.

In total, LEAP's digital activities engaged over 157,000 people in 1,100 activities, alongside 2,360 participations in-person in the windows where this was possible.

Throughout the year, LEAP also continued to explore new opportunities and develop future projects to expand our community engagement offer and reach once we were able to reopen. Connections were established with Chichester District's Social Prescribing Team which have developed into new initiatives and opportunities for CFT to support the team's work in 2021/22. The expansion of the CFT Buddies scheme continues and will be a central focus of the Culture Spark, Season of Culture 2022, participation and engagement strategy.

Our digital outreach work proved a vital lifeline for hundreds of isolated individuals in the local community and, as noted in our Trustee's report, it has accelerated our commitment to find new ways of supporting our community via telephone, social media and online, not just through in-person signed-up activities, courses or events.

Appendix 3 details the share of total sales associated with LEAP's youth and community events from within the District, along with the geographical spread of CFYT members.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

CFT's staff Green Committee galvanised during 2020/21, utilising lock-down to continue to meet online and develop plans for future improvements in CFT's sustainability.

The Christmas CFYT production of *Pinocchio* had sustainability as a central objective. The set, props and costumes utilised recycled and natural materials wherever possible and were designed with reuse in mind. Two company members were elected as Green Champions to support the cast finding new ways to be sustainable and, as a pilot, trees were planted in Oaklands Park adjacent to the theatre, in partnership with CDC, in place of opening night gifts – a project which has developed in 2021/22.

Investment was made in digital conferencing equipment to facilitate digital meetings on an on-going basis and reduce travel, and CFT staff have been engaged in industry wide discussions about reducing the wider environmental impact of theatre processes.

A successful grant application was made to The Theatres Trust/Wolfson Foundation to replace the Minerva Theatre house lights with sustainable alternatives, reducing energy consumption of the lights by 95%.

Environmental Sustainability is a key area of focus for CFT moving forward. We will continue to work to reduce our impact on the environment alongside advocating for a sustainable future. It is intended that a full environmental impact audit will be undertaken in 2022 with a brief to establish a framework for CFT to move towards a carbon net-zero model.

## **FINANCE**

CFT's statutory accounts for 2020/21 are attached at Appendix 1, with a detailed financial review at pages 17-23.

As demonstrated within the accounts, CFT saw ticket income of only £437,231 in 2020/21, relative to £9,191,177 in 2019. Further impact was felt through the costs associated to aborted productions, loss of corporate sponsorship, loss of LEAP and friends membership income and reduced Theatre Tax Relief. Despite this, through persistent reviewing and scrutiny of expenditure, the incredible generosity of individuals and donors, ACE and CDC funding arrangements, over £900,000 claimed through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (Furlough) and voluntary staff salary reductions, the deficit before depreciation for the year was restricted to £185,282 with an overall deficit of £1,287,341 after depreciation. Due to the Furlough scheme, no redundancies of permanent staff were made, ensuring that CFT's workforce is robust as we move forward.

In March 2021, following a successful application to the government's Culture Recovery Fund, CFT was awarded a grant of £953,000 to support the transition back to full operational capacity in 2021.

## **CONCLUSION**

Despite the profound impact that Covid-19 has had on CFT and the District, it is heartening to reflect on all that we achieved during 2020/21 and acknowledge the extraordinary work of our staff and the incredible support that we were afforded by CDC and the local community. Writing this report as we near the final weeks of the Festival 2021 season, we can confidently share that we have seen a steady incline in numbers over the summer both in terms of audiences and participants for our LEAP programme. We have had overwhelmingly positive feedback on the breadth of work we were able to deliver through lockdown, and on our ability to work flexibly during unprecedented times.

We look forward to sharing our plans for 2022 in the new year, but recognise that the challenges ahead are great. Covid-19 rates are high, and we know that some audiences remain nervous about returning to in-person events. There is a high level of financial uncertainty, and the theatre industry has lost significant numbers of creative artists to other industries, many of whom worked regularly at Chichester. Continued careful management of CFT's financial reserves will be imperative to ensure a resilient and sustained future, particularly vital as we navigate the uncertainty around audience numbers alongside the ever more pressing need to refurbish the Minerva Theatre.

We look forward to celebrating our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022 and to working closely with CDC to deliver Culture Spark, the Chichester Season of Culture, alongside our largest season to date. We will continue to support the local community in experiencing great culture and accessing creative opportunities in the District.

CDC's support, both financially, and through the engagement of councillor's, portfolio holders and staff, remains invaluable to CFT. We extend our thanks to CDC and the Overview and Scrutiny committee.



**Kathy Bourne**  
**Executive Director**  
**19 October 2021**

## **APPENDICIES**

Appendix 1 – Statutory Accounts for the Financial Year 2020/21.

Appendix 2 – Arts Council England (ACE) Risk Monitoring Assessment for CFT 2020/21.

Appendix 3 – Statistical analysis of sales from within the Chichester District for 2020/21.

\*CFT has not produced an Annual Review of 2020/21 due to the unique nature of the year. It has also not been possible to estimate CFT's Economic Impact, as submitted in previous years, given that 2020/21 did not reflect a usual year of operations.