**Report from the Chairman, Claire Stretton, 2017-18**

This has been a highly successful year artistically, but it has come at a high price for the

relatively small number of people who are continually supporting the group to maintain our

current output. It is immensely disappointing that most MDG ‘members’ feel no

responsibility to support, even by buying a ticket, those productions they are not actively

involved in and will be having a discussion regarding this at the AGM, as those stalwarts who

are between them carrying the load, cannot continue at this pace, so things will have to

change. We have a particular problem with Sales and Marketing and the Technical Skills

required to support our productions.

The year started in June with the news that there was to be, for the first time in

Maidenhead, a professional Christmas Pantomime – Aladdin at the Magnet Leisure Centre.

After an initial ‘gulp’ we set about ensuring our sales and marketing were as professional

and effective as possible and thank Simon Kelly for bringing his skills to this task... but more

about that later...

Productions started in July with our Third Summer Literary Classic, The Picture of Dorian

Gray. Always wanting to stretch the envelope, we took on the challenge of finding a few

new young men to join our existing membership (and one that could be a believable

‘beautiful’ Dorian!) as well as deciding to utilise the unique facility that is the Courtyard

Theatre at Norden Farm and turn it into the “Thrust 2” layout. This layout is one that NF had

never used before, so it was a learning curve for us all and, with other technical challenges

like back projection and flying chandeliers, the crew, a resource that is rather smaller than

our current programme requires, were challenged but not found wanting. Audiences were

highly appreciative, although not as plenty as we would have liked.

Next up was Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, staged in the Studio and in the round

– we do like to keep our audiences (and Norden Farm) guessing! Directed by Karen Hanley,

this fantastic production was also cast from a mixture of MDG stalwarts and new members.

Sales and Marketing activities included performing an extract in the Desborough Theatre

Gala, making a video in the park, and last but not least, attending the Maidenhead Zombie

Walk – however it all paid off as houses picked up through the week and the cast had

good audiences to play to. Luckily Karen was able to bring her own lighting designer and we

twisted enough arms to provide an crew. Anyone involved will remember fondly Karen’s

“HamFact’s” on each of her emails to the cast and crew!

So on to panto...

A huge effort was put into Sales and Marketing for Cinderella by Simon and the cast, which

started way back in July, the week after Dorian, at the Maidenhead Festival in Grenfell Park.

People dressed up and had a fantastic time, we had a large banner on the main screen (a

trick the ‘professionals’ missed!). Work continued unabated until we achieved a virtual sell-

out, including joining the RaGaD team at the Desborough Theatre Gala and manning a stall

in costume in the Nicholson Centre almost every Saturday through the autumn.

But this effort was surpassed by the Herculean commitment and energy of Maureen, who

not only directed Cinderella and also took on various additional roles as those on board

dropped out for valid reasons, these included Wardrobe Lead and playing the Fairy for four

and a half performances, at the 11th hour, well more like 10 minutes after midnight, when I

was unfortunately struck down with unstoppable nose bleeds! I give her my most sincere

thanks. It was a beautiful production and highly acclaimed - well we are The Real

Maidenhead Pantomime!

With no time to breathe, efforts continued to cast and produce Four Nights in

Knaresborough, a comedy of the blackest variety, which required everything from hiring

four sets of authentic armour and the cast learning sword skills, to manufacturing a huge

hand-painted fireplace and hiring a medieval bath from the RSC! Drew, who directed,

spared no effort in attention to detail, including underscoring to create the mood for his

Tarantino’esque interpretation. Audiences were reasonable and sold out by the last

performance. The main irritation was having to clear the set every night, bar one, including

after the Tech and Dress – rather took the edge of the week!

Overlapping the end of Four Nights we started work on not one, but two, plays for the

Maidenhead Festival of One-Act Plays, again at Norden Farm. Beth and Maureen did us

proud with their two offerings, which could have not been more different. Beth’s comedy

Parentcraft had the audiences in stitches and Maureen’s Something Unspoken walked

away with both Third place overall and the trophy for Best all-female cast. A fantastic end to

the year.

Currently in rehearsal is The Great Gatsby where we are on track and learning how to ‘do

the black-bottom’ and play drunk at parties! Oh – and there’s a bit of serious acting going on

too...

However, as always, we desperately need YOU to buy tickets and assist our Sales and

Marketing activities to sell to others. Tickets are available direct from Norden Farm.

Production dates 4th-7th July Courtyard Theatre Norden Farm.