

# adc theatre

Annual Report 2020-2021



Ordinary Days, ADC Theatre (Photo by Helena Fox)



**The Man Presents: Women, ADC Theatre** (Photo by Martha French)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a time when the future of the arts has been put in peril, the Management Team and the Executive Committee are happy to report on a year that has been artistically successful during the times in which our venues have been permitted to be open, and in which we have been able to survive financially due to the support of the University, public funding and the generosity of our patrons.

The ADC Theatre re-opened as a socially distanced venue in October 2020, also livestreaming its shows for people to watch from home. There were some excellent shows performed before we needed to close our doors again during the November lockdown. After this point, our operations went very quiet while the management team were on flexible furlough, although we were able to support a season of online shows.

Both the ADC Theatre and Corpus Playroom were then able to re-open in late May 2021, in line with the government's loosening of restrictions. Shows that took place during this truncated Summer season sold out almost all their reduced, socially distanced capacity.

Happily the ADC has survived the pandemic in good heart but with significantly weakened finances. With our reserves now exhausted and the fragility of our business model (absolute reliance on ticket and bar sales) underlined, the theatre faces a period of continuing financial uncertainty during which it will be necessary to explore ways of diversifying income streams, securing alternative funding and raising endowment capital through a longer-term fundraising campaign.

This report takes the opportunity to look over the highlights of our past year. We hope that you enjoy reading it.

## 2020-21 Management Team

**Jamie Rycroft:** Theatre Manager

**Luke Dell:** Operations Manager

**Lucia Revel-Chion:** Production Manager

**Eduardo Strike:** Technical Manager

**Will Pears-Cooper:** Box Office Administrator

**Anna Perry:** Office Administrator

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# WELCOME

Needless to say, this past year has been a strange time to be the Manager of a Theatre: one in which the very medium of live performance hasn't been permitted much of the time. Our focus has been on ensuring that our institution survives this period of closure, making changes to our administrative practices during periods of dormancy, and ensuring that we re-established the importance of the arts when we re-opened.

In October 2020, the ADC re-opened its doors as a socially distanced venue. Knowing that our lower auditorium capacity meant that we were unable to generate as much income in ticket sales, and that some audience members might not yet feel comfortable watching a show indoors, we installed three cameras in our auditorium that allowed us to livestream all our performance for people to watch from home. This was a brand-new venture for our management team, one in which we learned the delicate art of ensuring that a show is entertaining both for a live audience and a remote one. It also provided a good opportunity for students to learn to use a new technology, one that will likely be a feature of the theatre industry for some time to come.

We had some excellent shows perform during our Autumn season, and were happy that our students and customers all followed the restrictions and guidelines put in place to keep everyone safe. However, towards the end of October it was becoming apparent that at a national level, coronavirus levels

were looking concerning, and it came of little surprise (albeit much sadness) to find that we would have to cancel the second half of our Autumn season as the government were instructing all theatres to close once more.

Barring a brief window of time in December where we were able to stage a filmed screening of *The Nutcracker*, this period of closure extended all the way until May 2021. We had now become used to what to do with the theatre being closed, but conscious of our rapidly dwindling finances, we settled into a period where our management team only worked a day a week, keeping critical building maintenance functioning while also running another online season of shows for students to take part in from home.

The government's roadmap for the loosening of restrictions gave us something of a light at the end of the tunnel to work towards, and we planned for a season of shows that we'd hopefully be able to stage from mid-May onwards. Thankfully, when it came to the Summer we found that we were able to re-open safely, and produce a season that, although shorter than usual, was packed to the brim with drama, comedy and musical theatre. We were also immensely glad to be able to re-open the Corpus Playroom again. The size of the Playroom stage meant that under social distancing, there could only be three people maximum on-stage, but this limitation resulted in an incredible season of intimate, student-written drama.

Although livestreaming helped to provide some supplementary income, the reduced capacity of our venues meant that our expenditure significantly exceeded our income, and we would not have been able to operate financially were it not for the support of the University, the patronage of our donors and members, and our successful bid for the second round of the Culture Recovery Fund. All of these sources of income meant that although the ADC has exhausted its financial reserves, it is not currently operating at a deficit. The Culture Recovery Fund also gave us the ability to widen our theatrical opportunities without needing to worry about financial solvency, and we were proud to use some of the money to stage an outdoor production of *As You Like It* in the Grove Lodge Gardens outside the Fitzwilliam Museum.

As I write this, restrictions have been lifted across the country and although we have taken precautionary measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus, like encouraging audience members to wear face coverings, we are reaching a point where from Autumn onwards, we can bring our venues back up to full capacity. I hope that we can take the things we have learned during the admittedly difficult closure period and deliver the arts once more at a time where society sorely needs them.

**Jamie Rycroft**, ADC Theatre Manager



# ABOUT US



**The Trouble with Today's Women**, ADC Theatre (Photo by Hassan Raja)

The ADC Theatre and Corpus Playroom remain the centres of Cambridge's thriving drama scene. Productions at these venues are mounted entirely by students, amateurs, and volunteers. From actors and technical crew to directors and producers, everyone is united in a desire to enjoy and contribute to the creation of high-quality theatre.

Vibrant and varied programmes of drama, comedy, musical theatre and dance are presented at each venue by student groups during the University terms and by local groups long during the long vacation. Typically each venue has staged two different productions each night.

Today we aim to provide opportunities for students and amateurs to experience and learn about all aspects of theatre, while presenting productions of the highest standard. We are a department of the University of Cambridge and the oldest University playhouse in the country. The ADC Theatre is still run almost entirely by students, with no faculty involvement.

Training, learning and support are at the heart of everything we do here and we are set up to encourage and to provide help and guidance to all who are interested in creating theatre from the seasoned habitué to the most inexperienced user.

All of this activity draws on a long tradition: plays have been presented on the site of the ADC Theatre since 1855 when the **Cambridge University Amateur Dramatic Club** (CUADC) was founded and the Club met and performed in the back room of the Hoop Inn on Jesus Lane. The coaching inn stood almost exactly where the ADC Theatre stands today.

At first the Theatre was run as a private members' club by the CUADC, but owing to growing financial difficulties, it was agreed in August 1973 that the Theatre would be leased to the University of Cambridge for 75 years.

Although the Theatre continues to be owned by CUADC, it is currently run as the smallest department of the University which has assumed responsibility for its management and maintenance. The CUADC remain as one of the resident companies of the Theatre.

The ADC Theatre has helped to launch the careers of many theatre luminaries, including Sir Ian McKellen, Rachel Weisz and Emma Thompson.

# RESIDENT COMPANIES



**Survival Strategies**, ADC Theatre (Photo by Cordeilia Sigurdsson)



There are several student companies resident to the ADC Theatre and Corpus Playroom. Not every show is produced by these companies, but the Theatre is the epicentre of their activities and their student committees are heavily involved in the programming of each season. Representatives of CUADC and Fletcher Players serve on the Theatre's Executive Committee.

### **CUADC**

The Cambridge University Amateur Dramatic Club is the oldest and largest student drama society in Cambridge. The first performances on the site were staged by the founders of the Club in 1855. The CUADC present a varied programme of mainshows and lateshows at the Theatre each season, bringing together some of the finest young theatrical talent in the country and providing unrivalled support for their productions. The ADC Theatre and CUADC are very close partners as the Theatre continues to be owned by CUADC.

### **Fletcher Players**

The Fletcher Players are the drama society of Corpus Christi College and the resident company at the Corpus Playroom. The Fletcher Players are integral to the running of the Playroom, helping with programming and producing up to six shows a term. Named after John Fletcher, alumnus of Corpus and Jacobean playwright, productions by the Fletcher Players showcase new writing, traditional classics, comedy and cutting-edge political drama.

### **Footlights**

It is hard to think of a group that have had more influence on British comedy than the Cambridge Footlights. Their fortnightly Smokers, an original mix of sketches and standup, are the breeding ground for new talent. No other student comedy society champions new talent and new writing more consistently, or provides as many opportunities to try out and develop material.

### **CUMTS**

The Cambridge University Musical Theatre Society are the source of the very best musical theatre taking place in Cambridge. In addition to their mainshows, the Society runs popular Bar Nights and a series of social events throughout the year. Its contribution extends far beyond showcasing existing onstage talent: it aims to encourage training in musical theatre and regularly invites experts and seasoned professionals in the field to run masterclasses for its members.

**ADC THEATRE**



**Macbeth**, ADC Theatre (Photo by Bella Biddle)

Even during such a difficult time for the arts, the ADC Theatre continued to be one of Cambridge's most popular venues, often selling out its socially-distanced auditorium capacity and having thousands of people tune in to watch livestreams of our shows.

Rather than our typical year-long rota of productions, the ADC Theatre was only able to stage two truncated seasons: one in Autumn 2020 and one in May 2021.

Our Autumn season was shorter than we had hoped it to be, due to the imposition of a national lockdown in November, but we nonetheless packed in some fresh and exciting drama, comedy and musical theatre. The season opened with the student-written musical **Survival Strategies**, which was written before the pandemic took place but whose subject matter about a group of doomsday survivalists felt increasingly and especially relevant. Other highlights included a production of Shakespeare's **Macbeth** set in a dystopian future, and the classic musical **Ordinary Days**.

We continued our run of ADC Lateshows, although due to national restrictions and curfews, we were unable to have a live audience, and instead presented these shows as a livestream only. While it was a little strange for a comedy show to be performing to an empty auditorium, and not be able to hear the laughter of audience members as they watched from their laptops at home, the students did an excellent job of adapting their shows to work in this new medium. Highlights included the return of the **Footlights Smokers**, presenting the freshest in

student comedy, and the always-excellent **Dragtime**, presenting a Halloween-themed drag show.

After having to close our doors in November 2020, the ADC laid dormant for seven months, barring a brief window of time around Christmas when we were permitted to screen a filmed version of our Ballet show **The Nutcracker**. When theatres were finally able to open again in May 2021, we were right off the bat with a Summer season packed with shows, maximising the number of available opportunities for students to get involved after such a long period of closure.

Our first Summer show at the ADC Theatre was, very unusually, our Freshers' show **No Quarter**, long-delayed after its cancelled production in November. Thankfully, the Freshers did an incredible job considering the strange circumstances, staging a dark and unsettling play. Other highlights included Alan Bennett's **Talking Heads**, the powerful and relevant drama **Consent**, and the ridiculously fun musical **Little Shop of Horrors**.

All of these shows were performed under social distancing, meaning that actors were not permitted to get closer than 2 metres to each other. This admittedly unusual staging challenge was embraced with aplomb, and for many of the final shows it was barely noticeable that such matters had to be considered. Overall it was incredible to have live theatre to provide some joy and reflection during these particularly dark times.

# CORPUS PLAYROOM



The Hound of the Baskervilles, Corpus Playroom (Photo by Ben Owen)

Our studio space, the Corpus Playroom, had to unfortunately be closed to the public between March 2020 and May 2021, since national restrictions were too tight to be able to let this tiny venue re-open.

As national restrictions loosened in 2021, in line with the government's roadmap, it became increasingly possible to consider re-opening the Corpus Playroom, albeit with some limitations in place. The unique L-shaped auditorium, which in normal times could seat a maximum of 80 people, would have to be reduced to a capacity of a mere 18 in order to keep audience members socially distanced. Meanwhile, the stage was so small that only three performers would be able to be on-stage at once.

It is said, however, that limitation breeds creativity, and hence we considered this challenge an exciting opportunity for student creatives. With so few people permitted on-stage, the intimate atmosphere that is so key to the Playroom's strength would be even more heightened.

Meanwhile, the practical limitation that we would not be able to stage any shows with performance rights, due to small size of the auditorium, became a great opportunity to program a Summer season entirely made up of original student writing. During a time in which most University theatres had to remain closed, and in which so few student playwrights were getting the opportunity to have their work performed in front of a live audience, we were proud to still be able to support our

theatrical community.

Highlights of our Playroom Summer season included the powerful one-person show **Lost Boy**, using the story of *Peter Pan* as a metaphor to discuss the effects of eating disorders, and an adaptation of Christina Rossetti's classic poem **Goblin Market**. The relationship drama **The Passion** explored the difficult subject matter of assault, while **The Way to San Francisco** gave us a glimpse into an increasingly possible future where artificial intelligence will be indistinguishable from humanity.

The Corpus Playroom is an excellent venue for comedy as well as drama, and we were happy that even within the limitations of social distancing, we were able to support up-and-coming comic talent. The Footlights **Playroom Smoker** provided a showcase of sketch and stand-up comedy. We hosted a double-bill of stand-up shows by graduating Footlights: Jade Franks with **Eat the Rich (but maybe not my mates)** and Dan Bishop with **Stand-Up in the Third Person**. Finally, the drag show **Charlene's Teatime** provided the perfect ending to our student season.

With restrictions lifting, we can bring the Corpus Playroom back to full capacity, and have more performers on-stage, meaning we can return to the wide variety of drama, comedy shows and musical theatre we typically present. We can't wait for you to see what we have in store for Autumn!

“The ADC has provided, and continues to provide, a great deal of creative energy to the professional theatre.”

Sir Peter Hall

“The ADC is where I learned about Theatre.”

Miriam Margolyes

“Without the ADC Theatre I would never have become a director.”

Sam Mendes

“Few if any training grounds have contributed as much to the performing arts as the ADC Theatre.”

Michael Attenbrough

“We learned the hard way about planning, budgets, cost control, box office, marketing, and the price of failure. For me and my contemporaries, working at the ADC Theatre amounted to an exhilarating contradiction, the most audacious and yet the most responsible time of our lives.”

Sir Trevor Nunn

## 2020-2021 IN NUMBERS

37

productions at the ADC Theatre and Corpus Playroom

438

students involved at our venues

3,609

in-person tickets sold for events at the ADC Theatre and Corpus Playroom

33,255

people watching ADC Online shows

2,445

livestreaming tickets sold

**107**

performances at the ADC  
Theatre and Corpus Playroom

**898**

students involved in cambridge drama

**67%**

of available in-person tickets sold  
(of a socially distanced auditorium)

**183**

students involved with adc online



# FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE



Training Wheels, ADC Theatre

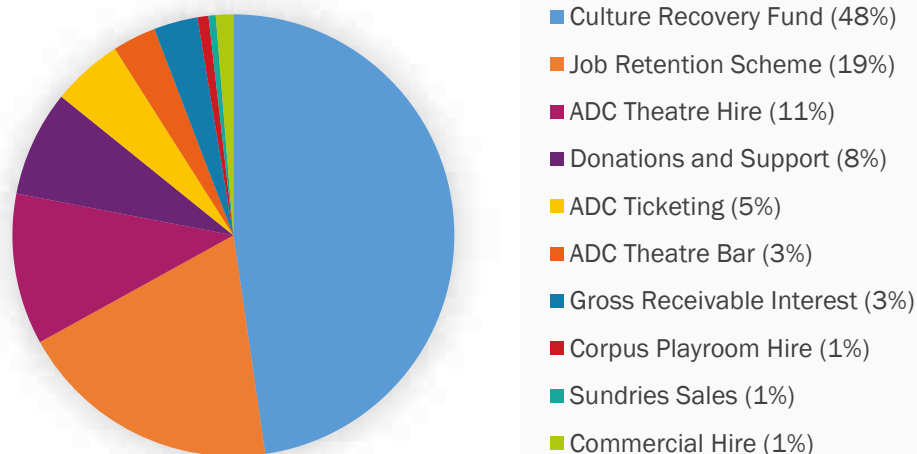


Since the ADC Theatre and Corpus Playroom were closed for most of the 2020-21 academic year, and considering that when these places re-opened their capacity was significantly reduced by social distancing, it is unsurprising that this financial year performed more poorly than previous ones. Our focus was ensuring that we would be able to survive through the use of available sources of funding and cost-saving measures, and as the below chart demonstrates, over half of our income was generated either by the second round of the Culture Recovery Fund, or saving money on salaries through the job retention (“furlough”) scheme.

Our reserves have been fully exhausted by the need to cover building running costs over the course of this year, but we will be able to remain operational due to the University, who have agreed to provide £20,000 of financial support this coming year. Since a typical year of operation typically costs us around £500,000, we hope to generate the remaining income by re-opening of our venues at full capacity, having our Bar return to full operation, a revival of our ADC Ticketing service, and donations made by our patrons.

Although our income targets had to be much lower due to our reduced capacity, we are proud that we managed to “sell out” many of our performances. We sold, on average, 67% of our available auditorium capacity across the ADC Theatre and Corpus Playroom, a higher percentage than usual, and indicative of the willingness people had for supporting us. This also does not factor in our income from livestreaming, which provided a useful supplement during social distancing.

## ADC Theatre Income



# STUDENT INVOLVEMENT



No Quarter, ADC Theatre (Photo by Sophie de Sousa McMeakin)

## Involvement

The ADC Theatre worked with CUADC and other resident societies to do the best it could to offer opportunities for students to get involved during such unusual times. Although in-person tours were not possible, virtual introductory events and talks were helpful in explaining to Freshers how they could get involved with shows.

In a typical year, CUADC provides three Freshers' shows, but unfortunately all three were cancelled due to the lockdown in November 2020. One of the productions, **No Quarter**, decided that they would apply to be staged in a future season, and finally performed on-stage in May 2021 after six months of postponement. This show, alongside other shows that the ADC Theatre and Corpus Playroom provided, has meant that during a time that theatres have mostly been closed, there has still been the ability for students to get involved.

## New Writing

When it comes to operating during a time of financial difficulty, theatres sometimes feel the impulse to stage only safe and well-known shows, and hence not provide the opportunities for new writing that are sorely needed to create the next generation of theatregoers.

Hence we felt both incredibly lucky and proud to have been able to continue supporting student new writing throughout this academic

year: if anything, the lack of performing rights meant that student writing felt like a safer 'bet' financially. Our very first socially-distanced show was the student-written musical **Survival Strategies**, demonstrating to students that original writing can be at the forefront of the ADC's programming.

Other highlights included the Shakespearean parody **Almost Romeo and Juliet**, the comedic musical **No Cash Left on the Premises Overnight**, the dark comedy **Memento Mori**, and the intimate drama **Halfway**. We hope that student writers can continue to flourish as the arts scene begins to resemble normality again.



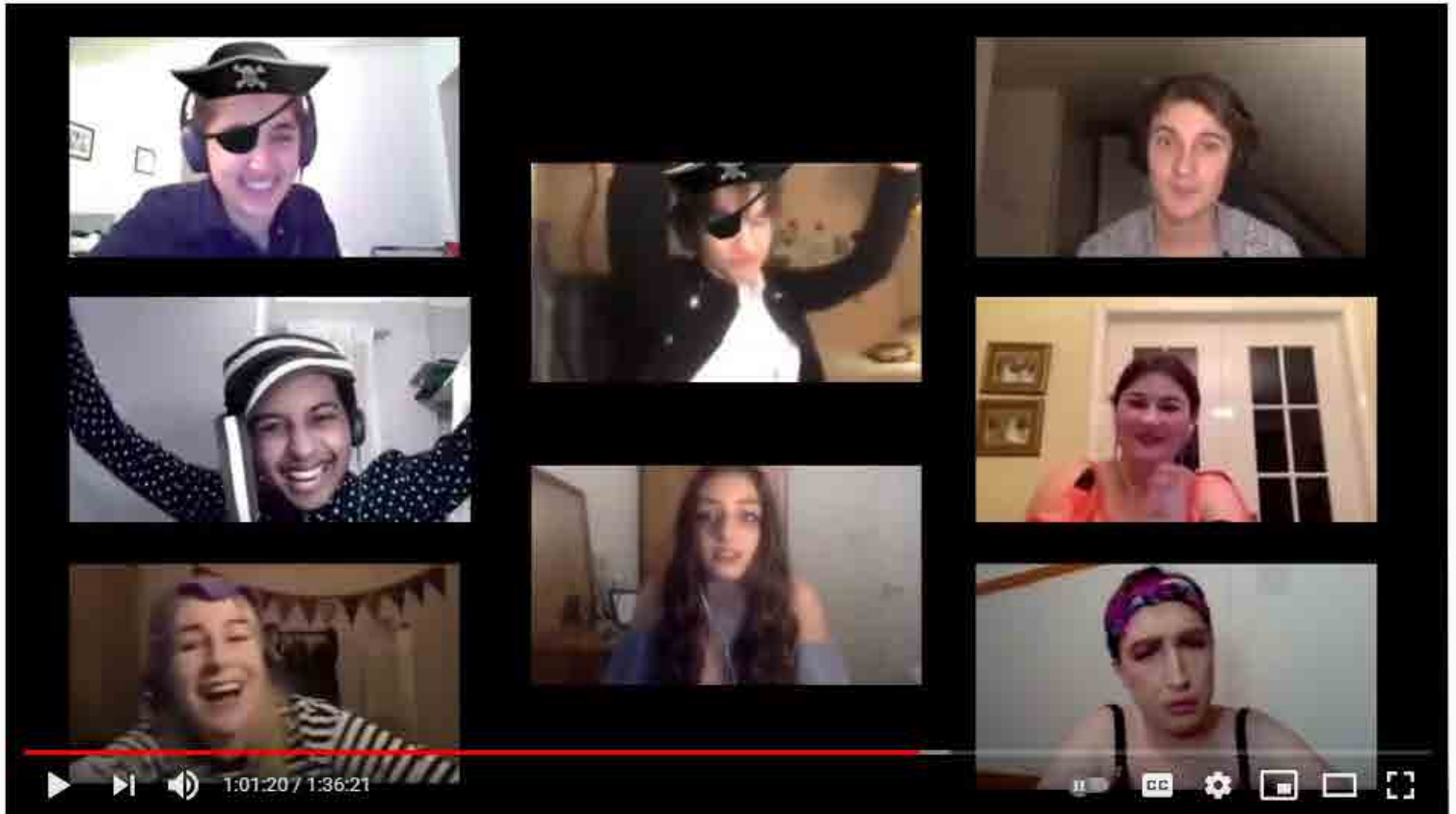
**Macbeth**, ADC Theatre (Photo by Bella Biddle)

# ADC ONLINE AND LIVESTREAMING



YouTube <sup>GB</sup>

Search



CUADC/Footlights Pantomime: SLEEPING BEAUTY

1,303 views · Streamed live on Mar 17, 2021



46



0



SHARE



SAVE



January 2021 was a particularly dark time for the arts, as theatres were shut throughout the country with no clear indication of when they would re-open. In order to support students who were working virtually during this difficult time, we decided to run another season of ADC Online shows, created remotely and streamed via our YouTube channel.

A few of the productions were shows that we had hoped to stage in Spring 2021, that instead had to be cancelled due to the extension of the national lockdown. This included the ridiculous student-written musical **A Blown Job**, the scratch writing evening **Smorgasbord**, and the sketch comedy show **S.H.E.E.P.** The CUADC/Footlights Pantomime **Sleeping Beauty**, which was meant to take place in November 2020, decided to instead host an online rehearsed reading of the script, which was of at least some solace for all the talented cast and creatives involved with the production.

The remainder of our online season were brand-new productions tailor-made for the online medium. The Impronauts returned with **Clickfire**, a livestreamed show in which improv comedians could take real-time suggestions from those watching the show. **The Balloonist Masterplan: Forgotten Lives** was a sequel to the surreal radio play *The Balloonist Masterplan*, staged last year as part of our previous ADC Online season. The student-written political drama **In Denial** gave an acerbic overview of a government's response to both a pandemic and environmental crisis.

We were concerned that our audiences might no longer be interested in online content after a year of it being essentially the only option available, so were pleasantly surprised to find that we had more people tuning in to watch the second season of ADC Online than the first: an overall 67% increase on the number of viewers. Thank you to everyone who watched our shows and who chose to give a donation to the ADC.

When we re-opened as a socially distanced venue — firstly in Autumn 2020 and again in Summer 2021 — we supplemented our income by livestreaming our productions at the ADC Theatre. We installed three cameras to film the stage: one at the very back of the auditorium, one in the middle, and one on the front row. This gave a variety of angles and coverage for livestreaming, as well as a brand-new technical opportunity for students to learn how to point, zoom and focus cameras. A student video director then chose which angles to put out over the stream.

All of our livestreams were available to watch via Vimeo, at a cheaper price than a standard live ticket. We found livestreaming a hugely rewarding opportunity to try out a different medium, and we hope that in the long-term we are able to livestream some of our largest performances to widen the available audience that can see the show.

# COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT & SERVICES



Ordinary Days, ADC Theatre (Photo by Emily Brailsford)

## ADC Ticketing

Our ADC Ticketing service was much quieter than usual since for most of the year, theatre performances were not allowed to take place. Nonetheless, we were able to support a small number of events as restrictions began to loosen, that helped the local community to get a better sense of what form the arts might take as the pandemic winds down.

The amateur theatre company Bawds staged **Supernatural Shakespeare** in Madingley Hall gardens, giving an abridged version of some of Shakespeare's spookiest plays within a beautiful outdoor setting. We also provided ticketing for a **Festival of New Writing** hosted by Downing Dramatic Society, and a concert by **Cambridge University Jazz Orchestra**.

Our regular clients, including Cambridge University Musical Society and Camerata Musica, are beginning to stage shows and concerts again, and we are very excited to be able to provide ticketing for them and to support the staging of local arts and music.

### Commercial Hire

The ADC was able to hire its space for various commercial hires, including the filming of *Practice Room 99*, a play that was part of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe's On Demand season, and as a rehearsal space for *The Wonder Games*.

## ADC TICKETING IN NUMBERS

10

performances

1,177

tickets sold

£1,500

income from ADC Ticketing

SUPPORT US



Memento Mori, Corpus Playroom (Photo by Dylan Evans)



The ADC Theatre remains committed to keeping our ticket prices low and our bar affordable, so that both our student and local audiences can experience and enjoy the Theatre as frequently as possible. We are always mindful that any of our performers today could be the famous names of tomorrow and that they and our audiences can only thrive in a lively and affordable theatre.

We encourage participation in all forms and at all levels including:

### **As an ADC Friend**

With your support we can ensure that our students get the best theatrical training we can offer, with industry standard theatrical equipment, financial support for ambitious and innovative productions and an ongoing investment in our backstage facilities.

You can help nurture new talent and get closer to the theatre you love by becoming an ADC Friend for £45 per year. As such you will enjoy:

- One free ticket to a show at the ADC Theatre or Corpus Playroom
- 10% discount on two tickets per show
- Special offers on selected events throughout the year
- Backstage tours and Friends-only events

### **As an ADC Fellow**

For £150 a year, you can provide even more support to the Theatre you know and love, and can enjoy in return:

- Two free tickets to a show at the ADC Theatre or Corpus Playroom
- 15% discount on two tickets per show
- Special offers on selected events throughout the year
- Priority Booking on selected events
- Backstage tours and Friends-only events
- Optional recognition in our season brochures and annual report

You can become an ADC Friend or ADC Fellow today by visiting [adctheatre.com/memberships](http://adctheatre.com/memberships)

Many thanks to our 38 current ADC Friends, and to our ADC Fellows: Susan Dennis, Stefan Dixon, Denis Finan, Mr and Mrs Fisher, Mark Fogerty, Karl Harrison, Paula Meyer, Dylan Phelps, Gavin Robertson and Andrew Shepherd.

# THE TEAM



No Quarter, ADC Theatre (Photo by Sophie de Sousa McMeakin)

## 2020-21 Executive Committee

Dr Mark Billinge [Chair]  
Richard Barnes  
Emma-Rose Bouffler  
Sarah Cain  
Maria Cleasby  
Luke Dell  
Ella Fitt  
Diane Gaskin  
Nick Harris  
Sam Porter-Frakes  
Lucia Revel-Chion  
Jamie Rycroft  
Tom Shortland  
David Todd-Jones  
Robin Walker

## 2020-21 Management Team

**Jamie Rycroft:** Theatre Manager  
**Luke Dell:** Operations Manager  
**Lucia Revel-Chion:** Production Manager  
**Eduardo Strike:** Technical Manager  
**Will Pears-Cooper:** Box Office Administrator  
**Anna Perry:** Office Administrator

## Casual Staff

30 casual staff members worked as Box Office Assistants, Bar Staff, Front of House Support and Playroom Duty Managers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we were able to furlough our staff to continue to pay them during the closure period.

The ADC continues to provide an opportunity for young people to gain work experience in customer service roles in a supportive environment and offers a means whereby they can be provided with positive references when they go on to apply for other jobs.

## Thank you

We are, as always, grateful for the ongoing support of the University of Cambridge, the University Theatre Syndicate, the Executive Committee and the CUADC Committee and for the generous help offered by many of our friends, audience members, students and volunteers.

We are extremely grateful for the ongoing IT support provided by volunteers Alex Brett, Alan Egan, John Evans, Paul Gotch and Nick Hall.

Our warmest thanks go to everyone who has supported us in making this another memorable year.

adc theatre



Little Shop of Horrors, ADC Theatre (Photo by Jonathan Black)