



2019/2020 Annual Report

Tim Lince :- Lowther Gardens (Lytham) Trust

2019/20 saw Lowther come into it's own with more performances both amateur and professional , higher number of attendees and increased revenue. We were heading for a record breaking year only to put the brakes on completely on March 16th 2020 on government advice that people should not attend theatres.

In the weeks up to the closure we started to prepare by purchasing the tools required for staff to work from home (Laptops etc) and thus when we were closed we were in a relatively good position to continue to run the Charity and the operational company from a distance. Good housekeeping and financial management allowed us move forward and budget for the closure without taking on debt.

The Theatre has welcomed such names as Robert Plant and Rick Wakeman as well as developing and growing a market for the ballet, Jazz and family theatre. Our Pantomime has continued to develop and grow in both reputation and audiences whilst we have been inundated once again with community groups wanting to perform and use the space. The closure of the Charter theatre in Preston has seen community groups from there, booking into Lowther and this has culminated in us having to take the decision to charge differential rates so that Local Community groups benefit most from the Local Authority subsidy. Work has continued regarding redevelopment plans and this has included updates to the grounds master plan and work commissioned to upgrade the lighting in the park.

1. Lowther have commissioned and fitted a new sound system for the Theatre for both cinema, standing and seated concerts. The Sound system has been designed by the manufacturers to deliver perfect sound to each seating position in the house. This state of the art system makes us one of the best equipped theatres in the country and has played a large part in encouraging the range of names that we had booked in 2020 to play at the theatre.
2. The new web site has been further developed to include the Lowther Hub an enhanced social media section that features up to date interviews with all the stars playing at Lowther.
3. The Web site has also had a volunteer section incorporated to deliver a better experience for Volunteers working for the Theatre. We have also added a Friends section that allows new members to sign up on the web site and renew membership automatically.
4. The Car park continued to perform strongly and delivered good results to the Trust as well as removing the risk of fines for the public.
5. We completed our second year of Cinema production and screened Lansat broadcasts from theatres around the world. This has proved to be a popular addition to our programme and has enabled Lytham residents to experience Ballet from Russia as well as Italian Opera and productions from the RSC and National Theatre. We are looking forward to developing this as we move forward in 2021.
6. Sponsor a tree scheme was further developed and gave money towards park development.

7. Lowther, together with support from FBC, negotiated a settlement in the legal case brought by the tenants of the Café, enabling it to continue to raise funds for the development and continue onwards to provide a state of the art building for the next generation of visitors and residents.

1. Session Usage

Community and user groups totalled 228 (up from 226 in 2018/19) individual user sessions in year, this includes usage by FBC, fairs and charity events outside of the normal performance scope such as the dementia sing-a-long. Arts Society Fylde relocated to Lowther during the year and have regular monthly lectures. The SLA allows for 120 events per year and to enable us to keep prices reduced for community groups and we are working with Local user groups to reduce the number of sessions booked and share the subsidy more proportionately. Some charitable groups and commercial dance/ Theatre schools have now been moved to non subsidised but competitive rates. The first full year of the new system was due to start in April 2020 but will now be introduced after shows that have been rescheduled have taken place.

2. Traffic & Sales

There were 425 unique saleable public events in 2019/20, in total 60209 (up from 56358 in 2018/19) individual tickets were issued for these performances. (This excludes all agency sales for Lytham Festival 2019, Southport Flower Show, Lytham 40s Weekend & Events at Lytham Hall)

There were 7442 unique new Customers in 2019/2020

49.4 % of our customers came from the FY8 and PR4 postcodes. A good deal of the remainder of customers coming from much further afield. Lowther is continuing to attract from places such as Manchester, Leeds and Newcastle and has recently embarked on publicising certain events across the North of England responding to customer location data.

3. Training completed by staff in 2019/2020

Lowther has continued investing in it's staff and volunteers through training and skills development. To these ends in 2019/2020 it has completed the following formal training as well as on the job training conducted by senior management.

Induction training:

Box Office Staff x2 (Casual/ PT)

Marketing

Work Placement / Intern X1

Full FOHM Training:

FOHM X1

Volunteer Front of House Manager Training

4 Volunteers, Front of House Staff Training X 25

Spektrix Continued Box Office Training

Box Office Staff x 2, Marketing Manager x 1, Theatre Administrator x 1, Volunteers x 5

Fire Warden Training

8 Volunteers, 10 Staff

Fire Alarm Training

14 staff, 8 Volunteers

PASMA

5 staff

First Aid Training

12 staff, 4 volunteers

EPOS Till Software

Bar Manager x 1, Bar Staff x 4

Accounts Manager

Completed Institute of Financial Accountants Qualification (Grades: Distinction & Merit)

Administrator

Workshop Manager

Arts Award Training to deliver to young people.

Technical Department.

Lansat, Programming Lighting, Use of the Coda Line array.

4. Technically speaking

As well as fitting the state of the art sound system, we have looked at the use of intelligent lighting and how this will revolutionise the fit-ups for incoming shows. We are intending installing an intelligent lighting rig that can be focussed from ground level therefore improving venue safety as well as making us more efficient.

We have satellite broadcast to the venue and seen an increase of cinema presentations during the day maximising our through put of events.

This year we have been one of the most talked about venues on the circuit with our “can do” attitude, the quality of our staffing and equipment that makes it a real pleasure to play the venue.

7. Bar Matters

We have introduced drinks in the Foyer as well as the Theatre itself. With Alcohol now available to be purchased directly in the theatre, we are hoping to develop a drinks to seat ordering system. A licence has been applied for to sell alcohol as off sales to the park.

2019/2020

Ice cream / snacks area / merchandise £29,460.86

Bar sales £171,189.41

2017 Profit - £50,989.38

2018 Profit - £59,857.12

2019 Profit - £100,325.13 @ 50% margin This is a 67% increase in profits from 2018.

New tills allow us to track stock and flag potential sales areas that we can develop.

Challenge 25 is in place on the bar. All bar staff are given training on this and have signed to say they have received it.

8. Volunteer Hours.

I would like to note that these figures are based on the recorded duties the friends and theatre volunteers who have provided a great deal of ad hoc work outside of our standard arrangements including print distribution, brochure stuffing, general works etc. We have increased volunteer engagement to the theatre and are seeing an increased uptake in volunteering hours and projects for the general upkeep of the venue. Lowther would find it difficult to operate without it's army of volunteers and is actively recruiting across the ages to give us some sustainability of the Volunteer Programme. In 2020 we will also be starting a Young Technician's course to bring on interested volunteers who have a technical leaning.

Volunteer hours for year

- FOH Duties
 - 425 performances, 7 persons per performance, average of 4 hours per person
 - 11900 hours in FOH staffing * £9.20 = £109480
- FOH Manager 140 * 5 Hours = 700 hours £6440
- Box Office
 - 5 persons per week, average 6 hours per person, period of 49 weeks.
 - (5*6)*52 = 1470 of box office support (£13524)
- Technical & Operations
 - 260 performances 1300 Hours of technical support (£11960)
 - Follow spot 154 Performances *4 hours
 - 1232 hours = £11,334.40

Additional Volunteer Hours

- Totalling 179 additional hours for special projects.
- £ 1646.80

Volunteer Coordinator

49 weeks at an average of 20 hours a week (980 hours) £9016

**Total Volunteer value to the Trust.
(£163,401.20 @ min wage of £9.20)**

9. Marketing Report.

FREE Arts and Craft events for children over the summer and winter period – now supported by Fylde Art Society. With over 100 children attending the Aladdin workshop in October 2019.

Working with Streetlife and the Lions Club during the pantomime season.

We've also invested in a new range of advertising displays around the venue, digital screens in the Bar, new Bar till screens and cinema screen advertising. New poster board fixings around the borough.

Brand New Events!

Raising the bar with our events, with stars such as Belinda Carlisle, Rick Wakeman, Robert Plant and Alexander O'Neal all taking to the Lowther Pavilion Stage.

Community Cinema was only an idea 1 year ago and now we're branching out and bringing national broadcasts from around the world to Lytham. After the success of our soup and sandwich plus a film, bringing the community together, we've invested even more into our cinema facilities.

We've worked with the local council to bring treasure hunts that run alongside our outdoor summer theatre, giving children and families a safe environment to discover and enjoy the outdoor space at Lowther Gardens.

We've also welcomed the Arts Society, Alzheimer's Christmas Singalong in 2019.

We won the Blackpool Gazette Tourism and Leisure venue of the Year for 2019

Brand New Website

We've once again taken a step forward to create a website that caters for everyone. Whether a mobile, tablet or desktop user, your experience will be stress free and simple.

The Hub (Social Media & Website)

A brand-new feature giving people the chance to find out more about the shows they love. We want people to discover what Lowther is all about. The interviews with artist's and backstage walkthroughs allow you to do this in the comfort of your own home.

90.4k Views on the The Hub videos since April 2019 – This feature has just been added to our brand new website.

Lowther and the Press

Working with the local press for the first time in years has really helped build the new Lowther brand. One of our projects, the Pantomime Christmas Guide (October 2019) was seen throughout the North West of England free in their newspapers.

Digital Marketing

We have brand new figures from a digital tag that was put into our website early November 2019. This gives us in depth information to how people are finding shows and where they are coming from.

We also have a brand new tag on our Facebook – this linking in to JPI media also, this gives us more analytics to improve marketing and how we set up / target adverts.

We still have the January 2020 campaign running, the x2 press articles in BPG and LSE are the print inclusions in this package. The digital campaign covers the biggest shows of the year and a general link to our what's on page.

Website stats – This is how people are accessing our website

109,339 - Users of the website APRIL 19 - APRIL 20

108,496 - New users or reregisters.

876,000 Pages views on website.

Operating systems used to visit website APRIL 19 - APRIL 20

iOS - 45.5%

Android - 29.8%

Windows 17%

Facebook: 1,623 APRIL 2019 - APRIL 2020 New Likes
6,479 TOTAL LIKES –
265,000 Reach JAN 19-JULY 20

Twitter: 366.8K IMPRESSION from APRIL 19 - APRIL 20
Twitter: 1,300 (New Followers Since April 2019)

Instagram: 450 (New Followers Since April 2019)

39.5% of tickets purchased in the FY8 post code

59.5% of tickets are purchased outside of the FY8

Digital Customer interaction

75% of our customer social media interaction online are women aged between 35-44 & 45-54.
We are starting to see a new younger audience interacting with events and activities online.
29,700 Minutes viewed on our social videos including interviews on The Hub.
Our top performing video is 'Tom Robinson Interview Part 1' with 16,000 views.

People who regularly follow our online activity
Blackpool (1,846)
Lytham St Annes (1,624)
Preston (820)
Manchester (252)

10. Park Matters

Lowther Gardens (Lytham)Trust have continued to work closely with FBC through a grounds based SLA.

In 2019/ 20 the gardeners presented Lowther at its best with regard to planting and general upkeep. Pathways were repaired, a permanent Christmas tree was planted to enhance the winter aspect of the entrance of the park. The Park Volunteers did a fantastic job with both the herbaceous border and the planting of the woodland paths at both the south and north entrances. We identified lighting that needs to be replaced and other electrical points around the park that would be needed if we are to follow development plans.

11. In conclusion

Lowther Pavilion and Gardens grew exponentially in 2019/ 2020 and from the Draft Accounts it can be seen that the Trust through the operational company made a £106K surplus to reinvest in through the charity before depreciation (surplus to the financial year of £54K and depreciation of £52K). The company held cash reserves of £349K in 2019/20 (Ticket sales) over £183K in 2018/19. The Company maintained it's policy of ringfencing ticket advances, protecting the organisation from not being able to refund tickets for cancelled events (as noted by the demise of Preston Charter Theatre, Southport Theatre and other theatres that have had to close and go into liquidation due to Covid 19). We have lost over £50K in profits (Due to shut down) during the first three weeks as we reinvented the business, refunded tickets and made ourselves resilient to the expected 12 week closure. Donations were £10K down throughout the year which was represented by the early closure. We look forward to working with Fylde Borough Council in 2020 and 2021, planning for both the full opening of theatre and the delivery of the redevelopment project and providing the region with an iconic Park and arts space for all generations.