

POSSUM POINT PLAYERS
ARTISTIC COMMITTEE
October 7, 2021

- I. CALL TO ORDER - Chairwoman Marsha Shull called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM. Members present: Marsha Shull, Scott Beadle, Fred Dean, John Hulse, Dawn Conaway, Peter Klotz (proxy for Shakespeare) Donna de Kuyper, Chase Schirmer, Lorraine Leavel, Claudius Bowden, Donna Flomp (via phone), EJ Panico (proxy for Radio Theater & Rosanne Pack. Absent: Nina Galerstein, Gina Shuck, Olivia Farro, Diane Counts, Richard Huffman, Bernie Noeller, and Ashlie Workman,
- II. CERTIFICATION AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF MEETINGS, & CERTIFICATION of E- mail votes
 - A. Approval of Agenda - Agenda had been reviewed by committee members. Additions: Lorraine Leavel move up to reports. Donna Flomp requested that we add to accept Steve Perry as Assistant Props. Donna de Kuyper requested to give her report on Heroes. Motion to approve revised Agenda by Fred Dean and seconded by Chase Schirmer. Approved. **CLOSED**
 - B. Approval of Minutes of September 1, 2021 - After properly moving (Lorraine Leavel) and seconding (Donna de Kuyper). Approved. **CLOSED**
 - C. Certification of vote on approval of White Christmas in place of Holiday Hit Parade. Motion to certify by Chase Schirmer and seconded by Fred Dean. Approved. **CLOSED**
- III. REPORTS
 - A. EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATOR – Dawn Conaway **INFO**
 1. Marvelous Wonderettes – 652 attended
 2. ELF – 213 tickets sold so far
 3. New Security system installed
 - B. SHOW DIRECTORS
 1. The Marvelous Wonderettes - John Hulse – went well, positive responses, audience was interactive, cast/crew was great. Will have financial report next month. **OPEN**
 2. Elf - Kenney Workman – Cast of 20. **OPEN**
 - a. Requiring COVID immunization for cast & crew – lost 5 people who auditioned who were not vaccinated. Since performances will be held indoors, tickets holders are asked to wear masks if not vaccinated. Vaccinated persons have to the options for wear masks. Can purchase 20 images of scenes that can be project-

ed. Meeting next week to discuss projection system. Only need furniture pieces for set. Will provide budget in the next couple of days. Need 8-9 Santa suits.

Affiliates & Fundraisers

1. Shakespeare Players - Milford Library – Building Request Form 12/10/21 (Attached)
Motion to approve made by John Hulse and seconded by Fred Dean. Motion carried.

C. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

1. Maintaining Civil Discourse Policy – they are drafting a policy
2. White Christmas – approved for Holiday show 2022

IV. OLD BUSINESS

- A. 50th Anniversary - Nina Galerstein – no report **OPEN**

V. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Immunization & masking policy for productions. Make a policy on a show-by-show basis. Director's decision. Motion made and amended by Donna de Kuyper – in Artistic meetings unvaccinated need to wear mask, vaccinated have option to wear mask. Claudius Bowden seconded. 2 abstentions. Motion carries.
- B. Resignation of Diane Counts as assistant for Props (attached) – Donna de Kuyper moved, and Fred Dean seconded to accept his resignation. Approved. Nominated Steven Perry motion made by Fred Dean and seconded by John Hulse. Motion carried.

VI. ARTISTIC COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- A. Fred Dean –Set. Thanks to all volunteers who showed up to take down the outside stage
- B. Rosanne Pack-Publicity. Good publicity in Cape Gazette. Continue “sharing” the shows on social media. Have been in touch underwriters at WSDL/WDEE 91.1 radio. Rosanne will meet with them.
- C. EJ Panico: Radio Theatre – both shows were good. Radiorehoboth.com/archive
- D. John Hulse –Make-up. Scott held workshop; Scott Ross donated wigs
- E. Donna de Kuyper – Director Selection. Will be interviewing potential directors for Calendar Girls on Oct. 14th. Presented a report on Heroes of the Fourth.

F. Claudius Bowden – Dreamers – Reading “The Piano Lessons” by August Wilson. Meet second Tuesday of each month. Actively recruiting new members.

G. Chase Schirmer – EFX/Sound/ Lights. Sounds/lights are fully restored from being outside.

H. Marsha Shull – Costume; still working on cleanup, getting new flooring, old shoe rack torn out.

I. Lorraine Leavel-PJs. Working on improving communication with Artistic. Planning on a “Lock-in Retreat “ Jan. 14-15. Plans on parent chaperones. Will obtain building use form from Exec. Director for submission to Executive Committee. Lorraine & Ashley working on new policies & procedures. will bring to Artistic when completed. First change is for summer production to choose show & then director to reflect PPP main stage procedures. Artistic supported this change. Lorraine will contact John Zinzi about Web site reminders of PJ meetings. Andrea Padilla will contact Devon Lynch to take over for PJ Instagram. Olivia Farro still President. Lorraine will send John Zinzi with names of new PJ officers to post on PPP website.

VII. CURRENT ITEMS FOR EC APPROVAL, NOTIFICATION, OR INFORMATION

A. Shakespeare Library performance approval

B. Vaccination policies discussed. Artistic to follow continued state mandates for inside.

C. Steve Perry approved as Props assistant. Diane Counts resignation accepted with regrets.

D. PJs planning a Lockdown/retreat in Jan. Building use form will be submitted to Executive when plans finalized.

VIII. NEXT MEETING DATE – Scheduled Thursday, November 4th @ 6:00 PM.

IX. ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ADJOURNMENTS - Motion to adjourn made by Donna de Kuyper and seconded by Fred Dean. Meeting was adjourned @ 7:29 PM.

REPORT, 10/7/21: "HEROES OF THE FOURTH TURNING", OTE
SUBMITTED BY: Donna de Kuyper, Dir. Liaison/Dir. Selection Chair

"AT LAST! THE WEST END REGAINS ITS YOUTH." - Headline from London's first company of "Rent".

That's how I felt after this production. How exciting was it to see these Possum "kids" present something THIS good?!!

It seems to me, a community theater like Possums may get challenged by the very people who grew up within its walls. If we welcome them back to present material that interests them, they will return to create great theater and help us to expand our boundaries. And, if you think about it, the "Heroes" creative team members are practically the same age as the founders of Possums were when they came up with this crazy idea of a community theater in Sussex County, Delaware!

Having read all the information submitted to me, my takeaway is this: Possums has access to wonderful talent and is capable of presenting a diverse catalogue of material, employing both traditional and more organic methods. There will be bumps in the road in expanding our repertoire and audiences, but I believe the reaction to "Heroes" proves it was worth it. This research shows me that we will NOT lose any Main Stage audience by presenting "edgy" material, but we WILL gain additional patrons and artists who are interested in new and/or more controversial works. *In fact, I plan to propose we include a "Contemporary" category in our 5 show season.*

I am not a journalist. The following is my best attempt at impartially compiling the feedback I requested from various sources close to "Heroes". I have edited the submissions in an effort to only include informative and constructive comments, without unnecessary negative details. I hope it helps bring us all closer together in what we envision for Possum's future.

I have separated the comments into **BOLD** categories. I hope you will read the entire report, but you can peruse the subjects that most interest you, too.

Each new "voice" is indicated by the - before the statement.

-Continued-

Re: On the Edge

- *It should not be presumed a risk to produce work that is modern. It should not be presumed a risk to produce Pulitzer Finalists. It should not be presumed a risk to tell diverse stories that we may not agree with.*

Re: Gratitude

- *I would like to start by saying thank you to all who are listening for giving everyone involved in this project a way to create art and community again. Almost everyone who went into this project had not done any theater since the beginning of the pandemic. We couldn't be more grateful for the opportunity.*
- *Abundant thanks to: Dawn Conaway, Fred Dean, Jim DeBastiani, Donna Flomp, Jim Hartzell, John Hulse, Lorraine Leavel, Michael Murnin, Rosanne Pack, Chase Schirmer and Kenney Workman.*
- *Credit where credit is due, Chase and the Creative Team worked very well together once we were on the same page. He was immensely helpful, and a crucial part of the production.*
- *All in all, I feel extremely grateful to PPP for allowing this kind of work to exist on their "stage".*

Re: Pride

- *I am immensely proud of the work we were able to complete. I am proud to have worked with an incomparable group of artists. I am proud to have done it at a place I like to call "home". I am proud of Possum Point Players for taking this "risk". I hope PPP continues to invite conversation and curiosity around how we choose the material that makes theater.*
- *This was a truly rewarding experience.*
- *This was work that the team found utterly fulfilling and which, by many accounts, audiences found thought-provoking and riveting. This kind of theater evidently excites young artists and audiences.*

Re: Trust

- *A committee member reached out about attending a rehearsal, and upon arrival told an actor they were attending as an "unofficial chaperone" to ensure we made curfew that evening. Mind you, everyone involved in "Heroes" was legally an adult. I was embarrassed in front of artists new to Possums, who worked so tirelessly and professionally on this project.*

- *I understand that PPP has a colored history with young artists, but we have grown up. This pre-existing animosity towards us has run its course. Many of us want to work for this theater- my talented, educated, experienced and professional colleagues. However, this lack of trust is perhaps the greatest roadblock that PPP must confront and correct.*
- *There just seemed to be a lot of animosity coming from the administrative boards for some reason. Strict curfew. "You varied from your published schedule by 15 minutes." That sort of thing. And coming from people who were not present to see the level of intensity and enthusiasm this young crew put into making a successful show. Instead of feeling embraced for their efforts, they may have felt punished.*

DONNA: The fundraiser was in tech around the time "Heroes" was finally granted performance rights. Miscommunication can mostly be traced back to this period of time. The EC voted on additional caveats required of the "Heroes" team, based on past problems. Those minutes were eventually posted, but the details slipped through the cracks and were never officially communicated to "Heroes".

Re: The Building:

- *From my standpoint, the experience with OTE and "Heroes of the Fourth Turning" was, for the most part, positive. Those individuals involved in the production were thoughtful and courteous, and actually let the facility in excellent condition.*
- *Logan and his staff did a wonderful job during the set build and strike. They were responsible for the whole process. Some volunteers did help them Saturday before the show, since we were already there for "Marvelous Wonderettes". Things stayed organized in the shop area. Again, excellent job by Logan and his crew. The show was also great.*

Re: New Rules

- *When "Heroes" was approved, we received an additional list of caveats; new rules created by the EC specifically for this production. These guidelines were not communicated clearly to the production team or our supervisor, Fred Dean. Neither AC nor EC communicated these new guidelines to me directly, nor informed me that we had even been approved. Everything was communicated through Fred.*
- *Another hostile interaction occurred during a rehearsal when we were told we had broken a rule- one of many that had been invented specifically for our production.*

DONNA: As Director Liaison, I should have been made aware of this.

Re: Affiliates

- *Affiliates are essential in expanding the capacity of our Main Stage audiences. They entice and inspire our current artists and designers; They are outreach and training programs; They encourage creativity, consistency and focus in a way that our current Main Stage model does not.*

Re: Performances

- *We had asked for three rather than two performances, which allotted a difference in the budget of \$90. This was cited as “far too great a risk”, but with \$15 tickets we only had to sell 7 tickets to be profitable. I believe we proved this kind of theater generates buzz and is greatly enhanced by word of mouth. No doubt, we could have made PPP more money with another night of performances, as many people expressed that they were unable to make either of the two shows of this very limited run.*

Re: Approval

- *It was made clear by several board members that our proposal would not be met enthusiastically. We were even forcibly asked to leave the building and wait outside during one Artistic Meeting that we had been invited to. We were on the agenda three times before we were approved.*

Re: Actors and The Process

- *Our rehearsals were, at times, longer than our day job shifts! Everyone was completely committed to making the project as fulfilling as it could be.*
- *Every member of this team had specific responsibilities, and were permitted and expected to independently carry out their roles. I believe that people will achieve a level of excellence if their leader believes that they can rise to the occasion.*
- *The commitment of process over product provided for extended exploration into the author’s intent, character’s goals and relationships, which in turn produced a show worthy of that effort. A by-product of this process is that rehearsals do not function as line rehearsals. Memorizing lines is the responsibility of the cast, on their own time.*
- *There was an air of professionalism permeating the production.*
- *Logan had a vision for the play and his leadership was strong enough to keep all hands rapidly moving in the same direction, while providing a platform for everyone.*
- *From what I understand, some people involved did not understand this different, more organic process, and that’s what might have caused some friction.*

- *I was spoken to in an aggressive and belligerent tone several times. A hostile interaction twice interrupted in a rehearsal, in front of cast and crew.*
- *Because of the short rehearsal period and lengthy rehearsals, break times were closely monitored.*

Re: Intimacy Coordinator

- *This is a relatively new position within the Theater Industry. Missy's responsibility in "Heroes" was to negotiate and coordinate any moments of physical intimacy or touch that occurred on stage.*

DONNA: I still feel uncomfortable with how, as Ass't Director, I handled staging a love scene between 16 year old Liat and 30 year old Lt. Cable in "South Pacific". Missy could have been very helpful.

Re: Tech

- *Better organization and communication would have helped. The "process" was not what we are accustomed to, and was not clearly communicated to Tech. So when "unusual" hours and practices came into play, we were unprepared. This caused friction between Tech and Creative.*
- *Tensions were high between the Creative Team and Tech. There was an energy of hostility, which became counter-productive to our already brief rehearsal period.*
- *I was told they would have a crew to set up and strike each night; that all I had to do was be there and advise. However, that was not the case.*
- *Chase was incredible on our 10 of 12. I thanked him profusely and we discussed our frustrations productively.*

Re: Challenges

- *There were problems that arose during this process that were purely bureaucratic and provided unnecessary challenges, which hindered the production and made the actors feel devalued.*

Re: Recommendations

- *Firstly, I want to thank you for giving the actors an opportunity to speak on our experiences in On the Edge's recent venture, HEROES OF THE FOURTH TURNING. It is not often that we are given a platform to share our thoughts on rehearsal, production, and administrative proceedings. I do hope you consider extending this opportunity to actors in all future productions.*

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- *I do believe that serious reevaluations must be made in negotiating the freedom and respect for young artists working within PPP's space. I invite you to ask questions and critically consider actionable steps in welcoming outside artists and professionals for the benefit of Possum's future.*
- *In the future, especially with affiliate groups, I feel a Stage Manager booklet with clear cut rules and guidelines would eliminate any unnecessary miscommunication between the SM and the committee reps.*

DONNA: "Heroes" SM Blair Williams would like to work on writing this manual with other Stage Managers and Directors.

In Conclusion

- *If Possums, as a community, can keep their hearts and minds open to any and all theater, whether it be a classic musical or a controversial play, I believe that PPP could become the center for all things theater in Sussex County.*

DONNA: Given Logan's contentious history at Possums, perhaps a messy return was inevitable. There were so many challenges, especially with time, weather and communication. But most were met with skill, creativity and teamwork. So, let's recognize what he and his team were able to accomplish in three weeks, and move on from here. (I've heard a lot of stories about the beginnings of the theater, but never much about the founder's curfews!)

Once we have approved a project, we must give each *approved* project and director equal respect and trust. Following approval, if an Artistic Committee member cannot be supportive, they should step away from the project. These young Possums came back with new and valuable resources. This should be a celebration of new ideas.

Please see the following pages for comments that were compiled from audience members. There were NO written negative comments.

AUDIENCE FEEDBACK:

I gathered some of the feedback we received from audience members who have either posted praise or reached out to Logan and I individually. We are hearing wonderful things. I figured that I would share with those who may be interested in reading.

"I don't think I've ever been moved more by your art than last night. So layered and important and so well done... individually and collectively. The courage to take that on... in a pandemic... in a parking lot in the middle of Georgetown reminds me why we need art in our lives. Please tell your fellow artists and production crew that voices were heard last night that needed to be heard, in a place that needs to listen, and that their courage in presenting the show preserved the opportunity for that voice to give rise."

- Tim Slavin, Dover, DE, an audience member from Closing Night

"Devon - I just wanted to reach out and let you know how powerful tonight's show was for me. I loved so much about this show - from the script to the acting to the staging and on and on. The political-horror genre is my new favorite thanks to this play! Please let your brother know that I really enjoyed watching his work as well ... I will not stop talking about how important this is on many levels for the future of PPP."

- Susannah Griffin, a PPP artist and audience member from Closing Night

"Wonderful, thought provoking performance of HEROES OF THE FOURTH TURNING tonight at Possum Point Players. Congratulations to the entire team for this amazing show... you all did a great job."

- Rebecca W. Craft, a PPP artist and audience member from Closing Night

"I don't really watch theatre! And I certainly don't have the access to new pieces or plays. I was stunned about how relevant and specific [HEROES...] was. My immediate friends aren't really interested in engaging in critical discourse surrounding the nation. I am endlessly impressed by the dynamic performances and the elasticity from the actors."

- Jehan Knox, New Orleans, LA, audience member from OPENING NIGHT

"Congratulations to the cast and production crew of "Heroes of the Fourth Turning." It was an impressive achievement to put on something of this quality in the time that you had, and I hope we get to see more from everyone involved, and more theater like this from Possums!"

- Tara Wisely, Lewes, DE, frequent PPP artist and audience member from Closing Night

"I had a lot of takeaways... We can't limit ourselves to the echo chamber of our immediate community. We have to be able to acknowledge and confront our generational disparities in non-judgmental and nonpartisan ways... And there is a little bit of 'evil' in all of us: something animal that takes over in one way or another."

- Josh Russell, Allentown, NJ, New Jersey Theatre-Professional and Musician and an audience member from Opening Night

"This was one of the most exciting nights of theatre I have ever experienced. To be watching something so new, in what feels like the middle of nowhere, featuring some of the strongest performances I have seen in a long time - under the big sky... it was a truly wonderful experience from beginning to end."

- Alexia Correa, Philadelphia, PA, Philly-Theatre Professional and an audience member from Opening Night

"Logan - this was truly professional work. There were moments that slipped so deeply into realism that I forgot I was watching a show... this dialogue and the action that takes place is so riveting, it had me on the edge of my seat from the moment I saw that deer to the literal possession in the finale of the show. Commendable work, my friend. This show was on another level."

- Thomas P. Gardner, Baltimore, MD, Baltimore-Theatre Professional and audience member from Closing Night