

MASQUE THEATRE

Reports for the year 2007/08 to the AGM 18 May 2008

Chairperson's report (incl. Theatre Club report)

A special "thank you" from your theatre management to all of our societies, their members, our portfolio holders, their helpers and their families. Without their sterling services and willing donations of time and expertise our theatre would be unable to function.

I say "your" theatre-management team as we are all nominated and voted for by our societies and all, except our treasurer, are members of one or more of those societies. We run the theatre to the best of our various abilities to ensure that the theatre remains viable to service your needs for the various shows produced by you. Any open times are then used by marketing looking for other groups, whether professional or voluntary, to use the Masque Theatre to bring additional income into the operating budget.

The running of the theatre includes ensuring the public see us as a theatre that performs shows that are worth attending, that the theatre has minimum "dark" periods (excluding Eskom enforcements) as well as the related issue that we are financially sound.

You will have heard of the actions taken when Cape Town had a general electricity failure when *Dêns wit Me* was in the theatre and how the sound was generated by a portable player, lights were torches and emergency lights, and the audience stayed to watch and thoroughly enjoy the show while the rest of the theatres closed doors. We can make this work.

We have lost some of our stalwarts and regular theatre and society members of whom we will always retain fondest memories. We pray that they have gained their desired reward and are able to continue to use their amazing talents.

Attendances

2007/08 Masque Theatre statistics

	Actual BoS	%	No. of shows	Perfor- mances	Average BoS	Ave. %	Income to the theatre	%
Visitors	9 309	49	25	99	94	17	105 585	40
Claremont	1 289	7	2	14	92	17	28 473	11
Constantiaberg	2 346	12	2	19	123	23	26 796	10
Fish Hoek	1 661	9	3	21	79	15	30 610	12
MVDS	4 368	23	3	29	151	28	71 074	27
	18 973		35	182	104		262 538	
Societies 2008	9 664	51	10	83	116		156 953	60
2007	9 222	58	11	79	117			

I have "borrowed" the income from the treasurer's report to reflect the various contributions.

These statistics are not meant to encourage competition between societies but to allow us to reflect on the attendances at the Masque Theatre and, when compared to last year, to note that they have grown back into the target area we aimed for. We must continue to aim at a minimum of this level. Congratulations to all who have played any part in this.

However, let us also note that almost 50 per cent of bums-on-seats (BoS) have come through the visiting shows, whether one-off performances or runs, and thus we recognise the importance to the Masque of their contribution not only to the finances (40 per cent) but also for bringing new BoS, creating a new interest in our Theatre Club as well as contributing to attendances of our plays.

Wizards

Our Masque backstage, lighting and sound wizards always require a special mention. Gary Fargher and John Blewett, Frances Brunwin and Scott Gill, together with the various society experts and other helpers, between them continue to make miracles happen on our stage and have constantly given lots of their private time. - A very big "thank you".

Backstage

Frances Brunwin was forced to leave us by moving to KwaZulu-Natal, and we have lost an amazingly capable person with this move.

However, every cloud has a silver lining, and with Scott Gill we have been very lucky to get that silver lining delivered on cue. How lucky can one get? Thank you both for making the backstage area operate so efficiently.

One message we get from most of our visiting shows is that they are amazed at how friendly, efficient and helpful our theatre and particularly backstageers are. "Well done" to you and all your assistants.

Jill Cooke brought a quantity of Zenite boards which have proved to be amazingly adaptable to many kinds of sets and props building. Well done!

Marketing

The office located in the theatre box office is operating efficiently and having the theatre staffed during the week is of great benefit.

The staffing of the office underwent some change, and Hayley Fargher is doing sterling work assisting Celia Musikanth. We also thank Melanie Horn for her contribution and for standing in, with Hayley, while Celia was away recently.

Unsung heroes

Many of our helpers work very quietly in the background, and we take them very much for granted.

We must remember, these people are of vital importance to us and that our theatre could not operate without them. These include Lieske Bester and Barrie Howard on wardrobe/props, Ruth Allsopp on publicity, Ed Cutten on maintenance, Mav Magnin with bookings, Elaine Brady being on call to clean and open the theatre at most times and, especially, all our helpers in the foyer, box office, refreshments and bar.

Hearty thanks for the rest of our society and theatre members for their sterling contributions.

Equipment

Various pieces of equipment have been purchased during the year, most notable is sound equipment with various hanging and radio hand and cheek microphones. Lights have also been repaired and a video projector permanently installed. We must also remember that technological changes occur rapidly today, and the original cheek microphones purchased when we rebuilt our theatre are not able to give the same sound quality of the later versions, and we all always want the best.

The replacement of the sound board will need to be looked at shortly as the current board has only eight sound channels, and the number of microphones that we have for use is greater. Thus, to use all of these a board needs to be hired each time.

Masque Theatre Club and Youth Club

Birga Thomas reports memberships as above 700 compared with 576 for the previous year.

This portfolio is our main advertising thrust as we mail out quarterly programmes and show information to all members as well as make the programme available to Artscape, Baxter, libraries and local businesses.

Foyer area

This area of our theatre is what the public see as the service part, and it is critical to our image and thus the return of patrons. An unhappy experience here will sometimes stop them from returning. - Jane Philbrick managed the tasks of the foyer for this year. Thank you. - Helen Mathers and Dawn Scholtz and their team manage the refreshments and are continuing the good work.

The bar continues to operate well thanks to the willing efforts of Hayley Fargher and her team. We could not do without you! - We have had less people willing to do a stint on the bar and this is making Hayley's task more difficult in setting up and running the bar-volunteer roster.

While these are to be seen as a service to our patrons, they continue to show very needed income to the theatre. These results can be seen in the financial report.

Development

Both Ralph Lawson and Brian Notcutt have been used in this area but they are both very busy with their own development areas and, as this is not a portfolio that must be filled, the solution appears to leave this to operate under marketing with their expertise being called for as required and available. We will thus not be nominating anyone for this portfolio.

Jean Glass operates a youth drama group under the umbrella of the Masque Theatre which has become more and more popular and we must congratulate her on her work. Celia and Jean are in constant contact, and we will assist her, where possible, in her presenting the results of her group to a larger audience.

Conclusion

One comment heard in the foyer (name to remain anonymous) was: "It is only an *amateur* production" is *not* what we want to hear, as all performances as well as all services of our theatre must be professionally presented to our growing public.

Lastly, I would like to thank my wife Mav and my family for allowing me the time to give to the Masque Theatre.

Rick Magnin



APPENDIX

Show statistics

Society	Shows			Performances			BoS			Average			
	2006	2007	2008	2006	2007	2008	2006	2007	2008	2006	2007	2008	3 years
Constantiaberg	2	2	2	14	14	19	1 939	1 425	2 346	139	102	123	121
Fish Hoek	3	3	3	26	22	21	2 854	2 229	1 661	110	101	79	97
MVDS	2	2	3	16	14	29	2 177	1 901	4 368	136	136	151	141
Claremont	3	4	2	22	29	14	2 938	3 667	1 289	134	126	92	117
Galas				6	6		835	675		139	113		
Sub-Total (Ave.)	10	11	10	78	79	83	9 908	9 222	9 664	127	117	116	120
Visiting shows	20	18	22	65	66	94	7 106	5 988	8 967	109	91	95	
Foyer shows	4	2	3	6	2	5	209	108	342	35	54	68	
Total	34	31	35	155	153	182	18 058	15 993	18 973	117	105	104	108

Society	Title	Actual	Perfor-	Actual
		I	mances	ave. BoS
Claremont	<i>Kings</i>	383	7	55
Claremont	<i>The Shadrack Affair</i>	906	7	129
Constantiaberg	<i>On golden Pond</i>	819	7	117
Constantiaberg	<i>Cinders - The true Story</i>	1 527	12	127
Fish Hoek	<i>Art</i>	505	7	72
Fish Hoek	<i>Butterflies are free</i>	571	7	82
Fish Hoek/MVDS	<i>Don't misunderstand Me</i>	585	7	84
MVDS	<i>Rebecca</i>	1 269	10	127
MVDS	<i>Murder in the Vicarage</i>	1 348	9	150
MVDS	<i>All You need is Love</i>	1 751	10	175
Visitor	<i>Imagining Einstein</i>	200	5	40
Visitor	<i>Magic Tales</i>	304	7	43
Visitor	<i>Pierre McClown</i>	50	1	50
Visitor	<i>Nose of Nonsense</i>	859	14	61
Visitor	<i>A Twilight Soiree</i>	65	1	65
Visitor	<i>My Song - Your Song with Love</i>	136	2	68
Visitor	<i>The Brills</i>	70	1	70
Visitor	<i>Laughing wild</i>	355	5	71
Visitor	<i>My Song - Your Song</i>	145	2	73
Visitor	<i>Africa Blues</i>	221	3	74
Visitor	<i>For the good Times</i>	224	3	75
Visitor	<i>Dêns wit Me</i>	309	4	77
Visitor	<i>Mark Sampson</i>	250	3	83
Visitor	<i>Kissed by Brel</i>	785	9	87
Visitor	<i>Dance Diverse-it-is</i>	400	4	100
Visitor	<i>The 'Berg fights back'</i>	207	2	104
Visitor	<i>Shirley Valentine</i>	835	7	119
Visitor	<i>Godspell</i>	400	3	133
Visitor	<i>Can you feel it?</i>	700	5	140
Visitor	<i>Giselle</i>	570	4	143
Visitor	<i>The Way we move</i>	600	4	150
Visitor	<i>Ballet Magic at the Masque</i>	609	4	152
Visitor	<i>Movie Memoirs</i>	160	1	160
Visitor	<i>Pulse</i>	855	5	171

Front-of-House/Refreshments

It is once again that time of year when I have the opportunity to thank all our volunteers for their sterling work at the Masque Theatre over the past year. You can rest assured that Mancom is both grateful and appreciative of all you do. I must particularly thank Wally Hodges, Dawn Scholtz and the "Hitchcocks" who have proved towers of strength for all the *many* outside, holiday and day-time shows this year. No ways could the Masque Theatre be run without us. Thanks also to Jin Howard and Nola McDonald for enabling us to spread the load. Our volunteers' "Tea" was a great success, and I hope to repeat it after the AGM this year.

Annual statistics

Net profit	R28 250
Number of shows	175
Audience numbers	17 866
Teas/coffees sold	4 241
Sweets/juices	6 508

We always need more helpers, so if you have any willing friends, please give their names to Dawn (021-794 1119). Our biggest problem is "foyer managers". Not all societies are pulling their weight, but hopefully this will improve. If you have any suggestions (not about serving food please!) or complaints, please phone me (021-785 4050).

Looking forward to another happy and successful year with you all at our theatre.

Statement of income and expenditure: 01.03.2007 to 28.02.2008

Income		R	
Sale of	Sweets and juices		32 540,00
	Tea and coffee		20 965,00
			53 505,00
Expenditure		R	R
Cost of	Sweets and juices	18 923,00	
	Tea, coffee, milk, sugar	3 196,50	22 119,50
			31 385,50
Miscellaneous	Laundry, cleaning	1 207,50	
	Transport	830,00	
	Non-capital equipment	579,00	
	Kids and volunteers' party	480,00	
	Stationery, photocopies	39,00	3 135,50
Net profit			28 250,00
Reconciliation		R	
Cash in hand			—
Net profit			28 250,00
LESS banked			28 250,00
			0,00

Front-of-House society-play statistics 01.03.2007 – 29.02.2008

(appr. figures from box office)

Month	Society	Production	Audience	No. of performances	Average
April	Fish Hoek/MVDS	<i>Don't misunderstand Me</i>	585	7	81
May	Constantiaberg	<i>On golden Pond</i>	819	7	117
June	Claremont	<i>Kings</i>	383	7	54
June	MVDS	<i>Murder at the Vicarage</i>	1 348	9	149
August	Fish Hoek	<i>Art</i>	505	7	72
September	Claremont	<i>The Shadrack Affair</i>	906	7	130
October	MVDS	<i>Rebecca</i>	1 269	10	127
November	Fish Hoek	<i>Butterflies are free</i>	571	7	82
December	Constantiaberg	<i>Cinders – The true Story</i>	1 527	12	127
			7 913	73	108

	Total audiences per annum (incl. O/S)	No. of performances
2007	17 866	175
2006	12 139	117
2005	16 572	139
2004	18 125	151

Helen Mathers



Publicity

Publicity for the Masque Theatre productions presented by the four societies (viz. Claremont Dramatic Society, Constantiaberg Theatre Players, Fish Hoek Dramatic Society and Muizenberg Dramatic Society) continues to function as set out in last year's annual report.

Publicity is a joint effort of Ruth Jay, Pam Ross, Celia Musikanth and her marketing department as well as the publicity portfolio-holders of each of the four societies.

We continue to get good publicity in the form of preproduction mention and reviews in the *Cape Times*, *Die Burger*, the *False Bay Echo* and on Fine Music Radio. Websites (esp. the Fleur du Cap site) and newspaper entertainment diaries are also a source of publicity.

We commend the reviewers who so faithfully attend our shows and give the public their critiques - mostly favourable!

The triumvirate (Pam, Celia and Ruth), who write the more detailed publicity for the main newspapers, often do not know the play being presented. We urge the directors to provide us with a copy of the script (early on) so that we can set about our task with added confidence.

Thank you to all society publicity persons for timely submission of information and photographs.

Co-ordinator: *Ruth Jay* (Allsopp)



Marketing (incl. Development)

I would like to start my report by saying how sad I am that Joyce McKinley passed away during the year under review. She was part and parcel of the Masque Theatre and was a huge part of my function as marketing manager, as the voice behind the bookings phone and a brilliant P.R. for the theatre. I know I speak on behalf of all concerned with the Masque when I say that she will always be greatly appreciated and sorely missed.

Not all society shows had good houses - bums-on-seats are our word of mouth and the most important aspect of marketing/publicity for any given show. The visiting shows feel no pain papering entire evenings at the beginning of the run of the show - they know the show is good and the word-of-mouth spreads very quickly - I think we should take a leaf out of their book and make sure that our first nights are choc-a-bloc full. This does not only mean cast/crew complimentaries, but the societies could give the seats away and get the vibe of full houses going. This also means that we need to have the confidence to do this and know that our shows are good. We need to put our heads together to achieve this.

The genres for the year under review were as follows.

Society shows

3 comedies	<i>Don't misunderstand Me</i>	<i>Art</i>	<i>Butterflies are free</i>
4 dramas	<i>On golden Pond</i>	<i>Kings</i>	<i>The Shadrack Affair</i> <i>Rebecca</i>
1 murder mystery	<i>Murder at the Vicarage</i>		
1 pantomime	<i>Cinders – The true Story</i>		
1 musical revue	<i>All you need is Love</i>		

The bums on seats have been varied from not-so-good to good to excellent to outstanding.

Cancelling a dramatic society production, viz. *Don't misunderstand Me*, had a real run-around effect on not only the society but also the marketing department, and we had to replace the show with two quick-fix productions, i.e. *Imagining Einstein* and *Laughing wild* - both shows were very good, but had selective audience appeal. Thank goodness

we were able to keep the theatre lit (our thanks to Helen Houghton and David Muller for helping us to achieve this at comparatively short notice). Fish Hoek Dramatic Society picked up the baton and replaced their un-cast show with MVDS' *Don't misunderstand Me*, using the same cast as had previously been in rehearsal and presented it later in the year (April) as a combined MVDS and Fish Hoek production. Thus, the very first (single-) society show was only in April, which is later than usual. - An earnest request at this stage: When directors and societies consider shows, they must keep in mind that these are in fact "cast-able", and all the stops must be pulled out to get the whole society team together to make a success of the show. Audition notices should always be placed in all the newspapers (it is amazing how much new talent comes from this), even if the responding people are not cast, their names could be kept and used for other tasks in the show or later with other shows. The Masque loses credibility when we publicise a show in our quarterly programme and then cancel it.

Visiting Shows

The following visiting shows were presented in the year under review. They were varied and attracted lots of new faces and, together with the society shows, helped to increase membership of our Masque Theatre Club considerably.

<i>Imagining Einstein</i>	one-man show	David Muller
<i>Laughing Wild</i>	Adult comedy	
<i>Pulse</i>		Sarah Cookney Dance Studio
<i>Mark Sampson feels funny</i>	Stand-up comedy	
<i>Godspell</i>	Musical	Brian Notcutt
<i>Movie Memoirs in Song</i>		Derek Mills
<i>The Way We move</i>		Kerry Dominey Dance Company
<i>Magic Tales</i>	Children's theatre	
<i>Can You feel it</i>	Dance show	The Dance Project
<i>Shirley Valentine</i>	Comedy	Anthea Thompson
<i>The Brills</i>		Heather Mac and her band
<i>Ballet Magic</i>		Cape Town City Ballet
<i>Africa Blues</i>	Choreographed by Philip Boyd, Phyllis Spira and Adele Blank	Dance for All
<i>For the good Times</i>	Tribute to Perry Como, Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin by Harry Curtis, Len Ritchie et al.	
<i>My Song – Your Song</i>	Cabaret in foyer	Janine Magnin and Julian Fernandez
<i>... Nose of Nonsense</i>		Waterfront Theatre Company
<i>Pierrot McClown</i>	Children's entertainment	
<i>The 'Berg fights back</i>		Robin Auld
<i>Kissed by Brel</i>	ex-Grahamstown Festival	Claire Watling and Godfrey Johnson
<i>Déns wit Me</i>	ex-Grahamstown Festival	
<i>My Song – Your Song with Love</i>	Valentine's week-end cabaret	Janine Magnin and Julian Fernandez
<i>Giselle</i>		Cape Town City Ballet
<i>Twilight Soirée</i>	Classical soirée in foyer	Bergvliet Music Centre

Highlights in this category were definitely the Masque Theatre Festival, which proved to be a wonderful success with fantastic variety and totally across-the-board new and "old" audiences; *Africa Blues*: mind-blowing dancing and choreography; both the *My Song - Your Song* cabarets in our foyer (the tables are a bit too cumbersome though); *A Nose of Nonsense*: great show with brilliant use of stage and props; *Kissed by Brei*: awesome; and, of course, the Cape Town City Ballet (as always).

Ward 64 Sub-Council

I have been elected onto the sub-council for Ward 64 representing tourism and business (I am the representative for the Masque Theatre on the Tourism and Business committee). In this capacity I attend regular meetings, and this keeps my ear to the ground and is a useful P.R. tool with our local community role-players.

Grahamstown Festival

Visiting the festival is not only educational, but contacts are made, friendships forged and future shows at the Masque looked into.

Development

Directors'/Actors' Workshop. I have applied for a grant-in-aid from the Cape Town City Council for our promised directors'/actors' Workshop with Anthea Thompson and Paul Griffiths. It appears chances are good, and we will be able to offer bursaries to "needy" future directors/actors. The results will be out in about September 2008- let's hold thumbs together.

ARTreach

Our thanks to Margot Hattingh for all her efforts in co-ordinating art exhibitions for our foyer. They are of interest and have changed the look in our re-vamped foyer. Some exhibitions sell better than others, but the Masque Theatre is again affording opportunity for exposure of yet another art form - this time visual.

Masque Theatre Drama School

Jean Glass is forging ahead with developing young talent in the foyer on Wednesday afternoons and Saturday mornings. I am often at work in the afternoons when she is there and have witnessed excellent work being done by her and her enthusiastic pupils who range in age from young to young adults. Her school has grown tremendously with a new branch in Sun Valley as well. Well done, Jean, keep up your fast growing school and good luck to your elsteddfod entrants.

More development

Thanks to Sharon McCallum for organising audiences for the "Dance for All" ballet and *Cinders - The true Story* from "Generations for Change" of Capricorn Village, the latter also attended *Dêns wit Me* when the power was turned off by Eskom. Thanks also to Helen Mathers for organising the Ocean View drama children to come to our theatre. They all loved the experience, and we will try and make these visits more regular.

Signboard

The new signage is great, and now no-one can say they can't find the Masque! Thanks to all involved.

Thanks go to ...

My thanks go to our great publicity team of Ruth Jay and Pam Ross, who meet with me, and we try to put punch into the editorial copy as well as get the public panting to see our shows. These get-togethers are not only cerebral but great fun as we play with words and teasers for the media for all our society shows. Thanks, Pam, for always being a gracious hostess and keeping us sustained with refreshments.

This publicity then gets filtered to Hayley Fargher (up until last year Michelle Griffiths), who diligently sends off the publicity together with photographs to the relevant newspapers as well as editorial to radios, diaries, etc. A special request here: Although the photos have mostly been good, there have been occasions when they are rather "bland", with no action. These are the pictures that newspapers reject and one notices the editorial with no picture. Please keep them exciting and inviting. This further helps with our publicity function.

I would like to thank Michelle for her excellent contribution (and to congratulate her on the birth of Finn, her adorable second son) and Hayley in her position of marketing assistant for her support and ever growing knowledge of the marketing department.

My grateful thanks go to Mav Magnin, who has been passionate about the bookings. She shows that she cares about the success of the shows and is truly concerned when the bookings are not good. Thanks so much, Mav.

Thanks too to birga Thomas who, again, has been a pillar of strength and help designing posters, programmes, Masque Theatre Club cards, and, of course, our four-times-a-year job - the quarterly programmes. Thanks to Mike Moss for his help with all aspects when needed, viz. poster designs, new logo information and design as well as programmes etc. Thanks also to June Edwards for her great work in designing posters, programmes and also going the extra mile.

Special thanks to Peter Sharp for excellent foyer design for *All You need is Love*.

Big thanks to Jane Philbrick, Helen Mathers and the FoH team, Hayley and bar team, my boss, Rick Magnin ("oh he of patient ear"), Gary Fargher and his team, John Blewett, Frances Brunwin (to whom we said *au revoir*), Jill Cooke - for all the folding of programmes, advice, making the tickets for the box office, etc., Scott Gill and all the societies for help with the visiting shows. Grateful thanks, too, to the management committee for all the support. Also to Elaine Brady, our sweet caretaker and cleaner, for all her help and willingness with last-minute bookings (cleaning up) etc.

Our marketing phone rings constantly with requests for hiring the theatre, booking shows, for recordings of CDs, film shoots, gospel concerts, school projects, new shows, old shows and all sorts of enquiries - it is hard to accommodate everyone, but they all get a hearing, and the flexibility of our theatre is proved almost daily.

The Masque Theatre continues to grow and looking at the figures, there has been a huge growth in bums-on-seats with over 6 000 increase over 2006 with 68 extra performances. We can be proud that our little theatre has its place on the map, and we must keep it there. Let's make sure that the rest of 2008 does it for us.

2009 is the Masque's 50th year of existence as well as being the 10th year since the new theatre was built - let's strive to make it an unforgettable year of full houses and well chosen shows.

Celia Musikanth



Maintenance

2007/08 was a period of essentialities being addressed, and a splish and a splash of paint stroked onto various grubby parts of the walls and ceiling. There was a short period when the theatre "closed down" for major maintenance, especially on stage, backstage and in the foyer. This gave us the opportunity to renew cables, tie wire and steel wire, to service winches, to install a lighting system on stage and to rejuvenate the foyer to some extent.

Roof

The blue roof has stood the test of an exceptionally wet winter, and no leaks were reported. I trust this will be the situation for years to come. Well done, Patrick and his crew from Choice Roofing. They are busy with the downpipes at the rear of the building which have been vandalised for scrap metal. These are being replaced with a PVC equivalent, which has no commercial value with the scrap merchants.

Building

Damp still continues to plague the walls and electrical system, and various experts have shared their ideas and submitted high cost quotes. There is no doubt that in order to fix this problem, money will have to be spend, and it will be foolish to do a short-term, cheap and nasty cosmetic repair on the building.

The exterior cracks on the walls all lead to water ingress, and the best method to fix this is to replaster after chipping of the existing stuff.

The foyer received a new look with repainting of walls and the creation of an "Art Wall". This all adds to the friendly ambience of the front-of-house area.

The pavement tiles, due to vast expansion and a very moist screed, came loose and most of them were lifted; a small patch was re-laid using a two-tone, pleasing pattern, having the required expansion joints. An added factor causing this disaster could well be the vast amount of roof water being dumped arbitrarily onto the pavement and not into the municipal gutter in the parking lot.

Air-conditioning

The unit received a major revamp, and after a burnt-out motor was replaced the system is working well. Lights have been installed on the thermostat, and a user-

friendly dial has been added to help regulate the temperature. There is still a very hot backstage and stage area, but to cool this down will require mega-bucks.

Thank you all for assisting and assuring that our theatre remains clean, safe, "hazardless" and a pleasure to come to.

Ed Cutten



Backstage

*A very special "thank you" to **Frances Brunwin**, our official "resident stage manager".
Frances has, however, been overseas a good part of the year under discussion and then, unfortunately, she broke her hip.*

*Therefore, another special "thank you" to her caretakers **Jill Cooke** and **Scott Gill**!*

April to September 2007 – Jill Cooke

From April to September 2007 I was the backstage dogsbody during Frances's absence overseas.

It was a very fruitful six months, thanks largely to the motivation of Simon Sutton who's fresh broom swept out long-forgotten cobwebs.

In no particular order, achievements were

- the establishment of a maintenance week,
- a *massive* clean-out of the basement, *long* overdue,
- new tabs after half ours were burnt,
- recovering of 27 plain flats with numerous volunteers (mostly approaching their seventies) with amicable lunch breaks,
- new lighting in the wings (oh boy!),
- straightening and re-aligning of fly-bar rails, with safety measures,
- hooks for brooms and gardening tools in the paint store and tool cupboard,
- more serviceable shelves,
- purchase of a back-stage gas heater - a boon to semi-naked dancers in mid-winter,
- repairing rostra tops and bottoms (ongoing),
- donation of 70 sheets of thick cardboard, of invaluable assistance in building sets,

- poles installed against cyc to aid bulky flats storage,
- curtain dividers in the dressing room (Frances),
- locking-up process streamlined with master keys replacing bulky bunches,
- sensible plugs in the tea area,
- recovering of the chaiselongue (Helen Mathers),
- clean-out and tidy of props, tools and lighting cupboard.

As usual, the basement was swamped during the winter rains, but it appears that this would cost too much to remedy. This year we encountered an unusual species of long-stemmed mushroom thriving off the filthy carpet.

The improvements I should like to see happen shortly are

- the backstage fridge connected to a circuit that does not cut out when the master switch is turned off; at present the fridge acts purely as an ice-box and frequently needs excess water cleaned out; this causes rust, mildew and muck;
- additional easily accessible storage (extension to the wardrobe mezzanine) *not* for costume storage but to store sheets of cardboard that have proved to be invaluable over the last six months and are used constantly in every production.

Finally, tidiness, maintenance and constant vigilance are the key to orderliness and morale backstage. This does not stop.

Scott Gill

From mid-December the Masque Theatre has hosted many visiting shows. They ranged from one-man performances to large casts which overflowed into the basement area. This has entailed much cleaning, vacuuming, swabbing of floors and removal of cobwebs, sawdust, etc. from hidden corners.

One upgrade has been made: Thanks to Jill Cooke's motivation the Green Room swing doors, opening on to the veranda, now have new hooks and eyes which hopefully will anchor the doors securely when they are open.

