

President's Report: 2023 AGM – Wayne Yercha

Please Note: This report covers the period of Dec 5, 2022 to July 5, 2023.

In my president's report at the last AGM, I outlined the enormous amount of work undertaken by dedicated Langham volunteers and staff to bring the theatre back to life after the extended closure.

In this past year, this work has continued, and in many ways, what we have achieved has surpassed expectations, which is particularly noteworthy given that we were unable to hire a general manager due to the need to rebuild the Society's financial resources. As this is the case, I'd like to especially recognize and thank all those volunteers and staff whose tremendous efforts and talents contributed to the success of the productions and events that took place during my tenure as president. These included the excellent Langham productions of *Almost Maine*, *Silent Sky*, *Moon Over Buffalo*, (and their associated art shows) and two Readers Theatre events, *Miss Bennett: Christmas at Pemberley* (with Theatre Carpe Diem) and an offsite production at *The Cedar's* retirement home, along with numerous co-productions and events that welcomed the wider community into our theatre. In this regard, we initiated much-needed fundraisers for organizations such as Help Ukraine Vancouver Island, The Alzheimer Society of B.C. (with Target Theatre), the Victoria Flamenco Festival, the Türkiye & Syria Red Cross Earthquake Appeal (with the Victoria Academy of Dramatic Arts), as well as a Christmas Food Drive in support of the Mustard Seed and held in honor of long-time (and dearly missed) volunteer coordinator, Vinnie Chadwick. In addition, we staged co-productions and/or sponsored events with Central Middle School, Lifetime Networks Theatre Troupe (working with disabled adults), Lawyers on Stage (in support of *Together Against Poverty Society* and *Need2*) and Reconciliation Theatre, who visited us from Nanaimo and whose mandate is to foster, "indigenous talent telling indigenous stories written by indigenous playwrights". Further, during this 7-month period, we held a volunteer appreciation event, and planned additional activities scheduled for the following months, such as an Intro to Community Theatre Workshop for the Filipino community (facilitated by Francis Matheu - a local Filipino director), promotional support and rehearsal space for Filipino-Canadian Pride Vancouver Island's staging of Victoria's Got Talent, a Halloween concert for kids, and for the first time initiated and facilitated the hosting and sponsorship of the Victoria Festival of Authors, which took place in October, as well as setting in motion the planning of two exciting co-productions scheduled for early next year. In my view, this level of community outreach (which, to my knowledge is unprecedented at Langham) has demonstrated the tremendous potential that Langham has to both continue our long-standing tradition of theatre excellence, and at the same time become a valuable and much-needed resource for the wider community. Indeed, we can all take much pride in what has been accomplished.

That being said, as this report concerns the state of the Society during my tenure as president, I would be remiss if I did not also address areas that I believe are of concern to the Society. One of these areas relates to the activities that I have just outlined.

During my time as president, and in my work as de facto general manager, I encountered various viewpoints in regard to the increased number of events being staged at the theatre. While the majority saw these events as highly positive, I also became aware of a narrative that wrongly indicated that these events did not generate significant income or benefits to Langham - and painted these co-productions and events as disruptive to Langham productions, offering little value to the organization. While these presumptions are patently false, and can be readily disproven, I am more concerned about the divisive effect that such misinformation has on the Society. In actual fact, Langham's Constitution not only recognizes the inherent value of such events by stating that, "*The purpose of the Society is to foster the art of drama in its broadest sense...*" it also specifically refers to "*fostering liaison and cooperation with other societies and groups having similar objectives*", as being one of the prescribed methods to be used. In my view, this is an area that Langham has not sufficiently addressed in the past and this deficit has led to the perception that Langham is an insular organization. Further, I believe that our experience this year has shown that opening the theatre to community organizations through co-productions, sponsorships and collaborations provides benefits (for all concerned) that far outweigh the occasional problems and inconveniences inherent in a busy schedule. In addition, I can truly say that the heartfelt gratitude, enthusiasm and appreciation directed towards Langham by these groups is a concrete indication of the goodwill that these events generate in the community and of the tremendous good that can be achieved when a variety of talents and perspectives are given an opportunity to be presented on our stage. My hope is that we can continue to embrace this positive direction in community-building, which adds to the vibrancy and inclusiveness of the theatre - and I encourage more Langham members and volunteers to show their support by attending and becoming involved in these events.

A second area of concern that I'd like to raise is the need for more consistent respectful communication. During my time as president, the board was required to address a number of instances in which communication between individuals at Langham was much less respectful than one would hope for, or expect. This led to negative repercussions that extended beyond the initial incident. My hope is that by pointing out the need for respectful communication in all circumstances, that we might all become more aware of how our words and actions affect our fellow volunteers and members, and how these reflect on the organization that we care so deeply about.

To conclude, I believe that as members of Langham Court Theatre Society, we can be extremely proud of our accomplishments, while also being cognizant of the challenges we face. I further believe that Langham is at a crossroads, with the membership divided between some who favor a return to the norms of the past, and those who favor an expanded direction. We have the privilege of being part of one of the finest community theatres in Canada - and with that comes an opportunity to generously share what we have. It is my hope that we choose to embrace this vision.

Sincerely,

Wayne Yercha, Past President