

Sudbury Savoyards Minutes  
April 29, 2018, 4:00pm  
Home of Tom and Nancy Powers, 477 Main St., Hudson, MA

Minutes

Attending: Brendon Chetwynd, Paul Baxter, Karen Powers, Tom Powers, Laura Jacobson, Susan Elberger, Sue Flint, Jim Ravan, Laurel Martin, Nancy Powers, Mike Lague, Tony Parkes, Kathryn Denney, Graham Daley.

1. Consideration of Agenda: Debrief is scheduled for May 6th. Tom reviewed the agenda. Add item to discuss Sherlock. Tom sent around the results of the Chairman's Survey of Iolanthe to the Board Only list and directors.
2. Secretary's Report (Sue Flint): March minutes. Motion: to approve the Minutes of March 1<sup>st</sup> as submitted. All in favor. Most recent minutes on the webpage are September 2017. Action: Sue F will contact Steve Malionek to get other minutes posted.
3. Treasurer's Report (Brendon): Some of the paperwork for the bank still needs fixing. The Iolanthe financials are in progress. We've got ~\$31K in the bank, but many Iolanthe bills haven't been settled yet.
4. Iolanthe Thumbnail (Jim Ravan): Preliminary financials are: expenses \$16,646; gross income \$20,400 (waiting on final numbers for internal sales and makeup). The WERS experience was worth the cost of \$800, although we might not have sold additional tickets enough to cover (this year) we've increased our name-recognition. The question "how did you hear about us" was included on the Brown Paper Tickets site; that data still need analysis. A bunch of the new people in the production this year and they reported positive experiences. "Best G&S production ever."
5. Sherlock update (Jim Ravan & Susan Elberger): Good publicity for the auditions. Most the 10 people who auditioned were new to the company. The show has 6 men, 2 women, and a few others. Women's roles have been cast; Sherlock has been cast (Julian Willard); still working on casting Moriarty (oldest), Larrabee (30-50 y.o.), King of Bohemia (30 – 60 y.o.) and a policeman's bit part. Susan sent out preliminary budget (predicting making ~\$400). Looking for production help with: house manager and other roles that Susan emailed about. Laura Jacobson will send email to her acting class to recruit. Action item: Karen will put it on FB that we're still looking for "a few good men".
6. Reporting Legal Status Meeting (Tom Powers): Brendon Chetwynd and Tom met with Liz Reinhardt and Connie Castro (our lawyers) regarding legal status, specifically: What are the legal implications and *process* for dissolution or merger? They offered their time pro-bono (thanks!). Disposition of assets for dissolution is the biggest item: involves board action, court system, and AG's office. Merger also requires legal support. There are various flavors of merger, mainly a question of "group culture" of the organizations. Discussion went to non-legal aspects too (what's good and what to watch out for). If we stop filing (annual reports, etc.), it would take the state probably 10 years or so to catch up with us, but it's not the ideal option.

7. Restructuring options: (Not expecting to make any definitive decisions today.) Susan Elberger emailed a list of potential restructuring options.

- a. Budget summary (Brendon) and discussion: Brendon put together a budget scenario going forward. People-power is a separate discussion. Best, worst, and middle-cast scenarios with the change to independent 501(c)3. Our assumption of “all volunteer” organization might not be possible: e.g. lighting (Silber is not willing to continue to donate time), sound (not continuing to donate services), orchestra members may need to be paid. SLOC gave Brendon their numbers to work with.

If we have to pay people, and have to pay rights (~5-6K) for a show, a show costs \$40K for a big show (directors, tech, and 25 musicians included), or \$6,500- \$7,000 for a small show. Rehearsal and rental spaces have to be paid for (storage \$4,400 / year storage); legal services; web hosting; insurance; other incidentals. \$10K general company expenses. Best cast \$52.6K; worst case \$61K (one little show, one big show, and operating expenses).

Incomes side: membership (\$1,200), ticket sales (one big show + one little show = house capacity of 1700 seats; prices \$24 adults, seniors \$20, students \$15), playbill ads and patrons (5-6K), concessions (\$1,500), general donations (\$0 assumed), set/prop/costume rentals (\$1K). At 100% ticket sales, ticket income would be \$36K, at 70% sales we'd get \$25,645; 50% of capacity we get \$18,318. This year we sold ~45% of Iolanthe capacity. Best case: lose \$6,200 per year. Worst cast \$34,000/year. If we don't change something, we couldn't afford to put on another big show if we're paying people as predicted. If we don't pay, we save \$10K.

Difference between actual this year and projected: rehearsal rental space, tech rental space, stipends to directors and orchestra.

- b. Plans of Action: we were down a considerable number of positions for Iolanthe this year (publicity, house manager, and costume construction). We still need production people. Susan's list of potential restructuring scenarios was sent out.
  - i. Plan A: Dissolution is the easiest.
  - ii. Plan B: Do the same as we've been doing. Would need considerable fundraising and the fundraising would have to be year-round and continuous (year after year).
  - iii. Plan C: merger. Susan outlined some of the steps. What do we want; research other companies; approach other board.
  - iv. Plan D: restructure the company: working within the budget that we've got, and do smaller shows. Determine what values of the company keep.
  - v. Plan E: hiatus for a specified period of time and what do we want to get out of it. Would still have to be paying for insurance (D&O and liability) and storage and some legal (probably ~7K/year).
- c. Our status and ability to donate:

- i. We can donate to whomever-we-want a small percent (1-2% of our budget) of our budget as a corporation by our legal status (we're a charitable organization not a foundation (foundations are dedicated to giving away money). If we could turn a profit, we could donate 1-2%.
- d. Discussion: we were making considerable donations in the past. Can we make a change to an organization that *could* donate to world hunger? (Yes, but we'd need to go back and change our articles of incorporation to be a foundation.) Mission: did we have to become a "performing arts" non-profit? This was the closest to our mission.

Communication: We can do a better job of asking people to do things, and empower people to help. Discussion of our history of company volunteerism, both by being asked and offering. The disruption of the chaos with the church and changes in performing and tech spaces hurt our volunteerism. if we're looking for expertise, we should be asking the biggest member base possible (but still have to ask very specific things of specific people). We should level with our widest base about our financial and people problems to get help; we need better transparency right now. There were comments among the participants in *Iolanthe* of "Why are we not continuing G&S" and "Why are we choosing *Bells are Ringing*;" nothing positive. There have been general calls for help, but the severity of the plight wasn't getting through, and need to follow through on offers of help. Structured communications weren't enough.

Now is the time to take the energy from *Iolanthe* and try new things. There are other ways to get money. Most theater companies get ½ their money from non-ticket sales. Kathryn handing out a proposal listing ideas to improve overall finances and responding to the options proposed (A-E). (See attached). Suggestions of outreach performances, grants, and donations that could close the gap of \$30K and keep us going. We should think about how to present the financial information in a compelling and accurate way to the broader membership.

We need multiple people to undertake all these potential activities, and not leave a "single point of failure" and we need more "bus drivers". There are four people here today offering to help, including directing. There was a lot of consensus about preserving the inclusive nature of the cast, making charitable contributions, and continuing G&S. Particularly continuing G&S! There is hope and enthusiasm to continue the group. NEGASS is an "appreciation" organization and needs board members now; and can we leverage NEGASS' help in sustaining our group.

Brainstorming: adding to / changing list of options to develop a list of vote-able options. It was felt that we should vote on this outside the context of the Annual Meeting.

We need to talk to the membership about this process. For annual meeting must communicate budget and that we're talking about planning changes. We may not be ready to talk about at the Annual meeting about what exactly we're doing/what decision. Must communicate status; suggested that several board members write an email to the general

membership. Suggestion: that we don't produce *Bells are Ringing* in 2019; involve a larger group in developing a series of proposals and make a decision about the way forward.

**ACTION ITEM:** the board put together an email in the next week to outline status; and set a target date to make a decision; continue with the Sherlock production. Ask for new board members.

**Motion:** Brendon makes motion: Sudbury Savoyards cancel planned production of *Bells are Ringing* scheduled for 2019. All in favor.

**Motion:** Board to commit to develop a plan of action for future of Sudbury Savoyards to be voted upon by the end of September 2018 and in lieu of action by Sept 2018, the board will commit to dissolution. Seconded. Discussion: understanding that we need a deadline, but caution about setting a deadline now because there needs to be a serious listening campaign before the next plan is voted upon. Should have roundtable listening campaigns in multiple locations. Susan's document of options is great and easily digestible and a good starting point of discussions. Lead time needed for a big show means that we're very unlikely to do a spring 2018 show; but does not preclude shorter term actions. Vote to finish discussion; all in favor. Voting on motion: Five for, two abstaining, 1 against.

8. Planning for the required annual membership meeting: Wednesday, June 6<sup>th</sup> 7:00pm; location TBD. Motion to call the annual meeting June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at 7pm, location TBD. All in favor. Email within next week, and through MailChimp, announcing meeting and suggesting that people sign up as members to vote at election. Graham will check St. Elizabeth's for meeting space.
9. Final recruiting for Trustee candidates: tabled discussion. Four seats are open now.
10. Date and place for next Board meeting: May 24<sup>th</sup>, Thursday. Laurel's house, 7:30pm.
11. Adjourned: 7:04pm

Attachment: Kathryn Denney's ideas presented at the meeting.

## **Kathryn Denney: ideas for the future of The Sudbury Savoyards:**

April 29, 2018

I am here to represent a number of like-minded people, who share an interest in preserving the core values of a group that has flourished for 57 years. The Sudbury Savoyards is an inclusive group with a strong social culture that performs Gilbert and Sullivan operettas on a grand scale. We understand that there has been a feeling that in order to survive, we have to evolve into a general theater group, but we feel that there are other ways to preserve our core values and still survive financially, even in the face of declining audiences. We believe that our goal should not be to follow the model of other theater groups, but to take what is uniquely ours and market it as a commodity of its own.

In order of preference, if I were a voting member of the board, I would prefer

- 1) Option B: continue as we have been, as a volunteer group, with fundraisers closing our budget gap and supplementing positions that cannot be filled by volunteers.
- 2) Option E: As above, but plan not to do a main stage production in 2019, raising enough money so that we can in 2020.
- 3) Option A: close our doors and donate our profits.
- 4) Option D: expand to Broadway, pay an orchestra, audition a chorus, and

**My first choices, OPTIONS B/E, could include the following fundraiser ideas to bring in up to \$30,000.**

### **Proposal: Using the talent in our midst (see p. 4 for details)**

- **Presenting hour-long versions of operas, in costume, at retirement homes and assisted living facilities**
- **Put on a show with children, during summers or school vacations**
- **Organize collaborations with local high schools, Longy School of Music, other colleges, prisons, senior centers**
- **Presentations for elementary and middle schools**
- **Plan Living Room Concerts, concert series at churches, libraries or fairs**
- **Silent Auction Gala dinner**
- **Trivia night, Square dancing, Craft fairs, Sing-outs**
- **Outside Support from donors, Cultural Council Grants**

**My next choice is OPTION A:** If we fold, someone should definitely keep track of our costume supply, and have it go as a full collection to one place. It is just glorious, and so easy to use second and third times. The extra money in the bank can be donated to UMCOR, since it upholds the 57-year tradition in the company, or can be put into another worthwhile cause, perhaps another theater

group or a non-political charity. I am not sure what the rules are, but I'm sure that we can use our legal advice to find out what to do with any remaining funds that need to be dissolved.

## **My last choice is Option D: Turning into a different kind of group**

In a year when the Sudbury Savoyards is struggling for money, I believe we should play to our strengths by utilizing the resources that we already have. Our costume collection, a chorus with a core who would know any Gilbert and Sullivan show, the online resources that help people learn the music, and a satisfying ensemble experience that does not require heavy dancing and set changes.

I am not in a position to comment on all aspects of the show the board has selected for next year, so I will just mention what I have learned about the orchestra.

## **Bells are Ringing (planned for 2019):**

The orchestra calls for FIVE REED DOUBLERS (woodwind players who can perform well on clarinet/alto sax/flute, clarinet/tenor sax/oboe/English horn, clarinet/bari sax/bassoon,) 2 violin A-C, 2 violin B-D, viola, cello, bass, 2 French horns, 3 trumpets, 2 trombones, lots of percussion, telephone bells, piano, celeste, guitar and HARP!

This means the pit will need to have at least 22 humans in it if we don't double ANY of the string parts. Typically we like to have at least two string players playing each part, especially with heavy brass and woodwind and percussion orchestration, which this piece calls for. Also, MANY of the musicians will need to have around them extra instruments on stands, some of them quite large such as a baritone sax, tenor sax, or alto sax. A harp takes up at least 6 feet of depth and three feet of width, and a guitar player needs side to side space that is nearly four feet wide.

We were kind of crowded in Iolanthe, with 22 musicians, no extra instruments other than piccolo (which is really small compared to a baritone saxophone), no harp, no guitar, and significantly fewer percussion instruments needed.

## **WE CAN MAKE IT THROUGH THIS!**

**The Sudbury Savoyards has a long history of making money with our staged productions of Gilbert and Sullivan. We understand that things are different now that we are no longer under the auspices of Sudbury United Methodist Church. Here is a summary of what the general public sees: data that is published in meeting minutes from 6 of the last 7 years, according to the Sudbury Savoyards website. (There are no minutes posted on the website since September 2017.)**

**2012 Ruddigore: \$6,856**

**2014 Pirates: \$15,500**

**2015 Patience: "break even"**

**2016 Sorcerer: \$6,500-\$7,500**

**2017 Mikado: -\$1,300 loss**

**2018 Iolanthe: \$4,000 or so, final numbers not in yet.**

**The general population does not understand why the situation seems so dire that we should be considering making drastic changes to our practices, or closing our doors. We would be very much open to understanding your concerns better than we do, but we see a lot of reason for hope.**

Thoughts of interest from recent participants I interviewed:

**Meredith Jones:** Adding programs for children can really boost revenue. Rivers Edge Arts Alliance has dropped their main stage production for this year, but has added a “theater for young audiences program” as well as a summer program for kids.

**Vanessa Aldridge** (an opera major at Longy Conservatory of Music in Cambridge who decided to be an unnamed fairy in our chorus this year and used to work as the Social Media Publicity Director for the San Francisco Opera): I was attracted to the group because you do Gilbert and Sullivan, which is some of the most beautiful operatic music ever written. It’s hilariously funny language, and it’s in English, so audiences can understand it. This music is hardly ever done, and I would go anywhere for it.

**Brendon Chetwynd:** has been thinking we should turn off the lights for a while, but there is renewed energy after Iolanthe because there are many people who care enough about the group that they will work hard.

**Brad Amidon:** Over the past seven years, it appears to the members that over \$30,000 in profit was made (\$10,000 in the past four years). Also, as of July 2017 (according to meeting minutes), the group had almost \$28,000 in the bank.

It seems that if we ran shows at a \$5,000 loss each year, we could still run the group for five more years without going bankrupt. **This does not seem like a "time to fold the group" scenario.** However, it does feel as if sticking to a show that does not require royalties, paying directors or stipends for instrumental musicians and department chairs would be fiscally sensible at this time.

**Kaitlyn Robinson:** It’s the dedication and passion of volunteers that makes performing much more fun, and attracts high quality soloists and chorus members as well. **What drew me to the production is that it was Gilbert and Sullivan.** I would do other kinds of musicals too, but only with something well known that will definitely attract an audience, such as Music Man or Carousel. It’s not worth paying royalties for something that modern audiences know nothing about. I’ve actually never heard of Bells are Ringing.

**Ann Ferentz:** I am also very enthusiastic about G&S. As other groups are pulling out of that repertoire, that is more of an opportunity for us. If we move to non G&S main stage shows, **we lose some of our identity.** Community theater groups are closing all around and we have a following. I would say do more G&S and build our "brand" rather than less. If the coffers are nearly dry or member dissension a high about future direction, **I would rather see a rebuild year with gigs and grant writing and some larger sings to hold the group together than alienation of members through non G&S and/or chorus auditions.**

**Joyce Isen:** Three or four people cannot save the group, because they will burn out. We should have closed our doors when we were kicked out of SUMC, and given all the extra money in our bank account to UMCOR. Going on hiatus would kill the group. We don’t want to be limping along. Let’s sell off the costume collection, and donate the proceeds to World Hunger, and all members can move on to other theatrical organizations.

**Joel Hersch:** I like variety. I think branching away from Gilbert and Sullivan is a great idea. Being in a Gilbert and Sullivan show is much more fun than watching one. I am nomadic, having done 10 theater companies in 10 years, my future participation in Sudbury Savoyards productions would depend on the directors, the timing, and what else is happening at the time, but I like the fact that everyone gets unique opportunities and most people are really fun to work with. The question is how successfully can the group promote themselves in this new light?

**Ben Morse:** I hope that as we discuss our future, we can all do so peaceably, with common goals at the forefront of the discussion.

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**Making Plans B and E work will require a lot of energy, which I am willing to invest, and I have several people lined up who can help.**

**Using the talent in our midst to generate company-sustaining income.**

- a) **Performances at retirement communities**, such as New Horizons in Marlborough, Briarwood retirement community in Shrewsbury and Auburn, Wyngate in Sudbury, Cadbury Commons in Cambridge, Carlton-Willard in Bedford. There are 35 other places in Hudson alone, probably over a hundred within 15 miles of Sudbury.

*In Good Company* has had good luck using over-55 high-end living communities to generate income.

- b) **Directing a summer/school vacation show with children** during a few weeks in the summer, or a shorter version of a show during April vacation or February vacation. I AM VOLUNTEERING TO TAKE CARE OF THIS. NOTE: A detailed proposal for this project was presented by me during the fall of 2015. If there is interest in pursuing this, I can revise it for presentation at any time.

*SkyRise Theater* and *Full Circle Theater* are two examples of companies that have generated income in this way. This could include up to 30 children, and we could charge several hundred dollars per child, I would volunteer and not need to collect salary, we could use a live piano for accompaniment (probably for a small stipend) and we could have rehearsals from 9-2 every day and then a performance on Friday afternoon or evening. This could generate a significant income, with two assistants who could either volunteer or be paid a modest sum.

- c) **Collaborations with local high schools**, colleges, and children's theater groups, performing Gilbert and Sullivan concerts, staged or semi-staged. Gilbert and Sullivan music could be taught in schools, in the image of *Follen Church* in Lexington who always does kids' shows and are currently preparing a production of *Patience*.

- d) **School presentations** a small group of actors who do not work from 7 AM to 10 AM performs an hour-long creative arts program for either the whole school or several grade levels, as desired by the school administration. Sudbury Savoyards did this at Haynes School a few years ago: We created a script that was narrated to educate about Gilbert and Sullivan, and singers showed examples from "The Big Three" musicals, *HMS Pinafore*, *The Pirates of Penzance*

and *The Mikado*. We rehearsed ahead of time and also presented the music teacher with materials to teach the students so that they could be involved in the performance in an interactive nature.

NOTE: If this project seems daunting to the person reading this proposal, such a project can easily be created and implemented by a teacher with 21 years in the classroom and decades of theater experience, and I am volunteering to take this on.

- e) **Living Room Recitals** in homes with a piano and sufficient space: there are several in our community who can host such an event, and charge admission if there is a high-quality group of people who can perform.
- f) **Concert series at churches and libraries, and town fairs**
- g) **Silent Auction Gala dinner** with entertainment (see *Revels, Inc* and *New Philharmonia Orchestra* websites for examples) (I am NOT qualified to organize these events but could help)
- h) **Trivia night, Square dancing, craft fairs, Last Minute Opera, Sing-outs** with casts pre-assigned, as we did in 2014, thought it wouldn't have to be three in one day.
- i) **Outside Support** We could make a wide plea to our membership, asking which folks are in a position to make a sizeable yearly donation. To generate funds to cover our operating costs each year: there may be families who can commit to an annual donation, and coupled with cultural councils of all the communities in which our members reside, it would not take many passionate, motivated members to put their wallets together to secure what we need each year. In order to make this work, we need to let the general public know the extent of our financial difficulties, and make clear the fact that our new status does not allow us to donate more than 1-3% of our proceeds to charity.
- j) **Cultural Councils** of the towns people are living in: Now that we are a non-profit organization that is not affiliated with a church, we can apply for grants to sustain a 57-year tradition. Looking through the program of a recent *Nashoba Valley Chorale* concert, this is a volunteer organization that is supported by the Chelmsford, Littleton, Shirley, Acton-Boxborough, Groton, Townsend, Westford, and Massachusetts Cultural Councils. Every one of them supplied at least \$100, and Shirley donated \$1000.