



The St James

The St. James Theatre (previously known as His Majesty's Theatre, and the Westpac St. James Theatre from 1997 to 2007, usually referred to simply as "The St. James") is a stage theatre located in the heart of New Zealand's capital city, Wellington.

The theatre was officially opened 8pm on Boxing Day, 1912, by the Wellington Mayor, David McLaren. During the new theatre's first months, it was used primarily to play silent movies. The St. James was changed nine months later to present live performances. However, in 1930, after 17 years, it was again converted back to playing both movies and occasional live performances. This was after the St. James's lifelong opposition, the Opera House, began screening movies. After this change to the "talking films" or "flicks", on 3 May 1930, His Majesty's was closed and reopened as the St. James Theatre. Over the years, the St. James was slowly brought back to showing live performances. Many shows were performed at the venue; everything from Shakespeare, to minstrel acts to ballet. After Fuller died, the St. James passed through numerous owners.



The theatre was nearly demolished in the 1980s and '90s after the owners placed a destruction order on the plot. However, due to the efforts of an objecting group, the St. James was eventually spared and restored to its former glory. The alarm had been risen after a photographer, Grant Sheehan, was told by the theatre's curator that the St. James was set to be demolished by the Chase Corporation. For nearly a decade, a wrecking ball sat poised above the theatre, but it was never used after the owners were finally persuaded to save the property. The company looking to build on the site, Chase, were still angered by the result, so a trade off was made by the committee vouching for the St. James; Chase would be allowed to build a tower in Wellington exceeding current height restrictions if the committee could save the theatre. The offer was highly contested, with some companies near the new tower protesting at its aimed size. The Opera House objected to the St. James's restoration, saying that the city would not be able to sustain two theatre.

In 1996, the council gave a \$10.7 million contribution towards the restoration plan, in addition to \$2.4 million from a Wellington Community Trust grant, \$3.5 million from the Lottery Board and over \$1 million in donation from the public. The total of around \$17.7 million allowed the St. James Trust to confirm they would start restoring the theatre.

In July 2011 Positively Wellington Venues, an integration between the Wellington Convention Centre and the St James Theatre Trust, began managing this theatre along with five other venues in the capital city.

Engineering assessments in 2015, led the building to be yellow stickered, as it was measured to be 20-30 percent of the current building standards. Earthquake strengthening began in April 2018, with the building to be reopened in 2022.

It's first scheduled theatre performance for its reopening is to be Les Misérables.

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- If you have an idea for an article or would like to contribute please get in touch.

Presidents Message



Welcome everyone to this edition of the WLT Newsletter. It's fair to say that our year so far has been interesting. Also, exciting, exhausting, frustrating, but finally hugely satisfying.

The exciting, exhausting and satisfying parts were that we finally got to perform Les Misérables! The frustrating (and I should probably add disappointing) part was the role Covid still got to play. The virus that just kept on giving right up until opening night. I don't think any of us could have known how it just kept on popping up when you least expect it.

Les Misérables was 18 months in the making but what a ride and what a result. That ride included an Alert Level change just for Wellington on the opening night just to make things interesting. It meant we lost a few performances but as they say, the show must go on. The entire Les Misérables cast and crew should be congratulated for their perseverance and deserve a huge thank you for a fantastic outcome. Even when faced with the disappointment of having to cancel the first week of the season, everyone pulled together and made the remainder of the rescheduled season something special. In the end, we lost three performances but the rest were sell-outs and the audience feedback was fantastic.

We will be taking a break for a little while as another local group, Acting Out, will be using the Hall for their production of Aladdin Jr. They usually use the High School auditorium but due to the construction work at the High School can't this year. We wish them all the best with their production in October.

WLT is excited that our next production will be the well known classic musical Oliver! The show has a host of memorable characters and songs and is widely considered a theatrical masterpiece. It has a large ensemble cast which is needed to bring the characters and score to life. Production dates are June 2022 and auditions will be held late this year or early 2022. Keep an eye out for more details.

That's all from me. Keep healthy and safe in whatever you may be doing. Look forward to seeing you at the Oliver! auditions.

Local Theatre

Les Misérables 2022

Les Misérables is coming to the St James Theatre in Wellington in 2022. It will be the first major performance in the newly refurbished building.

Musical Theatre NZ

'MTNZ are on a mission to connect communities all over New Zealand through the magic of musical theatre and want you to join us. MTNZ invites you to be a part of an organisation dedicated to quality, live theatre in New Zealand's communities.'

Check out their web site, resources and information etc. about upcoming musicals around the country at www.mtnz.org



We are pleased to announce that our next production will be the award-winning musical adaptation of the classic Dickens novel, Oliver!

Consider yourself at home with Lionel Bart's classic musical based on the Charles Dickens novel, Oliver Twist. The Tony and Olivier Award-winning show is one of the few musicals to win an Academy Award for Best Picture and is widely hailed as a true theatrical masterpiece by actors and audience members alike.

The streets of Victorian England come to life as Oliver, a malnourished orphan in a workhouse becomes the neglected apprentice of an undertaker. Oliver escapes to London and finds acceptance amongst a group of petty thieves and pickpockets led by the elderly Fagin. When Oliver is captured for a theft that he did not commit, the benevolent victim, Mr Brownlow takes him in. Fearing the safety of his hideout, Fagin employs the sinister Bill Sikes and the sympathetic Nancy to kidnap him back, threatening Oliver's chances of discovering the true love of a family.

Auditions will be held in late 2021. Further details will be on our Facebook page so keep a lookout there. Production dates are June 2022.

Actor's Corner

This is the next in a series of resources to help actors.

An actor needs to have some knowledge that is necessary to do well in this profession. When taking a technical or university course in the area some points are very well worked. But there are amateur actors who have talent and have not taken a technical or university course. For this reason, knowing what it takes to do well in this profession is essential.

Versatility

A good actor is one who is versatile. One way to achieve this is by reading out loud an excerpt of something modifying the voice and even the accent. For this it is very worthwhile to watch videos of people who speak the dialect that is being rehearsed. It is necessary to pay attention to the way the mouth is moved, the words are articulated among other points.

Projecting the voice

This is essential especially for the actor who likes to act in the theater, because some members of the audience are more distant from the stage. To know how to speak loudly and in a good tone is essential and for that it is recommended not to smoke, drink or take any measure that leaves the vocal cords dehydrated.

But attention, a projected voice does not mean shouting, so there is a technique. In order for it to be projected it is necessary to breathe through the diaphragm so that it has more depth and the volume of the voice is increased.

Attention with the emotional state on stage

The character must show the emotion of the moment. This means that if she/he feels happy the actor must let this feeling emerge in a convincing way. One way to achieve this is by reading some scripts and determining the main emotions on stage. Moreover, the emotional state that the scene possesses helps the actor not to forget his lines, because they can be associated with emotions.

Actor's Corner— Three Blind Alleys

The Whisperer

I am going to tell you a secret. It is an unusual kind of secret, in that when I tell you what it is, you will realise you knew it all along. The news is dark, so let's not delay: when you stand on stage to sing, a stranger is whispering in your ear. You may think I am teasing you, but I am being serious, deadly serious. To be clear, I am not talking about a person you can see, another actor, for example. I am referring to someone much more menacing. If you don't believe me, let me tell you some of the things he says, and you will begin to notice him, because he has spoken to everyone who has ever stepped in front of an audience to sing.

- 'You are not going to be able to hit the top note.'
- 'You don't know what to do with your arms.'
- 'You can't remember the next lyric.'
- 'You are going to run out of breath.'
- 'You don't know what you are doing.'
- 'You are not good enough.'

This visitor is called self-consciousness, and he is death for the actor. Do you recognise his words? Of course you do – they are your own. The Whisperer is you

Blind Alley No.1: Hiding Behind a Good Voice 'I only feel self-conscious when I sing badly, so if I focus on singing really well I won't feel that way anymore.'

This particular blind alley is one of the most frequented by musical-theatre performers. Many actors believe that by developing a good singing voice it will rid them of self-consciousness – because when they make a pleasing sound they feel better about their performance. Now I do concede: a good level of technical security makes things easier.

As any singer knows, when things are going wrong musically, or technically, it is almost impossible to ignore. 'You are out of tune with the piano' or 'You need to lift your soft palate,' mocks the Whisperer. However, relying on the beauty of your voice won't keep self-consciousness at arm's length for long. Even if you are sounding like Julie Andrews in her prime, the Whisperer can still find ways of filling your mind with nagging self-doubt.

You are using too many gestures', 'You don't understand what you are saying', 'You don't know where to look,' he taunts.

Have you ever rehearsed with an actor, who, after giving a gorgeous vocal performance, admits they are feeling uncomfortable when they sing? This is because we don't just feel self-conscious about our singing, but also about our acting. When a singer's sound is impressive, those of us watching assume they must be feeling confident. But in fact, their wonderful voice has not solved their problems. They are just hiding behind it, hoping that we won't notice that they don't know what they are doing, like a mouse in a suit of armour. It is a case of sound and fury, signifying nothing. Time for some more bad news: focusing on your vocals in performance not only fails to keep self-consciousness at bay, it can actually make it worse.

Reflect upon it for a moment: listening to yourself whilst you sing is a form of self-consciousness, as it requires you to turn all of your attention onto yourself. Even if you are performing at your absolute best, you are still thinking: 'That top belt sounds great tonight' or 'My vibrato is beautiful.' You might think: 'What is wrong with that?' But monitoring yourself with your inner judge – even if you decide you like what you are doing – is unhelpful.

On stage, an actor's thought processes should primarily be those of the character.

Does the audience of *Les Misérables* want to see Valjean praying for the life of Marius, or thinking about his wonderful falsetto? The starting point for all good acting is openness to what surrounds you, and listening to your own sound – no matter how attractive – is the polar opposite of that. It is also very precarious. If all your concentration is on your singing voice, it only takes half a second to decide 'My belt sounds forced' or 'I am slightly flat on that note' – and you will be right back to where you started – feeling worthless and incompetent.

Actors Corner—Three Blind Alleys

Blind Alley No.2: Becoming the Character ‘If I become the character, I won’t feel self-conscious anymore.’

This blind alley is popular amongst classical actors and musical-theatre actors alike. At first, it seems like a good solution to the self-consciousness issue. Surely, if you can become the character, it will free you of your own personal worries?

Wrong. You should never seek this goal. Why? Because it is impossible. What happens if the actress cast as Sally Bowles wants to become the character? How might she try and achieve this? She could alter her mannerisms, her movements, her accent and her voice patterns. She could cut her hair in a style fashionable for 1930s Berlin, dress in period outfits provided by the wardrobe, and paint her fingernails green.

Has she become Sally? Really? Of course not. She is still the actress pretending to be her, no matter how much energy she expends on trying to believe in her own transformation.

In actuality, a character doesn’t exist, they are simply a construct of the writer’s imagination expressed as words on a page. This even applies to characters like Sally, who are based on real people. They are still just a series of lines and lyrics, not the actual flesh and blood that inspired their written incarnation.

I know many actors who talk about ‘trying to find their character’, but I am never quite sure where they are trying to look. Where is Billy Bigelow? Who is Julie Jordan? They are just a series of words made up by the writers. When actors use this phrase, what I think they really mean is they are trying to find out what their character does. Now you might be reading this as a doubting Thomas.

You may have in mind a performance of a great actor who – in your opinion – became the character when you watched them. A remarkable transformation did occur when you watched that memorable production, but it was you that did the transforming, not the actor. What happened that night was that the actor became the character in your imagination.

Blind Alley No.3: Playing Emotion ‘If I play the emotions of the character, I won’t feel self-conscious anymore.’

This third and final blind alley is the most problematic – but also the most important to grasp. The role of emotion in acting is a complex issue, and one with a long and troublesome history. It is also the subject that is most likely to get acting students arguing.

The crux of the problem lies in the discrepancy between the actor feeling the emotions of the character and playing the character’s emotional state.

So what is the

difference? When we talk about playing emotions we are referring to the actor deciding how a character feels at a particular moment and then trying to replicate it on demand, i.e. ‘I think they feel happy during the verse, and sad during the chorus.’ This is the route to generalised and demonstrative acting – the opposite of a genuine emotional connection.

If an actor ends up feeling the emotions of the character as a by product of their actions then that is ideal. But they should never aim to play emotions. Why? Because it is impossible. Many performers rebel against this statement when they first hear it, so it does merit some further explanation. The reason you cannot control your emotions on stage is because you cannot control them in life. Our feelings are actually a response to the events of our day-to-day existence. We do not choose them – we only decide how to act upon them.

On Line Theatre Performance

While COVID-19 in New Zealand has been at least annoying we have been lucky in as much as the disruption to our lives compared to other parts of the world (even now) has been minimal. As a result we now enjoy things the rest of the world either still can't or is only just getting back to some level of 'normalcy'.

Performing arts in particular have been hugely effected . Innovations (like those for working from home) has lead to theatres producing shows exclusively online, allow actors and crew to continue working, providing those in their home some relief from the isolation and staved for entertainment . But it has also robbed actors of the energy of the audience amass, but has also lead to some interesting innovations and unique opportunities for participation.

Some will likely service beyond COVID-19, some will fall by the way side as people around the world begin to return to live performances. But are a few examples for the innovations COVID has provided:

Almeida: TM

From experimental Belgian theatre company Ontroerend Goed comes a new interactive one-to-one experience, premiering online via the Almeida theatre. With their 2018 hit show **£¥€\$ (LIES)**, the company transformed their audience into wealthy traders tasked with gambling on the world economy. With TM, it's media manipulation, populist ideology and conspiracy theories under the spotlight.

STEM Sisters

One to take the load off home-schooling parents: STEM Sisters is a new online musical show designed for primary-aged kids and their families, which focuses on female scientific pioneers like Mae Jemison, Ada Lovelace and Marie Curie. Written by Rachel Barnett-Jones and composed by Jenny Gould, STEM Sisters follows a young girl called Jina, who gets lost in a forest and is helped by key figures in science and maths, learning about their experiments, inventions and achievements on her journey.

The Kindling Hour

Swamp Motel (Plymouth Point, The Mermaid's Tongue) returns with the third and final installment of its online trilogy. Like its predecessors, The Kindling Hour is part theatre, part immersive experience, but expect a show that's darker, more chilling and, according to the company, more ambitious than what you've seen to date. Taking inspiration from myths, history and the ancient tradition of storytelling (it even stars Dominic Monaghan of Lord of the Rings acclaim), The Kindling Hour places you and your teammates in the centre of a chilling underworld in a bid to bring down the London Stone Consortium once and for all. Throughout the run, Swamp Motel's previous two shows will also be available to watch/play, for those who need a plot re-fresher or are keen to immerse themselves deeper in this unnerving world.

Les Enfants Terribles presents Sherlock Holmes: An Online Adventure

Immersive theatre connoisseurs Les Enfants Terribles have wrung their innovative streak once more, adapting to the current digital-first climate to present Sherlock Holmes: An Online Adventure. The Case of the Hung Parliament.

Inspired by the world of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's great detective, this latest experience from the creators of the Olivier Award-nominated Alice's Adventures Underground sees them join forces with virtual reality company LIVR to transport audiences from their homes back in time to Victorian London. A gripping and imaginative online 'whodunnit', the resulting 80-minute experience fuses the charms of theatre, escape rooms and virtual board games, using 360° technology to bring the spectacle to life.

Blast from the Past

Wainuiomata Little Theatre Inc has performed two shows that were based on the comic strip “Peanuts” – first was “You’re a Good Man Charlie Brown” in 1977 then “Snoopy” in 1984.

You’re a Good Man Charlie Brown (Peter Rollinson directed this and wrote the following)

This show is a delightful musical play with a cast of six. Each portrays a character from the famous and very popular cartoon strip PEANUTS, After a season at Wainuiomata College the play was toured to Masterton and Levin with considerable success. The play portrays characters of absolute simplicity and is a sheer delight. It manages to capture childhood dreams and shows how these are often unfulfilled. An interesting aspect of the production was the need for a grand piano on stage. In our case it had to be a real piano because the actor playing Schroeder (Michael Vinten) actually played it. We did not have a grand piano so had to make a mock one out of an upright. For the production we built (for the first time) a sloping stage on the south side of the hall floor which provided an acting area very close to the audience.

It is a pity that in the nineties we can no longer afford to present these small cast works as the rights are held in the USA and are extremely expensive.

Snoopy (written by Denise Andrews)

This was a lovely show. Peter Rollinson directed a cast of seven teenagers in the second of two shows based on Charles Schultz’s comic strip Peanuts (the first was “You’re a Good Man Charlie Brown). The songs and dialogue were a joy to work with and we all spent quite some time “researching” the Peanuts strip to really get into our characters – not too much of a hardship I can assure you! I’m sure I speak for all of the cast when I say that we all grew to like and appreciate our roles (I know I particularly did – after all I named my daughter after my character!), and I particularly remember stand-out performances by Turei Reedy as Woodstock the bird, and Michael Neville as Linus with his blanket. The only real pity is that the cost of the rights to this show are so expensive we shall probably never repeat it.

People in photos:

2 – L-R: Martin Isberg, Dale Johnson, Susan Watters

3 – L-R: Janette Best, Michael Vinten

4 – L-R: Dave Johnson, Susan Watters

5 – Jamie Higgins

