

Evenley Parish Council

Arts Co-ordinator Report March 2017

Evenley Arts exists to develop the arts in Evenley to provide a rich and varied set of experiences and to contribute to the sense of community by bringing people together.

Accompanying documents

- EVA Development Plan 2016 – 2017 with review column completed
- EVA Development Plan 2017 - 2018
- Analysis of ticket sales
- EVA Accounts – NB 2016 – 2017 on 3rd sheet

Main issues

In my report last year, I commented on the successes of the programme as I saw them, namely the fact that most events had sold out, a wide range of events had taken place, the positive response from those participating and the fact that a small financial surplus had been generated as a contingency. I am pleased to say that these features have remained true of the programme over the last year. I believe that what has been offered has been varied, of high quality and has sought where possible to give opportunities for members of our community to participate and perform. The financial reserve has risen to over £660, largely because the Shakespeare event last April had much lower costs than expected and sold out when I thought it may appeal only to a minority. Please see the accounts for the year. Parish councillors can see a list of all Evenley Arts events and activities in Appendix 1 together with a few that are due to take place in the coming months.

My main concern last year was that the EVA programme was not appealing to sufficient members of the Parish to be sustainable. The statistics I collate on percentage attendance from inside and outside the Parish are supplemented by a rough analysis of households attending at least one event. The former is averaging over the three years 73.6% which is broadly similar to the figure from the first two years. The percentage of households represented has risen slightly to 25.2% compared to last year's analysis of 23% although the latter figure was produced before the final event of the year and became 24.5%. This year's figure is a little misleading as in the final two events a number of households previously unrepresented attended whilst some households who have attended in previous years did not do so this year. When all three years are taken together, the percentage of households attending at least one event is 30.2% which suggests some progress is being made and achieves the target I set.

The need to extend the number of people who are willing to consider attending an EVA event remains a priority in order to meet the main objective of the programme (see above). The importance of doing so can be illustrated by the last main event of the EVA year, Paris in Swing. Some 10 people who could normally be relied on to come to such an event had other commitments on that date. Two weeks before the event, I was having to consider cancelling it but some hard marketing outside the Parish secured enough to fill it. However, at this event, only c56% of the ticket sales were to residents of Evenley. It was possibly the best event we have as yet put on judging by audience reaction but without a number of core supporters, it was in jeopardy. It is inevitable that on any one date some people will have prior commitments and that is why it remains important to extend the number of people who are willing to come to EVA events so that we are not dependent on the same people all the time. It would also demand less time and energy from me promoting events!

Another issue I raised last year was the age profile of residents in Evenley. This is important as it indicates where the main emphasis of our activity should be placed. I was able to obtain some statistics from SNC based on the 2011 census. The broad picture that emerges is that in age bands below 44, Evenley has a smaller proportion than both South Northants and the east Midlands region whereas the reverse is true over the age of 44. In fact over 62% of Evenley's population was 45 or over and 197 out of 571 (34.5%) were 60 or over.

I had suggested to the Village Hall Committee that they consider buying a black backdrop that could be available when needed. It is disappointing that the change in the committee membership has meant that it is only now, 18 months later, that this issue is being explored.

The early part of 2017 has not been an easy ride. The Big Sing which had 31 people in Feb 2016 and was very well received had only 21 in January 2017. It was still an enjoyable evening but the drop in attendance must raise questions about repeating it. I have already commented on the difficulty of selling tickets for Paris in Swing. I suppose that last minute decisions about buying tickets is a reality we have to deal with. I have had to postpone the Dance Spectacular event planned for Sat 8th April as I could not get enough local dancers to make a full programme. This is because it clashes with the first weekend of the school holidays. All the dates offered by the headline act were in school holidays and this seemed the most likely. I am currently exploring staging it in September but will have to find a new headliner.

Communication

This is a perennial issue and one that came up in the open section of the PC meeting of 27th February. I am therefore presenting my thoughts as they may be helpful when the PC comes to discuss this issue. Methods used to advertise/ promote/ communicate EVA events are listed at Appendix 2 below.

The essential truth about communication is very obvious – it takes two. One can speak, some will not hear, some will hear but not listen, a few will listen and even fewer will act on what they have heard. I have tried to use multiple methods of communication, knowing that no single one will work for everyone. I was a bit surprised when I knocked on doors trying to sell the last few tickets for the Paris in Swing event. I targeted those who have never been to an EVA event. Some remembered receiving the flyer or an email but others were completely unaware of not only the event but Evenley Arts! To be fair to people, we are bombarded with information so it is not surprising. The best way is by word of mouth but this is dependent on enough people being interested enough to talk with others.

A suggestion was made at the last PC meeting that the email alert system generated automatically from the web-site should be re-instated. I would support this but it is only useful if a large number of people sign up for it. I did suggest to the then Parish Council some four years ago that it should have a co-ordinated campaign to increase the number of people registered for email alerts. Issuing appeals in newsletters and on the web-site will not work so I suggested that over a period of say 6 months, parish councillors should talk directly to a member of every household and try to persuade them to provide an email address. If the Parish is divided between 7 people, this is manageable. An alert system of this sort would be very helpful to me but only if it is set up in a thorough manner. I wonder how much traffic the PC web-site currently gets and whether it warrants the amount of time that has been put into it? A thorough campaign may improve its use.

The work that Eric Millard did in writing the Evenley column on the Advertiser newspaper was very valuable and produced a number of ticket sales albeit outside the Parish. I would like to record my thanks to Eric for the support he gave to Evenley Arts in this way as well of course as attending many events and organising an event himself. I am disappointed that Eric has not yet been replaced and hope that the Parish Council acknowledges the work he did and has thanked him for it.

Thanks

I want to thank very warmly those people in the Parish who have supported Evenley Arts by regular attendance at events. Without these, Evenley Arts would not have lasted the three years it has. Once again, I am indebted to my wife, Carrie, for doing so much work in putting on events, promoting them and providing refreshment. She has even been a participant in some events!

The future

Maintaining the programme of main events, visits, talks/ demonstrations is extremely time consuming. It is not organising them but promoting and selling tickets. It is clear that it is appreciated a great deal by those who participate. My concern is with those who do not. I am uncertain whether I

will continue as Arts Co-ordinator beyond the coming year and I will probably be limiting the number of events, in order to make it more manageable. One of the things I think that needs to be done is to carry out a survey of those who have not attended any Evenley Arts events. I intend to make this informal, short and conducted in person using a framework of open questions so that I can pick up as much feedback as possible. It is dependent of course on people being willing to discuss it with me. Although some reasons for non-attendance will be predictable, I do wonder if there are some more complex reasons why people do not engage. I suspect some people may feel these events do not apply to them or they will not be welcome. If the latter is the case, it is a serious flaw in a programme that is seeking to bring people together and I must try to address it.

I have not asked for any support from the Parish Council other than use of the PC Facebook page and web-site to promote events. I will be approaching those parish councillors who have not engaged with Evenley Arts or only rarely and hope that they will give me 10 – 15 minutes to participate in my survey. The best support the PC can give me is more attendance from parish councillors at events. I am certain, given the leadership role you have in our community, that if you attended an event and mentioned it to your circle of friends, it would make a big difference to ticket sales and make the Arts Co-ordinator role more attractive to anyone who succeeds me.

Appendix 1 – Events in 2016 – 2017

Events that have taken place from April 2016 to March 2017.

- 1st April '16 Play reading: Hay Fever
- 23rd April '16 Shakespeare Unplugged
- 27th April '16 Visit to Stowe for piano recital by Ben Andrew
- 3rd June '16 Visit to Carmen by BCOS
- 19th Aug '16 Play reading: The Winslow Boy
- 1st Sept '16 Visit to live screening of The Deep Blue Sea
- 23rd Sept '16 The Stage is Yours
- 28th Oct '16 House Concert with Anthony John Clarke
- 4th Nov '16 The Western Front: 100 years on
- 23rd Nov '16 Visit to Stowe for recital by Carducci String Quartet
- 25th Nov '16 Ben Waters – NB facilitated by EVA not an EVA event
- 15th Dec '16 Visit to live screening of No Man's Land
- 28th Dec '16 Pantomime: Robin Hood and Babes in the Wood
- 11th Jan '17 Visit to live screening of RSC's The Tempest
- 21st Jan '17 Green Forms, play - NB facilitated by EVA not an EVA event
- 8th Feb '17 Visit to Stowe for piano recital by Murray McLachlan
- 18th Feb '17 House Concert with Joal and Lauren Kamps
- 21st Feb '17 Visit to live screening of I Monet
- 25th Feb '17 Paris in Swing with Hotclub '42
- 9th Mar '17 Visit to live screening of Hedda Gabler

Events planned:

- 30th Mar '17 Visit to live screening of Madame Butterfly
- 11th April '17 Visit to live screening of Jewels by Royal Ballet
- 21st April '17 Play reading: Noises Off
- 27th April '17 Visit to Banbury Cross Players' production of The Tempest
- 24th May '17 Visit to live screening of RSC's Antony and Cleopatra
- 21st June '17 "Every picture tells a story" – talk on paintings
- September '17 A demonstration by a local sculptor

Appendix 2 – Methods used to promote Evenley Arts events

- Parish Council web-site events page and calendar
- Seasonal programme delivered to every household in the Parish and to Mixbury and Hinton; also given to contacts in other villages
- Posters in village shop and on noticeboard outside the village hall
- Events notification on Evenley Arts Facebook page shared to both Evenley PC and Evenley Residents Association Facebook pages
- Facebook invitations to everyone in and near Evenley with whom I am connected
- Timely posts on Facebook similarly shared
- Emails to those whose email addresses I have (NB Email list for visits/ workshops)
- Info to the Village Correspondent for mention in the Advertiser (no longer in place)
- South Northants Council events page
- SNC Arts Calendar prepared by Arts Officer
- Brackley Town Council events listing which is shared with Brackley online post
- Specific flyers for some events eg pantomime to every household in the parish
- Word of mouth and some house to house calls

Kevin O'Regan
Arts Co-ordinator
20th March 2017