

28th September 2024

BIGLITTLE Arts Support Trust (BLAST)



Annual General Meeting — Chair's report.

Introduction

BLAST, now in its second full year since it was established, has qualified for charity status which will give it greater freedoms to apply for financial support and to be eligible for the gift aid system. Now fully established, and with the necessary routine meetings and practices in place, the volunteers that run the charity can invest greater time in the alumni network, news distribution and outside fundraising. A priority already underway, is to upgrade the website, membership process and event booking system to make it easier for members. The trustees are thankful to Suzie Wheeler, who in her busy life still finds time to maintain our online presence on a volunteer basis.

Sub committees

The two key sub-committees, '**Alumni**' and '**Hospitality**' have again flourished this year.

Alumni – The alumni committee have celebrated a wealth of significant Alumni events and achievements over the past year on social media and through newsletters etc. A well-established network continues to grow, with many being invited back by Colin to the school, to teach and assist with the current students' training and development.

A number of Alumni headed back to Bournemouth for Broadway Showtunes 2024, and drinks afterwards at the Marsham Court Hotel, which gave the opportunity for the cast to meet former students.

On behalf of the trustees I would like to thank Charlotte Clitherow (BLAST Alumni trustee), Michelle Guy (BLAST Alumni Ambassador), Kelly Pope, Colin Billing, Darrell West and Jennie Penney (BLAST trustee), for their continued efforts to maintain and increase the alumni network. Thanks also go to those alumni that reach back and tell us about their adventures – we love hearing from you!

The Hospitality Team – Busy throughout the year providing both hospitality for BIGLITTLE events, and organising and running events on behalf of BLAST, the team of volunteers that have come forward to help has grown and is now well established with people dipping in and out of events depending on their time and availability. There have been a lot of giggles this year, and the saying that 'more hands make light work' is certainly true, ensuring that helping is more fun than an endurance!

The Trustees and I are truly grateful to everyone who devotes their time and effort in whatever capacity, and new faces are always welcomed to the friendly team. Thank you especially to Jayne Harray, who has not only managed the bar stock for the year (a full workout every time stock is moved!), but also stepped up to lead the Summer Soiree and a significant element of Artsfest.

People to lead 'front of house' at each event are still required and it is hoped that each event will ultimately have its very own leader to organise the 'Dream Team'!! Please let me know if you can take on one event per year and make it special!

Fundraising

Fundraising both through hospitality and other initiatives, such as stewarding for Glastonbury Festival has led to over £13000 being raised towards BLAST objectives – a truly spectacular amount and an increase from 2022-2023. On behalf of the BLAST trustees I would like to express my thanks to everyone who has made this possible.

Grants made in accordance with our objectives

BLAST were delighted to be able to once again fund the orchestra for Broadway Showtunes this year (£6000). A production of that scale is a huge financial undertaking, and with rising costs, the luxury of a live orchestra may not have been possible without this donation. Not only supporting musicians in the industry, one of who is a BIGLITTLE alumni, this funding enhanced the experience of the 160+ students on stage performing, and of course the audience.

BLAST also funded three students from local primary schools, who had not done any performing arts training outside of school, on the BIGLITTLE Theatre School summer school projects; without financial support these three wonderful young people would not have had access to such a great opportunity. Providing this outreach is important to BLAST and an area that we hope to expand on next year.

A further outreach opportunity arose when the BIGLITTLE Foundation Plus students created and performed a fabulous show to local schools. Promotion of the Performing Arts is a BLAST objective, and the trustees were delighted to be able to provide a grant to help fund their project.

In the past, students recording vocal reels for auditions needed to fund their own backdrops and lighting. In September 2023 BLAST purchased a full set of equipment that is now available to senior students (trained to operate the equipment) so that they can record audition material without having the expense of purchasing the necessary items. Thank you to BIGLITTLE Alumni Nick Hayes, who ran workshops to train the students on how to set up and use the equipment.

Finally, this year BLAST were also able to provide a grant towards 'The Stationmaster' production in February 2024. This hugely challenging project for the Professional Development programme students, like in previous years, offers a rich and broad educational experience that significantly advances their skills and is not available elsewhere locally; the training benefit is unarguable. The cost of such an endeavour to the high production standards achieved cannot be covered by ticket sales alone, but the value to the students is immense. Hence BLAST decided to grant £1500 to enhance the problematic sound situation at BSG and to ensure the beautiful score could be played by live musicians.

Looking ahead

Moving into the new financial year, BLAST hope to increase their membership and take advantage of charity status to secure external grants that will enhance the BIGLITTLE Theatre School curriculum for current students and extend opportunities in the performing arts. There will be a focus on communicating the successes and experiences of our alumni back to current BIGLITTLE students and their families, and collaborating with Colin and his team on both outreach projects and internal projects that BLAST should support.

Finally, the trustees and I would like to thank Colin for his unconditional support and encouragement, and Mechelle and the office staff at BIGLITTLE who have helped BLAST throughout the year.

We look forward to an exciting 2024 – 2025 year ahead, and hope that our members will continue to support us moving forward.

Debs Douglas
Chair
BIGLITTLE Arts Support Trust