



## St George's Players Chair's Report 2020-21

Hi all. I write just as we pass the day of reflection, one year on from when the Covid pandemic struck. Without any hyperbole, the world did change overnight. My thoughts are with all those who have lost loved ones and been affected by the pandemic. With the rollout of the vaccine, the flicker of a light shining more bright at the end of this very long tunnel awaits.

Most of you will recall that in 2019 we celebrated being 85 years young. We were excited for 2020. A spring production was in the planning. Monthly readings were well underway. The play writing group was in full steam. Social events were planned. Covid brought all that to a shocking halt and probably for the first time in our 85 years, our future was worryingly uncertain. However, with 85 years in the tank and a brilliant team of creative, enthusiastic and, most of all, kind people Covid did not stop us in our tracks.

We didn't have to "go dark" (to use the old theatrical terms) and turn our lights off. Instead we turned our laptops on and achieved a first for St George's – our inaugural online production, Homework written by Howard Colyer (a local guy himself) in February 2021. Shelley Brownlee and Dan Sumners performed brilliantly telling a beautiful story of relationship, memory and experience.

This was the first time I had ever directed online - an experience in itself. The production team, led by Steve Connor, were simply fantastic. They knocked down every hurdle the virtual world gave them and brought their own creativity and drive to create as close to as real a theatrical experience possible (with a little help from Zoom). Over the two nights 83 devices and so perhaps 200 people saw the performance, similar to what we'd get in our big spring and autumn shows. My thanks again to everyone who made it possible and those who showed their support by watching online. Oh, and we were able to donate £350 to Dementia UK, our chosen charity for this performance. Well done us.

I wanted to give special thanks to Uli Wilfer and Marcus Ware, who inspired us to get virtual with a forerunner to Homework, getting a few of us to perform a short series of Shakespeare vignettes online in October 2020. They also kept the group activities going through most of the first and subsequent 'lockdowns', with frequent play readings and play watching taking place covering a variety of themes and genres. Without their commitment, and all those joining in the fun, the last year would have been a much less creative space.

This is my final report as Chair. I have decided, after 7 years in post, not to stand in the upcoming elections. It has been an brilliant time working with amazing people. The group is in great shape with a strong, loyal, local (and international) following, sound finances and people brimming with ideas and innovation. Stepping down doesn't mean stepping away. I look forward to working with the new committee and I hope to tread the boards again as we head away from the worst of Covid and into better times ahead. So for one last time, thank you and stay amazing.

***Stephen Gaskell, Chair***