

adc theatre

Annual Report 2019-2020



Chicago, ADC Theatre (Photo by Helena Fox)



Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, ADC Theatre (Photo by Timothy Winn)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Management Team and Executive Committee of the ADC Theatre are delighted to report on an artistically successful year, that managed to quickly adapt to the need to close our venues after two terms of performances.

Our two venues, the ADC Theatre and Corpus Playroom, have provided a wide range of opportunities for students in Cambridge's universities to learn about all aspects of theatre, from acting to directing, writing, backstage work and everything else that goes into making a show. While the ADC Theatre is not itself a student society, it is the home to most of Cambridge's most active student societies, including the Cambridge Footlights, Cambridge University Amateur Dramatic Club, and Cambridge University Musical Theatre Society.

We had two excellent terms of shows during Michaelmas 2019 and Lent 2020, with plenty of creative ambition in the plays, comedy shows and musicals being staged.

Unfortunately the ADC had to close to the public in March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and cancel the Summer season that it had programmed. However we managed to support the students as they stayed at home, allowing them to create shows virtually as part of our ADC Online season.

It has not been the easiest of years for the ADC, but we are glad to have gotten through the most difficult part, and have now managed to re-open as a socially-distanced venue in Autumn 2020. This report takes the opportunity to look over the highlights of our past year. We hope that you enjoy reading it.

2019-20 Management Team

Jamie Rycroft: Theatre Manager
Luke Dell: Operations Manager
Ellie Mitchell: Production Manager
Eduardo Strike: Technical Manager
Will Pears-Cooper: Box Office Administrator
Anna Perry: Office Administrator

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WELCOME

The 2019-20 academic year was very much a year of two halves: the first half characterised by two terms of exciting and ambitious shows at the ADC Theatre and Corpus Playroom, and a generally healthy financial performance; and the second half marked by the closure of the theatre due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a position of financial precarity.

Even as we had to close our doors to the public during a national lockdown, we worked quickly to come up with ways in which we could still support the creation of theatre by students, even if the creators in question had to stay at home. Within weeks of closing, we had programmed an entire Summer season of plays, comedy shows and musicals which would be performed and recorded by students at home, for audience members to then watch on our YouTube channel. Our **ADC Online** season was watched by over 19,000 people and ranged from online sketch comedy to a radio production of Oscar Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance*.

I will not pretend that there has not been difficult times during the last six months: it can be disheartening to see a theatre go dark and not be sure when it will be able to re-open. But I am proud of the speed with which the Management team adapted to working from home, and how the student community took the opportunity to express their theatrical creativity, even when the shows in question do not have a live audience.

Since the ADC's income is solely generated through ticket sales, bar sales and the generosity of customer donations, the lockdown period led to a significant reduction in revenue while still needing to pay for staff and building running costs. The government's furlough scheme helped us to save on staff wages, but even so we have reached the end of our financial year having made a significant loss. Thankfully the last few years of successful programming has generated financial reserves that the ADC could spend during a 'rainy day'. We are excited to re-open as a socially-distanced venue from October, but the significantly reduced auditorium capacity means we will continue to operate at a loss during Autumn. Without support from the University, the government or other sources of funding, the ADC will run out of financial reserves before the end of 2020.

Nonetheless, we are privileged to be in the position of being one of the few theatres in the country that is in the position to consider being able to re-open as a socially-distanced space. We expect to offset our financial losses in the long-term through a combination of applying to government and University sources of funds. In the short term, the generosity of our customers and patrons has been essential to ensuring our day-to-day survival as a venue.

One other way we plan to generate revenue while the capacity of our auditorium is so greatly reduced is to livestream our upcoming shows for people to be able

to watch from home or their college room. This is not only a way in which we can work around the logistical and financial difficulties of social distancing, but also an excellent opportunity for the student community to learn skills in the field of film as well as theatre. In a world where plays will likely contain an element of livestreaming for some time, I am proud that the ADC can continue to support the next generation of theatre creators before they enter the industry.

It is difficult to know quite how long the art of drama will be affected by the restrictions caused by social distancing. Certainly it has made the staging of our upcoming shows more difficult. But during difficult times, the arts are more important than ever for being entertaining and thought-provoking, for letting us reflect on what is important in life. In its 165-year history, the ADC Theatre has survived closure during the World Wars and various refurbishments. It has burned to the ground and nearly been flooded. I am confident the ADC will survive these difficulties, and continue to flourish as the forefront of British amateur theatre. And I am consistently amazed and humbled by the creativity and resourcefulness that the management team and student community have displayed in their solutions to problems. Art is in many ways about working with limitations, and I am excited to see the incredible work that students and the local community will create in the coming year.

Jamie Rycroft, Theatre Manager



Guys and Dolls, Corpus Playroom (Photo by Lucia Revel-Chion)

ABOUT US



The Rise and Fall of Little Voice, ADC Theatre (Photo by Cora Alexander)

The ADC Theatre and Corpus Playroom remain the centres of Cambridge's thriving drama scene. Productions at these venues are mounted entirely by students, amateurs, and volunteers. From actors and technical crew to directors and producers, everyone is united in a desire to enjoy and contribute to the creation of high-quality theatre.

Vibrant and varied programmes of drama, comedy, musical theatre and dance are presented at each venue by student groups during the University terms and by local groups long during the vacations. Typically each venue has staged two different productions each night.

Today we aim to provide opportunities for students and amateurs to experience and learn about all aspects of theatre, while presenting productions of the highest standard. We are a department of the University of Cambridge and the oldest University playhouse in the country. The ADC Theatre is still run almost entirely by students, with no faculty involvement.

Training, learning and support are at the heart of everything we do here and we are set up to encourage and to provide help and guidance to all who are interested in creating theatre from the seasoned habitué to the most inexperienced user.

All of this activity draws on a long tradition: plays have been presented on the site of the ADC Theatre since 1855 when the **Cambridge University Amateur Dramatic Club** (CUADC) was founded and the Club met and performed in the back room of the Hoop Inn on Jesus Lane. The coaching inn stood almost exactly where the ADC Theatre stands today.

At first the Theatre was run as a private members' club by the CUADC, but owing to growing financial difficulties, it was agreed in August 1973 that the Theatre would be leased to the University of Cambridge for 75 years.

Although the Theatre continues to be owned by CUADC, it is currently run as the smallest department of the University which has assumed responsibility for its management and maintenance. The CUADC remain as one of the resident companies of the Theatre.

The ADC Theatre has helped to launch the careers of many theatre luminaries, including Sir Ian McKellen, Rachel Weisz and Emma Thompson.

RESIDENT COMPANIES



Deathtrap, ADC Theatre (Photo by Cora Alexander)

There are several student companies resident to the ADC Theatre and Corpus Playroom. Not every show is produced by these companies, but the Theatre is the epicentre of their activities and their student committees are heavily involved in the programming of each season. Representatives of CUADC and Fletcher Players serve on the Theatre's Executive Committee.

CUADC

The Cambridge University Amateur Dramatic Club is the oldest and largest student drama society in Cambridge. The first performances on the site were staged by the founders of the Club in 1855. The CUADC present a varied programme of mainshows and lateshows at the Theatre each season, bringing together some of the finest young theatrical talent in the country and providing unrivalled support for their productions. The ADC Theatre and CUADC are very close partners as the Theatre continues to be owned by CUADC.

Fletcher Players

The Fletcher Players are the drama society of Corpus Christi College and the resident company at the Corpus Playroom. The Fletcher Players are integral to the running of the Playroom, helping with programming and producing up to six shows a term. Named after John Fletcher, alumnus of Corpus and Jacobean playwright, productions by the Fletcher Players showcase new writing, traditional classics, comedy and cutting-edge political drama.

Footlights

It is hard to think of a group that have had more influence on British comedy than the Cambridge Footlights. Their fortnightly Smokers, an original mix of sketches and standup, are the breeding ground for new talent. No other student comedy society champions new talent and new writing more consistently, or provides as many opportunities to try out and develop material.

CUMTS

The Cambridge University Musical Theatre Society are the source of the very best musical theatre taking place in Cambridge. In addition to their mainshows, the Society runs popular Bar Nights and a series of social events throughout the year. Its contribution extends far beyond showcasing existing onstage talent: it aims to encourage training in musical theatre and regularly invites experts and seasoned professionals in the field to run masterclasses for its members.

ADC THEATRE



The Comedy of Errors, ADC Theatre (Photo by Domininkas Žalys)

The ADC Theatre continues to be one of the most popular venues in Cambridge, both with those wishing to create high-quality theatre and those audiences who consume it. We are proud of the quality and quantity of the applications we received for our slots, and we continue to receive more applications for shows by students than we can program.

Over the past twelve months the ADC Theatre programme has offered something for everyone. Our Mainshows, which are performed every evening at 7.45pm, offer an opportunity for theatre creators to take on an artistic or technical challenge in a safe environment. Our Lateshows, which are staged every evening at 11pm, allow for a more Fringe theatre environment, providing high-quality comedy, student new writing, and even circus.

The Autumn 2019 season began with the home runs of **The Comedy of Errors** and the Footlights Tour Show **Look Alive!**, both of which had been touring in dozens of venues across the USA. This was followed by the first amateur production of Danai Gurira's play **The Convert** to take place in the UK. This powerful and often darkly hilarious play explored the story of a woman in 19th-century Zimbabwe who is stripped of her identity and religion while working for a Catholic family.

For the first time in over a decade, the ADC performed the timeless musical **Chicago**, in a dazzling, jazzy, toe-tapping rendition that sold

every available seat in the house! The ADC stage was transformed into a playground for the CUADC/Footlights Pantomime **Red Riding Hood**, with swings and slides giving the setting for a hilarious and surprisingly touching show.

A highlight of the Spring 2020 season was the second part of **Angels in America**, performing exactly a year after the first part and continuing the story in an epic, four hour-long production. **My Fair Lady** was performed in a way that honoured the classic musical while interrogating the complex gender and class dynamics in the show. We unfortunately had to close to the public halfway through our two-week run of **Guys and Dolls**, but there was no better show to finish on: one that fully showcased the talent of student performers, musicians and technicians.

The ADC Lateshow slot continued to be a home for shorter works of theatre and comedy, like the debut of the critically-acclaimed, student-written musical **Rust**, and a rendition of the ballet **Scheherazade** performed by the Cambridge University Dance Society.

Although the majority of our non-student amateur shows had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we still managed to host an incredible production of **Chitty Chitty Bang Bang** by the Pied Pipers, complete with an impressive hydraulic car, and Bawds presented **The Wind in the Willows**, a joyous show for all the family right before Christmas.

CORPUS PLAYROOM



Maurice, Corpus Playroom (Photo by Cora Alexander and Charlie Bentley-Astor)

Our L-shaped studio space is Cambridge's primary Fringe venue, showcasing a variety of productions with an emphasis on new student writing. Seasons at the Playroom and the ADC are devised holistically in order to ensure that the two work as complimentary spaces.

The President of the Fletcher Players, which is the dramatic society of Corpus Christi College, has a significant input into Theatre programming both specifically at the Playroom and more generally across the two venues.

Since 2011 the Playroom has been managed by the ADC Theatre and in that time we have seen an increase in audience numbers year on year, and a higher and more consistent calibre of production.

Much like the ADC Theatre, a typical week at the Corpus Playroom has a Mainshow (at 7pm), and a Lateshow (at 9:30pm). This allows the opportunity for both theatre and comedy shows to be performed.

With only 80 seats and an intimate auditorium, the Playroom is the perfect place for Cambridge's best student actors to sink their teeth into challenging roles. During Autumn 2019 and Spring 2020, the Corpus Playroom had a range of exciting, entertaining and thought-provoking shows. The season opened with the home run of **Pygmalion**, which had performed in venues across Asia, followed by **Bottleneck**, a powerful one-person show that commemorates the tragedy

of the Hillsborough disaster.

Some of the shows in this year's Playroom season sold incredibly well, such as the comedic, multi-roling staging of **The Hound of the Baskervilles**, and an adaptation of E.M. Forster's **Maurice**, produced in honour of LGBT+ History Month.

Being smaller than the ADC Theatre, the Corpus Playroom is the perfect place for new writing. **Spring Robin** provided a touching insight into student life, while **CTRL-Z** explored the lives of a commune who try to isolate themselves from all forms of technology. **Chalk** looked at the way in which people of different races and religion navigate their identities, while **Animals Who Ate Their Humans** crafted a macabre and surreal story set inside a destroyed pet shop in the 2019 Ukrainian war.

Outside of term time, we hosted Playroom shows produced by non-student companies, like the improvised comedy **The Apartment**, and a musical adaptation of Tennyson's **The Ancient Mariner**.

Unfortunately the Corpus Playroom had to close to the public in mid-March 2020, cancelling and postponing the student and non-student shows that we had programmed for the rest of the year. We have not been able to re-open the venue yet, but we are making plans as a team that should hopefully mean we can re-open the venue as a socially-distanced space in 2021.

“The ADC has provided, and continues to provide, a great deal of creative energy to the professional theatre.”

Sir Peter Hall

“The ADC is where I learned about Theatre.”

Miriam Margolyes

“Without the ADC Theatre I would never have become a director.”

Sam Mendes

“Few if any training grounds have contributed as much to the performing arts as the ADC Theatre.”

Michael Attenbrough

“We learned the hard way about planning, budgets, cost control, box office, marketing, and the price of failure. For me and my contemporaries, working at the ADC Theatre amounted to an exhilarating contradiction, the most audacious and yet the most responsible time of our lives.”

Sir Trevor Nunn

2019-2020 IN NUMBERS

98

productions at the ADC Theatre
and Corpus Playroom

887

students involved at our venues

36,605

tickets sold for events at the
ADC Theatre and Corpus Playroom

19,890

people watching ADC Online shows

412

performances at the ADC
Theatre and Corpus Playroom

1,643

students involved in cambridge drama

57%

average capacity

234

students involved with adc online



FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

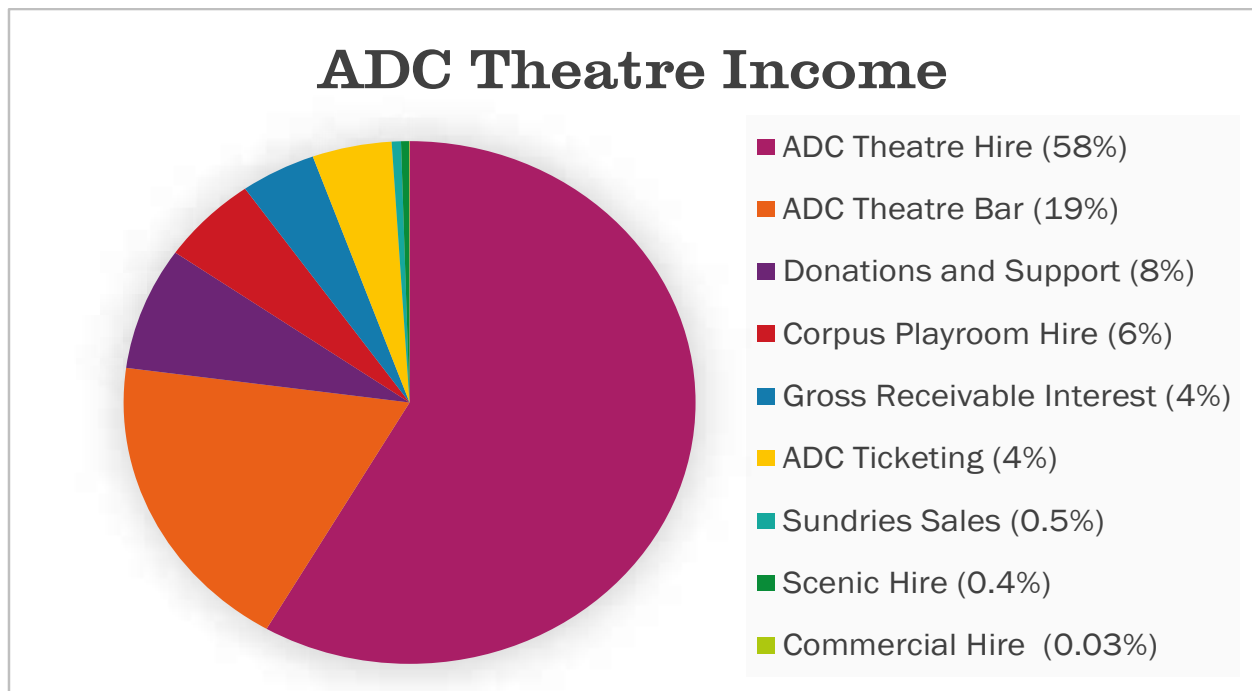


Angels in America: Perestroika, ADC Theatre (Photo by Lucia Revel-Chion)

The ADC Theatre performed well financially throughout Autumn 2019 and Spring 2020. By March 2020, the ADC had generated £112,000 in Theatre hire income, higher than the amount made over the same period in 2018-19. Over £34,000 of surplus had been generated in Bar sales, and Corpus Playroom income was on track to exceed its £35,200 budget for the financial year.

Having to close the ADC Theatre, ADC Bar and Corpus Playroom during the lockdown period caused us as an organisation to lose all forms of income with the exception of donations made by customers. The generosity of customers and patrons during our closure was important to keeping us afloat: we received £24,000 in donations and Gift Aid over the 2019-20 financial year, with £12,000 raised since the Theatre had to close. Through the furloughing of our staff we have managed to save £29,000 in salary costs.

The ADC had generated healthy reserves over the last few years, which have gradually been exhausted by the need to pay our staff and cover the running costs of the building. We expect to fully run out of financial reserves by the end of 2020. Despite our application to the Culture Recovery Fund being unsuccessful, we hope to continue to operate as a theatre through the possible financial support of the University, alongside the continued generosity of our patrons.



STUDENT INVOLVEMENT



The Deep Blue Sea, ADC Theatre (Photo by Helena Fox)

Involvement

Mindful of our wider educational role and constant desire to offer opportunities to all, the year began with a campaign to attract new students to the Theatre community. We worked closely with the CUADC Committee and hosted a social in the ADC Bar during the Friday of Freshers' Week, where new students could receive backstage tours and ask any questions.

CUADC continue to provide three Freshers' Shows that are entirely performed, produced and crewed by those new to Theatre. This year's shows were **Nell Gwynn** and **The Bloody Chamber** in the ADC Theatre, and **Beautiful Thing** at the Corpus Playroom. These shows continue to be the best showcase of Cambridge's freshest student talent.

New Writing

The ADC Theatre is committed to providing an opportunity for new student writing to be performed, and our programming structure allows for writers to apply with scripts without the need to have a full team already assembled. Both venues had productions of new writing over the last year that performed well financially.

The most impressive work of student writing continues to be the **CUADC/Footlights Pantomime**, an original musical that has been the largest and most financially successful show in the ADC Theatre's calendar since it began in

1970. Previous pantomimes have starred Stephen Fry, David Mitchell, Robert Webb and Simon Bird. This year's Pantomime was **Red Riding Hood**, filled with colourful characters and catchy music.

The medium of new writing does not only extend to original scripts: the ADC was privileged to host some excellent student adaptations of previous work. Sarah Taylor's theatrical rendition of Virginia Woolf's **The Waves** brought out the inherent drama and tragedy inside a rich and complex novel. On the complete other end of the scale, Joe Venable's irreverent musical adaptation of Shakespeare's **Cymbeline** explored the inherent silliness in this bizarre and often-overlooked play.



A View from the Bridge, ADC Theatre (Photo by David Swarbrick)

ADC ONLINE



3:06 / 29:12



paused. a musical in self-isolation

1,497 views · Premiered May 23, 2020

65 0 SHARE SAVE ...



ADC Theatre
432 subscribers

[ANALYTICS](#) [EDIT VIDEO](#)

A single parent, a dried-up vlogger, a couple in crisis, a pair of home-alone siblings, a retired lady and a climate scientist are thrown into uncertainty when the world around them seems to stop. This original musical, written and performed in isolation, follows its characters as they figure out

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9 Comments SORT BY



Add a public comment...

Screenshot from **paused. a musical in self-isolation**

Although the ADC Theatre and Corpus Playroom had to close to the public during the COVID-19 pandemic, we worked quickly to come up with an alternative way in which we could support the creation of theatre by students. With the student community having to study from home during their Easter term, the best way to do this was with an online season of shows, where students could record plays, comedy shows and musicals that would then be broadcast for people to watch or listen from home.

The ADC Theatre partnered with the student radio station CamFM to broadcast its season of shows, ranging from pre-existing works of drama like Sylvia Plath's **Three Women**, to a fortnightly broadcast of our **Musical Theatre Bar Nights**, delivering the best performances by student singers. Our radio season was well-received by customers, and students enjoyed the opportunity to not only be able to create works of theatre during difficult times, but to work with a medium they might not have used before.

At the same time as producing radio shows, the ADC also supported a season of video shows, recorded by students at home individually on webcams and then edited together into a show that was broadcast on the ADC Theatre's YouTube channel. Many of the fixtures of the ADC's usual season, like the **Footlights Smokers** and **Impronauts Quickfire**, swiftly transferred to an online medium, and although it was strange at first to produce comedy shows without a live audience, the shows impressively adapted to this new medium, using filming and editing techniques to add a new dimension to telling jokes and stories.

Our ADC Online season became a fantastic way to support new student writing, with an impressive range of creativity being unleashed even in such unusual times. **Sorry For Your Loss** told a dark, twisted story of a man giving a bizarre request to the mourning parents of the dead friend who once bullied him. The absurd **Adventures of Sharkman** skewered the superhero genre with an over-the-top parody. The student community even managed to create an entirely digital musical with **paused.**, which explored the strange and complicated feelings that many people had during the lockdown period.

For various reasons related to performance rights and the platforms on which we were broadcasting these shows, the ADC Online season was free to watch, although customers were encouraged to make a donation to support the Theatre. We are grateful to the student societies CADS, CAST, CUMTS and the Fletcher Players for making donations that helped to support the creation of this season of shows.

So far, nearly 20,000 people have watched the 70 shows that we produced and released online: on average, this equates to each show having a sold-out ADC auditorium viewing it. Our ADC Online season is still available for you to watch, for free, forever, so make sure to catch up with these shows at youtube.com/adctheatre

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT & SERVICES



Footlights Spring Revue: *Crossed Wires*, ADC Theatre (Photo by Michelle Spielberg)

ADC Ticketing

The Theatre continued to provide a secure, convenient and affordable Box Office service for events happening in and around Cambridge. We provided ticketing for 114 performances, selling 11,516 tickets. This generated an income of £10,809 to the ADC Theatre via our 9% Box Office Commission.

Clients for ADC Ticketing include Cambridge University Musical Society, City of Cambridge Symphony Orchestra, East Anglia Chamber Orchestra and Camerata Musica.

Most external events unfortunately had to be cancelled during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the ADC Management team has redesigned its ticketing service to be used for socially-distanced venues. We plan to resume our external events in the 2020-21 financial year, with upcoming concerts in West Road Concert Hall and St John's Chapel.

Hire Business

The provision of ready-assembled packages has continued to prove very useful and has encouraged those less experienced in technical theatre to hire equipment for external events and productions.

Commercial Hire

During August 2020, the ADC Theatre was hired out by Pauline Quirke Academy for a series of socially-distanced classes where young people local to Cambridgeshire could learn how to create musical theatre.

ADC TICKETING IN NUMBERS

114

performances

11,516

tickets sold

£10,809

income from ADC Ticketing

SUPPORT US



The Hound of the Baskervilles, Corpus Playroom (Photo by Ben Owen)

The ADC Theatre currently receives no external funding, yet we remain committed to keeping our ticket prices low and our bar affordable, so that both our student and local audiences can experience and enjoy the Theatre as frequently as possible. We are always mindful that any of our performers today could be the famous names of tomorrow and that they and our audiences can only thrive in a lively and affordable theatre.

We encourage participation in all forms and at all levels including:

As an ADC Friend

With your support we can ensure that our students get the best theatrical training we can offer, with industry standard theatrical equipment, financial support for ambitious and innovative productions and an ongoing investment in our backstage facilities.

You can help nurture new talent and get closer to the theatre you love by becoming an ADC Friend for £45 per year. As such you will enjoy:

- One free ticket to a show at the ADC Theatre or Corpus Playroom
- 10% discount on two tickets per show
- Special offers on selected events throughout the year
- Backstage tours and Friends-only events

As an ADC Fellow

For £150 a year, you can provide even more support to the Theatre you know and love, and can enjoy in return:

- Two free tickets to a show at the ADC Theatre or Corpus Playroom
- 15% discount on two tickets per show
- Special offers on selected events throughout the year
- Priority Booking on selected events
- Backstage tours and Friends-only events
- Optional recognition in our season brochures and annual report

You can become an ADC Friend or ADC Fellow today by visiting adctheatre.com/memberships

Many thanks to our current 79 Friends and 5 Fellows for continuing to support us.

THE TEAM



My Fair Lady, ADC Theatre (Photo by Emma Howlett)

2019-20 Executive Committee

Dr Mark Billinge [Chair]
Richard Barnes
Emma-Rose Bouffler
Sarah Cain
Luke Dell
Diane Gaskin
Nick Harris
Amy Hefferman
Sam Porter-Frakes
Lucia Revel-Chion
Jamie Rycroft
David Todd-Jones
Robin Walker
Isabella Woods

2019-20 Management Team

Jamie Rycroft: Theatre Manager
Luke Dell: Operations Manager
Ellie Mitchell: Production Manager
Eduardo Strike: Technical Manager
Will Pears-Cooper: Box Office Administrator
Anna Perry: Office Administrator

Casual Staff

30 casual staff members worked as Box Office Assistants, Bar Staff, Front of House Support and Playroom Duty Managers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we were able to furlough our staff to continue to pay them during the closure period.

The ADC continues to provide an opportunity for young people to gain work experience in customer service roles in a supportive environment and offers a means whereby they can be provided with positive references when they go on to apply for other jobs.

Thank you

We are, as always, grateful for the ongoing support of the University of Cambridge, the University Theatre Syndicate, the Executive Committee and the CUADC Committee and for the generous help offered by many of our friends, audience members, students and volunteers.

We are extremely grateful for the ongoing IT support provided by volunteers Alex Brett, Alan Egan and Paul Gotch.

Our warmest thanks go to everyone who has supported us in making this another memorable year.

adc theatre



The Convert, ADC Theatre (Photo by Adédámólá Láoyè)