



Metro Theatre – How we got here...

The Metropolitan Co-operative Theatre Society was founded in 1962 helped by a \$5,000 grant from the City Council to turn a derelict movie house into a live theatre.

Eleven companies, among which White Rock Players, Vagabond Players, North Vancouver Community Players and West Vancouver Theatre Guild, which still exist today, combined to present Metro's inaugural season. It was not until September of 1964, however, that they were able to move into the present location where an open house and black tie gala heralded the opening night of White Rock Players' production of **Dark of the Moon**. It was reviewed by James Barber, the Sun theatre critic, as "a good play, well executed and one that sets a standard for Metro that is worthy of their investment."

In its first few years, Metro seemed set for success. Although, the co-operative idea did not survive, Metro became an independent production company. During the early seventies, there was an exponential growth in Vancouver's professional theatre. As long as Metro had its grant, they were able to compete reasonably well, using a combination of professional and non-professional performers, directors and designers. Actors such as Robert

Clothier and Anthony Holland lent their experience while young performers like Brent Carver and Ruth Nichol honed their craft. Similarly, Metro was a training ground for young technicians, like Rob Moser, employed full time in the movie industry and Les Erskine, formerly of the movie business, now our very own GM and TD.

Sadly, in 1977, the BC Cultural Fund decided to withdraw Metro`s grant, on the grounds that there were more professional training facilities available(like Studio 58) and a grim struggle to stay ahead of the creditors began; so much so that in the summer of 1977, there was doubt Metro would be able to mount another season. At this point the President, David Reynolds, called a Board meeting to discuss the possible closure of the theatre. Fortunately for all concerned, Johnny Duncan, then president of Dunbar Musical Society, stuck his neck out, offering that, if the operation of the theatre was turned over to him for one year, he would mount a season at virtually no cost to Metro. Supported by a group of staunch volunteers like Gerry Amos, Margaret Cullinan, Eleanor Heath, Sean Ullmann and Peggy Delisle and backed by president, David Reynolds, Metro mounted a season of 5 productions, allowing other theatre companies to also take part. Joining him were people that came to be associated for many years with Metro`s success, the most influential being Jerry and Leslie White, Lillian McKittrick, Pat Waldron, Tom Shorthouse, Gordon Fairclough, Rosemary Heselton, Gwen Crowe, Hazel Cambrin, and Roy and Laura Burslem.

That season was a great success with every production gaining a good following and the picture began to look a lot brighter. Johnny Duncan was elected president, a capacity he continued to serve in for the next 7 years.

During this time, prompted by Gordon Fairclough and John Crittenden, Metro acquired the Oak Street Scene Shop where rehearsals take place and sets are built. In 1985, this dynamic duo was also responsible for starting the British-style Christmas pantomime with **Babes in the Magic Wood**, a co-production with Delta Players. What an auspicious beginning that was! From 1989 to 1997, the pantos were written and directed by Ellie King, who dubbed herself "Panto Queen." When she ended her "reign", Johnny took over, writing and directing every panto (with a few breaks for other directors) until he was succeeded in 2014 by Catherine Morrison who wrote and directed her first one, **Aladdin** and is now working on her third, **Robin Hood and Marion**.

Financial difficulties once again came to the fore in the 2012/13 season as we saw our number of season ticket holders decline and the ability to keep the theatre afloat seemed in doubt. This time another saviour came to the rescue - Les Erskine, our TD, who took on the role of General Manager and by dint of hard work and financial acumen turned things around once again. Production costs have been pared, a new computer programme installed in the box office, allowing patrons to buy tickets online, equipment has been upgraded and the theatre now fills its "dark" periods with rentals for everything from pre-school graduations to movie shoots. All this, together with dedicated staff and generous donations from our loyal patrons, is helping to keep Metro going for what we hope will be many years to come.

None of this would be possible without the contributions of our many sterling volunteers who have contributed over 1.2 MILLION hours of their time to mount productions and keep our public entertained. It is to them that we truly owe over a half a century of great entertainment!