



SMOCK ALLEY'S BAD REVIEW

WITH DUBLIN City Council (DCC) preparing to take over Smock Alley Theatre (SAT) in Temple Bar, the board of the linked Gaiety School of Acting next door will be hoping that the planned changes don't impact on their coffers.

Fans of Goldhawk will not be surprised that SAT is in a financial mess. It will be recalled (see *The Phoenix* 21/9/18) that the directors reported at the time that there was "a significant chance that Smock Alley Theatre will not be sustainable". Fast-forward to the accounts for 2021, which showed the accumulated deficit standing at €173,000.

Moreover, the auditors highlighted "significant uncertainties" and stated that they were "unable to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence to provide a basis for an audit opinion on these financial statements".

It was reported by the *Dublin Inquirer* that DCC is now preparing to take over the running of the venue and create a Dublin Municipal Theatre to operate out of the building, which has been leased from Temple Bar Cultural Trust since 2008.

The SAT board was chaired until the start of this year by banker-turned-financial consultant **Brendan Lynott** (ex-PTSB) and includes number cruncher **Gerard Dempsey** (ex-Diageo), Goodbody legal eagle **Danielle Fleming**, actor **Mark Lambert** and charity boss **Fiona O'Malley**.

A long-time director was SAT's founder and communications consultant, **Patrick Sutton**, who was the face of Smock Alley for decades. He was also the driving force behind the

Gaiety School of Acting, from which he stepped down as head honcho last month after 30 years.

The rather profitable Gaiety School – which is now run by UK theatre director **William Wollen** and chaired by Element Pictures group head of business affairs **Mark Byrne** – is closely tied to SAT, as is clear from the theatre's last accounts. The auditors state that, at the end of 2021, no less than €208,000 was owed by Smock Alley to Singman Ltd, the parent company of the Gaiety School.



Brendan Lynott

EN POINTE!

THE DECISION by **Anne Maher's** Ballet Ireland (BI) to withdraw a piece choreographed by Israeli **Ohad Naharin** from its Bold Moves programme raised eyebrows, given the predominantly conservative character of artistic companies dependent on the state for funding.

The move was a provocative

one from BI, which is chaired by the former MD of Irish Times Training, **Una O'Hare**. Other members of the establishment on the board are the recently arrived legal eagle **Jeremy Erwin**, a partner at the big Hayes Solicitors firm; and **Graham Reid**, the head of markets for consultancy giants EY Ireland.

Also arriving on the dance floor last year was senior civil servant **Róisín Cahillane**, who is principal officer at the Department of Transport, having previously served in the Departments of Health. *In situ* since 2022 is **Leo Moore**, global director of creative systems at Facebook parent, Meta; and **Karen Lowey**, ex-marketing director at EY Ireland.

BI has long been a favourite of the Arts Council's and this year has been allocated almost €½m in funding. While the Merrion Square Mafia has not expressed an opinion on the Gaza invasion, it will be interesting to see where it stands on its clients taking action. (In January, the Arts Council of England introduced a controversial policy on funding, with implications for individuals who make political statements.)

Some delicate footwork may be required.



APPEALING BEHAVIOUR

THE REVELATION last month that the IHRB had been described by consultants in 2021 as "not fit for purpose" was dismissed by the agency on the grounds that the new chief executive, **Darragh O'Loughlin**, has strengthened governance. Now O'Loughlin is preparing to fill the brand-new role of head of racing regulation and integrity.

Topping the list of responsibilities for the position is "management of referrals and appeals to ensure robust and efficient case management including preparation of cases, establishment of hearing panels and presentation

of disciplinary cases".

The requirement for applicants is to be legally qualified with at least five years' experience. Judging by the referrals committees' hearings in the week leading up to last month's closing date for applications, whoever gets appointed will need to be on their toes. No less than three of the four cases before the appeals panel were reversed.

In the first challenge, **Peter Allen** (chairman), **Nick Wachman** and **Paddy Molony** reversed the decision of the **Finbar Cahill**-chaired referrals committee, which also included **Mary Cosgrove**, **Anthony Byrne** and **Liam Walsh**. Allen *et al* agreed with all nine riders who had appealed a finding that they had erred in their judgement in a Dundalk contest.

In the second case, before Allen, Wachman and Molony, the panel again agreed with jockey **Wayne Hassett** that the **Robert Dore**-chaired committee – which also featured **John Tyrrell**, **Henry Lappin**, **Anthea Smyth** and **Paul**

Deegan – had got it wrong when giving him a 20-day ban at Dundalk racecourse.

The other amended appeal was heard by a panel chaired by **Peter Law** and including **John Murphy** and Byrne (who had been one of the race-night stewards at Dundalk that had wrongly penalised the nine jockeys). The trio agreed with rider **Philip Byrnes** that the stewards – **Frank Kenny** (chairman), **Laurence McFerran**, **Joe Collins**, **Rupert Macauley** and Deegan – had erred in their finding at Navan and, therefore, overturned his four-day ban.

There was yet another reversal for the stewards the following week, following a high-profile decision by the referrals committee, chaired by barrister and RTÉ board member **Susan Ahern**, to suspend a six-month training ban for **Tony Martin** after his horse, *Firstman*, had tested positive for lidocaine. The IHRB immediately lobbied in an appeal on the basis of leniency, resulting in a finding from the (retired judge) Peter Kelly-chaired panel that three months of the suspension should kick in next month.

MEYDAN RACECOURSE Dubai was the location on

Saturday afternoon where the spotlight really shone on Rebels Romance.

Ballydoyle's champion, Auguste Rodin, who had been so impressive at Dundalk under regular work rider Rachel Richardson, could only look on as Charlie Appleby's charge showed them all the way home in the Longines Dubai Sheema Classic.

Visibly disappointed that all good things come to an end, Aidan O'Brien said: "The race was a bit of a non-event. It was just one of those where it didn't happen."

Another Ballydoyle stalwart who "needed a change" has also been making waves. Seamie Heffernan, the best second jockey in the world, departed the training operation after nearly 30 years to pursue a freelance career.

With Heffernan being one of the oldest riders in the weigh room, a changing of the guard in Fethard was always inevitable.

Not content to dismount quietly, however, Heffernan rode a winner later on Saturday afternoon for his old friends, John Magnier and Paul Shanahan, when Shandy, trained by Fozzy Stack, won at Cork.



Darragh O'Loughlin