



SMOCK ALLEY'S PATHWAY

ACCOUNTS SIGNED off this month for Smock Alley Theatre (SAT) in Temple Bar make clear the state of affairs that has seen Dublin City Council (DCC) moving in to take overall control (see p28).

Fans of Goldhawk will not have been 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



Lucy Ryan

will not be sustainable". Fast forward to the latest accounts (for 2022), which show an accumulated deficit of €211,000.

The board put on their PR spinning hats to confirm that the commercial lease situation with landlord Temple Bar Cultural Trust and DCC is "an inappropriate financial model". As a result, to "secure a brighter future for the theatre... a new funding pathway" has been identified.

This means that the trading business (but not the legacy liabilities of the theatre) are to be transferred to a new legal entity, controlled by DCC, called Dublin Municipal Theatre Co.

Two years down the road, Goldhawk asked the council if this process has concluded but no response was received.

The good news in the accounts is that Smock Alley attracted 40,000 patrons during the year, although this included corporate shindigs and weddings in the banquet hall, which was responsible for 10% of the visitors.

The SAT board is down to just four members as a result of exits by chairman **Brendan**

Lynott (ex-PTSB) and **Gerry Dempsey** (ex-Diageo). Still listed as *in situ* are Goodbody legal eagle **Danielle Fleming**, actor **Mark Lambert**, fundraising consultant **Brendan Phelan** and charity boss **Fiona O'Malley**. Meanwhile, filling the roles of both director of programming & finance and company secretary is **Lucy Ryan**.

Happily, according to the new "funding pathway", all 20 staff employed in Smock Alley are being transferred to the Dublin Municipal Theatre company.

BOXED OFFICE

THE DREADFUL home box-office performance of Irish films will be familiar to fans of Goldhawk. Now, research from Crescine, a €4m cinema research project looking at seven small EU states, confirms the harsh reality.

A team of Irish-based film academics, **Judith Pernin**, **Daithí Mac Síthigh**, **Fiacre Muller**, **Nic Flanagan**, **Padraig Trehy** and **Rónán Ó Muirthile** – led by Dún Laoghaire's IADT – has found that "Irish domestic productions are receiving increasing support and festival recognition internationally... but are still poorly attended at home, comparatively to the popularity of cinema-going

overall".

The mechanics of the 'Irish' designation do matter, because some films considered 'Irish', due to tax breaks availed of and/or location or post-production work, could dramatically skew the figures. For example, **Ed Guiney** and **Andrew Lowe's** Oscar success, *Poor Things*, for Disney, might be counted, at least partially, as an 'Irish' film.

The actual box office numbers for Irish films in Ireland tend to be hard to find and, for example, **Désirée Finnegan's** Screen Ireland (SI) stopped updating its box office tables in late 2021. Even the promising Irish results for **Pat Collins's** over-hyped adaptation of John McGahern's *That They May Face the Rising Sun* are not on the public record. It has taken some €700,000 in total from UK and Ireland cinemas but there is no available breakdown between the two markets.

Former SI board member **Marian Quinn** will be hoping her second feature, *Twig*, released this week, will emulate the Collins film and not slip away like **Paul Duane's** *All You Need Is Death*, released in 19 cinemas in April for an underwhelming box office of €7,000. This represents the unfortunate fate of most Irish releases in Irish cinemas – 14 admissions per day over its opening weekend.



HASSETT'S ALLOWANCE

PUNTERS WHO backed **John 'Minella' Nallen's** *Pinball Wizard* in Sligo's Web The Tool Company Handicap on May 15 can feel a little hard done by.

Having finished second to **Carlo Bianconi** on the day, it later transpired that winning rider **Wayne Hassett** had claimed a 7lb allowance rather than the 5lb he was entitled to. This was due to the fact that Hassett had ridden *Pro Bono Alexander* to victory at Wolverhampton for trainer **Willie Browne** but had failed to notify the Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board (IHRB) of the result so that its archaic system could be updated. While Hassett explained that this was a genuine mistake on his part, it is clearly unsatisfactory – given the scale of funding the IHRB receives – that such

embarrassing mistakes continue to occur on a relatively frequent basis. The **Robert Dore**-chaired referrals committee – which included **Noel McCaffrey** and Dr **Paddy Molony** – had no option but to disqualify all seven mounts Hassett had ridden over a three-day period. They also fined Hassett €250 for failing to advise the Irish authorities of his UK winner.

HAVING HAD a recent four-day Navan ban for careless riding overturned on appeal, jockey Philip Byrnes again returned to the IHRB to appeal his latest ban for the same offence.

Once again, Byrnes insisted that the stewards on the day – Dr Tom McDonogh (chairman), Anthony Ryan, Nick Wachman, John O'Shaughnessy and H Hynes – had erred in their original decision.

The appeal was heard before the Laurence McFerran-chaired panel that included Meta Osborne and Nicholas Lambert.

The three amigos found that yet again the stewards at the course had erred in their original decision and therefore allowed the appeal.

ABANDONING ADO

LUSK TRAINER **Ado McGuinness**, who has been having a quiet season, delivering a 6% strike rate, was dealt a further blow with the announcement that Shamrock Thoroughbreds is removing all of its 11 horses from his care, following a split with assistant trainer **Stephen Thorne**, who is also the syndicate manager.

The horses will now be trained by **Jack Davison** until Thorne is granted a licence in his own right next year. Last week Davison saddled his first runner for the syndicate – *Shamrock Breeze* – to land a gamble in the two-year-old maiden at Down Royal.

Shamrock Thoroughbreds' *Laugh A Minute* was the opening winner of the season for McGuinness's Skylark House Stables in late April. The same horse had been the subject of

no little controversy in 2022, when the trainer was fined €750 (seen to be very lenient at the time) for failing to present him for post-race sampling following a request from the chief Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board (IHRB) veterinary officer, **Lynn Hillyer**.

Hillyer had requested the sample having noticed a venepuncture with traces of blood on *Laugh A Minute's* neck, which had appeared to be relatively recent. Having run in the Curragh's Rockingham Stakes at 3.10pm, *Laugh A Minute* was seen on CCTV leaving the course at 3.31pm. McGuinness put the over-

sight down to a "communication breakdown" and "human error".

Separately, in 2017 McGuinness was given a two-year suspended ban by the IHRB following his court appearance relating to the possession of unauthorised animal remedies at his stables.



Ado McGuinness