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producer £5m if a musical goes wrong'

Save 1 Sir Howard Panter and Dame Rosemary Squire, have formed a new company, Trafalgar Entertainment Group CREDIT: DAVID ROSE By Nicola Venning

Follow ~ 15 APRIL 2018 • 9:02AM ir Howard Panter, 68, is a theatre impresario who ran Ambassador Theatre Group (ATG), one of the world's largest live-theatre companies with wife, Dame Rosemary Squire OBE.

The couple stepped down as joint chief executives last year, and went on to launch a new theatre company called Trafalgar Entertainment Group. Panter has one daughter, Kate, 15, with Squire and two older step-

children, Jenny and Dan. He lives in Surrey and has a second home in Cornwall. How did your childhood influence your work ethic

and attitude to money? My father was a director at EMI in electronics in London and my mother was a housewife, so my background is middle-class managerial.

Both were part of the war generation and the keynote was that you did not waste anything. So it was quite frugal. I am mildly dyslexic and in my day that meant you were pretty much at the bottom of the class, so I had to create or find practical things I was

good at. I started a rock 'n' roll band, a pirate radio station and I ran the school

theatre. Then I went to Lamda (The London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art) to do its technical theatre and stage management course and learn a craft.

What was your first job? My first job was moving boxes around in the storeroom at Woolworths when I was 15 to earn pocket money.

Power couple: Panter and Squire previously founded the Ambassador Theatre Group, one of the world's largest live-theatre companies CREDIT: REBECCA REID/EYEVINE

at school.

know how you were going to pay the bills? Oh yes, absolutely, when I left Lamda I had no money. I literally had 14 shillings and thruppence and had to work at anything and everything in the theatre to pay my rent and buy my soup. It has stood me in very

In the early days of ATG, we remortgaged my flat in West Kensington

twice and Rosemary had to sell her prize red BMW car to pay the

wages. We were employing about 50 to 60 people then, and it was

certainly a worrying time. But we got through it and paid the bills.

No I didn't, but I did want to work in theatre. I was doing shows in

fringe venues like the Kings Theatre and became a producer almost by

evolution. Producing allowed me to put things together, as I used to

Have you always wanted to be a producer?

What has been your best buy?

ticketing and merchandise).

actor] Richard O'Brien.

good stead, as now I know how everything works.

Has there been a time in your life when you did not

Rosemary and I had worked out that owning theatres was also a very important part of the theatre industry. So about 25 years ago we decided to buy a lovely freehold London theatre, The Duke of York's, as well as a regional arts complex in Woking.

We had very little money ourselves, and had to raise several millions.

We moved from just doing productions in the West End to having a

fully integrated business theatre model (productions, theatres, bars,

When did you realise it was all going to work out?

which was hell to find. But it was a financial turning point.

When we started to behave like a proper, corporate, grown-up company with proper accounting systems and a number of grown-up investors [including shipping magnate Sir Eddie Kulukundis, property development brothers Peter and Sir John Beckwith, and [the late] insurance broker David Beresford Jones. The Rocky Horror Picture Show was also a very important moment and has always been very good to us over many years. We administer the

licence to produce the musical around the world with [writer and

at the Old Vic Theatre from about 1991 for two years and was a big

investors, many of whom have stayed with us to this day.

one year and out of fashion the next.

same: you cannot bottle that chemistry.

with imagination, to maximise it.

wonderful.

actors had not done before.

It can easily cost £5m.

took off?

Carmen Jones, adapted by Oscar Hammerstein II, was also good. It ran

success. Then we took it around the world and it brought in a lot of new

What is the biggest financial lesson you have learnt?

I think it is true to say that it's very hard to make money in theatre and

I did a play years ago, *And a Nightingale Sang*, with the wonderful Patricia Routledge and Gemma Jones. No one came. It was an absolute disaster. But then you get involved with the fabulous Jersey Boys and success just keeps on coming because it is an accessible and entertaining piece

Each time you approach something, it has to be attacked freshly and

Before we do a particular production, we do a lot of research and make

sure that we know who our customers are and what they like. Casting is

very important. Getting Keira Knightley to appear in *The Misanthrope*

What has been your best business decision?

You're always trying to find the right people for the right roles; it's an instinct and chemistry thing. You can get a huge satisfaction when you get that combination right. And your worst?

Possibly backing some writers and directors who didn't quite work out.

There are big sums of money involved when a big musical goes wrong.

What did you treat yourself to when the business

The very first thing I bought was a bigger car. A Saab, I think. I collect

Do you have any financial goals? To grow the new company Trafalgar Entertainment Group. That's the main goal over the next three to five years - and for it to be as diverse

It helps in some areas but I think it is very important that one's

children, for example, don't become "rich kids" as it were. We're very

disciplined about that. Ours will do work, and will do so for some time

more hairy.

and independent as it can be.

Does money bring happiness?

before any money comes their way.

can sometimes turn people a bit nasty.

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charities. I am chair of Rambert Dance Company.

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We also had to put down an initial non-refundable deposit of £30,000,

very easy to lose it. Theatre is very volatile and you can be in fashion of work. Truly, you talk to anyone in the theatre and they will say the

was good. It was the first thing she had done on stage and she was Having Ewan McGregor appear as Sky Masterson in our West End production of Guys and Dolls was a good move. He was very good, as was James McAvoy in *The Ruling Class*. They were all parts those

contemporary British painters and I particularly like West Country painters, like Trevor Felcey and Anthony Frost. When I have a bit of money I go and treat myself to a painting or two.

Panter says getting Keira Knightley to appear in The Misanthrope was a good business decision CREDIT: PASCAL LE SEGRETAIN/GETTY IMAGES Do you use cash, debit or credit cards?

I use cards more than I should, given the cost of them, but I absolutely

now pay them off every month. There was a time when it was a bit

Is there anything you don't like about handling money?

I don't like it when money turns people into mean and inhumane folk. I

think it's important to keep humanity at the front of things and money

Yes. We are involved in a number of arts, education and health

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