

Belfry Theatre 2020 Annual Report Report From The President of the Board

It is my great honour to provide the annual report of the President of the Belfry Theatre.

We began the 2019-20 season with great optimism. We were excited by the season chosen by our Artistic Director, Michael Shamata, and were looking forward to sharing it with our audience. However, the world changed.

As 2019 became 2020 it became clear that the world was going to face a catastrophic health and economic crisis – the scale of which we had not experienced in over a century. Soon after the conclusion of our powerful production, *The Ministry of Grace* by Tara Beagan and right in the middle of the SPARK Festival we made the difficult, but inevitable, decision to close the theatre. First it was the cancellation of the second week of the Festival and shortly thereafter, the remainder of the season.

In closing the theatre we recognized the significant financial impact this would have on the actors, designers, directors and companies contracted for the remainder of the season. This was our first priority and I am pleased to report that we met or exceeded all contractual obligations to the Belfry's contributing artists.

The arts are familiar with economic and financial challenges. Even at the best of times theatre is a difficult business. This pandemic, however, has produced a set of circumstances unlike any that we have confronted before. It has changed the very nature of our business. Theatre traditionally brings people together to be entertained, informed or to have their imagination or beliefs challenged. It is a powerful, collective experience. Currently, we are not able to do this and when we will be able to do so again is uncertain.

Despite the challenges there is much that we can celebrate.

The support of our patrons has been remarkable and has inspired both the Board and the staff. Literally thousands of subscribers chose to donate the value of their tickets for cancelled shows. Additionally, many businesses continued their support despite getting no tangible benefit in return. This made a significant difference to the Belfry at a time when expenses had been incurred but revenue had disappeared. The generosity of our subscribers and our friends in business will not be forgotten.

The support of governments and foundations has also been exemplary. I would particularly like to acknowledge the federal government and the Vancouver Foundation. Both quickly recognized the fragility and importance of the cultural sector and provided much needed assistance. We are incredibly grateful.

The Belfry is fortunate to be led by our Artistic Director, Michael Shamata and our Executive Director, Ivan Habel. Between them they have kept the Belfry focused on the future and on developing innovative programming which will allow the theatre to continue serving our community. Michael and Ivan are supported by a remarkable staff. Individuals who have responded to uncertainty with unmatched professionalism.

I would also like to thank the Directors of the Society who continue to provide advice, support, direction and oversight as the theatre responds to the myriad of challenges presented by the pandemic.

The ongoing financial contribution of public funding agencies at the federal, provincial and local level must also be acknowledged. The Belfry could not exist without this support. Equally important is the contribution made by individuals and companies in support of the Belfry. These funds both support our operations and validate our role in the community.

The past year has been difficult and it is unclear when some sense of normalcy will return. The Belfry, however, will manage this crisis. In its almost fifty years, the Belfry has survived many challenges. It will survive this one and it will prosper.

Thank you.

Richard Brownsey

Board President