

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT

We have much to celebrate!

In 2023/24, our productions demonstrated the company's exceptional range and versatility. Each play exemplified well-crafted scripts, bold direction, and inventive design, and was brought to life by passionate and committed actors. Each show resonated with audiences and prompted conversations about issues both timely and timeless.

We had many sold-out performances thanks to our loyal subscribers and an increasing number of first-time audience members. Ticket sales were supported not only by our artistic achievements, but by two key policies: Pay What You Want and Pay it Forward. These innovative policies are reducing barriers, growing our audience, and supporting revenues. I am also exceedingly grateful to report that generous contributions from donors and sponsors surpassed our targets. Our partnerships with public funding agencies also led to a significant level of support. These contributions are all critical to our operations.

I cannot discuss our financial success, though, without also mentioning our Director of Finance, Patricia O'Brien. After forty years of exceptional service, Pat is leaving the Belfry to enjoy a well-earned retirement. I cannot adequately express how grateful we are for all that Pat has given the theatre. I am still firmly in denial that I will no longer have ready access to her depth of knowledge and her fabulous, hilarious, and loving presence.

Though there were many highs, last year also held challenges and lessons. We faced a serious decision regarding *The Runner*, a play about an Israeli man facing a religious and cultural dilemma. The context within which the play would be presented and witnessed had changed entirely. We listened to members of our community, including those with ties to both sides of the conflict. Our concern was that putting *The Runner* onstage would further polarize our community, rather than fostering healthy dialogue.

For clarity, the decision was initially discussed with the board and many considerations were raised, including the long-standing principle that artistic programming decisions are the purview of the theatre's Artistic and Executive directors. The board recognizes that staff carefully considered this decision and fully supports Michael and Isaac.

I can only begin to imagine how painful these events have been for those directly affected and I want to thank every community member that wrote, called, and met with us to share their thoughts, feelings, and stories – both those that supported our decision and those that strongly disagreed. I am truly grateful to learn from you all and we at the Belfry will continue to listen.

I would like to congratulate Michael Shamata and Isaac Thomas for delivering an exceptional season and for leading the theatre with integrity and kindness. Michael, as always, you touched our hearts profoundly with your skillful work. And Isaac, your dedication and tenacity have both supported our artistic excellence and strengthened our community connections. Thank you both. I would also like to thank the entire Belfry staff. I wish I could list you all. I have never encountered such a passionate and committed group of people. The success of the 2023/24 season is the direct result of your work.

Finally, I would like to thank the Directors of the Society for their steadfast support. I am humbled and honoured to serve and be surrounded by such a depth of knowledge and experience. I would also like to thank Joan McArthur-Blair, Cathi Charles Wherry, and Stephen Tax, for serving on the board. I will sincerely miss your presence and guidance but am very grateful for the time, energy, and insights you have shared with us.

I am very excited for the year ahead and hope to see you all soon at the Belfry!

With gratitude,

Alison Watt