

2020 Artistic Director's Report - Burnt Thicket Theatre

What a long and strange year 2020 was! We started with two remounts and tours of *Every Brilliant Thing* [EBT] and *My Little Plastic Jesus* [MLPJ], the latter of which closed the day before the first lockdown. I could not be more proud of the artists who created these shows or more satisfied with the artistic work we offered to patrons. Audience engagement with both productions was tremendous, with many patrons returning to bring friends. We had comments about how the stories touched wounded places in audience members' hearts with transformative, healing effects. We told powerful stories that offered positive change for people's lives.

EBT led to good relationships with the artistic leadership of presenters Broadway Theatre and Globe Theatre. Both have asked us to propose future productions for their seasons. It also opened the door for me to be mentored by Ruth Smillie—former A.D. of Globe Theatre—a huge gift. Our MLPJ tour advanced our relationship with presenting partner New Leaf Network and refined our processes for future house-shows.

In early 2020 we pitched a co-production of Rosebud Theatre's *The Mountaintop* to Persephone Theatre for their mainstage. This rendition of Martin Luther King Jr.'s final 24 hours was offered a limited spot in their Deep End series, but was unable to move forward due to budget limitations and COVID. Considering the significant transitions at Persephone related to the Black Lives Matter movement, we will bring this production back to the table.

We continued our work with emerging playwrights, supporting the development of Wanita Bird's new play *Kneel Down* with dramaturge Curtis Peeteetuce, which explores historic stories of systemic racism in our city of Saskatoon. We began development of Sienna Holden's new musical *Breathe*, a challenging drama about relationships with family, with ourselves, and the effects of opioid addiction. Receiving a SK Arts production grant allowed us to bring singer/songwriter Karla Adolphe and dramaturge Yvette Nolan to the project.

When COVID-19 postponed our live productions, we learned to create for the digital world. Instead of a live version of *Delft Blue* by Andrew Kooman, we crafted an innovative online play reading for Remembrance Day, transcending the limitations of Zoom to give audiences the feel of a live in-person reading. Our livestream *Christmas Presence* show allowed us to include people from across the country, as performers and audience members.

In 2019-2020 we explored what it would take for Burnt Thicket to create a fiction podcast, applying for several grants in the months before COVID. Then the pandemic hit, we received a SK Arts Microgrant, and *Tied In Knots* moved from an idea to a reality. We learned best practices from five established and emerging audio fiction producers, and contracted five playwrights to create or adapt existing scripts for audio drama.

We've long had equity of gender diversity among our contracted artists and board leadership. We are committed to do the same with playwrights and with our staff. We are also committed to close the gap between our values of ethnic diversity and our actual practice with representation in leadership, programming and artists.

Thank you for your support of Burnt Thicket,



Stephen Waldschmidt, Artistic Director

2020 By the Numbers

932 people saw EBT in Saskatoon & Regina

281 people saw MLPJ in 9 living rooms across SK & AB

Over 1300 people engaged with our digital performances

43 artist contracts in 2020 (compared with 11 in 2019)

2020 President's Report - Burnt Thicket Theatre

The year 2020 was a remarkable one. The global pandemic may have stopped in-person theatre, but it did not stop Burnt Thicket Theatre from working towards its' mission to tell stories that change people's lives. We were grateful to have produced two productions before the pandemic hit, and once we realized in-person events would not be possible for the indefinite future, we adapted to hosting theatre virtually.

Despite the dramatic impact to the theatre world, Burnt Thicket has continued to build its' presence in the Saskatoon community, and beyond. One of the benefits of our new virtual reality is that we are not bound by geography. We have been able to reach audiences that we couldn't have before. This growing presence and positive reputation are proven in the affirming reception of our online productions and in the successful bids for a number of production grants in 2020 (two from SK Arts and one from Creative Saskatchewan). In addition, we benefitted from the Artvest program, which, along with training and mentoring, provided a matching grant to corporate donations. We were able to match this in full, thanks to the ongoing support of our major sponsor, Shercom Industries.

Riversdale Neighbours Church and individual donors have maintained their commitment to support our work and we are very grateful for their contributions, particularly in this unimaginable year. Their support, the grants we received, and the 89% increase in tickets sales (compared to 2019) have ensured Burnt Thicket is on good financial standing going forward.

Our 2020 Board work involved changing our fiscal year to better align with the theatre production season (now beginning July 1). We developed a harassment policy and continue to build processes to strengthen the operations of Burnt Thicket. Also in 2020, we added a new staff position (Administrative Marketing Associate) and increased our overall staff labour capacity by 50%.

As I reflect on 2020, I would like to thank our Artistic Director, Stephen Waldschmidt, who has provided much vision to adapt and ensure our mission continues. I also thank Brendan Andrews, our bookkeeper (and board member), who took on more responsibility in the absence of a treasurer for most of the year. Thank you to our board, staff, and artistic associate. Your work is invaluable, and I am grateful for your commitment to Burnt Thicket.

As an organization, we are exceedingly grateful to all the patrons who came to our shows, whether in-person or in the virtual world. What would theatre be without you? Looking ahead to 2021-22, we are excited for what the future holds for Burnt Thicket Theatre, as we expand the work of our mission to tell stories that change people's lives.

Respectfully,



Carol Tebay, Board President