

January-June 2021 Artistic Director's Report - Burnt Thicket Theatre

In the first half of 2021, our company continued to adapt to the challenges of COVID-19. We implemented our research of best practices from 6 established audio theatre producers and launched our first audio drama series *Tied In Knots*. This podcast of five new plays for the ear shared stories that embrace the challenges of marriage with audiences worldwide, supported by a micro grant from SK Arts. The series was well received by listeners, attracted significant media attention, offered great learning experiences for our company, and brought satisfying work to the artists involved (as this pandemic has canceled many of their projects). We experimented with encouraging listeners to engage each episode with their significant other or loved ones, adapting our practice of post-show conversation with audiences in hopes of connecting each story with our actual lives and communities beyond the performance.

Three of the *Tied In Knots* plays (by Jeany Van Meltebeke, Aaron Krogman and Krista Marushy) began development with Burnt Thicket Theatre [BTT] years ago, intended for live performance in a Calgary coffeehouse over Valentine's Day weekend. We worked with those playwrights to adapt their scripts for radio drama and commissioned Saskatoon playwrights Yulissa Campos and Curtis Peeteetuce to create two more scripts. Aaron offered the short film version of his script (directed and produced for his graduate thesis project at Regent College), the audio tracks from which Tim Bratton incorporated with additional material for the audio drama. Following virtual rehearsals with four Saskatoon-based casts, we recorded each play live in separate temporary recording booths in the basement of Courts of Praise Church (who generously donated their venue). Tim led the post-production work of editing each piece with sound design.

We continued development of Sienna Holden's new musical *Breathe*, a challenging drama about relationships with family and oneself in recovering from opioid addiction. We added composer/arranger Alixandra Cowman to the team with songwriting consultant Karla Adolphe and dramaturg Yvette Nolan. We supported Wanita Bird's script development of *Kneel Down*, with dramaturg Curtis Peeteetuce, an exploration of systemic racism in our city's history. We also pitched a larger audio drama series called *We Treaty People* to Canada Council's new Digital Now Grant Program, which was funded in August and will form much of our 2021-2022 work (not in this 6 month fiscal year).

We were invited to apply for a SK Arts Professional Arts Organizations Lite grant, a one-year operational funding stream for emerging companies. Such access points to operational grants from public arts funders have been scarce in the past. We're grateful to have received that grant for our 2021-2022 season which allowed us to more than double our staff capacity this summer, following a hiring process in June. We welcomed new staff Yulissa Campos (Producing Associate) and Brooklynn Bitner (Marketing Associate).

We've long had equity of gender diversity among our contracted artists and board leadership, and have begun to close gaps in ethnic diversity and gender equity among our staff, playwrights, programming and artists. We committed to participate in a long-term Cultural Pluralism training cohort hosted by SK Assoc. of Theatre Professionals in 2021-2022.

Thank you for your support of BTT,



Stephen Waldschmidt, Artistic Director

January-June 2021 By the Numbers

Over 1250 people engaged with our digital performances
(46% from SK, 35% from the rest of Canada, 14% from
the United States, 5% from elsewhere worldwide)
26 artists contracted in these 6 months

January-June 2021 President's Report

"Change" is the word that comes to mind when I think about the first half of 2021. Change in very good ways! Despite the ongoing pandemic and uncertainty that goes with it, Burnt Thicket Theatre has grown and is thriving. We are extremely grateful to have been awarded a substantial grant through the Saskatchewan Arts Board. This grant has funded 3 part-time positions, expanding our capacity to tell stories that change people's lives.

We have continued our dramatic work, offering a series of relationship-themed audio dramas over the Valentine's season. In addition, we have been working with playwrights in developing plays on important issues such as addiction and being treaty people.

Burnt Thicket's presence is growing in the Saskatoon community. We have seen great success in our bids for grants from the Canada Arts Council and Creative Saskatchewan, in addition to the grant from the Saskatchewan Arts Board. For a second year, we are benefiting from the Artvest program, which is providing training, mentoring, and funding through a matching grant.

We are incredibly grateful for the ongoing support of our annual sponsor, Shercom Industries, and of our donors, including the Riversdale Neighbours Church. Our work would not be possible without their support and those of our granters.

As Board President, I am thankful for the work of our board and for their passion and engagement to see this organization succeed. I am also thankful for the work of our staff and artistic associate. Finally, I am grateful for the leadership of our Artistic Director, Stephen Waldschmidt. He has implemented and is navigating the changes that are making Burnt Thicket stronger, while maintaining our mission to tell stories than change people's lives. I am excited to see what the 2021-2022 season will bring!

Respectfully,



Carol Tebay, Board President
Burnt Thicket Theatre