

2023-2024 Artistic Director's AGM Report



This past season we produced a remount of *Every Brilliant Thing* for presentation at Bez Arts Hub, a performing arts venue and training centre in Langley, BC. The show was experienced by more than 425 people, and brought together performer Sarah Robertson (who performed in our 2022 production at Rosebud Theatre) with stage manager Mackenzie Dawson (stage manager for the 2020 tour and production assistant in 2018), blending past creative teams. Audience responses to the show and the talk-backs were again enthusiastic and deeply meaningful, delving into the play's topics of depression, suicide, emotional wellness, and gratitude, dismantling stigma, building empathy and compassion. Performer Sarah Robertson shares our conviction that this story about mental health needs to be told as widely as possible. This remount helped us present a 20-minute excerpt of the play at the Organization of Saskatchewan Arts Councils' Showcase 2023. That performance and the myriad of significant conversations with arts council representatives over the weekend event led to OSAC inviting us to tour the play for 7 weeks across SK this season, to 20 regional arts venues and 7 high schools.

We also produced an updated version of Tim Bratton's show *My Little Plastic Jesus*, performing in Saskatoon living rooms over two weekends, across southern Ontario for two weeks in the fall, and across western Canada from here to Victoria in the spring. We connected with new audiences in 26 cities through these tours (and E.B.T. in Langley), 16 of which were our first time performing there. Tim's solo show was experienced by more than 700 people, mostly in living rooms and a few small venues like a comedy club, art gallery, and church hall. The new content in the play incorporated the increasing polarization in the political and religious realms worldwide, including the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection in Washington, DC. Talk backs after every performance again brought a very wide range of people together, often from those with opposing viewpoints, growing constructive dialogue and mutual understanding, humanizing "the other" across the divides of our subcultures.

We again partnered with Ay Caramba! Theatre, sponsoring and collaborating in their 2nd annual presentation of RASTROS, a festival celebrating Latin American Heritage month, here in Saskatoon one weekend and in Regina on another. Rastros is Spanish for paths, and the events included performers from across SK, traditional food, a latin dance party, and a conversation about the meaning of Latinidad, ethnicity and culture.

All 18 episodes of our *We Treaty People* fiction podcast were presented by Native Earth Performing Arts in Toronto (Canada's oldest professional Indigenous-led theatre) in their Weesageechak annual festival of Indigenous work. This series exploring the question, "What does it mean to embrace all our relations?" found new audiences worldwide through Native Earth and it continues to do so.

Our *Christmas Presence* variety show and our production of Yvette Nolan's *The Unplugging* had to be postponed due to illness in the creative teams. This was disappointing and unfortunate, but new partnerships have emerged for both projects, which Board President Jessica Isaak details in her report that follows.

Ed Mendez joined our staff (now of five) as our first-ever General Manager, which has been a great boost for our operational capacity. Ed's work led to our receiving significant grants for producing *The Unplugging* from Canada Council for the Arts and from Dakota Dunes Community Development Corporation. This Canada Council grant makes our company eligible to apply for operating funding in 2024-2025, which is both a milestone and a great opportunity.

We continued to facilitate Sienna Holden's development of the new musical *Breathe*, a challenging drama about recovery from opioid addiction, bringing the script and music to performance-ready drafts. This

culminated in a week-long workshop with actors, director, playwright, music arranger, music director, and musicians collaborating on a staged workshop reading and sing-through, with free admission for the public. The artists' and audience's responses to the story and songs convinced us that we need to produce this musical. The work with actors and the dynamic conversation with the audience after the public reading provided the creators with much insight and guidance for a final round of revisions. We began sharing the work with other theatre companies, seeking partners around Canada for co-production and/or touring.

We continued to work towards integration in equity and diversity among contracted artists, programming, and leadership, and we are committed to continue closing gaps. We refined our strategic goals and priorities as part of annual strategic planning processes with our board. We worked to cultivate healthy organizational culture for our staff through an increased regularity in meetings, check-ins, and an expanded annual review process, while maintaining that same priority of healthy culture-building for artists and audiences.

With respect and gratitude for your support of BTT,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Waldschmidt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "S".

Stephen Waldschmidt, Artistic Director

2023 – 2024 President's Report

Burnt Thicket Theatre (BTT) is proud of the work it does to tell stories that kindle hopeful change in people's lives. Our 2023 – 2024 efforts were examples of such initiatives. As I reflected on the work of this previous year, it occurred to me that collaboration was a common theme, evident in several of our productions and decisions.

An updated version of our one-person play, *My Little Plastic Jesus*, completed two successful tours, reaching new audiences of people in Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario. We partnered with The New Leaf Network to expand our audience base across Canada.

Our production of *Every Brilliant Thing* was presented at the Bez Arts Club in Langley, BC, last September. Additionally, performing it at the 2023 Organization of Saskatchewan Arts Councils (OSAC) Showcase led to the SK Arts Councils inviting us to bring the play to twenty-four cities and towns across the province this season.

Our goal last year was to produce *The Unplugging*, but in the face of unforeseen and uncontrollable circumstances, we postponed that show until this year. We are pleased to partner with Live Five Theatre in Saskatoon to feature *The Unplugging* at The Refinery from February 27 to March 9, 2025. We held a script development workshop for Sienna Holden's *Breath* in place of *The Unplugging*. An SK Arts grant and a Dakota Dunes Community Development Corporation grant supported that workshop.

We temporarily halted and re-examined our annual story, music, and poetry event, *Christmas Presence*. The holiday experience will be relaunched this year as another collaborative effort with On the Boards. We are excited about this revision's new potential and energy as we seek to expand the BTT community.

A highlight of last year was hiring Ed Mendez as our General Manager. He brings strong administrative skills and experience in grant application to our team. Funding continues to be supplied through grants, donors, corporate sponsors, and ticket sales.

As a board, we continue to work with our Artistic Director, Stephen Waldschmidt, on developing our three key strategic pillars: 1) Fostering Growth in the BTT Community, 2) Developing and Supporting BTT Staff, and 3) Developing and Producing Plays.

BTT has a solid and dedicated board of directors. I consider it a privilege to serve alongside a great team that cares deeply about local, impactful theatre. I look forward to the variety of ways BTT will continue to make space for sacred encounters in its work.

Sincerely,



Jessica Isaak,
Board President
Burnt Thicket Theatre