

GREAT PLAINS THEATRE COMMONS

2020/2021 YEAR END REPORT





Dear GPTC Friends,

This past year has been one of great changes and challenges for us all, with hope and despair rising and falling throughout. The year also revealed how the essential act of sharing stories provides communal sustenance in a time of unparalleled isolation.

It was also our first year as a stand-alone nonprofit with the ability to provide programming in new ways for our community. They say that timing is everything, and if that's true, then it's a great sign that we began life as a nonprofit when the collective stories that we shared meant everything to our survival.

Enclosed is a review of our first year and a look toward the future. Woven into every detail of this is our gratitude to you, and the Omaha community, who helped us to provide all our programming for free to under served groups across the city. It also allowed us to directly pay hundreds of artists across the city and nationally in a time of great desperation for performing artists.

Last year, we were all virtual. What we were able to accomplish was due to a wonderful, dedicated staff and board, and to you. In 2021/22 we look forward to safely bringing back in-person programming, to continuing our growth as an organization, and to our partnership with the Yates Illuminates nonprofit coalition to serve the refugee, immigrant and new American communities.

As we approach the fall, we see new challenges rising across the city and country. As always, we will be there, listening, supporting the community, and fostering the creation and sharing of diverse new stories that will help guide us to a more compassionate world.

I hope you enjoy this year-end review of our work and take pride in your part in bringing this work to life in our community. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me with thoughts, questions, and visions for the future.

With thanks and warmth,

Kevin
klawler@gptcplays.com
917-570-2624



August 1, 2021

Dear Friends,

During the past eighteen months the Great Plains Theatre Conference has grown into its own 501-c3 with a strong financial and policy infrastructure and a fully inclusive and diverse board of directors. Now called the Great Plains Theatre Commons, we have an active board and a growing foundation of programming throughout the community which reflects the diversity of Omaha and our state.

As president of the GPTC board of directors, I feel privileged to draw upon my over 25 years of work in the non-profit sector to help guide the GPTC. Kevin, as director, leads with experience, intelligence, compassion and respect for the communities and people we are engaging with.

With the board of directors, we look forward to working with a wide array of local and national partners, and to our continued growth as an important arts organization in service to the Omaha community!

Carolyn Owen Anderson
GPTC president



GPTC Board of Directors



Carolyn Anderson, President

Community Volunteer, Founder and director of the non-profit Why Arts for 15 years, Carolyn is committed to creating accessible artistic opportunities for all abilities, age and cultures and works closely with organizations to build arts programming. Recipient of the 2020 Governor's Arts Award for "Access to the Arts".



Cecilia Poon, PhD, ABPP, Vice President

Staff Psychologist, Adjunct Assistant Professor in Psychiatry, Nebraska Medicine/University of Nebraska Medical Center. As a geropsychologist and avid backstage volunteer, Cecilia seeks to promote resilience and bring people of all ages, abilities, and cultures together through creative arts.



Susan Baer Collins, Secretary

Theatre Director, Actor. Recipient of the GPTC McDowell Award for her service to the Omaha theatre community and the 2014 Governor's Arts Award for "Outstanding Artist," Susan served as Associate Artistic Director of the Omaha Playhouse for 27 years.



Diane Watson, Treasurer

Diane is a Growth Officer with Cetera Advisors. She is an actor, improv artist, and serves on the Board of Trustees of Saybrook University.



Raydell Cordell III

Behavior Interventionist at Westgate Elementary, Westside Community Schools and Actor / Teaching Artist in the Omaha Community. A product of Omaha Public Schools and The Rose Theater, Raydell is a passionate individual who believes in the human connection and the power of impact and growth in individuals.



Ted Lane

Regulatory Compliance Counsel, Berkshire Hathaway Homestate Companies. Ted's law career and passion for nonprofit arts derives from his enduring love of writing, acting, stage managing, and producing theatre.



Marina Rosado

News anchor on Radio Lobo 97.7 FM and Telemundo Nebraska. Professional Bilingual Journalist, Broadcaster and Photographer.



Kathy Tyree

Performing Artist, Director, Producer. Kathy Tyree is a native of Omaha with a 40 year performing arts/theatre career which over the past 6 years evolved into directing and producing.



Hugo Zamorano

Multidisciplinary Artist. I am a multidisciplinary artist who enjoys mentoring, spray painting, and boxing.



Ronald J. Zank, PhD

Assistant Professor of Theatre, School of the Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha. Ron Zank is a director, playwright, dramaturg, and theatre historian at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

GPTC Program Highlights

Featuring Connect, Community Events, Playwriting Groups, Workshops, Panels, Performances & more

GPTC CONNECT Part 1: BLACK THEATRE HISTORY IN OMAHA

Tuesday, July 27th, 7pm CST



Moderator: Kathy Tyree • Panelists: Tyrone Beasley, Denise Chapman and TammyRa'

This July and August we're going to have a 2-part Connect over Zoom to celebrate Omaha's rich theatrical history by asking our community leaders to talk about Black Theater History in Omaha and explore the immense contributions made by artists here. Reminisce, learn and keep an eye on how to build the future.

RSVP to commons@gptcplays.com

Funding for Connect is provided in part by a grant from Humanities Nebraska and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment

GPTC CONNECT PLAYWRIGHTS ON PODCASTS

Tuesday, April 27th, 7pm CST



Panelists: Khalid Y. Long, Katherine MacHolmes & Daena Schweiger



GPTC Connect



Workshop with Asian Community and Cultural Center

BUTTERFLIES & BAGELS

Sneak peek of GPTC's new home!

Saturday, July 17
9:30am-11:30am
3260 Davenport St, 68131

GPTC is transforming! Join us for a bagel and get a sneak peek at our new home in its larval stage. Stay and help turn boxes into butterflies for a puppet parade.



Yates Community Center, Butterflies & Bagels



Edem Soul Music, Conference Closing Celebration



Design Wing Panel



PlayLabs & Response Sessions



Conference Writing Workshop



GPTC Commons Group



GPTC Community & Artistic Development Programming

We are here to help you tell your story
"You are a blessing."—Denise Scales, First First Draft writer

GPTC is building a programming continuum that will provide a creative home for people throughout their artistic lives. This means welcoming *everyone* through opportunities to experience stories, explore artistic creation and grow careers.

EXPERIENCE STORY

CONNECT: The first Zoom broadcast of our **monthly discussion series** brought a surprise visit from a Pulitzer Prize winner and ended with words of wisdom encouraging a young Omaha artist to put their work out into the world --- and it kept getting better from there! Whether we wept with one another about missing family in January or shared our favorite theatre podcasts, we stayed connected.

- **10 Panels, 35 Guest Panelists, 225 audience members**

EXPLORE CREATION

FIRST FIRST DRAFT: We gathered two cohorts of **aspiring playwrights**. Funeral home directors, social workers, actors and historians put pen to paper and wrote more than they ever had before. Meeting bi-weekly for eight weeks, they supported one another and made progress toward the magic words "End of Play."

- **12 new writers**

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS: We brought acting and storytelling workshops to students at Lincoln's **Asian Community and Cultural Center** (fall) and veteran groups at **Warrior Writers** (spring). For six weeks, we helped further the public speaking and storytelling skills of Omaha community leaders from around the world as part of **New American Civic Leadership Academy** in partnership with **Civic Nebraska** and **Benson Refugee Task Force**. We built butterfly puppets for **World Refugee Day** at **Joslyn Art Museum** and at **Gifford Park Neighborhood Association** Community Market as we continue to develop and deepen partnerships with our future neighbors at Yates Illuminates.

- **126 community members**

We're currently developing programming with **Simple Foundation**, **Familias en Accion**, **Intercultural Senior Center** and **Refugee Empowerment Center** for 2021/2022.

CAREER GROWTH

COMMONERS: Our first writer's residency supports the careers of **5 produced Nebraska playwrights**. Guest speakers from across the country join via Zoom. This year we've focused on playwrights and literary managers with Nebraska origins and regional ties, such as Amy Wegener, Literary Manager of Actors Theatre of Louisville, and Lynde Rosario of Denver Center for Performing Arts. We continue to build pathways for plays to move into the wider cultural conversation.

ARTIST ADVOCACY: GPTC also serves as a mentor in encouraging and helping artists apply for opportunities such as Amplify Arts grants, commissions at Rose Theatre and national awards.

The success of our continuum can be seen in Jimmy Nguyen's trajectory through GPTC's programs this year. We offered Jimmy the opportunity to be a guest artist as part of Connect, which led to him teaching an acting workshop for us, which led to him signing up for First First Draft and enlisting GPTC's mentorship as he wrote his application for the Jane Alexander award at the Kennedy Center (which he won!). We look forward to more of these success stories in 21/22.



New Play Conference

- The 2021 Conference took place from **May 29 to June 6** with all activities (including rehearsals) taking place over Zoom and hosted on a the conference platform Whova.
- **Over 150 artists were employed through the Conference (over 100 were local).**
 - 88 actors
 - 19 Playwrights
 - 19 Guest Artists
 - 19 Directors
 - 10 Staff Members
 - 5 Design Wing Fellows
- **Over \$50,000 of direct support was paid to local and national artists and designers.** We were incredibly grateful to support artists in the midst of a global pandemic that has effected the theatre industry severely. The Conference enabled them to dedicate time to their craft and community when they would otherwise be isolated.
- **384 registered attendees** viewed PlayLabs, Panels, Workshops, Networking Events, & our PlayFest *Stories: On the Brink* evening with Anastasis.
- **837 submissions** were received and 19 playwrights shared their stories with our community. Submissions for our **16th Annual in-person Conference** will **open next month**.
- Although physically located across the continental United States and in Puerto Rico, **the**
- **five Design Wing Fellows created and presented a collaborative installation piece** which can be seen in a 4-minute video [here](#).

"As a playwright working on a new play, it's so vital to be in a space with thoughtful, sensitive people who get theater. Great Plains provides such a space. Whether it was in rehearsal with my talented crew of Omaha collaborators, in discussion with a professional dramaturg, in workshops with a collection of leading literary voices, in the audience for the work of my diverse peers, or receiving feedback following my own play's reading, I was learning and growing as a writer. I so appreciated being in such a space for a week and I know my work was made better for it."

Daniel Hirsch, 2021 Playwright

GPTC New Play Conference

Local & National Participants





GPTC PlayFest 2021/2022

Omaha's (Free!) Season of New,
Contemporary Performance

PlayFest makes more plays for more people in Omaha. As part of the Great Plains Theatre Commons, PlayFest broadens public access by providing a season of free, high-quality theatrical events. Community organizations and artists (both local and national) participate in the storytelling we see on stage. Evening performances are held at geographically diverse venues. PlayFest gives voice to the stories that have the power to unite and inspire diverse audiences. The form of these works can vary, including traditional plays, devised work, short forms, music and dance. Much of the content celebrates Omaha stories. Neighborhood Tapestries is a program that puts Omaha stories on stage. Each year this program presents work based on the lives of Nebraskans. The result is a vibrant portrait of our city.

"First, thank you for the honor to partner to make Epic a life changing project! This is a prophetic play! Our history in South Omaha will be divided into before and after EPIC!"

-Luis Marcos, Founder & Co-Executive Director, COMUNIDAD MAYA PIXAN IXIM,
2019 Neighborhood Tapestries Partner

The 2021/22 season includes three plays,
based on Omaha families and communities,
written by three playwrights with deep Omaha/GPTC roots
whose voices are now heard across the nation.

STORIES: ON THE BRINK

by Colleen O'Doherty
Directed by Haley Haas

World premiere
Neighborhood Tapestries
Commission

THE GUADALUPES

Written and performed by
Noah Diaz

Regional premiere
Neighborhood Tapestries
Commission

IN THE UPPER ROOM

by Beaufield Berry
Directed by Denise
Chapman

Regional premiere
GPTC 2017 PlayLab

Photos from PlayFests (2019 & 2016)





GPTC PlayFest

STORIES: ON THE BRINK

by Colleen O'Doherty

Directed by Haley Haas

World premiere

Neighborhood Tapestries Commission

Full, in-person and touring production

Public Performances at Holy Family Community Center, 1715 Izard St.

October 8th-10th at 7:30pm

A Co-production in partnership with Anastasis Theatre Company, Holy Family Church, Sienna Francis House, Open Door Mission, Stephen Center and Micah House. Developed from the stories of people affected by homelessness, STORIES: ON THE BRINK incorporates the art of storytelling and theatre to amplify voices too often ignored.

THE GUADALUPES

Written and performed by Noah Diaz

Regional premiere, Neighborhood
Tapestries Commission

Full, in-person production

Spring of 2022 at the Simple Foundation Community Center, 30th and Q St

A meta-theatric exploration of history, memory, family, sadness, the importance of naming things, and the hard pill swallow of accepting our ancestry. A commission, and regional premier, with playwright Noah Diaz, will continue our community-based work with an autobiographical dive into a multi-generational, Mexican family in South Omaha.

IN THE UPPER ROOM

by Beaufield Berry

Directed by Denise Chapman

Developed as a GPTC 2017 PlayLab

Regional premiere, Neighborhood
Tapestries Production

A Co-production in partnership with Creighton University Fine and Performing Arts and The Union for Contemporary Art

June 1 – 3 at 7:30pm

Performances at Creighton's Lied Education Center for the Arts, 2500 California Plaza

Meet the Berrys, a multi-generational African American family in the 1970s. Their lives orbit around a strong-willed matriarch whose secrets drive her relatives nuts. Fed up, they each make plans to break away. But by standing their ground, they may lose what has held them together all along.



Meet the Playwrights



Colleen O'Doherty

Colleen is a writer, educator, director and actor. Her short plays have been produced nationwide. She holds an MFA in Play and Screenwriting from the University of Nebraska, an MA in Teaching from the College of Saint Mary, and a BA in Spanish from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She has acted in many theaters around Omaha. She works annually with the Great Plains Theater Conference as a director and actor. She is half of The Anastasis Theater Company.



Noah Diaz

Noah Diaz is a playwright and television writer from the Iowa/Nebraska border. His plays have been developed with Roundabout Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, Baltimore Center Stage, Two River Theater, The Sol Project, First Floor Theater, and The Playwrights Realm, where he is the current Page One Resident Playwright. He is a recipient of the ASCAP Cole Porter Prize for Excellence in Playwriting, a five-time recipient of playwriting awards from the Kennedy Center, and is currently under commission from La Jolla Playhouse, Manhattan Theatre Club/Sloan, The Great Plains Theatre Commons, Baltimore Center Stage, and Audible/Amazon Studios. MFA: Yale School of Drama. He has written on *Joe Exotic* (NBC, USA, and Peacock), *Vampire Academy* (Peacock), and is currently developing projects for Eva Longoria's UnbeliEVable Entertainment, AMC, and Hulu.



Beaufield Berry-Fisher

Beaufield Berry-Fisher is an Omaha-based playwright, novelist and arts education professional. Her work has been performed across the country and in multiple conferences including the Great Plains Theatre Conference, Philadelphia Sparkfest, Manhattan Rep and Colorado New Play Summit. She has served as a guest artist with Inge Fest in Independence, Kansas, on several entertainment and arts panels and boards. Beaufield is currently the Performing Arts Editor at the Reader and Resident playwright at Creighton University. Her last play *Red Summer* premiered at the Bluebarn Theater. Her next production *In The Upper Room* (O'Neill 2018 Finalist) will be produced at the Denver Performing Arts Center in 2022.

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged us in many ways. To continue providing programming safely, we pivoted to virtual formats where possible and cancelled planned in-person PlayFest performances. As reflected in the chart below, this adjustment significantly reduced our Community Program expenses and eliminated our PlayFest budget.

