

2020/21

# Season Highlights



FORWARD  
THEATER CO.

## FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

We've often heard that you can't really know someone until you've seen how they act in a crisis. And wow, this past season really proved the truth of that idea. I'm so in awe of what I've learned about Forward's communities during this time. Our audiences blew me away with their generosity and willingness to engage with us online, embracing the unknown and trusting us to tell stories in new ways while we kept them safe. Our artists humbled me with their gameness to learn new technical skills on very short timelines, and their adherence to strict safety protocols that got us through a return to in-person rehearsals with **NO** illnesses. Our staff, board of directors, and advisory company members all doubled down on their support for Forward's mission—a global pandemic and the possibility of staggering financial losses didn't stop them from a full-throated commitment to not only stay the course, but to do even **MORE** in this time of great need.

And all through this COVID era, we have not been afraid to lead—in developing new approaches for sharing theater online, in setting safety protocols for artists and audiences, in creating forums for arts colleagues to connect and support each other, and in advocating for our industry at the local, state, and national level. As a patron said to us last spring: "They don't call you Backward Theater!" I'm so grateful to **ALL** of our communities for keeping us moving Forward.

Jen Uphoff Gray

## FROM THE MANAGING DIRECTOR

While many theater companies took a break during their 2020-2021 seasons—furloughing staff and canceling productions—Forward Theater produced an entire season and then some! We went into the year with four different budget scenarios, each projecting a significant deficit. What all those scenarios had in common was a commitment to full staff salaries, and to full contracts for all our artists. We truly did provide a "home base for Wisconsin theater professionals," just as our mission states. (Here's a sobering fact: nearly 2% of all **NATIONAL** Actors' Equity Association contracts from March 2020-March 2021 were provided by Forward Theater).

We're grateful to our board of directors for supporting these efforts, even though they came with projections of large deficits. I'm so pleased to report that due to the generosity of our donors, commitment of our subscribers, and truly unprecedented levels of government support, we ended our 2020-2021 season in the black, enabling us to go boldly into the next season...and the next.

And during this time of racial reckoning and social justice following the murder of George Floyd, we worked with our staff, board, and advisory company to thoroughly review and expand our EDI and Anti-Racism commitments. That plan can be found on our website.

Last season, in so many ways, we lived our values. I am so proud of the results.

Julie Swenson

**Cover Image:** Phoebe González and Jamal James, *46 Plays for America's First Ladies*.



**Top:** James Carrington and Michael Herold, *The Lifespan of a Fact*. **Bottom:** Michael Herold's home setup for *The Lifespan of a Fact*.

## We Told Stories...

We are so proud that during this challenging year Forward Theater was able to produce our entire season of four full-length plays online. Each one came with an online Opening Night celebration, a recorded preshow lecture, and multiple live talkbacks to provide the deeper opportunities for engagement that we are known for.

### THE LIFESPAN OF A FACT

Sept. 10-Sept. 27, 2020

Our first venture to produce a play online with each actor filming themselves in their own homes and connecting through Zoom.

“What a great accomplishment! The opening had me in tears and I had forgotten what intimate theater felt like.”



SUBSCRIPTION SALES WERE 82% OF PREVIOUS SEASON NUMBERS

178 DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS SOLD FOR THE SEASON!

**Top Left:** Samantha Newcomb and Sarah Day, *The Niceties*. **Top Right:** Josh Krause and Jerrod Langwinski, *Lewiston/Clarkston*. **Bottom Right:** Nadja Simmonds, *46 Plays for America's First Ladies*. **Bottom Left:** Carrie Hitchcock, April Paul, and Jonathan Wainwright, *Lewiston/Clarkston*.



## THE NICETIES

Jan. 22-Feb. 7, 2021

With *The Niceties* we built on what we'd learned about digital theater in the prior months and took a major step forward, using green screen technology to create the illusion that the characters were in the same room (when they were actually working in their homes 2,000 miles apart!).

*"I don't even have the words. WOW WOW WOW. Thank you... Could not be a better time for this piece."*

## 46 PLAYS FOR AMERICA'S FIRST LADIES

April 13 - May 23, 2021

Rehearsed in person at Overture Center and filmed with a small, live audience! In addition, Forward collaborated with Arts + Literature Lab (ALL) to commission *46 Artists for America's First Ladies* (a contemporary art and poetry exhibition), initially made available online and later installed at ALL.



*"Such a clever play! This belongs in every high school history class—history and creative entertainment celebrating women."*

## LEWISTON/CLARKSTON

April 7-April 25, 2021

*Lewiston/Clarkston* brought theater back to the Playhouse. The show was rehearsed in person, filmed onstage, and then shared virtually.

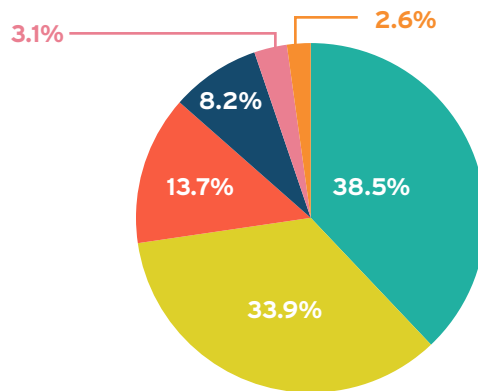
*"A beautiful production! And that cast...not one false note. Bravo."*

# You Supported Us...

**INCOME \$1,294,733**

- TICKET SALES
- INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS
- GOVERNMENT SUPPORT\*
- FOUNDATION SUPPORT
- FEAST FORWARD EVENT
- CORPORATE SUPPORT

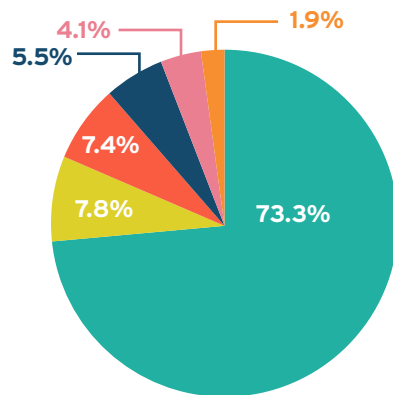
\*One-time only COVID relief. Government Support is typically just 1-2% of our annual income.



# Artists Got Paid...

**EXPENSES \$1,209,836**

- PEOPLE Artistic, Staff, Production Personnel & Benefits, Community Connections, and Playwright Royalties
- OPERATIONS Office Space Rental, Office Supplies, Insurance, Financial Services, and Organizational Memberships
- VENUE Theater Rental, Rehearsal Space Rental, Security, and Box Office Fees
- MARKETING/DEVELOPMENT Advertising, Graphic Design, and Donor Engagement
- PRODUCTIONS Sets, Costumes, Lighting, Props, Sound, and Playbills
- COMPANY EXPENSES Artist Housing, Hospitality, and COVID Safety



# And We All Stayed Safe...

**COVID COSTS**

**\$11,521 + \$5,108 + 2 + 9 + 42 = 0**  
 Direct costs of tests, masks, etc.    Overture safety fees    Productions rehearsed in person    Weeks of 3x a week testing    People working    **CASES!**

## THE NICETIES IMPACT & OUTREACH

Digital tickets sold to **3,783** households, **478** viewed through classroom showings, **641** participated through government agencies.

“I loved it! Regular DEI trainings are informative, but it doesn't really put you in someone else's shoes and give you that perspective.”

—Dane County Employee



In partnership with UW-Madison Division of Diversity, Equity, and Educational Achievement during the run of *The Niceties*, we presented a panel discussion on how racial equity plays out between students and faculty on campus.

# We Stayed Connected with our Community

We added all kinds of bonus programming this season, to keep you connected and entertained, and to provide additional employment for artists: a series of play readings just for our subscribers, live Q&As with our mainstage playwrights, six months of *Tuesdays With Forward* chats to spotlight local organizations and artists, our bi-monthly *Theater Forward* podcast, weekly *Mike's Picks*, and more.

## LA FOLLETTE HIGH SCHOOL

During the 2020-2021 academic year we kept LHS' drama program afloat by providing mentorships and facilitating LHS's transition to virtual theater.

## READING SERIES

On top of producing a full season under brand-new circumstances, FTC provided even MORE content by adding a three-part subscriber reading series—giving artists even MORE work in uncertain times, and providing MORE quality entertainment options for audiences stuck at home in a pandemic.

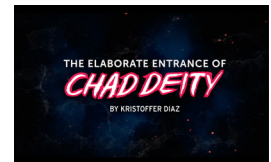
- *The True* by Sharr White, October 15, 2020
- *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity* by Kristoffer Diaz, November 12, 2020. Featuring a member of the original *Hamilton* Broadway cast!
- *Grand Concourse* by Heidi Schreck, December 10, 2020

## FORWARD PODCAST

Episodes this season covered the challenges of digital theater, developing COVID protocols, grappling with inequity in our field, and conversations with leading artists from around the state and around the country.



“Relevant, engaging, thoughtful, and whip-smart. Highly recommended.”  
 —Podcast listener



Top to bottom: LHS Cast of *What I Want to Say But Never Will*, LHS Cast of *Twelfth Night*, *The True*—Title screen, *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity*—Title screen, *Grand Concourse*—Title screen.

## MONOLOGUE FESTIVAL: WITHIN THESE WALLS

June 24-June 27

Provided us the opportunity to host Overture Center's FIRST LIVE AUDIENCE since everything so abruptly shut down in March 2020. Forward employed 40 directors, actors, and writers for this festival.



From Left: Madison Uphoff, Jim Pickering, Tosha Freeman.



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