

FORWARD!

22/23 ANNUAL REPORT



**WONDERFUL!
GO SEE IT!**

— Mike C.

**HAVE NOT
LAUGHED THAT
MUCH OR THAT
HARD AT A
SHOW IN AGES.**

— Kristi R.



**THANKS AGAIN
AND HERE'S TO
MUCH AWESOME
LEG BREAKAGE!**

— Bill A.

**THIS WAS
EXCELLENT!**

— Penny K.

**BRILLIANT,
EVERYTHING
THEATER
SHOULD BE!**

— Amy N.

**FUNNY
ORIGINAL SCRIPT
& INCREDIBLY
AMAZING TALENTED
HILARIOUS CAST.**

— Tim M.

MAGNIFICENT!

— Kathryn A.



**WOW, FOLKS! GET
TICKETS NOW! THIS
SHOW IS SO GOOD!!!!**

— Kathie N.

FORWARD!

What a spectacular season this was! The experience of sharing these stories with you, of hearing your laughter, gasps, tears, and applause echoing in the Playhouse, of delving into deep conversation with you during our talkbacks, of learning alongside you at our many engagement events — all these joys filled us up to the brim with gratitude for this incredible theater-loving community.

From the intricate emotional web woven in *The Wanderers* to the chilling and haunting ghost story of *Feeding Beatrice*; from the raw f***-ing joy of *Airness* to the lush and empowering celebration of *Artemisia*, we aimed to provide a little something for everyone this season. And we believe we succeeded in doing just that.

Yes, the environment is pretty rough for nonprofit arts organizations these days. Costs are way up. Revenues are still slowly rebuilding. We finished last season with a deficit (and since we've **always** been in the black, we don't love breaking our streak!). But our careful stewardship over the years, which created a solid reserve, meant that we could cover this season's losses without going into debt or cutting back on any of the values we hold most dear — living wages for our arts workers, robust production design, accessible ticket pricing, and extensive engagement programming to serve our broader community.

Besides, there were so many wonderful, positive signs of hope for the future to celebrate! We saw dramatic increases in single ticket sales throughout the season, as new audiences flocked to see our unique and thought-provoking productions. We birthed a brand-new play into the world (Lauren Gunderson's gorgeous *Artemisia*), and spearheaded the hugely successful World Premiere Wisconsin festival to bring together theater-makers and audiences across the state.

None of it would have been possible without **you**. Thank you for joining us for the journey. We look forward to going even further together next season!



JEN UPHOFF GRAY / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



JULIE SWENSON / MANAGING DIRECTOR

TREMENDOUS CAST AND SO MANY SURPRISING & REVEALING MOMENTS. WE ARE COMING TO SEE IT AGAIN, NOW THAT WE KNOW WHAT WE KNOW!
— Francesca K.

BRAVA!
I ONLY WELLED UP LIKE 5-6 TIMES
— Alex M.



Forward Theater Company's Advisory Company, Board of Directors, and Staff.

**SO CREEPY.
TERRIFYING.
SO WELL DONE.**

— Leslie L.S.

**THIS SHOW IS
PURE RAW JOY.
DON'T MISS THIS
ONE, FRIENDS.**

— Deb N.

BRAVO!! I'M SO GRATEFUL THAT I WAS ABLE TO JOIN YOU ALL FOR SUCH A WONDERFUL PERFORMANCE FOR MY FIRST TIME AT FORWARD THEATER!

— Ashley R.

**EXQUISITE
WRITING,
IMPECCABLE
ACTING**

— Lisa G.

THE WANDERERS

With our production of *The Wanderers*, it felt for the first time as though we were really ‘back.’ The energy shared between the artists and the audience no longer felt impeded by Covid, though we continued following our rigorous health and safety protocols throughout the production and the season. We heard from a host of audience members how much they appreciated this piece for its deep heart and quiet beauty. The design elements spanned time, location, memory, and imagination in unexpected ways. We hired quite a few new-to-Forward designers and actors, and this was our first production with up-and-coming director Mikael Burke.

In conjunction with this production we deepened relationships with our local Jewish community. Alan Klugman, the Executive Director of the Jewish Federation of Madison, served as a cultural consultant on the production, and visited our rehearsal room to speak with the cast and director. Folks from across the Madison Jewish community attended the production in groups. We partnered with our friends at Cap Times Idea Fest to present an online panel discussion on “Wisconsin’s Jewish Experience,” featuring Rabbi Jonathan Biatch, Alan Klugman, Jonathan Pollack, and Hannah Rosenthal (moderated by Allison Garfield) which was seen by over 5000 viewers.

Photo by Ross Zentner

INSIGHTFUL,
FULL OF
SURPRISES,
NICE TOUCHES
OF HUMOR —
GLAD I COULD
BE AT OPENING
NIGHT.

— Phil H.



Photo by Ross Zentner

Paris Hunter Paul and Elyse Edelman in *The Wanderers*.



Candace Thomas and Jamal James in *Feeding Beatrice: A Gothic Tale*.

FEEDING BEATRICE: A GOTHIC TALE

This play was one that we knew brought with it both risk and the possibility of great reward. *Feeding Beatrice* was our first venture into the genre of horror stories and, more specifically, the burgeoning subgenre of Black horror. We did a lot of homework and a lot of advance planning to make the process as rich, supportive, brave, and thoughtful for the artistic team and the audience as possible. The actors felt empowered to be telling this story, and the audience leaned in. We saw significant attendance from new audience members, drawn in by the genre and subject matter. Talkback conversations were incredibly robust. And total ticket sales for *Feeding Beatrice* exceeded projections by the largest margin of any show in our season, demonstrating that this particular risk really paid off.

We hosted a live lecture series in conjunction with our production to explore different aspects of the piece: “Horror, Blackness, and the History of Horror Noire” with Dr. Sumana Chattopadhyay of Marquette University; “Redlined: Madison’s History of Racial Discrimination in Housing” with Kacie Lucchini Butcher; and “The Legacy of Lorraine Hansberry” with our production dramaturg Dr. Khalid Y. Long. These lectures were also filmed for online viewing.

**SAW IT LAST NIGHT! GREAT PLAY!
EVERY ACTOR WAS AMAZING. AND
OOOH BEATRICE...STAY OVER THERE.**

— Rae R.



Photo by Bob Zanier

Jess Schuknecht, Joe Picchetti, James Carrington, Josh Krause, Nadja Simmonds, Marcus Truschinski, and Ashley Oviedo in *Airness*.

AIRNESS

Chelsea Marcantel’s love letter to air guitar and the deeply committed international air guitar community brought a wealth of “raw f***ing joy” to our stage. Everyone on the production team did a deep dive into performances of historic and current air guitar performers, from YouTube to the documentary *Air Guitar Nation*. We enjoyed beautiful staging and choreography from director Molly Rhode and assistant director Doug Clemons. And this cast threw down to make their performances truly memorable.

We heard from scores of subscribers who shared with us that they hadn’t thought they would like a play about air guitar — but who emerged from the Playhouse aglow from the infusion of much-needed joy, and shredding their imaginary guitars. Rock on!

WE SAW THIS SHOW THIS PAST WEEKEND, AND IT IS SIMPLY PURE, UNADULTERATED FUN! GO SEE IT AND FORGET ABOUT EVERYTHING ELSE FOR ~100 NONSTOP MINUTES OF JOY AND LAUGHTER, ALONG WITH SOME AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION.

— Joe & LuAnn M.

ARTEMISIA

ARTEMISIA WAS
ABSOLUTELY REMARKABLE.
YOU ARE SUCH A JEWEL
FOR OUR COMMUNITY.
— Carolyn M.

22/23 MAINSTAGE PRODUCTIONS

Forward's latest world premiere production was the highly-anticipated *Artemisia* by audience favorite Lauren Gunderson. We spent a lot of time in the year leading up to this production with Lauren — during a week-long developmental workshop in May 2022, and then during our added week of rehearsal in March 2023 for the final production. Lauren even came back for opening weekend, declaring Forward to be an “artistic home.” Director Jen Uphoff Gray assembled a team of Wisconsin’s theater royalty for the production’s cast and design team, and everyone brought their A-game to this brand-new play.

We appreciated this chance to tell Artemisia’s story in a way that encompassed not just the traumas of her life but also the triumphs. And we offered multiple opportunities for additional learning alongside our production. We created a lobby display of all the paintings featured in the play, shared resources from the Rape Crisis Center and Domestic Abuse Intervention Services, and partnered with the Chazen Art Museum to host internationally-renowned art historian Aneta Georgievska-Shine for a free public lecture entitled “Artemisia, In Her Own Hand.”



Clare Arena Haden and Daniel Molina in *Artemisia*.

Photo by Ross Zentner

Photo by Ross Zentner

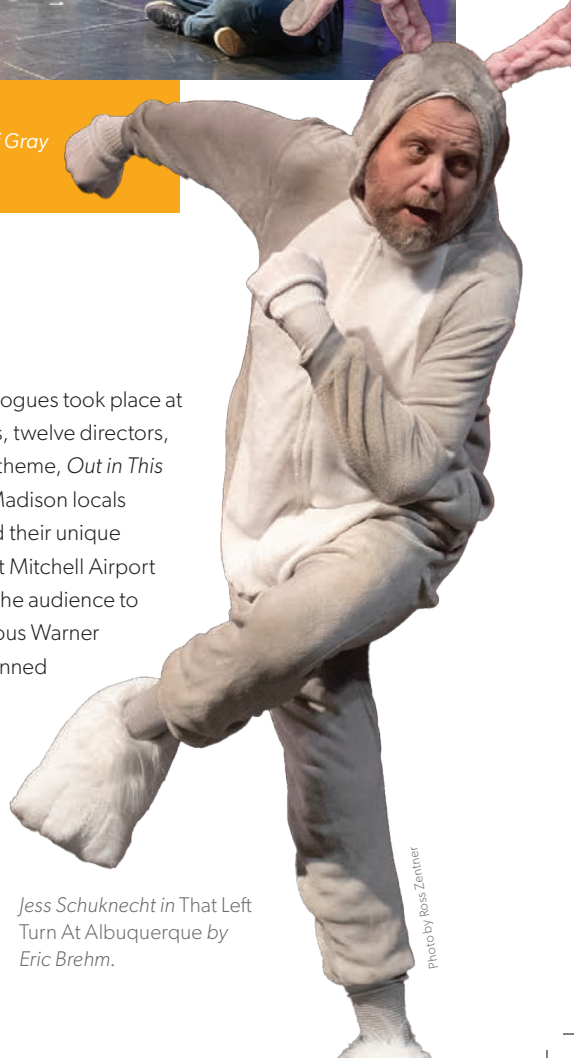
2023 FESTIVALS



Out In This World Monologue Festival actors, directors, and writers onstage with Jen Uphoff Gray during a talkback.

OUT IN THIS WORLD MONOLOGUE FESTIVAL

Forward's biennial festival of original monologues took place at Overture Center in May: twelve playwrights, twelve directors, and twelve actors brought to life this year's theme, *Out in This World*. Featured playwrights ranged from Madison locals to writers from across the United States, and their unique stories about travel ranged from a traveler at Mitchell Airport in Milwaukee handing out cheese curds to the audience to a psychotherapy session with a certain famous Warner Brothers rabbit. (One notable piece was penned by poet and spoken word artist Deshawn McKinney, a former First Wave production intern with Forward.) Several playwrights from farther-flung locations were able to join us in Madison to see their work onstage, and audiences delighted in this theatrical 'potluck feast.'



Jess Schuknecht in *That Left Turn At Albuquerque* by Eric Brehm.

photo by Rose Zentner

Michael Cotey, Molly Rhode, Jen Uphoff Gray, and Deanie Vallone, part of the World Premiere Wisconsin Leadership Team.

WORLD PREMIERE WISCONSIN

Artemisia was Forward’s entry in World Premiere Wisconsin, an inaugural statewide festival celebrating new plays and musicals. WPW originated at Forward and had a leadership team of staff from Forward, the Milwaukee Rep, and Northern Sky Theater. It is the first statewide theater festival of its kind, and 47 productions and readings took place across Wisconsin between March 1–June 30, 2023. WPW also hosted a two-day retreat for Wisconsin playwrights; and gatherings in Genesee Depot, Madison, and Door County to foster connection among Wisconsin theatermakers.



Forward Staff, Board Chair Dave Chaimson, and Advisory Company member Elyse Edelman attend the kickoff event for World Premiere Wisconsin at Ten Chimneys.

MAKING THEATER MORE ACCESSIBLE

Forward’s 2022-2023 season saw transformational growth in our accessibility initiatives, as we implemented learnings from our 2022 Accessibility Plan. For the first time ever, we incorporated ASL-interpreted performances into every production of our season. We improved communication with audiences to create a welcoming experience, from purchasing tickets to getting back home. We implemented new services and fine-tuned existing ones. And we listened. We met with more than 50 individuals, leaders, and organizations to better understand the wants and needs of our community, and to collaboratively explore the best way for us to help serve some of those needs. This work carried through to an episode of our Theater Forward podcast with the Guthrie Theater’s Robyn DeCourcy and Forward’s Samara Safarik titled *Making Accessibility the New Normal*.



WELCOME TO THE PLAYHOUSE

Our new welcome video introduces audiences to our theater space, accessibility services, and what you can expect when you visit us for a show.

WE CONNECTED & CELEBRATED



EVENTS, PRE-SHOW LECTURES, TALKBACKS, SEASON LAUNCH, & MORE!



clockwise from top left: Diane Kostecke , Jen Uphoff Gray, and Nancy Ciezki at the 2023–24 Season Launch at Ovation; FTC Staff hosts a table at Magic Pride Festival 2022 in Warner Park; Gavin Lawrence and Cereyna Bougouneau perform a staged reading of a new work by Quan Barry for Forward Leaders at Maiahaus; Sue and Russ Schaefer-Landau at Game Night at the Goodman Center; Katie Dowling-Marcus, Sarah Milestone, and Theodora Zehner attend Feast Forward 2022 at the Wisconsin Historical Society; Casem Abulughod, Samara Safarik, and Ben Haden shred at the Air Guitar Summit at the High Noon Saloon; Marcella Kearns delivers a Pre-Show Lecture in Overture’s Rotunda Lobby.

THEATER FORWARD PODCAST

We continued offering our Theater Forward podcast, with episode topics ranging from copyright issues, to the new reliance on understudies, to new trends in theater education.

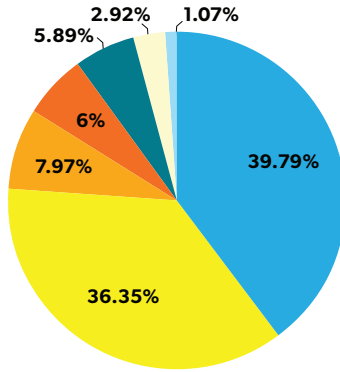


BY THE NUMBERS

YOU SUPPORTED US!

INCOME: \$ 1,300,658

- **Ticket Sales**
- **Individual Contributions**
- **Investments**
- **Events**
- **Foundation Support**
- **Corporate Support**
- **Government Support**

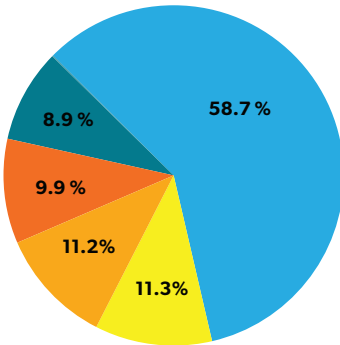


Less than 0.1% categorized as 'Other,' (not included on graph)

ARTISTS GOT PAID!

EXPENSES: \$1,473,628

- **People**
Artists, Production Personnel, Staff & Benefits, Community Connections, & Playwright Royalties
- **Venue**
Theater Rental, Rehearsal Space Rental, Security, and Box Office Fees
- **Operations**
Office Space Rental, Office Supplies, Insurance, Financial Services, and Organizational Memberships



- **Productions**
Sets, Costumes, Lighting, Props, Sound, and Playbills
- **Marketing/Development**
Advertising, Graphic Design, and Donor Engagement

SOME OF THIS SEASON'S COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Cap Times Idea Fest
- Capitol Lakes
- Chazen Museum
- Dane Buy Local
- Domestic Abuse Intervention Services (DAIS)
- Downtown Madison Inc.
- Downtown Rotary
- Foundation for Madison's Public Schools
- Jewish Federation of Madison
- LaFollette High School Drama Department (Adopt-A-School Program)
- Madison365
- Madison Central Library
- Madison Metropolitan School District
- Mystery to Me
- Out Professional Engagement Network (OPEN)
- OutReach
- Rape Crisis Center
- Temple Beth El
- TEMPO Madison
- UW Division of the Arts
- UW DDEEA
- UW Department of Theatre and Drama
- UW Hillel
- UW - MKE Interpreter Training Program
- UW McBurney Disability Resource Center
- Wisconsin Book Festival
- Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce

FORWARD THEATER CO.

P.O. Box 14574
455 Science Dr. Ste. 245
Madison, WI 53711

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201 STATE STREET
MADISON, WI 53703

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