

FORWARD THEATER

ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024



HERE'S TO ALL OF YOU

Forward's audiences, donors, artists, and community partners: thanks to you our 2023-2024 season was a record-breaking success!

Once more we were filling the Playhouse to capacity as we welcomed nearly 20,000 audience members to our productions. Every show in our season exceeded goals, and several set all-time attendance records.

Our artists outdid themselves this year: from the city streets strewn with trash in *The Garbologists* (so realistic you could smell it!) to the working kitchen in *Clyde's*; from the fantastical Chagall-inspired beauty of *The Flying Lovers of Vitebsk* to the shoebox diorama of *What the Constitution Means to Me*—the worlds we created onstage took us in wildly diverse directions. And that's before the actors came in to bring you on emotional journeys as varied as their physical settings. We hope you enjoyed all of it and were as fulfilled by this season's storytelling as we were.

We are so grateful for the opportunities this season provided to expand our impact beyond the Playhouse stage....and we relished the meaningful post-show conversations we had with the 6,500+ folks who stayed for our signature talkbacks.

The cost of producing professional theater remains at all-time high levels, but with vigorous ticket sales and the continuing generosity of our supporters we were once again able to finish our season in the black without compromising our key values—living wages for our arts workers, robust production design, accessible ticket pricing, and extensive engagement programming to serve our broader community.

As we move into our 2024–2025 “Sweet Sixteenth” Season, we are focusing a lot of our energy on meeting the incredible \$2 million matching gift challenge to establish an endowment for Forward's future. This challenge expires on December 31st, and we hope you will consider joining this effort with a contribution of your own.

Whether you are one of our subscribers, donors, single ticket buyers, or artists (or any combination of the above), we are so honored that you are a part of the work we do. Thank you for supporting local, professional theater that serves the greater Madison area, and we look forward to working with you in the season ahead!



JEN UPHOFF GRAY
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



JULIE SWENSON
MANAGING DIRECTOR

COVER: Sam Taylor,
Emily Glick and
Marcus Truschinski in
*The Flying Lovers of
Vitebsk*

RIGHT: *Clyde's*
production team
and cast





Danny Jones and Alys Dickerson in *The Garbologists*

RIGHT: Danny Jones joins a member of the City of Madison Streets Division for a ridealong.



The Garbologists



WRITTEN BY
Lindsay Joelle
DIRECTED BY
Jen Uphoff Gray
SEPT 7-24, 2023

“The two actors played off each other perfectly while bouncing in the truck or loading garbage and the set ‘truck and hopper’ were so amazing. I will take my garbage to the curb with a new perspective.”

—SUE JOSHEFF

What a joyful way to launch our season! Audiences embraced everything about *The Garbologists*—the heartfelt and charming performances from Alys Dickerson and Danny Jones, the scenic and prop designs of Sarah Ross and Pam Miles that made us all believe we were standing on a New York City sidewalk, our working onstage garbage truck built by technicians Kevin Zimmer and Jordan Rockman, the lighting design of Colin Gawronski that found beauty in piles of trash, and the original cityscape of sound crafted by Brian Grimm.

Our actors went on a ride-along with employees of the Madison Streets Department, helping us do justice to these essential workers. And thanks to our partnership with Art + Lit Lab, visitors to Overture Center’s Playhouse Gallery were treated to a powerful exhibit of art created from trash by local artists.

Clyde’s



WRITTEN BY
Lynn Nottage
DIRECTED BY
Jake Penner
NOV 2-19, 2023

“The play exposes the painful journey of coming out of the jail system. The trauma the experience carries, the lack of compassion from their own community as well as the bonds formed because of how they are perceived by others. There are no villains nor heroes in this play, there are just broken people, trying very hard against all

odds to become whole again. All that reality was delivered in the form of a sandwich, layer upon layers, spiced with a touch of fear, a lot of laughter and an abundance of courage.”

—YVETTE COLE



We were honored to bring the work of legendary playwright Lynn Nottage to our stage with her Broadway hit, *Clyde’s*. A stellar cast (Dimonte Henning, Sean Langenecker, Dana Pellebon, Ronald Román-Meléndez, Nadja Simmonds) led by director Jake Penner and supported with great design (Joe Cerqua, Jason Fassl, Jason Orlenko, Keith Pitts) helped us tell this story with care and specificity.

Just as the characters onstage were all about building connections with each other, we were all about building connections between this play and our community. JustDane volunteers were in our lobby before performances to share information about their programs and sell delicious JustBakery cookies. And thanks to support from American Family Insurance Institute for Corporate and

Social Responsibility, we were able to host a private performance of *Clyde’s* for formerly incarcerated members of our community and the service organizations that support them.

Dimonte Henning,
Sean Langenecker,
Nadja Simmonds
and Ronald
Román-Meléndez
in *Clyde’s*

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The Flying Lovers of Vitebsk



WRITTEN BY
Daniel Jamieson

MUSIC BY
Ian Ross

DIRECTED BY
Brian Cowing

JAN 25-FEB 11, 2024

“What a beautiful and moving performance. The acting, the music, the choreography, the stuff falling from the sky. Another gem from Forward Theater. Definitely a cure for the winter blues.”

—WALLY MEYER

The love story of artists Bella and Marc Chagall came to vibrant life in the Playhouse, washing away any winter blahs for our sold-out audiences. Emily Glick and Marcus Truschinski sang and danced their way from tiny Vitebsk to Paris and New York, accompanied by musicians Sam Taylor and Brian Grimm. Brian Cowing’s creative direction inspired our design team (Shelley Cornia, Chris Dunham, Greg Hofmann, Jim Uphoff) to beautiful new heights, bringing audiences to their feet night after night. Since the show was about real-life figures, we provided many opportunities to delve into the world of Vitebsk. In December we offered a free reading of the play *Chagall in School* at the Chazen Museum of Art. Lobby displays outside the Playhouse featured reproductions of Marc Chagall’s paintings referenced in our production, and translated excerpts from Bella Chagall’s Yiddish stories.

Marcus Truschinski and Emily Glick in The Flying Lovers of Vitebsk.



Colleen Madden and Alliae Krueger

What the Constitution Means to Me

WRITTEN BY
Heidi Schreck

DIRECTED BY
Jen Uphoff Gray

APRIL 1-21, 2024

“We can depend on Forward Theater for taking on the most innovative and thought-provoking plays; we are proud to live in a community that does so.”

—CONNIE FINNEGAN
& JOE SPOLAR

Could there have been a more timely play to close out our season than *What the Constitution Means to Me*? It had a tour-de-force performance from local legend (and Forward favorite) Colleen Madden, Casem AbuLughod in a surprisingly moving supporting role, and inspirational turns in alternating performances from local high school students Alliae Krueger and Caroline Talis. Designers Joe Cerqua, Ren LaDassor, Lisa Schlenker, and Noele Stollmack created the perfect space in which to wrestle with big questions about our country.

This intimate exploration of the roots of Constitutional law and the ways it impacts the lives of American women resonated powerfully with our audiences. It was an honor to host State Supreme Court Justice Jill Karofsky at one of our talkbacks. We are grateful to the many local organizations who provided resources to our patrons. And over the course of our run we gave away over 5,000 pocket Constitutions!

Colleen Madden
in *What the
Constitution
Means to Me*

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& BEN MARCUS

Wisconsin Wrights New Play Festival

MAY 2024

A biennial new play festival featuring three works by Wisconsin playwrights. Selected playwrights develop their plays with professional directors, dramaturgs, and actors, culminating in public readings.

Playwrights Quan Barry, L.C. Hovey
and Thomas Campbell



THE FLYING CORPSE

WRITTEN BY
Thomas
Campbell

DIRECTED BY
Erica Berman

THE OTHER SIDE

WRITTEN BY
Quan Barry

DIRECTED BY
Jake Penner

ANATOMICAL HEARTS

WRITTEN BY
L.C. Hovey

DIRECTED BY
Orion Risk

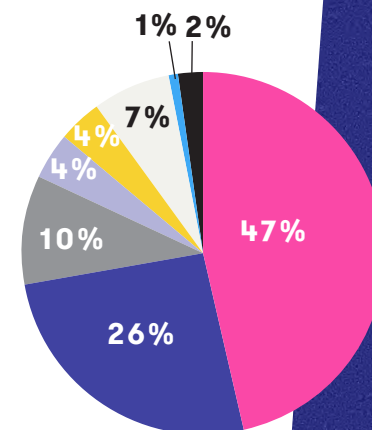
The cast and creative team
for The Flying Corpse



You supported us!

INCOME: \$1,636,724

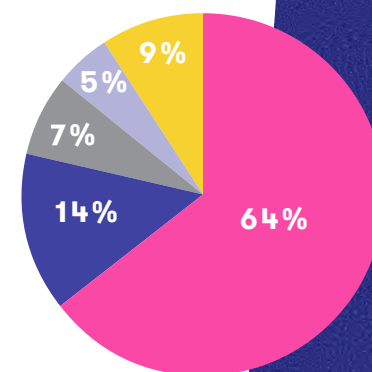
- **TICKET SALES**
- **INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS**
- **INVESTMENTS**
- **CORPORATE SUPPORT**
- **FOUNDATION SUPPORT**
- **EVENTS**
- **GOVERNMENT SUPPORT**
- **IN KIND**



Artists got paid!

EXPENSES: \$1,621,443

- **PEOPLE**
Artists, Production Personnel, Staff & Benefits, Community Connections, and 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



Engagement

Who we support is as important as who supports us!



Development Director Sarah Milestone and Board Member Adam Erdmann with Gov. Evers at the Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce's National Coming Out Day Breakfast

LA FOLLETTE HIGH SCHOOL DRAMA

Provided technical support, design mentorships, marketing support, social media boosts, actor coaching, play-writing residency, and organizational support.



OUTREACH

Sponsored event and tabled at the 2024 Magic Pride Festival.

Patron Events

CONVERSATION WITH A DESIGNER

Forward Friends enjoy a private conversation with *The Flying Lovers* of Vitebsk Scenic Designer Chris Dunham and Costume Designer Shelley Cornia, moderated by Jen Uphoff Gray in the Playhouse on February 1, 2024.



NEW PLAY READING

Forward hosted a new play development reading of *Murder Girl* at Element Hall on March 5, 2024 for Forward Leaders. RIGHT: Samara Frame, Casem AbuLughod, Cassandra Bissell, Scott Haden, Celia Klehr, and Sarah Day.



SWEET SIXTEEN

Guests enjoying our "Sweet Sixteen" Season Announcement on March 19, 2025 at the Ovation Sky Lounge. Those who made an annual gift of \$250 or more were invited to attend.





Feast Forward 15th Anniversary Gala

We are grateful to all who attended and supported our Feast Forward 15th Anniversary Celebration, especially:

Susan & Jonathan Lipp, Co-Chairs

SPECIAL THANKS TO THOSE WHO GAVE GENEROUSLY THROUGH OUR PADDLE RAISE!

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Kathleen McElroy & David Newby
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Sandi Reinardy & Keith Furman
Orange & Dean Schroeder
Lynda Sharpe
Jane Taves

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Capital Ketamine
Audra & Dave Chaimson
Nancy Ciezki & Diane Kostecke
Adam Erdmann & Shawn Langel
Amie Goldman & David Gunderson
University
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\$5,000 OR MORE

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Pleasant Rowland, through the Madison Community Foundation, has created a unique opportunity to put Forward on equal footing with our sister Resident Companies at Overture Center. She has initiated a one-to-one MATCHING GIFT CHALLENGE for the Future Forward Endowment Fund for Forward Theater. **For every dollar raised before December 31, 2024, Pleasant Rowland will match the gift, up to \$2 million.** Contact Development Director Sarah Milestone at 608.234.5001 or smilestone@forwardtheater.com for more information.

THANK YOU TO OUR LEAD CAMPAIGN DONORS

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Thank you to everyone who has invested in the Future Forward Endowment Campaign to date. A full list of our donors will be included in our program at the conclusion of the fundraising campaign. This list includes lead donors through June 30, 2024.

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List reflects Annual Fund gifts made between July 1, 2023 and June 30, 2024.

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FORWARD THEATER
ANNUAL
REPORT
2023-2024



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the ARTS**

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MADISON, WI 53703

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