

ANNUAL REPORT

2021/22 SEASON



THEATRE HORIZON'S MISSION

Theatre Horizon uses the transformative power of storytelling to foster empathy and provide an inclusive home for artists, audiences, and students alike.

A Year of Reemergence and Renewal

As we entered our 2021/22 Season, Theatre Horizon was facing an exciting challenge:

How do we welcome back audiences to our theater while honoring the new relationships we forged during the pandemic? How can we create more opportunities to make Theatre Horizon into a Third Space for Norristown when we are able to open our doors again?

As theaters began to reopen, we wanted to find the path to reemergence that put the safety of our audiences and artists first and celebrated being back in space together. We successfully programmed three in-person productions this season, including: *The Holiday Spectacular*, our first show back in our space; *TJ Loves Sally 4 Ever* by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright James Ijames; and *Athena* by Gracie Gardner. Behind the scenes, Artistic Director Nell Bang-Jensen and the creative team for *TOWN* continued to develop this new play by, for, and about the people of Norristown.

While artists filled our theater once more, Theatre Horizon's Education Department discovered strategies to reach students both virtually and in-person in our Autism Drama Program, Norristown Supplemental Theatre Education Partnerships (NSTEP), and our 2021 Summer Drama Camps.

Even as theaters are facing dwindling resources and continue to navigate the consequences of the pandemic, our team chose to expand education

programming to reach more students—all while simultaneously hosting our most well-attended summer camp sessions since 2011.



Teaching Artists and students creating together during an NSTEP class session

After transforming our lobby last season into a “Zoom school” for Norristown kids in partnership with our upstairs neighbors, The Willow School, we began to consider other ways we could strengthen our role within the community. Our Third Space activities this season included:

- Providing space for a local dance studio, who lost their studio during the flooding from Hurricane Ida. We hosted more rentals this year in our theatre than ever before
- Attending and co-hosting community events, such as the inaugural Martin Luther King, Jr. Freedom Run, organized by RUNegades and Councilwoman Heather Lewis
- Hosting several Covid-19 vaccination clinics in our lobby, in partnership with ACLAMO and the local NAACP

- Forming our Community Advisory Board, a group of Norristown residents committed to shaping the future of Theatre Horizon to ensure the needs and desires of the community are informing our practices

These ongoing efforts and more are all in service of becoming a Third Space for Norristown—a dream we hope to achieve through our newly minted three-year Strategic Plan, which we developed this season. The objectives and goals put forth in the plan were inspired and guided by our Antiracism Action Plan and our Third Space Initiative—both of which saw significant milestones this year.

In this 2021/22 Annual Report, we are excited to share with you in greater detail all that we learned and accomplished this season.



Staff members and volunteers from Theatre Horizon, ACLAMO, and the Greater Norristown NAACP at a vaccination clinic in the Theatre Horizon Lobby

**2021/22 Season
By the Numbers**

1,915
Patrons served

885
Students served

57
Artists hired
(including 4 Norristown High School Musicians)

OUR ARTISTIC PROGRAMMING

Our Productions By the Numbers

316

New Ticket Buyers

37

of Performances



Pictured: Bren Thomas, Andrea Lamy, Suli Holum, Steve Pacek, and Marisol Rosa-Shapiro

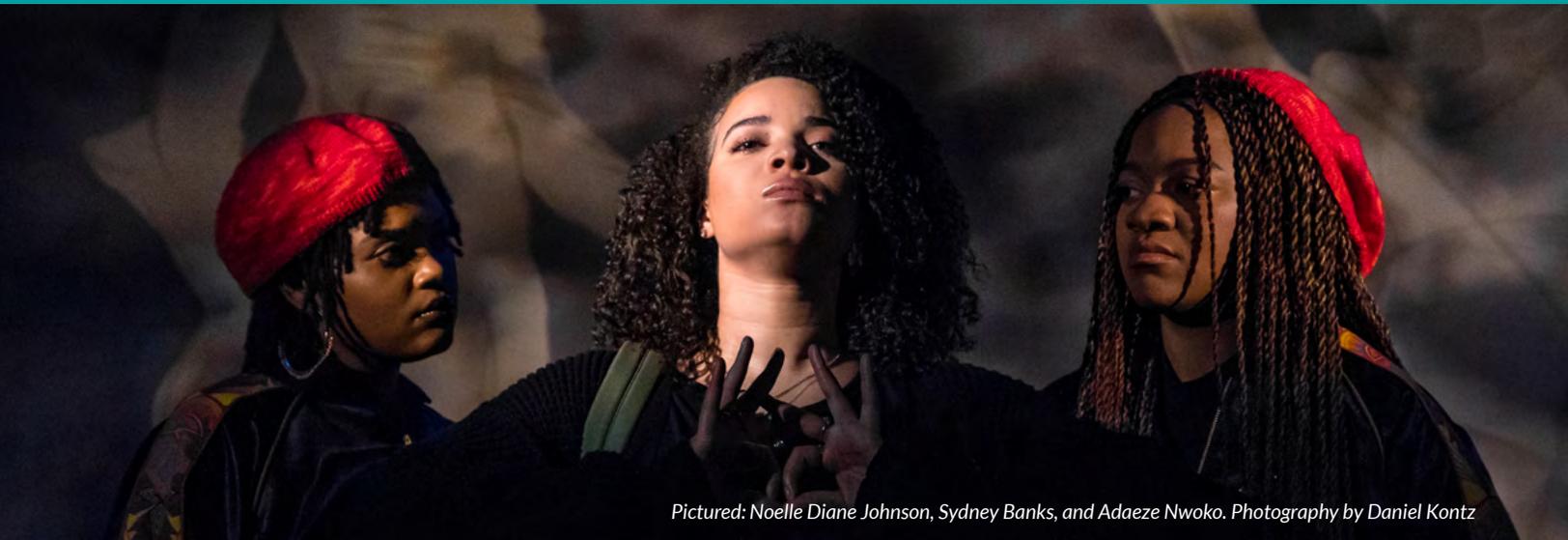
The Holiday Spectacular Directed by Nell Bang-Jensen

Theatre Horizon was thrilled to reopen the doors of our theater just in time for the holiday season with a curated evening of music and much-needed laughter hosted by Philadelphia theatre icons, Brett Robinson and Alex Bechtel, with special appearances from Santa and the Non-Denominational Holiday Owl. Audiences joined us for our first in-person production after nearly 18 months of virtual programming as beloved actors, musicians, and community members celebrated the holiday season with an original variety show.

As part of this limited engagement, we hosted a raffle for a basket of goodies from Five Saints Distillery. From this raffle, we successfully raised nearly \$1,500 for the theater and for our partners at the Lenape Cultural Center to support their Rising Nation River Journey.



Pictured: Jess Johnson. Photography by Daniel Kontz



Pictured: Noelle Diane Johnson, Sydney Banks, and Adaeze Nwoko. Photography by Daniel Kontz

TJ Loves Sally 4 Ever

by James Ijames
Directed by Lauren Turner

Executive Honorary Producers:

Diane & Jonathan Edelman
Linda & David Glickstein
Sherry & Doug Kargher

Welcome to Commonwealth of Virginia University, where a modern education is rooted in the nation’s “complicated” history. As the campus wrestles with its antebellum legacy and the names of slave-owners on university buildings, Sally finds herself locked in a more personal battle with Dean TJ.



Pictured: Devon Sinclair and Sean Close

One of American theatre’s most ingenious truth-tellers, James Ijames (*WHITE*, 2016/17 Season), reimagines Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson as a student and a dean at a southern American university, and dismantles the legacies that keep us bound amidst a swirl of marching bands, step teams,



Pictured: Noelle Diane Johnson and Adaeze Nwoko

and bubbly tour guides. This production allowed us to ask our audiences the vital question: how do we reckon with an inheritance we never asked for?

TJ Loves Sally 4 Ever attracted a wide variety of audience members, especially after a feature in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. The piece sparked important conversations among our audiences, with many patrons reaching out to let us know just how much this play encouraged them to consider the complexities and nuance of race, legacy, and inheritance. As our company continues to look at our work through an antiracist lens and implement strategies that reflect these values, this production affirmed that our audiences are game to move forward on this path with us.



TJ Loves Sally 4 Ever was supported by PNC Arts Alive.



Pictured: Campbell O'Hare and Kira Player. Photography by John C. Hawthorne

Athena by Gracie Gardner Directed by Kathryn MacMillan

Executive Honorary Producer:
Carol Beam

Associate Honorary Producers:
Martha Carey & Mark Tomlinson

Athena and Mary Wallace are seventeen, determined, and preparing for battle. Sparring partners for the National Fencing Championships, they balance high stakes fencing attacks with the dangers of becoming friends with your competitor. These fierce athletes risk it all in a breathless series of epic fencing matches and quick-witted parleys. A badass comedy about the ruthless pursuit of glory—and friendship.

After having to postpone our production of *Athena* from its original slot in our 2019/20 Season, we were so pleased that we could bring back the same team of artists nearly two years later.



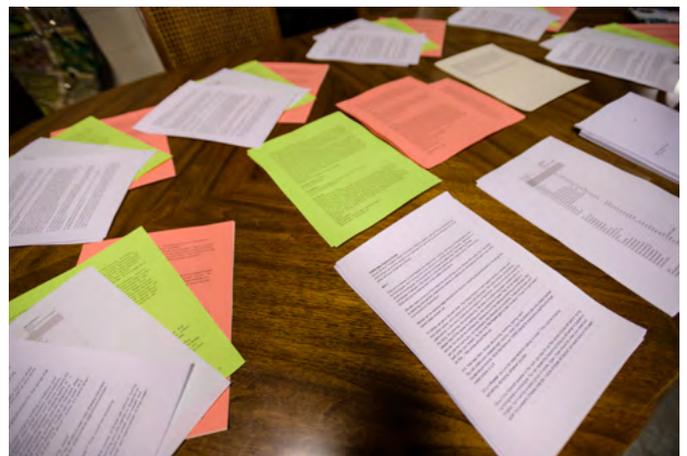
Audiences were notably impressed by the physical stamina and prowess of our actors, and the comedy and complexity of female friendship explored in the play excited folks. The following quote from an audience member beautifully sums up what we strived to offer this season: “[*Athena*] was great! This is our favorite theater because you always put on such thought-provoking shows. We are going to talk about this for a long time.”



Helmed by Artistic Director Nell Bang-Jensen and Playwright Michael John Garcés, *TOWN* will be a three-act play with original music by ILL DOOTS, in collaboration with Norristown residents.

What emerges when members of a wildly diverse city tell a collective story?

TOWN is a social practice theatre piece that uses the ideas and structure in Thornton Wilder's classic play *Our Town* as inspiration to explore the nostalgia and myth of small-town America—and think about what community means to us in the 2020s. The project will culminate in free, large-scale performances on the campus of Eisenhower Science and Technology Leadership Academy, featuring community members alongside a cast of professional performers.



Scripts from our May 2022 developmental reading of TOWN at Hopeworx. TOWN photography by John C. Hawthorne

This season, we completed our final week-long development workshops in October 2021 and May 2022. During the first workshop, we continued interviews with Norristown residents, went on in-person tours of community partner sites, did workshops with Norristown Area High School students, and held an open mic night at Haya Ground Studio.

Then in May, we transitioned our community engagement activities to focus on receiving feedback on the script-in-progress. ILL DOOTS facilitated lyric generation workshops, and we launched TOWN Tuesdays, where our teaching artists led acting workshops across Norristown to prepare community members for auditions. In June, over 70 community members auditioned for the show, and we look forward to showcasing many of their talents in the performances, which will take place September 15-18.



Above: A community member looks over the script during one of the public readings. Below: Community Members rock out with ILL DOOTS at the TOWN HOLLA at Haya Ground Studio.



Major support for TOWN has been provided by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage with additional support from PNC Arts Alive.



OUR EDUCATION PROGRAMS



Summer Drama Camps

In our annual **Summer Drama Camps**, young actors spend a week working as an ensemble to create an original play full of drama, comedy, suspense, and one-of-a-kind characters. On the last day, they perform their world premiere play for an audience! In Drama Camp, children make new friends, build listening and ensemble skills, take on leadership roles, and explore their creativity.

Last year, with the use of social distancing, masks, and other Covid precautions, we were able to return to in-person summer camps. We

kept our class sizes smaller to allow for social distancing, but this also gave students more individualized time with our amazing teaching artists. Though we reduced the number of students for each session, the 2021 summer camp sessions saw the biggest turnout since Summer 2011—with over 380 students participating! Students were eager to return to in-person camps, and 10 of the 25 sessions were sold out. Many camp sessions shifted to utilizing outdoor spaces, and we collaborated with the Parks & Rec departments to run everything as safely as possible so that our kids could get back to being creative in-person with each other.

Summer 2021 By the Numbers

- 25 Camp Sessions (at 12 locations across Montgomery County)
- 383 Participating Students
- 15 Teaching Artists Employed



THEATRE HORIZON presents
NSTEP Norristown
Supplemental
Theatre Education Partnerships

NSTEP continued to offer ongoing free theatre arts education programs in collaboration with our renowned community partners, including the Norristown Area School District, GirlsFirst, and ACLAMO Family Centers. This year, we added three community partners to support new programming for adult and senior learners: HopeWorx, Montgomery County-Norristown Public Library, and Montco SAAC. Through NSTEP, Theatre Horizon works to enrich the cultural life of Norristown by producing quality theatrical experiences and programs accessible to Norristown students of all ages.



In the summer of 2021, we also launched our first ever NSTEP summer camp, welcoming 10 first-time campers for a week at Theatre Horizon. The camp proved meaningful for our students, especially after spending so much time in isolation during the pandemic. A message shared with us from a parent after NSTEP Camp, “...camps with Theatre Horizon really saved [my son] this summer. He was in a deep depression from lockdown and virtual school and you all turned that around. Thank you!!!”

NSTEP By the Numbers

- 6 Partner Organizations (including TOWN Tuesday Workshops for adult learners)
- 288 Participating Students (99 virtual learners; 189 in-person learners)

Autism Drama Program

Our award-winning **Autism Drama Program (ADP)** had another wonderful, if unconventional, year of serving students on the autism spectrum. We continued to offer two classes—Youth Drama for ages 10-17 and Storytelling & the Art of Playwriting for 17+—which help students develop social skills, verbal expression, empathy for others, and a sense of self-worth and accomplishment. Our classes help students develop social skills, verbal expression, empathy for others, and a sense of self-worth and accomplishment.



During the pandemic, we were able to reach many students virtually, who had previously been unable to attend classes before, and we remained committed to serving them when we were able to return to in-person classes. This season was our first time teaching ADP in a hybrid format; Summer and Fall sessions were held virtually, and our Spring sessions were offered virtually and in-person. We even experimented with hosting classes outside in the sunshine! One happy parent, whose child participated virtually, noted: “**Teachers and staff were amazing, especially in this really difficult Zoom format! [...] I loved how they adapted exercises to work over Zoom. I loved their general enthusiasm and sense of fun and play they all had.**”

ADP By the Numbers

- 36 Classes/Sessions (3 sessions of 6 weeks for 2 different classes)
- 61 Participating Students (48 virtual learners; 13 in-person learners)
- 22 Teaching Artists Employed

OUR FUTURE



Community members and professional theatre artists at a script-in-progress reading of TOWN. Photography by John C. Hawthorne

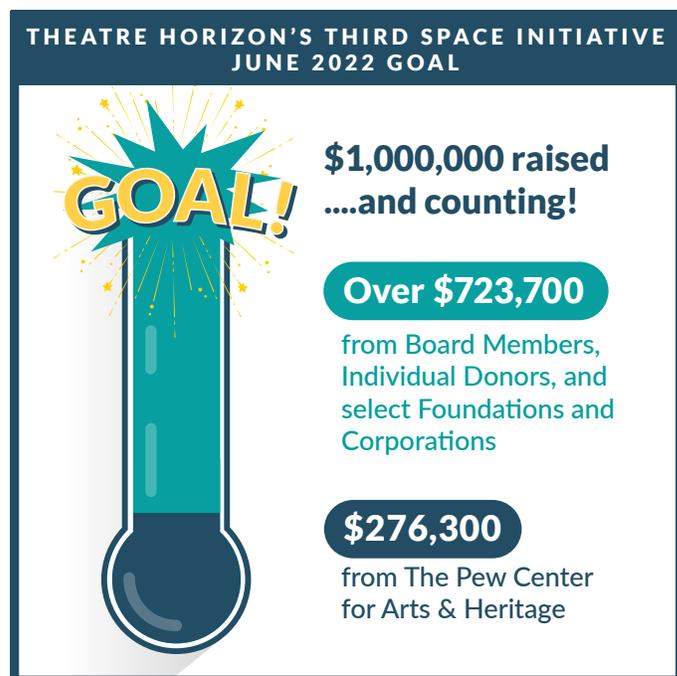
Third Space Initiative and Campaign

In December 2020 we launched our Third Space Campaign, with the ambitious goal of raising \$1,000,000 by the summer of 2022 to become Norristown's Third Space.

But what is a "Third Space?" The "Third Space" is inspired by the work of sociologist Ray Oldenburg who defines it as the social places separate from home and work that are essential for democracy, civic engagement, and creating a sense of connection across perceived boundaries. As a communal gathering place in the heart of Norristown's Arts Hill District, Theatre Horizon is uniquely positioned to be this place of gathering for Norristown residents. Thanks to the support of our Board of Directors, institutional and corporate partners, and many donors, we surpassed our goal of raising \$1,000,000!

The last eighteen months has shown us just how enthusiastic our supporters are in creating this Third Space with us. Rather than stopping here, Theatre Horizon has made the decision to extend

the campaign to December 2023 and raise an additional \$500,000 to fully realize this vision. Stay tuned for more news on our progress!



After 18 months of fundraising and over 800 donations, we've raised over \$1,000,000!

RE:IMAGINING RECOVERY



Photography by John C. Hawthorne

In September 2021, we learned that The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage had selected our organization to receive a Re:Imagining Recovery grant! In a critical and forward-thinking move, The Center focused their recent funding cycle on helping cultural organizations “undertake critical adaptations as they emerge from the effects of the pandemic—bringing new perspectives on how the arts can be revitalized and play a key role in the resurgence of the region’s civic and economic vitality.” Theatre Horizon is grateful to have been selected as one of their grantees.

How are we using our funding?

Theatre Horizon will continue to focus on becoming an antiracist Third Space, and we will use this funding to bring in extra support and make physical improvements to the theater. Already this season we formed our Community Advisory Board (CAB), which is being led by antiracist facilitator Nicole Brewer. As creator of Conscientious Theatre Training and originator of the Anti-Racist Theatre Movement, Brewer has worked with arts organizations to explore the aesthetics of inclusivity. The CAB is composed of two cohorts, each of seven Norristown residents, to expand our ability to gather feedback directly from our community. Members met several times throughout the year to offer their wisdom and guidance on potential programming and the look and feel of a Third Space.

We’ll be implementing their ideas starting in the 2022/23 season.

We are also working with Jared Mezzocchi, an artist pioneering the field of digital theatre. Mezzocchi is a director, designer, virtual performance creator, and multimedia artist who founded a video design collective (ViDCo) during the pandemic to explore the new art form of virtual theatre and facilitate innovations for live performance companies. Mezzocchi will serve as our Virtual Access Consultant to develop a strategy for more virtual events, like our 2020/21 *Art Houses* series, and technology upgrades. Mezzocchi has met with our staff and community members to begin the process of designing these experiences, and he will continue this work in the Fall of 2022.

And last, but certainly not least, we’ll be redesigning a more visible, welcoming, and accessible exterior of our building. Though our dark street gives us an air of mystery, we’re excited to brighten the entrance and make it easier to find us!

We look forward to implementing these changes in our 2022/23 Season and beyond.



“Becoming a Third Space” has been supported by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage.

INTRODUCING: OUR FY23-25 STRATEGIC PLAN

While Theatre Horizon's mission from the beginning has been to build empathy, the Covid-19 pandemic and the pause to in-person productions provided an opportunity to explore new ways of doing this and to focus on relationship-building with Norristown residents. The Theatre Horizon staff, board, and strategic planning committee met throughout the year to craft our next strategic plan, which will move us deeper into this work, giving us a structure to reexamine how we build empathy—particularly among disparate groups in our heterogeneous community. Our Antiracism Action Plan will be a key part of this. For Theatre Horizon, a predominantly white institution, building empathy also means continuing to prioritize and build trust with Black and Brown Norristown residents, who comprise over 60% of the population.

In becoming a Third Space we hope to serve as a model for how theaters function with and for the communities they serve.

These are the principles we discovered through our strategic planning process that we aim to carry forward over the next three years:

This is an adaptive plan that will continue to be shaped by feedback from staff, artists, board members, and most notably, the newly-formed Community Advisory Boards of Norristown residents.

We will prioritize relationship-building by bringing the art into the community and the community into the art.

We will work collaboratively across departments to creatively reimagine how we serve artists, audiences, students, donors, and newcomers to Theatre Horizon.

Theatre Horizon's culture has prioritized values of inclusion and empathy in the past; we will go deeper to become an actively and explicitly antiracist organization.

Our space is one of our most valuable assets. We can use it to make a difference in our community.

Our industry is irrevocably changed as the result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Over the next few years, we must resist the urge to readopt old practices that weren't serving us prior to the pandemic and will not serve us in the future.

These principles are informing the following strategies, which will serve as overarching goals for us to achieve within the next three years:

1. Become a Third Space for the greater Norristown community, integrating art into the community and the community into our art.
2. Reimagine our theatre and education programs in ways that resonate with our diverse audiences and creative teams.
3. Build a business model that supports financial stability and our core values.

We look forward to sharing our progress with you as we journey forward and achieve milestones!



Our Strategic Plan will help us build strong partnerships, like the one we have with RUNegades (pictured above).

ANTIRACISM ACTION PLAN

On September 30, 2020, Theatre Horizon published our Antiracism Action Plan: a living, breathing document that will be edited and expanded over time as we continue to learn how the implementation of antiracist initiatives resonate within our organization and community. Our goal is to ensure ongoing commitment to the evolving conversation surrounding diversity, equity, inclusion, and access.

Inspired by “We See You, White American Theatre,” our goal in doing this work is to establish a culture at Theatre Horizon that dismantles the institutionalized centering of whiteness. To shape our plan, we included six strategic focus categories: Accountability; Staff & Hiring Culture; Training & Education; Programming Practices & Cultural Competency; Funding & Financials; and Governance. In September 2021, we released a 1-Year Progress Report as outlined in our plan. The purpose of this progress report is to provide external accountability for where we are in achieving these goals.

Below are a few highlights from our 1-Year Progress Report:

- In October 2021, we hired the group oneTILT to serve as external consultants to conduct an anti-oppression assessment of our organization, as part of their consulting and EDI training for our board and staff. Nicole Brewer of Conscientious Theatre Training also worked with our Board in the Fall of 2021.
 - Our EDI Representative and Artistic Director began working with oneTILT to further refine our harm reporting systems (created in March 2021) to create a focus on developing relationship repair processes and policies. In the meantime, all contractors have received updated harm reporting information.
 - We have developed and disseminated a preferred vendor list that prioritizes Norristown- & BIPOC-owned and operated businesses by reaching out to contacts at the Norristown Chamber of Commerce, Valley Forge Tourism Board, and the Norristown Chapter of the NAACP. This is an ever-evolving list, and we will continue to add contacts and businesses as we learn of them.
 - We have reenvisioned our production processes to hold rehearsal 5 of 7 days/week and eliminate “10 out of 12s”—12-hour rehearsal days during the tech process—to foster a better work/life balance for our artists.
 - In FY21, our board members contributed \$6,750 to our Antiracist Action Fund which helped fund the creation of a video for volunteer ushers with information on bystander intervention and identifying microaggressions.
 - We published pie charts on our website that break down both our financials (Antiracist Action Fund Spending, Expenses, & Income) as well as the racial parity of our staff, board, and contractors. These pie charts will be updated yearly so we can track our progress over time. We would like to hold ourselves accountable as we work to cultivate a more diverse workforce and to gain trust in our community.
 - In September 2021, we began ensuring that every draft of a job posting is reviewed by three people who are not in the theater industry to conduct an edit for theatre jargon and exclusionary language.
- In September 2022, we will release a 2-year Progress Report. This added update will serve as an additional benchmark between year one and year three of our plan for increased accountability. Our Antiracism Action Committee continues to meet regularly.

OUR SUPPORTERS

Theatre Horizon could not thrive without support from individuals and institutions who believe in our work. We are proud to receive funding from local, national, private, corporate, and government grantmakers. For a full list of our individual donors, please visit theatrehorizon.org/oursupporters

Foundations

Actors' Equity Foundation	The Mariner Foundation
The Anne M. and Philip H. Glatfelter, III Family Foundation	The McLean Contributionship
CCRES	Montgomery County Foundation
Charities Aid Foundation of America	Montgomery County Redevelopment Authority Grant
The Charlotte Cushman Foundation	National Endowment for the Arts
CHG Charitable Trust	The Patricia Kind Family Foundation
Child Development Foundation	Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
Connelly Foundation	The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage
David Nation/Suzan Willcox Family Fund of The Philadelphia Foundation	PNC Arts Alive
Delta Kappa Gamma Society International	The Shubert Foundation
Engelmyer Fund	Shuttered Venue Operators Grant
The Hess Foundation	The Stratton Foundation
The Independence Foundation	The Victory Foundation
Impact100 Philadelphia	The Virginia Brown Martin Fund of The Philadelphia Foundation
The Lida Foundation	Upper Merion Board of Community Assistance
The Lily Foundation	The William Penn Foundation
Little Tower Foundation	The Wyncote Foundation
Loeb Performing Arts Fund of The Philadelphia Foundation	

Corporate Partners and Donors

Bright Light Design Center	Merck & Co.
Ernst & Young	Montgomery County Community College
Five Saints Distilling	Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board: Arts Montco
Hiway Theater in Jenkintown	The RUNegades
Jaz Press	Renzi, Bernardi, Suarez & Co.
Jazz180	
Johnson & Johnson	

THEATRE HORIZON STAFF, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, AND TEACHING ARTISTS



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Marketing & Development Coordinator..... Kirsten Sughrue
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Fiona Dwyer, Becky Fleckner, Sohrab Haghverdi,
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Brooke Shilling, Mydia Simpson, Carl Smith,
Melissa Spangler, and Angela Trovato
Front of House Managers..... Seth Duncan and Jessica Merkins
Box Office Managers..... Ava Ciriello, Tiffany Hall, and Willa Jaffe

Thank you for reading about our activities during our 2021/22 Season

Returning to in-person activities and building back after the pandemic was never going to be easy, but the foundation laid this season is setting us up for a bright future. As we stand back for a bird's eye view of what was accomplished throughout the past year, we continue to see the importance of the work that we are doing to become a Third Space—and how none of it would be possible without the community we have been building since our founding.

Artists infuse our mission with the creativity and daring that challenge us to strive for excellence and bold risk-taking in our artmaking. Our students bring vitality and hope for the future, reminding us how they are prepared to become champions

of the arts for life—thanks, in part, to their time with us. Community members and funders, both locally in Norristown and beyond, provide us with multi-faceted and enduring support, whether it be through exchanging resources, providing wisdom, or showing enthusiasm.

Our successes are your successes. Whatever your connection may be to this theatre company, you are a part of what makes it all happen. We hope you see yourself in this season's triumphs, because being a Third Space means that whatever we do, we do it together.

THANK YOU!

