

# **MATRIX** **THEATRE COMPANY**

## **Annual Report to the Board of Directors**

**October 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020**

**Presented at  
March 14, 2021  
Annual Meeting**



Kate Brennan



Jessica Pappas

### **A Message from the Executive Director and Board Chair**

This past year was full of unexpected challenges. It is hard to believe we have spent 12 months sheltering in place. Those of us who are fortunate enough to still have a job are working from home, practicing social distancing and masking up when we venture outside the safety of our own homes.

During this difficult time, our hardworking staff showed incredible courage and resilience. They spent valuable time learning new technology in order to provide virtual creative arts programming for all ages, even though we couldn't be together. We sent out weekly email blasts filled with creative ideas for parents to enjoy with their youth. And, we provided Broadway show suggestions for streaming on Netflix. In addition to our virtual School of Theatre programming and email blasts, we continued to work on our devised theatre project.

We had to reschedule our annual fundraiser for the 2020-2021 fiscal year, but thanks to our loyal supporters and the funding community, we were able to ride out this year's financial and emotional storm.

As we move into this new year, we are hopeful that plans which were put on hold during these difficult times can be brought to life in 2021. That play that came to a screeching halt just before the start of rehearsals can start up again. The summer camp that had to become virtual can be in-person. Our Ford-funded listening parties can actually be live and presented at locations throughout southwest Detroit. Finally, we can actually celebrate our upcoming 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary together and share many Matrix memories.

Thank you for your continued support throughout this difficult time, and we look forward to seeing you in person in 2021.

Kate Brennan,  
Executive Director

Jessica Pappas,  
Board Chair

## OVERVIEW AND MISSION

### *Matrix Theatre Company Mission Statement*

To build community, improve lives, and foster social justice, Matrix Theatre Company teaches, creates, and shares theatre as an instrument of transformation.

Matrix Theatre Company is focused on the powerful vision of transformation and believes that **creativity is an essential power**, the practice of which changes lives and transforms the world. In the years since its founding in 1991, it has remained focused on that singular vision.

The organization operates the Matrix Theatre Mainstage, Second Stage and the Matrix School of Theatre. It is inclusive in practice and purpose: the theatre engages all ages, all ethnicities, all identities, and all abilities.

Fundamentally a theatre of hope, Matrix Theatre company offers a powerful vision of community transformation: a place where the essential dignity of every human is recognized and where every story and life is honored as a source for art-making. **Matrix's vision** is *to be a cultural anchor of Southwest Detroit, nationally recognized as a socially-engaged theatre that transforms individuals and revitalizes community through theatre.*

**The Matrix School of Theatre's program goals** are *to nurture creative potential, develop positive self-identity, develop a sense of responsibility and community, teach playwriting as a form of self and community expression, and provide an outlet for participants to tell their stories.*

**Matrix Theatre Second Stage offers a unique approach to engage and empower people of all ages to find their voice, in order to clearly articulate their thoughts and be understood. The theatre provides the opportunity for playwrights, poets, and other amateurs, as well as professionals, to try their hand at performing, playwriting, and other forms of performing arts.**

**The Matrix Theatre Mainstage**, the professional arm of the organization also seeks to create community-conscious theatre that engages its audiences through the introduction of new thoughts, ideas, and dialogues. It is our objective to produce high quality, professional theatre that aims to begin and/or further issue-based conversations and build upon the sense of community that will strengthen society's resolve toward social justice.

Since its founding, Matrix Theatre Company has presented over **207 productions** and developed more than **205 new scripts**. These plays have been seen and heard by approximately **131,000** people. Our 2019-2020 season was cancelled due to the pandemic.

## **MATRIX PROGRAMS: Fostering Creativity, Community, and Collaboration**

Matrix Theatre Company consists of three departments -- **The Matrix Theatre Mainstage**, the **Matrix Second Stage** and the **Matrix School of Theatre**.

As a major component of our mission, Matrix includes community members of all races and ethnic backgrounds. In particular, more than 85 percent of Matrix enrollees are low income; 50 percent are African-American, and 30 percent are Latino.

In addition to serving a wide variety of racial and ethnic groups, Matrix engages community members of all ages. 80% of all participants are between the ages of 5-17; the remaining 20 percent is evenly distributed between community members ages 18+. The major concentration of youth and teens is directly linked to the Matrix School of Theatre, which engages students ages 5-17 in playwriting and performing. The majority of adult participation is with the Theatre's Mainstage productions and the reignited Second Stage programming.

In spite of a major staff change and the pandemic, Matrix Theatre Company's limited programming directly engaged approximately 175 people in the 2019-2020 fiscal year including two virtual showcases.

## Matrix School of Theatre



Following our successful summer camp, the registration numbers for our fall School of Theatre semester fell short of expectations, so we decided to postpone it and work toward a more robust winter semester. Our winter semester started off with nine students but was abruptly cut short because of the pandemic.

We took that time to find ways where we could provide virtual programming for the students. We trained teaching artists and created two virtual offerings for youth – **Play Time** and our regular creativity classes. Play Time was developed for the summer as a pilot program where we offered individual one-on-one programming to students. Seven students received four one-hour classes for one month at days and times of their choosing. Each four-week series ended in two virtual showcases where they invited parents, family, and friends to attend. This new program is slowly gaining traction and registrations are growing. Parents are really glad to have their children engaged in creative play of their choosing at a time when many are experiencing Zoom fatigue. We hope to continue with Play Time as it continues to gain traction. We worked with approximately 20 students and held two virtual showcases for an audience of family and friends.

**Residencies** continued throughout the Pandemic. January through March of 2020 we worked with 10 students at Detroit Prep which culminated in one Showcase. We also provided theatre arts programming for 11 students at Alternatives for Girls Summer Camp in June and July 2020.

**Partnerships** with other organizations continued throughout the year. Matrix Director of Education, Amy Johnson presented to the Michigan Arts Access (MiAA) at their Red-Carpet event in October 2019. She continues to stay involved with the Just for Me Social Club, and has attended some of their virtual meetings.

We are pleased that although we were only working virtually these past months, we were able to hire nine teaching artists and train them to work in this new virtual environment.

## **Matrix Theatre Mainstage Season**

In Fall of 2019, Megan Buckley-Ball, Matrix Artistic Director for the past 8 years, left for a new position with the Macomb Center for the Performing Arts. We decided to use that time to reflect on our work and any adjustments we might want to make in the direction for the theatre.

We moved ahead with our plans to reignite Matrix Second Stage programming, as well as to develop and produce the first of what we hoped would be a yearly devised theatre piece, along with our traditional plays. In addition, we met with Black and Brown Theater founder, Emilio Rodriguez, and agreed to produce his play, *Swimming While Drowning*, in spring 2020.

We were well on our way to filling in the gaps left by Megan's departure when the Pandemic hit, and we had to immediately close down the theatre.

We had already held auditions and cast *Swimming While Drowning*, so we have decided to hold off until summer of 2021 to hopefully present the show outdoors.

Although our fall production was presented in our 2020-2021 fiscal year, much of the rehearsal and preparation was conducted in fiscal 2019-2020, so we are including a description of it in this report. Based on an originally devised piece by Sojourn Theatre, who offered their 2006-2008 show script as a template, along with the directive to, "create something for our own community." In partnership with C&G Collective, Matrix Theatre's, **theR.A.C.E** along with planning for the all-day festival on election day which would need to be changed to *Reestablishing Art as Civic Experience*, was based on the question, "**What do Detroiters have, want, and need from their city, state, and national leaders?**" The planning for the production included pivoting from live performances to creating four filmed performance pieces outdoor activities only. Much of the work which included planning and hiring of staff and artists was completed in September 2020 **where we hired a team of 13 artists** to begin the project which would be presented in October of 2020.

## Second Stage

Matrix Theatre reignited its **Second Stage programming** this past year, using a creative approach to meet the needs of individuals ages 18+, who are not theater professionals, but they are interested in performance and storytelling experiences.

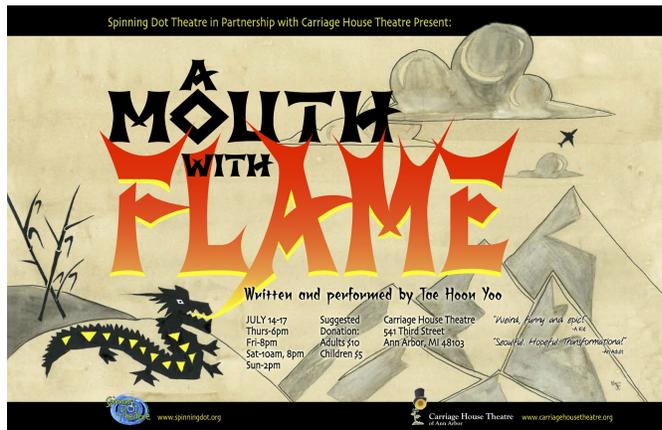
### Sounds & Sessions:



**Sessions** – With funding from Ford Motor Company, we initiated Sounds and Sessions programming. Working with trained forensic coaches we conducted four storytelling “sessions” with 11 individuals who were interested in learning how to write and perform their own stories. The pandemic called a halt to the sessions, but we are currently offering virtual sessions for those individuals interested in continuing with their storytelling workshops.

**Sounds** - At the same time coaches were working with Sessions students, we conducted 20 long interviews of southwest Detroiters, new and old, with Detroit-based sound technician Scott Murphy. In spite of the pandemic, we were able to complete all 20 conversations by moving the interviews outdoors. We are now in the process of creating listening parties which will hopefully be conducted in person throughout the community and online.

## Professional Children's Theater:



In December of 2019, we partnered with Spinning Dot Theatre of Ann Arbor to present three international children's shows and special workshops for local youth. Unfortunately, the first one was cancelled due to a snow storm, but the second show was very well received. ***A Mouth with Flame and shadow puppet workshop*** was a success with **nearly 20 youth and their parents in attendance**. However, the final show *The Kids from Amandla Street* and Performing Character Workshop was cancelled due to the pandemic lockdown. We plan to renew this partnership for next year, and hopefully we will have better luck.

### ***Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind:***



We continued our partnership with UnTheatre Company and presented a six-week run of ***Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind*** in January and February 2020. As usual, the run of this show brought in a younger and very enthusiastic crowd to Matrix.

## DEVELOPMENT

Matrix Theatre Company continued to research new funding sources, along with continuing its ongoing events and outreach efforts. Although the pandemic forced us to move our annual fundraiser into the next fiscal year, we were successful in raising additional foundation dollars for the theatre.

### Annual Appeal:

Each November, Matrix carries out a year-end campaign to raise unrestricted operating funds. Our 2019 Annual Appeal resulted in additional funding of \$9,328. Matrix solicited donations through a direct mail campaign mailed to approximately 1,600 people and received donations through remittance and online efforts.

### 3rd Annual Women's Automotive Cup -- GM vs Ford:

In February of 2019, Matrix Theatre and Clark Park again partnered to raise unrestricted funding for the two organizations at their third Annual Women's Hockey Game at Clark Parks' outdoor ice rink. It was a huge success, and we raised more than \$12,000 for the two organizations.



## COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING

Due to budget constraints, Matrix relies heavily on earned media, print collateral, social media, and other methods of disseminating information. For Mainstage and Second Stage productions, educational programs, and other smaller programs, Matrix uses any or all of the following to disseminate information: press releases, media relations and following up with press contacts, sourcing relevant and contacting potential "game-changers" based on subject matter or content of program, print collateral (the season brochure and postcards sent by direct mail and disseminated at area locations, and posters and fliers), online event calendars, weekly eblasts sent to targeted lists, Matrix's website, and social media forums like Facebook and Twitter.

Matrix receives earned media coverage for both its professional and educational programming. In addition to marketing Matrix's programs and events, the organization has undertaken efforts to market Matrix's brand and market the institution itself.

When we were forced to close because of the pandemic, we quickly worked together to put out a weekly email blast to help us stay in touch with parents, Main Stage ticket holders, and supporters. Our director of education came up with creative ideas for parents to do with their children, and the rest of the team sent out lots of Netflix Broadway play and movie suggestions, along with great books to read during lockdown. We received lots of thanks for our ideas and suggestions, as we continued to support everyone through these difficult times.

## **A VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

Matrix Theatre Company continues to be deeply and profoundly engaged in the creation of a vibrant, just, and humane culture within the city of Detroit. Matrix Theatre Company's commitment to building a powerful and sustainable organization can be found in its vision statement.

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This year we will be celebrating our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a number of special events designed to bring back alumni and celebrate our past, present and future.

We are forging new relationships with organizations such as the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and we are finalizing exciting plans for our hybrid summer camp for our youth.

We continue to find new ways to engage the community and expand our offerings, and we continue our commitment to creating one devised theatre piece each year.

Our Second Stage offerings will grow this year, as we promote and continue our storytelling sessions and present our listening parties.

As a cultural anchor of southwest Detroit, Matrix Theatre Company will provide the highest quality of inclusive programs, facilities and performances, as it strives to become a nationally recognized model for socially engaged, community-based theatre production, playwriting, and education.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL FUNDERS**

The Brennan Group, LLC  
Tom & Mary Tereza Centlivre  
Canton Community Foundation  
The Centlivre Family  
Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan  
Crossover Solutions  
Derek Edwards  
The Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation  
Shannon Ferrini  
Fusco, Shaffer & Pappas, Inc.  
Honey Bee Market/La Colmena  
Hudson-Webber Foundation  
Junior League of Detroit  
Kern Foundation  
Kresge Foundation  
The McMahon Family  
Michigan Humanities Council  
William & Barb Lawton  
Molly McMahon  
Joseph Melnick  
Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA)  
The Naoum Family  
Northwestern Mutual  
James & Susan Pappas  
Pappas Consulting  
Dan Reed & Afia Asamoah  
Robar PR  
Rugiero Promise Foundation  
Sicily's Pizzeria & Subs  
Sisters of Mercy  
Cynthia Yott

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2019-2020**

**Jessica Pappas**, President  
**Lisa Varnier**, Vice President (through January 2020)  
**Nicole Calhoun-Huddleston**, Secretary  
**Derek Edwards**, Treasurer  
**Mary Thereza Centlivre**  
**Lynn Stevens Naoum**  
**D. Stafford Nelson**

**Molly McMahon**  
**Colleen Robar**

## **Staff 2019-2020**

**Kathryn Brennan**  
Executive Director

**Amy Johnson**  
Director of Education

**Andrea Kannon**  
Director of Operations

## **PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS**

Alternatives for Girls  
Berkley High School  
Black and Brown Theatre  
Cesar Chavez High School  
Congress of Communities  
Covenant House Academy  
Detroit High School for the Fine and Performing Arts  
Detroit Opera Theatre  
Detroit Youth Development Resource Center  
Diann Banks-Williamson Educational Center  
Ford Resource and Engagement Center (FREC)  
Frank Cody DIT High School  
Gompers Middle School  
Living Arts  
Martin Luther King Jr. High School  
Neinas Elementary School  
Partnership for Youth  
Repair the World  
Roberto Clemente Recreation Center  
Ruth Ellis Center  
Southwest Solutions  
Southwest Holiday Fest  
St. Anthony  
Urban Neighborhood Initiatives (UNI)  
VSA Michigan