



Meridian Hall
St. Lawrence Centre
Meridian Arts Centre

Executive Management Report to the Board

**Q4 Activity
(Oct-Nov-Dec 2020)**

PRESIDENT & CEO'S EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The final quarter of 2020 saw the working staff (those still on salary and not on furlough) continue to promote the ongoing digital work with both artists in the community and our partnerships with local companies, including the presentation of the MacArthur Award winning, Taylor Mac's *Holiday Sauce...Pandemic!*, and the [Transformations Project](#) by three local artists: [Susanna Fournier & ted witzel](#), [Ian Kamau](#) and [Yolanda Bonnell](#). These digital works continue TO Live's commitment to providing unique, high quality artistic work from a diverse set of voices across our community.

In order to maintain our budget and provide staff a break, it was decided early in the year that our offices would be closed for two weeks beginning December 19th. Prior to the office closure, the team was preparing the beginning of 2021 with production focused on the rehearsals and filming of Obsidian Theatre's [21 Black Futures](#), and the creative development of a new work by DLT Experience. The Capital Projects team took full advantage of the down time to move forward with as many of the needed SOGR projects for all three venues, including the exploration of upgrades related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hopefully you would have received our holiday message outlining our work with the community. The holiday email, along with a message from our Development department, closed out a successful year of fundraising during very difficult times. Development was particularly thrilled to break over 200 new donors in 2020! This is the start of a multi-year project to build a network of new supporters to help us continue to provide access and support to the artistic community for both uptown and downtown.

The TO Live team (along with our Board Chair) also participated in Metcalf Foundation's Staging Change workshops, focusing our time on the development of a future plan for the Meridian Arts Centre and how best to increase usage and engage the local neighbourhood.

We look forward to new beginnings in 2021 and building upon the many important investments we have made throughout the 2020 season.

Clyde Wagner
President & CEO

PROGRAMMING

TO LIVE Presents

In October funds were made available to enable TO Live to fulfil one of the priorities identified in our three-phase Program for Recovery, namely the provision of space to artists and companies so they can create, perform, and maintain connection with their audiences.

In addition to work opportunities for around 250 artists, importantly this initiative has also meant that TO Live has been able to offer project work to many furloughed production and other staff.

For the offer of space to be meaningful, as well as waiving rent, the invitation included our commitment to cover the cost of opening the buildings (cleaning, operations etc.), and production staff.

The range of projects enabled by the provision of space initiative to date ranges across:

- Partnership projects including:
 - Fall for Dance North: Open Studio
 - Obsidian Theatre Company: *21 Black Futures* films project
 - Outside the March: adaptation of *Solo Together: Lessons in Temperament* stage work to film
 - Toronto Fringe: Next Stage Festival: Theatre Shorts (films of 6 works)
- TO Live presents projects including:
 - National Transformations Project: 3 digital commissions (Yolanda Bonnell, Susanna Fournier/ted witzel, Ian Kamau). On view on the TO Live and NAC websites
 - DLT Experience: 4-week company creative development residency
- Supporting TO Live Residents and others by giving them access to venues to them to rehearse, film and stream performances including: Sinfonia Toronto, Hannaford Silver Street Band, Orchestra Toronto.
- Future space commitments include with: Dance Immersion, Paprika, Xenia, Nova Dance, BAND Gallery and The Power Plant.

Other TO Live Presents projects during Q4 of 2020

- TO Live joined an international cohort to live stream *Taylor Mac: Holiday Sauce ... Pandemic!* from one of North America's boldest queer vaudevillian satirists. We invited Buddies in Bad Times to partner, and to co-host, an online after party featuring performances by local artists from the LGBTQI2 community. (ticketed event)
- The VP and Director of Programming continue work identifying and scoping potential TO Live Presents and partnership projects for 2021 in anticipation of the return of live performance albeit within ongoing health safety restrictions. In accordance with the concepts outlined in the TO Live 3-phase Program for Recovery (previously shared with the Board) these plans include presenting, and also producing, events that allow us to welcome audiences back to our venues safely and in ways that offer rewarding experiences for them and for the artists. Commitment to 2021 programming is pending confirmation of budget.
- Work also continues for TO Live Presents seasons and partnership projects for 2022 and beyond, by which time we assume the return to a full performance and rental schedule.

Resident Companies and Rentals

We maintain regular contact with resident companies, annual hirers and other presenters and promoters to maintain open and regular communication about the impact of restrictions during the pandemic and the implications for future planning.

The work of facilitating the cancelation and/or rescheduling of events in the 2021 calendar is ongoing and led skillfully and thoughtfully by the Director of Programming, the Bookings Manager, and the ticketing team.

Education and Engagement

The Education and Engagement Manager (working limited project-based hours) continues to maintain her community relationships and role on relevant external committees.

Corporate Events

The Corporate Sales team has focused on staying connected with existing and potential clients. They continued to post regular podcasts for their Special Event Studio series, which has proved to be an excellent way for them and TO Live to remain active in the industry.

Production

The Director of Production continues to:

- Work with the VP and Director of Programming on planning, budgeting, and assessing feasibility of programming scenarios for recovery and for future seasons including the 2022 calendar year.
- Provide regular support for Corporate Sales team as they respond to event inquiries.
- Prepare for forthcoming labour agreement renewal negotiations.

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Ticketing Services

- The Box Office team has provided ongoing patron and client support for active ticketed events, comprising over 34,000 tickets booked across 76 performances and other offerings. This has taken the form of telephone and email assistance, managing requests for refunds, exchanges, and additional information about the status of events, and has applied to events originally scheduled in TO Live venues, events at the Elgin & Winter Garden Theatre Centre, and virtual events.
- The Box Office team has worked to improve reporting and documentation. Enhanced worksheets have been set up for gathering event information, creating show scaling layouts and assigning holds, as well as revising internal report templates and creating new tracking reports to fill identified gaps.
- As TO Live has begun presentation of ticketed virtual events, notably *Taylor Mac's Holiday Sauce...Pandemic!* and [Scott Silven's The Journey](#) the Box Office team has overseen the setup and selling of these events, as well as managing outreach and information to patrons regarding how the events are being run, troubleshooting access issues, and running the “virtual Box Office” for the live stream and on-demand sales period of the Taylor Mac show.

Digital Transformation

- The TO Live Digital Transformation Selection Committee has conducted an extensive RFP process and has a recommendation for a preferred vendor

- The selected vendor will deliver on TO Live's Digital Transformation roadmap (i.e. a plan to implement specific digital initiatives that will address TO Live's critical strategic and business challenges)
- Project work is expected to begin early Q1 2021 pending Board approval

Marketing

- The Marketing Department executed the organization's first campaign for a paid online event to support *Taylor Mac's Holiday Sauce...Pandemic!* and After Party. The team worked in conjunction with our partners Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. The campaign resulted in a significant profile piece in the Toronto Star, Xtra Magazine and Proud FM, over 75,000 impressions on Facebook and Instagram and over 6,000 views of the event page.
- The [*Living Rooms*](#) series now has over 140,000 views, an increase of 10,000 over the past quarter. We have secured a promotional opportunity with American Express to highlight the videos of three Living Rooms' artists as part of their Black History Month spotlight to their email subscribers.
- [*The Arts Squad*](#), TO Live's first independently produced and distributed digital content series for children, now has over 11,000 views on YouTube.
- Marketing continues to promote digital content and to engage with audiences online and to support TO Live's philanthropic initiatives including social and email campaigns.

FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION

Finance

- Completed interim audit with our new auditors KPMG
- Began year end preparations and reconciliations
- Testing of EMBS took place as IT prepares for upgrade to booking and accounting system
- Continued working on Ticketmaster reconciliation of ticket sales for cancelled and postponed shows
- Digital Transformation Project participation ongoing and enhanced involvement

Human Resources

- Advised staff of the return to a 5-day work week on January 4, 2021
- Recalled select staff for January 4, 2021
- Held Virtual Town Hall on Tuesday December 15, 2020
- Provided “Introduction to Unconscious Bias Training” to all current working staff
- Provided “Confronting Anti-Black Racism Training” (via City-approved consultant) on December 15 and 16, 2020 (8 hours total) for Senior Team
- BambooHR was utilized for the first time to assist with the recruitment of the Director of Capital projects position
- Developed first draft of DEI Recruitment & Outreach Plan; actively working with the City’s Diversity and Next Generation Strategic Recruitment & Employment Services to source out new job posting sites, employment services and community partners

Information Technology

- Began preparation for EBMS upgrade that included creation of test site
- Regular monitoring VPN security to ensure risk in low as people work from home
- Cell phone contracts – further review and reassignments
- Microsoft Intune evaluations for more enhanced and robust mobile device management
- Digital Transformation Project participation ongoing and enhanced involvement

OPERATIONS

Facilities

- TO Live continued its partnership with Ryerson University in the creation of a COVID-19 reopening guide to benefit performing arts organizations across the City. “#Lights-On Recovery and Reboot in Live Entertainment,” launched in November as an online resource: www.lights-on.guide
- Discussions began with the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts (TAPA) on how to leverage the combined purchasing power of all TAPA members to secure favourable pricing of personal protective equipment and other related COVID-19 equipment purchases. Through its capital projects department, TO Live will issue an RFQ and

function as a quasi-clearing house for the procurement and distribution of personal protective equipment and other related COVID-19 equipment purchases for the Toronto theatre community.

- Skeleton staffing continues at all venues to ensure safety, security, and basic building operations.

Patron Services and Food & Beverage

- Staff in this department continue to be on leave

Capital Projects

- Numerous 2020 capital projects concluded, including:

→Meridian Hall

- new Meridian signage
- exterior accessibility ramps
- fire alarm system replacement
- motor control panel replacements
- exterior window replacements
- air Handling Units upgrades
- replacement of lobby furniture
- new accessible lobby washrooms and gender-neutral washrooms

→Meridian Arts Centre

- new Meridian signage
- new catering kitchen
- concession stand upgrades for accessibility
- replacement of lobby furniture

→St. Lawrence Centre

- various projects related to life safety concerns and business interruption prevention
- Extensive design work has occurred related to accessibility upgrades and Meridian Hall and the Meridian Arts Centre. Large portions of this work will be ready to go to tender in early 2021.

DEVELOPMENT

2020 has been a challenging year for the arts. Over 25,000 performances were cancelled in the City of Toronto alone with \$145 million in lost income for artists and arts workers. For Development, this meant relationships with existing and new partners were even more impacted with performances suspended. Despite that, our fundraising efforts were rewarded, and Development:

- met its 2020 budget
- initiated a fundraising campaign that grew a significant donor base from nothing, reaching over 250 donors by the end of the year
- secured over \$4 million in capital grants specifically for COVID and accessibility upgrades
- continued to steward Meridian and BMO and programming and venue sponsors, engaging them with virtual programming, and retaining the majority of our sponsorship funds
- secured a major initiative with Metcalf Foundation, becoming one of 10 charities engaged in a highly competitive Staging Changes program.

Development is going into 2021 with several ambitious initiatives including the launch of a Meridian Hall 60th anniversary campaign, Legacy Giving and a Patron Circle program.

StLC REDEVELOPMENT

- Continued work with community outreach to arts groups, neighbourhood and not-for-profit organizations: dialogue around City's Culture/Arts Report and future thinking and recovery with the cultural sector
- DEI work with TO Live Committee to align with STLC NEXT communications
- Regular meetings with CreateTO. Also, discussions with City Staff about Agencies partnership and launch for Public Consultation