



Meridian Hall
St. Lawrence Centre
Meridian Arts Centre

Executive Management Report to the Board

Q1 Activity
(Jan-Feb-Mar 2021)

PRESIDENT & CEO'S EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As we were planning in the end of the second quarter of 2020, the idea was to have some presentation opportunity in the beginning of 2021. The expectation of the vaccine rollout and the potential for performance (albeit restricted) was something that we have been working towards with efforts across the organization, including the Operations team (the Lights On Guide) and the Programming team in our collective support of Provision of Space. It was clear as we entered Q3 that this would not happen and a rollout of the Provision of Space program, as detailed in the Programming update, was implemented with the secured support from the City.

As described previously to the Board, our top priorities for 2021 remain; Reopening, Digital Transformation, Strategic Planning, and the further development and continued implementation of our Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) campaign.

Looking ahead, over the course of the next four months, the TO Live team is taking full advantage of the COVID suspension of normal operations and set itself to complete the next phase planning for TO Live, the four key elements of which are the:

1. strategic plan;
2. brand refresh and marketing strategy;
3. digital transformation; and
4. launch of the public consultation for the STLC Redevelopment project.

Together, the above elements will combine to create the 5-year plan directing TO Live from 2022 – 2026. By timing these to launch at the September 24th Board meeting, we should as a team catch the start of the reopening wave, capitalizing on this work to guide the company with robust community engagement into the late fall/early winter with a renewed sense of purpose.

A warm welcome to our new Board members who are only recently joining the team. It is the perfect time to engage with TO Live and help lead us and the Toronto arts community into a hopeful and exciting future!



Clyde Wagner
President & CEO

PROGRAMMING

The first quarter of 2021 saw the welcome return of three programming staff who had been furloughed for most of 2020:

- Lani Milstein, Director of Producing;
- Rachel Robbins, Education and Engagement Manager; and
- Danny Shelton, who when he resumed work accepted a promotion into the fulltime position of Education and Engagement Program Coordinator.

As has been the case since April last year, we continued to offer other furloughed staff project work wherever possible.

In addition to ongoing planning for 2021-2023, general activity for Q1 included:

- Finalising 2021 program planning and departmental budgets for approval
- Working on 2022 program planning and departmental budgets
- Virtual participation by VP and Director of Programming in the annual January conferences, arts markets, and festivals to maintain networks and plan for future programming
- Participation by five members of the Department in the IDEA committee and/or working groups

TO LIVE Presents

Just before the December holiday break, Toronto entered a new period of lockdown due to COVID-19. This meant that we were not able to continue to offer rent-free space to artists for rehearsals or the streaming of performances. However, two Provision of Space projects that we had committed to were film productions and so they were able to proceed in January.

- Obsidian Theatre Company: [21 Black Futures](#)
For her first major project as new Artistic Director of Obsidian, Mumbi Tindyebwe Otu, commissioned 21 Black writers from across Canada to write 10-minute monologues to be performed by 21 Black actors, directed by 21 Black directors. They were commissioned as films and are made available by broadcast partner, CBC Gem. Filming took place on the Meridian Hall stage over three weeks in January. TO Live, as the Venue and Production Partner, provided the venue rent-free and covered crew and staff costs.

- [Outside the March: Lessons in Temperament](#)

TO Live was a Venue Production Partner on a film adaptation of the play, Lessons in Temperament. Meridian Arts Centre was one of around a dozen locations chosen by Director Mitchell Cushman. As a partner, TO Live waived rental and subsidised crew and staff costs.

Other activity

For the most part, under the various levels of restrictions throughout Q1 this year, we have had to cancel or postpone arrangements made under our Provision of Space program. However, we have been able to present:

- Scott Silven: The Journey (February 16-21 & March 16-28)

This ticketed show by Scottish mentalist, Scott Silven, is an imaginatively conceived response to the challenge of creating compelling digital theatre. Performing for a maximum of 30 people at a time, Scott created an original and engaging interactive experience that demonstrated how satisfying a live virtual experience can be. As Kelly Nestruck (Globe and Mail) wrote: “it almost seems as though the audience lives inside Silven’s thoughts.”

- Vibe Arts: NExT: The Future of Art Exhibition 2.0 (22 March – 11 May)

TO Live partnered with Vibe Arts, an organization providing children and youth in under-resourced communities with high-quality arts education. NExT is a 2-year Black Youth Mentorship Program and TO Live collaborated with Vibe Arts to display installations of digital and mix media works by the current group of 10 mentees in the windows of the St Lawrence Centre for the Arts. The works are also available to view on the [TO Live website](#).

Resident Companies and Rentals

There was no in-venue activity in Q1 due to restrictions, however we continue to stay close to our Resident and other rental clients as everyone assesses scenarios for future plans. We are still holding bookings for the summer/fall 2021 and hirers continue to postpone and reschedule events.

Education and Engagement

The Vibe Arts NExT exhibition described above was an initiative of this Department. Planning continues for 2021 initiatives.

Corporate and Private Events

The Sales Manager continues to pursue future business. There is constant interest in TO Live venues for location shoots by film production companies which are permitted to continue working. As with other rental areas, clients continue to postpone and reschedule existing bookings.

Producing

With the return of the Director of Producing as the sole member of this Department, she is kept busy supporting planning, budgeting and event delivery.

Production

The Director of Production is also the sole staff member still working in this Department and supports the team in budgeting, assessing production and technical requirements of future projects.

Other activities in Q1 include:

- Renegotiation discussion for three Union agreements
- Progressing his model for a mentor and intern program for BIPOC technical and production students and other training initiatives.

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Ticketing Services

- Ticket Services handled the setup, selling, and customer service for the online run of The Journey. This included managing outreach to patrons, troubleshooting technical issues, running the virtual FOH/Box Office for all performances, collecting post-show feedback, actively managing dynamic pricing, and ensuring required inventory levels were met for all performances.
- Continuing work has been done to best position ourselves to support re-opening, including cleanup and database fixes for accounts with active bookings, standardizing communication templates for patron outreach, and both assessing impacts and creating game plans for possible venue configuration updates.
- The Box Office team provided continued support for the patrons and clients of active ticketed events across TO Live's venues, virtual events and the Elgin & Winter Garden Theatre Centre. Q1 saw a renewed round of event cancellations, reschedules and

postponements, and the Box Office team has continued to provide telephone and email assistance for those in need.

Digital Transformation

TO Live's Digital Transformation initiative has received approval from the Board of Directors to proceed as follows:

- Approval to enter into contract negotiations with IBM, the vendor selected by the Digital Transformation Selection Committee as a result of the RFP process.
- Approval to the proposed Guest Engagement Platform architecture, including solutions to enable first-party data collection, digital event presentation, a consistent experience across web, desktop, and mobile, and a customer profile database.
- Approval of proposed implementation and development budget in year 1, and ongoing subscription and maintenance costs in years 1-3.

The new Guest Engagement Platform will launch September 2021.

Marketing

- Marketing executed a multi-channel campaign for The Journey, TO Live's first long-run ticketed digital presentation. The campaign included paid digital and social, earned media, email, organic social, radio giveaways, contests, sponsored content on social channels, Amex Insider email and traditional media and partnership marketing. Positive reviews were garnered from the Globe and Mail, NOW Magazine, Toronto Guardian, Ludwig Van and the Slotkin Letter.
- As partner with Obsidian Theatre on the 21 Black Futures project, we have extended the reach of the program through promotion on social media, email and by creating original video content. We have also facilitated a content sharing relationship between Obsidian Theatre and Amex.
- The Arts Squad continues to reach new audiences and now has over 42,000 views on YouTube. The TO Live Kids YouTube channel now has 376 subscribers.
- TO Live has been working with American Express to promote the Living Rooms series to Canadian cardmembers, with plans to further collaborate to provide arts experiences to this audience.

FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION

Finance

- Completed 2020 audit with new auditors KPMG, 1 month earlier than prior years with half the team
- Assisted departments with 2022 budget process
- Completed necessary (heavy) City reporting for year-end process
- EBMS testing continued 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/Payroll

- TO Live Virtual Town Hall held on March 29
- “Confronting Anti-Black Racism Training” on February 17 and 19
- Advisory work and support on the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) Committee and four Working Groups continued in Q1
- The third IDEA Committee meeting took place on February 22
- HR participation and input at Staff Union Negotiations: IATSE 58 (St. Lawrence Centre) and IATSE B173 Patron Services
- New hires:
 - Director of Capital Projects
 - Project Managers – Capital Projects x 2 – 1 Year Contract
 - Education & Engagement Programming Coordinator
 - Development Assistant (temporary)
- Active Recruitment:
 - IT Systems Analyst – 1 Year Contract
 - Assistant Manager, Donor Care & Partnerships (temporary)
 - Social Media Specialist
- Completed T4s on time with new required COVID-19 reporting
- Completed year end OMERS reporting

Information Technology

- Continued and ongoing support for remaining staff
- Digital Transformation project management
- Cybersecurity plan, budget, and workback plan development
- EBMS v20.95 upgrade workback plan development
- Windows 10 build 20H2 testing and evaluation for rollout in 2021

OPERATIONS

Facilities

- Assisted the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts (TAPA) in the roll out of a bulk PPE purchasing program. TO Live surveyed the TAPA membership for PPE needs and coordinated a bulk purchase to allow for reduced rates for all interested members
- Acquired electrostatic sprayers to aid in disinfection of all TO Live venues
- Completed Heat Exchanger repair at Meridian Hall
- Completed asbestos repair in both the St. Lawrence Centre and Meridian Hall
- Completed Load Bank testing for all backup generators
- Continued “care and feeding” of all venues while running at reduced capacity and with skeleton staff

Patron Services and Food & Beverage

- Preliminary research on new uniforms for purchase in 2022 has begun
- COVID-19 audience safety procedures continued to be refined for when audiences are welcomed back into TO Live venues
- Investigations, in conjunction with the Digital Transformation Project, are underway to consider TO Live’s Point of Sale system, alternative concessions purchasing options and improved inventory management hardware and software solutions
- The new catering kitchen at the Meridian Arts Centre has been commissioned, stocked and ready to operation once events can return

Capital Projects

- **Meridian Arts Centre** highlights include:
 - Sound Isolation: construction scheduled to start in May, completed in late Q3
 - FOH Washrooms: Tender closed, work to commence in early Q2
 - Stairs: Tender awarded, construction to start in early April, completed in June

- Boiler and Chiller Replacement: boiler to be replaced in 2021 but Chiller and Cooling tower postponed to 2022. Boiler construction scheduled to begin first week of July and completed late Q3
 - UV-C Lamps in HVAC: Phase one construction currently underway
 - Performance Rigging – Studio: Rigging RFT awarded. PA RFQ closes on April 9th. Tentative completion date August 15. Electrical contractor selected
- **Meridian Hall** highlights include:
 - UV-C Lamps in HVAC: Abatement to begin early Q2 with completion in early Q3
 - Door Replacement: final discussions with Heritage Preservation Services underway. Award anticipated in June with completion late Q4
 - Administration Offices, Security and West Ramp: Contractor has mobilized to the site. Demolition and Abatement ongoing. Project to be completed by mid-August
 - Back of House Stair and Guards: existing floor systems removed and materials on order. Installation to start mid-May. Project to be completed early Q3
 - Front of House Heritage Renovation: Tender package issued with prequalified contractors. Project construction to start mid-May, operational mid-August and close out in Fall
- **St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts**
 - UV-C Lamps in HVAC: : abetment will begin early Q2 with completion in early Q3
 - Performance Dimming: RFQ issued and specialty distribution equipment ordered

DEVELOPMENT

The first quarter of 2021 remains challenging for fundraising organizations internationally not attached to health organizations. The development department is watching fundraising trends and anticipating further government investment and granting opportunities aimed at driving recovery, contracting of one-time gifts as economic impacts sink it, and renewed focus on social justice causes and equality for foundations and corporations. Meanwhile, monthly donor programs will increase in importance, and remain a key focus of the development department.

To fill the void of live performances, development is working to strengthen relationships with government granting agencies, corporate sponsorships, foundation, and individuals for immediate support and positioning for TO Live’s reopening. As per the 2021 strategic

planning document, development is working to meet its deadlines of its Patron Circle, Legacy, and sponsorship deliverables. To that end, we have had some wins this quarter:

- Awarded \$164,800 from Canada Cultural Spaces fund for COVID 19 upgrades for Meridian Hall and Meridian Arts Centre
- Awarded \$36K for Journey
- Engaged several donors & stakeholders to attend Journey, presented by TO Live
- Launched monthly newsletter in February

Engagement Metrics:

- Issued 6 Grant applications including Canadian Heritage, Canadian Tourism, Canada Council for the Arts, Social Development Canada, Ministry of Labour
- Had 4 Corporate sponsorship meetings
- Had 8 government meetings
- Meetings with major gift donors

Ongoing Strategic Objectives:

- Meridian Hall 60th anniversary campaign to support.
- Legacy Giving program
- Patron Circle program

StLC REDEVELOPMENT

- Preparations for Public Engagement; Date confirmed to launch May 4th
- Preparations for ADDED scope to consultation process (preliminary Phase 0) to include research findings on performing arts sector, Neighbourhood, Communities, and Inclusion Diversity, Equity and Inclusion lens
- Collaborating with Programming on commissioning of Creative Currencies: digital series to support discussion on future creative spaces/public engagement
- Ongoing involvement on Digital Transformation and DEI Committees