



A WORLD AWAKENED  
BY THE WONDER OF THEATRE



**SEASON 14**  
2021-2022

(L-R) Kristin Robinson, Lauren Steele, and LaRhonda Steel in  
*Bella: An American Tall Tale*, photo by Shawnte Sims

**Annual  
REPORT**



# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

**We, the Portland Playhouse, are located in the heart of Portland's historic King Neighborhood.**

We honor the Chinook, Multnomah, and Kathlamet Nations, and many additional tribes on whose traditional and ancestral land we sit. We acknowledge that the Indigenous peoples of this land, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiians have exchanged millions of acres of land for access to basic needs and human rights through a plethora of treaties all broken by the US government.

We recognize that we operate in what was once the home of Mt. Sinai Baptist Church. We honor the spirit, history, and lives of the people who used this very building for fellowship, praise and worship.

We acknowledge the enslaved Africans, who have lived, been subjugated to free labor, and toiled the grounds where many theaters have been built and resurrected. We also acknowledge the Black Americans who have been oppressed in and forced away from anti-Black territories like our very own state Oregon.

We acknowledge the ancestors and survivors of African holocaust and Native American genocide, and recognize that we are here because of the sacrifices forced upon them.

We, the Portland Playhouse, honor their legacy, their lives, and their descendants who carry on traditions for present and future generations.

**Portland Playhouse is a professional theatre company dedicated to artistic excellence and community engagement. We believe that creative expression is for everyone and participation in the arts brings people together.**

**We are committed to bringing a voice to our diverse community through the power and beauty of performance and creative experiences.**



*Drag Brunch performers during **Joy (Comes) in the Mourning**, balloon installation by Kameron Messmer, photo by Kirk W. Johnson.*

## MISSION

Celebrating the complexity of the human experience.

## VISION

A world awakened by the wonder of theater.

## VALUES

**Belonging:** Portland Playhouse works to be radically inclusive onstage and offstage. We serve together. We rise together. We lead with kindness.

**Gratitude:** We are here by the grace and generosity of our community. We honor, join with, and are guided by those who came before us as well as current and future generations.

**Courage:** We challenge the status quo; we take risks. We listen and learn with an openness to change.



# SEASON HIGHLIGHTS

## COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Facilitating community repair from the mental and physical impacts of racism, and fostering joy.



Season 14 began with *Joy (Comes) in the Mourning*: nine days and nights of free, in-person and virtual interactive experiences that explored and celebrated rituals of loss and grief.

Curated by Portland Playhouse Community Programs and Associate Artistic Director Ramona Lisa Alexander, "Joy" featured performances, art installations, workshops and discussions by nearly 30 artists.



Workshop participants, photo by Kirk Johnson.

A powerful virtual key note address themed "Grief, Gratitude, and Racial Healing," was delivered by Sarah Bellamy, Artistic Director at Penumbra Theatre Company in St. Paul MN. (Founded by Lou Bellamy, director of S14's *Thurgood*.)

The festival included artist-led workshops, installations, and performances grounded in a rich range of cultural practices and perspectives, as well as conversations that provided affinity space for Black and Brown Portlanders.

In January we hosted youth and adults from Jack & Jill America Inc., Portland Willamette Valley Chapter for a Remembrance event in celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's legacy.



Actor Lester Purry performs an excerpt of *Thurgood* for the guests.

Guests participated in a series of performances and activities that explored the prompts: What is your dream? How are you going to make this dream a reality? What is a tangible thing you can do to make that happen?



Ballon artist Kameron Messmer entertains youth, photo by Juston Gaddis.

Portland Playhouse and Albina Vision Trust partnered to present an immersive two day event: *Porches & Stoops: An Afro-Topia Pop-Up*. Held in the Lower Albina neighborhood, the Pop-Up featured dozens of artists, creatives, vendors, and performers to program a porch/stoop installation to honor their vision of the neighborhood's future based in Black diasporic community, livelihood, and sovereignty.

The project achieved our primary goals, i.e. to create a space for Black and POC Portlanders to come together and celebrate the past and future of Lower Albina; to build a strong partnership with Albina Vision Trust; and to celebrate and remunerate Black artists, creatives, and vendors. Overall, participant responses were glowing. People valued the space created and the sense of freedom, safety and celebration it generated.

*Return to Wonderland* screened post-season.

A multidisciplinary film festival which empowered four artists to create short original films responding to the current moment in our country, and our world. With their films, they opened the door for us to imagine ways to listen, learn, and move forward; with a sense of curiosity and wonder. Curated by Producing Director, Charles Grant.



*Return to Wonderland* was a follow up to the project's popular first iteration in 2020, *Wonderland*.

Grant collaborated with Cinema 21 and The Kennedy School to present the films in cinemas, as well as offering screenings on the stage at Portland Playhouse.

Casual conversations between the audience and artists after each screening offered space to reflect and respond. The festival was also available to stream online.



(L-R) Charles Grant with the 4 artists: La' Tevin Alexander, La Toya Hampton, Kamryn Fall, and Hayley Durelle. Photo by Ela Roman.



# SEASON HIGHLIGHTS

## APPRENTICESHIP

A company of 9 emergent theater artists joined us in S14. This dynamic group learned and worked on stage, in stage management and design, and supported office administration. Their bold honesty and creative drive enriched the Playhouse experience, enabling us to grow our values and deliver the essential programming of our mission.

At the conclusion of S14 we made the difficult, but necessary decision to temporarily pause our Apprenticeship program to address the inequitable model of unpaid internships. Though we do our best to support these young artists as they learn and grow with us, we can do better. We are currently fundraising to bring the Apprenticeship back in S16 as a paid internship.

A soft start to this initiative will bring 2 technically-focused apprentices to work and learn with us in early 2023!

*Apprentice Company Solo Performances, June 2022*



**Portland Public Schools Summer Enrichment:** In the summer months of 2021 and 2022 the Playhouse was awarded a contract to provide arts enrichment activities free of charge at several schools. We adapted our student-centered education model in response to the urgent community need for social-emotional development activities for youth. Participants learned fundamentals of theatre and creative expression.

### Summer 2021

- 335 students served over 9 weeks of camp
- Elementary, Middle & High School aged participants
- 6 locations: Sabin and Boise-Eliot/Humboldt Elementary Schools, Tubman and DaVinci Middle Schools, and Grant and Franklin High Schools

### Summer 2022

- 856 students served over 8 weeks of camp
- Elementary aged students entering 2-5th grades.
- 3 locations: Boise-Eliot/Humboldt, Vestal, and Woodlawn Elementary Schools
- Administered by a staff of 64 professional theatre artists and educators



## SOCIAL JUSTICE THEATER PROJECT

**Emergent Activist Project:** Though students returned to the classroom in 2021, our education partners need time to focus on delivering their curriculum and meeting the basic needs of students. We were not able to renew our in-school programs during S14. We did welcome a dedicated group of students to create a project at Portland Playhouse in the spring of '21 — and hosted a series of mutual support events in support of arts educators.

A cohort of 5 students from multiple schools selected a social issue of relevance to them (housing justice), met with a community partner organization working on that issue (P:EAR). They then collaboratively created an original film based on their research and experience.

Classes were held at Portland Playhouse.

*Students rehearse their work on stage.*





# SEASON HIGHLIGHTS

## ON STAGE

### New This Season

**On Demand:** To accommodate the pandemic related accessibility needs of many audience members we offered recordings of most plays as a ticket option. People could choose to watch a professionally filmed recording of the play from the comfort and safety of their home.

**BIPOC Performances:** In Season 14 we initiated an audience space that centers the experience of persons from the Global Majority (Black, Indigenous, Persons of Color). 3-4 'pay-what-you-will' performances for each play invited in people who identify as BIPOC, inclusive of multi-racial family members, and those who are white.



A Christmas Carol, photo by Shawnte Sims.



La'Tevin Alexander, Aevah Gardner, and Margot Weaver.

Charles Grant and Ashlee Radney in Titus, with Anthony Shepard and Nikki Weaver. Photo by Shawnte Sims.

### Season 14 by the numbers

- 5 Plays
- 91 Artists engaged to create our plays
- 8501 Total Audience Served
- 500 On-Demand Views
- 101 Arts-4-All \$5 ticket sold
- 14 BIPOC Performances

63% Learned something new



63% of audiences surveyed learned more about an issue they hadn't fully considered before.

85% Highly satisfied



85% of audiences surveyed expressed high satisfaction with selection of plays and their experience at the theatre.

### **Barbecue**

By Robert O'Hara

Directed by Patdro Harris

October 20 – November 21, 2021

### **A Christmas Carol**

By Charles Dickens

Adaptation and Original Lyrics by Rick Lombardo

Original Music by Anna Lackaff and Rick Lombardo

Music Arrangements by Anna Lackaff

Directed by Brian Weaver

November 28 – December 30, 2021

### **Thurgood**

By George Stevens, Jr.

Directed by Lou Bellamy

January 21 – February 27, 2022

### **Titus**

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Tina Packer and Brian Weaver

March 16 – April 10, 2022

### **Bella: An American Tall Tale**

Book, Music, and Lyrics by Kirsten Childs

Directed by Damaris Webb

Music Direction by Chika Ma'atunde

Choreography by Julana Torres

May 4 – June 5, 2022

**Post-show discussions:** During each show run we hosted 3-4 conversations that held space for audiences to reflect on the issues raised. Some were artist talkbacks; others were hosted by therapists and cultural consultants with experience navigating subjects that may be triggering; while others were facilitated by community leaders whose life experience intersects with the stories onstage.



# FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

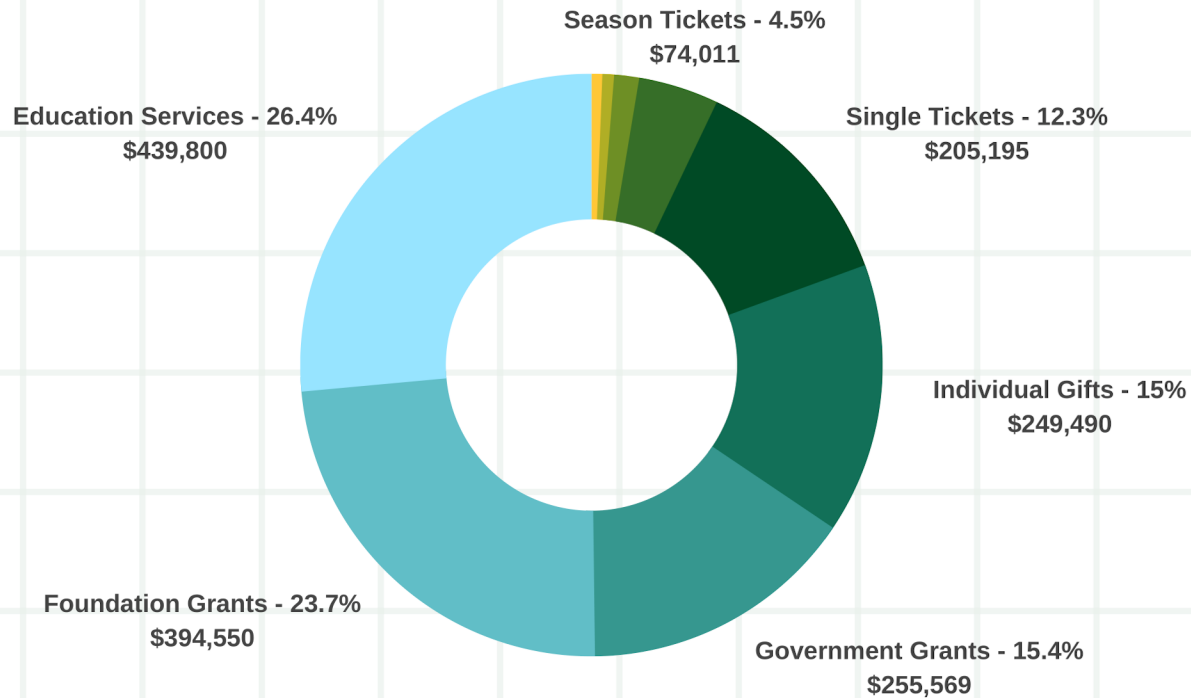
## REVENUE

Total Operating Support & Revenues: **\$1,662,314**

Corporations & Employer Match - <1%  
\$9,930

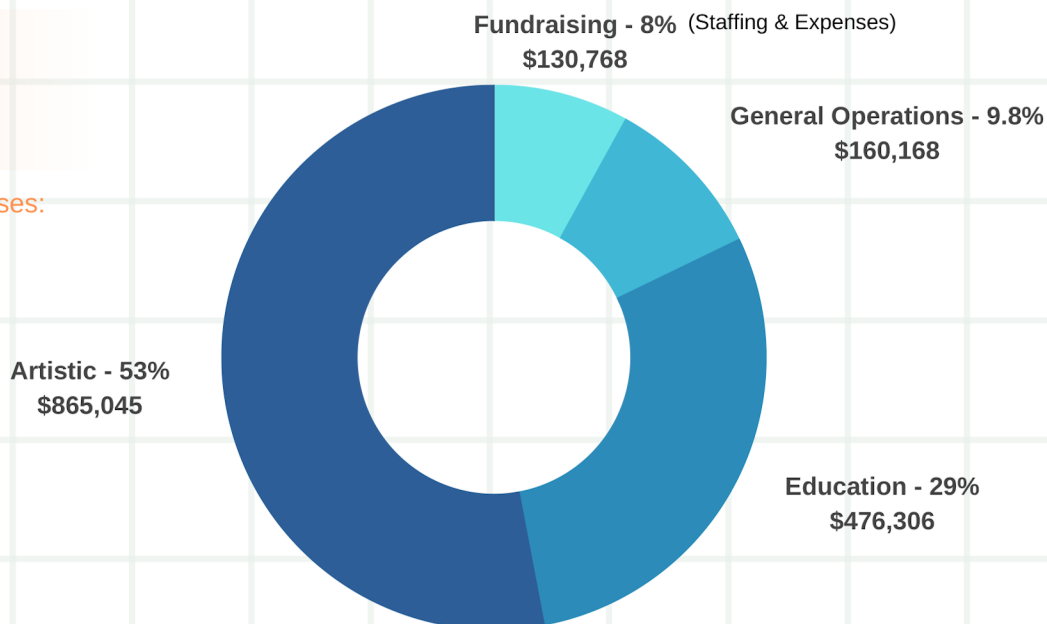
Raffle & Dinners - <1%  
\$10,725

Other (rentals etc.) - <1%  
\$23,044



## EXPENSES

Total Operating Expenses: **\$1,632,287**



**"Buy the Building" Capital Campaign update:** In 2021 we embarked on a campaign to raise the funds needed to purchase our buildings and property from the LLC that currently owns it, and make some building improvements. With a significant grant from the Murdock Charitable Trust (\$324,500), major gifts from individual donors, and 100% board participation we raised \$522,501 by the end of fiscal year June 2022. We intend to complete the purchase in 2023, after pursuing further grant funding to ensure a maintenance reserve.



# IN YOUR OWN WORDS

"I'm so grateful for the funding you and your sponsors were able to provide. I would not have been able to assemble a team of professionals to rehearse and present this show without your financial support. As a writer, it was thrilling to have an organization believe in the story and stand behind it."

- Wayne Harrel  
*Joy (Comes) in the Mournig artist.*

"I really enjoyed it and felt that it was a thoughtful, moving, funny, provocative, and well balanced piece of art. Also, big fan of the BIPOC Affinity Night. Wish everyone was doing that because it makes the viewing experience, especially for a play like this, a bit easier."

- Titus Audience Member

"Having lived through some of this history, I felt a renewed sense of outrage in how little has changed... Honestly this play calls me to act. Act more than I have. Thank you!"

- Thurgood Audience Member

"My child loved the experiences she had at camp this year! In just the two weeks that she spent there she grew more confident and comfortable expressing herself. It empowered her and really gave her a lasting impression that this is something she can do and enjoy. I am so grateful that she had this opportunity this summer, and really hope it's available again next year."

- Summer Camp Parent

"Incredible! I attended during BIPOC night and the energy of the audience was awesome. As a black woman, it was so affirming to experience this production. The story was astounding in the way it blended elements of comedy, history, culture and politics."

- Bella Audience Member

"The conversation I had with my friend after was as intense as the play. That's what good theatre does, gives us different angles and perspectives on age old ideas."

- Barbecue Audience Member

"The air was light and full of love at Afrotopia. We laughed, danced, and engaged guests freely. Indeed, the ancestors' presence permeated the space they envisioned. We had a beautiful time, and look forward to seeing and participating in more events like this one. Our deepest gratitude to Portland Playhouse and Albina Vision Trust for creating a safe space for us to just be."

- Miranda and Marcus Lattimore

"It was an amazing interpretation of a classic that made us feel like our attendance made a difference in local theater... Dads and kids were thoroughly entertained, thank you!"

- A Christmas Carol Audience Member



The cast of *Barbecue* takes their bow, photo by Shawnte Sims.



## Portland Playhouse practices anti-racist theatre.

Our goal is to continually create a community of care.

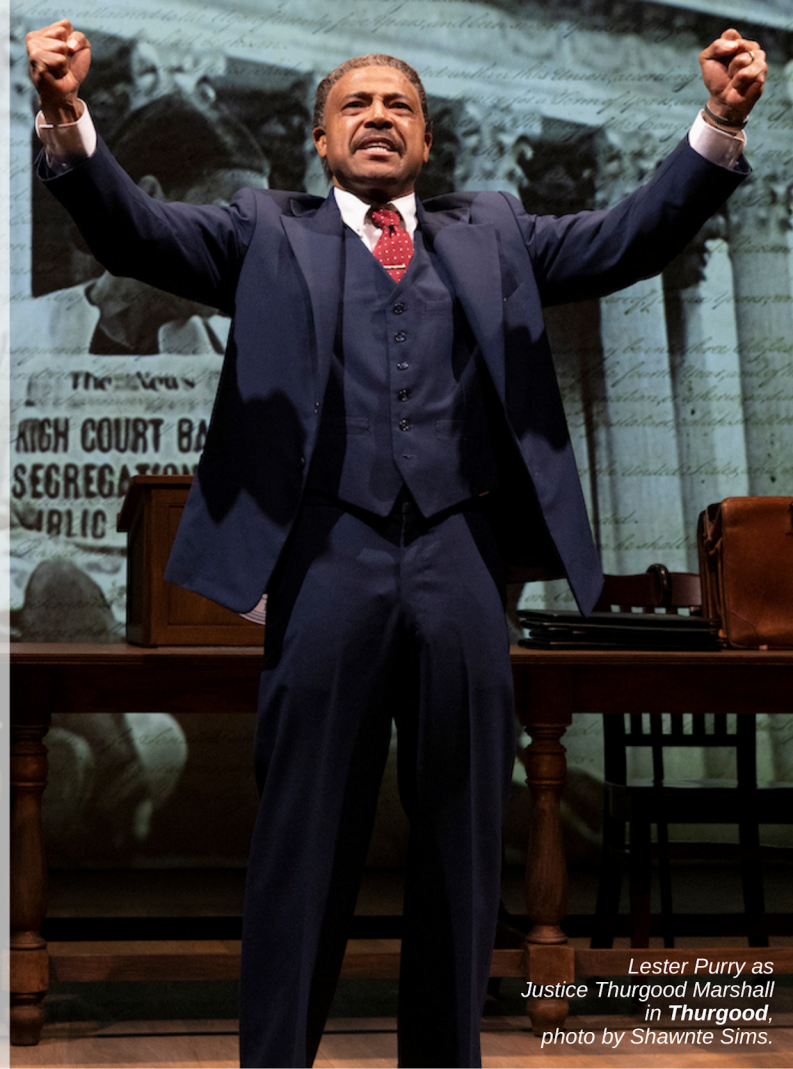
Racism is institutionalized in the American theatre industry. We are dedicated to changing these structures and systems of oppression. This dismantling is now and will always be a work in progress.

We resolve to carry out this work on all levels of our organization, and to advocate for change and help create this change in our larger community.

We will hold ourselves accountable and also welcome you to hold us accountable to living out these values in our large and small actions.

Read more about our commitments:

[www.portlandplayhouse.org/anti-racist-statement/](http://www.portlandplayhouse.org/anti-racist-statement/)



Lester Purry as  
Justice Thurgood Marshall  
in *Thurgood*,  
photo by Shawnte Sims.

## JEDAI: Justice, Equity, Diversity, Accessibility, Inclusion

We stand in relationship with and are accountable to our community, in particular our historically Black King Neighborhood. In service to our practice of anti-racist theatre and JEDAI commitments, our staff and board work diligently to operationalize equitable practices.

In 2020, "We See You White American Theatre" released Principles for Building Anti-Racist Theatre Systems, created by hundreds of BIPOC theatre workers in response to the pervasive and historic racism in American theatre. Our staff have used it to audit practices across our organization. BIPOC staff members set priorities for changes, and a task force was formed for implementation. We frequently refine our approach to this work, and adapt our systems to meet emergent needs. Our focus on racial equity intersects with justice, equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion for all oppressed people.

Advancing racial equity and social justice isn't a checklist. We don't try to "get it right" or expect to arrive at a moment of completion. We have made mistakes and our actions are imperfect.

We're on a journey of racial healing, human connection, and community care that began before us and will continue beyond our lifetime.

**Thank you for your joining us on this path, and for your ongoing support!**



## STAFF

Ramona Lisa Alexander, Community Programs & Associate Artistic Director  
Aiyana Cunningham, Development Director  
La'Tevin Alexander Ellis, Front of House Manager  
Corinne Gaucher, Training Program Manager  
Charles Grant, Associate Producer & Company Manager  
Thyra Hartshorn, Production Manager  
Hayley Hilmes, Annual Fund Manager  
Alix Kolar, Finance and HR Director  
Jace Meyer-Crosby, Education Programs Manager  
Ela Roman, Marketing and Communications Director  
Brian Weaver, Artistic Director  
Jon Wykoff, Audience Services Manager

## APPRENTICE COMPANY

Maia Denzler  
Genesis Hernandez  
Isabelle Jennings Pickering  
Ashlee Radney  
Orlando Reyes Cabrera  
Teisha Riley  
Anthony Michael Shepard  
Jasmyn Tilford  
Sawyer VanVactor Lee

## BOARD

Stephen Robinson, Chair  
Greg Hinckley, Vice-Chair  
Michelle Mark, Secretary  
Andrew Clark, Treasurer  
Alex Colas  
David Greenberg, Ph.D.  
Maude Hines  
Kimberly Howard  
Shauncey Mashia  
Andy Riccetti-Eberly  
Pancho Savery  
Michael Weaver  
George 'Bing' Sheldon  
(in memoriam)



*Members of the staff and Apprentice Company, Season 14.*

Find our audited financials, 990's and a complete list of funders on our website.

This report was contributed to by Aiyana Cunningham, Development Director; Brian Weaver, Artistic Director; Alix Kolar, Finance Director; and Jen Mitas and Maesie Speer of CONE (the Playhouse Grants Team)

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A 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.  
Tax id# 30-0507198

## Season 14 Funders



The Emily Georges Gottfried Fund of the Oregon Jewish Community Foundation



# PARTING THOUGHTS

## OUR END-OF-YEAR LETTER TO SUPPORTERS

**For as long as I can remember, theatre has been a gift to me.**

I think about the times I saw people on stage who looked like me. I think about the times when I worked on a play that helped me get to know myself (and the world) a little better. I think about the shared moments of breath and beating hearts between performers and audience as we go on a journey together. Being in a space to tell and hear stories has often been a way for me to learn, unlearn, and remember.

I am approaching 6 years with Portland Playhouse, and the amount of growth as an artist (and human!) in this short amount of time has been immense. I started as an Acting Apprentice during the 2016-2017 season, and dove in right away working on the Fall Festival of Shakespeare at Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School where I assisted on a condensed production of *Othello*, a story, in many ways, about finding truth and connection in a moment of chaos. **The greatest gift of this was witnessing these middle school students finding their own voices** and parallels to these characters and story, while supporting each other and giving their all to bring it alive.

During these same few months, I was also understudying the talented Victor Mack in ***How I Learned What I Learned***, a solo show by and about August Wilson. This opportunity to watch a professional at the top of their game taught me so much about process, persistence, and presence. In a very full circle way, I went on to perform the role at the student matinee, where the very students I was working with on *Othello* got to see me perform. These experiences, both alone and in tandem, were so beautifully fulfilling for me — and served as powerful reinforcements of what can be achieved by way of supporting and encouraging each other to reach new personal and creative heights; and **what a gift that is**.

These are prime examples of the way **Portland Playhouse has made space not just for me, but for students, artists, and community members** alike to step into our individual and collective truths. Over the last few years, I have been able to step into many administrative positions at the Playhouse, including roles in Audience Services, Company Management, and now as the Producing Director.

When I think about some of the tougher moments of my life, the opportunity to express myself has allowed me to pause; and that pause has invited connection and reconnection to myself and to those around me. That connection becomes even more important to me as the days go by, and I'm reminded that it is one of the reasons I got into theatre. Yes, I love to tell stories and perform, but more than anything, **I love to collaborate and be in community**



**with others.** There's something beautiful about creating and being in the moment together that makes space for growth, understanding, and the excavation of truth. My journey with the Playhouse continues to reinforce that desire for connection and truth; **and what a gift that is.**

I often think about how justice and sustainable change can come from the resources and opportunity to make space for others to share their own truths. As an organization, The Playhouse is committed to providing many opportunities for holding space in all its variations. This has come via way of talkbacks after BIPOC performances to community programming like *Portland Playphone*, where we connected artists with community members to share stories over the telephone.

In December of 2020 I led our virtual program, *Wonderland*, which was an opportunity for 4 artists in the Portland area to create a short piece responding to an issue in our country's current moment from the perspective of wonder. The topics ranged from challenging the stigma of sex work, to the story of 2 migrant children separated from their family at the U.S. border, to resistance and revolution by and for women. As we approach our 15th Anniversary Season at Portland Playhouse, I am excited to share ***Return to Wonderland***, another opportunity for 4 different artists to respond to this moment in 2022, paired with community conversations and spaces for us all to collectively learn, unlearn, and remember from a place of curiosity; and **what a gift that is.**

Reflecting on my 6 years working and playing with Portland Playhouse is an exercise in remembering **where I have been and where I desire to go.** In numerology, the number 6 is the embodiment of the heart, representing the ability to heal, nurture, and support. That feels divinely apt as I think about this next phase for myself as a leader in this organization, as well as what Portland Playhouse can offer us all.

My hope is that our plays, community events, and education programming will provide space for all of us to experience individual and collective healing. May we support each other by showing up for each other. **May we open our hearts and allow ourselves to be challenged and changed with the vision of a more equitable, just, and joyful world.**

Thank you for supporting Portland Playhouse in all the ways you have.  
We are in deep gratitude for your continued love and care.  
We are here because of you; and **what a gift that is.**

In gratitude,

*Charles Grant*

**Charles Grant**, Producing Director  
Acting Apprentice 2016-17  
Actor, Director







*Portland Playhouse by artist Aki Ruiz, 2020.*

THANK  
YOU