
ANNUAL REPORT: 2017-2018

MISSION: Next Act engages the hearts and minds of its audience with compelling and intimate theatre productions intended to stimulate thought, foster the exchange of ideas and to promote the development of new perspectives and understanding.

Next Act Theatre, a professional theatre company located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, has recently completed its twenty-eighth season of producing powerful, engaging performances of contemporary, issue-driven plays. The 2017-18 mainstage season featured four full-length plays, two play readings, one special presentation, a student community project and the annual Next Actors Summer Theatre for Teens Program. These activities took place during the FY2017-18 year from July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018.

SEASON PROGRAMMING

Mission Driven: Next Act's play selections are chosen with the goal of stimulating thought, inspiring new perspectives and generating conversation about issues relevant to our lives. Our 2017-18 season was comprised of four mainstage productions for a total of 108 public performances. In addition, we staged two play readings, two preview excerpt readings, a special presentation, the annual Student-Community Project (our latest arts-integrated education program) and the 20th anniversary of our distinctive arts immersion education program, the Next Actors: Summer Theatre for Teens.

SILENT SKY by Lauren Gunderson (September 28-October 22, 2017) In its Milwaukee debut, *SILENT SKY* recounted the true story of Henrietta Leavitt, one of many 19th century female astronomers whose brilliant but unheralded work paved the way for modern astronomy. Community partners included local astrophysicist Dr. Jean Creighton and the UWM Manfred Olson Planetarium, as well as Professor Dawn Erb, representing the UWM Physics Department. Professors Erb and other UWM colleagues brought students to performances and provided their expertise at post-show talkbacks with the audience and cast.

THE SECRET MASK by Rick Chafe (November 16 – December 10, 2017) Making its national debut, *THE SECRET MASK* told the story of a man who loses his capacity for language due to a sudden stroke and his efforts to connect with his estranged son as he struggles to recover. With deep empathy and attention to detail, *THE SECRET MASK* reveals the personal challenges and small victories of a stroke victim and their caregivers. It is a story rich in humanity and ultimately, a moving parable about prodigal fathers and sons.

EQUIVOCATION by Bill Cain (February 1 – 25, 2018) *EQUIVOCATION*, another Milwaukee premiere, was a departure from the contemporary settings common in most Next Act productions. Returning to Shakespeare's time, an intriguing scenario was proposed: what if the government had commissioned the famous wordsmith to write a propaganda play about a national political event? "Shagspeare" found himself in a moral quandary – does he tell the true story and risk his life or does he play it safe, writing the story that the government dictates.

David Ceccarini, Producing Artistic Director
Anne Lehmer, Development Director
Rebecca Moder, Marketing Director



I AND YOU by Lauren Gunderson (April 5 – 29, 2018) The season closed with another gem by the most produced living playwright in America (2016-17). *I AND YOU* brought us into the world of Caroline, a feisty teenager, living homebound with a chronic ailment. Caroline copes with an unexpected visit from a schoolmate, asking for help on an urgent poetry assignment. Their seemingly mundane project revealed a much deeper, more profound human connection that brought them together. The play's final revelation regularly brought gasps from the audience, with hearts singing and breaking, all at once.

SILENT SKY and SECRET MASK were named Best of the Year by the Waukesha Freeman; SILENT SKY received the same honor from the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

PLAYREADING SERIES AND SPECIAL EVENTS:

THE SEEDS OF BANQUO by Angela Iannone (February 12, 2018) Local actor, educator, director and playwright Angela Iannone presented a reading of one of the plays from her original Edwin Booth trilogy.

THE BOOK OF WILL by Lauren Gunderson (February 20, 2018) Shakespeare's remaining company members struggle to collect the deceased writer's many plays before they are forgotten and lost to posterity. Gunderson unwound her typically warm and heartfelt adventure among family and friends.

HEAR WHAT'S IN THE HEART: An Italian Shoemaker's Tale by Steve Scionti and Anthony Crivello (May 2-6, 2018) *HEAR WHAT'S IN THE HEART* celebrated the passion and love for a revered grandfather and his Sicilian-American family. Co-author Steve Scionti starred in this original, heart-warming tale about eight relatives and friends, telling the story of their affecting journey into adulthood.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

The Next Actors: Summer Theatre for Teens Program: Every summer, a multi-cultural group of 18-20 Milwaukee area teenagers works with professional artists for six weeks. They study music, movement, acting technique and improvisation while collecting ideas for an original theatre piece. After creating their play or musical, based on their own life experiences and concerns, the students give free performances and talkbacks at community centers and youth organizations in and around Milwaukee. Along with arts education, the program emphasizes collaboration, creativity and mutual respect among peers. Program tuition is completely underwritten; no student is excluded from participation for financial reasons.

Next Actors Recruiting Workshops: In April and May, artist educators conduct approximately 20 workshops in area high schools to introduce the Next Actors program to potential teen participants. Students are coached in improvisation and collaboration techniques, giving them a glimpse into the workings of the summer program.

Student Matinee Performances: Next Act presents special student matinees for high schools when the material is deemed age-appropriate. In 2017-18, Next Act presented three matinees to high schools students: *SILENT SKY*, *EQUIVOCATION* and *I AND YOU*.

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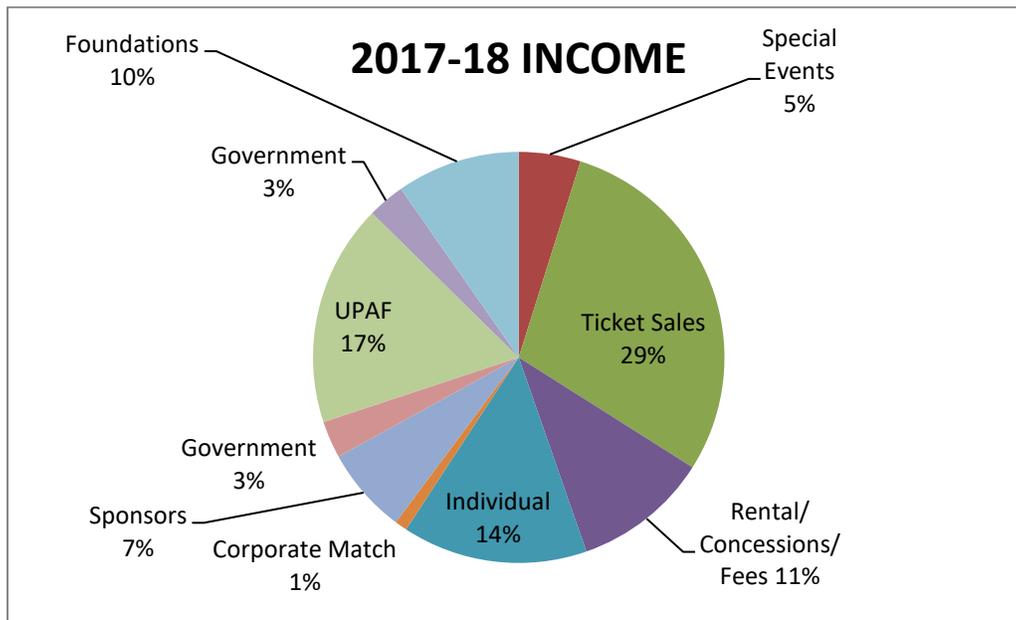
Talkback Series: Next Act coordinates a series of five or more post-show “talkbacks” in conjunction with each season production, as well as after readings and special presentations. Directors and actors host many of the informal discussions, with occasional assistance from professionals with specific expertise on issues that arise in the plays.

Personal Previews: Next Act also holds a series of talks before performances, intended to enrich the audience’s viewing experience. Free of charge and open to the public, these casual but noteworthy presentations give context to the play with insights on topics such as artistic production, design challenges and historical background.

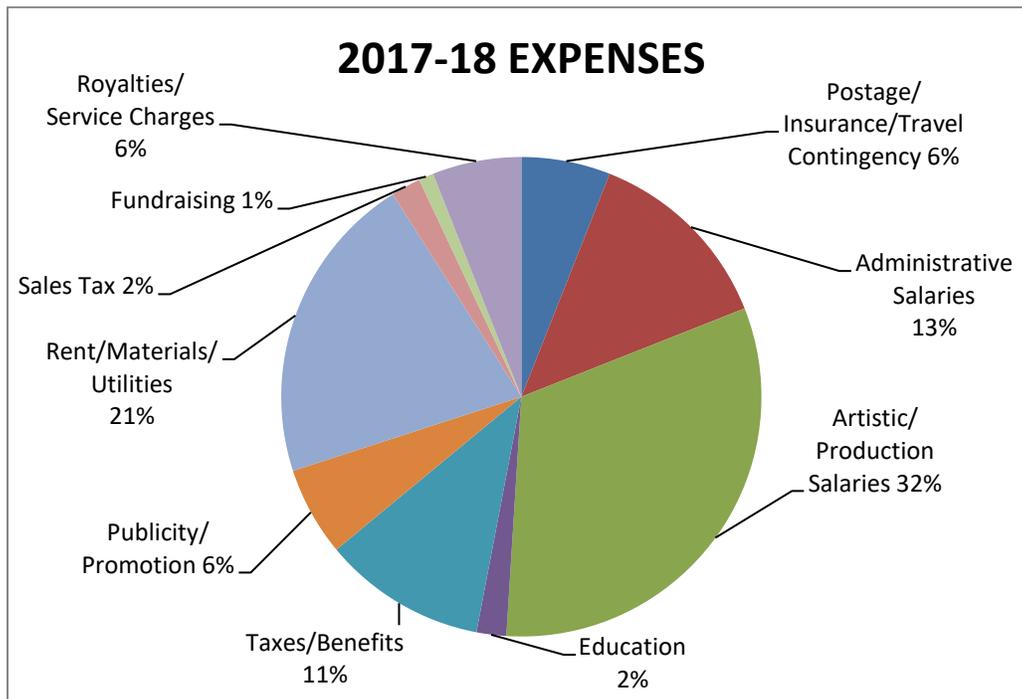
FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Although subscriptions and single ticket sales lagged somewhat behind the previous year, overall ticket sales were virtually equal (-.5%) with the 2016-17 season due to added revenue from the special presentation, *HEAR WHAT’S IN THE HEART*. Rental and concessions income increased by 19% and contributions grew by 7.5%.

Press and audience reviews were consistently positive throughout the 2017-18 season, with many patrons stating that this was the finest Next Act season of their recollection. Twenty-six actors, seven directors, designers, and production staff were engaged to produce a highly-successful and respected season.



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Earned Income: Next Act earned 46% of the operating budget from ticket sales, special events, service fees, space rental, concession sales, equipment rental and interest. (Total: \$378,540)

Contributed Income: Next Act derives contributed income from a healthy variety of foundations, corporations, government agencies and individuals. (Total \$444,371)

Fiscal Responsibility: Next Act maintains steady control on its annual budget, providing for necessary growth or reductions from year to year. The theater finished the 2017-2018 season with a **\$16,780** surplus.

Next Act receives strong and consistent support from:

Bader Philanthropies
Briggs and Stratton Corporation Foundation
Brookbank Foundation
Larry and Patty Compton
Einhorn Family Charitable Trust
Evan and Marion Helfaer Foundation
Richard and Ethel Herzfeld Foundation
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Jan and Vince Martin
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Milwaukee County (CAMPAC)
Dr. David Paris
Peck Foundation, Milwaukee Ltd.
Ildy and Skip Poliner
Gordana and Milan Racic
The Lucy and Jack Rosenberg Fdn
Steigleder Charitable Trust Senator
David and Julia Uihlein
United Performing Arts Fund (UPAF)
Wilfred Wollner, Jr.
Wisconsin Arts Board

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COMMUNICATIONS

Communication with our patrons is a high priority. Next Act Theatre publishes five (5) newsletters per year which highlight our upcoming productions with articles focusing on why plays were chosen along with background information on the playwrights and the play's subject matter. Highlights also include upcoming rental performances, development and marketing updates as well as any other special events. The newsletter is mailed out and emailed to our patrons.

Next Act also maintains a Facebook page and a website, www.nextact.org, for quick and up-to-date information. Patrons can look forward to receiving regular email blasts with pertinent information that makes the Next Act Theatre experience more enjoyable. After all performances, our patrons receive email messages asking for feedback about their experience at the theatre.

RENTALS

Next Act Theatre provides affordable rent to small, emerging and touring companies for a myriad of rental opportunities. Dance, theatre, music and comedy have all graced Next Act's venue over the years which results in:

1. Performances at Next Act that offer a wide range of experiences for our patrons.
2. Next Act Theatre potentially attracting new patrons that may not regularly attend plays in our space.
3. Additional annual revenue.

BRAVO, NEXT ACT!

Bravo! Next Act is Next Act Theatre's annual fundraising event that takes place every May. Patrons and supporters start the evening off with a vibrant and varied silent auction along with catered hors d'oeuvres and drinks. Guests are invited to go on guided tours of the costume shop, dressing rooms, rehearsal and stage management. A celebratory burst of entertainment is followed by a boisterous live auction, an education appeal, and the annual wrap-up address by Producing Artistic Director, David Ceasarini. It is an evening like no other and one that continues to be a celebration of Next Act's supporters and a financial boost to Next Act Theatre's bottom line.

WHAT OUR PATRONS SAY

This is my first year as a subscriber, and if this play is indicative of your quality of plays, I am so pleased I decided to join you. Congratulations on the excellent review of the performance in the Journal Sentinel today – well deserved! – *A Patron to SILENT SKY*

I saw *THE SECRET MASK* last Saturday and was deeply moved by the play and the presentation given by your actors and actress. It was the most brutally honest piece of theatre I have ever had the privilege to witness. I thoroughly loved it. By reclaiming and bringing to light parts of ourselves that have been lost,

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we can reconnect with our own vitality, our life source. Unless we acknowledge, honor and grieve that

which has been lost, we can neither experience the joy that is available to us in life. Working through deep levels of sadness that we experience in life is very contrary to American culture which denies aging, illness, disability, and death. Thank you so much for having the courage to present theatre that is real to the core. You did not blink in this production. My highest compliments to Next Act Theatre! – *A Patron to THE SECRET MASK*

I went to see EQUIVOCATION yesterday and I thought it was just great. It has stayed in my mind since I saw it. All the performers were wonderful, and there was a very good definition of the many different characters each actor played. Also, on a stage that was basically empty, with only lighting and sound, there seemed to be a number of different environments in my head. It is a really interesting and powerful play and, sadly, very analogous to our own time. I would like to see more of Cain's plays. I was not familiar with his work. Congratulations on a terrific production! Next Act always does good work. – *A Patron to EQUIVOCATION*

We loved the production and meeting the fabulous young actors afterward during the talkback. Every time I think I understood everything, something else occurs to me! It was unexpected and a great story line. We had a great time! – *A Patron to I AND YOU*

Your plays are always so moving and emotional for me. Again I found myself in tears at the end of the play. I too might need a transplant sometime in the future as I have suffered the consequences of cancer and this play brought out the beautiful result of an organ donation. Thank you and the production company for making this play. – *A Patron to I AND YOU*

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