

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



ANNUAL REPORT: 2018-2019

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.

HISTORY: Next Act Theatre is a professional theatre company located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In 1990, Next Act Theatre was created with the merger of Next Generation Theatre and Theatre Tesseract. The company was originally led by Artistic Director Jonathan Smoots and Associate Artistic Director David Cecsarini. Just prior to the company's third season, Smoots left to pursue other artistic opportunities and Cecsarini took the reins as Next Act's Artistic Director. Around the same time, Charles Kakuk came aboard as Managing Director, a position he held until his death in 2014.

Next Act performed in a number of venues in its early years including Centennial Hall (located in the Milwaukee Public Library), the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre's Stiemke Theatre, the Todd Wehr Theatre in the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, The Broadway Theatre Center's Studio Theatre, the Humphrey Masonic Center and Marquette's Helfaer Theatre. Seeing a need to establish a home space that could accommodate a growing number of patrons, Next Act created the Off Broadway Theatre in 2000, a 99-seat theatre space at 342 N. Water Street which also housed their offices and rehearsal space. Next Act would remain here until the sale of the building prompted an ambitious and successful capital campaign that resulted in a 152-seat theatre in the burgeoning Walker's Point neighborhood, just south of the Milwaukee River. The new facility opened in fall 2011 and after only four seasons, all construction debt was retired.

Next Act Theatre offers a four-production season of provocative and compelling plays. In addition to its regular programming and educational activities, Next Act regularly rents its space to small, emerging and touring organizations. Four visual arts exhibits, featuring the work of local artists, don the lobby walls for patrons to enjoy and often purchase, during each of the season's mainstage productions.

SEASON PROGRAMMING

Next Act's play selections are chosen with the goal of stimulating thought, inspiring new perspectives and generating conversation about relevant issues. Our 2018-19 season was comprised of four mainstage productions, totaling 104 public performances, two special student matinees and a local tour. In addition, Next Act held a special presentation and hosted several arts education initiatives. The 2018-19 season mainstage plays were all performed at Next Act's venue. They included:

OUTSIDE MULLINGAR by John Patrick Shanley (September 27-October 21, 2018) Next Act opened its 29th season with *OUTSIDE MULLINGAR*, following a five-year endeavor by Producing Artistic Director David Cecsarini to obtain the rights to this popular play. In its Milwaukee premiere, audiences were treated to the talents of local and Next Act favorites, Cecsarini, Deborah Staples, James Pickering and Carrie Hitchcock. Pickering and Hitchcock had performed the play together in Madison a season prior with Forward Theatre Company.

In the play, set deep within Irish turf country, Anthony is an introverted farmer and Rosemary is the woman next door who secretly vows to have him at any cost. They are nearing their middle years and uneasy with

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what the future might hold. When Anthony's crusty father threatens to disinherit him, Rosemary steps into the middle of a land feud and family eccentricities to prevent disaster. Only an Irish heroine as strong and down-to-earth as Rosemary could hope to secure the land and her love.

OUTSIDE MULLINGAR was sponsored by Larry and Patty Compton. It exceeded its ticket goal by 20% and received high praise from patrons and critics.

"There are two reasons to see Next Act Theatre's production ... One is to soak in the feisty, lyrical, bitter, sentimental, goofy worldview of Irish-American writing ... The other is to enjoy a veteran cast performing Shanley's words like old friends singing together." -- Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

THE TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS by Ginna Hoben (November 15 – December 9, 2018) Dumped on Thanksgiving Day by her fiancé, Mary stumbles back into the dating world where romance ranges from weird and creepy to absurd and comical. Over the course of an epic year of mismatches, Mary's cynicism grows. Luckily, the charm and innocence of a five-year-old boy unexpectedly brings her a new outlook on life and love – just in time for Christmas.

At the suggestion of the playwright, Next Act Theatre chose to add an element of music to the production. With a delightful musical backdrop by a female doo-wop duo, this heartwarming and hilarious show brought a cheery, change-of-pace glow to the holiday season. *TWELVE DATES* attracted younger audiences (15% of the overall audience were new to Next Act) along with Next Act's mainstays, and exceeded goal by an impressive 72%. The show was sponsored in part by Donna Martynski and Briggs & Stratton Corporation Foundation.

"With its rueful comedy and open ending, THE TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS isn't a Hallmark Channel kind of show. But Next Act Theatre's new production could appeal to singles and former singles." -- Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

BLOOD AT THE ROOT by Dominique Morisseau (January 31-February 24, 2019) Jena, Louisiana: September 2006 – an African-American student sits under the school's large oak tree, challenging its "whites only" status. The next morning, three nooses are discovered hanging from the tree. School administrators dismiss the incident as a prank. As racial tensions grow, six Jena High students wrestle with the causes and consequences of deeply entrenched injustice. These young people speak openly about the prejudices and fears that stand in the way of their dreams, and find the courage to seek solutions for a better life for all.

Producing Artistic Director David Cecsarini was drawn to the play's topical, issue driven nature as seen through the eyes of young people. Based on actual events, the playwright crafted a story that featured high school students grappling with ongoing issues of race and class. *BLOOD AT THE ROOT* offers hope that the younger generation has not fallen into the complacency that plagues adults and which perpetuates these problems.

Thanks in part to a generous grant from Bader Philanthropies, Next Act Theatre toured *BLOOD AT THE ROOT* to four area high schools, provided a special matinee at its venue for Bradley Tech, a high school that couldn't accommodate the show, and one public performance at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center (MYAC), located in

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a diverse area of Milwaukee. The MYAC performance was well-attended with tickets at only \$10. United States Congresswoman Gwen Moore was in attendance and expressed great enthusiasm for the production, its content, and the presence of such a diverse audience at a theatre event.

In addition to Bader Philanthropies, *BLOOD AT THE ROOT* was supported in part by the Herzfeld Foundation, Dr. David Paris Dentistry and the Milwaukee Arts Board. The production received critical acclaim and enjoyed a diverse and appreciative audience and achieved 88% of its projected sales goals.

"The script feels both poetic and achingly authentic – seldom have teenage voices been captured so accurately for the stage." -- OnMilwaukee.com

"[BLOOD AT THE ROOT]...explores the complexity of racial relations in the US with a cleverly-constructed script that reaches into a big, messy issue with a tender scalpel."
-- The Small Stage

HOW TO WRITE A NEW BOOK FOR THE BIBLE by Bill Cain (April 4 – 28, 2019) After producing the popular *EQUIVOCATION* last season, Next Act chose to showcase another play by the same author in the 2018-19 season. Completely different in tone and content, *HOW TO WRITE...* was a story derived from the playwright's experiences of caring for his ailing, but very feisty, mother. Cain's play asked the questions that speak to the heart of every family: what will never change and what has to in order to love? A deeply personal and intimate story, *HOW TO WRITE...* fit Next Act's aesthetic and resonated with audiences. Even so, ticket sales were lower than anticipated. This may have been due to the length of the play's title and the word "bible," in it, which may have been misleading as to the content of the show.

HOW TO WRITE ... was sponsored in part by Sheldon and Marianne Lubar, the Maihaugen Foundation and Milan Racic.

"To Cain, the bible is family history: an incredibly personal group of recollections. Through a well-crafted blend of pathos, humor and tenderness, Next Act brings Cain's thoughtful drama to life." -- Milwaukee Magazine

"Cain's understated play is both a beautifully realized story of a mostly functional family – a true rarity onstage – and a meditation on grief from many perspectives." -- OnMilwaukee.com

SPECIAL PRESENTATION

HEAR WHAT'S IN THE HEART: An Italian Shoemaker's Tale by Steve Scionti and Anthony Crivello (October 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 heart-warming tale about eight relatives and friends, telling the story of their affecting journey into adulthood. Brought back by popular demand, this touching tale enjoyed six public performances.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

A part-time Education Manager position was created to accommodate Next Act Theatre's growing arts-education initiatives. Local actor-educator, Grace DeWolff took the reins. By tripling recruiting workshop activities and reaching out to more schools in diverse neighborhoods, Ms. DeWolff revamped the Next Actors program within the 2018-19 season, resulting in nearly double the number of students as the previous year and significantly increasing the diverse make-up of the group. The tour was expanded to include twelve tour stops and one public performance held at Next Act amounting to the largest number of performances in the program's history.

"I just wanted to take a moment to tell you how awesome Next Act was at Sherman last week! The kids had a bumpy schedule that day and were not initially very responsive, but the Next Act team brought on the charm and invited all the children into a circle activity before the performance. It was heartwarming to see them engaged, loving and active with the youth, and obviously interested in ensuring that everyone had the best possible experience. We are blessed to have them as partners, and I hope more and more Club Kids get to be a part of some Next Act magic in the future. Thanks for nurturing this great partnership." -- Boys and Girls Club Representative

Arts Education Program Descriptions:

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 each of its four mainstage productions when shows are age-appropriate. Talkbacks follow these performances and when requested, individualized preshow and/or post-show workshops are taken to attending high schools, deepening the students' experiences by providing play-related insights before they see the show and/or to answer questions and spark discussion after they have attended.

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Additional Educational Initiatives:

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.

Newsletters: Next Act provides five newsletters a season, providing in-depth information about an upcoming play which provides attendees the opportunity to learn more about the play they will come to see and a deeper understanding of a show's content, history and issues derived from the story.

Community Partnerships: Next Act reaches into the community on a regular basis to identify and connect with other nonprofit agencies whose mission reflects a particular show's theme. Next Act and the participating organization cross-promote which results in Next Act patrons learning more about a partnering group's mission while attracting new visitors to the theatre. When appropriate, a member of the partnering organization may provide a speaker to join Next Act for a Personal Preview or Talkback session. Next Act has provided speakers or brief performances at the partnering organization's venue.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

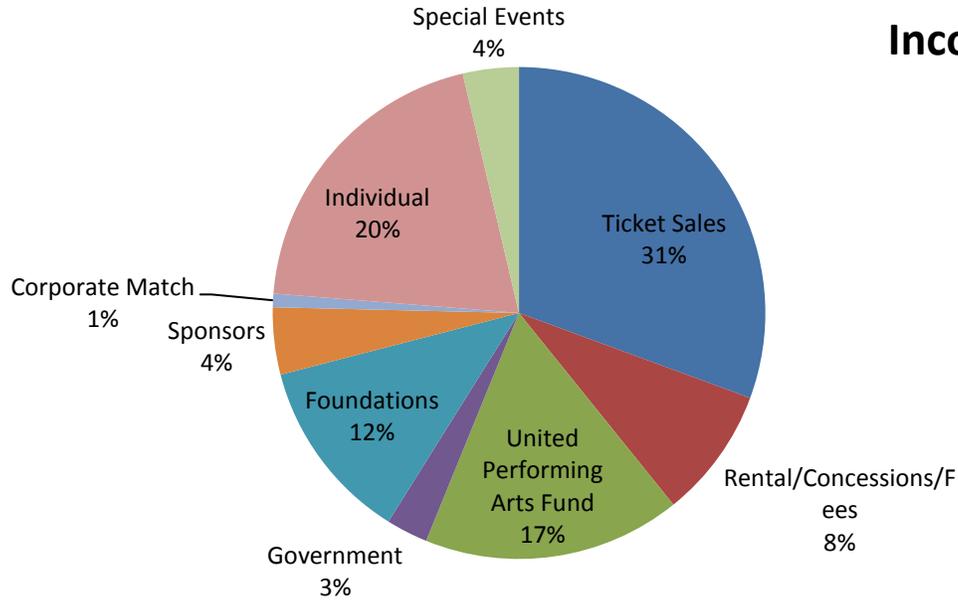
In the 2018-19 season, single ticket revenue increased by 20% due in part to an increase in single ticket prices. Group sales revenue increased by 12% for the same reasons. Subscription tickets enjoyed a slight increase over the 2017-18 season. Rental and subsequently concession income decreased over last season. This is attributed to a number of Milwaukee's smaller, nomadic arts organizations lacking the ability to afford rental rates and/or having a preference for smaller and site-specific venues. Slightly larger organizations have continued to rent Next Act's venue but attracting newer arts groups to rent for a one to two week window has declined. One-off and short rentals have remained relatively consistent.

Press and audience reviews were largely positive throughout the 2018-19 season. In addition to administrative staff, fifty-four artists: actors, directors, designers, stage managers, crew, board operators, dialect coaches and musicians, were engaged in paid positions to produce a highly successful season.

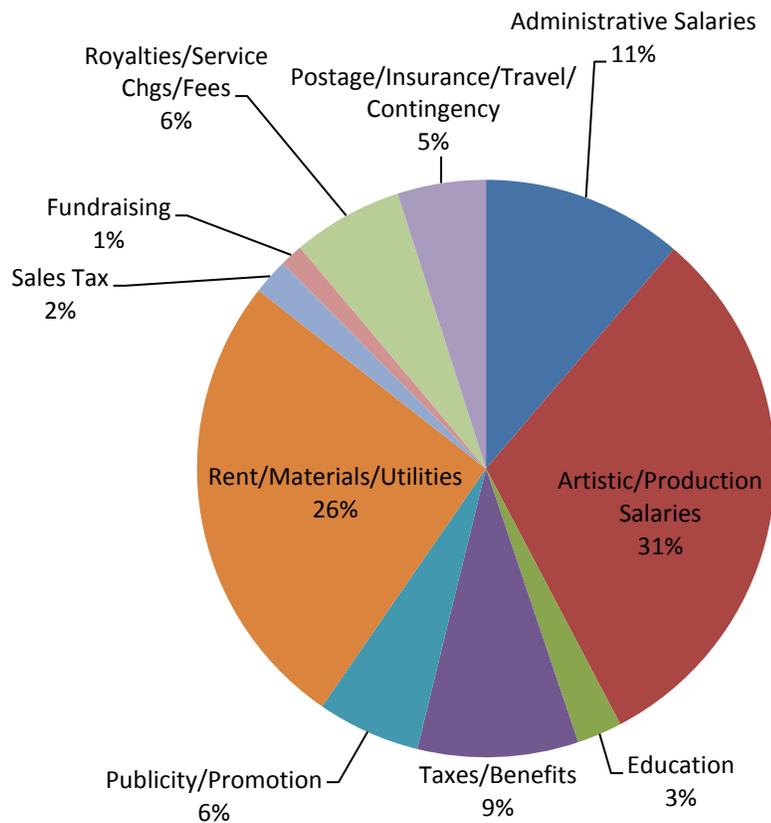
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2018-19 Income



2018-19 Expenses



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Earned Income: Next Act earned 43% of its 2018-19 operating budget from ticket sales, special events, service fees, space rental, concession sales, equipment rental and interest. (Total: \$365,089)

Contributed Income: Next Act derives contributed income (57% in 2018-19) from a variety of foundations, corporations, government agencies and individuals. (Total: \$486,230)

Expenses: Administrative and production expenses totaled \$826,362 in the 2018-19 season.

Fiscal Responsibility: Next Act maintains steady control of its annual budget, providing for necessary growth or reductions from year to year. The theater finished the 2018-2019 season with a **\$24,957** surplus.

As a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, Next Act Theatre relies on the generosity of hundreds of supporters each year whose contributions allow us to continue creating exciting live theatre and providing employment for artists, arts administrators and artist-educators. The following are supporters of our 2018-19 season in the amount of \$1,000+:

James & Terri Alioto	The Richard & Ethel Herzfeld Fdn	Park Bank Foundation
David & Patricia Anderson	Richard & Esther Huiting	Clare M. Peters Charitable Trust
Anonymous	Dorothy Inbusch Foundation, Inc.	Pieper Power PPC Foundation Inc.
Isabel Bader	Barbara Johnson	Skip & Ildy Poliner
Bader Philanthropies	Johnson Controls Foundation	Milan Racic
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Briggs & Stratton Corp. Fdn, Inc.	Judith Keyes	Lucy Rosenberg
Brookbank Foundation	Werner & Susan Krause	Larry Salsbury & Mary Buchel
Carolyn & Mike Burton	Joseph Kress	R. Max Samson
Michael and Ericka Burzynski	Pam Kriger	Howard & Sue Schoenfeld
Miles & Barbara Capron	Sandy Laedtke	The Shubert Foundation
Lois Ceccarini	Arthur & Nancy Laskin	Mark & Nancy Smuckler
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Beverly Colton	John Mahony & Evelyn Burdick	The Bert L. & Patricia S. Steigleder Charitable Trust
Larry & Patty Compton	Maihaugen Foundation	George & Eileen Stone
Stephen and Nancy Einhorn	Donna Martynski	Christine Symchych & Jim McNulty
Pam Frautschi	Guy & Mary Jo McDonald	Nicole Teweles
The Gardner Foundation	Milwaukee Arts Board	Clarice S. Turer Charitable Fund
GE Foundation	Milwaukee County (CAMPAC)	Julia Uihlein
Judith Goetz	Dwight & Marleen Morgan	David & Cheryl Walker
Judith & David Hecker	Daniel & Julie Murray	Wisconsin Arts Board
John and Grace Held	Kathy Nusslock	Wilfred Wollner Jr.
David Hertel	Dr. David Paris	Bettie Zillman
		Sandra Zingler

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 hard copy 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.

FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

- Bravo! Next Act is Next Act Theatre's annual fundraising event that takes place every May. This themed gala allows guests to enjoy a silent and live auction, while enjoying food, drink and entertainment.
- An annual card is crafted using photos from the season's first production and sent as our holiday campaign piece. By tying in our productions with a request for support, donors are able to more clearly identify what their gift helps create.
- The Producer's Circle is a tier-based level of giving that provides added benefits to those patrons who give \$1,000 or more each fiscal year. Producer Circle benefits include an exclusive gathering in the fall at which they enjoy a cocktail hour followed by a sneak peek of a scene from the final rehearsal of the fall show before it goes into technical rehearsals. This sneak peek is performed in the rehearsal hall, after which guests tour the theatre as the first patrons to see the completed set.

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WHAT OUR PATRONS SAY

It was an incredible play and performance. **The story was a melding of the power of love and tolerance,** often the same thing. Deborah and David, Carrie, and Jim were just superlative – the accent, the passion, and the energy. **How rewarding to leave the theatre with the reinforcement that life is worthwhile,** that we have the free choice to strive, hope, and persevere against seemingly unconquerable barriers. Thanks so much for enriching our lives. – A Patron to *OUTSIDE MULLINGAR*

We really enjoyed this play. **The conversation between the actors was just like you might experience with your own family.** Thanks to David & Deborah who are always looking for new opportunities to showcase their many talents. Way to go Next Act! – A Patron to *OUTSIDE MULLINGAR*

My girlfriend and I attended the Saturday November 17, [2018] evening performance of *THE TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS*. Can't say when I've last enjoyed a performance this much! Even more so in that one actress performed so nearly flawlessly for more than ninety continuous minutes. Amazing – **I completely forgot I was in a theatre.** I'll spread the word.– A Patron to *TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS*

Loved the show! The Doo-Wops and piano enhanced the experience further. Once again, we brought two friends who had never been to Next Act, and they were so impressed with the professionalism. **Thanks for all you do to make our lives richer.** – A Patron to *TWELVE DATES OF CHRISTMAS*

We are still reeling with introspection after seeing this impeccably done production. The powerful, honest script, perfect music and dance, and unforgettable, well-developed characters make this another "must see" Next Act show. – A Patron to *BLOOD AT THE ROOT*

Thank you for bringing a black female playwright, a local black woman director, an issue like a tinder box, a relevance so timely still, but at the cusp of change if to find the words, to say out loud what weighs in our souls, what is terrifying to breathe out. Such hope these talented young individuals gave but overwhelming sadness to me too, they still must fight this, when I at 68 years lived through the 60s loud and strong, hoping different now, feeling to fail them. – A Patron to *BLOOD AT THE ROOT*

This is a heart wrenchingly honest examination of family love and duty. It is also sweet and funny. So many of us have had to or will have to address end of life situations with our loved ones. This is a great addition to the discussion. Stellar performances by all of the actors and a spare but very effective set. – A Patron to *HOW TO WRITE A NEW BOOK FOR THE BIBLE*

I thoroughly enjoyed this presentation. The theme is one everyone can relate to because it is types of family dynamics we all experience in our lives. – A Patron to *HOW TO WRITE A NEW BOOK FOR THE BIBLE*

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