



2023 – 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



MISSION & VISION

About Face Theatre advances LGBTQ+ equity through community building, education, and performance.

We envision an affirming and equitable world in which all LGBTQ+ individuals are thriving and free from prejudice and discrimination.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The staff and board of About Face Theatre honor and uplift that Chicago is the homeland of the original stewards and guardians of Chicagoland: the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi Nations. Their alliance is known as The Council of Three Fires, first formed in the year 796 of the common era at Mishimikinaak, also known as Mackinac Island, in Michigan. These peoples did, and do still exist. Without their committed stewardship, we would not be enjoying this place today.

We also recognize and acknowledge the enslaved Africans who have lived, been subjugated to free labor, and toiled the grounds where many theatres have been built and resurrected. This organization, and the people behind it, believe that Black Lives Matter. We cannot serve our mission to advance LGBTQ+ equity without including the voices of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) in everything we do and create.





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A Message From

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MEGAN CARNEY (SHE/HER)

"Without leaps of imagination or dreaming, we lose the excitement of possibilities. Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning." —Gloria Steinem

This was a year for letting our imaginations run wild.

There was a moment during tech for *The Brightest Thing in the World* when the entire team—actors, director, designers, stage management, and production—paused together to explore how all of the storytelling elements could express the complexity of the final moment of the play.

After several iterations, they landed an exquisite combination of gesture, sound, and a sequence of light cues that captured the utter heartbreak and enduring love that so many of us have experienced for those we've lost to substance use. I believe the moment onstage worked so well because it drew us together while allowing each of us to engage our own imaginations to find meaning. It was highly specific and gorgeously universal at once, a powerful combination that makes for great theatre.

Our production of *Lavender Men* drew us into a different imaginative realm where history became porous and anything was possible.

Chicago Theatre Review declared the show an "extravaganza... an imaginative illusion that cannot be ignored." Similar themes ran through Re/Generation Studio where we experimented and stepped into the unknown.

The work we do at About Face is about creating space for change and boldly moving forward and we couldn't do that without your support. Throughout the season I spoke with so many of you who expressed how you felt more connected, more open to the fullness of life, more attuned to different world views after experiencing the imaginative work onstage. If imagination is truly the heart of innovation, the key to unlocking complex problems, and the root of empathy and understanding, I'm grateful we get to make the kind of theatre that encourages us to strengthen it. Thank you for making this important work possible.

In solidarity and gratitude,

Megan Carney Artistic Director

A Message From BOARD CHAIR ED TALIDEH (HE/HIM)

As I reflect on the past year, and look forward to our milestone 30th year, I can't help but notice how strange the times are—economic and political shifts abound; the news we consume is more troubling and confusing than ever; and everything can seem a little, well, heavier. I think we can all agree that this is exactly why we need beacons of light and hope like About Face Theatre, and the incredible community that surrounds us. The journey through the last twelve months has been a testament to the resilience, creativity, and unwavering dedication of our entire community.

At About Face Theatre our mission is to advance LGBTQ+ equity, often by challenging perspectives and igniting conversations through bold and thought-provoking theatre. This year, we have embraced this mission with renewed vigor, presenting a range of performances that have resonated deeply with intersectional audiences, sparked meaningful dialogue, supported new and upcoming artists, and, I believe, made the world a better place. Everything we've done has been a reflection of our commitment to uplifting diverse voices, supporting the future of art, and exploring themes that are both relevant and profound.

I really couldn't be prouder of what AFT has achieved —I often talk about how incredible our people are (and they are), but it's important to also highlight the 'community' part of our mission: our success

wouldn't be possible without the invaluable support of our patrons, donors, and partners. Your belief in our vision and your continued support have enabled us to continue pushing the boundaries of theatrical expression and to create experiences that inspire and challenge.

In this report, you will find highlights of our artistic achievements, financial overview, and a look ahead to the exciting projects on the horizon. We are proud to share these moments with you and, importantly, to celebrate the collective efforts that have made them possible.

As we look forward to the future, we remain committed to our mission of fostering artistic excellence and engaging with our community in meaningful ways. We invite you to continue this journey with us, and we thank you for your unwavering support.

On behalf of the About Face Theatre board of directors, thanks to you for being a crucial part of our incredible organization.

Ed Talideh Board Chair



THE PEOPLE OF ABOUT FACE

STAFF

Megan Carney

Artistic Director

Logan Jones

Managing Director (through Feb 2024)

Kate Warner

Interim Managing Director (March – Aug 2024)

Audrey Kleine

Operations & Production Manager

Dionne Addai

Education Manager

Charles Riffenburg

Marketing Manager & Graphic Designer

Theo Wampuszyc Pen Wilder

Green Room Collective Participants

Ruby Muñoz

Bookkeeper (through Feb 2024)

Cathy Taylor Public Relations

Publicist

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ed Talideh

Chair, Treasurer

Lisa Boden

Vice-Chair

Adithi Chandrashekar

Artist Representative

Amy Hutchison Sarah Powers John Rooney Amanda Suckow

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Patrick Andrews Scott Bradley Sheldon Brown Mikael Burke Scott Duff Armand Fields John Francisco Keira Fromm Bob Kuhn Elizabeth Ledo Lexi Saunders Kelli Simpkins Benjamin Sprunger Paul Oakley Stovall Mieka van der Ploeg Alex Weisman

ARTISTIC ASSOCIATES EMERITI

Kvle Hall

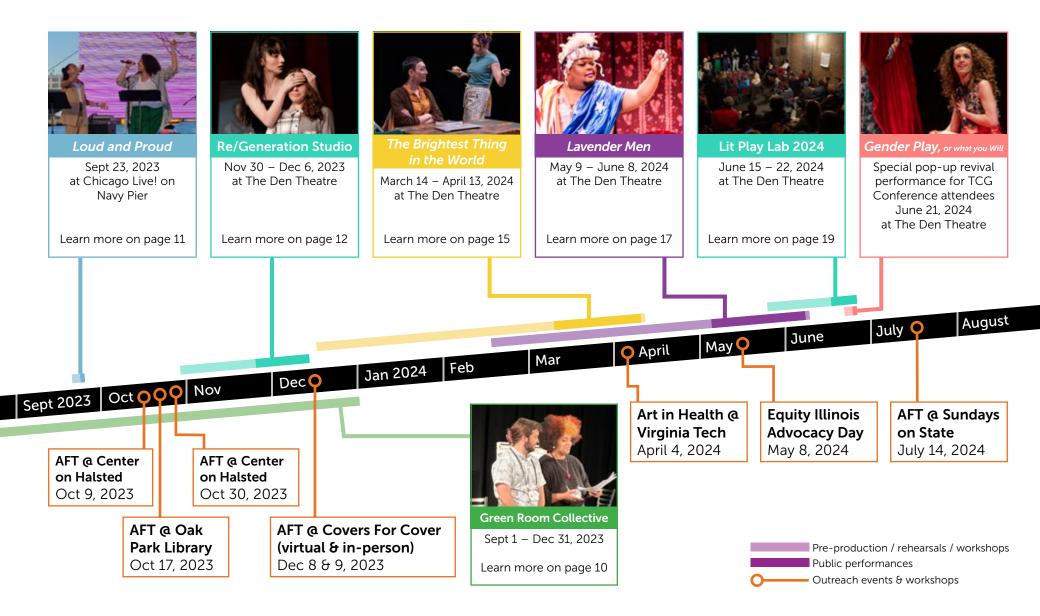
Amv Beck Alexandra Billings William Boles Precious Brady-Davis Joel Butler Megan Carney **Brad Cawley** Geoffrey M Curley Jane C. Cho Philip Dawkins Shelley Echerd Mark Emerson Mitchell Fain Scott Ferguson Steve Futterman Brian Goodman Sarah Gubbins David Hyman

Ted Hoerl Eric Hoff Jessica Hudson Patricia Kane SK Kerastas Delia Kropp Julia Fabris McBride James McKav Amy Matheny Jacob Padron Andre Pluess Dida Ritz Rebecca Rugg Tanya Saracho Arturo Soria Daniel Stermer

2023-2024 PROGRAMMING

SEASON 29 TIMELINE

About Face Theatre was busy all year producing a wide range of compelling programs. From new play development to full productions to touring workshops, AFT engaged our community through a wide array of programming.

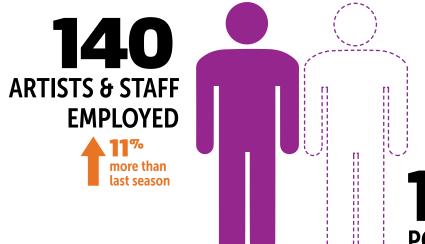


SEASON 29 AT A GLANCE

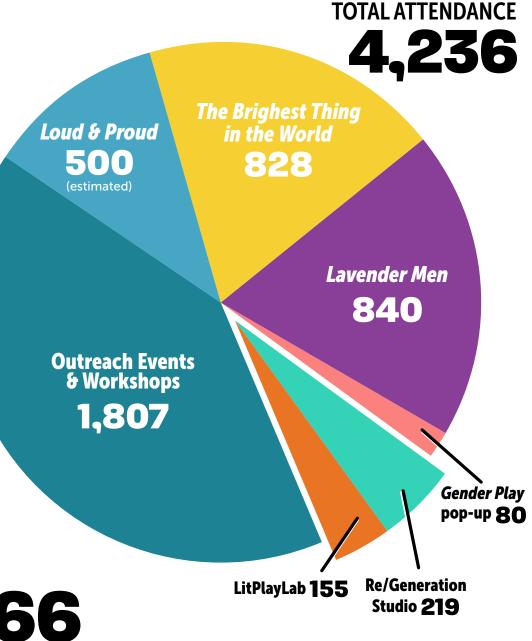












EDUCATION PROGRAM:

GREEN ROOM COLLECTIVE

INVESTING IN THE NEXT GENERATION OF LGBTQ+ ARTISTIC LEADERS



In a theatre, the "green room" is a location backstage where the artists prepare for performance. The green room is a space for camaraderie and community, vulnerability and questioning. It's the place to experiment with big ideas and work out the details with others. The Green Room is often the last stop before you take the stage. The Green Room Collective program embraces these aspects to create a supportive platform to springboard young leaders in the LGBTQ+ community toward the advancement of their goals.



In About Face Theatre's Green Room Collective program, participants advance through a series of individualized skill building activities, engage in meaningful tasks that directly support AFT operations, and take actions toward their education and/or career goals. In this role, GRC members work on two main project areas that will be developed together with AFT staff and artists.

2023-2024 Green Room Collective participants Theo Wampusyzc and Pen Wilder



SPECIAL PERFORMANCE:

LOUD & PROUD:

A CABARET OF SONGS FROM BROADWAY HITS BY GAY AND LESBIAN COMPOSERS

Performed by MATTHEW BETTENCOURT, KORY DANIELSON, and BETHANY THOMAS Directed by **ROB LINDLEY**

SEPTEMBER 23, 2023

as part of Chicago Live! at People's Gas Lake Stage on Navy Pier

> **ATTENDEES** (ESTIMATED)

For the third year in a row, About Face Theatre was invited to perform at Chicago Live! Chicago Live! is a free annual two-day performance festival featuring more than 80 artists and cultural organizations in back-to-back performances on three stages. Performances span every artistic genre – including music, dance, theatre, spoken word, improv, vocal performance, and more!



COMMUNITY BUILDING & NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT:

RE/GENERATION STUDIO

Artistic Producers MIKAEL BURKE and CATHERINE MILLER

NOVEMBER 30 – DECEMBER 6, 2023

at The Den Theatre, 1331 N Milwaukee Ave, Chicago

Re/Generation Studio is About Face Theatre's invitation to build the future of queer theatre together. This welcoming series of public workshops is shaped as a collective dreaming space for connecting with each other, learning about new plays, world-building, and exploring new production models.

All workshops were free and open to the public.

15% more than last season ATTENDEES

WORKSHOPS

READINGS



PLAY READING WORKSHOPS & PERFORMANCES

Dec 1

A HOME EDUCATION

by Liz Haas, directed by Denis Yvette Serna

Dec 7

TRANSFORMATION

special performance by Quyen Tran

Dec 8

WHY ARE GRAHAM CRACKERS HARD?

by August Foreman, directed by Landree Fleming

Dec 15

YŪGEN

by Emilio Williams, directed by Mikael Burke



WORKSHOPS

Nov 30

INTIMACY SKILLS FOR REHEARSAL & PERFORMANCE

with intimacy designer Courtney Abbot

Three workshops: Dec 1, 7 & 15

S.L.A.Y. (SPACE FOR LEADERS & ARTISTIC YOUTH)

with AFT Education Manager Dionne Addai

Three workshops: Dec 2, 9 & 16

LEVEL UP: SKILLS BUILDING FOR EMERGING CREATIVES

with Artistic Director Megan Carney, Education Manager Dionne Addai, and director Alyssa Vera Ramos



Dec 2

SHAPING YOUR STORY: AN INTRO TO CREATING A SOLO SHOW

with writer/performer Will Wilhelm

Dec 9

DND: DIRECTORS IN DEVELOPMENT

with director Mikael Burke

Two workshops: Dec 14 & 16

WRITING FOR THE ME IN YOU

with writer/performers Terry Guest and Omer Abbas Salem



SUPPORTERS:

DONOR SPOTLIGHTS

Our work is made possible by the generosity of many people in different ways throughout the year. We want to highlight two examples from this past year that made a big impact.

ESTATE OF KARL ANDERSON

About Face Theatre is deeply grateful to the estate of Karl Anderson for a major gift.



Photo credit Connie Shirakawa

Karl Anderson February 27, 1943 — May 19, 2023

Karl was a gifted fine artist. He graduated from the School of the Art Institute and became a talented advertising art director. Throughout his life Karl was passionate about helping queer youth find their way in the world. He believed deeply in LGBTQ+ equity and we are proud to continue this work in his honor. Thank you to Karl's friend, Connie Shirakawa, who shared her memories of Karl's life along with this photo. Thank you to Karl's family for their kind permission in making this public acknowledgment.

If you would like to discuss planned giving to ensure the future of About Face Theatre please reach out to Artistic Director, Megan Carney at megan@aboutfacetheatre.com

WHINNY CITY PONY CON

For the second year in a row, About Face Theatre was invited to be the charity partner with Worthwhile Events, the organizer behind Whinny City Pony Con. They have been incredibly generous with us—and are a lot of fun! Worthwhile Events NFP (WE) is an Illinois nonprofit that runs annual conventions near Chicago and Milwaukee to support the fan community that developed around the My Little Pony franchise. In addition to promoting appreciation of animated storytelling and related arts, their conventions provide an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere for the fan community to meet and showcase the art, music, and literature created by its members.

The charity auction that Worthwhile Events holds at the end of each convention invariably features many unique works created by fans, and it is always a highlight of the weekend. We are so grateful to partner with organizations that advance our shared vision of an affirming and equitable world through the creative and performing arts.







MIDWEST PREMIERE PRODUCTION:

THE BRIGHTEST THING IN THE WORLD

by LEAH NANAKO WINKLER, directed by KEIRA FROMM Featuring CYD BLAKEWELL, CLAIRE KAPLAN, and JOJO BROWN

MARCH 14 - APRIL 13, 2024

at The Den Theatre, 1331 N Milwaukee Ave, Chicago

Charmingly free-spirited barista Lane is determined to win over her new regular, the reserved and intellectual Steph. Delightful romantic comedy ensues with poetry, homemade desserts, and sparks flying. But both women are carrying life-changing secrets involving addiction, past relationships, and family. What happens when the giddy romance wears off and Lane and Steph must do the work of building a lasting relationship out of honesty, compassion, and courage? The Brightest Thing in the World is a funny, heartfelt new play that celebrates love, family, and the people in our lives who shine the brightest.

PERFORMANCES

ATTENDEES

MEDIA

Trailer & behind-the-scenes documentary



Production photos









REVIEWS

"The most sensitive, life-affirming story about the opioid epidemic that I've come across since Barbara Kingsolver's Pulitzer Prize-winning 2022 novel *Demon Copperhead*"

-Chicago Tribune

"What [AFT's production] does best is remind us that **the time to love someone** and the time to take chances on your life is always now." RECOMMENDED

-Chicago Reader

"Packs a powerful punch"

-WBEZ

SPECIAL EVENTS

MARCH 28: PRE-SHOW CRAFT & DISCUSSION with comedian, activist, and storyteller John Michael

MARCH 30: POST-SHOW DISCUSSION with plawright Leah Nanako Winkler

APRIL 6: POST-SHOW DISCUSSION & NARCAN TRAINING with addiction recovery specialists

JOSEPH JEFFERSON AWARD NOMINATIONS

LIGHTING DESIGN (Conchita Avitia)

PROGRAMMING



MIDWEST PREMIERE PRODUCTION:

LAVENDER MEN

By ROGER Q. MASON, directed by LUCKY STIFF performed by MATT MARTIN, SHEA PETERSEN, and JULIAN "joolz" STROOP

MAY 9 - JUNE 8, 2024

at The Den Theatre, 1331 N Milwaukee Ave, Chicago

Taffeta is a fat, multi-racial femme with a unique form of gueer magic: she can conjure dead historical figures. In this energetic and surreal play, Taffeta invites audiences along as she summons none other than President Abraham Lincoln and his handsome young law clerk Elmer Ellsworth to her stage. Playing every other character in Abe and Elmer's gay narrative, Taffeta uses this fantasia to confront issues of visibility, race, and LGBTQ+ inclusion. But is any of this historically accurate? Sit down, honey, that's not what we're here for. Lavender Men is an embrace to every queer, fat person of color who has been ignored, neglected, or erased for unapologetically being themselves.

PERFORMANCES 840

ATTENDEES

MEDIA

Trailer & behind-the-scenes documentary



Production photos









REVIEWS

"Thought-provoking and engaging... you might find yourself laughing, sighing, and swooning at the fabulousness of it all... making it a meaningful time traveler special for the queer at heart and their allies."

-Chicago Reader

"The theme of self-acceptance

ties together the past and present as the play explores the question: What if we could reject the stories that others tell about us and change the stories we tell ourselves?"

-Chicago Tribune

"Stroop's performance redefines the overused term tour de force; this is what happens when an actor absolutely absorbs the character they are playing"

-Chicago On Stage

JOSEPH JEFFERSON AWARD NOMINATIONS

SCENIC DESIGN (Caitlin McLeod)



NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP:

LIT PLAY LAB 2024

Conceived and produced by BONNIE METZGAR

JUNE 15 - 22, 2024

at The Den Theatre, 1331 N Milwaukee Ave, Chicago

About Face partnered with UIC professor and former AFT Artistic Director Bonnie Metzgar for the inaugeral year of the new works development and reading series Lit Play Lab. This two-week event series included vital development time and resources for crafting new queer plays and supporting queer artists. All workshops were free and open to the public.

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READINGS

ATTENDEES

PLAY READING WORKSHOPS

June 15 & 16

THE LEADS

by Jesse Morgan Young & Matthew Sherbach directed by Eric Hoff

June 20

ESTRELLAZZO

by Nelson A. Rodriguez directed by Xavier Custodio co-presented with Subtext Studios

June 22

JUMP THE SHARK

by Bonnie Metzgar directed by Mikael Burke

June 22

WE COULD BE: THE FUTURE OF SEX ED

conceived & creative produced by Dionne Addai written by Kirsten Baity & Teddy Thomas



PROGRAM:

TOURING WORKSHOPS

This year's education program has been a journey! Literally and metaphorically. We've been summoned to various sites to teach workshops and connect with the Chicagoland community. Our department shared knowledge of how the theatre and performance industry works with youth at the Center on Halsted, and with special affinity groups during Re/Generation studio.

This was also a year of listening and gathering feedback on what schools needed to support their LGBTQ+ students. Some programs we provided, like addressing the issue of transphobic bullying, resulted in a crash course on gender identity and how to be an active bystander at the Oak Park Public Library. Others were more challenging. For example, some schools wanted a performance that spoke on gender and sexuality, but we didn't have a touring show up and running. Identifying community needs was crucial to our planning for future programming, as it led us to green light the creation of a new touring show to launch our 30th Anniversary Season.

We began the development of We Could Be through an unconventional workshopping process. We connected with Equality Illinois on the importance of sex education across the state and the need for more supportive protections for queer youth. We took the bus to Springfield for Equality Illinois' annual Advocacy Day to interview people about their sex health education and what they wish it had included. We then built

a first draft of the show for the UIC Lit Play Lab at The Den. For that process, we built a team around the idea of filling in the gap schools often leave around sexuality and gender identity in the curriculum. We ended the year with a rough draft of a script that we are in the process of finishing as we prepare for a special 2 week run at Rivendell Theatre Ensemble. After that launch, we'll be hitting the road with our next touring show in 2025! I'm proud of what we accomplished this year, and ready to jump into the next one.

Dionne Addai **Education Manager**

WORKSHOPS

Oct 9, 2023 @ Center on Halsted Oct 17, 2023 @ Oak Park Oct 30, 2023 @ Center on Halsted Dec 8, 2023 @ Covers for Cover (virtual) Dec 9, 2023: Covers for Cover (in-person)

OUTREACH

April 4, 2024 @ Arts in Healthy Communities discussion at Virginia Tech May 8, 2024 @ Equality Illinois Advocacy Day June 9, 2024 @ Whinny City Pony Con July 14, 2024 @ Sundays on State

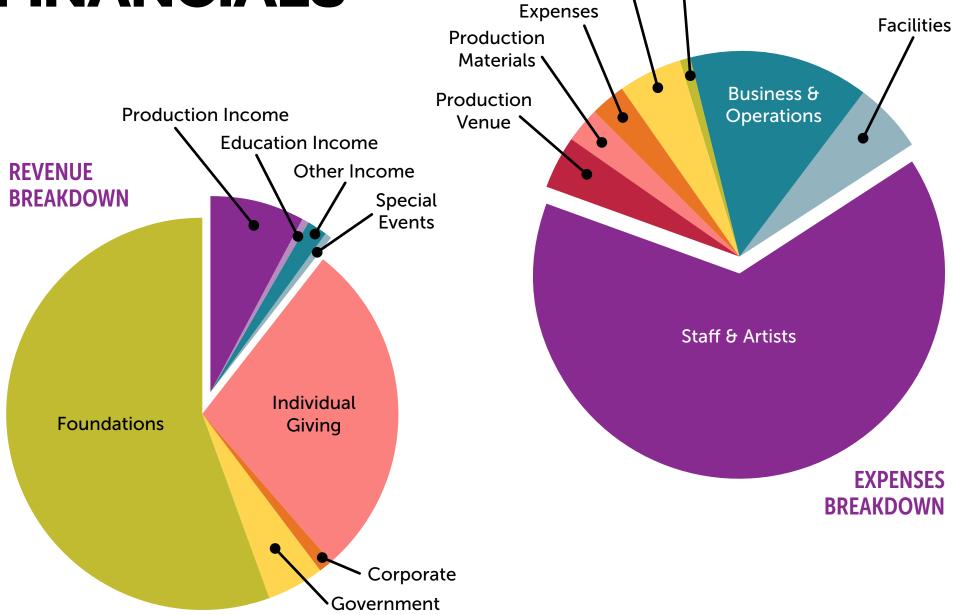
2023-2024 **FINANCES**

Fundraising

Marketing

Educational

2023-2024 FINANCIALS



STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

ASSETS	FY2024
Bank Assets Accounts Recievable Other Current Assets Fixed Assets	185,649 119,000 22,566 81,573
Total Assets	\$408,788
LIABILITIES	
Accounts Payable Credit Cards Other Current Liabilities Long-Term Liabilities	-60 0 7,398 81,961
Total Liabilities	\$89,299
EQUITY	
Total Equity	\$319,489
Total Liabilities and Equity	\$408,788

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITY

EARNED REVENUE	FY2024
Production Income Education Income Other Income	44,739 3,100 9,025
Total Earned Revenue	\$56,864
CONTRIBUTED REVENUE	
Individuals (Board) Individuals (Non-Board) Special Events Foundation Government Corporate	4,320 151,697 2,598 309,000 25,000 7,023
Total Contributed Revenue In-kind Revenue	\$499,638 3,800
Total Revenue	\$560,302
Total Revenue EXPENSES	\$560,302
	\$560,302 290,459 117,598 25,350 17,993 17,189 30,741 5,305 88,900 34,408
EXPENSES Staff Personnel Production Personnel Production Venue Rental Production Materials Education Expenses Marketing Fundraising Business & Operations	290,459 117,598 25,350 17,993 17,189 30,741 5,305 88,900

^{*}Pre-audit financials for Fiscal Year ending August 31, 2024

DONORS

CORPORATE, FOUNDATION & GOVERNMENT SUPPORTERS

Reflects donations made between September 1, 2023 and August 31, 2024.

Alphawood Foundation
Arts Work Fund
Paul M. Angell Foundation
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DCASE
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John R. Halligan Charitable Fund
Illinois Arts Council
Illinois Back to Business

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National Endowment for the Arts
Polk Brothers Foundation
Service Club of Chicago
Shubert Foundation
Venable Foundation

INDIVIDUAL DONORS

Reflects donations made between September 1, 2023 and August 31, 2024.

SUSTAINERS CIRCLE

About Face Theatre would like to thank the Sustainers Circle, a community of donors who pledge a recurring monthly or quarterly donation in support of the Theatre and its mission to advance the national dialogue on sexual and gender identity.

Mr. Jim Andrews Dave Bentlin Judge Tom Chiola Alan Eddington Xavier Esters Pat Ewert Mr. Howard Heyman Bill Michel & Mark Botelho Carolyn Miller Geoff Robinson Lauren Sack Bernadette Smith RJ Silva Joshua Turnbull Moises Villada

FOUNDERS SOCIETY

With a generous annual contribution or monthly gift totaling \$1,000 or more in a year, Founders Society members support today's LGBTQ+ artists creating About Face Theatre's performances and touring shows, as well as our youth ensemble and education initiatives.

\$70,000+

\$10,000+

Estate of Karl H. Anderson

Nan Schaffer

\$5,000-\$9,999

Cheryl Lynn Bruce & Kerry James Marshall Jason Held & John Sanders Soloman H. & Elaine B. Snyder Philanthropic Fund

\$1,000-\$4,999

Anthony Ackerman Geoffrey Anderson Mr. Jim Andrews* Jim Bennett Derek Blin Judge Tom Chiola (ret.)* Biz Wells and Jessica Carson Steve Cross

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Bill Michel & Mark Botelho*

Sergio Puente Geoff Robinson*

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IMA

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Brent Warburton Brian Woodworth Worthwhile Events NFP

\$500-\$999

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\$100-\$499

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\$1-\$99

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Maxwell Winston

^{*}Sustaining Donor

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Your ongoing support makes our critical work possible.



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