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NAC English Theatre / Black Theatre Workshop

Co-Curating Company in Residence

FACT SHEET

December 9, 2020

Is this co-curating model / this response to the call to action unique in the world?

Many arts organizations which are currently white led are implementing steps aimed at sharing power and agency: some are committing to a quota, some are hiring IBPoC senior staff and some are hiring associate artists and Artistic Director apprentices or associates who will have a certain scale of impact and influence. Many of these white led organizations are doing something to try to change the tide, following the lead of some very strong IBPoC led companies who are championing change. However, we are not aware of another example in response to the call for true equity in which a stream of programming is actually being dedicated to another company's culturally specific mandate, to be planned by that company's knowledgeable staff.

How / why was Black Theatre Workshop selected?

Mike Payette (Advisor): "Black Theatre Workshop (BTW) started as a community-based company 50 years ago, bringing together members of the Caribbean and diaspora communities to engage in theatre for us and by us. It is now the oldest Black theatre company in the country, and continues to interpret the various spheres of Blackness within the arts and within society. In the past few years alone, they have grown to broaden their impact by cementing a strong foundation of mentorship and training for emerging BIPOC youth, drawing a parallel between artistic programming and fostering new generations; this is a unique contribution to the larger theatre ecology in Canada. They continue to pursue working in interdisciplinary forms of storytelling, embracing music, dance, and song through important fresh works, while bringing world-renowned new and classic works to its audience in Montreal. Their history has helped pave the way for many of the country's established artists, and their mission continues to promote emerging Black voices."

How will the Co-Curating Company be supported through their time at the NAC?

It is of critical importance to note that the role of the Co-Curating Company is exactly that: curation. BTW has not been engaged to solve the systemic racism issues facing English Theatre; that is English Theatre's work to do. In order to ensure that BTW is relieved of this burden, we have engaged **ahdri zhina mandiela** as Interlocutor, with the role defined as follows: ahdri will be available to BTW as a resource to whom BTW can relate any issues they may encounter over the course of their work with



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English Theatre and the NAC as a whole. Addressing these issues is work that will be done by English Theatre and ahdri, until they are resolved. As Interlocutor, ahdri will also have third-party resources available should a particular expertise be required.

How much of the programming will be determined by the Co-Curating Company?

This plan was built around the notion of equity, therefore Black Theatre Workshop will have the platform of and access to 50% of all of NAC English Theatre resources with which to plan a season, including both human and financial resources. The pandemic complicates things, however whatever envelope is available to English Theatre programming, that same size envelope will be made available for BTW's curatorial choices.

What is the distinction between the Artistic Director and the Co-Curating Company?

Black Theatre Workshop will be working in close collaboration and partnership with English Theatre's Artistic Director to jointly curate a full season of programming that considers both companies' programming mandates. The responsibility overall for English Theatre remains with the Artistic Director. The Co-Curating Company will select productions and projects that fall within their own mandate, having been engaged by NAC English Theatre to view that mandate through a national lens. English Theatre's overall programming will encompass the execution of BTW's mandate.

Is the Co-Curating Company doing this work for free? How is their payment structured? How does the budget for partnering work?

The work of programming a season of theatre at the NAC is a significant undertaking, and Black Theatre Workshop will be compensated accordingly. BTW will be paid a fee of \$100,000, distinct from their programming budget, to cover their work and any travel/accommodation required to come to Ottawa. The essence of the model is that BTW and English Theatre will evenly split whatever resources are available to English Theatre to program the 2021-22 season. These resources include not only financial, but human and venue resources as well. Our programming may not be mirror images of each other in terms of number of productions and performances, but that will only be because of the unique programming choices made by the two Artistic Directors, Quincy Armorer and Jillian Keiley. They will be working from the same starting point, with equal access to funds, staff and venues.



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Why a Black Canadian Theatre Company and not any IBPoC Theatre Company?

The core mission and value of NAC English Theatre is "Towards a more compassionate society." In order to fulfil this mission NAC English Theatre will dedicate half of our resources to essential, beautiful, thrilling Black voices for the next few years, voices which have been systemically excluded for far too long. The establishment of Indigenous Theatre was a necessary step to acknowledge the importance of those voices to the Canadian narrative, both past and present. This collaboration is another step in allowing other voices to lead in order to shape a new future.

How will the programming work? Who has the final decision as to what goes in the season?

Jillian Keiley (NAC English Theatre Artistic Director): "The programming is a constantly evolving mix of dreams, aspirations, previous commitments and budget allowances and restrictions. What BTW wishes to program is their purview, no less than when I hire a great director to shepherd a show through our season; I don't pick apart their choices as they do their artistic work. Part of artistic direction is trusting your choices and only intervening if things go too pear-shaped. This model asks me to trust my instincts that this was the right choice for this company. And I trust that BTW is going to curate an extraordinary slate of performances. The final slate will be agreed on between us. BTW doesn't technically need to get involved with my half of the season, but I am hoping Quincy will be interested in that aspect as we reflect on the season as a whole."

As this is the pilot season, what is the plan for Co-Curating Company going forward?

For the first year or two as English Theatre establishes this model, we will aim to partner with Black-centred companies and engage those mandates. After that time, we may widen the model in any number of ways, including opening up to other companies with mandates centered around artists of colour. It is also very possible that the next English Theatre Artistic Director will be a BIPOC artist. This model may or may not be useful in the future. But it is a useful action that English Theatre can take right now.

Does this mean that the NAC will be presenting BTW's season in 2021-22?

BTW will still program their own season at home in Montreal, distinct from NAC English Theatre's season. NAC English Theatre remains the producer of our own season, which will include curatorial choices made by Black Theatre Workshop with respect to their mandate.



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What happens if the 2021-22 season is delayed due to Covid?

Neither company can be immunized against the challenges of programming in pandemic times. Whatever resources are available to English Theatre under pandemic circumstances, BTW will control half.

Is this a separate company / separate entity that you're donating half your resources to? Like NAC Indigenous Theatre?

Indigenous Theatre is an autonomous programming department within the NAC that took years of planning to design and launch. By contrast, this distributive leadership model shares English Theatre's curation resources, creating space within English Theatre for the Co-Curating Company, but not a separate department. This is the most effective means we have at our immediate disposal to address anti-Black and systemic racism.