

2016/2017



Sarasvati Productions Annual Report



Year in Review

This year we broke the silence around mental health both in premiering *Breaking Through* (based on the stories of over 400 people) and taking stories of youth struggling with mental health to schools with the second leg of the *Shattered* tour; we showcased powerful stories in our International Women’s Week Cabaret 2017 – *Staring Over*; we broke barriers with FemFest 2017; and continued work on a new community-based project exploring stories of displacement and resettlement, *New Beginnings*. Plus offered regular workshops for emerging artists and youth.



Shattered School Tour



New Beginnings preview at FemFest17



Int'l Women's Week Cabaret



Breaking Through

Support Sarasvati Productions

If you care about the work we do, we can use your help! As a registered charity we provide tax receipts for all donations. Mail in a donation to the address on the back or donate to our endowment fund at the Winnipeg Foundation (www.wpgfdn.org).



Become a Sarasvati Supporter today!

Vision Statement

Transform society through theatre.

Inspire, Challenge, Change

International Women's Week Cabaret of Monologues

In 2017, we did a record number of community performances of our monologues leading up to two public shows. The monologues were all focused on the theme of *Starting Over* with pieces written by playwrights from across Canada as well as new work created in collaboration with immigrant and refugee women. Community venues included a range of community groups in the North End of Winnipeg, a fundraiser in Selkirk for Nova House women's shelter, in Winkler at a fundraiser for Genesis House Women's Shelter, at Rainbow Resource Centre, at both the University of Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba, for Agape House in Steinbach, for newcomer serving agencies and at an Indigenous youth conference. We received enthusiastic responses from audiences. It continues to be a way to do important community

outreach and give voice to a variety of experiences in one evening. We did also help several other agencies fundraise at their own events. In total 940 people saw the monologues at the various venues, our highest attendance yet. In addition a wonderful art installation featuring newcomer artists filled the lobby for the public shows!



Sarasvati has been a part of our Women's day events for the past 10 years. We find that the monologues consistently reflect relevant issues for women and community every year. They simply never disappoint! The material is raw and powerful and we have always been able to choose a selection of more serious content that are thought provoking blended with a few that will get the audience laughing as well. I believe that people look forward to the women's day event because of the monologues.

**- Angela Braun
Genesis House Women's Shelter**

Once again we were really amazed at the wonderful performances, the energy and passion of each monologue! The Cabaret of Monologues is an entertaining evening that inspires, educates and entertains.

**-Anna Pazdzierski
Nova House Women's Shelter**

FemFest 2017: Coming of Age

We celebrated 15 years of FemFest 2017 under the banner of *Coming of Age* from September 16-23. We marked this important milestone with unique new partnerships and taking the work out to the West End Cultural Centre and the Millennium Library. The line-up included local productions produced by Sarasvati Productions, touring work from across Canada presented by the festival, readings of new works in development, opportunities for community interaction and skill development workshops.

Through FemFest 2017 we continued to meet our goal of using theatre as a medium to initiate dialogue on issues of relevance to the community. Topics addressed were racism, the justice system, gender roles, the newcomer experience, growing up to be your true self outside social norms, and the importance of human interaction to counter discrimination. We did our sixth 'Bake-Off' in honour of Janet Taylor. The event helped five female playwrights develop new work and provided financial support for the winner, Joanna MacDonald, to keep writing. We had a powerful talk-back with Senator Kim Pate following the touring production *Watching Glory Die*. Judith Thompson was a huge hit with a sold out masterclass. She also gave a lecture to 100 students at the U of W Department of Theatre and Film and helped to give FemFest and Sarasvati greater exposure. *Tomboy Survival Guide* brought in students from as far as Brandon.

The diversity of the programming continued to be noted by audiences as well

as appreciation for the more intimate events such as the Human Library, which provided unique experiences. Total attendance was 1,230.

The festival continues to tackle several social issues in one week, by giving opportunities to those who are underrepresented in theatre, allowing for experimentation in form and providing roles for dozens of professionals as well as emerging artists.

Met many inspiring people. I've gained hope in the courage of people to learn. I gained confidence in myself and my story. I met some people who were struggling with life and it makes me feel so validated to think I helped them in some small way.

- Anonymous, Human Book

Thank you so much for the opportunity to be in Judith Thompson's master class at FemFest! It was amazing to be in the same room with such an accomplished playwright, to have the opportunity to learn from her, and to also receive feedback on my writing. I am an emerging playwright and where else would I get this type of opportunity?! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you, for all that you do to support women playwrights!

- Tyler White, Playwright



**SARASVATI
FEM
FEST
15 YEARS**



Ivan Coyote, *Two Indians* by Falen Johnson featuring Melanee Deschambeault and Erica Wilson; and the Human Library

Breaking Through

As part of our larger Mental Health is Everyone's Health project, we used our May slot for the world premiere of *Breaking Through*. After over two years in development and the participation of 400 in the story-gathering phase, we contracted a team of professional artists for the full production. Total attendance was 608. We also organized multiple post-show panels that allowed various perspectives to be discussed.

It certainly achieved our mandate by addressing how we as a community support those with mental health concerns and sparked dialogue around the systemic barriers. We were pleased that through

valuable donations to cover ticket prices, several community groups and those who have lived through mental health challenges were able to see the show and participate in discussions.

I identify with some of the characters as I have gone through mental struggles of my own... I think what it certainly got across very well was that each character was a sort of individual element, not of their own choosing, but they're trying to find some means of attaining normalcy. This is what I've gone through—the struggle to find normalcy when you have a condition that leaves you feeling anything but.

– Patrick Lowe, Winnipeg Filmmaker



Elena Anciro and Richie Diggs

Shattered

With support from the Winnipeg Foundation we undertook the second leg of the *Shattered* tour. This show was also a result of our mental health project but with a focus on youth. The second part of the tour included 46 performances for a total of 4,460 in attendance in this fiscal year. During the whole tour 6,161 saw the show.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. Schools have let us know that the resulting dialogue continued for some time afterwards.

In line with our mandate to use theatre to address social issues in our community, our goal was to use this production as transformative art. Through the production and scene interventions following the performance we allowed youth to understand what their peers go through, but what was most empowering was that the youth who often participated were those who had themselves struggled.

The Shattered Production brought strong messages to our students about the need to address the stigma attached to mental health difficulties. This production was so well received, we invited them back. It has resulted in a real shift in thinking in the students and staff and was a fantastic kick-off to many other mental health campaigns the student body now wishes to embrace and plan for the remainder of the school year. Many teachers and students continue to reference the characters when discussing issues that impact them and the follow up discussions in classrooms created further awareness.

– Laura Nault, College Lorette

Capacity Building

This was certainly a banner year for capacity building. A grant from the Manitoba Community Services Council supported building of capacity within the office. Receiving three year funding for an Administrator from the Winnipeg Foundation realized a goal we have had for years. In addition we received funding from the Manitoba Arts Branch Consolidated Arts program for the first time, our largest project grant from the Canada Council for the Arts, plus multi-year core funding from the Canada Council for the Arts. With continued multi-year funding from the

Winnipeg Arts Council, this has put us in our strongest position ever for both current infrastructure and long-term planning.

A strong Board has allowed Sarasvati Productions to grow. The review of human resource policies, liability insurance and the commitment to actions from the TRC began and will be key components moving forward.

Workshops

We continued to offer a series of workshops to emerging artists. Our 'Coffee with a Pro' series continued along with workshops focused on auditioning, grant-writing, playwriting and technical elements of theatre. We were also contracted to do theatre-based workshops for community groups including working with WCWRC on a powerful exploration of homelessness. With funding from Neighbourhoods Alive and NERI we completed workshops for North End Indigenous and newcomer youth. Our popular One Night Stand reading series was also reinstated this year!

Financials

Sarasvati has again performed well in 2016/17 continuing to provide an incredible level of theatrical work and community outreach in an economy where funding for the arts has not kept up with inflation and rising costs.

We saw increases in earned revenue and grants. Our Endowment Fund continues to grow due to the support of the Winnipeg

Foundation.

We once again finished the year in a healthy position, posting a surplus that resulted in the elimination of our accumulated deficit. With new core funding the outlook for the next fiscal year is extremely positive and will allow for long-term planning and greater sustainability.

November 1, 2016 to October 31, 2017

Total Expenses: \$267, 130

Total Revenue: \$268,376

Surplus/Deficit: \$1,246

Accumulated Surplus/Deficit: \$160

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Erin Cunningham**

**Administrator Intern:
Samantha Lussier**

Board of Directors

In the 2016/17 fiscal year, we were pleased to welcome new Board members leading to a full slate and a wonderful diversity of experience and background. Allison Birch, Navneet Malhi,

Jennifer Montebruno, Shannon Sampert, and Myra Tait made contributions from the legal to social justice fields. The strength of the Board allowed for stability, planning and fundraising.

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North End Women's Centre
Nova House
OCD Centre Manitoba
Playwrights Guild of Canada
Prairie Theatre Exchange

Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba
Rainbow Resource Centre
Red Threads Playback Theatre
Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre
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Selkirk Mental Health Centre
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