

COMMONWEAL THEATRE



***Year in
Review
2021***



Professional Live Theatre

We're Back!

2021 was a challenging year for the company. We began with the hope that we could finally emerge from the zani-ness that was 2020; but, like most of theater history, the Greeks (in this case Delta and Omicron), had other plans. Still, as you will learn in the articles that follow, we were able to bring our talents to bear on a full slate of main stage performances, with the added benefit that, in the course of the entire year, not one ensemble member tested positive for COVID, and we had no reports of any audience member developing COVID as a result of attending one of our performances.

For this remarkable record of health, I wish to thank our Board of Directors, who proposed adopting strict protocols for safety; our staff, for implementing and adhering to the protocols; and you,

our valued community members, who adhered most willingly to said protocols.

The season was also enhanced by your generosity, which allowed us to bring in outside seasonal artists to assist in the final two shows of our season. Our first three productions were achieved through the tireless efforts of our amazing ensemble.

In the months to come, it is my fervent hope that we will have finally come to terms with this "new normal" and that we will all enjoy the wonderful, magical stories which we have chosen to share with you.



Hal Cropp
Producing Artistic Director



The Commonweal Company

2021—A Year in Review

After many months of discussions and the drafting of safe reopening plans, the doors of the Commonweal Theatre were once again opened to the public on April 15, 2021. We are immensely proud that this date was far, far earlier than any other performing arts organization of any size in the state of Minnesota. There was also the added celebration of marking Producing Artistic Director Hal Cropp's 30th season with the company.

Following a year of pivoting to virtual programming due to pandemic restrictions in 2020, all of us at the Commonweal were thrilled at the thought of finally seeing the faces—albeit masked—of our friends and loved ones. While we had a blast creating and performing our virtual productions, live theatre is what we do best, and even though there was some uncertainty about opening again, the one thing we



Adrienne Sweeney
as Scrooge

knew for sure was that there was something in the 2021 lineup to delight everyone who walked through the doors.

Our reopening in April featured the talents of now former professional resident ensemble member Philip Muehe

in the role of famed chef James Beard in *I Love to Eat*. In this “love story with food,” we were invited into the Greenwich Village apartment of America’s first TV chef in a solo play that imag-



ined a late-night glimpse into Beard’s home, where he shared recipes and cooking tips, spilled secrets, talked to his best pal Julia Child over the phone, and re-enacted moments from his acclaimed television show. We’re sure you’ll agree that the highlight of the evening was Beard sharing the stage with a certain cow named Elsie!

The story of Senga Quinn and her apartment building neighbor Ever Montgomery, a young man with Asperger’s Syndrome, quickly became an audience favorite of the year. In his search for a dancing lesson to survive an evening at an awards dinner, Ever and Senga taught us all a lesson in being more accepting of those around us and, perhaps more importantly, of ourselves.

The warmth of summer welcomed the hijinks of Elizabeth Dunn, Ben Gorman, and Brandt Roberts, our three masters of physical comedy, showing off their skills in *The Complete Works* ▶



The comedy team of (l. to r.) Gorman, Roberts, and Dunn in *The Complete Works of Wm. Shakespeare (Abridged)* (Rev.)

of *William Shakespeare (Abridged)* (Revised). Our version was the most up-to-date, with revisions that included some of the funniest material from

“Live theatre is what we do best.”

productions across the globe. An added bonus for Commonweal patrons was the addition of a spoken word piece by Minnesota artist Dominique Jones which served to shed new light on Shakespeare’s *Othello* while renewing our commitment to diversity and inclusion on our stage.

In the fall, we hit the road with Sky and Bruce, a scene-stealing African Gray parrot, for a road trip to remember in *Come Back*. As Sky sought out the perfect resting place for his best friend Erin’s cremated remains, he came to terms with his own grief. In the hands of playwright Neil Haven, an unfunny topic was dealt with in a fanciful and lighthearted manner



Jaclyn June Johnson and Jeremy van Meter in *Come Back*.

and reminded us all of the value and importance of the most treasured relationships in our lives. And...we’ll never look at a vacuum cleaner the same way again!

The 2021 holiday season was made that much more special with

an added twist to our own adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*. The role of Charles Dickens’s sinister miser proved to be “genderless” as longtime professional resident ensemble member Adrienne Sweeney seamlessly took on the role of Ebenezer Scrooge for the first time on the Commonweal stage. With added material in the form of song and dance by director Craig Johnson, our take on the Christmas classic was just

what we intended from the start: fresh and faithful.

At this time last year, our hopes were incredibly high at the thought of reconnecting with you to once again share stories together, in person.

Those hopes are just as high, if not a little higher, as we look ahead into 2022. A poignant comedy from an American master, a screwball farce, a rollicking musical whodunit, a riveting drama, and a whimsical holiday adventure are what’s in store when you walk back through the doors this year at the Commonweal. We will see you there!

Board of Directors Salute

The past year has been one of unprecedented challenges for non-profits throughout our country. As we wrestled with the dilemmas of when or whether to open, whether to keep staff employed, and how to maintain relevance as an organization pursuing our mission, one key group of volunteers has been willing to provide excellent guidance and the fortitude to look this catastrophe squarely in the face. Against this backdrop, it is instructive to examine and express gratitude for the work of a largely unsung group of volunteers, our Board of Directors.



Outgoing President
Joan Ruen

Under the capable leadership of our Board President Joan Ruen, these heroes of the Commonweal (Chuck Aug, Alan Bailey, David Boen, Laura Gentry, Chris Hanson, Wendy Mattison, André Novack, Sarah Peterson, and José Rivas) have been engaged in developing strategic initiatives designed to assure the company's long-term stability. As reflected elsewhere in this report (see "Finances and Needs"), they have assisted in increasing the percentage of contributed income to total income toward the stated 50:50 goal. They have overseen the creation of both a cash reserve fund and a building fund (designed to cover maintenance issues on both of the company's properties). They have articulated a process for leadership succession, both in emergency situations and as a planned outgrowth of

the company's longevity. They have become active participants in season selection. And they succeeded in articulating policies that kept the company and our audiences free from the direct effects of COVID.

All of this effort has been done as true volunteers. Attendance at bi-monthly Board meetings (which last anywhere from 1.5 to 3 hours), participation on Board committees, attendance at various social functions, and participation in the annual Board retreat are totally uncompensated. Yet their efforts have been, and continue to be, instrumental in the ongoing success of the company.

We would be remiss if we did not salute the service of Chuck Aug, retiring Board member, whose leadership and guidance through his 12 years of service have anchored these amazing years. Without Chuck's drive and wisdom, we would have been unable to retire the mortgage on Dixon House, our artist residence, or create a series of cash reserve funds. Our gratitude will be forever at your feet, Chuck.

Also, please welcome to our Board Dan Christianson and Ken Mogren, our newest Board members. Dan returns to our Board after a fourteen-year hiatus. Ken, a Winona native, together with his wife Sally, has been a long-time supporter of all of our work. I know the Board will benefit greatly from their presence.



Current President
Wendy Mattison

Finances & Needs

As alluded to in our introduction, 2021 was another unique year for the Commonweal. We ended 2020 with a relatively strong cash position and believed that 2021 would mark a return to normal. Yet, cognizant that this might not be the case, we built the 2021 plan to rely heavily on our resident ensemble. We chose to keep the Apprentice Program on hiatus and greatly limit the number of outside artists we engaged. Our choices reduced our expenditures by 68% on these categories; a prudent decision as in-person attendance dropped 43% and there were an additional 1800 virtual attendees.

As we plan for 2022, we are expecting a slight increase in in-person attendance, conservatively 18%. More importantly, however, we are restoring our Apprentice Program and have six apprentices confirmed for the coming year. We are also engaging three outside directors and a number of outside designers. As a result we are projecting a 145% increase in the funding for these categories over the levels we saw in 2019. In fact, the Board has authorized a small deficit for the coming fiscal year, which may be offset if we see a stronger return to in-person attendance than we are currently forecasting.

We are also continuing to explore ways to make the company more responsive to the environmental needs of the world in which we live. To that end, we are continuing to move to digital programs, rather than the booklet we produced in the past. Digital programs offer a number of advantages, in addition to conservation of paper. They can be accessed in advance of a performance. They can be maintained in an archive to review again and again. They

increase accessibility. They can take patrons beyond the stage. They can be updated instantaneously, eliminating the need for inserts. Moreover, they offer interactivity and a variety of options for those businesses who support us through advertising.

We continue to believe that by increasing our contributed income as we grow our patronage, we bring the Commonweal to a position of financial strength. With the support of Commonweal family members like yourself, we have been able to maintain the resident ensemble and begin to build some cash reserves. For that, we thank you. We also recognize that it will take



Our last apprentice show, *The Fox*, in 2020

some time to realize a return to patronage levels we saw in 2019, but with your support we surely will be back there.

As we move forward, the Board and staff have recommitted to last year's two initiatives: increasing the amount of contributed income to come closer to the 50:50 ratio of earned to contributed income and increasing patronage in our key markets. We ask for your support, as together we work to assure the Commonweal's success for generations to come.

Artist Residence Dedication



Stela, Kieran, and Hal at the newly named Dixon House

Despite its humble beginnings, the Commonweal Theatre found itself growing quickly after just a few years. And as more artists came to work at the theatre, it became obvious a place was needed to house all these fresh faces.

As Producing Artistic Director Hal Cropp recalls, “recognizing that housing was going to be at a premium for seasonal and guest artists, due to Lanesboro’s increasing popularity...we decided to create a space that could meet most of our needs for housing in the immediate future.” Materials for the building were delivered in May of 1998, and the building that would come to be known as the artists’ residence was completed by November of that same year. The residence became the home of countless artists as they arrived in Lanesboro to work at the Commonweal.

One such artist was Scott Dixon, who first arrived in 2001 to work as a seasonal actor in

An Enemy of the People. As the years went on and Scott made Lanesboro his permanent home, he became an integral member of the Commonweal, touching and inspiring everyone who knew him with his passion, kindness, and wicked sense of humor (minus a few cringe-worthy puns).

Beyond that, he recognized the importance of having a resident ensemble living in Lanesboro and the surrounding areas, as he believed the presence of such a group would allow art to become a vital part of the landscape of the region.

So, when the question arose in 2021 as to what to officially name the residence, the choice quickly became obvious. As Hal so wonderfully put it, “In thinking about all of the many talents and passions that Scott brought to the company, as well as his role as a model of compassionate leadership and its impact on company members, past and future...it’s only fitting that the space that will serve as home for generations of artists to come bear his name.”

Thus, in 2022 the residence was given a new name: **The Dixon House Artist Residence**.

Let Our Audience **SEE** Your Business!

Our full programs this year will be online, not in print, and they will include clickable links to make them interactive!

Put an ad in our season program –

- For the entire year or for specific shows!
- Help sponsor our five County Free nights for workers & residents in Fillmore & Houston Counties!
- Have your name mentioned in the pre-show speech!
- See your name appearing in our lobby video!
- Underwrite an entire production!
- Your logo on the program title page!
- Your name mentioned in the post-show speech!

For more information, contact:

Program ads

David Hennessey, (507)467-2905 ext 222
advertising@commonwealtheatre.org

Sponsors & Underwriters

Jeremy van Meter, (507)467-2905 ext 211
jeremyvm@commonwealtheatre.org

It Takes a Village

Theatre is a collaborative art form, not only in its creation but in its support as well. Making art costs money, and many organizations and people step up to the plate to make our art happen—including you!

To our granting organizations, our board of directors, our MDC members, our season pass holders, our volunteers, and all our many individual donors:

Thank You!

2021 Board of Directors:

Alan Bailey	Wendy Mattison
David Boen	— <i>President</i>
— <i>Vice President</i>	Ken Mogren
Dan Christianson	André Novack
Harold N. Cropp	— <i>Treasurer</i>
— <i>Ex Officio</i>	Sarah Peterson
Laura Gentry	José Rivas
Chris Hanson	— <i>Secretary</i>
	Joan Ruen



McKNIGHT FOUNDATION



**And thank you to theatregoers like you—
your patronage makes live theatre possible!**