

ENSEMBLE: A YEAR IN REVIEW

Segal Centre Board Meeting, June 7th, 2023

ENSEMBLE began as the Segal Centre's anti-racist and anti-discrimination working group. The members intentionally come from different departments at the Segal to offer a global view of the *organization*. *Since its inception the group's focus continues to offer recommendations to advance* our commitments to equity, diversity, access, inclusion and belonging across all areas of the Segal Centre and its activities.

PROGRESS REPORT ON RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SEASON 2021-2022 REPORT

Annual or bi-annual anti-racist workshops for staff

Consultant Tema Smith (diversity advocate, writer, and Jewish community builder) led an insightful workshop on Antisemitism for staff. We hope to invite her back in future years to update and grow our team's knowledge of the definition of Antisemitism and strategies to deal with it when it occurs.

We have reached out to various organizations and individuals about conducting an Anti-Racism workshop at the top of our next season for Segal staff and will be prioritizing its planning in the next couple of months.

Hold a conflict resolution workshop for staff

We are still searching for the right organization or individual to hold these workshops for an organization such as ours and will prioritize it in our coming season.

Updated practices and policies

The working group members had various discussions on improvements to systems and processes which would strengthen communication, project management, evaluation and defining roles and responsibilities to facilitate integration of different learning styles, and ensuring a safe, strong, and inclusive working environment.

Consistent event post-mortems

This season, with the help of Ensemble members, Lisa and Jon instituted post-mortems in the form of event specific "Debrief Surveys". Through these surveys, team members are given the opportunity to highlight elements of the process of creation that should be kept as well as those that should be improved. The results are analyzed by Lisa and Jon who then follow-up with individual meetings as needed.

Working towards more transformative engagement and hiring practices

This season we hired three cultural and outreach coordinators to engage specific communities implicated in those productions:

- For *English*, Leila Ghaemi engaged in conversation with our staff about the cultural contexts the production and provided valuable training around this. She also brought out over 50 Iranian guests to our opening night for and led post-show talk back sessions centered around the Iranian-Canadian experience as well as the current political situation in Iran. With her support, information and educational activities were also set up in the lobby to foster various kinds of audience interaction with the subject matter.
- For *Sharing Circle*, Maddison Popov engaged the Indigenous community in Montreal to attend our event celebrating the talents of the Indigenous community in Tiohtià:ke.
- For *Prayer for the French Republic*, Ilana Zackon engaged local Jewish audiences through outreach to Jewish community organizations and Sarah Segal-Lazar moderated post-show discussions after every performance. Through the Working Together Grant, we collaborated with the Montreal Holocaust Museum on all the educational and ancillary components.

A LIST OF EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION INITIATIVES IN OUR 2022-2023 SEASON

Gender Neutral Bathrooms and Dressing Rooms

Following special consideration of the language used for our patrons and to move in the direction of inclusivity, Gender Neutral Bathrooms have been instituted within the Segal Centre on the lower floor of the building. This has also been supported with training around the language used by Front of House staff to communicate with patrons about this bathroom.

Gendered bathrooms remain in the lobby, but now include signage promoting a sense of belonging. Specifically, there is a sign placed between the bathrooms encouraging individuals to use the bathroom that best aligns with their gender identity.

As part of the renovations, urinals will be removed in the former male bathroom downstairs and be replaced by a changing table which the Segal Centre does not currently have anywhere.

Non-gendered dressing rooms will be assigned on a show-to-show basis and signage to reflect the same has already been put into effect on the doors.

Pronoun Badges

Our Front of House staff now have name badges that have their pronouns on them so that patrons can communicate with them without misgendering them.

Script Review

The Ensemble team members engaged in conversations around the themes in each play presented at the Segal Centre this season and considered what support material around challenging conversations that they could provide audience members with, along with the outreach ideas for each show that our consultants could engage with. Conversations about each show were shared with the creative teams via Lisa Rubin so that some elements might be taken into consideration during the creative process.

Accessibility Outreach

We continue to work towards making our productions and our building as welcoming as possible to the disabled community. This season alone:

- We programmed ASL-interpreted performances for *Dracula*, *A Comedy of Terrors*, *Frankenstein: A Living Comic Book* (via Geordie Theatre), *Josephine: A Musical Cabaret* and an audio-described performance of *Prayer for the French Republic*.
- We collaborated with Seeing Voices Montreal to create a promotional video in ASL and promote the show among the D/deaf and hard of hearing community.
- We continue to offer comps and lower priced tickets to individuals who cannot afford to see productions otherwise.
- We offer free tickets to companions as a policy and via the Carte Accès Loisirs, etc.
- We hired an ASL-interpreter for 2023-2024 season launch.
- We hired Darragh Mondoux as our Accessibility Outreach Coordinator to promote and engage communities that would benefit from these services.

Both as an accessibility tool and to facilitate outreach to the francophone community in Montreal, Segal invested in surtitling *Prayer for the French Republic* in French for every performance. Word-of-mouth feedback confirmed that the surtitles were useful to audience members beyond the French community because of the fast-paced dialogue in the production.

Masked Performances

In order to be inclusive of our COVID-cautious audience members, many of which count themselves in the vulnerable population, Segal programmed masked 2 performances a week (one matinee and one evening show). This inspired several other theatres in the city to add similar initiatives to their programming.

Making our Communication Tools More Accessible

We collaborated with the Nazareth & Louis Braille Institute to produce:

- Program book in Braille for *Prayer for the French Republic*
- Reusable bar menus in Braille
- Segal Centre portable map with enlarged characters (for patrons living with vision impairment or who are neurodiverse)
- Segal Centre tactile portable map (for patrons living with vision impairment)
- Integration of an accessibility widget on segalcentre.org (via support from Federation CJA)

Leaders of Accessibility in Artistic Institutions in Montreal

It is important that Segal be at the forefront of these the progress made within the greater artistic community in accessibility. To that end, Emilie Hervieux, our Head of Marketing, who has spearheaded the bulk of our accessibility initiatives at the Centre, has been sitting on the Communauté de pratique committee since its inception last summer (via Erika Malot at Théâtre du Rideau Vert) with about 20-30 members from various theatres across Quebec as well as individuals from the healthcare system, lobbying groups, etc. She also sits on the sub-committee Politique et financement.

Closer to home, we are currently working with Institut Nazareth & Louis Braille to ensure our renovation plans are as optimal as can be in terms of accessibility for patrons living with vision impairment and other types of limitations (lighting, signage, etc.)

A LIST OF EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION EVENTS IN OUR 2022-2023 SEASON

CORE PROGRAMMING

Out of our 4 Mainstage productions this season, 3 specifically addressed the experience of marginalized groups:

- *English* spoke to the experience of Iranian immigrants and the took on the widely relatable subject of the ties between language and identity.
- *Prayer for the French Republic* detailed the experience of French Jews in the midst of the 2017-18 political climate in France and addressed the human need for a safe home.
- *Josephine: A Musical Cabaret* tells the life-story of often misunderstood Black American icon, civil rights activist and WWII spy Josephine Baker and her struggle to gain respect and renown in her own country.

KOLOT | Voices

Spearheaded by Jewish Programs Manager Sivan Slapak, the first iteration of KOLOT was very successful. Six diverse artistic practices from artists outside of the white and Ashkenazi identity were showcased at the Segal Centre :

- *Periphery* screening and panel with No Silence on Race (3 guest panelists). 21 registered, 12 attended;
- *Hanukkah Light Sculptures* with Ella Cooper: 25 registered, 24 (there's was waitlist and cap)
- *HaMapah, the Map Dance on Film* with Adam McKinney from DNAWORKS (virtual): 14 registered, 12 attended
- *Ten Tips for Writing Great Creative Nonfiction* with Ayelet Tsabari (virtual): 132 registered, approx 75 attended (Ayelet has following in Israel and I think they didn't realize time difference when they signed up)
- *An Evening of Culture and Conversation* with Kendell Pinkney (hosted at Museum of Jewish Montreal): 53 registered, approx 50 attended.
- *Li Habibi: An Andalusi singing workshop* with Laura Elkeslassy: 57 registered (including waitlist), 44 attended.

Bringing total engagement numbers to 302 registered, with 217 attending. A formal evaluation of KOLOT will be forthcoming and we will be continuing this series as part of the 2023-2024 season.

Sunday @ the Segal

Spearheaded by Artistic & Executive Associate Gabriela Saltiel (assisted by Marketing Coordinator Liora Friedland), this season of Sunday @ the Segal engaged in conversations around each production two of which concentrated on the experience of a particular cultural community:

- For the *English*, the event brought together members of the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) artistic community in Montreal to discuss their experiences in their respective industries including Sophie El Asaad (4 time META Award winner and finalist for the Jovette Marchessault award for design), Leila Ghaemi (Artistic Director of Persephone Theatre, educator and dramaturg), Anne-Marie Saheb (bilingual stage and screen performer) and Arash Ebrahimi (emerging artist and recipient of the Victor Knight Memorial scholarship).
- For *Prayer for the French Republic*, we invited Jeremy and Stephanie Altman, two French Jews who left Paris in 2017 with their three children to move to Montreal, to discuss their experiences with Antisemitism in France and what led to their choice to immigrate to Canada.

Broadway Café

Spearheaded by Head of Communications Melanie Thompson, Broadway Café made large strides towards including more people of color from the theatre community both on and off the stage:

- Diversity was considered within the sheet music provided which now includes many composers and lyricists of color.
- This year, Broadway Café met its goal of having at least 35% BIPOC hosts for its events (an important step in diversifying its audience).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SEASON 2023-2024 AND BEYOND

Anti-Racism Goals

- **Continue Improving Casting Practices:** As the new season is cast, we will be mindful of color conscious practices while also pushing for diversity in body-type, gender, disability and age.
- **Promote Diversity in our Hiring Practices:** As we welcome more full and part-time employees into the company with the coming of the new season of theater, the Segal Centre continues to keep diversity at the forefront of its hiring practices.
- **Anti-Racism Training for Staff:** As stated in the report on recommendations for 2022-2023 (above). We are in the process of finding a consultant to lead anti-racism training for the entire Segal Centre Team. This search will be guided by the Ensemble team and the BIPOC Artist Advocate.
- **Updated Indigenous Land Acknowledgement:** In line with other theatre & cultural organizations in the region the Land Acknowledgement will be reviewed by the BIPOC artist advocate while working closely with an Indigenous artist from Tiohtià:ke to ensure we are using appropriate language and acknowledging the unceded land.
- **Continued Outreach for Broadway Café :** Continue with diversity outreach for Broadway café and update our songbook repertoire to feature more BIPOC works.

Gender Diversity Goals

- **Training for Staff:** Sensitivity training for staff members on gender diversity.
- **Expanding/Updating Style Guidelines:** Establish style guidelines for external communication, particularly in French, centering the use of gender-neutral language.
- **Gender Neutral Washrooms:** Continue the conversation about gender-neutral washrooms including how to provide a gender-neutral washroom for our audience which is also accessible.

Accessibility Goals

- **Accessibility Budget:** Have a fixed and recurring budget allocated to accessibility practices so we can really start building an offering that is more regular, build a habit among said communities, and work ahead of time enough to maximize the impact of the great services we are offering. This would also help us build stronger partnerships with our external collaborators and start improving our current offering.
- **Consistent Offering:** Offer 1 ASL-interpreted performance, 1 audio-described performance and 1 relaxed performance for each production in our season (if appropriate).
- **Advisory Committee:** Put together an advisory committee comprised of members representing each community: someone who is D/deaf or hard of hearing, someone who lives with vision impairment, someone who is on the autism spectrum, other neurodiverse individuals who might have different needs.
- **Training for Staff:** Offer yearly training to our Front of House staff and Box Office staff on how to better serve the various communities our accessibility programs are made for.
- **Full Time Staff to Focus on Accessibility Initiatives:** Hire full-time staff, who could be in charge of “médiation culturelle” and “accessibility/inclusion”
- **Continued Collaboration:** Continued conversations and partnerships with other cultural organizations and lobbying groups to share our knowledge, exchange best practices, and learn together on how to improve the way our society work to remove all barriers.
- **Programming for the Disabled Community:** Share more stories from the disabled community like we did for *Tribes*, and with *Letter to My Disability* (via the collaboration with Giant Steps).

Organizational Culture Goals

- **Finalizing a Formal Onboarding Process:** The building of the onboarding for the Centre process has been initiated by Gabriela Saltiel and Emilie Hervieux. This process will continue over the summer into the new season, and we hope to implement the process with incoming part-timers & full-time staff members.
- **Establish Ensemble as an Internal Resource at the Segal Centre:** Before the beginning of the season we will re-establish goals for Ensemble while also working on our internal communication about what Ensemble is so that all employees have a knowledge and understanding of the team and are able to join meetings and engage in change at the Segal Centre.
- **Build Internal Resource Guide:** Our BIPOC Artist Advocate will build & maintain a resources guide over the course of the summer 2023 to share with organizations that

engage the Segal Centre. This will include resources for support around difficult conversations relating to people of color, Indigenous care and LGBTQIA+ engagement resources. The resources will be made available to the entire staff at the Segal Centre. Resources will change and evolve based on the changing political climate and feedback from the Ensemble team.

- **Ensure the comprehensive inclusion of Jewish religious and cultural sensitivities within the broader framework of EDI and accessibility conversations and initiatives:** By actively incorporating Jewish religious and cultural sensitivities into the broader EDI and accessibility conversation, we create an environment that fosters inclusivity, respects diverse practices, and supports the needs of observant Jews. This goal aligns with our commitment to cultivating a diverse and equitable community where everyone feels acknowledged, understood, and welcomed.

Programming Goals

- **Maintain and Seek Out New Partnerships:** Continue to grow relationships and collaborate with local theatre companies and organizations that represent a diverse community.
- **Mentorship as Outreach:** Use our excellent mentorship capacity in theatre to widen our Jewish portfolio, to continue to connect with emerging artists for marginalized communities.
- **Culturally Specific Outreach:** Continue audience outreach to diverse communities as part of marketing strategies.
- **Outreach for the Academy:** Ensure the Academy continues to grow its diverse community particularly through our fundraising and scholarship capacity.
- **Sustained Programming Speaking to Diverse Communities:** Explore and continue community programming that amplifies stories and experiences from diverse communities.
- **Gather Feedback:** Make efforts to receive feedback and ongoing listening from diverse groups.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY ENSEMBLE

Liora Friedland (Marketing Coordinator), Paul Brian Imperial (Associate Producer), Justin Kopy (Assistant Front of House Manager and Hospitality Coordinator), Jean-Marc Leblanc (Head of Box Office), Stephanie McKenna (Development Officer), Charlie Morin (Schools Group Sales Specialist), Melanie Thompson (Head of Communications), Gabriela Saltiel (Artistic & Executive Associate), Sivan Slapak (Jewish Programs Manager). CHAIR: Keith Fernandez (BIPOC Artist Advocate)