

PRESS RELEASE
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SJTC Reflects On A Season Like No Other

Saint John Theatre Company Hosts AGM for 2019-2020 Season virtually

SAINT JOHN – On January 20, 2021, staff, board and community members gathered virtually to participate in the Saint John Theatre Company's (SJTC) Annual General Meeting which included an overview of the 2019-2020 Season, the company response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a review of the financial status of the company, as well as a look into the future of the organization.

With record-breaking subscriber numbers and many successful events in the fall portion of the season, the SJTC 30th year of work was on track to be the largest season to date. The season began with the ever-popular Loyalist City Shakespeare production of *Much Ado About Nothing*, followed by another record-breaking year for the Fundy FRINGE Festival as well as a new International festival offering in partnership with the Imperial Theatre. In the fall the Atlantic Repertory Company (ARC) had successfully coordinated a tour to Germany and France with the touching Canadian play *Mary's Wedding*. The November Main Stage production of the holiday classic *A Christmas Carol* became the fifth best-selling production in thirty years of theatre, in addition several successful music events took place in the BMO Studio Theatre space.

In March of 2020, the SJTC prepared for a visit from their partners at Theatre Konstanz in Germany, the all-female ARC production of *The Wolves* was in pre-production, and the Main Stage production of *Mary Poppins* was in rehearsal, in addition *Driving Miss Daisy* was getting ready to begin final tech rehearsals prior to opening night. Suddenly, after 29 years of maintaining a significant upward trajectory, on March 13th, 2020 the unthinkable happened and all operations came to a halt.

The sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced the postponement and cancellation of the remainder of the season and forced the leadership team to re-think the way performance art could be delivered safely to the public. The COVID-19 pandemic has been unprecedented in its impact on the organization. The speed with which it hit, and the decisive approach of the New Brunswick government meant that SJTC went from fully operational to fully shut down in one week.

"It is the same willingness to embrace change and take risks that allowed the SJTC to manage the single biggest challenge we have ever encountered. Nobody gets through a crisis by sitting still, and our team did not stop. Within two weeks of shutting down the SJTC was making plans to shift to digital story-telling and presentation." Stephen Tobias, Executive Director, SJTC.

Within the boundaries placed on the company due to social distancing, a live music series was developed that showcased a solo artist performing alone at the BMO Studio while being

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broadcast through a Facebook livestream. Over the course of three music events, the teams had to rally to focus on admin matters, marketing, and unprecedented facility protocols due to COVID-19 pandemic regulations. The SJTC created a new facility operational plan.

After the success of the music events, the SJTC partnered with local stand-up comedian, James Mullinger, to set up an evening of comedy. This marked the company's first ticketed virtual event. The shows was broadcast over Zoom. 135 people attended the event on the evening of May 16th, 2020. On May 22, 2020, the company hosted a live-streamed fundraiser called the SJTC Off the Stage Give-A-Thon. The production was a series of pre-recorded acts presented with live hosts in a telethon style event broadcast from the BMO Studio Theatre. The pre-recorded acts were combined with clips from the live-streamed music events plus some archival materials to create an interactive two-hour live broadcast complete with phone operators and online platforms to collect donations in support of the SJTC COVID Relief Fund.

"I commend the courage and boldness of our staff for discovering positive opportunities within the framework of the province's mandatory health directives and restrictions. We view it as our duty, as well as our pleasure, to continue to offer engaging, relevant and entertaining live theatre and musical events to you, our loyal and supportive patrons. Thank you for supporting the Saint John Theatre Company during this most unusual and uncertain time." George Daniel, President, SJTC Board of Directors.

The President of the SJTC Board of Directors, George Daniel, presented a re-cap of the company's activities for the past Season as well as a solid financial report for the fiscal year. Artistic Director Stephen Tobias highlighted plans for future growth and development.

Members Jon O'Kane and Lisa Gribbons will be stepping down from the SJTC Board of Directors. The SJTC would like to thank Jon and Lisa for their contribution to the SJTC. The SJTC is now accepting expressions of interest for new board members.

The SJTC is a professional arts organization that aims to enrich and engage the community by producing quality theatre and creating experiences through performing arts. The company strives to be a leading Canadian performing arts organization.