

2022 Next Stage Theatre Festival Celebrates a Successful Switch to Online

(February 24, 2022) The 2022 **Next Stage Theatre Festival**, previously planned as a hybrid in-person and digital festival, ran completely online January 19-February 13, 2022, returning over \$17,000 in box office revenue to festival artists. This 25-day festival included live and on-demand screenings of nine digital theatre pieces, plus a full day of professional development initiatives for youth building their careers in the arts.

The **Next Stage Theatre Festival** began with the original four Digital Series presentations of *Stories of a Dish* and *The Sunglasses Monologue* on-demand; and live, interactive digital presentations of *The Complex* and *Saving Wonderland*.

Next Stage continued with staggered digital drops of *Tango In The Dark*, *Stand Up Comedy*, *Heart of a Dog*, *Ursa: A Folk Musical*, and *She's Not Special*, featuring live-to-tape performances for on-demand viewing. These shows, except for *Tango In The Dark*, were recorded live at Ada Slaight Hall at Daniels Spectrum then made available to audiences for online viewing. The original 2022 Next Stage line-up also included *Bremen Town* from Bremen Town Collective who were unable to participate in the digital pivot.

Audiences were supportive and understanding of the changes from live to digital performances, and patiently waited for the premieres of these Next Stage digital offerings. **Next Stage 2022** was a positive opportunity to learn about audience preferences, as appetites for digital tickets varied from show to show, and across demographics.

The 2022 slate of **Next Stage** shows received critical acclaim with enthusiastic reviews throughout the festival dates with quotes including: "Give this multi-talented artist a Netflix special already" from NOW Magazine's NNNNN review of *She's Not Special*; "Ursa is a clear example of how a simple story can be brilliant when it is done well." from The Brock Press's five star review of *Ursa: A Folk Musical*; and "The Complex is a digital theatrical experience that is well worth indulging in at least twice" from Stage Door's review of *The Complex*.

fringetoronto.com was an evolving hub of information, earning more than 85,000 pageviews throughout the festival, while social media buzz was high throughout the 25 festival dates with over 934,000 impressions across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. This digital edition of **Next Stage** allowed for web traffic beyond Toronto including Brampton, Hamilton, Montreal, Ottawa, and Vancouver, with significant international audiences from the United States, India, Iran and the United Kingdom.

Next Stage was proud to offer access features throughout the festival including captions for all video, ASL interpretation in the welcome video preceding each screening, plus a listening party and audio descriptions of *The Sunglasses Monologue* and *Ursa: A Folk Musical*.

Executive Director Lucy Eveleigh says: *“We are immensely proud of the work presented during Next Stage. The original digital series presented brilliant storytelling and unique ways of interacting with audience. Our original live series did an incredible job of re-working their shows for a digital platform. We are thankful to those ticket holders who moved to watching shows online, for our new audiences that supported the digital festival and I am thankful for the tenacity of the Toronto Fringe team who yet again excelled in the world of pivoting.”*

The Youth Programming at **Next Stage** included the New Young Reviewers program, and two professional development events. The New Young Reviewers Program, supported by the Jon Kaplan Legacy Fund, offered training and publishing opportunities for four participants, who collectively wrote eight reviews, which were published on Intermission Magazine and Future Voices, the Toronto Fringe blog. The first professional development event in the **Next Stage** Youth Program was Raising the Curtain: How to Craft a Career in the Arts, co-presented by Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts, where 21 high school students were treated to a presentation about various career paths in the theatre sector. The second youth event was No Pressure Networking for Emerging Theatre Professionals, where 33 participants learned new networking skills and were then encouraged to practice in a low stakes environment with eight invited Industry Professionals from Soulpepper, Nightwood, Cahoots, Theatre Passe Muraille, Tarragon, and Generator.

The Next Stage Theatre Festival is generously supported by Ontario’s Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism, and Culture, as well as the Ontario Arts Council, The Toronto Arts Council and Canadian Heritage

The 2022 **Next Stage Theatre Festival** moved completely online in compliance with the Government of Ontario’s Step Two of the Roadmap to Reopen announcement on January 3, 2022.

Toronto Fringe is a grassroots, charitable organization that runs the Toronto Fringe Festival each July, the Next Stage Theatre Festival each January, and various year-round programs that benefit youth, emerging artists, BIPOC artists, artists with disabilities, and the performing arts community at large. Embedded in Fringe’s operations are the values of Access, Accountability, Creativity, Exploration, and Support.
www.fringetoronto.com

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