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## **16th Annual Next Stage Theatre Festival Celebrates success at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre**

**Toronto Fringe** is proud to reflect on the success of the **16th Annual Next Stage Theatre Festival**, which took place October 18-29, 2023, at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre with sold out shows, enhanced accessibility features, and a dynamic selection of community programming.

**Next Stage** was back in person for the first time since 2020 at a new time of year and at a new venue. Over 3000 tickets were issued to audience members who enjoyed six productions in this exceptionally rich and experimental festival at the historic Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. It also marked the final festival with Executive Director **Lucy Eveleigh**, who will depart after six years in this position and 11 years in total at the Toronto Fringe. She will start as Festival Producer at Luminato Festival Toronto in January 2024.

With the generous support of the Government of Canada's **Community Services Recovery Fund**, administered by the Canadian Red Cross, the **Toronto Fringe** was able to expand accessibility and community care to artists, volunteers, patrons, and staff through active listening and peer support. Due to this generous fund, **Next Stage Theatre Festival** had active listeners available before, after and during performances and auxiliary events each day that were available to everyone.

The **Next Stage Theatre Festival** hosted several other community building events including a workshop about **Producing at Edinburgh Fringe**, the interdisciplinary collaboration **POOL PARTY**, and a public gathering of indie artists in collaboration with **TAPA's Indie caucus** to discuss supporting the mental wellbeing of theatre artists. On October 28, Next Stage featured a fully ASL-interpreted screening of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, a first for Toronto, presented in partnership with **The Disability Collective**. This special screening included a packed audience with 30 members of the d/Deaf community. Additional community programming at Next Stage Theatre Festival included **After Stage with TENT**, where TENT (Theatre Entrepreneurs' Network & Training) Program artist producers collaborated with each Next Stage company to create and produce programming that expanded the experience of each production with activities such as a **Gender Sock Puppet workshop**, and virtual talkbacks.

"We have found wonderful new partners with our friends at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre and it was so lovely to spend my tenth and final Next Stage Festival at this historic space," says Lucy Eveleigh, Toronto Fringe's Executive Director. "I am immensely proud of all the shows we presented this festival; the artists were amazing to work with, and I am so grateful to all the audience, volunteers, and industry that came out to see some theatre. What we need more than ever across the arts is for people to show up. I will miss this team and this company very much, but I will just be across the way, still making art happen."

**Toronto Fringe** is a grassroots, charitable organization that runs the Toronto Fringe Festival each July and the annual Next Stage Theatre Festival each October. Toronto Fringe offers 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.

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