

2020 TORONTO FRINGE FESTIVAL CANCELLED DUE TO COVID-19

Ontario's largest performing arts festival, which brings over 1,100 artists and 140 shows together with 68,000 tickets issued each July, will be cancelled for the first time in its 32-year history.

April 7, 2020 (Toronto, ON). It is with a heavy heart that the staff and board of directors of the Toronto Fringe announce the cancellation of the 2020 Toronto Fringe Festival (originally scheduled July 1-12, 2020) due to COVID-19.

The safety of our artists, staff, volunteers, and audience is our top priority as we navigate this difficult time, which is why the 2020 festival cannot move forward as planned. In addition, Toronto Public Health's announcement on April 1 regarding a timeline of 12 weeks of continued social distancing makes it impossible for our artists to move forward with rehearsals, and for our staff to execute the logistics of the 2020 festival. This decision to cancel the 2020 festival has been made in consultation with Toronto Public Health, our city councillors, and our stakeholders. This decision was not made lightly: we have a responsibility to our festival artists and staff, and we know that the financial impact of this cancellation will be devastating.

Regardless of these challenges to the Fringe community, the staff and board of the Fringe applaud the responsible measures the City of Toronto and Toronto Public Health have taken in response to this global pandemic, and fully support the calls for continued social distancing. The Fringe staff is working remotely, having closed its administrative offices on March 17 until further notice, and is following all municipal and provincial guidance in response to this crisis.

We had a thrilling program set for the 2020 festival, including a launch event at Yonge-Dundas Square, exciting free programming at POSTSCRIPT, the Fringe patio, and 140 innovative shows from across Canada and around the world. We look forward to celebrating and sharing this work with the city in 2021: the artists of the 2020 festival have been offered first right of refusal for slots in the 2021 Toronto Fringe Festival.

From Executive Director, Lucy Eveleigh: "It seems unbelievable that this staple of the Toronto arts community will not happen this summer. The Fringe is a platform for so many, especially for those who do not always have access to present their work. It is so disappointing that these folks will not get to share their stories this year. We know we will be back to provide that platform again, along with many other festivals, events, and theatres that have had to pause. But for now we are going to be sad for a little bit, along with all of you."

From Board Chair, Jason Murray: "We take the health and safety of festival participants and patrons very seriously, and know that this decision is in everyone's best interest. At this time, among other things, let's focus on health and wellbeing. Let's also hold on to the possibility that goodwill can come from this difficult time—more meaningful connections; world governments putting the needs of people first; and broader acceptance that education, research, and healthcare, as well as learning and experiencing through the arts, are all central to enhancing life."

In the coming days and weeks, the Toronto Fringe will be engaging in conversations with sponsors, donors, volunteers, and, of course, the 2020 festival artists to plan for how we can best serve and support our community during this crisis.

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In these precarious economic times, we know that artists are hurting. Emerging and independent artists - the ones working on the "fringes" - are facing significant challenges. Many Fringe artists rely on their summer Fringe tour to bankroll their year, and then supplement that work with part-time jobs in the service industry. With Fringes across the country and the service industry shut down for the foreseeable future, **we are concerned for the safety and security of our artists** and the work we move forward with will serve this community first.

We are also concerned about our dedicated staff. The Toronto Fringe seasonally hires 150+ paid staff to run the festival, many of whom come back year after year to be part of the Fringe family. This year, many of our summer contract staff, box office representatives, front of house managers, venue technicians, bartenders, KidsFest, and POSTSCRIPT staff will also be seeing a loss of income due to the festival's cancellation.

As the Fringe works towards a new set of goals for the 2020 season and looks forward to 2021, the Toronto Fringe promises to:

1. Maintain its core values of Access, Accountability, Creativity, Exploration, and Support.
2. Create opportunities for artists from the 2020 festival to connect with audiences.
3. Ensure that 100% of the net profits of any alternate or replacement performances will be shared amongst the 2020 cohort of artists.
4. Advocate for our independent artists, providing access to resources and support wherever we can.

You will be hearing more from us in the coming weeks about programs and services we will set up for members of our community, particularly the artists effected by the cancellation of the festival. In the meantime, those looking for resources can [access some links on the main page of our website](#), which are updated daily.

The cancellation means we will also be unable to continue with our 2020 Teen Fringe and Teenjur Young Critics programs, but we are happy to say that our 2020 TENT emerging artist training program will continue and convert to an online format, running July 1-12, 2020. [Applications for TENT are now open on our website.](#)

Artists can also look forward to an upcoming call for applications for the 2021 Next Stage Theatre Festival in the coming weeks, which will take place next January.

Please keep the original dates of July 1 -12 in your planners - we will have some kind of Fringe spirit to share with you this summer, so stay tuned.

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