

June 5, 2020

To our Fringe community and beyond,

I have been thinking so much about the role of the Toronto Fringe in the anti-Black racism and white supremacy reality that exists in our world; what part we have played in this reality, and what part we want to and need to inhabit. On Monday, we issued a straightforward statement of our solidarity with the Black community and our support of the Black Lives Matter movement. Since then we as a team have been reflecting deeply and looking hard at how the Fringe, as an organization whose main focus is to support indie artists, must go much further to make sure there is a safe space for BIPOC artists in our organization. We need to ensure that BIPOC artists know this is their space, and most importantly, that they feel safe. Do we live and breathe and shine the light of our [safe space and inclusion policies](#)? Do members of our community feel reassured by those policies when they look at us? We believe we are an organization that upholds honesty and transparency above all with our wider community. With that in mind, I am writing today to share where our reflections this week have brought us, and how we intend to move forward.

Our focus has always been and always will be our artists. We state that anyone can apply to the Toronto Fringe, however not everyone does. Due to the historical whiteness of the Fringe movement here and across Canada, not everyone feels that this is a community for them. We must do more to make the Fringe more welcoming, more safe, and supportive. We are still a gatekeeper, and we have to recognize our position of power within the community – as much as we can say we are for everyone. **If our artists have a harder time getting an audience because they are artists of colour, then we need to do more. If our artists experience racism in a review, then we need to do more. If our artists do not feel safe to come to us and be heard and unconditionally supported, then we need to do more.**

We pursue our work always by centering our values: access, accountability, creativity, exploration, support. We are coming back to our mission, and doubling down on doing what we set out to do: be a platform for everyone to access, discover, and experiment with the arts. We are having conversations with our colleagues at other Canadian Association of Fringe Festivals (CAFF), acknowledging that the majority of us are predominately white institutions, and that this is where much of the change needs to happen. We at Toronto Fringe recognize that our core leadership team is predominately white. That recognition means it's on us to work even harder to identify, demonstrate and make clear how Toronto Fringe actively and constantly pursues Equity and dismantles perceived bias. It is a priority to hire BIPOC festival staff, and ensure that both our festivals are representing the diversity of the city and the community.

We are starting the process of an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Audit, following the lead of our friends at Vancouver Fringe, to find the gaps we know we still have, as well as augment where we are succeeding. We have been and continue to deepen our Equity and Safe Spaces work plan, which must address internal and external forces, and must include resources for our artists to consider in their own work. The Fringe is unjuried – we cannot and do not wish to control the programming that lands on the stages. That means we need to ensure those stages are truly, absolutely equitable and accessible. We can break down barriers that still prevent marginalized and oppressed voices, which have been systemically held back, from accessing this platform. We can educate and inform those participants who have NOT faced the same hardships, who have benefited from facets of privilege, about their role in eradicating inequity, and everyone's role in being actively inclusive, and fostering a safe festival.

We have always prided ourselves on being honest and transparent about what we do. We hold ourselves accountable and we ask for feedback. Please find our feedback form on our [website contact page](#), or email me at exec@fringetoronto.com. At this moment in time, we are all reading and absorbing and listening – hearing what our

artists have to say to see how we can make it better for them. There are no excuses. The world must change. We will look to our BIPOC peers, we will make investments, we will seek and compensate consultants and collaborators, and we will keep going.

I acknowledge my privilege as a white able-bodied woman, from the UK, settled in Canada for many years now. My interactions with racism have mostly been through the eyes of my partner (an artist and person of colour), my colleagues, and my friends. And my responsibility goes beyond the confines of my home and how I bring up our bi-racial child – hoping that the world will have changed before she is subjected herself.

When speaking about race and racism on our platforms, our hesitations always come from wanting to say and do the “right” thing by our artists, but hesitation is not what our community needs. This is not a new issue, Black folks and the IPOC community have been talking about these injustices for a long time, and we have barely begun our journey in solidarity. We acknowledge our mistakes and failures of the past, and we will likely make mistakes in the future, but we will and must continue to learn from them.

To summarize the points discussed above, these are some of Fringe’s action items moving forward:

1. We are working on an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Audit
2. We are asking directly for feedback from the Black and IPOC community
3. We will prioritize and hold space for BIPOC artists within our Festivals and organization

Thank you for reading.

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