



# COMMONWEAL THEATRE COMPANY

## 2017 Minnesota Nonprofit Award for Excellence Acceptance Speech

I am deeply honored to accept this award on behalf of the Commonweal Theatre Company, our staff, our Board of Directors, and the over 20,000 people who make up the extended family that we are proud to call our audience.

One of the most important functions of theater is our unique ability to bring to our audience, our community, a deeper appreciation for what it means to be human, in all our diverse forms, through the use of creative story-telling. The fact that 99.92% of the genetic material of humans is identical only reinforces the belief that we are more alike than any of our differences, yet it is this small difference that serves as the source material for great stories, tales which help us to see our similarities while we appreciate and ultimately accept our differences.

That, for the past 29 years, we have been blessed with the opportunity to bring our artistry to bear on these stories in a town of less than 800 people is a testament to both the hard work we bring to our art and the welcoming nature of our extended family.

How does such a miracle come to be? It begins with a very clear vision of what the theater stands for – “enriching the common good through actor-based storytelling which is both transcendent and relevant”. It is supported by a strong set of values, artistic excellence, community, diversity, education, sustainability, and balance. These are underscored by the creation of a unique model of “business” – the notion of the artist-administrator, where each member of the ensemble is engaged not only in the creative work but simultaneously in the work of sustaining the company. Underpinning it all is a company culture which embraces the concept that anyone who walks through our doors is made to feel that the Commonweal is their theater, their home.

You may wonder about what makes a theater, or any art form, believe so deeply in its ability to impact its audience. The company culture serves to put

our audience in a comfortable, accepting state to share in the stories we have chosen to tell. The accounts of how a particular production affects an audience are legion, from the sexual abuse victim, flanked by close friends, who thanked us for telling the story in *How I Learned to Drive* that she had not had the courage to share, to the parents who recently lost a child and came to more deeply experience their grieving and healing process while attending *Steel Magnolias*, to a devoutly religious woman who opened her heart to the story of two homosexuals dealing with the AIDS crisis from a map store in Seattle in *Lonely Planet*. These tales just scratch the surface of the impact the Commonweal has had on our audiences over the years.

We all do good work. We all do important work. We are all challenged to do more.

At the Commonweal, we are committed to telling the stories that help us to broaden our acceptance of the 0.08% of difference we hold – because we are committed to the notion that this is the path to peace between humans.

On behalf of our staff and board: MCN and Propel Nonprofits, thank you for this award. And a deep expression of gratitude to all of you for all your efforts to make communities across Minnesota better places to live, work, and play.

**Hal Cropp**  
**Executive Director**  
**Commonweal Theatre Company**