Organization Name: Red Theater

Year of Incorporation: 2013

Website: https://redtheater.org/

Please list the last 8 productions (or more) that you have produced in the last 5 years (2021-2025). Please list by year:

2022 Vinegar Tom by Caryl Churchill,
2023 Indoor Cats by Mora V. Harris Caveman, Play by Savannah Reich,
2024 Hamlet by William Shakespeare, DOGS by Hannah Kime, Muted. by Zack Peercy, marfa Lights by Casey Wimpee,
2025 Kairos by Lisa Sanaye Dring, The Pilon by Zach Barr, The Rebound by Annalise Cain,
2026 The Seagull by Anton Chekhov

Tell us about your organization. Some suggestions include: why your organization was created? What is your organizational structure? What are your organizational values? What are some current challenges you are facing as an organization?

Red Theater's mission is to make theater by putting people first. We do this under the foundational ideals of radical transparency, community care, and meaningful experience. These ideals drive us to bring access to theater to anyone who wants it, with an intentional focus on those restricted by financial and physical disability. Since incorporating as a 501(c)3 in 2013, Red's productions have included ten Chicago premieres and nine world premieres. In Chicago, Red has changed the theatrical landscape with new works and radically accessible shows like R+J: THE VINEYARD and YOU ARE HAPPY, both bilingual Deaf/hearing productions featuring limited subtitles and multiple Deaf actors. The Chicago Tribune named our work as a model production in their Resolution for Theater in 2016, and our production of THE ELABORATE ENTRANCE OF CHAD DEITY was featured on "Best of 2017" lists in The Chicago Tribune, Chicago Inclusion Project, and Theatre by the Numbers. We program two ongoing monthly reading series that strive to increase literacy on new plays and awareness of a wide variety of active playwrights. Script Club is our virtual book-club-style meet-up, curated by Literary Manager Zach Barr Zach relies heavily on the New Play Exchange database, using its strong search engine and substantial library of plays to source diverse, captivating new works from hidden gem playwrights. Since its inception in October 2020, Script Club has hosted and facilitated the discussion of 66 plays, often with the playwright in attendance. Readings at Red is a live reading and feedback session of in-

development scripts by Chicago playwrights, led by Casting Director Becca Holloway. Since April 2023, this series has featured 35 new scripts, ten of which have gone on to receive world premiere productions. In 2020, Red Theater had its first major leadership shift to co-Artistic Directors Wyatt Kent and Clare Brennan, who function as both artistic and executive leadership. This transition coincided with the pandemic, which allowed us as an itinerant company to pause all production efforts and focus on evaluating our internal structure. We re-wrote Red's mission statement, standardized our record keeping, and revitalized our branding. This was a crucial period of reflection and re-commitment to our values that proved invaluable once we returned to live performance in 2022. In August 2025, we welcomed Hunter Cole to Red as Director of Production. They lead our design teams, advise on resource management, and serve as technical supervisor for our mainstage productions. Our Board of Directors is led by Marisa Macella. She previously served as Red's Executive Director, and leads a board of four in providing guidance, accountability, and resources for Red's small but dedicated staff. Red has an Artistic Cohort composed of thirty Chicago-based theater artists, including performers, directors, stage managers, designers, and technicians. Many of our cohort members volunteer on teams to assist with general operations, including front-of-house, marketing, season selection, and manual labor support. An unexpected challenge of the last year has been in our attempts to increase coverage from leading local media sources. We've worked hard to grow our reviewer base, but feel we've hit a ceiling for the coverage we are able to secure without retaining the professional help of a press agent or other similar assistance.

Tell us about how your organization has grown in the last couple of years:

Our top accomplishment in the last year is continuing to raise the profile and reputation of Red Theater's artistic work, most exemplified by THE PILON receiving the 2026 Harold and Mimi Steinberg/American Theater Critics Association New Play Award. This national award is chosen from among plays making their professional premiere in the previous calendar year outside of New York. As the winner, playwright Zach Barr received a $25,000 award. We believe we are the smallest organization to have produced a winning play, and as a small but growing company it was a tremendous honor to represent the depth of the work happening in Chicago storefront theater. In addition to this national recognition, Red Theater was nominated for our fourth best new play Jeff award in three years of producing, winning our second. We also received sterling reviews and our highest ticket sales yet for our production of THE SEAGULL, cementing Red Theater's reputation as a home for both excellent new plays and intimate stagings of major published works. In August 2024, Red moved into our first physical homebase - The Hearth, housed in the Edgewater Presbyterian Church. It functions as both a rehearsal and meeting space, as well as a

venue for the F* Around Series. We launched this programming series to provide opportunities to artists with strong DIY concepts and a desire to self-produce. Shows at the Hearth are free to attend and so far have featured some of our most experimental work. In October 2024, we collaborated with Ensemble Consulting on a series of workshops focused on clarifying job descriptions and creating a more efficient and sustainable organizational practice. Their input and guidance were fundamental to our first pass at strategic planning under current leadership. The 25/26 season was a notable one in terms of material growth. We doubled our scenic budget, which translated to two of our most intricate sets to date with THE PILON and THE SEAGULL. This was supported by an increase in major donors, with four new individuals and one new foundation giving in the $4,000 - $6,000 range. This support has set us up to expand our mainstage season from two to three productions in 26/27, returning to Red's pre-lockdown cadence.

Tell us about your organization's artistic and programmatic plans for the future:

Our 26/27 season is shaping up to be another exciting one for new work, featuring two world premieres from Chicago playwrights. In the fall, Red cohort member Jessica Love directs CHURCH HURT by Brynne Frauenhoffer. In July, Red will undertake our first first co-production, collaborating with Brian Pastor and City Lit on the premiere of Alex Lubischer's YOU DESERVE TO BE HERE, directed by Jonathan L. Green. We are currently reading scripts with the goal of selecting a more well-known piece for our winter production slot to balance out these two new plays. Our overall goal for next season and beyond is sustainability. We want to maintain a stable schedule of three mainstage productions per season. This would allow us to function with a subscription model, which would greatly increase our draw for audiences to return to our work year after year. We also want to maintain consistency in our F* Around programming. We are currently building a submission and review process to make pitching to this series more accessible to a wider pool of interested creatives. Ideally, we want something happening in The Hearth every weekend. Even without a physical theater of our own, we want Red to feel like a reliable hub for the most engaging theater happening in our community.

Tell us about ways that your organization engages in community partnerships, education programs and/or outreach activities:

Red Theater has a number of collaborative relationships that power both our day-to-day operations and overall growth. Our Artistic Cohort is a group of Chicago artists invested in a collaborative experiment in theater making and community building. This takes many forms, including a virtual shared space, attending each other's shows, social media shout-

outs, and group volunteer opportunities. We believe strong theaters mean a better environment for all theaters. This ethos motivates our efforts toward resource sharing, providing expertise, materials, and space to our peer organizations whenever possible. Most recently, we donated rehearsal hours to JunkHeart's premiere production of ANATOMY OF A SUICIDE. We also collaborate closely with the Edgewater Presbyterian Church, which houses The Hearth, our first rehearsal room in Chicago. We are fortunate to share the building with other artists, mutual aid workers, worshippers, refugees, and residents of Edgewater's greater community. Just south a couple blocks from The Hearth is The Edge Theater, a longstanding partner of ours. We've performed a total of nine shows in their Off Broadway space and find consistent creative inspiration in the community of regular producers in the building. The Saints have served as ushers for our mainstage productions for most of Red's existence. We have a deep appreciation for this vibrant and active community of theater lovers, some of whom have become "regulars" at our shows. We're grateful to be based in Chicago's Edgewater neighborhood, which in recent years has become one of the city's busiest hubs for live theater. By developing personal relationships with other Artistic Directors operating at a similar level to our own, we learn vital information and strengthen the Chicago theater scene as a whole.

Tell us about your organization's current work to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion:

Red Theater attracts a broad and diverse group of artists and audience members to our programming. We ensure that there is always an access ticket price available to all of our productions, varying from free to $10. Both our rehearsal and performance venues are fully ADA accessible, and we make sure to provide wheelchair accessible seating close to the main entrances. Our accessibility efforts extend to our artists, many of whom are parents, work full-time jobs, or are pursuing higher education. We enthusiastically make accommodations for our artists' responsibilities outside of working with us and adjust to their needs, rather than demand time and energy that cannot be provided. We have also expanded our casting submission windows and, to make our stages more accurately reflect the demographics of Chicago, we have actively seen more theater that features BIPOC talent and extended personal invitations to those performers to submit. We make concerted efforts to provide opportunity for feedback, which include but are not limited to: anonymous surveys for both audiences and artists, facilitated conflict resolution, and case-by-case attention to the personal accessibility needs of our artists. In 2020, we hired Cruel Valentine, a Black queer recruiter and artist, to help us hire a BIPOC Managing Director. We found someone who we were lucky enough to collaborate with for a summer of anti-racism training and mission statement development before an unexpected

opportunity led him elsewhere. That fall, we invited Cruel to join our board, an invitation they graciously accepted. Our board is now majority-femme and half BIPOC. In terms of programming, our Literary Manager is dedicated to sourcing scripts from BIPOC, international, disabled, queer, and other marginalized voices for our monthly Script Club series. The F* Around Series was designed with a low barrier of entry, with the intention of attracting directors and devisers with a wide variety of experience and historical access, expanding across race, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, and ability. During THE PILON, Red hosted its first relaxed performance, an evening intended to give audience members with diverse physical and psychological needs a more accessible environment to enjoy our work.

Tell us how your organization would use this grant and why this is important to your organization at this current moment, please be as specific as possible:

Receiving this award would be a validation of Red's persistence and growth in our second phase as a company. We were unsure if our organization would be able to survive the evolution away from founding leadership and through a global pandemic that fundamentally changed our industry. After four successful seasons, we feel confident that Red Theater is in it for the long term here in Chicago. The 26/27 season will see Red return to producing three mainstage shows. We have been working toward this goal since returning to production in 2022, and are confident that now is the time to make the jump. The more we're able to produce, the wider scope of audiences we're able to attract, which directly translates to an increase in donorship and foundation support. Adding a production adds a major strain on our already limited budget, so a grant of this size would go a significant way toward offsetting that cost. The snowball effect of additional money provided at this pivotal moment would compound quickly, translating first and foremost to higher stipends for all of our artists. Over time, we hope to transition our staff from a volunteer model to part-time employment, which will only be possible if we are able to evolve into the next tier of production and fundraising. Our team is composed of some of the most passionate, talented, dedicated artists in this city, and we want nothing more than for Red Theater to be a source of both artistic fulfillment and meaningful compensation for artistic labor. A portion of this grant would go towards efforts to make our design processes more efficient and sustainable, a challenge for itinerant companies. We intend to start a membership with Conscious Costume, a Chicago organization dedicated to storing, recycling, and renting costumes at affordable rates. We are also looking into a shared storage space with Shattered Globe, which would free up vital square footage in The Hearth and allow it to function more easily as a space for gathering and performance.

List of production history and any awards received. Please include that list here:

Schweyk in the Second World War by Bertolt Brecht, dir. by Aaron Sawyer Red Hamlet by Aaron Sawyer (adaption), dir. by Aaron Sawyer Dylan by Sidney Michaels, dir. by Aaron Sawyer Three Soldiers (for Sisters) by Aaron Sawyer, dir. by Aaron Sawyer R+J: The Vineyard by Janette Bauer & Aaron Sawyer (adaption), dir. by Aaron Sawyer Year of the Rooster by Eric Dufault, dir. by Carrie Lee Patterson Taste by Benjamin Brand, dir. by Aaron Sawyer *non-Equity Jeff Award for Actor in a Principal Role - Play (Gage Wallace) The Feast by Celine Song, dir. by Gage Wallace Beowulf X by Aaron Sawyer (adaption), dir. by Aaron Sawyer Prince Max by Ellen Struve, dir. by Elizabeth Lovelady The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity by Kristoffer Diaz, dir. by Jeremy Aluma *non-Equity Jeff Award for Fight Choreography (Kyle Encinas) Red Cyrano by Aaron Sawyer, dir. by Aaron Sawyer Sickle by Abbey Fenbert, dir. by Elizabeth Lovelady An Oak Tree by Tim Crouch, dir. by Jeremy Aluma Non-Player Character by Walt McGough, dir. by Beth Wolf You are Happy by Rebecca Deraspe, dir. by Mary Kate Ashe & Aaron Sawyer Isle of Sugar by Alejandro Tey, dir. by Alejandro Tey Vinegar Tom by Caryl Churchill, dir. by Clare Brennan Indoor Cats by Mora V. Harris, dir. by Wyatt Kent *non-Equity Jeff Award for New Work (Mora V. Harris) *non-Equity Jeff Award for Performer in a Supporting Role - Play (Sarah Wisterman) Caveman Play by Savannah Reich, dir. by Clare Brennan Hamlet by William Shakespeare, dir. by Wyatt Kent Muted. by Zack Peercy, dir. by Becca Holloway marfa Lights by Casey Wimpee, dir. by Jack William Rodgers DOGS by Hanna Kime, dir. by Becca Holloway Kairos by Lisa Sanaye Dring, dir. by Clare Brennan The Pilon by Zach Barr, dir. by Jessica Love *2026 Steinberg / American Theatre Critics Association New Play Award Winner *non-Equity Jeff Award for New Work (Zach Barr), subsequently declined The Rebound by Annalise Cain, dir. by Jack William Rodgers The Seagull by Anton Chekhov, dir. by Ian Maryfield

Organization Name: Kerfuffle

Year of Incorporation: 2015

Website: kerfuffletvy.com

Please list the last 8 productions (or more) that you have produced in the last 5 years (2021-2025). Please list by year:

The Dinosaur of Lake Michigan (2026), behold: an opera for the very young (2026), The Conductors (2026), Bookworms (2025), Toddler Hiking Club (2025), The Conductors (2023), Toad Hall (2022), Goose and Gert (2021)

Tell us about your organization. Some suggestions include: why your organization was created? What is your organizational structure? What are your organizational values? What are some current challenges you are facing as an organization?

Kerfuffle is an award-winning midwestern theatre and dance company devoted to creating aesthetically and emotionally engaging performances for children ages 0-6 years old. Founded in 2015, Kerfuffle centers young children as major creative partners in the development of new work and shares playful, multi-sensory performances in museums, libraries, parks, and other nontraditional spaces. Children's imagination is at the center of Kerfuffle's process. In order to understand what engages, delights, and surprises children, Kerfuffle's plays are developed through creative drama workshops where young people create stories, characters, and worlds in collaboration with adult artists. Founded by Artistic Director Ashley Laverty in 2015, Kerfuffle was created because she identified children under 6 as being deprived of theatre created specifically for them. Kerfuffle creates original work through creative drama workshops and classes with very young children. Artists present the characters and themes they are interested in exploring to the children and the creativity of these very young children helps bring the plays to life. Kerfuffle's current organizational struggle is bridging the gap from a passion project to a full-time career. This past year went through a co-leadership transition with a new managing director. And there is a five year plan to increase earned and contributed revenue in order to support a full-time leadership staff of 2 and a part-time staff of 4. When a family attends a Kerfuffle production, they come up to us afterwards and tell us how thankful they are to be given an opportunity to share something specifically made for their young child. Kerfuffle is an escape from the mindnumbing content farm of YouTube for kids into a

sensory and immersive world that celebrated the creativity and capacity of very young children.

Tell us about how your organization has grown in the last couple of years:

Kerfuffle started as a graduate thesis project at Arizona State University with Artistic Director Ashley Laverty and Managing Director Jeff Sachs in 2015. Laverty took the company to Nebraska after graduate school and continued to develop her craft and build partnerships with local organizations, producing 1-2 productions a year. In 2020, the organization moved to Chicago where a partnership was made with Chicago Parks District's Night Out in the Parks, which has been an important part of Kerfuffle's growth as we returned to our park tour year after year for Goose and Gert, The Conductors, Toddler Hiking Club, and The Dinosaur of Lake Michigan. In 2023, Managing Director Jeff Sachs had the idea during his MBA at DePaul University to reincorporate as a nonprofit organization. This led to an immediate exponential growth for Kerfuffle through the development of a board of directors and the support of individual donors and grant funding. Shortly after, Kerfuffle hired their first part-time staff member: Production Manager Miranda Taylor. In 2025, as the organization prepared for a transition to a new managing director, we hired our first Marketing & Communications Manager, Tikal Rivera. And in 2026, Kerfuffle's second managing director, Molly Burris, was hired. Our operating budget went from approximately 10,000 in 2022 with 2 productions to 45,000 with 4 productions. We gained the capacity to tour and bring our work not just to the many wards of Chicago, but also abroad to Nebraska and Iowa. We went from 13 individual donors in 2024 to 49 in 2025. ANd from 24 performances in 2021 to 50 in 2025. We went from under 500 audience members in 2023 to 2,216 in 2025.

Tell us about your organization's artistic and programmatic plans for the future:

Kerfuffle sustains itself by maintaining a repertory of original plays for very young children, as well as developing new works. We plan to continue to remount and tour our long-running play, "The Conductors", kicking off its sixth consecutive year of touring with two free performances at Chicago Children's Museum in 2027. In addition, we are looking forward to continuing our six-year relationship with the Chicago Park District's Night Out in the Parks program after 2026's successful debut of "The Dinosaur of Lake Michigan".

In the next two years, we plan to produce intimate, multi-sensory work for the younger range of our very young audiences. We plan to share a fully mounted production of "behold", an original opera for 1-3 year olds. "behold" is an intimate show featuring clarinet

and vibraphone, written by award winning composer, Gillian Rae Perry. Developed while in residence at Writers Theatre in 2025, we are excited to continue to explore and expand this piece. Additionally, we will bring nationally renowned theatre and dance practitioner and award winning author, Amanda Pintore, to Chicago to remount her dance piece, "wonderwander", which Kerfuffle first produced in 2017.

Kerfuffle will also expand our educational programming offerings with creative drama and movement classes for children ages 3-6 at Lifeline Theatre this fall and into the future. Finally, we will continue our virtual professional development series for early childhood educators and artists around the country.

Kerfuffle continues to seek out future partnerships with local organizations where children congregate, like zoos, children's museums, theaters, schools, and local libraries. Looking even further ahead, we've begun to dream of a permanent home for educational programming and rehearsal and performance space.

Tell us about ways that your organization engages in community partnerships, education programs and/or outreach activities:

Our two most reliable partners have been the Chicago Parks District and the Chicago Public Libraries. Kerfuffle brings our work to where the children are, and we have been fortunate to be hosted by these organizations and present the vast majority of our programming with NO COST to our audiences. Kerfuffle has also partnered with Lifeline Theatre and hosted educational classes as well as having our productions in residence at Lifeline. We also have been the Company in Residence with Writers Theatre, where we presented Bookworms and developed behold: an opera for the very young. We have brought classes and productions to 23 of Chicago's wards

Tell us about your organization's current work to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion:

We believe all children and families deserve to experience the power of the arts and the magic of theatre. We develop partnerships with arts and non-arts organizations to remove geographical barriers, provide free-to-low-cost tickets, and bring our performances into the many spaces where children and families congregate. We collaborate with a range of artists because we prioritize diverse perspectives in the rehearsal room, classroom, and on our stages. We want children to see themselves and their experiences reflected in our programming. We build spaces where children can come as they are and engage with the

performance as they see fit. We want all families to feel included, safe, and comfortable in the experiences we create.

Tell us how your organization would use this grant and why this is important to your organization at this current moment, please be as specific as possible:

Kerfuffle is in a critical transitional period from a passion project to a sustainable career. The support and recognition of the League of Chicago Theatres will help us to build on our current network of support and broaden our nets to attract foundational and governmental grant support. As we commit to reaching more and more young people and keeping the barriers of entry low, we need to seek other sources of funding to make up the difference. This award tells the larger theatre work to take notice and states loudly and proudly that very young children are a valuable part of vibrant communities who are worth investing in.

List of production history and any awards received. Please include that list here:

Kerfuffle received the Zeta Phi Eta Winifred Ward Outstanding New Children's Theatre Award from the American Alliance for Theatre and Education in 2020. Year Title 2016 The Caterpillar's Footprint 2016 Shadow Play 2017 wonderwander 2018 wonderwander 2018 Nested 2018 The Caterpillar's Footprint 2018 The Caterpillar's Footprint 2019 Firefly 2019 Goose and Gert 2019 Fox is Here to Party 2021 The Conductors 2021 Goose and Gert (2021) 2022 Toad Hall 2022 The Conductors (2022) 2022 Virtual TDVY Workshops 2023 Virtual TDVY Workshops 2023 The Conductors (2023) 2024 The Conductors (2024) 2024 The Conductors (2024) 2024 PD Workshop: Adapting for EC 2024 PD Workshop: Design for Very Young 2024 Toddler Hiking Club 2024 Bookworms 2024 Bookworms (Nebraska Tour) 2024 PD Workshop: Dance in the EC Classroom 2025 The Conductors (2025) 2025 The Conductors (2025) 2025 PD Workshop: Grantwriting 2025 Untitled Opera Project 2025 PD Workshop: Inclusion 2025 Toddler Hiking Club (2025) 2025 The Conductors (2025) Tour 2025 Campfire Storytelling Night 2025 PD Workshop: Spectacle Education 2025 Bookworms (Iowa Tour) 2025 Bookworms (Writers Theatre) 2025 PD Workshop: Sueñitos Tiny Dreams - Creating Multilingual Work for the Very Young 2025 Little Conductors (Class for Children) 2025 The Conductors (Lifeline Residency) 2026 We are the Dinosaurs (class for children) 2026 The Conductors (Tour) 2026 PD Workshop: Participatory Theatre 2026 The Conductors (Tour) 2026 The Conductors (Tour) 2026 behold: an opera for the very young (open rehearsal) 2026 behold: an opera for the very young 2026 PD: collaborating with 1-3 year olds 2026 Play Development: The Dinosaur of Lake Michigan 2026 The Dinosaur of Lake Michigan 2026 PD: community partnerships

Organization Name: First Floor Theater

Year of Incorporation: 2012

Website: firstfloortheater.com

Please list the last 8 productions (or more) that you have produced in the last 5 years (2021-2025). Please list by year:

Season 1 (2012-2013) *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* by David Mamet directed by Audrey Francis and Will Bishop*, GrimmFest* short play festival

Season 2 (2013-2014) - *Polaroid Stories* by Naomi Iizuka directed by Hutch Pimentel*, Tollbooth: A Clown Show* devised & directed by Will Bishop and Scott Merchant*, TROKALB* by Nat Cassidy directed by Gus Menary*, Twain's World* play short play festival

Season 3 (2014-2015) - *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* by Emmett Rensin directed by Will Bishop, *Edith Can Shoot Things and Hit Them* by A. Rey Pamatmat directed by Hutch Pimentel, *Matt & Ben* by Mindy Kaling and Brenda Withers directed by Amanda Fink, *Kafkapalooza* play festival

Season 4 (2015-2016) - *The Awake* by Ken Urban directed by Josh Altman, *Animals Commit Suicide* by J. Julian Christopher directed by Hutch Pimentel, *World Builders* by Johnna Adams directed by Jesse Roth, and *Fitzfest* short play festival

Season 5 (2016-2017) - *Deer and the Lovers* by Emily Zemba directed by Jesse Roth, *peerless* by Jihae Park directed by Hutch Pimentel, *American Hero* by Bess Wohl directed by Cody Estle

Season 6 (2017-2018) - *Two Mile Hollow* by Leah Nanako Winkler directed by Hutch Pimentel (Leah won the Francesca Primus prize for this Rolling World Premiere that also included Mixed Blood Theatre/Theatre M, Ferocious Lotus, and Artists at Play), *Refrigerator* by Lucas Baisch directed by Hutch Pimentel, *Dontrell, Who Kissed the Sea* by Nathan Allan Davis directed by Chika Ike

Season 7 (2018-2019) - *I'm Gonna Pray for You so Hard* by Halley Feiffer directed by Cole von Glahn, *Mike Pence Sex Dream* by Dan Giles directed by Hutch Pimentel, *Hooded; or Being Black for Dummies* by Tearrance Arvelle Chisholm directed by Mikael Burke, *Killed a Man (Joking)* by Beth Hyland directed by Rebecca Willingham

Season 8 (2019-2020) *Sugar in Our Wounds* by Donja Love directed by Mikael Burke, *Plano* by Will Arbery directed by Audrey Francis (at Steppenwolf 1700), *Vape Naysh* by Brynne Frauenhoffer directed by Cole von Glahn

Season 9 (2021) - *The Secretaries* by Omer Abbas Salem directed by Laura Alcala Baker

Season 10 (2022-2023) - *Botticelli in the Fire* by Jordan Tannahill directed by Bo Frazier*, Hatefuck* by Rehana Lew Mirza directed by Arti Ishak

Season 11 (2024) *Pro-Am* by Brynne Frauenhoffer directed by Rebecca Willingham (Jeff Awards for Best New Work and Best Director), *In His Hands* by Benjamin Benne directed by Micah Figueroa
Season 12 (2025) *One Party Consent* by Omer Abbas Salem (Jeff Award for Best New Work), *Evanston Salt Costs Climbing* by Will Arbery directed by Micah Figueroa
Season 13 (2026) - *WORK HARD HAVE FUN MAKE HISTORY* by reid tang directed by Tina El Gamal

Tell us about your organization. Some suggestions include: why your organization was created? What is your organizational structure? What are your organizational values? What are some current challenges you are facing as an organization?

First Floor Theater was founded in 2012 by eight University of Chicago alumni, with the goal of engaging our audience's intellectual curiosity. Shortly after our inaugural season, FFT was named "Best New Theater Company" in the Chicago Reader's Best of 2013 Reader's Pickedition. After that initial creative impulse, we redefined and expanded our mission to include the principles above. We brought new members into the company and onto our staff, bringing fresh perspectives and innovation. As we continued to develop our identity, we moved to focus on intensely collaborative production processes that bring challenging, daring new works to Chicago stages. We have received several Joseph Jefferson (Jeff) Award recommendations and nominations for our productions, including peerless (Best Sound Design), American Hero (Best Scenic Design), Hooded, Or Being Black For Dummies (Best Production, Best Director, Best Ensemble, and Best Actor), Sugar In Our Wounds (Best Lighting Design and Best Sound Design), The Secretaries: A Parable(Best Ensemble and Artist Specialization), Botticelli in the Fire (Best Director, Performer in a Principal Role, Costume Design, Sound Design, a d Lighting Design), Hatefuck (Performer in a Principal Role), and PRO-AM (Ensemble, Production - Play, New Work, Director - Play). Brynne Frauenhoffer and Rebecca Willingham winning New Work and Director - Play, respectively, for their work on PRO-AM and Renee Lockett won Best Supporting Actor for her role as Aunt Mama in Sugar In Our Wounds. Jayson Lee was also recognized with the Black Theatre Alliance's The Denzel Washington Most Promising Actor for Most Promising Actor for his work in Hooded, or Being Black For Dummies. In addition, FFT was honored to be recognized with the 2018 Francesca Primus Prize from ATCA for our production of Leah Nanako-Winkler's Two Mile Hollowand to have been recognized in Newcity's Players 2019: The Fifty People Who Really Perform for Chicago in which our Artistic Director (Hutch Pimentel), Associate Artistic Director (Andrew Cutler), Managing Director (Amanda Fink), and Casting Director (Catherine Miller) were all featured. In 2020, we secured underwriting to accomplish a longstanding artistic goal: create our own commissioning program. This

initiative, The Blueprint Commission, made possible by Michael and Mona Heath, has produced several new plays by artists such as Ariel Zetina, Omer Abbas Salem, and Gloria Imseih Petrelli.

Tell us about how your organization has grown in the last couple of years:

We have shifted to focus on developing our own work. We have commissioned at least one play every year since 2020, and have produced a full production of one: One Party Consent by Abbas Salem. Moving forward, we intend to produce more original work that we have commissioned, including our upcoming production of 3obalek (ur next) by Gloria Imseih Petrelli. We also pay very competitively, and are working towards becoming an AEA house. Finally, we had a difficult financial shortfall in 2025 -- amidst a general downturn in funding, we were denied on a grant that we had been told we would very likely receive. Fortunately, we were able to make up the shortfall by working with individual donors, and have recovered financially since then. The company is currently on its best financial footing in years, with a current cash reserve significantly in excess of financial obligations. Because of this, we have increased artist pay heading in to this season by nearly 50% across the board.

Tell us about your organization's artistic and programmatic plans for the future:

We hope to become an AEA house within the next few years, and produce more frequently. We also hope to produce more commissioned work.

Tell us about ways that your organization engages in community partnerships, education programs and/or outreach activities:

We have a fairly young, diverse, and engaged audience. We invite our community to play readings, particularly of plays in our Blueprint Commission process. We have worked with a number of community groups over the years including local colleges, libraries, and other community organizations to ensure that our work is reaching a broad audience. Finally, we keep our ticket prices as low as possible, and have a significant number of low-cost tickets available for every performance.

Tell us about your organization's current work to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion:

A majority of our staff members (3/5) are BIPOC individuals, and we work with a majority of BIPOC artists every year. We program many shows by and for LGBTQ individuals, and are

committed to equity and anti-racism. We also pay competitively -- among the highest rates for a non-Equity storefront -- to ensure that artists from all economic backgrounds can work with us.

Tell us how your organization would use this grant and why this is important to your organization at this current moment, please be as specific as possible:

Every dollar of this grant would go directly towards advancing the mission of our organization: to be the vanguard for what's next in Chicago Theatre. We would use this grant to increase artist pay, develop new work, and produce cutting edge theatre at a very low cost for Chicago audiences.

List of production history and any awards received. Please include that list here:

Non-Equity Joseph Jefferson Awards: Best New Work - Pro-Am, One Party Consent Best Director - Pro-Am