

# Indie Arts Worker Check-in: July 2021

As a follow up to our *Should I Stay or Should I Go?* micro conference back in January we recently hosted another community discussion focused on imagining the future of theatre. Our goal was to uncover and identify the pressing needs of our community, specifically focusing on new initiatives The Toronto Fringe or our peers can put in place to help improve the lives of Toronto's indie theatre workers as we come out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of this community discussion, we asked attendees a series of questions in four key categories: **community, working conditions & pay, institutional support & advocacy, digital theatre & beyond.**

This discussion focused on pain points within the industry, many of which were also covered in our *Should I Stay or Should I Go?* post-conference report. This report will focus on **what we as an institution and as a community can do about those pain points.**

## Community

In our discussions about how to improve the state of the community and make it more inclusive and accessible, the conversations primarily focused in on how digital platforms can connect us and ways to support people at different points in their careers. Some of the suggestions were to:

- Develop an online community for indie arts workers with no barriers to entry (potentially over Discord). The need for transparent moderation, moderators, and structure, and questions of who will run this community/Discord were discussed in depth.
- Develop a mentorship program for both artists and arts workers at different levels of their careers.
- Connect early-career writers with experienced writers by hosting writing circles.
- Develop a "skill share bank" where people can search for people with desired skills and then connect with them.

## Working Conditions & Pay

Key areas of discussion included the financial stability of indie arts, the problems with project-based work, feeling isolated and lonely in this industry, and a world with Universal Basic Income (UBI). Some of the main ideas and tangible initiatives that were suggested by the group included:

- Developing a proper system for resource sharing among indie artists (tech, production equipment, rehearsal space etc...).
- Funding opportunities for projects that have struggled to receive funding because of a perceived lack of market value.
- Funding opportunities for career development (as opposed to just funding for artistic output).

We also discussed toxic hustle culture in great depth, and brainstormed possible solutions to the often inhuman scheduling expectations that come with the production cycle.

- Encourage production organizers to build more balanced schedules by opening up a dialogue to the greater theatre community about deadlines, working hours, and the size of production teams.
- Collectively move away from treating busyness like a virtue in our dialogues about our work, both online and offline.

## **Institutional Support & Advocacy**

While the topic of “what the Fringe can do internally to help indie artists” was the main focus of this conversation, we also wanted to see if there was a desire for the community to advocate for indie artists beyond the Fringe. While the floor was open to discussing tangible steps Fringe could take, participants ended up identifying broader topics they felt were important. These included:

- Continued discussion and momentum towards UBI and affordable housing.
- Shifting the mindset away from Fringe as a stepping stone and turning it into a sustainable place to stay; or making it possible to use the festival for either of these options.
- Helping change the public perception of indie theatre – we are an industry filled with working professionals. Indie theatre’s value in the public mind should reflect that.

## **Digital Theatre & Beyond**

As Toronto slowly starts to reopen and things (potentially) go back to normal, it’s important to ask: what’s the future of digital theatre? In what capacity should it stick around? We discussed the benefits and drawbacks of the media itself. Here are the key takeaways:

- The elements of digital theatre that make theatre more accessible should stay, and we should look for ways to creatively integrate them.
- Digital should be supplementary to the live theatre experience.
- Training and technology should be made more easily available to those who want to explore the medium of digital theatre, but who do not have access to it.
- Digital theatre can be a great way to create global connections.
- Digital theatre doesn’t have to remain a less satisfying version of live theatre, but can continue on as its own mode of performance, and creation.

## **Next Steps**

This discussion was a really powerful stepping stone for our goal of making indie arts more sustainable for both artists and arts workers. We will be taking all of these suggestions into consideration as we develop future workshops, programs, and other initiatives.

Toronto Fringe will host another community conversation building on some of these aspects in the hopes to create tangible solutions. We are interested in hearing from as many indie artists as possible, so please feel free to share this document with others in your community. We will also look

into the possibility of creating a Discord where some of these conversations can happen on a more ad-hoc basis.

We welcome your feedback and thoughts to [general@fringetoronto.com](mailto:general@fringetoronto.com) please use the subject line IAN (Indie Artworker Network) so we can compile the information easily.