



## DIVERSITY & ACCESSIBILITY IN CLASSICAL PERFORMANCE

By creating more opportunities for female-identifying artists in classical performance, The Tiger's Hearts Collective aims to redefine the term "classical" as an inclusive and accessible tradition of theatrical excellence.

This company defines "Classical Performance" as any creative work that explores universal truths and is inspired by epic, historical or foundational narratives from any culture and shared in any performative expression.

### REDEFINING A TRADITION

The term "classical" has long been used as an elitist gatekeeping tool. While the original meaning was coined by Ancient Greek theatre to mean "chosen", as in those pieces "chosen" to represent our stories to the world, the trick lies in who does the choosing.

For millennia, that power to curate our shared stories has been held by the white, western patriarchy and has been used to advance white-supremacist and colonial interests. From a young age, most of us were trained to consider this definition of the classics as *the only* definition of the classics. Privileging of the powerful in our classical history has built a foundation for our entire theatre tradition that is deeply racist, misogynist and oppressive. Classical theatre has directly contributed to the erasure of people of colour from our shared histories and from our stages, the fetishization and vilification of experiences or personal truths considered to be "other", the objectification of female-presenting bodies, and many other harmful practices.

*So, why do we need to keep doing them?*



Positive change takes time, humility, creativity and resolve. Every day, we must actively choose to do this work and walk this path in a good way, even when we stumble.

### WE CONSENT TO LEARN IN PUBLIC

We acknowledge that this journey asks us to keep our hearts and minds open to different experiences, voices, and opportunities. We are invested in educating ourselves with new and wonderful training opportunities, such as **Nicole Brewer's Anti-Racist Theatre Practices Workshop**, but we are equally invested in learning from members of our community whose experiences are different to ours.

This is a life-long journey, and along the way we will confront our own biases head-on and name them: internal racism, systemic racism, structural racism, anti-black attitudes, anti-indigenous attitudes, misogyny, homophobia, queer-phobia, ableism. Our ignorance and selective knowledge/awareness of the experiences of others will be revealed, acknowledged, and addressed as we learn.

We commit to removing ego from this journey of growth by sharing it publicly and uncensored.

### DIVERSITY & IDENTITY POLICING

Before outlining our commitments further, we want to clarify our stance on **identity policing**, including but not limited to gender and cultural self-identification.

We have no desire to police how or why any artist self-identifies. We acknowledge that self-identifying can be a journey through a grey-area towards a potentially undefinable goal and no artist should be required to explain or qualify that personal journey to the company that engages them on a contract.

We want to offer support that will enrich those journeys of self-discovery, not enforce criteria that will question their validity.

The social and performative construct of **gender**, for example, is intimate and fluid. As an all-female classical performance company, we use the term "female-identifying" wherever possible, but when we do employ the term "women", it is with the express intention to be inclusive of all female-identifying experiences including queer women, trans women, and womxn of other experiences. Patriarchal systems impact everyone, but they immediately disadvantage those among us who are female-identifying.

The complexities of **racial or cultural identification** are even more difficult. While acronyms like BIPOC serve to create recognizable space for black people, indigenous peoples, and people of colour, such simplifications also have the potential to homogenize these unique groups of people and their very different experiences and ways of life. In our ongoing work to build more a inclusive and diverse theatre community, we must be aware of the traps of performative allyship, such as tokenizing artists who are visibly identifiable as being other than white.

As Canadians, we should all be aware of the use of of blood quantum and/or visual signifiers in

## OUR COMMITMENT TO TRAINING

One of our biggest challenges going forward will be to encourage a new sense of belonging and confidence in classical performance. While we are committed to hiring at least 35% black, indigenous, and artists of colour *before* the year 2025, there is much work to be done towards supporting those artists that goes beyond equitable hiring practices.

As we've said, if the term classical refers to "the exceptional stories chosen to define us", it's all about who does the choosing. And the same people who choose what gets to be classical, choose who gets to be "exceptional".

When so many of us have been told from an early age that we "don't fit" the classics because they're only for educated white men, that creates trauma. When so many of us have fought to squeeze into that mould, to codify ourselves to be more white so we can be accepted, to fetishize our femininity so we can play one of the few roles available to us, to hide everything that makes us unique or different in order to be deemed "employable", that all creates trauma. This trauma sticks with us in unseen ways and can keep us from pursuing the jobs we want or succeeding in the jobs we get.

As classical theatre makers, we must support and encourage artists who are on that journey of healing. We also have a duty to create a *new* classical tradition for the next generation of artists. It's not enough just to commit to equitable hiring policies, just to commit to decolonizing and diversifying our rehearsal rooms and stage spaces. We have to go back to the source and re-imagine a classical training tradition that is rooted in actively anti-racist, anti-homophobic, and anti-misogynist policies.

We are committed to working with the community to develop classical training opportunities that will support any artist who has felt othered by the genre in the past, opportunities that can encourage healing and help develop exceptional creative skills in an empowering way. By reinventing the ways in which we train exceptional classical artists, we can enrich and revolutionize the stories that will be chosen for our new, inclusive classical tradition.

## ACCOUNTABILITY & TRANSPARENCY

We're working on ways to keep you all informed about our on-going diversification efforts. As we continue to collect resources and develop policies to enforce our diversity mandate, you can find those updates here on our website. We are at the beginning of this journey, but we're determined, passionate, and very excited to develop and follow through with this vision for a more diverse and accessible classical theatre tradition.

We value your thoughts on what the new classical theatre tradition means to you, so get in touch! We'd love to hear from you.

[tigersheartscollective@gmail.com](mailto:tigersheartscollective@gmail.com)



our history of racializing people who are "other than white". Corrupt systems of power police a person's identity in order to control them, leading to internal, systematic, and structural racism. This is especially true in Canada when it comes to First Nations Peoples, Métis, and Inuit.

This conversation, while complicated, is important because so many Diversity Statements rely on statistics to prove their commitment to diversity. This accountability tool is a positive step in the right direction, but we also acknowledge that diversity is a wholistic practice that sometimes doesn't fit into a pie chart. Diversity is a process, a conversation, a journey, and we hope that transparent hiring statistics are just the beginning of that collective evolution.

### **EQUITABLE HIRING POLICIES & THE 35//50 INITIATIVE**

In September 2020, members of our arts community from around the province came together to create the **35//50 Initiative**: a call for theatre companies to publicly commit to employing at least 35% black, indigenous, and people of colour and at least 50% women and non-binary people across their staff by the year 2025. You can read their initial letter [here](#):



We're deeply thankful to the people behind 35//50 for their work. Their initiative, in every sense of the word, has developed a resource that will support our community's collective journey towards equitable hiring practices. Although we are an all-female company, we recognize that this call-to-action still includes us and we gratefully participate in the initiative as a part of our commitment to diversity and accessibility.