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What We Are Doing

A message from Denise Clarke, C.M.



Photo Cred: Trudie Lee

Greetings one and all. I hope this finds you well and moving forward. As Associate Artist with One Yellow Rabbit, I have been listening and learning throughout the months of quarantine and social change. These are the interesting times the proverbs talk about and we certainly have been living them. I have used the time in deep research and exploration of my own creative path for whatever is to come and to further my understanding so as to be of service, to effect positive change and to continue to make beautiful art. Art heals and strengthens and gives voice to pain and joy and I cannot wait to see what these underground months bring forth once we all come back into the light!

I have also been engaged in some fascinating work which I'd like to share.

April saw me finishing up an innovative program with the U of C. Last fall Bruce Barton, head of the School of Creative and Performing Arts, invited me to design a course in performance study. Taking into account the intense workload university students are already under, I opted to lead twelve students in a series of six, day long workshops, one every three weeks, in solo creation and presentation. The course was kicked off by mandatory attendance at four Rodeo shows to inspire and invigorate them and the following workshops were to culminate in a presentation, by each student, of a 10-minute solo piece at the Big Secret Theatre. Of course, once the campus was closed, these became video presentations from

their homes. I have long been fascinated by finding ways to empower the individual to explore their own creativity within the framework of a group endeavour. The long year of research at the OYR Lab, which resulted in the **Big Secret Book** came in handy in this particular case, and once the pandemic left them to their own devices, I was grateful they each had a copy. It insured they had accurate notes referring to the specifics of our workshops, to refer back to for their creations. The challenges were obvious but I was genuinely delighted by the quality of several of the resulting pieces. I sincerely hope we can see some of those on the OYR website soon.

In May I joined Canadian film and theatre icon Tantoo Cardinal for Zoom sessions with colleagues, Tracey Nepinak, Tina Keeper, Grace Hardy and Jolie Proudfit in a week long intensive Zoom meeting to begin discussions for the development of a theatre and film training and cultural arts centre on Tantoo's home land of the Kikino Métis Settlement in central Alberta. These were exciting meetings to look at how the project could take root and grow while nurturing youth and charging the art of storytelling for the people of Kikino. Talk about an amazing group of artists to share ideas with. That work is in its infancy but with Tantoo's vision and the support of the Kikino Settlement Council, I hope the project can see light as soon as next summer.

Tantoo and I joined forces again in July for a two-week intensive in Calgary. We were joined by colleague Barry Bilinsky who did a phenomenal job of recording and transcribing the proceedings. We worked safely distanced in an isolated studio as guests of DJD in their amazing building and I was privileged to bear witness as we unpacked Tantoo's illustrious career of 50 years. Initially the workshop was to look at the possibility of a one woman show. Tantoo is a revered artist of film and stage and she has been a huge force of change for Indigenous women. She faced extraordinary challenges of racism and sexism from her earliest times and yet the July days also passed with laughter, power and love as she fearlessly let her stories come pouring out. We were left with a treasure trove of material generated by the fourteen days of workshop, which Tantoo can turn to for the next stage of creation.

In August I began work, one on one, with twenty immigrant women as part of the ongoing work with The Shoe Project, which OYR has joined forces with for the last 3 years. Normally, I work as a director and coach to bring their written stories to life for the stage but this year the Shoe Project goes online for the Covid and Us series. Each woman wrote a story of her Covid experience and then joined me in person for a distanced mini workshop, one person a day whenever their schedule permitted. The glorious weather of August and September allowed us to work outdoors for the majority of the time and once again I was amazed by the courage, strength and resilience these women have as newcomers to Canada. They are from all over the world; Cameroon, Congo, Nigeria, Azerbaijan, Poland, Peru, Venezuela, Mexico and our one-on-one sessions were fascinating and for me thrilling. Speaking English as a second language is just one of the huge obstacles they must overcome but in each and every session I was humbled by the journey each of them has undertaken to bring themselves and their families to our city. In every individual case, we left one another inspired and looking forward to the next time we could meet. I cannot wait for Covid to end for many reasons not least of which is to see OYR bring these remarkable women together, in our theatre, to continue the work and the community building that both OYR and the Shoe Project is so effective at.

The Pandemic has given me something I have never before experienced: an enforced break from the intense schedule it has always been my privilege to be engaged with. I long to be back together in the rehearsal room and on the stage but poetry, literature and my physical practice have filled the rest of my Covid days and nourished and strengthened me for the future. I have embraced uncertainty and change, I have accepted that new challenges mean new opportunities. I have stayed healthy and grateful and I will endeavour to continue to.

Despite ZOOM fatigue which I just learned is officially 'a thing', the online viewings I have witnessed have reinforced for me that our art form is a glorious one; to step on the stage in front of an audience is something sacred and rare and I look forward with deep longing to the time we once again come together.

From One Yellow Rabbit

One Yellow Rabbit is committed to doing better every day in creating a safe environment of equity, diversity, inclusion and access (EDIA), for artists, employees, volunteers and audience members in coming together for shared authentic artistic experiences. We would also acknowledge that we have received the 35//50 initiative.

To that end we are taking a deep look at our place and our practices which we will continue to do on an ongoing basis for the good of the community.

We know that we need to not only look closely but to also work diligently at bettering our systems and the opening of our doors regarding EDIA at the administrative and board level.

We acknowledge that we are at the starting line and our work will continue as we declare our commitment to equity for all. We are grateful for the CommunityWise Anti-Racist Organizational Change (AROC) resources as guidance with our work in this area and for the resources provided by CADA, PACT, Theatre Alberta, the Ad Hoc Assembly, as well as individuals inside and outside of our organization.

CURRENT ACTIONS:

- The formation of Diversity & Inclusion committee on our board.
- OYR is an active member of the PACT ALL IN (PWI) training as designed and delivered by the AD HOC Assembly as facilitated by Theatre Alberta.
- Active bystander team training with the Calgary Centre for Sexuality in 2018 and 2019 with the goal of creating a safe space for all in our theatres and workplace.
- Establishment of an active 3rd party anti-harassment hot line for staff and contractors in the fall of 2019.
- Applying to the IBPOC Leadership Residency Grant offered by the Rozsa Foundation with the goal to work with an established IBPOC artist on a leadership track with our company.
- We will publicly report annually on the diversity presented in our seasons going forward.

IN OUR HISTORY:

- One Yellow Rabbit has contributed directly and significantly in the Making Treaty 7 stage production.
- The High Performance Rodeo has actively produced and presented many Indigenous companies and work over its 35-year history.
- Over 36% IBPOC work was presented at the 2020 High Performance Rodeo.
- We have taken a 10-year audit on the IBPOC work presented at the High Performance Rodeo which we will make **available on request**.

These are some of the actions we stand for, are doing, and now actively moving towards, with more to come as we evolve.



Contact Us

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