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Former Performance Network Theatre staff members announce plan to re-open professional theater. Group will submit plan to produce next year's season to Performance Network board on June 16.

ANN ARBOR, MI - Ann Arbor's professional theater, Performance Network, left the community reeling when it announced a sudden suspension of operations on May 22nd. In the two weeks that followed, a group of artists, former staff members, donors, subscribers, and community supporters have put together a plan to keep the theatre alive, and with great excitement announces a plan for a revitalized Performance Network, including significantly modified operations and a fundraising campaign to reduce debt and ensure financial stability in the future.

The group will submit the plan to the Performance Network board of directors for review at the June 18th meeting. Key points include:

- Reducing full time staff and salaries by more than half, ensuring that more resources directly support theatrical productions;
- Replacing the Executive Director position with an Executive Producer who will exercise more direct control over production expenditure;
- Presenting a slightly reduced season that will still honor currently held season packages;
- Cutting enhancement programs to focus solely on the Professional Season and the Fireside Festival of New Plays;
- Retiring a majority of outstanding debt, including all debt to the IRS, before the opening of the 2014-2015 season;
- Implement an austerity plan that will reduce the annual budget by nearly 50%;
- Building a sizable fund for operating capital;
- Implementing a strategic plan to build operating capital, with the goal of moving to "compartmentalized funding," eliminating all cyclical deficits, and simplifying financial management;
- Working with a strategic planning group to explore strategies for developing new audiences, increasing economic accessibility and making board governance more effective;
- Examining new ways to make the theatre a community resource for other performance groups, putting some of the "network" back into Performance Network;
- Ensuring that the new organization is fully transparent in its financial operations, and in its relationship with artists, donors, community organizations, and other theatrical companies.

One of the group's core members, Carla Milarch said "We've been working non-stop to gain insight into just exactly how we got to this point, and we've had to take a hard look at our strengths and weaknesses. The reality is that our company is great at art, but has, for years, suffered from a serious lack of financial acumen, and has failed to control costs and forecast problems. We are very fortunate that Dan Walker, who is well-known in the Michigan theatre community for his ability to manage costs and produce theatre efficiently, has offered to join our team. We're also bringing a top-notch bookkeeper on board in order to produce accurate financial statements, which has been a huge problem for over a year."

Walker says: "Our goal is to move, over the course of three years, to a simpler way of managing the finances, called "compartmentalized funding" where we fundraise for an entire season ahead of time, put it in the bank, and then only spend the money we've raised for THAT season, while using single tickets and fundraising to build the coming year's fund. We can then produce a season with absolute certainty of the resources available." Walker adds: "Simplifying our business in this way will also help create the possibility of more available time slots for collaborations with other companies. One of our strategic planning committees is exploring ways we can provide community performance space, as we did in the early days of Performance Network."

Logan Ricket, a former Performance Network staff member who will join the new management team adds "There's more to the changing picture than just our new financial model. For years the organization, in an effort to maximize ticket revenue, has been pricing itself out of all but our most economically privileged markets. In our changing economy, there are fewer and fewer families who can drop \$90 on two tickets to the theatre, not including dinner and a babysitter. One of our strategic planning committees is specifically looking at ways to increase accessibility, and grow new audiences."

. The group is inviting those who would like to join the strategic planning effort, or who would like to send a message of support to be included with the group's proposal, to email carlamilarch@gmail.com. Justin Dietzel, another member of the company says, "This community has shown a passion for the high quality, professional theatre they've come to know and love from Performance Network. But if we want to hold on to it, we need to send a message to the Performance Network board to give this proposal its utmost consideration."

The proposed Performance Network staff currently committed to the project include:

- **Daniel C. Walker, Executive Producer** - Will oversee financial health of the organization, control spending, and manage productions. Will share fundraising responsibilities with the Artistic Director, and act as a liaison to potential outside groups using the space. Will also manage the technical production of all shows.
- **Carla Milarch, Artistic Director** - Will oversee the artistic output of the theatre, including selecting plays and directors, and coordinate casting. Will manage the new play festival. Will share fundraising responsibilities with the Executive Producer, and lead marketing efforts.

- **Logan Ricket, Development and Marketing Associate** - Will manage front of the house and subscriptions; will support marketing and fundraising efforts.
- **Justin Dietzel, Apprentice** – Will assist in all areas from box office, to building sets, to assisting with mailings.
- **David Wells, Bookkeeper** - Will track all income and expenditures, allowing for full financial transparency.