



REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY



This is **YOUR** Arts Commons

Our Vision:

A creative and
compassionate society,
inspired through the arts.

Our Mission:

To bring the arts
...to life.

Our Core Values:

Do the right thing - behaving
with integrity, applying
professionalism, being honest,
and erring on the side of grace.

Be our best always - in
service, in leadership, in
professionalism, and in
providing a quality experience.

Be open: minds, hearts, arms
- through empathy, openness,
trust, and collaboration, seizing
opportunities to impact our
community in a positive way.



*Keayae Alo (in front) & Abby Amu (behind) at
ArtsXpeditions © Samuel Obadero*

This has been another interesting year for Calgary.

In January 2020, after an international search, we, the Board of Arts Commons, appointed Alex Sarian as our new President and Chief Executive Officer. For over a year, the organization was adeptly led by Colleen Dickson and Greg Epton, our Interim Co-CEOs. We are so grateful for their commitment to Arts Commons. They both worked tirelessly to ensure Arts Commons' continued success and sustainability, on top of their usual roles of Chief Financial Officer and Chief Development Officer, respectively. I think I can speak for both of them when I say we were all excited for this next chapter and couldn't wait for Alex to get started.

In March, however, our worlds changed. Arts Commons was forced to temporarily close our doors, and our new President and CEO now had to move up to Canada from the United States in the midst of a global pandemic. A new hire, at any level always holds an element of risk. We knew we had made the right choice when Alex, his wife Aliza, and their two dogs hopped into an RV and drove five days, across 11 states, and up into Canada at a time when our borders with the U.S. were closed. Alex being Canadian helped, of course, but it was his ambition, determination, and commitment that reinforced what we saw in him when we first met. We are fortunate to have found someone of Alex's character and breadth of experience to lead Arts Commons. Even before his arrival, Alex dove in with an eagerness to understand the Calgary community and culture and get to work on moving our

organization forward. Once he arrived, he spent time getting to know every single member of our staff and meeting with community leaders, hoping to gain a good understanding of where the needs were and how Arts Commons could potentially help. He called it his "Listening Tour".

The larger Calgary community and the Board of Arts Commons have been enormously impressed with Alex's positive energy and his advocacy for the arts. We have also witnessed Alex become both a thought leader in the community, and a thoughtful leader for our organization. On behalf of the entire Arts Commons Board of Directors, we are proud to introduce and welcome Alex Sarian, our new President and CEO, to Arts Commons.



R. Scott Hutcheson
Arts Commons Board Chair



Dear Friends,

How does one reflect on such an overwhelming year that has both taken and given us so much? We can start by recognizing that as complex human beings, we are capable of holding divergent thoughts in our minds, just as we are able to hold divergent feelings in our hearts. In fact, if the arts teach us anything, it is that we are adept at making sense of things—even in the most troubling of times.

While this has been a year of personal and professional mourning for so many—including the loss of communal experiences that remind us of our shared humanity—it has also been a year of new beginnings. As a newcomer to this institution, and as a newcomer to Calgary, I would be remiss if I did not express the immense and humbling gratitude I feel at having joined the Arts Commons family. Thank you to the Board of Directors, to the staff, to the resident companies, to our supporters, and to the artists and audiences that call Arts Commons 'home', for the generosity with which you have welcomed my family into yours. Times of conflict do not build character; they reveal it—and you have revealed yourself to me as a community that is welcoming, generous, kind, adventurous, and curious. I cannot think of a more necessary combination of character traits to navigate this pandemic and its aftermath.

A special thank you must also be given to Colleen Dickson and Greg Epton, our Interim Co-CEOs, who led the organization for over a year prior to my arrival, and have guided me during this transition, helping me become more familiar not only



with the organization, but also with this great city, province, and country. Without their leadership, Arts Commons would not have been able to weather this COVID-19 pandemic storm, and I would not have been able to jump into my role with the confidence that I have.

Throughout my career, I have always believed that truly successful cultural organizations embody three unflappable commitments: to constantly re-evaluate their relevance; to increase access to the transformative power of the arts; and to find new ways of measuring their impact. In short, it is our commitment to civic engagement that will allow us to break down the barriers of cultural participation, and to thrive in times of change. And there has never been greater urgency to navigate change than there is now.

After the unjust killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, we did what many institutions across the world did: we took a hard look at ourselves, reflecting on the role we must play to fight racism and racial inequality within our own cities. In doing so, we realized that we must continue leveraging our privilege towards championing more artists of colour, by providing a safe space for their expression; actively inviting them to create, perform, gather, and share their stories; reflecting the diversity of our communities on- and off-stage; and using our leadership positions to demonstrate and embody our values. While we are proud of the actions we have taken, we know we still have more work to do, and you will learn more about this work in the pages ahead and months to come.

To be clear, the work will never be done. Our focus will be on learning, growing, supporting, and progressing.

As someone who is responsible for the overall performance of Arts Commons, I would like to be transparent and explain how I view the difference between measuring progress and measuring success. Simply put, although we are a not-for-profit organization, we operate like a business, with fiscal responsibility, and our bottom-line matters. It is because of our rigorous, strategic, and surgical budgeting process that we are able to remain active and vibrant. The degree with which we can run our business soundly (particularly during a pandemic) measures our progress but does not define our success. It is through the lens of our social impact that we will measure our success—and not just by asking the question ‘what was the impact of Arts Commons on Calgary?’ but rather, ‘how has Arts Commons become a more inclusive community because of Calgary’s impact on our institution?’

The pages ahead will outline some of our successes of the past year, including how we prioritized taking care of our employees (living up to our 2020 appointment as one of Alberta’s Top 75 Employers), our artists, and the resident companies; how we found new ways to bring the arts to life, despite our doors being closed since March; and how we have continued to support and advocate for a vibrant arts sector and community gathering place, for both the economic and cultural wellbeing of our city. We will conclude this story with our vision for the

future. Navigating change does not just consist of looking back, after all; it requires us to reflect on the rise of trends and changing behaviors, and anticipate their impact on a vision that is forward-facing.

It is exactly for this reason that the Arts Commons community has been hard at work during our closure to the public—not just responding to the impacts of the pandemic but charting the course for a new future. A future in which all Calgarians, regardless of income or background, feel a sense of belonging in our venues. A future in which a cultural experience elevates what it means to be a Calgarian, whether it’s by bringing world-class artists to our local audiences, or giving local artists exposure on a world-class stage. And a future in which an expanded, modernized, and transformed Arts Commons complex contributes to our city’s social, cultural, civic, and economic prosperity.

Every major city across the globe has world-class arts institutions. It is because of your support, your trust, and your belief in Arts Commons’ success that our city is home to one of the largest and most vibrant arts centres in North America. I am honoured to join you as your new CEO, and look forward to shaping an exciting new future for the arts in Calgary.

Alex Sarian
President and CEO



Arts Commons
Presents



CALGARY
PHILHARMONIC
ORCHESTRA



theatre:
CALGARY



We are Stewards

Our mandate is clear. We are the chief stewards of the vessel that is known as Arts Commons. Good stewards believe in sustainability, practice inclusiveness, embrace innovation and change, and exercise honesty and transparency. As good stewards, our sense of purpose and responsibility puts the success of our artists, resident companies, staff, and community above all else. Their success is our success.



National Geographic Explorer Zoltan Takacs
in the Jack Singer Concert Hall
© Mike Hopkins

Our Mandate is...

to provide and care for our assets

Though the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic presented many new and unprecedented challenges, for our production team it offered up a bittersweet opportunity. While significant capital projects were already planned for rapid completion over the quieter summer season, due to the generous support of all three levels of government, we were able to begin this work earlier, replacing, restoring, and refurbishing over 35 years of wear, tear, and outdated equipment in our many performance spaces.

The Jack Singer Concert Hall received the lion's share of the work, as the team took on the challenge of upgrading the sound system, in both the Hall and the Lobby. While the Lobby sound system was initially designed to support announcements only, the upgrade provided the desired sound quality for the live music performances that take place on the Lobby Duet Stage today.

The successful replacement of the Hall sound system was a careful balancing act by our technicians, to ensure the system would meet the nuanced requirements of the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, but also be able to support a full-scale rock performance. The result is extraordinary and we can't wait to share it with you.

Inside the Jack Singer Concert Hall, our production and technical crew worked harder than ever to implement a number of technological enhancements that included extensive electrical work, sixteen new monitor cabinets with eight new

subwoofers, Front-of-House console upgrades with new technology to match the new monitor console, a wireless microphone system upgrade, and 10 new wireless personal in-ear monitor systems. Even the venerable Carthy Organ, which stands majestically behind the stage and above the choir loft, has received a beautiful visual upgrade. The previous lighting system for the Carthy Organ was made up of white halogen lights. The new system, made up of much more power efficient LED lights, can light the organ with virtually any colour on the spectrum. Each lighting fixture can also be separately controlled, which makes for a huge array of customization.

The Max Bell and Engineered Air Theatres also received important upgrades with new LED stage lighting which will provide a wider range of artistic options, as well as increased reliability and energy savings.

This work would not have been possible without the following support:

Government of Canada through Canadian Heritage's Canada Cultural Spaces Fund (\$1,800,000), the Government of Alberta through Culture, Multiculturalism and the Status of Women's Community Facility Enhancement Program (\$1,000,000), and The City of Calgary through the Civic Partner Infrastructure Grant Program (\$2,988,900).

Due to the majority of our staff working from home, and our venues not in use, we've also been able see significant

savings in both power and water use. During the six months of the lockdown from March to September, our power consumption was reduced by 781,505 kWh (38%) compared to the same time period from the year before.

To decrease our water use, we also shut off most of the automated flushers on the 220 toilets throughout the building. Combined with the building being less occupied, this resulted in a savings of 2,914 cubic meters of water, reducing our consumption by 69%.



Carthy Organ lighting upgrade
© Rafal Lichman

Our Mandate is...

to ensure optimal access and utilization of our assets

Each year, hundreds of thousands of people walk through the doors of Arts Commons, often to enjoy a performance, but also to view the exhibitions in our visual arts galleries, participate in a community event or work seminar, or even to get married! Even though the season was cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic, over 470 events happened within our spaces during that short time, welcoming people from all walks of life to participate in the arts, celebrate milestones, and share in rich cultural experiences.

One aspect of optimizing access and use of our space is to ensure that our +15 Galleries are utilized by community artist groups for the positive enrichment of both patrons passing through the building, and the community groups themselves. Supporting emerging artists, especially those from historically underrepresented communities, gives their work exposure to an audience that they may not otherwise have access to.

In early 2020, Arts Commons worked with Migrante Edmonton and Migrante Calgary to bring *Kwento't Litrato (Stories and Photographs)* to the +15 Galleries. The culmination of a series of storytelling through photography workshops, *Kwento't Litrato* was a collection of deeply personal images that fostered empathy, understanding, and community through the lens of new immigrants to Canada. Their time at Arts Commons was well spent, as we included them in

RBC Emerging Visual Arts Program (RBC EVAP) workshops, providing them with networking and learning opportunities that they were not expecting. The exhibition at Arts Commons received so much positive community feedback and media attention that they were able to move forward with plans to publish the images in a coffee table book.

In February of 2020, ActionDignity held their second presentation of *Our Canada, Our Story*, a collection of true-to-life stories shared through ActionDignity's Youth PLACE meet-ups at Arts Commons. During these meet-ups, the young people, who come from backgrounds as diverse as Cameroonian, Chinese, Eritrean, Filipino, Indigenous, Jamaican, Lebanese, Nigerian, South Asian, and Sudanese shared their stories and experiences of being racialized youth. These stories culminated in the performance of *Our Canada, Our Story* in the Martha Cohen Theatre.

The event included a community market and additional community performances from ethno-cultural groups across

Calgary, both in the theatre lobby and the Centre Court of Arts Commons. Performing with the full professional production support of Arts Commons provided the necessary platform to help elevate these important stories.

Though Arts Commons works with many organizations to create collaborative opportunities, we also work with individual artists to create more intimate shared experiences. Chantal Chagnon is a Calgary-based Indigenous artist, teacher, speaker, storyteller, and musician who has ignited the imaginations of students through Arts Commons' education programs for years.

During the 2019-20 season, Arts Commons provided Chantal with space, free of charge, to hold her evening drum circle for 13 sessions. Open and accessible to anyone interested in attending, these drum circles encouraged artistic expression and cultural sharing in a welcoming environment.

"When Josh offered the space at Arts Commons it was great because then we were able to have those drum circles, have smudging, rapping and dancing, and the different things the kids wanted to do. It really saved us because I wasn't sure how we were going to continue to program going forward."

Carissa Gravelle, Action Dignaty

Kwento't Litrato installation in the +15 gallery space © Sanja Lukac



“It was wonderful to know that I was valued as an artist, and the impacts I was facing were not forgotten. I felt as if I was supported as part of a greater community in recognition of the work I have done alongside Arts Commons over the past several years.”

Chantal Chagnon



Visual Artist Rick Wolcott © Sanja Lukac

Our Canada, Our Story © Lmigrino Photography



Our Mandate is...

to foster, promote, and present the arts

As stewards, we like to take this opportunity to recognize the incredible work of our artists, staff, patrons, donors, sponsors, and resident companies, and celebrate the collective impact of all those who contribute to the Arts Commons ecosystem.

The 2019-20 season has been like no other, and although there have been challenges, we can't deny that the season began with a bang! Alberta Theatre Projects broke ticket sales records as they presented *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* to huge acclaim and success. Arts Commons Presents followed that up with a magnificent presentation of the Canadian circus troupe Cirque Flip Fabrique's *BLIZZARD*, a poetic love note to the great Canadian winter told through playful choreography, stunning acrobatics, and perfectly executed feats of physical prowess.

Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra put a spotlight on Canadian talent as they presented Polaris Prize and JUNO Award-winning tenor and pianist Jeremy Dutcher in Concert. And Downstage premiered what is sure to be a new Canadian classic shocking us all with the bold truth that even *Men Express Their Feelings*. It was praised as "Wildly funny" and an "Instant Canadian classic".

One Yellow Rabbit's High Performance Rodeo demonstrated once again that excellent theatre never gets old with the 30th anniversary presentation of *The*

Land, The Animals starring Denise Clarke, Christopher Hunt, and Andy Curtis, and Blake Brooker directed Keith Alessi in a "riveting solo performance" with *Tomatoes Tried to Kill Me but Banjos Saved My Life*.

And finally, to round out the season, Theatre Calgary's top selling show of the year, *The Louder We Get*, brought to life a true story of standing up for what you believe in, even when all the odds seem to be against you.

There were more stories to share, and more cherished moments to look forward to, but the season took an unexpected turn in March as the rise of COVID-19 necessitated not only the cancelling of any further performances, but also the temporary closure of Arts Commons.

As we all adjusted to our new reality, Arts Commons still found a way to share the transformative nature of the arts with our community. Right on the heels of the shutdown, Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra made international waves with an online collaboration with Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, recording a virtual performance of the hauntingly beautiful Elgar's *Nimrod* from the Enigma Variations. The video went viral, reaching more than 155,000 combined viewers on YouTube and Facebook.

In April, Theatre Calgary launched their TC Takeout series and now has 40 episodes to date. Employing theatre professionals, TC Takeout has featured local, national, and even a few international artists performing a song, dancing, showing off some unique skills, cooking, making crafts for kids, and reflecting on Theatre Calgary memories, through the virtual-scape into the homes of Calgarians, and those beyond.

Over the summer, Theatre Calgary also launched a full online run of *Shakespeare on the Bow*, reaching over 2,000 homes and garnering a huge outpouring of support for the series.

Downstage circulated emotional and physical wellness videos, encouraging people to stay active and healthy in their homes through yoga, while Alberta Theatre Projects and One Yellow Rabbit worked industriously behind the scenes to prepare for a season that would be very different from anything that the arts have experienced in the past.

Through our partnership with National Geographic, Arts Commons Presents provided access to four *National Geographic Live*: Backstage events, featuring Carnivore Ecologist Dr. Rae Wynn-Grant, Wildlife Filmmaker Bertie

"Bertie Gregory had great energy and enthusiasm and was very authentic. Loved his parents and brother at the end. Nice touch!"

Patron, National Geographic Live: Backstage



The cast of Theatre Calgary's production of *The Louder We Get* © Trudie Lee

Gregory, Egyptologist Dr. Kara Cooney, and Underwater Photographer, Brian Skerry. Our *National Geographic Live* subscribers and patrons were thrilled to have the opportunity to hear these great stories again directly from these intrepid Explorers.

To share all of these wonderful stories, Arts Commons launched a new blog, sharing educational activities for young people, interviews with artists, profiles on exceptional individuals and businesses, and ideas for how to continue to infuse the arts into life. Since its launch in March, the blog has received over 18,000 page views.



Downstage premiered *Men Express Their Feelings* © Katy Whitt



ATP's production of *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* © Trudie Lee

*"I loved everything about the evening:
the performance, the food, but
especially the people. It felt fresh,
liberating, and fun. Thank you!"*

Patron, Amplify Cabaret – We Gon Be Alright



We are Programmers

Arts Commons strives to bring a breadth of programming to our community that complements the offerings of our fellow cultural organizations, creating a more diverse mix of the arts in our city. These programs and series would not be possible without the generous support of our Title and Supporting sponsors, and include TD Black History Month Cabarets and Amplify Cabarets, BD&P World Stage, Classic Albums Live, *National Geographic Live* (Sponsored by ConocoPhillips Canada), PCL Blues, and TD Jazz as well as seven art galleries, six education programs, and seven access programs for artists and community.

Over the past five years, with the support of our community, donors, sponsors, and government, Arts Commons has been able to increase the number of performances and presentations by 67% and the number of artists employed by 69%. This substantial increase demonstrates our commitment and the commitment of the community to the continued development of programming to engage Calgary's ever-changing population.



L-R: DeVery Bess, Indigo Rose, MelVee X, aloT of Poetry, Tola Dee, and Sabrina Naz-Comanescu in *We Gon Be Alright*
© Mike Hopkins

We Engage Community

The Arts Commons Presents 2019-20 season may have been cut short, but the time we had together was well spent. The powerful and expressive voice of Rosanne Cash launched our BD&P World Stage series, filling the Jack Singer Concert Hall with deeply emotive music that garnered an enthusiastic standing ovation from the nearly sold-out crowd.

Opening our *National Geographic Live* season, National Geographic Explorer Damien Mander and Sgt. Vimbai Kumire told the inspiring story of mobilizing, training, and deploying Africa's women warriors, the *Akashinga* (The Brave Ones), and their fight against the poaching of some of the world's most endangered animals. Survivors of domestic violence, single mothers, abandoned wives, and AIDS orphans; according to Mander, they were some of the toughest rangers he has ever trained. The powerful presentation initiated several heartfelt emails from patrons thanking us for bringing this kind of programming to Calgary.

Founders Circle, Arts Commons' premier membership program, kicked off its 2019-20 season of events with an intimate Q&A session in the Engineered Air Theatre with GRAMMY Award-winning artist Maria Muldaur as part of the PCL Blues series. Guests were able to gain a new perspective on the life of a legendary songstress with the ups and downs in her career, guided by the expert interview style of CKUA's Holger Peterson.

The new year started off with an unconventional performance on the Jack Singer Concert Hall stage, with Canadian circus troupe Cirque Flip Fabrique's beautifully choreographed production, *BLIZZARD*. That night it snowed both inside the Jack Singer Concert Hall and out, as the talented acrobats of Cirque Flip Fabrique celebrated winter in high-flying style. Founders Circle members also got a sneak peek behind-the-scenes with a demonstration from members of the troupe of their juggling, acrobatic, and athletic prowess.

From cold wintry wonderland, to hot, spicy dance party, The Hot Sardines returned to Calgary as part of Arts Commons Presents TD Jazz. Their vintage jazz style effortlessly channelled New York speakeasies, Parisian cabarets, and New Orleans jazz halls, transporting the audience to another time and place, and inspiring many to jump up and swing dance in the aisles.

During Black History Month, we welcomed the gospel-infused *We Shall Overcome: A Celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.* as part of BD&P World Stage. Created by Jazz at Lincoln Centre's Damien Sneed, *We Shall Overcome* uplifted us with the iconic music of Aretha Franklin, Nina Simone, and Stevie Wonder. Part of what made this musical celebration so unique was the inclusion of the Calgary Gospel Choir, led by Jamie Browne with over 60 local community performers assembled for this one-night-only performance.

Classic Albums Live also brought huge excitement to this season as it was the first subscription year for the series. Both Pink Floyd's *The Wall* and Tom Petty's *Damn the Torpedoes* were successes, leaving jubilant fans hungry for more.

While there was so much more activity planned, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to close our doors we needed to take a fresh approach to how we would fulfil our mission of bringing the arts to life. As the warmer weather made it possible for us to gather safely apart outside, Arts Commons launched *ArtsXpeditions*, a series of surprise pop-up events that brought the arts to neighbourhoods, elderly care facilities, and even street corners in all quadrants of the city. With 35 performances including 45 artists (23 of which had 2 or more performances) and 6 technicians, *ArtsXpeditions* provided these individual artists and crew members with much needed employment and the opportunity to engage in their passion with a live audience.

These energizing and uplifting, powerful and beautiful performances were celebrations of the human spirit, commemorating the past, inspiring our present, and leading us into the future with a love of the arts and our shared humanity.



Local jazz musician Tim Tamashiro performs for residents at Bethany Care Centre, during ArtsXpeditions © Jennifer Roberts



L-R: Syliva Temis, Tosh Hayashi, and Aya Mhana perform at ArtsXpeditions for Calgary's Yazidi community in partnership with Centre for Newcomers © Samuel Obadero



We Shall Overcome: A Celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr musical celebration © Will Young

"It was a delightful experience! The residents seemed to know many of the songs. It was easy to get the residents to interact between shows. I was even lucky enough to have a few fans in the crowd. I feel ArtsXpeditions provided a break from isolation for Calgarians. It benefits the audience and the entertainers. It's like a visit back to being 'normal' (whatever that is)."

Tim Tamashiro, local Jazz musician and entertainer

We Support Community

Key to everything that happens at Arts Commons is our connection to our community. These efforts can be felt on a daily basis through our work with community groups, local artists and musicians, and cultural organizations.

For well over a decade, Arts Commons has helped local, community artists reach new audiences by featuring them on our Duet Stage, in the Jack Singer Concert Hall Lobby, prior to our mainstage series performances. Even with our season cut short by nearly half of our scheduled performances, we featured more than 100 local artists and performers including jazz musicians, hip hop artists, award-winning singer-songwriters, a high-energy drag and vogue dance party, and even a traditional Chinese Lion dance by Calgary's vibrant Chinese Community in celebration of the Lunar New Year.

Arts Commons continued to support our community through sponsorship of popular events such as the *Top 40 Under 40 Gala* and Calgary International Film Festival and worked to create the optimal experience for every organization who used our venues and meeting spaces. In September, the Chinese Consulate of Calgary held their National Day Celebration Concert in the Jack Singer Concert Hall. In every respect, our team went the extra step to ensure that the event was a success and exceed our client's expectations.

On March 12, 2020, the Provincial Government announced that all events with an expectation of over 250 people in attendance were to be cancelled or postponed until further notice. Arts Commons temporarily closed its doors to the public on March 15, 2020.

Understanding the significant impact this would have on local artists, Arts Commons made the decision to pay all of the Alberta-based artists contracted for the remainder of the 2019-20 season, regardless if they were able to fulfil their original contract. This was made possible due to the generosity of almost 200 households who donated their tickets for cancelled performances, and with the assistance of a \$20K grant from the Rozsa Foundation. We are beyond grateful for their combined generosity. In total, Arts Commons paid \$36,488 to these artists.

Even closer to home, our priority was ensuring that our staff remained whole and healthy. Although labour costs

account for over 40% of our budget, we made the decision not to cut expenses in this area. We provided our casual staff with a week's pay for shifts unfulfilled due to the shutdown, and gave 65 of those staff access to our Employee Family Assistance Program. By the end of the season, we had also managed to retain 93% of our salaried staff. Additionally, we supported the resident companies by waiving all venue occupancy fees from April through August, reducing their monthly costs by as much as 89%. It was paramount to maintain our healthy ecosystem through this crisis.

This demonstration of commitment to our community is crucial to who we are as an organization and as a contributor to the wellbeing, sustainability, and vibrancy of Calgary. It also wouldn't have been possible without the incredible generosity of our patrons. When the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the cancellation of so many performances, you, our patrons, stepped up to donate nearly \$30,000 worth of tickets back to the organization.

"It's amazing to have an arts organization that truly puts their support behind local musicians. Arts Commons has done exactly that. My band and I are all full-time musicians and our livelihoods are from performances that are currently on hold indefinitely. With the bleak prospects for the next several months it was a true godsend to have our contract fulfilled despite the closure. Every dollar counts and this means the world to me and my band."

Musician, Keith O'Rourke



Lunar New Year performers on the Duet Stage prior to Arts Commons Presents BLIZZARD © Will Young

“We would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your team for having us. It’s amazing and we are grateful to have worked with your group of professionals that is so helpful and understanding. Our performance shined because of your team’s dedication and passion.”

Thomas Cheuk Canada 88 News, Chinese Community, Lunar Celebration – Duet Stage, Flip Fabrique BLIZZARD, BD&P World Stage



The Northern Beauties perform prior to Arts Commons Presents, BD&P World Stage, Rosanne Cash © Will Young



James Demers in FastLove Preshow © Mike Hopkins



Raven Virginia in The Floppy Glamour Cabaret
© Lisa Amos

*“It was fun, inclusive, thoughtful and titillating.
I had some good laughs.”*

Patron, Amplify Cabaret – The Floppy Glamour Cabaret



Sabrina Naz-Comanescu performing at
We Gon Be Alright © Lisa Amos

*“Cirque Flip Fabrique BLIZZARD was
one of the most amazing shows I have
ever seen. Being there was one of the
best decisions I have ever made! There
were high-flying acrobatics, a gorgeous
snowy blizzard set, lots of humour and
awesome skills. Thank you for this
opportunity for my family and I. We all
appreciate it very much!”*

Patron, TD Access Pass



Cirque Flip Fabrique BLIZZARD
© Will Young

We Create Connections

Launched in our 2018-19 season, the Amplify Cabaret series brought something new to the stages at Arts Commons – a series of cabaret-style performances with poetry, spoken word, dance, and music structured around a powerful central theme, each with a charismatic host to guide the evening along. During our 2019-20 season, two of our four cabarets planned were able to go forward and were performed to a packed audience of excited patrons. The first cabaret, *The Floppy Glamour: It's Better Not to Ask Questions Cabaret*, showcased the unbridled creativity of Alberta's best alternative artists through burlesque, drag, clown, satire, and farce.

We Gon Be Alright, the second Amplify Cabaret in our season, was presented in February as part of TD Bank Group's Black History Month sponsorship, and was hosted and curated by artistic activist and spoken word artist, MelVee X. *We Gon Be Alright* focused on the power and perspectives of queer black women and queer black non-binary folks by gathering some of the most unique and exciting up-and-coming voices in Calgary. It resulted in an empowering evening of sharing and solidarity.

“Being the curator for the We Gon Be Alright Cabaret has strengthened my artistic practice in unexpected and profound ways.”

MelVee X, curator and host of *We Gon Be Alright*

With overwhelmingly positive feedback, we can't wait to resume this high demand series and announce new dates for the two cabaret performances that had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Arts Commons Presents strives to provide the opportunity for all Calgarians to participate in the arts. Through the TD Arts Access Pass, we partnered with the Institute for Canadian Citizenship (Cultural Access Pass) and the Calgary Public Library to be able to offer more than 1,000 tickets to students, new Canadian citizens, and families challenged by their circumstances to attend Arts Commons Presents concerts and special events at no cost to them. Though this past season the program was cut short, the impact was still felt by the individuals in our community who were able to attend.

In another demonstration of how Arts Commons created connections with our patrons and artists, our team made a proposal to National Geographic and Disney, to host a virtual reception featuring National Geographic Explorer Joel Sartore, who was originally slated to come to Arts Commons this season.

This was an exclusive event for Arts Commons Explorer Circle members, and Arts Commons was the only organization out of *National Geographic Live's* entire territory that provided this kind of engagement. Both National Geographic and Disney were so intrigued they requested members of their management team be able to attend and participate.

This 'sold-out' event further humanized the heroic image of the National Geographic Explorer, as Sartore shared stories of how his *Photo Ark* project had to now take a different turn due to the shutdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and told the story of two fellow Explorers who had been infected and the kind of illness they experienced. While obviously saddened by the impact of COVID-19 on him and his colleagues personally, Sartore had an optimistic view of the future for the planet, pointing out how the earth had responded to the shutdown. Pollution levels were lower than they had been in decades, marine life was thriving, and Sartore himself was discovering the world right outside of his door, in the secret lives of insects and smaller species. He shared his hope that this unprecedented time would help the world see that it was not too late to reverse some of the damage done to our planet.

We Inspire Learning

Arts Commons Presents began the 2019-20 season with an amazing array of learning moments for students, teachers, and patrons. Our LGBTQ 101 & Allyship Training sessions provided positive education sessions for free to employees from over 53 organizations. Sponsored by Royal Bank of Canada, these workshops just scratched the surface of the impact that programs like this could have in the future.

Education of students and the professional development of teachers is an important commitment of Arts Commons. During this past season, we passed an incredible milestone with over half a million dollars invested in our *National Geographic Live* education series providing free tickets and busing to students since the student series began. We could not have achieved this without the generous support of Presenting Sponsor ConocoPhillips Canada, Student Engagement Sponsor Keyera Corp., EXPLORE National Geographic Sponsors Enbridge Inc. and Saskatchewan Mining and Minerals Inc., as well as Supporting Sponsor Cabra Consulting Ltd. Through this work and because of this support, thousands of young people have been able to experience powerful and inspiring *National Geographic Live* presentations featuring scientists, astronauts, biologists, mountain climbers, wildlife photographers, and even a medical toxicologist. These experiences have inspired these children to care about the environment, conservation, exploration, and science, molding our leaders of the future.

“As a choir student, the experience of getting to see a community getting together to sing about the importance of freedom is incredibly majestic and pleasurable. It was a great time to remember how our generation has the advantage of getting to hear beautiful songs that portray history to modern day. The interaction between audience and musicians is beyond words. It was a space where individuals felt connected in all senses. I know all my peers and teachers appreciate these unique experiences.”

Student

“I just wanted to say thank you so much for giving my fellow classmates and I the opportunity to attend the Gospel concert. Thank you for paying our admission fees. The concert was absolutely amazing, it was engaging, active and vibrant. We got to sing and dance. The performers were so humble and gifted. I just wanted to say thank you so much for the opportunity, it was a blessing.”

Student

Arts Commons was also able to open young minds through the power of music, in a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Over 1,500 music students, ranging from Grade 7 to Grade 12 from Calgary Board of Education and the Calgary Catholic School Board, were invited to a private concert of *We Shall Overcome: A Celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.* There was no cost to them and it was an experience that many of them could not have even imagined. Eyes were wide, jaws were dropped, and the excited banter in the lobby post-performance was invigorating.

Through the RBC Emerging Visual Artists Program (RBCEVAP) we not only provide artists with valuable

exhibition opportunities, but also in-depth professional development sessions hosted by artists, curators, and other professionals working in the field. Although the COVID-19 pandemic required us to close our doors, we were able to successfully continue these sessions via Zoom for all RBCEVAP artists. Of the four sessions that were conducted, two were hybrid virtual and in-person (under safe socially distanced conditions) and two were fully virtual. Each session had between 40 and 60 attendees and covered topics such as financial management for artists and how to work with and prepare work for commercial galleries.



Macarena Ruidaz © Sanja Lukac



Students on stage during the student presentation of We Shall Overcome © Will Young

Training and tutorials on how to use the video conferencing technology were provided to the artists and recordings of the sessions were made available after the fact as reference materials, which in turn allowed the participating artists to focus and engage during the event itself.

Through the utilization of online platforms, important relationships established by the artists were also allowed to continue to flourish. An example of this is the mentorship of Macarena Ruidáz by Rocio Graham. Spanish speaking Macarena Ruidáz was born in Chile and was diagnosed with learning disabilities during her primary school years. Through her mentorship with Rocio, she was able participate fully in the Professional Development sessions and become more independent as both an artist and as a person.



RBCEVAP Zoom session

“Never have I been as challenged yet supported in my artistic career as I have with the RBCEVAP. Our mentors and guest lecturers have intensely encouraged us to truly define who we are as an artist and describe ourselves more comprehensively than we have before. These exercises have not only resulted in a more professional tool-kit to utilize when presenting myself to galleries, grants and prospective exhibitions, but have allowed me to dive deeper into what truly motivates and inspires me as an artist. I have rediscovered myself and love what I have found.”

RBC Emerging Artist, Nicole Wolf

We Welcome You, We Welcome All

During our 2019-20 season, Arts Commons hosted *Itty Bitty Arts Days* starting with the *Alice in Wonderland Tea Party* which built on the outstanding success of our first *Itty Bitty Arts Days* in 2018. Two different events were planned for this season, but the second had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These events are designed to create a safe, fun, arts-oriented atmosphere where babies and toddlers, with their parents in tow, can have their first arts experience. Along with engaging and colourful characters, craft activities, and an immersive decorated space, things like quiet rooms were provided for parents who may have needed a moment of calm for their family, as well as accessible washrooms with change tables for little ones. The event was an overwhelming success and opened up the arts experience to a new audience.

was only part of the fun. The sensational 80s-inspired preshow and intermission party, featuring some of Calgary's most highly regarded drag royalty, had everyone dancing, transforming the Jack Singer lobby into an 80s dance club. It was an evening that brought everyone together in mutual inclusion and love for George Michael's legacy.

As a new initiative this season, Arts Commons introduced the Founders Circle *Friend* donor tier. This new tier provides access to more benefits than the entry-level *Associate* tier while maintaining a relatively low barrier to entry, ensuring accessibility. The *Friend* tier has been warmly embraced by our patrons, and the majority of donors previously at the *Associate* tier have increased their contribution to become part of this new benefit tier.

Feels So Real brings a human perspective to the issues that we're all facing, while supporting local Calgary artists.

Four years ago, the Board of Directors of Arts Commons took the decision to strengthen our longstanding commitment to diversity and equitable representation on our stages. With a focus on elevating artists in our local community, this resulted in the development of programs such as the Amplify Cabaret series which gives voice to historically underrepresented artists on the edge of their practice. New programs developed during the pandemic, like the *This Feels So Real* video series allowed us to continue fulfilling this commitment, in spite of our doors being closed.

Over the past three seasons alone, Arts Commons has hired a total of 571 Black, Indigenous and People Of Colour (BIPOC) artists of various disciplines. This represents 45% of all the artists we work with. Arts Commons believes it is essential to continue to champion diversity on our stages, now and into the future.

"I think you did a fantastic job of creating such a welcoming environment. The kids felt comfortable to engage and enjoy."

Parent, Itty Bitty Art Days

In November, we rocked the night away with the nostalgically charged *FastLove: A Tribute to George Michael*, a performance featuring George Michael doppelgänger, Andrew Browning, direct from London's West End. Including all of George Michael's iconic hits, *FastLove* had the entire audience on their feet and singing along to Faith, Careless Whisper, and Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go. Sponsored by Royal Bank of Canada, the main show

As we moved into a different performance-scape with the closing of our venues, Arts Commons launched a new video series called *This Feels So Real* that engaged artists to bring their unique perspective to the world in that moment. Featuring artists like dancer, instructor, and performer Wunmi Idowu who spoke about the importance of being an authentic ally to the Black Lives Matter movement, *This*

"I thought the concert was amazing! I bought my ticket last minute (and went solo) and had an absolute blast dancing the wonderful music from this band."

Patron, FastLove

FastLove in the Jack Singer Concert Hall
© Mike Hopkins



"The performance, especially the singer was unforgettable. Truly amazing."

Patron, FastLove



Black Lives Matter poster at the Centre Court entrance to Arts Commons © Arts Commons



L-R: Mandy Morris, Alicia Ward, Lisbeth Maidment, Raffi Minas in Itty Bitty Arts Days: Alice in Wonderland © Sanja Lukac

We are Future-Oriented

Under New Leadership

On January 20, 2020, Arts Commons Board of Directors announced the appointment of Alex Sarian as our new President and CEO, after seven years of leadership roles at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City. Alex brings a fresh approach and progressive vision for Arts Commons that elevates the Arts Commons ecosystem; engages, collaborates, and celebrates the diversity of our community through inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility; and focuses on how the artistic community contributes to a shared sense of culture, to our emotional and mental wellbeing, and to our economic prosperity.

The New Normal

It has been said many times over: when the COVID-19 pandemic landed on our doorstep, live arts were the first to shut down and will be the last to return. Although many arts organizations have either been forced or have chosen, for a variety of reasons, to postpone their entire 2020-21 seasons, Arts Commons and the resident companies have summoned all of their energy and influence to continue to bring the arts to the lives of all Calgarians at a time when we have needed the power of the arts the most. While most of us understand that our lives have been forever altered by the pandemic, and a return to “the way things were” is unlikely to happen, we also recognize that times of greatest hardship often hold some of the greatest opportunities.

Our investment in our workforce means that when we reopen our doors to the public, we will be able to hit the ground running and provide you - our patrons, donors, sponsors, artists, and community groups - with the creativity, knowledge, understanding, and innovation that this time has allowed us to develop. The support we have been able to offer the resident companies and local artists means that they have been able to and will continue to create and develop meaningful arts experiences for our community.

A Brave New World

We are looking forward to continuing to engage with our community in new ways. We are in the final stages of establishing a partnership with Canon to professionally stream, capture, and broadcast some of our performances in order to further break down the barriers to participation in the arts. Implementing some of Canon’s most recent technologies, this will become a resource that we can share with the resident companies and community groups that use our space, facilitating a further reach of the arts into lives near and far.

By the spring of 2021, in time for the announcement of the new 2021-22 season, we will also launch a new website. Focused on enriching the patron experience, the new website will be more reflective of all the activities in our complex, including the work of the resident companies, as well as convey the

greater Arts Commons story, providing more insight and access to the things that are most important to you.

An Opportunity for Greater Impact

On October 9th, 2020, Arts Commons, together with our partners at Calgary Municipal Land Corporation (CMLC) and The City of Calgary, announced a tri-party development agreement that will initiate the design process for the Arts Commons Transformation (ACT) project. A virtual information session was held on October 29, 2020 that outlined the upcoming procurement process and the selection of the project teams for design/architecture and pre-construction planning. The winning teams will be responsible for the design development over the next 16 months, taking until Q2 of 2022 to complete the detailed design work. We look forward to telling you more about the ongoing evolution of this incredible project in the months to come and in next year’s Report to Community. ACT has been attracting world-wide attention to Calgary, in particular because it promises to be the first major, multi-use arts centre to be designed since the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted our lives, and will incorporate new design, construction, and art-making practices.

Always Learning, Always Growing

We have also taken this time of closed doors and reduced activities to look inwards.



Our Canada, Our Story
© Action Dignity

Since the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement reignited after the unjust killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, we have been reflecting on the role we must play to fight racism and racial inequality within our own community. While Arts Commons has been doing some of this work over the past few years, we have taken a more focused approach, engaging in anti-racism learning opportunities, as well as consulting with artists, community leaders, and our partners at ActionDignity, to name a few. In the 2020-21 season, we will begin consulting with Indigenous cultural and spiritual leaders towards the multi-year development of an Indigenous Strategy. This will not end with our Indigenous community. This is only the beginning. We know we have a lot of work to do to get to a place of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (I.D.E.A), and we will look at

this strategy as an entry point into a much greater commitment to all marginalized, ethnic community groups. The new Arts Commons website will include a section dedicated to I.D.E.A., and while it began as a grass roots staff effort over a year ago, the I.D.E.A Committee will take on a more formal 'think tank' structure to guide change more intentionally from within the organization. This 'think tank' will connect us to the community outside our walls, ensuring that we do not make any decisions in a vacuum. We will focus on learning what we do not know and growing an authentic appreciation and inclusion of all voices.

This past year has been difficult for many individuals, families, communities, and organizations. But we will not pass up the opportunity to learn from it and to grow into an organization that every Calgarian can be proud of.

We are Sustainable

Arts Commons has always been critically aware of managing risk. In February, as the COVID-19 pandemic progressed, our Health and Safety team moved quickly to implement our pandemic plan. Unfortunately, what the plan could not predict was the magnitude of its impact on our business, our community, and our people.

Despite significant losses to our revenues, we chose not to make hasty decisions around cutting expenses in the short term. With labour costs over 40% of our budget, this would have been devastating to our people. Instead, we focused on three primary objectives:

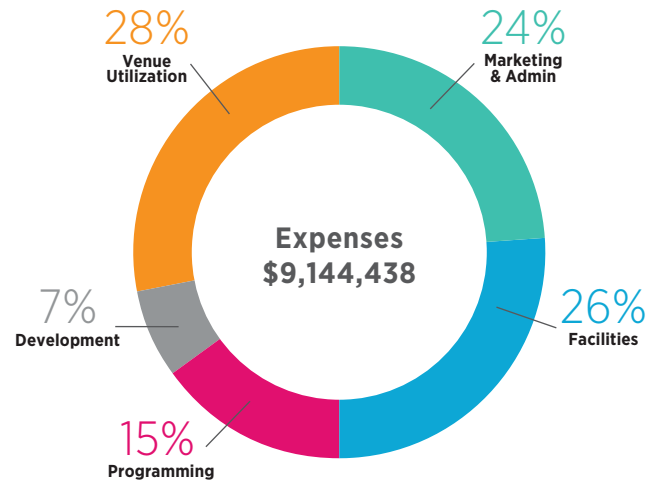
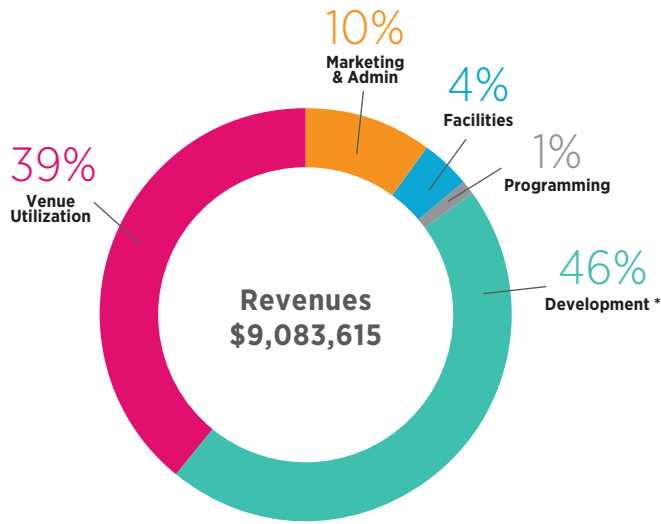
- To remember that we are a values-led organization – our decisions in times of crisis must not stray from our values.
- To protect and retain staff – they are the lifeblood of our organization and we must come out of this situation as strong as we went into it.
- To remain focused on the future – by living our values and keeping staff engaged and connected.

The final test for our decision making was: Will we be ready to reopen? Over the last six months of the fiscal year, we spent significant time building scenarios,

researching options for accessing government support programs, budgeting, forecasting, and then doing it all over again. Through all of these efforts we were able to:

- Retain 93% of our salaried staff, at full pay, shifting many to working remotely. Despite being closed to the public, essential workers stayed in our building to keep it safe, keep it running efficiently, and to complete capital projects.
- Update and improve processes, work on the ever shifting 2020-21 season and seasons into the future, and to look at ways we can evolve and provide value to our community going forward.
- Implement organization-wide projects which staff from any department could participate in; institute LinkedIn Learning to provide professional development opportunities; and allow staff to take some of their paid time to volunteer in the community. Our ability to keep our core staff fully employed was made possible through the Federal Government's Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) programs, resulting in recoveries of \$1,104,090.

- Provide our casual Front-of-House and production staff with a week's pay and, with the generous support of Board members, we have been able to provide over 65 casual staff with access to our Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP). This provided them with free, confidential counselling services on a wide range of topics such as health and wellness, financial planning, elder care, and more.
- Support the resident companies by waiving all venue occupancy fees from April through August, which reduced their monthly costs from 63-89% and resulted in savings to them of \$487,058. While this meant a loss to Arts Commons' revenues, we are expecting to recover \$249,004 in the form of forgivable loans through the Canadian Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA) program.
- Not only pay all Alberta-based artists the full value of the contracts that could not be fulfilled, but to hire more artists and technical support staff, providing \$19,045 in payments over the last six months of the fiscal year.



Financial Results

Revenues

Arts Commons ended the year with over \$2.8 M (41%) in lost earned revenues. Just over \$2M of those lost revenues were from venue operations, with almost 25% of that resulting from our decision to forgo resident company venue occupancy fees. We also lost over \$500K in ticket sales for cancelled shows in the 2019-20 season.

We have been very humbled and appreciative that despite our season ending early, not only were we able to retain almost 100% of our grants, corporate sponsorships, and individual donations but we were also able to exceed our contributed revenue budget by over \$100K. This is in part due to the generosity of our Board of Directors. Launched with a lead gift by David and Roxanne Dunlop, the Board created the COVID-19 Response Initiative, and at the time of writing, had collectively donated \$551,826. These funds will help Arts Commons weather the significant financial challenges ahead while helping to support the delivery of Arts Commons Presents programming this season.

Arts Commons also generated an additional \$91K in revenues through a partnership with the Calgary Telus Convention Centre to provide shower facilities for clients of the Calgary Drop-In Centre from April through June.

Expenses

Facing millions of dollars in lost revenues, we launched an aggressive expense reduction program throughout the organization. Costs linked to earned revenues including programming, marketing, and venue usage were down just over \$1M due to cancelled activities and variable expense reductions. Expenses related to fundraising activities were also reduced by 36%.

Our facilities team was able to cut expenses by another 15% by keeping the building as quiet as possible after shutdown: turning water and lights off, controlling the air flow, and reducing as many other services as we could, resulting in over \$300K of savings. Despite significant fixed administrative costs another 5% was cut from that budget. Overall, we were able to cut over \$1.5M from our 2019-20 budgeted expenses.

Due to the significant efforts across the organization, we ended the 2019-20 year with a deficit of \$60,823. While this is still a deficit, it leaves us well positioned going into what will be another challenging year, with a \$1.2M cumulative surplus.

The financial implications of the pandemic are, without question, considerable; and the arts community has been particularly hard hit. We recognize the road to recovery will be a long one, not just for Arts Commons, but for the arts sector as a whole. This is not a matter of 'if' the arts come back, but 'when' as we all have a role to play in healing society through community building and shared experiences.

Thank you

Private and Public Sector Support

Arts Commons wishes to express our sincere appreciation to the following corporations, foundations, governments, and passionate individuals who gave generously to support Arts Commons during the 2019-20 season, especially as we collectively navigated the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you for ensuring that Arts Commons is able to continue to be a key contributor to the social, economic, cultural, and intellectual life and wellbeing of our community.

Government Operating/Program Support



Canadian Heritage
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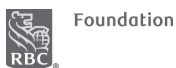
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The arts inspire, enlighten, and entertain. We are grateful to the following members of Founders Circle that support our work in performance, learning, and community engagement. Enriching the lives of Calgarians through the arts is our shared aspiration.

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