



Report to the Community

2023-24



Arts
Commons



Becoming a Civic Centre

2023-24

Arts Commons has been going through an internal transformation, setting the stage for the external changes that the Arts Commons and Olympic Plaza Transformation projects will bring. As we transform, we are actively working to build our city through community-driven programming and collaboration. We are driving relevancy and building safe, accessible spaces for Calgarians to engage with culture, the arts, and each other.

Our belief

is that equitable access to the arts is a human right.

Our responsibility

is to redefine a bold and adventurous Calgary by championing and investing in creativity.

Our mission

is to be an inspirational force where artists, community, and organizations celebrate cultural identities, experience the full breadth of human emotions, and ignite positive change.

Our family of resident companies:



Timothonius, Tim Williams, Dawn Tyler Watson, Yolanda Sargeant, Ollie Owens, and Colin Adhikary performing at Whale of a Jam. ©Sara Kuefler

Letter from the President and CEO

Looking back on the 2023-24 season, I could not be prouder of what we've been able to achieve together. Our accomplishments, many of them years and decades in the making, speak to the resiliency of the Arts Commons community to meet the evolving needs of the fastest growing city in Canada. Over this season, we embarked on precedent-setting community collaborations, world premiere performances, and transformative education initiatives; we revealed the much-anticipated designs for the expansion of our campus and announced the single largest philanthropic gift to the performing arts in Canadian history.

In addition to bringing some of the world's greatest minds and voices to enrich and entertain Calgary audiences, we celebrated and learned from those who call Calgary home. Wakefield Brewster, who participated in our very first TD Incubator cohort, and went on to become Calgary's first Black poet laureate, returned this season to lead the 2023-24 cohort as TD Incubator Fellow. To witness the growth of our organization alongside Wakefield's growth and contributions to our city has been nothing short of humbling.

On the topic of growth, our programming department added 39% more capacity to our ConocoPhillips Hub for Inspired Learning program. Never before have we had this many weeks of education programming, offered more professional development to educators, and created more collaboration opportunities between teaching artists and teachers. Despite this large increase, our schedule was fully booked well before the academic year started. Not only do these programs prove to be transformative for the students and the teachers they aim to serve, but they are an important mechanism by which we keep our ears to the ground and learn from the young people of Calgary about who they need us to be.

In addition to the life-changing activities taking place within our walls, we also forged ahead and broke new records with the Arts Commons and Olympic Plaza Transformation projects - a bold new direction for our organization which will make Calgary home to one of the largest cultural campuses in North America. Key to our success as a re-imagined destination for cultural experiences is the urgent inward reflections we must undertake as an organization, transforming on the inside as well as the outside.

As I share in my new book, *The Audacity of Relevance*, "The artistic process cannot be separate from the experience of engaging audiences, and arts organizations must be in lockstep with the artists they support and the audiences they serve, or they will suffer both during the term of a crisis and in its aftermath." Together, we need to put the needs of our growing city at the centre of our work. Leading the charge with artistic, cultural, and civic experiences, the evolution of Arts Commons is key to the future of our thriving cosmopolitan city, providing gathering spaces that nurture conversation and inspire participation.

With our own evolution on full display, as we break ground on our expansion and transition into becoming Werklund Centre through the incredibly generous gift of Dave Werklund and his family, we invite you to continue inspiring us and teaching us what it means to be the very best version of Calgary.

With endless appreciation and admiration,

ALEX

Alex Sarian
President and CEO



Dave Werklund and Alex Sarian in front of the Jack Singer Concert Hall. ©Will Young

Here is Where the Magic Happens!

It's a moment of pure discovery when a performer, a group, or a band takes to a stage within the Arts Commons complex. You may have never heard of them before or maybe you're a lifelong fan, but as the performance begins, you realize that this evening is going to be special. And what's more, you're sharing this moment with anywhere from a couple dozen to a couple thousand other people. That's the power of live performance. For the six resident companies of Arts Commons, these are the moments that make all the hard work pay off.

2023-24 was an exciting season for Alberta Theatre Projects (ATP), with newly appointed Artistic Director Haysam Kadri at the helm, and Executive Director Peita Luti joining the team in January. The company's season featured four shows, including the critically acclaimed *Made in Italy*, and new Canadian play *Selma Burke* (both presented in partnership with Theatre Calgary). ATP also produced W.O. Mitchell's devilishly funny *The Black Bonspiel of Wullie MacCrimmon* (an audience favourite both in 2023-2024, as well as when the company first produced the play

in 1997), and presented the Arts Club Theatre (Vancouver) production of the hilarious and heartwarming, *The Birds and the Bees*. ATP concluded its year with the exciting announcement of their 50th Anniversary Season lineup for 2024-25, featuring the casting of Canadian icon, Paul Gross, in *The Seafarer*.

"It's been a remarkably good year for the Orchestra," wrote the Calgary Herald's Kenneth Delong in his review of *Joshua Bell: One Night Only*, the Calgary Philharmonic's final concert of the 2023-24 season. Whether they came for world-renowned superstars such as virtuoso violinist Bell or emerging talents such as the brilliant young pianist Illia Ovcharenko, audiences seem to agree as attendance at the Jack Singer Concert Hall returned to pre-pandemic numbers. The Calgary Phil continued to demonstrate that the Orchestra is for everyone as a resounding 61% percent of patrons were first time ticket buyers – undoubtedly drawn to an incredibly varied season featuring 70 concerts, 25 guest conductors, 26 guest artists, and three new commissions.

These included collaborations with: the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra (the first in 20 years), Latin-pop Alex Cuba, soul phenomenon Capathia Jenkins, blockbuster films (*Star Wars*), symphonic fusion (*Beethoven X. Coldplay*), and Education Concerts which welcomed thousands of students to the world of orchestral music. A remarkably good year, indeed! ▶



Norma Lewis and Christopher Clare in *Selma Burke*, presented in partnership by Theatre Calgary and Alberta Theatre Projects. ©Trudie Lee



Capathia Jenkins performing with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra. ©Dennis Envoldsen



Gerry Mackay, Arghavan Jenati and Nancy Kerr in *The Birds and the Bees* at Alberta Theatre Projects (an Arts Club Theatre, Vancouver production). ©Benjamin Laird





Bruce McCulloch in OYR Production of *Dark Purple Slice*. ©Benjamin Laird



Meg Farhall, Katelyn Morishita, and Linda Kee performing in *Beautiful Man*. ©Mike Tan



The cast of *Beaches the Musical* at Theatre Calgary. ©Trudie Lee

Downstage celebrated their 20th Anniversary Season in 2023-24. It was a dynamic season filled with a plethora of collaborations and innovations! The season opened with Downstage's sold-out production of *All Good Things Must Begin* in association with Immigrant Council for Arts Innovation and Climate Change Theatre Action. In February, Downstage co-produced *Beautiful Man* by Erin Shields with Handsome Alice and Verb Theatre. The run was sold-out, and audiences raved about this hilariously poignant comedy.

Magnetic Bodies took the stage in March. This devised theatre piece was created and performed by University of Calgary Performing Arts students and marked the first collaboration of its kind between Downstage and the UofC. And finally, *GoGo Battles: OMG Someone Dies!* brought the season to a close with a sold-out run featuring a femme queer political theatre-meets-wrestling throw down for the ages.

One Yellow Rabbit (OYR) proudly presented the 38th High Performance Rodeo (HPR) from January 15 to February 4, 2024. The festival featured an electric atmosphere with 25 live productions and over 90 performances, co-presented with nine partners across 13 venues. Curated by Artistic Director Blake Brooker and Producer Oliver

Armstrong, highlights included new works from OYR Associate Artist Denise Clarke (*One Yellow Rabbit Salon*), as well as performances by OYR favorites Scott Thompson (*KING*), Bruce McCulloch (*Dark Purple Slice*), and Rebecca Northan and Bruce Horak (*Goblins: Oedipus*). Free activations by Dustin Harvey's Secret Theatre showcased local talent, while youth performers from Calgary Young People's Theatre enlivened public spaces in Arts Commons.

In March, OYR hosted *A Lean Slice of Nighttime*, an intimate event featuring acclaimed American musician and songwriter Alejandro Escovedo. The Beautiful Young Artists (BYA) captivated audiences in April with their reinterpretation of the 19th-century classic *Middlemarch*, offering a fresh perspective for the 21st century.

Theatre Calgary's 2023-24 season took audiences through worlds filled with dreamers, murders, Italian meals, ghosts, martinis, Shakespearean wrestling rings, ground-breaking sculptors, and warm beaches. It was a season that not only had it all, but was a season for all! Their lineup was highlighted by the sold-out runs for both Farren Timoteo's *Made in Italy*, and the return of Calgary's holiday tradition, *A Christmas Carol*. They also presented the acclaimed world premiere of *Selma Burke* (in

partnership with ATP, along with *Made in Italy*), and the international premiere of *Beaches the Musical*, which featured a lineup of much lauded local, Canadian, and Broadway talent. Perhaps the biggest success for Theatre Calgary this past season was the introduction of the Theatre For All \$39 campaign. More than 74,000 tickets were sold for this initiative alone. With price, flexibility, and an entertaining mix on stage, their 2023-24 season truly was an opportunity for all theatregoers to discover, return to, and embrace the experience of seeing a live performance.

Arts Commons Presents offered its own powerful moments, from world premiere orchestral film screenings to life-size dinosaur puppets. Take a deeper dive on page 16.

A Home Worth Sharing

As Western Canada's largest performing arts centre, Arts Commons supports Calgarians at every step in their journey, from engaging students' curiosity through backstage tours showing them how the pullies in the fly galleries work, to giving teens and young adults a place to gather, sharing pizza as they Rap about life's challenges, and highlighting graduates on one of the greatest stages in the world as they accept their diploma. We offer lifelong inspiration and creative experiences in our spaces because we have a team of passionate experts who believe in this work and support every event and activation from start to finish.

During the 2023-24 season, we were proud to host over a hundred community groups and support their needs for venues to showcase their work, ensuring that our beloved venues were utilized to their full potential throughout the season. We welcomed Canadian interdisciplinary creative group, Bodycube Art Collective for 21 days of rehearsal in the Martha Cohen Rehearsal Hall and Kawalease ACT, Arab Canadian Theatre with their production off *Interrogation* قِي قِي حَت in the Engineered Air Theatre.

Arts Commons was thrilled to see the return of many longtime community collaborators including CRESCENDO,

a fundraiser in support of child and youth mental health. Like many of our community partners, they've made the Jack Singer Concert Hall their home for their meaningful event.

As our beloved and hard-working venues reach 40 years old, our team carefully prioritizes the replacement and refurbishment of safety and

Civic Partners Infrastructure Grant program. Another key upgrade to the venues took place in the Front of House where a new Clover point of sale system gave us new tools to improve customer service in our venues and improve the efficiency of our bar staff. It also has an intuitive user platform, greatly enhancing usability by staff.

“Thank you so much for your support with CRESCENDO 2024! This night wouldn't be possible without you!”

– CRESCENDO organizer

infrastructure systems. During the 2023-24 season, the fire panel for the building was replaced to adhere to contemporary safety regulations, bolster reliability, and optimize system functionality. The hot water tanks had also reached end of life and were replaced over the summer months.

In the venues, the counterweight rigging systems in Max Bell Theatre and Martha Cohen Theatre had reached end of life and were converted to a new state-of-the-art system that is more efficient, ergonomic, and safer for staff to use. These projects were made possible by the City of Calgary's

In addition to keeping the building humming like a well-oiled machine, we continue to pioneer new technologies within our walls to increase accessibility and engage in proof-of-concept work for the new building as part of the Arts Commons Transformation project. During the 2023-24 season, we continued the installation work of the new Sennheiser Mobile Connect+ Assistive Listening system which will offer listening support in all our venues via any Bluetooth device. The system was made possible with the help the Campbell McLaurin Foundation and the City of Calgary.

2,070

events hosted at Arts Commons



Celebrating our Communities

In addition to the resident companies, hundreds of artists, organizations, and community groups bring their vision to life in our spaces. Remaining accessible to the Calgary community is essential to our work in providing a safe, downtown gathering space for cultural sharing and dialogue.

On a joyful day in early September, Arts Commons and friends danced in the streets with the Calgary Pride Parade, showing off our colours and moves to jumpin' beats. The result? Our most successful organic video to date, shared by Calgary Pride across social and garnering over 30,000 views.

In November, Arts Commons embarked on a collaboration with Casa Mexico to celebrate Día de Muertos (The Day of the Dead) in the Jack Singer Concert Hall Lobby. The event received a record number of RSVPs and attention from local media with the lobby operating at maximum capacity. Coloured banners and vivacious music, along with the smell of hot chocolate and freshly baked bread, filled the space with celebratory energy.

During the holiday season, we uplifted the generosity of the season by inviting the Food Bank into our lobby during the sold-out double evening performances of *A Jann Arden Christmas*, made possible by first-time sponsor Lawson Lundell LLP, where a total of \$10,111 was donated.

Chinook Blast chased the winter blues away in a collaboration with Arts Commons Presents on Olympic Plaza with hosts Anthony Russell and CHISH, RBC Emerging Visual Artists Program alumni and current Arts Commons teaching artists. They were joined by brass theatre ensemble, Cowtown Collection, as well as spoken word and teaching artist, Priscille Bukasa, energizing the outdoor party, lit by the glow of light installations. Indoors, we celebrated Black History Month with two Arts Commons Presents shows, *Queens of the Blues* featuring Canadian JUNO winner, Dawn Tyler Watson, and American GRAMMY contender, Shemekia Copeland and the second TD Amplify showcase, *Wakefield Brewster Pt. 2*. ▶

“Thank you so much for allowing us to be a part of such a fabulous concert! Your staff are truly amazing!”

– Stacy Glaubitz, Calgary Food Bank





A beautiful blending of dance and live music from the GRAMMY Award winning Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra and Cuba's lauded Arturo O'Farrill, Malpaso Dance Company with Arturo O'Farrill & the Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra came to Arts Commons Presents as part of a collaboration with Decidedly Jazz Danceworks (DJD). In addition to supporting the presentation, dancers from Malpaso Dance Company did a special masterclass with DJD's dancers, engaging in cultural and artistic sharing.

In April, we uplifted Ukrainian culture with the incomparable DakhaBrakha in the Jack Singer Concert Hall, local Ukrainian artist, Noble, in the Lightbox Studio, and Jack Singer Concert Hall duet stage performers Iryna Kalinovich and Khrystyna Kolodii. The world renowned DakhaBrakha blew audiences away, with comments like "one of the best shows I've ever seen" that was "deeply original" and "an evening of great import and purpose." Both of these Arts Commons Presents performances were made possible by our BD&P supporters, Burnet, Duckworth & Palmer LLP, ALSA Road Construction, and SerVantage.

As the warm summer weather came into full swing, Arts Commons was thrilled to invite Garret C. Smith, proud member of the Piikani and Kainai Tribes of the Blackfoot Nation, and his family to raise a tipi together at Olympic Plaza in a free public event to commemorate National Indigenous Peoples Day. Tipi raising is an essential part of many First Nations cultures across Turtle Island and Garret shared the Blackfoot method using four foundational poles, while other Nations typically use three. The tipi raising was followed by storytelling with Elders and the collaborative dismantling of the tipi.

Relevance to our communities is key to the work we do, and core to that work is collaboration. Through partnerships we strive to serve our city, sharing creativity, arts, and culture on every level.

Watch the tipi raising by scanning the QR code.



Connecting with the Land, Ourselves, and Each Other

Maya Angelou once wrote, “Do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better.”

Most of us were educated about our history from a single perspective. Today, we know better and although it can be uncomfortable it is necessary to build a better future for all. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), “Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one. Reconciliation requires an understanding that the most harmful impacts of residential schools have been the loss of pride and self-respect of Aboriginal people, and the lack of respect that non-Aboriginal people have been raised to have for their Aboriginal neighbours.”

As Arts Commons continues down the path of reconciliation, we remain committed to building awareness of the past and understanding the impacts of colonialism. This requires a long-term commitment and openness

to listen and learn, accepting the discomfort of not knowing the answers, and having the humility and strength to make mistakes. And as we learn and know better, we commit to doing better.

While Arts Commons engages with Indigenous communities and artists in a variety of ways, there are two experiences that stand out as moments of active reconciliation.

On September 30th, 2023, in commemoration of National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, we invited the community to Arts Commons, for free, to learn about Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. We held an Indigenous Makers Market and Pow Wow Showcase in the Jack Singer Concert Hall Lobby (curated by Four Winds YYC), which recorded 1,367 people in attendance; screened films (provided by the National Film Board) by and about Indigenous peoples, for approximately 100 people in the Engineered Air Theatre; and hosted over 770 people

at the Elders Story Project in the Jack Singer Concert Hall. We were heartened to know that there was an appetite for learning and change in our community and celebrated the success.

As mentioned on Page 13, Garret C. Smith, a proud member of the Piikani and Kainai Tribes of the Blackfoot Nation, and his family accepted Arts Commons’ invitation to raise a tipi together at Olympic Plaza in a free public event to celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day. It was joyful, meaningful, respectful, collaborative, and awe-inducing to see this tipi raised in the heart of this city.

As we continue down the path, we invite you to join us in connecting with the land, ourselves, and each other with respect, compassion, humility, and kindness. It is a long journey ahead filled with rich opportunities for personal and societal transformation.

“Reconciliation requires that a new vision, based on a commitment to mutual respect, be developed. Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one.”

– Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)



Tony Tootoosis at National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in the Jack Singer Concert Hall. ©Gavin John



Energizing with the Power of Live Performance

The 2023-24 season of Arts Commons Presents set out to push the envelope with a gravity-defying circus performance, a Ukrainian cultural phenomenon, a world premiere presentation of an Emmy Award winning series, and a sold-out holiday celebration with Calgary's own Jann Arden.

The longstanding BD&P World Stage series celebrated the opening of its 24th anniversary with *The Triplets of Belleville: 20th Anniversary Film in Concert*, the first ever orchestral concert for Arts Commons Presents. This beloved Oscar-winning film brought out Francophiles and cinema lovers alike, as Arts Commons worked closely with Alliance Française, Quickdraw Animation studio, and Calgary International Film Festival among other partners to reach as many Calgarians as possible.

Making for an extra special holiday season, we celebrated with Canadian talent The Barra MacNeils: *An East Coast Christmas* and *A Jann Arden Christmas*, who brought cozy cheer to the Jack Singer Concert Hall. The performance was full of laughter and smiles, with both shows ending in resounding standing ovations.



The spring was a hotbed of activity with pulse-pounding concerts, mesmerizing dance performances, cabaret-style showcases sharing Calgary's best local talent, and speaker presentations enthralling our sense of curiosity and wonder. A stand-out was the world premiere of National Geographic Film Concert: *Secrets of the Whales*, a spectacular fusion of stunning underwater footage, live orchestration with international conductor Anthony Parnter, and on-stage narration by Jann Arden, made possible by Swiftsure Foundation. ►



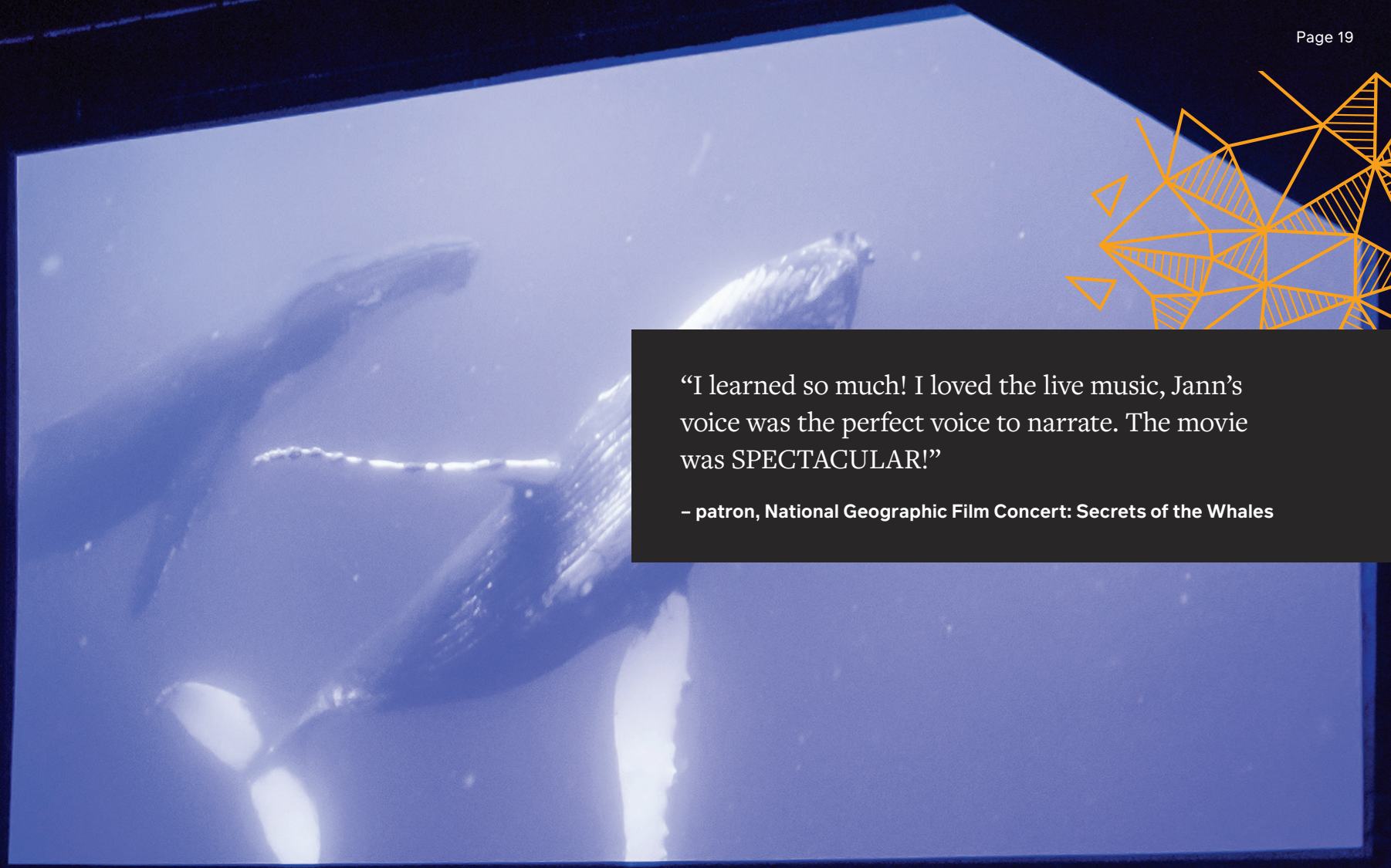
A Jann Arden Christmas in the Jack Singer Concert Hall. ©Will Young





26,051

attendees to Arts Commons Presents
ticketed events



“I learned so much! I loved the live music, Jann’s voice was the perfect voice to narrate. The movie was SPECTACULAR!”

– patron, National Geographic Film Concert: Secrets of the Whales



National Geographic Film Concert, Secrets of the Whales in the Jack Singer Concert Hall. ©Will Young



Our season of Classic Albums Live came to an absolute stellar close with the sold-out performance of Eagles: *Their Greatest Hits*. The Classic Albums Live crew belted out everything from “Hotel California” to “Life in the Fast Lane” to an overjoyed audience of audiophiles and classic rock fans. This season, we welcomed new Classic Albums Live season sponsors Acera Insurance and EllisDon.

Roaring onto the stage in May, we welcomed new audiences to the Jack Singer Concert Hall with *Dinosaur World Live*. The life-like puppets had parents in awe, and children squealing with glee, especially when the 10-metre-long T. rex puppet made it’s show-stopping appearance. Arts Commons Presents looks forward to continuing to welcome families to our building to experience the life-changing power of the arts.

National Geographic Live didn’t disappoint as we hosted Killiii Yüyan, National Geographic’s first Indigenous Explorer, with his powerful message of resilience and cultural understanding for the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic in *Life on Thin Ice*. His commitment to sharing these important messages was clear as he worked tirelessly with our Brand and Audience Development team to create impactful social media pieces to reach far and wide.

We bid a heartfelt send-off to not only the 2023-24 season, but summer on Olympic Plaza in its current form as Kyle McKearney opened for Emerson Drive, braving the weather to deliver their farewell tour performance, at the public celebration, *Plaza For All*. Rain and cold didn’t keep back the ardent fans who danced in the drizzle and were rewarded with a stunning sunset rainbow as the rain took a backseat to one of Canada’s most beloved country music groups.



Emerson Drive perform at Plaza for All. ©Mike Hopkins



Classic Albums Live. ©Jenn Five



Dinosaur World Live. ©Will Young





Unlocking Endless Potential

The paint flies everyday with Arts Commons Education as students, teachers, and parents tap into their creative imaginations in the best possible way. The ConocoPhillips Hub for Inspired Learning expanded from 18 weeks to 25 weeks of student engagement, continuing to broaden our reach to fill the needs of our community. This was made possible by a 3-year commitment from the Werklund Foundation.

The year started off with Culture Days, a building-wide celebration of arts and culture that welcomed eight classes and over 200 students to dance, paint, tell stories, stage fight, and beatbox. Throughout the day, each class was engaged in four 40-minute activities led by a teaching artist with a unique creative discipline.

Arts Commons Education recognizes that along with fostering students, teaching artists also need opportunities to grow into the type of instructors that will change the lives of their students. This season, we were delighted to mentor RBC Emerging Visual Artists Program alumni, Anthony Russell and CHISH. They worked alongside our experienced teaching artists to hone their craft and develop their own methods. They even had the opportunity to host an evening of performance at Chinook Blast!

Training teachers how to incorporate the arts into their classroom is another key element that Arts Commons

Education undertakes. On February 15 & 16, with the support of Calgary City Teachers' Convention, teachers came out in full force to experience a wide spectrum of workshops designed to add new tools to their toolbox. During this time, luminary and inspirational educator Dr. Christopher Emdin delivered his keynote, "Education is not memorization. It is the activation of the imagination and the path towards liberation" to 350 teachers, parents, and arts professionals, bringing his infectious passion to the work of arts education.

Taking on a myriad of forms, arts education spans every discipline imaginable. For the students of Pineridge School, two classes of Grade 1 and 2 students were taken on a creative learning journey. Dean Bareham of the Green Fools led 20 students to collectively construct a Bowhead whale puppet and local illustrator, sculptor, and arts educator Jenny Dale worked with 19 students to create two Orca whales out of recycled materials. They learned about the mechanics of creating a puppet, from body construction and how that contributes to structural integrity and weight, to the integration of moving parts in the case of the Bowhead whale. These impressive puppets were showcased at *Whale of a Jam* and National Geographic Live: Killii Yüyan: *Life on Thin Ice*. ▶



15,738

Students and teachers engaged through Arts Commons Education





Diverse Learners. ©Kiani Evans



Culture Days. ©Gavin John



Arts ReimaginED Summit. ©Will Young

For those who were able to get a ticket to the sold-out *Whale of a Jam*, it was an evening that fused blues and arts education, bringing a month and a half of Arts ReimaginED activations to a brilliant close. A group of high school students who were chosen for a masterclass with JUNO Award-winning singer/songwriter Dawn Tyler Watson, when she performed as part of *Queens of the Blues* in February, returned to Calgary to perform with Canadian blues and roots legend, Tim Williams, as well as lauded musicians Yolanda Sargeant, Ollee Owens, and the Timothionius Trio. Dawn Tyler Watson headlined, offering a keynote address the next day. It was a powerful example of the magic that happens when you create opportunities and allow burgeoning artists to create with seasoned professionals.

In its second season, Arts ReimaginED brought arts activations to schools across Calgary and hosted four public events that gave parents and youth the room to get creatively messy, supported by Calgary Arts Development, Government of Alberta's Ethnocultural Grant Program, and the City of Calgary. Over 4,000 students in 20 different schools engaged in storytelling, dance, visual arts, and music with 27 teaching artists. We also offered four days of professional development for our company of teaching artists, identified as a need by the Stone-Olafson Benchmark survey of spring of 2022.



Bringing Creative Minds Together

Arts Commons Connects is the hub that combines artists, arts organizations, and opportunities. At the forefront is the TD Incubator program, which entered its third season of creating essential supports for Calgary-based multidisciplinary artists. This year, the program made a monumental leap, engaging Calgary Poet Laureate Wakefield Brewster to lead as program Fellow. Wakefield was a member of the TD Incubator program in its inaugural year, and to have him return to lead after gaining the civic recognition of poet laureate, is nothing short of a pure demonstration of the value of the program.

Under Wakefield's leadership, 44 participants were coached through professional development workshops, elevated on stage and through exhibitions, and afforded future opportunities through networking with artists and arts professionals. The season launched with the Summit, a three-day intensive designed to immerse the TD Incubator artists in a learning excursion, setting the stage for the rest of the season. Over the course of the year, we witnessed the multidisciplinary artists of the program make powerful connections and further their craft. Highlights include participant Bruce Miller's short film *CONVICTION* being programmed as part of the Calgary International Film Festival after being selected for the

Special Jury Prize as part of the NBC Universal Alberta Short Film Devon Bolton Memorial Award. This was screened alongside inaugural TD Incubator Fellows Jae Sterling and Contra and the presentation of Kamika Bianca Guerra-Walker's spoken word poetry. Similarly, Thomas Dundas' incredible performance in Wakefield Brewster Presents, *Pt. 1* inspired the inclusion of Cowtown Collection – a cow-themed brass marching band – as the resident fanfare band for Arts Commons Presents, so expect to see Thomas again in 2024-25.

Wakefield Brewster Presents, presented in four parts, shared spoken word, dance, music, stage projections, poetry, and comedy throughout the season, with audiences praising it as "a rich inclusion of culture, identity, and expression" that is "beyond expectations" and "phenomenal!" The underground TD Amplify after-party took that energy to the next level with the launch of SCRATCH, the coolest party you've never heard of.

This season also saw The Mix, a new format of networking event for artists that engages professionals working in their fields. This format encourages creatives across disciplines to intersect in new ways – entrepreneurs, technologists, and artists of all types were brought together through games and an atmosphere of collaboration. ►



“I have nothing but gratitude for the opportunity I was granted to lead the TD Incubator program. Through connection, co-creation, collaboration, and co-curation, this program gave the artists the opportunity to become better, more complete people and practitioners. I also found new pieces to add to myself, and it was a gift.”

– Wakefield Brewster, TD Incubator Fellow



TD Incubator Fellow, Wakefield Brewster performs in the Engineered Air Theatre. ©Mike Tan

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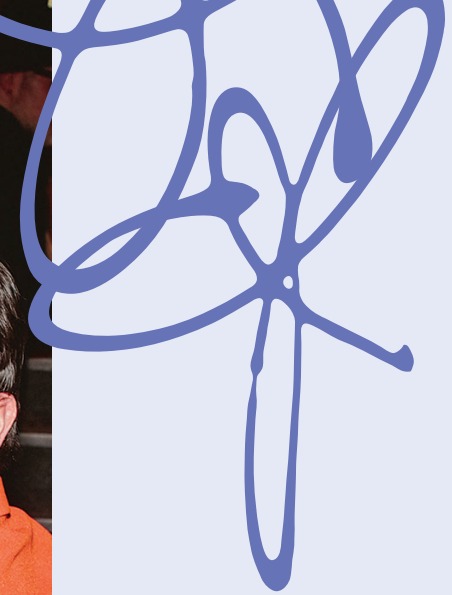
Artists engaged in professional development, mentorship and networking opportunities with Arts Commons



Revelers at SCRATCH. ©Mike Tan



Mikayla Martin (Itsooaakkii) film on the TELUS Art While You Wait Digital exhibition. ©Foreignerz



RBC Emerging Visual Artists Program (RBC EVAP) shared the work of 65 artists, primarily through the Arts Commons Galleries but also through the TELUS's Sky Art While You Wait digital exhibition space, which entered its second year of sharing the creative processes of RBC EVAP artists through a stunning city block long screen on Telus Sky, located on the 1st Street C-train platform.

One outstanding contribution to Art While You Wait was a short film, conceptualized and produced by FOREIGNERZ, an art and production house focused on pushing boundaries in film, music, art and culture. The film was supported by TELUS and Arts Commons as a companion film to artist Mikayla Martin's (Itsooaakkii) Ledge Gallery installation, *NDN Girlhood*. Using Mikayla Martin's acrylic painting *VISITING* as a source of inspiration, this film moves from a reclusive state to a defiant, Indigenous future that the artist desires.

These programs are supported by RBC Foundation, TD Bank Group, and Canada Council for the Arts.

Ado performs in the Engineered Air Theatre Centre. ©Mike Tan



Uplifting and Mentoring Local Talent

The Galleries of Arts Commons showcase the work of the RBC Emerging Visual Artists Program participants and TD Incubator cohort to the thousands of patrons and passersby who frequent our facilities every year. They offer an immersive and creative experience within our building. This includes the working spaces of the Ledge Gallery and Lightbox Studio, the visual art centered Window Galleries, the +15 Soundscape and Broadcast Lab, and the community partnership focused +15 Galleries.

Our galleries also created a platform for conversation in commemoration of National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Arts Commons worked in collaboration with Building Bridges and ReconciliACTION (renamed Pokaiks Reconciliation Society) to host an exhibition of 14 artists in the +15 Galleries. Pokaiks Reconciliation Society, an Indigenous led non-profit organization, delivers art-based workshops and events that provide education on Indigenous ways of knowing and promote healing and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The artists shared works across all mediums including beadwork, painting, leatherwork, regalia, and photography.

As we moved into the winter months, we welcomed Calgary-based feminist art collective, Fem Assembly, to the

+15 galleries with their exhibition *When We Circle*. It showcased archives and photographs from Fem Assembly meetings, exhibitions, and self-published zines including a book that was written in 1950, called *Every Woman's Standard Medical Guide*, written by 40 men.

65

Artists exhibited in Arts Commons Galleries

Gallery tours invite the public to meet our current exhibiting artists and give the public an opportunity to share in their artistic journey. These have now become sold-out engagements that now include so much more than just the galleries. We call them Art Parties. The last Art Party of the 2023-24 season that took place on July 4, was a perfect culmination of this new format including a DJ in upper Centre Court, an art market in the Big Secret Theatre, and an interactive art activation in the Motel Theatre. People of all ages and backgrounds mingled, laughed, and enjoyed the evening's atmosphere. These events were in collaboration with our friends at One Yellow Rabbit and Downstage. Special thanks to the RBC Foundation and Canada Council for the Arts for their continued support of RBC EVAP.



Fem Assembly. ©May Shi



Art Party. ©Mike Tan

Forging Forward

It was a frosty morning in November when the Olympic Plaza phase of the Arts Commons Transformation project took its next significant step forward. To a crowd of eager arts supporters and queued cameras, the design team for the Olympic Plaza Transformation (OPT) was announced, creating a ripple of excitement over the exceptional expertise of the creatives involved. This team would undertake the exciting task of redesigning a space to be in conversation with the Arts Commons Transformation with the goal of creating a complete cultural campus for all Calgarians to enjoy.

Led by development manager Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, the Olympic Plaza Transformation (OPT) project is a collaboration between gh3* Architecture, Urban Design and Landscape Architecture, CCxA Landscape Architecture and Urban Design, and Belleville Placemaking.

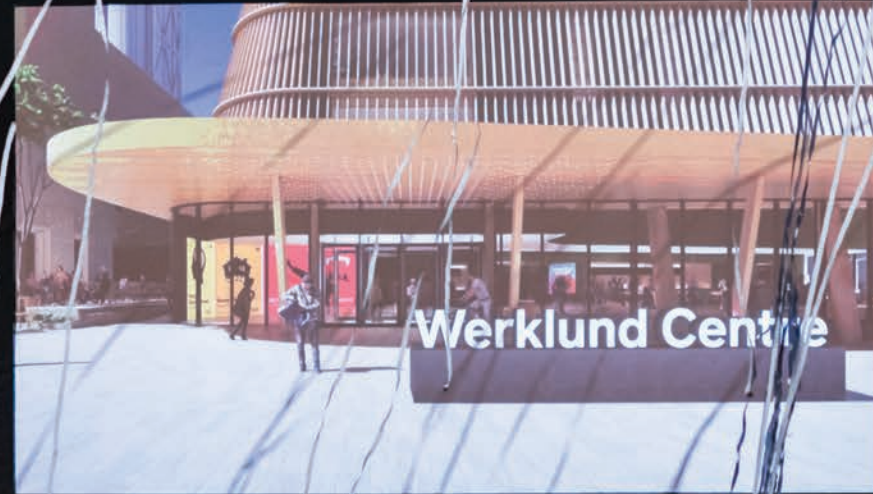
A significant city-building and cultural initiative, Olympic Plaza Transformation (OPT) will see the 35-year-old Olympic Plaza transformed into a modern, innovative and flexible space for Calgary's downtown core. The alignment in planning and design of Olympic Plaza's transformation, with the adjacent \$270M modernization of Arts Commons, will allow for design

synergies, construction efficiencies, and coordinated leadership, supporting Arts Commons' vision for a larger, more integrated campus.

Another major milestone took place in March of 2024, when the Alberta Government announced a commitment of \$103 million to support the Arts Commons and Olympic Plaza Transformation projects. This substantial commitment paved the way for an even bigger funding announcement in June of 2024.

But first, after two years of meticulous planning and design work, Arts Commons, Calgary Municipal Land Corporation (CMLC), and its partners at The City of Calgary were thrilled to reveal the architectural design for our expansion, which will feature a 1,000-seat theatre and 200-seat studio theatre. Behind the expansion's modern and striking design is a team of internationally recognized architects and designers from Toronto's KPMB Architects, Calgary's Hindle Architects, and Calgary-based Tawaw Architecture Collective. In discussion with Indigenous consultants including a mix of artists, Elders Knowledge Keepers, and other community members, The expansion building's curved form, exterior cladding, and interior finishes are inspired by Alberta's dramatic landscapes and regional lodge ►





Werklund Centre



Alex Sarian, President & CEO, shares announcement of Arts Commons receiving the largest philanthropic gift to the performing arts sector in Canadian history from Dave Werklund and Family in support of the ACT/OPT projects. ©Will Young



Premier Danielle Smith and Arts Commons Board Chair David Smith. ©Will Young

typologies. With a naturally lit, fully transparent ground floor, the design team placed importance on the southeast corner where a gathering circle with a skylight provides space that welcomes Calgarians and encourages visitors to come together and share stories.

The prime design team also included Level Playing Field, an accessibility consultant to ensure the new spaces are inclusive and accessible for all. The main floor entry and both stages are set flush to the adjacent pedestrian realm to allow for barrier free access to the performance spaces and central elevators allow access to theatre seating at all levels.



Students of Lake Bonavista School on Olympic Plaza. ©Lake Bonavista School

It was with immense excitement that Arts Commons announced on June 26 the largest philanthropic gift to the performing arts in Canadian history, thanks to a transformational commitment of \$75 million from Albertan Dave Werklund and his family. This incredible gift raised the secured funding for the transformation of the Arts Commons campus to over three quarters of its \$660M goal. In addition to contributing to construction costs, Arts Commons will create the Dave Werklund Education Wing and will be buoyed by the inspiration of the Werklund legacy to shift our organization in its role as a modern cultural centre in Canada — one that blends arts, education, social enterprise, and greater civic dialogue.

A Strong Season for the Books

Embarking on our mission to transform ourselves inside and out from a performing arts centre to a cultural civic hub, Arts Commons staff challenged many of our established precedents to discover new, more effective ways of giving the best possible experience to our stakeholders, patrons, donors, and sponsors. Taking on ambitious new concerts and presentations, including a world premiere with National Geographic, paved the way for opportunities in sponsorship. We fostered relationships with community partners to secure longer engagements, and by revisiting the way that we collectively manage our venues, we opened the door for greater utilization of our many resources. These efforts, combined with the efforts of our experienced and passionate team, have resulted in an operational surplus of \$183,756.

Development exceeded budget by 17% and welcomed new Arts Commons Presents season sponsors including Acera Insurance, EllisDon, and geoLOGIC Systems. *Plaza for All* generated excitement for the future of our campus evidenced by the generous support of the consortium of consultants working on the Arts Commons and Olympic Plaza Transformation projects. The team's successful grant application for the Civic Partner Community Safety Grant supported the expansion of our security strategy; this meant we were able to further our goal of working from a compassion-based model when interacting with vulnerable members of our downtown community.

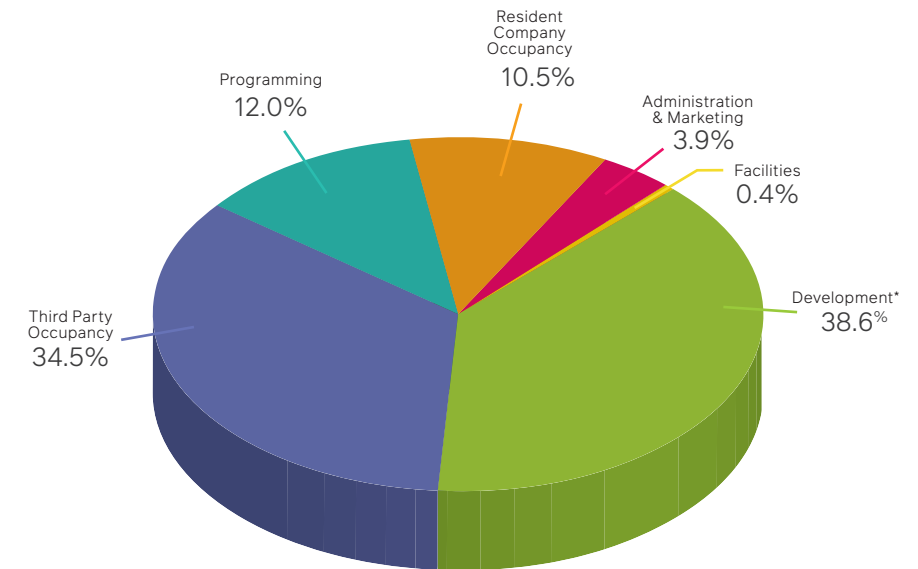
This grant also helped us add additional hardware (including exterior security cameras, lighting and radios), as well as an additional resources to our security team. The bulk of this work was accomplished in the 2023-24 season with staff support running into the 2024-25 season.

We were also able to leverage the exceptional work done by Arts Commons Education to secure a grant from the Werklund Foundation for three years.

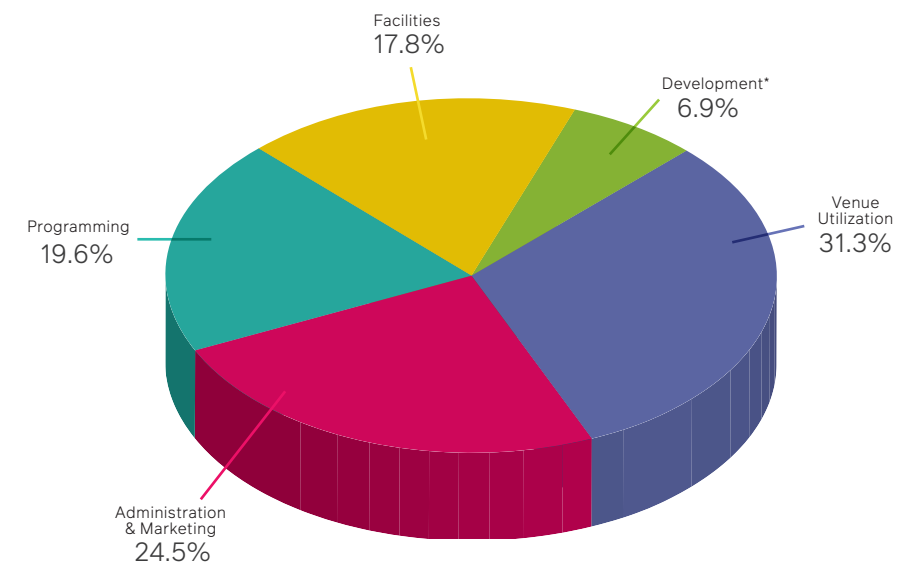
Our Venue Operations team facilitated and executed over 2,000 activities throughout the building ranging from performances, rehearsals, graduations, education programs, and lectures which allowed us to increase revenues more than \$323K (net \$132K) over our original budget. Some notable events included the Kawalease – Arab Canadian Theatre who brought their show *Interrogation* قى قى قى to the Engineered Air Theatre, as well as utilizing other spaces for various workshops. Young Women in Energy held their YWE Awards celebration here inspiring women to pursue careers in energy.

While we had great success in contributed revenue and most earned revenue streams, we did fall slightly under our ticket sales targets. There was continued inflationary pressure on expenses but we were able to keep facility operations expenses inline by renewing contracts at less than inflation and were able to bring administrative expenses in at \$50K lower than budgeted which helped bring our year ending surplus in at 33% higher than budgeted.

Revenue \$15,813,778



Expenses \$15,630,022



*Includes Gift and Services in kind

The Power of Giving

Arts Commons is fortunate to be supported by a strong base of donors and sponsors who generously gift their resources, supporting the true definition of philanthropy, “promoting the welfare of others, expressed especially by the generous donation of money to good causes.” Without their support, a ticket to any given show would be significantly more expensive than what patrons currently pay, arts education programs would be non-existent, and the mentorship and growth of local and emerging artists would not be possible.

A supporter of Arts Commons when the building opened in 1985, The Nickle Family Foundation has since contributed to Arts Commons’ accessibility and inclusion initiatives, such as the addition of

accessible seating in the Jack Singer Concert Hall in the late 90s, and the Indigenous Cultural Mediation Project during the 2021-22 season. Arts Commons applied to The Nickle Family Foundation this season to secure funds to support Tribe Arts Society’s Indigenous-led Monday Rap Night. These funds go to creating a safe space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth to gather and share their creativity including food, equipment rentals, and artist fees for the musicians leading the weekly sessions. By Arts Commons supporting Monday Rap Night, it not only makes the weekly event possible, but also provides greater capacity for Tribe Arts Society to continue to make a positive impact in our community and use the work as a springboard into other projects locally and nationally. ►

“We wanted to create that [Monday Rap Night YYC] because there’s a gap, especially as native people and it’s not just native people who come here, everybody comes here, so we’re a sober place where hip hop lives that’s for everybody.”

– Dwight Good Eagle Farahat, founder of the Tribe Artist Society.

“We want to help in the development of a fulsome arts community. Right now, we support Tribe Artist Society. Organizations like them would historically be placed in a community centre, on the fringe. Providing an opportunity for varying artists and voices to come together in an artistic hub like Arts Commons, this increases visibility and advances reconciliation, inclusion, and diversity.”

– Jodi Smid, The Nickle Family Foundation



Little Chief performs with Monday Rap Night in the Arts Learning Centre.



“The unique vision by the Arts Commons leadership team to host several matinee programs for students inspired us to become contributors to the National Geographic Live program. We often wonder what life-changing impact the program may have on their career paths.”

- Doug Flaig and Helen Timmons, National Geographic Engagement Sponsors

“Our social structures are multifaceted and it is imperative that we support organizations like Arts Commons that create an environment and culture that allows all people to thrive. Organizations like Arts Commons require consistent support.”

- Evelyn Ferchuk of ConocoPhillips Canada

Another longtime supporter, ConocoPhillips Canada, has helped make it possible for tens of thousands of students to access the arts, both through the ConocoPhillips Hub for Inspired Learning and the wildly inspirational National Geographic Live series. During the 2023-24 season, 618 students immersed themselves in experiential creative learning through the ConocoPhillips Hub for Inspired Learning (39% more than the year prior) and 8,489 were introduced to a whole new way of thinking about the world through National Geographic Live. ConocoPhillips Canada believes strongly that organizations like Arts Commons make Calgary a better place to live.

Over the 15-year relationship with Arts Commons their support has never faltered, even during the pandemic when all gathering spaces were mandated closed. This work has also been supported by patrons as evidenced by Doug Flaig and Helen Timmons, who have served as Explorers Circle Engagement Sponsors of National Geographic Live since 2017-18 and supported *T. rex Rises* with Dr. Lindsay Zanno during

the 2023-24 season. Engagement Sponsors support Arts Commons in bringing the National Geographic Explorers to Calgary to share incredible first-hand accounts from the field, usually paired with high-definition photography or videography.

Another passionate supporter of National Geographic Live, Swiftsure Foundation entered its third season of supporting Arts Commons Presents. Without their additional 2023-24 support of *Secrets of the Whales*, Arts Commons Presents would not have been able to bring this world premiere to the Calgary stage. With a nearly sold-out run of three public performance and one student presentation, this impactful look into the complex lives of whales was shared with over 6,000 members of the public, including 1,600 students.

The impact of philanthropy cannot be overestimated, and Arts Commons is grateful to those individuals, organizations, and funding bodies who have recognized the power and impact of the arts.

Arts Commons is the steward of one of Canada's largest arts centres, and the artistic and civic cornerstone of Calgary's downtown core, comprised of six world-class resident companies. The organization's strategic priorities include supporting the artists and arts organizations that call Arts Commons home, including more than 200 community groups that utilize our facilities to realize their missions, and to foster opportunities for collaboration across our cultural campus. By championing inclusion and reconciliation, and increasing the accessibility and reach of the arts in Calgary, we are reimagining the performing arts and ensuring their rightful place at the centre of civic life.

We wish to express our sincere appreciation to the following corporations, foundations and government agencies that provided the support that made it possible for Arts Commons to contribute to the social, economic, cultural, and intellectual life and well-being of our community.

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- Canadian Heritage
- Canada Arts Presentation Fund
- National Day for Truth and Reconciliation
- Community Foundations of Canada
- Employment and Social Development Canada
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Sector Innovation and Development



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ACT Capital Campaign

Great cities invest in their futures. The Arts Commons Transformation (ACT) project represents the largest investment in any arts centre in the country – a testament to Calgary’s commitment to the arts and its appreciation of their transformative, city-building power.

We are grateful to the following for their support of ACT that will give Calgary an extraordinary campus that reflects the diverse perspectives of its citizens and makes the arts available, accessible, and relevant to all.

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Circo Circo Gala

Arts Commons is where education meets exploration and discovery through the arts. We are transforming the learning experience for young people and the educators who reach them with the tools, resources, and the support they need to feed their curiosity and become engaged, empathetic, and resilient citizens of tomorrow.

We are grateful to the following donors and sponsors that have come together in support of Arts Commons Education and our work with Calgary’s youth.

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National Geographic Live drives impact by featuring an international community of Explorers: leading scientists, educators, storytellers, conservationists, technologists, photographers, filmmakers, and many other changemakers, that drive new knowledge, advance new solutions, and inspire positive transformative change.

We are grateful to the following members of Explorers Circle that help Arts Commons present National Geographic Live, which offers unparalleled content and inspiration for student & public audiences.

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Holly Clark, Jon Handforth with National Geographic Explorer Andy Mann at an Explorers Circle event. ©Will Young

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Janine LaBossiere at the Explorers Circle dinner. ©Will Young

Arts Commons
**FOUNDERS
CIRCLE**

Our community helps us create a home where audiences, artists, and organizations can experience excellence on stage and behind the scenes: in our many programs for children, teachers, and aspiring artists; for the companies who call Arts Commons home; and to the hundreds of community-based organizations that depend on our support and facilities.

We are grateful to the following members of Founders Circle that support our mission and our collective success, making world-class arts and culture experiences accessible to all Calgarians.

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Gord Will
Teresa Willigar
Nichole Windblad
Deborah Winston
Garth Wong
Iris Wong
Karen Worrell
Robert Worthington
Teghan Yanover
Anonymous



Wilmer Aburto and Ken Havard at an Founders Circle event. ©Will Young

Clem & Lynn Feldmeyer
Peter Feldstein
Maria Lourdes Fericgla Rovira
Galen Finnman
Michelle Flaa
Sandy Freema
Shannon Galenkamp

Nancy Hicks Mahler
Jim Higgins
Paul Hoogenboom
Anastasia Huculiak
Janet Hutchinson
Niza Ibarra Avalos
Karyn Ironside
Peter Jackson

Zach Lyster
Jill Mackenzie
Cathy & Wallace Macnaughton
Glenda Magallon
Vaughn Marillier
George Marquardt
Gloria Mazloun



Terry Aalders
Head of Sound

Jordan Alvarez
Facility Maintenance

Shannon Ambrose
Administrative Coordinator

Sheena Baird
Associate Director, Ticketing Services

Timothy Beattie
Senior Finance Administrator

Brian Beaulieu
Director, Venue Operations

Alex Bonyun
Manager, Community & Media Relations

Samir Boubenna
Manager, IT

Blair Burrows
Bar Operations Supervisor

Terry Bursey
Ticketing Services Supervisor

Nathaniel Cherinet-Sahilu
HR Coordinator

Kevin Chin
Security Supervisor

Shanique Chisholm
HR & Operations Coordinator

Alycia Chornohus
House Manager

Cameron Clowe
Associate Production Manager

Cheryl Cornelson
Senior Development Officer

Joshua Dalledonne
Associate Director, Creative

Katherine Dekruyf-Zuber
Executive Administrative Assistant

Kelsey Deveraturda
Executive Administrative Assistant

Colleen Dickson
VP & Chief Operating Officer

Kaija Dirkson
VP, Brand & Audience Development

Keane Eng
Associate Head of Sound
& Production System Technician

Gregory Epton
VP & Chief Advancement Officer

Kiani Evans
Manager, Digital Communications

Henry Falls
Ticketing Services Associate

Arran Fisher
Associate Head of Sound

Megan Fox
Client & Patron Lead

Matthew Gault
Associate Production Manager

Alexandra Gibson
Booking Logistics Coordinator

Matthew Gilbutowicz
Associate Head of Lighting

Jaclyn Gowie
Head of Stage

Courtney Groot
Marketing & Communications Coordinator

David Gustafson
Security Supervisor

Shannon Hipson
Associate Head of Stage

Jason Ho
Bar Operations Coordinator

Stephanie Hutchinson
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Kim Imhoff
Finance Administrator

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Vice President, Strategic Projects

Kris Ladd
Head of Lighting

Ian Lane
Technical Coordinator
Engineered Air Theatre

Rafal Lichman
Director, Capital Projects

Sanja Lukac
Senior Curator, Visual & Media Arts

Antonia MacConnell
Graphic Designer

Carly Maga
Senior Manager, Communications
& Public Relations

Sunny Mand
Database System Administrator

Breezy Manning
Facility Operations Supervisor

Marinya Marcichiw
Event Services Coordinator

Glenn Miguel
Manager, People & Culture

David Mikkelsen
Manager, Security & Life Safety

Daniel Mills
Director, Development

Emmanuel Mukandwa
Junior Database Administrator

Marcus Ogden
Ticketing Services Associate

Lance Olson
Director, Facility Operations

Amy Packham
Manager, Ticketing Services

Kyle Perry
Junior Technical Support

Ekaterina Pervakova
Controller

Bren Pladsen
Digital Experience & Multimedia Designer

Cody Rilling
Security Supervisor

Jessica Ritchie
Administrative & Accounting Coordinator

Jennifer Roberts
Education Specialist

Terry Rowley
Help Desk Analyst

Alex Sarian
President & CEO

Jahdayl Spence
Programming Coordinator

Alynn Spence
Chief of Staff

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Vice President, Programming

Nicole Swanson
Senior Manager, Marketing & Sales

Lucy Tan
Accounting Technician

Megan Thatcher
Head of Stage

Meaghan Underhill
Development Officer

Dena Vahle
Social Media Coordinator

Christopher Vereshagin
Digital Marketing & E-Communications
Lead

Montana Versluys
Scheduling Coordinator

Chantel Wons
Associate Director, Event Services

Phillip Wu
Event Services Coordinator

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Ruhee Ismail-Teja

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Arun Lakra

Jim Laycraft
(One Yellow Rabbit)

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