

PAPER MILL PLAYHOUSE – Mark S. Hoebee, Producing Artistic Director

1/29/24 Public Session

Paper Mill is a not-for-profit arts institution and was one of the early founders of the regional theater movement. We are not a commercial entity like a Broadway theatre, we exist as a service organization providing entertainment, arts education and access services to the residents of our surrounding communities. We are the largest producing musical theater in the state, meaning that what you see on our stage was cast, rehearsed and created by the Paper Mill team, sometime with commercial partners or in collaboration with other regional theatres, but always specifically for our patrons. It is true that many of our shows enjoy a life after their run at Paper Mill, some go on tour, some move to Broadway – like our recent production of THE GREAT GATSBY which just announced it will open in NY in March – but unlike presenting venues like NJPAC, Morristown PAC, and The Count Basie who book in their shows, Paper Mill creates what you see on our stage.

It's no secret that we are known mostly for our high-quality mainstage productions but that is only a portion of what our organization does to serve our community.

To begin with, between our mainstage productions, our Weekend Childrens Theater and On-School Time performances, and Arts Education classes and programs Paper Mill brings over 200,000 people to Millburn each and every year.

Our Education programs reach over 40,000 students in 19 of the state's 21 counties. We have Theater School classes that operate year-round and which are held both at the theater and at the Paper Mill Studios downtown. One of our most impactful programs is the Adopt A School program which provides arts education and experiences for 16 high schools that cycle through a 4-year series which begins by bringing students to Paper Mill to see shows, sends artists to the schools for workshops, places an artist in residence at each school as the students create their own theatrical production and then in the last year brings the students back to Paper Mill as part of the Young Critics Program where each student must write and submit a review of the shows they see. This improves their critical thinking, power of analysis and improves their writing skills.

At the end of each year, we hold our Rising Star Awards ceremony which is a Tony Awards style celebration of excellence in New Jersey high school musical theatre. Awards are presented in the same categories as the Tony's but also includes acknowledgement for all aspects of togethwhat it takes to put on a high school musical. This year we will send professional adjudicators to evaluate productions at more than 100 schools in order to decide which are deserving of a Rising Star Award.

Over the summer we hold our Summer Musical Theater Conservatory which is a 5-week competitive and intensive series of classes in all disciplines of the musical theater art form

culminating in the New Voices Concert which is a full staged, choreographed and orchestrated performance showcasing the talents of over 120 of the area's most talented young performers. Paper Mill provides over \$55,000 in both merit and financial need-based scholarships each year for this. We also have a 2-week Summer Intensive program, which is a condensed version of the SMTC and several sessions of Theater Camp which run in July and August for those young people who are just starting out or want to learn more about musical theater.

In addition to arts education, access is a very important component of the work we do. Paper Mill provides access services to each of its mainstage productions. Those services include but are not limited to, large-print and Braille programs, Open Captioning (which Paper Mill pioneered in the early 1980's) ASL signed performances for those with hearing loss and audio described performances for the visually impaired. I'm not sure if you are aware, but Paper Mill was the very first theater in the country to have a comprehensive Autism Friendly performance, a model that has been copied by Broadway and by hundreds of theaters across the country. We have an Autism Advisory Board that we work with to keep up to date on all the most appropriate accommodations and the supporting services that allow for a judgement-free environment for these families and young people to enjoy a live theater event. Several years ago, our Director of Education, Outreach and Access, Lisa Cooney and I were invited to Washington, DC to speak with the National Endowment for the Arts about our Autism Friendly performances and since that visit, Paper Mill has shared all of our tips, techniques and resources with theaters all over the United States.

Out of the AF performances grew our Theater For Everyone Initiative which provides arts education classes for students with a variety of physical and cognitive challenges free of charge. The classes are open to include parents, siblings and other members of the students' family groups.

For many years we have been working with the Pilar School on a project called Lend Your Voice. The students at the Pilar school have some severe challenges some of in wheelchairs, many are on the autism spectrum and a good number of them are non-verbal, still, their school director wanted them to be able to participate in one of the most important milestones in one's middle school and high school years – the school musical. Well, Paper Mill discovered a way to help. Paper Mill's neuro-typical students record the songs and dialogue for the Pilar students. So, they literally LEND their voices to make a fully realized musical. It is one of the most moving performances you will ever witness.

Several years ago Paper Mill began offering Community Engagement Nights at the theater. At these special performances, Paper Mill offers tickets free of charge to organizations that work with under-resourced and marginalized constituencies. Some of those groups include:

Organizations that come to community night:
Opportunity Project (Millburn based organization)

First Baptist Church of Millburn
Essex County Civic Club
Essex County Cops for Kids
Jewish Community Housing Corporation
NJ Veterans Network
Paterson Music Project
Refugee Assistance Partners of New Jersey (RAP)

Paper Mill has an art gallery located on the second floor of our lobby and over the past decade we have dedicated that space to showcasing local artists. We are currently working with Jesus Nunez, who has a gallery in Millburn, to curate a different showing for each mainstage production. Some recent highlights included

PMP Celebrates (Global Heritage Months we have paid special emphasis to are bolded):

- A Gallery Exhibition for **Native American Heritage Month** featuring the Red Dress Project and the work of Oleana Whispering Dove and Jeremy Dennis.
- **Black History Month** celebrations including current gallery exhibition titled Afrofuturism: 100 Years After the Harlem Renaissance

In addition, we have saluted other cultures with live events:

- Last May we held an **Asian American and Pacific Islander Celebration** in collaboration with the Millburn Short Hills Desi Club, Millburn Short Hills Korean Parents Organization and the Millburn Short Hills Chinese Association (who awarded us a plaque of appreciation for our ongoing partnership.)
- Each June we hold **Pride** celebrations centering LGBTQ+ history and family friendly spaces such as student performances, poetry, drag, and other community centered events.
- **Last Fall in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month** in our courtyard we had a Bomba y Plena Performance from Segunda Quimbamba and Peruvian Folkdance from Peru Inca Folk,

We have provided entertainment in the form of professional and student singers for Millburn Township events like the Winter Walk and recently, we renewed our relationship with the Millburn Middle School by providing a special performance just for those students of our recent production of FIDDLER ON THE ROOF. We are talking about ways to continue that effort for upcoming seasons and also hope to have two sections of our Summer Conservatory in residence at the Middle School this summer. All those talks are currently happening.