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Despite Closed Doors, Pay What You Can and Live Streaming Bring Near West Theatre Closer to Community

The community theater will present Pay What You Can ticketing and streaming options in its upcoming season

CLEVELAND – Near West Theatre (NWT) announces yet another season of firsts, featuring Pay What You Can access for every show as well as new online streaming.

“One of our priorities has been evaluating our organizational values and improving opportunities for accessibility and inclusion,” says Mike Obertacz, Executive Director, NWT. “With feedback from the community, it was clear that our Thursday ‘Pay What You Can’ performances were very successful in engaging diverse new community members from our immediate geographic area. We are now committed to removing all barriers to engagement by extending this opportunity to every performance in our main season lineup, for every seat in the house, and are hopeful this growth will continue.”

Access to the theatre’s in-person shows was previously set at \$10 General Admission—a rate that was set with accessibility in mind—with center-section Star Seats offered for \$25.

“We recognized that neither a tiered ticketing nor a one-size-fits-all approach were the best fit for a community with such diverse financial background as ours,” says Bailey Pfohl, Audience and Community Development Manager at NWT. “Our new model focuses on equity and meeting people where they are. Although we are setting our standard ticket pricing at a suggested price of \$15 for any seat, attendees will pay what they can afford – for some people that will be \$5, for others it may be \$25. Data shows that patrons will show up at a realistic level for their personal circumstance. We trust that this will hold true in our community as well, and we are so excited to see what this does for our engagement in spite of the stressors of the pandemic.”

With COVID-19 safety precautions in mind, the first two shows of the theatre’s season will be offered solely online via streaming through NWT’s online ticketing platform.

“It’s a big change, but an exciting one. We’ve jumped into online streaming in a big way to transition the organization to streamed productions for this season, and have been grateful to learn a lot from fellow theatres across the city as we step into this first-time experience,” says Trinidad Snider, Artistic Director of NWT. “We’ll continue to stay adaptive for as long as the pandemic wears on.”

When the time comes for in-person shows, the organization is excited about how the new Pay What You Can access for every show will make all seats affordable for all patrons.

“We are confident that by making those center seats available at any price, we will truly make our performances and entire theatre accessible to people and families of all financial means. Our community



now has the opportunity of choosing any seats they like in an equitable and fair first-come, first-served basis.”

The Pay What You Can model will be integrated into Near West Theatre’s new online ticketing system, which will make purchasing tickets easier and more streamlined for attendees. “We are continually grateful to the Cleveland Foundation for their gift which enabled us to update NWT’s organizational technology infrastructure with a new website (designed by Form Group) and ticketing system (by Agile Ticketing Solutions). These changes will ultimately alleviate the burden on staff capacity and simultaneously improve online sales capabilities – while making it simpler for patrons to purchase and select tickets,” says Obertacz.

Patrons interested in learning more about the theatre’s upcoming season can visit their newly-rebuilt website to learn more and to purchase streaming access for their upcoming show, *Rise: The Isolation Project* at www.nearwesttheatre.org.

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About Near West Theatre

Near West Theatre builds loving relationships and engages diverse people in strengthening their sense of identity, passion, and purpose, individually and in community, through accessible, affordable and transformational theatre arts experiences. Since 1978, Near West Theatre has been shaping, changing, even saving the lives of children, teens and adults. The community theater hosts a variety of free community events and free after school programs to underline its commitment to accessibility for all people. The organization serves people of all ages, but a focus on youth goes back to its founding and continues to this day.