Changing the Narrative:
Wonderlust Productions Progress Report
First Years
When we tell stories, we create our community.

Wonderlust Productions is proud to be creating new stories for a new century as we work toward a more just and equitable future for everyone together. Our activities build empathy, understanding, social cohesion, nurture creative and personal potential, entertain, and transform.

5300 people have seen our work, shared their stories, sat for interviews, participated in creative workshops, or starred in our shows.

Generations have been represented on stage with children as young as 8 and actors as old as 80. We’ve connected people who would never normally meet across the barriers that money, ethnicity, politics, and power create. Working together, we’ve been able to make beautiful, new experiences where every Minnesotan has a chance to be seen and understood.

Our aim is to subvert the myths that generalization and simplification create, and the tyranny of systemic inequities that keep people’s true experiences hidden. By inviting and empowering the full diversity of a community, we can share the deeper truths of complexity, conflict, comedy and tragedy. By cultivating a radically inclusive creative space where all voices drive content and form, and supporting those voices with the best of theatrical craft, we create art that changes the way our audiences see the world and their place in it.

Our mission is to forge new ways of seeing our common experiences by creating new art that transforms the past into a better future.

Our method is to listen, wonder, create, and repeat.

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WHAT PEOPLE SAY:

“Pure genius, the way they wove such an intricate play together around true stories and facts.”

“Being part of the #AdoptionPlayProject was moving on so many levels for me. In part personally healing, in part uncovering a history with adoption long past, and in part an honor to play a character that offers the kind of love and acceptance most of us spend a lifetime seeking. Theater is a journey that can bond people together and this topic and project really brought the participants closer.”

“The Capitol Play Project, for me, is an example of the transformative power of literature and other arts to mirror our experiences back to us in a new way and to help us build empathy for the experiences of others. It helped me put a name to something I’d felt for years. The character of Oscar, a gay, Latino nonpartisan employee, invokes what he calls the “shield of invisibility” several times during the play. As nonpartisan staff, he must stay out of any partisan discussion or activity and avoid even the appearance of any political feeling in his personal and professional lives. But he's also living in a world that politicizes who he is and his right (and the right of his communities) to exist. What the nonpartisan job requires of him is to be visible as a worker and invisible as a person. Hearing Oscar describe the "shield of invisibility" helped me understand my own experience in that job—both why it was comfortable, and, ultimately, for me, why it was oppressive—and gave me insight into my own struggle to be seen and to take up space.”

“I feel understood in a way I didn't know I needed to feel until it was given to me by this process.”

“Thank you, thank you, thank you everyone for creating the wonderful production that I saw last night about 2 years since I participated in a story circle. I was so moved to hear my own words interwoven with the stories of others in a performance with top production values!”
“A wonderful confirmation that LOVE doesn’t fix any relationship but is the best elixir available. . . Thank you to all the people who shared their stories. This was phenomenal.”

“Bravo! Bravo! What an imaginative, interesting and fun production! All the actors did a marvelous job and I thoroughly enjoyed all of it! Made me proud to be a Minnesotan. I loved all the humor, especially lots of funny lines that felt so authentic. I loved reading about your process in creating the production. Terrific show!! Thank you! Several moments in the first act were moving, made me tear up. I wish I remembered them all. The Native American woman and the bridge collapse are the only two I remember now. I loved how personal the show felt, regular people, forgotten people, all part of it.”

“I didn't know how much the play would make me think, or how directly it would engage the hottest political and social issues of the day.”

“I was in awe of the Capitol event. I didn't know what to expect, but I can tell you it totally surpassed what I might have imagined. I also learned a lot and feel more connected to the MN process and the beautiful restored Capitol, of which I knew nothing.”
FEATURED IN:

“Minnesota State Capitol is the star attraction of a new play” by Chris Hewitt, Minneapolis Star Tribune, 1/20/18

“This time, drama at State Capitol involves actors” by Marianne Combs, Minnesota Public Radio, 1/19/18

“A New Play at the State Capitol” by Mary Lahammer, Twin Cities Public Television, 1/18/18

“All the Capitol’s a stage in ‘Our House’” by Pamela Espeland, MinnPost, 1/23/18

   “Ambitious and challenging dramaturgically, logistically and financially. . . You learn something without feeling like you’re sitting in a classroom. You leave with a sense that many people who work in the Capitol are serious about serving the public, even if their version of what that means is not the same as yours.”

“Wonderlust Productions to work all year on a ‘Capitol’ idea” by Margie O’Loughlin, Midway Monitor, 2/7/17

“Professional community-driven theater partners with students for performance project” by Samantha Hoanglong, University of St. Thomas Tommie Media 4/4/18

“Our House: The Capitol Play Project by Wonderlust Productions at the Minnesota State Capitol” by Cherryandspoon.com, 1/23/18

   “I’ve never experienced anything quite like Our House. . . More impactful than any high school civics class could be, it should be required viewing for every citizen. . . as fun and playful as it is real and serious.”

Dramatists Magazine, July/August 2016 and March/April 2018


And more. . .
WHAT HAPPENS:

**Changing the narrative.** During a workshop for the Adoption Play, an adoptive parent played the role of a grandparent meeting the birth parent of her grandchild for the first time. “Thank you,” she says. A birth parent in the audience reflected “I always thought I had done a bad thing,” she said. “Until this moment, I was never able to see that maybe my choice had brought joy to someone else’s life.” Then the adoptive parent leaned forward to say that she was able to let go of a fear of birth parents she had carried around until that moment.

**Facilitating healing.** A military veteran came to a creative workshop on his 30th wedding anniversary. Somehow, using the *Three Little Pigs* as a frame, he created a scene that became a center point of the Veteran’s Play Project, almost entirely unedited, dramatizing the trauma of his experience in war. When asked why they decided to join us on their anniversary, his wife said, “No one wants to hear this stuff. If you will listen, then this is exactly where we want to be today.”

**Inspiring action.** After seeing the Adoption Play, an audience member decided that it was time to find his birth parents—a journey that would eventually lead him out of a severe depression.

**Making connections.** Cast members in the Capitol Play who would never normally cross paths on equal ground had open conversations about the different attitudes they held toward the issues in the play.

**Nurturing creativity.** A Capitol Play cast member who had struggled for years to “find strength in her voice” was able to play a cocky politician so convincingly that passersby at the Capitol thought she was a real legislator.
BY THE NUMBERS:

5300 participants since Wonderlust was founded in 2014, including:

14 sold out public productions
60 story circles
540 story circle participants

29 creative workshops
131 community member participants
215 people provided feedback at 4 public readings

79 community member actors with
35 professional actors

25-35% of all casts and
20-40% of audiences are people of color.
50% of board of directors are women.
14% of casts and audiences self-identified with disabilities.

50% of the audience, on average, identifies with the community and
50% discover a new community in their midst.

5 weeks and
1 semester in residence at the Univ. of St. Thomas with more than
300 students overall.

1 storytelling workshop with
13 members of Nexus Youth Services Communications Staff.
OUR ENSEMBLE:

In 2017, we solidified our commitment to exceptional artists who understand our method and love to work with passionate community members.

**Megan Kim Anderson** is a graduate of the American Musical and Dramatic Academy-Los Angeles who has returned to Minnesota after 9 years acting and singing in Los Angeles.

**Gabrielle Dominique** is a 2017 graduate of St. Olaf College where she earned bachelor's degrees in Dance and Theatre. A South Minneapolis native, she has also performed with Flying Foot Forum, Stuart Pimslar Dance & Theater, Perspectives Theater, Playwrights Center, Artistry, Theater Latté Da, Ordway Center for the Performing Arts, Guthrie Theater.

**Zeb Hults** is a recent transplant to Minneapolis from New York City and Connecticut. He is currently the Assistant Technical Director for the Theatre Arts & Dance Dept. at the University of Minnesota.

**Ariel Leaf** is a graduate of the University of Minnesota with a BA in Theatre Arts. She is an actor, lighting designer, director, a company member of Freshwater Theatre and Co-Artistic Director of Fortune’s Fool.

**Delinda “Oogie” Pushetonequa** is a member of the Meskwaki Nation in Tama, Iowa. Oogie also holds an MFA in Theatre: Design & Technology from University of Missouri-Kansas City.

**Adam Whisner** has been a full-time actor in the Twin Cities since age twenty-five, doing theatre, corporate/educational video, and commercial TV, radio, and Web advertising. Adam has been the voice of dozens of regional national brands, and his stage acting has been recognized in Lavender Magazine and City Pages, where he was named Best Actor in the 2016 “Best of the Twin Cities” annual review.
CO-ARTISTIC DIRECTORS:

Alan M. Berks, Co-Artistic Director, is a theater-maker whose work has been seen in Minneapolis, Chicago, San Francisco, Phoenix, Albuquerque, Indianapolis, and New York. Recent non-Wonderlust Productions include Complicated Fun at the History Theatre; Feast of Wolves at Workhaus Collectives last season; and Pillsbury House Theatre’s first iteration of The Great Divide: Plays for a Divided Nation. Other work includes his solo show Goats, set in the Middle East after Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination, which has been produced in Phoenix, Indianapolis, Chicago, New York, and St. Paul, MN. Awards include: Minnesota State Arts Board (Ringtone), MacDowell Colony Fellow (They Want), and Jerome Fellow (Mourning Rituals). Alan is also a teacher, communications consultant, and co-founder and former editor of MinnesotaPlaylist.com.

Leah Cooper, Co-Artistic Director, has been directing, producing, and managing in theater for over 30 years. Locally, she has directed for Park Square Theatre, History Theatre, Commonweal Theatre, Gremlin Theater, 20% Theatre, Theatre in the Round, Shakespearean Youth Theatre, The Playwrights Center, and for the Breaking Ice (diversity and inclusion) program at Pillsbury House & Theatre. She was the first Executive Director of the MN Theater Alliance serving over 450 theaters across the state, co-founding Partner at MNPlaylist.com, and Executive Director at the MN Fringe Festival. Leah is also a facilitator, trainer, and consultant in community engagement, business planning, governance, and infrastructure systems, and she spent 10 years in the corporate sector as a software engineer and business consultant.

OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS:
Erica Fields, President, Brooks Grain, LLC
Ashley Hanson, Artistic Director, PlaceBase Productions
Jack Reuler, Artistic Director, Mixed Blood Theater
Ned Rousmaniere, EAP/Organizational Health, State of Minnesota
Maren Ward, Artistic Director, zAmya Theater Project; Founding Artist, Bedlam Theatre
Alan Berks, Co-Artistic Director, Wonderlust Productions
Leah Cooper, Co-Artistic Director, Wonderlust Productions

Inaugural Board Members:
Julie Guidry, Executive Director, Upstream Arts; Wu Chen Khoo, Director, Technical Tools of the Trade; Harry Waters, Jr., Professor, Macalester College
WHERE WE GO FROM HERE:

Wonderlust is growing fast

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Wonderlust Productions incorporates. Adoption Play story circles begin.</td>
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<td>2015</td>
<td>Knight Foundation Arts Challenge award winner. Partnership with University of St. Thomas begins.</td>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>Mardag Foundation funds start-up costs for space and artist stipends. <em>Six Characters in Search of an Author</em> produced. <em>In My Heart: Adoption Play Project</em> produced.</td>
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<td>2017</td>
<td>Artistic Directors and ensemble become employees.</td>
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<td>2018-2020</td>
<td>Distribute community stories on more platforms to reach more people with projects past and present, including: Overachievers Web Series, Adoption Play graphic novel, <em>Cringe</em>: a storytelling Sound installation, virtual reality, communal ritual, and more.</td>
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We need you to be a part of our community now more than ever as we hit this crucial juncture in our evolution. We can multiply our impact quickly in the next three years as we bring our work to more communities whose stories are too often ignored or misunderstood—stories that are essential to understanding how we all can live together better in the future.

Thank you,

[Signatures]

COMPLETED:

- *In My Heart: The Adoption Play Project* (Sold out!)
- *Our House: The Capitol Play Project* (Sold out!)
- *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (in partnership with Park Square Theatre and University of St. Thomas)
- *Dear Future Self* (on the University of St. Thomas campus)
- *Veterans Play Project* (as Footprints Collective in partnership with Mixed Blood Theatre)

IN PROCESS:

- *Incarceration Play Project*
- *Overachievers Web Series*
- *Normandale Community College Play Project*
- Organizational Services

IN DEVELOPMENT:

- *Adoption Play Project* graphic novel
- Ritual for the release of ambiguous lose
- A community-driven adaptation of *The Bacchae*
- *Cringe*: an audio-only story gathering project
- *Capitol Play Project* civic engagement process
- And much much more.
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