

WACO THEATER CENTER

2022-2023

inaugural **ANNUAL REPORT OF COMMUNITY IMPACT**



background image
Artist **Camden Coley** in
Marty and the Hands that Could



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about

WACO THEATER CENTER

WACO (Where Art Can Occur) Theater Center is a performing and visual arts organization that presents, commissions and develops artistic works dedicated to stories of the African diaspora.

Co-Founded by **Richard Lawson** and **Tina Knowles**, WACO provides artists and young people a platform to voice and showcase their creativity in order to connect and inspire others.

WACO's artistic and education programs are driven by four values. We create work that unapologetically:

- **Centers Black art and culture** from a diasporic lens and voice.
- **Incubates and launches new creative ideas** to memorialize the past and envision the future of Black life.
- **Is collaborative** and leads with an Ubuntu mindset, "I am, because we are."
- **Serves the needs of the community** including the social, economic and civic priorities of our neighbors and Black Los Angeles.

Now in our seventh season, we have continued to elevate an emphasis on the history of the African diaspora and culture in our programming.



The artists' role is to raise the consciousness of the people. To make them understand life, the world and themselves more completely."

- Amiri Baraka

Dear Friends,

As a leadership team, we know that the arts are powerful and can transform the lives of individuals and communities, no matter your zip code. We are living testimonies to its power and WACO is the manifestation of this, expressed through our commitment to artists, young people and community members like you.

When WACO first opened its doors, there was a limited number of physical spaces and financial support for Black artmaking and storytelling in Los Angeles. We filled a critical void by establishing an artistic home for these artists and invited audiences and young people to see themselves and be inspired.

Our 2022/23 season, **Black with a Capital B**, helped illuminate this mandate.

This program year we returned to live performance and in-person events. With generous support from sponsors and partners, we increased our impact ten fold and reached more community members in Los Angeles and beyond.

Please read our inaugural annual report of impact. We hope to leave you inspired, and excited to join our ongoing efforts to create a place where art can occur.



Shay Wafer
Executive Director

background image
Executive Director **Shay Wafer** at
Black Women on the Rise Film Festival

our impact

BY THE NUMBERS

Summarized below is a composite of our impact through our engagement with artists, young people and community members through our in-person and online artistic and mentorship offerings.

888

YOUTH SERVED

42K

SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS

157

ARTISTS SERVED

358

WACO TV SUBSCRIBERS

3,664

TICKETS SOLD

9

GRADUATING SENIORS ATTENDING COLLEGE

8M

EARNED MEDIA IMPRESSIONS

39K

WEBSITE VISITORS

OUR APPROACH TO IMPACT

**We firmly believe in the power that art and mentorship have to be transformative.
We fulfill our mission through the following program areas:**

Performing Arts

Presenting live and virtual dance, theater, music, film, and interdisciplinary events by emerging and established artists

Visual Arts

Showcasing the work of visual artists in our gallery across various artistic disciplines, including painting, drawing, sculpture and more

Mentorship

Building dreams of the next generation through mentorship, to facilitate growth of young people from 8th grade through high school graduation and beyond

Education

Providing opportunities for our audiences to move the culture forward through public dialogue and hands on experiences—linking communities, artists and audiences together

background image
Exhibited work of Artist **April Bey** at
WITNESS



FILM

JANUARY 2023

Black Terror Film

Black Terror is a co-production in partnership with **Newark Symphony Hall** and **Yendor Theatre Company** and was originally produced off-Broadway fifty years ago. Writer **Richard Wesley's** *Black Terror* returns in a new film adaptation under the direction of **Richard Lawson**. We completed principal photography this past January and expect an official film release in 2024. [Read More](#)



MUSIC

JANUARY 2023

South Side Symphony

Conductor and composer **Dr. Marcus Norris** and the **South Side Symphony Orchestra** opened the 2022/23 season with a musical trip sharing their collective vision for the Black future. Drawing inspiration from their motto "Our Music in Our Time" and the Afro futurism movement, South Side Symphony crafted a melodic interrogation of the Black future and invited listeners to give voice to their hopes and dreams through vulnerability. [Read More](#)



DANCE

FEBRUARY 2023

Black Hömer

The first in our Artist-In-Residence series, choreographer **Fríidom Dunn** presented *Black Hömer* revealing an alternative window in which to explore—“Epic”—poetry in motion. The Greek author and poet Hömer has been noted as “the greatest of all time...” but to whose standards? Creator and choreographer Fríidom Dunn allowed audiences to recognize the Odyssey-like journey we each are on, and through *Black Hömer* invited communities along the fantastical journey of his. [Learn More](#)



FILM

MARCH 2023

8th Annual Plan A: Black Women on the Rise Film Festival

Plan A: Black Women on the Rise Film Festival, is an annual showcase of short films by Black women to empower Black women. Presented in partnership with **MPACT Events**, the program celebrates the artistry of filmmakers, producers, writers, and actors, to bridge the gap between emerging and established industry leaders. Each year one filmmaker receives a production grant, based on voting by audience members. [Learn More](#)



THEATRE

MARCH 2023

HANG TIME

This spring we co-produced the world premiere production of **HANG TIME** by Pulitzer Prize Finalist **Zora Howard**, with **The Flea Theater** in New York City. *Hang Time* invites the viewer to envisage the living Black body triumphant over the legacy of violence that it holds. This co-production will have its west coast premiere during our 2023/24 season in Los Angeles. [Learn More.](#)



VISUAL ARTS

APRIL 2023

WITNESS

Co-Curated by **Tina Knowles Lawson** and **Genel Ambrose**, WITNESS was a visual art experience featuring work by Los Angeles-based Black women and non-binary artists who project their vision of the world, society, community, and themselves through their art. This exhibition was produced in collaboration with **GOOD MIRRORS** and **Black Women Photographers**. [Learn More.](#)



THEATRE

MAY 2023

Marty and the Hands that Could

In partnership with **Watts Village Theater Company** we presented the world premier of *Marty and the Hands that Could* by **Josh Wilder**, directed by **Larry Powell**. Released from prison on the eve of his 25th birthday, Marty returns home to his family, equipped with a handwritten manuscript and big dreams to turn his life around. This production was presented in Watts, CA at the Watts Labor Action Committee's Phoenix Hall. [Learn More.](#)



THEATRE

MAY 2023

The Window

The Window is a new play by **Natasha Ofili**, telling an original love story about two high school teenagers who fall in love through *The Window*. This workshop production was produced in partnership with **NioVision Productions** and **Deaf West Theater**. The work featured deaf actors, and hosted a community conversation about access in the arts. [Learn More.](#)



DANCE

JUNE 2023

Keeper of Sadness

The second residency of our season was entitled *Keeper of Sadness*. Conceived by choreographer **Jade Solomon Curtis**, the residency presented a work-in-progress dance presentation, that illuminated the countless contributions that Black women have made to ensure the livelihood of others. *Keeper of Sadness* is an expansive and versatile dance production, incorporating various artistic mediums. This project was produced in collaboration with **Solo Magic** based in Seattle, WA. [Learn More](#)



VISUAL ARTS

JUNE 2023

To Sit a While

In partnership with **The Lorraine Hansberry Initiative** we were one of the community partners for **The Lilly's To Sit A While** sculpture unveiling in **Grand Park's Olive Court**. In addition to the unveiling artist and composer **Adrian Dunn** performed a new rendition of the hallmark song *To Be Young Gifted and Black*. This project is a part of a national tour, bringing the sculpture to cities across America in 2023. [Learn More.](#)



JUNE 2023

3rd Annual Films for Teens by Teens Festival

in association with Richard Lawson Studios, we presented the 3rd Annual *Films For Teens By Teens Film Festival*. Utilizing film as a tool for self-expression, communication, and mental health awareness, this program is offered to students in our mentorship program to create new short films over the course of a yearlong program. [Learn More](#)

THANK YOU

To date, we have supported over 870 artists and 1,200 young people build their dreams.

Adrian Dunn, Alonso Malik Pirio, Byron Sleugh, Caleb Smith, Carolyn Gage, Corey Hogan, DaManuel Richardson, Devin Pruden, Felix Hernandez-Jones, Friidom, Frexinet Johnson, Golub Volodymyr, Harmony Palmore, Jaylon Black, Jennifer Floyd, Jo Siri, John Freeland Jr., Jordan Busa, Joshua Thompson, Justin Ruff, Keala, Kenneth Brown II, Keasha Ealy, Kimiko Daniels, King Oliver Trumpet, Kyle Dombroski, Madison Dorsett, Maggie Corona-Goldstein, Marcus Norris, Marlon Martinez, Marty Lamar, Nikki Shorts, Quenton Blache, Shigeru Logan, Solomon Turner, Troy Everett, Tyler Johnson, Vainayaki Sivaji, Vertrease Sanders, Akoiya Harris, Arif Gursel, Cristina Orbe, Jade Solomon Curtis, Jessica Pinkett, Lyn-Maria Boxill, Michele Dooley, Nia Amina-Minor, Nile Ruff, Ambar Matos Ortiz, Blossom Wilder, Cassandra Torrez, Chris White, Dustin "DPayne" Payne, Enom Clayton, Indigo, James "Animated J" Jimenez, Jesse Smith, John Freeland, Jr., John Nyboer, Jordan Sotero, Kae'dyn Levy (KD), Luz Gaitan, Malik "GVMBY" Bannister, Mode Korvidae, Rebekah "Beks" Denegal, Reshae Mackey, Rose Krol, Stéphen "Swizz" Banks, Tai Ryan, Thao Aishat Hasati (Miss Roots), Torrance Winder, Valencia "Free" Stallings, Zion Elamin, Aaron Shaw Adrienne Embry, Akilah Walker, Bernadette Speakes, Camden Coley Dessaline Etienne, Joshua R. Lamont, Joy DeMichelle, Matthew Elam, Montae Russell, Netfa Perry, Robert Lee Hardy, Alexis Hunley, Amber Phillips, Amber Evangelista, April Bey, Cara Elise Taylor, Dana Davenport, Dee Williams, Deun Ivory, Elise Peterson, Akua, Liam Woods, Sade Ndya, Sophia Nahli, Allison, Stephanie Mei Ling, Taylor Edwards, Tobias Truvillion, Charles Jake Johnson, Henri Franklin, Michele Morgan, Terry Daluz, Lester Purry, Nia Miranda, Curtis Scott, Candice Lenoir, Wadiah Brown, Kelly Tighe, Bria Williams, Aljanod Parrish, Tiffany Wright, Lamar Richardson, Shang Abrams, Darxia Morris, Titus Fotso, Terrance Kendrick

Humanity Events

Our signature education programs provide opportunities for our general audiences to engage with artists and the themes of their work through public dialogue and events.



Sounds of the Black Future

a post-show artist talk featuring **Dr. Amber Withers** of the Levitt Foundation for music in communities and **Conductor Dr. Marcus Norris**.

Reinvigorating Black Memory

a post-show artist talk featuring choreographer **Chris Emile** of **(No)one Art House** and Artist-In-Residence **Freedom Dunn**.

Black Women in Hollywood

a post-show artist talk featuring Black women across the film industry hosted by **Tashara Parker** featuring **Cassandra Freeman, Brandee Evans, Shoniqua Shandi, Novi Brown, Samantha Logan, Coco Jones, Dominique Fishback** and **Tina Knowles Lawson**.

Roots and Wings

a post-show talk featuring formerly incarcerated artists in conversation with the cast of *Marty* and the *Hands that Could*. This talk was produced in partnership with **Inside Out Writers**, and the **Roots and Wings Project**.

A New Work: The Window

a post-show artist talk featuring playwright **Natasha Ofilii**, founder of **Nio Vision Productions**, in partnership with **Deaf West Theatre**.

Black Queer Creators of MARTY

a post-show talk in partnership with **Better Brothers LA**, featuring writer **Josh Wilder, Wesley T. Jones**, and **Cornelius Humphries**.

WITNESS through Filmmaking

a conversation with filmmakers **Sophia Nahli Allison, Amber Abundance**, and **Dana Davenport** about their process, practice, and advice around storytelling through film moderated by **Jaunice Sills McSwain** of **Black Women Film Network**.

Releasing Black Magic

a post-show artist talk featuring Artist-in-Residence **Jade Solomon Curtis** of **Solo Magic Productions**, moderated by **Shay Wafer**.

Pavillon Afriques at Cannes Film Festival

May 23, 2023

Pavillon Afriques champions visual storytelling by creators emerging from the African continent and Greater African diaspora while promoting the continent as a shooting destination.

Essence Film Festival

June 30, 2023

Curated and presented by ESSENCE Studios™, the film festival showcases storytellers across the African diaspora through original screenings of film, television and new media, plus panel discussions, workshops, celebrity events and more.



4

mentorship

ANGELS & WARRIORS

Our Angels and Warriors mentorship program provides wraparound services to facilitate personal development and growth for young people from 8th grade through college. We empower participants to identify their dreams, and through mentorship, gain the clarity, discipline and skill to achieve those dreams.

The program curriculum includes off site field trips and workshops with guest artists to foster skill development and awareness of the arts and future careers.



Vision Board Workshop
February 2023



Passion Day
March 2023



Etiquette Workshop
April 2023

88

PARTICIPANTS

9

GRADUATING SENIORS



Restoration Retreat
June 2023



End of Year Bash
June 2023



Films for Teens By Teens
June 2023

15

MEETINGS +
FIELDTRIPS

6

GUEST SPEAKERS

MAKE A GIFT TODAY

and join us as we build the dreams of artists and young people

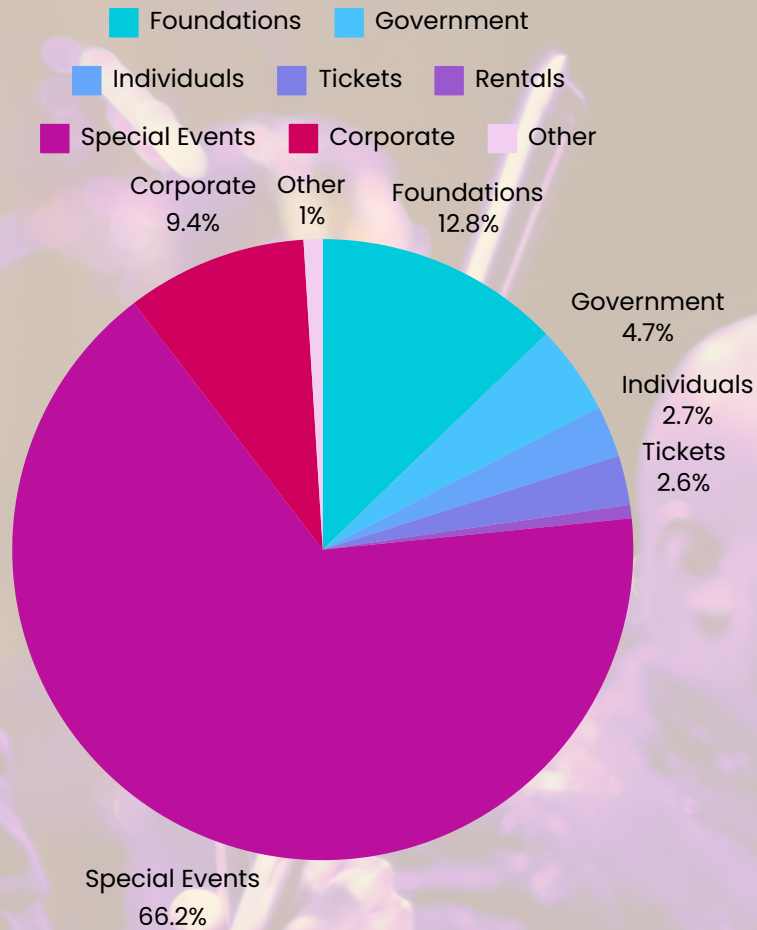
wacothheatercenter.com/support



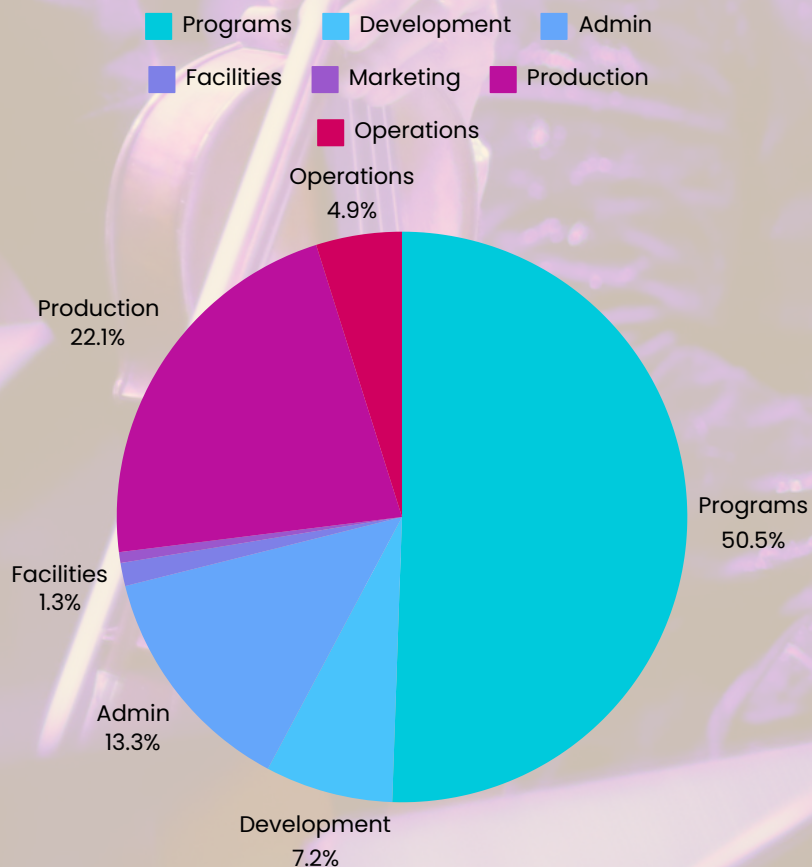
FISCAL OVERVIEW

operating activity

Revenue



Expenses



our team

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| EXECUTIVE STAFF

Richard Lawson
Artistic Director

Tina Knowles Lawson
Artistic Director

Shay Wafer
Executive Director

background image
Artist **Justin Ruff** and the
South Side Symphony

to our supporters

THANK YOU**| \$250,000+**

Amazon's Black Business Accelerator
 Amazon Music
 Ebony/Jet
 Horowitz Family Foundation
 PRG
 Mark Bradford & Alan DiCastro
 SheaMoisture
 Start Small Initiative

| \$100,000 - \$249,999

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| \$50,000 - \$99,999

AIDS Healthcare Foundation
 Gilead Sciences, Inc.
 Kendra Gilliams
 Leticia Chavez-Smith
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| \$25,000 - \$49,999

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 CIGNA
 Damson Idris
 Dr. Jasper Brewster
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 Fearless Fund
 Horizon Media
 JP Morgan
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 Bazemore Foundation
 Leticia Shanya
 Marcia L. Dyson
 Mike Triplett
 Morgan Stanley
 Pivotal Ventures
 Sandra Richards
 Todd Halfmann
 Women's Global Institute
 Za Lawyers

| \$10,000 - \$24,999

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background image
 Angels & Warriors at the
 Wearable Art Gala



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#WhereArtCanOccur