



SOULPEPPER'S
STRATEGIC PLAN
2020 - 2025



Soulpepper's Strategic Plan 2020 – 2025 was enthusiastically adopted by the Board at its meeting in November 2019.

Whilst the first few months of 2020 showed committed energy for, and progress against, the objectives contained herein, the realities of the Covid-19 Pandemic have had a profound effect on the company's daily life.

At time of writing, the company's home, The Young Centre for the Performing Arts has been closed to the public since mid-March, all live theatre and education programming has been cancelled and replaced with digital offerings (much of it for free), and our team is mainly working from home.

However, at its one year review in November 2020, we were pleased to note that not only does this plan still feel like the right articulation of the company's hoped for future, but that progress *is* being made, despite the magnitude of unexpected challenges that have dominated the last nine months.

That this is the case is entirely due to the unwavering commitment of Soulpepper's board and staff, the extraordinary energy of the artists with whom we have the privilege to work, and the remarkable loyalty of our patrons and donors.

Thank you.

Weyni Mengesha
Artistic Director

Emma Stenning
Executive Director

INTRODUCTIONS

We are delighted to introduce for you Soulpepper's Strategic Plan, 2020 - 2025.

Thank you to the staff, artists and board of Soulpepper who have worked with us throughout this year of transition, reflection, learning and planning, as we have imagined together what the future of our company might be.

This plan holds within it our deepest ambitions for Soulpepper: that it be a producer of world-class, socially engaged theatre; that it be radically inclusive; that it be a home for artists, staff and audiences; and that through our work as theatre-makers and arts educators, we can build more connected communities.

The work is already underway, and we look forward to the future with confidence.

Weyni Mengesha
Artistic Director

Emma Stenning
Executive Director

While Emma and Weyni have spearheaded the in-depth development of this Strategic Plan throughout 2019, the foundation really commenced as Soulpepper began to emerge from its crisis of 2018.

There were innumerable conversations with all manner of stakeholders as people sought to define the essence of Soulpepper and which aspects they wished to emphasize in the future and which areas they preferred to change going forward.

And so began a culture of redoubled commitment to participatory inclusion, enhanced communication and respect. Through this process grew a new sense of openness to collaboration, within and outside the company, commencing a progression towards a greater diversity of work, artists and audiences.

Vanessa Morgan
Chair

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1.

WHO WE ARE



1.1 OUR AMBITION

Soulpepper is already widely admired for its trademark ingredients of ensemble theatre-making, creative teaching and community outreach. They are characteristics that have defined the company, and they provide for us a remarkable base from which to build.

We are ambitious to take Soulpepper further.

We want to *push ourselves creatively*, demanding the best from each other, while committing to an ongoing practice of teaching and learning.

We want this world-class company truly to be recognized as a *theatre of international impact*, known for the boldness of its productions, its celebration of vital Canadian voices, and the excellence of its acting ensemble.

We want to be *radically inclusive*, building a program and organization where everyone's experience is both valued and reflected.

We want to be *organizationally resilient*, possessing the financial, human and operational resources to deliver on our potential to the best of our ability.

We want our home, The Young Centre for the Performing Arts, to be a *social cultural hub for the city*, with opportunities for community engagement, learning and to see great art.

And we want to be *civically minded*, knowing that it is the artist who can best remind us that the ties that unite us are stronger than the forces that divide.

1.2 VISION AND VALUES

VITAL STORIES, CONNECTING US ALL

We are artist-driven.

We are a community of artists, theatre makers and administrators who are committed to creating vital theatre.

We tell stories that resonate in different ways across time and place; stories that raise necessary questions; stories that can inspire us, and the audiences who engage with us, to imagine and work towards a better world.

As well as producing the work of visionary artists of varying lived experiences, we offer a host of ancillary programs that nurture and develop the creativity of everyone who wishes to engage with the theatrical, musical, and performing arts. We offer these opportunities because we believe that the arts are for everyone, and we know that creative expression is a vital part of individual and community life.

We engage with our city, and its many communities, through our programming and outreach, and strive to make Soulpepper a place of belonging in which everyone who wishes to participate is included.

We believe in inclusion, and strive to be a place of collaboration, excellence and innovation, one that is dynamic, open, and forward-looking.

1.3 BRAND

In June 2019 Soulpepper commissioned creative agency SOS to work with the company to hone its articulation of vision and values, while also delivering a refreshed brand.

The work was founded on a period of audience research, enabling the company to think clearly about how it communicates with both current and potential patrons.

Soulpepper



BRAND ESSENCE:

Sharing Stories, Connecting us all.

THE WHY:

As Canada's pre-eminent modern theatre company we are dedicated to creating, producing, presenting and supporting work that challenges, moves, excites and ultimately changes audiences. For it is the relevant stories, bridging old and new, with timeless themes, in modern voices that speak to us all.

THE HOW:

We seek out extraordinary artists to create or interpret important works that tell relevant stories. We seek out broad and diverse audiences to experience and connect through these works in a variety of settings, mediums and formats. We support, encourage and educate talent at all levels and we invite communities near and far to participate and share their stories.

TONE:

Open, inclusive, creative, optimistic, accessible, approachable, global, provocative, passionate, knowledgeable, and entertaining

THE WHAT:

Driven by artists, we are educators, innovators, producers, rule breakers and visionaries. We strive for connection in everything we do – whether in our building, our communities or around the world. We believe we have a vital leadership role to bring theatre forward ensuring that everyone has a chance to experience, share and tell the important stories.

1.4 A BRIEF HISTORY OF SOULPEPPER

Founded by 12 artists, Soulpepper was launched in 1998 with a two-production summer season at Harbourfront Centre, with the artists undertaking all operations, including fundraising. The Company's ensemble approach to artistic rigor garnered enthusiastic response from audiences, artists and critics alike. With a focus on youth outreach and artist training, Soulpepper's activities grew year-over-year to fill a vital need in Canada's largest theatre market.

In 2005, Soulpepper completed a capital campaign and migrated from Harbourfront to its new home in The Young Centre for the Performing Arts, a world-class venue which anchors the Distillery Historic District as a cultural destination for residents and visitors. Under the leadership of founding Artistic Director Albert Schultz and former Executive Director Leslie Lester, the Company experienced a period of growth and expansion of its activities.

In 2008, Soulpepper launched the Soulpepper Academy, Canada's only two-year paid training program for theatre artists of all backgrounds. Responding to industry needs, in 2014 Soulpepper grew the program to include specialized training streams in directing, acting, playwriting, designing, and producing/stage management.

In 2015, Soulpepper launched a Creative Capital Campaign, to raise \$10 million to be invested into artists, ideas and new activity (rather than bricks and mortar), including touring, audio programming, and Project Imagination – an ambitious multi-year theatre commissioning program. The Campaign reached its goal in 2016, two years ahead of schedule, and the resulting activity has accelerated the growth and activity of the Company.

On July 1, 2017 Soulpepper opened its month-long festival of 12 original Canadian works in a multi-venue complex on 42nd Street in New York City. The festival featured 75 Canadian artists, and proved to be a critical and audience success, garnering over 200 media articles, reaching 11,000 patrons, and planting seeds for future collaboration and international touring activity.

In the fall of 2018, Soulpepper announced the appointment Emma Stenning as Executive Director, and Weyni Mengesha as Artistic Director. Together with our Board Chair, Vanessa Morgan, Soulpepper's new leadership team is complete, and is beginning to write the next chapter in the ambitious future of the Company.

1.5 THE YOUNG CENTRE

The Young Centre for the Performing Arts was launched in 2004 as a joint venture between Soulpepper Theatre Company and George Brown Theatre School (a joint venture known as GBSP), and is an independent organization registered and operated as a federal charity, under the managing direction of Soulpepper. Opened in 2006, in the then underdeveloped Corktown neighbourhood, The Young Centre became an anchor tenant for the revitalization of the community.

Designed by Thomas Payne of Toronto's internationally renowned Kuwabara Payne McKenna Blumberg Architects, the facility features 46,000 square feet of combined heritage and contemporary architecture with five flexible performance spaces, ranging in size from 80 to 300 seats; numerous rehearsal studios, classrooms, administrative offices and a central atrium with café/bar.

The entire facility, including rehearsal, performance, and administration spaces are wheelchair accessible, and AODA compliant, which has made it a preferred venue for RARE Theatre (which creates work with artists with disabilities) and Para-Pan-Am cultural programming.

The Young Centre is open to the public 352 days a year and is one of the busiest cultural hubs in the city, with over 500 performances per annum. In addition to professional theatre, the space is home to school visits, workshops, theatre-for-young-audiences, classes, student performances, concerts, cabarets, lectures, talk-backs, musicals, festivals, art installations, book launches, film screenings, and play readings – all designed to invite the community into a deeper appreciation of artistic expression. We provide discounts for not-for-profit bookings, and we regularly donate the venues for community use (citizenship ceremonies, conferences, student showcases). The Young Centre hosts an average of 130,000 patrons each year, with the diversity of programming appealing to different demographics, different age-groups, and different interests.

During the life of this plan, George Brown College and Soulpepper are committed to reviewing the financial model and long-term viability of their joint venture, reflecting on each organization's use of the space, the potential for cost efficiencies, and the opportunity to develop commercial incomes through third-party rental and café trading.

By 2024, GBSP will need to negotiate its lease renewal with the Distillery District.

2.

OUR PLANS 2020 - 2025



2. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES 2020 - 2025

Through staff, artist and board consultation, Soulpepper has established nine Strategic Objectives to govern its work for the period 2020 - 2025, presented below, and discussed in more detail in the chapters that follow.

PROGRAM

Within the next five years, we will have expanded our artistic program, remaining a home for new interpretations of classics and a company rooted in text work and musicality, but growing to include new Canadian voices, work by artists of varying life experience and lesser known works drawn from a more global canon. We will do this by aligning our commissioning activities to this ambition, and actively diversifying our curatorial process, becoming a truly contemporary arts organization.

ARTISTS

We will be widely recognized as one of the strongest creative companies in the English-speaking world, with diversity of experience and shared practice at our core. We will invest in artist training, development and rehearsal time, risk-taking, commissioning new work, and delivering ambitious projects of scale. Core to this achievement will be our role as a training organization, with a re-launched academy, and work in schools, community settings, professional development, and for adult learning.

AUDIENCES AND PARTICIPANTS

We will develop our audience and participant community so that it becomes truly reflective of the city we serve. We will do this by diversifying our offer at The Young Centre and developing initiatives that allow our work to remain as affordable as possible for everyone. We will seek out partnerships with organizations who can help us to connect with the people and places that we don't currently reach, always looking to increase our own learning while extending our offer.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

We will embrace inclusion (as defined in our code of conduct) in all we do, becoming fully representative both on and off stage, in our leadership and workforce. We will do this by supporting the work of our diversity and inclusion team, continuing to challenge our own practice, and striving for a culture of continuous improvement.

TOURING AND PARTNERSHIPS

We will seek to develop our audience across Toronto, Ontario, Canada and the world. We will do this by applying a touring lens on project development, using multiple means of distribution, and by actively participating at international industry events. Where appropriate, we will maximize the commercial gain of our work's future life, delivering new revenue streams in support of our mission.

CIVIC LEADERSHIP

We will emerge as a social civic leader, growing our impact beyond on our stages, to engage in issues that affect our communities. We will do this by playing a more active role in city initiatives and launching new public programs that embrace debate, social justice and progressive action. Soulpepper artists will be known for their ambition to go 'beyond the stage', embracing this aspect of our work by providing creative leadership, insight and inspiration.

OUR TEAM AND WORKPLACE

Soulpepper will be recognized as one of Canada's top employers in the arts sector, and a leader in strengthening workplace culture around issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion. We will do this by creating a culture where everyone is heard and decisions are accountable, valuing our staff and embracing joy while creating great art.

TOWARDS A GREENER WORLD

We will strive to become recognized as pioneering for our working practice, and our approach to operating an environmentally sustainable performing arts facility. We will do this by working with experts to make strategic investments into new technologies, and making changes in operations and workplace culture, for both short-term and long-term goals. We will also embrace our responsibility to be an agent of cultural change, inspiring those around us to work together towards a greener world.

BUILDING BUSINESS RESILIENCE

We will become a more resilient business, seeking to develop appropriate financial reserves that allow us to say yes to opportunity, while protecting our future. In particular, we will push to expand our donor base, finding exciting and multiple opportunities for supporters to begin and develop a philanthropic relationship with our company. We will also seek to maximize revenue through revitalized relationships with public-funding bodies, and entrepreneurial developments of both our ideas and our building.

2.1 PROGRAM

Within the next five years, we will have expanded our artistic program, remaining a home for new interpretations of classics and a company rooted in text work and musicality, but growing to include new Canadian voices, work by artists with varying life experience and lesser known works drawn from a more global canon. We will do this by aligning our commissioning activities to this ambition, and actively diversifying our curatorial process, becoming a truly contemporary arts organization.

2020 - 2025 will see a significant shift in the diversity of Soulpepper's program, with new leadership committing the company to both better representing the city it serves, and more actively engaging with stories that reflect the world in which we live. While this shift will be palpable, it will not be at the expense of the text-based classic work on which the company was founded, nor will it see us move away from the highly successful presentation of staged concerts. Rather, the program will become richer, and more varied, offering greater choice to a growing audience.

The period January - September 2020 makes a first step in this direction, with 6 original productions, 4 concerts and 2 partner presentations, presented under the theme 'Breaking Ground'. Kate Hennig's *Mother's Daughter* brings a much-admired trilogy to its conclusion, and Daniel Brooks' production of *The Seagull* by Anton Chekov offers subscribers something familiar amidst a program that also invites audiences to be a little more daring, with Weyni Mengesha's production of *Jesus Hopped The 'A' Train* by Stephen Adly Guirgis and Alan Dilworth's production of *Winter Solstice* by Roland Schimmelpfennig. Mumbi Tindyebwa Otu's production of *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, and Nina Lee Aquino's production of *M. Butterfly* by David Henry Hwang bring a breadth of international perspective to a season of work that sees 13 artists making their Soulpepper debut.

The concert series, created by Slight Family Director of Music, Mike Ross, will see re mounts of two much loved performances: *The Secret Chord: A Leonard Cohen Experience*, and *88 Keys*, alongside new works that push at our sense of social conscience *Revolutions: Songs That Changed The World*, co-created by Mike with Amanda Parris and Weyni Mengesha, and *Behind The Bars: Legendary Prison Songs*, co-created by Mike with Frank Cox-O'Connell and Sarah Wilson. With the ongoing support of The Slight Family, we are committed to developing Soulpepper's musical life, and are keen to collaborate

with a growing pool of music artists. For the period 2020 - 2025, at least 15% of the artists involved will be new to Soulpepper, as either creators or performers.

Finally, partnership presentations will encourage our audiences and artists to consider new forms of theatre-making, with Haley McGee's brilliant solo piece *The Ex Boyfriend Yard Sale* and Jordan Tannahill's boundary-breaking virtual reality project *Draw Me Close*.

In February 2020, Soulpepper will announce a full year of programming, September 2020 - August 2021, which will further build on this ethos of breadth and diversity. This will bring the company to an annual seasonal cycle, launched each Winter and commencing each Fall; a rhythm that will allow for a better planning timeframe, without restricting the organization's ability to respond with agility to new opportunities as they arise.

Soulpepper's Resident Artists program has played a vital role over the past five years, embedding a sense of ensemble theatre-making at the heart of the company. Soulpepper is indebted to those eighteen artists whose practice and talent have defined the company's ethos and public profile. While we will continue to cherish these values, the company will move on from this model from January 2020, instead, looking to introduce a larger family of artists to its stages, which will flex each year in accordance with the program's casting needs.

The company has established clear targets for representation within the program. We will continue to monitor these metrics alongside national and international benchmarks, aiming to become an industry leader. Key to this achievement will be our commitment to hold general auditions on an annual basis.

The company is committed to re-booting Project Imagination, the audacious program of commissioning dedicated to the development of new Canadian voices, supported during its first phase by the Garland Imagination Fund. A fundraising campaign, re-launched in January 2020, aims to deliver in excess of \$200,000 per year to fund a program that will seek out and support new writers, developing their work to the point at which it can be considered for production as part of Soulpepper's program.

Our Artist Development program will continue to provide time and space for work in progress, allowing us to connect with the dramaturgical and staging development of new ideas. We will prioritize bringing work to a willing audience earlier in its process, allowing artists to try out ideas before they are completely formed, inviting reflection and feedback from those present. For our announced season, this will take the form of four, pilot, Scratch Nights, curated events that will bring open mic, staged readings and artist discussion into a fun, low/no cost evening at The Young Centre. Following evaluation, we will consider complementing these evenings with a weekend-long festival from 2021.

We will also seek to bring informal performance to our foyer and ancillary spaces, as a way of engaging new artists and trying out new material, while contributing to an atmosphere that welcomes younger audiences. This program might include a regular open mic night, a return to the cabaret format once widely enjoyed, or open-air gigs in the courtyard throughout the summer. We will seek out the financial support to do this through early 2020, aiming to have some test events before the end of the year, and a planned program from 2021.

Audio and digital programming remains part of the company's ambition, with a determination to build on the multi award-winning projects of the past. Ideas for the digital exploitation of our program, the development of a regular magazine style Soulpepper podcast, and the increasing inclusion of Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality in our work are all part of this plan. 2020 will see our presentation of Jordan Tannahill's *Draw Me Close*, a ground-breaking piece of Virtual Reality theatre, that will set a new tone for what might be achievable. However, this sits in stark contrast to the financial realities of the audio program, which sees us begin the year with no budget for audio work, nor the budget for the Head of Audio position. Resource-finding and partnership-building will be a key target of 2020, with the hope of bringing back a more consistent offer in 2021, that has a

clear end-audience in mind, and/or advances one of our strategic objectives. We will continue our partnership conversations with Audible and Kobo, looking to drive meaningful ongoing relationships that will provide a real platform for our work.

Further to audio and digital, Soulpepper is developing concepts for four new programming streams, that will become effective through the life of this plan, as resources are procured through partnerships, grants and fundraising campaigns. The focus of 2020 will, therefore, be feasibility work and test events, with the aim of confirming longer-term commitments for 2021 and beyond:

THE LAB SERIES

A natural extension of Soulpepper's Artist Development program will be to dedicate the Tank House Theatre as an experimental third space, becoming a home to artists who want to push boundaries of form and content, creating a new, distinctively Canadian voice. A naming sponsor for either the Theatre or the season could be possible, which would drive cash resource to GBSP or Soulpepper respectively.

YOUTH PROGRAMMING

Soulpepper is committed to continuing its 20 year history of free, year-round youth programming. The Young Dreamers' Program; nurturing the leaders of tomorrow will empower young voices through education on vital social issues, creative training and live digital platforms. Weekly sessions will include poetry-writing, song-writing, acting, music props, and scenic painting, coupled with talks and discussion on relevant social themes. Termly projects will be displayed through video content on our website, social media and a potential live show.

Alongside this structured scheme, we are committed to programming more work specifically for children and young people, from free story-telling in the atrium, to developed theatre shows in our main spaces. We are excited by the potential opportunity to partner with the Distillery Historic District to offer free public programming for this age group.

As our commitment to training develops with the Training Room (see section 2.2), we would like to add a series of drop-in classes for children, ideally starting in September 2020.

THE MY TORONTO SERIES

This new monthly series will look at the many stories that make-up Toronto, one of the most diverse cities in the world, by bringing people together in celebration at The Young Centre.

For each one-off night, music, food and history will combine to tell the story of one of Toronto's unique communities (i.e. Little Ethiopia, Little Italy, Greektown, The village, Korea Town). A story to hear, feel and taste.

COMMUNITY PLAY AND ACTION

We plan to partner with companies whose mandate is to make a social impact on the city, working to help them tell and share their story. Potential projects include working with CultureLink on their Newcomers Welcome program, Pen Canada on their Writers in Exile program, The 519 for LGBTQ2S youth, and Pathways Regent Park.

Each of these four areas of work will continue to develop through 2020, as we seek out the partnerships and resources to make them real.

2.2 ARTISTS

We will be widely recognized as one of the strongest creative companies in the English-speaking world, with diversity of experience and shared practice at our core. We will invest in artist training, development and rehearsal time, risk-taking, commissioning new work, and delivering ambitious projects of scale. Core to this achievement will be our role as a training organization, with a re-launched academy, and work in schools, community settings, professional development, and for adult learning.

Soulpepper is an ensemble theatre company, putting artists at the heart of all we do.

With a change in leadership, the company's sense of ensemble is, understandably, evolving. Rather than a specific group of identified Resident Artists, the company is moving to celebrate the artists engaged in each season of work as its current ensemble, working to support those artists both in their engaged roles and positions, but also to provide a home for their independent creative lives, and to encourage them to participate in the full life of the company through partnership working with both our education and development teams. The facilities of The Young Centre will be made available to ensemble artists when possible, as will access to the staff team at Soulpepper for consultation on and support with independent projects.

This new sense of ensemble will be reinforced by a revised structure of actor pay, setting one flat pay level for the company, sitting c.8 – 10% above CTA minimum. A higher flat rate will be established for Founding Artists, in recognition of their enhanced role within the company. This new policy creates a positive reality of pay equity at a time when Soulpepper is determined to introduce new artists to the company in increasing numbers.

The Academy, on hiatus since August 2018, will be relaunched during the life of this plan, our target being that classes re commence in September 2020. The new Academy will have 10 participants; a writer, designer, director and 7 actors. The search for participants will begin with a call-out for scripts, or script treatments, allowing us to build the ensemble around the 'Academy Play', which will form part of the mainstage season at Soulpepper at the end of The Academy's third term. Teaching for the first year, therefore, will be a mix of workshop, development and rehearsal for The Academy play, skills-based teaching, and projects on various aspects of theatre-making. The second year will allow and encourage the ensemble to take on its own form, dictating

its own development, leaning on the resources and expertise at Soulpepper to support the company's emergence as a professional ensemble with a distinctive creative voice.

The future of The Academy is subject to funding, the company needing both grant income from the Canadian Arts Training Fund (CATF) and significant philanthropic giving in order to fund the annual cost. Options remain to deliver alternative training models, potential focussing in on areas of real need with shorter programs, which would be at less financial cost to the company. Decisions as to the scale of the Academy offer will be made, first off, in March 2020 when news of the CATF funding is received.

Soulpepper will launch The Training Room in 2020, providing professional development opportunities for actors through weekly skills-based classes, a theme-based master class series, and one-on-one coaching with Soulpepper artists. The Training Room will be an affordable opportunity for artists in the Toronto area to invest in their own professional development, while also providing teaching work for Soulpepper ensemble members. As the Training Room develops, classes for creative disciplines will be added. Following a successful pilot programme in Fall 2019, The Training Room will be planned to deliver surplus income for Soulpepper.

The company's teaching work will continue through its free youth programs; providing workshops with artist educators, and tickets to see plays. The flagship City Youth Academy will provide six weeks of rigorous performance training and with a focus on acting and devised collective creations. Participants are paid a basic wage for their participation, allowing them to commit to the program in place of a summer job.

Youth Outreach will continue with its March Break Program, providing a week of creative ideas and skills development and Curtain Up, a series of interactive theatre workshops, paired with a Soulpepper production. The Ada Slaight Youth Link program will continue to deliver community focussed youth programming, connecting Soulpepper Youth Alumni and Soulpepper artists with a community partners organization. In schools, our education team will continue to provide an ESL program and play creation labs, as well as being responsive to the ideas and needs of teachers from across the GTA.

While Soulpepper's Youth Programs will remain free for all participants, the company will explore the opportunity of extending the model to paid for op-

opportunities for non-professional adults. The market place seems open for the provision of such classes, which could provide more teaching opportunities for our artists instructors, and income potential for the company.

The final piece of our training portfolio will be the expansion of our Corporate Training program as an offer across the corporate market place. This proven program has enjoyed four years of success, delivering solely for the Rogers Communications corporation. Under the leadership of artist Derek Boyes, the team has gained real insight into the potential for theatre skills to support professionals in issues ranging from their handling of difficult conversations, to their public-speaking skills. Again, this new opportunity will provide employment opportunities for our artist instructors, and income potential for Soulpepper.

As described above in section 2.1, alongside opportunities to both train and teach, Soulpepper will remain committed to artist development, nurturing the growth of ideas from the page or workshop room to the stage. The company continues to recognize that this promise is made real by the affording of significant rehearsal time, establishing a baseline assumption of five weeks in the rehearsal hall, plus technical and dress time in the theatre, prior to previews and an opening night. This will inevitably flex due to the demands of the project in question, but allowing artists ample time to play and create will remain a vital ethos of the company.

Soulpepper has clear ambition to support and deliver projects of real scale and ambition, whether that be work in international partnership that will travel beyond our city, or pieces of innovative form and impact that will pull attention and generate new audiences. It's important to the company that, while The Young Centre provides an excellent home base, the scope of its three black box spaces not limit the capacity of our creative reach, nor the potential of our artists to reinvent form and break boundaries. Ultimately, we seek to be responsive to an idea, whatever form that idea may eventually take, or whatever media it may eventually need.

The company is forming connections across the US and UK (discussed further in section 2.5), which will surely lead to future international collaborations, and is already pursuing an idea of a major site-specific piece, telling the story of Anna Karenina, which will be created by Artistic Director, Weyni Mengesha.

2.3 AUDIENCES AND PARTICIPANTS

We will develop our audience and participant community so that it becomes truly reflective of the city we serve. We will do this by diversifying our offer at The Young Centre and developing initiatives that allow our work to remain as affordable as possible for everyone. We will seek out partnerships with organizations who can help us to connect with the people and places that we don't currently reach, always looking to increase our own learning while extending our offer.

Soulpepper is committed to being a theatre company for everyone. In stating this ambition, the organization understands its responsibility to develop its audience and participant base to become truly reflective of the city it serves.

Audience research, carried out during the summer of 2019 by consultants sos provided Soulpepper with valuable intelligence about both its current and potential audience and participants.

Plans to develop the program are outlined in section 2.1. While actively aiming to diversify its audience through the provision of a broader range of programming choice, Soulpepper also believes that this move can be an attractive opportunity for its existing audiences to become more theatrically adventurous. Indeed, the 2020 season, which sees a European classic sit alongside more experimental and international work, has been received extremely well by the subscriber base, with sales tracking evenly across all productions, and favourably when compared to previous season launches. This formula, of presenting known titles alongside more innovative or less familiar work, will continue to inform programming choices, with the continued aim of steadily growing our audience.

Soulpepper will also continue to deliver a programme of Talkback Tuesdays, providing audiences with an opportunity to engage at a deeper level with the work on offer. Hosted by artists, these post show conversations will explore the play in more detail, while offering patrons the opportunity to talk directly with the actors and artists involved.

Aware that program curation is only one aspect of audience development, Soulpepper endeavours to address other potential barriers to entry.

Soulpepper's program from January 2020 will benefit from a new offer of accessible pricing, aimed at making the company's work as affordable as possible for the 20 – 25 year old age demographic in particular. The MyPlay program, supported by Sun life, previously offering free 'day of' tickets to under 21 year olds will be extended to under 25 year olds. This bold move will see Soulpepper stand out in the city's cultural marketplace, allowing us really to target the age demographic that we most want to engage. Coupled with the Young Philanthropists program, noted in section 2.9, this move will aim to see a new generation connect with Soulpepper for the long-term. Furthermore, we will commit to a limited number of \$25 tickets for every performance, available to any patron. In addition to our existing rush ticket program, we will have a Soulpepper offer that is as affordable as possible for everyone.

Soulpepper has piloted a program of relaxed performances to great success, and is now committed to providing at least one relaxed performance per production. Relaxed performances are intended specifically to be sensitive to and welcoming of patrons who may benefit from a more relaxed environment, including, but not limited to those on the autism spectrum, with sensory and communication disorders, or learning-disabled people. There is a more casual than usual approach to front-of-house etiquette and we ask all audience members to be aware of people's need to move or make noise. The artistic excellence of the production and director's vision remain unchanged.

Soulpepper has convened a cross departmental working group, in collaboration with staff from The Young Centre, to look at how we make our building as welcoming, accessible and inclusive as possible. The Building Access Team is working on initiatives ranging from gender-neutral washroom facilities, improvements to the Atrium's wheelchair accessibility, and training for patron services staff in dementia awareness and ASL. A recent grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation will provide for significant improvements in this area, including new furniture, improved lighting, and access modifications to the café counter, will-call desk and box office window. An upcoming submission to the Investment in Canadian Infrastructure Program for a \$3.5m grant will, if successful, allow for a transformational re-think of the building's public space.

A constructive relationship with the Distillery Historic District is proving helpful in developing plans to help improve access to our building from our major transit drop off and local parking sites. For the life of this plan, we commit to working in collaborative partnership with George Brown College to both raise funds and continue to invest in interventions that make the building welcoming to all.

Partnership-building is critical to our continued work on access and audience development. Training from the 519 is helping us to become gender aware, opting to use language and messaging that includes everyone, and our on-going work with Culture Link helps us to provide a welcome for the newest members of our city. We will continue to search out new partnerships that will enable us further to develop our network and learning.

We are also aware that geography can create a real barrier to access, and that through outreach, touring and partnerships we have an opportunity to take our work to those who might not instinctively consider a visit to The Young Centre. By introducing people to our work in their own community settings, we can look to develop a loyalty that may convert participants into future attenders.

2.4 DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

We will embrace inclusion (as defined in our code of conduct) in all we do, becoming fully representative both on and off stage, in our leadership and workforce. We will do this by supporting the work of our diversity and inclusion team, continuing to challenge our own practice, and striving for a culture of continuous improvement.

In September 2018, Soulpepper commissioned a review from KPMG, assessing the ‘Current State of Inclusion and Diversity at Soulpepper Theatre Company’. The report made a series of high-level recommendations, many of which have been achieved in the twelve months since the report’s completion, most notably, gender-parity at board level, the founding of a staff D&I working group and the commitment of new leadership to embracing D&I within programming and audience development initiatives.

Soulpepper progresses into 2020 with a grant from TD Bank with which to employ a fixed-term D&I consultant. The company also plans to create a dedicated HR role. An HR committee of the board considers diversity and inclusion within its brief.

The company has set out target metrics with the intent to see a marked improvement in the diversity of the company’s make-up and output. Progress against these targets will be monitored by the D&I working group.

The D&I working group has taken forward the KPMG recommendations, authoring and owning an action plan that considers staff, board, community, audience, artists and donors as six distinct areas of focus. For each area, the group has audited our current position, set in place ambitions for the future, and formulated year-on-year plans for progress.

Soulpepper is committed to developing impactful ways to recognize the history of the land on which the organization sits, and of welcoming Indigenous practice and artists to the organization. We are privileged to have the guidance of Community Elder Shirley Horn, and aim to find, throughout the life of this plan, ways in which the company can adopt Indigenous practices in our operations, make meaningful contributions in support of Indigenous communities, and be a place for celebration of Indigenous culture and the work of Indigenous theatre-makers.

Soulpepper is also committed to recognizing and celebrating days of national

and international recognition, such as Pride, International Women’s Day and Black History Month. More than a communications exercise, Soulpepper aims to use this calendar as a provocation for organization-wide initiatives that can both improve our own learning, and see the company work publicly for the advancement of these causes.

We recognize that we are only at the beginning of our project to make Soulpepper a diverse and inclusive organization. The full participation of our staff team, our willingness to listen and learn, our commitment to dedicating real resources to the task and the bold thinking of the artists from whom we take inspiration are all key ingredients in our success.

2.5 TOURING AND PARTNERSHIPS

We will seek to develop our audience across Toronto, Ontario, Canada and the world. We will do this by applying a touring lens on project development, using multiple means of distribution, and by actively participating at international industry events. Where appropriate, we will maximize the commercial gain of our work's future life, delivering new revenue streams in support of our mission.

We are determined to develop touring and future life, both nationally and internationally, as a core aspect of Soulpepper's business.

Taking a show 'on the road' can be a deeply enriching aspect of a company's life, through sharing a creative ethos, practice and art with audiences in different communities. Theatre is always a two-way process; the artist performs and the audience responds. We will only learn more about our craft and the potential of its impact by seeking out new audiences in new places, and listening to their response.

It also makes economic sense for our company. We make a heavy investment in our program at The Young Centre, and are unlikely ever to yield break-even or surplus results on a project-by-project basis, due to the cost of capitalization versus the income driven by our relatively small seating capacity. If we can extend a show's playing life by taking it to other venues, we are more likely to move into a project surplus position, through amortized costs, general management fees and – eventually – the willingness of venues to co-commission and co-produce our idea from the earliest development stage.

Through the life of this plan, Soulpepper commits to developing its touring capacity, building networks of opportunity for us to create work here in Toronto, before travelling on to venues across the country and, eventually, across the world.

Plans are already underway, and the profile of the company's name in Canada in particular, means that there is real interest in our work. Most immediately, the further development of *ROSE* is predicated on the idea that the next version of the project would be created to tour, along with a return run at The Young Centre.

Conversations area also underway with international partners, particularly in the US. Most notably, ongoing conversation with the Public Theatre in New York, and Steppenwolf in Chicago are beginning to consider joint projects and the possibility that Soulpepper work could play at these highly prestigious venues.

We also need to consider the future life of our work, i.e. rather than a strategically established tour, our ability to act nimbly in the face of success to secure opportunities for transfer that could see our work play at a larger scale, on commercial terms. This will most likely be through developing a strong partnership with Mirvish Productions here in Toronto, but the possibility of New York partnerships will also be considered, particularly given the company's success in the city through summer 2017.

Central to the success of this development will be our continued networking on a national and international level, making our participation in industry events such as the Canadian Arts Summit and ISPA (the International Society of the Performing Arts) a strategic priority.

For Soulpepper, our ability to share with audiences beyond The Young Centre will always be about more than touring our work, since the company has an exceptional pedigree in radio broadcast, podcasts and television. We will look to revitalize this aspect of our creative life, searching out new partnerships and funding, encouraging our ensemble of artists to really push at what these forms of media can offer. Renewing our first look deal with Thunderbird, or finding a replacement partner, will be key to this initiative.

2.6 CIVIC LEADERSHIP

We will emerge as a social civic leader, growing our impact beyond on our stages, to engage in issues that affect our communities. We will do this by playing a more active role in city initiatives and launching new public programs that embrace debate, social justice and progressive action. Soulpepper artists will be known for their ambition to go ‘beyond the stage’, embracing this aspect of our work by providing creative leadership, insight and inspiration.

We believe that art can engage and empower individuals, including the most gifted and talented as well as the most vulnerable or disadvantaged, and that developing creativity is central to developing the life and future of our city. We want Soulpepper to be a meeting place for people from all walks of life where live performance provides a focus for public debate and deliberation, where bridges between communities can be built.

Through the course of this plan, we will look to use our resources to understand and extend the potential of live performance to contribute to social cohesion in the city, inspiring and supporting communities to develop a new sense of self confidence by celebrating what makes them distinctive, and empowering a sense of common human connection.

Programming discussed in section 2.1 demonstrates our commitment to showing the city on our stages, with ideas such as My Toronto and the Community Play and Action growing to form core elements of our offer over the life of this plan. Added to which, we have begun, and will seek to develop, our series of Community Conversations, giving our audiences and participants an opportunity to engage in conversation on topics of interest, or issues sparked by the theme of a particular play.

We will continue to listen to community and city leaders, seeking to determine where we might develop projects and initiatives that can be of positive impact. Conversation with local MP Chris Glover revealed for us the extent of gun violence still prevalent within the city, leading to a partnership with Think twice supporting their *Dying To Live* project, and the idea to develop two thematically relevant monologue pieces, *Random* by Debbie tucker green and *On The Exhale* by Martin Zimmerman as a double bill, with an associated education package that could tour on from the Tank House Theatre to school and community settings.

Soulpepper is partnering with Jamii (a community arts organization based locally in the Esplanade) to develop the Kisanii Hub, a mobile theatre unit, which will be launched in the summer of 2020.

We are committed to delivering on a long-held conversation with Sick Kids, first conceived in 2017, to provide digital content and live performance that could bring some joy to the hospital's young patients.

2.7 OUR TEAM AND WORKPLACE

Soulpepper will be recognized as one of Canada's top employers in the arts sector, and a leader in strengthening workplace culture around issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion. We will do this by creating a culture where everyone is heard and decisions are accountable, valuing our staff and embracing joy while creating great art.

Through 2018, Soulpepper developed and published a Code of Conduct and Statement of Promises. Both living documents, these critical pieces of work helped to establish a new culture of openness and accountability that has been championed and carried forward by both the board and new leadership.

In addition to these new policies, the company established a whistle-blower hotline, enabling staff who might like anonymously to feedback directly to board members on any aspect of the company's life. Reports are considered by the HR committee, before working with management to effect any necessary change.

Furthermore, the company is committed to having both artist and staff participate at board meetings, in a program that is supported by 1:1 conversation with the Executive Director and chair of the Governance and Nominations committee.

These policies and practices remain under annual review by the board, and are included in the induction for new staff members. Through the life of this plan they will continue to be evaluated, such that they remain examples of best practice for our industry. Soulpepper will commit to taking up any opportunity for industry wide conversation and peer-learning, understanding that we all share a responsibility to keep our workplaces healthy, positive and safe.

The company has established a Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) working group, discussed in more detail in section 2.4. This is part of a new structure of staff working groups that are designed to take on, understand and deliver action on areas of development for the company. As at January 2020, along with the D&I group, Soulpepper working groups are Greenpeppers, looking at issues of environmental sustainability, Access Team, looking at ways to make our building accessible and welcoming for all and the Joy Division, looking at ways to sustain a positive team culture at the company. Working groups are drawn from across the company, on a voluntary basis, aiming to have representation from each department as part of each group. Working groups have

contributed to the tasks and targets included in this Strategic Plan, which will be measured and evaluated on an annual basis.

In October 2019, the company piloted an ‘Open Space’ session to guide staff, board and artists through a thorough a discussion process that will serve as an aid to planning for the year ahead. Following the session, the need for additional, or alternative, working groups is being considered. Following its success, the Open Space session will now become a regular annual event.

Soulpepper is committed to an annual staff survey process, using the resulting feedback to inform decisions relating to staff welfare, employment conditions and pay.

The company is also committed to beginning an annual appraisal process, planned to commence in Spring 2020. This will be an appraisee-led approach, aimed at creating a positive context in which individuals can discuss performance, key performance indicators and annual goal setting with their line manager.

Through the life of this plan, we aim to develop a greater capacity to invest in staff training and development. At present, budgets allow little beyond mandatory training for operational staff, and yet we are clear that our team, and indeed our organization, would benefit a great deal from a strategic program of support for professional development.

As a first step, Soulpepper is committed to establishing a mentorship program as a way of offering support to the staff team. Along with the opportunity to work with a mentor, we also hope to commit to developing mentoring skills among our more senior staff.

We are also interested in exploring the idea of development days as a way of supporting our team’s professional progress. This would be an allocation of time, say 3 days, for each staff member to pursue their own development projects, which could range from shadowing a member of the Soulpepper team whose work they are interested in learning about, time to attend a lecture or industry event that’s pertinent to their own development, or time to visit with other organizations to get wider industry perspective. Once launched, the aims of an individual’s development days can be discussed and agreed as part of the annual appraisal process.

Soulpepper values a positive, collaborative workplace culture, and seeks to be both ambitious and industry leading with this aim. By year 3 of the plan, Soulpepper will make an application to the Canada's Top 100 Employers competition, looking to make a strong submission, demonstrating that an arts not-for-profit can excel in this area, alongside larger corporates.

2.8 TOWARDS A GREENER WORLD

We will strive to become recognized as pioneering for our working practice, and our approach to operating an environmentally sustainable performing arts facility. We will do this by working with experts to make strategic investments into new technologies, and making changes in operations and workplace culture, for both short-term and long-term goals. We will also embrace our responsibility to be an agent of cultural change, inspiring those around us to work together towards a greener world.

In early 2019, Soulpepper established Greenpeppers, as part of its new system of cross departmental working groups. The team has set about reviewing the sustainability of Soulpepper's own practice, adopting and advocating measures for positive change, and thinking widely about how the company can become a public voice for a greener future.

Greenpepper's workplan focusses on three areas:

- i. Making provocations that will encourage the company towards decision making through a green lens, including a focus on paperless working and a reduction in energy usage.
- ii. Setting up procedures that will make Soulpepper a greener company, reducing its carbon footprint and production of waste.
- iii. Planning investments that will make The Young Centre a more sustainable venue.

By the end of year one of this plan, Soulpepper aims to have hosted a major city-wide cultural gathering on the theme of climate change, encouraging a collective action plan, and collaborative working on this most important of agendas.

In support of this aim, Soulpepper is part of a wider 'Climate Warriors' group, working alongside other cultural organizations, both locally and nationally, to develop action for change. In its infancy as this plan begins, we are hopeful for the impact that this collective working could have by 2025.

The company is also committed to programming theatre that provokes thought and action on the climate crisis, and is keen to collaborate with like-minded artists and arts organizations.

We begin this plan with a clear understanding of the capital requirements of our building, which is in urgent need of high-level maintenance and equipment upgrades. The search for capital investment is underway, and presents an opportunity to make strategic choices that will see The Young Centre's environmental performance improve as we proceed (under the remit of GBSF, our partnership with George Brown College). We will continue to seek out sources of funding that allow us to make these investments in a timely manner, and seek to deliver a full capital action plan to the GBSF board by the end of year one of the plan.

2.9 BUILDING BUSINESS RESILIENCE

We will become a more resilient business, seeking to develop appropriate financial reserves that allow us to say yes to opportunity, while protecting our future. In particular, we will push to expand our donor base, finding exciting and multiple opportunities for supporters to begin and develop a philanthropic relationship with our company. We will also seek to maximize revenue through revitalized relationships with public-fundingbodies, and entrepreneurial developments of both our ideas and our building.

Soulpepper begins this plan with an accumulated deficit, with plans to recover to a small surplus by close of FY 2021.

Soulpepper is committed to developing a financial reserve. The target reserve will be commensurate with the risk profile of the company and, in time, will also provide a fund from which to properly care for our building and fixed assets, invest in new business initiatives, and support the development of our most ambitious ideas.

It must be noted that this decision to recover deficit within two financial years, and to push towards surplus budgets requires the company to cut back from spending levels of recent years. There will be fewer program weeks in the theatres, lower staff numbers, and less immediate ability to respond to ideas. However, it is deemed vital that the company moves to a place of ‘living within its means’ as soon as reasonably possible, particularly given the likely financial challenges to be encountered through the life of this plan.

Crucial to the life of this plan will be the need to find new stability in our donor base, consolidating relationships of the past behind new leadership, bringing new donors to the company, and delivering on a fresh opportunity to begin a philanthropic relationship with Soulpepper at a younger age and at a lower level. The company’s base fundraising target is set at \$3.9m for year one of the plan, inclusive of three areas of targeted growth: the Academy, the annual gala, and for a relaunched Project Imagination. In addition to meeting these targets, which are required to meet budget for 2020, Soulpepper will look to launch new campaigns that will allow for the creative growth of the company, funding the projects outlined in section 2.1. With the appointment of a

new Development Director at the start of 2020, a comprehensive Fundraising Strategy will be developed as a priority, and appended to this plan following board approval.

In partnership with George Brown College, Soulpepper will endeavour to drive new revenues to The Young Centre, offsetting the company's current annual deficit, which is borne equally by both partners. Plans to develop the food and catering offer within a more animated atrium (currently the café operates at roughly break-even) and to develop third-party rentals (currently delivering income of c.\$30k) will be explored and tested through year one of the plan, with a view to delivering real rewards thereafter.

While Soulpepper has made some important progress towards increasing our level of public sector support, it is clear that there is no appetite at any funding body for significant adjustments to bring us in line with our peers. With granting bodies experiencing flat or contracting budgets, competition for resources is fierce, and we are unlikely to see anything beyond moderate increases. Soulpepper will continue to play a leadership role in advocating increased public sector investment, which will create the conditions for funding increases by granting bodies. Additional public-funding may be available as it aligns with strategic projects or infrastructure enhancements.

Again, partnership will be key. Soulpepper is keen to renew its first look agreement with Thunderbird Entertainment, in the hope of developing more options for television to follow in the successful footsteps of *Kim's Convenience*. Should Thunderbird decline, a similar relationship can be sought elsewhere.

Also, conversations with the partner owners of the Distillery Historic District are unlocking exciting ideas for the future use of the courtyard space, along with the possibility of delivering cultural programming across the whole DHD site. Ideas will be explored during year one of the plan, with the ambition of having a fully effective, long-term, partnership in place for year two.

3.

CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS



3 CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Soulpepper's future is extraordinarily bright.

With new leadership, a terrifically engaged board, and an energized staff, the company has claimed this moment to re-state its ambition, and to set out a route map for success.

The quality of its artists, the commitment of its audiences, and the diversity of its city all serve as ongoing inspiration for this pursuit.

The board of Soulpepper endorsed this plan at its meeting on November 11, 2019, and look forward to its first review in one year's time.

Interim updates will be provided to the Planning and Priorities Committee on a regular basis.