

An Interview with Lisa Kitei | President, Broward Performing Arts Foundation

Can you give a behind the scene update on Parker Playhouse?

While most of the world was stopped in its tracks by the pandemic, work on Parker Playhouse continued, and today, two years after we started construction, we are in the final stages of transforming this heritage theater so beloved by the community. We are planning for a ribbon-cutting in September and a grand reopening celebration in October.

What were the effects of COVID on theater?

COVID impacted everyone and the Broward Center was no exception. After we closed the theaters in March 2020, we lost 90% of our revenues. We had to lay off more than 86% of our staff and those who remained took significant cuts in pay or hours. Still, we were fortunate because we had reserves to help offset some of the losses and we immediately implemented a Road to Recovery campaign to provide the additional support necessary to sustain the Center until we could fully reopen the theaters.

We took our entire education program into the virtual realm to ensure that we continued to provide engaging content to all grade levels. Through our partnership with Broward County Schools, we brought new tools and ways of learning to the classroom with important lessons that we will build on for the future.

For our community, we introduced “Classes to Go” free of charge featuring Broward Center Teaching Artists and “Broadway Chat” series featuring Broadway professionals.

In the area of entertainment, we began offering programs online, and in January of this year, introduced the Backlot Live! series as a way to safely offer performances to our audiences in an outdoor setting. We are especially thankful to FAB for providing support for this series.

How the community has stepped up?

As a quasi-governmental body, we were not eligible for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), which put us at a greater disadvantage as compared with many of our peers.

When we introduced our Road to Recovery Campaign, we were fortunate to have some immediate and significant support which motivated others to give. Michelle Howland and Donald Sussman jumpstarted our fundraising effort with a \$250,000 matching gift and the Leo Goodwin Foundation provided a \$25,000 challenge grant. Those gifts were matched within a month and in less than a year, a total of \$3.7 million has been raised for the Road to Recovery Fund, and our efforts continue.

What are BCPA's plans for the winter?

With conditions surrounding COVID-19 improving due to a variety of factors, we anticipate things getting back to normal this fall. The health experts tell us that we can expect to operate without physical distancing requirements in September. Our concert season is booking up solid in October, our local partners in the arts have scheduled their dates, and Broadway will open its season at the Broward Center in November with a two-week run of *Come From Away*. Adding to the excitement, the “new” Parker Playhouse will have *its* grand reopening with its own schedule of concerts and shows. The 21-22 season should be a blockbuster!