Jordan Stoval: Hi there. My name is Jordan Stoval. My pronouns are they, them. And I am the Regional Programs Manager for the Dramatists Guild of America. Although I am filling this from London, the Dramatists Guild office New York City sits on the Wickquasgeck Trail, eventually renamed Broadway by the colonists who stole it and the traditional ancestral unceded territory of the Lenape.

Essentially, our regional programs comprise of a few different components. The Affiliates program is our relationships with theaters and arts organizations across the country who are producing new writing. We are involved in the development of new writing.

The Region Reps and Ambassadors program is a team of now approximately 80 individuals who are working tirelessly around the year to provide programming, resources, professional development opportunities and information to our members in theatrical communities all across the country. And across the world. We have ambassadors in Canada and New Zealand. I'm in the UK, hello.

So yeah, they are there as a front line of support to membership but also, they help let us know essentially what's going on in these various theatrical communities from a boots on the ground perspective so that we are able to direct our day-to-day work in a meaningful way. If you're not familiar yet with who the regional rep or ambassador is in your area, I highly recommend taking a minute just to look at the Regional Reps And Ambassadors page of the website, find the person who is nearest to you. Or if you find that you are in an area that doesn't previously have representation from the Dramatists Guild, be in touch. There's also a link to an ambassador application there.

Our reps and ambassadors attend monthly meetings so we are constantly in dialogue. It's an exciting place to be. They are a really incredible group of people and I think they are all sort of cut from the same cloth in that they really care about the work that they do. They care about each other. They care about connecting with each other. They care about connecting with members and they care about being there to provide information and make their own communities a better place to be professional writers.

Without further ado, I'm going to hand it over now virtually to a few folks in our Reps and Ambassadors program. Yvette Heyliger who is an ambassador for New York City, Dominic D'Andrea, who is our regional rep for New York State who was previously

the ambassador for Hudson Valley, Marjorie Bicknell, our Philadelphia regional rep and Rachel Carnes, the regional rep in Oregon.

Yvette Heyliger: Hi. My name is Yvette Heyliger. I became a member of the Dramatists Guild in 1996. Wow, I can't believe it's 25 years. In 2009, I was one of the organizers of the now defunct Women's Initiative made up of members of the Dramatistss Guild. I currently serve as a New York City ambassador. I am joining our annual meeting from New York City, specifically Harlem, which is on the traditional territory of the Munsee/Lenape nation and was built largely by the free labor of enslaved Africans. When we make artistic work on this land, it should be conversant with the impact of this history. I will be setting the stage for what my colleagues will be reporting with regard to the activities of your ambassadors and regional representatives during the coronavirus pandemic and what we will need to fulfill our charge in the future.

Pre-COVID, the arts and culture industry in New York City employed almost half a million workers and generated $120 billion, nearly 8 percent of the state's economy. A year ago, as you know, in March, marquees were turned off and ghost lights were turned on on stages here in New York City as well as on stages across the nation. Statistics show that the average financial loss due to COVID-19 per arts worker is $23,500 as reported in the summer of 2020. Sixty-three percent of arts workers, about 2.7 million, report being completely unemployed with artists in New York and Los Angeles accounting for the highest number of casualties. And as you know, if things are hard for white artists, they are triply hard for black, indigenous people of color and LGBTQIA artists who are estimated to be hit the hardest; financially, logistically, emotionally and psychologically.

And if you are a woman artist who found parallel employment while working on that next great American play or took a side gig perhaps to keep a roof over your head and food on the table for your families, then perhaps you know firsthand that women accounted for 100 percent of job losses at the end of 2020. Again, a disproportionately high number of these women are black and Hispanic and they have been faced not only with losing their jobs but they also disproportionately face losing their homes due to impending evictions. In this tale of two cities that is New York City, the disparities that have come to light are not new but because of COVID, they have been brought sharply into focus not just here what around the country.

I recently completed a survey after watching a theatrical event on Zoom. Participants were asked when do you realistically expect to be working your way down a crowded aisle to squeeze yourself into a seat surrounded by hundreds of other theater lovers? The options that were given were spring/summer of 2021, fall of 2021, the first half of 2022, the second half of 2022. Sometime in' 23, '24, '25 and last but not least, never again. Well, I checked spring and summer of 2021 and I see that I'm not the only one who has high hopes.

A recent article in *Backstage* reported New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has plans to bring back theater. In his State of the state address, Cuomo detailed a new initiative called, "New York Arts Revival" which will help fund a series of pop-up performances and events across the state that will involve live shows by artists such as Hugh Jackman, Amy Schumer and Chris rock. Additional headliners include Alec Baldwin, Billy Porter, Sarah Jessica Parker, Patty Smith and Mandy Patinkin. Cuomo declared, "New York City is not New York without Broadway."

Well, as a playwright who has done her share of independent producing, I am here to say that it's not just about Broadway. Of course, we appreciate the celebrities lending their gifts and talents, doing their part to revive theater in our great state. But as an ambassador, I know firsthand that playwrights, composers and librettists are quietly working towards that day when theater is revived. These artists are the Hugh Jackman's, the Billy Porters, the Sarah Jessica Parker's and Chris Rock's of our industry. Artists here and across the nation are firing up their star power, creating art by the people, for the people and about the people in every village and every hamlet from every state and every city that they are serving. These artists stand ready to embrace capped audiences toting their negative COVID-19 test results, sitting socially distanced, while wearing masks in properly ventilated theater spaces. They stand ready to submit new work to artistic directors, producers and theater owners so that they might retire those ghost lights and replace them with the light of human spirit told in stories crafted for the stage.

In closing, I would like to give a shout out to President Biden who signed an executive order in his first days of office to disrupt systematic racism throughout government agencies. He said, "Advancing equity has to be everyone's job. Everyone's job." And this includes American theaters. Maybe not commercial theaters who can do what they want with their money but at the very least, those theaters and arts organizations that collect city, state and

federal taxpayer dollars. They should be held accountable to the call for equity or risk losing those dollars.

Speaking of one of the 94 percent of women of color playwrights whose work has not been produced in theaters across the nation, along with a 92 percent of men of color playwrights and the same boat and the 81 percent of our white sister playwrights in the same boat, these theaters need to take their knee off the neck of these playwrights. We are disproportionately affected by the coronavirus pandemic either because of the color of our skin or because of our sex or both as is the case with playwrights who look like me.

In my opinion, we should be counted among the ranks of essential workers and first responders. We lend our gifts and talents to heal sustain and uplift our fellow Americans in ways that only the theater can. I pray that we all live to tell the tale when the country sees the much-anticipated revival of theater and the performing arts not just on Broadway but off-Broadway, in theaters large, small and in between, in living rooms and church basements, school auditoriums, outdoor amphitheaters and nontraditional spaces. I think I can safely speak for all of the regional reps and ambassadors when I say we intend to be a part of that revival and so do our constituents. Thank you.

Marjorie Bicknell: Hello. I Marjorie Bicknell. My pronouns are she/her. I first joined the Dramatists Guild in 1982 and since 2018, I've been the regional rep for Philadelphia where we live on the ancestral lands of the Lenni/Lenape people. I will be talking about the regional reps' resilience throughout 2020.

When the pandemic shut down just about everything last March, we needed a way to reach out to our members and keep them productive, hopeful and happy now that everyone was on lockdown. It was obvious that the thing to do was to embrace Zoom so we did quickly. Dominic D'Andrea, now the New York State regional rep, gave us a course in Zoom best practices and we were off. DG Footlights events flourished. For example, Philadelphia went from no readings in 2019 to 28 playwrights seeing their plays read in 2020. Across country, Footlights ___ popped up between Seattle and Tennessee and Tennessee and Philadelphia with more to come.

Zoom silent writing groups became popular. NYC Write Now brings writers in the five boroughs together every Monday and Wednesday for two hours. And the first Wednesday of each month

is an open house for DG members worldwide to join in. It has been enormously successful and has a loyal following.

The Florida region also hosts a successful weekly writing group and Emma Falzera Ray, in Western New England, took a tiny writers group that met in her church basement and turned it into a group filled with Dramatists Guild members from throughout her region, across the country and around the world. Social events on Zoom also popped up such as the monthly Friday night Cocktails and Mocktails social in Florida.

And education flourished. In Florida, Marge O'Neill Butler was especially busy with events such as Writing The 10-Minute Play, Getting An Agent, Writing For Musical Theater and more. In Philadelphia, we presented How To Submit So Your Play Gets Produced, 10 Mistakes Playwrights Make When Submitting To Contests and to Q&A's with Jeffrey Sweet.

And that's just the tip of the iceberg because distance has no meaning when you're meeting on Zoom, regional reps got together and planned multi-regional events. Oregon regional rep Rachel Carnes and Seattle rep Hannah Cole got us started and have now joined with Patricia Milton and Diane ___ to create events that involve the entire West Coast.

While this hasn't been easy, we've had to learn new skills and stretch ourselves in ways we never expected we could. Seattle rep Hannah Cole said she initially found planning and executing these meetings difficult because she couldn't take the temperature of the room. This month, she's launching Hearts in Isolation, a solo show writing challenge.

This is just a small sampling of what's gone on across the country in 2020 where surprisingly, we've been more productive than ever. Want proof? We've got it. In 2019, the regions hosted 197 events. In 2020, however, regional reps and ambassadors hosted 319 events and as of the date of this recording, February 14, we've already held 52 events in 2021.

Harrison Young, the ambassador for Knoxville, Tennessee puts working in a pandemic this way. "The point is to stay involved. We're all going to feel weird about this era when the pandemic finally lifts. But just because it's not the same doesn't mean it's not worthwhile." To quote MOP, "The game ain't changed. It just got harder." And as you can see our regional reps and ambassadors really know how to rock the harder. Thank you.

Dominic D'Andrea: Hi, my name is Dominic D'Andrea. I use he/him pronouns and I'm recording this from the unceded land of the Lenape people in the Hudson Valley, New York. I am the New York State representative for the Dramatists Guild of America. And before I was elected to this position, I served as a first ever Hudson Valley ambassador for New York.

I wanted to take a moment today to spotlight the Ambassador program as it's become one of the most robust and interesting groups within the Dramatists Guild organization. The Young Ambassador program, as it was initially called, started in 2014. The goal was for regional reps to onboard students and recent graduates to help them in their efforts in exchange for professional mentorship and a professional experience.

The first ambassadors were on boarded in 2014. That year, 22 young ambassadors were initiated into the program. All of them lived in the same regions as their local reps. And as the Ambassador program evolved, DG shifted to focus on enlisting existing members and at-large community members to help them with their efforts. The roles expanded and so did the opportunities for our community.

The Dramatists Guild learned that there were critical gaps in certain regions without representations that many of our members felt that so much of what the Guild did was so New York City-centric and that regional members were willing and eager to get involved. So with that, the Guild wanted to shift to honor that energy and to try to bring people into the fold.

The Ambassador program evolved into something more dynamic, more inclusive and designed to reward folks for their efforts. For their service, ambassadors were offered free DG membership, continuing education, relationship building on a national level and professional development perks. Today, we have 49 active ambassadors and 33 alumni of the program. The number of ambassadors has quadrupled within three years. Of that cohort, 10 went on to become regional reps and some have moved into committee work and other roles within DG.

A DG ambassador can be anyone, anywhere of any age and of any professional relationship to the Guild. Each theatrical community operates differently, responds to different needs and works at different paces. It follows that the Rep And Ambassador program would vary vastly from state to state and from region to region.

Some reps and ambassadors work as teams and others work independently.

As we continue to evolve as the Guild, the Ambassador And Regional Rep programs are becoming more and more parallel to one another. Reps and ambassadors attend monthly meetings together, have built a strong and unique bond as a cohort and are largely in the same community. The work of the ambassadors in the field is critical because their feedback helped shape and reshape the DG regions. For example, we established the Southwest region and promoted Puerto Rico to its own unique region from an ambassadorship. And now we have ambassadors in the UK, Canada and elsewhere around the world helping us learn about the needs of our international members.

The Ambassador program has added so much reach and engagement and dynamic energy to the life of the Guild. We have gained a nuanced understanding of our regions because of their contributions and we will continue to evolve and be responsive as we learn. We still have a lot of work to do. But we couldn't have done it without our ambassadors. Thank you, ambassadors for your service. We really appreciate all that you are doing.

Rachel Carnes: Hey, there. I'm Rachel Carnes. My pronouns are she/her. I'm the rep for Portland in Oregon and I'm recording this message on land that belongs to the Kalapuya people. Today I'll be focusing on what the Rep And Ambassador program needs to continue into the future based on input gathered from my national and international colleagues. We put out a request for suggestions which I'll now summarize.

As has been detailed in the wake of COVID-19, our modest annual programming budgets are cut so as a community, we hope to see a restoration of that funding. We'd like more access to Zoom for workshops, readings, classes and productions. We look to leadership to help us to develop our partners programs in this moment when theaters are dark so we can build a solid reentry plan for ourselves and audiences when we can gather once more. We see continued meaningful engagement initiatives from headquarters with the regions and extension of and considered in all the work that the Guild is doing. As you've heard in previous reports, the pandemic has created opportunities for creative collaborations and the Rep and Ambassador program has become increasingly interconnected. We would like to see it not become a standalone operation tasked with being the organization's national component but to continue in this integrative model.

The current moment has provided us ways to interact across regions and we want to keep this momentum going forward. For example, we can organize programming for various affinity groups, commonalities such as ethnicity and play genre, technique, identity and style. But Zoom exhaustion is really all – we all need hope and a physical sign that live theater will return. We want to be able to support our regions' dramatists and to help lead a path towards rebuilding live audiences.

"Mostly we are grateful," writes one ambassador. "I can only offer support and admiration for all of the challenges that I've seen met by the staff with grace and humor as we navigate through this difficult time." Thank you.

Jordan Stoval: The work that our reps and ambassadors are doing on a daily basis is reflective of the resilient nature of theater makers everywhere. We are dynamic, adaptable, ever-changing, forever in dialogue and always looking towards the future. Simply by becoming a member of the Guild, you've been invited into a community of folks dreaming beyond what is possible. Please don't forget that these people are here for you whenever you are need of support and we'll make sure to point you in the right direction no matter where you are in your writing career.

We may be out imagining the stories of tomorrow's stages alone, but we are all in this together. Please be in touch with me or any of your reps or ambassadors. Let us know what's on your mind or just say hello. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

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