



REPORT: ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT TO SUPPORT DISMANTLING RACISM

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Introduction: Assessing Ourselves to Guide Our Future

The events of the past year have highlighted the devastating harms of systemic racism and called for intentional and effort-filled work to dismantle these oppressive systems in communities and organizations. Theatres across Canada, and within Manitoba, have been called on to do the work of seeing and dismantling racism within the theatre community.

In July 2020, Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre (MTC) developed an *Anti-Racism Commitment to Action* that launched a more dedicated effort to address racism and become an anti-racist organization. In this statement, MTC acknowledged its privilege as a predominantly white-led institution, apologized for the harm caused by inherent barriers for IBPOC communities, and committed to making transformative change.

As an early step in this larger effort, MTC requested an independent consulting organization to facilitate an anti-racism organizational assessment, engaging internal stakeholders (Board of Trustees and Staff) and external stakeholders. The external stakeholders are artists who identify as Indigenous, Black, or People of Colour (IBPOC) and have experience working with MTC. This assessment report – shared with the community – is part of our commitment to making transformational change, to repairing and reimagining MTC's relationships with our community, and to building bridges with those who have been historically excluded or underserved by our theatre.

There were two purposes of both the internal and external engagements:

- a) to gauge the environment at MTC - understand if, where, or how MTC supports (often unintentionally) systemic racism,
- b) and to inform next steps and actions to support the *Anti-Racism Commitment to Action*.

Captured here is a summary of the findings of both internal and external stakeholders engagements that includes their perspectives on MTC and suggestions for how MTC could work from an anti-racist approach to support more equitable and respectful art, art making, organization and community.

This report begins by summarizing assessment processes, namely an organizational assessment survey completed by Board members and staff, and interviews with IBPOC artists. What follows are two separate sections that share stakeholder input: Part One and Part Two.

Part One highlights findings from Board and Staff perspectives; noticings from the organizational assessment survey; actions MTC is already taking that work to dismantle racism; and places where Staff and Board feel MTC could do additional or improved work. Part Two captures input from Winnipeg-based and non-local IBPOC Artists. Engaged through interviews and focus groups, Artists shared their own experiences and noticing of MTC as well as opportunities for MTC to engage more deeply in dismantling racism.

During the assessment process, the two sets of stakeholders (Board and Staff; Artists) were engaged using two very different styles. The engagement with Board and staff was more structured and quantitative while the engagement with artist was qualitative and allowed for the sharing of personal experience, reflection, and story. Given this, Part One and Part Two of the report read very differently.

It is important to note that MTC's engagement in the growing conversation about representation and diversity did not begin in the summer of 2020. MTC's current Strategic Plan (2017-2021) identifies a strategic direction to reflect and respond to the Manitoba community. The appointment of Artistic Director Kelly Thornton – the first female Artistic Director in the organization's history – represents an intentional shift at MTC to expand the stories being told on its stages. This was reflected in Kelly's first programmed season, announced in January 2020 but cancelled due to COVID-19, which centred diverse stories and amplified IBPOC and female artists.

MTC's intentional commitments outlined in their *Anti-Racism Commitment to Action* (July 2020), and the feedback and insights gathered through this assessment process lay the foundation for MTC's continued work to address systemic racism and create transformative change. MTC is grateful to all those who contributed to this assessment process, deeply appreciates the ideas, suggestions and experiences shared, and is excited to continue on a path to change.

Process

The organizational assessment consisted of two types of engagement: an internal assessment and an assessment by external stakeholders.

The internal portion of the assessment was an organizational assessment survey completed by the Board of Trustees and 39 staff. It is noted that this assessment took place during the COVID pandemic which saw a large reduction in the MTC staff. The staff who conducted the assessment were comprised of those currently and recently employed, in both administration and production departments, and including full-time, seasonal, and part-time staff. The internal assessment asked staff to reflect on seven areas of the organization in relation to its work or efforts around working from an anti-racist approach:

- Organizational Culture
- Staffing and Human Resources
- Governance
- Leadership (Executive Director and Artistic Director)
- Programming
- Community
- Audience & Communications

The survey also asked staff for their insights on what MTC was currently doing that supported a respectful and inclusive organization as well as their suggestions for what MTC could be doing. The survey was completed by Board and staff in November 2020.

At the time of the assessment 82% of staff identified as white and 18% as IBPOC. The staff survey results have been analyzed around racial identity and any differences in experience or awareness will be reported within the findings below. At the time of assessment 100% of the Board identified as white.

The external assessment involved conversations with IBPOC artists through interviews (individual or focus groups) in November and December 2020. All the artists had experience in the last three years working with MTC. Some were locally based, and some were based in other Canadian provinces. In the interviews, artists were asked to speak to their experience or noticings of how systemic racism is present at MTC and to suggest ways for MTC to dismantle racism and address inequalities.

Part 1: Internal Assessment

Board Input

All MTC Board of Trustees (Board), a total of 19 people, responded to the Organizational Assessment Survey. At the time of the assessment all Board of Trustees were white.

Organizational Culture

The Board believes MTC has a culture where concerns about racism or colonization can be freely named and addressed and that MTC values diversity and draws on a variety of perspectives.

Most of the Board (62-77%) felt they did not know about staff experience with the impact or presence of racism and colonialism, cultural expressions or norms within MTC, and processes around decision making and conflict resolution.

Staffing and Human Resources

Half of the Board felt the MTC's staff complement did not reflect the full spectrum of IBPOC communities, while the rest did either not know or believed representation was present.

A large majority of the Board did not know about MTC's hiring practices, anti-discriminatory policies, opportunities for staff to build dismantling racism skills, or if IBPOC staff were supported in leadership development.

There was a lot of variance in response to MTC's strength in hiring and retaining IBPOC staff. Board members equally agreed, disagreed, or did not know about MTC's strength in these areas.

Leadership (Artistic Director and Executive Director)

Overwhelmingly, the Board has confidence in the current leadership's approach to dismantling racism. All Board members believe the current leadership is open to engaging with dismantling racism, building MTC's capacity to work from an anti-racist approach and creates an environment where concerns about racism or colonialization can be raised and will be acted upon. Most of the Board felt the leadership makes informed decisions, rooted in community consultation and connection. Nearly 65% of the Board agreed that the leadership is clear around how it makes significant decisions, while some neither agreed nor disagreed and one member disagreed.

Governance

The Board had quite varied responses around MTC's mission or vision clearly articulating a goal of dismantling racism, yet most of the Board believe that values that support anti-racism are incorporated into strategic planning. The vast majority believe the current Board make-up does not reflect the diversity of the community. Regarding the Boards engagement in discussions or training about dismantling racism or colonization, half the Board believed this did not occur, while most of the remaining Board members see this occurring in limited ways.

Programming

The majority of the Board believe that MTC prioritizes diversity and equity in programming and that programming is assessed for how well it is connecting with diverse communities. More than half of the Board do not know how MTC supports or trains IBPOC artists, and 30% believe this happens in marginal ways. Similarly, most of the Board were unaware of whether MTC's youth programming was welcoming or accessible to IBPOC youth, while 35% believed it was accessible.

Community

Regarding connection, relationship, and accountability to the larger community, for the most part the Board felt MTC was connected or engaged.

The majority of the Board believes the Fringe is welcoming and accessible to diverse artists, audiences, staff and volunteers. Similarly, half of the Board felt MTC has good working relationships with IBPOC leaders and were accountable to IBPOC communities, while half the board did not know about these relationships or if/how MTC was accountable.

The Board believes it helps MTC build diverse connections and partnerships.

Audience & Communications

The Board recognizes that the audience at MTC does not reflect the diversity of the community. While some were unsure, over half of the Board feel promotional materials are culturally appropriate and accessible to all and that MTC tracks marketing and audience data and utilizes that information to support anti-racist objectives.

Staff Input

A total of 39 staff responded to the organizational assessment survey. Data was analyzed by staff racial identity, where 32 staff identified as white and seven staff identified as Indigenous, Black, a Person of Colour and/or mixed race. It is common in many organizations for IBPOC and white staff to have different experiences. While there are some places where all staff are aligned, those differences in experience are present among IBPOC and white MTC staff.

Organizational Culture

Half of white staff feel the workplace welcomes conversations about race (another 35% feel neutral about this) and nearly 70% of white staff feel free to raise concerns about racism or colonization, believing those concerns will be acted on. In contrast, half of IBPOC staff report that discussion of racism and colonization are not encouraged and nearly 60% do not feel comfortable raising concerns about racism or colonization.

Most staff believe MTC is a workplace where staff can express their own culture, with 28% of IBPOC staff and 5% of white staff disagreeing. The majority of staff believe MTC values diverse perspectives, however while 35% of white staff feel neutral about this, 35% of IBPOC staff disagree or strongly disagree. Similarly, most staff believe MTC uses clear decision making and conflict resolution processes, with some staff reporting that they are unaware of these processes.

Staffing and Human Resources

Most staff agree or feel neutral about hiring practices being transparent and equitable. At the same time, they do not believe MTC's staff reflect the diversity of the community nor do most staff agree that MTC's strength is retaining IBPOC staff. Over half of IBPOC staff believe IBPOC staff are supported around leadership development (40% were unaware of these opportunities).

Most MTC staff believe the organization offers opportunities to build skills in dismantling racism (40% of IBPOC staff disagreed with this). Regarding MTC's anti-discrimination policies and practices, most white staff agreed they exist and that MTC follow through on the policies (20% did not know) while half of the IBPOC felt neutral about the policies and the follow-through.

Governance

The majority of staff believe the current board composition does not reflect the diversity of the community. Similarly, most staff did not know if the Board regularly engages in discussion or trainings around dismantling racism, colonization, or accountability, nor do most staff know if the Board incorporates values of equity and anti-racism within their planning and visioning. Most IBPOC staff felt neutral or disagreed with suggestion that MTC has a clear goal to dismantle racism, reflected in its mission or vision, while a significant amount of white staff (60%) agreed with this claim.

Leadership (Artistic Director and Executive Director)

The majority of all staff sees an openness and commitment from leadership in addressing racism and working from an anti-racist approach. Similarly, nearly all staff reported feeling comfortable to raise issues or concerns about racism with MTC's leadership.

Staff feel quite varied on the clarity around the process for significant decisions with nearly equal responses indicating staff agree, feel neutral, disagree, or do not know how significant decisions are made. While most staff agreed that leadership makes informed decisions based on consultation with the community, some were unaware and 30% of IBPOC staff disagreed.

Programming

Nearly all staff agree that MTC prioritizes accessibility, diversity, and equity in its programming (20% of IBPOC and 4% of white staff disagreed) and that there are training opportunities and supports that prioritize IBPOC artists and voices (14% of IBPOC and 10% of white staff disagreed).

Over half of IBPOC staff did not feel that MTC regularly assesses programming to understand how it is connecting to diverse communities or reducing barriers, while over half of white staff agreed or felt neutral about MTC assessing programming. Approximately 38% of all staff did not know how MTC assess or ensure accessibility of its programming.

Most staff believe that MTC's programming for students and educators is welcoming and meaningful to IBPOC youth. Many staff believe the Fringe is accessible and welcoming to racial diverse artists, audience, staff, and volunteers while 30% of IBPOC staff disagreed or strongly disagreed that the Fringe is welcoming.

Community

Most staff were unaware of MTC's relationships with IBPOC leaders while 30% of both IBPOC and white staff agreed good alliances with IBPOC leaders exist. Staff feel mixed about how accountable MTC is to IBPOC organizations and communities (equally agreeing, disagreeing, or not knowing if that accountability exists). Similarly, there were varied responses to whether MTC utilizes the knowledge and experience gained from IBPOC organizations and communities (with 40% IBPOC disagree that it is utilized).

Many staff agree or feel neutral that MTC supports anti-racism work within the larger theatre community. Most staff do not know or do not believe Board members assist with building connections and partnership with diverse communities.

Audience & Communications

Most staff do not believe current MTC audiences reflect the diversity of the community. IBPOC staff were split on promotional materials being culturally appropriate and accessible to all. Nearly 60% of IBPOC staff felt they were appropriate and accessible and 40% felt they were not. White staff were more varied, some reporting that they did not know if materials were accessible or appropriate. Staff were also varied in their responses to MTC efforts in tracking marketing and audience data to support anti-racist objectives with 30-40% of staff not knowing if or how this occurred.

Assessment Noticings: Board and Staff

After completing the bulk of the Organizational Assessment Survey, Board and Staff were asked for their initial noticings. Some common noticings among Board and Staff included:

- * MTC has started the journey and can build upon some of the efforts it has made to dismantle racism.
- * As a predominantly white organization there is a lot MTC does not know and has the opportunity to learn.
- * There is a lot of work ahead to centre IBPOC voices/artist and to work for an anti-racist approach. There is great opportunity in this work including: ensuring all staff feel welcome and valued; building deeper connections to the community; producing art that reflects and values the diversity of the community; and welcoming a more diverse audience.

MTC's Current Work to Support Dismantling Racism

The organizational assessment survey asked staff and Board to name what they believe MTC is currently doing that supports dismantling racism.

	IBPOC Staff	White Staff	Board of Trustees
Leadership		<p>Leadership is making anti-racism work a priority</p> <p>The AD and Associate AD are seeking out more diverse programming and more intentional works with IBPOC artists</p>	<p>Current staff leadership take the work of dismantling racism seriously and approach it with care.</p> <p>The AD is committed to engaging IBPOC artists and exploring IBPOC stories.</p>
Process		<p>Following through on commitments made this summer</p> <p>Occasionally MTC does a land/treaty acknowledgement</p>	<p>MTC is open to having dialogue with IBPOC artists, taking feedback (and criticism seriously) and responding in meaningful ways</p>
Productions	<p>MTC is beginning to produce show that represent IBPOC communities and centred in IBPOC stories/experience</p>	<p>Some productions are respectful, thought provoking</p>	<p>Some recent programming has explored racism or told Indigenous stories</p> <p>Upcoming season had planned for some diverse stories</p>
Staffing	<p>Some staff diversity, particularly in the Box Office</p> <p>The new Associate AD</p> <p>The Indigenous Fellowship position</p>	<p>The Indigenous Fellowship position</p> <p>Staff training (striving for learning)</p>	<p>Organization-wide training</p>
Board			<p>Board Commitment, open to engaging, learning and changing</p> <p>Organization wide training</p>

Community and Outreach	Backstage Pass has fostered some diversity by connecting with IBPOC youth.	Youth Programming Indigenous Playwright Circle National Mentorship Program	
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Board and Staff: Suggested Ways Forward

The Board and staff shared suggestions for how MTC could support dismantling racism efforts and become an increasingly equitable and respectful organization.

a) Staff & Workplace Culture

Diversify MTC staff and volunteers while ensuring the workplace culture is welcoming and supportive for IBPOC staff.

- Increase IBPOC representation with the MTC staff (and volunteers) and ensure that IBPOC people have an opportunity to build their careers at MTC.
- Ensure policy and practice (hiring) provide opportunities for IBPOC people, and that the environment is welcoming and anti-racist.

b) Board of Trustees

Build meaningful diversity into the membership of the Board of Trustees.

c) Productions

Ensure our productions reflect the entire community and are created by diverse artists and crew.

- Ensure that more productions, particularly on the Mainstage, are IBPOC centered stories and include IBPOC writers, directors, actors, creative teams and crew
- Do a better job telling the stories of our diverse community
- Bring more diversity into casting (too often we see an all-white cast or a cast with minimal IBPOC representation)
- Diversifying productions could be supported by engaging IBPOC people/community
- Ensure productions are vetted for racist content and this content is addressed.

d) Audience Engagement

Engage in different opportunities to strengthen connection to patrons in ways that support anti-racism.

- Create policy and procedure for managing audience comments or actions that support racism (ensuring staff are supported and equipped to respond to such patrons, creating safe space policy)
- Enhance outreach and build relationships with more diverse communities as a means to welcome IBPOC audience members

- Develop more ways to engage with audiences around dismantling racism or colonization (educational support). For example, opportunities for those who want to engage more deeply or learn more. This could be done through program inserts, connecting with other community resources/opportunities, or engaging with artists
- Develop capacity to gather data on the diversity of the audience

e) Relationship with Community

Build strong and authentic relationships with IBPOC communities through deep listening, implementing learnings/feedback and focused outreach.

- Build relationships and collaboration with the IBPOC community (artists, local organizations) to help inform and guide MTC's work (creation of work, outreach)
- Realize that outreach with multiple IBPOC communities will take time, energy, beyond the work of a staff person. It will also need to be authentic and meaningful
- Ensure programming is made accessible and reflective of IBPOC communities. Find creative ways to reduce barriers to accessing theatre (included ticket prices)

f) Support IBPOC Artists and Crew

Develop dedicated and intentional ways to support IBPOC artists and crew within the community and at MTC

- Create mentorship or training opportunities for both IBPOC artists and crew
- Develop programming/education that connect IBPOC youth to theatre
- Invest in the development of plays from IBPOC voices

g) Training

Provide staff and board with opportunities for ongoing learning and reflection.

h) Processes and Decision Making

- Continue dialogue and deep listening with IBPOC artists and communities and follow-through on feedback received
- Work collaboratively with IBPOC artists
- Dedicate resources (staff time, funds, services) to this work, recognizing that it is a long-term project
- Enhance communication among MTC staff. Create opportunities for all staff to learn about MTC's goals and objectives and contribute to those being actualized (e.g. planning discussions).

Part 2: External Assessment Through Artist Input

The artists who engaged in this process did so with generosity and dedication to the theatre community. While recognizing that these are hard conversations to have, artists spoke about wanting to be part of the conversations in order to build stronger relationships and contribute to making change. They want to see MTC flourish and have a bright future. They also need that future to include real change.

The IBPOC artists interviewed were asked to comment on their experiences and noticing around systemic racism within MTC, focusing primarily on the last few years. They were asked about behaviours, actions, or attitudes at MTC that worked to support or dismantle systemic racism, how they experienced these behaviours, actions, or attitudes. They were also asked to comment on how the working environment at MTC made them feel.

The artists were then asked for their insight and suggestions on how MTC could work from an anti-racism approach and work to dismantle racism. They spoke to why this was critical work and what MTC could either adjust, start, or continue in order to create a more equitable and culturally reflective organization and art.

Artist Reflections on MTC's Past and Present

When asked about their experience and noticings of MTC, both currently and in the recent past, artists spoke to seven areas where systemic racism has impact: **Productions; Respect, Care and Accommodation; Casting; Creative Teams; Tokenism; Harm, Discomfort and Fear; Community & Outreach.**

Productions

Stories by and for white people have been normalized as the 'standard' across Canadian theatres. Plays deemed prestigious are predominantly written by white playwrights, cast white actors and tell white stories. Artists interviewed believe MTC has upheld this normalization of the white standard. As one artist said "we have always been on the planet, but are not written into stories" shared on mainstream stages. Dominant culture has ignored stories by and for IBPOC people. Artist report that MTC's productions have been predominantly white, occasionally with a tokenized show with a diverse cast or by IBPOC playwright. Artists feel shows with IBPOC writers or diverse casts are sandwiched between all white shows or stories to appease the audience. For example, *The Color Purple* being "balanced" by MTC's version of *Christmas at Pemberley*.

Some artists spoke about being pleasantly shocked when MTC announced it was producing *The Color Purple*, shocked that MTC was going to give this Black story and Black culture a spotlight. Deep down they know Black culture is rich and diverse, but they did not think Black stories were welcomed at MTC. There is a spoken and unspoken idea that IBPOC stories are 'risky' and may not connect with the dominantly white audience.

Given the dominance of white storytelling, Artists reported not feeling connected to the plays that MTC produces. Productions often (or never) reflect their cultures or histories or experiences. Similarly, productions can include no staff or crew that reflect IBPOC races or cultures. IBPOC artists are capable of high-quality work and story telling. However, those interviewed feel IBPOC artists are not given room on MTC stages.

Artists indicated that when IBPOC voices or experiences are represented, it is often done on the MTC Warehouse stage. The Warehouse is 'edgier' representing slightly more varied stories, where they are not given the attention or focus that the MTC Mainstage is given. One artist said, "when I'm allowed to use my voice it's on the small stage and always representing people that aren't even me."

On occasion, Artist also noticed a lack of thoughtfulness when IBPOC stories were part of MTC productions. Artist spoke about how good it feels in the rare times they are part of a diverse cast on MTC's stages, yet the IBPOC stories that are told are often generally the same - stories of black and brown people's trauma. The wholeness of Black, Brown, or Indigenous life is not reflected on stage in the diverse and varied ways stories about white people are shared. One artist spoke about being part of a production centered in a IBPOC experience that was not written or directed by an IBPOC person and that disconnect was never acknowledged. There seemed to be a lack of thought about the need to have someone in the rehearsal hall that understood the choices, the culture, or the music.

Respect, Care & Accommodation

Part of dismantling racism is recognizing the different experiences we have and giving intentional care, attention, and respect to those differences. On occasion, that is done well at MTC. Artists feel supported in their work and notice particular care or attention. For example, before the production of *Sarah Ballenden* (story of a Metis woman), there was a welcoming ceremony, smudging ceremony, and land acknowledgment. There was also a cultural advisor to support the show. At the same time, it was never acknowledged or discussed that the play was written and directed by white artists.

Artists notice discrepancies in how white and IBPOC artist are supported. For example, in a production with British characters there is thorough dialect support offered. Yet for a show with other accents there is little to no support or training. Artists report that MTC does not have a strong history in providing IBPOC dialect support.

Artists also spoke about the lack of awareness or care around their bodies, specifically their hair texture or skin tone. MTC staff have not been aware of the specific needs Black actors have with regard to wigs. Also, on occasion wigs were created to emulate white hair (straight, smooth) but put on a Black artist. There was no thought put into making the wig resemble the textured hair of the artist. There is also little awareness around lighting stages with diverse casts, and dark skin in particular. There has been a lack of consideration for how darker skin tones need to be lit on stage (while there is comfort, familiarity, and skill lighting light skin tones).

There has also been a lack of respect or care when it comes to seeing people. There were different examples of artists being mistaken for others within their racial group. One example was a member of the creative team of a production often being mistaken for actor in lead role. The messages this gives to artists is that it is not important enough to tell people from their racial groups apart. It also speaks to the fact that it is rare to see people of IBPOC identities in key roles.

Lastly, some artists spoke about a recent show that was on MTC's Mainstage and the Regional Tour, *The New Canadian Curling Club*. The show's content included issues around immigration and racism. They believe it is important for MTC to explore this type of content in their productions. However when the play toured small towns, members of the cast felt vulnerable, noting it was their bodies on

stage telling the story. They did not feel safe or protected in that environment. There could have been more thought or care put into how to ensure the IBPOC cast would not feel vulnerable or unsafe. It would have also been more thoughtful to anticipate or name this experience prior to touring.

Casting

When it comes to casting, those interviewed said they were most disappointed when white shows are predominantly cast with white actors. From their perspective, it feels like the norm for an open casting call to result in an all-white cast.

Artists know that, more often than not, they are auditioning for roles that have not been written for them and by directors who do not envision them in the roles. With predominantly white directors, IBPOC artists also realize there is less affinity or connection between themselves and directors. There is added “psychological weight” to convince a director that not only could they work with you, but that, as a skilled artist, they could fill a role they never envisioned would be filled by an IBPOC artist.

IBPOC artists see white artists getting reached out to during the casting process, yet never have that experience themselves. They are never, or rarely, invited to audition for parts, largely because so many parts are written for white actors. When productions express an openness to cast with racial diversity yet hire predominantly white artists, often the excuse is that there is not enough IBPOC talent in Winnipeg (“they all leave”). IBPOC artists suggest looking beyond Winnipeg (for example, for a lead role). They want to see skilled, talented IBPOC artists on the stage.

Artists believe there is opportunity for MTC to be more mindful and intentional about casting IBPOC artists. Those interviewed reported that *Christmas at Pemberley* was written for a diverse cast yet the cast was not diverse in the MTC production. There also needs to be care and thoughtfulness around racially diverse casting. Colour-blind casting can create harm when audiences see a IBPOC actor in the role written for a white actor (for example creating a biracial family) yet the implications or context are never discussed openly or processed by the creative team. Another example is when a Black person is cast in a role that is submissive (similar to a maid), upholding racial stereotypes. One artist recounted a role they played, written for a white actor, where their character was continually being shut down and dismissed by white male characters. The power dynamics or racial messaging around this casting decision was never acknowledged or discussed. Artists are calling for racially diverse casting, but they want that casting to be done with care and consideration of systemic racism.

Creative Teams

Those interviewed have noticed some recent positive changes at MTC with the hiring of Artistic Director Kelly Thornton and Associate Artistic Director Audrey Dwyer. Kelly is open to discussions that name and address racism. Since the summer roundtable, Kelly has engaged with IBPOC artists, providing space for them to be honest and to be heard. Kelly listened and created a safe space to offer feedback. To those interviewed, this feels new and different for MTC. One artist said, “when you really see us it does wonders, we will speak up, show up, do well”.

The hiring of Audrey Dwyer is exciting for many of the artists interviewed. Several spoke about appreciating Audrey's presence and perspective. Audrey creates a safe and comfortable space for IBPOC artists. The IBPOC artists report that it is easier to connect with Audrey and feel like you are being seen. One artist said that Audrey knew or understood their culture and knew how to relate to them. At the same time, those interviewed are cautious. They want to be hopeful and they are watching to see how welcomed Audrey's influence will be at MTC.

The artists interviewed explained that the creative teams they have worked with at MTC have been nearly all white. There is a noticeable absence, for example, of IBPOC writers, directors, and choreographers. This is harmful in a few different ways. First it ignores the work and talent of IBPOC artists. It also prioritizes white artists, even when the material is about IBPOC communities with whom they have no connection or affiliation. Artists see white artists being paid 'top dollar' for their stories (including stories they write about IBPOC communities) while IBPOC artists are called in to consult or research. Secondly, challenges are created by lack of awareness or attention paid to important details (see Respect, Care and Accommodation). One example given was the production of *The New Canadian Curling Club*, a show written and directed by white artists, telling the stories of IBPOC people, specifically those who recently immigrated to Canada. The show addressed racism, but from a white perspective. Artists report IBPOC acquaintances (audience members) expressing how humiliated they were by the show. It is believed that a racially diverse artistic team would have supported both the story and the production in ways that would be appreciated by all audiences.

Lastly, all white artistic teams can perpetuate ideas and expression of white superiority (only whites are hired for key roles). For example, some artists talked about being targeted by white directors (being called incompetent for something small and being the only person to be called out in this way) in a room of entirely white people. This type of environment dissuades IBPOC artists from auditioning.

Tokenism

Those interviewed all agreed that tokenism is a big problem, both within MTC as an organization and on its stages. This is seen in limited IBPOC presences on and off stage (see Casting above). IBPOC artists mentioned that when they are the only IBPOC artist on a stage they stick out, and they often stick out on MTC stages. This can feel like they are targets or unwelcome and that they have limited voice or contribution.

Stories also get tokenized. Artist reported that when IBPOC voices or experiences are represented, it is often done through limited stories lines or on the smaller MTC Warehouse stage (see Productions above). Nationally, artists also notice one IBPOC play will be part of multiple theatres across the country during a single season. It will be the only IBPOC story told and often about IBPOC trauma, tokenizing the stories of IBPOC communities.

The reality that IBPOC artists have such limited (tokenized) opportunity on MTC and Winnipeg stages affects the larger theatre community. For example, artists believe that if institutions training artists do not see opportunity for IBPOC artists they will not prioritise or encourage IBPOC artists. Currently local training institutions have very low IBPOC enrolment.

Harm, Discomfort and Fear

Many artists saw the summer Roundtable in July 2020 as a growth opportunity, and a chance to name and acknowledge how systemic racism shows up in theatre. It also helped IBPOC artists feel they could raise their voice and share their perspective. Artists appreciated the interviews conducted as part of this Organizational Assessment as important and an opportunity to speak freely. This is critical because IBPOC artists are constantly navigating power imbalances, and fears speaking the truth about systemic racism.

Artists report that working in a systemically racist system takes a great toll on IBPOC artists. It is harmful to show up in spaces where white colleagues are getting contracts more often, getting paid more, and getting their stories told. One artist said, “it’s oppressive and disorienting”. There is an emotional cost to “trying to make it” in an oppressive system. IBPOC artists articulated several ways that emotional toll is experienced:

- Feeling like we are not allowed to be mediocre; we have to be excellent
- “I have to have everything memorized, dig deep, I need to be excellent just to get a call back”
- Feeling we should be proud of who we are, but who we are is working against us
- Being told to be grateful just because we get a part (be quiet and be grateful)
- The common, uncomfortable feeling of being the only IBPOC artist on stage

Artists speak about carrying this weight year after year. It can build and they can become disillusioned. They can be left wondering if they got a part because they were filling a diversity quota or if they got a part because they were skilled and talented. They want to be seen for their skill and talent.

Engaging the Theatre Community

As noted above, several of the artists interviewed spoke about the importance of the summer Roundtable in July 2020. They saw it as a critical moment that made conversations about racism in theatre more public. They also expressed their appreciation for being part of the interview process for this Organizational Assessment. They were open to further conversation and welcomed engagement by MTC.

At the same time, they called for good process around these types of engagements. Systemic racism means IBPOC artists must continually navigate power imbalances, so unless some trust is established there will be some resistance to honest feedback or input. Kelly Thornton (AD) has done a good job of beginning to establish that trust and safety with some artists.

Some artists also felt the summer Roundtable lacked good process and thoughtfulness. They were unclear why the Roundtable took the form it did and felt the planning and engagement with IBPOC artists was rushed. Some of the IBPOC panel, and those attending, did not feel able to speak freely nor did they understand the purpose of the Roundtable. While they are glad the Roundtable happened, there was potential for it to have happened in a more mindful and effective way, taking into perspective IBPOC voices and experiences.

Audience & Outreach

It is recognized that the MTC audience is predominately white. It is also assumed that the majority of donors are white. There is a feeling from IBPOC artists that there is fear or risk in telling IBPOC stories because it is assumed those stories will not connect with the white audience and result in the loss of audience and donors. They do not believe it has to be an either/or situation. They see great opportunity to connecting with new IBPOC audiences and donors.

From the Artist perspective, there appears to be a lack of interest or intentional effort in engaging IBPOC audiences, which is particularly frustrating when the artists interviewed know that there are potential IBPOC audiences out there. Those interviewed talk about examples of when audiences were racially diverse and in both those cases the diversity was not perceived to be a result of the efforts of MTC. For example, in a one-time presentation by One Yellow Rabbit and Making Treaty 7 at MTC, the audience was significantly more racially diverse then the typical MTC production. One artist described it as thrilling and beautiful to see. Artists attribute this diversity to the connection to community and relation building that went alongside the production. In another production, telling the stories of a specific ethnic community, some artists perceived no effective effort, on the part of MTC, to engage local members of that ethnic community in attending the production. At the same time, an artist in the production undertook personal efforts to promote the performance with members of the local community resulting in a much more diversified audience.

Lastly the artists interviewed believe MTC has an opportunity to build connections to more racially diverse communities and welcome them into the theatre in ways that go beyond being audience members. Artists have knowledge and experience with other theatre programs for youth (including in Winnipeg) that intentionally welcomed more diverse youth, particularly youth who may experience barriers to participation. They also see the importance of engaging IBPOC youth who may not otherwise be exposed to theatre as a critical way of diversifying the theatre community, including artists, audiences, staff, and volunteers.

Artists: Suggested Ways Forward

The IBPOC artists interviewed were generous in offering ways that MTC could more intentionally work to dismantle racism within the organization and the larger community. They offered opportunities around **Outreach to the Community; Organizational Approach; Diversifying Staff; Board of Trustees; Diversifying Productions; Diversifying Creative Teams, Cast and Crews; and Investing in Artists.**

This work would result in more care and compassion to themselves, as IBPOC artists, but also make changes to art and the larger community that would reduce harm, build awareness and connection, and create more equity and respect.

a) Outreach to the Community

All those interviewed believe strengthening MTC's outreach and diversifying MTC's audience are crucial steps in this work. This includes building relationships with racially and culturally diverse communities and finding ways to effectively promote programming (both productions and community programming such as youth programming). One artist said "you can't invite people to a house they have never been in and expect them to come. They have never seen themselves there, they don't feel they belong." Outreach to communities means listening for what resonates and responding with content that is meaningful. It also means finding ways to reduce barriers to attending or participating in programming. The artists interviewed know this is possible to do (see *Audience & Outreach* above).

Several artists also spoke about the importance of intentionally connecting with IBPOC youth or students. MTC could find meaningful opportunities to introduce IBPOC youth to theatre or supporting IBPOC students with opportunities (such as an invitation to a table read) or internships along their journey. The theatre could demonstrate to IBPOC youth that MTC cares about and values their presence in the theatre and wants them to excel.

Diversifying who engages with MTC programming is important work that not only supports the dismantling of racism but is also strategically important considering the benefits to diversifying a support base. Those interviewed believe that connecting with, and bringing in, new audiences will only support the theatre in the long run.

b) Organizational Approach

There are some specific suggestions for how MTC as an organization could effectively approach dismantling racism work.

- i. *Focus on the systemic nature of racism and MTC's role within that system.* It is important for MTC to spend time reflecting on itself, which was acknowledged as hard work to do but very critical work. Artists encourage MTC to start with itself when wanting to create change, finding ways to break down the ways MTC currently supports or contributes to systemic racism
- ii. *Stay centered in IBPOC input.* MTC is encouraged to continue connecting with the community (as in this process) and continue seeking out IBPOC perspective and input. Artists want the conversation to continue. Ensure that when you are reaching out to IBPOC community members, you do so in a meaningful and respectful way, showing that you value

their input. There are IBPOC community members (artists and others) who want to be part of the conversation and want to support change.

- iii. *Blend hearts/vision with policy and accountability.* Artists talked about the importance of policy to support the changes MTC wants to see. Policy helps ‘make things official’ and helps to ensure follow-through. However, that policy is not meaningful without vision, otherwise it just becomes numbers (tokenizing). There must be heart and vision guiding this work to make it effective and real. That heart and vision need to carry and guide this work.

c) Diversify Staff

The perspective an organization carries is based, in part, on who is in the room. Artists dream of a future where MTC’s staff is more racially diverse. This diversity would help foster varied approaches, wider connections, and additional perspectives that would benefit all aspects of the organizations work. The lack of diversity currently at MTC has an impact (as described above throughout *Reflections on MTC’s Past and Present*).

d) Board of Trustees

Artists also called for increased racial diversity among the Board of Trustees and improved communication between the Board and community. The Board is recognized as having a lot of power. There is an opportunity for IBPOC representation and perspective at the Board level, particularly when it is the Board’s role to shape and govern the organization. The Board of Trustees could also have more connection to artists or the larger community. Suggestions for this include more accessible AGMs or reporting to the community.

e) Diversifying Productions and Casting

Artists interviewed see huge potential in diversifying the stories that are told on MTC stages. They dream of a future where ‘the best stories’ are told from varying perspectives and world views.

Artists also said they need the future to reflect their communities. The time of predominantly white storytelling has passed. The focus on predominantly white stories has supported systemic racism and created harm. One artist said that a production on MTC stages has never reflected their culture, and they “would love to know what it feels like to belong” and be reflected on an MTC stage. In reflecting diverse communities, it means telling stories that are not only about IBPOC trauma or tragedy or stereotyped identities (terrorists, victims, etc.), but varied stories that show the wholeness of IBPOC experience and cultures. Artists advocate for IBPOC joy and strength in the stories that appear on MTC stages.

When diversifying casts, Artists name the importance to approaching this thoughtfully and with care. Consider the diverse bodies of IBPOC artists (see *Respect, Care and Accommodation* above) in relation to costumes, wigs and lighting. Working thoughtfully also includes care, consideration, and context (presence of systemic racism) when IBPOC artists take on roles written for white artists. Artists want to ensure MTC acknowledges and unpacks the effect of an IBPOC person being put in that role. That includes interpreting the writing as it relates to IBPOC bodies, unpacking the impact of an interracial relationship, or being mindful of how diverse casting will be introduced or acknowledged to audiences. IBPOC artists want to take on roles written for white bodies, but they want to do that in a way that is safe, a way they feel supported.

f) Diversify Creative Teams & Crew

As explained earlier, creative teams at MTC have been predominantly white. Artists see significant opportunity and benefit to more racially and culturally diverse creative teams. A team that represents multiple voices and perspectives behind the scenes can help build more responsive and reflective productions. Those interviewed called for increased diversity around decision-making tables or in decision-making roles, including creative teams.

Similarly, a lack of diverse crew also has an impact. Those interviewed believe there is a lot of room for MTC to diversify their crew. Sometimes organizations like MTC claim they have looked and can not find racially diverse creative team or crew members to hire. That does not feel like a legitimate claim to those interviewed. They see potential for MTC to work harder to ensure diverse Creative Teams and Crew.

g) Investing in IBPOC Artists

The artists interviewed stressed the importance of reducing barriers to and building up the experience of IBPOC artists (includes those who are students). Systemic racism creates a highly unequal playing field, therefore creating equality means having an intentional focus on IBPOC artists. Artists are calling for explicit support for IBPOC artists such as:

- i. *Mentorships* – Opportunities for emerging artists to be mentored, specifically by a senior IBPOC artist, would be “magical” (as one artist described). This experience would have multiple benefits. Like any mentorship, it would help artists develop their skills. But in a more unique way it would provide opportunity to share lived experiences and navigation tips plus create a safe place for IBPOC artists to check in, debrief or seek guidance about experiences.
- ii. *Internships* – Develop paid (full-time) internships for IBPOC artists. One example is the Neptune Theatre who has a paid, full-time IBPOC Artistic Director Internship. MTC is encouraged to think creatively about providing well-resourced internships to IBPOC artists.
- iii. *Developing Writers* – Artists spoke about the opportunity to invest in stories that have not been told on the MTC stages, yet are part of the larger community. This could be done through supporting IBPOC writers in the creation of new work.
- iv. *Training* – Provide training opportunities explicitly to IBPOC artists. The training should be as accessible as possible (no fee) and give IBPOC artists opportunities to build their skills and experience.

Artists suggest that similar supports could be put in place for IBPOC creative team members and crew.

Conclusion

For too long, the theatre community in Canada, Winnipeg and at MTC has perpetuated systemic racism, creating harm on a variety of levels. That harm has included limiting IBPOC stories, perspectives, and experiences; tokenizing and ignoring IBPOC artists and audiences; and perpetuating harmful stereotypes. There is great interest within MTC to continue to support dismantling racism work that helps to make the organizations and theatre community equitable, safe, and respectful. Artists have been waiting for an intentional and focused effort to end racism within theatre and are ready to help support this effort.

There is opportunity for great and meaningful change. Change that would create or highlight quality art, created by diverse and talented artists (and perspectives), and supported by a respectful and inclusive organization. This change would draw new audiences and supporters to theatre, building deeper connections to community.

Staff, Board and IBPOC Artists recommendations for how MTC can build on current efforts to strengthen its anti-racist approach align in several places. Within MTC itself, there is opportunity for MTC to enhance its organizational practices and policies, to strengthen its outreach and connection to community and to diversify its staff, volunteers and Board of Trustees. Considering the art being made, there are calls to diversify productions, creative teams, casts and crews, and to do so with care and thoughtfulness. There is also opportunity to invest in IBPOC artists through multiple means to provide training and experiences that reduce current barriers. As MTC does this work, it is asked by Artists to ensure it keeps clear vision and intention in mind (to avoid tokenism) and to be in regular communication with IBPOC communities.

While this assessment was designed to inform efforts going forward, MTC takes some reassurance that some of the suggestions and guidance captured in the assessment align with programs and practices already underway. Recent artistic announcements have demonstrated our commitments, including the launch of the National Mentorship Program, the Pimootayowin Creators Circle, and priority access to the Tom Hendry Digital Studio.

Since the assessment process was started, MTC has undergone staff and board training that provided opportunities to understand how systemic racism operates, as well as how to work from an anti-racist approach. While the journey to dismantle systemic racism is life-long work, this assessment highlights that the Board of Trustees, staff and artists recognize the importance of this work, and are prepared to continue their commitment and investment.

MTC is grateful to all those who contributed to this conversation, and recognizes that there are strong directives, suggestions and ideas in this report which will require action, change and new relationships. Artistic Director Kelly Thornton and Executive Director Camilla Holland welcome feedback from any who read this report, as does our Board of Trustees. MTC will continue to provide updates on their work at royalmtc.ca

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