

Dear Vancouver Theatre Community,

The Jessies are back! We have heard from so many of you that having annual awards for excellence in Vancouver's professional theatre scene is something our community wants and has been missing. We also know that there are structures of inequality the Jessies have contributed to upholding in its past that needed addressing for it to have a robust, inclusive future. In the time since announcing our hiatus, your Jessies Board has done a lot of dreaming, researching, and consulting to try and re-shape aspects of the awards that need changing.

You will see on our website our new Vision, Mission, and Values honed at a board retreat in 2023 and put into practice this past year as we have readied the Jessies' return. Our values of inclusivity, transparency, receptiveness, community, and joy have been at the heart of all that we've done to steward this organization into its future.

We now have three budgetary categories (Large, Medium, Small) in order to try and level the playing field between companies and ensure that early career artists or new companies and collectives can receive the professional boost that come from Jessie nominations and awards. We have an inclusivity fund for jurors so that no one who wants to serve will experience financial barriers to doing so - through it we plan to help pay for childcare, transportation, or any other needs identified to us. We remain committed to requiring annual equity, diversity, and inclusion training for all board members, jurors, and special award committee members. After many rounds of community consultation, we have created juror rubrics that will now help guide jurors as they assess shows for "excellence" and report back to each other in their discussions. These rubrics will be living documents - publicly available on our website and open to feedback and adjustment year over year. We are also shifting our voting process so that jurors choose the winner from the short list of nominees, further ensuring winners are fully representative of jury consensus.

I'd like to thank the board members who have done vital work during the hiatus: Michael Wilkinson, Tamara Vishniakoff, Shayna Goldberg, and Hila Graf, as well as long-standing board members Seamus Fera and Matthew Rhodes. We are also thankful for our new board members who have joined to help energize and support this coming Jessies season: Melissa Oei, Deanna Overland, David C. Jones, and Itai Erdal.

Excited as we are to begin the Jessies again, we are not out of the woods yet. We have long-term financial challenges that are ongoing, and we also need buy-in from our community. To keep producing not only the awards show but the behind-the-scenes work of a thoughtful, equitable, and progressive organization requires many of you to step up and join us. Please respond to our call for jurors; please consider serving on our board or volunteering at event time; please call us in when you see things that need to be different and then stick around to envision ways to produce and implement that

change. As we said in our hiatus statement, we know it's possible that folks who have been historically excluded from the Jessie Awards may not feel called to give their energies to its future. But our current board very much wants every member of our community to feel valued and honoured by our work. We sincerely dream of a Jessies that's for everyone, open to the magic and possibility of every type of professional theatre being made in so-called Vancouver. We hope you will give us a chance this season, and not give up as we work through the processes of making the Jessies all that it should be.

With excitement,
Jocelyn Pitsch
Acting President
The Jessie Richardson Theatre Award Society