

**YOUR WORLD
ON STAGE**

With a unique grant from the David Rockefeller Fund, in spring 2018 we began amplifying our social justice focused work through an elevated stream of events within our existing PUBLIC PROGRAMS framework of free engagement programming. Grounded in the civic dramaturgy method that VG pioneered, THE PUBLIC PROGRAMS enhance the audience experience by connecting our theater to the world beyond the stage; bridging ideas, evoking dialogue, and deepening the relationship between our audiences and our play productions. This new **Social Justice Track** uses our plays to ignite important civic conversations and spur action on current issues and public policies. We are using the art of theater to draw out and amplify stories that are urgent in and to our Chicago communities and asking: How can our theater be a catalyst for change?

We have found our focus on theater as an agent of social change to be both motivating for our audiences and invigorating for the art that is central to our mission. We have begun to leverage new resources for this aspect of our programming; this year securing a one-time grant from the Illinois Humanities Council, funded by the MacArthur Foundation's Safety+Justice Challenge, towards *Pipeline*.

Seeing the Impact

Throughout 2018 we partnered with 15 organizations to host event-based programs highlighting and raising funds and other resources for their social justice work in the community. VG provided deeply discounted group tickets to these partners who then re-sold them at a mark-up to guests as part of a fundraising event package. Many groups offered pre-show receptions for their guests and hosted post-show programming.

Partner Organizations have included:

- Women Employed
- Branch Family Institute (ongoing)
- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Chicago Regional Organizing for AntiRacism (ongoing)
- Circles and Ciphers (ongoing)
- JustIs4JustUs
- Grace House/St. Leonard's Ministry (ongoing)
- Chicago Youth Centers
- Represent Us
- Alpha Phi Alpha
- National Council of Jewish Women on the North Shore
- Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers
- Yoga for Recovery
- Jane Adams Resource Center
- Moms United Against Violence and Incarceration
- Chicago Community Bond Fund
- Chicago Books to Women in Prison (ongoing)
- I Grow Chicago (ongoing)
- Consulate General of South Africa

Total Tickets Sold by Partners: 1022 tickets. **Total Cash Donations Raised by Partners:** \$80,780.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS events also have featured experts and activists from the following organizations to which VG donated 140 complimentary tickets:

- North Lawndale Employment Network
- Storycatchers Theatre
- JustIS4JustUS
- ABJ Arts
- Youth Empowerment Performance Project
- Chicago Help Initiative
- Women's Treatment Center
- Lincoln Park Community Shelter
- Latinos Progressando

Community Partnerships-What Happens Now

Building from our work with community partners and with support from the Joyce Foundation, we are now undertaking a multi-year, city-wide transformation project. This project is a direct outgrowth and extension of our Social Justice work and has us now working with anchor partners in East Garfield Park, Lower West Side and West Englewood—some of Chicago's neighborhoods most neglected by the city's political apparatus—to generate resources and create arts integrated programming with and for their residents.

Anchor Partners:

- North Lawndale Coordinating Council (NLCC)
- North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN)
- Homan Square Foundation
- El Valor
- Mujeres Latinas en Accion
- ABJ Community Services
- Latinos Progressando

Audiences Give Back

Through the Social Justice track we provide opportunities for audiences to take immediate remedial action to address real-time critical needs. Throughout the run of *Lettie*, we collected toiletries/supplies and books for donation to JustIS4JustUS and Chicago Books to Women in Prison. Audiences contributed generously to the campaign; amounting to 10 bags of toiletries (545 items), and 237 paperbacks to JustIS4JustUS plus 41 hardcovers that went to Open Books. Additionally, we invited our *Indecent* audience members to participate in a food drive in support of The Ark, an organization that runs a food pantry for the Chicago Jewish Community. For *Rightlynd*, we promoted a clothing drive on behalf of EZRA, a Multi-Service Center dedicated to tikkun olam / repairing the world and helping community members who are experiencing difficulty with compassionate interventions. Such efforts raise awareness of the important work that such organizations do on a daily basis.

When we heard about the massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh during the run of *Indecent*, staff and artists quickly rallied behind a common cause to collect donations to benefit HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, after the remaining performances. During the run of *Rightlynd*, the post-show appeal raised funds for Season of Concern, an organization supporting those in the theater community afflicted with AIDS-related illnesses in Chicago. Combined, we raised over \$12,000 to benefit these important causes.

Recent Social Justice Public Program Track:

PANEL: THE CONSEQUENCES OF HATE

A recent Claims Conference survey showed that 22% of millennials have never heard of the Holocaust. Even fewer know that the Khmer Rouge killed 21% of the Cambodian population or that 800,000 people were killed in just 100 days in the Rwandan genocide. With so many people still uninformed about such atrocities, how can we use the past to save us from its repetition in the future? And perhaps more importantly, what makes people turn on one another in the first place? Join us for a conversation with scholars and *Indecent* Consultant Dr. Alvin Goldfarb as they discuss the lasting impact of genocide in our society and how we can work towards a less hateful world.

PANEL: QUEERNESS TODAY

Discrimination against queer bodies has plagued society for generations. *Indecent* shows us some of what this discrimination looked like in 1924 New York, but how has it evolved since then? Join us for a conversation with LGBTQ community leaders and the Center on Halsted to talk about how queer communities have changed, the challenges that queer people face still, and how queerness functions in America today.

PANEL: SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

Today, so many volatile political conversations center around immigration. But what does it take to actually thrive in this country? The actors in *God of Vengeance* came to America seeking artistic success, but were faced with anti-Semitism, misogyny, homophobia, and censorship. How do artists make their way in America in 2018? How do you create art that speaks truth to our time? Are censorship, the threat of being blacklisted, and even jail time worth the risk to create meaningful work? Join us for a conversation with local artists as they discuss how their art allows them to express themselves in an oppressive political climate.

PANEL: NOT MY CHICAGO

On the surface, gentrification appears to be a positive change to the neighborhood. It is sold to people as a way to revitalize and beautify their communities. However, there is a dark underside to gentrification that can tear neighborhoods apart. In Chicago, gentrification has redefined neighborhoods from Pilsen to Uptown, causing families who have been there for generations to become strangers in their own city. But where can they go, and what neighborhoods can they afford? And even when it is offered, is affordable housing actually affordable? Join us for a conversation after the show to discuss the effects of gentrification in Chicago and ways people are taking a stand to save their neighborhoods.

PANEL: LOST IN THE SYSTEM

In *Rightlynd*, Pac finds himself having to cope with a world he hardly recognizes after being imprisoned and forgotten for over a decade, all because of petty theft and a flawed system. How is this possible in 2018, and how did we get here? We welcome Circles and Ciphers, a youth leadership and restorative justice organization, as they discuss how people slip through the cracks of the justice system and what we can do to stop it.

PANEL: THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

What happens when a minor classroom disruption is punished with arrest? In the school-to-prison pipeline, students of color face the threat of being punished at far higher rates than their white peers. With the data showing systemic racism to be a very real problem, what is the emotional toll on the people behind the numbers? How can we keep students in the classroom and out of the prison system? Join us as we discuss the personal side of the relationship between the educational and penal systems in America.

PANEL: TEACHING THE FUTURE OF CHICAGO

As class sizes grow faster than school funding can handle in Chicago, teachers must foster student success on standardized tests in order to obtain state resources. With students taking an average of 112 standardized tests in their K-12 education, there is not much time left for teachers to address individual student needs, leaving many students behind. How can teachers work with state learning standards while also addressing students' unique learning needs? How harmful is Chicago's School Quality Rating Policy, and what neighborhoods does it target? Join Chicago teachers and administrators as we discuss the impact of quantifying student success in a system where educators are bound to testing scores and numbers.

PANEL: SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE LAW

In *Pipeline*, a video of an altercation at school threatens to change Omari's life forever once it is shared online. Social media is a powerful tool in our modern legal system: it can expose injustices, capture video evidence, and eliminate hearsay from an investigation. However, smartphones and social media can also be used for intrusive and non-consensual surveillance. As we see more people using video to expose the truth, what is the role of technology and social media in legal practices today? What are the dangers and legal ramifications of posting, sharing, or recording something that shows an injustice in action? Join us as we navigate our changing landscape of privacy and accountability.

What We've Learned

Beginning with *Pipeline* this winter, we added a dedicated research team--a lead and two support personnel—one of whom is on hand to survey audience members in our lobby before every performance. **Of audience members who replied to our survey, 75% said they were inspired by the production or public program to take some form of action to make a difference. Of those who were inspired, 24% said they were motivated to volunteer and 31% said they were motivated to make a donation to a cause.**