

February 22, 2021

Honourable Lisa MacLeod, Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries

Dear Minister MacLeod,

I am writing to you today as the Executive Director of the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts (TAPA), that serves 164 professional theatre, dance and opera companies in the city of Toronto. The membership is all-encompassing and ranges from commercial to not-for-profit theatres, venued to non-venued companies, and national institutions to emerging independent companies. The scope of work on Toronto stages is unparalleled, and is recognized every year as you may know at the annual **Dora Mavor Moore Awards**, Canada's largest and oldest professional theatre, dance and opera award show that last year was presented as the Dora Awards VIRTUAL EDITION 2020. *See the attached TAPA membership list.*

Toronto's stay-at-home order has been extended two more weeks until March 8, 2021. Since January 12, 2021 our industry has been **completely shut down** due to Restrictions (15):

Entertainment Concert venues, theatres and cinemas (includes drive in or drive through events)

- Closed for all purposes, including rehearsing or performing a recorded or broadcasted event, artistic event, theatrical performance or other performance.

However, the Businesses Permitted to Open and Sector Specific Restrictions (14) have allowed film and television to continue to operate:

Commercial film and television production, including all supporting activities such as hair, makeup and wardrobe:

- No studio audiences permitted to be on the film or television set
- No more than 10 performers may be permitted to be on the film or television set
- The film or television set may be located in any business or place, including any business or place that is otherwise required to be closed
- Set must be configured and operated in such a way as to enable persons on the set to maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from other persons, except where necessary for the filming of the film or television production
- Persons who provide hair or makeup services must wear appropriate personal protective equipment
- Singers and players of brass or wind instruments must be separated from any other performers by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier

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This letter is an urgent plea requesting regulatory fairness with the television and film industry. Continued restrictions preventing professional theatre, dance and opera companies from doing the same will threaten the survivability of our sector.

We are planning to return to engaging our communities in our theatre venues when it is safe to do so. In the meantime the creation of digital content has become the only form of artistic practice for the professional theatre, dance and opera industry in Toronto, and our members have found new and creative ways to continue to operate and connect with our audiences. Our industry has pivoted and many TAPA member companies have temporarily shifted to hybrid theatre, dance and opera models that include live streaming programming to pre-recorded film and digitization, as well as the exploration of creating and utilizing outdoor spaces.

TAPA member companies are governed by collective bargaining agreements, and be assured that health & safety protocols are absolutely in place with the same union regulations as film & t.v.. Before these restrictions prevented the TAPA membership from creating digital content, our members diligently followed all restrictions including social distancing of minimum 2 metres from other persons, no more than 10 performers, and in full compliance with all other stipulated regulations and also with the *Lights ON Re-Opening Guide* <https://www.manula.com/manuals/ryerson-university/lights-on-venue-guide/1/en/topic/introduction>. (TAPA is a founding partner of the *Lights ON Re-Opening Guide*; created in partnership with Ryerson's School of Creative Industries, Toronto Arts Council and Toronto Arts Foundation, TO Live and SOCAN). As a community, our number one priority is the safety of our artists, employees and patrons. TAPA has negotiated preferred pricing for COVID 19 testing with 'Switch Health' which our membership has been accessing when live-streaming, filming and recording their digital productions.

The one-year grim anniversary of the shutdown of our theatres March 17, 2021 is almost upon us. We remain in the dark. Now more than ever it is important to remember that the arts sector — along with the hospitality businesses that we boost — has been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. TAPA members must be permitted to engage in rehearsals, content capture, and live broadcast. To be perfectly clear these activities do not involve any live audiences whatsoever, and in fact the working conditions are identical to the creation of film and television. There is NO PUBLIC attendance at our theatres during the creation of the digital content, nor during rehearsals in large and spacious rehearsal halls. The support from your Ministry will be crucial in ensuring Toronto's survival of live theatre, dance and opera for the future.

When the time comes, we hope to emerge as an innovative, resilient and vibrant arts community. But in order to do so, we need your support and permission to be able to create digital content.

Thank you for your consideration of this essential request.

Sincerely,



Jacoba Knaapen
Executive Director



Régine Cadet
TAPA Board President

c.c.: Deputy Minister Nancy Matthews; Assistant Deputy Minister Kevin Finnerty, MPP's Jill Andrew, Jessica Bell

Mayor of Toronto John Tory; Toronto city Councillors Bailão, Bradford, Carroll, Crawford, Cressy, Filion, Layton, McKelvie, Robinson, Thompson, Wong-Tam

Economic Development and Culture Division City of Toronto: Pat Tobin, Sally Han, Matt Ootes, Marguerite Pigott, Mike Tanner