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BOOK-IT REPERTORY THEATRE ENDS PRODUCTIONS AFTER 33 YEARS OF TRANSFORMING LITERATURE TO THEATRE

SEATTLE – Recovery from the pandemic and a business model that doesn't work in today's environment are at the core of Book-It Repertory Theatre's decision this week to cancel production planning of its 2023/24 season. Book-It intends to continue through the run of its current production, *Solaris*, which opened June 17 and runs through July 9. Closing gracefully at the end of the show is the top priority for the Book-It board as it develops a plan to cease operations after 33 years. The team at Book-It encourages theatre lovers to see the final show and donate to help the organization sunset.

In March of this year, Book-It hired an incredible interim artistic director, Kelly Kitchens, who has deep experience in Book-It's mission of bringing literature to life through theatre. Feeling confident in the artistic vision, the board was fully invested in strategic planning for the company's future and the 2023/24 season, as well as exploring new sustainable business models. But the runway was too short to let Kitchens create the magic that was intended. Sufficient resources were not generated to enable the board to financially commit to a new season. Ticket sales make up just 30% of Book-It's budget, with the remaining costs subsidized by individual giving and grants. With theatregoers still slow to return to live performing arts, ticket revenue down, and individual giving not returning to pre-pandemic levels, forecasting is incredibly challenging. While forecasts for ticket sales and philanthropic funding were made and adjusted, the pandemic has left no margin for error. Not enough of those projections were achieved.

Book-It's experience is similar to theatre organizations across the country that continue to balance increasing production costs and attempts to provide livable wages with an uncertain financial model and donations that have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Book-It sadly joins many theatre organizations, locally and across the country, that have recently announced decisions to close, merge, or pause.

“This is an incredibly difficult decision to make. We know the reverberations this will have on the theatre industry in this town, on actors, stage managers, stage technicians and crews, writers, directors. We need mid-sized theatres such as Book-It for the entire eco-system to flourish,” said Christine Stepherson, Book-It Board President. “We have a dream team of artisans and staff at Book-It who believe in our mission and have gone above and beyond, we have a small but dedicated board, but we don’t currently have a model that works.”

In addition to employing 18 permanent staff and more than 267 cast members, designers, dramaturgs, artisans, technicians, directors, and writers, Book-It provides shop space, scenic building and paint services, and other scenic assistance to local nonprofit theatre companies, as well as providing resources to schools and other community organizations. These services currently support roughly five to six local theatres per season. Book-It is also known for its premier, cornerstone Arts and Education program which provided singular K-12 literary-based programming throughout Washington State, reaching tens of thousands of students and teachers annually.

Book-It Repertory Theatre had begun outreach with other groups in the industry to strategize new ways of working together and sharing costs. There was a scenario where Book-It could come back with a stronger, more sustainable model. But that would only be feasible if that strategy included paying a livable wage, meeting necessary protocols that protect artists, employing understudies, acquiring affordable rental, rehearsal, and venue space, and building a reliable funding model.

For all season subscribers who have already bought tickets to the 2023/24 season, those funds are secure. Future subscribers can request and receive a full refund or choose to donate their funds to support the cast and crew through the end of the 2022/23 season and help the company close the doors with intention and care. The company will be pursuing fundraising opportunities over the next few months to close the gap between its existing accounts payable and closing its doors permanently. Book-It anticipates up to three employees may need to be retained for several months to close the 33-year institution.

“In our board vote, we unanimously passed a motion to begin the process of closing Book-It. We all still believe in the art form and can’t help but hope that we will see a show in the Book-It narrative style on a Seattle stage again,” Board Secretary Becky Monk said. “And if it was brought to life by Kitchens, and the incredibly talented production team that has transformed these works for years, that would be a dream. But our focus right now is to close without undue harm.”

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About Book-It Repertory Theatre

Our Mission: To transform great literature into great theatre, through simple and sensitive productions, and to inspire our audiences to read.

Book-It Repertory Theatre and its co-founding artistic directors, Jane Jones and Myra Platt, built a 33-year legacy of creating new world premiere theatrical adaptations from all across the literary spectrum. In 1990, Book-It was officially incorporated as a 501c3 organization. Helmed by founder Jane Jones, Book-It people performed as part of Seattle's Fringe Festival and began touring productions throughout the King County Library system. In 1994, Jane Jones and Myra Platt became co-artistic directors and continued to grow Book-It's family of artists and collaborators, and went on to find a home for their unique theatrical storytelling style at the Armory Theatre on the Seattle Center Campus. Jane and Myra honed a unique narrative theatre storytelling technique that soon became well-known as the Book-It Style. Their adaptations were particularly unique in that they honored the source material by directly incorporating the authors' words as they were seen on the page. Book-It has more than 150 original adaptations to its credit ([For a list](#) of Book-It's production history, please visit our [website](#).) Through its Arts and Education program, Book-It reached 60,000 students a year in schools with performances, residencies, and workshops. Book-it's Arts Education steadily grew into one of the largest and widest-reaching arts programs offered in Washington state, and the only one dedicated to exploring the theatre-literacy link.

Book-It is widely respected for consistent artistic excellence and production quality and world premiere adaptations. Both its main stage and its arts education program brought literature and theatre to life in classrooms across the state. Visit our website for more information on the [history](#) of Book-It.

As a nonprofit organization dedicated to great literature and quality theatre, striving to inspire a love of reading through a live, communal experience, the company has been funded in part by generous contributions from corporations and foundations, and hundreds of individuals who share its passion for literature.



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