



History of the Portland Theatre Brigade

The Portland Theatre Brigade was founded in 1999. It originated as a Portland Parks and Recreation Program created by Artistic Director Adrienne Flagg and the Parks Theatre Program Director, Jane Lancaster. Adrienne's vision was to offer a unique, professionally modeled performance program that benefited from year-long training and artistic empowerment of young performers.

In addition to their acting skills, Brigade Members are each mentored in the art of leadership. Every ensemble member, no matter how young, performs administrative or management duties in addition to their performance responsibilities. The young actors run their own business meetings and are responsible for choosing what plays will be performed each season.

It was in 2000 that the ensemble formalized the production of an annual series of short ethnically or culturally based plays. The children informed the adult leadership that if they were to accurately represent Portland youth, they must reach to the far corners of the Earth. Every year since then the Brigade has performed three to six plays from different countries and cultures spanning the globe.

In 2005, the Portland Theatre Brigade survived a near-fatal blow, when city budget reductions eliminated the citywide Theatre Program from Portland Parks and Recreation. At the advocacy of Mayor Tom Potter, the Brigade was formed into the sustainable 501c3 that now functions as an independent nonprofit theatre company. Adrienne formed a small team of dedicated volunteers into a Board of Directors, committed to ensuring the ongoing survival of this vital program. The newly independent Brigade enjoyed a kick-off performance in City Hall commemorating their new status as a non-profit theatre company.

Also in 2005, the Theatre Brigade expanded to include a second troupe in North Portland. Until that point all rehearsals were held at Portland Parks & Recreation's Laurelhurst Dance Studios in Southeast Portland. The presence of North Portland Brigade at the Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center ensures that Brigade performance opportunities are as accessible as the performances themselves. Both the Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center and Portland Parks & Recreation maintain a wonderful partnership with the Brigade.

It is through these partnerships, our sponsorships, and the generosity of volunteers and private donors, tuition for the actor training remains remarkably low. An actor paying full tuition receives professional-grade dramatic instruction for less than \$2 per hour. The affordability of the program is integral to its diversity. The 2007-08 season includes 47 members age 7-15 from a variety of backgrounds representing schools and neighborhoods across the city.

The Portland Theatre Brigade Board of Directors is expanding, and spearheading a new level of strategic planning and diversification of funding. We are laying plans for a larger, stronger, better-organized and more sustainable program.

Throughout our growth and development we have never lost sight of our core values: professional training, high expectations, and trust of the young actors – young people who then rise to challenges, demonstrate strong work ethics and show deep generosity to their fellow players and to their audiences.

**For more information visit:
www.theatrebrigade.org**