

Arts Chats #2

What is Success? Impact, Measurement and Creative Practice

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SPEAKERS

Claire Hopkinson

MODERATOR

Shawn Newman

PANELISTS

Jasmine Gui, Ilter Ibrahimof, Mark McGrinder, Natasha Adiyana Morris

Claire Hopkinson 00:01

So I think we'll get started. I want to say good afternoon and welcome you to the second edition of Arts Chats. Now, I'm Claire Hopkinson, the Director & CEO of Toronto Arts Council, and Toronto Arts Foundation. And I'm really happy to have you join us in this new discussion series that centers the voices of artists and arts workers. As part of Toronto Arts Foundation's ongoing research into the importance of the arts and city and community building. These arts chats are bringing together a diverse array of speakers from a variety of disciplines throughout the month of March. Together, these artists will discuss timely and understudied issues that affect them, their practice and their impact their work has on audiences, consumers and communities. Collectively, these discussions are helping guide the foundation's research strategy towards ordering advocacy, programming and community building efforts across Toronto and the art sector as a whole. Toronto Arts Foundation is very happy to acknowledge the diversity of the First Peoples of this area, and recognize the territories the Wendat, the Anishnabe nation, the Haudenosaunee confederacy and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Today, Toronto is still the home to many Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island and around the world, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work, to live and to meet on this territory. Arts

Chats is made possible and available to you through the generosity of our donors, and we are very grateful for their ongoing support of our work and we invite you all to join us as Toronto Arts Foundation supporters. After this session, you'll receive a follow up email with a link to a feedback survey, please fill it in, as well as information on how you can contribute to our ongoing community based work and our growing suite of COVID-19 response effort initiatives that are helping artists and arts organizations with mitigation, resilience and recovery during the pandemic. And this includes Arts Chats. In today's discussion: What is Success: Metrics Impact and Creative Practice? Our panelists focus on the strategies the sector has been using in the last year to understand impact, the struggles to understand success in this new environment, and how our current context is reshaping conversations about impact. Leading this discussion is our very own Research and Impact Manager, Dr. Shawn Newman. After working for many years as a dancer and choreographer, Sean switched gears towards academia, earning his PhD in cultural studies from Queen's University. His past teaching and research has focused on race, gender and disability in the arts. And here at the foundation and our sister organization, Toronto Arts Council, he leads all research projects and evaluation activities. We are so grateful to our wonderful panelists today who Shawn will introduce, thank you for your insights. And now Shawn, over to you.

Shawn Newman 03:36

Thanks very much, Claire, really appreciate the opening. Thank you everyone who's attending today. We're excited about this new series. And as Claire mentioned, it is a research initiative, which is a response to the pandemic, but also born out of a host of interviews last summer with artists and arts workers in the city. We wanted to get a sense of how the shift to digital creation and content delivery was impacting the sector. And perhaps unsurprisingly, one of the common themes that interviewees spoke about was how understanding what success is or can be in a digital and virtual space has taken a number of twists and turns. People we spoke with talked about not only the challenges of "measuring success," and there are many ways, but also the opportunities to rethink what success means to them, their creative practice and their organizations. So today, we're going to take a bit of a step back from the specificity of the pandemic, in order to place our current context into more of a continuum that allows us to see the COVID experience as one moment in time, albeit, it is a rather lengthy moment. The ways that artists and organizations are now working to articulate success during the pandemic dovetails with pre-pandemic conversations aimed at better articulating the social impacts of the arts, which the sector has been struggling with for many years, there's been a long reliance on statistical and economic indicators. And this has largely meant that we lack a shared vocabulary across the sector that allows us to effectively communicate the importance of all of our work to funders, governments, donors, the public and more. As Claire mentioned, I started out as a dancer and then when I retired from performing, I moved into the Humanities. And one of my interests in this conversation around success is how the arts sector has relied largely on Social Science methods and economics instead of the Humanities and the Arts in order to demonstrate impact. So to talk with me today about some of

these issues and opportunities around success is a group of people who bring a wealth of experience as both artists and administrators. Jasmine Gui is a Singaporean born interdisciplinary artist, arts programmer at the Reel Asian Film Festival, and a writer and researcher based in Toronto. She is the co-founder of TACLA, an Asian Canadian living archive initiative, and runs an interdisciplinary arts and publishing studio to people. Her work explores counter archives translations, traversals and grief, and is grounded in grassroots communities. She is the author of two chapbooks, and has been featured in Room magazine, Held magazine, Zine Theta, Guts magazine, a spectatorial Panorama journal, and Soft Blow among others. She also does experimental paper arts as one half of the creative duo, Gems. Ilter Ibrahimoff is the Artistic Director of Fall For Dance North, Toronto's Premier International Dance Festival. Born and raised in Istanbul, Turkey, Ilter moved to North America in 1998, first to attend Emerson College in Boston and then to live and work in New York City and Montreal, before settling in Toronto. Ilter's own dance touring agency, Sunny Artist management, was active from 2004 to 2020. As a creative mind in the dance field Ilter is regularly invited to participate in festivals and conferences in Canada and around the globe as a curator and speaker. In 2020, Danse Collection Dance awarded Ilter the Sandra Faire Next Generation Award. Joining us also is Mark Mc Grinder. He's an actor, writer, artist, educator and Co-Founder of Studio 180 Theatre. Select Studio 180 acting credits include The Nether, Oslo, You Will Remember Me, Our Class, Perry, Prayed and Clyborne Park. Mark adapted and directed David Rakhov's Love Dishonor Marry Die Cherish Perish for Panamania and was an Associate Director for Studio 180 productions of Blackbird and God of Carnage. He spent five seasons at the Shaw festival and performed in several reviews with the Second City's national touring company. Film and television credits include American Gods, Reign, Remedy, Heroes Reborn, Murdoch Mysteries and Spotlight which was also an Oscar winner for Best Picture. And also we have Natasha Adiyana Morris, who is a soft spoken but dramatic storyteller who is drawn to wordplay and a healthy dose of satire. Born in Winnipeg, and raised in Toronto's West end in the most encouraging and "full up" Jamaican household, Natasha was able to explore her craft and hone her voice from a young age. Recognized for founding Piece of Mine Arts, a platform for presenting works in progress by Black play creators she owes a great deal to the esteemed tutelage of b current, anitafrika dub theatre, Obsidian Theatre and Volcano Theatre. Natasha was most recently Dora nominated for the outstanding New Play Award for her debut theatre production, The Negroes are Congregating by Piece of Mine Arts at Theatre Passe Muraille. This timely play touches on internalized racism and has been produced internationally, including Canada, the United States, and Europe. So thank you to the four of you, so much for joining us today. And so as with all of the series, that we have a series of questions that I'm going to throw out to the panelists and it's just a casual conversation, back and forth. So there's no script per se, aside from what I just rambled through. So we really just want it to be an open and casual talk. So there might be pauses, there may be silences, and that's all great. So thinking about success and the ways that we as individual artists, and also organizations are asked to think about success, even before the pandemic, what were some of the ways in both of those roles for you all, that you were asked to demonstrate Success and

Impact, before March 2020, and have these expectations, from any sources changed for any of you, and I'm just going to throw that one out to any of you to start with.

Mark McGrinder 10:38

I'll jump in. I think prior to the pandemic, it was always a mix of hard numbers and, anecdotal, and that would vary from, whoever you were seeking support from, or whoever you're reporting success, to. And I can say that I've seen a significant shift, I think, when we're looking at the emergency funding that we've been applying for, in the last, eight months to a year that there's a bit of a shift in terms of what they're asking in terms of us to bring, for success and how we're thinking about it, I noticed the Canada Council's Digital Now grant, which just came out. I know, traditionally, a Canada Council project grant will look at 50%, artistic merit, 25%, feasibility, and 25% impact. And this new grant is, I believe, 75% impact and 25% feasibility. And it's all about, how can we just provide opportunities for artists? How can we make work and it's not necessarily, how successful is the product that you create going to be? And I think that's been kind of enabling, because so many times the criteria for success are monetary or attendance, and those criteria don't really enable risk taking. So I feel like a lot of the emergency funding is leaning towards enabling risk taking and just Enabling in general, and I would love to see some of that carry over as we return to, "normal."

Ilter Ibrahimoff 12:30

I'll jump in and kind of second that. In 2020, our festival did a very sharp pivot to Digital; producing and presenting. And we learned so much. But I think the way that we were looking at success was similar in a way; what kind of opportunities we were able to create, in, as Mark said, both numbers, but also anecdotal like how many artists that we engage with, and how many people we were able to keep employed, and perhaps even bring to the festival as new hires and new faces to help us with a very new kind of way of producing and presenting. And I think, continuing into the future, that's the way we see things grow for our organization, and in our field, in some sort of a hybrid way where in-person meets digital, and I think that balance and health perhaps is different for each organization, and maybe different genres. As we discussed in our pre-conversations for this chat, there is a little bit of a difference when it comes to level of engagement for different genres in the arts and digital delivery and producing. But in a way, from our perspective, from our festival, perhaps we're in a unique position in the sense that we did take a lot of risks in 2020. And we did produce a large amount of projects and presented them, there was an opportunity to look back, reflect and report in a similar way, I would say, to pre-pandemic, and that actually did give us a chance to reflect on some of the things that I mentioned in terms of our engagements with the artistic community, our engagement in our crew and hires and staff, as well as more emphasis on organizational health. That's I think the big switch on our side and reporting and measuring success is organizational health, both sort of physical, mental, economical, organizational health is what I think was the biggest shift on our side.

Jasmine Gui 14:58

I think I can add maybe a slightly different angle, because I think Mark and Ilter have both covered the grant funding side of things pretty well. But I think a huge change in the last year and a half is really like in the realm of private sponsorship and donors, especially is, money, changed really drastically in terms of what is available. And so just the kinds of conversations that we're having with donors and sponsors, I think there's a lot more need to very clearly communicate the exact ways in which their sponsorship will translate to something that they're looking for. And, those fits, those partnerships. A lot more, effort, and back and forth, in both ways, and a lot of it, feeling out what the needs are on either side, within this context, that usual programming, or the usual presentation methods are, deeply disrupted. So I think that was maybe a big thing. I wouldn't say that the change necessarily is the relationship itself. I think, in general that, the alignment in that regard, is constant. But the ways in which we have to communicate the impact, and then what does that impact look like? Now that you've translated a presentation style? What does it mean, now that, you have to redistribute the way you pay your artists, etc? You know, what do they need in this time, for filmmakers for example, if you can't make films, film equipment sponsorship has a very different meaning. So just what does that mean? The timelines for that, and the language around that partnership, those things are evolving.

Natasha Adiyana Morris 16:53

And my little two cents, going back to what Mark had said earlier, about, I guess, experimentation, a lot of grit or arts council said, you know, if you don't kind of meet your objective, a lot of the times it's okay, but I think it felt more, like.. just a promise that wasn't really real. Don't fall for the trap is what I'm trying to say. Whereas now, I think there's more real opportunities to try things that maybe you wanted to try and never really went for it. And especially for those early adaptors, as we're seeing throughout our sector. The risk takers are really paving the way through their falls and, and their leaps, kind of like sharing imperative knowledge that maybe you didn't know was possible or didn't understand, would fit within our current model. And with so much of the leadership changing, especially in the last two years, I think it's also a great opportunity for artistic directors to kind of leave a stamp of what is important to the organization at this time. So where some may... because my background is in theater, so some may, do the live stream, show, others may focus on development, so that when our doors are open again, then we we have this new work that we've been wanting to develop for a long time, but maybe didn't have the resources or the permission to do so. Especially for like, how many artists that we're supporting. So I think we're here for all of it. At Factory, Nina Lee Aquino was just like: "I'm here for all of it. Okay, the messy, the good, the bad and the ugly." Which really helps with taking the pressure off of what is success at this point in time. I don't know how long it'll last. But it's a great bubble to be in.

Shawn Newman 19:25

Yeah, but it's interesting, because that notion of now being able to sort of take risks and experiment and try new things is, I mean, that's inherently part of any sort of learning process, any process of creative practice is trying to go beyond the boundaries. So, it's interesting that now that that's seen as part of what is expected to happen with, at least in the eyes of, financial supporters. So, I'm interested also in "what now," and having heard you talk a bit about the expectations and what you're being asked to do. And, Mark, you gave that example of the new Canada Council grant, and that the weighting in terms of the assessment of an application is different now and gives more room that this notion of impact, and supporting artists directly. I'm wondering where the process of actually being asked to report on impact or report on your success, if it actually is something to you, as individual artists and as organizations, Does it feed you in your process? Does that actually support you in exploring things? Or has it? Is it just this thing you have to do that actually doesn't help you, in terms of running your organization? And if that, what was that like, pre pandemic? In our current context?

Jasmine Gui 21:05

I think I can start. So I would say, that's a tricky question. I would say that, a lot of times, it is very much a chore. And, just the fact that the way funding works is that it's so ahead of time. And that you are always, you know, forecasting or speculating. And the report asks upfront for so many things, that, you want to be in a position where you can try to communicate the need or the importance of your project, but you don't want to lock yourself necessarily into a thing before you've even gone through the process of doing the thing. And I think this is a bigger problem of the idea of the process of building programming and projects itself, not being seen as the kind of substantive labor, that we just assume that the operational part of the creative presentation is the only thing that the money is there to fund, not the ideation process, or the experimental, brainstorm room, for example. And so I think the reporting on that becomes tedious in the sense that you have to fill that gap yourself, where you are, "I said, all these things back then, I got the money for these things." And then and then you know, life changed... life changes because sometimes it's a six month period before you hear back for funding. And that funding is not necessarily enough to cover your project. So you're juggling multiple pots of funding, that have multiple interests, and you're just trying to answer to all the stakeholders and say, hey, my work is important to you, and to you and to you and to you. And, you know, it's that kind of a process. I think it is an exhausting process in which you have to constantly prove your value over and over again, in the beginning, and then again, at the end. And then the problem being that the people who read your reports, they aren't at your programming. They're not invested in that conversation. And so what you're translating for them, it's completely different. And, and so, I think, in a sense of financial stewardship, it might be like, useful in some capacity to have a record of what you allocated money to, it might be useful to, have a starting point, like your "My Original Objectives." This is the initial work plan that I planned, I think it works a lot better when it's short term, when their turnaround for the the grant is a month or two months. Or if it's a year long, or when you're applying for multi-year operational stuff, that is just a chore to then go back and be like, "three years ago, here are the

activities that I did" and dissolve that part of it. And here's the impact, this is why these three events in this month of this year mattered now, so give me money again, please. I think that process in of itself is very exhausting.

Natasha Adiyana Morris 24:18

Also, with grants, I think, if we've ever been on a jury, we know how fortunate we are to receive one because there's usually like 10 to 20% chance it'll go through and it's not necessarily because any idea is better than the other but just how you articulate. So it's a good exercise to understand what your project is. But at the same time you feel like you have to be good in every subject. For instance: I'm good in math through the budget. I'm good in English or language, I'm good at humanities and economics. There's so many questions that you hope you can pull your weight through. But I think with everything that's.... I know, we're talking about past and present and future, but just what the latest like TAC operating grant, for example, it being 24 pages of notes and new questions and trying to, kind of cover all bases is what makes how we're measuring success difficult, because at some point, you're like, what is the point? That we have to be good at everything? That we have to have to understand everything? Or at the end of the day. Like the artists first and some sometimes and even in these times, it feels like it's more about not offending anybody, being politically correct. Just like you don't have a stain. And that's what's difficult. Something that I'm seeing as reoccurring.

Mark McGrinder 26:17

I agree with everything you're both saying. And I just in terms of reporting on success, I think the one strong element of that, is that to report on your success demands that you have a criteria for success. And if we are really engaged in building our own criteria for success, as opposed to attempting to fulfill someone else's criteria for success, it gives you an option to lay out priorities. And it can be a bit cart/horse, because I think we're talking about reporting, we're often saying, how did you succeed in the work you've done, but I think about... we have an education program, Studio 180 In Class, and it came out of very generous support from the Trillium Foundation, as part of an audience development grant. And as we set out to do that program, we had to articulate how would we measure the success of it. And I think it would have been really easy to say that success would be: We developed our audience, we had more students, our education program, we had more students coming to our shows, more bums in seats, and increased our bottom line. But I think with the education program, we set out a different criteria, which was like successes if we can make younger people see theatre as a viable form of entertainment, and a compelling way to engage with issues and ideas, and can they see the merit and the empathy it demands to help us understand people? And so that's a little artsy fartsy? Maybe. And I think sometimes we avoid that type of articulation. Because we think it's not concrete enough. But so I do think in terms of being obliged to report, it can empower us to really make strong choices about what exactly are those criteria we're going to evaluate by.

Ilter Ibrahimoff 28:11

Yeah, I'll jump in and kind of second that because I feel like we set our own criteria by coming up with our own sort of mission and mandate, in a way, what we want to achieve. In our case, that is to elevate the popularity of the art form of dance, and bring more people and diverse audiences to dance and diverse dance to them. There are certain ways to measure that, that's very sort of tangible. Before the pandemic, it was very much the attendance and the sale. And Natasha was seeing some early adapters, I feel like our festival was one of the early adapters to start charging for online programming. We experimented with that last Fall. And measuring that success was helpful, just to see how slow or fast the audience's adapting to purchasing tickets for an online performance. When it comes to our free programming, for example, we've been doing free programming in partnership with Union Station. And we always struggle to measure that impact of free programming on the audience that's in the space. And we've been trying to define what a meaningful engagement means when it comes to free programming at Union Station. Is it the person who comes because they knew the program was happening and sits there and watches the program and engages with the artists or just happens to be there to have his, her or their lunch and just sits there for 45 minutes and has lunch and looks at beautiful dancing, or is it the people who just are coming out of that union, airport train and just run into dance, by accident, and they'll just snap a photo and just stay there for five seconds. But they might be posting that photo on their Instagram right away and say I just arrived in Toronto and I saw dance, and have hundreds more people engage with what dance and like it and all of that. So what is the meaningful engagement when it comes to free programming that's in person and that we have to adapt that this year to: What is that then in the digital context? And in the digital platform? Is it someone who comes and spends, again, five seconds to 30 seconds on our website and engages with a free programming or someone who just stays there and watches an entire video for 12 minutes? So there was just a lot of nuance, but I would say, we always tried to bring it back to our core mandate, and just try to assess: Did we achieve either in a tangible way or, as Mark said it "artsy, fartsy way?" Did we achieve what we said that we wanted to achieve with our core mandate? And there's all sorts of different levels of asking that question. I agree that it's tedious. I agree that it's really tough on us, on our team, especially when it comes to predicting for the grant applications. However, I think bringing it again, back to the mission and measuring helps us at our organization.

Shawn Newman 31:45

I think, Jasmine, you were talking about, things change between the time that you write the grant, and then get the notification and then, even have to report on it, and on this whole process. And then through the four of you talking, those intangibles that do emerge that you didn't even necessarily know, perhaps, would be a positive impact and, how do you actually make space for capturing that and for, actually honoring that and allowing that to be part of the discovery? So we met last week to just touch base about a few ideas before today. And Mark, you had said that intangibles aren't strong arguments. And, you know, this is certainly a sort of problem with conventional impact measurement.

Yeah, I think we would all agree that as artists, it's the intangibles that are perhaps, in some ways, the most important. Yes, people getting paid is super important, especially now. But the intangibles in terms of experiencing arts and culture, are really some of the most valuable, at least what we in the sector see as value so, I'm interested to hear why you think intangibles aren't considered that important?

Mark McGrinder 33:16

I'll jump in, just because you're leaping off something that I said, sorry to jump in right away. But I think that in that conversation, my point wasn't that intangibles aren't strong arguments. But those intangibles aren't perceived as strong arguments. And that's a product of existing in a capitalistic structure that does, just like demand certain metrics as a measure of success. And it also, as a product of a system where, if we don't have those economic successes, we don't continue to exist. So, my point was that it can be frustrating to not be able to articulate - I think I referred to anecdotal stuff before - but those types of stories that are really about the magic of what the art can do, and how it can transform and, I'm probably being unfair, and saying that we're always demanded this versus this, I could go into two, you know, funding meetings back to back for our education program, and not say, the same word in either of them. Because I go to this larger body and I say, 37 schools with, over 1000 Kids attended our three day thing, and, this, this, this, and then I go to that private donor who gives us a few \$1,000 a year because they're interested in how education impacts kids and how theatre impacts kids. And I can tell that story about the kid who comes up to me after and says, I kind of thought plays suck, but that was kind of cool. And that's like a narrative that feels weird to put in a grant but telling that story and knowing that one young person has maybe shifted their focus a little bit on the value of art is just so huge. So I think they are totally strong. But I think that often they're not perceived as strong. And when the strongest arguments, when arts funding's cut, we say Tourism and Money and These People and, sometimes it's just like, it feeds our souls and it's hard to make that when you're trying to, really prove something.

Ilter Ibrahimoff 35:21

I think that becomes increasingly important as to something Jasmine said earlier when it comes to private support too. Very similarly, we have an education program where one private supporter gives a substantial amount, for us to bring dance to middle schools and high schools. And the way that we pitch that proposal is really from the audience survey that we share with the students and teachers and the anecdotes and the testimonials and the feelings that we receive back from them. And try to assess how their life, maybe was a little bit changed, at the show and how they started to engage with the arts a little differently. I think that becomes really important. And I think it's important to find ways to collect that information as much as possible and measure that information and make sense of that information. Just before this panel started, we were asking Shawn, how are we going to measure the

success of this panel? And he said, Well, we're gonna send out an audience survey. And I think that's important.

Shawn Newman 36:37

Sorry, that's what I was just gonna say, just to Ilter's point, we are sending out an audience survey, but also, I will be writing a report of the entire series where I've actually got to talk about just my own feelings about success. So just for some more context, Jasmine.

Jasmine Gui 36:56

I think I would like to engage the thought at, maybe a little bit more of a conceptual level first, just because I think that it's not even necessarily that intangibles are important or not important, but that they're threatening. They're very threatening to organizations and structures that need to be able to measure success and value because that's how they can own it. That's how they can keep it. So I think that the reason why intangibles won't work when you ask structures of power for money is because they want to maintain their relationship to you as a structure of power, so that they can give you money, and that you will always be in the position of asking for it. So I mean, in that sense then, it's a good argument whether or not it's important-not important, because we fundamentally are all working in this exchange relationship, where we understand that this is the power exchange that is happening. And I think that is a large, a very, obviously, a large, large conversation that will always hang over. The question of success will always hang over the question of creative work; the work that we do, will also always be relevant for us, in a country where our arts funding is largely supplemented by the government. I think this is always a problem that we will run into, in terms of our work having to align with a lot of larger ideas and thoughts that are safer in some ways, or that are not threatening in other ways. And that's the only way that we can then put our foot in the door and ask for funding. And then the question for us goes, it trickles down into, well, at what point can we do any kind of disruption and is disruption part of our core mandate, is disruption part of our own vision of success? And so, I think that negotiation is very difficult. I think it plagues all creators everywhere. So, I'm not saying this to be some sort of, like exceptionalized, position. I think this is very common for everyone. But in response to the point about shifting that even in just little ways, or maybe just like the daily battle situation, I know, for a relation when when we get into these, maybe emotional places about, these fights are the exhaustion of just tapping into the system over and over again, and then we go back to this idea that we are in the practice of storytelling, and we are in the practice of creative experience. And then we also claim that there is transformative power in asking people to engage in complexity, to ask people to engage in narrative, and to ask them to grapple with human emotion and human relations, then we should be applying that storytelling process to our organizational structure. We should be telling stories in the boardroom. We should be telling stories to our sponsors. We should be challenging them, persuading them and asking them to dream different kinds of ways of success. It's not like, here are the donors this is their power. We have our power too and my power is that I'm going to enchant you, I'm

going to do it over and over and over again right in all the ways that I know how until maybe the playing field is evened out a little bit until maybe some kind of disruption has occurred. So I think for me that's one of the big things I was thinking about in the context of this panel

Natasha Adiyana Morris 40:28

Jasmine you just killed it, I'm sorry. I'm just like Every Thing! I agree. So: impact with The Negroes Are Congregating may not be pulling all these major sponsors that Stratford has for example, but does this institution present work that might offend or disrupt the general population? Likely not and there's that.

Shawn Newman 41:02

My neurons are just firing in overdrive right now. But this idea of just disruption is that there are so many different ways that the arts as we know them have long done that work. And there are long, long histories of the arts being actual, of social disruption, and that being part of it, and if there are these really intricate relationships between art being used as a system to disrupt social structures and political structures and yet as Jasmine pointed out, largely a lot of the arts sector is supported by government and so there's this kind of muddiness there. So I'm sort of shifting gears a bit now, but I'm wondering about, even with some of what you've already talked about in that there being more freedom to articulate in some ways to set your own terms for what success is or looks like, has your sense of what success is, shifted? Or [video skipped] pandemic those same values about what success is, be it in terms of impact, but also just in your creative practice? Or has your own understanding of success or where you see that happening changed?

Jasmine Gui 42:49

I can go again first because I think there is some sort of continuing thread from what I was just thinking about to this one. And I think, shifting measures of success is a natural part of an artist's evolution, and it's also a natural part of an organization's growth. You know, size matters, how much money you are able to have matters, how many people you're accountable for and responsible to matters, the size of your community matters. You know all of those things as you move into space and take up space. As you build things you would then become responsible for all of those things and so I think that shifting context is ever changing. But I think specifically in the context of the pandemic and not just the pandemic last year because last year we also saw huge civil rights movements worldwide, and Reel Asian as a festival that has as its target audience a diaspora that you know largely falls under a category, however arbitrary that category might be, of Asian, we have a responsibility to answer to pressing questions or concerns or challenges or difficulties of the time. And so I think what the shifting context allowed Reel Asian to do in the last couple of years actually is to unlodge foundational stones in the organizational structure, because I think success and impact, they're influenced by legacy and we're a 25 year old festival and so we have a lot of history that we have to contend with. The older the

organization, the more there is to be entangled up in expectations and opinions from intergenerational communities, relationships that started ages ago and aren't necessarily updating or rejuvenating themselves as the organization evolves. So, I think the big shift for me was that sentences like: It can be done, It cannot be done, It should be done and It should not be done, they all now carry the same weight. It's always a toss up which one you use, because the pandemic and civil rights movements that happened, they really shook up a lot of things at a scale that is difficult to box in. So, because of that, I think we can leverage all four of those statements in completely different ways to constantly be switching up what success and impact mean, at least that's that was my experience in last year

Ilter Ibrahimoff 45:29

And... differently, our organization is younger, much younger, and to me it's almost like measuring success is almost, not allowing us to be entangled in certain relationships for the future and staying as sort of fluid and flexible and agile as possible. But I think a response to the current conversation, response to the current shifts is very important and that's another way of... we look at our success this year: how did we respond to the Black Lives Matter led civil rights movement? How did we respond to this idea that now that a year has passed and it feels like five years has passed? But now that the year officially kind of has passed, our staff, our core family, our board of directors, our public, our audience, do they feel that we have survived or do they feel that we have survived and we are continuing to somehow lead at the same time? So those are the questions that we're asking for ourselves just to understand: are we still relevant and should we continue to do what we do? Do we still have a place in the community? And I think, both personally and professionally, the pandemic gave all of us an opportunity to pause a little bit and reflect and look at our practice, look at our organizations and look at the place that we hold and the space that we hold in our communities and our connection to the communities. And that also was another level of our conversation's success, let's say, in our organization, to just an audit of our relationships in the community and how do we want to be plugged into the community, maybe differently in the future and take that time to build those relationships or renew those relationships.

Natasha Adiyana Morris 47:54

Yeah and I think that what we think about the arts community, in a lot of ways, it is segmented and I don't want to say segregated. But a lot of companies and organizations are essentially invisible, and what is success for me at Piece of Mine Arts has nothing to do with the larger mainstream theatre arts organization. For example, we had a "Blackout Night" which was inviting audience members who identified as Black, to come and see the show, which felt polarizing to some audiences that didn't identify that way. But ultimately the show was hype, every joke and every nuance hit and it was just like an energy you would not feel with any other performance. But that was in partnership with Theatre Passe Muraille. Outside of that partnership, what Piece of Mine produces is always a Blackout Night for the most part. The majority of our audience are black and the content is from artists of the African

diaspora so that is normal but I think the concept of: is this a space that can be taken up by Black voices, Black narratives, do we belong here? Even an artist beforehand the show bug that had went up had a similar show and it's like: "Well if you want to have only Indigenous people up in the spotlight why don't you do it in an Indigenous place?" So that type of reaction I think further wants to keep you safe in your community and safe spaces, because disrupting brings a lot of politics and a sense of always having to defend yourself versus being in places, and I mean, you really don't ever get away from feeling like you don't belong in some sense. I mean, you pay your money, you do what you got to do. And you feel like sometimes you're just treated differently, because ultimately, there are no black-owned venues in the city. So we are always essentially taking space, but especially partnering with what would be considered non-traditional theatre of producing Black work, which is changing. It's always a negotiation. But I think keeping that at core, front and center that we're not trying to merge or, like force ourselves to be liked, or welcomed, or belonging is a different choice from other artists. And there's also, for example, like the Black pledge that has recently come out, asking theatre companies to look at the way they program, the way they audition, the audiences etc. to really welcome it to a larger community, that's specifically the Black community. And I'm reading it, and I don't know if this is going to happen comfortably, naturally, and in ways that we kind of force change, is difficult to narrate. Because we'll see, and I'm going on the longest rant, we'll see like all these messages in our inbox, when Black Lives Matter was really popping in June about all these commitments. And then, you know, almost a year later, it feels like it's just a moment in time, but not a long term commitment. So I think a lot of the change that we're seeing is really from those companies and organizations that have always been committed and leading the charge, and in partnering with those that really want to be supportive and about it, rather than people just kind of like scrambling to fit in.

Shawn Newman 52:41

This connects a bit back to last week's panel, about the ways that this pandemic and the shift to digital has obscured, actually, long standing issues of equity. Because all of a sudden, the discussion was about digital, and the digital itself is not an equitable format. But, Natasha, what you're talking about just reminds me, just because certain groups, people, communities are marginalized, just the fact that they're doing work does not mean that it's their job to be activists. They're just living their lives, sometimes they're just telling their stories. And sometimes that work does push particular movements, but also that's not the only reason for their existence. There are many, many important other things that they represent. So just looking at the time. Okay, so we're about five minutes to the end. But I think maybe I'll just jump to the last thing, let's say that... conventional frames out the window, and I think there are some things that some of you have said throughout that speak to this, but, how do you want to measure success? How do you want to tell those - Jasmine, you were saying, the stories like - what is it that, if you still had to say, report to funders, or donors or whomever? How would you want to measure that?

Mark McGrinder 54:32

I unmuted because no one had yet and don't know that I have anything profound to say you got something to run with there, Jasmine? I was just gonna say I think of myself, as someone who's an actor, I think about: that actor steps into the audition room and is like, I hope this is how they want this monologue done. Is this the right accent for this character? I don't even know if I should be wearing this shirt. And we've all had that and that went terrible. And then you booked that audition where you walked in, you hadn't really worked on it. You came in with less concern about fulfilling their needs. And you just came in for yourself and you were your authentic self. So I guess, in terms of reporting, in terms of articulating what, you want I, love to be, not as the actor who doesn't do the work, but the actor who enters that room, only wanting to be who they authentically are. And if you like that great, and if you don't, that's okay. And it can that kind of thing translate to the Courtship of support and funding. It's like: No, I have to try to stop articulating what I think you want me to say, because that's always going to ring false, I need to figure out what I really want to say. And I need to put that out there. And, kind of leave it at that. I think that's incredibly hard, like the scenario as an actor and then applying that to anything because it goes to what Jasmine was saying about power structures, how do we disrupt this system and put the onus back on us.

Jasmine Gui 56:08

And I think, just to go off of, some of these conversations, and also what Natasha said earlier about, the experience of last year in particular as BLM, and the sort of overwhelming amount of support that showed up online. I think that what I feel now, too, is that in negotiating the reporting and negotiating funding, and in looking forward, casting forward, there's this sense in which the pandemic is being considered an exceptional time, when actually all the pandemic has done is shown us how badly the systems are already, they've always been terrible. We've not had equitable systems for our artists, we don't have sustainable ecosystems for our administrators. There's so many pre existing problems, the pandemic did not cause like a whole ton of new disruptions, they just showed us that we don't have the resiliency, we don't have the community care, and support and, we see where the money actually is. And it's not with people. And so, Mark at the beginning mentioned that, pandemic grant reporting, now, the percentages, they're looking very differently at the applications. When are they going to stop doing that? And when they stop doing that is, is literally the same thing as when the posts start disappearing from social media, and that's when you start feeling like, Okay, that was just a moment. And it was a small, little moment. It was maybe a breather for some, and for some others, it's material devastation. Real lives are gone. And so I think, success and impact being stuck in this reporting format, there's so much to say about its inadequacy. But I think that if there's any takeaway, it's that, don't make it an exceptional moment. All the lessons that we're learning now need real change implementations that are lasting. If you're taking time to listen to what everybody has to say, then that listening has to translate into something else, not just a temporary, you know, switch into percentages

of evaluation. I don't know if that exactly answers your question, but I do have this growing trepidation around, the way that we're talking about the pandemic as something that will be over soon. That is a very scary language to me.

Shawn Newman 57:40

Sorry. It is two o'clock. So we are going to wrap it up. Sorry. I just want to quickly say thank you so much to all of you. Again, the purpose of this whole series is to help the foundation with our research agenda and strategy. And so this is really great. Thank you, Marcia, for your interpretation. Thank you to the captioners. Next week, we're doing Technology Before, During and After, moderated by the wonderful Heidi Strauss from adelheid. And we'll explore the the ways that artists have been engaging with the arts through technology and the hybridized forms of practice the delivery that are emerging and might continue to emerge. Thank you, Claire, again, for the introduction and for sticking around and listening and, thank you everyone for attending. And please, we hope we see you next week.