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Near West Theatre Announces COVID Protocol for 2021-22 Season

CLEVELAND – Today, Near West Theatre announces its safety protocols for the 2021-22 Season, focused on ensuring the health and safety of staff, performers, audiences, and the entire Near West Theatre community. The theatre plans to open for its first live, indoor performance in November.

“The safety and wellbeing of our audience, performers, staff and volunteers is of utmost importance as Near West Theatre navigates the return to live, in-person indoor theatre and performances,” says Mike Obertacz, executive director of Near West Theatre. “Near West Theatre has a long history as an intergenerational community theatre serving youth, families and adults. As we continue to respond to the COVID-19 health crisis and the current Delta variant, we are working diligently to stay true to our mission of providing accessible and transformational theatre arts experiences to audiences of all ages while simultaneously following public health best practices to keep all those in our theatre safe and healthy. Our new safety protocols have been developed with both goals top of mind, using guidance from scientific data and research, insights from health professionals, reports from school district data, and community best practices to inform our policy. We want to ensure that our protocols protect the wellbeing of our community without creating barriers and accessibility issues that may inhibit us from serving those who need us most.”

As of October 13, 2021, Near West Theatre will adopt the following COVID-19 safety protocol for all indoor productions:

- All audience members ages 12 and over must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or provide proof of a negative test result taken within 72 hours prior to entering Near West Theatre.

- Fully vaccinated audience members will be required to provide proof of vaccination with a COVID-19 vaccination card, paper or digital. The vaccination card must show that 14 days have passed since either the second shot of a CDC or WHO-approved two-shot vaccine or since the administration of a CDC or WHO-approved one-shot vaccine.
- Audience members ages 12 and over who are not vaccinated will be required to provide proof of a negative test result from a PCR COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours prior to entering Near West Theatre or a negative antigen COVID-19 test result taken within six hours prior to entering Near West Theatre. At-home tests will NOT be accepted.
- All staff, volunteers, and audience members are required to wear masks, properly covering their mouth and nose at all times while inside Near West Theatre, regardless of vaccination status. Cloth, surgical, and KN95 masks are all accepted. Masks with exhalation valves, bandanas, scarves, gaiters, etc., will not be permitted. Surgical masks will be available free of charge at the box office.
- All audience members will have a temperature screening prior to entering Near West Theatre.
- Near West Theatre will not provide concessions during performance runs to limit opportunities to remove masks.
- Near West Theatre will remove balcony seating for social distancing of musicians, otherwise, the house will be at full capacity. NWT may update this policy and reduce house size as we continue to monitor local case rates.
- Anyone who has been exposed to someone with COVID-19, or is exhibiting symptoms or feeling ill, will be asked to stay home. Arrangements can be made with Near West Theatre for an alternate date or refund.

“Near West Theatre is in support of our fellow arts and culture institutions who have also announced their safety protocols and understand that these decisions are not easy and are always made in the best interest of who we serve,” adds Obertacz. “We applaud the local theatre community for taking the right steps to protect its staff, performers, and audiences.”

The safety policy was developed in collaboration between Near West Theatre staff and its board of trustees.

“We at Near West Theatre, both our staff and board of trustees, are united in our policy and do not take these decisions lightly,” says Near West Theatre Board President Jazmin Long. “We understand the inconveniences these safety protocols may cause to some members of our community, but are resolute in our belief that measures must be taken to encourage a healthier and safer community aligning with our values and mission.”

For more information about Near West Theatre or the safety protocol, please visit nearwesttheatre.org.

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About Near West Theatre

Near West Theatre builds loving relationships and engages diverse people in strengthening their sense of identity, passion, and purpose, individually and in community, through accessible, affordable and transformational theatre arts experiences. Since 1978, Near West Theatre has been shaping, changing, even saving the lives of children, teens, and adults. The community theater hosts a variety of free community events and free after school programs to underline its commitment to accessibility for all people. The organization serves people of all ages, but a focus on youth goes back to its founding and continues to this day. www.nearwesttheatre.org. @nearwesttheatre.