



LOOKING BACK WITH JAMES BLACK

INTERIM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

The Alley's Interim Artistic Director James Black has been working at the Alley for more than 30 years as a member of the Resident Acting Company and a frequent director. During the season he curated as Interim Artistic Director, we are delighted to present a series of essays from him about his career and his memories of the Alley.

The opening of this show marks the official completion of my Interim Artistic Director duties and that means one last look back, but then, eyes straight ahead on new adventures. It's been an honor and a privilege to shepherd this great organization during the past seventeen months and I step down filled with pride and admiration at what we've accomplished and I marvel in gratitude at how we have healed.

And since all stories end when they return to their beginnings, it seems appropriate that my next chapter at the Alley finds me off the artistic staff and back on the stage. "The wheel is come full circle."

I've talked a lot on these pages about the many extraordinary experiences I've had at the Alley over the years, the amazing people I've shared the stage with in great productions that were met with glowing reviews and cheers at curtain call. But in comparison to the job I've just completed, those rewards seem hopelessly insular, nothing more than quickly evaporating moments of self validation. Ego fuel. The experience of this past year and a half was the opposite. It felt tangible, permanent,

and of real value. Instead of being turned inward, my focus was forced out. This was no longer about me and what wig I was going to wear in what show or who I was going to act with or direct next. This was about us. This was about helping the theater that I love, and helping those who work in it and those who support it and love it, as well.

This has been, without question, my proudest accomplishment in 30 plus years at the Alley. And it happened offstage.

Before I exit, there are a handful of people I need to acknowledge and thank by name. First, I am completely indebted to the finest artistic staff an Interim Artistic Director could ever be blessed to have. Whatever success I achieved would have been impossible if not for them. The indefatigable Brandon Weinbrenner (Associate Producer and Casting Director) - he was my right hand, my left hand, and sometimes one or both of my legs. I'm so proud of his artistic triumphs this past year and so appreciative of his insight and most importantly, his friendship. Thank you, Brandon. Liz Frankel (Director of New Work), the mastermind behind Alley All New, and our brilliant Literary Manager

Lily Wolff - two endless wellsprings of encouragement and more importantly, my aesthetic conscience. They are two of the brightest theater people I have ever known and they were invaluable to this season. Thanks to you both. Noah, Henry, and Brandy, you are not forgotten. I just can't praise these people enough. Not only were all these folks tireless and inspiring collaborators, they were, and continue to be, dear and supportive friends. We were a grand team.

Thank you to Managing Director Dean Gladden, retired General Manager Ten Eyck Swackhamer, and Alley Board president Butch Mach for your unwavering confidence and leadership. Though at times I was overwhelmed, because of you, I was never lost.

Thank you also to Production Manager Ray Inkel for guiding me through countless set design challenges, Associate General Manager Elle Aghabala for guiding me through countless contracts and union rules, and Clem Hernandez, our amazing Executive Assistant for guiding me to where I was supposed to be at any given time.

To the ENTIRE Alley staff - thank you for teaching me more than you will ever know about resilience, overcoming obstacles, and never ceasing to move forward with your head held high. Though it would have been understandable, your work never faltered. Never failed. You are an inspiration to me.

To my truly better half, Elizabeth, take from my heart all thankfulness. You are my strength.



Top Photo: Alley Theatre. Photo by Dalton Dehart.
Bottom Photo: Alley Theatre Staff. Photo by Brandon Fincher.

And finally, to a genuine gentleman of the theater, new Artistic Director Rob Melrose - evermore thanks for making this transition not only seamless but filled with anticipation and inspiration. You are a refreshing combination of energy, intellect, and humility and an inspired choice to lead the Alley into its next magnificent era.

Let the great work continue!

James Black