

ALLEY THEATRE

Actions speak louder than words

"Houston, this is *your* theatre."

-Alley Theatre's Founding Artistic Director Nina Vance

Houston is one of the most diverse and dynamic cities in the world. When I started as the Alley's fourth Artistic Director in January 2019 seventy-two years after its founding, my primary goals were to build on the Alley's outstanding theatrical legacy and to grow the Alley into a theatre that reflects the diversity of Houston. The Alley has a storied past, but a past where everyone did not feel welcomed and included. I believe that the Alley's best days are ahead when it fully lives up to the promise of our founder to truly be Houston's theatre.

My first season was a big step forward for the Alley in reflecting Houston's diversity. Our season of plays included the following percentages of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC): Playwrights (38%), Actors (55%), Designers (47%), and Directors (25%). Obviously, there is more work to do, especially with directors, and we are committed to doing that work. I share these percentages both as a way of checking where we are and indicating the direction we are going. We have been deeply engaged in this change since I joined the Alley and will continue to move the theatre forward.

Change starts with the work we put on our stages, but it doesn't end there. Deeper institutional changes must follow in order to ensure that we become the theatre we want to be. In addition to making sure the work on our stages represents the city of Houston, Managing Director Dean Gladden, the entire Alley leadership team, and I commit to the following actions which will have a profound impact on our forward momentum.

1. The Alley was founded on and is rooted in our Resident Acting Company. As we rebuild from COVID-19, we commit to adding to the diversity of our Resident Acting Company by adding four new company members. All four will be actors of color and at least two will be women making our company 50% BIPOC actors.
2. Our Education and Community Engagement (ECE) department has been doing extraordinary work in and for the community but in the past ECE and Artistic have been very separate departments. I believe that the future of the Alley depends on ECE working with Artistic and the entire organization to be fully aligned in our goals. ECE is doing the hard work of building up our communities and bringing Alley Theatre into the lives of people who have not had access to the Theatre previously. Our entire organization will follow through and build on that important work. An important first step is that our Manager of Community Partnerships has become part of our artistic programming meetings, which is responsible for season selection and artistic programming, making it a five-person team with two BIPOC members (40%) and will make Community Partnerships a more central part of our way forward.
3. We are working with consultants to do anti-racism work with all Alley employees. We recognize that this is a first step in a life-long path of dismantling the structures that have kept BIPOC artists, theatre workers, and leaders from achieving access to and feeling welcome and supported by the Alley.
4. We commit to bringing more diversity to our Board of Directors and engaging all current board members in this effort. This will include both recruitment and retention efforts, knowing that as the work on stage and the make-up of the staff becomes more diverse, serving on the Alley board will become a more attractive proposition for BIPOC candidates.
5. We commit to examining our hiring practices and finding ways to ensure that we are bringing more BIPOC employees into the Alley at all departments. Part of our implicit bias and anti-racism training will include dismantling the structures that have served as obstacles for BIPOC candidates and creating new methods to ensure a robust pool of BIPOC applicants.
6. We further commit to creating an on-ramp into the Alley for early career BIPOC administrators and production workers in the form of a one-year fellowship. This fellowship will include a living-wage and housing so that it is a realistic entry point into the Alley and the field at large.

These are immediate action steps we are taking to live up to the [statement](#) we made on May 31 in support of the Black community. We recognize that these are just steps on a long journey to live up to our values and we commit to making sure that the Alley lives up to being a theatre for all of Houston. We will do what we can during the times of COVID-19 and we will do more when we are past this pandemic.

Finally, while I stand behind my statement, I feel that I let some of my colleagues down by not stating simply: Black Lives Matter. I believe a theatre that is welcoming to all is centered on kindness and love and that Black Lives Matter is not a political issue but rather a moral issue and a matter of human rights. So let me say unequivocally, from my heart, and with love that Black Lives Are Precious and Black Lives Matter.

Thank you for listening. I'm listening too. The Alley Theatre's channels will go relatively silent during this time in order to center the experiences and stories from BIPOC voices and we will use this important turning point in history to listen and learn.

With love,



Rob Melrose
Artistic Director