

# Creating the Ultimate Theater Experience

2020-2025 STRATEGIC PLAN



**contemporaryamericantheaterfestival**  
AT SHEPHERD UNIVERSITY



## Introduction

**The time has come to put into motion our **new five-year Strategic Plan** that strengthens our position as one of the most important curators of new American theater.**

Strategic planning is paramount to our success. It provides us with the opportunity to **reaffirm** and **redefine** the dream, vision, mission, and purpose of the organization. As one of the leaders in contemporary art-making, we have a responsibility to our artists, audience, and industry colleagues to demonstrate our commitment to these values, in both our art and our business. Our steadfast mission and reconceived core values motivate every major activity of our organization. They guide, direct, and inspire our strategic planning and define how we measure our future success.

We eagerly share this public plan with you - the champions of our mission - acknowledging the vital role you play in CATF's sustainable growth and evolution. This plan firmly demands that CATF's leadership, board, artists, and audiences understand the commitment and flexibility required in the risky business of creating bold art.

We have adopted five innovative and aggressive goals that provide the foundation for provocative, compelling, and necessary stories.

We continue to **maketheater. . . talktheater. . . thinktheater. . .**

Join us for the future - **premieringtomorrow.**

Ed Herendeen  
Founder and Producing Director

**CATF.ORG**



# Strategic Plan: 2020-2025

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## Contemporary American Theater Festival

AT SHEPHERD UNIVERSITY

Joey Parsons and David McElwee in *Memoirs of a Forgotten Man* by D.W. Gregory. CATF - Rolling World Premiere, 2018.



## Our Focus

### MISSION:

To produce and develop new American theater

### VISION:

The ultimate theater experience for artists and audiences

### CORE VALUES:

- Fearless Art
- Daring and Diverse Stories
- Inclusivity
- Community

Antonio Edwards Suarez in *Antonio's Song/I was dreaming of a son* by Dael Orlandersmith and Antonio Edwards Suarez. CATF World Premiere, 2019.

# Defining CATF

Each word in our name is intentional, potent, and packed with meaning. Contemporary, by definition, evolves daily – much like the world of theater. CATF, too, will embrace and encourage its own change, growth, and new opportunities.

## CONTEMPORARY

We are committed to producing and developing new theater that . . .

- Asks both audience and artist to examine the here and now, as well as our collective responsibility to sculpt the future
- Tells timely, relevant stories
- Holds up a mirror to our world and challenges its conventions, practices, mores, and assumptions

## AMERICAN

We are committed to being a home for American artists. We...

- Tell stories that tap into the current American dialogue
- Acknowledge that “American” means many cultures, perspectives, voices, and personal journeys – that we are united by our individuality

## THEATER

We believe that this art form is intentionally broad, vibrant, and inclusive. Theater is...

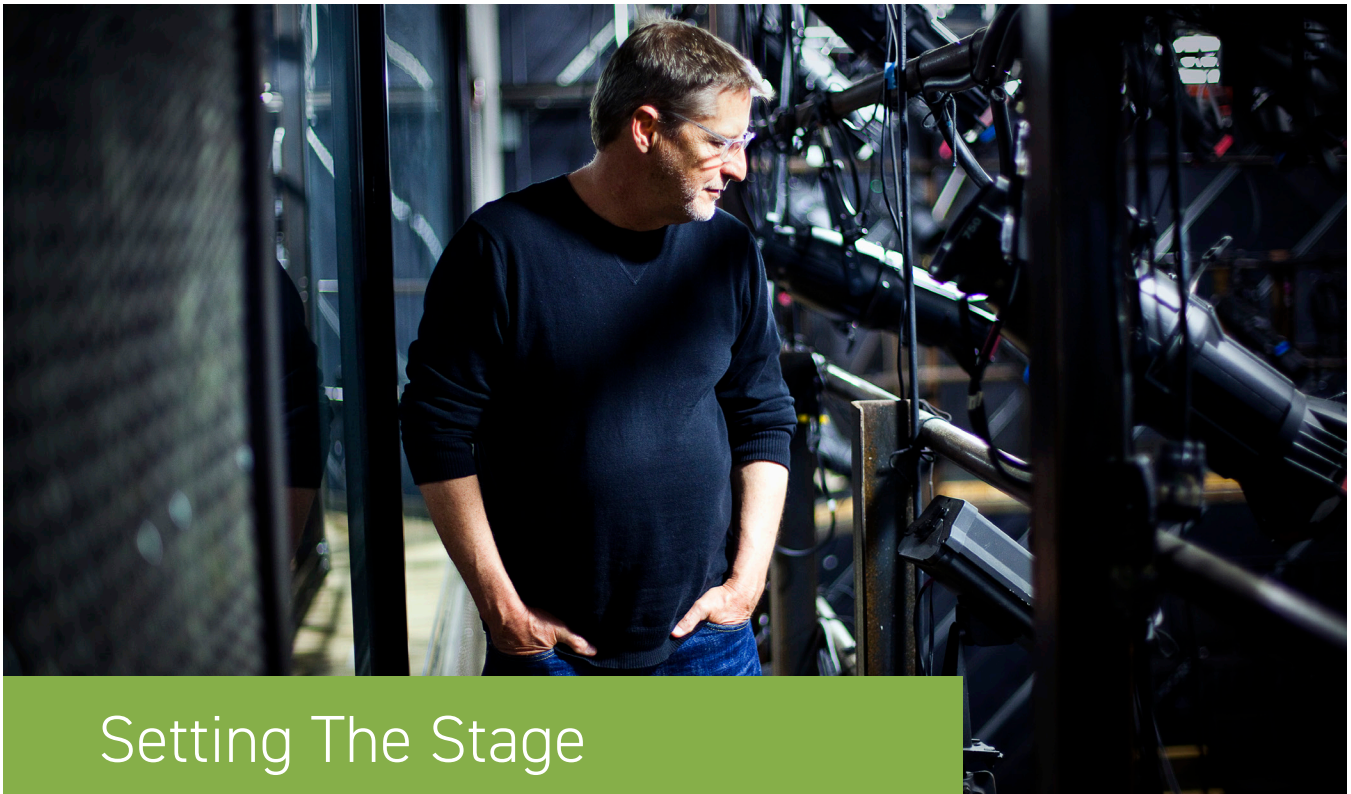
- A community created through live performance engaging both artist and audience
- Live story telling
- Provocative, immediate, ever-evolving, and collaborative

## FESTIVAL

We promote a cultural destination and art that exists beyond our stage.

The Festival atmosphere is permeated with...

- A rotating repertory experience that offers varied opportunities for engagement
- Diverse stories told through visual art, music, literature, film, and new media
- A celebration of multiple forms of art that expresses our inclusive, contemporary aesthetic
- A continuing dialogue among artist, audience, and community about the themes and impact of the work
- Community-building inspired by risk-taking and pioneering art



## Setting The Stage

In 1991, Ed Herendeen founded the Contemporary American Theater Festival on the campus of Shepherd University, a public liberal arts institution. Beginning as a humble endeavor with a budget of \$80,000, the Festival has grown to an organization with a year-round staff, an active Board of Trustees, and an annual budget of \$1.5 million. The Festival and University helped establish Shepherdstown, West Virginia as a preeminent destination for new theater work and a cultural center.

An example of the unparalleled CATF/Shepherd University partnership shines on West Campus: the first two of three phases of the Center for Contemporary Arts. These state-of-the-art buildings represent the successful realization of the Create the Future campaign. In 2006, the boards of Shepherd University, Shepherd University Foundation, and CATF came together with the unified goal of establishing an academic and professional center for contemporary art. The University's visual and theater arts programs are housed in the Center, which features art studios, rehearsal halls, graphic design labs, galleries, production spaces, and the beautiful Stanley C. and Shirley A. Marinoff Theater, named in honor of one of the Festival's first families.

Another noteworthy example of the private-public partnership is Shepherd's recently created B.A. in Contemporary Theater Studies. At its core, the one-of-a-kind major celebrates the vital relationship between a well-rounded, robust liberal arts education, the artistic process, and community and audience engagement. Built on the relationship between the University and the Contemporary American Theater Festival, theater students learn from and are mentored by leading theatrical professionals.

This partnership champions the power and impact of collaboration. The resulting synergy helped transform the economy, civic appreciation, and social well-being of West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle. In 2018, Shugoll Research conducted an economic impact study of the Festival, a result of the previous Strategic Plan's efforts.

CATF's four week season directly contributes \$5.86 million to the area. Theater tourists flock to CATF from over 38 states and across the globe. While in Shepherdstown, patrons spend their dollars lodging, dining, shopping, and enjoying other attractions throughout the region.

The community's vibrant culture and rich opportunities blend rustic ambiance and metropolitan thought. Committed to inspiring and facilitating discussions between artists and audiences, CATF offers the **talktheater** series. This collection of events includes workshops, lectures, pre- and post-show discussions, late-night salons, readings, and artistic exchanges that explore relevant and contemporary themes inspired by the plays.

Over the course of its dynamic 30-year history of producing high-caliber and thought-provoking plays, the Festival has earned both a national and international reputation for new play development. CATF works closely with prominent industry groups (New Dramatists, League of Regional Theaters, Dramatists Guild, Theatre Communications Group, and National New Play Network) and professional unions (Actors' Equity Association, United Scenic Artists, and Stage Directors and Choreographers Society). Twice-recognized with the West Virginia Governor's Award for Leadership in the Arts, the Contemporary American Theater Festival prides itself on being an industry leader that creates and promotes a diverse culture, where artists and audiences grow and thrive.

Demonstrating the success of strategic planning, CATF accomplished several milestones articulated in the 2015-2019 plan. In 2017, the Festival expanded to a six-show rotating repertory season. Two years later, CATF celebrated the release of *Plays by Women of the Contemporary American Theater Festival*. Published by the London-based Bloomsbury Methuen-Drama, this anthology of contemporary plays written by women is the first of its kind and is being used as a theater textbook around the world. The Plan tasked CATF to have a total of 40 engagement opportunities by its completion. The Festival exceeded that goal by offering 60 engagement opportunities by augmenting the **talktheater** series.

## LOOKING BACK

- 
- 1991** Lisa Loomer's *Accelerando* CATF's first professional production.
- 
- 1998** First CATF Commission *Carry the Tiger to the Mountain* by Cherylene Lee.
- 
- 1999** *Compleat Female Stage Beauty* by Jeffrey Hatcher, commissioned and premiered by CATF, film rights purchased by Robert DeNiro, adapted and produced as film *Stage Beauty* starring Billy Crudup and Claire Daines (2004).
- 
- 2009** *Farragut North* by Beau Willimon produced at CATF, later adapted into film *The Ides of March* featuring George Clooney and Philip Seymour Hoffman.
- 
- 2010** Two Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award nominees. Only the second time in the history of the award that a single theater had two plays considered.
- 
- 2011** Lydia R. Diamond's *Stick Fly* (CATF 2008) made its Broadway debut.
- 
- 2012** CATF world premiere *Gidion's Knot* by Johnna Adams published in *American Theatre* magazine, becomes one of the most produced plays in America in 2013-14.
- 
- 2014** *Uncanny Valley* by Thomas Gibbons is first-ever CATF Off-Broadway production transfer.
- 
- 2017** CATF expands season to six plays in rotating repertory.
- 
- 2018** Shugoll Research studies CATF's regional economic impact.
- 
- 2019** Anthology featuring CATF plays written by women is published, CATF produces *Antonio's Song...* by Dael Orlandersmith and Antonio Edwards Suarez, the first co-production with Milwaukee Rep.

Complete production history available at [catf.org](http://catf.org).



## Looking Forward

The Contemporary American Theater Festival Board of Trustees adopted this strategic plan in 2020, during a tumultuous, changing time for both the world and for American theater. A dedicated ad-hoc committee of trustees and committed community members, sought insight from staff, seasonal artists and interns, community partners, and other stakeholders to form this plan. The judiciously crafted strategies included in this document are the result of in-depth reviews, reflection, planning, and prioritization.

The current Strategic Plan serves as the Festival's guiding principles for the next five years, taking the organization through the year 2025. New programs, projects, endeavors, and budget directives will be tested against this Plan. This is a blueprint for CATF's next chapter.

**CATF's Board and staff are committed to achieving the five strategic goals embodied in this 2020-2025 Strategic Plan:**

- GOAL ONE: ART**
- GOAL TWO: AUDIENCE**
- GOAL THREE: SUSTAINABILITY**
- GOAL FOUR: COLLABORATION**
- GOAL FIVE: FACILITIES**

Jalon Christian in *Thirst* by C.A. Johnson. CATF World Premiere, 2018.

Opposite: Franchelle Stewart Dorn, Alexandra Neil, and Kathryn Grody in *20th Century Blues* by Susan Miller. CATF World Premiere, 2016.



# contemporaryamericantheaterfestival

AT SHEPHERD UNIVERSITY



Goals & Priorities

## GOAL ONE



## ART

### GOAL ONE

**Inspire, create, and nurture great, new American theater**

#### PRIORITY ONE

**Create, discover, and instigate new, compelling, and thought-provoking work**

#### PRIORITY TWO

**Produce and present professional theater of exceptional quality and merit**

#### PRIORITY THREE

**Develop and nurture American writers and theater makers**

#### PRIORITY FOUR

**Distribute CATF's work and showcase its artists around the globe**

#### PRIORITY FIVE

**Expand and diversify the canon of contemporary American theater**

Harold & Mimi Steinberg/American Theatre Critics Association New Play Award nominees, citation winners, and finalists include:

1999: *Compleat Female Stage Beauty*  
by Jeffrey Hatcher

2010: *Lidless*  
by Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig

2010: *Breadcrumbs*  
by Jennifer Haley

2012: *Gidion's Knot*  
by Johnna Adams

2013: *H2O*  
by Jane Martin

2014: *Dead and Breathing*  
by Chisa Hutchinson

Angela Wildflower in *My Lord, What a Night* by Deborah Brevoort. CATF Rolling World Premiere, 2019.  
Jason Bowen and Bianca Laverne Jones in *Berta, Berta* by Angelica Chéri. CATF World Premiere, 2018.

Sarah Sun Park and Kate Udall in *A Welcome Guest: a psychotic fairy tale* by Michael Weller. CATF Commission and World Premiere, 2019.



## AUDIENCE

### GOAL TWO

**Grow, engage, and diversify the CATF audience**

#### PRIORITY ONE

**Inspire ALL audiences to feel welcome and necessary to the theater experience**

#### PRIORITY TWO

**Market to position CATF as the ultimate arts destination**

#### PRIORITY THREE

**Develop the culture and infrastructure to support superior customer service and hospitality**

#### PRIORITY FOUR

**Grow programming to expand audience engagement**

## GOAL THREE



# SUSTAINABILITY

## GOAL THREE

**Build leadership and organizational structures to ensure growth and sustainability**

### PRIORITY ONE

**Assess and develop new leadership and management models for staff and Board**

### PRIORITY TWO

**Create Business Plan to diversify revenue**

### PRIORITY THREE

**Adopt best practices and policies to secure a strong foundation for future growth**

### PRIORITY FOUR

**Share our own expertise with the industry and our community**

### PRIORITY FIVE

**Establish a new agreement with Shepherd University to grow programs and facilities**



GOAL FOUR

## COLLABORATION

### GOAL FOUR

**Advance mission impact through strategic partnerships**

#### PRIORITY ONE

**Strengthen and promote the collaboration with Shepherd University**

#### PRIORITY TWO

**Enhance the Shepherd University Contemporary Theater Studies major**

#### PRIORITY THREE

**Serve as a cultural gateway to and economic driver in the region**

#### PRIORITY FOUR

**Create industry relationships for creative exchanges and continued life of CATF plays**

#### PRIORITY FIVE

**Develop connections to export new American plays to the global theater industry**



## GOAL FIVE

### Create state of the art venues and facilities

#### PRIORITY ONE

Develop a long-range master plan in collaboration with Shepherd University

#### PRIORITY TWO

Explore alternative income streams

#### PRIORITY THREE

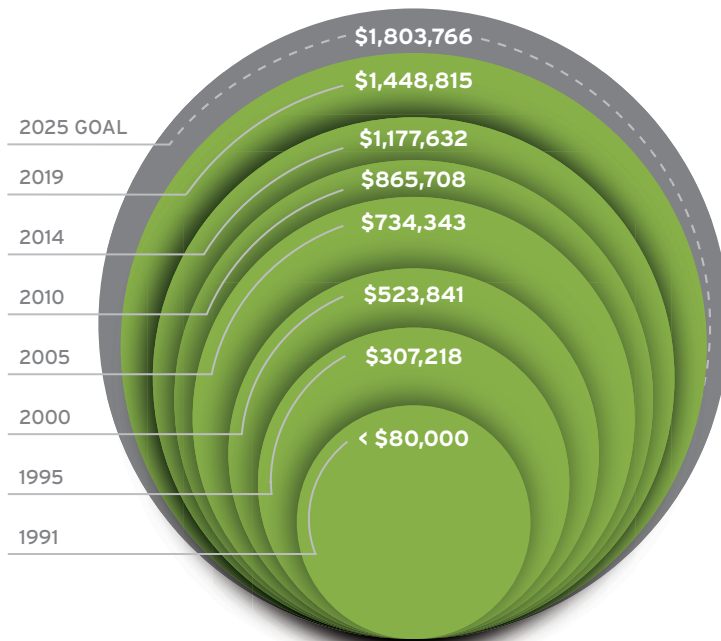
Enhance patron services

#### PRIORITY FOUR

Expand availability of space and facilities for academic and commercial interests

## JOURNEY TO 2025

| 2020   | 2025  |
|--|---|
| 133 plays produced<br>6 plays in rotating repertory  | 157 plays produced<br>8 off-season pieces produced  |
| 113 performances each year<br>96 playwrights produced  | 153 performances each year<br>110 playwrights produced  |
| 56 world premieres<br>11 commissions   | 76 world premieres<br>13 commissions  |
| Patrons attend an average of 3 shows<br>20,000 tickets issued  | Patrons attend an average of 4 shows<br>23,000 tickets issued   |
| \$5.86m in regional economic impact<br>\$1.5m annual budget  | \$7m in regional economic impact<br>\$1.8m annual budget  |
| Closed caption capabilities<br>Enhanced artist housing   | Renovate infrastructures to increase accessibility<br>Designated housing for CATF artists   |
| Electronic archive for new plays<br>CATF hires consulting firm to assist with audience outreach and sustainability | Dedicated research library/archive for new plays<br>Financial resources established to promote sustainability<br>Increase audience outreach with expanded engagement programs |



### BUDGET\* BY YEAR

As the Festival has grown more ambitious over time, so too has its financial capacity. The goal of this Strategic Plan is to continue CATF's responsible expansion in tandem with its artistic aspirations in order to fully support its artists and staff members.

\*Budget does not include in-kind contributions.

**“Brand new plays have found a home—and a loyal audience—in West Virginia’s oldest town. [CATF] is a dream for the writers of those plays.”**

**National Public Radio**



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**thinktheater**