

December 17, 2014

Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia

Code Green, Enhancing Awareness of Species at Risk

Final Report to the Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund (Agreement 9/4/14)

Amount awarded: \$ 5,000

Overview:

The Mermaid Institute of Puppetry Art's popular curriculum-based production, ***Code Green, Enhancing awareness of species at risk*** returned to Nova Scotia's elementary schools with an updated edition in the fall of 2014. Specifically, the company presented thirty-three (33) performances in sixteen communities, and performed for a total of 3469 students, parents and teachers.

The four-week tour (November 13 – December 8, 2014) was prefaced by a four-week rehearsal period at Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia's headquarters in Windsor, NS. Following the model of earlier presentations with the same name, the production is an interactive theatre piece intended to explore the impact of insensitive human activity on the natural environment. Created through extensive consultation with wildlife specialists, the play introduces students to several threatened species, including the little brown bat, the piping plover, the woodland caribou, and the Blanding's turtle.

One performer played the role of wildlife scientist and shared the stage with three spirited puppeteers, imparting solid information through the imaginative incorporation of video footage, interpretive comments, a lyrical soundscape and innovative puppetry. Sessions were followed by an interactive question-and-answer period.

The Creative Team:

The creative team for ***Code Green*** included the following participants:

- Co-director, Designer: Jim Morrow
- Co-director: Struan Robertson
- Science Consultant: Brennan Caverhill
- Original Script: Brennan Caverhill
- Script Updates: Rick Bartram, Struan Robertson
- Narrator: Hilary Adams
- Puppeteers: Ryanne Chisholm, Rachel Hastings, Genevieve Jones
- Composer: Paul Cram
- Production Manager: Deborah MacLean
- Production Designers: Rosemary Browning, Sam Bissex, Jon Ford and Struan Robertson
- Video Design: Rick Bartram, Rachel Hastings

The Rehearsal/Development Process:

While the basic elements of the production had been developed in earlier versions, an intensive rehearsal/development period was essential for the researching and integration of new elements, including additional puppets, refined props, enhanced multi-media components and tools, and an augmented musical score.

New animal and plant characters (along with relevant scenes and script) included:

- Plymouth gentian
- Cuckoo bee
- Right whale
- Little brown bat

New technical elements introduced included the use of power point and upgraded video projection. Building on the original score and with the permission of composer Paul Cram, Mermaid associates added relevant new tracks and visual materials.

Response to the touring program:

The response from educators and administrators was entirely positive, reflecting an appreciation of both the artistry and content of the presentation, as well as the value of the project as an important curriculum tool. The format of the show, designed for prompt setup with a minimum of disruption to gymnasium programs, was appreciated, and school personnel welcomed the company and facilitated their technical requirements. Virtually all expressed interest and enthusiasm for a return engagement of a similar nature.

Next Steps:

The following observations are drawn from post-event discussions among the creative, performance and administrative teams, as well as external suggestions and comments.

- 1) Under the auspices of the Mermaid Institute of Puppetry Arts, the project provides a unique training vehicle for young performers, designers and directors. Mermaid Institute “alumni” have gone on to pursue professional careers with Mermaid’s national and international touring productions.
- 2) There is a demonstrated theatre-in-education niche to be serviced in the Atlantic Region, and shows such as **Code Green** that reflect high standards in both presentation and educational content will continue to be a priority for our parent company (Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia).
- 3) There is agreement that we should return to our original practice of “embedding” a wildlife specialist, rather than assigning a performer to fill this role. Despite serious efforts, we were unable to engage a specialist from among the potential candidates we interviewed due to scheduling conflicts.

4) There is agreement that we should return to our earlier practice of including classroom-based follow-up workshops in conjunction with performances. Touring with a specialist will facilitate this aspect of our program.

5) There is agreement that there is merit in considering the expansion of the touring circuit for **Code Green** to include schools throughout the Atlantic Region as a next step, and thereafter to promote the show nationally and internationally. To achieve this goal, we will need to explore heightened media exposure especially in the realm of nature and environment sectors, as well as earn the support of funding agencies who share the vision of enhancing awareness of species at risk.

Budget: A full accounting is attached.

Summary:

The Mermaid Institute of Puppetry Arts, as well as the Board of Directors and management of Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia, extend our gratitude to your organization and your officers for the encouragement and support that ensured success for our 2014 project.

Respectfully submitted:

Sara Lee Lewis, Managing Director

Struan Robertson, co-director