

For Immediate Release

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S THEATRE GRAND UNVEILING

### Canada's Largest Children's Theatre Reveals Historic Renovations

**TORONTO, ON (Sept. 22, 2022)** – Today, **Young People's Theatre (YPT)** launched the next era in the company's 57-year history with the unveiling of its \$13.5 million *Room for Imagination* [expansion project](#). More than 10 years in the making, this ambitious project includes both renovations at its renowned Heritage venue, as well as a brand new facility across the street at 161 Frederick Street – **YPT 161 Studios**. YPT now anchors the corner of Front and Frederick streets in downtown Toronto with two buildings united in vision, creating Canada's largest state-of-the-art theatre complex for young people.

At a celebration thanking donors and funders, **YPT Executive Director Nancy Webster**, **Artistic Director Herbie Barnes** and **YPT Board Co-Chair David Scandiffio** recognized all who have contributed to this important milestone. Special guests included award-winning actor **Paul Sun-Hyung Lee** (*Kim's Convenience*) and his two sons, who have a special history with YPT. Indigenous drummers **Gabe Gaudet** and **Nathan Roy** performed a traditional Honour song as the theatre doors opened and guests explored the revitalized spaces.

"Today we open our doors with a beautiful new accessible facility that will serve both our audiences and our artists," said **Nancy Webster**. "A community of people have come together to make this transformation possible, to launch a new era for YPT."

This long-anticipated improvement will allow YPT to fully serve the 150,000 young people who participate annually.

"First and foremost for me are the young people we serve," said **Herbie Barnes**. "When you consider what the last few years have been like for our young people, my strongest commitment at this time is to bring back joy in these new spaces – the joy of creation, the joy of imagination. And now we have room for it."

The theatre will open its doors to the public on October 6 with the world premiere of Herbie Barnes' epic Indigenous tale, *Bentboy* – told through movement, dance and song. *Room for Imagination* major donors and funders include: **The Slaight Family**, the **Metcalf Foundation in honour of Johanna Metcalf**, **The Dalglish Family Foundation** through its support of YPT's education and outreach programs, **Bank of Montreal**, **TD Bank Group**, **CIBC Foundation**, **The Brown Guzman Family**, **The Scandiffio Family**, the **Kingfisher Foundation**, **CIBC Mellon** and the **Government of Canada**. YPT is thrilled to recognize a *Room for Imagination* leadership gift from The Slaight Family, with the renaming of the company's Mainstage to the **Ada Slaight Stage**.

**KOHN SHNIER architects** and **Flat Iron Building Group** were responsible for the transformation of YPT's public and

artistic spaces, including:

- Enhanced accessibility features throughout the theatre building;
- Spacious lobby areas doubled in size;
- Redesigned box office and concession spaces, both accessible and with touch-free patron features;
- Additional physical accessibility in the orchestra of YPT's Mainstage;
- Expansions and upgrades to backstage areas and dressing rooms, including barrier-free features to better accommodate artists with varying abilities;

- Larger props, set-building and scenic painting workshops;
- Upgraded theatrical equipment, vastly reducing YPT's environmental footprint; and
- Brand new art installations at each level of the theatre.

Across the street at YPT 161 Studios, an additional 12,000 square feet features purpose-built spaces for YPT's ever-expanding education initiatives, community programs and Drama School, including:

- Three accessible studio/classrooms and barrier-free washrooms;
- A Mainstage-size TD Rehearsal Hall;
- An expanded BMO Costume Shop with natural light;
- Administrative offices;
- Rental spaces serving the wider community;
- A street-level café, currently leased, providing rental income.

### History of 165 Front Street:

YPT moved into the Heritage building at 165 Front Street in the fall of 1977, opening its first production in its own building on December 22, 1977 – an adaptation of Laterna Magika's *The Lost Fairy Tale*. This new, permanent home once housed the horses that pulled the Toronto Street Railway Company's streetcars in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (pictured below). When the horses were retired in favour of electric power in 1891, the building became an electrical generating plant and remained that until 1906 when the company began purchasing power from Niagara Falls. In later years, the Toronto Transit Commission used the building as a warehouse before leaving it to sit empty and marked for demolition for years.



R: Building circa 1930.

Before YPT moved in, Zeidler Partnership Architects renovated the existing building and the interior space was converted into a main theatre and a smaller studio space. The Toronto Historical Board awarded YPT the Award of Merit for its imaginative and sympathetic treatment of a landmark that might otherwise have been destroyed. Over the years, the St. Lawrence development grew up around the new theatre, and the theatre found itself in the heart of a distinctive and vibrant family neighbourhood. In 2020, during its 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary, YPT launched its \$13.5 million *Room for Imagination* expansion project. **Martin Kohn** of **KOHN SHNIER architects** has continued to honour Eberhard Zeidler's original design for the building, while modernizing its accessibility, bringing light and spaciousness to its lobbies. Now complete, schools and families will be welcomed to experience the new 165 Front Street East, as well as YPT 161 Studios in October 2022.

For more information, visit [youngpeoplestheatre.org](http://youngpeoplestheatre.org).

### About Young People's Theatre

Young People's Theatre (YPT) launches the next stage in the company's 57-year history, co-led by Indigenous artist and new Artistic Director Herbie Barnes, and Executive Director Nancy Webster. This new era also marks the unveiling of YPT's expanded and renovated theatre complex, more than 10 years in the making. As Canada's largest and oldest professional theatre for young audiences, the company produces and presents a full season of theatre and arts education programming, serving approximately 150,000 patrons annually. [Learn more.](#)

## Connect with Young People's Theatre



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