**Playback NOW! St. Louis**

What is Playback NOW! St. Louis?

We are a St. Louis-based performance troupe that employs the techniques of Playback Theatre to entertain, engage, and educate and promote empathy for audiences of all ages.

What is Playback Theatre?

Playback Theatre is a highly specialized form of improvisation that was created by Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas in the 1970's, in an effort to encourage individuals from all walks of society to let their stories be heard. The Playback form is now practiced in over 40 countries and is still used to give a voice to those who might otherwise feel marginalized, under-represented, ignored, or misunderstood. It is also used with great success with general audiences because we all have stories.

Who is Playback NOW! St. Louis?

A project of That Uppity Theatre, directed by Joan Lipkin, our troupe features an extensive cast that includes seasoned improvisers, actors, writers, musicians, and other performance specialists. Together, we combine our unique skill sets into a poignant and humorous family-friendly show for all ages.

How many people are in the troupe

It varies! Our troupe ranges in size from four to eleven. Sometimes this is limited by the venue and sometimes by player availability (our cast is made up of some very sought-after performers!). Playback is very versatile and easily allows for variations in cast number without changing the quality of the show.

What happens at a Playback NOW! St. Louis performance?

After a brief (and fun) series of ice-breakers, volunteers are invited onstage to tell a story about their life. They are interviewed “talk show style” by our host. Our cast is listening intently as emotional details are mined. The players then portray the story.

Because it is improvised, each show is unique but there is a constant -- we listen to audience volunteers share their feelings and stories, and we honor them by deconstructing and playing back their story into its root emotional component parts.

That Uppity Theatre Company | thatuppitytheatrecompany@gmail.com | (314) 534-1454
Why is Playback Theatre important?

It is liberating for the teller, and entertaining, engaging, and educational for the audience. We honor the stories and experiences and emotions of the audience in a way that creates a sense of community and promotes both individual and collective well-being. Although we don’t have the same experiences, we have all had similar feelings at some point; emotions are the universal language that unifies humankind.

How long is the show? Is there a theme?

Performances range in length from 20-60 minutes and can be designed to cover any topic or theme. Some of our previous performances have focused on: racial, sexual or ethnic discrimination, gender identity and sexual orientation, coming out, freedom and equality, New Year’s resolutions, and Halloween stories. Our latest series of shows, under the general theme of “summer,” produced stories about weddings, baseball, summer camp, pregnancy and giving birth, foreign travel and more. We can work with you to develop a custom theme for your event!

Is there a cost associated with this performance?

Again, we are flexible. Your organization may even qualify for a free performance. Among the criteria: open and accessible to people of all ages and from all walks of life.

What are the logistics of the performance?

**Space:** We are very versatile in where we can perform. Lecture halls, meeting rooms, theaters, and even living rooms have hosted us in the past. Ideally, a performance area (our stage) would offer a minimum area of 12x16 feet. We would also appreciate a private area for our troupe to meet and warm-up privately before the show.

**Technical requirements:** We work best with one wireless microphone (that can be used to amplify audience members’ comments and stories) and the accompanying PA. In larger venues (such as a theatre) we may need for our troupe to be equipped with lavaliers/body mic’s.

**Other:** It would be helpful if your venue could provide one small table and at least four chairs. Depending on cast size, it might be helpful to have more chairs. Other accommodations may be needed, based on the venue and other factors.
Where has Playback NOW! St. Louis performed?

Webster University Conference on Diversity & Inclusion, Missouri History Museum, Diversity Awareness Partnership (Boeing, Edward Jones, St. Louis Zoo, Missouri Botanical Garden), Toyota Bodine Aluminum, Monsanto, the Monocle, Grand Center Theatre Crawl (International Photography Hall of Fame and Museum), and the National Theatre Communications Group Conference.

What do people think about Playback NOW! St. Louis?

Beth Stroble, President of Webster University: Whether the topic is disability or bullying, we know their performances will use the power of story to awaken emotion and guide preconception to new insight. By incorporating our students as authors, actors, and audience...this company simultaneously delighted us and challenged us to see the drama on the stage and in our everyday human interactions.

Elizabeth Pickard, Director of Education and Interpretation, Missouri History Museum:

Playback is different from any other theatrical art form...seeing audience members’ own stories unfold onstage takes the power of theatre one step further. Under the direction of Playback Now! St Louis, we watch the audience feel with the stories, be empowered by the stories, and for the audience members whose stories were told...the experience was validating and transformative.

Kathleen Wilder, Pastor of Lafayette Park UMC: That Uppity Theatre Company captured the heart and passion of my teenage daughter...she attended a performance of their Playback Now! St Louis ensemble and had an opportunity to share a story and felt really heard. This is a company that transcends all ages.

Patricia Wente, CEO/President, International Photography Hall of Fame and Museum: IPHF was flowing with people who came in somber and left feeling, laughing and some crying with the Uppity Theatre troupe as they brought back memories of "Summer" through their Playback Now! St Louis performances.

Who are the principals?

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Joan Lipkin is the producing artistic director of That Uppity Theatre Company. She is well known in St. Louis and nationally as a playwright, director, educator, and social activist, and specializes in civic engagement. Her plays are published in “Best American Short Plays”, “Amazon All Stars”, “Mythic Women/Real Women” and elsewhere. Her role in our playback troupe, involves the overall vision. She also serves as one of the conductors--welcoming and interviewing audience volunteers during the show.

Theresa Masters is a corporate trainer and staff development specialist. She serves as the coach (director) and musical co-director of our troupe and has been performing and coaching improv for over twenty years. She is also an actor, writer and produced playwright. She has developed the curriculum for several educational improv programs, including ours. During our shows, she serves as player-conductor and director.

Bob Baker is our musical co-director and musician. Music plays a fundamental role in playback, helping to create a mood and cue the pace of the scenes. Bob teaches short-form and musical improv and is an author, musician, actor, and visual artist. Bob's books include "Guerrilla Music Marketing Handbook," "The Empowered Artist," "Unleash the Artist Within," and “The Improv Comedy Musician” co-written with Laura Hall, music director and pianist for “Whose Line is Anyway?”

Paula Heller, MA PLPC, is a therapist and maintains a private practice in St. Louis. She serves as stage manager and advisor to our troupe. She was formerly a teacher of High School Theatre and English, where she practiced the art of drama therapy. Drama therapy (like playback theatre) involves tellers having their feelings re-enacted by people to empower the participants.

Audrey Crabtree is an instructor and award-winning creator, performer, director and producer of original theatrical work who is known for creating dynamic physical work that interacts directly with the audience. Her extensive improv and performance experience proves invaluable in our playback rehearsals and shows.

Howie Hirshfield is a producer, actor, and writer. He has extensive improv experience and is the director of the “Not Quite Right” improv troupe. He has been a member of Playback NOW! St. Louis since its inception and performs with the troupe as well as assisting in outreach and development.