EMPOWERING NEW YORK CITY GIRLS THROUGH THE ARTS

2020 ANNUAL REPORT
When FY19 began, in September 2019, viBe was poised to celebrate its 15th anniversary, and have its biggest, best year yet. Years of work had gone into rebranding and rebuilding the organization from the ground up with the intention to be more mission-driven; have the folks on our staff, Board, and even our volunteers reflective of the girls and communities that we serve; have viBe’s leadership include young Black women; and have our programs provide both artistic and leadership opportunities. We began our season with The Feminism You Left Out, a performance commissioned by Gloria Steinem for the November 5th book launch of The Truth Will Set You Free, But First It Will Piss You Off! at PioneerWorks. We conducted fall residencies at The Young Women’s Leadership School and Achievement First University Prep High Schools, both in Bushwick. We also raised over $46,000.00 through our participation in the Youth, Inc. Celebration fundraising training program, all stirred and led by viBe’s Board of Directors.

We began 2020 with plans to produce four shows, a full-length album, and two new programs: viBeOut, for LGTBIQA Black females, and the viBeWP Professional Mentorship Initiative, which gave a cohort of five young women from viBe the opportunity to be part of the artistic team for Donetta Lavinia Grays’ Where We Stand. Our viBeSongMakers and viBeSolos programs were in full swing, and viBeCompany was hard at work on their mainstage show after having enjoyed a riveting performance at the Poetic License Theater Company’s Generation Now. Then the world stopped.

We closed our offices on March 14th, halting production and all viBe programming. The decision to “transition” to virtual programming was made by viBe staff and participants. I couldn’t envision how we would be able to continue on, and I feared that all of the “pivoting” that was happening at other organizations would not work for viBe. How can theater and music be made in a virtual setting? What kind of experience could we offer, who lived in some of the most challenged and under-resourced communities, pre-COVID? For viBe it was necessary to first ask our participants what they needed. We quickly discovered that our participants were necessary additional program offerings, as well as providing equipment like microphones and props, to those working on producing music and theater. Our viBeOut participants decided that they wanted to produce a zine for their final project, which launched viBe into the world of publishing! Look out for viBePublications, which will include a new book written by viBeGirls.

During the spring of 2020, in quarantine, our staff and young women worked hard to support each other, continue their artistic pursuits, and also make a contribution to the Movement for Black Lives. Artistic partnerships with WP Theater and The New York Philharmonic fueled the creativity of our young women, and connected their writing and performances to larger, more visible cultural organizations. Virtual offerings included the viBeSolos performance Flowers and Butterflies: Emerging from Our Chrysalis, the reading of La Limpieza by Monique Letamendi, a listening party for our viBeSongMakers 2020 group RoyalBlu, and a record release show for RoyalBlu in August. We also served 250 girls through our summer programming, in partnership with Black Feminist Futures and viBeSongMakers Express all happened virtually, and both programs included a paid stipend for participants in order to address the growing economic crisis that was exacerbated by the cancellation of the Summer Youth Employment Program.

We did more than we could have ever imagined this year, and served our youth in ways that we could not have even dreamed of. Through a pandemic and a social movement, we have managed to do so — and expand our reach — under the historic circumstances of a global pandemic and an explosive reckoning on anti-Black racism in the U.S.

As we begin FY21, we need your support more than ever. We are working to shore up our resources, and viBe’s capacity to meet the needs of our participants in new ways. For example, viBe has offered free yoga and meditation classes led by yoga teachers Aimee Cox and Linda Lopes. There are two series: one for girls of color and their caretakers, and another for cultural/youth workers of color. Community care is crucial if our communities, which are deeply hurt right now, are to heal and thrive again. In FY21 we plan to continue to serve, train, and employ girls and young women of color to lead arts programs, and give them artistic and leadership opportunities on and off the stage. To that end, in September we will welcome viBe’s first Artistic Director, Monique Letamendi!


Partnerships with foundations, corporations, city and state agencies, and individuals has helped viBe to maintain the quality of its programs as we continue to grow. Your support helps us keep our programs high in quality and free of charge as we serve girls and communities that have a dearth of arts programming. We are excited about the future, and hopeful that change is coming soon. We hope that you will join us in supporting viBe’s growth and expansion in our 16th year. Thank you for your support as we look toward FY21 and beyond!

viBrantly,

TOYA A. LILLARD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, VI BE THEATER EXPERIENCE

I have never felt more proud and purpose-driven in my commitment to viBe than in the past fiscal year. Not only have we continued to provide participants with opportunities to develop leadership skills through our innovative, high-touch, free arts programming, we’ve managed to do so — and expand our reach — under the historic circumstances of a global pandemic and an explosive reckoning on anti-Black racism in the U.S.

viBe’s consistent and now digital-first presence in the lives of our community marked a powerful shift in response to current events. As a Black-led and predominantly Black-serving organization, we were uniquely prepared to understand the emotional and physical needs of our community and to answer the increasing demands for expert Black voices on topics of social justice and women’s empowerment. We have always looked matters of social justice squarely in the eye; this year, the world was ready for our POV.

With predominate Black leadership, Board, and team makeup, viBe served as a model for how organizations can ensure the voices influencing organizational action are inclusive and representative of the communities they serve.

If anything, the events of the past year have proven the necessity of this work. Our commitment is redoubled. We will continue to remain a consistent and positive force in our participants’ lives, regardless of fluctuating resources and priorities. We will shout loud and knock on more doors to ensure Black and Brown girls and women are given every opportunity to become the leaders we know them to be.

Your support this past year has been tremendous; please join us again as we continue the fight.

#Onward,

CHERYL OVERTON
BOARD CHAIR, VI BE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Thank you for your support as we look toward FY21 and beyond!
This year’s viBeResidencies served as an altered version of our viBeStages program and allowed students to collaboratively work with professional theater directors to write and perform an original show in school! All Achievement First Director Monique Letamendi worked with viBe girls Geornae Davis and Adesode Otagho to present System of Life (“Two high school girls battle not only their mental demons but the pressure and hurt from their physical world as well. Follow them for a glimpse into their lives at school, at home and how they get through the day, being in this thing called the SYSTEM OF LIFE”) on December 16th, 2019. At The Young Women’s Leadership School in Brooklyn, despite an abrupt end due to COVID-19, Directors Michaela LeMonier and Camryn Bruno got to work with Shamilla, Jassenia, Cecie, Lishaay, Symay, Malaya, Alexes, Rihanna, Brenda, Jaleah, Samantha to explore original writing and theatre-making.

viBeCompany is viBe’s pre-professional group of young adult artists who receive ongoing training and paid performance opportunities, and who devise original theater for viBe’s invited performances. viBeCompany produces and performs one full-length show each year. 2019-2020 Abrupt opened on September 25th, directed by Monique Letamendi and starring Mylereena Adams, Chayna Antoine, Hanifah Johnson, Michelle LeMonier, Chelsea Allison, Kenya Lewis, Khadijah Boney, and Monica Cacancion.

viBeOut is a new viBe program that began in Spring 2020. This 15-week program, LGBTQIA+ femme-identifying females have the opportunity to place the Black queer icons of the past in conversation with those currently contending the fight for equal representation in mainstream culture, culminating in a final project that empowers participants to become icons in their own right. Through dance, theater, storytelling, and art in all forms, participants learn ways to be more in touch with themselves, their identities, and learn the ways in which past black queer icons have paved the way for them, and for us all. In this debut year, program director MiBaeLanner works with participants: Anna Richardson, Rhae Gilliam, MFORMATION, Ayo Joe, and Angelina Rodriguez on an e-magazine. Our inaugural viBeOut group created and published viBeOut Magazine on May 8th, 2020.

viBeSolos is an advanced performance program where girls craft and perform their own 15-minute “one-girl” solo pieces in collaboration with an ensemble cast. This year, writers performed: Tatia Copeland, Hanifah Johnson, Angeline Rodriguez, Gabrelle Santillante, and Jhanay White devised and debuted Flowers and Butterflies: Emerging from Our Chrysalis (“Transformation takes growth: From cocoon to butterfly and from bud to flower, these six girls exploring what it means to be confident, open-minded, free, and safe in this life!”) This production was directed by Michaela LeMonier and Camryn Bruno and performed on May 8th, 2020.

viBeSongMakers is a six-month program that provides the tools for viBe girls to express themselves through writing/recording, composing, and arranging a full-length album of songs. Professional musicians work with participants to offer basic music instruction and guide girls through the songwriting and recording process, resulting in an album and live performance. Co-directors Felisha George and Monique Letamendi led 2019-2020 group RoyaleB (Haylee James-Stewart, Ashley Lawrence, Jeanine Griffith). RoyaleB’s album, Palette Ouvrette (“Feel the colors. Feel and hear how open we are and how open you can make yourself.” Color is the mental emotions that have a language. When listening to Palette Ouvrette we ask you to make your own”) was shared at a May 29th listening party and August 9th record release event.

viBeApprenticeship is a leadership program geared toward viBe Alumnae and college students who have expressed an interest in exploring careers in the arts. Program director Amanda hosts youth panel discussions, workshops, and performance opportunities for alumnae, college students and high school students. In February-June, viBeAlumnae mentored the creation of an original poem which was performed during their May 29th panel event.

FEBRUARY — MARCH

FEBRUARY — AUGUST

APRIL

MAY

JUNE — JULY

JULY

AUGUST

1/ viBeApprentices attend IGNITE: Young Women Run NY; viBeCompany performs at BMI Performance at Harvest Coliseum HS
2.1/ NYC Arts Day of Learning Equity & Inclusion Panel & Performance

27/ viBeCompany members lead a performance & talk-back at Madwell Company for their Black History event

5/ viBeCompany performs at Poetic License Festival: Generation Now

8/ viBeSongMakers Express group, RoyalBlu, premieres their music video for original song “Eyes of the Young”

14/ viBeSongMakers Express & viBeOut Class of 2020: Rebirth

20/ Members of viBeCompany & RoyalBlu and Program Director Monique Letamendi perform at BLM Mural located at Restoration Plaza, Brooklyn

22/ Virtual reading of La Limpieza, written & performed by Program Director Monique Letamendi

29/ viBeSongMakers’ RoyalBlu hosts virtual listening party

JUNE — JULY

viBe attends “Fabulation” at Harlem School of the Arts & viBeCompany member Amanda hosts youth panel

viBeSongMakers express group, Revolution A, premieres four music videos from their “Palette Ouvrette” album & viBe hosts virtual after-party with DJ Reborn

9/ viBeSongMakers group, RoyalBlu, premieres four music videos from their “Palette Ouvrette” album & viBe hosts virtual after-party with DJ Reborn

11/ Women in Music talk with DJ Reborn

12 – 13/ viBeLeadership Institute participates host virtual reading/sharing for their culminating projects

14/ viBeSongMakers Express group, Revolution A, premieres their music video for original song “Eyes of the Young”
According to a new report, Ready to Lead, published by Girls Leadership in July 2020, Black and Latinx girls are our most skilled and ambitious leaders. This is something that viBe Theater Experience, and our participants, have echoed for years, in the plays, music, and media created by our participants.

According to pre-survey reports provided by Hello Insight, at the start of viBe programming, 92% of young people served were challenged in at least one writing capacity. 61% of the participants saw themselves as “emerging” in academic self-efficacy, but 67% of participants saw themselves as having advanced social skills. A majority – 59% – of participants saw themselves as having advanced social capital. This underscores the idea that Black and Latinx girls see themselves as leaders, but often lack the academic support, or support from adults, to fuel this belief.

According to post-survey reports provided by Hello Insight, at the end of viBe programming, 80% of participants saw improvement in academic self-efficacy. 82% of participants saw significant improvement in their self-management skills. Through their participation in viBe programs, participants were able to sharpen their Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) capacities, as well as their academic self-efficacy.

In viBe programs, 100% of young people demonstrated gains in at least one writing capacity, and 100% of participants demonstrated gains in at least one SEL capacity. See all our data at: https://ins.gt/S0QnJG.

In 2019-2020, viBe served 483 young people through our programs & residencies, and an additional 1,826 people by way of our events, workshops, & performances.

We are so grateful for the brilliant, thoughtful, diligent, resourceful, and dedicated young women of viBe! The five artists who joined us for the Off-Broadway premiere of Where We Stand by Donnetta Lavinia Grays amplified our production in every way–we were so grateful to have them join us on that journey, and can’t wait for what we will make together in the future.
Bring viBe Vibe into your virtual community space. We provide space and context, but the creative process is truly the artist’s own. Our participants have already produced albums, zines, manga, and more. viBe continues to commit to our participants’ touch can never be underestimated. viBe is happy to provide virtual spaces for our participants as we understand the importance of creating safe spaces that approximate an in-person atmosphere for Black girls during this time. The value of in-person touch can never be underestimated, viBe continues to commit to our participants’ ability, need, and desire to create despite the restrictions that the world has placed on us. Our team of skilled arts practitioners has the capacity to bring interactivity into virtual spaces, and help to guide participants virtually through viBe’s tried and true creative process. Our participants have already produced albums, zines, socially distanced photo shoots, and community building through Zoom and other online platforms. Our administrative staff is equipped to provide virtual Professional Development for Educators, Parents, and Corporate Teams, including Racial Equity, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Training. If you are interested in viBe Residencies, we are more than happy to accommodate all. viBe aims to go above and beyond for them, &— soon—working for them.

The NYC Fund for Girls and Young Women's Foundation COVID-19 Response Fund Nonprofit Stabilization Fund
Grantmakers for Girls of Color “Love is Healing”COVID-19 Response Fund Youth, Inc.

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I have been inspired by Toya Lillard and the young women at viBe Theater Experience for the past few years. The New York Philharmonic was fortunate for viBe’s partnership in a recent project surrounding the civil rights song We Shall Overcome. Their contribution was the highlight of this production. Young Black women unapologetically and creatively addressed anti-Black racism within the context of gender, sexual orientation, and class. Soon after its release this piece garnered over 60,000 views on our social media channels, and that number has grown steadily within our community. We look forward to many more years of partnership and learning with this company.
PROVIDES GIRLS, YOUNG WOMEN, AND NON-BINARY YOUTH OF COLOR (AGED 13-25) IN NEW YORK CITY WITH FREE, HIGH QUALITY ARTISTIC, LEADERSHIP, AND ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITIES. VIBE WORKS TO EMPOWER ITS PARTICIPANTS TO WRITE AND PERFORM ORIGINAL THEATER, VIDEO AND MUSIC ABOUT THE REAL-LIFE ISSUES THEY FACE DAILY. VIBE'S PERFORMING ARTS AND TRAINING PROGRAMS PROVIDE THE PLATFORM FOR PARTICIPANTS TO AMPLIFY THEIR VOICES AND "SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER" BY CREATING AN ARTISTIC RESPONSE TO THE WORLD AROUND THEM.