

Calendar alert! Touchstone's Festival UnBound rides again!

The Bethlehem Gadfly Arts, the, Touchstone Theater August 19, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts on Touchstone Theatre 

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Festival UnBound Sept 4 – Oct 16

Festival UnBound, year two, socially distanced

Touchstone opens 2020-21 season with reprise of community festival

BETHLEHEM, PA – Touchstone Theatre will begin its COVID-friendly, social-distance-safe 2020-21 season with a return to *Festival UnBound*, a celebration of Lehigh Valley arts and community discourse that premiered in October 2019. This year's festival will feature weekly events running from September 4-October 16, 2020.

The first year of *Festival UnBound* took place twenty years after the closing of Bethlehem Steel, a massively impactful and traumatic event for the community. In the years since the closing of the Steel, Touchstone began to explore questions of community and identity in the Bethlehem community: Who were we, now that the Steel was gone? What were the challenges ahead, and what were the values that would hold the community together as we faced the task of shaping our future? Out of these questions came *Festival UnBound* in October 2019, a ten-day festival of arts and community dialogue around concerns of diversity, sustainability, health, youth leadership, and interconnectedness. The festival was an immense success, and many in the community expressed a desire for the festival to continue.

“What emerged from the Festival was a vision of our community as a healthy, just, and loving place, as it had never been before— one full of music and play in the service of compassion and joy,” says Touchstone Ensemble Member Bill George, who coordinated *Festival UnBound* in 2019. “We knew we couldn't let go of that vision but had to keep holding it up as a light to lead us forward. And so, the Festival must live.”

In an extraordinary 2020, Touchstone will be manifesting *Festival UnBound* in a series of outdoor events, parties, forums, and performances. Many will be free to attend, and most will provide a livestream or digital recording to accommodate audience members who are not comfortable attending for concerns of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Planned events include:

- **LATINX BLOCK PARTY** – September 4, 7p – Kicking off the season with an end-of-the-summer party for our neighborhood and our neighbors – all are welcome! Join Touchstone for an evening of local food, live music by Héctor Rosado Latin Jazz Experience, and celebration of local Latinx culture and community. Cost: FREE, donation welcome. Venue: Touchstone Parking Lot (321 E. 4th St. Bethlehem, PA 18015). Rain dates: September 5 and September 6, 7pm.
- **MEDICAL WORKERS SPEAK OUT** – September 12, 7p – In the last year, doctors, nurses, and healthcare professionals have come to the forefront of national attention for their work on the front lines of COVID-19. Come out and take a listen to what some of our local medical workers have to say about the experience – tales of trauma, triumph, and compassion, from the healers in our community. Cost: FREE, donation welcome. Venue: Touchstone Parking Lot (321 E. 4th St. Bethlehem, PA 18015). Rain date: September 13, 7pm.
- **RUMI/NATION** – September 18-19, 6p – An original project created by Touchstone/Moravian MFA student Sean Patrick Cassidy. This site-specific audio walking tour starts on the South Bethlehem Greenway and takes us into a world within our own, allowing the audience to reflect on how they interact with and benefit from natural cycles of change. Cost: FREE, donation welcome, limited spots available. Venue: Performance takes place outside, starting at the 400s block of the South Bethlehem Greenway and covers a 2-3 mile walk around Bethlehem. Rain date: September 20, 6pm.
- **SUSTAINABILITY FORUM** – September 19, 6p – At last year's Sustainability Forum, high schoolers from across Bethlehem came together to share projects that would create a more sustainable community for all of us. This year, our students – as they continue to

reflect on the massive changes in our world – take those big plans and bring them to the steps of City Hall, to make their voices heard. Cost: FREE, donation welcome. Venue: Outside on the steps of Bethlehem City Hall. Rain date: September 20, 6pm.

- **ALOUD** – September 26, Time TBA – An original project created by Touchstone/Moravian MFA student Adam Ercolani. LGBTQIA+ youth coming into their own identities often feel trapped and restrained by their surroundings and circumstance. How can artistic creation and performance allow us to process and understand our identities in a new way? An exploration of queer identity, self-discovery, and finding a way out of the bonds that hold us back. Cost: FREE, donation welcome. Venue: TBA. Rain date: September 26.
- **HOMECOMING** – October 2, 7p – A continuation of last year’s celebration of the history, struggles, and successes in the Black community of the Lehigh Valley, recognizing exceptional talent, drive, and leadership. In this year of the Black Lives Matter movement, protests, civil discourse and loss of great civil rights icons – a year where the names of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd are raised in voices across every state – we claim space and call for justice, recognizing that our history informs the present. Cost: FREE, donation welcome. Venue: Touchstone Parking Lot (321 E. 4th St. Bethlehem, PA 18015). Rain date: October 3, 7pm.
- **TALES OF HOPE AND RESISTANCE** – October 9, 8p – From around the world, myths and fairy tales have always taught us how to triumph in the face of overwhelming odds. Touchstone in collaboration with Mock Turtle Marionette Theater presents retellings of traditional stories from the diverse cultural backgrounds of the Lehigh Valley, featuring live music and puppetry. Together, we look to the wisdom of the past to remind us that we are capable of overcoming adversity, now and always. Cost: Tickets by table: \$40 for a 4-top, \$30 for a 2-top. Venue: Touchstone Parking Lot (321 E. 4th St. Bethlehem, PA 18015). Rain dates: October 10 and 11, 7pm.
- **DICTATORS 4 DUMMIES... AND MORE!** – October 16, 7p – An election season retrospective of original political satire. Ensemble Member Christopher Shorr presents a re-imagining of his 2018 musical, now a movie with larger-than-life characters played by action figures voiced by the original *Dictators 4 Dummies* cast. Plus: a live concert of satirical songs from the Touchstone archive. Join us

for a comical evening... and a chilling reminder of the tenuous state of democracy. Cost: Tickets by table: \$40 for a 4-top, \$30 for a 2-top. Venue: Touchstone Parking Lot (321 E. 4th St. Bethlehem, PA 18015). Rain dates: October 17 and 18, 7pm.

Funding for *Festival UnBound* is ongoing, but to date, Festival sponsors and supporters include: CADC Bethlehem, Discover Lehigh Valley, FIG Bethlehem, Freestone Productions, Kira Willey Productions LLC, PBS 39, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, The Morning Call, RCN, WDIY, Webfoot Digital, and Working Dog Press.

Touchstone Theatre's *Festival UnBound* takes place September 4-October 16, 2020, with performances taking place in the parking lot behind Touchstone Theatre and other locations throughout the city. More information at www.touchstone.org

The Bethlehem Gadfly