

THEATER MU WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

MISSION: Theater Mu was founded in 1992 to empower Asian Americans through theater. Mu is the largest Asian American theater company in the Midwest and a leader of the Asian American theater movement. Known nationally for artistic excellence and innovative community engagement; playwrights we have commissioned and/or developed early in their careers have gone on to productions around the country; and actors we have trained have gone on to work with major local and regional companies.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Theater Mu has been training artists since its inception. In 2019, under the leadership of Artistic Director Lily Tung Crystal, Mu revamped our artist training program, MTI (Mu Training Institute), developing a suite of arts education programs designed and led by Asian American artists. With the addition of Managing Director Anh Thu Pham in 2020, Mu committed to economic justice, subsidizing the community engagement programs for all participants, and providing scholarships for MTI classes and Mu Explorations and adding compensation for the Mu fellowship program.

Mu's community engagement programs use the power of live theater to educate, create art, and share complex perspectives on important issues. Mu's workforce development programs have:

- Reached over 450,000 Minnesotans through artist training (since 1992) and theater and taiko arts education residencies, workshops, and performances (since 1996). Taiko became a separate entity, TaikoArts Midwest, in 1997.
- Mu currently reaches 2,000 students annually through theater residencies, workshops, and Mu Training Institute (MTI) programs.
- Mu Stories residencies, English Language Learner (ELL), immigrant, and refugee students build skills, confidence, and pride in their own stories using theater, speaking, and writing practices. In Mu Explorations, students in grades 3-12 learn theater skills along with Asian American history they likely wouldn't be taught in school. Both programs were written with the assistance of an evaluation and curriculum specialist.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: Our artist development programs are building a strong creative workforce in the Twin Cities. Theater Mu has three workforce development programs:

- Mu Training Institute (MTI)
 - provides training for Minnesota-based Asian American artists at any stage of their career.
 - Classes to develop artists in all theatrical disciplines
- Mu fellowships
 - Provide on-the-job training to a variety of theater artists on our mainstage productions.
 - All programs prioritize the exploration of how to bring unique Asian American qualities to the stage. This is different from many traditional theater training programs that choose to ignore or hide an artist's roots.
- Mu Emerging Playwrights' Circle-development cohort for emerging playwrights in Minnesota.

We use a robust pre- and post-program evaluation system to measure success and gather participant feedback. After attending an MTI program in 2022, a youth participant shared, "The most rewarding part of this experience was the fact that I got to experience theater with other Asian Americans within a community I never knew I had." Participants of Mu's Community Engagement and Workforce Development programs comment on how their experience helps them grow in voice and confidence, and connect with a community through the arts, reducing isolation. One artist wrote in a feedback form, "Theater Mu is an artistic home where I have felt welcomed. It's a nexus of colleagues, friends, and communities that come together to create and enjoy art that celebrates our shared humanity through the Asian American experience. What a blessing it is for Theater Mu to exist..." A community member made this observation after attending a virtual showcase during the pandemic, "It's so impressive how active you and your team have been in creating space for artists not only in your local region but for many API artists across the country (and even beyond). What a true inspiration you and Theatre Mu are!"



In terms of impact, our programs have shown AAPI artists who are typically discouraged from going into the arts that they have a clear path to vibrant careers. Our in-house artist roster has grown to nearly 300

REQUEST: Theater Mu has a vibrant community of teaching artists and community members in the Twin Cities. Our programs are limited only by funding and physical space. We only have a leased studio and administrative offices totally 1100 sq feet. This limits the amount of people that we can train through our programs. Our Mu Explorations summer camp and two adult workforce development programs, MTI and Mu Fellowships, are dependent upon having access to a performance theater and rehearsal rooms. The limited space prevents us from running simultaneous programs and impacts the timing of programs as we are beholden to when openings are available in other theaters' production calendars.

We are asking for support from the legislature so that we can investigate physical and financial costs of the space needed for all of our workforce development programming. We are committed to the St. Paul, Little Mekong community. We believe that Theater Mu is not only an artistic performance space but a community center that contributes to the well-being of our Asian American neighborhoods.

