

Leanne Rubinstein
Column

Now more than ever, people are realizing how vital a position art holds in our survival as human beings. With millions of people finding themselves trapped in their homes to wait out a global pandemic with little to do, the search for entertainment leads them to both the consumption and the creation of music, movies, books, painting, dance and writing, to name just a few.

Some of the most impactful art throughout history has been brought about through collaborative effort, however, and many artists now are finding themselves simply unable to create.

One of the art forms that has been hit the hardest is the performing arts, specifically theatrical productions. Musicals and plays require full casts, crews and staff to be able to put together and present their final product.

Reflective of the repercussions from both the bubonic plague and the Spanish flu, the strict limits put in place for larger gatherings meant the closing of theaters everywhere, resulting in a devastation to the field.

All shows were quickly canceled both professionally and on a smaller scale, some in the middle of the production process. Others were unfortunate enough to be shut down mere days before opening.

Though some are hopeful to continue with performances at the next opportunity, [a number of shows have announced that their production process will not resume](#). Locally, the University of Colorado Boulder was forced to close their productions of both “The Marriage of Figaro” and “Spring Awakening” before the end of their runs.

This is not only devastating for those involved in terms of all the hard work they had put into them, but also the loss of employment for those that take part in the field as a career. [Though Broadway actors and staff under the Coalition of Broadway Unions and Guilds are set to receive some financial protection during the shutdown](#), many smaller-scale performers who are not with a union are left without support during their inability to work.

A great number of smaller theatre companies, especially at the high school and college level, are hurting financially as well.

Many of those involved in such productions have been imploring people who bought tickets to a show that was ultimately canceled to not ask for a refund, instead considering it a donation as a show of support.

Easton Michaels, a musical theatre student at Ball State University, urged in a Facebook post, [“Theatre programs across the country are about to go into huge amounts of debt for not making back ticket sales for productions that are being cancelled. Be a patron of the arts and support the work we do!”](#)

[Some theatrical productions have released live recordings of performances to the public](#). Many hope to maintain a percentage of ticket sale revenue, though some are offering free access with donations encouraged.

More importantly, they hope that, in doing this, they can reach larger audiences and provide entertainment when it is most needed – and when it is most challenging to. Is that not the purpose of live performance in the first place?

We need theatre now more than ever. Throughout history, theatre has played an important role in times of crisis not only in maintaining a sense of community and raising the morale of the people, but also in its power to work through these critical times.

Alexis Soloski explained in her [New York Times article](#), "Theater has provided a place to think through the fears and realities of communicable or otherwise dangerous illness and to do that thinking in community." She references the play "The Normal Heart" as an example in its ability to leave audience members with a sense of personal responsibility in their behavior during a time of rapid spread of HIV.

It's only a matter of time before the first coronavirus plays are created, nudging us toward even more empathy and compassion for those affected. It is my hope that these will also help us treat this as a critical moment to analyze the ways our world is in need of change.