



A MESSAGE FROM TAMPA FRINGE

Some of you may have heard that yesterday (Thursday, June 27th, 2024), the governor issued statements in defense of cutting all funding for arts and culture in the state of Florida by saying that Fringe Festivals are “sexual festivals where they do all this stuff”, and that they shouldn’t receive funding.

This is a gross mischaracterization of what the Tampa International Fringe Festival is, and what Fringe Festivals all over the world do.

As a Fringe Festival, we strive to be accessible, unjuried, and importantly, uncensored. Open-access festivals like ours have traditions running back to the 1940s in Scotland, and artists and audiences around the world have embraced this style of performing arts festival. Shows at Fringe Festivals can include theatre, children’s storytelling, acrobatics, magic, dance, music, and more. Companies selected come from a broad swath of backgrounds and ideologies. That is the beauty of Fringe - there is something for everyone, and we don’t try to gatekeep.

The production from this year’s Tampa Fringe Festival that the state’s Communications Director drew attention to was “Captain Havoc & the Big-Titty Bog Witches,” a satire that employed naughty language but was otherwise just a regular comedy play. This show was labelled as 18+ and entrance was restricted, because we are committed to ensuring that we follow all laws and that shows are age appropriate.

To be clear, no Florida tax money we have ever received has been given directly to artists to fund their projects. Revenue that artists earn comes directly from their audiences via ticket sales and merchandise. Fringe Festivals are live-arts clearinghouses. Festivals like ours don’t produce the art themselves, but do give artists a stage, technical support, and marketing/ticketing support. Fringe Festivals aggregate arts events to make them cheaper and more easily accessible for the communities they serve. Any funds festivals receive go to helping pay technicians and administrative staff, and to pay for equipment and space. Artists are allowed to use that platform, but Fringe Festivals do not fund artist’s work, nor do they market specific works but rather spend marketing funds promoting the festival as a whole.

Yesterday’s actions have added insult to the injury of the loss of state arts and culture funding. This unwarranted reaction guided by a misinformed opinion has strangled access to all arts and cultural programs in the state. Hundreds of organizations lost funding when the governor used his veto. Children’s museums, opera companies, ballet troupes, and local arts funding bodies all lost much-needed support because of this action, and Fringe has been named scapegoat.

Florida arts organizations are already feeling the pain from these actions, as the state’s fiscal year begins in July, in just THREE days. We urge you to support arts and culture as much as possible in any way you can over the next 12 months. Be it with attendance, with donations, with volunteering, with amplifying, whatever you can do. Tampa Fringe lost \$15,678 due to this, so if you are able to help fill the gap, please do. Moreover, support all of the organizations that you can. This year it is vital to do so, for the sake of the Fringe, and for all the arts and culture in Florida.