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SOCIAL PURPOSE
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TAPESTRY OPERA & NIGHTWOOD THEATRE NANCY & ED JACKMAN PERFORMANCE CENTRE CASE STUDY

A SOCIAL PURPOSE REAL ESTATE FOR ARTS SPACES CASE STUDY
BY ARTSBUILD ONTARIO (2025)

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INTRODUCING TAPESTRY OPERA & NIGHTWOOD THEATRE

Nightwood Theatre and Tapestry Opera are two of Toronto's established and innovative arts organizations, both celebrating 45 years of art-making this year.

Nightwood Theatre is Canada's preeminent feminist theatre. They cultivate, create, and produce extraordinary theatre by women and gender-expansive artists, liberating futures, one room at a time. Founded in 1979, Nightwood Theatre is helmed by Artistic Director Andrea Donaldson and Managing Director Naz Afsahi, whose leadership has received public acclaim for artistic excellence, the successful training and development of emerging female talent, and their ongoing advocacy around gender equity. Nightwood Theatre's incredible history has had a massive impact shifting the weight of what's produced, and what key artists are at the helm of projects, and while only 31% of plays are by women, with less than 0.5% of plays by trans women, Nightwood continues to fight for parity in the industry. Nightwood creates inclusive, intersectional spaces that seek to insert humanity into how we work, which includes Nightwood's longstanding commitment to the five-day rehearsal work-week, placing humanity and care at their work's centre.

Tapestry Opera has earned acclaim for its boundary-pushing work in the classical music and opera sectors. Tapestry was founded in 1979, and is the only Canadian company solely dedicated to creating and performing original Canadian opera. Their mandate is to create powerful opera that reflects and changes the world around us, bringing together art forms, creators, and communities to create boundary-pushing work.

Tapestry and Nightwood share a commitment to experimental and interdisciplinary work and have been partners since they began sharing their previous space in 2002. Together, they have long been advocates for bold, socially relevant art and creating spaces where everyone is included.

In March 2025, they launched the Nancy & Ed Jackman Performance Centre, an innovative purpose-built space in a repurposed retirement home that shares its upper levels with affordable housing in Toronto's trendy Yorkdale neighbourhood at 877 Yonge Street.

PROJECT SUMMARY

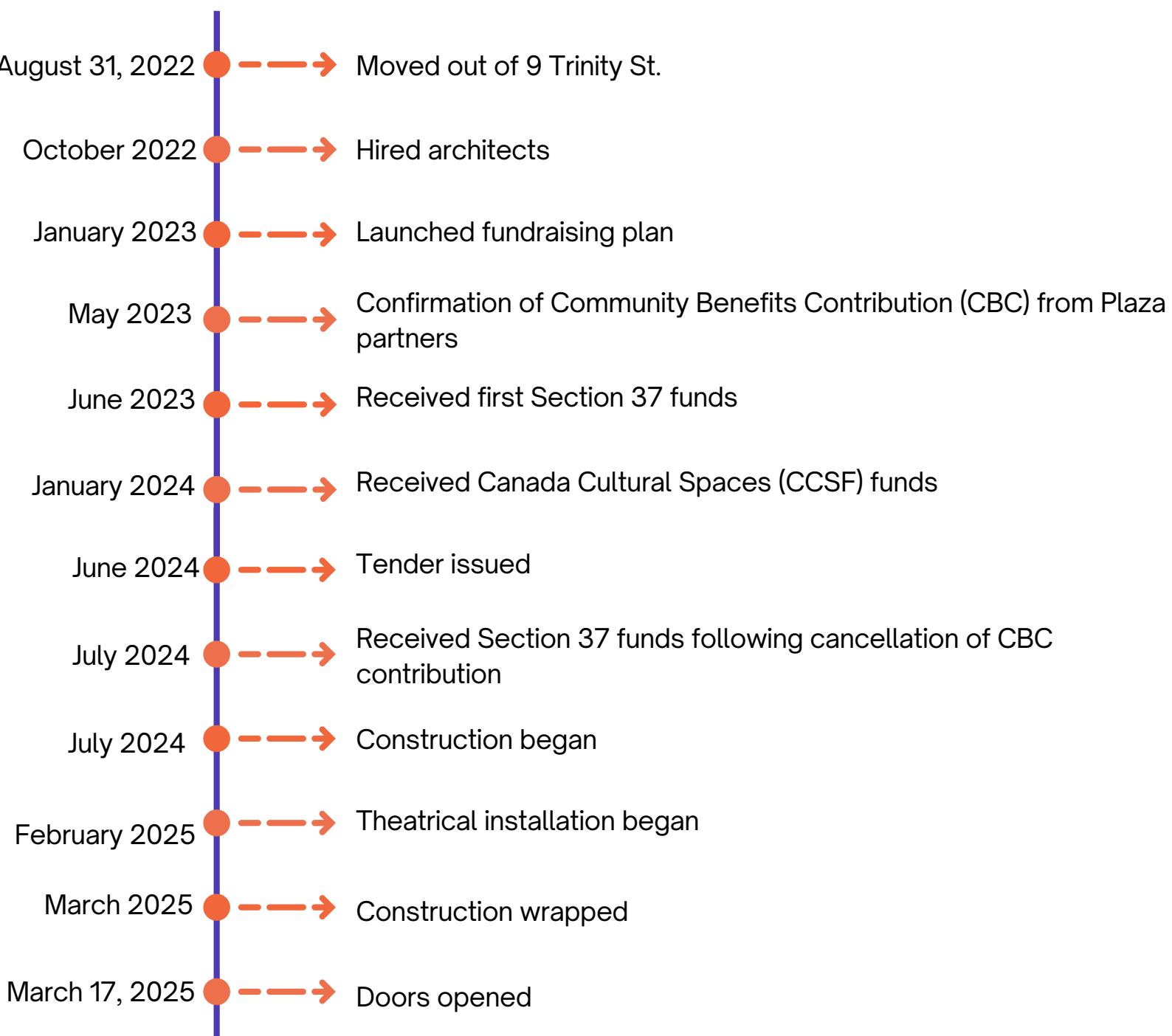
In 2022, after losing their home in Toronto's Distillery District when their 20 year headlease was unexpectedly not renewed, Nightwood Theatre and Tapestry Opera found themselves in search of a new space that could accommodate their expanding needs. The search for a suitable location led them to work with St. Clare's, a key community partner that assisted in identifying potential properties.

Their search culminated in the acquisition of the Nancy & Ed Jackman Performance Centre, a 6,500-square-foot building at 877 Yonge Street. This site was envisioned as a dual-purpose space for both rehearsal and performance, with flexible seating that can accommodate between 110 to 250 people. The design of the space is intended to be adaptable, meeting the evolving needs of the companies' diverse programming while maintaining a strong connection to the surrounding community.

Securing the building and funding for the project was not without its challenges. The partners had to navigate complex bureaucratic processes to access funding, demonstrate the validity of the project, and secure support from various sources. The development was further complicated by unexpected costs and delays, including a flooding incident which shifted the project timeline. Despite these hurdles, the goal was clear: to create a space that would serve as a cultural hub, an anchor for affordable housing, and a beacon for community engagement.

TIMELINE





PLANNING

Readiness

As they were aware of a looming eviction in their previous home base in the Distillery District, Nightwood and Tapestry took several steps to prepare for the possibility of a new space well before successfully sourcing a vacant site.

The following actions enabled them to be ready to quickly jump on the opportunity presented to them:

- They worked with architects early on to do exploratory work and create preliminary drawings. This allowed them to be ready when a funding opportunity arose, as they were able to quickly provide a budget and drawings.
- They invested in having the architects act as contract administrators during the construction process. This provided valuable expertise in reviewing change orders and advocating for the organizations' needs, which was crucial since the organizations themselves did not have that level of construction knowledge.
- They built in a contingency budget of 13% to account for unexpected costs. This contingency was important given the challenges they faced, like unexpected flooding and an unplanned bathroom renovation.
- They leveraged their existing relationships and networks to get advice, guidance and potential funding sources. This included reaching out to politicians, community groups, and other arts organizations to find support and opportunities.
- They were flexible and adaptable in their planning, adjusting their initial vision for the space as new funding became available. This allowed them to expand their plans from a simple rehearsal studio to a more robust performance and community venue.

“A major takeaway from this experience is asking yourself, how do you get to the place where you're ready for the phone call that says “I have \$500,000 if you have a drawing and a budget”?

While feasibility studies are often a crucial element of readiness, Tapestry and Nightwood did not conduct a feasibility study for this project. The speed with which the project came together, combined with the predevelopment work completed made applying for funds for a feasibility study not a good use of resources. The team elected to invest those funds in more architectural services going forward.

The key readiness elements that enabled quick action when a venue opportunity presented itself were pre-development work, building in contingencies, leveraging partnerships and networks, and maintaining flexibility to take advantage of emerging opportunities.

PARTNERSHIPS

“The CAT fund was helpful because we could do an environmental scan to see what else was out there at the same scale as us. We got to use some of that to help do some visualizing in terms of the actual space we would make.”

The Nancy & Ed Jackman Performance Centre is owned by the City of Toronto, run by St. Clare's, designed by Hilditch Architects, funded by Section 37 funds and community donations, and rented by Tapestry and Nightwood, who will have subtenants renting the rehearsal and performance spaces.

A venture of this magnitude is not undertaken alone. Nightwood and Tapestry had some strong partners support them throughout the process:

- **St. Clare's** is a charitable organization that provides affordable mixed-income housing in downtown Toronto. Their tenants represent a cross-section of Toronto's diversity; most tenants pay a rent-geared-to-their-income, and others pay market rent for their apartments.
- **Hilditch Architect Inc.** has been helping clients realize their dreams for more than 37 years. They have dedicated more than three decades to creating projects that help people break barriers to health and community services, and to affordable supportive housing and emergency shelter. Hilditch works almost exclusively with non-profit agencies and municipal governments in delivering services in the Toronto area and beyond.

- **The City of Toronto**'s now defunct Section 37 of the Planning Act, which authorized the City to adopt a community benefits charge (CBC) by-law and collect CBCs to pay for the capital costs of facilities, services and matters that are required to serve development and redevelopment. CBC funding helped support complete communities across Toronto.
- **Canadian Heritage**'s Cultural Spaces Fund (CCSF) supported renovation projects, acquisition of specialized equipment, and planning, design and feasibility studies related to arts and heritage cultural spaces.
- **Work in Culture**'s Catalyst and Transformation (CAT) Fund, which provides financial support to Ontario arts organizations to investigate, plan, and implement substantive change in their operations.
- Community members, who supported $\frac{1}{3}$ of capital costs through ongoing fundraising efforts.

“They wanted something in the space that would permeate the boundary between affordable housing and the rest of the neighbourhood.”



R.U.R. A Torrent of Light, 2022. Photo by Dahlia Katz



Pictured above: original facade (2023) and renovated entrance (2025)

FACILITY FEATURES

Nancy & Ed Jackman Performance Centre facilities:

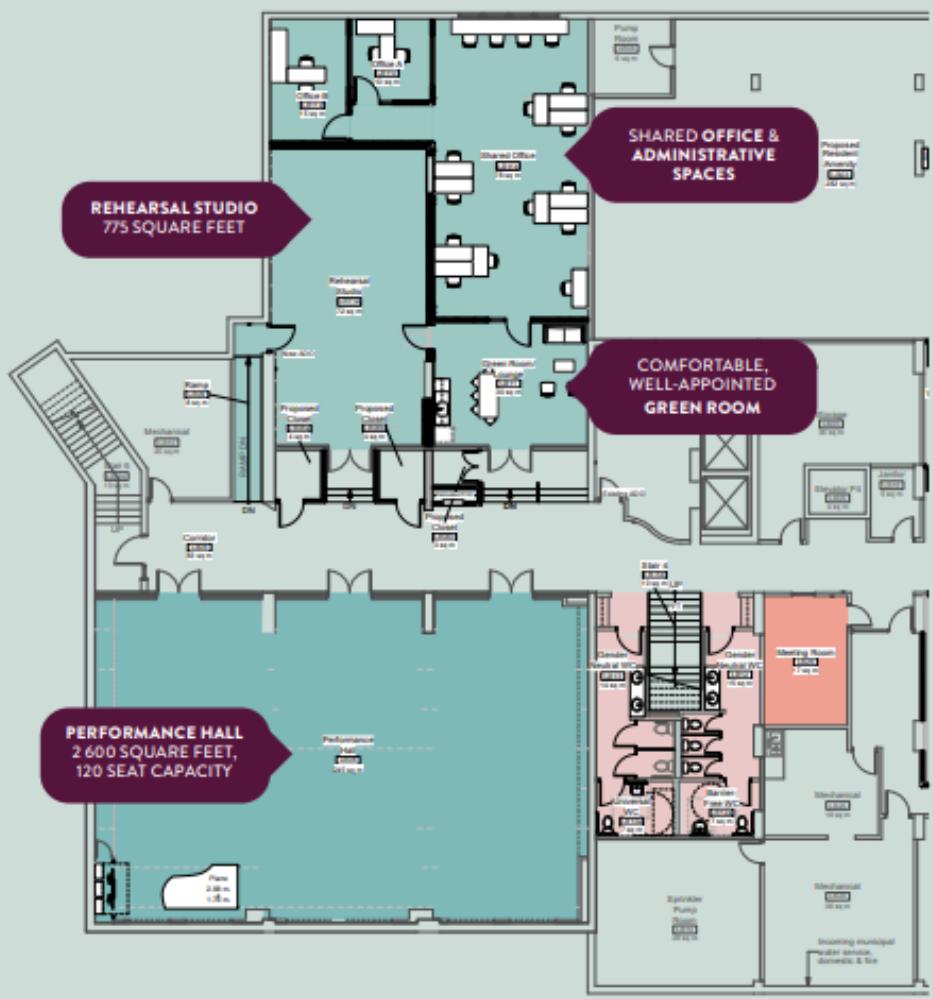
- 6,500 square feet
- 2,600-square-foot performance hall
- 775-square-foot rehearsal and recording space
- Green room and offices

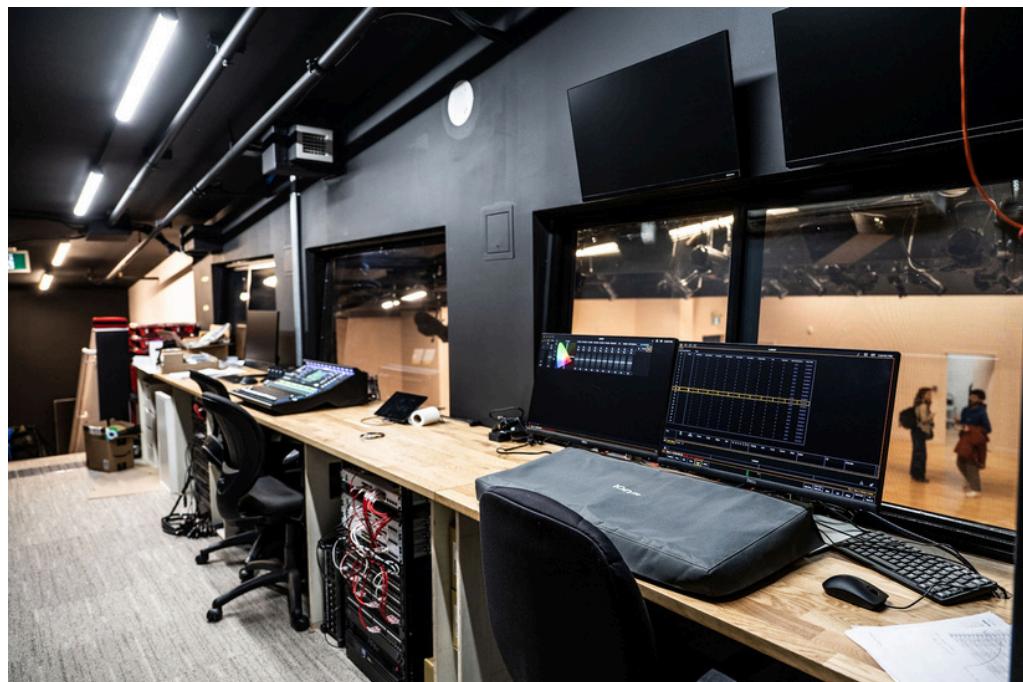
The new build and vision will encompass a performance space that features a fully equipped theatre for recitals with the Bösendorfer Imperial Grand piano, black box performances featuring lighting, audio and video systems, and a turn-key audio-video recording set-up. The rehearsal space will support multiple activities simultaneously and act as a dressing room during show runs.

THE SPACE

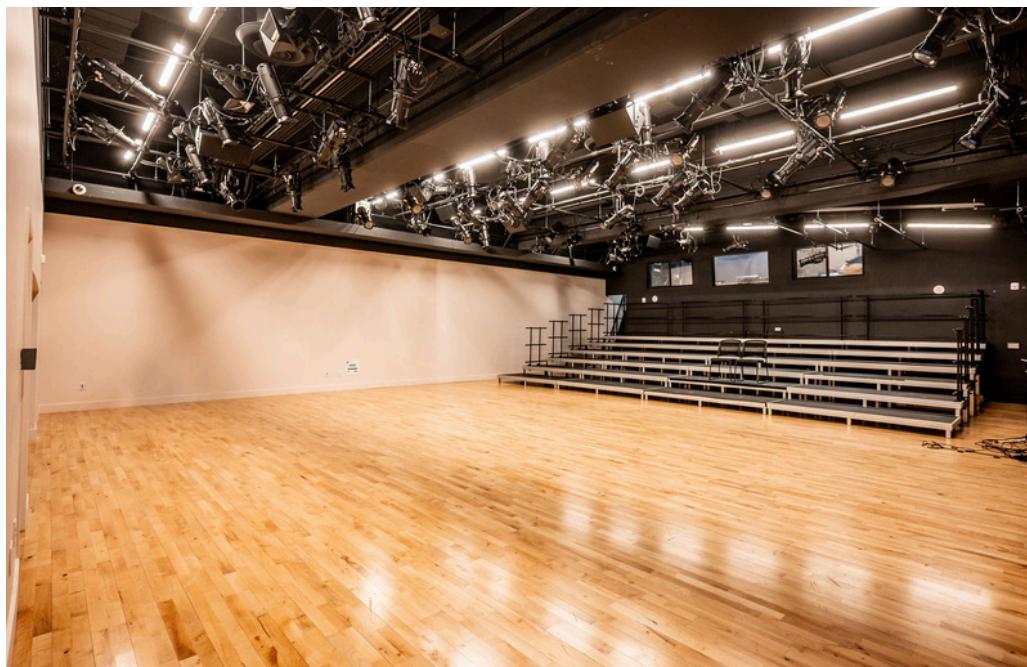
Beautiful Dynamic Intentional

The performance hall will be the most flexible, accessible, and well-equipped theatre of its size in the city.

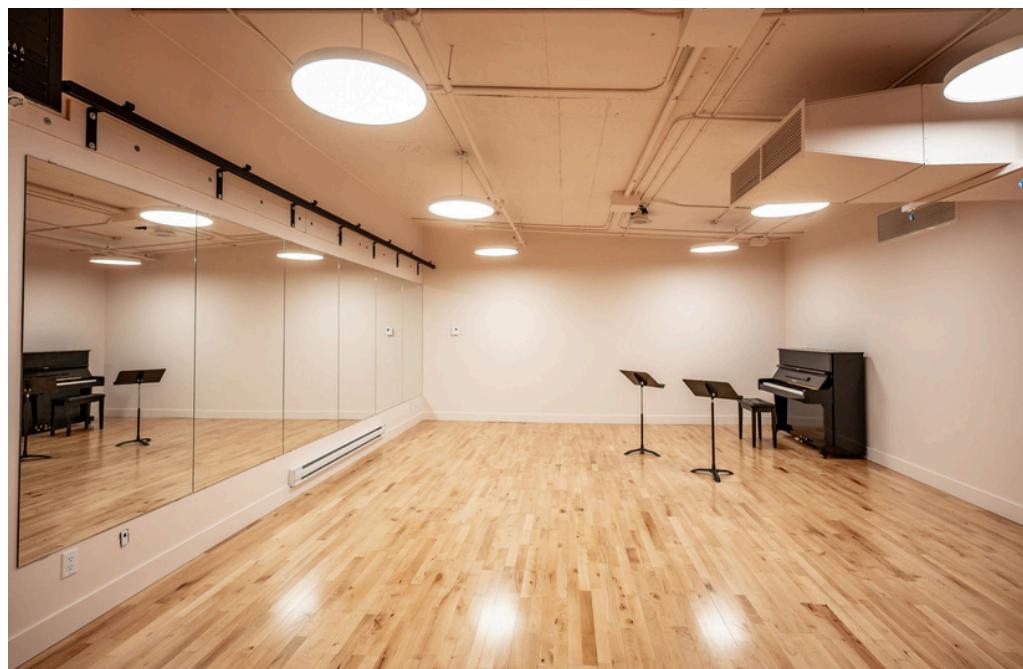




Pictured left:
Tech booth above the main
performance space.
Photo by Dahlia Katz



Pictured right:
Performance hall.
Photo by Dahlia Katz



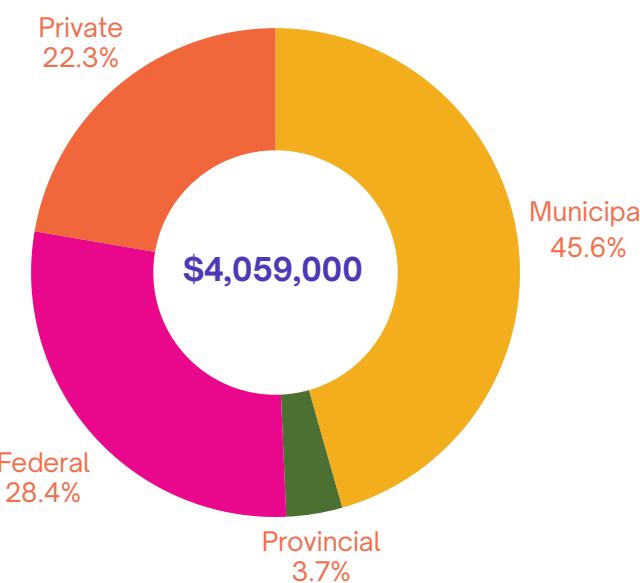
Pictured left: The ABCRA
Studio.
Photo by Dahlia Katz

FUNDING & SUSTAINABILITY

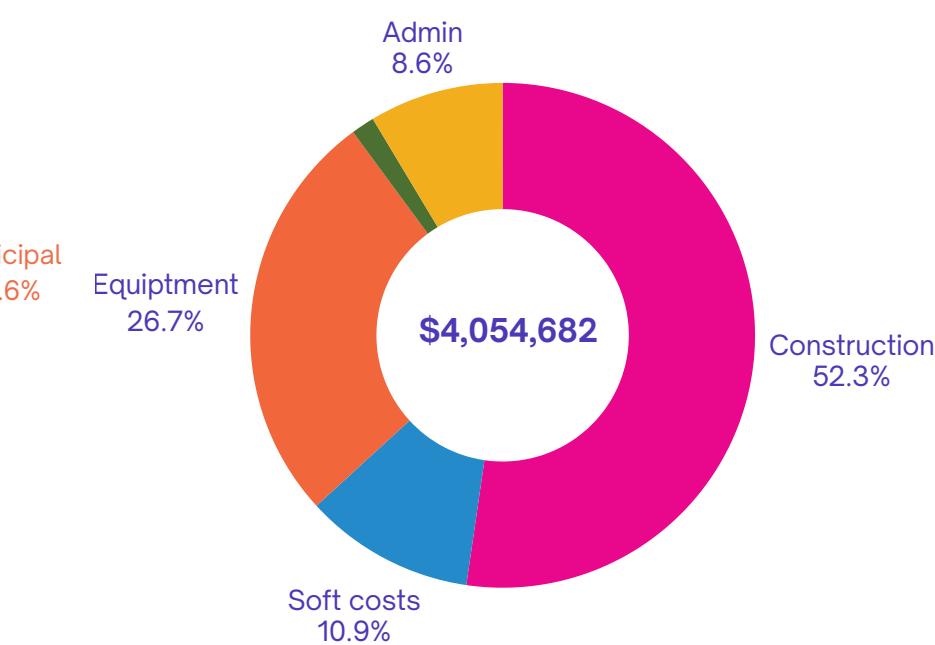
The project secured a range of funding sources to support its development, starting with a \$130,000 contribution from St. Clare's. This was followed by a significant \$500,000 commitment from a local developer and a \$1.25 million allocation access via Section 37 funds, which allowed the project to proceed without the need to phase it in over multiple years. The commitment from Section 37 funds, typically reserved for infrastructure improvements in areas impacted by new development, was particularly significant in helping ensure the long-term sustainability of the project.

In addition to direct funding, the partners also established partnerships with various stakeholders in the arts and real estate sectors to help ensure the space would meet both operational and community engagement goals. As the project evolved, the team faced challenges balancing the needs of rehearsal space, performance venues, and community-driven programming.

TOTAL REVENUE



TOTAL COSTS



Municipal -Section 37 - City of Toronto: \$1,850,000

Provincial - Trillium Foundation Capital Investments Grant: \$150,000

Federal - Dept. of Canadian Heritage Cultural Spaces Grant: \$1,154,000

Private (Individual Fundraising): \$905,000

Total revenue: \$4,059,000

Construction: \$2,119,626

Soft Costs: \$443,461

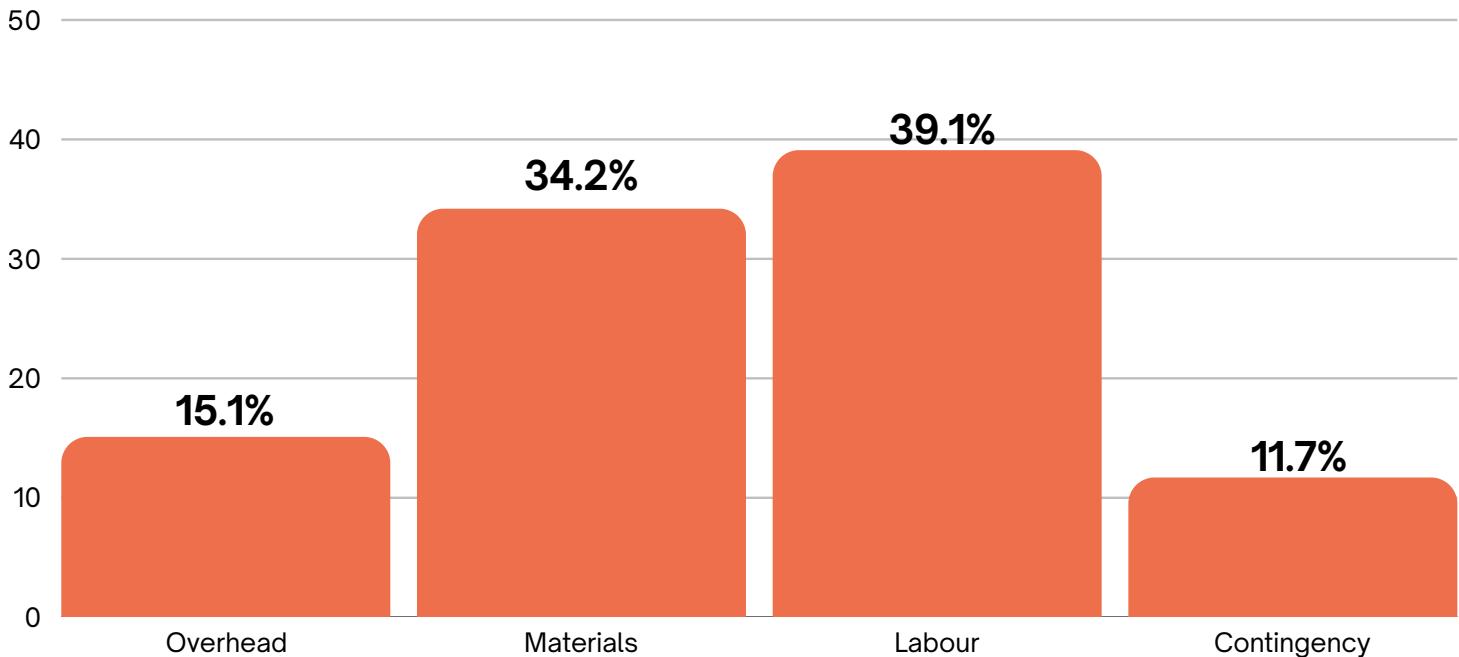
Murals and Signage: \$60,000

Operations & Admin : \$350,000

Theatrical & Office Equipment : \$1,081,595

Total costs: \$4,054,682

CONSTRUCTION COST DETAILING



General Conditions and Overhead: \$314,715.00

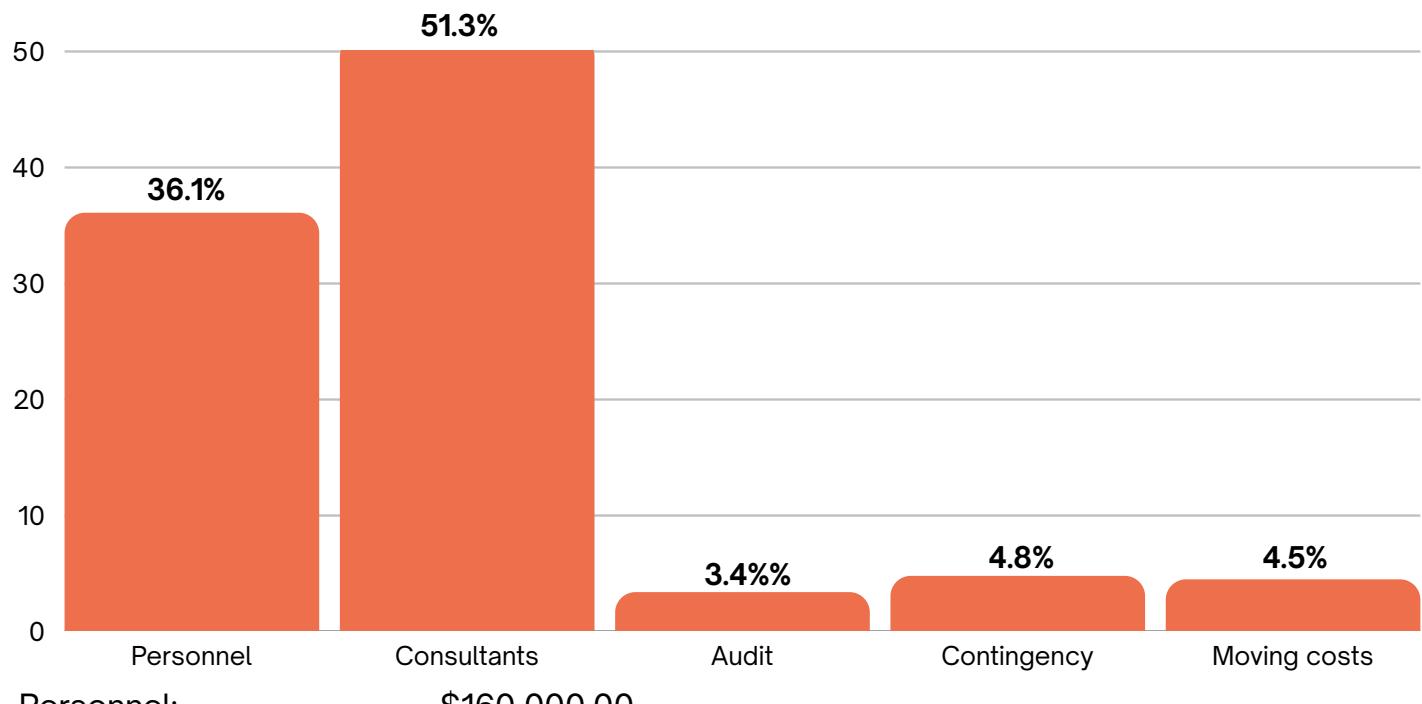
Materials: \$712,885.00

Labour: \$814,766.00

Contingency: \$243,851.00

Total: \$2,119,626.00

SOFT COST DETAILING



Personnel: \$160,000.00

Architects and Consultants: \$227,344.00

Audit: \$15,000.00

Moving Costs: \$20,000.00

Contingency: \$21,117.00

Total: \$443,461.00

SUSTAINABILITY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The unique location and mixed-use purpose of the building pose an exciting opportunity to permeate the boundary between affordable housing in 877 Yonge and the rest of the neighbourhood, which is known for its high-end shopping and upscale restaurants and has an average annual individual income of \$170,900. The inclusion of theatre in the building offers an opportunity to legitimize affordable housing and demonstrate that it adds value to the community. The arts and housing sectors have a shared struggle under the affordability crisis. Cross-sector collaboration is imperative in addressing socio-economic issues that contribute to, and are impacted by, the ongoing space crisis and how it impacts belonging and sustainability in the city. The Nancy & Ed Jackman Performance Centre aims to beautify and vivify the space, making it a continuous cultural presence in the neighbourhood.

Sustainability was a key consideration for the project, both in terms of environmental impact and long-term financial viability. A significant contingency was built into the project budget to account for unexpected costs, particularly during the construction phase. The project's operational model also reflects a commitment to social wellness, with plans to engage with the local community, including tenants of the affordable housing units housed within the same building.

“We talk a lot about the crisis in the arts...it is not a separate crisis from the housing crisis, or the inflationary crisis, or the general affordability crisis. What it means to live in the city and who is able to do it, and the kind of quality of life that is accessible to you, at its base, is the same problem”. - Jaime Martino

The space is designed to be inclusive and accessible, ensuring that the building serves as a cultural asset for both the arts community and residents. Programming will include workshops, performances, and public-facing art projects, with an emphasis on inclusivity and cross-cultural collaboration. The community will be engaged through a variety of initiatives, from offering discounted tickets to local residents to developing educational outreach programs for nearby schools.

Accessibility and inclusion were at the forefront of sourcing a space and considering design possibilities. Ensuring the facilities are accessible to people of all abilities and genders was paramount throughout the ideating and design process. Sourcing a space that was previously a retirement home had its advantages in this respect. There were already ramps, elevators wide doorways to accommodate mobility devices in the building. The most significant upgrade to the space was the expansion of bathroom facilities to enable having one larger, all-gender, accessible washroom with more toilets.

Financial accessibility and belonging were also an ongoing consideration in this unique combination of performing arts sharing a building with affordable housing in a wealthy neighbourhood. Nightwood and Tapestry see the placement of them and their upstairs neighbours in Yorkville as a valuable opportunity for mixed incomes and diverse backgrounds to increase the value of the community.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Typically theatres are put in a position to prioritize production over rehearsal. Nightwood and Tapestry want to challenge this practice and better balance creation and rehearsal time, in an effort to increase sustainable practices in the performing arts. This includes opening their space to renters from their current home in the Distillery, as well as new organizations, collectives and community groups.

With a new space comes additional support needs. Despite being separate organizations, Nightwood and Tapestry plan to create a new position that will combine production and administrative duties, offering a model for managing the space efficiently. They're looking forward to shaping the new rental model alongside the new hire and community groups accessing the space.

POST- PROJECT

Measuring Impact: Community Engagement and Audience Metrics

An exciting opportunity presented by launching a new space includes measuring the impact of the new arts hub on the local community and the broader cultural ecosystem. The project team will track several key metrics, including:

- Audience Engagement: Metrics including repeat visitors, new performances, and demographic data collected via QR codes and cell phone data will be used to track behaviour and growth.
- Economic Impact: The team is keen to measure the economic impact of the space on local businesses, particularly restaurants and shops in the surrounding neighbourhood.
- Community Feedback: Regular engagement with the community—especially with residents of the building —will be an integral part of the project's ongoing development. Feedback will be collected through surveys, interviews, and other outreach methods to ensure that the space remains responsive to community needs.

REFLECTIONS AND ADVICE

Reflecting on the process, Nightwood and Tapestry emphasized the importance of patience and self-care when undertaking large-scale projects like this one. The lessons learned from the experience included the necessity of raising more funds than initially planned, building in contingencies for unexpected costs, budgeting extra time, and asking for help when needed.

For other organizations looking to undertake similar projects, Nightwood and Tapestry recommend being clear about the long-term business model and the importance of cultivating relationships with community stakeholders. Balancing the financial and creative aspects of such a venture is challenging, but with the right partnerships and a clear vision, the results can be truly transformative.

The launch of The Nancy & Ed Jackman Performance Centre represents a significant step forward in the intersection of arts, community building, and sustainable real estate development. The collaborative efforts of Nightwood Theatre, Tapestry Opera, and St. Clare's have created a space that not only supports the arts but also integrates affordable housing and community engagement. The success of this project is a testament to the power of creative collaboration and the potential of social purpose real estate to address both cultural and social needs in urban environments, proving that culture, community, and housing can thrive together.



Pictured above: Performance Hall - L-R: Naz Afsahi, Managing Director, Nightwood Theatre, Andrea Donaldson, Artistic Director, Nightwood Theatre. Jaime Martino, Executive Director, Tapestry Opera, Michael Hidetoshi Mori, Artistic and General Director, Tapestry Opera

LOOKING FORWARD: FUTURE PLANS

The project team is focused on establishing the new space as a vibrant cultural landmark. One key future goal is the creation of a large external mural, which will serve as both an artistic statement and a draw for visitors. The team also envisions transforming the ground-floor space into affordable below-market venues for other artists, creating more opportunities for creative work and public engagement.

The project has been transformative not just for the organizations involved but for the broader cultural landscape in Toronto. The Nancy & Ed Jackman Performance Centre is a model for arts-based real estate development, one that bridges the gap between affordable housing, community engagement, and sustainable cultural programming.

Nightwood and Tapestry have a lot of exciting community engagement ahead with the forthcoming launch of their space in spring 2025. In addition to their creative programming, they're looking forward to building relationships and exploring potential collaborations with residents in the building and neighbouring businesses; developing metrics to measure the impact of the new space on the local community, including audience engagement and rental usage and exploring how this new space will support previous tenants from their former space, as well as create space and opportunity for new organizations and different forms of performance art.

FURTHER READING

- [WE'VE LAUNCHED A THEATRE AT 877 YONGE STREET!](#) [Blog post by Tapestry Opera](#)
- [A Stage for All | A Big Red Oak Story Short Documentary](#)
- [Click Here for our Deck: A New Home For the Performing Arts](#)
- [A state-of-the-art theatre is set to open in the basement of this affordable housing complex. It's also a sign of hope for the future](#)



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THANK YOU!

If you have any questions or would like to discuss our findings further, please don't hesitate to reach out.

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