

# TUCSON GIVING

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## New music theater takes stage

LONI NANNINI  
Special to the Arizona Daily Star

In Tucson's continually unfolding story of the arts, the new nonprofit Saguaro City Music Theatre seeks to write the next chapter of musical theater through both performance and education.

"All of us have a story to tell, and musical theater is storytelling. Saguaro City Music Theatre is engaged in bringing top-tier professional musical theater to the Tucson community," said Drew Humphrey, artistic director of the theater and co-founder of the company with Charlie Ingram. "We want to engage the public through musical theater to inspire diverse artistic opportunities and community involvement. On the educational side, we are launching Saguaro City Studio Arts as a way to promote longevity of musical theater by inspiring young people and creating an inclusive atmosphere of tuition-free educational opportunities."

It's a homecoming of sorts for Humphrey, who came to Tucson in middle school and earned a bachelor's of fine arts in dance from the University of Arizona. He is returning after nearly 20 years in New York City, where he built a career in professional musical theater that included performances in the Broadway production of Irving Berlin's "White Christmas."

Humphrey said he is thrilled to be back and looks forward to enhancing the already vibrant arts culture in the Old Pueblo by providing additional possibilities for aspiring musical theater artists as well as amateurs and professionals who might otherwise feel compelled to look elsewhere for professional theater opportunities.

"Tucson has a wonderful theatrical community and we look forward to providing another outlet — not replacing any outlets — to contribute to the rich environment of the arts community. We want to provide a place for folks like ourselves, kids and other professionals in Tucson to grow their art forms in musical theater," said Humphrey.

Humphrey is also excited about Saguaro City Studio Arts, which embraces a curriculum based on the concept that arts education should be accessible to all children. With the support of a \$50,000 matching grant from the Kautz Family Foundation, the Studio Arts "Clean Slate" program will offer free classes for students ages 7 to 17. The inclusive classes will serve children of all backgrounds and abilities.

"We don't feel there should be any barriers to access to arts education for any child regardless of their abilities or challenges and want to encourage kids of all abilities, including those with special needs, to come join us," said Dena DiGiacinto, director of outreach and education.

DiGiacinto, a graduate of the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York City and a certified occupational therapy assistant, has witnessed amazing outcomes with inclusive theater environments. She said that children with diagnosed challenges — including autism, spina bifida, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy and hearing and visual impairments — work alongside children who may not have challenges and the results are outstanding for everyone involved.

"It is just a beautiful thing to see kids come together as a team to learn about the art of musical theater in this environment. It is naturally a place where people feel a sense of belonging and when you walk in you can see everyone's self consciousness and inhibitions left at the door," said DiGiacinto.

This type of theater creates a unique sense of community, empathy and acceptance that funnels into other aspects of the children's



VARIETY THEATRE

Saguaro City Music Theatre and Saguaro City Studio Arts educational academy will offer an inclusive tuition-free Audition Prep Course for children ages 7 to 17 this summer at the Tucson Jewish Community Center beginning on July 16 and continuing through August 13. Saguaro City Music Theatre Artistic Director Drew Humphrey and Director of Outreach and Education Dena DiGiacinto (pictured above with actress Olivia Kallaos in a production of "Mary Poppins" at the Variety Theatre in St. Louis) created the program with Executive Director Charlie Ingram. For registration or more information, visit [www.saguarocity.org](http://www.saguarocity.org).

### Audition prep course

Support the nonprofit Saguaro City Music Theatre and Saguaro City Studio Arts educational academy

**What:** The "Clean Slate" Audition Prep Course through Saguaro City Studio Arts

**When:** Classes begin July 16 and continue weekly through Aug. 13

**Where:** Tucson Jewish Community Center, 3800 E. River Road

**Cost:** Free; register online at [www.saguarocity.org](http://www.saguarocity.org)

**Notes:** The "Clean Slate" Audition Prep Course features educational musical theater classes geared toward preparing children

ages 7-17 for auditions and community theater. The course will cover components ranging from basics on musical theater, sheet music and headshots to vocal and physical warm-up and a range of other topics. The program is built on diversity and inclusion and welcomes children of all backgrounds, cultures, skill levels and all abilities, including those with special needs. The summer program has two sessions: 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. for children ages 7-11; and 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. for ages 12-17. For information or registration, or to make a donation, visit [www.saguarocity.org](http://www.saguarocity.org).

lives, according to Humphrey.

From his own experiences and those of other artists he has worked with over the years, Humphrey also believes that musical theater provides a unique venue for storytelling for all children.

"Everyone can share in a common goal without needing to compete. The goal is achieved through cooperation, so success is measured in cooperation and community team building. ... Theater is a valuable tool to

get kids to learn to work together and to communicate. ... It is 21st-century skill-building," said Humphrey.

Ultimately, the inclusive educational programming will feed into a planned annual on-stage production for the professional musical theater company, which plans to produce four productions each year.

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## Arizona Gives Day raises \$6 million

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Arizona Gives Day 2022 raised more than \$6 million for nearly 1,000 nonprofit organizations across the state during the 24-hour fundraising event in April.

More than 32,000 donations were made to 918 of the 1006 participating nonprofits to bring the grand total raised since the event began in 2013 to \$36,406,062. The average amount of money raised per organization was \$6,546 with the average online donation at \$239.

Also during the event, 955 volunteers pledged a total of 36,269 hours to their favorite nonprofit organizations.

Nonprofits also had the opportunity to win one of 116 cash incentive prizes. The complete list of results can be found at [www.AZGives.org/prizes](http://www.AZGives.org/prizes).

The final numbers for the year event, organized by the Alliance of Arizona Nonprofits and Arizona Grantmakers Forum and presented by FirstBank, include prize pool distributions of more than \$180,000 and from additional donations that came in after the 24-hour online fundraiser had ended.

"Heading into this year's event, given the nature of the economy, the global unrest and the fact that we were just climbing out of the pandemic, we weren't sure where Arizona Gives Day would end up," said Alliance of Arizona Nonprofits CEO Kristen Merrifield. "The results certainly show that the people of Arizona are more than willing to generously step up to support the incredibly important work being done by nonprofits in every community in our state. On behalf of those nonprofits, we are deeply grateful."



BEN'S BELLS

Brylee Binger is this week's bellee.

## Ben's Bells: Brylee Binger

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Brylee Binger is this week's Ben's Bells bellee. Tracy Smith nominated Brylee for spreading kindness to the TMC Pediatric Therapies.

Tracy wrote: "Brylee has been a patient at TMC Pediatric Therapies for years. I had the chance to work with her as a PT and have gotten to know her and her family. This year for her 10th birthday, instead of gifts for herself, she asked for toys for our outpatient clinic

## New teen lounge at Diamond Children's

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Teen patients at Banner Diamond Children's Medical Center now have a new place to relax while at the hospital.

Last week, the Dunkin' Joy in Childhood Foundation and the

was designed to ease stress and support the overall health and well-being of patients.

Additional technology including a gaming system is planned for the future.

"This new space delivers han-

