



MARGO NEELY

My name is Margo Neely. I am a proud New Yorker and a professional actor and director (SAG-AFTRA • AEA). I had the great privilege of starting my acting career many, many years ago under the mentorship of Olympia Dukakis, and I've enjoyed a successful career in professional theater in New York City for well over 30 years. Now, and more importantly, I am a Williamstown resident and a devoted member of the Williamstown Community Chest Board of Directors. I am raising my children here and running Neely & Daughters, a professional arts consulting firm, known worldwide for creative innovation. As such, I feel an immense responsibility to address a pressing matter that affects not only the Williamstown Theatre Festival but the state of the arts and the entire economy of the Berkshires.

The beloved Williamstown Theatre Festival is, as we know, in peril, and the repercussions extend far beyond the artistic world. The tourism economy of the Berkshires relies heavily on the success of the WTF. Year after year, visitors flood into this region, bringing their patronage to local businesses, restaurants, and accommodations, and contributing significantly to our livelihoods. But, things being as they currently are, we can no longer turn a blind eye to the serious challenges we face.

We must acknowledge that blaming bad weather, or the cost of theater tickets, or an aging audience for the theatre's struggles is no longer valid. The heart of the matter lies in the schism between the festival itself and the Williamstown community, the content presented on stage, and the manner in which it is presented. We witness people across the country, and right here in our own community, endure extreme weather conditions and exorbitant costs, to support their favorite artists and sports teams – and professional theatre elsewhere. If they can fly across the country and brave the pouring rain to see Taylor Swift or Beyonce in concert, or endure scorching heatwaves or blizzard conditions in open air stadiums to cheer for the Yankees or watch the Pats; if they add their names to three year lotteries for theatre tickets to see a show with no stars, or take the train to sleep on the streets of New York for a chance to see a show with no stars, then surely we can find ways to create content right HERE that truly reflects who we are as a community, resonates with the audience at large, and draws people to US. We must acknowledge that the theatre itself, and the theatre's offerings, are failing to connect with or inspire people. We need timeless content and themes that resonate with the audience, we need incredible vision, and we need to think LOCAL.

Our distinguishing factors lie in the rich history of great writers and artists who have contributed to the festival, the unique locations found only in Williamstown, and the people of our community. These are our strengths, and we must leverage them to stand out in the field of theatre. To ensure the revival and prosperity of the WTF, we must tap into our local resources: the extraordinary places, the historic spaces, and the incredible PEOPLE right here in Williamstown that make this place extraordinary. Let's stop overlooking the immense talent and potential within our community. Together, we must collaborate, not compete, with local businesses and arts organizations – and by doing so, we will not only elevate and distinguish the festival but ensure the thriving of our entire region.

Now is the time to act. We can no longer settle for pretending on a stage. To survive and thrive, we must make it REAL. The economic impact of the loss of the theatre and the repercussions if we do not innovate are counterbalanced by the OBVIOUS: the enormous opportunity we have if we simply work with what we have here right in front of us. I urge you all to explore my proposal for a re-imagined Williamstown Theatre Festival, which harnesses the potential of our local resources and showcases the true essence of what makes Williamstown special. Please explore the proposal online at NeelyandDaughters.com

Let's come together, support our beloved WTF, and usher in a new era of creativity and prosperity for the Berkshires. Together, we can make a difference, and together, we can show the world that Williamstown is where authentic, inspiring theater LIVES.

Margo Neely
July 26, 2023