

This document is intended to provide a summarized list of the HR consultant's findings regarding OTC and steps the Board has taken or plans to take to address those situations. The Board does not plan to release the full report because it includes sensitive and confidential details, but has set forth the summary of findings.

## OVERALL FINDINGS

*"In organizational change management, we are taught that change cannot truly begin unless it is seen as urgent - someone has to essentially yell fire. That is what is happening here. The community has yelled "FIRE"! I hope the Principals are hearing "FIRE" being shouted."*

Peale Piper wrote: "I would like to note up front that I do not believe it is within [Peale Piper's] purview to directly call for the closure of Otherworld or the removal of its principals, Tiffany Keane Schaefer, or Dylan Schaefer. While the issues discussed herein are not minor, they are not severe enough to warrant the dissolution of Otherworld's operations. Ultimately, the Board's goal should be to help Otherworld to recognize and learn from their mistakes. Second, calling for closure and removal in this case, might satisfy some members of the larger Otherworld theater community, but does not provide the necessary accountability, which in this case is learning and growth, something I expect the Principal Respondents will have difficulty with."

"Generally, the accusations are the result of mismanagement typically seen in small and growing businesses. The allegations were presented as severe abuse, but that really is not the case. Many times, workers are simply not aware of what it really takes to own and operate a business, thinking that it is a lot simpler than it is or that the owners are better capitalized than they actually are. This has been a point of contention for almost every small business owner I know, and their employees."

"The Principals grew up in this culture that teaches suffering and no doubt have suffered too themselves. Even though the allegations have the tone and tenor of "piling on" and there are some hard and harsh lessons to be learned, they are fortunate to have learned these lessons now, before things go too far. Trust me, the longer these things go on, the more difficult it is to change. Thankfully, I believe the capacity for change exists, but it will be difficult."

# TIMELINE

- Otherworld Theater Company has been working to understand the nature and scope of complaints that started on social media in late September/early October 2020. At the time, many volunteers quit the theater. The Artistic, Development and Managing Directors voluntarily stepped down from their leadership roles around that time (helping the Board as needed to run the theater).
- The Board eventually chose HR consulting firm Peale Piper to conduct a review of the complaints. As mentioned in an October 23, 2020 Facebook post on Otherworld's page, Peale Piper would only consider complaints submitted through one of three ways:
- Any information previously collected by our Operations Manager (including official statements, emails, and notes)
- Emails submitted to a new non-Otherworld email account created by the Board September 30, 2020 (copies were provided to Peale Piper)
- Emails sent to a new Peale Piper email address created specifically for the Otherworld review
- Once Peale Piper was engaged there was no Board involvement with the investigation. The Board provided little guidance to Peale Piper on how to conduct the investigation and relied on their professional expertise in these matters.
- Peale Piper provided the Board with their findings in early February 2021 and discussed the findings with the Board mid-February. The Board was not provided any of the testimonies (emails, screenshots, transcriptions, videos, etc.) from those interviewed nor were they provided a list of those that were requested/completed interviews. The Board was informed of the findings directly through the HR Findings report and has little direct knowledge of specific individual concerns/complaints that were submitted to Peale Piper.
- The Board processed the findings over multiple meetings and made preliminary decisions based on those findings to continue operations. The Board felt releasing findings with no plan to address the problems found was not a good approach, especially after many months of no communication with the community.

# METHODOLOGY & APPROACH

Peale Piper conducted multiple video and audio interviews with complainants, respondents, and witnesses to the alleged events. Further interviews were conducted with individuals outside of Otherworld to gain context around Chicago theater operations, performance standards, employment and pay practices within the theater industry and to understand the nuances of LARP. Finally, each individual interviewed was asked to provide any notes, emails, screenshots, or any other relevant material to support their version of events. Peale Piper also requested and reviewed Otherworld's staff logs, contracts, and other internal documents relevant to this investigation.

- In an effort to perform a thorough review, all employment related claims, including harassment, safety, retaliation, or non-payment concerns were prioritized for investigation.
- Allegations of misconduct, abusive behavior, or mismanagement on the part of Tiffany Keane Schaefer and/or Dylan Schaefer were also reviewed.
- This investigation did not examine any non-employment related issues
- The findings in this report rely on the review of documentary and testimonial evidence, including the credibility of the parties and their statements during the interviews.
- Limitations included:
  - **Passage of time:** Allegations lodged against Otherworld and Moonrise spanned from 2012 to present day. Some individuals interviewed stated that they had difficulty remembering the details We relied on the documentary evidence provided to either refresh recollections or to make findings of fact.
  - **Inability to contact complainants:** In January, Peale Piper learned emails sent to people with gmail accounts in November and December had been going to spam. Otherworld provided phone numbers and HR attempted to call parties. While the response rate improved, I remained unable to get in touch with several of the individuals with whom I wanted to speak in the first instance.
  - **Witness reluctance to be interviewed:** Several of the parties that were identified for interviews declined to provide further information via a formal witness interview.

**Note:** Many of the findings and observations as they relate to Otherworld also apply to the Moonrise Games operations.

Many individuals who may have been able to provide additional insights to these incidents either declined to be interviewed or were unreachable. Findings relied primarily on written statements submitted to the official email accounts for this investigation and any testimonial evidence provided by the Principals. As a result, findings related to many of the allegations directed to Otherworld are largely inconclusive.

## **Business Operations/Customer Service**

- An overwhelming number of allegations regarding theater administrative, contractual, customer service operations were submitted. The claims, many of which were nebulous and nonspecific, were outside the scope of this investigation, and not examined in detail.
- Claims related to Otherworld's business operations were not fully examined during this investigation. However, due to the overwhelming number of such allegations and the similarity among the claims, there is evidence of a negligent pattern and practice. This suggests that some of the work that is necessary to keep the theater operating optimally, is not being properly completed.

## **Harassment**

- **Finding:** One instance of harassment related to an outside cast party was filed as a formal complaint but not followed up on. Peale Piper also concluded that ongoing problems during the production largely went unaddressed and may have led to the resulting offsite altercation between members of the cast.
- **Finding:** One other formal complaint included in the files, related to a LARP event, was resolved but the resolution was not formally communicated to the complainant.
- **Finding:** An Oct. 7, 2020, email to the Board from a former Director of Operations (prior to September 2020) told the Board that she was asked to review two LARP related complaints, but only one such complaint form was included in the files for the HR review.
- **Finding:** A castmate was subject to behavior in a show with Dylan Schaefer that was deemed unwelcome (it was initially deemed welcome via agreement through a "consent circle" process). Mr. Schaefer maintains that he was unaware the behavior was unwelcome. The castmate chose to stop performing with Mr. Schaefer to avoid further incidents.

**Action Item (In Process): Working with contracted EmPower HR Consulting on new protocols that build from the Chicago Theatre Standards. These protocols include a written employee handbook, anti-harassment standards, an updated concern resolution path, and the onboarding of an independent human resources manager.**

## Unsafe/Unsanitary Working Conditions/Cleanliness of the Space/COVID-19 Precautions

- **Finding:** Otherworld acknowledged the prevalence of various safety and sanitation issues related to the theater building. Documentary evidence finds that Otherworld took appropriate steps to work with the landlord to get the issues resolved.

**Action Item (In Process): Obtaining quotes from cleaning services and contractors to professionally clean the space at least once a week to supplement existing cleaning practices.**

- **Finding:** The allegation that Otherworld failed to properly follow CDC guidelines and did not close until mandated to do so by the government is “generally unfair”. The guidance around COVID-19 precautions were inconsistent during early March 2020. Many businesses did not close until mandated to do so. That Otherworld remained open is not evidence of negligence or abuse.

**Action Item (In Process): Create/evolve processes and procedures for how and when to film productions or reopen to public audiences.**

- **Finding:** The investigation was not able to make any findings regarding allegations that Otherworld required actors and others to perform in the theater without proper masking or social distancing measures in place.

## Race-Related Issues

- **Finding:** Insufficient information regarding allegations of tokenism, colorism and other behaviors to perform a substantive review.

**Action Item (High Priority): We can and will do more. We would like not only for everyone to feel comfortable and their concerns heard but we also want more diverse representation at the top, including on the Board. We have sought out bids from diversity and inclusion consultants and will be contracting with one to build an anti-racism and inclusion plan as part of our rebuilding effort.**

## Other Allegations

Numerous other allegations were lodged against Otherworld relating to mismanagement, lack of appropriate staffing on productions including appointment of NEDs, failure to follow other guidelines of the CTS, disorganization, and a severe lack of appropriate communication on Ms. Keane Schaefer's part.

- **Finding:** These were prevalent issues within the organization.

**Action Item (In Process):** Plans to address these are being put into place. See sections for “Chicago Theater Standards...”, “Communication”, “The Principals”.

## Chicago Theater Standards

- **Finding:** During conversations with Peale Piper, Tiffany recognized and acknowledged an over reliance on the Chicago Theater Standards and the need to operate differently to fill in the gaps left by the standards.
- **Finding:** Complainants reported fear of retaliation or reprisal if they spoke up about their concerns about Dylan Schaefer or Tiffany Keane Schaefer.

**Action Item (Near completion):** We have contracted with EmPower Human Resources on a short-term contract to help revise and improve trainings, onboarding documents and procedures, Otherworld Theater Standards (not limited to Chicago Theater Standards), and the concern resolution path with branches for both agents of Otherworld as well as short- and long-term renters and residents.

**Action Item (Near completion):** We have identified an external HR consultant to provide long-term HR services, help maintain files and provide HR support to Otherworld as well as renters and residents. Otherworld will be working with EmPower to integrate the external HR consultant into company operations.

## Communication

- **Finding:** This investigation found severe communication issues on the part of Otherworld. The instances varied from failure to respond to inquiries about payments or refunds, failure to inform participants about the actions they may have taken following investigations and general lack of communication related to the status of the theater as the severity of COVID became more widely known.

**Action Item (Near completion): Improved communications/oversight from the Board. Also see “Chicago Theater Standards/Concern Resolution...” section.**

**Action Item (Near completion): Leadership Training for Principals and others in management/leadership roles, including the Board when applicable.**

## The Principals (Dylan Schaefer/Tiffany Keane Schaefer)

- **Finding:** Peale Piper observed a tendency for the Principal Respondents, to defend, deflect or justify their actions. The allegations allude to defensiveness and blaming behaviors on the part of Ms. Keane Schaefer. Multiple complainants described their interactions with Mr. Schaefer as “hostile,” “rude,” “unprofessional,” “offensive,” and “immature.”
- **Finding:** There were several letters of support submitted to the email address provided in support of Mr. Schaefer, Ms. Keane Schaefer, and Ms. Ruppert.

### **Action Item: Tiffany Keane Schaefer was reinstated as Artistic Director**

- (In progress) Will be required to work on leadership skills and management knowledge through training and coaching.
- The Board will be looking for ways to move more operations functions to a new role as one of the main takeaways is that doing too many things means things like communication, etc. will suffer. Temporarily, she may need to help with other roles until additional people can take over those roles. She is expected to collaborate with the Board to be more transparent on challenges/needs/over-utilization and for help prioritizing to avoid similar problems to those outlined in this document. We have also discussed adding support/additional role(s) for managing Moonrise Games versus Otherworld Theatre productions.
- When performances or rehearsals begin, at least initially, a Board member or appointed individual will audit rehearsals and performances.
- The Artistic Director will not be a voting Board member.

### **Action Item: Dylan Schaefer was provisionally reinstated as Director of Development**

- Will not return to the Board of Directors
- (In Progress) Will be required to work on leadership skills and management knowledge through training and coaching.
- Performing with Otherworld & within Otherworld spaces will be on hiatus.
- Focus is on Back of House duties (grants, finances, programming, development, training, fundraising) in collaboration with the Board.

### **Katie Ruppert**

- **Finding:** Peale Piper did not note issues specific to Katie Ruppert in her role of Managing Director of Otherworld Theatre. She was appointed as Managing Director of Otherworld on or around April 29, 2019. However, Katie Ruppert is also a founder/Manager of Out On A Whim

**Action Item: At this time, Katie will not be returning as Managing Director, but may be returning in a different position pending discussions.**



# MOONRISE LARP GAMES

**Note:** Many of the findings and observations as they relate to Otherworld, specifically issues with communication, customer service, and the concern resolution path, also apply to the Moonrise operations.

Allegations against Moonrise Games were listed in a 56-page Google document, curated by [REDACTED] and Meredith White. Given the volume of information, the allegations have not been summarized by Peale Piper.

- **Finding:** Specific to the allegations outlined in the google document, the inclusion of the following statement (which has been subsequently removed from the document) raises suspicion as to the motivations for creating the document in the first place “we ask that the rights and IP to Chronicles of the Realm are handed over to Meredith White and [REDACTED], the organizers of this document.” The motivations as to Ms. White and [REDACTED] have been questioned by several of the witnesses interviewed, some of whom had other legitimate complaints about Ms. Keane Schaefer and Otherworld.
- **Finding:** Many of the allegations cited point to issues with how the games were organized, managed, and run.
- **Finding:** The allegations of abuse due to inappropriate accommodations have been cited by others in the LARP community as not unusual. This appears to be an expectation mismatch relative to the cost of the event. Further, the lack of food charge appears to be overblown and something that is not always in Ms. Keane Schaefer’s control.

**Action Item: Board oversight and collaboration with creating the next two LARPs, Chronicles of the Realm and Albion School of Sorcery.**

**Action Item: Working with EmPower HR to create in-depth LARP Protocols and Concern Resolution Path for better reporting**

**Action Item: Review LARP on-boarding to set clear expectations for LARP Players and NPCs on venue accommodations**

## CRESCENT MOON NERDLESQUE

- **Finding:** Not Applicable. Peale Piper did not include Crescent Moon Nerdlesque as part of the HR Report. As explained to the Board, documents were not submitted through one of the three methods listed under the “Timeline” section. Peale Piper also noted this issue as primarily a contract dispute, which was outside of their purview.

## OUT ON A WHIM

Otherworld Theatre became the performance home of Out On A Whim starting in approximately June 2018.

The incidents that were alleged to have transpired within the Out On A Whim ensemble referenced within the “Open Letter” occurred before the relationship with Otherworld Theatre became more established. Due to the sensitive nature of those incidents, the Otherworld Board will not be issuing any official statements as it relates to what transpired within their company and outside our purview. It is their responsibility to address the situation and not Otherworld’s place beyond the scope of where our businesses overlap and may be impacted going forward.

**Action Item: Merger talks, which were ongoing, have been suspended.**

**Action Item: We have had larger discussions on what it means to be part of the Otherworld Ensemble (which is beholden to the Board) versus a renter or resident company (either short- or long-term) and what levels of accountability and concern resolution paths we can have for each. Until we have new established guidelines and expectations to share with renters and the public, we will not be accepting new rental contracts. We will be starting work soon with the help of EmPower to create new guidelines.**

# ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN

The following plan is a combination of recommendations by Peale Piper & the Otherworld Theatre Board.

- **Restorative Justice / Moderation / Mediation**

- Upon completion of the HR audit and once the findings have been shared with the community, inform and engage with the community
- Engage in a restorative process directly with individuals within the community with those that are ready to do so
- Otherworld Board and Principals will be reaching out to some individuals directly and others with the assistance of the Center for Conflict Resolution, who will provide mediators as desired.

- **Obtain HR Professional**

- Select & Announce HR company
  - We have hired EmPower HR to audit, develop and evolve our HR process, protocols and documentation
  - We are finalizing a contract agreement with an external HR consultant who will become our new on-going company & employee manager of HR affairs

- **Executive Training/Coaching**

- Otherworld has already engaged with an external leadership training organization to begin training for senior staff and Board members
- The first segment of this training was completed in February, and future trainings have been scheduled for over the summer
- Work with EmPower HR / HR consultant to develop & implement individual, management and leadership trainings
- Identify and work with additional training orgs & groups to bring in additional training for ensemble, staff, leadership and Board
- Trainings advised for Principals, Board and select Leadership
- Employment Law for Managers
- Supervisory/Management Basics
- Leadership Skills Training - Underway
- Emotional Intelligence Skills Training - Underway
- Harassment Training
- Diversity and Inclusion Training

- **Leadership Roles**

- Tiffany Keane Schaefer
  - Retains title as Founder
  - Board Seat - Remains Ineligible
  - Artistic Director title (reinstated by Otherworld Theatre Board)
  - When performances or rehearsals begin, at least initially, a Board member or appointed individual will audit rehearsals and performances
  - The Board will be looking for ways to move more operations functions to a new role as one of the main takeaways is that doing too many things means things like communication, etc. will suffer. Temporarily, she may need to help with other roles until additional people can take over those roles. She is expected to collaborate with the Board to be more transparent on challenges/needs/over-utilization and for help prioritizing to avoid similar problems to those outlined in this document. We have also discussed adding support/additional role(s) for managing Moonrise Games versus Otherworld Theatre productions
  - Role & Responsibilities within Moonrise Games will continue as-is but will be re-evaluated and re-defined
  - Focus continually on personal & professional leadership, business acumen, and empathy training with new training programming
- Dylan Schaefer
  - Provisionally reinstated as Development Director
  - Board Seat - Now Ineligible going forward
  - Performing with Otherworld & within Otherworld spaces is on hiatus
    - Focus on personal & professional leadership, business acumen, and empathy training and until such time as a performance need arises again
  - Focus is now on Back of House duties (grants, finances, programming, development, training, fundraising)

- **Restructure Leadership / Role Definitions / New Roles & Responsibilities / Org Chart**

- Restructure Board roles and expand membership with a focus on diverse representation
- Restructure Leadership requirements for senior staff
- Redefine/Create new Roles & Responsibilities to help supplement senior leadership
- Restructure Ensemble requirements, update ensemble contracts, and redefine ensemble roles and expectations
- Restructure requirements for residents, contractors, renters

- **Hire Operations Manager**

- Hire/Engage someone to take over Administrative responsibilities
  - Otherworld will explore options; due to limited budgets and immediate demand it is not a top priority
- Explore potential for Facilities Management or incorporate into an Operations Manager position

- **Evolve from Chicago Theatre Standards**

- Evaluate & Integrate CTS as needed, while also defining our own builds and variations
- Rework Concern Resolution Path and integrate external human resources consultant
- Work with EmPower to develop customized standards for Otherworld

- **Policy & Procedure Manuals**

- Develop comprehensive employee handbooks, anti-harassment policies, and include language around mission, vision, values, expectations
- Build a Culture of Recognition, Honesty, Vulnerability

- **Volunteer, Contractor, Ensemble, Staff Models**

- Rework the structure of the theatre and explore ways that the company can rely less on a volunteer model moving forward
- Rework how people are paid, benefits
- Revise contracts to ensure clarity and equity

- **Address Public Concerns**

- Plumbing - Otherworld continues to work with the landlord and the City of Chicago to maintain the building. All sump pumps were replaced in 2019, and the city continues work on the water lines underneath Clark Street. Water penetration in the basement appears to be resolved currently
- Safety - The theater has passed all health, safety, and building inspections performed by the City of Chicago. These inspections will need to be renewed prior to reopening to the public. Otherworld has been making physical improvements to the space during the closure. Due to the age of the building, sometimes leaks occur. However, all leaks have been promptly attended to by the landlord
- Cleaning - As of now, we have received multiple quotes from cleaning companies to provide weekly cleaning. A contract will be executed prior to reopening to the public
- Performer Payments - At this time, Otherworld is unaware of any nonpayment or outstanding payment on any contracts. If this is not the case, please contact us
- Shift Work Payments - We are exploring a new staff model and working on a way to hire part time staff, although this is a future goal, not an immediate one
- Diversity & Inclusion - We have received bids from diversity and inclusion consultants and will be engaging with one as part of our rebuilding plan
- Staffing / Volunteering - Otherworld recognizes that relying on volunteer staff is unsustainable. While budgetary constraints do not allow an immediate resolution, Otherworld is working on a way to hire part-time staff to fill these roles
- COVID19 Protocols - Otherworld is currently completely closed to the public. Reopening will happen in conjunction with local and state guidance, as well as with guidance from local organizations like The Belmont Theatre District and The League of Chicago Theatres
- External Accountability Advisors - In addition to the Board of Directors, Otherworld Theatre will be forming a group of external Advisors for additional accountability
- Awareness - This website page and the contents within will remain available for future ensemble, performers, contractors, LARP attendees so that they can be made aware of these findings in order to evaluate their relationship with Otherworld Theatre prior to engaging