



**BorderLight**  
THEATRE FESTIVAL

# Impact Report

IGNITING IMAGINATION,  
ACCESS, AND BELONGING.



# WELCOME

Dear Friends,

Each summer, the BorderLight Theatre Festival transforms Cleveland into more than a stage—it becomes a gathering place where civic pride and cultural vitality come alive. Local restaurants and hotels see a boost in business, volunteers and partners feel the joy of contributing to something bigger than themselves, and audiences discover the thrill of theatre that is bold, inclusive, and unforgettable.

Leading this work is both a privilege and a responsibility. BorderLight exists because too many Clevelanders still lack affordable access to high-quality, globally informed theatre, and too many artists lack the resources and platforms to share their work. Every year, we witness the impact: artists lifted, audiences moved, and a city strengthened.

When someone tells us they experienced “Fabulous, meaningful performances that filled the emotional spectrum,” or thanks us for “creating and providing accessible productions,” we know our mission is alive in our community. This is why BorderLight was created, and why we remain fiercely committed to its growth.

Looking ahead, our vision is clear: expand accessible programming so more people can participate without barriers, deepen support for artists so they can continue to take creative risks and grow their careers in Cleveland, and sustain a festival that showcases our city as welcoming, innovative, and inspiring.

Thank you for standing with us. Together, we’re not just producing performances, we’re building a more connected, creative, and vibrant Cleveland.

With gratitude,



Dale Heinen  
Co-Founder,  
Executive & Artistic Director



Rachel Costanzo  
Interim Board President



# BORDERLIGHT THEATRE FESTIVAL

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2025 FESTIVAL SCOPE

JULY 16-19, 2025

PLAYHOUSE SQUARE DISTRICT

**150+**  
PERFORMANCES

**9**  
VENUES

**4,396**  
ATTENDEES

**280**  
ARTISTS

**49**  
PRODUCTIONS

**42**  
NEW WORKS

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## OUR MISSION

BorderLight's mission is to present innovative theatre that inspires, builds cross-cultural understanding and celebrates the diversity of the human experience.

## OUR VISION

To serve as a catalyst for Cleveland's cultural and economic growth.

To expand Cleveland's reputation as a theatre destination.

To develop the next generation of artists, producers, and theatre workers.

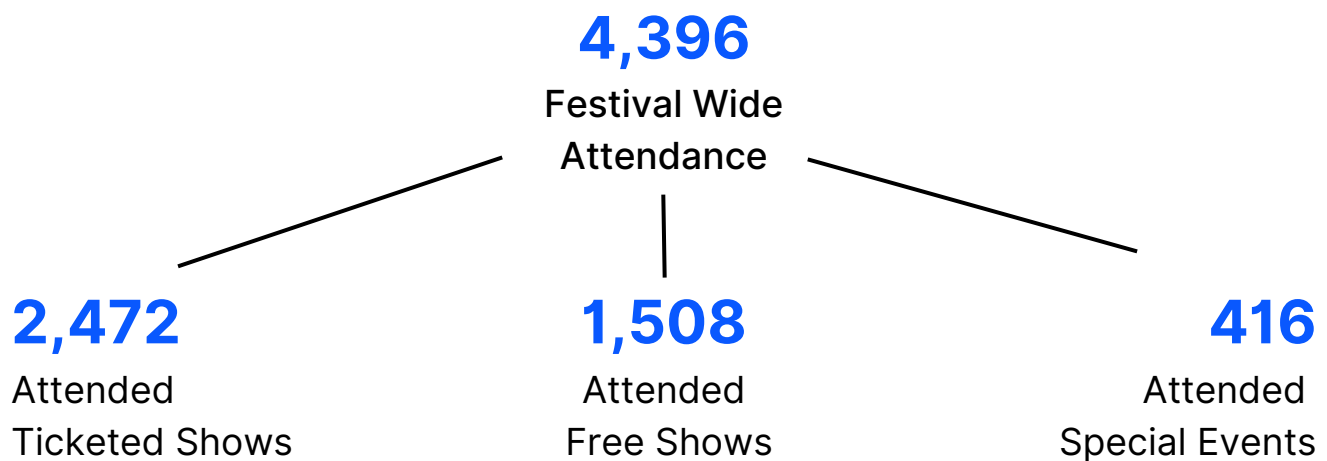


## FESTIVAL AT A GLANCE

***"BorderLight brings something fresh and global to the heart of Cleveland."***

One minute you're seeing a boundary-pushing piece from halfway across the world, the next you're watching local artists light up a black box. It's bold, it's inclusive, and it brings a real energy to Playhouse Square. The city shows up for it—and that's exactly why it belongs here." —Craig Hassall AM, President & CEO, Playhouse Square

**4 DAYS 174 PERFORMANCES**  
**+ KIDS' DANCE PARTY**



**\$27,767**

Net Revenue from Ticket Sales

**\$15.03**

Average Fringe Ticket Price

**\$13,883**

Artists' Cut (net)



**\$1,300**

Cash Prizes Awarded to Artists

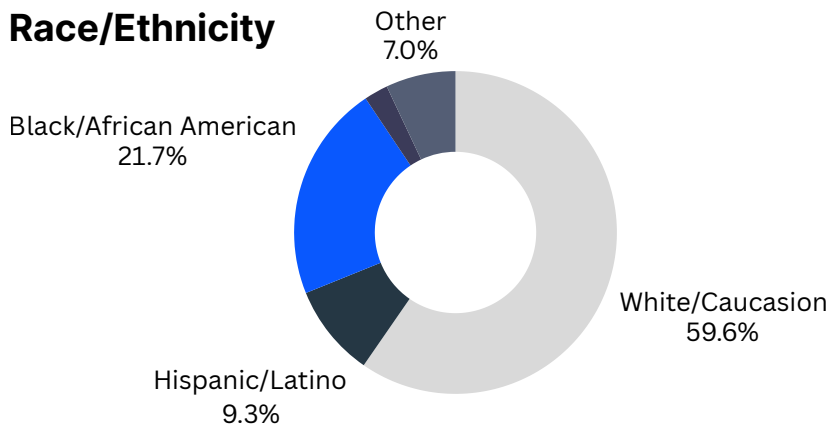




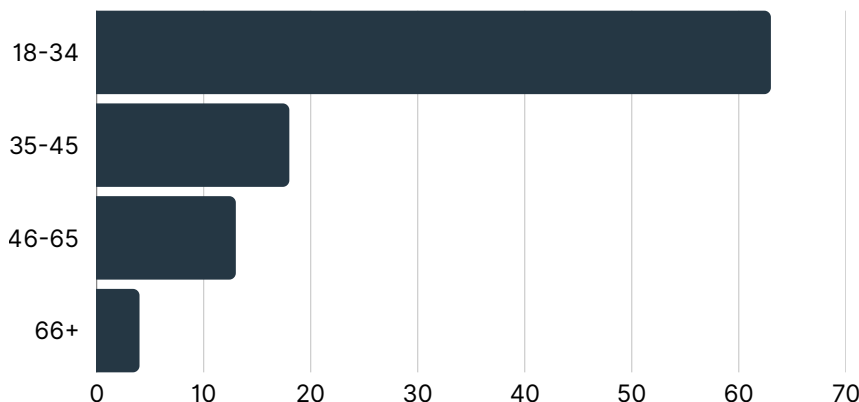
# MEET THE CREATIVES

BorderLight 2025 featured the work of **280 artists** representing **49 shows** from around the country, including individual artists and companies from the local Cleveland theatre community and around the world.

## Artist Race/Ethnicity



## Artist Age



## Investments in the Artist Community

### Housing

Free Housing for Out-of-State Artists

**50%**

Of Box Office Returned to Artists

### Travel Stipend

Offered to Artists in Need to Travel to the Festival

### Artist Pass

Participating Artists can See All Fringe Shows for Free

**10**

States Represented

**40.5%**

of Artists from Underserved Communities

**54%**

Of Fringe Artists from Northeast Ohio

**23.5%**

of surveyed artists self-identified as having a disability





Out With It  
Photo by Elaine Manusakis, Every Angle





## FRINGE JR

2025 marked the inaugural year of Fringe Jr., featuring 17 shows curated for kids, teens, and families. These performances blended circus arts, magical stories, dance battles, and interactive theatre—creating a fun, accessible festival zone for all ages.

17

Fringe Jr. Offerings

6

Free Shows



1

Kids' Dance Party

3

Circus

3

Children's  
Theatre

2

Magic

2

Immersive/  
Interactive

2

Dance

4

Music

1

Improv



PLAYground 2025 | Photo By Steve Wagner

“

**The PLAYground show was so well-done. Perfect for kids of all ages in content and in learning how theatre works behind the scenes.**

-2025 BorderLight Attendee



The Girl Who Swallowed a Cactus  
Photo by Steve Wagner





## ARTIST LAUNCH PAD

BorderLight gives artists more than a stage, it gives them momentum. From world premieres to international tours, works launched here continue to grow and thrive long after the festival. In 2025 we had:

**42**

No. of “Premieres”  
in 2025

**3**

No. of “New Works  
in Development”

**13**

“Partner Productions” in  
2025

**Works developed at BorderLight appeared at:**



### **Artist Offerings:**

- **Professional Photography:** Every production received high-quality photography to support future promotion and touring.
- **Marketing Training:** Artists were provided with tools and workshops to strengthen their ability to market themselves and their work.
- **Press Exposure:** Coverage across print, television, radio, and digital platforms elevates artists and connects them to wider audiences.
- **Touring Pathways:** Works developed here went on to reach stages regionally, nationally, and internationally.
- **Collaboration & Networking:** The festival fosters connections that spark new projects and long-term partnerships.



# ACCESSIBILITY

Our commitment is to create spaces where all people can connect, share, and be represented. We strive to reflect the diversity of our community and to offer a festival that is welcoming, accessible, and meaningful to all.

Our goals include:

- Creating opportunities for a wide range of artists and audiences to engage with the festival
- Supporting local talent, especially voices that have historically had fewer platforms
- Ensuring that participation in BorderLight is not limited by economic, social, or physical barriers
- Building a culture of welcome where every person feels valued

4

ASL interpreted  
Performances

6

Relaxed  
Performances

## Positive Feedback:

- “The interpreters added to the performance—I felt included and engaged.”
- “Loved that there were many sensory tools for people to use!”
- “Thank you for creating accessible productions—I think you’ve done a marvelous job.”

## Accessible Offerings:

- **Quiet Space:** A dedicated area in the Idea Center with noise-reducing headphones, fidgets, sunglasses, and a calming environment.
- **Accessibility Coordinator:** Hired an on-site Accessibility Coordinator to guide festival-wide ADA/WCAG compliance and support patrons.
- **Know-Before-You-Go Guides:** Developed detailed sensory guides for specific venues and performances, available online and in print.
- **Web Accessibility:** Updated festival website with filters for ADA accessible venues, ASL shows, and Relaxed shows.
- **Inclusive Audience Tools:** Created ASL-signed survey questions so Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing attendees could participate fully in audience feedback.





Photo by BorderLight Staff

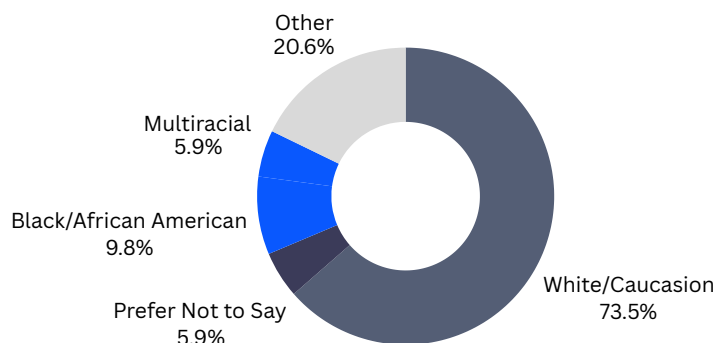




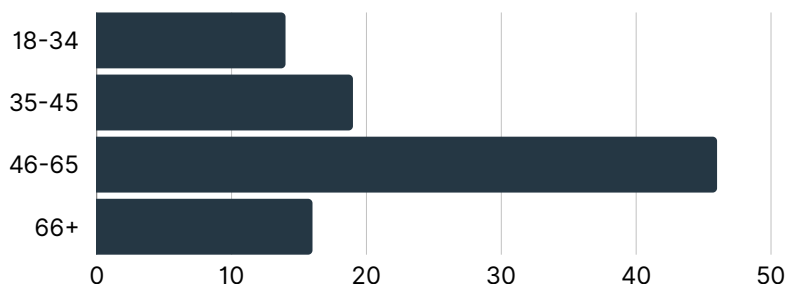
# MEET OUR AUDIENCE

BorderLight welcomed **4,396 attendees** in 2025. Feedback from 125 respondents provides insight into festival impact, audience experience, and intentions to return.

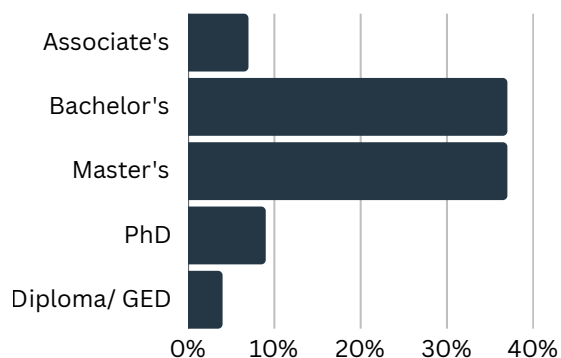
## Attendee Race/Ethnicity



## Attendee Age



## Attendee Education level



## Attendee Responses

**98.1%**

Specifically Came  
Downtown to Visit  
BorderLight Festival

**51.6%**

First Time Attending  
BorderLight Festival

**90%**

Highly rated their  
BorderLight Experience

**18%**

Of BorderLight  
attendees saw 5  
or more performances

**8.3%**

Attendees identified  
as having a Disability

**2.3%**

Attendees identified  
as a Protected Veteran





Mother Nature's Tears  
Photo By Steve Wagner





# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

In 2025, BorderLight deepened its commitment to collaboration by partnering with 15 community organizations across Northeast Ohio. These partners aligned with the festival’s mission and helped amplify its reach by sharing events through newsletters, social media, and direct community engagement.



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**152,573**

Approximate number  
of additional reach via  
Social Media

**54,800**

Approximate number  
of additional reach  
via Email





# PRINT AND PRESS

BorderLight 2025 received widespread media coverage, including an insert in the New York Times. This visibility built anticipation for the festival, sparked conversations, and connected our work with a wide and diverse audience.

**6,500**

Festival Guides  
Printed

**6,000**

New York  
Times Inserts

**15**

Digital Ads

**8**

Print Ads

**5**

**Neighborhood  
Outreach Partners**

Beachwood Buzz  
Downtown Cleveland, Inc.  
Famicos Foundation  
Little Italy Historic Cleveland  
Metro West Community Development

**7**

**Media Partners**

CAN Journal  
Cleveland Jewish News  
Cleveland Scene  
Freshwater  
The Land  
Russian Magazine  
Signal Cleveland

## Social Media & Email Data\*

**41**

Email  
Campaigns

**4,013**

Individual Email  
Recipients

**43%**

Avg.  
Open Rate

**2,205**

Facebook  
Followers

**2,106**

Instagram  
Followers

**360**

Tik Tok  
Followers

**379**

Threads  
Followers

\*As of July 2025.





Erie St. Cemetery: An Invitation  
Photo by Steve Wagner



# SEASONAL STAFF

BorderLight thrives thanks to the commitment and energy of our seasonal staff.

21

Seasonal Staff  
Hired in 2025

4

Contract Staff

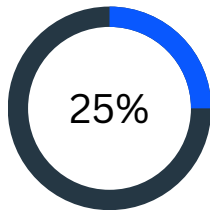
100%

of Seasonal Staff  
“Had a Blast”

92%

are “Very Likely” to work  
with BorderLight again

## Seasonal Staff Racial Identification



Self-Identify as Black,  
Hispanic, or Non-White

“I just love the whole  
team’s excitement and  
passion and being able  
to witness the growth.”

-2025 BorderLight  
Staff Member

# VOLUNTEERS

Our crew of 40 volunteers worked 77 individual shifts and donated a total of more than 308 hours of their time.

40

Volunteers  
in 2025

308

Number of  
Volunteer Hours

89%

of Volunteers  
“Had a Blast”

85%

of Volunteers are  
“Very Likely”  
to return

“

**“The chance to be part of a unique Cleveland experience.”**

*When asked what they enjoyed most about their BorderLight experience.*

-2025 Volunteer



This is My Place  
Photo by Mark Horning



# 2025 FESTIVAL LEADERSHIP

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## BorderLight Staff

Dale A. Heinen  
Executive and Artistic Director

Yazmin Maldonado  
Operations and Communications Manager

Tiffany Trapnell  
Associate Producer

## Board of Directors

Jon Bloomberg  
President

Dr. Felicia Phillips  
Secretary

Luis Cartagena  
Treasurer

Amb. Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley (ex-officio)

Joe Cimperman

Rachel Costanzo

Patrick Espinosa

Charlotte Fowler

Audra T. Jones

Dan Moulthrop

Megan O'Bryan

Jenny Pykett

Rab Razzak

Terry Stewart

*"BorderLight's Board of Directors is united in its commitment to the festival's future, championing a vision of innovation, accessibility, and opportunities for artists across Cleveland."*

# THANK YOU!

BorderLight Festival is made possible through the generous support of our funders and sponsors.

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## THE GEORGE GUND FOUNDATION

PAUL M. ANGELL  
FAMILY FOUNDATION

CLEVELAND  
*Foundation*



In-Kind



THE CITY CLUB OF CLEVELAND





## Media Partners



## Neighborhood Partners



## Individual Supporters

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Holley and Rob Martens • Dan Moulthrop • Pam Neides • Megan O'Bryan  
In honor of The Harris Family - Tiffany Onger • Rab Razzak  
In honor of Halle Bros. Geranium – Christine Sherwin • Terry and Sally Stewart  
Betsy Stueber • Harriet Warm • John C Williams

## Special Thanks

Alicia Hansen • Amy Schwabauer • David Greene • David Stoughton • Debby Rosenthal  
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Rock The House • Samira Hassan • Sarah Bene • Sophia Gordon • The City Club  
Thomas J. Humphrey • Tiffany Trapnell • Type Twenty Seven • Yazmin Maldonado •  
Our Neighborhood Ambassadors: Eunice Cabrera, Jailyn Harris, Lori Ingram  
Our Board of Directors



# BorderLight

THEATRE FESTIVAL

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