



## THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY THEATER

### Mission

Founded in 2004, The Chocolate Factory Theater (CF) supports the creation of new work by dance, theater and interdisciplinary artists from its post-industrial facility in Long Island City, Queens. We encourage risk-taking and innovation within the experimental performing arts community by responding to artists' needs with space, time, money and administrative support throughout their careers. As an artist-founded, artist-run institution - and one of the few remaining spaces wholly devoted to experimental performance in New York City - we believe that the ideas generated within our walls have the potential to improve the lives of New Yorkers, shape broader cultural movements, and inspire change.

### About

Each year, CF builds a robust Artistic Program comprising 8-10 Commissioned Premieres by interdisciplinary artists; 6-8 Early Stage Creative Residencies; a number of contextually-relevant interdisciplinary events (organized by guest curators) including cinema, music, and literature-focused gatherings; and organizational partnerships (recent examples include New York Live Arts, the Vera List Center for Art and Politics, ISSUE Project Room, and Queens Museum) intended to deepen and expand connections between specific interdisciplinary artist communities.

Artists receive exclusive 24/7 access to our spaces and technical equipment for a period of 1-6 weeks, culminating in premiere performances for the public. We literally hand artists the keys and - in addition to substantial financial, administrative and technical support - provide a level of flexibility, trust, autonomy and appreciation that is rare in New York City. CF has earned a strong reputation - among its artist community, its peer institutions, and the field at large - as an organization that is truly "by artists, for artists".

CF supports a highly specific community of performance makers whose work, because it skirts disciplinary boxes in a myriad of ways, can be hard to pigeonhole or define; and which is rarely supported by larger, more established institutions. In a certain sense, the community we support is a niche within a niche; but in our view it is a critically important niche in terms of its potential to impact the wider culture over time.

Now celebrating its twenty-first year, CF is nationally and internationally acclaimed for the strength of its artistic programming, which draws thousands of visitors to its Western Queens neighborhood each year. CF has cultivated a devoted multigenerational audience (many of whom self-identify as artists based in NYC, but include arts-goers from all five boroughs and a growing number of national and international visitors) whose most common unifying trait is an attraction to risk-taking, experimentation, and interdisciplinarity.

## Background & History

In 1995, co-founders Sheila Lewandowski and Brian Rogers began collaborating on experimental, performance-based work. Recognizing the need for a creative home to support their own work and that of fellow multidisciplinary artists, they began laying the groundwork for a new artist-founded and artist-run organization.

In 1997, theater et al, Inc. was launched (in residence at The Educational Alliance) in lower Manhattan. By 1999, the collective was formally incorporated and opened a space in Manhattan's Garment District.

In 2004 theater et al, Inc. moved to LIC, Queens and founded The Chocolate Factory Theater, a 5k sq/ft multi- arts facility dedicated to development and public presentation of dance, theater and interdisciplinary performance.

Over 20+ years, CF has remained artist-led, continuing to respond to the evolving needs of independent artists in NYC. The organization was born from challenges the founders faced as young makers, and that culture remains central to its mission. Rather than curating based on polished proposals, CF invests in the potential of an artist to grow over time, on their own terms, according to individual needs, interests, and points of view—expanding the notion of what performance can be and how it's shared publicly. We do not curate for immediate success, but rather the potential to succeed long-term.

## A Permanent Home for Risk-taking and Innovation

In 2017, CF (with the support of the City of New York) purchased a one-story, 7,500 sq/ft post-industrial building in the Dutch Kills area of LIC; and moved operations and programming to its new permanent facility in 2021. CF is currently planning for the full renovation of this facility (with major support from City, State, and Private funders) into a flexible, fully accessible, LEED certified performing arts and community center dedicated to the development and public presentation of dance, theater and interdisciplinary performance in Western Queens.