

COLT

Working in the arts, I mean, that's my whole life. And for me, being just in the industry that I work in, life looks a lot different, and work looks a lot different. So I grew up in Rome, and about three years ago, I started working in Marietta. And so pre pandemic, I was commuting from Rome to Marietta every day, two and a half hours in my car. I'd tell people that I lived in Rome, but I existed in Cobb County because so much of my life, personally and professionally, existed here. Earlier this year, I finally made the move to Marietta, and I'm living in Cobb County. And I just started a new job about six months ago here at The Lyric. And I think that living in Cobb County now and having the extra time on my hands, it just makes my work so much more effective.

I think pre COVID so many folks working in the live entertainment/performing arts industry, you know, we often got lost in the hustle and bustle of our work, and patrons may not have always been top of mind. Those folks that come to see a show, whether it's a ballet performance or a theatrical production, there's this mindset of like, "Oh, these people." They're coming to see our product, but now, there's just been this whole realization that we wouldn't have a product if it were not for these people that are coming to see our work. And one big focus that I've had now that I'm working at The Lyric and this capacity, truly our top value here and priority is community, and I talk about that a lot. It takes a village to create live theater. And, you know, we often think it's just the actors. It's just designers and directors and everyone that goes into actually creating the product. But the most vital role in the creation of live theater is our community, the people that we are serving. Uh. We're not in the business of creating live theater, just for the sake of creating live theater, and now there's an even more important piece to that. And that is the fact that the arts live theater will play a strong role in the emotional recovery of our community as we've come out of the pandemic, and as our artistic team has curated next season, our big priority is making sure that people come to the theater and leave filled with joy. We're not focused on the tragedies and the heartbreaking stories. It's all about creating an escape from the pain that is real in the world. And it's not to discount the reality that there are bad things in the world, but we want to be an outlet to help folks heal and to be a distraction for just those two and a half hours that they are with us.

Something that's most important to me is recognizing, um, how grateful that we are when people now come and see our product. I make it an effort, and our team makes an effort, to personally thank every single person that walks through the door when they come to see one of our performances and let them know how grateful we are that they're there to see our work, and to support our work, and to invest in our work. And we want to make sure that they feel welcomed and that they feel like they are part of the product that we create.

We certainly appreciate our patrons, and we are seeing, as they come back to the theater, an even stronger appreciation for what we do as well. So I think it's very much mutual. So not only are we thanking patrons, every single person that comes through the front door of the theater for being there, but these folks are leaving, they're just telling us these stories about how much they have missed going to the theater. Maybe not just The Lyric, they have missed the sense of community that's created when you're in an audience. You know, even though the house may be smaller, the energy is much higher. We've seen some audiences maybe had, you know, 50% of the house full for some performances, and the energy is stronger than a full sold-out house pre-COVID. So many people are ready, and there's a lot of folks that are still not comfortable, uh, returning yet, but we're going to be here, ready to welcome them back when they are comfortable. But the people that are coming back, they are energized, and that's just a testament to how important our work is. And that's something that we may have taken for granted in the before times.