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GSU employees pen a 'love letter to the university' in CPA study



As the [Center for Performing Arts](#) (CPA) prepares for the rest of its season, Executive Director Lana Rogachevskaya sees the work she did on a recently published academic paper with fresh eyes. For her, it is less of a case study highlighting how CPA responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and more of “a love letter to the university and the work we do.”

“What we did would not be possible on a campus not supportive of the arts,” said Rogachevskaya, who teamed up with Anna Bernadska, Assistant Director of Research Compliance to co-author “The Show Must Go On.” Published in The Journal of

Nonprofit Education and Leadership, the paper explores how the center prioritized its mission and refused to close its doors in time of crisis.

“We got full support from the dean, the president and this type of trust is invaluable in creating thriving cultural institutions,” Rogachevskaya added.

When COVID-19 took the world by storm in 2020, everyone was affected, especially the entertainment industry. About 99% of arts venues were affected due to cancellations of in-person events. The CPA was no exception. It relies on multiple sources of revenue to operate, including ticket sales, summer camp admissions and facility rentals, accounting for 68% of its budget. That is why when the center had to put a pause on in-person events, Rogachevskaya said it was one of the most challenging times in her career.

Nonetheless, she and her team were dedicated to staying true to their mission, which is to engage Chicago Southland’s diverse communities in art through education, entertainment, performing arts, and dialogue. They shifted to finding solutions, surveying their patrons and audiences to get a sense of how they would be willing to engage during the pandemic. They decided to experiment with virtual formats, resulting in the 25th Anniversary 2020-2021 Virtual Season. They offered programs like Theater Thursdays, Family Fun Fridays and Opera Up Close Sundays. They leaned on their partnerships with the Illinois Arts Council Touring Fund and board members, and artists who curated and supported virtual performances. They changed their pricing structure to a “suggested donation” model rather than using price tiers.

And people noticed their resilience, including Bernadska, a member of the Association of Nonprofit Researchers, who has researched arts organizations.

“COVID put so much pressure on the CPA and it would have been justified if they didn’t do anything during the pandemic and closed their doors like many other organizations did. Instead, they not only stayed open, but they basically reinvented themselves,” Bernadska explained.

When she heard about a call for proposals to publish a paper about COVID-19 and best governance practices she thought of Rogachevskaya and the CPA immediately. She thought the CPA’s work could serve as a good example to other institutions that had to make decisions amid challenging times.

When Bernadska reached out to Lana about the opportunity, Rogachevskaya said she felt empowered

“It’s like you are swimming and you don’t see the beginning, you don’t see what’s in front of you and you don’t see what’s behind you and someone’s telling you good job!” Rogachevskaya said. “Anna did that for me. She was like ‘it’s incredible what you are doing in one of the most challenging points of your career.’ And I’m like ‘somebody sees me? Somebody sees what I’m doing?’”

Both women are native of Ukraine and this project allowed them to reconnect while supporting one another and pouring their passion and skills into a project they both cared about. The two took about four months to write the study and developed

something they agree is not only important to the CPA but to GSU, and for the entertainment industry.

“I think the study is important because it gave GSU greater visibility and it detailed a university culture supportive of the arts unafraid to support innovation,” Bernadska said.

For Rogachevskaya, authoring the study gave her an even greater appreciation for the people who work for the CPA and at GSU.

“When people look at the CPA they say, ‘Good job Lana,’ but it’s truly the collective power of individuals who are giving themselves generously to this organization,” she said. “And this case truly highlighted the generosity of GSU’s stakeholders to make this work possible.”

Click here to read [“The Show Must Go On.”](#)