

Climate Action Designer 2022 Report

Compiled by Flux Theatre Ensemble, November 2022

Flux Theatre Ensemble was grateful to receive a 2022 New York City Theatre Greening Grant to fund a new position, **Climate Action Designer (CAD)**, for our production of *Metra: A Climate Revolution Play with Songs*. *Metra* ran at Abrons Arts Center, located at 466 Grand St, NYC, from October 24 - November 12, 2022. For this first iteration, Flux was fortunate to work with Jem Pickard (they/he) from **Superhero Clubhouse**. As CAD, Jem worked with the director, playwrights, designers, and production team to manifest *Metra's* themes of climate revolution by inspiring all participants toward climate action. Jem's experience, care, and hopeful vision made for a powerful collaboration that we hope will serve as a model for other companies and future productions.

Working with Jem, we developed the following scope of activities for the CAD role:

- Offered dramaturgical feedback to the playwrights on how to align the themes of the play with a hopeful, regenerative vision of our climate future;
- Presented on the intersection of climate justice and theatre to the designers and production staff at a production meeting;
- Presented on the intersection of climate justice and theatre to the stage managers, actors, and playwrights at the first read-through;
- Served as a resource for the designers and production managers on sourcing sustainable materials and reusing/recycling materials for strike;
- Developed program & website-based resources for audience members who are inspired by *Metra* to plug into sustained climate action;
- Hosted a talkback where artists and audiences reflected on the themes of *Metra* and broader climate action; and
- Wrote a program note to contextualize *Metra* within broader climate narratives.

Q. How did your project go? What was most successful?

A. "As one of the creators of *Metra*, it was so important to me that the production both be rooted in, and make meaningful connections to, climate justice movements. Jem made that possible. Their conversation with the team as part of design presentations stayed with the cast throughout the rehearsal process—grounding everyone in a shared understanding as members of the cast stepped into roles as climate revolutionaries. And Jem's resources for the program offered tangible opportunities to connect to and support climate justice.

If the play—hopefully—inspired some audience members to take action, they had immediate access to impactful work that's already happening.” - Emily Hartford, director and co-writer, *Metra: A Climate Revolution Play with Songs*

We are very happy with the process and outcomes of the CAD role and hope to carry it forward into future productions and projects. We also hope the CAD role serves as a model for other companies. We perceive that one of the primary challenges organizations face in following through on climate action is that there is no single person or department accountable to seeing it through. Often, the burden falls on theatre workers who have the passion and/or experience to do this work, but who are already at or over their capacity from their primary responsibilities. While everyone should contribute to climate action, having a person whose sole role is to organize and lead that work is an effective way to address this challenge.

Additionally, positioning this role as a *designer*, rather than a director or manager, frames the CAD's role as creative, and not just administrative. This is important because fully integrating climate justice into every aspect of a process and production is a positive disruption that requires reimagining how we work together. Rather than a guilt-induced framework where climate justice is seen as a chore or a box to check, the frame of *design* is inviting, hopeful, and innately theatrical. Jem's leadership as CAD continually modeled this approach at every touchpoint. They urged our collaborators away from perfectionism, which burns people out, toward curiosity—how can we make each choice better aligned with climate justice? It was exciting to see our collaborators so energized by this approach.

We were also very happy with the external-facing resources Jem created for our audiences. They did a wonderful job of rooting the resources in the themes and narratives of *Metra* while at the same time expanding and deepening them. One example: in *Metra*, the play's denouement includes a #LandBack shift in power where the Haudenosaunee Confederacy resumes stewardship of the land and leads the first democratic elections. Then, Jem included a call to donate to **Iron Path Farms**, a Haudenosaunee Two Spirit-led food sovereignty project, within the website and program resources.

Similarly, one of the main narratives within *Metra* concerns the kidnapping of an energy billionaire and the attempt by the climate revolutionaries to use the magic of myth to persuade him to join their revolution. The resources included a partnership with the Stop the Money Pipeline's Blame **Wall Street Project**, which has the similar goal of persuading Wall Street to divest from fossil fuels through protest and direct action. In both cases, the resources empowered audiences to take climate action directly inspired by and connected to the themes of the play.

While these actions are important, we also know that climate justice requires a shift in values, in narratives, and in the stories we tell. That's one reason we were so grateful that Jem hosted a talkback with the audience and artists.

There was a powerful moment where a teenager and their family remarked on how important it was for young people to see stories like this, since young people are so often leading climate movements and yet are not reflected in mainstream climate narratives like *Don't Look Up*.

Q. What roadblocks did you face in implementing the project?

A. While we didn't really experience roadblocks, we did wish we had more time and resources to invest in the CAD role. We would've loved to have Jem present at more production meetings and rehearsals, as well as hosted more talkbacks. We could've also expanded those talkbacks to include conversations with climate activists and organizers. We'd entered into discussions with Stop the Money Pipeline about supporting direct actions with our creative resources, but those conversations came too late to manifest. Ideally, a role like this wouldn't end when the production ends, but rather foster ongoing reciprocal relationships with climate activists, with Indigenous communities, and all the communities of which we're a part. We're currently reviewing our budget for the 2023 calendar year to see how we might move from a production-based model to a more sustained approach for the CAD role. While our current financial resources limit our scope, Jem's voice is in our ears, urging us not to be dissuaded by perfectionism, but to stay curious about what we can do with the resources we have.

Q. How did you share about your greening project with your audiences/community?

A. The Climate Action Designer role, and the resources they developed, were shared through Flux's website, digital program, social media, and e-blasts. Examples:

<https://www.fluxtheatre.org/2022/10/climate-resources-for-metra/>

<https://www.fluxtheatre.org/2022/10/jem-pickards-program-note-for-metra/>

<https://www.fluxtheatre.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Metra-Program.pdf>

<https://www.fluxtheatre.org/metra-a-climate-revolution-play-with-songs/>

<https://www.fluxtheatre.org/2022/08/climate-action-designer-for-metra/>

<https://www.facebook.com/fluxtheatre/posts/pfbid025QcDHFdVnXKfBuwVs1CBGBaSMERby5z9PJw9RvFm17xzTnby8h7xZ4SewJwQwYKYI>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CkoNnRCOBOq/?hl=en>

Additionally, Flux's Corinna Schulenburg presented with Jem Pickard on the CAD model at Theatre Communications Group's Climate Action Monthly Meeting on 11/21. An archival video on that presentation is available here:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/rec/share/0Rk2f4eIPjR3G4feq72Wxt0vxFoli845lKlhMzJHOCWITuKSU4p3ETtNGu21lsCE.zZ8DspkHU7roAw4z>

Passcode: !H&RGIDF

Flux hopes to continue sharing the CAD model with interested companies, as well as amplifying Jem’s work and the work of their company, Superhero Clubhouse.

In closing, Flux is deeply grateful to have received a 2022 New York City Theatre Greening Grant from Broadway Green Alliance. The impact on our production of *Metra* was so positive, and we expect those impacts to ripple out into our future work and broader community.

Pictures from *Metra: A Climate Revolution Play with Songs*

