



A Message From Frank Bluestein, TAA Executive Director 2021 Virtual TAA Announcement

News Release - February 2, 2021

Dear Friends:

After many consultations with Belmont University officials, TAA alumni, board members, and staff, the TAA Administrative Council and the TAA Foundation Board have made the decision that this summer's Tennessee Arts Academy will once again be a virtual experience.

When we began to plan for the Academy in the late summer of 2020, all signs seemed to indicate that we had a good chance of being able to have a near to normal Academy experience in mid-summer 2021. At that time, COVID cases and hospitalizations were down, the word was that a vaccine would be ready by the November election, and inoculations would begin soon thereafter with the goal of having everyone immunized by late spring of 2021. We really thought that by July we could pull this off and make it work.

The reality is that there are currently too many obstacles and unknowns for us to move forward with certainty on having a quality on-campus experience. Most disturbingly, the new, more contagious, and potentially more lethal variants to the virus may cause a third wave that health officials say would begin in the spring.

Belmont University, our partner institution and host site, has been very helpful and encouraging since the beginning of the COVID crisis; however, any Belmont summer programs or group electing to come onto campus for summer 2021, including TAA, would understandably be required to adhere to all local, state and national guidelines in place at the time of our event. Currently, these restrictions include strict adherence to mask-wearing and vastly reduced class sizes. Participant interactions would be severely limited due to social distancing requirements, gatherings in the auditorium for performances and other events would be nearly impossible, and limitations on foodservice and cafeteria seating would all exist. In other words, the Academy under these conditions would be a pale representation of what normally occurs. There are numerous other considerations, but I am sure you can imagine some of the many additional challenges we would face.

Our thought is that we would rather have a fully realized virtual event, rather than a completely scaled back on-campus one. This past summer, the evaluations we received regarding the virtual event were glowing. Eighty-four percent said they gained valuable new content for virtual and in-person learning and nearly three-fourths of the respondents indicated they enjoyed the virtual aspect of the Academy. One 2020 participant summed it up by simply saying, "TAA really knocked it out of the ballpark." Making this all-important decision now allows us to start planning for the virtual event in the summer of 2021. We know with all certainty that a virtual event is possible, regardless of external conditions. With the knowledge we gained from the 2020 session, we believe we can have a very strong 2021 Academy. I promise that the TAA staff and I will do everything we can to make this summer's Academy a fulfilling and rewarding experience.

Take care and please stay safe and healthy.

Frank Bluestein
TAA Executive Director