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Media Contact: Jacob Daneman
Email: jacob@pitchperfectpr.com

TOM WELSH AND RACHEL MILFORD JOIN BIG EARS TEAM





KNOXVILLE, TN – Big Ears, the innovative Knoxville-based cultural organization, has named Tom Welsh as Managing Director and Rachel Milford as Community Arts Director, according to Big Ears’ founder and Executive Director, Ashley Capps. Welsh comes to Big Ears after 15 years at the Cleveland Museum of Art, where he developed an acclaimed performing arts series that rose to international stature. Milford, an artist and cultural organizer, is the founder and director of Knoxville’s Cattywampus Puppet Council. She played a central role in Big Ears’ community outreach work during the 2022 festival.

“Big Ears enjoys an international profile as a groundbreaking, forward-thinking arts and culture experience. After several years of steady organizational growth, the 2022 festival this March was transformative in many ways. It was an extraordinary experience for those who participated, and its success signals remarkable potential for the future,” says Capps. “We’re bringing Tom and Rachel to the team so that we can fully explore and realize that potential.”

Before his time at the Cleveland Museum of Art, Welsh lived and worked in San Francisco, where he managed the award-winning contemporary classical music record company, New Albion; was a principal in Elision Fields Artist Management, whose clients included the legendary composer (and two-time Big Ears alum) Terry Riley; and founded and directed The Northwest Passage Festival. Joining the staff at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 2007, Welsh booked and produced the CMA’s acclaimed performing arts series, work that included commissioning new pieces and presenting numerous premieres by many of the world’s finest

musicians. He was also the creative architect of the annual Solstice Festival in Cleveland, as well as City Stages, an annual, multi-faceted summer concert program that served to redefine the museum's role in the cultural landscape.

Rachel Milford brings over twenty years of experience in visual art, theater, storytelling, and youth education to the Big Ears team. She has worked as a teacher and performing artist throughout the Southeastern Appalachia and is known for utilizing play and giant puppets to cultivate joy and bring communities together. Milford has collaborated with such organizations as the Knoxville Museum of Art, Knox County Schools, Alternate Roots, and the Highlander Research and Education Center, and her work has most recently been featured at the William King Museum of Art in Abingdon, VA. After successfully coordinating the Krewe du Cattywampus Parade alongside New Orleans' legendary Preservation Hall Jazz Band during this year's Big Ears' festival, Rachel will be expanding Big Ears' year-round community programming and collaboration.

Welsh and Milford join a Big Ears team that, under Capps' leadership, also includes Director of Operations Bryan Crow and Director of Development Casey Fox. The Big Ears Festival returns March 30-April 2, 2023, in downtown Knoxville, TN.

Big Ears

Described as both as "one of the world's greatest music bashes" by *The New York Times* "one of the most quietly earth-shattering, subtly luminous festivals the world over" by *Oxford American*, Big Ears has established itself as one of the most exciting and imaginative cultural gatherings in

the world, bringing together a virtual who's who of established and acclaimed iconoclasts, innovators and influencers with younger artists who are synthesizing their own experiences into fresh, new creative work. Located in the heart of downtown Knoxville and taking place in its world-class historic theaters, excellent clubs, and unique alternative performance spaces—all within easy walking distance of one another and intermingled with superb restaurants, bars, and shops—Big Ears offers an unparalleled experience for adventurous artists and audiences alike.

Big Ears' work is made possible by the generous support of The Aslan Foundation, Pilot Corporation, Visit Knoxville, The City of Knoxville, Knox County, The National Endowment for the Arts, the Tennessee Arts Commission, South Arts, and additional sponsors, foundations, and individuals.