

### The Ark's Mission

*"The Ark is a non-profit organization dedicated to the enrichment of the human spirit through the presentation, preservation, and encouragement of folk, roots, ethnic music and related arts. The Ark provides a safe and welcoming atmosphere for all people to listen to, learn about, perform and share music."*

## VISION STATEMENT for THE ARK FY2020-24: **MIDPOINT REVISION**

### VISION 2020-2024: *Revised for the Covid and Equity Era*

#### Introduction

The work and accomplishments of The Ark's previous five-year plan (FY2015-2019) set the stage for a new era at The Ark. Generous support from our communities enabled us to purchase The Ark's space, pay off the mortgage, and complete major renovations and updates, providing The Ark with unprecedented security and capacity. We understand that with ownership and increased capabilities comes the opportunity and responsibility to **expand The Ark's involvement and impact across its communities**. We began our next five-year plan poised to further develop The Ark's leadership role as we continue to advance its mission of enriching human spirits through the power of music.

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#### New Context

We launched The Ark's FY2020-FY2024 Strategic Plan in the fall of 2019, shortly before the Covid-19 pandemic hit.

- On March 11, 2020 The Ark **closed to in-person programming** and staff began working from home at reduced hours.
- **Mission & Programming**  
For the remainder of FY20 and continuing through FY21 we regrouped to develop and deliver **virtual programming**:
  - We created a **livestreaming series** that presented artists initially from their homes and ultimately from The Ark (The Ark's Family Room Series).
  - We produced a **virtual** Fall Event in 2020, a two-night virtual Ann Arbor Folk Festival in 2021, and a hybrid in-person/livestream Fall Event in 2021.
  - We pursued a partnership with the **Ann Arbor Summer Festival** to present three outdoor programs in 2021, switching to a virtual production alternative due to weather.

We also had an opportunity to begin more deeply addressing the challenge of **expanding diversity, equity and inclusion** at The Ark:

- From October '21-January '22, six Ark staff and Board members participated in a 10-session **Building Adaptive Capacity (BAC)** intensive program that provided us with new thinking and tools for approaching complex challenges.
- We opted to focus on the complex challenge of **expanding diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)** at The Ark during the BAC program, which provided us with unprecedented insights and feedback and ramped up our commitment to actively address DEI at The Ark.

- **Facility**

We utilized the period that The Ark was closed to focus on some **capital improvements**, including renovating our restrooms and adding touchless features to provide additional protection against spread of disease. We completed the lowering of the freight elevator to ground level to improve safety and ease for artist load-ins and deliveries. We also undertook research and planning to install video equipment in The Ark to allow for continued livestreaming going forward.

- **Finance and Fundraising**

During the first 18 months of the pandemic, The Ark's **earned revenue disappeared**. We focused on **fundraising, grants, and state and federal funding** opportunities to fill in the gap:

- We secured **government loans and grants**, including two PPP loans (subsequently converted to grants), a Michigan Stages Grant, and two rounds of federal Shuttered Venue Operators Grant (SVOG). We also took advantage of the IRS Employee Retention Credit (partial refund of FICA taxes on employee wages).
- Membership, crowdfunding, direct mail, and online appeals yielded **strong support from Ark members and donors**.
- **Virtual event fundraising**—the 2020 Fall Event and 2021 Folk Festival—was generously supported.

- **Reopening**

The Ark reopened to live shows at full capacity in late August, 2021 with masking and vaccination protocols. Since reopening, **the environment for live performance has continued to be extremely unstable**:

- Artist cancellations have been ongoing.
- Audiences have not returned at full force.
- Volunteers have not returned at full force.

- The surge of the Omicron variant in December 2020 and January 2021 resulted in artist cancellation of most Ark shows in January and forced the cancellation of the 2022 Ann Arbor Folk Festival.

### Midpoint Status

In the first quarter of calendar year 2022 we're mid-plan in the midst of a changed and changing world. Much of our original vision for The Ark's Strategic Plan 2020-2024 remains relevant, but the context has shifted.

- **Musically:**
  - The **music industry** has been severely impacted by the pandemic. It's not yet clear how touring and live performance will ultimately change as a result.
  - Venues and audiences are ready to embrace hybrid **technology** that combines live shows and livestreaming; artists are not there yet.
- **Socially:**
  - It's not yet clear how **audience** habits and expectations have changed long-term as a result of the pandemic.
  - Ongoing **social and racial inequities**, underscored by events like the murders of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery, have brought a greater sense of urgency and immediacy to The Ark's intention to consciously address and expand diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.
- **Financially and Structurally:**
  - The Ark has a limited **financial "runway"** that will allow us to sustain expected operating losses over the next two years and invest in revising our infrastructure to meet the future.
  - We have to make our best guesses about what this **infrastructure** should look like since we don't yet know the shape of the changed world we're entering. We do know that to meet this changing environment:
    - We need to **grow staff**.
    - We need to **expand our adaptive capacity**.
    - We need to redouble our efforts to **welcome and include new and diverse voices across all aspects of the organization**—in programming, staffing, volunteers, leadership, decision-making...
  - We need to **plan now for how we continue to fund** our new infrastructure and new initiatives after we've run out of runway.

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## Revised Vision (as of 4/26/2022)

We see: As we navigate the continued uncertainty of the Covid environment, we will make strategic decisions and investments that **help audiences and artists return to live music during these times**. To address the ongoing, urgent issues of racial inequity and social injustice, the staff and Board of The Ark will interrogate our organizational culture by **re-evaluating systems, customs, and traditions** with an eye toward **cultivating diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging**. We realize that the best way we can honor The Ark's legacy and carry it forward is to encourage **new generations and new communities of music lovers** to express that legacy's heart and intention in ways that are meaningful to them. We will **grow our capacities for adaptability, flexibility and responsiveness**, learning to **co-create** and develop innovative programming with new people and partners in the community, and **welcoming new voices into The Ark** to become part of shaping and guiding its future.

Our revised FY2020-FY2024 Strategic Plan will continue to focus on three key areas: **Evolution, Stewardship, and Infrastructure**. Over the remaining two years of the plan:

- We will assure The Ark's **continued relevance and impact** by **assessing and responding to needs and trends** in our communities, music, and society.
- We will assure The Ark's **sustainability** by supporting and caring for its most important assets: **People, Programming, and our Venue**.
- We will invest deeply in **expanding diversity and inclusion** within our programming, across our constituents, and throughout our organizational culture. Listening, learning, and being open to critical feedback will be vital for building an increasingly inclusive space and organization.
- With music as the primary channel for connecting people to The Ark, **programming will remain central** to our efforts to develop new relationships, create new partnerships, and broaden our audiences and other constituencies. Along with this, our **marketing and outreach** will likewise evolve, investing in resources to reach new markets.
- As we further develop The Ark's **inclusiveness** we will **focus on ways to enhance the authentic and welcoming hospitality that has always been its core**.
- We will update The Ark's **administrative infrastructure** and **strengthen its internal operations** to keep pace with current needs, developing appropriate structures and systems that support The Ark's growth and evolution and enhance its cultures.

- We will continue to invest in **capital projects**, such as HVAC replacement, that provide a safe environment and support The Ark's most important assets: People, Programming, and our Venue.
- We will continue our commitment to **fiscal responsibility** and ensure The Ark's long-term sustainability and viability. The current unstable financial environment will require us to develop sustainable models for earning revenue from hybrid programming (in-person with livestream) and other initiatives.