

A Message from the Board of Directors

After 10 outstanding years with the company, Artistic Director Rena Cohen has announced she will be moving on from her position at the end of the 2019-2020 season. The search for Rena's successor begins in April 2020, with the intention of Realwheels securing a new artistic director by summer. Rena will continue to work with the company on individual projects as an artist and consultant.

"It's hard to believe I have now been a part of Realwheels for 10 years," says Rena. "I have loved this job, the amazing people I work with and being a very vocal ally to the disability community.

"One of my earliest objectives was to increase community engagement through participation in live theatre experiences. These programs have been wildly popular and I think they have helped change the landscape and discussion around inclusive and authentic casting. We have even taken steps toward influencing cultural venue accessibility, not just for patrons, but also for performing artists and backstage workers.

"However, there comes a time to make space for new leadership. Plus, I'm ready for new challenges. I'll first be treating myself to some time off. Then, we'll see what's next. Stay tuned — and thanks to everyone who has joined me on this wonderful ride!"

Board President Alfiya Battalova adds: "Under Rena's leadership, we have mounted several groundbreaking professional shows and Realwheels is now a "go-to" company for information around accessibility, disability-inclusive casting, and other discrete issues around equity for artists with disability. We conceived an actor training curriculum the company is preparing to launch this fall of which we're incredibly proud. We have also pursued and developed new partnerships with training institutions and professional theatres across Canada."

Rena first joined Realwheels as Managing Director in partnership with Founding Artistic Director James Sanders before taking on the responsibilities of both positions. She has been remarkably successful in each of these roles, purposefully creating a solid foundation for Realwheels to eventually make space for our current General Manager Cadence Konopaki, and a new Artistic Director.

Rena's leadership as an ally to the disability community, her dynamic artistic vision, and her capacity to fulfill it has contributed immensely to the success of the organization. We thank Rena for her generosity to the company and community, and her ability to oversee advances, both locally and nationally, in cultural equity and community engagement.

With sincere appreciation,

Alfiya Battalova, President
Henriette Koning, Director
Maya Pankalla, Director
Martin Thomson, Director

Amy Amantea, Vice President
Jinkai Li, Secretary/Treasurer
Leena Chen, Director