

National Coalition Against Censorship

19 Fulton Street, Suite 407
New York, NY 10038
tel: (212) 807-6222
fax: (212) 807-6245
e-mail: ncac@ncac.org
web: www.ncac.org

Joan E. Bertin
Executive Director

NCAC PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Actors' Equity Association
American Association of
School Administrators
American Association of
University Professors
American Association of
University Women
American Booksellers Foundation
for Free Expression
American Civil Liberties Union
American Ethical Union
American Federation of Teachers
American Federation of Television
& Radio Artists
American Jewish Committee
American Library Association
American Literary Translators
Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Society of Journalists
& Authors
Americans United for Separation of
Church & State
Association of American Publishers
Authors Guild
Catholics for Choice
Children's Literature Association
College Art Association
Directors Guild of America
The Dramatists Guild of America
Educational Book & Media Association
First Amendment Lawyers Association
International Reading Association
Lambda Legal
Modern Language Association
National Center for Science Education
National Communication Association
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
PEN American Center
People For the American Way
Planned Parenthood Federation
of America
Screen Actors Guild
Sexuality Information & Education
Council of the U.S.
Society of Children's Book Writers
& Illustrators
Student Press Law Center
Union for Reform Judaism
Union of Democratic Intellectuals
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ
Office of Communication
United Methodist Church
United Methodist Communications
Women's American ORT
Writers Guild of America, East
Writers Guild of America, West

To:
Board of Directors, Boston Children's Theatre
P.O. Box 171388
Boston, MA 02117

Phone: 617.424.6634
Email: info@bostonchildrenstheatre.org

May 8, 2017

To the Board of Directors of the Boston Children's Theatre,

The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC), founded in 1974, is an alliance of over 50 national nonprofit organizations, including literary, artistic, religious, educational, professional, labor, and civil liberties groups dedicated to promoting the right to free speech. We write to express our concern over some Board members' actions with regard to a brief scene containing nudity in the production of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in late April. Burgess Clark, BCT's longstanding Artistic Director, refused to remove the scene. The Board suspended him temporarily, pending a meeting.

It is our understanding that Clark chose to produce *Cuckoo's Nest* because it is widely read at the high school level in the Boston Public Schools. Clark has been the Artistic Director at BCT for nine years and has never been obliged to submit his creative decisions to the board for approval, and contractually he retains full artistic control of the productions at BCT. Also, we are aware that the theatre has presented many boundary-pushing plays in the past including a gay-positive story that features a kiss between two men.

Clark ensured that ample warnings were given about the play containing nudity, adult language and themes. The play was a success at the box office as well as critically, and there were no complaints from students, parents, audiences or critics. The only complaints came from two Board members who took issue with the nudity in the context of a children's theater.

Children see artistic representations of nudes in every museum, as well as in public spaces. The nude has historically been one of the central subjects of art and the beauty of the human body has inspired painters, photographers, sculptors and choreographers for many centuries. For hundreds of years there have been sculptures of nudes in many public spaces from Washington, D.C. to the capitals of Europe. Adults, possibly shamed about their own thoughts and fantasies, may occasionally be embarrassed, but if anyone

can look at a nude and not see an issue, it is a child. Nevertheless, there are frequent calls to censor artwork containing nudity so as to “protect children” from what some claim is “indecent,” or simply to avoid controversy.

However, the U.S. Supreme Court has stated multiple times that simple nudity (i.e., representations of the nude body in a non-sexualized manner) is constitutionally protected expression. *Schad v. Mount Ephraim* (1981), *Jenkins v. Georgia* (1974), *Osborne v. Ohio* (1990).

BCT is the oldest children’s Theatre in the country and the oldest theatre in New England. It has a long legacy, and it would be a shame to see it impose a misplaced sense of “morality” and “decency” on the entire community. We urge you to re-instate its Artistic Director so that he can continue to produce plays with creative rigor and not bend to the moral beliefs and values of a few members of the community at the expense of presenting artistically valuable work.

NCAC has resources for cultural institutions that find themselves in the position where they need to negotiate controversy. Some of these resources can be found on our online resource, Artist Rights: <http://www.artistrights.info>

Please let us know if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Svetlana Mintcheva". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'S'.

Svetlana Mintcheva, Director of Programs
National Coalition Against Censorship