

Welcome, Nick Licata – Opening remarks, José Gonzalez plenary

Sam Read: Hi everyone, I'm Sam Read, the conference committee chair and Membership and Programs Manager for Theatre Puget Sound. And behalf of the board members and staff at Theatre Puget Sound, I'd like to welcome you to our eighth annual Fall Forum, Theatre in a New Box. (Applause.) I'd like to start things off by offering up some enormous thank-you's to people who helped make this forum happen. First, the Fall Forum planning committee, which includes Rik Deskin, Daniel Flint, Frank Lawler, Michelle Lockhart, Roxanne Ray, Floyd Reichman, Teresa Thuman, Charlotte Tiencken, and of course, our Executive Director, Karen Zeller Lane. And I want to give an especially loud shout-out to a rock-star volunteer that we've had in our office for over a year now, who's been doing everything from filing, to copying, to making phone calls, to binding, and staffing all of our events: Michelle Lockhart, would you please stand up? (Applause.)

Also, I want to extend thanks to this year's exhibitors, which include Actor's Equity Association, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, Brown Paper Tickets, Ears Inc., Hollywood Lighting, NPower, Screen Actors Guild, and Susan Doupe Photography. If you get a chance, please take a look at their vendor tables, which are out in the lobby. Also, the TPS table is located by the registration table, and that includes some of our SeattlePerforms brochures, as well as opportunities to buy directories, renew your membership, and make a donation. So please take a moment to peruse all of that.

And I'll also like to take a moment to thank Hotel Andra, which has given accommodations to some of our guests. And I've heard back from them this morning that it was absolutely fantastic, so a huge thank-you to them. And I also want to thank a couple of important agencies for their continued, sustained support of Theatre Puget Sound: 4Culture, the Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs, and ArtsFund. (Applause.)

But most of all, I want to thank all of you, for showing up and being here this weekend. The greatest value of this event is the opportunity provided to Seattle's community to share our stories, our successes, our failures, to learn from each other, to inspire each other, and to challenge one another. That's why I believe this forum this year is so exciting, because it provides and explores a tremendous challenge for us all: the challenge of building and maintaining a solid and lasting relationship with our communities, with the community at large, what we like to call the "general public." All of those people who we hope will show up and give two or three hours of their time, and sit and listen to our stories – these are the people who should be in our thoughts, and perhaps even in our company, when we create a show, plan a season, or even start a company. And yet, so many times, in the day-to-day hectic of running a theatre, we tend to think of them as nothing more than hopeful "butts in seat." So the main focus of this forum will be "Beyond Butts." That was actually the original title of the forum this year. (Laughter.) And in starting to think about marketing, all I could see were brochures filled with butts. So we moved on to "Theatre in a New Box," which sounds a lot more professional. But the sentiment remains: it's about a new way of thinking, and a new way of seeing, not just in our work, but in our relationships with our audience and with our community. They have the potential to be our most valuable and creative partners and collaborators. By investing in them, we are investing in the future of our theatres, and preserving the collective imagination and stories of our community. So, thank you all for being here.

And with that, I'm honored to welcome one of our own community leaders, avid arts supporter, and one of the leading voices in the creation of Live Theatre Week here in Seattle. Please give a warm welcome to Seattle City Council Member Nick Licata. (Applause.)

Nick Licata: Thank you, Sam. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be here this morning. And let me say that, this program looks very exciting, a lot of great speakers here. And I didn't realize that you'd done this so many times before. It's a testimony that you're still around and still going. I know how hard it is for arts organizations of this size. I used to be the Chair of the Board of 911 Media Arts Center, and often on the Board, we were always talking about how they're going to make the next bill. So it's an ongoing challenge.

But you've exceeded expectations, because I've noticed that the Theatre Communications Group has a publication called *Political Advocacy for Your Theatre: Making a Legislative Visit*. Well, you brought the legislature to you. (Laughter.)

What I find in theatre in Seattle – and I've been around and actually started work on a community newspaper in Seattle in the 1970's – there was only one or two Equity theatres, and there's more than that now. And that was about the time that the Empty Space had just opened. And over this period of time, the last three decades, there's been a tremendous growth in live theatre in the Seattle/King County regions. In 2003, over \$78 million was spent – we're talking live theatre now – and drew the highest number of patrons of any arts or cultural category. Truly amazing. That number is 2.3 million, so there are literally millions of people who are doing something other than watching baseball on TV. That's very exciting, because there are a tremendous amount of people out there who do go to theatre. On the other side, there is a continuing struggle to keep arts organizations afloat. In fact, this happened last year, an Op-Ed piece about keeping the lights on in Seattle's theatres, drawing attention to the fact that the Empty Space Theatre was having their financial crisis. As you know, other theatres like ACT have also had problems. So what do we do to help these theatres? One of the ways that I think is critical is you bring people together, like in this forum. And one of the things I hope to do next year – we held a couple meetings last year, but next year I'd like a larger meeting – is bring together theatre professionals, philanthropists, business leaders, legislators, to actually develop an action agenda on the future of live theatre in this area.

One of the things in particular that last year we did, and I hope to improve next year, is we established a Live Theatre Week. During that week, we showcased programming, motivated live theatre attendance, and basically tried to generate more excitement. The theatres themselves participated, by offering incentives such as Pay-What-You-Can admission, Meet-the-Artists events, giving a tour of theatres. I think the general public gets excited when they realize that they too can, in fact, if not participate in theatre... but give them a sense of how theatre comes together.

What's interesting is that this trouble is going on across the country, in other cities. I've been talking to other cities, where we have representatives from municipal government talking to us here, through a group called the Big Cities Conference, where all cities over 200,000 get together, and we tried to generate this Live Theatre Week in other cities. In Chicago, they picked it up at the same time we did. I hope that next year we can bring in more cities, and this way, we can get some national attention across the country – hopefully, scheduling one week where people across the country talk about bringing their neighbors to live theatre. That's a grassroots, organized effort to undertake to spread the consciousness.

The Seattle city is doing a decent job – we can always do a better job – but right now, our Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs (just to give you an idea) in the current cycle, we distributed about

\$45,000 to small theatres (those with budgets under \$300,000), and distributed about \$250,000 to those large theatres with budgets over \$300,000. I'd like to see those numbers dramatically increase, but if we can't do it directly through a subsidy from the city, then we have to think of creative ways to go about getting – the government, whether the city or the county, can work with you to generate more awareness.

I just have one final point. Another issue that's on the radar screen: Some of you may be aware that we had a Hotel/Motel tax that was identified specifically for the arts. Then they took some of that for the two stadiums, the baseball stadium and the football stadium. They also took some sales tax: this is something you should keep in mind. There is a .4% (point-four percent) sales tax that right now goes to them. If you go to a restaurant – that money generates millions of dollars every year, and it's kind of a hidden tax. Right now, it goes to pay off the bond structure for the Kingdome, which is gone. That bond will be retired in a few years. When it retires, I think we need to look at that revenue stream, and ask ourselves, what use will be put that to, to make sure we keep the original intent, which is tapping revenue source for the arts. Because then we can make the connections for politicians who are big on the arts, but who are, let's say, more economically concerned: that the arts generate economic activity. Not only does it feed the soul, but it creates jobs, good jobs that people enjoy doing. So that's what's on the radar screen ahead, and I hope to go to work on that issue, and hopefully work with you to make sure that money can go to the arts. Thank you very much for allowing me to speak to you this morning, and I think it'll be a great forum. Thank you. (Applause.)

Sam Read: Thank you, Nick. I have one thing I forgot to mention during the Welcome. Some of the most important people to thank are the people who are actually spending their time here, attending breakout sessions, and participating in the conference – so I would like to give everyone who is participating a big round of applause. (Applause.)

Good. Getting things started today: Our first plenary speaker has joined us from Portland, Oregon. José Gonzalez is the Founder and Executive Director of the Miracle Theatre Group, a group committed to presenting works that exemplify the Hispanic experience through a culturally-informed lens. Miracle Theatre's efforts have given a prominent voice in issues affecting the local and national Hispanic community. Mr. Gonzalez's work with the Miracle Theatre Group embodies the very idea I mentioned earlier in the Welcoming. He's joined us today to share his experience and speak to the importance of creating work that speaks to and reflects the communities in which we live. Please give a warm welcome to José Gonzalez. (Applause.)

José Gonzalez: It's nice weather we're having. (Laughter.) It's always the nice days when you have to be indoors, and the bad days when you can't do anything else. Thank you, Sam, and I want to thank Karen for recommending me to speak here. I don't do this very often, so forgive me if I'm a little rusty. Essentially, this is not a subject (community-based theatre) that I really can speak about from the outside. This is because, as I've been serving for the last 20 years as Executive Director of the Miracle Theatre Group, I've been dealing with basic survival issues, creative issues, mundane daily issues, you name it. So, I think this dialogue – and I hope it is a dialogue, because I encourage you to speak after I've spoken – is best identified by talking about the Miracle Theatre and how it was founded about 22 years ago, about close to this time of year. So, that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to give you a little background on the Miracle's story, so you understand how this Latino community-based theatre got started, and a little bit about the work. And I'd like to encourage all of you to contribute your own thoughts and your own experiences in the same direction, and I'll open that up to a question-and-answer period.

My wife, Dañel Malán, who is Artistic Director of Teatro Milagro, our bilingual touring company, and I got together years ago. And essentially, we were two designers, both gradually from UCLA. I came up to Portland, because she loved Portland, and because my family was up here, and decided to do theatre. We looked around for different jobs, and everybody already had their positions fully staffed up. Now, Portland, at this time in 1984, was not a very big town, and I think there were only three theatres that actually really did something, and then a lot of little underground stuff. Everything was booked up, so like a lot of young people today, coming out of college, we said: "Let's start our own theatre company; that'll be fun." (Laughter.)

We weren't totally naïve. As I said, I was out of graduate school, and had spent ten years working in theatre, primarily community theatre, primarily as a technical director and designer. Dañel was a costumer. We thought this was a great way to show off our skills and get to know the general theatre community. The interesting thing is, the play that we did, we actually made money at. I laugh because, as I say, it's the only play that I think we've ever made money on. (Laughter.) So we said, this is easy. Let's do it again. Quite frankly, in our very early years, our first three, four, years, we were just a theatre company. We were not a touring theatre company; we were just essentially learning, because neither of us had previously dealt with producing theatre. I remember, on those first shows, we had people essentially hold our hands in terms of how to write a press release, what you do next, how you set up a box office, scrambling around... We knew how to do tech and sound, build sets and costumes – but that whole thing of organizing this adventure that is called theatre – we were really in the dark. And it's amazing how you can do this and not know what the heck is going on, on the other side of the room. And the first thing that happens is the agony – (Laughter) – and the occasional ecstasy, usually through stimulants. (Laughter.) And that was the other side, because the one thing, as a scenic designer, I could always remember was that I built the shows and then I could go home. I didn't even care who came to see the shows, or how the bills were being paid, on the other side. And suddenly, that was my concern.

Those first years, I think like any start-up company, we were trying to figure out who worked, and what would work out. I was struck internally with my own personal issues: prior to coming from UCLA, I had actually been living in my hometown in Texas, which is where I was raised, prior to my parents moving to Portland. I moved back there, and actually lived in my old house in what we call the *barrio*, and was doing theatre down there – in a community theatre, which interestingly enough, did no Latino theatre, in spite of the fact that the town was half Latino. So I was struggling with that, and living up in Portland, hating the weather, and missing a lot of stuff – the weather, the music, and food, and the whole lifestyle. I remember thinking, in the back of my mind, about maybe we should just pack it up and head back south. I still had my friends, relationships. Dañel was very adamant, that we shouldn't do it. And that she wouldn't do it. (Laughter.) So then I had to find another way of doing this.

It occurred to me that, if I couldn't go back home to capture that piece of culture and life that I cherished so much, then perhaps I could duplicate it or replicate here. Then it occurred to me also that there might be others, in my community, that shared that desire. At that time, I could say honestly, in addition to myself, in the entire theatre arts community, there were three other Latino performers. Two of them were dancers, one was an actor, and I was doing everything else. So there wasn't a lot of representation in the theatre arts community there, and nobody knew where people were – and that's another whole issue. We knew we were there, and we knew we were strong, but nobody really knew where it was, or didn't want to.

So what we did was, we decided that we would put on a Hispanic cultural festival. And that it was going to be a month-long event, and that we were going to produce three theatre pieces. One of those would be an original production for children. That we were going to find out who

was out there – dancers, musicians, other theatrical artists, and just invite them to join us. We had the venue, so if you were a musician and you wanted to do something musical, you could do that. I remember talking to some poets from the Poetry Festival, and asking them to do several evenings of Latino poetry, in English and in Spanish – and they did. Somebody told me about a dance instructor, that I should call her – and I did. We got an entire dance company and production from that. And we put out the call, and we sent out our story: that I was looking for other Latinos who might be interested in getting involved in putting together an event. Interestingly enough, they ran a casting call in the newspaper, which the papers never do – they never do a casting call. So somebody was looking out after us. The results were incredible. People just came out from everywhere. I had 130 Latino artists auditioning just for theatrical roles. We put on a series – we were doing double-bills every night, where we would do a theatrical show, and then follow that with an event. One of our Latin American service organizations, the Council for Human Rights in Latin America, organized of the top groups from Chile, to come do a performance. It was astounding to see this community, which has been seen as quite silent and passive from the theatrical scene and actually the artistic scene, say, “We really want this. This is a dream I’ve had forever. I’ve never been asked. Nobody’s ever asked me to join.” And now somebody is saying something. So we got them involved.

We continued our work in that direction, and at that point, I realized we had to do something different. This was not theatre that was pre-packaged that I could do: one, the works of Latino artists, still today, by and large, are unknown, outside a very small circle in New York, California, or academic circles. In Portland itself, we didn’t have an artists’ community to work with. We weren’t living in a place where we had a high density of artists who we could approach, so we had to look at what we had there. We didn’t have a public that was accustomed to going to theatre. There were those who were culturally astute or interested, but there wasn’t anything connected to them, and what they might be able to see. Nobody ever asked them, so we had a big question: how do we develop a Latino theatre here in Portland?

And there were a lot of other issues, as you may well guess. During that period of time, perceptions about Latino people were incredibly negative. Every time that I looked at the news or in the newspaper, the only time you saw a Gonzalez or a Hernandez or somebody like that, was a reference to being an illegal alien or a drug dealer, or something like that. That was tough to deal with. The other thing was, like I said, on the arts side. I remember, on one of the first grants that we wrote, a comment came back from the arts commission, that if the work was going to be done by Latino artists, then it wasn’t going to be any good. That was kind of hurtful, but then it was also: “All right, we’re going to show you something.”

So, what did we do? This is not necessarily unique. Anybody can do this. What I will say, if you’ve got the crazy idea that you’re going to build a community-based or other cultural theatre, is that there’s nothing certain. There’s a lot of commitment, there’s a lot of luck, there’s a lot of timing. A lot of that stuff going on – that, even if you have all the right intentions and the right ideas, it doesn’t necessarily translate into success. Someone who came to our premiere of *Elliott* recently pointed out to me that, 90 percent of theatres fail in their first five years. So, it’s just tough all around. Even if you make it past five years, that doesn’t guarantee that you’re going to make it to twenty-two. Even at 22, I still don’t feel comfortable, so we’re hoping for 25.

One of the things we did is we got to know our community, and really got to know it. We didn’t just read about it – we got on the phone and called anybody and everybody, and everybody I called gave me two or three other people to call. I started the call, I introduced myself, and told them what we were doing. I got nothing out of that, except a lot of shaking hands and conversations about who we were and what we were up to. And they knew they were invited to join us. We also looked at what we did over the years in terms of developing artists, which is a central issue and not just background noise. If I’m going to build a Latino

theatre in this town, it's got to have a Latino audience supporting it, and in order to do that, it's got to have Latino actors on stage. Where are the Latino actors? They're in L.A., and I can't afford to bring them up. So we embarked on a process of developing the talent in our home base, which was critical, as far as I was concerned. These people had friends, neighbors, working associates, and people came to see them because of that relationship. So it became our job to grow the arts in our community, and not to import them fully grown. And also, it shaped our program considerably, because we did – not only in terms of selection of material – we had to be very conscious of what material we produced based on who was with us at that time. We actually created material, taking advantage of both the strengths and the weaknesses of the people. It was a highly creative period in time. We were working with new artists, creating new material, working with existing material, improvising as we went along.

The other thing that we did was, we said, let's not create a place that the only way you can get it is if you come to us. We felt strongly, because of the particular demographics that we had at that time – for example, in about 1990, census figures came out and revealed that Latinos were the largest minority in the state – and I was kind of shocked. The majority of Latinos were not living in Portland at the time. In terms of Portland itself, the population was about four percent. At a statewide level, it was seven percent. Most of the Latinos were living in small, rural communities, working in the agricultural sector. A lot of them were migrants, but a lot of them weren't. What we did was, we said, these are communities that we need to get out to. And we developed Teatro Milagro, which is a bilingual program. And we developed it specifically so that the plays could be performed in both languages simultaneously. They toured to these small communities that were going through these incredible social changes. If you can imagine, these were traditionally white communities, and suddenly overnight, half the population is Latino, and they didn't speak English. And they really didn't know how to deal with that. These were what I like to describe as "railroad communities," where all the Latinos lived on one side of the railroad, and all the whites lived on the other side, and nobody talked to anybody. And particularly when you got into the school, Latino kids wouldn't, and couldn't, participate in extracurricular activities. So, Teatro Milagro, in addition to just going to these communities and performing, developed a residency program incorporating the students into the production, helping them and actually encouraging them to add to the material that already existed, and also perform it on the stage. That is a very successful program that tours throughout the country. Dañel just got back from Colorado and New Mexico just last week.

That's a big part of the picture: identifying the community, working with them, knowing them, working with your artists, knowing your artists, and reaching out. And finally, the kind of programming that we did: I'm no longer Artistic Director. I used to be, and I'm still interested in that, but now am managing the money. And I'm terrifically concerned about butts in seats. And that's always been the case. I do honestly believe that people should pay for art. We give a lot away, we've given a lot away, over the years we've given a lot away for the future. But I think one of the problems we have, as an arts community, is that people just don't want to pay for the arts. And I have these arguments with my staff all the time about, "Well, we should give these tickets away to these kids." And I say, yeah, but they're wearing \$90 Nike sneakers, and they can afford \$10 for the show. And if they paid that \$10, it would be worth something to them. If you give it away, they usually won't care. My job is to try to make sure that we try to incorporate that value, and that's a value that I worked very hard in the Latino community to incorporate, for a number of reasons, and hopefully, it gets to the end run of the situation. If you can reach them, and connect with them, they become your patrons. The next step is to move them from patrons to donors. And that seals value. That says that this is important. And then they become your colleagues.

We just completed something that, in our community, can be described as something incredibly unique. Ten years ago, we developed our first ten-year plan, and this year, we're excited that

we need to re-do it. Ten years is a long time to hold on to the old plan, and I thought, we should do it not alone in a dark little backroom, where the staff do basically the same thing, but we should do it as a community exercise. So we conducted three town halls. We focused on three sectors of our community for each town hall. The first town hall was focused on the artists that we worked with – all the artists. We went back as far as we could go, scenic artists, designers, technicians, actors, directors. The second group, we invited patrons. And the final group, we invited community members at large: members of the corporate community, the donor community, the public sector, the political sector, and also from the education sector. In each one of these sessions, we asked the community to respond to a variety of questions, to address: What was the Miracle? Who was the Miracle? What was valued? What should we retain? What should we continue to do? What should we fix? “The arts are great; we should improve the facility.” (Laughter.) The results will be out pretty soon on that, but privately, it was incredibly positive, to the point where staff actually had to lead them to be much more critical than most people would be. On certain occasions, we sensed that we were truly part of the community, valued and respected.

Where I would like to take it right now is: I’d like to encourage people who’ve had similar experiences working on something to share those.

Audience: Could you tell us a little more about how it actually worked? Did you do work separately in Spanish and separately in English? Or did you combine the two? And what about casting, and about the rehearsal process?

José Gonzalez: We have three different companies that Miracle oversees. Miracle is the umbrella. We have a Miracle Mainstage, which is a company that performs Latino plays, in our large house, and those plays are in English. Teatro Milagro develops new plays every year, and in olden times, we used to do two a year, until we persuaded Dañel that was a little crazy. The plays are written in English and in Spanish. Lately, she’s been the author, and then she works with members of our company to translate sections of the play, and they fine-tune that. The idea is that the plays can be performed in English or Spanish audiences, and be fully understood or enjoyed. That’s the idea. Of course, you can never fully count on that. And about two years ago, as we started seeing a number of Spanish-speaking artists coming to the theatre, there has been a continual increase in the Spanish-speaking population. We developed a Spanish-language theatre, which we call Teatro Español. It’s been performing regularly for the past two or three years, and this year we’ll be doing *Ardiente Paciencia*, or in English, *Ardent Patience*. It is complicated. One of the signature programs is El Día de los Muertos, and it’s not only multi-disciplinary, it’s original, and it’s also in English and in Spanish. So the actors vary from Spanish-speaking actors to English-speaking actors, and everything in between, and there is no formula for doing that. It’s just part of the creative enterprise, and part of the culture, shaped to meet those objectives.

Audience: Have you found a need to expand beyond the Latino culture in order to meet financial needs? How has that, as you guys grow, how has that directed where you focus?

José Gonzalez: I mentioned earlier that one of the issues is that a lot of the negatives stereotypes – I grew up in South Texas, where those kind of things were commonplace, and pretty much in your face. I felt Oregon to be a very subtle community. Yes, I have some interesting stories to tell about that too. But certainly, prejudice, intolerance, and ignorance were there, as well. Surprise. But it was pretty quiet, so we really didn’t know where we stood. We saw that we could do what we wanted to do, which was to present quality work onstage, that it could serve as a tool, a special tool, to hopefully change the way people think. Rather than think that all Latinos comes from Mexico, or that all Mexicans just fell off a truck across the border – that we have hopes, dreams, aspirations that we share with everybody. I think we’ve been successful.

The majority of our audience is not Latino, and I think last year our audience just in one year increased 174 percent. Our challenge is now running in the other direction. We don't want to lose the connection we have with our Latino audience, but we don't want to lose our connection with the non-Latino audience either. Because, one thing at the Miracle is, we talk about being Latino, and we are, but we're not exclusive. That's one thing we've always said. This is not an exclusive club, and if you feel you're Latino, you're Latino. (Laughter.) Sometimes, people want to know what it takes to get a discount. And if you feel Senior, then you are Senior, you got a discount. I'm not going to check your ID. But I think that's very true – we love that kind of sharing. We encourage it. It's important, and it's a great way to learn from each other. It's a great way for Latinos to learn from each other, because we have Latinos representing every country in Latin America. We put them all on stage together, and they're all arguing about what you call "this," and how you pronounce "that," and they've all got different stories. There's a tremendous Latino cultural exchange going on. So our challenge is in the opposite direction, to try to maintain and grow Latino audiences. A lot of our initiatives, such as with Teatro Español, are trying to capture more Spanish-speaking audiences and truly integrate them into the arts and life of our community, as well as the greater community. And hopefully they'll become patrons of everybody later on.

Audience: I was wondering if you could expand on your statement that the arts should be paid for, and how that correlates to a production touring company, that brings work to people who can't pay for that. And also how you're positioned financially, and how that influences your view.

José Gonzalez: I think that my first experience regarding the necessity of paying for something came when I was working for Imagine Theatre, and I didn't know anything about that side. I'd peek into the office every once in a while, and they'd throw me out back into the dungeon. I found it very interesting that they wouldn't take a reservation from anybody unless it was paid for. I wondered about it. The logic of that came home when we produced our first show, because I found out that people who didn't pay for their tickets were the ones most likely not to show up. When we first started, when someone would call and want a reservation, those were the people who didn't show up. And I realized that it's because they had no buy-in, to make them show up. The other thing I noticed was that everybody wanted comps. One of the policies I developed was that we'll give out comps, but we won't give out reserved comps. You won't get a ticket until you show up, because over half the people who were given free tickets didn't show up either. That still goes today, again, because they have no buy-in. Along with comps, we had financial problems because we were underpricing our programs. We were forced to do that. And that puts a heavy responsibility upon us to make up the difference by getting donations from private foundations, governments, and individuals. It really affects how we go about doing our work. We don't like to think about that. I don't like to think about that, from a producer's standpoint. But money does affect the decisions that you make. As much as I try to avoid that from being a primary purpose, it does make an impact.

Also, there are a lot of interesting statistics out there, and one of the ones that I marvel at is a study, I think, made by the United Way, of charitable donations by ethnic communities. And interestingly enough, the highest charitable givers were the Latino people. But they didn't give in dollars. They gave in volunteer hours. I think that when people pay, it gives value, so that adds meaning to their experience. If they don't pay, or pay little, they don't value it. There was an interesting story – I forgot the name of the book, it was a marketing book – by one of the premiere advertisers. It was a consumer test, where they took two French cheeses: but it was the same cheese. Exactly the same wrapping, and they put them side by side. Nothing different, same labels and everything. And they put one price here, and twice the price here. And they found that most people bought the most expensive cheese, because they perceived

more value. I think of that story. So when we're pricing things, I think about what is the perception of value that I can communicate?

Audience: I wanted to say how much I appreciate that, and I'm going to take your words back to my boss. I'm Artistic Director of Rainier Valley Youth Theatre, and we work in the Rainier Valley Cultural Center, and we do these extraordinary programs with amazing artists. They all started years ago trying to get people, who couldn't afford to go, to come to the arts. So our ticket sizes are about \$5 and \$3, and they're vastly subsidized by grants. But the people in the neighborhood, who've just bought a \$400,000 house, don't come, because they think it's something silly, or that it's not quality. So I just wanted to say thank you.

José Gonzalez: I think we all have challenges like that. Certainly, I wish I could say I've overcome them. As to your final question, the theatre is actually doing quite well. I hate to say it, but I've got a lot of money sitting in the bank. (Laughter.) And this is rare! I've got this money, so there must be something wrong... (Laughter.)

Audience: I think there's an issue in our community, about how we're all growing together. And I'm interested in your experience in Portland, about coming together and trying to create more of a whole.

José Gonzalez: One virtue, one aspect, is that our building is quite expansive, so in addition to our theatre, we also have a scene shop and a smaller theatre, and we're very generous in letting the arts community use those. We do a lot of things opening the theatre whenever we can to outside productions, and most of the time, we try to help when we feel strongly about a production. One of the things that has been central to the organization's goals has always been to be receptive to collaborations and partnerships with other groups. We are more than happy to be approached by groups to participate in collaborative projects with them. And we're very serious about that, because most of these, quite frankly, are cooperative projects not only exchanging creative information, or a creative experience, but also because we've got the key to most of the Latino audience in town. And these other companies are very interested in expanding their audience. We really have to be a little bit more careful about who we work with, because we're interested in sincere relationships. We're not proprietary. We think our audience belongs to everybody, and everybody else's audience belongs to us too. But we want to make sure that the approaches are correct. Those are the difficult ones, because there are a lot of companies who aren't interested in doing Latino-specific theatre, and there's a lot of reasons, and we're not sure that all of them are willing to go the extra mile to make those connections to the community and to the Latino audience. We at least hope that those companies that have that desire, and are sincere about that, will be interested in working with us. We do seven productions a year, starting September through June. We have other visiting productions coming in. I worry a lot about not killing everybody, by accepting too many things coming in. We're a fool for love, for that kind of thing.

Audience: Do you work with Latino authors, as well as actors and directors?

José Gonzalez: All of what you said and more. Last year, we presented at the close of our season, a brand-new verse adaptation of Lope de Vega's *Fuente Ovejuna*. It's a Spanish Golden Age classic, and we commissioned a new translation – a translation in verse, which was very difficult to do from the Spanish to the English, and it was really well done. Just recently, we closed *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*, a brand-new play, a world premiere, by Quiara Alegria Hudes, who is a Puerto Rican author from the east coast. This will be the third world premiere that we've produced by her, and have worked on developing the show from raw material to full production on stage. Right now, I should be at tech rehearsal this morning for our *El Día de los Muertos* production, which is, not what I call spectacle, but one that in terms of Latino is

espectáculo, not in terms of the spectacle, but is an original program, music and dance, celebrating death and life. We also work with young people: we have a program we created two years ago called Pluma Nueva, which is a program designed primarily for role-modeling for Spanish-speaking high school students. We take them through a three-component program, and the first component is a writing workshop with professional writers, so they're doing creative writing. The second component is taking that creative writing and making a play out of that. And the third component is actually them performing in a play that they wrote themselves, and putting that on stage. It's a really heart-warming program, and one of the things we like about that is that kids keep coming back the next year.

One of the things I told you about was, early in my experience, I worked in community theatre. I got my first job at the Portland Civic Theatre in 1975, which would be thirty years ago. And my second job was also at another community theatre. I did a lot of Neil Simon, and did every musical under the sun – to the point where I couldn't remember what the last show was – they all looked the same. They were either bedrooms or musicals. One of the things I was determined to do was to try to do different stuff. So whenever you try to do something original and creative, it changes the whole dynamics of the company. You can develop scripts, and we've been doing it for eleven years, for a lot longer than that. So you know what you're doing in a sense, but you really don't *know* until you actually do it. I actually try to look for that, to try to shake up things, to not let us get sedate, not let us think it's just a production.

Audience: What would you say are some of the specific strategies that helped you get the audiences?

José Gonzalez: I think quality is number one. You've just got to do good work. Of course, letting people know about your work is also critical. Building those relationships. Media sponsors. But also I think it's quality: you can say anything you want about yourself, but if you can't put it onstage, then it's going to be disappointing. I still tap into that old rule of marketing, which is that the best marketing is word-of-mouth. It really does work. Last season, we did some good work, damn good. But we've done our bad stuff too. We've got some real losers that we don't even talk about. (Laughter.) With the nature of our company, it's impossible for me to talk about others, necessarily. A lot of it is by sense – I wasn't trained to be a producer. I was trained to put together sets and lighting. But a lot of it is to have a sense of where you are, and what the perceptions are.

Audience: Sometimes when theatres work with playwrights, they already have a standard way of doing things.

José Gonzalez: I wish we did. Although I think we're looking at that, as the process is developing. As you know, regarding Latino playwrights, Southwest Repertory was a resource for development and exposure for Latino playwrights for over twenty years. Last year, they closed their doors. They just shut it down and said, no más. Right now, we're actively engaged in setting up a conference that we're going to host next August. It's not really a conference as much as a convocation, where we're going to be inviting playwrights, directors, producers, bigwigs from across the country, to discuss how Miracle, as well as other Latino and other interested theatres, can develop development programs for playwrights – really, I don't care what color they are. But if we can come up with some kind of system that would support their work – because that is what in the balance. We've got to create opportunities to support this kind of work. We believe in miracles, and if that's the kind of miracle that it's going to show us, then that's it.

Audience: Do you have any links to Spain and Spanish artists?

José Gonzalez: There have been Spanish artists who have worked with us, but not any kind of official relationship, like country-to-country or cultural exchange. We've had artists onstage with a Spanish background. We work with Cuban artists. We've actually developed a show in Mexico, with a Mexican theatre company. Dañel went down there and worked with Actores del Método, Actors of the Method, and developed a play, and premiered it in Mexico City, and then toured it both in the United States and in Mexico. We're actively looking for those kinds of relationships. That is one of our primary goals, in our new strategic plan, to pursue more collaborations with Latin American theatre companies.

Audience: Regarding ticket sales, do you have any statistics?

José Gonzalez: One of the things that obstructed us in selling subscriptions, was that we were all over the place. We did so many different things, for different audiences. And we had to get that organized so that it made sense, to both ourselves and to other people, and find out how we could package it so that it made sense, as well. And about three years ago, I said, let's go ahead and do it. I didn't want to put a lot of money into it, because if you think back to three years ago, that was 2002, and the economy was really in the tank. So I said, we'll do a subscription program as a low-cost approach. We'll do it so we can do it the same way every year, and not spend a lot time on it, and just see what happens. As of last year, our subscriptions went up, I think it was, close to 200 percent. All the winds are telling us, this year is a terrible time for doing that across the country. But we still did it, with an increase that was just very slight. Because last year, with everything else, it was kind of a bad measuring year. The jumps were so extreme. And if you're coming off of 2002 and 2003, 2004 will look like heaven, comparatively speaking. We need that to even out, before we can really make some good judgments, see how healthy we are in the economy. But it still doesn't represent a big portion, and I'm not sure when we might want to jack that up. It also may be that we don't really have a subscription type of audience.

Anything that you can do to foster a relationship is good. And I'll tell you this: a lot of those folks who came to those town halls, particularly the second town hall, and they're folks who've been coming to the theatre for twenty years – so I think that anything you can do to personalize your relationship to your audience members, it's just like gold, it's money in the bank. I wish the extra time to greet them all at the door. Sometimes I'll do that. I'll come out and shake their hands as they're walking in, and thank them. Especially at a good show, when I want them to come back again. But those things are necessary. One of the things we still try to do rigorously, even though we've initiated online ticketing availability this year, is that we still take reservations in the office, and everybody in the office takes reservations, and we want to make sure that we're talking to our customers, and listening to what they say.

Audience: Do you do a lot of post-play discussions?

José Gonzalez: It'll vary. With our current play, *Elliot*, because it's a play about three generations of men who are soldiers, in Korea, Vietnam, and then Iraq, we had a post-play discussion for every show. Most of the participants in the discussions were veterans, from all of those years, who came in and talked about their experiences and why they made the decision to go. We will, but it depends on subject matter. I think we see it an amenity, in one way. But there's a whole sphere of education that surrounds us. We feel like we're constantly educating ourselves and everybody else. If you go to the website, we have volumes and volumes of material. We do a tremendous amount of research on every show, because we're dealing with so many different ideas and issues, from religious ideas to historical content. To inform ourselves, but also to inform our public. I think those things are good. We want our audiences to be informed, to be prepared to receive and document the experience. Not to say: this is how you think. But to say: These are things that you didn't know about it.

Audience: First I want to thank you for telling us such a success story. (Laughter.) Specifically, of a community-based theatre, and I feel like that's something that Seattle has kind of had a loss of for a while, with closing down the Group Theatre and the Alice B. But I'm thinking of the re-emergence of this kind of theatre in Seattle, with groups like BrownBox, or LiveGirls!. What kind of advice would you give a new company that wanted to perform as a specifically-based theatre, just starting out? What would you say should be their first step to establishing themselves?

José Gonzalez: That's a tough one. If I knew then what I know now, I would never do this. (Laughter.) I was really stupid and stuff. With our first show, we made money. And we thought, ah, this is a cakewalk. And then, forget it! I think if I could go back to back then, I totally agree with the young woman up here. Schools don't give you enough information on how to manage a business, and that I think is often what kills some real positive, wonderful enterprises. Young, creative artists come into them with talent, and there's something about the arts that says we're supposed to be antithetical to the business side. But at the end of the day, money needs to be gotten, props need to be bought, and so it really is important. Also, so many of our creative artists are coming out of schools: my experience at UCLA was that the university had to shelter the students from reality, from the marketplace, from the workplace -- everything was taken care of for you, and nurtured for you -- and then, when you graduate, you're thrown out there and it's a tough place to be. If there were more real connections between study and workplace, it would better prepare young people to do that. I think what's critical to all of that is: don't assume you know anything. That's usually the first turn-off. And maybe what we did was the right thing, which was hone yourself, and go around and meet everybody. Introduce yourself, tell them what you're doing, but don't expect anything. Just let them know who you are. Because those kinds of face-to-face connections, those personal connections, can really be beneficial for you later on. You just never know when that can work for you. Don't do it by a phone call, don't do it by a letter -- do it in person, or don't do it at all. That would be where I would start. Make sure you know what you're doing. That's the tough part, when you've got all kinds of vim and fire, and that can lead to grand assumptions that we can change the world and we know everything. That sometimes results in naïve material, naïve efforts, that end up turning off your audience. I'm not saying, don't do that; I'm saying, make sure you know what you're doing before you do, and really explore that without jumping the gun. It's tough. I endearingly call the young companies fly-by-nights, here today and gone tomorrow, it's terrible -- but what I appreciate is that they're always there. Every year, there's at least half a dozen or more young theatre companies starting up, friends that got together after college, or came from the same city, or just hanging around at the same time, and they've got these interesting names. When we started years ago, we were sitting around in the kitchen, and we had this little savings account, and not knowing anything, and there are all these established theatre companies around town.

I think if you look at our company -- it's sometimes difficult for me to talk about -- it's an incredible amount of work. I think Miracle has been Miracle, because basically the founders are still here. And that's twenty-two years, taking care of things. At the very beginning, when I did the non-profit incorporation papers, I recall reading them: so-and-so will create a corporation in perpetuity. I said, this is serious business, in perpetuity. It's forever, and we need to think of it as very, very serious. In the early years, it was all about making sure a foundation was laid. And that went for everything from learning how to do accrual accounting, and finding my dad's old textbooks, to taking workshops in grant-writing, to keeping every possible piece of data that I could possibly keep, and then learn how to understand and evaluate that data. I would drive Dañel nuts, saying: You've got to give me the numbers for this, and for that, and how many people did you perform for? And where are those evaluations from the teachers? Nagging nagging nagging nagging nagging nagging. But when you feel you want to make a

change, that's where that information becomes useful, because that's where you can really look and say, what do we know about ourselves? What do we know about our audience? What do we know about our work? What does our public say? Those are things that can't necessarily be taught, because it's not part of the organization, but it's just that part where you have everything there, so when you get to that next juncture, you can take that opportunity. Being ready for those opportunities, that's a lot of it. If you're not ready.... And I think people can do it. It's not just an accident. I think you can do it. It's a whole bunch of stuff together. (Applause.) It was interesting, because I got this in the mail the other day: It's from TCG Books (*Invitation to the Party*, published by Theatre Communications Group), it's about a new book that's written by Donna Walker-Kuhne, describing her methods of developing and sustaining non-traditional audiences. "This book is a practical and inspirational guide for ways to invite, engage, and partner with culturally-diverse communities, and to enfranchise them in the project of arts." I'm going to get this. I don't know if it'll be any good, but I'm going to give it a try. (Applause.)

Sam Read: I want to thank José Gonzalez for taking time out to come share his work with us today, and to let you know it's lunchtime!

END OF SESSION

Sheldon Epps

Joe McIalwain: My name is Joe, and I'm the current Vice President of the Board at Theatre Puget Sound. And on behalf of all of us, I thank you for being here. It's already been a great day, and I'm looking forward to this next part of the program. For our keynote of the weekend, we've invited Mr. Sheldon Epps to join us. Sheldon is a renowned director of both theatre and television. He serves as the Artistic Director of Pasadena Playhouse since 1997. He's conceived and directed the Duke Ellington musical *Play On!*, which received three Tony Award nominations and was produced at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, where it won four Jefferson Awards including Best Musical. He also conceived and directed the highly-acclaimed musical revue *Blues in the Night*. The Broadway production was nominated for a Tony Award as Best Musical of the Year, and the London production, which he also directed, was nominated for two Oliviers. Today, we come to address our need to constantly re-evaluate our progress, both in our artistic work and in our communities. I'm really looking forward to what he has to say. Please your hands together for Mr. Sheldon Epps. (Applause.)

Sheldon Epps: Thank you. Thank you very much. I wanted to do something slightly uncharacteristic for a group of theatre people. That is, I want to begin from a point of optimism and joy. (Laughter.) And I mean that sincerely. As I've been here for the last couple of hours, looked around, looked at the schedule, looked at the fliers, looked at the Seattle Theatre Guide, I realize that we do have a great deal of reason for optimism and joy, and whatever our challenges – and I much prefer that word working in the theatre, to problems – whatever our challenges, whatever our obstacles, whatever our disagreements, we must always maintain that optimism and that joy and that celebration of what it is we do, which is keeping the art of the theatre alive. Sometimes when I hear my bio like that, it just makes me very, very old. It's wonderful, but I start to feel I've reached my grand middle age. But it's great to look around this room and see so many youthful faces. And it is a great reason for joy and celebration. All of us are here to talk about to talk about the theatre, and that's reason enough for optimism and joy.

It's compounded for me by the fact that just last week, Saturday in fact, I was at a very, very similar conference in Los Angeles, as part of the Edge Festival at L.A. Theatre Center, where we talked about a lot of the same issues that we're talking about today, and you will be talking about throughout this conference. Mainly -- and it's so important to remember, sometimes I do just sit in my courtyard at the Pasadena Playhouse -- mainly, the reason that we should be so joyful and optimistic is that on this very day, especially this day, for many theatres it's matinee day, on this very day, there are hundreds of thousands of people in America going to the theatre. And sometimes, we worry about budgets, we worry about marketing, we worry about filling the house and all of that, and we forget that, every day of the year, there are hundreds of thousands of people who go to the theatre. I'm going to go to the theatre right after I speak tonight, because I love going to the theatre.

And even though we want our theatres to be more full, we want more activity all the time, we want more energy, we want more say in all of this, we want more opportunity, we want more work for everybody, there is a hell of a lot going on everyday single day in the American theatre. And we must remind ourselves of that, we must celebrate that, and we must remain joyful. The work is far too hard on any level to do it without joy. So, to get yourselves -- and I include myself -- to get ourselves into a position where we are dour and sad and frustrated and angry and pessimistic about what we do only increases our load. So right away today, I want to say, let's come from this place of optimism and joy, because I am truly joyful to be here to talk to you about the art of theatre.

I've had the chance to come to Seattle a couple times, to work at the Seattle Rep, with both of the shows that were mentioned, *Blues in the Night*, and also *Play On!* a few years ago. And I've also been here a few times as an NEA site-visitor. So I do know something of your city, and of the tremendous amount of activity, and the variety of activity that is going on here. So it's nice to be a part of your community, even for a day.

I want to tell you a little bit about my personal history at my own theatre. I'm going to tell you a story now that is absolutely true, but many people think I make up, because it sounds like it would be a public relations story. You're going to hear me talk several times over the course of the hour about my father. My father is a Presbyterian minister, who was sent to Los Angeles in the late 1940's from North Carolina, where he had a Presbyterian church. He was sent to the Compton community of Los Angeles, to start the first black Presbyterian church west of the Mississippi River. So, there's a man with a mission. And in fact -- this too is part of the truth of the story -- he left my mother to do that. At that time, especially to black people of the south, Los Angeles was considered the wilderness. Nobody knew about L.A. or Hollywood. No sane person would do that. But my father said, "I have a mission. I have something that God has told me to do, to go and start this church. So I am going." And they were a couple very much in love, and they had one child, my older sister. If not for that, I wouldn't be standing here at all today, because that relationship might have ended at that point. But because they did love each other a great deal, my mother saw the madness of her ways, or something -- and joined my father about six months after he left to start that church. And, they stayed together. His church was called Bellevue Community Church, not a name chosen by the hierarchy of the church, but a name chosen by my father. And he was very, very intent on putting that word into the name of the church.

The church grew to be one of the largest African-American congregations on the west coast, in about ten years. One of the tenets of my father's church, because he did think of it as a community service organization, was youth education, and in particular, youth education in the arts. So, my brother and my sister and I were constantly going to the L.A. Philharmonic, going to the opera, going to see dance companies. And when I was about eight years old, I got on a

bus and made what felt like a very, very long, long journey, from one side of L.A., way over the freeway, over a hill, over a bridge, and I got off the bus, and I went through the courtyard, and I went to see a play. That play was Carson McCullough's *Member of the Wedding* with Ethel Waters, in one of the last times that she performed on stage. And it would be a great story, a truly great story, if I could tell you that that was the day I decided to spend my life in theatre. But, that theatre was the Pasadena Playhouse, and that was the first place I saw a professional stage production, and the first time I saw a true diva on stage. One of your sessions talks about the power of the actor on stage – that was the first time I was affected by the capability of a great actor, Ms. Waters, who truly did everything that we talk about a great actor doing, investing from her soul to communicate with an audience, every single life experience she had had, and by that time, at that age, she had a lot of life experience. Investing that material with everything that she knew about life, about the art of theatre, about being a great actress and commanding an audience, and bringing it to that performance. If I'm really loose by the end of this talk, I'll show you Ethel Waters's bow – which, to this day, is one of my supreme theatrical experiences in a long life of going to the theatre, the great great *raison d'être* of the theatre.

Anyway, it was when I was eight years old when I saw this performance. Then my family moved to New York and New Jersey (Teaneck, New Jersey). That's where I started going to see Broadway theatre, and I was a very, very weird little kid. I would go to see *Hadrian VII*, I don't know why. I would go to see Chekhov plays, and I would go to see big Broadway musicals, and all kinds of things, but I would go to see things that I had no understanding of at all. Somehow I was just drawn to it. But I was one of those kids who would save up his nickels and his dimes and his quarters, and I would gather up fifty cents to ride the bus on a Saturday afternoon from Teaneck, NJ, into New York, and probably what was \$4.80 to buy a balcony ticket to go to see something playing at a Broadway theatre. Now, the bus is \$4.80, much less the theatre ticket. And I'd do that thing of hanging around, and going in at the second Act, and trying to figure out what the first Act had been about. I loved being in the theatre, and that's something I still love. I love the joy and the excitement of simply being in the theatre. That is why I want us to re-identify with that childlike excitement, not that *childish* excitement, but that *childlike* excitement that all of us at some time in our lives must have had that brought us to the creation of this art. If we can do that, and if we can remember that there are hundreds of people rediscovering that childlike excitement that go to the theatre and talk about the theatre, then one of the questions that this conference is probably asking, and the conference in L.A. last week was asking, is immediately answered quite simply. "Is theatre relevant?" Yes. End of discussion.

A lot of times at these conferences, this question comes up, and it seems intended to invite some long conversation or discussion, and long debate that can be very esoteric, and my answer is "Yes." As long as there are people who are willing to get out of their houses, get on the bus, get in the car, get on the subway, or walk to a theatre, it is relevant. Or it's so important that we make it more relevant, but it is relevant, and it always will be relevant. We think that we're so smart, that this question is coming up at conferences like this for the first time now; no, we're not. That question has probably been asked hundreds and hundreds of times. And the answer is as easy now as it was a hundred years ago, which is to say, yes, theatre is relevant.

So, many many years later, I came back to the Pasadena Playhouse as the Artistic Director. And frankly, the first time I directed at the theatre, I went through the courtyard one day, and I had this strange sense of *déjà vu*. I'd forgotten that that was the theatre where I saw *Member of the Wedding*. So actually, I had to go back and check, and it was the same theatre as my first experience of seeing a professional production. Unfortunately, by that time in the Playhouse's history, it had fallen on some really, really hard times. I was asked earlier today how old the Pasadena Playhouse was. In some ways, it's one of the oldest theatres in the country, in that it was built in 1925, and started into production in 1925. But it's had one of the most roller-coaster

histories of any theatre in America, including coming very close to being torn down in 1971 because nobody wanted it, and nobody was using it. There were horrible pictures of the way it looked. If you've ever been there, or if you see it now, you can see what a terrible, terrible tragedy that would have been. It's a beautiful, beautiful physical facility. And as the rendition of the song goes, they almost did pave paradise with a parking lot. That was literally what was going to happen. It was the community that came together, and said, we cannot allow this to happen. We cannot allow this rich treasure to be destroyed, to be turned into apartment complexes. We won't let that happen. And there were some people who did that movie-like thing, of chaining themselves to the chain-link fence, as their way of saying, "No, we won't let you tear this place down."

Shortly after that, the good thing that happened was that a developer came along, and with the city, they did in fact stop the destruction of the theatre. The downside of that was that the developer was profit-focused, and his investment, quite literally his financial, emotional, intellectual, and resource investment in that situation was to increase the value of the property around the theatre, not necessarily to do great art on stage. So, the theatre went through a very troubled period even after it was restored and reopened, because the goals were all wrong. They were all about: what do we do to increase the dollar-value of this property, and this immediate neighborhood, so that we can sell the land more profitably? That met with a bad end, as it had to, in about 1990 or so. Once again, this time when the theatre was unused for a little while, I directed there in 1991 or 1992, and over a few-year period, things settled down, resources became available, and I went to the theatre as Artistic Director eight years ago.

In some ways, even though that building is twenty-five years old, and even though there had been something called the Pasadena Playhouse on and off for about eighty years, in some ways, the theatre as a non-profit arts institution has only been alive for about ten years. And that is a great opportunity for us, but also a great challenge. When I got there, the theatre was pretty artistically moribund. There was not much going on there that was of energy, of any kind of excitement, of any kind of vitality. They had not had an Artistic Director in ten years, so I had to be a whole lot better than the last guy. So I took the job because it represented potential. It represented possibilities. I felt that given this newly-restored and beautiful building, and given the fact that we were in the city of Los Angeles, there was the potential to make really rich theatre here.

Now, I talked about the courtyard of that theatre, and walking through it when I was eight years old. One of the things that I did then, and one of the things that I still love to do, is to just sit there and watch the audience as it goes into the theatre. When I arrived at that theatre, eight years ago as Artistic Director, frequently I would sit in that courtyard and I would be the only person under 50, and I would be the only person of any color other than white. Absolutely true. That had to change. That had to change for a number of reasons. It had to change because of the color of the person who was now Artistic Director of the theatre. It had to change because the community of Pasadena, and even more than that, the greater Los Angeles community, is a richly diverse and eclectic community. We had the obligation to serve that community. And that had to change, frankly, because if it didn't change in terms of age, the audience that was there would be gone. That's a very big problem, for all the major theatres in America, and a challenge that we really do have to concentrate on and that we've got to find ways to change.

So, I set about changing the programming, somewhat recklessly, with the hope and the strong belief that if we started to offer programs for audiences of different colors and different ages, and we did it well, and – I'll get back to this later – if we let them know we were doing it, the audience would come. Fortunately, I was right. I don't take all of the credit for it. I didn't do all the work. I depended on the community of artists in Los Angeles. I did exert a bit of quality control, which that theatre had been missing sorely, and used some discretion about who was

going to be involved, who was going to direct the plays, be in them, who was going to design them. But I had so much to draw on, because L.A. can be, in addition to being a great industry town, it can be a great theatre town, as this is a great theatre town. So it's important for me to look for the people who share my passion about the creating of the theatre, and invite them into my house.

Sometimes I think, in being the Artistic Director of a major theatre but not a large physical theatre, it's like being in a house where you have a great kitchen. And you kind of say, yes, I want to cook in the kitchen sometimes, I really do, I like to cook, see what I can make. But sometimes I want to throw it open to other artists, and as long as you don't make a mess, or don't destroy everything, try to leave the kitchen as clean as you can, cook the meal you want to make. Serve up the meal that is the result of your passion, of your instincts, of your knowledge. So I started to find those people that had the same passion about the theatre that I did.

It was, however, a theatre that had this philosophy prior to my starting as Artistic Director: We do plays. That's all we do. So this theatre would turn on the lights about seven o'clock and let the ushers in, turn on the outdoor lights around 7:15, open the doors at 7:30. The people would come in, sit in the theatre, leave the theatre around 10:15, 10:30. Around 10:45, all the lights were off, and they didn't come back on until 7:00 the next day. And I said, this is a tragedy, this is a real tragedy. Here we have this tremendous resource in this building, and all we're doing is plays. The board would look at me as if I was speaking Sanskrit or Farsi, and say, "What are you talking about? This is what a theatre does." And I said, "Well, that's one of the things that a theatre can and should do, and yes, we must do those excellently. But we must also be a resource to the community.

That's directly tied to my father, to my father's philosophy, that a church is of and for the community. It's a tragedy if the only time the church is open is at 11:00 on Sunday morning, and it closes down when everyone else goes home. So my father started all these library programs, reading programs, cultural programs that I talked to you about. Sometimes I think maturity is just realizing how much you are like one or both of your parents. I am so much like my father in so many ways. And so I adopted his philosophy, that this theatre had to be of and for the people. That's really important, for all of us in theatres big, small, or in the middle have to realize: you've got to be of and for your community, not of and for yourself. Because if it's of and for yourself, don't expect anybody to come. Don't want them to come, because you can do that on your own. When a theatre is of and for your community, then the community starts to feel ownership of your theatre. They start to feel ownership and pride: it's a difference between rental and buying a house. If people buy a house, it's proven, they start to take better care of the property. They're very careful about where they put the trash, they paint it, they take care of the lawn and the flowers. It's all true. It's all scientifically proven. You can get the community to feel ownership of your theatres, then they will help you to take care of your theatres. Yes, you can get them to feel ownership by doing great work, but you've also got to offer them other things.

So, we started to offer in the community a variety of other programs. A couple of you have already mentioned to me that you're part of Directors Lab West, located in the Pasadena Playhouse. We started sponsoring a company called Parson's Nose, which does productions of classics for family audiences on Saturdays and Sundays. We have a small theatre upstairs, and we gave that theatre to a homeless theatre company called Furious Theatre Company, which does furious plays, far different from my own tastes. We started a program called Conversations at the Playhouse, which in some way, invites not necessarily artists involved in the particular production but artists who have some connection thematically or artistically to the kind of thing that we were doing. So, one of our conversations was a panel discussion about Tennessee Williams, when we did *The Glass Menagerie*, with several actresses who had

been in Williams's plays, or knew Williams, or worked with him at one time, and a director who had worked with him on one of his last productions.

It's my firm belief that if there is something that has turned the perception of our community around, about our theatre, it is the fact that the work has gotten better, but it's also that we've become a strong service organization, become a real community resource, and that we are feeding our community in so many different ways. And frankly now, when I say to the Outreach Program, "Show me a list of what we did in the last year, in addition to producing plays," I'm staggered. I'm really staggered. Because if you're intent on just doing plays, you tend to forget in September what you did in February and March. It's dropped out of your mind, because you're really thinking about what you're going to do next August. So, I did once ask them, put down a list, for grant-writing frankly, and it was really staggering. And the reason we were able to do that without as great of an increase in the staff as we should have had, is because the community got involved in those programs. They got involved in asking for them, they got involved in working on them, and they got involved in supporting them. They got involved with starting to make greater contributions to the theatre because they felt we were operating as a wealthy theatre company, but also as a resource.

Any of you who are running theatres or hope to, I encourage you to find ways to look beyond the programming on the stage, to those things you can nurture your communities with. Nurture the young people. This is a theatre that had not done in forty years a student matinee. That is a tragedy. That's a great tragedy. And now we do them for every single production that we do, sometimes three or four times. I personally believe that that's the most important kind of outreach to young audiences. We don't send plays out to schools. We're not saying that that's not valuable. But I personally believe that the most valuable thing you can do is to get 8, 9, 10-year-olds to come to your theatre, and have the same first-class theatre experience that you and I do. That's what we do, and in fact, one of the most glorious moments I've ever had, after the first or second student matinee we had was: a little boy came in with his family. He was about ten years old, and he recognized me from the program, and he came over and said, "You're the Artistic Director, aren't you?" I said, yes. He said, "You're doing good. I like this play." I said, "Thank you, I'm glad you did." He said, "I was here last week for the student matinee, and I dragged my family here tonight." Isn't that a great story? It's a wonderful story. That young man, ten years old, became an advocate for the theatre, an advocate for our theatre. He became an activist for our theatre.

One of the things that we most strongly face, and any of you who are on Boards of Directors for your theatres, is how you convert your Boards of Directors from supporters to activists. How do you do that? I'm still fighting that, and I fight that every week of my life at the theatre. For that young man to become an activist in that way, and get out and spread the word, is a great, great find. If you find ways to do that, you've served that young man, you've served his family, and you've served his community in a tremendously dynamic way.

I want to talk a little bit – I'm going to take this jacket off, because I'm so passionate, I've made myself hot. (Laughter.) I want to talk a little bit about – and we talked a bit about this in the last session that I sat in on with the equally passionate Russian gentleman [Leonid Anisimov] – about the challenge that exists for all of us of keeping our theatres alive, literally alive, and vital, versus people who watch TV, movies, concerts, all of that. It is a great challenge, there's no doubt about it. I'm going to tell you a story – it's about sausages. I heard this story on NPR a few years ago, and I said, that's a great story for the creation of theatre. There is a huge sausage company, and I can't remember the name of it, and it's been enormously successful about sixty years, let's say. And one of the things they were known for was the quality and the taste of their sausage is the fact that the sausage, after you cooked it up, had a very distinctive color and a very distinctive texture. The company was so successful that they built a new multi-million

dollar plant which was completely automated. No reason for anybody to ever have to touch the sausage in the process. It went from this part of the process, to this part of the process, to the cooking part of the process, to packing, to being out the door, without anybody ever having to touch the sausage. Because they push buttons, they work with machinery, with computers, they did all that, but nobody ever touched the sausage.

They opened the factory, and the sausage was wrong. That distinctive color that it had, and that snap and that distinctive texture that it had, was gone. It was gone. They spent millions of dollars to build this plant, with all of the high-tech knowledge they could get, and they ruined the product. They went into deep deep panic, when they started shipping the product, and people were complaining, "What happened to that great color I used to love? That great snap I used to love? It's not happening anymore." And sales started to die. They went through the factory, they went through every piece of machinery, they brought consultants in, they did this, they did that, and they could not figure it out. They fine-tuned everything that they could fine-tune in the machinery, but the sausage kept coming out the exact same way: missing that distinct quality that had made the sausage so successful. Finally, after about two years of panic, somebody said, "Do you remember Ned?" And the scientists turned around, and the mucky-mucks turned around, and the directors... and said, "Who's Ned?" Well, Ned was the guy who used to pick up the sausage, he worked at nights, he pretty much worked alone or with his son. Ned was the guy who went in at ten o'clock, pick up the sausage, and walk it from where it went into the casings down this long hallway, around the corner, and through that cooling vent, and then he'd take it to the cooking room. They said, "Oh my god, that's the problem. Ned is gone." It was that time that it took for Ned to pick up the sausage, walk it through the changes in temperature, down that hallway, through the cooling room, and put it down, that changed the texture of the product: changed the texture of the sausage, so that when someone came in the next day and actually put it in the cooker, then it became red and achieved that texture.

Okay, so what does that have to do with the theatre? What I'm saying is, what we cannot allow – otherwise we're going to miss that red hotness that we get to – is for our theatres to become high-tech theatres. It is the hands-on process, it is the extra time, it is the passion that Ned exerted for forty years, before it was decided that nobody actually needed to touch the sausage. It was the touch of the sausage that he gave to the product for forty years that made it what it was. I'm starting to see a lot of theatre that has no hands-on process. I'm starting to see a lot of theatre that has no Ned to infuse it with his personal passion, to walk it down that hallway. As long as we keep walking our theatres down the hallway, and being hands-on about it, infusing it with our passion, we will make something that will have value beyond film, beyond TV, or any other form of high technology.

I just told you about a program called Conversations. About two months ago, we were doing *Purlie* at my theatre, and so we invited Ruby Dee out to have a conversation, and talk about politics. Ruby is a brilliant, wonderful woman. She is a writer, story-telling, a producer, but she's not really of this earth. You kind of have to rein her in, in order to have a conversation with her. She'll be all over the place. Fascinating, but all over the place. And she told me, before we went out to have a conversation, that she would like to end the evening with a piece of poetry. Okay, we went out, had the conversation, and I swear to you, it was like having really good sex with someone for an hour, because you had to be so in tune to where she was and what she wanted. I was exhausted! And I said, okay, it's time for your poem. And she got up and started to wander, to go off on something, and I thought, she's forgotten remember the poem, she doesn't know where she is, she doesn't know what she's supposed to do. I was just about to step over, and she says, "Today!" And I tell you, the lights, the air, and the electricity in that room, changed. Literally, you could see people, with the force of that human voice, and the emotion that was driving it. And this woman, who had fluttered and fluttered all over the universe for the last hour, for the minute was completed focused, on that material, and that

audience. The movies are never gonna do that. The movies are never going to change the air in the room, and the light, and the electricity, the way that actress did, in that word, and for the next sixty seconds. I've been at that theatre now for eight years, and it's the most exciting moment I've had since Ethel Waters, since that bow – when suddenly, in that room, that community was *drawn* to that actress and the power of her story. That's what we have to offer, is that kind of human contact. If we can get an actor to open their soul in that way, and deliver their soul to ours, with heat, with intensity, and with passion, then you've got something that you cannot get on Channel 4. That's a very special thing. No amount of technology is ever going to deliver that.

I want to leave a few minutes for some questions, if you have some. But just for a moment, I want to go back to my father, and tell you another story like the one I just told you. I used to go and watch my father preach every Sunday morning at eleven. And I was a little bit in awe and in wonder that he could hold the stage like that. So when I was old enough, I said to him, "How do you do that? How do you make that connection with the congregation? How do you create that fervor in the pulpit?" And he said, "Well, I study during the week. I learn my task. And then on Sunday morning, I set myself on fire." You find something to set yourself on fire, so we can watch you burn. That's what we've all got to do about our work, from director, to actor, to playwright, to dramaturg – find a way to set yourself on fire, because it is that fire, that glorious passion, and you will burn, and it'll be worthwhile. Thanks. (Applause.)

Karen Zeller Lane: The bow.

Sheldon Epps: You really want the bow?

Audience: Yes!

Sheldon Epps: All right. Many of you probably know *Member of the Wedding*. Ethel Waters plays the servant, and it's not the biggest part in the play. The biggest part is actually that of the young girl. But it's no small part. So she runs about, she sings, but energetically. So, the curtain goes down, and the curtain comes up for the bow. And Ethel Waters is really old by this time, tremendously dynamic, but really old by this time. And the entire company comes out and does their bow, and the little girl comes out, and does her bow. And we're expecting Ethel Waters, but the curtain comes down. We think, Oh my god, the woman's dropped dead. And it stays down for a long time. We're sort of sitting there, and slowly the curtain starts to rise back up. And this woman, who's been all over the stage, all night long, is sitting in a rocking chair, up stage. Finally you see her. Of course, the applause just went up, because you're so glad she's alive. It's Ms. Waters, sitting in her rocking chair. Finally, Ms. Waters looks up.... [demonstrates sitting position, to uproariously audience laughter]. This is the woman who's been running around the stage all night long, and now, is in this little rocking chair. And for us, she holds out her hand, and the little girl comes out. And it lifts her out of this chair... [demonstrates bow, to uproariously audience laughter]. And in perfect synch, that curtain comes down. And Ms. Waters has taken her bow. (Applause.)

Sam Read: I wanted to have another round of applause for all of our guest speakers today. Thanks. (Applause.) We're having a reception in the lobby, beer and wine, so join us.

END of SESSION

Daniel Banks

Karen Zeller Lane: Welcome. I'll begin as people continue trickling in. I'd like to first do two things: to acknowledge current board members or past board members. If you could stand, if you're in the room, if you're a board member. Thank you for your service. (Applause.) The other thing I wanted to do is – we didn't do this yesterday – but invitations were sent to a broad population of people, including school programs in both Oregon and Washington. And I wanted to acknowledge that both yesterday and today were in attendance a large group of students from Central Washington University, who came out from Ellensburg to be with us. And from what I've heard, they've really added a great element to our discussions, and I want to thank them for being here. (Applause.) With that, I'm going to turn it over to Sam Read, our fabulous Membership and Programs Manager. (Applause.)

Sam Read: Hello, everyone, welcome back. Our first guest this morning is joining us from New York City, via Denver. He's an international director and choreographer, having worked with theatres like the Belarussian Drama Theatre, the National Theatre of Uganda, and Singapore Repertory Theatre. He also works with the New York City Hip Hop Theatre Festival, and is a full-time faculty in the department of Drama at New York University. In addition to that, he is also the recipient of both the Drama League's Special Interest Residency Grant, as well as the National Endowment for the Arts/Theatre Communications Group Career Development Program grant for Directors. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming Mr. Daniel Banks. (Applause.)

Daniel Banks: **Good** afternoon, everybody! Good afternoon!

Audience: Good afternoon!

Daniel Banks: I'm going to have to readjust to standing at a podium, because I've been at Naropa Institute in Boulder where I'm visiting faculty for two weeks, and because it's a university focused on Buddhist practice and how that relates to theatre arts, I've had a nice little mat to sit on, and it was very egalitarian, and this is different. First, I would like to thank Karen and Sam and Frank Lawler for the invitation to come here and reflect on the relationship between theatres and communities. They have been magnificent hosts and I want you to know how well they represent this organization. So let's please take a moment to thank them. (Applause.)

Given that I'm in Seattle, and that's not the only reason, but I also just need to speak the name AUGUST WILSON. He made Seattle his home, I had hoped to see him on this trip, and he and his plays transformed US theatre and theatre audiences. So actually what I would like to say, is, if anyone here has been moved by a play of his, has seen a play of his, has been provoked by his work, make some noise, and let him know that right now. (Applause and shouts.) Thank you. Sam mentioned that I worked with the National Theatre of Uganda, and I directed *Jitney* there, and actually had seen the New York production two years prior, so I feel like I have a special relationship to that work.

This is a topic that is of crucial importance to me for many reasons. But before I dive into it, I actually want to flip the typical structure of putting the question and answer portion at the end – I'd like to hear from you first. Here are my two questions that I would like to hear people respond to: What did you come here specifically to learn or discuss? What are your hopes for this session?

Audience: I'm Joe Boling, and I'm a theatre junkie. I joined TPS in 1998 as a result of the announcement of the (TPS) conference, and this organization is doing something with this community that I'm interested in. And how can I get involved with this, because I'm not an

artist, I'm not a designer... But way down at the bottom, it said, Volunteer. A-ha! I can do that. I joined TPS in 1998, and I've done everything that TPS has offered ever since, regardless of what's proposed, what the break-out sessions are going to be, I come and I find something to do for the two days.

Daniel Banks: Thank you. What did you come here to explore, to learn, or what do you hope to get out of this?

Audience: I'm Patricia Britton, and I work at Seattle Repertory Theatre by day. I'm also a performer occasionally, still. I think that we get insulated in our little worlds. Your nose is to the grindstone, and you do your work. Sometimes, you don't get a chance to talk about the work that you're creating or participating in, on a day-to-day basis. And what I hope to get out of this session is to hear other people's thoughts on who we are and what we're doing.

Audience: I'm Michelle Lockhart, with Burnt Studio Productions. A couple things I really wanted to get out of this whole conference is: we're in a state of evolving as a community, and we've done some really incredible work and we've got some really challenging times, and I think we're finally starting to enter a certain momentum with both. We need to learn to look past the stage, and connect with our community again, connect with Seattle again, and what we really want to do artistically. But what do our audiences need from us too? So it's not just our hope that people come to see, but that people value what they see. I'm interested in hearing – I think we're so insulated in our own offices, and it kind of becomes this little secret of how you just make it day-to-day, and we don't share that. And we need to be more willing to share that, and work as a theatre community, to overcome problems as we grow. So that's what I'm interested in.

Audience: I'm a transplant from New York, who's come to UW's PATP program as a performer. In the three or four years that I've been here, I've been pleasantly blown away by the intensity of devotion of a lot of theatre companies. But they seem very insular, with "this company" and "this company," and never the two shall meet. There seems to be not only a need to form a community with our audiences, but also with each other.

Audience: My name is Teresa Thuman, and similar to what others are saying: Something I recognize in the Seattle theatre community, for whatever reason, whether it's time or money, sometimes how we experience theatre is through our media or through our online sites. And the actual experience of being inside a theatre is very hard to get to. So there's one issue of practicality, regarding our day-to-day lives. And in addition to that, working in isolation as artists, working in isolation in institutions, we recognize this common love and passion for the experience of being in the theatre at the same time.

Audience: Echoing all these things I've already heard, but one of the things that's very Seattle-specific for me: there's an enormous wealth of theatre in this town, and amazing work going on. We have over 140 organizational members. That's amazing. But I know a lot of these companies, and I still am one of these companies. It's hard as hell to get people to come out. There's a huge amount of supply and not enough demand. And I think that one way to address that is what we're talking about today. Because at least from my perspective, with my own company, I haven't really done anything to make a relationship with the community. I started out fresh out of college: I want to do a show, I want to start my own company, so it's all about what I wanted to do, and not about actually becoming a non-profit, which we did, which means we're meant to serve the community. So I think it's a matter of finding that transition, and how we can build those bridges and grow in that way.

Daniel Banks: So one of the things that I hear is that there's a real need for thinking about this question of community development, and there's a real need for actually building community relationships among yourselves. If there is time for some of that discussion at the end, we'll see how that goes. I have actually prepared my own discussion, but I'll try to leave as much time as possible at the end. Here is how I'd like to use our time together. I'll riff for a bit to start off the discussion, then I will share with you some thoughts about this topic and models of community engagement from colleagues around the country, and then we'll have a chance to share amongst ourselves approaches you have tried, dreams you have of projects you'd like to try, that perhaps you want to get some feedback on, and, of course, any responses you have to my provocations here.

I also just want to mention that it's not my preferred style to read from a paper, and I hope that it will be more interesting to you than it would be if I were sitting in your place. But there is specific information and specific voices that I wanted to share, so I found the need to structure my thoughts in particular ways, and that's why the paper is here. I would also like to assure you I have not plagiarized José Gonzales and Sheldon Epps, that I was really pleasantly surprised to find the overlap in specific terms and words and philosophies that were discussed yesterday. But I assure that the paper was written before I came, but it does point to the similar concerns that folks are having from across the country....

I also want to say, at the outset, before I launch into the discussion, I have not a single doubt that what you do is hugely difficult, that each of you works inhuman hours, and that you want the best for your theatres and communities. I would never presume to say what institutions should do or how they should do it. I also think that the smaller the institution, the more direct communication tends to be with a community – by necessity, as small institutions look to their immediate communities for day-to-day support and resources. There are also fewer channels to impede this relationship. And since many of you come from smaller size organizations, I may be preaching to the converted. Nevertheless, my hope is to open a dialogue so that we all have an opportunity to learn from each other, to find inspiration or concrete workable ideas how to implement programming that you would like to see happen, or even to consider new programming that you are inspired to dream up.

I want to begin with a few quotes to warm us up a bit:

Bertolt Brecht wrote: "A theatre which makes no contact with the public is nonsense,"

Brazilian practitioner and activist, Augusto Boal, wrote: "...theatre is a weapon...For this reason the ruling classes strive to take permanent hold of the theatre and utilize it as a tool for domination...But the theatre can also be a weapon of liberation,"

Eugenio Barba, director of the Odin Teatret, Denmark – "The choice is the market or revolution."

I don't mean to suggest that a revolutionary theatre model is the only valid kind of theatre. I also don't believe that things always fit as neatly into the binaries that Barba suggests. But I also believe that all performance is inherently political, either by what it says or communicates, or by what it does not say – and that we had better be aware of what politic we are embodying in our work. I think far too often as a community of artists we put out work that has ambivalent political messages because of our sometimes naïve insistence that what we do is art, not politics.

As an example of this completely interwoven relationship, let's consider Aristotle's *Poetics*. Many of us studied this book in high school or college – in fact, where I teach, in the

Undergraduate Drama Department at New York University, it is the only text that each teacher must put on his or her syllabus for the Introduction to Theatre Studies course that each of our 350 freshman take. What many folks are not aware of is that Aristotle also wrote a book called the *Politics*. Thus, the same man codified both the artistic and political systems of his time, over 2000 years ago, and each of these systems is still in evidence and wide circulation today in this country. The so-called well-made play and our system of government are deeply intertwined. And the well-made play, in terms of what it asks of an audience – its passivity, its quiet attention, the hierarchy of characters onstage in terms of leading roles, supporting roles, and chorus – models the behavior necessary for the maintenance of what we call a democracy. However, the result of the way we structured our Democratic process is that our system looks actually more like a plutocracy, a governing class of the wealthy (it has also been argued that we have an oligarchy, “Government by a few, especially by a small faction of persons or families”). Even, as has been much discussed in the last two elections, our procedure of electoral college is not purely democratic, according to Aristotle’s *Politics*.

Just so you don’t think I’m just telling you this, I actually want to read you a couple statements about democracy. Aristotle writes, “There are two main aspects of freedom: 1) being ruled and ruling in turn, since everyone is equal according to number, not merit, and 2) to be able to live as one pleases.”

He also writes, [1278b](#): 8-12: “The system of government of a city-state is the arrangement of its various institutions, especially those having authority. In a democracy, the people ([demos](#)) have authority.”

He also writes – and I just found this this morning, “The real difference between democracy and oligarchy is between poverty and wealth. Wherever the rulers, whether they be a minority or a majority, owe their power to wealth, that is an oligarchy. Wherever the poor rule, that is a democracy. Usually, where the rulers hold power by wealth, they are few, but where the poor rule, they are many, because few men are rich but all are free [if they are citizens in a city-state], and wealth and freedom are the grounds on which the two groups lay claim to government.”

I want to be clear, I am not making a value judgment, for the purposes of this discussion, about our system of government. But it points to the slippery relationship we have to language in this country, using words to mean things they do not actually mean, starting with the structure of our governing system. Therefore, as artists, and especially as theatre artists who engage word and image so prolifically, I believe that it is our responsibility – (1) to be rigorous about the meaning of what we say, (2) of how we say it, and (3) the wide cultural repercussions of writing stories large onstage.

What, you may ask, does all this have to do with AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT and COMMUNITY RELATIONS? It reveals the relationship between macro and micro – that is to say, what happens on a macro level trickles down and influences the structure of relations on a micro level. Thus, a government’s relationship to the people sets the tone and models the structure of smaller institutions and organizations – from corporations, to arts and educational institutions, to families – possibly even our relationships to ourselves (for, after all, one of the terms for government is the “[body politic](#),” which reveals that conflation of macro and micro). I believe it is imperative for institutions who consider themselves to be *for* the people, to look carefully at their relationships *with* the people. This is especially crucial for socially minded organizations that, nevertheless, do have internal and external hierarchies. The ARTS and EDUCATION are both representative of this. Let me give you a prime example of how this relationship works:

As cited above, Brecht believed himself to be *for* the people – from the early days, his conception of theatre grew out of his fascination with Marxism and a desire to create a people’s theatre – one that told stories of ordinary, working class and poor people, and that kept the audience awake and engaged. As many of you will be aware, he rejected a “culinary” theatre, one which only appealed to the senses. He created his famous *verfrumdunseffekt* or “estrangement effect” as a way of keeping the audience critically engaged DURING the performance, creating moments of strangeness and theatrical awkwardness so the audience would have a questioning, critical response AS they watched the show. This process, thus, rendered the audience active participants in the creation of their own experience and response to the event, not lulled by the “poetics” of the well-made play or manipulated by the purging effects of catharsis associated with Greek tragedy. As Brecht himself wrote, he wanted to “appeal... to the spectator’s **reason**” and create for them an “exercise in complex seeing.” Augusto Boal, influenced by Brecht, similarly also rebelled against the notion of catharsis, calling it “Aristotle’s coercive system of tragedy,” explaining that, when an audience leaves the theatre “purged of pity and fear,” which is how Aristotle described catharsis, they are also purged of the desire to act and to implement change – thus his statement about theatre being a “tool for domination.”

Later in life, Brecht realized the contradiction of his earlier tenets and practices. He spent his career developing theories and techniques to reforge an artist-audience relationship. But, this relationship, although resulting in compelling theatre, was subject to a reiteration and repetition of a certain power dynamic, what German philosopher Theodor Adorno referred to as Brecht’s “coercive domination.” As Walter Benjamin wrote, Brecht believed that the audience “should be educated.” Educating the audience, I contend, reveals a hierarchy. Brecht had pre-determined of his audience who they were and what they needed.

Aristotle advocated tragedy as a form which provokes “recognition...a change from ignorance to knowledge.” Brecht’s short *Lehrstück*, or learning plays, essentially attempted to do the same thing by presuming audience ignorance or political complacency. Moreover, Brecht assumed that his audience wanted to be empowered, wanted to be engaged critically, wanted to be revolutionary. Brecht thus worked within the same discursive model as the “culinary” or sedative theatre, which he deplored as “foisted” on the audience – his dialectical theatre acted *on* the audience with a motive or bias – in this case pro-sedition (as compared to the sedative theatre which was, for him, anti-sedition and pro-complacency). To cite Brecht’s own language, which he used to indict the Bourgeois theatre, he too was “selling” – but in this case what is sold is revolution, not complacency. What we have here are two ideological machines at war: Brecht’s polemical theatre and culinary theatre’s complacency. In 1934, Brecht admitted, “The struggle against ideology has become a new ideology.”

Brecht ultimately conceded the incomplete nature of his discourse and praxis. Benjamin reported that Brecht said, “‘A deep need makes for a superficial grasp’” (Benjamin 1977: 95), and Brecht himself wrote that *Verfremdungseffekt* “takes it for granted that society considers its condition to be historic and capable of improvement” (Brecht 1957: 277). He also began to identify the coded privilege of certain audiences, and for whom he was playing. He wrote: “Enjoyment of learning depends on the class situation. Artistic appreciation depends on one’s political attitude.” He acknowledged that a “balance” between “didacticism and entertainment” might be a useful strategy, one which would open the theatrical experience to a wider public.

ORIGIN OF QUESTION – FREIRE

I am reviewing here Brecht’s dilemma – and suggesting there is something crucial in understanding his presumptions in relation to his audience – because Brecht is often held up as the father of revolutionary theatre in the west. Yet he was so set on doing something FOR his audience, that he neglected to do work WITH his audience. Brazilian theorist, Paulo Freire, in

his groundbreaking book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, discusses this very dynamic in regards to a process of “educating” and “liberating” those who are oppressed in society. Freire writes:

“If revolutionary leaders deny this right to the people (to engage in critical thinking and to be part of the critical process), they impair their own capacity to think – or at least to think correctly. Revolutionary leaders cannot think *without* the people, nor *for* the people, but only *with* the people. The dominant elites, on the other hand, can – and do – think without the people – although they do not permit themselves the luxury of failing to think *about* the people in order to know them better and thus dominate them more efficiently. Consequently, any apparent dialogue or communication between the elites and the masses is really the *depositing* of ‘communiqués,’ whose contents are intended to exercise a domesticating influence” (126).

Freire continues by explaining that, “What distinguishes revolutionary leaders from the dominant elite is not only their objectives, but their procedures. If they act in the same way, the objectives become identical. (166)

Freire proposes an alternative model to what he calls the “banking” theory of education, where the educator provides the information and the student stores it up, passive, without self-determination or voice. I find some of what he writes about the teacher-student relationship useful in thinking about the artist-audience relationship. For example, Freire writes:

“The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them.”

He also explains, “Those who use the banking approach, knowingly or unknowingly (for there are innumerable well-intentioned bank-clerk teachers who do not realize that they are serving only to dehumanize), fail to perceive that the deposits, themselves, contain contradictions about reality.....reality is a process undergoing constant transformation” (61).

He concludes, “It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their world and ours” (85).

In the not-for-profit world, we often work under such time constraints and with such limited resources that Arts institutions sometimes forget to review and analyze the vectors of power inherent in a model of artistic “programming.” This can risk looking like the banking method – in other words, it is as if we are saying that we know what is good for the audience, what messages or content an audience “needs” to hear or experience, how we can “stretch” our audience or help them “grow.” Does this sound familiar? (Laughter.) It is, quite simply, a paternalistic relationship. What is, of course, missing in creating a more balanced equation is the question of “consent.” When it comes to leadership – specifically revolutionary leadership – activity that can change the injustices of the social order, and can *liberate*, Freire suggests a model of investigators going into communities to cull information and local representatives working together. Both sit at the table together and discuss the findings of the investigators – “representatives of the inhabitants participate in all activities as members of the investigating team” (104).

ARTISTS AND AUDIENCES

I have often wondered how Freire's model of revolutionary leadership would work for arts institutions, especially theatres. Many theatres are faced with declining audiences and spend numerous hours and significant parts of their budgets attempting to develop marketing campaigns to, as is so lovingly said in England, "put bums in seats" (or butts in seats, as you say here in Seattle! that was from yesterday), I have been left to consider, since many, if not all, of these institutions are doing good work, why are audiences not coming? I don't believe that it is only a question of cost or the proliferation of film and television. I have often heard the acknowledgment that rock concerts, raves, and other popular cultural performance events continue to thrive, with high ticket prices. Why do potential audience members, then, feel disenfranchised and phlegmatic, or even antipathy, about what we do in the theatre? What, I wonder, would happen if we really engaged them – not simply in dialogue after a few shows, but in the life of the institution? Would there be a way to open the door to the type of dialogue with "the people" that, as suggested by Freire, leads to lasting change, understanding, and liberation?

In my mind, this would take the form of (and here I find myself echoing ideas you have already heard yesterday): 1) creating programming around shows that could extend the dialogue about the work past a post-show, possibly offering learning opportunities to audience members about the issues or style and structure of the work we do; 2) creating other kinds of community activities that happen at the theatre so that the theatre belongs to the community and the community has a voice in creating programming that it needs; 3) employing a more diverse cross-section of the community, so that friends and family of the employees would be introduced to a theatre they may not know in order to support their loved ones; and, finally, 4) involving or engaging the community in season planning -- not to have the community dictate the play choice, but to be a partner in it. This may simply mean having a series of town hall meetings where the artistic directors discuss their choices and audience members have an opportunity to reflect on their experiences. Churches, synagogues, and other religious and social groups do this community building well – people come to their sites looking to have a need fulfilled – spiritually, intellectually, socially, psychologically – whether it is Bible study, counseling, sisterhood and brotherhood meetings and events, potlucks, or community dialogues, the institution is of, by, and with the community. Clearly our theatres can serve a similar function in and across communities. We can bring people together in a lighted room, as opposed to only a dimly lit room – who might not necessarily have an opportunity to meet – and there have meaningful interactions.

I attempted to raise the question of the feasibility of such a model at the TCG conference here in Seattle in June, and received responses that spanned the gamut from assent, that this was a model worth considering and exploring, to shock (and perhaps even a little rage) that I would suggest that artists let their audiences "dictate" their art – that it is the artist's responsibility to create, unhindered by the concerns, desires, or taste of her audience.

First let me say, I don't disagree with this last point of view. I think there are many kinds of art, and many kinds of artists – and all are necessary and valid. Moreover, I don't see it as an either/or proposition – either we maintain artistic autonomy or we can no longer create rigorous, compelling, and professional art and programming that has integrity. However, one of the challenges facing theatres right now is a decline in audience and revenue. Mark Shogoll from the firm Shogoll Research (I'll introduce him more formally later), conveys that one of the top two complaints that former subscribers have is "why don't they ask me what I want to see." Thus, we can't really have it both ways at the same time. Opening dialogue and sharing the mic is very different than giving up artistic control. And why do we want control, anyway? (Laughter.)

This brings me back to Freire. We must understand the inherent power dynamics in our relationships. Freire writes about education:

“The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students’ creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed. The oppressors use their “humanitarianism” to preserve a profitable situation. Thus they react almost instinctively against any experiment in education which stimulates the critical faculties and is not content with a partial view of reality but always seeks out the ties which link one point to another and one problem to another (60).”

How does this, unbeknownst to us, mirror and reflect the structure of our relationships with audiences and communities?

Given the range of responses and the number of questions these responses provoked for me, I wanted to hear more. So in preparation for today’s talk, I spoke with a small group of colleagues about this topic. I attempted to get a diverse cross-section of voices, in terms of theatre size, geographical locations, the population it serves, and the structure of the organization. I spoke and corresponded with Bart Sher about the American cycle and his work at the Intiman Theatre, Henry Godinez, Artistic Associate of the Goodman Theatre in Chicago and co-founder and past Artistic Director of Teatro Vista, Susan Booth, Artistic Director of the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, Michael Rohd, Artistic Director of the ensemble Sojourn Theatre in Portland, OR, Mia Katigbak, Artistic Director of National Asian American Theatre Company, in NY, and Terrence Spivey, Artistic Director of Karamu House Theatre in Cleveland. I asked them a series of questions:

What are your feelings about the role(s) of our theatres in the communities that they serve or in which/near which they are?

- What methods of community engagement have you tried or thought about? What has worked? / What has been challenging? (What have the benefits been? Have there been any costs?)
- What would your advice be to others who are looking to create similar programming or are thinking along similar lines?
- Who have been your greatest supporters in expanding the theatre's programming and identity in this way? What resistance, if any, have you encountered?
- Has this community involvement extended into mainstage programming - taking the community's/communities' needs and desires into account when building a season? How could it (or should it)?

These are some of the responses I received:

I have heard **Susan Booth** talk about the Alliance not as a Community Theatre, but as a Communities theatre. I remember conversations she and I had when she moved to Atlanta from the Goodman in Chicago, and she was extremely concerned with accessing and reaching out to the various communities in Atlanta. Susan was at the panel at the TCG conference, and responded to me publicly, and then she and I continued this dialogue via email and phone. She wrote to me:

“In determining the best programming for a not for profit theatre that resides in a community, it seems necessary to listen to the conversations of that community – but in order to render one’s

self market *aware* – not to render one’s institution market *driven*. It is sometimes a listening that is mistrusted or misinterpreted by artists in the field, but as an artist in the field, I think it’s not only an option, but a necessity.

“We’ve considered the option of allowing a small group of community reps – some subscribers, some not – to listen to in house readings of works that are under consideration for the theatre. Not works to which we are already committed, nor works that are under development through our commissioning programs – but works that we’re considering for production and have some question as to their capacity to resonate with our likely audience. The notion was that these folks would hear a reading and then meet with some theatre staff folks to share responses. These groups would not be led to believe that our programming would be decided upon by community vote – but simply that we want additional information as we consider our options.

“Because this suggestion met with real consternation by some members of our artistic staff, we stopped to consider what that response was all about. Was commerce driving art? Were we becoming unduly informed by community desires rather than mission centered aesthetics?

“We don’t have answers yet – but these are our questions.”

Susan also said to me that since we assess community response in single ticket numbers, why not let the community in question participate.

I was struck, in the recent *American Theatre* profile of **Bart Sher**, by the extensive community outreach programming that the Intiman does around its mainstage season – “high schoolers rewriting and performing *Our Town*, a lecture series with experts on each work, a rotating lobby ‘Salute to Seattle,’ voter registration, and cameo performances by prominent citizens.” The American Cycle program also includes community readings where community members sign up for a role and read the play (they did 5 readings of an abridged first act of *Grapes of Wrath*) and a Core Audience program (in which a select group tracks all the various work the theatre does all season and gives feedback), modeled after Anna Deavere Smith’s work in audience development and dialogue. These words leapt out at me from the article:

“The point is we will not only produce a play for reasons *artistically*, but because it should impact and be connected to the people.”

I spoke with Bart this week by phone, and here are some of his responses to my questions: “Community and theatre are, at least at Intiman, inseparable – they are the two pillars of the work that we do. It doesn’t make any sense to me to be a non-profit organization working in a community in which your program stops at the door of the theatre.”

He spoke of “initiatives that keep the work rippling further out into the community” such as the talk at Intiman this past week on salmon, the environment, labor, and top soil erosion – topics and community issues that are related to their production of *Grapes of Wrath*.

Bart explained: “Otherwise the work itself feels like it has no opportunity for conversation and expansion into people’s lives, and we have to provide more than that if we are running a theatre...It makes us feel like we earn the title non-profit.”

He related that “The costs are manageable – the biggest cost is labor. The staff gets overwhelmed when it comes to the number of community initiatives that everyone is being pulled upon to plan, and work out, and invent, and come up with. That is probably the biggest drain if there is one. People enjoy the work very much, it means that the marketing

department, and education, and community programs department, and development, that everyone has to be working very hard....”

His advice is to engage an Education Director and community programs manager.

He cautions: “It’s not easy work, and it’s not often as valued as directing or acting, but it probably is as critical or important to any theatre experience you can get.”

He credits his Managing director, Laura Penn, for coming up with tremendous programming. Also, one crucial step he took was to put the education director on the artistic staff. I believe that’s true with Susan Booth and the Alliance, as well.

In terms of the process, he explained: “The community development process happens after plays are picked and artists are in place.” He told me that he is the kind of “recalcitrant personality” that would not choose a show only because it would work as a community program – and also that we would be “likely to do it if it seems impossible to do with community programming,” and would try to figure out how.

“What’s important to keep in mind about how to think about something like this,” Bart explains, “is that these are artistic institutions run by artists, and artists have different reasons why they do something....All of our artistic decisions are based on what is the best possible art we can do at the highest possible level of content, no matter how you look at it. If those motivations are in place, then the next level of work to develop a community program around that is going to be an easy thing to have happen.”

He continued, “I do not think that communities should be influencing what the artists do, because if they are in a healthy relationship, the communities should be looking to the artists for what it is they are interested in, and the artists should be members of and connected to communities who are exploring ideas that are obviously going to resonate in some way with communities. You can’t allow (and I am saying it as strongly as that) people who are not artists to tell artists what sort of work they should be doing; nor should you allow artists to work in a vacuum that does not find itself within some sort of context. I don’t tell doctors what to do and I don’t tell business people or priests what to do. Yet every one of those serves different kinds of communities. And if we do our work responsibly with obsession and craziness about what it is, it’s going to still resonate somehow in that community. That’s where I think the relationship is. I think as soon as you have communities say ‘we need a play about this,’ there’s no point in having artists – they can go off and do their own play.”

“Communities do in some subconscious way get what they want,” he asserts, “but artists always have to be pushing, leading, driving, making people think in ways that are uncomfortable, and that’s where you get into the kind of great open process of what artists make and do that make a difference for other people.” And I’m not saying I agree with these models, but to share them with you.

Ultimately, Bart describes, we need to be “in Dialogue with, not dictated by, community.”

Henry Godinez and I also spoke by phone and communicated by email. Henry is in the unique position of working between and among various communities and types of organizations in Chicago. He knows how a large institution like the Goodman function, and he also knows the challenges of maintaining a smaller, culturally specific theatre. In addition, and I think this is really important, he is on the faculty of DePaul, and is thus in daily contact with a generation of younger practitioners and audience members.

Henry writes, "I believe that theatres should reflect the communities which they serve and/or, it seems to me, should serve the communities in which they operate. When I say reflect I mean the community should be able to witness itself on the stage and in the work. I believe theatre should always enlighten and entertain, provoke and inspire, provide a space where community, in its truest sense, can be celebrated.

"Collaboration is what has always paid off the most, but the cost is always learning to give up some of the control; for some people that's hard."

He advises, "Get into the community, face to face. Give them what you would give anyone else, no less. Be patient and persistent."

In terms of supporters for these kinds of initiatives, he writes, "The leadership, our Executive Director and Artistic Director, and a good portion of the Board, otherwise I wouldn't be writing this. Whatever their motives or reasons, that's what makes the Goodman unique."

In terms of community involvement extending into mainstage programming, Henry explained, "I fear that Box Office does carry some weight."

Mia Katigbak is a phenomenal actress – like on the level of a national treasure, never pass up a ticket to New York to see her, since she's really one of our top 15 actresses -- and produces cutting edge theatre in NY. It just so happens that this work serves a constituency group – but, as you will hear, Mia is reimagining even that model:

Mia writes: "I think of my primary community as the community of Asian American theatre artists who are under- and misrepresented in American theatre. There is no geographic boundary, therefore, and I am meeting more and more artists nationally who would like to collaborate with NAATCO because of the company's project. Engagement with this community is intrinsic to what NAATCO does. Extending or expanding this community happens when we outreach to communities who have an affinity to the specific production we are presenting."

She explains, "We asked Intar (a local Hispanic theatre in New York) to provide us their mailing list when we did *House of Bernarda Alba* in their theatre. The results were mutually beneficial. Their audience base was introduced to a 'different' (I suppose non-traditional) interpretation of a work that is in the Latino canon and Asian American actors and their abilities were given wider exposure. Intar's management told me that their subscribers began following up after *Bernarda*, asking when the Asian group was coming back. We subsequently presented *Fuente Ovejuna* at Intar and built on the Latino base we had through Intar.

"When we presented *Eyes of the Heart* we did significant outreach to Cambodian groups especially to the largest Cambodian community on the east coast, Lowell, MA. The response was tremendous and emotional. The Cambodian ambassador to a UN Special Mission came to the show, was overwhelmed by the subject matter we had chosen to present and subsequently hosted a party of 20 ambassadors to come to another performance.

"The challenge is to maintain these audiences after we have cultivated them for their particular interests. We have no measure at this point to see how successful we have been. NAATCO's mission is three-pronged: to promote and support Asian American actors, directors, designers, and technicians through the performance of European and American classical and contemporary works; develop actively an Asian American audience and encourage Asian Americans to become a significant part of a more diverse audience in American theatre;

cultivate in non-Asian Americans an appreciation of Asian American contributions to the development of theatre arts in America today.”

The community outreach examples cited above adhere to these basic tenets.

Mia’s advice is: “To be sincere about service to the community in terms of how synchronous it is with the company’s mission.”

And the ways in which community involvement has had a direct impact on the season programming is through NAATCO’s commitment to its artists – many of the projects are a direct result of the desire on the part of affiliated artists to work on a project.

Michael Rohd’s work is created specifically out of engagement with his community and addresses issues that are of importance to his community. He has built an audience of people who know how to read and appreciate the unique blend of physically exigent work and abstract imagery in which his company specializes. He reaches out to the community for source material, as well as uses community members in performance. For example, *Reflection: Witness Our Schools*, is a piece of documentary that actually stages the dialogue the company had in and with people all over Oregon. The piece treats the state of education and schools and literally on stage asks and answers such core questions as:

- What is the role of public education in our nation today?
- What impact can a small theatre company have on a giant community issue?
- How do these issues impact the art we make?
- How do we represent these issues without leaking our own perspectives and biases into the performances?
- How as artists can we honestly engage people as resources and collaborators, who are not normally part of public policy conversations?
- How do theatre and democracy intersect?

Although this is clearly a very different model than a LORT theatre or an SPT, Michael has spent the last 10 years traveling around the country developing this methodology for creating work with and out of community engagement.

Michael wrote to me: I think any theater anywhere should be serving those who live around it as well as other populations they choose to serve. As Bob Alexander at Living Stage (in Washington, DC) said, “if your theater were to disappear, would your neighborhood notice? If not, what are you doing there...?”

Terrence Spivey took over the historical 90-year-old African American Karamu House two years ago. Terrence has revitalized this theatre and has received tremendous publicity and accolades in his short tenure so far. He’s constantly having articles written about him, it’s incredible. His season is diverse in content, style, and historical authorship.

Terrence explains, “Our role is to educate, entertain and inform with more challenging works that brings about social changes. Also, to educate them about the purpose and importance of theatre itself in order for it to survive.”

One way he has involved audiences, in addition to more traditional post-show discussions, is by creating a pre-show session titled “A Moment with the MU,” in which the audience has the opportunity to meet with the cast and tech staff before the opening of a show.” Yet getting people into these sessions has been challenging, he reports, because of the marketing.

The benefits have been, as Terrence writes, that “those who participated in both sessions get a better understanding about the production and it creates word of mouth within the community. The only cost has been tea, coffee and cookies. (lol).”

I think it’s really interesting what he says about season programming: Terrence relates that, “Listening to the voices of the community during the post discussions has provided Karamu a better perspective on what they like. We are surrounded by four churches and that has caused us to choose a few works to play it safe. As a community leader, I want to serve as much as I can to each sector of the community. Karamu is the premier black theatre in Cleveland and Ohio, and it is important not to take the community from granted. There are not many cultural outlets to go to in Cleveland, so, I must keep in mind to have a play for each audience. I compromise to a certain extent.”

Finally, the last person I spoke to was **Mark Shogoll**. Mark is the director of Shugoll Research, a firm that consults on marketing and audience development. Mark is a Board member of the Council of American Survey Research Organizations and is on the Board of Directors of Arena Stage, as well as Chair of its Communications Committee.

When Mark and his associates speak to people who have left the theatre about what would bring them back, they hear two main reasons – 1) money and scheduling, and the subscription process, exchanging tickets, etc., 2) dissatisfaction with the season – people want to be consulted about the programming – It’s a “value decision” – (and, as mentioned earlier, they ask “why don’t they ask me what I want to see”?). This is such a potent question.

Mark also similarly reported, “we find that people are interested in becoming more involved in the process.”

In his consultation work with theatres, Mark helps them find opportunities to educate and to inform the audience. He remarks, “Marketing teams sometimes assume that people know a play.”

As to my proposition that we create dialogue with audiences around season programming, Mark replied, “there’s nothing wrong with sharing with the community your ideas and your vision. It’s one thing to educate – ‘here’s what we are doing, here’s why we are doing it’ – but I wouldn’t be for having the audience vote and tell us what they want.” Nevertheless, he acknowledges that theatres do “need to extend the reach beyond where it currently is.”

“One strategy,” he advises, “is to go out into your community and make contact. It means getting out of the building – doing a play offsite or taking an artist off-site.” He points to the work that the Arena Theatre has done, including “Molly’s Salon,” an opening night pre-show salon talk with artists hosted by Artistic Director Molly Smith and other members of the artistic staff. She does this, and other initiatives, to help to personalize the role of the artistic director and make her more accessible. She also has a sort of blog on the website, in order to have a dialogue.

Mark explains, also, that they have only “had conversations on marketing side, not on artistic side.” Here’s where you get a bit of my politics: I responded that, for this shift to happen, the DNA of the institution has to change and it needs to become a service organization; that, for a shift to happen, it can’t just be one department working in this direction. The mission needs to be embraced by the whole institution, and the artistic vision and programming need to reflect this.

I want to reiterate, this approach may not be for your theatre, and that's fine. But if you are looking to reinvigorate the life and art of your institution, and if what you are doing is, on some level, not working, it is worth considering, as Freire suggests, that it is not enough to change the objectives – the procedures must change as well. And the change must begin with a philosophical renegotiation of the relationship of the institution to the people.

So, the question I would like to put on the table, to conclude, is: What would happen if we created a more transparent process, one which included our audiences and gave them more of a voice – not control but, rather, made them a stake-holder in the work we do?

I'd like now to open the floor and, although I would be happy to answer any questions and hear any responses that you have to these provocations, I also invite you to dialogue among yourselves – for here is a unique opportunity for a community of artists to support each other in change. (Applause.)

Audience: It's very diplomatic to say, I don't believe in this, and you do what you want, if that works for you. What rings your chimes? What are you passionate about?

Daniel Banks: Yes, I've been diplomatic, but it wasn't insincere. I do believe – for instance, I can't watch a Richard Foreman show. It makes me feel completely claustrophobic. Yes, I recognize the genius, and I love the fact that he has an audience. So I'm fairly zen about the fact that many things can exist in contradiction. I really do want you to know that I mean that sincerely. It's not that I think you should change. It's simply that, if things aren't working, there are ways to change that, that you might want to consider that will help you. What rings my bells is being in contact with people. That's why I hate reading a paper, because I want to be more in contact with you and not have the mediation.

For instance, I do a lot of work in hip hop theatre. First of all, we have no problem getting an audience. Why? Because our performers come out of the culture. First of all, we recognize ourselves as a culture, and not as an aisle at Tower Records. Hip hop culture is not defined by rap music. It's defined by a politic, and an ethos, and a need globally to engage each other in dialogue and create methods of social change. Our practitioners come from the culture. They speak the language of the culture, they speak to the problems of the culture, the vernacular of the culture, and the cultural production of the culture. So that might be a reference, which is a nod, or homage to someone, or it might be a reference to something local. And it's by, for, and about the people, as a point of reference. I like theatre that collaborative. And I try as much as I can, in whatever I do, to dismantle hierarchies, and create as level and even a playing field as possible. Because my life has been about trying to somehow find that plane where we're equal, intellectually or artistically. Aesthetically, those are my politics.

Audience: What model have you found to work with that has broken down this hierarchy? Frankly, most theatre directors maintain this hierarchy, even if they're doing community outreach. They're just layering on a kind of community outreach program onto the structures you've described as a hierarchy.

Daniel Banks: First of all, I'm not an artistic director, so intellectually I know the challenge that many of you are up against, but I don't presume to know what it's like to be in your shoes. This is theory. I wish it were practice. And maybe someday I'll be an artistic director, but that's another question about access, and the playing field. For me, it starts locally. For me, as an artist in the room, it starts by creating dialogue, making space, and giving actors permission to say whatever they need to say to me. To create an open space. It means choosing projects carefully. I was recently asked to direct a play for the Belarussian Drama Theatre, as the first American to direct a play there, and the State Department said that I had to do *The Price* or *The*

Skin of our Teeth. And I thought, what possible relevance would that have for them? So I chose to do *Anna in the Tropics*. Because they could be in dialogue with the piece. When I did *Jitney* in Uganda, there was a gypsy cab station in the parking lot of the theatre, so this goes back to Henry Godinez's thing about seeing yourselves on stage. Though these are examples of two very traditional plays, which were chosen very specifically to have relevance. Remember, what is the last word of Peter Brooks's film, "interest"? Where you open up the box and that is the secret to creating theatre, interest?

So for me, the first thing I would do if I was an artistic director is, I would set up a monthly open town hall meeting, where everyone from the community, subscriber or not, was invited, to come and discuss our work, what was going on, and not as a speaker, but as a facilitator. A topic, maybe a speaker, but something that would give the community a voice. That would be my dream situation. I would absolutely do what you suggest, have a rotating group of people who came in to speak. I would have an open town hall meeting. I would have my artistic meetings in front of the audience, and discuss the season in front of the audience, and hear what they have to say. I would make it completely transparent, *if* I wanted to do theatre in a specific community, if I wanted to be supported by that community. If I were relying on arts funding, or government funding, or private donors, then I would do whatever I wanted to do. But I grew up in a strong community, and come from a strong cultural community background. My desire is to work with a community, so given that commitment, that's what I'm interested in. If you know what that commitment, don't let anyone tell you to do it differently. But if you know what your commitment is, you have to make sure that all of your choices line up with that, and I think we are not taught that. We aren't taught strategic planning. Strategic planning works. Businesses are having no problem, because they do strategic planning. They do five-year plans, and everything has to line up. They spend hours, making sure that everything lines up. Someone said yesterday, why aren't we taught business in school? Not just to learn business, but in the theatre, it's creating the inevitability of success. The inevitability of success comes from structure, and we're taught to believe that we're artists, we don't need structure.

Audience: I did some work with Molly Smith in Perseverance Theatre in Alaska, a very small community. She reached out to the community and asked, what would they like to do? And she got some answers that she gave some specific thought to. And then she told them what she would like to do, and so they compromised. And now, with my seventy some odd years, I find a creative evolution in my own community, in West Seattle, which is pretty staid. In my specific community, of the churches, which have gone, to my mind, beyond nothing – they're not really reaching people at all very much anymore. So I'm trying to create a revolution in churches. But churches don't understand how to make theatre, let alone what theatre is all about. So I'm reaching out in little pieces. And I did a little theatre piece, and invited other churches to come, and now they're inviting us to come to their church. We're hoping, in the next year, to have a dialogue with all the people we've reached so far. Because I'm like Molly: I've got things I want to do, but I want to hear what they want to do. That's all in my specific world. I'm not trying to reach the great outdoors. I've selected my audience, and I've learned that through experience. I've selected an audience that I wanted to have an impact on. In the past, I've done all kinds of stuff. I've participated in community theatres that had an established audience, and then we had to make it grow. So I've done that strategic planning stuff, and it does work. It takes time, though. You have to give yourself time, which means you have to spread yourself a little bit thin for the first few years. But if you can't grow your audience in five years, you're doing the wrong thing. My name is Jan Richman.

Daniel Banks: There's a key principle that Jan's talking about that I just want to boil down is "exchange." Exchange in terms of you come to my house, and I'll go to your house. That is one of the principles of cultural exchange. Learn how the other person sleeps, eats. It gives immediate access to understanding their culture. What language do they speak? They may

speaking a Roman language, or a non-Roman language, but what language do they speak? What meta-language do they speak? Thanks, Jan. Anybody else?

Audience: I just wanted to say, I really agree with a lot of what you said, particularly the part about creating a dialogue. One of the things that struck me, in having a day job, and having a small theatre that you're running, and having no time, is the fear that if I start that, it's just going to take up every bit of my time. I know we're limited by that. So do you have any suggestions for someone who might want to do that in a marketing phase, and how we can get that started?

Daniel Banks: Find people in the community who don't have day jobs, who want to join your organization, who can help mobilize and bring the community together. Let me just take a step backward, really quickly. The origin of theatre is in ritual. Ritual was there to have the community of a manageable size communicate with itself, and have a way by which the community could heal itself when there were ruptures in the landscape – or celebrate, or whatever. It was a way of creating continuity and solidity within the group. So ritual was necessary to the life and the health of the community. What you need to do is, whatever your community, actual or imagined, because some of our communities are imagined first, is you need to engage that community. So why would they need it? Why would they want it? Well, we all are experiencing trauma and devastation on various levels in the world today. We need to come together as people, and not be further atomized. There's going to be someone who's going to intuitively and intellectually understand that it's important to have an institution in the community and be able to invite the community to come together. Find those people. They may be college students, whatever. Give them a project, and a way to build a team around you. And it will actually be easier than you think. At the moment, you think, I don't know where to go. The wonderful thing about the world is that once you put something out there, it actually has a life of its own. One sign in a laundromat will probably get you more help than you hoped for. Or maybe you need to do ten signs, or maybe you need to do a hundred. And if you do a hundred, and it doesn't work, why do you stop at a hundred? We stop because "oh, nobody wants it." No, you just haven't found them. Again, that's what business does. It puts out as much as it needs to until it gets back what it's looking for. Certainly with email and list-serv's and blogs, you can find people who will partner with you in the community, and then, you build rapport. If you took business classes, you would know this: if you create a very clear mission and goals with those people, that will create the life of the project.

Audience: I appreciate your comments on transparency artistically. I also feel like in some way, we kind of need that on the management side, and have some accountability. Because I fear that what happens is that we get in crisis mode secretly, and we go out and we seek help. But that's the biggest contact that is made with our audience, ever. We have a big campaign to save the theatre, and sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't. It seems a lot to ask of people that we haven't, other than putting on great work, haven't given much reason to pull out everything for us. So it seems like we need transparency all around, and have some accountability for what we're doing. We go through these cycles we create for ourselves, and constantly are running after them, as opposed to having this force that, when we sense that hole, we patch that before it becomes a sinking ship. I feel like what you're saying, is once we create that community, it'll fuel the kind of work we want to do because they'll support that need, it'll fuel the desire to save theatres before they become beyond repair. I feel like we need to have transparency all around, and not be so afraid to admit our mistakes and our shortcomings. I think we're all just too afraid to show that we're suffering in different ways.

Daniel Banks: In an effort of trying to open up while finishing up, by having you all cross-talk: there was a question out here about how to do something as a theatre company, and a suggestion here for creating a kind of transparency. Does anyone else here have an answer to

that question, or an experience, or a thought about what that would look like, especially in management, to be transparent? Share your knowledge.

Audience: I would share an experience I had that was just amazing. I worked in a preschool. I worked with four- and five-year-olds. All my ideas about what life was were transformed to giving over to the present. We talked about where the power was: how you're an adult, and you can have all this power, where you can choose to say, what does it really mean if I give over and listen to all these little people, who aren't really children? There, I felt, was the root of not just theatre or drama, but *performance*. And engaging. And what I hear a lot here is that it's great if you want to have a theatre, and you can go out into the community, but I'd love to see or talk about performance, starting to open it up, that a theatre and performance company would open up the idea that you go out and engage them and they engage them – and it could also happen outside a theatre, and that's a dynamic living, breathing thing. It engages not just in these enclaves or places, like churches, with religion and the holy, but it's a practice that's practiced throughout life and throughout different spaces in the community. So it's not something that's isolated and invisible, in a way, because of these buildings – because if you don't know about them and engaged with them, then you're just: I don't really see it. So I would just say, for me, one word is performance. Then open that up, and look at ways that it's not just about a central space, but it's about how do we feel? Engaging with them, really saying, what do they want to see? It's a process, how can we actually perform, as we perform in communities everywhere?

Daniel Banks: Any other comments or responses?

Audience: I was interested in the issues of not being afraid to give up control. Yesterday, I shared, in one of our sessions, one of our volunteer success stories. And it does take time, at the very beginning, to sit down with the volunteers and talk about not only what they're good at doing, but what they want to do. Like, what they want to learn, what skills they want to gain. One of our volunteers -- he came in, and he was a software designer by day, he couldn't talk to people. He had seen one of our shows, and thought it would be interesting to try theatre. He had never even seen a show before he saw ours. So we started out by talking to him, and we tried him in all the different areas, so he could learn and be trained for different areas. We put him in charge of our phone and email, responding to all our phone and email stuff. He loved that, and he took over completely our email and our website. He loved talking with people. He's so great -- we have no problem not having control over that. He actually put himself in a position of...

Daniel Banks: Responsibility.

Audience: Right. Because he's so pleasant. People call in, and he calls them. I won't say what company he works for, but he responds to email. He's so great with all of our customers, that they feel like they have someone they can talk to. So they send him a lot of feedback and input that way, and he responds to every single person. What was so great was that, because he did that, we moved him into handling all of our volunteers. We have so many volunteers at load-in, it's not even funny. It's a rarity, and it's because of that: he took so much of the effort away and the time away, that even though it took us time at the beginning to find out what he was good at, he put us in so much time with us, it's not even funny. It's great to be able to give up that control. A lot of people, when we run our own theatre companies, feel like we have to be involved with everything, and we have to be in charge. What happens is that you do burn out, because you can't do all that. What we do is letting people try that, and "you want to do that? Sure, go for it." He had this idea for setting up an email thing and setting up the volunteer program, and we just let him run with it. We figure, if it doesn't work, it doesn't work.

Daniel Banks: Thank you. One more quick point, and then we have to wrap.

Audience: We in theatre sometimes have low self-esteem sometimes. We think that we have to have our act together all the time. But you know, we're just one or two people, we're just doing our thing. You don't have to pretend that you're someone else. They sometimes go out in the world, and say, "I've got it all together. I'm doing this show." I think that's why people put up a front, "the work is excellent, we've got it together, come see this brilliant work." Instead of saying, "hey, everybody, let's all do this." We become a company that's afraid of each other, has a limited amount of resources, so we don't want to give anything away to anyone else. It might be good for theatres to open up and get rid of all that crap.

Daniel Banks: My fantasy for this meeting is the totally open town-hall meeting. But maybe that could happen in your imagination. (Laughter.) Or maybe in your future breakout sessions. I just want to share one other epiphany moment that I had, was meeting here at least one board member. I think having board members come to TPS, if you could get at least one board member from each theatre to come to TPS events, that would instantly change the DNA of your event. Thank you so much for having me here. (Applause.)

END OF SESSION

Theatre and the City – DJ Hopkins

DJ Hopkins: Hi everybody, my name is DJ Hopkins, and I'll be your host for the next "x" amount of time. I feel a little bit like a tourist, because I'm not from Seattle. It adds a certain amount of irony to the fact that I'm leading a discussion here in Seattle entitled "Theatre and the City." I do want to say that I'm here from San Diego in part to study the Seattle Public Library. I've fallen in love with Seattle, and I led a seminar yesterday at the Seattle Public Library.

[See http://www.spl.org/default.asp?pageID=branch_central_about&branchID=1]

So what I'd like to do today is just say a few words about what came out of the discussion yesterday. I'd really like to hear from all of you, and I'd really like to think about the organization of buildings.

At the library yesterday, we had a gathering of dramaturgs in Seattle. Part of the reason that I got interested in site-specific theatre and architecture, and in this project, is that the architect of the Seattle Public Library, Rem Koolhaas, works in a way that I work as a dramaturg. He approached his design of the library as a research project. He wanted to create an opportunity for ideas to circulate in the library, to create a relationship as well as a tool. So it's really a question about finding a process for working.

These are some of the questions that we asked yesterday – because we had a two-hour tour of the library. And we asked, how does the building work? What is your experience, as a user, when you come into the library? As someone who visited the library and wants to check out a book, do you think the library is working?

Audience: It felt overwhelming,

DJ Hopkins: That was a popular answer.

Audience: [Unintelligible on tape].

DJ Hopkins: The escalator doesn't go to all the floors, but the elevator does. Yes, the elevator goes all the way up. The escalator is staggered all the way up, and one of the things that people notice is for the top five floors, the escalator will go up, but it's staggered back down, and you walk the spiral down, or use the elevator.

Audience: [Unintelligible on tape].

DJ Hopkins: The very first time I walked in the building, I had some confusion, because it seemed beautiful, and I had absolutely no idea where I should go. And I found just what I should do, as a body in the space, a little confusing. What I discovered was, I was in a space that didn't structure my experience. There were things I could do, but it wasn't like when you walk into a bank, and there's the teller, someone says, "Can I help you?" There are architectural clues as to how you should go through the space, when you come through the door. There's a Living Room space, as you go into the library, on the third floor, on Fifth Avenue. But it's an unstructured space. There are books right over there, and chairs down there, and a theatre down there, which you can't see – and banks of computers and open space. It's not a space that structures your activity, which at first was disorienting. I came in the building, it should tell me what to do, so that I'd feel comfortable in the space. I had to sit there for a little while, feeling uncomfortable, and I realized, oh, it's not going to tell me what to do. Then I realized I could do whatever I wanted with it, and the time this took was relatively short. I do recognize that it's not a perfect building in a lot of respects.

Audience: [Unintelligible on tape].

DJ Hopkins: When I talk about the structure of theatres being fairly monolithic, I use this metaphor that has been discussed in an essay by a French theorist: If you show someone a recording of piano music, who had never heard piano music before, they'd think that the piano made beautiful music, and they'd love it. But if you were to give someone a piano, who'd never heard piano music before or seen a piano, and say, "you can make lovely music with this, now have a good time," they wouldn't enjoy it, they wouldn't appreciate it, because they don't know how to make the piano work. If you don't know how to make something work for you, you'll have at best disappointment. It's the same with the library. Depending on when you come in, or what sort of mindset you bring with you, you may not know how to make the building work. That's one of the things that makes the building exciting, but it can also pose difficulties.

Audience: [Unintelligible on tape].

DJ Hopkins: I think I'll jump in here, since I think it's an interesting paradigm shift. If you think of the library as a tool for learning, which is I think an important distinction between a packing container for information. The coin may be flipped from an archive to a tool that you can use. That may have made the building -- for some who are looking for the building to be a container, as I have always done, certainly, may find the building a little off-putting. Because you don't know how to necessarily work it. Nobody put up a sign: "By the way, no longer an archive. It's a tool. You need to use this. You need to find something to do." To go back to the theatre comparison, I think a lot of people sometimes find that a theatre can be off-putting, because it requires an audience to actively start putting things together.

Audience: [Unintelligible on tape].

DJ Hopkins: Yes, for someone who's already gone through the process, who's already gone through the paradigm shift that's taken place, who knows how to make the thing work. To go back to the piano metaphor, it's between someone who has sat down and played a couple of keys, and someone who plays really well and ends up really enjoying it. A few minutes ago, we started talking about the Children's Center, which I think is a universally popular section of the library, because I think it's doing what the library wants to do. It's like other sections of the library, because it's innovating the different ways in which it's engaging with an audience of children and their parents. But, it's doing so in a way that doesn't completely flip the paradigm, because as you walk into the Children's Section, there are the books, you can check the books out. There's a sort of wall of books on display, and then you've got the bridge that you can use to move into or out of the main part of the Children's Section. The potential experience of that space is guided, and you know that. It's more like the bank, where you know where you should physically go. So there isn't that moment of "where do I put my body?" You can look at books or go forward, and there's no other place to go. And once you get in there, there's more things to do and see. It gets you past that first physical barrier of "I don't know how to make this place work," because it adds some structure. I think that's interesting, and with its Reading Room and the separate areas by age group, with chairs and cushions – so there are some interesting ideas, but generally there is a familiar physical structure.

Audience: [Unintelligible on tape].

DJ Hopkins: One thing we learned on the tour yesterday was that the designers wanted the Children's Section to be in the very core of that downstairs section, the first two floors. But the librarians said, no, we want the kids to have a lot of light. We like the idea that there will be a lot of fun kid activities going on, but we want the windows to be visible to the outside. We want people walking by to see the lively activity going on here. So they ended up putting it where it is, and they ended up putting the theatre in the core of the building, which I think is particularly interesting. If you look at other buildings designed by Rem Koolhaas, particularly the Prada store in SoHo, New York City, it also has a theatre built into the core structure. It's a store where you can buy things like a \$100 handkerchief, but it's a fascinating space, because you walk in, and there's absolutely no shopping. There are no clothes on display. The mannequins are gorgeous, but you don't know how to get over there. So you walk into the space, you walk along the ramp, and you start walking down a flight of stairs – and you realize that there's an auditorium on one side. There's a theatre in the middle of the space. There's this hugely empty and gorgeous wooden theatre space, but no clothing to buy. So it's a theatre in the middle of this store. You actually have to hunt around to find out where the clothes and shoes are, and you can actually get there through the back door of the theatre space.

Audience: [Unintelligible on tape].

DJ Hopkins: Conceptually, the point of going to a clothing store is the clothes. But there is a theatre there in the center. And less visibly, there is the theatre in the core of the library. And it wasn't their original intention, but it becomes the space around which these major sections of the library are organized.

Audience: [Unintelligible on tape].

DJ Hopkins: To my knowledge it hasn't been used yet, which is too bad. I did a little research on the Prada store, about a space that is for shopping as well as for culture, and what Koolhaas wanted to do was make the space about something other than the obvious thing. So if you walk into the Prada store, they want that space to justify the price tag. All the clothes are made by hand. Everything is hand-stitched, and there are garments into which hand-blown glass beads are stitched. There's a lot of craftsmanship that goes into the clothes. But there's also a great

deal of status in the name. It costs more than average, so justifying the luxury value is part of the mission of the architecture. So part of my research was, what constitutes luxury? It includes difficulty, but it also includes at least one thing: it includes waste, to a certain extent. So if you want to make a \$50,000 mink blanket, it's a waste. You could have gotten a blanket for far cheaper, that might keep you just as warm. So they wanted to try to justify the waste of luxury in the space, through the space that is given over mainly to other space, such as a theatre – a theatre that more often than not isn't used for anything other than displaying mannequins. So it's like a fake theatre, a theatre sculpture. And the space of shopping is given over to other spaces.

I don't think that's the sort of thinking – waste, luxury – that was used in thinking about designing the library. In fact, one of the products of the research process was, I discovered that contrary to core thinking in library sciences and design, Koolhaas in his design emphasizes that books are not obsolete. Books are going to have a life in the future. So this building, the Seattle Public Library, more than many other new libraries being built, gave a significant amount of space to storing books, and they wanted to make sure it was a space that could expand. Everything is on wheels, so that the shelves can be moved closer together. And there's still a lot of space on the shelves. When the shelves are full, they can be brought closer together, and the numbers on the floor can be replaced, and moved closer as necessary, and more books can be brought in. So I think that the amount they have now can double. Walking through the building, it seems like it's all about new media, it's all about the space, and there is a lot of space in the lobby.

Audience: [Unintelligible on tape].

DJ Hopkins: I think this is a good jumping off point to talk about that. One of the points we talked about yesterday was about the new structure. What does a new theatre building do? What does *a* theatre building do? These are things that influence site-specific theatre, as well. I'm wondering if you have thoughts about the way a theatre structures itself, in the building? Maybe about your theatres, specifically, where it's located inside the building?

Audience: [Unintelligible on tape].

TAPE RECORDING DISCONTINUES

Freelance Survival Guide

Teresa Thuman: This session is in response to a survey put out to the TPS community regarding the concerns of freelance artists. This survey was to find out what the problems were amongst the larger community. But the questions were basically finding out, how can – find themselves? And they could check any number of those. There was Actor, Director, Playwright, Designer, and a long list of things. And then there was listed Other, and that was a very interesting list in terms of what people would fill in, in terms of Other.

And then it also went into some stuff about how you identify yourself for your taxes, how much of your resources went toward self-marketing, self-promotion, networking – anything – The interesting thing about that is that it's all very "un-scientific," all very "what do you think it might be? What feels comfortable to you?"

And then there were a number of questions about issues that people wanted to discuss. We had 300 people respond, and had interesting results.

Let's start by doing a bit of an introduction. I'm Teresa Thuman, and I live here in Seattle. I'm an independent freelance theatre artist, teacher, member of committees. To fulfill the cliché: what I really wanted to do was direct, so now I'm doing that. And I'm loving it. I'm loving the independence, I'm loving the freedom, I'm loving the ability to work with lots of different people and different institutions – and I love not belonging to those institutions. I'm pretty passionate about what this can be for us as artists, but I'm also very aware of the challenges.

So, I'll talk a little bit about how this evolved, this whole idea of having a larger discussion. But first I'd love to find out who you are, and what your pressing needs are, what you'd love to get out of this, some of the issues that could be addressed in groups like this, so we might be able to problem-solve in some way.

Audience: I'm resettling here in Seattle as an artist, after three years in LA of doing the actor thing, and that I had down pat. It worked. But now, I'm trying to reconnect and I'm going back to directing, and I have formed a small group of people. So what I've done since I got back is produce and direct two plays, but I really want to connect with my acting roots again. And I want some collegiality. I need to connect with people who are acting, directing, and actively engaged in other theatrical pursuits of any kind. I feel isolated in the community I'm in, in Seattle. I've connected with two or three other artists, but these are designers, sound people, things of that nature. I just connect want to connect to people who act or direct: those are my passions. So that means I read lots and lots of plays; I have drawers and shelves full of plays. A great many of them are new plays, which need to be on the boards. I've attended the theatre conference for new plays in Alaska, which for ten years has been sponsored by Edward Albee, so he's attracted a great many excellent playwrights.

Teresa Thuman: So you're new to the community?

Audience: No, I'm not new to Seattle, per se, I'm just new to the theatrical community.

Teresa Thuman: And so that's something that very important to you, to find people in similar situations, so you can work together.

Audience: Because I do know Seattle, I do know where things are, and I have a sense of the lay of the land in Seattle. I just need to connect with theatre in Seattle.

Teresa Thuman: Being new to the community is one of things I wanted to address.

Audience (different): I live in West Seattle. I don't ever work there. I love my active career. Boston is where I did a little bit of everything: Teaching, acting, through different unions. Here, I decided I would not be an actor, but direct, and be a director who enjoyed acting. And then I quickly got tied back into other things. But got back to teaching and directing. So now I'm doing some directing, some teaching, writing a book on a technique of acting that I've been working on for years. I'm here to see what else there is to know. I've been calling myself a Schedule C artist for taxes.

Audience (different): I've been a freelance actor for fourteen years. In that time, I've also started incorporating choreography, film. I've been here because I came to the University of Washington to do the Professional Actor Training Program to get my MFA. And I spent seven years in New York, and though I really loved the town, I didn't want to grow roots there. Really, of my experience in LA, I wasn't really happy. So I said, what's wrong with Seattle? And have truly grown to love the town. But even in New York, I was truly struggling to make

ends meet. And though I'm about 75-80 percent here, I'm always looking for ways to streamline.

Audience (different): I'm here as an actor, and what I want to get out today is: The whole reason I came is for the networking possibilities. So much that I need to learn, I don't have any academic background or theatre background. I just got into it as a kid, and just stayed with it. And I think I'm a little long in the tooth, if I'm going to start from ground zero. I do want to network. I want to find out what there is as far as learning from other directors; I've worked with a couple directors that have come in, but I feel like I've missed out on a lot in my acting experience. I want to get in with other actors, other directors; I want to see what's out there, training-wise. I want to learn, I want to grow. For me, it's all about networking, so I can pursue my career.

Teresa Thuman: So you're interested in actor training programs that we're considering here?

Audience: Just working with different directors, different technique.

Teresa Thuman: Are you from here in Seattle?

Audience: I've lived here for four years. It is a different culture for me, and one that I want to find my niche in.

Audience (different): I'm a junior at SPU. I'm primarily interested in acting when I graduate in two years. I'm just starting to learn the whole self-promotion thing, and I'm interested in networking. I would like to know what I can do to better equip myself before I graduate.

Teresa Thuman: You're sort of just getting ready for this big world?

Audience (different): I'm a freelance director and actor. I've been in this area about ten years. I've been working on and off, and my primary issue is that I'm ready to start working more, because I have had children. And now they're going off to college, so I want to be more active, I feel like I'm a little bit in a rut, because I'm trying to move to a place where I have more opportunities. The other thing that I'd like to throw out there is this same topic: one of the things I find difficult as a freelance artist is that you're constantly having to prove yourself again. So each time you go into a new situation, you're with a whole new set of people and that's the worst part. Actually, the worst part is getting the work. But then, at the beginning, you have to reestablish who you are, and I don't like that feeling of having something to prove.

Teresa Thuman: In some ways, I've thought about that too: this scenario where you want the trust that you've gained in one situation carry over into the next – so you feel like you can build trust, trust as a form of capital, in a way. How do hold onto that? It might be important to look at the things that keep people from being trusting.

Audience (different): I'm a sophomore at Central Washington University. As I go through my course work, and go towards getting my degree, I want to get as broad a perspective of theatre as I can. Because I really believe that it's not so much my degree that's going to help me get work when I graduate: it's the skills I gain, and the concepts that I grasp. And so, the firmer grasp I can have on "what is theater?" and the different aspects, the different ways to do theatre, the different ways to get paid doing theatre, the better off I'll be in the long run, once I graduate.

Teresa Thuman: So in a way, you're acquiring lots and lots of skills, and now you want to move to the applications of those skills? Taking them from the institution of the school, and moving into how an income can be gained?

Audience (different): I'm also a student at CWU. I'm a freshman, however. I'm here basically to acquire more knowledge about it. But also, because I know what I want to do, and I know where I want to end up, but I don't know how to do it. So I'm hoping I can figure that out in here. I want to know about – you mentioned, protégés, and you nodded – and I don't know what that's about! CWU is a four-year school, and you have to go somewhere else to get a Masters of Fine Arts. And so I came here hoping to find out more, answer some questions. I'm here to further my knowledge in theatre.

Teresa Thuman: To get yourself out there, after graduation.

Audience (different): I've been acting most of my life, since the early 1990's, with Annex Theatre. Then went off to Drama school, in San Diego. I was in New York, almost nine years, and experienced a lot of that not really building momentum or trust. I live here now, came back last year, and I'm in all the unions now. I'm not sure which is worse: being a small fish in a huge ocean, or being a medium-sized fish in a pond where you can't eat much. The one thing about Seattle that I'm liking, which I guess is a step, is that I can speak with the casting people and they know who I am, and that's a lot further than I've gotten in New York. I would like to find out how to crack the "club." The one thing I want to bring up about casting directors is that, I really get the sense that there really is this kind of "A list," who work all the time – and there are a lot of good actors. I'd also like to get away from the service day-job, and incorporate more performing and artistic things in terms of income.

Audience (different): I was in New York, and returned in about February. I'm focused on making my living in acting and teaching. I teach voice, do public speaking, acting. It feels like I acquired a lot of skills in New York, in terms of marketing and that kind of stuff. I want to know how I can apply that here.

Teresa Thuman: Making this your local community? Well, great. That's so useful to know. There's so much information – I've put myself in a situation of absorbing and amassing so much information, that it helps to know who's here, and how also to create an exchange: the different needs of people in school getting ready to graduate, others who are getting older in life and starting families. So there's all of those issues that are important and very very valuable.

First of all, I just wanted to make one little statement, one anecdotal thing that I was going to share. And then, after that, if we do get into any discussions about anecdotal stories that happened to us along the way, let's think: what would you do differently? Or what would you change about that situation? How could you take some control of it: what have you learned since then? What did you grasp from it? So it doesn't become a long story from the past -- though sharing those are very important, because we all learn from other people. But I think that in terms of continuing to connect problem-solving to the stories.

For me, my one little anecdote that I'll throw out is, at the TCG conference last spring, and which was just a wonderful experience, there was a specific group for Individual Artists. And it was a fascinating group of people. But it was clear that TCG wasn't used to thinking in terms of individual artists, that they were very much parts of organizations. They're there to support organizations, and to support institutions. So that as individual artists, we were definitely asking "Why are we here? How did we get here? What does this mean to us to be here, and what are our needs?" So, to start off with, we were put in this tiny little room, and there were way too many people. And they had to find another spot, which ended up being in the middle

of a lobby – and we couldn't talk and communicate. So it was really clear on many levels that this was sort of a different area. And a number of issues came up within those discussions that have sparked my own thinking.

One of the things for me is: is this valuing that independence? Having been involved in theatres, companies, and institutions for so many years, and really feeling a certain attachment to them for an identity purpose sometimes, as well as the income associated with them – to really let go of that, and to say I am choosing to be an independent artist, and I'm going to take all the privileges that go with that, and at the same time, certain responsibilities that go with that.

So with that said, I've just been thinking about it a lot, and asking a lot of questions, and sharing them is great. But most of all, it's that we all have a lot in common. And I just think that if we know we're not alone in those concerns, those issues, it can really help. And to come up with different solutions: because whenever we get together, whether it's online or in these conferences, something comes out of that, just getting together, all together in one place, and having an exchange. It can often redirect the next step in what you do.

Based on the survey, I'd like to find out if people are still interested in any of those items. As I mentioned, the item on "Managing Self as a Small Business" is one that had a lot of interest, specifically. One of the things that I did was to do some research in terms of looking at startup companies and small businesses, and asking: What of that thinking would be useful to us in that situation? We can talk about that.

"How to Keep Up in Your Field": that was also another thing that was a big area, how to keep up with what's going on in different disciplines. So if we had an exchange on that, would that be useful? Great.

I have a lot of information on the "Flexible Day Job." It was an important issue, so we can address that. I've heard a lot of stories of different ideas, but I haven't found the answer.

"Continuing Education and Training" was one issue. "Retirement and Aging" – I know, for me, that's something I'm interested in. As the years go by, your relationship to your work changes. You can almost measure it by the decade. Again, I have observations to share, and resources that might be useful.

I think one thing to cover is recommendations and referrals. I think there are some accepted ideas about how that is supposed to happen: when to get recommendations from someone, when to not get recommendations from someone. When we work in as many organizations as we do, we're going to sometimes have negative ones, as well – and how to manage that? How do we have control over how you're being "shared" by someone, or how to make your case about what that experience might have been? Those are very difficult issues to extract, since we have a set protocol to follow. But I think it's an important issue, and it really affects how many opportunities we have.

Other than that, there's some contract negotiation skills -- that could be a whole other Forum, in terms of finding out what those are. In many ways, it would involve independent artists and producers and employers coming up with a clear understanding of what's fair and appropriate in negotiating. We often feel we have no wiggle room in that area. And there's very specific things that we could do, contract- and time-wise. One of the reasons that this idea started was an artist who was told that she was going to do this job, but she never got the contract in the mail. She turned down a number of jobs, and then the first one fell through. So once you get a verbal agreement, how do you hold onto that verbal agreement? The same goes with

employing artists: I know, in my own experience in casting, I will cast an actor who gives a verbal agreement, and I will continue the rest of the casting based on that one agreement – and then find out that the actor has been doing other auditions for another show they want to do instead. And then, you have to go back and fill in the hole. So that's one area that I think more clarity, in terms of the ethics that we're working under, would be useful.

Audience: It's a gray area. It's so hard. I've been bitten several times in New York and here, by trying to be the mensch. I wanted to say to people: "I'm really interested in this role, but I have three callbacks this week. Can I wait a week to tell you?" And trying to be honest with people, and getting burned that way as well. This really gray area is that it pays to be the asshole, and say "sure, I'll take the job."

Audience: I learned in New York that, unless you have something written, it's not going to mean anything. Say yes to everything, even if it was on the same day. Then, nine times out of ten, the other jobs would fall through. Because I realized, after several times of getting burned, I don't think it's necessarily being an asshole – but until something is signed, I'm not obliged to anything.

Audience: And even then –

Audience: You have a two-week "out," is what I heard.

Audience: For remunerative employment, in smaller contracts: if you've taken the job, and signed the contract for \$180 a week, and all of a sudden, someone else offers you \$1000 to do this movie in St. Louis, and you have to leave in the middle of tech week – then you have to say, either I can do this for you or you can let me go, and they have to decide. And you have to decide, whether it's worth alienating that producer in order to make that nickel.

Teresa Thuman: And that's where you have to think long-term, as well. It could be that opportunity is exactly the one that's going to take you some place great, and alienating that producer is not going to be any problem. But in the theatre community, it can come back to you.

Audience: And it's not always alienating. The producer may completely understand. That's the other side of that, it's a tough one.

Audience: Very often, you get a verbal agreement, and I am living with that kind of situation right now. There was a very firm verbal agreement, and I was told that the contract would get to me by September, but I still don't have it. And so I've just decided, after emailing the company and not getting a response, that I'm going ahead without it. I have made that decision. Because, I don't care how busy they are. The contract's very important, because I have to travel a great distance, and give up three months of my life. And I can't do that on a moment's notice.

Teresa Thuman: So having some awareness up front, before going into discussions with them...

Audience: And the discussions were over a month's period of time. And the agreement was very firm, and still I haven't gotten the written stuff. That means I'm not committed if I don't have that written agreement, when I was promised that written agreement. For now, I've decided that I've unpromised, or they've unpromised me. The timing is important – you can't let people string you along forever. And maybe it's just because I'm older, that I've determined that nobody's going to jerk me around anymore. And it does matter to me: I really would like

to do that part. And part of it is a very personal reason, because I'd be on stage with my son for the very first time in my life, and I would love to be able to do that. But I don't want to upset him, because it's not any of his doing. He lives in the community, and I don't. So he's not upset about it; he has other commitments, so it's not a problem for him if they don't give him a contract. It's a company he's worked with for twelve, fifteen years.

Audience: Here's some advice from an objective viewpoint: Call your son and say "they still haven't sent me a contract."

Audience: I have.

Audience: Because if he's worked for them, and he's got a long-term relationship, use him to go in and say, "Are you going to contract with my mother or not?"

Audience: Yes, that's my last ditch plan, but my computer's been out of commission for over a week, and if I try to call him to talk to him about this on the phone, it'll get all confused.

Audience: That seems to me to be an early step, rather than the last step. He's got a trust relationship with them, clearly. And if anyone can find out, he can.

Audience: But there's a new artistic director.

Audience: Bummer.

Teresa Thuman: But that brings up one thing: the role of artistic staff in terms of long-term trust issues. One of the things that I found interesting from the survey is that there's a huge amount of people who, no matter how many institutions that they worked for in the last few years, six or more, and I've actually gone further than that. For myself, it was twelve institutions, but there were three that I worked at twice (didn't count that). And maybe two or three volunteer projects that I'd taken on, that definitely involved those dynamics as well. And the need to move from different political short-term politics in your short-term encounters with those institutions can be so wearing and challenging, and another reason why I think there should be some industry code of ethics is that we could all talk about some basic things that we could carry forth.

Audience: I don't think people think about it. I sent an email that made it really clear, that I needed to know that the contract was in my hand. But evidently, I didn't stress it enough.

Audience (Karen Zeller Lane?): What I'm hearing about this code of ethics is that there is an issue beyond the community – to try to get some of the companies together and agree to certain terms. I think there is an unspoken code, that a lot of us who are familiar with each other use, but the code that they're using is protecting the institution, not the artist. Now, on the flip side, the compromise between the individual artists and the institutions is that, I'm really sorry, but I don't think the independent artists' need to constantly prove themselves is ever going to go away. It comes with the territory.

Teresa Thuman: There might be a way to manage it.

Audience (Karen Zeller Lane?): I was just going to say: Perhaps there are some ways to mitigate it, and improve it. But I don't see it ever going away. That's an interesting thing for me listening at TPS, if I put it out to all the organizations: let's talk about your code of ethics with contract negotiations, at the small, mid, and large levels, and see if we can come to terms. I don't think it would be popular. We can try, and see what we hear on their end, and how it's

servicing them. We can point out that it's servicing them more than it's servicing the artists, which in the larger picture, doesn't ultimately serve them. My own experience is that my daughter was recently up for a role at one large institution's audition, and five days later, she had an audition at another large institution – and the latter was a role she really would have wanted, but the first organization wanted to cast her. So the two organizations communicated, and the second one said, "Please don't cast her; I'll be shocked if we don't use her." And they didn't use her. And we're talking about an 8-year-old child that I had to explain, "Honey, it's the way the business works." So, I hear you, obviously from personal experience.

Teresa Thuman: It's the way some of the businesses work, and I think it lacks some of the personal integrity that we expect on some levels, which we have to bring to it, as well. So, if there was something set up as guidelines, not as rules, but if a group of people from both sides, or from many different sides, come to recommend that – In thinking about that, why is experience so not valued? Why does that basic thing come back? It's so overwhelmingly surfacing, in terms of so many different artists: why does that not matter?

Audience (KZL?): It's totally connected to the references and referrals conversations, totally. I know of a director here this weekend, who had a couple of decades of experience and fantastic training, and an MFA in directing, who can't get a job in this town, even at a small theatre, partially because the small theatres are being run by young people who aren't valuing and respecting his years, and hiring from referrals from people they know, who are like them, that are similar, whether they have any directing experience or not.

Audience: that's my experience as well. I got hired at Second Story, because of a Boston connection I had. I didn't know the guy, but we knew common people. So I've been working there quite a bit. And getting into other places has been difficult, because people look at me, and say, Why would you want to work here? Another thing that has been suggested to me is the fear factor: "what you know is something I don't know, and that will make me feel bad." And so you continue to hire someone who is not going to challenge you.

Teresa Thuman: I kind of respect that in some ways, if there's kind of a mix. Certainly from a directing point of view, there's no way you can get directing opportunities without it being what's called promotion by the artistic director. That's the only way you can get directing opportunities. And there are very few that come up on TPS: if they do, the question is why? And I'd go for it anyways, but is there something I should know?

Audience (KZL): We need to try to go forward. What you all should be doing is, if you're a director or a designer, or any discipline within theatre arts, if you see something you want to participate in, find out everything you can, do your research: who's involved? who do they know? Particularly with directing, I wouldn't ask the person they know to write a letter, but I'd ask them make a phone call for me. But you have to capitalize on that and put it out there: who you know. That's just the way it is, and we don't do enough of that. Do that: ask somebody to make a phone call for you. Then follow it up with a letter. Call them up and say "Jerry, or David, I don't know if you've had a chance to meet Teresa Thuman, but I worked with her at XYZ, and she's really great. And regarding this particular show, if it's not set yet regarding who's directing it, maybe she'd be a great assistant director."

Audience: Anybody who's worked in LA definitely knows that.

Audience (KZL?): Yes, definitely. It's who you know, not what you know.

Audience: On the age thing, you're absolutely right. But I have auditioned for parts that were cast by a younger woman, who had not a clue about my age. Because they're afraid that I'm

going to know something more than they do, the director. They're mostly young people. Because I'm in that fringe area just in between being paid and not being paid.

Teresa Thuman: There may be other dynamics going on there, that you're not aware of.

Audience: And I really think that the way to combat it is getting people of an older age together with younger people, and letting them get to know, that as you get older, you really get less aggressive as an actor, with a director, and more willing to follow directions, because you're more confident of what you're capable of. It makes for an easier relationship, but younger directors don't always know that until they get to know you. And that's why I think networking is essential.

Audience: I was thinking about the whole "it's who you know, not what you know," and about finding references. It's essential that I get out there and meet new people. For younger counterparts, over here, I don't even think people know where to start their research. How can we find out who someone knows?

Audience (KZL): When I was an undergrad like you, I subscribed to *American Theatre*. And I wasn't so much interested in the articles, though those were interesting, but rather in the relationships. In the back of *American Theatre*, there is a listing of everything playing and who's directing it. I read that entire list of about 20 pages from across the country, and knew who was doing what, and who was directing it, and could follow, now this theatre's directing it. And you can look up and see who their staff is, and where they went to school. When I was your age, I was going down to Ashland, Oregon, every summer. What did I read mostly? The bio's of every artist and where they were educated, so that I had a foundation and eventually, if you spend enough time doing that, you know who's where, and who's going where, and what shows are done where, and who's developing what shows, who commissioned it. You have to know it. And yes, it's completely different from your coursework, but that's what you need to know to hit the ground running when you graduate.

Audience: Now that stuff's online, it's easier. I can Google their names, and look up what they're doing. Just starting to get connections, I'm finding that from a university standpoint, I've had faculty that work with certain artists, and so now I sort of have a connection with. Just getting to know people, if I know people who graduated from the same school as me, it's another way to get started.

Teresa Thuman: It's another way to build trust. I want to distribute some stuff. One is, I compiled a list of all the service organizations that everyone mentioned, and it's a pretty extensive list. And all the performing arts unions, as well. For instance, there are organizations here, such as ETA, which has a wonderful website that connects all teaching artists. They're connected with all theatres, and are trying to keep a national registry of teaching artists. They always let you know which theatres are involved. These are the organizations that your peers work with, so that might be useful for you.

The other handout is certainly one that is worth looking at before we end: the paradigm of looking at yourself as a small business. I'm delightfully challenged in the direction of being business-oriented, and thinking more creatively about that end of being a theatre artist in the world.

The issues go on and on: time management issues, scheduling issues, especially when we have many different areas that we are interested in. I find that the hardest part of recommendations can be having friends as employers and employees. In terms of networking, something I always struggle with, is that there are people I really like, and want to work with, and build a

friendship based on that affinity. Is there a point when you meet a lot of people, and they just become contacts? And the connection is not very deep? It's something that I wrestle with, since I feel sometimes I am just a person's contact. I wonder: how will we share in the rehearsal room, how will they make the play better, how will I find that they share the values about the work? And then, there are other people with whom you have that connection, definitely, if we could get beyond the idea of just being contacts.

The other things that came up in other people's comments include motivation: how to keep the motivation going, and what are some tools we could come up with for keeping the motivation going? And really evaluating what is fair payment. The union has something set up, but if you are not working under a union, you have to be able to establish that yourself. And interestingly enough, I found it very useful: Roxanne Ray, a research guru, who does the net so well, has pointed me towards GuideStar, at www.GuideStar.org, which has information on all non-profit organizations, what their budgets are. Now unfortunately, you have to register, and you may have to pay a little something to get all that information. That was very helpful, because then you can get all of their information, and how much they pay in artists' fees. And, do they have a \$35,000 yearly budget, or do they have a half-million dollar budget? That doesn't necessarily mean that that will dictate what you can ask for or expect, but it gives you a sense of what the organization is able to pay. I joined, and they give you information like a bar graph, a useful tool.

Audience: The question is: who do they give that money to?

Teresa Thuman: It's intended as a source for fund-raising, for people who are fund-raising for non-profits, so it amasses all that information. Others: Fractured Atlas. If you don't know about Fractured Atlas, I encourage you to learn about Fractured Atlas. Through TPS, you have an associate membership, and I joined. It's a great thing: they're trying to get healthcare for artists. And they have another of other services: you can pay for full membership, and even get onto their fiscal sponsorship program. I think as an individual artist, people often overlook this: that you can create a way for people to donate to you as an individual artist. Sometimes this can be project-based. But through Fractured Atlas, it doesn't even have to be project-based. You say, "I have an artistic statement," who you are, what your goals are as an artist. You make those statements, you apply, and you have to pay a yearly fee for that service. With fiscal sponsorship, people can donate to your project, as if it were a 501c3. In New York, ArtsFund is doing that as well.

Audience: 911 Media Arts does that as well.

Teresa Thuman: Allied Arts does that as well.

Audience (KZL): TPS does that, as well, but right now we only fiscal-sponsor two organizations.

Teresa Thuman: Then they take a percentage of what is donated to you, but you keep the rest. People should know about it. Next, taxes and insurance: VITA. Definitely something to know about through TPS. Services are made available through VITA. Chris Comte is the person who leads that program. It's available to everyone. He also has people to whom he can refer you, and is always looking for volunteers to help with VITA.

Audience: For those of you who are not out there, if you're going to be making any money doing theatre – you want to be saving every single receipt from every single expense. When you go to an audition, you log your miles, you save your receipt from your lunch. Books are not supposed to be tax-deductible, but... if they're related to your discipline...

Teresa Thuman: If you use a single credit-card, especially if you go out of town, to track all those business expenses, that can be very useful.

Audience: It is. But you do not use that for anything else, except expenses related to your theatre work. I learned the hard way, because I sold insurance, and that meant that I was an independent person. I clocked my mileage, everyday, every appointment. Every appointment had to be written in my daybook.

Teresa Thuman: If you don't know about Washington Lawyers for the Arts, it's a great legal resource for artists. How it works is, you make an appointment, and then you make a donation of \$20. They have a 30-minute timer, and you have 30 minutes of their time. If you have contract questions, you can send that to them ahead of time, so they can have looked at it. It's such a great resource, and contract issues or questions are things to bring to them. It's on Capitol Hill, in a certain law firm.

Those are some of the things that have surfaced in getting the net out there, for independent artists. So, what if you are a small business? It's so important for individual artists to have a mission, like a business, and ask: are your activities working toward that mission? What is your competition? Understand what that is. Marketing and business plans are important, to a business model. It was interesting because it was often the opposite of how we are used to thinking about ourselves. There are also some loans for artists, though I haven't researched what those are. You do often have to earn a certain amount in order to get those loans.

Also, we need to consider health as capital and experience as capital, as things you have to offer as an artist and as a teacher, perhaps as a barter, in educational and professional relationships. One of the things that did come up was that book, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make A Big Difference*, by Malcolm Gladwell, which is a wonderful book about how things get to a point where enough of the contacts you've made can be built upon, and you can move into a whole different level, and how that can serve you. It's beautifully written and a beautifully conceived work for people who share the same interests that you have. Any thoughts or questions before we finish up here?

Audience: Some things I really wish I'd known when I graduated, first is the book *Acting as a Business* by Brian O'Neil. Another is: keep in touch with each other. You never know where you all are going to go. The reason people who join alumni associations are successful is that they keep in touch with each other, even if they are absolutely sick of each other, they really cultivate those relationships. And another is the Season Overview, which comes out in April, put out by TCG nationally: what's going on with all the seasons absolutely everywhere.

Teresa Thuman: National, but not local – which would be a whole other thing to keep track of.

Audience: It's borne out in my experience, that the only way to get this sort of tipping point going, is to be working. You have to be working, to get more work. And so one of the major detriments that I've seen, in New York but here as well, is to be suckered into the day job in the restaurant scene – and then you can't make that audition, because you have to work. I've known a select few who are able to do that and somehow get work. One thing I wished someone had told me earlier is that it is perfectly viable to take a job, a day job, and just work every instant they allow you to, and throw it all in the bank, then quit and just act.

Teresa Thuman: I think that's part of this idea of having something before you start. And have that part of the plan.

Audience: And get medical. And have it as a lifestyle. When I started out, it was all hand to mouth. Sometimes I was working, and sometimes I wasn't. So whenever I was working, that money went into the bank. And when I wasn't, it came back out again. I began to make more money than I was taking out.

Audience: But if you audition, won't that money run out, if you don't have any more work to go back to?

Teresa Thuman: Managing work and auditioning is like a full-time job.

Audience: You could work in a theatre, though.

Audience: Or you could have a flexible job, and audition around that. With every person I've spoken to, there's really no way to do it. But it's good to hear other ways.

Audience: This summer I was supposed to go up to Alaska, to do commercial fishing, to earn money. But I wanted to get your feedback: is that a good time to do that? Because I could just do that every summer. It makes a lot of money, and I have connections in Alaska. I could work there 3 months, then spend the other nine months of the year elsewhere.

Audience (KZL): Research the cycles for the region in which you want to live. When do they audition?

Teresa Thuman: There's lots more to find out, but I need to wrap up. This is really helpful. Would a monthly forum be helpful to get together, to discuss topics like this?

Audience: Or email contacts would be helpful. Could we just exchange emails right now?

Teresa Thuman: Sure. The next session will start up in five minutes. Put your name and email, and I will make the list.

END of SESSION

Triumphs of 'Turgy: How Dramaturgs Can Help You Build Audiences and Bring Your Dream Projects to Life

Roxanne Ray: Welcome to this breakout session: "Triumphs of 'Turgy: How Dramaturgs Can Help You Build Audiences and Bring Your Dream Projects to Life." My name is Roxanne Ray, and I'm a local dramaturg. I wanted to first introduce our fabulous panel, who is here with us today. Right next to me is Madeleine Oldham. She is currently at Berkeley Rep, and her connection to Seattle, among many other things, is her service as Literary Manager at Seattle Children's Theatre. Next to Madeleine is Liz Engelman. She is currently the President of Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (also known as LMDA – we'll be throwing that acronym around a lot). One of her many connections to Seattle has been her service as Literary Manager at Intiman Theatre. And next to Liz is dramaturg-extraordinaire Geoff Proehl, who is currently a professor at University of Puget Sound, and also past President of LMDA. I will be asking the panel, as well as everyone here, to talk about their triumphs of 'turgy, and also help brainstorm some ideas about how dramaturgs can help create projects and build audiences.

But first, I wanted to pass around a few bookmarks, especially for those of you who are not familiar with dramaturgy, to take a look at some of the things that dramaturgs might be engaged in. We do things ranging from research and development, new play development, production dramaturgy, doing research in regard to bringing work from the page to the stage -- or even pre-page, working with new playwrights and ensembles creating work -- as well as in Education departments, bringing the work specifically to the audience beyond the stage, whether that would be in post-play discussions, newsletters, program notes, what have you. Hopefully, you'll take that with you.

What I'd like to do, first of all, is just have a show of hands to see how many people in the room are actors. (Shows of hands after each call.) A few actors, okay. And then directors. And designers? No designers, okay. And I know we have some dramaturgs. Excellent. Marketers, okay, and playwrights, absolutely. Good.

To divide the session into two parts: first we'll talk about our triumphs, and make it a nice casual and relaxing session. And then we'll turn to the brainstorming. I have a few ideas about how TPS can help the community in dramaturgically-oriented ways. And then hopefully you all will have a lot more ideas that I haven't thought of.

Liz Engelman: Would it be possible to go around the room, and say who people are, and why they're in the room, and what you're interested in hearing about?

Roxanne Ray: Absolutely.

Liz Engelman: Because there are so many things we could talk about, and it would be nice to know what would be of interest to you.

Roxanne Ray: To my left.

Audience: I'm Sarah Wallace. I am an early-career dramaturg. I'm the artistic and literary intern at the Seattle Repertory Theatre.

Liz Engelman: And why are you in the room?

Audience (same): Because I'm early-career, and it's always great to hear from more experienced dramaturgs.

Audience: I'm Megan Smithling. I'm a freelance dramaturg in Seattle, and I'm in the room because I think there ought to be more opportunities for freelance dramaturgs in Seattle.

Audience: My name is Mark Zufelt, and I'm the artistic associate at Book-It Repertory Theatre, in charge of new play development. And I'm here because I'm interested in finding more opportunities for that, and I'm in the process of developing a new work series "second stage" for Book-It. I'd like to find ways to incorporate dramaturgs to help us develop work.

Audience: I'm Heidi Broadhead. I'm a director, and most of the productions I work on are so small that we never think of a dramaturg. The word doesn't even come up. I'm interested to find out if dramaturgy can work for us, can help the quality of the work.

Audience: I'm Kris Keppeler, and I'm an actress and I'm working on a solo project. I didn't work with a dramaturg until Roxanne responded to a notice on TPS about my solo project, and she's been a great help. I would like to have that more. (Laughter.)

Audience: I'm Sherry Narens. I'm an actor, playwright, and dramaturg. I'm particularly interested in working on new plays, and the role of the dramaturg being the advocate of the play.

Audience: I'm Joe Boling, and I'm a dramaturgy consumer. (Laughter.) I subscribe to the series that has the post-play discussions. I read everything that's posted in the lobby. I read the program from cover to cover. I read everything. And so I'm just here to get a little more.

Audience: As an actor, I'm often more interested in the research to support a production. I'm here to hear about that.

Audience: I'm working as an actor, dabbled in dramaturgy. I'm interested in exploring more of that, particularly interested in adapting work to the stage, particularly what Book-It is doing.

Audience: My name is Patricia Britton, and I work at the Seattle Repertory Theatre. Joe Boling makes me feel the full weight and responsibility of my job. (Laughter.) I work in publications, mostly editing and writing. I brainstorm what we call marketing of the play, but it's pretty dramaturgical. And so I'm here so I can find out how to work better with dramaturgs, to communicate to our patrons.

Audience: I'm interested in the functions of the dramaturg, in creation of new work, and what that might be.

Audience: I'm a former actor, a director, a playwright, and I also work as an editor and historian. I'm interested in hearing about dramaturgy as a possible career choice. As a part of playwriting and theatre history as well, it's sounds fascinating.

Audience: (entering) Is this Triumphs of 'Turgy?

Roxanne Ray: Yes, come in and have a seat.

Audience: I've done some acting, and some directing, but dramaturgy is something I've wanted to get more comfortable with.

(Multiple audience comments unintelligible on tape.)

Audience: I'm Daniel Flint, and I run a company called One Lump or Two Productions. And I'm also an actor, as well, and a writer. I have a lot of ideas for what I'd like to write. I've got a couple of projects right now that I – I am not into research, and to hear what you just said about – I've never considering asking a dramaturg, or somebody who does that for a living, to help me figure out where to go, how to hook up with the community, how to authenticate this work so that, if you're going to do it, you can do it right, so that you don't make a fool of yourself. Both of the projects I'm working on are adaptations of books, so I'm interested in that, as well. So this is a good discussion.

Roxanne Ray: Great. Thank you, everybody. What I'd like to do first is ask each of our panelists to share a story or an anecdote or two about a time that good dramaturgy really made the difference to a project. Or...if they really feel inclined, perhaps, to talk about one of the worst times they've had as a dramaturg, but what was educational about that – if you want to give us the other side of the coin. So, who wants to start?

Liz Engelman: We're looking at Geoff.

Geoff Proehl: Okay. I'll start with an anecdote. I'm not sure if this is a triumph or not, but it will help clarify, to me, one place in which to begin to think about dramaturgy. I was working on a production of *Antony and Cleopatra*, and there's this fantastic moment in *Antony and Cleopatra* after about the third time that Antony feels that Cleopatra has betrayed him. He rages at her, and rages at her, and rages at her, and finally he's exhausted and can't yell at her anymore. And she turns to him, and says, are you finished yet? He rages a little more. Then she says, "Not know me yet?" That's just a very simple line: Not know me yet? There was one time in this production when this actress said these lines, and it broke my heart. I started to weep, and I wept pretty much from there until the end of the show. And I wasn't the only one either – the director, the actress – it was one of those, it was a wonderful moment. And not because we were all crying, because I cry at the drop of a hat, on certain days, depending on the medication. (Laughter.) But just before that, the director had asked everyone to stop moving around – one of the actors was shuffling around – to stop, and there was this kind of focus. And there was this emotional rise, moment by moment, every moment just dropping, one after another. And we never got back to that moment.

Part of my job as a dramaturg, in the latter stages of that process, was to try with the director to understand why we didn't get back to that moment. To try to track how each of those beats fell out. And it was a successful project because he and I were able to come together on how that was happening, or how that wasn't happening. So successful in terms of collaboration, but less successful in terms of the actual production.

The reason I brought up this particular moment, this "Not know me yet?", is because it came to be a kind of an icon for what I think of as important dramaturgy. If you parse that sentence, Not know me yet, question mark, there's about five elements there. And one of the elements is "not." Whatever that is, there's a "not" between ourselves and another person. "Know" – which is more of a positive term, what we can know, how we connect, how we can know in the Biblical sense of the word, in the emotional sense of the word, in the social sense of the word. She wants to know Antony again, like she knew him at home. "Me" – which suggests a deep subjectivity, me and you, and the difference between me and you, and the difference that language, no matter how much I talk, I can't get across that schism, that gap, between us. "Yet" – how all this is taking place in time. Followed by a question mark. Now in regard to the text, in regard to my relationship with it: all those things can be said about our relationship to a text. Not know me yet? We look at the text, and it says, do you know me yet? You'll never know me. We both love that text, that is trying to become a play. The rest of that rehearsal worked out that text, it kept saying to us: you don't quite know me yet. In that moment, it becomes new again. And there's something about how a play puts us in this place – not as a dramaturg -- actors, directors, designers. One of my points here is that we all do dramaturgy in a sense, in the sense of engagement with something that is mysterious, other, potential, constantly changing. I think creates in us a sensibility, and I would guess that sensibility is already shared amongst us. So I'll say one of the things that you've already said, which is, dramaturgy is an evolving practice, in our different functions and in terms of the characteristics of our work. As a dramaturg, when I've had the luxury in a production of focusing in particular on the moment-to-moment unfolding of the story, on why it is at this point that we're stuck in this moment of the production – it's an amazing luxury to be able to sit in the room, and look at the work develop, moment to moment. I can talk later about how that relates to the community in Tacoma.

Liz Engelman: I'll mention two instances: I don't know, they could be both triumphs or both failures. I'm not sure. But they're experiences. One is what took place in a rehearsal room, and one is how a dramaturg creates outside a rehearsal room. And I think, in terms of what I've been doing recently, I've moved from being the dramaturg being in the rehearsal room, watching those moments and seeing how those moments fall out, to trying to find ways of

actually getting people to a rehearsal room, and then letting them fall out day to day. My career has shifted a bit, but I'll talk about dramaturgy in both instances.

One was here in Seattle, where I used to live. I was working at Intiman at the time, on a show that I won't necessarily name unless it comes out later. It was an interesting experience in that the major actors came to the first read-through with all the stage directions blacked out. Not only the ones that say, "she said evilly" – which the actors could come up with on her own. But major stage directions that in this play in particular helped tell the story. There were moments of action that were scripted and crafted that might not have been in the dialogue, yet the story would change completely if those actions weren't done. And it's a whole other conversation regarding how important are stage directions or not – that's something else. But in terms of the play being text, but also being scripted action: when you come in and the Sharpie has covered all of the story's action points that are not verbal, there was a little bit of a problem once you got into rehearsal -- when the director, who hadn't read the play very closely, is responsible for what is being seen, and I, as the dramaturg, coming in to make sure the playwright's story is being told, noticed some moments where: gee, at the moment of reconciliation in this play, between the two characters, this actress who had blacked out all the stage directions, knew instinctively had to be done, and there was a moment that needed filling. Her impulse was to make tea. However, in the script itself, there was something about the actress going offstage and bringing in this framed picture that had once been on the living room table, that she had taken off in a moment of conflict and there was a fissure between them in their relationship because of it – and bringing that picture back onstage was saying, "I forgive you. I love you. We can be together again." And the story ends soon after. Making tea said something completely different.

As someone said, a dramaturg is an advocate for the play. Well, as an advocate for the play, and an advocate for the playwright's voice and expression, who was saying this reconciliation needs to happen – you can't just take it out, but it clearly wasn't there. So I was being that advocate for the play, when the play wasn't allowed to speak for itself, and the actress who didn't know what was underneath the black marker had stifled that voice. It wasn't an easy conversation with a director who was a little bit scared of this actress, who really did not know the text very well, so didn't really have a counter-reason to do this other thing, other than, well, taking a cue off an actor. And it wasn't the first production – it was the second or third. When I would call and ask questions of the playwright, I didn't want him to be, "Oh, my play's going great. I'm going to come out here and see the first preview. I'm going to see my play." Because he wasn't going to see his play. Along with another section of the play, in the penultimate scene, which was basically all stage directions, some people leave and some people arrive, at night into day – but because the stage directions were all blacked out, the lighting was changed, and you couldn't tell the passage of time. So the story wasn't being told. So how to prepare a writer for their not seeing their play? How to try to lead a production back toward what that writer's vision was a challenging task. But the point being, in terms of dramaturgy, being watchful of the story and how it's being told. So that's an inside-the-room example for me: the playwright came, and watched the play with huge eyes – again, having been prepared, so it wasn't a total surprise. I felt more of a responsibility for how he would view his play. My hands were clenched, and I think he actually had a much better time than I did. The next morning we had one or two previews left before opening, and I suggested, why don't we go out for a conversation and talk about these obvious sticking points in the production of the play. And we went out, and the director was trying to explain or excuse his choice, and he wasn't very clear, and I asked a question to try to clarify – and he yelled at me, and said things like, "The playwright's here now, and I don't need your mother-fucking questions." So, for me, it was, well, as a dramaturg, if I can't ask questions about the play, or the process, or the choice, it's like saying to an actor: don't memorize your lines, don't read your lines, don't speak. So, that was a shutting-off of the dramaturg. In the end, things changed, and we got through that.

It was a triumph, and also a personal failure for a while – the definition is less important. The point is: that was the process of trying to advocate for the intention of a play.

And then the other outside-of-the-rehearsal-room story I'd share is: trying to make matches that fill holes in a community or in a theatre or programming. This example is also in Seattle. For a while, we had a festival called FringeACT. I was working at ACT Theatre at the time. The Fringe Festival was going strong there – the Festival that they have every year -- and they wanted to try to do know more new plays in their festival, and not only plays that are done that are just going to be in the festival. So we had a program at the time called FirstACT, which for a while had existed, but it had fallen away from its center, so I was at a point where I was the dramaturg for that program, and I asked why are we doing it this way? And at the same time as we questioned about our programming, the Fringe Festival had come to us and said, if we try to move our festival, or do a new festival about new work, maybe one of your FirstACT pieces could kick off our new festival? We said, we want to change anyway, you seem to want to change, so let's get married, and have a FringeACT. And that festival was born.

But the idea being, an ultimate response to: this is somewhat a writer's town, a director's town, an actor's town. But it hasn't necessarily been a hotbed or home for writers. Well, there are a lot of writers in Seattle, but that wasn't the word on the street. So, one way of responding to a community's perceptions was to say, let's look in our backyard and celebrate who we are. It was born out of a celebration of local talent. So again, in terms of what we get to later about community, how do you respond to either what is there, to what is seen as there, what isn't there, what is seen as not there, and program accordingly or in response to? And for me, that is more exciting dramaturgy in some ways than being in the rehearsal room, and having to protect or cater to other people's ideas and visions rather than figuring out your own vision of the situation, and generating and initiating something on that.

Roxanne Ray: Great, thanks.

Madeleine Oldham: I still haven't decided what to talk about. I think I have two examples, as well. I've been thinking a lot lately about the dramaturg as a creator of space, of room to breathe, of a kind of life-force in a collaboration in a theatre, in whatever situation you find yourself in, injecting whatever you're injecting that wouldn't have been there otherwise. I recently found myself working on a production that was very, very intense, difficult, difficult material, and it involved very graphic and explicit intimacy between two male actors. And the question is, how do you, as a dramaturg, aid the situation in the rehearsal room? It's a very awkward beginning: everyone's nervous, and everyone's intimidated, and it's really important that everybody gets along. And when you picture that, you want to figure out how to allow that to happen and not to put more pressure on it. One of the things that we did that was fascinating to me, was that we devoted so much rehearsal time to dramaturgy. In the few first days, we just watched movies, and it was called a "frank and sexual story" in our marketing material. Fortunately, the playwright had sources that he was drawing on from all over the place, so that was very convenient for us. We ended up, we would just watch movies, and we would talk – about literature, and about other things. In my experience, there's been a lot of: Okay, Day 1! Let's get to it – we're going to block the show. And, while that's great, it doesn't leave a lot of space for the production to breathe, and it doesn't leave a lot of space for it come up organically, and find its feet. A lot of the time, that feels like coming in from above and imposing a feeling, rather than seeing what comes up in the rehearsal room. And that spirit of exploration, that spirit of creating space to see what happens, was so wonderful and so moving, and you could see, in the final production, could see that comfort level and closeness, and a feeling of safety and security in the room. And it came out in the production, and it was beautiful and lovely, and really, really tangible. I haven't figured out how to explain that. So that was internal to the rehearsal room.

Another situation I found myself in: I worked at a theatre in Baltimore, and they had a strong desire to create a new audience of younger people. This is a thing that people are talking about a lot these days: how do you bring in younger audiences? What can the theatre do about that? As a dramaturg, I felt that “in-between” connection, as the person between the art and the administration, so I felt that role of, how do I create that bridge-space? And what can I do to help this? So I looked at the work we did, and I looked at the reading series we had, and I thought, you know, what if we turned the reading series into a forum to do things we wouldn’t normally do, “younger” work, or whatever. I ran into a challenge: the artistic director was saying very much, “Yes, I want this, yes, I want this. Get younger people in here. I don’t care how you do it.” But when I presented her with a play, I said, this really has a younger sensibility, it’s great writing, read it. And she’d say, I don’t know what this is. And so I kind of said, “Oh.” And it happens on a repeated basis. She had an idea in her head that she wanted to know what she didn’t know, and she was very, very open theoretically to new ideas and to things she didn’t “get.” However, she wasn’t seeing that she wasn’t really letting go of that. So finally, I just had this sort of “come to Jesus” meeting, and said, “Look, I’m closer to these people than you are, and I’m not that young, but I’m closer, and here’s why.” And I sat down, and thought about it, and I made a list of things where different generations look for different things. We want different experiences. That’s why we have to have a toast bar at the reading – we have to have toast! It just has to happen. It kind of opened her up and she realized, “She’s really thought about this. Okay.” We’re multi-media, we want different kinds of information, we don’t need a linear story, all those things that are sort of flying around our culture. It helped to create the space within that theatre for something that didn’t exist, or that they actually really did want. So it was interesting, as a dramaturg, to be able to help them realize that vision. So that was a success story.

Roxanne Ray: Great. Thank you. What I’d like to do for a short burst of time here is to open up the floor to some of your stories, for those of you who might have any triumphs, or perhaps educational, tales to tell about how dramaturgy worked within a project that you might be working on, or might have worked on. Great.

Audience: I worked on a play that had an enormous flaw, regarding the age of the main character. The playwright wanted to produce it himself, and I was pushing, pushing, pushing, him to deal with this. (Additional comments unintelligible on tape.)

Roxanne Ray: What you’re talking about is trying to have that kind of “come to Jesus” meeting that Madeleine was talking about, where you can try to illuminate the concern that you might have about the work. Whereas there’s also the line, where you step back and say, this isn’t my play, this isn’t my project that I’m directing. I’m here as an advisor, and I can only offer so much guidance.

Liz Engelman: There’s asking questions, and there’s making statements, and there’s also a third category, and I’m sure there’s a fourth and fifth, as well. And that is, you show alternatives: “If you make your character age 29 rather than 19, we get this experience. Is that what you intend, because that’s how it reads on the page? If you make your character this, your story says this, this, this, and this. If you make your character, then it says this. Which story are you trying to tell here? Well, if you’re trying to tell that story, maybe that story and that age don’t connect.” And so by providing alternatives, saying, “This is how I read it this way. This is how I read it that way. If you go through door D, and make him 35, you’re going to have this story. And if you continue on this path...” And so when a writer sees the options there, the array of things that you have laid out, they think, “I’ll choose this door. And then through this door, if I need to go there to get through this door. Or actually, I did mean for him to do that, whatever.”

Audience: Right, and I think the conflict was between those choices in the room, with those doors open, and where to go.

Roxanne Ray: One of the analogies that I like best for dramaturgy is that of a buffet. I tend to think of myself as a dramaturg – though I actually don't cook – as someone who lays out a buffet of a whole lot of different kinds of foods and snacks and entrees and vegetables and salads, and what have you. The artists can come and partake, probably with different combinations on each of their different plates. Actors will take different things from the buffet in production dramaturgy. The director might take a totally different combination on his or her play than the actors or the designers. And that's one thing that I love about dramaturgy, is that it gives me a chance to expand what I know and learn different things, and try to present those all out onto the table and hope that people take whatever they find most interesting for their project. Any more interest in sharing your own triumphs or difficulties?

Liz Engelman: I'd just like to respond to something that was asked when we went around the circle, which was: are dramaturgs interested in small works? I don't think it's size. I think it's the process and the relationships, because you could have the best creators in the world in a small corner of a theatre or parking lot, putting together something with a great group of people where you've made space for a dramaturg's input, as Madeleine was talking about. Or create space in a certain way for explorations, where, if you were in a big theatre, they might just see the dramaturg as someone who puts together an actor packet, and then you're never needed again. I think size doesn't matter in this case. It's the process that you set up going in, and a dramaturg would want to know, "What are you looking to do in this project? How can I be of help in this project? This is what I'm interested in, and do these interests jive with your project and your process?" And I think it's by building those relationships that it's a most successful project. I know when I worked at – and I'm working at several theatres, I'm freelancing now – at theatres, you're the staff dramaturg, so you're the dramaturg of the evening, and somebody comes in and you say, "Hi, I'm going to be working with you now." So, you may not necessarily be the right fit. You're the staff person, and you make it work if you're smart, and you find a way in, and it might not be even half the way, you just help out as needed. But when you're able to choose your collaborators, and choose your partners as a playwright and a director with certain reasons and certain sensibilities, as actors are chosen in a play for certain reasons, then ask, "Who's the right dramaturg?" Find the right dramaturg. Who's the right dramaturg for your interesting play in whatever-size space. What's your process, and who'd be good for it? We're not all the same. We're three very different dramaturgs, all great, but we'll all be different in that process, so I think it's about matching, and conversation and relationships – knowing what you're getting into at the beginning, so you know what you have for the long haul.

Audience: I would just add that the idea making the space and time to engage a dramaturg, and have the conversation to find out, as a dramaturg, your objectives and your desires for creating the work, is not necessarily something you should be taking on at the last minute, right as you're going into rehearsal. It's not as effective, and it's much better to be there from the very beginning, as you would be as a playwright and a director. It's more about the process of setting up a relationship.

Roxanne Ray: And it's not just important for other artists to select the right dramaturg. I find, as a dramaturg, that it's really important for me to select the right project, and to not choose to work on projects that really don't engage what my skills are, or my specialties or background and training. The right match absolutely is crucial on both ends of the interaction. Okay, any stories that you feel like sharing before we move on? Okay, before we go to the brainstorming section, there's just a brief story from *The New York Times* that I wanted to share about a success in dramaturgy that came out of a terrible disaster. This article was published on September 15

of this year, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Some of you may have seen this article about Redmoon Theater. They were doing a piece called *Spectacle '05: Loves Me... Loves Me Not*, and this was in Chicago. And I'll just read you a brief snippet of this article, so you can get a flavor for what they were doing. It says:

"The scene resembles the pictures broadcast from the Gulf Coast. But this is not New Orleans; this is the Jackson Park Lagoon, a large pond behind the Museum of Science and Industry here in the Hyde Park neighborhood. It is temporarily the outdoor stage for the Redmoon Theater's *Spectacle '05: Loves Me ... Loves Me Not*, a live theatrical show about a mythical town destroyed by a cataclysmic flood. The sunken house and garage are merely props. The weary workers are part of the cast and crew. And the teenagers in life vests are choir singers, not evacuees. The show is scheduled to run from Sept. 15 through 25, and in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina the Redmoon troupe has scurried to overhaul the entire production: rewriting the storyline, rescoring the music and redesigning the costumes, all to make the show more [in this article, it says:] palatable to audiences still coping with the catastrophe.

It was "originally conceived as a fantastic fable set in a waterbound town." It "was part commedia dell'arte, part boisterous extravaganza, and part "Swiss Family Robinson" survival story. Now, after Hurricane Katrina, Jim Lasko, the artistic director," said they had to completely revise the show into "a more somber tale focusing on themes of survival, loss and rebirth."

And they did this through the whole team doing a lot of dramaturgical work, in order to change this story and make it more appropriate, given the current event that had just happened down in New Orleans. So to me, this is an exciting tale about the triumphs of 'turgy. Yes?

Liz Engelman: You were talking about PR can work with dramaturgy? I live in Minneapolis now, and one theatre in town, the Guthrie, is putting on a new, their first play laboratory and workshop. There are lots of theatres in town where they do plays, and they have a lot of festivals, in that town. But something that they did at the Guthrie, which was a very interesting program, was they had ten or eleven playwrights around the world, and you could go wherever you wanted to go, and they could come back to share their experience, and write a proposal for a play. And they were commissioned to write that play, and they were given a workshop to work on that play. The workshop was interesting and exciting, and the festival came out of that process. So rather than eleven seated people and projects who maybe would get one or two productions at the Guthrie or around the country – what was interesting was that they began a newsletter specifically for that project. So now that they've workshopped the plays, the subscribership has gotten so many newsletters over the last three years preparing them for the workshop. So you can go into the workshop and see something, and, "Oh, that's good." But for three years to hear about – and not every month, but over time – there was a seeding of, "Oh, playwrights are going around the country. Look where they chose to go. Oh, look at photos that one person took in Turkey. Isn't this interesting? And here's a little bit about her experience." And, "Oh, now here's an update. These four writers have gone to these places." So now that they're coming to the workshop, they have a complete context for how this play began, why this play began, what the travels are – in the lobby, there are all these pictures from the playwright's journeys, to Cambodia... It just opened again, a few days. And the feedback sessions have been incredible, because they're so educated. I've never seen a workshop that is so cared for, and that was through the marketing and dramaturgy departments working together to prepare an audience. I don't think our theatres in this country prepare audiences enough. Your interest really interests me, in terms of, how does theatre evolve more? Is the artistic director ready, is the market ready, to know how to bring in and prepare the younger audience, prepare *for* the younger audience? It seems like there are gaps and expectations, when you could figure out what you're trying to do.

Roxanne Ray: To launch into our brainstorming session, I want to share just a few of the ideas that I came up with, regarding how TPS – and in particular, TPS members and volunteers – can help build theatre audiences in Seattle, as well as help Seattle theatre artists bring their dream project to life. And I hope you'll all have many more to add:

To build audiences, ideas include:

- A monthly play-reading group at Seattle Public Library branches, to offer drama to people who already love literature; TPS members could also participate in other literary book clubs, to bring a theatre artist's point of view to the discussion, and engender thinking about the "dramatic"
- A periodic TPS newsletter to be sent to TPS "Patron/Audience" members (& others who want it); as a regular behind-the-scenes way to contact this potential new category of TPS membership, and to offer dramaturg-hosted access for audience members to sit in on rehearsals for shows-in-progress
- Cross-Talkbacks: two or three theatres doing projects that are similar or complementary might arrange to attend and present at each other's talkbacks; these might be facilitated by a TPS Message Board thread to facilitate coordination, as well as a special field on Seattle Performs.com to publicize them
- A TPS appearance on KOMO's Northwest Afternoon television show, to increase the exposure of Seattle theatre and suggest connections between theatre and the world
- A TPS play reading series connected to current events, to promote connections between the theatre and the "real world"
- TPS might host films or videos of play productions, to offer a resource for theatre artists and the community, especially regarding hard-to-find videos of previous productions, either by Seattle theatres or nationally-known artists
- TPS might make contacts with language-training schools, to suggest another way for English-learners to study English and English literature, beyond TV
- TPS might post the 8-page Seattle Theatre History display online and at more TPS events, as well as expand it and make it available elsewhere

To bring dream projects to life, there are several ways TPS might help:

- The TPS Message Board might begin a new thread on Project Proposals, as a networking tool to allow local artists to initiate and develop new projects, even at the idea-stage
- The TPS Talent Database might add new checkboxes for Translators (with a field for specifying their languages and fluency), add a new checkbox for Literary Managers, separate Dramaturg into two categories (Play Development and Production), add a field for specifying the instruments played by Musicians, and add a field for specifying the types of dance for Dancers
- On the TPS website, a new section could be added for online resources that are outside TPS, such as the unions, LMDA, Dramatists Guild, Seattle Dramatists, Dramaturgy NW
- TPS could host networking events, including speed-networking and/or trade shows at the General Auditions or Fall Forum
- Field trips: TPS dramaturgs could host a field trip to the University of Washington libraries, to familiarize dramaturgs with one of the greatest research resources Seattle has to offer
- TPS could host a conference/workshop dedicated to joint play development labs, with sessions by local theatre companies and Seattle Dramatists/Seattle Playwrights Alliance
- TPS could continue its "TPS Historian" activities, including transcripts of the Fall Forum in future years, as well as transcripts of other TPS events; TPS could also improve or reorganize its archive of materials in order to make it useful to the Seattle theatre community

So, what are your ideas? What would you like to see TPS do, and what would you like to help TPS accomplish, in support of Seattle theatre?

Audience: In Washington State right now, there are four productions of *Romeo and Juliet* happening. We'd like to try to find some way to have a production in Bellingham, or a production in Spokane, and give the audience a chance to see work in those places, to increase regional understanding. Who knows? The people in Spokane might have thought of something different, and that would broaden our views.

Roxanne Ray: Right. And link cities and regions, and so forth.

Audience: Field trips!

Roxanne Ray: Field trips – I'll put that on the list. Beyond the library. (Laughter.) Okay, other ideas?

Madeleine Oldham: I'm wondering if TPS might be able to help at a sort of grass-roots level, because I've heard a lot of, "Oh, my theatre would love to have a dramaturg, but I can't afford one," and "I'd love to do these things, but I don't call myself a dramaturg." And so I'm wondering if there's a way that they could do a kind of "exchange," where if I need somebody to help me do research on "this," and somebody who might do "that"? Because I know when I was an early-career dramaturg, I didn't call myself a dramaturg until well after I was dramaturging. I didn't know what it was, I thought I had to be official to call myself that. And I think people are doing dramaturgy, who don't know that they are. And so I'm wondering if there's a way that TPS might help – but I don't know what that looks like.

Roxanne Ray: And LMDA might also help in the NW region to try to pull together a pool, as you say.

Liz Engelman: I think before we say, who do we do, I think we ask, what do we want? Are we trying to promote the idea and function of dramaturgy in a city where maybe a lot of people didn't know what it was until they heard there was a forum about it? Is it about awareness of the function, and also the fact that there's a role as well, which suggests different things? Everyone committing acts of dramaturgy without labeling themselves as a dramaturg? It's a professional role, and it's also a function, and is that the point of awareness? Is it actually practical-professional linkages, where it's about putting dramaturgs in theatres and connecting freelancers to jobs? Job opportunities, like who can write, who can research for us, you might be able to write our PR newsletter... There are multiple levels, but I think it's identifying what are the things you want to do, because otherwise, we could draw up tons of ideas, but they'll all float forever until they find their mean, and so we could just articulate what we want.

Audience: Also, it would help if we could educate about what the function is. There have been times, I know, when a dramaturg has worked with a theatre, and it has entailed educating people about what that role means.

Audience: I appreciate what you said, with "What do you want?" With TPS as a service organization, it is a grass-roots organization. Everything that happens, happens because the members want it, so it's "for members, by members." There's obviously a need and a desire to package ourselves, and show ourselves, to the general public. With the question, "what do we want?" -- if I were a dramaturg, I guess I'd probably want to work. I'd want a job. I'd want people to know what I do, and how I can be useful. I think, for me, as a producing artist, I guess I'd want to know what you do, and why I need you. And I'm already thinking, if there's a dramaturg who wants to work with me on a specific project, I'd love to meet that person. What would they get out of it, what would they want out of it? What would our relationship be? And how would I find them? So I like your idea of just making it a resource on the website

that says: “We’re here. We’re interested. This is what we are. This is what we’re looking for. I expect get paid. I expect to not get paid. I expect...” And how would that pan out? It’s just like us, with our headshots on there and whatever – so I think that would be very helpful, and would be a way that our community could hear different voices within this – and be informative about the different kinds of artists.

Liz Engelman: Do you have links to Dramaturgy NW and LMDA on your website?

Roxanne Ray: On TPS? I highly doubt it.

[Dramaturgy NW: <http://www2.ups.edu/professionalorgs/dramaturgy/>
LMDA: <http://www.lmda.org/blog/WhatisDramaturgy>]

Liz Engelman: I think that would be very helpful, particularly Dramaturgy NW, for the people here. And LMDA explains all those things, and talks about who we are.

Audience: And on TPS, in the database, you can search. You can check the box that says “Dramaturg.” You can specifically go and search “Dramaturg,” and call up people who call themselves that, or say that they do that function. What I think is a little more important is the education that says, “Hey, we’re out here. We’re interested. We’re looking for...” Finding a way to highlight that that function exists, because it is a peripheral thing, a lot of the time. I think, it seems, and I haven’t been in Seattle for very long, but it seems that Seattle has lost a lot of its dramaturgs on a professional level. You guys being a case in point – you don’t work here anymore.

Audience: When you congregate, when you put your needs together, you can advocate for policy together. My mind is going to a lot of midsize – and I won’t name names so as not to get into trouble – but a lot of midsize and large organizations who have never employed a dramaturg, and they actually have heavy programming, not necessarily in town, but in our area. And it’s frustrating as an actor, to work at those places, to have to do your own research all the time on a fairly large project. I wonder if you could advocate for yourselves by going to these organizations and saying, “We think you might like our services. Here’s what we can do.” Then you walk a fine line in terms of communicating, “We think you need us because you’re not smart enough to do this.” Also I feel, from working in those places, that they just don’t consider having a dramaturg working on the project if the director doesn’t suggest it.

Audience: As a member of the Directors Lab NW, or whatever we’re calling ourselves, we might be able to get linked with organizations, so that we can introduce that process to organizations who don’t really have an awareness of it.

Roxanne Ray: Yes, absolutely, and I’m glad you said that, because I do have Directors Lab NW down here at the bottom of my list, which I didn’t have a chance to mention earlier. But yes, making those connections between TPS, LMDA, Seattle Dramatists, and Directors Lab NW – all the different specialty organizations.

Liz Engelman: If all the organizations work together, say, in three months, in six months, and if you want to get together, meet each other, and come up with some seminar topics, have your own meetings. The local organizations can talk about what they’d like to do with each other.

Roxanne Ray: Okay, we only have a couple more minutes. So if I can just take the last few...

Audience: You could always earn residuals on what you write. What you write about isn’t always necessarily specific to that production. There are four productions of *Noises Off* in three

years, three productions of *Sylvia* in the same year – there might be someone who’s coordinating the program who could go to TPS and say, “Have you got something about this show?” It might be good to have original dramaturgy for every production, but some companies just aren’t going to do that. But they might be willing to pay \$30 to get the rights to reprint an essay that somebody wrote previously on the same show. ACT runs their program notes for *A Christmas Carol* on about a three-year cycle. If you keep going back to see *A Christmas Carol* enough times, and you read the program notes, you read the same over and over again about every three years. (Laughter.)

Roxanne Ray: Good, good idea.

Audience: There’s a larger issue of how do you get the community to support the work in general. A lot of us, as directors and writers, know that when we’re working on a new play – especially if they’re not well-known, or unknown -- with playwrights that are not going to have a lot of support. I’m wondering if maybe there’s a larger question of how do we support new works, which will in turn support dramaturgy? Where, if you’re a small theatre or an independent, and you’re doing a play, there’s some sort of way of compensating dramaturgs from a larger source? To support an ecology of dramaturgs and literary managers, and what would that be? I know a lot of playwrights who can’t get their work out in anything other than a reading somewhere – and that’s great, but if you’re going to make your plays stronger, as a writer, you need the process, the development, the rehearsal, and then seeing it in front of an audience. I’m wondering if there are ways to not just make people aware of dramaturgy, but to make it possible for that playwright, or director, or dramaturg, to be able to create that sort of process? I want to put that out there: how to make it a larger question, of supporting the arts as a whole?

Roxanne Ray: That’s one thing that we can do in connection with Seattle Dramatists as an organization. They have a lot of new playwrights, doing a lot of new plays, and maybe a linkage between LMDA and Seattle Dramatists –

Audience: And Seattle Playwrights Alliance –

Roxanne Ray: Yes. Building that connection to LMDA, as well.

Liz Engelman: How old is Seattle Dramatists?

Roxanne Ray: It’s very new. Two years? Very new.

Audience: My experience has been, at the schools – all the universities and colleges. The word comes up, but no one can take a dramaturgy class, let alone a focus-area like acting or directing. There’s nothing nearby that I know of, that has dramaturgy programs or degrees, so it seems to me that in universities and colleges, this focus that could be alongside the theatre community. It would be a great idea if – we see all these great programs with all these young artists and theatre-goers – and let’s start with that. And they, having the opportunity to create community, though they’re not necessarily paid, but seeing young artists get together. So it would be a great thing to do. I don’t know if “educate” is the word I’m comfortable with, but sort of create awareness around dramaturgy and this aspect of the theatrical process, and we’re going to honor it, and so these reputable places will say, “Oh, this is important. We need a class.” One class at least, so that the artists know this exists. We could have a dramaturg come in, and teach us about what this is, as not just sort this “other thing,” but how it might fit in the theatre process as a human being, as a theatre-goer, as a performance-goer, that there’s a specific understanding about the use of the dialogue, and so on: Community is what’s shared, and how to share that voice.

Roxanne Ray: And beyond colleges, also the conservatories, like Freehold and Northwest Actors' Studio. Okay, we have one more...

Liz Engelman: I think it's a very important point, but the whole point is, we're not dramaturgs of acting. What are we here for? What kind of conversations do we want to have? What kind of theatre do we want to make? And until we know what kind of theatre we want to make and what kind of conversations we want to have, who we want to communicate to, and what about that – why are we doing theatre, and what are we there for? – I think it's a larger question that each of us has to figure out, in terms of why we do it.

Audience: I just wanted to say, I'm responsible for publications at the Seattle Rep, and I've had several requests for suggestions for plays or other literature for people to read. I just wanted to put that out there.

Roxanne Ray: Excellent. I see that it is time to end this session. So thank you to our fabulous panel. (Applause.) I thank you all for joining us.

END OF SESSION

To Grow or Not to Grow

(Rik recorded & will transcribe.)

Site-Specific Performance

Roxanne Ray: Hi, everyone. Thank you for coming, and welcome to this session on site-specific theatre. My name is Roxanne Ray, and I would like to introduce to you the chair of our panel, D.J. Hopkins. D.J. is currently Assistant Professor at San Diego State University, and he is in town, here in Seattle, looking at the relationship between architecture and performance, particularly in relation to our new downtown Seattle Public Library. As a dramaturg and the local contact for this panel, I invited this amazing group of theatre artists to come and speak to us about site-specific theatre, and because D.J. is studying this area in particular, I've asked him to chair the panel. So, I will turn it over to D.J. (Applause.)

D.J. Hopkins: Welcome, everyone. I would just like to say, as we get started, that I take my cue for my role in this from Daniel's plenary. I think that what is called for here is not a speaker but a facilitator. I feel a bit like a tourist in Seattle, because I'm not from here, although I'm ready to move. So, I think what I'd like to do is to say a few words, in general, about site-specific theatre, in terms of what I think it does, by way of introduction, for people who aren't too familiar with the phenomenon, though it is increasingly familiar, increasingly part of the literal landscape of the theatre. And then I'd like to turn the panel over to the actual theatre makers, and hear about making site-specific theatre in Seattle.

Site-specific theatre, by way of sloppy definition, theatre that makes theatre in places that weren't intended as theatres, that were not purposely-built theatre structures. And what I find particularly attractive and engaging, and what gives me a giddy sense of breaking rules and doing something naughty about site-specific theatre, is that, as a theatre person, it takes me, literally out of the theatre – but also takes me out of ideas that I've occupied about what theatre

is, changing the space in which I might be putting on theatre or going to see theatre. So, as a theatre person, that literally getting me outside the box, outside the black box, I think adds a certain excitement. It's the first phase of excitement.

But there's a larger opportunity, in site-specific theatre, to engage ideas of community, to engage ideas of shared experience, bringing audiences to places to have an experience that's not structured, necessarily, by the ideas that we normally bring to the theatre when we go as audience members. And I don't mean to malign the architecture and institutions of normal theatre spaces, but to bring audiences to different parts of the city, to think differently about that city: it reorients the ways we have relationships we have to cities, but not just to cities – to farms, to gardens, to schools, to the places we're sort of reinventing by turning a light on in ways that make them unfamiliar and allow us to rediscover them, and to rediscover the history, the layers of the past and the possibilities for the future, that maybe we've been walking by for a number of years. I used the term "landscape" casually earlier, but site-specific theatre is a kind of art that engages with the landscape, and reminds us that the structures and institutions, the social conditions and the actual buildings, that maybe we've been taking for granted in our pedestrian strolls, are part of our environment, are part of the lives that we've been living, and put them, bring them back into art in ways that make them available to us – the word I want to say is "discourse," but gosh, what a stuck-up word – that make them available as part of the tools that we have for living. That's one of the things I think art can do at its best, and that's why I think site-specific theatre is a particularly exciting mode of making theatre.

So, what I would like to do is just start at stage-right. Because I'm a tourist, I really can't introductions as Roxanne did. So if everyone could introduce themselves, and begin by talking about your projects, or whatever it is that's brought you here today. What I think I'd like to do is bank a little time at the end, and we can start about each other's work, and quickly then turn things over to have a lively discussion in the last part of the session.

Carla Barragan: My name is Carla Barragan, and I'm a choreographer. I founded Birlibirloque Dance, which is now shortened to BQ Dance. I have a long history of site-specific work. So I'm not sure exactly what to talk about. Do you want me to tell you about my experiences doing site-specific work?

D.J. Hopkins: I think that sounds great. If there's a particular topic you'd like to focus on, that would be great too. You choose.

Carla Barragan: I think the reason why I'm drawn to site-specific work is because the dance audience was becoming static. There was no new audience, and I really wanted to show my work to other audiences. So I was working in Ecuador at the time, as well, so I proposed working in a restaurant-bar, very small. And I collaborated with a musician and other people, and I performed in all these kinds of spaces: the windows let the light into the spaces, at the bar itself, anywhere, in every unique angle I could find in that bar. I found that I fell in love with the process of making an actual performance in the bar. With the experience being so close to the audience, I tried to make it a little bit interactive. After that, I just kept going on, doing this site-specific work, as well as traditional stage work.

One of things I did next, is I chose three objects for a site-specific application, to get a grant. I wanted to do a project of site-specific work, to take the dancers to the site to perform there, but I ended up doing this book. (Displays book, flips pages to show "animated" movement of images on the pages.) I noted that that was site-specific too, and it would be placed in an archive, and people were going to see dance burst off the page.

So, I did a project that ended up, in its result, being in a different medium. But the process was to go explore an old building, and performed against the walls. It was actually an old convent, these old ruins. We spent six hours, and we tried to move from one place to the other, in areas in the space. Picture it: You would have to get reaching up, and reach down. I agree to tell about that experience, because I realize that is when the work comes most alive. When I've been in a space that is not a traditional stage for dance, I have channeled it, I have interacted with the space and with the environment. If I'm in a market space, I have to travel in the space that is allowed for walking, it does bring things incredibly alive. And my dancers have experienced a real joy, too, because they have a connection, a real connection, to the environment and to the audience. Not necessarily a provocation, because sometimes we do special material, with a sofa or sometimes a set. You always have challenges like that.

Sometimes I just create material that I choreograph, and then set it in a space. I think that one of the reasons that I do it, also, is because of the interaction. It's so overwhelming moving from a theatre, to doing work that advertises itself as work that goes in that environment. I'm taking a lot of time here, so again, I'd love to hear about the other artists.

D.J. Hopkins: Great. You haven't taken a lot of time. I think that under ten minutes is perfect, and that means there'll be time at the end of the session.

Charlie Rathbun: I'm Charlie Rathbun, and I'm the Arts Program Director at 4Culture. 4Culture is the fancy new name for what was the King County Arts Commission, which is our King County regional government, and I coordinate arts programs for our local county regional government. And as the local regional King County government, we have a relationship with all the cities in King County. There's about twenty of them, I guess, and fifteen of them have actual arts commissions. Bellevue, Mercer Island, Enumclaw, Auburn, Vashon, Duvall, Shoreline, all around the county. They all do an array of programs of public art and live presenting throughout the year. We have been meeting with these cities, all together, every two months, for the last fifteen years.

About eight years ago, the Arts Commission (at the time) recognized that there was a crisis happening in our dance scene here in Seattle, there were a lot of venues closing, and there was a lot of stress coming onto the community – and we were looking for ways to increase opportunities for contemporary dance in Seattle. And that's how the King County department of arts began, by using the home network at local arts agencies that we have around the county, creating a special program to fund contemporary dance to go out into the suburbs and rural areas of King County, and be presented by the local arts agencies and build new audiences. A lot of this stuff was pretty "out there," and we didn't really have any idea how this thing was going to fly. But as it turns out, most people, wherever they are, are hungry for that aesthetic experience, and it actually turned out – it went gangbusters.

It created a lot of new relationships and started to build a program, over the years. We did dance for a couple years. We brought in some other disciplines, and we decided it was getting too broad, so we focused it back onto contemporary theatre. So now we've been doing this for about seven years. We started to ask ourselves, "What can we do to keep this thing fresh and moving and challenging to the presenters and the audience?" We were sitting around having a beer – where most good ideas come from – and we had seen article about a site-specific performance in Los Angeles. And it occurred to us, "Why don't we try to pose the idea of site-specific performance?" Get the art out of the theatre, bring some other cities into the mix, that don't have actual venues. Again, we had no idea how this concept was going to fly. I actually didn't even know how the concept was going to fly with the artists, and the communities in which we wanted to present. But amazingly enough, all of the coordinators with these cities -- and some of these cities are pretty conservative, and they had their hands full with the

programs that they're doing – but amazingly enough, I think most of them were ready for some kind of new “something.”

So we embraced the idea. We put out a call for artists. I honestly didn't hear much of a peep. Usually, with our grant deadlines, the phone is ringing off the hook, with artists saying, “We want to know this, we want to know that.” My phone was dead. And I was starting to get nervous. The deadline was coming. Actually, one of my favorite stories is: running into Keri Healey, before the deadline, and she's a playwright in town. And I said, “So Keri, have you heard anything about the site-specific performance proposals?” And she said, “Oh, yeah, people are talking about it.” I asked, “Does anybody want to do it?” She said, “Yeah, but I don't think anybody's going to go for it.” I said, “Are you doing anything? Do you have any ideas?” She said, “Oh, you know, I haven't figured it out yet.” I asked her, what is it? And she said, “Well, I thought of doing a serial theatre play in IKEA. If you shop at IKEA, you park at the door, you walk through it, and it's all about leading the audience through this experience of suburban living.” All the sets are there, the audience is there. I said, that's great. That's exactly what we're looking for. And we have no idea whether it's going to fly, but....

Well, Keri applied with this idea. And actually, we got about 65 proposals that first year. And there were some pretty interesting proposals. We selected a limited number of them. Then we had to bring in all the city coordinators, and let them select what they'd like to offer – some selected two, some selected three. And we did it. And from this process I'm describing right now, IKEA is going gang-busters: every Monday and Wednesday night, 7-9pm, you can go down and see a part of a thirteen-part play. We've had dancers out in parks, under bridges, we've got this mobile living room, a 3-sided fully-articulated living room which travels around the county in a trailer and parks, and people walk by and say, “What's that?”

It wasn't just about theatre. We also wanted to do visual art, and we had to come up with some criteria that: we're not just hanging art on a wall, but it had to have some dynamic relationship to the location. Because visual artists who are interested in the performing-arts aspect of their work, the performative aspect of their work, can bring a lot – to my mind, it's obvious. I think it's all theatre: visual art is theatre, literature is theatre. It's all the ideas of our time that are happening. And if they connect with them, and they connect with you at the time – and that's theatre. So, as far as I'm concerned, there are a lot of ways that site-specific performance can occur.

I think that one of the things that site-specific performance addresses is, of course, the theatrical experience itself, which is defined by “this” [referring to TPS auditorium], and certainly what happens here can be an entire world unto itself. But it's still defined by the fact that you come here at a certain time, and you sit in a certain place, and the play happens here, and those parameters are themselves, in site-specific performance, broken down. In some ways, it's a little more challenging for the performers. It's rare that people will actually sit to see these things. In a theatre, you're going to be pretty hard-pressed to get out of that seat, and walk out the door if you don't happen to like what you're seeing. With site-specific work, you can go, and do whatever you want to do.

I have actually taken a lot of constructive thinking about his. Since this panel, I've started to think about, what are the challenges that we face in doing site-specific work? Certainly, one of them is the artists sending, or turning, themselves into the environment. We had an interesting story about IKEA – I happen to be lucky enough to be there on the night that they did the couch dance. When I call it the couch dance, people laugh, but I call it the couch dance. The entire company was choreographed in a dance, actually on the living room couch. It was wonderful, hilarious, very well done, very well performed. With a bit of music. That was the only time that the couch dance happened, because from what I can tell, IKEA has a huge staff and they

rotate all the time. And from what I can gather, the staff on the floor that evening didn't know this was happening. (Laughter.) Not only that, but between the time that they had set the piece and rehearsed it, the manager had actually changed things around. When the company got there, they had to put it all back. For all they knew, this group of people walked in, rearranged the couches, turned on a boombox, and started jumping up and down. (Laughter.) So there was a little bit of confusion with the management, and they're still working on that.

But the point is, is that when you're going into a space that is a public space, everyone owns that space. They're not coming to your theatre – you're going into their space. And it's very important that not only have you established yourself in relation to that space, and in relation to those people, but the company you're working with – all the individuals in the company – really needs to be supporting this, so that everyone's together, on the same page, as you're going into that space. It's not the same as when you're working in a theatre space, and you just tell everybody to get out of your way. You can't do that here. There's an incredible number of unknowns and unpredictable things: of course, the weather is the obvious one, but machinery, babies crying, this kind of stuff. I saw one production of *Hamlet* in the Tukwila Community Center the other night, and that was a challenge. They had done about two nights, and there was a machine right at the back, and it was a challenging play. They set it up in the lobby, and they had launched into "To Be or Not to Be," and there was [cchhhhh sound], and they had to wait until it was finished. But in some ways those challenges are for artists to get out of the box, and show the strengths of the artists.

There's another potential thing about site-specific work in the arts that's very good, when the arts go into the community. They've recruited the community to be part of it. We're going to do this again. We're having the time of our lives – it's incredible. And I would continue to advocate for artists to think about possibilities for things to do. Now of course, we are King County, and most of the work we do is getting art out there into the suburbs. Sometimes it's a bit of a haul, but it's an idea whose time has come. Thank you.

Ron Sandahl: I'm Ron Sandahl. I'm the Artistic Director of Open Circle Theater. We've actually done shows that range from a rock-opera in a former rink space, to a one-woman show about stripping done in a film director's office, to a park show. This season we're actually working on a collaboration with Seattle School (Mike Min and Korby Sears), who are *The Stranger* 2004 Genius Award winners. We wanted to do a show that focused more on propaganda and manipulation of the media. So we decided that what we needed to be able to do was be able to manipulate our audience. To do that, we had to have the expectation that they were going to see the standard theatrical presentation, but then be able to remove that expectation from them. So it would require a place with a theatre, but also other areas. And we're in the process of producing that right now. The audience is gathered around, the performance is happening, and the producer and director might actually divide the audience in two, and then they're each shown, "Here's the show that I was going to show you, and here's the kind of mess that the other side is likely to see." The difficulty becomes: where do you find space that has a theatre, but also enough external areas to have two separate large groups roaming around? Part of the difficulty of doing theatre now, as opposed to ten years ago, is that it was much easier, I believe, to do found-space theatre, where you take a show to an old building or warehouse. I think there's much greater awareness now of individuals being less willing to take what they view as risks. More and more owners of spaces are not interested in theatre. And they're less than forthcoming in wanting to take a risk.

Llysa Holland: I'm Llysa Holland, and I'm one of the Artistic Instigators for theater simple. I'm actually a sub on the panel. Andrew was supposed to be here, but he's in rehearsal. We go see a lot of spaces: over the years, ever since we were doing a piece called *The Ascent of Big Linda*. You started seeing the show in each room, and changed rooms at quarter-past that time. You

started, and there were about eight different rooms you could go into and see a piece, and you could stay there the entire time and watch them cycle through differently each time. Or you went to other rooms, and you all came together in this great room, at the very end when Linda ascends into a tornado in the sky. We said, wow, they sure did that well. It was letting the audience be responsible for their own experience, in terms of the order of how they saw it, was really, incredibly brave.

So then we went and saw a show in Australia, by a group who physically endangered their audiences every time they did a show. In fact, the show, when I was there, had these giant cardboard containers that they pushed around, and blocked the audience from each other. And they had lights and cameras, showing what the audience on the other side was doing. And you think it's crazy: they're getting stripped next to you, they're taking their clothes off, on camera. And you find that the audience who's sitting right there, this intimately, is not watching the actual person who's getting their clothes ripped off – they're watching the feed of it. And we thought: what do that say about our society? Because you can't really do that in a theatre – you could, but you don't.

So when this project came up, Andrew said, let's do it, and I said, it's too broad a subject for me, so let's put your brain on that one. And we ended up doing a piece based around a 1962 Airstream trailer. We knew that our idea for the piece itself: we wanted to have at least three components, preferably four to six. We know that the maximum capacity of any group has to be what can be fit inside the trailer at any one time. And it has to be something in which the audience is so taken out of their comfort pattern with the environment, and subvert the experience, so that they forget that they're at the theatre. That was our goal. And we ended up coming up with this pseudo-family reunion. We wanted to explore the idea that all theatre is story-telling. We're exposed to theatre for the first time when we hear family members tell stories: "I remember the time that your grandma set her hair on fire..." The idea is that there are traditions in the theatre, but there are family traditions that are just as theatrical, or just as arcane. You try to subvert that and catch it up. Ultimately, at the end of the show, they'll be telling a story to someone you don't know, or go home and tell the stories that they hadn't told before they get lost to the families – neither of which we expected to happen, but it did, which is kind of cool!

We ended up writing three sort of semi-set pieces, that were supposed to be ten minutes long. And we had several options: you could have someone move through different parts of the piece, and you could get different information at different times, and then bring them together at the end. Or we could have just a cycle, and the audience all together at the end. Our community-involvement aspects that we felt very strongly about were: we have a host of improv stuff, developing characters for people who weren't necessarily involved, who were interested in becoming involved. And they became our cousins, or married in. As a person who came to experience the event, the first thing you do is you roll the dice, and find out how you're related to us. And you're either a cousin, an aunt, uncle, or grandparent – it was really fun when five-year-olds got to be grandparents – you're married in, or you're a friend of the family. Then when we're going through the piece, we start endowing you with, "Oh my god, I haven't seen you since – does your mother still have that pear tree in back?" You start telling stories with them, and they're like, "Oh, okay." Audiences were amazingly generous in going along with that, which I think we should probably trust a little bit more. So that was a great learning experience for us.

But we discovered, at the very first time we ever did this, at the Camlin Medieval Fair, and we were going through with our 1962 Airstream trailer. We actually had people come up to us and say, what does an Airstream trailer have to do with medieval times? We had to say, it's actually more about the community that surrounds it. Come on in! Our hope was, and our success with

our community members that we got involved with was, they'd come up with their stories about us, and continue the event for the audience members, so there was never actually any lag. It was literally just seconds, when you were out of earshot, and they'd say, "Did you hear about the time when....?" It encouraged the audience very specifically to say, "Did you ever have that happen to you?" So that all of a sudden, you started to get an exchange of stories, and you started slipping them in really subversively. So by the end of the fourth piece, when we do this toast to the matriarch, we came up with many new traditions – we barbequed things, we sang Happy Birthday off-key, we offered toasts, we made melon-balls (leaded and un-leaded). At every station, we're continually handing things to our audiences. We're giving them food, we're giving them melon-balls, we're giving them water. There's a different exchange there, that becomes very neat, and we didn't realize the impact of that until later.

Getting the community members to be our advocate with the groups, because they always stayed within the same group, it stopped being us and them, and it started being: audiences, people were taking over the trailer. You'd say something like, "Do you ever have this thing happen?" And they'd say, "Oh yeah!" And you think, okay, let's go with this one. And all of a sudden, someone in front of you is giving you a recipe with cardamom. You just can't control that, and it's fabulous. People will later say, "It was great how they told that story. How did you rehearse that?" And it's like, "I didn't." They just did it.

The hardest job is to find a location. We performed in three parks and a parking lot. In the parking lot, it was really unfortunate, because it was right after [Hurricane] Katrina, and we were right next to the Gottschalk's building. We were on asphalt, and it was raining. We discovered the Airstream leaks. And we still had audiences show up – about thirty people, four dogs. I love people who bring dogs to the theatre. (Laughter.)

We were overly successful in some ways, getting the community to think this was a family reunion, and this consisted of bringing your dog. For us, as theatre artists, we just facilitate what a community wants to do anyway. That was our experience. It was a blast to do. In the beginning, we were worried about people just wandering into the space, because you know the Airstream's so fragile. So we had buckets of giant pillows from Archie McPhee's. When we were performing in Duvall, the head of the local arts commission, Helen Butler was very supportive, and she went to the dollar store and got some things – and she also led people down the path to the venue. And we couldn't believe the number of people who showed up, out of nowhere. I was sure we'd only have a dozen people, and we had over a hundred. And they stuck around – most interesting is when people stick around, and keep talking.

One thing I neglected to mention is that we wanted to have a visual and literary record of people's participation. We said we'll take Haiku lines, in which people, after or before their wandering through the piece with us, could write down a haiku. All of us extemporaneously would just whip out our haikus, in the middle of our piece, and we'd always do an improv haiku at the very end. So they had this chance to put in a haiku, and also at the very end, we would also take a family photo in front of the Airstream, and put it on whatever the haiku had been. We also set up a huge A-board, that was covered in paper like the checked tablecloths, and we had set out white paper plates, so that people could write a family member on it, or draw pictures on them. I was looking at them last night, and we have over two hundred that people have left. Some of them are made-up stories, and those are hysterical, and some of them are, "My mother told me a story of when she was five years old, when her mother left her near a bucket of snow, and they were very poor, and she was really hungry, so when she came back, she had snow all over her, and her mother said, what happened?" And that's one of her first memories of her mom. Okay. And that sort of generosity – telling your own stories, or telling stories of your family – I think was really an interesting work of theatre. We could make an entirely new piece, about an amalgamated family, from all those stories.

We had no idea what we were setting ourselves up for. The fact that we actually have a 1962 Airstream trailer as a set, to begin with, really got people excited because of the emotional inspirations of this architecture: it brings up the idea that, "Oh, I'm on a camping trip like when I was eight. I remember learning how to catch a fish – wow, I haven't thought about that in years." We would have people break the perimeter, in between rounds, and say, "Can I please see the trailer? Please? I grew up with one of these. I didn't expect to see one of these again." We had done no restoration on it at all. It was nothing. But we had people say, "Hmm, we had all these traditions, and we don't do them anymore." But it was really fun, and if we get to, we'd do it again.

Stephen Hando: I'm Stephen Hando, Artistic Director of Printer's Devil Theater, which is currently doing *The IKEA Cycle*, which Charlie was talking about. We also have a history -- we've been around for ten years – a history of producing work in non-traditional spaces. One of our productions we did in just an emptied-out garage, a hollowed-out restaurant: we actually did two shows, one in the garage area, and one in the kitchen area – we did this Junk Rock Opera in the kitchen area. We also did a production of *The Seagull* on the Kalakala, which was that ferry that was docked out there. A beautiful production, because we had all the windows open out to the lake, so there you are – what more perfect setting can you want for *The Seagull*, with this beautiful lake in the background that I was speaking of?

Audience: It was dark. You couldn't see it, because it was dark.

Stephen Hando: At the beginning you could see it, and the lake disappears as the production went on. Also, *SKIN*, which was the production we did out at Sand Point, and installed in this enormous airplane hangar – installed a big production in there, as well. We're a theatre company that doesn't have a space of our own, so on the one hand, as we talked about earlier, it's an issue of finding space. And it's really expensive to rent space. So if you find spaces to do things that aren't as expensive, well, there you go. Also, it's – depending on the directors' visions of what they want for their shows, these are the right spaces to do them in. In the case of *IKEA*, that was something that Keri actually brought up herself and came in with – and that was another melding of script and space.

It's a great experience, and it's really interesting. And I'm glad that we've done that work, and we'll continue to do that kind of work. But it's extraordinarily difficult to produce that kind of work. *IKEA*, as Charlie has just mentioned, has had its challenges – and there have been other ones. It's actual been smooth, compared to some of the other productions. You are in spaces, installing a theatre where a theatre was never intended to be. You're bringing in lights and sound, and you're essentially having to build – like at that airplane hangar we were in, we had to build, set up lights and a sound system that could accommodate that much space. And you're also dealing with, many times, like at *IKEA* and most of the places where we do it, people who are getting in that space with not a very clear idea of what it means to produce theatre, and what it takes exactly to do that. You're constantly trying to navigate that relationship, and get away with as much as you can, and also be as clear as you can with them. But inevitably, you'll come up against something. Like in the case of the Kalakala, which ended up being shut down after a week, through no fault of our own, I think, although having the production brought some attention. We had a lot of press for that show, which was fantastic, but then, the Coast Guard started coming around, and we actually had to do our last weekend – instead of on the boat, we had to do the last weekend of the production in a normal theatre. They were like, "Wait a second, you can't have this many people on the boat."

One night we were out on the boat, and we were doing the show – and I was just watching. I wasn't involved in the production. But late at night, on this ferry, seagulls, beautiful quiet sea.

And we hear, "Permission to board the Kalakala! Permission to board the Kalakala!" At this point, we'd already heard wind of the Coast Guard, and there was all this stress about getting the show shut down, and so Jen Creegan, who was the Managing Director at the time, slipped out of the theatre. As it turned out, it wasn't the Coast Guard coming to shut down the theatre at 8:30 at night. It was these drunk frat guys going by on their boat, just having a good time.

Audience: Permission denied!

Stephen Hando: Right. (Laughter.) You're also dealing with environmental things you don't have any control over. Like in the case of IKEA – we encourage people to walk in front of the scenes, because I think that's part of the experience when people are watching it, is to also watch how people are reacting to the show. Some people are out to see the shows, specifically, and many people are just there shopping, and are stumbling upon the show. And I think part of the experience, for both people who are clued in and people who are just going there, is to see how people are responding to someone – a couple having a marital spat in a little living room area, or someone sitting in the middle of this dining area. People walk in, and they're doing a little scene, and this woman comes up, and says, "So, do you have this in light brown!" Gets out a ruler, and just starts measuring away... And A, we can't stop her, and B, let her go for it, let her be part of the experience. (Laughter.) What are you going to do?

When you do this kind of work, in some ways, you have to let go. You have to make sure that you're really as prepared going into this as you can be, as communicative with the space as you can be. And try to anticipate as much as you can. But at a certain point, you've got to just roll with it. One of the other things that happened with IKEA: My piece – I'm in the play – took place in this kitchen area, so that was fine, they were great. And Keri got a call on Friday, saying, "We need you to move the scenes. They're getting rid of all the kitchen areas, and they're doing it on Monday." And I was going to perform the scene on Monday. So we had to go out on Monday, and scout for new scenes, and I ended up with this great living room, and I'm happy there now. We just had to roll with it. You can't get stressed out. You've got to put up the best work you can, and deal with the situation.

Valerie Moseley: I'm Valerie Moseley. I'm Artistic Director of Ear to the Ground, but I think I was invited here because Roxanne tracked me down as someone who has also performed on the Kalakala. But not in Printer's Devil's show, but with EXITheatre. They did a production called *Project 2002*. I think it was their second version of it. So, I've done that, and a few other site-specific pieces. My sister is a visual artist, and she asked me to commission some people to write a play for public spaces, so we did a very small, one-time-only scene in a McDonald's, where this couple of guys, who were pretending to – they were taking each other out to lunch, to have a business lunch, so they could write it off. I think maybe one or two in the McDonald's actually knew that it was happening. My sister's photographs of the event were the art. It was a question of how theatrical this very realistic moment can be: where do the art and the reality end and begin? And how can you tell the difference, in a situation in which they're just sitting around and talking? And yet, you had to know something was up, because they were eating with silverware.

We did a little scene from *Waiting for Godot* in line at Ross, an endless line, and she was also taking photographs of that. (Laughter.) But with just a little camera, so it was all very discreet. It was fun. Also, I don't know if this fits under your definition of site-specific theatre –

D.J. Hopkins: I can tell you right now, it does.

Valerie Moseley: Okay. I think it does. As a clown, I've done a bit of busking, and performing amongst crowds. Recently, a partner and I did the Fremont Fair, for the Solstice. We did some

character development work for our own upcoming show that we're going to do in a theatre, but we went into the crowd, to be how our characters would play, because this was going to be a show that did not have a fourth wall. It's that kind of stuff that I've found I enjoy a lot.

My Ear to the Ground, a very new company, has so far performed in traditional spaces, but I'd like to take the lessons learned from site-specific work, and always bring them into our work, because Ear to the Ground does actor-generated work. And while we might start with a seed of an idea, the general thing to come into the room, and say, "What do we have?" Let's be very attentive to what's here right now, and generally what's here right now is our skills and our people, ourselves. But also the physical space, so really utilizing the environment that we have, and turning that into something. We're all bummed that we're not currently rehearsing in the space that we're performing in, because we all know that the show would be more of its essential self if it had been created in the space that it's going to be performed in. That's, for me, the tug and the interest in site-specific work. I enjoyed the show we did on the Kalakala, but it was very much that the show was rehearsed "here," and then we brought it to the Kalakala. And it was great because it had this apocalyptic thing, where you had to watch where you stepped, because the floor's so rusty, and a couple times I thought I was going to go right through it. But I didn't feel like the show owned that space. It was just like, we're sticking theatre in this weird place, as opposed to, what can the space do? That's what excites me.

D.J. Hopkins: Thank you.

Diane Stern: Katy [Kingsbury] and I are both from Theatre Unlocked. I started the company by email, actually. Our first show was done at the Segway, mainly because we didn't have a space, and I worked out a way for us to use it for free. It was an uncomplicated production that we did for two nights there, and then we moved on: We had someone present an idea for doing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on the Fremont Troll as part of the Solstice Festival. So we did that piece, which I'd say was our most site-specific that we've done. We realized that this idea of using non-traditional spaces really appealed to us. We did our third show in a café, *Aunt Dan and Lemon*. We were creating – the space is sort of separate from the actual café, where the coffee was being made – and we made it feel like a living room. And then our last show that we did was *True West*, in the basement of a house, built out to look like a kitchen.

Part of it is necessity: we have no money, and we can get this space for free. Another part of it is creating a theatre experience that lets the audience know that theatre doesn't have to be in a black room, and that you can think about theatre in a different way. And I think that the Troll show was probably the most successful in that way, because it really asked, what is a theatre? And what constitutes – what makes it – where are the values drawn?

Katy Kingsbury: Just a little bit to add. At the Troll, I came into Theatre Unlocked because I was in *Midsummer*, and the constant interaction of the audience into your space – there's nothing you can do about it. Kids coming up onto the Troll and wanting to play while you're performing, and you just have to go with it. And even in *True West*, where beer cans were being thrown out, and basically almost landing in the audience members' laps – and they're reacting, not quite sure.

And then one night, actually, it was just interesting to see how much they want to be a part of it. The fourth wall did not have to exist. One of the actors (playing Austin) was trying to get the keys from Lee, and Lee takes them out of his pocket and throws them – and it goes under one of the risers. And everybody in the audience is going, what's going on? He needs those keys. One lady in the audience – she's fumbling through her purse, and she takes out her keys and hands them to him. (Laughter.) And Austin says, "Thanks." (Laughter.) And it was so great to be a part of it that: where the audience thinks, oh gosh, he needs keys or he's going to kill

this guy! And how much they want to be a part of that, and how at the end, she's waiting outside, waiting for her keys. (Laughter.) We've closed the door, and I'm running around, trying to get them. And I'm running around, and she says, "That was very exciting." It was probably not at all what she had expected in a theatre, in a traditional space. So, I think it's those kind of interactions and connections with the audience that you won't get from a stage that I just love, and am so eager to be more a part of. And I'm thrilled with the IKEA idea, and when you guys described the trailer too.

Diane Stern: One of the other things I'd add, is with *True West* – on the Troll, we had very little technical elements, but in the other spaces, we set up lights and we had a fairly theatre-like environment, although it was in a different space. With *True West*, we didn't have any of those available to us at the time. And so we looked at other ways: Why do you have to have lights up, where the house goes down, and they're in black, and the stage is lit in a certain way? It was very simple lighting, but as an audience member, you didn't feel like you were really outside the action, because the lighting didn't separate that. I think that's a really interesting thing to play with, which is why does the audience have to be in the dark? And playing with that safety of being an audience member sitting in the dark where they can't see me, it's no big deal, so if I unwrap my candy, nobody's going to know it's me. But playing with that idea, letting them be a part of the show – they don't necessarily have to interact, although they can – but that they're included in the show.

D.J. Hopkins: Well, we're going to have some time for some questions and comments and discussion. But I think it's a really good time to thank all of our presenters, with a round of applause. (Applause.)

One of the things that I get as a through-line of many of the presentations is a reminder that so much of site-specific theatre is about taking theatre to places, to situations, that are going to be porous. Where you're not going to have – and this is part of the plan – where you're not going to have total control over your audience. And this is something that Diane just mentioned at the end, and that we were talking about in one of our previous break-out sessions [on "Theatre and the City"] – you bring the lights down, you're in the comfy chairs, you're over there, we're over here, and the convention is that you're going to stay over there and stay quiet while we put on a good show. And if you're in IKEA or under a bridge, you're not always going to have that kind of control, and that's part of the virtue of doing this kind of theatre: giving up a certain degree of control, and invite participation on the part of the audience, and blur the distinction between audience and performer. I think that's an exciting way to begin to structure a more active relationship with the performer and those around you in the community.

There's also an element of danger that came up and was mentioned several times. (Laughter.) I personally attended a number of productions that a friend of mine referred to as "insurance-waiver theatre." They all involved climbing a rickety ladder – and that was the audience! I wonder if all of you, to one degree or another, are talking about danger, whether it's the danger of what's the audience going to do when they start telling you about their recipes, or really physical danger in terms of –

Llysa: Burns. Physical burns...

D.J. Hopkins: With the piece? (Nod "yes.") I wonder if part of the attraction of working in site-specific theatre is our danger, whether it's the less-physically dangerous uncertainty of what an audience member is going to do, to the greater dangers of actually being in a site that is unstable, whether it's a rusty ship or certain remote factory location. I wonder if you might speak to the friction of actually working in these locations.

Carla Barragan: We knew the dancers would be challenged in site-specific work. I was a gymnast, and did work as on a balance beam on the edge of the window sill. And it was the most exciting moment of my career. I actually did this, and I felt safe. Of course, I could do that when I'm on my own, but unfortunately, I find that when I try to do things like that in a theatre, a lot of times I've been told, "No, you can't do that. It can't be insured, for our audiences. Not for yourself – we don't care about you. We just care about our audiences."

D.J. Hopkins: Sure, exactly.

Carla Barragan: I think there is that kinetic, and I think the audience shares that kinetic, of risk-taking. And that's what they feel more – if I'm able to do that, they can feel that, that I'm enjoying the danger.

Llysa Holland: In one parking lot, there was a building, which was essentially a "shooting" gallery upstairs. And when we were cleaning up the space, we kept finding dead needles. One of our things is, in the show, we thought, please god, don't let anybody scoot along the ground and find any needles. And the audience kind of knew the space better than we did, and thank god. They were like, "Oh no. I haven't been here, but I've heard all about it." So for them, it was that. And also, they were moving throughout the piece and under the canopy, they wanted to see the model, and they wanted to see what would happen if the rope falls.

Ron Sandahl: I think you are blurring the line, with a lot of site-specific theatre, between what is real and what is theatrically-imagined. A lot of times we'll have actors that will come in with the audience, who won't know they're actors, a lot of times, after they jump up and start doing something. The danger comes, that once that line's been broken, then it has happened in the past, that other people in the audience might jump up with the actors and start participating as well. So that the dynamic is reversed, and there is implicit danger to the actor, not knowing what this person is going to do, how the actor is going to work it into the show, and the actor can do what he was going to do.

Valerie Moseley: When we were in Fremont, people were mostly very nice. But there was one fellow who had been drinking, and decided my character was really cute. He just kept saying, "Come on over here, babe! Come on!" I was really trying to be generous and go with it, and it was really lucky that my partner was there, and she pulled me out of this icky situation, of this man glomming onto me in this not-appropriate way. So there's the danger of hanging twenty feet in the air, but also just of an interpersonal nature.

D.J. Hopkins: I think we should get all of you [audience] involved. Yes, please.

Audience: I just wanted first to say, that I admire the ingenuity and creativity of the artists doing site-specific theatre. I'm sure for all of us – a lot of the most effective theatre I've seen has been site-specific. Most of us talked about, for a long time, all the great site-specific plays that we've seen. However, as a challenge to you, I'll put out: if any of us had the budget and the means to be in a legitimate theatre, would we not use that route? I put this out for argument: Would we not rather be able to have the budget and do a traditional thing? Because what I'm seeing here –

D.J. Hopkins: You mean, do a traditional performance in a traditional theatre?

Audience (same): Yes. The audience in this situation is still in the traditional bourgeois relationship of "actor vs. audience" that we're talking about. And I maintain that what we have here, in fringe theatre – we've all done things in non-traditional settings. So, is it not merely an extension of traditional theatre with a lack of means? As opposed to a truly new way of looking

at theatre, as forum theatre, where the relation between the actor and audience really isn't a clear thing, and the audience is not intruding on the performance, and has been incorporated as part of the performance?

D.J. Hopkins: I see some hands in the audience, but would any of our panelists like to respond to that first?

Charlie Rathbun: I'd like to take one crack at that. I think that it's not for everyone. I don't think there's anything right or wrong with the proscenium or fourth-wall approach to theatre. A lot of environmental, experimental work goes on inside a regular theatre, but bringing the audience on stage, all kinds of stuff trying to break down that formality. What is has to do with is the expectation of an audience, who comes from an idea of general safety in – particularly in a subscription style of theatre – which is where I know exactly where my seat is, I know exactly where I'm going, and I know I'm going to be able sit here, and it'll be safe, and it's all going to happen over there and everything's going to be fine – all the way to the other end with fear, and I've seen that. I think people are actually – and I think many of the artists in this room interested in site-specific theatre, and I think artists in general – are really looking for ways to break out, particularly with such an institutional environment that we are now in.

We had the same discussion with the arts agencies, and said, you are no longer in charge 100% of this event. It is now the artists who are in charge, who'll decide where this is going to happen, in collaboration with you. But you no longer have to manage this. You don't have to publicize it, you don't have to sell tickets, you don't have to make revenue or income – and it's really an opportunity, and you no longer have a venue or an arts manager saying, this is what's going to happen here. I think artists are really hungry for that. And not only that, I actually think that the public and the community are really hungry for that – partly because we are so overwhelmed with watching. We watch everything. We watch TV all day long. We listen to music all day long. We watch an event at the Hugo House, and we sit in the audience very nicely, and we clap. And I think people are getting sick of watching all the time. I think people want to actually be involved, want to interact with the artists. And certainly, I think we are getting that in way. If you remember how performance art happened in the 1970's – remember that? Visual art started striking into the medium of theatre, visual art started coming out of the galleries, and wanted to get out of that formal relationship, and really incorporate the body and incorporate the danger into the work. And I think that's the nature of artists, who want to explore, to want to employ, have a more real experience.

Audience: On the topic of control: site-specific theatre focuses audience members in a way that is encouraging a prolific theatre experience. Someone could be wondering through IKEA, looking for a shower curtain, and then all of a sudden realize, "Oh, this is actually a show going on." And if some of them think, "Hey, we should go check out that next thing up on Capitol Hill, in those crazy little spaces that they have up there." Or if some kid walks by the Troll, and there's some fairy talking in some language he doesn't quite understand, and his family has never exposed him to theatre – but the theatre community is exposing other people. And I think that's one thing that's so important about site-specific theatre.

D.J. Hopkins: And if I might add to that, I think that a lot of site-specific work is done by theatre companies and theatre individuals whose goals are to engage communities who are not normally associated with subscriber bases of major regional theatres, and going to parts of the city that are in some way or another marginalized. And the porousness, the open invitation of site-specific theatre, makes it possible to engage more people with the project, and also to get outside of a physical architectural structure that is pregnant with a lot of social ideas that put a number of people at a distance. So I think that is an extension of what you were saying.

Audience: Something that came up this morning, and that came up again a couple times – it's kind of related to the idea of danger, but it's really about us letting go of control. And it came up with Daniel Banks, and why do we want to be in control? The gentleman here said, it's the most effective performances he's seen have been site-specific, and it's usually because, I think, this fourth wall is down, and we've allowed interaction between those on stage telling the stories and those being told to. And I go back to Shakespeare, back in his day, where the light was uniformly distributed across the audience and the stage: the idea that it was about this relationship back and forth. And I think, more and more, I go to see plays, and I feel that it's purely objective experience. I'm in the dark, and I'm watching this presentation, and it's really easy for me to be critical, and to say, I didn't like that actor, I didn't like that choice. And it's so much harder to do when you're in an experience, in a small room, where you're basically in someone's kitchen, having this experience, and you're a part of it – you lose that. I think that's good for the institutions to continue to strive for, and it's one of the nice things about not being – And I think the important part about creating new audiences, people experiencing theatre in places they've never experienced it before.

Charlie Rathbun: We've got one of our site-specific artists right here. Can I ask you to describe what you're doing?

Audience (same): Yeah. I was also at the theatre forum last year, and I asked a question about site-specific theatre, and one of your people came up to me, and said, "Have you heard? We're doing a site-specific thing." And gave me an application, and it was due in four days. And we came up with a proposal to do, similar to some other people here, a short play in a coffee shop. It's a homeless teenage girl meeting with somebody from her past, in a coffee shop, where people don't know this homeless person is actually an actor. I later found out, very belatedly, about doing conversations in restaurants. It's gone over quite well. Challenging in all of the same ways that you guys spoke of, but interesting because people experience theatre all the time in their life, and it's not much different than listening to a conversation in a coffee shop where you're like, "What was that going on over there?" And just listening to it, a semi-scripted conversation happening....

Audience: I've just had a good experience as an audience member, with Sarah Michelson's show at On the Boards, which was great, because instead of the usual theatre experience, or dance experience: The challenge was, it was in the space, but it was site-specific because you had things going on all around you. One thing we found out was that Seattle audiences were very prepared for that, "What's going on? Let's check this out." I found out later at a meeting, part of the experience was that the audience was uncomfortable, not being able to move, or knowing what's going on. And I said, "really?" Because on my night, I had get up and see what's going on. They said that on the first night, they really freaked out because all at once, the Seattle audience realized, "Oh, we're supposed to get up now." And they rose and walked around at once, and the dancers were like, "Oh my god, oh my god, what are we going to do?" Then they said, "Okay, it's fine. It's just different." But with my audience, they weren't quite as active, and so people weren't running into each other. I found it so fascinating, when I looked at the light, the most lit area was the audience. And just watching how people confronted their own issues of their expectations of what that experience was supposed to be. And my friend was really angry, even though she's very open-minded about this kind of thing, and she said, "I don't know what to say." And she just went back to her seat and watched the dancers who were still dancing in this little area. And I was watching a little girl do the same movement for about ten minutes, and then I'd feel the wall, and it was vibrating, and watch the people. Like I would if I was in a museum, just people-watching. It was just fascinating: site-specific within the site, and it was great.

D.J. Hopkins: Charlie mentioned that it requires a condition, anytime you're introduced to something that is unfamiliar to you -- and many projects introduce new conditions for performance -- and that's an audience that is going to be receptive, that comes with a condition of receptivity, that will throw out conventional expectations, and to use a non-technical term, "just go with it," and accept the new conditions of performance. Yes, last point?

Carla Barragan: I think that my work has really been going through a transformation, transgressing, in order to create something. And I think that site-specific work allows audience to be part of that. And it really is hard, I think, for an audience to go transform themselves, for performances out in the world. You can see their faces lighting up, in front of them, and it's a rewarding thing for the artists to see the audience. Without realizing it, they've become part of the creation. I think that's powerful.

D.J. Hopkins: I think that's a great point -- making the audience active. Once again, thank you all, very much. And thank you for your time. (Applause.)

END OF SESSION

The Grand Unified Theory: Getting Ahold of Your Stakeholders

Eric Schinfeld: So, I think as we get started, before we talk about how to connect to your community, is to first talk about what is community, and who this community is that you're trying to connect to. So, just throw out whether you're an individual artist, playwright, actor -- or whether you belong to an organization. Name one group that is in your community. Senior citizens? Good. Women. Residents of South Seattle. Good.

Now when you say that they're in your community, I imagine that you're creating art for them -- most of you. So for those of you who were so brave as to shout something out, now you're going to be punished. We're going to go back to you and say, great, so that is part of your community, but what is a way that you've actually interacted with them? And by interacted with them, I don't mean "made art for them," but actually either asked them what kind of art they wanted to see, or talked to them about how to do your art better, or talked to them about how to spread the arts to more like them.

Audience: Yeah, I'll throw out -- we do have a different cultural focus each summer. Summer is our biggest program. Professionally directed and designed production. We have theatre professionals on the staff, that have seen high school kids in the past in the summer camp. We do a teen show. So in each summer, we have a different cultural focus. This summer is Southeast Asia. So right now, I'm actually working with the Lao community center, to partner with us, so that their kids will be a part of the whole thing. Then also with the parents of teens in the summer camp, I send them emails, asking "What did you like? Would you tell somebody else about this? What do you want us to repeat?"

Audience (different): We did surveys through mail and email. To subscribers mainly, to see what they'd like to see, to test potential show ideas, what they're response is. We've also have newsletters, to let them know about guests that are related to the shows. But also we have performances, getting out into the community.

Audience (different): We sent a few students to the Annie Wright school, to serve as dramaturgs on productions. We sent a few students over to Stadium High School, taking the role of dramaturgs. That's our big focus, sending people out to the high schools.

Audience (different): I spend a lot of time in high schools, talking with kids, out in the community, that essentially act as a focus group for me. Emails, a lot of interaction with that audience. With *Strike Anywhere*, our audience is primarily people like us, already 20, 30, 40-year-olds. And our outreach would primarily be alcohol, I guess. (Laughter.)

Eric Schinfeld: There's really two parts that we're talking about. One is actually identifying them. And the second is actually going out and interacting with them, whether that is actually serving them, or getting feedback from them about how they want to be served. For some of you, it's really obvious. I run a program called TeenFlix, so my community is obviously teens. But for some of you, it can be a lot less obvious. I'll just pick on Diane because she's right there and I know her. So when you decided you wanted to make theatre, how did you decide for whom you wanted to make it? (Reply inaudible.) So the kernel of it was filling a market need that wasn't being served. Anyone else want to talk about how you arrived at what you thought your community would be? Not only why, but was there a process, or a group of you got together and said, let's do this thing, who should we serve? (Inaudible.) One of the ways you identified your community was for them to come to you and say, "we want you to perform for us."

Frank Chiachiere: I think, obviously, we don't need to go to the point of slicing and dicing the electorate, to get different subgroups. Does anyone ever have this stumbling block, where they said, they tried to do some outreach and it just fell on its face, and found it's just not worth my time? You tried to reach out to the community, and thought this would be a great project, but what were the challenges? Did you not have enough time? Or you didn't know who the person was who you needed to talk to?

Audience: I would love to speak to that. Especially in terms of cultural groups: Last year, I was working on Hawaiian cultural show. And I contacted all the Hawaiian newspapers locally. But almost none of the Hawaiian people in Seattle came to see the show. And I worked on the show for almost a year, had great artists, had great cast, but I started to get calls three or four weeks later saying, "hey, is that show still going on?" And I think it's harder, when you're reaching out to a special group, is being consistent. It might take them two or three shows for them to hear about the show and want to go. And that's where it's hard to maintain the energy and the commitment. Because it really does take a long time.

Frank Chiachiere: It's a long grassroots process.

Eric Schinfeld: And you're also educating a lot of people about what it means to be a theatre-goer. I've definitely had the experience in trying to do that kind of thing. And either they didn't know it was open at a certain time, or they'll show up at twenty minutes after eight and assume that they can just walk in. Because if you don't know, if you're not an avid theatre goer, most things in life you can show up late to, and it's not a big deal. Especially when it's a theatre when you have to walk across the stage. You have to be consistent, let them know it only runs through these days.

Audience: You have to create a sense of urgency. Yes, it's only playing for this weekend. Yes, you have to buy a ticket at this place. And I've run into this: theatre is a finite commodity in a lot of ways. We did a beautiful play two years ago that Carla [Barragan] choreographed, and Olga Sanchez directed, and I had someone call me this year and say, "Can you bring that play?"

And I said, "Well no, the actors are in Portland. I can't bring her back, and get all the kids back from two summers ago, for \$400. Sorry."

Eric Schinfeld: Anyone else had those stumbling blocks? I think that can be the biggest challenge, getting non-theatre groups conditioned to what that means, what's expected. But it can be very rewarding. You can get interesting feedback, when you actually talk to them afterward.

Audience: What is the responsibility of the artist to encourage people to come in and see theatre, in a society that definitely does not support that? It's thinking about what is our community, each other, and our larger society.

Eric Schinfeld: One of the real reasons that Frank and I wanted to have this conversation with you today, and why we do the work that we do at the Shunpike, is that I think it can be very easy to have an inside-feedback loop. You interact with all of your theatre people, and you think the same, so you say, I'm going to use this marketing tool to market this show. Or I'm going to do this type of theatre because the community really wants it. What you're not getting is actual feedback who you're trying to target.

One of the real things that it comes down to, for us, are what I call proxies. Let's say you're doing a play for the Pacific-Islander community. You can't get the entire Asian/Pacific-Islander community into a room, and say, "All right, what do you want, in terms of your art? What is the best way to connect to you? How can we really bring you in and speak to you, and have you speak to us?" And what it comes down to, are the proxies. And the traditional ones are: Board of Directors, your donors, people who are giving you money and investing in you, volunteers in that they're investing their time and resources, whether selling tickets or a lawyer volunteering services – and audience. Well, it's easy to say, the audience is in my community. They came to see my play, they get it. They automatically must love everything I'm doing, and why I'm doing, which is probably not true. But really try to figure out how to use those proxies, to get that broader perspective, to bring in those thoughts – and say, "Wow, you don't view theatre as this thing that you must do or else you'll die?" Which I think a lot of us think.

Audience: Certain things are different from forty years ago. We have the internet, we have surround sound, we have Netflix arriving. How is that impacting our audiences and their motivations to get a babysitter, get parking, and come to theatre?

Frank Chiachiere: I wish I had the answer. It's changed a lot of things. I think why this forum is titled what it is, is that we've realized that theatre can't be a passive entertainment experience to the same degree.

Audience: Many years ago, Theatre Puget Sound had a conference about the future of theatre, and Misha Berson gave a talk about what theatre would be like in another ten years, or something to that effect. I think she saw it as tipping toward different communities.

Frank: Frank Chiachiere: Theatre has always been a community-based organization, back to the Greeks around the fire. It's always been about community rituals. You don't have to be doing experimental, avant-garde, 1960's theatre, to be talking about ritual. That process of these rooms, and these buildings – we have this experience where we have these buildings, and they're walled off, and god forbid there's a window because there is no connection to the outside world – that intensifies the challenge. That's why we want to ask, who are our specific communities, how are we reaching them, and how is this designed?

Eric Schinfeld: I would say that it is the challenge of how you get people out of their homes. And the answer is -- not *the* answer – but the answer is to make it something that they actually want. Back in the day, they went to theatre because there was one thing on television, and it was what the community did. So, now there's a sense of accountability and responsibility to make theatre meaningful to those people. Now we're seeing 4Culture doing site-specific theatre, bringing theatre to them. They're saying, this is really speaking to this issue. And it doesn't mean that they're only making theatre for 19-year-old men in Germany – that's not the kind of boutique theatre. But making theatre that speaks to those issues. But the best to figure out what that is, is to figure out who the community is, and speak to them.

Audience: People want to get out of the house. But the question is for what.

Frank Chiachiere: And that's really important too, just getting people used to that ritual, of bringing them into the theatre, bringing them into the building. Obviously, that's a challenge, with certain places, certain theatres, who don't have a home – but training them: “this is where you go.” They see, oh yeah, there's a parking garage next door. There's a restaurant nearby.

Eric Schinfeld: Money is something that we don't often realize how important it is. I don't mean that, as artists or organizational directors who need money to keep our things going. I mean about the money that people are giving to you. Whether it's a donor giving you a check, ten or twenty or fifty dollars – that money is valuable to them. So when you ask people for money, which you're either doing by soliciting them or by getting them to buy tickets, you're asking them to really give something important. And it's important to recognize that responsibility, that accountability, if they're going to give you something of such value, you have to respect that, and make sure you're giving them something of equal or greater value. I want to just take a quick straw poll: When someone says they want to make art that better serves our community – especially for all the art creators in the house – does that make you cringe a little bit? Do you say, I don't want to sell out? Does that sound like selling out to you? Taking your artistic freedom? Is that a concern? (Inaudible.) It's a Grand Unified Theory. You cannot develop a Box Office unless you are connected to the community.

Frank Chiachiere: And what we're trying to tease out is to have a successful arts organization, a good community-based institution – which I think all arts organizations should try to be – what are the different lengths? Reaching out to the audience, to the donors, the city, the county. How do all these people support those organizations?

Eric Schinfeld: Let's think about Theatre Puget Sound for a second. Theatre Puget Sound is a service organization. It has a Board of Directors, it has governors. It has people that it serves. So how does Theatre Puget Sound operate? First they had to decide who they wanted to serve. They serve theatre artists. They made that decision, by first having a Board of Directors come together. We have some founding Directors here from the Board, maybe we could ask them. But theoretically, somebody came together and said, “we want to do this thing.” We want to serve this community, which happens to be theatre artists. Then, when they made that decision, they then went out and tried to get people from that community to help them do that. And to find out what they wanted and how. And they're still doing that. When a new initiative comes on the table, like helping theatre artists get health care, where does that come from? Well, it comes from the community that TPS is serving, which says, “Here's a thing that is going on in our lives that we don't have. Here's a need. Can you help us serve that need?” Maybe they hear that because there's a TPS meeting. Maybe they hear that because somebody just emails it in. Maybe the Board of Directors, as proxies, brings it up at the meeting. Then there's that constant loop of community-Board-organization strategic goals, planning, serving, that all comes together. You don't necessarily start all in one place, but you need to have all of

those legs of the table, like Frank said: your audiences, your donors/volunteers, your board, your services, they all fit together.

Frank Chiachiere: It's true of any non-profit, of any community-based organization, not necessarily just the arts. But we'll focus specifically on the challenges of the arts. I think one of the challenges, too, is bringing the challenges of the artist and the challenges of the community together, and trying to find how to create that balance, so that everyone's serving each other in the right capacity.

Audience: It's hard to put your arms around something so large, because I don't know where to squeeze. As a writer, I can write something and it's finished as soon as I finish writing it. Nobody ever has to see it or read it, and I've had the pleasure of writing. In theatre, it's a two-way process, because it depends on an audience to see it. It's that kind of electromagnetic energy that only exists in theatre, not in film, but in live performance, dance as well. That live exchange, as opposed to film or television or a painter painting in his garret by himself.

Frank Chiachiere: Excellent.

Audience (different): It's important to note that if you're passionate about what you're doing, that only goes so far. It's important to think about what the audience wants to see. We sometimes get caught up in: "This is the show we want to do," and forget about the audience.

Audience (different): I'm thinking about post-play discussions. And whether people participate. And if we can get the same kind of interest and buzzing that's going on for *Boston Legal*. People are passionate about *Desperate Housewives*. I heard a whole conversation about it, though I've never seen it. How do we get people to be so passionate about theatre, something an actor does, and talking about that? Would that be a community of ownership, or proxies?

Eric Schinfeld: Who's had some successes with that?

Audience: I work with SIS Productions. It's interesting because it relates to your question, and to your question. I was having a conversation with someone who was talking to someone who wanted to get involved in theatre, and they were asking about a lot of different theatres and what it would be like to be involved. They were asking a lot about CHAC, for instance. It feels to me, regarding CHAC, that they're actually relatively young in the Seattle scene, but it feels to be like a "director's theatre." As we started talking about that, and the fringe theatre scene specifically – less so, with the larger theatres – that you could almost categorize theatres by saying, "This theatre started as a way to give certain directors a chance to do the work they wanted to do," and the CHAC, that's what they do. They have a core group of directors, who choose works that they want to direct, and that seems to be their focus. There are theatres that are started by playwrights: they want to get their work onstage, so they start a theatre company, and they start extending to let other people do their work. There are theatres that are started by actors, who want a company and want to be able to act, and have an actors' focus. And then I started thinking about, are there theatres that start because they have an audience focus? (Laughter.) Not doing stuff for ourselves, but based upon the group of people that you're trying to target. What do they want? And so, we had this huge conversation about this, and then I ran into your conversation.

So the company that I run, SIS Productions: we actually started with that premise of the audience. We were talking about things, as Asian Americans, that we never had the same privilege of growing up with, that other people grow up. For example, seeing ourselves everywhere in mainstream culture. We don't see ourselves on television. We don't see ourselves as big rock stars. We don't see ourselves – occasionally, there will be a featured

Asian. But they're not American. They're Asian, but not Asian American. So, we never see ourselves reflected in our culture. So, for all the Asian Americans out there, how do we learn about anything? We realized that most people have role models in pop culture, but we don't have any role models in pop culture. So what we started thinking about was: how do we give that to them? And what we did was create a pop culture world for Asian Americans. And from that, everything that we think of is from the eyes of our audience. So we developed a play, and decided to make it episodic, so that we could give our audience pop culture icons that they could actually follow like you can in pop culture. But you can't do that if you just do different plays.

So then we started thinking about, how we keep the audience connected in between shows? Because in pop culture, in between shows, you can open any magazine and read about *Tomcat* or whatever. What we do is: we send regular emails, and each of the characters have diary entries that they can get. Over time, so the audience can actually keep up on the lives of these characters we've created. These characters have become real people, in the audience's minds, and we actually invite different audience members to hear the new scripts workshopped, along with different actors who have worked with us, so that we get a lot of feedback from the people. And we just sit back and watch: they have these huge passionate debates and they get really into it. And what we do with marketing, rather than us having to do so much work going in, we actually let our audience do that work for us. So we tell our audience not only, "If you like the show, go tell your friends," but we actually contact them personally and say, "If you like the show, here's some incentives for going." And we have people who've come to the first show with a friend, but now they're bringing in groups of 46. We tell the groups that have brought in five or ten, if you can bring in twelve next time, here's this incentive. So they get so close, okay, we've got eleven, we're almost there. Groups that have been bringing 25, we ask to bring in 30. And one guy said he'd get to 30, but he brought in 46. He was so excited because he surpassed his own goal. So we set these benchmarks for our audience, and they're going and doing the work for us.

And we work with our cast too. Because part of our mission is to develop talent among people who might not ever have a chance to. So we have contests with them, as well. And we get the community involved, like business sponsors. So it's all these different things, getting people out there, they're doing most of the work. And we're just there to be their cheerleaders.

Eric Schinfeld: That's obviously a lot of amazing stuff.

Audience: But it's coming from the audience perspective.

Eric Schinfeld: Yes, that's what I was going to say. Because you have a connection to that community, and have an idea of what they want, that's great. No offense to the 5th Avenue Theatre production of *Miss Saigon*, but maybe that's not what the Vietnamese community in Seattle actually wants. If you go to them, and say, "hey look, we're doing your play," and if that's not what they want to see, they're not going to respond in that way. So having that connection, really getting that feedback, really getting to what down deep in their gut they want to see, that they can't see in any other place, is important.

Audience: There aren't a lot of people saying, "What do you want to see?"

Frank Chiachiere: There was "Market Research Theatre" a while back. Where they literally took a survey. It was kind of tongue-in-cheek. They took a survey, and then did a play that was exactly what people said in the survey that they wanted to see. (Laughter.) It had random kung-fu stuff.

Audience: One thing that was interesting, was about getting audiences responsive and involved. We invited parts of our audience to email us about their thoughts about the script, and the director and playwright read every single one of those emails, up to 300 pieces of mail. People say, I want my voice heard. Most people only see a full production, and hear, "What do you think?" And they can only say, "do it again." But having those workshops and inviting the audience to give their opinion – that's something that will help us as creators, actors, to build audiences.

Eric Schinfeld: A couple of things coming from that comment. It's so important to draw that line between your audience and your friends. To get out of that sort of feedback loop, of saying, "Well, I'm a playwright, and I wrote this play, and all my other playwright-friends, who all went to college together, and grew up and trained in the same playwriting schools, and they love it, so it must be great." So, to just be aware of that. The second thing is, to bring it back to organizations that have a board of directors, or for your less-formally organizations that just have a crew of volunteers and audience – there are totally inexpensive, accessible ways of doing these things, even if you're not a giant house that has a huge list-serv for emails or surveys. Trying to build that in, is always a part of not just a specific play, but also building an organization and your work as an artist, incorporating that into your process. If you're a playwright, maybe you're doing a reading and maybe you just want to make sure that's a reading for a randomly selected group of people at the Pike Place Market, or a group of people who've seen your plays before, or a group that's friendly to you but are actually a doctor, lawyer, and an architect, but not other artists.

Frank Chiachiere: We've spent a lot of time talking about the big picture of the community, and how the art that's created interfaces with the community that it serves. And once you define that community, I think the next step is to become something that community really wants to support, and wants to see survive and thrive. And how you do that, like Kathy was talking about, turning it from an artist-generated organization to a community-sustained organization no longer relying on just the artists.

Audience: We rely on parents to help. For instance, we had a parent design our set, and build our set for us. That was exciting. Another parent has designed costumes for us, for the last three years or so. Probably will again, for the next couple of years. So that's not so much board members, but getting non-theatre people involved, which is intrinsically positive. So even as their children go off to school, we still have those contacts and word-of-mouth to go off.

Audience (different): And boards of directors are so complex as well. You need some expertise and experience as board members to build the organization. Some boards are strictly fund-raising based, where each board member brings in five, ten thousand, whatever. Other boards want the experience, theatre expertise of their board.

Frank Chiachiere: There's also an evolution of boards. You'll find when most organizations start, they have a very hands-on kind of board. Then over time, if it's done right, that shifts, and you move into having representatives who do more fund-raising. Maybe you keep some people who have some expertise, keeping the board diverse. But then you move toward having an Executive Director and Board President, who herd and shepherd that along, so that the board doesn't -- At some point, the board can't continue to micro-manage the actual organization.

Eric Schinfeld: Also, no one is going to fund-raise for you, unless they have a stake in the organization. Unless you've really brought them in, to help you help guide the organization.

Audience: I had someone say "I want to volunteer." Just asking, people will say yes.

Audience (different): What strikes me about our conversation, in regard to how to reach community, is: This morning in our conversation, Jose Gonzalez said he recommends that when you start an organization, you go around to people and shake their hand. And they might help you now, or they might never help you. But you have to ask. I wouldn't be on the board of TPS right now if Karen Lane and I hadn't run into each other at the coffee shop, and she said, "You know..." And I'd never thought of it. Of course, I wouldn't have asked to be on the board, but I'm really glad to be on the board. Or other organizations that I'm a part of: I think it starts with a handshake, and then you have coffee, and they come to see the show. It ends when you're serving on the board, or donating money. It's not that you just fit like a little cookie cutter. You have to invent it. I also have to say, working at the Seattle Repertory Theatre is so unlike any other. I'm very proud to work there. But it was not started by artists, as almost all the groups here were. It was started by the community. If you can imagine, the community has been involved there for years and years. There was so much community buy-in that you have a different kind of set of responsibilities to balance for the non-theatre people.

Audience (different): I was at the TCG conference, and someone said they couldn't get over the organization of the SRO that supports the Rep. And I think one of the reasons that this works so well, and you can tell them this, is that there's a sense of participation and control, as opposed to controlled participation. Nothing was more off-putting for people than being controlled, as in school. It's the sense of ownership, buy-in. They do all the lobby shop, and it's a major support organization for the theatre, because there's a sense of ownership of the theatre. And I think that if more organizations would do this, there'd be a sense that "this is our theatre," and you're voting by going to the theatre, by buying a ticket, and most importantly, by volunteering.

Eric Schinfeld: One of the things that we throw around a lot is the word "stake." The most important word that you can learn today is stake. It's a word that is thrown around a lot: "you really need to build your stakeholders, and communicate with your stakeholders." It's a word in place of community a lot, because your board and your donors are your stakeholders. But the only way that they're actually stakeholders is if you give them a stake in the organization to actually take hold of. And I think that's what your point really speaks to. No one's going to be a donor, if they write you a check, and you say thanks a lot, and you never involve them, and you never ask their opinion. Board members don't just come through the door, and want to hear, "Thanks, but don't give me your opinion. I don't have time for that." You have to give them responsibilities, input. You have to let them own the organization. Because what it comes down to, when you put your art in the world, whether as an organization or as an individual artist, it's not yours anymore. It's owned by that community. You have to foster that, and cultivate and develop that.

Frank Chiachiere: We only have a few minutes, so in closing, I want to make sure we touched on all the things. Extending your hand, defining the community. And I think the last thing that we didn't really talk that much about is the specific fundraising and grantwriting, which is a way of talking to those other community stakeholders and those other proxies, whether it's private foundations or government foundations. And all that work gets a lot easier, once you know who you're serving. What a lot of those organizations want to see is that you know who your community is, and that you know who you're serving. I think a lot of that does follow through and gets a lot easier, when you say, "This is who I'm serving. This is what I'm doing. This is my specific task, how we're reaching out to them." As we close, does anyone have any stories of volunteers, of systems they use for their volunteers? Kathy had a great example of using other people to bring in new people, of incentivizing that. And that can be anything from volunteers in the Box Office, to anything. What do you when someone says, "This is a great

organization. I want to help." What do you do? You give them the job. So what's the first that comes to your mind to say to someone like that?

Audience: Can you file? (Laughter.)

Audience (different): I think that's a great question, because I've watched other people in my organization. Sometimes we have an overwhelming sense of our own fantastic-ness. (Laughter.) "I'm the only one who knows how to run that." But many times, a volunteer really does want to be in charge of something. So, if they've got the right skills, "You get to run the front of house for my whole show." You can have it.

Frank Chiachiere: And the more they have, they love it.

Audience: Lots of times in organizations, they ask what kind of skills do you have? But we ask, what do you like to do? Or learn to do? Our most successful volunteer stories have been, not when they came in to do something they already knew how to do, but because they came in to learn something they'd never done before. We take the time to train them. So someone came in to volunteer on one show, came in after we put out a call for volunteers, and one said, "I've never done theatre before." We set him up as an Assistant Stage Manager, to shadow along following the script. The next show, he was assisting backstage. The next show, he was helping do Box Office. The next show, he actually ran the ticketing system. And now, he's a producer. So it's six gals and this one guy. He started seven episodes ago, and he just gets more involved.

Frank Chiachiere: I think you're getting to the heart of what makes theatre unique, and it is that participatoriness on every level. Finding new ways to make it even more participatory, and getting people more involved. And it doesn't mean that we bring you up on stage, and you have to spontaneously perform – it's not that kind of participatory. You can still be doing any kind of theatre, art-wise. Anyone else before we close up? (Inaudible.) That's good. What are passion plays? Church and religion are part of what Western theatre is built on. One of the great things that CHAC did was that: a church that didn't have a church as a home would use CHAC on Sunday mornings for church service. It's great on any level. It just gets the community involved.

Audience: xx is in town doing her one-woman show "Hurricane" for relief for Hurricane Katrina. And this was the first time I'd heard of it, but there was some referring to theatre and other arts organizations, as faith-based organizations. But we have to have faith to make what we do work.

Eric Schinfeld: Like Frank said, we're the Shunpike. You can find us at www.theshunpike.org. You can email us at Eric at [TheShunpike.org](mailto:Eric@TheShunpike.org), or Frank at [TheShunpike.org](mailto:Frank@TheShunpike.org). Thank you so much for coming and talking about this topic.

Frank Chiachiere: Have a great rest of the Forum. (Applause.)

END OF SESSION

Staged Violence

(Tape too quiet.)

Complexities of Casting: with Steve Salamunovich of Complete Casting, Margaret Layne of ACT, Kate Godman of Intiman, and Jerry Manning of Seattle Rep

Karen Zeller Lane: Thanks everyone for being here. The way this is going to go down: here, you have in front of you, casting directors from three major theatres in Seattle. I'm going to give them each a brief moment to clearly introduce themselves, where they work, what their position is where they work, and then we'll go back and start with the section of the conversation that is "Do's and Don'ts" about casting, and then talk about some of the practicalities of casting: how they want you to behave, what works, what doesn't work. And then, I promise we'll take some time for some long conversation about the ways things have changed in our community in the past couple of years: has that been by necessity, or by desire? And we'll try to cobble all that together. Jerry, would you like to start?

Jerry Manning: My name is Jerry Manning, and I'm the Casting Director at the Seattle Rep. And that's it. (Laughter.)

Margaret Layne: My name is Margaret Layne, and I'm the Casting Director and Artistic Associate at ACT Theatre. That means that I do casting. The Artistic Associate part of it is on the edge, but primarily my purpose is casting.

Kate Godman: I'm Kate Godman. I do the casting at Intiman.

Steve Salamunovich: I'm Steve Salamunovich, and I do the casting at Complete Casting. My company handles freelance casting for film and television.

Karen Zeller Lane: Very good. So obviously when we get into the "Do's and Don'ts," Steve will be representing the non-live theatre casting community. So, I'd like to ask each panelist to speak about the "Do's and Don'ts" of actors in the casting process, and whatever else they'd like to talk about, one after the other – without interruptions, because I really like to interrupt.

Margaret Layne: What is most useful to people in terms of this section on "Do's and Don'ts"? Are you asking about practical things like making contacts? Or about what we're looking for?

Karen Zeller Lane: Let's just ask: someone throw out at me, or a couple people throw out at me, what is everyone's question when it comes to a "Do or Don't"?

Audience: What are theatre companies looking for?

Audience: Also, being on the other side, when *we're* casting, what's a good way to see, through an audition, whether that actor is going to be right for the part? A lot of us are probably producers, as well.

Margaret Layne: I'll start. Most of our auditions are callback auditions. We almost never do an open call, or what is known as a cattle call. And that means that, as an actor, you'd be contacted by me, because someone – the director, the artistic director – thinks that you might be a good fit for a role in the play. You also have the option of contacting me. If you look at our season, and you think there are things you'd really like to read for, you're absolutely welcome to let us know that, by phone or by email. We reserve the right to say, based on what the artistic director is looking for, we don't think you're right for the part. But there are so many of you, and we can't remember everybody. But it's a beautiful thing -- if there's something that you feel particularly passionate about. For presentation, I like to see someone with the attitude of: you

are the person I've been waiting all day to see. And we're certainly hoping that you're the person we've been waiting all day to see. None of us enjoys seeing an actor do badly in an audition. So, someone who comes in with a very positive, almost performance-level, energy, and stays there and owns the room, and exits cleanly, still projecting at least a positive feeling about what it is that just happened – because you don't always know. An audition that you may think didn't go well at all, may have landed extremely well. And while the reverse is often true, it's important to remain in a positive place until you leave the room.

Other tactical stuff? Look nice. I think, there's a fine line between wearing something that you're comfortable and confident in, and looking like you don't care. And it is, to a certain extent, a job interview. You want to look like you take yourself seriously, and you take your craft seriously, and you want us to take you seriously, and it matters to you whether or not you get this job. And when people come in, as happens occasionally, in broken-down tennis shoes, in ratty jeans and a t-shirt, the subliminal message tends to be that they don't really care how it turns out. This may be the only time in your life that it's useful to ask yourself the question, "Would my mother think I look nice?" Or if your mother is very, very "out there" fashion-wise, then "Would my grandmother think I look nice?" If you have a question, sometimes let the character help you out. If you're reading for the role of a lady, try to think in terms of a dress or a skirt that's got a little flow. It helps us to imagine you in the role, without coming in costume. Look out for shoes – that's a big trap. There is nothing that will upstage you faster than your own feet. Clomp clomp clomp!

Then introduce yourself. And once you start, we're looking at practical skills and level of experience and ability, and how dramatically the basic stuff – diction, projection, how physical you can be, are people relaxed in their body being up there – is there. How people manage the text, and their relationship to it – not just what they're saying, but how they're saying it, what kind of person expresses him- or herself in this way, and how the actor would use the text to discover and illuminate that in a way that transforms them. I'm looking for strong committed choices. And something I started to look for in just the last 3-4 years, because I don't see it all that much, is a kind of scale of energy that, for lack of a better word, I call Theatricality, with a capital T. Sometimes it becomes kind of a dirty word, because of the connotations of fakeness, but it's an air that makes you slightly larger than life.

Jerry Manning: On practical things – by looking at websites about casting practices, information on the website, it's a good practical guide to tell you some things. There are always many ways to do things. I'll start by saying that the Rep, like everybody else here, is at the TPS auditions here twice a year, I know I take it very seriously. I've been attending for five years, so that is one avenue. We sponsor mandatory union calls, sponsored twice a year. Those are primarily for union actors, though it's in what's called an Eligible Performer Audition. So if you see an open call posted on the hotline, Equity actors are given first priority, but if times allows, I can see other actors, as well. Also, from time to time, not regularly, but depending on a particular project, I will do conduct an open call. There's been a project I've been working on recently called *Temple*, a new musical, and that has been advertised on TPS. If you're an actor who sings, check the TPS website, and I think there's another posting for Thursday, the 28th, and Friday. I would encourage people to call, stop by, write, use carrier pigeon, I don't care, it doesn't matter. Stay in touch, I do my best, and on a good day, I'm pretty good about getting back to people with a response. My own policy is if you live in the Seattle-Portland area, and I don't know you, then I'm not doing my job. Drop me a note, and I'll do my best to meet you as quickly as I can. That might take a couple months sometimes, or it might be a day. So, I do my best. It's usually me, and an intern, an assistant. So that's the basic gridwork.

We, like ACT and Intiman, cast on a show-by-show basis. I've never offered a contract to anyone based on a monologue. I have monologue aversion, if anybody knows me. People are

invited to audition on a show-by-show basis. And again, as Margaret just said, we're very similar, based on my knowledge of who's in Seattle, are there other requests, or other ideas floating around the room? My wish would actually be to do three, four, five days per show. For many people that's possible, but often directors at the Rep do not live in Seattle, and I have them for a very limited amount of time. In the case of directors who live here, they may have a very good knowledge of who is working in Seattle. Each time there's a show, we develop a list that is pages and pages long, and we'll say to someone, "I don't think he's right," or "I don't think she's right." But I do encourage you to apply. If you see our season brochure, and you see there's something, the worst that can happen is that we say, "We can't use you this time around." What happens more often than not is, I don't know you. But stay in touch. Right now, it is in the realm of possibility. But I just don't know; I don't know enough about the project yet.

What else can I say? I think in the way that is similar to these other folks: when I'm working on a play, I'm thinking on many fronts, geographically. So if I'm thinking of who should play the lead in *Restoration Comedy*, I'm thinking of all the actors I know in New York, Bay Area, Washington D.C., Los Angeles, and Seattle. Now it's not that every role is open that way. Some are, certainly. I'm thinking, often, of a national pool of actors. And sometimes the best solution is in Seattle. Sometimes it's not, and maybe that will be germane to some of the discussions we'll have.

What do I look for? I look at a resumé. I don't even so much care, although as things become refined, I'm not so much interested in what roles you played, but where you played them, with whom you've worked, and where you trained. That's of most interest to me. If someone comes in, has a cup of coffee or does a monologue here at TPS, I'm not keeping track of that in my little thing here. I'm interested in getting to know an actor over time. Because really what my job is – I don't want to say "broker" because that suggests that actors are commodities, and I don't want to suggest that at all – I'm doing my best work when I can have a fluent conversation with a director not just about an actor's ability, but what kind of person they are. Because if I'm reading the role of, let's say, a fop, in *Restoration Comedy*, there are 25 people in Seattle who can play that role. The question becomes who will play that role in this production? And at a certain point, a director is going to be asking me questions that have nothing to do with an audition, like "Is this guy a jerk? Does he have a sense of humor onstage? Is this person intelligent? Is this person political?" These kinds of questions – and I can't begin to answer those kinds of questions based on a monologue. I'm looking around the room and seeing many people I know, but for me, it's a process. I'm changing, you change, six years from now you may be someone else. I'm saying, I may not have something for you today, or the next day, but I might next year, or in three years. So, for me, it's an ongoing process of learning about actors and being able to then articulate that to a director. On that note, I'll defer to others.

Karen Zeller Lane: Thank you.

Jerry Manning: Thank you.

Kate Godman: I think I would echo what Margaret and Jerry have said. I do encourage you all to stay in touch, regularly in touch. And I try, like you all, to be good about seeing people when I can, to develop relationships with you over time. As far as what we're looking for, we express what we're looking for in an audition as a combination of "heart and art." We're looking for actors who have a real emotional availability onstage, that we've clearly and truly felt. And we're also looking for an actor who has some chutzpah, a wonderful power, that can support that, some chops. Bart can start working with them, or whatever director it is, and they can turn on a dime, be open and available, and then change directions and give them something else. That's the kind of magic combination of the things we're looking for.

How you can be in the state of mind in an audition – which is terribly tense, and look at me, I’m a mess. (Laughter.) Getting to the question of coming in and doing an audition, because many of our auditions are readings, how you can get in a position to audition, so that we can feel confident that you’re right for the part – we could have a long, long conversation about how to prepare for an audition. But I think, actually, the key is in preparation. If you are 50 percent prepared, you are probably leagues ahead of 50 percent of the other people auditioning. And I don’t know why that is. I don’t know if people get scared about doing really really rigorous preparation and research. I don’t know if they – and now I’m getting too psychological – if they want it too much.

Jerry Manning: Some people don’t know how to prepare.

Kate Godman: But all those things that you learn in drama school, the work about finding the action, finding the event, finding the beats, being very rigorous about making different choices. If you do those things, you will automatically be so far ahead. And also something about -- we’re getting into choices, and how to prepare a scene – but people will avoid making a choice. They can think, “We don’t know what you want, so we’re going to try to be all things to you, to maybe see if it’s this way, or maybe see if it’s that way.” And what the director really wants is for you to make a choice.

Margaret Layne: I agree. There’s often a reluctance or timidity, or both, about really committing, and I think it might be that exact thing – of wanting to not look as if you’ve already made up your mind about who this character is, so there’s the director to do some stuff. But often that just results in a kind of a strange color-wash, and a character that doesn’t really tell us what you think about the character, or what you might bring to that role.

Kate Godman: You could make some choices that are really way out there. But if the director says “No no no no stop stop stop!” and “Do this instead,” then you can change it, and do that. Then you’ve just given us a fantastic example of what you’re like to work with, and your ability to do that.

Jerry Manning: In the audition classes I’ve taught, I have a whole theory about this: It’s very much like being in Physics 101 in college: it’s graded on a bell curve, and if you do your part, and if you take the texts, and you spend considerable time on it, and you analyze the texts, and you articulate it well, you’re going to do just what every other competent actor is doing. Therefore, your grade on this is a C, and one person gets the role. So, again, this takes a whole class to teach. The really smart actor prepares for that audition, puts it away for 24 hours or however much time he has, and then reconceives the whole thing – finds a way to look at this scene that is textually correct that someone else is going to do. That’s how you begin to make what we call strong choices. Sometimes you’re going to be doing something absolutely outrageous, so rather than getting the A+, you’re going to get the F. But you know what, people coming into an audition room, we don’t know who you are – but we will have seen your work.

Margaret Layne: We are your friends. *We* are your friends in the room.

Jerry Manning: So how do you make any effort coming in, these ten people coming in who can do the role? The question is, who is going to get cast? Strong choices. It’s a cliché. It’s like knowing, thinking like us. What are the other nine actors that I’m up against for this the role going to do, and what’s a variation on that, that would be vibrant?

I also have a whole list of what I call "Stupid Audition Tricks." First of all, you can empower yourself. If I call you on a Tuesday, to come in on Wednesday, it's actually okay to say, "You know what, I don't have enough time to prepare. Is there any other time?" Don't be passive in the lead-up-to; this is a negotiation. Another thing: find out what room it is in. You can actually look at the room. And, as they say, auditions are always determined in the first three minutes, and if you walk in and Joe the director is there, and you're doing this [mimes looking around blindly], then you've already made a bad impression. If you know what the room is, and you just [mimes going directly to the director, shakes hands], say "How are you?" You know what I mean? So I've got a whole thing I could do on stupid audition tricks. So you can maximize your ability with preparation. [To Steve:] You haven't said a word. (Laughter.)

Margaret Layne: To say or not to say.

Steve Salamunovich: You're on the theatrical side of things, but my field is quite different. You're more interested in hiring someone who can play nice in the sandbox for a long time. I work in more brief sections of time. The longer I have an actor on camera, the more I know about what that actor is bringing or not bringing to the movie. I'm a tremendous believer in actor empowerment. And there's no shortage of actors saying, "If you tell me what you want, I can be that." I'm not interested in actors like that. I find that they're there to get something, instead of give. And what I want is for every actor to find some creative voice, to have a reason for doing what they do. And if acting is your muse, it's become your muse for one of two reasons: you're motivated by love or fear. And if it's love, you're in the right place. Bring what you love about this character. There could be an unlovable character, and you find a way to bring the humanity of that character so clearly to bear, so truthfully to bear, that we recognize ourselves or people we're trying to get along with in your characterizations. In any great art, we recognize ourselves in your truthful representation, and learn more about who we are.

So, a perfect example, for anybody who watched NYPD Blue when it was on, the Dennis Franz character is a pretty unlikable guy. He's homophobic, racist, ill-tempered, impatient, a real curmudgeon. And yet, most people who watched that show, and who watched the story arc of that character, which has more to do with the strength of the actor, where you can tune into a television show and watch someone over a period of years and storyline, you know a lot more about them than in that brief snippet of time. And when you can bring some sort of humanity to that character, what I'll call subtext, a maximum amount of subtext, with the least amount of effort, because the camera is at varying distances. Just as in theatre, you're faced with a real challenge, because there's a row right here, and there's a row up there, and how do I modulate for that? The easy news about the camera is that it's a certain distance away from you. Now you've got to find out about where your scene is framed, and you have to really pay attention to the intensity of the energy that you're conveying.

So, when you're coming into a room, when you're coming in to my office, there are as many different ways of doing it, as there are people doing it. These standards and practices have evolved over years and years and years. And when I do a class on audition technique, which Jerry hit on, I could go on for three hours on the philosophy of Nietzsche, Buddha, and Sartre, and all sorts of reasons about why this is a perfect microcosm for life. Everybody auditions all the time, really, whether you're an actor or not. In this particular context, you're faced with a real challenge of people watching and scrutinizing you, and "Gee, is that something you want?" And there's a tendency to feel like there's something you can do or not do to get the part. For me, that's a very slippery slope. Everything you start thinking about, in terms of "Gosh, I hope I don't do this," you start moving into a fear-based place. Then it's not about what you're hoping to contribute.

There are times when I'm hiring actors who don't need roles, and are at that point in their careers. They're most vitally interested in what the director wants, what the director is thinking of the character, not because they want to provide that, but because they're wondering whether or not that meshes well with their impressions of the character, with what drew them to the part, to even have the discussion about, "Gee, I've read the script, and now I'm thinking about talking to the director." Because they have created a vision on their own. The directors I've worked with want collaborators. They don't want trained seals. They don't want people they have to spoon-feed. There's no shortage of other things that need to be taken care of on set, with regards to the director and photographer, makeup, wardrobe – all the other things that directors have to take care of – so they want people who are going to collaborate, fellow artists who have a fellow creative vision, a creative vision that mixes with what they've got.

All the questions I get in my class – almost all of them have to do with, how can the actor gain the maximum amount of control over the audition process? That's probably true for you guys. I'm going to talk to you about the paradox of actually letting go of that kind of control, and to say, forget about it until your agent calls you and tells you, you have a callback. And if they don't, chalk it up to, "I got a chance to go in there and do something that's fulfilling for me as an artist, to express myself." If that didn't happen, ask yourself why that didn't happen. Sometimes you go into a situation where somebody is frantic, or asserting a lot of control over the audition process. I don't know what to tell you about that, other than to try to thicken your own skin as much as you can. Because in my job, and in what I'm hearing from Jerry, Margaret, and Kate, we really want you to be the solution to our predicament: "This is what we're looking for."

So to make a strong choice for me – I want to caution anyone who's reading, that from my standpoint in my office, as being a drastic choice – I think what I'm wondering about, is whether your choice is borne out of serious introspection into the character, and your vision of the character, and what you want to say about the character. How have you chosen to convey that, and were you able to do it so that we recognized that? It may be a completely different choice than the director had in mind, but I've seen directors be completely swayed by somebody else who said, "Here's how I'm seeing this, because of this part of the text." And the director says, "There's really something to that." So, come in with something to say. If you don't have something to say, maybe this isn't the right muse to follow – because there's dinner theatre in Topeka, or if you want to do *The Odd Couple* for the rest of your life, and follow somebody else's choices...

And regarding monologues, they're not always useful for me. I don't know if I'm seeing your choices, or your acting teacher's choices, whom you've had for the last twenty years. When you look at a script, I don't like you to be memorized, because I think you're concerned about what words come next, instead of what you want to do with the words. And I'm a real strong believer in stream-of-consciousness, because it's the first thing that goes out the window in a cold reading -- if you haven't got your wits about you. Does anyone not know what I mean by stream-of-consciousness? Stream-of-consciousness is what I'm doing right now. And if I'm looking for a word, I may pause, find it, come back. When you're worried about what words come next, that goes out the window. And it's a trick – I'll be honest with you – it's not necessarily a character-driven kind of choice. However, if you don't bring that to bear, if you're worried about trying to make the words come up, you're just reading a script, and it sounds like it, and we miss all of your choices. All your characterization is gone. And this is part of a much longer discourse I have about how to make this come about, so if anybody's interested in a class, it's on my website. At any rate, that's something I'm really really looking for, and something I miss quite a bit – people coming in hoping to conform to what it is they think I'm looking for, and in the process missing the opportunity to convey who they are.

Margaret Layne: Marcia Mason told a story about watching auditions for the first time. She'd already been cast in a play by Neil Simon, and she asked to sit in on auditions for one of the roles. And at the end, she turned to the director and said, "I understand now. People cast themselves." And there's a degree to which certain types of choices will put you with everybody else, and then somewhere, someone is going to make another kind of choice that will make that role, in this production, theirs. And it doesn't happen all the time, but it's kind of wonderful when you see it, and it's absolutely true. Sometimes an actor will walk in and do this and this and this, and it may not necessarily be the interpretation that I think is what's there, or even the director thinks is what's there.

Jerry Manning: Yes, good acting is all these things. But you're not operating in a vacuum. If you're doing your preparation, there's a lot more stuff than just looking at the text. Who's directing it? There's a big difference between auditioning for Juliet in a production directed by Bart Sher, than the same play being directed by Kurt Beattie, than the same play directed by Anne Bogart, than the same play directed by Tina Landau. And if you know who the director is, Google them. Read all their reviews, if you've never heard of them. And then you can say, oh my god, yes, Tina Landau, the co-creator of Viewpoints. She's all about physicality. Now you have something to help you prep for the audition. You can maximize your ability to end up further on the correct side of bell curve.

I know I speak carelessly and I say this all the time: auditions have nothing to do with acting. All that stuff you learn in school, sorry, it's not. It's about stupid audition tricks. Who is directing? How can I maximize my place in the bell curve? Simple things like focus: where's Joe sitting, and which is the best way to do it physically? What orientation do I have in the room? I overstate the case, but your ability to end up on the correct end of the bell curve, with ten other actors, is going to be determined by these stupid audition tricks. It's going to happen again and again and again.

Steve Salamunovich: One thing I wanted to add also about the maximum amount of control: one thing that's true about my office, and that I think is probably true about most film casting and television casting, ask for what you want. There's no book that people have in that room that says, "Oh excuse me, you just fouled on rule #24C." Many times, the people in that room know less about what you're there to do, than you do. So if you're not quite ready, and you're thinking, gosh, I could use another five minutes, ask the casting director if someone else can go, because you just need a little bit more time. Or if you're doing a commercial audition, and I've got a cue card in there, and you need it to be closer, don't sit there and squint. Ask me. I might say, "Sure." Ask for what you think you need. I'm also there to try to minimize the number of things you have to think about all at once. That's my philosophy. If you're used to memorizing, for instance, and I tell you, don't memorize, now I've given you something else to think about, after you've already done that. So minimize the number of things -- the characterization is really what you want to have survive, above all other things, not whether or not you've got all the right words in the right place. Now that's again for the audition process -- if you go out onstage or in front of the camera, and you don't have your words right, can't help you there. This is just as far as the audition process goes, and that's kind of our point -- we probably take a hit unfairly, or a bow unfairly, after a certain point, if you do really really well. We didn't create you, but we helped push her or him. A friend of mine said to a director, "Gosh, I really have to put my foot down. You're going to cast this person. Or, I really think you're making a mistake, because of this. Or gosh, I'd really like you to see this one other person again, because there's something I'm seeing and I hope that you will." But help us out with that, to make that part yours.

Kate Godman: I think about one thing you said, to thicken your skin, and also, to have confidence of presentation. Auditioning is a really abrasive process, and you do have to protect

yourself. At the same time, I talk about auditioning being like dating: anyone that you want to like you, you might give off a vibe of, "Please like me! Please!" And your response is to run as far as you can. It's easier to create that relationship if you say, "I'm just scared of you." (Laughter.)

Margaret Layne: It's like dating: you don't want to be scary, and you don't want to be boring. You can do your very best to anecdote, and hope that it goes well enough that you get invited out to dinner. (Laughter.)

Karen Zeller Lane: Okay. Kate, I just wanted to say that you gave me a great idea for the next time we do a session like this. I really just want to put an X on the floor, and you enter from back there. (Laughter.) Would you all like to see that? And Jerry, as far as checking out the space, I just have to tell briefly, the ultimate in that. When people come for the TPS generals, they come along and they want to check it out and whatnot, come a little early and peek. One day, I think it was this past June, this gentleman showed up, kind of about lunchtime, which was perfect, because you all were out. And he was wandering around the stage, and performing and doing his thing. As he kept on, I was just, "That's okay, Karen, stay calm, Karen, stay calm." Because I can get really angry about these things, and figuring that he must be right up right after lunch. And then he proceeded to help himself to a bunch of the snacks, and he stayed there a long time. And come to find out: his audition wasn't until the next day. He hung out the entire afternoon in the lobby and just scoped it all out. Margaret talked to him afterward in the lobby – I can't remember his name. (Laughter.) But I think there were several people clamoring to meet with him.

Anyway, if we can keep them quick, are there a couple of questions that you're just dying to ask that have been instigated or brought up in the forum comments that you've heard already?

Audience: The space you were just talking about. When you're auditioning for a camera, it's a different thing, when you're auditioning for TPS it's a different thing. What about casting in an office? And what about projection levels?

Jerry Manning: You've got to adjust to the space. If you end up auditioning in a closet, then you've got to --

Margaret Layne: Adjust to the space.

Jerry Manning: But I usually don't audition in a closet. Generally, we're in a rehearsal room, or something like that.

Margaret Layne: That sometimes happens out of town, you'll get into a very small. Normally, we do our auditions in our rehearsal room, which is essentially the same size as our spaces. So people don't have anything to be afraid about. If we are concerned that someone is too small or too intimate for the space itself, very often a director will ask an actor to go all the way back in the room, and do the scene again from there. And that can be a very useful exercise, both in terms of the directability and in terms of whether they can project what they just did in miniature across a much larger space.

Audience: How often do you actually get someone who gives you the exact character that the director is looking for, or very close to it, regarding the motivation and the intention of the character, but the director will say, you don't look the part? Does that happen often?

Steve Salamunovich: Yes. It's harder to cover up -- I think on stage there's probably a lot wider age range that you can fudge on, than the distance where the camera is right up there.

There's a project I worked on this past year that I feel like we miscast the lead on, and there was a better choice. Characterization-wise, she was a better choice. But she was a little too old for the part. And it's a reality. We didn't include New York, but we did cast out of Seattle, Chicago, and we found this actor in Los Angeles, who was my second choice, because the other was a little too old for the role. So it happens.

Margaret Layne: But not if it's a little bit different, say, if someone is five years too old for a role. If they're giving a wonderful performance, there is the magic of theatre. There is the illusion that someone is able to deliver the character would be completely persuasive to an audience. Even though, if you met them on the street, you wouldn't think that person could do the role. Our theatre is small, so our elbow room on that is not quite as large, as if we had a bigger space. It actually happens a lot with height, and really silly casting stuff. If you already know your leading man is five-foot-seven, and you have a very perfect leading lady, and she's six-foot-one, it does become an issue. We wish it didn't.

Jerry Manning: I don't think it happens that much, once someone has already begun the process of auditioning, because by the time you get to that point, I've already typed out a whole bunch of people based on that. So ultimately, if someone has done a really good audition, and I have to say, hmmm... It's kind of rare. But I just want to jump on something you say: "what the director is looking for," and I find more often than not, that the director isn't sure of what they're looking for. And that's as it should be. If I'm bringing in ten people, anyone of whom can do that role, and the ten people I bring in can do that role, there's no question – then the director is refining their vision. I think that a director who says, "I know exactly what I want!" is a director headed straight for hell. (Laughter.)

Margaret Layne: The only director like that I've ever worked with who's said that is André Serban. And Andre had a very specific idea, and certainly his productions require a very specific set of skills. But he had a really definite notion, and if people didn't deliver exactly that in the auditions, they were done. There was no appeal to a higher court. You either matched up or you didn't. In his particular case, his vision was so complete, and so utterly itself, that he in fact was usually right in holding out for exactly what he was looking for. But he was the only person like that.

Jerry Manning: And I think the point that I'm trying to make is actually much more in play, or a director not knowing and having things in play. Because the writer may not know, the director may not know, the writer and the director may have a different notion of what it is. Every project is different, and every role within a project is different. I tend to think, and I hope, that for actors who don't look right, they've already been typed out.

Kate Godman: That's our job, to type out people, and to bring in the ten people who fit the director's vision. And I think that approach would describe our work with the director we haven't worked with before. And so even if we've had a conversation about character, or what they're looking for, we don't have a relationship, we don't have a common vocabulary yet. So I bring in a broad spectrum of people, based on my conversation, and then I've got to make choices if he or she would say, they're not giving me what I'm after.

Jerry Manning: And Margaret brought up something that I think is really, really important. Once there is someone cast, it becomes very much about, "how do they match up with that person?" Like if the leading man is that high, you know what I mean. It often will be determined based on who else is already cast.

Kate Godman: Regarding protecting yourself, sometimes when you're thinking about your audition, what worked and what didn't, sometimes you think about what you'll do next time,

and sometimes you just have to let it go, and say, "I think I was too tall." And that will help you keep going.

Audience: I'm often sitting there, thinking, maybe they won't hire me, and psychologically that's not very good either.

Kate Godman: There are things within your control that you can change, and there are things that totally are not. You don't have any control over that.

Steve Salamunovich: Your artistic vision is going to play very heavily in terms of the film category. I use Danny DeVito and Arnold Schwarzenegger as examples. If either one of those guys had come to me for a general interview twenty years ago, I would have said to Danny DeVito, based upon what I saw, "Well, you're not going to be right for any leading man roles, but you're great for character stuff." And Arnold could probably make a bouncer. (Laughter.) But they have their vision of who they are, and then producing pieces themselves, and saying, I want to produce this, has a great deal to do with it. But if their instincts weren't right for their artistic vision for the character, nobody would have gone to the movies to watch their films. So, your vision as an artist about what it is that you feel -- Whoopi Goldberg won an Oscar for a role that was written for a Caucasian. So, really, what you think is interesting about your view of the character, to you as an artist -- if it really resonates within you, it's probably going to resonate with somebody else too. Of course, you could have delusions of grandeur, I don't know. But it's hopefully borne of some introspection into the believable psychology of the character that you feel illuminates that character and why you love that character, why you understand that character.

Karen Zeller Lane: I'd really like to get to the last topic of conversation here, and see what kind of conversation we have. Instead of going from person to person, let's just handle this second part of the conversation as a conversation, with you as well. If you want to try to answer amongst yourselves, feel free to do that as well. I think that might be more useful, at this point. What we want to converse about are things about the strengths and weaknesses of our community. I don't want that to be limited to the strengths and weaknesses of our talent pool, although that's part of it. But strengths and weaknesses as far as the climate that you all are living within, and has that all changed your casting and the way you go about doing your casting? Does that make any sense?

Steve Salamunovich: I'll start. For me, casting has changed drastically. Not just here, but everywhere, in terms of the fact that there is less and less apprenticeship. Casting is more than just who would be right for the part. It's a lot about communication, collaboration with directors, understanding how to take care of problems before they become problems, understanding contracts, keeping a record in your head of the talent pool, and there's less and less apprenticeship going on. I'm finding a lot more people are doing their own casting, and they're not necessarily doing a good job of it. Our particular talent pool in film and television, with regards to the making of pictures, not the actors, has shrunk. Budgets have shrunk, and when budgets shrink, people have an abundance of time and they don't have an abundance of money. If they've got an abundance of time, they start rolling up their sleeves and start figuring out how they can do things themselves. It's to the detriment artistically, I'm finding, of most of the things that are getting done. The workaday life of a film-and-television actor -- for instance, industrials are a huge part of that work for those who do that kind of work: Microsoft is a huge employer of that. And Microsoft cares less and less and less about how good you are at this kind of part, and whether you're miscast, whether or not you've been miscast. But some people want the best possible person for the role. If it's just a breathing body who fits the agent's type range, and they just cast them, then why do they need somebody like me? So there's a lot of

people making productions like those, and when you look at them, you say, “gosh, what were they thinking?”

Jerry Manning: I’ll just say sort of the same thing, but put it this way: In the five years that I’ve been at the Seattle Rep, we’ve written twenty-five percent fewer contracts.

Margaret Layne: And I think we have a very similar situation, where we’re having to cut back - - partly because of the larger economic situation, and partly because of our own personal economic disaster, which we had three years ago. So we have fewer acting contracts per year. It hasn’t affected very much the percentage of those that are local. We were founded as a theatre of Seattle actors, and we’re still very committed to that. In an average year, about 90 to 92 percent of our contracts go to local actors. So, with the change in the economics, that’s picked up to 94, 95 percent. So, although we have fewer contracts, about the same number of them are actually going to actors here in town.

Steve Salamunovich: I have to say, I go to shows at all three of the big theatres, and I’m really encouraged by how many of the productions are populated by Seattle actors. I feel really great about that, myself, as a fellow Seattlite, watching actors. You want to get them work.

Kate Godman: I think the reality of what is going on – I think it puts a squeeze on the bigger theatres, and it puts a squeeze on the industry, but I think it also puts a real squeeze on the smaller theatres who are really doing some interesting stuff, where a lot of actors get their first chances to build up their resumes. I guess about five or six years ago, it seemed -- when the Fringe Festival was still going, there were lots of ways to be working. And as you all know, when you’re working, you can get work, and when there’s a period of not-working, it’s harder, because people can’t see you in something you’ve done. That’s not to say that there isn’t really great work that I know we all try and see you in action.

Jerry Manning: But at the same time, it’s not just big changes. Two points here. Whereas the Seattle Fringe Festival has gone by the wayside, and I’m thinking of several other theatres recently that have, at the same time, Washington Ensemble Theatre has sprung up, CHAC has sprung up, LiveGirls! has sprung up, all kinds of really interesting theatre is rising in the ashes of that. Not to get on my soapbox, but if any of you are waiting around for any of the four of us to call you, you’re out of your mind. If you really are actors, then get out there and act. This is, I think, what Steve is trying to say: It’s not easy. It’s hard. This is not news. But if Steve is talking to an actor who says, he can’t get a bleeping job, so what does he do? Well, he’s teaching a class at the top, and he says, you’re an actor – get out there and act. Go out to the fountain and do your monologues for people at lunch. That’s honorable work. And it’s not easy.

Margaret Layne: I was going to say, since we’re talking specifically about strengths and weaknesses, there is something that are counter-productive – and it’s related to what Jerry was just saying – I sometimes feel that there’s a little bit of a tendency towards a feeling of entitlement, I guess is the word that I want. That because one is a Seattle actor, that because one has a Seattle address, that that sort of automatically means that we will know you, that we’ll call you if we’re interested, we know you’re out there. It doesn’t actually work that way. If we don’t know you’re there, at all, then we can’t bring you in. If you don’t remind us from time to time, or invite us to shows that you’re doing, make opportunities for us –we can’t remember everybody and we need to be reminded, and it isn’t an automatic thing. And it isn’t in any city. That’s not unique to here. And all actors in communities of this size feel, with some expectation, that they should get first right of refusal. And that’s understandable. But you also need to put yourselves forward.

Jerry Manning: The mission of Seattle Rep is not about hiring Seattle artists. And no one hides that. That is not the case. If I'm trying to cast Romeo, I'm thinking in every city, I'm thinking of actors all over the country.

Kate Godman: As you gain in experience, you will be thinking more openly. You should be thinking more openly.

Jerry Manning: That's a great trend that I'm seeing. More and more Seattle actors are working all around the country. Jim Gall is in Kansas City right now, Larry Paulsen is at Cleveland Playhouse, this is a coming trend. It's got to be a coming trend – all those theatres come to Seattle to cast. Margaret and I were trying to help out Cleveland Playhouse, and how many actors got leads out of that? Two, three?

Margaret Layne: Two, three offers. I don't know that they were able to accept them, but two or three offers.

Audience: Can I ask, when I'm trying to get in touch with you guys, when is it pesky, and when is it just persistent?

Jerry Manning: I actually appreciate persistence. I respond to yelps. Thump thump thump, these resumes in my house. I don't really want to deal with them there. But I respond to yelps. It's that simple.

Margaret Layne: We don't, any of us, have huge support staffs. There's me, and there's me. Jerry has Tad sometimes. We're usually always with people. So if you invite us to come see a show, and we don't make it, that means we couldn't make it. Because the calendar just can't – sometimes we'll try to get someone else, from the artistic staff. If it's not necessarily me, it's someone whose opinion I trust, to come and see it instead. Don't be discouraged.

Jerry Manning: No, don't be discouraged. I make mistakes, and I forget. So I love to be reminded. Or you know what? Argue with me: "I think I'm right for that role." I've been proven wrong a couple times, more than a couple times.

Kate Godman: My immediate thing about communicating is when people call and say, "Do you have anything for me?" But I don't have time to do your homework for you. You need to read the play and tell me which part you think you're right for. And, it's a boundary thing, but I don't like it when people show up to an audition call when they haven't been called, trying to get in. Because that makes me look bad. Then the director's like: "Why didn't you call them?"

Margaret Layne: I've had people come to an audition to which they have been called, so badly prepared, or not prepared at all, that it has been an embarrassment to me, with the director, because I haven't been able to explain to them what that person was doing. And I may know perfectly well that that person is, in fact, a very talented actor, and probably there was some kind of accident that made that happen, but I can't make that argument if the director doesn't know me, either, and has no real basis to take my word for anything.

Audience: Regarding training, are there various teachers around the city that you respect, or if you see them on a resume, you say, oh that's a good teacher, you've gotten good training?

Steve Salamunovich: I'm going to plead the fifth. I ask actors, when I do a general interview, and I do those as my schedule permits – I set them up a day in advance, and I do them only in the morning, because my schedule changes very quickly. But if you are unknown to me and my office, certainly call and I'll tell you. If you get my machine, don't leave a message: it's the

number one message that I get, career guidance calls, and if you get me on the phone, I'm happy to give you a summation of advice that's generally workable. If there's some sort of specific thing you need, I can also address that and we can cut to that chase. I have a website that has Frequently Asked Questions, as well, you can check that, at www.completecasting.com. You can send headshots by email, if you're freelance. If you're not, and you're with an agent, then you've already got a representative that puts you in front of me. If you're not getting seen at my office, call me up and ask why that is. Now, if you're not getting submitted, I'll tell you that, and it's between you and your agent. But if you're freelance talent, please understand that it's harder for me to work with you. If I have, and I get very little time to set up auditions, if I have seventy spots open in one day, and I can call seven different agents who have ten different people each – and I'm not saying that's the criteria by which I operate – but a significant part of my workability is how can I make the most efficient use of my time, and minimize the time I spend on the phone? Because I get called all day, and the day of.

Jerry Manning: I would say this, do a self-assessment. What are you interested in improving? Be it vocal, or physical. Better than ask us, ask other actors who have experience with that, and be specific about it. If you're talking about a conservatory program, a graduate program, that's a whole other kettle of fish. It's not that I don't recommend people in town; I'm ignorant, that's all.

Steve Salamunovich: One of the things that I was going to finish up with is that on the website, there are a group of teachers, under Resources, that I have heard good things about, after asking actors over and over again, after seeing their names on a resume. I tell the actors that the purpose of my question is not to hear you pat somebody on the back, because you think it's politically correct, but I need to advise other actors, what are the drawbacks and the plusses that you've got about this class? When I keep hearing good things about teachers, they end up on that list.

Karen Zeller Lane: I want to ask a couple questions here, to finish up here, that require short answers. (Laughter.) I want to hear what you say off the top of your head, but to be succinct. I'm going to ask you for a generalization, in the positive, and I'm using that word for you all [indicating audience], so that you know that they are providing you a generalization. But just to give us a foundation of an idea – a generalization of what you feel about Seattle talent. (Laughter.) What you feel typifies Seattle talent.

Jerry Manning: I'll take a stab at that, and it's only because, after five years, I'm working with a new boss, David Esbjornson, and I've been doing auditions with him. And he's been struck by the theatricality of Seattle actors, and there's a passionate commitment to theatre, and a theatricality in all the best and worst senses of that word.

Margaret Layne: I think it's the personal idealism – that you can give your life to theatre, even if that means you're living your life on a thin edge some of the time, or much of the time. You can dedicate yourself to it, and you can make a life in the theatre that is satisfying to you. I think Seattle, as a city, supports that idealism. It's one reason that actors move here from other places: they hear that you can, if you give it the time – and everything takes time – if you give the time, you can have a good quality of life here and do what you love to do. I think, although everyone is feeling discouraged, and you're banging your head against the wall, I think one of the wonderful things is that everybody believes that this is a thing worth doing and worth keeping alive.

Kate Godman: Oh no, don't let it be my turn. (Laughter.) I think the reason I'm having a hard time is that there's such a huge pool of talent, and it's so varied. So making a generalization about it is going to be hard.

Steve Salamunovich: I'm going to echo what Margaret and Jerry said about what I perceive as an ingenuousness about the actors in Seattle, in terms of the fact that I come from a market where there are movie stars. I find movie stars really boring, really uninteresting. But there's no shortage of tabloid television shows about them and their life choices, and I'm not interested. Put me inside actor's studio when I can find out about someone's dedication with which they follow their craft, how they make those choices, and I'm all ears. Unless they have nothing to say. Sometimes they get people up there, with a body of work, and I wonder, what made you choose that person? I don't know if you've had the same problem. For the most part, they get some really interesting folks. I find generally the people in Seattle aren't in this because they're going to make a lot of money, and they're not necessarily interested in getting the best table because somebody recognized them – that's not a real option, and it's a wonderful breath of fresh air compared to where I'm from. And so the fact that you guys are here doing this, generally speaking, is because you love doing it, and what better reason is there? It's the only reason, I think.

Karen Zeller Lane: And now the flipside question, which is the one where you give the opposite, which is why I saved it for last. It would be very informative, for an ongoing conversation: a generalization, in the negative, that you feel typifies Seattle talent. (Pause. Laughter.)

Jerry Manning: I think there's – and I'm doing this deliberately – I think there's a lack of self-confidence. And I get very weary of the argument, "you're always hiring out of New York," and that to me reflects a lack of self-confidence. I know, when I see the tape recorder, I'm going to regret that. (Laughter. Applause.)

Margaret Layne: As Kate was saying, there's such a wide range of talent here, so many different kinds, at so many different places on the career curve, that it's hard to make a generalization. So I'll say something that doesn't necessarily apply to everyone – which is that there is, sometimes, because we are a small community, and everyone knows everyone else, and people tend to find themselves working with the same people – whatever part of the community they're in – and in one way, that can be a wonderful thing. It's like having a great basketball team, everyone knows everyone else's moves, and can anticipate, and it can be a certain kind of wonderful thing. But the flipside is, it often leads to actors living too much in their comfort zone, and being allowed to do that, or encouraged to do that, with the result that sometime will work perfectly fine, but it's not terribly interesting to watch. That there's a lack of edge that comes from consistently working with the same people in various combinations, over and over again. So the challenge for the community here is to make sure that doesn't happen to you. Find ways, if you're in that space, once again, find ways to keep pushing yourself, and push the people around you. And really keep on growing and living up to the potential of everything that they can do, and not get too comfy.

Kate Godman: Again, this is hard. For everything I could say, there's ten examples of why it isn't true. Sometimes, I think, having come from other cities.... (Pause. Laughter.) Sometimes when directors come in from out of town, they are surprised at how insular our community feels, and how they're always searching for artists who are more than just a theatre artist, that are thinking people. That's why this statement is so "off," because I'm looking at each one of you, and thinking, "you're a thinking person, and I know that you do that." But I think that communities that are very politicized or very engaged in world affairs or philosophy, sometimes our community is very insular, and love of the arts can keep the world small.

Margaret Layne: And I think there's a wariness about allowing it to get bigger. This is the positive side of having an out-of-town actor, as we sometimes do – we always try, we always

start here. And sometimes we hope that we get it right, and everyone goes, oh yeah, that was inevitable. But the good thing about that is that you need that new energy to shake up the familiar patterns of interaction inside of a production. And just introducing a new person, like putting a new spice in a stew, and suddenly, things get big and loose, and people are rediscovering parts of themselves, because they're getting things that they haven't encountered before. And there is a real, if we get it right, there's a real advantage to the opportunity to work with artists from other communities, when they're able to come here, as they will do when you go to their communities.

Steve Salamunovich: I'm going to answer this question not specifically with regard to Seattle, I'm sorry. But this is designed to help any of you who don't feel like you're in a spot I'm about to talk about to reconsider. If you don't have artistic decisions worth fighting for, consider another line of work. Which is: I talk a lot in baseball analogies. Ted Williams, who is arguably the greatest hitter in baseball, used to look at the seams on the ball. It would be all I could do to look at the ball when it's coming ninety miles an hour at me. Look for the seams in the work. Develop more rigor about your choices, and have them borne of a deep inspection of human nature. If your relationships personally don't call that out for you to continually explore the human condition, as an artist you have a great responsibility to do so. If you're not, you're not truthfully portraying your art. If you're not doing that, you're kind of taking up space. And I'd say this about anybody who's pursuing any sort of artistic profession: it requires a great deal of dedication to do right. And if that's not the way you want to do things, there's certainly ways of doing them. But I'm talking about at the highest level of expressing yourself. So have artistic decisions and choices that are worth fighting for, that are backed up by a specific introspection of the human condition. And the more you guys do that, the easier our jobs are, the more you work, and it's a win for everybody. It's like Ted Sorenson said, for John Kennedy, ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can contribute, really, to this art.

Karen Zeller Lane: Well, let's thank them for their time, and this latter part of the conversation, particularly. (Applause.)

END OF SESSION

State of the Unions: Laura Kenney and Chris Comte

Laura Kenney: If you have any questions, just informal questions, please ask those.

Audience: Can you talk about the recent election?

Laura Kenney: The recent SAG election? Yes, that would be very interesting. I'm amazed that only 27 percent of those who could vote, voted. And that was considered to be good, which always amazes me. So with 27 percent, the gentleman who won – [Chris Comte enters] – I've already started without you.

Chris Comte: I was down at the resource table. I've got all of the handouts down at the resource table. If we haven't answered your questions by the end of today, then feel free to stop by, because we've got tons of information there. I'm assuming you've introduced yourself.

Laura Kenney: Yes, I did.

Chris Comte: My name is Christopher Comte. I actually wear two union hats in this town. I'm the recently hired membership director for the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, Local 7 here in Seattle, and in addition to holding a volunteer position as Seattle Liaison for Actors Equity Association. So, between the two of us, we represent all three of the major performers' unions. And that's why there are three chairs. (Laughter.) Basically, what we were asked to do with this seminar was a couple of things. The title, "The State of the Unions," is aimed at what is going on with these particular unions -- at a national level, as well as what's happening locally. And secondly, to try to dispel some of the myths, some of the misinformation, that some people -- not necessarily you people -- have with regard to the unions: in particular, how it is in fact possible to be able to use union members, if you do not have a union contract with them. So we're going to try in the space of a little over an hour, and also to answer any questions that you may have with regards to unions, and our experiences with them, and hopefully some things that you may be able to do in order to actually work with professional union members. Just a quick question: how many of us are actually members of one of these three unions? Wow, that's great.

Audience: How many wish they were?

Chris Comte: Yes, joining a union, how do you go about doing that? And I'm sure we can certainly address how to go about doing that, as well. Hopefully, that means that most of you are aware of how these unions work, what their function is, and through the course of your education as a union member, have seen some of these myths and rumors and misinformation quelled by your experience of being a union member. I just want to touch very briefly upon a couple things that are happening in the bigger picture, on an annual level. How many of you are SAG members, currently? You guys are all very much aware of what's been happening in your union at the national level.

Laura Kenney: Informally, a question was asked about the new election, and the MembershipFirst outcome of the Los Angeles vote. Basically, they are now President and Treasurer, and they also took many seats. I think we're going to see a different union. I think we're going to see -- it's been stated prior to this that their position is that anything that's outside of Hollywood is a run-away production. They don't really care a lot for the regional areas. So, we're going to have to really work hard to get them to realize that those regions are important to the union, and to the solidarity of the unions. But I'm trying to keep an open mind about it. The gentleman who took over, Alan Rosenberg, you'd probably recognize him from television, his position is that prior to this administration, the union has given in to much, and they're really going to go after bargaining and residuals, and markets that we aren't currently representing. And I think that's terrific. I think that's an excellent thing. But if it causes more strife, then that's not a good thing, because the Screen Actors Guild was severely injured in the 2000 strike. For instance, when we went to the national conference, Nashville said ever since the 2000 strike, they have had no union contracts. Zero. What's exciting about Seattle is that we have a lot of young filmmakers, experimental filmmakers, student filmmakers, people starting up their own production companies and funding them almost themselves with money that they've made in gaming -- they're making films, and they're hiring union actors. I've worked on several. And some of them, I've waived my salary in hopes that if there is distribution in the future, I will get paid. On some of them, I've been paid a daily rate at a union rate, under the contract, and I've made money.

Audience: I don't see anybody saying we want union actors, so should we just contact everyone who is making films and say, "Will you look at a union actor?"

Laura Kenney: Every union actor can go to any audition, any non-union audition -- you just can't work non-union. So if they want you, they can turn it and change it to a union contract.

And all they have to do is contact the SAG office, here local. We have so many contracts that they can work under. SAG has really been very responsive, to make all kinds of union contracts available, for people doing experimental films, ten-minute films, whatever. And you are free to go to any of these auditions. If you go to the TPS website, and you see all these non-union films, you are free to audition. If they want to hire you, then they need to discuss it with us.

Audience: So if you're a union member, do you keep that information until they've fallen in love with your performance? What do we do?

Laura Kenney: It's not a matter keeping it from them.

Chris Comte: No, in fact, I'd say you'd probably want to do just the opposite. Because one of the things, as a union member, that you'd want to impress upon them – and this is true for theatrical union members as well – is that you're free to audition for non-union theatre productions – but the difference being that you cannot actually work in those productions unless they sign a union contract. What you want to do is show them there's a difference in the level of professionalism between non-union and union talent. Which is not to say that there aren't extremely talented non-union people in our town. You can't swing a cat in this town without hitting incredibly talented people who aren't members of a union. But it's to our advantage, as union members, to show those people that if they hire union talent, they are going to get the best talent available to them. And SAG has been doing a very, very good job in terms of the experimental film contract, and the deferred payment contract that they have. To work with those small-scale, those young, those new, those independent filmmakers – it makes it possible for them to do that. Equity is a little bit more problematic because of the nature of the work itself and because of the fact that we don't have the same type -- there's not as much as flexibility in the Equity system as there is in the SAG system. Part of that is simply due to the fact that the way you produce a film and the way you produce a theatrical production are very different. It's possible to hire a SAG member on a day-shoot basis, at a rate that's going to be affordable for the producer and director, and also make money for the performer, as well. So that's different than the situation in which you're trying to rehearse a show for four weeks, and then do a four-week run. Hiring them at the same rates that you would pay a SAG performer for two days' work, paying them at that daily rate, and spreading that out on the entire run – that's more than the entire run budget of the production, at that small-scale level. It's a little bit more problematic. But there are other ways that non-union companies and producers can use Equity talent: For instance, doing things like staged readings, doing festival productions, and things like that. We actually do have a contract that makes it possible and affordable to be able to do that.

Laura Kenney: Something that Chris said when we were speaking about this prior to the conference was the member-produced productions. If people want to get together and showcase somebody's script, or just showcase themselves, they can do that.

Chris Comte: One of the most difficult questions I get asked as an Equity liaison is, "Why is there no 'waiver' theatre in Seattle?" Or showcase theatre? And for those of you who are Equity members, hopefully you know what I'm talking about. For the rest of you, in New York and Los Angeles, Equity has created these codes called Showcase Codes. Basically, the idea is that it permits union performers to work, essentially, for nothing, in order to be seen by people who might be able to provide them with work at a future time. It's become extremely problematic, particularly in Los Angeles, because if you go to Los Angeles, live theatre is dead in L.A. There is no live theatre, and primarily one of the reasons that that has happened in the last eight or ten years is because of the Showcase Codes. No one does theatre just to do theatre in L.A. anymore; it's just to get film producers to see your work, so that maybe they'll cast you in a future film production.

Audience: In terms of the idea of showcasing, there's a huge difference between performing a monologue at TPS, and actually doing scenework of some sort. So would it be possible to do something like a scene showcasing, in Seattle, where there actually might be some people who might cast some theatre? I'm not actually interested in being seen for film – I'm interested in being seen for theatre.

Chris Comte: Let me just address that with a couple of specific points. A) The Member's Project Code that Laura just mentioned is essentially the way that that can be done in cities that don't have a Showcase Code. But what it means is that – and it's based on the same sort of principle in terms of: you're going to produce a show yourself – you or a group of other individuals. That's how the showcase works: a bunch of people get together and say, "We're going to do this play and we're going to put it up, and we're going to rent the space; you're going to do the props, you're going to direct, you're going to run the box office." So the possibility is that not everybody gets to be the performer in the show, but if it turns into a project that sustains over a period of several shows, then people switch roles and everybody gets a chance to perform onstage. Other members of that particular group take on the particular responsibilities that are inherent in putting up a theatrical performance. So, that is one way that you can showcase your performance talent for an audience.

The second thing is that in a city like Seattle, most of the casting directors in this town are extremely accessible. For Jerry Manning, Margaret Layne, for the most part – it feels a little intimidating if you don't know these people, but if you call them on the phone, and say, I would like to come in and spend 15 minutes with you, most of them will grant that request and schedule time for you to come in and see them on a one-to-one basis. Or, in some cases, they have monthly times open, and you can just call them up, and they say, "Yeah, we're going to do it on the first Tuesday of every month, or whatever," and you can basically go in and do the same thing. Rather than having to wait for that general audition to come up every year, and do your three minutes of materials for the six shows they've got in their season –

Audience: But they're still not seeing what they would see if they saw scenes.

Chris Comte: True. Yes, absolutely. But again, it does at least give you another way of getting your foot in the door with those particular organizations.

Laura Kenney: Also, I think that may be something where TPS, or maybe even the Equity liaison committee, or someone might want to look into having, once a year – I know that they have general auditions at TPS once a year –

Chris Comte: Twice a year.

Laura Kenney: -- Twice a year, excuse me. Maybe once a year, there could be some kind of organization, where they actually have the same producers and other people coming in. That's something that we, as union members, we can go to TPS or go to the Equity committee, and say, we would like to organize this.

Audience: The point is, I would definitely not ask TPS, because TPS is everybody. And if we're trying to say, the union is different, then establishing an Equity live theatre here might be the way to do that.

Chris Comte: Right, it falls in some middle ground. But the Member's Project Code also makes that possible. It doesn't have to be a full production. I've heard of very successful Member's Project Code work being done in Boston and Philadelphia, mostly on the east coast – they just

have more experience doing this. But doing exactly what you're talking about, doing scene selections, or short or ten-minute plays, things like that, where the production values don't necessarily have to be – you don't have to build a giant set.

Laura Kenney: It could be a couple of chairs and a block. You're there to showcase the work.

Chris Comte: So that's been done under the Member's Project Code, and been done very successfully. There's really no reason why it couldn't be done here.

Audience: The only reason I'm coming across cranky is because I've been in the union for more than thirty years, and I worked in Chicago where there were a lot of showcases and opportunities including scene showcases. And at this point, I feel it's a lot to build my own sets, and sending out my publicity.

Chris Comte: Absolutely. I understand. I think probably, realistically, that's one of the least attractive things about the self-producing angle.

Audience: You're never going to get work if you're not seen. So that's the problem with producing yourself.

Chris Comte: Yes, and actors want to act. Actors don't necessarily want to be the box office manager.

Audience: I don't mind being the box office manager, as long as somebody else is doing the organization. But I've run too many things all by myself. I'm not going to do that anymore.

Laura Kenney: As union members – and I'm a member of all three unions – I think that's a perfectly valid thing to bring up to the liaison committee, and say, is there a committee that can look at doing something like this? Getting the different staff and directors on board? I know that ACT is offering that once a month thing right now, for Equity actors to come in and that might be an opportunity there: instead of bringing in a monologue, bring in a scene partner and do a scene. Yes, it does take a lot of preparation on your part, working with someone else. But it sounds like you're willing to do that. A lot of times, we're like, "I'm going in for my three-minute audition. I can't do a scene." But I think, if they're opening up to actors – and again, Jerry Manning is wonderful at the Rep. If there was something that you wanted to show him, I think he'd make time to see it. I don't know about David Esbjornson, but all the theatres, fringe theatre, Equity theatre – they see everything, whereas the previous administrations didn't see anything. So that's really exciting. Jerry Manning's always out in the fringe theatre looking at stuff. I think that there's definitely a way that can happen.

Chris Comte: And that has made a tremendous difference. To take the 5th Avenue Theatre as a great example, because David goes out and sees work in the community, and he knows how good they are. And that's why he hires so many. I would love to see David Esbjornson do that. If all the Artistic Directors from all the theatre companies could get out there, and see what's there, that's incredible, because when they see it and recognize that it's there, and it's right in their own backyard, and they don't have to pull people from three thousand miles away, pay their per diem, pay them housing and all the other extra expenses that it takes for an out-of-town actor to work here. And not only is it good for us as members of the local community, but it's good for their bottom line too, because it saves them money.

Audience: What do you see as the direction of that tipping? That it's going toward hiring more people from three thousand miles away? I just moved here ago. I'm from New York, and I wanted to get away from that.

Chris Comte: There's always going to be an element in certain towns; I think Seattle is always going to have some of that, to a certain extent, because of the nature of our audiences. Here in Seattle, we still tend to think of ourselves, and I'm speaking as an audience member, as somewhat provincial. As in, if it's from Seattle, it's really not that great. But if it's from New York, wow! They're from New York! It's starting to change, because now we're starting to see things like: New York Broadway producers are bringing shows to Seattle, to work them over, because they see how sophisticated our audience members are, the people who see theatre. And that's causing it to shift more. It's just the economics of producing theatre, and we're talking theatre, specifically. It's making that change, because it costs more to bring people in.

Audience: So, there's going to be more jobs, do you think?

Chris Comte: In my experience of being here for twenty years, I'd say that overall, it has increased. But that is due to things like the 5th Avenue Theatre, which hires an incredible number of local actors. And the Village Theatre, which has only had a relationship with Equity for about seven or eight years – they hire a tremendous amount of union talent. So, in an overall sense, I think it's increased. But if you look at specific theatres, to a certain extent, look at the Rep and look at the Intiman, it's been kind of flat. It really hasn't changed tremendously. You may have a different perspective.

Laura Kenney: I have a bit of a different perspective on that. I think the Seattle Repertory Theatre has hired more local actors. I really do. I'm going to show my age here: I've been working at the Seattle Rep off and on since I was 27, so I've had an association with them for over "ten" years. (Laughter.) I remember a time when there were maybe a handful of Seattle actors who worked there. Everybody else came from outside. And now, I can safely say that my experience – I'm going to be doing a show there in December, doing *Restoration Comedy* – and half the actors are local. I think are ten actors in it, and I think there might be three or four coming in from out of town. It's always who the director's comfortable working with, if they have a project in mind, if they've worked with them before and think they're absolutely perfect, they're going to bring them in. That's the way it is. But Intiman has also been better about hiring local people. Again, the 5th Avenue. ACT, out of economics, has been hiring a lot more local actors. There will always be people they've brought in. And that's good for us. That is good for the local Equity people working on all these stages, because they bring a different perspective, a different lifestyle, they bring a different experience to the table. And we can learn from that. I find it to be – you don't want to be in a situation where out-of-town actors are taking all of the roles, but I think it's healthy for the acting community to work with these people from different places.

Chris Comte: Just to put it in a little more perspective, every year I get a little spreadsheet from Actor's Equity in L.A. And there's a breakdown of the number of hours per contract in Seattle theatre, number of people who've been employed. And the breakdown for the last three years has been pretty consistent overall: 75% of the jobs, 75% of the work, and about 60% of the income, has been local performers. And it'll waver a few points per year, depending on how theatres schedule productions. But it's been roughly in that mid-70's range, at least as I've been a member of the liaison committee. The truth is that most of the jobs here in Seattle are local jobs. But just addressing what Laura's saying about how important it is, how beneficial it is, for local performers to get the experience of working with actors from other cities: there's also the other side of the coin, that every time you go do a job in Portland, or in Billings, Montana, or Fairbanks, Alaska, you are that out-of-town actor, going to their town, taking away their job. And we tend to not think of that in those terms, because, well, it's just Montana. Somebody lives and works in that town; otherwise, the theatre wouldn't be there in the first place. So, again, to dispel one of these myths that the big theatres always hire out-of-town actors, that's

not true. But conversely, a lot of our members go work out of the Seattle area in this region. I just had a friend who came back from doing summer Shakespeare at Lake Tahoe, which is a heck of a lot closer to L.A. than Seattle is. But for some reason, they thought he was worth bringing down for a summer, and doing two shows.

Audience: And that particular company is auditioning here.

Chris Comte: Yes, it's the third or fourth time that they've come up here, because again, there is a really good pool of talented performers who live here in Seattle. So they're willing to spend the money to come up here from California, which is where they're located out of, on the California side of the Lake Tahoe area, to audition our actors to come down to their production companies.

Audience: And what's the name of that theatre company?

Audience (different): The Foothill Theatre Company.

Audience (different): And that's something that people can look up?

Audience (different): It was on TPS just a few weeks ago. They're looking for submissions of resumes and headshots.

Chris Comte: It's a summer season. I know people who go off and work in Kansas City, Missouri Rapids, Phoenix...

Laura Kenney: I've worked down at the Old Globe, and the Shakespeare Theatre. I've had the great fortune to be at the Rep to do *Don Juan*, and that show has taken me to the McCarter Theatre and the Old Globe, and will hopefully take me to the Shakespeare theatres.

Audience: That is just the result of the national scope of the scene: you have a connection to a director in New York, who knows you, to fly you in to D.C. If we have an actor who originated a role that moved to New York, then we're going to bring him back in. I agree with you, Chris, that there is probably 75-80% of the work here, local market, and that 20% of the jobs are probably going to be brought in from elsewhere. That's just the nature of the business.

Chris Comte: Yes, though there's a perception that we're trying to dispel: that people are coming in and taking away jobs.

Audience: I don't think in any business, or in any venture you're involved in, that your entire talent base will come from that particular market.

Chris Comte: Yes, but again, it's just one of the myths that we're constantly finding ourselves butting up against.

Audience: The conversations last year focused on theatre companies wanting to hire more Equity actors, and having Equity come up with better ways for them to do that, and make it more economically feasible for them. There was a spin-off committee for a while on that. Can you fill me in on that?

Chris Comte: What came out of that conversation was a group of small, primarily independent producers, but also some other producers like Taproot Theatre and a couple other midsize companies, basically getting together for a series of conversations on the issue of: How can we find ways to make it economically feasible for these companies to be able to hire union

performers in a way that doesn't bust their budgets, and in a way that would be consistent and supported by our national union with the ways that have been established for hiring practices. So during the process, what was developed was this thing that was euphemistically called the "Seattle Plan," for lack of a better term. One of the things that we've run into that has put a bunch of boulders in the road, is this whole issue that's going on in the state Department of Revenue and Labor & Industries. Because if in fact – and I don't know how many of you are familiar with what's going on, so let me just break it down in very brief terms – at some point, about a year and a half ago, the state Department of Revenue contacted several local theatre companies, and said, "We understand that you're a theatrical employer, and you have been hiring actors as contractors rather than as employees. And we want to come in and audit your books, and see how long this has been going on, and see whether you are in violation of state labor practices, and need to be fined or penalized in some way."

They went in and did these audits. I have not heard what the actual results of the audits have been, at this point, but essentially, it caused a "Chicken Little/The Sky is Falling" panic, primarily because most of these small, non-profit theatre companies have been basically hiring people as independent contractors. Well, the state law says that if you are engaging the services of other individuals -- and you're meeting certain criteria, which is basically that you are telling them where they have to work, when they have to work, basically establishing a set of parameters that basically identify these people as employees, and not as independent contractors. Well, if you're an employee, that means that you have to be paid minimum wage, that means that the employer has to be paying unemployment insurance, state industrial insurance, worker's compensation insurance. All of these small theatre companies are now looking at a dramatic change in their relationship with performers, but they may be liable for back-penalties, going back ten or fifteen years. These are people who don't necessarily have any relationship to Equity, whatsoever. This is the dilemma, because if you are an Equity union member, you are being hired automatically on some sort of contract that at least is meeting the minimum requirement. But the rest of the cast is not; they're getting a \$100 stipend for their work. They're working in places where you have one bathroom, where you'd have a dressing room if they hung a curtain up, with the boys on one side and the girls on the other side. Or if there's no curtain, everybody's all thrown in there together.

Audience: As I understand, two of those theatres both hire Equity actors on a regular basis. Taproot and Harlequin.

Chris Comte: Harlequin is no longer hiring Equity actors.

Audience: They almost went Equity for a while, then they went back. And now they do hire a couple of union performers per show.

Laura Kenney: Those union performers are covered.

Chris Comte: Yes, those people are covered. But everybody else, they're not covered. And the dilemma, what's put this huge roadblock in the process of trying to develop a way to make this possible is that, well, if everybody's got to be paid at least \$7.35 an hour, going up to \$7.63 an hour starting January 1st here, most of these theatre companies are not going to be able to hire anyone. Equity, non-Equity, whatever. They are going to have to declare themselves as all-volunteer community theatres, which for many of these companies – these individuals and organization have consciously tried in some way, whether qualitatively or quantitatively, say, we're not a community theatre, because of it has all sort of evil connotations regarding quality of work and so forth – but that's essentially what they're going to have to become, if they can't afford to pay somebody minimum wage.

Audience: As I understand it, the community has been told, don't change your plan, and don't change your operation unless you've been contacted.

Chris Comte: Here's the thing: the state Department of Revenue is in process of contacting all these people now. I work with a number of small fringe theatres like Annex Theatre and Capitol Hill Arts Center, and a few others. They are getting letters saying, "You better contact us and get your books ready, because we're going to schedule an audit." The letters starts off, "Dear Theatrical Employer."

Audience: Do we have any lobbying plans?

Chris Comte: Yes, Karen Lane from TPS and Gretchen Johnson from the Washington State Arts Alliance, which is an larger state umbrella of non-profit performing arts organizations and other types of arts organizations, have been down lobbying in Olympia quite actively. There is a bit of a culture clash happening with regards to this issue. On the one hand, all these small fringe theatre producing organizations – obviously, this is not in their best interests to be forced into this position. However, on the other side of the issue, are SAG, AFTRA, and American Federation of Musicians, who are strongly in support of the state's doing what it's doing, because this is also an issue for them and their members. But whereas these small theatre producers want to avoid hiring people as employees, these other unions are telling the for-profit producers, recording producers, voice-over and commercial studios, the interactive gaming industry, that they do not want their members hired as contractors. They want their members hired as employees, and not on contract, because it gives them work conditions that are more protective. If you're injured on the job, and nobody's paying state industrial taxes for you, you're not covered. So, there's a bit of a dilemma in that regard, in that some of the unions are very active in supporting the existing system, and do not want to see any kind of changes made, either legislatively or in terms of actual policy.

Audience: Let me tell you a story. I joined all three unions back in 1974 in Chicago, which was right before the Chicago theatre scene exploded. I was in the union when the non-union companies were becoming more solid, but that's another story. What happened in Chicago – and I think it's important to think about the very big picture, and if you think of Chicago right now, it's probably the most vital theatre community in the country. Up until 1974, there were no storefront theatres in Chicago, because Chicago fire code prevented storefronts from being theatres. And also, the first Mayor Daly thought theatres were somehow bad, and he didn't like them. And then he died. And the first thing that Mayor Burns did was change the fire code, and storefronts became possible. In the 1970's, these theatres suddenly exploded all over Chicago. These were very small theatres; some of them were started in a basement. Some of those theatres became the theatres that have now built their own houses, and are very big theatres. The other thing that happened along with that was the development of the Special Appearance contract, which allowed very small theatres to gradually hire Equity actors, and there are now something like 36, 38, 40 Equity houses in Chicago now, and another 110 non-Equity. It's really important for everybody, to build the community. I've worked in theatres where the only exit was out the front, and the audience had to walk across the stage to get to the one bathroom backstage in the dressing room.

Laura Kenney: I've worked in places where we had to go out the front door, and go around through the alley, and come in the back door, because that was backstage.

Audience: In terms of the lobbying work, it has to be in terms of absolutely broad-based economic development. Right now, theatre is one of the strongest economic voices in Chicago. And it wasn't, thirty years ago. Thirty years ago, there were four theatres, and that was it.

Laura Kenney: The way I see it is that, the way the labor code is set, theatrical performers are employees, they're not contractors. That's a very strict interpretation of the law. But there's no reason why, through negotiation and some compromise, for Taproot and some of these other theatres, for people who aren't under an Equity contract, we can't come to some kind of agreement.

Audience: I think the labor code and the earthquake code in Seattle are the exceptions that the fire code had to be. The way that the whole change in the fire codes in Chicago was done to specifically make theatre possible is the same way that we should look at some of those things in Seattle.

Chris Comte: You bring up, actually, several really good points. One I'll just address quickly is that we do, in Seattle, have an Umbrella Agreement, which is a developing theatre agreement. We've had marginal success with it, in terms of, when it was started about seven years ago, we had six theatres who joined the Umbrella -- which basically allowed them, rather than operating as separate independent companies, basically it said, we're just going to pool you under a single contract, so that individually, you don't all have to take on the economic burden of hiring these performers, but you can spread it out amongst yourselves, in the process of allowing you to grow and develop your budgetary basis, and so on, until you would eventually reach the lowest rung of the Equity contract system. Out of the six or seven theatres that started with that process, only one, which is Seattle Shakespeare Company, ever achieved that goal. The rest just over time gradually dropped out, for various reasons. It wasn't necessarily all economic, but economics is part of that. And that Umbrella is still open and available. I think that, at this time, there is actually only one theatre company actively using that Umbrella, so it's not really tremendously advantageous for them, because the whole point is to use it as a group using it, to pool resources. If it's just you, then you might as well just hire Equity contracts.

Secondly, in terms of the things about the theatre building code: Theatre Babylon just went through this incredibly laborious process, a year and a half trying to get the space that we had on Capitol Hill up to the city, state, and county fire and other codes. And every time we work with these guys, first it started out as \$145,000, then it was \$200,000. By the time we got to the end of this, we were actually soliciting bids from contractors to see what it was really going to cost, it ballooned up over \$350,000. This is for a space that basically was about the size of two large garages. You could knock the building down, and build a brand new theatre for the amount of money that it would take to make all the changes that were required.

Audience: How many stores have that many people in them, at a time, who might get flattened by an earthquake?

Chris Comte: And again, part of what happened was, if you remember, there was a horrible, horrible fire in a Rhode Island nightclub. As a result of that, and because the fire codes for that facility were so lax, and it was so crowded, and it's horrible: a hundred and some odd people died in that fire. The fire department and every city and municipality in the country started looking at these small, mostly unregulated venues, because nobody wanted to have the same sort of horrible conflagration in their city. Subsequently, nobody wanted to get sued for the tens of millions of dollars that it would cost, because the city was not enforcing its fire and safety codes. And part of what happened with the Theatre Babylon space is a direct fallout of that situation.

Audience: What's interesting about Chicago is that the fire codes were so strict there, because of earlier fires -- so that if Chicago could work it out, it should be possible.

Chris Comte: I think it's going to take time.

Audience: As we're talking about, about the space available, and the economic models that are – in the industry, with the DOR coming down on the independent contractors – does it behoove the unions, specifically Equity – if I'm trying to come back to the "Seattle Plan" – if there's a 99-seat contract in L.A. and New York, to try those kinds of contracts in a town that can apply all the bargaining power of the unions to the folks who were formerly independent contractors?

Chris Comte: In fact, we have done that in some cases. But there is also a bottom limit that you simply cannot go below. And Equity has established that that line in the sand, as it were, is minimum wage. Whatever the state prevailing minimum wage is, we will not set a level of compensation lower than that. This state has the second or third highest state minimum wage in the nation, and starting January 1st, it's going to go up another 28 cents. That limit in itself, aside from paying unemployment and state industrial and worker's comp, automatically makes the ability of some fringe theatres in this town to hire Equity actors for a full-scale performance – it's simply more money than they can afford.

Audience: Why can't this hold in New York and L.A.?

Chris Comte: It doesn't hold in New York and L.A. because the membership in New York and L.A. is strong enough to say, we want this Showcase Code, because we want Broadway producers and the guys filming *CSI* and *Law and Order* to come and see our work, and we'll work for nothing, because if we get those guys to come in the door and see us and like us, they will hire us on SAG contracts at \$600 per day. We don't have that in Seattle.

Audience: In a city that hires outside actors, and we're trying to get them to realize that Seattle is a vital theatre community, and that there are vital Equity actors here. They might not realize –

Chris Comte: Let me just iterate what Equity's policy is, and what their rationale for not doing that is. All of these theatres are required to hold general auditions. So there is always going to be an opportunity for you to be seen by the local theatre companies. We don't have enough industry of for-profit entertainment enterprises in this city to justify having the Showcase Code that they have in L.A. If we had a huge film industry like they have in Vancouver, it might be possible. In the last ten years, all of the commercial film and television production in this city has disappeared, and 90% of it has just kept going up the I-5 corridor up to Vancouver, because of the tremendous tax incentives that the British Columbian government has offered to do those productions in Vancouver.

Audience: I don't want to do Showcase work – and forgive me for picking on SAG here – but I don't want to do Showcase work so I can get screenwork? I personally don't care about screenwork. I'm an Equity actor because I like theatre, and I want to do theatre. And there are certainly a lot theatre professionals that I would want to come see my work. I think there's a large enough quantity of them, and not just for creating a vital community in general, for a community where Equity and non-Equity can work together, where there's not such a gulf between union and non-union performers. I understand the trickiness of it: that if non-union local companies can start hiring union actors for free, then when is anyone going to become union if they can get it without it?

Chris Comte: Certainly, why should the Seattle Rep hire you on an Equity contract, if they hear they can hire you for less? The other argument that Equity would make in this instance is that the Member's Project Code is available to you for the work you're describing. It's just that the terms of that code are a little bit different than the Showcase Code, but essentially it's designed to serve the same purpose. It's there to allow Equity members to showcase their talent in a way

that is not cost-prohibitive. The difference is that, under the Member's Project Code, the production has to be produced by equity members, whereas with the Showcase Code, anybody can set up a Showcase production, and in a lot of instances, Equity members actually pay to be part of an organization, so that they can be in a showcase. This is exactly the kind of situation that Equity does not want to find itself in, in other cities. So, the Member's Project Code is specifically to provide an avenue for a showcase-type production. The difference is that most of the people involved in the production have to be Equity members. The person who is the Producer of Record has to be an Equity member, the person who is handling the finances for the production has to be an Equity member, but they're all free to use non-Equity members in the production itself. They want to make certain that the people who are running this particular project are union members themselves, and there's a certain amount of oversight by the local Equity liaison committee. The idea is, we don't want to see people be exploited. So therefore, if it's for members, by members, the likelihood of that happening is tremendously less.

Audience: There's something in the wording of the membership agreement that said that if you were a staff member of a theatre and wanted to produce a showcase, that it was not eligible.

Chris Comte: The idea is that, if you're a staff member of a theatre, then you have to separate yourself out for that. It may be not the most logical way to deal with union members who are also in administrative or management roles in a theatre, but it is an important distinction, because of the inherent relationship of the union-management relationship. As a staff member, you are privy to a lot of information that, as a union member, you wouldn't necessarily be privy to. So it works both ways. It's not just conflict of interest on the union side, but also on the management side. Because it would be very easy for a union actor who works in the administrative office of the Seattle Rep to go around and say, "You know what they're going to offer for salary?" Basically, that creates an unfair advantage for one side or the other.

Audience: Could the Equity member that runs a small theatre company, say, produce a Showcase apart from the company?

Chris Comte: That's a good question. I know where you're going with that, and I'm not absolutely certain that I know the answer to that. One thing that I should point out is, that when we're talking about staff positions, we're talking about paid staff positions. If you're an independent producer, and you're not paying yourself a salary, that line wouldn't exist. It would be entirely possible for Green Theatre Productions to do a Member's Project Code. You, just because the producer – that would not disqualify you from producing a Member's Project Code. And I should mention that, finally, after five years in this position, that several people have in the last six months or so used this, and it actually in some instances has been incredibly successful. Ann Evans recently did a production at Theater Schmeater called *John & Jen*, which is a chamber musical, two-character piece, had a piano to play music, and was a relatively good piece, and they actually made a profit on the show. So it is possible. A lot of people saw it, and they got great reviews. And hopefully, she and the person she did the production with [Brian Earp] are having people call and knock on their door to get additional work, which is the point of the whole thing in the first place. It's there, and you can use it.

Audience: My question is, along the lines of the minimum wage, are restaurants having to pay waiters minimum wage?

Audience (different): Yes, and that's hard for them too.

Chris Comte: For one thing, the State Restaurant Association, has for decades, since Prohibition, has been an extremely powerful lobbying organization in this state, which is why, up until a few years ago, you didn't have things in this state like cocktail lounges. Because the

state regulated the liquor industry, and the restaurant industry said, you really shouldn't be serving liquor unless you're serving food. So therefore, the only decent establishments that can serve liquor are restaurants. Well, guess what: that's how they made a huge amount of money off their liquor sales, because they make a lot more money off their liquor sales than they do on their food sales. Well, if you limit your competition by saying, you can't have places that just serve only booze, where are you going to go to get a drink? You gotta go to a restaurant. In terms of the minimum wage law, there was some little weird provision in the interstate commerce law that said that if you had any dealings with interstate commerce whatsoever, you were exempt from state minimum wage laws, because then it became a federal issue. Large restaurant chains that have establishments in most of the states were then exempt, places like McDonald's were exempt because they're everywhere, and even smaller places were able to make the case successfully that "we buy a lot of our products and ingredients from companies out of state that have to be trucked in, so therefore we're engaged in interstate commerce." That's why for literally sixty years in this state, restaurant employees were paid something like two bucks an hour. Basically, all their money came out of tips. Finally, it's only been in the last few years, the state said, no, you're going to have to pay them minimum wage. If you were trying to make the case that restaurants were not paying minimum wage, then theatres might not have to, that won't work.

We've been talking a lot about Equity stuff here, and we've got about ten minutes left, so I want to make sure – we've talked about some very specific issues, so if there are any other questions that anyone has –

Audience: I have a question. I have heard that SAG is non-existent. (Laughter.)

Laura Kenney: That is one of the myths, that SAG is non-existent. I too remember a time when there were six different films being shot here, by several producers. But Vancouver is kicking our butts, and in Olympia, we have a legislature that doesn't support anything to promote that industry here. I've gone and spoken to the legislature myself, on occasion, to tell them that it would pump about \$50 million into the economy right here, and it wouldn't go back to L.A., and somehow the legislature has the notion that we don't make any money when films are made here. But I have to say that we on the council are working with this with the Seattle Film office and the Washington State Film office, that we are talking to people, going to Olympia, we are bringing figures and showing how much money one television commercial can bring. When Gray's Anatomy came up here and shot exteriors up here for their television show, it brought millions of dollars into the economy, and we're going down to the legislature, and showing them, here's the facts and figures, this brings money into this economy. Also, there's this notion that, somehow, they might make us look bad, and that I never got. We already look bad. (Laughter.) Don't even go there with me.

Audience: They're not going to Olympia.

Laura Kenney: They don't want to go to a windy city. If it's ten miles an hour, then everybody's packing up.

Audience: But there's an independent film industry here.

Laura Kenney: Yes, and SAG has gone out and gotten all these new contracts -- for anybody who wants to make a film, they can find some kind of SAG contract to work under. We also are sending out our membership to go to these producers: some people think that some producers, like Microsoft, always do non-union work, and that's not true. You can go to the individual producers, and you can turn a job. If you go in there and say, I want to work, and they want you, and you want to work under a union contract, you can turn that job to union. The

unfortunate thing is that we do have a lot of people who work in AFTRA and SAG, and they are more than willing to give away their rights and residuals, to give away their rights to fair working conditions and stuff like that, to do these jobs. But this is where this employee/employer labor law helps us, as SAG members. Now that they are going after producers and saying actors are employees, the producer can no longer just cut a check and say, see ya later. They have to fill out all the paperwork anyway, so they might as well hire a union employee. And that's what we are trying to get on the bandwagon, and get out to these producers, and say, "You know, when you hire somebody under this, you are in violation of the labor laws." And if you're going to hire them anyway, you might as well a union actor under a union contract.

Audience: Where do I find out information about the benefits that are offered to the SAG member, because when you get to L.A., you have to make \$12,000, and the average wage for the SAG actor is \$7,000. So, you don't get any benefits until you get to \$12,000.

Laura Kenney: That's not any different up here.

Chris Comte: And that same case applies to AFTRA performers as well.

Audience: Will the unions, SAG, AFTRA, and Equity, develop a health plan so that people can buy their own until they earn their rights to it?

Laura Kenney: There was a measure on that when we voted on merging SAG and AFTRA together, and unfortunately, Hollywood didn't want anything to do with it. And unfortunately, again, as I mentioned, only 27% of the people who could have voted, voted. And on the merger vote, it was even lower than that. If you don't go and vote – and they sent you a vote with an envelope – get a pen, make a mark, lick it, and put it in the mailbox. You don't need to spend a dime. And yet, we can't get people to organize and vote. And I'm with you: I don't qualify for AFTRA insurance, I don't qualify for SAG insurance.

Audience: At this time, I am lifetime-eligible for SAG, but I have not joined, because it's such a damn pisspoor organization. And they're not going to change. And what this shows the industry that voted down the SAG-AFTRA thing is that the SAG leadership had fought against it.

Laura Kenney: I agree with you.

Audience: They don't even have a local chapter here.

Laura Kenney: We called every single one of our members, asking them to please vote for the merger. It would give us stronger bargaining power, and it would give us better access to healthcare. We here in this office – I personally called many people, to ask them to vote. Our local return rate was excellent. Across the country, it was pitiful.

Audience: Since Oregon has changed its tax rules to favor film production, has any of that leaked over to us? Is there Oregon work that may be coming our way?

Laura Kenney: Dina, who is our representative from SAG, here in Seattle: she has just been taken over not only the Seattle office, but also the Oregon or the Portland office. And that is one thing that I've asked Dina to report on now for us. Since this change has come about, which is very recent, where they've put in a bunch of incentives. Washington needs to get a break too, in that the way our Constitution is set up, it doesn't allow us to give these incentives that other

states have been able to do. I've asked to see if that's going to increase some of the work, I would be glad to report on that to you when I know.

Audience: I'm not a union member, but it almost seems to me that: aren't the unions afraid that if it looks like they're not really doing much in a community like ours, we're going to have actors like me, who are willing to work for minimum wage? I could start a theatre company, pay them minimum wage, because a lot of the good actors aren't joining Equity. And it's a separate economy.

Chris Comte: If you were hiring every actor at minimum wage, and it may come down to that, then I'd say hallelujah! Because I know an incredible number of non-union actors in this town who are, frankly, far more talented than I am, who deserve to be paid minimum wage for their work, regardless of what union they're affiliated with. By the same token, I don't necessarily feel afraid. Many of those people are friends of mine. I consider them colleagues. Seattle is – I don't want to say, unique, in the sense of there evolving a stronger sort of connection between union members who have worked their way up through the ranks and are now full-fledged union members. It's not an us vs. them mentality, because we've grown up together, we've grown companies together, we've grown careers together. The fact that some of these people have decided that it's in their best interest to not join a union vs. those who have decided that it is in their best interest to join a union – there is no inherent conflict, either between those individuals, or between the communities and cultures that support those individuals and types of theatre. Seattle is healthier because it has such a tremendous mix. One thing I'd say we're really lacking in this city currently and has been for some time is, regarding the mid-range theatres, that we're losing the middle rungs of the ladder that allow those individuals who wish to become union members the opportunity to transition from non-union to union.

Audience: It almost seems like a midrange company could afford a business model that hires actors who have left Equity, and are paid minimum wage, and it even provides them with healthcare -- and it would still be cheaper. The business model that's going to emerge in the middle that would allow people to just forget about the unions, and work under the regular business code in the city. And I don't know if that's possible.

Chris Comte: We may very shortly find out, in the next few years. Some of those theatre companies may have to do just exactly what you're saying.

Audience: They're going to have to work until they have a hit. That's what happened in Chicago.

Chris Comte: And that's what happens here in Seattle, too. With *Angry Housewives*.

Audience: And they made a lot more than the Equity minimum wage.

Chris Comte: Part of the dilemma is that we lost the sense of a lot of these small organizations wanting to go up to become union – because they've seen what happens to mid-range companies. They get to a certain state, and suddenly everything starts falling apart. Financially, logistically, and for every reason imaginable – so a lot of these small organizations say, why should I aspire to become a larger producing organization if it means that the odds of me going out of business, and not being able to do this anymore, are going to increase with every step up on the ladder that I make.

Audience: And they increase exponentially.

Chris Comte: They do increase exponentially. One of the challenges for us as unions is to try to find something – and we haven't found it yet, at least not in Seattle – how can we make those incremental steps less difficult one by one? And also to the point that we can encourage them to grow up and become bigger, semi-professional, even professional theatre companies? It was a lot easier thirty years ago in Seattle, when you had the Rep and ACT, the two big players, and everybody else who started a new theatre company did it with the idea that someday they wanted to be the new Rep and ACT Theatre. People don't do that the way they used to. And that's a challenge that the unions face in terms of: you can't create new members and you can't enlarge the work opportunities for those members, if the theatre companies themselves are not in the mindset that they are going to grow from being fringe to professional.

Laura Kenney: But we do have one example in Seattle Shakespeare.

Chris Comte: Yes. There are companies –

Laura Kenney: And Village Theatre -- they were on a schedule, and now, my god, they are doing so well, it's remarkable.

Audience: They're doing well, but they're not doing the quality of theatre that they need to do.

Laura Kenney: Gosh, they are too.

Audience: But they're doing musical after musical.

Laura Kenney: But that's part of their mission.

Audience: In the old days, they did more plays --

Laura Kenney: But that is their mission. That's how they are making money. And they're filling that niche over on the Eastside. And the quality of the work is excellent.

Chris Comte: I'm sure that we have not even scratched the surface in terms of the issues and questions that you may have. I'm going to be downstairs all this weekend at the union resource table. So please feel free to stop by, whether it's a simple question, or a longer conversation you want to have with me – whatever. I also have some business cards down there, for my actual real job, which is the AFTRA representative. But you can still call me at that phone number and ask me questions about Equity, I'll just pretend that I'm talking to you on my cellphone. (Laughter.) But again, we want to make sure that we are available and accessible, so please feel free to stop by and talk in person. Or if you want to chat over the phone – because my personal feeling is that, this is your union, and if you're a union member, I work for you. My job is to make things better for you, and so I am fully committed to doing that. And any input, or ideas, or suggestions, or criticisms, that you have, I'm completely open to them.

Laura Kenney: And I joined the SAG council because I thought I was losing all my SAG work, and I'm on the SAG council as a SAG member, to get in and try to fight and get some more work done up here. So feel free – if you have ideas, I will bring them to the table. I'd be glad to do that for you. One more thing I'd like to say, for everyone who is a union member – and not excluding the people who aren't – just remember, you can go to any auditions, union or non-union, and you can turn that job to a union job, if they want you. So don't forget that you can do that. I found that out at the last yearly meeting, and it gave me a whole new perspective on life. I'm not going to go audition for the 20-year-old blonde role, but if I see something that I think I'm right for, and if they're non-union, I'm going to go and audition, and try to get them

to turn that into a union job. Don't forget that. It's a wonderful tool. The strength is in the members, and getting out there and trying to make the unions work. We are the unions.

Chris Comte: Thank you. (Applause.)

END of SESSION

I Have This Great Idea for a Play... Seattle Dramatists

These passages are NOT quotes from the session, as it was not recorded. They capture the essence of each playwright's talk, from notes by Becky Hellyer.*

INTRODUCTION –

Becky Hellyer: Welcome to the Seattle Dramatists session. I want to tell you a little bit about what we're doing here today and ask you to tell us what you're hoping to get out of this session. We're here to share the experiences of three widely produced local playwrights and to talk about playwriting in Seattle. We won't be doing any writing exercises. Keri Healey will talk about ideas, where they come from and how you can know whether they're worth pursuing. Bret Fetzer will talk about how to approach writing a play. Do you start with dialogue or plotting it out? Scot Augustson will discuss when to bring others into the process. And then we'll talk about where to go from here. We'll have time for questions at the end but please feel free to ask them during the session as well.

We'd like to go around the room and ask you to tell us who you are and what IS this great idea you have for a play?

[mostly the participant were playwrights who'd already written plays and many of them had been produced.]

A. IDEAS –

Keri Healey: I'd like to talk a bit about where I get my ideas for plays. I keep a journal of ideas and I often refer back to them when I'm looking for an idea. Sometimes they're a jolt of dialogue. Often I get ideas from the news and news stories I read. I keep the journal daily and refer back to it as I need to.

Ideas can come from anywhere. Mostly playwrights are using ideas from their own lives and from the lives of people they know. But that is not always a whole idea. It morphs from a factual story that we'd like to tell, into a fictional story during the process of developing an idea. Often the story you think you're going to tell, ends up getting altered radically once you start to write it.

My play PARROT FEVER came from my feelings of loss and helplessness after I'd been sick. Many other ideas ended up in that play – but mostly it was about illness and loss.

[Interjection: I thought it was about internet sex.]

Okay, that was one of the ideas that ended up seeping into it. But death was in it. While I was writing it I ended up getting very interested in online relationships and I interviewed many people online to ask them about their experiences and then used those ideas in the play.

It's important to let your ideas live and not try to force them to remain as you originally conceived them. If they're good, they'll end up changing and you need to go with that.

So, I keep a journal and I refer to it often. That's probably the best advice. And ideas are rarely unique. Even though an idea has been done before, that doesn't mean you shouldn't still pursue it. You'll have your own take on it. And it will grow. And there are only a limited number of stories. You can't let that stop you from using an idea.

I read a lot of books on playwriting and take writing exercises from them. Exercises free me up to write things I might not otherwise have written. And I keep those in a journal, too. Sometimes something from the journal will go straight into a play. And you don't always know that when you're writing it.

B. BLANK PAGE –

Bret Fetzer: I've approached writing from different angles. When I'm writing a play I usually end up just starting to write it and then throwing things out and rewriting. When I'm working on a fairy tale in prose, I usually plot it out first. It's a different approach. So you need to first ask yourself, is this idea I'm writing a play or a short story or what?

When I'm writing a play, I find I write a lot and then cut it down. I just let the characters talk and see where it goes. I don't always know where the story will end. Or how it will end. And sometimes I go off into a direction that I wouldn't have predicted. The characters do things that I might not have plotted. And I like that freedom to be able to follow my characters.

So, I'd say, I start with character and then plot comes from that. I know Scot does that differently. He tends to start with plot.

[Scot Augustson: I do. I have to know where they're going before I begin and what's going to happen. But I find, as I teach playwriting, it's very hard for me to separate character and plot. They are one in the same for me.]

There are writers who say that characters are only a conglomerate of the actions they take within the story. Plot is all. And writers who say that, without character, there is no story. Unless you have a character you care about, no one cares what they do.

My play MARS IS A STAR was completely character driven. I just let the characters do what they did. I didn't worry about plot. Maybe it was more of a short story. I don't know. Some would say it was more or less successful. But, I enjoyed it. And learned a lot. Sometimes, when you go with character, plot elements have to follow.

[Question: Scot, do you ever have to sacrifice character for plot?]

[Scot Augustson: I don't think so. I do work on characters until I can get them to do, believably, the things the plot requires them to do.]

Sometimes you get an actor who says, "My character wouldn't do such and such." Often, though, it's that the character that they've created in their head, wouldn't do it. But the character in the script would. They just have to go through the same process that the playwright did to find out how it is that the character WOULD do it.

C. OTHER PEOPLE –

Scot Augustson: At some point, as you have all experienced, you have to bring in actors to start reading the script out loud. Scripts are meant to be heard and it's a very important part of the process. As one of you mentioned, a play can be rewritten to death by the playwright. When what it really needs is actors. I'm a shy person and for a long time I didn't like to bring others into the process. But, it's very important.

You can get so much out of a reading. You can hear how the characters speak and where the holes are. I often write with particular actors in mind and often they're not available when I go to cast the reading or production. That's an awful feeling. You think, oh how can anyone else do this part justice. But I've learned that if a part is well-written, a good actor can make it work.

You have to decide when it's ready. And only you know. I know that Becky has mentioned that she's run into a lot of different approaches to this.

[Becky Hellyer: When I was first talking to our Principal Playwrights about Seattle Dramatists and asking them what they wanted, I was shocked to hear the differences in when playwrights want to include actors. Keri Healey brings them in when scenes are still just outlined and has them improv around the ideas. Elizabeth Heffron shows it to no one until it is as done as she can make it.]

[Keri Healey: I also write with particular actors in mind and I find that hearing their voices helps develop their character.]

[Question; Do you ever read your script out loud to yourself?]

Never. I'm a bad actor and I won't do it justice. I can't read the parts. Also, I think when you do that, all the parts end up with your own verbal cadence and that can be boring.

[Question: Do you ever have others read the script?]

I don't. I like to hear it read by good actors. That's where I get the most information. I rarely get feedback from an audience that I find very useful. It's almost always from hearing it.

[Bret Fetzer: I do have people I ask to read the script. But, I also think you get the best feedback from hearing it.]

[Keri Healey: And good actors can tell you a lot about your script.]

It's important to get it out of your hands as soon as you possibly can. Once you know you want to. Plays can atrophy in a drawer and you can forget they're there.

D. WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE? –

Everyone:

Write every day. Don't let it go for too long or you'll have a hard time coming back to it. Even if it's just an exercise. Write.

Let your own voice emerge over time. Each script is a learning experience and develops who you are as a writer and what you want to say. Often, we're writing the same script over and over.

Go to theatre.

Read plays.

Go to play readings.

END OF SESSION

Find Your Sweet Spot: Voiceovers

(No recording available.)

Conversations with Leonid Anisimov

(No recording available.)
