

If I Ran the... TCG Member Theatre
TCG Conference
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KAREN KANDEL: Reading from *If I Ran the Zoo*, by Dr. Seuss:

“It’s a pretty good zoo,”
Said young Gerald McGrew,
“And the fellow who runs it
Seems proud of it too.

But if I ran the zoo,”
Said young Gerald McGrew,
“I’d make a few changes.
That’s just what I’d do.

The lions and tigers and that kind of stuff
They have up here now are not quite good enough.
You see things like these in any old zoo.
They’re awfully old-fashioned. I want something new!

So I’d open each cage, I’ll unlock every pen,
Let the animals go and start over again.
And somehow or other I think I could find
Some beasts of some beasts of a more unusual kind.

A four-footed lion’s not much of a beast.
The one in my zoo will have 10 feet at least.
Five legs on the left and five more on the right.
Then people will stare, and they’ll say, ‘What a sight!’
My New Zoo, McGrew Zoo, will make people talk.
My new zoo, McGrew zoo, will make people gawk.

They’ll be so surprised, they’ll swallow their gum.
They’ll ask when they see my strange animals come,
‘Where do you suppose he gets things like that from?’

If you want to catch beasts you don’t see every day,
You have to go places quite out of the way.
You have to go places no others can get to.
You have to get cold and you have to get wet too.

I’ll catch ‘em in caves, I’ll catch ‘em in brooks,
I’ll catch ‘em in crannies, I’ll catch ‘em in nooks
That you don’t read about in geography books.

I'll load up five boats with a family of Joats
Whose feet are like cows, but wear squirrel-skin coats,
And sit like dogs, but have voices like goats—
Excepting they can't sing the very high notes.

And then I'll go down to the Wilds of Nantucket,
And capture a family of Lunks in a bucket.
Then people will say, 'Now I like that boy heaps.
His New Zoo, McGrew Zoo, is growing by leaps.
He captures them wild, he captures them meek,
He captures them slim, he captures them sleek.
What do you suppose he will capture next week?'

In the far western part
In southeast North Dakota
Lives a very fine animal called the Iota.
But I'll capture one
Who is even much finer
In the northeastern west part of South Carolina.

When people see him they will say, 'Now by thunder!
This New Zoo, McGrew Zoo, is really a wonder!'

I'll bag a big bug
Who is very surprising,
A feller who has
A propeller for rising
And zooming around making cross-country hops,
From Texas to Boston with only two stops.
Now that kind of thing for a bug is just tops!

In a cave in Kartoom is a beast called a Natch
That no other hunter's been able to catch.
He's hidden for years in his cave with a pout
And no one's been able to make him come out.
But I'll coax him out with a wonderful meal
That's cooked by my cooks in my cooker mobile.

They'll fix up a dish that is just to his taste;
Three chicken croquettes made of library paste.
Then sprinkled with peanut shucks, pickled and spiced,
Then baked at 600 degrees and then iced.
It's mighty hard cooking to cook up such feasts
But that's how the New Zoo, McGrew Zoo, gets beasts.

‘He hunts with such vim, he hunts with such vigor. His new zoo,
McGrew’s Zoo, gets bigger and bigger.’

Then the whole town will gasp, ‘Why this boy never sleeps!
No keeper before ever kept what he keeps.
There’s no telling what that young fellow will do!’
And then, just to show them, I’ll sail to Ka-troo
And bring back an It-Kutch a Preep and a Proo,
A Nerkle, a Nerd and a Seersucker too.

‘This Zookeeper, New keeper’s simply astounding.’
He travels so far that you think he’d drop!
When do you suppose this young fellow will stop?’

Stop... ?
Well, I should.
But I won’t stop until
I’ve captured the Fizza-ma-Wizza-ma-Dill,
The world’s biggest bird from the Island of Gwark
Who only eats pine trees and spits out the bark.
And boy! When I get him back home to my park,
The whole world will say, ‘Young McGrew’s made his mark.’

PHILIP HIMBERG: Thank you to the wonderful Karen Kandel. Thank you so much. You know, we had a debate about whether we should have Karen come here and read this wonderful book or whether we might have Molly Smith, Susan Booth and Martha Lavey sing, “And I’m Telling You I’m Not Going,” but I think we made the right choice. I’m Philip Himberg. I’m the producing artist director of the Sundance Theatre Program. I also want to thank Theodor Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss. In my generation, the Baby Boom generation that raised such awful children that we heard about this morning, Dr. Seuss was more often than not the first book that you actually read on your own, depending on what year you were born. I was born in 1953. You’d always have that memory of the book that you picked up and was not read to, but actually learned to put together and actually read. It was the great joy of the ‘learning to read’ moment. And for me, without a doubt, that book was *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back*. Now, not *The Cat in the Hat*, but *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back*. For some reason my mother forgot the first one and bought me the second one. It’s funny, I can still remember the first page of that book: “This was no time for play, this was no time for fun, there was no time for games, there was work to be done.” It’s sort of amazing that I can remember that, and if you ask me what plays we’re doing at Sundance this summer, I’ll have a problem remembering that.

This panel isn’t really about aging, but it’s entitled, “If I Ran the TCG Member Theatre,” a riff on the Dr. Seuss *If I Ran the Zoo*, which is the story of a young boy who imagines letting the animals out of a city zoo and creating his own unimaginable menagerie without the limitations of what we call reality. A few months back my associate director at Sundance posed a question to me after what I think were too many

pinot grigios. And he blurted out without any warning or provocation: “So, Philip, how much time do you figure you have left?” Now I don’t believe he would have asked that question in the same manner if he knew that every morning when I open the *New York Times*, and I don’t read the front page, I don’t read the world section, I don’t read the opinion or even the arts. I read the obituaries first. And I read them a little obsessively, and I have this sort of weird response to them. I read an obit, and if it says that the person has died at age 72, I do a quick mathematics on my fingers and I think, 17 years, and I think about that for a while. God forbid it says that someone passed away at 59, I think, “Whoa—four years.” And my daughter has taken to thinking this is hilarious. Now she reads the obituaries and says, “Dad, dad you have like six years left.” So I responded to Christopher by saying, “Well, you know, my parents lived to ripe old age, and if I average the age of their deaths together, I figure I have about 30 years left. And he was shocked and said, “You plan to stay at Sundance 30 more years?” And then I got it, and then I got suspicious. I got really suspicious, because I figured after all I had done for him, he was coming after my job. But honestly he was just curious about how I perceived my future. And I love my job—I genuinely do. It’s a extraordinary job, it’s fascinating, it’s challenging, and I’m blessed to have it. I’m just entering my 13th year, so I’m ready to be bar mitzvahed again. But I do think quite honestly about how many years I have in me, and more importantly than that, how many more years the institution can truly flourish in my care. I know I have a lot to offer. I know there’s a kind of wisdom that comes with being solidly in middle age. But I want to be very circumspect about when it’s time for my institution to grow differently and grow dynamically, and when another, younger individual needs to take the reigns. I think about it a lot.

This plenary is not about retirement, and it’s not about a critique of the current scene at any theatres. It’s about acknowledging that a new generation is undeniably and joyfully going to lead the American theatre, and lead the institutions and create new ones, and more likely create new models we haven’t even imagined yet. So just to be creepy, I sent an email to some of my peers and colleagues and sent them the following question, promising them that their answers would be completely anonymous. The question I asked was: How many years do you have left as the leader of your institution? What are your plans for succession, both in terms of how you want your theatre to continue after you’re gone and the vision for your own personal and professional future? And these are some of the responses I got back:

“Philip: Just a word of advice, and just so you know. At 12 years rest assured that you are bored and others are looking at the expiration date on your milk carton.” Also, “the ‘God I am so old’ has not set in yet, but a way of working collaboratively with the folks around me—a dismantling of a hierarchies in favor of a more shared leadership, and maybe that’s the first step in tooling a succession.” “My timeline has changed dramatically since the collapse of the economy. My retirement package, lovingly put into place by a responsible board of directors, is severely damaged, and I have to try to stay until I can figure out a way to support myself in my dotage.” “We have a successor in place. Should I keel over from heart failure?” “I would probably envision three to five years left in my time as leader, as it has become increasingly hard to be an artist in one’s own institution anymore. My hunch is that the artist-as-CEO model is probably over, and more and more institutions will be run by producers and executive directors than by artists.” “Who knows. The more immediate question for most of us I suspect is: How

many years are left for our organizations? When I look around, none of the organizations can presume their longevity. So maybe this whole exercise needs to be focused on the nature of a new institution, or rather new institutions, which need to be built in a changed terrain.”

Okay, there are four extraordinary people behind me. Backstage they said to me, “Wow. Is this moment going to be the end of my career in the American theatre?” And I told them that nursing was also a very good profession. TCG selected them because they are interesting and fearless and complex and dynamic members of our community. And we paired them with four theatres, four very different theatres, and we sent them off to spend a little time at those theatres, and then they were asked to think and imagine how they would respond to being a leader at that particular institution—not in terms of fixing things so much, but as a reflection of their generation and a particular generational point of view. I actually begged them to include Sundance in this because I’m desperate to steal ideas from the next generation, but wasn’t lucky enough to be chosen. The four panelists are: Andrea Dymond, who visited the Arkansas Rep; Kate Taylor Davis, who visited Imagination Stage in D.C.; Joe Salvatore who visited ACT in San Francisco; and Meiyin Wang, who visited the Baltimore Theatre Project. So what we’re going to do is give each of them a little time to present their vision, and I’ll ask a few questions of the panel after that, then we’ll open it up to question from you.

So to begin with, let’s begin with Andrea Dymond, who is resident director at Victory Gardens Theater, where she has directed five world premiere productions in seven years. You have the rest of her bio in your materials. And, Andrea:

ANDREA DYMOND: We really did ask him about ruining our careers, and he really did tell us about nursing. When I was asked to participate, I was of course very excited for the opportunity, and I know I’m not alone in thinking in various situations that everything would be very different if only I ran the world. Of course TCG means a lot to me professionally, and the panel meant that I would get to come to this great conference. But mostly I was just jazzed to really take the time to think about how change is made in organizations, and, more to the point, what changes I would make if I could run a regional theatre. I was invited to consider Arkansas Rep in Little Rock, and in my first conversation with the artistic director, Bob Hupp, he posed the question that I think is key: How do we make the Rep a place that people visit more than six times a year? And that’s what I want to explore. Full disclosure, I think it was mentioned, I do work at Victory Gardens, which is a fabulous mid-sized theatre. I also run a small ensemble, which along with having spent a lot of time working in organizational development, makes me somebody who is keenly aware of the challenges even in times that aren’t as difficult as ours right now. So what that really means is that I wasn’t going to leap out with guns blazing, because from my perspective what you do is important, but how you do it is at least equally so.

Where to begin? I went down to Arkansas for a few days, learned an awful lot not only about the Rep, but also, thanks to the generosity of everyone there, a lot about the community of Little Rock. In addition to touring the facility, I had the opportunity to speak with some of the staff members and also some time with the board president and I sat in on a rehearsal of *Tommy*, which was great. And since none of us work in a vacuum, I was really interested to get context about the community, at least an overview of Little

Rock—who lives there, what shaped the community. So when I arrived in addition to talking to me about the theatre, Bob Hupp took me on a driving tour of the city, gave me some great background on the different neighborhoods and his own experience getting to know the city in the 10 years he'd lived there. And he also set up a meeting for me with a really fabulous local historian, and of course I visited Central High School, which was pivotal to that community.

But before we get into that, I'll give you a few facts about Arkansas Rep. The producing artistic director, as I said, is Robert Hupp. They have an operating budget of about \$3 million. Their stated mission is as follows: "Arkansas Repertory Theatre exists to create a diverse body of theatrical work of the highest artistic standards. With a focus on dramatic storytelling that illuminates the human journey." It is also the largest nonprofit theatre in the state, and the only LORT theatre for 300 miles in any direction. They've got a great building which they're in the midst of renovating. They're right in downtown Little Rock on Main Street. The building houses—it has a 300-seat main stage and a small studio, which used to be a 90-seat theatre, then became a 65-seat theatre and now they just use for rehearsals because of complications. They have all their own shops, a full time staff of about 25. And because of their location they import pretty much all of the actors that they use throughout the season, and house them in some fabulous old art deco buildings that they've recently renovated. They do all of this in and for a city with a population of about 187,000 and an area population of about 850,000, and their attendance is in the 270,000 range. The model, as far as I understand, is the very model of a regional theatre. They serve a smallish southern city and its surrounding region. By all accounts it's a church-based community. There's a lot of word of mouth that drives the audience. In their current season, just so you know, they have *Les Mis*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Looking Over the President's Shoulder*, *The Foreigner*, *The Elephant Man*, and their final show is *Tommy*, which opens tonight.

So now I figured I knew pretty much about the Rep, and I saw that they had a hard-working, committed staff, and that they did by all accounts pretty fine professional work, both on their stage and in their community through their outreach programs. So I needed a little context. Because before my visit I knew two things about Little Rock: one was that the Clintons staged their ascent to the White House from there; and secondly that it was the place where federal forces had to escort nine black teenagers to school every day in 1957 to ensure their safety, the Little Rock Nine, the integration crisis, as everyone calls it there, at Central High School. In the few days I spent in Little Rock I did learn that the community was forever changed and shaped by that event. All right, so I think, got it: I'm ready to make change now. Where do I begin? Or more to the point, how do I begin? I needed to find a way in, and because I'm a director the solution for me is always found in the text. When in doubt, go to the text. So, I did. There it is.

[REFERRING TO A SLIDE] Okay. Just so you know, we're not going to take it completely literally. The zoo patrons in the book will represent theatre artists. Or audience. And the different creatures in the book will represent different types of work and different artists. But before anyone gets offended at being thought of as beasts or exotic or whatever. I just want to say, cut it out. I'm not being literal. It's just an exercise.

Here we go. As said, I'm Gerald. My experience of Arkansas Rep is pretty much summed up here. It's a pretty great place. Okay. So. Still. If I ran the place I would make some changes, and I have to look at the text to see really about the process of making

change—to see how Gerald went about it, but right away I find that he and I diverge a little bit in our thinking. I'm with him and with a lot of my generation in thinking that how we make theatre, what we put on our stages, needs some investigation, some reinvention, but not because it's old-fashioned. Well, sometimes because it's old-fashioned. But not only because it's old-fashioned. I think it has to do more with theatre we make—for whom and by whom. And yes I do believe, for example, that we should embrace technology, but I believe even more strongly that to bring new audiences into the theatre, we have to go even further afield to make sure that new voices are represented on our stages and that what they say can be said to their peers and to anybody who will listen whether or not we get it or are comfortable hearing it. But more on that later. So, Gerald is making his first mistake, from my point of view. He lets all the animals out. He just gets rid of them. All right, to me this looks like change for its own sake, and apparently Gerald is unfamiliar with the warning and axiom about the baby and the bathwater. I don't think that the answer is going to be in a total rejection of all that has come before. There is a reason that classics are classic. And there is a covenant made with our existing patrons and subscribers about seeing certain things, certain styles of work, perhaps. No problem. I appreciate that. When I go to the zoo I do want to see a lion. A lion is a majestic beast. The thing is I don't only want to see a lion. And we all now how often we see the same thing at theatres across the country. Bad enough that we see the same 'name-your-classic-show-here.' But why is it that we have to see that same show everywhere at the same time. I know this happens. And I know you guys know what I'm talking about. More horrifying to me is when this happens to new works and it seems like there's only one thing that's being done everywhere. I'll mention perhaps very quickly most particularly the February shows, and I know you know what I'm talking about. It's as if you can only take one risk or give one opportunity at a time and in those cases what is on stage could not by any stretch of the imagination be called risky, but we'll leave that for now.

Okay, so Gerald. Let's get back to the text. All is not lost. He didn't give up lions entirely. He just wanted a 10-footed lion. It's still a lion, just a fancier one, perhaps. A reimagined and reinvigorated classic maybe. And I have to give it to him because he calls on his improv chops possibly. He says, "Yes, and." He doesn't close down the conversation with the patrons who like lions. They go for it, as you can see. It's quite possible also that with this new lion he can get some people who otherwise preferring the reptile house ignore lions altogether. Those people might come to give a look-see and I think it's really important to continue to nurture our relationships with our current patrons by giving them what they want, but we're also responsible to not only challenge their perspectives a little bit, but to open up the world of classic works a little, to create access points, to find a way to give traditional work to nontraditional audiences. Because theatre is a living art form and to live is to change, right?

So, here's where Gerald begins to do something very interesting to me. Building on the idea of the reimagined classic, perhaps, he combines ideas, right? He expands upon existing creatures, creates a new one, evolution, maybe even a revolution, by taking elements from both worlds. Now, check out his audience. When he does this, you'll notice, they're surprised, maybe not altogether delighted, except the kid. And that's not bad, right? That's okay. They're not sure they like this new, odd creature. I take encouragement from that one throwaway comment from the one spectator, if you're

reading there. "He must hunt them in very odd places." I think that's instructive. I think it's about more than outreach in a traditional sense. I think it goes beyond schools, especially in today's climate when the world is changing around us, I think to hear the stories that we need to hear today there are exciting possibilities working with people who maybe aren't playwrights or actors, though we love them and want them as well. I think now's a prime time for devising theatre that expresses concerns and tries to make sense of the lives of the people in our communities, because things are changing so rapidly for all of us. We can encourage theatre by making it central to their lives, a way to tell their own stories. And it's not a new idea. It's an old idea whose time may have come again. One in which it could be very exciting because we do have new technologies to bring in the 21st century.

All right, so there's no picture here, because it was really bizarre and I thought it took us off on a weird path. This is where I think Gerald hits his stride, as far as I'm concerned. He begins to deal with what is, I think, the major challenge going forward. He's committed himself and his organization to boldly go, and he isn't put off by the inclement weather. He accepts that part of the challenge will be the adversity met along the way, and he steps outside his comfort zone to discover what or who he doesn't know. But of course this is where it begins to get tricky because Gerald's going to get it from all sides. He current audience will kick about the changes. And he may not get thanked by the creatures he takes into his zoo either. Gerald does have the best of intentions. But you can see here that he is getting a little nervous. He's begun to run up against beasts that maybe don't want to be in his zoo. Or maybe want to be there, but on their own terms. He's worrying about getting bitten, and he uses a cage to capture his prey. For my money, this is exactly where institutional theatres are today, and maybe where our country is today. How do we get people to participate? How does the majority culture get people to participate who want to say things that we don't want to hear? Or say them in ways that we don't understand. These are the conversations that Americans have so much trouble having. Theatres, I think, if they are willing, are exactly the places in which the conversations can take place. The challenge is inviting folk into the place and supporting them and doing what they do, not what you would have them do. And if you want to make a home for new artists and new voices in our institutions, then we have to make a place where those artists can speak their own truth. And it will be sometimes hard to hear. But there will be people, people who may not currently come to our theatres, who may be hungry to hear it.

Okay, as Gerald proceeds on his quest, this is one of the most important pieces. He gets it exactly right here, I think. Here we see that Gerald cannot, does not, get it done all on his own. Perhaps it is his vision that is driving the changes at the zoo, but as we see here, he is only able to accomplish his goals with the aid of his team. I think this is probably my favorite picture. Gerald is out on a limb. He's out there. But his guys are all working away, all attention, all support thrown to him. One of them's even walking a tightrope to get him what he needs. Total engagement of the team, a truly instructive image, I think.

So what did the team members I met at Arkansas Rep tell me? Because if I ran the zoo, their input is what I would use as I consider changes at Arkansas Rep, though I know it will come as a surprise to some board members. The staff, the theatre professionals who run the theatre are the ones who know the strengths and weaknesses of

the organization and can identify the opportunities afforded for change. So going back to where I started, how to make the Rep a place folk come to more than six times a year. This is some of what I learned from the staff of the Rep, and some of the ideas that came to me. There's a lot more to investigate. But I found myself most drawn to ideas that incorporate thoughts about the use of the facility, the theatre's commitment to downtown, and its commitment to nurturing new voices. Other than a small community theatre nearby and a big receiving house, there's no other theatre in Little Rock. I asked why that was, and the answer I got was, "Well, because there's the Rep." Well, strange as it sounds, I think that being the one, the only, is detrimental in the long run. For example, a biennial program that the Rep has is a program called Voices at the River. It's a developmental opportunity for black and Latino writers nationally and locally, which includes a two-week developmental workshop. It had an amazing inaugural outing, but now faces a challenge going forward in identifying and developing young Arkansans. My suggestion might be to create an ongoing opportunity for young artists to meet, comparatively, informally, to explore and make work that speaks to them. Not necessarily fully produced work, but workshops, readings, things that are just exploratory for them. Likely some of it, well, some of it could reach the stage, be right for the stage, but some of it could not. But what would happen is that relationships would deepen, artists would develop and be supported in their development. To be honest, I think that the long-run goal would be to begin to nurture small theatres popping up around there. It's actually a logical offshoot, I think, of the nurturing of new voices. Nurture them enough and you will nurture the growth of the theatre community centered in Little Rock. I think that this should be or is, for me, the ultimate goal of audience development—more and disparate opportunities for each. That could mean, for example, making their studio space a kind of lab that could begin with developmental work and grow into perhaps a second stage that is part of the Rep or even a place where the work of others is supported, a space that's available for independent presentation. Just ideas. But somehow that studio is what calls me again. One of the staff members spoke to me about finding a way to connect the kids work that they do to the stage. Maybe the studio could become a place dedicated for teenagers that's programmed and performed by them. You could build, perhaps, on the successful summer intensive musical theatre program that they already have and/or the emerging voices that they're already engaged with at 'Voices at the River' or, getting back to the idea of getting folk to explore their current experiences through creating theatre, another possibility there. 'Voices at the River' also had a huge success in something called the Legacy Project, which incorporated oral histories and talked about the Little Rock Nine, I believe. That suggests to me the idea of exploring more local stories, current stories, as I said. I heard some really cool tidbits from this historian. There was this place or an organization called the Mosaic Templars in the '20s, supposedly an amazing place downtown, a black cultural showcase. Right there, downtown Little Rock, at 9th and Broadway, there was the very last lynching ever. And then of course the Clintons. You know there are stories there. About the glorious '90s. Someone I talked to there talked about how amazing it was to suddenly have everyone you know running the world. I can only imagine what that must have been like.

Another very cool space in the Rep is a little lounge that they call Club Mez because it's on the mezzanine level. It was a subscriber perk—like for first-class travelers. I thought for repurposing, it could be as a cabaret space with continuous

performance or musical offerings or perhaps here the Rep could have a bar or a restaurant, something—well, anyway, that takes me to the next bit of interest for me.

The Rep is on main street, right downtown, and five blocks away is a thriving River Market District. And in between is a whole lot of nothing. An empty warehouse, a lot of places that aren't open, not a lot happening, and people don't traverse that space. Since the Rep is committed to staying downtown, I think some of that commitment could be helping to close that gap between the River Market District and the theatre. To do that things will have to move into the dead zone, and obviously they can't be responsible for all of that, but I think one of the things they might do is change the perception of what happens at their end of it by, perhaps, having a festival. If I ran the zoo, I think I'd have a festival—that has all kinds of stuff, that uses every bit of public space, in the building, but that also spills out into that area between the two. A big party, performances of all kinds, utilizing some of the warehouse space that isn't being utilized. Tents. Who knows? Maybe a day, maybe a weekend, something that I think should be recurring, something that people should look forward to. And really right now the Rep does draw from great distances away, and it would be another reason for people to come to town and another reason for locals to be downtown and to hangout at the Rep and in the blocks between the Rep and the river.

Okay, so this is what I'm going for: a theatre transformed. It may look kind of like a circus, but it's still a theatre. And what I think is cool is that there are all kinds of exhibits and, let's say, some are caged and relatively safe, but some are roaming free and they are risking chaos. But most amazingly and I think this is well worthwhile for this reason, there's all kinds of interaction that's made possible here with this model, if you'll allow me to call it that, and just look at all the people who come. Thanks.

PHILIP HIMBERG: Okay, I'd like that mind at Sundance and how great for a director to go to the text. Our next zookeeper is Kate Taylor Davis, who went to visit Imagination Stage. Kate is the chief marketing and communications director for the Olney Theatre in Maryland. She began at Olney in 2003 as their public relations manager, and since stepping into her current position in 2004, her theatre has increased revenue by 73 percent and grown its subscriber base by 20 percent. Kate?

KATE TAYLOR DAVIS: Hi. So my assigned theatre was Imagination Stage in Bethesda. Imagination Stage produces arts education programs which nurture, challenge and empower young people of all abilities. Their vision is of a future where theatre experiences are a fundamental aspect of children's lives. There's a little bit more. It's very beautiful there. Their core belief is making the arts inclusive and accessible to children regardless of their physical, cognitive or financial status. There's a mini timeline I worked out. [referring to a slide] So they're celebrating their 30th year, and they actually began as the Bethesda Academy of Performing Arts, otherwise known as BAPA. Seventeen years later they launched a professional theatre for young audiences in a mall. And then, in 2003, they opened up a building which housed both their academy and their professional theatre. Their leadership is a three-person leadership team. Their founder and executive director is Bonnie Fogel. Their artistic director is Janet Stanford and their managing director is Brett Crawford.

So where does all this happen? It happens in Montgomery County, Maryland's most populous and affluent jurisdiction. It's a highly educated community. Fifty-nine percent of the workforce holds a bachelor's degree or higher. And 39 percent hold a post-graduate degree. Bethesda is pretty much adjacent to DC. Twenty-four percent of the population is under 18. And the median household income is 119,000. The neighborhood is upscale. I pulled a picture of the café, look. There's lots to do, actually. There's lots of cafés, restaurants, bars, shops. It's within walking distance to two other theatres, both Round House Theatre and Bethesda Theatre. It's metro or subway accessible. And I would say the problem could be the traffic congestion since it is such a popular area, especially around rush hour it can be hard to get in and out of.

They have essentially two lines of business. They have an educational line, which is classes and camps, mostly for people ages 1 to 18, though it goes up to 21 for people with disabilities, and also a professional arts-integration program for arts education in schools and an access program. Through these they welcome about 3000 unique students a year. Their professional theatre line does six productions a year, including two new works. Productions range from new commissions to interpretations of children's classics. Through this programming they welcome 90,000 audience members a year. They also have some ancillary business. There's a really cute gift shop and a café. The café is outsourced and brings in some percentage revenue. So their budget is \$4.9 million. They're running a modest surplus each year. And they do have some debt, but I believe that it is manageable, and it's related to the construction of their new building.

Observations from my visit. I attended a production of *Heidi*, which had all the sophistication of a regional theatre that is adult-specific, but with content that was manageable and accessible to kids. On a separate visit I had meetings with their managing director, their artistic director and their executive director. And I have great admiration for what they do there. Their facility is beautiful. They have several theatres, state-of-the-art classrooms, easy access to parking, nice amenities like the café, friendly and smiling staff—actually friendly and smiling staff. Everywhere. And I also thought that they're process-oriented, not product-oriented. They're not grooming people to be stars, although Mo Rocca was a student of theirs. They're really preparing people to be compassionate humans, which—who can argue with that? As their artistic director put it, it's not being a star, it's a holistic approach to artistic education. So it's a pretty good zoo. They have great educational programs. The camps and classes are a hit. They are leaders in arts education. In fact they just got the okay to work with DC public schools to integrate arts into some of those classrooms. They have progressive teaching techniques, quality productions and very forward-thinking leadership. I have to say it was difficult, this assignment, because they're already thinking really big. Their executive director was telling me how she would like to be a place that people can touch even before they ever get to Imagination Stage and after they leave. Sort of like Disney—where kids have a relationship with Disney even if they only get to the theme park once in their lifetime. And their managing director was talking to me about how they need to do downloads on the website for games for kids, for iPods. So they're already doing a lot of progressive and fun things, and they've got vision.

But I do have a few suggestions on how to deepen and expand on their current good work. Here's my zoo. My husband actually drew this for me, and within it are four new zoo ideas: set a trajectory for lifelong learning beyond Imagination Stage, cultivate

the potential of their new works, partner and collaborate with other theatres and then encourage hip parents and parenting. By its nature retention seems to be an issue at children's theatres, whereas at my theatre I can keep someone for maybe 50 years. They really have turnover quite a bit with their constituency. So they're actually starting to work quite a bit younger. They actually got a 'Think It. Do It.' grant from TCG to work on early-childhood education. This is good because if you can start the relationship earlier you get to keep the relationship going longer. I know they're in the middle of a database overhaul, but really a simple thing to do would be birthday capture. I've got an idea that we could do a birthday promotion, so that on your birthday you receive a card or an e-card with a small gift waiting for you at the gift shop. Not only would this allow you to get more foot traffic into your gift shop, and more warm and fuzzies generally about the organization, but it also allows you to pull the list, target by age, really drill down, and really put people, your constituents, on a trajectory uniquely designed by Imagination Stage. Also, they seem to have a gap on the later side of youth. Classes keep kids to roughly 18, but it's not matched by their professional theatre, which seems to age out at about 10. The organization expressed frustration about their ability to get an older audience when they push the age of their theatre programming. Apparently once children separate from childhood, Imagination Stage seems babyish to them. So what are those 11-to-18-year-olds seeing or doing that moves them to become lifelong theatre attendees? I think this is the perfect opportunity to graduate them to other theatres in the area. Perhaps a teen subscription could be arranged, cherry-picking packages from local theatres, organizing trips like a class to those venues. There's got to be a way to make theatregoing a habit. Another idea is to form a youth advisory council. This would be a group of older Imagination Stage students. Staff should find a place where the theatre could use a youth perspective, and then take it. It needs to be meaningful for both sides. The other benefits of having older kids around is that little kids love older kids. And so everything they do would be inherently cooler by having the presence of the older kids. It also nurtures leadership skills in the people you've taken so long to help develop.

My second idea is cultivating a potential for new work. As Bonnie Fogel said to me, she's the executive director, and it's perhaps very relevant to many theatres who have just finished capital projects. "Now that we've put up these walls, we need to take them down." I think there's a way to break outside the new building though—there are many ways to break outside the building, but to use the potential of the brand-new works that they're putting on stage. They have a big investment to do two new works a year, and they believe it's important to help create a canon of works for young audiences, however, these works seem to have little life after their productions at Imagination Stage. How do we get these plays into the lives of young people beyond the walls? Virtually touring is an idea. I know that physical touring seems to be down. But one idea is to do something like Great Performances, and this was actually inspired by conversations I had with the leadership. PBS has a program called Great Performances that doesn't seem to have any offerings for kids. Their youngest age range is 4th grade. So I would suggest that some collaborations happen with other children's theatres and they really go to PBS or another organization and convince them to put out great work for young audiences. The other thing is that there's no real marketing push to license these works beyond their life at Imagination Stage, and I think there could be a marketing push here, letting the community know that these pieces are available. The idea would be to get the new quality

theatre out into the world and also better fulfill the Imagination Stage mission. It would get Imagination Stage's brand out in the world and would result potentially in a new revenue stream for the theatre.

And the last one, which is a little gimmicky, but I think a sister city or organization to either exchange work or just content swap would be really interesting. Perhaps an opening night simulcast with your sister theatre's new production. It also opens up a reason to travel, and who doesn't love a field trip.

So partner and collaborate. There are many ways in which the theatre community, at least in this region, can get better at sharing expertise and resources. Since Imagination Stage has amazing educational programs seemingly down pat, why not convince other theatres, especially those who focus on adults, to let Imagination Stage create fun classes and camps at those places. There would, of course, be some logistics to work out. Revenue share, rental, etc. But it seems to be a win-win on a lot of levels. For the hosting theatres it allows the adult-centric theatres to focus on what they do best. Camps and classes take a lot of energy, and if it's not your thing, theatres might be spending more resources than they think on something that's less focused on their mission and perhaps more focused on their bottom line. If there's a group with trusted expertise, why not outsource this action? It also gets younger people into the hosting theatres' venues without much effort on their part. Plus, the hosting theatre could be on the Imagination Stage teen subscription list. I think there are ways to make this circular. For Imagination Stage, it takes the brand outside the building. It reaches parents and kids who might not be able to get to downtown Bethesda easily. And it opens points of entry into other programming. I admit that this is going to be a hard sell to theatres, but I think it's worth it. I don't think each theatre needs to do it all.

As to the other idea, outsourcing the evening programming to organizations and theatre companies who share common values, the managing director took a look at the overhead and realized that there really isn't any cost savings because there really isn't any way to shut the theatre down for any length of time. So if the overhead is fixed, you've got to fill it up. The strategy seems to be to put as many things into the building as possible to maximize the revenue, but the theatre has recently eliminated its evening shows, citing low audience participation. This seems like the perfect opportunity to collaborate. There would of course be logistics, but the benefits are good. For the outside organizations they get a really beautiful venue and, in many respects, it's an ideal location. Space can be hard to secure for nomadic theatres, and there are a lot of them out there. For Imagination Stage these other organizations would hit a slightly different demographic. It would bring more people through the doors, perhaps encouraging them to spend in the gift shop, and maybe even your box office at some point. Plus it brings in more revenue, either in ticketing fees or rental fees and it increases the cred in the community. I think there's real value in being a convener.

My last idea is kind of goofy, but I think there's room in this mission to address the parents' needs as well. I would argue that the overall health of the family is helped by finding ways in which parents can be parents with or without their kids. So I have two ideas, one is Parent Survival Night. This is a potentially once-a-month class that goes from 7 to 9 p.m. Parents park at Imagination Stage, drop off the kids, then go out on the town. It's an opportunity to partner with area restaurants, entertainment venues, area theatres. It could foster adult theatrical engagement and it really does maximize the cool,

hip area in which they are situated. The other silly idea is Baby Loves to Disco. Now this is very self-serving because many of my once cool and very hip friends have had kids and they used to love to go dancing with me, but recently, on a Michael Jackson versus Prince versus Madonna night at the Black Cat, they all turned me down. Sad, I'm getting old. I've noticed that they don't just turn me down because they can't get a babysitter, but they love to be with these kids. They're like their new best friends or something. So why not create opportunities to do things they used to like to do without their kids, with their kids. I remember dancing with my parents in the living room to the Rolling Stones. I'm sure that some of my friends would love to dance with their kids to Michael Jackson, Prince and Madonna. Plus, it's never too early to work on those dance moves and I really think it could be a lot of fun for everyone. Treat it like an adult club with a family friendly option. It could bring a slightly different audience through the doors. It also feeds into the other offerings. Plus, it could be some really good revenue too.

So to quote Dr. Seuss, "Yes, that's what I'd do. I'd make a few changes if I ran the zoo." Thank you.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

PHILIP HIMBERG: [IN THE MIDDLE OF INTRODUCING JOE SALVATORE] ...George Platt Lynes, Glenway Westcott and Monroe Wheeler, which was featured as part of the 2008 New York Fringe Festival, where it received the Fringe's Overall Excellence Award for outstanding play. And his current project, *open heart*, is an interview theatre piece about gay male couples living in open, non-monogamous relationships, and will have its first workshop performance in July '09. [TO JOE] You haven't interviewed me yet for that. Joe is on the faculty of the Program in Educational Theatre at New York University where he teaches courses in acting, directing, Shakespeare, applied theatre and theatre pedagogy. Joe.

JOE SALVATORE: Okay, so American Conservatory Theater in 20 minutes: Go. So I included this quote from the Dr. Seuss book because I feel it represents where I stand as a theatre artist and educator in this moment, looking into the field and wondering what out-of-the-way places I might need to go in order to take my own next steps. I want to give you a little bit of context about the lens through which I looked at this assignment. Tuesday, June 2, marked 10 years for me of living and working in New York City and when I visited ACT I realized that I had developed a little bit of New York-centricity. It was upsetting. This test became a powerful experience for me personally because I was reminded that producing new work does not have to be about ultimately getting a commercial run in New York City, which of course I knew, but having this experience outside of New York was a helpful reminder. The task also reminded me that when I went to graduate school I thought that I wanted to become the artistic director of a large regional theatre like the one that I was asked to visit. I do work as an artistic/education director for a small youth theatre in southern New Jersey, but it's very different, so I'm grateful for this opportunity that was given to me to go visit this amazing institution and to be reminded about this goal that I had in the past.

My visit to ACT took place on May 14 and 15. I met with 15 people in a number of areas during my time there, and I also had a chance to see a production of Jose

Rivera's *Boleros for the Disenchanted* in the Geary Theatre. During my visit I was struck by the upbeat energy I entered into at the end of a long, eight-show season that was weighed down by the current economic crisis. People were genuinely nice and seemed happy to be there and to speak to me about the work that they were doing. And I found this surprising and refreshing, given all the language that's been used to describe the situation that we're in.

So let me give you a little bit of background information about ACT. American Conservatory Theater nurtures the art of live theatre through dynamic productions, intensive actor training in its conservatory and an ongoing dialogue with its community. Under the leadership of artistic director Carey Perloff and executive director Heather Kitchen, ACT embraces its responsibility to conserve, renew and reinvent the theatrical traditions that are our cultural legacies while exploring new artistic forms and communities. A commitment to the highest standard informs every aspect of ACT's creative work. The operating budget for ACT is just under 19.5 million in '08-09, and their subscriber base is just under 15,000. I want to give you just a really brief history of this organization. Founded in 1965 by William Ball in Pittsburgh, which I did not know, then moved two years later to its current home, the Geary Theatre in San Francisco with a resident acting company in place. The acting company was somewhere between 20 and 25 actors, from what I understand. The first full season of the advanced training program, which was a one-year program for talented actors, happened in 1970, and then the ACT Young Conservatory was founded in 1971. So just to be clear, within the first five to six years of this organization's existence, education was at the center of its existence. Next slide, 1979 received a Tony Award, 1987 they received full accreditation and authority to award the MFA in acting. There was a leadership change in 1986, and in 1988 Craig Slight becomes the director of the Young Conservatory, and Craig Slight is still there as the director of the Young Conservatory. In 1991 Carey Perloff becomes the artistic director, and she is the current artistic director. Melissa Smith becomes the conservatory director in 1995, and Heather Kitchen becomes the managing director in '96. I would just like to point out that of the four leadership positions in the theatre, three of them are women, which I thought was really great. In 2001 the current incarnation of the acting core company was established, and ACT becomes the resident theatre at Zeum, an interactive center for youth and families. I want to bring us currently into history because in 2009, in the fall, ACT is doing something new in the conservatory which I think is important and will play out in the later part of this discussion—they are accepting eight MFA actors. Historically they've accepted more like 15 to 18. They're accepting eight. And those students will move through three years of training, and the first two years they will pay for, and the third year the institution will pay for. I think that really represents something powerful about training in this moment.

So, in my visit, as I began to think about if I ran ACT, I think I'd begin by counting my blessings because I have inherited a pretty dynamic institution with a rich history and a commitment to an aesthetic that strives to be accessible and thought-provoking at the same time. Taking transition into consideration, I would take my cue from ideas that are already in place, elements that I imagine to be part of the DNA of the institution. What is an institution's DNA? These elements of DNA emerged for me as recurring patterns as I met with these 15 people and talked about the theatre, saw the work on stage, and then revisited the mission statement. You will see these reflected in

the next few slides, but I'm just going to highlight a few as we go through. Looking at the first slide, you'll notice that the core acting company is in existence and is very important. It functions on all levels in terms of decision-making at the theatre. They contribute to the season selection process, they teach in the conservatory and they are doing development and outreach. So they are really part of the theatre, integrated into the institution, and they are on salary 52 weeks of the year. That's six actors, five men, one woman. Another DNA piece is this notion of mentorship, this notion of passing knowledge. Steven Anthony Jones called it a medieval apprenticeship, and when I spoke to members of the Young Conservatory, they spoke about being mentored by actors from the MFA conservatory. The MFA actors talked to me about being mentored by the core company members. This notion of mentorship is at the center of this institution.

The Geary Theatre is another element of its DNA. It's a 1,000-seat theatre like the one we're sitting in, and it affects selection of repertoire for the main stage. It affects how actors are trained. They talk about being Geary-ready at the end of your three years in that MFA program. And who comes through the door to see the work? Who comes through the door of a 1,000-seat proscenium theatre to see the work that's on the main stage? That will play out later in my remarks as well. This blew my mind when I learned this. The larger institution pays for the education programs. The training program does not pay for itself and is funded both through endowment and operating funds. In every other model that I know of where a theatre has an education program, the education program is paying for other things in the theatre, in addition to the education programs themselves, so I thought this was really unique about ACT. Also there are two conservatories, the MFA and the Young Conservatory, and I mentioned this shift in philosophy in training where they are taking just eight students. The other element that I find interesting is that they're also going to be training those eight actors to make their own work because they feel that's an important element of being an actor now, is how we create our own work, which I think is important. And then the geography. This is a theatre located in a city where people are known for activism and social awareness. There's an audience for this theatre that engages with material on an emotional and an intellectual level. We see this played out in the outreach work that happens when audiences work with artists in dialogue with academics and intellectuals in dialogue with the publications the theatre puts out. We see that the audience is loyal to this theatre—and later in this discussion I'd like to talk about how that might expand. In the final slide the three ideas that I've bulleted here all have to do with relationship. I would say that the leadership of the organization is collaborative, reflective and service-oriented leadership, and I feel that that would need to stay. The people who interact with the organization should have a positive experience at every level, and that's full-time employees, artists hired for individual shows and audience members.

So I left ACT with three questions that I would consider if I ran this organization, and these come from my own observations and from my discussions with Carey Perloff and Heather Kitchen. Those three questions are: How can the theatre better acknowledge its strengths, successes and accomplishments? How can the theatre share its models? And how can new audiences interface with ACT without necessarily walking through the doors of the Geary? So these questions helped to frame my thinking, but the following ideas that I'm going to unroll don't always answer these questions in a direct way. These questions were a starting point, so I'd like to share some of my ideas with you.

The first thing that I would do if I ran ACT would be to maintain the resident company. I would keep those actors on salary for the year and continue to have them invest in the theatre as true artistic partners, keeping the artist at the center of the institution. I would not expand beyond eight members of the core company, but I would try to bring in more women into the company so it was four and four or five and three, something. I would also continue to keep this company of actors involved in these decision-making processes because I feel that is training the artistic leaders of the future as well. Some of you may know that Marco Barricelli was a company member at ACT and now he's artistic director of Shakespeare Santa Cruz, and I feel like this is a way of sharing the theatre's models of leadership.

My second idea is to bring a playwright on board for a three-year residency. The playwright would enter with an incoming MFA class, and that playwright would write for that class of actors throughout their time in the MFA program. My idea here is to cultivate playwrights who can write for different sized theatres and to develop relationships with a set of eight actors, so the playwright would basically follow the actors through their conservatory training. The actors must act in one play each year by this playwright. It doesn't have to be a single play for the eight actors. It could be two plays, one for three, one for five, it could be eight monologues. But I would really like to bring a playwright into this training mix. For me it's about creating space for the relationship to develop between the playwright and the actors. It could be an early-career or mid-career playwright, but it gives the theatre an opportunity to mentor the playwright in writing for three different spaces. There's a small space, a 99-seat black box, the Zeum is a larger space, 120 to 140, and then there's the Geary, which is a 1,000-seat space. Different sized theatres require different kinds of writing and theatricality, and I think we have a responsibility to be giving playwrights opportunities to figure that out in real production opportunities. When the MFA eight finish their time in the conservatory, they would finish it with a performance in the Geary in a play by this playwright. Currently they perform in *A Christmas Carol*, all third-year students perform in *A Christmas Carol* on stage. I would like to see them perform in a play that's by this playwright-in-residence. This idea contributes to the development of the canon, to the development of the playwright's voice and the development of the actors ability to assist with new-work creation. It also potentially establishes long-lasting relationships between a playwright and eight early-career actors. Then, if all has gone well, the playwright could write for the resident acting company—so maybe we add a fourth year in that residency and he or she writes a play for the Geary stage for those eight core company members. I would pilot this program and allow it to complete a cycle, then I would make a decision about whether to continue it and make a decision about whether to have a playwright attached to each incoming MFA class, which ultimately would mean that we would have three playwrights-in-residence at any one time.

There's a project that happens right now at ACT called the NIA Project, and Nia is a Swahili word that means purpose. The NIA Project came out of the MFA conservatory. The MFA actors of color got together and started to do work with young kids of color in the Bay Area after school and on Saturdays. And it's a program that I would like to formalize more than it is. Right now it's a loosely affiliated program from my understanding of it, and I'd like to formalize it for a number of reasons. The MFA actors are mentoring these young people of color, and they're teaching them skills that

they've learned in their own training, sometimes just the week before. They told me stories about learning something Tuesday in a movement class and using it on a Saturday. And I thought that ability to teach others about what you've just learned to me signals a real acquisition of skills, and I'd like to find ways to cultivate that. I feel like when people can teach other people what they've learned how to do, there's something internalized about it. They talked about, again, pulling directly from the work they were doing in their conservatory courses. And I think that when I talk about formalizing this I don't mean taking it over, because I think the MFA students need to be at the center of it. I don't mean to run it, because it's an idea that come from the students, it should stay with them. However, it would be helpful to provide them with a weekly or biweekly meeting space to discuss their work as actor-facilitators, because that's different than just being an actor. And I don't know if that leads to coursework around being an actor-facilitator, but I think that there needs to be space to have that discussion.

This also makes me think about how to bring these young people and their families into the fold of the organization. And I don't necessarily mean that that means that they have to enter the Geary. One of the students, the MFA students, said to me—and this is sort of a paraphrased quote—that the proscenium theatre panders to a certain demographic. And that really made me stop and take pause and think about what it means to come into a space like this. And so it sort of makes me think about my own family, my working-class parents who really only go to the theatre to see the work that I do, and when my father came to watch the *Romeo and Juliet* I directed, said, “When are you going to do a real show, Joey.” So I said, “What does that mean, Dad?” He said, “Well, one with music, like you used to direct, like a musical.” I think my father has an easier time with me being gay than with me being a director that directs classical theatre. I think this gets at issues of class, and for me class is a really important thing to talk about with the theatre. I would love to have that dialogue. This notion of thinking about the community with this NIA Project brings those thoughts up for me.

Related to it, since the MFA actors are going to be required to create their own work in their coursework, I'd like to combine that work with this notion of bringing more audiences into the fold at ACT. I believe that the way to engage people with art is to create a work that tells a story that resonates for them or they feel represents them accurately, that encourages people to have agency and space where a community's voices can be heard. I may have ideas about what stories a community should see or hear, but I need to ask: What does that community want to see and hear about itself, particularly if I'm an outsider and then find out from that community how we can tell that story. I wonder about the possibilities of linking the devising work of the MFA eight to the idea of telling the stories of the communities. We certainly have models of this kind of work at other theatres around the United States, and I'd like to see how a long-range plan engaging the community with plays and performances about them would affect the overall demographic of people involved with ACT as audience members. I mean, this is the conservatory Anna Deavere Smith came out of. I feel like there's something, again in the DNA, that this place has created people who wanted to engage in that way. I'd like to build that into the theatre's season. Next year they doing a play called *The Tosca Project*, which is a collaboration between the theatre and San Francisco Ballet that examines 100 years in North Beach's Tosca Café. So this is a great project that's already happening, and I'd like to see more of that kind of work happening—maybe one show in a season.

The final piece for me is about throwing open the doors of the organization and inviting colleagues in to see what happens at ACT at all levels. I think that when we share our strengths, successes and accomplishments and hold them up to be viewed it allows us to hear affirmations about what we're doing. It also brings up questions and we need to be ready to hear those questions. We need to be open to hear those questions. I would begin this process by seeking out other leaders in the field who are truly committed to transparency and reflective practice. Once I identified these partners and we began these exchanges and developed a relationship, I would float an idea that has stuck in my head since I paid a visit to ACT. Could there be a network of four theatres, ACT and three others, who form a national training network and ultimately a national theatre with four sites? One of the other four theatres focuses on training playwrights and conferring an MFA, another theatre to do that with designers and another theatre to do that with directors? For me, this is getting at the point that the education of artists finds a home in the theatre space in an apprenticeship model. Could ACT's eight MFA model for actor training be replicated with appropriate numbers depending on discipline with playwrights, directors and designers in these other sites? And then these theatres would do artist exchanges, administrator exchanges, co-productions, international tours, civic engagement with web streaming and all that hootenanny, and this becomes our national theatre. Not a sole entity, but a network.

I want to thank all the people at ACT for their generosity with time and spirit during the my visit, and in particular the artistic administrator Carly Cioffi for all her organization and assistance, and thank you for listening this afternoon.

PHILIP HIMBERG: Okay, so rounding out these four people, our next and last zookeeper—and thank you everyone for your sensitivity and your incredibly perceptive questions. Meiyin Wang visited the Baltimore Theater Project, here in town. She is the associate producer of Under the Radar Festival and Symposium in New York, where she has worked under the mentorship of Mark Russell, the great Mark Russell since 2006. In her three years there, she has managed 47 productions, applied for artist visas from 11 embassies and hosted over 550 artistic directors and presenters from 19 countries. She was born and raised in Singapore and served as resident playwright and associate artistic director of Singapore Repertory Theatre before earning her directing MFA from Columbia under the great Anne Bogart. Meiyin.

MEIYIN WANG: Hi. So when I was a kid growing up in Singapore, which is where I'm from, one of the biggest news items of the decade was the creation of the Night Safari Zoo. I'm taking this very literally. The Singapore Zoo was already one of the first in the world to create an open concept—no cages. And now it created the world's first nocturnal zoo, an open-air habitat set in a rain forest. It was a revolutionary thought for me. Instead of reversing the animals' day-night cycle for the visitors and creating an unnatural relationship, the zookeepers created a circumstance in which people could come see the nocturnal animals at their most active, their most awake and their most alive. And, of course, it also mean that they could charge the zoo admission fees twice, once during the day, and once at night. I'll bring it back home later.

Before this conference what I knew about Baltimore Theater Project amounted to the TNT Festival. It was one of the models for Mark Russell when he started the Under

the Radar Festival, where I work. Under the Radar is an international festival dedicated to presenting contemporary theatre and artists that challenge the traditional boundaries of theatre. They work in fluid platforms, visual art, film, technology and investigate our current experience and work outside the normal pathways of theatre. It is a festival where you can get a survey of what artists in the U.S. and throughout the world are thinking about the world. Our Under the Radar secret mandate is also to encourage the conversation between regional theatres and presenters by being a platform and advocate for this kind of hybrid, interdisciplinary, unclassifiable work, and hope that producers and presenters will collaborate on this kind of work—like ERS, yay!—and getting the work to travel: American work going out, and international work coming in. And the the New Theatre Festival—TNT for short—in Baltimore was a pioneer event. In 1976 it presented 35 productions, four of which were international and only one of which was from New York, and that was Meredith Monk, very cool. So I visited Baltimore Theater Project and spoke with the producing director Anne Fulwiler, who has been so generous with her time and information, I saw the opening night of Elizabeth Hess's *Living Openly and Notoriously*, took in the vibe of the theatre and I also spoke with a few Baltimore theatre artists and John Barry who writes for the city paper.

Theater Project is a presenter of contemporary theatre, dance, music and visual arts, nurturing those who are actively experimenting with the new forms of expression and supporting international and emerging local companies creating new work. Founded by Philip Arnault in 1971, it was part of an experiment to create learning centers outside of the campus at Antioch College. The theatre has presented Pilobolus, Spiderwoman Theater, Bread and Puppet, Danny Hoch, Karen Finley, Danny McIvor, Squonk Opera, Peabody Chamber Orchestra, just to name a few. At the heart of Theater Project is the theatre. It's a gorgeous black box space which seats 150 people with a sprung wood floor and backed by a 20-foot-high acoustic dome. At present the theatre is incredibly lean with an operating budget of \$220,000 and three full-time staff, the producing director, a technical director and an administrative assistant, and a part-time audience-development director. It averages four performances a week for 42 weeks of the year, and last season it served 12,000 individuals, including 550 performing artists. Theater Project operates on a mix of presentations, co-productions, rentals, with a top ticket price of \$20, with \$10 tickets for students and artists. And they annually present events like High Zero, the country's largest experimental improvised music festival, co-produced with local companies. Right now they're presenting Naoko Maeshiba's dance-theatre piece *Paraffin*. Go see it. Theater Project has not been immune to the recession, but has done a remarkable job keeping itself lean and flexible. It is the primary presenter of dance and independent touring companies in Baltimore and the programming crosses cultural barriers by presenting spoken word, slam poetry and comedy improv next to opera and performance art. People go there to get a shot into the arm; to get new ideas. So I lucked out.

I really respond to the core values of helping artists push the form, being a space for new ideas and the necessity of international exchange. So if I hit jackpot and life turned into a Dr. Seuss book and I get to run the Baltimore Theater Project, the question is, as it always is: What kind of performance do we want to do, and how do we deliver it? How do we engage with the artist and audiences the way we want to? How do you make the creative alliances that we want to? Essentially how do you make sense of this theatre

in this city in this time? Being a director working in New York, I always dream about eloping to a smaller city where the space is cheap, rent is cheap, there's public transportation, there's good food, there's a community that's open. I always think, maybe I'll go to Philly, Austin, Portland, Oregon. Now I'm like—Baltimore! It has major universities, Towson, Johns Hopkins, the Maryland Institute of Art. This also means that it is an ideal town with open people. It's accessible from New York and DC. It is home to the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation, which supports touring. It has a really great music scene, including experimental music. So people seem to be invested in arts and culture, and between John Waters and "The Wire," Baltimore's got street cred, here and overseas. I think Theater Project is positioned to become a major destination for artists and out-of-town audiences and be part of the national dialogue on culture.

So, here we go: the TNT Festival. The first thing I would do is revive it. I don't propose a festival because that's what I know, that's what keeps me employed, although both are true. A festival really gives you a chance to do extraordinary things. You are creating an event, you're able to invert the normal order of things, create a different relationship with the audience, the art and the city. It gives you and the artists the chance to take tremendous artistic risk because people are expecting you to surprise them. A festival brings people together. Artists get to see work, exchange ideas, and it's so easy to talk to somebody at the festival bar when you have a great pickup line: "So what did you think?" There's a small movement of experimental theatre festivals, not fringe festivals, which include: in Portland, Time-Based Arts; Philly Live Arts; and the Fusebox in Austin, that managed for two or three weeks to place art and ideas—cutting edge art and ideas—at the center of the city. By placing their artists next to work from around the U.S. and the world it really changes the dynamic of the cultural dialogue within the city. It informs the context of work and ups the ante. The intensive delivery and intersection of ideas that a festival creates is pretty amazing. So in reviving TNT I'll partner with local companies with their own spaces and productions to showcase work and talent from Baltimore and to contextualize the work I'll also invite companies from around the country: Rude Mechs from Austin, Pig Iron from Philly, Reggie Watts and Lemon Anderson from New York, just as examples. I would also bring in international companies by collaborating with other festivals and presenters around the city, around the country, in sharing costs. If P.S. 122 was bringing German dance company Dorky Park, I'd split the visa costs with them and ask them to hop on the train. And if Philly Live Arts was presenting Rodrigo Garcia, I would split the flight and send somebody to drive him and the lobster over.

Being part of a multi-spot tour makes it very attractive for artists to come for lower fees and marketing 15 shows for one festival probably costs as much as marketing two or three. Convincing funders to support a city-wide festival is so much sexier than asking for general operating costs, and you're more likely to get enthusiastic volunteers for two or three weeks instead of hoping that your volunteer usher is going to show up. And, yes, I would give up some of my year-round programming to devote resources to the festival. I thought, who died and said that we had to have a regular season? Who said that we had to have a subscription series? In 2003, Portland Institute of Contemporary Art, under artistic director Kristy Edmunds, concentrated their year-round programming and budget into two weeks with the TBA festival. It now serves more people, with a two-week festival, than they ever had with 40 weeks of programming. What's inspirational

for me about that case study—and this is a great festival—is that they were able to radically change the rules of the game while still serving their mission to the fullest. And really to me a festival is between a birthday and a carnival rolling into town. It's a time to be awake, rethink the beliefs you're trading in and to party with the freaks.

Number two, (I've got three altogether) creative networks and strategic partnerships. The one thing that I know from Under the Radar is that if you keep your ear to the ground there might not be money, but there's going to be partners. Theater Project has an informal partnership with Towson University where both sides share some resources. It has pro bono graphic design by a great local artist. The theatre has a relationship with the Government Inn with free artist housing. Imagine that in New York. The second thing I would do is to build on these partnerships and strengthen the network of institutions to support artists. Theater Project should have a larger profile in the country and overseas. It should be represented at the National Performance Network, at the Under the Radar Symposium, at IETM and performing arts markets. Alliances with these organizations and with these networks will widen the resources available. In Europe festivals and presenters commission works together and shepherd them all the way through production and touring. One presenter will act as the fiscal sponsor, distribute the commission monies and mentor the artist through the process, and then help organize the tour when the show is done—and there's very little institutional ownership of the piece besides a credit note at the bottom of the page. It may be difficult financially for Theater Project to fully commission a piece, but by teaming up with the Walker or On the Boards in Seattle, or Diverse Works in Houston, it becomes easier to support a company or work that you believe in. I mean, we're not alone. The artists who work outside the normal pathways of theatre benefit from a strong network of institutions who understand that this kind of hybrid, devised work takes time to develop and nurture and mature and that producing can be of an improvisational nature and the model can and will always change. I really believe that hybrid work requires hybrid models of producing. So other models or partnerships—with the universities in Baltimore and the embassies and the foreign cultural institutes and, yes, the State Department in DC—there are many opportunities for alliances and partnerships. So I would work with the embassy and the university Spanish department and invite the company from Columbia and make the performances a mandatory class assignment. The relationship between PICA in Portland and the PNCA, which is the Pacific Northwest College of Art could be a model for Theater Project and MICA, where the dorms are. During PICA, PNCA hosts talks, performances and exhibitions, curated by PICA for the TBA festival. In return PNCA, the college, pays for its entire freshman class to attend the festival. I would formalize internships and think tanks with the universities, and not just for theatre students, but students in business, graphic design, humanities, architecture. And volunteer to be the marketing experiment for the business school. Create a space where innovation and new ideas are really practiced outside of the theatre ghetto. I think that these fluid relationships and alliances are the key to survival and growth both for Theater Project and for the artists I want to support. And the key to finding these partners, I think, is to make sure that the aesthetic identity of the theatre is tightly focused. It is impossible to be all theatre to all people, as Andi said. Why even try? My goal would be to establish an environment where people might not know what they're coming to see, but will come anyway because they're expecting a specific artistic point of view. Even though Under the Radar does work from

Mike Daisey monologues to a Brazilian naked *Hamlet*, the audience that comes knows that they might not always like what they see, but they know that the artists who are here are trying to push against the form and the ideas of performances. They come to be shocked, to be challenged and to be uncomfortable, and they like it.

Theater Project as center. I've been fixating on the fact that Theater Project was first conceived as a learning center. As it was told me, in the '70s the Mount Vernon neighborhood where Theater Project is located was a hive of community, social, political activity. The landlord's office was on the first floor below Theater Project and people came to the building all the time to pay rent in cash and around the corner the American Communist Party met in the same room as the Nazi Party, on a different day, of course, and there were classes and workshops at the theatre. The performances were free or pay what you want, and there was no fixed seating. People would climb up the scaffolding on the side to see the performances. This picture really holds for me. I picture a constant stream of activity in the building, not just at the theatre, but in an ongoing relationship with the city. Politics, urban renewal, safety, the price of insurance aside, when thinking about running Theater Project, my question is how it can maintain this constant stream of activity. How do we create as many intersections between the people and the work? How do you get people in the door, even if it's not to see a show, perhaps? How do you create events where people can be creative participants in the process? And if there's one thing we can learn from the zoo, we cannot afford to be inbreeders. We get pretty ugly pretty fast. I'm really working the zoo metaphor. So with a lively arts scene such as in Baltimore, it's essential to create a situation where artists can grow together. I would arrange a showcase perhaps every quarter where emerging and established artists can come and try out new material in front of an audience of their peers and the adventurous, curated by a changing panel of experts, artists or not. Hip-hop next to butoh and a dance party afterwards. The aim is to create investment in the work, an active network of artists from different disciplines and an active engagement with the wider public about the process of making this work so we can contextualize what is going on and what this work is actually saying. I would encourage a space where people can perhaps come together for an open teaching system. Artists or non-arts experts can come and offer something they are an expert in—the Suzuki Viewpoints, contact improv, tango, sound editing—a place where people can meet and share skills. I would not put up scaffolding, but I might tear out the seats. I know it's terrible. But I would want a more flexible playing space. The arts, to me, really need to be a place of more civic discourse and public engagement. And I mean beyond the post-show discussion. It should be a combination of a circus tent, debate hall and beer hall. I mean, that's how the Greeks did it, that's how the Chinese teahouses were. Theater Project with its history and mission could be the center of the intellectual and cultural conversation in Baltimore. It can engage the public and artists in dialogue about the real questions and anxieties of their time and place. And to address these issues artists and curators need to be cross-breeding with other experts and thinkers in their field. I mean, we need mini-TED conferences—the speeches that we hear at this conference but don't present to our audience. This could take the form of panel discussions or debates that include arts and non-arts experts. What would it be like if I could go to a conversation series and listen to a neuroscientist and a clown talk about laughter? It could take the form of a conversation between an urban planner and a site-specific company. By bringing other experts in the public realm into the discussion and

deepening the dialogue between arts, culture and society we can bring arts back onto the table of civic discourse instead of having a conversation with ourselves. I would love to make Theater Project a center of ideas with performances and the public dialogue. What would result? What would the audience look like? What is the work that could grow from it? We cannot be reactive anymore, I really think we have to lead the discussion.

I am really excited by the city of Baltimore and its changing landscape. The converted warehouses, the new arts district, the raw spaces. It really is an opportunity to challenge artists to respond to a changing environment and to change the rules. I would free Theater Project from its concrete location sometimes, letting it encompass activity around the city—site-specific performances. I wouldn't lose the theatre, it would still be the center, but I would try to expand the brand of Theater Project to communities that might not think of it as a place for them. If you bring the theatre into the city, maybe the city will come to the theatre. One of the most creative theatre experiments of the past five years is the National Theatre of Scotland. It's actually the national theatre of Scotland, that has no building of their own. They're free to make theatre in scales and venues that fit the art that they want to make. They produce and present and tour adventurous work around the world. And again, for me, it's an institution that has changed the rules of what a theatre is supposed to be. A theatre could not be just a building. It really is a state of mind.

These ideas aren't just mine. They're happening around in practice, in blogs, around the city, overseas. And so my question for lovely Gerald McGrew, why change the animals when you can change the zoo? These hybrid artists create work that has a secret logic, that is argumentative and beautiful, it is exhausting and can change your heart rate in a second, you don't even know it. I like these animals just fucking fine. So, back to the Singapore Night Zoo. Instead of twisting ourselves into knots about what people would be willing to see and when they would see it, and how much we can do it for, we should really make a zoo where people can come and see the animals on their own terms in an open complex habitat at their most awake.

Thank you.

PHILIP HIMBERG: Thank all of you for your wonderful, respectful and thoughtful perspectives on the future. And let's open up to the audience for questions. Anything.

AUDIENCE: If you go down the line and just ask what the biggest kink to their dream would be—if they had the power to do this right now. What is the obstacle?

MEIYAN WANG: I think the challenge would be—the way that I'm envisioning it, it's really a huge shift in just structure, programming and what the year would look like. So, I don't know, everything would be an obstacle, but it would be worth it.

JOE SALVATORE: That wasn't the question I was expecting at all. I think the easy answer is money, because I think I proposed some things that cost money. A lot of money. But I think that also I am just really conscious of transition, and I think the challenge for me would be focusing on the history of the institution and coming in as a new leader—coming in and trying to make that transition smooth and acknowledging some of the things I talked about around DNA. Because I think I would do things

differently, but I would want to make a smooth transition process for the people who are already there, because there's a lot of institutional history in the organization.

KATE TAYLOR DAVIS: Well, I can't speak for Imagination Stage specifically, but I know that at my institution, we're having to refocus and retrench a little bit in order to get done the things we always thought needed to get done, so in a time when you've got fewer dollars to work with and fewer staff members to help, it's hard to push new ideas forward.

ANDREA DYMOND: I think it's that change is frightening for people. I think that's the biggest kink. And you don't know what's going to happen, so being patient with the results as you figure out what works of what you tried and what doesn't and what you have to readjust as you go. Remembering that creative change is about the possibility of failure, but it takes time. That's the hardest part. You can scare people easily when things don't go the way that you hoped that they would right away.

AUDIENCE: This question is probably more for Meiyang than anyone else, but you had mentioned PICA and they have transformed their season into a festival season. In that region you also have On the Boards in Seattle, which you mentioned, and I'm wondering what you think the relationship is between those two organizations and maybe is that something that could be reproduced here between maybe Baltimore Theater Project and St. Ann's in New York.

MEIYAN WANG: Yeah, absolutely. I would just offer Under the Radar in New York City. That's an easy one. I think that they do share artists from the Northwest and there is a constant dialogue from these presenters and very specific presenting organizations that talk to each other all the time. They actively search for things that they can collaborate and pay for together—and support together. Under the Radar, P.S. 122, St. Ann's is—they do really large-scale things, so it's a bit separate.

AUDIENCE: I know St. Ann's and OTB share a lot, like with Cynthia Hopkins coming through.

MEIYAN WANG: But I think one thing that we're very particular about in Under the Radar is the size of the production that we do, especially with the theatre space at Theater Project, it really can do a small to mid-sized scale project, unless you take it outside and you're doing *Small Metal Objects*. Then it's a whole other matter.

AUDIENCE: So part of this seems to be purely about you all as future leaders in the field as well, or as current leaders from where you are. So I'm wondering or want to challenge you: Have you thought about how all these great ideas, all this thought you've put into this, how do you apply this to where you are right now?

MEIYAN WANG: I'm working on it with Under the Radar.

PHILIP HIMBERG: So, national theatre, right now, Joe. Go.

JOE SALVATORE: Yeah, five seconds. You know, that idea about national theatre, I know people are probably like, yeah, whatever. We've been talking about a national theatre for a really long time, and there've been times where there was one and there wasn't one. I know that theatres do co-productions that start in one place and move to another. Regional theatres do those kinds of co-productions. I would like to see that it doesn't just become about the production, that there are other ways to create the interface. For example, is there a production that's happening on the East Coast that moves to the West Coast, is there a way to do some kind of webinar or some kind of civic dialogue discussion of that production with those two communities that are experiencing it in different ways? And how do we begin to use the technology—this phrase “use the technology” keeps coming up for me in this conference—to begin to create that network that I've proposed? I'm not saying that that's going to happen tomorrow, but part of it for me is about that transparency piece and really starting to find ways to share the models of success that we're having internally with one another. For example, I spent time talking to the marketing director there, and I was like, oh, right, I need to call the marketing director of the theatre I work with in southern New Jersey and say we need to do this, we need to think about that, we need to think about this because they were great ideas and he was very forthcoming with them. The operating budget for the institution that I work for is tiny in comparison to ACT, but those ideas that came from him will absolutely be transferable to the organization that I work with. I also saw ways that it translates into the work that we do on a mainstage season and in the academic department that I work in. So I'm trying to sort of web those ideas out where I have influence.

KATE TAYLOR DAVIS: I think it's about keeping up your energy and taking time out to really think about the bigger picture on a regular basis. I think our biggest enemy is exhaustion, and doing our best to think outside the box and think outside your current role and bringing as much of your energy to the institution that you work for is really important.

ANDREA DYMOND: I would say that where I work at Victory Gardens there are already some of these ideas. I think any brick-and-mortar institution is already thinking about how you bring more people into your theatre on days when it's not about the production that you're doing, perhaps, and looking for new audiences and that sort of thing. So I think continuing to contribute to that discussion and to think about other ways that we might do that. And also to be the person who says, “What about this guy over here? I know he says stuff that our guys on Sunday afternoon don't want to hear, but there are a lot of other people.”

PHILIP HIMBERG: To end this, I'd like to invite Karen Kandel to join me at the podium for just a moment to put the bookend on this because we never actually finished the last moment of the book.

KAREN KANDEL: “Wow,” they'll all cheer, “what this zoo must be worth. It's the gold-dardest zoo on the face of the earth.” “Yes, that's what I'd do,” said young Gerald McGrew. “I'd make a few changes if I ran the zoo.”

