CRISIS TO CREATION
A Town Hall on the Future of NYC Performing Arts

February 9, 2015 | at the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center | GC CUNY

REPORT
Summary, Participants List & List of Resources for New York City Theatre

Prepared by Brad Burgess in collaboration with Frank Hentschker.

Participating Organizations:
Crisis to Creation: A Town Hall on the Future of NYC Performing Arts

Town Hall at a glance: Crisis to Creation: A Town Hall on the Future of NYC Performing Arts took place at the Proshansky Auditorium (The Martin E. Segal Theatre Center, The Graduate Center, 365 Fifth Ave, New York, NY 10016) on Monday, February 9th, 2015 from 6:30pm to 9:30pm.

Video: The Town Hall was live-streamed and is available at http://tinyurl.com/levoqzg.

Presenting Organizations:

Fourth Arts Block http://fabnyc.org/
Staten Island Arts http://statenislandarts.org/
Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance http://www.baadbronx.org/
Asian American Arts Alliance http://aaartsalliance.org/
The New Black Fest http://www.thenewblackfest.org/
Theatre Communications Group http://www.tcg.org/
Arab Stage http://arabstages.org/
The Actors Fund http://www.actorsfund.org/
The Field http://thefield.org/
Network of Ensemble Theaters http://www.ensembletheaters.net/
The League of Independent Theaters http://litny.org/wp/
The LITFund http://www.litfund.org/
One Percent for Culture http://www.oneforculture.org/
Artspool http://artspool.co/
Alliance of Resident Theaters http://www.art-newyork.org/


Attendees: About 200 participants attended the Town Hall and represented an estimated 100 different groups, organizations and universities. While most of the attendees were from the professional theatre world either Artistic or Executive directors or administrators, an interesting number of attendees represented the broad spectrum of profiles in the arts and cultural sector (from funders to artists, producers, programmers, administrators, managers, consultants, researchers and students).

Goals of the Town Hall:

- To present the wide array of services provided to the field, highlighting innovative efforts to respond to the financial crisis of 2008
- To highlight missing diversity from larger and more commercial performing arts organizations
- To highlight cultural diversity in the non profit and small to mid size performing arts across all 5 boroughs;
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- To share resources and best case practices between the participants in order to enhance the opportunities, ideas, and responses to the needs of the performing arts community;

- To position the arts service organizations as a key contributor to the health of the city and showcase this strength to political allies in NYC government departments and councils;

- To inspire individual, institutional and infrastructure support for the performing arts and the service organizations that provide for the industry.

**Presenters:** The Town Hall was divided into four main parts: cultural and borough diversity, service to the field, civic friends and finally an informal reception for attendees to meet the presenters.

**Diversity:**

**Fourth Arts Block** (Est. 2001): Originally to represents groups from the Lower East Side confronted with displacement. Program include: low cost rehearsal space for dancers (DANCE BLOCK), public arts to tell community stories (ART UP), share resources to sustain the environment and economy (LOAD OUT) [http://fabnyc.org/](http://fabnyc.org/)

**Staten Island Arts** (Est. 1992): There are 500,000 SI residents, making it the smallest borough…but larger than New Orleans and Atlanta. It has a large West African, Puerto Rican and Mexican population, and the largest Sri Lankan community outside of Sri Lanka. It is the fastest growing borough. SAI is committed to listening to and advocating for artists post Sandy as a current focus. Also there are fears of residents being priced out of neighborhood post recovery. [http://statenislandarts.org/](http://statenislandarts.org/)

**BAAD** (Est. 1998): Started out looking for space in the Bronx for artists, turned into more. During the recession, the small salaries were lost. The recovery strategy was based on founder perseverance with reduced hours. Yearly programs include: BAAD!ASS WOMEN FESTIVAL, BOOGIE DOWN DANCE SERIES, OUT LIKE THAT, BLACKTINA FESTIVAL. [http://www.baadbronx.org/](http://www.baadbronx.org/)

**Asian American Arts Alliance** (Est. 1983): Started in wake of civil rights movement inspired by African American community coming together. Regranting organization for many years, but lost program post economic collapse. Now a convener of dialogue and community building programs. A major concern is that Asian American make up 15% of population in NYC, but representation on stage not equivalent. [http://aaartsalliance.org/](http://aaartsalliance.org/)

**The New Black Fest** (Est. 2010): Created as a response to lack of diversity for the black stage. Observed that only certain actors and playwrights produced, even within the community, and a large number who were not. Lynn Nottage helped fundraise from her apartment to get started. A focus is on diversity within diversity. Example: not just Uganda, but LGBT Ugandans. One problem is that plays were read but not produced. Efforts to change that are underway. Importantly, NBP went into social activism with killings of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown. [http://www.thenewblackfest.org/](http://www.thenewblackfest.org/)


**Arab Stages** (EST. 2014): Digital journal on theatre in the Arab world. Features, articles, plays, and videos, as well as highlights resources available to artists. First issue featured NYC NOOR THEATRE and Chicago’s SILK ROAD RISING THEATRE. [http://arabstages.org/](http://arabstages.org/)
Service:

**Actors Fund** (Est. 1882): Historically founded as burial society. Now it exists for artists in need, crisis, or transition. There are Employment program to train artists in other fields to complement their skills and income, through career counseling, group programming, education and training programs, seminars on resume building, interview skills etc. AF is about to introduce entrepreneurial program. Services also include, social services, emergency financial assistance, senior assistance, chemical dependency, HIV AIDS, housing department, and healthcare. [http://www.actorsfund.org/](http://www.actorsfund.org/)


**Innovative Theatre Foundation** (Est. 2004): IT provides promotion through annual IT Awards, and new and info enewsletter. Foundation assisted Hurricane Sandy community recovery efforts. IT conducts research studies and reports, on financial info, space closings and demographics, which can be found online. “45 million tourists come for the arts and culture, not the big buildings.” [http://www.nyitawards.com/](http://www.nyitawards.com/)

**Network of Ensemble Theaters** (Est. 1995): NET supports committed ensembles and collective sustained work. “Ensemble work is part of the solution to the problems.” NET has 400 membership companies nationwide. Programs include: NET 10 TRAVEL AND EXCHANGE GRANTS, PLAYWRIGHT COLLABORATION GRANT. Student programs available, regular convenings, MICROFEST CONVENINGS. Quoting Judith Malina post economic disaster, “artists are in solidarity with every other working class group in the world.” [http://www.ensembletheaters.net/](http://www.ensembletheaters.net/)

**League of Independent Theaters** (Est. 2009): 501c6 political advocacy organization which can endorse candidates and fundraise for candidates, whereas 501c3 cannot. Political policy platform available online. Programs include: Meet the candidates event, voting guides, CHARTER BARTER putting schools with arts organization, space in exchange for working with community. [http://litny.org/wp/](http://litny.org/wp/)

**LITFund** (Est. 2013): 120 NYC companies who tithe 5 cents per ticket sold to community chest. In two years, Two grants given for SHIT LIST, and INDIE REVIEW. Long term goal to approach broadway, who at 12 million tickets sold could tithe 600,000 annually to the fund for endowment and emergency efforts towards industry stability. [http://www.litfund.org/](http://www.litfund.org/)

**One Percent for Culture** (Est. 2010): Currently over 500 organization members representing all districts. Main program is as an advocacy org to increase the city budget to 1% of the municipal expense budget over time. Current figure is at .20% which is $150 million. Quoting a study by the Economist on global competitiveness of cities in the arts, NYC ranks number 1 now and projects to be 1 in 2025. Statistics presented: Nonprofit arts create over 76,000 jobs and employ 41,000 artists. 89 million attendees at performing arts events in 2012. Gov’t funding accounts for 14% of funding for the arts in NYC. [http://www.oneforculture.org/](http://www.oneforculture.org/)

**Artspool** (Est. 2015): Incubated by ART NY. Funded by Rockefeller, NYC Community Trust and Sherman Foundation. Observed that general operating funding dropped after collapse but compliance requirements have increased. Noticed member companies were building their own infrastructure, technology, staff and space. Artspool is an idea to try to share some of the resources that made these infrastructures and compliance efforts, so that more time/money could be put towards artistic and strategic vision of members. [http://artspool.co/](http://artspool.co/)

**A.R.T./NY** (EST. 1972): A membership and service org that provides advocacy and support to nonprofit theatre community. There are 350 nonprofit theaters in all 5 boroughs. 53% have operating budgets under $100,000. Programs include: CURTAIN CALL, INTERN FAIR with American Theatre Wing, SPACE PROGRAM. 9,000 free rehearsal space given last year. In 2016 A.R.T./NY will be opening a 150 seat theater and 99 seat theater at 53rd and 10th with a 99 year lease, and subsidy fund that will keep costs at as low as %50 of market rate. [http://www.art-newyork.org/](http://www.art-newyork.org/)
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Ideas for follow-ups:

- Participants and attendees called for this to be an annual event
- The evening Town Hall could be followed or prefaced by a day articulated around smaller types of meetings, workshops and focus groups
- Regular breakfast meetings for leaders of cultural organizations
- Editing event video into smaller clips for each organization’s presentation
- Create online performing arts resource guide

Feedback: Importantly, the feedback from the participants, particularly from the new initiatives, and also the smaller organizations from outer boroughs and representing cultural diversity, was very strong. A strong sense of unity and mutual respect and admiration emerged from the event.

Commissioner Finkelpearl: “2002-2012 there were 250,000 people with arts degrees under the age of 30 who moved to the city...half of Minneapolis. Mayor has promised 1500 affordable housing units for artists... We are launching diversity study and social impact of the arts project with UPENN. What does it mean to have cultural organizations in the community? Art is good for the soul, it’s good for the community, and it’s good for the economy.”

Councilman Van Bramer: “I love fighting for every single person in this room. I love what you do, I love what you represent, I love how you say it. I love that you say things differently. You are not only being heard by me but you are being heard by each other. We are all together as a part of this ensemble...We have establishing the cultural immigrant initiative this year at 1.5 million, another 1 million to the coalition of theatres of color... But we must do more. I am not here to declare victory, I am here to fight for you and to get more money in particular small not for profit theatre companies and the work that you do. If all of us could feel the power of art and culture and theatre more often, we would all have more time to reflect on who we are and why we’re and what we’re doing. All of you have made me better.”

Teresa Eyring (TCG): “I remember thinking after 2008 that we would be decimated...We survived...with our adaptability, our resilience, turning insurmountable challenges into creative problems to solve...our desire to engage the widest most complex diversity of voices, our urge to collaborate with each other and communities, our increasing skill in rapidly responding to crisis with art whether economic, natural disaster or racial and social justice. We can be first responder brain trusts in responding to crisis in our communities and help with our art. We have one big pushcart that we are pushing together.”

Mia Yoo (quoting Ellen Stewart), “I feel very strongly that someday we will have to do more than just say hello to other people. There has to be a visceral understanding among men, not just a greeting; so I tried to use la mama as a pushcart to help push us in this direction.”

Baba Israel, NYC Artist and Town Hall Attendee, “I wasn’t going to come, I was exhausted from just getting back into town...but I came, and I left with ideas and contacts that will help and now I feel stronger about my ability to do my own projects.”

Key resources:

U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis Study on Arts providing 4.3% of National GDP
http://tinyurl.com/nrqa8
One Page Fact Sheet on NYC Arts and Culture Budget Impact
http://tinyurl.com/nql9vmz
Commissioner and Majority Leader Discuss First Ever NYC Cultural Plan
http://tinyurl.com/pcooeea
Petition to Increase NYC Cultural Budget
http://www.oneforculture.org/sign
Funding Guide for Cultural Mobility
http://www.us-culturalmobility.org/