

## **Curtain Call Remarks Ginny Loulodes**

**A.R.T./New York Curtain Call  
March 15, 2010**

**Harold & Miriam Steinberg Center for Theatre - Laura Pels Theatre  
Roundabout Theatre Company**

Thank you Theresa for your thoughtful and inspiring Keynote. And a very special thank you to the wonderful Laura Pels for sponsoring yet another remarkable Keynote at Curtain Call. I also want to thank the amazing Roundabout Theatre Company

This Wednesday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, will mark the second anniversary of the collapse of the Financial Giant Bear Stearns. For me, March 17<sup>th</sup> was the moment when I began to feel the ground upon which I stand, changing. So, in the spring and summer of 2008, A.R.T./New York began conducting some informal research among our theatres regarding initial impacts and the economic uncertainty looming. And on September 15, 2008, when Lehman Brothers fell, we moved into action. Working with Commissioner Kate Levin and Deputy Mayor Robert Lieber, A.R.T./New York and DCA co-produced a Fiscal Forum at the American Airlines Theater. Commissioner Levin read remarks that had been prepared by Deputy Mayor Lieber, which were honest, frank, and in many ways comforting. Diane Ragsdale of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation gave a keynote which described various ways arts groups might rethink their relationship to their communities and their audience development tools.

I recall standing on the stage and promising all of you that A.R.T./New York would dedicate ourselves to helping you get through what many of them called “the economic crisis”. Today, I am pleased to tell you how we are honoring this promise.

On October 20<sup>th</sup>, the very day of the Fiscal Forum, A.R.T./New York submitted a proposal to the Theatre SubDistrict Council which responded to some of Ms. Ragsdale’s recommendations. We were thrilled to receive \$150,000 to develop **The New York Theater Network**, a co-branded website with our partners TheaterMania, which will provide one-stop shopping for all A.R.T./New York member Broadway, Off Broadway and Off Off Broadway shows. **The New York Theatre Network** will include listings, streaming video on any aspect of your shows; links to sites where you can purchase tickets; opportunities for audience members to write blogs, or tweet; and have a news section about our sector. One of the greatest features of the New York Theatre Network will be the Customer Relations Management system that they now have through Ovation Tix. Any group that uses TheaterMania to sell its tickets will be able to communicate ticket sale information in real-time to the box office, the marketing office, development, finance and the artistic and managing directors! Last, but not least, anyone purchasing their tickets through TheaterMania will have a profile of their sales. If someone purchases tickets to, say, *The Glass Menagerie*, at Roundabout, they will also be notified about Target Margin’s Tennessee Williams’ *Camino Real*.

In the winter of 2009, the Harold & Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust commissioned A.R.T./New York to conduct qualitative and quantitative research on our membership, to determine how they were faring through the economic crisis. This process helped us develop a clearer picture of the artistic and organizational health of our member theatres and their relationship (both direct and indirect) to the economic crisis.

Unsurprisingly, the findings revealed that our theatres, particularly those with annual operating budgets between \$750,000 - \$5 million, were feeling severe effects from reduced funding from foundation, government, corporate and individual sources. These sources, deeply invested in the stock market (and some in ponzi schemes) lost tremendous amounts of money in the crash.

The findings also revealed that many of our theatres had been astute in reading and responding, as best they could, to these conditions. Anticipating the impact of what could be a severe and prolonged economic downturn in the country, many of our theatres acted preemptively to bring their budgets into income-based alignment and even below. At the same time there are a number of theatres that have been unable to act as quickly or dramatically due to significant fixed costs especially related to owning or operating facilities or to unalterable contract commitments. The conditions and prospects for these theatres remain of great concern to ART/New York.

Throughout all of our research activity and ongoing dialogues a notable viewpoint has been sounding and resonating: the traditional not-for-profit Off and Off Off Broadway institutional model is slow, confused and unresponsive to dramatic disturbances in the environment and efforts to address disturbances

Therefore, A.R.T./New York, with initial support from the Rockefeller Foundation Innovation Program, is launching the Theatres Leading Change Initiative (TLC), a project involving professional leaders from our industry that will help us assess, rethink and re-tool how our theatres need to operate. In collaboration with ARTS Action Research (AAR), a long time provider of technical assistance to New York theatres and advisor to A.R.T./New York, we will examine the current conditions and explore new possibilities, perhaps a new paradigm, for developing and producing theatre in the challenging and fast-changing New York City environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

A.R.T./New York will draw on a number of key experts and resource sectors to inform the TLC process and products generated. ARTS Action Research has been engaged because of their twenty-plus years of commitment to identifying, confronting and addressing the anomalies, the emerging new realities and what arts professionals need to do when the old model fails. AAR has drawn and continues to draw on a vast array of non-arts resources including: social anthropology, hard and soft sciences, futures studies and theories, demographic data, movement patterns and projections, paleontology, complexity and emergence theory, evolution theory, mathematics and physics, business and economic theory, and a wide range of academic study, among others. But most of all AAR draws on the true experts in the arts field, the arts professionals themselves.

Additionally, A.R.T./New York has already begun informal discussions with Actors' Equity Association, and they remain open to ongoing dialogue. We will also explore some of the external forces that effect audience participation and community support. Mitchell Moss of New York University and Dr. Joseph Salvo, Director of Population Division for New York City's Department of Planning, have agreed to lend their expertise and assistance in this process. Finally and significantly, the entire staff and board of A.R.T./New York commit their considerable skills, talents and passion to assuring that New York remains the theatre capital of the world, for better and for worse.

As the staff and I were planning **the New York Theatre Network**, and **Theatres Leading Change**, it soon became clear to me that if we were going to study and identify sustainable ways for our theatres to operate in the New Economy, A.R.T./New York would have to undergo changes itself. Suddenly, it became clear to me that everything we do going forward should come under the conceptual umbrella of "Theatres Leading Change". The choice of an architect for the two theatres we are building at Archstone-Clinton suddenly became not just a capital project; but a design project geared towards the current and future needs of theatres producing in the new economy and beyond. I am thrilled to announce that Toshiko Mori, former Dean of Architecture at Harvard will be designing our spaces.

Changes are not just taking place with our major projects, but with our workshops and Roundtables as well. The arrival of Frances Black has brought new energy and fresh thinking to how we can best serve all of our members. And the constant questioning, not only of Frances, but of our Finance Director Guy Yarden, Development Director Jennie Miller and Facilities Manager Jerry Homan has created a new energy that inspires me to take on such important, but seemingly daunting challenges.

If anyone were to have told me a year ago, that you would be the producer of some of the finest new plays in New York City; that you bravely took on large cast plays like the ***Orphan's Home Cycle*** and ***The Scottsboro Boys***; that the solo performances by Colman Domingo, Anna Devere Smith, Charlayne Woodard, and David Greenspan would forever change my thinking about one person shows, I would have not have believed you. You have already defied what so many expected from this financially challenging, but artistically inspiring year.

The challenges are not over; in fact, next year could be the year we hit bottom. But I believe that despite the odds, you will prevail. Why? Because we are one hell of a community. You co-produce with one another; share props, staff, trucks, and even technical directors and spaces. We care about our colleagues. And so long as we work together for the betterment of the industry we love -- nothing can stop us.

In his editorial called, ***"The Hard and the Soft"***, David Brooks wonders how Norway, a country of 4.7 million people, is consistently the recipient of the most Olympic Gold Medals in the Winter Games.

“There must be many reasons for Norway’s excellence,” claims Brooks, “but some of them are probably embedded in the story of Jan Baalsrud.”

In 1943, Baalsrud was a young instrument maker (artist) who was asked to sneak back into Norway to help the anti-Nazi resistance.

His mission was betrayed. His boat was shelled by German troops. Baalsrud dove into the ice-covered waters and swam, with bullets flying around him, toward an island off the Norwegian Coast. The rest of his party was killed but Baalsrud made it to the beach and started climbing an icy mountain. He was chased by Nazi’s yet despite the fact that there were 50 Nazi’s on his trail, and his toe was shot off, he managed to kill one officer.

Baalsrud swam successfully across the icy sound to an island, where he lay dying of cold and exhaustion on the beach. Two girls found him and led him to their home.

And this is the core of the story – during the next months dozens of Norwegians helped Baalsrud get across to Sweden. Flouting any sense of rational cost-benefit analysis, families and whole villages risked their lives to help one gravely ill man, who happened to drop in their midst.

Baalsrud was clothed and fed and rowed to another island. He showed up at other houses and was taken in. He began walking across the mountain ranges on that island towards the mainland, walking as much as 28 hours without a break.

A 72 year old man rowed him the final 10 miles, to the Norwegian mainland, past German positions and gave him skis. Baalsrud skied through severe winter storms, causing an avalanche. He fell 300 feet, smashed his skis and suffered a concussion. He lost sense of time and his vision, but he managed to stumble upon the cottage of Marius Gronvold, who took him in; treated his frostbite, and hid him in a remote shed across the lake.

Alone in the hut, Baalsrud’s sight returned and he discovered that Gangrene had invaded his legs. Using nothing more sophisticated than a knife he stabbed his legs, to drain the infection. Because Baalsrud was unable to walk, Gronvold and his friends built him a sled and carried them both up a 3,000 foot mountain to meet a party that was supposed to take him to Sweden. The party never arrived, so Gronvold left Baalsrud in a hole in the ice under a boulder. When he returned a week later (expecting to collect Baalsrud’s dead body) Gronvold found him barely, alive. For 20 days Baalsrud lived in a sleeping bag, in the same hole; sustained by food and supplies provided by Gronvold and his friends.

More days passed and the weather made any attempt to pass into Sweden impossible. Baalsrud cut off his frostbitten toes with a knife and even attempted suicide, for fear of costing the Norwegians their lives. Finally, he woke to the sound of German

fire, and snorting reindeer. A group of Laps arrived, and, dodging German bullets, successfully dragged him to Sweden

According to David Brooks, “this astonishing story could only take place in a country where people are skilled on skis and in winter conditions. But there also is an interesting form of social capital on display. It’s a mixture of softness and hardness. Baalsrud was kept alive thanks to a serial outpouring of love and nurturing. At the same time, he and his rescuers displayed an unbelievable level of hardheaded toughness and resilience. That’s a CULTURAL COCKTAIL bound to produce achievement in many spheres.”

As I read that story I thought of you, the members of A.R.T./New York’s wonderful community. And I thought of our wonderful Local Heroes. If we keep combine our two communities, as the various towns and valleys of Norway did in WWII, we can do anything.