

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY REMARKS

By Virginia P. Louloudes

Curtain Call

The Pershing Square Signature Center

September 16, 2013

On behalf of everyone at A.R.T./New York I want to join Erika Mallin in welcoming our members and special guests to The Pershing Square Signature Center for ***Curtain Call***, our celebration of our amazing membership as we kick off the new season.

Tonight I want to bring you up-to-date on the progress we are making with the ***A.R.T./New York Theatres*** and introduce you to ***ArtsPool***, our newest initiative. I also want to share with you some of the ideas expressed by a new book I've been reading, Arlene Goldbard's *The Culture of Possibility: Art, Artists & the Future*, where she encourages us to use arts and culture to solve society's problems.

In an exercise to help us open our minds Goldbard asks us:

"Who are we as a people?"

"What do we stand for?"

*"How do we want to be remembered?"*¹

I'm going to save the first question for last, so let me begin by answering, *"What do we stand for?"*

Theatre begins with the play, and our playwrights are the conscience of our culture. And that is why we also stand for freedom of speech, arts education, and access for people of all ages and incomes.

This was demonstrated in a recent *New York Times Magazine* article, "The Real-Life 'Glee' in Levittown, Pa.," sent to me by our Board Member Andy Lance, about the forty-plus-year career of drama teacher Lou Volpe at Harry S. Truman High School. According to author Michael Sokolove, "Volpe is one of those people who create astonishing success in the most unlikely of settings....As the community was going to pieces, Volpe built Truman's drama program into one of the best in America...."²

¹ Goldbard, Arlene. *Culture of Possibility: Art, Artists & the Future*. [S.l.]: Waterlight, 2013. Print.

² SOKOLOVE, Michael. "The Real-Life 'Glee' in Levittown, Pa." Editorial. *New York Times Magazine* 15 Sept. 2013: n. pag. *New York Times*. 13 Sept. 2013. Web.

Over the years, Volpe's work had become so bold and ambitious that executives at Musical Theater International (the licensing agent for high school musicals) travelled to Levittown to see his work. They began to "count on Volpe to pilot challenging material to see if it could be adapted for high-school actors and audiences."³ In 2007 they asked him to produce *Rent*; twenty percent of the student body auditioned! In 2010 Volpe chose to produce *Good Boys and True*, a drama by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, in which a prep school athlete meets a girl working at the food court in the mall, seduces her, and films them having sex without her knowledge. Volpe was the first to produce this on a high school stage.

The more he observed Volpe's rehearsals and classes, the more Sokolove came to realize that, "For Volpe's students, engagement in theater tapped into their souls and spirits. It excited the parts of their brains that relate to language, movement and musicality....With each production, they set an incredibly high goal and went about building something."⁴

While some of the cast were top students, others, including the show's finest actress, struggled with a learning disability. Later, when Volpe's students performed *Good Boys and True* for local judges who would decide which companies would proceed to Nebraska's Thespian Festival, Mariela Castillo, the student with the learning disability, won an award for acting. She said she felt, "'Like a movie star getting her Academy Award.'"⁵ And yes, Volpe's students made it to the Festival.

"How do we want to be remembered?"

I hope we will be remembered as an organization that anticipated and responded to your needs through progressive programming. But most of all, I want A.R.T./New York to be remembered for pioneering two of the most ambitious projects in A.R.T./New York's history: a *Rental Subsidy Fund* for the A.R.T./New York Theatres and *ArtsPool*.

ArtsPool is the new name for what was originally described as "Collective Insourcing," a project developed by A.R.T./New York's Director of Finance Guy Yarden, with Sarah Maxfield and David Sheingold, thanks to cornerstone funding from The Rockefeller Foundation Cultural Innovation Fund, The New York Community Trust, and as of today, the Katharine S. and Axel G. Rosin Fund of The Scherman Foundation. Having watched our field grow exponentially these past 22 years it has become increasingly clear to me that funding cannot keep pace with our growth. For this reason, we need to explore new models, and I believe that the *ArtsPool* model is at the core of our industry's future health and sustainability.

Just imagine a world where we have the power to control our futures, where we all have the highest quality management tools at affordable prices. Imagine a world where, if your budget is below \$1,000,000, producing theatre doesn't mean you have to hire an entire staff! Imagine a

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

world where large companies can “share” their administrators with small companies without losing the quality or output of their work. Think about it! What distinguishes artists and theatre companies is the creativity and individuality of the work you produce, not the way you file your 990s, develop your budgets, or keep your books.

ArtsPool embraces a shared economy for our industry and can actually allow us to benefit from one another’s administrative knowledge – thereby strengthening our capacities while saving us money. Just as Zipcar and Citi Bike are examples of shared transportation economies, *ArtsPool* will function as an arts shared economy. Initially, the services *ArtsPool* will offer include human resources, technology resources, contract processing, and financial management (including updating data filing requirements for the Cultural Data Project, the New York State Grants Gateway, Better Business Bureau, and Guidestar). In time we hope to expand by incorporating additional services.

If enough theatres (particularly our larger companies) work with *ArtsPool*, we can achieve economies of scale to make this project incredibly cost-effective for our smallest companies as well as our largest.

The creators of *ArtsPool* have designed a process that is both reliable and flexible, while ensuring that you remain fully in control of decisions that impact your company.

- *ArtsPool* will support a range of member activities – from one-off productions in need of short-term administrative support to long-term organizational administrative work such as managing a company’s finances, from budget creation, to bookkeeping, to annual audit.
- *ArtsPool* will produce member and collective benefit by considering financial, social, and environmental impact in all operating decisions.
- And *ArtsPool* will be financially self-sustaining after a soft launch period. At this point, the goal is for *ArtsPool* to be a member owned and managed entity.

Both *ArtsPool* and teachers like Lou Volpe are living proof of Arlene Goldbard’s assertion that, “The bridge between paradigms is being built by artists and others who have learned to deploy artists’ cognitive, imaginative, empathic, and narrative skills.”⁶

Just as *ArtsPool* has the potential to reduce costs while improving your administrative work, we are raising money so that you can rent the *A.R.T./New York Theatres* at prices even our smallest members can afford.

As I write this, Theatre for a New Audience is about to open its new theatre, which is a wonderful addition to our community. But we cannot deny the fact that this weekend a funeral was held for the Collapsible Hole – a space where Collapsible Giraffe, Radiohole, and other DIY companies performed. In the last decade alone, we have lost over 50 small theatres, which is

⁶ Goldbard, Arlene. *Culture of Possibility: Art, Artists & the Future*. [S.l.]: Waterlight, 2013. Print.

why Community Board 4 insisted that the mixed-use development now known as Archstone-Clinton contain space for three theatre companies.

And how fortunate we were to have the Bloomberg Administration in office to not only accept but also embrace Community Board 4's request and to invite A.R.T./New York to manage two of the spaces for the many homeless companies in our membership. Thanks to leadership funding from Mayor Bloomberg and Commissioner Levin; the City Council through Speaker Christine Quinn and Finance Chair Domenic Recchia; Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer; and the New York State Assembly, we were launched.

The City and State's \$14.8 million investment in this public-private partnership will cover the entire cost of construction and allow us to purchase state-of-the-art lighting, sound, and video equipment, which will be included in the rental package. Their leadership has inspired support from the LuEsther T. Mertz Charitable Trust, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Emma A. Sheafer Charitable Trust, the Altman Foundation, and others.

Last winter our *Rental Subsidy Fund* was launched with a \$1 million pledge from our Board Chairman Jeff Gural and his wife Paula. Their leadership inspired the Cory and Bob Donnalley Charitable Fund and the Michael Tuch Foundation to make generous gifts, along with several members of the A.R.T./New York board. Thank you all!

Beyond "bricks and mortar" these funds will provide enough money for us to subsidize our rents dramatically, allowing you to spend less on rent and more on the art. The spaces are set to open in 2015. But perhaps the greatest contribution the City of New York has made to the *A.R.T./New York Theatres* is the lease with our landlord, who has agreed to preserve the spaces for the exclusive use of nonprofit theatres for 99 years, ensuring that there will be no funeral for the *A.R.T./New York Theatres* in your life or mine.

The remaining \$6 million to be raised for the *Rental Subsidy Fund* is not simply for A.R.T./New York – it is a Fund for the Future of New York City Theatres! ***This is truly what I hope we will be remembered for.***

Now to return to Arlene Goldbard's first question: "*Who are we as a people?*"

I'd like to share with you a true story about one of our artists, Morgan Jenness. When Morgan came to New York City, like many of us, she was in the process of figuring out who she was as a person. And that led her to become obsessed by Mother Teresa, who in Morgan's mind epitomized the best of what it means to be a human being.

One day, Morgan learned that Mother Teresa was planning to speak at the United Nations so she managed to find out where she was staying. On the appointed day Morgan stood in front of the hotel, and miraculously a car pulled up and Mother Teresa emerged. Morgan ran over to Mother Teresa and said, "Oh, Mother Teresa, I so admire you. The work you do is so important that I want to come to Calcutta and work for you."

Mother Teresa replied, “No. You have to want to do this work because you love the poor people of Calcutta.” But after she spoke, Mother Teresa could sense that Morgan was very disappointed and sad, so she asked her, “What kind of work do you do?”

Morgan replied, “I work in a theatre and help produce plays.”

“There are so many different famines in the world,” Mother Teresa explained. “In my country there is a famine of the body. In this country there is a famine of the spirit. Stay here and feed your people.”

And for thirty-some-odd years Morgan has done that, as have each and every one of you. So I would answer Arlene Goldbard by saying that we feed the spirits of our people. We stand for the power of theatre to change lives, and we want to be remembered for our work. While I specifically spoke of A.R.T./New York’s work, I know Arlene would be as proud as I am of your work, which places a mirror to society.

On behalf of all of our members, I want to thank you, Commissioner Levin, as well as Deputy Mayor Patty Harris and Mayor Bloomberg for being such staunch supporters of the *A.R.T./New York Theatres*. I want to thank Speaker Christine Quinn, Finance Chair Domenic Recchia, and the wonderful Jimmy Van Bramer for the City Council’s generous match of funding for the *A.R.T./New York Theatres*, which will be feeding the souls of New Yorkers for nearly a century. You have all been tremendous supporters of this field, and I believe you all deserve a round of applause!

I also want to congratulate our DeWitt Stern Local Heroes, and thank the many members, donors, and A.R.T./New York and Signature Board Members who are here tonight.