

THE ART OF ARTISTIC DIRECTION

Kimberly Colburn

A Master's Project
Presented to the Department of Arts and Administration
Of the University of Oregon
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts in Arts Management
June, 2007

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**APPROVED BY DR. LORI HAGER
ARTS ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM
UNIVERSITY OF OREGON**

DATE

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academic vitae

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education

1997-2000 University of California, Riverside

B.A. Theatre, graduated cum laude

Courses include: Theatre literature and history, Play Analysis, Theory of Modern Theatre, World of the Play: Brecht, Political Science: The Social Contract, Modern Political Ideologies, Anthropology of Art, Religious Myths and Rituals, Sociology, Women's Studies

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M.A. Arts Administration, Performing Arts Concentration

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master's research: The Art of Artistic Direction

Examining the factors involved in creating a theatre season. A series of interviews with artistic directors combined with an in-depth analysis of programming literature.

professional experience

Assistant to the Artistic Director

Oct. 2004-present, Lord Leebrick Theatre; Eugene, OR

Read, researched and reviewed plays for possible production, assistant in directing, casting. Involvement in marketing, grant searching, writing personnel policy, redesign and implementation of website

Director /Co-founder

Dec. 2002-May 2004, Full Frontal Artist Collective, San Diego, CA

Produced and directed three successful multi-media shows. Directed and organized all marketing and operations

General Assistant and Box Office Staff

Dec. 1997-June 2000, Theatre Facilities Unit, Riverside, CA

General stagehand, including lightboard operator, running crew, costume crew, followspot operator, strike crew, light hangs/focuses. Box Office staff, selling tickets, setting up season subscriptions (Ticketmaster)

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Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon, 2005-2007

- Humanities 101: The Classical period.
- Humanities 102: Medieval to the Renaissance periods.
- Humanities 103: Age of Enlightenment to the modern period.

Arts Bridge Scholar, Spring 2005

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Curriculum: Examining Different Cultures through Masks

production experience

The Libbies	Lighting Designer	Pocket Theatre, 05/07
Trouble in Tahiti/Riders to the Sea/Hand of Bridge	Lighting Designer	Opera Ensemble, 4/07
Company	Asst. Lighting Design	University Theatre, 11/06
The Seagull	Assistant Director	Lord Leebrick, 11/06
Sex Habits of American Women	Director	Lord Leebrick, 5/06
Assassins	Assistant Director	Lord Leebrick, 10/05
Two Rooms	Director	Pocket Theatre, 5/05
Copenhagen	Assistant Director	Lord Leebrick, 4/05
Valparaiso	Stewardess/Chorus	Sledgehammer, 6/02
The Virgin Slut Actuality	Producer/Dancer	Seattle Fringe, 3/01
Mullet	Dancer	DropOut Dance, 8/00
Baltimore Waltz	Anna (lead)	UCR, 6/00
Commedia dell'Arte	Ruffiana	UCR, 3/00
Mother Courage	Various	UCR, 11/99
Chenille Stems & Coco Midrib	Amy (lead)	Barn Theatre, 11/98
Crucible	Ann Putnum	UCR, 5/98

scholarships/awards

- NEA stipend recipient, National Endowment for the Arts 40th Anniversary Arts and Cultural Symposium
- Scholarship recipient, Shakespeare on Page and Stage, English Department, University of Oregon

conferences

- 31st Annual International Conference on Social Theory, Politics, and the Arts (STP&A). Served as décor co-ordinator. Eugene, Oregon: October 6-8, 2005
- Trends, Concepts, and Approaches in Arts and Cultural Management, Claremont Graduate University. Claremont, California: March 4, 2006
Paper presented: Cultural Policy in Theatre Programming
- National Endowment for the Arts 40th Anniversary Arts and Cultural Symposium. Washington, DC: May 17-19, 2006

service/affiliations

- Member, since Fall 2005: Graduate Teaching Fellowship Federation
- House/Stage Manager-October 2005: En Masse performance group at DIVA, Eugene, OR
- Volunteer-2004-05: Eugene Ballet, Eugene, OR
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KIMBERLY COLBURN

TITLE: The Art of Artistic Direction

ABSTRACT: My research explores the factors involved in selecting plays for a professional theatrical season for the purpose of creating a decision-making model. The factors examined include the mission statement of the organization, marketing and financial considerations, challenges to new play development, concerns about diversity, and the community context of the organization. The decision-making processes of six regional theatres are examined through personal interviews with artistic staff. Although there were some similarities between each theatre, each theatre's decision-making process was unique. My research shows that the season planning process is determined by the needs of the theatre, the community, and the artists, as seen from the perspective of the artistic directors.

KEYWORDS: artistic direction, artistic administration, theatre programming, season planning, producing, play selection

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CHAPTER I: PROBLEM STATEMENT

In this research, I will address the mechanics of creating a theatre season, specifically the process of selecting plays to be included in the season. Programming a theatre season involves balancing numerous factors and represents an attempt to see into the future. The factors I will consider include the mission statement of the organization, marketing and financial considerations, challenges to new play development, concerns about diversity, and the community context of the organization. The selection of plays that comprise a season instantly communicate the type and style of a theatre organization and thus must correctly reflect the mission statement while creating an interest for a prospective audience.

In order for the theatre as an organization to continue, it must be financially solvent. In order to maintain financial solvency, the productions must continue to attract both audience and artists: "Three constraints reflect the risks involved in theatrical production today: specialization among theatres, limited rehearsal time and high rates of unemployment among acting personnel" (Lyon, 1983, p. 86). Producing theatre is already risky, and deciding upon what plays to produce is critical to the success of a theatre: "Arts organizations are revenue intensive, meaning that they rely heavily on current income and advance ticket sales to support current expenses" (Kotler and Scheff, 1997, p. 12). Some theatres are thus only one poorly selling show away from dire financial straits: "The desire to fulfill the organization's mission often leads directors to spend all available money on short-term artistic pursuits" (Kotler and Scheff, 1997, p. 12). Successful season planning is tantamount to continued operation regardless of

perceived artistic success. In this research I will consider factors involved in play selection for season planning.

Creating a season by selecting the plays and deciding the order they are performed in is primarily the responsibility of the artistic director (Cattaneo, 1997; Langley, 1990; Volz, 2004). There is no widely accepted set of guidelines or standards that are used to determine the plays included in a season, but it is commonly the responsibility of the artistic director to oversee this process. Some literature assumes that the artistic director will program based on their own artistic goals, rather than balancing artistic vision with the economic needs of the organization. Langley (1990) states that “the artistic director of a theatre company will impose his or her tastes upon that company and, indeed, cannot do otherwise” (p. 186). Assassi (2005) disputes this claim in her discussion of theatrical season play programming in France, saying that “contrary to a widely-held opinion among performing arts professionals, theatre managers do not build their programming solely on the basis of their own artistic preferences and affinities” (p. 32).

Professional theatres operate within the structure of an organization, which can become institutionalized. Institutionalization is when the theatre organization serves the needs of the organization to first maintain itself before it can address the theatre it was created to produce. Whitehead (2002) argues that because theatres have become institutionalized, the factors that go into programming are not solely based on artistic sensibilities or even the theatre’s mission statement. Instead, he states: “As the art becomes increasingly subject to the economic needs of the institution, the institution starts to drive the art rather than the other way around” (p. 31)

Theatre professionals generalize about theatre programming without elucidating where these assertions are coming from. Palmer (2003) illustrates this by saying “it seems like a fairly widely held belief among producers, artistic directors, and audiences alike that producing a new work is a risky undertaking” (p. 64). It is unclear what information has prompted this generalization and if producing a new work is risky because it may be financially unsuccessful, difficult artistically, or require additional time or resources.

Exploring the factors that contribute to theatre programming will help to either confirm or disconfirm some of these opinions. Whitehead (2002) acknowledges that unseen factors may be at work in programming, but does not clarify or postulate as to what those factors might be. Palmer (2003) similarly makes the previous statement about “widely held beliefs” (p. 64) in theatre production, but has no evidence or data to back these claims up. My research will address these generalizations by asking if and why artistic directors hold them.

My research will explore the balance between financial needs and artistic needs in creating a theatre season, and determine if they operate separately or “synchronistically.” Theatre organizations often operate with a dual leadership system, with an artistic director and managing director (Kotler & Scheff, 1997; Langley, 1990; Volz 2004). This can create the perception that artistic concerns and economic concerns are separate. However, as Kosidowski argues. “The division between artistic and institutional needs is not as clear-cut as we’d like to believe. And I think our theatres should seek out a place in which these two drives operate synchronistically” (Kosidowski, 2003, p. 85). My research explores this balance.

My research may contribute to assessing the needs involved in creating a theatre season. It may or may not be possible to establish guidelines on how to plan a theatre season, but I will attempt to determine what factors are involved in this decision-making process. The focus is specifically on the selection of plays to be included for full production within a season. The myriad of other programming activities, such as workshops, readings, or educational events or classes is outside the scope of this research.

I examine professional regional theatres that are members of Theatre Communications Group (TCG), a theatre service organization, and are located in the Northwest. This will focus the research on professionally oriented theatres rather than community theatres, including Seattle Public Theatre, Intiman Theatre, Artist's Repertory Theatre, Profile Theatre, and A Contemporary Theatre.

My goal is to discover if it is possible to develop a decision-making model to describe how current theatre programming occurs within the theatres involved in this study. Research participants may not benefit directly from this research. However, by determining what factors are used in making programming decisions, perhaps organizations can assess where their priorities in programming currently are. The literature suggests that a tension exists between financial concerns and artistic aspirations, with artistic programming done from financial constraints, as opposed to artistic goals as the sole determinant of season planning.

I further hypothesize that there may be some instances of operating on what I have termed a "slot-based philosophy." This is an important governing principle in season planning, and describes the process wherein the artistic director, and others

contributing to season planning, have definite “slots” in season selection. For instance, a company might want to include a Christmas play, a musical, and a play with ethnically broad appeal within their season. Each of these “slots” then guides plays that are considered for inclusion. A slot-based season planning philosophy saves time and effort while offering a season that is balanced between many factors. However, this is limiting in that it does not allow for plays that defy easy categorization or it could make audience members or theatre artists feel that the theatre is repeating itself.

The goal of my study is to determine what factors are involved in theatre programming decisions during the play selection process. This information may assist organizations to analyze their own programming and inform future programming decisions. Currently, there is very limited research in the area of theatre programming, particularly in the play selection process. It is my hope that by asking why theatres choose the plays they do, this might make artistic staff more aware of the way that they choose plays in the future, or consider their own priorities and adjust their process.

CHAPTER II: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

My research considers what factors are involved in programming a theatre season. Additional questions that I address include: Is it possible to generalize about what factors are most important? How do artistic directors perceive these factors? Are they seen as positive, negative, or possibly detracting from the integrity of the art? Is it possible to create a decision-making model?

My main methodological framework is critical social science. As Neuman (2003) explains, it is “a critical process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves” (p. 81). My goal is to uncover the structure of the decision-making process in play selection and season planning.

This is descriptive field research, in that, “Descriptive research focuses on ‘how’ and ‘who’ questions...describing how things are” (Neuman, 2003, p. 30). I examine how programming occurs in six specific TCG member professional theatre organizations including Seattle Public Theatre, Intiman, A Contemporary Theatre, Artist’s Repertory Theatre, Profile Theatre and Lord Leebrick Theatre. Further, interviews revealed how regional theatres do their season planning, as described by a member of their artistic personnel. Data-gathering techniques included literature review, in-depth interviewing with questions shaped from the literature review, and analysis of documents such as the theatre’s website and promotional materials.

Artistic personnel were chosen for the interviews because they are “charged with crafting the vision, shaping seasons, hiring artistic personnel, and fully realizing the artistic mission of the institution” (Volz, 2004, p. 22). In some cases, particularly in larger institutions, an associate, dramaturge, or literary manager assists the artistic director in season planning, as detailed Cattaneo (1997) in *Dramaturgy: An Overview*. I focus on artistic directors because they are traditionally responsible for play selection.

CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

My literature review revealed several key factors that contribute to play selection in theatre programming: the sociopolitical and community context of a theatre, marketing and development of plays, diversity of ethnicity and gender in playwrights and casting requirements, challenges in new play development, personal networks and relationships, the mission statement of the theatre, and consideration of the expected audience. These factors are interrelated and vary from theatre to theatre; thus, it becomes difficult to assert which factors influence decisions more than others.

Bloom (1996) conducted a survey of TCG member theatres in existence for more than 10 years, and asked them questions about how they selected their season; “the desire to present a balanced season” (p. 13) was the most common response, but it was unclear what a “balanced” season constituted. By exploring each of the previously listed factors individually, I will examine their relationships to each other.

The artistic director(s) are the primary force in selecting the plays for the season, rather than a more democratic voting process that some non-professional theatres employ. Contributors to theatre programming such as artistic directors, literary managers, and directors argue against democratic processes, saying that this leads to unchallenging works and repetition (Wickstrom, 1999). If every person is involved, the plays selected are those that will please the greatest number of people rather than challenge the theatre or the audience. A large portion of the artistic director’s job is to create a successfully balanced season, financially and artistically, rather than make

easy choices based in popularity and potential economic success without regard to developing the art of theatre.

BACKGROUND: CULTURAL POLICY

We must consider the larger environmental framework in which professional theatre organizations exist. Financial constraints have a large factor in programmatic decision-making (Colbert, 2000; Heilbrun & Gray, 1993; London, 1988; Longoria, 1992) and it is useful to elucidate how these theatre organizations operate. The financial framework for most non-profit theatres in America consists of the indirect support of non-profit organizations through tax incentives, federal granting agencies like the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and state arts agencies, and the larger political environment. Mulcahy (2000) defines the United States as “a libertarian political culture that is skeptical of socio-cultural policies in general, but particularly those at the national level, preferring nonprofit cultural institutions and market allocations of cultural goods” (p. 140). This means that non-profit professional theatres are operating in an environment where they cannot rely on the government directly, although the government does provide various forms of indirect support.

The tax incentives given to non-profit organizations are numerous. Both individuals and corporations receive tax deductions from contributing to non-profits. As a result, some money is simply given (donated) to non-profit organizations. Non-profit organizations “generally do not pay local property taxes or federal tax or local sales tax on income that is related to their mission” (Mulcahy, 2000, p. 151). They also receive preferential postal rates, which is a substantial discount for communication and

marketing efforts. All of these contribute to the ability of a non-profit theatre to remain financially solvent.

According to the Theatre Facts 2004 report, theatres receive about 0.9% of their income from the federal government, and only 4.9% from state, county, or city funds (Pesner, 2005). The American Assembly for Arts (2000) insists on recognition for all arts, but with the limited amount of funding available, this seems like an impossible task. The United States has no explicitly stated cultural policy, but merely a set of democratic ideals and an implicit framework. As Mulcahy suggests, "This organizationally pluralist system, supported by mixed funding and largely outside the public sector is the distinguishing characteristic of the American cultural condition" (2000, p. 145). The government has created conditions where non-profit organizations can exist and occasionally thrive, but clearly there are no guarantees, or even significant state subsidies.

How might this affect programming choices? Not only are theatre and the arts subject not only to a lack of governmental support, but they must defend their programming choices in order to obtain the stamp of approval from granting agencies, corporations, or the NEA. The NEA itself must be reauthorized by congress periodically, and this process is fraught with political tension. For example, during the reauthorization processes in 1990 and 1998, some members of Congress attempted to get rid of the NEA by cutting off its funding (Quigley, 2005). All this happened for the limited amount of funding distributed by the NEA, which in 2000 averaged just 64 cents per year per American taxpayer (Kammen, 2000). Organizations are constantly struggling to find sustainability and our arts and culture are subjected to the free market.

In addition to the financial impact on the socio-economic conditions of America on the play selection process, there are artistic impacts as well. Tom Key (2005), executive artistic director of Theatrical Outfit, explains in a podcast interview that once he has begun to compile the list of plays that he will consider, one of the factors that he looks at is if the plays “resonate with current events.” In another podcast interview, Mira Hirsch (2005), artistic director of Jewish Theatre of the South, says “Timing is crucial, and sometimes a play just feels right for right now.” Some artistic directors give preference for plays that address current issues or topics.

MARKETING AND DEVELOPMENT

Marketing is also a factor in programming decisions. The world of the arts definitely feels is not free of the influence of market forces. No text on theatre or arts management would be complete without chapters on fundraising or marketing. Volz (2004) cites the rise of what he calls “market-based fundraising,” where donors are demanding a return on their “charitable investment.” These can include “contractual agreements for advertising space, mailing list access, media acknowledgement, prime box seats, endorsements, merchandising rights” and more (p. 110).

Fifteen years prior, Langley (1990) also warned against the dangers of dependence on corporate sponsorship in fundraising: “Like any type of patronage, corporate support can seduce its beneficiaries into compromising positions” (p. 407). This can become a factor in deciding what shows to produce when taken into account what show might be more likely to attract corporate sponsorship. “Private sponsors will be “careful, choosing only the safest projects to fund” (Potter, 1992, p. 46) Theatre professionals worry that this can “have undue influence on program selection—by

favoring 'safe' or 'popular' works over new or experimental ones" (Langley, p. 407). The implication is that theatre professionals prefer newer or more experimental work, while corporations prefer to sponsor shows that have a history of success in past productions. This increases the tension between artistic needs and financial needs.

Wickstrom (1999) gives a detailed example of corporate sponsorship on Broadway in her study of the Disney Company's influence in theatre. She determined that the influence of Disney led to commodification and the sanitizing of theatre in order to be 'family-friendly.' While there was the notable exception of Julie Taymor's *The Lion King*, she found the rest of the Disney-produced shows to be lacking in artistic quality. The shows themselves seemed to be promotions for other Disney products, such as stuffed animals or clothing. This implies that the motivation for producing these shows was to develop revenues, which demonstrates a favoring of marketing and financial needs over artistic excellence.

Hayes and Slater (2002) advocate an audience development plan that analyzes existing box office data in order to cater to the audiences that exist, rather than focusing on diversifying. Pressure to deliver programs that established popularity heavily affects the type of plays that are produced.

There is no question that marketing is a necessary component in the operation of a successful theatre. However, as Langley (1990) explains, the danger is that artistic directors will be forced to program works that appeal to the broadest audience. Board members, some of whom may be corporate executives, are susceptible to basing their decision "on the bottom line" (p. 424). He does say "producing theatre of high quality is not antithetical to selling tickets, raising money, or satisfying all the theatre's different

user groups.” He argues that artistic directors should be aware that board members are vulnerable to making financially based decisions. This is not mutually exclusive to producing theatre of high artistic quality, but could be a factor in the decision making process.

FINANCIAL INFLUENCES

Fiscal contributions made to organizations are clearly important to maintaining them. According to *Theatre Facts 2004*, an annual study of theatre organizations done by *American Theatre* magazine, 45% of a theatre’s budget comes from contributed sources. Smaller theatres, with budgets of less than \$250,000, averaged 61% contributed sources (Pesner, 2005). Theatres would not survive without these contributed funds. About half of a theatre’s budget must come from contributed income sources, and corporations and foundations have a great effect, with 15.3% of income. Individuals account for 14.6%. Theatres receive only about 0.9% of their income from the federal government, and only 4.9% from state, county, or city funds (Pesner, 2005). Therefore, corporations, foundations, and individual donations are most important to a theatre’s financial health.

Play programming is thus subject to market forces, as about half of the income is earned, primarily through ticket sales (Pesner, 2005). Organizations are trying to get the largest market share, and to please (or at least not offend) possible corporate sponsors or foundations. Contributed income is about half a theatre organization’s budget. The United States has a history of being philosophically in favor of capitalism and the ‘free market’. Lewis (2000) shows that “left to its own devices, free market capitalism tends to drift inexorably toward monopoly” (p. 81) Mulcahy (2000) shows that the United States

relies on the taste of donors, corporate, foundations and individuals in order to determine what arts organizations receive funding. Individual choice and personal preference are part of the market forces of our democracy. Barber (1997) states, “the market pushes towards uniformity of taste” (p. 15). This is based on the idea of appealing to the lowest common denominator, when appeal applies to the greatest number of people. As there is no stated cultural policy in America, the arts and culture are subjected to this possibility of streamlining or decreasing the available arts experiences, as determined by market forces (otherwise known as the ‘mainstream’). Monaghan (2003) laments the financial constraints that increase the perceived risk of new or challenging works for theatres. Hodsoll (2002) says, “Not-for-profit organizations include more popular fare to increase revenues and lure audiences for the full range of their repertoires” (p. 106). There is a financial incentive for programming works that are considered popular. However, if all theatres programmed only popular works, it would be impossible to include new development of new plays and the plays deemed “popular” would be produced again and again.

Many artistic directors feel constrained by financial necessity: “Necessity, artistic directors feel, often dictates vision, instead of the other way round” (London, 1988, p. 2). In 1985, Theatre Communications Group convened over 200 representatives from theatres across the country to discuss what was termed “artistic deficit,” defined as “the condition that prevails when economic priorities begin to take precedence over artistic concerns” (London, 1988, p. xi). Clearly, the theatre community saw a need to address artistic concerns over a perceived lack of quality. This study argued that the primary factor that affected artistic decisions was economic, in terms of time as well as money.

Additionally, many people working in non-profit organizations work in crisis management mode where “Crisis management, which is the process of dealing with emergency situations, becomes the norm, preventing strategic planning both for the short and the long term” (Kotler and Scheff, 1997, p. 21). This crisis situation will affect the amount of resources the artistic leadership can devote to play selection and season planning. They might use a shortcut system, like my theory of a slot-based philosophy, to find plays to fill the niches as quickly as they can.

Funding determines the types of programs available, regardless of artistic integrity, accountability, or public benefit in many organizations. Another issue is that as organizations must find corporate or foundation sponsorship, they create programs which include plays selected for production as well as ancillary programs such as readings, workshops, or educational programs in order to fit into funding sources (Kris Tucker, personal communication, 2006). Since foundations and corporations supply an average of 15.3% of a theatre’s budget, this could have an enormous effect on programming (Pesner, 2005). Foundations and corporations could make demands on the type of plays they would like to see produced or reject the production of particular plays as an investor in the theatre.

Market forces, financial considerations, the availability of grant money, and the political environment are all factors in programming decisions. Additionally the mission of the organization, availability of resources, and artistic integrity play a role. Langley (1990) offers some sage words of advice: “Good trustees and good fundraisers understand that the funds must follow the art, because art that follows the funding has

usually lost both integrity and purpose” (p. 400). The funding should support the art, not drive it.

DIVERSITY OF ETHNICITY AND GENDER

Consideration of diversity of ethnicity and gender in play selection affects casting and selection of playwrights to produce. Audiences, other theatres, and funding agencies consider what playwrights are produced or what jobs are available to minority actors and directors. Numerous articles have been written lamenting the lack of diversity in casts or subject matter; some of these articles also acknowledge strides in increasing diversity (Akbar, 2004; Abarbanel, 2007; Lampley, 2003; Lustig, 1996).

At the Americans for the Arts annual convention in 2003, in a roundtable discussion on “community cohesiveness,” participants agreed that the need for diversity in the arts was great: “Participants questioned whether arts groups are actually being as diverse as they need to be in structure, programming, and outreach” (p. 4). However, participants also felt that “many groups program what they feel a community needs, not what the community has expressed as a need or desire” (p. 4). Participants seemed to feel that diversity should be a consideration in every season selection whether the audiences demand it or not, but the conversation did not specifically address how diversity should or could be programmed.

Walker (1994) subverts the notion of a mission of cultural diversity in her article, *The Dilemma of Multiculturalism in the Theatre*. She determines that, in many cases, theatres will simply include one “ethnic play” in a season to address notions of multiculturalism without actually integrating diversity throughout the company. As a

result, plays viewed as ethnic are frequently marginalized and only allowed to fill the slot of the token “ethnic play” within a season.

Appel (2004), the artistic director of Oregon Shakespeare Festival, discussed diversity and season planning in a recent interview. Appel relies heavily on her own taste (Appel, 2004, p. 2) and diversity is a very important factor in her decision-making concerning play selection, cast, and directors (p. 3). For example, she says “the show that’s doing 100% [audience capacity] is *A Raisin in the Sun*, so we know our audience responds to our multicultural priority” (p. 3). OSF’s mission is “to create fresh and bold interpretations of classic and contemporary plays in repertory, shaped by the diversity of our American culture, using Shakespeare as our standard and inspiration” (osfashland.org). Diversity, then, is not solely the vision of the artistic director, a stated factor, but is also demanded by the mission statement of the company. For example, *Raisin in the Sun* requires a diverse cast, and concerns issues of ethnicity specifically.

A number of studies address the under-representation of women in theatre. The Theatre Program of the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) released a report in 2003 on its three-year study assessing the status of women in theatre. The report found that “while numbers [of women] have improved over the last 25 years, the percentage of professional female directors and playwrights has hovered around 16-17 percent” (“Status of Women,” 2003). Women artists who start theatre companies dedicated to producing work by women have also addressed the under-representation of women. For example: Women’s Project (www.womensproject.com/), Red Hen Productions (www.feministtheatre.org/), Pleiades Theatre (www.pleiadestheatreco.org/) and Washington Women in Theatre Company (<http://www.washingtonwit.org/>) are just a

few of the theatres that dedicate themselves to producing and supporting work by women. In addition to theatre companies, there are a few organizations that offer support for women artists, such as Women in Theatre which is “dedicated to promoting positive images of women and empowering theatre arts professionals through performance, education, net-working, service and outreach in Southern California” (<http://www.nohoartsdistrict.com/womenintheatre/>).

Dart (2003) goes so far as to suggest the need for quotas to include women playwrights in the landscape of American theatre to achieve diversity. In *American Theatre* magazine’s compilation of the 2005-2006 theatre season, for the first time ever, four of the five most produced playwrights this year were women (Zappulla, 2005). The trend did not continue. In 2006, only one woman made the top ten most produced playwrights (<http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/archives.cfm>). Lynn Nottage, the only woman and only one of two playwrights of color (the other August Wilson), was quoted in a 2006 interview as saying “just when I am feeling optimistic about the future of the African-American writer, I look at the theater season and see we are not present” (Kentucky Educational Television).

Goldbard (2001) discusses the difficulty of securing funding sources when a “smaller, culturally specific theater...suddenly finds itself in competition with a major institution such as the Guthrie Theater, seeking a subsidy to add an African American play to its season, to “reach out” into the black community” (p. 136). She cites an interview where a director told her,

There are historical impediments to multicultural organizations growing. When I ran a company, I was told I couldn’t apply for substantial grants unless our

operating budget was \$1 million a year. The larger organizations that have that kind of resources weren't interested in multicultural work until they got extra money for it. I'm glad they're expanding and including, but will their programming dry up when the money does? (p. 136)

Playwright Lynn Nottage addresses the issue of theatres adding multicultural work in order to appeal to granting organizations. She explains that as an African-American woman writer, "Theaters give you a commission by way of raising grant money for themselves without the intention of ever producing your play" (Kentucky Educational Television). Her plays have received many readings without ever being produced as a full production, and she feels that her ethnicity and gender are being used to benefit an organization that is not really interested in promoting diversity, but only in using her as an example of diversity to appeal to funding streams.

The Brustein-Wilson Debate

At the TCG 11th annual conference in June of 1996, noted playwright August Wilson gave a speech entitled *The Ground on Which I Stand*, which sparked a debate about how racial diversity could and should look on American theatrical stages. At one point, he specifically rebutted several remarks made by Robert Brustein, artistic director of American Repertory Theatre from 1966-2002, which led to a public debate moderated by Anna Deveare Smith six months later in January of 1997. This debate illustrates two distinct views on how theatres should address diversity in their programming and casting.

In his initial speech for TCG, Wilson disparages the lack of funding for black theatre in America, and colorblind or non-traditional casting practices. He "argues that

the values of the black community are compromised if black actors, directors and playwrights can only work within the structure of the mainstream, white-dominated theater” (Goldberger, 1997, p. 2). Wilson argues that the work of black artists should be supported the way that white artists have been and continue to be supported in all regional professional theatres. Brustein claims that the work that has the highest level of excellence should be rewarded without regard to any other criteria. Wilson criticizes Brustein’s July of 1993 *Unity from Diversity* article from The New Republic, which discussed funding agencies using multiculturalism and racial diversity as a granting criteria: “Funding agencies have started substituting sociological criteria for aesthetic criteria in their grant procedures, indicating that ‘elitist’ notions like quality and excellence are no longer functional” (p. 24). Wilson responds to this: “To suggest that funding agencies are rewarding inferior work by pursuing sociological criteria only serves to call into question the tremendous outpouring of plays by white playwrights who benefit from funding given to the 66 LORT theatres” (Wilson, 2001, p. 25).

After this speech, Wilson was criticized by some for what was perceived to be a call for separatism, in stark contrast to the “liberal dream of integration” (Goldberger, 1997, p. 3) Others argued that Brustein was biased: “He refused even to acknowledge the possibility that any sort of human foible (social habits, intellectual assumptions, temperamental preferences) could ever affect the artistic judgment of a cultivated man like himself” (Jefferson, 1997, p. 5). The two sides did not change significantly after the public debate (Evans, 1997, p.1). Goldberger (1997) sums up the debate:

Mr. Wilson went on to attack Mr. Brustein, who, as a longtime critic of multiculturalism, has often said that social goals have come to take precedence

over purely artistic ones in financing of the contemporary arts. Mr. Brustein, for his part, says he views Mr. Wilson's demands as a cultural version of affirmative action, and he fears that their acceptance would have the effect of lowering standards, much as critics of affirmative action assert that traditional standards are compromised by its use in admissions and hiring at universities and corporations. To Mr. Wilson, this claim is nothing more than racism by another name. (p. 3)

The issue comes down to what the larger funding structures should be used for in American theatre. Is it better to continue attempting to integrate diversity into our existing structures or to build new infrastructures dedicated to exploring notions of racial diversity on their own terms? This debate plays out in programming choices that artistic directors make. Discussion about diversity, multiculturalism, or inclusiveness continues and the question remains as to whether enough or even any action to significantly address diversity has been taken: "Even when groups try to be 'diverse,' oftentimes they are merely paying lip service... there seems to be a need for, and natural aversion to, frank dialogues about diversity and multiculturalism" (Americans for the Arts, 2003, p. 4). Notions of "diversity" are clearly difficult to categorize or implement, and in season selection can apply to audiences or the size of the organization. In his article *How to Save the Performing Arts*, Kaiser (2002) argues that we need diversity not only in our programming, but also in the sizes of the arts organizations that exist. The theatre field has "has lost many of its minority organizations in the past few years. Those that remain are terribly small compared with their white counterparts" (p. 7). This includes audiences as well: "We are heading toward a world where only white, upper-middle-class people

come to the theater, because only white, upper-middle-class children are being exposed to the theater” (p. 7). The lack of organizations that make exploring minority voices their mission has led to a corresponding lack of diversity in audiences at the larger mainstream theatres that remain.

In my inclusion of diversity as a possible factor in season programming, I focus on diversity of ethnicity and gender. Other exclusions include diversity of age or differently-abled populations. At the Americans for the Arts 2003 conference, it was noted, “oftentimes diverse outreach seems to be aimed merely at easily identified ethnicities” (p. 4).

Diversity needs to be a part of play selection, but how to integrate multiculturalism within the selection process can be difficult. In Bloom’s 1996 survey, “only 7 out of 47 companies listed a multicultural focus for the plays under consideration...multiculturalism as a specific consideration did not appear to seriously impact the decision making process” (p.13). In this research, I seek to establish if addressing diversity of ethnicity and gender is a factor that seriously impacts their decision-making process of selected theatres in the Pacific Northwest.

CHALLENGES TO NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT

The traditional “canon” of professional plays typically marginalizes non-white and women playwrights. One of the ways to increase diversity in season programming is the development of new plays from a range of voices. However, new plays, regardless of the issues that they address, are at a disadvantage in getting produced. New plays are both artistically and financially risky, and as Monaghan (2003) argues, “New plays present a marketing challenge” (p. 81). A dramaturge is often employed to develop new

plays effectively (Cattaneo, 1997). Aesthetic theorist, Pavis (1993), comments “No creator of theatre would ever really risk writing a text or constructing a performance without taking the conditions of the public’s receptivity into account” (p. 26). Professional theatre in the United States is meant to be produced for an audience. One of the challenges to developing new works is the fear of negative audience reception and associated loss of revenue. If new plays are so difficult, is it any wonder that “the most commonly expressed concerns are that seasons are too bland” (Whitehead, 2002, p. 130). Plays that are unknown are financially risky, and it is frequently difficult to predict if they will be successful or not.

In fact, any play perceived as “challenging” or “experimental” is often then also seen as “risky.” Susan Trapnell, managing director of ACT in Seattle, points to the recent success of *The Pillowman*, a play that discusses infanticide, as an example of risky programming. “I think it’s definitely economically perilous to do this sort of work,” Trapnell says. “But I don’t think it’s impossible” (Longenbaugh 2007). However, upon closer examination, I would argue that this was not a perilous programming choice. *The Pillowman* had a very recent and successful run on Broadway with several popular actors. The play itself received attention not only for its grotesque subject matter but also its innovative style (Brantley 2005). For a major regional theatre to then include this play in its next season is not risky but calculated. In the Northwest alone, ACT, Portland Center Stage, and Berkeley Repertory Theatre are doing productions of *The Pillowman* this season. There is clearly a difference, then, between programming a “risky” new play that has been successful on Broadway and a new play that has not yet been produced.

Occasionally, government funding can be an important tool in producing more challenging works. Langley (1990) illustrates this with the story of a theatre whose mission was dedicated to anarchy yet most of their funding came from government sources. “‘We just walk into those agencies,’ explains the artistic director, ‘and say, ‘we’re here to destroy you—please fund us,’ and you see, they must—if only to prove that they are serious about democratic principles and freedom of speech!’” (p. 400). However, is the theatre betraying its own principles by using government funding sources? Each theatre must keep in mind its mission statements in deciding upon their programs.

GUIDING FORCES: MISSION STATEMENTS

Mission statements are an important factor in considering which plays to produce. It would be inappropriate for a company whose mission dedicates them to Shakespeare to produce a season full of avant-garde plays. Voss and Voss (2000) put it simply, “managers are expected to embrace the organization’s mission and values” (p. 62). The mission is the core of an organization and affects every part of it. Key (2005) describes the season selection process as “an implementation of our mission statement” (Podcast). Mission statements guide the theatre’s season selection process by focusing considerations of genre, style, scope, or themes. Mira Hirsch (2005), artistic director of Jewish Theatre of the South, selects plays based on the theatre’s mission statement: “the plays selected for a theatre’s season are largely what gives a theatre its identity. Our play selections are largely guided by our theatre’s mission” (Podcast). The New American Shakespeare Tavern’s first play selection criterion is Shakespearian authorship, as determined by their mission statement (Meierhofer 2006).

LOCAL RESOURCES, AUDIENCES AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Both patrons to the theatre and the artists who work in it are clearly a factor in the season selection process. In Bloom's 1996 survey of theatres, "general audience appeal," "specific audience or community appeal" and "casting opportunities for company or specific actors" (p.13) were frequently cited factors. She recommends that when programming a season, theatres should "keep the needs and wishes of your producing team and your core and target audience a high priority when selecting plays" (p. 14). Kosidowski (2003) posits that the primary concern in the creation of theatre is the audience: "If the mission of theatre is indeed to bridge the fissure between observer and observed, or at least to create a meaningful, if illusory, connection between the two, isn't the audience the locus of our energy?" (p. 83).

Artistic directors must also consider their local resources, which include their local talent pool of actors, directors, and designers. Appel (2004) says "I'll sometimes choose a play specifically for an actor in the company" (p. 3). Sometimes she will choose a specific play at the behest of a director she wants to work with. Booth (2006) says that the availability of local talent is always a consideration. These personal relationships between the artistic director and theatre community have an influence on programming decisions.

The artistic director of Theatre Hopkins, Suzanne Pratt, describes how she selects plays: she "attempts to balance out each season with a comedy, a classic, a drama and a popular piece, each chosen for the tastes of the audience she knows so well" (Rienzi 2002). Due to audience popularity, she also includes a Shaw play every other season. "In selecting a play, Pratt says her guiding principle is finding a work of

‘strong, dramatic literature’” and that “there will never be a play up there that has not already proved itself to be an uncommonly impressive piece of dramatic literature” (Rienzi 2002). Pratt organized play selection to be responsive to her audience through selecting plays that are well established. She is unlikely to include many new plays, plays by minorities, or experimental works due to these constraints.

By the very nature of theatre, the question of creation involves the audience. While some theatre theorists or practitioners dismiss the audience’s involvement, in the reality of a non-profit organization, the audience must be considered. “For us, the question of ‘Who’s there?’ is tied not only to the nature of the drama, but is inextricably linked to box office numbers, marketing matters, and the unsavory, but necessary, business of competing for consumer leisure time” (Kosidowski, 2003, p. 83). Regardless of how a season is evaluated artistically, the box office receipts, surveys, and critical or informal responses all play a part in the overall evaluation of the success of a production, and the audience is at the helm of those factors.

Kosidowski (2003) suggests that artistic needs and financial or institutional needs are not opposed to one another. He maintains that regional theatres should behave regionally, responding to their own communities rather than prioritizing the needs of the theatre professional or reacting to national trends. “The division between artistic and institutional needs is not as clear-cut as we’d like to believe. And I think our theatres should seek out a place in which these two drives operate synchronistically—creating great theatre that a community will *want* to see” (p. 85). This means that if the audience is a factor in the play selection process, it is not necessarily an artistic or financial concern, but comes from a desire to create, respond, or maintain a community.

This contradicts other literature that posits economic and artistic concerns as opposing forces.

CONCLUSIONS

The sociopolitical and community context of a theatre, marketing and development of plays, diversity of ethnicity and gender, challenges in new play development, personal networks and relationships, the mission statement of the theatre, and consideration of the expected audience are criteria for play selection at some point in the decision-making process, though their weights may vary. The mission statement is the foundation for selection criteria. Similarly, each theatre's core audience and local artists will have an effect on the season selection process that will be different for each theatre, depending upon the theatre's size, scope, and geographic location.

While financial issues clearly play a role in the overall health of the theatre as an organization, it is not clear how much of an effect this has on season planning other than in the amount of new work that is produced. Financial concerns restrict the amount of new or newer work that is considered (Longenbaugh 2007, Monaghan 2003, Whitehead 2002) or cause the inclusion of another play that will be cheaper to produce in order to balance it out (Booth 2006). Marketing considerations are similar in that they limit work seen as "risky" in that it is relatively unknown, untested, or perceived as challenging to audiences. It is difficult to ascertain if financial considerations play a role implicitly or explicitly. It is possible that they play a role in determining what plays are read for the possibility of inclusion, but that may not be recognized by the artistic staff. For example, if the organization has very little resources available for play research, it is more likely that the artistic director(s) will choose from the plays that they are already

familiar with. In this case, they may or may not recognize that it is financial reasons limiting their selection process.

There is some support for my claim that a slot-based philosophy is sometimes employed. Hirsch (2005) says that she “considers a variety of tones. One show will be a musical or comedy, another will be more dramatic, and a third that will be somewhere in between” and that she likes to include “at least one title that audiences are familiar with.” Each of these generalizations is a slot that is then filled by a play that meets those requirements. Meierhofer (2006) says that their theatre schedules a show they know they can sell out, a well-known, popular play, in the January timeslot, because that is the most difficult time of the year to attract an audience. Pratt does this as well, with “a comedy, a classic, a drama and a popular piece” (Rienzi 2002). This slot-based philosophy is likely not universally employed, but could be a guiding force in the play selection process.

Balance within a season is frequently cited as a desirable quality, but exactly what the balance consists of remains elusive. “Appel explained the factors she takes into account when selecting the season: balance, theatricality and a variety of messages, situations, periods and looks” (OSF 2005, p.3). In Bloom’s 1996 survey, “the desire to present a balanced season” (p. 13) was cited more frequently than any other criteria in the play selection process. Booth (2006) describes how balance is a matter between multiple factors. “In one slot, you decide the mission must be served, and decide take a financial risk...you balance that with a more conservative work in another slot.” While one show will use more resources, it will be more artistically fulfilling and appropriate to the theatre’s mission, while the other show has a proven track record of

success but may be less artistically exciting or relevant to the theatre's mission.

Kosidowski echoes this concern that the concept of balance is less of a negotiation and more of a trade-off: "important artistic decisions about programming are made by a sort of bargaining-table bean counting: allow us to do *this* play (challenging, dark, unfamiliar) and we will reward you with *that* play (comedy, chestnut, Broadway hit)" (p. 85). Based on the literature, balance is generally shown to be a consideration of all of these factors, subject to the individual needs and experiences of each theatre.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

I interviewed artistic personnel from theatres in Seattle and Portland, including Seattle Public Theatre, Intiman, Artist's Repertory Theatre, Profile Theatre, and A Contemporary Theatre. I conducted all of these interviews in person. Interview questions were organized by categories based on what the literature revealed, including the sociopolitical and community context of a theatre, marketing and development of plays, diversity of ethnicity and gender, challenges in new play development, personal networks and relationships, the mission statement of the theatre, and considerations of the audience. Additionally, I asked participants to describe their decision making process and identify people involved in the season planning process. I specifically asked how the organization's board was involved, and how a season's success is evaluated (see Appendix C for examples of questions).

In this chapter, all quotes are from these interviews unless otherwise identified. All of the documents that I looked at are publicly available and include their websites, promotional materials, information from TCG, and tax forms.

INTRODUCTION

Lord Leebrick Theatre in Eugene, Oregon is currently in its 15th season. They are a small organization, with two full time staff members and two part time staff members and a budget of about 200,000 dollars (www.tcg.tool/profiles).

The Lord Leebrick Theatre is a new TCG member theatre, having joined in 2006. While I did not formally interview Craig Willis, the artistic director, I was involved in the season-planning process as an intern during the 2004-2005 season.

My job as an intern consisted primarily of reading scripts that Willis was considering and evaluating them. I would prepare a written summary. This included a synopsis of the play, the casting needs of the play, the type of set, what other theatres had produced the play, quotations from major reviews (or a general impression if the reviews were primarily good or bad), and finally, my opinion of the play.

My assessment included not only my personal reaction to the play, but also whether I felt the play fit within the type of plays that Lord Leebrick produces typically somewhat edgier, contemporary fare. This is determined in part by their mission statement, which is “dedicated to producing vibrant and provocative theatre” (www.lordleebrick.com). Several restrictions were placed on play selections as a result of the talent pool available, which had (and continues to have) a lack of racial diversity and several age ranges that are difficult to cast, particularly for women. Because the Lord Leebrick is a small venue, the plays also needed to have a smaller cast size. It is difficult to have a large cast because the stage and the backstage area are small; both get crowded quickly.

As an intern, I did do some research looking for plays, particularly plays by women. This was at the behest of the General Manager, Rachel Steck, who noted that during the 05-06 season, there were very few women represented as playwrights or actors.

After gathering all of this information, Willis created a shorter list of plays that he wanted to include. We discussed how the plays worked together, and the need to have both lighter comedies and darker, edgier plays. Willis explained that he wanted to have a balance between comedies and dramas, as they each draw slightly different audiences. Several plays were set by virtue of being plays that Willis wanted to direct, or that another director wanted to do. Finally, once he had the season in mind, he presented it to the board, although they did make some suggestions during the process as well.

The factors that were most important in season planning were the mission statement of the theatre, whether Willis thought it was a good play worth doing, and the availability of local resources in the form of actors and production staff. Other factors considered were the diversity of the playwrights in terms of sex, the need for plays that did not require diversity within the casts, and the demands of the play in terms of set requirements and cast size. While the board did play a part in contributing to ideas for plays, they were not a large factor in the decision-making process. Financial considerations came into play with discussions of the resources that would need to be allocated to a play based on its size of cast or set, but there were not conversations that specifically discussed whether we thought the play would make money. In my estimation, it was assumed that if the play itself was a good play that met the criteria of

the mission statement and seemed like it would appeal to our audiences, it could be financially successful.

During the 2005-2007 seasons, I was not formally an intern with the theatre, although I did (and continue to have) an ongoing relationship with them, serving as a director, assistant director, gala co-coordinator, or website designer. This season's planning process appeared to work similarly to the previous season. Several plays that were on the short list from the year before but had not been selected were again being considered.

One thing that was somewhat different from the previous year was the high amount of pre-casting that was done. Due to casting difficulties, particularly for the last play of the season, Willis had lined up the lead roles for several of the plays in advance. The pool of good actors in Eugene is small enough that theatres are often competing for their time. This did not necessarily change the pool of plays that were considered, but could confirm the play's place within the season. For example, he wanted to schedule *Mother Courage*, but he did not want to announce it as part of the season until he had cast the title role with an actress that could handle it.

Again, the artistic considerations were primary. Financial considerations were peripheral, pertaining to a need for smaller production budgets. I did note that the success of other new plays, mostly on Broadway or off-Broadway, was influential in the sense that those plays might be read or seen to see if they might work for Lord Leebrick. Their financial success elsewhere simply increased their profile for consideration. For example, one of the plays considered for this season was *The Pillowman*, which had a small cast and excellent critical and audience response on

Broadway. In the end, Lord Leebrick decided not to do the play, in part because they had committed to doing *Frozen*. The two plays both deal with children being murdered, so Lord Leebrick felt that this would make the overall season too dark in subject matter.

The factors that went into the decision making process were: the availability of local talent, the play's themes being consistent with the mission statement of the theatre, the balance between plays in terms of being challenging (thematic weight or complexity), the play's past production history, set or technical requirements, and finally, if the play was deemed to have merit.

What I observe about Willis's process that is noteworthy here is his informal polling of his constituents. He often asks board members, actors, directors, other theatre professionals, and even regular audience members for their opinions on certain plays or gets their response to performances. While it does not appear that this informal questioning guides his process of play selection in a primary way, this network serves to inform his choices and hopefully predict how a play will be received. Additionally, Craig travels often and sees plays performed at other theatres, primarily in New York, Seattle, and to a lesser extent, Portland. Nause from Artist's Repertory Theatre and the artistic staff at Intiman also relies heavily on these networks of constituents and seeing theatre in other cities.

SEATTLE PUBLIC THEATRE

Organization Profile

Seattle Public Theatre is a small theatre located steps from Greenlake in a residential neighborhood of Seattle. Their website states:

Founded in 1988, Seattle Public Theater was originally a small company that primarily toured plays in local Seattle public schools and worked with adult and at-risk youth populations to create socially conscious theater. In 2000, Seattle Public was chosen by the City of Seattle in a competitive bidding process to be the resident theater company at the historic Bathhouse (www.seattlepublictheatre.org).

The staff is comprised of six people, including the artistic director, associate artistic director, managing director, technical director, a marketing person and a box office person. Their board is comprised of seven people, and their annual budget is approximately \$400,000 (www.tcg.org/tools/profiles). They are a relatively young and small theatre when compared to the other theatres in this study. Because they are less established and working with a smaller budget, sustainability is of a greater concern.

Before the interview, I went to see their current production, Tom Stoppard's *Travesties*. The theatre is in an idyllic setting, nestled in the corner of a park overlooking a lake. The building seems dwarfed by the expanse of grass, trees and water surrounding it. It is easy to forget that you are in Seattle, minutes from skyscrapers and downtown. It reminds me of a fairy tale, as though this was the house of Snow White or Little Red Riding Hood.

The theatre is equally diminutive, making use of every available nook and cranny. There is no real lobby to speak of, merely a hallway stuffed with a ticket booth and a coffee cart. The theatre is certainly intimate; no seat is more than a few rows of packed-in seats from the stage. The seats ring the stage on three sides, and the set is large; it is difficult to tell where the acting space leaves off and where the audience

begins. The programs are nice and glossy. This lends an air of professionalism to the small space.

As the production began, I immediately noticed their lighting equipment, which includes some moving lights. Again, I was struck by the feeling of intimacy often found in small, community theatre contrasted with equipment more often found in larger, more professional theatres. I felt similarly about the production as a whole. While I did enjoy myself, I could not help but notice that some performances were more uneven than others, or that at times the pacing of the production dragged. The audience was engaged, laughing and watching intently despite the three hour running time. Overall, just in that one production, it seemed like a place that served its community well, a place that would make someone feel comfortable whether you were a theatre veteran or neophyte. It wasn't as polished as the slick programs or moving lights might lead one to believe, but seemed like a good middle area between a non-professional stage and the imposing professional theatres.

Mission

I interviewed Carol Roscoe, who has been the associate artistic director at Seattle Public for the last two years. Our interview took place in a coffee shop across the lake from the theatre, as the shared office space was too small and noisy. An interesting part of our interview was about refining the mission statement of Seattle Public, which at the time was very broad. I asked her how this broad mission statement had an effect on play selection, as it did not have any specificity. She responded by saying "the organization is re-finding itself right now." She discussed how she (the associate artistic director), the artistic director, and the managing director had been

having conversations about what the identity of the organization is and the need to begin talking with the board about making the mission statement more specific. “In a way it [the mission statement] does [determine play selection], but only in terms of the conversations the staff has had.” The organization has since published a much more detailed mission statement on their website (<http://www.seattlepublictheater.org/>). It reads, in part:

We act out of a belief that building a strong arts event, program, or organization is inextricably connected to building a strong neighborhood and city...

Seattle Public Theater is proud to steward the Bathhouse. The intimacy of the space combined with the immediacy of our presence in a public park is our mandate to involve audiences and provide ownership while maintaining a high quality of professional work...Seattle Public is committed to: plays with strong rhythm, character, and juicy text; plays that tell stories that allow us to feel more deeply, to reflect on ourselves and community; plays that challenge our expectations and allow us to dream; plays that leave us talking in the parking lot.

(www.seattlepublictheatre.org)

This mission statement is clearly much more specific in terms of determining the style and types of plays that will be produced there, and specifically names maintaining their location at the intimate Bathhouse Theatre. During the interview, Roscoe said that what makes their theatre unique is intimacy and community: “That’s what we’re trying to focus on, that sense of intimacy and community that comes from being 20 feet away...the audience can never hide, they’re never in black...they’re not fully lit, but at bigger houses, you become invisible like in a movie, with that sense of isolation.” Their

new mission statement reflects this desire to connect the intimacy of the space with the feeling of a shared experience and provides a much clearer guide to play selection in their planning process, and as a result is a larger, more important factor in the season selection process.

The board of the organization was involved in refining the mission, but the process of the refinement seemed driven by the staff: “with that really general mission statement, the artistic director, managing director and I sat down to have a conversation about—what is it that we do? What are these plays that work for our audience?” After having this conversation, they then took their findings “to the board as a discussion of: this is what we have found our identity to be, let’s look at the mission and see if we can’t make that more specific and reflect that.” The board does not play a role in the season selection process, however. According to Roscoe, the board has “set the mission for the organization and then have hired us to see that mission fulfilled.”

Role of the Audience

Roscoe asserts that the relationship between the performers and the audience has a large part in the season planning process. Roscoe spoke of the role of the audience extensively, from contemplating “what will be fun for our audience” to their recent realization that their audiences would like to see more of the artistic director and associate artistic director onstage. Thus, reading plays for inclusion in the season reflect this concern:

We look through the plays with the question of—will this be interesting to our audience? [...] We believe that we can interest our audience with these shows,

and we believe we can sell that to them. Hopefully then other people will then be coming in as well.

For Roscoe, the audience is composed primarily of regular attendees. She believes that by appealing to their returning audience, they can also attract new audience members.

The audience impacts their marketing plan and their programming. Rather than thinking of a play in terms of how they could sell it, Seattle Public looks at the appeal that it would have to their perceived audience. They refined their mission statement based on their explorations of who the audience is and which plays have been appealing to them.

The mission statement and the audience are clearly the primary factors of consideration for play season selection at Seattle Public. When I asked what the most difficult thing about season programming was, she answered: "Taking your ego out of it. Keeping the focus on the mission and the audience, and the sustainability of your theatre." The third part of her statement addresses the financial considerations that affect their decision making process.

Financial Concerns

The overall financial situation of the organization affects the play selection process. Roscoe made reference to a quotation she once heard: "all artistic decisions are financial ones and all financial decisions are artistic ones." She further explained that the season is budgeted as a whole, and the needs of each show must be balanced. If they wanted to do a large-cast show, they must balance it with one or two smaller-cast shows. The budgets that govern each show are in flux, the organization has moved from a system of dividing the season budget per show, where each show has the same

budget, to a process of addressing the needs of each show to determine their proportion of the season budget. In this way, they can consider plays with larger technical or personnel demands as long as they balance that with a show that could be done with a smaller budget. This increases the number of plays that they can consider for possible inclusion in their season.

Diversity

When asked if the ethnicity and or gender of the playwright or actors in a piece plays a role, Roscoe responded: “Not really.” Instead, she said they look at the season as a whole and ask if the voices, perspectives, and characters are offering diversity not just of ethnicity or gender, but also of age or viewpoint: “If we do a whole bunch of shows that are about middle-aged guys, regardless of the race, after a whole season of that, we’re going to be bored. We want to mix it up; we want to find the diversity within the season.” Additionally, she acknowledges that Seattle is “very homogeneous” and that it is “really hard to cast and maintain diversity,” but she and the artistic director select the plays that interest them and trust they will find people to fill the roles. So far, they have been successful. “Casting those roles can be really challenging in Seattle, but we do try to make it more interesting, because we’re more interested in that.” They are primarily concerned with plays that appeal to them, that they believe are good plays. Secondly, they might address ethnicity or gender if the season as a whole appears to favor a particular type of voice or viewpoint.

New Work

While Roscoe is interested in producing new work, she said that the financial challenges are too great at this time. “We have wanted to do something for a long time, some kind of reading or something, but it comes down to: Can we support it? Is it sustainable? And at the moment, with the size of our theatre, it isn’t.” The increased resources that producing a new play demands (Cattaneo, 1997; Whitehead, 2002) preclude Seattle Public’s ability to produce one at this time, although they hope to be able to commit to new work in the future.

“Sustainability” of the theatre is still secondary to the primary concerns of the mission and the audience for Seattle Public. However, developing the mission to reflect who the theatre is, based in part on who the audience is already, will presumably improve the sustainability of the theatre by appealing to their current audience base. They are “looking through the lens of who is this theatre and what are we producing and [asking] how we make that sustainable.” As theatre artists, they are not solely imposing their artistic desires, but responding to the audience that exists.

Slot-based Season Programming

After reviewing the literature, I theorized that balancing the various factors involved might lead to establishing categories, or slots, to guide the decision making process. In this way, artistic personnel might have a system to navigate and designate certain plays as fulfilling a particular slot or demand for inclusion in the season.

In terms of the possibility of a slot-based philosophy guiding their play selection process, Roscoe gave some indication that this is partially accurate. Seattle Public has developed a following for two different holiday pieces for their December slot. One is

family-oriented and is directly related to their education programs, and the other appeals to young single people or couples married without children. For their opening slot, “that first show really wants to be an invitation,” and they have found that plays that end with a more hopeful note do better financially. It can be “dramatic and poignant”, but they do better when they are more relationship-oriented or funny rather than emotional. Their February slot, when the Seattle weather at its worst, is the hardest to fill. “What we find works is to do a really funny play, so that’s what we look for. The more it is a flat out comedy, the more it tends to be successful in that slot.” In these examples, the slots may not determine the plays that are considered, but they do determine which plays go where and might give the advantage to one play over another if it fits better in that described slot.

Balance

Roscoe addressed balance both overtly and implicitly. There is a financial balance that happens between each show. Implicitly, the slots are working to balance where the season moves in terms of its basic appeal, whether it is more emotional or lighter and funnier. She spoke of the season planning process as a whole as: “a balance of looking at what worked and what didn’t work in the last season, where we feel we are as artists, where we feel our audience is as participants, and the plays that we have.” The notion of balance is in terms of all of the factors that come into play for Seattle Public during the entirety of the play selection process.

References and Guiding Principles

Roscoe says that she does not consult many reference materials as part of her decision-making. Sometimes she will “read the books that inspired me in the first place to do what I’m doing.” While she has seen a few books that address programming, she does not use them because while they “can be useful, the answer is never there. There’s no how-to [guide].” Because of her constant return to the needs of the audience, which are specific to that part of the Seattle community, a general programming guide would likely not be helpful anyway.

What struck me most about Roscoe was her commitment to Seattle Public. From subduing her own demands for which play she directs to her constant reference back to the community that Seattle Public serves, she is, in her own words, “taking her ego out” of the equation.

I’ve signed on to this company to serve that theatre and that mission, which itself is a not for profit, and therefore a public trust. We’re serving the public, so I’ve signed on to be a public servant. It can’t be about what I want, it has to be about if I am fulfilling this public trust.

This notion of service aligns with Kosidowski’s idea that regional theatre should serve the community it operates in and challenges Whitehead’s claim that serving the institutional needs of the theatre means a sacrifice of artistic considerations. Instead, Roscoe represents a different mandate, that of service to her audience (Kosidowski, 2003, p.84).

Sacrifices that must be made to continually develop their community and serve their audience. For Roscoe, they are personal attachments to projects when she sees

that the theatre will be better served in a different way. She told me a story about a former professor whose metaphor guides her both as a director and an artistic director. “What you have to learn how to do, is like Medea, you have to kill your children. You’ve got to take the things that are more precious to you and get rid of them. Get rid of your ego.” As a theatre artist, recognize the larger goal and remove your own self-interest from the process.

INTIMAN THEATRE

Organizational Profile

Intiman is currently celebrating its 35th season, making it one of the oldest theatres I studied. They are located in the Northwest corner of Seattle Center, two doors down from Seattle Repertory Theatre. The organization is large, with 115 staff members listed on their website (www.intiman.com), a budget of approximately five million dollars and a supporting fundraising organization called the Intiman Theatre Foundation (www.guidestar.org). Intiman is a member of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT). They have agreed to operate under the contracts agreed upon by the various theatrical unions and LORT, and are designated as class C, indicating weekly box office receipts between \$45,000.00 and \$69,999.99. They are a much larger organization than Seattle Public Theatre and are much more established. Their mission statement is:

INTIMAN Theatre produces engaging dramatic work that celebrates the intimate relationship among artist, audience and language and, through the exploration of enduring themes, illuminates the shared human experience of our diverse community (www.intiman.com/about).

The name “Intiman” is Swedish for intimate, and according to their website, Intiman emphasizes “a close relationship between artist and audience.” The theatre is less intimate than their name might suggest, at 446 seats, although no seat is more than 50 feet from the stage. To get into the building, you enter a beautiful enclosed courtyard that immediately serves to separate you from the bustling Seattle Center just outside. The lobby seems both small and large, because while the floor space is not huge, the ceiling rises several stories. The lobby has multiple standing screens like room dividers, covered with interesting information about the play and the playwright.

I attended their production of Thornton Wilder’s *The Skin of Our Teeth* on May 1, 2007. The theatre felt large to me, and for me, the set actually emphasized the distance between the audience and the actors, despite the fact that I was sitting in the third row. The set for the first act was intriguing, a floating platform with a few doors leading to staircases down to the stage, surrounded by strips of wild grasses. It was very abstracted, appropriate for a play where the first act takes place simultaneously in suburban New Jersey and the Ice Age. A woolly mammoth, reminiscent of *Sesame Street*’s Snuffleupagus shuffled in and even, impressively, climbed the stairs. A play written in a post-modern style before the post-modern existed, I was soon disinterested in the sappy subtext, emphasized here by the Greek muses softly singing underneath a recitation of the Bible as the act comes to a close. I did like the main character, which was played by a deaf actor signing his text as another actor shadowed him and spoke his lines but this was not enough to overcome a text that I was not compelled by.

Balancing Against Anchor Pieces

I interviewed Kate Godman, an artistic associate who has worked in casting and artistic relations for the last seven years, and has been with Intiman for nine years. She described their play selection process. It begins, she said, with two or three “anchor” pieces, pieces that Bart Sherr, the artistic director, based on his directing interests. After he selects those plays, the artistic personnel begin to discuss the plays that would balance them in both financial requirements and thematic content. Staff is included in making suggestions, including associate artists, the managing director, and the director of communications. Intiman used to have a literary manager, but due to downsizing they no longer have one. This means that while they accept new work from agents, it is often a long time before a script is read and “the chances of those submissions making it into the final season are pretty remote.” The board does not approve the season selection, but Godman describes the relationship between the board, managing director and artistic director as close. Because of this, the board is kept apprised of the planning process and it is unlikely that they would have a problem with the final selection.

Currently Intiman is in the fourth year of a five-year play series called the “American Cycle,” which features “ambitious, large-scale productions of plays and adaptations of classic literature” meant to “advocate for literacy,” “encourage an informed citizenry,” and promote an “inclusive conversation about American values and our national heritage” (www.intiman.org/tac/goalspartners.html). The American Cycle has included *Our Town*, *Grapes of Wrath*, *Native Son* and this season’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The creation and implementation of this program has meant that one of the productions of Intiman’s season is already decided, and becomes part of what

Godman describes as their “anchor” pieces, while other plays are selected in relationship to this pre-selected play.

Mission

The mission statement plays a smaller role in Intiman’s selection process than at other theatres I contacted. Godman asserts that while their mission statement drives their selection of “work that speaks to the community, that has some ambition, that is exciting and vibrant,” ultimately “that’s all a matter of taste or preference. You could look at a play and one person would say it fits [the mission statement] and another might say it doesn’t.” Godman does not find the mission statement very restrictive, because their mission to produce ambitious work that speaks to the community ensures that the plays they are interested in producing will fit within that mission.

Marketing

Marketing is also not a large factor. While Godman admits that sales are something that the artistic director might think of, they do not drive the play selection process. In the past, when they have programmed “safer” plays to sell more tickets, the audience has been “irritated,” says Godman “because they feel like they’re being pandered to, or they expect more. Which is great, about our audience, that they’re demanding and have an intellectual rigor, and they don’t appreciate the fluff.” Godman defines “safer” pieces as those considered by the theatre community to be the “more conservative programming choice,” such as comedies like *The Mystery of Irma Vep* or *Round Thirds*.

Diversity

Godman was the only person at any theatre I interviewed that unequivocally said Intiman considers ethnicity and gender in their programming choices: “Part of our mission is the community pillar, and part of that is making sure that the voices we hear on the stage and the points of view that are represented are as diverse as they can be.” When asked about the difficulty in casting diversity, Godman admitted that casting ethnicity can occasionally hinder a play’s selection for inclusion, but points out that this could be true of a particular specialized talent, such as singing, as well.

Balance instead of a Slot-based Philosophy

As at several of the theatres, the timing of each play determines where different plays will fit best. Godman explains “we want the season opener to make a big bang, we want certain shows to fall during the school year, so they can get the matinees in, the schools in.” Intiman’s extends through the summer, which is unusual in Seattle. “You have to be careful what you program in those two summer slots... the chances of them coming in for a deep, wrestling piece like Beckett is maybe not going to be the best fit.” The discussion of slots is limited to which play fits best in each time slot.

Intiman does not use these time slots to determine what types of plays they consider, they use the time slots to determine which order the plays they have already selected should be presented in. In fact, Godman believes that Sherr, the artistic director, is “resistant to the idea of slots because he feels it to be constricting.” However, she admits that may be how it comes out when they are looking at the season in terms of balance. She gives an example: “if we feel that two of the anchor pieces are classical pieces, and then we might say, well, where’s the new writing slot? We might think that

way, but we don't talk that way." Instead, Sherr is "much more about the journey, the conversation. The building of all the pieces that fit together," like a "puzzle." Godman identifies the most difficult thing about programming as "finding balance." That can be "a balance of budget, a balance of stories, a balance of voices, perspectives." She compares it to a "huge scale that you're trying to get to balance, and on each side of the scale there are so many variables that you feel like you're adding in little teeny weights every time you throw another thing into the mix."

Relationships to Other Cities

Sherr, the artistic director, often directs in other cities, particularly in New York. I asked Godman if his New York productions affect his play choices at Intiman. She said that while he has talked about bringing in productions he has done there, he is more interested in beginning a show at Intiman and letting it grow and develop into a piece for New York stages. "Intiman can be a very safe place for the development of new work. It doesn't have the spotlight of New York; it doesn't have the pressure of the critics." She cites the audience as a key factor in that play development process, saying there is "a very smart audience, and they're also interested in the process. If they understand which many of them do, that work starting out will change, and they're part of that process, they're very excited about being part of that." She calls Intiman the place "where he [Sherr] gets to experiment and try new stuff. As an artist, you've got to feed yourself and keep yourself excited to do the work." For Intiman and Sherr, this means the ability to experiment without the pressures of a New York audience and in front of the more understanding Seattle crowd.

Godman talks about Seattle as a community that exists in relation to larger market but at the same time the community is proud of their own unique contributions to theatre. Godman asserts: "I think that's just an ongoing contradiction that regional theatres face, that the audiences do want to exist in some relation to the bigger market, but at the same time they do really value local work." While Intiman "will have an ongoing commitment to nurture local writers," they "have to exist in relation to bigger markets." This is one more factor that Intiman is addressing in terms of their concept of "balance," including work that has a relationship to the larger audiences.

New Work

Development of new work each season includes no more than one or two new works because of their "high risk factor." The risk is not only in the unknown potential audience draw, but also the time pressure: "Sometimes, at the point at which you commission them, you don't have anything. You don't have a script, you just have an idea, maybe a source material. You don't really know how they're going to play out." Godman described a recently commissioned work based on a book, *Nickel and Dimed*: "When we commissioned that adaptation, when we brought Joan Holden on to write it, she had eight months to create that piece. You can imagine the risk in that. We're not going to see the full piece until pretty much the end of rehearsal." She says that while that is a terrifying prospect, often the audience is thrilled with the results.

Intiman's programming process is based on the artistic director's "anchor pieces," and the remaining plays are selected to balance those plays in terms of the stories, voices, and diversity of perspectives. Currently, one of the anchor pieces is pre-determined by the American Cycle. Unlike Seattle Public Theatre, marketing and the

mission statement play small factors in this balancing act, as do their continued nurturing of specific projects and commissioned works.

ARTIST'S REPERTORY THEATRE (ART)

Organizational Profile

Artist's Repertory is a theatre in Portland that started as a theatre collective, where artistic decisions, like play selection, were made by a group of people. In 1989, they decided that they needed to have an artistic director, and they hired Allen Nause, who is still the artistic director there today. The organization lists nineteen staff members on their website (www.artistsrep.org) and has a budget of about 2.2 million dollars as listed on Form 990 from 2005 (www.guidestar.org). They are not a LORT member, but operate under the Small Professional Theatre contract (SPT) with Actor's Equity Association (AEA), the professional theatre actor's union. They are a mid-sized organization, and are bigger than Seattle Public but smaller than Intiman.

After a two year capital campaign, ART moved into their current location in Southwest Portland in 1995, and later expanded to two stages with administrative space in 2005 after purchasing the entire city block. I admired their administrative and theatre spaces. The theatre is located downtown, sandwiched in among the concrete. The entrances were unremarkable, the building a plain brick façade. Inside, however, the space seemed expansive. Both theatres were of a size that managed to feel intimate and spacious at the same time. They seemed nearly identical to one another, each with a thrust space at the floor and seats going up on three sides. When Nause gave me a tour, some lighting was being adjusted in one of the spaces. The set was intriguing, a floor of squares wherein each square tilted in a different direction. I was immediately

intrigued to watch actors negotiate that terrain, though I was sadly unable to stay and watch the show.

Mission

Nause was friendly and forthcoming in describing the play selection process, and I felt that he has been refining his opinions over his seventeen years of practice. He spoke extensively of the importance of the mission statement in guiding his decisions.

The mission states:

Artists Repertory Theatre is a professional, not-for-profit theater company dedicated to challenging artists and audiences with plays of depth and vibrancy in an intimate setting. Artists Repertory Theatre explores the strengths, frailties and diversity of the human condition primarily through regional premieres, commissioned works and selected classics appropriate to contemporary issues. Artists Repertory Theatre is dedicated to enhancing the artistic culture of Portland and the region by establishing and maintaining education and outreach programs consistent with the artistic mission of the theater (www.artistsrep.org).

Nause spoke most specifically about the words “challenging” and “intimate.” The plays that they select “must work for their space,” meaning that they can be performed in a smaller venue. He does not view the mission statement as restrictive, merely specific. “What’s important to us is that the play does have that intimate experience. That it is a play that really engages the audience on an emotional level. That it does challenge us, because challenge is part of our mission.” As Langley (1990) states, the mission statement is the basis for the artistic decisions made by the theatre, and Neuse’s play selection process confirms this. Nause does admit that the mission statement restricts

some plays due to its demand for intimacy, specifically those that are large and lavish, that require creation of a spectacle. He gave the example of *Oklahoma*, saying: “You can’t imagine that play being done in an intimate environment and having an intimate experience with it.” As a result, Artist’s Repertory Theatre does not generally do musicals, particularly the traditional large-cast, Broadway variety.

Balance as a Meal Metaphor

Nause also spoke at length about putting together the season as a whole. He compares the season to a seven-course meal, wherein “you wouldn’t want to serve barbeque with stir-fry,” but this also does not mean that the season should have an easily identifiable theme or overarching concept. Instead, a season should be balanced and varied. “You want each course to have textures and flavors and smells and presentation that are unique, but it should all fit together...It can all be very different, but it should be a whole of some kind.” This metaphor for what “balance” in a season allows for a myriad of variations yet strives for a presentation as a whole neither necessarily larger nor smaller than its parts, but serves instead as a through-line. Of course, he says, “we need a variety of things; people don’t want to see five of the same really wrenching dramas that just lay your heart on the table. We need to find a mixture of things.” This is similar to how someone wouldn’t want to serve five different chicken dishes, but instead include soup, salads, and dessert.

Still, using a metaphor to define a concept does not totally clarify what “balance” means for a season. Nause admits: “the idea of the season as a whole is more of a feeling than something specific.” He further stated that finding plays that “fit our mission,

fit our space, fit our budgets, and are plays that we really feel that we want to do” is hard enough without having an overarching theme or concept.

In trying to describe a “season as a whole,” he discussed how the balance between the plays to create a “meal” must also take timing challenges into account. He explained that the opening slot was one they tried to fill with a well-known play or playwright, because the weather in Portland is generally good so people are less likely to think of going to the theatre, and kids are going back to school so people are busy. He said that “the reason those shows [*Crucible*, *Metamorphosis*] did well for us in that slot is your single ticket buyers are a little tougher to sell, so we need a lot of group sales,” and classic plays or well-known plays are often easy to market to school groups. The November-December slot was likely to be filled with the most family-friendly fare of the season, when families are visiting one other, children might be home for the holidays, and people are looking for things to do as a family. By January, audiences are ready to settle in for a thick drama. Ultimately, “it’s all just theories and we use it as a guideline.” For their closing show, they want a show with “legs”, meaning “it has the ability to be extended...that is good for us financially. So we’re thinking about all those things as well as just those plays.” Essentially, while the slots serve to guide the placement of the plays, they do not serve as rigid rules.

People Involved in the Selection Process

Play selection at Artist’s Repertory Theatre is ongoing. Nause relies on his associate artistic director, literary manager, other “key staff” and an advisory group made up of actors, directors, playwrights, and theatre academics. This advisory group was the group that originally made programming decisions, and Nause kept the group

when he was hired. They now do some play research and have readings of plays: “They act as a network and they’re not merely a play reading group, but they are a group of people I feel understand our mission.” However, Nause makes the final decision after he has consulted with all of these people.

Like all the theatres I interviewed, the board is not really involved in the programming decision. Nause explains: “When it gets to things that are outside our normal budgeting, then I really alert them, get their advice, get their buy-in. If they haven’t bought in, then we could have problems. I try to get them excited about it.” Otherwise, if he does not perceive any unusual demands being made in a season, he does not generally alert them before making his decisions.

Nause oversees all productions, assists in casting, and directs some shows in each season. “In theory, I often get to choose what I’d like to direct and what I’d like to participate in...however, it doesn’t always work that way.” Instead, he negotiates with his associate artistic director, who also directs several shows a season, and his guest directors, who have their own scheduling needs.

Marketing

He says he does not, however, consult with the marketing department at all, which was not unusual in my interviews. He says it is too hard to find plays that fit their criteria without considering the demands of marketing. He does acknowledge:

I think our marketing people would like nothing better than for us to pick a season that had this theme that they could look at and say, ‘This is what our season is.’ I would rather give them a season that does everything that we need it to do and then we find the themes. I don’t want to be restricted by that.

Even having said that, he later said that if there is a play he wants to include is difficult—not popular, unknown, difficult to describe—then “you might try to balance that with something in the season that’s going to be more popular.” This prevents him from programming an entire season filled with unknown or difficult plays, even though their mission emphasizes contemporary issues. Additionally, the slots he described were clearly driven by the kinds of audiences they were trying to appeal to; for example, determining which plays are more well-known in order to place them in a particular time within the season.

After discussing several new plays that are currently receiving attention in theatre, he laughed and said: “We in the theatre, we have all these ideas about plays and what’s hot, and the general audience, that’s just not on their radar.” It is thus even harder to achieve balance if you are not certain how particular titles might balance against each other in terms of popularity.

Availability of Rights

They have had increasing difficulty in obtaining rights to plays they would like to produce as “other theatres have become more like us” and there are multiple theatres attempting to obtain rights for the same play. In addition to negotiating the timelines of various playwrights’ agents, they have recently found themselves in competition for scripts with other local theatres such as Portland Center Stage. When Portland Center Stage was first created during Artist’s Repertory’s sixth season, they primarily performed more classic plays such as Shakespeare, Shaw, or Chekhov. While the competition is higher, this does not change the play selection significantly, because Nause often will make the decision to try to produce the play before obtaining the rights.

Diversity

In terms of ethnicity or gender being a factor in the process, Nause says “sometimes.” They are “cognizant of trying to have voices that represent society, community and culture as a whole...first we’re looking for the best plays, and then out of that we want to make sure we have our community represented in our work.” Diversity is also not a factor in terms of available actors. While he acknowledges that casting multi-ethnic actors can be difficult in Portland, this does not prevent him from considering scripts that demand them: “If we find a script we want to do, we say we’ll do it and *then* try to find the people.”

Guiding Principals

When asked if he consults any reference material, Nause said that he didn’t know of any. Instead, he referred back to the various elements in our conversation, and indicated that “we have these things that are really guidelines, where nothing’s hard and fast and for every rule something will come along and break it. But we use those guidelines.” He looks first at the mission statement, finds plays that fit those guidelines, are appealing in some way, and balances each play against each other in terms of their popularity, their tone, their technical requirements, how well they might fit in a particular slot, and how they interact with one another. He makes his initial decisions and then begins the process of negotiating for the plays that he wants, occasionally having to substitute one for another. The hardest thing about season programming, he says, is “having a deadline.” The process never really ends, as they are continually thinking ahead to seasons two or three years from now.

PROFILE THEATRE

Organizational Profile

Profile Theatre is a small theatre, which has only recently grown from one to three paid staff members. Their budget is about 330,000 dollars (www.tcg.org/tools/profiles) and they are not a LORT member but do operate under the Small Professional Theatre contract with Actor's Equity Association. They have an eight-member board (www.guidestar.org) and they are the smallest theatre in my research. Like Seattle Public, sustainability is a high priority.

Profile Theatre exists within the *Theatre! Theatre!* complex in the Belmont neighborhood in Portland. Small cafes and boutiques line the street, a big city neighborhood seeming to mimic a small town main street. The theatre is unassuming, housed in a building that contains two theatre spaces, offices, and connects to a tea shop and a clothing store. The 'lobby' is more of a hallway, cluttered with tables full of information about the various groups that perform here in addition to flyers, brochures and posters for many other arts events across town. Their offices are upstairs from the theatre space, with the walls covered in posters and blown-up reviews from their previous productions.

Mission Statement and Selection Process

Their mission statement is simple and clearly helps to guide the season programming. Their mission states:

Profile Theatre Project was founded to celebrate the writer's contribution to live theatre by producing a full season of plays by (or about) a single playwright each

season and is supported by a strong Educational Enrichment Program

(www.profiletheatre.org)

First a playwright is selected for the season, and then the play selection comes out of that playwright's body of work. I interviewed the founding artistic director, Jane Unger, who was the sole staff member until recently.

Unger definitively stated that she alone selects the playwrights and the plays for consideration. She explained that she might ask for other people's opinions and use people she trusts or the board as a sounding board, but she alone makes the final decision. A theatre whose mission focuses on one playwright is unique, with only one other theatre in the United States having a similar mission (Signature Theatre in New York, which specifies American playwrights). In a way, this makes her job easier because "every other theatre is looking at trying to find a balance, a little bit of this, a little bit of that. We go with one writer, and then within that writer's work we have to find a balance." Rather than having to continually balance many factors at once, once the playwright is decided the list of possible selections is automatically created.

Marketing and Financial Concerns

Choosing the playwright is thus a significant portion of the planning process. Marketing is also a big factor in the decision of playwright selection. "In deciding on a playwright, a major factor is their popularity, their ability to sell tickets. That has more to do with choice of playwright." She cites several years where sales have dipped because audiences were unfamiliar with Lanford Wilson or Romulus Linney's work.

As founding artistic director, Unger has had a list of playwrights that she has wanted to produce ever since she started the theatre ten years ago. Because only one

playwright is performed each year, the list tends to grow larger rather than smaller, and Unger feels that she will never run out of playwrights.

Another factor, similar to the marketing concerns, is the overall financial solvency of the theatre. Due to its small size, the way it has only recently begun to add staff members, and Unger's position as a founder, Unger has a vested interest in seeing the theatre continue. When I asked if she sees herself continuing indefinitely with the organization, she said: "I don't see stopping until we're at a point where I can turn it over, when I can see that it can stand on its own." She spoke of the theatre's new position in the building as the sole tenant of the space, rather than renting the space on a show-by-show basis. This has allowed them to expand their programming this year to include more staged readings in addition to the performances. This demand means that they must have a playwright with a large enough body of work to choose from, so newer playwrights with only a few plays cannot be considered. Additionally, as the sole tenant they are under more pressure to sell tickets. This explains why marketing concerns are such a large factor for them.

Diversity

Gender and ethnicity are a small factor in the decision making process, says Unger. Gender came into play with the current season's playwright, Wendy Wasserstein: "I had noticed how long it had been since we featured a woman playwright, and I had wanted to do a woman playwright for a long time, but I just was not finding anything that spoke to me." However, Unger said she thought less about Wasserstein's gender and more about her body of work.

Ethnicity is more of a factor in terms of restricting some of the authors that Unger will consider. She offered the example of August Wilson, and said that while she had spoken to the playwright about “doing a season of his plays, but it would have broken our bank account because the pool is very limited for African American actors in Portland...we’re just not equipped to do that.” Therefore plays that have requirements for large numbers of African-American actors cannot be produced, not only in terms of the playwrights that are chosen, but possibly plays within a playwright’s body of work as well. Unger says that “race isn’t the deciding factor, it’s the money factor” involved in committing to casting African-American actors.

Balance

While she said that their theatre’s mission statement allows them to avoid the balancing of seasons that most artistic directors have to worry about, there is still some amount of balancing. When I asked her what the deciding factor is in choosing a particular playwright, she said: “It’s a combination of so many things. What’s been done recently, the timing, what we’ve done before, how we want to follow it up.” Additionally, there is the concern of programming a playwright that is recognizable with a large enough body of work.

I asked if she ever consulted any reference materials when selecting the playwright or the plays. She does not necessarily favor work that has been done in other cities, and she just wants to read the plays and decide for herself if they will work for Profile Theatre. “There are many great writers in this country, in this world. I don’t need to consult something; I need to keep reading their plays, that’s what takes up the time.”

A CONTEMPORARY THEATRE (ACT)

Organizational Profile

A Contemporary Theatre, or ACT, is a large regional theatre in Seattle with about a five million dollar budget. They were founded in 1965 and are in their 42nd season. While they do not list their staff on their website, it is clearly a large organization with at least 100 employees. In 1995, they moved into their current location, Kreielsheimer Place, in downtown Seattle. Their larger stage is classified as LORT B, weekly box office receipts from \$70,000.00 to \$109,999.99; while their smaller venue is classified as LORT C, weekly receipts from \$45,000.00 to \$69,999.99 (Actor's Equity Association, 2005, p. 19). They are the largest theatre I studied and have been in operation the longest. Their mission is:

ACT's mission is to build a nationally recognized contemporary theatre, rooted in downtown Seattle that sets the highest standard for consistent quality, breadth of programming, and audience loyalty. ACT is passionately committed to theatre deeply rooted in our community, which is recognized nationally for its high standards of production of contemporary theatre. This standard is evident in the quality of artists, the variety of work, the electricity between audience and performer, the overall experience of our audience, our relationship with young, talented new artists, the quality of our staff, and most particularly in the loyalty of our audience. We are committed to enriching the cultural life of downtown and the surrounding region (www.acttheatre.org).

ACT's mission reflects a commitment to contemporary theatre, which focuses their play selection considerably.

In the fall of 2006, I saw a production of Caryl Churchill's newest play, *A Number*, which was a small, two-person show exploring parent-child relationships but complicated by human cloning. It was a well done production, with high levels of production value that did not distract but simply served the play. It was produced in their smaller theatre, which is a theatre in the round, and I enjoyed how the play wound together universal themes of the parent-child relationship while posing a contemporary social question.

I interviewed Kurt Beattie, the artistic director of ACT. He has been artistic director since 2003. Throughout our interview, Beattie was forthright and candid, and often returned to examples of the plays ACT has produced to illustrate his points. Over and over again, he returned to the idea that he is motivated to program based on artistic excellence.

Selection Process and Mission

Beattie's play selection process is to find plays that he feels are worth producing. He gathers a long list of plays together, which is then whittled down to about ten selections. At this point, he shows his short list to the staff of ACT and receives input on each play to determine the final six or seven plays. Everyone is given the opportunity to make suggestions, and a budget for each show is drafted. The board does not have a say in artistic considerations, but they do play a role in shaping the budgets. With all of that information, he makes the final decision. His decision is based primarily on his estimation of the play's quality and its ability to demonstrate their mission statement, with considerations for how the community will respond, the available talent pool of actors, and occasionally he will look to balance riskier works with less risky work.

The mission of ACT is specific and evident in their name. Beattie explains: “We’ll probably never produce plays that are written before 1900, and rarely plays that are written before WWII.” However, their mission is to produce contemporary work that wrestles with contemporary issues, so “it doesn’t mean it wouldn’t happen in the future if there were truly a great play that was really about *something*, some contemporary problem.” Beattie has thought extensively about the mission of ACT and has written out these ideas into a personal manifesto to help clarify what the mission of ACT means and how that manifests itself in programming a season.

In addition to the mission of ACT specifically, Beattie explained that there are two basic principles of all regional non-profit theatre: “For one, it’s got to create a service for the community, and two, it has to expand the art.” He believes that all non-profit regional theatres must adhere to these principles in order to be successful, and his mission statement serves to refine and direct these basic guidelines.

New plays are clearly important to ACT. They are continually developing new plays, particularly within the Seattle community. This year, they produced a show by a local writer called *Mitzi’s Abortion*, to which Beattie proudly says: “*Mitzi’s Abortion* was written by a local playwright, which is almost unheard of, to produce a local playwright.” Beattie was quick to say that it is the quality of a play that prompts him to produce it, and being homegrown, while appealing, is secondary.

Marketing Concerns and Audience Appeal

Marketing considerations are heard and understood, but are sometimes ignored in favor of producing work Beattie feels is important, like *Mitzi’s Abortion*. “To have the word [abortion] in the title is box office death,” he says, but he knew that when he

programmed it. The play did not do as well as they would have liked, but “marketing is encouraged to respond, and last season we ignored it. We wanted to say to the public, we’re a theatre that’s interested in being ahead of the curve, not behind it.” In the same season, they produced *Pillowman*, *A Number*, *Miss Witherspoon*, and Steve Martin’s adaptation of *The Underpants*. “They’re all pointedly about cultural problems and conditions. They’re made so they’re not just comedies but they’re comedies about dark problems in the world. So the overall season was pretty aggressive.” In the end, the audiences did not come in the numbers they expected. Beattie theorized that perhaps “they didn’t want to be on the edge so much.” He does not apologize for this, and is clearly proud of the art that was produced.

However, Beattie does not neglect thinking about what might appeal to his audience entirely. He was excited about the introduction of a Tessitura database, which he describes as “a very elegant tool for really knowing your audience.” This database has the “ability to cross reference people in terms of their attendance history, activity of donors, and a lot of other things is vast compared to what has been available to us before.” Currently, they are working to build up that database, but he does not feel it will necessarily impact the programming process. It will simply give them the ability to predict better how a particular show will do and do adjust their budgeted ticket sales per show accordingly. In his thirty-five years of professional theatre, Beattie doesn’t “know anybody who has a crystal ball and can look into the future and can accurately predict the success or failure for any given play,” and Tessitura is merely a tool to aid in the prediction.

Diversity

For Beattie, ethnicity and gender do not play a role in his selection process: “I would say the most compelling piece of art gets my attention.” He explains:

I’m a man, so I have inevitable limitation, just as a woman has inevitable limitations. We’re creatures of our sex to a certain extent, and we are blind in certain ways. I can’t understand totally what it is to live inside a woman’s skin, and a woman can’t understand entirely what it is to be a man, either. Art allows us to sort of dwell in each other’s brains and bodies. It is transformative in that respect. I’ll just accept that I’m not God and I miss a good play because I am limited as a human being as we all are. But I know that if I’m truthful with myself, I’ll be able to recognize something that really means something to me.

He repeated through the interview several times, “I won’t program cynically.” He requires that each play in his season be something that he responds to. The ethnicity or gender of the playwright is not important. This does not mean that his programming becomes one-sided, focusing only on one voice. This season includes three plays by women, Claire Booth Luce’s *The Women*, Sarah Ruhl’s *Clean House* and Alice Childress’s *Wine in the Wilderness*. Beattie discussed at length how one of the themes for this season was examining how the position of women in society has changed as depicted by the 1930’s *The Women* to *Clean House*’s modern portrayal.

Beattie recognizes his personal limitations in being able to program multi-ethnic theatre that speaks to a diverse audience, and created the Hansburry project. The Hansburry project is an autonomous theatre that exists within ACT and “is a professional Black theatre company dedicated to the artistic exploration of African

American life, history and culture” (www.acttheatre.org/community). He created this with a University of Washington professor, Valerie Curtis-Newton, who specializes in African American theatre because, as he explained, the community has lost many of its smaller theatres dedicated to diversity. He wants the Hansburry project to develop and grow based on the black community: “If it develops a white audience, fine, but I don’t care about that. It’s really about—can it connect with a community? And grow to really share the building with us to their own full season, or move out and take up roots in the community.” He does not feel that the Hansburry project prevents him from including “hyphenated writers” in ACT’s regular season, however, he says he will program “any writer of any ethnicity in which the play is good and speaks to us.”

Local Talent

The local talent pool can have some effect on the play selection process. Beattie clarifies: “sometimes there’s a reason for doing a play because there’s a great actor who can do it.” The actor is the only part of the process that is absolutely essential to theatre making, and “that is a good reason for doing a play, because it gives a great actor the chance to make great art.” Similarly, if he does not feel that he can cast a play based primarily on his local pool of actors, it is unlikely that play would be included in the season.

Balance and Risk

Unlike some of the other people that I interviewed, Beattie did not speak in terms of addressing the season as “balanced,” but instead discussed thematic qualities that drew the plays together. I asked if he develops these themes, like this season’s themes

about the position of women in society, while making his selections and he responded: "Maybe, but I think a lot of times it's more serendipitous than that. The zeitgeist is throwing up these interesting connections that are about the time and place that world culture is at, and sometimes it's about seeing those connections." The themes are developed and conceptualized after the list of plays has been narrowed down to the short list.

Beattie researches plays and attempts to predict their success, but predicting success is a minor factor in his programming. Beattie admits that he thinks about the riskier plays within each season, but views risk as unavoidable: "risk is essential, few have ever made anything good without it." It is more important to program plays he feels are important to produce rather than program in fear of ticket sales. Additionally, plays are not produced or received identically, but vary from community to community: "Each production of a play, no matter how successful it's been elsewhere, is a unique thing." He travels and watches other theatre's productions of shows that he may have programmed already or is currently considering, but seeing a poor production of a show he believes will do well at ACT does not dissuade him from continuing to include it.

Beattie does not believe that a season should be "balanced." He explains what the definition of balance means to him:

A balanced season means I'm going to do a couple comedies because I know people like comedies, and then I'm going to do one kind of aggressive new work, and then I'm going to find some redemptive stories to throw in there so that basically they'll come away from the season feeling redeemed and uplifted, having had a good time and be interested in coming back. That's what a

balanced season means in a lot of programming and regional theatre. I don't think that's very interesting.

He says that often people use a meal metaphor to describe a season: "You get a little soup, then you get the main course, and a salad, and then you get the dessert."

Instead, he prefers "to think about it like a journey through a magazine, where you might get a comic short story, but you get a related article about the Sudan, like a good edition of the New Yorker." He views himself as an editor, culling the best of what is around at the time and deftly working them together into a whole. This is different then trying to find plays that balance one another in various ways because Beattie is instead drawing on the best material that is available at the time. For example, he would not be compelled to program in equal number of comedies and dramas if he felt there was a dearth of good, compelling comedies that year.

This is reflected in his evaluation of a season, to which he definitively replied: "If the work was artistically good." I asked him if he does any kind of monetary evaluation, and he answered: "I always feel bad if a play doesn't sell tickets." He admits that the board and development team will be unhappy about poor sales, because it falls on the shoulders of the development department and the board to help get that money in the door to help make it right" and balance the budget, "but if the artistic quality of the work isn't good, nothing else can be right." Budgeting is part of the season planning process, but if the shows do not do as well financially as budgeted, this does not effect Beattie's evaluation if a season was successful or not.

When asked what the most difficult thing about programming was, Beattie named the inability to predict success: "It's the fact that you know that no matter what you did

well or poorly last season, it's not going to have much relationship to what the next season is going to be." He says "it's very hard to know, categorically, or to create a successful calculus based on your own experience, that's going to predict success in programming." The world is constantly changing, and a successful programmer needs to be flexible in recognizing what is happening in the world and how to respond to that. "Evolution is going on constantly...it can be revolutionary and interesting to do an old play, it doesn't mean that you are necessarily going to produce something that was written last year." Above all, while he attempts to be well informed to the possible outcomes of any production, he is committed to his two guiding principles for any non-profit theatre: to serve the community and expand the art.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSIONS

INTRODUCTION

In this research, I identify and explore the impact of multiple factors on season selection for specific professional theatres in the Pacific Northwest. Comparing the data gathered from my interviews to the data from my literature review, I had some interesting results. Often the data was consistent, such as how the mission statement is the foundation for the season selection process, or how new work is risky and difficult to include in a season. Financial concerns, outside of marketing, were much less of a factor than the literature suggested. Marketing played a slightly larger role for the

theatres I examined, but often the information was used to make decisions that were not solely financial.

In my interviews, the process of selecting the season was frequently viewed as the “sacred space” of the artistic staff. The factors that go into the selection process are filtered through the artistic director, who is responsible for the final selection.

GUIDING FORCES: MISSION STATEMENTS AND THE ORGANIZATION

Mission Statement

The mission statement is the foundation for the decision-making process. All of the participants cited their mission statement as a factor in play selection. In fact it was the only factor from the literature review that was used by all of the theatres I interviewed.

Some used their mission statement to guide their process more than others. Roscoe with Seattle Public described their process of refining their mission so that it could more accurately reflect their theatre and serve to guide their process in the future. This is consistent with the literature: “the mission statement should describe what the organization does, whom it serves, and what it intends to accomplish” (Bernstein 2007, p. 69). Because their mission statement was not accurately reflecting the theatre, it was refined. Profile Theatre is heavily guided by their mission statement, which limits their programming to one playwright per season, with the intent to explore the playwright’s body of work.

ACT and ART both cited their mission statements as defining the parameters of the theatre’s identity. ART highlights the scope of their productions, emphasizing intimacy. Nause returned often to the mission statement in explaining his rationale for

factors that he uses in his decision-making process. Limiting their repertoire to contemporary work defines ACT. Beattie returned often not only to ACT's mission, but also to his personal reflection about what their mission means in programmatic decisions. He also cited the non-profit theatre model as being defined by the existence of their mission, which they are required to fulfill.

Godman with Intiman was the only person that did not cite the mission statement as critical to play selection. She discussed the mission as prompting diversity and offering a starting point. At one point, Godman explained that mission statements are open to interpretation, that it is "all a matter of taste or preference. You could look at a play and one person would say it fits [the mission] and another might say it doesn't." This may be in part why she did not cite the mission statement as a factor as often as the other participants did. Even though she believes that mission statements are open to interpretation, she also feels that the artistic personnel at Intiman interpret the mission statement in a similar way.

The mission statement was the foundation of programming choices for four of the interview participants, and it was a factor for the fifth. Additionally, my work with Lord Leebrick theatre was based in identifying plays to fulfill their mission. My research shows the mission statement as the first and most important factor guiding the decision-making process.

The implications for theatre organizations are that a strong mission statement that clearly defines the theatre will be much more helpful than a theatre statement that is vague. According to the literature, the season is the representation of the theatre's mission, and often the first way potential audience determines the theatre's identity. If

the mission statement is not clear enough to guide the decision-making process, then the resulting season selection may not offer a strong sense of identity, making it difficult to define the parameters and purpose of the theatre for the staff, the audience, potential donors and potential granting agencies.

The Role of the Board

The board as an entity played little to no role in determining the programming for the season for any of the theatres I contacted. At most, Intiman stated that they keep their boards abreast of developments in season planning. For ACT, the board plays a role in deciding how much money can be budgeted for productions, which effects the process in a minor way by limiting the scope of some plays in consideration for inclusion. This is consistent with Langley's (1990) assertion that the board will make financially based decisions, but no artistic director felt that the decision-making process was swayed by needing to appeal to the board for approval. In fact, using the word "approval" was clearly the wrong choice of words in phrasing my questions, because several artistic personnel interviewed had a visible reaction to this word. Roscoe with Seattle Public and Unger with Profile Theatre were both quick to explain that while they maintain close relationships with their boards, the board in no way functions as an obstacle to producing their desired season.

The literature suggests that boards make decisions that are financially motivated, and the theatres I examined want to protect the artistic integrity of the mission statement. This suggests that the board's role should be clearly defined in the artistic decision-making process. What kind of input should they have? How can they voice their concerns about a season they might disagree with? Should they always follow the

artistic director's choices? How much should the artistic director keep them aware of the decision-making process? When it is appropriate for them to object to a season selection? Each theatre should answer these questions for themselves and make all staff and board members aware of them, in order to avoid potential problems. If an artistic director spend a considerable amount of time and research selecting a season they feel best illustrates the mission statement, only to have the board protest their choice, then this could result in resentment and continued hard feelings. A theatre operating under Roscoe's assumption, the board "set the mission for the organization and then hire [artistic directors] to see that mission fulfilled," should be sure everyone understands this.

The Role of the Managing Director and Other Staff

The amount of staff participation in the decision-making process varied from none at all for Unger at Profile Theatre, to ACT, which opens up their short list of plays to garner opinions from the entire staff. In all cases, while opinions were solicited from various staff members, the theatres studied expressed that it is ultimately the artistic staff's decision.

This is similar to the role that the board plays in the season selection process. It was implied or stated by all people I interviewed that the involvement of the staff in the decision-making process is at the behest of the artistic director. The literature, the foundational role of the mission statement, and the very minor level of involvement the board or staff plays suggests that the artistic director's season selection process is viewed as a sacred space. People outside the artistic staff must be invited to participate

in the process. I did not interview organizational staff outside of artistic personnel, so I am unable to determine how they view their role in this process.

If an artistic director were programming seasons deemed impossible to produce or inconsistent with the mission, the staff and board must step in. However, my interviews show that all the artistic staff I interviewed are aware of the need to follow the mission statement and also create a season that is possible to produce. Additionally, they are not unaware of financial concerns, which I will address later in this chapter. All of this supports the idea that season selection is entirely within the domain of the artistic director, who often will seek outside opinions to balance the various demands of a season, but is not required to.

DIVERSITY

Diversity of Local Talent Pool

Profile Theatre and Seattle Public cited the availability of ethnically diverse actors as an obstacle to their inclusion of more diverse works. My observation of the season selection process at Lord Leebrick was that the process was definitely affected by the perceived availability of diversity within the local talent pool. Smaller theatres are challenged in programming ethnically-based plays in communities where the local talent pool is extremely limited because the artistic staff is not confident in their ability to cast these plays.

For example, Intiman emphasized that diversity of ethnicity as well as talent affects available casting pool. Artistic Director, Godman explained: “Say we were going to do *Streetcar Named Desire* and set it in Latin America, and expect to get twelve Latino actors. That’s not realistic.” Godman also offered her perspective on the

challenge of casting multi-ethnic plays in Seattle: “I’m sure the talent is there, but it is whether they’ve decided to make this crazy business their life’s work.”

Artistic Directors at both A Contemporary Theatre and Artist’s Repertory Theatre felt confident that if they programmed a play that required a diverse cast, they would be able to cast those roles based on the local talent pool.

All theatres in my research are located in the same two cities, yet theatres from both places had different perceptions on the availability of multi-ethnic actors. For example, in Seattle, Seattle Public and Intiman cited ethnicity as an impediment for selecting a play due to casting concerns, while ACT did not believe this to be the case. It also varied in Portland. For instance, Profile Theatre cited ethnicity of the cast as a large factor in the decision-making process, while ART said it was not a factor at all. It is possible that the relative size of the organization and the amount of money they pay their actors could be a factor for the actors deciding whether or not to audition for those theatres, but that is outside the scope of my research.

The Brustein-Wilson Debate

Profile, ART, ACT and Seattle Public Theatre all stated that they are first looking for the best plays before they consider the ethnicity of playwrights, the themes of the play, or the casting needs within their seasons. This perspective is consistent with Brustein’s assertion that producing the best art should come before any other factor. However, all of the theatres expressed a desire to have a range of voices portrayed on their stages, not just in ethnicity and gender, but also in age or perspective. This is not part of the initial selection process, but after the season has been selected it is reviewed to prevent a uniformity of voices. This is consistent with the research in identifying a

need to speak to a broad range of community members without having a set formula for their inclusion.

ACT theatre clearly supports the Wilson prospective, however, in their creation of the Hansburry project. The Hansburry project gives artistic control in the creation of African-American theatre to African-Americans, as Wilson calls for. The intent of the Hansburry project is to appeal to African-American audiences.

Intiman is unusual from the other theatres interviewed because they include considerations of ethnicity and gender explicitly in their decision-making process, as is demanded by the “community pillar” portion of their mission statement: “Part of that is making sure that the voices we hear on the stage are as diverse as they can be, and the points of view that are represented are as diverse as they can be. So yes, we do consider that in programming.” (Godman, personal communication, March 28, 2007) Godman was not clear how this worked when selecting specific plays, she merely identified considering diversity a factor in the process.

Artistic directors are aware of the need to address diversity in some capacity, but of the theatres I interviewed, all but one rejected the notion that diversity should be a major factor in the decision-making process. Participants who did not include diversity as a significant factor spoke of a desire to first produce the best plays and secondly addressing diversity needs after that or not at all. This illustrates Brustein’s argument: artists want to produce the best plays available. What this suggests to me is a need to continue to develop resources for minority playwrights. If there are a greater number of good plays by minority playwrights, this could increase the numbers of minority playwrights who get produced.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Size of the Organization

For the theatres I studied, the size of the organization corresponded to their concerns about sustainability. The larger theatres, ACT, Intiman, and ART, acknowledged that they do look at financial information, but it does not heavily affect their selection process. The smaller theatres, Seattle Public and Profile Theatre, both cited marketing and financial concerns as important to their selection process due to the need to sustain the organization. The greater the amount of resources at the organization's disposal, the less likely they were to give great weight to financial concerns.

Interestingly, the size or age of the theatre did not correspond with any other factors in the theatres I examined. Seattle Public, one of the smaller theatres, cited their position in relationship to other theatres as being important for defining themselves. They define themselves in part by how they are different from the larger theatres in Seattle. This was not true for Profile Theatre, the smallest of the theatres I looked at, but the only one to place little weight on the context of their surrounding community as a factor in the decision-making process.

ACT and Intiman, the largest of the theatres I studied, have achieved national recognition as a regional theatre, but they respond to their profile in different ways. Beattie at ACT talked at length about the organization's desire to employ local talent and respond to the issues within the community, while Godman at Intiman talked at length about Intiman's relationship to other communities.

Whitehead's (2002) notion about the institutionalization of art partially contradicts my research results. He argues that our non-profit regional theatres have become institutionalized, with the art pushed to the side to serve the needs of sustaining the organization first. In my interviews, I found that the larger theatre organizations were less concerned about sustainability and less likely to cite financial concerns as a basis for their artistic decision-making. Profile Theatre is only ten years old, and Seattle Public has existed in its current form for seven years. Both of them cited marketing concerns and financial stability as a large part of their decision-making process. By contrast, ART is 25, Intiman is 35 years old, and ACT is 45. Intiman was the only one of the three to cite marketing concerns as a factor, and while all of them use ticket sales in evaluating the success of a season, none of them cited this as largely influential in determining the next season's offerings.

Whitehead (2002) also claims that decisions about the art itself are moving more into the hands of boards and administrators, which was not the case for any of the theatres I examined, even if they were more concerned with financial stability. The board played almost no role in the decision-making process. Administrators were sometimes involved in the process, but their role in season selection was not a large factor.

My research is consistent with the RAND report, *The Performing Arts in a New Era* (McCarthy, 2001) that shows large, professional and small, community-based performing arts organizations growing at the expense of mid-sized organizations. Profile Theatre and Seattle Public Theatre are mid-sized theatres, and sustainability is a much greater concern for them.

The size of the organization determines the amount of resources they have to produce plays and how much time each staff member has to devote to various tasks. For example, Profile has only three staff members. A greater percentage of staff time must be devoted to maintaining the organization, possibly taking away from time to research and read plays for season selection. The smaller a theatre is, and the less its resources and the more demands are made on each staff member, and the less proportionate amount of time the artistic staff can devote to the season planning process. This could change their evaluative criteria, like for Seattle Public and Profile Theatre, favoring financial results because they are easy to access and tangible, unlike artistic criteria for evaluation.

Local Talent

The available local talent was a factor in all of the theatres I interviewed except ART. Nause at ART explained that he programs his season based on the mission and the balance of the season as a whole, and trusts that he will find the actors to fill the roles.

For ACT, Beattie occasionally programs a particular play because he believes it will be a good fit for his local talent pool, highlighting their desires or talents in a collaboration to create good theatre. Similarly, Unger at Profile Theatre cited a desire to program plays that will better fit the available pool of actors. Because it is cost-prohibitive to cast actors from out of town that will require housing, both of these theatres cited the need to keep costs low as an additional rationale for selecting plays that match the skill set of the local actors.

Godman at Intiman also expressed that there was a need to keep the number of out-of-town actors low for cost reasons, but did not emphasize the need to appeal to the local talent pool. Instead, she phrased it in terms of making sure that they have a minimum number of plays in a season that require special skill sets leading to a need for out-of-town actors.

The availability of local talent impacts the decision-making processes both in which plays are considered and contributes to the financial burden of a production if it requires out-of-town talent. Theatres might consider ways of continuing to develop their local talent pool to ensure a diverse and large resource and minimize the impact of the local talent pool as a factor in the season selection process.

CHALLENGES TO NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT

Demanding Resources

The literature review suggested that new plays demand considerably more resources than other plays, and most of the theatres I studied supported this assertion. However, all the artistic staff I interviewed expressed that including new work was desirable to them as artists, even if it was unsustainable at their organization.

Roscoe at Seattle Public said that developing new work was currently unsustainable by the theatre. Godman at Intiman explained that new work submitted to them often goes unread for a great length of time, because they have downsized and eliminated their literary manager position.

ACT and ART, a large and mid-size theatre respectively, both regularly produce new work because their missions demand it. However, both Beattie and Nause recognized that producing new work is risky, and often they will attempt to offset that

risk by ensuring that their season also includes plays that the audience might be familiar with. Both theatres are committed not only to producing new work, but expressed a desire to include regional new work and nurture local playwriting talent.

Profile Theatre includes new work as appropriate, depending on the playwright selected for that season. This season, they are doing a reading of Wasserstein's new play. Once in their third season, Profile has collaborated with the selected playwright for the season to develop new work, but this has not yet been repeated.

New work continues to have a disadvantage in being considered for inclusion in a season, and the reasons given in the theatres I spoke with were related to the perceived risk of the audience reaction and the resulting financial risk for the organization. This is consistent with the literature. From my research, the best way to include new works in a season is to have a mission statement that demands their inclusion.

MARKETING AND DEVELOPMENT

Name Appeal

Name recognition of the playwright or title of the work can alleviate risk. Godman at Intiman used the example of a commissioned work in 2001, *Nickel and Dimed*. Adapting the play from a best-selling book of the same name alleviated some of the risk involved in producing a new work.

For Profile Theatre, the name recognition of the playwright they select for the season heavily affects their ability to see tickets. Unger gave the example of Lanford Wilson, who she found to be surprisingly unknown by Portland theatergoers. Ticket

sales for that season were very low in comparison to better-known playwrights such as Wendy Wasserstein and Terrance McNally.

At Seattle Public, the name recognition of the playwright is less important than the emotional tone of the piece: “It might be a name, but that doesn’t necessarily mean it’s a draw. Sometimes a name can work against you.” In this example, she described an instance of a well-known contemporary play, *Wit*, being placed in their opening slot that is more financially successful with a play with a lighter tone.

For ACT and ART, Beattie and Nause acknowledge that while they are aware of the name recognition of the playwright, this has little weight in their decision to program a play.

In all these examples of the effects of name recognition, the artistic personnel are making assumptions about the knowledge of their community. In the case of Profile Theatre, Unger underestimated the popularity of Lanford Wilson, even though she does use name recognition as a factor in her decision-making process. Therefore, predicting the popularity of a playwright could be as difficult as predicting the popularity of a particular play. It is possible the name recognition of the playwright changes how marketing departments might change their approach in marketing a play, thereby possibly changing the financial success of a play and effecting its perceived success. However, this would not change the decision-making process of the artistic director in selecting that play, only in how they might evaluate it, which is outside the scope of my question.

Knowing the Audience

Knowing your audience and the larger community context of your organization is a key factor in interpreting the mission statement of the organization into a concrete season selection. While no artistic director ever suggested that the audience might participate in the decision-making process, all artistic personnel I interviewed cited knowledge of the audience as one of the keys to successful programming.

Seattle Public Theatre used the audience as a key factor in driving their re-evaluation of their mission statement. Knowing what plays the audience responded to in order to predict what might interest them in the future helped the staff and board to develop a mission statement consistent with their current audience. Additionally, they use the audience as a tool of evaluation for the success of a season. If they felt the audience responded well, or the season “raised the profile of the theatre in the community,” it is considered successful.

Intiman uses their audience to obtain feedback about the season as well. The marketing department employs the use of surveys to obtain data. Intiman has also created a group of people, self-selected, to attend the plays and give feedback, operating similarly to a focus group. This information is used to evaluate the success of a season; similar to the way Seattle Public uses information about the audience.

ART has a long history in Portland, and Nause states that some of their audience has attended since the beginning, thirty-five years ago. He has been the artistic director for seventeen years, and spoke of the audience in terms of the trust that he has developed with them over that time. The mission of ART is clear, and the audience

trusts that Nause will continue to program seasons based on that mission, as he has for so long.

Unger at Profile Theatre spoke of knowing the audience in terms of recognizing what plays and playwrights are popular in the Portland community. Her example of underestimating the popularity of Lanford Wilson is applicable here. She implied that if she had known how little his name was recognized in the Portland area, she might have considered programming a different playwright for the season. She is continually learning about her audience and refining her knowledge of them.

Beattie at ACT is beginning the process of gathering information about the audience to predict the success of a season using a Tessitura database, rather than simply using the audience as a tool of evaluation. He hopes to use the information gathered about preferences of the audience and attendance patterns in order to better predict the success of an individual play. ACT can then set a more accurate estimation of budgets and ticket sales based on expected attendance. However, he did not indicate that this information would dramatically change the plays he selects, only that the organization might get a better indication of the financial success of a season.

While the concept of “knowing the audience” was used in different ways by the different theatres I spoke to, the audience was some factor in either the decision-making process or the evaluation of a season. Because the concept of knowledge of the audience did not arise in my literature review, I did not initially consider it a factor. However, all participants addressed it in some way. I consider this a marketing factor, since that is where most of this information would come from, but it can also be classified as part of the organization's community context. According to the literature,

part of the mission statement should include whom the organization is attempting to appeal to. In many cases, this is simply a geographical area. Knowing who is attending from within that could help to further identify who the audience is and how that may be different from who the organizations would like it to be. For programming, this could mean adjusting plays selections to appeal to either the known audience or attempt to address the potential audience with different selections that are still consistent with the mission.

Organizationally Unique

The size of the theatre and the amount of resources they allocate for marketing and development may have a relationship to the influence marketing plays, which would require further research to explore. In the theatres I interviewed, the smaller organizations were more likely to cite marketing concerns as a factor. Neither Seattle Public nor Profile Theatre has a dedicated staff person to address marketing, while ART, ACT, and Intiman all have one or more persons devoted to marketing and development. This has the same implications as the size of the organizations, that smaller organizations have fewer resources to devote to any one area, which includes marketing.

FINANCIAL INFLUENCES

Evaluation

Evaluation is where financial influences play their greatest role. While all theatres were careful to note that a large component of their evaluative process is artistic, all

participants except ACT cited that they do consider ticket sales at some point in their play selection process.

None of the artistic staff that I spoke with considered the possible ticket sales of a show to be a major factor in determining their season. Several cited that it is impossible to predict what show is going to make an impact with your audience. Unger at Profile Theatre stated that it is difficult to know what the audience is familiar. Nause at ART similarly stated that people involved in the theatre underestimate how little attention the general public pays to what is happening in the theatre community. Beattie at ACT spoke of the hope of developing new databases that might better predict the success of a show, but this would not change his programming of challenging works, only allow him to better predict how monetarily successful they might be. Godman at Intiman says their audience becomes irritated if the audience gets the sense that Intiman has selected a play because it is popular and will sell a lot of tickets.

Despite the fact that ticket sales are a significant tool in evaluating a season's effectiveness, being able to predict how a show will sell is nearly impossible. As Beattie cited, what works in one community might not work for another. Each production is unique, and even within the same community, one production might connect more strongly with the audience and sell significantly better than the same show at a different theatre. Roscoe at Seattle Public considers programming plays even if they have been done recently at larger theatres, because their theatre has a very different quality of intimacy.

Because it is often difficult if not impossible to predict the success of a production, ticket sales or other monetary measurements are not a significant factor in

the decision-making process. The only significant factor in season selection that is based in possible monetary success is marketing, which is not solely a financial influence. The lack of financial considerations in the process could be partly attributed to the lack of significant involvement of the board and other administrative staff in the process.

BALANCE

Bernstein (2007) was one of the few sources in the literature that directly discusses the notion of balance:

Programming is only partially driven by the artists' and the artistic decision makers' vision. Selecting programming is a complex activity, requiring that the artistic director and the managing directors work together to solve a perpetual problem: how to create a series of programs that has artistic merit, is congruent with the organization's mission, competencies, and constraints; and serves the needs and interests of the community (p. 91).

This is consistent with the interviews I conducted, but it only describes a portion of the balance involved in creating a season. Several of the artistic personnel interviewed, including Nause at ART, Roscoe at Seattle Public, and Godman at Intiman, also cited a desire for artistic balance. They want their seasons to address a balance of things including themes, styles, messages, or perspectives. Often it was difficult for them to define what balance was.

For all the participants, there was a financial balance, including big shows and little shows in the right proportion to create a feasible budget. Some shows require a

larger budget, because of a larger cast or demands of certain production elements, and those shows must be balanced with shows that have less budgetary requirements.

In some cases it was an ideological balance, between uplifting comedies or tragic dramas. For others it was a balance of “flavors,” Nause used the metaphor of a meal—wherein you would want various flavors and textures and different courses that make up one meal or season. Godman at Intiman cited a desire to balance all of these factors.

Only Beattie at ACT theatre rejected the notion of balance in a season, defining it as a formulaic mix of comedies, dramas, and one new work that leaves the audience feeling “redeemed and uplifted” so they will want to come back next season. However, he does say that he balances riskier new work with less risky work when programming. Beattie makes the notion of a “balanced season” seem undesirable and not artistically rewarding.

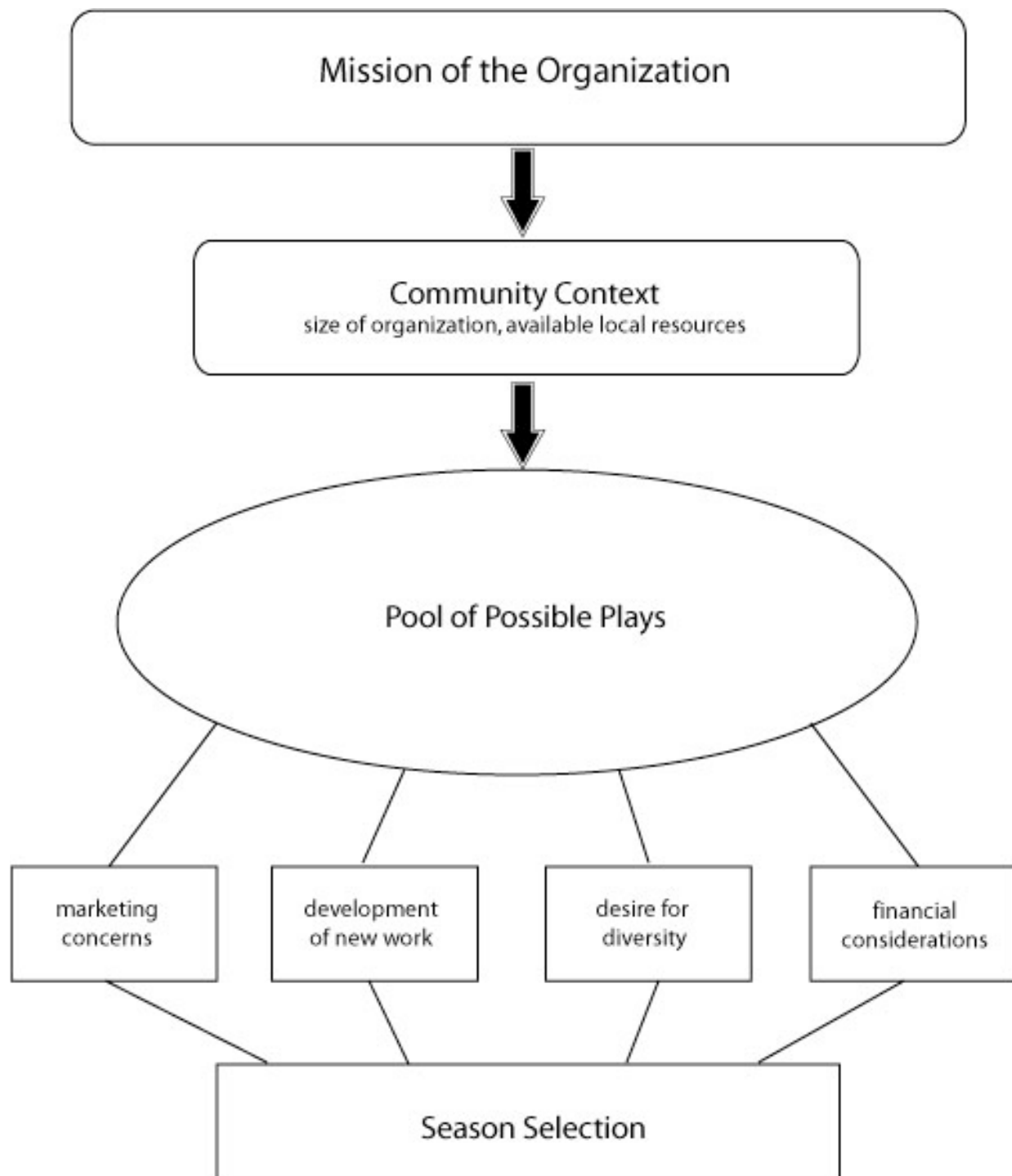
Balance is the language used to describe what I had termed a slot-based philosophy. In my interviews, slots were spoken of in terms of time slots within the season and operated much more broadly. The determination of what kinds of plays work better in certain slots determines the order of the plays more than which plays are produced. While an artistic director might notice that their list of plays to consider lacks comedies, they discussed remedying that by citing a desire for balance rather than trying to fill a particular slot. The guidelines in season programming are not distinct but amorphous and ephemeral, described only in terms of how these changing factors and artistic considerations must be ‘balanced.’

CONCLUSION

The factors involved in the selecting a season are complex and interconnected. The mission statement serves as the foundation for the selection process, but after that each theatre's balance of factors is unique to the size of their organization and their community. The various factors involved and the artistic directors, who are given a sacred space to make their decisions, determine their varying weights. I have created a flow chart representing the mission statement and the community context operating as filters in play selection, because each of these factors are limiting factors (see chart on next page).

Overall, my initial instincts that there was a tension between the financial side and artistic side of the season planning process were not entirely accurate. There are financial considerations, but they do not outweigh fulfilling the mission statement or other artistic considerations. In the theatres I examined, the artistic staff is given their "sacred space" to make their decisions, which puts them in control. While some of the theatres were more risk-averse, this affected their selections only moderately.

Flow Chart of Factors



The mission, depending on its level of specificity, will guide which plays are not appropriate for each theatre. Similarly, the community context of the organization serves as a secondary, if not completely separate filter, because some theatres address the scope of their plays within their mission statement. A smaller theatre like Profile or Seattle Public does not have the space or the resources to consider a production that would demand a large space, large cast, or a large amount of resources, so their community context would serve as an additional filter in play selection. Once those limiting factors have been addressed, the other factors, including diversity, developing new work, marketing, or financial concerns, will be applied to the pool of plays already limited by the two primary filters. Each of these secondary factors will vary in their importance as determined by the artistic director.

My theory of a slot-based philosophy was only moderately employed. Identifying time slots and what kinds of plays work well in particular time slots was the primary use of slots. This was not a significant factor in the decision-making process.

It would be impossible from my research to create a guideline for how to program a season. More research should be done to explore the connection between the evaluation of a season's success and the factors used to create that season.

Additionally, with more research into programming, theatres could be more aware of recognizing their own process and modifying it based on strategies that have proved successful in similar organizations. Sharing research about the decision-making process could also make the process more time and cost efficient. I want to see our theatres not only survive, but to flourish.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Date

Kimberly Colburn

367 N Polk Street, Eugene, OR, 97402

Dear _____:

You are invited to participate in a research project titled The Art of Artistic Direction conducted by Kimberly Colburn from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration program. The purpose of this study is to determine the factors involved in programming a theatre season.

The season of plays that a theatre schedules has a large impact on determining what kind of audience it can attract, how economically successful an organization can be, and how the theatre is perceived artistically within the community. A significant gap in research exists in determining the process by which these theatre seasons are put together. This study aims to determine what factors are involved, and whether artistic directors view these factors as positive or negative.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your position as _____ with _____ and your experiences with and expertise pertinent to developing a theatre season. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to provide relevant organizational materials and participate in an in-person interview, lasting approximately ninety minutes, between February and April of 2007. If you wish, interview questions will be provided beforehand for your consideration. It may be advisable to obtain permission from your institution and/or your supervisor to participate in this interview to avoid potential social or economic risks related to speaking as a representative of your institution. Interviews will take place at your organization, or at a more conveniently located site. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. In addition to taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I will use an audio tape recorder for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or email.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (619) 322-2030, or at kimberlycolburn@gmail.com, or Dr. Lori Hager at lhager@uoregon.edu. Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office of Human Subjects Compliance, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR, 97402, (541) 346-2510.

Thank you in advance for your interest and consideration.

Sincerely,
Kimberly Colburn

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

The Art of Artistic Direction Kimberly Colburn, Principal Researcher University of Oregon Arts and Administration Program

You are invited to participate in a research project titled The Art of Artistic Direction conducted by Kimberly Colburn from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration program. The purpose of this study is to determine the factors involved in programming a theatre season.

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You were selected to participate in this study because of your position as _____ with _____ and your experiences with and expertise pertinent to developing a theatre season. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to provide relevant organizational materials and participate in an in-person interview, lasting approximately ninety minutes, between February and April of 2007. If you wish, interview questions will be provided beforehand for your consideration. Interviews will take place at your organization, or at a more conveniently located site. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. In addition to taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I will use an audio tape recorder for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or email. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study, such as displeasing that individual's colleagues and supervisor(s).

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will be carefully and securely maintained. Your consent to participate in this interview, as indicated below, demonstrates your willingness to have your name used in any resulting documents and publications and to relinquish confidentiality. It may be advisable to obtain permission from your institution and/or your supervisor to participate in this interview to avoid potential social or economic risks related to speaking as a representative of your institution. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

I anticipate that the results of this research project will be of value to the cultural sector as a whole, however, I cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research. This research project is for obtaining a graduate degree.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (619) 322-2030, or at kimberlycolburn@gmail.com, or Dr. Lori Hager at lhager@uoregon.edu. Any questions

regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office of Human Subjects Compliance, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR, 97402, (541) 346-2510.

Please read and initial each of the following statements to indicate your consent:

_____ I consent to the use of audiotapes and note taking during my interview

_____ I consent to my identification as a participant in this study.

_____ I consent to the potential use of quotations from the interview.

_____ I consent to the use of information I provide regarding the organization with which I am associated.

_____ I wish to have the opportunity to review and possibly revise my comments and the information that I provide prior to these data appearing in the final version of any publications that may result from this study.

_____ I wish to maintain my confidentiality in this study through the use of a pseudonym.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you have received a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies. This is your copy of this letter to keep.

Print Name:_____

Signature:_____ Date:_____

Thank you for your interest and participation in this study.

Sincerely,
Kimberly Colburn
(619) 322-2030 or kimberlycolburn@gmail.com

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL/QUESTIONS

Date:

Location:

Name:

Job title/description:

Consent: ____Oral ____Written (form) ____Audio recording ____ OK to quote

Mission:

Notes:

Interview Questions:

1. Describe the process your theatre takes in season planning.
 - 1a. Who is involved in deciding what plays will be considered for production?
 - 1b. How much involvement does the board play in approving the proposal for the next season?
2. Are you directly involved in the production of plays during the season (i.e. directing, acting)?
 - 2a. Do you decide which play you are involved in (or how)?
3. Does your mission statement restrict the types of plays that can be considered?
4. Are marketing factors involved in play selection?
5. Is the budget per show divided (fairly) evenly between shows?
6. Do you consider the gender or ethnicity of the playwrights you select?
 - 6a. Do you view considerations of ethnicity/gender as important?
7. Are you more likely to include plays that have proven successful in other places?
8. Is the availability of rights a consideration?
 - 8a. Cost of rights?
9. Do you include new works?
 - 9a. Do you make any efforts to include regional new works?
10. Does the available talent pool of actors/directors/designers affect the plays that you will consider?
11. How do you evaluate if a season was effective?
 - 11a. Monetarily? Artistically?
12. Do you ever consult reference materials in programming a season?
Reports, journal articles, books?
13. What is the most difficult thing about programming a season?

APPENDIX D: SIMPLIFIED CHART OF INTERVIEW RESPONSES

<i>The Art of Artistic Direction by Kimberly Colburn</i> Simplified chart of theatres interviewed and their responses									
Mission- and how much?	Board Involvement	Community position	Role of New Work	Balance	Race and Gender	Local Talent Pool	Marketing Concerns	Financial Concerns	
Seattle Public	recently modified to guide process	none-season presented to them	smaller in comparison- appeal to local community	Not currently sustainable	financial balance for season	season reviewed for diversity of voices	somewhat	Yes, to get a better sense of audience	sustainability high concern
Intiman	can be open to interpret ation	kept aware of process, but limited	compare with NY while still appealing locally	some, no more than 1 or 2 per season	anchor pieces decide, balance against those	yes, involved in process	yes, esp with regard to special skill sets desired	minor, some surveys and focus groups for evaluation	evaluation of ticket sales after season, minor role
ACT	basis for all program decisions	none artistically, some financial input	emphasis on using local talent, selections that appeal to locals	imperative to process (mission), esp regional	no, balance implies a formula	no, best plays (but does include)	yes, to create better art	given a voice, if sometimes ignored	not neglected, but pre- evaluated vs. post
Profile Theatre	narrowly defined, heavily guides	none	No-due to special structure	occasional- depends on the season	No, because of one playwright	Not really- minor factor	yes, prohibits ethnicity and prompts selections	yes, name appeal of playwright	yes, ticket sales considered
ART	yes, defines para- meters	alerted to unusual plays, otherwise no	long history, strong identity	yes, esp regional	meal metaphor	Cognizant, not driving force	Not a factor	none	some, desire for group sales/school

Note: Boldface denotes strong contradictions to the literature, italics where the literature is conflicting

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