

NPN Announces Mentorship Grants

Five NPN Partners received support, totaling nearly \$25,000, to pursue professional development opportunities for their staffs.

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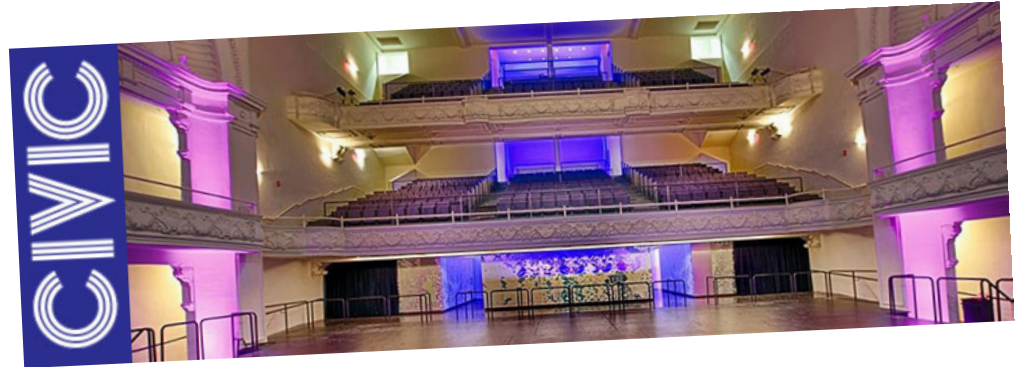
Center for International Theater Development Coordinates Russian Trip

NPN's CEO/President MK Wegmann traveled to Russia for three weeks this spring to learn about the contemporary performance scene and opportunities for exchange.

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Thank You!

NPN is proud to announce a \$2,000 grant from the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Foundation to support the upcoming Annual Meeting in New Orleans.



ANNUAL MEETING *New Orleans* DECEMBER 12th-16th 2013

NPN to Feature Creation Fund artists at Annual Meeting

As a part of its Annual Meeting in New Orleans, NPN will feature four companies who received Creation/Forth Fund support. The performances are free to the public, at the Civic Theater:

ArtSpot Productions (New Orleans LA)
Go Ye Therefore

Sean Dorsey Dance (San Francisco CA)
The Secret History of Love

NY2 Dance (Washington DC)
Oasis: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Arabs & the Middle East

Holcombe Waller (Portland OR)
Surfacing

Six New Orleans performing artists will also share the stage and will be announced in the November issue. Performances are Friday, December 13 at 5:30 p.m. and Saturday, December 14 at 3:30 p.m.

Mentorship and Leadership Initiative Awards Support New Learning

Six NPN Partners were recently awarded grants of up to \$5,000 to support professional development tailored for the needs of each organization.

Alverno Presents, Milwaukee WI
alvernopresents.alverno.edu

Alverno Presents/PICA Peer Mentorship Exchange

Marielle Allschwang and PICA's Roya Amirsoleymani will attend the annual NPN and Arts Presenters meetings in order to organize and present their own panel events. They will be mentored by Erin Boberg Doughton of PICA and Rory Trainer of Alverno Presents.

Flynn Center for Performing Arts, Burlington VT
www.flynncenter.org

Leadership Champlain Class of 2014

The Flynn's Madeline Bell will attend the Leadership Champlain program to learn more about community issues in the greater Burlington area, develop leadership skills, and grow a network of local peers and colleagues.

La Peña Cultural Center, Berkeley CA
www.lapena.org

Engaging our Community, Building our Future

Newly appointed Executive Director Kristen Sbrogna will be mentored by retired Executive Director (now board president) Paul Chin, and former Development and Finance Director Manuel Alonso.

Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA), Portland OR
www.pica.org

Emerging Leaders

Roya Amirsoleymani, along with Marielle Allschwang, will attend the annual NPN, Arts Presenters, and New York performance festivals to exchange skills in performance presenting and community engagement with Alverno Presents. They will be mentored by Erin Boberg Doughton of PICA and Rory Trainer of Alverno Presents.

Sandglass Center for Puppetry and Theater Research, Putney VT
www.sandglasstheater.org

Tour Coordinator Mentorship

Bill Menezes, consulting tour coordinator, will mentor Michael Hanish, new Sandglass projects coordinator, in the procedures, strategies and methods of booking and coordinating a touring theater project.

The Mentorship and Leadership Initiative, as part of the Community Fund, is made possible by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, MetLife Foundation, and American Express.



MetLife Foundation



Beyond the Capitals 2013

A Trip to St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Omsk and Moscow, Russia, May 13-June 3, 2013

by MK Wegmann, President and CEO, National Performance Network

To summarize a trip that was a solid immersion into contemporary Russian culture is a daunting task. I have deep appreciation for our colleagues, hosts and translators who facilitated this trip for us: Philip Arnoult, from the Center for International Theater Development, Susan Stroupe, associate director of CITD, and Yury Urnov and Maria Kroupnik, theater professionals from Russia who tirelessly translated and interpreted in every situation, at any hour and were with us every step of the way.

By my count we saw about 30 productions or staged readings and had an equal number of meetings and guided tours of theaters, museums and arts centers. The breadth and range of individuals whom we met covered the gamut: theater leaders, professors, cultural ministers; directors, actors, visual artists, choreographers and dancers; students, young and emerging professionals, established and internationally recognized leaders in their fields; and those deeply entrenched in the classics, the highly experimental, and populist song and dance.

Each city we visited was a distinct and different cultural experience; first St. Petersburg, then Yekaterinburg, followed by Omsk in Siberia for the Young Theaters of Russia Festival (work of emerging theater directors, not theater for youth) where the most challenging and political work was presented, ending in Moscow. Except for the Irish company Brokentalkers' production of Blue Boy, every production we saw was in Russian. In a few cases we had scripts to read in advance or follow, or written summaries of the play, or they were familiar classical texts. We saw at least four interpretations of Chekov's Three Sisters, including the exhibition of designs by Dmitry Krymov at the New Manezh Exhibition Hall in Moscow.

Two highlights of the trip were the meals in their homes hosted (and cooked) by Milena Avimskaya, artistic director ON.TEATR in St. Petersburg, and Maria Kroupnik, independent art manager in Moscow. And in Yekaterinburg, the end-of-the day reception turned into singing together where we found both common and individual repertoire as a



Opening scene from *Katya, Sonya, Polya, Galya, Vera, Olya, Tanya...* created by Dmitry Krymov



From left to right: Kathy Randels, ArtSpot Productions, MK Wegmann, Susan Stroupe, Center for International Theater Development, Kristina Hayden, public affairs officer in the U.S. Consulate in Yekaterinburg and Natalya Druzhinina, our Yekaterinburg host. At a dinner in her home, hosted by Kristina Hayden.

real point of connection with our counterparts.

In each city we also had the opportunity to meet with government officials at different levels, reinforcing the “cultural diplomacy” aspect of this trip, which was supported by the Bilateral Presidential Commission: American Seasons in Russia and CEC ArtsLink. Meeting with Susan Katz on our first day in St. Petersburg gave us a context for exchange between Russia and the U.S. Then we were graciously hosted in her home by Kristina Hayden, public affairs officer in the U.S. Consulate in Yekaterinburg, where we had a chance to informally meet most of the artists and arts leaders with whom we would be meeting later in our visit. Natalya Druzhinina was our Yekaterinburg host and had invited a great group of artists and organizational leaders to the party; many of the conversations there, where we had a chance to introduce ourselves, set a great tone for the week, as we re-met people in their own settings. In Omsk we met with Viktor Lapukhin, Ministry for Culture of the Omsk region, and several of his staff. This gave a good perspective on their interest in cultural tourism and the creative economy, topics at the forefront in many U. S. cities and regions as well. Our last meeting with a government representative was lunch with Maria Shustine, cultural manager for the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. I learned from her that, despite the support for this program from the Presidents of Russia and the U.S., their embassy and our embassy “don’t talk to one another.”

A valuable aspect of this trip was the overlay of cultural policy that we learned about as we had opportunity for discussions with so many different individuals from across the spectrum of the arts in Russia. Almost every conversation was a true exchange of information about our different systems of working, which felt open and sharing. (In only a few cases did I feel we were being lectured.) It was especially interesting in Omsk, when three controversial pieces were presented three nights in a row.

The works were all part of the Young Theaters of Russia Festival, curated by our Omsk host, Pavel Shishin, literary director of Fifth Theater. The first piece was Tennessee Williams late play, *Vieux Carré*, which is his most overt depiction of gay life among his plays,

translated by Pavel. Given the current effort by Putin to make it a crime to even mention homosexuality to young people, the fact of this production, however flawed Williams’ script might be, is evidence of the courageous curation of this festival. The next evening’s production of *Blue Boy*, a devised, interdisciplinary work by the Irish company Brokentalkers, took on the issue of the oppression that comes when a religious institution becomes intertwined with the government — an issue just beginning to gain traction in Russia. The third production was the most controversial, *Damned be the Traitor of His Homeland* performed by Slovensko Mladinsko Gledalisce from Ljubljana. We saw this production on its second evening; the first night provoked controversy and protest from the audience, some of whom walked out. There was speculation whether there would even be a second performance and if there would be an audience for it. While not a sold out house, the second performance was preceded by a curtain speech by a respected theater critic who contextualized the work in the tradition of political theater. Rumor also raised the question of whether Pavel Shishin would keep his job.

I mention this festival in detail because censorship was a question that was on our minds as we learned about the systems of support for theater in Russia. Since theater is still highly subsidized by national, local and regional governments, and we got answers all over the spectrum when we asked about the prevalence of censorship, the impact of these three pieces was of interest to me. This festival stands out for its risk-taking. In many other instances, the effects of self-censorship were evident and several individuals did acknowledge the problem (though many denied it, too). And overall, most of the productions we saw, if they were experimental, were experimenting with form, rather than content. The structure and environment of the pieces were challenging, but the ideas were not.

Most impressive, everywhere, was the size and enthusiasm of audiences. Most houses were full, and many times people were turned away, squeezed in, or standing-room only. And this seems to be true across the board: we were in St. Petersburg for “Museum Night” which is held in most cities in Russia on the same night in May. We walked to the “always New Year’s Eve” bar that night and passed numerous



Gogol Theater in Moscow, stripped of its classical ornamentation.

museums at midnight with long lines waiting to get in. I am impressed by a culture that embraces the arts so whole-heartedly.

Overall the systems for producing and presenting work are very different from ours. Two factors in particular seem to have the most impact: the extensive government support and the repertory system of presentation. Government subsidy exists in the form of operating support and new arts organizations do seem able to start and grow into that subsidy. Project grants also seem to be available for individuals and/or emerging organizations. Hearing about theaters with staff and acting companies numbering in the hundreds took our breath away.

Almost unknown (and untranslatable) were the concepts of community engagement and social practice in the arts. Of course, if you only define community engagement as a means of increasing your audience (as is often the case here in the U.S.) and you feel powerless to have an impact on social change, the idea of citizen-artist would not rise to the top in terms of awareness, especially if your life as an artist was not marginalized by your community. That, on reflection, is one of the most striking differences between our two systems: while there may be dissatisfaction with the status quo by many artists and arts leaders, they do not struggle for either support or validation in the way we do. The large amount of public dollars supporting cultural practice in Russia is clear evidence that their role in society is valued and appreciated (if they don't make too much trouble, of course).

Change in the Air

There is a strong sense, however, especially from younger leaders,

that their system is stultified and in need of revolutionary change. We certainly heard and saw this repeatedly. The very existence of ON.TEATR, which had just lost its basement space to gentrification when we were there, created as an alternative to the established institutions in St. Petersburg to nurture young writers and directors; our meeting with Engineering Theatre AKHE; the National Centre for Contemporary Arts in Yekaterinburg; the performance of Hamlet at the Kolyada theater; the discussion with Tiit Ojasoo and Paul Agurauja from Theatre Nogg from Tallinn, Estonia; the meeting with general director Alexey Malabrodsky and Anna Shalashova and production of Brothers at the GOGOL Center, which has physically stripped its historic theater of every evidence of its classical ornamentation and transformed its acting company; the round table at the School for Theatre Leaders in Moscow who wanted to learn how we do things in the United States, where we heard “we get nothing from struggling for our rights,” and “We trust no one. No one is trustworthy”; young people desiring a different system but baffled about how to make change; and the performance of Katya, Sonya, Polya, Galya, Vera, Olya, Tanya... created by Dmitry Krymov, followed the next day by his guided tour of his visual design exhibition — these are all examples of people and organizations who are creating change in the arts in Russia.

Connections for the Future

Collaborative projects and partnerships are most successful when the relationships are strong between and among individuals. This trip to Russia was the next step in the building of relationships between the 15 or so individuals who are part of the Beyond the Capitals project. From the point of view of the National Performance Network, touring opportunities for U.S. artists do exist in Russia. The many international festivals, which are the most consistent form of “presenting” in Russia that I encountered, seem eager to welcome U.S. artists. The structural problems of financing and the lack of support in the U. S. to help artists get their work abroad and the lack of knowledge about U.S. artists by Russian festival directors are two large barriers. Several of the Russian artists we met have been to the U.S. including AKHE in St. Petersburg who performed in the Under the Radar festival, and Tatyana Baganova in Yekaterinburg who has been to the American Dance Festival.

At the National Centre for Contemporary Arts in Yekaterinburg there was definite interest in hosting U.S. artists. This center is part of a network of contemporary arts centers in Russia, which are very similar to ones in the U.S. such as the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans, DiverseWorks in Houston and others. NPN has found that a network-to-network model lays a good ground for artistic exchanges in other regions of the world. We look forward to the fruits this trip will bear for future opportunities.