

Roundtable Discussion

DIRECTING, PRODUCING, AND CREATING ARTS IN THE SMALL CITY

This discussion, edited and transcribed for publication, took place on Thursday, March 26, 2009, as a keynote panel of “Whose Show is it, Anyway? Community-Engaged Performance and Exhibition Arts in the Small City” a Community-University Research Alliance Conference held at Thompson Rivers University.

Participants represented a variety of arts organizations and university theatre departments across Canada: James Hoffman (Thompson Rivers University), Mike Youds (Kamloops Daily News), Derek Rein and Samantha MacDonald (Project X Theatre), Kathy Humphreys (Kamloops Symphony Orchestra), Ted Little (Concordia University), Ted Price (Theatre North West), Alan Corbishley (BC Living Arts), Annette Hurtig (Kamloops Art Gallery), Robin Whittaker (St. Thomas University), Lina de Guevara (Puente Theatre), Bruce Barber (NSCAD University), Lori Marchand (Western Canada Theatre), Erin Hoyt (Thompson Rivers University), and Ken Blackburn (Campbell River Arts Council).

The panel was moderated by Dr. James Hoffman, chair of TRU’s Visual and Performing Arts Department.

James Hoffman: A big welcome to everybody to the world’s largest panel. The theme of this panel is *Directing, Producing, and Creating Arts in the Small City: Engaging the Community*. That is also the theme of the conference of which this panel is a part.

A week or two ago, I sent participants a note about the panel and I asked them to think about a few guiding questions. I’ll read a couple of them. How do you reach the wider community? What’s the effective way of making art to truly have a meaningful impact in community? What local issues can you, and should you, be connecting with? What does your arts organization understand by community engagement? Are there operational issues in your organization or local problems that inhibit this engagement? As far as process goes, I’ve asked them each to speak for three to four minutes – just enough time to get a good thought out. Then we’ll open up to include the audience.

Mike Youds: I’m, of course, the sole media member on the panel here so I imagine my perspective might be a bit different. I’ve been covering the arts in Kamloops for the past eight years and it is not a full-time occupation by the nature of the small city newsroom. You are kind of stretched in several different directions. I think that if an arts reporter brings a genuine interest and passion to the subject, it’s possible to do it justice. Unfortunately, that’s not generally the case at most newspapers in most cities our size because they have resource limitations.

The arts, in my view, are integral to society – not just because they are part of our quality of life, but because they are also part of our identity, collectively and locally. I think we have a very vibrant arts community here and it's been a golden opportunity for me to be able to cover it.

Within most media organizations, you need to have an individual who carries the ball for the arts because, in the politics of the newsroom, they are quickly forgotten otherwise. The predominant view is that the arts tend to be elitist and therefore are not necessarily of interest to the general readership on the front page. You wind up becoming almost an arts organization unto yourself within the newsroom, and there are advantages and disadvantages to that.

Just as an example, I attended a recital last night presented by the Kamloops Symphony which was quite an impressive performance by one of the leading violinists in the country. I'd intended to review that today, for tomorrow's publication; however, a few things got in the way. One was the weekly arts section, which had to be produced in the morning, and then the Leader of the Opposition, Michael Ignatieff, was up the hill—I also cover federal affairs, so I was up to cover that. At the same time, a Chase resident, who had managed to get himself arrested in Calgary last week for trying to arrest George W. Bush, called me. This was a story that was not only local, but national in interest, so I had to pursue that. As a result, there was no time to write the review. And in the end, there was no space for it either.

I think, despite the fact that newspapers find themselves in difficulty these days, it would be shortsighted to cut off that conduit for arts coverage. I believe it is part of what could enable newspapers to survive.

Derek Rein: Samantha and I, as co-artistic producers of Project-X Theatre, produce an outdoor Shakespeare festival in Prince Charles Park locally. I want to talk about the opportunities for creating arts in a small centre. I think the big benefit of Kamloops is that we have the opportunity to create our own opportunities here that might otherwise get lost in the shuffle in a bigger centre. I feel we are very fortunate that we are able to produce the kinds of shows we are passionate about.

The struggle may be finding an audience to some degree, but, artistically, I think we are better artists for what we are able to produce. In terms of engaging the community, part of our mandate is to actually put our community on the stage. We use a number of local actors, a lot of whom are students here at TRU or actors in the community. We feel we give them a professional theatre opportunity without their having to leave the community. With our festival in the summer time, we are creating tourism and economic opportunities as well in this small centre – shining the spotlight on what Samantha has coined “the pass-through city.” We want to make it a stop-over as opposed to a drive-through community.

Samantha MacDonald: I want to cover our particular perspective of what community engagement means. For us it's very inherent in what we do because we can't operate as a small theatre company in this community without engaging our community. It's kind of hard to separate it from what we do. Our vision of community engagement is creating art that our community can relate to. Ultimately, our goal is to create something that our community embraces as its own so there's a sense of ownership and there's a sense of pride. We've really felt over the last few years, particularly with X-Fest, our Shakespeare Festival, that our community is doing that. We said last year, “Okay this is it guys. This is our make-or-break year,” and our community came through one-hundred-and-ten percent. We had a fabulous summer and that was because of our community.

That's about community engagement and yes, as Derek said, we do bring local artists in and involve them in the shows. But I also think we involve the people in our community. I think it is about that sense of ownership and it's about the pride that our community has in what we are doing. I think it's, too, for all of us, about the awareness in our community. Sometimes people don't know what is going on. There's so

much happening in this community and it's absolutely unbelievable once you start looking at what's going on. That's about community engagement as well.

I just want to touch very briefly on what Derek said. Some of the challenges, as a small company in a regional place, that we face are lack of resources, competition with other entertainment, and for us, I think the big one is probably more sports than other arts organizations. I think, for the most part, arts organizations in this community work incredibly well together. But sometimes we do have a tough time when there's a Blazers' [hockey] game on.

The other thing for us is getting overlooked by larger funding bodies because we are a regional organization. A lot of arts organizations in this community face that because we don't get the visits from the art funding bodies. That is a challenge, particularly with new initiatives. Derek and I are now in our fifth year of doing summer Shakespeare and we are finally seeing a return. We are finally getting government funding – not a lot, but a little bit – and it's great, but it is a huge struggle.

But again, all of that leads to us needing to be more engaged with our community and that is something we work towards every time we put on a production, whether it's outdoor summer Shakespeare or whether it's a collective creation piece talking about school shootings. Whatever it is, we are trying to find ways to talk to our community and have them talk back to us.

Kathy Humphreys: I recall attending an Orchestras Canada conference a few years ago; I guess at that time community engagement was called “outreach” more often than “community engagement.”

It was almost like many of the orchestras had never figured out how to connect with their communities. We'd hear people say, “I don't know if we can talk our conductor into listening to the audience.” Of course, those of us in the smaller community have a different point of view. It's just a part of what we are to talk to our audience and to build the trust that they have in us. Our community and our audiences are only going to be there if we provide them with things that are interesting, engaging, maybe a little bit innovative. We give them some variety in our public orchestral concerts. We give them good quality.

It's some of the other things that we now do in the community that are more, I think, what engagement is about: extra things that other organizations in other communities might not consider doing. We do things like operate our own Kamloops Symphony Music School because it connects us with a whole group of people in the community or strengthens our connections with our existing community. People in our audience are now adult music students; people who are at the music school now become audience members. The music school is a place for our musicians who are also part of our community to teach and reach others and a way of helping us as an organization to attract musicians to live and work in a small place like this.

We started the Chamber Music Series a couple of years ago in response to requests by our musicians, because no one else in the community was offering them. In a lot of other places there's a Community Concert Society or some other group that takes on that role. Obviously it's something the community wants. If they didn't want it, they wouldn't come to the performances and it wouldn't work. I think we have to be responsive to all our stakeholders, and that's not just the audience, but includes the audience who, a lot of times, are many other things to us. They could be students, they could be donors, they could be volunteers, board members, or members of other organizations that we partner with. The connections are extensive, and developing them and touching people in the community – doing something that is meaningful to them – I think that's what engagement is really about.

Ted Little: I have to start with a confession. I live in a big city, although I was born in a small city that

was so small that it became a village during my life. So I think that's about the smallest you can get. I want to make a pitch for intercultural theatre. I'm working with culturally diverse communities in my teaching and in my professional work in the theatre. We do a lot of work in neighbourhoods so, yes, I want to ask your indulgence to sanction neighbourhoods and culturally diverse communities as small communities for the sake of the discussion.

The company I work with is called Teesri Duniya Theatre. We do four kinds of activities. We do main stage professional Equity shows. We do what we call artists-in-communities projects, which are rather like the way the Canada Council frames artists working: professional artists working with community members or communities. We do new play, new forum development, and we publish a magazine that talks about the kinds of work we and others do across the country. I have found that's been a really great experience – to work with those diverse forms. I think that's partly why we are able to reach out. I recognize that no project is ever the same. The rules don't really apply. I used to think there was a formula. And a lot of us were introduced to the Colway Theatre form in terms of community engaged work and it gave us a kind of a blueprint.

I think most of us probably work more from values and principles now than from any kind of blueprint. For me, the essence of that are intentions and values: the intentions that I might have in working with community or starting a project and the kinds of values that are represented in the work we do. That might be an aesthetic or an artistic choice as much as anything else we do. So we are questioning ourselves and asking the audience to go on that journey with us.

Just a couple of other things – about language. Yesterday Jim and I had a discussion about community-engaged and community-based and how those words shift and what they mean to different groups. I think the exciting thing about the work is that it is really grounded in various communities. That language will always shift because groups are inventing themselves, re-presenting themselves. They are shifting, and so the language shifts. You have a bit of a tower of power, I think, when you look at popular community-engaged forums across the country. I think we are finally in this very big country beginning to have the kinds of networks – emails help and conferences like this help –where we can come together and talk about these things.

I really wonder about volunteerism now. This is changing, in my experience, very much. I think it calls for us to re-examine what we are trying to do in that regard. And what we want from the volunteers, if we are doing participatory theatre. I think the form of theatre itself is often that there's too much time demand. So we are looking at how new media can help and how we might do work with oral histories that might be documented on video and then inserted into the work in various ways.

Ted Price: One of the questions was “What does your organization understand by the term ‘community engagement?’” For our organization, it's really simple. So much of what we do is so fundamental. For us, community engagement is getting them to attend. That's what it is for us, because we believe that theatre is a communal experience, so, in tandem with that, having them respond.

This was a topic we had to write quite a bit about in a recent grant application, so I'll share some of my notes and thoughts from this grant. Much of the credit for Theatre North West's successful community engaging has to go to the community itself because our community is amazingly open to being engaged. I've never lived in a community like Prince George. It's different than any I've ever experienced. People often ask me, “What is Prince George like?” because the urban media give our community such a bad rap. So to people who haven't been there and who want to know what our community is about, I say this: “Conjure up someone you have known a long time, who has the biggest heart imaginable, who is generous and obliging and kind. Now conjure up somebody that you've met sometime, who is the worst dressed,

most slovenly, and, indeed, even smells three or four times a year. Now combine those two personalities and that's what Prince George is like."

A great deal of whatever success Theatre North West has enjoyed can be attributed to its engagement of such an unusual, broadly-based audience. When it comes to regional theatres, knowledgeable observers often comment that TNW has somehow managed to cut across the conventional audience's social and economic demographics.

Programming has been pivotal in this unusually broad-based engagement. It's not that the programming has been somehow innovative or audacious; in fact, programming has moved more cautiously than anticipated. However, this caution came about as a result of an unexpected blessing. We never dreamt we would attract such enormous proportions of newcomers to theatre. When I say newcomers to theatre, I don't mean necessarily newcomers to Theatre North West. I mean new to theatre and indeed, in surprising numbers, new to performing arts.

Perhaps this disproportionate number of newcomers over the season stems from the fact that there had previously been no professional theatre resident in B.C.'s north. Perhaps more transience in the adventuresome population of the north plays into this. But the point I want to leave you with is, we were lucky to realize, early on, that how we engage newcomers was going to have a big effect on how TNW's audience was going to be – indeed, how we were going to succeed at development.

There was in fact a deciding incident. It happened in a very early season that a patron made this almost offhand comment: "Coming to the theatre for the first time is like going to someone else's church. You don't know what you are supposed to do. Maybe you'll do it wrong." Now, the arts are so much a part of our lives that I think we sometimes forget how many Canadians feel that the arts aren't really for the likes of them. This kind of insecurity is, of course, irrational, but what's important is that it is made clear to these terrific people that they do, indeed, belong. We believe that our welcoming ways and avoidance of anything that could be interpreted as pretense foster this effective engagement with theatre neophytes.

We've also learned that careful programming can help eliminate any secret nagging doubts that still may inhibit attendance. Our programming and the culture of our venue make every effort to send strong signals about a lot of things you *do not* need to attend theatre. You don't need to be an experienced or sophisticated theatre-goer. You don't need to travel in particular social circles. You don't need a particular level of education. Although we didn't realize it at the time, even our venue has helped us. TNW's home is a converted strip-mall warehouse. Our neighbours are Visions Electronics, Bubba-Baloo's indoor playground for kids, and Homesteader Meats.

These wonderful neighbours have helped us dispel any mystique about theatre and downscaled TNW's image in a very useful way. TNW strives to have the most friendly lobby and front of house you could find. We honour sale tickets, we celebrate patron's birthdays at intermission, we support their causes, and we thank them a lot. The most obvious evidence of community engagement is TNW's subscriber level. It is currently at 3,842 – according to the Canada Council for the Arts, likely the highest per capita ratio in Canada. This number represents 4.83 per cent of the population within an hour and a half's drive. By way of comparison, if an organization in Vancouver had a catchment area ringed by North and West Vancouver and Richmond and Surrey, 4.83 percent of the population would give them 74,314 subscribers. Don't let anyone ever tell you that rural Canadians have less interest than others in the arts. They only need to have access. Rural Canadians need and deserve arts as much as anyone.

The constant influx of newcomers means TNW's audience is less unified than originally anticipated. We must strive to engage an enormous range of theatre sophistication. We, in fact, have three audiences rolled

into one. One audience is the experienced and confident, the second audience is the newly converted, and the third audience is the newcomers. The constant challenge involved in programming is to engage them all. You have to attempt to nourish the experienced and newly-converted while still being palatable, even appetizing, to the newcomers. The whole time you are trying to gently expand everybody's theatre horizons. You will never serve a broader constituency in the arts than in a small city. The breadth and diversity of our constituency is enormous in a small city.

Alan Corbishley: Much of what's been said here tonight is exactly what B.C. Living Arts is about. Actually one of our core values is community engagement. All of our programming is designed around getting people involved in a creative process and redefining what creativity constitutes. I grew up with the understanding of the arts as something that you should take in. It's good for you and you get cultured that way, etc.

Having lived in Europe throughout my performing career, I've seen that there it's completely the opposite. It's a way of life. Life without the arts is almost unheard of. A little tidbit, a perspective on North American and European cultures: if we were struck with the Second World War and everything was completely demolished, the first things that we would build would be our hospitals, our government buildings – these kinds of things. In Germany, the first things that were built were their opera houses and their theatres to get people to the theatres to be a community – to come together as one to build up their morale. From that, they started building the infrastructure of the city. Here, it is the exact opposite. Why is that?

When I came back to Kamloops to start B.C. Living Arts, I started with the design. I wanted not to approach it like, "Here are some really great things that you ought to take in because they are great." It was, "What are you interested in? What is the community interested in? What inspires each individual?" Yes, we do have a performance division, which is all based in music. We do various creative things with music, whether it's theatrical interpretations, dance, or compositions. We are just coming up on our second year anniversary in April, but our programming just started in September of 2007. We've had four original productions that were created through the community and integrated national talent with local artists. So we have that division. But right next to it in our programming we have living events – hence the name B.C. Living Arts – for the community to start engaging themselves in their own creative inspirations. What constitutes creative process? We have cooking courses, wine appreciation, and literary events such as poetry workshops. We do big workshops on photography. Some of our presentations are actual performances. They are bringing in some of the nation's, the world's, best photographers.

So it's plurality within our programming that meets people halfway. Instead of them coming to us for entertainment, we are going out to them and saying, "What are you interested in?" And here's an avenue to take to inspire your own creative process. While you are doing that, let's show you some presentations that were also inspired by the same process that you are now going through – that music, theatre, and dance, and artists within our society are products of our every-day living. Our programming is very much integrated with performances and living events.

We also work hand-in-hand with other organizations in town. Because we offer such an array of things, we don't even attempt to say that we are the experts in these things. We let the experts be the experts. We partner with the Kamloops Art Gallery, with Western Canada Theatre, with the Jazz Society, and with the Film Society. At the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts, we do pre-talks to promote understanding of and education in that art form. As well, we just held our poetry workshop at the Kamloops Art Gallery and integrated the gallery exhibition into the writing of poetry. We practice getting people to locations where cross pollination of audiences can broaden our PR and the other organization's PR and foster interdisciplinary interest groups. So it helps create a community in the plurality approach, which was led by the three main organizations [Western Canada Theatre, the Kamloops Symphony Orchestra, and the

Kamloops Art Gallery] with their endowment legacy fund. So that inspired me to say, “Okay, this is a community that works together.” That’s the future of small town arts because you can’t do it alone, and the big problem is we are all looking to the same people for funding, for support.

I will say we are very blessed to have Mike [Youds] and other support, such as Western Canada Theatre in particular, who has mentored me in this company. For example, the opera broadcasts were down to between twenty and eighty people. When Mike does an article, for example, numbers rise to 120 to 230.

Annette Hurtig: Tonight I’m standing in for Beverley Clayton, the acting director at the Kamloops Art Gallery. I must say, too, that I’m very new to the gallery in my current position, although I have more than ten years working with them. But I’ve never actually been on site as a member of staff until very recently. I have some knowledge of the history of the organization and what its current activities and operations are. But it’s not deep knowledge and there may be people in this room who have more knowledge than I do.

Of course every gallery in Canada is dependent on funding. We are fortunate here in British Columbia and Kamloops to have three levels of funding: municipal, provincial and federal. Most of these funding agencies are juried by our peers, and one of the things our peers look at is our relationship with our various communities. That keeps us conscious that we exist to serve the public. At the same time, we have responsibilities to the artists with whom we work, and those are always foremost in our mind. In the best situation, those two things align and become very powerful. When you have artists who are producing work that is important and of merit, that work is going to engage people, and then it becomes the responsibility of the organization to find as many diverse avenues through which to reach the various communities the organization serves.

At the Kamloops Art Gallery, we offer children’s classes and seasonal art camps, so there are youth programs. We have a Lunch and Learn program for adults in the community. We have a modest program of public events, and all of our programming is related to the exhibitions. So the exhibitions are the foundation upon which we build our other activities.

Our public events program is modest because of limited resources. Right now we have a series of Native youth workshops that are part of building towards a presentation in a solo exhibition by Jayce Salloum. Young people are working with Jayce and other First Nations and non-First Nation artists and mentors to produce things that will accompany Jayce’s show. One of our upcoming exhibitions is a solo show by Tania Willard, a Secwepemc artist. We will reach out to that particular community with invitations and with a panel discussion on a topic that is relevant to people from that community. And, of course, as other people have said here, it’s always shifting. It changes in terms of the practice: what artists are actually doing, in our time, has become more and more engaged in relationships. And of course the organization follows.

James Hoffman: At this point I invite the audience to contribute.

Robin Whittaker (Audience Member): Something interesting happened near the end of this panel. I am directing this comment at Ted Price and Annette. I found this interesting—the idea of getting newcomers into the theatre to teach them what it is about and how it becomes interesting. I think it’s also about teaching the theatre people what interests audiences.

Alan was talking about starting from the ground-up maybe with cooking classes and wine classes. I think that probably these ordinary Canadians that Stephen Harper mentioned back in the fall might have a whole lot of art in them. It’s a question of letting them know that what they have inside of them is actually quite artistic. I sympathize with Annette—I imagine it’s terribly troubling trying to make some of these

connections sometimes. You may be an artist, but you also spend so much time as an administrator.

I'm trying to figure out how to make these outreach connections. I was really fascinated about starting from the top down—you know, I'm a bit of a specialist artist and I need to attract people to what I'm doing. But then you also try to start from the other way and you say, "Well, remind everybody they are artists." So I think this ends in a question: How do you negotiate that in the work that you are doing? "I know the work that I'm doing. I want to make it go this way." But how do you always also remember that everybody may also be interested in the idea of art?

Alan Corbishley: The reason I started from the other direction was that everyone would say, "I would never do that. I just don't think like that or I don't believe that I could create something." Then I would always challenge them: "Well you just made an absolutely incredible meal. You understood all the ingredients. You put them together. That is a creative process. You designed your garden. That is a creative process." So that goes back to when I grew up: the thought was that the fine arts were something you ought to take in. But it's really all the clues that go along the way that guide us into a creative output or process.

By getting people thinking along those ways, you are investing in your audience and therefore they are going to invest in you. As long as what you are doing is of very good quality and very integral to your own artistic process, and then pushing their boundaries and showing what's possible. We just did a production this past weekend and I got an email from someone saying, "Congratulations for doing such a modern approach to music and for believing that you could do something like that in cowboy country." It's that sort of mentality that I think needs to be blown out of the water because then you are limiting a community to a stereotype and capping a ceiling on what you think is possible.

Annette Hurtig: I think your question runs to a conundrum that we definitely deal with. It is about divergent communities because we serve the local community, which in itself is diverse, but we also serve a national community and an international community – a community of professionals. So we are always struggling to find the correct language, the effective language for those various demographics; it is difficult and it does stretch us.

Lina de Guevara (Puente Theatre): First of all I want to say that in Victoria, Kamloops is known as a very vibrant centre for the arts so it must be doing something good. So congratulations on that.

Then I have a comment. I'm the artistic director of Puente Theatre, a theatre that focuses on the immigrant experience. I've been in Canada for thirty years. There are wonderful plays all over the world – in Japan, in Latin America, in China, in Africa. In the thirty years that I've been in Canada, the only plays from those countries that I have seen on stage are the ones that my theatre stages in the limited way that we can because we are a very small company.

So if we are talking about promoting diversity, immigrant communities don't see what is the best they have created represented in the theatre. I understand why the artistic directors are scared of staging Garcia Lorca. I have proposed it many times in Victoria. I think that artistic directors have to be brave sometimes and really try to attract. There are so many immigrants from Asia – even from India, where the plays are written in English. I call for more diversity in the programming because it pains me that in thirty years in Canada I have not seen one play from Latin America performed in one of the main theatres.

Ted Little: What struck me as I was listening to these three and Robin's intervention: it's about the risk that we might take or not be able to take. It's about that financial support within communities. It's about the role of the Arts Council to support work that might challenge. You are talking about bringing in plays

that we may not have a traditional or conventional audience for, and we have to develop a new audience to meet that demographic. In the work we try to do in Montreal, we talk about wanting to see our audience look like a separate platform, with all the differences that are in the city.

But what about the art that is more politicized? How do people deal with that within a small city? We want to support artists. The whole notion of multiculturalism was fine when it was about “Let’s dress up in the ethnic costumes and let’s have exotic food and we’ll get some funding and call it a day.” But where do we support the artists that want to speak truth to power within their communities? And what is the role of arts in that regard? I guess I’m asking all of the audience and fellow panelists, how? It’s difficult enough in the large city. We are not going to find corporate sponsorships to criticize neo-liberalism on the stage. I think art has to give a bit of a kick-in-the-pants sometimes. How do you do that?

Annette Hurtig: What you are saying, Ted, reminds me of something Alan said about one of the differences between North America and other parts of the world like Latin America, Europe, and Asia where culture is an integral part of everyday life. We don’t have that here so our cultural organizations are subject to funding vicissitudes and to political vicissitudes. If we knew that we would continue to exist, we would take those risks.

Bruce Barber (Audience Member): It’s important to recognize who our communities are. We tend to reify our community just as we reify the values that we uphold – political, aesthetic, or otherwise. But we also have to recognize that we live in a context where there are some powerful forces at play that happen to distinguish between what they think is an aesthetic experience and what we think is a valuable, critical, potentially enlightening experience. These are the realities of the day. We have to recognize newcomers, not only newcomers, but all people within the community who’ve been here for a few hundred years, and those who have moved here recently, but we don’t know what kind of theatre experience they have had. Nor do we know what they can contribute to your understanding of living in a ‘hood, a small city, and a regional centre and being a participant in the global community.

James Hoffman: Would anyone on the panel like to respond? Lori, would you like to say something?

Lori Marchand: I always want to say something. I’m Administrative Director with Western Canada Theatre. We are in the middle of producing *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, and the production of *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* was really the instigation for this whole conference. We’ve had a fabulous three days with the Canadian Studies program. Echoing everything that everybody up here has said: we are here because the community wants us to be here. Otherwise there’s no way that our three organizations in particular – the symphony, the art gallery, and the theatre company – could exist in a small city of 80,000. We share audiences, we share donors, we share communities, and we share outreach activities. Samantha, in particular, with all of her job titles, reflects this: not only is she the co-artistic director of Project-X, but she’s also our associate producer, and the administrative assistant with the Kamloops Symphony. Every artist in this community interacts with all organizations. Our technicians and our designers are local and they are the technicians and the designers for every other performing arts activity in the community. It’s the reality.

Here’s something that Kevin Loring and I spoke about today, in terms of Aboriginal work in this community and actors on the stage: the reality is that we are only a certain percentage of the Canadian population. So we need to tell our stories in a way that they can be heard by the whole community. We are still telling our stories, but we do need to take into account that, in order for us to be heard, we need to make that outreach. We need to, perhaps, change the way we are telling the story.

Erin Hoyt (Audience member): I’ve had a love for theatre without having a theatre background in any of my family for generations. I’ve been trying to do theatre in small communities across BC for a very long

time. For a person particularly interested in theatre trying to make it within a small community, it's a hard go. It's kind of a cliché, but it's an artistic brain drain when it comes to small communities because if you want to contribute to the arts you have to move somewhere else. I was wondering if we could address – I'm sure they've got the same issue in Prince George – the issue of people who are amazingly creative that have to leave in order to make a living doing what they love.

Mike Youds: Well, the obvious route is through education, and I think we have a perfect example right here with the university. It has become an incubator for that kind of talent. We see it spread throughout the community. Now we didn't see that fifteen years ago, so it's working.

Samantha MacDonald: Derek and I are probably lucky: we started when it was the perfect timing for us. The city was looking for something, and we were looking for something. What fostered Project X in the very beginning was we had all these great friends in the theatre program who were having to go away and work for the summer. We thought, "Wouldn't it be great if they could stay and work here for the summer?" But what is so great is that our organization is the middle ground. People are able to come from either the community or the university. They do some shows with us and then later on they go to Western Canada Theatre. Dozens of people who have come through this community have then gone through Western Canada Theatre.

You may have to go away, but you'll get to come back and Lori will hire you to direct or act in a show. A stable of people who have started here with Western Canada Theatre are now national and international celebrities. For example, Jonathan Young, Kevin Kerr, Keith Dinicol, and Kevin Loring are all big names in Canadian theatre. We are very fortunate that we get to be a part of that and, obviously, Western Canada Theatre is a huge part of that as well.

Ted Price: The question of having to go away to pursue theatre, in many cases, only strictly applies to actors. In many towns, and in smaller ones that are fortunate to have professional theatre, there's a terrible shortage, particularly of administrators, but of all the crafts people. So it's a bigger dilemma for actors, but the opportunities are growing in almost every field except for acting and stage management. You can actually pick your town and stay there, if you are competent, for a very long time and then have a much fuller lifestyle if you are looking for that particular kind of community.

Alan Corbishley: As singers, you do also have to venture out. Unfortunately, for vocalists anyway, in the classical stream of things, it's a national problem. In opera, for example, there are eight companies in all of Canada. So you have a great many talented people all fighting for the exact same jobs in the same productions. People have to leave not only their community – it's a very specialized trade, of course – but they have to leave the country just to be able to survive and keep themselves occupied.

Kathy Humphreys: There are a lot of theatre people in this room and not many music people. There was a question at the very beginning about challenges of a community of this size. Mike mentioned the university as being one of the strengths of our community and an important aspect; at least it makes it possible to do a lot of things here. But, for the instrumental musicians in our community who are struggling to embark on a career, it's not just a matter of leaving because there's not enough of a living here, it's a matter of leaving the community to get an education to begin with. Alan is an example: he was here for the last few years of his high school education and had to leave to go to university to study music. People wanting to study music professionally have to leave Kamloops. Sometimes they are able to come back and to be part of the community again.

Another part of the music challenge is the same as the theatre challenge—not enough work here for people to make a living, unless they have a brilliant idea like Alan has or are able to do a lot of teaching.

We have a number of people in voice who come back to the community and do a lot of teaching here. But instrumentally, it's really, really difficult to work in a place like Kamloops. For an organization like ours, one of our roles is to do everything we can to develop the opportunities for musicians because of the important things they bring to the community when they do live there. We continue always to work on that.

In some art forms, it's easier to go out where the community will feel more comfortable interacting with you – where the access is easier. I think that Project X's summer theatre is an example of that. It's not too threatening to go down to the park on a summer evening and sit in the bleachers and watch Shakespeare that you had never experienced before. For an art form like the Symphony Orchestra, the challenge of doing that is tremendous. The cost is huge. The number of people you are dealing with is huge. The venues that can accommodate you are huge. The funding for it isn't there.

Ken Blackburn (Audience Member): It's no secret that small presses are under heavy evolutionary pressure right now, and, as we look at small cities and especially the gradient from rural to little to semi-small, to small to mid-small to big-small, all of those presses are definitely shrinking. I know that's the case in the North Vancouver Island.

At the same time you have a rise of a multitude of voices – in theatre, dance, film, literary arts, and fine arts – all trying to funnel a message of programming or activity into a shrinking news environment. The question is really, “Do you have an insight as a newspaper insider about how we could consolidate messaging to make it more effective to get information to a newspaper? Or should we be abandoning newspapers altogether and going to alternative media?”

Mike Youds: I wouldn't recommend abandoning newspapers. The variety across the country is surprising. Some arts organizations simply can't get sympathetic coverage, or even consideration, within the newspapers. Others are very responsive. I would suggest finding that certain individual within the organization – within the general news media – who will take an interest. Failing that, because the organizations are often too small to afford to designate those kinds of resources, propose your own freelancer. In my experience, the small organizations are all too happy to have capable writers supply the material. They may be doing it just out of community spirit, but there's generally a sense of responsibility for editors to respond.

Ken Blackburn: Next week we are having a meeting with newspapers to discuss how we will deal with this issue. Is there another strategy to get that kind of messaging out in a shrinking industry? The idea of a reporter coming has been gone for a while now, so we have been providing coverage ourselves. We are writing our own critiques and releases. But the paper is shrinking, advertising revenue is shrinking, and more and more organizations are writing press releases, so you've got a growth of press releases.

Mike Youds: I wish it weren't so, but the writing is on the wall. We know. I wouldn't recommend to my youngest son who has an interest in English and writing to go into newspapers. But there's no doubt that new media are there to fill in. The concern on a local level is that it's often not as timely or relevant. The ground is moving as we speak, and we are looking at ways to link into the new technology. Use the newspaper as your primary flagship to attract interest and then feed into the electronic media so you could then have a much more elaborate system where all players in the community could go.

Ken Blackburn: People still read the paper. This is the thing about small communities. They still read the paper to know what's going on. What you are saying, then, is to have a presence there that links them outwards.

Mike Youds: That's right. The only problem is that, fundamentally, we haven't found a way to make it pay. Until we solve that mystery, we are all on shaky ground.

Samantha MacDonald: We are very lucky here because our newspaper does a good job of covering things, but I know exactly what you are saying: there are so many organizations going after the same piece of the pie.

Here in Kamloops, about four or five years ago, the Community Arts Council put out a magazine that was a fabulous vehicle for all arts organizations. It has since gone the way of the dodo, but what has sprung up around that is a small downtown newspaper, also very supportive of the arts. Then there's another paper called the *Look Magazine*. It's a small, fairly simple weekly publication, but again, it covers all arts and entertainment in Kamloops, whether it's music, an exhibition at the Kamloops Art Gallery, or something at the smaller galleries.

If you have all of these organizations, do they work together to create something? When we used to do the *Mosaic Magazine*, it fostered a sense of ownership within the arts communities. It would be interesting to explore those options of arts organizations working together again to create something that they can all use as a medium that the newspapers are unable to support.

Ted Little: As I'm working in neighbourhoods and on participatory projects, finding volunteers – finding people who have the time to invest in these projects to reach the quality that we and they would want – seems to be increasingly difficult.

I'm considering what might be new strategies for that kind of involvement. One of the things we are looking at is adapting the form – not expecting so much of theatre: looking at integrating new media, video, for example, that allows us to create something like the happenings of the seventies. When events can be recorded, they become reproducible and have a life beyond. This satisfies the participants. The record – whether it is video, audio, however that is produced – seems to be something that keeps the momentum building. For example, if we want to work inter-generationally, with very old people talking to very young people, neither very old people nor very young people want to be in the theatre from eight in the morning until ten-thirty at night doing ten shows a week. But using new media to integrate seems to be one way to keep that perspective and breadth of participation alive.

Audience Member: There was a remarkable community activist in Victoria who died just about two years ago – Janet Rabinovich. She distinguished in her writing between participation and engagement. Participation, she said, is when I and other artists have these ideas and invite you to participate in our thing. And engagement is when we are co-authoring. In my experience, when you shoot into the co-author mode and they believe that it's not something they are helping you do, but it's actually something that is theirs and that you are working with them on, there's much less attrition. People are far more willing to commit their time. It's a way of thinking about it that I found has been a real difference.

Ted Little: There are lots of different reasons for people to get involved and to participate. Some want the responsibility of co-authorship, and others want something that is recreative. We've worked in neighbourhoods where people come because they want to practice their English and meet people outside of their cultural ghettos. I'm very honoured that they would donate their time and participate. Our theatre tends to be quite political. They are dealing with issues in their community; it seems to be quite a sacred charge to take their stories and work with them. They are saying, "You know, we really don't want to put all this time in to working out the politics of this – doing the heavy lifting on the administration project. We will trust you to do that."

For me now, every project is about attending to it: doing your homework, talking to the people, getting to know people you are going to work with. One of the lessons that I take away from this, and I suspected it before I came here, is that in the small city there's an alliance of artists. When Joy Coghill was here [at what was then the University College of the Cariboo] for the first conference on B.C. theatre, she said, "Don't forget the amateurs." Just that notion is the heart and soul of the work somehow. With the professionalization of Canadian theatre, and Equity, we threw the baby out with the bathwater in some cases. I think small towns know this. Your galleries and your symphonies and your theatre companies are all talking to each other. *We* talk to only theatre companies that are mid-size and the same as us.

Alan Corbishley: This goes back to a comment earlier about servicing your community and wanting to do a piece about Lorca, but everyone is scared to take the risk; therefore, the output ends up being monitored and, perhaps, restricted. Is it programming that is essentially regulated? How do we then push the boundaries without feeling that society is going to reject us because we are not serving them properly? But then, where is the creative process that is really guttural and instinctual? How do we balance that?

Lori Marchand: This is my own philosophy. In some respects, and this is part of the reason Western Canada Theatre in particular mentors and supports the organizations like BC Living Arts and Project X, the larger the organization, the larger the risk. So the smaller companies are the ones able to take those risks and do the Latin show – the edgy, provocative work. I think that at Western Canada Theatre we push the boundaries in what we do produce, but we certainly anchor the season.

The season has to be anchored because *Seussical* pays for everything else. That's just the reality. We are dealing with Equity performers, we are a member of PACT, so, for us, seventy-five percent of our cast has to be Equity members. Because we are a mid-size regional theatre, a cast of four is a good-sized cast. That means one, maybe one, local, non-Equity member in that cast. That's the way that we can engage performers: we try to encourage the continuum from amateur to professional – encourage development – by supporting Project-X, Saucy Fops, and B.C. Living Arts.

Lina de Guevara: It is really important for all of us to remember what I said initially: there is wonderful theatre everywhere. So your audiences would be blown away by a really, really good play from Latin America. It doesn't matter if it's from Latin America or wherever. It's a good play and it's an openness.

I understand the fear. But I know artistic directors have stacks of plays to read and I have proposed lots of wonderful plays that don't even get read because the artistic directors don't have time. We need to start opening up to the possibility of really paying attention. We should not stay over and over in the same circle.

James Hoffman: Can we have some final comments?

Ted Price: What the last two speakers said made so much sense. For medium-sized and big organizations, it's a balancing act, but I do think it is our job to stay gently ahead of our audience. Artists really respect those organizations that aren't so gentle about staying ahead. But as soon as I consider an extremely risky possibility, I start thinking of my invaluable technician who is supporting a family of five on what we are paying him. That comes into the equation as powerfully as the artistic motivations. The other thing that I think we should remember is that audiences like what they know, and it's our job to make them know more.

James Hoffman: I want to thank this wonderful panel for some really provocative comments. It's made me think a lot.