

Keynote Speech

Steve Spiegel
President & CEO

Theatrical Rights
WORLDWIDE

Theatrical Rights Worldwide
1359 Broadway, Suite 914
New York, NY 10018
(646) 736-3232
(212) 643-1322 fax
www.TheatricalRights.com

You're about to create a new civilization and for your starting point, you want a center of this new town. A town square. To start, you will build an environment where artists can converge. Poets, painters, dancers, storytellers and musicians. And, all will be fine until the government realizes that these artists influence people. So, the artists get rounded up but quickly society realizes that without art, there is no community. And without community, there is no environment for self-expression, interactivity, socialization, mentorship, personal creativity and growth, friendship, knowledge, risk taking, and yes, without community, there is no environment for debate or leadership. So, this new civilization learns the value of community, especially that of its artists. Herein lies the fabric of your society, your gathering place, your social circle, your opportunity for learning and improving. And from this realization is the birth of community theatre, a wonderful leveler of people.

Here's how significant this birth of community theatre has been in the United States:

The American Association of Community Theatre boasts a membership of 7,000 theatre organizations. These theatres involve more than 1.5 million volunteers (from actors to musicians to costume designers and set builders) and produce over 46,000 shows a year. They entertain yearly audiences of 86 million people and have a combined annual budget of over 980 million dollars. In America, Community Theatre involves more participants, presents more performances and plays to more people than any performing art. It's clearly an influential and essential component of the arts landscape. And this statement, being an essential component of the arts landscape, applies to community theatre in every corner of the world.

To achieve this standing, community theatres must promote their success stories and have a strategy to face challenges in an ever changing civilization.

These challenges include:

Audiences

We hear about erosion of audiences. Thankfully not everywhere and not equal in places that share this problem. However, if this is an issue, contributing factors include a decline in subscription renewals, difficulties in attracting single ticket buyers and a shorter window for family social event planning. Even with great product on your stage, these buying habits impact marketing departments, financial stability and box office protocols. And it's not getting easier when a typical American gets bombarded with over 3,000 different marketing messages every day. Many consumers, of all income levels say they are simply too tired to do things. They say the activity they most want is a good night's sleep.

Technology

Are we fully able to understand the impact of technology on the performing arts? While the advantages, featuring attractive websites, on-line ticket purchasing, a 24 hour, seven day a week source of marketing, information and sharing are so wonderful, technology has also emerged as our biggest competitor for leisure time. A new blog is being created every second of every day. People can get their culture on demand through You Tube and iTunes at any time they want it and at little or no apparent cost. What are the ramifications of 99 cents a song or a free download when we, producers and guardians of musicals are asking someone to pay \$50 or more for a theatre ticket?

Leadership

Over time, community theatres, like all businesses are faced with the transfer of leadership, as the founding members retire or depart.

Will new leaders bring expectations that are counterproductive to the goals of the long established environment they now control? Will they expect shorter hours, higher compensation and a shift in the artistic ambitions established by their predecessors? Can creativity prevail along side the protection of a theatre's identity?

I briefly mention these challenges, and there are many more that can be added to this list, without providing any thoughts on solutions or next steps. Those answers will come from you.

For challenges, like success stories, require daily attention, energy and know how. The spirit, dedication, talent and artistic sensibilities of those involved today, specifically all of you sitting in this room, will foster excellent health of community theatre for decades to come.

And why will you do this?

Because, a community theatre does hold a special place in that town square.

When a tour production comes to town-it's a destination.

When a performing arts venue books a show-it's a location.

But, a local community theatre is a foundation.

Nothing can be built without a strong foundation.

I've spent my entire career in the theatrical licensing industry, and therefore I've held many jobs and many job titles. In one of my jobs in the early 1990's, I was responsible for management of the amateur licensing department. At an event, the President of the company introduced me as the Amateur Manager. I was not particularly keen on how he grouped those two words, and said to myself that I'm going to have your job one day. A few years later, I did, and I introduced my staff person in that job as the manager of amateur licensing. My point is simple, amateur theatre which is community theatre, provides capable, talented, entertaining, performance with actors of all ages who love the craft and embrace the opportunity.

And as leaders of your theatre companies, I applaud your efforts, admire your vision and salute your contribution to musical theatre. The performance on your stage is top quality. Nothing Amateur about that!

Throughout my 31 years, I've been blessed in working with notable authors including Joe DiPietro, Eric Idle, Henry Krieger, Lynn Ahrens & Stephen Flaherty, Jerry Bock & Sheldon Harnick, Martin Charnin, Thomas Meehan, Richard Maltby & David Shire, Stephen Schwartz, Stephen Sondheim, Charles Strouse, Tim Rice, Dean Pitchford, John Kander and Fred Ebb, Richard Adler, Meredith Willson, Jeanine Tesori, Jim Jacobs, Hal Prince, Marsha Norman, David Yazback, and Andrew Lloyd Webber, to name just a few. And I've been responsible for licensing, copyright administration, marketing and sales for well over 400 hundred musicals.

So, I'm often asked, how did you get to where you are today?

It started when I was 10 years old and my parents took me to see Fiddler on the Roof on Broadway.

I wasn't happy that I needed to put on a suit and I didn't fully understand why my parents were so overjoyed in taking me and my brothers to "live" theatre. My parents had saved for months and bought 5th row, center orchestra seats. The music started and I leaned forward in my seat now realizing that real people were walking across the stage. And when they all started to sing, spit was coming out of their mouths! I thought, how cool is that. They're spitting while they're singing.

Surrounded by my family, it was a night of pure magic.

I mention this because there are things that happen to us, influences at an early age that land us in the business of theatre. Not sure a plumber or a shoe salesman necessarily has these same experiences.

And it's these life experiences that make Community Theatre a centerpiece to our existence; an unmatched component to the very core of our neighborhoods, towns and cities.

Truly, the words, Let's Put On A Show, are intended for Community Theatre.

During my career, I've had the privilege to work with tens of thousands of theatrical organizations running the gamut from schools to professional companies throughout the United States, Canada and around the world. Of these organizations, I'm most proud of my affiliation with Community Theatres.

Thank You for letting me be a part of your New Zealand Musical Theatre family.