

Keynote: the changing relationship between art and audiences

Andy McKim, Artistic Director, Theatre Passe Muraille

Introduction

Andy McKim (@andymckim) spends his professional life developing, dramaturging and directing new Canadian plays and since 2007 has been the Artistic Director of Theatre Passe Muraille, Canada's oldest theatre for developing new work. Andy has been awarded and nominated for several awards and has directed more than 50 different productions, mostly world premieres, the most outstanding of which is *2 PIANOS, 4 HANDS* which has toured worldwide. Andy has directed over 30 intensive, new-play workshops and worked as a dramaturg with over 120 different writers. He sat on the Toronto Theatre Alliance board (TTA) from 1993-1997 serving as the TTA President from 1997-1999 and on the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT) board from 1993- 2002 serving as the PACT President from 2002-2005.

Andy believes that we are facing the danger of a coming tsunami of indifference for the arts and that the way to counter this is to listen to what people are saying. In this session he outlined his vision for Theatre Passe Muraille, the values that they have instilled and why engaging the audience is at the heart of the organisation. By exploring what 'engagement' really is he challenged us to consider what relationship we want to have with our communities, what relationship they want to have with us, and what myriad of ways we might use to engage a diverse community of people with our work.

Audience engagement: what does this really mean?

Storytellers traditionally start their stories with a ritual in which they say 'crick' and the audience says 'crack' to check that everyone is engaged. [Shouts] 'crick' [delegates respond 'crack'].

The building (right) was originally a bakery. Theatre Passe Muraille (TPM) was established in 1968 and is the oldest Canadian theatre presenting new work. Theatre Passe Muraille translates as *'theatre beyond the walls'* and today I want to talk about engaging with the community *'beyond our walls'*. That engagement is based on TPM's history, grounded in values and built by individual acts of engagement by our staff, artists and community. Engagement is not an adjunct to what we do, it is central to our values



and we are a value driven organisation. Organisations need to be value driven organisations if they want to increase their quality of engagement.

First, two caveats. I feel odd talking to a room full of arts professionals in Britain, because I have spent decades coming here to steal your ideas. I hope that I am not bringing coals to Newcastle. I have a great respect for the innovation, variety and intelligence of what you do in this country. It fuels my professional life. In fact TPM has twinned with Farnham Maltings so that we can share projects with them, but more particularly so I can develop my personal and professional relationship with artistic director Gavin Stride. Secondly, I'm aware that I'm an artistic director talking to a room full of marketers but I cherish this opportunity to look at marketing through a different lens and also for me to look at what I do with a different eye.

We need a sea-change in institutional culture if we expect to have any meaningful impact on issues of engagement. You, as marketers, are best suited to lead that change because you recognise its necessity. However, this responsibility cannot lie solely with the marketing staff. Arts institutions are facing a huge challenge now and our ability to respond is dependent on the leadership and staff of our institutions as much as it is on the good efforts of marketers. You need everyone in your organisation to value engagement as much as you do.

When I came to TPM five years ago, it was financially bankrupt and most of the staff had left. One of the first things I had to do was sell the building to the city to pay off the huge debt. But we got to lease the building back from the city for \$2 a year. I came to TPM because I wanted to do some radical things, particularly around audience engagement and the theatre situation now meant I had a blank slate to work with. I arrived prepared with a vision and values document. I developed it with a respect for TPM's past, paired with a belief that our institution's legacy lies in the next generation. At the core of this value document was a commitment to audience engagement.

Audience engagement seems powerful and exciting to me now but there's no doubt that in the past, I undervalued our audience's and community's ability to be creative, passionate and challenging about the arts. Everyone around me reinforced this view, but now things are just beginning to shift and engagement is no longer heresy.

Engagement is uppermost in my mind at the moment. When I was in France with my colleague from Farnham Maltings, Gavin Stride escaped with his son to visit a little church, finding himself following an elderly couple. While he was following them, the woman stopped by the majestic stained glass window and said to her husband – *'there- do you see that blue pain of glass just above Jesus' head? That's the colour I want for the bathroom.'* Is that participation in the arts?!

People are participating in the arts without our institutional guidance all the time. A 2008 US National Endowment for the Arts Paper – *Beyond Attendance* -

demonstrated that while fewer people are attending the arts, more people are participating in the arts. That leads me to wonder how we can take advantage of this participation whilst we are seeing a decline in attendance at our institutions. Surely we have to engage the audience in a way which gives them more room to participate? If we can do that, we might see a rise in the attendance at and relevance of our institutions.

Helen Bartle of Creative New Zealand wrote: *'the organisation that is interactively engaged with its audiences and stakeholders has a two way flow of communication and creativity which recognises that the audience is as creative, passionate and challenging about the arts as the organisation is.'*

Early in my career, I set up my own theatre and I put on three plays. One I had written – truly awful – with a behaviourist and an existentialist stuck in a room with no exit – and needless to say, I haven't written for the theatre since. I also acted in one of the plays, which had our largest audience, including my mother, father and father's brother and my father's brother's family. It involved me having to be undressed by a woman, down to my underwear. She had taken off my hat, shirt, shoes, belt and was preparing to take down my pants [trousers] when my mother shouted *'No, don't!'* I think this may be why it took me so long to recognise the importance of audience engagement.

It was actually only recently that I realised how abstracted I had become from the audience. We were in essence broadcasting our work to the audience through a megaphone. Either they liked our work or not, but we didn't seek their opinions about what we were doing. We were the professionals and surely the artistic decisions were made as the result of years of experience and talent. Why would we need to directly involve the community? It took a long time to come around to understanding the power of engaging with the audience. For me, at TPM, this has meant developing new muscles.

TPM's first production was in a car park, with sheets for walls and car lights for illumination. As we enter our fifth decade, we look back at the creation of around 550 new plays with a rich legacy of ground-breaking theatre. In the beginning, TPM was focused on going beyond our walls to engage with the audience. Paul Thompson, the early artistic director, led TPM with a vision to do theatre in a collective creation verbatim style that was very much community engaged. When I hear this 1972 video of Paul Thompson talking about how his actors were living in the homes of the very farmers they were writing about, it motivates me because he is explicitly asking us to go out of our comfort zone to achieve community engagement.



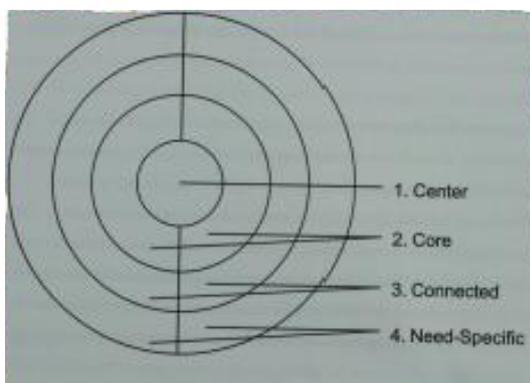
[Paul Thompson video of interview was played].

Sadly, little was done in the 40 years following to further connect with the community, so this video spoke very loudly to me when I came to write my vision and values document. In my mind, TPM had to reconnect with these historic original values. These were:

- Theatre Passe Muraille is devoted to encouraging, enhancing and increasing meaningful interactions (engagement) between its communities – artists, staff, audience, neighbourhoods and supporters.
- Theatre Passe Muraille has a special interest in supporting and presenting independent artists and companies, emerging artists, collaborative and multidisciplinary work, ethno specific and intercultural work, and marginal voices.
- Theatre Passe Muraille develops, disseminates, produces, showcases and promotes locally, nationally and internationally, work that represents and forwards these values.

Our values are in the gravitational centre of our activities. Success is measured with respect to our values. How powerfully have we realised them in action? A value driven institution can lead to community engagement.

You'll be familiar with the hierarchical organisation model which has a person at the top of a family tree like structure and everyone else in the organisation is under that person. Unlike that model, we use a 'value based' organisational model.



Concentric circles of engagement are based around a core of values. In this model, TPM's values are at the centre of these circles. All our decisions are made in order to further those values. At the centre, we also have the professional leadership, the general manager and I, who are responsible for articulating these values and that vision. The core section on the right is the full time staff and board and then in the connected part we have the part-time staff along with our employed artists. Finally, in the need-specific half-circle on the right are the companies or artists we collaborate with.

In the 'core' on the left side, we have our core audience: our donors, stakeholders and alumni. Then in 'connected' we have our occasional audience and in the 'need-specific', those who are familiar with us but don't engage with very often.

The starting point for us, as professional leaders, is to engage our staff with TPM's values. One of the ways we do this is by removing staff silos of job segregation. Each of our full time staff has the title of Associate Producer followed by their main

responsibilities, such as 'Associate producer marketing and publicity'. This means that they are part of the management team that is moving the theatre's agenda forward collaboratively. It is reinforced by two clauses at the beginning of everyone's contracts:

- All employees of TPM accept their role in and responsibility for the marketing, promotion and development of the theatre in order to further the Mandate, Mission and Values and continued health of the theatre.
- TPM understands and values the daily commitments its employees make to the organization. As such, TPM strives to provide a supportive working environment where people can learn and grow from each other and contribute to each other's success.

Most of our staff is around 25 years old and that is a choice we made. If we are going to make a connection with young people beyond the walls we need to have young people within our walls. We value giving them opportunities to have meaningful learning experiences in order to train for the next step in their careers. In this respect, we ask each associate producer to take on the task of being producer for one of the shows in our season, taking on the administrative oversight for that production. They are mentored by our general manager, assisting and intervening when necessary. We are purposefully creating future producers, artistic directors and managers who will see the value of artist and audience engagement.

I have a marketing example of how this works. Heather, our associate producer marketing and publicity was chatting with Ryan, our production manager. Because of his name, he started joking about the 'Hey Girl', Ryan Gosling memes. I was unaware of what they were talking about, but I now know the original Gosling meme idea started on a website called Feminist Ryan Gosling and now everyone is posting 'Hey Girl Ryan Gosling meme photos characterised by things women would like to hear from men, but they're also humorous. Here's an example, and by the way, Swiffer is a new brand of duster. *'Hey girl, I'll swiffer your place if you swiffer mine.'*

Our production manager Ryan suggested to Heather that TPM do a 'Hey Girl' Ryan Gosling version of me. It seemed a bit sexist to me but I trusted that they knew more about youth culture than I do. Heather did two Ryan like memes for our Buzz festival. People went berserk. We had tons of likes and comments on Facebook plus over 50 people sharing the meme from our site, not to mention numerous other sites where it was being shared as well. During these few days, more than 70% of our Facebook friends



clicked in to the page (normally 28%). All this because our 25 year-old associate producers had the idea of using my easy going public persona for a marketing tool.

It's worth mentioning here that we have a three to one social media policy whereby we only make one post about ourselves for every three posts about something or someone else – like other theatres, cultural events, pop culture or politics. We register the most click-throughs on politics.

It is fundamental that our values guide our decision making. Our staff, board, part-time staff, employed artists and collaborating companies have a copy of our four page vision and values document. We ask them to refer to this every time they have to make a decision. They end up making more decisions on their own as a result.

One area where we've had a great success is front of house. We are trying to create a lively, welcoming and inclusive environment for our audience when they enter the building. It's the flexibility and good humour of the staff which engages the audience. A great example is evident in the following postcard we received recently, seriously:

'To the girl working on the box office last spring...Even though we only talked for a minute, you changed my life for the better. Thank you.' – Shayla

Recently, I saw a Mission Paradox blog which echoed this model we have been talking about. It posted three questions which I'd like you to consider in relation to your own organisation.

1. What if the idea that could revolutionize your organization was in the heart and mind of a person you overlooked because she was at the bottom of the organisational chart?
2. What if the energy and spirit you need to move the art forward could be provided by an audience that looks a little different than the one you have now?
3. What if you missed all of that because you valued (hierarchical) comfort more than progress?

Inclusion and other values

We are home to a repertoire of work that is eclectic, inclusive and representative of our city. We do work that we devise and work that we collaborate on. We're as interested in developing audiences and artists and companies as we are in developing plays. I'm pleased that our shows in their diversity, represent our values for collaborative development, emerging and marginal voices, ethno specific and inter-cultural work and independent artists and companies. There are also shows that are open and available and entertaining to any audience. Plus, inter-cultural plays and the inclusion of emerging artists are helping to make young people and more culturally diverse communities not often seen in our major institutions feel welcome.

TPM's desire to be as inclusive as possible took an interesting turn last season when we welcomed naturists into our theatre. The idea came to us because in one of the productions, the two actors were nude for most of the show so we had a 'clothing optional' performance. It was a huge hit and now we're doing it annually. Our publicist crafted an accompanying message, which the press ran with, about how accessible and inclusive TPM is. We now have a new audience which is at home at TPM and we have reinforced a sense that it is a welcoming place to go.

Engaging with our peers is just as important as engaging with the audience and community. It can be hard for artists to break through our institutional walls. To crack this problem I hold a three times a year, 'pitch blitz'. This is an open opportunity for artists and cultural professionals to have five minutes one to one with me to do what they want: dance, read from their script, propose an event, play their composition, volunteer for administrative work or simply introduce themselves. It has been a success on both sides, as we are more accessible to our peer artistic community and we have found a variety of interesting people and companies who are involved with our work at all sorts of levels.

We value engaging with our community one person at a time; narrowcasting, not broadcasting. I have a great example. We were interested in finding a neighbourhood resident for our board. There was a house close to the theatre which always fascinated me because it had a great graffiti wall. So, I dropped in a business card with a note saying 'call me' on the back. He did and two years on, he is now on the board and chaired our recent gala committee.

Listening

How can we be a leader and listening? What does that mean? What does it include? Why would we want to do this?

We want to do this because our arts institutions are not listening as well as they are broadcasting and we need to reverse the current status quo. We need to be the leaders. Engagement is key. I judge success by the quality and quantity of our engagements with staff, artists, audience and community. The way to overcome indifference to our artform is to listen to what people say about us. There is nothing as important as listening.

I recently read a story about an opera company that was interested to know about why people came to their shows. They commissioned a research company who began by asking the staff from the opera company why they thought people came. They said – 1. the reputation of the opera, 2. the singers in the piece, 3. the composer. The research revealed that the reason why they said they were coming was 1. it was date night and they wanted to do something romantic and 2. they wanted to seem classy and cultured. There's a massive gap here, so what should they do with this information? For the opera company to take full advantage of this

feedback they would need to alter programming, advertising and several other things to address the primary audience benefit. What would you do?

Adam Thurman, who is a director of marketing and communications in a not-for-profit organisation in the mid-west of the USA, has written a long story about people he didn't understand - because of the money they were spending 'outside the arts'. I will cut to the end, where he says:

'The easy thing to do would be to mock these people. It would be easy to look upon them with scorn, the same way we do about people who like trash reality television. Why don't these losers put down the remote and come out and see our noble and worthwhile art? Concluding, maybe it's because we look down our nose at them and they know it. Maybe it's because we lack empathy for their experience. A good way to get over that feeling is to understand their perspective. Once we understand others we can market to them.'

Audience dramaturgy

We'll never know how an audience feels about our work unless we ask them and then listen. The art of play development is actually the art of listening to the audience. As part of our play development process it is natural to use audience engagement as a play development tool. We refer to this process as audience dramaturgy.

Three times a year we have the Buzz Festival. This is designed to develop audiences and plays at the same time. Artists use an audience to gain an insight into what is working in their piece whilst audiences can become more involved and informed participants in the play development process. Buzz provides a framework of involving the audience and gives them the tools to participate. It's remarkable how much more sophisticated these conversations have become.

Some of you will recognise this process, as I have stolen it from Battersea Arts Centre's Scratch Programme. There are different pieces at different stages of development. It's important that each evening has an inclusive and living room feel. Before each piece I invite each artist to talk about their work, to give the audience an insight into the artist's creative process. They also give the audience a few questions to answer and these are provided on Buzz question sheets immediately after each work has finished. It also means we can mentor the audience by providing them with a framework to discuss the work in a way which is not judgmental. One artist said,

'I believe the focus on work in development and the request for audience engagement/ feedback is a unique and important way to facilitate the development of new Canadian theatre. Because my work explores alternate ways of storytelling, Buzz was an essential means for us to get a sense of the ways we can communicate with an audience and where we need to provide more clarity while still maintaining the works' sense of musical and visual poetry.' – Jennie Esdale, creator, performer.

We also provide an incentive for the audience to stay afterwards, being given a beer and a completely free cheese table – *how can you resist?!*

We want to encourage the audience to mix, talk and listen to each other. One audience member said,

'Both Cathy and I felt that the set-up of Buzz was useful to all of us. For audience members--artists or not--to be "forced" to grapple with their feelings about a play directly after witnessing it and to take the time to articulate coherently about the work is something we could all learn a little more about I think.'

I want to thank Culture Geek website for making me aware of a really great example of engagement and listening that is happening at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

'What's your Met?' is a part of their website which enables people to put their favourite items from the online collection and to share this information using social media. The campaign takes it to the perfect conclusion by featuring collections curated by celebrities and 'ordinary' members of the public. This is a great way of enabling part so the audience to be a partner in curating art. Plus they get a great marketing campaign highlighting this audience engagement.



Theatre beyond walls



Theatre beyond walls is an umbrella title for 12 separate and inter-connected community engagement projects that will take place in and around the city throughout the fall [autumn]. This is huge, considering we normally only do three shows in the season. With this project we want to take our audience engagement to the next logical step. In order to do this, we will leave the building for a season in an effort to include the audience in the development of our creative work.

At its heart, *theatre beyond walls* is a Toronto building project. We imagine a city where theatre is accessible to everyone, where citizens have the opportunity to create, enjoy and participate in the arts.

The large number and diversity of these events will create a spider web of intersections between communities, artists and neighbourhoods. We want to hear

their voice, we want them to interact with the artists and we actively welcome them in to theatre beyond walls. One example is *The Four Corners* developed by Fixt Point Theatre. Last year, we worked with them on a project called *The Tale of a Town*. It was a site-specific project about how the neighbourhood we are in is being over-run by big box stores.

[A video of this last project was played]

This time, TPM and Fixt Point will be producing *Four Corners* together. This title refers to a major intersection near TPM which is a bit of a border zone. We will be producing a podcast documentary for CBC and a dramatic component that will engage the community in and around that inter-section, contrasting everyone from local merchants to corporate retailers, tattoo parlours to art galleries, recent immigrants to first time condo dwellers and so on.

Fare Game will use text and audio recordings from taxi drivers who are predominantly new immigrants, to produce a verbatim theatre piece. Through the taxi drivers' stories, we learn about different neighbourhoods, communities and perspectives, thereby gaining a world view within our own city as well as dramatising the challenging economic, social and political place the taxi drivers find themselves in.

My favourite story of how deeply engaged the artists are with this community happened last month, when one of the creators Marjorie Chan got into an unfamiliar taxi. She started asking him about his work and she was asking him questions about taxi driving and within a couple of minutes the taxi driver stopped talking, turned around, studied her face and asked – 'are you Marjorie Chan?'

Toybox is a project which is an 'entry-level arts adventure' for people who may not have considered participation in the arts. To do this, we'll go out to the surrounding community with a travelling hand-on arts experience. Envision a room that could transform into any place your imagination takes you; a creative boisterous room alive with colour. The toybox is this place – an immersive, interactive and portable environment whose sole purpose is for creation and fun. The toybox is portable so the goal is to visit City Hall, a hospital a church and a community centre for a week each. Participants will be encouraged to play, to create their own narrative or simply fool around.

These are a sample of the 12 distinct programmes we are offering this fall in *theatre beyond walls*. Functioning within these will be 21 different independent creation based groups. This unprecedented level of activity, much of which is free to the public, will increase our engagement with indie artists, local residents and the community at large. We also plan for it to create a strong positive feeling about Toronto, which has been buffeted by a lot of negative news recently. We want to lead people back towards a sense of pride about the unique dynamic strengths of our

unique city. Please check out the title of our map – *Toronto Passe Muraille* – Toronto without walls.

Along the way, each individual project is developing a multitude of community collaborations with non-artistic organisations and associations bringing us into contact with many new parts of our non-arts community, some of whom are unfamiliar with the institutional artistic experience.

Social media and other tools are an important way of starting a dialogue with the public. To announce our *theatre beyond walls* season we chose a technique that was new for us. We Tweeted the press and other community mavens days in advance and told them that we were going to make a series of announcements from 11 to 11.30 on a given day without saying what the announcements were. When the time came we made a separate Tweet announcement every 2 minutes for a half hour, slowly announcing all the portions of *theatre beyond walls*. It was also streaming on our website. It worked really well as an alternative to a press release. It was the first time we got coverage in all the dailies and our Twitter followers tripled in number in the following month.

On our *theatre beyond walls* website we have a page of different options for folks who want to participate. At the top of our site, there's a link saying '*how to participate*'. It takes you to a page describing in detail, how to get involved and how novices can learn to use the various social media. On the right, each major arts group has a different social media tool. In the centre we have links to dedicated pages for all the various programmes. Then scrolling further down at the bottom there is an interactive map which enables people to find out about what and where all the activity is taking place.



Switching to un-social media ways of interacting, we have four banners which will be displayed outside the building asking the public a question, one being added one at a time every four weeks. There's an answer box on the side of the building. These questions will also be written on boxes in stores and community centres with paper provided and asking people to drop in their answers.

All this activity, from the artistic work to the ways we engage with people is a big step forward for us. *Theatre beyond walls* is allowing us to leap forward with our community engagement vision for the theatre. The legacy of this project will be a theatrical institution which is better equipped to meet people, to tell stories about them, to make culture relevant for them and to develop stories that speak to them.

Concluding comments

I started by saying that arts institutions need to be value-driven organisations if they want to increase the quality of their engagement. I want to end with five different people talking about values and the quality of that engagement.

I saw another post yesterday. It was Michael Rohd, writing about *The New Work of Building Civic Practice* on the Howlround blog. He said:

'I think, as artists and organizers involved in a collaborative form that demands, arguably, one skill above all others, we are at a moment where we can put that skill to new use. That skill is listening, and we can radically alter our role in our communities if we employ it with greater intentionality and generosity. Arts organizations do not have to engage with non-arts partners solely through a lens of project-based needs. Partnerships can be relationship-based, and projects can originate from a different type of exchange. Producing new work ... can mean producing new relationships, producing new forms of events and processes, producing new ways of crossing disciplinary and sector boundaries.'

Second, in Mike Daisey's show, *'How Theater Failed America'*, he talks about theatre institutions being more interested in their own survival and growth as opposed to creating art and engaging with communities. This is a harsh analysis of America's theatre institutions, but it forced me to consider the possibility that as culture professionals we might be institution-centric rather than art-centric, in which case that art and community engagement suffers – as it is not based around sharing art but fundraising.

Third, Mark Ravenhill echoes these comments:

'.. (arts) marketing is based on the assumption that each arts organisation is an independent business unit competing against other arts organisations for customers.'

What's the solution? I believe we can find another cooperative model, one in which public arts organisations come together to promote their work and build new audiences ... This would...mean...a paradigm shift away from the model of arts organizations as individual business units...

.. We too often forget that the greatest art...is created when there is no division between excellence and community.'

Fourth, *the guardian* had a timely article last year about how theatres need to reconsider their community engagement with other organisations. Under the headline 'theatres beat the cuts, not each other' *the guardian* claimed:

'It's clear that after years of isolationist tendencies, theatre is waking up to the value of sharing...it requires a major sea change in a theatre culture... We will need to

gauge a theatre's success not just by the work it puts on its stages, but by how far it is contributing to the community.'

And lastly, a provocative us website called 'creating the future' draws the connection between community and resources.

'What would it look like if resource systems were about sustaining thriving communities, rather than figuring out how to meet payroll? Sustaining thriving communities would require cooperative systems rooted in our interconnectedness, rather than rooted in competition...Sustaining thriving communities would require systems that aligned with core values, rather than requiring us to constantly choose between core values and economic survival.

Engaging at every point also reminds us that we are not alone- that this is, indeed, a cooperative effort, built on trust and relationship.'

These five sources are pointing us toward the idea that our strength is based in our community, not in our revenue. For me all signs are pointing to the need for and the inevitability of more engagement with our various communities. It's either that, or our institutions will disappear due to our lack of relevance and community support.

Each of us chose to enter our field because we wanted someone to hear and see what we had to offer. We wanted to have an impact on peoples' lives. So from the beginning of our careers we have believed in the need to engage with our community. This is not a new objective but now we need to commit even more time and effort to that instigating ideal. We need to move out of our comfort zone and challenge ourselves to listen even more deeply to our communities, our patrons, our supporters, our artists, our colleagues. This is what we always wanted but we need to raise our game.

The questions I'd like to leave you with are these:

What would it take for you and your organisation to be part of this movement and to do your own version of this community engagement and what role can you personally play in that development?

Keynotes in conversation

Andy McKim

Chaired by Jo Taylor

This session was an opportunity for delegates to ask further questions of the keynote speaker Andy McKim.

Jodi Myers: I'm an independent consultant. I found the presentation absolutely mesmerising and provocative. I must take issue – and it may be a case of transatlantic different use of English – but you said at one point if I remember correctly that 'there's nothing more important than listening'. Well, I would say there is, which is *hearing*. There is a bank which calls itself 'the listening bank'. I think a lot of people pay lip service to the notion of a customer engagement channel of communication but they don't necessarily *hear* what people are saying. I know that's not what you meant but I think we need to be quite careful about semantics. I'm also very aware in some of the things you're advocating, which I absolutely buy into, that some artists feel that 'well, if we hear what people are saying, we may need to change what we're doing fundamentally'. Now, sometimes you say 'Yes, that might well be the case' but I'm interested in how you, as an artist, have responded to what people say to you and how it has impacted on your art.

AM: The short, easy answer is yes, there may be a difference in the use of 'listening' and 'hearing' between the two countries but eventually words are unsatisfactory when we want to be extraordinarily precise in our use of them and we do want to be precise when we say 'listening' that we want it to be an active verb and not an inactive verb so if 'hearing' works for you, please replace 'listening' with 'hearing'.

We need to do more than just receive. We need to find a way to do that thing I think we don't do with anyone, let alone our audience, including with friends or colleagues. I'll speak for myself; I'm a horrible listener so I'm on both a personal and professional quest to improve my ability to listen. I'm always interrupting people. So yes, I agree with you – we should be more active in our listening. Take it in, cogitate, and then maybe do something with it.

As far as being an artist goes, I think that was really the point I was trying to make about this being something new for me. I'd always presumed that to listen to the audience meant, for example, a product survey as they leave, saying '*more red dresses, fewer female dancers*', that sort of thing. But I'm trying for us to find a way as artists to get a level playing field with the public in general and I don't think we have one, which is why I went on at length to talk about the Buzz festival. That section was really important to me because what I was trying to communicate is, it's almost impossible for us to have a dialogue between artists and the public if the public doesn't have the vocabulary or the tools to interact with us beyond what's

provided to them by the newspapers which is by definition judgemental and not engaged, participatory or informed.

So that's why the Buzz festival for me is really important because I spend so much of my time trying to give people vocabulary, point of view, just simple things like I will say at every single Buzz session *'I am not, nor is the artist, interested in you having a judgemental response which is "I like" or "I did not like" something about this work. What we really want you to say is "This was unclear" and those kinds of responses are really useful for us as artists'* because frankly the benefit of an audience is that they are ignorant and as ignorant folks, if someone finds something unclear which we the artists thought was clear, then we are not doing our job. I think we can extend this beyond play development to everything we do. That's what I've spent the last five years doing. First, I tried to make it clear to my general manager, then my staff, then to my board, then to the people who work beyond the staff, the artists who work in the company, and then to the community. And five years on, I feel we are finally reaching the point where people are getting it and so there is a point where we are on the same terms, both the community and us, when it comes to talking. That's a great question and an important one for me.

Gemma Bodinez: I'm the Artistic Director of the Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse Theatres. Your speech was truly inspiring and things will change as a result of listening to you. We do quite a lot of the things you are doing. You have the Buzz festival and we have Everyword which is about new writing and includes artist engagement and audience engagement and has very similar scratch performances. We do a huge amount of outreach and community work. However, I don't think we are quite as evolved as you. One of the problems we have – and I'd be really interested in how you solved it – is that for example in our Everyword festival, we find our audience is made up of playwrights and the chattering classes that would want to go to a playwriting festival. Where is the bridge made where your core, regular audiences and your members of the communities, feel they can come and join in those conversations about work? I know most of the playwrights who attend the new writing events and they are making fantastic contributions to the place but I'd love to hear more from people who aren't in the industry.

AM: I absolutely agree. We face the same challenge. It's endemic. One of the things we've done is that any artist who participates in Buzz is required to bring ten people. That doesn't mean email ten people. From the beginning, I thought the best way for us to grow was for us to get more artists into the building, the friends of the artists would then come, and then the friends of those friends would then come so that one by one (we called it 'hand to hand combat') they would bring people into the theatre. We couldn't bring them in if we didn't first bring the artist into the theatre in a way they felt comfortable with. A lot of the ten people who come are not necessarily artists. Those ten people are really important because if we present five pieces, that's 50 people out of an average audience of around 70 people for these Buzz events.

What's important for me is that one group of people who came to see one artist's work also see the work of other artists and maybe become interested in the other artist's work too. In the questionnaire I showed you on the screen, each sheet has space for your email address so if you wanted to follow three of the five companies you would put your email on each of the sheets and these go directly to the artists who can then respond. These people then become the mavens for that company. I think it's an endless challenge. My wife says her favourite thing to do in the theatre is to go to the Buzz festival. It's interesting because it tells me that she likes how accessible and informal it is. She likes the fact that she doesn't ever feel excluded because at every juncture she's being given all the information she needs to participate in this event. So I feel that when we get someone in once, we've got them for life.

GB: I went on Twitter asking my followers what they'd like us to programme. It was just an open-ended question and a very shallow approach, I admit. I was shocked by the response – the ideas covered nearly everything I considered to be inappropriate, for one reason or another. It forced me to question whether my audiences (or at least my Twitter followers, which isn't the same group of course) want something different from the theatres or whether they do not understand. Some of the suggestions were things I considered too commercial, not brave enough, or unrealistic in what audience numbers they would achieve. I don't think there was one title that came up that made me think 'Oh God, that's a brilliant idea. Why didn't I think of that?' So this disconnect is really interesting and on one level the problem either lies with me as the listener or in our audiences' perception of what we are. This is exciting but challenging.

AM: I think that's the trap that we've laid for ourselves and that is the sense that we should constantly be surveying people. What you did was interesting but people don't have the tools, the equipment, to respond in a way that's going to be really useful to you. We have to find ways to create the context for them to respond and also find ways to interpret what they're saying. For instance, when our friends, who are not familiar with the theatre, come to a show and make an offhand comment about it that seems quite cutting and cruel to us, we always want to have the ability to take a step back and reflect on what they've said, then wonder if perhaps what they've meant is '*This thing isn't really clear to me*'. But they don't know how to say that. How could your Twitter followers possibly know the vast range of artists that you are engaging with? But they might be able to tell you the nature, spirit, philosophy and emotional quality of work that would enthuse them.

GB: We have a policy that script meetings are open to all members of staff. Often the most useful comments come from the most unexpected places. I remember an usher once saying they could imagine ushering this play on a Thursday matinee and really not wanting to. Within their comment was the sense that the play was boring, which was really useful to know.

AM: Bravo to you for having those meetings. I'm inspired.

Sally Goldsmith: I'm from the Theatre Royal Stratford East. We've just done a big project called Open Stage during which we spent the last two years talking directly to the community over 3,000 personal conversations which completely allowed them to take control over what was programmed on stage for a season and interestingly now we're at a point where we're talking about future strategy, what's worked, what hasn't. We got requests such as wanting to see a show back again and so on. It was really interesting to open up the dialogue and it has done a great deal of good in terms of the community feeling they can speak.

We have a new writing festival called Angelic Tales but it doesn't bring in much money so there's almost no marketing budget so the obvious thing to do is to get the artists, through their networks, to bring people in and that tends to fill the house. We've been talking about how to take this a step further. At the end of each Angelic Tales (we'll do thirteen plays in six or seven nights) we have a dialogue and have had people Tweeting throughout the room and we've tried live streaming them through our web site and also recording them. What seemed to work really well in the second season is that we put out a call for submissions and table readings and this drew in a lot of writers who were in East London. There is a commitment from the theatre that if there is one that feels really great then we will actually make it into a full show.

People got quite interested in contributing to the discussion about the work because they feel they can have a bit of an influence. What's interesting is how you start to programme so you can take the model of a new writing festival, offer people different ways to engage with it, including digitally. We have a big group of volunteers who chat to all the audience afterwards and get their feedback and those people are members of the local community so they are word of mouth ambassadors for what they've seen that night. I think it's interesting that we're all playing with the same theme, and talking about how that fits in with the artistic vision and, for instance, showing people new things which is part of artistic leadership.

AM: I lived in London from 1981 to 1983 and the Theatre Royal Stratford East was an inspiring place for me to go for two reasons. One reason, of course the most important one, was that you could drink in your seat. But secondly, because it drew the most working class audience of any theatre that I had been to and I was really inspired by that. Our ambition is to attract as many people as possible to come to the theatre who don't usually go. I feel Theatre Royal Stratford East has done so well in attracting the person who lives across the road. We want to do the same and for us that's someone who speaks Chinese or Portuguese.

SG: We have 160 different languages now spoken in the borough. It's complicated to translate various bits of marketing print into the top languages.

Sean O'Neil: I'm Head of Press and Marketing for the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. I loved your talk and am very interested because Andre Melrose also talked about a museum without walls. The Fitzwilliam Museum is a daunting, neo Classical building, it looks a little like the Bank of England. It's a little scary to walk into. We have been trying to reach out through educational programmes and special events for ethnic groups. I've been working in direct marketing now for years and years, since the pre-digital age. But, despite our digital strategies, we still rely on old media (e.g. we still run campaigns on the London underground). My question is: do you need to rely on old media too or do you not need to invest in that?

AM: In five years, we haven't placed an ad. To qualify that answer, we have put some posters in some subway stations for certain shows, but that's about it. I could easily spend in advertising in one newspaper what we spend on a production so I have always resisted wasting money in broadcast advertising. I have no money for development at this stage.

To contextualise the situation, when I took over the theatre, we had only 67 subscribers and we were constantly unable to make 20 per cent box office and I was really given a blank screen to work with. I wanted an organisation that was open, welcoming to the community, for a variety of uses. And I didn't want a programme with a number of slots that I could drop plays into every year; I wanted to programme much more according to the nature of the work we do. I see print journalism as a dying industry. I simply didn't think people were coming as a result of print advertising. Also, in our city there is so much going on it's impossible to make a dent. The one commercial theatre organisation in the city sometimes takes out four page colour ads. They would cost around a fifth of our season.

SO: Do you still value critics' reviews in the newspapers?

AM: What verb did you use, 'value'? We rely on critics' reviews to a certain extent. We do new work and yet when critics review new work they tend to be less engaged, informed or sympathetic. Sometimes the quality of their writing in the three hours they are given simply is not very good. In our country, about 23% of the directors and writers are women but in our theatre it is 70%. So 70 per cent of these new works are written by women and they don't stand a chance against these male reviewers. They misconstrue the different world view women put forward. It astonishes me that there are so few women writers and directors elsewhere. Even when reviews are good they don't necessarily bring in an audience. Once we had a woman who wrote an extraordinary show but the critics clobbered it. However, word of mouth sold the show. That's a better use of our time, to work out how to generate word of mouth.

SO: So do you do that by concentrating on the work itself?

AM: When we do the quotes after a production, half of them are from the papers and half of them are from the audiences.

Phil Cave: I'm from Arts Council England. Thinking of organisations in this country which do lots of engagement with their communities, I've heard quite a lot of them say the main challenge has been with their peers. They might get international recognition but it's as if their peers look down on them. I'd be interested to hear what your experience of this is.

AM: There is a theatre company in our city that does community based plays. The people involved are charged and filled with meaning by this work but it doesn't seem to come across to audiences. For me, that's the demarcation line. As artists, we need to mediate the work we do with communities. We are the professionals. We should be leading, even if everyone else on the project doesn't have a history in the business, it's our role to make sure they don't look bad. At the moment, a famous Canadian playwright is producing a show I wish I could have seen where she is working with eight Downs Syndrome young adults. My young friend (who usually hates everything she sees) called me the other day to say it was one of the best things she'd ever seen. I read a dismissive review of it saying it felt like you were going to a child's concert. The difference is between the words profession (exclusive attitude) versus professionalism (inclusive attitude).

PC: Do you get the recognition from your peers?

AM: It's an uphill battle. There is a company that works outside of town. The director drew people to his theatre from all walks of life. He originated a show called The Last Fifteen Seconds. When I saw the work, people from within the industry told me they didn't think it was very good but I knew it would connect with an audience. There was a wedding, I think it was in Beirut, where a couple were both loaded with explosives and only one of the couple succeeded in setting off the explosives. One of the people killed was a famous American film maker and the play showed the last fifteen seconds of their lives.

The show was done in a multi media style. It was very impactful. Some performances were extraordinary, others weren't good enough. But as a whole, it was talking about things that matter. I had people coming up to me from the business saying '*Thank you, it's the best thing I've seen in years*'. I programmed it into our theatre and it went down very well. Yes, I'm willing to accept that I'm going to have peer criticism but I want them to wait because they will realise they are behind me and they need to catch up.

Andrew Ridal: I'm from Last Second Tickets and used to work in venues. How do you communicate the value of what you do to your funders and organisations who may think of the work you do: that's just a bunch of hippies in an old bakery?

AM: That's a great question. We've had forty years of 'hippies in a bakery'. It came to the point when the theatre was given an extra two years of lifeline if it changed its ways. When they knew I was taking over as artistic director, they gave it another year; otherwise they would have pulled the life support systems. The theatre had a history of not successfully managing the administration and the art.

The very first thing I did when I started my job was to go and have meetings with all three levels of council; municipal, provincial and federal. I sat down with each of them and went through my entire vision and value documents which I had sent them in advance and asked them if they saw any problems with my plans. They all responded incredibly favourably except, surprisingly, the national council which has always been two or three years behind us and didn't quite get what we were doing. They didn't understand that we were involved in development of plays (e.g. not just developing new plays but enabling existing plays to have a second production) but they caught up with us. Now, five years later, we have caught up with the communities, which has been harder than the councils. A lot of the words we are using, we have to reinvent them to ensure the communities understand what we are doing. Now, they really seem to understand.

We went through a programme with Andrew McIntyre in the last year trying to focus on what our story is. We did a presentation at our annual theatre AGM in May after which it was as if a curtain lifted and everyone got what we were doing. It was the peer community that was behind the council.

Mike James: I am from the Liverpool Empire Theatre, a large touring venue in Liverpool. We are one of the biggest venues in the country in terms of touring musicals from the West End. We engage with our audiences in the sense of them coming to see the shows but we don't engage with them as a venue. We've started to engage with the audience using Twitter but it's on such a small scale and mostly touring theatre fans rather than our core audience. It's been inspiring to hear you talk, and also Gemma Bodinez from Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse Theatres because we know there's a lot going on in our city. My question is how we, as a big venue, can engage with people given the scale we work to?

AM: In June (the hardest month for us to rent the theatre) we found a children's theatre producer who wanted to book both theatre spaces. Each week they put on a different production by a different age group and they pack the venue because they bring their own audience which is largely family. So maybe you could introduce something similar. The young people have a joyous experience performing on the stage and the parents love it. Maybe you could approach similar groups, or other kinds of performing groups such as ethnic dance groups. The first thing I did was to say to the community groups, you are all free to come as long as you do something which will bring in an audience.

MJ: We do have an annual project called Stage Experience in which around 120 young people are involved in producing and performing on our stage and it is a unique experience for them. Most of the audience is their family and it's grown over the last five or six years into quite a big thing for us. We need to move on to the next step of engaging with the ethnic community within Liverpool as well.

AM: Yes and then what you get is the one on one relationship with the maven from that community too.

Ivan Wadeson: I am from The Audience Agency. Thank you for your talk. The discussion about empathy, listening and hearing really resonated for me in relation to when I worked in presenting venues. How linked are the changes you've made to the 'without walls' nature of the work? If you were constrained for some reason to using only the bakery, would you be able to make the changes you've delivered?

AM: What I gave you was completely skewed. I wanted to give you an experience that was challenging and interesting for you. I worked hard at representing our experience in a way that was going to ignite your thinking. I want to recast the whole institution as a place which is open, inclusive, trying to bring in an audience that doesn't normally go to the theatre, emerging artists, ethno specific and cultural audiences and work, marginal voices and a vast range of work. And to do this in a way which is not a subscription model where everything has to slot into a box and each box is the same.

I wanted to get to a point where some things are maybe on only once a week for the whole year and so on. I also wanted to arrange the administration of the theatre in a different way. I view being an artistic director differently from most people in my city and country. Most people use a magnifying glass to direct a hot beam of light – it's all about them as directors. Instead, I wanted to use a prism which would refract all the colours in the rainbow. I have made a point of not directing shows. My board wanted me to direct the first show (a musical) as the incoming director but I said no. Instead, I chose a 34 year old woman to direct this play about older men. I wanted to spend all my time as artistic director trying to lead the company and move it forward, trying to show this company is about something bigger than my ability to direct. I want to create an organisation which is as collaborative, representative and inclusive as possible. My job as AD is to try to create the kind of audience I would like to sit in.

IW: It's been great to hear you saying that because there are some organisations who feel bound by the building. There was a theme from your talk which was about reconstructing the organisation to get round some of those building based issues. An earlier Arts Council England piece of work, 'Not for the Likes of You', looked at engaging with artistic directors and CEOs about how the organisations engaged with the public. It was a really good piece of work.

AM: We couldn't have made the structural changes we've made if I wasn't an artistic director who is in the office most of the time. It's important because we work as a unit and I came from a theatre where that was not the case.

James McVeigh: I am from Edinburgh Festivals. I went to an event in Brussels in which entrances were turned into exits and vice versa. It was a very effective way to transport audiences away from the everyday.

AM: The Young Vic has done something radical architecturally. Now, every single person who goes into the building has to go through their foyer, a stroke of genius.

JM: Gavin Stride told me some time ago that at his venue Farnham Maltings, an audience member came up to him and said they had a complaint. Gavin said *'Stop, we don't do complaints here. We don't have enough money to deal with complaints. You come up with the solution and we will talk about it'*. He brilliantly turned it around into community empowerment.

AM: The ripple of that story is that that person went and told everyone in the community: *'Do you know, they are not accepting complaints?'*

JM: Have you or would you ever turn over some of your commissioning budget to the community unmediated? And with the 'clothing optional' performance, what did you do with the seats?

AM: At the moment, after five years, I still do not have a single dollar in my budget for the development of new work. The Buzz festival was a three year festival financed by the Metcalfe Foundation so all of that money came from a grant and not from our operating budget. Similarly, the Theatre Beyond Walls initiative came from the Metcalfe Foundation; otherwise we could never have afforded to do that. We got \$325,000 strictly for the festival. My first season was smoke and mirrors because we put on all of these shows and people said it was fabulous but when you looked closer you'd realise that four of the five shows we put on were solo women performances.

Next year, we are committing one of our staff member's time to building engagements with the local community. He has found a good link already with the Alexander Park community adjacent to us, social housing with a lot of immigrants there, especially from north east Africa and south Asia. He is going to go there weekly to develop their stories into a presentation and then bring them back to the theatre where we will present them for a week. So even though we don't have any money we have found a way to creatively contribute that time to a community project. We hope this will help us lever more money from one of the councils. There are 21 creation based groups working with us. One element of our work is called 'Bring the Buzz'. We give five of the groups either the main space or the back space for two or three weeks. They get the space for free and the only condition is that they must do ten performances and their work must touch on one or all of these three areas of

interest: culture, social justice or sustainability, areas that are core to the Metcalf Foundation as well as ourselves.

The more interesting question – bums on seats. When people come into the foyer they are asked whether they understand it is a ‘clothing optional’ performance. They must say yes to proceed. When they go upstairs, staff are standing by with green garbage bags into which members of the audience put everything except their shoes, their wallet and a small towel which it is traditional to bring with you. The towel is placed on the seat, and you sit on the towel. The funniest thing is a lot of naked people with shoes on.

Delegate: I’m responsible for software at Blackbaud but I’m also a fundraising manager for several venues in Portsmouth. How does your organisation see the difference between engagement with audiences and making them into supporters as in individual donors? How do you capture data when you go out on the road (e.g. with the Toy Box project)? We have a concert hall and a producing theatre in Portsmouth where I sit as a board member and we have a playhouse. There is some competitiveness. Do you have any advice on how to deal with that situation?

AM: There can be too much going on. Where I previously worked, we set up a Playwrights Unit and it was getting six people together working over a year as a group. It makes me sad that people can’t create their own ideas but take something that worked and replicate it. If the activity is different between organisations, I’m sure there is room for lots of such work to be accommodated and I really believe it would benefit us. I strongly believe that the more we promote our art forms, the more people we will have in our theatres.

It is the curse of putting energy into promoting the show of the moment rather than promoting the art form that I think will be the undoing of us. On the question of donors, it seems to me that us getting money is the last thing that’s going to happen to us. As my friend and performer Jack Clap said when we walked past someone who was pan-handling on the *street* ‘*I’m not giving him any money – he doesn’t have a very good story*’. You have to have a great story if you are going to have someone give you their money. In relation to the Toy Box question, we are arranging for groups to come to the Toy Box so if a class wants to use it during the day, even though it’s free, we will charge the class to reserve it for an hour. That will be part of our development of a relationship with schools. When people come unbidden, I’m hoping we will find a way to capture phone numbers and / or email addresses for those people.

Andrew McIntyre: I’m from Morris, Hargreaves McIntyre. I’ve had the pleasure of working with Andy for a couple of years and every time I come back from Toronto I feel I come back with more than I’ve given. The company has been building emotional equity in Theatre Passe Muraille. The audiences have become shareholders in the place and it’s an emotional shareholding. They have a sense of

belonging. What's the worth of the organisation to the community and how is this measured? Please could you tell the audience about Dancing with Mary, turning a failure into a success, and especially about people converting their interest into sponsorship and ticket sales?

AM: We have usually had five shows which we have produced or presented and three shows which we present on behalf of someone else. Last year, of the five shows we produced, there were two in the main space that were potentially really popular. One was called Ride a Cyclone about six kids who die in a cyclone ride and they get to sing about themselves after they have died. That show sold out instantly.

The other show was called Dancing with Rage. The woman who was the solo performer is a Canadian icon. Her job over the last fifteen years has been to dress up in a suit of princess warrior armour and confront various politicians, grab them by the arm, not let them go and harangue them with questions. People in the country love her because she expresses things they never get a chance to express. In 1972 she along with four other people from our outlying province Newfoundland auditioned for Paul Thompson, the person you saw in the video in my Keynote speech. He had no roles for any of them. Instead, he called all five of them in, gave them \$500, told them they were special and invited them to go and use the money to create something and then come back and show him. They came back with a show called Cod on a Stick and they called themselves Cod Co. They were the biggest entertainment export of Newfoundland and it was created by Theatre Passe Muraille recognising their talents and giving them \$500 back in the 70s. So now we had the opportunity to bring this person back to intense popularity in 2012. She got pneumonia and everything else and we didn't know day by day whether she would make it to Toronto to do the show. The show was selling out. A few months earlier she had accosted our mayor. She made a huge splash because she went to his house and he called the police. She was too ill to perform the show so we decided to create an event called Dancing Without Mary. We wanted it to be like an Irish wake; we wanted to recognise there was grief because she wasn't there but at the same time we wanted to drink and dance.

Eventually, it turned out that we were not able to present this play so we gave people three options: one was to have a refund; second, they could transfer their ticket to the next season; thirdly, they could just consider their ticket a contribution to us. It broke down a third each. So two thirds of the people let us keep the money. Also, I was at a party at a rich person's house and I was talking about Mary Walsh and this person said 'Oh my God, I've got tickets!' and I said 'I'm sorry but I don't think you'll be able to see it' and someone else who knew this guy had built himself a \$30 million home to live in alone and is a violin prodigy so has a stage in his house, said 'Why don't you invite Andy to do Mary's show in your house as a fundraiser?' and he said yes. So on 1 November we are going to do the show in his home and if you want to look it up on Google images it's called Integral House. He's a mathematician who

made his money producing calculus books and is a violinist so 'integral' works both ways. He only allows in three or four benefit performances per year and we are doing one of them so our emotional capital really paid off. People were sick about the show not going on. I created a blog site on which I invited people to send Mary a note as she was in hospital. We had ten times more comments on that blog than on any other blog we ever did. I'm really interested in emotional capital.