

## Arts Management E-Newsletter

### From Theory to Practice

by Richard Kamenitzer

Spending countless hours and paying out many dollars, putting up with conflicts in scheduling and varying requirements, wrestling with priorities – these are the plights of those who prepare for the world of arts management, as students. Of course, then there are figuring out the faculty members, with different styles and assignments, along with their expectations. Somehow, most students manage to meet all of these challenges, complete those papers, take those exams and make a variety of presentations through the required number of credits and earn that wonderful M.A. in Arts Management.

Along the way, the theory and techniques become part of the accumulation of threads that make for the tapestry of form and function. The classroom application of author and professor allow the acquired knowledge to become the framework from which the world of creativity can be combined with the worlds of commerce, psychology and “the street.” Most of our faculty have invested years beyond their studies, writings and on-going training in the exercise of these acquired additions to their own intellect by having to deal with the realities of keeping it all going. It is these very same arts professionals who have learned how not to lose their passion for the creative process, their respect for the artists that bring “life” to these art forms and make them available to audiences and, most importantly, have experienced failures and learned from them.

All of us are grateful to our teachers, who have spent much of their lives in developing their knowledge base and the methods to bring them alive to their audience – the students. When the arts professional becomes a teacher – and, indeed, we all do – we take the theory and the practice and convey what worked and what did not, but in a specific context. There clearly are many, many ways to “meet the payroll.” In certain environments, the implementation of sound theory provides for predictable outcomes and, just as importantly, positive results. In others, thinking outside of the box is the way around the many obstacles, competitors and uncertainties. It is knowing the options or tweaking the chemistry that makes for progress or at least the potential for progress.

We have assembled a corps of some of this area’s best practitioners who are gifted storytellers, logical thinkers, educators, credentialed achievers, as managers, and, some have become well known leaders in the field. They take the students along the pathway from theory to practice, while still in the classroom. They provide one of the most powerful management tools that such professionals have worked hard to accumulate – that of the “network,” to their classes and, if you are ambitious and aggressive enough, to you. For those who take the path from theory to practice and invest the years, the trials, tribulations, failures and, oh yes, successes, becoming an arts manager is a forever joy. If you have any doubts, just ask any of your professors.

Richard Kamenitzer,  
Associate Professor Arts Management,  
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## Career Spotlight

### Theater Management

by Allison Calhoun Katsufraakis

The lights, the costumes, the drama...for many Arts Management students, the stage is the place they call home. Theater management is a popular career choice for arts managers, but is it right for you? I spoke with Kevin Murray, Managing Director of GMU's Theater of the First Amendment (TFA). In the middle of overseeing this summer's first Festival of the Arts, Kevin was kind enough to offer some words of wisdom.

Just what does a managing director do? Murray describes it as "the equivalent of a producer. You're basically overseeing every aspect of production, from the highest-paid directors and designers to the stagehands and volunteers. There's no part of the nonprofit sector that we don't have our hand in." Sometimes called executive directors, these staff members oversee the business and operation of a theater company. This allows the artists to focus on what they do best—art!

Murray began his arts career as an actor, and then started a theater company with a group of friends. "It quickly became apparent that you can't run a theater with just actors," he explained, "so I was asked to handle the business side of things, probably simply because I was willing to do it." That theater company began working with GMU in the early stages of the Center for the Arts, and Murray was hired as assistant director of a play. He eventually became a member of the theater department faculty, and was promoted to company manager of TFA. His success in that position led to his current role as managing director of TFA.

When asked about a typical day in the life of a managing director, Murray laughed, "It doesn't exist!" Each day is different, but a typical week consists of production meetings with directors and designers, attending rehearsals, and planning meetings for future productions... and then there is the email. "There is literally a hundred a day," Murray explains, "sometimes a hundred an HOUR that need to be dealt with to troubleshoot and maintain the forward motion of a production." Managing directors oversee marketing, budgets, schedules, fundraising, and other important aspects of the business side of a theater, and ensure that other staff members are performing their duties. "The higher you go," Murray offers, "the more you're responsible for, but the less you're doing directly." The ability to delegate work to other staff members is an important skill for managing directors.

Financial compensation for a managing director position varies widely and depends on the size and scope of the theater. "The good thing about arts management positions is that there is continuity, and opportunities for growth. People in arts management can rise through the ranks and become arts leaders," Murray advises. "If well-trained, well-educated managers do their job well, they can make a very decent living." There are definite good and bad sides to managing a theater company. As Murray says, there is no such thing as a typical day, so each day will have you handling different tasks. The job can be exciting and high-energy, but also high stress. Still, there is the satisfaction of a job well done—"There's something satisfying about watching an audience react to something you know you had a hand in every step of the way," offers Murray. "The best feeling in the world is when you pull off a show successfully, and there it is: Opening Night, the show happens and the curtain comes down and people applaud, and the managing director is the guy in the last row going, 'phew!'"

## Alumni Column

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It's important to note, however, that handling the business side of theater can be a thankless job. The attention garnered by a production tends to be lavished on actors and directors, not managers. "There's no Helen Hayes award for outstanding management," he warns. Additionally, personnel issues can be a significant challenge for managing directors. Murray explains, "In a factory, if you have one guy who's disgruntled, you can put him in a new job and isolate the problem. In the arts, you can't just recast the troublemaker in another role or hire a new lighting designer on the fly." Being able to quickly and efficiently handle conflicts between staff members is an important trait for a managing director.

So you're interested in the job, but you have no theater experience. Is there a chance you can still get the gig? Murray says it depends on having a reliable staff to help you out. "If you're a good arts manager [without theater experience], the thing that's important is to hire someone who does know theater," he cautions. The theater world has many nuances that may not be apparent to the lay person, and knowledge of those nuances can affect your reputation as a director. Murray adds, "When you hire professional directors and designers and actors, they have an expectation that the organization they're working with knows what they're doing." How do you get theater experience? An internship in a theater company is a great way to build experience and handle some real world situations. Murray raves about the Arts Management's internship program, pointing out that he had five Arts Management interns working with him for the GMU Festival of the Arts this summer! He also recommends business classes for any artist, such as those offered within the Arts Management program.

For Arts Management students with a flair for the dramatic, theater management may just be an ideal career. Whether the company is for profit or nonprofit, the facility large or small, the actors amateur or professional, a managing director puts the pieces together to bring theater to life.

### Alumni Column by Ginger Gene

George Mason alum 2006, Ginger Gene credits her experience in the Arts Management program with her subsequent executive directorships in theatre management in many parts of the country.

"The teachers at George Mason were excellent," she said. "I was actually able to work with theatre professionals and not-for-profit specialists, take from them as much as I possibly could, and apply it. I was like a kid in Candy Land."

While in Washington, D.C., Gene worked with the Washington Stage Guild, a professional theatre company specializing in neglected classics, new works of merit, and the works of George Bernard Shaw.

Upon completion of her Masters degree, Gene became executive director of Florida's Tallahassee Little Theatre, a well-established, strongly traditional community theatre. During her tenure, Gene initiated a strategic planning process and positioned that organization for strong financial viability. These changes, in turn, served as the catalysts that ultimately more than doubled the theatre's fundraising, directly improved the quality of its productions and facility, and measurably increased both attendance and prominence.

Gene, who has to date directed over 75 plays in 8 states, says that the combination of the excellence of her post-graduate education at George Mason and her ever-increasing subsequent theatre responsibilities also enabled her to write her own professional ticket and allowed her to pick and choose both her professional opportunities and their locations. She is currently executive director of the Ferndale Repertory Theatre on the northern California Coast, where she manages all aspects of both administration and production. Gene states, "I live in a beautiful part of the country, doing what I love, and I thank the faculty and my experiences at GMU for my success."

## Student Experiences

### London

by Laura Benson

This past summer I had the time of my life working in London, England for the National Campaign for the Arts. The NCA is the UK's only independent lobbying organization dedicated to furthering the arts in the UK. I attended a reception at 10 Downing Street, penned policy analysis briefings that were sent to various ministries and the NCA membership, and on one particular day, put non-self-stick stamps on 800 envelopes. I was an intern, after all – you can't escape that title completely, right?



I don't think I would have ever gone further than dreaming about working with the arts in London if it hadn't been for Mason's Center for Global Education Study Abroad Office. I had no knowledge and lots of anxiety about the process of working abroad and had resigned myself to the fact that it wouldn't happen. I envisioned the bureaucracy and ease of the process to rival some kind of crazy-international- DMV-meets-Customs-meets-IRS level of complication. Luckily I tend to exaggerate, and I found the CGE Study Abroad Office's London Internship Program.

I can't really go into detail about the process of obtaining my particular placement and work permit and everything leading up to the day I left, mostly because of how embarrassingly little I had to do. The Study Abroad Office made this process incredibly easy and positive for me and many others. Once you are accepted into the program, you simply provide them with your work placement choices (like all successful research endeavors, I found the NCA via Google) and they set things up on our behalf. Mason also set up our work permits, which were provided by BUNAC (British Universities North American Club). (Site note: in addition to providing work cards, BUNAC can also help you find work. They are a great resource if you choose to go abroad to England.)

We were prepared to enter a work culture that is much more relaxed and a lot less stressful than our own – and many of my fellow program participants did in fact encounter this in their placements. I, however, had a different experience. My office was open until 5:30pm, but I can't remember a time when someone wasn't there until at least 8 or 9pm. The NCA is a small, hardworking office that has three or four people doing the workload of about ten, on a budget that can probably only afford two. The office had that

"fighting the good fight" energy every day, which was sometimes stressful, but most of the time was invigorating and inspiring. I appreciated this because I knew it mirrored the dynamics of so many arts not-for-profits here in the States. It showed me that no matter where you are, the arts industry faces the same problems and challenges. The arts attract the same kind of people, as we all know: hard working, passionate, and eager to bring the arts to everyone.

I could spend the next several pages talking about the details of my time there, and how beneficial it was to me personally and professionally, but I'll spare you. Without getting too sappy here, my experience at the National Campaign for the Arts was a fantastic one and I will no doubt transfer my professional experiences there to my work in the future. Moreover, the process of getting to the NCA was easy and virtually painless. I would highly recommend working abroad, whether through GMU or your own endeavors.

Laura Benson

## Student Column

### A Tale of Two Policies

by Chris Choate

Ever since I graduated from George Mason in 1991, one regret kept lingering over me and just wouldn't go away. That regret was never having studied abroad. Though the opportunity was available, the tyranny of my core curriculum and the demands of a job seemed to bar the way for the experience. So when I found out about Comparative Arts Policy last spring, I jumped at the chance to study in Berlin, Germany.

And my regret is now redeemed!

With Beth Bienvenu and Mathilde Speier at the helm, our group from across the pond had the exceptional privilege of interviewing scores of arts managers and arts policy players in a city that has overcome many obstacles in its brief history. These interviews were with directors and representatives of organizations such as the Berlin Opera, Hamburger Banhoff, Radial System V and Studio Babelsburg, to name a few. Using the information we gained, we compared the differences between funding for the arts in the two countries. While the arts are excellent in both places, means of support for the arts varies greatly. Namely, funding for the arts in the US comes primarily from private streams, and funding for the arts in Germany comes most heavily from public support. In addition, Germany includes support for freedom of the arts specifically in their constitution, whereas US arts have a history of legal and political restrictions. And finally, the fine arts are much more accessible in Germany, where an opera ticket only costs about 15-20 dollars. Both systems have their positive points and their limitations, and as with any human institution, both can learn from each other.

As for my own personal reflections on the trip, the experience was definitely a great adventure! Heading over, I was eager to try out my German language skills and was both immediately humbled at how much I need to improve and delighted by the fact that I was able to hold my own in the streets. The subway ("U-bahn") was great, and still held much of the nostalgia and appearance of the classic European movies of the 60's. I was expecting to see James Bond zipping around the corner on a Vespa at any minute.

As for the food – expensive but good! A small bottle of water (no gas, please!) costs about \$3, but the bread and the beer are great. And the café dining experience is much more relaxed than that of the US in-and-out atmosphere.

So in the end, would I recommend the program do the course again? Absolutely! And would I recommend Arts Management students taking advantage of study abroad? Definitely! Not only is it a great personal experience, but it gives us a better perspective of the global arts community as a whole.

Tchüss!  
Chris



**The author (far right) with fellow students (r-l) Andrea Cordray, April Irwin, Leticia Moreno, and Lynne Venart.**

## Student Column

### Berlin

by Lynne Venart

This summer, I joined Professors Beth Bienvenu and Richard Kamenitzer, as well as Mathilde Speier<sup>1</sup> and nine fellow MAM students, in Berlin to extend our understanding of arts policy to the German model. We met with top-tier arts managers—at museums, performing arts venues, operas, arts associations, the government, and throughout Berlin's diverse and thriving cultural scene—to discuss how Germany funds the arts, and how this differs from the American model.

Along the way, we also found a deeper understanding of the unique history of Berlin and its people, and how they truly embrace the arts, not only as a way to commemorate and preserve the rich cultural traditions of Germany, but also as a way to remember, heal, and communicate the forward-thinking policies of the new German democracy to an increasingly international audience. History and culture are everywhere in Berlin, seen in the contrast of new and old architecture; the wealth of museums, monuments, galleries and performing art spaces; and the contemporary and ground-breaking graphic design and graffiti throughout the city.

As Berlin tries to dig itself out of economic trouble, the government has turned to the creative economy, and as Dr. Torsten Wöhlert Press and Public Relations Official for the Berlin Senate Office of Cultural Affairs told us, "[The business in Berlin is] not steel and concrete anymore. It's [based on the] brain, arts and creative industries." The opportunity for the group to meet with such a high level official of the Berlin Senate put the experience over the top. To hear about Berlin's transformation of Richard Florida's ideas into practice was awe striking. The book-learning met with reality in that conference room, and I, for one, am rooting for Berlin to turn their economy around with their innovative arts and cultural policies.



As a group, we found all of the German arts managers to be consistently gracious and forthcoming, giving us their time, their thoughts and their knowledge—all with a great enthusiasm for Berlin and the German way of life. The openness of the German arts managers was encouraging and inspiring, and made me

wonder if we would get as great a reception from arts managers here in the States. Likely because we traveled so far to meet them, and because we were interested in their unique culture, they opened their doors to us, and were as eager to share as we were to learn.

Most fully embraced the German method of arts funding—which relies heavily on government funding but strives for artistic perfection and innovation over all else—but some were also interested in (and occasionally envious of) the US methods of fundraising, marketing and audience development. Sharing this information across borders with peers and mentors was an amazing opportunity, and one that I am very grateful to the Arts Management staff for organizing.

The uniqueness of the city's history and cultural traditions, the heavy support for innovative and groundbreaking visual and performing arts, and the welcoming nature of its people made Berlin an ideal choice for a learning experience of this kind. When can I go back?

<sup>1</sup>Mathilde researched, made contacts, and scheduled the interviews students participated in.



Comparative Arts Policy students and faculty gather for a final meal in Berlin. Pictured:(l-r) Mathilde Speier, Shawn Robertson, Andrea Cordray, Ryan Braaten, Rachel Patton, Professor Beth Bienvenu, Leticia Moreno, Jessica Lai, Chris Choate, April Irwin, Lynne Venart, Shawna Vacca.



Arts Managers(l-r) Shawna Vacca, Lynne Venart, Professor Beth Bienvenu, April Irwin, and Andrea Cordray enjoy a sunny day in Berlin, Germany.



## Arts Management

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