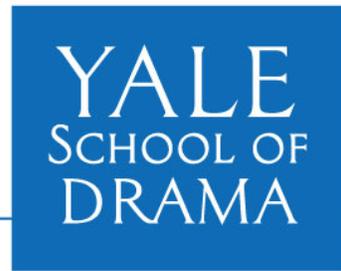


Theater Management Knowledge Base



Interview

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BILL RICHTER

October 24, 2016

Bill Richter, former Board President of Shakespeare Santa Cruz, and then founding Board President of Santa Cruz Shakespeare, describes the transition of this 35-year-old festival from public university to community, tracing the fundraising, organizing, and strategic challenges a community took on to ensure its theater for future generations of audiences and theater artists, as well as its building of a new outdoor theater for its 2016 season (93 days from groundbreaking to opening).

Bill Richter: Santa Cruz Shakespeare is now a 35-year-old summer professional rep festival in Santa Cruz, California. It was formed in 1981 by Audrey Stanley. Audrey Stanley is now eighty-nine and she continues to be very active. She was our original artistic director. She was one of the first women to get a PhD in Theater from UC Berkeley. She was apparently one of the first women to get a professional degree in Theater in the UK—I'm not quite sure how and when and all that, but that's what people say about her. She's been a force of nature and a great source of inspiration for our community. As people in our community have gotten to know her—she played Puck one year, suspended from wires from redwoods, flying across the stage, before we moved to Santa Cruz—everybody has a vision of Audrey doing these miraculous things, and that continues almost up to the age of ninety.

We've been a professional repertory theater, originally at University of California Santa Cruz, and we've had the experience of trying to be a

professional rep theater in a university that is priding itself more and more on being a major research university, and it is sort of moving from its roots as being sort of hippie and artsy to more mainstream and more scientific. Adaptive optics, genomics—it's moving off in that direction. Now the pendulum is swinging a bit back there for digital arts and digital media, which leaves things like live theater sort of in the lurch.

So, the experience that I've had since 2005, which is when I joined the board, until 2013—that's the period when we were on the campus of the university—has been one of trying to find a way to help a theater co-exist within the priorities of a California public university. That has been a very difficult road, I think probably mirrored by a lot of theaters that try to operate in universities. I don't know how things work at Yale, but at least you've got a drama school and you may have your own endowments, and you may have institutional sources of support, as well as, I would hope, a much

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broader vision of the arts and the humanities. It's just part of the university life generally.

But in 2005, we began to receive letters from the campus suggesting that it might be better if we left and became an independent theater off-campus, a separate nonprofit, because we perform in the summer, and there are never students there in the summer. The argument always was, "Well, you're not really helping us fulfill our land-grant university mission of education since you're not performing when most students are here. You're not really contributing to research," in the way that they define it. We disagree.

We started to take steps as early as 2005 to form an independent nonprofit. We created a shell company, and then within a few months we were ready to pull the trigger and start being public about it. Then the Dean of the Arts from the school came to my office and said, "Maybe you shouldn't do this. Let's think about this some more." Because the theater was something the university relied on in admissions—you could go to the website and see people extolling how wonderful it is to have this professional rep theater company. There were lots of positive media impressions.

This was also one of the few things that brought the public to the campus of UCSC, which is up on a hill and somewhat removed. It always surprised me when people who had lived in Santa Cruz forever told me, "Oh, I've never been here. This is all very interesting. What is this?" We were actually a conduit—one of the few things that many people in the community saw as the university's contribution to the city.

For tens of thousands of people, this was their connection, and the university could never quite see that in reverse. The university was never able to launch a summer quarter, so it never really had students around. We would get funding from the campus, but it became harder and harder—with the shrinking tax revenues and all the competing demands for very scarce public resources—for the campus to be able to justify having a theater company, particularly when they couldn't understand, because its chancellor was an astrophysicist. Its executive vice chancellor, the number-two person down, was also a scientist—a

forensic anthropologist. The university had a lot of people who just hadn't been brought up in the arts. Our artistic director was Marco Barricelli, who is a fabulous actor, and one of the things that we were really proud of institutionally is that we would select, as artistic directors, not people who had been artistic directors, but people who were actors. We've had an actor-led theater pretty much our entire run. We had hired Marco and given him the mission to, above everything else, protect the aesthetic and the professional quality of the theater. Of course that was exactly what we wanted to do, but we were set up for one struggle after another after another.

So, fast-forwarding to 2008, shortly after the election of President Obama, everybody was in this "Move.org" kind of mindset. You know, \$25 from a million people can do great things. That was something that I never thought we'd take advantage of—a mass movement—but in 2008 we got locked into discussions with the campus, which led to the campus to delivering pink slips to our artistic director and to most of our staff. The university was tiring of the constant struggles between our theater company and Theater Arts, where we were nested. Theater Arts' mission was world theater, and people would look at us and say, "Well, you're just doing Shakespeare, and that's just dead-white-man theater." We would have this battle because we were actually the public face of the successful theater to the community, and yet there were many other faculty members trying to do their own art—but we were the ones who'd get the recognition because we were out in the public and they couldn't get out in the public. There were all these different things that I guess only happen in academic environments. I had spent a lot of time with—and sent a lot of late-night emails to—the chancellors, sending materials from MIT: "And here's why MIT thinks it's really valuable to MIT as a research institution to have students in the theater." You try to explain how organizations and institutions see the value, but sometimes you just don't get there.

It came to pass that, despite all of our efforts to try to explain to the campus what the value of a live theater company was to a research organization like a major university, we couldn't do it. We ended up having a meeting with our artistic director, myself, another board member, the chancellor, and the various other campus leaders to talk about the

future of the theater. We all had already been told that people who were going to be terminated had already received their pink slips. It was sort of one of these medical drama shows where you've got the patient in the middle, and it stops breathing, and you have to go shock it, and it sort of moves around for thirty seconds, and the conversation then fizzles and everybody on their side of the room is silent. Do it again. Eventually I just said, "Well, what is it that you would want us to do in order to have a 2009 season?" They huddled, and they came back and said, "Well, if you can raise \$300,000 in a week, we will give you your season." My instinctive reaction was to laugh. I said, "Well, if that was 'all you wanted us to do,' it would have been nice if you could have helped us frame this in advance so that we could have raised twice that amount."

In any case, we went back to Marco's office and set the clock; 168 hours. How are we going to do this? We had a town hall meeting, inviting everybody we could. We went on TV. We announced what had just happened. We had Marco give a talk about the importance of theater, and we had Audrey Stanley, who was our founding artistic director, publicly present a check to us for \$25,000. We organized a fundraising campaign without knowing it—sort of invented Kickstarter. The last thing we wanted was for people to give us money without us meeting the goal and have the university keep all the money. We were able to get the university development office to figure out a way to take money but also to give it back if it didn't work out. Going back to this "Move.org" model, I would wake up every morning and log on to my computer—and it would be screenful after screenful after screenful of donations, \$25, \$50, \$100. In the end, at hour 168, we showed up on the campus with \$417,000, raised from 2,050 people globally. A lot of the donations we got were from actors and theater artists, people who had come to work with us and had gotten paid our sub-LORT C wages due to all of our exceptions, writing us a check for \$500 or a \$1,000, which might be more than they made the summer before with us. It was just really astonishing to us, because we look at it from a community perspective, an audience perspective: "Hey, don't take away my theater!" But the artists were looking at it from the other perspective, which is, "Hey, we can't afford to lose one theater anywhere. Because if you lose one, you lose another, and then we have nothing to do. We

need you to keep the supply of theaters alive so that we can do the work that we have to do as people." We were really looking at it from an audience perspective. In our case, what makes our theater special is the recognition that it has been passed down within families. You have people who started going in the 1980s, who bring their kids, who bring *their* kids. We look at our audience not as individuals but as families. People began to realize, "I was going to bring my grandchild to this. What do you mean you're not going to be here?" I imagined my daughter walking around Santa Cruz twenty years later, or thirty years later, or whenever, and someone saying, "How did your father, who was board president, allow that to happen?" I'm just not going to allow this to be a possibility—that's how we all felt.

My moral of the story is: "Don't Mess with the Arts." It will come back every time.

So that was our 2008 experience, which I refer to as our near-death experience. It brought us together as a community. It also made it really hard to continue to operate on campus because people were now all publicly incensed. We, as a program of the campus, would have our donations go to the campus, who, after taking the requisite development fees, would send us the money. We were really locked into a situation in which, no matter how great we were, or no matter how well things could work, it was hard to rebuild everything that needed to be rebuilt. The \$417,000 we raised to be like a rainy-day reserve fund, so that is there was a shortfall and we had uncovered expenses, rather than that being added to the deficit, which we ran at the campus, we could use that to just repay the debt, the deficit, right then. The university did a sort of end-run around that by writing to all the donors and suggesting, "Thank you. Wouldn't you like your money to support the theater?" They wrote it in such a way that they could then dip into the \$400,000 to put it into our budget at the top, instead of waiting to see it at the end, which was really not the best thing. As a board of the theater—we were a board in name only, since we didn't have any budget authority, no hiring and firing authority, no ability to waive procurement rules, no real ability to approve anything—there wasn't much we could do about how that \$400,000 got spent.

We got to a point where priorities on campus began to change. There was a new dean. There were plans for raising money and building a \$50 million center for the arts and sciences. The digital media and digital arts revolution was really coming to the fore. And again, theaters such as ours were becoming less of a priority, of less interest. So in 2013, we attended a very hastily scheduled board meeting in August, in the middle of our summer performances, where the dean announced that we would be terminated totally as of December 31st. This just hit everyone like a ton of bricks. It wasn't that it was totally surprising, but the way that it was handled was pretty awful. I asked the dean in our meeting whether we could have a copy of the press release, and the answer was, "Well, you can see it when it comes out in the newspaper." I thought of Audrey Stanley, who then was only 85. This is basically the kind of thing that can kill a person like Audrey. This is somebody who's dedicated thirty-some-odd years to the campus, to theater, and to this program which she created. And just to say, summarily, "That's it. Goodbye. Good luck," was pretty awful. But it also inspired us. We've got this woman here who has given everything to the theater. It's impossible to say, "Okay, we are not going to do everything possible to stand in front of you and shield you from everything. We will get this back on track." That motivated a lot of us to form an exploratory committee to begin to think about what we could do. As we did that, we found ourselves in a position of having a great opportunity as well as an immense challenge.

From the artistic side, let's just go back to that for a moment, we were in the middle of doing the *Henriad*, and we're at *Henry, Part 2*. Immediately after this news sprung, the way the actors began to treat the roles and the way the audience began to understand the "Band of Brothers" speech and all the St. Crispin speeches, all the battles—it was like people were just transformed, and they were seeing an entirely different play from one night to the next. That was something that really captivated the imagination and helped feed a fury of, "Okay, what is going to happen to the theater," because it could not be allowed to disappear. Now everybody had this vision of joining together, of figuring out what to do.

The big challenge was to be able to go to our public, and to our donors in particular, to try to explain to them how we were going to try to create something new, something different. The goal was not to create a one-season wonder, but to come up with a theater company that is going to be financially responsible, sustainable, transparent, and yet still have the same commitment to the art form that we've had before. How do you start when you have really nothing? That was the question. When we began to think about it, it wasn't that we really had nothing. We had a thirty-two year operating history of knowing our audience, of knowing our donor base, of knowing the canon, of being part of the theater world.

So we set about trying to explain to our donors, to our large donors, one by one, how we could do things differently. For example, we could actually have a board of directors that have fiduciary responsibility, which we didn't have before. We could own our own assets, so anything that we paid to create, instead of being owned by the university, we would own, such as costumes, props even. We would have the ability to hire and fire people, which we haven't had. We would be able to accept in-kind donations that under university rules couldn't be accepted because perhaps someone wasn't a member of the union, so you couldn't accept lumber from so-and-so. We would have the opportunity to have our own mission statement. We would be free from constantly trying to shoehorn ourselves into the mission of a science and research university. As we began to talk to people and explain to them what we could do differently, how we could be in the world, we began to get support. We then decided that, if we were going to do this, we needed to have a new financial model. We decided to adopt what we've called a forward-funding model. The idea behind it was that, unlike the theater before, and unlike most theaters, you commit to a whole bunch of expenses and liabilities, and then you hope to raise that amount, if not more, through donations and ticket sales. You can't always be assured that that's going to happen, but you've committed to all the liabilities. We decided to flip that and say, before we start anything, we will have raised all the money for the budget, plus a ten percent contingency fee. And if we haven't done that with enough time to be assured that our artistic director can hire the best

directors and actors and others, then we're just not going to proceed.

So we had another campaign, this time starting in about December, to try to raise \$1.1 million from the community by no later than early February because our season would start in June. We began TV, radio, press; multiple meetings with many, many people; emails; Facebook; and really galvanizing, with only four or five of us doing this, pulling together through explanations of the artistic vision and governance and this financial model, pulling people together to raise the money.

One of the things we did early on was to create an advisory board. They were people who had some connection to us, but we didn't expect them to do too much. But we needed to be able to get into people's heads that the theater community is paying attention to what's going on in Santa Cruz. We were able to get James Bundy to join, which was wonderful. We were able to attract Patrick Stewart, who had actually once done a fundraiser for us in the 90s and had been slated to come and direct but then went off into outer space, and that was that. We had Emily Mann from McCarter. We had a number of local philanthropists and, intentionally, the campus's largest donors we could find, just to send a message: "We too can play these games." If you're on the board of a theater, you really owe a duty, not just to your theater and your community, but to the theater generally. We had an obligation to be fighting not just for ourselves and the issues in front of us, but for all theaters and the theater as an institution. We were doing what we were supposed to do. Anything less than that was just not going to be acceptable.

We got to the point where we were able to raise the money. It took a while. But having the advisory board really unlocked the floodgates of support because people could say, "Well here are all these people who are hoping for you to succeed." After we announced the advisory board creation we had an anonymous gift of \$400,000. We were able to take that and just create wildfire enthusiasm for the theater, because it was now within reach. If someone has put this much trust into us, I think then we can do this. We should be able to do it. And then it happens.

We were able to pull that off, and establish ourselves as an independent theater company with a nonprofit board. We had tremendous support from the Packard Foundation, which actually called us and said, "Oh, we think you need some money. Can we fund a whole number of different consultants to help you do strategic planning, organizational management, organizational development, to get your policies in place?" I said, "Yes." And, of course, when you have one foundation, then you can begin to talk to others. Our problem was that most foundations, before they give you a grant, want you to have three years of audited financials, which we didn't have. But we had a track record of 32 years of artistic product that we could point to and say, "We know that we're going to have these audiences, more or less. We know that we're going to be able to raise this much money, more or less, from our community." So people came together to make that happen. The kind of support that we got was really amazing. What I'd like to do, if you don't mind, is read you just a couple of letters that we got, to give you a sense of what people from the community thought when this was happening in real-time. So, we had a letter from an actor who writes:

"Let me know if there's anything I can do to help. My heart and soul are behind you. Less than financial help, but I wanted you to know I'm here. The theater has shaped my artistic life as a professional actor. The world is watching and it needs you to succeed. Shakespeare is universal, and the level SSC is begins to approach his pedigree."

Then I got this letter from somebody in the community. It was one of those things where you have to sit back and realize that your theater is playing a role in the lives of families. From the stage, you just might see the audience. From our perspective as the board, we might just see people as, "Oh, good. That seat's been filled. We've checked this box here. We've gotten these donations." But it was so much more than that. So we had this letter:

"You live in our hearts, our souls, and the anticipation we have all year. You're a family legacy, as we introduced each of our children to the joy of the spoken word on stage. You're a basket of memories—a cookie grabbed by an actor running up the hill; a branch falling—we have big redwood trees—and then the whole audience ducking as we

then cry, 'Is there a doctor here?' The ache and comfort of the first summer since the death of our son who so loved you. You're a beloved friend who has given our family 25 years of delight, laughter, and bond. We love you and support you in any way you need. Let us know."

As we as a board began to look at these kinds of letters that came in, we felt, "We have to do these things. We have to do them for our community. We have to do them for the people who are in the arts who are relying on us to have our audience to come to each summer."

We had another actor write:

"As I expressed to Marco last week when the news broke, that summer saved my artistic life. At the time I was struggling to find work. The work I was getting was unfulfilling, to put it mildly. Working on those plays with such a wonderful company of actors, two tremendous directors, and the rest of the company, reminded me why I love acting. I will forever be grateful to Marco for the opportunity, and I will never forget that magical summer."

From our perspective as sort of "mere civilians," to see the artistic community express its feelings was just something unexpected. It made us feel that as a community we're doing something good. It motivated us to continue. And so continue we did. We had, first and foremost, to negotiate a lease to use our outdoor theater space, which was this redwood grove that we had been in for thirty-odd-some years. The actors have always loved it because the redwood trees come out of the stage which was built around it. Our audiences had been going there, and it really had become sacred ground. Then got a letter in March of 2015 with the university telling us that it was not going to be in the campus's long-term interest to extend our lease. They had plans to possibly use the theater for an MFA dance program which had yet to be established. The other issue was accessibility—that it would cost the university about a million dollars, which they didn't have, in order to make the space usable for the public. I assumed they had ADA issues. The idea that they wanted to make intense use of the space for other programs, but that they couldn't bring it into code compliance, left a lot of people scratching their heads. For us it meant we had one more year in a sacred space for

performance, and then the challenge of finding a place where, within a year's time, we could bring water, power, parking, and magic.

We started to talk with the Parks Department in Santa Cruz. Our artistic director and a few of us drove around to city parks looking at different things, trying to imagine what you could do here, what you could do there. As our artistic director tells the story, we were driving out of a park after looking at the place the city was suggesting, and there was this piece of land off to the side somewhere, and he said, "Stop the car!" We identified a piece of land that looked like it could work. We really had very few places we could look, because we needed to have a place where you could get power, as well as water, and have parking for hundreds of cars, and there were not very many of these kinds of places. But we did find one. It required us to figure out how to get a theater designed, how to get the funding for building it, and how to get through a city-approval process, all within, at that stage, about nine months. So our merry band of brothers and sisters, our board, got support from the Packard Foundation to hire a capital campaign consultant. We designed a capital campaign and applied to the Packard Foundation for a bridge loan, because we were going to have to pay the construction cost in real-time, but we couldn't raise that much money in that period of time—we had pledges payable over three years. The Packard Foundation said, "If you give us written pledges from people, we can advance you the money. You can collect the money from people over three years and pay us back at a very nominal rate of interest." We were able to pull that together, and we ended up raising about \$1.13 million. It turns out the costs that we've incurred are about a bit more than that, but just about a week ago we got a challenge gift from someone who had never given to us before for \$100,000. If you go to our website now, you'll see that there's an artistic director's message explaining, "We've got someone who's going to give us the \$100,000 if we can raise the other one hundred." So we're working on that.

In some ways, the funding part was the easiest part. We needed to be able to take this space and transform it into something that was going to work for the artists. Our artistic director flew in various members of the design team we work with. They came up with the design. We then had to get it

through the planning commission in Santa Cruz. That was theater in its own way. There were going to be hundreds of people coming from our theater community, but also the neighborhood was going to be impacted by traffic. We were in our civic auditorium, and people would get up and say, “Well, if you build a theater in this little piece of the park, the coyotes will have nowhere to eat dinner five days a week.” Or, “If you have to choose between butterflies and art, city planning committee, you need to choose the butterflies.” We had a lot of people who were very concerned about traffic noise and roads because a lot of the roads in this particular area are narrow—there were just some real issues. It turned out that there was someone among the group of neighbors that I actually knew and had worked with. I talked to her. She said to me, “Well, we’ve been complaining as neighbors about different road issues, different traffic safety issues, and no one at the city council even calls us back.” I said, “Well, we don’t have that issue. They will call us back. But we need to find a way where the neighborhood will make us feel welcomed as a theater.” So we came up with the proposal that the 250 neighbors who were going to sign the petition to the city council saying, “Don’t approve a theater in this park,” instead agreed to sign a petition that said, “Well, when you do approve this, also approve all the traffic safety issues.” So we did a joint presentation to the city council where the neighbors expressed conditional support, and I read them a list of, basically, “We need a stop sign here; we need to get the staff to agree to do all these things before opening.” We took a couple members of the city council around to drive through the neighborhood to look around, and when they actually experienced the roads themselves, they agreed and we eventually got unanimous city council approval.

Then we had to do permits and everything. But if you go to our website or to our Facebook page, you’ll see this great little video—a little 93-second video—from ground breaking to opening night in about ninety-three seconds. We had ninety-three days to do it, to create a 485-person theater. And we did it. And we had a fabulous season. For me the artistic highlight was *Hamlet*. Our artistic director is very committed to gender equity, and so for *Hamlet* we had Kate Eastwood Norris, who has performed with us many times, play Hamlet, but play Hamlet as a female character. Opening night

was, I thought, just electrifying. The night before, Hillary Clinton had just given her acceptance speech. The next night you see Kate on the stage playing Princess Hamlet, which was just beyond-belief phenomenal.

So that’s what we’ve been up to since 2005. I wanted to present it so you know what kinds of things are possible. I think you’ll see that communities really value having the work that you all do come and grace our lives. I want to encourage you to keep doing the things that you do. I want you to know that as a community—and I’m sure we’re not the only ones—we’re there for you guys.

Student: I’m from Berkeley, and so California politics are my enemy. I know those people who will tell you that the coyotes and butterflies are top priority. And galvanizing that energy to actually unite your causes is not something that I had actually thought through before, but it is actually brilliant. It’s an intense energy that can be incredibly valuable.

If there was an appeal, or an environmental appeal, we would not have had a season. It would have been too late. We had one member of the planning commission who did not like the stage design because we had to cut a tree for sightlines. Our artistic director explained, “Well, you know, if we move the stage over here so the tree wasn’t in the sightline, it would run up against the Riparian Corridor, and we would need to have a modification to a slope permit.” We had to agree on exactly where the seats are, where a rare form of prairie grass is, that was going to be disturbed, we had to agree to mitigation measures of removing poison oak and taking care of adjacent land. It was theater in its own way. It was a Northern California moment.

Joan Channick: Now that you’ve got this theater, what happened to your board? How big is your board now? Were there a lot of transfers from your previous advisory board, or the non-governing board you had when you were at the university? Where do you do all your other functions? Where do you have your offices, because that must have been a space that was subsidized by the university before? Where do you do all that stuff?

We've had to rent it. Built into our budget is rental of office spaces. We have offices downtown. Our initial board was largely the existing board when we were on campus. We've grown now to about ten. We have brought on a number of people who are new to us. From my perspective that's particularly fabulous. I was delighted to be able to transition being board president after two years to the person who was head of the site committee, who I felt needed greater authority because we were dealing with the city and needed the authority of the position. So we've had a transition of board leadership. We've now expanded the board to include people who are not only interested in the construction aspects, but education, HR. We're looking strategically for what we need the most. Can we continue to try to build the board? That's really, in some ways, our biggest challenge. I look at raising the money as sometimes the easiest, because the festival generates the enthusiasm and sort of sells itself. We're just there to figure out how to do it. The Packard Foundation has funded a follow-on strategic planning process for us, which we just started a few weekends ago.

I didn't explain everything about our forward-funding model. So, we had all the money raised for the first season. What that means is that all of the ticket revenue is available to go immediately into the next season's production budget. We finished year one with about \$450,000-\$485,000, and it was so fabulous to wake up on the "first day" of the fiscal year, and be half way to the budget. The artistic director can now go on and figure out what to do, because we know that we can easily—"easily"—raise \$300,000 or \$400,000 because we've done it every year for decades. We're not at risk for having the next season.

So, when we learned that we weren't going to have our old space and we needed to be in a new space, that really created a difficult moment for us, because the way the model works is: the more shows we can offer, the more revenue we can generate for the next year. But because of all of the timing issues and the construction issues, and of course, we had El Niño, we had a lot of rain and a lot of flooding, we had a lot of things conspiring—everything but fire, I think, knock on wood—to make our deadline for opening very difficult. We actually had to push it back a week. But we couldn't do three shows, as we

had done in our first year, because we would have needed to have the theater ready for tech before it was going to be done.

So, growing the board has been a challenge. Our strategic planning is where we have some difficulty now. We need to be able to forward-fund as much as possible the ability to mount a third production. If we can't get ourselves back to the point where we have enough art on the stage to generate the revenue that we need for the next season, we run the risk of getting back into the old way of doing things, which is lots of sleepless night wondering, "Are we going to have a hole at the end?" We have these reserves, so we can actually approve budgets that have a bit of a deficit in them, and we are on the verge of doing that because we need to get that third show back in. We're sort of treating that as an investment in ourselves, taking \$100,000 out of our reserves in order to be able to get one more show. Then hopefully we earn enough revenue that we can think about, eventually, either four shows in two reps, or other things during the year that will help us generate revenue.

These are the difficulties that we've had in the board meeting in just the last week and a half: thinking through, if we continue to dip into reserves, what will happen, how this model is going to work. We haven't yet done audited financial statements, but we have had a CPA review, which is sort of the next level down, and that went very well. The financial model that we have is still very confusing to people, and we're just now beginning to understand and articulate that forward-funding is not an accounting concept, it's just a name for a reserve. But the curtain speech that our artistic director gives at every performance is: "By buying a ticket today, you're investing in your community, but you're also allowing us to produce next summer." People are now beginning to understand that and they like the idea that "The ticket I bought for us and the kids tonight—that's already funding next season. This is terrific. This season was funded by last year." So we're working really hard, and one of the best ways to make this model work is to increase the board, because it's the board that helps get the word out and unlocks new circles for fundraising and grants. I think your question is really a good one because it's the board that's at the heart of all this. From my perspective, when there were two or three of us

doing this work at the very beginning, there was a lot of weight on our shoulders. We did it because we had Audrey and we could not even imagine what would happen if we couldn't pull this off for her as a person. Now that there are ten people and a fabulous staff shouldering all this, the theater's really light on everyone's shoulders. If we can find more people to share it, it becomes that much easier and hopefully it becomes self-sufficient.

Student: This is such a great story, and it's very inspiring. It seems historically that times of crises are sometimes the easiest time to raise money. All this drama with the university created the perfect storm of people wanting to rally, and also the excitement around having a new space and all that. So I wonder if you have any thoughts about what happens if and when that dies down, and what the plan is to kindle that?

We've moved to a membership model. What we learned in 2008 is that there are only so many times you can have a fire sale. Although there were many other times when we would have liked to do it, we had to get out of the "save the festival" mindset. In 2008, I looked at it as the near-death experience. When I talked to people in 2013, I said, "We're not asking you to save anything. It's dead. This is a near-life experience." It's very different. It's, "If you want this, you need to help us do it. We're not asking you to save anything." That's what helped us, I think. It was a realization that we weren't going back to the well to ask the same people, all the usual suspects to save us or to bail us out. You can only do that once. This time the approach was: if we want this as a community, then we all need to do something. By transitioning to a membership model, we're hoping that we can get people to become members, and then get members at different levels. The idea in our strategic plan is to work on growing the number of members. Right now I think we've got about 800. Keep in mind that when we became independent, we were not given access to our subscriber list, of thirty years' worth of data—addresses, emails, ticket history—nor did we get any of the donation information. We didn't get the costumes. We didn't get the props. We started from a point of literally nothing. We had the programs, and of course those of us who ran the board had all that information, like the cellphone number for so-and-so, but we made a conscious decision, we were not going to look at any

of that. We started out life with having to get the word out without a lot of great local press. We still have people saying, "What?! You're still alive! You're still here! Why didn't you call me?!" We tell them, "Well, we knew we didn't know how to reach you. We couldn't reach you because we couldn't use that information."

Really we had the reputation and the love of the community and the theater world.

Student: Follow-up on the enthusiasm question...

Channick: You should probably disclose your parallel.

Student: I run a summer Shakespeare company up in Maine. It's going through its seventh season, and maybe our second death experience now. But we don't have ticket revenue. We're in the place of having a very enthusiastic community that won't let it die.

Good!

Student: Which is great, but the community also really doesn't want to give money to keep it alive.

Getting the community to contribute is a big thing. You've got grant funding that covers the cost? Is that it?

Student: It is almost completely contributed, but half of our earned income comes from camp. We do kids camps, so educational programming. Almost all the rest is pass-the-hat, or corporate, or other kinds of donations. The budget's not that large, and it's kind of in this place where it feels like a public good, so the people in the town think, "The town should pay for it," and the town thinks, "The people should pay for it." It seems like one of the things that you guys had going for you was this enormous legacy and reputation, where a really large group of people said, "This is important to us." But we're talking about 100 people—not 1,000 people—who are super dedicated to it, partially because they're connected through their kids. So, that's the big question: how to really tell that story in a compelling way to donors that would rather give elsewhere.

We found was that our intern program was really important because being able to point to people who have gone through the program and gotten a benefit from it by working shoulder-to-shoulder with professional theater artists—that opens up channels to raising money from an educational perspective, if you can get people to talk about the influence that being able to work and perform on your stages has given them going forward. I would work on that story. I would also look in the general Maine ecosystem: Who are voices that are respected? Begin to get their attention and begin to get them to make the case. Having an advisory board may be a good thing. You can change it over time, but try to identify the influential people who can open the doors that you need opened. Maybe talk to grandparents.

Student: I have a question. Now that you're not attached to the university, is there any plan to expand? You said that you don't have an education program yet. Are you looking to add programming, or not make it just a summer festival?

We are doing a few things. As fate would have it, UCSC hired a Shakespeare professor for the first time in a long time. We do a weekend-with-Shakespeare program with him, and that has a scholarly aspect to it. We give away a lot of tickets to school groups, particularly at the beginning of the run. We have free or reduced tickets for people who are under eighteen who come with an adult. And we are thinking about having our season run until the end of the first week of September. Now, a lot of schools in California will start in the middle of August, but unless you've gotten everything planned with lesson plans way in advance, it's been a little bit late to bring all that together. Our thought was that if we could extend our season into the first week of September, then we could have schools come for matinees. I don't know if we're going to get to it this year, but we now have a board member who's really enthusiastic about that. We'll have a small committee and start planning that. It's definitely on our agenda.

How early in the summer do you start?

Opening for our first show was, I think, July 15th. Previews were a couple of days before that. We had to push it back because, from a safety perspective,

we were not ready. We had opened the year before on July 4th weekend, and that was not a good idea.

We've made that mistake too.

So early July until the very end of August is our season. But if we can get it a little bit into September, we think we can do much more education, which is really important.