
THE PRODUCER'S PERSPECTIVE

A BROADWAY PRODUCER'S OPINION ON
EVERYTHING BROADWAY AND BEYOND

THE TOP 100:
THE MOST READ BLOGS ON
THEPRODUCERSPERSPECTIVE.COM

BY
KEN DAVENPORT

WWW.THEPRODUCERSPERSPECTIVE.COM

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DEDICATION

To my readers -

There is no way I could have blogged for six days, never mind six years, without each and every one of you. Even the ones that disagree with me.

TheProducersPerspective.com
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A Note From Ken

I have to admit it. When I first joined the blogosphere, I felt like one of those crazy people on the subway who talk to themselves. I never imagined that one day I'd be typing a preface to a book of entries, especially since I've found myself staring at my screen at 3 AM so many times wondering, "What the &#@\$ am I going to write about?"

Six years later, and I've written 3,941 posts as of today. Since new, passionate theater people stumble onto the blog every day and don't know where to begin, I put together this compilation of the 100 Most Read blogs over the past six years.

Enjoy them and I'll see you 'round the blogosphere!



Ken Davenport

P.S. All of the text in this book is taken directly from my blog. If a word is underlined, it means that there is a hyperlink or a photo or video on the entry on the website. If you wish to check out the link or the photo/video, just visit www.TheProducersPerspective.com and search for that specific entry (you can find it by date in the archives section).

1. October 10, 2008

Top 10 Audition Tips for Actors

Sitting on the other side of the table is something that every actor should do. It's incredibly educational and inspirational, because frankly, you realize that while there are lots and lots of people that call themselves actors, there is a much smaller group of Actors (and talent is only a small part of that definition, by the by).

Since so few Actors get a chance to sit where Producers and Directors sit, here are my 10 tips on how to have a better audition experience.

1. Always bring a picture and resume.

I don't care if you have an Agent, a Manager, and a Momma Rose-style "mom-ager" who all promised to send it over. You're the one that won't be remembered if you don't have one. A P&R is more than an American Express card. It's like a pair of shoes. You wouldn't leave home without shoes, would you?

2. Haven't memorized the material? Don't pretend you have.

If you have sides, try to memorize them. But if you can't, it's ok. We'd rather hear the material as written with the papers in your hand than hear you make up stuff just to prove that you tried (and failed) to memorize the material (remind me to tell you about the time an actor added a few lines to a Tony Award winning playwright's monologue to kill time while he tried to get back on track).

3. Don't make excuses.

I don't want to hear that you have a cold, or that you have bed-head, or that your printer is broken. Do your best.

4. If I ask you to make a choice, make one.

I commonly ask the people auditioning for me to choose between two monologues, or I ask them to give me three song choices from their book and then I say, "which would you like to do?" I want to learn what YOU are attracted to, and I also want to see you make a choice. Don't say, "It doesn't matter. What do you want?" Actors have to make strong clear choices when developing characters. I want to see that side of you in everything you do.

5. Make your first 15 seconds count.

When you meet someone for the first time, don't you make a lot of suppositions? We do too.

6. Be the 3 Cs.

Be comfortable, charismatic and confident. Actors have to command attention. They have to be the most interesting people in a 1000 seat theater. Be someone that we want to get to know. If you can do that as yourself, I know you'll also be able to do that in a character.

7. Don't take the last audition times of the day.

Casting is not an easy process, and at the end of the day, a creative team is grumpy, tired and wants to go home. The early actor gets the part. (Another reason to be scheduled early? You don't have the rest of the day of actors to be

compared to. I'm much more likely to call someone back that I see early because I have no idea what the rest of the day will bring.)

8. Let us know where to find you.

Even if you have an agent, put an email address where you can be reached directly on your resume (For safety reasons, I'd suggest a separate email just for this purpose). This way, if you ever leave your agent, or if your agent doesn't get back to the casting director right away, interested parties have a way of at least sending you an inquiry. You don't have to respond. Pix and Resumes sit in files for years. You always want some piece of contact information to be accurate so someone can find you fast.

9. Don't start over.

Screw up? Fight through it. And it probably wasn't as bad as you thought. You're more sensitive to it than we are. An old voice teacher of mine used to say, "If you put a microphone on the inside of a Mercedes engine, you'd hear all sorts of sputtering and spitting, but from the outside, you'd hear nothing but purrrrrrrrrr."

10. Always audition.

The best way to master auditioning is just like everything else. Do it over and over. You'll get numb to the nerves. You'll be able to be yourself. And you'll get free practice! I used to go to dance calls, because learning a dance combination at an audition is a free dance class (and I needed them). Actors who get to work on sides with directors at an audition get a free coaching.

Remember, we want you to be great. We're pulling for you more than you can ever imagine. Because a great audition, means a great cast, which means we're one step closer to a great show.

2. February 25, 2009

How to Get A Producer to Read Your Script

As someone who gets a minimum of 10 script submissions a week, I can tell you first hand that I know how hard it is to get a Producer to read your script and give it even 1/10th of the time and energy that you gave when you wrote it.

So what can you do to get that Producer to take that first step to producing your show and actually sit down and read your script?

Here are five tips on how to get a Producer to read your script:

1. THE ASSISTANT APPROACH

Surprise, surprise, most people who work in Producers' offices love plays and musicals, and have similar tastes to their boss, or at least know what the boss likes or doesn't like (no one in my office is bringing me absurdist operas about Dadaism and its effect on South African monkeys).

Odds are that these people don't get a minimum of 10 scripts a week sent to them like the guy or gal with their name on the door. So find a way to get your script to them (which will probably make them feel pretty special and they'll be even more inclined to like it). If they do read it, and if they do like it, they'll have 40+ hours a week to push it to the Producer. If the Producer has already hired that person, then they already trust them, so odds are high that he or she will read it. I know I'd read anything that my staff asked me to.

2. THE TREATMENT APPROACH

Time is moolah, so sitting down (or standing up) and reading a script is a major investment for someone with a busy schedule. I once did NOT read a play simply because it was 187 pages. It could have been the next *August: Osage County*, but the thought of flipping 187 pages when I looked at my schedule made me throw up in my mouth (BTW, I did give it to an associate to read, and it was NOT *August: Osage County*). The last thing you want is the taste of vomit in a Producer's mouth before they've even glanced at your script.

Why not send a paragraph or one page treatment to whet the appetite of the Producer? Or just send one of the best scenes (Producers tend to make up their minds quickly about plays and if your first few pages don't grab the reader...don't start by sending the whole play which starts with the first few pages!!!)

Along with the treatment, include a postage-paid postcard with a box to check to request the full play, or ask him or her to reply to an email if he or she wants to read the full play. Not every show is for every Producer, and that doesn't mean it's a bad script. God knows, the Dadaism opera could be the next *Jersey Boys*, but I still wouldn't want to produce it. Why waste the Producer's time and the Earth's trees if the show isn't a concept that appeals to the Producer?

Anyone can read a page. Bait the Producer. Get him or her to ask YOU for something. Make them beg for it. It'll put a little psychological power back in your court.

3. THE PRODUCTION APPROACH

Produce the show. Anywhere. Anyhow. Produced shows have more value. I don't care if it was up at a community theater, a black box on the lower-east side, or in your college dorm room. Get it up, and tell me that it was up, and show me some good reviews. A few random quotes from a Philadelphia paper is what got me interested in the book writer of *Altar Boyz's* work. Without those quotes, he and I never would have met, and the show wouldn't be the same.

It doesn't even matter what the production values were like or if you only sold 2 tickets. Just give me the highlights . . . like a (here we go) baseball game on the 11 PM news. Show me the game happened. Show me that you won. And show me a couple of great 'plays'. But I don't need to know everything.

4. THE PAY THE PRODUCER TO READ IT APPROACH.

Just kidding. 😊

5. THE CONTEST APPROACH.

Can't get a show up? Win a contest. There are zillions of playwriting contests out there. Enter a few. Win a lot. Slap that seal of approval all over your cover page that you send with your one-pager. Awards are cool and even if it's from an organization I've never heard of, it still makes Producers sit up and take notice. (By the way, contest deadlines are also great ways to motivate yourself to finish something if you're having trouble setting a deadline for yourself).

There are many other ways to get Producers to read your script. Just put yourself in their shoes. Imagine that they don't know you or what it took to write your baby. What would make *you* read it?

Oh, and what do you do if you try all this, and do your follow up, and they still say they don't want to read your script?

Move on. #S*%('em. You can thank them for passing on it when you win your Tony Award, because there was obviously someone better suited to produce it. You just have to get *that person* to read it.

(Oh, and before you try to get a Producer to read your script, make sure that script is ready for reading! You only get one chance to make that first impression, so make sure your script is tuned up and the best it can be before submitting. I suggest you do readings, have friends read it, and I also strongly suggest script coverage services so you can get professional feedback on how your script stacks up. All this will prevent your script from just getting tossed on the stack.)

3. June 7, 2012

What's the Average Cost of Putting on a Broadway Show?

The subject of this blog is from an email I got from a reader just last weekend, and wouldn't you know it, two days ago the Broadway League's Economic Impact report arrived on my desk and had the quantitative answers this reader was looking for.

So I thought I'd share it with all of you!

If you recall yesterday's entry that detailed the economic impact of Broadway on the city, 2.2 billion doubloons came from direct spending on shows. Let's see how that breaks down so we can also calculate the average costs of producing a Broadway show.

The report indicates that in the 2010-11 season, there were 43 shows produced for a total of \$209.7 million, or an average of \$4,876,744.

Now, there are musicals and plays muddled in that mix, so that figure is a bit hard to do anything with. So, for the rest of this entry and analysis, we'll separate the plays and the musicals. I'll also be excluding any so-called "Special" productions (as classified by the League which refers to productions that don't fall under the definition of either Play or Musical).

So, drilling down now.

In '10-11, there were 15 new musicals produced for a total of \$144,900,000 or **an average of \$9,660,000.**

That same season, there were 25 new plays produced for a total of \$60,200,000 or **an average of \$2,408,000.**

Now that's the "production budget", or capitalization. What about the second component of every Broadway Budget? What about the "operating costs", or how much it costs to keep the show going each week?

Here's more . . .

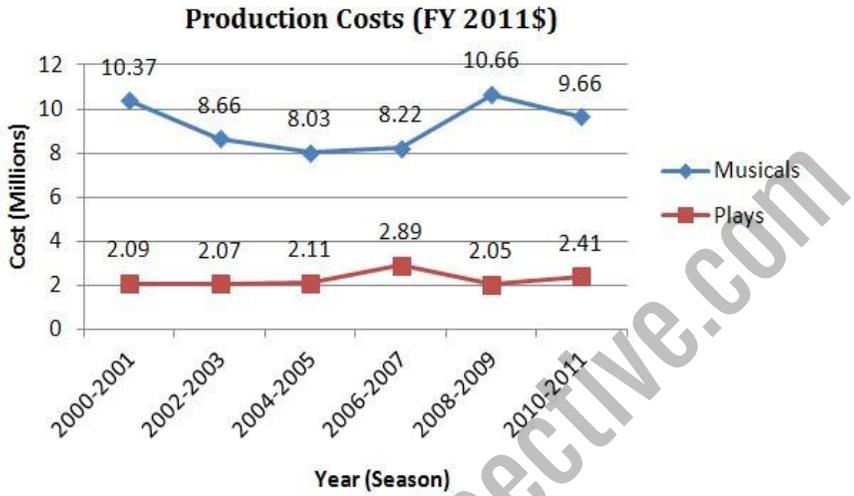
In '10-11, the total spent to operate musicals over 1142 playing weeks was \$673,500,000 or **an average of \$589,754.**

In '10-11, the total spent to operate plays over 426 playing weeks was \$118,500,000 or **an average of \$278,169.**

And there's your answer.

Buuuuuut, let's just keep going. Because now I have a question. Just how do these numbers compare to years past?

Thankfully, the Broadway League published the prior years of stats in addition to the most recent years so we could . . . oh, I don't know . . . graph out how costs have escalated over the last decade. And those charts are below:



So there you have it, James K from Illinois . . . the answer to your question. And for all of you non-James Ks out there . . . there are answers to your questions in this blog as well. For example, if you're budgeting a play or a musical, where should you look to land? Well, the numbers above give you guidelines as where you need to be. Certainly some shows are going to draw outside those lines in either direction, and being average certainly doesn't mean being successful. But when building a model of anything, it's important to understand what the market is bearing so you can see where you fit in the market . . . so you can market your show to the best of your ability for your investors. If you're interested in learning

more about the economics of putting on a Broadway show, pick up this book:
Stage Money: The Business of the Professional Theater.

4. December 18, 2012

Stephen Sondheim Helps Answer the Q, "Why do we do what we do."

Writing theater, producing theater, acting in the theater, making costumes for the theater, ushering for the theater . . . none of it is easy. But this note from The Great Mr. S. and the accompanying letter he received that appeared in a recent edition of *The Dramatist*, (A publication of The Dramatist Guild), is a great reminder of exactly why we all got into this business, or why I did anyway.

For those who wonder why we do what we do, I offer in evidence the following letter, written to the Cincinnati Playhouse by a man who won a promotional contest for John Doyle's production of *Merrily We Roll Along.*

Paste it on your bathroom mirror to read whenever you lose heart.
 Who says art is a luxury?
 -Stephen Sondheim

To just say thank you for the tickets to last night's play could not convey my gratitude for the evening we had. I am not good with words or expressing myself but feel I need to let you know what your generosity in donating the tickets meant to my wife and me. When I received your email saying I had won them I had mixed emotions. I was happy to be able to give my wife a well-deserved night out, but never have attended a musical, I did not know if I really wanted to go. I knew my wife would probably enjoy it though so I agreed to come. We have been married for 27 years now and this was the second night we had out in the past twenty years. We just literally cannot afford nights like this. We do not dine out, go to movies, or do anything that requires extra money. We both work hard and have been at our jobs for years. It is just the past twenty years have brought such heartache and expense we have no disposable income. I have seen my wife lose three children through miscarriages and the pain and hurt caused, then we lost our home and all we own in a fire. We started over and in '97 the flood came and the same month our youngest son was diagnosed with a brain tumor. So with the expenses of rebuilding, over and over, the expenses of his medications and hospital bills we just have nothing extra for ourselves. I tell you this to just let you know that an evening like last night was something I have been unable to give my wife but was one that now I know I have to no matter what.

As a working man, I did not know if I would fit in, but was made to feel welcome by all involved. I always had thought why see a play just watch it on TV or see the movie. Well what I experienced last night changed my life. I want to experience it again and again. But more importantly for me was the impact it had on my wife. From the smile and the glow she had as she watched the play, to joy she had expressed in discussing the play, I saw something I had not seen my wife have in years...pure joy. No thoughts of our son's pain at the moment, no

hurtful memories of the things we have lost but just pure joy at the evening we had experienced. Our drive home and the hours talking through the night were the most enjoyable we have had in years.

So to just say thank you for an evening like this is not enough. To some it is just a few free tickets. To us, it will change our lives forever because as my wife say and asked, "Could we ever do this again?" then answered, "Well of course we could never afford it." Not as quickly as she asked. I realized that no matter what, Playhouse in The Park will be a part of life for years to come. I will sacrifice my lunch every day until we can attend again. We need these moments of joy. I know I rambled. I know this probably does not make much sense to you but I somehow wanted you to know that the tickets for us were much more than just another of many nights out on the town. It gave us an experience we will never forget. You allowed me to give my wife a night I could not have done without your generosity. I can never repay you for what you have given me. I wish I had the funds to donate but do not. But I am a hardworking man. If you can ever use someone to sweep floors, pick up trash, clean toilets, etc. I would gladly volunteer to give back to show my gratitude for what you have given me. Thank you.

Pretty amazing stuff, right? To read some more amazing stuff from the genius brain of Mr. S. himself, check out the incredible *Finishing The Hat* (a must for any theater writer) or his [bio](#). Both are some of my favorite reads.

5. December 21, 2010

The Top 10 Most Performed Plays and Musicals in High Schools

Every year, the folks at the [Educational Theatre Association](#) publish a list of the most performed plays and musicals in high schools around the country.

Here's what drama clubs were up to this year:

Top 10 Plays

- 1) *Almost, Maine*
- 2) *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- 3) *You Can't Take It With You*
- 4) *Noises Off*
- 5) *Twelve Angry Men*
- 6) *Alice in Wonderland* (various adaptations)
- 7) *The Crucible*
- 8) *Our Town*
- 9) *Neil Simon's Fools*
- 10) *A Christmas Carol* (various adaptations)

Top 10 Musicals

- 1) Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*

- 2) *Seussical*
- 3) *Grease*
- 4) *Into the Woods*
- 5) *Footloose*
- 6) *The Wizard of Oz* (multiple adaptations)
- 7) *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*
- 8) *The Music Man*
- 9) *Once Upon a Mattress*
- 10) *Thoroughly Modern Millie*

So, for those of us who don't have kids, why is this important to us?

If you produce and/or invest in a Broadway play or an Off-Broadway play or musical (and sometimes in a revival), you are usually entitled to receive a percentage of the subsidiary income that the authors receive for productions in regional theaters, community theaters, and yes, high schools. And with the right show, this can be a substantial number.

In fact, the possibility of a lucrative post-Broadway life is a reason why so many (smart) Producers and investors choose certain projects. While a show may not make it to the recoupment finish line on Broadway, the subsidiary market can often get it well beyond the profitability mark.

In film terms, the regional, community, and high school theater market is like the DVD market.

So when you are contemplating investing in a Broadway show or Off-Broadway show, or producing a Broadway or Off-Broadway show, take a look at one of these lists. Does your show have similar characteristics (big casts, positive messages, colorful costumes)?

If so, you could have a very nice "stock and amateur" insurance policy in case your Broadway dreams turn into a nightmare.

6. April 30, 2009

How to Invest in a Broadway Show, Part I

I've gotten a lot of questions from readers all over the world expressing interest in investing in a Broadway or Off-Broadway show. Usually they are unsure about how to get involved and, more importantly, they want to know how to pick their first show.

Since this seemed to be such a hot topic, I thought I'd take a couple of blogs to dispel a few of the nasty rumors associated with investing in Broadway or Off-Broadway shows, and also give you my checklist of how to choose a show to invest in.

Today, we'll deal with the rumors. Tomorrow, the checklist. Ready? Here is part I of How to invest in a Broadway show:

BROADWAY INVESTMENT RUMOR #1: Investing in Broadway shows is only for the super-rich.

Because Broadway capitalizations can range from \$2 million for a play, to up to \$20 million for a Broadway Mega-Musical, many people fear that the "entry point," or the amount of money required for an initial individual investment, must be astronomically high.

Not true.

While the average smaller investor in a big Broadway show is probably about \$25,000, I have seen many shows where investors were able to get in for as little as \$10,000, and even a few where the entry point was only \$5,000! There are a lot of publicly traded mutual funds that don't allow you to get in at that level. These lower investment thresholds are very common in the Off-Broadway arena.

What determines the lowest investment level? Here's how it works. Capitalizations are divided into 'units', just like shares of a stock. What defines a unit is up to the Producer. Some Producers like to have a round 100 units per show, regardless of the capitalization. Some like to pick the lowest amount they can accept as an investment (some shows are limited to the # of investors they can have). Some just make it up arbitrarily.

Here's a tip. If you're considering a show and you get sticker shock when you hear the price of one unit? Ask for a partial. Splitting units ain't like splitting an atom. It can be done with ease. Depending upon a variety of circumstances, including how hot the property is, who the producer is, and whether or not other investors took "round units," it may be possible for you to invest in a smaller amount than the "ask."

The key is, of course, never be pressured into investing more than you're willing to lose. If the entry point on one project is too high, don't worry, there are others.

BROADWAY INVESTMENT RUMOR #2: Investing in Broadway shows is only for the super-crazy.

So many people think that it's bonkers to get involved with Broadway.

The fact is, if you're an individual of a certain net worth, your traditional financial advisor will probably recommend that you allocate a certain amount of your investment portfolio (usually about 10%) to higher risk instruments or so-called Alternative Investments in order to diversify yourself (most Broadway and other AIs require investors to be "Accredited," although this is not always the case for shows). Look at the Smith Barney site here to see a description of the Alternative approach.

Why would Broadway, with its high risk but potentially high return, be excluded from that list? In fact, it isn't. Check out the Wikipedia entry for Alternative Investments here. Recognize anything?

Alternative Investments, including Broadway and Off-Broadway shows, are high-risk, without a doubt.

The commonly quoted statistic is that only 1 out of 5 Broadway shows recoup their investment (that ratio is even lower for Off-Broadway shows). But it's not the only high risk instrument on the market, by any means. Investing in Broadway shows is a lot like investing in a restaurant, a piece of art, or frankly, in any entrepreneurial start-up. Look at this statistic that puts the success rate of start-ups at the exact same percentage as I just quoted above – 20%! See, it's not as bad as we thought.

And, if you do proper due diligence, as we'll discuss tomorrow, you can increase those odds.

Also, with big risk can come big rewards. Even if you do end up performing according to the stats, the goal and hope is that the 1 show out of 5 ends up paying for any other previous losses (it's a marathon not a sprint) and then some. Imagine what it would have been like to invest in *Annie*, *West Side Story*, *Cats* or *Wicked*.

BROADWAY INVESTMENT RUMOR #3: Investors in Broadway shows belong to an exclusive 'club' that doesn't accept new members.

While it is true that there are a lot of investors in the Broadway world that have been in the circle for a long time, it's not as closed door of a club as you think. While it can be hard for a new investor to get in on the hottest shows coming to town, it's not impossible, and sometimes, Producers will let you get in on a 'sure-thing' (which doesn't exist, by the way) if you also agree to come into something a bit more risky.

However, it is a relationship business, and preferential treatment is often given to investors who have been doing it longer, and to those that have been faithful to the Producer.

So what does a new investor do?

Start the relationship.

Call a Producer. Email them. Fax them. Simply state that you're looking to invest in a specific show (if you know one that they are about to do), or ask to be put on the list to be called about their next show. It's not a commitment for either party, and I don't know any Producer out there who would mind putting you on a "potential" list. Just make sure you are serious about your interest.

Those are three of the biggest obstacles potential Broadway and Off-Broadway

investors tell me prevent them from taking the first step and joining the ranks of Broadway investors. Tomorrow, we'll talk about just how you choose a project to invest in, once you've decided that investing in Broadway is something you definitely want to do.

7. January 20, 2010

How does a Broadway Producer Get Paid?

I wrote a blog in November which stumped for the concept that Producers should receive a portion of Author's subsidiary rights on shows that have not recouped on Broadway, since it was the Producer's production that branded the show for subsidiary production in the first place.

I got tremendous positive response from the industry from that blog, including several Producers who said they would be willing to take more risks on Broadway if they knew they would have a guaranteed revenue stream to help keep funding their projects in the future.

I also got a lot of questions from readers wanting to know exactly how Producers were compensated for producing shows on and Off-Broadway, so here's a blog that breaks down the bucks (or lack thereof).

There are three main forms of traditional Producer compensation. They are:

1. Producer Office Fee

The Office Fee is a flat weekly amount paid to the Producer designed to cover costs associated with maintaining an office needed to run a Broadway show. If you were the CEO of a company, then your rent, your assistant(s), your copy machine, etc. and all of the things that you need on a daily basis would be taken care of under the company's overall operating budget. A Producer's overhead is not covered by the show's operating budget, therefore the Office Fee was designed to help offset some of those expenses. For an Off-Broadway show, the average Producer Office Fee is \$1,000/week, but it can range anywhere between \$500 – \$1,500 week. On a Broadway show, the average Producer Office Fee is approximately \$2,000, but this can vary as well depending on the size of the production. The Producer Office Fee is usually paid to the Producers two weeks prior to the start of rehearsals. Before that, you're on your own.

The Producer Office Fee is traditionally split between the Lead Producers of the production. If there are three Leads, then divide the numbers I've specified above by three, etc. At times, secondary Producers (or other "above-the-title" Producers) also share in a portion of this fee. In that case, the Producer Office Fee can sometimes be split many, many, ways. I've been on shows where some Producers were getting \$62.50/week.

If a show is in trouble, this Office Fee is usually one of the first to be waived.

2. Producer Royalty

The Producer Royalty is similar to the royalty paid to the Authors or the Designers of the production. It starts off as a percentage of the gross (customarily about 3%), but usually ends up converting to a percentage of profit through a royalty pool. There are traditionally minimum royalties paid to everyone in the pool, and a 3% Producer Royalty would usually mean about \$702 Off-Broadway and about \$3,000 to \$4,500 on Broadway per week. The hope, of course, is that the show is constantly in profit, and that everyone in that pool is paid more than the minimums.

The Producer Royalty is split between Lead Producers as well, just like the Office Fee. Three Lead Producers who are treated evenly on a \$3,000 royalty would get \$1k each. And, usually on the bigger musicals, a portion of that Producer Royalty is split between a bunch of those other names above the title as well.

Unlike the other creatives, however, there is no advance paid on a Producer Royalty and the royalty begins with the first performance.

If the show is in trouble, creative royalties to all participants, including Authors, etc. are usually reduced, waived or deferred pretty quickly.

3. Profit after Recoupment

This is the proverbial pot at the end of the rainbow for Producers. Before a show has recouped, 100% of its profit (after the royalties specified above) goes to its investors. After a show pays back its investors in full, profit is treated differently. First, some folks usually take a sliver off the top (some General Managers, Stars, Authors, etc.), and then the remaining profit is split in two . . . half of which goes to the investors, and half of which gets paid to the Producers. However, once again, this profit that gets paid to Producers once again gets divvied up, first to the Lead Producers, and then each Lead Producer pays a portion of his or her profit to all of the other big money raisers on the show. Because the cost of producing Broadway shows is so great, Lead Producers usually "sub-contract" some of their financing, and in exchange for that, they have to give up some of their profit. But this is the profit that all Producers are praying for, because if you can get a show to recoup, and run for years and years, and spin-off tours and subsidiary companies for years and years, this profit can help provide a financial foundation for your office and help you get future shows off the ground.

In all of the above, you can see how quickly Producer compensation can get diluted, especially if you've got a bunch of Producers helping you get your show up (which is becoming more and more the norm). Now you know why so many Producer's offices are smaller than the offices of their own vendors!

This dilution has caused the creation of a sometimes utilized fourth income stream known as the Executive Producer Fee and/or Royalty.

The EP Fee is a lump sum payment paid in production to cover the work on a project before it opens. It can be \$10k or \$25k on a Broadway show, or whatever is appropriate and "budgetarily" responsible. The argument for the EP Fee is that every other person on the production team is paid up front, from the Authors to

the Director to the Production Assistant . . . so why shouldn't the Producer be paid? A CEO is paid, right? A Managing Director?

The EP Royalty is usually a fixed amount that is paid directly to the Producer during operating weeks that was created in response to the fact that so many Producers had to give up their standard Producer Royalty to their major investors or other above-the-title Producers on the show.

It's becoming more and more challenging to make money on Broadway as a Producer, as it gets harder and harder to recoup because of escalating costs, and because the traditional compensation streams are being tribuized to so many other players.

But it still is possible.

But seriously, I don't know a single Producer that is in it for the money, and you shouldn't be either.

I laugh whenever people say that Producers are greedy, and money grubbing, etc. That is an old stereotype that just doesn't apply anymore. Sure, there have always been a few bad eggs in any chicken coop, but if we were really in it for the money . . . we'd be in movies.

8. May 11, 2010

What Does a Broadway Producer Do? Over 100 Producers Respond.

I got an email a few weeks ago from a high school student with the simplest question ever.

"Ken," she typed, "Can you tell me . . . what does a Broadway Producer do?"

I try to answer all of my reader's questions, but I have to say, I was a bit overwhelmed at the thought of trying to answer this one. First I thought about directing her to my Producer Mission Statement. Then I thought about trying to come up with a list of my day-to-day duties on a show.

But then I remembered how different every single Broadway Producer I know is . . . and how each one of them focuses on different areas of the biz, depending on what they know, what they love, and what they do best.

So, rather than come up with a long-winded answer of my own, I decided to come up with a Wiki answer to my reader's question. I went to my Broadway League brothers and sisters and asked all the Broadway Producers I know to answer my reader's question in one, short sentence.

And now, right here, I'm going to list all of them. Put them all together, and that's what we do!

I promised all the Producers on this list to keep it anonymous, but I will say this . . . there are some heavy hitter answers below. There are more Tonys on this list than at a *West Side Story* reunion.

Enjoy the answers!

Question: What does a Producer do?

- Have fun while keeping all the balls in the air until we open.
- Producers do everything! We are the bank, the therapist, the negotiator, the scapegoat, the creative, and we rarely get credit! I should add its awesome. Because I think it is.
- Getting everyone to do what I want done while making them all think it was their idea.
- We manage the business behind the show.
- Create solutions.
- Producing is the art of saying yes judiciously and no politely.
- Look at a blank slate each morning and figure out – “what has to happen next” – and then make it happen.
- What do I do? Emails... decision maker and cheerleader. (mostly emails)
- Producers inspire others to be as passionate about the project as they are.
- Encourage and foster excellence for the purpose of optimizing profit and art.
- We raise money for projects we have faith in and then try our hardest to repay all of those wonderful investors who have had faith in us (hopefully with a profit).
- Make ideas real.
- Create/ facilitate product, then get butts in seats.
- Find the right project. Raise money. Hire the creative team. Raise money.
- It's a lot of blocking and tackling, with the occasional touch down.
- Partner with the best creative team and let them work their magic!
- Pray.
- Create a safe space for new art to be born.
- Everything but act, write, direct or design . . . In other words, everything you wouldn't hire someone else to do.
- Deliver an engaging production that appeals to the widest possible demographic.
- Encourage, empower and embrace.
- Create a collaborative, focused, dynamic and exciting team-working environment where everyone shares a common vision for the material.
- How about "everything."
- I don't UNDER spend or OVER spend, but WISELY spend every dollar avail on creative advertising and marketing.

- No matter how difficult the biz may be, I always remember the passion which enticed me to be a Producer in the first place.
- I try each day to prove I am the natural heir of Max Bialystock (to collect the royalties he amassed).
- I would say my greatest challenge as a producer is putting together the right team (director, choreographer, music, lyricist, etc).
- Create a safe and supportive environment for artists to make magic.
- A Producer is a midwife for writer(s) and the creative team. .
- To make the impossible possible.
- Assess, finance, assess, stay out of the way.
- Make the best art possible with the available financial resources.
- Find works and artists you feel passionate about and to put them on the stage.
- Realize the world of the play.
- Passionately advocate for the creator's vision of the play and the investors' right to recoup their investment.
- A Producer does whatever needs to be done, from A (finding the property) to Z (making sure the johns have enough toilet paper).
- Producing is the art of making the deal.
- A theatre Producer manages the collaborators of the most collaborative art form that exists.
- The three F's: FIND IT (the show), FUND IT, FILL THE SEATS (preferably with paying customers)
- Create an experience for an audience they never knew they needed.
- Guidance Counselor
- Visionary.
- Advocate/ambassador, sounding board.
- A producer coordinates all aspects of the project and hopes the people he or she picks does the best job possible creating his vision while at the same time getting the most bang for his buck.
- Deal with the people who invest that think they know more than we do re: advertising and everything else.
- Maintains the connection between "show" and "business."
- Raise money.
- I hold a lot of hands and smile & agree with everyone.
- The Producer is the mother that nurtures the baby until it grows up!
- A benevolent (collaborative) Dictator.

- Make their dreams come true.
- I don't believe that any writer, actor or director has ever made a live stage event happen. Without demeaning the incredible talent that the team brings to the table, without a Producer wanting to see the product, nothing would ever get on stage.
- In my view, the Producer is the project manager of the show, who also acts as the CEO/entrepreneur.
- This is a big topic and not one I am comfortable addressing with a sound bite.
- Identify the project, the creative team, and get out of the way.
- I bring together all the resources necessary to transform an intangible idea into reality.
- Support the general partners.
- I often say the Producer is "The glue that holds it all together."
- A producer ensures that: the show is good, sells well, and runs smoothly and...remains calm.
- Have a vision and find the right team to execute it.
- "Put it all together." (to borrow, if I may, from Sondheim)
- Producing is keeping the ball moving down the field until hopefully, you help to allow the entire team to score a winning goal.
- Discover & nurture new works, try and keep everyone happy, create a "family"
- Keep myself constantly inspired by reading everything I can get my hands on.
- Make shows happen
- A producer produces.
- Get the show on.
- Choosing what to produce is the most important decision a producer makes.
- To present a writer who is able to spark the thoughts or feelings of an audience in a fresh and unprecedented way.
- If a show is the equivalent of a small company, the producer is its CEO.
- A producer is like the CEO of a company: hires and fires everyone and most importantly, makes sure everyone's paycheck clears at the end of the week.
- Develop great work and persuade audiences to buy tickets to it.
- Keep the herd moving forward
- To me, producing is development and marketing.
- My response to this often-asked question is that producing each new show is like starting a business – you have to raise the money, hire a business manager (GM), raise money, hire an attorney, raise money, hire a marketing/advertising/promotions team, raise money, hire a director, raise

money, select and hire a design team, raise money, deal with the unions and raise money, etc.

- Oversee the financing, marketing and creative process to deliver a show that connects with audiences.

- My first reaction to your question is one word: "nurture." Actually, it's just like mothering.

- Identify the kernel of greatness and execute a vision for making it so

- A producer is (among so many things), both . . . the owner of the sheep, and their border collie.

- Oversee every element both creative and financial

- A Producer is ultimately responsible for everything, but actually does nothing.

- A Producer always keeps the lines of communication open so that artists, management and money are unified around the same vision.

- Strike a balance between artistic vitality and commercial appeal.

- All encompassing; responsible for every detail

- Maintain an environment where your creative team can do the best work they are capable of...

- Focus on the product, not the money. If the product is really good, the money will find you.

- Happily enabling artists to execute their visions.

And lastly, I'll include one longer answer on this subject because this guy agreed to go on the record with his answer, and because, well, this guy just has a certain way with words.

A producer is a rare, paradoxical genius: hard-headed, soft-hearted, cautious, reckless, a hopeful innocent in fair weather, a stern pilot in stormy weather, a mathematician who prefers to ignore the laws of mathematics and trust intuition, an idealist, a realist, a practical dreamer, a sophisticated gambler, a stage-struck child. That's a producer.

- Oscar Hammerstein II

Thanks to all the Producers that participated!

9. May 1, 2009

How to Invest in a Broadway Show, Part II

Yesterday, we dispelled some of the rumors associated with investing in

Broadway shows. Today, we'll step through my checklist of how to decide whether or not to invest in a particular Broadway or Off-Broadway show.

BROADWAY INVESTING RULE #1: Have passion for the project.

Broadway shows are often referred to as the “children” of Producers and Investors. Shows need the same type of care, hand-holding, and unconditional love.

So much love, that even when your kid F***s up royally, you (as the parent) will still love him, right?

Unfortunately, the odds are that your “kid” is going to disappoint you, so you better make sure that your bond is so tight that you won't care either way.

This theory is based a bit on famed investment guru Peter Lynch's theory of “invest in what you know.” Peter believed you should put money into companies that make products which you see and use every day (and products that you can't live without). I believe this should be adapted to entertainment investments as well. Invest in shows that you can't see NOT happening. Invest in shows that you believe are important to be seen; whether that's because it has a socio-political message, whether that's because it features an amazing performance by an legendary actress, or whether that's because it's so much fun that the audience's day will be better just by experiencing the show. Invest in shows that you love.

BROADWAY INVESTING RULE #2: It's all about who's driving the boat.

Before investing in a mutual fund, Wall Street geeks will tell you to look at a variety of factors, one of the most important being who is managing the fund. You've got to know who is making the day-to-day decisions. What is their track record? Where did they learn to do what they do? How long have they been doing it?

These are all questions you need to ask before investing in a Broadway show. Look at the Producer's resume (you can find them all on the Internet Broadway Database (www.ibdb.com)). Have they produced shows that have recouped? How many hits do they have? How many misses? Would you have produced similar shows? Do you have similar tastes? Choosing to invest with Producers with a proven track record is one of the best ways you can reduce your risk when investing in a Broadway or Off-Broadway show.

BROADWAY INVESTING RULE #3: Just like an actor, you have to know your objective.

What do you want out of investing in a Broadway show?

Different objectives will greatly affect what project you choose to do. Do you want to make money? Do you want to get access to opening night parties, etc.

so you can network? Are you looking to get inside access to agreements and figures, etc. so you can learn more about how to produce your own show? Do you want to support the work of a specific playwright?

One of my favorite "objective" stories is about the investor who was thinking about graduate school as a way to learn how to produce. They decided against it, and took the money they were going to spend on tuition and invested it in several shows. They thought there was more to learn by playing the game. Last I heard, they were doing pretty well and beating the odds.

There are a zillion reasons to invest in a Broadway show. Make sure you have at least one.

BROADWAY INVESTING RULE #4: Don't try to be a one-hit wonder.

We all want our first time to be perfect (I even wrote a show about it!), but often our first time out isn't what we hope it will be. Don't expect to knock one out of the park your first time up at bat. When signing up to invest in Broadway, imagine that you're a baseball player playing a full nine innings. If you strike out the first time (or even the second and the third) don't worry, you could hit a homer in the bottom of the 9th and win the game.

If your first show doesn't make it, have a post-mortem with yourself (and with the Producer) and try and determine why it didn't work. Learn from it, and apply those lessons to your next time up at bat. Your odds of success should get better each time.

Just don't pull yourself out of the game.

BROADWAY INVESTING RULE #5: Examine the lay of the land.

It's impossible to time the market. But, in a playing field as small as Broadway, with its limited audience, it's important to take a look at your potential competition. Are you doing a new musical at a time when six other new musicals are opening? How do your stars match up against the other shows' stars? Are you the only classic play? Are you the only comedy?

The big TV networks program their seasons so they can appeal to all of the appropriate demographics, without too much weight on one type of show. Since Producers are mostly independents, we can't program collaboratively, but as an investor you can look to see if your show is going to get lost in a sea of other similar shows, or if it will stand out amongst a lack of competition, without having to place \$125k New York Times full page ads.

So there you have it! The above are the first five basic questions I ask myself when contemplating investing in a Broadway or Off-Broadway show. There are countless others you should ask when you get into the details of the production after you examine the budget, find out who's directing, etc., but these will get you started on the road to investing in a show.

You'll notice that a lot of the above rules and checklists are very similar to the rules and checklists for investing in the stock market or any market (invest for the long haul, know your objectives, risk tolerance, etc.). And that's the most important thing to remember.

Too many people think investing in Broadway is a hobby, which it can be, and in those cases you'll probably only hit a winner on the average 1 out of 5 times.

Broadway is big business, and should be treated as such. And if you apply the same principles you'd apply to other investment vehicles and do the due diligence, there's no reason you can't turn that hobby into something that is fun, educational, and yes, even profitable.

10. May 3, 2012

Why Do People Get So Upset When They See a Standing O?

The always Smart 'N Snarky John Simon wrote a blog a couple of weeks ago airing his disgust about the ubiquitous standing ovation. (If you don't know JS, the quick intro is that he was quite a respected critic for a whole bunch of publications until he was fired from his Bloomberg post in 2010. The whispers in Shubert Alley were that he was dismissed for being too "mean". That's a subjective opinion, of course. I always thought his reviews were fun, although I do seem to recall a write-up for Footloose where he he mocked the ensemble for being unattractive.)

In the blog, John hypothesizes that since he sees audiences stand up at almost every show they see that they are A) stupid or B) standing up to try and convince themselves the high price of the ticket was worth it.

Of course, John isn't the first person, critic or otherwise, to complain about standing ovations at shows that aren't "worthy". I'm sure you've been weirded-out when a show has gotten that kind of response when you felt it didn't deserve it, right? Kind of makes you mad? I'll admit that I've seen a couple shows (this season, in fact), that left me shaking my head as to what motivated the audience to get off their bums and on their feet.

But when I read John's column, I started to wonder . . .

Why do we care what motivates a person to stand up?

A person that stands up at the end of a show has enjoyed their experience. And when a person enjoys their experience, they are more likely to repeat it. That = good.

And BTW, if you've stood on a stage, you know that a Standing O can mean a heck of a lot to those that devote their life to a career in the theater.

So, while you, or me, or John Simon, may not understand why some people jump to their feet at the end of a specific movie-turned-musical, we shouldn't be POed that they did. John says that they are "devaluing the standing ovation". Ok, maybe they are. Maybe the Standing O is less rare and so it's devalued.

But I'd argue that they are increasing the value of their own personal theatergoing experience.

And I'll jump to my feet about that, 8 times a week.

11. August 3, 2012

8 Tips for a Kick A\$\$ Kickstarter Campaign

All Kickstarters are not created equal.

I get an average of 5-7 cold requests (meaning I don't know the person asking for the donation) to fund Kickstarter projects each week. It has become a bit of a game for me to place my own internal bet on whether the project will get the green "funded" light or not, based on how the campaign was created. (If I were playing my game with real \$\$\$, I'd be able to fund my own Kickstarter by now!)

For those of you who don't know what Kickstarter is, click [here](#) to check it out. But in a salted peanut shell, Kickstarter is an online platform that allows you to raise money for your project by seeking donations (non tax deductible, mind you) from people in any amount. You set a goal for the amount you want to raise, and different "rewards" are usually given for different levels of financial commitment (\$100/\$500/etc.). Each campaign has a time limit that you set, and if you hit your goal, you get your cash. If you don't, then . . . (insert Game Show losing sound here) . . . you don't. It's all or nothing on Kickstarter.

And that's why your campaign better be kick a\$\$.

Kickstarter has revolutionized fundraising for independent artists (I first blogged about it before it tipped here). But, because it has been such a successful platform, it has also become a cluttered platform, which means you have to stand out from all the rest.

A number of consulting clients have asked me to analyze their Kickstarters over the last several months (partly because of the similarity to the crowd-funding I did with Godspell), and in doing so, I developed a number of simple tips on how to build a more successful campaign. And now I thought I'd share them with you.

Ready? Let's kick it . . .

1. People invest in people, not projects.

This old axiom, which was first told to me by my very first investor, holds true for projects of all different sizes . . . but it's especially true for first projects, or projects for "emerging" or up-and-coming artists. So, while you need to talk about your project in detail so potential donors know what you're doing with their hard-earned recession-valued cash . . . you also need to make sure you give them a heavy dose of you and your personality. Show them why you are the one that they want to help, and they won't even care if your project is a call to save

the Sri Lankan monkeys or a performance art piece that takes place in a public toilet.

2. Make your minimum more than their minimum.

Kickstarter will allow you to accept donations for as little as \$1. But that doesn't mean that's what you should accept. There are a boat load of people out there that will just give you whatever the minimum is, so make sure you don't let them off the hook too easily. That doesn't mean you should make your minimum \$100. But someone giving you \$1 can easily find another four to give you \$5. Do that a bunch of times over and you're a heck of a lot closer to reaching your goal faster. (Bonus tip: The more you want to raise, the higher your minimum should be. Raising \$100,000 a dollar at a time is going to be a heck of a lot harder than \$10 or \$100/time.)

3. Don't click OK, until your contact list is more than OK.

Remember, Kickstarter is a timed event. While 44.01% of Kickstarters reach their goals successfully and therefore receive their money, the last thing you want to do is work so hard at raising \$10,000, only to not raise \$12,500 and get sent right back to the starting line with nothing in hand. Since the majority of the money you will raise will be from your personal network or from people that know you or people who know people who know you (see tip #1), it's important that you assemble a list of everyone and their brother that you think might give you that \$5 way before you start your campaign. It's fun to see your Kickstarter go live, and while we all wish "Trollers" (people who just cruise through Kickstarter looking for interesting projects to fund) were the main source of funding for successful projects, they are not. Trollers are as rare as a troll, so you can't count on them. Build your list. Then add more names to it. And then find more. And then you'll be ok to launch.

4. Shoot high, but not too high.

The average project on Kickstarter raises between \$1,000 and \$9,999. While some have gone higher, it's important to remember these figures to give you an idea of what the market is bearing. Now, your power to raise money will be based first on your contacts, second on you, and lastly on your project. If you think you can bust that average, then go for it. Set your goal high enough to fund your project and give you a cushion, but don't go too high and put your project's funding at risk. Because if you fail, I'd bet the value of your Kickstarter that you won't even try again. (Bonus tip: If you are afraid of not reaching your goal, but still want that cash – check out Kickstarter competitors like Indiegogo and Fractured Atlas for their versions of K-starter campaigns, without some of the pressure.)

5. I learned this from MTV.

You need to have a video. Period. See next tip for more details.

6. It is a “campaign”, but it doesn’t have to act like one.

Make your campaign fun. Show your personality. Your video and your description should be passionate, yes, but they should also play into the fun of what you’re doing, as well as the gamification of Kickstarter itself. I’ve seen some Kickstarters that were raising money for serious “real life” projects were very successful in adding a dash of fun to what they were doing. And it helps.

7. More time doesn’t necessarily mean more money.

The fear of not reaching your goal gets a lot of people so nervous that they automatically select the longest period of time Kickstarter will allow them to run a campaign (60 days). FYI, the average length of a Kickstarter is 30 days, and I definitely recommend somewhere in that ballpark. Kickstarter is a lot like eBay, in that a huge chunk of your donations (“bids”) are going to come as you get close to the finish line. (Sometimes being far from that finish line just a few days out helps you blow through it and beyond.) People are lazy, and if they see they’ve got more than two months to donate, they will take that time – because heck, maybe you’ll fund it another way by then, and they’ll get out of having to give you anything! Put a little more pressure on yourself and on them and set a reasonable amount of time for your raise.

8. Pick rewards that have value, not just valuable awards.

When choosing your different donation levels and the different rewards that go with them, have no more than five. Too many levels just confuses a potential donor, and confusion will just lead them to picking a lower level or not donating at all. And when choosing your rewards (aka “Bait”) for each level, make sure you make them more about the donors than about you. Tickets are a yes (and not for the minimum – people that donate are also more inclined to buy tickets, so try to get both out of them at once), and signed programs and posters, etc. are also nice, but unless it’s Mom, a donor probably isn’t going to put your signed program of your piece out on the coffee table next to the graduation picture of their granddaughter. Parties are good (people like parties), and I’ve also seen some fun stuff (see tip #6) like, “For an XX donation, I will come clean your apartment, do your laundry and cook you dinner,” or “For an XX donation, our composer will provide piano accompaniment at your next holiday party,” etc. Get the point? These ideas show that you are super passionate and willing to do anything to get your show off the ground, and they provide an actual dollar value for a potential donor (odds are they won’t take you up on either – but like agroupon, they buy it and save it because it seems like such a good deal).

12. July 8, 2008

House Seats Shouldn’t Be On the House

Every show on Broadway holds a certain number of seats offsale to the general public called “house seats”. They are reserved for the authors, producers, cast, theater owners, etc. and are generally released 48 hours prior to each performance if not used.

(Ticket buying tip: if you're looking for great seats to any show, go to the box office 2 days prior to the performance you want to attend looking for any house seat releases.)

It is also industry standard to allow other people in the industry, from agents to ad agencies, to purchase house seats, even if they aren't working on that specific show (i.e. I can have my assistant call for house seats to The Little Mermaid).

When I started out, each GM office had a "house seat hotline" that was open from 3 – 5 PM, Monday to Friday, and anyone could call and purchase great seats to any show at regular prices with no service fee. There was even a way to hold these tickets on a "48 hour hold" which reserved the tickets, didn't obligate you to buy them, and if you didn't purchase them, they were just let go 2 days prior as previously discussed.

We've gone to email and fax now, so house seat requests can come in 24 hours a day. And believe me, on hot shows like South Pacific, they do. Every friend of a friend knows someone who works somewhere close to Broadway and wants a couple of tickets to the hottest show around.

House seats are a job that sometimes falls to the Assistant Company Manager, but many times, a person in the General Manager's office assumes the responsibility.

You know what that means?

It means that house seats cost shows money. The GM has to put someone on salary. In triplicate house seat forms are created. Phone calls, faxes, mistakes. Money, money and time and money.

Should we get rid of house seats? No. But why not add a service fee to offset the costs and inconvenience?

If we charged \$5/order to the people that had no connection to the show (I'm not suggesting that we charge those that work on the show), we could pay for the staff member and expenses associated with house seats.

And what if the buyer didn't want to pay? Well, then they can call telecharge like anyone else. I hear the same locations would go for double regular price. But something tells me that just like the \$1 comps, the buyers would suck it up and pay.

I'm all for being nice to the people in my industry. But I'm all for being nice to my investors first.

13. March 16, 2012

The Secret to Producing a Big Fat Hit Broadway Show

A distinguished member of the press recently asked me for my thoughts on developing product for Broadway, and the ingredients that make a million-dollar-a-week-show.

While sure, I'm a big believer in market research, and understanding who your audience is, and what they want to see, and trying to meet and exceed their expectations.

The big secret to creating a gi-normous, box-office busting, Broadway smash?

Ready?

There is none.

Anyone who tells you they can sit down and write a hit is full of something that rhymes with hit but doesn't smell as good.

You just can't do it. People can tell you that they can engineer it, but they're wrong.

You think Da Vinci sat down and said, "I'm going to paint a picture of a woman with a half-smirk that people will talk about for centuries!"

You think Hemingway sat down and said, "Yep. An Old Man. The Sea. Better open up the cash drawer and make some room, because this one is going to be a gusher."

You think R&H sat down and said, "Oh yeah, this Oklahoma thing is going to make us so much money we're going to be able to buy . . . well . . . Oklahoma!"

Artists write what they love, and what they want other people to love. They write what they are passionate about. Period.

And a Producer has to do the same thing. While sure, it's hard when you've got people's jobs on the line (including yours), to not think about "what could I produce that would be a hit?" But since that never works, why bother?

Here's my mission.

Produce like Da Vinci painted. Like Hemingway wrote. Like R&H dreamed. Produce what you love, what inspires you, and what you want to inspire others. You'll be proud, instead of pandering.

And whether or not people it's a "hit", when you're done with one project, find another one and do it again.

14. May 14, 2012

Starry, Starry Night 2.0

There has been a lot of chatter about stars in shows these days, including this recent article from The Hollywood Reporter that features a few quotes from me.

While I was being interviewed, I remembered a blog I wrote back in 2007 (!) called "Starry, Starry Night," that took a look at the 10 longest running Broadway shows of all time and the people that were in them.

Since five years have passed since that blog (!), I decided I should take another look at that list of 10 shows to see if anything had changed in my conclusion.

The following is a list of the 10 Longest Running Shows on Broadway:

1. *The Phantom of the Opera*
2. *Cats*
3. *Les Miserables*
4. *Chicago*
5. *A Chorus Line*
6. *The Lion King*
7. *Oh Calcutta*
8. *Beauty and the Beast*
9. *Rent*
10. *Mamma Mia!*

What changed in the last five years? *Chicago* shot up from 8 to 4, and look out *Les Mis* because Chi-Town is hot-cha-cha on your tail to take over the the 3rd spot in less than a year. *Miss Saigon* got bumped off the list for *Mamma Mia!* and *Lion King* went from 10 to 6, and will soon to take *A Chorus Line* down a peg.

What didn't change? Well, the point of my blog five years ago, that's what. In fact, I'm just going to repeat it verbatim, because I still believe in it 101%.

Ready? Here goes! (I'm making that little Wayne's World doodle-deedle sound and moving my hands up and down now as we go back in time.)

"What do 9 of these 10 shows have in common?

Not one of them opened with a Star.

Make the show the Star. That's the key to a long runner. In a new show, stars are nothing but expensive insurance policies for those who lack the confidence in their own material. Stars make us lazy. And they ask for crazy things like special luxury wallpaper (true story).

And once you go Star, you can never go back. Save the Stars for the revivals (like the 1 out of the 10 above) because they need them.

Now, look back at that list . . . how many musical theater Stars were born from the shows above? I count at least as many as there are shows on that list.

Make Stars, don't count on them." (!!!)

15. May 9, 2012

My Advice to Graduating Seniors Pursuing a Career in the Theatre

It's that time . . . caps and gowns and commencement addresses.

And millions of young adults entering the work force.

And thousands of those millions are looking for a career in the arts.

I got an email from an about-to-graduate-young-lady last week who asked for my advice in how to go about starting her career in the theater.

Of course I could have given her a lot of specifics, like where to send her resume, and what bars to hang out in, etc. Instead, for some reason, I was reminded of the 1980's campaign to stop drug use . . . "Just Say No."

(I know, just give me a second, it'll make sense . . . I think.)

While saying no to drugs and a whole lot of other things when you're young is the best thing you can do, for your career, you actually want to do the exact opposite.

Yep.

Just Say Yes.

You're going to get a lot of opportunities when you're starting out, in a lot of different areas in the arts. Some of those opportunities may not be what you ever considered doing in a zillion years. So what? Just Say Yes.

Never thought about working in a press office? Just Say Yes. Agent? Costume Assistant?

Just Say Yes for awhile.

You've got time on your side. You may not be able to Just Say Yes in 10 years. But now, it's an essential part of your growth and exploration.

And you never know where the Yes is going to take you. You never know what opportunity that you never even knew existed will end up being what you want to devote your life to.

But there's only one way to find out . . . by saying Yes.

In 1993, I was a junior Acting Major at Tisch at NYU. And for some reason, to this day I don't know why, one of my professors recommended me to be a Production Assistant on the Broadway revival of My Fair Lady.

Honestly? I didn't even know what being a Production Assistant actually meant.
But I Just Said Yes.

And I wouldn't be typing this today if I hadn't.

(By the way, being a Production Assistant means getting fresh-off-the-bone roasted turkey sandwiches, walking dogs in a blizzard and being paid in lunch and subway "tokens" . . . and it was the most awesome thing you could ever imagine.)

16. February 18, 2013

Why Writers are Like Indiana Jones

The best stories I've read, watched, and listened to have high, obvious and dramatic arcs. The writer(s) start you off slow, and then over the course of a number of pages or a number of minutes, they take you up a hill and then down again in such a thrilling fashion that you wish you had a seat belt.

If you're having trouble with your story, then you need to think like Indiana and find that lost arc. Where is the beginning? The top of the coaster? And the smooth release to the end?

And if you're starting off from scratch, here's a tip: take a clue from so many great dramatic tales out there and pick something that has a built in arc.

What do I mean?

Do you think it's a coincidence that courtroom dramas are some of the most popular on and off the stage? A Few Good Men, 12 Angry Men, The Verdict . . . The OJ Trial??? Their arcs are built into the story. The audience knows from the get go that the story will be over when the defendant is innocent or guilty. Everyone knows exactly where they are headed (and it's the dramatists job to add some twists and turns and a few loop-de-loops before the end).

Or what about Sports Dramas? Or American Idol? Or . . . and here's the commonality amongst them all . . . any story that is a contest with a black and white/win or lose finish.

I was watching a slice-o'-life drama the other day, and I worried that tomorrow's audiences, who grew up on video games and Survivor and political elections that played out like boxing matches in their living rooms, won't take to those shows the way yesterday's audiences did.

And that means it's going to be even more important that all of us act like Indy. Find the arc. And don't let it go. With it you can find riches beyond your imagination and beat the Nazis.

And without it, you're just another "arc"-haeologist.

17. April 13, 2009**Got an Idea for a Show? Here's the First Thing You Should Do**

Buy the domain name.

That's right . . . I don't care whether it's a new play you've written or an old play that you want to revive. Before you breathe a word of it to anybody, go to a site like www.GoDaddy.com and snatch up the domain for less than the cost of an extra value meal . . . and sit on it.

Maybe the show won't happen, or maybe it'll take five years, but I guarantee you the cost of the domain today will be less than the cost of the domain tomorrow.

Because if you don't grab it, someone else will.

There's a bunch of very savvy businessmen and women out there who have made a bunch o' bucks buying and trading domains like they were derivatives, and benefiting Broadway from producers who fail to buy up their rightful domains before their new musical or new play leaks to the press. I'm sure these 'cybersquatters' read Playbill.com more religiously than I do, just waiting for the announcement of a new reading or the rights of a project being sold (go on . . . visit www.InTheHeightsMovie.com . . . do you think that's Universal Pictures sitting on that domain)?

The truth of the matter is . . . it may be illegal for these cybersquatters to sit on something that is rightfully yours. The infamous "Simpson Movie Suit" between Fox and a squatter who bought TheSimpsonsMovie.com set a precedent that individuals having no legitimate business interest in the domain name could not keep it from those that did.

The problem with the law? It moves very slowly.

So here's what usually happens:

Producer decides too late that they want a domain.

Producer finds it's already gone.

Producer contacts squatter to try and obtain it.

Squatter wants cash.

Producer's show opens in a few months and has no time (or money) for a lawyer to take the case to the World Intellectual Property Organization, so Producer does one of two things:

Producer pays (anywhere from \$100 – \$1,000 and some tickets)

Producer chooses inferior domain and the "right" domain stays in possession of someone else. And that squatter is not happy. And they decided to, oh, I don't know, point the site to the negative NY Times review of the show. Check out www.GuysAndDollsOnBroadway.com.

Either way you pay . . . in cash or by the loss in marketing value from not having the prime domain. Web addresses are exactly like street addresses. And different streets have different values. Your show is like your home. I don't care

how beautiful it is . . . you also want it on the right street in the right neighborhood, don't you? That means it needs the right domain.

So go get your domain. Frankly, I'll even let you stop reading this blog right now to go buy it. Go. I'll be here when you get back.

Good, feel better?

Now what do you do if you find out it's already gone?

Look for alternatives, or start the process of trying to get it back. If you've got time and a lawyer on your show on retainer already, make that lawyer work to get it back.

If you don't, and you simply must, must, must, have that domain like it's a new kidney and you don't have any time, then try to cut a deal. The good news is that most of the guys I know who deal in these domains are pretty reasonable (I can say that because, unfortunately the web design and marketing arm of Davenport Theatrical has had to acquire a few premium domains over the years from shows so big you wouldn't believe). The Squatters know that legally they may not have ground, so they'll cut a decent deal making things easier for everyone. And remember, they're dealing in perishable inventory. Once a show starts marketing an alternative domain like Guys and Dolls did, the other names lose value. Sure, the squatter on the G&D domain mentioned above may feel good about sending traffic to the Times review, but that's not making him any money. In fact, he's losing . . .

But remember, every time you settle, you actually encourage the squatter to repeat the process since it was a successful venture for him/her.

The simpler answer is to snatch up your name faster than you can saw w-w-w. Cuz if you don't, you'll be, well, to bastardize a Loesser lyric: "under the thumb of some little . . . squatter."

In fact, one of my peers out there didn't grab the domain for the show that he's planning on bringing to Broadway in the next 2 years.

Don't worry, Mr(s). X. I bought it for you. :-)

And no, no, before anyone gets any ideas . . . don't worry. I have no desire to sell it for a profit. That's not what I'm about. I'll be happy to hand it over.

I just didn't want it sitting on someone else's servers where they could ransom it for cash.

Because God knows, Broadway shows don't need yet another unnecessary expense line on their budgets.

Oh, and while you're buying your show's domain, buy your actual name at the same time.

Otherwise, this could happen to you.

18. December 29, 2009

10 Simple Steps to Start Internet Marketing Your Show

You're probably smart enough to know that the internet is where you're supposed to be if you're trying to market your show.

But are you smart enough to have started?

If you are one of those Producers or Playwrights who always meant to get around to understanding the internet but haven't quite got around to it, don't worry, you're not alone. I know a bunch of players in the Broadway arena who still haven't picked up the ball yet.

To help you get into the game, I consulted with my web-guru, Jamie Lynn Ballard (who makes all of my sites so pretty), and we came up with the following 10 Simple Steps to Start Internet Marketing Your Show. These tips work for Broadway shows, Off-Broadway show, Off-Off Broadway shows and everything in between. In fact, this list is even more helpful for the smaller shows. Apply the majority of these tips and you can make your show seem a lot bigger than it is.

Ready? Here we go.

1. Buy Your Domain Name

You've heard me say this before, but this is the most important thing you can do when you start plans for a show. As soon as you have an idea, make sure you snatch up the domain, because if you don't, someone else will. Use a site like GoDaddy that sells domains and hosts websites, so you can buy and build in the same place. And get a starter site for your show up as fast as you can. It doesn't matter if you don't have all the relevant info yet. The sooner you can put up your site, the sooner it will show up in search engines, and that means free traffic.

2. Know SEO

SEO, or Search Engine Optimization, is one of the most important things you can learn about internet marketing. Do it right, and you'll stand out like Gulliver in the land of Lilliput. Ignore it, and you'll fall to the bottom of the web sea. What you should know is that as technical as it sounds (why are all acronyms scary?), there are basic strategies that are very simple, so don't be scared. Pick up a book and get started.

3. Build Your List

I've spoken on three internet marketing panels in the last six months and in the wrap up section one panelist always said, "The most important thing a web marketer can do is increase the quantity and the quality of his/her opt-in list."

Email Marketing allows you to build relationships with fans, promote your show, sell tickets and more. Put a sign-up box on your website to collect email addresses, and send occasional emails to your list with information and updates about your show to keep them engaged. Use a company like Benchmark to make it easier for you (Constant Contact is so 2005). It seems so old school, I

know, because this is what internet marketers were telling everyone ten years ago, but let me tell you first hand, that an effective marketing email blast is one of the most important tools you have in your show's marketing tool box.

4. Invest in PPC

PPC, or Pay-Per-Click Advertising, is one of the most economical and low-risk ways for you to reach customers. If you aren't yet ranking high in Google organic search results (and even if you are), pay-per-click advertising gives you a way to appear alongside the sites that are. Don't have a lot of cash to spend? Don't worry, Google Adwords and other PPCers let you set a cap on how much you want to spend per day. Tip: PPC works best when you have a very specific target demographic (e.g. bachelorette parties for The Awesome 80s Prom). PPC can get pretty involved when you start talking Quality Scores, etc., but it's worth learning, because it can put butts in the seats and bucks in the box office fast.

5. Be Social.

Create profiles for your show on social networking sites, like BroadwaySpace, Facebook, and Youtube (if you have video content). Your presence on social media sites may or may not help you sell tickets right away, but if that's where your audience hangs out, your show should, too. Make sure you keep these sites filled with content. No one likes an outdated social networking page. It's like the guy on your block who never cuts his lawn.

6. Tie Your Sites Together With Twitter.

Twitter is the twine of social media. By using this microblogging site you can quickly communicate with all your fans. You can also find new ones by prowling the Twitterverse searching for keywords that fit your show (doing Romeo and Juliet? Look for people tweeting "Shakespeare"). Once you have them in your world, use Twitter to point people to your website, social networking pages, or blog posts.

7. Blog.

In addition to providing you with another channel to interact with your audience, blogs are search engine magnets. Pick a topic, sign up to a blog site like Typepad, and start blogging. Keep SEO strategies in mind as you go. Oh, and remember one thing. Before you start, eat your fiber. Your blog doesn't have to be updated hourly or daily, but it does have to be regular. Think of it like a daytime talk show. Every day, same time, same network . . . yours.

8. Be Your Own Press Agent.

Write and publish articles and press releases about your own shows. Publish your stuff with sites like GoArticles or EzineArticles, and take it to the next level with a site like PRWEB. PRWEB allows you to submit your news releases to search engines, news sites, content syndicators, and RSS feeds. This is one of the fastest ways to increase incoming links (or 'link population'), which will

improve your credibility with the search engines.

9. Analyze This!

The #1 rule of marketing is to test and then test again. Just like in grade school, you didn't know how you were doing until you saw your report card, right? Get your web report card by signing up for [Google Analytics](#). Analytics is a free service that allows you to track and analyze your web traffic so that you can judge the effectiveness of your marketing initiatives and understand how visitors found you, what they like about your site, what they don't like about your site, and what you can do to keep them coming back. If you're not looking at your metrics, it's like going through school without ever knowing if you passed or failed. You can't get better without someone telling you how you're doing. Let Google school you.

10. Be Submissive.

Search engines can be old-fashioned, and sometimes they like a formal introduction. If you've got a new site, take the time to submit it to search engines. Hit the major ones (Google, Yahoo, MSN, etc.), of course, but take the time to look for specialized link directories and niche sites to submit your website for indexing.

19. January 9, 2013

How to Fiscal Cliff Helped Hollywood That fiscal cliff drama last week was better than some shows I've seen! Special holiday sessions of Congress, negotiations into the wee hours, nonstop blame-games . . . but we finally got a deal. (Sort of.)

A little known fact is that buried into section 317 of the fiscal cliff deal was an extension for "special expensing rules for certain film and television productions."

So as arguments were being made on how high to increase taxes, Tinsel Town got a breather.

See, it all started back in 2004, when Congress first passed "production tax incentives," which were extended in '08 and set to expire in '11.

And as this article on the subject says, "The fiscal cliff deal extends the tax incentives through 2013—even as payroll taxes rise on ordinary Americans."

But that's not what I'm blogging about. This isn't a poli-blog (yet).

What I'm irked about (again) is the consistent show of support that Hollywood gets from our legislative bodies, when Broadway gets squat. Now look, I understand. For one, a lot of television and film production went to Vancouver and overseas, and when that happens our country loses revenue, so part of the reason to keep these incentives going is helping keep production here (I'd like to see the stats on whether it has really helped, however). For two, Hollywood has a super wealthy and highly visible lobby of its own, and we . . . uh . . . do not.

While we've gotten a few bits and pieces of tax relief over the years, we've never seen anything substantial (how about some incentive for our investors?). The reason for the denial? Simple . . . if you want to produce a Broadway show, you can't go to Vancouver. You can't go overseas. Broadway only exists in one place. So our leaders look at us and say, "No tax relief? Poor babies. Go somewhere else if you don't like it."

Well you know what, my legislative friends? There's a rumbling that's just beginning in the new Producing Guard. Yep, I'm starting to hear the people sing. And they're saying things like, "It's so much cheaper to produce in London. I'm just gonna go there." And, well, you read my blog yesterday about how I'd think about trying out a show in Australia versus the US next time. I know Korean producers who are actively looking to develop shows in their native land . . . because they get governmental support to do it.

So, congresspeople . . . you might think you've got us on location lock down . . . but the times they are a-changin'.

Let's hope the tax laws do too.

20. December 20, 2010

My Top 5 Broadway Special Effects

There was some great Spider-Man coverage in Variety over the weekend that looked at the show from a bunch of angles, from branding, to storytelling and yes, to spectacle. (The show actually got the cover of Variety – and for a Broadway show to snag a cover, when the mag usually only gives us a page, says something about the power of the Spidey suit).

In the opening paragraphs of the article about the technical challenges of this super-sized musical, book writer Glenn Berger had this to say . . .

What really amazes an audience isn't a big set piece. It's how you can theatrically overcome narrative solutions. A simple, elegant solution is where the spectacle lies.

The quote made me think about some of my favorite "effects" from over the years, and, well, I gotta agree with Mr. Berger. Sure, chandeliers and helicopters and heavyside layers are cool, but my real "ahhh" moments come from effects with much simpler concepts (and simpler budgets).

Here are my top five Broadway special effects:

1. Raoul Takes The Plunge

In the 2nd Act of Phantom, after the chandelier has crashed, and we've seen the Phantom's face, Raoul leaves Madame Giry to search for Christine and jumps off a bridge into a river of fog. He does a pencil dive (his body perpendicular to the floor) and drops right through the floor . . . and the audience doesn't hear a sound. It's so unexpected, it'll take your breath away.

2. Old Joe Becomes Young Joe.

In *Damn Yankees*, Joe Hardy makes a deal with a devil, and with the help of some great underscoring, makes his transformation from old to young by simply walking through a door. If you've never seen the show before, you'll find yourself with some chills, as the young Joe capitalizes on the magic with a thrilling reprise. Again, fast and unexpected is the name of the game.

3. This Disappearing Houdini Trick

This trick was so good it actually disappeared! In the early incarnations of the original *Ragtime*, including the first year or so on Broadway, the 2nd Act started with the character of Houdini performing a trick, where he was put in a straight jacket, locked in a box and raised 50 feet above the stage. The chains on the box would "break", and you'd see Houdini's legs scrambling to stay inside, and then, the box would blow apart, and Houdini would be . . . gone. And he'd appear in a box seat next to a surprised audience member seconds later. It was an applause moment, and it also made sense with the story. Unfortunately, it was "tricky" and after a lot of complications, the trick (designed by super illusionist Franz Harary) vanished. But if you were one of the lucky ones that saw it, then you were colored impressed, I'm sure. I worked on the show, and it made me feel like a kid every night.

4. Bloody, Bloody, blood.

Whether I'm watching someone get stabbed at *West Side Story*, or whether I'm sitting in the splatter zone at *Evil Dead*, I'm a sucker for an old-fashioned blood packet. Shoot (no pun intended), the blood on Eponine's dress after she gets shot (which she merely reveals) used to get me, even the 12th time I saw the show.

5. Do I Smell Bacon?

Everything is better with bacon, including Off-Broadway. David Cromer's beautiful production of *Our Town* served up some fantastic performances, and some actual bacon. In the very vivid return to Grover's Corners scene, Emily's mom fried up some of the good stuff . . . and filled the theater with that smell that makes even vegans drool.

While sinking ships (*Titanic*) and entire mansions that move (*Sunset Boulevard*) can be impressive, what's most impressive are the effects that take the audience by surprise, capture its imagination, and most importantly, make sense with the story.

Otherwise, we might as well just go to the circus.

What are your favorite on-stage special effects?

21. April 23, 2013

What the Tuck is Taking Up All Our Broadway Theatres?

Last week, the Producers of the upcoming (and from what I hear, wonderful) new musical Tuck Everlasting, announced they were postponing its pre-Broadway Boston tryout due to the lack of an available Broadway houses this fall.

And unlike some other shows that have used that excuse, these Producers actually meant it.

I've always said that finding a Broadway theater for your show is like landing a plane at JFK on Thanksgiving Weekend. You're probably going to have to circle for a while until you find the right runway.

Well, Tuck couldn't even take off.

It has always been hard to find that Broadway home . . . but it is true . . . it's getting harder.

Why?

Well, in modern times, when a show is a hit, it runs a Tuck of a lot longer. Shows from the 1950s-70s didn't run for uh . . . DECADES! And now they do.

Phantom, Mamma Mia (which just announced a move to another theater to stretch out its run), Lion King, Wicked . . . where are these shows going? Hmm? That's why I postulated in this blog that we'd never have another "dark era" on Broadway again (although sometimes I think we could use a market correction, just like the stock market needs to blow off a little steam every once in a while).

But let's get back to that availability issue to determine just how hard it is, shall we?

If you're a Producer with a brand new show looking for a house for your new musical, you have 40 to choose from, right?

Well, there are 40 Broadway houses, yes, so let's start with that.

40.

Subtract the Disney house, because . . . come on, they're always going to have something.

39.

Now subtract the 5 non-profit houses and that leaves you with . . .

34.

Now subtract 16 for the long running musicals that aren't going anywhere in the next 2-5 years. (Already this season we've added 4-5 to that list that are going to be holed up for quite awhile (including my Kinky Boots!)

18.

Only 18 remain! Less than 50% of the Broadway theaters on the market are actually in play.

And hold on, I'm not done with my math just yet.

From those 18, subtract 4 for the shows that have been announced for the coming year, taking those houses off the market as well.

And we're down to 14!

Now, insiders tell me that 3 more of those are out of the running for the '13-14 season with handshake deals for yet-to-be-announced but firm bookings by powerhouse producers.

And just like that, we've got eleven left. Just 11.

Look, something always falls out, or unexpectedly closes, right? So for margin of error's sake, let's add back 1 to get to an even dozen.

A dozen. That's right, if you're a Producer of a brand new musical looking for a house in the coming year or so, you've got just a dozen to choose from.

Certainly you can find one that works for you out of that carton of eggs, right?

We'll hold your press releases, Producer, because here's the biggest rub of them all.

Those twelve remaining houses have an average capacity of . . . 1083.67.

And this is the Tuckin' problem.

The theaters that remain are mostly play houses . . . and they lack the capacity to be able to support larger musicals at today's cost of producing a musical (unless prices go up dramatically).

What does this mean?

Well, we're just about maxed out on big musicals . . . there just isn't a lot of room for them right now. Give us another season or two like this one and even the couple of remaining big barns will be eaten up as well. And then what?

And that's my biggest takeaway from this mathematical exercise.

Despite the fact that Broadway audiences love big shows, if I was developing a musical right now (oh wait, I'm developing 3), I'd focus on small to medium shows; shows that I know can fit in a smaller house. And I'd start telling my creative team now . . . "we're most likely going to have to fit in a smaller box than we would have thought, so let's make sure we start thinking creatively on how to handle that now, so we're not circling the airport forever."

Otherwise, you could end up be Tuckin' homeless.

22. May 16, 2013

What Are the Most Popular Broadway Theatres?

I got a lot of emails about last month's "[What The Tuck](#)" blog and Broadway theater availability in general . . . which got me wondering . . . which Broadway Theaters are booked the most often?

Because if we're facing an availability crisis then it would make sense that Producers should look at the theaters that are likely to be free, right? (Hmmm, maybe "free" isn't the right word.)

And at the same time, if a theater has a low occupancy, then perhaps the location, location, location of that specific theater isn't prime for recoupment, recoupment, recoupment. Right?

So, I dove deep into the archives of the [Playbill Vault](#) and [IBDB](#) and counted up the number of days that theaters were booked vs. dark over the past 30 years (from January 1, 1983-May 1, 2013), and listed them below, in order of the "most popular."

Before you look . . . guess. Go ahead. Guess which theaters you think have been the most booked, and which have been the least booked (oh – one note – I took out all the Non-Profit theaters, because, well, they have to book their theaters to stay in business).

Did you guess? No peeking!

Here's the list of the most popular Broadway Theaters:

Theater Name	Occupancy Percentage
Winter Garden	96.49%
New Amsterdam	94.27% <i>*Since theater re-opened in 1997</i>
Imperial	87.42%
Majestic	83.45%
Gerald Schoenfeld	80.00%
Broadway	78.19%
Richard Rodgers	76.70%
Palace	76.53%
Foxwoods	74.55% <i>*Since theater opened in 1997</i>
Helen Hayes	74.25%
Eugene O'Neill	71.50%

Gershwin	71.27%
Al Hirschfeld	70.64%
August Wilson	70.54%
St. James	70.12%
Booth	68.19%
Minskoff	67.76%
Broadhurst	66.01%
Marquis	66.00%
Shubert	65.44%
Neil Simon	64.06%
Walter Kerr	63.23%
Bernard B. Jacobs	62.14%
John Golden	59.55%
Ambassador	58.92%
Ethel Barrymore	58.80%
Lunt-Fontanne	58.35%
Circle in the Square	57.67%
Brooks Atkinson	55.46%
Nederlander	54.59%
Music Box	52.27%
Cort	37.72%

Lyceum	37.18%
Longacre	27.38%
Belasco	26.21%

So, how'd you do? Did you guess right?

There's a lot to derive from the data on this chart, but of course the most obvious bit is at the end:

Three of out of the last four occupied theaters are East of 7th Avenue.

Oh, and here's the other thing . . . if this were a list of apartment buildings in New York City, the rent would be lower for the buildings towards the bottom, right?

Hint, hint. And you know who you are.

(Shout out to my Super Assistant, Kayla, and her Super Intern, Kate, for the hours compiling this super-duper data.)

Here are a few fun facts that we unearthed during our data digging:

-The only show in the past 30 years that ran longer than a year in the Longacre Theatre was the 2010 revival of *La Cage Aux Folles*

-The Majestic has had just 1 show and the Winter Garden has had just 2 shows since 1983

-*Godspell* was the 5th longest running show at Circle in the Square in the past 30 years

-The American Airline's Theatre has had the most productions in the shortest span of time, 40 shows in 13 years

-In the past 30 years the theater with the most shows has been Circle in the Square with 51 shows

-12 theaters still have their original name

23. July 24, 2009

Oh No, You'll Never Get the Rights To...

I have a good female friend who is obsessed with *The Notebook*. She watches it like three times a week. I mean, it was like a teddy bear to a two year old. She never went anywhere without it. When I finally gave in and agreed to watch it with her, I didn't know what she enjoyed more . . . watching it, or watching me watching it, just to see my reaction.

One day, when I told her I was looking for things to turn into musicals, she said, "You know what would make a beautiful musical? *The Notebook!*" Then she stopped and didn't speak for like three minutes. I think she was imagining the duet that Noah and Allie would sing to each other right after Allie found out that Noah wrote her a letter a day while they were apart, even though the letters

never got to her (if your eyes just got a little watery there, it's not because you've been staring at your computer too long).

I sort of blew her off. "Too big a movie and too big a book," I thought, "No way anyone is getting the rights. Maybe Cameron Mac or Disney, but unless you've got a Broadway pedigree and a bank full of bucks, there is no way that musical is going to happen."

"But it would be soooooo good," she said. "Come on, let's watch it again and I'll show you."

Well, look what I read today. The Notebook is going to be a musical. And it doesn't have Cameron or Disney or even any New York Producers behind it. An actress fell in love with it, probably watched it more often than my friend, and convinced the powers that be to give her the rights. All because of her passion.

And she's doing a workshop in October with the hopes that it will be the first step to a Broadway production.

You know what else is cool? Just like *White Noise*, the workshop isn't at The Old Globe or La Jolla or any of the usual tryout spots. Oh no, they are doing this tryout at a community theater in North Carolina.

It's "Give Props" week here at The Producers Perspective. Yesterday, *Hair*, and today, Bethany Joy Galeotti, the girl who got *The Notebook*.

And I write this blog to remind myself that no matter how difficult things may seem, it never hurts to ask the question. The irony is that it took me the same amount of time to come up with a reason why I couldn't get the rights to *The Notebook*, as it would have to call someone and actually ask for the rights to *The Notebook*!

Now I gotta go. There's a 1-800-FLOWERS site with my name on it. I gotta send a big bouquet of flowers to a friend that is going to be pretty peeved when she hears that this is happening and I'm not attached.

Oh, and guess where I'll be in October.

24. October 31, 2008

When Creative Teams Earn Their Stripes

It's not in the two years prior to the first preview.

It's in the two weeks prior to the opening night.

When choosing your team, especially your director, make sure you have a set that can deliver within the choking restrictions of that 3-4 week period known as "previews".

Limited rehearsal hours, stagehand schedules that don't mesh with actor schedules, prohibitive overtime costs, miniscule lead time to build new scenery or costumes, and immediate audience feedback, are just a few of the things that a

creative team has to juggle with when fine or not-so-fine tuning their show before opening night.

It requires a different set of muscles to run this obstacle course as compared to the marathon of pre-performance development.

But your team needs both sets of muscles if your show is going to run.

25. August 23, 2012

The Future “Under Forty” Producers—Are There Any?

We've all known that we've been losing writers to Hollywood for years. And actors, well duh. Every Broadway actor I know fights tooth and toe-nail for a TV/Film out in their Broadway contracts. Yep, land the big gig and then look for a way to leave. Can't blame them, but it sucks for us nonetheless.

But what about Producers? As the costs and risks increase, and as it becomes more and more challenging to make shows happen, will we have enough Producers tomorrow to make sure that Broadway remains as “healthy” as it is today?

As someone who, just today actually, finally tip-toed over into his fourth decade, I'm concerned that we don't have enough folks under 40 doing shows now, which could jeopardize how full our theaters are in 20 years or so.

So, I decided to analyze the age demographics of the Broadway League. I looked at all the members who classified themselves as Producers and using my own knowledge of who's-who plus a little help from the Google machine, I figured out a rough percentage of those Producers working today who are under forty years of age (with a margin of error of course, but I think it's close enough).

The answer?

About 8%

Eek.

Now, granted, a lot of folks come into Producing for the theater later in life, when they have more disposable income, know more people with disposable income, etc. But still. While I lack the data of how many Under 40s there were a decade ago, I have a hunch we're losing ground.

And that means we need to take some serious steps to train new young Producers, and welcome them to the business with open arms. Because you know who loses if there aren't as many Producers tomorrow as there are today?

The audiences, of course.

But without a new crop of Producers coming up through the ranks, who will hire the writers? Who will rent the theaters? Who will buy the billboards? Who will pay the stagehands?

Vendors and Agents and Owners and Unions and all of us should remember . . . the theater industry is a long term game. We should do our best to make sure

we are encouraging young people to take risks in our industry, so that we can all see the rewards.

26. July 11, 2013

Invest in a Broadway Show and Get Your Green Card

Here's a little known secret out there for all you Producers looking to raise money internationally, and for all you wealthy foreign nationals looking to obtain green card status in our fair country.

Have you heard of the EB-5 visa?

You can read the legal definition from the US Citizen and Immigration Service's website here, but in a nutshell it's this:

Invest \$1,000,000 in a new commercial enterprise that creates at least 10 jobs, and the US Government will give you a green card.

Yeah. You heard it right . . . you can buy your green card if you can put 7 figures in a new US job-creating business.

And aren't there about 20 or so of those every year on Broadway??? (Sorry, non-profs – the rule is for commercial enterprises only – we've actually got an advantage over you for this one!)

This has been a very popular way for the wealthy of the world to obtain legal US status since the EB-5 was enacted in 1990. But, I haven't heard this used for a Broadway show as of yet.

But it should be.

Certainly there are uber-wealthy individuals out there that would like to invest in a Broadway show and get opening night tickets, a shot at a Tony Award . . . and a green card. Right?

We just have to make them aware of it . . . which means Broadway Producers getting out overseas to investment conferences, meeting with family investment offices, etc.

Oh, and get this . . . apparently, the EB-5 has been such a win-win for both sides that, according to this HuffPo article, the US Senate is looking at another visa with lower investment thresholds! In the EB-6, a foreign national would only have to invest \$100k in a business that generates at least three jobs (the catch is that the visa would be limited to three years residency in the US).

Our politicians see this visa as a way to reduce unemployment and revive our economy.

I see it as a way for us to revitalize Broadway.

27. February 17, 2011

10 Questions for a Broadway Pro: A Broadway Stage Manager Speaks

The first job I ever had on the ol' Broadway was as a Production Assistant on the revival of My Fair Lady starring Richard Chamberlain.

As a PA I worked very closely with the Stage Managers and learned a ton about how shows are put together, how people are managed, and so on. If you are coming up in the biz, and get a chance to PA, take it.

I was lucky enough to get to PA a few shows, and eventually got promoted and ended up SMing myself, including a stint with Grease on Broadway with everyone from Rosie O'Donnell to Brooke Shields.

I learned a lot.

But you know what the biggest lesson was?

Stage Managing is one of the hardest jobs in the biz.

In fact, I hung up my headset, and decided to leave Stage Managing to the pros . . . like Pat Sosnow, who is this week's star of our 10 Questions for a Broadway Pro! Pat has worked on a bunch of big-time Broadway shows including A Steady Rain with those two unknowns Hugh Jackman and Daniel Craig, Promises, Promises . . . and the about-to-preview, How to Succeed with another unknown . . . Daniel Radcliffe.

Here's Pat!

1. What is your title?

Stage Manager

2. What show/shows are you currently working on?

How to Succeed in Business...

3. In one sentence, describe your job.

I help run/manage the show on a day-to-day basis.

4. What skills are necessary for a person in your position?

Organizational skills. Ability to multi-task. Patience. Tenacity. Extreme sense of humor.

5. What kind of training did you go through to get to your position?

I have been stage managing since high school. I did not, however, major in Theater at Barnard. I did study Psychology which has on occasion come in handy. I worked at any job I could get in any backstage (electrician, props, carpenter) until I started as a PA at the NY Shakespeare Festival. Worked my way through Off-Off-Broadway to Off-Broadway into Broadway.

6. What was your first job in theater?

My first big PA job was on Measure for Measure in the Park in 1985, directed by Joseph Papp.

7. Why do you think theater is important?

It is a form of entertainment that cannot exist without live participation from performers, an audience, and the people/crew who run the show. No show can ever be the same or be duplicated. In an age of Film, TV and computer generated entertainment, it forces live, visceral responses that are of the moment. Spontaneous laughter. Unexpected Heartbreak. Profound ennui. Live theater is a wonderful, real, living thing.

8. What is your profession's greatest challenge today?

Maintaining a neutral position between Producers, Managers, Talent and the Unions

9. If you could change just one thing about the industry with the wave of a magic wand, what would it be?

I'd remove the caste system that has become so pervasive in recent years.

10. What advice would you give to someone who wanted to do what you do?

Don't even consider working in the theater unless you are absolutely sure you cannot live without it.

28. April 25, 2013

How to Improve Theatre-Going Manners in Your Audience

I got an email from a passionate yet disgruntled theatergoer recently who told me that several of her recent show-going experiences were marred by not-so-polite audience members who texted, gabbed, ate, etc. their way through the performance.

I'm sure we all can relate.

It wasn't always this way. Theatergoing manners (like manners in general) have been on the decline over the past 20-30 years. It used to be that in addition to a certain expected dress from audience members (which I still advocate), there was a certain way to behave.

And, as our audience expanded, and our ability to sit still has waned, some manners have gone out the window.

So what do we do about it? Do we scold and snob-out, spanking those that act-up and tell them they're not welcome in our hallowed theatrical houses?

Well, that's the easy way, and it would also be the wrong way.

Remember, on Broadway anyway, we've got some attendance issues, so we have to make sure we aren't pushing people away from going to the theater. And frankly, there are some things we may never change (as much as I'd like to see people dress up for the theater again . . . in 2013, comfort wins out . . . like it won out when people stopped dressing up for flights).

But there are things we can do. Movies have had similar issues with talking and the like (demonstrating that this is a societal issue, not one unique to the theater), and they added "Please don't talk during the movie" pre-roll to their films years ago.

We don't have trailers, so we have to get a little more creative. And let's face it, no one, from a kid to an adult likes to be told they have to "behave," so the task at hand is a hard one. But here are some ideas:

Create a standardized (and Broadway League approved) Top Ten list of theater etiquette (But maybe call it "How to Best Enjoy Your Theatergoing Experience") and put this in every Playbill on Broadway. Oh, and then try to pass it around to other theaters as well. If it's identical everywhere, it'll take firmer root. (You can also slip it into ticket envelopes as well – wherever and whenever, but get it out.)

Manners stick when they are taught early. Anyone running a children's theater, should spend five minutes before each show teaching their juvenile audiences how to politely watch the theater, so that they don't grow up to be juvenile delinquent theater goers.

If you have access to your customer's email addresses (which unfortunately we don't on Broadway without paying), send them a message on the day of the performance, including an etiquette list above.

Etiquette is also contagious. Train your staff, box office, managers, and so on to treat everyone like they are attending a "proper" event and you'll see your audience's attitude change as well. Don't you act differently when you walk in a library or a museum?

Is your theater clean and pristine? Broken Windows theory is a real thing. People act according to the surroundings that they are in. If you treat your space with more respect, people will treat it and everything inside it with more respect as well.

Install ejector seats?

This is a toughie. It's a problem that we're never going to eradicate, but we can improve.

What are some of your ideas on how we can improve theatergoing etiquette? Comment them below, and maybe we all can join the fight in improving theater manners. Because when the experience of going to the theater is a more pleasurable one, people just may come back more often. (And maybe I'll go ahead and create that Top Ten List I mentioned above myself for a future blog post.)

29. June 5, 2013**Google Changes Their Business and Changes Ours**

Fact: 60% of consumers use Gmail as their primary email account.

So, you can bet your bippy that when the G-Man makes a change to how it delivers that email, it has an effect on businesses all over the world.

And there's a change coming that's about to have a big effect on Broadway.

The thing is, you're probably going to like this change when you've got your consumer hat on. But put on your Producer hat, and you're going to sweat through the brim.

Google knows that everyone out there faces inbox clutter, and over the years they've set up systems for people to "take charge of their inbox." Simply put, they are like the California Closets of . . . uh . . . closets.

In the current configuration of Gmail, you can set up custom filters to have Google shuffle around your e-stuff for you. Emails from people, or companies can get tossed into whatever folders in your inbox you want. You can even have 'em automatically read, filed, deleted, whatever. It's pretty amazing.

But apparently, it wasn't amazing enough.

See, setting up filters is a bit of a process . . . one that most people probably aren't doing. Are you?

In an effort to make things easier for you (which you might suggest from the company that is developing a car that drives itself), just last week Google announced that they're adding an auto-filtering tool to everyone's inbox.

Gmail will now auto sort your incoming email into four main tabs:

Primary (your main feed)

Social (your Facebook, LinkedIn, and MySpace (joking) messages)

Updates (confirmations and receipts)

and . . .

Promotions

Guess what Promotions is?

You know, things like discount offers from Staples, Golf Galaxy . . . and, yep, Telecharge, Theatermania, Playbill, YourBroadwayGenius, TicketCentral, SmartTix, BroadwayBox, Ticketmaster, and every other e-direct response initiative our industry uses. In fact, even this blog is gonna be called a Promotion unless you teach Google that it's not.

What's the problem?

Well, all of those lovely emails that we pay big bucks for won't be visible in 60% of consumer's primary feeds (if they were lucky enough to get through the fascist spam filters in the first place). In order to find an offer for a show, a Gmailer will

have to select their promotions tab, and then sort through all their other offers from all sorts of sources and select it.

Sure, you can customize Google to treat the email offers differently, but by default, our email blasts won't be interruption marketing anymore.

In other words . . . open rates are gonna go down . . . and sales are going to go down. Period.

We're not the only industry that's going to be affected by this massive change. And while I expect some to lobby Google to reconsider, and others to pray that consumers backlash against this update (which hasn't rolled out system wide – you have to click your gearbox setting and manually turn it on if you want to test it – which I have), I don't see them backing off this idea.

Seems like a small technology change, I know. But this is serious. Our biz has been dependent on this form of communication for years. It's been our sales security blanket, and it's about to get torn away.

No worries, though, I'm sure our email blast providers will drop their rates if it does change their effectiveness.

Right? Right???

Not likely. So it's up to us . . . to find some work around, or even better, a new way to generate sales, and maybe even full price sales at that (!).

Security blankets are fine, but you gotta grow up at some point. No time like the present.

So thanks for the kick in the promotional pants, Googs. We need it.

30. January 8, 2013

10 Questions for a Broadway Pro: The Master of the House

There are two types of Managers that fall under the auspices of ATPAM, The Association of Theatrical Press Agents and Managers.

There are Company Managers, who work for the Producers and act, as I often describe, as the foot soldiers of the General Manager. (I started my career as a member of the CM infantry).

Then there are the House Managers, who work for the Theatre Owners, and make sure everything in that theater operates efficiently. Seem like an easy gig? These guys have to deal with the Public, with Producers and with Performers. I'll let you decide who is more demanding.

Today's Broadway Pro is Austin Nathaniel, answering my 10Qs on what it's like be the Master of the House at a Broadway theater.

Take it Austin!

1. What is your title?

I am the Palace Theatre Manager.

2. What shows are you currently working on?

We just opened the beautiful revival of Annie in November.

3. In one sentence, describe your job.

I view my job as a caretaker of the audience, the cast and creative team, the producers of the show, the staff of the building, and of course the theater itself.

4. What skills are necessary for a person in your position?

A theatre manager must be calm and collected at all times, and able to manage a large number of tasks at once. It's very important to have a working knowledge of all aspects of the industry, both the creative side and the business side. You must be able to manage a large and diverse staff of employees. Good accounting skills are important. Solid knowledge of the Broadway union contracts is essential. You also need to have a certain measure of compassion and understanding in order to manage your employees and serve the public. And you have to be able to laugh at yourself and others – people are going to be mean. You have to just shrug it off.

5. What kind of training did you go through to get to your position?

I have a B.A. in Theatre Studies from Emerson College in Boston. Emerson had very experienced, working management professionals running the program, so I received a solid education in the business of theater through course work and by working on productions at school. After college I worked for the Huntington Theatre Company as a House Manager and found an incredible mentor and friend in Sondra Katz, the Theater Manager. We were opening the Calderwood Pavilion, the first new theater built in Boston in 75 years. Developing the theater's operational structure from the ground up alongside someone as knowledgeable as Sondra was a once-in-a-lifetime learning experience. When I came to New York, I was again lucky to do my union apprenticeship as the Associate Theater Manager to David Calhoun, one of the most experienced Theatre/Company Managers on Broadway. There's no substitute for learning from the best in the business.

6. What was your first job in theatre?

I got a job as a part-time usher at the Goodspeed Opera House in Connecticut when I was still in high school. At the time I just wanted to get away from the job on a farm I'd had the summer before. Who knew it would turn into a career?

7. Why do you think theater is important?

A very wise professor once told me "Art prepares us for the big moments in our lives." I think theater is the most collaborative art form we have. The communal experience of an audience sharing the emotional heights and depths of a storyteller on stage, live and in the moment, is the purest and most intense artistic format out there. For me, no other medium has the raw emotional power of theater.

8. What is your profession's greatest challenge today?

Broadway has become about so much more than the shows. All of the talk-backs, meet & greets, backstage tours, pre-show receptions, post-show receptions, press-events, fundraisers, special events, and other satellite activities that now surround our productions take a huge amount of time and planning to make happen and keep cost effective. Theater and Company Managers have an incredible number of balls to juggle managing all of these events while also ensuring that they don't interfere with the main business of the show.

9. If you could change just one thing about the industry with the wave of a magic wand, what would it be?

I would wish for greater mutual respect between Broadway labor and management. Theatrical employees are extremely dedicated to their jobs, work long hours, deal with very difficult patrons, give up weekends and holidays, and take excellent care of the large and frequently very old buildings we work in. Producers take big risks in producing these shows, and are doing everything in their power to keep them up and running, which ultimately keeps us all employed. It's easy to forget on both sides that we all love this business and are in it together.

10. What advice would you give to someone who wanted to do what you do?

Experience as many aspects of the business as you can. Act, sing, dance, direct, design, usher, be on a stage crew, stage manage. Crunch numbers, build a budget, work in a management office, box office, or marketing office. Get some experience managing a staff. The more experience you have actually doing these jobs, the better you'll be able to understand the needs of the people you work with as a Theater Manager. Nothing is more helpful in doing your job than understanding those around you.

31. July 23, 2012**Have You Been to the Broadway Museum?**

You know the Broadway Museum, right? That place where you can see costumes from the original production of West Side Story? And sheet music from Candide? And see old TV commercials of Pippin?

And every year, thousands and thousands of tourists go there. After all, seeing a Broadway show is one of the first things on their "to-do in NYC" list, so it only makes sense that they'd go learn a bit more about it at the same time, right? And what about all the students that go to the Broadway Museum, who, as a result, may be more inclined to see more Broadway shows when they are no longer students?

You've been, right?

No, you haven't. Because the truth is, it doesn't really exist.

But you bet your bottom dollar, it should.

We've got a Hall of Fame (it's in the Gershwin Theatre, in case you missed it, which I'm sure you did because you can't really get in unless you're seeing a show at the Gershwin), and I've written about my desire for a Broadway Walk of Fame like the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and yes, there is even something called The Theatre Museum started by some very smart folks . . . but I've never been there, have you?

It's time we consolidate all these ideas into one centrally located, industry-supporting, admission charging Broadway Museum. All major cultural influences have 'em, from professional sports to Pez, so why shouldn't we? Museums have a bad rap. They've got a bad name, and they reek of boredom.

But, they are a way of establishing something as being of serious value to our society. We already know theater has value. But we could use everything we have to help spread that message to the rest of the world.

32. July 30, 2013

How a Country Song Reminded Me to Touch My Audience

First, yes, I'll admit, the title of this blog sounds a little creepy.

But it'll make sense. I hope.

If you love Broadway show tunes, then I bet you have a soft spot in your heart for country music, even if you can't admit it when you're singing along at Musical Mondays at Splash.

Country crooners tell great little stories in three-and-a-half-minutes and three-and-a-half choruses. And aren't story songs what the best of musical theater writers do? Someday soon, I do hope we'll get that country musical that 60% of the population and I have been pinin' for.

I was listening to a little country on my Sirius over the weekend when the new tune "Fly Over States" came on. My cruisin' partner practically jumped out of her seat when she heard Jason Aldean mention her home state of Indiana. I could see the pride in her eyes and hear it in her "yee-haw!" Aldean twanged on to mention Kansas, Oklahoma and a whole bunch of those Midwestern plain states that are often forgotten by East and West coasters. And I'd bet you my Sirius subscription that with each state he mentioned, he sold more singles.

The writers of "Fly Over States" not only knew how to write a catchy tune and cool story about two guys on a flight from NY to LA, but they knew how to personalize it for their audience. They knew how to create emotional "touch points" for their listeners. (Starting to feel less creepy now?)

You've experienced this, haven't you? When a character in a movie is a fan of your favorite baseball team (or any team but the Yankees) . . . or when a politician eats at a restaurant that you've been to. You can relate. And you feel a sense of pride.

All of this is a great reminder to writers and producers out there that you must strive to create these emotional touch points for your audience throughout your show.

They can be as overt as a localized reference like we use when Altar Boyz or Miss Abigail is licensed around the country (one of Miss A's biggest laughs in Tampa was when we referenced the local as-advertised-on-tvs-and-billboards law firm of Morgan and Morgan). Or they can simply be characters that audiences can relate to . . . and that feel things that they might feel.

But as much as we go to the theater to be swept away from our everyday lives, it's the elements of our everyday lives that can get us more swept up in what's happening on that stage.

33. November 15, 2011

Some Word of Mouth Statistics that You May Not Know

Sure you know about WOM, but do you know about WOMMA?

WOMMA is the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (yep – if it exists, there's probably an organization to support it – and if there isn't one, you should probably start one, because there's probably a conference that you could hold that could make money).

Since WOM is the #1 reason that people buy tickets, WOMMA is an org that I follow and support, ever since I was introduced to them when I spoke on a panel a few years back.

This year's conference starts tomorrow in Vegas. I didn't plan a trip this year since I knew Godspell would have just raised its curtain, but I gotta tell you . . . I thought about hitching a ride on JetBlue today.

But, alas for me, I probably won't be heading out to Sin City, so I have to make due with a great set of new stats they just released that I thought you all needed to see. The big takeaway from what you're about to read is pretty obvious, but I'll repeat it here anyway: as consumers we may do a lot of things online, but the offline activity carries even more weight.

Here is a list of a valuable WOM tips from WOMMA.

In America Everyday:

3.3 billion brand mentions in 2.4 billion brand-related conversations

9 in 10 word of mouth conversations about brands occur offline

The typical American mentions specific brand names 60 times per week in online and offline conversations

Like it:

When individuals talk about a given product or service the majority of the conversations are positive. Odds are, if someone's talking, it's a good thing.

66% of all brand-related word of mouth conversations are "mostly positive"

8% of brand-related word of mouth conversations are "mostly negative"

The average online review is 4.3 stars out of 5

Hear it:

Consumers are always interested in hearing about new and interesting products. Before making a purchase, consumers pay attention to what people are saying about it.

The Driving Forces of Purchase Decisions:

54% word of mouth

47% information from a website

42% email send by a friend

31% online review

The most influential element driving purchase decisions today is WORD OF MOUTH.

Credibility:

Offline: 59% of Americans believe offline (face to face or voice to voice) word of mouth to be highly credible

Online: 49% of Americans believe online word of mouth is highly credible

Profitability:

Service: 55% of consumers recommend a company because of its customer service

Experience: 27% of consumers would pay 15% or more to receive a superior customer experience

WOMM is as important as ever in both physical and digital channels. Despite advancements in technology, traditional brand interactions and conversations continue to be a significant factor in influencing consumers.

So, now that we know that so much of our consumer's opinions are influence away from the keyboard . . . what can we do about it? That's your homework! I've got one idea I'll pitch tomorrow. (Oh, and by the way, word of mouth doesn't just apply to shows . . . word of mouth also applies to genres . . . we've got to improve WOM on the entire theater going experience . . . and then get people to shows if we want an audience over the next 100 years.)

To see the pretty version of these stats, click here.

34. March 20, 2012

How to Tell if You're Going to Sell Out this Weekend

Ooooh, here's a fun tip that I started using months ago that has already started paying dividends.

Broadway and Off-Broadway shows are fully engaged in the variable pricing war. We used to employ the "set it and forget it" philosophy of our full price sales. Then, of course, we decimate those prices in the discount market.

Now, we've gone all airline industry on our consumers, and have started adjusting our full price sales depending upon demand.

But when do you know if you've got that demand?

Here's the trick about variable pricing . . . the sooner you know that a show is going to be "hot", the better you're going to do, right? Raising the prices one day before your show certainly would not be as beneficial to your bottom line as raising the prices one month before, as long as you were sure that show was going to sell out. (BTW, this is also true about discounting – if you know a show is going to be soft a month out, you have more time to employ tactics to shore it up).

So how do you know if a show is going to sell out? Especially in a market like NY's, where the week-of, day-of, hour-of, business is so dependent on street traffic and tourist traffic and the like.

There are a lot of factors you can use to help determine how you're going to do on a particular weekend. The best thing you can do is use historical data (if your show or your theater has been operating for more than a year).

But what if you don't have it?

Here's my latest trick . . . and shhhh, let's just keep it between you, me, and the rest of blogosphere.

What do I do? I let other industries with a lot more money and a lot more data figure it out for me.

I'll call or go online to check hotel prices in the Times Square area over a month period. On the days they are offering deals, I know we have trouble. On the days where the rates get close to the rack or MORE, I know the hotel is expecting heavy demand . . . which most likely means heavy ticket demand.

Sometimes I'll cross reference this with other tourist cities. A busy tourist time in NYC should also mean a busy tourist time in Las Vegas, DC, etc.

Then I'll do the same with the airline industry. See when they are offering deals, or when those deals are blacked out. If you're paying \$600 to fly from Chi-town to NYC, guess what . . . there are going to be some peeps in town that weekend.

You can't set your watch by these tips, of course, but they are just a little more information that will help you understand more about current consumer behavior.

And, as the NBC PSAs say . . . "the more you know."

35. May 10, 2013

Why Did the Dinner Theatre Die?

Ring the bells, for the Dinner Theater is no more.

Ok, I'm being slightly dramatic. There are a few dinner theaters still around serving up so-so steaks, and the National Dinner Theatre Association is still up and running (even though it only has 20 members), but the golden era of eating Chicken Marsala while seeing a performance of Hello Dolly seems to have come to an untimely end.

I remember the early 90s, when there were about 20 Dinner Theatres in the Baltimore area alone! (I closed one of those B'more theaters with a production of Evita.) And every city seemed to have at least one. Sure, they were the butt of a bunch of jokes (usually when an actor was referring to his/her career hitting the skids), but what wasn't to love about a dinner theater: a musical, a meal, and all in the same place, and for one low price!

So what happened?

I'm not exactly sure. "Dinner and a show" seems to be an easy combination to sell. And a theater having another way to make money besides just ticket sales seems like a great way to add to the bottom line. Was it that there were too many theaters period, dinner or not? Was it an older audience thing, whereas today's crowds don't want to sit in the same place for a two and a half hour show and a two hour meal? Is it because theater is a luxury purchase, so saving a few bucks by "showing where you eat" worth it?

Unfortunately for us, the Dinner Theater seems to have gone the way of the Drive-In, which in theory seems to be a cool way to consume a movie, but in practicality just doesn't seem to fit with a consumer's lifestyle.

36. July 12, 2012

Why a Lobster Roll Gave Me an Upset Stomach

I love a nice summer lobster roll. It must be my "wicked" New Englishish roots.

The other day, I found myself at a lobster roll place (can't really call them restaurants – in fact they shouldn't be restaurants – they should be shacks, or huts, or the aforementioned "places") that had a few different types of rolls to sell:

The classic "original" roll

The spicy roll with cajun spices and a special sauce.

So, here's the thing, and why I'm taking up some blog space talkin' about lobster meat on a hot dog bun . . .

See, I love a spicy something. But I also love what I know – and when I want to eat a lobster roll, (which ain't the cheapest thing in the world, mind you) I want to make sure I enjoy it . . .

So, when faced with the decision of what I knew and what I didn't know, (even though I thought I miiiiight like it) I went with the comfort of what I knew would leave me satisfied.

And that's what made me a little sick.

I may be a little food-risk adverse, I know, but something tells me a lot of people feel the same way about their food dollars . . . and their entertainment dollars. (See, here's where I'm going to try to bring it together and wrap it up in a take-out box for you.)

If a person who loves movies is faced with the decision of seeing a flick or seeing a musical, guess which one they are going to choose over and over again? They are going to go with what they know they love over experimenting with something new. If a person who loves classical music is faced with going to the philharmonic or going to a play, they are going to go with what they know they love over experimenting with something new. You get the point.

It's basic human nature to live within our entertainment comfort zone, especially when live entertainment is so dang expensive.

So, if we know all that . . . how do we get people like me, who are locked into their patterns, to "try the spicy lobster roll"?

Sure, you could say "discount", but that's just become our go-to answer for everything.

If we really want to build a new audience, we've got to get a friend to give us a bite of theirs.

See, you and I will devour theater first, and other forms of entertainment second. We are the biggest weapons the theater has in building a new audience. We've got to find a way to get the devotees to do more of the audience development for us.

Because if my buddy who had been to this lobster roll "place" had offered me a bite of that spicy sandwich, I would have jumped all over it, because if I didn't like it, I hadn't risked anything.

What I'm saying in this crazy food-based analogy . . . is that we need more "bring-a-friend" initiatives for Broadway.

What about bring-a-friend-for-free? Or, let's find a way to reward people-like-you (cash? prizes?) when you bring someone to a play who has never seen a play before. How do we get it into our theatrical social conscious that the future of the theater depends on new audiences, and it's all of our responsibility to not just encourage, but to bring, new people to the theater?

You and I can agree that the theater is the best party in town. And luckily, every show is "plus-one".

Oh, and at this party, they are serving all different kinds of lobster rolls. (See how I brought that around full circle? :-). Phew, that was a doozy. Thanks for staying with me.)

37. April 6, 2012

10 MORE Audition Tips for Actors

One of the most popular posts in Producer Perspective history was my "10 Audition Tips for Actors" from back in aught eight. So, following the old Hollywood axiom that says, "when people like something, give 'em a sequel", I decided to post a follow-up (unfortunately, that sequel thing doesn't work so well on Broadway . . . read this post about that unfortunate subject).

Four years later, after watching hundreds and hundreds of very talented folks strut their stuff in hopes of a big break on Broadway, I've come up with 10 more tips to help tune up your audition skills and help you land the job you've been dreaming about.

And if you're not an actor . . . well, I think you might find that some of these tips, as well as the originals, apply to interviewing for any type of job, even if a high A and a time step isn't required.

Here we go!

1. Be a Boy Scout. Be prepared.

Remember, an audition for a show isn't just an audition for that show. You're making an impression on that Director, Casting Director, Producer, etc. that could apply to other projects that they are working on now or in the future. So even if you're not right for that part, you could find yourself getting a callback for something else down the line (on Godspell, I watched a whole bunch of people who weren't right for our show get put in a Wicked pile.) And that's why you always have to be on your game . . . which means doing your homework.

Because we know when you don't. And see, the thing is, it cuts both ways. I've watched people come in that have been so unprepared that Casting Directors et al have written them off for that show and others as well. Make the most out of every chance you have in front of a decision maker. This doesn't mean you have to be perfect. It just means that you've got to treat that five minutes with respect, and be familiar with the material.

2. Research who is in the room.

Blind dates are nerve-racking . . . blind auditions are worse. Always try to find out from your agent or the casting director, or even the monitor, who is in the room sitting behind the table. Is the composer there? The playwright? The casting director? Assistant? You do this for two reasons . . . 1 – so you can tailor your material, your conversation, and your questions accordingly, and 2 – it's totally appropriate to drop a personalized follow up note to the folks that you auditioned for . . . but you gotta know who they were.

3. Forget what our Mom says, skip lunch.

Ok, I don't mean that you should skip eating lunch. You should skip auditions that are around the lunch hour. From about noon to two, auditioners get hungry and, if they're having food shipped in for them to eat (in order to make sure they see as many auditionees as possible), you run the risk of doing your 16 bars while someone is munching on a pastrami on rye. And, well, that might be a bit distracting for them and for you. So try and work around those hours, if you have a choice.

4. Dress like you're on a date.

A first date that is. You want to treat your audition like a professional experience (see tip #1), but you don't want to overdo it either. So dress to impress, but also make it look like you didn't try too hard (see where the "first date" thing comes in?). BONUS TIP: When you get a callback, and you will, wear the same outfit you wore to the first audition. They'll remember you more.

5. Singers, have all sorts of material.

Way back when, all musical theater actors needed was an up-tempo and a ballad. But as the music on Broadway has become more diverse, it's important that you can show your diversity as well . . . and you never know what someone might ask you to sing. You need a ballad, an up, a pop song, a classic, something funny, something serious, etc. Think about it this way, auditions are like improv, you always want to be able to answer "Yes" when an auditioner asks you anything . . . including, "Do you have something in the style of R&H that shows range?"

6. Having a bad day? Act like you're not.

Seems simple enough, but I can't tell you how many people come in complaining about the weather or how many auditions they've been on that day. People have bad days. I get it. But you're an actor, so pretend that you're having the best day ever . . . because no one wants to be around people that are sour-pusses.

7. Burn all your monologue books.

Monologue books were made to make it easy for actors looking for monologues. So, that means a majority of people use them. And that means you're not going to stand out as being special if you're the fifth person to do the monologue from Key Exchange that day.

8. Read the whole play/screenplay/musical.

True story – an actor auditioned for me for a play years ago and was visibly shocked when the director said something about later in the story when the character they were auditioning for attempted suicide. Umm, that might have affected some choices you might make, don't you think?

9. Your accompanist is your friend or your enemy. You choose.

If there's one person you really need on your side at a musical audition, it's the guy or doll playing the piano. Be nice, be thankful, be complimentary, and have music in the right key, in the right order, and in a book that is easy to read and easy to flip the pages. BONUS TIP: No song books that you just bought from Colony Records. Have you ever tried to get one of those things to stand up without falling over? And do you want your accompaniment to just stop in the middle of "On The Street Where You Live?"

10. Auditioning is like batting practice.

When I first made my varsity baseball team in high school, I was nervous about facing some of the faster pitchers in the league. "It's ok," my coach said, "that's what the batting cage is for." I stood in that thing every day, swinging away at everything until I got numb to 70, 80 and 90 mph fast balls and curve balls coming at me in all sorts of directions. So, when I stepped up to the plate during a big game, I was so much better prepared to show my best. You've gotta get numb to the questions, suggestions, and requests that will come at you in all sorts of directions when you audition. So get in a cage. Take a class, or better, audition as much as you can. Auditioning is a special skill . . . and if you can master it, you'll find yourself working a heck of a lot more.

38. June 21, 2012**How Many Best Plays and Best Musicals Recoup?**

Can you tell that I can't get enough of the Tony Awards?

The telecast and all of its post-appearance residue are keeping me up at night lately. It'll probably take weeks for me to stop wondering things like, "How much did the Nice Work number cost?" and, "How much did Newsies take in at the box office the day after?" or "Will the Tony Committee reinstate the Special Event Tony next year so Mike Tyson can be eligible?" ("Oh, please, please do," says Ken.)

And just when I was halfway through composing Mike's acceptance speech in my head, ("Big thanks to all the people who had my back at Rikers. Especially you, Big Bruce. I miss you, ya big pooh bear.") I said, "Forget about the complicated questions that I probably will never find the answers to," (kind of like Mike Tyson wondering where rain comes from) "let's just see how many Best Plays and Best Musical Tony Award Winners recouped."

So, I went back through the last 30 years of winners (starting with 2011), trolled through recoupment press releases, as well as variety stats, some common

sense, (Yep, I think it's safe to put Phantom in the Win column) and came up with the percentage of recouped Tony Award Winners that were commercial hits as well. (I left out non-profits, as you'll see, and there may be a slight margin of error of 1-2 shows at most.)

Here are the results.

Of the last 30 Best Musical winners, a whopping 21 recouped, 7 did not, 1 ran at a NP for its entire run, and 1 is TBD as it's still running.

So, of the yes/no's, that's 21 out of 28, or a super 75%.

Of the last 30 Best Play winners, another whopping 20 recouped and 7 did not (these numbers are so similarly spooky to the Best Musical figures, I feel like I should link to this). 3 of 'em were at Non-Ps.

That means the play stats are 20 out of 27, or 74%.

Incredibly interesting, isn't it?

Remember, the anecdotal industry stats put average recoupment rates at about 20-30%.

So, what's the big takeaway?

Produce a Best Musical or Best Play, and you've got a better shot at making money.

I know, I know, genius. This blog should be a brain teaser at Mensa, it's so insightful.

I'm sure you expected the above results just like I did. But did you expect them to be so high?

And if there is this high of a correlation between the awards and commercial success, could we then tear apart the Best Plays and Best Musicals to determine if there are commonalities that could help us choose or develop projects that are more likely to win? (Average # of cast members, how many are spectacles, comedy versus drama, etc.)

Oh boy, now I'm going to be up again tonight.

39, November 21, 2013

I Did Something Illegal Yesterday...

. . . And I feel so guilty, I just have to get it off my electronic-chest, and confess it here . . . in front of all of you.

I . . . I . . . took a video of a Broadway show.

I know, I know. But please, don't judge me yet. First, watch this 10 second clip of Janis Joplin that I shot from row J.

Now before you send the Broadway Usher Police after me, understand that I didn't do it because I'm a crazed Joplin fangirl. I did have a point.

I did it to demonstrate that if we think taking photos and videos of performances is bad now, well just wait, because it's about to get a lot worse. You see, not one person in that audience knew I was shooting that video.

Because I shot it with my new Google Glass.

If you haven't seen Google Glass, it's an eyeglass like device that can shoot stills and video faster than Joplin can riff! It's operated discreetly by a slight swipe and a tap and everything you see is instantly captured and shareable.

Incredible marketing opportunities abound (I could have sent that video around the world seconds after it happened without anyone knowing and without me having to stop watching the show (not looking down at my phone, or typing anything. It's communication multi-tasking!))

But it's obviously intruding in areas that should be protected.

So what do we do? What can we do?

Sure, Glass will become more instantly recognizable by the Usher Police after it goes mass market. They can ask people to remove them (and then people will put them back on and take some shots and then off they come). But see, Glass is just the beginning. The cameras will get smaller, easier to operate, and capturing media will be practically undetectable. At some point in the not-so-distant future . . . we'll be taking pix and vid by just thinking about it!

We're going to lose this fight. It's like drinking a beer in public. Technology is putting a paper bag around cameras. So maybe we should stop fighting and focus on making sure people use technology that doesn't distract others . . . or allowing them to shoot only during designated times? (I've always been a fan of allowing photos/vid during curtain calls – see this post.)

I don't know, though. Even as I typed the above, it made me nervous. I'll admit we have a problem, and at the same time that problem could be one of the biggest weapons we have in modern day marketing.

And I'll also admit I don't have a solution.

Do you?

(Oh, and while I'm at it . . . there's another bit of technology that is infiltrating our airspace. During the show last night, a guy two rows in front of me took a puff on an electronic cigarette.)

40. October 19, 2012

10 Questions for a Broadway Pro: The Voice Teacher to the Stars

If you have a Ferrari, and there were suddenly some sputtering sounds coming from the inside of that V8, would you take it to the local mechanic down the block?

Heck no, you wouldn't.

You'd take it to the best mechanic in town. It's a Ferrari for chimney's sake!

The same is true for the voice, which is a lot more valuable than a Ferrari, when you think about it. A great Broadway singer can earn well over the cost of a Ferrari in just a few short months.

And for singers, there's no better mechanic in town than Liz Caplan.

I can't tell you how many times during a tech of a show, or during a star's illness, I've heard, "We need Liz Caplan," or "Get me Liz!" Tricky music? Star new to singing? A dancer that has to learn to sing super fast?

Liz has all the tools and the tricks to make it happen. And to make it sound beautiful. You've heard her work all over town. Just look at some of the shows and stars she's tuned up:

American Idiot, Wicked, Once, Book of Mormon, 13, James Blunt, The Goo Goo Dolls, Amanda Seyfried (for the Les Miz movie), NPH (yes, that NPH) and even Stephen Colbert.

And today, Liz is answering our 10 Questions for a Broadway Pro. Take it away, Liz!

1. What is your title?

Vocal Supervisor/Vocal Coach

2. What shows are you currently working on?

As Vocal Supervisor: Once, The Book of Mormon; As Consultant: Wicked, Chaplin, Bring it On.

3. In one sentence, describe your job.

I offer vocal training, support and maintenance to the companies of Broadway shows on which I'm on staff or a member of the creative team.

4. What skills are necessary for a person in your position?

Knowledge of vocal pedagogy is necessary. Awareness of emotional, physiological, psychological, and muscular skeletal functions adds to the palette of knowledge. Playing piano proficiently and being an excellent listener is also paramount.

5. What kind of training did you go through to get to your position?

I was a Voice major in college and studied Theater simultaneously. Over the years I have apprenticed with homeopaths, dance and movement therapists, and with many alternative practitioners. I have been working with Broadway and music industry professionals for three decades. Being fully present and doing solid work one person at a time was what made my position possible.

6. What was your first job in theatre?

Performing children's theater during summers between college years.

7. Why do you think theater is important?

Not everyone gets to be emotional and expressive 24/7 (and be paid for it). I think theater allows audiences a portal into the possibility of deeper expression and communication. Simply by being exposed to a moving theatrical experience makes the conversation possible.

8. What is your profession's greatest challenge today?

Helping actors achieve a sense of balance is a challenge. My private studios' motto is 'Balancing the State of the Artist'. That balance includes giving the actors tools to keep their energies (physical and vocal) always moving fluidly and steadily. Most actors fatigue due to the 8-show a week schedule. The adrenals (responsible for releasing hormones in response to stress) take a beating if nutrition, hydration and sleep are overlooked. Singers must stay obsessively on top of their individual needs based on energy output. Broadway Companies benefit from hands on vocal work and vocal hygiene suggestions on a regular basis. Brush up sessions with the full company include healing, strengthening and preservation exercises for maintenance. They also offer group support and connection. Convincing Producers to include a Vocal Supervisor as part of the Creative Team is its own challenge. Templates based on shows vocal demands would keep everyone safe and strong. It's an insurance policy from the beginning

9. If you could change just one thing about the industry with the wave of a magic wand, what would it be?

Going back to old school by letting the matinees of especially difficult shows (most of them at this time) be performed by an alternate. Vocal preservation, mostly due to adrenal fatigue, has become quite a challenge.

10. What advice would you give to someone who wanted to do what you do?

Immerse yourself in many different areas : music, theater, body work, nutrition, psychotherapy, movement, and most importantly, excellent people skills. Now, don't blow it.

41. January 29, 2008

How Do I Get the Stage Rights to a Book/Movie/Play, etc?

When I was a Company Manager, I used to tell my assistants that if we ever got the same question from more than two company members, we hadn't done our job. If more than two people asked what time our flight was to the next city, or asked us to explain their paychecks to them, then we hadn't anticipated the needs of our company or communicated information that was important to them fast enough.

I believe this is a great way to measure your success as a manager. No questions? Nice job.

Using that definition of my job as a blogger, I have failed you.

I have been asked a few times recently how to go about obtaining the rights to a book or movie or play, etc. in order to turn that property into a Broadway show.

The good news? It's easy to ask for the rights. The bad news is that it's harder to get an answer.

Sometimes it's hard just figuring out where to start. Here are a few tips, classified by the type of property you are going after.

BOOK

Find the Publisher of the book (look at the first few inside pages) and call them. Most publishing companies will have entire departments dedicated to rights. I find that I get the quickest answers on the availability of rights from publishers (probably because disposition of rights is such a large source of their revenue). If they can't give you a straight answer, they should be able to tell you the agent for the author and you can contact the agent directly. They may ask for something in writing (see below).

MOVIE

The first question is to find out if the movie is an original or if it was based on earlier work. If it was based on a book or short story or a note jotted on a napkin, go after the original author first before approaching the movie company. Odds are that you are going to have to go to the movie company anyway, but you're much more likely to get a response (and a positive one) from the person who has the most invested in the project (the original author), rather than someone in the legal department of a billion dollar conglomerate. You can get the original author on your side, find out more info about what rights the movie company actually owns, and develop a strategy from there.

If it's an original screenplay, then you are definitely going to have to approach the movie company. You can also approach the author of the screenplay at the same time, using the same theory as the above, but if the script was written for MGM, then expect MGM to hold most of the cards. Movie companies get a ton of rights requests (for clips, etc.) so they will always want something in writing. Call the company and find out to whom to send the request. Send it, and then follow up with a phone call. Then wait and wait. And keep following up. I once got a response months later via the mail. I mean, they couldn't just send an email?

PLAY

Theater writers always own their material, as opposed to screenwriters who have to sell their soul to the mighty movie companies. Therefore, seek out the author directly, through the Dramatists Guild (if they are a member) or their agent, or by visiting Angus.

OTHER MEDIUMS

All of the above principles can be applied to other mediums as well, from optioning websites to television shows to clothing lines. Most people have agents or lawyers or production companies that you can track down through Google. If at all possible, get to the person, not the agent.

Another related question I get is "Should I have a lawyer make this inquiry for me?" Lawyers can make you seem more "serious" or "official", especially if you lack credits. Lawyers can also get you a speedier response if you hire a firm that does business with these agents or movie companies all the time. The downside is that lawyers cost bucks. Beaucoup de bucks. So, I often advise people on

limited budgets to make the request yourself first (do yourself a favor and make up some good looking fax stationery with a logo and a production company name). If you don't get a response, you can always go the lawyer route later.

This process is really easier than it seems. The key to it is to just start. Summon up some Oliver-like courage and just ask for what you want. Always thought your favorite book would make a great movie? Musical? Greeting card? Ask. It literally can take as little as 15 minutes to get the request off. Just by asking the question, you've started the ball rolling down the hill of getting your show done.

If they aren't available, you can move on to the next project, and stop saying, "The Alienist would make such a good film!" (I just found out that Scott Rudin has been sitting on the rights. Scott, if you are reading (or if your assistant is reading this for you), I'll take those rights – name your price.)

And, you can keep asking for them. I sent one request per year for five years before I got the rights to Somewhere In Time. Put a reminder in your Outlook to ask every year at the same time. Don't give up until you get the rights or they take out a restraining order against you.

And then form a dummy corporation under another name and ask again.

42. August 24, 2012

Two Surprise Closings and What They Mean for Broadway

What are these two closings?

Hint.

They aren't shows.

News hit the web yesterday that the famed NYC sheet music and showtune retailer, Colony Records, would be closing its doors forever at a soon-to-be-named date.

Colony, which is part of the footprint of The Brill Building (which has more history than Wikipedia) is a cultural landmark in this city. Sure, their prices were a bit high, which is why so many of its shoppers in recent years turned to eBay and other online retailers. But still, going to that store with its somewhat cranky yet incredibly knowledgeable staff and buying a song or two (like I did when I was at Tisch), made you feel like part of the scene.

And in other recent news, Colony's smaller yet still substantial counterpart in the West End, Dress Circle, just shut its doors on August 15th.

What's happening?

Well, yes, shoppers have gotten savvy, and they know they can get the same product online, and probably cheaper than by buying it at fancy brick-and-mortar store like Colony.

But, we'd be fooling ourselves if we thought that was the only reason.

When stores selling Broadway memorabilia can't sell enough Broadway memorabilia to warrant having a store, it means that Broadway memorabilia ain't in the same demand as it used to be.

And when people aren't collecting things associated with a brand, it means the passionate fan base may be dissipating.

Both of these stores advertised our brand. Millions of people walked by them every year, and thousands went in because they saw something that intrigued them. The web doesn't work like that. You rarely just run into something online without having received direction from somewhere.

So, no, these two closings aren't shows.

But I'd say they have an even bigger impact.

43. February 4, 2011

How to Get an Agent: 5 Tips for Actors

If the #1 question I get from Producers-to-be is "How do I raise money for my show?" then the #1 question I get from actors is "How do I get an agent?"

Well, I promised a couple of up-and-coming thespians that I'd tackle this tough topic, so here are my five tips for actors on how to get an agent. (I've ranked these tips in order of effectiveness, from least to most.)

1. The Picture/Resume Lottery

Sending out unsolicited pictures and resumes to agents is like playing the lotto. Maybe, maybe, if you've got a great headshot and some solid credits to match, 1 out of 100 will score you a meeting. But, it should still be a part of everyone's strategy, just don't spend too much time on it. And do it regularly, hitting the same agents up on a schedule every month, quarter, or whatever you decide. Try shaking it up with a pic/resume, then a postcard, then a flyer on what you're doing, etc. The advertising rule of "it takes 5 impressions for a consumer to buy" applies to agents as well. Repetition is key.

Think about interesting ways to get your pic/resume in the door. I once advised a bike-riding actor friend to deliver his headshot while pretending he was a messenger. I even made him carry a fake clipboard, and had him make the receptionist sign to accept his submission!

2. Pay to Play

You've all seen them: workshops like this one that charge an admission fee in exchange for getting some face time in front of an agent. Some workshops offer audition advice, others allow you to actually audition. I wouldn't expect to walk straight out of the workshop with a top ten-percenter in tow, but I do know many a folk that have gotten meetings after wowing the agent du jour. Just understand what you're doing – you're paying to meet someone. It may not be the most romantic method, but there was a time when Match.com wasn't cool either. And now, who gives an actor's a\$\$ how you get the representation?

3. Schmooze it up

Every business, but especially this one, is all about who you know. Get out there and “show face” as my dad would say. Get to every opening night party you can, and I’m not just talking about the Broadway openings. Get to Off-Broadway openings, regional openings, charity galas for non-profits, and anywhere where actors may be. Because where working actors are, their agents follow.

4. True friends refer

You can’t get into college without a recommendation from a high quality source, and often you can’t get into an agent’s office without the same thing. One of the most common ways that actors get agents is through a referral from a friend who is a client at an agency. So ask your buddies who have agents if they’ll make an introduction for you. They’ll get you in the door. What you do after that is up to you.

5. Do good work

Seems simple, but my last tip is by far the most common way that actors get agents. They are constantly performing, constantly improving, and are doing good solid work. And when you’re in a good show, and doing good work, people will come see it. Maybe an agent will come to see the actor that you’re standing next to on stage, but they’ll also see you. Or maybe an agent will come because they rep the playwright. Or maybe they’ll come simply because they like the theater. But putting yourself on stage in front of people is a great way to attract an agent. And, unlike the previous four tips, this puts you in the driver’s seat. Because instead of you practically begging to get in front of them, you’ll have them on their knees because of your talent.

44. October 22, 2013

3 Reasons Why Lion King Made a Billion Bucks

Broadway hit another milestone last week that made the business world (and a whole lot of potential Broadway investors) perk up and take notice.

The Lion King announced that it would be the first Broadway show to gross \$1 billion . . . from its Broadway production alone. The news was so big it got picked up by publications all over the world, from the usuals, like Entertainment Weekly, to “serious” outlets like Time Magazine (Fancy us!).

The Lion King’s success is of special interest to me, as I was right across the street when it opened, working as the Associate Company Manager of Ragtime. The Lion King vs. Ragtime matchup was more intense than Hulk Hogan vs. Rowdy Roddy Piper in WrestleMania I. And we all know what happened there. (Ok, maybe only dudes who were 13 in 1985 know what happened there.)

What happened was that Lion King went on to make a billion bucks. Ragtime, which I’ll go to my grave saying is one of the greatest musicals of the modern

era, lost the Tony and closed way too early, and its lead Producer would up in jail.

So what did it? What made Lion King the richest musical in the county . . . and counting? (It was the highest grossing musical last week (in its 16th year) with a take of 1.8 million bucks.)

Here are my three reasons why Lion King made a billion dollars at its box office:

1. "I've Never Seen Anything Like It!"

That's the thing I heard the most from audience members way back in the day . . . and what I'm still hearing now. As I preach all the time, in product development, in marketing . . . unique sells. The Julie Taymor puppetry was so unbelievably unique, and so "new," that it became a "talkable topic" – fuel for word of mouth. And the unique qualities of the design and the artistry made the show feel like it belonged on a stage, not like it was a cheap ripoff of a movie. It felt new. If you look at all the Disney musicals so far – it is by far the most unique – and, surprise, surprise, it's still crushing it at the box office.

2. The Circle of Disney

The Lion King is a new classic. Parents who saw it as a kid are now showing it to their kids, who no doubt will show it to theirs, and so on. That's the magic of a classic Disney movie. Because of the circular re-exposure it receives, entirely new audiences are created every year. And when a tourist comes to NYC, with family in tow, seeing the musical becomes part of the journey of the brand. While it can be scary to try and musicalize something that is such an important part of pop culture, if you can find a property that continues to generate new audiences year after year, snatch it up.

3. Cross Promote This!

The first bullet points in this list are something that we can all apply to our producing careers. This one, however, is a little most challenging . . . unless you own a ton of theme parks and a movie studio. Yes, yes, one of the reasons Disney has made so much money with Lion King is its ability to cross promote the property with the theme parks (there is a mini version of the show in Orlando) and the television networks (it's no coincidence that ABC affiliates are happy to do nice long feature stories on the show when it comes to town) and so on. Ok, ok, so you don't own networks or swamp land in Florida. But that doesn't mean there's a lesson to be learned here. You do have something. Maybe you have a real estate company in addition to your theater company. Or maybe you have a book club . . . or a blog? Those folks could come to your shows and vice-versa. Connect the dots of everything you're doing. Disney never lets people escape their world. And you should endeavor to do the same.

4. BONUS: Disney Datafication

Here's an extra reason why I think LK has done so well over the past decade and a half . . . they've got so much data at their fingertips and are so great at crunching it up (because they've been doing it in all their other industries for so many years), that they are the best at squeezing every dollar out of a consumer,

without the consumer feeling like they are being squeezed. From knowing when their customers are here, to knowing exactly how much they'll pay for a premium seat, they know how to maximize their revenue . . . even if it means spending more money to do it. Read this article to see their latest data-driven venture at their themeparks. Your mind will be blown. And your consumer experience will be improved . . . as will Disney's bottom line.

We can't all be Disney. Actually no one can be Disney. It's no surprise that they're the first company to produce a billion dollar musical on Broadway. So don't try to be Disney (Actually, that's what Garth Drabinsky did at Livent, and he ended up in the clink as a result). I don't want to be Disney. I don't want to be Apple. And I don't want to be Obama. But that doesn't mean I can't learn from the things they do well (and the things that they don't) so I can be the best ~~Producer~~ me.

45. November 1, 2012

What do Barry Manilow and Mike Tyson Have in Common?

Both are playing Broadway this season.

Tyson did a few rounds with us this summer, and now, the guy "who wrote the songs" recently announced that he is coming back to Broadway for 17 sweet shows only.

So why does this duo intrigue me?

Well, #1, I'm a Fanilow. "Can't Smile Without You," "Weekend in New England," "Somewhere Down The Road?" Come on, this guy can write a tune! Heck, I even enjoyed the score to his musical Copacabana!

But there's a #2.

Barry Manilow is doing seventeen shows. Tyson was here for just six shows. Frankie Valli just sang seven shows in the middle of October. Comedian Lewis Black was here recently for a week.

(FYI, that is probably the first time in the history of the typed word that those four gentlemen appeared in the same paragraph together. And now all that I can do is imagine all four of them starring in the next Judd Apatow buddy flick together.)

But that's not all. Donny and Marie were here just a bit ago. And Kathy Griffith. And . . .

Get my point?

While Broadway has always had a special event performer every once in awhile, the trend is definitely increasing. And, as I blogged back in 2010, it's starting to feel a little bit more like Vegas, isn't it?

This kind of "Alternative Programming" is good overall. It fills a couple of weeks at a dark theater, and provides jobs to many that might normally be out of work.

Just as long as it doesn't get in the way of our Traditional Programming. The day a new play can't come into town because Air Supply is doing a gig at The Broadway is the day I pack it in.

46. January 11, 2013

If They don't Go to Opening Night, then Who Should?

A friend of mine, and to protect the innocent, let's call that friend . . . uh . . . me . . . was recently offered a chance to invest \$50k into a Broadway musical. A high unit price, but fairly typical for a higher priced musical.

While I wasn't sure it was for me, I happened to have an investor that I thought might want the piece. And I have no problem putting my people into other people's shows. What goes around comes around, and if my investors are happy that's all that counts.

I asked some budgetary questions, as I do, and did the due diligence that I talk about in this seminar.

And just when I was about to recommend the investment to my guy, I was told that for the \$50k, this investor would not be allowed to go to opening night.

Uhhh, come again? You did say you wanted \$50k, right? Not \$5k?

I know theaters have fixed capacities, and I know there are a lot of people that put on big musicals that deserve to be there to celebrate the big Broadway debut. But isn't someone putting up fifty grand in a very risky proposition due the right to a couple of seats in a big theater?

I've planned opening night parties as a Producer. I've been a GM and a CM on opening night parties. And I know who gets to go to these things. Everyone and their brother and their assistant who has ever even thought about working on the show. (And the Company Manager usually has a few emergencies in their pocket at the end as well!)

And all of them should go.

But the moment we start telling \$50k investors that they can't go?

That's the moment we start losing investment dollars to other industries.

The perks are one of the few things that separate us from other investment opportunities. When you buy 100 shares of Coca-Cola, they don't give you a 6 pack of Coke, right?

But we can give you billing, insider access, and you betcha, opening night tickets.

Needless to say, my friend . . . and by my friend I mean moi . . . passed on this opportunity.

Why? Because Broadway Investors are the reason why we get to do what we do. They/we/you deserve to be celebrated for what they do, and therefore they deserve the respect of being invited to our celebrations.

47. February 21, 2013

The Ultimate Book of Mormon Ad Campaign

When The Book of Mormon was prepping for its first performance, a lot of folks thought the Mormon Church was prepping for a protest to take place outside the theater.

Many industry insiders expected picketing and heckling and maybe even a boycott or two.

But the first performance came and went and offended many . . . but there were no protests to be found. And no real statements of outrage or anger from the Mormon Church either.

Then I noticed something happening around Times Square.

Ads for the church start popping up on billboards and phone kiosks. Coincidence? No way in Spooky-Mormon Hell Dream.

The Church knew that thousands of people were being exposed to their teachings (admittedly in a backhanded way), and that some might be curious to know more.

And they were right. Heck, I even googled some of the Mormon history to understand what those planets were all about.

Their positive passive response was perfect.

Well, they just one-upped themselves. Check out the image in this blog. It's of an ad they placed in the Chicago Playbill for . . . yep . . . The Book of Mormon. If you can't read it, it says, "You've seen the play. Now read the book." (And the book they're talking about is the real Book of Mormon.) Rather than railing against the satirical juggernaut that is BOM, they decided to use its power to get people to learn more about what they really are.

Advertising isn't effective when you're on the defensive. Don't waste time trying to "protest" what you're not. Your show, your product, and yep, even your religion is more successfully marketed when you are what you are and are happy about it.

48. December 22, 2010

The Most Performed Play in High School- A Follow-Up

Yesterday, I listed the ETA's most performed plays and musicals in high schools.

What surprised so many people about this list was that the play that topped even Shakespeare for the number one slot was *Almost Maine*, a play by the Maine-bred, very talented and oft seen on *Law & Order*, John Cariani.

The NY Times even wrote an article about the Maine phenomenon.

What is so special about this play being the most performed high school play in the US?

Well, for starters, you've probably never heard of it . . . because it flopped Off-Broadway in 2006 after running for only 67 performances.

As the NY Times article details, it lost its entire \$800,000 investment.

What the NY Times article did not say was how much of that investment had been recouped since the play has become the most performed high school play in the US.

The article did say that Maine has done well for the author, which is fantastic news, because I'm a fan of John's and hope that he writes another play soon.

But those author royalties would be bupkus if it weren't for the original investors and if it weren't for the original Producer (who, if this is a traditional agreement, won't see any money until after the show recoups . . . if it recoups).

It's great that the play has been able to support John over the years, and I hope it continues to do so. But there has got to be a way that these plays that flop in NYC but have long lives elsewhere can provide some support to the Producers, while at the same time returning as much money to the investors as possible.

The goal of the subsidiary royalty revenue stream for authors is to keep them writing, so they aren't forced to take a day job.

Shouldn't there be something similar for the Producer? Wouldn't that allow the Producer to produce more often, just like it allows the author to write more often? And shouldn't they receive something for launching the project in the first place?

There doesn't have to be something similar, obviously. Because there isn't one.

But that may also be why the crop of career Producers is so small.

49. November 19, 2013

Theatre Things That Don't Make Sense Vol. 11: Why Pay Once When You Can Pay Twice

When I was producing Godspell, I bumped into a quirky little union rule that didn't make much sense to me, but cost my investors and me more than a few 'cents.' I was gonna blog about it then, but I figured it was a pretty rare situation. Since I didn't think I'd slam up against it again anytime soon, I let it lie.

Flash forward two years later, and while budgeting Gettin' The Band Back Together for Broadway, I've bumped back into it. And from what my GM tells me, it comes up on a whole bunch of Broadway shows.

So, I thought I'd clue you in, in case you face the same issue in the future.

Here's what's going down:

On a show where an actor plays an instrument, there is a bit of a jurisdictional battle over which union that "player" should belong to – the actors' union or the musicians' union. Sure, he's an actor, and that's his primary function. But, as the musician's union justifiably argued years ago, that actor might be replacing the work of one of their members – and that's the ultimate no-no when it comes to unions.

Honestly? The musician's union has a point. In some cases, if that actor didn't play that instrument, you might need another musician in the pit, right? And you probably auditioned looking for an actor that played that instrument in the first place. The musician's union could be losing a job, and it's their job to prevent that.

When this came to the bargaining table years ago, the first part of the decision was that the actor had to be paid the greater of his contractual actor salary, or the salary that he would have made as a musician. Example: if the actor's contractual was \$1,750 but the minimum musician salary for whatever he was playing was \$1,875 . . . he'd get \$1,875.

Ok, makes total sense. I've got no issue here. We shouldn't get away with paying less for a specific type of work.

But here's where it starts to get a little odd.

The actor is made to join the local musician's union (and pay the initiation fee). Now, since a majority of them never expect to work in that union's jurisdiction again, guess who a lot of agents ask to pay that fee? That's right. The Producer.

Hmmm, not sure I like that part. But hold on, that's not the big issue.

The producer is then required to pay benefits (health, pension, etc.) on behalf of that performer to the Actors Union . . . and the Musician's union.

Yep. Both unions get paid.

One person. Double benefits.

Now remember, in most cases, that actor won't work under the musician's union again, which means they most likely won't vest in the pension plan, and won't need the health insurance (since they will most likely be covered under their actors' union plan).

One person. Double benefits . . . and they won't even use them.

And now you can probably see why, in 2013, this just doesn't make sense to me. And this is one of those little things that drive Broadway Investors crazy.

Instead of all of the folks in on this battle coming to an equitable solution that didn't add expense to the show (splitting benefits, a your-turn/my-turn rotation, etc.), the solution was to just make the Producers and Investors pay more than they should. And remember, this wasn't even our jurisdictional issue! We just got saddled with the mediation bill . . . to the 'tune' of thousands of dollars per year.

You know, come to think of it, I'd be even more upset about this if I were the actor! Why? Think about it. If there is extra money being paid out, and the actor isn't going to see a benefit, why not just pay the money straight to the actor??? They are the ones doing the extra work, right? That money could be going straight in their pocket! And they could invest it/bank it as they see fit!

(Now, let me make something clear. I'm not pointing a blamity-blame-blame finger at anyone for this idiosyncratic rule. These kinds of things get into agreements for a whole bunch of reasons, including tit-for-tat on other areas of the negotiation, precedents, etc. So no blame here – no evil anyone. We study history not to blame, but to learn, so as not to repeat.)

So what's a Producer to do?

Well, you can choose to not have your actors play instruments. (That was something we considered greatly on Godspell where our actors weren't replacing pit musicians at all. The artists came in playing instruments and we found a way to use that in the show.)

But then the show probably just wouldn't be as good.

And so you pay. And that's what is happening now, and that's what I'll be obligated to do on Gettin' The Band Back Together (unless there is a collectively

bargained change, which would probably mean us giving up something else somewhere else . . . sigh).

But we can't do these kind of things forever. This is how budgets get bloated. Rules like this have to be more realistic, or we will have to start making decisions that will cause the shows to suffer.

And when the shows suffer, the audiences don't come, and then there won't be room for any benefit payments, never mind two.

50. March 1, 2013

Someone Wrote That Song

Musical theater writers out there are facing the exact same problem that popular music writers/artists faced years ago: the internet has made it waaaaay too easy to steal their work.

See, back in my day, I used to record the Top 40 off the radio, or "tape" my best friend's record if I couldn't afford to buy it myself. And the music industry was making so much bank in so many ways, no one cared.

When the internet exploded, well, all of a sudden anyone anywhere in the world could be your best friend, and "taping" became clicking so sleepovers for music sharing was not required. Thanks to sites like Napster and Limewire, stolen music was the norm (I'll admit, I downloaded some files myself in the early 2000s – the sites saved time and money and that's what consumers always want.)

Two things put those sites out of work – monstrous litigation and the invention of iTunes.

Now, let's talk about the subject at hand – musical theater writers.

Back in my days as a performer, we all photocopied music from the library, or, yep, from that same best friend. And while annoying to the publishers, no one really cared that much.

Here comes the internet, and surprise, surprise, here comes a couple of sheet music "sharing" sites doing the same thing as Napster and LimeWire. (I won't link to them or mention them here because I don't want to offer them that kind of promotion – no wait, there is one I'll name because they so obviously know they're doing something wrong, they named their Facebook Group "I Love Oven Mitts" as a mafia like cover!) The result of these sites is that hard working writer folks lose out on potential revenue that they could use to help pay the bills (and therefore they have less time.)

So, what could stop them?

Monstrous litigation and, well, a Steve Jobsian type publisher that puts the majority of sheet music on one central site. (A bunch of mini-Jobsian type writers established this site years ago and have been quite successful so far.)

Before the litigation or the "iTunes of Sheet Music" happens, the smart folks at the Dramatists Guild, with a number of brilliant writers and performers at various stages of their career, from Alan Menken to Craig Carnelia to Nick Blaemire to Kait Kerrigan, wrote the little ditty and shot the little video below to help spread the word about piracy and what it could mean for the future of our biz.

Enjoy it and enjoy your weekend. (But first make sure you give me a comment on what you feel about sheet music piracy.)

51. August 13, 2013

The Mission of Music in a Musical Is...

I went to see a show the other night and found myself sitting right next to an old fuddy-duddy (I do realize that by using the term "fuddy-duddy," I am probably now one myself). He was buttoned-up and scowling from the moment he walked into the hallowed halls of the theater.

He was absolutely silent during Act I. He didn't laugh. Didn't slump. Just kind of stared ahead like he was preparing for a role in the musical version of *Awakenings*.

And then, during the middle of the first act finale, Mr. Duddy started shifting around in his seat a bit. At first I thought he was preparing for an early exit to the bathroom and to secure a place in the front of the line for a \$9 coke. But then I realized he wasn't shifting at all.

He was tapping his foot.

Yep, like Robert De Niro in *Awakenings*, Mr. Duddy started to wake up slowly. You see, the music was rockin' at this point . . . more than it had the entire first act, and the musical was starting to really take off (a little late, of course). And somehow it had melted Mr. Duddy's wax figure state, and his foot was moving to the beat. I stopped watching the show for a moment, as I watched Duddy's foot move, and then slowly but surely that energy crept up his entire body, practically loosened his tie for him and then . . . well would you look at that . . . a smile.

The music literally got into his body. It moved him. And that, my friends, is the mission of music in a musical.

It has to move you. Obviously it doesn't have to physically move you all the time . . . but when it gets you tapping your feet, bobbing your head, or moves you to tears, you know that you are literally synced up with what is happening on that stage.

And of course there is a way to emotionally move you as well . . . when the sound of what is being sung has you moving like a tornado, but it's all happening

inside the audience member. When actually they are moved so much . . . they can't physically move. You know what I'm talking about, right?

I read and listen to too many musicals where the music doesn't move me at all. It's just there, trying to tell a story, but falling short because it doesn't reach out and grab me and pull me in. And worse than that? When the music is trying to "teach" . . . or be smart. The Sondheim Syndrome, I call it. You can't be smart. And you can't try to teach. You can just tell your story and move your audience, and if you're Sondheim, great . . . but I'd rather you just be you. (*Rent* is one of the simplest musicals written in the last two decades, and one of the best and most moving.)

I've said this before, but I will say it again . . . It's called a musical. It's not a book-ical or even a lyric-ical. It's a MUSIC-al. And that means that your music just may be the biggest weapon you have to snare that audience and make them fall in love with your story.

But if you're not moving them . . . they'll move on to something else.

52. May 22, 2013

Guess Which Genre of Source Material Hasn't Been Adapted for the Broadway Stage

Bunches of books have been made into Broadway shows, from *Phantom*, to *Tale of Two Cities*, to *Ragtime*.

And, as is more and more the case, lots of movies have made the leap as well, from *Billy Elliot*, to *Big*, to *Kinky Boots*.

We've even had albums morph into musicals, like *Tommy*, and as well as the catalogs of *Frankie Valli* and the *Four Seasons* (*Jersey Boys*), *ABBA* (*Mamma Mia*), and many more.

Lastly, we've also had a ton of TV shows make it to the stage, like . . . er . . . uh . . . you know like . . . hmmm.

Books, movies, music, even a poem (*Cats*) . . . but how many TV shows have become Broadway musicals?

Seriously. How many?

Can you find any?

We didn't.

Ok, there's the recent *Addams Family* . . . but the creators went out of their way (and rightly so) to state that they were using the original *Charles Addams* cartoons as their source material. The brand of the TV show was just a bonus.

Any others?

I know about the *Happy Days* musical that's played the regionals and a few tour stops. And there's a *Lucy* that's been making the rounds. *Jerry Springer The Opera* went up in London. But like all the others, it never made it here to

Broadway. (Most recently, *The Honeymooners* was all set to make its pre-Broadway debut this fall at The Old Globe, but backed out at the last second).

So what is it? Why don't TV shows make strong source materials for Broadway musicals?

Is it because their story is told over seasons instead of a more finite arc? Or conversely, is it because their plots are generally resolved in a 30 or 60 minute quick, simply structured wrap up? Is it because they are generally conceived as "lighter" fare and musicals require a heavier theme? Or frankly, is it just because we haven't gotten around to them yet and the next decade will bring an onslaught?

Whatever the answer, the Dragnet-style "just the facts" are that TV shows don't make successful Broadway musicals. In fact, they just don't make Broadway musicals period. That seems to be the rule.

Of course, that's the rule until someone breaks it. And I look forward to writing that blog.

You have an idea as to why there hasn't been more Broadway musicals based on TV shows? Or do you have an idea for one?

53. September 19, 2013

On September 23, Broadway Investing Changes Forever

Everyone in the world of investing, whether that means Broadway investing or Hedge Fund investing or Early Hungarian Cabinetmaking investing, has been talking about crowdfunding since the JOBS act was signed into law on April 5th of this year.

The crowdfunding rules and regs still haven't been finalized yet, and only the Gods of the SEC know when they will be (since the famed Wall Street Reform Act known as Dodd Frank isn't done yet, I wouldn't count on JOBS being finished anytime soon). But that doesn't mean there isn't anything else in the JOBS act that deserves our attention.

You see, there's another section of the Act that is going to become effective in . . . um, well . . . four days . . . that will have a greater effect on Broadway investing than ten crowdfunding bills (especially since the crowdfunding regs limit raises to only \$1mm).

The section I'm talking about eliminates the restriction on "General Solicitation and Advertising" for Rule 506 of Regulation D (which is the rule and reg that most, if not all, Broadway shows use).

In the old days, you couldn't advertise that you were looking for investors for your Broadway show.

In the new days, and those days start in just four days . . . you can.

Now, before you start calling the NY Times to place full page ads, or posting "investors wanted" notes on Facebook, hold your metaphorical horses. As with any legislation, especially any new legislation, there are a crap ton of complications and logistical nightmares, and frankly some serious trouble you could get yourself into (for example, this doesn't look like something that aggregators or non-GP/Lead Producers could do). I've got this feeling that the SEC isn't so hot on the easing of some of these rules, and since their job is to protect the public from fraud, you can bet your bippy they'll have their microscope out to examine how people use the new regs, like the governmental pit bull-like watch dog agency they are.

That said, one of the biggest comments I hear from a lot of new investors is, "Sure, I'm interested in investing . . . I just never knew how to do it before."

The closed door Broadway Investing community is now wide open my friends.

I could go into this in more detail, but I thought it best to leave it to the experts. Ladies and Gentlemen of The Producer's Perspective, I once again give you two of the legalest eagles I know, Daniel H. Wasser of Franklin, Weinrib, Rudell & Vassallo and Gary Emmanuel of Sichenzia, Ross, Friedman and Ferrence. You may remember Dan and Gary as the attorneys who guided me through the crowdfunding of Godspell as well as the authors of this article about Crowdfunding and its future for Broadway Investing.

Dan and Gary have once again written a gem of a piece about the chances in solicitation and advertising and have graciously allowed me to print their article here.

Take it away, Dan and Gary.

The Curtain Rises on Publicizing Private Offerings An Oxymoron becomes Reality:

by Daniel M. Wasser and Gary Emmanuel

The SEC's position has been simple and logical: general solicitation and general advertising are inconsistent with the very concept of a private offering and transform it into a public offering. Nevertheless, Congress passed the JOBS Act in 2012 and directed the SEC to develop rules to allow advertising in connection with private offerings, upending nearly eighty years of regulatory precedent. With the SEC's recent issuance of final rules, a new era awaits, where theater producers and other entrepreneurs will be able to reach out to unlimited numbers of people in pursuit of investment funds provided that funds are accepted only from persons who have been verified as being accredited investors.

Rule 506 is part of Regulation D, which was issued by the SEC to consolidate its policies on private offerings. Broadway producers, virtually without exception, raise funds through private offerings under Rule 506. Although Rule 506 authorizes an issuer to raise any amount of money from accredited investors and

up to 35 financially sophisticated unaccredited investors, the presence of unaccredited investors substantially increases the cost of undertaking an offering. Therefore, most Broadway financings have been limited to accredited investors (broadly defined as persons with at least a \$1 million dollar net worth exclusive of primary residence, persons who earn in the previous two years at least \$200,000 per annum or \$300,000 together with spouse and have a reasonable expectation of the same income in the current year, principals of the issuer, entities whose owners are all accredited investors, and entities not formed to invest in a particular offering with over \$5,000,000 of assets).

What The SEC Has Done

When the JOBS Act was signed into law by President Obama in April 2012, the SEC was directed to develop rules to govern the use of general solicitation and advertising in connection with private offerings. Final regulations were issued on July 10, 2013, with an effective date of September 23, 2013. Until that date, the old rules apply and no general solicitation or advertising is permitted in connection with Rule 506 offerings.

Under the new rules, a producer could, for example, put an advertisement in Playbill announcing the producer's latest project and need for investors. But most significantly, the new rules are expected to unleash the power of the internet and enable producers to develop pools of investors via social networking on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and blogs. The fact that such marketing efforts will reach mostly unaccredited investors is not problematic as long as funds are received only from investors whom the producer has confirmed through reasonable measures to be accredited investors.

Currently, producers tend to know their investors either directly or through trusted associates, and they rely on this familiarity plus the investor's self-certification of accredited investor status. Under the new rules, the producer must take reasonable steps to verify accredited investor status. Just what steps will be deemed reasonable are not dictated by the new rules, but the SEC has indicated its comfort with the following approaches: verifying income through copies of tax returns or W-2's for the past two years with a representation of a satisfactory level of anticipated income for the current year; verifying net worth through copies of bank statements and a credit report dated within three months together with a representation that all liabilities necessary to make a determination of net worth have been disclosed; or obtaining written confirmation of net worth or income from an accountant, attorney, registered broker-dealer or investment advisor who certifies to have taken reasonable steps to verify the investor's accredited status within the last three months.

In addition to the new rules on general solicitation and advertising, there are also new rules barring so-called "bad actors" from serving as officers, directors, 20% owners, or promoters of Rule 506 offerings. Of course, in this instance, the term "bad actor" has nothing to do with thespian talent. Rather, it reflects a concern that advertising will bring out the unsavory elements of the securities industry, such as boiler room operators and spammers, who will induce people – particularly the elderly – to invest in unsuitable or fraudulent schemes.

Accordingly, starting September 23, 2013, persons with criminal records or who have been subject to certain SEC proceedings or sanctions within specified periods are barred from holding positions of influence in companies making Rule 506 offerings.

What The SEC Did Not Do

By authorizing advertising in connection with Rule 506 offerings, the JOBS Act expanded the range of investment opportunities likely to become available to accredited investors. To create investment opportunities for the vast bulk of Americans who are not accredited investors, the JOBS Act authorized the much talked about equity crowdfunding model (as opposed to the Kickstarter type of donation-based crowdfunding model). However, equity crowdfunding has not yet become effective even though Congress directed the SEC to develop regulations to govern crowdfunding. We continue to remain skeptical that crowdfunding will be embraced by the Broadway producing community, if for no other reason than the fact that the JOBS Act limits crowdfunding offerings to \$1 million. The new Rule 506 offering discussed above which allows investors to be reached through general solicitation and advertising should not be confused with crowdfunding.

It bears emphasizing that when the SEC loosened the rules on general solicitation and advertising, it did not relax the requirement that investors be provided with the information necessary to make informed investment decisions and that there be no material misstatements or omissions in such information. Thus, an email blast touting a "can't miss" investment opportunity is not the sort of advertising authorized by the new rules. Similarly, advertising is not intended in any way as a substitute for full and fair disclosure; rather, it is only a means to reach potential investors who would then be provided with customary offering papers.

What The SEC May Do

The same day that the SEC issued final rules authorizing advertising in compliance with Congress' directive under the JOBS Act, the SEC revealed its discomfort with the new rules by issuing for public comment a number of proposed rules that would, among other things, increase filing requirements associated with the new Rule 506 offering and impose substantial penalties for compliance failures. We do not know whether the proposed additional rules will gain traction, but their issuance, together with the bad actor rule, suggest strongly that regulators are likely to step up oversight of Rule 506 offerings, particularly those involving general solicitation and advertising.

Conclusion

Broadway producers who consistently rely on a circle of loyal investors may find the new rules of limited interest. However, we anticipate that most Broadway producers and persons hoping to become Broadway producers will view them as presenting exciting opportunities. Because the new rules have yet to be implemented and interpreted, and because their passage has not necessarily been applauded by the SEC and state securities regulators, it will be particularly important for producers who utilize advertising when fundraising to proceed with

care to insure that all of the new rules are observed.

54. January 8, 2013

5 Things I Learned About Australian Theatre

I'm writing this blog on my last night in picturesque Sydney, Australia. I fly back tomorrow. And somehow I'll arrive earlier than when I left. So weird. I mean, I get why that happens, but I'll just never get over how bizarro-world it is.

Anywho . . .

I had an awesome time in Australia, and as I always do when I travel to foreign lands, I tried to pick up a few of its theatrical uniqueness so we could all learn from them.

Here's what I found out:

1. There are two Broadways in Australia.

In the US, we've got one Broadway. In Australia, two cities have similar sized commercial theater industries. You've got your Sydney. And you've got your Melbourne. They're only separated by an hour flight, but both put on the big shows. And from what I gather there seems to be a friendly rivalry between which city does drama better. Both cities aren't big enough nor do they have the influx of tourists to support super long runs like we do, but I wondered what it would be like if Boston was almost as robust as Broadway.

2. Chat Boards? What Chat Boards?

The fans I spoke to said the chat board community doesn't exist in Australia like it does in the states, so shows can go about their business without online pot shots. Of course, the people I spoke to all read the NY chat sites, so . . .

3. Got a star and a musical? Give me a few weeks.

Here's something that just doesn't exist in NYC . . . it's the limited-run star-driven revival . . . of a musical! For example . . . Geoffrey Rush just did a dozen or so weeks in Forum. Our economics haven't allowed for such a thing . . . yet. (Note to self: Call FAMOUS AUTHOR to discuss a limited run star driven revival of his musical because this one could work).

4. When your theater is a tourist attraction, you'll sell tickets.

My First Time is playing at the Sydney Opera House, along with a bunch of other shows in its many venues. Well, guess what one of the top things to do is in Sydney? Duh, it's "see the opera house." Tourists are drawn to the venue like I am to bacon. So, the venue becomes a lead generating machine, bringing you possible ticket buyers by the ferry boat full.

5. It could be the new Chicago.

Audiences speak English. Creatives love to stay there. It's cheaper. It's no wonder in the past several years, a whole bunch of new musicals have been born in the Bush. Boy from Oz, Priscilla, Officer and a Gentleman, Dr. Zhivago,

and the upcoming King Kong and Strictly Ballroom are just a few of the shows that began their lives in Aussie Land. I'm predicting we'll see several more start here over the next decade. I know I want to bring a show to town.

6. BONUS: Everyone is a mate.

They call you mate here, all the time. And why sure, that's just the local jargon, but for me it typifies this bonus theatrical trait. Ready for it? Here goes . . . the theater people are just nice. Super nice. They love what they do. They love where they live. And they love welcoming people to their land. I've never felt so at home in a foreign country, so thanks Aussies. I'll be back soon.

55. September 5, 2012

10 Negotiating Tips for Theatre Professionals: Part I

Ahhh, negotiating. It's an essential part of business and an essential part of life. Whether we know it or not (or want to or not), we negotiate all day long . . . with agents, with employees . . . with spouses. Because the bottom line is, if you want something . . . anything . . . you gotta negotiate.

A lot of folks I tell me that they are "bad" negotiators, especially theater peeps, since most of them didn't get in the biz thinking that's what they were going to have to do. The good news is that while it's true that some people are born blessed with a natural negotiating ability, just like some folks are blessed with a beautiful singing voice or a great golf swing . . . negotiating is a skill that can be learned . . . just like singing . . . and just like swinging a nine iron.

Negotiating in the theater is a little different than other industries, because of our small structure, unique deals and unique personalities. So, I put together this list of 10 Negotiating Tips for Theater Pros that you can use to help you get what you want.

Here are the first five:

1. What you want is what they want.

Speaking of "what you want," remember first and foremost that the best negotiation results in both sides feeling not only satisfied that their needs have been met, but both sides should also be excited about the endeavor they are about to embark on. Negotiating is not a guilty/not guilty trial. And you're not a prosecutor or a defense attorney. I've talked to so many people who have come away from a negotiation saying, "I got that guy for a song," or "I beat them up and saved a ton," and I can guarantee you that whatever they saved, they lost in morale from the other side of the negotiation feeling "beat up." Saving money is important, and often essential to a project's life. Just remember, that the only winner at the end of a negotiation should be the project, not a person.

2. Go easy on the emotion.

This is one of the hardest tips to remember for us in the arts. We're emotional people, so we get emotionally involved. When someone wants more money, or

doesn't want to do a project on your timeline, it can get under your skin, especially since you're most likely producing it or writing it because you LOVE it. And their semi-rejection may make you feel like they don't love it. And unrequited love is a bitch. Remember that this is a business and try to check your emotions at the door. Look at practical ways to solve the problems that have been brought up. A big heart got you into this business. Let your head lead you through it.

3. Who you negotiate with today, you will probably negotiate with tomorrow.

Boy did I learn this the hard way. I literally went off on someone very early in my career and then had to call them the next day and try and negotiate another deal for another project. It didn't go well. The theater industry is a small one. A very, very small one. And the people you are on the phone with about a show today are most likely going to be involved with other shows throughout your career. So, blowing up at someone and screaming at them in a negotiation may not only cost you that negotiation, but it might sour your relationship so much, that it'll cost you many more down the road. Luckily, in my case, the other guy had done the same thing when he was starting out.

4. Earn a Boy Scout Negotiating Badge and be prepared.

Let's face it, when we decide we want to do a project, we want it open like yesterday, so we'll rush to try and get the right people involved. First, re-read Tip #2, take a breath, and then, before negotiating with anyone, prepare for that negotiation like you're studying for a final. Who will you be negotiating with? Do you know enough about the person you want to hire? Try to find out what is important to them. What other projects have they worked on? What did they want/get on those projects? The more you can learn in advance, the more time you'll save on the actual negotiation, which will help get your curtain up that much faster. And never, ever, rush your negotiation. Rushing will always force you to give up more than you can. If you've got a fast approaching deadline, and the other side doesn't, then you're dead.

5. Keep notes like you're a stenographer.

A lot of negotiating these days takes place over email, which I'm not actually a fan of (you can't hear tone, emails can be forwarded and BCCed without knowing, etc.) so I advocate to my consulting clients that they always negotiate over the phone. But if you're talking and not typing your negotiating, then you've got to keep notes. I keep a whole separate negotiating book, and I write down details as we discuss . . . what I say, what they say, and what the next steps are. Not only does this help me remember what has transpired and help resolve any future issues, it also helps my next set of negotiations with the same negotiator.

Part II of this post with the next five tips will be up tomorrow. In the meantime, if you want to learn more about negotiating, I strongly suggest you start with this book. It improved my skills tenfold in about ten days.

56. August 28, 2013**What Miley Cyrus Can Teach Us About Marketing**

In case you've been living under a rock, that's under a rock, that's under a mountain of rocks, you have probably heard that Miley Cyrus turned some heads on Sunday night with a bizarro, sexually-charged-and-teddy-bear-infused performance at MTV's Video Music Awards.

It's been the talk of just about every town since then. Was it appropriate? Was it inappropriate?

And was it any good?

Me? Well, I just thought it was weird and awkward. I didn't think she sounded good. I didn't think she twerked good (that was grammatically incorrect on purpose, by the way – saying "I didn't think she twerked well" just sounds ridiculous).

And as a straight (and recently engaged (!)) dude, I didn't even find it all that sexy.

It was just . . . twerkin' weird.

But that doesn't seem to matter in the slightest to Miley's career.

She did what so many others have done, and on the same television program, no less. She hijacked the conversation. The talk of the entertainment town world isn't about the VMAs, it's about Miley, and her debutante ball as an adult woman performer, albeit a weird one.

If her performance on the awards show was a commercial (and, by the way, it was one – in the same way that a Broadway show's performance on the Tony Awards is a commercial), it would be a perfect example of "interruption marketing." It immediately slapped you in the face, woke you up from the drone-like slumber you were in from everything else you were looking at and . . . like a 5th grade joke . . . "made you look!"

I call this type of marketing "Detour Marketing" myself. Imagine consumers traveling down their same ol' roads, day in and day out . . . and then up comes a bright orange sign (or a half naked twenty year old and a giant effin' Teddy Bear) . . . and you're off in an entirely other direction.

And if that detour is a good one . . . you'll think and talk about nothing else for awhile.

And was Miley's detour a good one? Well, it generated 300k tweets per minute. To put that in contrast, last year's Super Bowl blackout only brought in 230k.

Perhaps your show could benefit from a little detour? Cuz, all press is good press, I guess, right?

No, not exactly. I wouldn't take Anthony Weiner's press. And I wouldn't like to be the Syrian Government right about now either.

But controlled and smart detour marketing . . . in an environment that is known for those kind of detours (like the VMAs) . . . might be exactly what makes Miley a star long into her adult years.

Although I predict a Britney/Lindsay/Amanda type burnout along the way.

Which will get her even more press. Right before her comeback.

57. March 29, 2013

How to Wage War on the Broadway Discount Sites, Part II

Alright, let's talk about how we can do some damage and start to take back our discounts! (Insert revolutionary cheers and French people waving flags and putting up barricades here.)

Yesterday we talked about how the discount sites are beating shows to the box office, because of the modern consumer's desire for a lower priced ticket, and the easy-to-find codes on sites like BroadwayBox, Theatermania, etc.

And why are they easy to find? One weird word. Google. Google makes these discounts easy to find. Because . . . and here's where we're going to try and insert ourselves . . . those sites have strong "organic" search rankings. When you search "ANY SHOW Discount" usually it's one of those sites that pop up first. Click here for an example of one of my own shows search results.

Why does this happen?

It's because these sites have the most relevant content, are the most aged, have the most links, and all those other things that Google likes.

And because the official sites aren't even trying.

But they should.

Here's the simplest trick that every single Broadway show should be doing when building their website in an attempt to at least get in the game of organic search for discounts in order to save money and/or make more money.

1. As soon as you know you might produce or create a show, buy the domain. See here.
2. As soon as you own the domain, put up a simple TWO page site. Google treats websites like a sommelier treats wine: the older the better. (Build the rest of your site as soon as possible as well – the more pages of content the better – but the two pages referenced below are the most important in this context.)
3. The first page should be your general splash screen that's visible when you visit: www.NAMEOFSHOW.com.

And now, here's the rub . . .

4. The second page should be an internal site page, named something like: www.NAMEOFSHOW.com/name-of-show-discounts. (See where we're going?)

5. On that second page, list your discount information. Make it relevant for someone searching for a discount. Hire an SEO consultant to make sure you nail this page. Don't link this page off your home site. Just let it live there for Google to see, and its spiders to crawl.

See what we did? We created a discount page, on the official site.

Now I know what you're thinking . . . "I don't want people to see that I'm discounting!" They won't . . . unless, they are already looking for it. And there's the key . . . if they are looking for it/searching, they are going to find a discount somewhere, right? They are better off finding yours than a third party discount site where you may not have as much control over price, over the marketing message, or heaven forbid, a site that actually costs you money.

If you can make this work, and I have . . . you can make more money.

On one show of mine, I made close to \$10k extra in a 2 month period just by having a slightly higher priced discount on my "official discount page" that achieved high organic rankings thanks to the above tip (and some of the advanced tips below).

Let me state that this is not a quick fix, nor is it guaranteed to shoot you to the top of the first page of Google. But it can absolutely and without a doubt have an impact. Especially on shows with longer runs. Because the page is built on the show's actual and official domain, it is very possible to rise high in organic rankings for someone searching for your discount.

Oh, and if you don't build this page . . . the discount sites will! That's exactly how they've been winning the search war. Sure, their sites are reputable, older, and get a lot of traffic . . . but watch them . . . as soon as a new show is announced, they'll have a ticket page and a discount page up even if there are no discounts. They are just trying to be the first to the organic search front lines so they can get an advantage.

But since you know when your show is announcing before they do . . . that advantage can be yours.

Here are a couple more advanced tips to help you fight your pricing battles:

Build the "Official Discount Page" referenced above on a Word Press or blogging platform. Update it often. Like everyday if you can, or whenever you have any relevant discounting content (rush, new discounts, changes to policies, etc.). Google likes old sites, yes, but they also like "news" sites, or sites that change everyday.

Buy a "discounts" Google Adwords campaign . . . again, only for people searching for discounts. Send those people to your official landing page. This will help with Google, and again, if a consumer is going to find a discount on another site, why not pay a little bit to send them to yours where you may be able to get them to spend a little more (a lot of these folks don't want to comparison shop – they just don't want to pay full price). And on your site, you can do cool things like, collect email addresses in order to get the discount, etc. And that's worth a lot in itself.

Buy a domain with discounts in the domain itself . . . ex. NAMEOFSHOWDISCOUNTS.com. Build a simple site that is similar to your official site filled with relevant discount info.

There are a ton more of these little known search devices to help improve your rankings and help you at least feel like you've got a fighting chance. Talk to your advertising or marketing agency about it, or find a good SEO guy/gal to put in your army.

It might be too late to win the Broadway discounting war. But we could win some battles.

And each one of those battles means bucks to your bottom line.

58. June 20, 2012

Another Thing We Have in Common with the Airline Industry: Attire

I have a travel outfit.

I sleep on planes (sometimes more than I do at home), so I snuggle up in a pair of cozy track pants, the softest and loosest long sleeve shirt I can find, and a sweatshirt that sometimes doubles as a pillow.

I am wearing that ensemble right this second as I prepare to board a red eye from Portland to JFK. And as I look around the terminal, everyone else looks pretty casually dressed as well. Some, to be honest, look pretty sloppily dressed.

But that wasn't always the case, now was it?

Used to be that you dressed up to fly. Remember that? It was a high class event to board a plane, and it deserved the respect of a nice outfit, maybe even a tie . . . but certainly not track pants.

See where I'm going with this?

Used to be the same thing for the theater.

It's really quite amazing how trends in the airline industry parallel so many of the trends in our industry. Premium seating, intense discounting, high priced union labor . . . and even dress.

Obviously, it's more practical to dress more casually when traveling, especially long ways, and especially on red eyes.

And, dressing more casually requires less effort and is more comfortable if you're going to the theater as well, right?

But here's the rub . . . dressing up actually helps assign a greater value (and yes, a higher price) to the experience. Seeing a bunch of suits and dresses make other attendees believe that they are at a higher class function. And higher class functions are more expensive by definition (think Galas, Black Tie events, Weddings, etc., etc.).

So, if more of your audience is dressing up, they are probably more willing to pay a higher ticket price . . . just because the value seems higher.

I'm not saying you'd see some kind of massive uptick in full price sales if you had a dress code at your theater (and we'd have to be careful about audience attrition if they didn't feel like they belonged), but I do wonder if as unofficial dress codes in this country disappeared, discounting started to pop up at the same time. (I don't have that timeline data, but it feels like they occurred at similar times, doesn't it?)

People are not price resistant. They are value resistant. If we want people to pay our prices (which are high and always will be high), we have to make sure the value of the experience is even higher. We do that by making great shows, first and foremost. But the environment our theatergoers are in can have more of an effect than we think.

I'm going to make an effort to dress better when I go to the theater from now on. Who's with me?

59. February 26, 2010

Broadway Vocab 101. Words Used to Describe Numbers

I threw out a word a few weeks ago that prompted a reader to pop me an email and ask, "What the fiorello does XXXXX mean?"

So, in an attempt to prevent future emails like that from readers (and future bad musical-cussing puns from me), I thought I'd introduce a new feature on The Producer's Perspective, called Broadway Vocabulary.

I remember hearing Broadway-specific terms for the first time when I started working in the biz, and not having a clue what they meant, and being too shy to ask (my staff all just did a spit-take at the thought of me being too shy). In case any of you have the just-starting-out-shy-gene, this feature is for you. (Oh, and get over the shy stuff, by the way. Channel your inner two-year-old and ask, ask, ask and you'll learn, learn, and earn!)

The first set of terms we will tackle are all related to the figures that Broadway producers examine on a daily, and sometimes hourly basis, depending upon when the show is opening and upon how OCD the producer is.

Hear are five Broadway Box Office terms:

WRAP (noun and verb):

The dollar amount of ticket sales in a fixed period of a time, usually daily. It includes tickets sold for performances that day (if any) as well as all performances in the future. ex. Did you see yesterday's wrap? How much did we wrap yesterday? If our wraps don't go up, I'm going to wrap myself in a box and mail myself to Portugal.

ADVANCE (noun):

The dollar amount of ticket sales for all future performances of a show. ex. Who has a higher advance – Addams Family or American Idiot? I don't know, but Wicked's advance is higher than the GDP of a small independent nation!

GROSS (noun and verb):

The total dollar amount of tickets sold before any deductions (see NET below) for a specific number of performances, usually weekly or daily. ex. How much did Miracle Worker gross during its first full week of previews? When did the Broadway League start reporting the Gross figures? If our grosses don't go up, I'm going to wrap myself in a box and mail myself to Portugal.

NET (noun and verb):

The total dollar amount of tickets sold after standard box office deductions (e.g. credit card commissions, group sales commissions, ticket printing fees, etc.), for a specific number of performances, usually weekly or daily. ex. How much did Miracle Worker net during its first full week of previews? When did The Broadway League start reporting the net figures as opposed to the gross? If we weren't overcharged for Credit Card Commissions, our net would be much closer to our gross.)

NAGBOR (noun):

pronounced "Nag-Bore". An acronym for Net Adjusted Gross Box Office Receipts, or just a fancy way to say NET. If there's a word you want broken down in the next Broadway Vocab, just pop me an email.

I promise I won't tell you to Fosse-off.

60. March 5, 2013**5 Things I Learned from the Academy Awards (and the Tonys Could Learn Too)**

It's been over a week since Seth MacFarlane offended a whole bunch of people (did people expect less?) and Anne Hathaway pi\$\$ed off a whole bunch of people (did people expect less?) at this year's Academy Awards. For the first time in years, I watched the show from beginning to end (admittedly with my computer in front of me googling things like "Charlize Theron in Cider House Rules" and "How old is Barbra Streisand now anyway?). Since the Oscars are so well viewed, I wanted to see if there were a few takeaways the Tonys could steal to help increase our lagging ratings this coming June.

Here's what I learned:

1. The Show Before The Show might be more entertaining than The Show.

Every year the Red Carpet Coverage seems to get bigger and better. It's a chance for us to get up close and personal with the stars, see who's hot, who's not, and apparently to see how short Kristin Chenoweth is compared to every other human being (I found that pretty entertaining, actually). I always enjoy hearing who's nervous. It shows that people in Hollywood are actually human.

2. If you're not in the industry, then a lot of the Awards don't matter.

I'm gonna say it. I don't care about the winner for short animated feature. Just don't. And that's when I went back to the Google machine and starting searching for things like, "How long is this \$\$(**ing awards show going to be?" We all want to recognize excellence. But we have to be careful if it costs us viewers. Not showing the short animated feature winner's speech on television doesn't mean they aren't getting the award. It just means people might actually get to go to sleep before the sun comes out tomorrow.

3. Controversy keeps The Buzz going.

Who would have thought CNN would be talking about the Oscars as of yesterday? What did it? Michelle Obama. I'm not sure anyone thought that the choice to have Mrs. First Lady giving out the big trophy at the end of the night would be such a talking point, but it was definitely a big, bold choice, and it got a lot of folks attention, for better and for worse. And I thought it gave the industry a lot of authority. If you can get one of the most powerful women in the country world to show up to your party, even on Skype, you're throwing one helluva party.

4. Being Prepared isn't always Best.

My favorite moment? Jennifer Lawrence's sweet blushy face after she fell up those stairs. It was real, authentic, and all of us out there said, "Mega millionaire stars fall up stairs too, just like me!" While I'm a big believer that all nominees should have some idea of what they're going to say should they get to run up those stairs, it's much more endearing to shoot from your cuff. Sure, you may trip up the stairs or over your words, but so what . . . save the memorization for when you're at work. Use improvisation when you win.

5. When there are more Musical Numbers, we all Win.

After the show was over, a friend of mine texted me and said, "Weren't The Tonys fantastic?" Thanks to Broadway Lovers (and Producers) Neil Meron and Craig Zadan (along with help from Rob Ashford), the show was filled with numbers and music of all types and genres . . . and that's certainly when I had the most fun, didn't you? We're watching something live . . . so we want to see something live. And the more of it, the better.

The Oscars took a lot of flack in the press this year, despite the fact that ratings were up about 3%. What did you think of the show? What would you like the Tonys to adopt? Not adopt? Let the comments begin!

61. July 17, 2012

"Closing Time, You Don't Have to Go Home..."

Sing along with me!

". . . but you can't stay here!"

If you work in the theater, then odds are you've closed down a few bars late at night/early in the am and heard that song.

With the rash of show closings, or announcements of closings, over the last six weeks, (thanks in part to the tremendous amount of product on the street) I've been thinking about "closing times" a lot.

Like . . . when do the most shows close?

And, more importantly, has that changed over time? Are there trends that Producers like you and I should be aware of as we decide when to open our shows, or are there months when our shows are more vulnerable than others? (Concentrated closings in a certain month should indicate that business immediately following that period would be slow, don't you think?)

To get a few of the answers to the above, I went data diving again. This time, I took along with my trusty sidekick, employee, and Broadway Historian, Jennifer Tepper. We dug out the # of closings in each month over the past 32 years, graphed them out, (I love a graph) and came up with a few interesting takeaways.

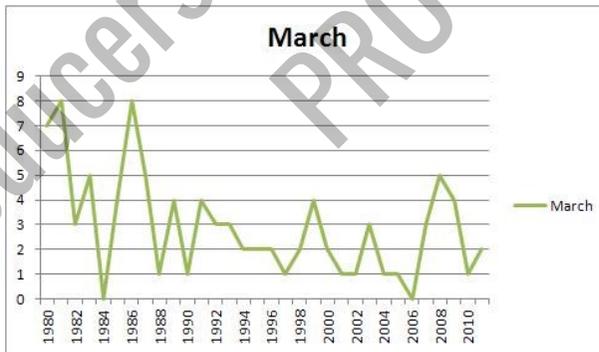
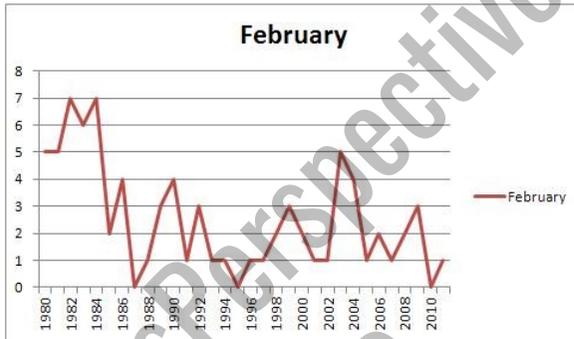
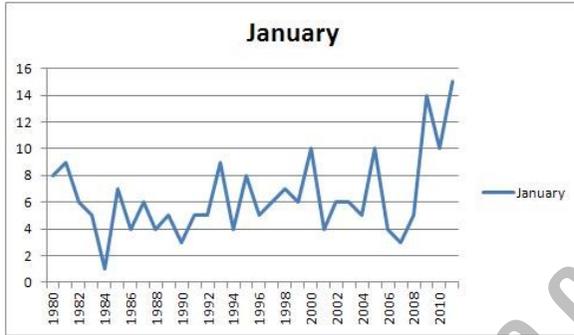
The graphs for each month are below, and here is the Producer Perspective Summary of our findings:

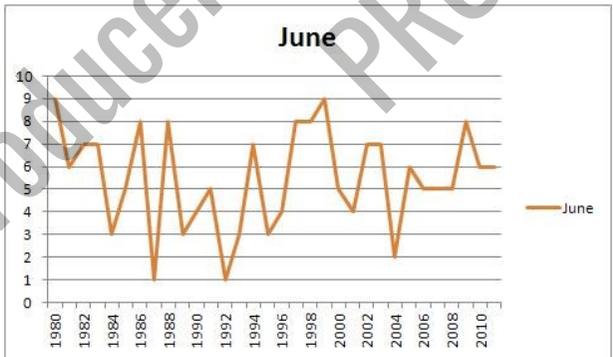
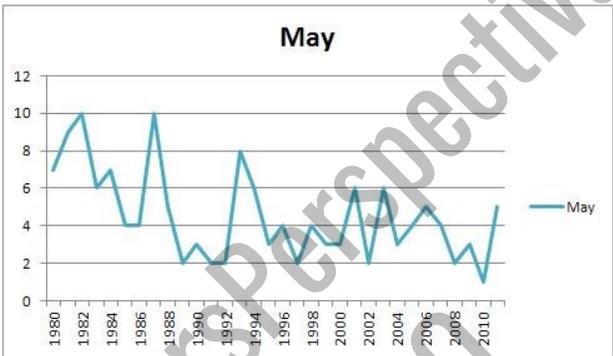
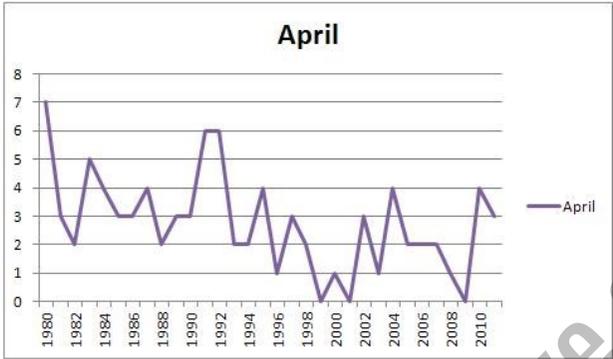
In the past 32 years, Broadway has seen the most closings by month in January, followed by June, and then May.

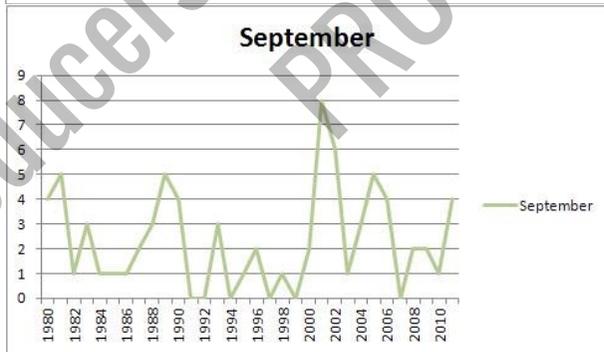
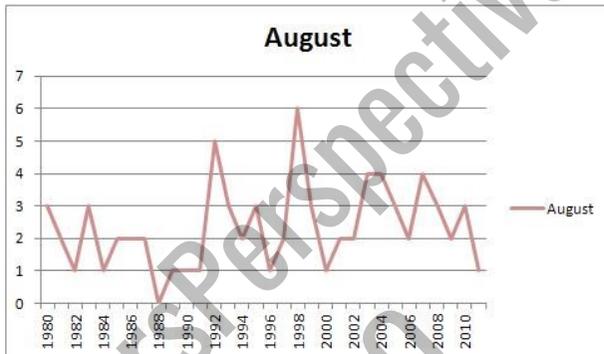
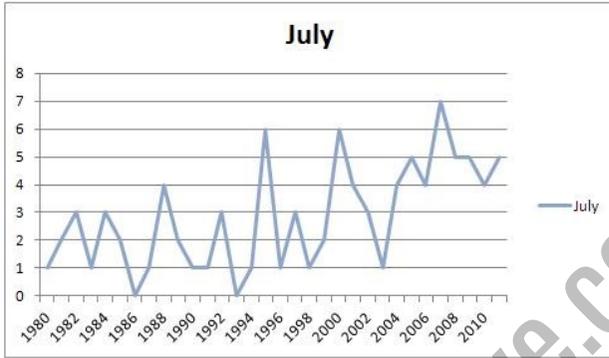
October sees the least number of closings. The average number of closings that happen in October is less than 1/3 of the number that happen in January.

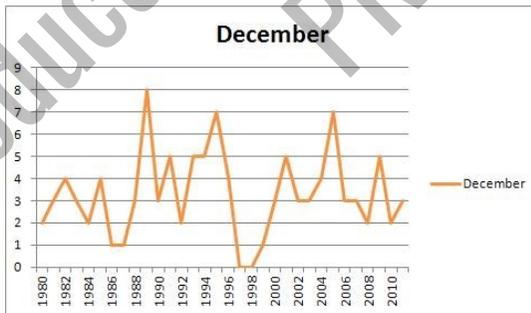
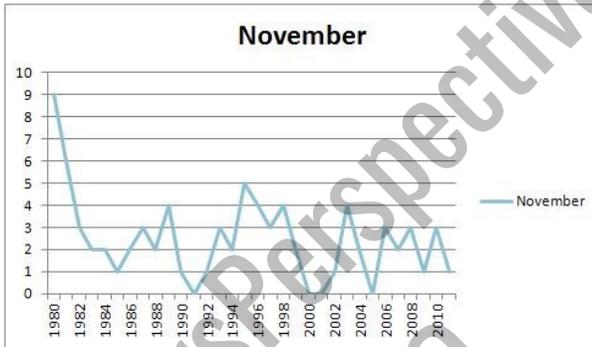
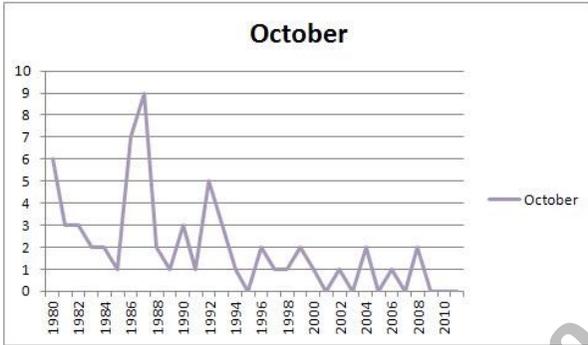
During the past 32 years, the single month with the most closings was January of 2009. (Financial crisis, anyone?)

The number of shows that close in February, March, and April appear to be generally decreasing, while more shows are closing in January, June, and July. Here go those graphs!









Interesting stuff, right? Do you have any takeaways from the above? Let me have 'em!

62. July 19, 2011

10 Questions for a Broadway Pro: A Few “Notes” from Lin-Manuel Miranda

To call Lin-Manuel Miranda just a writer is like saying Da Vinci was just a painter.

Like the ancient Italian, Mr. Miranda does a whole lot of things, and, unlike most, he does a whole lot of them unbelievably well. He's a composer, lyricist, actor, musician, poet, and one of the most beloved guys on the Broadway scene. I wouldn't be surprised to hear that he invented a flying machine too.

And to say he gives back to the community is an understatement. In fact, here's a perfect example of how much he cares about the movers and shakers and the writers to be . . . when I ask people to answer my “10 Questions,” the most common answer I get as a reply (when I get a reply) is . . . “How long do my answers have to be?” Sounds like a 12-year-old getting an essay assignment, right?

You know what Lin said?

“My answers are turning out CRAZY long. Is that okay?”

'Nuff said. Without further ado, here are Tony Award Winner Lin-Manuel Miranda's awesome answers to our 10 Questions.

1. What is your title?

I write music and lyrics.

2. What show/shows are you currently working on?

I'm working on Bring It On: The Musical (get the Bring It On Recording here) with another composing team, Tom Kitt and Amanda Green, which opens in November at the Ahmanson Theater in Los Angeles.

I'm also working on a concept album about the life of Alexander Hamilton.

3. In one sentence, describe your job.

I write the parts of the show that end up on the cast album.

4. What skills are necessary for a person in your position?

Musicianship. You don't need to be a piano or guitar virtuoso, but if you're getting into this because you have music in your head that you are burning to express, you must have a means by which to express it clearly. It's not enough to be able to hum a tune: You can't hum a chord. (I mean, some Tibetan monks can, but I can't.)

Reading and writing music is not necessary, but it certainly helps. Music is like any other language: you can make yourself understood if you're not fluent, but why not endeavor to make yourself understood as clearly as possible?

You have to ENJOY collaborating, and being part of a team. Musical Theater is many different art forms smashing together: music, storytelling, dance. You may

have to change a lyric because your choreographer is planning an amazing routine, and they can't hold that long legato note you wrote. Your book writer may come up with an amazing scene that renders a particular lyric redundant. If you've chosen great collaborators, you talk, you debate, and the best idea in the room wins. Other artists give you perspective and make you a better writer, if you're running with the right crew. Finding the right crew is the hardest part.

5. What kind of training did you go through to get to your position?

Musically, I took piano lessons at a very young age. I had a solid grounding of music theory in high school, at least enough to be able to fake play something by reading the guitar chords.

But the most formative training I had was a childhood spent with all different kinds of music. My parents and friends had eclectic tastes, and when I began seriously writing music of my own (as opposed to song parodies to amuse my friends), a lot of different influences began to seep out.

I went to Hunter College High School. We had an entirely student-run extracurricular theater program, and an amazing faculty adviser named Gina Dooley. I began acting in 8th grade and never stopped, though I soon began writing one-act plays and musicals, and directing as well. I cannot overstate how much I learned during these years. When you are directing your fellow high school students, and you have no authority to pay, fire or punish them, no motivating force at all other than to make them believe in your vision of how the show should be, you learn to project confidence very quickly.

I majored in theater at Wesleyan University. As a theater major, you need to log a certain number of hours doing BTP, ITP or ATP (Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced Technical Practice). BTP is applying makeup, painting a set, knitting a costume. ITP is a design position: you can stage manage or create costumes: I did most of mine by doing sound design or writing incidental music for other people's plays. ATP is acting or directing. So you learn to do a little of everything before you graduate. I learned to sew, I applied makeup, I built and struck sets, I learned to work within a tight budget. I'll never light a show, but I can tell a Source-4 from a Fresnel. The take away here is enormous: Understand what everyone is bringing to the table, in every discipline. Be around people who want to do what you want to do. You don't need to go to college for either of those lessons, though I did.

6. What was your first job in theater?

I had a summer job as an unpaid intern at Repertorio Español, an amazing Off-Broadway theater in New York. They have a repertory company that does productions in both English and Spanish. They do several shows simultaneously, so they're striking sets and putting others up every day. I mostly cleaned floors and struck sets, but I got to see amazing theater for free.

7. Why do you think theater is important?

I can only tell you why it's important to me: I don't ever feel more alive than when I'm in a theater full of strangers, and the magic that's happening on stage makes

us all scream, or laugh, or cry together. And those moments are rare because they're hard to get right, getting all those different elements to coalesce. But when they do? In Phantom, during Masquerade, when it keeps building, and building, and then the Phantom shows up, and the horns BLARE his theme? Or the end of Act One of Sunday In The Park With George, when the painting begins to take shape? I can't describe the feeling of when everything comes together just right, other than to tell you it's overwhelming, and powerful, and it has NEVER happened to me staring at my computer at home. It is a uniquely communal experience.

8. What is your profession's greatest challenge today?

Most immediately: rising costs, rising prices. If we don't find ways around it, then the only theater that gets produced is custom-built for the people who can afford it. And that club gets smaller every year.

In a macro-sense: funding and supplementing arts education if our schools cannot afford it. I was very lucky to go to a specialized public school where music was a class, right next to science and math and history. No, BEYOND lucky: I won the LOTTERY by getting into that school. It saved my life.

9. If you could change just one thing about the industry with the wave of a magic wand, what would it be?

Comfy seats for everyone. Not just Broadway. My magic wand wave will give every regional, community theater and every school auditorium and gymnasium on Earth comfy seats!

10. What advice would you give to someone who wanted to do what you do?

Learn marketable skills with which you can make a living while you pursue this passion. Listen to anything and everything critically. That doesn't mean criticize what you like and what you don't like. It means, if a piece of music moves you, start to break it down. What is the part that gives you chills? Is it the way the horns start playing in unison right at the climax of the song? What is the rhythm section doing: is it playing with those horns, or providing a counterpoint? Let's say you're at a show, and you just don't like what you're seeing. If you want to do this for a living, DON'T TUNE OUT, and DON'T DON'T DON'T CHECK YOUR PHONE. Look closer: what about this show isn't working? Did that rhyme pull you out of the story? Is this actor working too hard, and making you see the work instead of the story? Is it the sound system? There is no theater experience from which you cannot learn. In doing this, you begin to learn your own tastes, which will inform the kind of writer you will be. I wish you luck.

63. April 1, 2010

How to F-ing Write! A Mother F-ing Missive by David Mamet

David Mamet knows how to write drama. Even in his memos!

Check out this recently leaked memo below from Monsieur Mamet to his writing staff of his now defunct TV drama, The Unit. In the all-capped and over-hyphenated Mаметesque decree, he calls TV executives “penguins,” uses words like “dickhead,” and more.

Oh yeah, and along the way, he doles out some incredible advice on how to write a scene. Rookies and vets alike can learn from what he has to say.

The guy may drive us crazy sometimes, but he knows how to make a scene tick, that's for f-ing sure.

TO THE WRITERS OF THE UNIT

GREETINGS.

AS WE LEARN HOW TO WRITE THIS SHOW, A RECURRING PROBLEM BECOMES CLEAR.

THE PROBLEM IS THIS: TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN DRAMA AND NON-DRAMA.LET ME BREAK-IT-DOWN-NOW.

EVERYONE IN CREATION IS SCREAMING AT US TO MAKE THE SHOW CLEAR. WE ARE TASKED WITH, IT SEEMS, CRAMMING A SHITLOAD OF INFORMATION INTO ALITTLE BIT OF TIME.

OUR FRIENDS. THE PENGUINS, THINK THAT WE, THEREFORE, ARE EMPLOYED TOCOMMUNICATE INFORMATION — AND, SO, AT TIMES, IT SEEMS TO US.

BUT NOTE:THE AUDIENCE WILL NOT TUNE IN TO WATCH INFORMATION. YOU WOULDN'T, I WOULDN'T. NO ONE WOULD OR WILL. THE AUDIENCE WILL ONLY TUNEIN AND STAY TUNED TO WATCH DRAMA.

QUESTION: WHAT IS DRAMA? DRAMA, AGAIN, IS THE QUEST OF THE HERO TO OVERCOME THOSE THINGS WHICH PREVENT HIM FROM ACHIEVING A SPECIFIC, ACUTE GOAL.

SO: WE, THE WRITERS, MUST ASK OURSELVES OF EVERY SCENE THESE THREE QUESTIONS.

- 1) WHO WANTS WHAT?
- 2) WHAT HAPPENS IF HER DON'T GET IT?
- 3) WHY NOW?

THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS ARE LITMUS PAPER. APPLY THEM, AND THEIR ANSWER WILL TELL YOU IF THE SCENE IS DRAMATIC OR NOT.

IF THE SCENE IS NOT DRAMATICALLY WRITTEN, IT WILL NOT BE DRAMATICALLY ACTED.

THERE IS NO MAGIC FAIRY DUST WHICH WILL MAKE A BORING, USELESS, REDUNDANT, OR MERELY INFORMATIVE SCENE AFTER IT LEAVES YOUR TYPEWRITER. YOU THE WRITERS, ARE IN CHARGE OF MAKING SURE EVERY SCENE IS DRAMATIC.

THIS MEANS ALL THE "LITTLE" EXPOSITIONAL SCENES OF TWO PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT A THIRD. THIS BUSHWAH (AND WE ALL TEND TO WRITE IT ON THE FIRST DRAFT) IS LESS THAN USELESS, SHOULD IT FINALLY, GOD FORBID, GET FILMED.

IF THE SCENE BORES YOU WHEN YOU READ IT, REST ASSURED IT WILL BORE THE ACTORS, AND WILL, THEN, BORE THE AUDIENCE, AND WE'RE ALL GOING TO BE BACK IN THE BREADLINE.

SOMEONE HAS TO MAKE THE SCENE DRAMATIC. IT IS NOT THE ACTOR'S JOB (THE ACTOR'S JOB IS TO BE TRUTHFUL), IT IS NOT THE DIRECTOR'S JOB. HIS OR HER JOB IS TO FILM IT STRAIGHTFORWARDLY AND REMIND THE ACTORS TO TALK FAST. IT IS YOUR JOB. EVERY SCENE MUST BE DRAMATIC. THAT MEANS: THE MAIN CHARACTER MUST HAVE A SIMPLE, STRAIGHTFORWARD, PRESSING NEED WHICH IMPELS HIM OR HER TO SHOW UP IN THE SCENE.

THIS NEED IS WHY THEY CAME. IT IS WHAT THE SCENE IS ABOUT. THEIR ATTEMPT TO GET THIS NEED MET WILL LEAD, AT THE END OF THE SCENE, TO FAILURE – THIS IS HOW THE SCENE IS OVER. IT, THIS FAILURE, WILL, THEN, OF NECESSITY, PROPEL US INTO THE NEXT SCENE.

ALL THESE ATTEMPTS, TAKEN TOGETHER, WILL, OVER THE COURSE OF THE EPISODE, CONSTITUTE THE PLOT.

ANY SCENE, THUS, WHICH DOES NOT BOTH ADVANCE THE PLOT, AND STAND ALONE (THAT IS, DRAMATICALLY, BY ITSELF, ON ITS OWN MERITS) IS EITHER SUPERFLUOUS, OR INCORRECTLY WRITTEN.

YES BUT YES BUT YES BUT, YOU SAY: WHAT ABOUT THE NECESSITY OF WRITING IN ALL THAT "INFORMATION?"

AND I RESPOND "FIGURE IT OUT" ANY DICKHEAD WITH A BLUESUIT CAN BE (AND IS) TAUGHT TO SAY "MAKE IT CLEARER", AND "I WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT HIM".

WHEN YOU'VE MADE IT SO CLEAR THAT EVEN THIS BLUESUITED PENGUIN IS HAPPY, BOTH YOU AND HE OR SHE WILL BE OUT OF A JOB.

THE JOB OF THE DRAMATIST IS TO MAKE THE AUDIENCE WONDER WHAT HAPPENS NEXT. NOT TO EXPLAIN TO THEM WHAT JUST HAPPENED, OR TO *SUGGEST* TO THEM WHAT HAPPENS NEXT.

ANY DICKHEAD, AS ABOVE, CAN WRITE, "BUT, JIM, IF WE DON'T ASSASSINATE THE PRIME MINISTER IN THE NEXT SCENE, ALL EUROPE WILL BE ENGULFED IN FLAME"

WE ARE NOT GETTING PAID TO REALIZE THAT THE AUDIENCE NEEDS THIS INFORMATION TO UNDERSTAND THE NEXT SCENE, BUT TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO WRITE THE SCENE BEFORE US SUCH THAT THE AUDIENCE WILL BE INTERESTED IN WHAT HAPPENS NEXT.

YES BUT, YES BUT YES BUT YOU REITERATE.

AND I RESPOND FIGURE IT OUT.

HOW DOES ONE STRIKE THE BALANCE BETWEEN WITHHOLDING AND VOUCH SAFING INFORMATION? THAT IS THE ESSENTIAL TASK OF THE DRAMATIST. AND THE ABILITY TO DO THAT IS WHAT SEPARATES YOU FROM THE LESSER SPECIES IN THEIR BLUE SUITS. FIGURE IT OUT.

START, EVERY TIME, WITH THIS INVIOABLE RULE: THE SCENE MUST BE DRAMATIC. IT MUST START BECAUSE THE HERO HAS A PROBLEM, AND IT MUST CULMINATE WITH THE HERO FINDING HIM OR HERSELF EITHER THWARTED OR EDUCATED THAT ANOTHER WAY EXISTS.

LOOK AT YOUR LOG LINES. ANY LOGLINE READING "BOB AND SUE DISCUSS..." IS NOT DESCRIBING A DRAMATIC SCENE.

PLEASE NOTE THAT OUR OUTLINES ARE, GENERALLY, SPECTACULAR. THE DRAMA FLOWS OUT BETWEEN THE OUTLINE AND THE FIRST DRAFT.

THINK LIKE A FILMMAKER RATHER THAN A FUNCTIONARY, BECAUSE, IN TRUTH, YOU ARE MAKING THE FILM. WHAT YOU WRITE, THEY WILL SHOOT.

HERE ARE THE DANGER SIGNALS. ANY TIME TWO CHARACTERS ARE TALKING ABOUT A THIRD, THE SCENE IS A CROCK OF SHIT.

ANY TIME ANY CHARACTER IS SAYING TO ANOTHER "AS YOU KNOW", THAT IS, TELLING ANOTHER CHARACTER WHAT YOU, THE WRITER, NEED THE AUDIENCE TO KNOW, THE SCENE IS A CROCK OF SHIT.

DO NOT WRITE A CROCK OF SHIT. WRITE A RIPPING THREE, FOUR, SEVEN MINUTE SCENE WHICH MOVES THE STORY ALONG, AND YOU CAN, VERY SOON, BUY A HOUSE IN BEL AIR AND HIRE SOMEONE TO LIVE THERE FOR YOU.

REMEMBER YOU ARE WRITING FOR A VISUAL MEDIUM. MOST TELEVISION WRITING, OURS INCLUDED, SOUNDS LIKE RADIO. THE CAMERA CAN DO THE EXPLAINING FOR YOU. LET IT. WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERS DOING - *LITERALLY*. WHAT ARE THEY HANDLING, WHAT ARE THEY READING. WHAT ARE THEY WATCHING ON TELEVISION, WHAT ARE THEY SEEING.

IF YOU PRETEND THE CHARACTERS CAN'T SPEAK, AND WRITE A SILENT MOVIE, YOU WILL BE WRITING GREAT DRAMA.

IF YOU DEPRIVE YOURSELF OF THE CRUTCH OF NARRATION, EXPOSITION, INDEED, OF SPEECH. YOU WILL BE FORGED TO WORK IN A NEW MEDIUM - TELLING THE STORY IN PICTURES (ALSO KNOWN AS SCREENWRITING)

THIS IS A NEW SKILL. NO ONE DOES IT NATURALLY. YOU CAN TRAIN YOURSELF TO DO IT, BUT YOU NEED TO START.

I CLOSE WITH THE ONE THOUGHT: LOOK AT THE SCENE AND ASK YOURSELF "IS IT DRAMATIC? IS IT ESSENTIAL? DOES IT ADVANCE THE PLOT?"

ANSWER TRUTHFULLY.

IF THE ANSWER IS "NO" WRITE IT AGAIN OR THROW IT OUT. IF YOU'VE GOT ANY QUESTIONS, CALL ME UP.

LOVE, DAVE MAMET
SANTA MONICA 19 OCTO 05

(IT IS NOT YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO KNOW THE ANSWERS, BUT IT IS YOUR, AND MY, RESPONSIBILITY TO KNOW AND TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS OVER AND OVER. UNTIL IT BECOMES SECOND NATURE. I BELIEVE THEY ARE LISTED ABOVE.)

64. June 19, 2012

If the Show was Good, Why were the Ratings So Low?

Talk about a Broadway buzz kill.

After last year's raging success of a Tony show (everyone was so nervous about taking the show from Radio City to The Beacon – and then they realized that maybe a theater awards show would be better in an actual theater than in a Rockette-inhabited barn) this year the ratings took a post-Christmas-grosses-like nosedive, dropping a whopping 13%.

The LA Times reported that this was the least watched telecast since 1992.

Woof.

But we're not here to just bark and complain. We're here to figure out why. (Or at least come up with some crazy theories.)

So why do I think we took a few steps back? Here are three reasons why:

1. There were no super stories.

2011 had Book of Mormon and Spider-Man eating up a lot of press ink all over the world. I had people calling/emailing me that I hadn't talked to in years asking me, "What's up with that Spider-Man show?" At every speaking engagement of mine last year, if it was going a little soft, I always knew I could loosen up the crowd with a quick Spider-Man joke. Everyone knew about it. And everyone was curious. Same thing with the Mormon skit. Talk about curious. South Park + Mormons = what the @\$%\$? Broadway is a business fueled by hits. And when we've got 'em, all our boats rise.

2. Was there enough advertising/marketing?

TV shows are like Broadway shows. People don't just come in droves on their own. You've got to tell them to come. And if people don't come, you have to ask yourself if you're advertising enough, and to the right demo. Could CBS promote it more? Was there a pullback this year? (I honestly don't know the answer to this question, but it deserves to be asked.) Could we promote it more? I don't think we're getting enough of the casual theatergoers to tune in . . . like how casual moviegoers tune into the Oscars. And part of that reason may be that they just don't know that it's on, as simple as that sounds.

3. We're not creating new theatergoers.

I know, I know, I sound like a broken CD, but remember how our attendance stayed flat this year? Do we really expect viewership of our very nichey inside-joke-filled award show to expand if we're not expanding our audience? People don't watch the Tonys to fall in love with the theater. They're already in love. They've already experienced it. Then they tune in. We've got to get more people seeing shows, and then they'll watch the award show about the shows.

There could be a zillion other reasons why the ratings took a dive this year . . . some which we can control, and some which we can't and/or shouldn't. Frankly, it's probably a stew-like version of all of these reasons stirred together. But even if there are a zillion reasons, we've got to identify at least a couple o' thousand . . . because Broadway's biggest night of the year is the Tony Awards. It's the biggest marketing weapon in our arsenal. It's a chance for us to reach people we can't reach on our own, and that's super important to the survival of what we do as an art form.

What other reasons do you think the show didn't perform as well as previous years?

65. April 10, 2012

A First Click is Like a First Date

I've been watching a lot of banner advertising for shows lately, especially on news sites like Playbill (as opposed to shopping sites, like Broadway.com). And, of course, the most common call-to-action on those 468 x 60s is "Buy Tickets" or "Get Tickets", and so forth.

And that may be just fine and dandy for shows that are in the middle of their marketing life cycle, when the odds are high that the viewer has seen a good chunk of impressions before viewing that online print ad we call banners.

But what about shows during their launch phase?

Think about it . . . what would you do?

You're online, reading an article about something fun that a new show is doing, and up pops an ad for a new play. It's a play that you've never heard of before, a play by someone you've never heard of before, and maybe it stars someone you've kind of heard of before.

Would you buy a \$130+ ticket with one click?

Let me put it in a PG-13 kind-of-way . . .

Would you sleep with someone on the first date that you were only kind of attracted to?

Do we really expect our customers to commit over \$100 AND 3-4 hours of their lives (commuting time counts). Remember, getting someone to buy a theater ticket is a lot different than getting someone to buy, oh, a pair of pants, because it involves a cash investment and a time investment, which is probably 3x as valuable as the money to a lot of folks.

Yet knowing that this conversion is such a long shot for most shows, we go for it anyway, like a stupid frat boy who thinks he's going to get lucky just by telling people how much he can bench.

Why don't we try dating our customers first?

Why not use your banners to get them to sign up to your email list, so you can drip marketing messages to them and get them to buy later? Why not use banners to get them to click-thru to exclusive content that can give them a richer understanding of the experience they'll get at your show, so they'll be more inclined to buy later? Why not use your banners to play a game with them?

What banners do you click?

No advertising should ever exist without a call to action. But if the odds of you getting action on your first click are so low, then why not try a different strategy instead.

Because if you don't, that's when you'll really be f#\$*ed.

66. July 18, 2012

The Disney Director...Dare I Say...Formula?

Disney has had a great run on Broadway . . . they've produced seven shows, and five have (or will) recoup (I'm putting Newsies in the win column already). That's a 71.4% (!) recoupment rate, in an industry where about 20% – 30% is the norm.

Cha-ching.

And when they win, they win big. I'd guarantee that the profits from The Lion King alone have made up the losses for the two losers (Tarzan and Little Mermaid).

Business 101 tells you that if you want a successful business, you should study other successful businesses to see what makes them tick (there have been a ton of books on the Disney biz model, including this one). So, I thought it was time to take a look-see for a trend or two.

Sure, there are the obvious takeaways of the Disney model, many of which can't be duplicated by mere mortals:

Produce highly successful animated feature films first
Have several shows running at once so you can share marketing costs
Have a retail store in Midtown with huge billboard space
And so on . . .

But are there any others that may not be so obvious?

I was strolling past one of the three Broadway theaters that The Mouse occupies and I stopped for a moment to take a look at the houseboard (you know, that thing that looks like the title page on a playbill) . . . and before you could say "Supercalifragalisklalkh;lkjhjahjhd", a trend hit me smack in the face.

Disney has produced seven musicals.

That means they had seven Directors for those musicals.

Of those seven helmers, how many of them do you think directed a Broadway musical before they directed their Disney musical?

How about . . . 2.

Of those two, one of those was Julie Taymor, who had only directed one "musical" prior to that . . . Juan Darien . . . which was certainly not a conventional musical to say the least, as it was billed as a "Carnival Mass".

The other was their most recent ship captain . . . Jeff Calhoun, who had five shows under his belt . . . making him the only veteran Broadway musical Director to have been chosen by The Mouse (and . . . if you believe the Shubert Alley scuttlebutt, Newsies was never intended for Broadway).

Pretty amazing, don't you think? Entrusting a multi-million dollar musical, and more importantly, a multi-multi million dollar brand (remember those movies?) to a first timer? Now that's trust. That's believing in the artist.

And, it's working.

(It certainly helps that Disney doesn't have to worry about raising money on the back of anyone's name.)

Sure, it's not the only reason, or even the primary reason, why Disney's recoupment rate is what it is, but it's certainly a trend worth looking at, especially when conventional wisdom tells us that if you want a musical to work, you better have a director that has been down the bumpy road to Broadway before.

Disney has proven that it's not important that a Director has been down the road before . . . it's just crucial that a Director has a crystal clear vision to see the end of the road before they start their trip.

(BTW, Disney is not the only Producer out there who has had industry-standard-busting success using first timers. Click here to read this blog from 2008 about two other Producers who have also established a trend or two that are worth studying.)

67. May 21, 2013

Top of the Show to You!

I was struggling with the tone of a show I was working on several years back . . . the audience just wasn't getting on our journey fast enough. It took them too long to figure out what we were trying to do.

I actually felt like it was pretty clear once you got into the story, but I got some great advice from a respected vet that I will never forget, that helped me clearly define the tone for myself, and more importantly, the ticket buyers.

Here's what this pro said:

It's essential that at the top of your show (and sometimes even before you begin), you let the audience know the type of experience they are in for . . . or, more importantly, the type of experience you want them to have. Think about it in theme park terms: if you're a roller coaster, you want your riders to know, just as they strap themselves in. A carousel, same thing. A haunted house . . . you get the picture.

So if you're a comedy, better kick off with some funny. Fantasy . . . let's see/hear something that's pretty far from reality. And so on.

Let me reiterate that often this is in the first few moments of the show (if you're going to see Somewhere in Time next month, you'll see an example) . . . and sometimes it's in the pre-show. Sometimes it's text, and sometimes it's just an image, a sound, etc.

Examples? On Altar Boyz, we added a "Thou Shalt Not Touch" sign over our soul sensor to let people know that despite the cool, hip looking rock concert set, and a title like Altar Boyz, we were going to poke a little fun at ourselves, so the audience could relax. On Gypsy with Bernadette Peters, I remember the late, great, and often cranky, Arthur Laurents giving a note asking us to bring in the beautiful red house curtain at The Shubert Theatre for the audience walk-in, instead of letting them stare at the black, empty back wall of the theater and its ghost light for fifteen minutes . . . because an audience looking at darkness for that kind of time was going to get depressed, and Gypsy (while dark and dysfunctional at times) was an old fashioned Broadway show with a lot of comedy . . . and Arthur wanted the crowd to be in the mood. (Audience response changed overnight, btw. Arthur was often cranky, but often right.)

You're meeting your audience for the first time when they walk in your door. Make sure you make a great and honest first impression. If you don't, they'll never want to hang out with you for two and a half hours.

68. June 26, 2012

What Does the JOBS Act Mean for Raising Money for Broadway?

Good question.

There's been a lot of buzz about the recently signed JOBS Act and just what all the jargon and legalese in its many pages means to us out here pounding the pavement looking for capital.

www.TheProducersPerspective.com

I've watched with keen interest, of course, blogging about it a few times, since what I did with Godspell is so closely related to what I've always believed to be the future of capital raising. And while the bill has been signed into law, its benefits aren't available to the public just yet. So we still have some time to figure it out.

But what exactly are those benefits? What are the pitfalls?

Like I said, good question.

And based on the number of emails I've gotten from all of you ever since I started talking about JOBS, you've been wondering the same thing.

So, I decided to go to a couple of experts . . . two of the guys that made Godspell happen . . . Daniel M. Wasser of Franklin, Weinrib, Rudell & Vassallo and Gary Emmanuel of Sichenzia Ross Friedman Ference LLP. These two lawyers were with me from Day 1 of my brainstorming about how to crowdfund a Broadway musical using the current regulations. If anyone was going to be able to explain in layman terms how the new JOBS Act works, it would be them.

The ever-generous Dan and Gary agreed to let me share an article they co-authored about JOBS and its impact on the theater and film community with you.

It's an awesome article, which is not surprising, considering the expert sources from whom it comes.

Enjoy, and maybe you'll even use it. It could be a capital raising game changer.

The Times They Are A-Changin':

What does the JOBS Act mean for theater and film producers?

by Gary Emmanuel and Daniel M. Wasser

For years, theater and film producers who lack a network of wealthy backers and need to rely on friends and family have despaired of finding a cost-effective way to raise funds from investors without violating securities laws. Similarly, experienced producers seeking to democratize fundraising and reach beyond a small circle of wealthy backers have faced a daunting regulatory process. With the passing into law of the JOBS Act in April 2012, all that may be changing.

The JOBS Act, also known as the Jumpstart Our Business Startups Act, is designed to make it easier for business startups to raise funds, and theater and

film producers will be particularly interested in three innovations. First, the JOBS Act eliminates the prohibition on general solicitation and advertising in connection with "Rule 506 offerings" if all purchasers are "accredited investors." Second, the JOBS Act establishes a framework in which financing can be raised privately through crowdfunding. Third, the JOBS Act authorizes a type of simplified public offering by which producers can raise up to \$50 million.

Email Blast: "Do You Want to Invest in my Movie or Show?"

Under existing rules, an email blast of this sort to a blind list of recipients would likely be regarded as general solicitation and, therefore, would deprive the producer of the so-called Rule 506 exemption. However, under new rules being developed as a result of the JOBS Act, such an email blast is expected to leave the Rule 506 exemption intact. To appreciate the significance of this, some explanation of Rule 506 is required.

When raising money from investors in the United States, a company must either register its offering with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and make a public offering, or it must rely upon an exemption from registration and make a private offering. Due to the time and costs involved in registering securities, most offerings are conducted in reliance upon Rule 506, an exemption from registration under Regulation D of the Securities Act of 1933. To put this in perspective, the SEC estimated that in 2010 alone, approximately \$820 billion was raised in private Rule 506 offerings compared to approximately \$200 billion raised in public equity offerings.

To qualify for the Rule 506 exemption certain conditions must be met. For example, the securities sold must be purchased for investment purposes, sales must be limited to certain high net worth investors known as "accredited investors" in order to avoid more burdensome information disclosure requirements, and no general solicitation or general advertising is allowed. Rule 506 is attractive because there is no dollar limit on the amount that can be raised, there is no limit on the number of accredited investors who can invest, disclosure requirements are streamlined, there is no review process by the federal regulators, and compliance with state securities laws is limited to simple notice filings.

Despite its advantages, the limiting factor in conducting Rule 506 offerings has always been the prohibition on general advertising and solicitation. Not only is advertising of an offering prohibited in public forums such as newspapers, radio and the internet, but the SEC has traditionally construed the restriction on general solicitation broadly, taking the position that solicitation should be limited to persons with whom the company raising money has a pre-existing, substantive relationship. Consequently, many producers have found it difficult to expand their pool of potential investors, and they have often sought the assistance of "finders" who have relationships with accredited investors, a practice that is fraught with risk.

Congress recognized that the existing prohibitions on general advertising and solicitation were making it harder for entrepreneurs to raise capital. Lifting these prohibitions in connection with Rule 506 offerings now means that general advertising and solicitation for investors can take place through traditional media such as newspapers, through the internet and via social media networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. The rules to implement this change are supposed to go into effect in July, and the implications are staggering.

Consider the possibilities: When the new rules go into effect, it is expected that an offering can be advertised on the producer's website or the Facebook page promoting the producer's new film or theater project. Officers of the production company may be permitted to promote the offering to their friends on Facebook or to their Twitter followers. A theater producer could put an advertisement in Playbill soliciting potential investors for a new production. A film producer could combine a trailer with an appeal for investors and run that on YouTube. But keep in mind that in a Rule 506 offering that takes advantage of the new rules permitting general solicitation and advertising, only accredited investors will be allowed to invest. The SEC's rules are expected to spell out the steps the producer must take to insure that all investors are accredited.

Crowdfunding and the Expanded Reg. A-Type Offering: New Solutions or More Trouble Than They're Worth?

If a producer raises money through a Rule 506 offering and engages in general solicitation and advertising, then the JOBS Act requires that all investors must be accredited investors. Since accredited investors are estimated to make up just 8% of the US population, how does a producer reach the remaining 92%? The JOBS Act creates two possibilities. The first is the much heralded crowdfunding approach, and the second is a form of simplified public offering that will enable a producer to raise up to \$50 million without being subject to all of the reporting and other requirements to which large public companies are subject.

The concept of crowdfunding is the pooling of micro amounts of money from large numbers of people for a particular project. Originally used to raise money for charities, crowdfunding has been used to fund music, film and other types of projects through the solicitation of donations over the internet. However, the ability to crowdfund for investment purposes has been limited due to regulatory hurdles.

Upon the adoption of rules by the SEC, the crowdfunding portion of the JOBS Act will allow a company to raise up to \$1 million per year through crowdfunding. Part of the rationale for crowdfunding is that if no one risks too much money (commensurate with their income), the risk of loss is reduced if the investment does poorly, so there are limits on how much any one investor can invest. Disclosure documents including financial information must be filed with the SEC and made available to investors, and compliance with state securities laws is

limited. Perhaps most significantly, crowdfunding sales must be made only through intermediaries – namely, registered broker dealers or funding portals that register with the SEC. It will be up to the SEC to specify requirements for registering funding portals, and the best guess is that a funding portal will operate in a manner similar to Kickstarter, but for investment funds rather than donations. Those regulations, along with regulations regarding the crowdfunding filing and disclosure requirements, are expected to be issued by the SEC by the end of 2012.

The expense of complying with the SEC's regulations will determine whether funding portals develop and companies take advantage of the JOBS Act's crowdfunding provision. If the regulations make crowdfunding economically viable, the JOBS Act crowdfunding provision could be of great interest to independent filmmakers who can finance a production for less than \$1 million. Producers of more expensive films might also find crowdfunding useful to finance prints and advertising (so-called P&A offerings). Most Off-Broadway dramatic plays are financed for less than \$1 million, so the potential interest in crowdfunding is obvious. It's also possible that crowdfunding could be used to fund established producers' development activities, including the enhancement of regional theater productions. Of course, given the success many arts projects are finding in securing funding through Kickstarter, Indiegogo and other, similar platforms, film and stage producers seeking limited amounts of capital will no doubt also consider the crowdfunding donation model rather than the investment model.

The current Broadway revival of *Godspell* attracted many small investments from unaccredited investors – dubbed the "People of *Godspell*" by producer Ken Davenport. *Godspell* received lots of press coverage for its innovative use of a crowdfunding model but, in fact, the offering was an audacious return to the past. *Godspell* relied on the SEC's Regulation A, a form of simplified public offering that limits investments to \$5 million. Because Regulation A offerings undergo SEC review and also are regulated by the states, few companies have been willing to invest the time, effort and money necessary to clear a Regulation A offering, particularly given the availability of Rule 506. With the passage of the JOBS Act, this may change.

The JOBS Act includes provisions that create a new form of offering exemption, modeled on Regulation A, that will allow a company to raise up to \$50 million from the public. However the utility of this new exemption will depend almost entirely on the approach the SEC takes in implementing the rules it is required to adopt.

What's Next?

In July 2012, the SEC is required to issue rules regarding general solicitation and advertising in connection with Rule 506 offerings – although delays are expected. Once issued, this should open the floodgates, particularly for media savvy producers with a well-developed internet strategy for reaching potential

accredited investors. For producers, the time to start working on that strategy is now. By the end of December, 2012, the SEC's rules regarding crowdfunding are expected to be published. There is no deadline for the SEC to adopt rules for the new \$50 million simplified public offering.

In each case, the rules adopted by the SEC could consign these provisions of the JOBS Act to the back shelf. Alternatively, they could free up untapped capital and help transform how film and theater producers finance their productions. The times, they are a-changin'.

This article was written by lawyers to update selected key legislative and regulatory developments affecting the film and theatrical industry. Because of the generality of this article, the information provided herein may not be applicable in all situations and should not be acted upon without specific legal advice based on particular situations.

69. March 8, 2013

A Startling Stat on the State of Print

It's trivia week here at the Producer's Perspective! Yesterday a Sondheim stat and now take a look at this:

We all know that print advertising is on the decline, right?

Well, check this out:

In 2008, a Four Color, Full Page ad in the Sunday New York Times cost \$109,000.

(That was about the time when I was talking to a NYT sales rep and trying to explain why Off-Broadway shows needed more of a price break if the Times expected us to advertise there, and the rep said, "Sorry, we don't do that sort of thing. We are the New York Times.")

In 2011, the cost dropped to \$87,000.

And now, this season, it's \$79,200.

And the funny/sad sort of thing is . . . I still don't see a lot of them. Do you? What's the takeaway?

It's not that print is dying. We all knew that. And I bet the Times knew it before all of us . . . because they were writing articles about it!

The takeaway is that your business, your show, your foundation can be rock solid strong. But if the earth around you moves, your house could come tumbling down.

So you better be prepared to put something else up (preferably online) in its place.

70. December 3, 2013

The Next Generation is Finding New Places to do Theater

Site specific and environmental theater has always been a "thing." (I was one of the few that got to see Jonathan "Rent" Larson's site specific JP Morgan Saves The Nation which was performed on the steps of a big bank downtown.)

But is it me, or do much higher profile productions seem to be finding their way into new and interesting spaces? And do more productions in traditional spaces seem to be using the spaces non-traditionally?

Take the in-a-tent Natasha, Pierre and The Great Comet of 1812. Or what about the "360 degree scenic and video environment" seen in Here Lies Love? Murder Ballad? Sleep No More? Then She Fell?

And everyone's talking about how Rocky (directed by Here Lies Love helmer, Alex Timbers) turns the theater into a boxing ring by physically moving the audience.

And away from The Great White Way, what about this recent production of the Jeanine Tesori musical, Violet, which took place on a moving bus? That's right . . . I said on a bus!

So what do all these productions have in common?

You guessed it . . . the creators could all be on an "Under 40" list.

Is it just because younger folks have to come up with cheaper performance spaces than traditional halls? Are younger folks more likely to try something a little more out there?

Or, is it that the next generation of artists . . . and audiences . . . demand a different type of experience than the generations before it? Is it that a revolution of how we consume theater may be coming, which doesn't take place in old fashioned proscenium houses with only two bathrooms and uncomfortable seats?

If you're 40 years old or younger, then you've grown up in the computer age. And that means you experience the world in an entirely different way than the people who came before you.

And that means you're going to create art in a totally different way as well.

And this generation is only just getting started.

71. January 18, 2013

What Broadway Investors Really Need

Here's something I should have asked Santa for . . .

I get a lot of emails and phone calls and Game of Thrones-like carrier ravens from folks asking me my opinion on shows they've been offered a chance to invest in. "Is it a good show?" "Will it make money?" "Will \$50k get me opening night tickets???"

And I do offer my advice (as you may recall from that \$50k Opening Night Ticket blog).

Yesterday, a financial dude I know was telling me about this new 3D printing stock that he thinks is going to skyrocket (If you don't know about 3D printers, you should – they are tomorrow's rage. They cost as much as a small car right now, but so did VCRs when they first came out).

My FD (which is my abbrev for Financial Dude, because IB (Investment Banker) makes me think of IBS, and while FDs have given a lot of people IBS over the past 4 years, it still makes me a little blechy), recommended I take a peek at the stock.

"Where should I look at it?"

"Check it out on Morningstar, or Moody's or Yahoo Finance, or Motley Fool, or . . ." There are a thousand third party/objective sites that analyze and screen stocks and even rate them to help investors make their decision.

Wouldn't it be cool if there was one for Broadway investing?

Imagine a site that listed all the details of an upcoming show and gave it a 1-5 "marquee" rating, on the probability of recoupment.

Cool, right?

Some people would love it. Some would hate it (guess who?). But if done properly, I think in the long run it would actually help drive more Broadway investment dollars our way. Because the Broadway investors I talk to every day just want as much info as possible. I find that investors invest in ultra risky, 1 "marquee" ratings, all the time. They just like to know those risks up front. And the more they know, the less likely they are to be upset if the money isn't returned.

I know, I know, you're probably saying I should start this site (and believe me, the thought has crossed my mind). But I can't. It would have to be a panel of objective third party experts. Besides, I wouldn't be able to show my face at certain cocktail parties if I had to give a show a 1 marquee rating. :-) Go Pats.

72. July 9, 2013

The TKTS Fast Pass Seems Sweet in the Short Term. But What About the Long?

I love me an amusement park. At least one day every summer, you can find me at Six Flags eating a funnel cake (although we simply called 'em fried dough back in Mass), and riding the rollers.

I learned a long time ago that the only way to get the most value for my money was to opt-in for the Fast Pass, which cost some extra money, but allowed you to skip the line, and optimize your day.

So imagine my excitement when I read this article in The Times advertising a brand new Fast Pass for our own TKTS booth! I couldn't wait to read the deets.

Here's the scoop:

Anyone who buys a ticket at the TKTS booth gets to skip the line if they come back within seven days to buy another ticket! That's right! Buy a discount ticket on Friday night, then on Saturday afternoon you can come buy another discount ticket without waiting in line! And shoot, want to see a show six days later and only pay half price? Come back and skip the line again.

This sounds amazing . . . for the consumer.

But for the Producer?

Standing in that long line at the TKTS booth is one of the few obstacles that people have in their way to getting those drastic last minute deals on tickets. And we just removed it. And ok, I guess I can somewhat buy the argument that perhaps we can get some people to see more shows while in town, but they'll be purchasing half price tickets.

And the fact of the matter is, shows can't exist . . . shows can't pay back . . . on half price tickets. I can't recall ever seeing a recoupment schedule that has a show returning its investors money at 50% off.

It's challenging enough dealing with the proliferation of discounts all over the web . . . as if it wasn't easy enough for folks to find them . . . now we're going to make it easier? As if a giant red structure that says TKTS smack dab in the middle of Broadway wasn't enough. You do know that tons of tourists think that's just

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where you buy tickets for shows . . . and end up getting a deal. It's a ticketing oasis . . . and we just said, "Hey – come back anytime you want . . . why pay full price, when you can skip a line and pay half?"

Now, insiders tell me that one of the reasons for the Fast Pass was to educate folks that there are full price tickets now sold at the booth. Not sure I see the connection, but if that's the goal then why not . . .

List all the shows available at the booth, and on Broadway, and tell the consumer what the price is when they get to the window.

Eliminate the percentage off entirely, and just list the price available for that show that day. Show A = \$50. Show B = \$120. There's no longer full price or discount price, there is just the price.

Stop calling it a Discount Booth and just call it a Ticket Booth.

I realize this isn't the most consumer friendly post, but just remember, this is The Producer's Perspective. :-) And hey, I'm not saying eliminate The Booth, or get rid of discounting. We need it. But we need less discounting, not more. And just making it easier for people to pay less, isn't going to keep any of the thousands of people employed by Broadway shows working longer.

Remember, at Six Flags, if you want to skip the line, you pay for it.

73. June 22, 2012

They May Not Like to Come to the Theater, but We Sure do Like to Write About 'Em

Ahhhh, irony, thy name is young people.

At 9 out of 10 ad meetings I attend, the topic of getting more young people to the theater always comes up. And despite many concentrated and intelligent efforts, we're never as successful as we want to be in encouraging teens and twenty-somethings to put down their Angry Birds and get their butts in our buildings.

But what's interesting to me is that even though we can't get them to come in the quantities that we'd like, (both for the box office of today and the box office of tomorrow) we sure do like to make musicals where young folks are the focus of the story.

Think about it . . . or on second thought . . . don't think about it . . . read about it. Just look at this list of the last bunch of Tony Award winners for Best Musical:

Once

The Book of Mormon
 Memphis
 Billy Elliot
 In the Heights
 Spring Awakening
 Avenue Q
 Hairspray
 Thoroughly Modern Millie

Young characters are at the core of each of those stories.

But don't stop there . . .

What about A Chorus Line, Rent, and Les Misérables?

See what I'm talking about? What is with our fascination with this age group? Or what is it about this age group that makes for a fascinating (and successful, by the by) musical?

Is it the optimism of the beginning of adulthood? Is it that the average theatergoer, who is 44, is probably longing to be 24 again? Or is it just a fluke?

Well, news flash: it's definitely not a fluke. There's some kind of trend here. And I'll be using it as one of my many filters in choosing material going forward.

74. August 17, 2010

5 Things I Learned from King Tut

I fell prey to the ton of marketing being done for King Tut in Times Square last week, and headed on down to 43rd Street to check out what treasures the exhibitors had in store for me.

Although it may not seem like it, exhibits like King Tut are forms of live entertainment, shrouded in education. These are multi-million dollar productions with big capitalizations, operating costs, and marketing challenges. In other words, they have to be produced.

So, as I explored the life of King Tut, I also tried to find some gold coins of wisdom that I could apply to what we do.

Here are 5 things I learned from King Tut:

1. It's not the size of your pyramid. It's how you use it.

The priceless treasures of the Tut exhibit are currently sitting in . . . a basement. The producers of the exhibit found a non-traditional venue, and with some smart designers, turned it into a theater fit for a king. If you can't find the perfect space for your show, make it.

2. You can't touch the mummy. But you can wear his t-shirt.

Man, are these guys good at merch. They get your photo taken on the way in and show it to you on the way out (I almost bought mine . . . they photoshopped pyramids behind me, for Pharaoh's sake!). Just like the theme parks! And you can't get out of the building without walking through their super-sized shop of Tut toys and trinkets. Merch is a science, not a hobby. It can help pay for your play. (Remind me to tell you about the time a Company Manager friend of mine paid his load-out crew on a flop with cash from the merch till. When the cash ran out, the crew ran out. Oh, wait, I guess I just told you about it. You don't have to remind me anymore.)

3. Got your ticket? Good, now it's just a couple more bucks for this.

During the check-out process, I got pitched a \$5 add-on movie called Mummies. And it was in 3D! Just like Avatar! What's another \$5, I thought, since I already dropped \$40, and for something that sounded so cool! In reality, it wasn't that cool, but what did I know until I got there? And, at only \$5, there wasn't much remorse. Once you've got a customer on the hook, getting them to pay for just a little bit more isn't too difficult, if you ask. Tacking on an extra isn't tacky, especially when it makes the entire experience better.

4. Egyptians can wear funny hats too.

This is a monumental exhibit. It's educational. It's important. And it also knows not to take itself too seriously, evident by the King Tut street team that's been flying Times Square wearing King Tut headdresses. You can't help but smile when you see one, and that's not a bad thought to have when considering an entertainment option. On top of that, the Tut mask is so well branded that the flyer guy can make the impression on the passerby even without handing them a flyer. This street team strategy reminded me of the Princess Leia/Carrie Fisher team that brilliantly wore those bun-wigs while they were on the street promoting Wishful Drinking. The best street teams think every day is Halloween.

5. King Tut was a teen, and no one cared.

I get a lot of young folks emailing me saying that they are too young to produce, that they could never get a show up at their age. Well, King Tut was 9 when he was crowned and 19 when he died. In that time, he changed the entire Egyptian God structure (which had been set by his father), restored diplomatic relations with neighboring peoples, and married his half-sister. Ok, ok, so he was born into some money. I'm not saying you have to produce a pyramid, but age has nothing to do with what you do, unless you let it.

75. December 31, 2012

The Secret to Keeping Your New Year's Resolutions

Have you got your resolutions yet? Time is a tickin'. Only a few more hours until the start of the New Year, and the new you.

I love a New Year's. It's like rebooting your computer if it starts giving you trouble. You wipe away what got you there and start fresh with a blank screen.

It's a chance for us to take stock, and say to ourselves forgivingly, "Ok, after this last year, this is where I am, for better or for worse. Now, here's where I want to get to in the next year . . ."

And your resolutions act as the guide to help get you where you want to go. So have you got yours yet?

If you don't, and even if you do and are looking for a guaranteed way to make sure you accomplish them, try this tip:

Make your New Year's Resolution specific. In other words, don't pick the outcome. Pick the task.

Don't say . . . "I want to get in better shape." How can you define that? It's too ambiguous to set your brain on absolute accomplishment. Instead say, "I will go to go the gym three times a week for an hour each time."

As long as that's more than you're going now, I guarantee you'll be in better shape by the time 2014 rolls around.

Don't say . . . "I want to save more money." Pick an amount you want in your bank account by the end of 2013. Take the difference between that and what you have now, divide it by 12 and figure out what you have to save/make each month. Or divide it by 52 and figure out what you have to save each week, and then say, "I want to make/save \$X each week."

And since this is a theater blog after all . . .

Don't say . . . "I want to write a play." Ok, we know you want to write a play. And that is a good resolution. But what if you chunk that down in a more specific, and bite sized, to-do like task that's easier for you and your brain to see yourself accomplish like, "I will write 10 pages of my play a week." Uh, in case any of you failed algebra, that's 520 pages by the end of this year. And unless you're writing the sequel to August Osage County, then I'd bet you'd have written two or three plays before you know it.

So when you set your resolutions, make 'em specific. Then write 'em down and put them where you can see them every day.

Doing so, will make them much more achievable. Guaranteed.

76. May 29, 2012

10 Questions for a Broadway Pro: The Keeper of the Books

I first met Sarah Galbraith when I was Company Managing Thoroughly Modern Millie. She was the Bookkeeper on the show, and we hit it off instantly. (Bookkeepers are the go-between with shows and accountants, auditing weekly figures and bills and prepping the "books" for financial statements, audits, taxes, etc.) She taught me a lot about accounting for shows, so when I was looking for someone to help me with The Awesome 80s Prom (my first show), she was the first person I called. She helped get that show off the ground, and I've taken her with me to all my shows since.

What's great about Sarah is that (as you'll read below), she doesn't just crunch numbers. She was a CM herself, so her knowledge of the industry goes beyond taxes and benefits and such. She could literally remind you which unions got which holiday pay and which didn't. So, when the industry desperately needed a new payroll service designed solely for our unique needs, Sarah was the perfect person to head up the business.

Here for your reading pleasure, are 10 Qs with Sarah Galbraith!

1. What is your title?

Owner and President of Galbraith & Company Inc., and Checks and Balances Payroll, Inc.

2. What shows are you currently working on?

Galbraith & Company provides bookkeeping services for commercial productions and other theater-related entities. At the moment, we are represented on Broadway by Evita, Godspell, Nice Work If You Can Get It, Clybourne Park, Rock of Ages, Ghost, and Venus in Fur; Off-Broadway by Avenue Q, Rent, Cock, and The Fantasticks; and on the road by West Side Story, American Idiot, Memphis and Fela. We work on about 20 shows at any time.

Checks and Balances provides payroll services to about 30 shows and companies at the moment, including Wicked, Peter and the Starcatcher, Evita, Godspell, Bring It On, Stomp, and Traces, to name a few.

3. In one sentence, describe your job.

I have two jobs; do I get two sentences? I and my staff act as part of a show's management team, keeping the books and providing financial reporting to managers and producers. For the payroll service, I work with and supervise the staff that processes the weekly payrolls for our clients, and I handle all of the quarterly and annual payroll tax filings.

4. What skills are necessary for a person in your position?

You have to be good with numbers. After that, attention to detail, and a good memory. There are no manuals for what I do; it's all about experience and

knowing the tax laws for the various states and countries where our shows perform.

5. What kind of training did you go through to get to your position?

I have an MFA from Columbia University in Theater Management, which was a great start. I went through the ATPAM apprentice program and survived the dreaded test to get my ATPAM card. Most of my practical training has been on the job working for producers, general managers and a public accounting firm. I've had my own company for 6 years and I still learn something new every week.

6. What was your first job in theatre?

My first paid job was as an electrician and follow spot operator for the Goodspeed Opera House. We got housing and a stipend, and dinner on two-show days. When you're 16, that's pretty good.

7. Why do you think theater is important?

Theater is a primal human activity. One of the first things our ancient ancestors did was gather together to sit in the dark and hear a story. It's how we know who we are, as a society and as individuals.

8. What is your profession's greatest challenge today?

More and more tax rules. Every year there are new taxes, more states that require filings, more rules governing compliance. Nothing ever gets less complicated, and our job is to make sure the production is meeting its obligations and no one is going to get a fine or a nasty letter from the IRS.

9. If you could change just one thing about the industry with the wave of a magic wand, what would it be?

I love the history and tradition of the Broadway theater, but I think Broadway is at its best when it embraces new things and looks forward. Whether in artistic choices, marketing, business, or technology, it is exciting to me to see fresh ideas in the theater, and I wish I saw more of them.

10. What advice would you give to someone who wanted to do what you do?

Learn everything you can about every part of the business. Knowing accounting and taxes is crucial, but it's not the only thing. You have to know the union contracts, understand the budgeting process, know royalty structures, and be familiar with the key contracts that govern the finances of a show. To be able to be a valuable part of the team, and truly support the process, you have to see and understand the whole life of the production.

77. July 3, 2013

Saying Goodbye is Even More Important than Saying Hello

I recently found myself at a vacation destination . . . where the local economy is fueled almost entirely by tourists who fly in from places around the world.

When I arrived, I was welcomed with open arms, given gifts, and made to feel so welcome. Yep, they warmed me up to get me to spend money. And it worked.

But when my trip was over, an interesting thing happened. No one seemed to care about me. It was a customer service version of, "Don't let the door hit you in the a\$\$ on the way out!"

Staffers were slow, people were rude . . . and don't even get me started on the airport – uncomfortable, no food, broken facilities, long lines, no WiFi despite it being advertised, etc. (ok, you did get me started). Boy, was getting out of this place not fun.

Now, guess what memory I took with me the most.

Yep, the last one . . .

I had forgotten about the hello . . . it was days ago. The most recent memory was what I was most likely to recall . . . especially when people said, "Oh Ken, you just went to XXX. How was it?"

People are most likely to spread both positive and negative word of mouth right when an experience ends, whether that's a show, a vacation, or a break up! Catch 'em right after the final moments, and that's when people are the most passionate, which means saying goodbye is even more important than saying hello.

If you're a regional theater, how do you say goodbye to your audience? How do we do it on Broadway? Or if you're a playwright, how does your finale compare to your opening?

Or if you're a blogger, how do you end your blog?

78. June 23, 2010

5 Ways to Get Higher Open Rates on Your Email Blasts

Yesterday we dismissed the myth that the size of an email blast list determines its value. Since we know that the true success of any advertising campaign is the number of conversions and ROI (return on investment), it's essential that we examine ways that we can increase those conversions.

And before we get to the message inside the blast, we've got to make sure as many people are opening it as possible.

Here are five tips you can use to increase the open rates on your email blasts, whether a third party is sending them for you (Telecharge.com, etc.) or whether you're blasting the subscribers to your own lists.

1. Customize your "From" field.

Most third party email blast providers (like Benchmark, the service I use and recommend) allow you to send emails from whatever name you'd like. Make sure it's not coming from 'emailblast@yourcompany.com' or anything impersonal like that. It should come from you or your show or maybe even a character in your show. The more personal your communication, the better. Whatever you choose, make sure it's as instantly recognizable as possible.

2. Avoid Spam flags.

A lot happens to every email you send before it (hopefully) gets to your intended recipient. Their ISP scans that sucker a few times looking for signs that you are a spammer. If it sees one of those signs, your email will be sent to your recipient's Spam folder faster than it would take you to throw up after eating a whole can of Spam by yourself. Or worse, the ISP may just bounce your email back at you! How can you decrease the chances of being seen as Spam? Here are some things to avoid in your subject lines specifically: exclamation points, dollar signs, all caps, words like "free," "discount," "special," "save," etc.

3. It's all in the timing.

There are not only better days of the week to send emails to increase your open rates, but there are also better times of day. The tricky part is determining the best day/time for your specific message. My research has shown more success on mid-week email blasts for the best open rates when pushing a sales message, so I focus on Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday when I have a choice. Since most folks get their emails at work, I try to avoid Mondays (when their inboxes are overloaded from the weekend) and Fridays, when people are trying to get out of work. Weekends are more successful than they used to be, but I try to steer clear of selling on a Saturday or Sunday. I time my messages for the middle of the day (around lunch time), in the hopes that the recipient may open it while they're munching on their salad or sandwich, since they have more time.

4. Your subject is not a subject, it's a headline.

A well written subject is the equivalent of old-fashioned direct response copy ([click here](#) to read one of the most successful headlines of all time). It's an ad for the ad. Don't just slap a few words together to say, "Save \$20 on tickets to XXX show." Your subject has to rev up your reader so that they are compelled to hit that "open" button. Spend time on your subjects. And watch what subjects intrigue you as you open emails every day.

5. Test it and tweak it every time.

Split test your emails with two separate subjects, if you can. If you can't split, then try different ideas with each blast and see how your open rate changes from blast to blast. Testing is the key to improving anything, not just advertising and not just open rates, but this is one of the areas that we seem to ignore in this

industry more than anything. If we are so dependent on email blasts and open rates, then we have to try different things with each effort and adjust accordingly.

Email marketing isn't going anywhere. It's still your show's strongest asset, whether you're buying email blasts from third parties, or sending them yourself (I hope both). If you focus on improving your open rate with these tips (that, by the way, don't cost you any more) you can make that asset even more rewarding.

79. January 7, 2013

5 Tips to Getting a Job on Broadway

I get a lot of emails from folks telling me that it's their dream to work on Broadway. Some want to be General Managers. Some want to be Casting Directors. Some don't have a clue as to what they want to do, but they know they want . . . well . . . to be a part of it, New York, New York.

Some have finished school. Some have even been through graduate school. And quite a few through law school, actually. Some haven't even finished high school.

But they all know they want to do what I have been so blessed to have been able to do . . . work in an industry that they love.

Since I was one of those people who dreamed about working on Broadway, I've come up with some tips for folks looking to land that theater job . . . and keep it. And while, sure, these tips are focused on the NY scene, they are easily applied to wherever you may be.

So if you're looking to work on Broadway, here are five tips to help you out:

1. Got an interview? Get tickets.

One of the first questions I ask people who sit in front of me looking for a job is, "What shows have you seen lately?" And then I ask, "Have you seen mine?"

I can't tell you how many people say no.

Does it count them out? Not 100%. But the people that say yes? Oooohhh, they vault to the top of the leader board. It's not about kissing a\$\$, or putting some bucks in my till. It's about a gesture that says, "I'm interested in seeing the work that goes on here, so I can show you how I can contribute to making it even better."

I know, theater tickets are expensive. But they'll be a lot easier to pay for if you have a job that pays you a salary.

Make an investment in your search, and people will invest in you.

2. Get in the right room.

There's no question that Broadway is a very closed-door industry. And it's hard to get that open, no matter how hard you knock. Here's the good news. Once you do get the door open and you get in the room, the door usually shuts and we don't let you out. You're ours! Bahahahahaha.

Jobs are the best way to get entry into the room, but there's the catch-22, right?

So how else can you get potential employers to know who you are? Emails rarely work. Cold phone calls? Forget it. So, attend Galas. Go to conferences. Get to opening nights. Invest. Do whatever you can do to put your face in front of employers. I've hired at least three people who grabbed me for an intro after listening to me speak on a panel.

A face-to-face intro is a zillion times more "impressive" than an electronic one.

3. Be prepared to start at the bottom.

I have a lot of respect for people who have earned MBA's, JD's, MD's, or any advanced degree that cost six figures and took several years.

But that doesn't mean you get to start at the middle.

Broadway is a niche industry which requires a lot of specialized knowledge that isn't taught in any curriculum.

So that means anyone looking to get a job in the biz has to start where everyone else does . . . at the bottom. That means low wages, grunt work, and probably no health insurance. No matter what your age or your degree.

But do what you're told with a smile on your face, and you'll rise to the top quicker than you can say "I went to graduate school for this?"

4. We don't punch clocks.

At the end of every interview I always ask if the job candidate has any questions. (Tip: Have a question or two . . . it'll keep you in the room longer and create a stronger impression.) The questions they ask me teach me more about their personality than any other part of the interview. And the one question I hate the most? "What are the hours?"

Broadway don't punch no clocks, yo. Yes, most offices around town will tell you that their hours are 10-6, including mine. But walk into any theater company at 6:30, 7 or even 8, and I bet you see a few people still hanging 'round.

If you want to work on Broadway, you can't be a clock watcher. The employees that we want are the ones who are going to work until their job is done, with a smile on their face, because they love what they do.

Need an example of these types of employees? Stop by my office some time and meet anyone on my staff.

5. Remember JFK.

I've saved my favorite tip for last . . .

When going in for an interview, remember these words: "Ask not what your company can do for you, ask what you can do for your company."

Remembering that mantra will get you in the perfect frame of mind to seem like the perfect employee.

Working on Broadway isn't for everyone. And if there is any other industry you're interested in, you should probably do that. But if you must work on Broadway, you will. Passionate people who persevere don't stay idle long.

And if you're one of those people, make sure you send me your resume.

Good luck in your search!

80. July 24, 2013

Where to Start if You Want to Study the Performing Arts

Some of the coolest cold emails I get are from high school students all over the country, asking me for advice on where to go and what to study in college if they want to work on Broadway someday.

I pitch my alma mater first (duh) and then some of my other faves . . . and then spit out my usual advice of trying to be close to the city if you can, because getting acclimated to the business and NYC-life while you're still under the umbrella of an institution is what gave me a head start over my not-so-local peers.

But I always wished I could point the students (or their parents) to some kind of online directory that could help guide them through what I know is a difficult (and expensive) process.

And then poof . . . like magic . . . here comes Playbill with PlaybillEdu.com. Playbill has been expanding faster than a cronut-eater these days, having already given us PlaybillPro, PlaybillVIP and my fave, PlaybillVault.com in the last two years.

But PlaybillEdu may not only get them the most page views of them all, it could also be their most significant contribution to the theatre since they first introduced their program in the early 1900s.

By providing students, parents and college counselors a one stop shop to get all the info they need to find the right college for their future actor/writer/producer, they are helping to funnel more people into our business. And more people, means more talent. And more talent means better shows, which means happier audiences, which means the theater's future is safe and sound.

Check it out [here](#), and spread the word. I'm sure you know someone thinking about a career in the biz. And look, working on Broadway is hard enough. There's no reason why selecting a training program should be harder.

81. February 18, 2010

What Should a Producer Study? A Producer's Curriculum in Detail

I got an email from a college student this week who knows she wants to be a Producer. There's no question about it. She'd declare it as a major . . . if she could.

Her school has a theater major and a business major but it doesn't have a "producer's track" . . . and not many do. Even my alma mater only has a minor (and until we can turn Producing theater into a more stable and viable career choice, I'm not sure many will).

Since her school hasn't spec'd out a plan for producers-to-be, she asked me what I thought she should study on her way through school.

As I'm sure you can imagine, I'm a big pusher for producers to take standard business courses as they're coming up, from accounting to marketing to contract law (and there are still times I wish I had taken a few more myself).

But mostly I advised this focused young woman to take theater classes. I told her to take a directing class, with people that want to be directors. Take an acting class with actors. Take a writing class with writers. Take a design class with you-know-who and so on.

These are the people that are going to be on your team in the future. Learn their language. Learn what makes them tick. Learn what they want out of a show. And by doing so, you'll learn how to help solve their problems.

Theater is one of the most collaborative art forms there is, and part of a Producer's job is to make sure those collaborators are working at their absolute best with each other throughout the long process of developing and putting on a show. By making an effort to learn their craft, and by understanding more of what they go through on a day-by-day basis, you'll be able to earn more of their respect . . . and you'll be able to help them do their best work.

Oh, and another part of a Producer's job is to be able to spot talent. By sitting in these classes, you'll have the inside scoop on tomorrow's superstars.

That's right . . . the next Tony Kushner, Joe Mantello and Al Pacino are sitting in a class somewhere this very second.

By sitting among them, you'll be able to spot that talent, and snatch them up for yourself . . . before I do.

(And for those of you out of school? All of this still applies. There are umpteen classes for theater artists all over the country, and even online. And great business classes, too. There's no excuse to not know anything anymore. It's all in front of the screen you are staring at right now.)

82. March 7, 2013

When Was the Last Time There Wasn't a Sondheim Show on Broadway?

Everyone knows that the great Mr. S. has had a major impact on the Broadway stage, right?

Well, get this.

Our office just noticed that there isn't a show with songs by our "Shakespeare" this season. And for some reason that felt a little odd.

So we started sorting through the last few seasons of shows and realized it was odder than we thought.

In fact . . .

This is the first year since . . . ready for it . . . 1992 (!) that there hasn't been a Sondheim show on The Great White Way. Don't believe me? Check for yourself!

Shocking, right? Shocking that there isn't one, and shocking that for the last twenty years the Maestro has had some kind of representation on the boards. What does this mean? An anomaly? Have we finally run out of his shows to revive? Or, gulp, is he falling out of favor? I don't see any works slated for next season either . . . will it be two years in a row (trend alert). Or will Passion move and put us back on track?

All those questions aside . . . I'll end with this. We should all stop for a moment and remark on the incredible feat that this man has achieved. A show with your songs each year for 20 years? Like it or not, recouping or not, this dude is a

deity.

83. September 18, 2013

The Gmail Inbox Controversy Continues

Back in early June, I blogged about a change in the Gmail inbox that you are probably all very aware of by now – the separation of your inbox into three categories: primary, social, and promotions.

The NY Times just caught up with the story, and has revealed that we're not the only ones that are upset. Big and small retail all over the World Wide Web is up in arms, and justifiably so. (Read the article [here](#).)

While according to reports from email service providers, there has only been a 1% decrease in open rates. However, the article points out an even more serious effect this email segregation has had on online sales. While people may be still opening promotional emails, they are also doing it much, much later than they used to. I know this from firsthand experience myself. Promotional Email now means Non-Important Email to me. So I don't click that tab until I have nothing better to do, when I used to do it right away.

And the article states that I'm not the only one.

But for an industry like ours . . . which fights for the same customers, there's another monster issue with the lumping together of promotional emails. Because now . . . your show's discount email is going to be right next to all the other show discount emails in that promotional folder that your customer only checks once a day . . . maybe. In the new Gmail format, why sure, open rates may stay the same, but we're all going to face a different competitive environment as the promotional email tab acts like a discount bin at a record store.

And then there's the theory that whenever a customer is faced with too much choice, they choose nothing.

Let's hope The Times and Big Retail continue to complain about how Google delivers messaging, because even with all the social networking and other alternative communication methods we've derived in the last ten years, nothing, nothing trumps email.

In fact, I leave you with this tip that I learned from someone many, many years ago:

If you can have only one marketing goal each year . . . only one . . . make it to double the size of your email list.

And then tell your customers to make sure they drag your emails to their PRIMARY TAB. (And that reminds me, if you're an email subscriber to the blog,

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make sure to click it, and drag it out of Promotions and into Primary . . . just until I get Google to make a tab that says, PRODUCERS.)

How are you, as a consumer, interacting with the new Google tabs? Let me (and everyone else) know below!

84. October 7, 2013

A Life Lesson Learned from a Flight Attendant

I boarded a flight yesterday on an airline that shall-not-be-named (although I'll give you this hint – they don't have WiFi), and the flight attendant charged with greeting oncoming passengers and helping them to their seat stood in the galley . . . not talking to anyone and staring at the floor. She just looked kind of . . . well . . . over it.

The passenger in front of me was a nun, in full white vestments. She approached Ms. Over-It to ask about the location of her seat. She was a bit confused (something tells me she wasn't a frequent flyer), and hardly spoke English. You'd think Ms. Over-It would have bent-over-forwards to help. She did answer a question or two, but when the Sister walked away . . . wait for it . . . Ms. Over-It made a snarky comment behind her back (!).

And if that wasn't enough, Ms. O.I. made eye contact with me with a, "Can you believe some people?" kind of look. I shook my head, sat down in my seat, fired up my phone and prepared to tweet right at the airline in question. I literally had my finger on the tweeter . . . when I stopped. It's super easy to take to social networking or review sites to go public with poor customer service, and at times, it's important. But I realized this would just be trying to get someone in trouble, and that wasn't my point. There was a positive lesson here somewhere . . . and here's what I took away:

It was clear that this woman wasn't enjoying her job. There's no excuse for poor customer service in any profession . . . but for a flight attendant? I mean, isn't that why you sign up? Because you're good with nuns and people?

There was another flight attendant on the plane. He cracked jokes during the exit row speech. And when he brought my Coke to me a little later than he would have liked, he also brought me three extra bags of chocolate chip cookies. He enjoyed his job. And he's one of the reasons I didn't hit the 'tweet' button.

So what does this have to do on my blog about Broadway and theater?

I consider myself blessed. I'm fortunate enough to wake up every morning and do something I'm crazy about. Sure, I have my moments when I want to go to law school or run a hot dog cart, but those pass . . . and I certainly don't let my

audience see them. And if I wasn't enjoying what I do, I just wouldn't do it. And that's what Ms. Over-It taught me, and I hope she realizes herself. Hey, maybe that nun was sent from you-know-who with this message:

Love what you do. Or do something else.

85. May 8, 2013

Does an Attack on the Times signal a change in the times?

Things happen in threes, right?

Last week, my bloggin' hero, Seth Godin, wrote a fantastic entry called, "The Critic Stumbles," where he publicly announced that he thought the Times got their review of Macbeth wrong, especially in the face of what was obviously extreme positive feedback from the public.

Then, Scott Rudin, took a public swipe at the Times in an ad for Testament of Mary(!) because of a feature he didn't like so much.

And finally, Alec Baldwin hit the trifecta yesterday with his piece in the Huffington Post called "How Broadway Has Changed," where he . . . well . . . calls for the Chief Theater Critic of the NY Times, Mr. Ben himself, to be removed (!).

As I wrote last week, I'm a fan of reviewers and theatrical criticism in general, despite what some might think. Anyone who amplifies a conversation about the theater, whether it's the Times or a blogger in Boise, is a winner in my book. And, I'll admit it, I disagree with Mr. Baldwin . . . I think the other Mr. B, is a fantastic writer . . . and don't tell anyone, but I agree with him, oh, probably about 80% of the time, and yep, even when he has been mixed on some of my own shows!

But that's not what this blog is about.

Producers, actors, etc. responding to negative press, or bad reviews have always previously been thought of as sour grapes. But in today's age of social media and celebrities having bigger distribution methods than a lot of the theater writers, is the tide turning?

And should the traditional press embrace it?

Should the Times respond to Alec? Maybe feature a panel discussion with him as a featured speaker? A debate? Were you surprised that the Times even ran the ad with the Rudin quote?

Is there a way we could use this obvious tense situation to amplify the conversation about theater even more?

Because one thing you can't deny on both sides of this discussion . . . the theater is filled with passionate people, no matter what side of the footlights you're on.

And businesses have boomed on the fuel of passion for decades. In moments like this, we just have to figure out how to bottle it.

86. March 20, 2013

8 Writing Tips from Kurt Vonnegut

I stumbled on this website recently that had a bunch of great tips on writing from folks like David Ogilvy and Henry Miller . . . but it was ole Kurt Vonnegut's tips on writing a short story that seemed also incredibly applicable to playwriting.

Because I think Kurt was a pretty smart guy (and because I always thought he was cool for appearing in that Rodney Dangerfield movie in the 80s – see clip below), and because my blogs on writing tips from Mamet and others have been pretty popular amongst you readers, I thought I'd list those tips for your learning pleasure here.

You might be asking yourself, "Well, I'm not a playwright – so this blog isn't for me," and then you'll go back to a Playbill.com article about their most recent High Seas Cruises.

But before you go surfing those e-high seas, remember theater is a collaborative art form. And everyone, from the Designer to the Director and, of course, the Producer, is a contributor. Just because you don't write a word, doesn't mean you don't help tell the story.

Take it away, Kurtie:

- Use the time of a total stranger in such a way that he or she will not feel the time was wasted.
- Give the reader at least one character he or she can root for.
- Every character should want something, even if it is only a glass of water.
- Every sentence must do one of two things — reveal character or advance the action.
- Start as close to the end as possible.
- Be a sadist. No matter how sweet and innocent your leading characters, make awful things happen to them - in order that the reader may see what they are

made of.

-Write to please just one person. If you open a window and make love to the world, so to speak, your story will get pneumonia.

-Give your readers as much information as possible as soon as possible. To hell with suspense. Readers should have such complete understanding of what is going on, where and why, that they could finish the story themselves, should cockroaches eat the last few pages

87. March 6, 2008

Don't Ask for it Back

I get a lot of submissions. Scripts, CDs, headshots, etc. I take the time to go through every one.

Every once in awhile, someone asks me for their materials back if I send them a note saying their project is not for me.

Bad idea.

Sending materials to someone is like trying to plant a mine deep inside enemy territory. Yes, it's true, it might not blow up when you want. But let it lie dormant. You never know when it'll go off.

Example:

I got a demo of a musical about 10 years ago that I thought had potential. They never got the piece finished from what I remember.

Flash forward 10 years. I was digging through old CDs and bingo, there it was. I popped it in and remembered how much I enjoyed it. Then I looked at the composer's name, which I had forgotten.

Well, would you look at that! The composer was a guy that just so happened to be having a reading of a new musical a couple of weeks from now and his agent had just sent me an invite! I was originally going to skip it, but not anymore! All because of that old CD.

I also often pass scripts and CDs to my staff, director friends, other producers, etc. who may be looking for new material and may have different tastes as well. Just because it's not for me, doesn't mean it's not for anybody.

Truth? Yes, I do recycle some scripts as well. But take the chance. I know that CDs and binding are expensive, but it's an investment.

If you ask for it back? There's no chance it'll blow up.

88. February 15, 2013

How Many Star Vehicles Recoup Anyway?

You know what everyone is saying these days, right? If you want to make money on The Broadway, then you gotta have a gimmick star.

We here at the ole office don't believe in anecdotal evidence very much, so we dug into the archives of the last ten years to find actual data to see if that dog had legs. (Wait. Is that a saying? Huh. I don't think it is. But you get it, right?)

My professional data diver, Jen Tepper, sorted through the star shows ("Ken, it was like reading a whole year's worth of US Weekly," she said) and came up with a list of the recoupment ratio of star shows to not star shows.

Ready for the results?

We determined that of the 30+ star vehicles (we excluded shows where the stars played themselves, e.g. William Shatner, John Leguizamo, Colin Quinn, etc.) 66% made money. 33% did not.

Shocking? Not shocking? Your thoughts?

Did you expect it to be higher?

Yep, unfortunately what many of us think may be a guarantee is only a 2 out of 3 shot at getting one in the win column.

To do some comparin' and contrastin' . . .

If we use the industry standard percentages of 1 out of 4/5 shows recoup, then adding a star seems to increase those odds . . . but only by about 30-40%.

"Wait, Ken, that's a big percentage! That's doubling your show to make money!"

That's what you're screaming at your screen, right?

'Tis true, o' readers. 'Tis true.

BUT, what are you giving up for that increase of 30-40%? Well, in most big star vehicles the salaries and profit shares have gotten so humongo that the upside for the investors is limited. So sure you're getting a better chance at getting your money back, but you're giving up probably double that or more in upside (especially since most star vehicles are by nature limited runs, where non-star vehicles can run for years).

So, in a high risk biz like the one we're in, when you know you have to go into it with the knowledge that you may lose your entire investment, what would you rather do . . .

- Be safer (but not completely safe) and invest in something just because it's a star, with a ceiling on the upside and maybe make a concession on the art?

- Or take a chance on something riskier, that you believe in 101% that has endless upside?

Guess which one of those dogs I think has legs?

89. June 24, 2013

We're Surrounded by Studios

I popped a rights request off to a major movie studio last week . . . for a semi-popular but mostly-forgotten flick that I think has tuner potential.

The response I got from the studio included the news that they were in the process of setting up a stage division for handling the development of their titles.

In other words, I doubt I'll be getting my hands on that movie anytime soon.

But that's not what inspired this blog.

What got me a-bloggin' was something that I think is pretty significant.

With this studio . . . I think it's now official . . . every single major motion picture studio has its own live theatrical division.

And boy oh boy is that a difference from a decade ago. Back then, one executive at a studio said to me, "We don't want a stage division. One of the reasons we think we've been successful so far is because we haven't had an official department."

But they do now! Warner Bros., MGM, Disney (duh), Fox, Universal, RKO, etc. All of 'em.

Why?

Easy:

Billy Elliot, Hairspray, The Producers . . . Kinky Boots! And many more.

What started as a hobby for studios . . . investing their petty cash and letting other folks do the dirty work of putting the shows up, and financing them, is now

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big fat business. After all, Universal has gone on the record as saying that Wicked is one of its most profitable properties of all time. That's right . . . not one of its most profitable Broadway shows . . . one of its most profitable properties, including movies!

What does this mean for Broadway? And what does this mean for the independent Producer?

Will it be harder for independent producers to get titles?

Will Broadway become more like the movie model where Producers are hired and paid by studios to run their shows?

Will more movie stars come to Broadway because a movie company ties a film contract to a Broadway contract?

Too early to tell . . . but studio influence and money will have a major impact on our industry. Look at what Disney did.

Now imagine five Disneys.

90. July 19, 2012

Why I Allow Comments. And Why You Should Too.

When I first started blogging almost 5 (!) years ago, I listened to the advice of other bloggers and kept my "allow comments" button turned off. I was told that I would get swallowed up in reading the comments, get irritated by the ones I didn't agree with, not be able to sleep because of people that poked fun or found typos, and so on. "Reading/responding to comments can be a full time job," it was said, "and blogging is already a pretty big time suck!"

Then, one day, I just realized that concept didn't make sense to me. This blog, especially, is not about pushing content. It's about conversational content. It's about hearing from you, whether you agree or not, and continuing the conversation so that it fulfills my mission statement: to amplify the conversation about theater.

See, think about it this way . . . if two people are talking about theater at a party, a few people might overhear them and want to join in. If ten people are talking about theater, then even more people will join in. And if twenty people are talking . . . and so on and so on. And the more people talking, the more people going. Simple.

So, I switched them back on. And, because I've got the smartest readers on the planet, the comments are awesome.

And then, something really cool happened.

I learned . . . a lot . . . from reading them. I realized what subjects you liked. And what you didn't. I learned what data you needed, and what you didn't. Simply put . . . I learned how to write better blogs. And I'm learning every day and with every comment.

Which is why I believe all writers out there should "accept comments," not just blog writers but playwrights and screenwriters, and Wikipedia article writers. When you finish a draft, get lots and lots of friends to read it. Get lots and lots of enemies to read it. Frankly, I'm thinking about starting a website called YouReadMineAndIllReadYours.com which would be a quid pro quo site that guarantees you a read and comments as long as you return the favor. And it's not just writers. Theaters, Box Offices, Restaurants, Airlines, etc. should all not only accept comments, they should encourage them. Don't just put out a suggestion box, beg your customers to fill it.

All feedback is great. As long as you have a thick skin and know how to filter, because no, you not only don't have to modify what you do based on every comment/note, you shouldn't. At the end of the day, it's your blog/play/whatever, and you have to write what you want to write the way you want to write it. (A filtering tip I use is that if I hear the same comment three times, I know I've got an issue that I need to look at.)

So thicken up your skin, and turn your comments on no matter what you write. There are very few artists out there that are good enough to succeed without feedback.

And frankly, they'd be even better if they got some.

91. February 22, 2013

Why Don't I Rate for That Rate?

Spoiler alert: If you work at or run a non-profit, I'll bet you your endowment, you're not going to like this post.

Yesterday I put in a call to a vendor I have not worked with before to ask for some rates for their services for a developing musical I'm working on (this one is probably two years away from even announcing here, never mind being seen on a stage).

I expressed a little concern over the amount I was quoted and the salesperson then said, "Well, this is for a commercial production, right? If you're a non-profit, I could give you our non-profit rate." (That rate was about 15% less.)

If I was a cartoon, steam would have come out of my ears and my face would have turned as red as a pair of Kinky Boots. (That is what we call in the biz a shameless plug, btw.)

Everyone knows how risky producing on Broadway is, right? Only 25-30% of shows make money, but we get charged more? Just because of our tax status? Non-profits try to make money too, you know, they just put it back into their institution.

Well, guess what most Broadway Producers and Broadway Investors do? Yep, they put it right back in as well. And then some!

Additionally, big non-profits are almost guaranteed to be here for years and years, if not decades. Broadway Producers and their shows are just trying to get through to next week, next month, and if they're lucky and hit a juggernaut they're around for a long time. But Phantom of the Opera is still younger than the big NPs in town.

But still "For Profits" get charged more? Yet we don't get grants or donations and such, not to mention artists working for a lot less than their market rate?

One argument I've heard is, "Well non-profit is where the 'art' is done – and so many important shows wouldn't happen if NPs were given some favorable status." True, sort of. See, plenty of important arts shows from Angels in America to Clybourne Park were given a wider audience because of their commercial production. Don't they deserve a break for taking that risk? Especially if the vendors are admitting by even having a non-profit rate, that they can survive on those numbers.

Now, I know all you people that work for small struggling non-profits want to punch me right square in the blog because you need those rates to get by, right? Well, I agree. 101%.

Despite this semi-rant, I'm not proposing we do away with Non Profit rates. I'm proposing that, oh I don't know, maybe there should be a sliding scale of Non Profit Rates. Or maybe if your NP has only been in existence for 3 years or less, then you get the rate. Or if your budget is less than X dollars, then you get the rate. I'd have no problem with someone charging me more than someone charging a brand new company that's producing new American plays by unknown playwrights in 99 seat theaters. (In fact, I'll donate \$100 to the first theater company that fits that description that comments on this entry.)

But granting companies blanket Non Profit rates, when lots of us are struggling to make our bottom lines black and are contributing just as much to the art and the economy, just doesn't make "cents."

That's why I refused to use the vendor I called unless they gave me their NP rate. Which they did. :-)

92. December 23, 2013

10 Questions for a Broadway Pro: Sewing it All Together

I often tell young folks looking for a career in showbiz anything, that choosing the right path in your field is like taking the SATs. Sometimes it's easier to cross off the wrong answers until you find the right one.

For me, one of the jobs I crossed off early was working in a costume shop. I was horrible. Couldn't sew, couldn't hem, couldn't deal with the actors who thought they looked fat (and that was my friend Joe, by the way).

I've always had great respect for folks who worked in wardrobe . . . and that respect grew 100 times when I met Jim Hall on my very first Broadway gig. I was the Associate Company Manager on Show Boat, and he was the Associate Wardrobe Supervisor. He even costumed the very first thing I produced in NYC – this horrible revue based on TV theme songs called . . . ahem . . . Prime Time! He's since moved up the ladder and so have I (I was lucky enough to get him as my supervisor on Godspell).

And now he's here to answer our 10 Questions for a Broadway Pro! Take it away, Jim-bo!

1. What is your title?

Wardrobe Supervisor

2. What shows are you currently working on?

Kinky Boots

3. In one sentence, describe your job.

I oversee all aspects of the wardrobe and the wardrobe department from the initial set up of the show during pre-production all the way through the pack out at closing.

4. What skills are necessary for a person in your position?

Most obviously, you need to be great at organization, able to manage groups of people, make and balance budgets, be knowledgeable of fabrics, sewing, shoes, painting, dyeing, laundering, etc...but the greatest skill you need to be really successful, is the ability to relate to and understand people, individuals and group dynamics.

5. What kind of training did you go through to get to your position?

I attended the North Carolina School of the Arts for costume design & technology, but the best training I have had was to be an assistant to Debbie

Cheretun for over 10 years. That's where you learn, by watching and learning from someone else who has a wealth of knowledge.

6. What was your first job in theater?

I grew up doing children's theater and quickly became involved with the behind the scenes elements, specifically costumes. My first "job" was when I was 16 years old and was working/apprenticing at a summer stock theater. I designed their children's show called Pandas From Outer Space. It was ridiculous. They had a lot of faith in me. I might have had a \$200 budget and the use of their stock costumes. It was a great experience to make something out of nothing. I still enjoy doing that now when it's needed.

7. Why do you think theater is important?

There's a power in the exchange of energy that takes place during live theater that you can't get while watching a movie or TV. That power has the ability to transform people, even if for just that brief moment of time while sitting in the theater. I love standing at the back of the house and watching patrons be absorbed into the moment. And then there are those shows/performance that shift your life permanently. You never forget them. You have a new perspective or you open up to something hidden within that needs to be released. It's a special experience which stems from that exchange between audience and actor. Theater is transformative and builds relationships, with ourselves and with others.

8. What is your profession's greatest challenge today?

The greatest challenge for wardrobe supervisors is to maintain a joyful, positive attitude throughout the whole entire process. The wardrobe department never really gets to settle in to a run. We are constantly being thrown curve balls that need to be dealt with at a moment's notice. It is very easy to get frustrated and overwhelmed, but the best choice you can make in that moment is the decision to handle it with grace & kindness.

9. If you could change just one thing about the industry with the wave of a magic wand, what would it be?

Easy. I would make the work week be five days instead of six.

10. What advice would you give to someone who wanted to do what you do?

1) Take your time and learn as much as you can. 2) You don't have to know or pretend to know everything. 3) Admit it when you make a mistake and forgive others for theirs. 4) Choose wisely who you hire & surround yourself with. 5) And for God's sake, have fun!!

93. May 7, 2012

Do We Need More Theatre Competitions for Kids?

When I was a pre-teen, I was a student at Fred Villari's Studios of Self Defense (or kar-a-tey, as we used to say), and made it all the way up to my purple belt, before I . . . well . . . got more interested in the theater. Earning "belts" was great, but you know what was even better? Every six months or so there was a tournament. Yep, straight out of Karate Kid Parts I – III, at the end of every semester we trucked our gi-wearing butts to a convention center and battled other Fred Villari students from across the state for . . . yep . . . a genuine fake gold trophy. Awww yeah.

The tournaments were pretty cool actually. As you have probably already guessed, I didn't take home any of those genuine fake gold trophies, but I did win a couple of rounds. But participating in the tournaments made me practice more and introduced me to new people, and in general it got me more excited to be studying kar-a-tey.

When I was thinking back on my days in the dojo, I started to think that one of the ways we might rev up the engines of young people in the theater is to have more local, state and national theater competitions. We do have The Jimmy Awards now, and there has always been the Irene Ryan Awards, but when I think back to growing up and how it seemed like every other week the girls in my class had dance competitions, it feels like maybe we could use more theater competitions.

Should every community theater around the country have monologue comps, and scene comps, or American Idol type sing-offs for young people? (Actually, since most competitions have registration fees, this might be a way for some struggling non-profit theaters to earn a few bucks to help fund their productions.) Should the big professional regional theaters out there sponsor contests for high school students to earn scholarships to college?

Even when the gold trophies are genuine fakes they still could mean a lot to a young actor's resume and to their confidence, and therefore their future.

I held off on writing this blog for a while, actually, because there is an unfortunate flip side to competitions like the ones my young dancer friends were exposed to, or the many mini-beauty pageants that sometimes make us want to throw up. Not everyone wins. And even "free market" me thought to myself, "Do we really need to expose our kids to more competition? Can't they just enjoy things without having to win?"

It's a big debate, of course, and one that only parents can finally decide . . . hopefully along with their kids.

But I did hear a great argument for these kind of comps this past weekend at a screening for a brand new (and brilliant) documentary about The Youth America Grand Prix (the largest competition for ballet students in the world) called First

Position. At a post-show talkback, first time (!) director Bess Kargman said that without the Grand Prix or similar competitions, some of the dancers profiled in the film would never have gotten the opportunities that were afforded to them. Competitions changed their lives. (You should see the movie, by the way – it really is fantastic.)

What do you think? Since it is proven that engagement in the arts as a child helps develop an audience for the future, do the pros outweigh the cons? Should we have more comps?

94. May 28, 2012

How Can Musical Theatre Be Saved?

It's like clockwork. Every 3-4 years, in the midst of a weaker season, reporters in our biz start ringing the death knell for musical theater.

Leave it to the optimistic and smarty Scotty Brown from NY Magazine to not let us stew in the muck, however. In a terrifically fun and insightful article that ran last week, Scott interviewed a whole bunch of producers and writers from Robyn Goodman to Andrew Lippa to Maury Yeston and asked them . . . "How Can Musical Theatre Be Saved?"

Click [here](#) to read their answers.

My favorite response, btw, was from Scott Rudin, who said, "There are a lot of stories that do not need to be musicalized."

I've always believed that so much of a show's success begins with the seed of an idea, before a word is written.

If the seed is bad, no amount of fertilizer will help it grow.

Thanks for the terrific article, Scott. And if you have an idea on how musical theatre can be saved, comment below!

95. July 6, 2012

Two Things That Turn Me On

Want to know what really gets my engine going?

1. Data.
2. When experts from outside of our industry analyze our data.

Ohhhh yeah. Just typing that gets me all a-tingley.

So imagine how I felt when I heard that Jeffrey Simonoff, a NYU Stern School of Business Statistics Professor (!), had released a study entitled "Broadway Show Survival," with a headline that screamed, "New Study Shows that a Major Tony Award Lengthens a Show's Run by Almost 50%!"

Here's why the article is important to you and me, according to the Prof himself: "In the Broadway theater business, where attracting the largest possible theater-going audience is critical, theater owners, producers and investors need to understand what goes into a smash hit," said Simonoff. "This research takes an important step in furthering our understanding of what contributes to both hits and flops in today's business of Broadway."

Some of the salient points in the five page study we already knew, like:

-Musicals have an almost 50 percent longer expected run than non-musicals (i.e., comedies or dramas)

-Revivals, despite their tried and true beginnings, tend to be less successful than other shows with a roughly 20 percent shorter expected run than non-revivals

But, then, there are some new nuggets . . . including one of my favorites:

-Higher attendance in the first week after a show opens is a good indicator of the show's longer-term success

(This one, by the way, ties us closer to the film industry than many of us probably knew – it's more about the "opening weekend" than we thought.)

So, now you see why an analysis of the characteristics of a hit and a flop gets me more revved up than the characteristics of Kate Upton?

In fact, uh . . . here's a [link](#) to the full study, because I . . . uh . . . I gotta . . . go . . . somewhere.

P.S. Professor Simonoff and all of your Stats students, if you, you know, need some other ideas on numbers to "crunch," let me know. I've got a few ideas.

96. February 27, 2013

Are New Plays and New Musicals Really on the Downswing? Part I

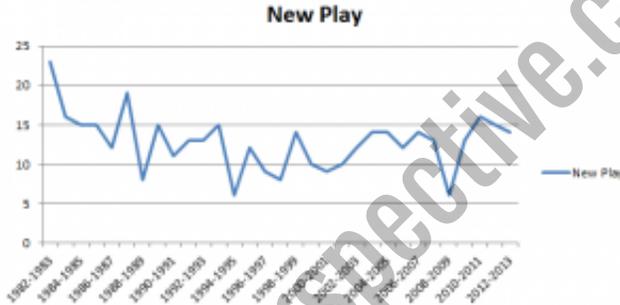
I read a quote recently which lamented the fact that there weren't as many new plays on Broadway anymore.

At first, my head started a-nodding in agreement. It's easy to jump on the ole "things aren't so good" whine-wagon. But then I wondered, "Is that really the case?" I know it seems like that, and maybe it is, but before I just start joining the

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pessimists club, let's take a look at the statistics shall we? Maybe the picture ain't as gloomy as we think?

So, my trusty intern, Kate, and I went into the season archives of IBDB, and simply counted the number of new plays and new musicals over the last three decades to see if we could find some kind of trend line, good or gloomy. Here's a chart of the number of new plays on Broadway since the 1982-83 season through today:

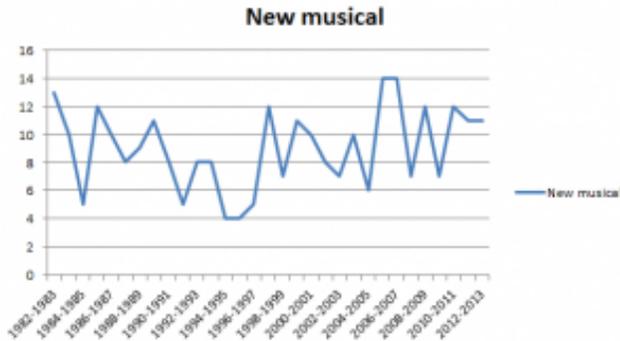


Well? What do you think?

Seems to me that the sweet spot of new plays is between 10 and 15 (average of the 30 years is 12.77), and actually there isn't much of a swing in either direction, or a downward trend line. Although we don't jump over that 15 mark much, and we have sunk below the 10 line a few times, it seems to be that we're sort of consistent. (Note to self: if ever I see a season where there are more than 15 new plays being produced – see if there's another season when I can do my show.)

So in the modern theatrical era (what I call the 80s to now), we're not doing drastically less new plays.

Now, let's check out the same stats for new musicals:



To quote an Xmas Carol, "Do you see what I see?"

After a downward trend in the first part of the decade, there's actually a slight upward slant since 1997 (average of the entire three decades is 9 and since 1996, the average is almost 10 . No coincidence that this is also when Broadway grosses started an upward trend as well.)

So, the picture ain't so bad after all. And that means, Pessimist club? You've got one less member.

While sure, it'd be great if we could produce more new plays and more new musicals, we actually have a real estate issue (see [this blog](#)) and a audience development issue (our attendance has been relatively flat – see [this blog](#)). But the good news is we're not producing less.

Tomorrow I'll look at the trend for revivals. More Graphs! #GraphNerdAlert

97. July 23, 2013

Why You Should Focus on Getting People to NOT See Your Show

There are no absolutes in marketing.

Except this one:

No show is for "everyone."

One of the most common mistakes that new Producers/Writers make is thinking that their show appeals to every demographic. Look, even West Side Story isn't for everyone. I know some people who hate Les Miz. And don't even get me started on Cats.

Obviously those shows appeal to an enormous amount of people, and I can only wish one of those to happen to you in your producing/writing future.

But most likely, you're dealing with a much thinner slice of demographic pie. When choosing a title, writing a marketing blurb, or choosing a logo, your first concern should be how to get people to buy a ticket to your show. You are attempting to communicate a message that will heighten the buying senses in a consumer and get them excited about spending time and money on your product (ironically, the two things that most people want out of products and services are to save time and money - so you're working against the grain a bit already). Maybe they buy right away, but more likely, you've teased them into learning more about the show, so when they get their next impression (via another ad, or more likely, word-of-mouth), they will whip out their credit card and buy a ticket.

Of course, the above is what you should focus on first when putting together all of your marketing materials.

But, if we remember that no show is for everyone, and that word-of-mouth is the primary driver of ticket sales, then when developing these materials, we must also consider this question, "Who do we NOT want to see this show?"

Too many folks try to develop materials that cater to everyone. And what happens? Well, if it's successful, you may have a group of people in your audience that you know are most likely not going to enjoy your show. And then what happens? They spread negative word-of-mouth. Not because your show wasn't any good, but because it just wasn't for them. And you've just counteracted all that time and money you spent on that advertising campaign.

No one likes to think that someone may not enjoy their show. But checking your ego at the stage door may be the most important thing a Producer can do.

98. March 12, 2008

There's the Pitch, the Swing...and It's a Hit!

Looks like they've done it again.

Lead producers of *In The Heights*, Kevin McCollum and Jeffrey Seller, have another hit on their hands. Word of mouth is good, reviews were good, and I'd put my money down now that these two will have another trophy on Tony night. But let's do more than pat them on the back. If we want to look at what makes hits, let's think like baseball players. If we want to be better batters, we'd analyze David Ortiz's swing and adopt some of the mechanics to our own.

So let's look at Kevin and Jeffrey's swing . . .

Since they burst on the scene with *Rent* in 1996 they have produced four new musicals on Broadway together:

Rent
Avenue Q
High Fidelity
In The Heights

If *In The Heights* holds, that's 3 out of 4 hits. They're batting .750 in terms of hits, and could be batting .750 in terms of Tonys! Not a bad record for producing new musicals.

So what do these three hit musicals have in common?

1. Geography

First thing that struck me? *Rent*, *Q* and *In The Heights* are all about small geographic subcultures in New York City. Hmmmm. Funny, isn't? I hadn't

thought about it either until yesterday. Lower East Side, a mythical last stop in an outer borough, and Washington Heights.

What does it mean? Well, I'm not sure this is the most important characteristic for us to focus on, but it is important. All of these communities have very distinct voices that we hadn't heard from before on Broadway. These shows taught us about the issues facing the youth of these three very distinct NYC communities. Hmm, there's another one. All three of them have to do with young people, starting their lives. Huh.

2. Who Wrote Them Again?

This for me is the most important element. You probably never heard of the writers of these musicals before their shows opened.

That's because each one made their Broadway debut with these musicals.

3 hits. 3 Broadway debuts of a book writer, a composer and a lyricist.

K&J use new writers. New voices. They invest in people that have stories that they feel must be told. The writers' passion for their projects goes right on the page and then bleeds right onto the stage. You can feel it.

3. What's That Director's Name?

You know what I'm gonna say don't you. But you can't believe it either. Yet, it's true.

3 hits. 3 brand spanking new Broadway directors all making their Broadway debuts . . . just like the writers!

\$10 million dollar musicals on the shoulders of Broadway Babies.

This is an unbelievable trend. Hal Prince once told me that if I wanted a musical to happen, all that I needed to do was to hire a name director, and the money would come, and the show would happen. He was right.

But Kevin and Jeffrey are demonstrating that if you want a HIT new musical, a name is the last thing you might want.

They even proved their own theory with their one flop. That one was directed by a veteran.

4. No Stars.

See this previous entry.

5. No Spectacle

No chandeliers, no helicopters and no flying monkeys, dragons, green girls, etc.

6. No Stars + No Spectacle < \$15 Million Dollars

All of their shows are economical. They don't try to produce the biggest musicals ever. Just the best that have budgets that can be recouped in a realistic time frame.

There's a lot to learn from studying the swing of these heavy hitters and future hall of famers, just like there's a lot to learn from all of the major leaguers. My advice to you is to watch them all and learn. Study the game tapes. Pick up some tips on what to do with your elbow. No two swings are alike, but there are powerful fundamentals that you've gotta get under your belt.

Then step up to the plate, because the only way to see if you've got game is to take a swing at a couple of pitches.

(Side note: Kevin produced another show in the last ten years without Jeffrey . . . *The Drowsy Chaperone*. Another recouped hit where all of these rules applied. (Except the NYC subculture thing.))

99. March 31, 2012

Should Theater Critics Specialize?

First, let me say that the idea I'm going to propose below probably isn't practical anymore. Unfortunately for all of us, the number of theater critics has dwindled in recent years. I know, I know, you're probably thinking, "But Ken, I thought you'd be an advocate for less critics, and more of the popular voice!" Regardless of how I feel critics affect or don't affect the life of a show or regardless of whether or not I feel they echo the sentiment of the theater-going public, the fact is that the more critics there are, the more articles and therefore the more discussion there is about the theater.

One of my missions is to amplify the conversation about theater . . . and well, theater critics start that conversation every day . . . so having less of them ain't helping any of us.

Keeping theater in everyday conversation should be all of our goals, and critics help do that, whether or not we agree with them.

So pretend the papers and the media companies out there like The Times and The Post and NY1 had a few critics to choose from . . .

Wouldn't it be more interesting and more accurate of an analysis if they specialized?

Theater is divided into three niches: musicals, plays, and those that don't belong in either category.

Musicals are very different from plays. And classic plays are very different from contemporary ones.

So what would theater criticism be like if there was a reviewer of classical plays and a different reviewer of contemporary musicals? Surely in other art forms there are these distinctions. Does a classical music reviewer also review the latest Madonna album? And since our world has the same sort of extremes between the commercial and the non, shouldn't we be afforded a similar judgment?

This blog is a bit of a non-starter, because of the current plight of the critic. We're lucky we have critics at all, and despite the fact that we may disagree with them at times, we should all be lobbying for their survival.

But it does make me think . . . with an art form that has so many different subsets, how can we paint the most accurate pictures of their quality for our theater-going public?

100. March 15, 2013

5 Tips for Planning a Great Opening Night Party

Whenever I scan a production budget for a new show, and see that hefty figure allocated to the opening night party, the scrooge in me always takes over and wonders, "What if we didn't have a party? We could put all that money into media to sell more tickets. Or just return it to the investors!"

But I soften up pretty quickly after that, remembering that getting a Broadway show up on its feet could be one of the hardest businesses to start . . . and it's because of the blood, sweat, and contributions (both fiscal and otherwise) of a whole ton of people, and those actors, designers, producers, PAs, ad agents, etc. deserve to have one night to celebrate in the grandest style you can afford . . . especially since the daily grind starts the day after that.

And, don't forget (and I say this to remind myself), that opening night parties are a form of media themselves, with celebrity photos getting posted everywhere. They are also a great place to do business because so many of Broadway's players are there (which is one of the reasons I recommend anyone interested in the theater start investing if they can, just to get in that room).

I don't pretend to be any kind of great party planner. In fact it's not even something I enjoy doing. But I have learned a few tips and tricks from the many parties I've planned and gone to over the years, so here they are:

1. Location, Location, Location.

Whenever possible, have your party as close to your theater as you can. An incredible amount of excitement is created at your opening night performance, and you want that momentum to spill right over into the party. It's hard to keep

the energy up when you have to take three trains and a biplane to your party location. And remember, since you're already paying for the party, you want people to go. And there's more of a chance that people will slip away if your party is too far away (especially in the colder months).

2. Food fast, and food plenty.

I don't care what time it is, and if you think your guests would have just eaten before they saw your show, you better have something for them to eat as soon as they walk in the door. You don't have to serve a full buffet (that's where things get super expensive). But you want something that people can nibble on right when they walk through the doors. I'm a huge fan of lots of passed hors d'oeuvres at my parties.

And obviously the same is true for le beverages de alcohol. Nothing clears a party faster than when it's too hard to get something to drink or something to eat.

3. Save the speeches.

Remember what I said about keeping that celebratory energy going? Well, nothing shuts down a party than the clinking of a glass and a speech that half the people can't hear. I've always thought that great parties are like spinning a top. You give it that big spin, and let it spin out on its own. Don't stop it halfway through, because it might be hard to get it going again.

4. Just because it's fancy, doesn't mean it can't be fun.

It is a party. No, scratch that. It's a paaaaaartay. People have worked super hard. Investors have dug deep. Let them get down! Just because people have nice dresses and maybe a tux or two (I can't remember the last time I went to a black tie opening), doesn't mean your party can't be a heck of a good time. Think about the best wedding receptions you've been to. They probably involved the bride doing the electric slide in her Vera Wang, right? I'm not recommending you get the room to do the Macarena, but do create an environment that allows people to let their wigs down, laugh and be loud. And if some of your guests don't like it, well, they can go to an opening night party for an opera.

5. To gift bag or not to gift bag.

When I first started going to opening night parties, I always got a little gift bag on the way out. They're less in favor now. And frankly when I have gotten them recently, they've always been tres lame, with just a few sample products of shampoo or lipstick or something that makes no sense with the theme of the show. A takeaway is a great idea, but it's the last thing that your guests are going to remember so make sure you make it cool . . . or just skip it and make sure they take home great memories instead. Because you know what they say . . . a memory can last . . . until the next opening night party.

Have you been to a great opening night party? A bad one? Comment below with your favorite or least favorite memories from opening night parties so we can

all learn what to do and what not to do.

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About The Author

Named one of Crain's "40 Under Forty," Ken is widely recognized as one of the most innovative Broadway producers today. His impressive Broadway production slate includes: *Mothers and Sons*, *The Bridges of Madison County*, *Kinky Boots* (Tony Award), *Macbeth* starring Alan Cumming, *Godspell*, *Chinglish*, *Oleanna*, *You're Welcome America* starring Will Ferrell (Tony Nomination), *Blithe*

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Spirit starring Angela Lansbury (Broadway and West End), *Speed-the-Plow*, and *13*, as well as *Altar Boyz*, *The Awesome 80s Prom*, *My First Time*, and *Miss Abigail's Guide to Dating, Mating, & Marriage* Off-Broadway. He has also released *These Magnificent Miles: On the Long Road with Red Wanting Blue*, an award winning documentary about one of the top unsigned rock bands in the country. Ken's productions have grossed more than \$100 million worldwide and have been produced internationally in 25 countries including Germany, Mexico, France, and Korea. He is building an unparalleled track record for success and has had the pleasure of being asked to speak to a variety of organizations on theatrical marketing and producing, including TEDx, the Word of Mouth Marketing Association, the Center for Communication Studies, Commercial Theater Institute, American Theatre Wing, Independent Presenter's Network, MediaBistro, TicketSummit, The TAMY Awards, Yale University, Columbia University's Graduate Program for Theatre Management and Arts Administration, and others. Prior to his career as a Producer, Ken was a Company Manager and General Manager for many Broadway productions and National Tours including: *Gypsy*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *Chicago*, *Jekyll & Hyde*, *Cinderella*, *Ragtime*, *Showboat*, *Candide*, and many others. Ken also runs a number of theatrical websites including YourBroadwayGenius.com, DidHeLikelt.com, and the social networking site BroadwaySpotted.com. Ken created and developed the Broadway board game "Be a Broadway Star" and a smartphone app called AT THE BOOTH™, which gives a listing of available shows at the famed TKTS® booth in Times Square. His blog, on which this book is based, has been featured in *Vanity Fair*, *New York Magazine*, *The Gothamist*, and many other online and print publications. Some of Ken's upcoming projects include: *Somewhere in Time*, *Gettin' the Band Back Together*, *Daddy Long Legs*, *A Few Good Men* and *The Great White Hope*. For more information, visit www.DavenportTheatrical.com.