

## Duke Progress Report Narrative – Summer 2015

To Be Submitted Online

Report Due Date: 9/1/15

Award Start Date: 8/1/14      Award End Date 7/31/16

Period Covered by Progress Report: 8/1/14 – 7/31/15

Primary Contact: Heather Hitchens

### Section A – Available to Public

#### American Theatre Wing Inc.

**Project Title:** To support the use of new media practices that engage audiences on their computers and mobile devices

#### Project Progress and Successes:

Produced Content: Working with Theatres Nationwide

One very important way in which our Duke funding has allowed us to expand our media programming nationally is that it has allowed us to partner with theatre companies across the country to produce content that highlights their work. During the reporting period, our “Working in the Theatre” crew traveled to Minnesota, Maryland, Texas, Massachusetts, Washington D.C., and Illinois, highlighting the work of eight different theatre companies. This was the first time we filmed “Working in the Theatre” outside of New York City, and it has greatly enhanced the program’s content and reach. We worked with each participating theatre company to cross-promote the episode of “Working in the Theatre” that features their work. The cross-promotion of videos online/ on social media has been mutually beneficial to us and to our participants, increasing online engagement with audiences.

Three of these trips were for the production of a series of episodes that document the National New Play Network’s (NNPN) Rolling World Premiere of Andrew Hinderaker’s “Colossal.” In a NNPN Rolling World Premiere, a playwright premieres a new work with multiple creative teams in different communities. We documented this process at The Olney Theatre Center for the Arts in Olney, MD, at Mixed Blood Theatre in Minneapolis, MN, and at the Dallas Theater Center in Dallas, TX. The nature of the Rolling World Premiere organically allowed us to compare and contrast how different companies and different communities uniquely interpret a play, while also highlighting the National New Play Network and the importance of extending the life of a new play.

We combined the crew’s trip to Olney with a stop in Washington, D.C. to get footage for an episode on Arena Stage. On a trip to Chicago, IL the crew met with and filmed at Steppenwolf, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, and Second City. As of July 31 the episode with Second City was in post-production. All other

episodes mentioned above have been released and cross-promoted. We also released five episodes filmed in NYC, and have five more NYC episodes in post-production. Our connections to theatres outside of New York and our mission to support theatre nationwide made this a logical next step for our media programming, and we are grateful to the Foundation for catalyzing this expansion.

#### Repurposed and Curated Content: Executing a New Digital Strategy

As we described in our proposal, we were inspired to use new media practices to increase audience engagement after a new digital strategy for the Tony Awards resulted in increased viewership for the telecast. We set out to share our technological investment and our media expertise with the theatre community at large. This initiative leverages the American Theatre Wing's audience engagement and connects the theatre community and our followers and support our partners through the web of social media. Through the execution of the Tonys digital strategy we formed relationships with social media platforms and prominent theatre industry media outlets. We have been able to parlay those relationships to create partnerships for this project. For example, in the last year we have built a direct relationship with Facebook in an effort to make our featured content more visible. We are a verified partner with YouTube, giving us access to create content in partnership with YouTube's studios. We have a partnership with Twitter that gives us access to a portable Twitter mirror (that creates and posts GIF selfies) that we plan to use at future events. We partner with Playbill to create and share content. With our permission, inspired by our "The Play that Changed My Life" content, Playbill interviewed Tony winners and nominees about the play that changed their life, resulting in content that we shared and cross-promoted with Playbill.com. We used our own brand, the Tony Awards, to promote our media content by running the "Working in the Theatre" trailer on both the Tonys Red Carpet Livestream and the Tony Awards Second Screen experience, which together reached 109,000 viewers. We also ran ads on Facebook during Tonys season that brought more "fans" to our digital initiatives, which in turn, showcased exclusive video content featuring the most fascinating work of our national theatre partners.

This year the American Theatre Wing took on the Obie Awards, which expanded our audience and allowed us to recognize excellence in theatre across New York City. Producer Jordan Roth of Jujamcyn Theaters worked with us to stream coverage of the Obie Awards to a national audience via Periscope, allowing us to launch a new social media platform. We also partnered with Clear Channel Spectacolor to promote the work of our winning artists in the heart of the Times Square Theatre District. Exposure in this advertising space is something that the individual winners could never afford to purchase, and allowed us the opportunity to advertise the vitality of downtown theatre in the crossroads of the world.

In addition to adding the Periscope platform to cover live events, we added other platforms during the reporting period, and enhanced the way we use those social media channels. We began streaming all of our newly released videos from Facebook (in addition to our website, YouTube, and Vimeo), which greatly increased our number of views. We are now using Instagram and also Pinterest to share images. We also used Snapchat to bring moments and insights from our Theatre Intern Network panel discussions and the Obie Awards presentation to the larger public. Of the new platforms we have started using, Instagram has been the most successful and fastest-growing so far.

At this moment, theatre has an important opportunity to extend the audience-artist conversation and build audiences by engaging them online, particularly on mobile devices, with interactive media and quality video content. We have found it helpful to think of our social media content as a curated series of posts with different themes. For example, we post congratulatory messages on openings across the country by keeping an eye on the seasons of our media participants, and our grant recipients and award-winners. These shout-outs are almost always re-tweeted and re-posted by the companies. Another content series is The Play That Changed My Life. This is based on our eponymous book from 2009, but consists of original new written and video content that we post on Facebook. To create the content, staff interviewed National Theatre Company Grant recipients, SpringboardNYC participants, and Tony Awards nominees. We also engage the public by soliciting online submissions that answer the question, “What was the play that changed your life?” More recently, we began a City of the Month series, which provides opportunities to engage with a different regional theatre community on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram each month.

### Measuring Success To-Date

As mentioned above, one way we have measured success to-date is in the number of theatre artists and companies whose work we have been able to highlight, share, and promote, not only in NYC but across the nation. We also measure success based on the quality of the content we produce, and diversity of artists and topics that we feature. In addition, we are measuring success by analytics that indicate how much we are expanding our online audience. We are receiving 20-25 new Twitter followers per day. Views of our media on YouTube and Vimeo have more than doubled during the reporting period. Streaming on our Soundcloud channel, containing our “Downstage Center” audio archive, has also more than doubled. Our total minutes watched on YouTube doubled compared to the previous year, to nearly two million, and our new subscribers on YouTube more than doubled. Overall, during the reporting period, our videos were viewed nearly 550,000 times on YouTube, Vimeo, and Facebook (we started imbedding videos on Facebook in Dec. 2014). This is an average of over 45,000 views per month. Prior to the launch of this national project and our new digital strategy in early 2014, our videos were being viewed online only 5,000 times per month.

### Looking Ahead

We are exploring a number of additional projects and partnerships for year two of the project. We are also in conversation with Ovation Network, who have shown interest in distributing “Working in the Theatre” series and who may offer the Wing free PSA opportunities in the coming year to disseminate the message about the power and importance of live performance. We are still in touch with the Smithsonian Institution and plan to collaborate with them when they are ready. We will continue to collaborate with NNPN to document a new Rolling World Premiere, and of course work with a new group of artists and theatre companies in the next year as we highlight their work in new episodes of “Working in the Theatre” and work with them to promote the films.

We are also exploring several exciting new elements to enhance our website as a media hub for theatre. First, we are in the process of developing a Legacy page that will feature great artists of the theatre. We already have a wealth of content featuring great artists, especially video and audio interviews from the past 30 years. This page will allow us to organize and highlight the content in an appealing and digestible way, creating an opportunity for new audiences to engage with our archival material, and adding another way for us to accession material to live online in a permanent way.

Finally, we are in the planning stages of working with Athletics to create an interactive map which would reside on our website and utilize aggregate data from multiple sources to give visitors up-to-date information on live theatre being produced throughout the nation. There are several existing resources that capture some information about what is playing, such as HowlRound's National New Play Map, TCG's This Month OnStage, and others. Our hope is to bring these groups together to pool resources and information, helping audiences connect with opportunities to see live theatre in their local communities. We would then promote this resource as part of our digital strategy.

### **Challenges/ Obstacles/ Failures Encountered in the Project:**

In year one, we encountered obstacles of capacity. Building the website with a focus on curation was a challenge technically and required us to build new relationships both online and in person. Additionally, providing educational outreach to the field about the power of video content that doesn't exist primarily for marketing purposes was more intensive work than initially anticipated. However, with the extensive ground work in place from this first year in the project, we are looking forward to adding more content/theatre partners in year two. Additionally, as mentioned above, we continue to seek out new distribution platforms that we may leverage to reach new audiences.

### **What was learned from these that might be of benefit to others?**

We continue to share the important statistic that the NEA's 2010 report, "Audience 2.0: How Technology Influences Arts Participation," revealed—that people who watch a performance online or on TV are twice as likely to attend a live show.

Now that the media paradigm has shifted from TV to internet to mobile, cultural consumers expect to be offered opportunities to engage with theatre directly and feel they are a part of the creative process, which includes interaction, creative participation, and social networking. At this moment, theatre has an important opportunity to extend the audience-artist conversation and build audiences by engaging them online, particularly on mobile devices, with quality video content. One year in—our social media data also reveals that our video content (highly leveraged on social media) gets nearly nine times the engagement as it did before the new strategy. Additionally, taking just the facebook platform as an example—interactive/video content garners three times the engagement of static/non-video content. It's a powerful argument to share with our potential partners, and for all theatre practitioners to know as they begin to utilize social media platforms to launch a more robust digital strategy.

Finally, we are pleased with the balance that we've managed to strike between content that is current and evergreen. We feel we have found a great format as each episode of "Working in the Theatre" is a documentary short that can stand on its own. However, aspects of that content grow and change through time, and we are pleased that the platform allows for us to clip, cut, and repurpose video and continue to share our work in different ways as different aspects become current and relevant. We feel this, combined with information about the statistical impact discussed above, becomes a powerful argument for companies to document their own work and work processes for growth in how we in the theatre field use video to tell our stories.

### **Links to relevant website(s) and/or project publications, reports, etc.**

Working in the Theatre: *Colossal* – Dallas, TX

An example of a complete episode of "Working in the Theatre" created during the reporting period: Our crew traveled to Dallas, TX to document the third production in the National New Play Network's Rolling World Premiere of Andrew Hinderaker's *Colossal*.

<http://americantheatrewing.org/videos/colossal-dallas/>

Video Channel on our Website

All episodes of "Working in the Theatre" and other new videos released during the reporting period can be viewed on the video page of our website.

<http://americantheatrewing.org/videos/>

How it Works

The How it Works page on our website features short videos mined from our archival content as well as contributed content that gives audiences a glimpse at behind-the-scenes jobs and theatre craft.

<http://americantheatrewing.org/how-it-works/>

Playbill's Play that Changed My Life Tony Awards coverage

Playbill created content that we cross-promoted when they aligned their Tony Awards coverage with our Play That Changed My Life content series.

<http://www.playbill.com/news/article/what-is-the-play-that-changed-your-life-audra-mcdonald-jeremy-jordan-cyndi-lauper-and-more-answer-351888/print>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/AmericanTheatreWing>

Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/americantheatrewing>

Soundcloud: <https://soundcloud.com/american-theatre-wing>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TheAmericanTheatreWing>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/TheWing>

Instagram: <https://instagram.com/thewing>

Pinterest: <https://www.pinterest.com/americantheatre/>

**Contact person if someone (from the public) wants to speak with you about the project: Name and email/phone**

Ian Weiss, Director of Digital Strategy

212-765-0606

mailbox@americantheatrewing.org

**Section B – Not Available to Public – for DDCF staff only**

**If there is additional information you wish to share about the questions in Section A that you did not want to be publicly shared, please share them with DDCF staff in this section, which is confidential.**

**Have there been any changes in the original project plan?**

None. We look forward to continuing to build this initiative and refine our digital work.

**Have there been any changes to the principal staff or Board (apart from annual Board rotation)?**

Kenny Gallo, our former Director of Media and Technology, left the American Theatre Wing in July 2014 when he relocated to Virginia. His departure gave us an opportunity to examine the position he vacated, and allowed us to reassess what our organization most needed from such a position, especially in light of our expanding new media initiative. As a result, we outsourced basic I.T. needs and created a position that would focus more wholly on digital strategy.

In September of 2014 we hired Ian Weiss as Director of Digital Strategy. Ian was instrumental in creating and executing the 2013 and 2014 Tonys digital strategy, as part of the Tonys digital team at Serino Coyne. This was the same digital strategy that inspired the expansion of the new media initiative that is the subject of this report. In September Ian came to work at the Wing full-time, and as our Director of Digital Strategy he has expanded the reach of the Wing's new media programming. He also continues to work with Serino Coyne on the Tonys digital strategy, and has helped us leverage our Tonys brand to promote the Wing's new media content.

His bio:

IAN WEISS (Director of Digital Strategy) has developed digital marketing strategies for Broadway, Off-Broadway, and Live Entertainment shows over the last six years at Serino/Coyne and Art Meets Commerce. At Serino/Coyne he helped create and execute the digital strategy for the Tony Awards. Weiss previously worked as a Producer for various projects, including educational workshops, the documentary Up Heartbreak Hill (premiere: PBS 2011), and hundreds of commercials for TV and radio.

**Were there issues about how the program was administered that would help DDCF create better programs in the future?**

None.

## **Section C: Financial Budget Information - for DDCF staff only**

**If matching funds were required have you secured matching funds? Please explain.**

Yes. The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation Fund for National Projects grant represents approximately 19% of the total project expenditures for this reporting period. As can be seen in the attached financial report, the remaining funds were raised from other foundation grants, government grants, individual support, a portion of annual income from our investment fund, a portion of net income from our annual fundraising gala, and a portion of the American Theatre Wing's share of Tony Awards net income. The confirmed matching funds that exceed our project expenses for this period will be used for the project in the next reporting period.

**Budget Narrative to accompany the financial report (including explanation of any anticipated or unanticipated operating deficit):**

**(Please include a brief description of how general operating funds were used.)**

Program expense comments:

Personnel costs for the project were higher than budgeted due to the addition of a part-time Digital Media Assistant, and the expansion of the position of Director of Digital Media and Technology into the position of Director of Digital Strategy. We had less equipment rental costs and more video production crew costs than budgeted because most of the sound technicians we contracted with provided their own equipment, which saved money on rentals but required higher fees for the technicians. In addition, the video production crew line includes original music and animation services, which we had not budgeted for, but which we felt were essential to the quality of our video productions. We spent more on travel than budgeted, as we took advantage of opportunities to film more episodes outside of NYC (our film crew traveled to Minnesota, Maryland, Texas, Washington D.C., and Illinois, often staying to film multiple episodes per location). We spent less on editing than expected due to editors taking fewer hours to complete projects than we had budgeted. Finally, less was spent on digital branding/web design services than projected because some payments to Athletics (digital branding & design firm) were made prior to the start of the grant period.

Organizational financial health:

The American Theatre Wing does not anticipate an organizational operating deficit this year. If we do experience a deficit this year it will be due to a drop in Tony Awards income, in which case we would make an additional draw from our investment fund, which was established to cushion the organization

from such variances. Our \$7.5M Board-designated investment fund includes \$1M as a Cash Reserve and \$6.5M as a Program Reserve Fund. We budget a draw of less than 5% of the fund towards our operating expenses each year. The Program Reserve Fund offers security in the face of varying income, allowing us to invest a maximum amount of our Tony Awards income back into the theatre community each year.

Use of general operating funds:

General Operating Funds received from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation for this grant period were used towards administrative costs (such as salaries and overhead). These administrative activities, though not part of the project budget, are essential to keeping this project, and our organization as a whole, running at a high level of efficiency and effectiveness.