

Discussion as Performance

Conversation during Museum Theatre

by S. Xavier Carnegie

Does any of this sound familiar to you?

- ◆ A post-performance discussion, usually led by talking heads.
- ◆ The obligatory Q&A after the action on the screen or stage is over.
- ◆ The “meet the actor” section of a performance of children’s theater.

There is a longstanding tradition of holding lectures after a dramatic piece, particularly when that piece has educational value. Museum theatre has long been a part of that tradition, usually as a means to reinforce the educational objectives or to cover, through audience questions, the nuances not mentioned in the presentation. This approach is useful and can serve a necessary purpose by separating the interactivity from the more digestible drama.

Another approach, used less, but often to great effect, is the technique of the performance itself as discussion: using the methodology of theater to facilitate discussion during, rather than separate from, the dramatic action. This technique has its own



Terry Averill as John Brown.

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The International Museum Theatre Alliance (IMTAL) is a nonprofit, professional membership organization and an affiliate to the American Alliance of Museums. IMTAL’s mission is to inspire and support the use of theatre and theatrical technique to cultivate emotional connections, provoke action, and add public value to the museum experience. For more information, to become a member, or to volunteer, please visit our website, <http://www.imtal.org>, or contact a board member via email.

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President's Report

Spring greetings, IMTAL! I hope you have had a wonderful winter season. We, your IMTAL board, have had a productive winter and are planning an even busier spring.



Stephanie Long at Mount Vernon.
Photo by Judy Fort Brenneman.

We're hard at work making plans for the American Alliance of Museums' conference (AAM) and we look forward to seeing all of you at our annual AAM luncheon. Please note that pre-registration is required for the luncheon and, as always, it will be a valuable experience, allowing us to meet new members and to reconnect with old friends.

Speaking of conferences, plans are gearing up for the 2014 IMTAL conference in Chicago September 28–October 2. Mark your calendars for an intensive museum theatre experience in one of the greatest theatre towns in the world.

At both conferences, AAM and IMTAL, you'll have the opportunity to converse with board members, including our new officers. We are pleased to welcome Amber Davis, Todd D. Norris, and Xavier Carnegie to the board. Also, we thank our returning members-at-large for committing to another year on the board, and we look forward to working with everyone.

And on that note, I would like to close with an expression of gratitude for everyone on the board. I continue to be impressed by our board, who donate their precious time, contribute their immense talent, and share their passion for museum theatre. We are a better organization because of them. On behalf of all the members of IMTAL, I send my deepest gratitude to the members of our board.

Stephanie Long
Science Museum of Minnesota,
IMTAL President

IMTAL's new address

IMTAL's articles of incorporation put us in Massachusetts, which is where Catherine Hughes was when she founded IMTAL in 1990. Since our officers are based throughout the United States, we currently have no permanent office. The combination of having an address that changes each time we elect new officers, legal requirements for corporations, and the difficulty of moving the legal site of IMTAL to a different state have at last been resolved! The New England Museum Association (NEMA) has graciously agreed to be our resident agent.

Our new—and permanent—mailing address is:

IMTAL
c/o New England Museum Association
22 Mill Street, Suite 409
Arlington, MA 02476

Use this address if you need to send us anything by snailmail. If you need to contact any of the board members—and especially if you would like a fairly quick reply!—email us instead. Board member emails are listed in the masthead as well as on the [IMTAL website](http://imtal.org/board_of_directors). [http://imtal.org/board_of_directors]

IMTAL 2014 Regional Conference

September 28 through October 2, 2014

The International Museum Theatre Alliance (IMTAL) is pleased to announce **NEW AND CONFIRMED DATES** for the IMTAL 2014 Regional Conference, hosted by the Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago.

Out & About



Harriet Lynn.

Photo by Judy Fort Brenneman.

IMTAL board member and founder of the Heritage Theatre Artists' Consortium Harriet Lynn was interviewed for the February 2014 issue of *Plinth* magazine. *Plinth* is a digital magazine dedicated to promoting and highlighting innovative and educational programming within museums and cultural institutions. See what Harriet has to say [here](http://plinth.co/article/heritage-theater-artists-consortium/): [http://plinth.co/article/heritage-theater-artists-consortium/]

Are museums the school of the future?

What do you think about the future of education and museums? Are they on a collision course? Are museums the school of the future? Is the future of education emerging from our interpretive programs and performances? Greg Hardison posted a [link](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I99UyE07cM4&feature=youtu.be) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I99UyE07cM4&feature=youtu.be] to a presentation by Elizabeth Merritt, the Founding Director of the Center for the Future of Museums, on the listserv recently. It's worth the time to watch—think—and comment.

Editor's Corner

As we emerge from the dark cold of deep winter into capricious spring, I am filled with restlessness. It's a kind of dissatisfaction, a frustration with static displays, with rote deliveries and routine lectures. It pushes me to question myself and my work. A yearning to create something meaningful and fulfilling stretches through my bones and sinews, like a too-big cotyledon trying to crack through a stubborn seed case.

When what we want and need does not yet exist, we create it. We find ways to nurture it (and so it nurtures us), and it grows, expands, finds and fulfills its purpose (and ours) in myriad ways. We shift and adjust and adapt to keep moving forward the way a good and powerful story moves forward, despite (or perhaps because of) obstacles and worries and fears.

This, it seems to me, is the crux of creativity: the world is filled to capacity and is an utter void. These two states coexist, always. As playwrights and performers, educators and experts, we plow through a planetful of data every day, pushing information into content-stuffed audiences. As creative people, we're aware of the void—we teeter at its edge every day—and sometimes we forget that our audience is aware of the void, too, and yearns to fill it with something meaningful, surprising, perhaps even profound.

Some days, the void is terrifying; we're sure we'll fall and vanish, swallowed whole. Other days, we balance on its edge, exhilarated, thrilled with the risk and knowing our job is to draw together the fear and the packed-full world and create something new that doesn't fill the void—the void will always be there—but reshapes it a bit. That makes the void a little less terrifying, and the world a little better.

The articles in this issue of *INSIGHTS* explore how museum theatre professionals create programs that engage and energize audiences, deepen audience connections, and extend our reach to new audiences, all in ways that are meaningful and fulfilling for both creators and audiences.

You'll also find news about upcoming conferences—there's lots going on in the next six months, including our annual conference (Sept. 28–Oct. 2) and a special “mini-workshop” at the NAI conference in November. If you're attending AAM, be sure to register for the IMTAL luncheon before April 25, and don't forget the IMTAL Theatre Showcase on Monday, May 19.

Judy Fort Brenneman
Greenfire Creative, LLC
IMTAL Publications Officer

You versus the Phone

Broadening the Audience Demographic in Museum Theatre

by Melanie Wehrmacher

When I heard the request for an article about using museum theatre programs to grow or expand audiences and interp programs, I thought, “Melanie, you’ve never run a museum theatre program; you don’t know anything about this. Be quiet, and mind your own business.” But then I thought about it some more. Museum theatre has, in fact, been my business for approximately the last 15 years. So even though I’ve never run a program, as an actor and writer, I’ve been very involved in the day to day, nitty-gritty business of what I like to call “growing the program from the inside,” or increasing the number of people who attend the institution and who also take in a museum theatre performance. I find there’s often a huge new audience available, right there waiting for us. I am referring, of course, to the adults.

There seems to be an idea amongst visitors and patrons that all museum theatre is for kids. Some of it is, of course. And some of it is actually intended

specifically for adults. But I think it’s fair to say that most museum theatre shows are what we’d refer to as “for all ages,” or “family audiences.” What we mean by this is that everyone can come to the show. But do they all actually watch and listen and learn? The conundrum, which I’m sure many of you recognize, is “You versus the Phone.” When a group sits down to see a museum theatre performance, do they all watch the show? Or do the parents, teachers, and chaperones immediately take out their phones and tune out until they hear the applause signaling the end of the performance?

This isn’t meant as a negative judgment of adult visitors. Believe me, I get it. It can be absolutely exhausting to shepherd little ones through an environment with so much stimulation, especially one with as many rules as your average museum or zoo. I completely understand the relief of being able to sit down and rest for a few minutes, to unwrap your kids’ snacks, and to check your texts so you can figure out if Grandma got lost back in the dinosaur exhibit, or if she’s still waiting in line for chicken fingers at the café.

So is this a problem? Well, maybe not. Everyone seems pretty happy in this scenario. The parents are getting a break, the kids are getting education AND entertainment, and we have an audience. Hooray!

But can we do better?

I think we can. I think it’s possible to pull the parents into the show, to entertain and educate them just as much as we do the kids, and I think one of the best ways to do this is through humor.

The current trend in animated films is a great example of what I mean. Take the movie, *Shrek*. Kids enjoy it because there are ogres, princesses, and talking donkeys. They don’t have to “get” the “Piña Colada Song” reference. That’s there for the grown-ups. Pixar, DreamWorks, Disney . . . they’ve all had tremendous box office success with this model. We can do the same thing, whether it’s scripted into our plays and presentations or thrown in as off-the-cuff remarks in demonstrations and interpretations.

Of course, not every show can or should be a rollicking comedy, but just letting the adults realize that we know they’re there, and that we are interested in engaging them as well as their kids seems to be a pleasant surprise that many chaperones appreciate. One of my shows was reviewed (probably the first and last time I’ll get a playwriting review for a

“The Strange Case of the Alien Invasion,” Kohl’s Wild Theater.
Photo: ZSM/
Richard Brodzeller.



12-minute script), and the author said, “The writing for Kohl’s Wild Theatre is really, really excellent kid’s stuff...far better than one might expect from traditional children’s fare. Typical of Wild Theatre scripts, the work here has a little something for every age group, including more sophisticated bits aimed at parents. It’s a remarkable balance.” (Bickerstaff, Russ. “Kohl’s Wild Theater at the Garden District Farmer’s Market.” *ExpressMilwaukee*, 13 September 2013. [<http://expressmilwaukee.com/mobile/blogs/blogView/id:9566>].) This isn’t to suggest that I’m particularly brilliant (although of course, I am) but rather that people’s expectations can be skewed and that they’re pleasantly surprised when things turn out to be more engaging than they’d expected.

Does humor facilitate learning, though? Or is it just funny? According to a recent study by two psychology professors at the University of Ohio, it doesn’t really matter. The two studied the effects of humor injected into online college courses and found that it did indeed seem to help the students’ success rates. They are not suggesting that the jokes themselves are what helped the students learn, but rather what the jokes represent. “Humor is more of a social lubricant. It can facilitate interactions . . . our job is not to make students laugh. Our job is to help them learn, and if humor can make the learning process more enjoyable, then I think everybody benefits as the result of it.” (Ohio University. “Learning through Laughter: New Study Supports Use Of Humor In Online Courses.” *ScienceDaily*. *ScienceDaily*, 26 May 2005. [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2005/05/050526135537.htm].)

The argument could be made that trying to engage the adults as much as the kids dilutes the show for everyone. In Malcolm Gladwell’s popular book *The Tipping Point* he pits Sesame Street (well-known for including content aimed at adults) against *Blue’s Clues* (well-known for . . . not.) His claim is that *Blue’s Clues* “sticks” with kids better, and one of the reasons he cites is that the adult references in *Sesame Street* are lost on the kids. I’ve certainly had this concern voiced to me by supervisors at plenty of institutions. And the argument could be made that if we really want to make sure kids are learning, then we should focus the show entirely on them. So why pander to the adults? I would suggest that it’s because, with the possible exception of some children’s museums, we work at institutions that exist to educate everyone, not just kids.

This is especially important when we have shows with clear action items. Often, we end shows with statements like, “And you can help keep the water clean by buying detergents without added perfumes and dyes!” or, “Save the bees by avoiding using

pesticides in your yards!” or, “You can see the route the old streetcar took by driving along University Avenue from Union Depot to downtown!” All good and true statements, of course, but very few people under the age of 12 are picking out detergents or landscaping their own gardens or driving their own cars. We can hope the kids will pass the information on, and sometimes they do. (There was a legendary story passed down amongst the actors of Wildlife Theatre at the Central Park Zoo about the 4-year old who point blank refused to get into a taxi after seeing a show suggesting you could help the penguins’ habitat stay cold by taking public transportation. I assume that kid has grown up to be a very successful activist.)

But most of the time, adults are making the decisions. So if we want help from them, we have to engage them. For example, the show reviewed above, “The Strange Case of the Alien Invasion,” is about invasive species. One of the missions is to teach audience members that earthworms are invasive, a fact about which there is little public awareness. At the end of the show, we ask the audience to help by cleaning zebra mussels from the bottom of their boats, freezing bait before disposing of it, and cleaning off shoes and tires before entering or leaving a natural area. This is a show aimed at kids, but some of the action items are not ones we can reasonably hope a 6-year-old to carry out. So the hope is that we get people to the stage with puppets and fun, grab parents’ attention with a few pop culture jokes and local references, and by the end of the show, the kids have had a good time and learned a few basic facts about salamanders, and the adults are armed with brand new information and a toolkit for action.

What I’m ultimately saying is that by trying to engage adults and teens with what might seem like the cheap tricks of humor and topical references, we gain a sizeable fan base, who will continue to bring the kids who are too young to get the jokes, but will grow up and bring their own kids, so that the cycle of “edu-tainment” can continue.

(*Author’s note:* I don’t recommend that you start telling your boss you’re trying to include more ‘adult entertainment’ in your museum shows. I can tell you from personal experience that people will take that the wrong way. Fair warning 😊.)

Melanie Wehrmacher is a freelance actor and writer whose museum theatre work has been seen at the Central Park and Bronx Zoos, New York Hall of Science, Science Museum of Minnesota, NiseNet, Minnesota History Center, and the Milwaukee County Zoo. She is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America.

**Does humor facilitate learning, though? Or is it just funny?
According to a recent study . . . it doesn’t really matter.**

strengths and weaknesses, unique challenges, and rewards that warrant real contemplation. For many museum programs, separating the discussion from the performance is just fine. However, the marriage of the two can provide a unique and much more evocative experience for the audience, if the concept and execution are right.

But what is “right”? How do we use performance as discussion, or discussion as performance? When should we use it? What should you expect, should you be so adventurous as to try it?

Our model for this exploration will be one of my signature shows at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, the Time Trials series.

Time Trials is a series of performances that engage the audience in a moderated debate about history. An actor portrays a controversial historical figure, whose actions are explored through improvisational interactions with the audience. The audience members ask questions or offer thoughts, which the character responds to live and in real time. A second character, known as the “arbiter,” serves as the moderator between the historical character and the modern audience.

We have explored two characters within the Time Trials framework. In the first, the [Time Trial of Benedict Arnold](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JtCsYk3AmY), [http://www.youtube.com/

watch?v=1JtCsYk3AmY] the conversation focuses on the definition of treason and allegiance to one’s country or nation.

General Arnold is known universally as the traitor of the revolutionary war, who planned to give up West Point to the British and ensure the defeat of the colonies. But what if Benedict Arnold never fought for full independence? What if he was spurred to rejoin the British because he disagreed with the philosophy of the Continental Congress, or even because he thought surrender would prevent the deaths of Continental soldiers?

The second, the [Time Trial of John Brown](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TleJqwUoLYs), [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TleJqwUoLYs] provides a forum to discuss the use of violence for an admirable cause. Captain Brown dedicated his life to the destruction of African-American slavery, but he used violence, killing pro-slavery advocates and even attacking a federal arsenal.

Both characters allow our visitors to discover the complex and deep history of American issues—and also to have a voice in the process as they question the character and debate with each other on the character’s legacy and actions.

Rather than the more traditional demonstrable educational goals, the Time Trials series was designed to fit what has become our overarching mission at the National Museum of American History’s theatre programs: to get people talking



Meaningful debate over relevant issues or information is a rare sight in today’s public sphere, and theatre can fill this void like nothing else.

David Kozisek as Ben Arnold.

about history. Meaningful debate over relevant issues or information is a rare sight in today's public sphere, and theatre can fill this void like nothing else. This discussion, being the goal, becomes the most important part of our theatre programs, and this is the truest way to decide whether or not discussion as performance is right for a program.

If conversation, debate, or interactivity is your goal, then making the discussion the lynchpin of the piece is a perfect fit. This technique can enliven programs oriented around other goals as well, because these programs are, by nature, engaging and evocative, demanding critical thinking and interactivity not only between the actor and the audience, but between the audience members themselves in diverse ways with respect to age, race, gender, religion, and lifestyle.

The most important and pressing need in a piece that marries the dramatic action with audience discussion is an audience that will discuss. Much of the willingness of people to participate in conversation is tied directly to picking a subject about which they feel deeply and strongly, and making sure they feel secure enough to share these feelings. For example, the Time Trials series uses controversy to evoke or provoke a reaction. John Brown's violent action to end slavery, itself despicable and violent, elicits impassioned condemning or condoning by people who are invested in the issues at hand.

Other tactics can cause passionate discussion: modern relevance, subject familiarity, or even interpersonal messages and feelings in a multi-person cast. The subject can help create a sense of security in shared understanding, as well.

A common concept is that of a "safe-space" for dialogue. For many audience members, "safety" is almost synonymous with "familiarity." Picking a character or a subject that your audience is familiar with, and perhaps giving them a reassuring introduction to the ideas and principles to be discussed, can go a long way towards encouraging conversation.

To test these techniques, you don't have to go far. Focus groups are a good way to determine how invested your audience will be in the subject matter. Each of our Time Trials programs are tested during the research and writing phase of production. We usually test for an audience of scholars, an audience of teachers, and a more open and mixed group. This also helps to plan for common questions and reactions to the specific subject.

Logistical concerns are also very important for a performance with a strong conversational element. Consider the average size of your house. Oftentimes your audience must reach a certain critical mass for



Terry Averill as John Brown.

comfortable conversation to take place. A smaller audience lends itself to more intimate discussions, say a very personal living history tour or a roving style "meet-and-greet" character. For debates or controversial subject matter, a large audience allows some anonymity on the part of the participants and makes for a greater diversity of opinions and expressions. Also, everyone must be heard well enough to facilitate the discussion during the action on the stage, so carefully consider the possible need for audio amplification. Time Trials performances take place in a small theater that seats about 40 people comfortably, ensuring everyone who wants a say gets one, but is large enough to offer a variety of perspectives during conversation.

The good news for discussion as performance is that the proverbial wheel has already been invented: theatre arts have a longstanding history of audience participation and interaction, and these techniques can be transferred to museum theatre. Improvisation on stage is a comedy staple, relying on the audience for suggestions, voluntary action

Discussion as Performance

on stage, and even for laughter and involuntary response to the comedy. It can also be useful for drama, particularly if conversation is the key goal. Using improv as a rehearsal tool will naturalize the actor to the format. Beginning with the Time Trial of Benedict Arnold, our programs merge improvisation with script memorization. The script for the show is made up of sections, based on the questions asked by our focus groups and in our research. These sections are memorized, but must be called upon at any time and in any order during the performance, depending on the reactions by the audience. It is a challenging ordeal for any actor, requiring study and concentration, but improvisational exercises can help with this framework and improve the recall and flow of these sections during the piece.

Above all else, though, I believe the key to conversation in performance is listening.

Keeping the sections manageable in length and malleable in subject can make for great moments of dialogue between the actor and the audience. I also find that first-person source material in the research, the character's own words, can inject a script with a true tone that transfers both information and emotion. For a particularly adept actor, a "full-improv" style, or "reenactor style," free-form improvisation without script, gives the discussion-performance unparalleled naturalness, but the amount of research and craft for this technique is even more demanding and needs a wealth of rehearsal time. Either approach can benefit from casting a student of improv in the roles in question.

Now, what can we learn from basic principles of improv if we are developing a program with discussion as an integral part of the performance? There are, of course, the basic benefits, like thinking on your feet and building energy and emotion based on the interactive suggestions. Above all else, though, I believe the key to conversation in performance is listening.

Museums are pillars of knowledge; we in museum education are used to being the authority and final word on the subject. This position often allows us to ignore the voices of our visitors, but sharing the authority with them, even symbolically, is a



David Kozisek as Ben Arnold.

powerful way to affect their museum experience and to encourage more discussion.

The writer and director must listen to their focus groups and test cases. The actor must listen to the

audience during live performance. It is crucial to truly hear and understand the opinions, feelings, and points of view of your audience, to tailor the discussion to them in the moment, rather than to create a stock performance that shows a façade of interactivity without stepping off of the path of established narrative.

The audience members in a discussion-performance transcend spectatorship and are endowed with a role in the piece themselves. Defining this role and allowing them to fulfill it by listening to their offerings exercises their critical thinking skills, challenges them to invest in what they are learning, and demands that they, too, listen in new ways to the character and to each other. A two-way dialogue between the actor and the audience is the spark, but conversation between the audience members themselves as part of the performance provides the real flame, and proves that all parties are listening and fully experiencing the best of the framework.

Time Trials programs are chock full of debates. A mother and son can disagree and debate on equal footing, with fellow audience members offering support to either side, but all in agreement that the relevance of unlawful violence for a moral cause is important to discuss. “How would you treat a person who used violence to rescue your child or spouse sold into slavery,” John Brown genuinely asks a man in the third row, and then he listens to the response. These are key moments of conversation that demand connection and investment; it is important to allow the space for contemplation and response.

Performance as discussion has specific weaknesses, or challenges, as well. Often, the subjects that evoke the most emotion contain a barrier to entry, particularly in appropriateness. Navigating these boundaries can be difficult and requires careful consideration. Also, these performances are notoriously difficult to evaluate. The outcomes are not learning objectives, but participation. Sometimes, the most interesting stories are not tied to the almighty curricula of our school districts. Whether museum theatre is meant to be chiefly art or educational medium, innovative evaluation is needed in the conversation-heavy format.

That being said, there are great rewards to sharing in dialogue with an audience. You can hear about their excitement straight from them during the performance. You can watch them really think about issues, and hear them work through their thoughts. Moreover, honest and respectful discussion can reinforce the concept of common humanity between people who hardly know each other. During one performance of the Time Trial of John Brown, two

gentlemen who adamantly disagreed with how Brown’s violent actions should be seen decided to shake hands after the program, whereupon they embraced each other, unbidden by the museum or the character. This moment, witnessed by their families and others, would not have happened without the open discussion during the performance. Moments like these qualitatively suggest the significant effectiveness and profound impact of this style of museum theatre.

I am hoping to explore this framework in even more innovative ways and am always interested in the work of others in the format. ☞

Xavier is the Creative Director at the National Museum of American History, and the host of television’s [Seriously Amazing Objects](http://www.smithsonianchannel.com/sc/web/series/1003263/seriously-amazing-objects) [http://www.smithsonianchannel.com/sc/web/series/1003263/seriously-amazing-objects] on the Smithsonian Channel. In addition to acting and writing, he is a steady advocate for museum theatre, presenting all over the world on theatre in museums and ways to expand and innovate in the field.

Sometimes the most interesting stories are not tied to the almighty curricula of our school districts.

Remembering: Jon Lipsky

by Catherine Hughes

The winner of the inaugural Jon Lipsky Award for Playwriting will be announced at the IMTAL luncheon during the AAM conference, May 19, 2014, in Seattle, Washington. INSIGHTS asked IMTAL founder Catherine Hughes, who knew and worked with Jon, to share some of her thoughts and memories about Jon and his work. (For more information about Jon, including a list of plays, visit his website, [<http://jonlipskyplays.com/>]. For more about the IMTAL award, see [<http://imtal.org/home/>].)



Jon Lipsky.

He loved the challenge of working within the confines of making theatre to fulfill a specific mandate.

The first project I remember Jon Lipsky creating for the Museum of Science, Boston was *The Ballad of Chico Mendes*, which was performed in 1989–’90 in the traveling exhibition, “Tropical Rain Forests: A Disappearing Treasure.” The play was a surreal musical that told the epic tale of rubber tapper and union organizer Chico Mendes’ life and death. It made visitors witness to the active fight over rain forest land between governments, cattle ranchers, and indigenous peoples, using song, dance, symbolism, pathos, and humor, all in twenty minutes. It was trademark Jon Lipsky. It grabbed you with its story within 30 seconds, and then never let you take a breath.

I loved performing this play, as I did each of the many of Jon’s plays I was lucky enough to be a part of. You knew you had something special to show people each and every time. Jon’s plays at the Museum of Science were solid pieces of theatre specially made for scientific and educational purposes. He loved the challenge of working within the confines of making theatre to fulfill a specific mandate. He relished the research required, and had a particular passion to learn everything he could about the Human Genome Project, cloning, bogs,

paleontology, organ transplantation, and the sinking of the Titanic.

Jon was an award-winning playwright whose work was widely produced and a respected theatre instructor for 28 years at Boston University. He shared his immense talent and collaborative spirit with the museum world for over two decades.

He brought out the best in anyone he worked with, and that was especially true for me. I learned how to stretch myself as a performer through Jon’s creative process. When we were working on a script, he was always asking if I could try this moment in a new voice, or with a different physicality, or to try a subtle gesture. He choreographed moments into sharply defined and evocative images. He packed his plays so tightly with emotional intent and intellectual fodder—there were always at least dual purposes to every scene. I loved how audiences would remark after his plays that they never imagined so much information could be packed into 20 minutes and be so much fun.

Jon was incredibly generous and supportive to the museum theatre community. He raised the level of professionalism in the field and inspired us with his work. We are forever in his debt.

Remember to register:

IMTAL Luncheon, May 19, 2014

Attending AAM (American Alliance of Museums) in Seattle this May? Remember to register for the IMTAL luncheon! Registration deadline is **April 25, 2014**. [<http://aam-us.org/events/annual-meeting/program/purchase-tickets>]

You MUST pre-register in order to attend.

Attending AAM?

Keep an eye out for these IMTAL presenters:

- ♦ **Monday, May 19, 1:45–3:00 p.m.**
Innovation Through Creation: IMTAL Theatre Showcase, presented by Doug Coler, Elizabeth Pickard, Heather Barnes, Todd Norris, and Catherine Chiappa. LOTS of great examples of museum theatre work!
- ♦ **Monday, May 19, 3:15–5:15 p.m.**
Marketplace of Ideas, IMTAL board members and others share stories and info about IMTAL.
- ♦ **Tuesday, May 20, 1:45–3:00 p.m.** “I wish somebody had told me...,” presented by Catherine Hughes and several other names you’ll recognize. Each presenter will tell a Moth-style five-minute story on the theme, “What I wish somebody had told me when I started in

museums.” They’re also planning some time for open-mic volunteers and will share a DIY activity with tips to help you do a story pitch.

Presenting but don’t see your name here? **POST IT ON THE LISTSERV** (send an email with your message to imtal@simplelists.com). Let your museum theatre colleagues know what you’re presenting and when.



Jillian Finkle and Susan Evans sharing IMTAL ideas at the 2013 AAM Marketplace of Ideas.

Photo by Judy Fort Brenneman.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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maamc.org for more information. More information available [on the web](http://www.rflewismuseum.org/whats-your-flag-story). [<http://www.rflewismuseum.org/whats-your-flag-story>]

This project and exhibition have been financed in part with State Funds from the Maryland War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission, an instrumentality of the State of Maryland. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Maryland War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission. Sheila Pree Bright’s residency is in collaboration with the Star-Spangled Banner Flag House.

Submit articles, news, and ideas for the next issue of *INSIGHTS!*

The Big Topic for the summer issue is *Theatre and Innovation for All: the benefits and challenges of performance and theatrical techniques for interpreters, interpretive programs, and audiences*. We’re looking for articles, opinions, and news about events, programs, your site, and your self. We prefer articles and opinions that address the Big Topic, but will consider other subjects, too. News can be on any topic. Articles and opinion pieces can be from 250 to 3,000 words long; must be in MS Word (.doc preferred, please); and it would be really nice if you could format your file to be double-spaced, first paragraph indented, 11- or 12-point Times New Roman or similar. But the most important thing is to send us your article, opinion, or news to pubsofficer@imtal.org no later than June 15, 2014. (*It doesn’t have to be perfect; it just needs to be reasonably coherent. If we have questions, we’ll contact you.*) *Send photos, too!*

Quick summary of dates

May 18–21, 2014: AAM (American Alliance of Museums), Seattle, WA

June 15, 2014: INSIGHTS deadline

Sept. 28–Oct. 2, 2014: IMTAL-Americas Regional Conference, Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago, IL

Oct. 18–21, 2014: ASTC (The Association of Science-Technology Centers) Annual Conference, Raleigh, NC

Nov. 18–22, 2014: National Association for Interpretation (NAI) National Workshop, Denver, CO

Announcements & Calls for Submissions & Auditions

Conferences and workshops

May 18–21, 2014: AAM (American Alliance of Museums), Seattle, WA

INCLUDING:

- *IMTAL luncheon* 12:15–1:30 p.m., May 19, 2014
- *IMTAL Theatre Showcase* 1:45–3:00 p.m., May 19, 2014

Sept. 28–Oct. 2, 2014: IMTAL-Americas Regional Conference, Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago, IL. Details will be posted on the [website](#) soon. [<http://imtal.org>]

Oct. 18–21, 2014: ASTC (The Association of Science-Technology Centers) Annual Conference, Raleigh, NC

Nov. 18–22, 2014: National Association for Interpretation (NAI) National Workshop, Denver, CO

INCLUDING:

- *Better than Broadway: How to use theatre to create and present amazing interpretive programs:* A 3-hour intensive mini-workshop co-presented by IMTAL and CILH (Cultural and Living History, a Section of NAI) members Judy Fort Brenneman, Simone Mortan, Bill Weldon, and John Luzader.
- *Most Misunderstood Characters:* An evening event where the audience and a panel of judges determine which of the performers is truly the most misunderstood. Open to all NAI conference attendees; performances by audition/proposal or invitation only; more information will be available through IMTAL and CILH soon.

Calls for submissions & auditions

Seeking individuals for “O Say Can You Feel . . .”

Oral history performance project at Reginald F. Lewis Museum of African American History and Culture:

Seeking individuals various ages, ethnic and racial backgrounds willing to participate in a special project that will be presented at the museum and at various sites in 2014. We ask that you share your story about your relationship to your flag. This program is part of the exhibit “For Whom It Stands,” opening May 17, 2014, at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum. A stipend is available to participants. Harriet Lynn of the Heritage Theatre Artists’ Consortium is the director. Contact Terry Taylor, Education Director at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum for information at Taylor@

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