

From Skeptic to Ardent Fan: David Rosenberg, 2016 IMTY Award Winner
Interview with David Rosenberg,
Vice President of Guest Experience, Monterey Bay Aquarium

by Judy Fort Brenneman

Monterey Bay Aquarium is well-known for its excellent museum theatre programming and leadership in museum theatre. As past IMTAL board members Simone Mortan and Cat Chiappa note, museum theatre at the Aquarium has been a difficult road, and things might have turned out quite differently if not for the open-mindedness and ultimately, whole-hearted support of David Rosenberg, this year's IMTY award winner. In their nomination for the IMTY, they wrote,

“When David was first hired about 8 years ago he was a bit skeptical of Museum Theatre and was in a “prove it to me” kind of mode. The following year he supported the request to have the 2009 IMTAL international conference held at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. From his lukewarm initial take on Museum Theatre he has changed to become a strong supporter of the museum programs...Financial support for the program has increased dramatically allowing for collaborations with people like puppeteer Chris Greene and a multimedia program that...now includes having actors and vessels in the water of the Great Tide Pool and large video monitors that allowed the voices of people connected with the multi-ethnic peoples who have depended on the resources of Monterey Bay to be included in our program...David has put key people...in leadership roles where their creativity and talents can shine. He has been there to support them with the material and financial resources to help their visions come to reality.”

JFB: According to the nomination that Simone Mortan and Cat Chiappa submitted, you had kind of ambivalent feelings about the usefulness or purpose of the theatrical approach to things when you first came on board at the aquarium, and have since become a “convert,” is the way they put it. So I wondered if you could start by telling me a little bit about your background and history, what brought you to Monterey Bay Aquarium, and what



Monterey Bay Aquarium Foundation

David Rosenberg, VP Guest Services, Monterey Bay Aquarium, 2016 IMTY Award Recipient

you thought about museum theatre, or in this case, aquarium theatre, when you got there.

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DR: In college and just out of college, I was working for Walt Disney World, in Florida, and held multiple entry level management positions. I was recruited by Hyatt Hotels Corporation, and spent the next 11 years progressing through the ranks of Hyatt Hotels and managed small and large properties around the United States.

About 10 years ago, I left the world of hospitality to join the Monterey Bay Aquarium. I joined shortly after the majority of guest facing departments were restructured to bring all of them under one division. I was hired to lead that newly formed group. For instance, our admissions was part of marketing, our security was part of human resources, public programs was part

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President's Welcome

Hello IMTAL!

It was great to see IMTAL members at AAM in May. If you couldn't make it, this issue of *Insights* has interviews with our IMTY and Lipsky award winners. They represent just two of the many of you who are doing innovative, engaging, exciting work in museum theatre.

Speaking of innovative, engaging and exciting (nice segue, right?) our next IMTAL conference is right around the corner. The Practical Magic of Museum Theatre will be held in Denver August 26-30. The conference committee has done an especially outstanding job on this one—with a great variety of keynote speakers, sessions, and institutional practices. Trust me, you do not want to miss this one, so you should register TODAY. Just visit imtal-us.org to register—like right now. Go do it.

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Elizabeth Pickard, President

Are you done registering for the Practical Magic of Museum Theatre? There is nothing better you could spend your professional development dollars on. You'll come back energized, excited, and bursting with new ideas. It happens every time.

All registered? If so, read on, McDuff.

All the best,

Elizabeth



Editor's Corner

Hey—

I don't have time to say much this issue; I'm busy putting the conference together.

You should come.

Don't take my word for it; check out the schedule on pages [14-16](#).

You need to be there.

We have the amazing Jeff Wirth of Interactive PlayLab and author of *Interactive Acting* plus storyteller Susan Marie Frontczak on Saturday—keynotes, performances, and workshops to share, play, and teach.

We have David Allison, Manager of Onsite Programs at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science and author of *Living History: Effective Costumed Interpretation and Enactment at Museums and Historic Sites* on Tuesday.

And all the days in between, we have programming and performances that will inspire us and help us do the important work we do for our sites, visitors, and the world. (Yes, the world.)



T. L. Brenneman

Judy Fort Brenneman, Publications Officer

You're gonna love it.

So quit stalling and register. Reserve your hotel room. Figure out the best airfare, the best road trip, the best whatever you need to get here.

Because we need you here, and so does the rest of the world. (Yes, the world.)

Judy



View of Denver from DMNS

From Skeptic to Ardent Fan, continued from page 1

of education. Under the new structure, they were all part of the “Guest Experience Division.” This division ensures that a visitor gets the same level of service, interpretation, and knowledge regardless of who he/she speaks with in the aquarium. For example, a ticketing agent has the same level of knowledge and training as a programs presenter, security officer, or a volunteer docent.

Over time we have continued to expand upon this model by increasing the scope of the Guest Experience Division, and I was fortunate enough to be promoted to General Manager and then Vice President of Guest Experience.

When I arrived at the Monterey Bay Aquarium in January, 2007, we were still six months away from relaunching our summer theatrical programming. Since I had not seen the programs, my concern was that if you don’t do something regularly, if you don’t put all your efforts into something, you’re not gonna do it right. And especially the possibility of museum theatre, where it’s only as good as the effort that you put into it. At that time, it was a passion of a couple of employees here, specifically Simone Morton. It was a passion, but not necessarily a core focus of our programs operation. So, I was very dubious of it. I was trying to understand how we can do good theatre without putting a large investment and a huge amount of time into it. My thought was either do it well or don’t do it at all.

“To not have museum theatre would be a huge detriment to our interpretation abilities.”

However, after watching the audiences in the summer react to our programs, it made me realize that the way that we engage visitors in theatre performances is very different from anything else we do, any other type of interpretation that we do, and that to not have museum theatre would be a huge detriment to our interpretation abilities. I also thought, Let’s make sure that we put the right investment and time into our programming to make sure it’s to the high level and caliber that we’d expect our visitors to see—that’s what we’ve built up over the years.

JFB: As you started to say, Okay, I’m sold; what does this program need to make it sustainable and effective, and how are we going to afford it, and what’s affordable, and how do we make this determination?—do those questions draw from both your Disney experience and your Hyatt experience, or did it turn out to be something radically different from what you’d experienced so far?



David Rosenberg (c), 2016 IMTY Award Winner, with Simone Morton (r) and Cat Chiappa (l)

DR: My background is very much business. And in business you learn, “concentrate on core competencies,” and if it’s not your core competency, DON’T DO IT. That is always something I was reflecting on. At Disney, a core competency is shows and programming. At Hyatt, a core competency is quality customer service and a profitable environment. At the aquarium, at the time, our core competency was interpreting and sharing an amazing collection of animals with our visitors. A core competency was not to do theatrical programming with actors. And so drawing on experience, I thought, well, we shouldn’t do it.

Instead we decided upon the two obvious options: we can either say it’s not a core competency, so don’t do it, or we make it one of those core competencies, and it is what we do.

And we chose the latter, and said let’s do this. So, to continue to build up a theatrical program, you bring in more experience, you build a focused team, and you put in, quite frankly, the right budget to make it happen. Finally, you build a model that will become sustainable. Another thought I had from my Disney experience was that everything was either “good show” or “bad show.” If it’s a bad show, don’t do it, and eliminate it. And if it’s a good show, make sure you do it all the way.

That term carries over into museum theatre as well. We want to make sure everything we do is really good show. And seeing what a “good show” is, is something that I learned from Disney early on. Our aquarium is a very different experience than one of a Disney theme park. We don’t talk about make-believe; instead, we interpret the ocean around us and stay true to our mission to inspire conservation of the ocean. “Good show” helps us achieve our mission every day.

JFB: It’s not entertainment for entertainment’s sake, it’s entertainment that needs to connect with the audience, with this sort of ulterior motive behind it.

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Turning the Tide performance draws big crowds at Monterey Bay Aquarium

There's a purpose that drives interp programs. I think that's true with any business setting, but that's one of the core tenets of interpretation. So, understanding how an amazing company like Disney does that, with some blend of real life and fiction, and connects with audience, and manages programs in such a way that audiences want more of that and come back and all that kind of stuff—that part does seem to me like it directly translates into what Monterey Bay Aquarium is doing in terms of its museum theatre, and its other interpretive programming too. But it's that, "we have this resource, and we are connecting it to the audience so that they want to know more, and they want to hang out here and they want to do other good things." Is that pretty accurate?

DR: Yes. Absolutely. I remember that first summer watching a family with two children outside clapping along with our songs. The song was *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle*. The kids walked away clapping their hands and still singing, "Reduce, reuse, recycle." This was the core message we were trying to interpret and clearly the children heard it loud and clear. The theatrical program got the message to those children in a way that we would not have been able to do anyplace else in the aquarium. It's using the medium that can interpret possibly to different ages, but also just interprets in a way that you might not catch anyplace else.

"We definitely had to prove that the program connected our visitors in ways that we couldn't do elsewhere."

JFB: As you started to build the model that become sustainable and figure out the financing, did you have to persuade your higher-ups about this? How did it work in the context of the larger organization to say, okay, we wanna do this, and it's gonna be good, trust me?

DR: Good question. We definitely had to prove that the program connected our visitors in ways that we couldn't do elsewhere. Our first goal was to build it, and build it in a way that we felt was meeting the goals of interpretation without straying too far away from our brand.

Once we built it, we evaluated it. We did formal audience evaluation to determine the strengths and challenges of the programs. We adjusted to that evaluation and rebuilt some of the future programming based upon the findings in that evaluation. We knew we were really hitting well in some areas and in some areas that we could do a little bit better. Ultimately, we built a formula that really worked for us as we built a roadmap for our future programming. And then, last year, we as an organization rallied behind our theatrical programs and built the largest theatre program we've ever done. Not only by investment, but resources and everything that went into it. We brought our outdoor decks as well as our Great Tide Pool alive with a wonderful new program.

The launch of the new highly produced program was a testament to the value our organization placed on making theatre a core part of our visitor experience. Incidentally, our new program has proven to be one of our most effective interpretive programs that we've done in the history of the aquarium.

JFB: Tell me a little bit about what the program entails; can you give me some details?

DR: The program is called *Turning the Tide*. We wanted to build a program that was very much on brand and mission, as well as was able to tell the history of the site that the visitors are standing on today. And to do that, we went back to what was here long before the aquarium. We tell many stories such as the Rumsen Indians, who were some of the first to fish the waters around where the Aquarium sits today. We show how the Japanese Ama divers harvested abalone—a key export in the early 1900s. We also show how the Chinese fishermen fished for squid at night in order to stay out of the way of the daytime commercial fishermen. Finally, we show how all these practices eventually led to the sardine catch, which is why this site became a cannery (the aquarium is in an old cannery). And then the sardine catch was so successful that they over-fished, and that was a contributing factor to the demise of Cannery Row. This whole story leads to educating on how the Monterey Bay became a marine protected sanctuary. Visitors learn that today, this sanctuary is thriving with life and thanks to the efforts

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Linda Yamane, descendent of the local Ohlone Indian tribe and builder of the authentic Tule canoes

of the Monterey Bay Aquarium, our visitors are building an understanding of how they can help protect the ocean. We made every effort to keep the program authentic. For example, we had authentic Tule canoes made by a descendent of the Rumsen Indians of Monterey. We had a Chinese sampan made by the members of the Chinese community in San Francisco. We even interviewed representatives and leaders from the communities we are interpreting to make sure our stories are truly accurate and authentic.

JFB: Are there some permanent exhibits as well as performances happening in these spaces?

DR: This particular program is outside, on what we call our Great Tidepool Deck. It's a deck that overlooks the Pacific Ocean as well as a man-made lagoon that sits below it. It is a beautiful setting since visitors are able to see performers in an amphitheater setting and can look below them to see the boats and aquatic performers. This area does not serve as a year round exhibit; instead it supports this summer theatrical program.

JFB: Now you're Vice President, which means that yes, we know that you love museum theatre and we hope that that love of it never goes away and that you support it forever, of course. But you're also juggling all the other demands of what's required for the institution. So how does that work for you?

DR: Vice President of Guest Experience is my title, which really just means that I'm responsible for leading a great team that makes sure every visitor has an amazing experience, learns something new, and leaves inspired to conserve our ocean. We have many tools in our tool shed to pull that off, of which our theatrical program is one of those tools. A very important tool, but one of those tools. I think that as my role has grown within our organization, it's allowed all the guest experience areas to have more support from the other departments that are under Guest Experience.

JFB: Organizations change, needs change, funding changes, everything changes. From your current position as VP of Guest Experiences, what do you see down the road?

DR: As I previously said, the mission of the Monterey Bay Aquarium is to inspire conservation of the ocean. It is going to continue to become more and more important for us to connect people to our mission; I think you will continue to see us looking at new ways to interpret our exhibits, to connect with our visitors, and to stay connected with our visitors long after they finish their visit. We will continue to become even more innovative with how we create an emotional connection to what we do. Again, theatre was one way to build that bond, but there are other things that we'd like to tackle as well. We will continue to look at ways to make sure our visitors use the knowledge and experience they have here at the Aquarium to take action in the future—long after they finish their visit with us.

The other area that we're really growing in is our formal education. We're building an education center down the street from the main aquarium. We host close to 100,000 school kids every year complimentary, to experience the aquarium. We're going to ratchet that up even more as we build a new education center. And hopefully they'll also be able to experience all of the different types of interpretation that we offer them at the aquarium. We will continue to ask ourselves how we can always stay relevant, always stay ahead, and always make sure that we're coming up with new ways to interpret our exhibits and interpret our mission.

JFB: Any other closing thoughts before we sign off?

DR: I debate about the term "museum theatre." I think that sometimes the term "museum theatre" is limiting. To me it's theatrical programming that connects our visitors. We're an aquarium and people also refer to us as a museum or an attraction. I think as an aquarium, we have a unique role because people see us in so many different ways. For this reason, the term "museum theatre" appears a bit limiting to what we do.

At the Monterey Bay Aquarium we are up to over 30 programs a day that are done by a live presenter, of which some are theatrical in nature and some are not. This unique mix of program delivery makes our suite of offerings engaging, entertaining, and inspiring. Again, theatrical programming is a key part of this mix.

JFB: For the non-theatrical programming, are you training your live presenters in performing arts techniques and skills to enhance their ability to present, or are those things kind of separate categories altogether?

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DR: Our non-theatrical presenters are trained in a lot of those techniques, because, as you know, there's a lot of theatre type components that go into public speaking. So, yes, it carries over. In fact, Cat Chiappa, who's the Manager of Programs, as well as Michelle Myers, who supervises the theatrical programs, both have significant theatrical backgrounds. They use their skills to make sure that every presenter meets all the theatrical criteria. The non-theatrical presenters are often in front of up to 500 people at a time doing a presentation. It's key that they understand all the valuable parts that would make up a theatre program.

JFB: Finding people who are in those upper levels of management who understand both the business side and the importance of what we do is always an honor. So congratulations again on winning the IMTY this year.

About a Door at The Adler

by Mark Webb, Director of Theaters, Adler Planetarium

About A Door is a “pop-up play.” These are short 10- to 12-minute plays that appear in an exhibit gallery without prior notice, using the existing exhibit as the setting and the random visitors that happen to be there as the audience. The actors wait inconspicuously until a decent size group is within the vicinity, then they make an entrance and the show is underway. A few visitors will immediately leave the area, but on most occasions they are replaced by a larger number curious to see what is happening.

Being a major planetarium, we find that most visitors arrive expecting to experience our programs, mostly live, under the planetarium dome. Often we learn that they were unaware of our exhibit spaces and historical collections until they arrived. Theater in the exhibit galleries allows us to take something we are already doing well, interpreting science in an immersive media environment, and expand it out onto the exhibit floor.

As a museum that specializes in astronomy, we are challenged to find ways to allow the audience to make a personal connection to the subject matter. Most of our area of concentration consists of rocks, gas, and robots located at inconceivable distances from our

“Theater in the exhibit galleries allows us to take something we are already doing well, interpreting science in an immersive media environment, and expand it out onto the exhibit floor.”

home planet. Presenting stories of humans struggling to understand the distant environment of space gives visitors an opportunity to observe how someone like them made a connection to the cosmos.

We have chosen to make these programs brief to make it possible for the visitor to join the experience without making a significant commitment of time. The surprise element of the experience allows audiences to feel that they received something special, more than what was expected. Most characters of pop-up plays are lesser known personae or fictional—witnesses to history rather than the focus of it. We feel this provides visitors the opportunity to experience the subject matter from the viewpoint of people like themselves. This approach also allows an audience to view the subject matter through more diverse sets of eyes, again providing perspectives we feel our visitors can make connections to.

Our *Mission Moon* exhibit gallery, the location for *About A Door*, tells the story of NASA's lunar program through the eyes of astronaut Jim Lovell. The gallery contains a re-creation of the Mission Control environment as it existed in the mid-1960s, along with the Gemini XII space capsule and a tribute to the Apollo I astronauts, also referenced in the play. One of the goals of the gallery is to communicate the tremendous human endeavors required to get to the Moon. Incorporating theater into the gallery allows us to get to the human element of the story immediately and effectively. It also reinforces our institutional commitment to “Doing Science” and STEM education.

After the play is complete we allow the actor to converse freely and address questions or commentary from the audience. Usually the actor remains in character for the free-form discussion, but we do not make that a hard and fast rule.

Editor's note: About A Door was first produced in May 2015 and is the 2016 winner of the Jon Lipsky Award for Excellence in Playwriting.



Challenging Choices: The 2016 Lipsky Award for Excellence in Playwriting

by Douglas Coler, Discovery Place, Inc., Lipsky Selection Chair, and Vice President, IMTAL

This is the third year IMTAL has awarded the Jon Lipsky Award for Excellence in Playwriting. Quality of the submitted scripts has always been high, and the number of submissions has increased each year. This year's submissions included scripts from six distinct and well-known institutions:

- The Indianapolis Children's Museum
- The Milwaukee Zoological Society
- Science Museum of Minnesota
- Minnetrista Historic Site
- The Adler Planetarium
- The Denver Art Museum

Each script delivered a unique insight into the subject of the work; each presented a strong voice and a strong point of view. Some were zany and comic, some were reflective and serious, one gave a firm nod to magical realism, one asked the audience to imagine a devastating side effect of mechanical failure, one presented a heartbreaking look at a friendship riven by racial misunderstanding.

I list these pieces to underscore the breadth and depth of museum theatre, and acknowledge that if the reading committee had been made up of a different set of members, the outcome would very likely be different. And that is the strength of this field: any of the submitted pieces is worthy of being honored for excellence in museum theatre. Each of these is an outstanding example of something vitally important: that museum theatre is worth the investment in time, worth the investment in energy and sweat and tears. That theatre, far from being an afterthought, is in fact a critically important co-resident in the galleries and exhibit halls of our museums, the underwater avenues of our aquariums, the darkened domes of our planetariums, the animal scented pathways of our zoos. Very few exhibits, static or not, are as effective as those which have a supporting story to tell, a live connection to the ideas, the values, the uncomfortable truths, the resilience, the glory, and the wonder of the human spirit.

This year's Jon Lipsky Award for Playwriting Excellence was presented to Chris Bresky of The Adler Planetarium for his play, *About a Door*.

The full text of the script is available in the members-only section of the IMTAL website (imtal-us.org).

The Practical Magic of Museum Theatre We Share, We Play, We Teach



IMTAL Americas Annual Conference Aug. 26–30, 2016 Denver, CO

About a Door: Chris Bresky, 2016 Lipsky Award for Excellence in Playwriting

Interview with Chris Bresky, Adler Planetarium

by Judy Fort Brenneman

JFB: First, tell me a little bit about your background and how you ended up doing this bizarre thing we call museum theatre. Are you primarily a writer or an actor, are you an everything interpreter?

CB: I got my Masters in Performance at the Old Globe Theatre. They have a partnership with the University of San Diego. Our thesis was one person written pieces, and where I wrote a piece with a social justice content about immigration. And it inspired me to write more, both the audience reaction and my journey through the writing and storytelling process, realizing the power of theatre to elevate real human stories. That was the first time that it dawned on me that I had audience members and my family as well championing me to continue playwriting. And so I did. I went on to write several plays and single person shows as well as collaborative pieces. Then I began to teach playwriting. So my love of performance also enhanced my love of teaching, and my love of teaching enhanced my love of teaching through art and theatre.

Acting brought me to the Adler Planetarium. Mark Webb and Sarah Cole [at Adler] had wanted to incorporate museum theatre onto the floor for such a long time. When they learned that I was a playwright as well as a performer, they thought, “What a perfect person to try to move our gallery theatre hopes forward.”

So when this new exhibit came to fruition, *Mission Moon*, about our journey to—well, through—the space program, kind of seen through the eyes of Jim Lovell, we decided that the Gemini Program helped us bridge the gap from the Mercury Program to the Apollo, where we landed on the moon. We rarely hear stories from it. We rarely hear about all the struggles that are a part of it. So that’s where that came about. That’s the whole journey, the arc.

JFB: Did the interpretive planning for *Mission Moon* incorporate in-gallery performance, this idea of the short pop-up theatre from the get-go, as part of the exhibit planning?

CB: As deep down as the construction of the space, no. But in the desire for the storytelling of the exhibit, yes.

As the exhibit was being built, we would walk around and be like, “Well, this is going to be kind of like a replica of Mission Control. We’re going to have this arc here, almost like an amphitheatre.” We sort of felt it out—this might be a good performable space, and this would be a great space to both allow a performance to occur and captivate the audience.

There was a conversation between some of the designers and us in that. We didn’t get everything that we wanted. As we’re trying to push more of this programming to happen at the Adler, there continues to be this conversation. This award and this piece are aiding to move that desire forward.

JFB: Is *About a Door* part of a larger group of pop-up plays performed by different people at different times in this or other exhibits, or is it one-of-a-kind?

CB: Right now the only one we’ve been doing is *About a Door*. There is strong work being done to get the story of the women of Mission Control and the women of the space program, some of the first coders—that story is being crafted and worked on, and that’s being pitched to advancement as well. But right now, we’re leveraging the success of this piece to build out museum theatre at the Adler. It’s been a little frustrating at times. You know you have all of this ready to go, and you even maybe have the talent to do it, but when the money’s not there, it’s hard to keep the ball rolling.

“As we’re trying to push more of this programming to happen at the Adler, there continues to be this conversation. This award and this piece are aiding to move that desire forward.”



Chris Bresky, Adler Planetarium and recipient of the 2016 Lipsky Award

Timothy Moyer

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JFB: Yes. That's something that we hear over and over and over. One of the things that both fascinates me and infuriates me is the fact that we know how effective and successful these programs are at furthering the mission of the sites, and how difficult it is to get upper level management to understand exactly what's going on. Sometimes I think that's because they've seen really, really bad reenactments or something like that. Sometimes I think it's just that they haven't had the experience of actually seeing it when it's done right. And to say, "Oh my gosh, look what our visitors are responding to."

"The donors were very excited about the piece and actually approached our leadership, saying things like, "We should do this more. We need this to happen more."

CB: Yes. This award definitely made the Adler leadership finally stop and say, "I really need to see this piece," because many hadn't. We'd done it for a bunch of donors, and the donors were very excited about the piece and actually approached our leadership, saying things like, "We should do this more. We need this to happen more." The conversations are happening, the movement is slow. But it is moving.

JFB: In *About a Door*, are you the actor or do you have multiple people who play the role?

CB: I was the main performer, and then we wanted the role to be able to be played with any gender, any ethnicity. We have actors at the Adler already, and we started training some of those actors to perform the piece. But then we've run into this funding thing. So it's been a little bit challenging to continue that flow of cycle, but we have brought on three other performers to perform the role.

JFB: How do you make sure that there's consistency in the script, with different actors? Do you do that through the directing and rehearsal process or does it just sort itself out?

CB: As the director and also the playwright, I'm pretty close—I'm very, very close to the piece. And so in the direction, the actors are very open to staying true to the essence of the piece. Chicago's a rich theatre town, and along with traditional stage performers, we are also home to a solid population of improvisors. Some actors are a little more used to a script than others, and other actors aren't used to working with the living, breathing moment to moment "groundling like" audience that can be found

in museum goers. However, *being the playwright*, I do desire a certain amount of adherence to the story being told. And so that has been a desire to use the script to clearly articulate the science, the trajectory of history, and the emotional journey of these astronauts. That's just like with any director and actor, just a navigation of where extemporaneous adds to the storytelling. And because you're still working with a live, breathing audience in museum theatre, you have to adapt to many different iterations of what "audience" is. Improvisors, I have also found, are the most adept at navigating a lively crowd.

JFB: You mentioned that part of the impetus behind this play was looking for stories that aren't told very often. Once you decided, "We're aiming for this category of story"—a story of something that happened between Mercury and Apollo, in this case—how did you decide on the story? And then once you said, "It's going to be this specific story," what was your development process?

CB: Mark Webb and Annie Vedder had done a lot of research about the entire space race. Annie Vedder worked on the storytelling of the entire exhibit along with the exhibit design team. And so both Annie and Mark came to me with this idea that something happens—something's happening here and we didn't know what, exactly. Because we have a very close relationship with Jim Lovell at the Adler, we didn't know if it was going to be something that was going to be Jim Lovell-related. We wanted someone possibly who was there, but at the same time, we didn't want to be married to a single character.

So we first had the idea for Gemini 8. There was a propulsion malfunction that made the capsule spin around out of control, so there was a risky time for a good while. We were sifting through a lot of the transcripts—the Jet Propulsion Lab has some interviews with past astronauts talking about their experiences, and it was very touching because they're talking



Chris Bresky performing *About a Door*

Nathalie Rayter

continued...

about partners that they've lost in the past program through Apollo 1 and some of the unfortunate mishaps that happened during that quick advancement. Oddly enough, a lot hatch-related, actually.

So when looking over these transcripts, Mark came to me and said, "I think I found something." The transcript was from Jim McDivitt, whose partner, Ed White, was the guy who walked in space and who later lost his life in the Apollo 1 fire when the hatch didn't work. James McDivitt is retelling the Gemini

"There was something very human about that moment"

4 launch, and he speaks about the door that didn't open and not only that, but they had to talk to each other. These two men were both trained Air Force test pilots and both rookies in space, and they had to agree to Jim getting the door open and him being pretty sure he could get it closed again. And there was something very personal about that, very human about Mission Control asking if they're ready and technically, they might be, but their ship was not.

And so there was something very human about that moment, and also very simple about the latch of a door. We thought that it related to people of all ages, this idea of entry and exit, this idea of a door. It was so simple, and it was the one thing that was the crux of this entire story—the door handle didn't work. This all revolves around a door, and we realized that to pivot on that was a very easy entry point. And a wonderful visual for the audience, and also what's behind the door, a door that's never opened, and the door that doesn't open—it was something that continued to ring true with the group, and so we decided to go with that.

JFB: The core of the story is the door. On so many levels it's wonderful and brilliant, one of those gifts from the universe—so how did you take that kernel of idea and—?

CB: Right, yes. Then I took the information that they had—the research that they'd gained so far—and then I just dove into those transcripts and documentation, and I poured over the time: where we were, what was happening, the interconnectivity between astronauts in programs before. You know you had Gus Grissom, who was on the ground, and he's the pro. He'd been up two times before on Gemini 3. And so you have to go like, okay, we know what happens and figure out how it happened—but when? What are all the context clues of what this means in the time period? How do we help the audience get a hook into where they are in time?

So I went to into researching, and I just made a draft that was everything and the kitchen sink. That was talking about that it's the first time we walk in space. Well, let's talk about the space suit. The space suit has never had to go outside the door before.

Let's talk about what it's made out of. Talk about why it's made of that, about micrometeorites that zoom through space at ludicrous speeds and worries about puncturing a space suit.

So I drenched it with facts and information and—they just wanted everything; just give us a draft that's pretty much everything. And that's great because that's how I normally write. I usually overwrite, and then the true writing is the editing and rewriting; 99% of writing is rewriting. We fleshed out both history and science, made sure all the sources were true and all the science matched up with time. Then we kept on whittling that down until we got a true work.

And this is the first time they had done something like that, or at least this team had done something like that, so it's definitely a dance, right? I have my playwriting background, another person has museum experience—like a planetarium theatre background and a star show are not the same as a museum theatre piece. We do have many things we can learn from one another. We were also dealing with scientists, astronomers, and historians. They're also not playwrights, but they are super-smart about their content, and so it was a dance. They pushed me to be on my game with content and in-depth, well-supported research, and we ended up going over it at the very end with a fine-toothed comb, word by word, line by line and trying to craft the best piece with everyone. It was a great challenge and learning experience.

JFB: When did the show go live?

CB: I think about a year ago now.

JFB: Is it becoming one of those things where people

"I usually overwrite, and then the true writing is the editing and rewriting; 99% of writing is rewriting."

walk in the door and they know they want to see it, or is it still one of these surprise things where it's catch as catch can, and you keep an eye out for when people are clustering in a particular area, and then you say, "Here we are"?

CB: Right now, it's catch as catch can. We do special events. Sometimes we do an adult event called Adler After Dark, and we do it then. And we'll do it on high peak times or if we know a school group is going to be there that day, and we've done it for donor events as well. But right now it's not a scheduled thing. It's a pop-up.

continued...



Chris Bresky

JFB: What's your advice to other people out there who are trying to find their way to superior play writing and really cool museum theatre?

CB: I was really grateful that museum professionals asked a theatre professional to help them with theatre. I think that a lot of the museum theatre that I've seen done that might not be exemplary storytelling or missed the mark, there was someone who was passionate about the subject but hadn't ever written a play before, or hadn't ever worked with an actor before, or both. And there are so many undergraduate programs or even graduate programs both in playwriting and theatre where people are hungry to be inspired by content.

I think that if it's a budgetary thing—and I'm pushing this with my own institution—if it's a budgetary thing, you can work with pros or training pros who have devoted their life to exemplary storytelling. When it comes to theatre, I think challenging them to work with the scientists and work with the museum professionals, and all bring the top of their game to the story. I think that that was a key element that happened in this collaboration. And I'm grateful that I was able to be a part of that.

And then of course, we're here at the Adler, so we're able to go to professional scientists and the professional museum educators. So all those people get to cross their own personal Ts, and that's why I feel that this project was really strong. So that's another one.

Also, utilizing the parameters that are given to you will only make your project better. If you don't have the space, if you don't have the mic, if you don't have the whatever, let it be a good challenge, as opposed to a setback.

And share it with as many people as possible at the institution and foster as much enthusiasm as you can about the piece. When I had a floor facilitator, then other members of the museum behind me were excited about, "What was that, that you were working on after the museum closed yesterday?" Or, "That seemed really interesting, what was that?" When we talk about moving forward, I think that this is something that is told

differently if an actor does it or someone who is more of a trained facilitator does it. There's a level of consistency that could shift, and I think of finding other ways to write it, maybe like duo. There's a wonderful piece that was presented by Accokeek Foundation. They have this Colonial Time Warp and a facilitator who helps you travel in time, and then you met this actor who plays a slave. And so you've traveled back in time, and you have someone to help you engage in that moment and teach you or maybe even help engage in debate. And then also someone who was helping, who was grounding you in the world through a human story. And I love that. I talked to both Sarah Cole and Mark Webb about it, and they have a strong desire, too, to find ways where we don't have to be so separate. Where we can enjoy that power of collaboration and work with facilitators and actors as professionals in their fields to come together to create strong pieces.

So that's a hope. The fire needs to get roaring, I think, a little more before I can keep dreaming so big. But I'm hoping also getting teens inspired by that can help foster that excitement.

JFB: Any final thoughts?

CB: At the Awards Luncheon, Catherine Hughes said the one thing she really enjoyed about my piece was that covered all ten of Jon's lessons of museum theatre. You know: "One through nine: don't be boring," and "ten, also find the education or be educational." And that was one thing about the beauty of getting to front-load the writing process with all content, all facts, all stuff, is that when we got to whittle away, then we started finding where the story was.

There's a writing adage that I live by in playwriting called, "Get in late and leave early." Get in writing, hit the ground running, allow your audience enough information to figure out what's going on, but not too much to get ahead of you and maybe even a little bit to catch up, so you're always one step ahead of them, and then leave them wanting more. I feel like with this piece, I definitely enjoyed the sense of getting in late. We're already in the midst of it all.

In playwriting in general but I think also in museum theatre, once we know who you are, then let's figure out what you want and why you want it so badly, and then we care about it. We'll learn and we'll listen if we care.

THE PRACTICAL MAGIC OF MUSEUM THEATRE:

We Share, We Play, We Teach

by Judy Fort Brenneman

As we go to press (or its digital equivalent), the deadline for the IMTAL Americas conference hotel block of rooms is rapidly approaching. Now that the fiscal year has turned for many of our members, registration is picking up. The conference committee, headed by IMTAL VP Douglas Coler, is gathering goodies for goody bags, figuring out logistics (we'll be at four—count 'em, FOUR—musuems) and other details to make your stay in Denver as full of “eeeeees” as possible: **enjoyable, exciting, entertaining, educational, emotionally engaging, and EXCELLENT!**

Highlights

August 26:

Welcome reception on Friday evening (a chance to get acclimated, acquainted, and re-acquainted)

August 27:

The Power of Serious Play, keynote by Jeff Wirth of Interactive PlayLab & author of *Interactive Acting*
A Visit with Madame Curie, performance by guest artist Susan Marie Frontczak, Storysmith

Workshops by both Jeff and Susan Marie, each presented twice, so you can go to both!

The Co-creative Audience: workshop by Jeff Wirth

Audiences are no longer satisfied with observing. They want to engage, to explore, to impact. This workshop offers practical, field-tested techniques to engage audiences as co-creators in the interpretive process. Learn how to establish instant rapport, endow collaborative roles, integrate improvisation with interpretive material, and transform passive spectators into co-creative spect-actors.

Bring Your Historical Character to Life: workshop by Susan Marie Frontczak

Walk through an overview of the process of developing a living history. We'll discuss a wide range of ways to implement Living History, from relating a historical anecdote (storytelling style) to assuming a historical persona in an informal setting to prepared in-character programs for a captive audience. You'll practice specific approaches for monologue composition and delivery that can help you bring your historical character to life, such as sensory detail, emotions, historical context, dialog, word choice, and specific instances. And we'll discuss aspects to consider when preparing for a question and answer in character.

August 28:

Denver Art Museum *and* History Colorado Center: performances, presentations, and more!

August 29:

Life-size dinosaur puppets!

August 30:

Entertainment, Education, and the Power of Relationships in Museums, endnote by David Allison, author of *Living History: Effective Costumed Interpretation and Enactment at Museums and Historic Sites*

Full schedule on next page.

IMTAL-Americas 2016 Conference: Four full days of sharing, playing, and teaching at some of Colorado's top museums:

Littleton Museum (conference host) <http://www.littletongov.org/?page=129>

Denver Museum of Nature and Science <http://dmns.org/>

Denver Art Museum <http://denverartmuseum.org/>

History Colorado Center <http://historycoloradocenter.org/>

REGISTER: <http://imtal-us.org/event-2201970>

HOTEL RESERVATIONS: Residence Inn, Downtown Denver <http://tinyurl.com/jbwg4>

Book by July 25 for the conference rate of \$179 per night.

THE PRACTICAL MAGIC OF MUSEUM THEATRE: We Share, We Play, We Teach

Schedule (subject to change)

Friday, August 26, 2016	
Time & Location TBD	Welcome Reception
Saturday, August 27, 2016: Littleton Museum	
9:00-10:30am Lecture Hall	Welcome by Douglas Coler, Vice President, IMTAL Keynote: <i>The Power of Serious Play</i> by Jeff Wirth
10:30-10:45am Lecture Hall	Break
10:45-11:45am North & South Classroom	<i>A Visit with Madame Curie</i> : Chautauqua-style performance by Susan Marie Frontczak
11:45-12:45pm Lecture Hall	Lunch (included)
12:45-2:45pm Lecture Hall North & South Classroom	<i>The Co-creative Audience</i> : workshop by Jeff Wirth AND <i>Bring Your Historical Character to Life</i> : workshop by Susan Marie Frontczak
2:45-3:00pm Lecture Hall	Break
3:00-5:00pm Lecture Hall North & South Classroom	<i>The Co-creative Audience</i> : workshop by Jeff Wirth AND <i>Bring Your Historical Character to Life</i> : workshop by Susan Marie Frontczak
5:00pm	Return to Hotel
Sunday, August 28, 2016: Denver Art Museum & History Colorado Center	
9:00-9:15am Classroom	Denver Art Museum (DAM) Welcome: Lindsay Genshaft
9:15-10:15am Classroom	<i>Children's Museum Theatre: Purposeful Magic</i> Cindy-Lou Edwards, Long Island Children's Museum and Cheryl Kessler, Blue Scarf Consulting, LLC. The IMLS-funded Theater Programs Expansion Project was a practical solution that had a magical effect on children, families, schools, the greater community, and the artists.
10:15-10:30am	Break
10:30-11:00am Auditorium	DAM Performance: <i>Art Emergency, CODE RED... and Yellow and Gold and Emerald and Cerulean Blue!</i>
11:00-11:15am	Break
11:15-11:30am Level 1-Family Activity Cart	DAM Performance: <i>Foxy & Shmoxy: Art Detectives</i>
11:30-12:15pm Classroom	DAM Post Show Talk Back/Discussion w/Lindsay Genshaft & Actors
12:15-1:15pm	Lunch (on your own)/Walk to History Colorado Center
1:15-1:30pm Classroom	History Colorado Center (HCC) Welcome: Alison Salutz
1:30-2:45pm Classroom	HCC Showcase and Discussion: <i>Memory Kitchen, Sydney Sales, and Ditch Boss</i>
2:45-3:00pm	Break

Sunday, August 28, 2016: Denver Art Museum & History Colorado Center	
3:00-4:00pm Classroom	<i>Benevolent Theft: Adopt, Adapt, Improve</i> Douglas Coler, Discovery Place How do we adopt and adapt the pieces that inspire us to create? How do we honor those who created before us? The answer may lie in how we steal, as much as what we steal.
4:00-5:00pm Classroom	<i>Souvenirs from Tomorrow</i> Kirk German, NYU Help develop this new script-in-process that strives to transform the practicalities of historical research into the magic of live performance.
5:00pm	Return to Hotel
Monday, August 29, 2016: Littleton Museum	
9:00-11:00am	<i>Bringing Science to Life! Biomechanics and Puppetry</i> Ilana Gustafson, Eli Presser, Brian Meredith, Betsy Zajko, and Jonathan C. K. Williams, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles The “practical magic” of museum theatre is in the synthesis of research, skill, and true artistry which can take guests on a magical journey of suspended disbelief and wonder. Explore how to navigate the line between scientific accuracy and artistic license to provide the most enriching experience for museum guests (life size dinosaur puppets!).
11:00-11:15am Lecture Hall	Break
11:15-12:15pm	<i>MTVYA: Engaging the Youngest Visitors</i> Roberta Gasbarre, Smithsonian Institution Finding the magic in museum content can be difficult with our youngest constituents. Learn how the Smithsonian’s Discovery Theater’s vibrant early childhood focus is growing multigenerational audiences and bonding with diverse communities through museum theatre and object based learning.
12:15-1:15pm Lecture Hall	Lunch (included)
1:15-2:15pm	<i>Post-Show 2.0</i> Todd Norris and Aaron Bonds, Children’s Museum of Indianapolis Monologues with a different kind of post-show discussion result in richer family learning moments that extend the power of the piece well beyond museum walls and makes difficult subject matter relatable to all age groups.
2:15-2:30pm Lecture Hall	Break
2:30-3:30pm	<i>Reaching Goals: Assessing and Improving Programming for Children and Families</i> Aaron Bonds, Carey Meier, and Todd Norris, Children’s Museum of Indianapolis How do you know if you are reaching the intended goals for your program? How do you incorporate family learning goals and objectives and still maintain the fun?
3:30-5:30pm	<i>Colonial Williamsburg Foundation: Journey to Redemption and the Creation of Devised Theatre; Our Process</i> Mary Carter, Stephen Seals, Katrinah Lewis, Antoinette Brennan, Corinne Dame, Jeremy Morris, Jamar Jones, and Dave Catanese, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation This devised theatre piece was born from the challenges Colonial Williamsburg’s African American actor/interpreters face portraying the enslaved, the challenges their White actor/interpreters face portraying masters, and the toll these challenges take on the ensemble relationship.
5:30pm	Return to Hotel

Tuesday, August 30, 2016: Denver Museum of Nature and Science	
8:30-9:30am Studios 102 & 103	Denver Museum of Nature & Science (DMNS) Welcome: Justine Zollo (8:30-9:00am) Light breakfast, tea & coffee, plus IMTAL/Educator Performer Mingle Enactor Program Overview: Jennifer Moss Logan (9:00-9:30am)
9:30-10:30am Studios 102 & 103	Endnote: <i>Entertainment, Education, and the Power of Relationships in Museums</i> by David Allison
10:30-10:45am	Break
10:45-12:15pm Shows in Galleries	10:30am: <i>So You Think You Can Fly</i> —Science Atrium (Level 1) 11:00am: <i>Astronaut on the Surface</i> —Space Odyssey (Level 1) 11:30am: TBD 10:30-12:00pm: Enactors, Ongoing, Diorama Halls (Level 2 or 3)
12:15-1:00pm Studios 102 & 103	Lunch (included)
1:00-1:15pm Studios 102 & 103	<i>Introduction for Destination Solar System—Managing a Cosmic Scale Production</i> Mark Webb & Samantha Richards, Adler Planetarium Destination Solar System uses planetarium technology to create the scenic environment for a theatrical production. It would run 3 to 4 times a day for 2 years or more and be the premier experience at the museum—but none of us had actually attempted something like this before. Would it work?
1:15-1:30pm	Break & Walk to Planetarium
1:30-2:00pm Gates Planetarium, Space Odyssey, Level 1	Performance: <i>Destination Solar System</i>
2:00-2:30pm Studios 102 & 103	<i>Wrap-Up w/Q&A for Destination Solar System—Managing a Cosmic Scale Production</i> Mark Webb, Adler Planetarium
2:30-3:00pm	Wrap Up/Closing: Douglas Coler
3:15pm	Return to Hotel

Auditions, Calls for Submissions & Announcements

Auditions and Cool Events for Museum Theatre; Calls for Submissions

Calls for Submissions

Scripts on a science-related topic or person, 20–45 minutes in length, no more than 2 actors, for Carpenter Science Theatre Company’s quarterly staged readings of “science theatre” scripts at Science Museum of Virginia’s Lunch Box Science events. Submissions are accepted on an ongoing basis; royalty payment of \$50.00 for single staged reading performance of accepted scripts.

Email copy of your script to lgard@smv.org OR submit hard copy to:

Larry Gard
4716 Scouters Pl
Chesterfield, VA 23832

OR to

Larry Gard
Science Museum of Virginia
2500 West Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23220



Submit articles, news, and ideas for *Insights!*

Send us your article, opinion, or news to publications@imtal-us.org **no later than Oct 10, 2016** for the Fall 2016 issue.

(It doesn't have to be perfect; it just needs to be reasonably coherent. If we have questions, we'll contact you.)

Fall 2016 issue: Practical Magic of Museum Theatre and 2016 IMTAL Conference report (deadline Oct. 10, 2016)

Winter 2016 issue: Yes, it works: Evaluation of Museum Theatre (deadline Jan. 2, 2017)

Want to write for *Insights!*?

Short, long, article, essay, opinion piece, announcement, photo

—if it has to do with Museum Theatre, we're interested!

Submission guidelines are now online:

<http://imtal-us.org/publications>

(the 2016-17 editorial schedule will be posted soon)

Conferences, Workshops, and Events

July 25, 2016

Deadline to reserve your hotel room for the IMTAL conference

(Rooms in the IMTAL block are available on first-come, first-served basis.)

[Residence Inn, Downtown Denver](#)

Or call 303-396-3444 or 800-593-2809 and ask for IMTAL group room reservation.

August 26, 2016

(specific date and time during the conference TBD)
IMTAL board meeting, Denver, CO

August 26-30, 2016

IMTAL-Americas annual conference

Denver and Littleton, CO

REGISTRATION <http://imtal-us.org/event-2201970>

Be Included on a Map of Conservation Theatres

Bricken Sparacino is creating a map of Conservation Theatres to share with teachers, community leaders, and others who bring groups on field trips or have tours visit their facilities. Conservation Theatre uses theatre as a teaching tool to inspire young people and their families to love wild things and wild places, helping to create the next generation of conservationists. Here is what the map looks like so far.

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=zYPl9ZckjnWc.k7YnqoF4Gjgk>

If you feel that your work fits under the Conservation Theatre umbrella, please fill out this survey and she will add you to the map:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1zDJ8t1tN2Aduo6xBaTO_QL0u5eyYUG5X3KIwcUyVSxI/viewform?usp=send_form

Once it is finished, it will be searchable on a blog and Facebook.

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**Doug also continues as IMTAL Website and Social Media guru. Please send questions about such things to him at web@imtal-us.org.*

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://imtal-us.org/home>, or contact a board member via email.

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