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professional inspiring challenging
Sister (Hannah Kenah) and The Magnate (E. Jason Liebrecht) drive to the Queen’s charity ball in this scene from Stop Hitting Yourself, a devised production created by the Austin, TX-based Rude Mechs, which was commissioned by LCT3/Lincoln Center and premiered at the Claire Tow Theater in January 2014. The scene begins with an object-based movement sequence featuring the entire cast creating the “car” they are driving. Sister doesn’t want to go to the ball, and in this photo has grabbed the steering wheel to drive the car off the road. In front of them is a standing fan to create wind. The production team also included performers Thomas Graves, Heather Hanna, Joey Hood, Lana Lesley and Paul Soileau; director Shawn Sides; writer Kirk Lynn; costume designer Emily Rebholz; lighting designer Brian H Scott; scenic designer Mimi Lien; composer/sound designer Graham Reynolds; production supervisor Madge Darlington; and stage manager Dave Polato. More info: www.rudemechs.com (Photo by Erin Baiano; cover design by Deanna Thompson; Photoshop work by Garland Gooden)
Why Read Plays?

Sitting down and reading plays, whether an important new title or an old chestnut that might be discussed in conversations with friends, is essential to becoming an informed theatre artist.

Years ago, I challenged myself to read the entire canon of Pulitzer Prize-winning plays since the award’s inception in 1917. This simple and achievable challenge resulted in the reading of truly rich and wonderful 20th and 21st century American plays. One of my personal challenges now is to read all of the Pulitzer Prize nominees in any given year.

As a professor of theatre, I require students in every theatre course I teach to read at least two to three plays they have not read previously. In addition, I created a required, seminar-styled Dramatic Literature and Criticism course for both majors and minors. In this course, students engage each week in spirited discussions of two plays written in the last 20 years. The students quickly learn that a steady diet of reading plays increases one’s understanding of dramatic structure and the elements that constitute a good play.

All of this prodding of our artistic minds helps to further cultivate and fuel our artistic literacy as theatre professionals. Another by-product of reading plays is that we grow better at visualizing plays and what they might look like on stage. I also bet there’s not one among us who reads a play without becoming invested in it as a vicarious participant. Whether we read the play through the lens of acting, directing or designing, or as an important literary form, we must envision the play.

I challenge any aspiring theatre professional (or seasoned theatre artist of any age) to read one play that you have never read previously each and every week. In a year, you will have read more than 50 plays. The math becomes more interesting when you multiply that number by 5, 10 or 20 years.

Whether you choose the works of a single playwright, plays from a specific era, or plays of a similar style, my challenge to you is to commit yourself to developing a lifelong habit of reading plays.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor:

I am truly saddened that the article “Straight Acting for the Gay Actor: Advice on ‘Butching It Up’ to Book the Role” (Winter 2015 Southern Theatre) was published this month and that this line of thought is still acceptable in 2015. An article entitled, “Gay Acting for the Straight Actor: Advice on ‘Femme-ing It Up’ to Book the Role” would be just as misguided. It does not matter that the author is gay; what does matter is that he was given extremely poor and frankly homophobic advice from a director in his early career. Whether playing gay or straight, no one is a “white canvas” which a director can shape, but one should be striving to share his or her true self in relationship to the role, which a director can then highlight and celebrate.

Generalizations about how straight men act (more grounded walk, less diction, the need to recreate what the author calls society’s “ideal male voice,” gain more weight, etc.) are not helpful to anyone. In the same respect, any director who encourages someone to add a sibilant “s”, to over-pronounce words, or to float around the stage to act gay is playing into stereotypes that are neither specific to a character’s wants and needs nor to making the character more honest. The author even does up to 100 pushups before a performance to exhaust his body and in turn prevent his “gay” habit of over-gesticulating to occur on stage. This kind of forced physicality to prevent a behavior is right from the playbook of organizations who profess to cure gays.

I encourage Mr. McMullen, and all artists, to work with colleagues who will honor you for who you are on and off stage and not ask you to play stereotypes – unless it’s to reveal how close-minded and damaging they are to all of us.

Michael Baron
Artistic Director
Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma
Oklahoma City, OK

Have an opinion on a story in Southern Theatre?
Send your letter to Deanna Thompson at deanna@setc.org
Theatre is a collaborative art form that requires individuals with many different areas of expertise to come together for the sake of a single performance. In this issue of Southern Theatre, we celebrate the scope of our work with a medley of articles designed to provide something for everyone.

Devised theatre is the subject of our cover story. No longer used just in avant-garde or experimental productions, devised work is becoming a way for mainstream theatres to inspire creativity and attract audiences. Tessa Carr shares four ways of developing a devised production, along with examples of the process used by groups that have embraced each storytelling method.

Digital is the way of the future in our world, and actors and their teachers need to take note. Yes, today’s actors still need a traditional headshot, but they also need a digital reel—whether they plan to act in theatre only or in film and television as well. J.J. Ruscella provides insights from talent agents and casting directors on the importance of reels and how to develop one, whether you have existing clips of your work or not.

No matter what you do, study or teach in the field of theatre, chances are good that you have occasionally encountered conflict you have not been able to resolve easily. In a two-story package, we offer strategies to defuse disagreements in the theatre. Bill Gelber shares a technique used at Texas Tech University to encourage collaboration during the production process, using the procedures outlined in Stephen Covey’s book, The 3rd Alternative: Solving Life’s Most Difficult Problems. In the second story, attorney Mary Lynn Bates outlines the benefits of using mediation—which is not the same thing as arbitration—when efforts to resolve conflict fail.

How often do you read a new play, either a recent work or an older play you have never read before? In our regular “400 Words” column, Richard Major challenges all of us to get into the play reading habit.

Anyone planning a new outdoor theatre or hoping to re-invigorate an existing one will want to read our “Words, Words, Words…” column in this issue. Frank Mohler reviews the new book, Outdoor Theatre Facilities: A Guide to Planning and Building Outdoor Theatres, which presents 21st century advice on constructing an outdoor theatre.

Grab your favorite beverage, settle into a comfortable chair, and take time to peruse the pages of this issue of Southern Theatre. You will be glad you did!

Jack Benjamin, SETC President
DEVELISED THEATRE

Drive Creativity by Inviting a Production from Concept
Participants to Steer to Performance

by Tessa W. Carr

From the development of The Laramie Project, to off-Broadway productions, to premieres at the Kennedy Center, to the inclusion of devised work as a category of adjudication for KC ACTF, devised productions are becoming a mainstream offering in American theatre. Devising is not a recent addition to American theatre – it has long been a part of avant-garde and experimental practice – but what is new is the more widespread use of the technique in educational, professional and even community theatre settings.

Even as interest has grown, many theatres, schools and individuals still shy away from creating devised works, preferring to produce traditional plays. In some quarters, devised productions are dismissed as lower-quality productions, not fully “realized” as theatrical offerings, more concerned with feeling and expression than crafted production. However, those who have embraced devising see it as an innovative way of doing theatre that is not always easy, but opens doors to creativity and teaches individuals a new way to see a process through from idea to performance.

As Alison Oddey, the author of Devising Theatre, a classic text of this field, writes, “Devised theatre encourages and supports the notion of a group of people having the opportunity to be artists in their own right, to discover their own creativity in form and content.”

This opens the door for designers, actors, playwrights and other team members to have a larger stake and say in the production process.

WHAT COUNTS AS DEVISED THEATRE?

Devised theatre isn’t easily defined, but a good start for a working definition is Baz Kershaw’s explanation in the Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance: “An approach to making performance and theatre that depends on the participation of all the producing group in all or most
stages of the creative process, from conception to presentation.”

Devised work may begin and end without a written text. It may be inspired by a written text and contain pieces of the original text in the work. It comes from dreams, obsessions, rants, photographs, smells – well, you get the picture. It comes from everywhere and anywhere that creates inspiration. Simply put, devised theatre begins with an idea and then the creators start to investigate the best form to bring that idea to performance. The interim steps can include physical theatre activities, choreographic structures, multi-media additions, musical composition, traditional playwriting, directing techniques – anything that moves the work from inspiration to production.

With roots in dance and socially conscious performance movements in the 20th century, devised work provides an inherently democratic method for production. Over the years, devised productions have opened dialogues in communities, given performance access to many voices that are not represented in theatrical literature, created new structures for performance, and have even served as a means of conflict resolution.

Because of the potentially low technical demands, devised productions can fill a spot in a season when rest is needed for the shops and the budget, while simultaneously creating huge audience buy-in. Conversely, devised theatre can also offer the opportunity for technical innovation and serve as a laboratory for trying new design and technology ideas.

**HOW DO YOU DO IT?**

Catching the buzz, theatre practitioners ask, “How do you do it?” Again, no simple answer. There are as many possibilities for creating work as there are people doing it. Having numerous tools at your disposal can help the practitioner figure out what works best for him or her. Favorite resources from devising practitioners include texts from performance studies, directing, performance art, oral history, performance ethnography, Theatre of the Oppressed, and performance of autobiography. However, those who do devised work say each individual must find the method that works best for him or her.

**Method 1: Ensemble Collaboration**

Devising usually takes a village. Many devised projects begin with a group of people who want to make a performance around a particularly inspiring event, idea, or – well, anything really. From this point forward, the process is as varied as the participants. Some groups assign traditional theatre roles – such as costume designer or sound designer – from the beginning, but others allow the talents of each collaborator to emerge through the process.

The Austin-based Rude Mechs (originally known as the Rude Mechanicals) have been at the head of the push for the recognition of devised theatre for nearly two decades. Recently, the company created *Stop Hitting Yourself*, a piece that was commissioned by Lincoln Center’s LCT3 (an initiative to develop new theatrical voices and audiences) and premiered at the LCT3 venue, the Claire Tow Theatre. The Rude Mechs’ Robert S. Fisher, Lana Lesley, Hannah Kenah, E. Jason Liebrecht and Thomas Graves (left to right) appear in Now Now Oh Now, an intimate play for 30 audience members. Lesley and Graves are co-producing artistic directors of the Rude Mechs, along with Kirk Lynn, Madge Darlington and Shawn Sides.
Mechs’ website describes Stop Hitting Yourself as “part Pygmalion, part Busby Berkley, part self-help lexicon – all while dancing around a queso fountain” and notes that it “borrows from the plots of 1930s musicals to dig into the contemporary conservative dilemma: how to honor steely individualism without disavowing the virtue of charity.”

The devising of the Rude Mechs’ Now Now Oh Now, which is touring, began in 2012 and was developed further while the company was in residence with PlayMakers Repertory Company at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for two weeks in May 2014. Now Now Oh Now is an intimate play for 30 audience members which “immerses the participants in an interactive puzzle reflecting on the challenges of navigating a world driven by competition, pleasure and random events.”

Kirk Lynn, one of the Rude Mechs’ five co-producing artistic directors, says devising “found” his company, rather than the artists setting out to do devised performances.

“Devised work got involved with us,” he says. “We were going to be normal and good and honest, but it kept showing up, like a feral cat that liked the fishy smell of our work. If you read a lot of books or get interested in how performance is made in other countries or in other times, you will attract devised work to you. Beware. Lock your doors and stay inside the theatre if you want to be safe from new ways of working.”

A good example of the Rude Mechs’ use of ensemble collaboration is The Method Gun, which premiered at the Humana Festival of New American Plays in 2010 to critical and audience acclaim. The Rude Mechs began with the idea of a legendary acting coach named Stella Burden, whose system, “The Approach,” infused “sex, death and violence” into every acting choice. The company members then threw darts at a map to decide where research on this legend should be carried out, and proceeded to create archival documents from her company and other pieces of ephemera to build the narrative around. The piece created a metaphorical conversation about process, training and representation.

Lana Lesley, another co-producing artistic director of the Rude Mechs, says the draw of the company’s devised work for her is its collaborative nature.

“What I love about how we create is the gradual forming of a collective aesthetic that really mirrors the passions of the people in the room,” Lesley says. “We operate by consensus and really ask that everyone in the room engage and find agreement on
Method 2: From Existing Texts

Devised practice can serve as a method for adapting and reconfiguring existing texts that were not originally written for the stage. This opens a wealth of opportunities for devisers who feel drawn to poetry, prose or works of nonfiction.

Beth Homan, associate professor of theatre arts at Catawba College in Salisbury, NC, has twice collaborated with Janice Fuller, professor and writer-in-residence. They collaborated first on an original work, *Machine Play*, and next on an adaptation of William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying.* For the latter project, Fuller began with her adapted text. Then the well-crafted, final script was developed through a workshopping process that included devising sessions with the students. During the workshopping of the play, Homan was able to take students for a four-day intensive with members of Tectonic Theatre Project, the groundbreaking creators of *The Laramie Project,* to fine-tune their approach to Tectonic’s Moment Work as a devising method. Tectonic defines Moment Work as “a unit of theatrical time” that has dynamic change and furthers the dramatic action or storyline. The focus is on a small unit that is then layered and sequenced to create larger moments.

Jesse Siak appears in a devised production at Catawba College that was an adaptation of William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying.* Students participated in a four-day intensive with members of Tectonic Theatre Project, the groundbreaking creators of *The Laramie Project,* during development of the play.

'We operate by consensus and really ask that everyone in the room engage and find agreement on the major decisions surrounding new work creation – content, style, mode, structure, design. It's a “no-artist-left-behind” style of working.'
- Lana Lesley, Rude Mechs
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Homan originally became involved in devising by learning the Viewpoints technique in acting and directing classes and using it as a means to create collaborative staging of existing texts. Viewpoints training breaks down the creation of performance into its constituent elements, such as space, shape, time and emotion, and explores the basics of each – forcing the artists to work from a deconstructed and changing point of view rather than using traditional methods of putting a production together. Expanding beyond Viewpoints, Homan attended the LaMama International Directors’ Symposium where she studied Moment Work with Leigh Fondakowski, a founding member of Tectonic Theatre Project. Homan continued to teach herself about the variety of techniques used by devising ensembles while creating a course on Collaborative Aesthetics and Ensemble Techniques.

Homan notes that devising isn’t just about the script that ultimately comes from the process. “A crucial piece that comes out of devising is that students understand when you are doing The Crucible or any other piece, you need to make a whole lot of choices on stage that no one is going to see,” Homan says. “The right choice is not always the first choice, and some failure is inevitable. Precision is so important!”

She notes that Moment Work explicitly teaches this precision: “If you lift your hand in a particular way – it matters. Everything an audience sees communicates with them.”

**Method 3: From Inspirational Artifacts**

Artifacts, including photographs, letters, historical documents and artwork, can serve as inspiration for a devised theatre project. The latest work of Cindy Gendrich, professor of theatre and director of IPLACe: The Interdisciplinary Performance and the Liberal Arts Center at Wake Forest University, was inspired by the diary and remaining writings of Petr Ginz, a young boy who became a leader in the Terezin concentration camp (of I Never Saw Another Butterfly fame) before his death in Auschwitz.

The script for this project, Embers and Stars: The Story of Petr Ginz, which had its world premiere in Winston-Salem, NC, in February 2014. Cindy Gendrich, professor of theatre at Wake Forest University, and Andrew White, artistic director of Lookingglass Theatre, used Viewpoints work and other techniques with students to develop the devised work.
in a print format. After finding inspiration for the project in a documentary film made by Churchill Roberts and Wake Forest documentary filmmakers Sandy Dickson, Cindy Hill and Cara Pilson, Gendrich and White used the documentarians’ source material as a starting point.

Gendrich then taught a full-semester class in 2012 with the goal of ending the semester with some form of performance based on the material. Pleased with the semester-long experiment, which included Viewpoints work and Moment Work as well as other techniques, Gendrich ended the semester with 40 minutes of strong material.

Next, Gendrich, scenic designer Rob Eastman-Mullins and a student collaborator travelled to Prague to immerse themselves further in the world of the title character. After returning home, Gendrich and White reworked the semester’s material into a rough text. The work then went through a standard playwriting process for new play development, with changes made throughout the rehearsal process.

Gendrich, who does not consider herself a playwright, felt she succeeded with the project simply by completing the devising process. However, she and White continued to work on the play, taking it through a traditional play development series, reworking and rewriting scenes. This led to the development of a final script for the world premiere event in February 2014.

While she was satisfied with the outcome, Gendrich says that she “would not do it again as playwright and director. I was wearing too many hats at once, and I found I was fighting with myself all the time!”

Some critics of devised work suggest that nontraditionally scripted work is inherently inferior. Gendrich disagrees, noting that the process of developing a devised work can be a rigorous process.

“We’ve all seen way too many bad productions of great material,” she says. “A great play becomes a great play because there is a rigorous process that goes into making the work. Anyone who works through a mindful, adventurous and meticulous devising process knows what goes into picking and expressing the exact right image. If we actually believe in what we say our mission is – to teach theatre artists – we have to give them ALL the tools. Otherwise, I think we are doing them a disservice.”

(Continued on Page 14)
Method 4: From Autobiographical Material

Solo performance from autobiographical experiences is a powerful form that gives a voice and the stage to people whose stories might not be heard otherwise. Tim Miller, the cofounder of the performance spaces PS 122 in New York and Highways in Santa Monica, CA, has been creating solo autobiographical work and facilitating devised work with others for nearly three decades.

Miller, one of the four artists (the NEA 4) who sued the U.S. government over First Amendment infringement in the 1990s when their individual National Endowment for the Arts grants were taken from them on the grounds of indecency, is best known for his works My Queer Body and Glory Box. However, Miller also has worked with literally thousands of other people throughout his career to help them find creative empowerment.

Devising theatre gives young artists a way to take charge of their careers, rather than sitting back and waiting for calls, Miller says.

“It can create a tremendous fire in the belly of a young artist in that they see that this is a way that they want to make work,” he says. “They see that they have agency, and they are not waiting to be cast or waiting for someone to write something that works for them – that they can bring their vision forward.”

The devising process can give them an opportunity to overcome the lack of diversity in theatre literature and casting, he notes.

“How many plays by women are produced?” Miller asks. “How many plays by people of color are produced? This area of devised performance has become the de facto diversity discourse in theatre and performance studies.”

In his work with groups in communities and schools, Miller draws upon the rich experiences in the lives of workshop participants and pushes students to discover the thing that must be said at this particular moment in their lives.

“I have such complete faith that the piece is there before we even start,” he says. “It is there in their Facebook posts, in their journals, in the late-night talk that they had with a friend the night before, and I think that people sense that I trust them. It’s our birthright, it’s our natural state of being, to come together, make things quickly, and perform them.”

Miller says devised work offers enormous positives over traditional productions for performers, theatres and audiences.

“It is dramatically cheaper, costs almost nothing, with minimal sets and costumes, no royalties, and maximum audience buy-in,” he says. “If you are doing a piece with 25 people out of their experiences and things they care about, then their investment
is so intense. Usually the audience engagement is incredibly strong.”

He notes that audiences have been packed for the mainstage devised pieces he has done on campuses.

“At Fort Lewis College (in Colorado), they had more people come and see the devised work than any nonmusical play that had ever been staged,” he says. “And many of those people were new audience members who came because they sensed that something was happening out of their student body.”

If you are considering making devised work, Miller believes that anyone has the tools to begin, and if you gain the tools of theatrical crafting, then you are fully equipped to make devised work.

“The key is that you walk into the studio and you know that there is this beautiful treasure chest of these people, whether they are young people or older people, or able to walk around, or in wheelchairs, or queer, or not,” he says. “There is just this incredible wealth in the room of the dreams they had last night, the last time their hearts were broken, the things that they imagine they will be doing in 10 years. Whatever you do that starts to tap the heat of that – like an artesian well – you are going to start finding the mechanisms for those stories to come forward and to find the form for presenting them. You ask the questions about linear narrative, catharsis, what do we want the audience to go through – the same questions that you ask of any play. For me, it really isn’t that different.”

**DEVISING THE FUTURE**

In a world of collaged images, mashed-up music hits, and cross-pollinating art of all sorts, devised theatre’s growth is not surprising. If you are looking to expand your collaborative practice and potentially grow audiences that want innovation and engagement, devised performance offers an exciting challenge for a company of any size or funding level. The methods outlined here are only a few. The world of devised theatre waits for you to bring the next innovation.

Tessa W. Carr is an assistant professor of theatre at Auburn University in Auburn, AL, and the artistic director of Mosaic Theatre Company. She is also a member of the Editorial Board of *Southern Theatre.*

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‘At Fort Lewis College (in Colorado), they had more people come and see the devised work than any nonmusical play that had ever been staged.’
- Tim Miller
THE DIGITAL REEL

Yes, Every Actor Needs One
Just as there have always been varying opinions on the best looks and styles for a headshot, agents and casting directors have different ideas on what makes the perfect actor’s reel. But they all agree on one important point: Actors entering the industry today – whether in theatre or in film and TV – need a digital reel as well as a traditional headshot.

For years, the headshot was how casting directors kept track of whom they wanted to call back and consider for a role. If you were a working professional actor, you would spend hundreds of dollars and countless hours researching headshot photographers, capturing your perfect look, begging your friends’ opinions and mailing out a Photoshopped picture in hopes of winning a role.

However, a still picture is not enough today. Casting directors want to see you in motion. In many ways, the actor’s digital reel has become today’s headshot. When the people watching your video audition want to get a deeper insight on you or a greater perspective of your work, they don’t pick up that cold, dead piece of paper we call a resume. They click on the link you have sent them to your digital reel and watch your brilliance in action.

WHAT IS A REEL?

A reel is an assembly of clips that:
• is roughly two and a half to three minutes long;
• represents who you are as an actor; and
• can be sent digitally to interested parties or uploaded to a site.

It normally begins with a still image of you that also includes your name, union affiliation, agent and a way of contacting you – usually via an email address and rarely via a phone number. Your reel should end on this same image of you and your contact information.

The clips that make up your reel normally represent three to four projects, with each clip lasting 20 seconds to a minute. Unless you’ve been in a project with a recognizable actor, the camera should almost always be focused on you. In choosing the individual pieces, concentrate on those that demonstrate your ability as an actor, particularly those that show an arc or shift from one emotional point of view to another. Look for those that represent your various types, and strive to build a reel that shows your branding and creates an understanding of who you are as an actor.

“Quality is much more important than quantity,” says Jenny Ravitz, associate casting director at Jonathan Strauss Casting in New York. “If you have one great quality clip that sticks out from the rest, it is much more important than 15 terrible ones. Put them in order of quality, with three or four clips being a good number.”

Zachary Durand, agent’s assistant at The Talent House, a talent agency in New York, agrees: “Short, sweet, and to the point. With everything at your fingertips, people expect to get their information quickly and it only takes a few seconds to see what we need.”

If you are strong in both drama and comedy, you may want to develop two reels to submit for different types of roles, Ravitz says. You just want to be sure to submit the correct reel when auditioning.

Those actors who decide to take paying gigs in niche markets beyond the stage may also eventually need specialty reels. If you find yourself getting more and more work in a particular market, you will want to build a reel from examples of your work. In addition to your theatrical/musical reel, you might want to create reels for the following types of work:
• commercial;
• legit (straight plays);
• entertainment/red carpet reporter;
• voice-over.
WHY THE REEL?

The reel is your calling card. Here are eight reasons you must have a reel if you want to be seen today – and be seen by multiple people:

1. Many casting directors use reels in casting virtually every show.

“I do not have all of my creative team in one place,” says Pat McCorkle, president and owner of McCorkle Casting Ltd., in New York. “I need to be able to send you to all of the members of the team so that they can see what you look like immediately and they can all discuss the possibility of you working out for the role. If my team had to wait until they could all get together to see who was right for which role, our casting process would be limited and time-consuming.”

2. Your agent can send a reel directly to a casting director.

According to Durand, this is one of the best things about having a reel. You can get in front of casting directors – even if you have not auditioned for them before.

3. The reel provides information that casting directors can’t get from a traditional headshot.

Rather than viewing a static Photoshopped image and perusing a printed list of shows on your resume, the casting directors viewing your reel can actually watch you in action. They can tell if you have any tics or mannerisms that they might or might not like in your acting. They can compare and contrast your abilities with the image they have in mind for the character.

4. Casting directors use reels to cost-effectively pinpoint the finalists for a role.

Once they have looked at your reel – and have decided you might be right for the role – they can then send your reel on to the director. Instead of looking at a number of headshots and scheduling auditions, they can pick out a few that they like and start narrowing down their choices via the reels, saving them both time and money.

5. Casting directors can watch your reel over and over again.

Let’s say they watch several auditions and have made notes on actors’ headshots, but are still unsure which of two auditionees is right for the role. With the digital reel, they can view – and re-view as often as they wish – examples of each actor’s work to decide which would be best for the role.

6. A reel is an absolute necessity if you want to work in film and TV.

If you plan to work in film and television as well as theatre, agents and casting directors need to see how you come across on camera.

Jessy Grossman, a commercial agent’s assistant at Don Buchwald & Associates, a talent and literary agency with offices in New York and Los Angeles, says a reel doesn’t have to be polished to open the door for a young actor.

“We understand that when someone is starting out that their reel may not be the best of quality or there just may not be much there, but we like some sort of footage that we can look at,” Grossman says. “Seeing what you look like on camera is different from looking at a photo.”

7. A reel enables your agent to send you anywhere.

Your agent can “virtually” send you all over the world for auditions, thus opening up and exponentially increasing your chances of getting work.
Juilliard DRAMA

MFA IN ACTING
added to Juilliard’s renowned BFA in Acting
Full-tuition and stipend are provided for MFA final year
APPLY BY DECEMBER 1
Auditions in NYC, Chicago, San Francisco
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A Postgraduate Artist Diploma program
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juilliard.edu/playwrights
You can save time and money on open calls. By having a reel that you can send to casting directors, you save yourself the trouble of going to numerous cattle calls for shows, which can waste both your time and your gas money. If they ask to see you as a result of your reel, it is essentially a callback instead of a first look.

So what happens if you don’t provide casting directors with a reel? They may end up scouring the Internet, trying to find a clip of your work, says Joy Dewing, owner and casting director at Joy Dewing Casting in New York. They may Google you, look on your Facebook page – and possibly turn up videos that you don’t want a casting director to view. By having a reel, you can control what the casting director sees.

HOW TO BUILD A REEL
There are a number of companies in Los Angeles and New York that put together reels for actors. However, if you have existing material from plays, films, television series or commercials, you may simply need to hire an editor. You may even want to do your own editing. Most people have a basic editing program on their computers, and it is a good idea for actors to learn how to at least do simple editing of their own materials.

What if you don’t have any material to include on a reel? There are differing opinions on whether you should create projects for a first reel. Many agents believe that you can simply develop your reel as you begin to get jobs. However, the majority of agents and casting directors interviewed for this article noted that without an initial reel, it would be significantly harder to get the jobs that will eventually fill out your reel and give you that professional experience. They recommend creating a reel so you have something to show casting directors. If the pieces on your initial reel are done well, they say, most people watching them won’t know what was produced for your reel and what was produced professionally.

If you’re putting together a theatrical or musical theatre reel, look carefully at any video clips you have from actual performances. If the quality of the clip is good, Dewing says she likes to see actual performances on your reel. However, if it is hard to hear the dialogue or the quality of the recording in general is poor, then she says you should not include it. In that case, she recommends creating your own material for the reel.

“If in some ways, creating your own reel can be more helpful because with reels based on actual performances you often deal with quality issues,” Dewing says. “If you have a live audience, the performance can be harder to see or hear. Often directors prefer a demo made in a studio as it has better sound and they can see what is going on.”

Although Dewing specifically prefers to see theatrical clips for theatrical reels, most of the other casting directors and agents interviewed said film/television clips are acceptable.

WHERE TO GET CLIPS IF YOU HAVE NONE
So, how can you build a reel if you have no prior theatre, television, film or commercial clips to use in creating your product?

A good place to start is with groups in your area that produce theatre or films. Contact local college and university theatre and film departments and find out how to get involved in student projects. Look for local plays and low-budget indie films being shot in your area and volunteer to be a cast member. This
will be great experience no matter how you look at it. Shoot a Web commercial with friends for a local nonprofit organization. This will not only give the organization free advertising and provide material for your reel, but often it will also give you experience you can add to your resume.

Another way to build a reel is by creating your own clips. Here’s the model developed at Shenandoah University:

- Find three characters in plays, movies, TV shows or commercials that you feel you could play.
- Choose a two-minute clip of these characters in a moment that resonates for you.
- Using the action and dialogue from that clip as a model, rewrite the entire scene in your own words, making sure to change names and other significant details. Do this carefully to ensure that you don’t infringe on any copyrights.
- Now that you have the new script, find a friend who knows how to properly use a camera, frame a shot and light the action. Then shoot the scene. You may need to cast other actors in your scene as well, but remember that each clip in your reel should focus on you as a primary character.
- Once you have shot your two-minute scene, you need to find the best 20 to 40 seconds of your best takes. Remember, this is not about the scene, but about seeing your best moments.
- After you have followed this process to create three clips, splice them together, putting your strongest performance first. Add an opening and a closing info card, and voila! You have your first digital acting reel.

**GETTING THE REEL OUT THERE**

Once you have a reel, Actors Access is a great way to put it to work for you. This is an online casting service that lets you search for jobs and submit your headshot and reel electronically. Many agents say that membership in Actors Access (www.actorsaccess.com) is a must for an actor to be considered for the New York and Los Angeles markets.

The site is recommended for actors who are looking for projects to start getting their name out there and to start building their reels. Through the actors’ side of the site, you can access roughly 30 percent of the work on the site. However, it is still necessary to have an agent represent you, because your agent will have access to the other 70 percent. The agents’ side to Actors Access, called Breakdown Services, provides them with all casting information. They can submit their clients’ info for any and all roles they think would be suitable.

One of the agents who recommends Actors Access to all actors is Ashley Landay, talent agent at Kazarian/Measures/Ruskin & Associates in New York. Although actors don’t have access to all information on the site, Landay says there are still a large number of breakdowns they can choose from in deciding where to send headshots and reels. She notes that a variety of types of jobs are listed and can be booked directly through the site – which is helpful, especially for young and beginning actors.

“Student projects, especially from schools like Columbia and NYU, as well as indie projects from up-and-coming directors are valuable,” she says. “They are great experience.”

Other valuable online resources for actors in Los Angeles and New York are LACasting.com, NowCasting.com, NY Casting.com, NYCastings.com and Backstage.com.

**GO FORTH AND CREATE**

The purpose of a reel is to help you succeed in your quest to secure work, but it also can benefit your career in other ways. Developing a reel can help you see what you are capable of, allowing you to truly know yourself as an actor. In addition, it can help you establish your brand and allow you to play a major role in sculpting the direction of your career.

J.J. Ruscella is the director of the acting program at Shenandoah University in Winchester, VA. An award-winning film director, Ruscella is also chief creative officer of the Orlando-based production company KRS Media Group.

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**A Few Do’s and Don’ts**

**DO**
- make sure that producers of indie film projects agree to supply you with footage of your acting when you work for free.
- add new material as you pick up acting projects to replace the scenes you shot on your own.

**DON’T**
- use brand names or unlicensed music in your reel.

And most importantly, the name of the game is to get in the game. In order to act, the first thing you must **DO** is act. Get out there, and then get better.

‘If you have a live audience, the performance can be harder to see or hear. Often directors prefer a demo made in a studio as it has better sound and they can see what is going on.’

- Joy Dewing

Joy Dewing Casting, New York
When the most engrossing conflict in the theatre is occurring behind the scenes, it’s time to take steps that will put the focus back on stage.

On the facing page, Bill Gelber explains a technique for encouraging collaboration that was adapted from a popular book.

In a second story beginning on Page 27, Mary Lynn Bates explains how mediation – which is not the same as arbitration – can help parties reach an agreement that allows a production to go forward.
Suppose that two people do not see eye-to-eye on a production of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the famous novel by John Steinbeck, adapted for the stage by Frank Galati. Carol, the set designer, realizes, based on the budget figures she has received, that she is very limited in what she can have on stage. Resources must be used to their maximum effect. To begin with, she cannot build a truck that will move on its own around the space. Shannon, the director, is excited to be helming the show. In particular, she loves how this adaptation of the sprawling novel moves from place to place, using very theatrical means to create each location. One element that she must have is the truck that the Joads travel in, as many of the scenes take place in the truck as it transports the family from Oklahoma to California.

How can these theatre artists negotiate the slippery slope that is collaboration on this project? How can these different minds meet in order to create a unified piece of theatre? What is it that makes some teams more cooperative than others?

At Texas Tech University, we have discovered a technique for encouraging collaboration instead of conflict, and it has helped us in our own production process. We developed our system using the procedures outlined in Stephen Covey’s book, *The 3rd Alternative: Solving Life’s Most Difficult Problems*. Covey, probably better known as the famous author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, offers many insights about conflict and how it can be negotiated.

Texas Tech has a very full season, averaging 12 theatre and dance productions. Using the 3rd Alternative, as described below, we have been able to realize our projects by agreeing to what we feel are the important criteria for each show. For example, we knew that we wanted to reconfigure our proscenium stage for our production of *Twelfth Night*. This affected the box office, the scenery budget and the timeline for completion of all work. At the same time, this led to safety concerns. (How would the audience be ushered onto the stage, for instance?) Everyone was willing to work toward a solution once they agreed on the primary purpose for this concept: to put the audience in a closer relationship to the performers. We could all agree that this was one of the main criteria for success. How we got there could vary, which allowed us to consider many alternatives.

Here is an overview of the technique, followed by a step-by-step description of how other theatres might use the system to resolve conflicts – using “Carol,” the set designer, and “Shannon,” the director, from above as examples.

**OVERVIEW: WHAT IS THE 3RD ALTERNATIVE?**

In his book, Covey discusses the nature of compromise, of win/lose situations, of breakdowns in communication. He points out that there are usually two sides to every conflict: the 1st Alternative is “we do it my way.” (This is win/lose.) The 2nd Alternative is “we do it your way.” (This is lose/win.) He suggests how these can be avoided altogether through a different paradigm, the 3rd Alternative.

Covey makes it clear that he is not talking about compromise. If each side or – in the case of *The Grapes of Wrath* production team, each team member – must give up something, then everyone, in a sense, loses. This is what Covey calls lose/lose. When Covey works with groups he wants to come up with win/win solutions.

The 3rd Alternative can be considered only if each side is willing to come up with a completely new solution that will work for both sides. Covey uses four steps to reach this alternative:

- I See Myself.
- I See You.
- I Seek You Out.
- I Synergize with You.

**Step 1: I See Myself**

The first step asks you to look closely at your own frame of mind to see why you feel the way you do. What do you see as theatre’s purpose, or what do you feel are your reasons for wanting to work on this particular play? What do you hope for this
production to accomplish? Who might be your ideal audience? This is a chance to see what your own biases are and how you might be less inclined to listen to someone else based on your own mindset. Can you think independently as an individual rather than as a member of a group? Can Carol, for example, consider all options in relation to telling the story rather than imagining that she has less to offer, because in the past the director has been the final arbiter of all decisions? Can Shannon let go of the idea of control based on her role as “overseer” of the show?

In Carol’s case above, she loves the challenge of moving from scene to scene seamlessly. She is not married to the idea that theatre has to present realistic elements in the way that film and television often do. She believes that Steinbeck’s work is an important time capsule that also speaks to our world today. Shannon also loves Steinbeck’s story, and, having been raised in a lower-middle-class family, embraces values that she believes the author shares. They both agree that the play offers timely lessons for a modern audience. How they get there, at this point, is open.

**Step 2: I See You**

In the second step, each member must be allowed to communicate his or her initial ideas completely. Given that each member of the team has studied the play (if this is a text-based piece), one by one the director, each designer, the dramaturg and any others involved in the dispute talk about what the play means to them and what their first impressions are. They use a “Talking Stick” model, i.e., as long as someone is figuratively “holding the stick,” he or she may speak without being interrupted. At the same time, the other participants must listen empathetically, trying to completely understand the other person’s point of view. Each person can speak only after he or she has stated the ideas and feelings of the previous speaker to that person’s satisfaction. When someone offers his/her ideas, that person wants to know that he/she has been heard first. Once that occurs, the group member feels valued, which will automatically lead to respect for others’ ideas as well. It could even be, based on this approach, that conflict disappears, because the thoughts of each person are so clear that the misinterpretations, and therefore, misunderstandings and resentment, are avoided. As Covey says, “If I truly see you, I’m predisposed to understand you, to feel what you feel, and thus to minimize conflict and maximize synergy.” It is one of his basic habits: “Seek first to understand, then be understood.”

For example, Carol and Shannon, in working on their production of *Grapes*, begin to see what each feels is important about telling Steinbeck’s story. When Shannon says to Carol, “I hear you saying that we don’t have the budget for a complete truck that can carry the family from location to location,” and Carol says, “Yes, that’s right,” Carol feels that Shannon has heard her and understands the issue. They can work together to figure out what to do, and they have avoided the either/or thinking that can occur in certain mindsets.

**Step 3: I Seek You Out**

The basic idea behind this step is that we need to listen to those who disagree with us. As Covey remarks, “If two people have the same opinion, it means one of them is superfluous.” By seeking out a different view, you are showing your appreciation for the gifts that others have to offer. If we see our disagreements as opportunities to learn, we become less defensive when it comes to working on solutions. The strength of a production team comes from its diversity. If Carol and Shannon are willing to talk through the issues, based on their respect for each other’s backgrounds, they begin to synergize. They will do this not only with each other, but also with the rest of the team.

**Step 4: I Synergize with You**

Synergy is that energy that is created when two or more people work together, making the work exponentially better. Covey suggests four steps for reaching Synergy:

- **• Ask the question:** “Are you willing to go for a solution that is better than any of us have come up with yet?” Just asking this question gets you started if the entire group answers, “Yes!”
- **• Come up with a list of criteria for success. (See below.)**
- **• Start experimenting with solutions to meet the criteria. (Consider the Magic Theatre: see below.)**
- **• Appreciate the energy that is created and continue using it to reach a 3rd Alternative.**

It is very important to know where the group agrees. Covey asks the group to determine the **criteria for success**, a list of essentials without which the solution won’t work for them. At the heart of any major conflict, some of the basic principles are the same. On a theatrical production, everyone agrees that a successful production is one major aim they all
Leigh Anne Crandall, MFA student and designer for several mainstage shows

“In a class project, we were given specific concepts and asked to play the role of either a designer or a director for Dangerous Liaisons. I took the role of costume designer and soon realized my concept for traditional period costumes was in stark contrast to my director’s minimalistic modern approach. There did not seem to be an obvious way where we both could ‘win,’ but that was where Covey’s 3rd Alternative came into play. Through listening to each other with the purpose of learning, rather than just responding, my director and I were able to come to a mutually exciting concept that stemmed from the root of our ideas, but was something completely new. While this was just a class exercise, it opened my eyes to the possibilities of what true collaboration can produce.”

Carol and Shannon obviously have some issues to sort out. The truck seems to be one of the sticking points. But is it? Both feel that, to be successful, the different scenes must have a flow that allows the story to move easily from event to event. They both want the audience to reflect on the differences between the 1930s and the 21st century and what they might learn through the comparison. As it turns out, they both want to find a way for the family to “travel” through the Dust Bowl to California, but the success of the production is not based on having an exact replica of an old truck.

MAGIC THEATRE: FINDING THE 3RD ALTERNATIVE

Covey suggests using what he calls the Magic Theatre in order to brainstorm for 3rd Alternatives. The members of the team meet in a quiet space with paper and markers that will allow them to write down their ideas and post them for the whole group. In this space, anyone and everyone throws out as many ideas as possible, no matter how outlandish.

PUTTING THE 3RD ALTERNATIVE INTO PRACTICE

Students and faculty at Texas Tech University discuss how this dispute resolution technique works.

Leigh Anne Crandall, MFA student and designer for several mainstage shows

She recently learned about the 3rd Alternative technique in a class presentation.

“I really benefited from discussing the collaborative approach. ‘You disagree with me? Then I need to listen to what you have to say.’ That is not a principle instilled in us in our competitive culture. Giving people a chance to be understood helps them to feel valued and, as collaborators in the arts, our mission should always be to relish in everyone’s value.”

Seth Warren-Crow, assistant professor of sound design, Department of Theatre and Dance

“I think that Dr. Gelber’s adaptation of Covey’s ideas on cooperation, conflict resolution and creative problem-solving – finding a 3rd Alternative – are extremely relevant and useful in the context of theatre. We try our best to present very polished performances to the world, but behind the curtain and leading up to opening night you will commonly find a great amount of strife, confusion and sometimes nastiness. Production meetings often feel like a petri dish of strong and eccentric personalities at odds with one another. This approach gives students and seasoned professionals just the right amount of self-reflection and considered language to help opposing sides find commonalities and accept (and even embrace) differences with mutual respect. It is enough of a clear structure to give one the confidence to ask the right questions and open-ended enough to allow the great diversity of opinions to stay in the ring – or petri dish – as either formidable foes or inspiring collaborators (or both). I know for a fact that students in our class benefitted from the process (as have I) and have been putting it to use ever since then.”
The group is given a time limit to do this so there is a sense that it is an ongoing process. (This step can be used more than once.) Also, an initial deadline for ideas (for example, 45 minutes or two hours) can spur creativity without suggesting that a final solution must be found in that time. As many ideas as possible are noted. One can make models, draw sketches, build mockups. This “thinking outside of the box” can lead to exciting solutions, as the right brain is engaged in each person, and no answer is considered off limits.

Carol and Shannon sit down together and consider how they might imaginatively create the world of the play on a limited budget. They begin to synergize. What they realize is that they can suggest, through pieces of set and specific props, the idea of each location in order to clearly tell the story. A “truck” needs to exist, but it can be created through a combination of materials and acting – for example, via a bench or chairs and a steering wheel. This also allows a rather large “set piece” to quickly disappear when it is not needed. It is a series of disconnected elements that can be held together by the performers until they are no longer needed. Both are enthusiastic about their 3rd Alternative, and they both “win,” because their basic criteria are fulfilled.

WIN/WIN FOR ALL

Although this article includes some of Covey’s ideas as a way to work out various production issues, Covey goes into much more detail about how to use each concept. Reading his book will enable you to more fully take advantage of the technique he describes. By using Covey’s principles, which have reconciled failing marriages, united antagonistic corporations and created stronger relationships within dysfunctional families, a production team can avoid conflict to the betterment of an artistic enterprise. The 3rd Alternative is actually the best alternative in the long run. It is synergy within the group. It is the alternative answer that the entire group agrees is best. It is truly win/win.

Bill Gelber is an associate professor and director of theatre at Texas Tech University, where he recently received the university’s President’s Excellence in Teaching Award. He is a member of the Editorial Board of Southern Theatre.
When Conflict Can’t Be Resolved, Mediation Is an Often-Misunderstood Alternative to Arbitration or a Lawsuit

Let’s say that Carol, the set designer in the previous story by Bill Gelber, can’t come to a collaborative agreement with Shannon, the director. What is the next step?

by Mary Lynn Bates

Artistic differences, personality conflicts and disagreements about budgets, scheduling and the allocation of scarce resources – from wing space to time on stage – are just some of the areas ripe for dispute in the theatre. Disagreements between the various professionals involved in a production can take up valuable time and consume vast amounts of mental and emotional energy better spent on the creative effort.

Mediation is a conflict resolution tool that has become very popular in recent years for resolving disputes ranging from lawsuits to school yard disagreements. It also is being used more and more often in theatre to resolve disagreements. Mediation can be helpful any time the disputants share a common goal and must continue to work together, but lack an appreciation for each other’s needs and concerns. Mediation works best when the parties are able to fashion creative solutions. A skilled mediator simply helps the parties get past the anger, frustration, fear and hurt so that they can communicate with each other and together find a solution to the problem.

This tool can save time, money and energy in the theatre – and ultimately make a production better by helping those with simmering disagreements resolve their issues.

MEDIATION IS NOT ARBITRATION

Many people in theatre and other arts areas are unaware of how mediation works – or confuse it with arbitration, which is a very different process.

In arbitration, the arbitrator acts like a judge and makes a decision about who is right and who is wrong and what should be done about the situation. The arbitrator’s decision is usually binding and is imposed on the parties, with little, if any, right to appeal.

In mediation, a neutral mediator with no stake in the outcome of the dispute helps the parties identify the real issues in the dispute (often not what appears on the surface), identify their real interests (also often not apparent), and talk to each other (or communicate through the mediator) about ways they might be able to solve the dispute and satisfy the interests of both parties. In conflict resolution parlance, the parties and the mediator try to find a win/win resolution. Failing that, they try to find a solution that both parties can live with and which is a better alternative for both than protracted litigation or arbitration, or having to dissolve the relationship or terminate the project.

Two actors, for example, could come out of mediation as colleagues with mutual respect and affection, ready to work together happily. Or, they could still hate each other but be willing to put up with the “inferior work” and “lack of professionalism” of the other “for the good of the
show.” Either way, the show goes on.

If the parties are not able to agree on any solution to the dispute, however, the mediator does not impose one. The parties leave mediation and pursue whatever other dispute resolution mechanism they want or that the relevant contract requires: for example, talking to the tabloids, leaving the show, a formal grievance process, arbitration or a lawsuit.

**MEDIATION CLAUSES IN CONTRACTS**

Union contracts in theatre and film/TV (such as Actors’ Equity, SAG-AFTRA and IATSE) typically contain dispute resolution clauses requiring that disagreements be resolved through arbitration, usually following a formal grievance process. Some union contracts also provide for mediation or conciliation. Conciliation is similar to mediation in that it attempts to help the parties reach a resolution as opposed to imposing a decision.

Theatres and artists will benefit from making sure that mediation clauses are included, through collective bargaining by the various unions, in their standard contracts. In addition, nonunion houses, actors, producers, directors, designers, technicians and other artists should consider including mediation clauses in their contracts.

Why? One of the chief reasons is that a mediation clause in the contract can save time and money. Often when emotions are high, parties are unable to believe that it could be possible for them to work together at all. They believe the other person is just too unreasonable, mean or stupid to discuss the issue. When a mediation clause is included, the parties are required to sit down and negotiate with the help of a third party before they pursue other, more costly and divisive remedies. The parties have to try to work it out, even when convinced it is a waste of time – and with a good mediator, they have an excellent chance of succeeding.

While mediation of disputes can be effective at any stage of the dispute resolution process, it is most effective at preserving relationships and projects and reducing legal and business costs (including opportunity costs, personnel time and emotional costs) when used prior to the filing of a formal grievance or lawsuit.

**WHO SERVES AS A MEDIATOR?**

The mediator is someone trained in the process of mediation who does not have a stake in the outcome of the dispute. This person may also be a lawyer, a counselor or an industry expert. Mediators are often referred to as neutrals. Stage managers are sometimes unofficial mediators.

Mediation can be evaluative (the mediator helps parties “value” the claim) or conciliatory (the mediator helps the parties reconcile).

The right mediator and the right mediation type

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**When Should Mediation Be Used?**

Mediation can be a good alternative to arbitration or a lawsuit in any of the following situations:

- Direct negotiations have broken down.
- The relationship is important, e.g., a key talent, a partnership, future opportunities.
- The personalities are difficult.
- Emotions are high.
- The project or transaction is significant and/or time sensitive.
- The other person’s lawyer, agent or union rep is unreasonable or unrealistic.
- The client doesn’t believe his lawyer, agent or union rep.
- There are cultural, class, language, industry or trust barriers to communication.
- There is clearly fault on both sides.
- Creative, extra-judicial solutions are needed.
- Litigation or arbitration could be lengthy and/or difficult.
- Confidentiality is important.
- Public relations would be adversely affected if the dispute is not resolved.
depend on the particular dispute and the parties involved. Some cases are mostly about “show me the money,” and others are primarily about “heal my broken heart.” In theatre, it can be a little bit of both.

The contract should note how a mediator will be chosen, and the mediator must be acceptable to both parties or the process will not work. Short-term contracts, or ones related to a specific production or theatre, might specify an individual and an alternate who are trained mediators, trusted by both parties and perhaps with some expertise in the field, to be the mediator.

THE MEDIATION PROCESS

Mediation can be through an organization providing mediation services according to its rules and procedures or by an individual mediator pursuant to contract. The dispute resolution clause in a contract can provide for how a mediation will be handled. Most mediations take less than a day.

Generally, there are few rules. The most important are that the parties must agree that what is said in the mediation will be confidential and will not be used by either party in subsequent proceedings or leaked to the press and that the discussions will be civil.

In a mediation, each party will state his or her version of the conflict to the mediator and other party in writing before the mediation or orally at a joint session, or through the mediator if the parties are not willing to be in the same room (or the mediator

Who Has Used Mediation?

Because mediation is confidential, organizations that work with theatres on mediation are reluctant to share names or examples. However, a spokesperson for the New York-based Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts, Inc., which operates a program called mediateArt, says mediation has helped resolve numerous conflicts in the arts.

“We believe that mediation is an extremely effective way for artists to resolve disputes in a productive, creative and amicable manner,” says Stacy Lefkowitz, director of legal services for Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts. “We have consistently seen great results through our mediation program. In some cases, friendships and working partnerships have been saved through the process.”
decides that it is better to keep them apart initially). Then the mediator will encourage the parties to try to see the situation from the other party’s perspective, identify the real issues and interests, and try to find a creative solution.

A good mediator uses body language, verbal cues and past dispute resolution and life experience to identify what is really going on. Then, through appropriate questions to each party and restating each party’s position or concerns to the other one, the mediator helps the parties begin to understand the issues, their own best interest and the other party’s perspective and position. The mediator may talk privately to both parties so they can vent frustrations outside the presence of the other party and perhaps acknowledge some responsibility for the problem that they are not ready to admit to the other person.

Mediation Resources

How to Find a Mediator

A number of private mediation services exist, and some claim particular expertise in resolving disputes involving the film, television and theatre industries. Many states have Dispute Resolution Centers, often affiliated with the state or local Bar association, that maintain lists of qualified mediators.

California Lawyers for the Arts (www.calawyersforthearts.org) has a mediation service for resolving disputes among those working in the arts, including the film and television industries. Their program is part of a national collaboration, Arts Resolution Services, funded in part by government grants.

Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts (www.vlany.org), based in New York, is part of that collaboration and has a program called mediateArt that provides mediation and other alternative dispute resolution services for individual artists and arts organizations.

Sample Contract Clauses

Some mediation service provider websites include sample contract clauses and listings of their rules and procedures.

See, for example:

- JAMS, which bills itself as the largest private alternative dispute resolution (ADR) provider in the world: www.jamsadr.com;
- National Arbitration Forum: www.adrforum.com;
- International Institute for Conflict Prevention & Resolution (CPR): www.cpradr.org;

The Uniform Mediation Act (www.uniformlaws.org) contains rules and procedures that many mediators follow. A version of this model is in effect in some states, and its rules can be incorporated into mediation contract clauses.

Training for Mediation/Conflict Resolution

Many organizations, including some of those listed above, provide conflict resolution and mediation training for the general public. The training usually involves role playing as a means of practicing and gaining a better understanding of the dynamics of the process. The best mediators will have a natural talent for the work, but their performance will improve with process and skills training and experience. Stage managers, who often are very good at resolving conflicts on a production, may be even better with some formal conflict resolution training.
The mediator will not reveal to one party what is said to the mediator in confidence by the other party, but can use this knowledge to influence the outcome. For instance, both parties might confide separately that they very much want the relationship to continue for the good of the show (and their careers or budgets). However, they are not willing to acknowledge this to the other party because of a perceived loss of negotiating power. Armed with this knowledge, the mediator knows there is room for compromise because ultimately both parties have the same interest. Sometimes, both sides want the same thing: apologies from all involved. The mediator can create a safe, supportive, confidential environment that will let that happen without a loss of face.

Once an agreement is reached, it can be accomplished immediately (apologies) or reduced to writing (for example, the promise of a better dressing room, or the use of different gels that won’t distort the colors of the costumes and “ruin” the concept). The written agreement, when signed by both parties, is a contract that can be enforced. If the issues are substantial and involve major commitments, a lawyer, agent or representative might be brought in to draft a formal document.

Theatre companies can use mediation to advantage in dealing with companies outside the arts and entertainment business as well. The website of the International Institute for Conflict Prevention & Resolution (CPR) (www.cpradr.org) includes a list of more than 4,000 companies that have pledged to use mediation or other alternative dispute resolution processes when appropriate.

Mary Lynn Bates is an attorney and mediator in Birmingham, AL, with an undergraduate degree in theatre. A past chair of the Alabama State Bar Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution, she regularly presents workshops on mediation at the SETC Convention.
The changing world of outdoor theatre is examined in a new book published by the Institute of Outdoor Theatre (formerly the Institute of Outdoor Drama), the member organization for Shakespeare festivals, historical dramas, religious dramas, renaissance festivals, dramatic and musical theatre and other theatrical organizations that perform in outdoor settings.

*Outdoor Theatre Facilities: A Guide to Planning and Building Outdoor Theatres* is written by a team of architects, theatre consultants and theatre managers with many years of experience in the planning or operation of outdoor theatre venues: Michael Hardy (executive director of the Institute of Outdoor Theatre), Christopher Hardy (landscape architect, SWA Group, San Francisco), Robert Long (theatre consultant, Theatre Consultants Collaborative), Barry Moore (architect and senior associate, Gensler, Houston), Scott Parker (director emeritus of the Institute of Outdoor Theatre) and David Weiss (theatre consultant, director and designer of many outdoor productions and theatres). They acknowledge that their advice on design of outdoor theatres has changed in recent years due to a variety of factors, including changing audience expectations, increased entertainment competition, the rise of digital content and weather concerns.

The authors begin with chapters discussing the physical site, front-of-house and backstage support areas and equipment necessary in an outdoor venue. The most valuable portion of the book is an in-depth look at three models of outdoor theatres: those with an open stage and an open amphitheatre, those with a roofed stage and an open amphitheatre, and those with a roofed stage and a partially or fully roofed amphitheatre. Each model is illustrated with a conceptual plan and section for a 1,000-seat amphitheatre and color illustrations of existing examples. The advantages and disadvantages of each model are discussed in relation to the type of productions to be presented.

The most important recommendation made in the book is that those considering the construction or renovation of amphitheatres should consider a roofed stage and a fully or partially roofed seating area because the day of the completely open outdoor venue is ending. The authors note that the open stage and amphitheatre, typical of the historical outdoor dramas of the mid-20th century, has problems surviving in today’s entertainment environment. These theatres were often designed for specific productions, are not easily adapted to other entertainment forms, and are subject to the uncertainty of the weather, which can cause cancellation of performances and loss of income. The authors note that covering all or part of the amphitheatre protects the audience (and box office income). In addition, the covered stage models provide protection for the performers and allow for higher production values with offstage space and greater lighting and sound possibilities.

The book also takes the reader through the design and construction process for an outdoor theatre, from evaluation of the needs of the productions that are to be presented in each model through the opening of the new or renovated facility. Although *Outdoor Theatre Facilities* does not eliminate the eventual need for an architect and theatre consultants, it offers valuable advice to theatre companies, community organizations, city planners or anyone interested in planning a new or renovated outdoor theatre. The sections of the book dealing with the design and construction process would be of value to those planning any type of theatre.
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