

RECEIVED

SEP 23 2010

RESEARCH

Sabbatical Leave Report

James Hoffman

Thompson Rivers University

September 2010

My scholarly work during the sabbatical (January to July 2010) involved continuing my long-term project that is part of the CURA *Mapping Quality of Life and the Culture of Small Cities*; specifically I worked to complete a book, *Community Shows: Professional Theatre in the Small City in British Columbia*, along with co-principal investigator, Professor Ginny Ratsoy, in which we are examining the relationship between theatre companies in Kamloops, Prince George, and Nanaimo and their communities, particularly with a view to assessing the nature of their community engagement.

To this end, I focussed on reading and analyzing the numerous studies, surveys, articles, reports, interviews, and other data that we (faculty investigators, student research assistants, community partners) have collected over the past four years. These studies come from a multitude of published and unpublished sources, many of which we have generated ourselves, such as audience surveys, community partner interviews, data from theatre companies, and various conferences. There are two primary areas of investigation: developing qualitative indicators of community engagement, and assessing the nature of community engagement of three professional theatre companies: Western Canada Theatre in Kamloops, Theatre North West in Prince George, and Theatre One in Nanaimo. With most of the data collection completed, and the outline of the book fixed, we have divided the remaining tasks of the writing and editing among the two principal investigators.

The bulk of my work during the sabbatical concerned the writing of several major chapters of the book: the introduction and chapter one, as well as the revision of several of my previously published articles that will also appear in the book. In brief, here is a summary of the two chapters:

Introduction: I begin by providing a background to and reason for the study, outlining the major questions we are addressing, and describing the objectives of the study. Such realities as rapidly changing community demographics, municipalities with new cultural agendas, reductions in government funding, competing arts organizations including semi-professional theatre groups,

have brought considerable challenges to the once dominant professional companies, especially as they search for meaningful ways to better connect with wider audiences. This study, conducted in partnership with the three companies, is intended to provide a framework for discussion and ideally lead to a solution for each company based on a multi-layered use of community engagement. I then summarize a history of theatre and community, with a focus on the province of British Columbia, especially as early theatre companies imposed a particular system of limited community engagement that colonized indigenous performance culture. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the new dynamic for regeneration in small cities, especially as it might impact the theatre companies. While we realize that busy theatre personnel often have little time for deep reflection on such matters, we also acknowledge that the theatre companies in our study will find the discussion in this book extremely useful, assisted as well by our listing of the best practices of a number of companies in other parts of Canada.

Chapter One: In this chapter I address the issue of community engagement and professional theatre companies. Starting with a generalized overview of the work of the companies, and following the stated goal of many theatre directors to take their audiences "from A to B," I posit "A" and "B" types of theatre, with A being conventional, canonical, and hierarchical in its operations and B allowing for more experiment, more flexible production operations, and a focus beyond entertainment. Most companies in our study fall somewhere in between, demonstrating aspects of both; neither, however, substantively addresses the paradigm of community engagement. I propose a "C" type of theatre production where aspects of an authentic community engagement take place. In brief, theatre artists work collaboratively with community partners in addressing the life the community, in adapting to local settings, and in using a flexible, multi-media approach to staging methods. In further elaborating this type of theatre and in positioning the current and future work of the theatre companies, I have developed a set of indicators; indeed, a model of engagement. Then by means of textual explication and a series of visual diagrams this schema is detailed, examining the types of community, the central nodes of theatrical activity, followed by six key indicators each of which can assess a company's movement towards a particular type of community engagement. Finally, a continuum of community engagement is offered, to assist the theatre companies in discussing and assessing their present and future work, ranging from basic company sustainability/survival to regeneration of place. These are accompanied by specific indicators having to do with three central areas: company goals and community; artistic roles and community; and participation and community. Along the way, as these are discussed, there are specific references to the work of the three companies of the study.

