

THE NEW ROAD TO BROADWAY

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## THE NEW ROAD TO BROADWAY

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Since the 1980s, a number of plays and musicals have transferred to Broadway from a professional nonprofit theatre. This growing trend was highlighted by the fact that a significant number of the 2015 and 2016 Tony nominated productions originated at or were produced by a nonprofit theatre. These professional nonprofit theatres, generally referred to as regional or resident theatres, are actively shaping the theatrical work that is appearing on the Great White Way. From 2000 - 2016, the Tony Award for Best New Musical has been awarded to nine productions that came from a non-profit theatre company; essentially the out-of-town tryout model that served as a popular method to work plays or musicals in the past has transformed into the regional/resident commercially enhanced model. These regional-to-Broadway transfers are gaining momentum with well over 100 Broadway productions having come from a regional in the past sixteen years alone.

In the past, in order to get a show to Broadway, there were only four two ways: the road, transferring from London, transferring from an Off-Broadway theatre or opening directly on Broadway. Producers would take a Broadway hopeful show out of town, work out any kinks in the relative privacy of a town far enough away from New York that critics wouldn't venture out to see it, then sail into New York with hopes of a successful run. This model, for the most part, has given way to the nonprofit/commercial relationship as a result of several mitigating factors including reduced funding from

important sources such as the National Endowment for the Arts and the Ford Foundation and an increase in production costs. As the cost of producing musical's continued to rise, the nonprofit began to play a vital role in the development of new works, raising the question of whether or not a nonprofit should receive financial compensation for their role in the development of work that eventually transferred to Broadway.

By examining the effects of the nonprofit/commercial relationship through four different nonprofit companies – The American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts, The La Jolla Playhouse in La Jolla, California, The Denver Center Theatre Company in Denver, Colorado and the Public Theater in New York City – we explore the various effects the commercial partnership has had on the nonprofit theatre – impacting the financial stability of an organization to increasing the organization's presence on the national stage – the nonprofits' have created a new road to Broadway.

To my grandmother—

the woman who ignored boundaries, climbed mountains, and loved limitlessly.

To my grandfather —

the man who changed the world, and offered it to me.

To my mother —

the pure and limitless incarnation of love, patience, and encouragement.

thank you. always.

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## Chapter I: The Old Road to Broadway

*Once upon a time, professional theatre in America operated centrifugally: From the creative crucible of New York City, theatre spun out, via the touring circuit or the scattered outposts of resident stages, to the nation at large. Today that dynamic is precisely reversed. Theatre in America is centripetal: Its creative fires burn in hundreds of cities and communities, and that energy flows from the regions to New York City, where the commercial sector has grown dependent upon its sprawling not-for-profit counterpart for virtually every aspect of its well-being. Broadway is still the place where talents are validated and economic prospects escalated, but it is no longer the singular, or even the primary, front of the nation's theatrical creativity.*  
(O'Quinn, "Going National" 2005)

In 1974, theatre professionals from both the nonprofit and commercial sectors met to discuss the state of the American theatre. What proceeded was an intense (sometimes violent) exchange of creatives who couldn't seem to find a way to co-exist. As the nonprofit regional theatre movement had gained ground and financial support from government and private funding – such as the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts – they had moved further and further from their commercial counterparts who, at the time were struggling to keep Broadway afloat. The question at hand was whether or not a partnership between the nonprofit and commercial theatre could somehow be possible. The answer, mostly from the nonprofit sector, was no, absolutely not. In a few short years, however, the defiant regional theatre would change its mind, but it would take another twenty-six years before a meeting between the two was held again. Fast forward to 2017 and the nonprofit/commercial relationship is a vital part of keeping the American theatre alive financially and artistically.

In the past thirty years over two hundred plays and musicals have transferred to Broadway from a professional nonprofit theatre. This growing trend was highlighted by the fact that a significant number of the 2015 and 2016 Tony nominated productions originated at or



were produced by a nonprofit theatre. These professional nonprofit theatres, generally referred to as regional or resident theatres, are actively shaping the theatrical work that is appearing on the Great White Way. In the past sixteen years, the Tony Award for Best New Musical has been awarded to nine productions that came from a non-profit theatre company; essentially the out-of-town tryout model that served as a popular method to work plays or musicals in the past has transformed into the regional/resident commercially enhanced model. These regional-to-Broadway transfers are gaining momentum with over 100 Broadway productions having come from a regional in the past seventeen years alone.

As a reflection of the growing trend of regional-to-Broadway transfers, the 2015 Tony nominations revealed that three out of the four new musical nominees could trace their roots back to a regional company (“Behind (Almost) Every Tony Nominee: a Nonprofit Theatre”). This is also true of the 2016 Tony Awards, with three of the five new musicals nominated for the top prize originating at a nonprofit theatre. But even more impressive than the number of Tony Awards and nominations non-profits have gathered is the fact that over the past decade, almost every musical or play to win a Pulitzer Prize can trace their origins back to a nonprofit, examples include The Public Theater’s *Hamilton: An American Musical*, which won the award in 2016; the 2008 winner *August: Osage County* began at Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre Company, the 2004 winner *I Am My Own Wife* began as a Page-to-Stage production at the La Jolla Playhouse in California, and the 1996 winner *Rent* began its Broadway journey at the New York Theatre Workshop (Marks, “Arena Stage Bans Media”).

It is safe to say that over the past thirty years, the regional and nonprofit theatre scene has exploded into a smorgasbord of innovative and exciting laboratories that are defining

nonprofit theatre as the place to see where American theatre is developing. As Robert Falls, Artistic Director of the Goodman Theatre in Chicago opined, “New York is a place to celebrate new work rather than originate or nurture it. That’s our [regional theatre’s] responsibility” (qtd. in Zoglin). The evidence of the nonprofit theatre companies’ role in the origination and nurturing of new works across the country has never been more robust, introducing the American public to such celebrated works as *A Chorus Line*, *Jersey Boys* and *Fun Home*.

Before the birth of regional theatre, a producer had one of two ways to get a show onto Broadway: the out-of-town tryout and the direct on-Broadway opening. If you didn’t live in New York City, you had only two ways of seeing the latest hit Broadway show: via a New York-based tour or a summer stock company (O’Quinn, “Going National”). While New York grew as the epicenter of theatrical creation, the legwork for what would grow into the regional theatre movement was beginning to take form with the Little Theatre Movement and the Federal Theatre Project.

The Little Theatre Movement in America began in the early 1910s, inspired by the Independent Theatre Movement in Europe. American artists sought to create non-commercial, intimate theatre for their surrounding communities. Notable among the American Little Theatre Movement experiments was the Provincetown Players, founded in 1915 by Susan Glaspell and George Cram Cook. The small theatre, located in Provincetown, Massachusetts, is credited with giving the great American playwright, Eugene O’Neill, his first artistic home. As the Little Theatre Movement grew and spread across the country, they continued their commitment to new work and unknown writers, supporting such American playwrights as Elmer Rice, George S. Kaufman and Susan Glaspell.

Helen Chiroy, author of *The Group Theatre: Passion, Politics, and Performance in the Depression Era* writes, as these Little Theatres grew around America, “the Crash of 1929 added economic and social devastation [to...] every aspect of American life” (Chinoy 262). Time and money for the arts left the artists of the Little Theatre Movement struggling for an audience as theatre became a luxury that many could no longer afford (Binkiewicz 15). While the Great Depression waged an uncertain war on the future of artists in America, President Franklin D. Roosevelt began work in 1933 on a federal project to provide work for the unemployed through the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), including funding for a federal arts program (Binkiewicz 15). Later that same year, Congress passed the Civil Works Administration (CWA) and the Public Works for Arts Projects was established (15). Arts projects, Donna Binkiewicz writes, “were divided into sixteen regional divisions and granted a budget of \$1,039,000 [... providing] work relief for approximately 25 percent of needy artists in 1933” (15). Despite the relief the funding provided for out-of-work theatre artists, debates began to rage in Congress over the necessity of the government’s involvement in the arts, with many believing the expenditure might be a “misuse of taxpayers’ money” (16). But amidst the contestations, The Federal Theatre Project, headed by Harry L. Hopkins and Hallie Flanagan, was established in 1935, funding productions all over the country. Eventually the Federal Theatre Project grew, employing 11,000 workers and reaching over 150,000 audience members every week (Gustaitis). Even with the Federal Theatre Project’s initial attempt to decentralize theatre, the Project became more and more focused on production in New York, resulting in a loss of sponsorships and a decreased number of projects in 29 states (Gustaitis). Ultimately, Binkiewicz writes, the Federal Theatre Project was killed by an act of Congress in 1939 due to growing concerns over

the content and messages of plays that congressmen argued could be “subversive, anticapitalist [...and] communist”(Binkiewicz 18). At its height, the Federal Theatre Project “employed 13,000 people and produced 850 plays” (18). Ultimately, it was The Federal Theatre Project that laid the groundwork for not only the growth of the regional theatre movement, but also for future government funding (18).

With the Federal Theatre Project gone, it would be another eight years before the regional theatre movement would receive another push. In 1947, Margo Jones, also known as the Texas Tornado, founded Theatre 47 (a name that would change every year) in Dallas, Texas (LoManaco 229). With the help of a generous grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, Jones set about creating a theatre in Dallas, believing firmly that “it [was] the duty and business of a capable theatre person to go into the communities in this country and create fine theatres” (224). Her goal was simple: decentralize theatre and provide professional theatre of the highest caliber to people who may not otherwise have the opportunity to see it. “My dream for the future is a theatre which is a part of everybody’s life, just as the railroad and the airplane are, a theatre in every town providing entertainment and enlightenment for the audience and a decent livelihood along with high artistic ideals for the theatre worker” (226).

Theatre 47 showcased an annual season that was devoted, to the development of both new and classical works (229). “I believe it is imperative in creating new resident professional companies to take a violent stand about the choice of plays. Personally I believe in the production of classics and new scripts with emphasis on new scripts” (Jones 283). Her dedication to new playwrights is evident in her work, producing new pieces by then unknown American playwright Tennessee Williams (London 279). Monica LoMonaco author of

“Regional/Resident Theatre” identifies that Jones successfully grew her company, producing “eighteen new scripts and eleven classics in repertory fashion” in the company’s first four seasons (LoMonaco 229). The entire season was produced on an arena style stage, a configuration Jones adamantly believed was the fastest and most effective way to get theatre to the people (Jones 283). Well supported and well loved by the surrounding community, the success of Theatre 47 spoke to the need for theatres in cities that had been without them since the death of the Federal Theatre Project. In addition to providing a new American stage for theatrical production outside of New York, Jones established the guiding principles that many regional theatres still operate under, such as professionalism, a divided focus on the production of new plays and classical works, a resident company present for the entirety of the season and, at minimum, a three week rehearsal period (Jones 281).

Jones, unfortunately passed in 1955 before she could see her dream of a professional theatre in every community come to fruition, but with the help of Nina Vance, artistic director and founder of Houston’s Alley Theatre, who had previously worked as Jones’s assistant, the regional theatre movement continued forward (London 279). When Vance founded the Alley Theatre in Houston in 1947, she had little more than two dollars in her pocket and a strong determination to start a theatre company (LoMonaco 231). Vance stood as the artistic director for thirty-three years, overseeing the production of 245 shows, 102 of which she directed, before her death in 1982 (231).

When Zelda Fichandler founded the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. in 1950, a regional theatre she started with her husband Thomas, who eventually became the company’s managing director, Zelda set to work producing seventeen plays in their first season alone (232). When

Jones died, Zelda became the new spokeswoman for the growing regional theatre movement. She, too, firmly believed in the production of classical works alongside new and original scripts declaring that what the community of Washington, D.C. wanted was a company that flourished where they lived and worked (232). Zelda Fichandler, who is also considered a matriarch of the Regional Theatre Movement, said in a 2011 meeting of nonprofit and commercial theatre producers:

We looked at what we had—the hit-or-miss; put-it-up, tear-it-down; make-a-buck, lose-a-buck; discontinuous; artist-indifferent; New York-centered ways of Broadway, and they weren't tolerable anymore, and it made us angry. We thought there had to be a better way, and we made that up out of what was lying around ungathered and, standing on the shoulders of earlier efforts in America and examples common in other countries, we went forward [...] The fabric of the thought that propelled us was that theatre should stop serving the function of making money, for which it has never been and never will be suited and start serving the revelation and shaping of the process of living, for which it is uniquely suited, for which it, indeed, exists. (qtd. in Ragsdale 50)

For Zelda, looking back at the regional theatre movement was about making “a thing that would help our fellow humans know themselves, to fathom more deeply the chaos that is our world, and, in the presence of each other, to shine a light on the delight of being alive” (Fichandler “Address”).

It is important to note that as the regional theatre movement began to take shape, another crucial development was taking place. In 1961, the Ford Foundation, which was formed

in 1936, approved a grant for \$9 million to “begin, ‘strengthening the position of resident theatre in the United States’” (O’Quinn, “Going National”). Shortly thereafter, under the advisement of President Lyndon B. Johnson, an Act of Congress created an independent agency in the federal government called the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in 1965 (Binkiewicz 77). Between the NEA and the Ford Foundation, the non-profit theatre world began to expand with a solid base of financial support. In the first five years following the announcement of the Ford Foundation’s initiative, Jim O’Quinn author of “Going National: How America’s Regional Theatre Movement Changed the Game” writes, “some 26 major new theatre companies were established in far-flung U.S. cities, large and small” (O’Quinn, “Going National”). In 2005, *Time* magazine noted, “there were just 23 [regional theaters] in 1961, when the first national organization of nonprofit theaters was formed,” and as of “2005, 44 years later, the numbers are off the charts: More than 1,200 theatres are currently alive and more-or less well... mounting some 13,000 productions a year and having an estimated economic impact on the U.S. economy of more than \$1.4 billion” (Zoglin, “Bigger than Broadway,” O’Quinn, “Going National”).

James C. Nicola of the New York Theatre Workshop notes that the NEA and the Ford Foundation were created

In a world that doesn’t exist anymore, amongst fathers, this patriarchy of America that were all sort of wealthy, powerful men, that had some community mindedness to them. Their fantasy was that every American town should have an arts component to make it a civilized place. How was that going to happen? So people up there at that level said that the Ford Foundation can seed people in these towns. I grew up in Hartford and I remember in 1964 reading in the

newspaper that there was going to be a theatre in Hartford and it was going to be about artists living here amongst us and making art amongst us and for us and not a show coming on its way from Broadway or on its way to Broadway. It was about us. And it was happening in all of these communities around the country. (Nicola)

Ultimately, it was under Zelda's watchful eye that the first regional production of an original work made its way to Broadway (Adams 49). *The Great White Hope*, written by Howard Sackler, produced in 1967 at the Arena Stage, transferred to New York in 1968 after a successful run in D.C. (Pressley, "The Good Fight"). The play, which starred a young James Earl Jones, went on to win the 1969 Tony Award for Best New Play as well as the 1969 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The success of the D.C. production was so great that the original cast accompanied the show to New York, marking the first time a regional cast played on Broadway (Adams 49). Gordon Cox, Legit Editor for *Variety Magazine* identifies that, "While it raided the resident acting company of Arena Stage at the time, it also highlighted the ability of a resident company that was miles away from New York City to create Broadway-ready work" (Cox "Defining the Relationship").

Zelda, upon reading the script, understood *The Great White Hope* needed a lot of work. Despite it being a work-in-progress, she decided to include the play in their company's season. Zelda, who tried to raise money for the play, remembered being rejected by the NEA three times before they were finally awarded a small grant for the Arena production (Fichandler "Zelda Fichandler"). "The NEA turned us down, I petitioned, they turned it down, I petitioned again, and the founding director of the Theatre Program, Ruth Mayleas, gave us \$25,000, which was small but pivotal" (Fichandler "Zelda Fichandler").



What is exceptional about the transfer of *The Great White Hope* in regional theatre history is that it happened at all. The large production featured a racially diverse cast of 68 actors, a storyline that centered on an interracial relationship (a relevant issue considering the 1967 Supreme Court ruling that struck down the ban on interracial marriages), and an expansive set with a multitude of locations. Nevertheless, Zelda never backed down from her commitment to “damn the obstacles, [and] make art” (qtd. in Pressley, “The Good Fight”).

Nelson Pressley, author of “The Good Fight,” identifies that for Fichandler, “Taking on *The Great White Hope* was sure to cost Arena more money than it could possibly earn back, even with grants and sold-out houses [...] Zelda and her late husband, Tom budgeted the show to lose \$50,000 [in Washington D.C.], even though they were armed with a \$25,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts” (Pressley, “The Good Fight”). Fichandler notes, when all was said and done, the production boasted a cast of “68 actors, 250 costumes and 11 sets rolled in on wagons,” as well as a three-hour run time, which was eventually cut to two-and-a-half hours for the Broadway run (Fichandler, “Zelda Fichandler”).

Despite the production’s critical acclaim and subsequent Broadway run, which included over 500 performances, three Tony Awards and a Pulitzer Prize, Arena Stage received no financial return from the production’s New York success (Adams 50). And while the Playbill for *The Great White Hope* did not credit Arena for their role in the development of the play, the Arena did walk away with a new national prominence that catapulted it to a new level in the theatrical community (Adams 50; Pressley, “The Good Fight”).

As the regional theatre grew in size and prominence, the financial commitment and stability of government funding was slowly dissipating. As Diane Ragsdale, author of *In the*

*Intersection: Partnerships in the New Play Sector* (2012), identifies, “[T]he implicit partners of the resident theater movement (private foundations and the NEA) began to pull their financial support just as growth in the size of venues and operating budgets at many theaters necessitated that they dramatically increase both revenues and audiences” (Ragsdale 13). Nicola continued,

The Ford Foundation was doing all the heavy lifting of giving a big chunk of money to establish the company and then promising a period of time, of five to ten years of significant operating support to keep the thing going. Then there would be this big government thing, called the NEA that would be created that would take over and expand from what Ford could do as one entity and take it to the federal level. By 1979 it was clear that that promise was not going to be fulfilled, that that entity [NEA] was not going to grow to the size that had been planned on, and these things, not just theatre but museums and opera houses, all now had to figure out some other way. And that is still the period we are in. (Nicola)

As financial support from the NEA and the Ford Foundation began to decrease, it was an inevitable step that managing and artistic directors would begin looking for alternative funding sources (Ragsdale 39). And, at the same time, Ragsdale notes, “[i]n response to rising production costs and other forces, commercial producers needed to find an alternative to the commercial out-of-town tryout, or Off-Broadway run—their historic avenues for developing and test marketing new properties (mostly musicals)” (Ragsdale 13). It was the perfect storm that would ultimately lead to a once unlikely alliance. Robert Brustein, founder of the American

Repertory Theatre and Yale Repertory Theatre, took a strong position against the inevitable marriage of these once opposing forces, stating in a 1988 *New York Times* Article,

What changed this relationship – and, in my opinion, threatens to corrupt the original goals of the movement – was Broadway's desperate plight. With box-office income shrinking, with more theaters empty, with fewer plays and musicals being produced each year, the Broadway system of originating shows in New York rehearsals and then developing them through out-of-town tryouts began to break down. (Brustein “Siren Song”)

Ultimately, the relationship that began to take shape as the financial support from the NEA and Ford Foundation decreased proved to be vital to the survival of the nonprofit theatre. Ragsdale states, “Without the influx of royalties and enhancement income, in combination with other sources of support, it would not have been possible for them to sustain costumes and scene shops, support the development of new work, and keep their institutions afloat” (Ragsdale 13).

The first show to create a financial benefit for a nonprofit was the Broadway transfer of the Public Theater’s *A Chorus Line* in 1975. The musical was an unexpected hit, transferring to Broadway after a sold out run at the Public, winning twelve Tony Awards in 1976, including Best New Musical, and becoming the second musical to win the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The financial success of *A Chorus Line* is an important moment in nonprofit production history, as it became the first nonprofit produced musical to be financially successful in the commercial theatre. *A Chorus Line*, which began previews at the Public’s 299-seat Newman Theatre on April 16, 1975, ran on Broadway until 1990, making it the sixth longest running show in Broadway history. *A Chorus Line*, which cost \$1,147,000 to produce in Broadway’s Shubert Theatre, made

an unprecedented \$146.5 million in profit, not including the additional \$131 million made from its subsequent international and national tours (Rothstein, “A Chorus Line”). The financial impact over the show’s 25 years on Broadway helped the Public Theater create an endowment of somewhere between \$25-\$36 million, while bringing in roughly \$38 million in profit (Rothstein, “A Chorus Line”). Papp disclosed that *A Chorus Line* was the main support for the Public’s Shakespeare in the Park for approximately six years and allowed for the creation of an endowment that made presenting future free Shakespearean productions in the park possible. Papp also credits *A Chorus Line*’s financial success with the expansion of the Public’s programming, stating that it is entirely possible the Public “probably wouldn’t be around” had it not been for the success of the long running hit (qtd. in Rothstein, “A Chorus Line”) <sup>1</sup>. It is important to note that the Public’s financial success of *A Chorus Line* is largely due to the fact that they acted as a producer on the Broadway production: investing their own money into the show free from a commercial producer allowed them to receive the maximum possible profit.

Following *A Chorus Line*’s financial success and Arena’s lost financial opportunity with *The Great White Hope*, Dean Adams, author of “Puttin’ the Profit in Nonprofit Broadway Theatre Companies,” notes that artists and producers alike began wondering; “Shouldn’t the originating theatre, even an NFP [not-for-profit], which bears the risk of developing a new play or musical, share in some of its future financial and public relations gains?” (Adams 50). A new answer to this question would arise with the 1984 production of *Big River*, which received its initial

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<sup>1</sup> The listed financial income only takes into account the original Broadway production of *A Chorus Line* and subsequent tours, and not the 2008 Broadway Revival, produced by Vienna Waits Productions.

<sup>2</sup> No official announcement of the musical’s Broadway run can be found for *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812*, therefore the listed date of December 14, 2015 acknowledges an announcement of casting for the Broadway run by *Hollywood Reporter* journalist David Rooney in his article “Josh Groban to Make Broadway Debut in ‘Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812.’”

production at the American Repertory Theatre (ART) in Boston, Massachusetts, before moving to the La Jolla Playhouse in La Jolla, California (Plotkins 44). Beyond the complete removal of the nonprofit from the Broadway production, as was the case with *The Great White Hope* and the financial risk taken by the Public with their Broadway transfer of *A Chorus Line*, *Big River* would bring forth a new model that would become the standard for all future nonprofit/ commercial partnerships. *Big River* was directed by then Playhouse Artistic Director, Des McAnuff, who had recently received national attention for his acclaimed production of *The Death of Von Richtofen* at the Public Theatre. Telling the story of Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn and Jim, a former slave attempting to find freedom, the musical received its Broadway premiere just one year after its regional debut and catapulted McAnuff (*Jersey Boys*, *The Who's Tommy*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*) into a career as a key regional-to-Broadway director. Working with Dodger Theatricals, the piece transferred to Broadway, where it won multiple Tony Awards, including Best Musical and Best Director of a Musical. *Big River* marks an important moment in the development of the American musical: a partnership between the regional theatre and the Broadway commercial producer. After the implementation of the "First Producer Clause" in the La Jolla *Big River* contract, the practice of including financial compensation for future runs of a show produced at any regional theatre became a standard practice in regional theatre production contracts and commercial producers saw a new way to develop new works without the debilitating budget of an out-of-town tryout (Bucholz). Michael David, commercial producer with Dodger Theatricals explained that in the late 70s and early 80s, "Broadway became extraordinarily expensive, dangerous, unsupportive, [and] unwelcoming" (qtd. in Ragsdale 79). As Sue Frost, commercial producer

with Junkyard Dog Productions, noted in 2011, *Big River* offered a new way for commercial producers to continue to foster and create new works with cost-sharing.

[*Big River*] was a different model. And it was an exciting model because a commercial production out of town was no longer affordable. It was no longer practical. You couldn't go and make mistakes out of town. It was too expensive. The physical production was too expensive. When you look at Broadway and what it cost in the early 70s to produce and what it cost in the late 70s to produce a show on Broadway—that's when it all went to hell in a hand basket. (qtd. in Ragsdale 79)

Many current regional artistic directors note *Big River's* development at the La Jolla Playhouse as a pivotal moment in the change from Regional Theatre as it had been defined to "Regional Theatre as Broadway Producer." When the Playhouse agreed to produce *Big River* as a part of their 1983/84 subscription season, they were already intimately connected with the production's director and commercial producer, which was one of the reasons why it made the transfer from ART to La Jolla (Bucholz). As a part of the negotiating contract, the Playhouse would act as a front line producer; should the production go on to have a life after the Playhouse, they would receive a certain percentage of the royalties (Bucholz). Ultimately, this contract between the La Jolla Playhouse and the commercial producer, Dodger Theatricals, was a game changer for an industry searching for ways to establish new funding sources. For their role in the development of the Tony Award winning musical, ART received 1.5% of the production's gross and 3.75% of future net profits, whereas La Jolla Playhouse received 1% less the \$65,000 enhancement money they had received for their Playhouse production (David, Michael 56).

Gone were the days of development that garnered only a financial benefit for the commercial producers, now regional theatres, as a part of the development of any production, would receive financial benefits from any commercially successful Broadway run (Bucholz). Gordon Cox, in an article for *American Theatre Magazine*, writes that,

These days, for some nonprofits, such deals are so commonplace they're nearly rote. Pacts tend to hinge on a not-for-profit financing a production with the same amount of money it would budget for any show in its season, while the commercial producer kicks in whatever amount the project requires above and beyond that. The producer then has the right to steer the show into the commercial realm, while the nonprofit receives revenues from those market endeavors, often 1 to 2 percent until recoupment, when the percentage can go up. (Cox "Defining the Relationship")

Although we have seen a large increase in the number of regional-to-Broadway transfers, the hope of the financial success can not only be exciting, but daunting. For a regional theatre company whose budget is generally comprised of ticket sales, grants, and donations, the possible increase in budget due to commercial enhancement money can mean a huge difference in their ability to produce a high quality musical or a play. The problem then becomes an increasing appetite from the subscription audience to continue to see a show that costs \$2 million to produce as opposed to the \$300,000 to \$800,000 a regional theatre typically can afford to produce on its own (Greene). Assessing the changing financial scale of producing shows, Cox writes, "In today's climate, the intersection between the nonprofit and the commercial sectors primarily centers around musicals, as rising production costs have made

mounting large-scale shows with big casts and sizeable orchestras increasingly challenging on both sides of the fence” (Cox “Defining the Relationship”). With the rising cost of production, there are concerns that the dependency on commercial money will continue to increase with commercial producer John Breglio suggests, “[Nonprofits and commercial producers now] ‘need each other because money is coming [from] nowhere else’” (qtd. in Ragsdale 114). André Bishop, artistic director of Lincoln Center Theatre, agrees that the combination of increased costs and decreased government funding, sometimes only ¾ to 1 % of a nonprofit’s budget, has caused regional theatres to look for help from other sources (Bishop). La Jolla Playhouse’s artistic director, Christopher Ashley noted that the, “commercial problems exists largely in musicals,” with Ragsdale summarizing and expanding on Ashley’s thoughts, adding, “because while most nonprofits can produce plays on their own, very few could commission, create, develop, and produce a musical without help and some kind of subsidy” (qtd. in Ragsdale 56). Commercial producer Kevin McCollum added to Ashley’s point saying, “beyond the need for subsidy for nonprofits striving to produce musicals: nonprofits generally don’t have the rights (which often sit with commercial producers) and commercial producers are often seeking out nonprofits because they need an audience to ‘take [the work] to the next level’” (qtd. in Ragsdale 57).

In many instances, a commercial producer can add money to the institution’s production budget. This additional money, used to help supplement the regional’s existing budget in order to provide things the theatre cannot usually afford, is known as enhancement money (Bucholz). The amount of enhancement money that is given for each production varies based on the budgetary needs of each show; generally, enhancement money is applied to musicals, since they are usually much more expensive to produce than a non-musical play. When a commercial



producer gives money to a production, that money can help secure more musicians, pay for an unexpected cost, like a specialized guitar player who is needed due to the complexity of the score, or various other needs to help bolster the final product (Bucholz). In the end, a production that would normally receive a budget from the regional theatre somewhere between \$300,000 to \$800,000 can now produce a show that costs anywhere from \$1.5 to \$2 million dollars (Bucholz).

Of course, there can also be drawbacks to committing to a commercially enhanced production as a part of a subscription season. With a regional theatre, the commitment to producing any production as a part of the season requires a nonstop collaboration between artistic, production, and financial departments and often, a regional theatre has a strict timeline they try to adhere to in terms of announcing their seasons as it affects marketing, publicity, development, and educational programming deadlines. When a season is announced with a commercially enhanced production, there is a certain expectation on that money being present, but sometimes the most unpredictable circumstances can arise. Three months after Barry Edelstein's arrival at the Old Globe in San Diego, a commercially enhanced production of *The Honeymooners* lost its commercial backing, leaving Edelstein to fill the hole in the season (Edelstein). There can also be the issue of rights and legality over producing certain shows. The La Jolla Playhouse was originally scheduled and had already announced *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* as a part of their season when the producers of the show found out that the writers had come up against some issues over the rights to the material on which the musical was based (Cook). When the Playhouse learned of the issue, they decided to forgo the production and the commercial enhancement money that came along with the production

because there was no guarantee when everything would be cleared. Ultimately, the issues were settled and the production had its world premiere at a different theatre (Cook). *A Gentleman's Guide* premiered at Hartford Stage in Hartford, Connecticut before a second production was staged at the Old Globe. The musical went on to win the 2014 Tony Award for Best New Musical. These are but a few instances of many that have happened over the years where a regional theatre company must scramble to find another show to fill its season when a commercial producer is unable, for whatever reason, to bring the show to the regional. Issues like this can send unsettling waves through the institution and ticket buying public. If a show is canceled, money must be refunded if the artistic team is unable to find a substitute show, and even if a substitute is found, the new show may leave subscribers or single ticket holders upset by the changes, especially if they purchased their ticket because of a show's title. Respectively, there is concern from both sides of the table that the nonprofit world is becoming too dependent on their relationship with commercial producers. As commercial producer Sue Frost notes, the growing dependency some nonprofits have developed on enhancement money is alarming and while she doesn't believe any company has crossed the proverbial line, she is concerned that nonprofits are selecting their programming around the possible infusion of commercial money (Frost).

From a commercial perspective, it is not difficult to understand the appeal of the regional theatre production. Commercial producers who have obtained the rights to a show are able to take the product to a regional theatre and experience a multitude of developmental benefits that can range anywhere from staged readings to new play development workshops and even fully staged productions. Cox writes, "Producers say that as costs rise, especially for musicals, the

comparatively safe haven of the not-for-profit offers an opportunity to nourish the creation of a work in a way that a purely commercial production, subject to the pressures of the marketplace, cannot” (Cox “Defining the Relationship”). In addition to the extra time the show is allowed to develop, it also receives an extended rehearsal time (compared to a typical New York City - Equity schedule), the experience of a staff that has honed their skills in the development of new work, and a cheaper price tag overall.

Traditionally, the model for developing musicals and plays in American theatre was to take shows on the road. The out-of-town tryout, largely popular in the 40s, 50s and 60s, often took a musical’s team of creatives, along with the cast, out of New York, allowing them time to work through the show before bringing it back to the city and critics. The model allowed producers to try out the show on audiences to see what worked and what didn’t before spending millions on the Broadway production. If a show flopped with audiences in Boston or Philadelphia, the producer could choose whether or not to continue working on the piece. If the show was well received, a Broadway opening with sets, costumes and actors in tow might prove to be a good financial investment. (Nevertheless, only one in four Broadway productions pay back its original investment). This model, which is contemporarily viewed as an expensive move for a musical due to the rising cost of production, was the best way to work a new musical without the risk of a direct on Broadway opening. The out-of-town tryout, despite its expense, is still used today, but with less frequency. Broadway productions such as the 2015 musical *On Your Feet*, which premiered in Chicago, Illinois, before opening in New York, fared well at the box-office, while Sting’s *The Last Ship* closed a mere four months after it opened in October 2014, despite an out-of-town tryout in Chicago, two Tony Award nominations and multiple

appearances by Sting in the production's Broadway run ("The Last Ship"). More recently, Broadway has seen an increase in direct Broadway openings with the 2016 Tony Award nominated movie-musical *School of Rock* featuring music by Andrew Lloyd Weber (*Phantom of the Opera*, *Cats*, and *Jesus Christ Superstar*), and the 2015 unexpected runaway hit *Something Rotten*, which took Broadway by storm with no big name stars and an original story (Cox "Broadway Skips Tryouts"). Producer Kevin McCollum admitted that the move to Broadway was prompted purely by the availability of a Broadway theatre, which is a precious commodity for a commercial producer with a Broadway show (Cox "Broadway Skips Tryouts"). Rocco Landesman, commercial producer and President Emeritus of Jujamcyn Theatres in New York City, identifies why the out-of-town model has mostly been replaced by the nonprofit/commercial relationship. "You have, in that kind of situation [regional theatre], the luxury of time between the productions. You're not in Chicago and coming in to New York in two weeks. You're in La Jolla and you have two or three months to really sit down and work with the show" (qtd. in Adler 113).

While no longer the only place to develop and see exceptional theatre, New York City is still the theatre capital of the United States. Broadway is the place, especially in recent decades, for a regional theatre to make its mark on the development of American Theatre. With the increasing number of shows that are currently in or scheduled for production and the increasing amount of Broadway hits that have transferred from a nonprofit, the name of many regional theatre companies have become synonymous with Broadway success. Many artists on both sides of the table wonder, as Diane Ragsdale identifies, "whether [or not] resident theatres have begun to lose sight of their purpose, their values, and their artistic and social missions, and have,

instead, begun to adopt commercial values and measures of success” (Ragsdale 22-23). Oskar Eustis, artistic director at the Public Theater, shares the concern, noting that many nonprofits are now driven by box office concerns, a concern traditionally left to commercial producers instead of nonprofit theatres.

The nonprofit theater is supposed to be a theater driven by values that are not determined by the marketplace. The commercial theater is supposed to be determined by the marketplace. That’s the difference between the two. But it seems to me that we are operating within a cultural climate where the sources of support that are (again, throughout the culture) separate from the market, have been reduced dramatically. (qtd. in Ragsdale 14)

After taking part in a three day meeting of commercial and nonprofit theatre artists in 2011 at Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. Ragsdale came to this conclusion:

While commercial partnerships were not perceived to be the cause of this erosion of ideals, necessarily, participants acknowledged that commercial transfers from nonprofits have increased in frequency (within organizations and across the field) and—along with box office success, reviews in *The New York Times*, enhancement income, royalties, Tony Awards, working with celebrities, and the other “bells and whistles” associated with them—have become increasingly important measures of success at many LORT theaters [...] [T]here is work that would not be created were it not for these partnerships. (Ragsdale 10)

So, as Ragsdale posits, the real question on the table becomes, “What would we lose if these partnerships went away?” (Ragsdale 11).

At this moment in our journey, we must take a moment to note that a working definition of Regional Theatre is almost as elusive as a guaranteed Broadway blockbuster. In a *New York Times* article published in 1988, Robert Brustein, founder of Harvard's American Repertory Theatre (ART) and Yale's Repertory Theatre, paints this portrait of his perception of the intents behind the regional theatre movement he had a hand in crafting, stating,

This movement wished to decentralize American theatre in the belief that it was unhealthy to originate so much stage activity in one cultural capital (New York). It sought partial subsidy in an effort to free the theatre from undue dependence on the timidity of the box office. And it wished to consolidate itself out of a conviction that permanent ensembles of actors, directors, designers and administrative staff, preserving the classical repertory and developing new plays, created a potentially more enduring theatrical art than pickup casts assembled for a single show and dominated by star personalities [...] The original purpose of the resident movement in relation to Broadway was analogous to the early aims (now somewhat compromised) of the Public Broadcasting System in relation to commercial networks – to be an independent channel for presentations of a more adventurous, if usually less popular, nature. Perhaps its most radical idea was that theater could develop the talents of artists and the imagination of audiences, not just be a source of profit and deals for backers, producers and agents. (Brustein "The Siren Song")

We must remember that Brustein's ideals were shared values by some in the regional theatre's early days on which the movement was started. We must also acknowledge that the reason no

cohesive definition exists is because there was no meeting of the minds, no manifesto, which articulated one vision of an alternative theatre for the American public. Instead, multiple individuals – Jones, Vance, Fichandler, Brustein, Tyrone Guthrie— created theatre in, around and for a community that wasn't New York. For the purposes of our research, I will define a regional theatre as an organization that is headed by either an artistic director and managing director, or a producing artistic director, operates an annual season with a budget of \$1 million or more, has a board of directors, a mission statement, and operates under a non-profit 501c3 tax status. Financially, the regional theatre is supported by donations, grants, season subscription sales, and box office revenue. While the focus of a regional theatre may be the production of new works, some companies include a reimaging of the classics, and often include an educational component that encompasses youth programs and adult education initiatives. As a part of their season, a regional theatre produces a collection of at least five to six shows that are staged in their theatres for a set amount of time without the option to do an open run. For the beginning of our study, we will also include in our definition of a regional theatre its national location, adhering to the ideals of the movement's intentions to stay outside of New York. The focus of the regional theatre movement originated by Margo Jones' Theatre 47 in Dallas, Texas, was to create theatre away from the existing centralized New York model and bring theatre to the people of America that could not otherwise access New York-based theatre (Christopher Jones; Margo Jones).

In 2014 the Tony voting committee expanded the scope of regional theatre by now including New York based nonprofits in the list of companies eligible for the Regional Tony Award (Christopher Jones). Nonprofit theatres in New York are eligible for a Regional Tony Award as

long as they are not eligible for a Tony on a Broadway show; for example, nonprofit theatre companies such as Roundabout and Manhattan Theatre Club are not eligible for the Regional Tony because they produce shows in their Broadway houses, making them eligible for Tony Awards in other categories. Theatre companies in New York, such as the Public Theater, are eligible any year they are not eligible for a show they have transferred to Broadway (Christopher Jones).

The world of American Regional Theatre is actively changing; understanding that change is imperative to understanding the state and trends of American theatre. This study will aim to answer the following questions: What are the changes in professional production of musicals in the last 30 years? Does the financial impact of a successful Broadway transfer impact the artistic decisions of a regional nonprofit theatre? What is the appeal for a regional theatre to participate in the production of a Broadway hopeful show? What are the financial repercussions on a regional theatre of forming a dependency on commercial enhancement money? How are regional theatres impacted in the long term when they actively program productions with commercial enhancement money? Ultimately, all of these questions aim to answer the question: What is the new road to Broadway?

For each company included in this study, the process of obtaining information has varied. Primarily, this study has used in-person interviews, financial 990 IRS reports filed by each 501c3 nonprofit organization, weekly Broadway financial reports through the *Theatrical Index*, and newspaper articles from such respected sources as *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Denver Post* and *The Boston Globe*. While researching the Public, I was able to dedicate a considerable amount of time to exploring the theatre company's donated files in the Theatre



and Dance Division of the New York Performing Arts Library. The files cover Joseph Papp's tenure at the New York Shakespeare Festival, from its inception in 1954 to Papp's death in 1991, and include such documents as personal correspondence, annual reports and yearly budgets. These files have been instrumental to discovering the full impact *A Chorus Line* had on the Public's operation as well as understanding the financial implications of the theatre company's growth over the years of the musical's successful Broadway run. While I was able to speak with Robert Brustein, the founder of the American Repertory Theatre, I was unable to secure an interview with current artistic director Diane Paulus; therefore, the majority of my information surrounding Paulus and her work has been compiled from interviews Ms. Paulus has conducted with national reporters. Additionally, for full disclosure, I feel it is important to note that I have worked extensively with the Denver Center Theatre Company, first as an intern in the literary department, then on the 2014 production of *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* and the 2015 production of *The Twelve*, then as a dramaturg on various other productions. In 2015, the La Jolla Playhouse hired me to work as their artistic intern where I worked closely with their artistic department for ten months.

In our search to discover the new road to Broadway, we will travel through four nonprofit regional theatre companies across America that have actively participated in the development of a regional-to-Broadway transfer in the last seventeen (2000-2017) years. While there are several active nonprofit- to-Broadway participants such as Hartford Stages (Hartford, Connecticut), The Old Globe Theatre (San Diego, California), Steppenwolf Theatre Company (Chicago, Illinois), Arena Stages (Washington, D.C.), Yale Repertory Theatre (New Haven, Connecticut), Goodman Theatre (Chicago, Illinois) and the Guthrie Theatre (Minneapolis,

Minnesota). The companies included in this study – American Repertory Theatre (Cambridge, Massachusetts), La Jolla Playhouse (La Jolla, California), Denver Center Theatre Company (Denver, Colorado) and the Public Theater (New York, New York) were selected as representatives of nonprofit theatre companies across the nation that have actively participated in a commercially enhanced production that had a significant impact on that company (La Jolla Playhouse and Public Theater), have altered the programming to accommodate more commercially enhanced productions (American Repertory Theatre) or operate under a different financial structure from other nonprofit regional companies and have recently seen an influx of commercially enhanced productions over the last four years (Denver Center Theatre Company). Additionally, each of the following companies with the exception of the Public Theater due to their location in New York City and the consistent transfer of shows from their downtown theatre to Broadway, making them ineligible for the regional Tony award, have been awarded the Regional Theatre Tony Award (American Repertory Theatre (1986), La Jolla Playhouse (1993), and the Denver Center Theatre Company (1998)). Each of these companies, with the exception of the Public Theatre, are members of the League of Resident Theatres. The Public Theater operates on an Off-Broadway contract, with the exception of the Delacorte Theatre in Central Park, which operates under LORT contracts.

Chapter Two: American Repertory Theatre – Artistic Differences. The American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts, founded by Robert Brustein in 1980, has been a part of a number of very successful Broadway transfers (“About the A.R.T.”). Considered one of the leading nonprofit regional theatres in America, A.R.T. has successfully been a part of the development of several Broadway shows including the 2012 revival of *Porgy and Bess*, *Pippin*

(2014), *Waitress* (2016), and *Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812* (2016). Under Brustein's direction, one of the first commercially enhanced productions, *Big River*, had a fruitful run before transferring to La Jolla Playhouse and then on to Broadway. This chapter will focus on the artistic changes of A.R.T. over the years from a foundational nonprofit theatre of avant-garde theatre to a pre-Broadway house.

Chapter Three: The La Jolla Playhouse – Financial Rabbit Holes. This chapter will focus on the La Jolla Playhouse in La Jolla, California, and its role in the production of 26 productions including *Jersey Boys*, that have transferred to New York, garnering an incredible 35 Tony Awards for the company. Founded in 1947 by Gregory Peck, Mel Ferrer, and Dorothy McGuire, this 1993 Tony winner for Best Regional Theatre has an active presence on Broadway. As a part of the company's mission, La Jolla aims to be the regional company that is actively shaping American theatre, making it one of the premiere pre-Broadway houses. This chapter will focus on the development of the first producer clause, the development of the highly celebrated *Jersey Boys*, and the benefits of the nonprofit/Broadway transfer, while exploring potential pitfalls for nonprofits that experience great financial successful from a Broadway transfer.

Chapter Four: Playing the Sandbox: The Denver Center Theatre Company. This chapter will focus on the Denver Center Theatre Company (DCTC) and their 2014-2015 season, which featured two large musicals, *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* and *The Twelve*. While the Denver Center is not focused on sending shows to Broadway and does not actively seek out these opportunities, the company premiered two productions in their 2014/15 Season that have Broadway aspirations. In this season, *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* was an extensively rewritten production of the 1962 classic, directed by Kathleen Marshall, Tony nominated director and

choreographer, with a new libretto and new lyrics by Dick Scanlan (*Thoroughly Modern Millie* and *Everyday Rapture*).

In the same season, the DCTC produced another world premiere musical, *The Twelve*, which focuses on the story of the twelve apostles and hypothesizes what happened to them in the 72 hours following Jesus' death. Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Robert Schenkkan (*All the Way* and *The Kentucky Cycle*) wrote the libretto and co-authored the lyrics with composer Neil Berg. The inclusion of both commercially enhanced productions in their season helped increase the Denver Center's presence on the national stage.

Chapter Five: The Public Theater – Lessons Learned. As the definition of regional theatre has grown and changed over the years, we have seen the American Theatre Wing embrace the New York nonprofit theatre scene. One of the most successful nonprofit theatres is New York's Public Theater, established in 1954 by Joseph Papp. The Public Theatre has played a very important role in the development of some of America's most financially successful Broadway transfers including *A Chorus Line* and *Hamilton: An American Musical*. Of course, not everything the Public has transferred to Broadway has been a financial gold mine such as their unsuccessful transfers of *On the Town* (1998) and *The Wild Party* (2000). The success of *A Chorus Line* allowed Papp to run his theatre without the infusion or influence of commercial money, but Oskar Eustis, current Artistic Director of The Public notes, the theater has not been able to fulfill its mission since the loss of income from *A Chorus Line*'s Broadway run without the infusion of commercial funding (Ragsdale 42).

Conclusion: The New Road to Broadway. This chapter aims to reiterate the significant changes that have occurred in the regional theatre circuit in the past twenty years. Additionally,

this chapter will work to identify the pros and cons of the recent changes in structure, focus and production goals and how they are representative of the new road to Broadway.

In examining the history of nonprofit production and how the interdependency of the nonprofit theatre and commercial producer began, we can hope to better understand the long term impacts these relationships will have on the development of new works and the identity of the nonprofit theatre in the future as they face the uncertain road ahead.

## Chapter II: The American Repertory Theater and Artistic Differences

*[The regional] movement wished to decentralize American theatre in the belief that it was unhealthy to originate so much stage activity in one cultural capital (New York). It sought partial subsidy in an effort to free the theatre from undue dependence on the timidity of the box office.*

*And it wished to consolidate itself out a conviction that permanent ensembles of actors, directors, designers and administrative staff, preserving the classical repertory and developing new plays, created a potentially more enduring theatrical art than pickup casts assembled for a single show and dominated by star personalities. – Robert Brustein (“Siren Song”)*

*The American Musical is a legitimate genre in the history of American Theatre, but they’re expensive just like opera. So, in order to do them, these marriages [regional theatres and commercial producers], even though they seem like marriages of convenience, they’re often the only financial mechanism that’s going to launch these productions for the artists involved. – Des McAnuff*

When Robert Brustein moved from Yale Repertory Theater to Harvard to start the American Repertory Theater in 1980, he brought with him an aesthetic and an idea he had spent years building at Yale. Brustein took over as the Dean of the Yale School of Drama in 1966, determined to change the face of the theatre by changing the curriculum to include dramaturgy, dramatic criticism, and theatre administration (Plotkins 2). According to Marilyn J. Plotkins, author of *History of the American Repertory Theatre*, Brustein removed all tenured positions, hired famed actress Stella Adler to head the theater’s acting program, and “shifted the long-standing academic model to one rooted in professional practice,” establishing the first resident company within a university (2).

But when Brustein’s long time supporter and Yale President, Kingman Brewster, left the university in 1977 to work as an Ambassador for President Carter, things began to fall apart for the Dean of the Drama School (3). A. Bartlett Giamatti, Brewster’s successor as president of Yale, wasn’t fond of Brustein’s less than conventional theatre style, effectively telling Brustein

that the 1979 academic year would be his last year at the Drama School (3). Plotkins writes that, “In spite of his knowledge of Harvard’s historic disregard for the applied arts in its curriculum, Brustein drafted a proposal to move his staff and his training program to Cambridge” (4).

For decades, the city of Boston had established itself as an important destination for pre-Broadway tryouts and touring productions, but with no repertory theatre in the Boston area, Leslie Bennetts, critic for *The New York Times* suggested that the city had become “diffident if not hostile to theatre, particularly unconventional theatre” (Bennetts). For centuries, Boston has lived and worked under the moniker “Banned in Boston” that had arisen from a citywide ban on anything authorities deemed objectionable, in movies, literary works, songs, and theatre. The ban created an audience of people who were not fond of theatre outside the box. But as Plotkins points out, Brustein was determined to win over new audience members by “producing universal works of art in a specifically American style, for this time, for this place, for this audience” (Plotkins 6).

Writing in 2005, Plotkins notes that, “Brustein has little patience for theatres that presented classical texts as museum pieces. He wanted to generate productions in an American style that spoke directly to his audience,” insisting that text not be viewed as “sacred,” but as a tool of “storytelling and image making” (5). With his company in hand, Brustein began his first season at A.R.T. with four revivals of successful Yale productions opening with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* on March 20, 1980 (Brustein 4; Plotkins 4-5). The move was a resounding success leading to thirteen thousand new subscribers soaking up the work of Boston’s repertory theatre (4).

Brustein's programming was not for all, and the company witnessed a sharp decline in subscriptions the following year (Plotkins 6). But the loss of audience members to the newly opened, more traditional Boston-based Huntington Theatre Company did not deter Brustein from choosing less than popular programming. Instead, he focused on the younger audiences A.R.T. drew to the theatre, recognizing that they were much more attracted to unusual fare (6). In fact, Plotkins writes, "Of the 172 plays produced by the A.R.T. during the Brustein years, over 70 were premieres, new translations, or adaptations," and Brustein did not stop there: "[h]e presented and supported the early work of Sam Shepard and David Mamet... [and] also demonstrated loyalty to his former students Christopher Durang and Mark Lieb, and to Marsha Norman and Adam Rapp" (7). With Brustein's guidance, A.R.T. quickly became a playground for new American playwrights as the New Stages Series took off in 1982 (7).

As a resident and repertory company, A.R.T. featured an acting company that boasted extraordinary talent such as Cherry Jones, Tony Shalhoub, Kathy Bates, Mark Rylance, and Felicity Huffman (8-9). Plotkins contends that throughout his tenure at A.R.T., Brustein was a fierce opponent of the star system, rejecting the celebrity vehicle, "insisting that plays were often chosen with opportunities for the company in mind. And, in spite of tremendous pressure from directors and playwrights, Brustein was a forceful advocate for company members" (9).

It was during Brustein's tenure at A.R.T. that Michael David, Rocco Landesman, and Des McAnuff brought *Big River* to Cambridge in 1984 (44). David and McAnuff, along with a few others, had recently created Dodger Theatrical, a theatre company that had started as a non-profit company but quickly became focused on commercial ventures (McAnuff). Landesman, who eventually became president of Jujamcyn Theatres in New York and President of the



National Endowment for the Arts, was currently in the process of developing a musical about Mark Twain's novel *Huckleberry Finn* (McAnuff). Landesman asked McAnuff to direct the new musical, but felt that the piece needed some time for development (McAnuff). McAnuff recalls, "There was no way we could do *Big River* alone and he needed, or felt he wanted the show to be developed so we first went to the American Repertory Theatre" (McAnuff). Landesman and Bill Hauptman, the musical's librettist, were both former students of Brustein's and with that connection, A.R.T seemed like the perfect place to start work on the musical. Brustein recalls,

I plead guilty to the fact that among the very first shows ever to move to Broadway from a resident theatre was a show of ours. And I must say I was kind of tricked into that by an ex-student of mine Rocco Landesman, who I adore, and who has done so much for the theatre with Jujamcyn and later as head of the National Endowment for the Arts, but he tricked me by showing me a script done by one of my ex-students, Bill Hauptman, called *Big River*, which was a play about Huckleberry Finn and I thought it was terrific play and I wanted to do it, and he said, "Oh by the way, I think there should be music to it and there's a composer interested," and he got Roger Miller to write the music and before I knew it we had a massive thing on our hands, that was aimed to go to Broadway without my knowing it. And it did go to Broadway and earned a lot of kudos, we had a small piece of it naturally, I think it was only about 1 % but it helped us with our budget. It was not what we had in mind when encouraging people to work with us. In fact, it was the very opposite of what we had in mind. (Brustein)

For their part in the show's creation, A.R.T. refused to accept any enhancement money, which at the time had yet to be officially named. But what they did receive was around \$300,000 in royalties from the show's successful Broadway run (Anderman). According to David, the musical's producer, A.R.T., received 1.5 % of the musical's future gross as well as 3.75% of the future net profit (David 56). Brustein noted, "we were happy to see it on Broadway, happy to see it get a larger audience. It was an extraordinary production. But we were also happy that we had no part in the producing of it [on Broadway]" (qtd. in Ragsdale 56-57).

After a successful run at A.R.T., *Big River* made its way to the La Jolla Playhouse in La Jolla, California, for additional development time. The Playhouse, which was under the artistic direction of the musical's director, Des McAnuff, seemed like the perfect next step for the show's artistic process. It was during the musical's tenure at the Playhouse, that Dodger Theatrical added \$65,000 to the show's budget (McAnuff; David). With the increased budget, the artistic team began working on expanding the score, with McAnuff noting that his ease and experience with music allowed the show to relax into what it needed to be. Diane Ragsdale, author of *In the Intersection: Partnerships in the New Play Sector* (2012) noted,

*Big River* also represented a watershed moment for the field because it is one of the earliest instances of a commercial producer successfully developing (and enhancing) a production at a nonprofit resident theater before moving it to Broadway [...] Following the first production, changes were made and it was then produced at McAnuff's theater, the La Jolla Playhouse. Following the La Jolla run, it was determined that, with some changes, the show was ready to move to Broadway. (Ragsdale 56)

With the enhancement money in place, it was important to establish the roles of everyone invested in the success of the show. McAnuff remembers, “We had a pretty clear understanding that when the show was at La Jolla, as artistic director, along with the managing director Allan Levy, we were going to make decisions and then when it got into the halls of commerce, others would take over: Rocco, Michael David, and so on” (McAnuff).

It wasn’t until the run at La Jolla that the transfer to Broadway was announced. McAnuff remembers,

I’m sure Rocco had the ambition to take it to New York. I’m not sure I really believed it would happen. And we have this term we like to use, “The B-word,” which is Broadway and often I think we found the best way to ensure a show doesn’t come to Broadway is to talk about it and plan it that way. So I think most of the time we take a kind of “wait and see” attitude. I think Rocco was more perhaps ambitious that way at the time and was kind of invested in it and so it was probably always his intention to try to get it there. And we got some great reviews on the way in. We also had some reviews that were critical and there was an interesting one – one of the critical ones was by Jack Viertel [*Los Angeles Herald Examiner*] – and, of course, that critical review was probably the most valuable review we got. So it was an interesting highway to take. I think we probably would not have made it to New York. We wouldn’t have made it to the Eugene O’Neill had we not gone through the not-for-profit hoops. (McAnuff)

Outside of La Jolla’s role as an out-of-town tryout and developmental space for *Big River*, Landesman also used the Playhouse’s production to raise the capital needed for a New York run,

establishing another first in the nonprofit/ commercial producer relationship. Landesman stated, “We used the production in La Jolla essentially to raise money to capitalize the Broadway production. We had people come to see it in droves with the idea that they might write a check. So it was really part of the commercial process, that run in the non-for-profit theater. It was part of the capitalization of the show” (qtd. in Ragsdale 78). This practice is now commonplace for many commercial producers who see the nonprofit run as an opportunity to not only work the show creatively and create critical buzz before moving to New York, but also as an important financial building block to create excitement with potential investors.

Beyond the show’s move to Broadway, and the subsequent Tony Awards that would follow, *Big River* established another important norm in the nonprofit/commercial producer relationship: the first producer clause. After the implementation of the “First Producer Clause” in the La Jolla-*Big River* contract, the practice of including financial compensation for future runs of a show produced at any regional theatre has become a standard practice in regional theatre production contracts (Bucholz). For their role in the development of the musical, La Jolla received 1% of future net gross less the \$65,000 advance (enhancement money) they received to produce *Big River* and no percentage of the musical’s future gross, a significant difference from A.R.T.’s 3.75% of future net profits and 1.5% of future gross for not having taken any enhancement money (David, Michael 56).

Many current regional artistic directors note *Big River*’s development at A.R.T. and the La Jolla Playhouse, as a pivotal moment in the change of identity for some from a “Regional Theatre” to “Regional Theatre as Broadway Producer.” Nowadays, as a part of the negotiating contract, it is written in that the nonprofit will act as a front line producer, should the production

go on to have a life after that institution's production (Bucholz). Generally, these agreements contain a clause that expires three to five years after the nonprofit's production and acknowledges the financial contribution of the regional company in the original production. As this agreement allows the company to participate financially in the show's Broadway run without investing any additional money beyond the budget of the show's original run, they are granted anywhere from one to five percent in returns from box office sales (Bucholz). If the show plays at multiple theatres pre-Broadway, as *Big River* did, the percentage of potential financial return is usually shared between the companies.

Ultimately, this contract between A.R.T., the La Jolla Playhouse and the show's commercial producers was a game changer. Gone were the days of development that depended only on financing from commercial producers; now regional theatres, as a part of the development of a production, would receive financial benefits from a commercially successful Broadway run (Bucholz). "These deals," Gordon Cox, Legit Editor for *Variety Magazine*, wrote in 2014, "are so commonplace they're nearly rote" (Cox "Defining the Relationship").

Although Brustein wasn't exactly a willing participant in turning his regional theatre into a Broadway tryout home, he thinks back fondly on the company's role in the development of the musical, often laughing about the unsuspecting intentions of show's producers. Ultimately, he says, "I don't mind a move, but I [didn't] want to be a tryout house" (Brustein). He notes the irony of the statement, considering one of the first shows to transfer from a nonprofit to Broadway came from his theatre. "People can always turn to me and call me a hypocrite. Which they often do" (Brustein).

Brustein stepped down as the artistic director of A.R.T. at the end of the 2001/02 season (Plotkins 14). His successor, Robert Woodruff, continued Brustein's mission of non-traditional theatre, but when Woodruff's contract wasn't renewed in 2007 and he was replaced with the company's current artistic director Diane Paulus in 2008, a decisive change in the company's focus took place.

Before accepting the position with A.R.T., Paulus was already a well-respected theatre artist having obtained several Obie Awards for her work Off-Broadway. As a theatre director, Paulus had recently experienced success with the Public's 2008 production of *Hair: The American Tribal-Rock Musical*. The show, which transferred to Broadway in 2009, won the Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical, securing Paulus with her first nomination for Best Director.

Despite the controversy that followed Paulus's move to A.R.T., the board's decision to break away from what the company had been previously, marked an important change in the company's artistic focus. For Brustein, (who had worked as an advisor to the company since his resignation as artistic director), the changes Paulus would bring to the company was a decisive step, stating in 2009, "She is full of beans and energy and excitement and exciting ideas. She's an electrifying person. The program is going to be very different than it has been at A.R.T. We welcome the difference, and I think the audience will be pleased" (qtd. in Walsh). But, in 2010, Brustein, long time supporters of his work, and the few remaining members of the acting company changed their tune about the changes Paulus was bringing to the company and decided to end their tenure with the A.R.T., with Brustein stepping down from the advisory board he had served on since 2002 (Edgers). Two additional members of the board of trustees and board of advisors left, stating that Paulus was destroying the company's great heritage by

turning it into an out-of-town tryout house (Edgers). The basis of their fears was that A.R.T. was beginning to succumb to commercialism. After the acting company was all but dismantled (only a few still remained following Brustein's departure), William LeBow, a long time member of the A.R.T.'s acting company, declared in a scathing letter, "that company WAS its people, giving heart and soul to Robert Brustein's vision. That company has been replaced with a corporate model, complete with the power centric CEO (the Artistic Director being so officially named)" (original emphasis, LeBow).

Despite the outrage from Brustein's community, it is important to acknowledge that Paulus had yet to transfer any musicals from the A.R.T. stage to New York: her only work to play Broadway to date was the 2009 production of *Hair*. For others, however, Paulus was breathing new and necessary life into the A.R.T., presenting works that were inspiring and revolutionary while simultaneously reviving the company's struggling box office that had, until Paulus, been on a decade's long losing streak (Edgers).

Geoff Edgars of *The Boston Globe* noted in a 2010 article about the changes happening at A.R.T., that Paulus's work was replacing the "company's steady diet of serious avant-garde productions with audience-pleasing musicals and adventurous interactive experiences" (Edgers). Paulus set to work quickly programming her Studio 54 inspired *Midsummer Night's Dream* cabaret titled *The Donkey Show* (which sold over 40,000 tickets), the popular immersive theatre version of *Macbeth – Sleep No More* — and a seven hour reading of *The Great Gatsby* titled *Gatz* (created by Elevator Repair Service). Edgars continued,

[S]upporters [of Paulus] point to a boom at the box office. In Paulus's first season, 143,933 people attended shows at the Loeb, Oberon, and old Lincoln School in

Brookline, where the British company Punchdrunk staged the interactive “Macbeth” adaptation “Sleep No More” as part of Paulus’s “Shakespeare Exploded!” festival. That total — which includes 10,643 for non-ART shows at Oberon — was nearly twice the previous year’s 74,623. (Edgers)

With Paulus now at the head of the company, financial advisors for A.R.T. noted that the 2010 \$10.9 operating budget was expected to break even for the first time since 2005, stating that previous seasons has ended with a deficit between \$665,000 and \$1.9 million (Edgers).

Beyond her departure from the avant-garde theatre of A.R.T.’s past productions, Paulus is a well-known revivalist, successfully transferring her 2012 Tony Award winning revival of *Porgy and Bess* and the 2014 Tony Award winning revival of *Pippin* to Broadway from A.R.T.

The *Porgy and Bess* revival began its journey to Broadway as a predetermined out-of-town regional tryout at A.R.T. with the show’s press release stating that the show was “specifically created for Broadway and will feature a revised book in a musical theatre format and jazz-oriented musical arrangements” (Gans). With Paulus at the helm of the revival and a revised book by Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Suzan-Lori Parks, producers Jeffrey Richards and Jerry Frankel announced the Broadway January 2012 run prior to the show’s August 2011 opening at A.R.T.’s Loeb Drama Center. While the amount of enhancement money A.R.T. received for the production is unknown, it can be assumed that some money was given to aid the expenses of the Cambridge run; considering the cost of employing Broadway caliber actors such as Norm Lewis, David Alan Grier, and four time (at the time of the show’s opening) Tony Award winning actress Audra McDonald, all of whom appeared in both the out-of-town A.R.T. and Broadway run, we can safely assume enhancement money was involved (Gans). Kevin



McCollum, Tony Award winning commercial producer of *In the Heights* and *Avenue Q*, pointed out in a 2011 meeting between Broadway producers and non-profit regional theatre artists, “Increasingly, in order to get commitments from stars and investors for the nonprofit production, the commercial producer must be able to guarantee a Broadway transfer (that is, secure a Broadway theater and raise the much larger sum needed to capitalize the Broadway production)” (qtd. in Ragsdale 62).

The predetermined Broadway bound show received several changes before its A.R.T. run, including a rebranding as *The Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess*. Previously considered more operatic than musical theatre, Paulus stated in an interview that both the Gershwin and Hayward estates had granted the producers permission to make adjustments to both the script and score in an effort to “bring *Porgy and Bess* to life on the musical stage in a way that feels essential, immediate, and passionate,” while aiming to make it more relevant for contemporary audiences (qtd. in Gans).

Paulus and the company received a litany of scrutiny for making changes to the Gershwin and Hayward show; chief among the complainants was Stephen Sondheim, celebrated composer of such shows as *Company*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Sunday in the Park with George* and *Into the Woods*. In a rather biting letter submitted to *The New York Times*, Sondheim blasted Paulus, Parks and the producers for seeking “to transform the classic 1935 opera into a commercial Broadway musical” (Sondheim). Sondheim personally took issue with Paulus’s assessment of audience members lacking the ability to relate to the characters in the opera, calling her assessment “woefully ignorant” (Sondheim). Originally a four-hour musical, the new Broadway bound version had been significantly cut and reworked into two and half hours (Brantley “A New

Storm's Brewing"). In response to the cuts that had been made to the script, Sondheim continued:

Then there is Ms. Paulus's condescension toward the audience. She says, "I'm sorry, but to ask an audience these days to invest three hours in a show requires your heroine be an understandable and fully rounded character." I don't know what she's sorry about, but I'm glad she can speak for all of us restless theatergoers. If she doesn't understand Bess and feels she has to "excavate" the show, she clearly thinks it's a ruin, so why is she doing it? I'm sorry, but could the problem be her lack of understanding, not Heyward's? (Sondheim)

Concluding his rebuttal of the work being done by Paulus on the Broadway-bound show, Sondheim stated with finality, "In the interest of truth in advertising, let it not be called 'The Gershwins' *Porgy and Bess*,' nor even 'The Gershwin-Heyward *Porgy and Bess*.' Advertise it honestly as "Diane Paulus's *Porgy and Bess*." And the hell with the real one" (Sondheim).

The show opened on Broadway to mixed critical response with some praising the restructuring of the classic opera and others feeling exceptionally underwhelmed by everything but McDonald's portrayal of the "new" musical's leading lady (Reed). Despite the difference of opinions, the musical received ten Tony Award nominations, winning the Tony Award for Best Revival that year, with Audra McDonald winning Best Actress for her portrayal of Bess. The show's win was Paulus's second Tony win for Best Revival and A.R.T.'s second Tony Award for a show that transferred from their theatre. The musical enjoyed an extended run after the Tony Award win and closed on September 23, 2012, after 322 performances, having grossed \$26.4 million ("*The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*").

Paulus's decision to program a predetermined Broadway show into her A.R.T. season was a huge departure from Brustein's determination to keep the company from becoming an out-of-town tryout house. But A.R.T.'s return to the critical spotlight, and the box office boost that came from Paulus's self-identified populist programming was transforming the company into exactly what Brustein had attempted to avoid during his tenure as the company's artistic director and founder. With every new season it was becoming clear that Paulus's definition of a regional theatre differed from Brustein's, as the pre-Broadway tryouts continued, effectively turning the A.R.T. into one of America's premiere out-of-town regional tryout theatres. Paulus and Diane Quinn, Head of Strategy, Planning, Staffing and Finances, disagree with that assessment, suggesting instead that the company's recent programming of Broadway bound shows isn't because they are bound for Broadway, although Broadway producers have been attached to many A.R.T. productions, but because Paulus's understands what it takes to bring audiences to the theatre (Healy "New Cast Behind the Scenes").

While none of the Broadway transfers have provided a windfall of money to A.R.T., the profits from shows transferring to Broadway, the increased visibility of A.R.T., and a healthy dose of enhancement money has certainly turned the financial situation around. When Paulus was hired in 2008, the company had an operating loss of "\$4.7 million over three years. The next year, it lost \$6 million, as investments managed by the Harvard endowment went south" (Healy "New Cast Behind the Scenes"). At this rate of loss, then Harvard provost and vice chairman of the theatre Steven Hayman stated, "The ART was not going to be financially viable" (qtd. in Beth Healy "New Cast Behind the Scenes"). With an already financially unstable foundation, Paulus's first week as the new artistic director was accented by the 2008 stock market crash that sent the

country into an unexpected financial hole (Healy “ART Stages Financial Revival”). Beth Healy of *The Boston Globe*, identified that Paulus’s new challenge went beyond the issues facing the A.R.T. financially, but to the audiences affected by the financial crisis, forcing her to “figure out how to make the theater thrive both artistically and financially” (Beth Healy “ART Stages Financial Revival”).

Artistically, Paulus’s first season saw audience members who had left during the company’s more avant-garde years return to the theatre, boosting ticket sales and revenue for the struggling theatre. And although Paulus’s vision for A.R.T. differs significantly from Brustein’s, the positive financial effects have been undeniable. In 2014, the company boasted \$6.6 million in grants and contributions, more than twice the amount it had seen in 2009, while also enjoying a climb in revenue in 2014 to \$19.4 million (Healy “New Cast Behind the Scenes;” Internal Revenue Services, American Repertory Theatre 2014, 9). The company’s 990 IRS filings for 2012 and 2013 feature a column of reported auxiliary earned income which can be comprised of both commercial enhancement money and Broadway box office revenue, reporting revenue of \$2.3 million and \$2.9 respectively (9).

Paulus’s Broadway bound programming continued with the 2013 Broadway revival of Stephen Schwartz and Roger O. Hirson’s *Pippin*. The musical, which ran at A.R.T.’s Loeb Drama Center from December 5, 2012, to January 20, 2013, announced its Broadway transfer in early January 2013 (Collins-Hughes). Given a discreet “special thanks” in the A.R.T.’s program, the show’s producers including Broadway vets Barry and Fran Weissler and newcomers Howard and Janet Kagan, who set Broadway previews to begin March 23, 2013, just two months after A.R.T.’s closing (Collins-Hughes). As with *Porgy and Bess*, we can assume the producers provided

enhancement money to help pay for the production at A.R.T., which featured prominent Broadway vets such as Patina Miller (*Sister Act*), Charlotte D'Ambroise (*A Chorus Line*), Terrence Mann (*Scarlet Pimpernel* and *Beauty and the Beast*), and Andrea Martin (*Young Frankenstein* and *Exit the King*) and a partnership with Montreal-based acrobatic troupe Les Doigts de la Main to add to the circus-inspired revival (Kennedy "Diane Paulus").

*Pippin's* Broadway opening marked Paulus's second A.R.T.-to-Broadway transfer, coming just a year after the successful transfer of *Porgy and Bess*. The revival opened to mostly critical acclaim, receiving ten Tony Award nominations, and winning four, including Best Revival and earning Paulus her first Tony Award for Best Director. In addition to the show's Tony Award wins, the investors successfully recouped their \$8.5 million investment in just eight months, while playing to mostly sold out crowds since it opened on Broadway (Healy "'Pippin' Revival Recoups"). After running for a full year on a profit, the revival closed in January 2015 when ticket sales hit just 36 percent of potential box office sales; the musical successfully grossed \$68.8 million (Piepenburg).

Next on the A.R.T.'s artistic director's programming was Robert Schenkkan's *All the Way*, which had recently enjoyed a successful run at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival as a part of their American Revolutions series. Schenkkan, who had received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1993 for his play *The Kentucky Cycle*, aimed for a 2012 opening at OSF, believing that it would be important for audiences to consider our presidential history in an election year (Schenkkan). After the show received critical attention, Schenkkan and his agent reached out to commercial producer Jeffrey Richards and invited him to Ashland to see the production (Schenkkan). Immediately, Richards said yes; but Richards also knew the show needed more work before

transferring to Broadway, and it would need a star actor to head the company of actors (Schenkkan). Bryan Cranston, Emmy winning actor for *Breaking Bad*, was hired to play President Lyndon Baines Johnson, and with Boston's political history, Richards set his sights on A.R.T. Before the play even opened at A.R.T. the run was completely sold out and a Broadway run was announced in November 2013, a month after the show closed in Cambridge. The show went on to win the 2014 Tony Award for Best New Play, making it the third year in a row an A.R.T.-to-Broadway transfer took home Broadway's most prestigious award. The production also recouped its \$3.9 million investment in three months; Schenkkan largely credits Cranston with the show's financial success, stating, "he did what a star is supposed to do: sell tickets" (Schenkkan).

After a workshop reading of *Finding Neverland* in 2011 at La Jolla Playhouse, the musical was scheduled to premiere as a part of the their 2012 season, but without explanation movie producer Harvey Weinstein (*Shakespeare in Love*) pulled the musical (Ng "Weinstein"). When the initial tryout in the United Kingdom in 2012, didn't go as Weinstein had hoped, he replaced the musical's original director, Rob Ashford – after receiving largely negative reviews – for focusing too much on recreating the movie instead of embracing the production's new medium (Zeitchik "'Finding Neverland"). It wasn't until 2013, that Paulus was hired as the new director for the struggling movie-musical. Weinstein was determined to get to the musical to Broadway (Hetrick).

The production at A.R.T., which received a \$3 million enhancement from Weinstein, was just a small part of the \$6 million he had already spent trying to get the show to Broadway, which would be nothing compared to the additional \$11 million he intended to add to the show

once it finally reached its Broadway home (Brantley “Fantasies”). Despite a \$15.2 million total investment, the show’s Broadway opening on April 15, 2015 (marking A.R.T.’s fourth show in as many years to hit Broadway) was met with mixed reviews and failed to receive a single Tony Award nomination. The show ran for sixteen months after its opening, but only made 60 percent of its initial investment (Gerard “Harvey Weinstein”). The first national tour launched on October 11, 2016.

Work on *Finding Neverland* also highlighted the importance of a good and clear working relationship between commercial producers and nonprofit theatres, as Paulus pointed out in an interview with *L.A. Times* journalist Steven Zeitchik. Zeitchik noted, “Paulus says that Weinstein has been vocal about changes but ultimately realized he had more to gain by listening, even reading books on theater she recommended and allowing her to win many of the creative battles” (Zeitchik “Finding Neverland”). Weinstein also admitted that letting go of the creative control on the project was difficult, admitting, “The temptation is to replicate the movie on the stage [...] But there are a lot of mistakes that can come that way. As I found out, because I was the author of those mistakes” (qtd. in Zeitchik “Finding Neverland”). The complications that come along with commercial enhancement money is not relegated solely to the Paulus/Weinstein relationship, with many individuals on both sides acknowledging these issues can often arise from such collaborations.

After *Finding Neverland*, Paulus set to work on another movie-musical *Waitress*, which premiered at A.R.T. on August 1, 2015, as the opening production of the 2015/16 Season. The project, a collaboration with *Pippin* producers Barry and Fran Weissler, featured a score of music and lyrics from pop-music sensation Sara Bareilles and a cast led by Tony Award winning actress

Jessie Mueller (*Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*). Just a week into previews at A.R.T. the producers announced the production's move to Broadway, setting the opening for March 2016 at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre (Viagas "Sara Bareilles' *Waitress*").

The musical, which received four Tony Award nominations, was headed by Broadway's first all female creative team and although it didn't take home any awards (as it was up against Lin-Manuel Miranda's smash hit *Hamilton*) the show did recoup its \$12 million investment in less than 10 months (Seymour "Sara Bareilles").

2016 saw two A.R.T. shows on Broadway with *Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812* receiving its Broadway opening in October. The musical, which began its journey at the experimental Off-Broadway theatre Ars Nova in 2012, featured an immersive design that allowed the already intimate Ars Nova space to transform into an elegant Russian supper club (Rooney "Josh Groban"). After a successful run at Ars Nova, *Hollywood Reporter* journalist David Rooney noted the musical's journey to Broadway, stating, the show "blossomed over the following two years in immersive off-Broadway productions, staged in custom-built tent structures and designed to mimic Russian dinner theater — with pierogi and vodka served during performances" (Rooney "Josh Groban").

Foreshadowing the Broadway transfer, the artistic team, along with the show's producers — Howard and Janet Kagan and Paula Maria Black — opted to take the production to A.R.T. where they could work on expanding the musical's immersive style into a more traditional proscenium stage (Viagas "*Natasha*"). As the show worked towards its December 18, 2015, opening on the Loeb Drama Center stage in Cambridge, the producers and creative team were preparing the cast for the already announced Broadway run (Rooney "Josh Groban").



With a \$14 million investment, *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812*, opened on November 14, 2016, at Broadway's Imperial Theatre to mostly positive reviews and nearly sold out houses (Rooney, "'Natasha"). But not every aspect of the transfer moved along smoothly. A month before the show's official opening, the artistic director of Ars Nova, Jason Eagan, along with the company's managing director, Renee Blinkwolt, filed a lawsuit against the lead producers of the show, stating that since Ars Nova had not only commissioned *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812*, but staged the premiere performance, the show should be billed as "Ars Nova's Production of *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812*" (Cox "'Great Comet'"). In addition to their role in the development of the musical, Ars Nova noted that a signed contract between the two parties that title billing would acknowledge the nonprofit's significant role in the show's development, as opposed to being listed as just one of the show's thirty producers, yet the Broadway producers contended that the significant changes that occurred while the show was in production in three separate productions after its Ars Nova premiere negated the language "production of" (Cox "'Great Comet;'" Paulson "Producers"). The show's lead producer, Howard Kagan, who previously worked on the board of Ars Nova, rejected the nonprofit's demand for the billing change, prompting the lawsuit (Cox "'Great Comet'"). *Variety Magazine's*, Gordon Cox, noted,

To observers, that five-word credit, and its placement in the billing, might seem a petty thing to litigate over. But in the five decades since such commercial-nonprofit partnerships have proliferated on Broadway, the not-for-profits have learned that prominent credit on a Broadway success can provide a vital boost in

profile, both as an audience builder and, even more crucially, as an attraction for potential funders. (Cox “‘Great Comet’”)

Ars Nova managing director, Blinkwolt, noted that *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812* marked the company’s Broadway debut and more importantly, receiving proper credit for their work is vital to smaller non-profits “because it’s a beacon of what this little theater company does and can do [...] To be able to connect those dots with ‘Great Comet,’ from Ars Nova all the way to Broadway, is a hugely important narrative for funders, for future artists and for audiences” (qtd. in Cox “‘Great Comet’”).

The litigation, which is now settled, sits prominently in the minds of all involved in such partnerships that constantly walk a fine line when such stakes are involved. Ultimately, Ars Nova is credited alongside American Repertory Theatre in the Playbill as a producer for the Broadway musical. The program goes on to acknowledge Ars Nova’s role as the company that originally commissioned, developed and premiered the musical with a note that further development occurred at American Repertory Theatre (“*Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812*”).

Although Paulus and Diane Quinn state the company’s focus is never to send shows to Broadway, with Paulus announcing, “That’s never the intention!,” the history of shows that have transferred to Broadway say otherwise (qtd. in Kennedy “Diane Paulus”). Each of the above mentioned shows have taken place at A.R.T. with a commercial producer and enhancement money attached, and as a result, each year, beginning with 2012’s *Porgy and Bess* to 2016, New York has seen a show that began or stopped by A.R.T. on its road to Broadway. Additionally, the announcement of each show’s Broadway run occurred while the show played at A.R.T. or, as was

the case with *The Gershwin's Porgy and Bess*, the announcement occurred before the A.R.T. run, and with *Finding Neverland's* announcement, a day after its Boston closing (see figure 1 below):

A.R.T. Show	A.R.T. Production Dates	Broadway Announcement	Broadway Opening
<i>Porgy and Bess</i>	August 17, 2011 - October 2, 2011	June 29, 2011	January 12, 2012
<i>Pippin</i>	December 5, 2012 - January 20, 2013	January 3, 2013	April 25, 2013
<i>All the Way</i>	September 13, 2013 - October 12, 2013	October 6, 2013	March 6, 2014
<i>Finding Neverland</i>	July 23, 2014 - September 28, 2014	September 29, 2014	April 15, 2015
<i>Waitress</i>	August 2, 2015 - September 27, 2015	August 13, 2015	April 24, 2016
<i>Natasha, Pierre &amp; the Great Comet of 1812</i>	December 6, 2015 - January 3, 2016	December 14, 2015 <sup>2</sup>	November 14, 2016

Figure 1.

For all the criticism Paulus has received, she has turned the financial and artistic fate of A.R.T. around, and while the company is working to create a financial reserve, leadership at A.R.T. still claims it's a bit of a struggle to balance a \$14 million budget, citing royalties from Broadway runs and touring productions as necessary revenue (Marks, "Diane Paulus"). Although the financial kick back from Broadway transfers has never been a windfall akin to New York Public Theater's *A Chorus Line* or *Hamilton: An American Musical*, the very real danger becomes the day those royalties and enhancement money attached to productions runs out.

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<sup>2</sup> No official announcement of the musical's Broadway run can be found for *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812*, therefore the listed date of December 14, 2015 acknowledges an announcement of casting for the Broadway run by *Hollywood Reporter* journalist David Rooney in his article "Josh Groban to Make Broadway Debut in 'Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812.'"

In an attempt to financially secure the company, Paulus has created an organization that is attached to the out-of-town tryout model Brustein actively worked to avoid when he was the company's artistic director. Taking on the role of the company's artistic director at a time when they were financially unstable and the country was diving into a financial crisis, Paulus has actively turned the financial future of the organization around.

Joan Anderman, journalist for *Boston Magazine*, examines the changes the company has faced since Paulus's tenure began, stating,

Some say that Paulus's populist approach may have forsaken the ART to save it. For decades, Harvard's theater was known as Boston's venue for serious, avant-garde artistic expression—an elite arts organization at the country's premiere academic institution in a city that prides itself on heritage and tradition. Over the years, however, dwindling audiences put the theater in the red. Now that Paulus has made the ART a launching pad to Broadway, the organization is once again financially stable. (Anderman)

Looking back on the changes that came swiftly to the company after her appointment as artistic director, Brustein says Paulus has

Totally changed the focus; totally undermined it. I know I am speaking of my successor, Diane Paulus, whom I adore, but she obviously had a different definition of a regional theatre than I did. I've been in pain over it for a number of years, while applauding her, I've been happy about her success. It's not what we were meant to do. It's come to the point where it's not even a resident [company] anymore... and she looks for shows to take to New York. (Brustein)

The question, of course, that begs to be answered is how much do we change the mission of a company to accommodate the box office to survive financially? As A.R.T. has changed from avant-garde elite theatre to populist Broadway-bound launching pad, the question of appealing to audiences, selling tickets and maintaining a nonprofit focus has been central to arguments on both sides of the coin. Boston's Huntington Theatre Company's artistic director, Peter DuBois, notes, "We don't have the luxury of the Ford Foundation throwing million-dollar grants at theaters, which is what the founding generation of [nonprofit] theaters had. We don't have a boisterous NEA celebrating experimentation and filling in the holes. You have to be thinking really strategically" (qtd. in Anderman). However, as many artistic directors, managing directors and even commercial producers have pointed out, there is an increasing dependency of nonprofits on commercial money to balance the budget, sometimes accounting for as much as 50% of a company's budget (Anderman). The dependency is certainly concerning for many producers in both the regional and commercial circuit who fear that too much dependency on commercial funding could undermine the value of the nonprofit theatre.

While the departure from the avant-garde programming of Brustein's A.R.T. to Paulus's populist theatre caused many to accuse her of pandering to the lowest common denominator, Paulus believes, "At the core of what I'm doing is a belief in the audience, a belief that populism doesn't mean dumbing down theater but rather giving the audience a voice and a role in experiencing theater" (qtd. in Patrick Healy "High Art"). Paulus asserts that populist theatre "involves creating shows that appeal to the mainstream as well as theater snobs, and blurring the line between viewers and actors" (qtd. in Patrick Healy "High Art"). Entertainment and high art, Paulus says, are not mutually exclusive.

Because of the changes and dependency on commercial involvement, A.R.T. is one of the most nationally recognized companies for reasons other than Brustein's original focus for the company: avant-garde not populist, resident company not Broadway road house. Theatre in the Cambridge area has seen a revitalization with newly engaged audience members invested in keeping the Harvard-based company around for years (and hopefully decades) to come.

### Chapter III- The La Jolla Playhouse and Financial Rabbit Holes

*The basic concept behind the Playhouse is if you want to see what's going to happen next in American theatre, go to La Jolla Playhouse. – Des McAnuff*

*If you happen to do a project that's hopefully true to your artistic mission, and it's a big success, then I'm all for exploiting it to the absolute maximum and getting every possible benefit for your company, because the environment for not-for-profit theatre companies is so difficult. You need to do everything you can to survive and prosper. – Terrence Dwyer, Managing Director of the La Jolla Playhouse, 1992-2004 (qtd. in Adler 102).*

Having garnered over 35 Tony Awards for productions that have transferred from their theatre to Broadway, the La Jolla Playhouse, in La Jolla, California, has certainly created a reputation for itself as a premiere American regional theatre. Established in 1947 by famed actors Gregory Peck, Mel Ferrer, and Dorothy McGuire, the Playhouse pushes its mission of advancing “theatre as an art form and as a vital social, moral and political platform by providing unfettered creative opportunities for the leading artists of today and tomorrow” (“About the Playhouse”) by programming and developing such shows as *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (2002), *Memphis* (2008), *Big River* (1984) – all Tony Award winners for Best New Musical – and the Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winning *I Am My Own Wife* (2003).

The Playhouse's golden start in 1947 lasted through thirteen seasons, with almost 100 productions playing to sold-out houses in a local high school auditorium before it became inactive in the 60s (Sandelin “Safe Harbor;” Donahue). It wasn't until 1983, after twenty-five dormant years, that the Playhouse reopened under the artistic direction of Des McAnuff (Sandelin “Safe Harbor”). McAnuff, who had worked for years under the mentorship of Joseph Papp, had recently opened *Pump Boys and Dinettes* on Broadway with Dodger Theatricals, a company he founded along with commercial producers, Rocco Landesman and Michael David

(McAnuff). Taking residence on the University of California, San Diego campus, McAnuff recalls the opportunity to develop a new regional, or as he prefers, resident company.

In 1983, I went off to start La Jolla. What was going on at the time in the American Theatre is that there was a kind of standstill - resident theatres had started waiting to see what Broadway was producing. That's how they determined a season. It was basically last year's Broadway hits became the fare for resident theatres. And Broadway had become hideously expensive already by that point, you know we had the million-dollar production and I think once the numbers got that big, Broadway became very timid as well and started waiting around to see what would be developed at the resident theatres. So, a term that got bandied about at the time was "artistic deficit" and when we started La Jolla it was an unusual opportunity. We had some capital, we had a brand new building, we had no staff, no artistic policy. The tradition was 20 years old, you know Gregory Peck had operated the theatre and Michael Langham, had not so briefly tried to run La Jolla for a while and shut down the old summer stock theatre. What I'm trying to say is that we had nothing to live up to and we could look at a lot of the mistakes that had been made in other resident theatres. We were able to take artistic risks. So, in an audacious and perhaps somewhat naive or certainly precocious way, we started off with a very aggressive artistic policy. We worked on an ambitious level when it came to production design – we always took opportunities for designers and directors very seriously. So, La Jolla instantly got on the map, because of this artistic deficit [elsewhere], relatively early on. We



figured out that we needed to sweeten the production budget if we were going to do large-scale productions and particularly musicals. In other words, we didn't have the resources, as a resident theatre, to work on that scale. (McAnuff)

It was in McAnuff's first season that he brought *Big River* to the Playhouse. Since its rebirth, the Playhouse has focused on its mission of being a refuge for unsafe work, while simultaneously building the necessary and essential muscles needed to support the development of large-scale musicals.

McAnuff wasn't interested in becoming another regional theatre that focused on the re-envisioning of classics, although that certainly was never off the artistic table. Instead, he chose to focus on making the Playhouse a center for new works. His decision to turn to new works immediately laid a new foundation for the Playhouse. After the successful development and subsequent transfer of *Big River* to Broadway, where the Playhouse enjoyed 1% of the future net profit, less the \$65,000 enhancement from the Dodgers, the Playhouse and McAnuff had a hand in the development of several non-profit-to-Broadway transfers including *The Who's Tommy* (1993), for which McAnuff received a Tony for Best Direction, a Tony Award winning revival of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, starring Matthew Broderick (1995), and the 2002 Tony Award winning musical *Thoroughly Modern Millie* ("On to Broadway").

While the company was gaining traction as a theatre where work could be developed, nurtured and potentially sent to Broadway, the 2004 La Jolla Playhouse production of *Jersey Boys* took off in an unexpected way. As a long time partner of the commercial production company Dodger Theatricals, McAnuff received a phone call from fellow producer Michael

David, suggesting he take a look at a show that was being written by Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice, but McAnuff wasn't interested. He recalled:

People on the staff nicknamed the project *Two Seasons* because it was so much about Frankie and Bob and the handshake, that the other two guys didn't really materialize or if they did, they were translucent apparitions in the background and so we decided not to pursue it. I didn't want to pursue it as a director at the time and we didn't want to do it as an organization. Then they [the writers] did an unusual thing, they actually partnered with me and let me in to the creative process in terms of doing an outline with them and giving them suggestions and so on. They didn't take all of my suggestions, by any means, but they took the important suggestions like I felt it needed to be four narrators - there initially had not been narration – four narrators over four seasons, Four Seasons narrating four seasons [...] And I'll get teary, but he [Rick Elice] actually asked very humble [questions], and they went off and they wrote such a great treatment; all their words, not mine. (McAnuff)

The creative team, along with McAnuff, began work in the early 2000s; yet the script was not finished when the musical was scheduled into the Playhouse's 2004/05 Season. McAnuff, recalling the swiftness with which the show went up, stated,

I put it into production. We didn't have a script. We didn't have a cast. I hired designers and I was actually working on a blueprint based on their material while they were writing the script. So when you say it happened fast - it was shocking, it was so fast. And we were in rehearsal and we were still making the sort of

fundamental changes you would have made normally over a series of workshops over the years. It was the velocity of that creative process that made that show successful because we didn't have time to second guess each other [...] I think it speaks to what can happen when you have a not-for-profit institution that's muscular and an ambitious project. (McAnuff)

Indeed, the speed with which *Jersey Boys* traveled towards a full production was a testament to the muscles La Jolla had developed over the twenty years since *Big River* had transferred to Broadway. The show, which opened at the Playhouse on October 17, 2004, became the longest running musical in the Playhouse's history after several extensions and 120 performances. When Michael David traveled out to La Jolla to see the show, McAnuff remembers the moment he knew *Jersey Boys* was going to be a success because of how his long time partner, Michael David, was responding to the musical. McAnuff immediately instructed the Assistant Marketing Manager to hire more people to handle the box office rush he knew the show would bring, saying, "You are not going to believe what's about to happen" (McAnuff).

The show's Broadway transfer wasn't determined until the run was in its second extension, and the announcement didn't come until after the show already closed at the Playhouse. On January 16, 2005, the company began preparing for their November 6<sup>th</sup> Broadway opening. As the reviews came in, the tickets sales skyrocketed and by March, just five months after the musical's official Broadway opening, the show had \$30 million in reserves (McAnuff).

The La Jolla Playhouse received \$900,000 in enhancement money from Dodger Theatricals, the Playhouse's long-time commercial partner, for their *Jersey Boys* production (Michael David 59). As a part of their agreement, the Playhouse was set to receive 3% of the

musical's future net profits as well as 1% of the Broadway box-office gross. This would grow to 1.25% once the musical recouped its initial investment (David, Michael 59). Financial returns from the musical's eleven year run on Broadway provided financial stability for the organization, sometimes sending as much as \$3 million in royalties a year to the Playhouse, helping it grow into a \$15 million organization (Rosenberg).

Debbie Bucholz, General Manager for the Playhouse, notes the financial structure of how a regional theatre can earn income from a regional-to-Broadway transfer, based on their contract with Dodger Theatricals.

*Jersey Boys*, literally two weeks after it opened [on Broadway], was sold out. So it took about eight months to make its money back. It's a very inexpensive show to run, everything was built here [in La Jolla]. If you look at *Jersey Boys*, it's a relatively small cast, a relatively small band, relatively small physical production to run, and a relatively small crew. So now we are at the point where the investors are paid back and we are operating in profits. The Playhouse then [after the show is in profits] participates in net profits; that's when the investors make money. Investors don't invest to make their money back; they invest because they want to make money. So, after recoupment then there are profits. [With] *Jersey Boys*, we were a profit participant. We made a lot of money. (Bucholz)

The Playhouse, in addition to being a profit participant on *Jersey Boys*, also participated in the show as a royalty participant, receiving between 3-5% of the show's royalty income (Bucholz). The royalty income is an acknowledgement from the producers that the show has been impacted by its run at a regional theatre beyond the organization's financial contribution to

produce the show in their theatre. Bucholz acknowledges that the resources available at a nonprofit gives the creative team, as well as the producers, additional tools that enrich the show, such as audience led talk-backs, feedback from audiences and from artistic producers, the dramaturgical research provided, as well as a marketing team that understands how to sell tickets for the piece (Bucholz). All of the contributions a nonprofit makes to a show beyond the financial is why it is able to participate in a transfer as a royalty participant. Bucholz states, "The thing that leaves here is much richer for having been here" (Bucholz).

There are, of course, other benefits of the nonprofit/commercial relationship beyond the intangible resources of a nonprofit organization. When a commercial producer decides to take a musical to a nonprofit theatre they benefit from the company's readily available stock of costumes, sets and props, meaning that any needed in rehearsal is usually available onsite and can be obtained within the day, as opposed to the out-of-town process that must send out to a specialized company, pay for the garment and then pay for the item to be delivered to the rehearsal space, which can take days, if not weeks, depending on the request. Additionally, if a play or musical does ultimately end up transferring, the commercial producers have already made an investment in the production, saving them money in the next steps of the process (Frost).

As a part of the agreed upon partnership between nonprofit theatres and commercial producers, the tangible contributions made by the nonprofit are taken into consideration. Bucholz explains, the money a nonprofit spends on their production, while not a direct capitalization on the Broadway production, is acknowledged by commercial producers. The financial aspect of putting a show on the stage, and their contribution to the budget, generally

the average budget they would spend on the show prior to enhancement money, allows the nonprofit to participate as a net-profit participant as well (Bucholz).

The *Jersey Boys*' Broadway run, which earned back its initial \$7.75 million investment by the following summer, was on its way to accomplishing what few other musicals had done before (Hofler "The Comeback"). Following in the footsteps of New York's Public Theater's *A Chorus Line* (1975) and New York Theatre Workshop's *Rent* (1996), the Playhouse's *Jersey Boys* broke box-office records and helped the organization grow and pay for new projects, with McAnuff adding, "Of course, that [financial success], in turn, did wonderful things for La Jolla. There were other shows, probably including things like *Memphis*, which they wouldn't have been able to do without this" (McAnuff).

In 2006, the same year *Jersey Boys* reached Broadway stardom, the Playhouse built its new black box theatre, The Potiker, and proceeded to incorporate the royalties into its annual budget (Rosenberg). The problem, of course, was that the financial windfall, should the Playhouse become so dependent on it, could cause the same financial struggles the Public Theater and New York Theatre Workshop faced when their "financial cashcow[s]" finally closed (Rosenberg). Both the Public Theater with *A Chorus Line* and New York Theatre Workshop with *Rent* faced financial hardship after their respective shows closed because the money had been incorporated into the annual operating budget. Michael Rosenberg, Managing Director at La Jolla Playhouse, noted that one of the major concerns for nonprofits that become reliant on commercial income that stops coming in is the possibility of having to downsize all portions of the organization (Rosenberg). He noted with *Jersey Boys*, if the Playhouse had not jumped into action to help offset the diminishing income from the royalties,

[The Playhouse] would have had to constrict, in a very small timeframe. It often comes that people will make the choice. The most expensive thing in our budget is production; cut \$3 million out of that budget, that's *you*, how are you going to sell that? How are you going to raise money? How do you go from an audience that's used to seeing *Up Here* (2015) [a new multi-million musical by Robert Lopez and Kristen Anderson-Lopez that premiered at La Jolla with enhancement money] and *Come From Away* (2015) [a new musical about the events surrounding September 11<sup>th</sup>] and now you're going to do *Annie Get Your Gun* and the encore production of *Chicago*? (original emphasis, Rosenberg)

Christopher Ashley, who has led the Playhouse as its Artistic Director since 2007, acknowledged the role *Jersey Boys* has played in the development of the company's art:

The institution is designed to be art friendly, to put as much of our resources into the art as possible. I think that has certainly been made easier over the last 10 years thanks to *Jersey Boys* royalties, which paid for a lot of our art. We are in a new phase, which the Public hit when *A Chorus Line* ceased its Broadway and touring run, where the New York Theatre Workshop went when *Rent* closed, that thing of, oh, we've had one show which has really [been] helping our business a lot. How do you recreate that business model without that show? Almost every budget is incredibly harrowing to balance and you also can't let your structure grow faster than you can sustain and that's tricky, because people would like to have permanent jobs, seasonal people would like to make a livable wage, which is challenging in our country already. (Ashley)

When Michael Rosenberg was hired by the La Jolla Playhouse Board of Directors in 2009, they had a very specific task for him: to get the Playhouse away from its dependency on the *Jersey Boys* royalties.

We've been working really hard and very successfully to replace that money because when I got here, we were completely dependent on those royalties to stay open. And when the board was hiring me they said, "Listen; we know these royalties aren't going to last forever. We have to have a plan to replace that or we're going to have to get smaller." And no one is really interested in getting smaller to the tune of \$3 million [a year]. (Rosenberg)

Rosenberg acknowledged there were already examples on how not to handle the situation.

"There were cautionary tales out there: the Public Theater with *A Chorus Line*. New York Theatre Workshop with *Rent*, and if you don't figure it out, it can hurt you really bad. It took the New York Theatre Workshop more than a decade to recover" (Rosenberg). James C. Nicola, Artistic Director for the New York Theatre Workshop, also notes that in addition to *Rent* closing on Broadway there were other unpredictable financial troubles that hurt the Workshop when the musical took its final curtain call: the 2008 financial crisis that sent the entire United States economy spinning into an unpredictable modern day Great Depression (Nicola). The Workshop, which had been a \$1 - \$2 million organization prior to *Rent*'s Broadway success, grew into a \$5 million company over the time the show played on Broadway (Nicola). Nicola recounts the reasons why the Workshop was able to navigate the crisis, stating, "Some very supportive board members who loaned us some money at a critical time [...] and they each chose to make their loan a gift" (Nicola). Nicola also identifies the ownership of their two buildings in New York City's



East Village as critical for securing a line of credit to help them through the uncertain financial times (Nicola). Ultimately, Nicola says the combination of two successful transfers to Broadway, *Peter and the Starcatcher* (2011) and *Once* (2011), along with a community invested in their survival, helped them stabilize and ride out the wave (Nicola).

For the Public Theater, the financial return from the successful sixteen-year run of *A Chorus Line* allowed for a dramatic increase in programming, allowing for as many as thirteen shows to be programmed into one season (Fishman). The Public's founder, Joseph Papp, readily incorporated the musical's profits into the budget and many, including current artistic director Oskar Eustis, believe that the Public wouldn't be what it is today without *A Chorus Line*, while also acknowledging that the Public likely wouldn't be around anymore if it hadn't been for the musical's profits funneling back into the theatre. (We'll discuss more about the Public Theater in chapter five).

For the La Jolla Playhouse, these two examples provided a significant blueprint of what could happen were they not prepared for the day *Jersey Boys* finally closed. Together, Ashley and Rosenberg took up the challenge of successfully helping the company navigate away from a potential financial crisis. For the Playhouse, that navigation has largely depended on the development of an endowment campaign and higher fundraising goals to fill the hole in the budget that was once occupied by royalties from *Jersey Boys*. The endowment campaign will close out in 2019 (Ashley, Rosenberg). Rosenberg acknowledges the endowment can be a less than attractive approach for some members of the Board of Trustees:

There is always a tricky conversation about at what point does an endowment become right for your organization. You're basically taking millions of dollars,

plunking them over here somewhere and you can never touch the millions of dollars, you only get the investment spin off. And so you have to wonder is that million dollars more valuable to me than the million dollars I can spend over the year or several years to put my organization in this capacity. And for smaller companies, that million dollars is much more valuable [as cash] and the plan that we executed around the *Jersey Boys* stuff was we're going to think of *Jersey Boys* as money that we can use to shore up our position and improve our capabilities to create great work, and use that great work to raise more [money]. Part of the way we replaced the *Jersey Boys* money was getting all of these big six or seven figure [private sector and government] grants. That used to never happen at the Playhouse. (Rosenberg)

With a commitment to new works, a focus on diversifying audiences and income sources, and a hard hitting endowment campaign, the Playhouse has established itself as a fiscally sound company, ensuring that they will suffer very little financial repercussion from the loss of the *Jersey Boys* royalty income.

After four Tony Awards including Best New Musical and Best Director and two touring productions, *Jersey Boys*' Broadway run came to a close on January 15, 2017, after eleven years and 4642 performances, making it the twelfth longest running musical on Broadway to date ("Jersey Boys"). After grossing \$2 billion worldwide, the Broadway production closed with a total gross of \$558,416,092, earning 88% of its gross potential over the course of its run (*Theatrical Index* "Jersey Boys").

Beyond the financial success the musical brought to the Playhouse, individual investors can boast significant returns; a local San Diego dentist received a \$1.4 million return on his initial \$12,500 investment, reminding so many investors why they play the very tricky game of Broadway investment (Paulson ““Jersey Boys’ Investors”). But this kind of financial success is rare, with only a handful of productions being able to boast significant returns.

There are always drawbacks to having launched such a financially viable show, such as the community and board constantly wondering when the next *Jersey Boys* will be programmed into the season, but those desires for another commercial windfall are often outweighed by the work the organization gets to do in its own backyard. As Ashley notes, “Knowing that with Broadway as a goal, it’s only a good goal for a very particular kind of theatre. If that’s the only kind of theatre you are doing, your mission is very narrow. It certainly doesn’t include experimentation and adventure or innovation,” and that certainly isn’t the only theatre Ashley is interested in giving to his audiences.

Under his leadership, the company has built a track record of programming over 50% of the commissioned works (Ashley). The company’s unofficial “art first” mantra has led to the continued support of their Page to Stage program that allows for the development of new works through readings and workshops, eventually leading to a production on one of the Playhouse’s three stages; shows of this program include the 2004 Pulitzer Prize winning drama *I Am My Own Wife* and the 2006 Tony Award winning play *Peter and the Starcatcher* (“Page to Stage”). Rosenberg notes, “In addition to producing a bunch of great theatre in the last decade, under Chris’s leadership, we’re producing a whole new type of theatre. Our audiences have grown and national organizations are recognizing that” (Rosenberg). Additionally, during his tenure, Ashley

has created the DNA Series, which is also devoted to the development of new works, as well as the site specific theatre festival Without Walls, which hosts a series of site specific or immersive theatre shows in and around the La Jolla Playhouse and the campus of the University of California, San Diego.

When Ashley arrived at the Playhouse, he had a project that had been in the works for some time. *Memphis* had been scheduled to receive a reading around the same time Ashley was planning his first full season at the Playhouse. His initial instinct was to take the musical to the Playhouse for a Page to Stage production, but after a reading in New York, Ashley, along with the producers Randy Adams and Sue Frost of Junkyard Dogs and his Director of New Play Development Gabriel Greene recognized the show was ready for production. When the musical opened at the Playhouse on September 8, 2008, *L.A. Times* reporter Daryl H. Miller observed, “the musical is given the fluidity and high-tech stagecraft of -- dare we hint? -- a Broadway show” (Miller “‘Memphis’ at La Jolla Playhouse”). With commercial producers and commercial enhancement money engaged in the Playhouse’s production, Ashley didn’t hesitate to admit he hoped it would make it to Broadway.

It was certainly always the hope that it would go to Broadway. We had been talking about a timeline if it went well. All that Broadway stuff is “maybe, maybe, maybe, maybe” and then there is a somewhat indefinable moment that the maybe turns into a yes or a no; although a lot have only been maybes. A lot of things have to come together for a show to make it to Broadway, all the money has to come in, the reviews have to be good enough that the investors will capitalize it and the theatre owners will give you a space. By the time we were at

the second leg [in Seattle], it was pretty clear we had dates on Broadway.

(Ashley)

The musical, which had originally made its debut at Theatre Works Palo Alto where Randy Adams, commercial producing partner with Junkyard Dogs, was working as the Managing Director, was put aside to wait out the rights agreement of then producer George W. George (Frost). Writers Joe D. DiPietro and David Bryan had decided it was time for new directors and new producers, which is where Junkyard Dogs and Ashley came in. It was after the La Jolla production transferred to Seattle's 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Theatre that the shows path to Broadway became clear.

The musical officially opened on Broadway October 19, 2009, a little over a year after it had begun its regional journey. With mostly favorable reviews, the show struggled to break even. Frost points to the difficulty of the title, contemplating whether or not people thought it might be some kind of Elvis Presley jukebox musical; and she also acknowledges that the musical's lack of a star didn't help sell any tickets (Frost). The show was quickly running out of money, despite a Tony nomination for Best Musical that only gave the musical a small bump at the box office, prompting the producers to hold on until the awards show in June. That's when the tables turned. Ashley recalls,

It was in the process of losing all its money, it was struggling to get to the Tonys, and winning the Tony completely turned it around. It was doing \$500,000 a week on Broadway and it needed to be making \$600,000 to break even pretty much every week. It was accumulatively running through its cash reserve and had it not

won the Tony it would have been closed a month later at a total loss. That was a show where winning the Tony was transformational for it. (Ashley)

After the show's win for Best New Musical in 2010, it managed to recoup its initial \$12 million Broadway investment just in time for its August 5, 2012 closing (Lee "'Memphis'"). The musical earned a total gross of \$104,453,840, just 57% of its potential ("Memphis").

In 2017, as Ashley celebrates his tenth anniversary as the Playhouse's artistic director, he has another show set for a Broadway opening. *Come From Away*, a new musical that focuses on the planes and people who landed in a small town in Newfoundland on September 11, 2001, opened in March 2017 to favorable reviews. Together with Junkyard Dogs, Ashley has taken *Come From Away* all over the United States in an attempt to build up reviews and word of mouth on a show that explores a difficult moment in American history. Understanding that each show has different needs, Frost, Adams and Ashley, along with two other members from the Junkyard Dogs team, Marleen and Kenny Aldadeff, agreed to a multi-regional theatre tryout, beginning the musical's journey at the La Jolla Playhouse in June 2015, then moving onto a co-production with Seattle Repertory Theatre in Seattle, Washington (Frost). The show then moved onto the Ford Theatre in Washington, D.C. before its final production, a \$3.25 million out-of-town tryout in Toronto, Canada (Frost).

The musical, which also lacks a recognizable star as *Memphis* did, has been met with applause and positive critical response at every stop, with Michael Gioia, critic for *Playbill* exclaiming, "a Musical about the meeting of strangers whose flights were grounded in Newfoundland on 9/11 has the power to heal us all" (Gioia).

Of the three regional theatres that have participated in the show's developmental journey, the Playhouse and Seattle Repertory are on a shared contract where they will split 3-5% of the show's net profits (Frost). The Ford Theatre in D.C. received a separate agreement after becoming a part of the musical's path to Broadway (Frost). The \$12 million investment for *Come From Away*, Frost states, has largely come from regional investors who became excited by the various regional productions, and not from New York City, which she says has a very small pool of investors (Frost). With a \$1.2 million reserve, Frost, of course, cannot say for certain how the show will be received by the city that lived through the horrors of September 11, 2001.

We also had several New Yorkers see this show in La Jolla—hardened New Yorkers [...] and we were very anxious to hear their response. Every single one of them came out of it saying, "This reminded me of how nice we all were to each other after 9/11, before revenge took over, before vengeance took over, before we started bombing people. Do you remember those first few weeks, where you would stop a complete stranger on the street and say: 'Are you okay?'" People were kinder, and they were nicer, and they were taking care of each other. That's what people said to us, and we came out and said, "If that's indeed the case, then we very much want to see this show in New York." (qtd. in Gioia)

The senior staff at the Playhouse can tell you horror stories of all the things that go wrong when it comes to commercially enhanced productions. Notable issues in the Playhouse's history include the Tony Award winning musical *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*, which was scheduled to make its world premiere as a part of the Playhouse's 2010/11 Season until a lawsuit over rights to the source material. After Ashley made the decision to cut the musical loose due to

the ongoing litigations there was a hole in the already announced season (Cook). The show's commercial producers were eventually able to clear up everything and the musical enjoyed a production in 2013 at Hartford Stage in Hartford, Connecticut before moving to the Old Globe in San Diego, California ("Globe to Broadway"). The show made its Broadway debut on November 17, 2013 where eventually it won the Tony Award for Best New Musical in 2014 ("Globe to Broadway"). The Playhouse eventually replaced the enhanced musical with another musical that eventually made its way to Broadway, *Chaplin*.

Another notable conflict for the Playhouse came when Harvey Weinstein pulled *Finding Neverland* from the Playhouse's announced 2011/12 Season. The commercially enhanced movie musical was pulled roughly six months prior to its scheduled slot in the Playhouse's season, where it had already been sold as a part of a subscription package. Mary Cook, the Playhouse's Marketing director noted that when shows fall through, it creates a "customer service issue," especially when audience members are buying subscription packages with the specific intention of seeing your enhanced production (Cook). Ashley noted, "One of the downsides to that [nonprofit/commercial] partnership is that whatever promise you've made to your audience as a theater is not completely within your control anymore. And that's real" (qtd. in Ragsdale 62). When Weinstein pulled the musical, the Playhouse needed to find another musical to take its place; one that hopefully had commercial money attached (Ashley). Fortunately for them, Des McAnuff, who was working as the Artistic Director at Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Canada, at the time, was directing a revival of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and was hoping for another regional production before moving the show to Broadway (Ashley). The show opened on



Broadway on March 22, 2012, where it enjoyed a limited run. Ashley admits that the Playhouse was very fortunate to find such a perfect replacement for *Finding Neverland*.

Rosenberg speaks to the dangers attached to programming commercially enhanced shows:

Financially—it's horrible, if you figure in the big gross numbers. Musicals make up 50% of our business and you lose one musical, 25% of your business just walked out the door and you now have three to six months to replace it. So, your entire operation becomes focused on that. And because we were counting on enhancement money, we're counting on a big number of ticket sales. The artistic department now has to replace it with another show that's got enhancement. So, literally, my first three to four years here, we would get yanked around, at least once, sometimes twice a year. We've been much more selective in who we work with. And we've been much more aggressive about the payment schedule for the enhancement dollars. All of the money has to be in our bag by the first day of rehearsal. (Rosenberg)

Despite these issues, Debbie Bucholz, Ashley and Rosenberg all point to the benefits of the commercial producer/ nonprofit theatre relationship. Bucholz explains,

We bring a consistent follow-through of actually doing what we say we are going to do and making it happen. Our shows happen when they are supposed to happen. Our staff knows what they're supposed to do. Our muscle here is well developed. We have an audience that comes in and sees new work. We have a process of obtaining feedback that we share with the creative team. And we have

this artistic capability, and the footprint of the Weiss stage, you can drop it into any Broadway house and it's this great little 500-seat theatre that creates this wonderful environment for people to develop work in. We used to be kind of off the radar, because we're in La Jolla, but that is no longer the case. We're very much on the radar. (Bucholz)

Bucholz also notes the best way for a nonprofit to navigate the waters of the commercial enhancement money/commercial box-office success is not to expect it and more importantly, don't become dependent on it (Bucholz). Rosenberg offers this advice for any company contemplating a trip down the rabbit hole, "As long as the regional is not using their own money [on commercial productions], they should be fine. As long as you're not banking on it or depending on the royalty stream" (Rosenberg). He adds that the Playhouse's long history of transferring shows hasn't always yielded success, pointing to musicals such as the 2013 transfer of *Hands on a Hardbody* which closed after twenty-eight performances. "If you look historically at us, if we had been involved on the commercial side of every show that transferred from the Playhouse to Broadway since *Jersey Boys*, our track record would be really, not good" (Rosenberg).

Gabriel Green, Director of New Play Development at La Jolla, explains that producing a season of only commercially enhanced musicals can also have an indirect effect on your audiences.

You can enhance a production to a level that your audience might not otherwise get. Which is not a terrible thing, but when you feed your audience a steady diet of enhanced musicals you're conditioning them to expect that kind of production

value in any kind of musical. There are ways to break that chain, but mostly you find yourself in a kind of self-perpetuating cycle where reliance on enhancement musicals begets further reliance on enhancement musicals. The flip side of that is that you are at the mercy of what commercial producers are interested in, and that can, not always, but it can lead to the pool of selections being variations on what's trending at the moment. So when movie adaptations in stage musicals became the rage, you had a selection process of fifteen to twenty movie turned musicals to select for your season. And there are certainly a number of commercial producers that look beyond that, that are more farsighted than what is buzz worthy at the moment, what's the trend. (Greene)

It is difficult to argue against the notion that audience appetites in La Jolla have increased for a certain level of production, which continues the cycle of commercially enhanced productions, but Greene adds that it is always trickier with musicals to pull away from commercial money since the cost of production is so high. "A play can cost \$300,000 - \$800,000 where a musical can cost anywhere from \$1 - \$3 million. With musicals, we don't want to just choose musicals blindly, we are looking for shows that justify their existence. We're looking out for exceptionally well written [shows] that have some kind of social consciousness" (Greene).

Eventually having moved from a \$5 million a year enhancement money organization, the Playhouse has considered alternative modes of production, including co-productions, which has become an important production model for the 2016/17 Season (Rosenberg). For their 2015/16 Season, the Playhouse reported an income of \$2.7 million in enhancement money and co-productions, along with \$4.8 million in ticket sales, while identifying \$557,912 from government

support and \$7.1 million in grants, gifts and contributions (990 IRS *La Jolla Playhouse* 9).

Rosenberg admits that he and Ashley, along with the entire Playhouse team, have been focusing a lot on building up the company's endowment.

Right now, we have \$6 million in endowments that gives us \$300,000 a year; that's real money. Before 2005, this was an organization that was very unstable. Feast or famine, big deficits, couldn't always make payroll. [It] wasn't until 2006 that we had a payroll company because we couldn't guarantee that we could transfer the funds to pay all the paychecks. So we would do all of the paychecks manually and then the managing director would say, "Ok, you can cash your check this week. You, over there, you're going to have to wait, I'll let you know when you can cash it." (Rosenberg)

With the success of *Jersey Boys*, the Playhouse was able to successfully ride the wave of financial uncertainty when the American economy crashed in 2008. While the diverse programming, prestigious grants and subsequent Broadway transfers (such as *Memphis* and *Come From Away*), have helped to shore up the Playhouse's position as a leading regional theatre, it is the company's ability to weather the financial tidal wave of a successful Broadway show with little damage to the Playhouse that Rosenberg takes great pride in. "The story you'll hear us telling over the next couple of years is — we beat the odds."

## Chapter IV: Playing in the Sandbox: The Denver Center Theatre Company

*The cost of doing business skyrocketed and regional theatre became much more reserved. There's been a lot of criticism that we no longer take risk, because for a show to fail, it's actually harder now for a big institutional theatre than it used to be in the past. So the programming [now] is safer or bourgeois. – Kent Thompson (Thompson)*

As the financial foundations of many nonprofit theatre organizations have changed in the past thirty years, the Denver Center Theatre Company (DCTC) in Denver, Colorado, has largely tried to remain true to its mission. As a part of the nation's largest nonprofit arts organization, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, DCTC has benefitted from the security of being a part of something larger than itself while also forging its own path in the world of regional theatres.

In the 1950s, Helen Bonfil, a well respected Denver businesswoman and co-owner of *The Denver Post*, provided the funding for the Bonfils Memorial Theatre, which opened in 1953.<sup>3</sup> As a great lover of the theatre, she later formed a partnership with Donald R. Seawell to produce plays in London and on Broadway ("About the DCPA"). Ms. Bonfil became determined to help create a professional acting company for the city, so Seawell contacted Tyrone Guthrie and hired him to "create the company and be its director" ("About the DCPA"), but everything came to a sudden halt when Guthrie unexpectedly died in 1971. Shortly after Guthrie's death, Ms. Bonfil passed away and Seawell found himself as the Chairman and Publisher for *The Denver Post* ("About the DCPA"). It was just a year later that Seawell encountered an old municipal building

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<sup>3</sup> The Bonfils Memorial Theatre closed in 1986, under its new name, the Lowenstein Theatre. After it closed, the building sat vacant for nineteen years before being converted into a book and record store, respectively (Moore "A History").

in Downtown Denver that he, along with the City of Denver, would turn into the Denver Center Performing Arts Complex (“About the DCPA”).

The city’s municipal building was renovated by 1979 and included, as a part of the Helen Bonfils Theatre Complex, four theatres: The Stage Theatre, The Jones Theatre, the Space Theatre and the Ricketson Theatre, as well as two cabaret spaces (“About the DCPA”). Edward Payson Call was named Artistic Director and the company opened its door on New Year’s Eve 1980 with three productions, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Moby Dick Rehearsed* and *The Learned Ladies*, performing simultaneously (“About the DCPA”). That same year, the DCPA partnered with a local Broadway presenter, Robert Garner, to combine the locally produced work of the Denver Center Theatre Company with Broadway touring companies, establishing the DCPA as the Western epicenter for theatre (“About the DCPA”).

The Theatre Company’s first venture into the world of Broadway came with their 1982 production of *Quilters*. The musical, which follows the lives and tribulations of pioneer women, was developed and produced by DCTC before it made its way to the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, California, the Pittsburgh Public Theater in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., before finally making it to New York City. For the New York run, the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, the Kennedy Center, and Brockman Seawell (Donald Seawell’s son) were billed as the show’s producers (“Quilters”). *Quilters*, which was largely dismissed by critics, with Frank Rich of *The New York Times* stating, the musical “might better serve as a diorama at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum” (Rich “‘Quilters’ A Musical”). The musical ran for just 29 performances before closing (“Quilters”). Despite the show’s quick turn on Broadway, it

received six Tony Award nominations, including Best Musical, and has enjoyed a relatively healthy life within community theatre.

The Theatre Company's next Broadway journey began when the Company produced the musical *It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues* as a part of its 1994/95 season. After playing at the Denver Center, the musical revue traveled to several other regional companies, the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Crossroads Theatre Company and San Diego Repertory Theater. These three nonprofits (the Denver Center was not financially involved), along with New 42<sup>nd</sup> Street Inc., financed the revue's run at the New Victory Theater before it was picked up by several commercial producers (Isherwood). The revue then moved to the nonprofit Lincoln Center Theatre Company, where it was produced for an open ended run in their Broadway house, the Vivian Beaumont Theatre beginning on April 26, 1999. The show received three Tony Award nominations including Best Musical and ran for 284 performances ("It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues").

In the time since its last show ventured to New York, the Denver Center has continued to focus on the development of new works and in 1999 the Company received the Tony Award's Special Regional Theatre Award. In 2005, Kent Thompson took over as the Producing Artistic Director, quickly working to reinstitute the Theatre Company's commitment to new works, which he stated had slightly fallen off the Company's radar (Thompson). Thompson also sought to create a place that would showcase and provide a stage to works for and by minorities (Thompson). Thompson's Colorado New Play Summit premiered in 2006, featuring four new works. Two of the plays – *Plainsong*, by Eric Schmierdl, and *Our House*, by Theresa Rebeck – received world premieres in the Company's following season ("Locally produced"). Now in its

eleventh season, the Company continues to be dedicated to producing at least two new works from the New Play Summit every year.

For Thompson and the Theatre Company, the focus has never been New York; he states that instead of worrying about New York, the DCTC instead “became devoted to the best first production” (Thompson). Perhaps it is that devotion to the development of new works that has led several commercial producers in recent years to the Denver Center. As a part of the 2012/13 Season, the Denver Center programmed the world premiere production of *Sense and Sensibility The Musical*. While the show received rave reviews from local critics in Denver, the musical has not yet received a second production. It did receive a private reading in New York in 2014, with the musical’s producers hoping to court potential investors, but Thompson admits the road to Broadway isn’t always clear (Moore). And, although there were talks of a potential tour or production in Asia, there had also been talk about going to London (Thompson). “The blessing of London is that it often influences New York [investors], although the reverse doesn’t always happen” (Thompson).

For Thompson, who has always wished to include the development of more musicals in the Colorado New Play Summit, the recent increase of commercially enhanced musicals is a welcomed change “because the cost for a musical is three times what it is for a play” (Thompson). As for the increased business with commercial producers and the influx of commercial enhancement money, Thompson states, “that’s usually about more musicians than we can afford or a particular talent or particular needs that show has” (Thompson).

In 2014, a fully reworked version of the 1960 classic *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* launched the Denver Center’s 36<sup>th</sup> Season with an estimated \$2 million budget. Headed by a



creative team of well known and well respected theatrical artists such as Tony Award-winning director and choreographer Kathleen Marshall (*Anything Goes, Nice Work if You Can Get It*), three time Tony nominee librettist and lyricist Dick Scanlan (*Thoroughly Modern Millie*), and supported by commercial producer Robert Greenblatt (*Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*) of NBC Universal, the Denver Center production featured a cast of twenty New York actors and actresses, and a full orchestra (Ostrow).

For Dick Scanlan, the musical's librettist and lyricist, the path to the Denver Center started when he was approached by Richard Morris, *Molly Brown's* originally librettist, to look at reworking the flawed show (Scanlan). Morris, who worked with Scanlan on the Tony Award winning *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, continued to turn to Scanlan and say, "Once we're done with *Millie* we have to fix *Molly*" (Scanlan). However, as much as Scanlan tried, he couldn't seem to find a way into the script. It wasn't until 2005, when he received a call from Freddie Gershon, the Chairman and CEO of Musical Theatre International (MTI) that he decided to take another look (Scanlan). Recalling with a touch of laughter, Scanlan stated:

In 2005, the Fall of 2005, Freddie Gershon at MTI called me and asked me to take a look at it and I actually said "no." I said "no, I'm not interested, I know it well, it's not for me" and I hung up. I was in my office and I have a picture of the original writer underneath the marquis of *Molly Brown* hanging over my desk, and I said to my friend, a colleague that I was working with at the time and I said "I feel like *Molly Brown* is always hanging over my head" and he said, "You hung it over your own head. And maybe you should consider it; maybe some part of you knows something." So I called Freddy back, right then, I had just hung up with him five

minutes before and I said, “Give me six months to see if there is any way I can fall in love with it. Because if I’m not in love with it, I can’t do it.” And he said that really works, because it’s going to take me six months to even begin to convince Mary Wilson, Meredith’s widow, to allow there to be any changes in the score of any kind. So for the next six months, I studied the script, I studied the score. I had a reading of the original at Goodspeed [Musicals] and I kept confirming that I wasn’t interested in it. It didn’t work for me and I wasn’t seeing any way in that I thought could work. (Scanlan)

It wasn’t until Scanlan began to research the real Molly Brown that he began to find that way in.

I thought, well maybe, if I really understand how Richard Morris and Meredith Wilson had written it initially I could understand how to improve it. So I thought, well, I’ll begin by researching the historical Molly Brown, because I need to see how they made those choices. And in doing that, almost immediately, what you encounter, this isn’t just me, this is anybody, you realize there are two Molly Browns. A historical Molly Brown who was a very, very strong, politically active, socially conscious, and pig-headed woman, and then, there is a mythical Molly Brown who is very strong, pig-headed, but actually just a striver, I mean she has a little bit of social conscience, because she remembers where she is from, but she’s certainly not politically active. None of that is in there [in the musical’s libretto] and she certainly not as educated as the real Molly Brown was. I just became very interested in the historical figure, specifically how she – when her husband became a millionaire overnight, which really did happen—she had a

platform from which to really, in a powerful and large way, advocate for things and that really lead to the downfall of her marriage. I thought that was a really interesting story. (Scanlan)

Once Scanlan found a way to tell Molly's story, he set about negotiating the right to make the changes to the show.

I met with Rosemary [Wilson] and I said, "I would like to tell a completely different story." And explained why; I actually used *The Music Man* as an example of a perfect musical to show her how flawed I thought *Molly Brown* was. I actually had a board [showing the structure of each musical]. And I'd say, "Let's look at what *Music Man* does and how it does it and how *Molly Brown* doesn't do that." She agreed and then began a legal process of what that meant, how much she was willing to change, because I wanted to be able to change 100% at my discretion. After a year of talking about that, I got them to agree to 100% at my sole discretion. (Scanlan)

Beyond the changes to the script, Scanlan felt some musical changes were also in order. It took an additional meeting between singer Michael Feinstein and Rosemary Wilson to convince her to allow Scanlan to change the music along with the lyrics (David). For his part, Scanlan, along with music director Michael Raftner, used only trunk songs in Wilson's collection of work (Scanlan). Scanlan began writing the new script in Fall 2007 and by Spring 2008 he had a new *Unsinkable Molly Brown* (Scanlan). "The moment I finished, I knew the Denver Center was the place to go. I didn't know anyone at the Denver Center, I didn't. I hadn't worked at the Denver Center. So I

just went out there and met with them and I said, “‘I’ve got something you’re going to want.’ That’s how it began” (Scanlan).

After the trip to the Denver Center, Scanlan received a call from Thompson who suggested the musical be a part of the 2009 New Play Summit (Scanlan). The artistic team took the opportunity to establish a two-week process for the musical, working for one week in New York and then moving to Denver for the second (Scanlan). Scanlan stated,

From that reading we learned that the first act was really kind of a homerun. But the second act was a disaster. We really had two one act plays: the second act was really very dark [as] people kept dying. But bio stories tend to be very difficult, so the entire first act is the way up and the entire second act is the way down. The way up is always more fun. It was difficult. Also, they move, so how do you keep their lives, and keep the people from the first act involved and integrated? So, it’s going to be two different looks visually. I wouldn’t have known that without the reading. And also for me, I saw that this version has great DNA, the audience really loved the show. They really did, and it was a moment of “wow, the show really plays.” (Scanlan)

In the months leading up to the reading, an unexpected admission brought Scanlan and Robert Greenblatt together. Greenblatt, who loves theatre, works as the Chairman of NBC Entertainment and is responsible for the increased production of live musical events on his network. Greenblatt has also worked as a Broadway producer, investing in musicals such as *A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder* and *9 to 5*. Greenblatt, who was flying back from Los Angeles with Scanlan’s agent, admitted that he had always wanted to do a revival of *The*

*Unsinkable Molly Brown*, but knew that with the show's flawed book, chances were very slim that it could successfully run on Broadway. Scanlan's agent told Greenblatt about the rewrites and put the two in touch (Scanlan). Greenblatt, who attended the New Play Summit to see the musical's progress, was also able to meet Meredith Wilson's widow, who gave the show her seal of approval (Ostrow). Thinking back on Greenblatt's contribution to the Denver Center, Scanlan noted that,

[Greenblatt] gave a significant amount, but he gave them less than some other [producers] because Bob [Greenblatt]— he line itemed it, figured out what everything would cost, and Denver said what it had to spend. And I think what has happened in the past, and my understanding from other shows, especially, if you are a less powerful producer you are just quoted a price tag. "You want your show at our theatre, it going to be \$1.25 million enhancement." The fear [from producers] with that [model] is, part of that money is going to feed other parts of the institution. With Denver, it was very transparent [how Greenblatt's investment would be used]. (Scanlan)

For the show's \$2 million budget, well above the normal \$1.2 million the Theatre Company usually spends on musicals, it is estimated that Greenblatt and the Theatre Company split the difference, with Greenblatt contributing roughly \$400,000 to the musical's budget (David). The Theatre Company's Associate Managing Director, Ryan Meisheid, stated that the extra money allowed them to hire a New York casting director, which in turn attracted a different talent pool (Meisheid). Additionally, it allowed them to increase the weekly stipends for the actors by a few hundred a week and afforded them the opportunity to hire a design team of notable Broadway

talent including Tony Award winners Paul Tazewell for costumes and Derek McLane for set design (Meisheid).

The new *Unsinkable Molly Brown* opened at the Theatre Company on September 19, 2014, receiving critical acclaim from members of the local press, as well as national attention (Ostrow). Meisheid noted that the enhancement money, beyond all of the things it did for the physical production, also allowed more money (roughly \$100,000) to be placed in the Theatre Company's advertising budget to help reach more potential audience members (Meisheid). *The New York Times*, two days before opening, published a full-page article about the musical's upcoming run at the Denver Center and Greenblatt used the Denver run to help engage potential investors (Scanlan). There was much talk surrounding the show about a potential Broadway run, but several members of the artistic team, including Greenblatt, noted that at the time of the Theatre Company's production, Broadway wasn't the focus of this particular production (David). Greenblatt noted in an interview with the *Denver Post* the importance of seeing what the musical was before aiming for a Broadway run. "I don't think any of us are assuming it will be an immediate run into Broadway [...] We need to take a step back and consider what the future is. That's what Denver will give us. These things have a way of telling you what the next step should be [...] We haven't begun the process of fundraising for Broadway, but I'm excited about what could happen" (qtd. in Ostrow). Greenblatt also noted that unlike most revivals, *Molly Brown* had been extensively written and was almost akin to a brand new musical, which can take anywhere from seven to eight years to fully develop (Ostrow). Scanlan noted that for Greenblatt's part, he worked to find that next step before the company left Denver.

You have to strike while the iron is hot, and Bob put out some feelers right after we opened, and he didn't get the kind of response he was hoping. He has a very busy day job and his ability to think about [*Molly*] is limited and compartmentalized. He made time for it, and when he didn't get the exact "yes, we want to do it" [from potential investors, so *Molly* had to wait]. So, the question was should we do another regional production, but that's another million to your budget, or whatever it's going to be. I was willing to do it, but it seemed inorganic somehow and then you're really just doing it to get it to Broadway, so it kind of languished. (Scanlan)

When the show closed on October 26, 2014, the musical had no announced future productions. Thompson noted there were several forces factoring into the hiatus.

With *Molly Brown*, you have an incredibly powerful commercial producer, but he runs NBC Universal Entertainment; he started [the live television productions of]--*Sound of Music*, they did *Peter Pan*, and *The Wiz*. I think that project [*Molly Brown*] is still out there. It's a scheduling issue; Bob, Kathleen Marshall, Dick and also him [Greenblatt] trying to figure out, "should it go in? How should it go in?" I think one of the challenges for the theatre company is—nowhere in the theatre complex, much less in our building – is there a 1,000 to 1,400 seat proscenium. You go 2,200 with the Ellie [Caulkins Theatre] and 2,800 with the Buell [Theatre] and they match the big Broadway houses, but there is nowhere [smaller]. So I would suspect that *Molly Brown* will go somewhere else and be restaged in a

proscenium [theatre]. It had to be staged as a thrust show [at the DCTC]. It's going to change profoundly when it moves to a proscenium [house]. (Thompson)

The Stage Theatre, the Theatre Company's largest space with 778 seats, is, in a way, detrimental to potential Broadway hopeful musicals due to its thrust configuration. André Bishop, artistic director of the Lincoln Center Theater Company, echoes Thompson's thoughts. As the Lincoln Center's largest Broadway theatre, the Vivian Beaumont, is also a thrust stage, he admits that it only allows for a certain kind of play or musical to be staged there, citing it as one of the many reasons the Lincoln Center Theater Company does not often participate in co-productions or work on a regular basis with commercial producers, and sometimes will prompt them to use other available Broadway houses to stage certain productions (Bishop). Meisheid notes that even if the Stage Theatre is reconfigured for a proscenium, it is a very shallow stage that doesn't offer much space behind the Stage's thrust (Meisheid). Thompson agrees that the theatre's set up can deter potential Broadway hopeful shows and producers, but he says potential Broadway shows and commercial enhancement money has never really been the focus of the company (Thompson).

Part of DCTC's ability to focus less on commercial money is the funding structure of the Denver Center for the Performing Arts at large. While the Theatre Company operates an annual budget of about \$10 - \$12 million, they are a part of a larger \$55 million organization that includes the DCPA Broadway touring division, the Theatre Company's experimental and unconventional Off-Center program, and Special Events and Education (Meisheid; IRS 990 1). Meisheid states that the Theatre Company's placement within the larger organization allows them to focus their budget on the direct costs of production and doesn't include shared



expenses such as accounting, finance, advertising and salaries for some members of the staff, which other companies, such as American Repertory Theatre and La Jolla Playhouse, must factor into their overall expenses (Meisheid). For Meisheid, this means less focus on commercial production money and more focus on their mission and community, allowing the DCTC to focus on the work they wish to be doing instead of the work they need to do in order to keep up with subscriber expectations for a blockbuster production every year (Meisheid).

On the other side of the organization is the Denver Center for the Performing Arts Broadway. This arm of the organization has programmed two out-of-town tryouts, beginning with Disney's *The Little Mermaid* in 2007 and Disney's *Frozen* in August 2017. The company is not listed among the producers on either show. Recently, DCPA Broadway participated as a Broadway producer in the 2016 revival of the play, *An Act of God*, featuring *Will and Grace* performer Sean Hayes as God; the amount of their financial contribution is unknown (Meisheid). The play ran for 98 performances, grossing \$4.5 million ("An Act of God").

On November 16, 2016, it was announced that the next step of *Molly Brown's* journey would include a weeklong run at The Muny, Missouri's largest outdoor theatre (Moore "'The Unsinkable Molly Brown'"). In an interview with *Playbill* (May 2016), Scanlan stated his hope for this next step of the journey would solidify *Molly's* path to Broadway (Viagas "Revised"). Beyond the musical's hope for a Broadway run, there was one thing Scanlan wasn't willing to leave behind from the Denver production: Beth Malone. Critics hailed Malone, who played Molly in the Denver Center production, as a revelation in the musical's title role. Malone was a crucial component in Scanlan's mind, for any conversation about the musical moving to New York. One of the issues he noted when talk of Broadway emerged was the ever increasing need for a star in

a title role, especially when it came to revivals (Scanlan). Scanlan noted that when talks about Broadway emerge, “There is the age old question of what do you do about a star. Selling a ticket on Broadway is not an easy thing; there is a feeling that a revival can only make it with a star, although there are always huge exceptions to that. And, I just don’t know who that star is. I just think, in my gut, that it’s meant to be Beth” (Scanlan). For Scanlan, who was a part of the birth of Sutton Foster’s career from an unknown to Tony winning actress for *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, a star isn’t always the right choice; he notes that in three separate readings of *Molly* with Foster and *Smash* star Megan Hilty, they never brought Molly to life the way Malone did (Scanlan). Of course, Malone’s status as a recognizable name changed when she received a Tony Award nomination for her performance in the 2015 Tony Award winning musical *Fun Home*. Scanlan recalls a conversation he had with potential producers:

[In] the spring of [20]15, I reached out to producers I know who produced *Fun Home*, who are very close to me. I said, “I want to meet with you to talk about *Molly Brown*.” It was the week of the Tonys. I brought Beth with me to the meeting and I said, “We’re going to talk about doing *Molly Brown* with Beth on Broadway. We’re going to talk about how to make this happen, because it just has to happen.” I said, “if anybody at any point mentions a box office name, I’m going to throw myself out the window.” I think [Malone’s] performance was a revelation. She was born to do this. It’s so contemporary without in any way being anachronistic. She’s completely historically accurate but her point of view is so fresh. (Scanlan)

Malone's participation in The Muny production of *Molly Brown* was officially announced on January 23, 2017, and while the next step after The Muny's July 2017 production is unclear, Scanlan clearly states, "The hope is Broadway ... I know it should be back on Broadway" (Scanlan; Gans "The Muny"). If they succeed, it will be the first DCTC production to make it to Broadway since *It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues* played the Great White Way in 1999.

Among the ever-increasing conversation surrounding stars and new works, the Denver Center concluded its 2014/15 season with a second musical, *The Twelve*. An ensemble piece, *The Twelve*, with book and lyrics by Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winning playwright Robert Schenkkan and music and lyrics by Neil Berg, follows the story of twelve disciples during the seventy-two hours after Christ died on the cross. The writers and producers, who are hoping to eventually take the musical to Broadway, question the power or need for a recognizable name when the show itself is not built around a single character (Berg). Nevertheless, the Theatre Company's commercially enhanced production featured two well-established actors: Tony Vincent (a contestant from the reality T.V. show *The Voice*, who played St. Jimmy in Broadway's *American Idiot* as well as Judas Iscariot in the 2000 Broadway production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*) as the doubtful apostle Tom, and Colin Hanlon (frequent guest star on the hit television comedy *Modern Family*) as Peter. These two are not what most producers would consider "above the title stars" whose names alone can sell Broadway tickets.

The musical, originally scheduled to open at the San Jose Repertory Theatre before it went bankrupt, received a little under \$200,000 in enhancement money for its Denver Center world premiere, although Berg noted the company would have done the production with no enhancement money attached (Berg). With enthusiastic reviews following the musical's April 3,

2015 opening, the Theatre Company and creative team enjoyed sold out audiences for the majority of the run (Berg). For Berg, choosing the Denver Center over a New York run allowed the artistic team the ability to receive valuable feedback from an audience of wide-ranging demographics (Berg). Additionally, he cited the financial benefits of a regional production over a New York City Off-Broadway run. “To get *The Twelve* up, I think we would have had to spend—to do an actual production off-Broadway would cost \$1.5 - \$2 million, where the production at the Denver Center cost closer to \$1,000,000” (Berg). He continues, “But those aren’t real numbers because they’re doing a budget but there is a lot of free money built in [because of DCTC resources]. If we had to build [the production] from scratch, it would have been more” (Berg). The question left for the creative team is where does the musical go next?

For both Schenkkan and Berg, who have thought about taking the show on a tour to different regional companies, there is a knowledge that many people still wish to see a show that has been branded, or received a stamp of approval, if you will, from New York (Berg). In the meantime, the search is on for a lead producer who can take up the effort of helping pave the musical’s path to Broadway (Berg). There is talk, currently, of taking *The Twelve* to another regional theatre or perhaps participating in a Broadway series that would travel around to different theatres before taking the show into New York City, which Berg acknowledges presents an entirely different set of issues, namely finding an available Broadway theatre and the inevitable conversation of casting a star (Berg).

For his part, Thompson notes that each commercially enhanced production that has been a part of the Denver Center’s season have dictated different paths in their pursuit of a commercial production. For *Sense and Sensibility*, the next step was a private reading in New

York, and for *Molly* a regional production at The Muny. Whatever the route, each of their journeys began at a nonprofit regional theatre in the hopes of paving a road to Broadway.

Thompson states that while many regionals are turning their focus towards Broadway hopeful shows, there is a danger in becoming a Broadway focused house when it comes to donors. For companies such as the La Jolla Playhouse and The Old Globe who receive a large amount of support from a base of annual donors, the excitement of a future commercial run can muddy the mission for the regional theatre (Thompson). Thompson recalls the *Jersey Boys* effect on financial donors in La Jolla who were approached about putting money into the Broadway production, ultimately causing the theatre to lose donors to commercial productions (Thompson). Michael Rosenberg, Managing Director at the Playhouse agrees that the financial returns can be enticing; “It’s seductive, [with] *Jersey Boys* we paid about 21 times what people put into it” (Rosenberg). Navigating the regional/commercial relationship, for Thompson, is a balancing act for the nonprofits, stating, “the new play, new musical model is not, by and large, a way for a theatre to get rich” (Thompson).

For Thompson, the inclusion of these three commercially enhanced productions during his tenure as artistic director have been an extension of the Theatre Company’s mission and his own artistic vision for the company, recalling his determination when he was hired to lead the company in 2005. “I wanted to focus on things that were adventurous or adventuresome. I wanted the stories to be something we hadn’t seen before” (Thompson). Even though, Thompson left DCTC in March 2017, he has a specific hope for the new works that have played on the Denver Center stages. “My biggest aim for the new play [produced by DCTC] is that we can create plays where a significant portion of them have a future life in the American theatre”

(Thompson). Ultimately, he believes the job of the artistic director is to be honest about how the show plays and works for Denver audiences. “Even if [producers] say [its for Broadway] I have to balance that out with some common sense. So few shows recoup their capitalization, and so few shows get to New York” (Thompson).

Thompson concludes that with each new production the Theatre Company premieres there is never really a concern of finding the next Broadway hopeful show or commercially enhanced production, because although they have played in the regional/ commercial sandbox, that is simply not what the company is focused on. “I think in the grand vision, we are always interested in musicals or plays going to larger markets, I think that’s a great aspiration. But you have to ask yourself, what are the odds of it succeeding? And I don’t just mean your artistic feelings, but the whole financial model and how it’s being done” (Thompson).

Thompson’s focus on the development of new works during his tenure at DCTC has produced a body of work that has gone on to be produced by other regional companies. Samuel Hunter’s *The Whale* and Matthew Lopez’s *The Legend of Georgia McBride* are just two of the plays that have premiered at the Colorado New Play Summit, and gone on to receive multiple productions across the country. For their role in the development of these shows, the Denver Center has received a portion of the box-office and are contracted to receive a portion of the box-office, between 1% – 5%, from *Sense and Sensibility*, *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* and *The Twelve* should any of those musicals move onto Broadway within a certain number of years, with the contract likely identifying a period of 3-5 years. For the most part, their financial structure allows the Denver Center Theatre Company to stay outside of the commercial

enhancement circle, but that certainly doesn't mean they don't welcome the opportunity to play in the sandbox every once in a while, provided it's the right choice for the company.

## Chapter V: The Public Theater — Lessons Learned

*If there is a single driving force which characterizes the New York Shakespeare Festival it is its continual confrontation with the wall that separates vast numbers of people from the arts. This wall spawned by poverty, ignorance, historical conditions—is our principal opponent [...] Our long-range artistic plans, therefore, evolve from a recognition of the need for humanity, intelligence and feeling in a fast-changing world. — Joseph Papp (Papp “Long-Range Artistic Plans”).*

When Joseph Papp started the New York Shakespeare Festival in 1954, he did so with the drive to make theatre accessible to all. In fact, Papp was so determined to keep the Shakespeare Festival free that when in the Commissioner of Parks of the City of New York, Robert Moses, in 1959 demanded the Festival “abandon its policy of free admission to the public for the performances, and agree to charge admissions to enter into a concession agreement with the Department of Parks pursuant to which ten percent of the gross receipts would go to the Department of Parks,” Papp took him to court (Shakespeare Workshop 2). While the \$2 admission charge to attend Shakespeare in the Park might have seemed inconsequential to some, it was a concession Papp was unwilling to make (Shakespeare Workshop 3). Fortunately, it was a concession Papp would never have to make for his Shakespeare in the Park. For Papp, the idea that a large portion of New Yorkers were not experiencing or attending theatre because they couldn’t afford the ticket prices was simply unacceptable (“Joe Papp’s Regards to Broadway”).

An early advocate of public funding for theatre, Papp began the New York Shakespeare Festival as a summer festival, producing Shakespeare plays, in a mobile van, and in a church



before raising enough money in 1962 to build the Delacorte Theatre in New York City's Central Park ("About the Public"). The Delacorte Theatre, capitalized by the New York Shakespeare Festival for \$250,000, is a 1,800-seat amphitheater built to house free performances in the summer months on the Upper West Side of Central Park and has been in continual operation since it opened in 1962. Beginning with a budget of \$10,000 for their first season in 1956, Papp grew the company budget to \$16 million by 1987 (Rothstein "Joseph Papp"). Helen Epstein, author of *Joe Papp: An American Life*, felt that Papp was determined to create a theatre that was "different from Broadway, off-Broadway and the American Shakespeare Festival."<sup>4</sup> It took as its model such institutions as the New York Public Library and New York City Goldman Band. At the band concerts he had attended as a child in Prospect Park, there were no assigned seats, no ticket-takers, no admission fee—just green lawn and music" (Epstein 92). Papp quickly gained a reputation as an avid advocate for the arts in New York, writing fiery letters to the Mayor to fight for space and funding, quickly growing the organization's audiences support, and eventually raising enough money to begin construction on the Festival's first permanent home in Central Park, the Delacorte Theatre in 1962 ("About the Public').

The Theatre Festival quickly became a staple of the New York theatre scene and a celebrated civic good, with W.W. Lawrence of Retails Trends on New York City's Madison Avenue writing to Papp shortly after seeing the 1957 production of *Macbeth*:

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<sup>4</sup> The American Shakespeare Festival opened in Stratford, Connecticut in 1955 "to give Shakespeare a home in America and keep his plays alive" (qtd. in Griffin 441). Under the direction of John Houseman, the Festival took two shows to Broadway in 1957, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Measure for Measure*.

August 21, 1957

Gentleman:

Shakespeare in the park [sic] gave me a respect for New York and a new pride in it which I never felt before. Chicago may have its Brookfield and Ravinia, Denver its Red Rocks, etc., but here now is a new and precious application of public facilities.

(Lawrence)

Five years after the Delacorte opened in 1962, as the theatre and as NYSF programming grew, Papp and the Board led a campaign to purchase the old Astor Library on Lafayette in New York's East Village, and aptly named it the Public Theater. Papp opened his new theatre in the Village with a controversial musical titled *Hair: A Tribal Love Rock Musical*, a musical that would become the company's first venture on Broadway. The musical's Broadway opening on April 29, 1968 was widely celebrated, but Papp sold the Public's rights to the production, not quite seeing himself as a Broadway producer at that point in his career, the success was bittersweet. He would later confess to his biographer Helen Epstein that it was a mistake, a mistake he intended to never repeat (Cohen).

In 1973, just before the Public struck gold with *A Chorus Line*, Papp convinced his board of directors to take up residency in the currently vacant Lincoln Center, acquiring a Broadway theatre with the Vivian Beaumont. Papp wrote to his board that taking over the lease at the Lincoln Center "will open the way for a unique socio-artistic experiment," believing "the merger of a popularly supported theater of national reputation with a privately supported, high-class cultural establishment, also nationally recognized" would increase the Festival's artistic achievement, provide them with the ability "to demand rather than plead for [financial]

support,” and help the Festival reach a larger demographic (Papp 1). The board unanimously approved the Festival’s acquisition of the Lincoln Center’s lease on June 28, 1973.

The Festival’s occupation of a Broadway theatre was, under Papp’s vision, a way to while continue the mission of the company by opening the theatre to a more diverse audience,. Although the Festival had agreed to a twenty-five year lease, they only stayed until 1978. It wasn’t easy for Papp to abandon his mission for the uptown theatre, but the rising cost of producing shows at Lincoln Center coupled with a decrease in government funding made the financial component more than the Public could handle. *Time Magazine* reported in 1978 that the company’s budget had risen to “\$6.2 million, up more than a third from [the previous] season” (“Papp’s Curtain”). While the Lincoln Center was pulling in about \$3.2 million in box office receipts during the 1976/77 Season, it wasn’t enough, despite income from *A Chorus Line* being used to help cover the deficits (“Papp’s Curtain”). The other mitigating factor was the reduced contribution from government and foundation funding, with the NEA’s gift decreasing from \$376,000 in 1976 to \$160,000 for the 1977/78 season. The Public estimated that by 1980/81 Season, the expenses at the Lincoln Center would cost the company \$6.3 million, with only \$3.5 million being earned (“Fiscal Projection”). Papp understood that the money coming in from *A Chorus Line* would continue to decrease, making it more difficult to cover the budgetary deficit if they continued to occupy the uptown theatre. Epstein writes, “In June [1977], he told board members that [...] staying there was simply too expensive [...] He was feeding \$2 million of *Chorus Line* profits into Lincoln Center every year. Even if plays averaged 90 percent capacity audiences, the Festival would still face a shortfall there of about \$3.7 million” (Epstein 344). Papp concluded, “We cannot fulfill our goals at Lincoln Center” (qtd. in Epstein 355) “I feel I

cannot grow at Lincoln Center. It's a showcase, not a place where things develop" (qtd. in "Papp's Curtain").

While *Hair* was an unexpected hit, the Public's long track record of producing financially successful Broadway shows they had developed in their Lower East Side Theatre really began with their 1975 production of *A Chorus Line*. The musical was a runaway success for the Public Theater, adding millions to the nonprofit's budgets, helping to increase and fund programming for several years (Pogrebin "Toil and Trouble"). Papp admitted, "Without it, we probably wouldn't be around and certainly wouldn't have been able to expand our programs" (qtd. in Rothstein).

The musical, which ran for fifteen years and 6,137 performances (making it the longest running musical at the time of its closing), is estimated to have made the Public a profit of \$38,750,000 (Rothstein). The original Broadway production, costing a mere \$1,147,000, was produced by the New York Shakespeare Festival without a commercial producer due to a generous gift from the company's Chairman of the Board, allowing the company to be the only recipient of the musical's profits (Rothstein). The Public's then managing director, Bernard Gersten, noted in 1979, "Not one dollar of profit from that show ever went to private investors. And that income is still keeping the New York Shakespeare Festival afloat" (qtd. in Adler 112). Papp had learned his lesson from *Hair*.

In a letter to his board of directors, published in the company's annual report on February 1, 1976, Papp wrote,

In July, A CHORUS LINE was moved to the Shubert Theatre for an open-end run.

The capitalization for the move was provided by an earmarked contribution from

the Chairman of the Board of the New York Shakespeare Festival, thus making A CHORUS LINE a totally-owned Festival production, with all earning and profit derived from it inuring to the sole benefit of the corporation and to be used in support of the corporation's purposes. The ownership of production rights to A CHORUS LINE is an extraordinary asset of the Festival and will provide an incremental factor of earned income for a number of years to come. It is, in effect, an endowment achieved by means of the Festival's own work. In this respect it is unique in the fiscal affairs of the performing arts organizations in the United States. 1974-1975 was a year of marked change and achievement for the New York Shakespeare Festival. Our means and plans shift; our goals and aspirations hold constant. (New York Shakespeare Festival *Annual Budget 1974-1975*)

According to Oskar Eustis, the Public's current artistic director, the success and financial windfall of *A Chorus Line* prompted Papp to get rid of the development department in the 1980s, an almost unprecedented move for a nonprofit theatre (Eustis). "Joe abolished the development department. He said it was immoral for us to be asking people for money when we had so much" (Eustis). As the money came in, the Public created an endowment to the tune of \$25 - \$36 million; the exact amount of money left in the endowment following the closing of *A Chorus Line* is the subject of much public speculation (Eustis). According to a 1977 fiscal projection report for the New York Shakespeare Festival, *A Chorus Line* made up as much as \$15.6 million of the nonprofits 1976/77 income ("Fiscal Projection"). While the money in the endowment grew, so did the Public's annual expenses, where Papp actively absorbed some of *A Chorus Line's* profits,

some years estimated to be as much as \$1.75 million, into the Public's annual budget (New York Shakespeare Festival *Income/Expense 1975-1976*). Eustis states,

What Joe also did, was after it became clear how big a hit *A Chorus Line* would be, he essentially used it to fund the operating of the theatre and took it into the annual budget, in a total and huge way. And, as near as we can tell, [he] was never particularly troubled by that or questioned that. And of course, *A Chorus Line* and Joe died exactly at the same time. So Joe never had to face what life was going to be like with out it. (Eustis)

Shortly after the musical closed on April 28, 1990, Papp appointed JoAnne Akalaitis as his successor and slowly stepped away from the company (Rothstein "Joseph Papp"). On October 31, 1991, Joseph Papp died of prostate cancer; a little more than a year after the final curtain fell on *A Chorus Line* (Rothstein "Joseph Papp"). While Eustis acknowledges that the Public is most likely still around because of the success of *A Chorus Line*, he also believes that the musicals' success was detrimental to the Public's growth overall.

Joe just didn't think about the future [...] So, we have on the one hand, [*A Chorus Line*] made the Public what it is today, but on the other hand, the way that Joe used it essentially prevented the organization from growing up. And, one of the ways was that in 1975 when *A Chorus Line* hit, the Roundabout [Theater Company] was bankrupt in the basement of a grocery store, and Manhattan Theatre Club was in a tiny little theatre on the Upper West Side, Playwright's Horizon was bankrupt on Theatre Row, New York Theatre Workshop didn't exist and the Public ran Lincoln Center. And then *A Chorus Line* hit and over the next

sixteen years we lived off the income from *A Chorus Line* and for ten years after that we engaged in very suspect financial practices spending the endowment *A Chorus Line* created on Broadway. It all of a sudden it crashed in the early 2000s. And, during that same period of time, Roundabout, Manhattan Theatre Club, Playwright's Horizon, New York Theatre Workshop, and then Lincoln Center, once we left, were slowly and painfully building up their organizations. Joe [had] abolished the development department [...] There was literally no plan for what to do [...] Joe was looking for another Broadway hit, like *A Chorus Line*. What he didn't realize, having [a show like] *A Chorus Line* is an act of God. It's a lightning strike. It's a gold strike. (Eustis)

In 1993, George C. Wolfe, a prominent stage director responsible for the staging *Angels in America* on Broadway, was hired to be the Public's new artistic director after Akalaitis was removed by the board who disagreed with her avant-garde style (Simonson "George C. Wolfe"). Wolfe, who would stay with the Public for a little more than ten years, was responsible for nurturing the careers of such celebrated theater artists as Suzan-Lori Parks, Anna Deavere Smith, and Nilo Cruz, as well as overseeing the transfer of important works such as *Bring in Da Noise*, *Bring in Da Funk* and *Topdog/Underdog* to Broadway. During Wolfe's tenure as the Public's artistic director, thirteen Public productions were transferred to Broadway and either produced by the Public, or by a commercial producer (Simonson "George C. Wolfe").

Included in the thirteen shows Wolfe sent to Broadway were two productions that almost brought the Public to the brink of bankruptcy (Simonson). When Wolfe took over the Public in 1993, the company was showing of deficit of \$5.8 million due to the loss of income

from *A Chorus Line* and rising operational expenses. However, after eight years of Wolfe at the helm the Public was showing a \$12 million balanced budget and a successful increase in their \$33 million endowment (Pogrebin “Toil and Trouble”). The rocky story of Wolfe’s tenure at the Public began with two self-funded ventures on Broadway that turned the tables on the Public’s fortunes: the 1998 revival of *On the Town* and the 2000 production of Michael John LaChiusa’s musical *The Wild Party*.

The 1998 Broadway revival of *On the Town* had premiered at the Public’s Delacorte Theatre in Central Park just one year before it transferred to Broadway (Simonson “*On the Town*”). Despite mixed reviews of the Public’s run, Wolfe opted to move the musical to Broadway with the Public acting as the sole producer, investing \$5 million in the production and placing it in Broadway’s largest space, the Gershwin Theatre (Simonson “*On the Town*”). The *Los Angeles Times* reported on the musical’s tumultuous path to Broadway stating that, “George C. Wolfe has, indeed, defied mixed reviews, discouragement from commercial producers and vanishing backers to bring the New York Shakespeare Festival’s 1997 production [...] to Broadway,” adding that the production was “nervily financed entirely now by the nonprofit downtown at somewhere between \$5 million and \$6 million” (Winer-Bernheimer). After weeks of continuous losses at the box office, the Public announced that the musical would close after only 37 previews and 65 performances. Robert Simonson, writing for *Playbill*, noted the \$6- \$8 million loss was “the costliest failure in the history of the venerable theatre” (Simonson “*On the Town*”). But the company, which had recently enjoyed the critical and financial success of *Bring in Da Noise, Bring in Da Funk* noted that the Broadway and touring productions of the Tony winning musical had provided a profit of \$5 million to the Public’s coffers, helping off-set the



costly Broadway loss (Simonson “*On the Town*”). Additionally, the spokeswoman for the Public at the time, Carol Fineman, stated that with the Public’s \$40 million endowment at an “all time high” in 1999, there was no need for concern over the company’s stability (Simonson “*On the Town*”). But the \$6 million loss wasn’t the only cause for concern.

On April 19, 2000, a second Public-financed musical, *The Wild Party*, was met with apathetic audiences, and this time, less than favorable reviews, with *The New York Times* writer, Robin Pogrebin noting the Public’s Broadway financial losses were now up to “\$14 million, a punishing amount for a nonprofit theater” (Pogrebin “Toil and Trouble”). Pogrebin reported that although *The Wild Party* was scheduled to begin production at the Public, the “board chairman, Kenneth B. Lerer, said that going straight to Broadway also made economic sense because the Public planned to put up just \$2.4 million, or half the cost of the show, only \$900,000 more than it would have cost to produce it downtown at the Public on Lafayette Street” (Pogrebin “Uptown Party”). The company’s other argument for opening directly on Broadway was their new star, Toni Collette, would only perform on Broadway, although her agent at the time vehemently denied the claim (Pogrebin “Uptown Party”).

While the Public acted as the lead producer on the musical, they had a commercial producer, Scott Rudin, who contributed the other half of the \$4.8 million budget, despite threatening to remove his money months before the show’s official Broadway opening (Pogrebin “Uptown Party”). Rudin, who later regretted the investment, stated, “George Wolfe invited me and my colleagues into this project because he said he wanted a partner in producing this show with the Public Theater [...] In fact what he wanted was investors to hand over the money and walk away and not care where it was spent, how it was spent, or whether there would ever be

even the possibility of a return” (qtd. in Pogrebin “Uptown Party”). In fact, board members acknowledged that they were unrealistically looking at the musical’s potential for financial return with Lerer, the board chairman, stating, “In my wildest dreams I thought it would break even” (qtd. in Pogrebin “Uptown Party”).

The musical received seven Tony nominations, prompting the Public to hold on until the June 4<sup>th</sup> ceremony, but the show, costing about \$450,000 a week, was already operating at a weekly loss of \$150,000. When the show failed to win any Tony Awards, producers announced that the musical would close on June 11, 2000 (Pogrebin “Uptown Party”). The board’s decision to back another risky financial venture so soon after the losses of *On the Town*, along with the board’s continued support of Wolfe left many theatre veterans scratching their heads, noting that in the past, artistic directors had been dismissed for much smaller offenses (Pogrebin “Toil and Trouble”). While rumors quickly began swirling around New York theatres, it would be another four years before Wolfe would step down from the company’s leading role, first helping the organization navigate the financial uncertainty following the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York City (McKinley). Upon his departure, the Public was operating a balanced budget of \$12 million, \$5 million in cash and an endowment close to \$17 million<sup>5</sup> (Pogrebin “Wolfe is Leaving”). The Public continued to transfer shows to Broadway after its substantial losses; in fact,

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<sup>5</sup> The amount and constant fluctuation of the endowment since its creation following the success of *A Chorus Line* is heavily charted, heavily debated, and ultimately unverifiable. The documents from Joseph Papp’s office that are available in the New York Performing Arts Library do not hold any information of the endowment, and most personnel at the Public are not forthcoming about the amount of money in the endowment after *A Chorus Line* closed. What we do know, thanks in large part to articles in the *New York Times*, is that the money from the endowment has been occasionally used to help aid the budget during times of financial hardship or used produce shows on Broadway. While the practice of using money from the endowment for Broadway productions has ceased, the history of the endowment remains unconfirmed.

they transferred many celebrated shows such as the Tony Kushner musical *Caroline or Change*, the Tony Award winning *Elaine Stritch at Liberty*, and Richard Greenberg's Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize winning *Take Me Out*. But these productions, as reporter Pogrebin cites, were financed through partnerships with commercial producers (Cohen; Pogrebin "Wolfe is Leaving").

When Oskar Eustis joined the Public as the new artistic director in 2005, he felt as though he had finally come home, stating, "I'm a son of the Public. I was kind of a self-made kid, the way Joe was" (Eustis). Long considered a champion of new works, Eustis had commissioned Tony Kushner's Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize winning *Angels in America* when he worked as the artistic director at San Francisco's Eureka Theater Company in the 1980s, a move that caused many to draw undeniable comparisons to Papp himself (Robertson). Upon his arrival, Eustis got to work, instituting the now celebrated Under the Radar Festival and, turning the nonprofit around, with one critic proclaiming that in just two years, "[Eustis] has made [the Public] relevant again" (Blum; Robertson).

In 2008, Eustis decided it was time to bring *Hair* back to the Public stage and when the show was met with unanimous praise, it seemed a Broadway transfer was inevitable. But cautioned by previous Broadway investments, Eustis decided to adjust how the Public handled commercial ventures financially, agreeing that the nonprofit would not put any of their money at risk (Cohen). Instead, the nonprofit created a for-profit entity, Public Theatre Productions<sup>6</sup>, inviting investors who wished to participate in Broadway transfers to do so without spending any

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<sup>6</sup> Public Theater Productions, for the most part, has played a relatively silent role in funding transfers of Public Theater productions to Broadway. The for-profit entity continues to be a part of the nonprofit, but the history and use of available funds have not been made public. Public Theater Productions does not have its own website, nor is it mentioned on the Public Theater website. Internet Broadway Database does list Public Theater Productions as a producer for *Hamilton: An American Musical* (2015) and *Sweat* (2017).

of the nonprofit's operating funds (Adams 56). When it was decided that *Hair* would transfer to Broadway, commercial producers provided 80% of the musical's capitalization, with the Public contributing 20% (Adams 54). The musical, which won the Tony Award for Best Revival, opened on Broadway on March 31, 2009, where it grossed over \$50 million during its 519 performances ("Hair"). The musical's transfer to Broadway marked a change in the Public's involvement in Broadway productions, allowing Eustis to establish "a new partnership model" that would help the Public navigate the tricky waters of the nonprofit/commercial relationship (Cohen). The new contractual agreement allowed the Public to maintain artistic control over the musical but kept them from any financial risk (Cohen). But *Hair* did not mark a complete change for the Public's nonprofit-to-Broadway structure; that change would come one year later.

The Public's most recent venture (as of this writing) into the commercial theatre world as a producing partner came with the 2010 production of *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*. The punk-rock musical about the seventh President of the United States opened on Broadway on October 13, 2010, after twenty-six previews and a \$4.5 million investment (Healy "'Bloody Bloody'"). Despite inconsistent box-office sales during its run at the Public, the nonprofit, along with two producers, Jeffrey Richards and Jerry Frankel, decided to move the musical uptown (Healy "'Bloody Bloody'"). According to Patrick Healy of *The New York Times*, the Public had trouble finding investors that would cover their half of "the \$4.5 million capitalization for Broadway, forcing Mr. Richard and Mr. Frankel to step in with more money" (Healy "'Bloody Bloody'"). Despite being loved by New York critics, the musical never gained traction with audiences and closed after only 94 performances, grossing just \$5,629,559 ("Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson"). As a result of the musical's unsuccessful run on Broadway, the Public lost

\$750,000 of the nonprofit's money (Pogrebin "Hasty Departure"). Eustis states that the financial losses of *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*, along with the \$14 million loss sustained under Wolfe's tenure prompted the removal of the Public's funds completely from future commercial transfers (Eustis).

That relationship [with commercial producers] is a result of what happened in the 1990s and what happened with us with *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*. The board became allergic to the Public taking an active role and certainly any financial risk in commercial productions. As a result, we don't do them. We don't put the Public's money into shows [...] It's a source of some debate if that should remain the permanent practice of the Public forever, or whether we should step back into being producers. What everyone is 100% clear on is that we will never again allow a situation to develop where nonprofit money is put at risk in a commercial situation. That happened in the 90s and it was wrong, it was a financial disaster, but it was also just wrong. When people give money to a nonprofit theatre they are not expecting you to invest it in a commercial enterprise, even your own. (Eustis)

After twelve years at the head of the Public's artistic table, Eustis enjoys what he refers to as a luxury of artistic flexibility, stating,

There was never a show that I thought was wonderful that I couldn't do here. If I like a show, I can do it here. And partly, I think it's because my likes are so aligned with the Public's mission, and partly because it's the virtue of being here in New York, with so many small theatres; if we do it well enough, there's an audience for

it. I don't have to worry, "I like this, will anyone else like it?" And that only factors what theatre I put it in, never whether or not we do it. And that's just, for an artistic director, a crazy luxury. That means that I'm not thinking with the box office side of my brain, I'm thinking with the artistic director side of my brain when I pick things. I like being a dramaturg. I like to think I'm absolutely indispensable to any show I work on, whether or not that's true. I like to think it. But what I know is that as an artistic director, my absolute power is to select the shows and artists that go here. I can do that purely as an artistic venture, not as a commercial or advertising measure. That's a huge virtue. (Eustis)

Diane Ragsdale learned that Eustis, when "he first came to the Public he spent time reviewing the commercial income the theater had received since 1972 (whether from royalties or enhancement) and that, in doing so, he learned that The Public had never been able to perform its mission without an infusion of income from the commercial sector" (Ragsdale 42). John Breglio, an entertainment lawyer noted at a 2011 meeting between commercial producers and nonprofit artists, that, "*A Chorus Line* created the opportunity for Joe to never take, virtually ever, commercial money," something that was not a option for his successors Wolfe or Eustis (qtd. in Ragsdale 41). Eustis admitted that "the temptation about the commercial stuff, the genuine on-the-ground, daily pressure that I feel, is the pressure to maximize the audience and the income for the artists that have invested their years working with me... And that doesn't feel *bad*; that feels *right*. Unfortunately, the venue for it, the only real venue for it, is the commercial, which creates contradictions" (original emphasis, qtd. in Ragsdale 42). The most recent 990 IRS statement available for the Public shows that in 2014, the Public took in about \$1.8 million in co-

production fees and enhancement income, while government grants totaled \$886,208, a significant difference from their 1974 figures. The company's subsidized support in 1974 had reached \$2,145,000, with \$310,000 coming from the NEA, which has since decreased to a little more than \$60,000 depending on the year (New York Shakespeare Festival *Cash Position 1974*; Ragsdale 44). However, the need for commercial money and decreased financial support from the government has not stopped Eustis from declining shows that he felt didn't match the company's mission.

The Public's New York City location had excluded it from being classified as a regional theatre, but the American Theatre Wing's decision in 2014 to include New York theatres in their consideration for the Special Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre completely disrupting the original concept of the regional theatre movement (Special Tony Award). The rationale for this change recognizes that regional theatres are eligible for Tony Awards when shows from their theatre transfers to Broadway that season. But some New York City nonprofits are not. For example, Roundabout, the largest nonprofit theatre in New York, owns three Broadway houses and are therefore eligible for a multitude of Tony Awards because of the plays and musicals that open on their Broadway stages. Due to their eligibility in other categories, Roundabout would never be eligible for a Special Tony Award for Regional Theatre, along with other Broadway theatre owning New York nonprofit companies such as Manhattan Theatre Club, Lincoln Center, and Second Stage Theatre, who recently purchased a Broadway home, the Helen Hayes Theatre, in 2015 (Chris Jones).

Of course, the nonprofit/New York regional conversation also opens up another, slightly more controversial one, about the ownership of a Broadway theatre. For nonprofit companies

such as Roundabout, that now owns three Broadway theatres, purchasing a Broadway theatre meant stability and a permanent home with each of those three theatres taking on a different personality within the company's mission (Rafson). Eustis contends that while there has been talk of the Public purchasing a Broadway theatre, ultimately, the move could irrevocably change the Public's mission; a risk, Eustis says, he is unwilling to take.

There has been talk of buying a Broadway house, but I have squashed it. I have no interest in having a Broadway house. I have no interest in having larger theatres than we have here. Case in point—I'll point to what happened at Manhattan Theatre Club when they took over the Friedman theatre. There is absolutely no question that they spent one year trying to program the Friedman the way the Manhattan Theatre Club worked, and it was a disaster. So, what they did was change their mission to fill a Broadway house. Manhattan Theatre Club didn't use to do revivals; now it does revivals constantly with movie stars. They have changed their mission because they own a Broadway house. I never want that fate to befall the Public. The beautiful thing I have is I have six small venues here. I have one huge venue where we give away the seats for free: the Delacorte Theatre. As a result there is no economic pressure on me when I am programming. The difference between a hit and a failure is a rounding error in our budget. We can't make a lot of money. We can't lose a lot of money. That's the artistic freedom I was talking about before. If we had a Broadway house, it would change us. You have to fill it. When we have shows that a lot of people



want to see, we move them to playhouses [commercial theatres]; they are the better for being created in a nonprofit environment. (Eustis)

The Public's role in the development of groundbreaking theatre is front and center stage again with two Tony Award winning musicals in a row; the first a graphic novel turned musical about a lesbian whose gay father kills himself, *Fun Home*, and the second the resoundingly successful *Hamilton: An American Musical*. *Hamilton*, which has been on Broadway since October 2015, boasts a record breaking \$189 million in ticket sales as of March 2017, and continues to be the hottest and most unobtainable ticket on Broadway, operating at a weekly capacity of 102%, while bringing in 108% of its weekly potential gross ("Hamilton"). The musical, which has been boasting weekly sales averaging between \$2.8 and \$3.3 million, continues to be the most sought after theatrical experience on Broadway with audience members happily paying well above asking price for a chance to see the revolutionary musical ("Hamilton").

The winner of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, as well as the Tony Award for Best Musical, Best Score, Best Libretto and a handful of others, has been a five-year journey for Lin-Manuel Miranda, who also wrote the Tony Award winning musical *In the Heights* (Sokolove). *Hamilton* tells the story of the "Founding Father without a Father," thrilling audiences with its combination of hip-hop, rap, and traditional musical theatre. *Hamilton* came to the Public as a commercially enhanced production, with an estimated \$1 million being placed in the Off-Broadway production by the musical's three producers, Jeffrey Seller (who also acted as the lead producer on *Rent*), Sander Jacobs, and Jill Furman. These three producers are splitting about \$13 million a year in profit from the Broadway run (Paulson "'Hamilton' Inc."). The numbers are astonishing; as Michael Sokolove of *The New York Times* writes,

*Hamilton* could easily run on Broadway for a decade or more. In September [2016], the first road production will open in Chicago, and it will be a “sit down” show, meaning it is intended to stay there for a year or more. Ultimately, there may be as many as seven *Hamilton* companies, in addition to the one on Broadway, performing at the same time in multiple American and international cities. Ticket revenues, over time, could reach into the billions of dollars. If it hits sales of a mere \$1 billion, which *Hamilton* could surpass in New York alone, the show will have generated roughly \$300 million in profit on the \$12.5 million put up by investors. (There are many eye-popping numbers to contemplate, but maybe the most striking one is this: The show is averaging more than \$500,000 in profit every week). (Sokolove)

Despite the commercial enhancement in the Public’s production, the profits from the Off-Broadway run went directly to the theatre. For the Broadway run, however, the nonprofit participated as a first producer, declining to place any of their money into the production.

For their role in the development of the piece, the Public will make an estimated \$3 million a year in profits from the Broadway run alone, a number that doesn’t take into account the estimated millions of dollars the show will make once other productions open around the world (Paulson “‘Hamilton’ Inc.”). The question, of course, is how will the success of *Hamilton* impact the future of the Public and what will Oskar Eustis do with the profits? Eustis answers that question without hesitation.

What we are doing with the *Hamilton* money, which I hope I can still say we’re doing 5 years from now, is we’re taking \$250,000 annually and putting that into

our operating budget to just sort of take a little edge off the operating budget and everything else is going into a cash reserve. When the cash reserve is full, we anticipate that in about eighteen months, we will have the cash reserves as big as we could possibly want and over the next eighteen months we are debating where the money will go after that [...] A significant percent will go into the endowment – this time we won't touch it—and the rest of it we will spend. We will spend it on extraordinary artistic projects. So we will use it for special opportunities we wouldn't have otherwise. But, what we won't do is let the organization grow dependent on the money. That's a terribly important fiscal discipline. Because it will go away at some point, and we also have to make sure that when it goes away it is leaving behind a really solid organization. And that may mean we don't get to do as many crazy artistic projects that we want to do. And I think that, honestly, is probably the biggest legacy that I will leave for the Public: if I can leave the money that we make from *Hamilton* in a responsible way.

(Eustis)

The musical premiered on the Public's downtown stage in early 2015 before opening on Broadway on October 15 of that same year. Broadway ticket prices have ranged from \$10 for the special "Ham for Ham" front row seats to \$849 for premium tickets. For the musical's producers, who saw a significant amount of ticket scalping on the Broadway production, the increased ticket prices was one way to circumvent future scalpers. The increased pricing on premium seats, commercial producer Sue Frost contends, makes the theatre-going public question whether or not theatre is affordable and continues the ever-present conversation of

how increasing ticket prices dictate who can afford to attend a Broadway production (Frost). Those ticket prices do not take into account the price many secondary ticket sites were attempting to sell their tickets for, one ticket reaching as much as \$50,000 for the final performance of the original cast on July 9, 2016 (See Figure 2). *The New York Times* estimates that scalpers from ticketing sites such as StubHub made an incredible \$60 million in profits from the musical (Paulson “‘Hamilton’ Inc.”). Thanks in large part to Miranda’s activism, New York City passed a law making scalping illegal, but that was not before producers announced that the tickets for premium seats would increase to a record-breaking \$849 (Paulson “‘Hamilton’ Raises Ticket Prices”). For their part, the producers have been adamant about keeping the \$10 tickets in the front two rows of the orchestra, or 46 seats, available for lottery winners, while a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation is helping to provide a minimum of 20,000 school kids with \$10 tickets to the must see musical (Paulson “‘Hamilton’ Raises Ticket Prices”).

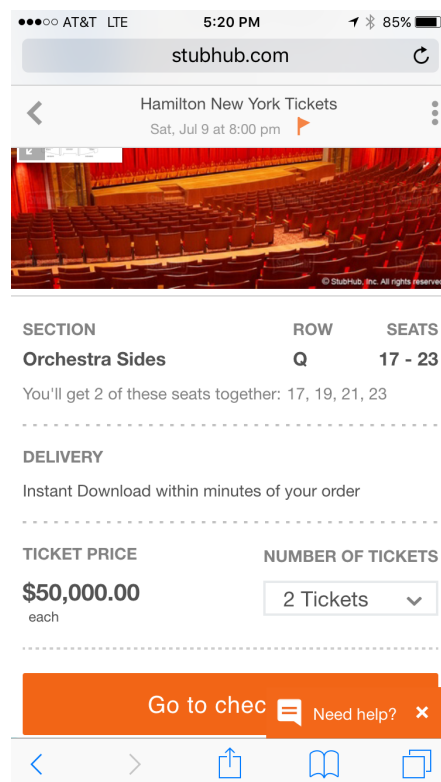


Fig. 2: Screenshot of *Hamilton* tickets for July 9, 2016 performance for sale through a secondary ticket source, StubHub.

Incredibly, the performers who helped contribute to the development of *Hamilton* will also share in the musical's profits, receiving an estimated \$10,000 a year, a coveted payment many artists contributing to *A Chorus Line* often wished they had received (Paulson "'Hamilton' Inc."). This new recognition from producers to their contributing artists has already impacted another Broadway-bound show, Disney Theatrical's *Frozen*, which will begin its out-of-town tryout as a part of the Denver Center for Performing Arts Broadway's 2016/17 Season (Catton). Disney Theatrical's preemptive move to avoid any issues down the line offers any actor who participates from the musical's developmental workshops to opening night on Broadway 0.5% of the production's net profits, as well as an additional \$400 a week (Catton).

Despite the success of *Hamilton*, Eustis isn't sure the nonprofit will ever go back to the old model of self-producing.

If we take that lead role again it will be with money that is discrete from the nonprofit money. For example, one of the things we have talked about with the money from *Hamilton*-- money that is actually earned in a commercial fashion-- maybe that is okay to put back into a commercial product. But it's not our mission to do that and that feels very important to me, that it's not our job to become really hot commercial producers. So, the reason to be the lead producers on a show is, if we believe that its going to make money that we can turn around and put back into our nonprofit causes. (Eustis)

What is extraordinary for the Public is not just that *Hamilton* is a runaway success developed at their theatre, but that it is the second runaway success to come from the Public's

downtown theatre, opening on Broadway a few months after the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *A Chorus Line*'s opening in 1975. While much has happened at the Public since that first financial windfall, the mission, Eustis says, has stayed the same. In fact, he believes the renewed commitment to the mission, along with smarter financial decisions are helping him ensure a solid financial foundation for the organization in the coming years. An immense source of pride for Eustis has been the tripling of the budget, now at \$36 million, since his arrival. Eustis says,

We raise about \$22 - \$23 million a year and that is the bulk of our income. That dwarfs what our budget was ten years ago, and that has primarily been, I like to think, because we have doubled down on the basic mission of the place. The simplest way of saying it is that this is a theatre based on the idea that the culture belongs to everyone, both in terms of consuming it and in terms of making it. And so diversity is at the core of the theatre and we have programs from the Mobile Shakespeare that goes to prisons and half-way houses and homeless shelters to the six theatres that we have here that perform Shakespeare, new works, new musicals and experimental theatre to our Under the Radar Festival that goes all over the world, to Central Park to Broadway. So, the fact that we are a big-tent and that we insist that being a big tent is at the core of the theatre and we have managed to build up the program, so that I think, we are really excelling in each of those arenas is what has allowed the contributing income to grow. (Eustis)

It's true that the success of *Hamilton* will have a significant financial impact on the organization but Eustis views it another way. He states, "The success of something like *Hamilton*, will absolutely make a difference in the amount of revenue [received], but, an even

bigger difference that it makes for us is as a flag for the excellence of how we are achieving our mission” (Eustis). And, perhaps that is the lesson of the regional-to-Broadway transfer; each show that makes its way to Broadway is a “flag for the excellence” of how a nonprofit is achieving their mission. For the Public, a company who has sent two of the most influential musicals to Broadway, changing the landscape of the American musical theatre not once but twice, the last sixty years has shown the strength of an organization that stays true to its mission. While the road has not always been smooth, the lessons learned along the way have made the organization a stronger, steadier nonprofit prepared to weather whatever artistic and financial challenges come its way.

## Chapter VI: The New Road to Broadway

*The fabric of the thought that propelled us was that theatre should stop serving the function of making money, for which it has never been and never will be suited, and start serving the revelation and shaping of the process of living, for which it is uniquely suited, for which it, indeed, exists. The new thought was that theatre should be restored to itself as a form of art.*

Zelda Fichandler (qtd. in Ragsdale 50)

*A lot of theatres measure their success by a move to Broadway. That mythology, that legend of what Broadway is, really prescribes the work you can do.*

James Nicola (Nicola)

*My dream for the future is a theatre which is a part of everybody's life, just as the railroad and the airplane are, a theatre in every town providing entertainment and enlightenment for the audience and a decent livelihood along with high artistic ideals for the theatre worker.*

Margo Jones (LoManaco 226)

As the necessity of the nonprofit/commercial theatre relationship continues to grow, the new road to Broadway will be paved with important partnerships between these once opposing entities. For many nonprofits and commercial producers, these partnerships mean that artists and playwrights are given more time to develop their work in a theatre that is rich in resources. The infrastructure of the nonprofit adds immeasurable value to the production while helping keep overall costs down. As the producers do not need to hire stagehands or a production



manager to run the show or hire a company manager to manage the needs of the actors as they are generally employed by the nonprofit theatre, as a result of the already present resources, more commercial enhancement money goes towards the development of the production. For commercial producers, the overall price tag of a regional run, even if the show is unsuccessful, is significantly cheaper than an out-of-town tryout. And, with the reduced cost of a regional run, it generally means that more plays and musicals make it off the page and into a workshop, staged reading and possibly even a production that makes its way to Broadway.

When the regional theatre movement began in the 1950s, it was a movement away from Broadway, but as the tide has turned and the cost of creating art has risen, the marriage of two seemingly opposing entities have made the regional theatre and the commercial theatre necessary bedfellows, and while the thought of co-habituating was once considered perverse, Sue Frost acknowledges, “The reality is we need each other to do *anything* – to do *anything* now” (original emphasis, qtd. in Ragsdale 43). While Rocco Landesman, who worked as the President of Jujamcyn Theaters on Broadway for many years before acting as the chairman for the National Endowment for the Arts (2009-2012), noted what fueled the unlikely partnership. “Today, it is the other way around. The National Endowment for the Arts has cut back support to next to nothing; there are far too many nonprofit theaters chasing a decreasing pool of dollars, and theater companies everywhere are choosing plays and musicals with an eye toward a Broadway transfer [...] We on Broadway look like nonprofit theaters and they look like us” (Landesman).

Robert Brustein, founder of Yale Repertory Theatre and American Repertory Theatre echoed Landesman's concerns at ACT II, a 2011 meeting between nonprofit and commercial theatres:

What's missing today is the subsidy that allows these people to do the things they want. They're naturally going to fall back on box office. It's inevitable to do that. Or to get enhancement money that's going to flow to the theater and allow that play to go to Broadway where it will always be a pot of gold as *Chorus Line* was to Joe [Papp]. That's understandable. It's almost as if everyone has to have one of these. But then you get the taste of it in your mouth and you want more of it. And gradually you're growing out of your old commitment to a collective ideal, your idealism, and you're becoming – essentially, whether you know it or not, you're becoming a Broadway producer. And the big difference is that you're trying to please an audience and make money rather than please a group of artists, and an audience who are part of that artist collective, and make art. And that distinction gets lost. And once that's lost then we have this confusion of a misalliance between Broadway and nonprofit [theatres]. (qtd. in Ragsdale 37)

So, the question becomes, has the regional theatre lost its purpose and vision because of the need to appeal to larger audiences? One train of thought is that as and the number of regional nonprofits participating in a commercial transfer increases, the plays and musicals that appear on the regional stage will bear more resemblance to the works on Broadway; setting aside edgier or more controversial works. Kent Thompson of the Denver Center Theatre Company agrees with this positing, “ As the cost of doing business [has] skyrocketed, regional

theatres have become much more reserved” (Thompson). Thompson continued, “There’s been a lot of criticism that we no longer take risk, because for a show to fail, it’s actually harder now for a big institutional theatre than it used to be in the past. So the programming is [now] safer or bourgeois” (Thompson). The opposing view is that nonprofits continue to be an important part of the development of plays and musicals that are both innovative and daring with such works as *Hamilton* (2015, Public Theater), *Evan Hansen* (2016, Second Stage Theatre) and *Come From Away* (2017, La Jolla Playhouse) opening on Broadway in the span of a year and a half.

For the La Jolla Playhouse and the Public Theater, there has been an acknowledgement that the infusion of commercial funds has allowed them to do more work, and sometimes, riskier work. The Public’s successful Broadway transfer and run of *A Chorus Line* supported the Public’s commitment to free Shakespeare in the Park for years and even helped fund the company’s expanded programming (Rothstein “‘A Chorus Line’ Ends”). For the Playhouse, programs such as their Page to Stage, which has played an integral role in the development of new works, has greatly expanded under Ashley’s direction (McAnuff). McAnuff credits Ashley’s ability to do so many “wonderful artistic things” at the Playhouse with the infusion of the *Jersey Boys* money (McAnuff). Gordon Cox, Legit Editor for *Variety* suggests that the works at nonprofits are ultimately what is impacting the work on Broadway. “It’s the kind of only-at-a-nonprofit program that, these days, tends to yield the projects and artists that go on to commercial success — and sometimes make it to the Tonys” (Cox “Intersection of Broadway”).

Robert Brustein, founder of the Yale Repertory Theatre and American Repertory Theatre, noted that once upon a time, the two were supposed to be separate, stating that now the nonprofit and for-profit theaters are “folding into each other” (qtd. in Ragsdale 58). For Chris

Ashley, artistic director at the La Jolla Playhouse, the mass appeal of Broadway creates new problems for theater in America.

Broadway is a great place for really broadly accessible work. It will never be the home of the most cutting edge, the most challenging, the most adventurous work in America because it has to appeal to too many people. As you get more and more adventurous, your audience narrows, and narrows and narrows. Knowing that with Broadway as a goal is only a good goal for a very particular kind of theatre. If that's the only kind of theatre you are doing, your mission is very narrow. It certainly doesn't include experimentation and adventure or innovation. Occasionally there is one that is both [...] but the ones that are both, are pretty few and far between. (Ashley)

Beyond the concern about mass appeal, James C. Nicola, artistic director at the New York Theatre Workshop, states that ultimately the financial concern can stop shows from being programmed into a theatre's season because of audience expectations that all content should be Broadway-bound shows. Nicola states,

It shapes the kind of work we can do. We can't do a big play that has no hope or no possibility or no dream or even a thought of a big long run. This is not unique to us. This is the state of the art, necessity has made bedfellows of the not-for-profit and for profit theatres, in what I think is now an unhealthy way. I'm not a purist, I'm happy for things to take the form they want to take, but there is no choice in this now. This is the way it has to be or you don't do it. And, I don't think a theatre like ours would survive if we weren't doing things on a certain

scale. So, I haven't the answers to these things, I just see them as a great issue.

The issues go deep and I don't know that there is anything a theatre or an individual can do to solve it. (Nicola)

Yet, even with the increase in commercial money and Broadway transfers, regional theatres are focused on doing what they can to stay true to their individual mission statements, some of which align with the movement's original focus; dedicating time and resources to the development of new works, commissioning playwrights and reimagining classics.

As government funding continues to decrease and government entities such as the National Endowment for the Arts continue to face threats of being eliminated entirely, nonprofits will need to continue the search for alternative funding sources. For some companies, those alternative sources will include an increase in co-productions with other regionals to help offset the cost of production. There is, however, concern about this model as well. Theatre veterans such as Nicola and Brustein caution that such a move could make regional theatres more akin to a McDonald's or a Holiday Inn, where the individual identity becomes lost in the company's need to survive (Nicola; Ragsdale 65). Nicola adds, "Weren't these places all supposed to be something different? The danger with these emerging co-productions is that, I think if it's a choice of people surviving and getting to see some interesting work by Suzan-Lori Parks it has a place, but I think if it becomes the way that it's done, then every company begins to look the same" (Nicola).

As funding decreases and theatre artists' concerns over the "Holiday Inn" of every theatre through co-productions increase, nonprofits are left with few other sources to help offset the cost of production. The funding left available, beyond the corporate sponsor and

individual donors, then becomes the commercial sector, where companies such as the American Repertory Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, and the Public Theater have been able to find financial stability thanks in large part to shows that have transferred to Broadway. For Diane Paulus, artistic director of American Repertory Theatre, the infusion of commercial money and the national attention the company received due to Broadway transfers not only helped the company survive the difficult times of the 2008 economic crash, but also brought new donors, new audiences, and new funding sources to the company, stabilizing the nonprofit for the first time after years of financial uncertainty (Healy, Beth “ART Stages Financial Revival”). For the La Jolla Playhouse, the infusion of income from the successful run of *Jersey Boys* was the key to surviving the 2008 crash, while also providing an opportunity for the company to fund more shows and programs (McAnuff). With the Public Theater, the commercial success of *A Chorus Line* meant years of financial stability, increased programming, and the continuation of free Shakespeare in the Park (Rothstein “‘A Chorus Line’ Ends”).

The infusion of commercial money for the Denver Center Theatre Company, however, has meant something else entirely. As a company that is structured very differently from other nonprofit theatres across the country, thanks in large part to the umbrella organization of the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, the need for commercial money has never stemmed from necessity or need but from who owned the rights and how that show fit into the company’s mission (Thompson). For each of the three enhanced shows that appeared on the Theatre Company’s stage, the commercial producers owned the rights, meaning that if the DCTC wished to program the musicals into their season a commercial producer had to be involved in the production (Thompson). This is something that has become a common issue for many regional

companies hoping to produce certain shows: commercial producers own the rights to a lot of productions regional theatres would like to produce (Ragsdale 57).

This is not to say that the other companies included in this study have not engaged in shows that fit their mission, but due to the structural differences, the need for commercial money presents different challenges when it comes to ensuring a balanced budget. On the other side of the regional/commercial relationship is the dependency on commercial money to achieve the company's mission. Sue Frost raised concerns over the nonprofit's dependency on commercial money, stating that it has changed over the years from "'we could use a couple hundred thousand dollars to help us with orchestrations' to 'this will cost \$2 million because we need to balance our budget'" (qtd. in Ragsdale 75). McAnuff agrees that the dependency on commercial money can ultimately prove hurtful to a company, explaining,

I don't think it's a wise idea to build enhancement dollars from the commercial theatre into your annual budget. However, if you're planning ahead and there is a production that has a commercial producer aboard or there's a potential partner, I think that's a different story. I think the problem when you're running a theatre – and I'm sure most artistic directors will tell you this – you tend to think in terms of six little boxes: so I have six little boxes, and I have to put shows into those six boxes. If you start designing those boxes so they have enhancement dollars attached, I think you're making a grave mistake. (McAnuff)

The most important question, perhaps, that emerges from the continued relationship between nonprofit regional theatres and the commercial producer is have these regional theatres, as a part of the regional theatre movement, lost sight of their individual missions?

Mike Daisy, a well-known monologist and actor, performed a piece in the Public Theater's cabaret space (Joe's Pub), titled "How Theater Failed America." In his piece he states boldly,

Regional theaters, in pursuit of growth, have lost sight of their original mission: They have put more money into expensive new buildings than grooming and rewarding actors; despite lip service about promoting diversity and community, artistic directors want to keep theater as a luxury item for the wealthy; the importing of actors, mainly from New York, has divorced theaters from their communities. (qtd. in Zinoman)

Many commercial producers, including Landesman, have been quick to chide regional theatres for losing focus, stating that the commercial producer is not to blame for the regional's lost focus, "but that regional theatres have the ethical responsibility to make choices that are in line with their nonprofit missions" (qtd. in Ragsdale 34). McAnuff agrees that the infusion of commercial money in regional theatre has definitely impacted how nonprofits look at potential shows, stating,

I think if the money's there and maybe you are on the fence about a project that can be the tipping point and the manager's always going to be pushing for that kind of activity, of course, that's the dynamic that exists between art and commerce in the not-for-profit. I think you're better off – integrity's not something you can have on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Either you have integrity as an institution or you don't. I think it's important to sometimes remind oneself of that. You can't kind of compromise. If you are doing *Jersey*



*Boys*, it had better be something you're genuinely in love with and that you really believe in. Serve your theatre and serve the art form. (McAnuff)

Edelstein continues McAnuff's argument by noting that the presence of the nonprofit as an alternative to Broadway isn't necessarily the case any more, but that the inclusion of exceptional works that may or may not be attached to a commercial producer is exactly what the regional theatre is meant to do, concluding, "I don't see it as a failure or a black mark against us that we're in partnership with a commercial producer. [It] helps us get these works, of exceptional artistic merit, to our audiences" (Edelstein).

For many nonprofits, the successful transfer of shows to Broadway means increased national recognition. Diane Paulus's presence at the American Repertory Theatre along with several successful Broadway transfers increased the ART's visibility after the company's first successful transfer, *Porgy and Bess*. La Jolla's national recognition increased with the financial windfall of *Jersey Boys* and the Denver Center enjoyed a *New York Times* article covering the *Unsinkable Molly Brown* production. And while the Public has enjoyed national recognition for years, the success and popularity of *Hamilton: An American Musical* has catapulted the nonprofit into the spotlight again, with headline after headline covering the musical's success and the Public's role in its development.

For Barry Edelstein, artistic director of the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego, California, working with commercial producers means producing larger musicals, which in turn sells more tickets for the theatre. Edelstein, whose Broadway transfers include such productions as *Bright Star*, *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*, and *Allegiance*, has averaged roughly two commercially linked productions (out of fifteen) in his season annually. The presence of

commercially enhanced productions in the Globe's seasons are important, considering that 63% of his budget is earned from a combination of royalties, commercial enhancement, and \$12 million in ticket sales (Edelstein). Edelstein's Old Globe isn't the only theatre to see an increased participation in commercial projects, with Christopher Ashley noting that other well-regarded regional companies such as Berkeley Repertory Theater (Berkeley, California), Arena Stage (Washington, D.C.), and Hartford Stage (Hartford, Connecticut, have equally gained ground in the regional-to-Broadway race (Ashley). Edelstein also admits that there is always a pressure in the nonprofit world (from boards) to participate in commercial productions, especially when a large portion of the company's budget is made up of earned income, as is the case with the Old Globe. Edelstein states,

The pressure is enormous; if you could move five or ten percent of that pie over to philanthropy you wouldn't feel that pressure at the box office. It goes into a lot of things. We know San Diego audiences don't like a lot of cursing, so we'll read a play that we just think is a spectacularly good play but there's a huge amount of cursing in it. So, we may say we're still going to go ahead and do it, but we know that the expectation at the box office is low, which puts even more pressure on us to find something that is going to be a blockbuster somewhere else. (Edelstein)

Among the growing concerns for artistic directors is the loss of control when a commercial producer is invited into the theatre. Chief among an artistic director's rising concerns is the risk of an announced show falling through, creating a hole in the company's already announced season. When producers are unable to raise the funds, as was the case with a Broadway hopeful revival of *Funny Girl* that was scheduled to play at the Center Theatre Group

in Los Angeles, California, in 2011, the show had to be pulled from the season weeks before it was scheduled to open (Ragsdale 62). La Jolla Playhouse's Christopher Ashley, who has experienced this kind of last minute fall out at least twice in his tenure as the Playhouse's artistic director with *Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* and *Finding Neverland*, states, "One of the downsides to that partnership is that whatever promise you've made to your audience as a theater is not completely within your control anymore" (qtd. in Ragsdale 62).

As a part of an institution that welcomes commercial producers into the process, Oskar Eustis identifies another concern beyond the loss of a commercially enhanced show: the loss of artistic control. Noting that a commercial producer, at times, might already have an artistic team attached to a project, Eustis admits, "I can't imagine putting a show on in one of my theaters that I'm not responsible for the artistic choices" (qtd. in Ragsdale 63). In fact, the Playhouse's artistic director emeritus, Des McAnuff, states that artistic control is always a concern when you have someone else contributing to the production financially. McAnuff explains,

The one thing that I feel very strongly about is, if you're going to go into a not-for-profit theatre as a commercial producer, you have to recognize that the not-for-profit theatre is responsible for their production of your piece, so you'd better trust them. I think on every level – on a moral level, on an ethical level—on every level, [Artistic directors] have to be able to call the shots under their own roof. And, even if you put in \$2 million, you still, at the end of the day, can't expect to have the authority you're going to have when the show goes to the Richard Rogers [Theatre on Broadway] or to another community – the Shubert in Boston or wherever. I think you have to recognize that the not-for-profit, whatever the

financial arrangement is, has everything to say. Now, that isn't to say that the not-for-profit can't have good manners. It's unthinkable that you would not listen to somebody who has developed a piece and who has, perhaps, a large stake in it. Maybe they've even mortgaged their house. You can certainly listen to them and make them feel welcome and make sure you have regular meetings to keep them informed about what's going on with the show and, consult, I think is the right word, but, I think the moment you have a commercial producer telling you what to do and expecting you to do it then that's a bridge too far. (McAnuff)

For many commercial producers, the appeal of the nonprofit/commercial relationship stems from four major points: built-in audiences, reduced costs, time to develop the show, and the ability to raise a production's capitalization from a nonprofit run. As the cost of producing musicals continued to rise, the financial benefits of a commercial out-of-town tryout became a less financially viable option, with commercial producer Sue Frost noting, "a commercial production out of town was no longer affordable. It was no longer practical. You couldn't go and make mistakes out of town. It was too expensive. The physical production was too expensive" (qtd. in Ragsdale 79). The benefit of the regional theatre is the resources that are already available within the company—a built-in marketing team, established scene and prop shops, and a built-in audience (Frost). Commercial producer Kevin McCollum agrees that one of the major benefits of a regional production is an audience, which is instrumental to helping the show reach "the next level" (qtd. in Ragsdale 57). For Frost, an audience's reaction can be the difference between leaving the show behind and financing a commercial production. With La Jolla's production of *Come From Away*, Frost recalls an uncertainty with the musical's ability to

succeed in a commercial setting, forcing her to ask, “does it sell 12,000 tickets a week?” (Frost). But for Frost, the encouraging aspect of the musical’s La Jolla run beyond the immediate audience response were the number of single ticket sales, helping the production team believe that the musical could do well in a commercial theatre (Frost). Additionally, commercial producers note that often the nonprofit production is an essential part of raising the capitalization needed to get a show to New York, with Frost acknowledging that for *Come From Away*, “most of the money for Broadway has come from the regional runs” (Frost).

Beyond the benefits of producing a show at a nonprofit, Frost states that what working with a nonprofit – at a reduced cost – ultimately affects is the amount of work commercial producers are able to produce overall (Frost). Due to the fact that most nonprofits are not developing their own musicals, mostly due to cost, Frost states that the nonprofit/commercial relationship “creates an opportunity for producers to get more work done; more work gets to be seen” (Frost). Frost does concede that while this relationship has been mutually beneficial for nonprofits and for-profit companies alike, there is concern that nonprofits have become too big to take any artistic risks, stating that “so many are dependent on commercial money, it affects their programming” (Frost). She also notes that their reliance on commercial money is dangerous because what happens to those companies if the commercial money goes away? (Frost).

Nicola states another concern that has arisen from the nonprofit/commercial partnership: “I think a lot of theatres measure their success by a move to Broadway” (Nicola). Landesman concurs with Nicola’s assessment, noting,

At some point along the line, success became the driving concern and how you define success is critical to the whole thing. But by the time you got to the 1980s what everyone was interested in was doing well, was succeeding. The boards wanted this. The audiences all wanted the validation of the show before they saw it. Everybody wanted to be successful. And, of course, to the boards this always meant Broadway transfers or big box office or some kind of recognition in a national publication, whatever the metrics were. (qtd. in Ragsdale 35)

But, as Eustis said, “an even bigger difference that it makes for us is as a flag for the excellence of how we are achieving our mission” (Eustis). A regional theatre’s national recognition has the ability to pull in new audiences, attract new donors and even attract new artists to the company’s stages. Landesman also recognizes that, “Institutions continue to do compelling work, but increasingly the template of success comes from the commercial arena, which is, in the end, not dedicated to the art so much as to the audience” (Landesman), and this shift to productions that have mass appeal has perhaps impacted some regional theatres’ dedication to riskier works and forced them to focus more on “catering to the marketplace” (qtd. in Ragsdale 34). This change from mission to marketplace has forced many theatre artists, including Landesman and Nicola, to question whether or not the regional theatre has lost its way (Ragsdale 38). The reality, as Nicola identifies, is that ultimately, we do not live within a culture that values the kind of art regional theatres were essentially set up to create -- ultimately, the regional theatre had no choice but to turn to other sources in order to ensure that riskier works could continue to thrive (Nicola). Edelstein agrees, stating the only way for regional companies to really move away from their increased dependency on commercial money is for philanthropy

to increase, noting that nonprofit theatres or companies with 501c3 status are made to lose money, to take risks, as opposed to the commercial theatre, which is not designed to make up for lost profits elsewhere (Edelstein). Edelstein suggests that the reason for the nonprofit – its purpose and responsibility – is to its audience. Audiences, he says,

[Understood] “we’re not going to get to see Ibsen if the commercial theatre is going to be our only place to see it. We’re never going to see a play by an unknown Latina writer starring an unknown Latina actor, because the commercial theatre just won’t create it.” The free market left to its own devices won’t make that happen. So, the government stepped in and regulated the free market, which a lot of people don’t like in broad terms in the United States of America, but they did and they created the 501c3. The free market, left to its own devices is not going to provide this thing that we believe is for social utility. That’s why you don’t see new plays by Latinos on Broadway and you don’t see Ibsen on Broadway unless it has Cate Blanchett is in it, something that is going to deliver that ticket burden in order to keep the thing going. We [regional theatres] don’t have that. And, the more philanthropy we can provide, the more insulated we are from commercial pressures. That’s it. The philanthropy we raise provides a bulwark from the tyranny of the commercial market. (Edelstein)

Eustis, Nicola, and Brustein all agree that what started as a promise from foundations such as the Ford Foundation and the government funded National Endowment for the Arts began to lose strength during the swing in liberal vs. conservative ideals. This swing began during the Carter administration and continued to gain strength during Regan’s tenure in the White

House (Ragsdale 40). The three noted that regional theatres took for granted the country's cultural commitment to artistic development and while the fight to save the arts is an ongoing battle across the American landscape, the regional theatre community continues to be committed to creating a home for new and emerging artists. Todd Haimes, artistic director of Roundabout Theatre Company in New York City, the largest nonprofit theatre in America with three Broadway houses, stated that their new works program, The Underground, may only make up 5 % of their income budget, but the works that emerge from it, such as the Tony Award winning *The Humans*, by Stephen Karam, make up 50% of the nonprofit's "soul" (qtd. in Cox "Intersection of Broadway").

For our four Tony Award winning nonprofit theatres, the impact of the commercial theatre has been undeniable. Whether the impact has been artistic, as was the case with Harvard University's American Repertory Theatre, or financial, as with New York City's Public Theater and the La Jolla Playhouse, the infusion and presence of commercial works have raised the theatres' profile and helped them each navigate tricky financial times. For the Denver Center Theatre Company, the increase in recent years of commercially enhanced shows have raised the company's presence on the national stage and while neither show, *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* nor *The Twelve*, has made its way to Broadway as of this writing, the Theatre Company's participation in these commercially enhanced productions makes them a part of an ever-growing list of regionals that have engaged in a new regional movement. Edelstein poses an alternative to Zelda's original argument for the role of regional theatre, stating,

Zelda's argument back in the 50s was that regionals were meant to be an alternative to the commercial theatres, and I would say in New York where the



commercial theatre is down the street, that's a valid argument. "What am I going to do tonight? Am I going to Broadway and see *King Charles* or am I going to the Atlantic to see *Skeleton Crew*?" Here [in San Diego] that's not the case. There are the touring shows that come through, but there really isn't a commercial theatre here. I don't see the nonprofit regional theatre as an alternative to the commercial theatre the way the Zelda articulated it in the 50s; what I do see us doing is providing works of artistic merit and exceptional aesthetic merit to a community because we provide a civic good. It's about a deep sense that this work matters in and of itself and a great city should have in it great theatre.

(Edelstein)

With what appears to be uncertain financial times ahead, especially as threats of dismantling the National Endowment for the Arts grows, it seems inevitable that more regional theatres will seek out ways to fill the holes in their budgets. As theatre budgets continue to grow due to the rising cost of production, and demand for crowd-pleasing musicals become more and more imperative to the nonprofit's survival, the necessary relationship between these once opposing entities will continue to ensure the presence of vital theatrical arts in America.

Responsible for brokering a considerable number of regional-to-Broadway productions during his 1992-2004 tenure as the La Jolla Playhouse's managing director, Terrence Dwyer, stated commercial productions at a nonprofit, "could go wrong more often than it goes right" (qtd. in Adler 119). However, Alan Levey, Dwyer's predecessor at La Jolla, says the nonprofit/commercial relationship is a balancing act of pros and cons.

When a not-for-profit theatre mounts a production that has commercial aspirations, the scale of that production tends to be larger than what they would typically undertake. It puts a strain on the institution, it challenges the institution. In some ways, there are probably pluses: the production provides the organization and staff with more varied experience, and presents specific hurdles to be overcome. In some ways, if the resources are not stable, there could be damage to individuals within the organization or even to the organization's reputation and ability to continue. The decision to embark on an enhanced musical is a balancing act. The organization has to be ready for such an undertaking, and capable of handling it. Are there long-term benefits for the organization? If the musical is a success, absolutely. (qtd. in Adler 119)

Despite the challenges of the relationship and the potential pitfalls of the nonprofit/commercial theatre intersection, the regional theatre has been instrumental in continuing to push and develop new works that may not have otherwise made it to Broadway. No matter what the future brings for the nonprofit theatre, the fact of the matter is, the regional theater has become an indispensable partner for commercial producers, ensuring that they will, for years to come, be a vital part the new road to Broadway.

## APPENDIX

- **Commercial producer** is an individual or group of people who operate in the sole interest of a production. Commercial producers are responsible for raising the capital for a Broadway production, as well as securing a Broadway theatre. Often commercial producers hire the creative team for a play or musical while navigating the potential road that show will travel, seeking out other potential investors, hiring star actors, and setting ticket prices for the Broadway production. Commercial producers often own the rights to production and are responsible for setting and negotiating contracts.
- A **commercial theatre** is defined as a theatre owned by an individual or consortium solely for profit and does not operate any additional programming outside of the indicial productions. Generally, commercial theatre success is determined by ticket sales. Theatre owners typically act as a producer (or co-producer) on the productions that are housed in its theatres. It is common practice, in commercial theatre, to produce a show with an open ended run.
- **Broadway** is defined as commercial theatre produced in one of forty houses containing 500 or more seats around Broadway in New York City, also known as the Theatre District. Broadway is home to both plays and musicals, and serves as a large tourist attraction, generating millions in annual revenue for the city of New York. Broadway productions usually come from one of four sources: the out-of-town try out, the regional theatre transfer, direct Broadway opening, and the London transfer.
- **Commercial Enhancement Money** is a financial contribution made by a play or musical's commercial producers to add to a nonprofit's production budget. Although the

commercial producers contribute to the nonprofit's production, they do not receive any portion of the box office from the nonprofit run.

- **Front Line Producer** or **First Producer** refers to a nonprofit theatre company that produces a play or musical as a part of their season, using their budget to fund the production. This is usually, if not always, done when a commercial producer is involved and commercially enhanced money has been contributed to the nonprofit's production. In recognition of the nonprofit's financial contribution to the production when it is housed in their theatre, commercial producers provide the nonprofit with an agreed upon percentage (usually between 1% - 3%) of future profit should the play or musical transfer to Broadway.
- **Future Gross Profit** refers to the profits a play or musical makes due to box office sales.
- **Future Net Profit** refers to the profits made by a play or musical minus the cost of running expenses.
- **The Out-of-Town Tryout** refers to the model of show development where producers take a Broadway-bound show to another city. These tryouts are used to work out the kinks in individual productions and gauge audience reactions, while building positive "buzz" and word of mouth.
- **The Broadway League** is an organization of over 700 Broadway theatre owners and operators, general managers and producers in North America. Created in the 1930s, the League negotiates collective bargaining agreements for the unions and guilds ("About the League").

- **League of Resident Theatre (LORT)** is a professional theatre association established in 1974 that operates on behalf of 71 theatres in the U.S. and negotiates agreements with Actor's Equity Association (AEA), the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC), and United Scenic Artists (USA) ("About LORT").
- **Co-Productions**, or co-pros, are a joint production between two nonprofit theatre companies, where the cost of the production is generally split between participating theatres until the production goes into technical rehearsals when the current producing company will accept responsibility for the expenses of their specific run of the show. The company that is working as the current producer of the show will also receive the box office receipts until the close of their production. Co-productions can be employed when a commercial producer is participating. If a show transfers to Broadway, the participating entities, regional and commercial, will split the financial return, or share the loss.
- **Actor's Equity Association** was founded in 1913 and is the United States labor union representing more than 50,000 actors and stage managers working in live theatre. AEA negotiates contracts, wages and working conditions of members while providing them with health care and pension plans ("About Equity").
- **Workshop** is an event created specifically to work on the development of a new piece. The workshop allows the writers and directors to see what aspects of the piece are working and what is not, while allowing actors to give voice to the characters and producers a venue where directors, choreographers, and even members of the design team are able to try out various ideas. Either the producing company or the commercial producers will organize workshops as a part of the show's development. Workshops are

also organized by nonprofit theaters, sometimes, but not always, in conjunction with a commercial producer.

- **Equity Workshop** is a specific type workshop that hires Equity actors to read and take part in the developmental process of a new work. Equity workshops are limited in both time and length and often stipulate a first right of refusal for the actor or a contract buy-out. Additionally, producers can opt to provide financial compensation to actors for their contributions if they participate from the first workshop to Broadway opening. Equity workshops can last four to eight weeks, must follow AEA rules and are not open to the public unless otherwise specified.
- A **Resident Acting Company** was traditionally comprised of a group of actors that became a part of a resident/regional theatre company for multiple seasons. Resident/regional companies would often select productions and create seasons with their acting company in mind. The traditional acting company has, for the most part, dissolved. Steppenwolf Theatre (Chicago, Illinois) is one of the few companies that maintains a traditional acting company, referred to as an ensemble. Nationally, it is common practice for Shakespeare companies to hire a group of actors to fill multiple roles for one season, as is the case with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (Ashland, Oregon).
- **National Endowment of the Arts (NEA)** was established by an act of Congress in 1965 as an independent federal agency that provides financial support to not-for-profit arts companies around the United States of America. In 2016, the NEA was awarded a special Tony Award for its assistance in the creation of several prominent theatrical works

("About the NEA"). The NEA was the first designated program to provide art institutions with a federal subsidy (O'Quinn, "Going National").

- **The Ford Foundation** was founded in 1936 by Ford General Motor Company owners (Henry and Edsel Ford) for the purpose of receiving and administering "funds for scientific, educational and charitable purpose, all for the public welfare" (Bak 217). The Foundation quickly grew into one of the largest American philanthropic foundations, and has worked over the decades to advance human achievement by reducing poverty and injustices around the world ("About Us: Mission").
- **The Tony Awards**, as a part of the American Theatre Wing, was established in 1947 as a celebration of excellence in the professional theatre ("Our History").

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