

THE PERFORMING ARTS IN LEAN TIMES:



OPPORTUNITIES FOR REINVENTION

SALZBURG GLOBAL SEMINAR

SESSION 468 REPORT

AUTHORS

ADRIAN ELLIS AND RUSSELL WILLIS TAYLOR

THE PERFORMING ARTS IN LEAN TIMES: OPPORTUNITIES FOR REINVENTION

FEBRUARY 21–25, 2010 • SESSION 468 REPORT

AUTHORS: ADRIAN ELLIS AND RUSSELL WILLIS TAYLOR

**THIS SESSION WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY A GENEROUS GRANT FROM
THE EDWARD T. CONE FOUNDATION.**



SALZBURG GLOBAL SEMINAR

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PREFACE

In February 2010, the Salzburg Global Seminar convened a conference entitled **“The Performing Arts in Lean Times: Opportunities for Reinvention.”** As an organization committed to addressing issues of global concern and to promoting dialogue among cultures for more than sixty years, the Salzburg Global Seminar took the view that this was an important moment to consider the repositioning of the performing arts within societies worldwide. To this end, and with the generous support of The Edward T. Cone Foundation, the Seminar brought fifty leaders of performing arts organizations, cultural policymakers, foundation representatives, arts association leaders, arts sector researchers, journalists, and scholars from a range of national and professional contexts into dialogue and gave them the opportunity to reflect on opportunities for reinventing the performing arts in this period of dramatic social, economic and technological change. Max Reinhardt’s former residence, Schloss Leopoldskron, in Salzburg, Austria provided an especially fitting backdrop for these discussions.

The program was guided by two invited co-chairs, Adrian Ellis, the executive director of Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York, and Russell Willis Taylor, the president and CEO of National Arts Strategies in Washington, DC, who also served as panel

moderators. The four-day residential program was structured around several plenary elements: opening remarks by the co-chairs and Michael Lynch, the former chief executive of South Bank Centre in London; five panel presentations followed by lengthy plenary discussion periods; and a roundtable discussion of issues confronting the performing arts in developing countries. In addition to the plenary program, five working groups met over the course of the session and provided an opportunity for sustained, specialized discussion in small groups. Both the plenary sessions and the facilitator-led working groups focused on the following five themes:

- 1) The Creative Process and Technology,
- 2) The Performing Arts and Communities,
- 3) The Creation of Value,
- 4) Understanding Our Crisis of Legitimacy, and
- 5) Sustainability and the Role of the Performing Arts in Civil Society.

This report summarizes the Seminar’s discussions in the plenary sessions and in the working groups, with the goal of sharing the thinking that went on in Salzburg with the wider global performing arts community. We hope that this report will be useful to the session participants and to other readers, and that they may wish to share the questions raised, the issues discussed, and the thoughts offered with other networks and organizations interested in helping the performing arts thrive in an ever-changing world.



Lyne Sneige Keyrouz



Lemi Ponifasio



Chris Mackie, Co-chair Adrian Ellis, and Andrew Taylor



Co-chair Russell Willis Taylor

SESSION CONTEXT

The global economic landscape has dramatically and irrevocably changed. What opportunities does this present for the performing arts around the world, and what issues must be in the front of every performing arts leader's mind seeking to establish, build or rebuild institutions that are relevant and sustainable for the next ten years and beyond?

The past few decades have been a period of expansion in cultural provision and in the roles that cultural organizations aspire to play in society. The performing arts sector—both institutionalized and unincorporated—has taken on ambitious roles in

community building, in urban regeneration, in tourism, in stimulating inward investment, and in health and well-being. However, the current global economic downturn and the resultant tough strategic choices that arts organizations face with respect to the scope and scale of their work present both challenges and opportunities for cultural leaders. Now more than ever arts leaders need to be able to define and articulate credibly the value that the arts provide to society as a whole and to the specific communities they serve. Leaders who are able to share a compelling message will head institutions that emerge from the current crisis stronger than ever before — leaders who cannot will find their organizations marginalized in the search for resources.



Basma El Husseiny



Anna Shulgat and Brent Reidy

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

“We half create the world we see.”

William Wordsworth

Cultural leaders are well-versed in the instrumental arguments of economic development and educational enhancement that have been adopted over the past two decades, often to persuade those with funding—donors, government, foundations—that they are deserving of support. While these arguments have been helpful in sustaining some arts organizations, they have eclipsed the more fundamental and intrinsic value that the arts provide as a key component of a healthy civil society. Arts leaders have become less adept at answering the question “Why do the arts really matter?” There has been a growing dichotomy between the ‘public’ and ‘private’ language of the arts, and a growing awareness that these need to be synthesized into an authentic and robust rationale: one that can help focus and direct the agendas of individual organizations in lean times.

As economies and citizens recalibrate their expectations and begin to look at what values they want their institutions to reflect—be they government,

higher education, or cultural institutions—the performing arts have a rare opportunity and a compelling need to regain a place at the civic table and become a more deeply integral player in civil society. Cultural activities of all types can be crucial building blocks in the society that will emerge from this period of dramatic change. Cultural institutions that were built on the values of thirty years ago have a chance to reinvigorate their missions and become central to public life, and this session explored many of the ways in which this new creation of meaning might advance.

The gathering was unusual in seeking to bring together a multi-disciplinary, international group of participants for an open, informal exchange of thoughts and ideas in a neutral setting – an evaluative international forum that brought together diverse experts from a very broad range of national and professional contexts and gave them the opportunity to reflect deeply on repositioning the arts within their societies. The candor and exchange allowed the emergence of new framing questions and conclusions for arts leaders as they shape the future of organizations. As a group, we sought to develop a framework for experimentation, a better way of “half-creating what we see,” rather than an overarching prescription for all arts organizations.



Peter Tade Adekunle



Sara Selwood and Hiroko Miyakawa



Patrice Walker Powell



Michael Lynch

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

In both the plenary sessions and the working groups, our point of departure was a set of questions, which we would encourage other performing arts organizations to ask themselves.

THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND TECHNOLOGY

We have a radically new delivery system for cultural performances for the first time since recordings and television: the internet. How can it be used to increase the value we create? How is the creative process affected by this medium? What cultural barriers within organizations prevent us from fully taking advantage of their potential? What are the implications for artists? How are audience expectations and audience participation changing?

Technological change has brought about a dramatic shift in how people interact with each other, possibly unequalled since the arrival of the printing press in the 15th century. The rapid evolution of participatory technologies like social networking, mobile communications, and other digital media is disruptive but also transformative in many areas of human endeavor – from industry and commerce to social movements to public process. It shortens attention spans in some cases, and deepens engagement in others.

These technologies offer new ways to communicate, coordinate, aggregate and share, and

arts organizations are responding to these new opportunities for unprecedented participation in global and local conversations. They break through traditional boundaries and disrupt longstanding monopolies in publishing, media, public discourse, and social systems. They recalibrate traditional pillars of authority, credential, and curation, and with them many established support systems and revenue streams. The role of institution as ‘gatekeeper’ is often undermined. New technologies enable people to enjoy the arts without the consumption of long form works in a central location, and the price of constant innovation is continual obsolescence.

In order to integrate the arts with all aspects of life, it is important to recognize that the shift engendered by participatory technology is—at its core—not technological. New technologies create a world where stakeholders expect to engage in conversation and co-create, or at least co-curate, with organizations while demanding a high degree of transparency from those organizations. These changes are *enabled* by technology, but are sociological in nature. To engage with audiences, organizations and artists must now not just do things *for* people, but instead do things *with* people. It is not that artists and organizations must plan to cede power to the public, but that the power is already ceded; organizations must now recognize that change and build on it to connect and engage with society.

The performing arts have always been a borrower’s field and they are therefore well placed to respond. Our means of generating, sharing, preserving, and interpreting human expression has

always been reflective of the systems around us, even when these systems were not designed specifically for artistic expression and experience. Rather, our arts ecology is a patchwork adapted and adopted from our wider society: the corporate organization, the nonprofit or NGO tax framework, private, public, and corporate philanthropic models, community organizations, and business processes are all regularly adapted to suit our creative intent. As a field, we should have no anxiety about adaptation.

Participatory media provide artists, communities, and organizations with new ways to achieve mission and express intent. There is a need for nuanced understanding of both the potential and the constraints of this media when matching it with the specific goals of our expression. We need to ask ourselves as leaders what type of participation we seek to invite. What types of participation do our audiences seek? Which technologies fit best with our capabilities and vision? Are we ready to accept contributions of content as well as cash? What contribution does our work make to the greater societal good? These questions should continually frame our choices in how we align our time, money, attention, and energies. The answers are not hidden somewhere in the private sector – it too is grappling with the invention of business models for the best use and monetization of participatory media. There is also a global inequality in access to technology that has the potential to limit access to the arts for many – thereby increasing the gap between the experiences of those with resources and those without.

One important impact that technological change has on our field is its power to cultivate curiosity in stakeholders, organizations, and communities. Curiosity drives innovation and fosters risk-taking. It encourages a search for different voices rather than voices like our own. Further, curiosity promotes the global awareness and interaction on which sustainable future cultural systems will be built. Curiosity offsets the natural organizational tendency toward pragmatic, lower risk decisions, which are sometimes necessary but can be antithetical to the overall purpose of artistic experimentation.

Another important opportunity that technology offers to the performing arts is that of an enabling tool for collaboration. Part of our reinvention, encouraged by the need for resources, could be the use of technology in collaborative problem solving. For nonprofits, collaboration can be an important strategic advantage. By collaborating where possible to solve shared problems, organizations may free up energy, attention, and resources to focus on the qualities that make the organizations distinctive, and the value they co-create with the world.

The choices we make in delivery systems and content will require clarity and transparency about our larger goals. There will be an even greater need to revisit and focus our core purpose and intended value. In a participatory environment, there will also be an expectation that we publicly share that focus. For many arts organizations this may be a departure from the tacit assumption of shared values, and they will need to reinvent how and what they communicate with constituents.



John Tusa and Stephen Salyer



Mulenga Kapwepwe



Chris Mackie and
Caroline Carpenter

THE PERFORMING ARTS AND COMMUNITIES

Most arts organizations are formed around the idea of being about something. This plenary session and working group examined how we need to be “for somebody” as well, and how we define community, however broadly.

Part of leadership is to make decisions about the community that one’s organization serves, and to create a consensus within and around the organization as to that community. It can be defined geographically, socially, technologically, or by issues of taste. But clarity about the community one serves and the relationship to it is critical – the temptation to try to be all things to all people can be a path to anonymity and timidity. And community engagement should not be incompatible with fundamental artistic responsibilities to take risks and to protect the ability to take risks.

Communities will create themselves without the arts – but the arts can enable a richer level of engagement for all members of a community. Artistic expression is, by nature, disruptive, and artists are often agents of change. The alternative perspective they offer allows the arts to help communities re-evaluate ways of thinking, examine critically philosophical issues, and embrace values that transcend the mundane. An arts leader’s role with regard to community is not to seek institutional permanence first, but instead to look at how

connections can be made that will benefit the community. Arts organizations offer a chance to celebrate purpose, refocus values, and form a collective identity. Exportation of the arts can help other communities identify with or understand different ways of seeing and living, and can sometimes lay the groundwork for trust. The arts can also be a rare, flexible and porous part of the creative infrastructure within a community, finding common ground in the act of either creating or enjoying artistic expression.

As a gathering ground for the creative impulses of younger people, the arts can provide a place where younger people can feel powerful through expression. Community is not an audience: it talks back, criticizes, challenges, and reshapes organizations to fit its needs.

Arts activities offer the opportunity for partnerships that unite universities, governments, artists and the broader community. Artistic organizations can become the “R&D” function for their communities as citizens look at new ways to view the world around them and the challenges they may face. Arts organizations can be the risk-takers in communities, bringing in new ideas that give people permission to think differently. The greatest contribution that the performing arts make to community building is to create a broad sense of empathy for difference, and a celebration of what makes each community unique. They need to be inclusive and welcoming to create societal equity for all who participate in their work.

THE CREATION OF VALUE

What value do we create and how do we best articulate the value of what we do in a compelling way? What are the arguments that really matter, that are well-grounded, that resonate, and to whom? What are the instrumental values of the arts, and, perhaps even more importantly, what are the intrinsic values and how do we find the language to communicate them effectively?

If relevance is important, value is paramount. Describing, defending, and promoting the value of the performing arts is a highly complex task and one that is difficult to systemize. What constitutes value for one society will be valueless in another, and the global rise of economic or monetary value as the universal metric is of concern to many who see this as an ultimately impoverishing trend.

This period of reinvention urges us to determine what will claim the time, attention, and commitment of those we seek to serve through our programs and institutions. The instrumental values of educational benefit, helping youth at risk, encouraging economic development have their place, but the greater value of artistic work is highly personal and therefore harder to measure. There is no generic value statement for the arts – and policy efforts to assign values and attendant resource are envied by some and reviled by others.

A summary of the value identified by seminar participants included:

- * personal development;
- * human capital;
- * heritage, history and culture;
- * resistance and power;
- * change, progress and adaptability;
- * human understanding and tolerance;
- * sentient value;
- * economic value; and
- * civic purpose.

Each artist, organization and leader must decide which of these values to frame and articulate at any given moment, knowing that value and meaning are produced by interaction and will differ for each group we seek to serve. Crafting our arguments is less important in the long term than demonstrating our value through programs that touch people's lives. Asking the question "What would be lost if this organization or artist were lost?" is a way of focusing on the unique value that artist or organization provides.

The global diversity of participants in this Salzburg Seminar encouraged the realization that in lean times, the arts offer one way of constructing meaning in a post-consumer society. For those countries that have experienced lean times over many years, the arts continue to provide irreplaceable value in the nine areas listed above.



Margot Leicester, Peter Struckel, Audra Molyte, and Diane Ragsdale



Ben Cameron



Gitta Honegger and Fabio Severino

UNDERSTANDING OUR CRISIS OF LEGITIMACY

We face broader societal changes that present challenges to institutions founded on principles no longer universally held. The relationship between the arts and society is evolving as changes in demographics, in technology and in how people can and do spend their leisure time fundamentally challenge old models. Is this a ‘marketing’ issue or does it go to the core of what we do, and why and how we do it? What do we hold on to as core, what do we need to jettison?

Consideration of all the ways that the arts create and sustain communities forces re-examination of the idea of “the arts in crisis.” With participatory technology and an ever more blurred line between professional and amateur (the “pro-am” movement¹), we live in a golden age of cultural participation and amateur creation. While the arts as a field of human endeavor are not in crisis, some institutions and the delivery systems that support them are clearly not sustainable. We may wish to reinvent those institutions and systems, but art as a field will continue to flourish.

Our definition of “arts organization” will need to be expanded in the coming years, and the western view of what constitutes an arts organization is not universal. Institutions exist because they enjoy a consensual relationship with society. The various constituents in that society often hold views on institutions that are irreconcilable and in constant debate. The diversity of these views can create what

might be best described as a “crisis of legitimacy.” This crisis is not only a changed relationship with those from whom we seek affirmation (audiences, peers, governments, funders, et al) but also a confusion about what we need legitimacy for at all. We need it for the securing of resources, be they government grants or time and attention from constituents and audiences.

Declining participation demonstrates this institutional crisis, as does research in the UK and US revealing that in some countries the public feels increasingly excluded from art or that art has become less relevant or meaningful. That legitimacy is not necessarily irretrievably lost or indeed even that far from an institution’s reach, but rather currently inaccessible when institutions ineffectively articulate appropriate values to different stakeholders. Creating communities is in part about establishing the relevance of activities within them, and there is scope for renewing our commitment to finding new ways of expressing why the arts matter to increase the legitimacy they need.

Legitimacy is bestowed, conferred, or awarded; it is not simply appropriated. With legitimacy come responsibility, resource and organization. It must be earned and re-earned and it cannot be assumed – and what we may be seeing in those countries where the arts are experiencing a crisis of legitimacy is a reluctance to re-earn the status once afforded institutions.

As new forms of participation rise and passive participation becomes less attractive to audiences, organizations must balance seeking legitimacy for

¹This refers to the professional-amateur movement first identified by Charles Leadbeater, and covers everything from gardening to orchestral playing.

funding, validation, acknowledgment, and affirmation with taking risks that advance art itself. An organization's receipt of funding, audience participation, or longevity does not alone confer greatness or legitimacy.

Organizations and artists must become values clear as well as value clear to gain legitimacy. We should examine and dismantle behaviors and beliefs that will no longer serve us. The single act of creating great performances is not sufficient to make our contribution to society – connecting people to those great performances in a meaningful way is also required. Now more than ever artists and arts leaders cannot expect their communities to come to them for art, but must instead go to their communities with art.

In our search for legitimacy, values should not be espoused merely to persuade stakeholders and win resources. These values must have utility for the actual creation of art. The value of the arts is in part ineffable and some values are better demonstrated than described. Grassroots artistic creation has legitimacy for those who participate in it, and organizations matter when they produce powerful work that has the potential to focus attention, create conversation, advance human understanding, and raise consciousness.

In the end, the invitation to others from artists and arts leaders to join them in exploring the value of the arts is far more powerful than marketing, advocacy, or arguments over policy, useful though these activities may be. Our most pervasive and enduring legitimacy will come from the creation of relationships, not just the amassing of audiences.

SUSTAINABILITY AND THE ROLE OF THE PERFORMING ARTS IN CIVIL SOCIETY

What role should the arts play in civil society? This plenary session and working group examined how the performing arts relate to other areas that are equally—and in some cases seen to be more—important. What responsibilities is it realistic for the cultural sector to take on and what is unrealistic? Do we have the confidence to do fewer things better?

Civil society can be understood very differently as a term around the world. Post-apartheid South Africa may have a very different experience of civic engagement than that of the rapidly growing city of Beirut. In this context we looked at how the arts are a sustainable and active partner in shaping the civic dialogue: providing an intellectual commons where people who share geography but perhaps not values or experience can come together and relate to one another.

In looking at how the arts can be an important part of the civic dialogue, we began with the relationship between universities and art, both as creators of art and as conduits between art and publicly valued institutions. The arts as part of a creative campus become more central to a civil society only if that campus itself is part of the civil society, but exposure to the arts is an important part of educating global citizens.

Another important role for the arts in a civil society is the creation of large scale artworks that can transform a city into a performance space, bringing



Steven Tepper



Geeta Chandran



Communities
Working Group

together large and disparate groups of people who share a memory and a sense of connection through the art. The unifying power of events and site specific work can be both celebratory and provocative, and can reshape the views of people about where they live.

One of the hard truths for some organizations that have a long history is that new civic identities or breaks with the past may alter their role. They may be perceived as having connotations less relevant, or not welcomed as part of the future. Establishing their continued relevance to their society can be challenging but must be addressed openly and with a sophisticated understanding of the issues faced. The performing arts can offer opportunities to connect with others rarely seen, to convene in a way that creates a sense of belonging. The instrumental values of the arts are often cited as contributing to societal well-being, including literacy support, working with at-risk youth, and bridging cultural divides present in cities around the world.

Social justice is another area where the arts are increasingly making a contribution. One example is the global spread of programs based on *El Sistema*, a Venezuelan music education program which seeks to create an “affluence of spirit” for all who participate regardless of whether they later become professional musicians. The world of possibility that the arts can provide for individuals can create an environment for imagining possibilities for cities, or countries. In giving

voice to the imagination of individuals, their ability to form cohesive groups in other ways can be enhanced.

CONCLUSION

In general, many factors are contributing towards a large-scale disruption of the arts across many nations, as in many other areas of society. Economic shifts, global and individual reach in technologies, the pursuit of strong and delineated national identities and the appetite for a voice from younger people are all changing how the arts are viewed, created and consumed.

While the observations and reflections presented in this report fall well short of a prescription, the conversation in Salzburg did suggest a common agenda for the performing arts and common approaches to that agenda. Above all, it is a critical moment for arts leaders to ask themselves the right questions and to pay attention to the disruptive trends affecting them: technology as a tool for building a community of practice; a shift away from producing for an audience to connecting with them; the need to deliver the special, the extraordinary, the magical; the need to be relevant to their communities, however defined; and, perhaps most importantly, the need to be clear on value and values. The performing arts can meet the challenges of this changing environment by recognizing the trends and by seizing opportunities for reinvention.

PARTICIPANTS

Adrian Ellis (Co-chair), Executive Director, Jazz at Lincoln Center, New York, United States

Russell Willis Taylor (Co-chair), President and CEO, National Arts Strategies, Washington, DC, United States

Tade Adekunle, Theater Director, Cultural Activist and Vice Chair, Arterial Network, Lagos, Nigeria

Iman Al-Hindawi, General Director, Royal Opera House, Muscat, Oman

Sara Billmann, Director of Marketing and Communications, University Musical Society, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, United States

Pieter Broucke, Designate Director of the Arts and Professor of History of Art and Architecture, Middlebury College, Vermont, United States

Suzanne Burgoyne, Curators' Distinguished Teaching Professor of Theatre, Catherine P. Middlebush Chair of Fine & Performing Arts, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, United States

Ben Cameron, Program Director for the Arts, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, New York, United States

Geeta Chandran, Dancer, Founder and Head, Natya-Vriksha, New Delhi, India

Constantin Chiriac, General Manager, Romanian National Theatre "Radu Stanca"; Director of the Sibiu International Theatre Festival; Vice-President, Sibiu European Capital of Culture 2007, Sibiu, Romania

Andrea Csanadi, Program Director, Arts and Culture Network Program, Open Society Institute, Budapest, Hungary

Basma El Hussein, Founder and Managing Director, Al Mawred Al Thaqafy (Culture Resource) Cairo, Egypt

Emma Evans, former Deputy Director, Diversions Dance, Cardiff; Board Member, Arts Council of Wales, Cardiff, United Kingdom

Delecia Forbes, Director, Department of Economic Development and Tourism of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa

Sarah Frankland, Deputy Director and Arts Manager, British Council USA, London, United Kingdom

Brigitte Fürle, Artistic Director, spielzeit'europa, Berlin, Germany

Lawrence P. Goldman, President and Chief Executive Officer, New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Newark, New Jersey, United States

John Holden, Associate, Demos, London; Visiting Professor, City University, London, United Kingdom

Gitta Honegger, Professor of Theater, School of Theater and Film, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, United States

Mulenga Kapwepwe, Chairperson, ARterial Network Task Team, Africa; Chairperson, Zambia National Arts Council, Lusaka, Zambia

John Killacky, Program Officer for Arts and Culture, San Francisco Foundation, California, United States

Sun On Gilford Law, Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs (Culture), Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Sarah Lutman, President and Managing Director, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, St. Paul, Minnesota, United States

Michael Lynch, Member of the Board, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Ultimo, Australia; Former Chief Executive, South Bank Centre, London, United Kingdom

Christopher Mackie, Information Technology Consultant, New York, United States

Douglas McLennan, Editor, ArtsJournal.com, Seattle, Washington, United States

Chris Millado, Associate Artistic Director, Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila, Philippines

Hiroko Miyakawa, Communication Officer, Office of External Relations, Inter-American Development Bank, Washington, DC, United States

Audra Molyte, Cultural Project Producer, Kaunas, Lithuania

Mohamed El Amine Moumine, General Director, Moulay Rachid Cultural Center, Casablanca, Morocco

Trygve Nordwall, Former Manager Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Munich; Performing Arts Consultant, Zurich, Switzerland, and Stockholm, Sweden

Ong Keng Sen, Artistic Director, Theatre Works, Singapore

Dick Penny, Managing Director, Watershed, Bristol, United Kingdom

Sibila Petlevski, Poet, Writer, Professor, Drama Academy, Zagreb, Croatia

Lemi Ponifasio, Founder and Leader, MAU, Auckland, New Zealand

Diane Ragsdale, Associate Program Officer, Performing Arts, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, New York, United States

Brent Reidy, Executive Director, Music for Tomorrow, New York, United States

Sara Selwood, Director, Sara Selwood Associates; Visiting Professor, City University of London, United Kingdom

Fabio Severino, Vice-President of Italian Association of Economics of Culture, Didactic Coordinator Master's Program in the Economics of Culture, Policy and Government, University of Rome, Italy

Anna Shulgat, Theater Critic, Arts Manager and Translator, St. Petersburg, Russia

Lyne Sneige, Regional Manager Cultural Leadership International, British Council, Beirut, Lebanon

Peter Struckel, Executive Manager Kasarne/Kulturpark, European Capital of Culture Kosice 2013, Kosice, Slovakia

Andrew Taylor, Director, Bolz Center for Arts Administration, University of Wisconsin School of Business, Madison, Wisconsin, United States

Steven Tepper, Associate Director, Curb Center for the Art, Enterprise and Public Policy, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, United States

David Thacker, Artistic Director, Octagon Theatre Bolton, United Kingdom

John Tusa, Chairman of the Court of Governors, University of the Arts, London, United Kingdom; Chair, Clore Leadership Program; former Managing Director, BBC World Service

Mike van Graan, Playwright; Cultural Activist; Commentator; Executive Director, African Arts Institute; Secretary General, Arterial Network, Cape Town, South Africa

Shawn Van Sluys, Executive Director, Musagetes Foundation, Guelph, Ontario, Canada

Patrice Walker Powell, Deputy Chairman for States, Regions and Local Arts Agencies, National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C., United States
Willie White, Artistic Director, Project Arts Centre, Dublin, Ireland

Tony Woodcock, President, New England Conservatory, Boston, Massachusetts, United States

SALZBURG GLOBAL SEMINAR STAFF

Nadine Farghaly, Program Associate

Alex Lee, Program Intern

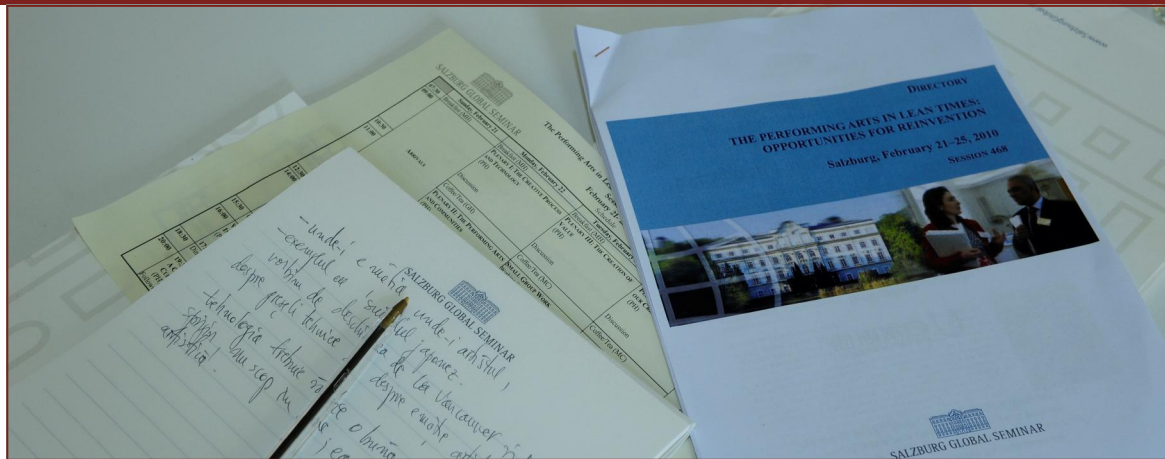
John Lotherington, Vice President, Program Operations

Tina Micklethwait, Director of Communications

Edward Mortimer, Executive Vice President and Chief Program Officer

Stephen L. Salyer, President and Chief Executive Officer

Susanna Seidl-Fox, Program Director



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ADRIAN ELLIS became executive director of Jazz at Lincoln Center in 2007. He comes to the not-for-profit arts organization at a pivotal time in its 21-year history, after being appointed to the post by the Board of Directors. He is the founder and former president of AEA Consulting, a company specializing in strategic, operational and facilities planning for the cultural sector. He was a civil servant in the UK Treasury and the Cabinet Office, and for two years ran the office of the Economic Secretary to the Treasury. From 1980 to 1982, he was a College Lecturer in Politics at University College, Oxford. Mr. Ellis has been a member of the Governing Council of the National Museums and Galleries of Wales and a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects' Architecture Centre Committee, the Kaufman Center, New York. He has written and lectured extensively on issues affecting the cultural sector and writes a column for The Art Newspaper. He received a B.A. and M.A. in politics philosophy and economics from University College, Oxford. Mr. Ellis is a Fellow of Salzburg Global Seminar Session 298, *Managing Non-Governmental Organizations*, 1992.

RUSSELL WILLIS TAYLOR has been president and CEO of National Arts Strategies since January 2001, and has extensive senior experience in strategic business planning, and all areas of operational management. She served as director of development for the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art before returning to England in 1985 at the invitation of the English National Opera (ENO) to establish the Company's first fund-raising department. From 1997 through 2000, she rejoined the ENO as executive director. Ms. Taylor has held a wide range of managerial and Board posts in the commercial and nonprofit sectors including the advertising agency DMBB; and head of corporate relations at Stoll Moss. She received the Garrett Award for an outstanding contribution to the arts in Britain, and has most recently served on the boards of A&B and Cambridge Arts Theatre. She currently serves on the advisory boards of The University Musical Society of the University of Michigan and the Center for Nonprofit Excellence in Charlottesville as well as on numerous other Boards. Ms. Taylor is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. She has participated in several Salzburg Global Seminar programs.

ABOUT THE RAPPORTEUR

BRENT REIDY is executive director of Music For Tomorrow, a New Orleans-based jazz not-for-profit that supports the jazz creative economy through grants, programs and audience development. He also works as a consultant for organizations including Jazz at Lincoln Center and Wolf Brown Consulting. He began his arts career when he contributed to a report for Mayor Ray Nagin's "Bring New Orleans Back" committee, which argued that immediate economic stimulus was needed in New Orleans' cultural sector if the city was to recover. He also started a website while studying at Dartmouth, which was named by the Public Relations Society of America as an "example of how to blog successfully." Mr. Reidy is a published musicologist and is working towards a doctorate in musicology at Indiana University.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Salzburg Global Seminar Session 468 was made possible by a generous grant from **The Edward T. Cone Foundation**. The session also received support from **The Nippon Foundation**.

The Salzburg Global Seminar owes special thanks to the Session Co-chairs, Adrian Ellis and Russell Willis Taylor, for donating their time and expertise. The Seminar gratefully acknowledges the support of all participants of the program whose diverse experience and ideas informed the session and this report.

DISCLAIMER

This report reflects many of the points raised and issues discussed during the February meeting, but is not an exhaustive exploration of the themes nor does it purport to reflect a consensus amongst the participants on the issues and ideas presented. The report seeks to reflect and summarize the multi-layered and nuanced discussions that took place. The report does not claim to reflect the views of the donors, the authors, nor does it necessarily reflect the views of the Salzburg Global Seminar.



SALZBURG GLOBAL SEMINAR

Salzburg Global Seminar
Schloss Leopoldskron
Leopoldskronstrasse 56-58, Box 129
A-5010 Salzburg, Austria
Telephone +43 (662) 83 9 830
Fax +43 (662) 83 9 837
Website: www.SalzburgGlobal.org
Email: sfox@SalzburgGlobal.org

