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The International Museum Theatre Alliance is a nonprofit, professional membership organization and an affiliate to the American Association of Museums.

The mission of the International Museum Theatre Alliance is to inspire and support the use of theatre and theatrical technique to cultivate emotional connections, provoke action, and add public value to the museum experience.

Tessa Bridal named Manager of Public Programs at the Monterey Bay Aquarium **KEN PETERSON**

Tessa Bridal, a veteran of public programs at science centers and children's museums, has joined the Monterey Bay Aquarium as Manager of Public Programs. Bridal brings with her more than 30 years' experience interpreting science, the arts, and the humanities to audiences of all ages. She has been Director of Public Programs for the Science Museum of Minnesota, and Director of Interpretation for the Children's Museum of Indianapolis, where she was also in charge of the year-round main stage productions for the museum children's theatre, and for the planetarium.

For her work, Bridal received the American Association of Museums' (AAM) Education Committee Award for Excellence in Practice, an award given to "individuals who have greatly influenced the work of the museum education field." She is the founder of one of AAM's first five professional interest councils, and has served on both the National Program Committee and the National Interpretation Project Advisory Committee.


Her publications include the book *Exploring Museum Theatre*, published by Alta Mira Press in 2004, and a book scheduled to be published in 2012, also by Alta Mira, examining the beneficial effects on staff and visitors of integrating exhibit and program planning. Bridal has also published articles in *Dimensions*, the bi-monthly journal of the Association of Science Technology Centers (ASTC), and in AAM's *Presence of Mind*, a collection of essays. She has served as guest editor for the ASTC's *Science on Stage Anthology*, and the *Journal of Museum Education*.

Over the course of 26 years, she ran the annual week long Theatre in Museums Workshop, supporting more than 100 institutions, including zoos and aquariums, with the establishment of theatre-based interpretation.




Marcos Stafne named Director of Education at the Brooklyn Children's Museum

Marcos Stafne, PhD has been appointed to the position of Director of Education at the Brooklyn Children's Museum where he will provide leadership for the activities of the Museum's education department and collections. Marcos most recently served as the Director of Education and Visitor Experience for the Rubin Museum of Art, where he led all aspects of youth development, family learning, PreK-12 school programs, university programs, educational resources (web & interactive exhibits), and museum tours and services. He has worked in the field of museum education for the past 17 years at the Orlando Science Center, Orange County Historical Center and as the Director of Public Programs and Traveling Exhibitions for the New York Hall of Science.



Jillian Finkle named Education Programs Coordinator at the Providence Children's Museum

Last June, IMTAL President Jillian Finkle started a new job at Providence Children's Museum in Providence, RI. As the Education Programs Coordinator, Jillian oversees all programs for school-age children, including those for school groups, Scouts and general Museum visitors. She is also a key player in the Museum's play advocacy initiative, leads professional development workshops, and supervises two teams of AmeriCorps volunteers who provide after-school STEM enrichment activities in partnership with community centers in underserved areas of the city. As she settles in, Jillian hopes to expand the Museum's small theatre program and increase IMTAL's presence in New England.



Using the Performing Arts to Build Community in Museums **SIMONE MORTAN**

I'd like to share with you four examples of using Performing Arts to build community. Two come from my home institution, the Monterey Bay Aquarium; the other two are from other institutions in our community. All of them represent different aspects of community building.

Using Theatre to Meet Market Goals and Create Mission-Based

Programs: In 2006 we began a collaboration with El Teatro Campesino, a local Hispanic theatre group that has a long history of "political theatre" associated with the farm labor movement of the 1960s. We approached them about developing mission-based theatre programs that were bilingual and effective in reaching out to the Hispanic audience. This collaboration not only connected us with a strong voice in the Hispanic community, but it also formed stronger bonds between the programs department at the aquarium and the marketing department, which had specific goals to increase our Hispanic audience. Although we have now "retired" these particular shows, El Teatro Campesino continues to use these scripts in their outreach work with Hispanic youth, which continues to carry out our mission to this important audience.

Luis Valdez, the founder of El Teatro Campesino said "On the surface, ocean conservation may seem an unlikely topic for El Teatro Campesino, better known for plays about the plight of farmworkers. But El Teatro's early work shed light on the dangers of pesticides, which are poisoning the environment. The conservation topic helps children develop a social consciousness. We're gradually, through migrant education programs, becoming involved in more down-to-earth issues."

The Alta California Dancers are a volunteer group that uses dance as an interpretive method at Monterey State Historic Park. Dance celebrates the universal nature of human experience. Dance can involve cultural consent, including the bonds of friends, families, courtship and marriage. Dance celebrates birth, death, marriage, holidays, saint's days, holy days and other feasts.

Dance has a broad appeal to multigenerational audiences, and it is fun. It can transport audiences to another place and time. As a volunteer organization, the Alta California Dancers have created a community in support of the California State Historic Park, and have added tremendously to special events sponsored at the park.

The arts collaboration of Spector Dance and the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute is a collaboration of arts and science that has brought the issues of global climate change and the oceans to a community that might not otherwise be particularly engaged in this topic. The dance *Ocean* blends dance, music, and science in an effort to convey the ocean's beauty, its importance to life on earth, and the many threats it faces. The show features interviews with MBARI scientists, and MBARI researchers continue to support the project's outreach efforts by speaking at performances and school events.

Finally another marketing initiative at the aquarium has resulted in Evenings by the Bay, a summertime program that invites our audience to enjoy the aquarium during extended hours on Saturday and Sunday evenings. We have partnered with the world famous Monterey Jazz Festival and their education program to bring Next Generation Jazz musicians to the aquarium on these evenings to play in the Marine Mammal gallery. The local community has caught on and we see many repeat visitors all summer as they come down to the aquarium on weekend evenings for "date night" to listen to some jazz and enjoy the exhibits after the daytime crowds have diminished.



Community-Based Projects **STEPHANIE LONG**

Museum theatre, such as community-inspired productions, strengthens the museum's role as a community-meeting place. At the Science Museum of Minnesota, we've included the community in the script creation process on two different projects.

The first project, *Suitcase Science: The Science Behind People's Stuff*, is a theatre piece that highlights many scientific disciplines: anthropology, geology, chemistry, sociology, engineering and many more. The project goal is to foster a connection between the science of objects and community. Community groups were invited to participate in workshops that consisted of creative exercises, games, and conversations designed to elicit stories through the use of objects. All participants were asked to bring two objects that have meaning, significance, or value to him or her. Any type of object worked, and objects were needed for workshop purposes only. We did not collect the objects, only the stories they inspire.

Our team utilized the community stories as inspiration to create the show. So the objects that have ended up in the show are replicas that we purchased, not the actual objects owned by the people who participated in the workshops. With this project we did not contract a playwright. Instead, I cast a team of 5 actors who had playwriting and workshop facilitation experience to form a creative team, along with myself, and the director of the theatre piece. The creative team ran the workshops and wrote the pieces inspired by the communities' stories. The challenge for the creative team was to bring the science of the object into the piece without losing the personnel narrative. Both the workshops and the show have been huge hits. One organization enjoyed the workshops so much they've now implemented them into their monthly meetings, and run their own object workshop. The show has been popular as well and runs daily at the museum.

Another community-inspired project entitled *Voices* is a 20-minute show on the idea of race written by high school students in collaboration with a professional playwright. Professional adult actors performed the piece completely in the dark allowing the audience to focus only on the voices of the story. This format allowed the students to speak freely and anonymously about race through their writing. Although the writing workshop was structured, the students were free to write about whatever they wished. After all the workshops were completed, the playwright crafted the script, pulling together the individual stories and creating the final product.

As I stated earlier, professional adult actors performed *Voices* in the dark so that the audience could focus strictly on the voices or words of the students. It was fun for our actors to see the shock on the faces of the audience when the lights came up for curtain call and they realized that the performers were adults rather than teens. Audiences were also surprised by how small the cast was. The director had the actors move around the audience to create the feeling of the seventy-eight voices represented in the script. The project and show were both extremely successful.

To summarize, our ability to engage visitors is, of course, essential to the livelihood and future of museums. By including our community's participation at the start of the theatrical process, our theatre programs stay current and vital to our communities.



Theatre in School—Theatre in the Museum **RACHEL MASTROMARINO**

Over the last decade, the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh School for the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA), embarked on a partnership that compliments both organizations’ beliefs and missions. This partnership is one-of-a-kind: Take innovation, creation, interaction, originality, and improvisation, and in a nutshell, those words epitomize the power of kids teaching kids through the craft of performance.

In 2002, museum consultant and CAPA teacher Chris Laitta approached the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh about creating a special partnership for her sixth- to eighth-grade theater students. “I wanted to create a model of how kids can teach kids through performance arts. When people forget about age and put aside their preconceived notions, they will realize just how engaging these children are,” Ms. Laitta said. Ms. Laitta’s realization forced her to devise a curriculum for her sixth- to eighth-grade students at the museum that abided by the Pennsylvania Learning Standards, while still benefiting the museum.

The Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh and Ms. Lois Winslow, the Director of Education, were more than thrilled to welcome the students from CAPA along with their inspired ideas. This partnership corresponds with the museum’s mission and philosophy. The Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh prides themselves on being a community-centered place, as well as a place that values and respects children. They do not talk down to children, dilute ideas, or reprimand creativity. The museum’s mission ends by specifying “We are a partner and resource for people who work with or on behalf of children,” and without a doubt the students accept and facilitate that mission. The museum’s philosophy compliments the partnership in a similar way, stating, “We are process based in every area, we want children to learn through a process, not focus on a cookie-cutter final outcome.” Both the museum visitors and the CAPA students learn through a process with no right or wrong outcome, furthering the reason why the museum feels the partnership is representative of their core values.

This partnership was extremely important to the museum and Ms. Laitta for various reasons. Through the partnership, the student-performers were able to feel empowered in a professional setting. The sixth- to eighth-grade middle school students from CAPA were not considered kids; they were Junior Staff members who were held to the same standards as everyone else in the museum. The student-performers were able to learn much more than is possible in the traditional classroom setting. The CAPA students were put in lifelike situations and had to think quickly on their feet. One CAPA student discussed the importance of thinking quickly in one of her reflections: “Through the experience there were a lot of hands-on interaction and on-the-spot thinking. For example, when your experiment failed and you were left with an empty bottle and some food coloring, and you had to quickly think of another activity to present. Or when you got there and ran out of materials in the first 5 minutes!” The Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh was an unusual venue for these student-performers, but it forced them to step outside of their comfort zone, and to be prepared for all types of variables.

What the museum found particularly phenomenal about the partnership was just how engaging these student-performers were, despite being in the company of some amazing distractions (slides, climbing nets, pools of water, and so on). The CAPA students were engaging the visitors and effectively teaching kids through their planned performances. At times, trying to capture the interest of a young visitor who has an average attention span of less than 30 seconds proved difficult, but the Children’s Museum was impressed by their determination. These student-performers developed perseverance as they learned that things don’t always go according to plan. Children may not understand the information being presented, or may simply not be interested. While these factors may seem difficult for middle school students to cope with, it made the successes all the more rewarding.

Over the course of the partnership, the results have been consistent and inspiring across the board. The museum has been a place where CAPA students could think critically and practice live performance through teaching others. And it has been an equally positive experience for the museum, which has been able to witness kids teaching kids within their facility. By developing more collaborations like the one between the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh and CAPA, museums around the world will be able to enable a place where kids can teach kids through live performance. Empowering these students sparks untapped creativity that is unlike anything any museum professional could envision. This partnership has been an inspiration to the museum and the students, as well as visitors at the museum. Hopefully more partnerships will continue to flourish throughout the museum world rooted in goodwill because of the impressive outcome of the partnership between the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh and CAPA. In the words of a CAPA eighth-grader, “In the end, I don’t think it’s only us making an impact on them; it’s them making an impact on us.”



All the world's a stage . . . especially at the World Expo: Theatrical programming at Expo 2012 in Yesou, South Korea **MARCOS STAFNE**

For many museum theatre actors in the United States there's often a competition between exhibition and performance space. While it is a best practice to include space in an exhibition for productions to occur, and many exhibitions are actually planned with human interaction or mediation in mind, imagine if you were tasked with performing with (or against) the most spectacular, cutting-edge, multimedia experiences ever presented. That's what the performers who enlivened exhibitions and pavilions at the 2012 World Expo in Yesou, South Korea were tasked with doing. By taking on this challenge, they added a definite human quality to the extravagant pyrotechnics, dancing robots, and giant projection-mapped experiences abundant throughout the fair.

I had my own battle with multimedia many years ago as a science theatre actor when I was asked to perform in an IMAX-scaled planetarium show, *Where in the Universe is Carmen Sandiego* at the Orlando Science Center. The show took place on a small platform in front of screen measuring 8,000 square feet in the Dr. Phillips CineDome (think: giant screen, tiny Marcos). I led the audience through a 30-minute romp around the universe. *Carmen* was one of the hardest theatre experiences I've ever performed because of the difficulty of capturing anyone's attention when a giant Saturn was flying over your head. Fast-forward a couple of years, and I was producing small dome shows, and trying my best to integrate media into productions I worked on for the New York Hall of Science. While working there, I began an intense relationship with World's Fairs.

The Hall of Science was built for the 1964-65 World's Fair in New York, which was the second to happen in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, also the setting for the 1939 World's Fair. When I first started out at the NY Hall of Science, now a hands-on science center, I didn't really understand what the Fairs were all about. But after being begged repeatedly to take people on tours of the Great Hall (a structure originally built for the Fair) on numerous weekends, I began to learn more about them from their die-hard fans (I'm sure some folks from the Pacific Science Center and Exploratorium can relate). I was also lucky to show a movie called *Peace to Understanding: The 1964-65 World's Fair* by BBQ Productions, a documentary about the themes of the 64-65 Fair and a snapshot of the interesting attractions, like Disney's *It's a Small World*, that were developed for the Expo. Cut to many years later, and I've now attended three World Expos: Zaragoza 2008, Shanghai 2010, and Yesou 2012. Aside from being great vacation destinations, I've come to love the spectacle and wonder of the corporate and theme Pavilions, and the charm and curiosity of the international pavilions. In this past Expo I noticed more experiences being led by performers, both as cultural ambassadors of their country's rich dance or music heritage, or as fully integrated players within a narrative experience of an exhibition.



Photo by Travis Stanton



Photo by Travis Stanton

Something important to note about Expos: very little of the media productions or performances are in multiple languages, and I have to admit that at Yesou, no matter what the experience, I was a bit lost in translation. It was easier to understand experiences that had human interpreters because I could at least read body language. The clearest use of body language was in the Lotte Corporate Pavilion. When visitors walked into the exhibition hall they were transported into a large garden with whimsical Cirque-du-Soleil-esque characters greeting and teasing everyone. After waiting for 90 minutes in the sweltering sun, this warm, personal, and silly experience actually made me smile immediately. Everyone was encouraged to sit down on the ground and the performers enacted a short pre-show performance. I have no clue what the show was about, other than that it was silly and put me in the right mood to progress to the next experience, which was a giant digital balloon ride complete with 360-degree surround screens and ride-show attendants dressed in steam-punk attire.

The main feature of the Marine Industries Theme Pavilion was an interactive show where you were introduced to a very hip researcher who could have doubled for one of Korea's emerging K-Pop superstars. He performed on a large set that was configured with many projection or video screens and interactive media. At the climax of the performance, he popped up next to an amazing display of cars that had an exquisitely elaborate projection-mapped media presentation. The car's projection-mapped experiences were unbelievably futuristic, but by placing a live human next to the display of media, the audience was allowed to suspend their disbelief in what was happening. The human added to the media in a way that brought the fancy bells and whistles into a live experience.

Cultural performances were sprinkled throughout the entire Expo. Some were elaborately staged in specific performance venues as major public programs, and others were embedded into specific exhibitions. The Thailand Pavilion added a wonderful performance stage to the entrance of their exhibition, and included cultural performances of Thai dance that contributed to the interior narrative. This was a much-needed experience as lines for this particular pavilion were long. It also increased exposure to Thailand for those just passing by and added value to people tired of waiting. The China Pavilion integrated dance into their larger narrative. After the audience watched a beautiful animated movie about dolphins, the screens lifted to reveal two ballet dancers who performed a moving duet between a young girl and a representational dolphin. The performance helped visitors connect on a human level. The language of dance communicated to a broad, multi-lingual audience.

The experiences that I provided are just a few examples of how live performances made a difference at this year's Expo. The performances helped to entertain, lighten the mood, engage, reach visitors who were experiencing difficult concepts, and added a much needed human face to the spectacle of the Expo 2012.

2013 IMTAL Global Conference

**National Museum
of American History
October 6, 2013**

The 2013 IMTAL Global Conference will focus on creativity and innovation in today's Museum Theatre. In 2013, Museum Theatre is a proven, tested, educational approach in the field of museum studies. It is also an art form bringing the best of performance to museum visitors of all ages. But how is the field continuing to evolve? The 2013 Global conference will bring together practitioners, researchers, performers, and museum professionals from around the world to discuss, debate, present, and share examples of how the field is evolving and innovating.

For more information, please visit
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/events/imal-2013>

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