

The Gifts of Theatre

PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

Happy End-of-Summer! We are just entering one of my favorite times of the year: seasonal transition. The changes of the season tease us—a couple of cooler days that foreshadow the relief of autumn after an incredibly hot summer. Those late winter days when temperatures creep into the 50s and shorts are seen everywhere. The reminders that relief from extremes is on the way. My thoughts focus on extremes, transitions, and relief often these days. Extremes are everywhere around us: weather, COVID-19, politics, the list goes on. Insecurities over our health, our loved ones, our fellow humans, and our careers continue to abound. For those in our community that have been affected by crippling weather, fires, illness, or any other personal loss, our hearts go out to you. Please let us know what you need. We want to hear your voices.

Despite the never-ending obstacles, museum theatre continues! Getting to meet Kandie Carle in person was one of the highlights for me of the 2017 IMTAL conference, and you will certainly feel her joy as you read her story about how museum theatre at her site led to a beautiful living tribute. Gillette Castle State Park is truly stunning. I look

forward to visiting there again soon to experience the spring blossoms in person!

As my term as president comes to an end next month, I look back at eight years of board membership, and the strongest memories I have are all tied to witnessing endless innovation and endurance. We make magic out of scraps. We work miracles for pennies. We build programs in the face of indifference. We create memories for our guests, our audiences, and our institutions. I am humbled by the creativity that my colleagues possess, and I am dazzled by their resilience. W.B. Yeats paraphrased Plutarch when he said, “Education is not the filling of a pot, but the lighting of a fire.” You can light some good fires by running for the vacant IMTAL board positions listed on the last page of this newsletter. Your voice needs to be heard! Descriptions of duties and term lengths can be found on the IMTAL website. In closing, let me just say to my friends, my colleagues, my inspirations— get some more matches.

-Todd D Norris
IMTAL President



Todd D. Norris
IMTAL President

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Welcome to a summer installment of *Insights!* The world continues to be a challenging place, but I hope that this issue brings a bit of peace to your day.

Read on to hear how an IMTY award and a museum theatre performance led to a partnership between arts organizations in Connecticut.

You'll also find that we are currently taking applications to run for the IMTAL board. Read our News section to see the available positions and learn how to apply.

Finally, I'd like to focus our next issue of *Insights* on how you are adapting museum theatre to our new world. How have your strategies and practices changed? What have you learned?

If you are interested in writing for this or any future issue of *Insights*, please send me your proposal! We'd love to hear what you are working on.

-Fiona Meagher
IMTAL Publications Officer

Submission guidelines are available online at <http://www.imtal-us.org/insights>.



Fiona Meagher
INSIGHTS Editor

THE GIFTS OF THEATRE



How the 2017 IMTY Award led to a fruitful community partnership — and eventually, a gift of cherry trees to the Gillette Castle State Park.

-By Kandie Carle-

Never underestimate the power of museum theatre to motivate and inspire! It may seem that we are often pushing a snowball uphill, backwards, and in high heels, but when you see the ultimate impact of the effort, it is not only rewarding, but humbling as well.

When IMTAL visited Gillette Castle State Park and conferred the 2017 IMTY Award to site supervisor Phil Yuris, well-deserved attention was paid to the efforts to

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Premiere of *Osaki-san*, William Gillette's *Gentleman Valet*
at Gillette Castle State Park, September 2018.

Photo by Casey Carle



promote creative options for interpretation onsite with the use of live theatre. At the awards ceremony, Connecticut State Representative Melissa Ziobron awarded Yuris and the East Haddam Stage Company (EHSCO) official citations from the State General Assembly in recognition of our value to the community.

This spotlight went a far distance in legitimizing our work when noted in EHSCO's grant application to the Connecticut Office of the Arts. The grant was for the creation of an original one-man show on Yukiitaka Osaki, who had been an integral, yet quiet, part of life when the 'Castle' was home to famous actor/playwright William Gillette, best known for portraying Sherlock Holmes on stage. Osaki's brother had been the

mayor of Tokyo and was responsible for the gift of the famous cherry trees from Japan to Washington, D.C., in 1910. The spring blossoms of those Cherry trees have been a delight for the city for over 110 years.

EHSCO received the grant and produced the show, which premiered onsite in September of 2018. Read the story below for what happened next.....and how the Japan Society of Greater Hartford would ultimately give a precious gift to the park...

As told to Kandie Carle by Masamichi Hongoh, Secretary, JSGH:

The Japan Society of Greater Hartford (JSGH) had always wanted to plant cherry trees somewhere in

Connecticut. In Japan, people visit the trees to see their beautiful blossoms during the spring season, at parks, old castles, schools, or along the riverbanks. For them, it is a time to share the joy of living. In Connecticut, however, we only occasionally see these gorgeous blossoms on private properties. There is nowhere for the public to enjoy them.

In early 2018, Kandie Carle contacted JSGH to help with her research for the upcoming production of her one-man drama on the life of Yukiitaka Osaki, titled *Osaki-san*, William Gillette's *Gentleman Valet*. The play is based on the life of Yukiitaka Osaki, who was valet, confidante, secretary and friend to the famous Sherlock Holmes playwright and actor, William Gillette. Carle had received an artist's grant from the Connecticut Office of the Arts to produce the play, which would premiere at the park in September 2018. She told us that Yukiitaka Osaki's brother was Yukio Ozaki, the famous Japanese politician and one-time Mayor of Tokyo, who facilitated the donation of 3000 cherry trees to Washington, D.C., in 1910. Yes, THE famous Washington, D.C., Cherry Trees! (The reason for the last name spelling difference is unclear, but we know that Yukiitaka signed his name Osaki, with an s.) We had previously been unaware that there was a Connecticut connection to that great

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statesman.

The experience of JSGH seeing EHSCO's show onstage at Gillette Castle State Park prompted the desire to plant cherry trees there, at the park, in memory of William Gillette and Yukitaka Osaki. When the plan to donate the trees to Gillette Castle as well as to Osaki-san's burial place was presented to JSGH, a member suggested that we try to get cherry trees from Japan. But we had no experience on the importation of trees from Japan.

Through a chain of contacts, we learned that the 3rd generation of the Washington,

D.C., cherry trees are actually grown in Sagamihara, the Osaki brothers' hometown! We had hoped that 100 young Yoshino trees from the nursery would arrive in the U.S. by early 2019. However, we learned that exporting trees from Japan to the U.S. is difficult. Moreover, JSGH is a not-for-profit, small organization of about 150 members and the funding was a real concern.

Checking on the regulations, we found that in certain cases trees can be imported from Japan with permission from the USDA, and would include a period of quarantine.

Fortunately, the young trees offered from Sagamihara Japan were rather small and the cost was attractive, but we still had to follow strict instructions by the USDA to export them to the U.S., and the cost of transportation was the biggest unknown.

In early 2019, we received a nice surprise from Dr. Foster at USDA. He was impressed by the importance of the 3rd generation of Washington, D.C., cherry trees and kindly offered to pay for the transportation. Quarantine would take place outside of Baltimore Maryland at a USDA facility. We were very



A cherry tree in bloom at Gillette Castle State Park in 2021.

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encouraged by this news. JSGH was now closer to our goal. Subsequently, JSGH received funds from individual donors to aid in getting the trees to the States.

Twenty-two young Yoshino cherry trees from Sagamihara, Japan, survived the journey and arrived at Dr. Foster's facility in March of 2019 for quarantine. Dr. Foster discovered a few viruses in the trees, which he told us would be removed, but would take time. He also suggested a graft to propagate the trees to healthy rootstocks for 2021.

In October of 2020 JSGH decided to go ahead with phase one of the project by purchasing additional cherry trees from a local Connecticut nursery and planting them at Gillette Castle State Park in a few spots: around the pond, near the Castle itself,

and at Osaki's house on the Connecticut River (Yukitaka Osaki was an avid gardener). We hope the cherry trees and their beautiful blossoms will be out for everyone to enjoy in the spring of 2021! Phase two of the project will be carried out when the trees from Japan are out of quarantine. Some of those trees will also be planted at Yukitaka's gravesite, Cove Cemetery in Hadlyme, Connecticut.

Postscript from Kandie Carle of the East Haddam Stage Company:

The trees flowered in Spring of 2021, to the delight of everyone. A celebratory picnic took place, and the Japan Society of Greater Hartford along with the East Haddam Stage Company thank the park

crew for their care of the trees. They look very healthy and happy to be at Gillette Castle State Park.

The gift of these cherry trees and ultimately the addition of those imported from the hometown of the Ozaki brothers is a testament to the power of the arts to bolster and ignite the coming together of cultural partnerships like that of the JSGH, EHSCO and a state park. Osaki-san, William Gillette's Gentleman Valet based on the life of Yukitaka Osaki (1865-1942) with actor Taku Hirai as Osaki has played multiple venues throughout the Northeast, was selected for New York City's Pan-Asian Repertory Theatre's 2020 NuWorks festival, and will continue touring once pandemic restrictions have been lifted.

MEET THE AUTHOR:

Kandie Carle is the Producing Artistic Director of the East Haddam Stage Company, East Haddam, Connecticut. She is in residence at Gillette Castle State Park, also in East Haddam.



MEMBER PERK!

Our organizational **Zoom Pro** account is now available for use by all active IMTAL members at no cost!

Learn more and reserve your time:
<http://imtal-us.org/zoom>.

Want to get involved with IMTAL but aren't sure how?

Connect with us!

- Submit articles, news, photos and ideas for Insights
- Share IMTAL with friends and colleagues
- Send a photo to post on the IMTAL website
- Write up a blog post for the IMTAL Facebook page

JOIN THE BOARD

Interested in getting more involved in IMTAL's strategic planning and community building? Multiple board positions are opening this fall. Contact secretary@imtal-us.org if you are interested in running or nominating someone to join the Board of Directors.

KEEP UP

...with IMTAL online and on social media!

Connect with IMTAL Americas on:

- Website** www.imtal-us.org
- Facebook** www.facebook.com/IMTALAmericas
- Twitter** [@IMTALAmericas](https://twitter.com/IMTALAmericas)
- Instagram** [@IMTALAmericas](https://www.instagram.com/IMTALAmericas)

for posts and pictures about IMTAL news and events!

Tag us when sharing your own museum theatre-related posts and tweets so we can help spread the word.

...and don't forget to check out our [online archive](#) for past issues of *Insights!*

The International Museum Theatre Alliance (IMTAL) is a nonprofit, professional membership organization and an affiliate of the American Alliance of Museums. IMTAL's mission 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.

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