

**IRISH THEATRE INSTITUTE**  
**ANNUAL NETWORKING CONFERENCE**  
**A View from North America**

Panel Discussion  
PROJECT ARTS CENTRE, 5<sup>th</sup> October 2006

**Mark Russell** – Artistic Director, Under The Radar Festival, New York

**James Morrison** – Director, World Stage Series, Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, Minnesota

**Michael Rose** – Managing Director, Annenberg Centre, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

**Céline Gagnon** – Govt. of Quebec in London

**Tina Rasmussen** – Director of Performing Arts, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto

**Mark Russell:** My name is Mark Russell. I work at the Public Theatre at the Under The Radar Festival. We're going to talk about North American Theatre and cultural exchange. I wish we had room for South American theatre because there's a lot going on down there, but we don't.

My esteemed panel will introduce themselves and talk for about five minutes each, and their particular view of North American theatre. Then we'll go on into questions, hopefully. We're going to start with James Morrison. I'll get around to Under The Radar later.

**James Morrison:** I'm the Director of the World Stage Series programme at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Our presenting programme at the Guthrie has existed since the early 1970s. Also work that we've done over the years has been in collaboration with the Walker Arts Centre, and I'm guessing that there are at least a few of you in this room that have brought work to the Walker Arts Centre. In the last seven or eight years I've taken over the programme at the Guthrie specifically to the focus of international work.

The Guthrie Theater is first and foremost a classical theatre. Founded in 1963 by Tyrone Guthrie, who was an Irishman, and is now headed by another Irishman, Joe Dowling, who has been our Artistic Director for the last seven years. Under Joe's leadership, he's really wanted us to expand our role nationally and internationally, with all our programmes; playwriting through to education and our whole stage programme. Like I said the Guthrie was founded in 1963; it was really one of the first theatres in the United States to take on the producing of professional work outside of the arena of New York. In the last forty three years the theatre has grown enormously. It was designed initially as a summer festival theatre, producing four shows over the course of three months. We now produce year-round. We have over 900 annual employees. We have education programmes; there's over 100,000 students each year. New playwriting commissions. Our new Learning Centre which is actually in the process of becoming a for-profit arm of the Guthrie Theater. A rentals programme. And I guess most interesting in the last number of years under Joe Dowling's leadership we've built a new theatre facility which we opened in June of this year. It's a three theatre complex of 1100 seats, and a reproduction of the original Tyrone Guthrie design, which is a proscenium theatre that he and Tanya Moiseiwitsch brought to the States, designed for large-scale, epic work, the classics. Now with the addition of a 700 seat proscenium theatre and a 200 seat studio theatre, along with 11 bars, two restaurants, all our education facilities. The Guthrie Theater in the last number of years had been operating in five separate locations. We've brought that all under one roof.

With the international presenting programme we actually had the great distinction this past June of bringing the Druid Theatre Company to the Guthrie, and opened our new facility with the DruidSynge project, which for me was extraordinarily gratifying. Going back to our roots of Irish theatre and being able to bring projects like DruidSynge to an audience that's very hungry for international work. I've produced or presented for the theatre in the last several years I think about 19 shows. Most of them are from better-known theatre companies such as the Globe, the Royal Court, the National Theatre and so forth.

**Michael Rose:** I'm the Managing Director of the Annenberg Center of the Performing Arts at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. We're a theatre space, with theatres ranging from 120 seats to about 950, and we use other spaces on campus as well. We present a really broad range of international theatre, music, dance and children's programming. For 23 years we've been the host for Philadelphia International Children's Festival, which is a week-long festival. Our dance series is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year; the Center, it's 35<sup>th</sup>.

We have three curators. I handle the theatre and music; we have a partner in dance in Philadelphia, Randy Swartz, who curates contemporary dance. I handle the dance which is culturally specific; part of our world music and dance series. Roy Wilberg manages our Children's Festival. Before him was a man named Brian Joyce who some of you may know.

I'd like to talk a little bit about where we fit within the role of presenting in the United States, within colleges and universities. The Annenberg Center is one of the few major urban university presenters that present substantial theatre. We are a member of an informal group called MUPS, Major University Presenters, which includes about 21 institutions ranging from Dartmouth to Berkeley to Texas to Michigan and so on. Among this group there are probably ten of us that will present week-long productions of theatre. Most of the presenters in the United States who are colleges and universities typically can only afford to present a single performance or two performances. One of the keys to performances on our campuses is that we're really looking for opportunities to contextualise the work, to connect to the curriculum and to have extended residencies. The Guthrie Theater, for example, toured *Othello* through the National Endowment of the Arts – Shakespeare in American Communities. During that time, including performances, we had 54 activities, involving all kinds of classes, lectures, pre-performance talks and talkbacks. These are extraordinarily important for our campuses, and for those of you who are interested in working with campuses, that helps leverage money from many different departments on campus. As an institution in a big city, the Annenberg Center needs to recognise that we have a lot of other theatres in Philadelphia, so that work that we present needs to be work that has not been presented recently by those theatre companies. We are part of one community, and it's extraordinarily important to recognise.

We will present shows which are traditional theatre to experimental theatre, and ideas and issues are extraordinarily important to us at the university. There are no issues of freedom of speech or topic at Penn. Penn is very open and will invite anybody in, and really cares deeply that freedom of expression is maintained. That's not necessarily the case in several communities in the United States, where you'll find that certain topics are much more difficult. There's a group in America called Four Bitchin' Babes and I know of a local college in Pennsylvania that had to present just the Four Babes, which is probably more offensive.

Residencies are extremely important. Subsidies are extremely important as well towards making the performances possible. Universities and colleges are non-profit so we are working on a very, very tight budget in that regard. We have a number of presenters' networks that can help to make touring possible. Our work through the Major University Presenters is one; we're also a member of a State-wide presenting network called Pennsylvania Presenters. There are many of the kinds of networks in the United States, by

state and by region, so as you're talking to different people – presenters in the States, in colleges and universities - I think the key is to have adequately timed a year and a half to two years in order to get everybody on the same page and build a constituency for a tour.

**Céline Gagnon:** I'm the Cultural Attachée from the Québec Government Office. Being a foreign government, we are not presenting or producing new work, but we are working with promoters, presenters and producers to get Québec work over in the UK, Ireland and the five Nordic countries. So we have quite a broad portfolio of countries. Michael was telling me he's working with our New York office; we have other offices in Europe, in North America and in Asia.

Because we are mainly concerned with wealth creation for Québec artists and companies we find that the best way of doing that is by acting as a link between them and mainly presenters and promoters based in the countries we cover. In London we find also that the best way to do that is to increase distribution of Québec work and art forms in all the countries we cover. We work in all sectors, theatre being one of the most important ones as the performing arts are very important in Québec.

The way we do our work is two-fold. We try to encourage presenters to take Québec work and we also make sure that we can foster relationships between the Québec companies and all the territories that we work with here. We do that by supporting three types of activities. We help support trips for presenters and promoters to see work, in Québec or in Europe, either to see a one-off, or a run of presentations or within the context of a festival or showcase. We also contribute towards marketing plans or the promotion of a show when it has been programmed, and we do that with the companies presenting it, so that there is a maximum of people who will eventually see it. We also make sure that we foster a good relation with the local presenters by attending a series of local networking events and being present at representations. We know from experience that the best way of getting the work distributed is by getting the right people to see it, and by fostering good relationships between everyone involved. We know that our work will only be seen if we are interested in other people's work; it's a two-way street.

I can maybe give you a short example of the sort of work we do, talking about our collaboration with the Dublin Theatre Festival. I'm here because there's this conference, but also because there are two Québec shows being programmed in the Theatre Festival, so we've been working with the Festival with Marcus Barker, who can tell you if we're a good team to collaborate with or not. We've been working with them to get them to promote the shows, and to have it seen by as many people as possible.

In 2004 we worked with the then Theatre Shop, which is now the Irish Theatre Institute to get a group of Irish promoters to go to CINARS, that Jane mentioned earlier today. CINARS is a biennial showcase for international arts which is set in Montréal; the next one is this coming November. The advantage of having it set in Montréal is that thought it's for international work, it's set in Québec and there's a lot of Québec work that's shown there. It's also helping presenters see the work in its geographical context. The other thing is that it's just before APAP, and it's much smaller, so it's easier in terms of networking, for everyone to get to know more presenters and artists and companies. We helped to get Marcus over where he could see shows and got interested in work which is now programmed this year in the Festival. Once we'd done that work, we worked in the marketing team in the Festival by getting them some money towards promotional costs, but also by discussing various ideas about how the work can be promoted. We also had a small event at *The Tempest* today, just to mark the occasion and get people who might be interested in collaborating with the company to have a chance to meet them.

**Tina Rasmussen:** I'm the Director of Performing Arts at the Harbourfront Centre in Toronto, Canada.

Harbourfront Centre is on a ten-acre site in the corridor of downtown Toronto to the lake, Lake Ontario. We do over 4000 events a year. We have multiple venues of 4500 seat outdoor amphitheatre, a 196-seat studio, two cabaret spaces seating around 300, multiple outdoor spaces, a 420 and a 425 seat theatre.

I have three jobs. I'm the Director of Performing Arts, I oversee programming in my department and the artistic directors of those programmes, such as the Milk International Children's Festival of the Arts, and also our dance programming, creative partnerships, our residencies and Hatch for emerging performance projects. I'm also the Artistic Director of New World Stage, which is our international performance series, and I'm also the director with twelve other colleagues that talk about toilets flushing and parking and so on.

I'd like to talk for this context about New World Stage, which used to be World Stage at the DeMaurier Festival, which was biennial and we've now changed the model to be January to June annually. We present international work of all scales. I'm currently just wrapping up the programme for January – so I can easily answer the programming cycle question – so it's very late. 43 people on the road and two one-person shows. Very large scale.

In terms of how to build a dialogue with me, if you're interested in presenting work in Harbourfront Centre, it's about personal relationships and contact and discussion. I'm interested in trends and innovation, work that moves me and that's also reflective of contemporary practice. Toronto, according to the United Nations, is the most multicultural city in the world. I am in a very active dialogue with that community and how we can maintain audience development and retention, and how the contemporary arts centre reflects the city and what the city needs, and how the contemporary arts centre can act as a membrane to support that community.

Toronto is a very difficult marketplace. For example *Lord of the Rings*. I don't think I need to say any more – after millions of dollars it was open for such a short period of time, and it was a very disappointing showing in Toronto. *Blue Man Group* was just in the New Yorker Theatre, where they were planning running for a decade, and they closed after seven months. It's a very difficult market, but like I said we're dealing with being reflective of contemporary practice and also working with a lot of new Canadians, and how do we not have folkloric representation in the theatres but develop a vocabulary together.

**Mark Russell:** I'll tell you a little bit about Under The Radar, which is centred at the Public Theater in New York. We've had two instances, and we'll have at least two more. It's connected with the Arts Presenters' Conference, with 4000 people coming to it in January, an almost underground larger-than-Edinburgh Fringe Festival for people seeing work, dance, music, all sorts of things. Under The Radar is a subset of that, and it's based on a symposium that'll happen the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of January where we sort of force-march about 225 invited people through as many shows as we can at the Public Theatre, and they see the full shows. The first year we did national shows from around the US, the second year we did international shows, and this year it's going to be more of a mix. Actually, kind of focussing on North America and South America, with a couple of Canadian groups and a group from Bolivia, but also Lone Twin from the UK, and a lot of folks from around the country; New Yorkers, but also from the north-west and Texas.

The companies are smaller scale. Under The Radar is based on a thesis I have that there is a theatre underneath the American theatre, created around the country by small groups, small ensembles that are making theatre and touring it through a presenting network, and not getting really that recognised by our regional theatre system, our larger theatre system. So it sort of happens under the radar, if you will. I think one of the greatest contributors to American theatre and to world theatre right now is Liz LeCompte and the Wooster Group, and the Wooster Group are not really ever done in the regional theatres. So I'm trying to

break that apart, and it's a piece of work. Also just trying to acknowledge this world, and bringing it more to light. So please hold onto the 16<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> of January and come to New York.

I think that right now, in my country, doing international exchange is one of the most politically important things that we can be doing, for various obvious reasons. It's a particular struggle, because of our homeland security and our union issues there's a lot of isolationist tactics going on in the US, and so it's very difficult. When you're bringing in a company from overseas you're going to be faced with \$2000 or \$3000 dollars in visa fees alone, just to get someone into the country. That's going to have to pass through a union that will have to ok it whether they know the work or not, to some extent. It really ups this ability to have exchange. But I feel that the US is hungry, thirsty for exchange. There is quite a heat for it, and a need for it. But you have to understand that the US is a third world country culturally. We feel that our pop culture has done all the work for us, and we operate as though we have no resources, which we don't. There's no cultural tsar. I think it used to have a set for international exchange, but they really don't deal much with that. It's quite a problem. The States are really strapped as far as cash for bringing people in. But like I said, there's a lot of us that are really involved in trying to crack that, but it's a lot of work.

Mostly here you have presenters, and I imagine that's because this is about exchange, about trying to get Irish work over to the US or to North America, and that's what we're to talk about a bit. Maybe I should just open up to questions?

**Tina Rasmussen:** Presumably people are here because they want to come to Canada for example? So I guess I could just talk a little bit about the process. First of all I like to see the work. I like to have a relationship with the people, the artists; it's very important. Programming is a very intuitive process. I also come to a place like Dublin and don't just stay and look at what's happening at the international festival. I go to places, I talk to people, I go to bars, I go to interesting shops. I find out what the cultural fabric is, the textures of the people and the place. Is there a context to bring that to Canada? Of course there's many Irish people that have moved to Canada, we have a huge history; that's great but there's also people like Declan Gorman, for example, who works in a community and dealing with issues of the community. It doesn't have to be an Irish community, it's dealing with the context, and can that context translate. Gavin from Pan Pan is going to Canada, and he's been relentless, and I arranged to go see a run-through last night because I'm here and though it's not part of this itinerary but I felt like I know him because I've talked with him on email so many different times.

There is an opportunity there. I think it's really important. It's like a love affair, and you can't have multiple lovers – or I can't anyway – so it's a slow burn. You're going to see something and maybe four years from now it's going to be the right time. It also could be a trajectory of work that's in the future, like collaborations. We also have a the Harbourfront Centre a literary programme, a community and educational programme, a visual arts programme, and anything that's performative I'm trying to make sure there's opportunities for performative aspects. So in the International Festival of Authors which is happening this month is there an opportunity for performative work to happen in the pre-show, middle of the show? You're onstage, is it possible to make the reading a little more about the performing arts and grow our audiences?

**Mark Russell: [to Céline Gagnon]** Is there a particular way your agency works? I know you've touched on that, but more specifically.

**Céline Gagnon:** We say yes to everything and everyone. That's the basis on which we work. That doesn't mean we have tons of money to invest. There are just four of us in the office, and we work with seven countries, so there's a limit to what we can do physically, but we're happy to work with anyone. There will be many different ways in which we get in touch with people. I attend events like that where eventually someone will be interested in presenting

work in Québec will come to me and ask me questions about how to go about it, so I'll provide information. Other people will see one particular work because they're interested in programming, and will want to see it beforehand, so they'll ask if we can do something, and we'll probably pay a plane ticket for them to go over because they don't necessarily have the means to see everything there is to see. We try to keep people informed of what's happening. If we know there's a children's festival who is particularly interested in dance for children, and we know there's a new production out we'll get the information out to the people who are interested in it. Again, it's about relationships, it's about knowing other people with whom there is a potential to build a collaboration, and to foster this collaboration. We're a bit like a go-between. We try to get the right people together, and we try to have them keep that relationship going.

**Mark Russell:** One thing I didn't mention in my Under The Radar pitch that basically that world is supported by presenters, and Michael Rose is one of the major presenters. Can you talk more about how you're working with theatre?

**Michael Rose:** Sure. At the Annenberg Center we have a long, long history of theatre. Joe Papp and Hal Prince used to open shows at the Annenberg Center. Hal Prince is a member of our board. Penn Players is an organisation that he was a member of when he was a student at Penn. And so we have a long history of presenting theatre; both bringing in theatre and also helping to produce it. There was a period of time where we worked with the Philadelphia Theatre Guild and also the Philadelphia Festival of New Plays because unfortunately both of those had financial difficulties in the mid 90s. By the time I got to Penn, Penn was very hypersensitive about theatre being a very risky business. When I was hired I was told I could do anything I wanted so long as I didn't present theatre. That wasn't my intent, so I began re-introducing theatre incrementally. We've presented experimental work which is now no longer experimental; we brought over *The Vagina Monologues* in for two weeks after the first season it opened in New York. That was the fall of 2000 during the presidential election. We presented 16 performances and we received 3 complaints, which is amazing. One of them was from somebody in a nursing school who thought that the play would be exploitative, based on the title. But it was extraordinarily successful. We sold out 11 out of the 16 performances the first year and 13 out of 16 the second. From that time on we've been trying once again to present a variety of work. This season we have *The Gate* in with *Waiting for Godot* which opens next week; we have a South African company, The Foundry Theatre and we have the LA Theatreworks presenting a production called *The Great Tennessee Monkey Trial*. We've presented a lot of work from the Globe and the Abbey. We're really trying to present work which connects to Philadelphia, but also connects, as I've mentioned, across the curriculum within the university. Of the work we present theatre is by far the most important in terms of connecting across the sciences, the social sciences, the humanities and the arts. I think maybe that's true again on many canvasses, and I think that's the emphasis that needs to be made in terms of pitching work.

**Mark Russell:** How do you look at that? What is your own process of choosing?

**Michael Rose:** My own process has a lot to do with what I've seen or what I know, and that's narrow in its own way; or what colleagues tell me whom I respect. So if I hear that UCLA is doing something, David Sefton is doing something or Robert Cole at Berkeley, or other colleagues, that makes a big difference. If I've heard that they've presented certain work and had great success with it, that's important as well. It's very much based upon informal networks.

**James Morrison:** If I could just elaborate too on the idea of bringing work in, and what the means, and what that process is. What I've discovered is that a lot of the work that I bring in to the Guthrie is on a rather larger scale. Much of the work I'm looking at has a classical bent to it, whether it's told in a contemporary way or whether it's based in myth or is Shakespeare, that sort of thing. One of the things that I think is hugely important to think

about as you're trying to get your work out there is this kind of lead time that it takes to pull a tour together. It's incredibly important to us to be able to partner with other presenters around the country to get the work in. Some of the major expenses that we're looking at are of course international flights, the freight, and just physically getting the company into the States; working with Equity to pull together a package that makes sense where you're touring to three or four cities within North America. As you're thinking about getting your work into the United States I think it's very important to not focus on just one venue. Ideally we all want to get two or three venues together to make a practical tour. As you're thinking about your work I think it's important to talk with as many presenters as possible, and to try and get those presenters on the same page, which as we all know is very challenging. I find oftentimes with my colleagues one will say, I'm doing this, and the second one will say, I saw that and it sucked, so you go round and round with it. But when you can pull together that consensus, I think it makes for a much easier process for the company coming in as well as for those of us presenting the work.

**Declan Gorman (Artistic Director, Upstate Theatre, Drogheda):** I just have a specific question, and it's in relation to the APAP conference in New York which takes place in January, and I was just wondering if one of you could comment on that, and just give us a sense of its value or otherwise. Particularly to organisations that fit the description that you've used to describe under the radar organisations, under the radar companies that are producing work in the United States. I suppose many of us here would fit that model of small scale producing companies. I was just wondering if APAP is a useful place to go, and also does it dovetail time-wise with the Under The Radar Festival?

**Mark Russell:** Yes. Basically I'm paid to do a one-day seminar. Under The Radar is a one-day seminar or symposium that masquerades as a festival. I could actually take the whole batch of money they've given me and blow it all on one day and send everyone home, but since we're brining in these companies, and I'm a maximalist, we just continue to make it into a festival, with smoke and mirrors.

I have conflicting feelings about arts presenters and that intense circus that it is as a conference. That's a lot of people, and a lot of different agendas going on. One can get lost, and can spend a lot of money coming to it, with high hopes, and lose a lot of money. On the other side, everyone is there, or a representative is there that you're going to need to network the country. You may have to invest several visits in order to figure out who the bodies are, how to get to them and that type of thing. Careful about bringing over your work and showcasing it there, I believe. Especially with theatre. I don't know if theatre works in 20-minute excerpts like dance does. That's why when I produce at Under The Radar it's full productions. I can only do very few of them, but I try to do it not compromising the work that much. Within reason.

**Michael Rose:** I think APAP is probably not the best place to attend unless, like Mark says, you have a piece being performed somewhere in New York at a smaller or larger theatre. But the key is to see the full work. I hate showcases. I don't go to showcases in hotels. I'm an anomaly I think, but I think there are a lot of people who feel as I do. I will tend to go to a lot of concerts in New York where I can go to full performances during that time.

I think the regional conferences may be better. There's a series of three regional conferences: the Wild Western Arts Alliance, which is usually at the end of August, beginning of September, Arts Midwest, which is in mid-September, and then the Performing Arts Exchange, which is basically the eastern coast one. What that does is it breaks up the groups into thirds. There's more opportunity to speak with people, and it's probably efficient just to go to one and if you have enough time to have work develop and percolate through the presenting field. Develop the contacts and hope that you'll find representatives and you'll find responsiveness that can allow presenters to be speaking amongst themselves and to their colleagues across the country.

**Mark Russell:** Also I think it's important that you have representation, usually. I mean if you have a professional that's representing you that understands the field in some way. If you come and try to do it yourself it's all on a high learning curve.

**Tina Rasmussen:** I think it's an important segue to talk about CINARS in Montréal. There's Canada, and then there's Québec, which is like its own little country. We're also hindered by our geography, so touring isn't like going down the road. It's 3000 miles to the next venue. So that's really difficult about international touring. With CINARS I find it's pretty much the same – it's great in terms of the work, but it's very Québec-centric. A lot of artists in Vancouver, for example, don't even know that CINARS exists. So you're not going to get the cross section of artists from across the country. But the work is interesting, and again it's the networking opportunities. This is where I say look to your colleagues who do go, and what is their responsibility is in mentoring you, and have them, like you say, be your agent, be your representative, to at least have you figure out the lay of the land. Who to talk to, and talk to in elevators. Don't go to hotel rooms. You literally see work in hotel rooms in APAP. It's not a great way to see work.

**Siobhán Bourke (Producer, Irish Theatre Institute):** Céline, you said the function of your office – and forgive me if I misunderstood you – was wealth creation for artists. Could you maybe speak a little bit about that?

**Céline Gagnon:** That's government talk. What it means is that, Québec is a very small place, and there are a lot of artistic companies, and if the artists who create them want to make a good enough living to have a place to live, food on the table, they also have to tour. They can't just work within Québec; they have to go outside in the rest of Canada or abroad. That's why we talk about wealth creation. We're trying to get those companies to tour enough so that they have a means to create their work and to live off their work.

**Fiona Clarke (Executive Producer of the Bush Theatre in London):** I'm particularly interested in what you said about trying to work with a number of presenters and form a tour in that way, and build that. Mark, as you know, we've collaborated in the past very successfully in PS122. But the big, big stumbling block that we always come back to is American Equity. It's been touched on before but I really wanted to get a clearer view from you on how that can change, and how we might make that situation work better. In a company like the Bush, when you're commissioning work you're working with that writer for perhaps many years, you're producing that work for a particular company and you do it in a certain style. That is, for want of a better word, unique. That's what you want to share when you're touring internationally. We never have a problem anywhere else in the world, but it's always a problem. It comes to the point where, unless you are part of a festival in one city, how do we go about developing the kind of touring network that you're describing, that is exactly the sort of attractive proposition that we want to develop and collaborate with?

**Mark Russell:** We should have a meeting in the bar where we can all bash Equity. It's a fabulous thing, and a great sport. Tapping into this presenting network. I would almost say studying the US and figuring out the five people that you need to talk to, your tastemakers. They will help you make the connections to make this work go around. That's a more scientific way of going at it. Going under the radar to find a way of getting your company taken on with the presenting networks. The theatre in the US does not tour necessarily. We have major theatres that do not create their work to tour. So the US way of making theatre is to tour playwrights. We will take that show that we have seen over there, and like that production, and we will remount it with American actors and American directors in our own way. I have my own problems with that, but it's really the way that American theatre generates. It's because actually it's so far between cities and it costs so much. The tradition of creating a piece with the idea that it might tour to other cities – other than making a major move to Broadway – is new to some extent. New to the culture of the American scene.



**Fiona Clarke:** It seems that way with British new writing. The companies that are producing that, they're in a way not being respected for the particular way in which they produce that. Commission and produce and work with their own style. The RSC gets away with it, and other international companies, for the fact that that is the style of theatre that they are. That is the nature of that company. We all want the playwrights work to reach the widest audience, and be translated into lots of languages, and to have American productions; but there must surely also be a market for, if you like the work you see when you come to London, Edinburgh or Dublin, that's the work that you want to present to an audience. How do you get that to be valued in the same way? What is the case that one makes to Equity to say that that's why that work should be seen?

**Mark Russell:** I think when you have one or two major presenters, perhaps, they're helping you make that case. They're saying, we want to bring this, and they will even call their senators to make this kind of case, or find ways around the homeland security or Equity problems.

**James Morrison:** It really is a persistence. Every time I bring a show into the States I get that call from Actors Equity saying no, absolutely not. You're not going to do this. Currently the jurisdiction is for English and French speaking language. So there is some appeal there for bringing projects in. Last year I brought in a project from Italy; I just brought it in.

Actors Equity are going to say no. I think that's the place from which we work; we know that Actors Equity are going to say no to any project that we're bringing in. It is about that persistence, and making the phone calls and stating the case for the project. I don't see it at a hindrance to bringing work in; it's an annoyance more than anything else.

**Michael Rose:** That's not true necessarily for children's theatre. Part of the process is that the INS will ask Equity before they grant the visa, and one of the challenges with the visa now is that they cannot be applied for more than six months in advance. So everything gets very tight and iffy.

**James Morrison:** And then everything is premium processed as well. I've done projects where I've not received blessing of Equity for the INS and just moved along with the process. For us it's a part of our mission. We're currently in negotiations with Actors Equity to distinguish what our programme is, vis-à-vis a traditional festival where Brooklyn Academy of Music or Lincoln Centre Festival can kind of be put under that umbrella, because our work extends throughout the year. I think there's a little bit of hope in Equity right now for opinions changing.

**Enid Reid Whyte (Theatre Specialist at the Arts Council):** Just at risk of doing a little commercial for the Irish Theatre Institute here. Two years ago, I think, Brian Goldstein who is an arts lawyer from the United States was here at the conference and gave a very good talk and explanation about Equity and visas and how to get through and around some of these issues. I don't know if that paper is still on their website, but it was for some time. If you go on to the Irish Theatre Institute's website and look for Brian Goldstein's paper you will see an awful lot of information about the visa problems, and the Equity problems of getting into the United States.

I think that this tension about Equity bashing is important in remembering that we have problems with American Equity, but the fact that American Equity has been allowed to remain strong has meant that it hasn't faced some of the socio-economic issues that we have in Ireland around performers and their ability to operate and make a living. Equity in the United States has protected that very, very well. So there are things to celebrate about American Equity, and we must be very careful to remember that they have protected their constituency very well. We could learn a few things.

**Richard Wakely (Independent Theatre and Dance Producer):** Just in response to Fiona's comments I've had the great privilege of working on an American tour of a new Irish work. Working with The Corn Exchange and a new play by Michael West called *Foley*. The way that we got through the problems was a lot of advance planning. Working with people who were leaders in the field, such as Mike [Rose]. We worked across festivals, and in an off-Broadway theatre as well. We took a tack with Equity to go to them early and to not present them a *faits accomplis*. To involve them actively from the very outset in advising us, and helping us to shape the approach to get into America. The down side of this is that that was a two-year process, and Mike's quite right to point out the difficulties now that theatre companies are going in with a six-month lead in. We employed an attorney over in the States which cost us a lot of money, over \$5000. It really did pay off, but only at the very last minute. That's when the visas came through. So there's a huge risk element in this. But the encouraging note is, it was a new play. That was fabulous. We have very good people working with us in the States, good presenters of high credibility, and that certainly helped with the practical problems.

I do have a question, and that has to do with collaborations and co-commissions and co-productions; the more collaborative aspects of our work. We've been talking about presenting work, but I'd like to know from the panel whether they're actually interested in a more collaborative relationship with theatre colleagues or dance colleagues internationally, as distinct from just presenting.

**Tina Rasmussen:** Just in terms of the networks I worry about the tastemaker comment, the five tastemakers. Also there are a lot of other presenters, for example Manitoba Theatre Centre, who might not be one of the regular players on the circuit that could also present work. Also certain cities, certain locations have different needs, and you might be presenting work in dance or theatre that might not be right for you, but there might be other places. For me networks, and work that's travelling across the country, I don't say ok I'll take that because it's going to be cheaper. I need to consider my constituency, I need to consider the artists, and also the artists in the community. Is this going to be an opportunity to have that collaboration?

I want to have the opportunity to fail too. Collaborations and co-productions do that; I'd rather inject work into the circuit instead of just buying it. I'd like to create a dynamic there. It's exactly that. Building relationships. I think also that the artists are the cultural forecasters. Where do they want to be? Think about how we can do that together and work towards that. It's expensive – you're far away – but I think if there's a problem or an issue that we both want to tackle that's where the art centre is the membrane. I'll think this is right for us and work towards – not solving it necessarily – but addressing a problem together. I think that's really interesting, and it's a real exchange. It could then have a life after that, but I think we start needing to change vocabularies with funding agencies and so on. It might not be right for Saskatchewan or Vancouver. I'm working on a project about urban theatre projects about Australia, which is a very long residency, and it's specific to Toronto and the problems of urban development and immigration. That's not going to be right for others, and I think it's really important we start changing the vocabularies as much as we can in our grant writing.

**Mark Russell:** Trying to get this conversation started happens through the presenting, but I think a lot of people are hoping for deeper conversations and collaborations. World Stage is sort of a new branch of the Guthrie and I know that you're thinking about this more, artistic collaborations.

**James Morrison:** With the World Stage Programme ideally, yes I would love to commission new work, and I have in fact commissioned new work: I did a piece a couple of years ago, that was a new commission. We developed it at the Guthrie Theater. The thing is that it is riskier and we all know that. As I said earlier the Guthrie is first and foremost a producing

theatre, so I kind of leave that, the work that we produce to development within the theatre. As a presenter of the World Stage Series I am really looking – I hate to be crass – but I am looking for product. I'm looking for work that is going to be exciting to my audience, that is work that they're not necessarily going to see on our stages or around Minneapolis or in our region; where they would have to either travel to New York or abroad. I'm very specifically looking at work that is unique and is a finished product.

**Mark Russell:** I'm very new at the Public Theater, and as Oskar [Eustis] says we're still trying to work out our relationship, but as we keep talking, that is one of our goals. To move these things into creation of work.

**Michael Rose:** There are some presenters at major universities that are majorly involved in commissioning. Particularly Ohio State, Berkeley, UCLA, Maryland. We have such a very tight bottom line – it's a bad excuse – that we typically are only involved in commissioning when we have grant funding in advance for that, and that means being able to define what we want to do, and that's a difficult process. And then we have to chase the grants first.

**James Morrison:** I might also add to that the Walker Arts Centre which also finds its home in Minneapolis is doing an enormous amount of commissioning and development of work, and I think it's one of the best presenting programmes in the country. I think it's a place that if you're looking specifically at commissions you should look at the Walker Arts Centre.

**Mark Russell:** But know that everybody else is as well. One last question.

**Catherine Boothman (European Cultural Contact Point at the Arts Council):** Just an announcement really. There'll be a good networking opportunity in Montréal at the end of May next year because the Canadian members of the IETM Performing Arts Network are co-hosting a big network meeting then. It would be a good chance to see a lot of work based in Montréal and so on. There's quite a good culture in the IETM network of building long-term collaborative relationships for co-commissioning and co-production right across multi-disciplinary productions and a good emphasis on dance as well as different genres of theatre. That might be an interesting place to further some of the relationships.

**Mark Russell:** Does everyone know about the Informal European Theatre Meetings? Is that pretty common here? It's going to be the first time that it's crossed the pond, so it's going to be a pretty important meeting. I'm really excited they're opening that up.

Thank you all very much.