

Teneo Insights Webinar: The Revival of Cultural Life in America

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Alexandra Lager (AL): Good day and thank you for joining today's Teneo Insights webinar. A recording and podcast of this call will be available on Teneo's website. And now I would like to hand it over to our host, Kevin Kajiwara.

Kevin Kajiwara (KK): Thank you, Alex. Good day, everyone. And thank you for joining today's edition of Teneo Insights. I'm Kevin Kajiwara, Co-President of Teneo Political Risk Advisory in New York City. Well, on March 12th of last year, cultural life came to an abrupt halt here in New York City when Governor Cuomo limited gatherings due to the pandemic. And if you recall, that was a shutdown that was originally intended to last just a month. Well, last Saturday night, 471 days later, Broadway reopened with the return of Bruce Springsteen. Performing arts organizations, both large and small, commercial and not-for-

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profit, are at various stages of reopening. But the reality of it is that the perception of the world, and I think even in the eyes of its residents, is that New York City will not have truly reopened until the Broadway Theater district is again fully lit.

Today, we're here to discuss the challenges and opportunities presented by the events of the last few years on these essential elements of cultural life, which are our performing arts institutions. And I am thrilled to have a stellar panel for this conversation. Let me introduce them here briefly.

Jordan Roth is the President and principal owner of Jujamcyn Theaters, which is one of the three main Broadway Theater operators. He is a four-time Tony award-winning producer for *Kinky Boots*, *Clybourne Park*, *Hair*, and the acclaimed revival of *Angels in America*.

Kara Barnett is the Executive Director of American Ballet Theatre, and the former Managing Director of Lincoln Center International. She also is a producer of plays, both on and off Broadway. And she received a Tony award as an associate producer of *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

My next guest, she needs no introduction for fans of *The West Wing* and *The Practice* and *Nurse Jackie*. But Anna Deavere Smith is an actress and playwright. She's best known for her documentary *Theater Style*. She has been nominated for two Tony Awards and a Pulitzer Prize. She was a recipient of the MacArthur Fellowship, the so-called genius grant. And she received the National Humanities Medal from President Obama. She also teaches at NYU, where she founded the Institute of the Arts and Civic Dialogue. And she will be inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame this fall.

So welcome all of you. Thank you for joining. And thank you very much as well to my colleague, Jimmy Asci, who assembled this stellar group.

Jordan, let me start with you. First of all, congratulations on being the first out of the gate here and getting Springsteen on Broadway open. Clearly a cathartic moment for New York. But obviously, *The Boss*, he is essentially a one man show. And I have to imagine that the challenges of casting and mounting full-fledged productions must be a considerably more complex on many fronts. So tell us about the preparations that Broadway producers and theater runners are going through right now, and what we should expect this coming season. And what should audiences expect in terms of changes in the experience, from not only getting access to shows, but the experiences themselves?

Jordan Roth (JR): First of all, thank you. Happy to be with you all in virtual space. I think that one of the things that we've all, all of us, learned from this time is expect the unexpected is no joke. But sometimes the unexpected is what we used to expect. And one of the things that was so shocking, shocking, about Saturday night's first performance of Springsteen was how much of it felt normal. That gathering in space with others who we don't know, a thing that we've done since the beginning of humanity, it can be okay, it is okay. And that was one of the revelations, one of the many revelations, of that time.

We actually did, also at the St. James Theater, where Bruce is playing, one of the first New York Pops Up, which was a program that the state did to create just moments of performance and potential for joy in March, April and May. And that was super protocolled. It was 120 people in a theater that holds 1,700 people. It was super hermetically sealed. And even then, even through the masks and the checks and

the protocols and the distancing, you could still see the kernels, the glimmers, the foundation, of we gather in space to share a story. And that's the eternal. That's what we're all trying to gather back to.

To your question of, what specifically can we expect? I don't know that I can tell you from hour to hour what that is. But I will tell you that even from when we put Bruce on sale to three weeks later when it was the first performance, the requirements were different and continuing to drop away. So I think it's very possible that we're heading for, in terms of protocols and requirements, a much, much, much less restricted experience than we may have anticipated even a few weeks ago.

KK: Yeah, that's interesting. By the way, the New York Times was, of course, quick to point out that the show that was playing in your Springsteen theater on March 12th last year was Frozen, which seemed also too apt, I suppose, for what was to come. I want to ask you though, on that last point that you just made with regards to being able to operate more freely than even you expected at the time tickets went back on sale. I noted that there was some disturbance, or some protest outside the theater early on in the evening of the first production of an anti-vaxxer movement, if you will. We have seen this at other venues that have reopened in New York, Madison Square Garden, Yankee Stadium, this kind of us, them mentality or protocol, I guess, of who's allowed into venues.

Is this going to be an issue? Or do you think, given that it's New York City and the theater going public in general, at the end of the day, it's not going to be that big of a distraction? People want to participate in civic life, and that means being able to function openly.

JR: I think that's right. Look, Bruce had the best comment about this from the stage after we all walked into this first performance through that protest. He said, and it rang true for me, "These are confusing times." And so, if we look at others who are railing against something that doesn't make sense to us, we can have compassion for the confusion that we're all experiencing. But I think ultimately, one of the things that was so clear from this last year is how interconnected our wellbeing is. And my health depends on your choices, and your health depends on my choices. And that is what it is to live in a community and in civic society, as you say. So one of the very many things we will continue to process and grapple with as we step forward.

KK: I want to move to Kara here in just a moment. But Jordan, one last question for you on this subject. Obviously, Springsteen, despite all of the variables that you were just talking about, Springsteen is very low risk in some ways, right? I mean, he's got an audience base that's built in, that will essentially crawl across broken glass to get to see him. And I presume that you and other producers and other theater operators on Broadway, when it comes to the shows that are guaranteed hits, the Hamiltons, the Lion Kings, those types of things, is one thing. But what about, as a businessman, from a business perspective, as you look toward the riskier shows, or the shows that you can't necessarily anticipate how it will resonate, has the risk of mounting shows changed at all, financially?

JR: We are in an enterprise of risk. And they're all risky. Even the ones that don't look risky are risky. And so this is not a field of, really, ameliorating risk. It is a field of embracing risk, leaning into risk, and seeing the risk as opportunity. Because really, it is the shows that change the world, that on the face of them were the craziest, the most risky.

KK: Exactly. Kara, let me turn to you. I mean, the fall is always the launch of the season for the major performing arts companies in New York and in other major cultural centers around the country. I know you're on the road right now with ABT. But how are preparations going? And what about, for the other constituent companies of Lincoln Center, such as the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic, New York City Ballet, and others? Jordan talked about the size of the houses on Broadway. The sizes of the houses at Lincoln Center are enormous by comparison. Over 3,000 seats need to be filled every night at Lincoln Center. How are preparations going on that front? And what should we expect?

Kara Barnett (KB): Well, thank you, Kevin. It's such an honor to be here, and such an honor to be with two of my heroes, Jordan and Anna. So thank you for having me. And yes, there are certainly many seats to fill, and we're all looking towards those seats and those indoor venues for the fall. But right now, we, at American Ballet Theatre and our colleagues at Lincoln Center are embracing the sunshine and the outdoors and recognizing that one way to welcome audiences back is to do so in the open air. And so right now, ABT has embarked on an ambitious tour of eight cities across the country. We actually open tonight in Lincoln, Nebraska for ABT Across America. And so, tonight we'll be performing for 5 or 6,000 people in an open field in Pioneers Park here in Lincoln. And the idea is to bring people back to the picnic blankets before we bring them into the red velvet seats.

And I think that's symbolic. It's not just about health and safety. I think it's about access and openness and just this embrace of community. And that feel of being together with your neighbors to enjoy the power and the uplift and the joy of shared arts experiences. And at Lincoln Center, there's something incredible underway, which is Restart Stages, where the

entire campus has been turned into an outdoor venue, and there are free performances happening all over that 16-acre campus every single day. And so, it's not just ABT visiting eight cities from Lincoln to New York, but it's also the Lincoln Center constituent organizations and other arts ensembles and artists that Lincoln Center is welcoming to its stages that will usher back in this idea of coming together for performance, for coming together to share stories.

And to the point about demand, you asked Jordan about whether people are ready to come back. How risky is this? I can tell you one anecdote, which is that, for ABT Across America, one of our stops is in Chicago. And we're going to be performing outdoors in Millennium Park on July 8th. The tickets were made available at 10:00 AM, and at 10:02, the system crashed. And at 10:04, when the system went back up, all 10,000 seats were filled within two minutes. I think that there is tremendous demand.

And this is ballet—this isn't Bruce Springsteen! I think there's tremendous demand for the return of the live performing arts. I think that we and other arts organizations have done a remarkable job of pivoting to digital and sharing artistry and creativity and stories on screens. But there's nothing like the magic of sitting shoulder to shoulder. There's nothing like the magic of a standing ovation, a real one shared with others. So, I'm tremendously excited. And I think that we'll all be sharing some pretty exhilarating experiences this summer out of doors. And then this fall, indoors, in our home venues.

KK: Yeah, I have to say that the ABT has played a big part in my life as a parent. I was extremely pleased to see my son come to cultural awareness as a young kid. He saw Misty Copeland on 60 Minutes, of all places, and then demanded to go and actually see her onstage at Lincoln Center. And that

was the first time he had been. So that was always a great memory of mine. But I want to ask, I mean, for you and for New York City Ballet, I mean, typically you're dealing with established and fixed companies, in a sense. And I don't know to what extent you can talk about this. But given your Lincoln Center experience across the Plaza at The Met and at the New York Philharmonic, which are highly dependent on visiting stars, soloists in particular. Those roles and those solo positions are oftentimes contracted years in advance, scheduled years in advance. How disruptive has this been? And how challenging is it to put back together their schedules, not only at Lincoln Center, but at the likes of Carnegie Hall as well?

KB: Well, I can speak to ABT's experience, which is that we have a company of 90 dancers and we've made it a priority to keep that company of artists together, to keep them connected, to keep them working together, creating together. We've certainly shortened the planning cycles. So, whereas we used to plan these epic productions three, four years in advance. During the past year, we've produced new work in a matter of weeks. And one silver lining has been the availability of collaborators. So often those star choreographers are tough to get ahold of. Jordan books them into Broadway shows and then we can't get ahold of them for years, but we've had the opportunity in the past year to work with many choreographers who've never before worked with American Ballet Theatre because they did have unexpected time on their dance cards, time on their calendars, where they could come and work with ABT dancers.

So for example, Sonya Tayeh who choreographed Moulin Rouge was someone who our artistic director, Kevin McKenzie, had wanted to work with for some time, she was unavailable and then all of a sudden she was available. And not only were these incredible

choreographers available, but they were willing to go into NBA style bubbles, which is how we at ABT managed to keep creating through the crisis safely was to bubble in residencies with strict protocols that we borrowed from the NBA, and go into these dance camps, residencies, in remote locations for four or five weeks at a time. And we were able to create 21 new works. Most of them by choreographers who had never before worked with American ballet theater. So in some ways I think that the upending of schedules allowed some new collisions and collaborations to take place.

KK: Interesting. Of course, at the end of the day, the audiences are coming to see the artists, and the pandemic we know has hit performing artists hard. So Anna, I want to bring you into the conversation. What's your sense of how the profession has been impacted and how resilient is it? I mean, certainly actors and performers are some of the most determined and passionate professionals in the world, but not the easiest to make a living at. How do you see this playing out?

Anna Deavere Smith (ADS): Oh, well, first of all, so happy to be here with you, with Jordan, with Kara, and I'm, as you know, on your old stomping ground, I'm in San Francisco, Kevin. Well, in a way that question is, the two things come together. We are individuals who, and I'm sure it's not that different for Jordan or Kara. I'm an individual artist. I don't have an organization. I don't have an institution of any kind, but we are used to rejection. We are used to catastrophe, not that many of us ever have a steady income. We're used to things collapsing right in front of us. We can kind of predict that a show may close, or maybe it's going to go for a long time, or maybe we'll move on to something else on the opposite end because we have another opportunity. So mobility is a part of the reality of what we do. And that's a good thing, because as we move around, we can affect more change. Kara, when you talk about

having a company of 90 dancers, it's just extraordinary to me. I was trained here in San Francisco many years ago at the American Conservatory Theater and they had a company of a hundred actors. But after that time, I've never had that experience again. And I even wonder with the two sort of earthquakes that we have gone through in this last year, both the pandemic and the murder of George Floyd and all of the subsequent racial reckoning and the attacks on Asian-Americans in our cities and other places, will we come out of this with even new forms, new ways of doing things, and is it a time when we can think about having companies again? When you talked, Kara, about Jordan getting your dancers, same thing happened with Ailey when Lion King came to town, I had a chance to work with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

I think Judith Jamison started to lose some dancers and possibly some other kinds of artists, but that mobility is also a very, very positive thing. And so we are in what we are calling, I guess an unprecedented moment. We have been through this before. We did have a civil rights movement. We did have a season of many race riots, and although it wasn't against a pandemic in the sixties, it was against other social uprisings, the Vietnam War, the women's movement, all these things. So we have been through the type of dissembling of norms in our history, of course. And in that time, what came out of it, I would say is new forms. And I wonder if, when we come back, even as I hope it does feel normal to be back home again, as Jordan said, be back home in our favorite places with our favorite artists, or as already started in New York, our favorite restaurants, but is this a chance when we will reorganize how we do business and come up with new ways of doing it and using even more imagination than we have previously?

KK: Anna, I want to pivot here a little bit. Two of your best known works were obviously developed around seminal

events. And for those of you who are unfamiliar with a couple of these, I'll just highlight them quickly. I mean, Twilight Los Angeles, 1992, dealt with the LA riots following the aftermath of the acquittal of the police officers who had beaten Rodney King, and Fires in the Mirror dealt with the Crown Heights riots. And indeed, even beyond you, historically important events have always inspired playwrights and artists. You highlighted both the pandemic and the social justice movement coming in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and others who were killed over the last year, and as well, obviously the political polarization that we've gone through over the last several years. I imagine, and I'm interested to know what you think about how this is going to unleash an amazing amount of creativity. I think we've already seen it start to a degree, but what are you seeing out there and how do you see it playing in terms of that nexus of art and civic engagement?

ADS: Well, I mean, no doubt, no doubt, right? Because also I think the reckoning has brought forth new kinds of initiatives and philanthropy, as some of your listeners will know, David Geffen has just given \$150 million to Yale School of Drama so that it can be tuition free. I think arts need to be tuition free at the level of New York University. Where I teach, Yale, places like that, because tuition is so expensive. And as I said before, artists, no matter how talented or determined they may be, we have to lean into risk to use Jordan's expression, and sometimes that pays off, sometimes it doesn't.

So the fact that we since the fifties have become on the one hand a part of institutions like very expensive universities, which we were not previously, then we can't really act like corporate people because we're not, then I think for David Geffen to make that gift recognizes how important it is to free artists

up from the kinds of loans that have been strapping people in the last generation. And I hope more schools will have that opportunity. And likewise, with MacKenzie Scott's 2.7 billion group of gifts that she gave, some of which are going to HBCUs. I hope that that will allow HBCUs to also invest in the arts, which is not necessarily a place if you don't have much resource, you're going to use that resource. On the other hand, if we look at a place like Howard, recently they've really delivered a couple of really extraordinary artists to the field. So that's the good news in philanthropy and places like Ford and Mellon, also having new kinds of initiatives to sort of stir up possibility in that way in terms of resources.

But the other thing is, I always say I'm a dramatist, therefore I am drawn to catastrophe. I think this last year will affect content. And I think it will affect form. I wouldn't be here if there hadn't been in the sixties, a Black Arts Movement, and also if things hadn't happened in popular culture because of the Anti-War Movement and because of the Sexual Liberation Movement, I wouldn't be here. So we're seeing not just in what we call the "arts," and I'm not an elitist when it comes to that, any kind of expression is art as far as I'm concerned. So in popular culture, as well as in what the three of us do, me and Jordan and Kara, there will be adjustments in form, there will be adjustments in content. And so, we'll have new kinds of expressions that will be very, very exciting for sure.

KK: So the New York Times ran an article earlier this week that was highlighting the fact that the upcoming season on Broadway will feature the most African American playwrights ever in a season, which sounded like great news. On the other hand, that number was seven out of, I believe, 41 houses, which brings me to my next question, which is that in the world that we at Teneo deal with and engage with every single day, which is the corporate

world, diversity, equity, and inclusion is becoming an ever more important element in companies, frankly, they're licensed to operate. The arts and entertainment have always obviously been a unique industry in many ways, but can you talk about efforts on this front? Kara, maybe I can start with you. And I'm thinking about this in terms of what and who is onstage, who is operating offstage, both in terms of arts management, as well as in the backstage operations, but also in terms of diversifying audiences and the efforts that are being made on that front.

KB: Sure. Thanks, Kevin. And I think that with American Ballet Theatre, I think that we have a unique responsibility. We're America's National Ballet Company by act of Congress. And so it's imperative that we grapple with, that we lead with diversity, equity, and inclusion, and we've committed pre-pandemic and through it to deepening our efforts in that regard. So it's certainly front and center in all of our decision making. And I like to think about it with a framework that I've borrowed from the president of Duke University, Vincent Price. He talks about first of all, starting with honesty. And for us, that's looking at an art form that's 400 years old and the history of a company that's 81 years old, and really looking at history square in the face, through all lenses. And then moving forward with humility. And that means really surrounding ourselves with a variety of perspectives, inside and out.

At ABT, we're blessed with an internal team of staff, artists, crew, musicians, dancers, who gather weekly to guide us. An internal working group that's helping us find our blind spots and also think about ways, imaginative ways, important ways we can evolve and rapidly evolve. And then also giving yourself peripheral vision. So we've launched something called ABT RISE and RISE stands for Representation and Inclusion, Sustain, Excellence, meaning that our uniqueness, our excellence, our leadership in the field is reliant on our diversity

and inclusion behind the scenes, and on the stages, in our studios, in our classrooms, and in our audiences. But we need people who have grappled and who have led in other industries to provide us with ideas, to provide us with that peripheral vision. And so our RISE advisory council now has 25 members who are from academia, who are from different industries, who are from the theater, who are from all over the country, and who really can be candid with us and who can share with us best practices that might apply in the ballet world.

And then lastly, the third H is hope, and that's about stepping forward. And Jordan talked about leaning into risk and he was talking about financial risk, but I think also artistic risk, and also in this space, it is stepping forward every single day, recommitting every single day, and knowing that at times you will forward fumble and if you surrounded yourself with the right people who will catch you when you fall and give you suggestions for how to pivot daily, that's what it's about. And so it really for us is certainly about artistic choices, about the voices who are telling the stories, the choreographers who are creating the steps, about the students in the training pipeline, it's about the teachers in front of the room, it's about leadership at the staff level and the board level, all of these different areas of improvement and growth. And that is what ultimately is going to make us worthy of that designation as America's National Ballet Company.

So that's the type of thing that we're thinking about with ABT RISE, and as we forge ahead. And I know that all of my peers across the industry, and I'm saying industry broadly, not just ballet, but in the arts and in the performing arts, we have to look back with honesty and look forward with humility and hope.

KK: Jordan, let me ask the same question of you and how efforts on diversity, equity, and inclusion are going on in the commercial theater world. And particularly with regards

to audience diversification given, obviously going to a Broadway show is not a cheap endeavor. And obviously it isn't up at Lincoln Center either, but how are efforts going on that front, and what's changing?

JR: Well, to continue from where Kara left us with hope, one of the things that gives me a great deal of hope about where we are right now is that these conversations and not just conversations, but actions and efforts and improvements and changes are happening all across at every level of our industry. I know it in certainly in all other industries, so it's not just a couple of forward-thinking institutions. It's not just, a little bit over here. It's big institutions, big companies, small companies, individuals in every aspect of what we do, which reaches pretty far. I mean, we've had conversations about, "Well, what is the dry cleaner doing that we all send our costumes to?" Extraordinary reach and yes, absolutely embedded in all of that is, well, where were we? Why did this take this? That is the thing that continues to drive the grapple, but drive it, it does.

I think, and you brought up the seven plays by seven African American playwrights that will be playing this season, and that's just what's been announced. I do want to contextualize that a bit because we are talking about—that was about plays, not musicals. Plays specifically. There have been seasons quite recently, where there haven't been seven plays in total presented on Broadway. I think it's an interesting—Anna talked about the ways in which content and form will be pushed, effected, explored.

That is an interesting one to point to both in who's making the work and what kind of work is it? What's the work that will take up these stages, which are of course physical space, but also very symbolic and influential space in terms of what gets talked about on calls like this and what gets seen subsequent to those productions in New York around the country? It does lead me if I ... I'd love to just sort of

circle back to you were talking about the financial models. I think it's really important to note that, Anna, if I may brag on you a moment, my dearest, has for several years been really creating her own form of commissioning her own work. Yes, as she said, she's not created, and she's not an institution or part of a larger institution in that way, but she is by connecting with funders and grant makers and over time. The kinds of projects that she creates over time is, I think, forging new models of how work gets created and where the power and decision-making of that work rests with the artist herself. I think that points the way for a lot of what we are talking about in terms of funding decision-making and power, which is really inspiring.

KK: Anna, can I just pick up on what Jordan was just talking about right there. He makes the point that essentially you and many other artists like you are effectively independent contractors in a way. You're not backed by institutions. You're looking for funding, you're looking for grants and the like, and ultimately, looking for commercial interests. Obviously, you yourself are a tried and true brand in the marketplace, and that means one thing. As you've mentioned, there's going to be a lot of artists who are taking interesting risks and they are increasingly going to be people of color and from other diverse backgrounds. Do you feel from your side, the evolution in terms of those who are producing and grant-making and whatnot to increasingly take on these risks?

ADS: Well, some are. I evoked the Ford Foundation and the Mellon Foundation, both of which have been at the forefront of the health of the arts in this country for a very, very long time. I was stunned when asked to create a performance for the 50th year celebration of the Mellon Foundation. It was like one, I mean, it's them and Ford who supported the arts and the humanities for many years. For your listeners who have the resources to support the arts,

let's not assume that that they're adequately supported! First of all, I want to just say a word of caution about our reckoning right now, and the types of initiatives that both Jordan and Kara have laid out for us so beautifully, which is how important it is for us to stay awake right now.

For a long time, we have not in the arts over the last few decades, had the success that university have when it comes to equity, diversity, and inclusion. I'm not saying that universities are perfect. However, if we look at even places like Harvard, Yale, Stanford, NYU, Princeton, we will find deans of color. We won't find people with that kind of power in our arts institutions, a power of decision-making in our arts institutions. That's because of something is not that great, which is that universities actually move slowly. They have a chance to stick to their ideas for improvement longer than we do. We're basically gypsies. We start things and we close them and then we move on. That's good in terms of the force of what creativity is.

I sometimes think that Plato was right, that we as artists do belong on the outside of the Republic, sort of banging on the door to get in, because that does keep us vibrant. On the other hand, maybe we need something in our community that's going to invest in not next year or the next year or the next show, but three decades of what we do want this community to look like? We've evolved sort of these kinds of institutions over time. We need a different one now. I think that the audience diversity project that began in the 80s did not succeed for example. There were lots of grants behind that. If we want to think of ourselves as a community that is dedicated to these values, maybe we need something more than just the way we run after production.

I do want to simply say that for folks on this call. Think about being a patron in the old fashion sense. In antiquity, the poet had a patron, but the poet was seen as the spiritual patron of the

patron. Think about investing in one artist who you really love. My friend, Bobby McDuffie, a concert violinist, figured out a way to get an expensive violin by getting people to invest in that violin. I think that we do need new non-profit and for-profit business models for individual artists around which to create their career and their influence.

One of the things, Jordan, if I may, my thought partner of many years, Mr. Jordan Roth. I think we might think about better models for individuals to work in groups than the way that we do now. Should five artists have one fundraiser for all five? Is this a time to look back at some of the structures in the 60s of group collaboratives that may have collapsed but maybe they did something right that we need to pick up again? Because the other serious part about this is how hard it is to survive as an individual, and moving from show to show, what about health insurance? What about families? What about education? I could go on and on, but I do think that the good news is that this is an incredibly important moment to be creative in terms of thinking about how we organize ourselves as an arts community.

JR: Exactly, exactly right, and I think what Anna's talking about right now and what she has been doing in her own work is pointing us back to support at the artist level, not just the institutional level. For exactly the reason of this, we go from place to place. If that support can follow that artist over time, over a career, that reaps extraordinary work for the community. And also as Anna's pointing to a different kind of life of existence for an artist that we talk a lot about wanting to support, but don't often think a lot about what is the experience of that life to live it?

ADS: Yeah, and I want to say back to Kara, of course, you have a completely different model and you say 90 dancers who your—

JR: Extraordinary.

ADS: Extraordinary. Kara, I was using the rehearsal space one time at the San Francisco Ballet. I walked in with Marcos who runs around teaching me my lines whenever I'm in a real crisis because I have to learn a lot of texts. We walked in and there was a man dancing in there and we said, "Oh, we're so sorry. Are we disturbing you," and he said, "Oh, no, no, no. I'm just fooling around. I'm the company doctor." We said, "The what?" "The company doctor." "You're the doctor? The company has a doctor?" I mean, if I get sick in a town where I have to do a show, I mean, it's like, I got to hope that the theater will find me a good doctor, right?

The company doctor, and so that level of care is something. When I had the chance working in the Alvin Ailey, I walked in and the executive director, I was of course, terrified to be working with dancers. The director, the executive director welcomed me and said, "You are home now." You are home now? You are home now? I mean, again, I'm a gypsy. I come and I go, they'd give a little intro with bagels and cheese or something. They introduced me to everybody. At a theater, most of the people will be from the development office, by the way. I do still feel like I am a part of that home of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company. That was back in the 90s. I do think that what the company model gives us is also something that we should go and study. If we can extend that type of care in places where folks are basically gypsies because we do need the gypsies.

KB: We, during this time, we redefined the three letters of our names so that they don't only stand for American Ballet Theatre, but we've been saying Alone, But Together, and there is something very powerful in that community of artists and in the collaborative of artists and staff and crew, and it is. It's very rare and very special. I think that we have a lot to learn from the gypsies and to be more porous, to welcome collaborators who come in and out. Then also with our dancers, I think that we need

to do more to elevate and amplify their ideas, their imaginations, their creativity.

One thing that we've seen a lot in ABT and in other dance companies during this time is artist-led innovation and asking these dancers who are usually created on to bring their ideas forward. Whether that's with short films that we produced during this time, or docuseries that we produced during this time, we really ... No one knew what to do, right? It was this time of total upending of our normal business planning cycle, producing cycles. We said, "What should we do? How should we produce? How can we continue to create?" The dancers came forward with the most extraordinary ideas and we nurtured those ideas and we produced those ideas. I think that that is something that we need to hold onto to make our community of artists that much stronger and that much more vibrant.

KK: Well, I have to say, Anna, it's very appropriate that you had a revelation at Alvin Ailey, but Jordan, I want to turn to you. Obviously, commercial theater is a part of the lifeblood of New York. In the last full season, Broadway produced \$1.8 billion in revenue and entertained 14.8 million patrons. But you're a force multiplier really when it comes to the tourism, the hospitality and the image of New York. Estimates are that the actual economic impact of Broadway approach \$15 billion and support over 97,000 jobs in the city. Obviously, the community has been helped by federal pandemic relief via the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant initiative and others. I'm wondering, as the district starts to relight itself, how much of that is kind of narrowly focused by producers and theater operators, and how much are you engaging with the broader community? The restaurant businesses, the hospitality industry more broadly, and others who are highly impacted by what happens on Broadway?

JR: Oh, it's completely an ecosystem of people that are interconnected in the deepest way. One of our team told me that they walked into the deli down the street from the St. James Theater a few weeks ago, and mentioned to the owner that we were reopening, and he started to cry. Think about a person who runs a deli on 44th Street in Times Square, where there have been so few people for over a year. The fact that that man is still standing and still in business. And the relief, the exhale that people will be on our block again. So when you talk about those statistics, they are true, but they allow us often to kind of look above the actual human existence that it is trying to capture and often misses.

There's a person three doors down from this theater whose life and family and other employees' lives and families depend on people having a reason to be near them and to come in. And just think for a moment about your own experience going to the theater or the ballet or wherever. You may drive in and you may park. There are people there whose lives depend on you being there. You may come into town and stay at a hotel. There are tons of people there whose existence depends on you being there. You may eat in a restaurant, you may buy something in the store on the way, and all of those people, that world spins because of a piece of art that draws people to it.

It could be on Broadway. It could be what Kara is doing in Lincoln, Nebraska. It could be anywhere, in any community, the art makes it spin. And there are so many people directly, directly impacted by your coming, by your being there.

KK: Absolutely. And Kara, it's been mentioned several times on this call—the economic model that you and your peer group has to work through. And Anna mentioned earlier the recent philanthropy of MacKenzie Scott. She donated to 286 historically underfunded and overlooked

organizations. One example was \$10 million to Dance Theatre of Harlem, which is obviously an iconic institution in New York, but one that frankly had to go dark for almost a decade at one point I believe. So this is existential.

But even for the well-known organizations, those constituents of Lincoln Center as an example, you're competing in an ever more competitive environment for philanthropic dollars I imagine, and the demographics of wealth are changing in this country as well. Tell us a little bit about what you're experiencing on that front and the challenges you see for non-for-profit performing arts institutions on that front.

KB: So I think that you can look at this as a scarcity model or you can look at it from a place of abundance. And so I don't think about competition for philanthropic dollars. I think about a collective effort to unlock and unleash more philanthropy. And I think that that's what you've seen with MacKenzie Scott and others who are recognizing the power of the arts to change our nation, the power of the arts to change the ways in which we work collaboratively to improve our society.

I think that it's incumbent on us, on all of us, on all arts organizations to make the case for why these organizations are worthy of support. And I think that the pie can be exponentially bigger as wealth increases. Anna earlier mentioned David Geffen's gift to Yale. This should not be a once a decade occurrence, that these types of gifts should be celebrated and should be multiplied.

So again, I don't think of it as either—I think it's the end of either/or. I think that there is plenty to go around and I worry more honestly about the competition for time and focus. I think there are so many opportunities for you to sit on your couch, and instead, I want you, I want all of us to come out and experience the live performing arts and to do it together. And I think that we

can impact and influence those who have excess resources far more than they could ever use in a lifetime, and that the arts can be part of their portfolio of philanthropy, not instead of environmental causes, education causes, et cetera, but in addition to as part of the many ways in which they can change the world for the better.

So as far as our experience, we have seen tremendous generosity over the past year in a time when we had no ticket sales, in a time when we had no touring fees. The fact that generous individuals and foundations and corporations stepped up to say these artists matter, art form matters, this national cultural treasure matters, that is what philanthropy has truly sustained us, that and some of our education programs.

I think that we have many opportunities in the future to generate support. I think that because of our new digital reach for ABT and other arts organizations, we have opportunities for really robust and exciting corporate partnerships, right? Usually in a traditional year ABT reaches 300,000 people in the seats in the traditional theaters. This past year, we've reached 9.9 million people digitally. That's an opportunity for brands to partner with us and tell exciting stories through the voices of, and the movements of, and the stories of our artists. So I think there's a tremendous opportunity and I really see it as a model of abundance and growth, and not one of competition for scarce resources.

KK: Well, we're at the bottom of the hour, and as usual, there's so many more things I'd like to ask each of you. But if you could indulge me for just a couple more minutes, I want to reward our audience by having the three, since I have the three of you here, and as the coming season looms before us, I'd love to have you tell them what it is that you're most excited about seeing and what excitement there is in the upcoming season.

It could be something you're working on. It could be something that you just know is coming down the pike, but coming attractions, Anna, what's most exciting for you?

ADS: Well, first of all, I just want to thank you, Kevin, for including the arts in your advisory capacity. And I also want to thank Jordan and Kara, and I'm taking away from this two words that Kara has put forth in the very beginning, hope and humility. And I have experienced both today. And so that's inspirational.

Well, number one on my plate, *Twilight: Los Angeles of 30 years ago*, which I performed as one person, is going to be at the Signature Theatre with five actors this fall. I highly recommend going to that. And as soon as I get back to New York, I'm going to be calling Jordan's office begging for tickets to see Bruce again.

JR: You're in.

ADS: And Kara, invite me and I'll be there.

KK: Great. Thanks. And Jordan, how about you?

JR: So I want to echo what Anna said. Anna and Kara are longtime friends and I'm really grateful to be able to dig in with you all. And Kevin, thank you, and all who are listening for caring, because that's I think what we've learned a lot about lately.

So I'm really excited about a play that we are doing that will be the next thing to open on Broadway. It starts performances the beginning of August at the August Wilson Theatre and it is a play called *Passover* by Antoinette Nwandu, who is making her Broadway debut, one of the seven playwrights that you mentioned, as is the director and the two stars making Broadway debuts in a piece that was developed in many theaters around the country, including most

recently, Lincoln Center Theater at their smaller off-Broadway space. And it is a play that is inspired by *Waiting for Godot*, but it is two Black men on a street corner, an existential street corner, and visited by several others, including a police officer. And Antoinette has talked about the ending of this play that she has written and rewritten as it has in front of audiences over the last several years. And to think about that kind of... The theater is not something that can often be in rapid response to the world. It's a thing we think about a lot because it does take many, many years to develop a piece of theater. But the notion that she is, in this framework that she has created already, able to be in dialogue with the moment by what happens at the end to these characters that she has created is a really fascinating and moving thing.

And so, to sit in a space with people and experience that, and it will be separate from Bruce, which of course is its own entity. It will be the first piece that plays on Broadway. The first play that plays on Broadway by itself and I'm really excited about that moment of light that it will shine.

KK: And Kara, last word to you.

KB: Well, now I just added two plays to my wish list for the fall. I can't wait to be with Anna at the Signature Theatre and with Jordan to see *Passover* at the August Wilson. And I've kind of survived the past year going in short chunks of time. It's hard for me to look months ahead. I tend to look days ahead and weeks ahead now. So I'm tremendously excited about this ABT Across America tour, to being with 5,000 people on picnic blankets tonight. The tour ends at Rockefeller Center on July 21st, which is where ABT had its first public performances in January of 1940. So 81 years later, to be returning to the site of that beginning is symbolic and meaningful and emotional.

And we close the program in each of these cities with a ballet that was created in one of

our bubbles. It was created by a choreographer named Darrell Grand Moultrie, who created his first piece for ABT during this time, and he named it Indestructible Light. And he talks about the inspiration for the piece being the light inside each and every one of us that cannot be destroyed, that cannot be muted, that cannot be dimmed. And so I look forward to visiting these eight cities and to closing each program with Indestructible Light and to forging ahead and celebrating that indestructible light inside each and every one of us through art, through dance, through theater. And so grateful to Anna and Jordan for everything that they do to bring forth that indestructible light.

KK: Well, guys, my colleague, Jimmy, is sitting here in the room with me and I can see him sitting here buying tickets as you guys are talking to just about everything. So I want to just tell you what a pleasure it's been to have people who are so passionate and moving so fast in this changing world. I think everybody on this call are patrons of the institutions that you represent and it's the reason that somebody like me lives in New York. So thank you very much. I appreciate your time today. Jordan Roth, Kara Barnett, good luck tonight in Nebraska. I'm not sure if you say break a leg to ballet companies or not, but whatever the equivalent is. Anna Deavere Smith, we're looking forward to having you back in New York. Thank you so much for getting up early on the west coast today. And thank you everybody for joining us. We'll be back in two weeks with the next edition of Teneo Insights on July the 15th. So please join us then. Until then, all the best for the 4th of July weekend.



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