

## **51% Preparedness Plan for the American Theatre**

A 2042: See Change vision statement promoted by East West Players, authored by Tim Dang (Producing Artistic Director)

### **The Proposal**

Commit to a goal, over the course of the next 5 years (to 2020), of reaching at least one of the following levels:

- 51% of your organization's artists and production personnel (combined) will be PEOPLE OF COLOR; or
- 51% of your organization's artists and production personnel (combined) will be WOMEN; or
- 51% of your organization's artists and production personnel (combined) will be UNDER 35 years of age.

"Artists" shall include performers, playwrights, directors, designers, musicians, and artistic staff such as artistic directors, literary managers, associate artistic directors, and artistic associates. "Production personnel" shall include stage managers, carpenters, electricians and running crew.

Organizations that do not achieve any one of the above levels should not be able to use the word "diverse" in describing their programming.

All funders - government, foundation, corporate, and individuals - should consider funding only those theaters that have achieved at least one of the levels of the 51% Preparedness Plan for the American Theatre.

### **The Facts**

By 2050, according to a CNN Report, 54% of the U.S. population will be minorities or People of Color (POC). POC includes individuals of mixed, biracial and multi-racial heritage. Among POC, Asian Americans are the fastest growing group, surpassing even Latinos.

According to the US Census in reports by the New York Times and Council of Urban Professionals, within one generation by 2042, POC are projected to become the majority, making up more than half the population.

In the not so distant future by 2030, more than 50% of Americans under the age of 30 will be POC.

Closer than you think, by 2023 -- 8 years from now-- more than half of all American children (under the age of 18) will be youth of color (POC).

Women comprise slightly more than one-half of the population. Statistics reveal that over 60% of theatre-goers are women and over 70% of persons purchasing tickets are women.

The Los Angeles Unified School District is already 91% youth of color. Here lies our future audience as well as future artists and production personnel. Southern California is the ideal test market to lead the American Theatre in diversity.

East West Players (EWP), based in Los Angeles, is already leading the charge for diversity. POC comprise about 85% of EWP's artists and production personnel; more than half of its artists and production

personnel are women and close to half are under 35. EWP increasingly is casting multi-culturally. Its 2013 production of *CHESS* featured a cast that included Asian American, African American, Latino, Native American and mixed race actors. Musicians and designers included Caucasian personnel. In no small measure due to EWP's diverse personnel and programming, it boasts an audience that is about 46% non-Asian and among the most diverse in the country.

EWP challenges all theaters to open up their storytelling to include all the stories of the world; invite the next generation to bring innovation and inspiration to theatre; and offer women equal opportunities in re-imagining the theatre. The future is already here at East West Players and we look forward to other theaters embracing this change.

### **The Elephant in the Room**

Why have larger American theatres been so slow to respond to the shifting demographics that are literally changing the face of America? What will it take to cause the most established theatrical institutions to envision the future and seize the opportunities presented by it?

Is American Theatre at a tipping point?

The questionable casting of *Nightingale* at La Jolla Playhouse (2012), *The Orphan of Zhao* by the Royal Shakespeare Company (2012), *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* at the Roundabout (2013), and *Julius Caesar* at the Lantern Theater (2014), have all presented questions of race representation and cultural authenticity.

Succeeding in two or three categories would show exemplary diversity leadership. Organizations of color need to work on diversifying as well.

Focusing on race, women, and youth is only a launching pad, a first step. Including older, differently-abled, and LGBT artists and production personnel also is vital. The key is to begin ensuring that your organization's make-up reflects the world in which we live.

### **The Reality**

The American Theatre currently is not prepared to welcome new audiences of diverse backgrounds; at the vast majority of theaters, the subscriber base is overwhelmingly white and rapidly aging. Nor is there infrastructure in place to adequately develop the stories of this new generation. We need time and resources to develop these stories of multiple intersections. The way that younger generations imagine and create is so different from the Boomers and GenXers. That is why we encourage the employment of artists and production personnel under the age of 35. They will be our future arts and managing leaders in their 50s as 2042 approaches.

The future is already here. We depend on the diverse, next generation of artists and theatre practitioners to continue the advancement of live performance. That is the only way we will have a chance of cultivating new theatre audiences. It is a survival imperative.

### **Common Questions and Comments**

Why have theaters NOT pushed for diversity when all these numbers seem to necessitate it for survival?

Potential objections:

- 1) *Caucasian males over the age of 35 are fearful of losing their job.* We don't want anyone to lose their jobs – we want artistic and producing leaders to get the big picture and embrace diversity. There is nothing wrong with being a part of the 49%. If leaders do not embrace diversity, however, it is

likely they will be perceived as out of touch with the community they serve and may likely lose their jobs.

- 2) *Diverse programming doesn't make money.* Have you given diversity a reasonable chance? Not being diverse will hit all theaters in the coming decade. Income (both earned and contributed) will suffer from NOT going with the trend for more POC, women and youth in your organization.
- 3) *The talent isn't good enough.* East West Players has on average 300-600 Asian Americans auditioning for roles per production. From Broadway talent to youth fresh out of high school, the talent is incredible. All theaters should do their due diligence in searching far and wide for the right person in casting, directing and design.
- 4) *Asians don't look right playing the roles in Phantom or Les Miserables.* This has already been done without much complaint. And Korea is becoming known as the next Broadway, producing big shows with Asian casts and being lucrative financially for the producers. In theatre, where audiences are already being asked to suspend belief, one need not assume that White is the automatic default for roles that do not specifically require a particular race or ethnicity.
- 5) *I am committed to diversity, and intend to move toward those percentages, but I want to meet the 51% goal with a "combination of POC, women and youth," for example we are 15% POC, 40% women and 25% youth, so combined, we exceed 51%.*

While we appreciate the effort to add up the diversity components to make the 51%, the big picture is being missed. America is going to be majority minority and is already majority women. This 5-year goal is a way to kick-start an effort in which all theaters will inevitably have to engage. Let's take on the challenge and begin addressing the problem right now instead of putting our heads in the sand and hoping, somehow and some way that things will turn out OK.

- 6) *Won't adoption of such a diversity plan violate labor laws or be challenged as a discriminatory hiring practice?* We are not suggesting that any institution adopt an unlawful quota in hiring, but instead urging you to implement robust, voluntary affirmative action programs that are designed to and do lead to meaningful progress toward achieving diversity goals. The U.S. Department of Labor's regulations affirm the adoption of programs that lead, over time, to a workforce that generally reflects the gender, racial and ethnic profile of the labor pool from which the employer recruits and selects. Such programs can and should include an analysis of the current workforce, affirmative efforts to recruit diverse applicants, placement goals, data collection to measure progress toward goals, and compensation incentives for meeting diversity goals. In the theatre, a robust diversity program will very likely also include conscious efforts to seek out plays with diverse themes, characters and playwrights.

### **Addendum**

The 51% Preparedness Plan for the American Theatre was created as a platform for East West Players while attending the 2014 TCG National Conference in San Diego. As Southern California residents, we have preparedness plans in case of earthquakes. We believe the coming stark demographic changes will finally shake things up, making way for a new chapter in American theatre. We hope so.

I welcome any thoughts to enhance this Preparedness Plan but want to keep it simple and attainable as a start for the next five years. While some theaters may choose not to prepare for whatever reason, we believe they may eventually face financial headwinds or even become obsolete.

If you do not support this specific plan, please create your own. It is vital, especially in Southern California, to have a Diversity Policy for performing arts organizations. While it is important to be affirmatively active in terms of meeting diversity goals, it is more important to understand the why of it all. An earthquake is coming that will hit all American institutions.

Save yourself.