

# BOARDWALK THEATRE

## **The world does not need another theatre company.**

You hear that a lot in not-for-profit circles and it is 100% correct. There are way too many theatre companies, especially in New York City. But it makes sense. It is too damn expensive to put good stuff on stage because the unions rip you off and SpotCo rips you off and the MTA charges way too damn much to throw an ad on a subway platform in Queens, wherein Cherry Jones will subsequently have spray-painted cocks on her face.

The only way to raise money for theatre is to give companies and wealthy people tax breaks. But if the 501(c)3 rules changed tomorrow and theatre giving was no longer tax deductible, the theatre would be nothing but a few blocks of cartoon stuff in midtown by 2025.

Our company will operate by a different set of rules.

## **Rule #1. No Readings**

Readings are useless. A play requires rehearsal. It requires rewrites. It requires multiple live audiences, ideally paying customers who aren't (a) related to the playwright (b) related to the cast or (c) working in the theatre. Readings have become the fundamental weapon of the Development Mafia, a band of career artistic administrators who believe they are doing playwrights a favor by throwing \$50 each to a bunch of actors and allowing the author's play to be read in front of music stands. The only thing readings develop is a culture of non-production. A culture of nothingness.

Think to yourself, what would have happened to *Long Day's Journey Into Night* in this system? How would *Hamlet* play behind music stands? I mean, there'd be nothing more compelling than a 20 year-old intern reading the stage direction, "Hamlet stabs Laertes" right?

## **Rule #2. No Public 'Workshop Productions'**

Audiences used to be asked to do one thing when it came to theatre: see it.

Pay some money, put on pants, sit in a seat, buy a drink or some Milk Duds, see the play.

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Now they are asked to attend pieces of theatre they are TOLD are not finished and give ADVICE on how to make those pieces better. In some cases they are actually asked to fill out comment cards. Comment. Cards. (For those of you who don't believe this, I can tell you firsthand that this process *is* happening, as close as Red Bank, NJ, and it is grotesque.)

Theatre audiences are wonderful people and they should be cherished for supporting our beloved art form. But there's a reason they are sitting in chairs in the dark. They are the audience. They're not writers or actors or directors or designers or even stagehands. Their opinions are expressed by how they respond to the work in the moment. That's the extent of their relationship to the work.

## **Rule #3. No Seasons**

Imagine this historical scenario.

It's 1985 and Larry Kramer has a play. It's called *The Normal Heart*. It's about the young men across the city dying from the AIDS plague and it's a call to arms for those fighting against the bureaucratic powers enabling the disease's spread. He brings the play to Joe Papp at The Public. Papp loves it. He flips. He turns to Kramer and says, "This is great. We're going to produce it right here at The Public. Next season. Our first open slot is fourteen months from now."

The beauty of theatre is its immediacy. It's about the actors and the audience and the words, together in that room, in that moment. Seasons were created to build a subscriber base. I get it. Producing theatre is easier when you know a certain number of people are guaranteed to hand you money. But all it would take is one experience with a predominantly subscriber audience for someone to understand that this system is draining all of the life from what should be a thrilling experience.

No seasons. Sometimes we'll do one show a year. Sometimes we'll do six. We'll do as many plays as we find a passion to produce.

## **Rule #4. We Accept Unsolicited Scripts**

So the current rule for American theatre is only scripts coming courtesy of New Haven, Connecticut or with a cover letter from John Buzzetti warrant reading. This logic has led to one of the most boring and irrelevant periods of American drama.

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I understand the argument against unsolicited scripts. They are a lot of work to read. But if theatre companies, which are receiving government tax breaks, aren't open to reading the work of some kid out there with a great play idea, why the fuck do we exist at all? Is theatre really only interested in the ideas of those who have put themselves in \$100,000 of debt for the honor of being called a playwright?

We will have a system. It will take time. But we will give every idea it's due. If someone wants to be involved in this kooky theatre life, we're going to give them every opportunity to make that mistake.

And we will never employ someone in the role of Literary Manager. Because it's a disgusting position.

## **Rule #5. No Overhead**

We're not taking on a big office space. Any space we do take on will be full of old sets and costumes.

We're not hiring a staff. Why do all these theatre companies have extensive marketing departments when the same 200 senior citizens from the same 20 blocks of the Upper West Side are in every audience?

Too many people are making too much money in this new corporate theatre structure and it's infuriating. Everybody will make money for the work they do on shows and nothing else. It's the digital age. This shit ain't that hard anymore.

If you want to perform an exercise that will infuriate you, listen to an Artistic Director complain about funding and then check that theatre company's tax forms and marvel at the blustery mid-six figure salary that AD is collecting. If you want to hear that administrator complain in the summer months, you can find the Hamptons Jitney schedule on-line.

We'll have an Artistic Director. And that Artistic Director will never make a single dollar of salary. Ever.

## **Rule #6. Every Show Will Have to Be a 'Yes' to the Question "Will This Bring in a New Audience"?**

Go through the seasons of various non-profit theatres and ask yourself about each title, "Who does this appeal to?" You'll be surprised how easily each show fits into a particular category.

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This show is for the black audience.

This show is for the gay audience.

This show is for the classics nerds.

This show is for those wanting to see a new musical (so it'll inevitably play a short run in a space with very, very black walls).

Go see a Broadway show, any Broadway show, at 2 pm on a Saturday. Count the number of non-white faces. Then count the number of people under 30. You won't need to bring a pen and paper. Your fingers will do just fine. Theatre has emphysema, folks, and nobody is hearing the coughs from the other room. We're all just buying it more cigarettes down at the bodega.

We're going to reach out to church groups. Not as group ticket sales leads but as people of faith. We're going to reach out to schools because we need to start getting kids into the real, live theatre and we need to create work that appeals to them. Oh, and we're going to give most of it away for nothing. That's the price we need to be paying. We need to get people into the theatre who would not normally be caught dead there. And right now, we need to treat this with the urgency of a life-threatening illness. Because that's what it is.

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Our theatre will make the people from Asbury Park to Point Pleasant Beach proud. It will be the kind of theatre folks from the city find worthy of the train ride. It will be honest, good theatre created for one reason and one reason only: because we believe it **MUST** be.