

White Heron Theatre Company  
Minutes of Board Meeting  
August 27, 2020

The Zoom meeting was called to order at 9:05AM. Present were Directors Lynne Bolton, Bob Doran (Chair), Chris Bierly, Leighanne Champion, Mark Cunha, Sheri Feigen, Robin Hammer, Victoria Hansen, Carolyn Durand, Michael Rhea, Martin Tackel and James Malone. Michael Kopko and Joshua Borenstein were also present by invitation.

The Chair requested and a motion was made by Martin Tackel that the members approve the Agenda for the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mark Cunha and approved by the Directors.

The Chair requested and a motion was made by Michael Rhea that the Minutes of the May 18, 2020 Board meeting be approved as presented. The motion was seconded by Ms. Feigen. The Chair asked if there were any proposed corrections. There being none, the Chair asked for a vote on the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Sheri Feigen next reported on the summer's Education Program. She described it as being about as successful as possible. The program was entirely virtual as efforts to bring the students and faculty together were just not possible because of the Covid virus restrictions. The program consisted of two main parts, a three-week, intensive Shakespeare program and then a three-week, Mixed Tape program. One highlight of the Shakespeare section was that each of the students was asked to prepare the "Tomorrow" speech from Macbeth and deliver it. Sheri sent a copy of the tape of these performances to "Broadway World" and such tape is now generally available on the Boston Broadway World website. Another tape from the Mixed Tape section will be available at the end of August.

There were 14 students in the program including four new students. The student performances were robust and the teaching great. The students also worked on a "Build a Book" segment where they produced their own audition book and a "Cyber Cabaret" where they recorded songs.

Sheri noted that in all these projects it was necessary for the families to become involved in the taping along with the teaching staff. Staff and family had to coordinate and produce each student's performances.

There are still a few costs unaccounted for but Sheri believes the program operated on essentially a break-even basis this summer. She may go back to a couple of families and ask for an additional donation to cover any loss.

For the future, staff and Sheri are excited about using what was learned this summer for additional winter programs and presenting all the products of this program to a wider audience.

Sheri noted a bit of "Zoom fatigue" among the participants towards the end of the summer. She attributed some of this to the fact that Zoom just does not substitute for the social reactions and relationships that come from person-to-person involvement.

Mr. Doran next introduced Mary Franco, a fund-raising consultant to talk to the directors about our soon-to-be-launched fund-raising efforts. Mary spoke of "expanding the donor base," "building a culture of philanthropy," and "stewarding current and future donors." With a substantial reduction in WHTC's mortgage debt our immediate and necessary goal, Mary urged the Board to direct its program beyond that hurdle. We need to be thinking about the future and not just getting out of debt.

Mary emphasized the notion of stewardship noting that only 5% of the time spent on fund-raising should be spent on actual solicitation of funds. WHTC needs to keep its donor base actively informed and engaged in what the Company is planning.

Mary noted that fund-raising events were at the bottom of her list in terms of effectiveness. They cost too much to produce, used up too much staff time, and had a relatively low yield at the end of the day. By contrast, the most efficacious fund-raising efforts should be directed at cultivating individual donors, with great giving capacity, to make major gifts to WHTC. Eighty (80) percent of the money is raised from twenty (20) percent of the donors. Seventy-two (72) percent of gifts to an organization like ours come from individuals, 15 percent from foundations, eight (8) percent from Bequests and only five (5) percent from corporations. "Dead people give more than corporations."

The Board needs to play a major role in this effort. We are a tax-exempt organization so as Board members we act as "Honest Brokers" to potential donors – "we've invested in this wonderful theatre, why don't you." We are also asking our peers to make donations – again, the effort is direct and personal. We are employing the network of our relationships on Nantucket, and elsewhere. Donors are motivated by belief in the message, trust that the commitment will be fulfilled and a family tradition of giving. We need to

connect our donor base to the stories we are telling on the stage and in our efforts to mount and tell these stories. "You cannot have a great ACK without great Acts upon our stage." "Great Acts for a great ACK."

Mary noted that younger donors want more detail than older donors. We need to find a way to present that – for example, "how far along in our campaign are we," "how, exactly, are we going to use these funds?" and most importantly, "Are we sustainable?"

Mary and Josh explained about the various Donor Search tools WHTC is using to identify potential large gift donors. We are using our own lists of playgoers and previous donors and then using systematic methodologies to predict, hopefully, the success we might have with these individuals.

Mary addressed the fundamental problem of Board members not wanting to or fearful of asking for a donation. We need to get over that and Josh and others will help. They can do the actual "ask;" we just need to help arrange the meeting once the donor has been cultivated a bit through our other non-solicitation efforts.

Chris Bierly noted that he believes WHTC is still in the position of trying to make a name for itself on Nantucket. He noted that we should leverage the talent we have on the Island in the summer in some of our fund-raising efforts. Josh noted that Long Wharf Theatre had developed a number of small, focused fund-raising events. There was consensus that we need to tie some of these things together in our efforts – e.g., center an effort around the Tony-award winning talent who are part of our acting company.

At the end of the day, we need a compelling case statement of why we need our friends to reach into their pockets and help us. Perhaps, WHTC did it backwards, "We built it, trusting they would come." However, maybe the better case is that "We trusted them, so we built it." WHTC made an incredible investment in the future of the Island – WHTC now asks that you be a part of that Island Community of Trust.

Mr. Doran thanked Mary for her excellent presentation.

Michael Rhea next presented the Treasurer's Report. The Report began by recognizing Lynne Bolton. Lynne told the group that as a way to kick off the Campaign for WHTC, she and Roger had decided to donate the land under the theater buildings and the adjoining house and the first year of the note payments on the mortgage to WHTC. Valuations will have to be done, but Lynne and Roger believe the gift is in excess of \$2,500,000.

Lynne's statement was met with first, silence, at the unexpected nature of hers and Roger's philanthropy and, then, with applause from the Board. Everyone was thrilled and overwhelmed with the Bolton's generosity.

Michael Rhea then continued his report noting that WHTC's operations are doing ok. While we have no ticket sales, we hardly have any expenses either, and often, mounting a production is a cash flow negative undertaking. Michael noted that it is unlikely that Christmas Carol will be produced in theatre form this winter and that WHTC will have no rental income this year. We do have the EIDL loan of \$149,000 and the PPP funding of \$49,600. The later is expected to be forgiven.

Michael Rhea noted that with the Bolton gift, our balance sheet will show improvement. We are moving to a 6:1 debt to operating revenue ratio. Our fund-raising efforts must continue to demonstrate substantial improvements in this ratio going forward so that the various National Arts Funders will look favorably on our case in the future. These include the Shubert, Mellon, Ford, Duke and Wallace charities. The Massachusetts Cultural Commission is another organization that may be able to assist us in future years by reducing our debt financing costs.

Mark Cunha next gave the Governance report. He addressed three issues – our Conflict of Interest Policy, our Whistleblower Protection Policy and our Document Retention Policy. The last two of these have Sarbanes-Oxley implications. Michael gave a brief summary of some of the issues and indicated he would make a full presentation at the November meeting.

Michael Doran noted that the Board has 21 authorized Director slots in its By-Laws and asked the Directors to think of a few good candidates to enlarge the Board.

Martin Tackel asked about WHTC's D&O coverage. Josh responded that he is working with our insurance professionals to increase our coverage from \$1,000,000 to \$3,000,000. Josh said he would report on this at the next Board meeting in November.

Lynne Bolton next gave the Artistic Director's Report. She first read from a note she received from Janet Zarish, the husband of actor Marc Blum who died in late March from the Covid virus. Janet wrote about her loss and how WHTC had helped her. She spoke about the excitement the two were experiencing waiting to come to Nantucket, be on the stage together and enjoy all that was the Island. Because of restrictions she was not able to be in the hospital with Marc but noted that the two months of expectation of

Nantucket were a poignant substitute for her inability to be with Marc at the end.

Lynne spent a few minutes talking about the extremely successful Ghost Light series of radio plays based on a book of such stories by Nantucket author, Blue Balliett. She praised Mark Shanahan, Michael Kopko, John Gramada and all the actors for the remarkable results they achieved. Lynne noted that the entire company rose to the occasion and produced a very high-quality product, as if you were in the theatre. This will not be the last of those plays. We will seek opportunities to monetize this effort in the future.

Lynne next turned to the 2021 Season of Plays. She thought it important to get out ahead of next summer and have a plan for what might appear on our stage. All acknowledged that productions next summer were dependent on the timing, efficacy and general acceptance of any vaccine developed and made available to the general public, the willingness/reluctance of people to go to closed rooms and theatres, and what rules the Broadway theatres and Actors' Union would have in place. We cannot predict these elements now, but we must be mindful of them.

The offerings for next summer include –

- A new musical, *Miss Mitchell*, about Maria Mitchell, the first female professional astronomer in America, and an influential figure in women's education on the island of Nantucket. [The playwright is Kristen Slaney. She will work with a group known as The Lobbyists. Their music for *SeaWife*, a haunted tale of the American whaling trade created with playwright Seth Moore and director Liz Carlson, was nominated for a 2016 Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Music alongside Steve Martin, Sara Bareilles, Michael John LaChiusa and Andrew Lloyd Webber.]
- *Blues for an Alabama Sky*, by Pearl Cleage. ["Blues" tells the story of Angel, a struggling blues singer in 1930s Harlem, New York during the Great Depression. Cleage is praised for bringing to life the cultural renaissance which took place in Harlem during a period of economic uncertainty. "Blues" looks at the lives of five characters who cross paths in a Harlem apartment building during the summer of 1930. Each character fights racism, sexism and prejudice daily.] WHTC will work with Yale Drama on this production.
- *The Half*, by Richard Dormer. Michael and Lynne first saw this play at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival a number of years ago. The play

tells the story of an “aging Shakespearian actor” as he spends the last half hour before curtain preparing to go on stage. [The play was first produced by Belfast’s Ransom Theatre Company in 2012.] Lynne and Michael have been chasing this play for years, hoping to bring it to the US.

- *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams will feature Kate Forbes as Amanda.
- Garry Hynes of The Druid Theatre Company is still interested in coming to Nantucket to direct and produce Alice McDermott’s new play, *Lifers*. The rehearsals would take place at John Johnson’s Almanac Arts Colony here on Nantucket. Unlike last years plan, Hynes will not be bringing any members of the Druid company with her and will rely on our own company of WHTC actors. AAC’s involvement in this production represents a big gift to WHTC as it frees up what would be rehearsal space for other WHTC productions.

The Board received this information with excitement. There was a discussion about the Delaware Theatre and Westport Playhouse also doing a joint production of “Blues” and Lynne was going to follow up on that. Robin Hammer suggested getting Sconset summer resident and NYU Professor Liz McHenry involved with this project.

There followed a few summary items. Bob Doran and others discussed getting work done to present to the November Board meeting so that the Board could authorize the beginning of the silent phase of our fund-raising drive to retire the mortgage and set WHTC on its path to the future.

Josh reported that using Wealth Engine he has been able to identify about 150 individuals familiar with WHTC who might be serious prospects for gifts ranging from \$1,000,000 to \$10,000. There were questions regarding whether the “pool” was big enough given the great number of charities on Nantucket competing for donor dollars. One answer to this question was to start our efforts as soon as possible and see if we can get ahead of a few other “asks.” We’ll need to match prospects to dollar amounts and determine exactly how to approach these people.

Robin Hammer offered her report on efforts to have a 2020 Gala. Obviously, nothing was possible. Lynne Bolton talked about a “Gala” around the New Haven Symphony, our Christmas Carol (maybe a reading) and perhaps a talent like Kevin Kline. More will be done on this project.

There being no more business, the Chair asked for a motion to adjourn. The motion was made by Mark Cunha and seconded by Martin Tackel. The Chair called for a vote and the motion was passed. The meeting was adjourned at 12:07PM.

DRAFT