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Bowater School of Management & Marketing

UNLIKELY BEDFELLOWS

Exploring Unique Performing Arts Collaborations

The 2004 Kenneth Myer Lecture
by the George Fairfax Fellow

Given by
Stephen Preece

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Deakin University

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Preface

The George Fairfax Fellowship in Arts & Entertainment management at Deakin University enables visiting practitioners and scholars in the cultural arena to enrich our understanding of national and international issues in cultural management. The Fellowship was made possible by the generous support of important donors, including the Myer Foundation, Dame Elisabeth Murdoch and the Faculty of Business & Law at Deakin University.

This volume presents the Kenneth Myer Lecture by Associate Professor Stephen Preece from Wilfred Laurier University, Ontario, Canada. The issue of collaborations is of keen interest to arts managers, especially with each arts organization receiving less funding from government and needing to bridge the gap by finding funding from other sources. In his keynote address, Professor Preece highlights the importance of collaborations outside the arts for both artistic relevance and the pursuit of scarce resources. Collaborative solutions are seen as one important way to develop profile, bolster resources, or build audiences. Professor Preece's key note address profiles a number of unique partnerships in the performing arts. It is research-based, drawing on interviews with over 50 artists, arts managers and other stakeholders.

This key note address is of interest to the Australia Business Arts Foundation. We are proud to have Winsome McCaughey, Executive Director of AbaF present this evening. Our program in arts and entertainment management supports the need for unique partnerships and seeks to extend them through this annual lecture series. We are also proud to present the lecture in Deakin's exquisite art museum: a collaboration between scholarship and practice.

The first arts management programs appeared in the 1980s in Australia. Traditionally, these programs were located in schools of arts and performing arts, emerging as a consequence of the need to re-define and reinvigorate their programs. Deakin University is truly unique in offering an integrated, creative arts management program in an innovative business faculty, nurturing artists and arts managers by having lecturers exposed to the latest issues and trends in management as well as experience in the cultural industry. In a sector concerned with performance, it has required a paradigm shift to see culture as fitting in a business environment.

This publication places on record the important collaboration case examples chosen for debate by the George Fairfax Fellow. This approach balances a process of scholarly and practical inputs for future inquiry. In addition, the volume places unique arts partnerships at the forefront of discussion, in order to emphasise its importance in the cultural context.

Elizabeth Fitzgerald, Jenny Treloar and Anne MacAuley assisted in the preparation of the event surrounding the Kenneth Myer lecture. I appreciate their tireless efforts in working long hours to complete this project.

Ruth Rentschler
Melbourne, March 2004

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Abstract

While collaboration has long been a way of life in the performing arts, recent trends have seen arts groups increasingly push into new, non-traditional patterns of partnership. Based on exploratory, qualitative research involving interviews with over 50 arts organizations, this paper presents a typology of performing arts partnerships which push the boundaries of collaboration in the various sectors. The resulting conceptual framework addresses the advantages and disadvantages of such collaborative ventures. The paper also provides recommendations for appropriate arts partnering as well as effectively managing the challenges of cooperation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Collaboration is a way of life in the performing arts. Artists, producers, technicians, stagehands, presenters, and funders all coalesce around one compelling drive: the show must go on. Nevertheless, despite well-traveled norms within the arts, substantive collaboration between arts groups and outside organizations is a far less-beaten path. Both the pursuit of scarce resources and the related quest for relevance are changing that. Whether to develop profile, bolster financial resources, develop diversity, or build audience, arts groups are increasingly looking outside for collaborative solutions. While cooperation within an artistic realm has relatively established practices and patterns, reaching to the outside world can create anxiety for the complex process of cultural creation. Properly navigating the mechanics of these kinds of relationships can be a daunting prospect for the arts professional.

The purpose of this paper is to profile a number of unique partnerships involving performing arts groups in order to examine their experience. Specifically, we evaluate the precursors, processes, and products of such cooperative efforts. The hope is that by revealing and conceptualizing these practices, others can anticipate challenges and outcomes, and thereby add to their overall collaborative savvy and awareness.

This paper draws from a research project involving interviews with over 50 artists, arts managers and other stakeholders, focusing on their collaborative experience. Participants were selected from several Canadian cities, with the bulk coming from Montreal, Vancouver, and Toronto. Organizations included music, dance, opera, and theatre groups, as well as a number of service, presenting and business organizations. The scope of the project was broadly conceived, including two major qualifications for inclusion as a partnership. The first was that it had to involve at least one performing arts group, along with at least one of the following: a business organization, a non-profit group, a government body, an educational institution, or another arts group. The second qualification was that it had to push beyond what is expected or routine for that type of organization within its professional context (i.e., unique).

Before introducing specific case examples, we start with a couple of assumptions. In the name of efficiency, our communities tend to segment, categorize, and isolate our various human activities. Specialization, the argument goes, leads to better productivity, making us all better off. Unfortunately, this has some negative side effects. For example, communities often set the artist aside, bundling creativity into various organizations, while the rest assume the more-passive role of arts consumers. The unfortunate consequence is that, in relation to community, the artist's position as the 'creative ones' becomes overburdened, isolated and unnatural.

Collaboration with groups outside the arts milieu presents an opportunity to redistribute art back into the community. When artists bridge into other segments of society, creativity can be unleashed in exciting ways leading to a variety of diverse encounters, innovations, profile enhancements, support and artistic creation. While the road to meaningful collaboration is not always smooth, the results can be well worth the effort. Unfortunately, on the flip side, ill-conceived cooperative ventures can actually lead involved parties away from achieving their main objectives.

II. ARTS COLLABORATIONS AS ENERGY

A metaphorical frame will help guide our thinking. The scientific properties of energy can be used as a metaphor to identify important elements of arts collaboration. Energy is something that can be built up or dissipated, used or abused, and it can actually facilitate important work when channeled correctly. These kinds of elements are relevant t\o arts partnerships as will be laid out in this paper. We start with the three types or states of energy—potential, kinetic, and mechanical—as representing the precursors, processes, and products of collaboration.

Focusing on the *precursors* to collaboration (potential energy) helps to identify activities that set the stage for these kinds of relationships. Many cooperative activities seem to appear out of nowhere, when in reality, they emerge from a substantial amount of prior activity which ultimately proves to be essential to the form and motives for partnership formation. The *process* options for collaboration (kinetic energy) vary significantly and can represent important choices for collaborative expectations and formats. Finally, *products* (mechanical energy) are the actual work or outcomes of the collaboration; they are the elements of cooperation that are identified most frequently and are often visible from an outside perspective. They also represent the rational interpretation of the partnership exchange and the results coming out of the relationship.

The paper will proceed as follows. Each of the three major performing arts partnership concepts already introduced (products, processes and precursors) will be developed relating why they are associated with the energy metaphor and what implications they have for arts collaboration. Through all of this, actual cases of performing arts collaborations will be discussed in order to illustrate the theoretical concepts. Finally, implications for practice will be explored.

1. Products

Performing arts collaborations are typically described in terms of results. Similarly, we often refer to energy by what it does (i.e., turn on a light bulb, propel a motor boat). As such, a good place to start is with the products or outputs of artistic collaborations (analogous to mechanical energy which results in 'work'). Examples would include such things as actual concerts, programs, sponsorships, artistic creations, etc. By their nature, these kinds of products are the most visible and tangible, despite their representing only the tip of the iceberg as far as the broader relationship is concerned.

This paper will develop a detailed account of three case examples of collaboration and apply their experience to our conceptual frame (the energy metaphor). Three partnerships from the dance world were selected intentionally to allow comparison across and to serve as a thread throughout the paper. With this in mind, we start with descriptions of the products/outputs from three collaborative relationships, all from dance. In each case, quotations from interviews will be listed in a smaller font (descriptions of interview sources appear in Appendix A).

A. L'Agora de la danse

The Montreal-based L'Agora de la danse, a contemporary dance presenter, has spent a number of years collaborating with a literary organization. The rationale from the dance side was to broaden their audience and take some risks in both the creation and presentation of artistic outputs. The first effort had popular writers and choreographers (who were also dancers) purposefully paired and creating dance together. Special performances showcased these pieces, drawing interested audience members from both the literature and dance worlds. Similar audience excitement occurred in subsequent years when popular writers were put on the spot to create spontaneous literary interpretations immediately after viewing a dance performance. A scant forty minutes after the show, audience members were invited back to hear a reading inspired by the performance they had all experienced. A final evolution in subsequent seasons actually placed writers in the role of choreographer. Over the years, the results of these collaborative efforts included an expanded audience, broadened profile, and interesting artistic creation.

In the words of Sylvan Dodier of L'Agora:

> . . . the people who like books came the first time to see the writer and for the events but afterwards they came back to see [dance] shows. So now we have this public. That's what we want. We want new public and we have new public from that. It leads to greater coverage in the media, the TV, the radio and newspaper that talk a lot about these kinds of things. . . It's really a development of public action for me. . .

B. Kokoro Dance

This time from Vancouver, Kokoro Dance, has spent a number of years working together with a folk festival. While music and dance organizations frequently cooperate—folk music and contemporary dance are a unique pairing. It started with the white body-painted dancers of Kokoro attending the three day festival and creating improvised performances within and among the 28,000 attendees. After a couple of years doing this, the festival presented a grand finale spectacle performance (attended by 8,000 people) created by Kokoro, including drumming, stilt walkers, bag pipes, and of course, the dancers of Kokoro. The result, led to huge exposure, audience development, and an interesting artistic creation (including a $15,000 commission).

In the words of Jay Hirabayashi, co-artistic director of Kokoro Dance:

> . . . people seemed to love it and you know to perform for 8000 people is not something that most dancers have an opportunity to do so for us it's just fantastic. . . it introduces our work to a whole bunch of people who ordinarily would never see dance, right? And some of those people eventually come to see our shows. So our audience is unlike any other dance company in town. You look out and you don't see the same people that you see at other shows. I don't know who they are but that they came from seeing us someplace else—someplace outside of dance.

C. Montreal Danse

Finally, Montreal Danse teamed up with the Vision Foundation, and a financial services firm in Idaho. The dance company received support for three weeks of choreographic creation in Sun Valley, in exchange for participating in community outreach, performances, and unique creativity-building sessions with financial services professionals. The result was a valuable opportunity to focus on creation while also bridging into communities in other geographic regions and from different sectors of society.

In the words of Kathy Casey, Artistic Director of Montreal Danse, the benefits to the business community are as follows:

> We taught some workshops for the business community facilitated by the co-founder of the foundation and also a consultant for financial services firms. He had some incredible ideas about how people look at problem solving. And so we combined forces to see what we could bring in from our view of problem solving in the art world and combined it with his views from a more business approach. . .

Casey also articulates the benefits to the dance company:

> . . . we work out with them that they cover all of our costs—three weeks on location, getting us there, feeding us, putting us up, paying my fee and

the choreographer's. And then they do these workshops and classes getting corporations invested in the project.

The products of these three unique collaborations resulted in significantly positive outcomes for the arts groups reaching out in unconventional ways. Improved financial resources, media profile, innovative creation, audience development and meaningful exchange are all represented in various ways. Interested onlookers can view these cooperative relationships as admirable, and even worthy of emulation. Arts professionals, on the other hand, may look on with a sense of bewilderment (and even frustration), trying to figure out how these kinds of efforts might factor into their own organizations. In terms of the energy metaphor, we see the light bulb go on an off, but know nothing about how the energy is configured or how it got there. As such, we probe deeper into the processes of partnership.

2. Process

Kinetic is the word used to describe the process of releasing energy. Scientists classify kinetic energy into three categories: vibrational, rotational, and translational. These three types of kinetic energy can serve as a way to classify process interactions within performing arts partnerships.

Vibrational. If an object shakes or wiggles in place, the process of release is vibrational kinetic energy. With unique arts collaborations, groups can arrange themselves in such a way that they interact purposefully (metaphorically wiggling or shaking) with their organizational partner. A vibrational partnership can be considered the least radical departure from what the performing arts group normally does, but incorporates new and interesting outcomes based on the interaction of being or working together.

Of the three dance collaborations, the L'Agora partnership best represents a vibrational interaction (at least from the perspective of the dance company). In this case, L'Agora was commissioning and/or staging dance as usual, only in each case creative writers were introduced into the process, circulating their literary energy in and around the dance creation and presentation process. The interaction required a substantial amount of thought and consideration to allow the vibrational interaction to be successful.

> For one paired production, the dancer had to be a guy. It wouldn't have worked with a girl I think. She needs a guy because she's [the author] is always in the seduction. She likes seduction. So I say, OK I have to find a dancer who has appropriate technique, and fits both technically and physically. She drinks a lot and smokes and she's a party girl. I choose her because she has a really, really big problem with her body and I want someone like this to do choreography because it will be really special.

Rotational. The second type of kinetic energy is rotational. In addition to vibrational movement, an object rotates or turns its position, increasing the range of potential impact. For rotational performing arts partnerships, more substantial interaction is involved (can be physical or conceptual) outside the typical patterns of making art. To illustrate the potential for rotational process, we turn to the partnership involving Kokoro dance company and the folk festival. In this case, the dancers are relocating themselves into the partner's context and, while keeping with some of their conventions (e.g., white body paint), they end up shaping their art in response to the partnership dynamics.

> . . . we just wanted to take dance out of it's ordinary setting and put it a place where it would confront people that weren't expecting it, keep their attention, and create something interesting . . .

> . . . the folk festival has an interesting tradition. Every morning when they open the gates it's like this mad race. People run with their blankets to mark off their territory in front the main stage . . . so we thought OK the first thing we'll do is place ourselves, our white figures, in the path of these people doing our really slow movement with all these people running by us. So their first exposure to us was this mass of people at the gate and they can see 8, 10 dancers standing there like statues and then we slowly start to move and they open the gates and there's this like flood running by us.

Translational. With translational process an object actually transfers location in space, giving it the most intense energy release. For performing arts groups, a translational collaboration process puts the organization in a position to make a substantial change or transformation.

To illustrate translational partnership process, we turn to the example of Montreal Danse and the financial services company. This collaboration enables the dance company to bolster its operating model by supporting the creation of new material.

> . . . I thought well what do I make out of this? The first one is that if things go how we hope it could be a very serious way for us to help pay for our creations. Getting funding for touring is a much easier, or getting funding for what we're presenting ourselves in the city when we're actually doing our shows, is a much easier proposition for us than getting money for the actual creation. And that's the most expensive part because there's no revenue coming in. You're just spending, spending, spending. So that's a very big interest for me. And I like the idea of give and take of it as a way of operating, that every body is gaining.

From the business side, participants are able to get rare glimpses into the black box of artistic creation, with the potential to inform and even transform their notions of creativity and problem solving.

> We asked people what they thought creativity was. It was remarkable, most of them said it's what other people do—that they themselves couldn't be creative. Which blew my mind. Like holy shit! If it's creative it's somebody else who did it . . . Other people said they felt they could be kind of creative but most of the really good creativity was artistic. So what we did was get people first of all to recognize that they are creative all the time and that's almost just a kind of a switch you open in your head and it's kind of a habit to install just to make choices. . .

Each of the three examples of kinetic energy (vibrational, rotational, translational) represent process patterns and degrees or qualities of integration between partners. In general, as partnership dynamics increase in intensity, they are also associated with the following: a need for greater resources, a higher level of risk, less direct control, and a more significant change tolerance. In considering collaborative possibilities, the process patterns for interaction should align with the goals and characteristics of the arts organization. Thinking about the energy metaphor and the most appropriate form of process interaction can help arts organizations get the best collaborative outcome.

To help illustrate the process of partnership, three more examples are provided this time from the theatre world (see Appendix B), specifically focused on the ways theatre and education intersect.

3. Precursors

The last category in our metaphor is potential energy, or precursors to collaboration. Useful applications require energy to be stored and then released. A ball perched on top of a hill, a battery, or an inflated balloon, all represent forms of potential energy. For arts organizations, the seeds of cooperative relationships are typically planted long before the actual partnerships emerge. Collaboration-building comes through rich and complex patterns of interaction with people, places, ideas and experience (this has been termed 'path dependence' in the organizational theory world).[1] For-profit firms derive competitive advantage through unique organizational patterns which are complex, take a long time to develop, and are hard to copy. Competition is less relevant to not-for-profit arts organizations; however, the most meaningful or rewarding arts partnership are often the result of substantial prior experience, rather than appearing out of the blue. To illustrate this concept, we return to our case studies.

L'Agora. With L'Agora and the writer's guild example, Sylvain Dodier is the *animateur* (director of promotions & outreach) with the dance company. His varied career includes experience as an artist (singer and actor), as well as arts administrator. Prior to working with the dance art form, he worked with publishers in the promotion of books for seven years, also becoming a writer of

children's books during that time. Eventually, his career in promotions expanded in scope and he found himself working part time for both dance and literary organizations. Through his connections as a publishing promoter, he came to develop a personal relationship with an administrator in the writer's guild and it is with this contact that the collaborative efforts between dance and literature developed and evolved over the years.

Dodier comments on the importance of his personal relationship in the partnership.

> So we always work together every time, every where. She does something some place, and asks me to join in . . . It's because she's my friend. I don't think I would work with the guild of writers if she's not there. So, I always work with people I like. If she went away, say to visual art, maybe I will gravitate to a partnership in visual art.

Kokoro. With the Kokoro-folk festival collaboration, a number of threads came together which had been in the works for some time. The company is no stranger to site-specific offerings: make-shift venues have included a local beach, urban street corners, and various public spaces. Jay Hirabayashi, co-artistic director, also cites the extensive collaborative experience he and his colleagues bring to the table. For years Jay was involved with an arts group with shared artistic direction (a collective), has published a community dance newsletter, and has been involved in a number of mega-projects involving extensive collaboration on a broad scale. One project in particular involved erecting an outdoor superstructure outside the Vancouver art gallery and included 30 days of artistic creation including numerous disparate parties. Contrary to expectations, dance participation was very limited; however, a large number of musicians came on board to participate and through this intensive experience, friendships gradually evolved into diverse collaborations between Kokoro and jazz, alternative, and folk music genres.

> I was disappointed that the people I thought could have contributed a lot didn't, weren't interested in it. And then on the other hand there was a whole bunch of people that I'd never met before who eventually turned out to be long time collaborators that came out of this project in 1990 and that we still work with today because we met them there, particularly jazz musicians. I didn't know the jazz community and we met about 15 musicians. We also got to know visual artists, and they continue to work with us, so there were a number of relationships that developed.

Montreal Danse. With Montreal Danse and the financial services company, much of the initiative for the interaction centers on Kathy Casey, artistic director. As an American working in Canada, Kathy's past experience dancing and touring with a U.S. repertory company has influenced her current efforts. She exhibits a fundamentally collaborative approach by being involved with a Canadian

presenter's network, performing extensive outreach as a matter of course, and interfaces with different choreographers for company performances (Montreal Danse has a repertory format which is fairly uncommon in the contemporary dance world). When she became artistic director, her initial thrust was to significantly ramp up touring, and started doing extensive networking, attending conferences and trade shows (particularly in the U.S.). During this flurry of activity she came in contact with the foundation director that ultimately pared Montreal Danse with the financial services company in collaboration.

> Not many artistic directors go. In particular Canadian artistic directors. Not many at all . . . They are long processes, meeting people. But not only did I start making contacts with presenters, I started understanding the context of touring these days. If you don't get that, it's really hard. First of all I didn't have very much experience. I'd toured a lot but I never knew how those tours happened. Then you start understanding the context of who's touring, what kind of work is touring, and what places are things really active etc. . . .So I started going to conferences, meeting presenters, that kind of thing. And one of the first conferences I went to I met a woman who is one of the co-founders of the foundation [which coupled them with the financial services company].

In each of the dance examples above, key people brought together a variety of experience, knowledge and contacts that combined to form a meaningful organizational collaboration. This is an important point. Arts groups can get in trouble chasing opportunities they pursue without meaning and purpose. This kind of meaning evolves over time and runs deep with the commitments and values of the organization. If the partnership attitude is: you have money (audience, profile, or whatever) that we need, and we are willing to do anything to get it, there is likely to be trouble. The result can be that artists become off balance or put out by being drawn too far away from their core activities. The result can be a feeling of resentment, a diminished sense of their artistic vision, and substantial frustration. Looking to more meaningful sources of 'potential energy' for collaboration can lead to much better results.

III. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

We now ask the question, why does all this matter? Having developed the energy metaphor as a way of thinking about arts collaborations, it is useful to consider specific ways that this kind of conceptualization can be helpful for those considering such organizational relationships. The following insights are developed from a broad range of interview data, as well as the specific examples used in this paper.

Thinking about the *products* of partnership, two general insights can be derived: get the vision right, and allow for failure.

1. Get the Vision Right

Too many arts partnerships have a nebulous vision. When pushed to state what the transaction is meant to produce, participants are hard-pressed to do so. The range of collaborative possibilities for any one arts organization is virtually endless; however, the number of collaborations that actually have a solid basis for the amount of time, energy and resources required, are a scant few.

Kathy Casey (Montreal Danse) puts it this way:

> I think collaborations just don't get defined very well and that really leads to trouble like what do we really mean by collaboration? Do we mean putting our ideas together? Do we mean putting our money together? What do we mean? What do we have to work with?

Why this happens, is an important question. Sometimes a relationship slowly emerges out of conversations, and participants are reticent to squelch the creative process. Other times people shy away from a bald-faced description of the transaction as it can reveal sticky trouble spots and problems that are painful to confront. Nevertheless, early in the process, some hard-nosed discussion of objectives, goals, direction and vision needs to occur. Otherwise, the arts organization can be pulled off balance and the costs can be high. With a plethora of available options, arts groups should not hesitate to pull the plug when the vision is not working.

Sylvain Dodier (L'Agora) has this to say:

> . . . for me there can be a problem of partnership with some groups. We don't want the same thing. We may work together for a time on one thing but after a while we don't really want the same thing . . . We have to believe in the same thing in art and then we are able to go there. But if we don't believe the same thing we can't do it.

In some cases, getting the vision right can be a very subtle, but essential problem. For example, if Kokoro were to be invited to dance for a large scale rock n' roll show, using outside choreography with the purpose of accenting the show, it could produce a very different outcome than what they were doing with the folk festival. While the profile might be present, the artistic compromise would likely not appropriately represent the essence of what Kokoro stands for and audience-building would be meaningless.

Finally, when thinking about partnerships, vision can sometimes be restricted to a kind of utilitarian lens which focuses its sights along administrative lines. Arts partnerships should always be viewed primarily with an artistic vision, allowing administrative considerations to have appropriate bearing as needed. In essence, no matter who the partner or what the circumstance, arts collaborations need to have art be front and centre.

Sylvain Dodier (L'Agora):

> We are in art. We are in new things. It's not business. It's not the money that put us together. We never say, oh we need money and that's what motivates us. It's not profit. It's not the same thing as I do a table and you do a chair. In that situation we could say OK we could do money. I don't like you, you don't like me but we will do money. It's OK. But in art it's not that. What we put together I think it's the people and what we believe.

2. Allow for Failure

Arts collaborations are inherently risky. If we think about releasing energy, there will always be some kind of associated hazard. Similarly, bringing different organizations and people together with an artistic imperative can inevitably create uncertain outcomes. It is precisely with this kind of collision, however, where the creative spark can occur and energy can transform into something worthwhile.

A reasoned risk assessment should be part of the visioning process listed above. In the end, some risk will simply not be able to be managed. For example, clearly anticipating the choreographic output of popular Montreal writers (as was the case with L'Agora) is going to be much more uncertain than the traditional process of commissioning dance works. Nevertheless, this is simply the risk that creates the excitement around the project and can not (and should not) be managed.

Sylvain Dodier (L'Agora):

> We don't know. It's the first time we tried doing it. It's with people we can never know what will happen. So it needs people who are really open, really open minded. Because we have to take risk. And it costs a lot . . . It's just like this because we want to do it. And that's it.

Other risks can (and should) be managed along the way. For example, Kokoro experienced a problem with the folk festival where Jay Hirabayashi felt he needed to intervene to reduce a negative outcome.

> . . . there was only one time some of the dancers wanted to do their own thing and I said OK go and try it and I went and watched and they made the wrong choices. First of all, they picked the wrong music group, it just wasn't working and their choices through the crowd weren't working and I knew it wasn't working and I told them . . . you had to be really respectful of the musicians and that the fact that the audience wasn't there for the dancers. So that if you were going to dance in that kind of environment you had to be really sensitive and really respectful to them especially depending on what kind of music it is . . . So they weren't tuned in to the fact that people were getting pissed off and if they had been I said, as soon as you noticed that I said your

> choice is get the hell out of there. Just exit as gracefully as you can and put yourself on the perimeter and not in the middle of people.

Some risks can be assumed to be manageable as the organizations mesh and the partnership evolves; learning occurs and adjustments can be made.

Finally, in some cases success and failure may depend on perspective. Looking at Kokoro's collective community project involving performances on scaffolding outside the Vancouver art gallery, Jay Hirabayashi reflects on the relativity of success.

> . . . there was a really snarky review in the Vancouver Sun about how it failed . . . and I say it was about the process, but a lot of people looked at the product as the key as to whether it worked or not. To me it was a complete success because we managed to actually get there. . . you know it was a mish mash of stuff and as a piece I would say it wasn't successful but I thought it was satisfying because I knew what went into the creating.

In reflecting on collaborative arts *process*, two important themes emerged: process alignment, and gradual evolution.

3. Process Alignment

When considering collaborative process, appropriate alignment or fit is essential.[2] While partnership goals are clearly important to properly define, selecting the right process to match those objectives can be just as vital to success. The first step is to recognize difference in choice. Substantive variance exists behind the process choices in this model. As mentioned earlier, vibrational, rotational, and translational collaborative processes require: progressively increasing levels of resources, greater risk, less direct control, and a more significant tolerance for change.

To illustrate, we can think hypothetically about the choices Kokoro made in their rotational interaction with the folk festival. A more *vibrational* process would have been for the dance company to program a piece in their regular performance schedule which would include live folk performance in some way. A more *translational* process would include a much deeper relationship with the folk festival, perhaps formally transforming the event into a combined folk music and contemporary dance festival. Both of these options represent very different process alternatives, require different resources, and would lead to different outcomes. The key is that the arts organization carefully consider the fit between collaborative objectives and process.

Fit is also relevant to the unique characteristics for individual organizations.[3] While one process pattern may seem to work for one group, it may be difficult for another.

Jay Hirabayashi (Kokoro) puts it this way:

> So I call those all collaborations with different organizations. And they're all different kinds—you know, pop music, rock music, jazz music, folk music, no music. Political, non-political, all kinds of different reasons for something happening. If you are open enough and the style of dance that we do is malleable enough that seems to fit anything whereas you know maybe a ballet company couldn't do that. They would need maybe a more severe adjustment. You know we don't require a sprung floor and we don't require toe shoes or jazz shoes or certain kinds of paraphernalia that would restrict what we do in collaboration with other sites or aesthetics.

4. Gradual Evolution

The concept of energy informs the idea of a gradual evolutionary process. Problems arise if all the energy blasts onto the scene at once. An emergent, sustained, and building flow of ideas and energy are more appropriate for arts collaboration process. Eager arts groups may want to start with a grand, planned collaboration out the gate, though this can be problematic. Better to begin small and let relationships emerge.[4]

Kathy Casey (Montreal Danse) in her experience with the financial services group puts it this way:

> Originally, we got talking and comparing our interests she was getting involved with this foundation at about that time and said why don't we think of a project together in which part of this foundation is the creation of work. She said, so why don't we think of a small project to start with so we can test it. . . Now we're looking at longer term. . . The company is quite interested in developing a long term project with us and what we're proposing to them is that we go literally inside their company and create with their management team . . . everyone seems to think it would be an interesting way of approaching it.

Similarly, with Kokoro, the process included a gradual evolution.

> And so after I think the first year we went back to the organizers and said we'd like to do an actual piece instead of just improvising at the folk festival. And so he said, OK. So we tried to raise money for it for the next year and weren't able to get the money together so we just did the same thing that we did the previous year and then the third year we got the money together.

The idea of gradual evolution also enables a learning dynamic to happen which helps the relationship to develop its own, self-generating energy. No matter what the objective of the collaboration, a substantial by-product will be learning from the partner.[5] Properly conceived, such learning can help the arts group stretch, grow, adapt, and thrive as a more robust organization with heartier resources.

Kathy Casey (Montreal Danse):

> Well I'm listening while he's explaining his management models which I don't know anything about. It's helping me deal with any kind of a challenge . . . it's problem solving in-and-of itself, and I feel I'm gaining more tools about how does one deal with that? It's very fascinating. . . This relationship is about exchange it's not just about businesses learning how to be artistic or creative. It's about artists and art-run organizations understanding how to be real on the business front and I'm learning things that I don't know about on a business front at all.

Recognizing the long-term trajectory in arts collaboration illuminates a number of ideas for good practice. Recognizing successful partnerships as the outcome of much larger efforts (in contrast to thin, short-term products of simple brainstorming) helps to reinforce the need for a more cooperative mindset which is embedded in the arts organization, as opposed to viewing collaboration as a separate, tacked-on activity.

Three points will be made with respect to precursors: spend time outside one's art form, engage people who bridge worlds, and draw from what you know.

5. Spend Time Outside One's Artform

The cloistered artist with little contact or awareness of the outside world will have a difficult time being relevant to an appropriate audience. With some luck, outside encounters can bring an enhanced sense of understanding, inspiration, context, and empathy. They also open up opportunities for collaborative encounters and can spark meaningful interaction. Some artists stay hunkered down with their art, feeling it more appropriate to spend time honing their craft. Others are leery that engagement with the outside may lead to being co-opted or push them towards unwanted compromise. While balance on all these fronts is necessary, the benefits that positive collaboration can bring, far outweigh the identifiable risks.

Kathy Casey (Montreal Danse):

> . . . they're interested in bringing together the business, arts and education communities to share ideas and see what can come up. Their primary focus is on creativity. They feel that each of those domains has its own views and definition of creativity and they think that the person who started this foundation feels that we will learn a lot amongst ourselves. The different communities have a lot to learn from one another—primarily, how to recognize it and develop it in other people

Each of the collaborations identified in this paper came about because of people who, as a matter of course, push deeply into territory outside their own artistic fields. With L'Agora, the relationship evolved out of eclectic career interests

and personal history. For Montreal Danse it was a byproduct of pursuing touring opportunities. Finally, with Kokoro, in addition to recognizing a long history of community interaction, Jay Hirabayashi speaks for himself:

> I worked at the UBC library when I was a grad student and also became a union officer. The vice president of the union, later became manager of the folk festival. So you know, these things always go back somewhere and she's a wonderful woman. So I walked in to say hello, and I just said to the artistic director we'd love to dance at the folk festival and he said that sounds kind of interesting . . . I said you know we like performing outside, we perform to different kinds of music and it would be great to do something at the folk festival. And he said, well OK.

6. Engage People Who Bridge Worlds

Passionate supporters of the arts have other lives. These come in the form of careers, interests, hobbies and past-times. In addition to being interesting people, they can be of great help to the collaborative process as they naturally build bridges between worlds. Based on their intimate awareness of different areas, they are in the enviable position of seeing unique linkages that others might be oblivious to—and they often relish the idea of bringing their disparate worlds together: the doctor as amateur violinist; the race-car driving, opera aficionado; the corporate executive dabbling in theatre. The possibilities are endless.

The roles these kinds of people play can vary substantially. Sometimes they simply open doors and make introductions. Sometimes they play a pivotal administrative role even as volunteers. With the Montreal Danse partnership, a behind-the-scenes manager from the financial services company was important in the development of the relationship.

> Now of course there's a senior manager in the corporation who is an ex-dancer and he's helping facilitate this. And everyone thinks he's the most creative thing on the planet. In part because I think he's so resourceful. In the arts you have no money, you have nothing but your own sense of being able to think of a solution.

Recognizing people for the diverse beings they are—not just your audience member—is a positive step towards meaningful collaboration.

7. Draw From What You Know

It bears repeating that collaboration-building comes through rich and complex patterns of interaction with people, places, ideas and experience (i.e., path dependence). An arts group interested in developing partnerships can start by looking in a mirror. Inspecting the already-established interests, connections,

resources or characteristics of its personnel and organizational history can uncover a wealth of possibilities for collaboration. Starting with what you know helps to provide an anchor for relationships as it enables the organization to build on established strengths. Engaging in collaboration can be a destabilizing activity as the act of partnering (i.e., negotiating terms, developing processes, jointly making decisions) can test the core balance of an organization. Drawing from one's own experience, or that of trusted colleagues, can help significantly in countering these kinds of destabilizing forces.

Another aspect relevant to drawing from 'what you know' is that, though they may seem common place within an artistic milieu, skills and attributes inherent in cultural industries can often prove to be of great value when applied to other areas of life. Arts groups are often rich in resources having to do with imagination, story-telling, problem-solving, creativity, abstract-thinking, and reflection. Other sectors of society crave these kinds of resources and truly need the gifts that artists have to offer. This was certainly the experience with Montreal Danse:

> I don't know, but in the arts you have no money, you have nothing but your own sense of being able to think of a solution. It's like no big deal. But it appears to be a big deal when you get in other contexts [i.e., a business]. So what's interesting about this is that this is actually a fund raising opportunity to support our creation—obviously the corporation pays for this.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper has presented a framework for thinking about unique collaborations in the performing arts. Energy served as a metaphor to reflect on the products, processes, and precursors associated with arts collaboration. A discussion of relevant concepts for practical application were highlighted in light of insights drawn from case studies and extensive interview data.

It is hoped that these ideas will help further the appropriate application of collaborations in the arts and help artists and arts managers make good choices for their organizations. Properly applied, such arts collaborations can be a wonderful mechanism to redistribute artistic creativity into the community, shore up arts organizations, and help a broader array of stakeholders feel a part of their cultural fabric.

APPENDIX A

Interview Subjects

The author respectfully thanks the wonderful people (numbering over 50) who agreed to be interviewed for this research project. The quotes included in this paper are drawn from the following three interviewees.

Sylvain Dodier
L'Agora de la danse
Montreal, Quebec

Sylvain works as *animateur* (promotion & outreach) for L'Agora de la danse, sharing his time with similar responsibilities in the publishing industry. L'Agora presents dance creators from Canada and abroad, maintaining a number of collaborations throughout the entire creative process. Their latest annual program includes12 shows presented by different choreographers in a 300+ seat studio.

Jay Hirabayashi
Kokoro Dance
Vancouver, British Columbia

Jay is co-artistic director (with Barbara Bourget) of Kokoro Dance Theatre Society. Formed in 1986 and inspired by butoh (a Japanese form of modern dance), the contemporary dance company emphasizes multi-disciplinary collaboration and cross-cultural exploration, fusing the aesthetics of East and West. The company has performed across Canada, the U.S., and Europe.

Kathy Casey
Montreal Danse
Montreal, Quebec

Kathy Casey is artistic director for Montreal Danse. Repertory in format, the contemporary dance company is devoted to the creation of vibrant works with an international roster of choreographers. Montreal Danse, which tours extensively throughout the world, has created and produced nearly 40 works with almost as many choreographers since its inception in 1986. The company has collaborated with numerous Canadian artists as well as choreographers from France, Belgium, the United States, Germany and Japan.

APPENDIX B

Theatre Companies
Education-Based Partnerships

A) THEATRE & COMPANY—Kitchener, Ontario

(Collaborators: Insurance Company, Social Service Organization, Schools)

Products

Anticipating a fall season play which included themes of racism and hatred, Theatre & Company initiated a partnership with a social service organization and the local schools. The counselors facilitated an anger management program with high school students, incorporating attendance at the play (along with follow-up discussion) as a focal point. An existing funder (a local insurance company) provided program-specific funds to cover costs. Outcomes included exposure for all parties and audience-building for the theatre. The schools and students benefited by an enriched curriculum.

Process (Vibrational)

Substantial collaborative activity took place away from the stage. Actors involved in the play actually helped with the facilitation in conjunction with the social services group. Following the kinetic energy classifications, this collaboration fits into the *vibrational* category, as the theatre maintained it's basic pattern of performance (albeit, presenting a substantial number of extra student shows) and students were brought in to the theatre to view the play. The unleashing of artistic energy occurred with the involved organizations working in and around the artistic output with a program that met all their needs.

Precursors

Given their strong orientation towards youth and education, the funders were delighted to be involved in this project, extending their existing relationship (including sponsorships and a capital campaign contribution). The social service organization had prior experience working in the schools and drew from an existing anger management program adapted specifically for the topic of the play. Senior administrators in all the organizations knew the theatre personnel from prior personal and professional relationships, and the theatre served as a kind of network hub to pull it all together. In general, the theatre is also highly community oriented, having won awards in the past for innovative community involvement.

B) GREEN THUMB THEATRE—Vancouver, British Columbia

(Collaborators: an Epilepsy advocacy organization, Schools)

Products

An Epilepsy advocacy organization funded the development of a play commissioned and produced by Green Thumb Theatre. The group was seeking a vehicle to raise awareness and understanding of the illness through youth-oriented theatre. Green Thumb was able to secure funding for originally-generated, socially-relevant theatre that could then be offered to the schools for on-site touring shows.

Process (Rotational)

While Green Thumb routinely produces and tours children's theatre, this relationship immersed them thematically into the focused reality of living with epilepsy. With the socially-oriented objectives, as well as the targeted performances in the schools, the partnership can be classified as having a *rotational* process of collaboration energy.

Precursors

Predating this project, Green Thumb had completed similar types of plays with other groups having varying mandates (i.e., drugs, violence, self esteem, sex). The advocacy organization initially wanted the play to be much more instrumental and didactic (with clear instructions and heavy-handed lessons to be learned). It was Green Thumb's experience that helped negotiate away from this kind of approach to a much more authentic artistic expression, consistent with their artistic mission.

C) HEADLINES THEATRE—Vancouver, British Columbia

(Collaborators: a school, individual students)

Products

Facilitators from Headlines Theatre spent a week working with students to write, develop, and stage a play centered around the general theme of bullying. Working within the Brazilian tradition of the *Theatre of the Oppressed*, a spontaneous process enabled a play to emerge, helping the students relate their immediate experience through an artistic vehicle. The final product was presented to the entire student body.

Process (Translational)

From a process perspective, the total immersion for both the theatre group and the students fits the translational energy metaphor. For a short, but highly interactive period, both sides focus intensively on the project, only to emerge at the end with an authentic artistic expression devoted to a specific community. This process requires more extensive resources to support, compared to, for example, a pre-prepared touring children's show.

Precursors

Headlines Theatre has worked to empower a number of marginalized people in a similar process function of creating theatre within communities. Themes have included: corporate dominance, housing issues, aboriginal language preservation, government cuts to welfare, citizen privacy, etc. Already a strong advocate for social justice and community empowerment, the artistic director, David Diamond, happened onto a text describing the Theatre of the Oppressed movement by chance in a used bookstore. A series of encounters with some of the original thinkers and like-minded people then led to the implementation of these ideas and their application in a number of settings, including, in this case, a public school.

END NOTES

[1] Path dependency is concept associated with the resource-based view of strategy. The basic idea suggests firms can gain competitive advantage when the roots of their activities have accumulated over time and are complex, ambiguous and hard to copy. See Lockett, A & Thompson, S. (2001) "The Resource-Based View and Economics" *Journal of Management*, 27(6): 723, for a review.

[2] The idea of fit or alignment draws from contingency theory in the strategic management literature. The emphasis is on strategic fit between strategy, organization, resources, management preferences, and environment. See: Donaldson, L. (1987) "Strategy and Structural Adjustment to Regain Fit and Performance: In Defense of Contingency Theory" *The Journal of Management Studies*, 24(1): 1-24, for an early description.

[3] A classic text on the resource based view of strategy is: Collis, D. & Montgomery, C. (1995) "Competing on Resources: Strategy in the 1990s" *Harvard Business Review*, July-August: 188-128.

[4] The concept of emergent strategy suggests that organizations are more likely to naturally evolve over time, though managers can look back to reflect on strategic patterns. This is in contrast to the deliberate unfolding of grand plans developed at the top of the organization. For a review, see: Mintzberg, H. & Waters, J. (1985) "Of Strategies, Deliberate and Emergent" *Strategic Management Journal*, 6(3): 257-273.

[5] For some time the concept of learning has been applied to both people and organizations. For a review of the organizational theory application, see: Crossan, M. & Berdrow, I. (2003) "Organizational Learning and Strategic Renewal" *Strategic Management Journal*, 24(11): 1087.

Author's Note

Dr Preece is actively involved in the arts, serving on several boards and committees. Current activities include: Princess Productions (contemporary dance), Penderecki String Quartet (chamber music), Waterloo Region Arts Foundation (arts grants to individuals and organizations), and the Robert Langen Art Gallery (chair, exhibition committee). During his career Dr Preece has presented or published over 30 papers in a variety of academic and practitioner forums including: *The International Journal of Arts Management; Poetics: Journal of Empirical Research on Culture, Media and the Art; Journal of Business Venturing; Long Range Planning;* and *Canadian Public Administration.*

Prior to coming to Wilfred Laurier University, Stephen taught at the Ohio State University where he completed his PhD in 1993, and has since taught at universities in both France and the Czech Republic. Prior to graduate school Dr Preece worked for 4 years in the financial services industry. Dr Preece is also a pianist.

Editor's Note

Associate Professor Ruth Rentschler (PhD 1999 Monash) is Executive Director, Centre for Leisure Management Research and Director Arts & Entertainment Management, Deakin University, Melbourne. Ruth is the author of publications in the cultural field including the *Cultural and Entertainment Industries Handbook*, *Shaping Culture, Innovative Arts Marketing* and *The Entrepreneurial Arts Leader*. She is on the editorial board of the *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, and has guest edited a special issue of the *Journal of Arts Management Law and Society* (Fall 2003) on culture and entrepreneurship.

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