



Talking to David White: A Brooklyn Commune Project Cultural Democracy in the Performing Arts Interview

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David White (Photo by Peter Simon)

[Donna Uchizono](#)...was getting a Master's and writing about the period of time in which she came of age as a choreographer in New York, which was in the 80's. She was asking a lot of people what they thought about that period, to characterize what their formative experience was as a group, at that generational moment. I simply responded: "death."

David R. White, who ran New York's Dance Theater Workshop for 28 years and is now runs [The Yard](#) artist residency, dance and performance center on Martha's Vineyard, schools The Brooklyn Commune Project in a wide ranging [interview](#).

White shares a personal history of the American performing arts climate from the 1960's to today, discusses the [National Performance Network](#)

he founded nearly 30 years ago, and touches on inclusion, community, generational change, artists and presenters and many other topics from the vantage point of one who's seen it all.

Read the full interview [here](#).

An excerpt:

What do you wish artists were more aware of, so they didn

?t consider themselves as outsiders to the organization and the systems that are already in place?

You're asking, how can artists stop feeling so much as outsiders to structures that already exist?

Yes.

Well, first of all, you need to understand what they are. So you know, read the material and understand that again, your lot in life, depending on what your artform is?I'm talking from a dance and performing arts point of view?your lot in life is tied up with producers/curators/organizers who believe in your work, some of whom may well be peer artists. Sometimes, you yourself are ultimately a self-producing artist, and ultimately, most artists are self-producers in most home seasons. Organizing, contextualizing, framing, curating, producing, presenting ? these are in fact core functions for the creating artist.

In any case, to the extent that you get other people involved in those communities, interested in your work, that kind of information becomes circulated. So if I'm collaborating with Ronald K Brown, or Camille A Brown?two African-American artists I'm currently working with?I'm on email talking to other presenters about those artists and who will represent them at the Idea Swap at the New England Foundation for the Arts or at NPN or at Arts Presenters (APAP) over the course of a year.

Annually, New England presenters get together to talk specifically about projects they're thinking about, but this requires artists?so I'm on the phone, deciding, who are the artists we're going to champion? And I'm talking to several people, seeing where commonalities of interest exist, and who should lead on an application. It has to be led by presenters, even though it goes to support the fees of artists. And so, to some extent, your lot in life is in fact set?unless you're going to self-produce all the time?and you're going to be tied in to strangers.

The most important thing is that none of these strangers are necessarily alike, so you know, people often make the mistake of taking the first gig that comes along because they say I'm interested in you, but you don't know that their space is a 10×10 foot box, and your stuff won't fit in there, but you're afraid to ask the questions that will prohibit those opportunities, and then the opportunity falls apart. That creates extraordinarily bad feelings.

The fact is that the information is out there, every member of the NPN is described on the website. Most presenters or organizations have specs on their websites on what kind of spaces they have and you can tell, looking through their past seasons what they've produced, whether or not your work is consistent or fits their agenda, generally speaking, and this is separate from the issue of quality and who perceives/judges/confers quality in the work. That's the wrinkle in time that nobody can explain, and I can't either.

I personally ask two questions: WHY? I want to know viscerally, I don't need to know it articulately, but I want to know why you shut yourself down from the world or immerse yourself in a particular world to do this work, over whatever period of time.

And then, SO WHAT? Now that I know a piece works, and you do this, I want to know what it means. Does it have any meaning outside of you and your shared universe of assumptions?

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