



Aurélia Thierrée grew up in the circus and has charmed audiences around the world with her dazzling display of stage illusion—now she brings *Aurélia's Oratorio* to Berkeley Rep for the holidays. Photo by Richard Haughton.

LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE

## Teaching Moments

### Diversifying the Workforce

Susan Medak, Managing Director,  
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**FOR DECADES**, Berkeley Rep has been discussing diversity in American theater. Though the good news is our young audience is terrifically diverse, after putting a lot of effort into finding candidates of color we find there's been little change in the diversity of our staff. I myself have advocated affirmative action, found new places to post openings, and attended seminars about diversifying our workforce. I've enlisted help to identify hidden prejudices in our company, endured criticism from funders, and sought sociological explanations for the ongoing lack of diversity. It drove me nuts that with good intentions and open minds we

saw so little change. I finally realized that if Berkeley Rep wanted to look different, we had to act different. We decided to dive into a proactive diversity initiative.

Over the years, hundreds of young artisans and administrators have spent 11 months in training as part of Berkeley Rep's fellowship program, where they learn about careers in the theater alongside an accomplished company of artists, administrators, guest directors, and designers. After acquiring this experience, they go on to work at theatres nationwide or stay at Berkeley Rep as full-time employees. My "a-ha" moment came when I realized that in order to diversify our staff, we needed to diversify our fellowship program—which meant diversifying its pool of candidates.

I decided to invest in a concerted recruitment effort. In 2008, we visited historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). We researched schools with active theater programs, contacted faculty, and booked on-campus meetings. In that first year, our recruiter met with students, faculty, and career counselors from a dozen HBCUs.

She described the full range of job opportunities and defined the attributes of a competitive fellowship candidate. Our effort got results. In the first two years, four of our fellows were chosen from this program.

This year we expanded our effort. We sent a current fellow along with two alumnae to speak at universities across the country. These young professionals brought their enthusiasm and their success stories to their peers. We visited more schools, reaching beyond HBCUs to contact students from a diversity of backgrounds. We convened a conference for representatives from schools with strong programs and discussed how to make their students great candidates for any position in the field. And we combined forces with another theater, so that as we attracted more candidates of color.

Although we have little data about our strategy for diversifying our workforce, we're confident it represents a new and more direct approach to remedying the problem. But the real measure of success won't be known for 10 years: Will our staff look markedly different in 2020? For everyone's sake, I hope the answer is yes.



Susan Medak. Photo by  
Lisa Keating.