

Please include a personal artist statement which describes how a previous project(s) illustrates your artistic vision and approach to creating work and ability to successfully complete your project-both artistically and financially.

500 Words

My life in the theater has been of three worlds: the actor, the teacher, and the producer. There is a perception that the process of the actor has no relation to the challenges of the administrator. Likewise the craft of teaching is looked down upon by many “professional artists” as is the case when a drama professor is considered a failed actor. But for me acting, teaching, and producing have been weaving themselves together since I was 16 years old. These activities inspire, inform, and reflect back on one another. Taken together they compose the fabric of my life practice.

I would self describe myself as a technology geek with one eye always to the distant past. The foundations of theater as a ritual were developed in a different society. The ability of the theater to survive as an art form attests to the deep power of its traditional practices. Contained within the resonance of a song, the energy of a dance, or the folds of a mask are deep truths and gateways for human connection. It has become a burning interest for me to look at the intersection of cultural traditions and technology.

This interest arose out of an expedition I took with Song of the Goat Theatre's 2011 student cohort. Artists from six countries were invited to this program which took us to cultural centers in rural parts of Romania. We attended gatherings, dance classes for kids, meals, and conducted group interviews. One of the project leaders commented that ‘Facebook is killing the culture because no one wants to learn the traditions anymore.’ I got really defensive when she said that for some reason. I began to wonder ‘what if young people were permitted to approach traditional heritage through technology?’ It then struck me as odd that most of the participants, including the project leaders, were armed with devices to record our experience. With hours of digital material in hand we entered into the studio to marry our experience with text and to create a performance. I began to wonder, what other ways can technology and traditions be integrated? What kinds of artists are doing this already? How can I look at other disciplines and apply their discoveries to the field of theater?

The Fun Family Festival of Tragedy is a recent project that fits within the framework of artist-teacher-producer and attests to my ability to carry out my current proposal. This was the largest project I’ve initiated and its total budget was over 45k. As executive producer I made education a central part of the program with a menu of initiatives to welcome people who had never been to a theater before. We used social media and marketing to express our core values to our community which enabled us to crowdsource over 70% of our budget. Building an infrastructure to truly support the holistic body of a small art theater felt like a radical idea and it has framed all of my experiences since.

Project Summary

Please provide a summary of your grant project not to exceed 100 words

I am planning to make a research expedition to South Korea in 2015. I'll be bringing with me songs and stories to share with people I meet as a way to open the door and encourage an exchange. There are three main activities for this research: engaging with children, hunting for traditional performance materials, and interviewing cultural producers. I have quite a few Korean students and their families are helping me to make contacts to ensure I have an authentic experience. This project takes inspiration from Poland's renowned anthropological theater artists: Jerzy Grotowski, Gardzienice, and Song of the Goat Theatre.

Question 1: Describe in detail the purpose of the proposed activity. What do you hope to accomplish?

Please answer the question in 250 words or under.

The intended aim of this research is that I will go to South Korea and meet people with whom I can share my experience and my craft. I will be bringing with me:

- folk songs from North America and Eastern Europe
- American tall tales and European fairy tales to share with English speaking international school children
- and a multi day workshop for professional and student actors to integrate body, voice, and masks.

While in Korea I would like to make contact with three groups of people who can help explain Korean culture to me:

- educators - teachers working at International Schools, historians, and professors at professional acting schools and drama programs
- artists - theater makers, performance artists, scholars, musicians, ethnomusicologists, filmmakers, designers, and cultural producers
- keepers of tradition - shamans, mask makers, and anyone who is keeping the ways of the past alive.

I can not enter this process with a list of demands. All I can do is meet others with a generous spirit. I will be asking lots of questions to mine the wisdom of the people I meet. I purpose to document these encounters and share them with anyone who is interested. It would be wonderful if I could initiate genuine and lasting dialogues with the people I meet. Even better would be if this trip is the springboard for collaboration, ensemble training, and created performances. But the journey is not a failure if it does not yield these results.

Question 2: How will this activity help to establish and/or enhance your collaboration with the partners or activities?

Please answer the question in 250 words or under.

One of my achievements from last year is that I started an organization in Poland to nurture international exchange. So far I have only served as a design consultant and conversation

starter to Odra Ensemble (physical theater) and Jubilo Project (community service project). Both include participants from across the world and are the kind of theatrical activity I would like to continue to support.

An expedition to South Korea will in many ways start up and initiate my own independent activities. Eventually I want to direct and develop a project that would play with the boundaries of physical theater and live cinema with masks and music.

Going to Korea is a way to open the door to conversations with other people. Entering into a dialogue is the centerpiece of this proposal. It may sound naive but I believe asking questions and listening is a relevant and meaningful activity.

To make contact, my initial inquiries will go to the education centers set up by the heritage preservation system of South Korea. I am looking for some combination of masks, movement, and music. I have reached out to Seoul Arts in search for a group of drama students to teach a movement and voice workshop. And my young students will have penpals when the Korean school year begins. I will then go to the Korean class and share some traditional stories. This is just the starting point. Through recommendations and correspondence I am sure I will find opportunities for exchange.

Question 3: What do you hope to accomplish through travel that cannot be accomplished in another way?

Please answer the question in 150 words or under.

The theater has always served as a place to challenge the way people think. The Greeks were exploring how we examine otherness and the assumptions we make when we encounter others. I think travelling to other countries mirrors that work. When people travel, isolated conversations can be used to define an entire culture. This kind of thinking is a subtle poison that needs changing. In the course of this expedition I hope to open my heart to the potential of the community. With so much conflict throughout the world, drawing this out is still relevant.

Will the Korean traditions I have read about touch me in some way? Will I find a song, some movement, a mask, or some practice that provokes me? Will South Korea connect with something else from my life? I can only answer these questions if I go there.

Question 4: Why have you chosen this specific time to travel?

Please answer the question in 150 words or under.

I work at the American School of Wroclaw and ATUT a bilingual middle school where I run a devised theater laboratory. Many of my students are from South Korea and their parents are in Poland because a large tech company has a factory here. In my kindergarten class one of the guiding principles is to "Be Curious." As I watch these students play with toys and technology and interact with students from many other countries, I wonder what traditions

they aren't being exposed to? It was meeting these families, in this place, which stirred these curiosities.

In 2016 Wroclaw is the European Capital of Culture. The idea behind this year long recognition is mutual learning and dialogue aimed at bringing cultures closer together. I thought to create a project (specifically designed with the Korean community in mind) now would be an ideal time to initiate contacts to begin some collaboration.

Question 5: Why have you selected the particular country(ies) or specific collaborators for this trip?

Please answer the question in 150 words or under.

I have been able to see aspects of Korean culture through the eyes of these amazing children and their families. Most of what the world sees is pop culture through the media: music, movies, and anime. Yet the Korean government spends over a half a billion dollars each year preserving traditional culture. It is a question that countries around the world are asking, how do we nurture traditions, even as we are reinventing modern life?

When it comes to technology, looking at South Korea is like looking at the future. South Koreans have a totally different perspective of how technology intersects with their everyday life. It is estimated that over 70% of the country has a smartphone. Smartphones have certainly played a part in helping to fuel the consumption of pop culture in Korea. What have technology done for cultural production such as theater, performance art, dance, or experimental cinema?

Question 6: Have you or any of your collaborators ever been part of an arts delegation visiting another country? If so, please list sponsor, year and purpose.

Please answer the question in 150 words or under.

Question 7: Describe your own and, if applicable, your organization's experience and/or interest in international exchange. How have these international experiences informed your work?

Please answer the question in 250 words or under.

I have been working abroad for three years now. It seems obvious to point out that in changing my artistic environment from the LA to Eastern Europe has opened me up to a new range of ideas. While working professionally at the Song of the Goat theater I was collaborating with artists from Poland, UK, Finland, Germany, Romania, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. That diversity of expression and how that manifests in a rehearsal room is infinitely rewarding. With different languages we can still understand one another through emotions!

On a more personal level, being away from home has induced surprising growth and maturity. It has taught me to live within my means both financially and energetically. I am not going into

fiscal debt to afford the life of an artist. And I am not exhausting myself by creating 4-5 plays a year. I have allowed this principle to come into my work by spending longer periods of deeper focus with each new project.

Living abroad with the loneliness and pain that comes with it has intensified my relationships with others on and off the stage. It forces me to listen deeply and to see what is before me. For my process it seems important that I make myself vulnerable and at the same time find my resonant strengths. It is not all misery. I continue to find these experiences fruitful. The most important lesson I have learned from all of this searching is that happiness comes from within.

Question 8: How will the proposed activity benefit your work?

Please answer the question in 150 words or under.

An expedition to Korea is the first step of a larger plan that will manifest throughout 2016. I hope to publish the interviews I conduct. I hope to find people who are interested in a collaboration and create a piece of work. But these need to ferment.

Travel and immersion in other cultures enriches us as citizens. For me this kind of experience not only invigorates my creative process but has led to unexpected paths, ideas, outcomes, and depth. Feeling like a total alien from my surroundings has also led to insights and new understandings about my own heritage and origin.

Sometimes in life I feel powerless because all the bad stuff seems beyond my control. We know the world needs changing and yet we sit. This sort of expedition requires full participation. It demands I become actively engaged in the world and in the work of transforming it.

Question 9: How will you manage potential obstacles, which are inherent to international exchange - from communication challenges and finding a common working language to visa issues and inter-country politics?

Please answer the question in 250 words or under.

The work that I am interested in making uses energy, presence, resonance, and emotion as a material for expression before language. It requires a holistic tuning to others around you. One area of my personal research has been "how to open my heart." From this I believe gentleness and attention can overcome any obstacle of communication. In regards to inter-country relations, being informed as possible and giving time and space to all things usually yields an answer whether it be some bureaucracy or a simple misunderstanding.

The most sensitive aspect of this kind of research is exploring the grey area between appropriation and authorship. America is perceived as being a consumptive power and a melting pot where all differences are blended into one. The idea of taking someone's tradition

and carelessly using it for my own purposes is not what I want to do here. If there is not an open hearted reception, permission, and exchange then I have to accept that.

On the other hand, artists are deviants - our task is to deviate from traditions. To bring the tradition into view in a new way allowing the familiar to be seen as unfamiliar which requires a new appraisal of all that we have been- and therefore all that we are.

No matter how subtle or complex the challenge, I find presence and listening to unlock compassion in others.