PROFILES OF RISK TAKING:
STORIES FROM THREE ARTS AND CULTURE LEADERS

A Conversation with David Devan
General Director, Opera Philadelphia

Caught in the thick of the 2008–9 financial crisis while attempting to institute a new strategic plan, Opera Philadelphia had a bold vision for the future but barely enough resources for regular operations. Forced to make cuts and institute a new level of financial rigor by forgoing the advance use of subscription funds, the organization made it through the financial crisis with a renewed artistic vision, a dynamic new product, and a commitment to capitalization and risk taking.

Background

Upon arriving at Opera Philadelphia in 2006, David Devan had two mandates: stabilize operations and establish a new strategic direction to lead the organization into its next stage of development. Devan spent two years doing his research. He closely examined the organization’s data and conducted benchmarking research to better understand how and where Opera Philadelphia fit into the national landscape. Through this research, Devan came to an important conclusion: Opera Philadelphia was not doing work that the opera community perceived as important. This insight pushed Devan and his management team to conduct a strategic review of the organization’s artistic product and market influence. The review evolved into a multi-year strategic initiative founded on an ambitious new goal – to become one of the country's top five most influential opera companies.

Then, just as Opera Philadelphia was about to launch its new strategic initiative, the market collapsed. Before the organization had a chance to raise the capital necessary to support its new direction, all funds were pulled out from under its feet. Devan will never forget the day when his CFO came to him and said, “David, we are going to run out of money.”

In response, Devan assembled a team of board members and senior staff to troubleshoot. The group unanimously agreed that to mitigate the risk of stalling operations they would need to escrow, or freeze spending on, the organization’s subscription revenue. This decision would in turn create a $1,000,000 cash hole they would need to fill in six weeks.

Emergency response

After reaching this conclusion, the group immediately informed the Opera’s landlord that they would need an extension of several months on their next payment. The team approached the Opera’s full board and other committed donors. They explained Opera Philadelphia’s financial circumstances, their plan forward, and the six-week turnaround period they had to work with. In exchange for their support, Devan committed to three key strategies that would set the organization on a path to long-term financial health: 1) Opera Philadelphia would work diligently to eliminate all accumulated debt, 2) it would continue its firm escrow policy on subscription revenue, and 3) it would maintain its relationship with its landlord. Devan also agreed that should the
organization fail to raise the required resources, the Opera would be left with no choice but to abandon their new strategic initiative.

The board rallied behind the turnaround, agreed to Devan's terms, and raised $500,000 in cash in just three weeks. Devan commended their rapid response and support, "It was only because the board was able to dig deep and quickly that we came out ahead." Not only did the board's efforts help the organization financially, he explained, but it also built board and staff confidence.

The crisis inspired a new level of financial discipline within the organization and motivated Devan to think more seriously about capitalization and balance sheet health. This new financial discipline also "caught the eyes, ears, minds, and wallets of a large number of foundations," enabling the Opera to raise sufficient revenue to match the board's gift. Close to its deadline, Opera Philadelphia received $1,000,000 in recovery capital and renewed its commitment to the long-term strategic plan they had set aside at the advent of the crisis.

These resources were not sufficient, however, to sustain staff at pre-crisis levels, and a significant reduction in force was necessary. To better align the necessary lay-offs with Opera Philadelphia's new strategic direction, management created a "change index" that rated each staff person's openness to change and risk. Devan applied this metric throughout the organization, assessing veteran and new staff alike. In the end, the Opera laid off 20% of its staff.

After the cuts, Devan gathered the remaining employees and explained, "You're it. And this is why you're it." Devan promised that the organization could sustain its remaining staff for a year, without furlough days or cuts to salary and benefits. He also made it clear that the organization needed to move quickly ahead with its new strategic plan, and that remaining staff needed to be committed to the vision that lay ahead. After that point, the Opera's internal culture noticeably shifted. "Everyone who remained felt a sense of pride," said Devan, and that pride has stayed with the organization to this day.

Back on track

Opera Philadelphia emerged from the crisis with a better understanding of the connection between capitalization and risk management. In 2009, the Opera developed a capitalization plan that laid out how the organization would improve its financial position, demonstrate financial performance, and carve out a strong brand and track record of artistic success in the marketplace. The plan's associated fundraising goal was $3,000,000.

Also key to the plan was a board-mandated annual surplus of $100,000. The board instituted this policy to demonstrate the Opera's commitment to strengthening its own balance sheet. Along with an annual surplus, Opera Philadelphia decided that it would not pursue funding for an endowment, instead raising funds for sufficient working capital and operating reserves. "Because we did not have an endowment during the economic downturn, we had to ‘eat what we kill.’ We had the tenacity to stay alive," said Devan.

The plan also established, at the advice of Susan Nelson at TDC, a $1,000,000 risk capital fund to help raise the company's artistic profile as it worked to become a leader in new American opera. The board decided the risk capital fund could be used to finance strategic initiatives fundamental to the advancement of the company, for which traditional funding was not available. The fund's policy also required that resources be deployed only after a repayment plan had been set. Reflecting back on this period, Devan believes that the Opera's capitalization strategy, which connected financial
health and artistic excellence, empowered the board and staff to focus on the organization’s new strategic direction.

With the capitalization plan in place, Devan’s biggest question remained, “How do we pay for it?” Opera Philadelphia turned to the same foundations that had followed the organization through its period of crisis and development of a capitalization strategy. The Opera’s relationships with these foundations enabled the organization to seed its risk capital fund and support other capitalization efforts. Simultaneously, by posting annual surpluses, the organization demonstrated its commitment to self-financing risk-taking, reserves, and compelling art.

**Reframing risk**

When Opera Philadelphia first established its risk capital fund, Devan thought the board would use the fund to invest in strategic business initiatives. However, Devan soon realized that he could more easily obtain outside support for business initiatives with clear goals and outcomes than for inherently risky creative initiatives. Today, 100% of the risk capital fund is being used to fund new artistic endeavors, specifically the commissioning of five new American operas. “Commissioning is a high risk activity,” commented Devan. “Not everything can be a total hit. It made sense that we self-finance it through the risk fund as there is not a lot of appetite for artistic failure in the funding community – we always need to be perfect.”

Fortunately, a commitment to capitalization in its strategic plan has helped the organization to succeed with funders. “In a sea of instability, we look pretty stable,” said Devan. The organization has also had success raising artistic support from individuals. “Many individual donors are not unlike venture capitalists,” Devan remarked. “Once the work has been developed and previewed, the investor gives the OK on the proof of concept and makes a financial commitment.” Opera Philadelphia has had the most success in raising individual support after the development stage, when a new artistic project has gone through previews and is primed and ready for the market.

**Innovation requires risk**

Devan made it clear that Opera Philadelphia is not out of the woods, and that the organization faces new risks each year. “New artistic works live in a battery of other risks that we constantly work to mitigate. How, when, and where we produce work is always connected to our core financing.”

Devan holds firm to the idea that artistic risk cannot be formulaic. “We get so granular in terms of trying to figure out the outputs on art that we forget the point,” he expounded. “We invest in art because we think we will create amazing and compelling experiences that will lift spirits, but in the end, you won’t know the output until it happens.” Only after the fact can you step back and ask, “What was really great about that? Where did it succeed and where did it fail? How did we make it happen?” But at the beginning, Devan asserted, risk-taking can be as simple as putting your trust and resources in good people – good artists – making good art.

Reflecting on the last five years, Devan is amazed by how far the Opera has come. “We hit most of our targets in our three-year strategic plan in year two.” The board’s commitment to artistic innovation and capitalization has never been stronger. In its most recent round of planning, the board pushed Devan and his team to think bigger – “they were ready for the real innovation,” he said. Looking back, Devan believes that Opera Philadelphia was able to institute financial discipline and develop a successful capitalization plan because its board and staff were energized by the new strategic initiative. “If there is nothing inspirational attached to where you are going, it is a bridge to
nowhere.” Getting one’s financial house in order can only be driven by excitement and passion for the art.
An Interview with Bill Rauch  
Artistic Director, Oregon Shakespeare Festival

Upon arrival, Bill Rauch propelled the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) to new heights of artistic innovation. With the development of the American Revolutions program and the production of classic musicals, OSF tried new works on traditional Shakespeare audiences, testing its own assumptions about audience tastes and preferences. Supported by a discretionary risk capital fund and its board, OSF weathered the 2008–9 financial crisis with a firm commitment to programmatic dynamism and artistic risk.

Background

Immediately after joining Oregon Shakespeare Festival as Artistic Director in 2007, Bill Rauch received the board’s approval to launch a new, innovative program that he had proposed during his interviews for the position. As a part of the new program, “American Revolutions,” OSF would commission and produce 37 new play works focused on moments of change in United States history.

Rauch, who has always been drawn to contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare, wished to mirror Shakespeare’s commitment to dramatizing periods of upheaval in history by commissioning new works set in our country’s past. “We are, after all,” he remarked, “a country that originated from revolution.” The American Revolutions program would build on the resources already available at OSF, including a repertory of 100 actors and several stages. The program would also extend OSF’s commitment to supporting playwriting artists, challenging playwrights to consider their art in the context of American history.

The American Revolutions program represented a big leap for OSF. It took the organization away from traditional Shakespeare, and refocused efforts on the development of new works. “I didn’t know if anyone else would be excited by the idea. I was proposing a huge undertaking,” Rauch remembered. Fortunately, OSF’s board was excited from the start, and Rauch was given the go-ahead to begin implementation.

Then, the financial crisis hit. OSF had just passed its budget, but quickly recognized that its financial position was shifting, and that leadership would need to cut costs to respond.

Standing up for the art

After learning about the cuts OSF planned to make, two board members independently reached out to Rauch with the same concern: would OSF limit itself from taking the artistic risks it proposed? “They did not want me, the new Artistic Director with an emerging program, to be hamstrung,” said Rauch. And so the board members each gave $1,000,000 to seed a discretionary Artistic Opportunity Fund. This fund proved instrumental for OSF at a time of great uncertainty, giving the organization the confidence to take risks it otherwise would not have taken.

With the leadership gifts backing the Artistic Opportunity Fund, finding other funders to support the American Revolutions program did not prove difficult. One foundation in particular took a leap of faith, making a large multi-year donation that helped the program to gain momentum. Rauch attributes their fundraising success to the fact that the funders believed in the vision for the program.
Making the jump

Oregon Shakespeare Festival is a destination theater, which means that audience members travel long distances to get there and typically see three or four plays per visit. This setup creates an expectation of excellence that makes risk-taking particularly challenging. However, Rauch emphasized that offering a dynamic product that keeps audiences interested and coming back is critical. “I try to make the actual stories and how they are told as unpredictable as possible. This is the core risk. With a large audience, you will please some people and not others with every choice you make,” said Rauch.

The American Revolutions program puts its full trust in the playwrights it commissions. Not limiting the artistic imagination is a core value of the program, according to Rauch. OSF picks individual writers, introduces a historical theme, and gives the artists free reign. Writers are not limited by cast size, number of scene changes, etc. “We tried to give them space so that the pieces could grow out of their hearts, minds, and imaginations,” said Rauch. This freedom “has allowed the writers to take wonderful risks and to create works they may not have created otherwise.”

In collaboration with the Executive Director, Rauch also changed the leadership team’s structure in order to make the American Revolutions program a clear focus of OSF. They brought on Alison Carey, Director of the American Revolutions Program, as a senior member of the management team. This structural decision, which gave Carey power and visibility within the organization, was hugely important in setting the program up for success.

Carey made some important changes right from the start. Rauch had originally envisioned the commissioned plays focusing on American presidents, just as Shakespeare’s plays focused on English monarchs. However, Carey and Rauch jointly determined that a focus on American presidents was too limited, opting instead to document “moments of change.” “It was an elegant way to bring many things together at once,” said Rauch. “I was lucky to have a good idea, but even more fortunate to have the right people to help develop the idea.”

Surprising results

Once in motion, the American Revolutions program excited staff and board members, the playwriting community, and OSF’s peers nationwide, many of which have since produced the new works on their own stages. OSF’s audiences were also riveted. In fact, OSF’s staff was surprised to find that some audiences preferred American Revolutions’ productions over their traditional Shakespearean works. “For us, it used to be that anything Shakespeare was a slam dunk with audiences and newer, contemporary work was associated with great risk,” explains Rauch. Now, OSF finds that newer work, such as The Liquid Plan, is selling at a higher capacity than audience favorites like A Midsummer Night’s Dream. OSF is watching these trends closely. Rauch explained that they wish to “figure out if this is a by-product of excitement over new work, or a real shift in how people are relating to Shakespeare.”

The American Revolutions program did so well at the box office that OSF’s leadership did not need to touch the $400,000 they had budgeted to draw from the Artistic Opportunity Fund in 2009 and 2010. These available resources gave OSF’s leadership further confidence to take more risks, and support other artistic endeavors, such as organizing a 14-member orchestra for a production of Pirates of Penzance.
In 2009, the organization utilized the Artistic Opportunity Fund to produce a traditional musical as its yearlong run. “That might sound like a slam dunk to some theaters, but it was an enormous risk for us – we’re a Shakespeare festival!” said Rauch. Among OSF’s peers, musical theater is traditionally seen as a staple of high school and community theater. Leadership worried that their most loyal audiences might push back. But again, their assumptions proved wrong. By producing musicals in OSF style, with a focus on innovative storytelling, the move proved an enormous success. Without the back-up resources in its discretionary fund, Rauch believes, the organization may not have taken the leap.

**Managing the fund**

In emergencies, OSF has needed to utilize the Artistic Opportunity Fund as an operating reserve to stabilize operations. In 2011, a load-bearing beam broke in one of OSF’s main theaters, taking the theater out of rotation for six weeks. Another year the Festival closed after smoke from a nearby wildfire wafted onto campus. In both cases earned revenue took a considerable hit and OSF looked to its discretionary fund to help it weather the rough patch. “Like most organizations,” said Rauch, “we must align resources, needs, and ambition.”

Since the Artistic Opportunity Fund’s inception, OSF has been on a cycle of deployment and replenishment of resources. “At the beginning we wondered whether we would be able to replenish what we used,” Rauch said. “But we found that many people don’t want this fund to dry up.” That said, the replenishment conversations OSF staff have had with foundations and major donors did not always come easily. Rauch acknowledged that OSF is constantly determining where artistic risk fits among other priorities and capital funds. “The rebalancing of priorities is key within any arts organization,” and business needs must always align with artistic vision. OSF’s new strategic planning process will address these issues head on.

**Culture of innovation**

While Shakespeare’s canon is still the core of OSF’s identity, risk taking is now a key component of its culture as well. As Rauch said, “there is risk in taking chances, but there is also huge risk in the sameness of approach. Audiences can expect a certain thing from you, but they can also be bored by that.” Rauch strives to continually provoke strong responses from audiences, and realizes that to do so, OSF’s artistic approach cannot stay the same. Art, Rauch believes, must always be dynamic.
An Interview with Abe Rybeck
Executive Artistic Director, The Theater Offensive

The Theater Offensive (TTO) was founded on passion, creativity, and desperation. After years of creating great art in survivalist mode, the organization found itself with a broken balance sheet and its future operations under threat. Knowing that it needed to take big risks and make deep cuts, TTO implemented a strategic plan that laid out a new vision to reinvigorate programming and recapitalize the organization, while staying true to its roots as a community-based and community-driven organization.

Background

The Theater Offensive grew out of a guerrilla street theater group in the mid-1980s focused on responding to the AIDS crisis, and fighting racism and homophobia in Boston. TTO's founder and Executive Director, Abe Rybeck, remembers the organization's early years, when the AIDS epidemic ravaged the community it sought to serve, as both passionate and tense. "Our reality was that people were dying in our organization and all around it. If someone told me at the beginning that we should put money away toward an operating reserve, I would have thought that was crazy. Every dollar put in a bank would be a dollar kept from saving someone," Rybeck remembers. For 18 years, TTO posted annual deficits or very small surpluses. Like many small arts organizations, Rybeck indicated that they were making ends meet by “spending tomorrow's money today.” And in some ways it worked. TTO consistently put on great productions with very little money. After some time this model became business as usual.

This cycle was especially hard on staff members. There were periods of cutbacks when TTO needed to lay off staff, and periods of growth when the organization increased its numbers. Such uncertainty meant that every year or two the organization would turn over a new set of employees. "It was amazing to have people stick around for two years,” Rybeck said.

Although highly stressful, this operating cycle persisted. The turning point finally came during a board meeting when TTO's president looked at the budget and exclaimed, “Does everything we do have to be impossible?” The board and staff were exhausted by TTO's history of setting unattainable goals. Rybeck remembers, "We were always measuring down from perfection instead of setting the standard at something doable and then meeting or exceeding it.” From that point on, TTO leadership and board members recognized that their status quo needed to change.

Righting the ship

In 2008, TTO participated in a project led by the Nonprofit Finance Fund that helped staff and board members learn about the importance of the balance sheet. Around the same time, TTO recruited a new board treasurer who was a full-time CFO at another nonprofit organization. The new treasurer took one look at TTO's finances and declared, “This is no way for an organization to live.” The organization had negative unrestricted net assets, serious debt, and its situation was getting worse as the effects of the global financial crisis set in. Although it seemed impossible at the time, her driving message was that TTO needed to produce consistent annual surpluses.

Following up on this diagnosis, the treasurer recommended a number of concrete steps to set TTO on the path towards financial health. First, TTO outsourced its accounting to an external firm. Rybeck met with the agency every week to review the organization's financial situation, forcing him
to face the reality of TTO’s finances and break bad habits such as spending incoming revenue three times over. The accountant also instilled a disciplined schedule for releasing restricted funds to TTO quarter-by-quarter. Although this process made managing the organization’s cash flow even more challenging, it also made it clear when TTO was trying to spend money it did not have.

During this period, Rybeck realized that TTO had to drastically reduce spending. The organization’s operating cash was at an all-time low, and every time they cut a check there was a question of where the resources would come from. Lastly, TTO carried debt. By 2010, to right the situation, Rybeck was forced to cut two-thirds of his staff. “It was devastating,” he recalls.

A new path

During this period, TTO board, staff, and community constituents were also engaged in a comprehensive strategic planning process. The organization’s board and staff realized that their new strategic direction needed to be excellent to justify the cuts happening across the organization. The upheaval propelled the board to consider even bigger questions. “We had to ask ourselves why do we exist,” Rybeck said, “and if we didn’t have a good answer, we needed to get out of the way and let other organizations emerge.”

To help determine the organization’s new strategic direction, TTO organized a series of community meetings. During these discussions it became clear that working with TTO’s neighbors in community to create place-based theater was a niche the organization could fill. This option also made financial sense. In prior years, TTO had paid large fees to rent formal performance spaces. With this new program, TTO could develop workshops and shows with community members and present them directly in neighborhood spaces. Board, staff, and community members responded with enthusiasm to the organization’s new direction – The Theater Offensive OUT In Your Neighborhood – and in June 2010, the strategic plan was approved.

To further reflect on its programmatic offerings, TTO rated each of its programs on 1) mission-relevance and 2) ability to bring in resources. Analyzing each program separately allowed TTO to deal with its financial problems piece by piece. This approach also helped the organization to challenge some of its internal myths. For example, staff determined that the Out on the Edge Queer Theater Festival, which had long been considered core to the organization’s identity and beloved by audiences, was not meeting the organization’s mission as well as other programs.

A capitalization strategy

Along with its new ideas for programming, TTO’s strategic plan laid out the following capitalization goals: produce annual surpluses, achieve sufficient cash coverage of restrictions, and by 2013, establish a cash reserve. The organization’s immediate priority, however, was to improve cash flow and recover its balance sheet.

In May and June of 2010, TTO conducted a campaign that introduced 30 of its largest and most committed donors to the organization’s new strategic direction. Rybeck knew that TTO donors had also been affected by the financial crisis, so rather than ask them to increase their gifts, he requested that they make a five-year pledge to maintain their current giving level. It was the first time TTO had strategically sought multi-year funding from its donor base. The request worked. In only a few months, TTO raised $200,000 of pledged recovery capital, which showed a positive trend on the balance sheet.
TTO also went to foundations with its strategic plan and asked for support. These were some of Rybeck's hardest conversations. Transitions were taking place within the Boston area foundation world and it seemed that each foundation relationship needed to be renewed. Finally, after months of difficult pitches, an out-of-state foundation granted the organization $100,000. TTO was able to leverage this major grant, along with individual donors’ multi-year pledges, to convince local foundations to support OUT in Your Neighborhood.

TTO continued to raise funds from every source it could to support operations. The organization also became more careful with its spending, and eventually budgeted for and achieved surpluses, without needing to make drastic cuts at the end of each fiscal year. When TTO finally found itself in a more stable position, with positive unrestricted net worth and a plan for debt repayment, it began to focus on building a cash reserve.

To determine the purpose and size of the reserve, the full board first engaged in a discussion about strategic and operational risk. Board members asked, “What are the negative risks that we face? What do we see as our biggest threat?” The board unanimously agreed that the biggest risk the organization faced was losing core staff. They also recognized that it would prove challenging to replace critical employees since TTO salaries were well below market rates. In response, the board created a “Compensation Fund” which set aside resources to increase the salaries of core staff and provide benefits to employees. The board’s commitment to this fund lifted staff spirits considerably. After everything that had happened, the staff saw the board prioritizing them and their commitment to the organization.

Moving forward

Rybeck believes that the board and staff gained a keener sense of the weight of their own responsibility throughout the process of organizational change. “Typically, when we think of innovation in the nonprofit sector,” Rybeck reflected, “we think it requires a lot of money on hand. This was not the case for TTO.”

Rybeck believes the organization would not have taken such bold risks on a new approach to its work had TTO not been in such serious financial distress. Though a painful and challenging period, the process of re-capitalizing taught Rybeck an important lesson: “When I look at a program that I think is sacred, I now take a tougher look, and ask: ‘Is it really so sacred? Is there a better way to do this?’” In the end, TTO board and staff now share a much clearer picture of the organization’s priorities. Moreover, there is evidence that this shared understanding has spread to TTO’s constituents. “Before, people did not understand everything we did,” Rybeck remarked, “but now, our strategic plan has made what we do crystal clear.”

TTO continues to push its boundaries artistically and operationally. In 2013, the organization set aside $75,000 in a cash reserve, and it has budgeted for another $75,000 in 2014. In a final reflection, Rybeck shared, “The biggest pleasure that has come out of this process is that now, instead of spending hours of time and days of my life dealing with the stress of cash flow, I can devote that time to what I care about most – taking artistic and social risks to accomplish our mission.”
Descriptions of organizations interviewed

Operaphila Philadelphia (Philadelphia, PA)
http://www.operaphila.org/
Founded in 1975, Opera Philadelphia (OP) is known for its exceptional presentations of both classical and new operatic works. OP’s seasons incorporate a wide breadth of programming, and the organization is recognized for its success in educating, developing, and diversifying the opera audience within and outside of Philadelphia. Opera Philadelphia is committed to producing dazzling productions of a conventional repertoire in new and original ways.

OP produces works that span from large-scale pieces to intimate chamber operas, community performances, and everything in between. Under the direction of General Director, David B. Devan, the company has initiated several new programs including the American Repertoire Program, a programmatic pledge to produce a new American work in each of the next ten OP seasons.

In its over 40 years of its existence, Opera Philadelphia has flourished. It continues to look toward the future with a commitment to providing audiences with new and innovative programming, high production value, artistry, and outreach. OP strives to create a community where opera is a crucial source of community engagement and inspiration.

Oregon Shakespeare Festival (Ashland, OR)
http://www.osfashland.org/
The Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) is a Tony-award-winning regional theater founded in Southern Oregon in 1935 by Angus L. Bowmer. Guided by its mission – “Inspired by Shakespeare’s work and the cultural richness of the US, we reveal our collective humanity through illuminating interpretations of new and classic plays, deepened by the kaleidoscope of rotating repertory” – OSF offers theatergoers a diversity of experience.

With a season that runs from February through early November, OSF produces 11 unique plays each season. Seasons consist of four plays by Shakespeare and seven others of different genres, including classic, modern, contemporary, and world premieres. OSF’s three theaters (two indoor and one outdoor) can produce up to nine different plays in one week. The festival experience includes not only live performances, but also backstage tours, park talks, lectures, classes, workshops, and more. According to OSF, 85% of its roughly 400,000 ticket holders come from 125 or more miles away, and from up and down the west coast, as well as the rest of the country.

For many years OSP performed only Shakespearean productions, but in 1970 the Festival extended the length of its season, as well as expanded its repertoire to include many more genres. OSF invites and welcomes audience members of all ages and backgrounds to be a part of the OSF community and build relationships with their neighbors through their theater experiences.

The Theater Offensive: OUT in Your Neighborhood (Boston, MA)
http://www.thetheateroffensive.org/
The Theater Offensive (TTO) was founded in 1989 by Artistic Director, Abe Rybeck, and a group of artist-activists. Its original goal was to expand upon the success of the gay men’s guerrilla theater troupe, the United Fruit Company. TTO’s mission is “to present the diversity of lesbian, gay,
bisexual, and transgender lives in art so bold it breaks through personal isolation, challenges the status quo, and builds thriving communities.”

TTO produces theater with an underlying goal to elicit lively discussions concerning the diverse realities of being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. The organization’s programming ranges from social gatherings and soirees to workshops and post-show discussions. TTO seeks to surpass conventional theater boundaries and unlock new doors of understanding, appreciation, and inclusion within queer communities in Boston and beyond.

All of TTO’s current programming lies within its “OUT In Your Neighborhood” approach, through which TTO works with and within LGBTQ and allied communities in Roxbury, Dorchester, the South End and Jamaica Plain. “OUT in Your Neighborhood” uses collective creation techniques to help community members make shows for their peers; presents neighborhood productions that bring residents in to help national artists develop more relevant shows; and hosts cultural events to create a space for dialogue and construct a safer, more connected community.
BARR-KLARMAN ARTS CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVE

The Profiles of Risk-Taking were commissioned by the Barr Foundation and Klarman Family Foundation for a seminar on capitalization offered to grantees participating the Barr-Klarman Arts Capacity Building Initiative.

In this Initiative, the Foundations seek to further Boston-area artistic vitality by investing in leading organizations and building connected learning communities. Over five years, they will infuse $22 million in two cohorts of mid-sized organizations and youth arts mastery organizations in the form of multi-year grants, knowledge-building activities, and technical assistance. The investment in mid-sized organizations stems from the belief that these organizations have the capacity to adapt organizationally and respond nimbly to a changing Boston. The investment in youth arts mastery organizations reflects a long-standing commitment by the Foundations to artistic excellence and nurturing the next generation of artists.

The Initiative aims to create a space in which cross-disciplinary relationships can form, new ideas can be tested, and organizations can work together to strengthen the collective sector. Training and technical assistance focus on four areas the Foundations see as critical to organizational success:

- achieving effective capitalization;
- diversifying audiences;
- defining and achieving mastery outcomes with youth; and
- growing cultural competency and proficiency.

TDC, acting as manager for the Arts Capacity Building Initiative, is one of the nation’s oldest and largest providers of management consulting services to the nonprofit sector. Since 1968, TDC has worked exclusively with nonprofit, governmental, educational and philanthropic organizations, providing them with the business and management tools critical to carrying out their missions effectively.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

**Mid-Sized Organizations**
- Actors’ Shakespeare Project
- American Repertory Theatre
- ArtsEmerson
- José Mateo Ballet Theatre
- Boston Ballet
- Boston Center for the Arts
- Boston Lyric Opera
- Handel and Haydn Society
- Hibernian Hall / Madison Park Development Corporation
- Huntington Theatre Company
- Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston
- Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum
- Lyric Stage Company of Boston

**Youth Arts Mastery**
- Artists for Humanity
- Boston Children’s Chorus
- Boston City Singers
- Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra
- Community Music Center of Boston
- From the Top
- Hyde Square Task Force
- OrigiNation Cultural Arts Center
- Project STEP
- Sociedad Latina
- The Theater Offensive
- URBANO Project
- West End House
- Youth and Family Enrichment Services
- Museum of African American History
- Villa Victoria Center for the Arts / Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción
- World Music/CRASHarts
- ZUMIX