

# Reaching for the Valley of the Sun

## The American Festival Project's *Untold Stories*

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*Linda Frye Burnham*

A writer approaching the American Festival Project (AFP) feels like one of the blind men trying to describe the elephant in the old fable: it's vast, and one has never seen anything like it before. This multicultural alliance of a dozen accomplished artists and performing-arts companies from all over the U.S. is a kind of movable arts feast. For 16 years they have been coming together in different configurations in cities and towns from coast to coast and border to border, producing a different festival in each location.

In theatre circles, the AFP is legendary for its lofty and far-reaching mission. Far from a traveling road show, the AFP thinks of itself as a cultural organizing tool, working with each of these communities to create an arts project that will leave lasting social change in its wake. The AFP is worth watching, if only because of the merits of each of its member companies, all of whom bear bona fide community-arts credentials and are vital arts powerhouses in their home communities. The combination of these talents can add up to some awesome potential.

Wherever the AFP works, it draws many artists into its net, but the "core" companies now include Carpetbag Theatre (Knoxville, TN), Junebug Productions (New Orleans, LA), Liz Lerman Dance Exchange (Takoma Park, MD), Robbie McCauley and Company (New York, NY), Pregones Theater (Bronx, NY), Roadside Theater (Whitesburg, KY), El Teatro de la Esperanza (San Francisco, CA), A Traveling Jewish Theatre (San Francisco, CA), Urban Bush Women (New York, NY); writer-directors Steven Kent (Los Angeles, CA) and Nayo Watkins (Durham, NC); and producers Caron Atlas (New York, NY) and Theresa Holden (Austin, TX).

After hearing impressive and exciting tales of AFP adventures in Montana, Louisiana, California, Mississippi, and elsewhere, I was eager to view this phenom up close and see for myself if it could live up to its reputation. I went to Arizona for the *Untold Stories Festival: Celebrating Campus and Community*, a three-and-a-half-year project (1996–1999) partnering five AFP artistic compa-



1. Zarco Guerrero, a local Phoenix artist, performs in mask at the Untold Stories festival, Grady Gammage Auditorium. (Photo by Andrey Hemandez-Garcia)

ties with Arizona State, one of the largest universities in the country, not to mention some 20 campus and community organizations. Flying into Phoenix from my home in North Carolina in November 1998 and April 1999, I twice stepped into the desert whirlwind of *Untold Stories*, rushing from meetings to story circles to workshops to performances on campus and in classrooms, in community centers, in civic buildings, in a small Mexican village, and finally, on a quiet Indian reservation outside town. My suitcase is full of articles and playscripts, photographs and recordings, programs and emails and notes taken in the dark. As I reach out for the elephant, it is hard to know where to begin...

The AFP story probably begins with the history of grassroots theatre in America, going back at least as far as the Federal Theater Projects of the Works Projects Administration. The plot thickened considerably with the civil rights and student movements of the 1950s and '60s, and with the women's, migrant-labor, and gay liberation movements of the '70s, '80s, and '90s. Throughout those periods of dynamic social flux, theatre artists all over the country have been cleaving to the same grassroots principles, working intensively in different geographic areas, but with similar intent.

This is a progressive creative impulse that takes its support and inspiration from the political, economic, and social struggles of people at the street level of society. Basic to its philosophy is the idea that the artist is as much a part of a community as anyone else, is just as responsible for the community's well-being, and is capable of using his or her skills to change things for the better.

Those principles need elaboration, and might well be stated here as an introduction to the innovative work now being undertaken by the artists of the American Festival Project. Some of them are succinctly put in *From the Ground Up*,<sup>1</sup> a report from a notable multicultural gathering of grassroots theatre artists in 1992 at Cornell University, written (along with others) by Dudley Cocke, a founding spirit in the AFP. The following "matrix" (slightly

paraphrased) was drawn from the Cornell gathering. These principles can fairly be said to underlie much of the best grassroots work now being conducted in all disciplines under the rubric “community-based art” (Cocke et al. 1993).

#### A Matrix Articulating the Principles of Grassroots Theatre

**Art of a people:** Grassroots theatre is given its voice by the community from which it arises. The makers of grassroots theatre are part of the culture from which the work is drawn. The people who are the subjects of the work are part of its development from inception through presentation. Their stories and histories inform the work, their feedback during the creation process shapes it. The audience is not consumer of, but participant in the performance.

**A sense of place:** Grassroots theatre grows out of a commitment to place. It is grounded in the local and specific, which, when rendered faithfully and creatively, can affect people anywhere.

**Tradition:** The traditional and indigenous are integral to grassroots theatre, and valued for their ability to help us maintain continuity with the past, respond to the present, and prepare for the future. Thus, the relationship to the traditional and indigenous is dynamic, not fixed.

**Inclusion:** Grassroots theatre strives to be inclusive in its producing practices. Presentation of the work is made in partnership with community organizations. Performances are held in meeting places where the entire community feels welcome. Ticket prices are kept affordable.

**Collective responsibility:** Grassroots theatre recognizes that management structures and business practices are value-laden; they affect the mission, goals, and creative processes of organizations through their structure and practices, self-reliance and collective responsibility.

**Struggling for equity:** Grassroots theatre is linked to the struggles for cultural, social, economic, and political equity for all people. It is fundamentally a theatre of hope, and often of joy. It is recognized that to advocate for equity is to meet resistance, and to meet with no resistance indicates a failure to enter the fight.

#### *Taking It on the Road*

With those principles established, to a greater or lesser degree, in work at their home bases, grassroots theatre artists began, in the early 1980s, to look toward creating exchange and dialogue among communities within and outside their regions, and exchange with other cultures. Over the last 15 years much discussion has arisen about how this is to be done: How does one culture or community encounter another?

This deep thinking about how artists move in the world also arose from some very practical consideration for these small artistic companies, for instance, Roadside Theater from Appalachian Kentucky. Roadside had become



2. Artists of Junebug Productions and Roadside Theater in their play *Junebug/Jack*, performed at Grady Gammage Auditorium, Phoenix, 9 April 1999. (Photo by Jeff Whetstone; courtesy of Roadside Theater)



3. Artists of *Idiwanan An Chave* and *Roadside Theater* in their play *Corn Mountain/Pine Mountain*, performed at the *Empty Space Theater*, Tempe, Arizona, 14 February 1998, and at *Grady Gammage Auditorium* in Phoenix on 11 April 1999. (Photo by Tim Cox; courtesy of *Roadside Theater*)

an essential participant in the self-discovery of their own rural place, the coal fields of the Cumberland Plateau, where they are part of the legendary Appalshop cultural center. *Roadside's* original musical theatre works are drawn from the history, character, and social struggles of the people of Appalachia. Their goals, like Appalshop's, were the perpetuation of cultural heritage, and collaboration with the community to create a contemporary cultural identity linked to progressive social change. The Plateau's—and the central Appalachian region's—relationship with their artists is a grassroots partnership based in ongoing dialogue via live performance, film, video, music recording, printed word, and a continuously broadcasting radio station.<sup>2</sup>

But the Appalachian economy is lean. *Roadside* must go on tour much of every year to bring in enough income to stay alive. In the early '80s, touring was going well, but the artists were suffering: Instead of the hail-and-farewell of the one-night-stand touring circuit, they longed for the fruitful interaction with the working-class audience that they had come to prize so deeply at home. Even more intense was the longing to stay in those communities over time in extended residencies, and to leave an inclusive, progressive artmaking process alive in those places when they departed for home.

The same desire was shared with many of their artistic colleagues in the southeast and elsewhere. Touring, they felt, could become so much more than a way to shore up a company's budget. These visits to communities all over the U.S. had to be brought up to the standards the artists were striving to uphold at home. They had a clear vision of the intimate connection between the quality and character of a people's political, economic, and cultural participation. To lose sight of that vision on the road was to be less than honest with themselves.

### *The Vision Comes Alive*

Sixteen years later *Roadside* and its colleagues continue to strive toward that vision for the arts—at home, and wherever they go. As the American Festival Project, these dozen theatre companies have created a mechanism for working together in community residencies all over the U.S.

Their goal is to help build coalitions, stimulate dialogue, and explore and celebrate the diversity of the culture in each place the festival happens. To do the job right—craft a long-term residency, and leave something in place at the end of it—they have had to create strategies for community-based artmaking on a grand and complex scale. They do this by looking for partners in the host community, combining strengths not only with local artists, but partnering also with a community's activists, educators, and presenters.

Since 1991 the American Festival Project has created major festivals in 45 communities across the country, with AFP companies bringing works from their own repertoires and producing new works with the people of their host communities. *Encuentro/Coming Together* in 1991 was a collaboration with the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in Texas to coproduce festivals in Appalachia and San Antonio as an exchange of Appalachian and Chicano cultures and concerns. Also in 1991, a number of AFP's touring artists met for the *Urban Cultures Festival* in Philadelphia, joining a citywide network of community-based cultural and activist organizations.

The Mississippi American Festival Project in 1991/92 reached across a whole state for a season-long collaboration with a network of community-based organizations, rural arts centers, and colleges. They created artworks based on stories of local history, culture, and lore, with a focus on Mississippi's struggles for social, economic, and political justice and empowerment.

In its second intensive association with a major academic institution (the first was with Cornell), the AFP carried out what some consider its most successful long-term residency on the Dartmouth College campus in 1992, with the mission of helping "to drive this institution of higher learning forward in its search for tolerance and respect for diversity" (ASUPE 1999).

In 1993, *Cross Poly Nation/Trans Poli Nación* took place on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border at San Diego. The "cultural dialogue about strengthening the community through coalition-building" among more than 40 partners was led by San Diego's Centro Cultural de la Raza (American Festival Project 1993).

Ambitions leapt far forward with the three-year *Montana American Festival Project*, 1993 to 1995. This statewide storytelling project was intended to honor Montana's diversity by focusing on pride of place and pride of identity. Farmers and ranchers, environmentalists, students, gay men, and lesbians were involved in "story circles" and performances. Director Steven Kent organized a series of gay/lesbian culture workshops across the state, which became an organizing tool for Montana Gay Pride and ultimately resulted in the state's oppressive antigay legislation being declared unconstitutional (Kent 1999).

Simultaneously, another three-year project got underway in Florida: *Miami X Change*, 1994 to 1997. It took on the task of promoting understanding and mutual respect between Miami's African American and Haitian American communities. Artists, educators, and civic organizations from both communities joined with the Wolfson Campus of Miami-Dade Community College, the AFP, and an array of international artists to explore culture together.

At the same time, a mammoth project started up in Louisiana around the issue of environmental racism. The *Environmental Justice Festival* (1993–1998) sought to link community activists with artists as real social-change agents addressing environmental racism along the polluted Mississippi River. AFP's Partners included the Gulf Coast Tenants Association, the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, New Orleans Youth Action Corporation, Christian Unity Baptist Church, and Chakula Cha Jua Theater Company (Schwarzman 1996).

As time goes by, the correspondence among all these groups of people has become voluminous as the AFP tries to keep track of the new theatre and performance companies, coalitions and cultural exchanges that have sprung up in its path across America.

Each of these festivals deserves a book in itself, rich with struggle and learning, friendships and enmities, hardships and failures, miracles and changes, pride and regret. To talk with the artists and administrators of the AFP about any one of them is to uncover a new agenda for next time: What did we learn about how we can keep going and do it better?

### *The Process: Doing the Right Thing*

By 1999, a multiphase process had been developed through trial-and-error and much deep consultation with hundreds of participants all over the country. Roughly, here's how it goes:

AFP gets a letter of interest from a prospective festival site—often a community where one of the individual companies has had a successful visit—and discussions of ideas for a collaboration begin among the AFP staff and artists, and with potential local partners. The site submits a proposal to the AFP board of directors, dealing with the project's purpose and goals.<sup>3</sup> They all meet face-to-face, and decide whether or not to work together. AFP then presents the host site with a roster of AFP companies who are interested in and available for the project, and together they select the companies that match the project goals and timeline.

The “producing coalition” comes together through a general call for interest. With inclusion as a goal, the partners use existing local networks to find the most diverse group possible, which may include presenters, arts organizations, community groups, local agencies, civic leaders, educators, students, media makers, and artists. They develop a blueprint for the festival, including programs, budget, and fundraising plans.

One innovative and important element of the process is that the AFP is always a coproducer—through its national staff, artists, and liaisons at the site—contributing financial and technical assistance through fee and site subsidies, personnel, joint fundraising, documentation, and evaluation.

The AFP artists who agree to join the project must visit the site as many times as possible to plan their residencies with presenters and the community partners. Documentation and evaluation are to take place throughout the entire process. After the performances, workshops, dialogues, and exhibitions are over, the work may continue through follow-up residencies.

As must be obvious, this process is very long and expensive,<sup>4</sup> and requires extended and intense negotiations among friends and strangers, sometimes creating lifetime bonds, and sometimes lasting estrangement. But nobody ever expected it to be easy.

### *The Rising of the Sun*

*Untold Stories Festival: Celebrating Campus and Community* took place in and around Phoenix, Arizona, in what is known locally as the Valley of the Sun, from 1996 to 1999. AFP companies involved were Roadside Theater, Junebug Productions, El Teatro de la Esperanza, and Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, along with Roadside's long-time partner from Zuni, New Mexico, Idiwanan An Chawe; each company worked with four or five of the campus and community groups who showed interest in participating. The local presenter was Arizona State University (ASU) at Tempe (a Phoenix suburb). The story of the festival—its goals, how it developed, who took part, what was learned, and what remains—is a story about turn-of-the-century community-based artmaking at its most ambitious level.

The idea for an American Festival Project in the Phoenix area arose when Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, Executive Director of ASU Public Events



(ASUPE), first encountered the AFP in 1992, while directing the presenting program at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. She was impressed with the energy engendered by the AFP activities on the Dartmouth campus (approximately 200 activities with some 45 partners), and the students' apparent discovery of a new meaning of the concept of an educational community. The Dartmouth festival set her agenda for the future. "Once you work in this context," says Jennings-Roggensack, "you evolve and change. And you can never not think in that direction again" (1998a). It was her idea to bring such an experience to her new post at ASU, partnering the American Festival Project with one of the biggest universities in the U.S. (45,000 students in 1999). If AFP is indeed like the elephant in the fable, says Dudley Cocke, this was "the elephant on steroids."

Jennings-Roggensack arrived at ASU fired up about the ways performance can connect people. Her office, Public Events, is the university's presenting entity, responsible for booking work into the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Gammage Auditorium, the intimate Kerr Cultural Center in nearby Scottsdale, and the mammoth Sundome in the West Valley. This means presenting a vast array of events and exhibitions every year, from a small show of local artists' colored pencil drawings, to a Broadway roadshow of *Fiddler on the Roof*—and not just arts events, but tractor pulls, basketball games, and the Super Bowl.

When Jennings-Roggensack and AFP members decided to title the project *Untold Stories*, she immediately annexed that concept as an umbrella for everything her office would present throughout the year. "This year," she said in a publicity release, "ASU Public Events will explore some of the untold stories which connect communities by helping us to see each other and ourselves from new perspectives" (ASUPE 1998). "As we begin to think about the arts and the role of presenters," she added in an interview, "I really see us as helping to support and hold communities together":

4. In Corn Mountain/Pine Mountain, long-time collaborators Idiwanan An Chawe and Roadside Theater explore commonalities of the cultures in Zuni and Appalachia. For *Untold Stories*, the piece was performed in Tempe's Empty Space Theatre and Phoenix's Grady Gammage Auditorium. (Photo by Tim Cox; courtesy of Roadside Theater)

People can share experiences and come together on an even footing. There's a lot of art that needs to be connected. There's a role as a presenter in particular, that I play in having those voices speak together, work together, and then actualize themselves together in the hopes that it will continue after I'm gone. Public Events will always do this, because it's in the fabric of what our mission's about. It's our core—connecting communities through the arts. (Jennings-Roggensack 1998a)

It was in this spirit that *Untold Stories* was born. “The American Festival Project is a natural,” said Jennings-Roggensack. “But Dartmouth was small. This project is big! Here it's geographical distance, language distance” (1998b).

One of the rules of engagement among AFP artists and their colleagues is an overt statement of the goals of all parties, because, as John O'Neal has often noted, no one ever acts out of anything other than self-interest.

The university had practical motives, and stated them outright. From the beginning Jennings-Roggensack saw *Untold Stories* as an opportunity for the university to interact with the many communities of the Phoenix valley, creating a new face for the institution. ASU President Lattie Coor had already established cultural diversity as one of ASU's “four pillars to its efforts to recruit and retain students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds” (ASUPE 1999), and ASUPE had developed an Outreach and Development Department in 1993/94. The department turned to the visual and performing arts to “develop appreciation and understanding among Arizona's diverse cultures” (ASUPE 1999). It had worked with a number of local organizations to create events that directly involved the Native American (the *Drawing the Lines Festival*), the Latino (the *South No Border* series), and the African American (the *African Diaspora* series) populations of metropolitan Phoenix.

For *Untold Stories*, Jennings-Roggensack saw ways to use, deepen, and multiply the community connections her office had already tendered. In setting its sites on the project, ASUPE decided on three goals: to increase staff and student involvement in ASUPE programs; to celebrate the cultural diversity of ASU and the metro Phoenix community; and to expose more local communities to the arts (Lewis 1999).

5. Students from Sierra Vista Elementary School who participated in the *Untold Stories* festival, Grady Gammage Auditorium. (Photo by Michael Villalobos)





For AFP, the artists' challenge for *Untold Stories* was to move their own process along in its evolution. They had worked with both Cornell and Dartmouth in previous festivals, but this Arizona project presented a scale and scope of partnership that was larger than anything they had tried before. AFP agreed to provide 25 percent of the artists' fees, as a way of declaring ownership in the project. "The artists set a place at the table to speak to what they want to do in the community," says AFP *Untold Stories* Project Director Theresa Holden.<sup>5</sup>

"This ensures the vision of the artists. Everybody has a share in the risk, blame and glory. It's about getting everybody to agree that we're all in it together, and agree on the general values and goals of the project" (Holden 1998b).

Meanwhile, AFP leaders and Holden, the AFP site liaison and producer, were thinking of the project in three concentric circles, and wondering how they would close the distance between them. "The first circle was tight and solid," said Dudley Cocke in a later interview. It consisted of the partnerships between the AFP artists and the particular community groups. The second circle consisted of a connection among all those various partners, "the people from the Campus Police with the people from the Boys and Girls Clubs." The third circle was the connection among the university and the first two circles "in a transformative way for them. It's like when you drop a pebble in the water," said Cocke:

and the intensity of the first ring is more than the second and the third. How to get them closer so the energy would be more intense for everyone? How to get them spinning together? We were pretty sure about the first circle, because that's where we were working. But what about the others? (1999c)

In spite of all this goal setting, however, other than a fee contract, there was never an agreement or compact about how decisions would be made and power shared in a manner equitable to all the partners' interests. ASU, as eventually became obvious, had control over it all.

### *The Artists and Their Partners*

Planning proceeded throughout 1996 and 1997, with AFP and ASU acting as partners in a series of workshops, performances, meetings, and dialogues. ASUPE put out a call to the campus and surrounding communities for participants. They used all their existing networks, connections, and meetings, inviting anyone and everyone to participate and to pass the word. Any name could be volunteered and that person would immediately receive a personal invitation to join the project. Participants were self-selected; all they had to do was show up. More than 40 local artists, campus organizations, civic and social-service groups answered the call, reflecting the cultural makeup of the metropolitan Phoenix area, including African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Caucasians of all ages. Community partners in the festival eventually shook down to 20 who became fully engaged in the project.

Company representatives of each of the five AFP partners in *Untold Stories* traveled to Tempe six to ten times each year in 1998 and 1999 for half- to full-week visits, working with community partners in workshops and residencies. Each company presented one or more performances from its repertoire as part of *Untold Stories* from fall 1997 through spring 1999. Altogether, the projects featured many public events and performances, more than half of which included community partners in principal artistic capacities. Each of the five artist companies performed in the festival finale at Grady Gammage Auditorium 9 to 11 April 1999.

Taking a slice through this massive chunk of activity, Roadside Theater's records show 84 activities in Arizona for members of that company scheduled between 19 September 1998 and 11 April 1999. These include strategy sessions with ASUPE staff, planning meetings with the artists, workshops with the community partners, story circles with the children, organizing meetings with the police, trips to the Pima reservation, coffees, suppers, tech and performance rehearsals, interviews, classes, community picnics, script reviews, assessments, and debriefings. In Roadside's project diary, each company stint in Arizona is followed with written notes recording Roadside's goals, current burning issues, evaluation of progress, and items that need follow-through.

### Meet the Artists

The five AFP companies that participated in *Untold Stories* were selected by ASU and AFP from a list of available artists prepared by AFP, showing each company's strengths and availability. Choices were made based on the project's shared goals and ASU's connections in the community.

**El Teatro de la Esperanza** is one of the oldest Chicano theatre companies in the country, and the only Chicano company that conducts annual national and regional tours. Inspired by the Chicano movement of the late 1960s, students at UC Santa Barbara formed the group in 1970. In 1986, the company relocated to San Francisco, where the group continues to develop works that are based on and draw from the culture, history, and mythology of the Latino experience.

For *Untold Stories*, El Teatro worked primarily with the Centro de Amistad, a behavioral and mental-health service agency in the Yaqui community of Guadalupe. El Teatro Artistic Director Rodrigo Duarte Clark worked with Centro participants to write and present a Christmas *pastorela* in December 1998. An important collaborator was Zarco Guerrero, a local performance artist, cultural activist, master maskmaker, and visual artist.

For the April 1999 festival weekend, El Teatro presented *Do a Rosita's Jalapeño Kitchen*, a hilarious performance piece written and directed by Duarte Clark for San Antonio artist Ruby Nelda Perez. In the piece, Do a Rosita invites the audience for the "Last Supper" in her barrio of Salsipuedes (Get-out-if-you-can), while she contemplates selling her restaurant/home of 23 years to make way for a new shopping mall. El Teatro also presented *Don't Leave Me, Baby* at Gammage in March 1998.

**Idiwanan An Chawe**, based in Zuni Pueblo, New Mexico, is the first-ever Zuni-language theatre/performance company. The group incorporates Zuni storytelling, music, and traditional song and dance to reclaim, preserve, and celebrate the traditional cultural arts of the Native American tribe. The company's name Idiwanan An Chawe translates as Children of the Middle Place.

For *Untold Stories*, Idiwanan An Chawe worked at St. Peter Indian Mission School, a Catholic school on the Gila River Reservation, serving the Pima Indian tribe. The Zuni artists included young teenaged dancers who performed their traditional dances for

6. *El Teatro de la Esperanza's* production of *Do a Rosita's Jalapeño Kitchen* at Grady Gammage Auditorium, March 1998. (Photo by Michael Villalobos)



the children at St. Peter's, and worked with the Pima children to develop a performance of their own tribal dances. Zuni performer/playwright Edward Wemytewa organized a joint festival performance of Zuni and Pima dancers. Wemytewa also worked with Which Way Productions, an emerging performance group of adult Phoenix Native Americans from diverse backgrounds and tribes, who credit ASU's *Drawing the Lines* festival with inspiring the creation of their group in 1995. Another Idiwanan An Chawe partner was the Boys & Girls Club—Red Mountain Branch in Scottsdale, serving a gang-ridden neighborhood. Children from the club performed in the April festival weekend.

Idiwanan An Chawe performed several times throughout the festival with Roadside Theater in their collaborative play *Corn Mountain/Pine Mountain: Following the Seasons*, about the commonalities of the cultures in Zuni and Appalachia. The piece is performed in English and Zuni. Idiwanan An Chawe also presented *They Lived in a Beautiful Place* at Gammage in November 1998.

**Junebug Productions**, organized in 1980, is heir to the Free Southern Theater, which was founded in 1963 as an instrument of the civil rights movement. Based in New Orleans, Junebug Productions' mission is "to create and present theatre that supports and encourages those who work to end oppression and exploitation of African Americans in the Black Belt South and other oppressed people throughout the world." To fulfill this mission, Junebug Productions has three components: a touring company, local and national artist presenting, and community-development programs.

Junebug performers John O'Neal and Adella Gautier worked on a storytelling project with the Carver/PUCH Museum and Cultural Center, a nonprofit organization that exists to preserve the history and increase public awareness of Phoenix Union Colored High School (PUCH), later named George Washington Carver High School. Founded in the early 1920s for the education of African American children exclusively, Carver/PUCH is an example of the decades of racial segregation of Phoenix schools. Carver/PUCH collaborated in a story-sharing in February 1998 with Sierra Vista School, a Phoenix junior high school with a predominately Latino and African American student population. Junebug also worked with the Sisters with Tongues Performance Group, the New World Theater, and the ASU African American Studies Program.

For the festival, O'Neal and Gautier performed with Roadside Theater in their collaborative musical-theatre work *Junebug/Jack*, created over the past 10 years with the hope of sharing each other's audiences—one predominantly white, the other predominantly black—both economically hard-pressed. The play features two culturally significant characters: "Jack," an archetypal Appalachian hero, and "Junebug," a mythic African American folk character invented by people from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee during the 1960s to represent the collective wisdom of struggling black people. Both Junebug and Jack represent "the triumph of wit over power, of the human spirit over oppression" (ASUPE 1999). Junebug also presented *Gumbo Pot* at Gammage in February 1998.

**Liz Lerman Dance Exchange**, based in Takoma Park, Maryland, near Washington, DC, was founded in 1976. The dance/theatre group, a company of performers whose ages span six decades, leads the new movement of "community-based dance." The company creates modern dance, performance art, and site-specific works that challenge boundaries between stage and audience, theatre and community, movement and language, traditional and "the unexplored." Its work consists of formal concerts, interactive performances, specialized community residencies, and professional training. The Dance Exchange has recently opened a school at its home base.

The Lerman company worked with The Entertainers, an amateur performance group in Phoenix's Ahwatukee retirement community, and with the

ASU Dance Repertory Theatre (DART), Hillel Jewish Student Center, a Phoenix charter school called Teen Choice Leadership Academy, and the ASU Department of Theatre Arts. This collaboration resulted in the most enjoyable collaboration of the festival, *The Gammage Tour: The Other Side of the Mountain*, in which guides took the audience on a tour of the Gammage Theater.

The Dance Exchange also presented two works of modern dance during the April festival weekend: *Getting to Hallelujah* from their mammoth work-in-progress, *Hallelujah*; and *Flying into the Middle*, with an exquisite, rare appearance by Liz Lerman herself in a dance-and-text meditation on being middle-aged and middle-class. The company also conducted an interactive dance workshop in the Sundome at Sun City West in October 1998.

**Roadside Theater's** home is in the Appalachian Mountains of east Kentucky and southwest Virginia. The company performs its original plays about Appalachia and its people for audiences in the mountains and across the United States. It has represented the U.S. at international festivals in Sweden, Denmark, England, and the Czech Republic. Roadside is one part of Appalshop, a homegrown arts and humanities center, which for 23 years has been providing opportunities for Appalachian people to express themselves in their own voice.

Roadside worked with the "classified staff" of ASU and students in a communications class, creating a performance script from the life stories of the staff that was presented in fall 1998 as *Highly Classified*. Roadside also worked with state police officers assigned to work at the campus, eventually presenting a series of pieces by the officers during the April weekend. Roadside also worked as mentors with a partnership between the Boys & Girls Club of Metropolitan Phoenix, a dynamic group serving young people from the most threatened and vulnerable urban neighborhoods, and the Phoenix Theater's Cookie Company; they performed energetically in the April festival, at a large convention, and in many other community situations.

Roadside appeared with both Idiwanan An Chawe and Junebug Productions in the performances mentioned above. The company also organized *Roadside Theater and Friends*, an evening at the upscale Kerr Cultural Center in Scottsdale in November of 1998, featuring Roadside, Idiwanan An Chawe, Zarco Guerrero, and the student dancers from the Gila River reservation.

Some of these performances will be described in greater detail below.

### *AFP Methodology: The Story Circle*

At the heart of *Untold Stories* was one of AFP's most time-honored methods: the story circle. "The success of this work," said Theresa Holden in the festival program:

is the communities' discovery of the inherent value of their previously "unheard" stories, the power of sharing them publicly, and their dedication to continue telling their stories. The recognition of the power of stories to create positive change is reinforced by projects such as this. Transformation can only occur when the source of change is internal. Stories can be such a source of change because they come from within, and are wholly owned by the teller. (ASUPE 1999)

The artists in the individual AFP companies also saw great value in such stories. "All the Native American communities we partnered with have concerns about certain aspects of their own culture dying out; for example, the stories, songs, and dancing," said Edward Wemytewa, director of Idiwanan An Chawe, who had been working with a Pima Indian mission school on the

Gila reservation outside Phoenix. “St. Peter Indian Mission School’s principal said to me: ‘A Pima elder, Emmet White, has had a dream of one day seeing Pima students singing their own tribal songs; he just about shed a tear when he saw the students do that’” (ASUPE 1999).

The story circle is a simple process of sitting in a circle and sharing stories that is based, of course, on an interactive process as old as the human race. Roadside Theater’s manual on the process, *You and Your Community’s Story*, talks about that tradition:

At one time, stories lived in the memories and in the ritual tellings of the people. They had both aesthetic and utilitarian dimensions. They enthralled and taught. [...] Roadside Theater focuses on the oral tradition, not to replace or ignore the written word, but to find its soul. (Roadside Theater 1995)

In the AFP process, each story circle has its own purpose. In the case of *Untold Stories*, the immediate purpose was to gather stories from which to draw performances for the festival. The circles consist of from 5 to 25 people, and each story is of importance no matter what its style; stories might be family history stories, local history stories, folklore, ghost stories, or even riddles or jokes passed down through the generations. Each story circle has a leader or facilitator who begins, moves along, and ends the circle, and guidelines have been drawn from years of experience to pilot the facilitator in his or her duties.

Roadside’s booklet on the process suggests questions that might be used to spark stories, such as: Who are you? What is your ancestry? Where do you live? How do you define the boundaries of the place you live in? Does your family tell stories? What is your favorite story about your own childhood? What is one way of life from your own childhood you wish was still the same now? Oral and written-word exercises have also been worked out to help the process along.

*You and Your Community’s Story* also offers guidelines for collecting oral histories through interviews with family members, neighbors, friends, fellow workers, and students. Suggestions are given for sharing the collected stories in story and music swaps. What stands out in this process is inclusion of everyone in the circle, respect for the individual teller and the tale, and learning how to listen. The story’s owner is always included in decisions about which stories are performed in public performance, and about if and how they are edited.

One of the *Untold Stories* partners already well acquainted with story circles and their benefits was Kristin Bervig Valentine, an ethnographer and professor of communications and women’s studies in ASU’s Hugh Downs Department of Human Communication. Each year Valentine teaches an undergraduate performance studies course called “Performance of Oral Traditions,” in which students learn to tell, gather, transcribe, and perform stories from their own lives and those of their families or acquaintances. Her purpose is to give students an unusual introduction to ethnographic techniques.

“It’s a way of getting students to step into other people’s shoes,” says Valentine, “of understanding their own and other people’s beliefs, attitudes and ways of looking at the world” (Valentine 1999). Students not only collect and perform stories, they report on their interaction with interview subjects, and describe how they were able to establish rapport.

Valentine had been working at ASU for two decades when *Untold Stories* rolled around, and she knew every one of the “classified staff” members: the administrative assistants, electricians, and staff supervisors who keep the university going. “That’s a voice we don’t hear very often,” says Valentine. She went to the Classified Council to ask for volunteers to tell stories to her students, and

the resulting interviews and student performances of those stories in class inspired her to take the work to a larger audience. Auditions for the performance were open to all, and the cast became half students and half staff, performing the staff stories. Valentine worked with student assistants Jennifer Shamrock and Amanda Hubber to craft the stories into a script. “We looked at 50 stories and chose 27. Only one performer told his own story,” says Valentine.

After weeks of Saturday rehearsals, the performance of *Highly Classified* took place from 17 through 25 October 1998 at ASU’s Memorial Union. “Not the best performance site,” says Valentine, “but the point was to get as many staff listening as possible, and I knew staff wouldn’t go to a student production in a theater” (1999).

Stories told in performance were “stories about their lives they wouldn’t mind seeing onstage,” says Valentine. Her favorite example is the story of a man who had been estranged from his daughter for two years and was making her a scrapbook about his life. During the period of the student interviews, the man received a call from his daughter in Tucson, who told him she had had a baby out of wedlock and had been ashamed to contact him. He was thrilled to learn he was a grandfather.

The intimacy of the process brought students and staff together, most for the first time. “We didn’t simply collect stories,” said one student. “We formed personal relationships with people we sometimes take for granted, but who make our lives a little easier. We found we were evaluating our own beliefs and values, and questioning why we look at the world as we do” (Afflet 1999).

The energy of the project was so infectious that ASU President Lattie Coor made a cameo appearance at a scholarship fundraising performance of the piece. A month later the cast was still hanging out together, attending another *Untold Stories* performance at Kerr Cultural Center in Scottsdale, and making plans to take their show on the road to the Western States Communication Association convention in Vancouver that fall.

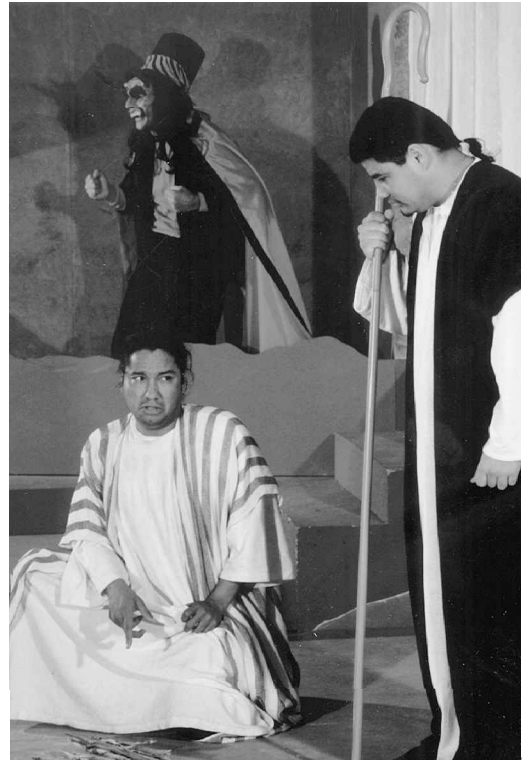
Valentine’s *Untold Stories* partner was Roadside Theater, and Dudley Cocke visited her class four times to do story circles with the students and talk about the importance of story in community-building. “He was a real inspiration to the students,” says Valentine, “and he gave me a lot of help as a director for the performance” (Valentine 1999).

### Success: La Pastorela

An example of a different use of story is *La Pastorela*. As a small case study of one part of *Untold Stories*, it is interesting to consider this project, in terms of the goals of the participants, the process, and the effects on the community. Of all the many efforts that were part of *Untold Stories*, the consensus is that *La Pastorela* went the way all the festival partners hoped it would. Everyone’s goals were met, the project will continue to feed the community in the future, and a good time was had by all.

*La Pastorela* was a Christmas performance/ritual, El Teatro de la Esperanza’s collaboration with the local Yaqui Indian community and the Centro de Amistad in Guadalupe. Teatro’s director Rodrigo Duarte Clark wrote and directed the piece. Cast and crew were drawn from El Teatro and the local Chicano community, including Guadalupe residents, and people affiliated with the Centro. It took place in the very heart of the community, where residents go on a regular basis, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church (in perfect accord with the principles of the grassroots matrix).

Drive down the byways of Guadalupe, and you’re in a Mexican village that revolves around its church and its *mercado*, or marketplace. Only a few blocks away is one of the biggest shopping malls in the world, and the village is



ringed by golf resorts. Guadalupe managed to wrench its identity from the onslaught of history by incorporating and declaring itself a separate entity from the sprawling city.

The pastorela is a traditional but malleable form of *teatro*, or popular theatre, and versions of it are widely performed in Latino communities in Mexico and the U.S. every year. It enacts the story of a journey to Bethlehem by a group of shepherds who encounter an army of devils and an army of angels. Chicano studies scholar Yolanda Broyles-González describes it as clearly linked to story traditions:

Although these dramatic pieces exist in written form, they nonetheless manifest numerous traits that link them to oral tradition and to the oral performance mode: improvisation, oral transmission from generation to generation through memorization, the use of a number of generic stock characters, the existence of numerous versions throughout the Mexican republic and the southwestern United States. [...] In typical oral tradition style, all scripts undergo constant transformation as they pass from person to person [and] have traditionally survived as [...] cyclical community rituals that address and transmit communal beliefs, critiques, and values. (1994:60)

In writing the script for Guadalupe's pastorela, Duarte Clark researched different Chicano and Mexican forms, and delved into the history of Guadalupe itself for local traditions and references to its Yaqui culture. He discovered that in Mexico's Rio Yaqui Valley there is a village called Belen, which translates as Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus. Belen lies in the Sonoran Desert, as does Guadalupe, Arizona, and both feature fertile river valleys as well. Duarte Clark's pastorela theme became the proposition that perhaps Jesus appeared in Belen,

7. Actor, maskmaker, musician, and muralist Zarco Guerrero as *The Devil* in *La Pastorela*, performed at the Untold Stories festival, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Guadalupe, Arizona. (Photo by Jeff Kida)

8. ASU students George Quintero (holding staff) and Carlos Rivera (seated) performed *La Pastorela* with local artist Zarco Guerrero (background), Guadalupe, Arizona. (Photo by Jeff Kida)



9. Local high school student Rose Villa as Archangel Michael in *La Pastorela*. (Photo by Jeff Kida)

Judea, and Belen, Mexico, at the same time. The scenery and costumes carried out the dual theme, with actors wearing robes that could be Arab or Mexican.

The *Untold Stories* collaboration had to face some serious challenges in the community. According to ASUPE's Outreach and Education Coordinator, Andreyra Hernandez-Garcia, Guadalupe's leaders were apprehensive about working with the university. At one of the first meetings among the collaborators, Hernandez-Garcia said Centro de Amistad's director Santito Bernasconi spoke up about their fears. "He said the university takes and takes and leaves nothing behind" (Hernandez-Garcia 1999a).

Esther Urbano is a Chicano studies and history major from ASU who worked with fellow student Carlos Nizcarra to provide music for *La Pastorela*. Urbano was aware of the cultural tensions as the collaboration progressed. Interviewed before the play, she said the project would work well "if the activist community gets involved. They're waiting to see what happens. Possibly there's resentment that so many people from the outside are involved—and a mega-Anglo institution (ASU)" (1998). Musician Nizcarra, a biochemistry major, was on the same wavelength, declaring, "I'm in it for the community organizing" (1998).

Guadalupe's pastorela was performed in English with some Spanish interludes. In this version, Satan appears to trick the shepherds into missing the whole affair. Local performance artist and master maskmaker Zarco Guerrero played the Devil as a trickster character in "Biblical-Mexican" costume, sometimes in horns, sometimes a shabby old man, sometimes a dandy or a magician. "This is a pivotal role for me," says Guerrero, who grew up in nearby Mesa and remembers coming to Guadalupe for Easter services at the Yaqui church. Guerrero is of Yaqui heritage, so "to do this in Guadalupe makes it more significant" (in Yost 1998). Duarte Clark invested Guerrero with the freedom to improvise his character and offer input on the script. "I was thrilled to be working with him and his script, but I had never considered playing the Devil—probably my strict Catholic upbringing," says Guerrero. "But I was drafted. And as I began to work with my masks, I realized I could use the Devil to raise consciousness" (1999).

There were plenty of laughs in *La Pastorela*, despite the pious subject and its setting. "Pastorelas tend to be quite comic," says Duarte Clark. "Shepherds are common people with common foibles" (in McQueen 1999). In this pastorela, Satan is a buffoon, and the Archangel Michael chooses a deaf shepherd to hear the news about the Savior's birth. When the angel talks about events happening "on high," the shepherd declares he's always wanted to meet someone from Ohio. "It's a comedy," says Hernandez-Garcia. "If you don't laugh, everyone will think you're missing the joke" (in Lawson 1998).

The play was carefully interwoven with other community Christmas events. Matachin dancers from Guadalupe performed outside the church before the play, and a traditional *posada* procession, commemorating Mary and Joseph's search for shelter, moved around the outside of the church afterward. Then *marachi* musicians played in the church's courtyard as a fundraiser for the Centro.

"It was really a community experience," says Hernandez-Garcia, who has been working with the university's Public Events office since she was a gradu-



ate student at ASU three years ago. She closely followed the progress of the whole festival, but took a special interest in the *La Pastorela's* creation (Hernandez-Garcia 1999a).

Hernandez-Garcia is a Chicana from Los Angeles who is in the process of re-discovering her own ethnic roots. Like many Chicanas of her generation, she was raised to speak English and forget Spanish. "I really didn't grow up with the stories of my Mexican heritage. For some reason they were forbidden," she says. For her father, who immigrated to the U.S. at a young age, "there was a lot of shame surrounding his identity as a Mexican-American. I think when I realized this I got angry. It's something to be proud of, not to hide, and not to be ashamed of." *La Pastorela* gave her the opportunity to connect with the culture:

You know, stories should be passed down from generation to generation. So in doing this, I've had an opportunity, and now I want to go back and discover what those stories are, so that I can pass them down to my children, and hopefully they'll pass them down to theirs. (1998)

Hernandez-Garcia was especially gratified with the community reception of *La Pastorela*. "Everybody came," she said, "young and old, even the Chicano community from outside Guadalupe. Many had never been to any kind of performance at all. And we had people from the non-Latino community who had never been to Guadalupe. Avenida de la Yaqui is a throughway," she said, referring to the bustling four-lane roadway that bisects the community. "I wanted people to stop. In fact, people didn't want to leave" (1999b).<sup>6</sup>

"I was most touched by *La Pastorela*," said ASU's Colleen Jennings-Roggensack. "Through the arts, a community was able to recreate a tradition, breathe life into it and go forward. Now Guadalupe will make the pastorela all their own" (in McQueen 1999).

*La Pastorela* has, in fact, become a new tradition in Guadalupe, one of value to the community that can continue without substantial further help from the university or El Teatro.<sup>7</sup> It was restaged in December 1999 with the 1998 costumes and scenery, and with Zarco Guerrero as director. True to pastorela tradition, the script has been changed by the community with whom it is performed.

"We were to take it and make it our own," says Guerrero:



10. For *Untold Stories*, AFP member company *El Teatro de la Esperanza* worked with the *Centro de Amistad*, a behavioral and mental-health service agency in the Yaqui community of Guadalupe. *El Teatro Artistic Director Rodrigo Duarte Clark* worked with *Centro* participants to write and present *La Pastorela*, a Christmas pastorela, in December 1998. (Photo by Jeff Kida)

We formed a committee from Guadalupe, mostly Yaquis, and they said they would like to add some elements. Their purpose for the *pastorela* is to strengthen the community, which has a lot of poverty and drug abuse. You know, since the '60s, the Chicanos have been saying "La cultura cura," or "Culture cures"—sort of "art as medicine." They wanted to change the play to de-emphasize the Devil as the main character and place more emphasis on the angel and on good in the community. And they wanted to add more local flavor, some Yaqui folklore and some little prayers that the audience would take away with them, even if they didn't know it. (1999)

One example of material added by the community is a Mexican folk tradition regarding the "dust devil," or small desert whirlwind. According to the Guadalupe Yaquis, when a Mexican sees a dust devil he makes a cross with his fingers and says, "Go away, Devil, please come to me, Jesus." Guerrero told Duarte Clark of these changes when he was in San Francisco in November 1999 to perform at El Teatro, and Duarte Clark was delighted that the community had taken such a strong interest (McQueen 1999).

"My overriding concern all along was continuity," said Duarte Clark. "It was important to have sufficient local participation so the community could take the ball and run with it" (in McQueen 1999).

The key to community participation, say all the participants, was hiring local artist Guerrero, someone who is going to stay in the community and keep the spirit alive and carry it forward. "Spirit in community will die unless there's someone calling the meeting," said Theresa Holden (1999). "The whole idea was to plant seeds in the community," said Guerrero. "The impact has been far-reaching. The Chicano and Latino community is networking like we never had" (in McQueen 1999).

One of the more exultant *Pastorela* fans is Santito Bernasconi, head of the Centro de Amistad social service agency. "It was exciting to see something like

11. *After the play, audience members at La Pastorela participated in a posada that ended in the church courtyard where they enjoyed mariachi music, pan dulce, and hot chocolate. (Photo by Jeff Kida)*





12. In front of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, neighborhood musicians lead the posada following the community performance of *La Pastorela*. (Photo by Jeff Kida)

this coming out of our community,” he said (in McQueen 1999). Bernasconi is a Spanish-speaking, 30-year Guadalupe resident who married into the community, and is now a deacon in the church. He helped with the town’s incorporation, and his wife sits on the Yaqui tribal council. During the collaboration, his fears of working with the university were overcome, and he appreciated the help of the professional artists from San Francisco. “Overall, many people were flabbergasted at how professional it was” (in McQueen 1999).

*La Pastorela* lived up to everyone’s hopes, including those of the university, whose goal was to broaden the community audience for on-campus events. That wish came true during El Teatro’s performance of their own repertory work in the Gammage Theater in the spring. “That many residents attended Esperanza’s *Don’t Leave Me Baby* on March 25 at Gammage was proof progress had been made in making Yaquis feel wanted on the sprawling campus,” said Phoenix *Tribune* critic Max McQueen (1999).

It is typical of an American Festival member company like Esperanza that they don't soften the impact of burning social issues, no matter who's in the audience. *Don't Leave Me Baby*, also written by Duarte Clark, is about AIDS in the Latino heterosexual community. It centers on a whole family with AIDS, and the conflict between the live father and his wife's ghost over who gave whom the disease.

"One of the things I wanted to do was to focus on heterosexuals and Latinos—to draw attention to that side of the issue," says Duarte Clark:

The other was to explore the psychological side of it. For instance, when the man learns he has AIDS, his first reaction is, "I'm no faggot." That was purposely put in there because with a lot of heterosexual males, especially in the Latino community, AIDS is thought of that way. (in Moorhead 1999)

Also true to form for the *Untold Stories* festival, *Don't Leave Me Baby* is based upon stories told him by acquaintances living with AIDS. And because the author is Rodrigo Duarte Clark, it has its comedic moments: the dead woman finds one advantage to bearing the sign of AIDS—it makes it easier to work your way through the holiday shopping crowds.

El Teatro de La Esperanza was founded in the early '70s by Duarte Clark and his classmates from UC Santa Barbara. They use the *acto* style of El Teatro Campesino and the traditional *carpa* (circus tent) style of quick-hitting sketches:

We were part and parcel of the overall cultural renaissance of the Chicano movement, and we were hot to address the obvious questions of the day—education, the Vietnam War, racism...but as we got older, the issues became more subtle, more complex. Today we try to face up to those problems that our community wrestles with on a daily basis. We're not interested in plays that have no purpose; we want to deal with the issues that haven't been resolved. (in Lawson 1998)

"AIDS is an issue that needs to be discussed more in my community," says Duarte Clark:

I live in the San Francisco Bay Area, and there have been a lot of deaths, but when you move outside the city, and especially when you deal with the more recent immigrants, you get responses like, "What does this have to do with us? Latinos aren't gay." There's a very conservative, very Catholic, very rural mentality that has to be overcome. (in Lawson 1999)

### *Letting Down the Barriers*

Another satisfying project within *Untold Stories* was *Behind the Barrier*, a performance/visual-art presentation by ASU's police officers, who are professional state police officers assigned to work at the campus. In their performance the officers felt they bridged a gap with the campus community they serve: in their very personal storytelling performances and their installation pieces, they revealed themselves as human beings with challenges and fears, failures and successes. One officer exhibited his paintings of Katherine Dunham, Josephine Baker, Martin Luther King, and other figures from African American history. He told one of his favorite stories about King's political activism, and declared, "I'm a cop because I love people."

A female officer talked about what it is like to be the “lone woman” on the force, how she gets asked out by arrestees: “I guess they like the uniform.” She told tales of harrowing arrests. Another officer, Sergeant Richard Wilson, did a piece in which he told the story of simultaneous calamities that happened on his watch: a child on a bicycle was pulled under a bus, and at the same time a police supervisor suffered a heart attack and someone attempted suicide in a campus building. Wilson was the first to arrive on the scene involving the child, and in the midst of managing the crisis, he was pulled away to deal with the suicide attempt. When he returned to the first scene, he found himself directing traffic, and coping with resentful professors who couldn’t get to work. There were other stories on this theme of tension between the officers and the campus population. Sergeant Wilson, in a letter to *Roadside’s* Dudley Cocke, said, “Everyone who participated was really happy for the opportunity, and afterwards were so excited that it went well. It was probably one of the most fulfilling undertakings I’ve worked towards” (Wilson 1999). Reflecting on the experience in July of 1999, Cocke reported that he would be going back to Phoenix during the fall to work with Wilson on the script for possible publication in a police journal, and further performances (Cocke 1999a).

### *Speaking Up: How Do We Talk About It?*

One of the AFP principles is to create artworks and conduct programs that anyone can understand. Academic jargon, deliberate obscurity, and any other form deemed intellectual elitism is to be avoided. The story-circle device is a good example of an AFP choice. What could be simpler than asking people to sit in a circle and tell their stories?

As simple as it is, the story circle’s value is not always apparent to all. “The AFP artists promote personal and community growth as tangible outcomes of their cultural exchange,” said project evaluator Leia A. Lewis:

because the artists work in confidence knowing that everyone has a story to share. While the AFP Artistic Partners concur and have internalized (practically as a Higher Truth) that storytelling has an incredible artistic, cultural, and spiritual value, this view was not immediately evident, or at all shared, by several Community Partners. (1999)

Lewis quotes Gesel Mason of the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange on her difficulty with the members of *The Entertainers*, the group of retired seniors. Several members even dropped out of the project, sizing up the exchange process as “psychobabble hogwash” and a “ploy to get people in a room to talk about social and racial issues.” Mason expanded on her original evaluation of the process:

The Entertainers don’t like to talk about their pasts. They want to talk about who they are now, what they do now. They did not understand how all this exploration and digging would result in a performance that someone would want to see. They wanted a script. They wanted characters. I had difficulty describing a process where the material came from them.” (Mason 2000)

“At the end relationships blossomed and they invited us to their houses for dinner,” said Mason later: “The same thing happened with *Which Way Productions*; the group of Native Americans invited us to their reservation. What a night-and-day difference between these two groups.” She went on to dis-



13. Audience members listen to members of *The Entertainers*, an amateur performance group in Phoenix's Ahwatukee retirement community along The Gammage Tour. (Photo by Andrey Hernandez-Garcia)

cuss differences and similarities in communicating with the diverse communities she worked with in the project:

Some may think that *The Entertainers* should not have been involved because they are not a disenfranchised group. But when we are talking about arts for social change, who is it that we think should be involved? Isn't the combination worthwhile? In hindsight, the snag with the *Entertainers*, and they were not alone, was the performance. The performance was the goal; not the process, not the community. And when the work we strive to do is important on all of these levels and the goal is social change and awareness, then the groups we work with need to understand that mission and have a willingness to explore outcomes at different levels. These groups were handed to us, versus being participants emerging through a more organic process within the community. Everybody's understanding of what the project was and what they would get out of it was different. The process will never be fully understood because it will be different every time. But it's important to start on the same page, and not spend time convincing them. (2000)

Sorting out the language used to describe the work was a major thrust of *Untold Stories*, and no one struggled with it longer and harder than Holden in her grassroots theatre course at ASU during the fall of 1998. "From Community to Stage: Creating Performing Arts through a Grassroots, Community-Based Endeavor" was an offering of the ASU Department of Theatre Arts. Throughout the course, students met with Holden and representatives from the five artistic companies to wrestle with the story-circle method and to assist the artists onsite with their local community partners in developing works for the festival.

Training for community-based artwork is a topic of great concern wherever AFP members and their colleagues gather. They exhibit great distress at reports of botched programs led by artists insensitive to the particular communities they are working in. Reaching for foundation money supporting artwork that benefits communities,<sup>8</sup> arts organizations large and small in every state are developing “outreach” and “audience development” programs, often without guidance or even forethought for the quality of interactions being set up between untrained artists and the populations of schools, hospitals, prisons, homeless shelters, retirement homes, and other agencies in their communities.

Holden’s class was a deliberate step in the direction of such training. At the same time, it provided student labor for the community residencies of *Untold Stories*. The students received parallel training in the course while they were providing an ongoing link with the community groups and their mostly absent AFP artist partners. Each student was assigned to at least one community project for eight months, and was required to visit the community each time the lead artist was in Tempe, with opportunities for more visits on their own. They kept journals reflecting what actually occurred in the community projects, their own roles in the projects, their responses to them, and their solutions to problems that arose. At the end of the course each student was assigned to present an essay about the project and a “producer’s plan,” considering the “perfect performance form, space, location, design, marketing approach, and audience development [...] to bring the community project to its fullest potential” (Holden 1998a). They had assigned readings and performances as well. “The course took three years of planning,” says Holden:

The more I do this with young people the more I realize it needs to be thought about in education. Young artists are ready to be bought. The sense that they have a place at the table is not there. Somebody has to tell them—through projects like these. (Holden 1998b)

Visiting Holden’s class took me into the heart of this work, the thrilling and difficult core. Listening to the students report on their work with the communities, it became obvious how elated, challenged, and even lost the untrained can feel when faced with this situation. One student, working with fifth- through eighth-grade Pima children at St. Peter Indian Mission School on the reservation, talked about her struggle with the Indian girls during the story circles:

We made story circles. We used “place” and “a time you were scared” [to spark ideas]. The stories led them to cry. They told about messages they received through animals about the death of relatives. Then we chose the best stories and retold them. Then volunteers acted them out, and the storyteller had the choice of whether to act or direct. The girls were very shy, and giggled. The challenge is their shyness regarding performances. It’s hard to imagine them doing anything in front of nonpeers. The troublesome kids loved the attention. Regarding the performance coming up Friday: They were told they’d be in it but they “forgot.” I showed them the poster with their names on it.

“The old poster trick!” cracked Roadside’s Dudley Cocks, who was also visiting the class that day (Burnham 1998). Another student talked about working in the Carver/PUCH project with older people who attended this high school during segregation. “They liked it segregated,” said the student, in surprise:

It’s exciting that these stories will be heard. But there’s a lot of confusion about what all the partners want. A lot of ideas are thought out but

don't really happen. It's hard to tell where things go wrong. I just try to show up every week. Sometimes only three people show up. The administration is resistant. Story circles are open, but it doesn't gather any momentum. (Burnham 1998)

Speaking of his own process in the work, one student got emotional:

This class made me think about things I like and don't like to think about—it got me back to my roots. I came here wanting to share my own theatre, to reflect community issues. This class reminds me that I can still do that, and do grassroots too. I realize that I don't have to change the world. I'm changing my idea of scale in making a difference. It takes me back to being a Big Brother in New York. I had grandiose ideas, but it became enough just to get him to hold my hand. Expecting small differences helps me not give up. (in Burnham 1998)

Part of the struggle to maintain the community activities was the infrequency of the artists' visits to Phoenix. Because of a funding hitch at the university,<sup>9</sup> the festival finale had to be pushed forward a year, from spring 1998 to spring 1999. This meant a longer timeframe for each residency, but no further funding for increased artist visits. The community interface by students from ASU was deemed essential in some of the projects, as time lagged between the artists' visits. "While it was wonderful to commit to long-term involvement to establish relationships with the partners, it was difficult to maintain continuity between visits," said the Dance Exchange's Gesel Mason in her final evaluation to AFP (1999). "The visits were often too short and too spread out over too long a time period," concurred ASUPE's Andreyra Hernandez-Garcia, in her evaluation to AFP. "At times, the community participants complained of losing interest in the project. Local artists and graduate students worked well with the groups, and helped carry the work forward when their AFP partners were not in town" (1999b).

The above-mentioned funding hitch, during which ASUPE's attentions were diverted to other university business, was the source of much trouble in the festival. Not only did the artistic companies have to contend with funding changes for their Arizona projects, they also had to make do in their own budgets at home. In addition, the support that ASUPE had promised to provide was reduced to only part-time help from Hernandez-Garcia. With Holden also serving the project only part-time, a serious break in momentum occurred. Because AFP had no binding contract with the university, there was nothing to be done but try to cope with the situation and stretch the available dollars and personnel as far as they could go (Cocke 1999c).

### *Staging Solutions*

Obviously, the process of *Untold Stories* created both miracles and challenges—before the festival ever reached the stage. But the inclusion of public performance brought up the inevitable "quality" question raised about community-based art: It may be beneficial, even therapeutic for a community, but is it art? When nonactors and nondancers take the stage, the work enters a traditional critical arena. Therefore, the performance element must be accounted for in any evaluation. Its inclusion also brings up a glaring obstacle to the success of the festival finale: the inappropriate space provided in Grady Gammage Auditorium.

Community projects that proceed to public performance often present the professional artists with a challenge. Using material from story circles, these





14. During The Gammage Tour: The Other Side of the Mountain, performers led audience members on an “unofficial” tour of the building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Here, Liz Lerman leads the audience. (Photo by Andreyá Hernández-García)

events tend to feature people with no performance experience. Making these events interesting as art involves not only expert coaching and directing by the professionals, but also innovative shaping of the work as a whole, and often creative stage design.

Grady Gammage Auditorium was the venue provided by ASUPE for the festival finale for the simple reason that it is a stage ASUPE must fill each year. Gammage is a huge, circular building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, and constructed in 1959. Its proscenium theatre seats 3,000, and an audience of, say, 300, which would have been extremely satisfying in a smaller theatre, looked lost in Gammage. The semicircular rows of seats have no aisles, so ushers are required to herd the audience into the center. An early exit is very embarrassing and disruptive because it requires climbing over dozens of people. This may have been intimidating to some in the *Untold Stories* audience, which included many who were new to campus, and some who had brought their children. The space was uncomfortable, inconvenient, and disastrous for most of the performances. The vast stage, which can accommodate a full symphony orchestra, was a challenge to professionals and nonprofessionals alike, and the technology was practically inoperative.

The artists attempted to approach this situation as creative problem-solvers. Approaching this venue problem with the police performance, *Roadside* employed performance-art tactics, siting the piece in an exciting way, placing the audience on its feet, and almost inside the performance itself.

The audience was gathering outside Gammage that night in April when we noticed a bearded man (*Roadside*'s Ron Short) in shorts sitting on a low wall; he lifted a banjo and picked his way into a high, whining chorus of “Bad Boys.” The crowd parted for a limping man in dreadlocks (Zarco Guerrero) and rags who eagerly exhorted everyone to follow him. He stopped for the



15. On 11 April 1999 in Grady Gammage Auditorium, the Untold Stories piece *Highly Classified* began with a masked rastaman (Zarco Guerrero) limping through the waiting crowd. He eagerly exhorted everyone to follow him into the performance space, a loading dock. (Photo by Michael Villalobos)

banjo player, urging him to come with the crowd. “I wasn’t invited,” complained the bearded one, and went on playing.

Gradually the curious crowd began to trail after the rastaman, moving around the building and onto a descending driveway that led into a lower-level loading dock. There they were stopped by a police barricade and a barrage of strobe lights.

“No entry,” said a policeman (Detective Al Phillips) firmly to the crowd, shouting to be heard above the crackling of the police radio. “Sorry. Please turn around and proceed back up the driveway.” Pressing closer for a look into the darkened space, the crowd protested, with several voices louder than the rest. Two men (Junebug’s John O’Neal and Michael Keck) stepped forward to harass the cop. Keck, dressed like a businessman or a professor, insisted “You don’t seem to understand, officer, I’m the one who pays your salary.” The cop resisted and the two men were belligerently face-to-face. “Man,” said Keck, “you’ve got to get a life.” Detective Phillips stepped forward, said quietly, “I’ve got a life,” let the tape down, and the crowd surged forward.

Inside the loading-dock area, instead of a crime scene, the crowd found an art exhibition. As quiet fell, Officer Richard Wilson stepped forward and began to talk to the crowd, now an audience, about his life as a campus cop...and an artist. As the audience members moved from one part of the garage to another, they leaned forward eagerly to get a view of the performance settings, and children pushed to the front.

Other performances struggled along on the auditorium stage. The inflexibility of Gammage challenged company after company as they fought to be heard and seen in the cavernous theatre. After two days of performances that were striking but hampered by the space and the tech, I, for one, resented not only ASU but Frank Lloyd Wright himself, and wanted nothing more than to exit Grady Gammage Auditorium.

This poisonous atmosphere was alleviated only once, by Liz Lerman Dance Exchange. After the company’s modern-dance performance, which actually worked well on the huge theatre stage, a light was thrown on a small balcony overlooking stage left, where a performer began to challenge the audience to resist the frustrations presented to them by “Frank Lloyd Left.” He invited the audience to split into two sections, each to follow a performer.

We were then led on an enticing tour of the building, punctuated with performances by the Dance Exchange and their community partners in every nook and cranny—storytelling in the ladies’ room, musical chairs in a room two stories below us, a parade of dancers with umbrellas around the fountain in the parking lot, 15 step-team dancers on the mezzanine, three Indian women playing pool and discussing the reservation—while guides shared the history and design of the building (“It employs 36 shades of terra cotta,” “They say it looks like a frog on a toilet seat from the air”). The excited crowd rubber-necked for an hour, even walking on the outdoor, second-story struts of the building, and ogling the gentle curves and intersecting planes of Wright’s creation. Art triumphed, and the performance effectively changed the mood of the audience from resentment to delight.

On the final day of the festival, a few performances took place in the lobby of the theatre, allowing the audience an intimate exchange with Native American children from the Boys & Girls Club, and the alumni of Carver/PUCH as they shared the stories of their lives. This only made me wish such solutions had been tried for other works.

### *Cultures Clash*

Another venue challenge presented itself for the *Roadside Theater and Friends* event at Kerr Cultural Center in Scottsdale on 13 November 1998. ASUPE operates the center, an intimate, adobe-and-tile private concert hall in an affluent community. The event brought together four cultures: the Appalachian culture, represented by performers Ron Short and Kim Neal from Roadside; the Native American Zuni culture, represented by Idiwanan An Chawe from New Mexico; the Native American Pima culture, represented by the St. Peter Indian Mission School dancers from the Gila River reservation nearby; and local Chicano-Yaqui performance artist Zarco Guerrero.

Roadside was interested in performing at the upscale cultural center because, according to Cocke:

our material needs both audiences like and unlike us. Those like us are those who know what it means to be poor and working class, also what it means to live rural. Those unlike us also bring something special to a performance. The “unlike us” was relatively easy, that was a given. The challenge was to cross the color line in that space; the patrons were all white.

They also wanted some familiar faces in the audience, Cocke said. “For the performance to take off, we needed an audience that, in part, reflected the traditions on the stage” (Cocke 1998). To that end, Roadside invited all of their partners from *Untold Stories* to come to the event. The ASU students and staff who had produced *Highly Classified* came together in a “class reunion” that night, still flushed with pride about their performance a month before. A dozen children from the Boys & Girls Club collaboration also came, a group of bright and active kids 8 to 12 years old, most of whom were in foster care. A number of ASU students from Holden’s grassroots-theatre course and some of the parents from the Gila River reservation were also in attendance, as were Zarco Guerrero fans from the Latino community.

This was an ideal audience from Roadside’s point of view; it accomplished one of the main goals of an AFP festival: to bring the participants together to share the fruits of the entire group effort. Ostensibly, it also met one of the stated goals of ASUPE: to celebrate the cultural diversity of ASU and the metro Phoenix community. But looking back on this event, there were a number of things to criticize about the way it was hosted by ASUPE and Kerr. The children were seated in the back, on bleachers farthest from the stage. Someone later reported that this was a strategy to make it easy to eject them if they started to act up, a strategy that, in my experience, would never be employed in Appalachian, Native American, or Chicano cultures. “The elderly and the children are always given places of honor in the front,” said Cocke. “But here, at Kerr, the front, the best seats are all reserved for the Kerr patrons with the season tickets” (1998).

The Roadside performers, who are used to welcoming the audience while they tune up onstage before the performance, were told to go backstage or the doors wouldn’t be opened. Meanwhile, the audience was kept waiting outside the performance space. The management required the performance to start at 8:00 P.M. sharp, another unfortunate decision, given the number of

“different cultures on different time clocks,” as Cocke puts it (1998). At least 30 percent of the audience arrived after the piece had started. Also, this prevented the many community partners from meeting each other (though ASUPE had promised a newsletter and events to connect the partners, not much had happened), and those who had met were prevented from greeting and catching up with each other. The performance ensued, and at its end the audience was invited to come onstage for a circle dance. All the community partners from *Untold Stories* eagerly joined in from all sides of the theatre, but the Kerr patrons, who were seated up front and only had to stand to be included, remained in their seats.

Talking with the Roadside people later that night, I saw a great deal of distress about the way this event was handled. All it seemed to amount to was a difference in style, but to them, this subtle difference was important. The artists seemed determined to remember the lessons learned from this small culture clash, which reinforced others they had had elsewhere. They were saddened to admit that, in future, they would have to take time to train their presenters to make the community partners welcome, to introduce them to the audience, and to recognize their participation in the whole process. “You have to talk them all the way through,” said Ron Short, about such presenters:

It’s like talking them down from a ledge, just to get them to participate in what they brought you there to do. We insist that somebody from the host community introduce us, but you can’t imagine the resistance we get. [On the other hand] when we go to Zuni, we can feel that generosity. We are the guests, and you don’t feel like we have to push people out of the way to get to our place. (Short 1998)

Summing up, the artists analyzed the troubled Kerr experience in typical AFP fashion, from the point of view of class. “The Kerr apparently doesn’t attract many Native American and Chicano patrons,” says Cocke. “Wealth can insulate people, causing them to have a relatively narrow experience of life” (1998).

### *Final Notes*

If the *Untold Stories* experience is to be judged for quality, overall it appears that the least successful performance of the three-year festival was that of the presenter, ASU, especially from my point of view as an audience member at the public presentations. The ASUPE venues, Grady Gammage Auditorium and Kerr Cultural Center, were actually obstacles to good community art. The technical equipment and staff in Gammage completely drained the energy from intimate, soulful works like *Junebug/Jack* (which I had seen in a much better setting in the past) and the delicate and delightful *Corn Mountain/Pine Mountain*. The performers wore faulty body microphones, and they couldn’t hear their own monitors. And such a setup could only have been bewildering for the community performers, most of whom had never been on a public stage before, let alone an architectural wonder like this one.

Ironically, says Dudley Cocke, other venues were available, more appropriate to the grassroots matrix principles (“Performances are held in meeting places where the entire community feels welcome”). “We did a performance of *Corn Mountain/Pine Mountain* a year before in the Communication Department’s charming little black-box theatre in a closed elementary school in a neighborhood,” says Cocke. “It had a diverse audience, everybody enjoyed it; you could hear a pin drop in there. The dancing was swirling around you, just like they do in Zuni, with all the elderly and children sitting right down on the floor. It was everything Gammage wasn’t” (Cocke 1999c).



16. Members of *Roadside Theater* and *Junebug Productions* in *Junebug/Jack*, a piece created over the past 10 years with the hope of sharing each other's audiences—one predominantly white, the other predominantly black—both economically hard-pressed. (Photo by Edward Cohen)

There is something of a stand-off between the artists and ASU as to what pressures came to bear in the choice of Grady Gammage Auditorium. Both parties lay the final decision at each other's feet. "The issue of the presentation of the work was discussed with the AFP representative, who decided not to move the work off the stage," said Jennings-Roggensack in a recent statement. "I believe the OnStage concept—seating the audience on the stage—would have been more beneficial here and the greater use of the theater's spaces, such as Liz Lerman utilized them, would be a better way to go" (2000).

Another distressing aspect of the festival finale was the size of the audiences, which may have been due to a lack of press. While earlier parts of the project got a great deal of press, there was no newspaper publicity for the April festival finale that I could see, not even a calendar listing in the local alternative weekly, which seemed to be the cause for embarrassingly small audiences. In a small town this might not have been a problem, but in a city as large as Phoenix, it was practically fatal.

The lack of press for the finale may have been connected to the fact that ASUPE requested reprises of several previous performances by the artists, and these performances had been reviewed earlier in the year. Questioned about this aspect, Jennings-Roggensack responded:

In order to reach the greatest number of individuals, we chose to rely on the use of media stories, radio, and TV features. The use of ads in this community works well for Broadway-type programs, but tends not to attract the audience for other kinds of work. In a town that has two major papers and many smaller independents, stories and features are the way to go. In terms of the work having been viewed before—it's an interesting

question in a town where there are 62 sports writers to every art critic, and only three writers who cover theatre as part of their film, music, dance beat. (2000)

Regarding the artist-presenter negotiations, Cocke does not feel the artists had enough muscle to make things go their way:

You could talk to them about it, but they were meeting other demands. What would have pushed them to question their ingrained priorities? Finally, AFP had very little pressure to exert, because we were only in for 25 percent of the money. We didn't have a written agreement that said, Look, though you're putting up more money, it is agreed that all decisions will be made equitable by a council representing the university, the community, and the artists. Without that the university held the cards, and within the university, even Colleen had very little room to move. For example, she was obligated to use the tech people and the auditorium—it was part of *her* job contract, and that obligation became a huge barrier. In fairness, 99 percent of U.S. universities haven't and won't—even with ASU's ten-foot pole—touch this kind of work and what it cares about. To cause such university change since the '70s has been nigh-on impossible: There's no popular mandate and no national leadership. AFP will have to sharpen its thinking if it wants to have any lasting effect on such institutions. (Cocke 1999c)

Perhaps most important, there was very little mixing of the communities, something that was a clear goal for the project. The presenter should have taken the opportunity to call all the community partners together several times over the three years, or at least at the very end of the festival. This kind of activity cannot be left to the artists, especially when their performances have been such a struggle. While ASUPE's Hernandez-Garcia received many kudos for her aid in holding the community projects together, the artists judge that overall she did not have enough time or help.

"ASUPE agreed to work with us before they were able to size up what it meant," said Junebug's John O'Neal in a small gathering of artists the morning after the festival ended. "They do some 380 events a year. ASUPE is fighting in the university ballpark, and they have to be able to respond to the demands of the institution, which sometimes overwhelms the benevolence of the participants" (1999).

When asked why AFP had chosen to work with such a large institution, O'Neal said:

We're going to have to learn to work with large institutions because the object is to change society. The only way we can do it is from a position of strength, by working with grassroots organizations, grappling with issues these inconsistencies are about—which big institutions are supposed to be serving. (1999)

"Some colleagues in AFP don't think we should have festivals inside large institutions," said Holden. "[But] you can make policy change through students. They had change occur and they learned something about education. They can now make a demand on the university, with theory around it" (1999).

"The community organizer is the key," responded O'Neal. "Maybe the first thing to do is identify an organizer" (1999).

Assessing the project from the point of view of its "three rings" objective, Dudley Cocke is not optimistic. "They didn't understand the three circles, the

three orbits. In the outer circle—changing the university—I don't feel we made any real success there," he told me with a sigh six months later. "We didn't accomplish as much as we wanted to on connecting the communities in the second circle. I'd say everybody moved back to their corner after we left. That has to do with the university not being a full partner (1999c). It's clear that a mammoth project like this needs a full-time producer and staff support, he said, adding another large budget item to the list of what's needed to carry off a responsible community-arts festival (Cocke 1999b).

In the last analysis it is discouraging that artists as accomplished as these can be tripped up by their own failure to adhere to the rules they have set for themselves. Inclusion and equitable interchange are paramount in AFP's set of principles, and their inability to contract successfully with ASU robbed them of the power to negotiate these elements to their own satisfaction.

Jennings-Roggensack does not take such a dim view of the collaboration, and did see some changes in the university's relationship with the community. "The benefits to the community were both tangible and intangible," she said:

Each community spoke of the importance of being recognized by the project, and that value and respect was given to each community through the interactions with the artists and the university. It also opened the door for other communities to envision themselves in similar roles. (2000)

What is clear is that the real successes of this enormous project happened at the community level and in the everyday interactions of the people—the Pima children who learned to dance their own tribal traditions, the kids in foster care who learned imagination is a precious gift, the staff and cops at ASU who saw themselves reflected in the eyes of an appreciative audience, the alumni of Phoenix Union Colored High School who earned how to effectively tell their stories from a hidden past, the parishioners of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church who took part in great art and ritual in their own community gathering place. Individuals reconnected with their roots, and new networks of communication were set up within existing communities.

There were many of those miracles that occur when good artists work with people who are not used to encountering their own creative selves, or telling their own stories to a group of strangers who actually want to listen. Fences were mended between the community and the university again and again. The *Pastorela* has become an annual event for the community of Guadalupe, the classified staff and police performance scripts are both being readied for publication, Kristin Bervig Valentine is writing a major article about her class's process, and a formal evaluation is being prepared by the AFP staff. "The three women from Gila River [Which Way Productions] are still working together," said Jennings-Roggensack in January 2000.

The children from the St. Peter Mission Indian School still play an active role not only with us, but through our efforts they have established a contact with Phoenix Rotary 100 (the largest in the state) to support their efforts. The mounting of a new project through the A3 project (*Asia, Arizona and the Arts*) will include the mounting of a theater work on the Gila River community." (Jennings-Roggensack 2000)

### *Lessons Learned, Future Plans*

Executive Director Michael Hunt represents a new generation of leadership for the American Festival Project. He has some strong views on how the organization should grow and change. Hunt came aboard at AFP after *Untold*

*Stories* was well under way, and has been spending his time overseeing AFP activities from its headquarters in Whitesburg, Kentucky, and making plans for the next festival in Knoxville, Tennessee. In early 2000, after the *Untold Stories* dust had settled, I interviewed him about what he felt the organization had learned from the festival, and what would come next (Hunt 2000b).

BURNHAM: From your perspective on *Untold Stories*, what do you think were its strongest aspects?

HUNT: Like all American Festival Projects, *Untold Stories* was a chance to re-examine our basic premise: that the arts play an essential and organic role in the life of a community. There were wonderful moments where community members saw each other outside of habitual oppositions, where they found a safe structure in performance to discuss difficult and painful issues, where they were able to listen to and marvel at people they might previously have ignored.

In the Dance Exchange/community collaboration, four “tour” groups explored Gammage Auditorium, witnessing performances in unexpected sites throughout, then converged at the highest point of the building, a veranda overlooking South Mountain. Through the haze you could really only make out the red lights on the telecommunications towers. Two people spoke. One was a Native woman telling her story about growing up at the mountain, the freedom of movement in her youth, her connectedness, and respect for the place. The other speaker was an older Anglo man telling about his life in a retirement village at the foot of the mountain, how that community and his participation in it were the fulfillment of a powerful dream, a true home.

Two completely different stories tied together by the contexts of place, of life experience, of dreams, of communities traditional or chosen. Every person on that veranda connected to both speakers, to those points of light in the distance, and in the night air to something else—it was as if everyone was given passage to their own dream sequence by the performance. Moments like that, unleashing the brilliance of both personal and social imagination, are what we always strive to accomplish.

BURNHAM: In retrospect, what do you think were the least effective or most problematic aspects of the project?

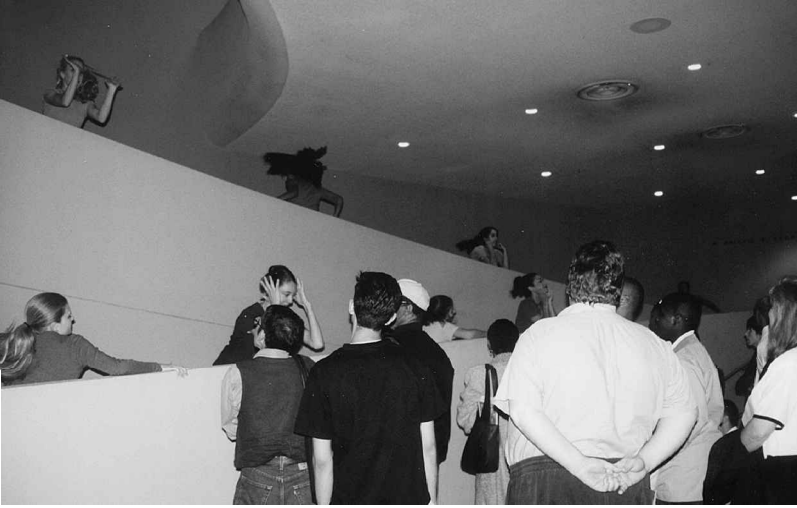
HUNT: Quite simply, the project had a problematic through line. Activities were compartmentalized in a way that never allowed momentum to build. Each artist worked in relative isolation from the others, and too much energy went to the relationship between the university/presenter and the visiting artists. The community never moved into the role of producer, creating the project they wanted. Unfortunately, and unlike our other projects, only limited resources were developed in the community, and very few indigenous artist/leaders were mentored to continue building on the seeds sown.

BURNHAM: Can you discuss the allocation of money in the project, and whether you think it was equitable for all concerned?

HUNT: Money is never allocated equitably in our society, and this is an area of particular concern in community-centered arts. Often presenters and visiting artists focus on supporting their own economies, and filter only very small portions of an overall budget to grassroots artists and organizations. Within the AFP, we recognize that if our goal is to foster social change and strengthen local arts practices, the best use of money is not to support the status quo, but to invest resources in the hands of local practitioners.

The bottom line is that if your language says you support indigenous leadership and arts that are truly by, of, and for the local community, you have to be willing to let that local community administer a significant portion of the





17. ASU Dance Arizona Repertory Theatre in The Gammage Tour: The Other Side of the Mountain, Grady Gammage Auditorium. (Photo by Andrey Hernandez-Garcia)

project's resources. Like the identification of goals and the development of project structure or performances, resource management needs to be a collaborative process with all the participants at the table.

**BURNHAM:** Many community artists, in evaluating past projects, seem to feel things would have gone better if they had more time. This festival was extraordinarily long. How do you feel that affected this project?

**HUNT:** It really wasn't long for a project of this sort: Right now, we're looking at all of our projects lasting a minimum of five years, with actual lengths determined by evaluation and analysis of the movement toward goals. Getting people to reinvest in community dialogue, reestablishing the value of the arts as a way to synthesize information and develop thoughtful action, these things take an immense investment of time.

The problems inherent with long-term projects, and *Untold Stories* presents a valuable case study, are how to maintain relationships and energy, manage internal and external communication, and build a flow within the project that allows it an ongoing life of its own. If our work is to animate the arts in the daily life of a community, the project has to focus on building sustainable resources that reside permanently and independently in that community. Extended time is mandatory for the process, but is only useful if used in a thoughtful and strategic manner.

**BURNHAM:** Looking at the AFP philosophy—according to AFP printed materials and the way it operated in *Untold Stories*—are there any parts of the philosophy you would like to see change as you move into the next decade?

**HUNT:** Our philosophy stands up: We continue to believe in the inherent value of cultural identity, cultural diversity, cultural exchange, and, most importantly, in artistic process as a key element in imagining and enacting social change. Where change is constant is in our commitment to evolving and broadening the practice of that philosophy.

The AFP possesses a tremendous base of experience in community-centered performance and organizing. Building on that, we're in the process of integrating community media practice into all of our projects, and plan to expand our network of arts practitioners to include a much wider range of disciplines, creating new and different possibilities for collaborations in and with communities. We are continuing to develop our language and methodologies,

always looking for a thoughtful clarity as we interact with communities of all sorts. In many ways, the AFP is a continuously posed challenge: How better can this work be done?

BURNHAM: Among the many goals and objectives of AFP, what, in your personal opinion, is the most important?

HUNT: The most important is the ultimate goal: to provide tools and facilitate local expertise in the development of a welcoming, thoughtful, and imaginative community life.

BURNHAM: Administering a project of this scope, with this many participants, must be fairly chaotic. What do you think AFP needs the most in order to focus on its mission?

HUNT: The AFP is very fortunate on a number of levels: We have positive relationships with several funders allowing a (cautious and only temporary) sense of security; our membership and networks include deeply committed, resourceful, and often brilliant theorists and practitioners who are generous in sharing their expertise; and we are a part of Appalshop, an exemplary community cultural and media center located in the heart of central Appalachia, which allows the organization to root and work at home as well as afield.

Like many adolescent organizations, we need to think creatively about the management, administration, and governance practices that support our artistic work. The AFP has always focused its energies and resources on projects, and now we're in the position of increasing our organizational capacity to support the work at new and more demanding levels. We're learning how to take advantage of new technology in our communication strategies. We're redefining our concept and expectations of documentation. We're adding staff, and utilizing interns from the Antioch College Cooperative Education Pro-

*18. Students from Sierra Vista Elementary School watch a performance at Grady Gammage Auditorium, 11 April 1999. (Photo by Michael Villalobos)*



gram. We're undergoing a very exciting yet difficult growth spurt in every part of the organization.

Our goal is to move, structurally and artistically, outside of the traditional market definitions of how arts organizations function, and what is possible for them to accomplish.

BURNHAM: Talk about the upcoming festival in Knoxville. What does it aim to do, and how? Who will be involved?

HUNT: Knoxville's festival project was initiated by Carpetbag Theater and an extensive network of community partners to address issues of community literacy, access to information, and decision-making power, and, socially, just economic revitalization. The project is using the arts, culture, and grassroots media as both the building blocks of alliance and the tools by which that alliance moves its agenda forward. Starting with the arts as a way to develop cross-community dialogue and a means of identifying and credentialing local knowledge, the project intends to locate the actual residents of inner-city Knoxville at the center of a ten-year, multimillion dollar Empowerment Zone project that will reimagine and redesign downtown Knoxville.

The project is being defined by the community itself, according to their needs and desires, but artists from outside Knoxville under consideration include Robbie McCauley, the Urban Bush Women, Cultural Odyssey, Rodrigo Duarte Clark of El Teatro Esperanza, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, Nayo Watkins, and Adella Gautier of Junebug.

BURNHAM: Does AFP have anything else on the fire?

HUNT: We're beginning an extended project in our home community of Whitesburg, Kentucky, that positions the arts within a holistic organizing concept addressing out-migration, resource exploitation, infrastructure development, and a sustainable economy. We're talking with the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center about how to incorporate their community school concept into our projects, and working to increase their community media capacity as a starting point for future work. In June we're convening a large group of artists with very different approaches to community work to explore with local people just what the two groups have to offer each other, where the connections are between these two bodies of knowledge, and how these new collaborations can be supported. We're continuing relationships with former festival communities like Louisville and Guadalupe to support their ongoing work. We've talked with Out North about working in Anchorage in the near future.

All in all, it's a very satisfying period of growth, where a lot of the connections between disciplines, between ideas, are coming clear and we're able to act upon them.

BURNHAM: If you could have your dearest wish for AFP, what would it be?

HUNT: To bring, at last, all the artistic and social elements together in one place with such an intensity and depth that a person in that place couldn't go an hour or a mile without coming into contact with a performance, an object, or an idea that causes a rethinking of their relationship to the whole and pushes them to engage their own imagination to act as part of that whole.

## Notes

1. *From the Ground Up: Grassroots Theater in Historical and Contemporary Perspective* is a report on a two-and-a-half-day symposium entitled "Grassroots Theater in Historical and Contemporary Perspective," convened in October 1992 at the Center for Theatre Arts at Cornell University. The symposium was attended by 100 practitioners, scholars, and

- interested observers of grassroots theatre. It was part of the Community-Based Arts Project, a three-year joint effort of the Cornell Department of Theatre Arts and Roadside Theater, in association with Junebug Productions; the project grew out of a prior three-year residency at Cornell by Junebug's John O'Neal. The purpose of the symposium (as stated in the report) was "to determine what grassroots theaters from various cultures and communities currently have in common, and to begin to prepare a concerted response to the present and a strategy for the future." A grassroots theatre developed during the project was the model for the course taught at ASU by Theresa Holden during *Untold Stories. From the Ground Up* was published by the Community Based Arts Project in 1993.
2. Beginning in 1999, the radio station's live broadcasts became available worldwide via the internet.
  3. This is the procedure that was operating at the time of *Untold Stories*. In 2000, according to AFP Executive Director Michael Hunt, "Basically, we just want to talk to people who are interested in the festival concept: they call, we talk, we visit, we figure out what might happen. No more 'official' application" (Hunt 2000a).
  4. ASU estimates that the total cost of *Untold Stories* was \$400,000 (Jennings-Roggensack 2000). *Untold Stories* was funded by the Arizona Commission on the Arts (through appropriations from the Arizona state legislature and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts), the *Tribune*, Carantin & Co., Southwest Airlines, and the American Festival Project. The AFP is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, Kentucky Arts Council, AT&T Foundation, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, and the Appalshop Production and Education Fund.
  5. Holden was also both Acting Executive Director and Board Chair of AFP during the festival (Hunt 1999).
  6. Hernandez-Garcia's remarks are from a report on the project, one of a number of evaluations requested from participants in the project by AFP as part of their standard operating procedure.
  7. The 1999 *pastorela* received financial help from the American Festival Project because, according to Michael Hunt, "there was no [financial] community infrastructure left in place to keep it going," a partial failure on the part of AFP and ASU, says Hunt (1999).
  8. Because of cuts in funding for individual artists' fellowships, there is a popular opinion among artists that funders have increased their awards to community-oriented art. While it is true that most funders require applicants to reflect on the ways their proposed work would affect their communities, arts organizations accustomed to working in community-based projects maintain that foundation funding in their field has not changed, but just appears more prominent after funding cuts to individual artists.
  9. According to ASUPE's Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, "the funding glitch stemmed from a two-fold issue: one, the festival itself had grown considerably beyond the initial scope, which required more funds, and the projected grant support which did not materialize" (2000).

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- 1999a Letter to author. 19 April.  
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