

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES AT CANADA'S
WORLD FESTIVAL OF CHILDREN'S THEATRE

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Between June 5 – 14 (2016), 210 children from 21 nations arrived in Stratford, Ontario for the 14th *World Festival of Children's Theatre (WFCT)*. 38 directors and technicians accompanied the children's troupes, as well as 30 chaperones; and the 21 troupes presented a total of 33 performances to an international audience in various public locales in the city of Stratford. The festival was produced under the auspices of the International Amateur Theatre Association (aita/iata.asbl), which annually produces and promotes international festivals for adults and youth in different venues worldwide.

Stratford, Ontario is also the home of the largest annual theatre festival in North America, *The Stratford Festival*, featuring the work of Shakespeare and established in 1953. At the time the *World Festival of Children's Theatre* took place, *The Stratford Festival* was in full swing, attracting more than a half-million visitors to the small town of Stratford. The planned coincidence of both festivals taking place simultaneously in the same city contributed to the success of the *WFCT*, and highlights the unique management strategies that were employed by the children's festival organizers

This article explores some of those management strategies. It identifies challenges unique to producing a festival serving children under the age of fourteen, from many world cultures and speaking different languages. It traces the step-by-step process by means of which Festival organizers set in place managers to oversee the many complex tasks, and to recruit volunteers. The article also reveals how the management team engaged with unforeseen problems that arose, mainly during the final months prior to opening. Finally and most importantly, this article focuses upon the ways in which the Artistic Director, Ron Dodson, developed remarkable methods for engaging the local community of Stratford in order to make the *WFCT* a success. Overall, this article reveals how educational, business, and artistic groups as well as individual volunteers in Stratford supported the children's performance project; it also foregrounds arts management guidelines for other producers to follow and identifies key areas of festival research that need to be explored.

The article has grown from the author's personal involvement with the Canadian festival project. As Vice-President of World Theatre for the International Amateur Theatre Association (aita/iata.asbl), the author met with Stratford municipal planners as early as 2012 when Dodson first proposed the festival. The remarks quoted in this article originated in several interviews and e-mail conversations conducted between June 2016 – January 2017 with Ron Dodson, General Director Steve Rae, Administrative Director Wendy McNaughton, and other children's theatre practitioners familiar with the Canadian festival.

I. BUILDING STAFF

Artistic Director Ron Dodson had lived for years in Stratford, and was no stranger to producing youth theatre nor tackling the challenges of an international event. His familiarity with the city, and with the city's annual *Stratford Festival*, certainly helped

him build effective relationships with the city's municipal government and Stratford's well-established Shakespearean festival. But Dodson also served for three decades with the International Amateur Theatre Association, concentrating his efforts on that organization's Standing Committee for Children and Youth. He relied upon his knowledge of Stratford culture and his international experience of youth festivals, as he set about to create the 14th *World Festival of Children's Theatre*.

The aita/iata organization, headquartered in Brussels, was an important factor in determining the overall purpose of the *WFCT*. Aita/iata was founded sixty years ago, and has facilitated annual festivals, funded artistic projects and theatrical training, promoted international artistic dialogue and collaboration worldwide, and advocated globally for "understanding and education through theatre."¹ In 2008, Dodson had served as Managing Director of aita/iata's international Congress and Festival held in Ottawa, in conjunction with the International Drama in Education Association. Dodson also participated in aita/iata's world children's festivals in Moscow, Havana, Lingen, Germany (on five occasions), Toyama, Japan, and elsewhere. His work with aita/iata festivals included both youth theatre (approximate ages of 15 - 22) and children's theatre (approximate ages of 7 - 15).

Finally, Dodson's experience also includes regional service in Canada as President of the "Drama Focus Arts Consulting Group," working with community arts organizations and K-12 schools in Canada. The Group guides such institutions in curriculum planning, Thespian activities, teacher workshops and other key areas. He also served as President of the Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators for four years.

Having worked in regional, national and international contexts for so many years, Dodson felt confident that a children's theatre festival could be successfully organized in Ontario. Early in 2011, he enlisted the support of Wendy McNaughton, a retired Ontario Drama/English teacher with three decades of experience, as his Administrative Director. Dodson also brought Steve Rae on board in 2011 as his General Director. Rae is a retired radio executive from Stratford with decades of managerial experience and excellent marketing contacts in the region. He was also a former Board member with *The Stratford Festival*, experience that he found useful when enlisting the support of *The Stratford Festival* for *WFCT* activities.

Dodson, McNaughton and Rae launched the festival at a meeting at the Stratford City Hall early in 2012. To his surprise, the municipal government welcomed the idea of a children's festival that would be "for children, by children," organized around the theme of 'My World, Our Planet.' "Stratford is a world class host city," Steve Rae remarked:

And whenever they get a chance to host--hockey tournaments, baseball tournaments, the Stratford Shakespearean Festival, the World Children's Festival--any of those events are always supported here. They welcome all these opportunities to help out. It's a part of the culture here. They'll support anything that is going to bring people into the community. For example, they especially loved the fact that all of the local children were going to participate in the workshops, host them at their schools, host the kids in their homes--they loved all that stuff. But the reason that they did it was because they always do it. Every time we asked them for something,

they said 'yes.' We asked them for money and they said 'Yes.' Facilities, the parks, crowd control & blocking off streets near the park for our World Village, big signs on City Hall. There's no doubt that being a world class host city is very important.²

Dodson, McNaughton and Rae continued to enlist the support and participation of municipal officials and volunteers through 2012, as the group wrote grants, planned fundraisers, built budgets, organized activities, and other matters. By August 2012, Dodson and McNaughton secured final approval of the project from aita/iata's Executive Committee, and Festival planning continued for another year.

Gradually Dodson and McNaughton began to recognize the unique problem of galvanizing support in a community that had never before attempted to produce a *children's* festival, with all of the special arrangements that required: chaperones, security, multilingual guides, meals, religious/cultural preferences, and other concerns. Although staffers and volunteers were enthusiastic and inspired, none had ever

Wendy McNaughton greets the arrival of Ugandan children.

--Photo by Ron Dodson. Used by permission.



experienced a children's festival on this scale. Hence, in 2013 Dodson and McNoughton began to plan a visit to Lingen, Germany in 2014 with key members of their steering committee, where aita/iata's 13th *World Festival of Children's Theatre* was taking place. They felt the visit would acquaint the steering committee with the scale of the Canadian festival that needed to be achieved.

Aita/iata's *World Festival of Children's Theatre* occurs every year in different global venues, but every fourth year it returns to Lingen, Germany, the site of its original "birthplace."³ Dodson's team members were stunned in 2014 by the scope of the activities they encountered in Germany and the diversity of the performance troupes there. "Going to Lingen really solidified so much," Rae pointed out. "And when we returned, we tried to describe it, show photos, and deepen everyone's sense of what's being planned. Even the Steering Committee had no real idea what it was we were doing. So I can't stress how important it is to be able to travel to a similar event. It takes a long time to get people moving."

For the next eighteen months, Dodson, McNaughton and Rae continued to build volunteer staff positions as they developed the various festival programs. Appointments made during this period included Treasurer, Fundraising, Workshop Coordinator, Marketing and Communications, Logistics (Transportation)⁴, and Community Education. After *WFCT* received a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, three other crucial positions were staffed: Project Manager, Head of Production and Volunteer Trainer.

When one adds up the rough⁵ number of members of the *WFCT* management team, the statistics and their community impact become truly impressive: 165 management staff swelled the ranks of the *WFCT's* Steering, Advisory, Jury Selection (of plays), Production, Marketing & Communications, Education & Workshops, Box Office,

Play! A symposium, Fundraising, Logistics, Opening Celebration, World Village, *Spirit of Inclusion*, Translation, Puppeteers, and Volunteer Coordinating Committees.

In addition to this list of *management staff* volunteers, the organizers relied upon 75 families who hosted the children in their homes, and 28 additional families who hosted adult guests in their homes. *Day-by-day volunteers* who assisted with such tasks as driving, ticket sales, postering, ushering, cooking & food delivery, decorating, and other tasks numbered 144.

Supervising this large number of staffers and volunteers posed a major challenge to the Festival's Steering Committee. Daily meetings with project directors were necessary, and those directors certainly needed to be in daily contact with their volunteers in order to keep everyone on task—particularly once the Festival got underway and the local merchants, school officials and others realized the scale of what was happening in Stratford, and rushed forward to lend support.

One challenge, though, that Dodson and his team failed to anticipate was the way that the *planned* Festival activities “ballooned” into larger projects and opened-up new directions. Months later, Ron Dodson emphasized two points that required special attention: “Be sure that everyone on the organizing team knows their roles and when to ask for help, through open communication.” Also: “Keep the group's focus on the mission and mandate of the organization and thereby avoid mission creep. It took me/us some time to do that.”⁶ Rae added another caveat, drawn from his experience as a local businessman:

It's very important for you to have people on your Steering Committee who have practical business experience. Somebody who doesn't have real boots on the ground experience has real trouble managing. Because managing people . . . is very difficult if you've never done it before . . . You can wish and hope to have things happen, but unless you have people who can actually make things happen, your festival is not going to work well.

Nonetheless, the organizers were thrilled by the success of community engagement when it came to staffers and volunteers: “The local community really stepped forward, & took these tasks in hand for our festival and did a great job,” Steve Rae remarked. Together with the large number of volunteers attending to the needs of *The Stratford Festival*, he contemplated the overall impact derived from community engagement in 2016:

What would exist here in Stratford without these festivals? Would life without these festivals give us the quality of life we have now? Would it give us the 50-some restaurants that we enjoy . . . would it give us the quality of the hotels? 130+ million dollars left behind each year, in a town of 35,000 people--that goes a long way to making our roads better, making our schools better, making our community a great place to live?⁷

II. INTEGRATING COMMUNITY ARTS

In addition to organizing the *general* support of these hundreds of community *volunteers*, Dodson and his team also designed plans for the key tasks that community *artists* would play in the *WFCT*. Chief among these artistic partners was the internationally acclaimed *Stratford Festival*.

The Stratford Festival lent Dodson and his team the use of its stages for successful fundraisers that his team organized (featuring nationally famous entertainment headliners). *The Stratford Festival* also provided hundreds of free tickets for the visiting children's troupes and their chaperones to the season's featured children's play, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis. *The Stratford Festival's* Artistic Director, Antoni Cimolino, was also a key donor to the *WFCT*—a fact of no small importance. In retrospect, Ron Dodson was effusive in his praise of how much *The Stratford Festival* contributed to the success of the *WFCT*:

The Stratford Festival was incredibly helpful right from the beginning when we approached Anita Gaffney, the Educational Director. Yes, using their facilities was a foundation, but I had no hesitancy to ask their advice on a wealth of issues. After asking for the moon back in 2013, including programming an internationally-understandable children's production in 2016, they asked us when creating their master schedule what day we wanted to take the kids to it, so they could schedule it on that day and time.

Local arts groups in opening ceremonies before the Stratford City Hall.

--Photo by Ann Baggley. Used by

permission.



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Dodson then added as an afterthought: "The main help they gave was credibility. When we were able to say to potential funders that the

Stratford Festival was on board in a substantial way, doors opened!"

The Stratford Festival also assisted with the production of one of the *WFCT's* most successful events entitled, *The Spirit of Inclusion*, that took place for one hour on the *Stratford Festival's* main Festival stage, on the final Sunday morning of the *WFCT*. The event sought to bring together all the *WFCT* performers, their host families, friends and community members in a free event celebrating the spirit of international inclusion and acceptance. "We wanted something that included everybody," Steve Rae remarked.

And so we approached the local Council of Churches and gave them the mandate that 'this was not about God, it was about everyone.' And the Council took that and ran with it, they pulled people from all over Canada to make presentations. We had a disabled swimmer who had swum across Lake Ontario. We had a fellow who used to be homeless in Toronto. We had music, the cast from *The Lion, the Witch and*

the Wardrobe. We had another local provincial dance troupe doing a special peace dance on inclusion We had Canadian throat-singers, a couple of speakers. And it was not about God, it was about ‘inclusion’ and so it covered everybody.

This single event united all the Festival participants with each other and with other artists and prominent Ontario figures in a ritual manner. But it’s also noteworthy to mention the impressive range of *local* artists that Dodson and his team enlisted to add momentum to the ten day-long festival and the shows that the international troupes were presenting at the *WFCT*.

The opening ceremonies, for example, took place on the steps outside the Stratford City Hall, and featured local singers, dancers, speakers, dance troupes, clowning and entertainment for everyone. By engaging all of them at the very start in the opening ceremonies, the *WFCT* created a dialog among them, encouraging them to work together for the first time in their history. “This was fabulous,” Rae remarked:

It was the first time that three independent dance studios had ever danced together, so that opened lines of communications that had never been opened before. The kids got to dance with them and we had a variety of dance styles. So it turned out remarkably well. And those dance kids

kept coming back again and again to different festival events. There was one young dancer who, during the week of the festival, made a big, big painting of every country represented at the festival, and then presented it to us at our closing ceremony. It was fantastic. It really made everyone realize that these integrated groups are essential parts of the community. And now they're discussing things together.

The Spirit of Inclusion, staged in The Stratford Festival's main theatre.

--Photo: Ron Dodson. Used by permission.



In one of Stratford’s public parks downtown, the local Kiwanis Club organized the *World Village* project. Stratford Police closed-off the street between 11 a.m. – 5 p.m. daily in order to make the park a home base “safe zone” to the visiting children. *WFCT* contracted with the local children’s entertainment group “Family and Co.” to provide daily afternoon entertainment on the Veterans' Stage, including an open microphone for the children, games, and a “Culture Expo.” Here each visiting troupe had their own tent in which the children displayed memorabilia and artifacts from their home lands: maps, artwork, ethnic clothing, photos, display boards and other items, where everyone could tour the Expo and learn about the children’s home cultures. In order to encourage attendance by the general public, the Kiwanis Club provided a daily BBQ lunch.

Overall, the contribution of local arts groups to the *WFCT* was a strong complement to the educational programs and dramatic presentations offered during the twelve-day festival. Not only did the artistic sector include traditionally arts-focused groups (such as *The Stratford Festival*, local dancers and singers, and others); it also challenged non-artistic groups to create artistic projects for the entire community. The local Council of Churches, for example, created *The Spirit of Inclusion* ritual entertainment, and the Kiwanis Club took responsibility for producing arts entertainment in the *World Village*. The entire artistic segment of the *WFCT* functioned as a catalyst to bring all artistic groups in the Stratford community together for the first time.

Afternoon activities in the "World Village."
-Photo by Ron Dodson. Used by permission.



III. INTEGRATING COMMUNITY EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

The final aspect of the 2016 *WFCT* that we need to consider is the noteworthy ways in which the Steering Committee integrated the resources of local school systems, arts education groups, and regional universities into the ten-day Festival. These groups hosted visits and performances by international troupes in Stratford’s K-12 classrooms; presented workshops in theatre arts and crafts (acting, singing, makeup, costume-building, etc.); provided student and faculty volunteers to lead workshops and serve as liaisons with the visiting troupes; conducted a two-day symposium on the nature and value of play; provided local facilities for rehearsal, performance and discussion activities; and presented five mornings of a “Director’s Forum” where international children’s theatre directors, producers and educators exchanged ideas and discussed best practices, using the stage productions a “laboratory examples.”

The complete list of Canadian and United States schools that contributed people, spaces, or supplies to this educational focus of the Festival was impressive:

- **Universities:** Brock University, Eastern Michigan University (USA), University of Waterloo (Ontario), the University of Michigan (USA), Guelph University, Providence University College;
- **K-12 Stratford-Area Schools:** Anne Hathaway Public School, Avon Public School, Hamlet Public School, Jeanne Sauve Catholic School, Romeo Public School, Shakespeare Public School, St. Aloysius Catholic School, St. Ambrose Catholic Elementary School, St. Michael Catholic Secondary School, Stratford Central Public School, Stratford Central Secondary School, Stratford Middle Years School, Sunshine Montessori School, Stratford Northwestern Secondary school;
- **Local/Regional Arts Schools & Organizations:** St. Mary School Choristers, Factory 163, Falstaff Family Centre, Dance Arts Academy, Gallery Stratford, Nancy Campbell Academy, Playmakers Theatre School, *On Stage* Dance,

Optimist Hall, Infinity Dance, Original Kids Theatre Company, Stratford Central Singers, Parkview United, Tangled Web Theatre, Ontario *Dancefest*, Stratford Public Library, 6 Wellington St., *The Stratford Festival*.

When examining the activities of the university partners of the *WFCT*, one identifies projects that are fairly common in many amateur and professional theatre fests. Critical "symposia" on a festival-related theme, for example, or post-production colloquies with audience and artists can often be found on many festival schedules. However, two university activities of the *WFCT* bear special mention: the "Director's Forum" and the "Children's Festival Ambassadors."

Unlike many festivals that invite several prominent judges or adjudicators to comment publicly upon the shows being presented, *WFCT* arranged for the International Amateur Theatre Association's "Standing Committee for Children and Youth" (SCCY) to conduct the Director's Forum each morning. Aita/iata's SCCY is not at all a random group of play adjudicators or specialists, each of whom would possess his/her unique perspective on the field of children's theatre. Instead, the SCCY is a group of like-minded experts who are appointed for four-year terms by the Executive Board of aita/iata.asbl, and who are drawn from worldwide practice. All of them share common goals and approaches to learning and to working with children that have been facilitated by aita/iata for several decades.

For example, the SCCY's biennial "Drama in Education" Congress has been training youth theatre practitioners since 1974, with leading instructors brought to Austria for the Congress sessions from all over the world. The Congress' goal is for leading practitioners of children's theatre to share their methods and "best practices" with participants. Additionally, the SCCY has a strong pedagogical focus, derived from decades of scholarly research and experiment conducted throughout Europe in the network of "Theater Educational Centers" (Theaterpädagogisches Zentrum or TPZ)⁸. This network of specialist academies for theater, play, dance, circus and media focuses on applied aesthetic education. The University of Osnabruck in Lingen, Germany, for example, is one key TPZ that has developed The World Festival of Children's Theatre in the city of Lingen-Ems, mentioned earlier.

By linking university-level research and discussion with *WFCT* children's theatre productions, Dodson deepened the festival's impact not simply upon the local Stratford or Ontario theatre community, but also upon the world community of youth theatre whose practitioners--from Austria, China, Germany and other nations--attended the *WFCT*.

A second, more interesting contribution of universities to the *WFCT* took the form of thirty-two "Children's Festival Ambassadors." These were university student volunteers who spoke the different languages of the visiting troupes (many were foreign

Children from Indonesia's Teater Tanah Air perform *Spectacle ZERO*.
--Photo by Ann Bagley. Used by permission.



exchange students); and who worked in pairs as liaisons between the *WFCT* and the children. They met the incoming troupes at the airport, accompanied the children to workshops, shows, and meals. They served as "big brothers/sisters" and cheerleaders for each visiting company. Many of these young people put their summer plans "on hold" and travelled a great distance to be a part of the *WFCT*. "They were just amazing to see," Steve Rae observed. "To me they were one of the most important elements that I underestimated. I expected them to be helpful. To be responsible. What I didn't expect was the total devotion on both sides: the kids from the acting companies loved their ambassadors, and the ambassadors gave that love right back to them. And that went way deeper than I ever imagined."

Turning from the universities to the K-12 schools, one must conclude that the relationship the *WFCT* developed with the elementary and secondary schools was remarkably successful. From the outset in 2011, Dodson and McNaughton has planned to schedule the *WFCT* during June when Stratford's K-12 schools were still in session. As things turned out, visiting children mingled easily with the Canadian students in the classrooms and on the field trip to tourist sites.

Initially, however, the *WFCT* Education Committee encountered problems linking the visiting troupes to local K-12 classrooms. As Wendy McNaughton, *WFCT*'s Housing Coordinator for the visiting troupes, remarked: "I spent a lot of time presenting the World Festival story at elementary school staff meetings. The idea was to connect each Stratford school with a visiting country group so that the school would feel some ownership of that country. Those connections and relationships enabled us to find billets for the 200 visiting children as well as to arrange two half-days of programming in the host schools."⁹

But as Steve Rae pointed out: "We couldn't get communication from the schools because of security & confidentiality when we tried to link schools with countries."

The School Board didn't want to have any responsibility for being the vehicle for acquiring our home hosts. So we communicated with the schools through social media, Rotary, and other channels. We thought the School Board would allow us to send out that info, but that didn't happen. This created a whole lot more pressure than we needed, but it worked out fine in the end.

Once the Rotary and other service groups became involved, the connections between the *WFCT* and local schools grew quickly—especially during the early months of 2016. As individuals and families in the community stepped forward to offer homestay housing for the visiting troupes, many of these individuals were also the parents of schoolchildren; and the parents connected very easily with the different schools to gain an entrée for the international children to visit classrooms. "Many schools were paired with different companies and they got to meet the kids," Steve Rae observed.

Teachers hosted them at their schools, and they got to do some workshops together and other stuff. So it was a tremendous integration experience. And there were some performances that went out to the

schools as well. So beyond the groups who just performed on the festival stages, they went out & performed in the area schools.

In addition to the way in which local parents and homestay volunteers connected visiting troupes with local K-12 classrooms, these volunteers also spontaneously generated two large social and cultural activities. Noting that the *WFCT* hadn't scheduled any field trips to regional sites, several parents organized a bus tour for all the foreign children to visit Niagara Falls. They provided the finances, the busses and food for the field trip. Additionally, groups of parents banded together to host barbecues and neighborhood parties for the children.

What all of this produced was a high degree of community spirit among Stratford's citizens. "In fact, many Stratford families got to know each other simply because they found themselves hosting one group or another," Steve Rae remarked. "One of them came to me later and said, 'I just wanted you to know that this was the highlight of our year—hosting these children in our home. Meeting these children, all of the shows we got to see and the activities we shared with them: this was the absolute highlight of our year.'" In some cases, groups of host friends would combine efforts. For example, all the Cuban children were hosted by the Montessori school parents. "Now these families who never knew each year are fast friends. This sort of thing really goes a long way," Rae observed.

Finally, we should note that the *WFCT* Steering Committee also successfully enlisted the support of a number of private arts organizations to assist with the nine special workshops offered to the visiting troupes: Dance on Film, Singing Games, AfroCulture, Mask Making, Newspaper Puppetry, Musical Theatre, Prop Making, Costume Warehouse, and Clowning.

A number of these workshop leaders came some distance to participate in the *WFCT*. For example, Adwoa and Fule Badoe from Guelph specialize in West African dance and drumming, and tour their work internationally. Laurel Brown, workshop leader for Musical Theatre, is the President of Ontario's *Dancefest*, the province's annual dance festival. And Tyler Seguin and Bonnie Thomson are professional puppeteers working through the Ontario Arts Council's "Artists in Education" program in a variety of provincial settings.

A number of local arts groups also stepped up to the plate and offered supplies, spaces or additional artists supporting the workshop programs. Groups like Factory 163, the Nancy Campbell Academy, and 6 Wellington Street combined their efforts with Gallery Stratford and the Stratford Public Library to make the *WFCT* workshops successful.

IV. FOLLOW-UP

Two noteworthy by-products of the *WFCT* that are not normally a part of other international festivals need to be considered at this point, because they exerted a certain impact upon the conduct of the festival during its operation. Ron Dodson and Steve Rae referred to these as the festival's "legacy." One spinoff of the *WFCT* is the ongoing project of writing a unique, up-to-date handbook of festival

management for theatre practitioners. The other is the creation of a fund to support the training of future young artists.

The idea of a festival handbook grew out of a report that had been planned from the outset, since the Canadian government requires such documents as a condition for awarding a grant to the *WFCT*. But in Dodson's hands, this documentation ballooned into a larger product of creating a hands-on "manual of operations" for festival organizers. When the Canadian delegation travelled to Germany and observed the 2012 edition of the *WFCT*, they were saddened to learn that the organizers had followed no clear-cut guidelines. "The fact that there was no manual made it very difficult for us," remarked. "That's why we're trying to build this manual in order to help people around the world."

In fact, the German model from Lingen was unhelpful to the Canadian organizers for several reasons. For example, the Lingen *WFCT* was funded almost entirely by municipal subsidies, so the Germans could offer no suggestions about underwriting a festival like Canada's with private/public partnerships.¹⁰ In the final analysis, though, it was Ron Dodson who envisioned the development of a festival Handbook " . . . so that other folks--Canadian and international--could use it to organize a theatre festival of their own. Aita/iata will have some use of it, I hope, but others as well. It will be over 100 pages and fairly detailed," he explained.

The other part of the *WFCT*'s "legacy" is the creation of a special fund that would support children's theatre practitioners in the future. The creation of this financial endowment to the city of Stratford arose because the Steering Committee had seriously underestimated the amount of cash contributions the festival would generate, and once the *WFCT* was seriously underway, the support turned into a flood of donations. "The biggest surprise," Dodson remarked, "was the degree to which the community supported the festival through small donations and most importantly at the box office."

At present the Steering Committee is debating how to dispense the funds. Some favor creating a travel fund through the aita/iata.asbl organization, to help impoverished children's theatre groups who find it impossible to travel to these large world festivals. Others wish to keep the money in Stratford, in the care of local foundations supporting arts and other community groups. Even individual students might benefit from this arrangement, Steve Rae pointed out: "Perhaps somebody wants to travel to Vancouver to take courses in theater arts . . . But I think the biggest legacy we'll leave behind is all the students around the world who shared this experience together. That make's me cry, it's so wonderful."

V. CONCLUSIONS

It's regrettable that more critical attention on the part of arts management researchers was not paid at the time to the efforts of the *WFCT* organizers because key areas of their management practices could yield valuable information. Arts management scholars should be studying festivals, examining their budgets, jury selections, advertising and marketing, unique private-public partnerships, and audience surveys. These studies could reveal important information on best practices for other festival organizers worldwide.

Additionally, two other shortcomings might be mentioned that occurred to the organizers only in hindsight. One was the need to include some budgeted resources for helping impoverished children's theatre troupes travel to Canada.¹¹ This is frequently a problem in amateur theatre where non-professional ensembles are often "grass roots" associations strongly based in their communities. Unlike professional or even educational troupes, these community-based, amateur ensembles lack the resources widely available for project development and travel that larger theatres enjoy. As Dodson himself pointed out: "The best change that I think we could have made is to be able to help groups which experienced last minute financial burdens more quickly and thoroughly. We didn't plan on that well enough, in my view."

The other shortcoming of the *WFCT* was the failure to elicit from teachers and troupe directors any sort of useful assessment of the festival's impact on the children participating--both Canadian and foreign. Surprisingly, only anecdotal information seemed to be collected by teachers and the Stratford schools. As Steve Rae remarked: "We didn't get back any feedback from the teachers that I heard, other than comment that they loved the experience, and the students loved having our groups there. We heard from some children who said that it was the best part of their school year to host kids from the other countries. But nothing specific from any of the teachers."

Of course, *WFCT* organizers were understandably preoccupied and under great stress to manage the fast-breaking and complicated daily activities while the Festival was taking place. In this, they did a splendid job. As one foreign observer noted: "Ron Dodson's festival was well organized and ran smoothly."¹² And the Belgian President of AITA/IATA, Rob Van Genechten, also pointed out: "What most struck me was the wide spread of the performances in every sense of the word. Shows came from anywhere on the globe, but also contents and subjects, and the style of performing were very diverse. The focus was on the kids, amazing, in one word. Therefore I felt the event to be a very interesting festival. To achieve this with a first time organisation, is remarkable!! Congrats to Ron Dodson and his team to bring all these groups together."¹³

As mentioned above, though, the Stratford *WFCT* failed to attract the critical attention of arts management specialists. Such detailed assessment studies are often done

AITA/IATA President Rob Van Genechten (left) & Ron Dodson.

--Photo by Ann Bagglely. Used by permission.



on larger global arts events (Avignon, Venice, Edinburgh, for example). But Stratford's *WFCT* was, of course, a "one-off" event, and an amateur event that will never be repeated. Perhaps this helps to explain the lack of such data. In the future, one would hope that some of the program participants--such as university specialists--would prioritize the publication of such work

Nonetheless, this exploration of the *Stratford World Festival of Children's Theatre* has revealed some important management features to bear in mind as we continue to regard the evolution of world

youth festivals in the 21st century:

1. Planning community engagement strategies at least four years out seems an advisable time-line for a children's festival, because of the many linkages to the local community that must be explored.
2. Artistic Directors of youth festivals should ideally have prior experience producing similar events, and be familiar with international youth festivals in different global venues. The ability to anticipate the challenges, problems and opportunities of such a festival is an invaluable resource for the organizers.
3. Affiliating with a major recognized entity (such as aita/iata.asbl or *The Stratford Festival*) offers definite advantages in terms of human and material resources, and credibility.
4. Site visits to comparable festivals are invaluable for orienting members of the Steering Committee/Executive Committee to the scale and diversity of festival programs, especially when such staffers have little or no experience with festivals aimed at youth.
5. Having at least one person on the staff with connections to the diplomatic community is useful for facilitating problems with visas, customs, embassy receptions, etc.
6. Scheduling children's festivals at a time when community K-12 schools are in session provides numerous opportunities for broadening and deepening the festival's impact upon the visiting children and the local community.
7. Homestays for visiting children seem desirable because they generate close cooperation between members of the community, the festival, and the schools; and because homestays encourage strong cooperation and teamwork among local citizens.
8. Mobilizing all sectors of the local arts and educational communities reduces expenditures, grows community cultural resources, and enables many different kinds of festival programming.
9. Key staff positions that should be paid are Accounting (the *WFCT* had two), Project Manager, Head of Production, Ticket Sales and Volunteer Trainer. Other key staff positions that may be volunteer or partially compensated include those of Treasurer, Fundraising, Workshop Coordinator, Marketing and Communications, Logistics (Transportation), and Community Education.
10. Tour guides of some sort should be assigned to each visiting troupe to the festival's communications with each group, and to acclimate the foreign visitors to the local environment. Young foreign exchange students seem ideal for this task because of their ability to relate well to young children.
11. A "central hub" or festival meeting-place is a desirable addition to a children's festival, with opportunities for spontaneous as well as planned activities, exhibits, performances, and the like. All festivals sponsored by aita/iata create this sort of venue, that in Stratford was called the *Global Village*.

¹ www.aitaiata.org.

² All quotations by Steve Rae are taken from an interview with him in Stratford, 21 October 2016.

³ Visit the website of the German hosting organization in Lingen at: <http://www.weltkindertheaterfest.de/en>.

⁴ One noteworthy skillset of the festival's coordinator of logistics was the person's past experience in Canada's diplomatic service. Thus the *WFCT* logistics person also assisted children's troupes with such matters as visas, clearing customs with stage equipment, and serving as liaison with different embassies in Ottawa for special events.

⁵ Some volunteer staffers served on more than one committee. For example, in addition to serving as a member of the *WFCT* Steering Committee, Gail Fricker also served on committees overseeing workshops, play selection and education. The total number of such "duplications" amounted to approximately 15 individuals.

⁶ All comments by Ron Dodson are taken from e-mail and phone conversations that took place on 4 November 2016 and 7 January 2017.

⁷ In the interview with Steve Rae, he commented on the overall impact of the *WFCT*'s budget: "We spent about half a million dollars. And we spent as much as possible right here in the community. I'd say 75% – 80% was spent in Stratford. That alone was a great economic driver for us. Beyond that the hotels, restaurants and so forth—we haven't tracked all the hotel rooms & number of nights and so forth. There were many of the festivalgoers who were lodged in hotels: the directors of troupes, the aita/iata folks, many observers. And many of the troupes also paid for hotels. For example, Australia came with a contingent of 18 people and we could only pay for meals & accommodations of groups of 10. And you know, there's no possible way of determining the number of restaurant meals. You know, we prepared a lot of meals for the kids, but a lot of them ate in their homes, and many were eating elsewhere in the city."

⁸ www.tpzlingen.de.

⁹ All comments by Wendy McNaughton are taken from e-mail conversations that took place on 2 December 2016.

¹⁰ The Lingen organizers also created a sectarian final ceremony for the children in one of the local churches, but the Canadians felt that the nonsectarian "Spirit of Inclusion" event in Stratford would be more appropriate for the diversity of children expected to participate.

¹¹ Normally with international festivals associated with aita/iata.asbl, participating troupes are expected to pay the cost of transporting people and equipment. Festivals then provide all the airport transfers, housing, events tickets and meals for each troupe, up to a limit of ten individuals.

¹² Kathleen Maldonado from the USA's American Association of Community Theatre, and President of NARA (*North American Regional Alliance* of Canada and the USA within aita/iata.asbl). Ms. Maldonado commented in an e-mail conversation on 6 January 2017.

¹³ Comment made in e-mail conversation 9 January 2017.