

This speech was addressed to Barter's Porterfield Society, a group of patrons who have committed to giving some form of bequest to Barter, at our annual dinner. I say this for two reasons: 1) It is a speech, meant to be presented through speaking, and not necessarily a literary work meant to be read again and again. Although it may stand-up to being read and scrutinized, it is really written as a speech for impact and impression. And 2) You must read the entire thing to get its full impact; do not stop half-way through as you may miss the point. It's meant as a whole and not for its individual parts. Enjoy!

“Collaboration”
Porterfield Society Speech
Given on Sunday, November 1, 2009
By Richard Rose – Producing Artistic Director

“Every so often, but not really often enough, a new show appears that restores our faith in the possibilities of theatre and reminds us why some of us decided to spend our life working there in the first place.”

– Terrence McNally in the liner notes of the musical *[title of show]*.

One of the signature songs of *[title of show]* has the following refrain: “I’d rather be 9 people’s favorite thing than a hundred people’s ninth favorite thing.” *[title of show]* is a musical – one which we might likely never perform here at Barter due to some strong language and content – which is about the writing of musicals. The theme of which suggests that the process of creativity – the writing of a musical – is almost as important and serious as the work produced by that process. The name *[title of show]* is intentionally ambiguous as you can and should insert your own title for your own work using your own creativity. This musical, certainly flawed but, likely, still important, both makes fun of itself as well as treating its subject matter as very important. And its ultimate message, if that word is even the correct one to use in referring to this musical send-up, is that every one of us must, together, not alone, tap our creativity with the help of others in order to find success and, maybe even, a new path in this world.

Certainly one cannot think of the world of creation without thinking of those who have come together to make great things. After all, only God created the world alone; the rest of us really need the help. Einstein even had collaborators who contributed to his great discoveries.

In the business world, we call them “partners.” And, in some cases, partners are just that – partners – not collaborators. Partnering usually means the bringing together of resources, often capital, in cases where one alone does not have the capability to succeed on their own. When I think of business partners, Bill Gates and Paul Allen, the founders of Microsoft, immediately come to mind. However, when I think of Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs, founders of Apple Computer, I think more of collaborators than I do of business partners. Yet they certainly were business partners as well as collaborators.

So, what’s the difference between a partner and a collaborator, if there is any?

A partner is most commonly defined as “one who is united or associated with another or other in an activity or a common sphere of interest.” What immediately comes to mind are business partners, a spouse, domestic partner, two people dancing together, bridge partner or tennis partner.

A collaborator is best defined as one who is not necessarily contractually bound but works with another to achieve the intersection of common goals. It’s a looser relationship, perhaps with less structure and with fewer of the responsibilities spelled-out in order, as one definition put it, “to achieve non-routine cognitive work.” Writers are usually thought of as collaborators, not partners. In the theatre world almost all of us consider our colleagues as “collaborators” and not “partners.” When I think of great collaborators in the theatre, I think of great musical collaborators such as Rodgers and Hammerstein, Rodgers and Hart, Comden and Green or other great collaborations such as the director Harold Prince and composer/lyricist Stephen Sondheim. The responsibilities of each collaborator may be clear in terms of the function that they perform within the collaborations – they may even have a contractual relationship – but, inevitably, the lines will be blurred and the relationship not as defined as is the case with partners.

Are our spouses partners or collaborators? Well, probably best not to get into that question.

One non-profit manual says the following, “The most important thing to remember is: organizations don’t collaborate – *people* collaborate.” And the manual goes on to state, “It is important to create and nurture both

types of relationships – partnerships and collaborations – to strengthen your organization and enhance the services it provides.”

How very true. Every law firm, medical partnership and an infinite number of business partners know that you can form partnerships, but you cannot always achieve collaboration. You can define the roles and responsibilities any which way you like, you might even get great cooperation, but that is not the same as collaboration.

Now, before I get to the point of this, please indulge me in one sidebar on the issue of collaboration, just because I think it is truly interesting. In every definition of collaboration that I have ever seen, the second definition offered is inevitably “an act of cooperating traitorously with an enemy.” Now that definition causes an irresistible urge to go back to the discussion on whether a spouse is a partner or a collaborator, but I will let that urge pass. The most fascinating part of this definition is that you can truly hate each other – be blood enemies – and still be collaborators; the passion of the common interest is the thread that keeps you bound together for your common purpose. Partners will leave and abandon the partnership (break the contract), in most cases, once the relationship moves beyond even dislike, much less reached enemy status.

So, think of Bill Gates and Paul Allen or Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs. Or if more theatrically inclined, think of Rodgers and Hammerstein, who are according to Forbes Magazine the second richest dead celebrities, ranking in wealth ahead of Elvis and Michael Jackson. Who would these people be today if it were not for their collaborators? Would they possess their personal wealth and their important achievements? Who would we all be today without our everyday collaborators – the people we love and those who love us? It’s not the partners who make our lives meaningful, it is the collaborators – those who help us when we want to give up and who convince us that what we love to do or feel passionately about is what we should pursue despite the consequences. When was the last time your business partner told you that?

In the theatre, we think of everyone as a collaborator, even though we all have contractual relationships. Barter’s staff and Board of Trustees has just spent the last two days at a planning retreat formulating Barter Theatre’s plans for the next 3 years. I can tell you that the relationship amongst the 30-plus people seated in that room planning Barter’s future is absolutely

collaborative and not reliant upon contracts and partnerships. We are all in it together for a common purpose and, no matter the difficulty or the reward, we share a common passion and commitment to the same core values and a deep desire for the future of Barter Theatre that transcends any contractual relationship. It's collaboration that gets you through the hard times and should be fully celebrated in the good times.

I hope, by now, you are thinking about your own relationship to Barter Theatre. You have made a contractual relationship with Barter Theatre and one that is extremely important to Barter's future. A commitment such as yours is inspiring to others, and shows a true and meaningful relationship with Barter. We hope that you think of yourself – because it is the way we think of you – as collaborators, and not just as partners. We are all voices coming together to intersect at a common goal, which happens to be the health and well-being of Barter Theatre and all that it represents through its core values and excellent services.

"I'd rather be 9 people's favorite thing than one hundred people's ninth favorite thing." *The Mock Turtle in Alice in Wonderland*, which we are adapting to open the 2010 season, says, "What is the use of repeating all that stuff, if you don't explain it as you go on? It's by far the most confusing thing I ever heard!"

There is a destructive element in the world. We watch this every day. It's not the critics, necessarily. It is those who act in the name of their own agenda and have no interest, really, in improving anything but what they represent. We'd normally call them lobbyists and pundits; but they have rapidly become politicians and the 24-hour cable news. We see this destructive element throughout the political system and our society regardless of which side of the aisle you are on. In *[title of show]* they call this the "vampire" – "filling you with doubt, insecurity about what your art should be..." The show goes on to explore how these vampires kill creativity, progress, invention, and, in general, just about everything you might believe, ultimately, forcing you into the mundane and normal. These vampires are both external and internal. The external vampire causes you to doubt your own creativity, ability, choices and, in the end, forces you to do what is in line with what everyone else is doing and, thus, never standing out from the masses. And they do so, as I said, for their own agendas and without consideration for anything or anyone else, and certainly with no interest in what you might be attempting to achieve. If

you listen to these vampires, you will achieve nothing, because the fear created by such vampires will overwhelm you, cause you to constantly second-guess yourself and, eventually, shut down any forward-thinking creative ability that you might have had. These external vampires will kill a non-profit entity, particularly the artistically oriented non-profits.

But, in *[title of show]*, the vampires are also internal – let me quote from the lyrics – “The last vampire is the mother of all vampires and that is the vampire of despair. It will wake you up at 4am to say things like: ‘Who do you think you’re kidding?’ and ‘You look like a fool.’ and ‘No matter how hard you try, you’ll never be good enough.’ Why is it that if some dude walked up to me on the subway platform and said these things, I would think he was a mentally insane jerk, but if the vampire inside my head says it, it must be the voice of reason?”

These vampires must be defeated. And they are defeated through collaboration. Collaborations such as those that exist in this room; such as those that exist between the staff and the Board of Barter Theatre. Vampires, as we’ve learned from all vampire movies, are defeated by people working together and, rarely, if ever, by just one single individual working alone.

Steve Jobs, founder of Apple Computer and Pixar Animation (*Toy Story*, *Monsters, Inc.*) says, “And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it. And, like any great relationship, it just gets better and better as the years roll on. So keep looking until you find it. Don't settle.”

Collaborators help you look, help you discover and help you find. Good collaborations, as Jobs states, “just get better and better as the years roll on.”

“I’d rather be 9 people’s favorite thing than one hundred people’s ninth favorite thing.” Give me, anytime, nine collaborators rather than one hundred people who praise our most recent play but are not interested in seeing our next production.

On September 12, 1962, President Kennedy gave his famous speech, which led to landing a man on the moon. Now, a perfectly legitimate question is,

“what does the space program and the lunar landing have to do with Barter Theatre?” Well, we are premiering *The Blue-Sky Boys*, a new play by Deborah Brevoort, in the summer of 2010, which is about the team that landed us on the moon and how they did so. It’s a wonderfully wacky and inspiring look at the engineering team and their unique and creative process of fulfilling President Kennedy’s objective. If you see no other show in 2010, see *The Blue-Sky Boys*.

During the process of researching *The Blue-Sky Boys*, we have made connections with NASA and discovered some wonderfully talented and brilliant people residing in our own community who have turned us on to resources about which we knew nothing. One of these resources was a little known film by Jeffery Roth entitled *The Wonder of It All*, which is a documentary cataloguing the personal accounts by 7 of the 9 remaining living astronauts concerning the process and the outcome of landing on the moon.

That’s a long way to get you to the notion that one could argue that there is no event in history that was more collaborative with such a focused effort than America’s determination to land on the moon. Kennedy challenged an ill-equipped and immature space program to do what was not on the horizon for them in a timeframe everyone thought impossible.

The documentary reveals the truly collaborative nature of this lunar process as does Barter’s *The Blue-Sky Boys*. Filled with fear, imagination, criticism, death, failure and ultimately success, it was the collaboration – not one single hero – that allowed this program to succeed. And included in this collaboration were the American people. We were collaborators. We wanted the program to succeed and did what we could to see that it did so. All were heroes; all were rowing the boat together. And, for a time, the collaboration worked to the benefit of everyone on earth.

I cannot help but share some of the thoughts from a couple of the astronauts as they spoke to the passion and the sense of the greater good, which helps to define the meaning of collaboration. They all, also, apply to what we do at Barter Theatre on a daily basis and, I would say, perhaps what you do everyday in your lives and businesses.

Alan Bean (Apollo 12) in speaking about the process said the following, “We knew that anytime you did new things, then, you made mistakes;

Things are made by humans. They are extensions of us. We know humans are not perfect. So, we all know that what we're doing is not perfect."

Gene Cernan (Apollo 17) – "We didn't know we couldn't do it. So we did it."

Edgar Mitchell (Apollo 14) chimes in, "[Going to the moon allowed us to] get out of the trees and see the forest. If you can go to the moon, why can't we...[dot, dot, dot, fill those dots in with whatever you want to do]. Well the answer is that you can do anything if you put your mind to it."

In the play of *The Blue-Sky Boys*, one of the characters – Jed – writes an obituary for the first astronauts heading to the moon in case they don't make it back (one of the engineers early in the play had stated, "There a 100% chance that they make it there, but there less than a 50% chance that we can get them back.")

JED: *(reads the obituary)* **The moon is in the heavens, but the road for getting there was on earth, and that road was paved by imperfect men. Our only hope lies in our ability to turn this failure into a tool for making progress.**

And, then, in the most poignant moment in the play, as the landing is successful and we see the earth from the perspective of the moon, one of the characters states:

HAGGERTY: **When the world sees these pictures...and sees...that we're all on this little raft together...floating in the darkness...everything will change. Mark my words, you'll see. Countries will vanish! Borders will disappear! Wars will come to an end! Yes, this changes everything. Mankind will never be the same after this...**

Collaboration made this happen and forever altered man's perspective of himself, even if it hasn't necessarily changed our behavior at present.

Bob Porterfield challenged this region in the same way that President Kennedy challenged the country – do what might seem impossible. If Barter Theatre was proposed today, everyone would think it was crazy to start a theatre in an non-metropolitan statistical area (MSA) and, even if

you include Barter in the statistical MSA of the Tri-Cities, that MSA is the smallest MSA of any LORT theatre in the United States. Crazy.

Bob did this. He supplied the challenge and the vision. But he did not do it alone. He had collaborators. Rodger Stuart's parents come immediately to mind. Frank DeFriece's parents come to mind. Helen Fritz, Bob's first wife, was certainly instrumental. And a host of collaborators in the beginning and through the years have made Barter Theatre into what it is today.

It is through collaboration that we make a difference every day in people's lives. I am here to report to you that Barter has had a very successful 2009 season to date and our expectation is, barring any catastrophe outside of our control, that we will have success through the end of year. This was accomplished through great collaboration amongst the Board and staff of Barter Theatre and in collaboration and partnership with our donors, sponsors, patrons and funding entities. *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Of Mice and Men* along with its current national tour, *Four Places*, *Adjoining Trances*, *Othello*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Showtime at First Baptist*, *Six Dance Lessons in Six Weeks*, *The Fantasticks*, *Forever Plaid*, *Frankenstein*, *Heaven Sent*, *Little Shop of Horrors* and *The Foreigner* along with all of The Barter Player shows for young audiences and the upcoming holiday shows happen through collaborations of many types. Only through collaboration is theatre possible.

There is no collaboration without results. Results are the reason collaborations exist. When results either fail to appear or simply no longer seem possible, then collaboration ceases. Remember, the key component to collaboration is the intersection of common goals. Keeping Barter alive and healthy is one such common goal. But there are many others that speak to all of our passions as to why we are sitting in this room tonight.

I want to share one such story to demonstrate the success of our collaboration. Following a student matinee performance of *Frankenstein*, 10-12 seventh or eighth grade boys were exiting the theatre and gathered in the lobby. They were all imitating, in a very empathic manner, the Creature from the show; saying, "Book(s)" and acting out not his acts of violence, but his acts of learning and humanity. In the midst of this, one boy asked, "Hey, is this supposed to be educational?" Feeling like they might have been duped, all of the boys were silent for a moment. Then, one of the other boys said, "No! This was way too cool to be educational."

And they went on to continue their discussion and enjoyment of their experience in the theatre.

I want to talk just a bit more about the recent planning retreat held by Barter's Board and staff over the last two weeks. Barter, as an organization, faces some very interesting and complex issues, which are very difficult to solve in a tough economy where resources are very difficult to secure. These issues demand a high level of focus and commitment to solve over the long run. It was impressive to sit in a room with our Barter collaborators – Board and staff – and watch and learn what brilliant minds can do collectively that none of us would be able to do singularly. It was also interesting to see those collaborators rally around the common core values of Barter Theatre, fight to protect those core values, and strategize to see that those values blossom into the future. I am ever impressed at the commitment and the passion demonstrated along with the care and concern for what we hold dear to our hearts.

In Barter's retreat, like America landing on the moon, we took up the challenge and asked, "Why shouldn't we? What's preventing us? And how to we move ahead?" And the results, I think, will be a better and stronger Barter Theatre three years from now.

As I stated earlier, collaborations must grow and flourish into the future, or they will cease to exist. **Or better, if more obscurely put, Alice of *Alice in Wonderland* says: "But then, shall I never get any older than I am now? That'll be a comfort, one way – never to be old – but then – always to have lessons to learn!"** We must always learn lessons, or we will wither and die.

"I'd rather be nine people's favorite thing, than a hundred people's ninth favorite thing."

Indulge me as I quote yet one more song lyric from *[title of show]* that I find speaks to that for what each of us strives; this is sung by one of the female characters (and this is a bit truncated, so forgive if you know this song):

Dancing in the backyard,
Kool-aid mustache
And butterfly wings
Hearing Andrea McArdle sing
From the hi-fi in the den.
I've been waiting my whole life
To find a way back to then.

[By the way, this is what *Where the Wild Things Are* – the movie, is all about. And what *Alice in Wonderland* will be and Barter's production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor[®] Dreamcoat* and *The Wizard of Oz* were all about – finding our way back into the child inside of us.]

I aimed for the sky,
A nine year old can see so far
I'll conquer the world
And be a star
I'll do it all
By the time I'm ten
I would know that confidence
If I knew a way back to then.

So I crammed my life in a U-Haul
To find my part of it all

But the mundane sets in
We play by the rules
And plough through the days
The years take us miles away
From the time we wondered when
We'd find our way back to then.

When you least expect,
Opportunity walks
Through the door.
You suddenly connect
With the thing that you forgot
That you've been looking for

And there you are
Right in the middle of
What you love...
You're that little girl
With her wings unfurled
Flying again.
Back in the backyard dancing.
I found a way back to then.

Barter's found a way back to then. We seek, as America did in going to the moon, a sort of child-like innocence and naiveté in our collaboration along with a sophisticated savvy and business acumen all of which will help us to succeed.

I've been saying this all night long, but, really, which would we rather be "nine people's favorite thing or a hundred people's ninth favorite thing?" Me, I'd rather Barter be the favorite thing of the people in this room tonight and the people who attend Barter Theatre an average of three times each year than the ninth favorite thing of a million people. Because, in today's world, being ninth favorite just doesn't put you on a priority list.

From the show:

We can either follow our instinct
Or take advice from every joker,
We can either be distinct
Or wind up being mediocre.

We knew we'd never please everyone.

I'd rather be nine people's favorite thing
Than a hundred people's ninth favorite thing.

Those nine people
Will tell nine people,
Then we'll have eighteen people
Lovin' our show. Then
Eighteen people could grow into
Five hundred and twenty-five
Thousand, six-hundred people,
All lovin' our show!

And ten years from now
We'll be reminded of why
We'd rather be
Nine people's favorite show
Than a hundred people's ninth favorite show.

Thanks for making Barter Theatre one of your favorite places to be, for being a collaborator, and for being one of the nine people who speak to nine people who become eighteen people and who turn into the thousands who connect with Barter Theatre each year.

So, in the words of Lewis Carroll, The King says, "Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end: then stop."

Good night and thank you.