



TALASKE
SOUND THINKING™

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Notes by Rick Talaske for "The Unexpected Space" Session at ISPA NYC08

SLIDE 1

We are about to begin the "The Unexpected Space" Session at ISPA NYC08. We hope to offer an interesting perspective regarding the role spaces play within the performance experience. In the course of doing so, we will discuss the expectations our society holds regarding the performing arts.

I am Rick Talaske of TALASKE | Sound Thinking in Oak Park, Illinois, U.S.A. I am an acoustician actively involved in the design of performance facilities. I will serve as the moderator for this session.

With great pleasure, I would like to introduce the members of our panel.

Josephine Ramirez is responsible for programming of performing arts events at the LA Music Center, and has a strong hand in establishing arts policy within her vast community as the city's Cultural Affairs Commissioner. She offers a unique perspective on the performing arts due to her present positions, and from past roles within arts funding Foundations such as the J. Paul Getty Trust.

Branford Marsalis needs no introduction. As a performing artist, his career has covered the spectrum of music: from Jazz to Classical, Popular music to TV. While working with Branford on the design of the Musician's Village in New Orleans, I recognized that Branford has a unique perspective on the arts and I asked him to join our session.

Benton Delinger is a managing partner of Theatre Projects Consultants. Benton and his firm's consultants are excellent performance hall designers and the firm's founders, Richard Pilbrow, Alan Russell and David Staples, were among the first to recognize the shortcomings of performance halls being designed a few decades ago.

SLIDE 2

When ISPA settled on the theme "The Expectation of Experience," I suggested a session to discuss the role of performance spaces. "Expectation" and "Experience" are words loaded with meaning and relate to everything we are trying to achieve when designing buildings. Initially, I envisioned a session talking about how well-designed spaces can facilitate and enhance the performance experience and how audience expectations have changed over time.

We could talk all day about the design of performance spaces. But after further thought, and especially after talking to Josephine, I realized that this conversation could not occur out of context.

As with many aspects of the arts, I realized that a discussion about performance spaces could not occur without concurrently talking about our Society and Technology.

Our expectations regarding performance experiences are influenced by who we are, our clever technology, and the built environment we have created to accommodate our diversity of activities. These matters are all intertwined!



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SLIDES 2, 3 and 4

When we talk about Society, Technology, and Performance Spaces during this session, this is our perspective.

To make our discussion about the present and future relevant, we should review our past.

SLIDE 5 – 1800S

When looking at a historic photo (graphic rendering, because then, photographs required long exposure times,) have you ever noticed that the image often depicts an audience engaged in discourse simultaneously with performance activities occurring on stage?

During those days, performances were very different and the interaction that occurred during performances spilled outside of the performance space. Society talked about the performing arts like our society today talks about sports.

SLIDE 6 – EARLY 1900S

In the early/mid 1900s, social, technological, and performance hall room design influences changed the arts audience. Engagement was suppressed.

In 1910, the Byreut's Festspielhouse opened. Its design was strongly influenced by Wagner who wanted to create a more "democratic" seating arrangement. Thus, the steeply-raked, fan-shaped room was invented and this influence perpetuated into the 1970's.

Furthermore, Vaudeville era producers and presenters demanded that the audience be quiet, but polite applause was acceptable.

In the late 1800's, lighting changed from uniformly illuminated audience chambers and stages to dimly lit audience chambers and brightly lit stages. This further subdued audience interaction.

Hence, social, technological, and room design matters were strongly influencing expectations and the performance experience.

SLIDE 7 – 1980 TO PRESENT

In the 1980's, theatre design professionals took notice of the qualities of the performance experience that have been lost over the decades. The design features of historic spaces were being touted and reintroduced into contemporary facilities. In particular, Theatre Projects Consultants were leaders in this revolution.

Flexibility was also maximized, based on a client's needs and willingness to put forth the resources to adapt their facility.

Part of the beauty of live performance is the ability to appreciate nuance. Quiet rooms facilitate the perception of nuance and offer artistic freedom.

If the excitement of the arts world that existed in the 1800's is the goal, today's performance space designs are responding to the challenge and technology is helping.



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While theatre greats such as Peter Brook, Tyrone Guthrie, and Jean-Guy Lecat perpetuated many wonderful concepts for the presentation of dramatic theatre and audience interaction, theatre still caters to a one-way, "show us more" mentality.

The creation of television forced a one-way presentation of arts and entertainment, from producer to audience, with little opportunity for public feedback.

In spite of the commitment and dedication of performers and arts producers, we still lack the broad-society excitement in the arts.

SLIDE 8

What does the future hold and what can be done to step up the excitement and involvement in the arts within our society?

With this stage set, I have a few questions for our panelists. (ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS WERE NOT RECORDED)

1.Question 1 for Josephine: Please describe further how our society has changed from "interactive" to "passive" in the arts. How have social changes influenced audience expectations and the overall performance experience?

2.Question 1 for Branford: Your talents cross many musical art forms (jazz, orchestral, television): What qualities of performer/audience interaction do you find most valuable and rewarding as a performing artist, and how can one art form learn from another to enhance the audience experience?

3.Question 1 for Benton: Your theatre consulting practice is grounded in your team's passion to create intimate and communal performance spaces: Please describe further how the hall designs of the early/mid 1900's impacted the audience experience, and audience/performer relationship. Likewise, how have performance spaces and technology changed in the last few decades?

4.Question 2 for Josephine: How can the structure of arts presentation be changed to further invigorate and enrich our society through more involvement in the arts? If you were building a facility for the future, what capabilities and design features would you request?

5.Question(s) 2 for Branford: How will the artistic world take to the ideas expressed by Josephine regarding greater interaction and input with and from audience members? and/or Are there procedural, contractual, or other obstacles that must be overcome to achieve the goals outlined here for raising audience expectations? and/or What qualities and features do you like to see/hear within a performance space to best engage and interact with an audience? and/or How has technology helped/hindered your ideals for music expression and how can technology be best used in the future?

6.Question 2 for Benton: What current and upcoming trends are you seeing in the design of performance facilities? How can the ideas expressed here be accommodated by "bricks and mortar"?

SLIDE 9

Let's recap what we have been discussing.

My color coding is based on Green/Yellow/Red. Green is good.



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The 1800's were a great period for the arts, driven by communal performance spaces and a communicative society.

SLIDE 10

Social, technical, and roof design changes diminished the performance experience over time.

SLIDE 11

In the recent past, performance space design and technology has experienced a renaissance, but society's excitement for the arts is lacking.

The vision for the future is for the performing arts experience to become a more integral component of the fabric of our society. Of particular concern is to involve the youth in our society.

Perhaps this can occur if we recognize what we have learned from the 1800's, noting that communication and interaction are one in the same.

Perhaps we can take strong cues from looking at how our Society will be communicating in the near future?

SLIDE 12 – Gates 1

There are strong forces forming that could be tapped to accommodate increased interaction within our society. These forces could be directed toward the arts.

My age likely matches the average age of this assembled group. I am technologically literate (although I cannot quite figure out how to operate the lights in my hotel room) but my college-age kids are more fluent at using technology to communicate.

SLIDE 13 – Gates 2

The technology they will use next year will wow us all. And this technology will become more user-friendly where even us older folks will submit to the trends.

Note the word "gestures" in Bill Gates comments. Interesting!

I have spared you the quotes of technology leaders that talk about body implants!

SLIDE 14 – NY Times Article

Our attitudes regarding interaction during performances will evolve.

Please note that we are not talking about using technology to dilute or pollute artistic expression.

As Ben Cameron stated yesterday "the core arts are not changing, the delivery is changing"

SLIDE 15 - IBD

The fact is that many people are recognizing how technology can be used to grow social interaction.



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Our desire for interaction creates new markets.

And there are considerable resources being directed to this new trend in our society. We should not ignore these trends. We should embrace these forces for the benefit of the performing arts.

SLIDE 17 - Goals

There is a saying "those not familiar with history are destined to repeat the past." Or perhaps we can learn those good things from the past which we have almost forgotten.

If we create the means for public discourse about the arts in our society, it will happen. And we will all be happier because of it.

SLIDE 18 – End Title Page