October 2011

Notes from the Director

Greetings from the Peacebuilding and the Arts Program at the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life at Brandeis University. This fall marks the global launch of the Acting Together project which began with a sold out screening of the documentary at the Stella Adler School in New York City on September 26th. And then, on the 28th and 29th, at screenings in Derry and Belfast, Northern Ireland, diverse audiences watched the film and discussed it with me and Acting Together contributors Dijana Milošević and Catherine Filloux. Comments in Derry addressed the need for dialogue facilitators and artists to collaborate more effectively; in Belfast, women from Catherine’s writing group emphasized the importance of sustained support for arts-based community development and community relations initiatives. I’m jotting these notes as I return to Brandeis from Derry, where I co-led a Master Class for leaders in arts and peacebuilding with Dijana Milošević at the Derry Playhouse’s International Culture and Arts Network (ICAN). Over four days, we explored concepts such as aesthetic inheritances, the moral imagination, and the elements of building trust, weaving together lectures, discussions, theatre work and a visit to the Bogside murals. On the final day, participants used the planning guidelines from the Acting Together toolkit to fashion and refine their own individual and collaborative peacebuilding performance initiatives. I was very moved by the vulnerability, honesty and skill of the participants; and honored to partner with Dijana’s commitment to precision and Catherine’s ethical urgency. The Derry Playhouse itself is an inspiration as a dynamic hub of the emerging peacebuilding and the arts movement.

All the best,

Cindy

Cynthia E. Cohen, Ph.D., Director
Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts
**Acting Together - Join the conversation!**

“How can we create the kinds of spaces where we can immerse ourselves in seeing what is going on right now around us, what is going on right now inside of us, between us?” – Roberto Gutiérrez Varea, in the Acting Together documentary.

This month, in cinemas, bookstores, theatres, community centers and classrooms on every continent, educators, students, practitioners and policy-makers from fields related both to the arts and to peacebuilding will be engaging with the resources of the Acting Together project. We hope you will join the conversation – by attending a screening in your community, by hosting a screening, by partnering with us on social media to get out the word, by reading and discussing the first volume of the Acting Together anthology, or by using the short videos and the print documents in the toolkit in your classroom or training session.

“Sometimes I think I’m working with these groups of people, and there’s so few, you know, and we’re so scattered, and then I realize, ‘No, that work is going on in Peru, and it’s going on in Cambodia, and it’s going on in the prisons in New Orleans…’ How can we then continue to support each other? We’re not alone, you know, we’re not just these tiny, tiny flames; we’re a pretty powerful fire.” – Polly Walker in the Acting Together documentary.

Learn more about the project and join in the writing of the next chapter of the Acting Together story.

**You’re invited!**

**Boston Premiere of Acting Together on the World Stage**

**October 23, 6:30pm - Reception; 7:00pm - Program Begins**

Medicine Wheel Productions and ReCAST, Inc. invite you to a film screening fundraiser supporting their Global Initiative to put innovative resources for peacebuilding into the hands of grassroots organizations in conflict regions around the world.

Location: Distler Performance Hall, Granoff Bldg, Tufts University, Medford, MA.


Additional screenings worldwide in Cambodia, South Africa, Australia, San Diego, Los Angeles, Chicago and more.

Contact Betsy Plumb if you want to host a screening in your area or join our campaign as a social
Featured Artist

“Cultural work reminds us that there are always possibilities, that there are no dead-end streets if we have the will to create a new world and to create changes in our communities.” – Jane Sapp

Jane Sapp is a musician and cultural worker with deep roots in the gospel music tradition of the American south. A musician of enormous power and talent, Jane was a civil rights activist who has worked in schools and community centers for decades. Recently, she has worked as a cultural facilitator with a foundation, the Southern Partners Fund, and also created a multimedia archive of interviews with social justice activists in the rural south who were grantees of the Bert and Mary Meyer Foundation. Her work has been documented in a film, “Someone Sang for Me.” Jane Sapp will join Cindy Cohen, Dijana Milošević and Polly Walker in co-leading the October 21-23 Weekend Intensive at Brandeis University.

Film excerpts from “Someone Sang for Me”:
Excerpt 1, Excerpt 2, Excerpt 3

News from the Field

Claudia Bernardi, a visual artist and friend of the Acting Together project, was in Northern Ireland in September working on a mural-making/sound installation project involving Catholic and Protestant young people from two different school communities. While there, she sent a report about her most recent work created in Guatemala with 75 Q'ekci' indigenous men, women, youth and children, survivors of the massacre of Panzos, Alta Verapaz.

Last month we were saddened to learn about the death of two courageous and creative people connected to the Peacebuilding and the Arts extended network. Vann Nath, a visual artist well-known as one of only seven survivors of the Khmer Rouge prison Tuol Sleng, or S-21, passed away. He first came to our attention because of work he contributed to Reyum Institute for Arts and Culture exhibition Legacy of Absence. His artwork documented the atrocities of Tuol Sleng, and also imagined a relaxed and peaceful future for the people of Cambodia. The peacebuilder Emma Leslie’s tribute to Vann Nath emphasizes Vann Nath’s commitments both to memory and to healing, and his ardent yearning for a justice that would reflect itself in an improved quality of life for the Cambodian people. An alumnus of
Brandeis University’s Sorensen Ethics Center Fellowship program, Daniel Ludevig, met Vann Nath during his internship in 2004, and wrote about their encounter upon his return. Learn about his impressions (Go to page 28) >>

In last month’s newsletter, we introduced the Iraqi theatre artist Waleed Shamil and the interview of him by Theatre Without Borders’ Catherine Filloux posted at the CultureHub website. Since then, Waleed wrote to announce, to protest and to mourn the death of his student, the Iraqi playwright, theatre director, radio personality and journalist Hadi al-Mehdi. We take this sad opportunity to express outrage at the violation of artists’ human rights in zones of violence all around the world, and concern for the safety of artists and journalists, whose work requires them to speak truths often at great risk to themselves.

**Upcoming Events**

**Weekend Intensive: October 21-23**
3-day educational and training opportunity for practitioners and students working at the nexus of arts, culture, development and conflict transformation. Workshop is co-led by Cynthia Cohen, Polly Walker, Dijana Miloševic, and Jane Sapp, with commentary by Hubert Sapp, the founder of Oxfam America’s US program. Register now.

Friday evening’s multimedia presentation by Jane Sapp is free and open to the public. Heller School students should contact Dr. Kelley Ready to inquire about participating in this weekend intensive as a proseminar for credit.

**Just Performance Symposium: December 1-2**
This two-day symposium at Brandeis University will explore a range of performative approaches through which communities seek justice in the aftermath of violent conflict and gross violations of human rights: rituals, theatrical works, truth commissions and trials. Dr. Salomón Lerner Febres, the President of Peru’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, will offer the keynote address. Panelists will present stories of justice-seeking performances in Peru, Cambodia and the United States. Guest performance by Ugandan playwright and Acting Together contributor Charles Mulekwa.

**Peacebuilding and the Arts in the News**

Listen to the interview with Cynthia Cohen on KadmusArts Podcasts.

Watch the interview with Cynthia Cohen and Allison Lund on Talking to Mahmood on YouTube.
Acting Together
Join the Conversation this Fall

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To comment on "Peacebuilding and the Arts Now" or to join the listserv, send a message here.