

An Address from Producing Artistic Director

Alex Roe

*in honor of the closing of
The Metropolitan Playhouse
on East Fourth Street*

August 17th, 2023

The Connelly Theater on E 4th Street, August 17th, 2023. The stage is dark. Alex Roe's voice is heard in the darkness:

There's a tradition in the theater that if the actor cries, the audience doesn't.
So it's you or me, folks.

[Audience remarks.]

I hope you have your cell phones.

Videos and photographs, of course, are encouraged in the theater.

[Flashlights from phones in the audience begin to illuminate Alex on the stage.]

You're way ahead of me now. It was such a great effect. I was going to ask those of the founding members of the company, if you're in the audience to please turn on your pho – your flashlights.

[More lights come on.]

And, those who were here before 2000, onstage or offstage, perhaps: turn on your lights.

[More lights come on.]

And anyone who, say, was onstage or backstage, before, before 2020, if you have...

[More lights.]

Anyone who caught the virtual playhouse, for the first time.

[More.]

Those of you who are related to anyone who was onstage or offstage...

[Laughter and more lights.]

I think you get the metaphor.

I get a lot of credit for running the theater ... into the ground. *[Laughter.]* I stole that joke; I can't remember who...

But if my work or anything I've done over the last 22 years has in any way shone, it's only a reflection of the audience and the people who've been a part of it.

The company, Parsifal's Productions, which does business as Metropolitan Playhouse--until recently--was founded as a membership company. And I don't think I ever understood how important a membership company was, until maybe the last few years when around the world, and around the country, and right here in the audience so many people came together to really illustrate what a theater company means in its heart. It's something that endures, it's something that we are all a part of equally, and vitally, and it thrills me to have been a part of it as long as I have.

When I was younger, I had the opportunity to climb a mountain, a big mountain, in another country. In fact, we had to stay overnight on the mountain in order to go up to the top, and that was a good idea, because had I seen what it was going to take to do the final ascent, I never would have tried it. But we set off before dawn, and we climbed to the top. And the view from the top was extraordinary, breathtaking. I could, as right now, see the world.

So I'm going to take your picture.

Then I'm going to ask somebody to turn on the lights. *[Something inaudible as he steps back.]*

[Alex takes a photograph of the audience holding its phone lights.]

OK, that's good.

Um.

[He turns to the actors offstage.]

Did anyone see how the lighting worked.

[He addresses the balcony of the theater.]

Josh, did we ever get the lighting to work?

[Alex trots off stage and turns on lights. As he returns:]

Why should this be any different from any other Metropolitan production?

[Laughter.]

You can take the theater out of the....

All right, so view from the mountain. You know, we're used to...we're used to plays having a story, a character has its beginning, its journey, his or her...their...inevitable end. The stories of theater companies aren't quite like that. They don't have a clear beginning, a clear life, a clear arc, a clear ending. But when the ending comes, like the cue, we know it's time.

Making a theater work depends on the alignment of stars. And many times you have to align those stars yourself. But there's a point, for many, many different factors--one imagines they are financial, but they're not only financial--that the theater has run its course. That's become the case, certainly, in this venture, this incarnation of Metropolitan Playhouse.

You know, one thinks of the, from the inside, of the story of the theater being an individual thing, very personal. And yet I can't help but notice there are theaters around the country, around the city that are falling, drawing back, folding, cutting staff, suspending their seasons. One almost feels like one is part of the zeitgeist, which I think is German for "What the hell is going on?"

[Laughter.]

And yet that is, that is what I, what I feel.

Many have asked me personally what am I going to do in my retirement, which I think is a tacit way of telling me that I'm unemployable. And I tell them the same thing that I told the founding members of Metropolitan

Playhouse when they asked me to take the reins what I was going to do, I said, "I have no idea."

It has all been a discovery, a discovery of the American canon, or the anti-canon, or the wet cannon--I don't know what you call a cannon that no one knows about and never has been fired. But it's been a marvelous discovery and one that deserves to live on, so in terms of Metropolitan Playhouse, as many of you know, our current effort is to maintain an archive--something that was not so possible before the Internet age, which has wrought such damage to the theater perhaps otherwise, but now seems a great opportunity. It seems almost anti-theatrical to try and preserve this ephemeral art, but it strikes me that rather than a tomb for the work that we've done over the past 22, and with my predecessors' work included, 31 years, it is in fact an inspiration for future productions of plays, and a history, and a drama that has been all but forgotten, and perhaps as illustrated by the show tonight, is inherent in everything we do and is well worthy of preserving. That is my greatest hope for Metropolitan Playhouse.

And as for Parsifal's Productions, it lives on. And whether there will be another venture, a Metropolitan Playhouse venture in another space at another time, or other ventures online, other productions, I dearly hope, in some other director's hands in the future remains to be unwritten. But I believe in my heart, with a community like this one, it will be so.

I want to give some credit, obviously, to everyone who has been a part of it--there are too many to thank. I thank the board, of course, of Metropolitan; I thank the founders of Metropolitan. I thank the folks who have contributed so much in the past several weeks and over the years in all their volunteer labors, or underpaid labors, or quasi-volunteer labors. And since I can't name every one of you, if you could just take a moment and look at the person next to you and thank them. That should do the job.

I also want to pay tribute to the people that are no longer with us. Michael Feingold, who was one of our greatest supporters--I think instrumental in our earning an Obie Award now twelve years ago--had a tradition at the

Obie Awards of taking a minute, a full minute, of silence to remember those who are no longer with us. So many of our friends have passed on: it was heartbreaking to me when we sent out our *Radium Girls* flier to see how many fliers were returned, and marked, as you can imagine, "Deceased." And it wasn't simply the pandemic. It was any number of losses that strike us as we go on. But I think we are, we, we all, all these people, all the people that we have lost ourselves, those that we know and that we don't are worthy of our remembrance. So I'd like to, in the late Michael Feingold's honor, observe that tradition. So if we just take one minute – fifty--sixty seconds--to reflect on those who are no longer with us.

[One minute of silence.]

As Michael always said, it's a very long time. And it's not yet ended.

But some introductions...

[Audience member's phone alarm rings.]

Perhaps some welcomes to ... to our future. I'd like to introduce, if he is with us, the man who will take charge of the Metropolitan space which I'm proud to say lives on as a theater for rental on a short-term basis or a long-term basis, and that's Josh Luxenberg. Josh are you with us?

[Applause.]

Josh has been a great ally and a great friend to Metropolitan as he has managed the Connelly over the past several years. I cannot wish the space to fall into better hands than Josh Luxenberg's, so thank you very, very much for making this evening possible, and making all of this possible.

[Applause.]

Of course, I want to thank Rafik Bouzgarrou of Bin 141 for providing a wonderful, wonderful repast. I think we may still have some left and some desserts. Please enjoy those.

And as ever, from start to finish, thank you, all, for being here tonight, for being a part of the Metropolitan Playhouse journey, a part of the future Parsifal's Productions journeys, online, in other spaces, wherever they may be. It has really, truly been the thrill of my life, these past 27 years, largely because I've gotten to know so many of you, and looking around I recognize almost everyone in the au--I do recognize everyone in the audience--[inaudible] everybody in the audience. I, I, I, I'm overcome. I, I can't say enough, so I will say, in closing: stay well, stay healthy, and -

[From the audience, several voices: "Love one another."]

Love one another.

Thanks for being with us, stay--

[Applause.]

Please stay, enjoy, enjoy meeting – what you ha – everyone you have not met, if you haven't--you're all marvelous people, all deserving of one another's friendship.

Thanks again.