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Effective intercultural communication is essential for creating inclusive programming within performing arts in order to highlight the interplay of identity and culture

Intercultural communication is the process of comprehending how people from different cultural backgrounds exchange meaning and bridge differences. Shannon Ahrndt describes in her textbook, *Intercultural Communication*, culture functions as “variable in interpersonal and collective communication,” and communicators must navigate both “similarities and differences in communication patterns, processes, and codes among various cultural groups.” In the context of the performing arts, this process is extremely important because these communities have become a space where identity, culture, and community interact in dynamic ways.

Dreya Cherry, Artistic Director of the Saratoga Performing Arts Center (SPAC), located in Saratoga Springs, New York, emphasizes that programming is a balance between tradition and innovation, while still making it clear that providing diverse programming is much harder than it seems. A prime tenant of SPAC, The New York City Ballet, offers programming based on what they have rehearsed in NYC, but Cherry notes that SPAC tries to diversify their offerings. “For the ballet... we want something for our people who love a core classical mindset but we also want to make sure that we can elevate some newer voices.” She adds, “We want to provide something that everybody will enjoy. And also a lot of the time, something to push our audience a little bit that maybe they won't see on their own.” Cherry also highlights the practical side of

booking: “A lot of these artists that we're booking are on tours... whereas if we have a group that's already touring... it saves costs and saves preparedness,” which makes providing diverse programming even harder when cost and timing constraints come into play.

Cherry highlights SPAC’s intentional focus on diversity and audience engagement. Presenting artists like Kyle Abraham’s dance company, which “focuses on Black queer stories pushing the boundaries of what a lot of our audience might expect,” in return, introducing audiences to perspectives they might not otherwise encounter. She explains, “The best theater you can have... is one where your audience trusts you so inherently that they will come to whatever you produce... a lot of what we do is working to build trust.” Community outreach also brings in underrepresented audiences. Cherry states “Our education team went out and found groups of people who are part of communities... to say, ‘hey, come to this... we’ll get you in.’” Cherry emphasizes the shared experiences of live performance, noting that it “does add to the overall experience.” Finally, Cherry acknowledges the challenge of balancing artist vision, audience expectations, and diversity: “You have to kind of figure out how to make this work... it’s a little bit of a gamble, like we know what we think will do well... it depends on the artist and the audience.”

Overall, Cherry's interview opened my eyes to the complexities of creating inclusive programming in the performing arts. She illustrates that achieving diversity is not simply a matter of choosing different artists; it requires careful negotiation between artistic vision, audience expectations, logistical constraints, and community engagement. SPAC’s efforts to introduce underrepresented perspectives and build audience trust demonstrate how intentional intercultural communication is essential for crafting programming that authentically highlights identity and culture.

I've decided to create a summer season lineup to demonstrate my understanding of intercultural communication and how it can be effectively showcased within a performing arts center with the right means.

Sources

Ahrndt, S. (2020). Intercultural communication. University of Missouri–St. Louis Institutional Repository.

<https://irl.umsl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1023&context=oe>