

Maeve McDermott

Professor Frank

LIL420

Oct 24, 2025

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 many 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 artists “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 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 but it still 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 portrays that providing diversity at a performing arts center is just about choosing different artists. It is about a balance 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 creating 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. This lineup reflects my ability to identify and curate artists whose work communicates across cultures, identities, and traditions based on what I have learned. The first person on my line up is Laufey. She is a modern jazz singer who has an Icelandic and Chinese heritage. I also included Leon Bridges. His music connects African American soul traditions with contemporary audiences. Including Kevin Abstract in my lineup brings in an opportunity for his personal story telling of his black, queer, and southern identity through hip-hop. Through this curated season, I am demonstrating that I have effectively learned what it means to identify and present intercultural experiences. More importantly, this lineup argues that with the right resources and thoughtful programming, performing arts centers can take initiative in presenting intercultural experiences in ways that are authentic and diverse to show that intercultural programming is impactful to their audiences.

Sources

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

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