

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH JOY ZINOMAN

SUBJECT: THEATRE: A VIGOROUS INSTITUTION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP

MODERATOR: DONNA LEINWAND, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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**DONNA LEINWAND:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon. Welcome to the National Press Club for our speakers luncheon. My name is Donna Leinwand. I'm a reporter for *USA Today*, and I'm President of the National Press Club. We're the world's leading professional organization for journalists, and we are committed to a future of journalism by providing informative programming and journalism education, and fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org).

On behalf of our 3,500 members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and our guests in the audience today. I'd also like to welcome those of you who are watching us on C-SPAN. We're looking forward to today's speech, and afterwards I will ask as many questions from the audience as time permits. Please hold your applause during the speech so that we have time for as many questions as possible. For our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you hear applause, it may be from the guests and members of the general public who attend our luncheons and not necessarily from the working press.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. From your right, Andrew Schneider, Associate Editor, Kiplinger Washington Editors; Amanda Williams, Public Affairs Specialist for the Freer and Sackler Galleries; Bob Madigan, WTOP's Man About Town; Keith Alan Baker, managing director at the Studio Theatre and a guest of our speaker; Barbara Bonnie, Director of Public Relations for the Willard InterContinental Hotel and InterContinental Barclay, New York; Murray Zinoman, husband of our speaker.

Skipping over the podium, Melissa Charbonneau, independent producer for News Hook Media, and Vice Chair of the National Press Club's Speakers Committee; skipping over our guest, Mary Lou Donahue, Producer and Editor for Artistically Speaking, and the Speakers Committee member who organized today's event. Thank you very much, Mary Lou. Harriet Blum, board chair emeritus, the Studio Theatre; Michael Phelps, CEO and Publisher of *The Examiner*; Min Chan, Vice President for Arabia Inform, and a new member of the National Press Club. Welcome to the club. And finally, Jerry Zremski, Washington bureau chief for *The Buffalo News* and former president of the National Press Club.

Our guest today looked at a car showroom on a downtrodden corner in Washington, D.C. and saw a theater. Against advice that no one would come to this area of the nation's capital, known as Logan's Circle, Joy Zinoman persevered. On a shoestring budget, \$10,000 to start, Zinoman and cofounder Russell Metheny created Studio Theatre. As a teacher, her Acting Conservatory has trained more than 8,000 actors and directors. Miss Zinoman has received numerous awards, including the Washingtonian of the Year Award, and more than once was named to *Washington Magazine's* 100 Most Powerful Women in Washington.

Studio Theatre has received 28 Helen Hayes Awards. Contemporary playwrights such as Tom Stoppard, Edward Albee and the late August Wilson have seen their plays produced with resounding success at the Studio Theatre. But after 35 years at the Studio Theatre, the Zinomans show is closing as she passes the theatre's care on to new leadership. We're sure before she goes she has much to tell us about the transformative power of the arts in a community. Please help us welcome to the National Press Club, Miss Joy Zinoman. (Applause)

**MS. ZINOMAN:** I must say, I'm intimidated sitting here listening to all the bad behavior of previous guests at the Press Club, so I'm going to try to behave myself, especially with so many audience members in the audience. That is my favorite, very, very favorite audience. But I thank you for asking me to come here today. I saw my name in the paper announcing this event in Jane Horwitz' column in the *Washington Post* and it was preceded by the phrase, "The veteran." "Who's that," I thought. "Who could that possibly be?" Surely, it is just moments ago that I walked down 14<sup>th</sup> Street with my small band of theater cohorts and walked into a hotdog warehouse where they kept pushcarts that are on the mall. And around the big freezers of mustard and piccalilli and red dye number four, were rats, big urban rats running back and forth around all of the freezers. It was quite a sight.

"Bravo!" I thought. "Here's where we'll make the Studio Theatre." Veteran? But I suppose that after 35 years and on the verge of retiring, I still have nine more months to cause trouble, however, I want to make that very clear, it is fitting and I suppose that that is why you have invited me here today for lunch and company and to share a reluctant veteran's reflections on the theater in general, its relation to other public institutions, and to boast a little bit about the Studio Theatre.

There is a great theater historian named Oscar Brockett, and he wrote that in the fifth century Greece, "Theater was a vigorous institution in high repute with the general populace and with civil and religious authorities. Drama was the most prized form of literature, and theater the most popular of the arts." No one would describe the theater in those terms today. Vigorous? We are perpetually told that the theater is drying, it's impractical with television, film, modern media creating narrative storytelling more efficiently and with much wider circulation.

In high repute? Government worries about elitism, and too much individualism. We at Studio Theatre have been picketed, seriously, by religious organizations several times including last year for the musical "Jerry Springer."

Most prized form of literature? Surely the novelists are most prized form in contemporary life. Who reads plays? It's inconceivable that the precious little space still devoted to book reviews would ever consider written plays as a subject for criticism.

And it's expensive, inconvenient and there's very little quality control. (Laughter) Yet, for all its impracticality, the serious theater, which cannot support itself in America by ticket sales, and has consistent death knells, that theater stubbornly persists. It will not go away and I must say looking back at 35 years in Washington, D.C. and its professional theater, maybe it even thrives.

For a moment, I'd like to compare the theater as an institution to others previously held in high repute. The press, (Laughter) our government, and our economy, if you'll forgive me being in the National Press Club. In a *Washington Post* article yesterday on the *Washington Times* staff cuts, Howard Kurtz notes, "A severe industry downturn that has forced a spate of big city papers to shut down or declare bankruptcy." You know all that. In our digital age, we don't need to get our information from the press, either print or TV journalists. And some accuse the press of bias, of being controlled by special interests, of polarization encouraged by TV or radio reporters which cheapens the discourse, of simplification or of promoting celebrity culture.

Of course, theater has always had a complicated, bruising love/hate relationship with the press so it's very nice for me to say all kinds of bad things about it. And especially critics. I say this as the sister, aunt and mother of journalists, even a theater critic among them. Our government, rocked by scandals from Watergate until now, a skeptical electorate is so quick to mistrust the notion of hero, so important in leadership and in dramatic literature. It rarely exists anymore, and then not for very long.

Even with the charismatic inspiration leader able to galvanize the public for a time, we quickly devolve into gridlock, polarization or, worse, malaise. The theater, as an institution that illuminates life at its best, encourages people to imagine, to dream. That is one of its greatest public virtues. Not a theater that takes a political stance, though there are some, not mine, not only of theater that deals with plays of power relations, of kings and rulers, as the Shakespeare theater does, but a theater that encourages thinking by first asking an audience to feel, to laugh or cry intensely. Never tamely.

After the economy, the dismal crashing recent past has rocked our confidence. Economic institutions, banks, businesses, regulatory agencies, all have taken hits. You know these institutional crises far better than me. But let me digress a moment and get specific about the extraordinary economic revitalization of one Washington neighborhood of which the theater has been an engine in moving from the macro to the micro.

So the Studio Theatre in the mid '70s came to 14<sup>th</sup> Street to the room with the rats running around in the freezers and the piccalilli. It came to Logan Circle, to a wasteland between P and U Streets created by the devastating riots after the assassination of Martin Luther King. The introduction was incorrect. We had \$1,000, not ten. All the buildings were shuttered, condoms and hypodermic needles cluttered the streets. Prostitution was on every corner. For those who were there at the time, you know I do not exaggerate.

Artists have gone to marginal neighborhoods before, and always because of low rent. Always. Additionally, the wonderful, old 1910 buildings had been built as auto showrooms and so they had column spans that were big enough for theaters. That's really the central architectural issue which is responsible, truly for the Studio Theatre. And our aesthetic was found space theaters, not new construction. I come from Chicago and there was a huge small theater movement in Chicago that was founded by putting small theaters in warehouses downtown, around downtown, ringing downtown in the neighborhood.

Buildings with history and character that could be put to adaptive use. This commitment to space, because the theater doesn't exist without space, even a Greek hillside is space, and to a neighborhood was the most important step. The theater and its relation to space cannot be overemphasized. I was very fortunate to have as my partner a great designer, theater designer and also a lay architect. Because the theater is not virtual or digital or transferable, and I claim to succeed, not transient.

We worked for years doing our work, making plays, building audience, modestly growing, renovating, trying to pay the bills. Then came a period of opening up to the community and to the city. I think very importantly, in a public sense, was testifying as Keith Baker did, and passing legislation to create the arts overlay district, which was a lot have far-reaching effect in terms of the development of the Studio Theatre, and I claim, of the area. Stopping the march of downtown at Thomas Circle by limiting the building height. Yes, the development was slower. There were people who were angry. But, the development became deeper, more organic. It took a longer time, but it was more neighborhood-based and it also saved the theater from being pushed out to ever more marginal neighborhoods.

We began to earn and raise money. Slowly, businesses built up around the theater. First of all, restaurants to serve the theater crowd. Then a building boom, condos and restorations using the theater in its advertising. "Shocking," they would say. "Buy a loft near the Studio Theatre," with a picture! A mixed use community, not displacing

residents because there is low cost housing to this day up 14<sup>th</sup> Street between P and U, but filling the empty spaces. Bringing the places that had been shuttered back to life.

And then give credit where it's due, the Fresh Fields Grocery Store and full blown retail, which followed. The Theatre bought one building, an anchor corner at 14<sup>th</sup> & P, then a second building, then a third building, renovating, uniting the interiors until now we have four theaters, stunning public spaces, six classrooms that house the Studio Theatre Acting Conservatory, offices and full shops where we build all the costumes and scenery and props for 10 or 11 shows a year attended by 50,000 people.

The theater's success has been an engine for the entire district. When we did the huge construction, we added water mains and improved the electrical grids during those renovations. Working with studio district as partners, art galleries, apartment dwellers, music venues, restaurants, all came. And now, at this point, I am proud to announce that the Studio Theatre, starting with a thousand dollars, is in excellent, extraordinary financial shape. Every year, it's a new challenge, but the fiscal year which ended three months ago produced \$522,000 worth of surplus earnings, and contributed income over spending. We own outright three buildings and 16 apartments for artists and apprentices, all within walking distance of the theater. We have \$25 million in assets, plus \$5 million in current management funds, a \$2.5 million capital campaign, of which we have half of the money, which is trying to upgrade technology theater-wide all on a budget of \$5 million.

And I feel we have never been stronger artistically, though I received an email from someone this week that I have to tell you about. They were noting the opening this week of a 1950s comedy by Howard Teichmann and George S. Kaufman called "The Solid Gold Cadillac." It's a 1950s American comedy starring Nancy Robinette. It starts a preview on Wednesday and opens on Sunday night.

And this email said, "What? The theater of the grim having a feel good show? We'll be sure to attend." (Laughter) I was mortally offended. The theater of the grim? What are they talking about?

The theater in Washington in general, not only at the Studio Theatre, thrives and grows in credibility. People depend on it for entertainment, for enlightenment, for pleasure, for purpose, for employment. Maybe because the theater seemed always on the verge of extinction, its very survival seems miraculous. And this phenomena is throughout Washington. Relative to when I first began, there are now over 70 theaters, large and small. There was a building boom. The development of real patrons, a community of first rate actors who make this their home, all in the last 20 years.

If I wanted to be controversial, heaven forbid, I would say that in some ways, Washington can rival New York. I think it's less insular in many ways, less provincial. I think it has international input. It has a more sophisticated audience, and it lacks the stranglehold of commercial Broadway. But no one would really agree with me on any of that. (Laughter) So why has the theater as an institution thrived and prospered? In

conclusion, what is the answer to that question? Number one, I really think it's because it is hand made and it stays ever human in its scale. And we continue to value that. It puts characterization first before images as in film or great narrative, as in the novel. We like stories about people, we like a form that is about human beings. It illuminates life through the living actor. It's a communal experience without the aggression of sports. (Laughter)

For some, in its ritual, it replaces religion. In addition to government and foundation, the real patronage of theater has always been the individual, in my opinion, the individual who values something beyond the material and finds pleasure and inspiration from listening to stories in the dark.

It has been a great joy to be part of the growth of the theater in our nation's capitol for the past 35 years. And so, I will accept the appellation, veteran. Thank you very much. (Applause)

**MS. LEINWAND:** Okay, now we have questions from the audience, so here we go. In the early days, did you fear for the safety of your actors and your audience? And how did you handle that?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** We had the buddy system, we still do. It wasn't just the actors, the Studio Theatre Acting Conservatory preceded the theater and there are 600 class places a year. And half of them are beautiful, young women. It was always a concern, but I'm a city girl so we just said, "Don't go to your car or your bus by yourself. Always go with somebody else." Yeah, sometimes it was worrisome. There were a lot of break-ins, but I wasn't one to fear a lot. And I know that risk is important if you want to do something.

**MS. LEINWAND:** What was the turning point when you new the theater would survive?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** That hasn't truly happened yet. (Laughter) Every year, it's a new budget and you start all over again. And it's an incredibly unreliable enterprise. But probably there was a time, but I'm not trying (?) when it was. It's uncertain and there's something in the uncertainty that I must say fuels and stimulates me.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Okay, but you have \$500,000 in the bank. You've got paid off buildings. That's better than most of us in the room can say. So there has to be a time when you finally felt confidence?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** No. (Laughter) It's not like that. You have to understand, you do ten plays a year, and my sort of economic philosophy is that seven of them will lose money, or maybe eight. But only one of them has to be a really big hit, and we've organized things in a very special way, something called the two theater model, wherein we can extend shows and use a for-profit model in the nonprofit theater. That model, much too complicated and boring to talk about now, means that if we have one really big

hit, some play that runs for four months, which we do, or two medium sized hits, then the theater can survive. Every single thing doesn't have to be a success. And, for whatever, 37 years, the sun has come up every day. But that doesn't mean that it will this year.

So it's nice to have money in the bank and buildings, but I wouldn't say, honestly, that there was a time that I felt confident. Except, I suppose, and I'm looking at Michael Higgins there, who is a very important member of the Board of Trustees of the Studio Theatre, when the Board of Trustees grew and when there were grownup people, not theater lowlifes but real grownup people who would stand at your side, that was a measure of confidence that I didn't have before.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Can you pinpoint the time when Logan Circle went from downtrodden first to hip and artsy and then finally to chic and expensive?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** I like to think that if you really know Logan Circle, as what's true if you really know any neighborhood, it's not monolithic. If you go to the HR 57 jazz club across the street, or if you go to Cork Restaurant, you'll have very, very different experiences. What I like about that area is that it is-- Are you all right? What I like about it is that it's mixed use. I think the history has been very slow. People say, "Oh wow, look at Logan Circle." It took 25 slow, long years. It didn't happen overnight. It happened gradually, incrementally. You didn't even know that it had happened. All you knew is that at the beginning, there wasn't even a 7/11. There was a chicken shack and you would not go in there or you would die. (Laughter) But the Mid City Fish Market is still there across the street. And if you go in there, you still may die.

So I like to think it's just a very gradual change, but that it still is very mixed use. And that the entire enterprise has been very slow and gradual. However, as I said in my speech, I think the establishment of the Arts Overlay was the beginning of hip and artsy and Fresh Fields was the beginning of whatever the other thing you said.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Chic and expensive.

**MS. ZINOMAN:** Chic and expensive.

**MS. LEINWAND:** I like the new chocolate place. When you expanded Studio, why did you not build a larger theater?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** I love that question. Who asked that question? That's my favorite question in the world. Fundamental value of the Studio Theatre is the relationship of the audience to the actor, the intimacy between the audience and the actor. Starting with an Acting Conservatory, my own interest is tremendously about acting. It's what I care about, and its relationship. Yes, we have all this space. We could have easily built a 500-seat theater or an 800-seat theater. We've got the space to do it. Before, people used to say, "Oh, you don't do it because you don't have the space." Well, we do, and we still choose to operate in 200-seat theaters because we believe that that's what the experience theater is; small, hand made, intimate. We have four of them, that's all. So we

do have, actually, almost a thousand seats a night. But in these small venues. It's an idiosyncratic idea.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Why did the theater invest in housing for artists and actors? Will those holdings grow?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** Oh, my. One of the biggest problems we had for so many years was where the actors would stay. Even some actors that you think of as being local actors, actors from the Shakespeare theater that also worked at the Studio a lot, they're actually not local actors and the union requires us to provide housing. So there was huge numbers of people in the theater that would spend all the time calling people up and begging them to let actors stay in their houses or trading for hotel rooms or trying to find places for designers to stay. It was such a drag, I can't even tell you, on the resources of the theater without having housing.

So, we made it a big priority for a number of years. And some of the apartments were donated to us, and then we saw what a wonderful thing that was. And so then we started to purchase them one by one.

The second part has to do with the Studio's mission as a powerful educational institution. Its large Acting Conservatory is only one part of it. We also have a big apprenticeship and internship program. We have ten year-long apprenticeships for 11 people, and that's in carpentry, in lighting, in administration, in public relations, in all aspects of the theater. Those young people are mostly college graduates. You can't get a job in a theater without an apprenticeship. And they have no money. You know, they have absolutely no money.

So, then what happened was that the apprenticeships were no longer based on merit, but just on people whose parents could support them for that year. That seemed deeply wrong. And so, we had another campaign and raised money to buy a building for apprentice housing. And it's on Corcoran and 17<sup>th</sup>. I'd like to live there. It's very, very nice. There are nine small apartments there, and it's made really the difference for those young people.

**MS. LEINWAND:** How do you find new plays and new playwrights?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** That's a bad question right now because I am engaged right now in choosing what will be the last season that I'll choose, although it's not a season that I will artist direct. That's hard.

But in general, I would say choosing the plays is the hardest part of my job, the very hardest part. At the theater, we have a committee of the leadership of the committee plus two to three staff members chosen from the staff for their diversity of age and interest and we meet every three weeks from September to February, or whenever we get the season chosen. We read many, many, many plays by reading the press, both in the U.S. and in Europe, Theater Record, American Theater Magazine, the major newspapers.



I also have a lot of relationships with writers. I listen hard to people who go to the theater a lot. And we make lists and read many, many plays and talk and fight about them and it's a long, hard process.

**MS. LEINWAND:** About how many manuscripts or plays are submitted to you unsolicited annually a year?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** About 300 unsolicited manuscripts, and that's for a theater that doesn't accept unsolicited manuscripts. (Laughter)

**MS. LEINWAND:** What is Studio Theatre's commitment to local playwrights, and what kind of material best suits your needs?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** We have no commitment to local playwrights. We have a very powerful commitment to actors and to designers. But there are other theaters in Washington whose interest is in local playwrights. That said, we just did a musical called "The Adding Machine," which was written by Jason Loewith and Joshua Schmidt and Jason Loewith actually does live in Washington now.

For me, although we do do new work on occasion, ours is not a theater whose mission, the central part of their mission, is the work of the writer and the theater. Our central mission is about the work of the actor and the designer and the theater. And then we spend lots and lots of time trying to find absolutely the best writing that we can.

**MS. LEINWAND:** What do you consider the biggest theatrical coup in your tenure?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** Tom Stoppard. I think when he came to the theater the first time, when I did a production of his great play, "Indian Ink," which had, because of a lot of theater politics, not been done in New York, had rarely been done in the United States and he was interested in why some small theater in Washington, D.C., was going to be doing this great epic play, and he came to Washington and discovered that I had spent 13 years in Asia with my husband in the foreign service. He had lived in Asia as a young boy, as a sort of refugee of the Second World War and he saw that production. That was a very big thrill. He then came back and saw my production of "The Invention of Love." I mean, for me, he is one of the greatest living writers and so that was a thrill.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Tell us about your favorite play in the history of the Studio Theatre?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** The one I'm about to do, which is David Mamet's "American Buffalo." And I'm just in the-- Maybe today when I go back, it'll all be cast. Maybe it will. It's a very intense, riveting Chicago play, goes back to my own roots in Chicago and also in realism. It has three extraordinary acting roles in it. And I'm in the design process, so that's absolutely my favorite play right now.

**MS. LEINWAND:** It's like picking one of your children. Conversely, what has been your biggest disappointment in your tenure?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** I'm very positive, that's hard. What's my biggest disappointment, Keith? What do you think? My husband just said, "The Bacchae," a Greek play that I did several years ago that people like ran out of the theater screaming. I was very disappointed, I was. I liked it very much. Someone came on with a skull, with a sponge in it filled with blood and they waved this thing around and the blood went into audience. People were like, "Ah, what is going on," raced to the-- I was disappointed. (Laughter)

**MS. LEINWAND:** So, someone in our audience asks, you are revered and feared. Why feared?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** I'm tough, I am. I don't know, before we put those big panels on the outside of the theater, somebody said, "Oh, that's the building that if you go in there, you'll be yelled at." I was sort of proud of that actually, for a little bit. I don't know. I think if you have high standards and you try to keep to them, and you don't have the most tact in the world, people might be afraid of that.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Have you chosen your successor yet? And if not, what type of person are you looking for? You want to make the announcement right here?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** No. We are in the midst right now of a national search. And it is a big deal, right Michael? I announced my retirement actually to the staff four years ago, so it's been a long process of thinking about what kind of person would be appropriate. The requirements of the job now are not the requirements of the job 30 years ago. They are not the requirements of the job 20 years ago. So, really trying to be specific about what are the requirements of the job now. We then hired a national search firm from New York and they've been quite wonderful. We are right now in the middle of it, applications are coming in, there's a lot of applicants, that's good. It's a great job. And then there will be a process of vetting and interviewing and eventually some announcement in the spring.

**MS. LEINWAND:** How do you come up with \$5 million for your budget?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** That's a good question. I think you can only spend what you can earn. It's very, very simple. I also believe that you need to earn two-thirds of your money. That is the determining factor of the size of the budget at the Studio Theatre, how much will we earn? That's two-thirds of the number. The other third is contributed income, and that's how much we can spend. Hence, \$5 million. I'm also not interested in a kind of empire, material, financial empire. I think that scale is right and very important. So, I've never really been much interested in growing the budget beyond \$5 million.

**MS. LEINWAND:** How important or unimportant has the city government been to the revival of Logan Circle?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** Keith? I don't know, what's the answer to that? I don't know, the city government? I think that Jack Evans has been very supportive. I think in general, the mayor's parents are subscribers to the Studio Theatre. That's very helpful. Very, very early on, John Wilson was a major supporter of the Studio Theatre. It turns out that his brother actually was an investor in Broadway shows and he helped with legislation and funding in the early days. But I've never been one to have that much truck with the government.

**MS. LEINWAND:** In this economy, many cultural organizations are cutting back, or in some cases have folded. How is the Studio Theatre coping with all of this?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** I'll let you know. So far, it has not hit us. But as I say, I'm ever vigilant. I think that we have endured hard economic times before. And I think we do something called a six month revision halfway through the fiscal year. And if necessary, we'll tighten our belt. But for now, I think we just try to work hard and do good work and hope that you'll all keep coming.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Why do you think the Studio Theatre has been spared so far? What makes you guys thrive?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** Ay, I don't know. Help. I like to think it's because the work is good. I like to think it's because it's thoughtful and comes from the heart. I like to think it's because we have built a strong, solid, real audience of 7,000 subscribers, not kind of flash in the pan, come or go. I think those people are there for us in a real way. I think that the theater has enough of a reputation so that when there's a hit, single ticket buyers will come. I think the organization of the four theaters and the way in which the programs are organized is helpful economically. And I think there is a strong leadership team, three other people who have been with me for 20 years. That's unparalleled, I think, in any theater in Washington where you have such stability at the top for so long. And those three people are all staying and will continue to provide that incredible leadership and stability.

**MS. LEINWAND:** At a time when the federal government is bailing out banks and car manufacturers despite an exploding deficit, how much would you like to see President Obama and Congress help out theater with federal funding?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** It's not my thing, as I said before. My own family's philanthropy is to social services, not to the theater. So, I get in trouble with my fellow theater people. I'll take any money they want to give me. But I'm not sure that I'm a big advocate for getting a lot of money from the government.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Do you think this country's school system puts enough emphasis on the arts? And are we losing that toehold in our elementary and our middle schools?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** Yes, I think it is absolutely criminal, extraordinarily criminal. Among most moving things in my life are the free matinees that we do for young people, and the young people's program in the Acting Conservatory. There is no question whatsoever that-- I mean, I myself was a child actress and when I first went, when I was nine years old and sort of entered a world, and I think there are other people in this room who have had that experience, either for themselves or for their children, it opens your mind. It allows you to dream. It makes you want to read, it makes you confident. It gives you personal freedom. The arts, it's metaphorical, it's not literal. And I think we need that poetry in our lives, no matter what your economic circumstances are. And the elimination of arts programs in school, it's criminal. It's really and truly criminal. I mean, what is an educated man?

**MS. LEINWAND:** To that end, does the Studio Theatre do anything with the local elementary, middle or high schools to encourage the arts?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** The Studio Theatre has this very serious young people's program and one half of the students are scholarship students. And that's not just a casual number. The classes are limited to 12 people each, every class has 12 people. Six are paid, six are scholarship. If you came, you couldn't tell which were which because, really, art doesn't know anything about economic bias, it doesn't.

So our commitment to education is through the Acting Conservatory. As a matter of fact, one of the things that I'm going to continue to do when I step down as artistic director, I'm going to continue to teach myself, but also teach teachers and continue curriculum development. And just this week, I have hired two more teachers in the young people's program, both ex students of mine. So, I think that that program will continue to develop.

The direct work with the schools has to do with the free student matinees where our literary department prepares study guides. They go into the schools, talk to the teachers, prepare people in the classrooms. They then come to the play. There's after show discussions, and then they go back into the classroom afterwards. And the very next play after "Solid Gold Cadillac" is a play called "In the Red and Brown Water," by a new playwright, Tarell Alvin McCraney, who is absolutely the inheritor of the mantle of August Wilson. We did a play of his a year and a half ago called "The Brothers Size." It's the first play in a trilogy called "The Brother/Sister Plays." That was the brother plays, this is his sister plays. It's about a young African-American girl who's a runner. She can run like the wind and she gets an athletic scholarship but turns it down. And it is the kind of play, very real, that will be seen by lots and lots of schoolchildren.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Given the financial challenges of arts organizations, what advice would you give to young art professionals to help them sustain a lifelong career in the arts?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** That's very hard. There's an actor here who's in "The Solid Gold Cadillac," so I'm-- I don't know that I have specific advice. In my experience, there

are two ways to have a career in the theater. You can either affiliate with an institution, strongly, work there, whatever that means, in the box office, in the costume shop, in administration and let your fortunes rise or fall with the fortunes of that institution.

Or, you can be an individual artist and go from place to place, theater to theater. It's not that much different than other jobs. Those are the two choices that you have in America. Being an artist in America is a very, very tough job. You know, like elementary school teachers but even worse. Not respected, not well paid. But even worse because the competition is so fierce and you can't get a job. I would say unless you are very sturdy, unless you have no other choice, unless you really see work as an artist in America as a calling, don't do it.

**MS. LEINWAND:** I think we may have some aspiring actors in the audience. How deep is the D.C. pool of actors and directors?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** Very deep. There are 1,300 union actors in Washington and Baltimore, and hundreds and hundreds more non-union actors. It's changed radically. When I first started the Studio Theatre Acting Conservatory, anyone with any talent left immediately. They just left. They went to New York where there was opportunity. That's completely changed. Nowadays, the people-- I mean the few-- but talent is rare, that's why we prize it-- can live here, can have a life, can make a living. And the talent pool is good. And I think the more theaters there are, the more that helps the talent pool because it gives opportunity, gives places for people to work.

I also teach directing, and that's a very satisfying thing, to see students of mine both work at the Studio Theatre in the second stage and also start their own companies. There's a lot of that going on.

**MS. LEINWAND:** At your Acting Conservatory, how many years does it take to complete the course?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** There's a three year curriculum. The first year is realism. The second year is the study of style, Shakespeare and Greek. And the third year is comedy, advanced styles and directing. It's a three year formal curriculum.

**MS. LEINWAND:** What voice quality of qualities do you like to instill in your students?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** A lot of range, great diction, projection, nuanced vocalization. What I would call the voco physical connection, that what you mean and feel can be expressed by your sound.

**MS. LEINWAND:** This seems really cryptic, so I'm going to ask it. What does Second Stage really mean?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** We were just trying to figure that out the other day at the literary meeting. Second Stage, which is run by Keith Baker, he's the artistic director. It's like a theater within a theater, is a program, one of the producing programs of the Studio Theatre, that does work that encourages new directors. It provides an opportunity for young actors. It also looks at writing by a lot of people that are younger, both in England and the United States. Some people think that the work is edgier. I don't.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Do you think the press does an adequate job covering the theater? What would you like to see done differently?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** Never. They never do an adequate job covering the theater. They never cover it enough. There are never enough articles, and the reviews are never good enough, period.

**MS. LEINWAND:** We don't have any strong opinions here. What do you think they should be doing differently? I mean, how should they-- What can they do differently?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** It's a very, very complicated problem. I mean, what press? The problem is that the press shrinks and so what's good is when you have a diversity of views, when you have a lot of different opinions. It gives people a chance to see that criticism is always the feeling of a single person, not some truth. And I think we lose that when we lose critics. I think that the new media, it has done a huge amount. I'll give you an example. The Studio Theatre now sells 60 percent of its tickets online. And that is just in the last seven years, going from zero to 60 percent. That means that's also where people are getting their information.

So I think, you know, it's a natural difficult relationship between the theater and the press. You know, we want more, they've got their issues of how much space they have and how much they can devote to that. As I say, because I have so many journalists and theater writers in the family, it's hard for me to just kind of powerfully say, "Oh, they should do that and this," because I understand something of what their problems are, too.

I think it's up to the theaters to find new venues. I think it's up to the theaters to be able to market. I think it's up to the theaters-- and Leann Jacob's the director of public relations and communications is here, too. It's about working harder, not expecting the press to come and cover you. Of course, I say that now. I think 25 years ago, I would have railed more.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Okay, we are almost out of time. But before I ask the last question, we have a couple of important matters to take care of. First, let me remind our members of our future speakers. Oh no, you don't get to go yet, you've got one more.

On December 8<sup>th</sup>, we have Gary Knell, President and CEO of the Sesame Workshop. He will be joined by Grover and will discuss the educational mission and history of Sesame Street, which celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. On December

14<sup>th</sup>, Karen Mills, Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration will discuss the Administration's efforts to boost the small business sector to drive economic recovery. And on December 15<sup>th</sup>, the Honorable Dick Armey, chairman of Freedom Works, will discuss the future of the Republican Party and the need to return to its roots in fiscal conservatism.

And second, I would like to present our guests with the coveted and traditional NPC mug. (Applause)

**MS. ZINOMAN:** Thank you.

**MS. LEINWAND:** However, just because we've given you a mug doesn't meant we let you off the hook just yet. So, we have one more question for you. How do you feel about the long-term future of the theater arts? Do you have any concern that the younger audience will be looking to computers for entertainment? In other words, will live theater be replaced by YouTube?

**MS. ZINOMAN:** Well, as I said, I don't think so. I think there is something about the live theater that just doesn't die. It won't die. I'm not sure I would have said that when I was younger, but my experience has showed me that there is still a craving. And young people become middle aged people. (Laughter) And fads come and go. And at the theater last night, actually, at the curtain call, I was shocked at the number of young people at the theater. So, I have faith. I think that there's enough to go around. Enough people to make the theater thrive.

**MS. LEINWAND:** I'd like to thank you all for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Joann Booz, for organizing today's lunch. Also, thanks to the National Press Club Library for its research. The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by the National Press Club's Broadcast Operations Center.

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END

