

PREFACE

THE NATIONAL ARTS JOURNALISM PROGRAM at Columbia University periodically sponsors research, symposia and conferences on arts and cultural issues in contention, and about which journalists, scholars and arts professionals agree that more information is needed. Our purpose in so doing, as phrased in our mission statement, is to foster a broad-based, engaged and thoughtful discussion of the arts and their place in our society: specifically, to improve journalistic coverage of such issues.

Often we partner with others within academia and in the arts management and research communities, as we did on Oct. 29-30 in presenting the conference *Wonderful Town: The Future of Theater in New York*. Our co-sponsor was Columbia's School of the Arts, and significant support came from The Pew Charitable Trusts (NAJP's funders), the Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation and Columbia's Office of the Vice Provost. We shared a draft version of this report with conference participants in order to inform the panel discussions.

Working with faculty colleagues from Columbia and with former and then-current NAJP fellows, we set out more than a year ago to explore a vexing web of questions. But why the subject of New York theater, at this time, under the aegis of a nationally based organization? (Other NAJP projects have examined arts coverage around the United States and cultural property disputes around the world.)

We began from a persistent flashpoint—the profound resentment of the press by theater professionals. We then asked ourselves what the NAJP might usefully do to advance past that flashpoint. Specifically, given our

physical proximity to the center of the theater world, how could journalists and scholars merge resources to look at how the export and import of New York theater underpins a national industry? What does traffic to and from Broadway and other theatrical hubs, both local and national, tell us about the convergence of commercial and nonprofit artmaking today? How does the current economic squeeze affect those conditions and trends? If, as it is clear, theater is one of New York's principal cultural jewels; if this city is the “capital” of theater, why is it so far behind other cities in developing sophisticated cultural policies?

A further spur to this project was a coincidental convergence in 2001 of fresh research about the state of the arts in New York and nationally, and the opportunity to draw journalists and arts professionals together to talk about it. For the *Wonderful Town* report, NAJP added its own reporting and fact-gathering to that of others.

Then came the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, which highlighted the prominence as well as the physical and financial vulnerability of theater in New York. We hardly intended *Wonderful Town* to be a post-Sept. 11 discussion, but to some extent it became one—gaining thereby in timeliness and dramatic tension. Much of our fresh research, and our synthesis of prior research by others, was presented at *Wonderful Town* for the first time, and we are proud to further detail it now in the pages that follow.

A full accounting of that research, and acknowledgments of the many individuals who made the *Wonderful Town* conference and report possible, is found in the Appendix. A transcript of the conference is available at www.najp.org. ■