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Opening Pandora – The Pandora Project

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The Tulsa theatre community has some incredibly talented people, some terrific resources at its disposal and is capable of delivering some first rate productions. But it also has its problems and a somewhat less than attractive side.

Several issues and concerns affect the theatre community, and these often remain unaddressed, or become distorted, due to a lack of honest, open critical engagement. Part of the problem is that everyone's just too darn nice! And yet, not anyway near nice enough. This is due in no small part to the existence of a culture of mistrust within sections of the community which often makes it difficult for groups and individuals to engage and communicate openly with one another. Concerns and grievances, real and imagined, get voiced over drinks and meals by informed, and sometimes not so well informed, voices. Discussions often break down into suspicion and resentment, creating a toxic atmosphere and the feeling that even trying to talk about an issue is like opening Pandora's Box.

A case in point is the community's response to *Urban Tulsa Weekly's* recent article entitled *Play to Pay*, on the question of professional theatre in Tulsa. While the question remained unanswered, the very fact of asking it managed to give Pandora's Box a pretty good rattling. And the repercussions have been disturbing to watch.

The "not nice enough" camp reared their head as people were accused of, or were perceived to be, taking shots at one another. The "too nice" quality also reared its head as scorched bridges were quickly doused with scrambled attempts to clear up misunderstandings and re-establish friendships, a kind of peace at any cost solution. And in the midst of all this, the question itself got pushed into the background. Often the tired, old axiom that drama is about conflict is then dragged out to justify this. But drama is not about conflict. Drama is about conflict and the resolution of that conflict.

One dim light in the dark is that the desire for a forum where the community can come together and critically engage and communicate is often voiced. People should not be afraid to talk and many have expressed a desire to be able to do so. Now they have the opportunity to do just that. To open Pandora's Box, in a safe and structured way, and address the problems contained therein

The Pandora Project, to be held on Wednesday, August 3rd at 6.00 pm at Harwelden, is inviting those involved in theatre in Tulsa to attend an independently facilitated discussion to explore how

the Tulsa theatre community can establish a forum wherein they can come together to engage critically and communicate openly. It aims to bring the community together to spark debate that is open, honest, safe and informed, seeking solutions that are realistic, supportive and beneficial, to provide a way for people to voice their opinions, ideas and concerns without fear of judgement. Critical engagement and open communication is vital for any community, because by the very act of engaging critically the entire theatre community unites to share ideas, address its issues and attempt to answer its questions.

And there are answers to those questions.

Like the question: who'll be there? Who'll stand up and be counted? If companies and individuals are indeed serious in their expressed desire to develop themselves and their community into what it could be, serious about challenging its divisive culture, healing its wounds, discussing its concerns and ideas, voicing theirs, proposing solutions, communicating, debating and engaging critically with the issues: then they need to be there. If not: well you can't say you weren't invited.

There's only rule on the night - leave your baggage at the door. The Pandora Project isn't about the past: it's about moving towards the future.

There's certainly been no lack of desire for a forum of this nature within the community.

But is there the will?

On Wednesday, August 3rd, Tulsa's theatre community can find out.

The Pandora Project: establishing a forum for critical debate within Tulsa's theatre community

Facilitator: Chris O'Rourke

The Harwelden Mansion, 2210, South Main Street

Wednesday, August 3rd, 6.00 pm

Admission: Free.



Chris O'Rourke
Tulsa Theater Examiner

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