

Offstage Archive Interview- Matthew Lewis
President and Producer
February 4th, 2021

Olivia Kormos: How did you get involved in *Offstage*? Or do you want to talk about the beginning of the production?

Matthew Lewis: Yeah, I guess *Offstage* got involved with us, in the biggest way. I guess I should backtrack to when I took over the organization. I had been a part of TNT since *Next to Normal*, which was fall of 2018. And I was a light board op on *Next to Normal*. But I came in because Tim, the former producer, my predecessor, plucked me out of P and D¹, was like, "I think he would like TNT." But essentially, I started on that, then I came in as an associate producer on *Legally Blonde*, worked a lot on with the production management team, as well as with Tim, understanding how TNT worked, and everything else, and really did not have a desire to take over the organization. My professor told me to do it, Tim said that I should do it, that was what I feel like was expected by a lot of people. I feel like TNT has been run historically by white men from Production and Design or Playwrights Horizons. And I did not feel comfortable continuing that if there was another option. So I tried really hard to have somebody else take it over, offering to still be in leadership, but wanting it to be led by somebody who I felt like could take the organization maybe in a better direction than I could. It turned out none of the people that I thought and Tim thought would be capable of doing it were interested. So I made a pact with myself that if I was going to take over the organization, I was going to work on trying to create avenues within it for people who aren't white men from P and D to be able to grow and be in the leadership of the organization in a meaningful way that would mean that by the time I left, there would be a multitude of people who could take that over.

But that being said, I actively chose not to produce an event in the spring, instead deciding that I wanted to stop the organization from producing for a semester in order to build a new board, build a new group in leadership, which is pretty much all the people that are in TNT now. And to work on changing the mission statement and changing the way that the organization functions to create a better environment for us to try to create whatever work we were going to create in the fall. The first thing I did was I got a new board and I worked really hard for that to be people who know TNT and are passionate about TNT but for that to be more representational than it had previously. So we developed three task forces within that. One that was responsible for interviewing and recruiting new membership and new leadership to take over production, that being people like Jady and Nina and Zoë, our director, and then another group to redevelop the mission statement. And then the third group was responsible for developing and creating new equity, diversity and inclusion guidelines for the organization. And so we spent quite a long time in each of those groups, building and presenting ideas. And some of that stuff didn't finish until actually we got through *Offstage*, but our new mission statement was developed, we built out

¹ Production and Design, one of the Tisch Drama studios.

new equity, diversity, inclusion guidelines and recommendations for the organization. And obviously, we built out our leadership group.

So within that, with the pandemic coming, Zoë and I- it was initially just me when I was planning what the fall season was going to be, in conjunction and in consultation with people like Nina, and Zoë had always been consulting with me in terms of the creative of the show. I had asked her early on to come into a new position that I was creating on the board that we were calling the “artistic curator.” And the idea being that instead of having a vice president who is a production person, the Vice President is usually the production manager, having a vice president who has an artistic mind. I've heard people being critical of TNT that it is too production based, and that sometimes the art falls secondary over the desire to have a high level production. And so my thought to combat that was to create a vice president position that was focused on the art. And that position was focused initially on finding a director and finding a show. And instead of that being a decision coming from my seat, that decision coming from the artistic curator spot in consultation with myself and everybody else on the board.

Initially, I did a lot of pre planning, not on what the actual show would look like, but in terms of how much money are we going to put towards it, where and when is it going to be, what type of show, in terms of concert versus musical. And so the original idea that we had was to do, because every time TNT has a new set of leadership, it really takes about a show for everybody to really train in- like a full show. So I didn't want to go into a big *Legally Blonde* style musical with a green team without us having done some sort of show, right? That's putting a lot on myself, putting a lot on those key leadership positions and creating stress that doesn't need to happen. So what the thought process had been was, let's do some sort of concert version of a musical because concerts are fun, concerts are much easier to put together, concerts can be more flexible. I wasn't thinking about what that musical would be. But I was thinking more logistically for all of us, that's something you can rehearse in a couple weeks, you can do a little bit of choreography/movement, if you want, you can do a little bit of design, but you're not needing to rent a shop, all of those things. Then, when the pandemic hit in March- the timeline's a little fuzzy at that moment, I do not think I had asked Zoë to be director yet at that point, but I had still been adapting these plans. At that time we were all like, theater is gonna be back in the summer, we'll be back in school fully in the fall, things are gonna be fine. But I was like, we should probably plan for some stuff, even at that point, because I talk really closely with the leadership in Tisch drama about what Tisch drama is doing and trying to plan in conjunction with that. So they, in consultation with us, thought that doing a hybrid concert, where we had a limited audience, we were broadcasting it, and it was just a concert, that would be a really great model to look at doing for the fall. So we moved forward with that and essentially spent a bunch of time trying to figure out what that concert was going to be. At some point in there, Zoë and I had been interviewing directors together and it became clear there was nobody who had anywhere close to the skill level that Zoë had. I had always known in the back of my mind that Zoë was going to be the director, but I felt it was irresponsible to not give other people a shot before I made that decision, but because of that I wanted to have Zoë in those interviews as much as I could with

me, because I really trusted her opinion and because if she in the end did end up being the director, I wanted her to see a slate of people who could be assistant directors for her. One of the things that we talked about was because we were doing so much work on the organization, was her being essentially an artistic director and having a director working underneath her so she's chairing an entire season, and then we have a director of each show as another way to think about how we might be sharing responsibilities. And in the end it didn't make sense to do that just realistically as a student club, we needed the most capable person to be in that directing chair because there's so much responsibility that falls in that role. And so I asked Zoë to direct and to continue this process with me.

We had been really thinking that a concert was going to be what we were going to do, we had started reaching out to rights holders such as MTI, other organizations that own copyright to those pieces, as well as individual composers, seeing if we could potentially get broader access to the music without having to go through a group like MTI because early in the shutdown, they did not figure out how to do rights for virtual shows. They were just saying no. We weren't getting a lot of traction trying to get rights directly from a composer, and we weren't finding a show that fit well. In the middle of all of this, everybody was rushing to do a virtual show. I was really against it in the beginning in the spring, because everybody was doing it. But I realized that number one, everybody that was on my team at that point wanted to do one, and number two, there's a great fundraising and a great learning experience from doing it. And so there hit a point where we decided, "Okay, fine, we can do a virtual show." And what we planned on doing was a short half hour, fully pre-recorded live stream version of five songs from TNT shows of the past and having a "miscast" type thing where people from different shows would come in and perform those songs. We had gotten all the way through the pre production of that, and then the night before our first rehearsal was the night that George Floyd was murdered. So we decided that it was irresponsible for us to be asking for donations, and that so many of our [members] were involved in activism or in the work that was being done in theater at that time. And the reconciliation that was happening, that doing a rehearsal process at that moment was not going to be the best way for us as an organization, or the best way for our membership and our cast to succeed. So we put the show initially on hold, deciding that we would wait a month and see how things were doing, see how we're doing as an organization. And at the end of the month, we just decided to cancel the show entirely, it just still didn't feel right to do it.

During all of that, Zoë and I still had a big eye for what the fall was going to be, and had not really established what that was going to be. We were really struggling with needing to have ultimate flexibility in our production, knowing that the idea of the show that we had at that moment, which was it was going to be in a Kimmel space, it was going to be fully live, everybody was going to be there, it was just going to have no audience, we're just going to broadcast it out, but other than that, it was gonna be a normal show. That was what was seeming like was going to be the best option to do it. Then, I met with Erin Black, who is one of our mentors, and was talking to her about all of this stuff. And she had asked if we'd ever considered doing an original show. I said, hell no, because original shows require an incredible amount of

work beyond just rehearsing and presenting them. And it requires that you find a set of extremely capable composers, which even a university like NYU, finding enough can be very difficult. And if we were going to do it, I wanted to have strong representation amongst those composers- not wanted, that was the necessity. And that was not something that I was confident we could do, given the fact that there was so much work that was still needing to happen with the organization. So I was really hesitant. I also was hesitant from an artistry standpoint, that I wasn't confident we could do it and do it well. But [I] realized that logistically, the problem with doing a show that you're buying the rights for, is you are contracted into a very certain way of doing it. You cannot change the script, you cannot change characters, you cannot change what songs are in it, etc, etc. So for us knowing that we needed to have ultimate flexibility, it became really appealing to do a show that we own the copyright for because then we can change the show itself to fit the demands of the time, both production wise as well as what feels like a proper tone to take at the moment because we were planning this still in the middle of the heavy Black Lives Matter movement this summer. And so we were really thinking that we didn't want to do a big Broadway musical, because that would feel really tone deaf. But there weren't a lot of shows out there that existed that we could do that I felt like we could do well. There's a lot of shows by people of color that were coming out. But I felt like as an organization, we couldn't do those responsibly, because as a producer, that is not my background, as much as I wish it was, and I felt like, even as capable as all of our team was, that there was a big risk that we would end up doing those irresponsibly, in that the end product would be a mistake, that we would have really fucked it up. So I didn't feel like that was something that I felt comfortable using an existing show being able to do that well, on top of all the challenges. So the idea of doing a written show seems like it made a lot of sense.

Zoë was really not on board with the idea, she's always been a big musical girl through and through. And so I was like, I understand that, but what I said is, "I need you to consider this just in case." And so I asked her to take two weeks, and to just mull on it, and to think about what it would look like if we were doing an original show to try to better fit this moment. She was like, "Okay, I don't think I'm going to come up with anything that we're going to like." I was basically like, "Try this, and if you don't, we will move forward with trying to do an existing show." She was like, "Okay, but I guarantee you, I'm not going to come up with an idea that I like more than doing a show that exists right now." And so I was like, fine. We'll cross that bridge when we get there. So then, roughly two weeks later, I get a text message from her that was like, we have to call and we have to talk about this today. So we get on the phone, she's like, "I know what we're gonna do, we're gonna do it, it's gonna be perfect. This is what we're doing. We're not doing a show that exists. We're doing this show. It's gonna be amazing. I haven't fully figured it out yet. But I found something. And I think it's gonna be awesome." I was like, "Sick, what is it?" She told the same story that she tells every time, that she's a Boston girl, there's a song that she really identifies with in that she feels like that's not something that exists for everybody, which I completely agree with. And we realized that that was kind of a singular case study for the representation problems that exist in entertainment right now, right? Like, not only

on stage, but also offstage, there are these moments where the creators themselves aren't finding shows in the work that they can align to, and inspire to, and fit their identities. That's a real problem. We never had high ambitions that we would be able to come in and solve that problem, or that we would be able to create songs that people of every identity would be able to be like, "that's me, this is it," but we felt like that we could essentially create at least a moment within Tisch for at least those of us working on the production, to create something for ourselves, that would be beneficial. And I think that's what really matters. Because, for me, when I was thinking about building this show, in this season, I realized that even if the show eventually was going to be done in person, we were going to have to spend so much time on Zoom creating it, that I didn't want to create something that people were going to be dreading getting on Zoom to after a long day of schoolwork. I felt like if we were asking for people's time, we had to be doing something that was beneficial, not exclusively, but primarily for those of us creating the work. So I basically said, I love it. I'm still hesitant, but let's try it. Let's see how we can flesh out this idea, and let's develop it.

So that's the point when we kind of presented it to our existing group. We'd been having pre planning meetings, talking about stuff here and there. I think we had our first production meeting around that time. And we're basically like, "this is what we're gonna try to do. Let's start talking about it." I think that's a similar time to when Ben and Chloe came on board, and we started working about this, and Zoë started building on her team more and [we realized] that this was the show that was going to work for us, as we look at what TNT is and what TNT's place in the world is, this is a good thing for us to be doing.

There's one other piece that I want to tell you about that timeline that's interesting was that we were originally planning to do this show last fall, we were originally planning to do it in Fall 2020. And initially, our timeline was that we were going to fit the creation of the songs and the rehearsal and presentation of the performance into one semester. This was a decision we were making in July, knowing that we needed to start rehearsals in September, and knowing that we needed to have composers on two, three weeks in advance of rehearsals and bringing a cast on in order to have at least a semblance of their work starting. And so two things happened. The first was I learned that Tisch drama was going to be fully remote, and I learned both that classes were going to be fully remote and that our productions were going to be fully remote and then had to sit on that information, make organizational decisions, but not fully reveal what was going on to the rest of my classmates who are also working on TNT. So, part of that was realizing that we weren't going to be able to plan well to produce in person in the fall, and so we hit a point where we had a deadline, where we were like, this is when we need to decide whether we're going to do it in the fall or in the spring. And we decided that it was going to be a much better idea to have a full 10 hour reading style workshop in the fall with a presentation or a preview of some kind to culminate that work, because I don't think the work actually needs a preview, marketing can do that. But what I wanted is a moment for the cast and composers to feel like this moment of Offstage has culminated, which is why we did the preview concert, because I wanted closure for that. And also knowing that, God knows what's going to happen in the spring. So I wanted to

have something that existed to showcase this work. in case something happened in which we couldn't do stuff. So that was a decision that we ended up making, and it was one that I'm really glad that we made, and oh, my God, I cannot imagine if we tried to do this in the fall, it wouldn't have worked, it would have had to have been fully remote, and it would have been a sad cap to the show.

OK: How would you describe your role in the production? I'm thinking both in terms of explaining what a producer does to people who might not be as familiar. But also, if you want to talk about what it looks like in this context, that would be great, too.

ML: It's something that I grapple with every day, and it's something that changes every day, to be completely honest. So, for TNT, because we are a student club, the producer has an elevated role over what a producer would oftentimes have in other shows. It's almost closer to the way that a producer works in events where the producer is, in many ways out of necessity for the need to be able to make decisions quickly and have one unifying voice, the final decider for a lot of things. I hate that way of working. That's actually how my company works for the event world, but that's because it's a for profit, deliverable based type industry. In my role as a producer in the event world, it's almost more like being a CEO. But my idea of a producer in a theater is very different. And so for TNT, I hated that idea that I was kind of the end all be all. That's not really what I want the organization to be like. And so as a producer for TNT, you're also the president generally of TNT, meaning that you make a lot of those kinds of key decisions. I like to make those decisions collaboratively. The way that I see myself as a producer now, is this is not my show. In fact, I hate the whole, "Matthew Lewis in association with Tisch New Theater presents Offstage", that's from the Broadway model. I keep it in only out of respect for the people who came before me and this organization and the tradition that's there, but I'm also still undecided whether I'm going to keep that in for the final show. Yeah, I put a lot of work into this, but that's not really fair, so did everybody else.

I think that the primary role of a producer for TNT is to create the situation in which everybody else in the organization can create art. And what I mean is that is providing the resources and the clearances for everybody else to create this work. I don't believe that creating the work is part of my job description. I think that giving everybody else the resources to create that work is what my job is. And for us, that means really fundraising as a big portion of this, because we receive very little funding for the university- this year more than others, we have more funding, because we're eligible for what's called a pro fund grant, which is not something that we usually are, and so that provides a higher level of a percentage of our budget than normal. But that's unusual. So anyway, beyond that, my job is to be the face of TNT for the university. So I am the one in the end that is responsible to Student Affairs, that is responsible to our mentors, that is responsible to all the other people who have a play in TNT's existence, because even though we are a club, we are a force of an organization within the university itself. For Production and Design this year, there are people who are being graded on their participation

in TNT, and it makes up coursework for some people to come and watch it, right? So what is TNT is an institution within itself, within the university. And so I become the face for the university for that- not the public face, but the face for the university. And what that means for me is doing the dealmaking to try to get space, to try to get resources, to try to get funding, to try all the things and then when things go wrong, I am in the end, the one that is responsible to the university for that.

Within this show itself, beyond providing resources for everybody, I feel like my role is most responsible for trying to guide, and not make, but guide educated decisions that take into account all of the knowledge of what's happening with COVID and with the university. So unfortunately, especially right now in production meetings, I feel like I have to be more vocal than I would want to be, simply because what I'm trying to do is to set ourselves up for success and to manage expectations. And a big part of my job right now is managing expectations, especially for our designers, and especially for Zoë of what is going to be possible, because we don't know still, I have a really good idea about what I think it's going to be based on what the city is saying, based on what other things are happening in the university, but we haven't received a green checkmark that's like, "this plan is approved". And we may never- it may just be a moment where they're like, "you can't" or, "you can", and we don't know. So my job is to try to help advise everybody else and to help shape the conversations to not get people's hopes up and then let down. So for instance, we were very close in the fall, and in the spring to being able to do the show in Skirball, and we thought that was going to be able to happen. We were planning for it, we budgeted for it, Skirball had said, "Yes, we want to do this and we want to support you." And then the university said "No, you can't work in Skirball." We kept that fairly secret, and I'm very glad that we did because if I announced in a production meeting, "we're going to be in Skirball, it's almost certain" and then I had to go into one two weeks later and say, "Hey, we're not going to be able to be in Skirball," that sucks, right? So I think that so much of my job is advising and trying to unify all of the different departments and all the different leaders within TNT to follow and create a plan that is going to be successful, based on my own knowledge and based on my own instinct for how the organization is going to run.

What I don't think that looks like is telling people how to do their jobs or telling people how to make this art. I have never once given Zoë a creative input. She will come to me and ask for advice on certain things, for instance with the opening number, we were talking about time and stuff, so I came into a meeting and gave ideas. But the only thing I will give in terms of creative is ideas, and I never ever ask unless there is a safety or monetary reason for anybody within the organization to change their plans, or to do something because of my own vision for what the show is. And I will say that my vision for what this show was and is, is different than what this show is now. And that is okay, that's what I want it to be. What I feel like is important is to bring in a set of leaders and a set of directors who can take what our initial idea was, and build it into something much better, and that case was most well seen in the preview concert in the fall, where my vision for that was very different and I was so blown away by the work that was created, because it was never something I could have imagined. And so even though I have

different ideas about what the show is going to be, I never ever ask my collaborators to change because very often I am wrong, and that is okay. And I like it when I'm wrong.

OK: A typical workflow for you- what does that look like on a regular-ish basis for you for the production?

ML: One of the things that I love is that my week changes every time, I don't really have a consistent set of work. The biggest part of my job is meetings, which is, whatever. But mainly what I'm doing is- and this sounds selfish, but I try to never actually be doing the work myself, but rather trying to give everybody else the resources to do it because I think the moment that I start doing the work myself is the moment it becomes Matt New Theater rather than all of us. So instead what it ends up being is oftentimes, for things like fundraising and things that are producing with a capital P, me meeting with my team, setting the expectations for what I feel like we need to be doing or what our goals need to be, and then saying, "Go try it, and then let's come back and let's work on it together." So oftentimes, we'll figure out a project, for instance, we'll put together a fundraising letter, and I'll be like, "Go draft it, give it your best shot, here's some of what the examples have been in the past, and then let's come back, and we'll review it together, and we'll work on it together." Almost always at this point, they send it to me, and it's awesome, and no changes need to happen. And then sometimes, I will suggest changes, and usually that's technicalities or information that I hold from past knowledge of TNT that they're still learning, and that's how everybody learns. But I really believe in TNT being first and foremost an educational experience for everybody. And so I try as much as possible for everybody to really be doing what is their responsibility.

Typically, for me, I have a series of one on one meetings with the key players in TNT every week, so I have a standing meeting with Zoe, I have frequent meetings with Jady, I have frequent meetings with Ben and with Nina and other groups like that. We have a core kind of producing and marketing meeting every week. I don't think my role is to come into a rehearsal and steamroll, or even come into a production meeting and steamroll. Sometimes that's necessary, because new information comes up, or we're in preliminary conversations where I really have to have a voice in that. But typically, what I try to do is meet with department heads, understand what are the problems and questions they have in what's ahead of them and give them my information on, this is what I'm hearing from the university. Here's an idea I had about how to solve this problem, what do you think, stuff like that, and then letting them go and do the work with everybody else in the organization. So for me, because our production team on this show is 60 strong, I really rely on those key players to be running the day to day operations, and to be able to funnel information to me because that's the way that big organizations work, it's impossible for me to be in every meeting in conversation and it's irresponsible, that's why we have these capable people, and that's their experience and their role in this position. It doesn't make sense for me to be in those. But very often what that looks like is, "we had this meeting about this and this was really awesome, I have some questions or concerns about this, what do

you think?", and I'll be like, "Great, talk to this person" or oftentimes almost a mentor way, we'll have a new designer that comes on and they're like, "Hey, I'm trying to get an assistant." And I'm like, "Awesome. Let's get on the phone. Let me talk you through how to interview, let me talk you through the process for us. Nina's gonna take care of onboarding them, Jadyn is gonna take care of sharing stuff. But for you, this is what it's gonna look like, I'm happy to come sit in on that meeting, if you want." So it really depends week to week, but the biggest things for me are production meetings, because I think that's the moment where we all get to gather together and share as a group and meld on different things that are going on. Those are the meetings that I tend to be the most vocal in, which I will be less vocal in moving forward, but at the moment, I tend to be really vocal in them simply because we're trying to figure out safety and capabilities things, which in the end, that's my job, right? What is safe? And what are our capabilities? That's my job, so I have to be vocal in those conversations, because I hold the information in that for the moment. But as we move forward, Jadyn is going to step more and more into that role as things become more settled on the development side of things, as will Nina, and so then my job will become less and less and more focused on specific fundraising and honestly, problem solving in a way.

OK: What has it been like working during the pandemic for you?

ML: I'm really proud of what TNT has done during the pandemic. I think that we more so than any organization, including the university at NYU, have found a creative way to be making work and making it a positive educational experience for our membership. I think that we have chosen a show and a way of working, that provides a certain level of flexibility, artistic integrity, and experiences of personal connections for our membership in a way that I don't think other organizations or other schools at NYU have done. And I attributed that greatly to Zoë and to the work that she's done with this, as well as to myself and people in my team who have decided to make the absolute focus of every decision that we make in this show. And I say that- every single decision that we make in this show, first and foremost, on the experience of those involved, with the art being second, and with our reputation and everything else being third. The art is very important for us, because that is so much of what everybody's experience is. But if there is something like the conversations that I was having about us doing an overnight shoot, my critique there had been, yes, artistically, this makes a lot of sense, but I think our cast and our company are going to suffer doing that, that that is going to be a certain set of emotional and mental trauma, not trauma, but hard work that isn't necessary. And I think that's a moment where it is more beneficial for us to have a more positive experience on site filming, where we are all awake and we are all here getting to do this stuff together, versus having something where yes, artistically the final product may be more interesting, but I don't care. I really don't.

OK: What would you say the most rewarding part of your role is and what the most challenging part of your role is?

ML: I think the most rewarding part of my role is seeing everything come together. Our preview concert last fall was a really great moment of that, where a whole set of work and a whole set of questions culminated into something that I was really proud of. I think the best part of my work is getting to watch all of my colleagues and my friends succeed and kick ass at what they're doing. The best part of my work is a moment in a production meeting where like, our costume designer will come in and say, "I have solved this problem. Here's the plan for it. And I'm proud of what I'm doing." Or a moment where Zoë says, "I think this is working, I'm excited about this. And this is going to be great." When I see my collaborators hitting a moment of personal growth, or hitting a moment where their experience has been positive. For me, the biggest reflection of my work and the biggest indicator for me of whether I've done my job right or not, and whether I should be satisfied with my work is whether all of my friends and collaborators involved are glad that they were a part of TNT. And I think for me, that is the success or failure of my job. If we ended this production and everybody walked away and said that was a terrible experience, then I would have failed. But if everybody walks away and says yes, this was hard, but I grew as a human being and I'm very proud of the work we did, then I will be happy and satisfied with what I've done.

The hardest part is when I have to say no to things, because I hate having to say no, I don't really believe it's my job to say no, but when I'm presented with a really great artistic idea, but I have to say, "I'm so sorry, but I don't think we have the funding to pull that off," or "I'm so sorry, we can't rent a scenic shop this year," or "I'm so sorry, but we don't have enough power for that," or whatever that might be, when there's a thing that's out of my control, but that prevents one of my collaborators from being able to do what they want to do. That's really hard. And that is always really disappointing. But I think the hardest thing is when somebody is not having a good time, if somebody is having a tough time in rehearsal, or if somebody is exhausted, or if somebody is frustrated. I try not to take things personally, and I certainly don't take that personally, but I do see it as a reflection on the way that I'm running the organization. And that's the only time when things are really hard is when I feel like I have created a set of conditions that is making somebody not enjoy themselves or be having a tough time. Because again, I try to think of this as a transactional thing in the way that I think people should think of university. In the end, we're all paying for this, right? Even though we fundraise a lot, in a way our tuition is still going towards this experience. And so if it's not a good experience, don't pay for it or don't do it.

OK: How would you say that this process working on this show overall has impacted you personally?

ML: It's really interesting, because it's been a parallel experience: during this process I've also started my own company, and I've started producing my own work. And so because of that, I have been experiencing producing in the pandemic in two ways- through this organization,

which is actually quite often much larger budgets than the shows that I'm producing myself for work that I'm getting paid for, this show still has a larger budget than any of the projects that I've worked on individually. That's insane. Even at the slimmest version of a TNT budget, it's still more than that. That's just an attribute of the ability of TNT to fundraise and the ability of TNT to create opportunities for ourselves. That being said, it's been a really great moment of growth. I never saw myself as a producer and I never wanted to produce before TNT, I really was a stage manager. I never saw myself as a creative and I never saw myself as somebody leading an organization. I always wanted to be a cog, right. And now I am in many ways the operator of a machine. And so that has become strange in many ways, to be sitting in a rehearsal and seeing 60 people that are there because of a show that I didn't create, but I had a lot of cause in making it happen, in finding Zoë and finding our team and bringing all those people who then created this amazing show, I take a lot of pride in that. And so I think it's been a really good moment of personal growth, of understanding the type of work I want to be doing as an artist and realizing that commercial type theater is not something that excites me. And really realizing that if that if I'm going to be spending my time and effort towards something that I'm not getting paid for, I want that to be a piece of art that I feel like is having a positive impact in the world, or at least on those who are part of it. And I think that's been a shift for me, because I've been a very commercial person through and through before, but I really believe in kind of the development that can come from this. And that's new.

I also think that this is something that I'm really still spending a lot of time growing, but understanding how to empower other people to do their jobs is a skill that I am just beginning to try to do. And I still don't know how to do it fully, and that I work hard every day to do, but I still feel like, "I spoke too much in that meeting." "I shouldn't have stepped on their toes." "I shouldn't have said this", or "I didn't say enough", or "Oh, I didn't set this expectation well enough." But I didn't want to, because I wanted to let them have the leeway to do their thing. And so I'm really still struggling with the balance of what does it mean to be empowering a group of people to go off and create the work without you hard hand holding that, but also, at the same point in time, being responsible to them and making sure that nobody is ever doing something that is going to have negative consequences for themselves or the organization. And so that's something that I'm still really grappling with every single day and something that I think about in every single production meeting we have all the time about how I'm running this organization. Am I doing it responsibly? Especially thinking about all of those goals that I set out for myself in the beginning of wanting to empower leaders who aren't white men. Am I doing that successfully enough? Or am I not holding myself to a strong enough account because there's so many challenges in just making the show happen? I'm saying, "Oh, we have to do this to make this show happen." And that's not acceptable. That's just not. And so it's something that I continue to kind of grapple with every day, and I continue to work towards but it's hard, which is an excuse, but it's hard. And when TNT isn't the only thing that we're doing right? Like, yeah, I'm president of TNT. But it's not a full time job that I'm getting paid for. I'm still a university student, I'm still doing everything else. I do have to prioritize time. And it's important to be

making time towards those things. And sometimes that can be difficult to be doing well enough. And it's not that I don't try, I try as hard as I can, but sometimes I still fail. And that failure is something that is inexcusable.