



Fall 2009

Friends,

Welcome to the official start of the Inaugural Season of **The Zoot Theatre Company, Inc.** Given that this is our first full and official season, I would like to provide everyone with a bit of a background on who **The Zoot Theatre Company, Inc.** is and what we're all about.

About three and a half years ago, Tristan and I thought up a company at the time called "Zoot Productions." Our aim was simple, to have a less centrally controlled and more artistically-centered theater company in the Dayton area (much of this mindset was a derivative of our current place in life). This isn't to say that all Dayton theaters are "centrally controlled," I think *The Human Race* is a great model for small, start-up companies like ourselves that eventually realize a great deal of success. Over time, we changed the name from "Zoot Productions" to "**The Zoot Theatre Company**" to more accurately reflect what we believed to be our mission. That simple name change, I believe, really helped to spur much of the success that we're experiencing today.

After we changed our name, produced our first couple of shows, Tristan and I went down two different paths, yet **ZTC** kept springing up. It was obvious to me, living 12 hours away from Dayton, that this wasn't going away and it wasn't some "pipe dream" that we would chat about over drinks. It was clear that Tristan's dream was really something that had a strong foothold in the area and a significant amount of interest. Several people came on board to help Tristan and provided such valuable insight that the strong foothold that we had, quickly became an established company with credibility.

I'm sending this note to you, because you're the dedicated artists currently involved with a **ZTC** production. That doesn't mean that this letter is proprietary, just the opposite, I would encourage you to forward it on to your friends and colleagues. I believe that **ZTC** is at a critical point in its life. We're at a point where we either go for the gold or we go home. I was fortunate enough to see a small portion of the *Hansel and Gretel* rehearsal a few weeks ago. I can't wait to come see it in October. Being in the Schuster Center again, truly lends a significant amount of standing to **ZTC**. It's the premier venue in the area and everyone knows of it and where it's located. This show is going to be a great success and it's going to be because of each of you. To that, I want to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation. I wish that **ZTC** could do more for each of you. I wish that we could place everyone on the payroll and throw a huge cast party after opening night. Unfortunately, we aren't in a position to do that...YET. This leads me to the point of my long, drawn-out note. I wanted to share with everyone five key points where **ZTC** currently stands and where we're heading.

First, it is the intention of **The Zoot Theatre Company** to eventually be in a place where we are able to pay a fair and equitable wage to everyone involved with a production, regardless of whether that involvement is onstage, backstage, in the house, or in the office. My background isn't in the arts, it's in accounting and economics. I know that people must move to where the jobs are so that each person is able to do what he or she is meant to do. It's productions like *Canterbury Tales*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *A Rescued Christmas* and *Moby Dick* that we must rely on volunteer time, your time to make it happen. By not paying wages on these shows, we're able to invest more money in development and advertising to allow us to recognize more income that will put **ZTC** in a position to pay wages for future shows. I strongly believe this avenue will not only strengthen **ZTC**, but will strengthen the Arts in Dayton by providing more paying opportunities for artists, keeping local talent local, and ensuring more choices for the consumer. Not to mention that by keeping this talent local, it provides a significantly greater pool of artistic talent for every theater company in the area. This in turn leads to more productions, more jobs, and a better quality of life.

Secondly, on the business side of the house; we're in the process of identifying potential funders and grantors. This is going to be key to continued success. As a consultant that deals exclusively with non-profit organizations, I know that the number one cause of failure for many arts organizations (and indeed, many non-profits) is the heavy reliance on earned income and a weak or non-existent stream of unearned income. What do I mean by that? Well, too often arts organizations rely on ticket sales or selling their product and fail to recognize the very important source of non-sales related revenue, such as applying for grants, creating membership opportunities, or courting potential donors. Having a healthy balance of both allows an organization such as ours to weather unforeseen or even foreseen circumstances. For instance, if one or two productions don't prove to be financially successful, that doesn't all together damage a company.

Thirdly, we are in the initial stages of taking **ZTC** on the road. We're constantly looking for booking opportunities, especially in the Greater Dayton Area, to bring the Arts to all different types of venues and people. One main strategy that ZTC is operating under currently is that we are keeping costs low by not straddling ourselves with debt or too much overhead by purchasing or leasing a performance venue. It fits directly in with **ZTC's** mission to not solely rely on people coming to experience a **ZTC** production, but to bring those productions to people. We feel this makes Art more accessible and goes even further to strengthening its base.

Fourth, on a marketing and development front, we're moving forward with a professional website vendor and will soon be linking in with an industry leading fundraising software that will allow us to receive and track donations online through a secure platform. By doing this, we will be able to provide potential donors a secure and easily accessible way of supporting **ZTC** and its mission. Until now Aaron Vega, who many of you know, has been doing a fantastic job at keeping our website up to date and making sure that all the critical information is presented. I'd like to extend my sincere thanks to Aaron for truly getting the website and many other things off the ground, including the recent production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Garden Center, downtown.

Finally, we have an office! This may sound trite, but trust me, it's not. Rhythm In Shoes has graciously agreed to lease space in their new offices at an extremely affordable rate. In fact, the lease is .001% of the other option from an arts-incubating organization. Trust me, it's a great deal. By having an office, this allows us to have space to work during business hours, field phone calls, and have a central location for meetings and storing records. And, as many of you know, we have consistent rehearsal space to prepare for our productions. My special thanks to Sharon Leahy and the folks at Rhythm In Shoes for their extreme generosity. It is in **ZTC's** plan to extend that generosity beyond June 2010.

I truly wish that I could mention everyone by name and recognize everyone's time, talents, and efforts that have helped to bring **ZTC** to where we are today. Unfortunately, that letter would be even longer than it is now. Special thanks to those that have been with us from the beginning and for continuing to help make **ZTC** a success and believing in our mission. And, if you're just now joining us, thank you and we look forward to a continued relationship to strengthen the Arts in Dayton and the surrounding area.

The Zoot Theatre Company, Inc. is already a great success and will continue to be as a result of everyone's hard work and dedication. It's my intention to send quarterly "Five Point Letters" to all those who might be interested and to begin to have these posted on our website for all to see. In starting a non-profit, I believe that transparency and letting people know where we are is vitally important to success. Please, feel free to reach out to me with suggestions or comments on how we can improve, things that we might be missing, or just to say hello. Unfortunately, we don't have the bandwidth to bring every suggestion to fruition right now, but some day, who knows...

All my best and thanks,



Michael