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## New York Scene : Inside the Association of Performing Arts Presenters (APAP)

Interview with Mario Garcia Durham

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# New York Scene : Inside the Association of Performing Arts Presenters (APAP)

Interview with Mario Garcia Durham

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## Association of Performing Arts Presenters : website

- 1 <http://www.apapnyc.apap365.org/Pages/default.aspx>
- 2 <http://www.apap365.org/Pages/APAP365.aspx>

Figure 1



Mario Garcia Durham  
Wood Powell

Figure 2



The Expo Hall  
Adam Kissick

Figure 3



APAP Conference logo

Association of Performing Arts Presenters

## Introduction to the Association of Performing Arts Presenters

- 3 The Association of Performing Arts Presenters (APAP) is one of the largest international conferences, created in 1957, to bring together artists and presenters from the United States and around the world. Based in Washington D.C, they run many programs in order to help professionals of the performing arts field: resources programs have been created in order to connect and network all their members and give them the information that they might need as well as many funding programs to financially support and sustain their members' work and projects.
- 4 APAP is mostly known for organizing its APAP Conference that has been taking place in January, every year for sixty years all over New York City. Over the course of five intense days, the Conference gathers presenters and artists - and many other professionals from the performing arts stage - together around showcases, debates, talks and a forum so they can share information, meet and work on their next season or tour.
- 5 We had the chance to talk to Mario Garcia Durham, director of APAP who detailed for us what were APAP and the APAP Conference.

## Biography of Mario Garcia Durham

- 6 In October 2011, Mario Garcia Durham became the fifth President and CEO of the Association of Performing Arts Presenters (APAP) since its founding in 1957.
- 7 Prior to his leadership role with APAP, Mr. Durham was posted at the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) where he served as Director of Artist Communities and Presenting from 2004 - 2011. At the NEA, Mr. Durham contributed to programs such as "An Evening of Poetry" hosted by the President and Mrs. Obama and the "NEA Opera Honors". He inaugurated the NEA's Artist Communities granting program and was the initiator of "Live from Your Neighborhood", a groundbreaking study of the impact of outdoor arts festivals in the U.S. After holding numerous management positions and serving as artistic director at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in the 1990s, he founded Yerba Buena Arts & Events in 2000, the producing organization of the annual Yerba Buena Gardens Festival. The outdoor event offers more than 100 free performances by the San Francisco Opera, the San Francisco Ballet and more for an audience of 100,000 attendees.

- 8 Throughout his career of over 20 years as a presenter, Mr. Durham has served on numerous boards, special advisory committees and funding panels. He is currently on the board of the Alliance of Artist Communities and Data Arts (formerly the Cultural Data Project). Durham served as chair of the Performing Arts Alliance, a board of the leaders of the major performing arts service organizations in the U.S.
- 9 Durham had previously served on the APAP Board of Directors and on the Executive Committee. He is on the Community Advisory Council of the PBS station WETA in Washington, DC and on the American University Arts Management Advisory Council.

## Interview

Margaux Szuter : What is APAP ?

Mario Garcia Durham : APAP is one of the largest service organizations for the performing arts industry. We focus on service, advocacy, resource sharing, trade and professional development. It is the industry's leading community for networking and knowledge.

MS : When and why was APAP created ?

Mario Garcia Durham : APAP was founded in 1957 by University and College managers. They first formed the Association of College and University Concert Managers (ACUCM) and directed their interests toward the educational role of the arts and the unique issues related to professional performing arts on campus. It was initially hosted by the University of Wisconsin in Madison. The Association expanded to a large variety of organizations and finally changed its name in 1988 to become what is known now as APAP. For the 2017 edition, we will celebrate our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary !

MS : Will you organize any special events in order to celebrate this anniversary ?

Mario Garcia Durham : For us, it will be an unusual anniversary. The 50<sup>th</sup> is a major milestone but the 60<sup>th</sup> is just indicating that you are getting old (*laughs*) ! So we will try to make sure that our anniversary is focused on the next sixty years, that we are not looking too much back in the past and we will also ask our younger members - the next generation - to tell us what their ambitions are for the next sixty years !

MS : What is APAP's main goal ?

Mario Garcia Durham : Our main goal is to serve the performing arts industry - specifically the work of artists and audiences around the country and around the world. We are the industry that brings artists to audiences in all sizes of towns and cities around the world. One of our main services is to offer our annual conference in which there is over a thousand showcases and contract bookings. There are also very important discussions that take place around culture and conflict and other situations impacting arts organizations.

MS : APAP brings an essential network to artists ; does it also bring any kind of funding for the creation or their arts ?

Mario Garcia Durham : No, it doesn't. Part of our work that we are very proud of is the commerce of art. We make it possible for artists to be booked, to have contracts, to generate revenues so they can create new projects ! We are very proud of that aspect ! It is more of a trade or transactional aspect of our work but it is very

important for all artists to have contracts and steady income for their living and we really facilitate this in our conference.

MS : Beside the conference, do you have any other activities ?

Mario Garcia Durham : Yes, we have a numerous of ongoing activities year-round. We have many different programs. For instance, we have a funding program - the “Cultural Exchange Program” - that allows U.S members to travel to other countries to see festivals and new artworks.<sup>1</sup> Another one is an initiative that focuses on Muslim art in the United States, which is a major program about dialogues and creating artwork in communities.

MS : Is there a reason to focus on this specific community ?

Mario Garcia Durham : Well, there is obviously a number of different directions that we can take. This program - “Building Bridges” - involves university presenters and various artists working with their communities and through the evolution of it as well as the recent history, we thought it was an important topic to focus on the work of Muslim artists.<sup>2</sup> We started to work on this a couple of years ago then we expanded the program and I must say it has been really remarkable ! Despite the many choices that we could have made, this one was proved to be significant and relevant.

MS : Who are the members of APAP ? Can anyone become a member ?

Mario Garcia Durham : We have about 1,800 organizational and individual members and over 50 % of them are presenting organizations. 47 % are artists, managers, agents, producers or creative producers and the other 10 % are other types of arts constituents (consultants, vendors, service organizations etc.). So yes, anyone can join us !

MS : Do you need to be a member to attend the APAP conference ? Who usually does attend the conference ?

Mario Garcia Durham : Yes, you have to be a member to attend the conference ! Who attends is primarily performing arts professionals from around the world. There are mostly individuals from the presenting side - agents and managers. Typically, they are individuals that are bringing artists to communities around the world. On the other end, we have hundreds of artists that are showing professionals their work, their new creations and the ideas that they have. They have discussions with presenters about the direction they want to go. Our audience is a combination of behind-the-scene professionals and artists !

MS : Do you also have non-professionals coming ?

Mario Garcia Durham : We do get some, but APAP is an industry event and a very unique one : you see artists walking around, you have showcases and music everywhere ! We get students though ! We have over a hundred and twenty young students that are learning arts administration who volunteer with us each year. We stay in touch with them and have a development program for them because we know they will become the future leaders of our fields. We also have board members that come and people that are interested in the performing arts.

MS : Do you know how many international professionals are coming to APAP ?

Mario Garcia Durham : Last year, we had over thirty-four countries represented !

MS : If we talk about the conference in a more detailed way, can you explain to us how the five days are organized ?

Mario Garcia Durham : We try to create the five days of the conference in such a way that allows maximum use of your time as a professional to see new artists, to go to professional development sessions, to meet with your colleagues or to book artists over the next years. It is difficult to do because, besides of being one of the largest conferences in the world, there are so many things to do and see in New York City which offers its own array of activities for performing arts professionals at that time ! There are twelve other festivals that occur around APAP ! You have the Chamber Music American, Global Fest, COIL, Under the Radar, American Realness etc. It is this amazing gathering of professional and individuals from all over the world that are coming to see the work of new artists so we try to divide our five days for maximum effectiveness for professionals in the field.

MS : Talking about all those festivals that occur around APAP, do you have any contacts with them ?

Mario Garcia Durham : Absolutely ! We started about four years ago I think. We reach out to them all so that we can start working together in order to publicize, to promote each other's work. APAP is the largest member of the entity but we have a really great relationship. As a result, our press has increased by almost a hundred percent last year ! This press presence is amazing to promote the ideas of all of these festivals working together in NYC at this one time of year.

MS : When I interviewed Vallejo Gantner and Jess Edkins from Performance Space 122, they told me they created COIL Festival because of APAP and the dynamic it has created in New York City at that time of year.<sup>3</sup> Do you think that is what happened for the other festivals ?

Mario Garcia Durham : I don't want to take credit for it but I do want to say that because we bring so many professionals from around the world, it is very smart of our colleagues to say that if there is something to do in New York City, it is interesting to do it around APAP ! But we also incubated some of those festivals. Global Fest or Jazz Connect - which is a conference for the Jazz industry - used to be parts of APAP.<sup>4</sup> Under the Radar was also initially programmed with APAP !<sup>5</sup> We are now incubating World Music at APAP and hopefully they will have their own World Music Conference soon ! We are very proud of all the things we have done and the things we are doing with all of these institutions and events !

MS : I want to come back to New York at the time of the APAP conference : why do you organize this international conference in January - which is not really known for a being a very touristic season in New York ?

Mario Garcia Durham : Haha, that's a good question ! Actually, it hasn't always been in January ; it used to be in the Fall ! What happened in New York is that over the past ten or fifteen years, what used to be a quiet period in the City after our Thanksgiving holidays became one of the busiest period of the year ! Hotel rooms that would cost a couple hundred dollars jumped to five or six hundred dollars during the period we used to hold it. The reason was partly economic ! But it is also a good time for booking as presenters are creating their Fall season at that time too !

MS : You said there were a thousand showcases organized for APAP : how does this work ? Where do you present them ?

Mario Garcia Durham : The shows are all over New York City ! Artists self-produce their shows, we don't produce them. We bring the audience, the professionals to travel to the City ! They trust us when they come to our conference ; they know that they will see spectacular new artists available for touring ! We basically list all the shows, give the information to our audience and guide them to the shows !

MS : Do you make any programming choices ?

Mario Garcia Durham : With our model, we don't. Some smaller conferences with a hundred showcases do ; they have a jury to select the shows they want to present. At APAP, we have it wide open ! Any of our members can offer a showcase to our other members.

MS : Can you tell us more about the 2017 edition ?<sup>6</sup>

Mario Garcia Durham : We are currently working on the conference, so it is still ongoing and we haven't made any press announcement yet. Our members will start registering their showcases information mid-October ! However, what I can already tell you is that we have a very active committee of professionals from across the U.S and the world that guides us in the selection of our annual topic. For 2017, the theme will be "Flow", to reflect many aspects of the performing arts and artists - the work flow, artists' life flow, the creation of projects and all of the ideas that artists bring forward. We typically choose a single word which encapsulates a momentum or a lot of ideas. This helps guiding the keynote speeches and the panels that we have. Last year the theme was "Maker" recognizing that artists, curators and professionals are makers : we make our arts in whatever aspects we are involved in.

MS : How does it work for the committee to choose the annual topic ?

Mario Garcia Durham : It is a long process before choosing the final theme. It takes about two or three months to narrow it down to a few propositions because when we start the conversation, it is wide open ! We are mostly focused on the burning issues that we need to address when we go to 2017. Part of our conversation is not only artistic but also practical. For instance, what happens if Donald Trump wins the presidential election ? What if it is Hillary Clinton ? How will it affect the mood of our attendees ? What has happened with terrorism and how do the audiences feel about the world ? We want to make sure that whatever theme we choose, it will hopefully resonate with the individuals who are coming.

MS : How do you see the evolution for APAP in the next few years ?

Mario Garcia Durham : We have intense discussions on a continuing basis with the board and the staff in order to try to anticipate the changes that might occur in our field. APAP is a service organization, we are here to serve the field. Right now, some manifestations of that service include our conference, our different programs and our ongoing professional development. As time goes by, those may change ! The conference may become smaller or break up into different types of conferences. The key is that we need to be responsive and anticipate in the best possible way the changes that are coming. And the world is changing so quickly, especially in this age of technology and the internet ! We don't know what application will exist next year that may impact the performing arts, the business or even our lives ! This is intense and really challenging !



MS : Thank you very much Mario Durham for your answers and I invite our readership to follow the next APAP conference in January from New York or afar !<sup>7</sup>

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## NOTES

1. For more information: <http://www.apap365.org/KNOWLEDGE/GrantPrograms/Pages/BuildingBridges.aspx>
  2. For more information: <http://www.apap365.org/KNOWLEDGE/GrantPrograms/Pages/BuildingBridges.aspx>
  3. Margaux Szuter, « Interview with Vallejo Gantner and Jess Edkins  
New York Scene: Inside *Performance Space 122* », *Miranda* [Online], 12 | 2016, Online since 29 February 2016, connection on 04 September 2016. URL : <http://miranda.revues.org/8338>
  4. Global Fest website : <http://www.globalfest-ny.com/>  
Jazz Connect website : <https://sites.google.com/site/jazzconnect2014/home-1>
  5. Under The Radar is the annual festival of The Public Theater. Website: <http://publictheater.org/en/Programs--Events/Under-the-Radar-Festival/Under-the-Radar-Festival-2016/>
  6. The 2017 edition will take place from January; 6<sup>th</sup> to January, 10<sup>th</sup>.
  7. Link to their Twitter and Facebook pages: twitter : <https://twitter.com/apap365> / facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/APAPNYC/>
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## ABSTRACTS

Interview with Mario Garcia Durham, director of the Association of Performing Art Presenters (APAP) in New York City. Conducted in July 2016 via Skype.

Entretien avec Mario Garcia Durham, directeur de l'APAP (Association of Performing Art Presenters) à New York. Réalisé en juillet 2016 via Skype.

## INDEX

**Subjects:** Theater

**Keywords:** performing arts, international conference, networking, theater festivals, APAP365, Flow, American theater stage

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