

# Arts community shows Intersection it's not alone

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executive director, told The Extra after the meeting that the fiscal sponsorship fees — about \$120,000 a year — are the organization's largest source of unrestricted income.

That won't get Intersection through the final months of this fiscal year, which began July 1. The previous year's budget was around \$3 million. Rollison expects this year's to be \$400,000 to \$450,000, excluding the activities of the sponsored projects. The deficit going into the year was revised down to \$200,000, half what had been reported when the restructuring news broke two months ago.

Still, Intersection's operational funds are deeply compromised. In July, Intersection had 16 residents artists or arts companies on its roster. Rollison says Intersection won't be able to generate or produce any new projects this year, not even from what it calls its five "legacy" resident artists: Campo Santo, Erika Chong Shuch, Howard Wiley, Dan Wolf and the Living Word Project.

At the community meeting, Widmer said the cause of the financial problems was "a perfect storm" that blew in last year: "We lacked enough unrestricted income, and, like many small and mid-sized nonprofits, we had few reserves. Funding that we expected and community contributions didn't come through. And we had a significant leadership change." Deborah Cullinan, executive director since 1996, left in 2013 to lead Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. Widmer expressed confidence that Intersection would weather this storm and asked the audience for ideas. The crowd split into five groups to discuss shared space, visual arts, performing arts, community engagement and fundraising. Another meeting is scheduled for Aug. 19.

## BELOW MARKET RENT

Organizations in financial trouble usually cut staff, then worry about how to keep a roof over the heads of whoever is left. Gentrification is exacerbating those concerns for central city nonprofit arts groups and service providers. Intersection, however, doesn't seem to be fretting about possibly losing its site at 925 Mission St.

Widmer and Rollison expect to be able to keep paying rent in the Chronicle building, at least until Intersection's lease is up at the end of 2015. It's an unheard-of \$10,000 a month for 6,200 square feet — \$1.60 a square foot in a market that today is charging \$4 or more. Intersection and other tenants were beneficiaries of an ambitious 2011 plan by the Hearst Corp. and developer Forest City to turn the Chron's 4-acre site into what they called 5M, a commercial, housing, cultural and arts complex.

Intersection's Hearst-subsidized digs include a 4,200-square-foot first-floor performance space, a large basement used for rehearsals, classes and meetings, and a gallery space donated to Intersection by The Hub, another Hearst tenant. The Hub, a shared workspace that leases 8,600 square feet and rents out individual workstations, offices and meeting and event rooms for its members, wasn't using the gallery area.

Intersection began life in 1965 in a dingy coffeehouse at 150 Ellis St., a former bar on the fringe of the Tenderloin,

where art, much of it racy, intersected with anti-Vietnam War activism and the socially conscious religion of the Rev. Ted McIlvenna.

He was one of the triumvirate of ministers who directed Glide's church and enterprises and set Glide on its course of social activism. A year later, Intersection moved to a North Beach church, then on to the Mission District at 776 Valencia St., a former mortuary. After that site buckled in the '89 Loma Prieta earthquake, Intersection took over 446 Valencia St., once a furniture store, and called it home for 14 years.

"For the record, we moved here to Mission Street to explore what Intersection could become, really what's being talked about here today — new models for the organization," Cullinan told participants in the space group. "We had problems on Valencia Street and had to let go of what we'd known. This may just be another path in our trajectory." The organization was "fragile when I came (1996) and when I left," she added.

Her reputation and skills as an ace fundraiser pulled Intersection through several financial crises, notably in the mid-1990s when the dot-com boom pushed out operations, then again in the mid-2000s when the recession hit and public and private funding dipped.

## ARTS SOLIDARITY

"Deborah always says, 'You have to be out on top of fundraising all the time,' and it's true," says Frances Phillips, program director of the Creative Work Fund, head of arts funding for the Walter & Elise Haas Fund. But she knows Intersection more intimately than that. She was Intersection executive director from 1988-94. The Haas Fund first supported Intersection in 1986, a grant to help it get established at 776 Valencia.

"So many people at the community meeting were Intersection peers — the executive directors of other arts groups," Phillips, one of several funders in the audience, later told The Extra. "They may have come to find out more about Intersection's plans, but it mostly showed the solidarity of the arts community."

Phillips says she knew Intersection was in financial trouble in March but didn't know how bad it was until the May public announcement. She's part of a funders' group that convened to try to help the floundering organization. In late July, the Walter & Elise Haas Fund gave Intersection a grant for operating support and a consultant to analyze its last five years' financial operations. Grants from other funders, not yet announced, will pay the consultant to work with an Intersection transition team to plan strategies and search for an executive director.

"Some of Intersection's vulnerabilities are like the cart and horse," Phillips says. "It needs a dynamic new leader, but it's hard to find a dynamic new leader without the money."

Grants for the Arts has been funding Intersection annually since 1971. Kary Schulman, executive director, pulls up the stats after a minute of searching a database at her fingertips.

"The first grant was \$2,000," she says, "and by 1981 it was up to \$15,000, then \$28,000 by 1984." Last year's grant was \$53,950. A separate grant of \$25,000 went to Campo Santo, one of Intersection's former resident theater groups that now, with the restructur-



PHOTO MARJORIE BEGGS

**Intersection** board Chairman Yancy Widmer addresses 150 supporters at the July community meeting to brainstorm the organization's next moves.

ing, has reverted to its original status as a fiscally sponsored project.

Sean San José, Campo Santo director since 1996, also was Intersection's performing arts program director before the purge. The company's future is secure, he assured The Extra, and now, "out in the world," he expects to "more fully forge our relationship with Magic Theatre, American Conservatory Theatre and others."

As one of the transition team members, San José believes there's no "lack of possibilities" for Intersection to

make it through the crisis.

Schulman agrees. She, too, was unaware its situation was so dire, and she wants to give Intersection every opportunity to regroup: "Intersection has reinvented itself several times, and there's a lot of trust in its strength to do it again. Also, among funders, we're most grateful for its fiscal sponsor program."

The city's thriving arts community depends on it: Intersection and Dancers' Group each has about 120 projects, but only Intersection sponsors in all art disciplines. ■

## Intersection test case: 'Wrestling Jerusalem'

"Wrestling Jerusalem," written and performed by Aaron Davidman, was one of Intersection's last performances before the organization went into restructuring mode. A piece about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it was praised by Chronicle theater critic Robert Hurwitt as "a remarkable solo performance," the portraits presented "riveting."

Contemporary and political, the play fits the Intersection model of presenting relevant artists whose work matters. Davidman's 15 characters are based on his own internal wrestling to make sense of Middle East hostilities and on the people he interviewed during his travels there. The nascent play had public readings around the country during the six years he was developing it and before he brought it to Intersection in early 2013.

"At the time, I was lining up funding and looking for a fiscal sponsor," he recalls, "but then Intersection asked me to consider becoming a resident artist, a sort of test case for what they wanted to do more of — they'd give me in-kind support by providing the space and technical assistance, and I'd raise the rest of the funds needed."

The solo production — 13 performances with minimal staging — cost about \$120,000, which Davidman says includes the box office, Intersection's contribution, and what he raised from foundations and individuals, each worth a quarter of the total.

He's no novice at fundraising. Beginning in 2001, he was artistic director of Traveling Jewish Theatre, a company founded in 1978 whose first fiscal sponsor was, ironically, Intersection.

"When I brought the play to Intersection, fundraising for it was some of the easiest I've ever done. The overhead was low and it was project-specific."

Davidman remains an Intersection resident artist, but has no new productions scheduled and isn't certain if organizational changes will affect their future relationship.

"You can really look at my experience with Intersection as a nod to why it's so vital to San Francisco's arts community and its cultural fabric — it serves a diverse range of people and supports the entire range of the arts." ■

— Marjorie Beggs

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FREE screenings — September 4–6 & October 7, 2014

<p>September 4 <span style="float: right;">7 pm</span></p> <p>Opening Night at El Rio 3158 Mission St Party, preview and awards Must be 21 years of age</p>	<p>September 5 <span style="float: right;">7, 8, 9 pm</span></p> <p>Film Crawl on Cortland Ave Bennington to Anderson Sts Progressive screenings/multiple venues</p>
<p>September 6 <span style="float: right;">7 pm</span></p> <p>Under the Stars, Precita Park Folsom St at Precita Ave Films &amp; live music in the park</p>	<p>October 7 <span style="float: right;">7 pm</span></p> <p>Best of Bernal Nite Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts 2868 Mission Street 2014 Award-winning films plus Q &amp; A with filmmakers</p>

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The North of Market / Tenderloin Community Benefit District (NOMTL CBD) invites community members to apply for a Board of Director's seat!

To qualify, applicants must be a property owner representative within the district boundaries. Please contact NOMTL CBD for more information, at: [info@nom-tlcbd.org](mailto:info@nom-tlcbd.org) or 415-292-4812

Applications must be submitted by end of day, August 11th, 2014 - thank you.

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