

Rotary
Club of
Charlotte



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

March 8, 2022

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Laura Little presents “Behind the Curtain”

By Kim McMillan

Recap by Kim McMillan but please watch the recording to do her program justice, per Kim.

Laura Little joined Charlotte Rotary Club just over a year ago and quickly immersed herself into producing lively socials and entertaining programs for all to enjoy. It's no doubt with her background, an accomplished theatre producer and director, she gave an outstanding performance educating us on what it means to produce live entertainment.

When she talked about the theatre, she compared it to her love of sports. As she puts it “whether I’m watching sports or a performance I’m so taken in that I often have to allow myself to breathe.” She shared that you have to understand the dynamics to fall in love with theatre and that theatres are dying and being shut down across the country because people are losing interest in live theatre with all the other choices in entertainment.

Laura started out with a local snapshot of theatres in our community. She explained the various types of theatre: professional, which is a presenting house like Blumenthal Performing Arts Center that hosts Broadway shows, ATC (Actor’s Theatre of Charlotte) producing smaller more Avant guard shows, the Children’s Theatre and community theatre, which includes Theatre Charlotte, CPCC Theatre and Matthews Playhouse.

She explained that Charlotte does not have a lot of paid theatres and that’s a challenge if actors cannot make a living. Theatre is expensive and comes with a cadre of theatre staff including an executive director, artistic director, business manager, outreach manager, development director, box office manager, and volunteer coordinator. Plus, the cost of production which comes with a staff, including a stage manager, director, music director, choreographer, sets and

props, marketing, musicians, cast, box office, and ticketing fees.

She explained royalties and the different levels of licensing fees. Laura shared the example of *My Fair Lady* and what the costs were for a two-week run of performances from Thursday through Sunday. Not including staff salaries, expenses included royalties at \$22,000, actors at \$29,000 of which two were equity, \$9,000 for musicians, \$5,000 for costumes, \$11,000 for sets and \$12,000 for the venue totaling \$88,000. So, when the cost of a ticket averages between \$50 to \$60 for a performance keep in mind no one is getting rich.

Theatres are funded through season ticket sales (generally five to seven shows), individual or group ticket sales, sponsors, advertisers, individual donors, fundraising events, education programs, in-kind donations and donations of goods. Season tickets are important because they help pay the royalties upfront and help pay for staff. In-kind trades are also important, such as advertising, printing and dry cleaning in exchange for acknowledgement or tickets.

Laura then explained the size of theatres and the location of theatres in New York City. There are 41 Broadway houses in NYC with Broadway defined as 500 seats, off Broadway houses are 100 to 499 seats, and off-off Broadway is 99 seats and under. These theatres are all owned by three corporations or families. She then explained that a National Tour is when a Broadway show goes on tour.

She then talked about the producer's roadmap to Broadway starting with attending a reading or pursuing a script. Moving forward requires hiring a legal team, then optioning the show for 12-18 months, to hiring a GM to work out all the details and contracts, to hiring an artistic team. Then there's auditions, workshops and "try-out" theatres where a show may have one to two tryouts before going to Broadway plus a press agent, marketing firm and praying that a theatre becomes available.

Then there's raising capital anywhere from \$20 million, but more like \$30 million where you need credited investors who can afford to lose money. "Who can afford to lose such money?", Laura asked, "people who want to support theatre, go to opening night parties and bump elbows with the stars."

For Laura, she has invested her money in shows that she's been able to recoup her investment. She has produced "*Come from Away*", "*Peter and the StarCatcher*" and "*First Date*." She was the producer and general manager of the off-Broadway production "*All is Calm, the Christmas Truce of 1914*" that PBS made into a film.

Laura mentioned there might be rumors of bringing her Christmas show to Charlotte. So, stay tuned for more details!

*A recording of the program is available here: <https://vimeo.com/686017397>
Laura's introduction begins at 19:10 minutes.