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# Theater Producers Strategize To Ensure Their Shows Go On

By: Monica Brown

*There may be no business like show business, but a recent workshop for producers showed how the slumping economy could alter the theater industry. NY1's Monica Brown filed the following report.*

Behind every good theater show is a producer who was willing to shell out the money.

"Producers raise money, they find the property, they staff the property, they get the people who are going to direct and choreograph, they get the set designers, the light designers, they rent the theater," says playwright and attorney Cheryl Davis.

But that job is getting tougher to do these days. Grant money from the state has been slashed, and while wealthy donors continue to fund the arts in general, some say such contribution amounts are decreasing.

"We need to change our model to some extent. We can't depend on funding they way we used to," says Bob Ost of Theater Resources Unlimited, a non-profit group that focuses on the business side of the arts.

Recently, TRU hosted an all-day workshop in Greenwich Village to teach producers how to ask for money in a climate of cutbacks and belt-tightening.

"Theater people are not just creative, they're also business people," says Davis, "and it's developing their skills as business people that will enable them to have a career in this industry, and not just be a one-off."

Both commercial and non-profit theater groups of all sizes rely heavily on investors and donors to get shows off the ground. Larger groups can make money through sales, while smaller groups can often struggle.

But across the board, if the start-up money is not there, producers say there could be some major changes to the way New York shows are produced.

"Certainly producers, given that they're a little gun-shy about asking for money in this economy,

they're going to be particularly open to pieces that have smaller casts, and maybe one set, things that are simple to produce," says Ost.

On Broadway, shows like "Spamalot" and "Hairspray" ended their runs earlier than expected, in part due to the economy.

TRU says given the climate, some shows are actually doing quite well, but the fear is the outlook won't be rosy for next season, both on and off Broadway.

Still, producers who attended the workshop say they got some pointers and are optimistic.

"People are still going to go see shows, and there are still going to be people who invest in shows," says producer Jeremy Handelman. "And you know, we may just have to be a little more inventive in how we go about doing it."

No matter the economy's health, such determined producers believe that "the show must go on."

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