Interview with Cynthia Argo

Cynthia Argo has one of the best jobs in entertainment. She’s Managing Director of Harlem’s iconic Apollo Theater – now in its feisty 76th year – still headlining today’s stars and still giving future stars a chance at its famous Wednesday Amateur Nights.

What are the challenges of running a historic venue? The theater was built in 1914 and has a wonderful beauty you want to preserve. But like many older buildings, you don’t know what’s behind the walls until something goes wrong. Before our renovation we had some issues with crumbling plaster, breaking pipes and our aging electrical system.

What do you worry most about? After all our renovations we feel good about safety in the building. As a nonprofit organization, we worry about variables out of our control, which is one reason we appreciate DeWitt Stern’s help in cost/benefit analysis – making sure we don’t pay for coverage we don’t need, and always being there to answer questions.

Tell us about the night the power went out in the middle of a performance. It was the Labelle reunion concert – a completely sold-out show. After only two songs, the audio went out. Once we got the audience out safely, our crew traced the problem to a Cox Ed wiring short under the street behind the theater. Our key staff stayed all night to supervise the repairmen and to ensure the safety of the building. There was a happy ending, though. The artists were understanding and we rescheduled the show for the next night.

How are you building the Apollo brand outside Harlem? It’s more about capitalizing on our already solid reputation. One example is a partnership with the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African History and Culture in an exhibition, Ain’t Nothing Like the Real Thing, that explores the Apollo’s impact on American popular culture. It will go on tour later. We’re also involved with the Dreamgirls production touring the US and we’re holding Amateur Night auditions in Atlanta this fall. DeWitt has been critical in defining our new risks in these opportunities.

The Apollo: Where Stars Are Born and Legends Are Made

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Bedbugs, Terrorist Threats and the Nashville Flood

Now it’s bedbugs in theater seats... a bomb discovered in Times Square... the Nashville flood. Are you covered?

An unexpected event can affect your bottom line. Some insurance policies will cover bedbug infestations; some will not. It’s important to know which.

Police can deny access to the area where your theater is located for a water main break or a steam pipe explosion, as well as a terrorist threat. Will your business interruption policy pay if the theater is shut down... or if performances are cancelled?

Having the right insurance policy can be the difference between a claim being covered... or not. Only a few insurance companies specialize in coverage for performing arts venues and live performances.

Specialized coverage can be designed by working with the right broker and the right insurance company. Some policies may have exclusions that severely restrict your coverage. You should review your exclusions with your broker. Many exclusions can be deleted from your policy; all you have to do is ask.

DeWitt Stern brokers can make sure that coverages, such as theatrical property, performance disruption and business interruption, meet the specific needs of your operation.

Not all venue insurance is the same. Different policies have different exclusions. Don’t wait for a loss to find out whether you are properly covered.

DeWitt Stern Sponsors Dance/USA Honors Dinner

Dance/USA gave awards to a dance artist, a dance company director and two foundations at its Honors Celebration Dinner sponsored by DeWitt Stern.

Dance/USA is a mentor for more than 300 dance organizations and many dancers, providing a national network for information, support, services and a unified voice for the dance community.

This June, about 400 from that community gathered at Dance/USA’s conference in Washington D.C. to network and discuss international opportunities, artistic trends, management and marketing, as well as to see some spectacular dance.

Dance/USA’s Executive Director Andrea Snyder noted that one of its many services is to funnel grant money to bring dance to more audiences – for example, theatre rental subsidies. Another initiative was to sponsor a U.S. delegation to a dance conference in Germany. “American dance needs to be seen and understood internationally,” she said.

“...We also join forces with other arts organizations in urging support for the performing arts in Congress. We monitor legislation, visas for artists and charitable tax incentives,” she said. Dance/USA conference’s keynote speaker, Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, chairs the Congressional Arts Caucus.

Controlling Employee Benefits Costs

Q. I offer medical insurance to my employees. My renewal premium is up 22%. How can I control costs?

Here are five areas to consider:

1. Plan design – Was the last time you increased office visit co-pays or deductibles?
2. Employee contributions – Do employees share the cost of your plan premiums?
3. Choice of plans – Do employees share the cost of plans? When employees share the premium cost of a plan, they may choose a less expensive one that fits their needs.
4. Dependent coverage – Do you offer employees incentives to waive coverage if they are eligible for healthcare elsewhere, such as under their spouse’s policies?
5. Network physicians – Using network physicians saves your employees money. If they don’t use your insurer’s network physicians, find out why. If the doctors are not located where your employees live or offer the type of services they need, inform your broker.