Theater Management Knowledge Base

Interview

JACOB PADRÒN

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Jacob Padròn, YSD '08, founder and artistic director of The Sol Project, talks about building The Sol Project's business model to support its mission of bringing the stories, culture, and community of Latinx playwrights to the fore of the American Theater. He also shares his insights into producing, based on his education at Yale School of Drama and his career at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Steppenwolf, and the Public.

The talk begins with a round of introductions, initiated by Jacob Padròn, in which everyone shares their name, where they call home, an "Aha" moment from the previous year at Yale School of Drama (YSD), and a shout-out to someone who has impacted them.

JACOB PADRÒN We're in the business of storytelling, yet we spend so little time actually understanding other people's stories, and taking the time to ask questions about each other: "Where do you come from?"; "What's meaningful to you?"; "Who's meaningful to you?" That's why I wanted to really create that intentional sense of community, so we can know who's showing up in the room, today, right now, at this time.

I'm from Gilroy, California, which is just south of San Francisco. It's the garlic capital of the world—but I'm allergic to garlic, and that's really, really unfortunate because I'm Mexican. There wasn't a lot going on in Gilroy, which has a population of about 60,000 people. But the one thing that was fantastic was that it was 10 miles north of a seminal theater company, the farm-worker theater El Teatro Campesino, which was started by a real visionary named Luis Valdez. He became my theater grandfather. He really encouraged me to use art as a catalyst for social change. Every December the Teatro had these community shows where people from the community could come and be part of the Teatro. I was 8 years old when I was in my first show. I thought a life in the theater, a life in entertainment, was what I wanted to do. I went to Los Angeles for college. I went to Loyola Marymount University, which is a small Jesuit school. I thought I wanted to be a film director, or some sort of TV executive. I knew that I wanted to have a life in entertainment, whether it was TV or

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film, or even theater, to go back to those roots of El Teatro Campesino. But LMU, as a Jesuit institution, really encourages its students to think about social justice and volunteering. So, when I graduated I was going to do the Peace Corp. I felt that this was the time to really give back to my community. While I was in college, I sort of moved away from the entertainment, the "life in the theater" idea, and I thought I wanted to be a social worker. I ended up applying to the Jesuit Volunteer Corp. I did AIDS/HIV ministry. I moved to Raleigh, North Carolina. I did that for twelve months, and really thought that was going to be my life's work.

But I had this other voice in my head, Luis, saying, "You can use art as a catalyst for change, for really galvanizing the community, and really doing something for Latinos in this country." I Googled "Artistic Internship on the East Coast," and what came up was Baltimore CenterStage. Baltimore CenterStage had a really robust internship program. I applied to be the Community/Education Programs Intern. Irene Lewis was the Artistic Director at the time. Michael Ross was the Managing Director. The timing was really fortuitous, because Michael had just stopped teaching in the Theater Management program at YSD. He had a real connection to the School of Drama, and he said, "I think you are a producer. I think you are a manager. You should think about meeting Vicki Nolan and applying to Yale School of Drama." So, I did. That was in 2005. The next thing I knew, I was moving to New Haven.

I was here from 2005 to 2008, and I was really, really lucky, because I did my second-year fellowship at Center Theater Group in Los Angeles with Artistic Director Michael Ritchie and Associate Artistic Director Diane Rodriguez. I don't know if you remember, but in 2006 Suzan-Lori Parks wrote a play a day. There was this big national festival called *365*. That was basically my project for Center Theater Group, to manage that festival. At the same time, Bill Rauch had just been appointed the new artistic director at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. He heard about my work at CTG and contacted Vicki. Vicki contacted me. Next thing I knew, I was flying to Ashland, Oregon, for many, many interviews. When I was a second-year, I was appointed the Associate Producer of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. What was so lucky was that they held the job for me, because I told them I wasn't going to quit the program here. Bill was like, "We want you to get your degree." So in my third year, when I was running the Cabaret, I was going back and forth between Ashland and New Haven, which was really, really intense. It was really hard, just in terms of getting my homework done, trying to run the Cabaret, and trying to get ready for this very big job. I was completely in over my head. My job as the Associate Producer was to manage all of the artistic contracting. The OSF has a resident company of actors, so my job was to really oversee that acting company, to do the casting, to line-produce the twelve repertory shows. While I was there, we got this huge grant from the Edgerton Foundation to develop American musicals, five in particular. Bill was like, "Why don't you take that on, too?" So I also oversaw our commissioning pipeline.

But the reason why I wanted to go to OSF was because Bill Rauch is one of the great artistic leaders in this country, and I felt like that was really where I cut my teeth. I knew that I wanted to find an opportunity where I was straddling a managerial function and an artistic function, and I remember one time I got in a big fight with Ed because I said, "I want to be a producer. I want to be able to straddle both." And he was like, "Those jobs don't exist. You have to pick one or the other." And I remember saying to him, "I think the field is changing. The ecology is changing"—more and more organizations are looking for employees that have a facility for being in conversation with an artist and being able to read a marketing plan or a budget. That's essentially what my job was at OSF. I was really grateful for the opportunity; I was there for about three and a half years. It was the hardest job ever. One time, I forgot a line item for an actor, and there was money missing from the budget. It wasn't until we got to the board meeting with the finance committee that they said, "We think that there's some money missing here." And I was like, "Oh. That was me. I'm sorry." That was probably my biggest mistake while I was there.

Then I got a call from Martha Lavey, who at the time

was the Artistic Director at Steppenwolf. She was looking for someone to run their Garage, which is their second stage to cultivate young artists and a younger audience. I did that for two years under the mentorship of Rebecca Rugg, who's on faculty here. She's a dramaturg who taught me everything I know about dramaturgy, how to understand a play in time and space. She said that I understood what it meant to be a producer at OSF, but that in order to be a great producer I needed to understand dramaturgy. She said, "Come to Steppenwolf and let's do that work together." So I did that for two years.

Then I got a call from Oskar Eustis. They were looking for another producer to join the team at the Public. I did that for three years.

Recently, about four weeks ago, I took a job with HBO. I'm working with Time Warner, where I'm identifying artists whom we can create projects for. They're trying to beef up their pipeline in terms of supporting artists of color. My job to is scout for artists in New York and develop projects for television. It's really exciting because I'm not familiar with the TV world, but I'm getting to learn a lot about that.

But I also work full-time on the Sol Project, which is this initiative I started about a year ago. While I was at the Public Theater, in 2013, the Latino theater community galvanized. We felt like for too long we've been eclipsed. We're not really part of the conversation within the American theater, and we felt we really needed to feel the weight of our own muscle. To do that, we self-organized and planned a major convening in Boston. There were about 80 Latino theater makers and leaders, and we came together to look at the state of American theater relative to Latinos. It was basically four days together when we were able to dream and be inspired, and to really think about how we make real change and progress. On the last day, the last exercise was led by Kinan Valdez, the son of Luis Valdez. We had to get in a big circle and make an offering, "What are you actually going to do to take this weekend and be of service to your community?" Because what often happens is you go to a great class or a great conference like TCG and you get fired up and inspired, but then when you actually come back to your real life, stuff doesn't always change. So what we wanted to do was to create real, systemic change. They gave us notecards on which to write down what you wanted to do, and then you put it in the middle of the room. I knew I was going to be moving to New York, so I thought to myself, "Could I create an initiative where I could support more Latino playwrights to have their productions at theaters in New York City?" That's all I wrote down. I put it in the box and started my work at the Public with Oskar.

Then I heard about 13P. It's 13 writers, self-organized, and each writer got a production. And once each writer got a production, they imploded. I thought that was a really interesting model, but instead of self-producing (because they self-produced all of their work), why don't we identify twelve Latino writers and pair each writer with a different Off-Broadway company who would commit to producing their play. Then we'll take it a step further. Once the work happens in New York, we're going to identify regional partners to commit to what we call the continued life of the play. Ideally, one writer would get a production in New York, and then we would find regional theaters who do the second, third, and fourth production. So the hope is that in five years, we'll have mounted 36 productions by Latino artists. That's basically the vision of the Sol Project, to create a kaleidoscopic body of work that we can contribute to the new American canon. Part of the promise of the Sol Project is that the American theater is supposed to be a repository to hold all of our stories, right? But that doesn't necessarily happen. What I often like to say to artistic directors or to funders is that a Latino story is an American story, and yet when we look at seasons across the country, or when we look at season announcements in New York City, you don't actually see us in the conversation.

To my great surprise, artistic directors in New York have been very supportive. We currently have six leading Off-Broadway companies committed as partners, including the Public. We had our first production in December with New Georges, a small

company. We did a show with them called *Alligator*, by Hilary Bettis. We're now in pre-production for our second show with Rattlestick, a new play by Martín Zimmerman called *Seven Spots on the Sun*. We're going to do our third show with the Public Theater. Our fourth production will probably be with the Atlantic or with Primary Stages. We ask each artistic director to not only mount the production but also to commission a Latino writer, as well as that the creative team are all people of color. Because when you open up your playbill, especially Off-Broadway or at the Public, my old artistic home, most of those creative teams are all white artists. So in order to create that pipeline, or a real feeder into these companies, we have to actually walk the walk and talk the talk by giving artists of color opportunities to showcase their work and be in conversation with all the other writers and artists that get opportunities.

We've been very fortunate to get funding from the Time Warner Foundation, from some larger philanthropic organizations. It's a great way to organize and galvanize the community, specifically the historically bifurcated Latino community in New York City, because if you're Mexican, you're like "I'm Mexican, not Dominican." The Dominicans don't want to be Puerto Ricans. But actually can we all come together and support each other? That's the thing that feels most important. That's the basis of the Sol Project. I'll start taking questions and then I'll share some reflections at the end.

STUDENT I'm curious what specific value the Sol Project provides the productions? It seems like you're functioning as an agent but I wonder if it's more than that. Are these plays and playwrights that these theaters have never heard of and you're introducing them? Are the theaters asking for funding from you, and how does that work? If that's the case, that seems problematic to me. How it is functioning in ways that weren't happening before, to get these productions to happen?

PADRÒN We definitely come with funding. That is why we're able to be at the table and be a real collaborator. It's not like we give them the money and the play and then we step away. It's truly a collaboration, a partnership. The way that we're actually picking the plays or the writer that we end up producing is that we enter into what I call a curatorial conversation with each artistic director. Many of these companies actually do have relationships with Latino writers. They just haven't green-lit the project, for whatever reason. So we're able to come along and be what I call cultural translators. Not only are we bringing resources to the table, but we also can really help the writer navigate a primarily white institution as a cultural translator. We also ask each institution to commit to pillars of inclusivity around making sure that the creative team are all people of color, around what it means to plant seeds in your organization. That way, this kind of work becomes part of the DNA of your company.

We're not interested in a one-off. We're not going to come into an organization that doesn't actually have a track record of inclusivity. A lot of companies, some of the larger companies that do primarily boulevard plays that have both second stages and Broadway stages, have come to us saying, "We'd really love to get on board with the idea of being a more inclusive theater." What I say to those companies is, "You should do that. You don't need to do that with the Sol Project. Once I see that you've done that, then we can come along and have a conversation. But we're not going to do that because we now have money to give you." I've been very strategic in thinking about who are the companies that have a track record of inclusivity, so that way we can deepen that commitment with them.

Funders have asked me, "Isn't it problematic that you're essentially raising the money for these companies that should be doing the work anyways?" But the thing is, they're not. So, we as a Latino community have to take matters into our own hands. Oskar is actually the one who said it, "It's you feeling the weight of your own muscle and creating opportunities for the people you believe in." And money, for better and worse, actually does change the conversation. It allows me to be really empowered to make decisions. When I say it's a real partnership, it's me and the artistic director making

the decision together about who the director is, how we want to market the show, the space that it's in, if we want to bring in an out-of-town actor. We're really making all those decisions together, which feels incredibly empowering and exciting.

STUDENT So, you'd call it a co-production between Sol Project and….?

PADRÒN I mean, that's not the official language in the contract. It's in collaboration, but essentially that's what it is, because we're bringing pretty significant resources. That way these Latinos writers, for whom this is their big shot, have the resources to have the best production possible.

STUDENT One follow-up. Let's take the Public for example. The Public is a well-resourced institution with a track record of supporting artists of color. So, why would it take your resources for them to green-light a production? I'm just pushing this because I think it's a really interesting but complicated situation. It's almost like risk-money. How does it get them to be sustainable in this practice?

PADRÒN It's an incredibly complicated conversation. I think it's a misperception that these companies are well-resourced. It is really, really expensive to produce in New York City, but it's specifically expensive to produce at the Public Theater, just in terms of the contracts that we're on.

But listen, when I got to the Public, I said, "Hey Oskar. This institution has been a home for Latino theater artists going back to the days of Joe Papp. How do we reactivate that part of our history? How do reactivate that commitment so that Latino artists feel like the Public is an artistic home?" The artistic staff does have a relationship with these artists, including Luis Alfaro. But if the Sol Project can bring money to the table and create highly visible platforms for our artists, I guess I'm not so much interested in the politics of "Why not?" For me, it's like, "Let's just do it. Let's make it happen."

STUDENT Clearly funders are very interested in the project, and particularly in the partnerships. I guess for conversations you've been having with funders, what are you finding is the lightbulb moment for them? Is it this idea of "Here is this entity that's going to encourage theaters to produce work by Latinx artists and collaborate with them? And maybe even then change their behavior?" What are you finding is the "click" moment for funders?

PADRÒN I think the funders are recognizing that when you look at the theater ecology in New York City, a lot theaters espouse inclusivity and wanting to open their doors, but they actually aren't doing that work. Here the Sol Project comes along, and we say we have the relationship with the writers, we have all these scripts, and we are actually committed to ongoing relationships with each partner company. I think that's the "Aha" moment: the ongoing relationship.

For example, when I was at Steppenwolf, I remember Martha Lavey programmed *Motherfucker with the Hat* by Stephen Adly Guirgis. They cast it with all Latino actors, which I thought was fantastic. Then they did a lot of outreach to the Latino community to come to Steppenwolf. I said to Martha, "That's fantastic. But the thing is, if you're going to open up your home, open your doors and invite them in and get them comfortable, but then you don't program another Latino play, and they don't see themselves on stage for another five years or ten years, then you're doing an incredible disservice to that community." You cannot program a black play, bring in the black community, and then expect those audiences to come to your Shakespeare. It just doesn't work like that. What the Sol Project can do is we say: we're actually interested in a longitudinal, robust conversation and relationship with our partners. Because if we are going to invest in this audience, this group of artists, it's not a one-off, it actually becomes part of who this organization is.

STUDENT Could you elaborate on what that long-term relationship looks like?

PADRÒN I'll give you one example. We're making every artistic director do an EDI workshop. We actually want every artistic director to understand their own privilege. We want them to understand

what it means to hold up systems of oppression. People get uncomfortable when you use the term "white supremacist" or "racist," but I think that it's inherent in the system. It's built on structural racism. So I think the more that our artistic directors across the country can unpack and understand their own unconscious racism or bias, then the more inclusive work you'll see on our stage. I think you'll see work on stage that truly reflects the world that we live in.

STUDENT You mentioned 13P as a model, which is about writers. I'm wondering if there's any room in the Sol Project for ensemble-created pieces, or artists that question the hierarchical model of playmaking that we currently have.

PADRÒN That's a good question. Not at this moment. The plan is to identify twelve writers, as I said, and pair each writer with a company who produces their play. Then we're giving money to each of the twelve partner companies to commission a writer. But I imagine some of these artistic directors may commission a collective like the Rude Mechs, or someone like that. So that's a possibility.

STUDENT Something that appeals to me about the initiative is that you didn't just start a theater company, which you could have done. I'm curious as to how your institutional experience has played into seeing this need of working almost as a consultant. Did you see things that weren't happening and decide to make them happen?

PADRÒN Working at those three big institutions became a constellation of all these different lessons that I'm able to put to use in my work as the artistic director of this initiative. But here's the thing, everyone. The reason why I'm able to have these meetings with these funders, or why these artistic directors are taking meeting with me, is because I worked at these other places. It's so relationship-driven. It's so about, "What's your experience?" I think if I was fresh out of Yale and had this idea, it'd still be a good idea. But because I wouldn't necessarily have these professional experiences behind me, I think it would really change the conversation. I think, for better and worse, we're part of a guild culture, which means that you sort of start at the bottom and work your way up. So how do we either buck that system or how do we reinforce that system? I'm constantly interested in creating opportunities for people who wouldn't normally get them. Having those experiences allows me to engage with these artistic directors in a really informed way, because they're like, "Oh, he's not fresh out of college." I bring real experience to the table. It's also my age. I walk into rehearsal rooms all the time, even as the AD of the Sol Project, and people think I'm the assistant director, or the intern. Ageism is alive and well in the American theater, which is something I think we can all relate to in a certain way.

STUDENT What's a workday like for you?

PADRÒN Oh my gosh. Right now I have this new Time Warner gig, and they're very good about my schedule. I work there Monday-Thursday, and then I am out in the field on Friday. It's also an opportunity to focus primarily on the Sol Project. I'm usually in the office by 9:30am, and then I'm in meetings with artists or executives until about 6:30pm. I'm obsessed with CrossFit right now. I do CrossFit from 7pm to 8pm, and then usually I'm seeing shows, either for Time Warner or for the Sol Project, or in rehearsal from 8pm to whenever. That's usually Monday-Thursday, and then I try to kick it on Friday. I also have to travel quite a bit. Next week I'm going to LA to meet with our divisions, and to see *Zoot Suit* at Center Theater Group, because they're doing the big revival. And Time Warner is one of the sponsors of Center Theater Group.

STUDENT Is there a plan for Sol Project to implode the way 13P did after the last regional or wherever production?

PADRÒN Yes, that's the plan. The plan is to implode after the twelfth production in New York City. As much as I would love to leverage my relationships in all the different regions, I feel like I can really only focus on what's happening in New York City. We're actually going to announce the next six Off-Broadway companies that are committed as a

partners.

The happy problem that we're having now is that more companies are interested than we have slots for. It allows us to be really selective in terms of saying to those larger companies that produce both Off-Broadway and on Broadway, to say, "You know, it'd be so sexy and great to have one of our writers at your company, but because, again, I feel like there's not a real commitment to inclusion, I'm not sure we're the right partner for you."

The other interesting problem that the Sol Project has had is that there was a lot of question about why are we giving money to the larger white companies. We have Latino theater companies all throughout the country who have been supporting these artists for years and years and years. But the thing that I've had to say is: I don't want to be an apologist for wanting our writers to have the same opportunities as all the other writers that get to have big, splashy, visible productions. Why shouldn't our Latino writers be in conversation with Lynn Nottage, with Tarell McCraney, with Sarah Ruhl, who are produced at the larger white institutions? Nobody is giving Tarell—and I've talked to him a lot—nobody is giving him grief because his *Head of Passes* was produced at the Public versus Classical Theater of Harlem. So it matters. Visibility matters. I feel like these organizations have platforms that are highly visible and I think in order for there to be real change, systemic change, I think our writers deserve to have the same level of visibility and opportunity as their counterparts.

STUDENT I'm wondering if in the regional level there is an opportunity for some of the bigger theaters to partner with some of the culturally-specific theaters? Maybe to have a really structured partnership that isn't exploitative, but maybe the Sol Project can allow for these partnership to flourish?

PADRÒN Absolutely. What we're trying to do with the regional partners is to be really intentional about actually supporting some of the smaller companies. Right now, with Cara Mía, a more culturally specific Latino company, we're trying to figure out a way for them to partner with Dallas Theater Center, since they're both in the same city. The thing that is hard is bandwidth, because it's me, plus an artistic collective that I work with, but all of us have full-time jobs. We're all in this interesting point of: how do you take an initiative as far as you can take it without making it a company? I mean none of us want to start our own company, but we also recognize that we really want this thing to have a real impact on the American theater. We really want to plant seeds that bear real fruit. But it's hard because we also recognize that we're not able to give ourselves 110%. The regional aspect has been the hardest piece, because all of us are in New York City, but we feel that is such an important component to the success of the initiative.

STUDENT Do you think that the Sol Project model is something that could be replicated?

PADRÒN Yes. That is my hope. That is my deep hope, actually. Because the model, as far as I know, doesn't really exist. With 13P, they self-produce. They're like, 'Writer number two is up. What venue to do we need to rent out? We have to get the money for the marketing.' The difference is that when your play was up, you were the artistic director. So you were in charge of really kind of leading the charge.

That's not the case with the Sol Project. I'm the artistic director. I work with the artistic director at the different partner companies. We work together to support the writer. But I think that the South Asian community, the Black community, the Native community, can really take the model, identify a group of writers, and then it's the same thing. Find different partner companies who commit to producing their plays. They cannot say no if you're able to bring money and resources to the table. It's unfortunate that money talks, but it's expensive to produce in New York City, so you have to. My deep hope is that it is a model that can be replicated, and I think it can be.

STUDENT Are you making some kind of toolkit or guide?

PADRÒN We're trying to figure out the best way to anthologize the success. We've enlisted a scholar to help us think through the life of the initiative. We're hoping to publish a book at the end with all of the plays and the methodology. It will be really interesting to see, once all twelve playwrights have been produced, what's the narrative? What's the story of the Sol Project? What's the story of how these twelve plays are in conversation with each other?

We want it to be kaleidoscopic. In terms of the writers, when we first started, we asked, "Are we just going to focus on emerging writers? Mid-career writers? What we call our veteranos, our veterans, our pillars?" What we realized was that we wanted it to be a kaleidoscope. We want to make room for people who have just graduated from an MFA program like YSD, but we also want to make room for someone like Luis Alfaro, who I think is one of our great master writers, but actually has never had a major production in New York City. And he's been writing for thirty years. I feel like that is such a clear example of us not being at the table. And so, to that earlier point, I really appreciated problematizing the issue. But if I have money to give to the Public Theater and we can make this happen, let's do it.

STUDENT Once you have partnered with these theaters and you have these playwrights that are going to be produced, what is your involvement through the production of that piece?

PADRÒN It actually varies. For our first production, I was very hands on. This second partner, Daniella Topol, who's a director and the artistic director of Rattlestick, is awesome. I feel I can be a little more hands off. I'm trying to become nimbly responsive to the needs of each theater company. But I function the way a normal artistic director does. I go to run-throughs. I give notes to the artists. With some of the plays, we do workshops and readings beforehand, so I'll help organize those. It definitely changes from production to production.

STUDENT The HBO / Time Warner job sounds really fascinating in conjunction with the Sol Project. I'm always wondering what are ways of working outside of theater using our skills. Can you talk about what you have learned from theater, or the theaters that you've worked at, that took you into this new job seeking artists and developing projects for television?

PADRÒN How does my MFA in theater management translate into film and television? The cool thing that's happening is a lot of TV and film executives actually want to work with theater artists in particular. A lot of them want to work with playwrights, because they know how to tell a story. The line that Time Warner uses is: we're interested in cultivating the next generation of diverse storytellers, the next generation of great storytellers. So whether the storyteller is someone who works in the medium of film and television, or theater, they only care about, "Are you a good storyteller?" or "Is this a good story?"

My brief at Time Warner is specifically to identify playwrights. What's kind of cool is that I can help them translate and move into TV. We can learn that together. And I'm very upfront with the division and with the playwright: "Hey, I'm a theater producer. You're a playwright from the theater. Let's go on this journey together to figure out how to make something for television." Fortunately I have two colleagues that come from the TV world, so they are guiding me as I identify playwrights. I think it would be much harder if I was trying to identify people who are TV or film writers and I come from the theater.

STUDENT Do you think you're sort of cannibalizing the theater field by moving people over to television and film?

PADRÒN Yes. It's very complicated. But I don't necessarily know how to solve the inequity of the pay scales. I'm all about more money in artists' pockets. I think a lot of these artists, just wanting to tell a meaningful story and make their art—they're not necessarily able to do that. Especially within the Off-Broadway theater ecology. It just doesn't work. I'm trying to do my part in terms of giving artists, specifically Latino writers, productions. I think in

order for a writer to see what they have on the page, they have to see it in 3D. My hope is that once people see it onstage, then that opens doors for other opportunities for that writer so they don't have to go to film and television. They can go right to their next production, and the next, and the next. But I think the reason why it's so difficult for playwrights to make a living in the American theater is because they often don't get productions. If you don't get productions, you can't get your work seen. And if your work's not getting seen, then it's more difficult to get an agent, to cultivate an audience, to have artistic directors show interest in you as a writer, or you as an artist. My hope is that this little seed that I'm planting will address a more systemic issue.

STUDENT It sounds like it has the potential to do something similar to the National New Play Network, if that writer is interested in seeing the work and revisiting it. I'm wondering if there is a new play development process or component? If there are dramaturgs involved?

PADRÒN We are the happy beneficiary of a grant from the Doris Duke Foundation. They gave us money to put towards play development. The idea is that once we identify the twelve writers, each writer gets a pot of money that we put towards development, where we hire a dramaturg, or hire a number of dramaturgs, and basically ask the writer, 'What do you need? Do you want to be in a room with a couple of dramaturgs? A bunch of actors? Do you want to be in a room where it's just you and director? Do you and the director want to take a research trip with your dramaturg?' Whatever it is. We know that for a play to be really fantastic, it needs a really rich, vigorous investigation of, "What's the project of the play? What's the thing you are trying to say?" We get a lot of scripts, a lot of raw material, but it's not always production ready. That's definitely a key step in the process. With *Alligator*, we weren't able to do that because Hilary had been workshopping that play for seven years. She was ready. But my hope is that we are really leveraging the skills of dramaturgs, like the ones that come out of YSD, and being able to use this money from the Doris Duke Foundation to make the plays betters.

To end, I'd like to share some of my reflections. I hope it's useful. It's five pillars I think about relative to producing.

I recently visited a friend in Philadelphia, a fellow YSD classmate. We spent a good two hours talking about our time in rooms very similar to the one we're sitting in. We soon realized that no matter where we are in our lives, or how much time has passed, we always come back to our time in New Haven. There's no denying that the reason is that YSD, for better and worse, is such a formative place. A place that can leave an imprint so strong, that when we reflect back, we spend more time talking about the chapters here at YSD and the deep wounds that we can all find at YSD.

I share that in this particular context because for me, the wounds are where I found my strengths. I remember there was this one night in the Cabaret, I was closing out the register, and it was YSD Night. I remember saying to myself, "If I can get through this, I can get through anything." YSD really does prepare you for the journey ahead, and I am deeply grateful for the place that taught me so much. A constellation of lessons, I like to call it.

So here are the five lessons.

One: Great art comes out of great relationships. I feel like you all know that. It goes back to what I was saying earlier. We're in the business of storytelling and yet we spend so little time talking about our stories and sharing our stories and making space to hear each other's stories.

Two: Have emotional intelligence, which is about understanding the Other, and having empathy and compassion. That feels really important.

Three: The value of flexibility. The value of being nimble and open, whether you're in a rehearsal room or a classroom.

Four: I try to live by this every day. Let the spirit of generosity animate everything that you do,

whether you're a director, a producer, or a student. If generosity can become a core value in terms of how you treat people, I think we can have a better American theater.

And five: Always place the art, always place the work at the center of what you do. I think in this business it's so easy to get wrapped up in your own ego, and in your own needs. If you can remember that we're all here just to make a great story together, you can place the art at the center. And the last thing, which isn't necessarily a pillar, but for those of you who are interested in being a producer, I feel like a producer makes stuff happens. But a great producer creates conditions that allow artists to do their best work.