

INTRO

(The following is read by Laura Colby over jazz music composed by Manual Cinema)

Hi, I'm Laura Colby and this is *The Middle Woman*, a roadmap to managing the performing arts. I'll be sharing personal anecdotes from my 30 years in the field, exploring the nitty gritty and the technicalities of this job. I'll tell you the story of how I got here and what it's taken for me to work in the industry of the performing arts.

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EPISODE 4

LAURA COLBY: Hello, this is Laura Colby. I'm the founder and president of Elsie Management, and I am once again making this recording from Tucson, Arizona, and you just might hear some jets going over.

You may also hear some birds tweeting because yes, there's nature

I'm here today with Michelle Grove Herzog, who lives in Tucson, and I've invited her to speak on this podcast regarding resources, and I'll give a very brief introduction of Michelle, who started as a classically trained artist.

Her medium, her instrument, was violin. She, like me also moved into management of singular artists, primarily musicians, She got a job working for the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County, which is in the great state of Maryland, before she moved on to her job as Program Officer for the Performing Arts at the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation. After her job at the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation, she was Interim Associate Director at Wesleyan University for two years, and she will also talk about that because her work then was primarily in the role as a programmer.

And she's now here in Tucson, and she has her own consulting business called ZogArts Consulting. And she also has a job at the University of Arizona.

I'm excited to have a conversation here with Michelle so that you can hear someone else's perspective in the field. And to talk about roles and possible jobs and resources out in the field. And to just get someone else's story and their perspective on work in the performing arts industry.

So welcome, Michelle.

MICHELLE GROVE HERZOG: Thanks, Laura.

LAURA: So great to be here in Tucson with you. I would love to start by asking if you would flesh out a little bit more on what I said about your start in this field, you're training as a violinist, and those first steps in terms of how you ended up managing those musicians. We'd love to hear what your experience was.

MICHELLE: Absolutely. As you mentioned, I started off classically trained violinist and I had graduated from university, with my music performance degree, and I was gigging all over the Washington, D. C., Baltimore area. I was also then at that time doing non-union contracting, helping musicians find other jobs throughout town, um, also playing a lot of these jobs with these musicians. And throughout that time, people were always remarking to me, you know, you're really organized, you're really good at this, you know how to deal with people.

And at the same time, I was injured. As many artists are in different ways. So as a musician, I had some repetitive motion injuries. So nerve damage. And that's what kind of sparked this, uh, idea or thought for me that, there were other options. And at that point, that's when I got a master's degree, an MA in arts management from American University. And that's what fully launched, my career onto, I call it the other side of things within the arts.

LAURA: So, you have your first job. You got hired as an employee, right?

MICHELLE: Yes.

LAURA: So that was a huge break from handling singular musicians. Now you get a job with the county. And you are a full-time salaried employee in the field of the performing arts.

MICHELLE: I mean, even jumping back a little bit, so I'm doing this MA in arts management and as many of these programs do, there were networking events or receptions or speakers that would come in and the speaker had been Teresa Cameron, who at that time was the CEO for the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County in Maryland.

And I was just really intrigued by what she talked about, about the role of a local arts agency, which at that point. I had very little understanding of what a local arts agency was, what a service organization was. But I knew that it sounded really

interesting to me, like it was, it was in the vein of what I was thinking I wanted to do.

So I went up and I spoke with her afterwards and, at that point, she essentially offered me a job on the spot. And I was still in school, and she basically said, you know, I've really enjoyed our conversation, and I need someone to come in and help and I think at that point, it was advocacy work. And so this is one of the ways that I sometimes date myself.

But, one of the things I did, it was budget season at the state level, and I was sending faxes to elected representatives, as part of the advocacy campaign that year. I was part-time then while I finished school, and once I finished school, they brought me on full-time. And I came in essentially as the grants manager and then the woman, Fran Abrams, who was a great, great mentor for me, um, who had been running that program, the grants program, then retired.

LAURA: Let's pause for a second and talk about grants program and what on earth is a grants program, because many of our service organizations have grants programs, and in shorthand, they are giving away money. It's typically when you see a grants program listed on a service organization's website, that's where, oh, that's where the money is.

So what kind of grants were you handling for the county, and do you remember, for example, What was the annual grant amount distribution that this council was putting out to the good people of the County of Montgomery?

MICHELLE: In Montgomery County, we were working with at that time, around 4 million dollars.

A grants program gives away money. And a big piece of that is it's money that does not have to be repaid. So it's not a loan, it's money that you're being given often for a very specific purpose that does not have to be repaid.

In this case, we're talking about a local arts agency focused on the arts. So all of these grants were to both arts organizations or... Individual artists. At this time, and this was 2006 ish the idea of especially a local arts agency giving funds to an individual artist was, it was progressive.

There are actually three types of grants. They were general operating support grants, which I always say is, that's what we want, these general operating support grants are funds for whatever you need them for. So general operating. We're also giving away program grants and these were typically to smaller organizations. And

so program grants are given for a specific purpose. We want to, um, fund our after-school theater program for youth. The third category we're going to say of grants was these grants for individual artists.

LAURA: The individual artist grants, um, and we will spend time talking about this in a historic context, because of course the National Endowment for the Arts had stopped giving out artist direct grants. Your point that the council was doing that is huge and very important to the local artists of the county.

MICHELLE: Absolutely. And one of the things that really distinguished these more so than them just being for individual artists, is that they were this kind of hybrid of, a program or project grant. I often use those terms more or less interchangeably. But also general operating support. And what I mean by that is that the artist had to propose a specific project within their grant proposal, but they could use the funds for whatever they wanted. And my example that I would always give at that time was if you need funding for a babysitter for your children so that you can do the actual work, you can pay for that with your grant. We're talking about grants to artists being rare, that one's incredibly rare.

LAURA: Yeah, still is, still is. You went from a county organization to the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation, which represents the states from New York all the way down to the Virginias. And that's a much larger service organization that receives a lot of money from the National Endowment, quite specifically, for redistribution out to the states within the Mid-Atlantic regions. How did your job change from the work you were doing for the county, versus when you went to Mid-Atlantic?

MICHELLE: The six regional arts organizations in the U. S. were all founded in the mid-70s around the idea of supporting touring of artists between the states. That thread still carries through in all of the regional arts organizations to varying extents today.

Because the regional arts organizations were founded around this idea of touring work, sharing work, distribution of work, my role changed in that I was much more focused. And so as the performing arts program officer, my portfolio and frankly the portfolio of the entire organization was focused on this idea of distribution, of primarily performing arts.

And so this job, it really built upon the work that I'd done at a local arts agency, but also expanded my knowledge, my job that I was exposed to and gained skills within the performing arts touring world, specifically. The idea of touring, the idea of curation, of programming, was an area where I really had a chance to expand my skills and experience.

LAURA: Part of your new job was that you were able to see more work.

MICHELLE: Absolutely.

LAURA: Because my experience of meeting the grants person from the Mid Atlantic Foundation was when I was traveling at all the regional booking conferences and the person in your role was almost always there and they were seeing work along with me. That was either curated by the conference or was being presented locally in a festival or at a performing arts center. And I'm sure you had the same experience I did, which is with every single show that we see in a theater, something shifts in us. We have an experience that sometimes can be cathartic and life-changing. And it's all... part of our professional development as arts workers in the field, seeing new work, work we might never have been exposed to for whatever reason to have access to that work and see it. I have always found that to be a complete game-changer.

MICHELLE: Absolutely. And that also was a new piece for me in that as an artist myself and working within the arts, I was of course often exposing myself to different performances or different shows, gallery shows, and everything else. But because my role was focused on, performing arts touring, part of my job was to be out seeing work and meeting the people that were facilitating this work happening from all sides. And that's the artists, but it's also the agents and managers and the presenters as well. So those organizations or venues that we're bringing in or deciding to invite their audiences to see the work.

LAURA: And then of course there are all the grant applications and in the process of reviewing grant applications, there's discovery.

MICHELLE: Absolutely.

LAURA: Suddenly, here's something from an artist who's doing what? Where? How? That's amazing, right? And then, you have those moments where you think, I have to see this. So then, from the Mid-Atlantic, you took this position as Interim Associate Director at Wesleyan University. And for our listeners, what does that interim part indicate?

MICHELLE': So that indicates that it was a temporary role.

LAURA: But it was still very much a full-time job.

MICHELLE: Oh, absolutely.

LAURA: And in the process of negotiating that job, typically, one negotiates, I'll do this for a year, or I'll do this for two years. And one accepts the titling of interim quite specifically because it is a termed position. You have negotiated one or two years at this. And in your case, this is at Wesleyan. So what did you do for the good people at Wesleyan?

MICHELLE: In terms of being interim at, uh, Wesleyan University Center for the Arts is that I had come out of these service organization roles. So at a local arts agency and at a regional arts organization. Yet I hadn't worked at what I would term the other side. So I hadn't been the presenter. I hadn't done that work. And I felt that while I knew I was very, we'll say frankly passionate about the service work that I thought it was important to be on that other side. And that's where an interim role was perfect. I also knew that I was helping out an organization that was in a time of leadership transition and I knew that I had skills and experience that I could offer to the organization and help them out for this period of time. And I'll say it ended up being absolutely perfect.

LAURA: And I think that was when you and I worked to bring Manual Cinema to Wesleyan.

MICHELLE: That was when we brought Manual Cinema. Yeah, we did that.

Manual Cinema is one of the companies that has left an imprint of my first experience with Manual Cinema.

LAURA: It's so fantastic, and this is the first time that I've mentioned Manual Cinema on the podcast, and they are the people behind the music that you hear at the start and at the end of the podcast, and Manual Cinema is a collective of five artistic directors, who have a multimedia company called Manual Cinema in Chicago, and they're comprised of two composer musicians, two physical theater puppeteers, and one, what I like to say, wonky English major graphic artist guy. And it's three men and two women. The company is 12 years old at this point.

But Michelle and I worked to bring Manual Cinema's work to Wesleyan. It was probably their second or third year of touring. It was early days. I do love that you have this impression of seeing them for the first time. And this goes back to the last episode I talked about in terms of skill. When something hits you, when something resonates with you when you see something that makes you go, Oh, hold on, wait a minute. What is this? And that's been happening for both of us, from Manual Cinema, ever since they've entered our lives.

MICHELLE: Yes.

LAURA: It's really a pleasure.

And now you're on a campus. So you are intersecting with students on a daily basis.

What was your experience then? And how does that connect to where you are today?

MICHELLE: So I think that was the unexpected piece of that role for me. Going into that role, I more or less knew what to expect on the presenting, programming, community engagement side of things for that job, even overseeing the various staff at the center.

However, the work with students was what surprised me, and I don't know why I didn't think about this going into the role, but I hadn't thought about how I would interact with students. And to me, the biggest piece was working with students as interns. And one of my takeaways from that time, especially when I reflect back now, is how much I enjoyed working with students and introducing them to this world of arts administration, arts management, cultural management.

LAURA: That's so fantastic. That's great. And just to clarify, they interned at the performing arts center. They got to see and participate and watch and observe how an artist was presented, what happened beforehand, what it took to get them there, what happened once they arrived, and then what happened afterwards.

MICHELLE: One of my memories of working with students is introducing them to the idea of grant writing and how you procure the funds for these engagements and also introducing them to the idea of budgeting for one of these engagements and how surprising that often is, um, to anyone who hasn't interacted with or seen the budget for one of these engagements to realize how few of the costs are covered by ticket sales.

LAURA: Yeah. And so this, this ties into the last, podcast episode about skills and the little I said about budgeting. And so what Michelle just touched on is the project budget for each of those touring companies that would come in and what those expenses and income were for every single one of the engagements that she presented. And on the artist's side, the artist has their own project budget. For them, what is it costing them on income and expenses? To go to Wesleyan. And I remember that that engagement for Manual Cinema was supported, I'm pretty

sure, by a New England Foundation for the Arts, what used to be called their Expeditions Grant.

And again, this is where New England Foundation for the Arts, which we refer to as NEFA, they're one of the six regional service organizations that Michelle mentioned earlier. One of their programs is touring of artists. And so, Michelle and I worked together in collaboration with other New England venues to secure grant funding that went directly to Wesleyan to support this engagement to present Manual Cinema.

And that was key. That was huge for Manual Cinema. It was the first time their name, their company, was put in front of a grant panel at NEFA. And this was great for the New England venues, because this was the first time for them to present the company, and they had support. And all of that adds up to making things actually happen.

MICHELLE: The Expeditions Program there has to be a minimum number of other venues or other presenters within the region who are also bringing in this same company. And so it's also building. A network and building connections among those presenters.

Laura: Yes and one of the other criteria is of course all the ancillary activity around just the performance. So there has to be workshops for students, public lectures, post-performance Q& A, some kind of community engagement aspect in addition to the live performance. They're really critical to the process of exposing audiences to work that they might not otherwise see

And now here you are in Tucson, Arizona. And if you would please talk about the work you're doing for the University of Arizona, and the Arts Administration Program here.

MICHELLE: Absolutely. So here at the University of Arizona in...

Sunny, blue sky, beautiful, perfect temperature. Tucson, Arizona.

LAURA: I'll say.

MICHELLE: Just noting. We're at that perfect time of year.

I oversee the Arts Administration program at the University of Arizona, which at this time is an undergraduate minor with some graduate options as well.

The minor is designed to be added on, primarily for College of Fine Arts students, so that means dance, music, school of art, theater, film, and television students, added on to give them exposure and experience on the business side of the arts.

And, to me, that's really important, because so many of these students, and I know I was absolutely like this as an undergraduate, getting a degree in music performance, I hadn't really thought about all of these other options that are out there, that there are so many ways to work in the arts, to support the arts, to be engaged in the arts professionally, that are not actually being the artist on stage.

And so, this undergraduate minor allows students from all of the different colleges, and honestly, any student from the university at all, to be exposed to all of these different careers, and to think about the jobs that exist running or working at a museum. Running or working at a symphony. Running or working at a theater.

And everything in between. I'm speaking very, I call them traditional categories right now. But it's also everything in between. This is a business. Yeah. And that there are roles doing marketing, fundraising, programming and curation, community work. And every other aspect of a business at all of these organizations.

LAURA: University of Arizona has a very robust programming department that falls under the name, Arizona Arts Live. And so these students, they have access to international touring artists that are coming through, through that presenting program. So again, they have exposure to work that they might not otherwise get to see. And this is a gigantic benefit for students who are here. This system, or model, is replicated across multiple universities in our country.

MICHELLE: This podcast focuses primarily on the performing arts. We have Arizona Arts Live and then we also have the University of Arizona Museum of Art, which is known as UAMA. And also the Center for Creative Photography.

LAURA: Well, part of why I'm here is because Arizona Arts Live is presenting Manuel Cinema's Frankenstein tonight. I don't tour with my companies as a staff person. I get to go on my tour dates basically based on my availability, but also when it's a very important engagement for me. And I have a long-time relationship with the programmer for Arizona Arts Live, Chad Herzog, who is Michelle's partner.

MICHELLE: Scary double arts couple.

LAURA: I know. So aside from your work for the university, you have your own company, that's called ZogArts Consulting. And, I'd love to know what services you are offering as a consultant. When you hear the word consultant, I immediately

think, oh, they get to do what they want to do. They get to choose their clients. So how does that work?

MICHELLE: I mean, ultimately, that is somewhat true, in that you get to choose the work that you wish to take on. I always had an entrepreneurial spirit. And I also always knew that I liked working for myself and that I could manage working for myself. Upon concluding my time at Wesleyan University as interim, I knew that that's what I wanted to do next.

It felt like it was the right time to make that leap. And I'm really excited to say... Just passed five years.

LAURA: Congratulations

MICHELLE: Which is great. I like to say that I do field forward work and this intertwines really nicely with my work at the university and I feel that while the work is different it is very much ultimately reaching towards the same goals, which is a stronger arts sector. As we've talked about my work at the university, helping to train and mentor, students who are our next generation of arts workers.

Within my consulting work, I also am helping to train, assist arts workers and the field in moving forward and doing better work. And that's realized through a few different areas. I still work in grant making, which is, you know, from whence I came. But, so that is developing grant-making programs and doing program evaluations or evaluations of those grant-making programs. And what that means is gathering data, looking at these programs, and providing feedback on how well they're working and how they might work

I also do professional development work, meaning bringing groups of people together to learn or to help facilitate their learning in various areas. The other area where I'm working now is also in board development and doing a bit more of that work here locally in Arizona, but helping organizations understand what a nonprofit board is, how it is. And I'm putting air quotes around this if you could see me right now, how it is supposed to function, and also how it could function in 2023. And that's a big piece. How should a nonprofit board function in 2023?

I think of all my work is falling under this field forward work and the idea of how do we make this field stronger moving forward.

LAURA: Yes.

MICHELLE: And that's not by doing things exactly the same way that we have always done them. And that's how I approach both my teaching and my consulting

work, is that we need to understand how we have done things, we need to understand the history, we need to understand what best practice might be. But just because it's best practice doesn't mean it's the way we should move forward.

LAURA: Right.

MICHELLE: It's important to understand what, you know, proper structures are, what that best practice, what the history is, and to learn that, and then to be able to improvise and think forward from there.

LAURA: Well, I think you and I are definitely in the same boat that we both know that creativity must play a huge role in moving all of this forward, and just because what we've done in the past has "worked" sorta it doesn't mean we need to keep doing it and there are many of us who are looking for other ways, other solutions, that take a completely different shape that we've never seen before. We share in the same goal, which is to continue in this massive cultural exchange between us humans on this planet and how can we keep doing this in a way that causes less harm, primarily to the artists, provides better access for everybody. And that starts with redesigning our buildings to our communications, all of it. So a lot of work to be done.

MICHELLE: Mm hmm.

LAURA: And this is why we're here, talking about the work that we're currently doing, which doesn't mean that this is going to be the work that you, listener, is ultimately going to do.

But here's where we are today, on October 26, 2023. We're doing what we can with what we have and you and I know are in lockstep for a better future. We all want that. So what that's gonna look like is gonna be up to the current 20-year-olds.

MICHELLE: Absolutely.

LAURA: Yeah. Thank you so much.

MICHELLE: Absolutely. It's been my pleasure.

LAURA: It's been great.

MICHELLE: I really enjoyed it.

LAURA: We're gonna go to a show tonight.

MICHELLE: Yeah we are.

LAURA: I'm gonna encourage all the listeners as I have: please go see a live show
Drop me a line. Let me know what you saw. Let me know if it rocked your world or
if it didn't I still want to know either way and until next time

(Fade out with jazz music by Manual Cinema)