

Double Edge Theatre in Its Ashfield Community

An Interview with Stacy Klein

Richard Schechner



Figure 1. Indigenous ceremony in The Ashfield Town Spectacle, Ashfield, 2017. Directed by Stacy Klein. (Photo by Greg Ruth)

This interview took place on 19 April 2019 in Ashfield, Massachusetts, the home of Double Edge Theatre.

RICHARD SCHECHNER: What was Double Edge's first encounter with Ashfield, Massachusetts?¹

STACY KLEIN: We moved to Ashfield in April 1994.

1. Population 1,733 in 2017. In 1994, the year Double Edge arrived, Ashfield's population was 1,743.

SCHECHNER: You moved from Boston?

KLEIN: Yes, in 1994 we moved from Boston, where I founded the company in 1982. We spent about a year looking for a farm with multiple outbuildings including the right kind of barn. We were planning on keeping our space in Boston but within three years, in 1997, we gave it up because of commuting and because the Ashfield community did not like the fact that we were not full-time residents. At first, we had a lot of difficulty in the community. They did not want a theatre to take over a farm.

SCHECHNER: Let me stop there. Two questions: Why Ashfield and not some other place in Western Massachusetts or Connecticut or wherever? And second, who is “they?”

KLEIN: Why Ashfield? We looked in western Connecticut and Mass[achusetts] for places that had a slate roof barn, which we thought was very important; the roof needed to be strong because Double Edge did a lot of flying even in those days.

SCHECHNER: By “flying” you mean circus techniques.

KLEIN: It wasn’t related to circus in those days. We were attaching things to ceilings as part of our performances and dangerously flying around. Much later we got some aerial training. All of the *Song Trilogy* [1985–1998] included some type of flying—I always wanted training to not only deal with



Figure 2. *The Farm* circa 1994. (Photo courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)

the ground. We used ropes, bungees, and built contraptions to get off the ground. The second requirement was that the property needed to have outbuildings. I had no idea of anything beyond that. Landing in Ashfield was extremely serendipitous because we did not do any kind of community research like “Is this a good community?” or “Is this a politically open community?” Ashfield and the Hilltowns² were cheaper than the Berkshires and Connecticut. We had a good relationship with the Mass. Council³ and so we thought, “Why start over again with a different state organization?” Unfortunately, after we relocated to Western Mass. the State Council redid their charter and we didn’t get any funding for a while. We ended up looking at five farms. We bid on one in Buckland, the neighboring town, but we did not get that. At first, we were disappointed with the Ashfield farm because it was right on a state highway. We thought that would mean lots of noisy traffic. But in fact this state highway had very little traffic. So we

2. Towns in Berkshire, Franklin, Hampshire, and Hampden Counties of Massachusetts.

3. Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, which changed its name to the Massachusetts Cultural Council in the mid-’90s.

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were lucky because if we had gotten the Buckland farm in the back woods, we wouldn't exist today because no audience would have ever come to see us. But anyway, we ended up moving to Ashfield. One of our real estate agents was very supportive; he still supports us and is really a major participant.

SCHECHNER: Who?

KLEIN: Phil Pless. The other agent was Dick Dils, both of Massamont Realtors. They showed us a number of places and then finally the farm. This was APR land.⁴ You can't build on anything but the excluded part, which is two acres. And you must use the land for farming. We were not intending to be a big developer and we wanted to grow at least some of our own food, so the APR suited our needs.

The farm had other things that suited our needs, too. It had a beautiful slate roof barn and a farmhouse. So we entered into an agreement with the owners, the Fitzgerald family. They were happy because they had been trying to sell the property for 10 years. Nobody wanted a 105-acre farm because big Midwestern farming had taken over and pretty much destroyed the local small farms by that time. There were only a couple farms left out of 50 or more farms in the area before that.

SCHECHNER: To a city-dweller like me, 105 acres seems big if not enormous.

KLEIN: It's too small to be one

of the thousands-of-acres industrial farms in the Midwest but it's too large for small organic farming that requires only 5 or 10 acres. So many family farmers who had existed for hundreds of years were not really interested in buying, especially because of the APR. Bill Fitzgerald was happy or at least really relieved to meet us. He said, "I hope you grow something here." Other than using the land to farm, no one would touch the place because of its restrictions.

SCHECHNER: How much did you pay for it?

KLEIN: \$259,000.

SCHECHNER: And you mortgaged some of that?

KLEIN: Yes. First my father took on the mortgage, which he paid until he passed in 1996, when I took on the mortgage. DE leased it from me until the company was able to get its own mortgage. Because we weren't going to primarily farm the land, we had to get a special permit from the town to run our theatre there.

SCHECHNER: Who is we? How many of you?



Figure 3. Initial visit to the Farm in 1994. From left: Felicia Shpall, David Flaxman, Carroll Durand, Bonnie Cordon, Stacy Klein, Nachum Cohen. (Photo courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)

4. Agricultural Preservation Restriction — land that cannot be commercially developed, that must be used for agriculture. Double Edge proved that it did farm (Mass.gov 2020).

KLEIN: We, Double Edge, was about five or six people then.

SCHECHNER: And you still live there, on the farm?

KLEIN: No, most of us don't live on the farm anymore. There are only three people living on the farm including Tadea and Cariel, Carlos's and my daughters. Tadea on the second floor of the farmhouse in an apartment made in the same room she grew up in and Cariel in an apartment made from my old studio, although she spends more time on the road. One of our ensemble members lives in a converted trailer on the other side of the barn. Several of the original group members still live in Ashfield including Carroll Durand and David Flaxman, who is no longer an actor—he works on the grounds. I live in town now. At a certain point the farm became too public to live there.

At the end of 1993, before we signed the papers to purchase the farm, I went to the town planning board and applied for the permit to open a theatre. That's when the problems started. One of our new neighbors was a conservationist. He did not believe that we were going to preserve the land and grow crops. So first we had to prove that we would have agriculture. The APR requires you to keep the farm active and keep some farm animals: substantial agriculture. Still the APR rules were pretty generalized in those days so we said, "OK we want to grow food because part of the reason we were moving was to become self-sustaining." We told the town that ultimately, we wanted to farm but we were not going to do that right away. Still, we had to sign on and prove that we would farm. The agricultural board of Massachusetts got involved and asked: "Are you really going to do this?"

SCHECHNER: Were you really going to farm?

KLEIN: Yes, before we could get this special permit for our theatre we had to assure them we were going to farm the land. Also, one person in the ensemble was keen to return to the farming he had done in his youth.

SCHECHNER: But everyone knew Double Edge was a theatre?

KLEIN: Everyone knew. And I wanted everyone to know we were a theatre because otherwise, when we started doing theatre they would say we bought the farm under false pretenses. And also—I don't remember the entire story—but there seemed to be some anti-Semitism going on. I ended up writing a letter to the governor, Bill Weld, and to Jay Healey, who was the Massachusetts Secretary of Agriculture, saying that I felt our application for a special permit was being treated in an anti-Semitic manner. After that letter, something happened and we got the special permit but people were angry about the letter. Particularly because it was mostly the conservationists who did not trust us. They thought we were going to build on the land, "develop" it.

SCHECHNER: Some people in town were angry?

KLEIN: They didn't feel that it was fair to identify what was happening as anti-Semitism. At the same time, that year there was actually some anti-Semitic activity. I am pretty sure it was the postman. He thought he was joking around with somebody—I can't remember who—and he said, "They should have burnt them all in the ovens," or something like that. He was reprimanded and some people in town, the churches, got together and had open meetings about tolerance—or however they termed it at the time.

SCHECHNER: Were any Jews living in the area?

KLEIN: Yes. Not many but definitely a small Jewish community. And that was why it was upsetting. When we moved there we were invited to a bunch of Jewish gatherings around the Hilltowns. Our group was working on the *Song Trilogy*, which dealt with the Holocaust and the Jewish diaspora, but we were not conventional in our approach to Judaism. So both practicing Jews and those who did not want a perceived Jewish theatre challenged us.

SCHECHNER: Why did you decide to leave Boston and go on this adventure? You had no farm or rural experience. So why not stay close to Boston?

KLEIN: We were doing a lot of exchanges, particularly with people from the Ukraine, but also with people from all over Central Europe. At that time, we had a three-bedroom apartment with six or seven people living in it. I had two small children, a one-year-old and a two-and-a-half-year-old, Cariel and Tadea. Another ensemble couple also had a baby and lived in the house. The living was very tight. We couldn't afford to have guest artists from Europe because we had no place to house them. Also, there were increasing restrictions on our performance space. We'd used an abandoned parish hall in an Episcopal church for a while until they started building up their community again.

SCHECHNER: What part of Boston?

KLEIN: Allston. A beautiful parish hall, a perfect space. But then it started to be like, "Let's put in fire alarms, let's put in a sprinkler system." The space was more appropriate for performing work—not for devising it. So we thought we would move to an affordable rural area, build our work there, have our overseas exchanges there, go on tours from there, but return to Boston to do workshops and performances. The suburbs would have been easier but were not affordable.

SCHECHNER: So at that point, you were not influenced by Gardzienice⁵ or Grotowski?

KLEIN: Gardzienice wasn't a model for us. They never farmed or tried to be self-sustaining. In those days they had some government support. I don't know why, but when I was in Gardzienice I didn't feel connected to the community. I think it took a long time for [Włoddek] Staniewski and his group to establish themselves in the area where they lived. The town of Gardzienice was perfect for them to launch their expeditions, but they only used it for their internal research.

SCHECHNER: What years were you at Gardzienice?

KLEIN: Regularly from '85 when I saw them for the first time. Eugenio Barba took me to see Gardzienice—*Gusla* and *Avakuum*—in Arhus, Denmark, in 1985 while I was interviewing him for my dissertation.⁶ For about 10 years, back and forth, they would come here, I would go there. I was literally blown away. It was wild and had all the passion I was looking for. I don't think I had seen something other than Kantor's *The Dead Class* that combined the visceral, wildness, musicality, and movement in that way.

When I returned to the States, I wrote and asked Staniewski to perform in Boston. He told me to contact Bill Reichblum,⁷ who was a Tufts undergrad when I was there, and remained a friend, and Chiquita Gregory,⁸ who I became close to. I also asked the Mass. Cultural Council

5. The Center for Theatre Practices, formerly the Gardzienice Theatre Association, was founded in 1977 by Włodzimierz Staniewski who participated in several of Jerzy Grotowski's paratheatrical experiments. Gardzienice is the name of the Polish village where the Center is located, and with whose inhabitants Staniewski worked. Staniewski led "expeditions," forays with locals both in Poland and beyond, seeking the presumed roots of performance in song and movement (see Filipowicz 1983, 1987; Allain 1998; Staniewski 1993, 2004).

6. Klein earned her PhD from Tufts University in 1987. Her topic: "Eugenio Barba, Master Craftsman, and the Odin Teatret's *Oxyrhyncus Evangeliet*."

7. Reichblum founded KadmusArts Corp which, according to its website, "created the site to help artists, audiences, cultural travelers and festival colleagues find each other — all over the world" (KadmusArts 2005–2011). Before Kadmus, Reichblum was Dean of the College at Bennington. He also helped facilitate the North American tours of the Grotowski Workcenter.

8. Mercedes (Chiquita) Gregory, who died in 1992, was a documentary filmmaker and an influential figure in experimental theatre. Among her films was *Art as Vehicle* (1990), about the late work of Jerzy Grotowski. From

for money. That was the last time we got substantial funding from the Council for an artistic project. Gardzienice was supposed to go to Baltimore for the Theatre of Nations Festival. But just before they left Poland, their visas were going to be canceled. These were the days when Poland was on the Communist list. I called Senator Ted Kennedy's office: they had a huge immigration staff. They worked with me and Philip Arnoult⁹ until we got the visas. That started a long relationship with both of them, Philip as a producer and initiator of many events at the farm, and Włodek as a collaborator. After this we produced Gardzienice at the New York International Theater Festival [1988] and on several other occasions. They produced us in Lublin at the Teatr Lalek and other spaces [*Song of Absence* (1988), *Keter* (1997), *Relentless* (2002), *Quixote* (2005)]. In 2001, we produced [Gardzienice's] *Metamorphoses* at the farm. At the same time, we convened a meeting of theatres that included Włodek and Anne Bogart's SITI



Figure 4. Włodzimierz Staniewski (right) at the Farm for the International Theatre Conversation in June 1997. Also in attendance were Philip Arnoult, Katalin Lábán from Hungary, and artists from Kazakhstan and Romania. (Photo courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)

Company, among others. Włodek wanted primacy over the event. I don't think I organized it so well, but Anne was really great and generous. SITI did a workshop, one of several we've collaborated on over the years. DE did one workshop with Gardzienice in 1986 and found their work to be more form-oriented while ours is visual—Włodek once told me I was a “painter of theatre.” I think he is correct. We did several projects together, including *Republic of Dreams* [1993–95], the name taken from Bruno Schulz's story of the same title. *The Hidden Territories* was my section of the project, referencing Jewish culture in the Ukraine. The project was a Gardzienice expedition-type work. We ultimately could not do the project together because of our very different ways of working. So he did his project and DE did a two-month research project in Drohobycz, Ukraine, researching Jewish culture. John Peitso, DE's musical director, made a

1973 to 1977, as executive director of A Bunch of Experimental Theaters, she managed touring, raised money, and put together festivals featuring the eight New York avantgarde theatres of the Bunch (*New York Times* 1992:D24). Schechner led the Bunch, followed by Richard Foreman.

9. Philip Arnoult is based in Baltimore where he headed two festivals, The New Theatre Festival (1976) and The Theatre of Nations (1986). He founded and led Baltimore's Theatre Project from 1971 to 1991. In 1990, he founded the Center for International Theatre Development (CITD) which focuses on Eastern and Central Europe (CITD 2019).

documentary about it [*Republic of Dreams*, 1995]. After the work in Drohobycz, Gardzienice and DE had a pause in relations, from 1995 to 1997. After *Quixote* was produced in Gardzienice in 2005, we had another pause until 2010. There is too much emotion for Włodek and me to work together. I think I am too much of a feminist to work steadily with Polish directors of a certain era. But we maintain a strong friendship, even consider ourselves family. I admire what Włodek has built at Gardzienice. Ultimately, I let go of my anger that he used my title *Hidden Territories* for the title of his book without giving me credit.

SCHECHNER: All this during the period Double Edge was going between Boston and Ashfield?

KLEIN: Yes. The permanent move to Ashfield was deeply influenced by the work that I did with Rena Mirecka¹⁰ in Sardinia in '85. The community there had to help us because we were in an abandoned place, no electricity or other basics. I found relying on the community really interesting, and that remained with me—the whole idea of surviving with the community and being able to retreat from the business of theatre.

SCHECHNER: Tell me about your work with Mirecka.

KLEIN: I met Rena in 1976 on a Kosciuszko Foundation trip to Poland. A group of 15 or 20 of us, including Mark Russell, Travis Preston, Eleanor Denegre, Blanche Baker, Jim Simpson, and Bruce MacVittie,¹¹ went in 1976 and/or 1977 and saw theatre across the country. We visited Kantor and saw *Dead Class* at Cricot, a performance that has guided my concept and vision of directing these 44 years. We saw Henryk Tomaszewski and Józef Szajna's *Dante* with a huge onstage ball inside which the actors performed and Kazimierz Braun's *Anna Livia* with its flying bed. So many great Polish artists.

The final weeks in Wrocław was a workshop with Rena, Antek Jahółkowski, Zygmunt Molik, and Ludwik Flaszen, all from Grotowski's theatre. Grotowski gave a lecture that was similar to Kantor's, who told us we were all shit and would not make anything significant, but Grotowski was much less direct. On the second day of the workshop I crushed my collarbone and Rena, who only spoke Polish and French at the time, took me to the hospital. That began our relationship which lasts until today. I studied with Rena and then also assisted her in Sardinia in the mid-'80s. In 1986, I spent three more months at the Odin Theater writing my dissertation on Barba's *Oxyrhynchus Evangelist*. Before this trip, I brought Rena to Boston. Both she and Molik¹² saw *Song of Absence* and *Song of Songs*. Then in the early '90s I started the process of moving to the farm. At the same time, I also began working in the Ukraine. I did not see Rena again until 2009. I believe I created the distance because I did not want to be so closely associated with my mentor. I wanted to make my own way, ask my own questions and be free from her sense of ritual. But in the spring of 2009, I brought Rena to the farm for *Bold Women*, a "conversation"

10. Rena Mirecka is a founding member of Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre. She performed in all of its Theatre of Productions phase, the only woman to do so. For Mirecka's notebooks detailing her participation in that work see Osiński (2014).

11. In 2005, Travis Preston became artistic director of the CalArts Center for New Performance; in 2010, he became dean of the CalArts School of Theater. He also directed plays in London and New York. Mark Russell directed PS122 in New York from 1983–2004. Next, he started *Under the Radar* at New York's Public Theater in 2005. Eleanor Denegre is a performer, dancer, and retired theatre specialist at the NEA. Blanche Baker is a stage, film, and TV actress. She played Lolita in the 1981 Broadway production of Edward Albee's adaptation of Nabokov's novel and Ginny in the film *Sixteen Candles* (1984). Jim Simpson, founding artistic director of New York's Flea Theater (1966–2015), and actor Bruce MacVittie were BFA students with Klein at Boston University.

12. Zygmunt Molik (1930–2010) played major roles in Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre from 1959 to 1966. After an 18-month break, during which he worked independently as an actor, Molik rejoined the Laboratory Theatre, remaining with it until its dissolution in 1984.

that included Muriel Miguel, Rachel Chavkin, Rena, and me, moderated by my good friend Martha Coigney.¹³

Rena stayed to do two workshops, one for Double Edge and one for the public. I did not think I could participate. I had quit smoking and gained 30 pounds. But training had become embedded in my body, so I had to join the workshop. Rena said things that became very important to me. She said I was doing the research and performance work of the Lab and others, but that I combined *life* with it. I heard something similar from Anne Bogart later—about the difference between the men doing the anthropological experiments, like Grotowski and Barba, and my experience that was more layered with real life.

The most important part of Rena's visit was her recognition of the combination of inner and intimate research with training and family/community life. Rena's training during the many years she worked with us was fundamental to Double Edge. She is much more dogmatic about training and spiritual practice than I am. The last time Rena was in Ashfield was 2015. We worked with her to build a temple next to the stream. Recently we made it more permanent, a meditation space. Although we had plans for more work, including a center for Rena's work, she had a series of strokes so now I only see her in Poland, most recently in August 2019.

To get back to Double Edge in the 1990s. We were in a very different place than we are now. When we moved to Ashfield in '94 we had no interest in working with the community.

SCHECHNER: So you move to rural Massachusetts as a kind of inexpensive safe space to live and make work to bring back to the metropolis—to Boston—and you tour. Of course, you wanted good relations with the community but you didn't think of Double Edge as a community-based theatre. You didn't plan on drawing on the community's resources beyond the fact that in Ashfield you would have a safe place to do your creative work.

KLEIN: Correct.

SCHECHNER: So what was the step-by-step process that led you from that situation to your engagement with the community?

KLEIN: The community actually taught us we needed them. Not only that we needed them but that we wanted them.

SCHECHNER: Can you specify?

KLEIN: First, I need to say what the community didn't want from us. Both parties were equally responsible for a negative beginning. We didn't have a clue about the community. We didn't look at the community, we didn't care about the community. I was such a domestically challenged mother that I didn't even think about looking at the schools ahead of time. I wasn't into that kind of stuff. I just made my work; the more self-contained the better. So the first thing is that I got my wish. Ashfield was pretty isolated. It didn't have the things it has today. It had a convenience store and a bar that served bar food. That's about it. When the first winter came and the snow was three feet deep all winter and you couldn't get out of your house, we were challenged. The same with the trash. No one came to take away the garbage. You had to take your trash to the dump. None of us knew anything about that. Right away we needed help.

13. Muriel Miguel is a founding member and artistic director of Spiderwoman Theater. She has directed almost all of Spiderwoman's shows since their debut in 1976. Rachel Chavkin is the founding artistic director of the TEAM and her freelance directing includes *Hadestown* and *Natasba, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812*. Martha Coigney (1933–2016) led the US branch of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) from 1966 to 2003. As head of ITI, Coigney, even in the harsh days of the Cold War, championed international cooperation and collaboration among the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and the USA. She also strongly supported women playwrights, directors, actors, and designers.

Some people helped us, some people we hired to help us, and some people didn't help us. We started to understand our survival actually depended on this community. It wasn't like you could go next door. If a big snow storm came and you hadn't gone the 30 minutes it takes to a super-market, you didn't have any food. There we were, me with two little kids not knowing anything, and the rest of the company who didn't know anything either.

SCHECHNER: How many were you?

KLEIN: Five or six. So, one of the first things that happened was—which was incredible—I was pretty hysterical because there was a pond, and I was afraid the kids would fall into the pond. So I called up somebody to build a fence and he sent his brother to build it. His brother basically stayed at Double Edge for eight years, from 1994 to 2002. He lived in the neighboring town, he repaired everything, he built everything, he told us how to get heat, and was so helpful. It was a whole new thing.

SCHECHNER: What is his name?

KLEIN: Gene LaValley. He definitely saved me and he saved Double Edge.

SCHECHNER: What happened to him?

KLEIN: Well, after eight years, he had enough. I mean, the job was getting too big, I think.

SCHECHNER: Do you ever see him?

KLEIN: Not so much. And I have had to come to terms with that as we were very close. I greatly respected his knowledge of this area, the buildings, nature, wildlife. All self-taught. He was one of those people who learned everything in order to survive. He was out of a job when he came to us, and I was often alone on the farm with my kids. He really helped me. He defended me, first from the rats, then from humans who did not care for a woman boss. He understood me. He also loved children. He did not care much for adults, but he was the gentlest person with children. Our families socialized. He and his children and wife came to gatherings and grills at the farm. But also he was a very formal person and a loner, an outsider. I think that is why we connected so much. When Gene came to the theatre he was jobless with three children and a wife to support. He had a temper and didn't work long for people. At first, we paid him by the job, like putting a fence up around the pond to protect small children from falling in, doing the electrical work, and lots of other things. Then it was clear without Gene we would not be able to survive or develop the theatre on a rural farm. He was paid a very small salary, enough for him to feed his family but not really much.

We tried to pay more over time, but the fact that we were growing in size and Gene was really a loner, forced us to part ways. I cannot emphasize enough what Gene gave to the theatre. The barn, the pavilion, the animal barn, and all of our sets for years were built by Gene.

SCHECHNER: He was indispensable in the early days?

KLEIN: Indispensable. But he decided to leave us, to go solve his personal problems.

SCHECHNER: Let's get back to Ashfield in the early days. You survived the first winter, and then?

KLEIN: We were in this back-and-forth period for three years, Ashfield to Boston. The first year we couldn't work in the barn—it was too cold. So we worked in a dance studio in Shelburne Falls, about a 15-minute drive from Ashfield. The dance studio was on top of a grocery store. We were preparing *Keter*, *The Crowning Song* [1997–1998], the last performance of the *Song Trilogy*.

SCHECHNER: The other two were?

KLEIN: *Song of Absence* [1985–1988] and *Song of Songs* [1993–1998].

SCHECHNER: And those first two were created in Boston?

KLEIN: Yes.

SCHECHNER: What does “keter” mean?

KLEIN: The Crown. It’s the top of the Kabbalah’s *sefirot*.¹⁴

SCHECHNER: Kabbalah in Western Massachusetts...

KLEIN: Yes indeed. Kabbalah in Western Mass., you can imagine how that went over when we performed the whole *Song Trilogy* for an audience in the barn. We were able to because eventually Gene put a heating system in the barn. That same heating system is there today. But back then there wasn’t any insulation so I remember trying to direct and putting my hands near the heat. It was like working in Central Europe at the time.

Next, we got a trailer for one of the actors, Nachum Cohen, to live in. Nachum was a Sephardic Israeli I met on the streets in Boston, selling jewelry. He has retinitis pigmentosa, and therefore when we moved he needed to live near where we worked. He was an amazing trainer and actor, one of the three core actors of the *Song Trilogy*, along with Bonnie Cordon and David Flaxman. Nachum was raised partially on a moshav¹⁵ so he was very involved with making a garden on the farm. He also was a climber and would climb the rafters of the barn even with limited vision. When we finished the *Song Trilogy* Nachum left. He wanted to continue doing Jewish work; I wanted to move on. I never thought of Double Edge as a Jewish theatre.

Bonnie created the role of Shekinah in *Song of Absence*.¹⁶ Her voice came from the angels. She hated the rural life. She rented an apartment off the farm and for a while tried living in Boston and working at the farm. Although she voted yes to moving, she told me later she just said yes because everyone else did. She grew up in New Jersey and went to live in New York with her wife Laura Siskind whom she met at DE. Today Bonnie works at the Ford Foundation and is one of our great supporters. David Flaxman and his wife Felicia Shpall and their two children moved from Boston and lived in Ashfield. Felicia, in addition to acting, was a klezmer singer. In 2005 at the age of 35, she died of breast cancer and David stopped acting to raise their kids. He works with us now as a groundskeeper and carpenter and often as a critic.

Also on the farm right next to the barn we put in an apartment for Carroll Durand¹⁷ where the grain storage was. That apartment is now my office. I met Carroll in 1980 when I began my PhD at Tufts. She was the technical director and a PhD candidate—and a designer. In Boston, partnering with Susie Chancey,¹⁸ I coproduced two women’s international theatre festivals in 1979 and 1980. I thought the world was feminist until I landed at Tufts’s theatre

14. According to Kabbalah scholar Gershom Scholem: “The mythical character of Kabbalistic ‘theology’ is most clearly manifested in the doctrine of the ten *sefirot*, the potencies and modes of action of the living God. The Kabbalistic doctrine of the dynamic unity of God [...] describes a theogonic process in which God emerges from His hiddenness and ineffable being, to stand before us as the Creator. The stages of this process can be followed in an infinite abundance of images and symbols, each relating to a particular aspect of God” ([1960] 1965:100).

15. An Israeli cooperative agricultural community.

16. In the Jewish mystical tradition (from gnosticism through Kabbalah), the Shekinah is the “divine presence,” always female (see Scholem [1960] 1965, [1976] 1991, and 1978).

17. Durand is among several women listed as cofounding Double Edge with Klein in 1982. However, Double Edge is Klein’s initiative and she is always credited with being the theatre’s founder. Durand designed and acted in many of DE’s productions. She is currently Cofounder Emerita.

18. Susie Chancey founded the Womyn’s Theatre Festival (coproduced by Stacy Klein) in Boston in 1979 — the first women’s theatre festival in the world. Chancey was a major originator and producer of feminist and lesbian theatre. She went on from Boston to attend the MFA program at Tulane University, and was killed in a car crash there in 1993.

department where theatre more or less concluded with Arthur Miller, although there was a mention of Grotowski when they taught 20th-century directors. No women were studied; I think Hrosvitha was included as the only woman in theatre history. There were no women professors. I fought as a TA to teach Ntozake Shange. And there was no physical training or movement, it was all talk. Carroll was drawn to my work, my passion for theatre, which went beyond words, my visual sensibility (and I to hers), my training, and my vision of women. She had not experienced a world in which she could be both lesbian and feminist. I asked her to design Maureen Duffy's *Rites* (1969) with me, which premiered at Tufts in 1981, a modernization of *The Bacchae* set in a woman's loo in London. The project was successful although some students and teachers were threatened by a bunch of women in a closed room vigorously training. We were "accused" of lesbian activities. In retrospect, it was not so much the lesbian rumors but the rumors we were proselytizing a lesbian way of life that affected us. In those days, discretion was the model. Anyway, we persevered, the show was a success, and we premiered it in Boston using the name Double Edge¹⁹ for our theatre.

Not everyone in the group moved to Ashfield. Jennifer Johnson²⁰ and John Peitso stayed in Boston but remained part of the theatre and then finally moved to Ashfield in 2015. My husband at the time stayed in Boston. That was the end of our marriage.

band at the time stayed in Boston. That was the end of our marriage.

SCHECHNER: Where did the money come from?

KLEIN: The farm was purchased by my father. But individuals in the ensemble supplied their own stuff.

SCHECHNER: You mean Cohen bought his own trailer and Carroll outfitted her own apartment?

KLEIN: Yes. Everybody else lived in the farmhouse with me and the kids. Or in town. So it was one kitchen and two bathrooms and 6 or 8 people. Then after about six months we put a kitchen and showers in the old milk room attached to the barn.

The milk room, which is now Double Edge's main office, was the only place with heat other than the house. We hired local people to do some of this work. Gene did the floor and the walls.

SCHECHNER: Beyond buying the farm, where did the money come from to hire, build? From grants, from your tours?

KLEIN: May 3, 1996, my father died. He made the Double Edge Theatre Foundation with part of the money from his estate. There was approximately \$500,000 in it.



Figure 5. Initial renovations of the Farm, winter 1996/97. (Photo courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)

19. Klein named her theatre "Double Edge" after the labrys, the double-edge axe of the ancient Middle East and Greece which symbolizes both women's power and Zeus's lightning bolts. "Labrys" is a polyvalent word, cognate not only with the Latin "labus," lip, and its plural, "labia," but also with "labyrinth."

20. A lead actor and one of DE's three coartistic directors, with Klein, and Carlos Uriona.

SCHECHNER: Oh, very nice.

KLEIN: The Foundation paid for all of the renovations of the Barn, insulation, new ceiling, outside walls, and rooms for everyone in the theatre and all the students. Any remaining money from the Foundation was used for living expenses for the people in the theatre. We also had some grants. Touring usually lost money in those days.

SCHECHNER: Are you an only child?

KLEIN: No, my sister was the other half.

SCHECHNER: So she shared in this.

KLEIN: Yes. I got one quarter of the inheritance, the foundation got one quarter and my sister got the other half. My sister has become a big supporter of Double Edge.

SCHECHNER: Your mother passed away?

KLEIN: My mother passed away on September 30, 1992. She lived to see Tadea's first birthday.

SCHECHNER: In the mid-'90s you never performed in Ashfield?

KLEIN: We opened *Keter* in Boston in '97 so we kept going back and forth. I had a very good relationship with Rob Orchard at ART²¹ who provided us housing when we were in Boston. But driving back and forth with a one-year-old and a three-year-old was no picnic. It definitely was not good for them. People in Ashfield were starting to say, "Oh, we were right, there is something weird about you. You got a special permit for theatre but you don't perform. Are you a cult?" That cult story started gaining momentum. So we tried to hire as many people from the community as we could. We put our eldest daughter Tadea into the local preschool so people started to know us. That wasn't so great either. People were very suspicious of me. Tadea only wanted to wear dresses and the teacher called me. "How come you are forcing her to wear dresses in the snow?" Look at me? Do I look like the kind of mother who is forcing my



Figure 6. Outside the renovated barn, 2019. (Photo by Kim Chin-Gibbons; courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)

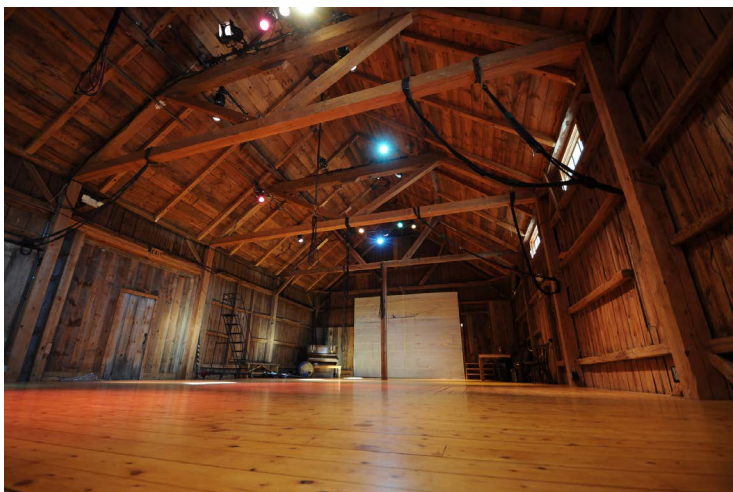


Figure 7. Inside the renovated barn, 2017. (Photo by Matt O'Hare; courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)

21. From 1970 until 2009 Robert Orchard served as founding executive director of the American Repertory Theater (ART) at Harvard University.

four-year-old daughter to wear dresses? Some or many of the local people thought everything I did was weird, that there was something wrong with me. So on the one hand, these people were interested and wanted to help or get hired and on the other hand, they were suspicious.

The first time I had an office it was in the upstairs of the farmhouse overlooking the pond. We hired a local carpenter to build it. He brought his teenage son to help him. And in the summer, we would go skinny dipping in the pond. Then I noticed his son wasn't there anymore. A couple of years later Carroll found out the man didn't want his son seeing us skinny dipping. This is our property; we should be able to skinny dip in our own pond. But that's not the way the community thinks in Ashfield. For them there are appropriate things and inappropriate things. A woman who had a B&B where my sister stayed talked shit about me and Double Edge. She was enraged that we didn't make the front of the farm look good. I decided that we better start cleaning up our act. We can't just hide in the barn and do our theatre work.

Still, all in all it would have been great except that touring wasn't economically feasible. The whole idea that we would tour, make money, and come back here to create new pieces wasn't working. We just couldn't keep going. We could tour in Central Europe whenever we wanted but that wasn't earning us any money. We had to change our ways. Eventually we gave up our Boston space in 1997.

SCHECHNER: What do you mean, "change our ways"?

KLEIN: Well, we started paying attention to what the farm looked like. It's right on the road so everyone who goes by can see what we are doing. We started taking care of the landscaping in front. We had let that go wild, we thought it was fine, but it wasn't fine. We fixed up the outside of the barn, which looked really bad. The previous owner, Bill Fitzgerald, hadn't painted it in a long time and we didn't paint it when we got there. We realized we had to make the face of the barn show that we cared. Fixing the barn was actually the first big project we did with the foundation money I inherited. We took out the two posts in the center of the barn and put beams in, giving us a much more open space. We insulated the barn, put new paneling on the outside, and painted it. We hired local people to do everything. A big job. My dog bit an excavator—that wasn't on the positive side—but in any case, we tried to get locals involved.

SCHECHNER: What years were these?

KLEIN: In '95 and mostly '96.

SCHECHNER: So you are upgrading your infrastructure using the local people to do the work. But things are lot further than that now. What happened next?

KLEIN: Next came a kind of standoff. We got a permit and opened the barn in '97 for public performances. But it wasn't easy. The building inspectors had absolutely no understanding of what a nonprofit was. They said "You can't do theatre in the barn." And I pulled out this special permit that said, "Yes we can." They fought me on that so I hired a lawyer and won.

SCHECHNER: Who fought you?

KLEIN: The Franklin County Cooperative Inspection Program.²²

SCHECHNER: Local residents?

KLEIN: State government operating at the county level. One problem was they had no idea what to do with us because while we were commercial in the sense of building code we were also a nonprofit and there are different rules for nonprofits. So for instance, a commercial build-

22. The Franklin Country Cooperative Inspection Program is a Massachusetts state agency that regulates building usage and issues permits.

ing can't have apartments. But a nonprofit building can have multiple dwellings. In Ashfield, a commercial property can't have more than two kitchens but a nonprofit can.

SCHECHNER: There are nonprofit theatres all over the place charging for admissions. In what sense were you commercial?

KLEIN: In the sense that the Hilltowns never had a theatre, and certainly not a nonprofit theatre. I asked them that exact question. How is Double Edge commercial? I'm trying to get the permits and I'm told that I can't because we're not allowed to do this, that, and the other thing. One of the things was how many kitchens. You asked about how come people all over the place build theatres and we can't. Because there was nothing like Double Edge in the entire area. The Berkshires are far away. There was no place the authorities could go to in the area and say, "This is like that place." There was some educational structure or something pretty far away. But that was education and Double Edge is a theatre. Even being nonprofit caused a headache. The authorities didn't want to recognize us as a nonprofit. I owned the land personally at that point and if Double Edge operated as a nonprofit the town would lose taxes. That caused a whole furor about us being people who aren't going to pay taxes. And, so we went back and forth with all this. Luckily, I had an idea because I'm my father's daughter: I will get a special permit.

SCHECHNER: Your father was what?

KLEIN: An excellent businessman and negotiator. He went from parking cars in a lot to owning an insurance agency. Even though I knew nothing about what I was getting into, I knew that they couldn't stop us if we had a permit, which I went and got. It was issued from the Planning Board of the Town of Ashfield and gave permission to have a theatre and parking on the property. The building inspector hadn't been part of that special permit. He told me, "I would never have given you guys that permit if they had asked me." It was so general, just saying we could have a not-for-profit theatre. I said, "Too bad, this is a legal document."

SCHECHNER: What year was this?

KLEIN: In '95/96. That's when our lawyer proved that we had the right to operate a theatre. We not only had to show the theatre was safe, we had to give a parking plan. Well, you add it all up, during those years the people in town were worried about many different things

about us. We were different and they didn't know whether that was a good thing or a bad thing. Meanwhile, going back and forth wasn't working out. I needed to spend money in Ashfield on the barn and on other things. Keeping a production and a space going in Boston wasn't possible. So we rented our Boston space to the Pilgrim Theatre run by Kim Mancuso and Kermit Dunkelberg. After a few years Pilgrim Theatre relocated to Ashfield, where it still is.

The mid-'90s was a trial period. We thought that after we built the barn we could try again in Boston, keeping two spaces. Clearly, that didn't work out. After we got the barn built, the first thing we did was *Keter*, the Kabbalah in the middle of Ashfield.



Figure 8. *Keter at the Farm*, 1997. Directed by Stacy Klein. (Photo courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)

SCHECHNER: In the winter?

KLEIN: The fall.

SCHECHNER: So you're in Ashfield where there might be some underlying anti-Semitism. You are strangers, city slickers maybe, not farmers, and you open with the Kabbalah?

KLEIN: Not only that. Even for Boston *Keter* was radical. Very physical, a little violent, and in five languages.

SCHECHNER: Did you write the text?

KLEIN: Yes, but the central text is the poem "To each person there is a name"²³ commemorating the Holocaust.

SCHECHNER: Did local people come to see it? Was it a success?

KLEIN: Well we had a fair amount of audience, mostly from the five colleges.²⁴

SCHECHNER: How far are you from them?

KLEIN: We're about a 30-minute drive from Smith, the closest; 45 minutes from Amherst and UMass. The five-college community, mostly faculty, comprised 60 to 70% of the audience. Another 10 to 15% came from the Western Mass. Jewish community who knew about us from our work demonstrations in Northampton and our Ukrainian work. The rest were Boston audiences who followed us.

SCHECHNER: Did any locals attend?

KLEIN: Not many. They probably didn't like it that much; *Keter* was probably too Hasidic. A few people from Ashfield. Gene might have come. I think Don Robinson from the Select Board. He was an early supporter. Reverend John and Mary Snow. Mary was raised in Ashfield and John was a professor at the Harvard School of Divinity. They recently had retired to Ashfield. They saw everything DE did and tried to engage the town. They were very connected to us spiritually and creatively. They joined our Board in 1997.

But let me backtrack because I just remembered something we did before the barn opening. We went to the B'nai Israel synagogue in Northampton and performed some of *The Song of Absence*, which we'd opened back in 1988. What we did was based on a true story of a woman who was raped in a gymnasium [school] in Poland during the Holocaust. The story was excerpted from *Shielding the Flame* [1986], a conversation between Hanna Krall and Dr. Marek Edelman, the last surviving leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Bonnie played the Shekinah crossing the gymnasium bleeding, trying to get help, but nobody helped her. She crossed the auditorium and got into a mikva [Jewish ritual immersion in water], which was actually a boiler we got from a junk yard. It had a fire and smoke in one end, so it combined mikvah and oven. This is what I chose to do as our first greeting to the area.

SCHECHNER: Before the barn opening?

KLEIN: Yes. Rabbi Phil Graubart invited us to do something in the synagogue because he knew *The Song Trilogy* explored Jewish themes. The audience's reaction was mixed, at best. One

23. Since 1989, every year on Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Israeli Knesset holds the "Unto Every Person There Is a Name" ceremony in the Chagall State Hall. Names of Holocaust victims are read aloud. The ceremony's title is from Zelda Schneurson Mishkovsky's (1914–1984) poem "To Every Person There Is a Name, Bestowed on him [her] by his [her] Father and Mother."

24. The Five College Consortium of Western Massachusetts includes the University of Massachusetts Amherst and four colleges: Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, and Smith.

woman brought her young daughter whom I didn't want to let in because she was under 14. But the woman insisted. Then after, she was enraged with me. The synagogue community was conservative at the time. Nobody spoke a word afterwards. I was totally oblivious to the values of the communities I was working in. But as it turned out, there are people in our audience today who were in that room back then. What we did in the synagogue may have been shocking, inappropriate without providing a context, but clearly some people recognized its importance.

Also, before opening the barn, we performed music we learned in the Ukraine in Ashfield's town hall.

SCHECHNER: Did local people come?

KLEIN: Yes.

SCHECHNER: And their reaction?

KLEIN: Many had no idea what we were doing. We were singing in Ukrainian. And even if it had been in English it was Jewish related. A few people knew what we were doing because there is a long tradition of folk music in Ashfield. But the point is we just did our thing without giving our audience any context. After the synagogue and town hall performances, people weren't going to buy tickets. What we were doing didn't relate to them.

That's not entirely true. At the synagogue probably 10 or 20 people out of 65 said, "This is really profound." About 75 to 100 came to the town hall; the concert was free. We performed because we wanted people to know who we were. We wanted to try to share something. We understood that we needed to make an exchange. That was in '96.

Then we did *Keter* in the barn in Spring 1997. We got a fair amount of audience, and performed for three weeks. Carlos [Uriona] began working with Double Edge in '96 and moved to the farm in '97. He is a genius at getting grassroots involvement. Even so, when we did the entire *Song Trilogy* in '98, the audiences were very small. They didn't come back after *Keter*. Clearly, this type of material was not something the local people wanted.

Carlos's arrival was essential to the development of the farm and Double Edge's relationship to the community. In Argentina, he worked in plazas with thousands of people. Philip Arnoult, who was producing Carlos's puppet theatre, Diablolomundo, in Buenos Aires, arranged for a tour in the USA. Once here, Carlos decided he wanted to work in the States for a while. Philip took him to different theatres. When he brought him to the farm, Carlos wanted to get involved.

Instantly, we started arguing. That's always a good sign. He thought that we should be more popular, engaging people more. I thought we should continue with our artistic work come hell or high water. Also, Carlos was adamant that everyone in the theatre had to share in creating income, it could not all be my responsibility. But he loved what we were doing. Carlos visited once a month for the next six months.

SCHECHNER: Had you become a couple at that point? Were you lovers? Did he return for the theatre or for you?

KLEIN: Our relationship grew out of our theatrical fire, I would say. Lovers? Not at that point. I was just extracting myself from a terrible marriage and Carlos was still married. Over the course of those six months in 1996 he worked with me on producing and he watched rehearsals and performances. Meanwhile he was very unhappy at his job as general manager of the theatre at the University of Tennessee—a job Philip found for him—because the work wasn't deep, they weren't building an ensemble and Carlos wanted to be in an ensemble. Also, Carlos really is a community person and there wasn't any community there.

We decided to make him DE's managing director. In the spring of '97 he moved to the farm with his wife and their sons: Eugenio, who was three, and Manuel, who was 15. Manuel, a percussionist, now travels from Argentina regularly to compose and play music for DE. After



Figure 9. Stacy Klein and Carlos Uriona in rehearsal for *Don Quixote Summer Spectacle at the Farm*, 2003. Directed by Stacy Klein. (Photo courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)

a time, Carlos went back to Argentina to repair both his theatre and his marriage but that did not go well. I visited his theatre in March of '98. Carlos returned to DE in the summer, started training with us, and then replaced David Flaxman in *Song of Absence*. The combination of Carlos's community work and his desire for depth in theatrical creation was very powerful. Over this time we became partners, lovers, and friends. Both of us had been in difficult periods of breaking up with our spouses. Carlos was cautious about relationships, having separated shortly after coming to the farm. Carlos's son Eugenio came from Argentina to live with

us in 2000, when he was 6. Neither of us wanted to marry again but we did in 2002, the day before we were off to Europe on tour. Tadea and Cariel were adopted by Carlos in 2007. Part of our motive was to make sure Carlos and Eugenio would not have a problem getting back into the USA.

SCHNECHNER: Did Carlos speak English at that point?

KLEIN: He always spoke English; he went to an English language high school. Within a couple of months of his moving to Double Edge in '97, everybody in Ashfield knew Carlos. He was involved with everything. He played soccer and coached all three of our kids at their different schools. He was accepted in Ashfield like no other. The wife of a guy who once wrote a nasty letter to us told Carlos he was an incredible neighbor, and he really was. Carlos would help anybody, he would talk to anybody. He was a one-man outreach. As part of his work he called people and asked them to come to our theatre. He got the whole audience involved. I had never seen anything like that.

In Argentina, Carlos created work in the plazas and thousands of people came—during the military dictatorship.²⁵ He really understood community in a whole different way. On the other hand, I really didn't like the work of his theatre, *Diablolmundo*, when I saw it on tour in 1991 at Philip Arnoult's Theatre Project. The subject was important but the performers were not engaged with their bodies, with their whole being. When Carlos came to DE and saw our training he was very moved, very drawn to it. When I went to Argentina in March 1998 for one month I saw *Los Calandracas*, another street theatre that Carlos worked with whose work inspired me. I led a training workshop with *Diablolmundo* but his own group did not want to work intensely. Then they asked Carlos to produce and stop acting. I thought that was a crime: I was very drawn to his work as a performer. What it all added up to was that he was ready for a big change, and so was I. Carlos really set Double Edge in a new direction. Keep doing what we were doing artistically but open ourselves up to the community. We became a group where everyone shared responsibility.

25. In 1976 a military coup unseated Isabel Perón. The US-backed "Dirty War" continued until general elections were held in 1983 (see Diamint 2019).

For all that, in 1999/2000 we almost closed the theatre. Some of the ensemble from the *Song Trilogy* left. We couldn't pay the mortgage. We didn't have enough paid work. Because of a recession we'd lost much of the foundation's investments and spent all the rest. I told Rob Orchard, "I'm gonna go to law school and Carlos is in massage school. We'll close the theatre and live on the farm." Rob answered, "That's ridiculous. Better to just be the two of you, figure out a way to make small things. You're a theatre director." I thought about that a lot. We didn't close the theatre. We figured it out. Rob produced *Quixote* and *The Republic of Dreams* and he encouraged ArtsEmerson when he moved there as Executive Director to produce *The Grand Parade*.

SCHECHNER: How many people stayed?

KLEIN: Jennifer [Johnson] and John [Peitso] and Carroll [Durand]. We started building the next cycle and got ready for more touring. Matthew Glassman²⁶ and a few other students had just come to learn from us. In 2001, after 9/11 we were touring—it was awful, everybody was depressed, nobody wanted to go anyplace. So we just did all of our stuff throughout the year and planned for the next summer. Włodek, Bill Reichblum, and I made a consortium from 1999 to 2001 to exchange students between Ashfield and Gardzienice. We had another partner, László Upor in Hungary, now the director of the National Theatre Academy. During the summers in Ashfield we had more students. After a couple years of exchanges, we felt we needed to work outside, on the land. So in 2002, we created our first outdoor spectacle, *The Saragossa Manuscripts*, written by Jan Potocki. Carlos and Matthew were the leading actors and were joined by students from the US, Poland, Hungary, and Romania—a total of 6 people.

We trained and rehearsed outside for three weeks. We ran in the fields, built a raft for the pond scene, created scenes for an episodic tale about a Spanish lieutenant who goes on a search, encounters demons, and fights military invasions. Carlos played the lieutenant, a perfect role for him, and also a great story for me as a director; it was like an Isaac Bashevis Singer story. There was a mystic Jewess, performed by a Gardzienice student, whom the lieutenant encounters. As night falls, she sings a beautiful song, goes into the water, and disappears. This became a signature of the spectacles: someone vanishing in the water at night. The only problem was that Carlos did not know how to swim. A total of 45 people came, locals, 15 a night, for three nights. We got a weird review in the *Northampton Gazette* saying the performers were mostly our family members.

SCHECHNER: Why did they say that?

KLEIN: The kids were in it because we didn't have a baby sitter.

A light flashed. Oh, this is a way to actually work with the community, right? The next year we did *Don Quixote* for five days and we had more audience, about 50 people a night. By the time we did *The Odyssey* in 2011 and 2012, the spectacles ran for six weeks, five to six performances a week. Completely sold out, as they are now. Outdoor performances at the farm bring in 80 to 90 per night for 6 weeks, 5 to 6 days a week.²⁷ On tour our indoor performances are generally full houses with 300 to 600 people per night and our outdoor touring spectacles have usually 700 to 1,000 people per performance.

SCHECHNER: Let's discuss business. You derive what percentage of your income from touring, what percentage from teaching, what percentage from performing on the farm, and how much from contributions and grants?

KLEIN: From 2012 to 2019, it's gone from 50% earned and 50% contributed to 33% earned and 67% contributed because we're raising money to finish all the buildings. Over the same

26. Glassman, ensemble performer, director, writer, and training leader, joined DE in 2000.

27. This summer so far, Double Edge reports, just 45 per night due to COVID.



Figure 10. New archive room in pavilion, 2019. (Photo by David Weiland; courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)

period, we've spent approximately \$900,000 on building renovations with more planned for the next three years. The overall budget, including capital building and operating, has increased from \$650,000 in FY13 to \$1,300,000 in FY19. (In 2002 the budget was \$75,000.) We get a lot of money to renovate buildings from the Massachusetts Cultural Council Cultural Facilities Fund. It's much harder to get operating money in a rural area. In 2013, I was awarded the Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, which was a big help [\$275,000]. Then in 2017, we received an ArtPlace grant [\$275,000] which was another big boost.

Our student programs have also grown. We've gone from two a year in Boston to 10 to 12 now. We bought the student house in 2007. It's the last house in town on Main Street, a 20-minute walk to the farm. Students are here for three months, some in the summer, some in the fall. They come from the US, Latin America, Europe, and Asia. A few years ago people used to laugh at us "crazy theatre people." But now with a lot more students spending money in town, the local people are accepting them. We also have three intensives a year with up to 25 students. In addition to students we also have a residency program for Black



Figure 11. New kitchen, 2019. (Photo by Milena Dabova; courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)

professional artists to retreat and create their own performances and a studio space with a focus on mentorship of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx emerging artists. This is an opportunity not only for the artists but for DE and the local community. Our art justice work has included residencies for Latinx and Black artists since 2015 but we only opened a dedicated studio for this work in 2018. These are now year-round. And since 2017 we were trying to build a space for Indigenous culture practice. We completed that in December 2019. It's called Ohketeau, Nipmuc for "to plant and to grow"; it's in a beautiful barn on our property, now accompanied by an outdoor space. It's autonomously run by the Ohketeau Culture Council, and we've been working together since December, particularly with the Nipmuc, who have been on this

land for thousands of years but had no space in Ashfield or the Hilltowns. Events have already included a solstice gathering and retreat, and upcoming events will extend to area youth. They'll also have housing attached to this space.

SCHECHNER: To get back to Ashfield, your involvement with the community became more than individuals attending the summer spectacles, right?

KLEIN: The spectacles were an opportunity for the town to learn how to see things they might not be comfortable seeing. That's something I'm proud of, it's at the heart of what I am trying to do. A lot of different types of people from town came to *The Grand Parade* (2013) and they really loved it. We've brought our two kinds of performances into harmony with each other. We tour both the spectacles and our indoor work. And we're taking this model to other communities. We did *The Odyssey*, for example, on the Atlantic Ocean in Maine at the College of the Atlantic and we did *Once a Blue Moon* in Jamaica Plain near Boston and in Springfield a



Figure 12. *New shop, 2019.* (Photo by Kim Chin-Gibbons; courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)



Figure 13. *Leonora's World at the Farm, 2019.* Directed by Stacy Klein. (Photo by Kim Chin-Gibbons; courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)

couple of times. In Jamaica Plain we paraded down the street dancing and singing; we rehearsed in the trees and in front of the more or less abandoned cathedral. People came to watch us rehearse. Over weeks they started to trust us. They went into the church for the first time since it was sold to pay for child abuse lawsuits against the Catholic Church. In Springfield we per-



Figure 14. *Community Day at the Farm, 2017.* (Photo by Matt O'Hare; courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)



Figure 15. *Community Day at the Farm, 2019.* (Photo by Kim Chin-Gibbons; courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)

wanted a Jewish community we should have stayed in Boston. So I took Cariel out. Not only for that, but also because of the way girls were being educated. We put Cariel into Full Circle in Bernardston, a private school. There the parents provided all the celebrations ourselves. We ended up making 80 latkes every year. Our son, Eugenio, also went to Full Circle and is now an airplane pilot.

formed in a park that rarely has a crowd. Both of these were with students who had never performed in the streets. In Norway we enlivened a historical park where Norway defeated Sweden, in Halden near the North Sea. We performed in the ruins and in the fortress. In all these places, people see themselves, their history, and their culture in a different way. They see what is possible. It really works. Imagine what would happen if everyone went to the streets in the US.

SCHECHNER: And in Ashfield?

KLEIN: It's a small community of 1,700 people. By the late '90s our families were integrated into the school systems and other activities. Cariel²⁸ was in second grade at Sanderson Academy, a public school. Because Tadea²⁹ had complicated learning disabilities she had to go to a special school. In December, Cariel came home and said, "I want to do Hanukkah." She told me that there was a Christmas tree at school but when Cariel asked the teacher about celebrating Hanukkah, she said no. Cariel said she told the teacher she could bring latkes and whatever, but still the teacher told me and Carlos that if we

28. Cariel is now Double Edge's associate producer and aerialist.

29. Tadea is now Double Edge's costume designer and farmer.

Taking Cariel out of public school lost Double Edge an important local connection. But we did send the kids to learn tae kwon do in Ashfield. The master, Roger Lynch, and his wife became very engaged with DE and us personally. We've held several large events for them at the theatre. Double Edge people volunteered to help out in the local park and so on. But this kind of outreach only goes so far. Right up through *The Arabian Nights* [2009], the *Firebird* [2010], and *The Odyssey* [2011] many spectators came from outside town, from the five colleges, or even from Boston or New York. The local people who came were intellectuals or from the church or people who'd moved to Ashfield looking for a retreat. We weren't getting the older community members at all. And we lost a fair amount of our Boston community who didn't understand why we changed from doing intense, dense, and visceral imagistic performances to spectacle.

And we kept having to spend a lot of money we didn't have. Ironically, that's what turned things around. The health department said, "You are having a lot of people here, don't try to fool us, you need a large septic system." The septic system cost \$150,000, which we didn't have. The Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund gave us \$75,000, which we matched with a bank loan secured by the local Community Development Corporation. To make payments, DE got a mortgage on the farm from the Greenfield Savings Bank, which we never could before. So DE finally was able to take over the mortgage on the farm.³⁰

We hired Ray Gray—from one of the earliest families in Ashfield—to put in the septic system. His company also cleaned out the pond. Ray and people working with him were doing the septic system at the same time as we were rehearsing. There were plumbers, electricians, and others seeing us work the same hours as they did, and even more. All of a sudden they're saying, "These aren't a bunch of lazy theatre people, these are people who really work hard like we do. These are good people."

Everything started to change. Adam³¹ got Ray Gray to come to *The Odyssey* in the summer of 2011. At first, he said he wouldn't come because theatre's boring. I've heard that a million times in Ashfield because they think it's all talking and not relevant to them. But Ray loved it. He became our hero. He got a lot of other people to come. *The Odyssey* moves all around the farm taking spectators on a journey with the performers. It had live pigs, a large boat on our pond, and lots of other exciting things like performers flying over the baby barn and across the main barn. The local people, including the conservationists who did not want us to move to the farm in the first place, saw that we are actually respecting the land. They can't believe we're using the land like that. They're very happy. They are now our stalwarts.

Most of the farmers in the area come to our performances. Local contractors do all of our building work. Stone masons saw what we were doing and said, "We can build stone towers for you. We can put stones around your septic system." They made a mosaic around a stone fountain. People told us, "I can do this. I can do that." Some guided our farming, telling us about the weather. We also engaged local artists and musicians. All these local people helped us build the spectacles. We developed a combination of volunteers and barter. We supported local businesses by hiring them to build or renovate buildings funded by the State Cultural Facilities Fund, a project of the Mass Cultural Council and Mass Development. We also began engaging our audience as members. People who contribute a certain amount receive free Summer Spectacle tickets as well as being invited to two gatherings a year, in the winter and early summer, with

30. Currently DE has three properties: the farm, with the mortgage started in 2009; the artist resident house and guest artist studio/Ohketeau building, with a mortgage initiated in 2007; and the design house, owned outright and purchased in 2017.

31. Adam Bright, Double Edge's producing executive director and ensemble actor, joined Double Edge in 2006. Other ensemble members are: Jeremy Louise Eaton, associate and design director since 2004; Hannah Jarrell, associate director of community development, performer since 2005; Milena Dabova, associate director, lead actor since 2009; Amanda Miller actor/singer since 2011; and Travis Coe actor, cocreator since 2016.



Figure 16. *The Odyssey at the Farm, 2012. Directed by Stacy Klein. (Photo by David Weiland; courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)*

Franklin County and the Valley perform from 1 to 5 in the afternoon in many venues in town. No one charged us for using the venues. There was music, visual arts, dance, film, tae kwon do demonstrations, etc. All local. Meanwhile our ensemble and about 20 volunteers from town, including our doctor, portrayed different characters from the history of the town. Jennifer guided the volunteers' development of their roles. We researched over five months. We used the actual places they lived in. It wasn't a reenactment, it was performing people who'd inhabited the town as starting points for a dramaturgy. The founders of the town were African American freed slaves. The first two women elected to office in the USA, in 1855, were from Ashfield. We had a parade with a giant bucket loader operated by Ray picking up a farmer and carrying him over the street. In hay carts were puppets representing townspeople. Everyone paraded to the lake. 700 people each day. Then Cariel, who's a skilled circus aerialist, zipped over the lake representing the blue heron, a bird that spends its summers visiting the farm. Ray provided all of the farm equipment: a crane, a bucket loader—both of which he operated—hay carts, and some older historical machinery. Phil Pless, the man who sold us the farm, acted in the Town Spectacle in clown whiteface. So many many many people were involved.

SCHECHNER: This all began at around the time of *The Odyssey*?

food, music, and conversation with the DE company. These are community-building events. Since the *Song Trilogy* in Boston, we've had postshow gatherings with the audience, where they could read materials or look at the artwork involved, talk to us, and share wine and water. The audiences very much look forward to these direct interactions, relations beyond the art. These now occur every time we perform, whether at home or on tour.

Ray and other craftspeople don't volunteer construction and things like that. We pay for that. But they support us by coming to our performances. The explosion of interaction with the town led us to do a spectacle in the town, about the town, and for the town. The idea generated in 2015/16 and we raised money from the NEA and other funders. The Town Spectacle was different from what we did on the farm: it was free, it took place in the town itself.

In 2017, it became The Town Spectacle and Culture Fair. For two days in May we had 80 people and groups from all over

KLEIN: People started getting engaged around the time of the *Arabian Nights*, 2009, when some retired local carpenters volunteered to help us build the set.

Even earlier, in 2005, a local woman told me, “We think you should have a forum with the town so we can tell you what we think you should be doing.” I shot back: “This is my theatre, I’m the one paying for it, why should I do what you want?” She answered, “Well that’s what a community is.” I didn’t agree and it took me a long time to change my mind. In fact, I didn’t change my mind. There is a difference between creating one’s art that is generated by one’s own imagination and engaging people in that art. Once people are engaged, a mutuality arises, such as the Town Spectacle and Culture Fair. This was Double Edge’s gift to the town’s people for their participation and support. It was also everyone’s desire to understand the history of Ashfield.

In fact, Ashfield is unique, a direct democracy, once part of Shays’s Rebellion,³² a stop on the Underground Railroad, and a place with a tradition of religious freedom—the Shakers’ Mother Ann Lee (1736–84) preached in Ashfield after she was kicked out of other places.

Five years ago, in 2014, we celebrated our 20th anniversary of living in Ashfield. We invited everybody in the town. We created a Living Culture Award that we gave to Roger Lynch, the taekwon do master who’s done a lot for the town. We invited the town to talk about Double Edge, and of course to eat—that’s part of every DE event. We asked what they might want from us. Basically, they told us we were doing a great job.

SCHECHNER: So you are knitting the theatre into the town. Do they pay to come to your theatre?



Figure 17. Parade in The Ashfield Town Spectacle, Ashfield, 2017. Directed by Stacy Klein. (Photo by Tamara Sloan; courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)

32. Shays’s Rebellion was an armed uprising led by Daniel Shays in Western Massachusetts in 1786–87, opposing seizure of farms by foreclosure, imprisoning debtors, and the government’s effort to collect taxes. Although the rebellion was put down, its effect was to reform debt law (see for example History.com 2019).

KLEIN: Ray Gray and a few other permanent contractors get comps. And they give us substantial discounts. But almost everybody else pays, though there's an Ashfield discount. We have a membership—more than 50 families from town are members. Both Ashfield and Double Edge have come so far. Think about it. Double Edge has increased property values and we're the largest employer in Ashfield.

SCHECHNER: How many people does Double Edge employ?

KLEIN: Oh, way more than an individual farm. On a full-time basis, 18 people. That includes 12 who are DE's artistic ensemble doubling as staff and 6 full-time staff, all from Ashfield. Plus, there are usually 3 or 4 interns. We also have an art justice consultant, a marketing designer, and a bookkeeper, all permanent but not full-time. Additionally, we hire summer contracted labor, cooks, carpenters, etc., and many carpenters, electricians, and plumbers. We work with a local solar company developing green energy on all the Farm properties and will create a solar farm for the town in the next years. We also bring our audiences and our students to restaurants, the general store, the convenience store, B&Bs, especially in the summer.

Even more important is that young people are starting to remain in Ashfield and raise families here. A decade ago, Ashfield was diminishing; now it's growing. In 2016, Michael Fitzgerald, the son of the farmers Bill and Marion Fitzgerald who sold us the farm, joined DE as the facilities/tech director and he oversees new building projects. Michael works on the farm where he was born and raised. Michael told me when he is in the barn watching us do aerial work, he remembers jumping across the beams into the hay. I also remember Mary Snow crying during our *Quixote* performance in 2003 when Quixote walked up the hill and pasture into the dark. She had sledged down that hill 65 years before as a child. The town meets Double Edge in so many specific ways.

SCHECHNER: So unlike Gardzienice or Alternate Roots/Roadside Theatre³³ you're not trying to find and use the performance culture of these people—their dances, music, and so on. Double Edge in Ashfield is more of an economically and socially integrated part of the community, part of its muscle. What started with mutual suspicion and tension has evolved into mutual dependence and cooperation. Even while Double Edge is knit into Ashfield, the company keeps on developing artistic work independent of the town. You bring in students, you tour. What's the relationship between your home base in Ashfield and your work around the world?

KLEIN: For many years our indoor work, as we called it, and our spectacle work was separate. When we did *Quixote* in 2003 we had two versions, indoors and outdoors. In 2019 we decided to have three shows a season. Until then, people thought we were just a summer theatre. But our budget requires performances here in the other seasons as well as touring. That's why we performed *Leonora and Alejandro* at the Farm in November 2018, April 2019, and February 2020, and in Albuquerque in March 2020. *Leonora and Alejandro* premiered at Peak Performances in Montclair, New Jersey in March 2018. We were going to take it on a world tour, but that was cut off by the COVID-19 pandemic. We also had a symposium, *Women and Magic: The Hidden Territories of Women's Creativity*, that was packed with townspeople in April 2019.

All this indoor work was challenging both economically and artistically. I figured out how to fit *Leonora and Alejandro* in the barn—actually it was really nicely intimate in the barn compared to the large Kasser Theater at Peak Performances in Montclair, New Jersey, where it pre-

33. From the Alternate Roots website: "Roadside Theater was founded in the coalfields of central Appalachia in 1975 as part of Appalshop, which had begun six years earlier as a War on Poverty/Office of Economic Opportunity job training program in film, for economically poor youth. From its inception, young Appalachians saw Appalshop as the means to defy the national stereotypes of their mountain home by telling the region's story in the voices of the people living there" (Roadside Theater n.d.; see also Fink 2020).

miered. I was moved: this was the first time that our spectacle audience saw one of Double Edge’s non-spectacle works. For the first time our two worlds converged. Before, I felt the local people wouldn’t appreciate our indoor work. But now I’m thinking we can develop a local audience for that work. Three quarters of the town is not farming anymore, it’s partially a bedroom community with a lot of eco-conscious people and some intellectuals. We understand each other now.

SCHECHNER: How has your aesthetic development been affected by Ashfield?

KLEIN: The spectacles are always intended for families. But even so, we go pretty far, like with the war in *The Odyssey*. In *We The People* (2018) we showed a lot of local history; it was political and site specific.³⁴ *Once a Blue Moon—Cada Luna Azul* (2015) drew on Latin America, Carlos’s world, and his experience during the dictatorship, but it was also entertaining for the whole family because there was salsa, murga, candombe, and live music. The way we use the whole farm in the spectacles—the pastures, the barn, the pond, the trees—is a big change from my early work which used to be much more “poor theatre,” the images drawn by the actors alone. Now I design and paint in full color. The land has given me a sense of place—a humble understanding that we humans are a small part of life, full of wildness and hope. Still, while I love creating the spectacles, I also need to return to the inner work of the imagination, where I can share the intimacy of creation with the ensemble and understand my dreams, or at least argue with them.

Addendum

On 6 April 2020, in response to Schechner asking if the Ashfield community has helped DE after the onset of Covid-19, Klein responded:

KLEIN: Yes, definitely, the community has been our bedrock. The virus meant that the third week of a three-month world tour of *Leonora and Alejandro* two years in the making was canceled. We grabbed flights home from Albuquerque heartbroken and financially shattered. The day we arrived home, John Howland, the president of Greenfield Savings Bank, told us we would not go under because of debt to the bank. He suspended our mortgage payments and our



Figure 18. Leonora & Alejandro: *La Maga y el Maestro* at Peak Performances at Montclair State University, 2018. Directed by Stacy Klein. Performers: Amanda Miller, Jennifer Johnson, Carlos Uriona. (Photo by Maria Baranova; courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)

34. From Steve Pfarrer’s review in *The Daily Hampshire Gazette*: “Driving those mostly outdoor spectacles have been storylines built from a variety of sources — the artwork of Marc Chagall, Latin American literature, ancient Greek legends — designed to transport the audience to distant or magical lands. But *We The People* [...] centers the story right at home, invoking real-life historical figures from Ashfield and Western Massachusetts, while also asking questions about what it means to be part of a community — or to be shut out of one. From Henry S. Ranney, who in the 1800s farmed the same land Double Edge now calls home, to W.E.B. Du Bois, the seminal African-American scholar and civil rights activist from Great Barrington, to suffragist Lucy Stone, the first woman from Massachusetts to earn a college degree, *We the People* offers a wealth of rich characters in an unconventional, imaginative setting” (Pfarrer 2020).



Figure 19. Carlos Uriona in *We The People at the Farm*, 2018. Directed by Stacy Klein. (Photo by David Weiland; courtesy of Double Edge Theatre archive)

credit line payments both principal and interest for three months or longer. He explained when we tried to thank him that DE is “a jewel of Franklin County,” an essential asset for the region both in art and education—and DE creates jobs. Other locals supported us too, including Yves Salomon-Fernández, president of Greenfield Community College, who said we’d work together to lift the students with culture at this time and assured future programming. Richard Warner, Double Edge’s doctor, has helped with our post-travel health and safe practices. Warner is the doctor I mentioned who played a key role in the Town Spectacle. So many others are offering support of every kind. Just as the community played a big part in our tour preparations, people know now how much help we need putting our artistic hearts back together. We will create a physically distant socially together spectacle in Summer 2020 to thank those in the Ashfield community for their incredibly moving solidarity.³⁵

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