



## COMBINING CULTURE + COMMUNITY

### What is DNAWORKS?

DNAWORKS is an arts service organization in New Mexico dedicated to furthering artistic expression and dialogue, focusing on issues of identity, culture, class, and heritage. I co-founded DNAWORKS co-founded it in 2006 with Adam McKinney

### What led you to found DNAWORKS?

When Adam and I met, our first conversation was about identities that we saw represented and identities that we *didn't* see represented. Given each of our experiences and individual heritages, or mixture of heritages, we really didn't see a lot of theatre in which we felt represented—people who didn't fit neatly into clearly defined boxes. We knew from our work in the field that there were a lot of other people who felt the same way, both artists and audience members. Founding DNAWORKS was an attempt to tell these stories with a certain level of complexity and to use art to create opportunities for dialogue about these issues.

### What are the actual processes or methods you use?

It really changes according to each community we work with, because we want to tap into whatever already exists in terms of strengths and philosophies within that particular community. A devised methodology tends to really work best, because that is porous enough to allow for these various communities' strengths to be brought into the room and to flourish.

### Are there examples of independent projects being created by the community once you have finished working with them?

Yes. In just about every site we've been, there has been something that has bubbled up from the community. I think it was the confluence of what the community did while we were there that created the excitement and courage to step up and create something on their own.

## SOUTHWEST

Arizona | California | Hawaii | Nevada  
New Mexico

SW | Members = 343  
Associates = 81



**RICK LOMBARDO**, Artistic Director at San Jose Repertory Theatre, became SDC's Southwest Regional Rep in 2011. In his tenure as Regional Rep he has already traveled up and down the California coast and welcomes the chance to get to know the full Membership in the Southwest. For this issue, director **Daniel Banks** discusses his work with the communities of the Southwest.

The best and easiest example is the Hip Hop Theatre Initiative, which is sponsored by DNAWORKS. In every single venue that the Hip Hop Theatre Initiative gave workshops, spoke, and spent time, a project or organization grew; some are still in existence and flourishing. I'm very proud of this. I have always felt in leading or teaching or facilitating that it is best eventually for participants to take things into their own hands, a kind of "planned obsolescence."

### How do you measure the success of your work?

One of our absolute measures in knowing we have brought value or contributed something to the community is the quality of dialogue afterwards. For example, when we walk out of the theatre an hour after a performance and dialogue, and the street is full of people talking about the show. Or when a dialogue session lasts longer than the performance. Or watching audience members sitting next to each other, reaching for each other's hands as they talk about their own experiences, and explaining how impassioned they feel about humanity—what they have in common with this person they are randomly sitting next to, or how they learned something about a particular group they didn't know before, or how they found this incredible point of connection, similarity, or synchronicity. Then we have a sense that our time in that community has been useful. We also, of course, use feedback forms, stay in touch with community organizers, and make our email addresses available to community members.

### What are some of the challenges you face?

The biggest challenge small organizations face is needing to do everything on their own and not having a large enough staff to do it. We have great supporters, but in the best of all possible worlds, we would have a funding structure where we had an experienced, paid employee who was the head of each initiative.

Several colleagues from around the country are pushing for us to reconfigure as an

ensemble theatre company in New Mexico. I'm drawn to that proposal, and that obviously would require a huge amount of work. Arts funding in NM is fairly limited.

### What is unique about doing the work you do in New Mexico?

There's a lot of work happening in the region. Adam and I have this inherent desire to bring lots of people to the table. One of the things we find we're able to do in both his work as chair of the dance department at the New Mexico School of the Arts and with DNAWORKS is bring as many people from as many organizations together and say, "Let's work together, let's partner, let's collaborate, let's talk about holes we can fill in each other's portfolio of work."

I'm on the founding board of a new professional performing arts conservatory initiative called PACS (Performing Arts Conservatory of the Southwest). Already DNAWORKS is starting to co-produce events with PACS. We just did our first event together, a reading of Caridad Svich's play, *Spark*, about a young woman returning home from war to her small town and her family of three sisters. We did a reading at Teatro Paraguas, and the small theatre was completely packed, which is not always the case with theatre in Santa Fe. After, we had a dialogue with a panel that included a local woman whose daughter is in basic training, the father of one of the actors who's a Vietnam veteran, one of the actors and her sister whose father and brother are both veterans—and it was one of those moments where time stopped. The audience was listening to the emotional stories the panelists were sharing, and the play and panel together left an impression. People immediately began asking how they could help and were planning to take action. It felt like DNAWORKS had really landed in Santa Fe.