

One More Productions

Grand Opening – June 28, 2008

Damien Lorton's Opening Speech

Good morning and welcome! My name is Damien Lorton, and I am the Artistic Director of One More Productions. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mayor Pro Tempore Mark Rosen and Council Members Broadwater and Jones and the Honorable Janet Nguyen, Orange County Supervisor for being here today and for joining us in welcoming back the arts to the city of Garden Grove!

Nicole and I are so honored and grateful to be here today. One More Productions was a dream of ours almost four years ago. We were sitting in my living room one afternoon and discussing the state of theater in Orange County, and we wished there was a theater out there that offered more than just performance. We wanted a theater that offered workshops, training, opportunities of growth, and challenges - not just for actors, but for directors, artisans, technicians, musicians, and all involved in the arts. A theater that worked with its community to bring about change, love and respect for the arts - and then we thought - why don't we try it? So we did!

We called some friends that we had worked with in the past, rented a local theater, and set out to mount a show. We had no idea what we were doing. We rehearsed music in my living room, all 24 of us! We danced in my backyard during the month of August in 95°+ heat, as we sucked on popsicles and yelled at Tara for putting her feet in the ice! We danced in church parking lots and tennis courts, and when late summer came, we bounded out on stage, sunburnt and all. And it was one the happiest moments of my life.

When it was said and done, Nicole and I looked at each other again and said, "We can do this." Over the next three years, we found our wings as we mounted and produced several fully staged musicals, and it was at that time that we found this beautiful building. We subleased The GEM from its former residents and ran a season of theater. We knew from the first moment we walked in the door that The GEM would one day be our home. As the doors were shut on the building

and the city went into negotiations of what to do with it, we were invited to perform at the Festival Amphitheater by Tom Bradac. We produced Musical Theater Under the Stars but always had an eye on the little theater across the parking lot. On opening night of *Bye Bye Birdie*, Mayor Pro Tem Rosen was in the house. As soon as the performance was over, Nicole and I ran to him and wouldn't stop talking about The GEM. When he left, he said he would look into it and have someone give us a call. Within a month, we were in front of the city council, and due to the diligence and labor of the staff of the community services department, we received a unanimous vote to be given a ten year contract for The GEM with a ten year option.

We moved into the theater 12 weeks ago, and in a whirlwind of excitement and hard work, this amazing piece of history has been transformed. In that short amount of time, we have ripped out the original stage down to its roots as a 1930's vaudeville house, and replaced it with a new structure. A lighting system has been put into place, and a sound system and curtains have been installed throughout the theater to create a sound design beyond belief! A jewel in the rough has now become a true GEM, and it will shine as a beacon for this astonishing community. The arts have a new home.

There are so many individuals who have stepped forward to aid us in this adventure. The city council had the foresight and vision to know that this venue still had life left to give and to know that the community and downtown Main Street needed a home for the arts. The Community Services Department, led by Kim Huy, was there for every one of our million questions and assisted us along every step of the way. Ralph Batsel and Eric Helzer stepped forward and said, "I CARE AND I WANT TO HELP MAKE THE GEM SURVIVE AND FLOURISH." Our community, friends, and patrons have donated their time and their money to see this day come. The board of directors of One More Productions... our friends and family who have continually supported us through our struggles and conquests and never stopped to ask why, but always believed in what we did. And for me personally, I want to thank Nicole Cassesso, my business partner and my friend. Without your passion, continued belief and support, none of this would ever have been possible.

I say to you today, it is now your turn. In the words of A. Thomas Young, “Successful businesses do more than simply pass through a community. *They have a vested interest in living where the quality of life attracts the very best employees, supplies and government, academic, and civic leaders. It is inconceivable that such a quality can exist where the arts are silent.*” One More Productions and THE GEM THEATER will not be silent. We open the doors for the first fully mounted show on July 17th and within our first year we will present over 186 individual performances, commence a theater program for the youth of our community, and offer classes in all aspects of the arts. We cannot do this without you and your support. Please join our family and become a season ticket holder today. Spread the word and let our community know that we are open, thriving and bringing the arts back to Garden Grove.

On behalf of One More Productions I thank you for being here with us and for sharing with us this exciting endeavor. And now, without further ado may I please ask Mayor Pro Tem Rosen, the City Council, and the One More Productions Board of Directors to join me in cutting the ribbon to our new home!