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### Kelly Moore *The Seagull*

**Kelly Moore** is the Artistic Director of The Roundtable Ensemble. She is also a director and a founder of this theatre company.

Kelly filed her cyberspace interview Monday, December 27, 2004.

[The Seagull](#) begins performances at the Blue Heron Arts Center on January 12, 2005.

**The Roundtable Ensemble, of which you are Artistic Director, is a fairly new company. Could you tell us a bit about its formation, why it was formed and a bit about why you believe this company differs from so many already in existence?**

First, thank you for your interest in our company. We are very proud of the work we have accomplished these past five years. The Roundtable Ensemble started out of some frustration I was experiencing as a director in Showcase productions. There was never enough time or money, or any real organization to do it properly. It wasn't showcasing anyone. So I, along with a fellow thespian, Hugh Cole, and a great friend and supporter of mine, Barry Shapiro, decided to see if we could get some support for a new non-profit company doing work in this arena. I was directing *Four Dogs and a Bone* by John Patrick Shanley, something I thought would represent the quality of work we wanted to produce. We invited several people to come see if they were interested in supporting a company that would produce that quality of work. They were interested and joined Roundtable's Board. We had a fundraiser and opened our first show, *Candida* by George Bernard Shaw, approximately one year later.



In forming the company, the three of us asked ourselves what we wanted for it, and what we would define as our success. We all really believe in the power of theater. The experience can have a powerful effect on individuals. Live theater is one of the few art forms that really is an "experience" that can be very moving for all the participants. The audience is an important part of the experience because without them it can't happen. This is how our name came about – with the idea that the theater experience encompasses everyone involved, including the audience, who are part of the “ensemble.”

After our first show we had a question and answer session. The audience included students from a number of different area schools and members of various senior centers. The age range was as big as it gets and the enthusiasm and energy in the room was amazing! It proved exactly what we knew – that theater could have an incredible impact on people and

that this was a wonderful contribution to the community. Our paramount goal of providing access to these groups that often did not have the opportunity to experience theater sprang from that day and has been embraced by our hardworking Board. And that is what differentiates The Roundtable Ensemble. We are all about providing access to this unique art form for all communities to enjoy, regardless of ability to pay. And while other companies do offer a little of this opportunity, that's our entire mission. We also provide it in intimate 99-seat theaters, which I feel really allow our audiences to connect with the play.

**Your production is a new adaptation of Chekhov's *The Seagull*. Why did you choose this particular piece?**

Roundtable Ensemble began a reading series this past Spring in order to expand our mission statement, allowing us to continue to reach out to our community in between mainstage productions. It also offered us the opportunity to work with different artists and discover plays we might not have otherwise considered. It was Michael Barakiva who brought *The Seagull* to one of those readings. We thought he did a wonderful job with the piece and the audience response undoubtedly indicated their enjoyment as well. It was clear that the show would work as a fully produced production for us.

The other reason we chose *The Seagull* stems from our goal of reaching out to young audience members. I wanted to provide the opportunity for students to experience Chekhov in a way that they would truly discover and enjoy his work. And after the reading I knew this was possible. Michael is a terrific director with a great vision, and I'm confident his new adaptation will provide a thoroughly enjoyable time at the theater and open a path for students to become our future's theater lovers.

**Michael Barakiva adapted and is directing this production. How did Roundtable and Mr. Barakiva become acquainted? What was in this adaptation that seemed so perfect for your group?**

Michael Barakiva and Roundtable became acquainted through a terrific playwright, Brooke Berman. We chose two of Brooke's one-acts to produce in 2001, and she recommended Michael to direct them. In interviewing him at that time, we connected with our love of theater and the process. He's been a great supporter of Roundtable ever since.

*The Seagull* is often viewed as a gloomy Russian play depicting life in the late 19th Century. However, Michael's new adaptation really focuses on the comedy found in everyday life that Chekhov spent his whole life writing about. Reading this truly funny new adaptation, while still grounded in turn-of-the-century Europe, made *The Seagull* fresh again to me. I feel that by putting the focus on the humor of the difficult situations *The Seagull* deals with will help endear Chekhov to the students that make up so much of our audience.

**Your website states a mission of making tickets available to underserved groups at no cost. How did you decide that a diverse**

**audience was the prime goal of your group and how do you make this come true?**

The goal of a diverse audience evolved after the wonderful experience during our first production and the incredible reception from the students and the older community members that sat together in that intimate 99-seat theater. Since then, Roundtable Ensemble ([www.roundtableensemble.org](http://www.roundtableensemble.org)) has been committed to providing members of diverse, underserved communities free admission to our productions. That goal is achieved through a constant outreach program, connecting with various community leaders in the area and letting them know that Roundtable not only provides free access to theater for underserved audiences, but free access to quality theater that people want to come back to see season after season.

Growing up, I never had the opportunity to go to a play until I was well into my twenties. If I'd been exposed to theater of this quality and intimacy, as there is a big difference between this and the Broadway experience, I might have had more direction in my life. I never realized that you could be a carpenter or an electrician and work in the theater. I hope by exposing underserved groups to these smaller and more intimate productions they can see themselves in the plays we do and the work that goes into producing them.

**What has been the reaction of the groups/persons receiving these tickets and how do you go about choosing who will receive them?**

The reaction from our various audience members has been overwhelmingly positive, and in those difficult times when you ask yourself "Why do we do this," it is really what keeps us moving forward. Beyond the applause, we receive wonderful letters from many of the students and community leaders thanking us for the great time they had, and making early requests to come to our next event.

Last year, one of the actresses told me about her journey home on the subway after a performance and how a group of children who had just been to the show ran up to her to get her autograph and tell her how much they loved it. One of the children's mother said it was her child's first time in the theater and that her daughter was glued to the stage during the entire performance. I find it thrilling that the work we do helps create an audience who will come back to the theater again and again.

Roundtable's Subsidized Ticket Program is also evolving. Much of our fundraising revolves around individuals and companies who want to sponsor a group to come to the show. Other times it is people our various Board members are associated with, or people who I meet, such as one of the mentors at the Boys & Girls Clubs. We mention the opportunity of free tickets and they take us up on it. We also reach out to other organizations, such as Sports & Arts in Schools Foundation, and this year we've connected with the theater department at the Board of Education. Roundtable has also created a special educational packet on

*The Seagull* for classroom use with this group.

**How do you envision the growth of this ensemble over the next few years and what are your own personal plans within the group?**

Next season Roundtable is planning to produce two shows and continue our reading series. Of course, we'd love to produce more shows, filling the theater with New York's underserved audiences. For myself, I'd love to increase our audience, the number of shows we produce, and to perhaps begin to teach acting as well, with the ultimate success being that one of the young people who have joined us will take over my position when I, one day, many years from now, retire. That would really complete Roundtable's circle!

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