DISCOVERY Ep. 17 - English

Hello and welcome to Discovery. Conversations about the power of the arts to connect us to each other into place. I'm Victoria Rogers, vice president of arts at the Knight Foundation. Joining me today as Henry Timms, author, public speaker, creator of Giving Tuesday and president and CEO of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, preeminent performing arts complex here in the US and home to 12 performing arts companies and educational institutions dedicated to music, dance and drama. Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the Met, the New York Film, Juilliard, New York City Ballet, the Film Society of Lincoln Center. The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Jazz at Lincoln Center, Lincoln Center Theater at the Vivian Beaumont Theater and the School of American Ballet. If you have questions and we hope that you do today, please submit them through the show. If you're using Zoom, use the Q&A button at the bottom of your screen through Twitter. Use the hashtag NightLive and in the comments section of Facebook live stream.

We'll get to as many of them as we can throughout the conversation now. Henry, welcome to Discovery.

I'm very pleased to be with you. Thank you for the invitation.

You're so welcome. Hold on a minute. I've got a message here and I want to see what it is.

So last night you tweeted Tuesday, tens of millions of people did amazing and generous things in every country on Earth with over two point four billion generated in the US alone. For those who don't know, tell us about the creation and ongoing evolution of giving Tuesday. What enabled it to literally transform giving around the world?

Well, let me start by thanking you, I know many of the people who will be joining us today will have participated yesterday and giving Tuesday. And I have to I had an experience yesterday, which is I think in a year when day after day after day, our experiences of social media have been negative. Right. It's been bad news. It's been it's been awful things. Yesterday was the first day I've had this year where actually my social media was actually pretty joyful, right? It was actually a whole bunch of stuff from around the world, people doing interesting things of helping each other, being generous to each other and supporting each other. And one of the reasons giving Tuesday, I think, has had such resonance in previous years is it tells a different story than what we often tell about people. And actually especially the one we told in some ways this year, which is, you know, it's a world where people are being driven apart from each other. It's a world in which people don't trust each other. It's a world where people can't be kind to each other. All of those things giving Tuesday was designed to counteract. Right. It was always when we first thought of this product. It was always his idea, which was like Black Friday and Cyber Monday. And you remember those images of kind of people lined up in front of stores fighting over televisions. You remember those kinds of images. We always thought, well, what's the kind of philanthropic counterpoint to that? Which is what we're giving. Tuesday kind of began its life. And it's just been amazing to watch it to grow around the world.

And it's truly a project which has only grown because of the generosity of people who take it and make it bigger. They grab it and they take it somewhere you would
never expect. I was learning yesterday about a campaign in Sierra Leone this year. They did a special campaign around masking as a sign of generosity. But actually the act of Maskey is something which is an act of giving to your society and your community. And, you know, it was a reminder much needed for me, a reminder, I think, of the essential goodness in all of us.

[00:07:06] I agree with you and you really created that when you were at the 90 second Street Y, right?

[00:07:12] Yeah, we were. So we were thinking a lot. Interesting something which you a big topic today really is like how do you how do you reimagine these great institutions? If you think about the 1973 one hundred and forty four years old as an institution, how do you reimagine what it does and how it does it? And what we was trying to think about then was the. One of the great challenges of any institution is your mission becomes your model.

[00:07:43] What I mean by that is at some point you try and solve the problem. The way you solve the problem is a certain kind of model which exists at the time. And then a lot of time passes and you can't get off that idea.

[00:07:53] And so in the new century, why in decades gone past, if you wanted to engage around philanthropy, you would have all that organized a lecture about philanthropy, philanthropy, class. You would have gathered people and got them to the building to engage in a topic of philanthropy. But there wasn't really a way of distributing the message of the 90 seconds required. And so giving charity was an experiment. Say, OK, how do you take one of the values of the why? The why is a Jewish organization seven people of all backgrounds, but was very focused on the idea of how you think about being charitable and philanthropy. How would you scale that beyond the four walls of the Y? And so giving Tuesday was born in that spirit. And I remember that the great conversation at the beginning, one of the big decisions we made about giving Tuesday was not to brand it right.

[00:08:39] Not to call it the 90 second Street Y is giving Tuesday. Right. And anyone on this call who's in the nonprofit sector can probably imagine the conversation, which was like, we're going to do this thing called giving Tuesday, but we're not going to take credit for it. We're not going to make it in 90 seconds free. Why is giving Tuesday?

[00:08:55] I remember I was talking to one of our board members at the time who said, this is great, I love this. Just explain to me where the whys logo is going to be. Will it be between giving and Tuesday? And I was like, no, no, no. We're not going to make it about us. It won't ever be owned by anybody else. No one else will be able to take it somewhere new. And I think that decision was pretty bold back then and actually has really proven, proven, proven the right one.

[00:09:21] Oshakati CEO giving Tuesday.

[00:09:23] She talks about the importance of branding its idea that we as institutions actually have to be less focused on putting our stamp on things and more focused on actually how you can be a part of something, but not a space. And I think that's a very resonant idea today.
I think so as well, so, you know, less than a year into your position as the new president and CEO of Lincoln Center, covid-19 basically shuttered in-person interactions, it really drastically changed the landscape for artists and for organizations across our country. We've seen at least a fourteen point six billion dollar negative impact to date. That's just with not for profit organizations. If you look at the entire creative economy, it's one hundred and fifty billion dollars and almost three million jobs that currently don't exist. We don't know what we're getting. A couple of questions on a minute about that. But as you look back at the almost 10 months, what stood out to you? Where did you find Grace and how did you galvanize your team? To really change your programe as you pivot it a lot to digital during that period.

Look, I think once we've seen.

You think back now, I remember the day there was a video of the first lockdown in Italy, in Siena, where they remember this video, right?

Yeah, singing from the balconies.

And and this was a chorus together as a way of showing solidarity. And it was such a kind of meaningful metaphor for the coronavirus. And then I think the thing we saw in New York. I know. I saw I know you see it across the country, too, was this moment at seven o'clock each night when everyone would come out their windows and they would clap.

And we I remember we in New York, we would see so many amazing moments where you would recognize that actually there was this moment, seven o'clock at a time when everyone was so fearful we were all being kept apart. There was a moment and I always saw this in artistic terms. There was a moment this kind of like ragtag community orchestra came to life, right? Everyone go out their windows banging pots of pans.

And there was a clarinetist down look down the road for me. And like, you have this sense that it showed us what the arts do so well, which is they help us connect with other human beings in a meaningful way. And so important this year. And I think there's a kind of metaphor for the work of the arts, not just Lincoln Center, but the artistic community everywhere. What everyone did was they didn't sell music. They didn't stop creating, they didn't stop connecting. They just found new ways, often unsatisfying ways, actually, but found new ways to meet their mission. So I think the thing that I've been inspired by this year is you just look across the country at the organizations and individuals who have found new ways to meet their mission, even though their models have changed. You know, the acts of service of everyone in the New York Philharmonic has been driving around in a pickup truck to take arts to people. You've seen countless performers performing for free. I've seen people doing concerts for medical workers. You know, the artistic community as a whole, I think has just excelled at a time. It's been so badly damaged, it has excelled at actually creating service for the country. And I think one of the reasons that such a great need for greater support for the arts in general and of course, from the new administration is because the arts have served so fully this year at a time of such a challenge. And we're going to need a huge amount of help to get back on our feet.

But didn't you also turn Lincoln Center into a place for people to come and get food? I know you did voting. Yeah.
So it's not just a place for arts to talk a little bit more about how you are really involving the community and because you're serving the community.

Look, I think we think of ourselves as a cultural center and to some degree as a community center right, and it hasn't always been true. That isn't always the case. And so I think thinking about we've got a lot of work to do to reimagine our relationship with our local community, which is from the very beginning was what was controversial. And in some cases, tragic is very difficult and uncomfortable. Beginning of Lincoln Center story. And over the years, we've got to distant from people closest to us. And so there's a lot of work that we have to do to rebuild that. And so we've been very focused on work around the census. For example, we became a polling place for the first time we've been we've become a food distribution bank for the first time on campus, providing the food insecure in our own community with some support. We also always had music that was the we for all of us. I think it's fair to say, of a kind of a more civic focus to our work. We never forget fact cultural center. So it was wonderful to watch the musicians of the Philharmonic playing for those clients who were lining up for the food bank. So you have that kind of combination of the two. And I don't think for what it's worth, this was not, for me a reaction to the coronavirus. I think we were very much pre coronavirus. We were very much recognized. I think that we as an institution have a lot of work to do, as many cultural organizations do to reconnect with people who have felt too far from us and for and in some cases we've come too far. So I think that work had begun. I think it's intensified this year, no question. And you must have seen across the field, Victoria, I mean, when you like as you look across the as you look across the country alongside the the great damage which has been caused, I think there is kind of a story you can see about resilience and optimism.

I, I totally agree with you in some really unexpected ways. I've been. Excited to see some of these new hybrid formats that are coming out, one here in Miami that the Miami City Ballet did, where they commissioned a choreographer, he worked with the dancers over Zoom. Then they went in and filmed following guidelines and created duets that weren't there well, from it. But I found it really moving as I did one of the concerts that I watched on Lincoln Center's field where they were they were playing to two front line hospital workers. And the man is sitting there and the woman with tears in their eyes. And you're you're this there's socially distance or safely distanced from the violinist. But that connection, that experience that was offered to them, I mean, having a musician playing for you like that or some of the others that I've seen both at Lincoln Center and other places where artists are just making themselves totally available as they do and conveying. Their sorrow, their laughter, their feelings through their own artistic genre, and I think that's what artists do best, they give us a different lens on the world through their artistry. And for that, I am eternally grateful and makes me both on an individual level and certainly as a grant maker to want to support this creation, you know, the artistic creation and what that means for us. So we've got a question here from Peter that relates to this. Do you believe that the previous business models for the arts are still valid? Yes. Or is covid forcing arts administrators to rethink how to deliver against mission?

I think a bit of both. So I think that when the previous business models. I think there's going to be a world in which we're selling tickets and lots of them.

Right. I think especially once we get to a point where the pent up demand for congregation will be so significant.
I mean, on a personal level, I will happily spend two years going out and never see them again. I mean, there will be a point at which given the opportunity, I think the demand for people to be people is going to be pretty significant.

Henry, we haven't. We have no we don't know what you're saying with that said.

So I do think that's going to be so. I think there will be a real I think there'll be a big demand when the time comes.

I do think what will happen I think one of the there are two there are two bits of the story for the performing arts.

One is the kind of tragedy and the trauma, as you point out, the staff, especially to many individual artists.

And then another part of this is there has been a transformation that there has been more experiment in the digital space by necessity, not by intention.

I remember we used to do this thing at Lincoln Center every summer, which is we would bring in arts educators from around the country for a summer forum. It's a great thing, right? So we have hundreds of people who come to Lincoln Center. They would fly in and they'd have three or four weeks together and it would be a life changing experience for the people who came. I remember before creative arts, we were having a conversation internally and saying if there was an intellectual question at the time, would we be better off doing that every year?

Or trying to build a digital network of ten thousand arts educators who never met in person. But you would create a digital network to share best practice and ideas and solidarity with the rest of it. And we had an interesting conversation among the team, which is which would you prefer? And some people want me in person. Three hundred and some people like the ten thousand.

But that became not an academic exercise for us because we couldn't compete anymore. So we had to think about how do you scale this in some interesting ways. And so I think what I my great hope is, is that what will end up happening is people will hang on to the best parts of the old model and then build alongside it what we've learned from this new world and how we start to connect around that. And my optimistic, optimistic prediction is that we'll end up with people getting the best of both worlds that will be able to actually add to our existing model with more digital. And I think it's also better saying, look, you know, Knight Foundation has done some really interesting and useful work. And in preparedness for this, all sectors go a long, long way to go to kind of catch up with digital. You know, we have unnecessarily resisted it in many ways with the argument that somehow it's lightweight and trivial and unimportant. And that can often be true of the digital world. But it isn't always true. Right? There is there's absolutely meaning and substance to be found in digital lives. And so I think our job going forward is as artistic organizations is is how do we identify the same policy that we put on our stages online and how do we build those worlds together in a meaningful way? And that's certainly going to be a big priority in itself.

Yeah, and I've said this before and some of these conversations because I'm enjoying arts. Experiencing artists is sort of visceral for me. And because I'm not a digital native, I'm a learner, but I'm not a digital native. It's can we create. Experiences that evoke
that same kind of response in people, because for me, live performance is just something to behold. But I want I wanted to say here that we actually have somebody joining us from India parameter today. I think that's the somebody that's the furthest away that I've had yet in one of these. But we've got a couple of questions know. One that I wanted to get back to, because it's going to relate to a question that I asked you later in our conversations, but it's how do you think institutions like Lincoln Center can better engage with Native American communities and artists? For example, with Wednesday on his land, Lincoln Center was built upon. And I know that we you and I have talked some about this as well. So if you don't mind taking that one on.

[00:21:38] Yeah. And I think all of our I think we all need to go through a period of kind of reinstitution, which is by which I mean, how do we think about reconnecting with the land that we live on, the world that we inhabit, the communities that we represent and those that we don't? Right. That's a voyage of Discovery. And so we've we put together a project called the Mirror Project, which is all about how we do two things. One, how do we as an institution better reflect the world that we live in and the city we live in? And to also, how do we look in the mirror? How do we as an institution look back and look back on the parts of our history that we are proud of and record with them in a meaningful way. So that's exactly the kind of way I think that we are going to start to reset our relationship with a number of groups, people who have felt too distant from Lincoln Center and too disconnected from Lincoln Center. And Oddjob, I think, as administrators is to do whatever we can to bring down some barriers and to do whatever we can to make some connections.

[00:22:34] And that's been a priority for us from the start. And anyone who has come through this year, I think, feels that responsibility to even more significant degree.

[00:22:46] Another run related to this is, you know, have you explored how you develop partnerships with smaller and mid-sized organizations and will post covid-19 World in the arts, be smaller with mergers between like organizations in order to survive? That last question I get a lot.

[00:23:06] Yeah, I think the answer is we've certainly thinking a lot about partnership, although I don't think historically we've been as good at this as we need to get right. I think one of the dangers of becoming a big institution is you kind of start to believe your own press a little bit and you get you lose the capacity to be a good partner to lots of people. And we've got to reclaim that. So we've done some projects. I like a lot was a project we did with Cultural Innovation Fund, which was a project which connected us to small arts organizations throughout the five boroughs, which was a really powerful way, actually, of us thinking about how innovative scale and a way for us to learn from all sorts of organizations who really want kind of the Lincoln Center radar.

[00:23:48] But I think the work our going forward is actually to is by necessity, we're all going to be hyper hyper local organizations for what it's going to be a long time since we have lots of people flooding in from around the world. So I do think it's a good opportunity for us to kind of reconnect to how we engage with the city. And we've certainly been trying to do that at Lincoln Center. The the the work we've begun. And I want to underscore, Bigon, because it's many years of work ahead, the work we have begun, I think it's kind of reset our relationship, particularly with community groups, and to reengage with people and parts of the city who have not been part of Lincoln said as well in the way that they need to be.
And here's another question that relates to this conversation. Our institutions like Lincoln Center turning to Internet artists to create unconventional intersections when rethinking the public stage to the personalized computer. And that comes from Jillian.

Yes, I think this is a really interesting I'm actually I think this goes to something very interesting within two things happened last year, particularly. Right. One has been a kind of repurposing of work. So one has been let's find a way of putting that thing we've always done and holds onto the Internet. So that's the digital livestream as a console, those kinds of things, which essentially let's just try to replicate the in-person experience and put it on the Internet. And then the other thing we've seen is things which are designed for the Internet as a stage. Now, that's been happening for a long time, but you've obviously seen it intensify this year. So there's been a really interesting, I think, trend in what you call that kind of digital arts, which is work, which is designed not for a theater and then repositioned, but actually designed for the Internet. And I think that's been some of the stuff that I've been very struck by this year. We did a bunch of stuff with the works and process program with the Guggenheim in collaboration with them. And it led to some really interesting work which was done, which was actually done outside of Lincoln Center on the plaza, which was designed essentially for an Internet stage. It wasn't designed for an in-person audience. And I think that is a very promising direction. And we're certainly going to do some more work to learn and to understand some of the work in that field and see what Port Lincoln Center might play.

Another one, and then I'll go on to my next question for you, Henry, is. This one is from Hadassah. Are you focused on keeping new audiences that have developed is. And have your contributions from remote audiences been significant?

Yes and no, in that order, I think I wondered about that.

So I think we've I think that there has definitely been a world of people we've opened up to like appeals you the help. Right now, they've had 15 million people watch their free live stream in the evenings. Amazing service throughout this year to people, which is providing free opera to people around the world. And, you know, that's had a financial positive, but by no means a very significant one. Right. So I think part of the challenge is we've and other industries went through this, too. There was a point in all industries in which there was very little money to be had in the digital world, and then that shifted pretty quick. So I do think there's going to be a kind of a shift that will work out some smart ways of engaging digitally. And I think that's going to be a big area of focus for we just set up a cap at the lab at Lincoln, set up specifically for that kind of question, which is how do we think about what that kind of revenue opportunities might be down the line in some more worlds. And then I think digital diversity in general was on our mind before coronavirus, which is one of the good, if spooky things about the platforms we have access to now as you can target audiences in a way you couldn't before. So if you're interested in reaching a demographic between twenty and thirty five of people in Brooklyn who love jazz, you can target those people pretty accurately. So what that means is you then actually can think more intentionally about curating audiences.

So who is it you're actually trying to reach and who you're trying to bring to Lincoln Center and how are you trying to make those kinds of connections? So I think there's got to be some really interesting work in the kind of digital diversity space in the sense of actually, I was thinking about marketing as a function of all the strategy.
[00:28:10] I think I think that's the direction you're going to be really interesting. And our team has done some really, really interesting work in that space. I think I think that.

[00:28:21] You sort of alluded to the program, but sort of the people that you're bringing in to do these collaborations are really interesting, these connections between artist and looking at issues within being able to decide what really what is the project that they want to create. I think it's both freeing and a phenomenal opportunity to sort of address some of the issues that we've been seeing. But you and Jeremy Heimans wrote a book, New Power, that really looks at old and new ways of Looking at power. And in that, you two posited that for every business, every organization and every political activity, mobilization of networks is the key. If you want to get ahead and you add it to that, you need to do that. You need to be committed in a strategic way, prepared to think about how you can engage more people more meaningfully, meaningfully in your work. So how is that playing out at Lincoln Center and then maybe give people? We did. There's a link that is posted in the chat, folks, for for those of you, I can tell you, it's a great read and it's given me a lot to think about as I look at how we evaluate what's happening in our country and where we can target and have even greater impact. So how is this playing out at Lincoln Center?

[00:29:50] So I think part of the way you think about the whole world in the new world, the Old World, which Lincoln Center certainly has grown up in, was one where a small number of individuals and organizations had a lot of power that they could kind of store up and spend down on their terms and if you will.

[00:30:08] And there will be those who see hints about on the ground making world as well. Right. So you can see that there's that sense of a set of institutions that are very important to our world. Right. But benefit from an old world. And what's beginning to shift now is this kind of wave of participation that is defining all of our world. Right. This kind of people's capacity to be engaged is such an interesting and important thing. So I think the interesting challenge for organizations is going to be how organizations who thrive in the old power will start to meet the new power world in interesting ways. And so I'll give you one example of Lincoln Center. We did a thing called Memorial for us all.

[00:30:45] So it was typically, if you want to have a memorial concert at Lincoln Center, someone very significant or someone of means would pass away and they would have a concert at Lincoln Center Memorial for us all with something we did with local faith groups who during the height of the coronavirus, were all challenged by the same problem, which is that they couldn't have services, they couldn't have burials at funeral services. So Memorial for US All was a weekly concert where we would have in an odd way, the best musicians in the world, performers that we had, you know, Yo-Yo Ma, Norm Lewis and people.

[00:31:17] But New Yorkers all around the city could submit names of people they wanted to have recognized so that the concert would be a tribute to people they had lost. And so thousands of New Yorkers would submit names each week and we would scroll across the screen as these works were being played. And this is a small example of, I think, the kind of direction which is right for Lincoln Center, which is we're not something a crowd Lincoln Center. Right. What we're going to try and do is look for meaningful ways to blend old and new power and bring more participation, more participate, more participation into our model. And if you want a striking example to the opportunity, think about tick tock, which I'm sure many of you are thinking about all the time.
And just think about the huge enthusiasm for choreography and dance that is playing out now. Acrostic, talking about the generations of people thinking of themselves as dancers and performers in ways they never would have done before. And there are two perspectives the whole power organizations might take on this.

One is, you know, this is trivial and it's not good enough and it's not disciplined enough. And this is amateur right posture. One posture, too, is there's this glorious opportunity of participation. So the question for institutions is how can we are value to those worlds? The question isn't how can we make sure those worlds do not want to do. The question is, what is the contribution we can provide? We can add to that world. So we've done a bunch of stuff this year, which has been kind of some fun dance videos, which have been kind of providing some expert dancers to teach dance steps and scale those.

But I think that the kind of the one extraordinary thing for all of us in the arts right now is there has never been more art just from a volume perspective. And that sounds like a weird thing to say, but actually the creation of art, we've never had more art works. We've never had more audiences.

We've never had more people of different backgrounds presenting their arts to a market in a way that that was actually pretty narrowly prescribed in the old world. So there's going to be a very interesting shift in how institutions are, as you know, chief among them, how we reimagine our work to not ignore that world or minimize it, but to connect with it.

I think that's a really good question.

Yeah. And one last question. I told you, our 30 minutes go by in a blink and has so this is from Carlos here with the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind. And he says, How is your projection to have normal activities after the majority of people get the vaccine? You know, with a live arts, performances normalize.

I don't think I have an expert view on that. We have a medical council, we put together a new consensus of leading experts, the medical world, and the line we're getting from them was, you know, you next some of looking, looking viable, not definite, but there's definitely a good chance. I think vaccination is going to be the key question.

And I think just as a closing thought, I think one thing which is going to be a big challenge in general next year is, is vaccination campaigns.

And I think the arts community is going to have a real role to play, particularly in communities who historically have distrusted the medical profession. The arts will have a really interesting role to play in connecting with groups across the country in the same way actually the arts community did with the census, really did a good job, I think, in that. So I think as we think about the kind of the great the great irony is not going to the great irony of the coronavirus is going to be that we end up getting a miracle, which is a vaccine exists, and yet it won't take it. So I think that's going to be a really interesting and challenging and important civic question for twenty twenty one. And I went with some others were doing some thinking about how the all played a role there.
So I like one more question here, but any prospect of a digital performance and art constituent being added in the foreseeable future, just as jazz at Lincoln Center was added in ninety six and met live in HD, was launched in two thousand and six.

You're on the radar. I don't think I think it's definitely the case that we ought to be wheeling and dealing in the Center for the Performing Arts, which is all of them. And there's lots of areas we've actually historically either ignored or not paid much attention to. So I think one of the things for the years ahead is how do we better engage with some disciplines we've overlooked? And I would think of this class as one of the more exciting ones.

But I couldn't agree with you more and that, you know, that is an interest of night.

So let's see what collaborations come up with. I'm looking forward to our time is up today. I'd like to thank all of you for joining and for submitting your questions. It always makes the conversations even better when we know exactly what's on your mind. Special thanks to Henry. It's just been fun, and that makes for a great day, and I want to thank the night production crew, Justin and Italia for making this all happen, remind you that the beats to the top of the show were designed and created by Chris Bar, our director of art and technology here at night. And the music that will play us out is composed and performed by the amazing jazz pianist and actor in Zone, one of nine cities there in Brown. And to ask you to tune in on December 10th for an episode of Informed and Engaged, hosted by our journalism colleagues What to Expect After the Unexpected Twenty Twenty One Predictions for Journalism and Informed Communities. Thanks so much for being with us again, Henry. Thank you so much for the conversation by.