In March 2023, USITT welcomed Laura Lee Everett as the Institute’s new executive director. Jenn Shuron, USITT’s Content Coordinator and host and producer of the TECHnically Speaking podcast, and Mark Blackmon, USITT director of engagement and host of the “Ask Me Anything” session held at the 2023 USITT Conference & Stage Expo, recently asked Everett about her career, her inspiration, and her drive in a series of questions submitted by USITT members.

Everett comes to USITT most recently from Opera America, an organization with a membership of more than 600 opera companies, educational institutions, affiliated businesses, and other entities. Opera America also operates the National Opera Center in New York City.

Following are excerpts of her conversations with Shuron and Blackmon.

What Came Before

*Can you tell us about your industry background?*

“My industry background is as a stage manager. I came into stage management in a somewhat circuitous route, but then went directly into the land of opera and musical theatre. I had studied piano and voice since I was a kid, and my voice teacher, when I was in high school, made me an usher at the opera. She thought this was a good way to get in touch with that repertoire. I came home and my parents said, ‘So what did you think?’ I said, ‘I think I want to run an opera company when I grow up,’ which only moderately terrified them because I had said the same thing about reading *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, which was one book that they had used as a stepstool when I was potty-training as a kid. Then I did it.

“But I was also president of the choir. I was president of the drama club. I was in show choir. I did all those things. When I was looking at colleges, my piano teacher’s daughter suggested I might want to look into arts management. I said, ‘Oh, is that a thing?’ She said, ‘It actually includes all of that being in rehearsal and doing work with music and theatre and your bossypantsness and your organizational skills.’

“There weren’t many undergrad programs back in the wood-burning-computer era when I went to college. I found three, and one had a built-in minor in management. It was a brand-new program at Appalachian State University called music management. And they didn’t quite know what to do with me. So, I said, ‘Well, I have to know what you do in the theatre. I’ve got to know what designers do and directors do and all of that because I’m going to run an opera company.’

“Also, I was working as an electrician as my work study in the new performing arts center. I took all my electives that weren’t in the business school over in the theatre department, and after a year of...
that and them getting to know me, someone said, ‘Hey, we’re going to do *Once Upon a Mattress* next year, and we need someone who can read music to stage manage it. Do you want to do that?’ I was like, ‘Sure, what do you have to do?’ They gave me a tackle box with a tape measure, keys to the theatre, and a slide rule. I learned from there and it was an amazing opportunity for me.

“I found out how much I loved being in a rehearsal. I loved being backstage and connecting all the pieces together—that there is its own artistry and storytelling in how and when you call the cues, and how you help and nurture the artists to feel the most comfortable they can feel doing what they do. So, I became a freelance stage manager. I worked in opera for roughly 25 years as a stage and production manager all over the country. I got to know a lot of the U.S., and I also got to know a lot of people at different companies. It was my real sweet spot: theatre.

“Then I moved into really working passionately with young artists and training programs, in particular in opera and musical theatre. I worked in Aspen for nine summers with their summer program as a production manager, which is an interesting place to do summer theatre as far as being able to acquire props. Once we had to find a surfboard as a stage prop. We had one of the best prop managers ever who figured it out. To this day, he’s my hero. After Aspen, I ran the graduate opera theatre training program, Maryland Opera Studio, at the University of Maryland School of Music.

“I’ve always loved working with young stage managers or emerging and interested stage managers, and was involved in building some apprentice programs. I’m happy to say that a bunch of those folks are now out working full-on in the industry—several as union stagehands and others as stage managers and production managers, both in the commercial and nonprofit ends of the industry. Some moved into administration. It feels like stage managers go one of two different directions—they become directors or they go into production management.

“I totally went into the production management and then administrative side. I worked for almost 11 years with Opera America. That’s when I got involved at USITT because Opera America came to the USITT conference to encourage people to look at tech jobs in opera because, well, frankly they pay well. Unless you’re talking directly about stage management and some aspects of design, you don’t have to fully know how to read music. That’s the part everybody’s afraid of. You only have to know how to follow music well.

“If you can understand foreign
language diction, you don’t have to know what every word means. There’s usually a translation in the score, sometimes a bad one, but you get the gist, but then you can pronounce it so that you can communicate where you’re going to start from in rehearsals. I know designers who don’t read a lick of music, and I know designers who can sit down and play the score. So it’s a fun, different aspect of the genre and an important part of what we do out there in the performing arts world. So that’s how I got here.”

USITT Enters the Picture

When did you get involved with USITT?

“Slowly but surely, I would go to some of the management sessions when I could escape from the Expo floor, and someone said, ‘You should get involved in this because we need people who know about management.’ I think in my second year I had been asked to become a mentor for the Stage Management Mentor Project (SMMP). We try to have the mentors in that training program be representative of all the different parts of stage and production management.

“Eventually I was asked to be the vice commissioner for programming for the Management Commission. I didn’t quite know what was involved when I got into it, but I didn’t know what was involved in the mentorship program when I got into that either, and look where I am now.”

What was your first USITT conference like?

“It was 2013 in Milwaukee and was freezing cold. I remember there’s a huge sign once you go through airport security above the seating area where you put your shoes and belt back on that says Recombobulation Area. I was like, ‘OK, Milwaukee, bonus points for your sense of humor.’ My second favorite thing was I met someone who said, ‘You need to come to the People of Color Network, which is now the BIPOC Network.’ I came in and there were maybe seven people in that room. I said, ‘We’d love to see you come work in opera,’ and there were a couple of students who followed me. We had a long discussion about what was possible and what the challenges were, and that they wanted to be able to find opera near where they were. They didn’t know there was a company in Birmingham, Alabama, right around the corner from them that was hiring. This conference had a two-floor exhibit space at the bottom of the escalator, and there was a huge mural that said, ‘Push for polka!’ The history of polka bars and polka dancing was in the mural on the wall, and on your escalator ride up or down, you got to listen to polka music.”

How have you kept your connection with USITT so strong over all those years?

“I think a lot of it has to do with the people that I’ve met. Meeting with the folks in SMMP even when I wasn’t a mentor and urging them to call me if they were looking for work in opera. So many of them have taken me up on it. It’s amazing to me the number of folks that you meet and say, ‘Keep in touch’ who do keep in touch. The ones that did keep in touch, I keep track of what they’re doing, and I’m a point of contact, reference, and history for them. If they’re going to go take a new job, they’ll ask my opinion. They want to pick my brain about it. I often want to introduce them to someone I know who has a need for what they do. So, my strength in connection with USITT has been through so many of those people that I’ve worked with for years and years and years that are at other companies that are also members. So, it is really old home week when I get to come to USITT. When this job opened up, I’ve known you for 11 years. The happiest I see you is when you come home from USITT. When you go to the conference, you have plugged into the mothership and you come back revitalized and excited...”
happen. I was like, ‘Huh, I should maybe just go get on the mothership.’”

**Entering a New Phase with USITT**

**What made you want to take this job?**

“I had been in my role at Opera America for 11 years, and for the first six of them, I was the director of programs and services. Then there were some staffing changes and I became the chief programs officer. I liked being ‘CCCPo,’ right? That’s what they called me. There was not another upward role within my organization. I was at the top level. My boss knew it. I knew it. We had talked about what opportunities might be next. While I had thought all along that I still want to leave to run an opera company, what I had discovered over time as I matured was I really like working in the national association structure.

“I wanted to be able to use that piece of my experience because it’s rare to take something that I’d spent 10 years learning how to do and apply it. Then here was USITT, which really and truly was coming home because these are my people. As much as I love opera, I do love all the performing arts. I’ve worked in so many of them. My husband’s a composer. I do all kinds of things related to theatre and dance and jazz.”

**What are you most looking forward to as USITT’s new executive director?**

“I think what I’m most looking forward to is, as we move forward, coming out of the darkest three years in the history of the performing arts that I can remember. I’m looking forward to seeing how live performance reshapes itself and being a part of sharing that message across the industry to those who are coming into the industry and others who may not have seen themselves working in this space. There’s a place for everyone. Bring all your cool, awesome, amazing, creative weirdness because that’s what we’re all about. Also, I look forward to planning some of those things that we can do that are not just our conference, which is awesome and spectacular, but I’m really looking forward to finding ways to support the membership and engage with them more over the course of the year.”

**What would you most like to accomplish within your first 100 days?**

“I’ve been trying to think about how to frame that out. Lea Asbell-Swanger and I have had some great discussions, and all props and honor to her as the interim executive director. I want to really dig in with her both as somebody who’s been with the Institute a long time and as past president and sit down and talk about the things that she’s seen progress over time that are important and key to tackle. I’m looking at a staff that hasn’t had a full-time leader since last June.

“I look forward to figuring out what support the staff needs, because we’ve got an opportunity to evaluate how we do things and what we can do to make it more efficient. Looking at systems, looking at structure, looking at staffing overall. Do we need more people? What are our resources? What are our resources financially? What are our human resources? What are our resources in organizational resources and systems? I’m excited to step into and work on that and get as many of those pieces in place so that staff feel supported, but also that we improve our communication collectively if there’s ways to make things more efficient. So that’s the very nuts-and-bolts, clean-the-house kind of things.

“The fiscal year rolls on July 1. So, we’re looking at the budget for next year. I’m excited about going to the Prague Quadrennial (PQ) and the PQ exhibit in June. But this is the moment where we must start the fundraising cycle for PQ 2027.

“There are some board governance changes that haven’t had a chance to happen because there wasn’t an executive director in place. So, I’m really interested to work on getting the programming committee in place before we get rolling on heavy-duty programming for Seattle next year.

“I also want to hear from the membership. I want to get to know them. I want to look at the other programming we do. I think so much of USITT is that people identify us with a conference, which is an awesome and amazing experience. Stage Expo is like nothing I’ve ever seen. But what are the other things as an Institute that we offer to our membership throughout the year? We’re the leader in education and training. What does that look like? How do we promote that? Come to us and we will connect you with all those vendors that make the Stage Expo so amazing. We are going to connect with them to offer training on their equipment so that you can be up to date and continue with your professional development—the kind of training you can’t get elsewhere, and the content that’s not being offered in school.

**When new leaders come in, everyone expects change to occur. How do you determine which changes to make?**

“This is an organization that’s been around for 63 years now, and we know that it’s solid, and we know that there are a lot of things about it that have become, shall we say, ingrained—things we do because we’ve done them this way for a long time. And new leadership always provides an opportunity to step back and look for a second, while we continue to move forward and do the work that we do. So, I’m going to take advantage of being in this position. I’m working with the staff on it, I’m working with the board on it, and I’m working with the volunteers, asking, ‘How’s this working for you?’ Let’s really sit down and take a look and ask, ‘Is this the best way to...? What’s your goal here? What does this—where it’s a piece of software, or section, or communication tool—do for you and is it achieving what you’d like it to?’

“If it isn’t, let’s talk about whether we need to change it or whether we just need to add more resources to it, or perhaps it’s just not getting used anymore and maybe we don’t add resources. So, we’re going to take some time to do some evaluation. Making those choices is based somewhat in data but is also going to be based in having those conversations about member experience, and what are the easiest to change. Any change has its own challenges. We’ll keep working on it, but it’ll prioritize the things that make the most sense to change, or are necessary, because that’s what is going to move the Institute forward.

**Leading and Listening**

**How would you describe yourself as a leader?**

“I try to be very open as a leader. I’m a collaborative leader in many ways, but I will also be the first to say, my birthday is in August. I am a Leo. I’m very much about protecting the pride. That’s something that I feel we collectively, as a whole, as a staff, are going to be able to come together...
with this great collection of skills. I’m so excited to inherit this staff at this time. The USITT staff members all have different skills they bring to this work, and I want to make sure we can continue to move forward as one. But everybody has their own perspective about how we’re moving the organization forward, because that’s how we row the boat in the same direction. But also in terms of that leadership, I need to really keep everybody’s feet to the fire about future vision.

“The first part of our organization’s name is the United States. Let’s focus on who’s here in this country because nobody else is representing us. I want to talk about what defines theatre. As a leader, I look at the big picture. That’s my job. I’m supposed to be looking at this from 50,000 feet. Some tricky things are happening in the world of traditional nonprofit theatre, theatre-in-a-proscenium space theatre. But I went to a football game on Sunday that was super fun. Shout out to the St. Louis Battlehawks. They were awesome in their debut home game. It was the largest XFL crowd to date. The number of microphones and people running with flags and costumes and props and sound and lights was no small thing. It’s theatre. The people who are working there came through the same training as all of us who went and got bitten by that theatre bug in the summer camp version of *The Mouse Trap* or whatever it was. I want to connect with those people in those parts of the world because that is theatre and they are looking for folks to work there as much as the rest of us are in the nonprofit theatre world or at Disney or at Carnival Cruises or Cirque du Soleil. The other piece is the technology. Theatre has always been one of the places that has embraced technology and used it in ways people may not have considered.

“As a leader, I’m looking at those aspects and listening as much as possible so I can sit down in front of the staff, board, and volunteers, and ask, “What looks like success for us as an organization? How do we use what we’ve learned to move the Institute forward and continue to be on the cutting edge, be the more equitable and inclusive organization that we aspire to be, and have all these voices get heard in this space when we bring them all together, either live and in person at conference or in globally presented webinars. We want people to say, ‘Wow, that’s what they’re doing in the U.S.’ So, this is sort of both mission and leadership style. I’m always open to conversation. I love to hear from everybody. I’m going to be transparent and honest and tell you if I agree or don’t agree. It does not mean that my mind is set. If you’ve got good statistics, data, and other things, I’m happy to talk through it because things change.

**What do you think USITT does right?**

“I’m continually impressed with the way this conference comes together and allows for, in particular, people who are emerging into the industry. It has nothing to do with age. It has to do with experience—coming into the industry, coming together, being able to find work, being able to talk about what the opportunities are, being able to show off and find good ways to show off the new technology, the new advances, and more.

“I think one of the things that USITT does incredibly well is the education and the training. I think there’s even more of it that I want to make people aware of. Professional development’s a tricky thing once you’re done with school and out there working and getting into your groove. But if you want to move up or you want to make more money in the role that you’re in, or you want to explore other parts of whatever industry it is that you’re in, sometimes it’s really hard to go and find a place to get the training you need to do that.

“USITT is a great conduit for next-level training, whether it’s a rigging seminar or it’s the work that we are doing with the BACKstage exam, which I think is so huge and enticing people to come into the industry and have some level of accreditation. The professional development aspects, like the Gateway program founded in memory of Taynesia Jefferson, are so important. She said that we need to be doing this. We need to have an opportunity for those who are unrepresented and underrepresented in our industry to connect to someone who looks like, is abled, and is in the same vein of the industry that they are in. Because if they can see it, then they can become it.

“I want to find ways for us to build on that and do more to enhance alumni
who have come out of those programs. Imitation is the highest form of flattery. At Opera America, we founded the Women’s Opera Network to look at gender parity and figure out ways we could try to balance that gap. We started a mentorship program for women administrators. The people are there, they're passionate, and we know that we need that. So, having more opportunities like that, expanding those programs so that they’ve got additional opportunities for connection and connecting those folks even more deeply in the industry to people beyond their mentors and beyond the staff and the board to really nurture them in their careers, it’ll go so far.

Membership and Engagement

How can a member best serve the Institute?

“I think best serving the institute is engagement and communication. I think everybody who is here benefits from meeting other people and from actually getting to participate in things beyond the conference. We love the conference. There’s so much value being here, and getting to meet with everyone, meet with the vendors, see what’s happening in the world. But there’s networks of folks who are, for lack of a better term, ‘star-bellied Sneetches like you.’ They do whatever it is that you do, and we often don’t get to meet with and work with them in this capacity.

“I think there are real opportunities if you go and meet with your networks at commissions, if you start to talk to other people. Ask them about the value of what they get out of USITT and how you can interact. And if you have a great idea of something you’d like to see us do, or you would like to see featured and help the industry move forward, bring that to the table.

Historically, there’s some tension between multiple sectors of the Institute in multiple audiences that we serve because we don’t necessarily serve just one audience. We serve academic members, organizational members, manufacturers, individual members. How do we best serve all these audiences, and what programs do we offer to serve multiple audiences?

“As a national service organization, we must be clear about our mission and our definition of success. Part of that is

Just the Facts

Where were you born?
“Sarasota, Florida”

Where did you go to college?
“Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina”

Anyone from college you’ve run into at USITT?
“Martha Marking, my costume design professor, who is a former Board member and is still a USITT volunteer. She’s amazing. And there are several other people that I know who were incredibly influential. My very first follow spot operator, Michael Klima, and my partner in crime at the campus radio station (WASU-FM), Mark Blackmon.”

Your first professional gig?
“My first professional gig was at the Ash Lawn Highland Summer Music Festival, now known as Charlottesville Opera in Charlottesville, Virginia. We did three opera productions in the summer outdoors. I wrote an exceptionally clever cover letter, and I was green, green, green. We had to store props in a boxwood hedge and deal with live peacocks wandering all over the grounds and interrupting the performances. It was an extraordinary experience, and yet I stayed in the industry.”

What’s your favorite color?
“Purple”

What’s your favorite opera and why?
“Everybody teases me about this in the opera world. I love The Magic Flute. I was one of the little kids—the genies in it. I was third lady in it. My voice teacher in college was Pamina. I got to stage manage it. My first cat was named Pamina. I love it. Everybody jokes about it, and they’re like, really? But the character of Papageno is really and truly Mozart’s best embodiment of every man. He just wants to have a good time and catch birds, and he likes food, and he likes wine, and he wants another nice bird to share his life with. And, for all the other things in it, I love that, and I love the music. And on the flip side, I can never not be a junkie for Strauss. Not only because Salome and Elektra are amazing operas, but also because they’re 90- to 100-minutes long, and you’re in and out, one act, no intermission, in and out before the bars stop serving food. Those are my really and truly big faves.”

What’s your favorite play or musical?
“My favorite play, because I love the funny, is Noises Off. And let’s be real, it’s because you know, there’s a stage manager in it, and that’s an important character for me. And for musical, I did Mrs. Lovett in college. I can’t not love Sweeney Todd. I would argue it is the perfect musical. I think it is definitely the greatest in the Sondheim canon, closely followed by Gypsy. My current favorite musical is Hadestown. It’s really awesome. If you haven’t had a chance to see it, then go see it. It’s pretty fab.”

What’s the best concert you’ve ever been to?
“Rock concert, Billy Joel. I got to see him, amazingly, in Charlotte, North Carolina, when he did the tour of The Bridge. And it was my first sort of full-scale, big rock concert, and he was all over the stage, and he was amazing. Spectacular in that way. For classical, it was going to, of all places, the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, a fabulous venue, to see Sir Simon Rattle conduct Mahler One with the London Symphony. And it was, A, remarkable, B, everybody just wanted to smoke a cigarette when it was over. It was fantastic.”

Where do you live?
“New York City.”

Do you have any pets?
“I have one cat and one fish at the moment.”
a charge with the board, and we have already started that discussion. But part of that is understanding what it is what we can do for our membership. We cannot be all things to all people in all ways, in that everything, everywhere, all at once way, because no organization can.

“What we can do is look at the things that nobody else in our industry is doing and try to be the best at doing those things. For example, we can provide education and professional development outside of the colleges and universities, or partner our academic members with some of our exhibitors who are developing the newest equipment and the most advanced technology, and help provide that training. We can be the connector that brings together all those seemingly disparate pieces in the industry, and yet those connections will ultimately lead to more job opportunities for people in the technical end of the live arts. That must be a key component of looking at what we provide, and what we put our resources into to serve the membership.

How can we be less of a closed-door shop? It seems like a lot of officers keep rotating around, is there any way to open that up more?

“I do think that that’s an important thing that we need to examine. And as we have learned, we have the power to make that change. That’s got to be part of the priority. USITT’s been going through a progressive governance restructuring to be visionary and less operational. There’s some bumps and squeaks with that, but when you have a hugely volunteer-based organization that now has an incredibly capable staff to do many of those things, then we can really become visionary and forward facing.

“I think we need to talk about how we are building opportunities for new and different people to get engaged. There are many folks to whom I want to say, ‘Stay engaged. We need you here.’ But this is a culture of folks where we can pass that knowledge on, pass that opportunity on, and I want to build that into the culture of service, so that folks don’t all end up being the same 10 people rotating through positions. In full candor, I’ve been working with USITT as a member for 10 years now and as a representative on the expo floor from a sister association. It’s a great piece of my onboarding the number of names I’ve heard people throw out and talk to me about in leadership, in the board, in some of the governing bodies. It’s a little bit wild that I already know many of those names as somebody coming in. I want to make sure that we are getting names that are new to me, and to you, but are representative of who’s in our industry.

“Of course, there are some situations in some roles where there’s huge value in having someone maintain a role over several years. But that’s the same thing when we start to talk about structuring leadership, mentorship, and training, so we don’t have a situation where someone rotates out of that position and there’s been no overlap with the person who’s going to take on that role. We need good succession planning.

Volunteer Leadership

So what kind of relationship do you plan on having with the board?

“Very, very close and regular. We just had a great training. The board is going through a governance change that has taken some time over the last couple of years. We still have a few pieces that will continue to shift, but the board is really excited. We had 26 people show up for our board training. That’s unusual, according to the consultants who do not usually see this much buy-in, but they’re all dedicated. It’s interesting. We’re in an industry of doers, so they want to do things and so a challenge is to get them to shift to be visionary and decide where this organization wants to go. If we can all get in alignment on what those goals are, then we know what our next action steps are.”

Do you have ideas about how to create clearer pathways into the USITT commission leadership?

“I come from commissions, and I think they’re incredibly valuable. I think that’s another one of those places where we need to take a minute and review our networks, look at how we communicate, and how we as the staff communicate. We need to set clear guidelines about how folks can get involved and we need to be transparent in recruiting people and finding out who is interested in participating.

“Maybe there’s a smarter way to be able to better present information to say ‘Here’s what commissions are, and here’s a link that allows you to be able to talk to someone in each of these commissions.’ And also, this is the structure for getting involved, and here’s where you put that information.” We’ll talk about what’s a good way to achieve that transparency. Communication is not only about conversations going one way. It’s not just about putting stuff out. Members must feel empowered to talk to us.”

There’s this idea that commissions are sort of seen now not so much as subject matter experts in the various disciplines, but as creators of content for the conference, and the perception is that’s all they are.

“Right, and that’s not what they are. I feel like most of the commissions are all active practitioners working in the business. We know who the experts are and can make those recommendations and connections. But also, commissions are clear about knowing what people are getting in the schools or training programs and what they’re getting out in the public, professionally, and then saying, ‘Here are the holes. Here are the pieces we know nobody knows where to go to get. Let’s fill the gaps.’ And that’s what we talk about for programming. We need to be able to say ‘Make sure you talk to this person because this person has totally cracked the nut on this.’

“There’s one session we worked hard to plan about unsustainable work practices. I sat down and looked at this and thought, if 60 hours is the minimum in the American Guild of Musical Arts contract for stage managers, that’s not sustainable. If that’s a minimum before you hit overtime, that’s a problem. We can’t solve that problem, but what we can do is bring in some people who have started to crack that nut and have them talk about it.

“Several of us in commissions said, ‘Who’s doing that in theatre? Who’s doing that in opera? Who do we know who’s figured out how to do that in the academic institutions?’ And those are the people who were on the panel at the conference, who have figured out how to make a 40-hour work week functional in the theatre world. Yes, let me say those words again—a 40-hour work week functional in the live arts world. I think that’s part of what we’re supposed to do at USITT.”

Looking Ahead

There have been a lot of conversations about changes that have to be made in the live entertainment industry post-Covid. How does this impact USITT
and what it does, its programming, and its focus in moving forward?

“IT is incumbent upon us to start to examine, A, the word theatre in our title. Because there’s more; it’s not just inside the proscenium space box. Everything that is live art or entertainment is theatre. Talk to these people at the booths out on the Expo floor. How did they get where they are, where they’re selling rigging equipment or they’re developing the next piece of new technology for XR or VR, or whatever the reality is we’re in now. It’s moving that fast. I can’t keep up with it, and I’m relatively fast. What does that theatre world encompass, and how do we engage with all those people? Because what you’re doing, what we are all doing, and what we’re training folks to do, applies to going into all those places. But, not everybody sees what that path is.

“Secondly, we need to talk about technology because that has also radically changed post-Covid. How many of you, pre-Covid, really used Zoom? Now it is literally a part of our everyday lives. It’s a part of our vocabulary, so is Google—words that we never thought were going to mean what they mean. And those are things that are starting to change how we do what we do in theatre. We don’t know what’s next. We’ve got to make sure that we are leaving space to get what’s next in here, and figure out where in our world of theatre training—because it’s all theatre—we go next to help facilitate that.

Where would you like to see USITT in a year? In five years?

“We are coming out of the pandemic, and we are starting to see some changes in how we build and do what we do with membership. Where I’d like to see us in a year is employing some of that transparency that folks have talked about, that makes it easy for any one of you to be able to say, ‘Oh, you should join USITT. This is why. Here’s what I get out of it, and here’s what’s important about what they are doing in terms of education, in terms of changing the way things look in the technical theatre industry.

“In five years, I’d like to see us getting to a place where, organizationally, we are the known go-to for those on the cutting edge of technology in industries that might not look like theatre but have learned that the people who are coming to work for them are coming with this training. There are people in the medical industry who have learned that there’s value in working with theatrical technicians in making spaces for healing and treatment feel better and yet can still be sterile and meet safety and health standards.

“In five years, I’d like us to have a good chunky endowment that allows us to fund even more of those trainings that we talked about earlier, like succession planning. In 10 years, I want us to be able to have it make sense to have a conference in some major metropolitan area, that we take over the whole city, and that we can actually bring people who have started to consume our programming internationally, that we get to send people to those international conferences, and that they’re all here. I’d like us to have 10,000 people coming to convene and talk, not just to see the Expo floor, not just to network about getting jobs, but to enjoy the chance to come together and talk about what’s next, what’s happening, and that the industry’s thriving.”

What are a few words that will sum up your tenure at USITT?

“Visionary. I would love for that to be the word. Inclusive. Collaborative.”

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