



Daniel Ordower

A longtime lighting designer, Daniel Ordower has also had careers as a lawyer, general manager/CFO of Pilobolus Dance, and COO/CFO of Guild, a nationwide experiential marketing agency. Now he takes on the role of general manager at Theatre Projects.

Lighting&Sound America: How did you get started in lighting?

Daniel Ordower: I was looking for something to do in high school; my older brother, who worked backstage, building scenery and hanging lights, told me to join him. I got hooked and kept on doing lighting in college. It spoke to my need for pattern, logic, and practicality. There's something I love about taking a script, identifying the problems that need solving, and setting rules to solve them. Lighting does that more than other disciplines.

LSA: How did you shift to the law?

DO: I was traveling constantly and, with young children, was away from home way too much. That plus the fact that the industrial and corporate work I was doing was growing, and I felt I needed another set of skills to help grow that. There's not enough business savvy taught in theatre schools and programs. I thought I would do labor law; I was active in the union. Then I realized my friends who were stagehands, designers, and actors hadn't gotten any training in running their businesses. No one talked to them about how to build trusts or write wills, so that's where I started focusing my time.

LSA: What was your time like as general manager and CFO of Pilobolus?

DO: I felt very lucky to be a part of the culture, energy, and creative drive that allowed the artistic directors and dancers to produce such mind-blowing work. But I was at Pilobolus at a time of great change: The founding group of artists, the artistic and business minds of the company for decades, had retired and there were questions about how to move forward with a new group. A lot of the processes were based in how the company was run in the '70s, '80s, and '90s, when the founders did everything together and were always chipping in. We live in a world that is much less cooperative and people are much more specialized, so my task was to build a team to help foster the art and rebuild Pilobolus into a company with long-term sustainability.

LSA: And you also helped Guild expand?

DO: When I started, the company was doing about \$7 million in revenue, in New York and Los Angeles. We opened offices in Miami and Portland and, by the time I left, we were doing about \$25 to \$30 million in revenue. We had expanded the work force by about threefold, to 150 people.

LSA: How would you describe Theatre Projects' culture?

DO: Theatre Projects is such a storied organization. What Richard [Pilbrow, its founder] built is absolutely amazing, and the company carries on, designing spaces that are true to Richard's original intent, really connecting audiences to performers. I've worked in so many Theatre Projects venues over the years, and you really feel that difference.

Internally, it's a great group of people. They all love what they're doing and strive to do it better every day. That's so important right now, being dedicated to making it a great work environment. If you want to keep people around, keep that institutional knowledge, and challenge them to do better work all the time, you give them the freedom to do that. Sustaining that practice is one of my goals here.

It's about looking to the future of theatre: How do we find ways to make community gathering spaces that are true to our philosophy? There was a period when we were building performing arts centers, but now cultural spaces are going into other developments, onto corporate campuses and into mixed-use developments and communities. Theatre Projects has a deep knowledge of infrastructure, of how to bring a group of people together in a space, connect them, and give them a good experience. Not everyone has that knowledge and few know how to use it in community centers, lecture halls, and pop-ups—how to move people in, make the flow work, and connect them to what they're there to do.

LSA: How would you sum up your career so far?

DO: When you're lighting a show, you're there to reinforce what the performers are doing onstage, to give them an environment where they can do their best work. From lighting to managing a company, I feel like it's ultimately been the same end goal; I'm just using different tools to do it. 📶