

**A Conversation with CAE's Newest Board Members**  
**By Clea Conner, Marketing Associate**

This month, **Clea Conner, CAE's Marketing Associate**, shares excerpts from recent conversations with CAE's two newest board members, Aidan Connolly and Shari Misher Stenzer. Clea spoke with each about their experiences with the arts and how they have informed and influenced their commitments to The Center for Arts Education.

---

**Aidan Connolly** currently serves as Political Director to Steven Rattner, a managing principal at Quadrangle Investment Group, and Maureen White, former Finance Chair of the Democratic National Committee. He also serves as Director of the Irish Arts Center, New York's pre-eminent Irish cultural institution. He recently served as Chief of Staff to Deputy Senate Minority Leader Eric Schneiderman and before that contributed to the election campaigns of Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell and Vice President Al Gore.

Throughout his career, Aidan has consistently maintained dual roles in politics and the arts, and formed his niche in the theater world by creating platforms for emerging Irish playwrights. The son of Irish immigrants, he is currently working with the actor Gabriel Byrne as well as business and government leaders to expand the visibility of Irish arts and culture in the United States.

**Q. Explain how you went from being a “theater person” to a respected advisor to some of the most influential people in New York’s political system.**

I told Senator Schneiderman if he let me help him take back the Senate, I'd help him get started in show business. (He is still waiting for that call.)

But seriously, I've always seen politics and theater as related fields: they both involve doing something improbable and important. They both involve finding or creating a great product (candidate or playwright), composing a persuasive message, courting reporters (or reviewers), mobilizing donors (or investors), and building a base of support (or an audience). And any time you gather 100 people in a room to hear someone's story -- and urge them to blend that experience into their life -- that's an inherently political act.

**Q. Explain why you think arts education is important.**

The arts are integral and not an extra -- we've got to remind people of that. What's essential about education is not memorization of facts, but that you learn how to think, and develop a method of learning to use throughout your life. Arts education does that just as effectively as any other discipline. A first grader who learns the difference between a whole note and a half note gets equal value from that experience as from learning how to use an abacus.

If you treat it as an “extra,” if you consider arts education a disposable luxury, then I think you are cutting some children off from learning, period. And those children are often the ones who need it most – the ones who may not fit in but will stay in school because of their music teacher or dance class or to do the school play.

**Q. Where would you like to see arts education in the next five years? How can our government help?**

Our government leaders won't help unless we demand that they do. I don't say that out of any disrespect – in fact, we have some wonderfully enlightened leadership, particularly in this city. But there are many, many competing priorities and governing is about choosing. So we've got to build a movement of people who understand that arts education is essential and who will let our elected leaders – and aspiring elected leaders – know how they feel. And that is something CAE is uniquely positioned to do.

**Shari Misher Stenzler** is the Co-Chairman and Co-Founder of Kidville, NY. Named "Best of" by *New York Magazine*, Kidville, NY, operates 20,000 square foot facilities catering to newborns through five-year old children and their families offering a wide range of developmental classes including *Little Maestros*, *My Big Messy Art Class*, and *Big Muscles for Little Babies*. Additionally, Shari is the Chairman and Co-Founder of London Misher Public Relations, which specializes in public relations, brand development, special events and marketing for charitable organizations and corporations in the lifestyle, fashion, entertainment, media, hospitality, travel and leisure, real estate, consumer products, retail and health/beauty industries.

Shari has been featured on the covers of *Entrepreneur* and *New York Family* magazines and named one of the Crain's New York Business "40 under 40". She is a member of the PBS Next Generation Media Advisory Board and the New York Board of Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

**Q: Kidville offers many arts-related classes for parents and children including music, art and dance. How did you decide which classes to offer?**

There is a lot going on in New York City – parks, museums, diversity – and we try to extract the best from it. In New York, I found sophisticated, educated and intelligent families who, in all other aspects of their lives, were demanding the best, but were settling for average when it came to kids classes. Kidville strives to offer New York families balance, and arts education is definitely part of that.

**Q: What do you think is most important about arts education?**

I feel it is important that all children have the opportunity to be exposed to music, dance and art regardless of their school district or neighborhood. In fact, Kidville is founded on the belief that the arts greatly contribute to the development of a strong, confident and well-rounded person.

**Q: What do you hope to accomplish with your position at CAE?**

Through Kidville we have seen the monumental role that the arts play in a child's development, well-being and future success. I hope to expand the impact of arts programs through the continued growth of such programs as Parents as Art Partners and the Career Development Program at CAE. We need to restore those programs that have suffered through the years and ensure the future of arts education for every student.