

Burton: When did you get the idea for World Audience Publishers and what gave you the idea for it?

Mike: The germ came around 1997-2003, when I was doing a lot of writing in Las Vegas. I had gone through a bitter divorce and was drinking heavily, and one day I slipped and fell in the parking lot of a casino (this is a true story) and banged my head so hard it scarred my brain. See my memoir for the full story, http://www.worldaudience.org/pubs_bks/pubs_bks_Strozier_Labyrinth.html. I had always been a writer, with varying degrees of energy and success, but I sobered up and returned to it then with a newfound, strange, incredible energy. At that time, the Internet was not very developed; but there were two things on the Web that worked well: porn and writing sites. I immersed myself in the writing sites, and I discovered the vibrant, worldwide...audience. We would write and post and review each other's work with a kind of obsession. I felt very proud of that time and even loyal to that group; it was our 1920s Paris (minus the romance, though we had the porn). From there, I drew up a very complex plan to create a site like that, where we would interact and also produce a literary journal. I did some reading about business and crystallized my ideas down to a business plan. Initially, only a handful of writers and artists were patient enough to stay with me; but I was adamant. I named our journal "audience" after a literary journal in the 1970s that another Strozier edited with Geoff Ward. During this time, as I was trying to set up everything, the Web was still not yet very mature, so I had little luck. But, it was good for me to go through all this planning and organization. Then, in 2006, I found myself out of work and decided to go for it. I put all my money together (\$46.41) and did everything I could to make my company fully operational. Luckily for me, the Web had just reached its full potential and I was able to start publishing, not just the journal, but also a review and books. From there, we really took off fast, and we're still expanding.

B: Why attempt another publishing operation, with all the competition? Is it because you envisioned World Audience as doing something unique, and if so what do you feel is unique about it?

M: Yes, as stated above, we are in a niche and our timing was perfect. We are able to publish a lot of books with POD technology very fast. We've almost published 100 books in our first year. Many small presses don't publish that many in their entire lifetime, decades. The key is to find and publish quality literature, and I think I've been able to do that -- the good writers are, in fact, on the Web, worldwide. I am starting to wonder if there is even any competition out there, or if I've arrived on the battlefield first, like Nathaniel Forrest says, "Get there firstust, with the mostust."

B: How long after you got the idea were you able to put it into operation, and where did you obtain the funding for it?

M: It took years of planning, as stated. The funding came from my limited savings.

B: Is World Audience, Inc. a public or closed corporation?

M: We are a "c" corporation, owned by our members/authors (<http://www.worldaudience.org/members.html>) who are actual share-holders. In our by-laws, we own 51% of the company, and we hope to sell the remaining shares to investors, as we get larger/more successful. The reason I set up our press like this is to try and create a way to resist corporate influence, which many presses suffer, and even not be influenced by government grant-lenders, or funders. However, if we have an investor in the future, that person would be on our board and would be an influence, but that's okay, I feel. It's all an experiment; but it seems to be working well so far. The key is finding great authors and books.

B: If it is not a private matter, who are your partners or who are the officers in the corporation, and how about a brief identification of the principles?

M: M. Stefan Strozier, CEO, publisher; Ernest Dempsey, President, senior editor; Kyle Torke, Vice-president, Editor-in-chief; Matthew Ward, Managing editor <http://www.mockfrog.com.au/portfolio.html>. Our vision is to be the catalyst of change in publishing, and to create an entirely new landscape for literature, one that is inclusive, global, and has integrity. Much of the fun of our press is its global nature, and interacting with other writers from other countries/cultures. We seek out diversity; it is what we are.

B: Did you have a different profession before you became a playwright, and if so what was it?

M: I've had various odd jobs, park ranger, soldier, AF lieutenant, mechanic, finance, but I was always trying to be a writer. With publishing, I am able to be involved in writing, though I find I have less and less time to write. I hope that will change if we grow a bit more and start paying our staff good wages.

B: What are your plays and where have they been performed?

M: *Guns, Shackles & Winter Coats*, *The Whales*, *The Tragedy of Abraham Lincoln*, and *The Green Game*, were performed in lengthy runs, off-off and Off-Broadway, in the Midtown International Theatre Festival and other festivals. More information is on my Web site: <http://www.mstefanstrozier.org>. I also have a theater company, La Muse Venale, Inc. <http://lamusevenale.org>.

B: Have you done any other kind of writing, and if so what kind and what has been published?

M: I've done a lot of writing and had some stories and poems published in various places. But this kind of success seems very limited to me, and my own press has published several of my books/plays, and my theater company has produced all my plays. I was never very good at marketing my own work, and impatient at it. Ironically, now I have my own press.

B: How many books has World Audience published so far?

M: Nearly, 100, I haven't counted lately. We have about 10 coming out just now. I have to buy more ISBNs.

B: Do you intend to keep the list short, and if so, how many titles a year do you envision?

M: I intend to focus more on marketing and sales in 2008 but still acquire new books. I say that but then I find another 10 great books to publish, so to be honest, I am not sure what the near-future will hold. It seems very much in flux.

B: How much of a staff do you have helping you, and since you seem to be doing most of the major work, how many days and nights do you put in, and how many hours?

M: The four people above help me a lot but I am the only employee of World Audience, Inc. right now. I've made contact with an intern and I hope to find some help soon, because we're growing very fast.

B: Are you a bachelor, and is that what enables to work so much? Or, if you are married, is the enabling factor an understanding wife?

M: I am divorced, thank God, and besides my two children, and theater, World Audience occupies all my time, yes.

B: How have the books been received so far? Do you have any particular writeups you want to mention?

M: We have had nothing but praise reviews. It's quite amazing, really. I've actually seriously wondered what bad reviews look like. Well, I take that back, we've had a couple of average to lower-average reviews but even then they were not that bad at all. My only frustration thus far is that many publishers, even small presses, can sell hundreds of thousands of books, from a single title, and I we have yet to reach those numbers. I'd like to get a fraction of that amount. I think it has to do with reviews primarily; but only certain reviews, like ones from Publishers' Weekly. We have yet to get a big review.