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How the Head of a Theater Nonprofit Spends His Sundays

The New York Times By Tammy La Gorce

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There is usually a matinee in store for Michael Presser, who is the founder of Inside Broadway.

“While I do go to many performances during the week, on Sundays I’m well rested and can focus,” Michael Presser said of his afternoon theater habit.

Credit...Sara Naomi Lewkowitz for The New York Times



More young people might be tuning into the [Tony Awards](#) this weekend thanks to the work of Michael Presser, the founder of [Inside Broadway](#), a nonprofit organization that brings Broadway musicals to New York City schools and New York City schoolchildren to Broadway musicals.

What started in the early 1980s as a free ticket program for local students to see “Cats” now reaches 75,000 students in 90 schools every year with its own touring productions and educational programs. Current shows in rotation include “You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown,” “Sophisticated Ladies” and “Free to Be ... You and Me.”

Mr. Presser, 75, lives in Greenwich Village. Though his organization will turn 41 this year, he is not yet done marking its latest milestone birthday. “Since we work on a fiscal year, we’re still 40 until June 30,” he said. “We’re still celebrating.”

QUIET FORMALITY I’m not a morning person, so I absolutely love to have quiet around me in the morning. No TV, no radio, and basically I prefer to settle in with the morning papers and spend a good period of time going through the news of the day. I never lie around in pajamas or athletic clothes. I am formal.

Image

“I very much enjoy the plants, and I very much enjoy my gardener who takes care of them. I’m not a horticulturalist.”

Credit...Sara Naomi Lewkowicz for The New York Times



GREEN SPACE There is a garden connected to my apartment. It’s a lovely place to be on Sunday mornings with the newspapers and tea. I’m not a coffee drinker. I prefer black tea or green tea. Many times when I have guests visit me from outside of New York, they’re fascinated to see a garden in the heart of Manhattan. They assume all New Yorkers live in Times Square. I very much enjoy the plants, and I very much enjoy my gardener who takes care of them. I’m not a horticulturalist.

ON THE TELEPHONE I do like to spend a little time in the morning making phone contact with friends and relatives from outside of New York. It’s a very good time to speak with people who are in different time zones. I prefer catching up by phone, because it allows for a more direct and personal exchange. Social media I think tends to be rather superficial.

Image

“This particular neighborhood is so rich in history and architecture,” Mr. Presser said of Greenwich Village.

Credit...Sara Naomi Lewkowicz for The New York Times



A GREAT HONOR I take a weekly walk through the neighborhood. This is something I started doing during the pandemic. Back then I was taking these walks daily. Even though I've been here a long time, I very much enjoy Greenwich Village. I think sometimes you maybe take for granted your immediate neighborhood. But this particular neighborhood is so rich in history and architecture. It's a very special area of New York and I actually consider it a great honor to be a longtime resident.

Mr. Presser often stops at Murray's Bagels on Sixth Avenue. "That is lunch."

Credit...Sara Naomi Lewkowicz for The New York Times



PHILLY THROWBACK I always end up stopping for bagels and lox. That's kind of a Sunday tradition from my childhood in Philadelphia. When I was a boy, one of my uncles used to deliver a bag of bagels and lox to our house every Sunday. It was truly something to look forward to. So I kind of continue it as a fond memory. I'll stop at Sixth Avenue, [Murray's](#). I'll take it home and sit outdoors in the garden. That is lunch.

MATINEE Sunday, I feel, is the best day of the week to go to the theater, and I have always loved having a matinee performance to attend. While I do go to many performances during the week, on Sundays I'm well rested and can focus on the performances, something that's sometimes harder to do during the week. I go to Broadway but also many other kinds of shows, Off Broadway and so on. It's really wonderful, the wide variety of theater we have here. It's a good time to sort of take that in. Recently I saw "Kimberly Akimbo" and a brand-

new opera at the Metropolitan Opera, “Champion,” and I had a wonderful opportunity to see one of the final performances of “Phantom of the Opera.”

“It’s really wonderful, the wide variety of theater we have here.”

TAKE ME OUT Sunday during the baseball season is a great time to get out to Yankee Stadium. I always liked baseball as a child, and then I sort of lost interest in it for a rather long time, and I seem to have rediscovered it again. I think it’s a fascinating game; the strategies, the players that have such unique skills. And during the summertime I think it’s a wonderful experience to be outdoors at a baseball game. Yankee Stadium is a real New York institution. I take the subway. All New Yorkers take the subway.

Mr. Presser often meets friends for dinner on Sunday evenings. “We do not discuss politics,” he said. “That’s a firm rule.”

FIRM RULE We have a sort of gang of friends who meet for dinner on Sunday evenings at the [Westway Diner](#) in Hell’s Kitchen. It gives us an opportunity to exchange what we’ve been doing this week, particularly about the world of the arts. We have a lot of strong and interesting opinions, and I always encourage everybody to respect other people’s opinions. For instance, we frequently discuss who performed at the opera or what they saw this week. We do not discuss politics. That’s a firm rule. No politics.

Credit...Sara Naomi Lewkowicz for The New York Times



TRAVEL RESEARCH After dinner, it’s free time, and what I like to do generally is to plan projects and activities and especially travel I’m going to be doing in the coming months. Because I’m not a beach person, I almost always plan travel around major cosmopolitan cities. I can figure out what theater I might like to see and research key people I might like to meet in the local arts community.

LATE-NIGHT STACK I’m an evening person. I can stay up late, until 1 a.m. or sometimes later. It gives me some time for personal reading. I am a great fan of the New York Public Library, which I feel is one of the great privileges of living in New York. I always have a stack of books that I’ve gotten from the library. I prefer biographies and history. One of the nice things about the library is you can borrow a book, and if you don’t like it you can send it right back.

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