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July 31, 2014

Los Angeles City Council
Room 395, City Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Attention: Arts, Parks, Health and Aging Committee

Honorable City Council:

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA) APPEAL OF MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION CASE NO. NG-13-404-RP (COUNCIL FILE NO. 14-0589)

I am writing in regard to the appeal filed by the Friends of Griffith Park and the Griffith J. Griffith Trust and the Sierra Club Angeles Chapter Griffith Park Task Force. It appears the above mentioned organizations are using a quote given by me to a reporter to suggest that the Shakespeare Festival is planning a nightly attendance of 5,000.

Here is the actual quote from the article published by LA Stage Times on August 15, 2013: *"The space, Melville says, could probably hold up to 5,000 people, easily 10 times the capacity of the former ISC home in Barnsdall Park. But with a house that size, the majority wouldn't be able to see or hear anything. 'We'll have to find some kind of solution,' says Melville."*

In answer to a hypothetical question, posed by a reporter, about how many people could fit on the hillside, I guessed 5,000. However, this number was never intended to indicate a potential audience size: as I am quoted in the article, if that many people were to attend a performance, the majority would not be able to see or hear anything. Clearly I was making a statement that reflects that we do not envision audiences of that capacity. (The "solution" I refer to finding was to was how to limit the hypothetical number of attendees to a smaller crowd.)

Over the last three years the festival has attracted an average attendance of around 1,000 per night. The Delacorte Theatre in Central Park in New York City can accommodate around 1,800 and we think of this as a good model to follow. On a few nights towards the end of the summer we can see audiences of around 2,500. But this size audience is absolutely the exception and not the rule. What's more, it is not a size we desire, as you can't ensure a high-quality experience for so many people.

Were we to see audiences regularly topping 2,500, we would look at implementing a free-ticket system (as used in Central Park in New York) or find ways to drive audiences to less well attended nights (days other than Saturday and Sunday). It is important to note, as well, that audience size is also limited by parking availability.

Our growth has been stabilizing over the last three years: last year's attendance was just over 43,000, and we anticipate playing to around that this summer. Over the next few years attendance may grow to 50,000, but this is small compared to the Halloween Hayride (which has twice as many visitors in half the time). Of course, going back in time a few decades when the site was a functioning Zoo, it had over 2,000,000 visitors each year. Clearly, our attendance levels are nowhere near that amount.

In conclusion, the statement I gave to LA Stage Times has been misrepresented by the above-mentioned organizations and I request that it be disregarded in the Appeal review

Yours Faithfully,

David Melville

Managing Director