



House Committee on Ways and Means

Statement of Rindy O'Brien, Director, American Arts Alliance

Testimony submitted for the record of the Subcommittee on Oversight of the House Committee on Ways and Means, September 25, 2007

ADVOCATES FOR THE ARTS

Hearing to Examine Whether Charitable Organizations Serve the Needs of Diverse Communities

Submitted October 9, 2007

American Symphony Orchestra League

On behalf of the American Arts Alliance and its member organizations – American Symphony Orchestra League, Association of Performing Arts Presenters, Dance/USA, National Alliance for Musical Theatre, OPERA America, and Theatre Communications Group - I am happy to share with the subcommittee the extraordinary charitable efforts being made by performing arts organizations that enhance the quality of life of all Americans.

Association of Performing Arts Presenters

Dance/USA

The American Arts Alliance is a national network of more than 4,100 member organizations and individuals comprising the professional, nonprofit performing arts and presenting fields. For more than 30 years, the American Arts Alliance has advocated for national policies that recognize, enhance, and foster the contributions the performing arts make to America.

National Alliance of Musical Theatre

OPERA America

Performing arts organizations and artists provide unique, diverse, and essential benefits that create and sustain vibrant communities across the country. Nonprofit performing arts organizations provide learning opportunities for all citizens, inspire creativity and imagination, and provide common ground for citizens to come together to build better communities.

Theatre Communications Group

The arts illuminate the human condition, history, contemporary issues, and our future.

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The performing arts are an essential public good, and performing arts organizations open the doors to full arts participation in America – by offering access to educational opportunities for all, places to gather and belong, and giving citizens an appreciation of our nation's culture and heritage through excellent artistic programming.

The arts help democratize our citizens. Communities of all sizes across the United States look to the arts to generate economic activity and to improve the education our citizens. Collectively, the performing arts reach millions of people daily. It simply is not true that only the wealthy

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elite are attending performances in a few concert halls around the country. Here are a few examples of the broad, diverse reach of the arts:

- Over 3.5 million people, including a large number of at-risk children are served by the more than 1,283 outreach and education programs of 202 non-profit theatres in the U.S.
- More than 37,000 orchestra concerts in 2004-2005 reached audiences of more than 28 million listeners, and approximately 1,800 orchestras exist in all 50 states.
- 2 million people attended education and community programs served by U.S. and Canadian companies during the 2004-05 opera season.
- 16 million people attended over 27,000 musical theatre performances in 35 states and 7 countries in one year.
- 3.3 million people attended dance performances before even counting the millions who attend small dance companies' performances in 2005.
- 6 million audience goers attend a performing arts event each week according to the Association of Performing Arts Presenters.

Millions of people attend nonprofit performing arts events cross all income and socio-economic groups and, through diverse artistic programming and community engagement activities, performing arts organizations increase access to the arts for all. A commissioned Urban Institute report revealed:

- 77% of presenting organizations develop programs and performances for students K-12
- 75% of presenting organizations offer free tickets through programs serving the poor, elderly and youth groups.
- 54% of presenting organizations offer special services for persons with hearing, sight, or mobility impairments.

The Institute for Innovation in Social Policy issued a report in 2005, "Arts, Culture, and the Social Health of the Nation." The findings of the report found that "arts and culture represent a vital component of social well-being. They create critical social bonds, webs of affiliation that strengthen the nation, deepen our tolerance, and grace our lives in unique ways." The report found strong support by people at all income levels that place a high value on the arts.

The Phoenix Symphony is an ideal example of the kind of efforts being made by orchestras across the country to serve diverse communities and its citizens through a network of funding efforts. The Phoenix Symphony's education programs are introducing more than 50,000 students to music through education and youth-engagement programs. As part of these efforts, the Phoenix Symphony has for seven years partnered with the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community. The program called, One Nation, has successfully promoted cross-cultural awareness and increased access to music education for hundreds of Native American children and families.

One Nation received National Endowment for the Arts funding and support from the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation to help expand the program from a small pilot project to a school-year long project. Over time, individual donors and other members of the community have endorsed the project attracting additional funding, and increasing public participation and attendance. A

teacher at the Salt River High School, Chris Wakely, has noted, “One Nation has had a huge impact on our students, not just musically, but also socially and behaviorally.”

Programs like One Nation happen daily in communities across our country, providing lifelong learning opportunities. Few investments realize the economic, not to mention the intangible, intrinsic benefits that only arts make possible.

The nation’s nonprofit performing arts organizations are supported by a delicate balance of foundation, corporate, government and individual support. Over and over again, civic leaders and arts supporters have designated their donations to be used for ensuring the vitality of the nonprofit performing arts organizations that anchor their communities, and often specifically provide funding to ensure broad reach into our diverse communities as well as sponsor free tickets and performances.

Wealthy patrons gifting large donations to build symphony halls, performing arts centers and theatres make headlines. Yet in reality for every multimillion-dollar gift there are thousands of smaller gifts made by citizens across the economic and social spectrum to support the arts. A recent 2006 report by the Pew Charitable Trusts, looking at the arts and culture institutions in Philadelphia found that “the vast majority of contributions (96%) came from individual donors, who made 266,000 contributions to the fundraising efforts of arts and cultural organizations in the region. The average contribution was \$300 from individuals.”

The arts belong to everyone, and are supported by a broad network of donors. According to a survey of 800 random households in 10 American cities, the vast majority of citizens believe that the presence of live, professional performing arts in the community improves the quality of life, promotes understanding of other cultures, fosters pride in the community, and contributes to the education and development of children. The same study found that communities with performing arts organizations attract “super-citizens”—volunteers, voters, philanthropists and other active, civic-minded participants. Those that attended live professional performing arts tended to volunteer and vote more often. Frequent attendees volunteer at a rate of 86%, as opposed to 53% of non-attendees.

Individual citizens of all income levels and from all socio-economic backgrounds play an important role in keeping the performing arts alive and ensuring their accessibility to all citizens. We must embrace the intentions of these donors, and encourage their charitable and philanthropic efforts, which contribute to our health and vitality as a nation.

The performing arts are an indispensable part of our society. Charitable donations to the arts guarantee their future access by all Americans. And, the arts ensure the best for America’s future; children increase their academic achievement through arts and music education, and this is especially true in our underachieving schools; performance centers anchor community revitalization efforts in our blighted cities; audiences find common ground across racial, social and economic boundaries. The performing arts provide inspiration and hope.

The arts belong front and center in our charitable giving portfolio, with full tax benefits granted to every donor.