

**Written Statement of the  
American Arts Alliance, Inc.  
submitted to the  
Committee on Ways and Means  
United States House of Representatives**

**Non-Profit Performing Arts Organizations and Hurricane Katrina Disaster Relief**

**December 27, 2005**

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the committee, the American Arts Alliance is grateful for this opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of our member organizations – American Symphony Orchestra League, Association of Performing Arts Presenters, Dance/USA, OPERA America and Theatre Communications Group - and the audiences they serve.

**The arts play a disproportionately large role in the economy of the areas affected by Hurricane Katrina.**

Culture is the second largest industry in Louisiana and tourism is the fifth largest employment sector in Mississippi. Arts and culture accounted for 7.6 percent (7.6%) of Louisiana's employment – more than 144,000 jobs across the state, 57,000 of them in New Orleans alone.

As with other sectors of the economy, the destruction of physical property and resources to community cultural and artistic institutions is immense. Tens of thousands of artists, arts administrators, and educators have been dislocated, left without the space or equipment needed to work. Facilities such as theaters, museums, galleries, concert halls, and studios are severely damaged or destroyed. Many surviving venues are being used to house evacuees.

**Performing arts organizations are serving the affected communities and displaced families.**

Recovery goes beyond providing mere material necessities. Displaced arts educators and artists have been key participants in creating recovery programs especially for displaced children and families. Performing arts organizations in host cities such as Houston have offered free admission to displaced Katrina families. Arts organizations whose own venues are unusable have taken the show on the road performing at the shelters and temporary housing. Artists from across the country have held benefit performances to raise money for the victims of the hurricane. In a gesture of solidarity, New Yorkers who suffered in 9/11 held a dance benefit, "Ballet to Ballroom" in October at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. All proceeds from the performance and the silent auction that followed it went to the Mayor's Disaster Relief Fund to benefit displaced persons in Dallas. And arts organizations in communities across the U.S. have offered temporary employment to displaced artists.

**❖ New Orleans Ballet Association**

Among the hundreds of thousands affected by Hurricane Katrina were the students, faculty and staff of the New Orleans Ballet Association (NOBA), an award-winning community

school and Creative Communities site providing free arts instruction to 1,200 inner-city children at three schools and 14 after-school sites. Creative Communities is an arts education, youth development and community building strategy that partners community schools of the arts with their local housing authorities to provide youth in public housing communities with high quality, sequential arts instruction. As with much of the rest of New Orleans, NOBA is now faced with rebuilding from the ground up. All but two of the schools and after-school centers with which NOBA works were completely flooded. 100% of NOBA's students have been displaced, as have the school's staff and faculty.

In November, NOBA held free dance classes at three satellite locations - Lafayette, Baton Rouge, and Metairie. Displaced New Orleans artists taught children displaced by the hurricane and children in the host communities. NOBA also partnered with two Baton Rouge based dance companies - Baton Rouge Ballet Theatre and Of Moving Colors - to raise money to support local teaching artists and to give them performance opportunities.

In January, NOBA will resume offering free dance classes in Orleans Parish at the one New Orleans Recreation Department center that is operating at Tulane University. The free program started in Metairie will continue in the spring. The Creative Communities free dance program in the public housing developments of New Orleans is expected to resume summer 2006.

❖ **Southern Rep**

The Southern Rep is a non-profit professional theatre in New Orleans. The theatre was broken into by looters during the storm and the building in which the theatre is housed, The Shops at Canal Place, suffered major damage. They estimate that 25% of their audience has lost their homes. Southern Rep's office and rehearsal space is being used by the Small Business Association's Disaster Relief Program.

Southern Rep had to cancel the first four shows of its season but hopes to reopen by the end of February. In April, they plan to co-produce THE SUNKEN LIVING ROOM, one of the two world-premieres that were scheduled for the year, with New Theatre in Miami, Florida. They plan to reopen the theatre in May with a production of KIMBERLY AKIMBO and THE LAST MADAM. They also plan to start offering acting classes again in the summer. All of this will be done with a drastically reduced staff of one full-time and two part time employees down from a staff of 50 before Katrina.

❖ **The Gulf Coast Symphony Orchestra**

Despite the loss of instruments and homes, the musicians and staff of the Gulf Coast Symphony Orchestra, located in Biloxi, continue to bring quality music to the people of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The Orchestra's venue, the Biloxi Saenger Theater is located just one block from the edge of the tidal surge. On November 19th, the Orchestra held its first concert since the hurricanes destroyed the entrance to the theatre. Displaced musicians and patrons used a back street approach through heavily damaged areas to perform in and attend one of the first cultural events to occur on the Mississippi Gulf Coast following the hurricanes. Virtually every seat in the house was taken as 78 musicians performed, and nearly everyone on both sides of the stage lights had been directly affected by the hurricanes; from minor

damage to completely losing everything. While the Symphony Orchestra plans to hold a January performance, it will likely be forced to cancel the remainder of the concert season, due to a drastic drop-off in donations. Nevertheless, the Orchestra regards itself as an integral part of the recovery and rebuilding effort, providing healing for the minds and spirits of musicians and audience members, and is currently hoping to recover in time for the 2006-07 season.

The Gulf Coast Symphony Youth Orchestra is struggling to find its scattered student musicians and secure undamaged rehearsal space. The Youth Orchestra will not be back to full strength for the next few years.

#### ❖ **The Columbia Theatre/FANFARE**

Southeastern Louisiana University's Columbia Theatre for the Performing Arts is located 50 miles from New Orleans in Hammond, Louisiana and was among the hundreds of thousands affected on August 29<sup>th</sup> when Katrina and its damaging winds hit. Despite the damage, Columbia Theatre forged ahead with its month-long arts festival, FANFARE, in October. Determined to keep its doors open, this theatre served as a coping mechanism for the community. Hundreds came to hear the music, see the dance and share with each other the sense of community so desperately needed.

With no phone service or mail and no hotel rooms for the guest artists, the determined Columbia Theatre purchased beds and asked its Board members to buy pillows and blankets. For the entire month of October FANFARE operated a hotel within the theatre's auxiliary spaces, with a men's dorm downstairs in the conference center and a women's dorm upstairs in the dance studio. The theatre purchased a bigger hot water heater for its three showers. In addition to making beds, doing laundry, preparing food (most caterers were unavailable), FANFARE presented approximately 55 events. Artists who slept backstage included the Harlem Gospel Choir (New York City, NY), Toxic Audio (Orlando, FL), Capitol Steps (Washington, DC), Odyssey Dance Theatre (Salt Lake City, UT) and Aquila Theatre Company (New York City, NY).

#### **Cultural tourism is a major force in these local economies and tourism will not rebound until arts and culture rebound.**

A vital performing arts community is necessary for the recovery of the Gulf Coast region. Unfortunately, performing arts organizations are not eligible for two forms of vital emergency relief. Under current Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) policy, performing arts facilities are not eligible to receive FEMA relief as a private non-profit facility. All non-profit organizations are not eligible for economic injury loans from the Small Business Administration that help with operations costs. The U.S. Small Business Administration can make federally subsidized physical disaster loans to non-profit organizations to repair or replace disaster-damaged property not covered by insurance, but economic injury loans appear to be only available to for-profits businesses.

#### **Conclusion**

Performing arts organizations are a vital component of community life, allowing citizens to appreciate our nation's culture and heritage through excellent artistic programming. The arts

illuminate the human condition, our history, contemporary issues and our future. Arts organizations in the Gulf Coast region have a strong commitment to serving their communities, and are dedicated to being a part of the rebuilding efforts. There is a misconception that federal resources are available for the non-profit performing arts in the hurricane-affected regions. For the non-profit performing arts to return to the Gulf Coast region in a robust way, communities will need access to significant, ongoing support from all sectors.

American Arts Alliance  
1112 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, Suite 400  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
Phone: 202.207.3850  
Fax: 202.833.1543  
[www.americanartsalliance.org](http://www.americanartsalliance.org)

*The American Arts Alliance is a national network of more than 15,000 members comprising the professional, non-profit performing arts and presenting fields. For more than 27 years, the American Arts Alliance has advocated for national policies that recognize, enhance and foster the contributions the arts make to America.*