



Central Coast Coalition of Arts Leaders

October 14, 2020

To Our Elected Leaders and Health Department Officials,

Thank you for your leadership at this challenging time for our community, our state and our country. As you consider forthcoming COVID-19 guidelines and relief legislation, we ask you to please prioritize assistance for one of the hardest-hit industries in the country: **the performing arts.**

No doubt you are hearing from many industries that need assistance. The need is nearly universal. But at this time, many of our Central Coast performing arts organizations and venues risk permanent closure if we do not receive economic relief in some form. **We are turning to you, our elected officials, to provide that relief and to help our local arts industry by including arts venues and live performances in our safe reopening plans.**

The arts are crucial to driving economic recovery—small investments that deliver big returns. They get people out of their homes and spending money in the community. Every visit to an arts event generates \$31.47 per person beyond the ticket cost in spending on meals, retail, parking, and lodging. This provides vital income to local merchants, energizes downtown areas, and puts people to work.

The arts also provide shared experiences in public spaces—a community connection that heals the loneliness caused by isolation and social distancing. The coronavirus toll is heavy, but the arts can be our greatest asset in recovering from the crisis socially and economically. Doing everything in our power to bolster the arts now will make our communities and states stronger later.

There are currently no official plans in place to reopen performing arts venues, allow live theatre or concerts for small groups (outdoors or indoors) or even to allow performing artists to gather in small groups for recordings, in any of the mandated stages listed for safe reopening. The State of California has somehow completely overlooked music and live performances in the California Department of Health's Blueprint Activity and Business Tiers. As a result, we, the presenters, performers and artists of SLO County, and the state of California, must now take responsibility for encouraging the development of such a plan, as there has been no unified advocacy effort on this issue to date.

Some of us were included in this conversation when the START guide was being developed by SLO County, but since the California Blueprint for a Safer Economy has been adopted, our voices have been noticeably absent from the conversation. In addition to navigating the COVID crisis and what it has meant to the financial wellbeing of our businesses and organizations, we should have reached out sooner to engage in these conversations as the staged reopening plans and guidelines for other industries developed. We are contacting you today as a group of nonprofit and for-profit organizations to request that our business operations be addressed. We are determined to make our voices heard until our industry receives the fair inclusion in reopening plans that other comparable businesses have been extended.

We urge you at this time to:

1. Include performing arts venues and organizations in staged reopening plans and in other industry guidelines referencing casinos, movie theaters and similar businesses.

2. Implement standardization around live music at restaurants, bars, wineries, and performance venues, so that all are treated equally and fairly, and held to the same precautions to protect the health and safety of our citizens.
3. Grant permission for outdoor performances in limited groups, with ample precautions in place and with limited, spatially-distanced audiences; as well as permission for drive-in performances

The arts are a fundamental component of vibrant communities—strengthening them socially, educationally, and economically. Our artists and our audiences rely on us to serve them during this difficult season, and to keep the performing arts – music, dance, live theater and more – alive and thriving beyond COVID.

As we look towards the future and our post-pandemic recovery, the arts will be an essential tool in both economic recovery and in reconnecting our communities. But only if arts organizations continue to exist. At this time, SLO County's arts organizations and venues are in real peril of permanent closure due to mandated event cancellations, performance restrictions and venue closures due to Covid-19. The Central Coast Coalition of Arts Leaders, on behalf of the venues, individuals and arts organizations listed below, hereby request your attention, your guidance and your assistance. We need your help.

For the quality of life in SLO County and the survival of the performing arts in our community, we ask you to take immediate action on this important issue.

Thank you for your attention and careful consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Anna James Miller, *SLO Symphony*

Dr. Brian Asher Alhadeff, *Opera San Luis Obispo*

Kevin Harris, *SLO Repertory Theatre*

Greg Magie, *Symphony of the Vines*

Theresa Slobodnik, *Ballet Theatre SLO*

Andrew Sewell, *SLO Symphony*

Steve Cass, *Cass Winery*

Steve Lerian, *Cal Poly Arts*

Tara Barrett, *Rock Scene Partners L.L.C.*

Connie O'Henley, *Clark Center for the Performing Arts*

Chris Miller, *Performing Arts Center San Luis Obispo*

Cricket Handler, *Canzona Women's Ensemble*

Taylor Stevens, *The CLCTV/Otter Productions/The Fremont Theater*

Ryan & Maartje Lawrence, *Movement Arts Collective and SLO Movement Arts Center, LLC*

Drew Silvaggio, *The Civic Ballet of SLO and The Academy of Dance, LLC*

Jill Whaley, *Central Coast Youth Chorus and Canzona Women's Ensemble*

Lloyd Tanner, *Festival Mozaic*

Cassandra Tarantino, *Cuesta Concord Chorus*

JG King, *The Fremont Theater*

Leann Standish, *SLO Museum of Art*

Skye McLennan, *SLO International Film Festival*

Maryellen Russell Simkins, *Foundation for the Performing Arts Center*

India D'Avignon, *Music Department Cal Poly State Univ.*

Thomas Davies, *SLO Master Chorale*

Bryan S. Miller, *Artist/Visual Art Educator*

Patty Thayer, *SLO Repertory Theatre*

Jill Anderson, *Canzona Women's Ensemble*

Katie Sturtevant, *Avila Beach Golf Resort*

Denise Leader Stoeber, *Cal Poly Arts*

Sarah Maggelet, *SLO Master Chorale and SLO Vocal Arts Ensemble*

Paul Leatherman, *Vina Robles Amphitheatre*

Dan Sheehan, *The Fremont Theater, California Roots*
Bettina Swigger, *Downtown SLO*
Gary Lamprecht, *SLO Vocal Arts Ensemble*
Zach Johnson, *Actor/Director/Choreographer*
Bruce Howard, *Otter Productions, Inc. and The Fremont Theater*

BACKGROUND INFORMATION & RELATED DATA

Arts and Culture Industry Data

- 82% of Americans believe that arts and culture are important to local business and the economy
- 87% of Americans believe the arts and culture are important to quality of life
- 72% of Americans believe “the arts unify our communities regardless of age, race, and ethnicity”
- 81% of the population say the arts are a “positive experience in a troubled world”
- In SLO County, the arts are a core component of the cultural fabric of the community, one that (in better times) generates nearly \$30 million in total economic activity, supports 916 full-time equivalent jobs, generates \$16.8 million in household income to local residents, and delivers \$2.8 million in local and state government revenue
- The arts sector has been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Research calculates the negative economic impact to be \$13.9 billion nationwide
- In California, our state’s losses are over \$100 million, with over 6,500 staff positions impacted.
- A new study by the Brookings Institution reports that the “fine and performing arts” (both nonprofit and commercial) have incurred losses of \$42.5 billion and 1.4 million jobs

Related or Similar Sector Opening Information

Movie Theaters

Under reopening tiers two through four, movie theaters are permitted to reopen for indoor showings at 25%-50% capacity. This should be extended to performing arts centers, experts at managing reserved seating and where presentations are often shorter in duration than a standard movie. They could easily implement safe audience protocols such as mask-wearing, spatial distancing and temperature checking.

Museums, Zoos, Religious Services, Protests, Ceremonies

As of September 22, indoor museums, cultural ceremonies, zoos, religious services, and protests are permitted at 25% capacity or 100 persons (whichever is fewer). Live performances should be extended this same opportunity, as they are cultural by nature and vital to the quality of life of our community.

Casinos

Tribal casinos are permitted to operate without meal service at gaming tables with elevated cleaning measures, hand-washing stations in high traffic areas, enforced distancing, and masks. Indoor performances could easily fit within these same parameters.

Parks and Beaches

Tourists and locals alike are permitted to gather at parks and beaches, if spatially-distanced and speaking at moderate volumes, which, per the aerosol study, has the same impact as singing or playing an oboe in terms of aerosol projection.

Cohorts

Cohorts of 14 or fewer children and two supervising adults are permitted, providing the group stays together for all activities including meals and recreation, and avoids contact with others not in their group. This practice could easily be extended to groups of performers leading up to and during live performances, recordings, or recording sessions.

Tattoos & Body Art Studios

Body art, requiring close proximity over a period of multiple hours, is permitted “under a tent, canopy, or other sun shelter as long as no more than one side is closed, allowing sufficient outdoor air movement.” It is difficult to imagine that SLO County and state officials believe that tattoos and tattoo artists are essential, but that our industry and its artists are not. We could easily follow similar safety practices and maintain greater physical distance for a shorter duration than body art requires and, thereby pose a much lower health risk to participants.

Recent exceptions to rules surrounding live performances in SLO County:

- A live performance for a drive-in audience at La Cuesta Ranch with Próxima Parada and The Vibe Setters planned for October 31st. They are advertising dancing during intermission in addition to the live musical performance. The organizers of this event informed one of our coalition members that their event is permitted by SLO County under cultural celebration rules.
- A live outdoor performance by the SLO County Stumblers (a four-person string band who also sing) at the Avila Valley Barn on September 26. The group is also promoting various upcoming live performances at local bars, restaurants, and wineries.
- Several local dining establishments are currently engaging live musicians to perform outdoors for crowds of spatially-distanced diners, although the guideline specifies that “Live music, even one musician, is not allowed at restaurants, wineries, bars, etc. at this time.”

Activities in other California Cities and Counties

- The San Diego Opera will perform a live performance of *La bohème* next month in a sports arena parking lot, for a drive-in audience.
- Mayor Breed of the City and County of San Francisco implemented a policy allowing live public arts gatherings with limited audiences. The San Francisco Arts Commission has now created a series of events to be staged outdoors at Fort Mason this month, featuring performing arts groups in a variety of genres.
- In neighboring Nevada, audiences as large as 250 people, or 50% of indoor venue capacity, can now attend indoor performances, with spatial distancing and an approved safety plan in place.

References

Which Sectors are Reopening:

https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/COVID-19/Dimmer-Framework-September_2020.pdf

Aerosol Study: <https://www.nfhs.org/media/4029952/preliminary-testing-report-7-13-20.pdf>

SLO County Stumblers Band Upcoming Shows: <https://stumblers.band/upcoming-shows/>

San Diego Opera Plans Drive-In La bohème Next Month:

<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/entertainment/theater/story/2020-09-23/san-diego-opera-plans-first-ever-drive-in-la-boheme-next-month?fbclid=IwAR0PRbkq5bUduJkwOZgcLxAlq-UbSIK7ZzOAIB-aYIEwa3ZdfcQPnJ69CkY>

San Francisco Arts Commission Performances:

https://www.sfiaf.org/october_2020_program_list?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=live_performance_returns_to_san_francisco&utm_term=2020-10-10

New Guidelines Allow Las Vegas Shows to Return: <https://m.lasvegassun.com/news/2020/sep/29/las-vegas-strip-shows-return/?fbclid=IwAR3wRv83WrpRefblfYe5fpvZct2xvSLkqBCXv3karvL1w1zT2TC-8REBckk>

SLO County's First Drive In Concert Experience: <https://www.bigbig slo.com/driveinslo>

Americans for the Arts: <https://www.americansforthearts.org/>

Brooking Institution: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/lost-art-measuring-covid-19s-devastating-impact-on-americas-creative-economy/>