

**Chair Jackson's League of American Orchestras:
2023 National Conference Remarks**

Date of Remarks: June 14, 2023

Location: Heinz Hall Theatre/ 600 Penn Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Greeting

- Thank you, Simon, for that warm welcome and introduction!
- Good afternoon everyone! I'm delighted to join you all today to help kick off the League of American Orchestras' 78th National Conference hosted by the wonderful Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra!
- I'm grateful to Simon and the League's conference team for inviting me to share some thoughts with you today.
- To everyone in attendance, thank you for all you do to help advance music, culture, and creativity in your communities.
- Your work is critical to helping us all fulfill our potential as individuals, as a nation and as a global community.
- I am honored and proud to lead the National Endowment for the Arts. We are a small but mighty agency with what I think of as a huge and crucial mission. In my mind's eye, the mission of the Endowment is tied to how well we do as a nation, how well we do as communities and as individuals.

- What I know for sure is that none of the things that we have said we aspire to, as a nation of opportunity, are possible or durable without the arts and related work. The music organizations represented here today:
 - help us make sense of the world,
 - offer us different ways of thinking, feeling; and being,
 - are a source of inspiration and innovation,
 - help us protect and advance our humanity and that of our neighbors.

Not Snapping Back

- This is a unique time. As a result of a global pandemic, we are emerging from a period where we have adjusted our lifestyles, re-imagined ways of working, and re-considered what it means to care for each other in our communities.
- This also has been a time of visible and heightened inequities and injustices that demand our attention, a complicated and fractured political landscape, and many promises to do better as a society.
- The entire creative sector has been seriously impacted—some concert halls closed, performances cancelled or reimagined on the virtual stage, even now, low-ticket sales and audience numbers for many are a source of concern. As the sector recovers, it has been, and continues to be, a difficult time.
- But as I have visited with communities and met with arts organizations and artists, I have found that there is also evidence of strength, flexibility, and even a sense of possibility.

- We are in a time that demands learning from examined experience and not just snapping back to what was pre-pandemic. The last three years have taught us that, in some cases, we don't have to do what we have always done, and that what we may have thought of as orthodoxy might be just one approach, among many, that we should consider going forward.
- While there is hardship, to be sure, this is also a time of possibility as we imagine what a new version of the sector can be.
- This time in history requires that we understand the arts as being at the heart of our efforts to evolve, heal and change.

Guiding Premises

- As I share with you the direction I am taking with the NEA it is important that I reference some fundamental principles that undergird my approach.
 - First, all people have the capacity to be creative. Creativity is an individual and community asset from which to build. Communities are not blank slates. Especially in historically marginalized communities, the creativity and culture that does exist is sometimes overlooked or under appreciated. Orchestra leaders in this audience know first-hand that creativity is an individual and community asset from which we can and must all build.
 - Second, the ability for people to be expressive and tell their own stories on their own terms is a critical dimension of justice and equity. It's part of our American ethos. Orchestras have important roles to play in that.

- Third, arts and cultural activity happens in many kinds of places—of course, those places that are dedicated to the arts explicitly like performing arts venues, but also in community centers, houses of worship, commercial venues, schools, parks and public streets. And while people participate as audience and consumers, people also engage in the arts by making, doing, teaching, learning. This is evident among the musicians that comprise the two youth orchestras that will perform here for you shortly.
- Fourth, art *process* can be as important as or in some cases even more important than art *product*. That is sometimes a hard concept to grasp because we are socialized to look to the thing that we will consume. The act of being in creative process, especially the collective creative process that is the everyday practice of orchestras has value in and of itself. That process often generates agency, stewardship, social cohesion. It contributes to the creation of new narratives, and enables of us to hold nuance and appreciate complexity—all often pre-conditions for other community goals and all the things we say we aspire to as a free nation opportunity.
- Fifth, artists and designers have many kinds of relationships to publics and roles within communities. In addition to the traditional ways that we think of what musicians and arts organizations do, I believe that some of the orchestras represented in this room can help to imagine and achieve the communities and cities we want to see thrive.

- Sixth and last, music and the arts are intrinsically important. (full stop). At the same time, they are important because they contribute to other community dynamics and can help address community needs and aspirations.

Artful Lives and Insights

- Unleashing the full power of art, including that of orchestras, requires not existing in a bubble, in isolation. The arts must be woven into the fabric of our lives—part of our daily lived experiences and inextricable from what we value most. At their most powerful, the arts are at the heart of social change and part of our civic infrastructure—the arrangements, structures, and relationships we rely on to care for each other.
- As I have traveled and spoken around the country, an idea I have been advancing focuses on the importance of all people having the opportunity to live "Artful Lives."
- "Artful lives" is an inclusive concept. It contains a wide range of experiences, including deeply meaningful practices and expressions of our diverse everyday lives as well as the production, presentation and experience or consumption of professional artwork.
- In addition to the concept of "Artful Lives," I have also been talking about how the next version of the sector requires more attention to animating work at the intersections of arts and areas such as education, community development, climate, and very importantly, health and well-being.

- At the Arts Endowment, we are enthusiastic about helping advance the notion of the arts at the intersection of other sectors; including our partnerships with other federal agencies.
- We are not starting from scratch. For example, we have been working with our federal partners at the National Institutes of Health (as well as with the Kennedy Center, Renée Fleming, and University of California, San Francisco) on a project called the Sound Health Network, which brings together artists, neuroscientists, music therapists, researchers, and others to better understand the many connections between music, health, and wellness. The NEA's support is helping to build the network, which can facilitate individual and collaborative efforts. We're learning and documenting how music can improve our wellness across a lifespan.
- As I travel around the country, I am seeing important local efforts that signal a deeper understanding of the connection between the arts, and especially music, to health and wellness at the local level as well. Just last week, I participated in a summit on arts and health in Los Angeles organized by the LA County Department of Arts and Culture and the LA Opera. It involved activations highlighting the work of large and small arts organizations in this realm as well as sessions highlighting new findings about the impact of the arts and music especially on health.
- There is evidence of efforts to advance inclusivity, but still not enough. All around the country I have heard forward thinking cultural leaders talk about the importance of commissioning and presenting new work—work that represents the rich diversity of the country, varied perspectives, the stories and voices of communities that haven't

been heard—work that helps us navigate a complicated terrain. Sometimes this is at odds with the desire to sell out a venue and rely on tried and true crowd pleasers.

- There are signs of promising practices and powerful ways of situating music and what it has to offer but more efforts are needed. We need systemic work to remove barriers, advance inclusivity and truly unleash the healing and transformative power of the arts. Last fall, President Biden issued an all of government executive order recognizing the contributions of arts and humanities on the health and well-being of the nation and on the future of democracy itself. He directed all federal agencies to collaborate with the NEA, the NEH and IMLS and lifted up the centrality of the arts to all of the work the country needs.
- At the recent ceremony honoring national medal of arts recipients, President Biden called artists truth tellers, bridge builders, and change seekers.
- And last night at a concert at the White House in honor of our newest federal holiday, Juneteenth, a celebration of freedom and an acknowledgment of slavery and our troubled history, a deeply moved President Biden spoke about the power of music to help us heal the soul of our nation.

NEA as National Resource

- Inspired by this sensibility, and the long-held core ideas I shared earlier, The NEA is leaning into our role as a grantmaker AND as a National Resource.
- We continue to be a grantmaking organization, which is how we are best known. For example, we are thrilled and proud that we helped support the commission and world premiere performance tonight of composer Stacy Garrop's new composition

Forging Steel, as part of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's

125th anniversary celebration, and we will continue to help fund important projects by orchestras and other arts organizations such as this!

- In addition, we are ramping up our role as a catalyst, convener, connector—offering a platform for important ideas and new ways of working that strengthen the cultural sector and unlock new and more opportunities for artists and arts organizations to shape our nation—to contribute to the wellbeing of our citizens and help to create the environment where all people can thrive and reach their full potential.
- We are proud that the NEA is increasingly seen by the federal family as a key partner in our quest to advance racial equity and better outcomes for historically marginalized communities, our quest to address the health of our planet, our work to stop hate-fueled violence like the senseless massacre that occurred at Tree of Life Synagogue five years ago right here.
- As a national resource, the NEA will access all of the assets it has at its disposal. This includes grant money and financial resources for bolstering existing programs as well as special initiatives, but it also means leveraging our relationships with other federal agencies, using the pulpit and bull horn of the executive branch, the imprimatur of the federal government, the infrastructure of state arts organizations, regional arts organizations and local arts agencies as well as other networks, being strategic about our ability to convene, be a catalyst, provide thought partnership and thought leadership, do and commission research, among other functions.

Closing

- I am excited about the roles that orchestras of all sizes and types can play in infusing arts into our civic infrastructure—in helping us all to see our common humanity and create the just communities we and generations to come deserve.
- Please know the NEA is here to walk alongside you as we adapt, dream big together, and work outside of our traditional lanes.
- We can do our best work with open channels of communication with you, and the benefit of your experience, perspectives, and reach.
- And finally: I want to offer a special recognition to the two youth orchestras, the Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra and the Three Rivers Young Peoples Orchestras that will be performing momentarily. These organizations strive to create dynamic and inclusive communities of young musicians, who celebrate diversity and open themselves to new ways of thinking, being, and performing. These musicians bring a sense of excitement about classical music to audiences young and old, and they are a testament to what can happen when we invest in bolstering healthy communities. Music education is a critical component of American school curriculums and part of a well-rounded education and artful life. The future looks bright thanks to the next generation of creative musicians who are shaping the world. Let's keep the music going in all the places where it is needed.
- Thank you for listening and may you all have a fruitful convening!