

## Keynote Address at the Montana Performing Arts Consortium

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I would like to thank the Montana Performing Arts Consortium and the Montana Arts Council for offering me the opportunity to speak with you today. I would also like to thank John Barsness of the Consortium, Arni Fishbaugh and Cinda Holt from the Montana Arts Council for making the arrangements that have brought me here. I would also like to extend to you greetings from all my colleagues at the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, DC.

In thinking about the idea of the frontier and the performing arts, I thought back to a time when, for Europeans, at least, all of the United States seemed to embody the very notion of the edge, the far off, the frontier beyond which lay the great unknown.

In 1840, Fanny Elssler, one of the greatest ballerinas of the Romantic Era, wrote in her diary, “I am about to cross the Atlantic and proceed to America!...I cannot look upon this strange intention as other than a mad freak that has seized my fancy in a thoughtless moment...My sober judgment could never have brought me to such a resolution.”

Little did Elssler know the reception that would await her. Her planned stay of three-months extended into two years; she broke her contract with the Paris Opéra, where she was a prima ballerina, to stay in America, where her hold on the popular imagination would make her both rich and famous.

Her performances in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, and Richmond created a general mania. Tickets to her performances were auctioned off to the highest bidder; whiskey bottles and shirt studs bore her likeness; lithographs showing her costumed for exotic solos sold in the thousands; and her carriage, unhitched from horses, was drawn through the streets of Baltimore by impassioned admirers. Richmond greeted the dancer with tolling bells and cannons. Washington was not immune to the power of celebrity.

*The eighth president of the United States, Martin Van Buren, and his cabinet received her in an official audience; Congress adjourned every evening she danced in Washington because most members attended her performances and no quorum could be made to move legislation forward; at a formal banquet in the Capitol Elssler's health was toasted with champagne quaffed from a satin slipper.*

Fanny Elssler returned to Europe where she danced for several more years to great acclaim, retiring at age 41, still beautiful and fabulously wealthy. Circumstances that are rarely experienced by dancers today. She died in her native Vienna in 1884.

If some of this story sounds vaguely familiar it might be because a young impresario watched the mania surrounding the glamorous foreign star and learned the importance of publicity. Ten years later, P.T. Barnum would replicate the public madness for Jenny Lind, the Swedish Nightingale with ticket auctions, whiskey bottles and so on. Like Elssler, Jenny Lind would make a fortune in the United States.

It has been 175 years since a Viennese ballerina crossed a frontier and found fame, but it raises the question of where is today's boundary line? In fact, what are today's frontiers for the performing artists, and how do you know if you're about to cross the border and enter uncharted territory?

The frontiers that the performing arts organizations must explore today are formidable as our societies are changing in such rapid and unpredictable ways. How, then, can theater, dance, opera, symphonic music remain as critical and core tenets of civic life? Indeed, how do the live performing arts, that require audiences to gather in a common space for a specific amount of time, remain relevant in a world that is increasingly non-linear and individualized? Are the performing arts a communal meal or a dinner for one?

Here are challenges that I think are the most important: the changing demographics of American society; racial diversity and cultural equity; the opportunities, challenges, and possibilities of technology; and, the changing expectations and desires of audiences of today and tomorrow.

The first challenge facing all sectors of American society is the changing demographics of our population. American's like to say that we are a nation of immigrants. From all corners of the globe people have come to the United States with their hopes and dreams but also with their food, music, and dances. Out of this tapestry of peoples has emerged a unique American culture. At least that is what we like to believe. The reality is a bit more complicated.

For most of the past two hundred years, the United States was essentially a New World version of Western Europe. The dominant culture created its cultural and civic institutions based on European models and that included its artistic endeavors. The mark of any city with aspirations to higher status was the presence of a museum of fine arts, a symphony orchestra, an opera house, a ballet company, and a theater company.

However, what we are seeing in the United States is that these legacy art forms of theater, symphonic music, opera and so on are declining in terms of their audiences. The Arts

Endowment has a research office that combs through the data generated by other government agencies to prepare a Survey of Public Participation in the Arts and nearly all traditional performing arts appear to be in trouble. Audiences are fewer in number and older in age.

But let me tell you a little bit about the SPPA.

The Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) is the largest and most comprehensive survey of U.S. arts participation, with a total sample size exceeding 37,000 adults, ages 18 and over. The latest SPPA compares arts participation rates based on surveys from 2002, 2008, and 2012, as well as regional, state, and metro-area statistics.

A new question in the 2012 survey revealed that adults who attended performing arts or visited museums as children were three to four times as likely to see shows or visit museums as adults. Exposure to the arts in childhood turns out to be a stronger predictor of adult arts participation than education, gender, age, or income.

Technology is a great enabler of arts creation and participation. In 2012, nearly three-quarters of American adults—about 167 million people—used electronic media to view or listen to art, and large proportions of adults used electronic media to create music or visual art.

Women participate in the arts at higher rates than men across all categories, except a few. For example, men are more than twice as likely as women to use electronic media to create or perform music, and they are also more likely to create visual art online.

More than half (54 percent) of all American adults attended at least one live music, theater, or dance performance in the past year, or they went to view an art exhibit. That's about 120 million people.

However, the SPPA still shows that audiences for the traditional performing arts have declined each year since 2002.

What has happened to audiences for the performing arts? Are they disappearing or are audiences growing but finding their cultural experiences in different ways? These are the factors that I see affecting the legacy art forms that have long been the cultural backbone of the United States.

As I said previously, the United States is a nation of immigrants and for many years the source of that immigration was from Europe and in the 17th and 18th century from Africa.

Now, however, the demographic makeup in the United States is changing faster than ever with the majority of the nation's new citizens coming from Mexico, Central and South America, Africa, and Asia. Within the next 30 years the United States will be a majority minority nation, with no single ethnic group able to dominate popular and high culture. Assimilation into a

common set of cultural and civic values will be a different process than that of previous generations.

In my own primary area of dance the diversity of the United States is striking. The Arts Endowment funds ballet, modern dance, post-modern dance, performance art, site-specific dance, aerial dance troupes, tap dance, and a number of other forms. However, we also fund dance traditions such as capoeira from Brazil, classical dance forms from India, China, Japan and the Philippines. Carnival dances from the Caribbean, clogging and step dancing from Ireland; traditional dances from all parts of Africa, Cambodia, and the Balkans as well as Mexico and our own Native American dances of which there are many. When I'm asked to describe American dance the only word I can use is "encyclopedic." There are almost no dance forms or traditions that are not practiced in the United States.

This same multiplicity of styles, techniques, and cultural borrowings are true in all the performing arts.

The United States is not alone in navigating shifting borders and frontiers. This is actually a world-wide phenomenon as the movement of peoples across borders is accelerating every day. Refugees from wars, from poverty, from political repression daily seek better lives wherever they can gain entry. And, societies must adapt, however fitful and awkward the transition might be.

Just one example of how the arts fit into this picture of social adjustment. Last week in Paris a new concert hall was inaugurated, the Philharmonie de Paris, the new home of the Orchestre de Paris Now you wouldn't normally think of Paris as a city that has faced any new frontiers in centuries, really, but that is no longer the case.

Paris and the French ministry of culture are actually using the Philharmonie and the arts to redress decades of neglect of its minority and impoverished citizens. The Philharmonie is literally on the frontiers of the city. It is located just inside the Periphrique, the ring road that circles the Paris of legend and separates it physically from the adjacent neighborhoods and suburbs that are mainly peopled with immigrants, minorities, and the poor.

Placing a concert hall far from its traditional audiences and diversifying programming to appeal to both its mainstay supporters and what is hoped will be new and enthusiastic consumers of musical culture is now an expensive bet. Stay tuned for results.

Diversity in civic culture as the French and those of us in America are realizing must address the fact that we are about to become a nation of many minorities. This leads to a host of questions but, principally, why public dollars should support any organization that does not reflect the

demographics of its citizenry. It is hard to build an audience if that audience never sees itself and its stories reflected on the stage.

Conversations around cultural equity, racial diversity, and social justice in the arts must now be permanently embedded in the broader relationship of artists to their communities if there is any hope of surviving the inevitable changes that are happening each and every day.

As performing arts organizations work within the changing national landscape their profiles are evolving as well. It is now no longer sufficient to present performances only. Most performing arts organizations have had to expand their portfolio of services to include education, training, social services, community development, and economic revitalization. Clearly, this is a massive expansion of any arts group's core mission of creating and presenting art.

Nonetheless, this additional set of services is expected by home communities, civic leaders, funders and government agencies. The benefit of course is that arts organizations are viewed as being relevant, important for quality of life and a part of the civic fabric.

With demographics and audience makeup so fluid just what are the characteristics of people who consume arts in any form and those who do not?

In 2012, the National Endowment for the Arts partnered with the General Social Survey to ask why people attend arts events (specifically music, dance, theater, and visual arts). This new report looks beyond demographics to discover the attitudes, motivations, and barriers for attending the arts at different life stages—the first time the NEA has published a report on this type of data.

There were common barriers for the 13 percent—31 million adults—who were interested in a specific event, but did not go for some reason:

Nearly 60 percent of people with children under age six said lack of time was the greatest single barrier to attendance. This finding could inspire arts providers to develop more family-friendly program options.

Some noted that the location was too difficult to get to. This was especially a problem for retirees, older adults, and adults with physical disabilities. If we're quantifying the value of what we often term "access to the arts," it's about 11 million lost audience members or exhibit-goers.

Twenty-two percent of those who wanted to attend but chose not to said a barrier was not having someone to go with.

Motivations include:

Top reasons Americans attend the arts (performances and exhibits) include socializing with friends or family members (73 percent); learning new things (64 percent); and supporting the community (51 percent).

We've looked at the nation scene, now let's take a look right here in Montana.

The Montana Arts Council commissioned a study on arts participation in Montana that revealed some interesting characteristics. Although the Montana study was conducted in 2003 the results are predictive of the results that would be revealed by the 2012 study authored by the National Endowment for the Arts and the general social survey.

In Montana, most interesting of all – *civic pride outweighed advertising* as a motivation for participation.

What matters to Montanans:

- Having fun
- Sharing an event as a family
- Seeing friends and neighbors

Why they participate:

- The chance to see and hear something special
- Accompany friends or family
- Family-oriented programs
- Personal interest in the material
- Quality/reputation of the performance/artist

Let's look more closely at just how the arts sector is doing, all the arts both for and not-for profit.

Surveying the landscape of American performing arts and the environment in which they are created, I am reminded of what a fascinating, maddening, complex and contradictory place this country is. In some ways performing arts have never been more visible and popular. That can be both good and bad. American Idol, The Voice, So You Think You Can Dance, and Dancing with the Stars, seem to have made a singer, a dancer or a critic out of everyone. This is the very apex of commercial artistic practice that encompasses all disciplines.

According to government sources, and I work for the government so I know these things, more dancers are employed in the state of Nevada, than in any other. I might add that the dancers in Nevada actually do earn a living wage. Something, the dancers in my portfolio of the non-profit dance world mostly do not.

Actors, dancers and singers in popular culture and the for-profit world seem to be doing just fine. But, what is going on with the other side of the equation, the high art and non-profit world of the arts? I am making these distinctions based on financial structures, not on the value to society and culture of what each mode produces. First, let me give you a broad snapshot of how arts and culture both for profit and non-profit fit into the nation's economy.

### **The Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account (ACPSA)**

The ACPSA, a partnership between the NEA and the Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis, is the first federal effort to provide an in-depth analysis of the arts and cultural sector's contributions to current-dollar gross domestic product (GDP), a measure of the final dollar value of all goods and services produced in the United States. The revised estimates reveal the arts are a bigger driver of GDP and jobs than previously estimated. Among the new estimates are:

In 2012, arts and cultural production contributed more than \$698 billion to the U.S. economy, or 4.32 percent to the U.S. Gross Domestic Product, more than construction (\$586.7B) or transportation and warehousing (\$464.1B).

4.7 million workers were employed in the production of arts and cultural goods, receiving \$334.9 billion in compensation.

Arts and cultural spending has a ripple effect on the overall economy, boosting both commodities and jobs. For example, for every 100 jobs created from new demand for the arts, 62 additional jobs are also created.

The Bureau of Economic Analysis highlights the Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account in the January edition of the [Survey of Current Business](#), widely read by economists and financial analysts to understand the state of the U.S. economy.

To give you some context, let me give you some data generated by Americans for the Arts.

The size of the non-profit cultural sector generates \$166.2 billion in economic activity annually—a 24 percent increase in just the past five years. That's about one quarter of the sector as whole. Still, that amount is greater than the Gross Domestic Product of most countries. This spending supports 5.7 million full-time jobs right here in the United States—an increase of 850,000 jobs since our 2002 study. What's more, because arts and culture organizations are strongly rooted in their communities, these are jobs that necessarily remain local and cannot be shipped overseas.

The non-profit sector of the economy is growing, all good news but so is its interconnectedness with the for profit world and this leads me to the next frontier we are in the process of charging

through and that is the role of technology in making art, distributing art, and connecting with audiences.

We now have several generations of young people whose life experience has been mediated and defined by their relationship to a screen whether on their computer, television, gaming console, tablet or phone.

Writing in the *New Yorker* several years ago, film critic, David Denby noted the rise of a technologically astute generation that was increasingly “platform agnostic.” His example was startling, *Lawrence of Arabia*, David Lean's epic, cinematic masterpiece with thousands of real humans and real animals, and miles of real desert is an overwhelming experience in the theater. This generation of platform agnostics, however, places equal value on the experience whether viewed on a smart phone or in the theater. They care more about content than the delivery system.

This is an audience for the arts that is omnivorous in its consumption. But, there is one huge difference between the recent generations and arts consumers of previous generations. Typically, they expect the content to be free of charge and available on demand. That is a huge hurdle for a business model that relies on ticket sales and subscriptions.

Performing arts groups must now ask themselves some very hard and costly questions about how to remain relevant and how to preserve the integrity and authenticity of the artistic experience when moving their product onto multiple platforms. Is the communal experience of gathering together in the darkened space of a theater auditorium the primary way to reach an audience or is it only one way, and perhaps not the most important? Indeed, an opera or ballet broadcast from New York or Moscow might be more enjoyable if you are watching in your own home.

Even now, any number of arts organizations are finding their largest audiences outside of their theaters. More people see the productions of the Metropolitan Opera in one world-wide broadcast than will ever see live productions at its home at Lincoln Center in New York City.

It is increasingly apparent that the analog arts must adapt to a digital world in which the challenges and opportunities are vast. Social media strategies, branding, and platform expansion are now important components of nearly all new projects and organizations.

As we have begun to navigate this new terrain in the United States, it is becoming clear that our learning curve is only just beginning. New technologies will create new art forms, provide access to new audiences, and expand the reach of many organizations, and create new models for business.



The new generational cohort, so literate in technology, is also comfortable with loose boundaries, inter-disciplinary work, and malleable definitions. For them, the future of art and arts organizations will look very different from the rigid lines that separated the arts disciplines in the past.

In the meantime, our laws and practices are often at odds with the presentation, performance, preservation and protection of art. Copyright law in the United States is based on assumptions from early in the last century. The relationship between performing arts organizations and the unions that represent performers, stage-hands, musicians, and designers were likewise based on how the performing arts worked physically and financially in the 20th century.

Much of this debate is about the financial value of artistic content in the present and future and who will control access to the archives. In theory, the archives of many performing arts organizations have enormous value, but only if there is the ability to provide access and distribution.

None of these relationships anticipated the global network that would make experiencing the arts on-demand in any location possible. Likewise, most artists did not anticipate the ability to have a worldwide audience and what that relationship would look like.

These are exciting days to be working in the performing arts. In the United States, we are living with a dynamic population change, a revolution in technology, and a great unknown landscape on the horizon. Artists are forging ahead, some as pioneers, others determined to reclaim and mine the past. Everything now seems possible.

While I have outlined a number of challenges and difficulties that American arts organizations are wrestling with, I am not pessimistic. I do think that the creativity of artists and those devoted to supporting them will find solutions to even the most complex issues. I am confident that there will always be a need for people to connect with each other, to share a common experience, and to find the nourishment that only profound art can provide.

Remember Fanny Elssler, she of the champagne toast from Washington politicians? Well, she's basically been forgotten, a curious footnote in the history of dance. There is one powerful lesson in looking back at Elssler, however, that should inspire us all. She dared to cross the frontier and embrace a new and unknown world. She in her turn was embraced in kind and richly rewarded. Freely giving her artistry she inspired an adolescent nation to rise above the everyday, and to experience as a single people the power of art.