

June 23, 2008

Please allow me to update you as our 2008 programming continues to reach across the Midwest – and around the world.

Arts Midwest World Fest

The first half of the 2007-2009 Arts Midwest World Fest finished with a triumphant tour by Chinese musical ensemble An Da Union. The group's unique form of "throat singing" and vibrant enthusiasm touched students and adults across the Western half of our region. As planning continues for the next half of the current cycle, we'd like to highlight some of the experiences of our communities.

Find out more about the program, the ensembles, and the cultures at www.artsmidwestworldfest.org.

An Da Union was eager to meet Native Americans on this tour, and in Bismarck, ND, they drummed, sang, and danced with members of the United Tribes on several occasions. The ensemble also jammed with country-western musicians at a restaurant, and a crowd soon formed to hear this rare musical combination.



"Most of our school population is underprivileged so the opportunity to attend such events is very critical to their success as future community members that can embrace diverse cultures."
– Alesia Albin, Grand Rapids Public Schools

The Nevada, IA, school system hosted An Da Union for a day, and the ensemble joined the kids for lunch. Imagine this scene: while waiting in the hot lunch line with the ensemble, 200 elementary-school children all began to throat sing just as they had heard the ensemble do in the workshops!

2008 Midwest Arts Conference

The newly designed Arts Midwest Web site features many Conference updates as well as the complete Registration Brochure and fill-in registration forms. This year's conference will feature a keynote address by Alan Brown of nonprofit consulting firm WolfBrown as well as performances by many exciting artists at activities throughout the Conference and insightful professional development sessions designed to build expertise in arts management. As one of the largest booking and educational conferences for the performing arts in the U.S., the annual Midwest Arts Conference plays a vital role in connecting the performing arts to audiences across the central United States. The 2008 Midwest Arts Conference will be held in Kansas City, Missouri from September 17 - 20, 2008. Learn more by visiting www.artsmidwest.org/programs/mac.



ArtsLab

It is remarkable to consider that the launch of ArtsLab was a mere five months ago. The project has been unfolding rapidly and smoothly. These first few months have been an extraordinary time for being introduced to the leadership and the passions of small arts organizations throughout northwestern Minnesota and the Twin Cities metropolitan region. Seven application workshops were attended by 95 organizations. The call for consultants to work with these organizations produced an exceptionally talented eight person strategy team, selected from a field of about 80 applicants, to guide the curriculum development and lead the training. All semi-finalist applicants have participated in one day organizational assessment workshops.

With the overwhelming response, the value of ArtsLab conceptually is clear. The hunger for ArtsLab among both urban and rural arts groups has been especially staggering. It is very clear that ArtsLab has the opportunity to be a significant professional development vehicle for community arts leadership. In our workshops, we heard comments such as “we need to learn how to take our work to the next level” and “we need to think through how to become more incorporated into our community.” With the final selection of participants on June 26th, we turn from launch activities to the exciting work of a three year capacity building program—and the shaping and evaluation of best practices in supporting the work of visionary, small community-based arts organizations for the 21st century.

The Big Read

A new cycle is about to start for The Big Read, and Orientation was held in Minneapolis, MN, on June 8-9 for 507 attendees representing the most recent 208 organizations selected to participate in the program. In total, \$2,810,500 will be granted during this September 2008 – June 2009 cycle, with activities reaching across 46 states. We are especially pleased that \$523,700 in grants were awarded to organizations in Arts Midwest's primary region, including:

- Illinois – 12 grants totaling \$160,500;
- Indiana – 4 grants totaling \$46,000;
- Iowa – 2 grants totaling \$34,000;
- Michigan – 6 grants totaling \$76,500;
- Minnesota – 2 grants totaling \$22,000;
- North Dakota – 1 grant totaling \$5,000;
- Ohio – 7 grants totaling \$82,000;
- South Dakota – 2 grants totaling \$27,500; and
- Wisconsin – 7 grants totaling \$70,200.

A nation-wide initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts, The Big Read seeks to restore reading to the center of American culture by providing citizens the opportunity to read and discuss classic books through innovative reading programs in their communities. For more information, including a calendar of events across the U.S., visit www.neabigread.org.



First Lady Laura Bush participates in a Big Read Egypt/U.S. roundtable discussion at the Fayrouz Experimental School for Languages in Sharm El Sheikh. White House photo by Shealah Craighead. www.whitehouse.gov

The Big Read Egypt/U.S.

Arts Midwest coordinated First Lady Laura Bush's visit to the Fayrouz Experimental Language School in Sharm al Sheikh, Egypt, in May 2008 to highlight and discuss The Big Read Egypt/U.S. with students and local officials. At the school Mrs. Bush met with Egyptian officials responsible for implementing The Big Read Egypt/U.S. initiative, Egyptian Minister of Education Dr. Yousry El Gamal, and U.S. Ambassador to Egypt Margaret Scobey. Following a discussion with the school's students about the importance of reading and an introductory question and answer session on *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Mrs. Bush addressed the World Economic Forum. Her remarks and photos from her Big Read activities can be viewed at the official White House Web site, www.whitehouse.gov.

As a follow-up to the visit by Egyptian partner organizations to the U.S., Arts Midwest staff members David Fraher and Adam Perry led a trip to Egypt in April with a group of eight representatives from U.S. communities participating in The Big Read Egypt/U.S. – including our region's own Sherry DeBoer, Executive Director of the South Dakota Humanities Council, and Harriet Swedlund, Executive Director of the South Dakota Council on World Affairs. The delegation explored Cairo and Alexandria, Egypt, to learn about Egyptian Nobel Prize winning author Naguib Mahfouz and Egypt's culture, traditions, and modern social dynamics. The group also met with their Egyptian counterparts in The Big Read Egypt/U.S. to plan cross-cultural programming and exchange activities, and was feted at a reception given by the U.S. Embassy in Cairo.

The Big Read Egypt/U.S. is a unique of the U.S. Department of State in partnership with Arts Midwest designed to encourage dialogue between citizens of the United States and Egypt through the power of literature.

NEA Jazz Masters Live

Arts Midwest continues to manage NEA Jazz Masters Live, a series of concerts and conversations featuring NEA Jazz Masters supported by the National Endowment for the Arts. SFJazz in San Francisco has already launched their activities honoring jazz artist Wayne Shorter's legacy with events in April, May, and June. Upcoming events will be at Litchfield Performing Arts in Litchfield, CT; Manchester Craftsmen's Guild in Pittsburgh, PA; and Detroit International Jazz Festival in Detroit, MI.

As always, our programs would not be possible without your ongoing support of Arts Midwest and its mission. Thank you for all that you do to help these vital programs reach across the Midwest. Please feel free to contact me at 612-341-0755, ext. 8024 with questions or comments about Arts Midwest.

Sincerely,

David Fraher
Executive Director