

July 14, 2009

As I write this, although it is the last week of June, the weather in Minneapolis is cool—in fact, *nearly* cold—and it is gray and even a bit misty. And while I trust that the weather is not a metaphor for the overall environment for our work, I *will* admit that the future is a bit cloudier and more uncertain than it was a year ago at this time. On one hand, despite the difficult economic climate, Arts Midwest remains a healthy and vibrant nonprofit arts organization. We are very thankful for the continued—and occasionally even increased—support of many of our key partners, including 3M, MetLife Foundation, General Mills, Land O’ Lakes, and our many individual contributors.

Additionally, we are very pleased to report significant growth in our support from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), which increased our regional arts partnership grant by 8% to \$1,504,490 and also awarded Arts Midwest \$514,400 through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)—commonly known as the “stimulus package”. With this funding, we are working in partnership with our nine state arts agencies to preserve vital jobs in our region’s arts community—a community that contributes significantly not only to the Midwest’s economic vitality, but to its quality of life and education. Together with our member states (and with direct support from the NEA), more than \$3.4 million dollars will be invested across the region towards this end during the summer months.

At the same time, it is important to recognize the critical challenges being faced by the state arts agencies in our region in the current economic environment. In many states, approved budgets have significantly reduced funding to the state arts agency. In other states, even as the fiscal year ends, budget debates continue, with state arts agencies facing potentially devastating cuts to their operating and program budgets. The table below provides an overview of the news we have received from our nine member state agencies as this newsletter was finalized.

IA	Down 9.79% from last year
IL	Down 67% from last year
IN	Down 20% from approved levels for last year
MI	No budget presented yet; Governor’s rec. effectively does away with the agency
MN	Down 16% in general fund from last biennium; will begin receiving a projected \$43.3M from Legacy Amendment funding after Jan 2010
ND	Up 17% from last biennium
OH	No budget yet; rec. is down 50% from last biennium (already down 20% from prior biennium)
SD	Level with last year (after defeating an effort to zero their budget out)
WI	Total budget reduction of 6.5%, wage rollback 2%, 16 furlough days



A public session at Wayne State University, Chamber Music Society of Detroit Ensemble Residency Program, supported by the Performing Arts Fund

Photo by Jerry Zolynsky

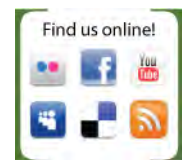
Funding support from our state arts agencies (SAAs) is critical to the overall arts ecosystem of our region. SAA funding often takes the form of general operating support to arts organizations, large and small—and such unrestricted funding is hard to come by, even in the best of times. The SAAs are also critical partners in support of arts education at the local level, helping to ensure that children have direct access to high quality artistic experiences and training. And our member state arts agencies play a major role in nurturing and preserving our native and traditional cultures—the music, dance, crafts, and stories that are the very fabric of our Midwestern communities.

For these, and many, many other reasons, the state arts agencies of this region are a necessary part of the public sector, and deserving of our support. I encourage each of you to learn more about your own state arts agency, and even more—to learn how you can take an active role in advocating on its behalf. Visit the News section of www.artsmidwest.org to learn how you can advocate for your state arts agency!

As we work to preserve our strong partnerships at home, Arts Midwest is also continuing to develop our international relationships. The value of our work through Arts Midwest World Fest has been recognized by the Israeli Consulate General in Chicago, the Consulate General of Canada in Minneapolis, the Québec Government Office in Chicago, and the Ministry of Culture of the People’s Republic of China. The President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH) provided support for Arts Midwest World Fest’s tour of An Da Union, and we will be partnering with PCAH again, along with the U.S. Department of State and the Chinese Ministry of Culture, to tour an exhibition throughout China by Minnesotan photographer Wing Young Huie. As you will see below, we continue to successfully manage the Big Read Egypt/U.S. on behalf of the U.S. Department of State and the NEA, and the Big Read itself reaches more people across the U.S. with every cycle.

While we are thankful for the continued success of our partnerships, we are mindful of the difficulties faced by arts organizations across our region. Several of our programs, including ArtsLab and the arts learning Xchange, are specifically geared towards building the capacities of Midwestern arts organizations. As you will read below, Arts Midwest has also invested to provide timely and vital professional development at this year’s Midwest Arts Conference, which touches all facets of the performing arts across our region.

Arts Midwest is proud to remain a progressive, viable arts organization fulfilling an ambitious and important mission. Please read below for more information on our programs, and do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or ideas. I encourage you to visit www.artsmidwest.org for further details—subscribe to our RSS feed or the online version of this newsletter, view our ongoing YouTube efforts, and much more.



Thank you very much for your continued support of Arts Midwest.

Sincerely,

David Fraher
Executive Director

Arts Midwest World Fest

Esta concluded the 2007-2009 Arts Midwest World Fest cycle with their tour through Menomonie, WI; Ames, IA; Hutchinson, MN; Bismarck, ND; and Spearfish, SD. With assistance from Arts Midwest, the ensemble also participated in the Flint Hills International Children's Festival, presented by Ordway Center for the Performing Arts in St. Paul, MN, before returning to Israel.

As we look back on another successful cycle, here are just a few comments from our community members about Arts Midwest World Fest:



An Da Union dances with the Elgin Children's Chorus

Photo by Steven Duchrow

"Due to a lack of funding in the school budget, these students miss the opportunity to be exposed to the arts. These workshops help to fulfill a space that is missing in their curriculum. They not only have the opportunity to see great performances, but they also have the chance to experience other cultures."

– Adam Fischer, Stuart's Opera House, Nelsonville, IN

"The opportunity for this caliber of music in Hutchinson is only made possible by the involvement of Arts Midwest and their sponsors."

– Dolf Moon, Hutchinson Community Education, Hutchinson, MN

"[Arts Midwest World Fest] enabled our small rural community of 16,000 to experience world-class performances AND learn more about the music and cultures of different countries...It has created a community ground swell of support for more world music events and also strengthened our partnership with the Menomonie School District."

– Gary Schuster, Mabel Tainter Memorial Theater, Menomonie, WI

"This performance didn't just move people emotionally; it dynamically shifted their cultural understanding of a people and a nation.... The evening with An Da Union was, in many ways, as good as it gets for a presenter. It was a crowning moment to end the program."

– Steven Duchrow, Elgin Community College, Elgin, IL

We thank the 2007-2009 communities for their wonderful partnerships with Arts Midwest. Already, planning is well underway for the 2009-2011 cycle of Arts Midwest World Fest, which will feature ensembles from China, Japan, Israel, and the Canadian province of Quebec. The first tour starts in the fall, which doesn't seem too far away!

Midwest Arts Conference

Preparations continue for the 22nd annual Midwest Arts Conference, to be held in St. Paul, MN, from September 9-12, 2009. This year's Conference will feature a unique focus on dance, using related educational programming and a variety of live performances to highlight the genre. We are also excited to partner with EmcArts, a leading arts consultancy with deep expertise in management, innovation, and organizational change. Through workshops, roundtables, and the keynote address at the Plenary Session, the group will share results from their own years of research and experience to help attendees apply innovative tools to their own organizational challenges. We hope that this investment will prove valuable for arts organizations, artists, and managers/agents facing difficult economic times.



ArtsLab

In June, ArtsLab completed its fourth retreat—the first in which the northwestern Minnesota cohort and the Twin Cities cohort have been in retreat together. As a first year “wrap-up,” the event pulled together and deepened discussions around the four strategic areas identified as a framework for capacity-building: strong leadership, organizational adaptive capacity, financial and marketing management, and operating capacity. The event offered sessions on branding, culturally competent leadership, financial scenario planning, and evaluation. The groups now prepare for year two of the three-year program, moving from the question “Where are we headed?” to focus on “How are we going to get there?” Despite the tremulous financial climate, ArtsLab is encouraging the strategic thinking and long term focus that will serve the program’s organizations well through economic cycles, ensuring a vibrant arts community in Minnesota.

The Big Read Egypt/U.S.

On April 28th, Congressman Keith Ellison (D-MN 5th District) was the keynote speaker in a video conference coordinated by Arts Midwest in support of Big Read Egypt/U.S. programming in Egypt. Congressman Ellison conversed eloquently with Egyptian program participants on topics ranging from the themes of civil justice and human rights found in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the value of cultural diplomacy, the struggle for racial and religious equality in America and Egypt, and the benefits of international citizen-to-citizen dialogue. Congressman Ellison was introduced by U.S. Ambassador to Egypt Margaret Scobey at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, which co-hosted the event with Big Read Egypt/U.S. community partner Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Alexandria, Egypt.



Congressman Keith Ellison fields questions during a video conference with Big Read participants in Alexandria, Egypt.

Image courtesy of U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs

Arts Midwest also coordinated a video conference featuring Mohamed Salmawy, a noted Egyptian poet, playwright, journalist, and personal friend of Egyptian author Naguib Mahfouz. Mr. Salmawy discussed *The Thief and the Dogs* and Egyptian cultural history with Big Read Egypt/U.S. program participants at Columbia University in New York, NY, and the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library in Huntsville, AL. Originating from the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, the session featured students in both American cities engaging one of Egypt’s leading literary figures in a lively dialogue on the religious, historical, and social context of the novel within Egyptian society and how it relates to American life and literature.

You can view a video produced by Columbia University about their Big Read Egypt/U.S. experience here: <http://news.columbia.edu/newyorkstories/1524>

American Recovery and Investment Act

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) included \$50 million to the National Endowment for the Arts to fund projects and activities that preserve jobs in the nonprofit arts sector threatened by declines in philanthropic and other support during the economic downturn. Under the ARRA, the NEA approved \$19.8 million in one-time grants to state arts agencies—including all nine agencies in Arts Midwest’s region—and regional arts organizations to support the arts sector of the economy. The NEA’s state and regional partners will invest their Recovery funds in projects that assist arts organizations in retaining critical staff as well as artists and other contractual personnel. Arts Midwest’s proposal to the NEA for arts job preservation in the Midwest was approved in full, and Arts Midwest funds will be added to the pool to be disbursed by each of our nine state arts agencies using their granting processes.