



NATIONAL
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FOR THE ARTS

NEARTS

A GREAT NATION DESERVES GREAT ART

American Masterpieces

THREE CENTURIES of ARTISTIC GENIUS



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Celebrating America's Artistic Legacy

American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Artistic Genius

For three centuries, Americans have contributed myriad artistic masterworks to the world culture, including uniquely American art forms such as jazz and musical theater. While some Americans may recognize Nickolas Muray's iconic photographs of Judy Garland and Babe Ruth, or may even know that the name Martha Graham has something to do with dance, for the most part American master artists go unheralded at home. To make the artistic accomplishments of great American artists better known to all Americans, the National Endowment for the Arts created American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Artistic Genius.

American Masterpieces began in 2005 with support for the touring of exhibitions of significant works of American art, including paintings by Georgia O'Keeffe, modernist silver, and contemporary Native American works. In 2006 and 2007, the program expanded to

include choral music, dance, literature, and musical theater.

Choral grants support regional choral festivals showcasing the rich and varied repertory of American choral music by such significant composers as William Billings and Libby Larsen.

In dance, American Masterpieces helps professional dance companies to revive, perform, and tour works by such important American choreographers as José Limón. Grants also are awarded to college and university dance departments to allow student performers access to their often-unavailable dance heritage.

In musical theater, the Arts Endowment provides support for professional and student productions of plays by Leonard Bernstein and Kurt Weill, among others, in venues from Tennessee to Washington to North Carolina.

Developed in response to the NEA study *Reading at Risk*, which documented the alarming decline in literary reading in the United States among all age groups, the Big Read is the literature component of American Masterpieces. (The Big Read will be featured in the next issue of *NEA Arts*.)

In 2008, the music component of American Masterpieces will shift to chamber music created for small ensembles. Projects that present a number of different art forms in a single performance also will receive grant support through the program.

In just two years, hundreds of communities and thousands of citizens have participated in one or more of the American Masterpieces exhibitions, performances, or events. In coming years, these projects will introduce thousands more to the wondrous treasure house of America's artistic legacy.

Douglas Sonntag
Director, National Initiatives



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ON THE COVER:

The Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre performing Talley Beatty's *Road of the Phoebe Snow* in 1976. Photo courtesy of Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation Archives.

American Masterpieces: Choral Music

Singing in Communities Large and Small

According to Wayne Brown, NEA Director of Music, “Choral music is celebrated by more than 28 million people who sing regularly in one form of chorus or another.” Given those numbers, it’s no surprise that choral music was the first music genre celebrated by the American Masterpieces initiative. In FY 2006, eight organizations received a total of \$490,000 to support regional choral music festivals, including the Providence Singers (Providence, Rhode Island) and Seattle Pro Musica Society (Seattle, Washington). Although only a few of the festivals have occurred thus far, the project already has reached more than 50,000 individuals.

In March, Craig Hella Johnson, Artistic Director of the choral group *Conspirare* (Austin, Texas), testified before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies about the Arts Endowment’s support for *Conspirare*’s regional choral festival. The January festival featured 14 choirs and included concerts, workshops, and community outreach events. “We hoped to create a variety of experiences within the festival that could highlight the power of choral music to bring people together even when faced with significant differences,” said Hella Johnson.

The Arts Endowment will award a second year of choral music grants in FY 2007. Those organizations that received 2006 grants also were invited to apply for additional NEA funding in order to broaden the visibility and awareness of these significant American composers of choral works. “We were pleased to provide the additional support to those organizations . . . who wanted to take advantage of regional radio broadcast and recordings. I would say most of them have accepted that invitation and are taking steps to see that we have



The Plymouth Congregational Renaissance Choir, which won first place as Church/Community Group during Brazeal Dennard Chorale’s spiritual festival in 2007. Photo courtesy of Brazeal Dennard Chorale.

subsequent airing and broadcast of those works that have taken place,” explained Brown.

In FY 2008, a first round of American Masterpieces grants are planned for chamber music. Brown said this is a natural evolution of Continental Harmony, a previous agency program that supported composers and ensembles in residence in all 50 states. American Masterpieces will use that existing network to support a series of chamber music festivals nationwide.

For Brown, American Masterpieces underscores the Arts Endowment’s mission. “This initiative has provided a great opportunity for all of the [NEA discipline] directors to become reacquainted with those works of repertoire . . . that resonate with communities large and

small. These works create possibilities for influencing new works going forward. Through an initiative like this one, repertoire that has had strong impact regionally has the potential to become known and observed in other parts of the country.”

Detroit’s Brazeal Dennard Chorale (BDC) received

an American Masterpieces grant of \$20,000 to support a choral festival devoted to spirituals. Festival coordinator (and director of the BDC Youth Chorale) Nina Scott spoke with the NEA about the importance of the spiritual in American music and the impact of NEA funding on BDC’s January festival of spirituals.

Brazeal Dennard Chorale (DETROIT, MI)

Remembering, Discovering, and Preserving the Tradition of the Negro Spiritual

NEA: Why did the Brazeal Dennard Chorale want to participate in American Masterpieces?

NINA SCOTT: We decided that we wanted to use that particular umbrella to put it in the forefront that the spiritual is *the* American art form in music that sprang from these shores. We wanted to make sure [the spiritual] got its rightful place and that we were able to do it in such a way that people were really able to glean a whole lot from the experience.

NEA: Who participated in the festival, and what kinds of activities were there?

SCOTT: We had 20 choirs participate, primarily from the Detroit area: thirteen different Detroit public schools, five churches, one community chorus, and one college. With the workshops and concerts, I would say that the project probably touched close to 2,000 people. [We had] a competition for the choirs, there were concerts each evening that featured spirituals, and spirituals only, and we had six workshops that covered the gamut of interest levels.

NEA: How important was NEA support to realizing your festival?

SCOTT: If it had not been for the grant, we would not have been able to do it at all. We did get matching funds, but the struggling economy here in the Detroit area has much of the funding drying up because the auto industry is really struggling right now.

NEA: What are some of the long-term benefits for the Chorale of participating in American Masterpieces?

SCOTT: Many of our Board members attended and watched the whole process, and after having seen [the festival], they decided that this has to be an annual event, so we’re really excited about that.

There would often be as many as 200 students or more in the auditorium at a time, and you could hear a pin drop. . . . when that kind of attention is being paid to something, they’re learning, they’re growing. So the long-term benefit is that the youth who were involved are going to grow like weeds, and they’re going to help to preserve and to spread the word about this wonderful genre.



Marvin Curtis conducts a workshop on spirituals for children. Photo courtesy of Brazeal Dennard Chorale.

America Sings!

How to Launch an American Masterpiece

The NEA launched American Masterpieces: Choral Music with “America Sings!,” an exuberant celebration of the nation’s rich choral music heritage, in partnership with Chorus America. Held at the Music Center at Strathmore in Bethesda, Maryland, the concert—featuring 12 choruses, an orchestra, a fife and drum corps, a barbershop quartet, and even square dancers—was spearheaded by Philip Brunelle, the initiative’s artistic director.

Founder and director of the Minneapolis chorale VocalEssence, Brunelle worked closely with NEA staff to develop the program’s choral music component. “When Dana Gioia met with me, he asked me to think about—from my years of choral work—who were the figures past and present in American choral music that really stood out, that would be called American masterpieces.” The resulting list of 29 composers ranges from early American composer William Billings to 20th-century legend Leonard Bernstein. Said Brunelle, “[The list is] so wonderful because it includes a wide range of people and a wide range of styles, from some things that are a little more esoteric to some things that are a little more down home.”

Featuring work by 14 American composers, Brunelle organized “America Sings!” to showcase the diversity of the country’s choruses, using staging as well as singing to keep the audience engaged. “If the music you do is not done in a way that’s interesting and catches the attention of the audience, they go away just saying ‘Well, that sounded very beautiful,’ but they’re not attracted to what you’ve done.”

Despite the extra hours of work, Brunelle thinks the program is an important one. “We in the United States in the choral field have not done enough to celebrate our composers, and so I see this initiative as one that will help make more people aware of the treasures and the



Music Director Philip Brunelle takes a bow at the end of the concert “America Sings!” at the Music Center at Strathmore in Bethesda, Maryland. Photo by Jim Saah.

beauties that we have in American choral music. I just think that this is the kind of initiative that will have a lasting impact.” Brunelle also applauds the Arts Endowment for its continuing commitment to bringing the nation’s art to all Americans. “All of the groups that have received [American Masterpieces] funding wish to not only perform what they’re doing in their home location, but also to take it out, and that becomes expensive to try and come up with the funds to go on any kind of tour. So the NEA’s support of this initiative really is critical. I do believe this wouldn’t even happen without it.”

American Masterpieces: Musical Theater

Curtains Up!

The hills are alive with the sound of musical theater thanks to the \$580,000 received by 13 theater companies as part of American Masterpieces. According to NEA Director of Theater and Musical Theater Bill O'Brien, "The inclusion of the discipline in the initiative has a particular resonance since, along with jazz, musical theater developed as an outgrowth of American culture.

state's year-long, statewide centennial celebration. Starring Oklahoma native and two-time Tony nominee Kelli O'Hara, the production features an all-Oklahoma cast and outreach presentations in partnership with the Oklahoma Department of Education.

Less familiar works by master artists, such as Kurt Weill's *Lost in the Stars*, and more recent works, including

Caroline, or Change by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Tony Kushner and composer Jeanine Tesori, are also on the bill. O'Brien said that what the works have in common is that "in every case, the works represent the very best that the form has ever produced. . . . The [funded projects] offer a number of very vivid snapshots of what lies at the heart of the American experience."

Oregon's Portland Center Stage received an American Masterpieces grant of \$45,000 to support a revival of *West Side Story*. More than 30,000 people saw the play during its extended

run, including more than 2,000 children and youth, and the production involved 25 actors and 15 musicians.

Wall Street Journal critic (and National Council on the Arts member) Terry Teachout raved, "Among other things, it's the best-sung revival of a musical that I've ever seen, whether on or off Broadway." The company's managing director Edith Love said that the NEA grant made the production possible: "It enabled us to produce something that Portland Center Stage could never have produced artistically on our own. It's twice the size of the average production that we do. . . it was probably the best received play in the history of the theater. It totally sold out weeks before."



The Shark girls extol the virtues of "America" in Portland Center Stage's production of *West Side Story* (left to right: Courtney Laine Mazza, Ivette Sosa, Dayna Tietzen, Kristen J. Smith, and Anna Kaiser). Photo by Owen Carey.

You can reach back and find influences in work that was generated in England and Germany and other places, but the form didn't really take flight until the Gershwins, Rodgers and Hammerstein, and some of the other American masters started to have their way with it."

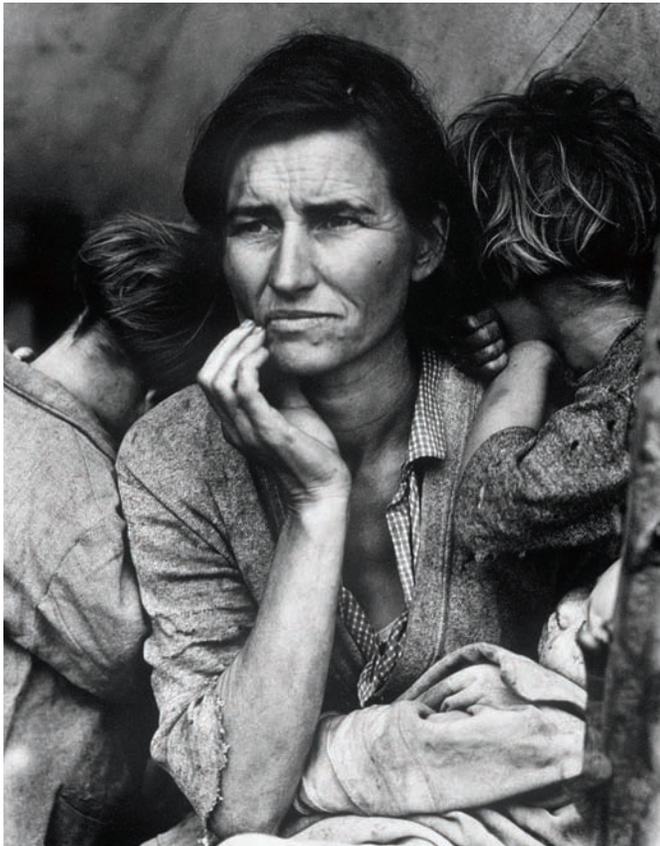
The productions supported by the grants include familiar masterworks, such as Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*, which is being produced by the Lyric Theater of Oklahoma as part of the

American Masterpieces: Visual Arts

Sharing the Depth and Richness of American Art

In the first two years of American Masterpieces: Visual Arts, 27 museums have received \$2,423,000 to support exhibitions ranging from *American Chronicles: The Art of Norman Rockwell* (Norman Rockwell Museum) to *Modernism in American Silver: 20th Century Design* (Dallas Museum of Art) to *Puerto Rico in the Artistic Imagination* (Museo de Arte de Ponce). This diversity of genre, geography, and period underscores the program's goals. Robert Frankel, NEA Director of Visual Arts, explained, "The idea behind the Visual Arts component is to bring to this country the material that highlights the extraordinary depth and richness of the history of visual arts in this country."

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Dorothea Lange's photograph *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California* (1936), which became an iconic image of the Great Depression, is one of the images traveling in the George Eastman House's exhibition *Seeing Ourselves: Masterpieces of American Photography*. Photo courtesy of George Eastman House.

George Eastman House

(ROCHESTER, NY)

Seeing Ourselves: Masterpieces of American Photography

NEA: Why did George Eastman House want to participate in American Masterpieces?

ALISON NORDSTROM: We recognize that we have the most important collection of photographs in the world, and we know that we are in Rochester, New York. And while we love it when people come to see what we have, and they do, we think the possibility of getting [the artwork] out to people is also really exciting. I think that American Masterpieces is one of the savviest projects that the NEA has come up with in a while—everybody wins. The big collections are supported in fulfilling their mission and the smaller institutions are supported in theirs.

NEA: Why is it so important that the nation have access to these original images?

NORDSTROM: When you see these *cartes de visite* of 18-year-old Civil War soldiers . . . it's not the image that breaks your heart, it's the sense that this little photograph would have been held in someone's hand, tucked away in a drawer as a special thing. The materiality of photographs is such an important part of how we understand them.

NEA: How important was the NEA grant to this project?

NORDSTROM: Oh, it was essential in that it let us offer this exhibition for a very nominal rental fee; if we had done this without NEA support, it would have been a \$30–40,000 exhibition, which would have been beyond the reach of most of these places.

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The itinerary of exhibit sites is extensive, with tours reaching communities from Cooperstown, New York, to Naples, Florida, to Anchorage, Alaska. “These exhibitions are scaled to be able to be shown not only in large institutions but small and medium-sized institutions in small and mid-sized communities throughout the country, and to bring to these communities works of art that in many instances would not be available,” says Frankel.

While some of the touring works are familiar to American audiences, Frankel insists it’s still important for the originals to be introduced to new generations. “You may be familiar with the materials from seeing

reproductions, but seeing the object itself is a very different thing.”

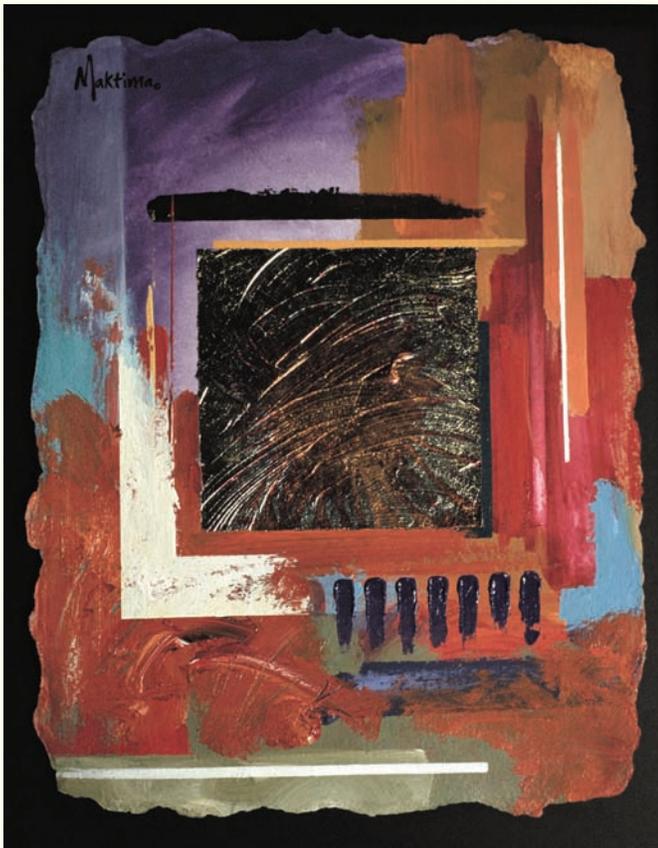
In FY 2005, the George Eastman House received \$200,000 to support the touring exhibition *Seeing Ourselves: Masterpieces of American Photography*. In FY 2006, Artrain received \$140,000 to support a tour of *Native Views: Influences of Modern Culture*. Eastman House curator Alison Nordstrom and Artrain President/CEO Debra Polich spoke with the NEA about what makes each exhibition an “American masterpiece,” why it’s important that all Americans have access to these works of art, and the impact of the NEA American Masterpieces grant on their projects.

Artrain

(ANN ARBOR, MI)

Native Views:

Influences of Modern Culture



Daybreak by Joe Maktima, a member of the Hopi/Laguna Pueblo tribe, is one of the artworks featured in Artrain’s traveling exhibition *Native Views: Influences of Modern Culture*. Image courtesy of Artrain.

NEA: Why did Artrain choose *Native Views* for its American Masterpieces project?

DEBRA POLICH: There’s a tendency in the United States to think of the outstanding artists of renown that are household names—the Warhols, the Rauschenbergs. . . . We have found from our research that there was a tendency not to necessarily look at the Native American culture and artists, particularly the contemporary artists, with that same level of recognition. But nonetheless, their work is pretty phenomenal.

NEA: How important was NEA funding to this project?

POLICH: It helped us to take *Native Views* to Alaska. This was our first time ever in Alaska; we took the show to six different communities. There are no Alaska Native artworks on board in the show, so to be sure to acknowledge and connect with the Alaska Native artists we had a resident artist that traveled with us to all six communities. We invited artists from the communities to take part as well.

NEA: How many people will benefit from this tour?

POLICH: For the entire tour [which is four years] we will probably hit 100 communities and 125,000 people directly. A whole host of those individuals, about 40 percent, are school children. We also have a lot of artists volunteering their time in our artist gallery, so they have an opportunity to showcase their work in the community they’re visiting and that turns into sales for them and exposure.

And The Trains Kept Coming

Jacob Lawrence's *The Migration Series* on Tour

Washington, DC's Phillips Collection received an American Masterpieces grant of \$100,000 to support the tour to five museums of 17 panels from Jacob Lawrence's *The Migration Series*. Senior Curator Elizabeth Hutton Turner, Associate Curator Elsa Smith Gall, and Director of Education Suzanne Wright spoke with the NEA about the museum's participation in the program. (Read the full interview on the NEA Web site: www.arts.gov/features/index.htm.)

these panels for yet another generation to tell this story, to be able to share this story not only with their children and their grandchildren but also to someone else's children and someone else's grandchildren. This gets us back to our mission at the Phillips, which is really all about the fact that we are so confident that there is a continuity, that art speaks across the generations and across cultures and across time. *The Migration Series* really is, for us, the great epitome of who we are as an institution. And we're

just so grateful that we can share this with the nation because it really does show us as a nation who we are.

NEA: I know the exhibit is traveling to a range of cities including San Antonio, Texas, Davenport, Iowa, and Jackson, Mississippi. How has the NEA grant affected your ability to present this tour?

PC: Because of the NEA grant we were able to provide [*The Migration Series*] to other museums without

charging a participation fee. (The fee helps with the organizational costs of developing the exhibition.) By waiving that fee, you really are opening up the possibilities for the medium and small museums, and that's who we targeted with this tour. Each venue also gets 100 teaching kits for free. [The grant] also allowed us to leverage other funding. So we have two foundations that have generously given additional money toward this tour as a result of the stamp of approval from the NEA.

I also want to point out how we have benefited from this grant. We have really, as an institution, made a commitment to studying *The Migration Series* and to learning as much as we can about Jacob Lawrence.



Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration Series*, "Panel 1—During World War I, there was a great migration North by Southern African Americans." Image courtesy of Phillips Collection.

NEA: Why is *The Migration Series* an American masterpiece?

PHILLIPS COLLECTION: [*The Migration Series*] is a quintessentially 20th-century masterpiece. What really enables us to keep going back to this series as an institution and for us to keep sending it to audiences is the way [Lawrence] made each one of these panels like a vessel of memory. The colors draw you in, the patterns open you up, and they allow room for the telling. There is room in

Because of our extensive work on this artist, we have a lot to share, and we believe we still have a lot more to learn. So this grant allows us to begin to test and really work with a whole new audience again exploring and learning more from allowing the panels to interact with communities all over the nation.

NEA: How many individuals will benefit from the exhibition tour?

PC: Our criterion was not that we wanted to reach as many people as possible. What was most important to us was that we could reach out to these smaller and mid-sized communities that would not have otherwise had access to the series and that we could also reach out to diverse communities that have been experiencing real issues of immigration themselves. [We've estimated] more than 60,000 people will be reached. But in addition to even thinking about the average general public, you have all the people we're reaching through schools; there's the immediate distribution of materials but then they're going to continue benefiting communities and schools.

NEA: Are there related community outreach and educational activities for *The Migration Series* tour?

PC: One of the things that we developed with the exhibition was a brochure that features excerpts of interviews with the artist, which have never been published before. What we really wanted to do with this tour is let the artist's voice come out, more than it may have in the past.



Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration Series*, "Panel 57—The female workers were the last to arrive North." Image courtesy of Phillips Collection.

Educators from the Phillips are going to each venue either in advance or during the exhibition to train and to



Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration Series*, "Panel 19—There had always been discrimination." Image courtesy of Phillips Collection.

learn from the docents and from the educators each museum works with. At the Phillips we have a program called the mentor-teacher program, a best-practices program to study how teachers use works of art in their curriculum. So we're taking this model and using it in each of these venues.

In *The Migration Series* teaching kit, we give teachers biographical and background information and all 30 panels that the Phillips owns, as color prints and electronic jpegs. We also provide a host of other kinds of visuals, from high tech to low tech. [There also are] literary resources as well as historical documents and things like that. We are advocates for the use of original documents and photographs that help kids develop their own critical thinking skills; they are active participants in learning about, understanding, and processing art and history.

American Masterpieces: Dance

Preserving Classics of an Ephemeral Art

Since awarding its first dance grant to American Ballet Theatre in 1966, the NEA has been instrumental in proliferating dance in the United States. American Masterpieces continues the tradition by providing grant support for reconstructions of masterworks of the American dance repertoire—many of them originally choreographed with NEA support—by professional companies and student dancers at the nation’s colleges and universities. The program also provides grants for companies to tour these works, providing employment for dance artists and offering Americans opportunities to experience the nation’s dance legacy.

The NEA’s dance reconstruction program is administered by the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) on behalf of the NEA. NEFA Executive Director Rebecca Blunk explained how the program works: “We have reconstruction grants for projects that get built back from being out of existence in live form and are then announced to the performing arts presenting field as available for touring. When presenters engage the reconstructed projects, there are touring grants available to the presenters who book them.” Since the program’s inauguration, 14 companies have received grants to support reconstructions of masterworks, including Paul Taylor Dance Company (New York, New York), Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company (Salt Lake City, Utah), and the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company (Dayton, Ohio). The first round of projects also included support for indigenous American dance forms, such as the hula drama *Kahekili* presented by ancient hula master Hoku-lani Holt (Maui, Hawaii). Two additional companies have received grants for touring support only.

Blunk said that the NEA’s support of these projects is crucial to their realization. “Although it sometimes ends



The Paul Taylor Dance Company performing Taylor’s *Esplanade*, which was reconstructed by Ruth Andrian and was performed by Florida State University as part of the American Masterpieces: Dance—College Component. Photo by Lois Greenfield.

up being a modest portion of the overall budget, [the American Masterpieces] grant is a sort of anchor or spark resource that then draws other resources to be aggregated, so there’s that leveraging effect.” Blunk added that the NEA’s imprimatur also gives a sense of community to the participating organizations. “The NEA is really behind this, it’s part of a whole campaign, in effect, that is helping the American public to be in touch with their artistic legacy. So therefore [companies think], let’s do it because we’re doing it together.”

Because of the touring component, American Masterpieces: Dance also benefits organizations that present arts performances. “We’re excited about how many new and different presenters are participating in the American Masterpieces program. It’s a different group of presenters in some cases . . . we’re happy to have them in our stable of presenters and communities that we directly work with,” Blunk said.

Another critical piece of American Masterpieces:



Dance is the college component, administered by Dance USA, which supports the reconstruction of master works by college dance programs. According to program manager Suzanne Callahan, the project serves a vital role in preserving the art form's rich history: There is limited notation of dance works, and professional companies often don't have the artistic or financial resources to support reconstructions. "Dance is passed on body to body. In the last 30 years or so, we've been able to work off video, which helps, but it's not the same. Imagine a musician trying to learn a piece of music from an audiotape."

In the first year of these college grants, 28 institutions have received \$10,000 each to reconstruct masterworks, including Donald McKayle's *Games* (University of Iowa, Iowa City), Isadora Duncan's *Schubert's Ninth Symphony* (Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, Pennsylvania), and Bebe Miller's *Blessed* (University of Hawaii at Manoa).

The college projects have three phases: the work is reconstructed using student dancers, the students perform the completed work, and students participate in active outreach outside of the dance department. Callahan explains that this outreach takes many forms, from presenting a performance to local community residents

Tapestry Dance Company's Matt Shields, Brenna Kuhn, and Jason Janas perform a piece by the Miller Brothers and Lois as part of *The Souls of Our Feet*. Photo by Farid Zarrinabadi.

to involving other campus departments in the creation and presentation of the work to presenting performances and lecture-demonstrations in local schools.

In the long term, the college component benefits individual students and the college community. "For colleges, the prestige of having NEA support and bringing national support onto campus gets the eyes and interest of the university administration. All of a sudden dance is not just this little hidden art form, it's the thing that's bringing national visibility."

The effect on students, who gain the chance to work with nationally recognized dance artists during the projects, is even more profound. "I think the thing that the students probably get that's most useful out of this [is knowing] if you put your mind to something, and you work together as a group, you can accomplish something that a month ago you never dreamed was possible. And that translates, I believe, to just about any area—a corporate boardroom, a non-profit organization, a sport, or a classroom," said Callahan.

Tapestry Dance Company

(AUSTIN, TX)

The Souls of Our Feet

Austin-based Tapestry Dance Company received a touring grant of \$25,000 to support a tour of *The Souls of Our Feet*, a celebration of masterpieces from the rhythm tap repertoire alongside contemporary work by living tap masters. Executive and Artistic Director Acia Gray—also the company’s co-founder—spoke with the NEA about the project and its importance to the preservation of tap as a dance form.

NEA: How does *The Souls of Our Feet* fit into the idea of American Masterpieces?

ACIA GRAY: [Tap is] an indigenous American art form. It was invented right here. Of course it’s an amalgamation of many different cultures and rhythms from African *juba* to Irish step dancing, but it didn’t become tap dance, in the form it’s been in the last 150 years, until it was invented here. It was our goal to truly celebrate this wonderful world of tap dance with not only a small selection of film classics but to be able to showcase some of the incredible artists that people don’t know.

NEA: How important was the NEA touring grant to realizing a tour of *The Souls of Our Feet*?

GRAY: It was actually imperative, I believe, because it gave a stamp of approval to Tapestry Dance Company’s work on a national level. Not that we hadn’t toured, but to know that [the project] had gone through an elite panel of people who really gave it a lot of thought, people knew they were going to get a wonderful production.

NEA: Is there a community outreach or educational component to the project?

GRAY: The outreach program kicks off [in March], and we’re going to start it here in Austin. We do a program called Rhythm, Dance, Music, and You, and it’s structured around the premieres we do each season. A big lesson in these outreach programs is really rhythm and music education. The next very important part of it is a



Jason Janas as John "Bubbles" Sublett in Tapestry Dance Company's production of *The Souls of Our Feet*. Photo by Amitava Sarkar.

history of the artists that are depicted in *The Souls of Our Feet* and the history of tap dance. It’s an elementary school program that we’re doing right now; the program that we take on the road will actually be adapted for all audiences.

NEA: What are the preservation efforts associated with the project?

GRAY: The reconstruction of the choreography itself, to have it documented for archival purposes, and keeping rehearsal footage of how the pieces were put together is important to me. But most important, there’s a reason, I believe, why tap dance hasn’t been touring, why you don’t see a lot of it. Finding out why that is and talking to people is a big thing we want to do. So evaluating our audience members and our presenters to gather that information on the interest of tap dance and the preservation needs of the art form is vital for us. And also [we want] the evaluations of the dancers or the musicians involved in the project: what was difficult, what were their thoughts on recreating the works, how are they going to use that for new work they intend to do?

Talley Beatty's *Road of the Phoebe Snow*

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre Tours a Masterwork



For nearly 50 years, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre (AAADT) has been a national and international cultural force. “We’ve been called by more than one U.S. President ‘America’s cultural ambassador to the world;’” said Development Director Bennett Rink. “That’s really important to us, to take the work that’s onstage . . . and make it accessible to the broader public. We are the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. The inclusion of the word American was not an accident on Mr. Ailey’s part. He wanted this company to represent the modern dance heritage of America.”

AAADT received an American Masterpieces grant of \$40,000 to support the reconstruction of *Road of the Phoebe Snow*, a jazz-soaked ballet for 14 dancers by Talley Beatty. Rink called *Phoebe Snow* a “quintessential American piece. You’ve got the choreography of Talley Beatty, who’s a true modern dance pioneer and a great influence on Mr. Ailey in his early years, and you’ve got music by two bonafide geniuses—Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn.”

AAADT Associate Artistic Director Masazuma Chaya—who danced *Phoebe Snow* in 1976—is restaging the work for the current company. “I think *Road of the Phoebe Snow* is very interesting because [Beatty] choreographed this in the 1950s and young people are still interacting in the same way. It’s very universal,” said Chaya.

What makes Beatty an American master is his fluent, concurrent use of movement from classical ballet, mod-

Masazumi Chaya (front/center) with the Ailey dance company in Talley Beatty's *Road of the Phoebe Snow*. Photo courtesy of Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation Archives.

ern dance, and jazz. As Chaya explained, “Classical ballet is about stretch and balance; modern dance is about going deeper to the ground, weight-wise; and jazz dance is sassy and sharp with a little bit more of an entertainment flavor to it. Talley is amazing in that his ideas about movement were always based on those three elements.”

The company’s 25-city U.S. tour in 2008, which kicks off in New York, will bring *Phoebe Snow* to more than 250,000 individuals. AAADT also will host outreach activities, including mini-performances for children, lecture-demonstrations, and master classes. Rink added, “We’ll be developing a special educational component around the production of *Road of the Phoebe Snow*. We anticipate that it will involve a Web site to learn more about the ballet, and about Talley Beatty’s role in American modern dance and the influence he had on others.”

As he rehearses the company, Chaya ensures that this new generation also feels Beatty’s powerful influence. “I love talking to dancers, saying, ‘When Talley was choreographing this. . .,’ sharing every single thing that I remember. I want them to know how he did his work, how he talked, and even how he got angry if you weren’t doing it right!”

In The News

Celebrating the Legacy of W.H. Auden

On February 26 and 27, the NEA presented *All I Have is A Voice: A Celebration of W.H. Auden's 100th Birthday*, a two-day event honoring the poet's legacy in American literature. "Although born in England, Auden spent half his life in the United States and died an American citizen," said NEA Chairman Dana Gioia. "It is important for his centenary to be celebrated in the capital of his adopted country." Sponsored in partnership with the Folger Shakespeare Library, *Poetry Daily*, and the Virginia Center for the Book, two free public events were held in Charlottesville, Virginia, and Washington, DC.

In Charlottesville, Auden scholar Arthur Kirsch, poet Charles Wright, and Chairman Gioia each recited their favorite Auden poems, expressing the poet's breadth of tone, from the



Reflecting on the evening's theme, "*All I Have is a Voice*," writer and critic Christopher Hitchens noted, "The voice is often enough." Photo by Michael Stewart.

humorous to the philosophical to the elegiac. Rounding out the evening was a live program by local cabaret legend Stephanie Nakasian, with accompanist Wells Hanley, of Auden poems set to music by Sir Benjamin Britten.

At DC's Folger Library, speakers included Chairman Gioia, Auden's literary executor Edward Mendelsohn, poet and critic William Logan, Irish poet and educator Eavan Boland, and writer and critic Christopher Hitchens.

Local Shakespearean actor Todd Scofield also gave a dramatic reading of an excerpt from *The Sea and the Mirror*, Auden's response to William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Auden

himself closed out the evening, by way of a rare recording of the poet reciting "On The Circuit" during a 1968 reading at the University Church of St. Mary, Oxford.

New Component of American Masterpieces Announced

On January 20, Chairman Dana Gioia attended the Association of Performing Arts Presenters annual conference in New York City to announce Presenting as a new American Masterpieces discipline, acknowledging that the new component would broaden the initiative's reach nationwide. Chairman Gioia then traveled to the West Coast for a February 2nd grants workshop with U.S. Representative Jane Harman (California-36th District.) After welcoming workshop participants, the Chairman and Representative Harman toured local arts organizations, including L.A. Theatre Works and Moffett Elementary School, an arts-based public school.

NEA Design Director Moving On

After four years, NEA Design Director Jeff Speck returns to private practice as a city planner. Chairman Gioia lauded Speck as "a creative visionary and a pragmatic entrepreneur. We wish him great success—and don't doubt he'll achieve it." Speck oversaw the successful creation of the NEA's Governors' Institute on Regional Design—modeled on the agency's 20-year-old Mayors' Institute on City Design—to aid governors with design issues.



Design Director Jeff Speck. Photo by Kevin Allen.

Still Swinging

25 Years of NEA Jazz Masters

Twenty-five years old and still swinging, the NEA Jazz Masters program celebrated its silver anniversary with a spectacular January 12 concert at the International Association for Jazz Education conference in New York City. The capacity crowd—including jazz educators, enthusiasts, musicians, journalists, and industry professionals from around the globe—gathered to honor the NEA Jazz Masters Class of 2007: bandleader Toshiko Akiyoshi, solo instrumentalists Curtis Fuller and Frank Wess, keyboardist Ramsey Lewis, vocalist Jimmy Scott, and composer/arranger Phil Woods. Dan Morgenstern, Director of the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, received the A.B. Spellman NEA Jazz Masters Award for Jazz Advocacy.

Since the program's inception in 1982, 94 individuals have been recognized as NEA Jazz Masters. NEA Chairman Dana Gioia noted that the award is "the greatest honor in jazz—equivalent of the Academy Award or Pulitzer Prize."

The evening's energetic tempo was set with performances by the Clayton Brothers Quintet and the Dizzy Gillespie All-Star Big Band, directed by NEA Jazz Master Slide Hampton, with special guests trumpeter Roy Hargrove and vocalist Roberta Gambarini. Rounding out the big band line-up were NEA Jazz Masters James Moody and Jimmy Heath.



Chairman Dana Gioia joins the 2007 NEA Jazz Masters. Back row, from left: Chairman Gioia, Dan Morgenstern, Phil Woods, Curtis Fuller. Front row, from left: Toshiko Akiyoshi, Ramsey Lewis, Jimmy Scott, Frank Wess. Photo by Tom Pich.

Other conference activities included the annual NEA Jazz Masters group photo. Fans waited patiently behind the roped-off staging area—many in disbelief that so many jazz icons were standing shoulder-to-shoulder a mere 10 feet away. The shoot was followed by a festive reunion luncheon with 25 NEA Jazz Masters enjoying a rare opportunity to get together. Conference attendees also were invited to visit the NEA kiosk for demonstrations of the NEA's free-of-charge Jazz in the Schools online curriculum (www.neajazzintheschools.org).

Poet (and retired NEA Deputy Chairman for Guidelines & Panel Operations) A.B. Spellman, in addition to his role as co-host with Chairman Gioia of the awards concert, moderated a lively hour-long panel discussion with six of the new NEA Jazz Masters. Chairman Gioia surprised Jimmy Scott by taking the stage to present to him a congressional recognition from U.S. Representative Stephanie Tubbs Jones (Ohio-11th District). Tubbs Jones thanked Scott "for sharing his beautiful voice and boundless talent with fans around the world."



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