

UTAH SYMPHONY | UTAH OPERA

Written Statement of
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Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations United States House of Representatives

FY2016 Funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)
March 18, 2015

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the subcommittee, Utah Symphony | Utah Opera (USUO) is grateful to submit testimony on behalf of its board, the community, the orchestra and opera fields, and music lovers throughout our state. Utah Symphony | Utah Opera urges the House Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies to appropriate \$155 million to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for Fiscal Year 2016. We ask Congress to continue supporting the important work of this agency, which increases public access to the arts, nurtures cultural diversity, promotes the creation of new artistic works, cultivates a sense of cultural and historic pride, and provides lifelong learning experiences to underserved groups, all while supporting millions of jobs in communities nationwide.

Speaking on behalf of my own organization, Utah Symphony | Utah Opera has served Salt Lake City as well as many communities throughout the state for decades, with the symphony celebrating its 75th Anniversary in the 2015-2016 season and the opera preparing to celebrate its 40th season in 2017-2018. Thanks to NEA grants for our opera and symphony, USUO has been able to enhance its provision of high quality musical and cultural programs to more than 820 schools, colleges, universities, libraries, community service organizations, senior groups, and corporations throughout the state of Utah, allowing us to serve over 400,000 people annually.

NEA Opera Grant Supports Community Connection to American Artistry

A FY 2005 NEA grant supported the development of *The Grapes of Wrath*, a co-commissioned and co-produced opera project of Utah Opera and Minnesota Opera, by American composer, Ricky Ian Gordon and librettist Michael Korie. Leading up to the premiere, Utah Opera and Minnesota Opera employed a unique approach to commissioning and developing the opera, which involved combining a series of workshops and public presentations. This innovative idea brought the stage director, conductor, composer, librettist, the entire cast, a full orchestra, and audiences together to thoughtfully develop the opera. The process gave the creative team the chance to revise and improve the work, well in advance of its premiere. This was done over a series of three public presentations held in conjunction with the Utah Arts Festival—an annual event serving approximately 80,000 people with a mission to promote the arts and enhance the quality of life in Utah—and through workshops in Minneapolis and Salt Lake City. Thanks to the interdisciplinary nature of engaging discussion forums and the participation of community reading groups and schools, this project allowed us to form lasting partnerships with local

libraries, academic institutions, museums, arts galleries, and other arts organizations while introducing opera to American literature enthusiasts and other new audiences.

On an artistic level, producing the *Grapes of Wrath* was exciting for Utah Opera because we are part of a growing body of opera companies telling current and timely stories that seek to make deeper connections with a growing audience. Since 1900, 880 new operatic works have been produced across the United States, and of those, nearly half have been produced within the last 15 years alone. This growth in the number and the quality of new American opera repertoire is a direct result of the NEA's investment in the arts.

NEA Orchestra Grant Supports Community Partnership and Young Musicianship

In that same vein of encouraging creativity, the Utah Symphony used a FY 2015 NEA grant to support the world premiere commission of *EOS*, by Augusta Read Thomas, the first woman and second American composer featured by Utah Symphony under its commitment to commission a new work annually. While Ms. Thomas is a composer of international renown, she has a special connection to Utah: the Utah Symphony previously premiered another of her works as part of our Chamber Music Series in 2007, and Ms. Thomas has also been composer in residence at the University of Utah. In a letter to the Utah Symphony following the premier, Ms. Thomas wrote, "Composers throughout history have needed the strong backing of great musicians, conductors, music leaders, and music lovers, who are of the depth, soul, excellence, vision, and care as you all are at USUO -- who program, perform and support music with expertise and sparkle. Without such support, composition is an impossible endeavor at which to improve. As such, I feel deeply fortunate for your personal investments in my life's work ... I loved being with Barbara Scowcroft and her amazing youth orchestra! Doing all of the various lectures and presentations was rewarding."

Commissioning *EOS* not only helped Utah Symphony audiences experience a longstanding tradition of contemporary music programming, but the work's premiere and surrounding events provided a unique opportunity for audiences in the western U.S., where orchestral music premieres are relatively uncommon. Furthermore, the Utah Symphony partnered with composition departments from nine surrounding universities to bring together composition students, professors, and working composers with Ms. Thomas, who discussed the creative process, career development, and new music in modern society. This NEA grant was more than simply providing seed money for presenting a single piece of music—it was the lynchpin for meaningful engagement with our community and connecting with the next generation of emerging local artists and students. We received wonderful feedback from our local composers who found the open rehearsal experience mesmerizing, delightful, and invaluable as a unique, non-lecture learning experience. Participants were able to watch the artistic process unfold and listen to comments from Ms. Thomas and Music Director, Thierry Fischer, to the symphony musicians as they worked on finer details of putting the piece together, such as articulation and balance of instrumentation.

Due to the success of our NEA-supported projects, USUO will be recording three commissions and world premieres by the Utah Symphony throughout the 2015 calendar year, which is the Symphony's 75th year. A federal grant of just \$10,000 has helped make it possible for USUO to undertake other projects with composers, such as recordings and community engagement.

NEA Funding Invests in Local Communities

NEA grants demonstrably support public access to and engagement with new and great art, while also representing a valuable investment in the economic growth of communities nationwide. Ron Jibson, CEO of Questar Corporation has supported the arts and identifies USUO specifically as an important contributor to economic development: “Utah Symphony | Utah Opera presents a level of artistry and culture that would otherwise not exist in our community. The organization is unique in having the capacity and artistic vision to perform major orchestral and operatic works of world class quality right here in Salt Lake City. They are a valuable resource in recruiting businesses and talented individuals who seek a quality of life consistent with the best cities in the nation, with economic impact extending far beyond the revenue generated by performances. Where the arts flourish, the people, and the economy, do as well, and this organization contributes to both a skilled work force and the livability index of our state.”

The economic impact locally truly is extraordinary. Utah Symphony | Utah Opera's performance activities generate approximately \$45.5 million of consumer expenditures in Salt Lake City and surrounding areas. Perhaps most importantly, it is estimated that 93% of USUO's expenses is directed back to the community. With approximately 120 full-time employees and another 200-300 contracted artists, craftsmen and part-time employees each year, USUO draws extensively from our local community to support our efforts, providing gainful and meaningful employment to individuals, who as consumers and tax payers contribute in turn to our economy rather than taking it out of state. Our audiences at the Capitol Theatre, Abravanel Hall, at Deer Valley, and at other venues throughout the state, spend money on transportation, dining, parking, childcare, and other services that further stimulate the economy and provide revenue for our business partners.

The return on the federal government's small investment in the arts is striking. In 2013, the American creative sector was measured by the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) in partnership with the NEA, which calculated the arts and culture sector's contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) at 4%, the performing arts being one of the top 6 contributors. Yet the return on investment is not only found in dollars. In 2012, 2.2 million people volunteered 210 million hours with arts and cultural organizations, totaling an estimated value of \$5.2 billion—a demonstration that citizens value the arts in their communities.

Grants from the NEA reach residents in all 50 states and every congressional district. From its grantees, the NEA requires at least a one-to-one match of federal funds, and on average, each NEA grant generates at least nine dollars from other state, local, and private sources, magnifying the impact of the federal investment and showing a network of support for the arts that is broad and interconnected.

Utah Symphony | Utah Opera Broadens Access to Live Music

As our grant examples have shown, USUO is committed to bringing the experience of live arts to many audiences—both those in our back yard as well as remote, underserved parts of the state. Our *Utah Symphony Mighty 5® Tour* last August took the orchestra on tour to all five of Utah's National Parks, allowing us to be a conduit for community engagement using great live music. The symphony performed in rural areas of Utah where many individuals, both young and old, heard live classical music for the very first time. As one audience member observed, “it's pretty

neat to be able to just walk down the road and be able to see the Utah Symphony—for free—at our park that we come to every day. It's quite the opportunity.” We also received extremely positive feedback from local businesses and tourism offices. “This was a one of a kind remarkable event and we are so grateful for the opportunity to have been a part of it and appreciate the special funding given to the Utah Symphony for these iconic performances. I believe we will see economic impacts from this project for several years in this rural area. We are excited at the prospects of teaming up and perhaps being able to showcase the Utah Symphony in our Mighty Five National Parks again one day,” said Falyn Owens, executive director of Garfield County Office of Tourism. This tour supported the Utah Office of Tourism's goals of promoting our parks locally, nationally and internationally; made efforts toward contributing to the economic development of the state; highlighted our organization as a kickoff to the 75th Anniversary of the Utah Symphony; and promoted Utah's National Parks in preparation for the Centennial celebration of the National Park System in 2016, which the NEA is also helping to celebrate this year in conjunction with its own 50th Anniversary.

Utah Symphony | Utah Opera is proud to be part of two extraordinary artistic disciplines. Our organization is represented on the national boards of the League of American Orchestras and OPERA America. The opera field has grown continuously and the productions, education, and community support that opera companies provide have evolved to meet the needs of their neighborhoods. Opera companies are finding new and exciting ways to bring the essence of opera to local theaters and community centers, frequently with new and innovative work that reflects the diverse cultures of the cities they serve. Strong partnerships with local schools, performances in non-traditional venues, and community-wide events introduce this multimedia art form to youth and adults who may have long held opera at arm's length.

Similarly, orchestras are continually finding new ways to unite and engage people through creativity and artistry. Orchestras now offer more than 10,000 education concerts, more than 4,000 community engagement concerts, and more than 40 kinds of programs, including pre-school learning, in-depth residencies in schools, afterschool partnerships in high-poverty communities, educational classes for seniors, and health and wellness programs. With more than 1,300 nonprofit symphony, chamber, collegiate, and youth orchestras across the country, America is brimming with extraordinary musicians, live concerts, and orchestras as unique as the communities they serve.

Increased NEA Funding Will Grow America's Creative Capacity

The NEA plays an invaluable role through its direct grants, Federal/state partnerships, and research on trends in public participation and workforce development. Communities nationwide have benefited greatly from federal support for the vitality of the arts, and even more communities could benefit from the myriad programs, workshops, residencies, premieres, free performances, and more that would result from increased support to the agency. The national arts community has called for NEA funding in the amount of \$155 million for FY 2016.

Thank you for this opportunity to convey the tremendous value of NEA support for opera companies, orchestras, and communities across the nation. On behalf of the Utah Symphony | Utah Opera, I urge you to support increased funding for the National Endowment for the Arts.