

**Virginia Commission for the Arts  
Minutes  
March 18, 2009  
Taubman Museum of Art, Roanoke**

Members Present: Dr. Lucius Ellsworth, Chair; David Briggs, Nick Covatta, Gwen Everett, Susan Hirschbiel, Evealina Gonzalez Porto, Ann Edwards Rust, Jackie Stone, Will Trinkle, Deborah Valentine, Vaughan Webb

Members Absent: Maria Laqueur and Deborah Wyld

Staff Present: Peggy Baggett, Foster Billingsley, Elizabeth Cantile, Cathy Welborn

Guests: Sarah Tune, Mill Mountain Theatre; Bamidele Emerson, Harrison Museum of African-American Culture

**Introduction**

Lu Ellsworth, Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. Peggy Baggett introduced Georganne Bingham, Director of the Taubman Museum, who welcomed the Commissioners to the Museum. Lu Ellsworth thanked Will Trinkle and Juan Granados for hosting the reception with local arts leaders on the previous evening.

Will Trinkle made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of December 11, 2008. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

**Update on State and National Advocacy**

Peggy Baggett reported on the status of the state budget and the appropriation for the Virginia Commission for the Arts.

Lu Ellsworth reviewed the state advocacy strategy and the attempts to minimize the state budget cuts. He also gave information from a recent meeting of the board of directors of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies on the status of other state arts agencies around the country.

Susan Hirschbiel reported on her meeting with the new U. S. Representative from the Second Congressional district. Peggy Baggett reported on meetings with the new U.S. Representatives from the Fifth and Eleventh Congressional districts.

Lu Ellsworth reported on the status of the appropriation for the National Endowment for the Arts.

## **Mill Mountain Theatre**

Sarah Tune, a board member of Mill Mountain Theatre, gave a status report on efforts to reorganize and reinvent Mill Mountain Theatre. Several Commissioners commended the work of the board of directors in dealing with the debt and planning a new model for the theatre.

## **2009-2010 Grants Budget**

Peggy Baggett reviewed the first draft of the 2009-2010 grants budget. A discussion followed in which the following points were made.

- If there is additional funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, it would be good to have the same amount of funding for Artist Residencies and Teacher Incentive Grants as at the start of the 2008-09 year.
- The Commission should continue to monitor its membership status with the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation to ensure that Virginia is getting a reasonable rate of return on its investment through the annual dues. In addition, the Commission should monitor where the Mid Atlantic funds are going in Virginia to ensure that these grants fit into the Commission goals and strategies.

## **Teacher Incentive Grants**

A discussion followed about the Teacher Incentive Grants. Several Commissioners commented that there has been discussion for several years about the value of these grants and about the distribution of the grants across the state. There was consensus to create a task force to make recommendations on this grant category by the June meeting.

## **Priorities for the Advisory Panels**

A discussion followed on funding priorities in a time of economic challenges. There were differing opinions on whether to fund new applicants in the coming year. The following points were made.

- The Commission has invested significant resources in building a network of nonprofit arts organizations across the state. Preservation of this network by giving priority in funding to the current grantees should be the highest priority.
- It is the goal of the Commission to support the entire infrastructure of the arts in the state. Cutting off funding for new initiatives would be cutting off the lifeblood of the arts.
- The Commission should exercise due diligence in reviewing all applications, whether from current grantees or new applicants. All organizations should be held to a high standard.
- In times of economic uncertainty it is more important than ever to ensure that the Commission grantees are providing excellence in the arts and are working in a fiscally responsible manner.

- Because operating support is the hardest funding to raise from the private sector, it is important that the Commission continue to provide it.

In conclusion, the Commissioners directed the Commission staff to ensure that the panelists review each application on the basis of financial stability and strategies for coping with the economic challenges.

### **Economic Stimulus Funds**

Peggy Baggett distributed and reviewed materials on the economic stimulus funds for the arts, as well as the plan for publicizing the new grant category.

The Commission then took a break for a tour of the Taubman Museum of Art.

### **Updates on Ongoing Initiatives**

Susan Hirschbiel gave a report on *MINDS WIDE OPEN: Virginia Celebrates Women in the Arts*, including the hiring of the marketing firm Neathawk Dubuque & Packett, the advisory committee of current and former First Ladies of Virginia, and the Facebook page. Lu Ellsworth commended Susan for her good work in chairing this statewide initiative.

Peggy Baggett gave an update on the Arts Build Communities initiative of Virginians for the Arts.

Peggy Baggett also reported on plans for the 2010 Art Works for Virginia conference.

A discussion followed on the status of the partnership between the Commission and Virginians for the Arts.

### **Election of the Nominating Committee**

Lu Ellsworth opened the floor for nominations for the Nominating Committee. Evelia Porto nominated Lu Ellsworth, Susan Hirschbiel, and Will Trinkle. Susan Hirschbiel nominated Deborah Valentine. After discussion the Commissioners agreed by consensus to suspend the by-laws, which call for a three person Nominating Committee, and elect the four individuals to the Committee. Nick Covatta made a motion to elect the four individuals. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

### **Discussion of Ways that the Commission Can Assist Arts Organizations beyond Funding**

David Briggs led a general discussion of ways that the Commission can assist Virginia arts organizations in addition to funding in these challenging economic times. There was discussion of offering loans in addition to grants, a mentorship program, and expanded information resources.

### **Discussion of the Commission Role in Mergers of Arts Organizations**

Peggy Baggett opened the discussion of this topic by reviewing the conversation at the

December 11, 2008, meeting. She noted how few mergers have taken place among Virginia arts organizations. There was consensus that it would not be effective for the Commission to actively promote mergers. There was agreement that the Commission should encourage partnerships and collaborations among arts organizations. There was agreement that it would be appropriate for the Commission to host, but not set the agenda for, meetings to discuss partnerships, collaborations, or mergers. There was agreement that the Commission could fund the start-up costs for partnerships, collaborations, and mergers.

During the discussion suggestions were made to have a list of consultants available with particular expertise in mergers and to include a concurrent session at a future Art Works for Virginia conference on successful models for shared productions by professional theatre companies.

Following a tour of the O. Winston Link Museum, there being no further business, the Commission adjourned at 2:40 p.m