Testimony in Support of FY2008 Funding for the National Endowment for the Arts
Submitted to the House Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee

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On behalf of The Phoenix Symphony, America’s orchestras and the entire performing arts community, I urge the subcommittee to approve Fiscal Year 2008 funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) at a level of $176 million. Bipartisan Congressional support for the NEA has strengthened in recent years, evidenced by meaningful incremental funding increases. Still, the NEA has never fully recovered from a 40 percent budget cut in FY96. The current FY07 level of funding for the NEA - $124.4 million – is well below the 1992 appropriation of $176 million.

The arts are essential to life in American communities nationwide. From small towns to urban centers, communities look to the arts to generate economic activity and educate our nation’s citizenry. Most significantly, as a nation we also turn to the arts for their unique capacity to offer comfort in times of stress, provide meaning amidst uncertainty, spark unity during conflict, and to mark many of our most historically significant moments. More than 40 years of support from the National Endowment for the Arts has fostered the development of many orchestras, theatres, opera companies, dance companies, and performing arts centers throughout America, and has increased the capacity of the arts to serve and strengthen communities across our country. A significant increase in funding will expand the NEA’s ability to serve the American public through grants supporting and promoting the creation, preservation, and presentation of the arts in America through the NEA’s core programs – Access to Artistic Excellence, Challenge America: Reaching Every Community, Learning in the Arts for Children and Youth, and Federal/State partnerships – and through important national initiatives.

Founded in 1947, The Phoenix Symphony proudly serves the citizens of the greater Phoenix metropolitan area, central Arizona, and the southwestern United States to evoke a passion for classical music within the entire community. What began as an occasional group of musicians performing a handful of concerts each year (in a city of fewer than 100,000 people) today serves more than 300,000 people annually, with 275 concerts and presentations throughout the Valley of the Sun and beyond. The 75-member Phoenix Symphony presents an annual season from September through May, featuring classical and pops concerts in downtown Phoenix, along with a variety of symphonic and community presentations in Scottsdale, in Prescott, and throughout central Arizona. Each season, the Symphony performs for more than 50,000 students and children (representing over 260 different schools), helping to introduce music to new generations through a variety of education, community, and youth-engagement programs.
NEA Grants Uniquely Support the Creation, Presentation, and Preservation of the Arts

The NEA awarded more than 1,700 grants last year to nonprofit arts organizations for projects that encourage artistic creativity and that bring the arts to millions of Americans. The NEA’s FY06 Grants to Organizations included 111 grants to orchestras and the communities they serve, supporting arts education for children and adults, expanding public access to performances, preserving great classical works, and fostering the creative endeavors of contemporary classical musicians, composers, and conductors.

It is a great pleasure to describe the impact of an NEA-supported project in my community. A $20,000 NEA grant to The Phoenix Symphony currently supports One Nation, a partnership between the Symphony and the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, designed to promote cross-cultural awareness and increased access to music education. The grant was awarded through the NEA’s Access to Artistic Excellence category, and the project exemplifies how NEA funding can help local arts organizations respond to the emerging needs and priorities of their communities.

Now in its seventh year, the One Nation program has been built, over time, to increase the capacity of the Symphony to address an important local community of learners. Throughout the development of the program, the Symphony has partnered with school administrators and the Tribal Council to plan and promote beneficial and appropriate music-learning experiences.

One Nation is an after-school residency program at the Salt River High School and Elementary School that culminates in public community performances by Salt River students and Symphony musicians. Through the One Nation program, the Symphony enhances the fundamental music education programs of the community’s elementary and secondary schools while simultaneously interacting with new audiences in the Native American community. This school year, 60 students have received private and group lessons with Phoenix Symphony musicians. Learning and musical accomplishment are key goals of the One Nation program, but are not the only outcome for participants. In addition to weekly private lessons, students also receive mentorship and guidance from Phoenix Symphony musicians. Salt River High School music teacher Chris Wakely has said, “One Nation has had a huge impact on our students, not just musically, but also socially and behaviorally.”

On April 15, after a semester of instruction and practice, Salt River students took to the stage with The Phoenix Symphony for a “side-by-side” concert performed for the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community. Participating in these concerts, I have witnessed the impact that the arts have in the lives of these students and their community. Over the months of study and preparation, students who were uncertain or shy developed improved self-confidence, coming out of their shells and developing new skills that they immediately put to use both on and off the stage. The Symphony members who work one-on-one with these students have a special bond with them, and performing together is a momentous occasion for both students and teachers. When a student experiences a full symphony orchestra from the inside for the first time, connecting with a masterpiece of sound, it is a life-changing experience that affects us all. I remember that moment in my life, and I am thrilled to bring the music I love to young people that might not otherwise have had the chance, without such great programs like One Nation.
The community-to-community connection forged by this partnership produced results for students, parents, and musicians alike. Though the reservation is geographically close to the orchestra’s concert hall, it can seem a world away. Throughout the history of this program, we have seen that metaphoric distance shorten as, over time, more and more parents attend the One Nation concerts. As a result of this program, The Phoenix Symphony’s relationship with this important part of our community has grown in very meaningful ways. It is said that music is the universal language. By teaching these young people to perform and enjoy classical music, we have started a connection using that language that will grow as this new generation becomes leaders in their community. The students are taught self-discipline, tolerance, appreciation, and communication, along with the music, and these skills will facilitate good relations between the reservation and the Valley of the Sun as a whole.

The One Nation project is one of many community-based programs supported by the NEA’s competitive grant-making process. Orchestras across the country are essential and active partners in increasing access to music, improving the quality of life in their communities by collaborating with school systems and other local partners in a wide array of performances and programs. Funding from the National Endowment for the Arts has been a key source of support for the One Nation program, and for hundreds of other community-based arts programs across the country.

**NEA Funding Uniquely Increases the Creative Capacity of the United States**

Ticket revenue covers approximately 40 percent of The Phoenix Symphony’s annual budget. Further funds are provided through the generosity and vision of thousands of individuals, corporations, and foundations. The Symphony also receives important support through public funding provided from the area’s citizens via the Arizona Commission on the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, Phoenix Office of Arts & Culture, and other governmental departments. This delicate balance of public and private support is also key to supporting the nearly 1,800 orchestras across the United States. Orchestras exist in all 50 states, in virtually every community, with annual budgets ranging from less than $50,000 to more than $70 million. Nationwide, concert income accounts for only 37% of orchestra revenue. NEA funding is a critical component in the network of public, private, corporate, and philanthropic support that makes the work of America’s orchestras possible.

The grants awarded directly to local orchestras by the NEA, and support provided to orchestras through NEA funds administered by state arts agencies, provide critical support for projects that increase access to music in communities nationwide. NEA funding also makes good economic sense. In this federal/state partnership, 40 percent of the NEA’s program dollars are granted to state arts agencies, conditional on each state devoting its own appropriated funds. NEA funds produce a similar leveraging effect at the local level. For many communities, the benefit of an NEA grant goes far beyond the dollar-value of the award, multiplying private support by attracting additional sponsorship and recognition.

This has certainly been the case for The Phoenix Symphony. Funding from the NEA in FY2001, together with support from the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, allowed One Nation to
expand from an initial pilot program to a school-year-long residency. Further grants from the NEA, matched by other sources of support, have allowed the project to grow over time. Donors and other members of our community view the support provided by the NEA as a significant endorsement of this project, attracting additional financial support, generating press coverage, and increasing public participation and attendance in the *One Nation* events.

**NEA Funding Connects the Arts and Artists to Their Communities**

The NEA identifies and supports projects that connect the arts – and artists – to their broader communities, encouraging creative collaboration and building artistic strength. America’s orchestras are deeply rooted in their local communities. Orchestral music is the product of a vast network of hundreds of thousands of local musicians, volunteers, administrators, and community leaders – all dedicated to adding value and meaning to life by fostering creativity and engaging the public in the extraordinary experience of orchestral performances.

It is time to increase federal support for the vitality of the arts in communities nationwide. The national arts community has called for NEA funding to be restored to $176 million. The American Symphony Orchestra League, the national organization for orchestras, endorses this request. The American Federation of Musicians, of which I am a member, also endorses this request. In fact, more than 90 national organizations representing the full range of the American artistic community - including my colleagues from the performing arts disciplines of Dance, Opera, Theatre and Presenting - are unanimous in their request for a significant increase in federal funding for the NEA.

Most notably, beyond this perhaps obvious core of advocates, *the American public favors increasing federal dollars in support of the arts*. This is evidenced by consistently growing bipartisan congressional support for the NEA over the past ten years. These modest but important year-by-year increases have still left the NEA’s budget – and capacity to support the arts - well below its level of 15 years ago.

Thank you for this opportunity to illustrate the value of NEA support for The Phoenix Symphony and communities across the nation. I urge you to support creativity and access to the arts by approving a substantial increase in funding for the National Endowment for the Arts.