

Summary of findings from Performing Arts Summit and Interviews

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Bill Bulick, of Creative Planning, was contracted in the fall of 2008 to design, facilitate and glean findings from a Summit of performing artists who live and/or work in the Beaverton area. The purpose of the summit was to determine strategies that could be undertaken by the Beaverton Arts Commission to improve the climate for performing arts in the community. The following is a report of those findings.

Three questions were used to probe for issues, challenges and opportunities:

- How and why do performing arts matter in Beaverton?
- What can be done to improve the climate for performing arts in Beaverton?
- What might Summit participants do to help forward an agenda responding to findings?

In advance of the Summit, Bill Buick conducted 60-90 minute interviews with four exemplary performing artists who live and/or work in Beaverton, in order to test our line of inquiry and gather in-depth responses. These artists appreciated the opportunity to provide input, and their input is synergistic with what we heard at the Summit. Findings and recommendations from both processes are melded together in this report.

At the Summit, participants were asked where they live and work, what artistic discipline(s) they represent, whether they teach, and whether they make their living full-time as artists. Our three principal questions were asked and discussed at small-group tables and findings were reported out to the large group for general discussion.

In this report, responses to the three principal questions are grouped by topic, with the most frequent and emblematic responses listed first, followed by those mentioned less frequently. *Direct quotes from Summit participants or pre-interviews that were emblematic and/or provocative are listed in italics.*

Pre-Interviews With Four Typical Artists

- Woodwind quintet member and teacher
- Member of the Beaverton Chamber Symphony
- Theatre artist, acting/singing coach, former High School Drama teacher
- Concert pianist and teacher

Relevant Factors For Our Inquiry – Typical Of These And Other Artists

- None are able to “make it” with performing alone; all have multiple sources of support: teaching, performing, part time job; retirement income.
- Part time work is a critical support factor for most, but makes scheduling – particularly for auditions – difficult.
- All of those interviewed teach, most in private lessons or coaching.
- It is important to note that although musicians can generally maintain their teaching in a room in their residence, other art forms, such as theatre and dance require equipped facilities for teaching, as well as rehearsal and performance.
- Most perform in more than one ensemble – to have more opportunities for creative outlets. Payment is minimal and is a minimal motivator.

Geographic Considerations

- Three of the four live in Beaverton, but all perform throughout the region. There are not enough performing opportunities in Beaverton to support these artists.
- Students tend to come from Beaverton or at least the Westside.

Summit Attendance and Make Up

52 individuals attended the summit, including seven Beaverton Arts Commission members and staff, who helped facilitate and take notes during small group discussions. They were also full participants. Of those in attendance the following characteristics were gleaned by asking for a “show of hands” at the beginning of the Summit:

- How many live in the Beaverton City Limits? 17-18
- How many are from Washington County? 13
- Not from Washington County? 14
- Artistic Disciplines: 30 Music, 7 Theatre, 13 Dance, 6 Management
- How many make their living as a full-time artist? 6
- How many by teaching? 13

Findings from Summit Discussions and Pre-Interviews

QUESTION # 1: Why do performing arts matter? (Many of these responses generalize to all art forms.)

- The most frequently mentioned “value” of arts and cultural activity is its ability to build community:
 - The arts bring people together and promote connections.

- They reflect the diversity of the community and the rich textures of its identity.
 - *Art helps us celebrate our diversity rather than being afraid of our diversity. Embrace it – understand one another better.*
 - The arts promote cross cultural and multigenerational exchange and understanding. One table noted that there are 89 languages spoken in Beaverton and that the arts and culture bridge differences by communicating in ways that all understand.
 - *We love to do it – practice and rehearse – but it is the harmony with the community that is important.*
 - *We are defined by our culture – which is defined by our art.*
- The performing arts also impact people personally in the following ways:
 - Improve quality of life.
 - Entertainment.
 - Provides a challenge to the artist.
 - Inspirational.
 - A break from reality.
 - *Life is boring without them.*
 - Constructive use of one's time.
 - Capacity to transform lives.
 - *Exposure to it is needed, especially now. People need to let their spirits soar.*
 - Adults have even less access to arts experiences (especially lessons) when they leave school.
 - *As we express ourselves through art, we learn about humanity – become compassionate, loving human beings, and understand other points of view and motivations.*
 - *For the individual, arts give you a voice – in words, in paint, in music. When we find our voice we build self-esteem and self-efficacy. We can contribute more to society.*
- All tables and interviews noted the importance of cultural exposure and learning for youth.
 - The arts improved science, literature and math skills.
 - They are an important part of learning about diverse cultures.
 - Experience in the arts develops skill sets such as creative thinking, time management, etc.
 - Involvement in the arts builds self-esteem.
 - Provides a great exercise in attentiveness and theater etiquette for kids.

- When young people are exposed to music, they are more likely to continue that interest when they are older, through hands-on involvement and as audience members and patrons.
- *Kids don't have as much access to arts in school, and it is usually visual and not performing arts.*
- *The arts are being left behind in schools. We should do anything we can to support them.*
- *"Live" performing arts are an example for youth – the arts come from people not just iPods.*
- The economic impact of the arts was also noted by several tables.
- Having performing arts events in Beaverton is also a cheaper, and "greener" alternative to driving to Portland.

QUESTION #2: What is needed to enhance the climate for performing arts in Beaverton?

- Venues was the most frequently mentioned factor – both the availability of suitable spaces for performing arts, as well as awareness of what venues might be available, and their capabilities.
 - The aspiration for a well-equipped, publicly supported (therefore accessible/affordable to artists and arts groups) performing arts center was voiced many times. Theatre and dance, in particular, require more specialized technical capabilities.
 - More multi-use spaces, available for rehearsals, storage, etc., are also needed.
 - There is a belief that more venues may be available -- churches, schools, plazas, retirement centers and unused buildings, even malls. But assessment is needed as to acoustics, stage size, seating, technical capabilities, cost and availability.
 - It was noted that schools often cancel at the last minute for various given reasons.
 - Perhaps some spaces could be better equipped to accommodate performance.
 - McMenamins was cited as an entity that has developed performance space and opportunities, often in partnership with the community.
 - City venues, such as the library, community rooms, central plaza and farmer's market could be better utilized as well.
 - An up-to-date, comprehensive, online database of performing venues – including churches, schools, etc., with info about costs, size, seating, equipment, etc. is needed.

- *Combine resources with Tigard to buy the closed down movie theater building at Washington Square Mall.*
- More opportunities to perform are needed. Possibilities include:
 - Summer concert series.
 - A performing arts showcase.
 - Integration of performing artists into events such as Beaverton Last Tuesday and “brown bag” lunch performances.
 - Enhance communication with community center and retirement center program planners, in order to surface and promote opportunities for performing artists.
 - *We should be developing performance series at local churches and schools, so people can walk to them without leaving a carbon footprint.*
 - *We need an international festival in Beaverton.*
 - *Bring back some well-known, talented artists who originated in Beaverton.*
 - *In this region, actors have the “Catch 22” choice of doing equity – jobs are few and far between, but better paid – or non-equity – more jobs, but very low pay. Most choose to be non-equity in order to work more, but must support themselves with part-time jobs that make it hard for them to audition. Until there is a critical mass of equity theatres in the region, this problem seems intractable.*
- Enhance marketing and audience development:
 - Promoting the role and value of the arts – as stated above – is a platform for building awareness and audiences.
 - Develop and/or enhance a web-based calendar of cultural events (see <http://www.pdxcc.net/> as an example).
 - Better utilize the BAC and City of Beaverton newsletters and other promotional vehicles for performing arts.
 - Marquees could be utilized to promote performances.
 - Raise media awareness and coverage of performing arts events, including critical reviews of Beaverton events. Better utilize Community TV.
 - One table posted a hierarchy of most used sources of information about cultural events: A&E, OregonLive.com, KBPS, Willamette Week, direct mail/e-mail.
 - *Invite famous performers who grew up in Beaverton back for events to promote the arts.*
 - *We could reach new and enlarge audiences by taking the arts into new venues and updating performance conditions to engage with young people and adults who may not think of themselves as interested in classical music; combining classical music with rock, for example.*

- Many said that the Beaverton Arts Commission should initiate joint marketing efforts and provide assistance to organizations in their marketing efforts.
- Create and promote networking opportunities for performing artists and potential partners, including professional development opportunities.
 - The www.artstage.info web site is a good start in connecting artists with producers, and sponsors. It needs to reach a critical mass of participation to be an effective tool. It will likely work better for musicians than other performing artists because musicians can take more varied gigs. Theatre and dance have their own “infrastructure” for selection of artists for events.
 - Artists need information and help to develop their marketing, fund-raising, financial management and other skills.
 - Inform and network with local businesses to interest them in using more performing arts.
- Arts education and cultural learning for youth:
 - *Bring arts back into the public schools.*
 - Youth performances at all arts events.
 - More mentoring opportunities in the arts, for youth.
 - More promotion of opportunities for private lessons – individual and group, such as the Southwest Music School (www.swmusicschool.org), but are needed in all performing arts disciplines.
 - Advocate for integrating the arts into curriculum.
 - Broaden the scope of Beaverton Educational Compact to include the arts and performing arts.
 - Promote parental involvement with performing arts in schools and opportunities for the community to enjoy these performances.
- Funding is a prime ingredient for fueling more performing arts activity and participation and it came up at every table.
 - Gain increased funding from the City of Beaverton.
 - Pass a local levy.
 - Integrate the arts into a school levy.
 - Change how the arts are supported through the state. *What could be done with our 150th birthday celebration?*
 - Public funding makes the arts affordable.
 - *How do we fund free performances for those unable to afford them?*
 - *The arts need to be accessible to all income levels.*
 - *Fundraising (private) is not so good right now.*

QUESTION #3: What are Summit participants willing to do to help address these issues and implement strategies?

Summit participants expressed eagerness to help in the following ways:

- Help with advocacy for increased funding. *I can organize.*
- Help to raise awareness; networking with other artists and groups; become more involved with BAC and RACC.
- Volunteering: update the website; willing to perform for city; continue volunteer work with their performing arts groups; provide better communication among groups and with BAC.
- Fundraising, grant writing, networking.
- Patronize events.
- *I'd like to build a consortium of intermediate artists – needs BAC to help bring the groups together.*
- *Beaverton Visioning Advisory Committee participation.*

The Beaverton Arts Commission would like to thank all of the Summit participants for their input and feedback. The views expressed at the Summit will help guide the Arts Commission's future planning and long-term objectives with respect to the performing arts segment of our local community, as well as establish the Beaverton Arts Commission as a reputable resource for performing artists.

Are you interested in moving our agenda forward? Please contact the Beaverton Arts Commission to find out what you can do to enhance the performing arts in Beaverton.