

the 1998 Nancy Hanks Lecture

ON ARTS AND PUBLIC POLICY



Photo by Carol Weinberg

LECTURER

DR. BILLY TAYLOR

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John F. Kennedy Center

for the Performing Arts

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH. I am highly honored to inaugurate the second decade of Nancy Hanks Lectures on Arts and Public Policy. I met Nancy many years ago. I was on a commission that Governor Rockefeller put together. Among other things, we came down to Washington, D.C., to see how the national government was doing it.

The first thing I noticed was that the entire country was spending less on the arts than we were in New York State. I asked Nancy about that. I said, “Why is it that we have got more money for the arts in New York than you have here in Washington?” She thought about that. The next thing I knew, I was on the Council.

Nancy worked tirelessly to make the arts accessible to the broadest possible audience. Her dedication, determination and creative spirit was an inspiration and catalytic to all of us who were fortunate enough to work with

her. As a member of the National Council on the Arts, I witnessed first hand how a concerned public servant could effectively represent her constituency by being as creative and as focused in her field as they were in theirs.

I remember her excitement after she appeared on a fund raising benefit for the Metropolitan Opera. She said, “That concept can work for everybody,” and she

immediately began to work on a program that was designed to stimulate and encourage the matching of money in ways that would increase support for hard-to-fund aspects of all the arts.

Nancy had a very special talent for bringing

odd people together. I mean, I watched her work on a lot of occasions and the most unlikely group of people would be in a room and she would have them talking. Ultimately, they would be in the fold supporting the arts because she had this quality of knowing how to match movie stars and piano players, or whomever, with Congresspeople and other folks that really could be helpful in their own ways.

She could articulate just how they should be matched up. She was very helpful in that regard. Her contribution to the arts in particular, and to our culture in general, was unique. It continues to be a benchmark for all of us.

I am a jazz musician. I have traveled all over the world representing the United States, so I’ve seen how our arts define us to people in other countries. Jazz is America’s classical music. It puts many aspects of our culture into a musical context which can be readily understood and accepted by people who may disagree with us philosophically and politically. For example, when my trio plays jazz in a country where the freedom to express oneself is limited, the audience immediately notices that each member of the trio has the freedom to say spontaneously whatever he chooses to say and the music that results reflects the combined efforts of all the players. This type of freedom is invaluable to those who don’t have it.

Many people who have immigrated to the United States were initially attracted to our way of life by the music and commentary they heard on the Willis Conover jazz programs, which were broadcast on the Voice of America’s radio network. The appeal of jazz, as a unique American medium of expression, has often transcended languages and customs, yet here in my own country, I am embarrassed and distressed when I realize how many Americans are unaware of the cultural legacy of this indigenous music, despite the fact that it has been declared a national treasure by an act of Con-

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gress. Since Congress has officially recognized its importance, it could adopt some policies that would help Americans realize, more fully, the positive impact that jazz has had all over the world. Willis Conover passed away but we should be continuing his legacy, not only outside of the U.S., but also here at home. That legacy should be built upon and expanded.

Other countries send their best artists to our country in order to share their culture with us, but though we are richer than most of them, as a visiting artist, I am often asked why we do not think enough of them to send our best in return. A few years ago, I was in Senegal with a large group of artists, business people and affluent supporters of the Jackie Robinson Foundation. We were there on a cultural exchange organized by Rachel Robinson and the friends of the Jackie Robinson Foundation. We put on a jazz festival and were entertained by fine many artists from Senegal.

One night at a reception at the American Embassy, a young American laughingly told me, many Senegalese musicians had asked if the Embassy would find someone to teach them to play jazz. He seemed to think it was funny that when the Embassy couldn't find anyone, the Russians came to their assistance. I asked him, "What did the Russians teach them? That, in the beginning, jazz came up the Volga, not the Mississippi?" He didn't get it.

When I was growing up here in Washington D.C., the capital of the United States was officially a segregated city, but I was not culturally deprived; I heard great music at home, performed by members of my family and their friends. I also heard great performances by world renowned artists at Howard University and in local churches, in the African American part of town. I was taken to the museums and other places of cultural and historical interest by my parents and other adults who made up my extended family. I

heard live performances of opera and other forms of European classical music on the radio, and I saw all the great jazz artists in person at the Howard Theatre, heard them on the radio and saw them in the movies. I thought great artists like Roland Hayes, Marion Anderson, Dorothy Maynor and Duke Ellington visited everybody's school — they came to mine. I attended racially segregated public schools from kindergarten through college, and throughout all those years I was shown, in every way possible, the intrinsic value of aesthetic experiences.

The arts were an important part of my daily life. Most of my teachers were overqualified for the jobs they held, but they were an integral part of the black community and they were determined to prepare all of their students for a more productive and fulfilling life. Today, I am a pianist/composer, but thanks to the preparation, training and inspiration they gave me, I have also been successful in areas that weren't even available to me when I was a child. Let me share with you some of the lessons I learned.

My elders told me I would have to be twice as good at whatever I did to have half the success of someone who was white. Equal opportunity programs did not exist, so my teachers did their best to provide me with the tools I would need to get ahead in a biased society. Education was considered an important weapon because no one could dictate how you used what you learned. The "three R's" were mandatory —and so were the arts, if one was to be completely educated.

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As a musician, I learned that if I wanted to play a really difficult passage convincingly, I had to practice it slowly, paying careful attention to details. Once I mastered it, I could say

whatever I wanted to say with it more effectively. That is a lesson I have applied successfully to many other areas of my life. Artists in every discipline and from every ethnic group have much to share and I know from personal experience how what they have to share can change one's life.

Congress must invest more, not less, in providing opportunities for students to be involved in the arts. In New York,

with a government grant, Jazzmobile developed an arts program which was designed to help at risk students function more effectively in traditional school situations by teaching them to apply the principles of jazz improvisation to self-expression in other arts like dance, visual arts, the spoken word and, of course, music. The program was so successful that 60 percent of the students who had been truants returned to school on a regular basis. There are many successful programs like this already in existence. There should be government programs that give them consistent support. That support could come from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), from the Department of Housing and Urban Department, through the Justice Department, the Department of Education and any number of other excellent sources. There are thousands of American

artists who are well trained and ready and willing to use their creativity for the good of the society that spawned them. We should not waste this resource.

I inherited my love for music from my father, he really enjoyed playing the piano and singing, but it was my mother who made me practice. She was not a musician, but she was a teacher, and she knew when it sounded like music and not a finger exercise. Sometimes when I walk past the practice rooms in schools where I teach, I am reminded of my mother's words—"Play that again, William, it's not music yet."

Well it's music now, and it has been for more than 50 years. Because of the habits I developed as a musician, I can do all of the other things I do better. That's why as an arts activist, I want others to experience the joy I have had, working to help make the arts more accessible to everyone — not just music, all the arts.

We have to help our government do the right thing: government must support the arts. Our representatives insist that the job of government is to make life better for those of us who are being governed. The arts make life much better, therefore the government should support the arts. It's that simple.

How? As I mentioned before, government can start by giving more support to some of the things that are already working. There are more than 40,000 jazz ensembles in schools throughout the U.S. Recent studies show that students who are involved in these kinds of programs are not the ones we are having problems with. They are well-focused and often among the best students in the schools they attend. As they learn music, they also develop skills in problem solving. Since those skills are transferable, it seems logical to provide support to these talented students, their teachers, their schools and the professionals who are teaching them how to create music on a very high level.

We must show others how those students benefit by being involved in the arts. Many of the best jazz artists in the world are teaching in schools and in special music programs connected with cultural centers, festivals and concert series. And many more would be involved if existing music programs were integrated more effectively into the learning process and given more support.

The International Association of Jazz Educators (IAJE) not only nurtures many of these jazz programs, it also coordinates many outreach programs which enable students to be involved in every aspect of music. The teachers, and others who serve as mentors, work very hard to motivate and inspire their students and the results are very exciting. This is hands-on learning at its best, with no generation gap. At IAJE's 25th annual convention, every aspect of the jazz field was represented: world-renowned jazz artists, emerging artists, composers, lyricists, students, teachers, manufacturers of musical instruments, music publishers, record company executives, entertainment lawyers, authors, representatives of radio, television and print media, experts in the latest computer technology, artist's managers, publicists, concert producers and many, many more. The National Endowment for the Arts was there to present the annual Jazz Masters Awards to three internationally-famous jazz artists — Ron Carter, James Moody and Wayne Shorter — giving visible evidence of the kind of government support that has helped the IAJE and other not-for-profit organizations pursue their outreach goals.

Many participants were able to attend the IAJE convention because of grants received from federal, state, city and private sources, and many other members of IAJE have helped the NEA develop some of its most effective educational programs. They can all bear witness to the fact that it is NEA support of effective organizations like IAJE that helps

generate a four-to-one dollar match for all kinds of not-for-profit arts organizations.

When he was Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, Livingston Biddle gave the New York based Arts & Business Council a \$25,000 Chairman's Grant so that they might organize regional replicas of their Business Volunteers for the Arts program. There are now 30 affiliate BVA chapters in cities around the country. They are creating partnerships between arts organizations and businesses, training volunteers to use their business expertise to help arts organizations survive and grow in their regions and helping volunteers use their experience and contacts to make the arts more accessible to everyone in their respective communities. In New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Seattle and many cities in between, BVA's are demonstrating how individuals who recognize the importance of the arts can make a difference by personally participating more fully in the development and effectiveness of the arts organizations they help counsel and guide.

Today, many cultural centers are using jazz more effectively in their outreach efforts. At the Kennedy Center, our new jazz programs have brought in internationally famous musicians as performers, lecturers, visiting artists and teachers. Our interactive jazz radio shows and distant learning satellite broadcasts have helped both the adults and students, understand more fully how creative jazz musicians do what they do.

Sometimes when I walk past the practice rooms in schools where I teach, I am reminded of my mother's words — “Play that again, William, it's not music yet.”

We have also created several programs designed to reach out to new audiences and help individuals of all ages better understand music, theatre, dance and films. A year ago, the Kennedy Center created “The Millennium Stage” in the lobby, with free live performances from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. every day. So far, thousands of people who have come to visit this presidential memorial have enjoyed these special presentations.

Outreach is an important part of our mission. As an international cultural center, we are doing everything we can to provide the most rewarding cultural experiences possible to the most diversified audience we can reach. You and I could do more — each one of us could expand our personal efforts to make the arts a

presents profiles of artists done by artists; my colleague Eugenia Zukerman does similar profiles on artists who create music in the European classical tradition. We have identified a large, loyal audience for both styles. Unfortunately, that audience is being ignored by most of commercial TV.

For more than 25 years, ever since the major networks discovered how much money could be made by merchandising the broadcasting of sports, there have been no regular performing arts programs on commercial TV. I like sports, but since we are now in the area of overkill in sports programming, I think those of us who are working so hard to make the arts more accessible need to be more effective in our efforts to lead commercial television back to

the huge audiences that they are missing. Whatever happened to the idea that the airways are owned by the people of the U.S. and licensed to the companies that broadcast over them? Why couldn't our representatives in Congress work out a deal that would encourage radio and TV companies to use the proceeds from one or two high priced commercials (like those from the Super Bowl and other popular

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special events) to pay for some extended support for the arts on commercial TV? At those prices, with just one commercial, they would have the money to produce many first rate programs, covering all aspects of the arts. Throughout the 1950s and 60s all of the TV networks presented great live musical programs. Why can't that be done better today? We have the talent, and the technology is much more advanced today.

Research has shown jazz fans to be affluent and well educated, so jazz is currently being

used successfully to sell cars and many other expensive products. Those commercials are very well produced and appeal to a broad audience. Jazz should be presented more regularly in well produced, prime time programs here in the U.S. Americans should not have to go to Japan, Canada or Europe to see and hear their best jazz artists. Here at the Kennedy Center, we have presented jazz programs which have brought in new audiences and we know there is a large untapped audience still out there. Basketball

players have been used to sell shoes. Dancers would seem to be another good choice as models. The TV series "Dance America" introduced dancers to many new fans through PBS. What would happen if that quality of dance were on commercial TV? Look at the success of "River Dance," "Bring in 'da Noise," and "Stomp." I believe combinations of public and private funding that work in public television can also work in commercial TV and vice versa if they are modified to fit the circumstances.

For too long we have been trying to make public television and public radio more like commercial TV and radio. I think this is stupid and counter-productive. Public broadcasting was created to serve audiences that were not being served adequately! I would like to see the system used as it was when it was first started, to provide places where one could listen to the best in the widest variety of music, provoca-



Photo by Carol Pratt

THE BILLY TAYLOR JAZZ TRIO

tively programmed and designed to hold on to traditional audiences and also reach out to new audiences. This was done successfully for many years until misguided government and economic pressures forced them to change.

I hosted a successful commercial jazz radio show in New York City for 12 years, a successful National Public Radio show for five, and was a regular on many radio and TV shows before, during and after that period. I believe we should re-examine how the arts are being presented on radio and TV and look at some of the things we did before TV and radio became so imitative and predictable. Many people in this country depend on TV and radio as their principal source of music, news and information. Currently there is too much unnecessary repetition and duplication in all three on both

radio and television. If every station is going to present the same thing then we only need one, not hundreds of clones. We are wasting important resources when we relate everything radio and TV does to the money they make instead of to the positive impact they can have on our lives. I know from experience how audiences can grow as participants in the arts as a result of well produced, informative and entertaining radio and

TV programs. I have used jazz to make many of my points today because I have already done many of the things I am suggesting and I feel those approaches can work for other arts as well.

As well informed consumers, we must insist on a higher level of public service from all media and we must recognize and support the significant efforts media is currently making in support of the arts.

Americans for the Arts is paving the way. The 10-

minute video it co-produced with the Bravo Cable Network showing the wide spectrum of support for the arts that gathered on "Arts Advocacy Day" here in Washington D.C., as well as "The Arts Enrich Us All" public service

campaign partnership with CBS and the strong media campaign in key forums such as the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, CNN and National Public Radio has demonstrated how effective an advocacy organization can be.

These and many other achievements in the past year are providing leadership, research and information, resources and the kind of strategic partnerships that are already bringing together traditional and non-traditional groups in wide ranging support of the arts, but we need more. I want to ask each of you to upgrade your personal contributions to the arts because, as we all know, individuals can make a significant difference. And service in kind can be as important as money.

I would like to leave you with the words to a song I wrote. Inspired by the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the lyrics to the third movement of my composition "Peaceful Warrior" are:

*If you really are concerned then show it
If you really want to help you can
If you lend a helping hand to struggling people
Right around you
You can make a different world
If you really are concerned then speak up
You can demonstrate your point of view
But you've got to get involved with pressing problems
Closest to you
If you want to change the world
It's easy to sit on the sidelines
To ask what can one person do
But each person has something special to give
And no one can give it for you
If you really are concerned then show it
If you really want to help you can
But you'd better start right now
By making changes while you're able
Or your world will disappear.*

Thank you. ■

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About the Lecturer

DR. BILLY TAYLOR'S multifaceted and distinguished career includes his work as a pianist, composer, author, teacher, actor, lecturer, and radio and television commentator. Since March 1994, he has been an artistic advisor at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, where he leads an ongoing series of programs using musical demonstrations and discussions to highlight important figures in the history and currency of what he calls "America's classical music" — jazz. This series, "Billy Taylor's Jazz at the Kennedy Center," is aired on National Public Radio.

Now entering his 17th season as on-air correspondent for CBS Sunday Morning, Dr. Taylor has also been featured on CNN and PBS, and has served as host of Bravo Cable Network's "Jazz Counterpoint." Earlier in his career, he was host, pianist and deejay on two influential New York radio stations and musical director of David Frost's first television talk show (1969-1972).



Photo by Carol Weinberg

Dr. Taylor's early playing time was spent at clubs along New York's 52nd Street, where he alternated with the foremost jazz pianists of the 20th century, including Art Tatum, Erroll Garner, Bud Powell, Mary Lou Williams and Duke Ellington.

Dr. Taylor is the proud creator of jazz awareness and educational programs for people of all ages. He founded Jazzmobile, which has brought free performances to hundreds of thousands of people since 1964, and has presented live, interactive performances, master classes, demonstrations and lectures to schools throughout the U.S. He is a board member of the Americans for the Arts National Policy Board, The Rockefeller Foundation, Meet the Composer, ASCAP and others. A guest performer seven times at the White House, Dr. Taylor is one of only three jazz musicians ever to serve on the National Council on the Arts. He has been honored by the National Endowment for the Arts with a Jazz Masters Fellowship, by President Bush with the National Medal of Arts and by his home state with the North Carolina Prize. Among his many accomplishments, Dr. Taylor has received two Peabody Awards for excellence in journalism, an Emmy Award, the first Certificate of Recognition given by the U.S. Congressional Arts Caucus and the New York State Governor's Arts Award. He is the Wilbur D. Barrett Chair of Music at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, a Duke Ellington Fellow at Yale University and holds 17 honorary degrees.

With a recording career that spans more than five decades, Dr. Taylor has performed solo and with small and large ensembles. He has toured with such diverse groups as the North Carolina Symphony, the Juilliard and Turtle Island string quartets, the New York Jazz Repertory Company with pianist Ramsey Lewis, and his own Billy Taylor Jazz Trio, which features him on the piano; the trio's most recent release is entitled *Music Keeps Us Young*. Billy Taylor just celebrated his 76th birthday, marking more than 50 years in jazz.

About the Sponsor

would like to extend a special thanks to Philip Morris Companies Inc. for generously supporting the Nancy Hanks Lecture for the past eight years.

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About the Nancy Hanks Lecture

NANCY HANKS served as president of Americans for the Arts (formerly the American Council for the Arts) from 1968 to 1969, when she was appointed chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, a position she served through 1977. Until her death in 1983, Nancy Hanks worked hard to bring the arts to prominent national consciousness. This year marks the 11th Annual Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy, established to honor her memory and to provide an opportunity for public discourse at the highest level on the importance of the arts and culture to our nation's well-being.

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- 1995 Winton Malcolm Blount, Chairman of Blount, Inc., philanthropist, former U.S. Postmaster General
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- 1989 Leonard Garment, Special Counsel to Presidents Nixon and Ford
- 1988 Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., historian

About Americans for the Arts

AMERICANS FOR THE ARTS is the national organization for groups and individuals dedicated to advancing the arts and culture in communities across the United States. Americans for the Arts strives to make the arts more accessible to every adult and child in America. To this end, Americans for the Arts works with cultural organizations, arts and business leaders and patrons to provide leadership, advocacy, visibility, professional development and research and information that will enrich support for the arts and culture in our nation's communities. Americans for the Arts has a National Policy Board comprised of more than 80 national public policy leaders, advocates, and philanthropists from the corporate, government and nonprofit communities who inform the direction of Americans for the Arts as well as provide valuable leadership for the arts and cultural life of the nation.

AMERICANS FOR THE ARTS offers the largest selection of publications on arts-related policy and careers, and its National Arts Policy Clearinghouse is the nation's leading centralized resource for arts information and research. Americans for the Arts' Institute for Community Development and the Arts, researching more than 1,000 models of cultural programs as agents for economic and social change, works closely with cultural leaders and elected and appointed officials to link the arts to solutions for important challenges facing America's communities, such as crime, unemployment, illiteracy and racial tension. *Arts Link*, the official newsletter of Americans for the Arts, includes the latest information on legislative activity and arts education, as well as news about private and public resource development, arts policy research and innovative community development programs. Americans for the Arts' annual conference brings together hundreds of arts, business, foundation and corporate leaders for information sharing, networking and professional development. Americans for the Arts' web site (www.artsusa.org) provides on-line access to a wide range of information and research.

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