

WASHINGTON
PERFORMING ARTS

2022-2023 ANNUAL REPORT THE WORLD IN OUR CITY

2022-2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

Connection and uplift were definitely on our minds as we emerged from the challenges of the pandemic. Both were so clearly and deeply needed by our community of artists and friends. And so, in 2022-2023, Washington Performing Arts returned to the broadest slate of live performances, in-school education programs, and special community initiatives that we had seen in three years.

Long-planned collaborations came to fruition, including the world-premiere Hazel Scott ballet, *Sounds of Hazel*, with our partners at Dance Theatre of Harlem—setting in motion numerous performances of this work around the country. We also hosted our inaugural Ruth Bader Ginsburg Memorial Recital, *COTTON*, featuring the powerful photography of John E. Dowell, which inspired music by Damien Geter; performances by Denyce Graves, Justin Austin, and Laura Ward; and a student residency project that featured new poetry by eight local young writers.

We celebrated 30th-anniversary milestones with our Men and Women of the Gospel Choir and savored the sounds of returning orchestras and concert artists such as pianists Evgeny Kissin and Emanuel Ax, violinist Joshua Bell, and soprano Renée Fleming to our region’s great stages. We launched Pride Month with a presentation of drag artist Sasha Velour. We embraced partnerships with Songbyrd Music House and Tregaron Conservancy that deepened through our Mars Arts D.C. series. We welcomed new staff at all levels of the organization, as well as new members of our Board and Junior Board.

We could not have done any of this without the support and engagement of you—our friends and patrons.

While COVID-19 cases waned this year, audiences were notably hesitant to resume full pre-pandemic activities. Rising inflation soon affected everything from postage, printing, and travel, to food and hospitality costs. We used this transition to fuel deeply thoughtful work around long-range strategic planning, focusing on Washington Performing Arts’s historic strengths and our “everybody in, nobody out” ethos, inviting exploration of our shifting needs and capabilities.

We invite you to read more about our 2022-2023 season in the pages that follow. Against this backdrop, we have entered the next season with resolve and new ideas. We are thrilled to see our performing venues humming with activity and our audiences returning and deeply engaged. In times like these, we are especially thankful to our staff, Board, Junior Board, and Women’s Committee for their admirable dedication and resilience. We also are grateful to our community partners, audiences, and friends in philanthropy for your commitment to the transformative power of the arts, and trust in our programs and future. Let’s see what we can do together in art and community in the seasons to come!

Jenny Bilfield, President & CEO

Rudy Burwell, Board Chair

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OUR MISSION

Washington Performing Arts champions the arts as a unifying force. Through collaborations with artists, educators, community leaders, and institutional partners, we bring wide-ranging artistic programs to stages, schools, and neighborhoods throughout our nation’s capital and, with our virtual platform, share our work throughout the world.



[FRONT COVER] *Putting on the Ritz* by Hector J. Torres, longtime Washington Performing Arts supporter and former Board member.

[ABOVE] Clockwise from top right: Pianist Emanuel Ax at The Music Center at Strathmore (Photo by Alex Galiatsatos); Taiwan Philharmonic music director Jun Märkl, Jenny Bilfield, and composer Ke-Chia Chen (© David Claypool/Kalorama Photography).

This season knit together themes of long-range artistic vision and collaborative partnerships, projects that defied genre and celebrated icons, and international flair on stage and in the classroom.

Presenting Season Highlights

In part two of our multi-year celebration of the extraordinary Trinidadian-American pianist, activist, and visionary Hazel Scott, we gave the world premiere of *Sounds of Hazel*, the ballet co-commissioned and brought to life by Dance Theatre of Harlem.



Center: Dance Theatre of Harlem (Photo by Theik Smith).

Our celebration provided the opportunity to recognize the extraordinary legacy of Dance Theatre of Harlem artistic director Virginia Johnson (now retired) who was the Washington Performing Arts 2009 Pola Nirenska Award winner for Lifetime Achievement in Dance.

One month later we thrilled in presenting *A Night at Café Society*, a fabulous reimagining of the kind of eclectic nightclub experience Ms. Scott may have headlined in her heyday—featuring an exceptional array of Mars Arts D.C. artists and visiting guest artists including Sheléa and Etienne Charles at Bethesda Blues & Jazz Supper Club.

Since 1993, more than 55 dancers and choreographers have been recognized with the Pola Nirenska Award, named for the modern dance matriarch. In spring 2023, Ralph Glenmore, former principal dancer of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre under the direction of Alvin Ailey, and George Jackson, longstanding dance critic and historian, received the honor.



Left to right: Artists from *A Night at Café Society*, including Nova Y. Payton, Etienne Charles, Sheléa, and Justin Trawick (© Art Trends Photography).



Inaugural Ruth Bader Ginsburg Memorial Recital



This season we experienced *COTTON*, a multimedia work developed and produced by Lyric Fest that features new music by Damien Jeter and poetry by eight phenomenal poets (Nikki Giovanni, Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Afaa Michael Weaver, Lauren K. Alleyne, Charlotte Blake Alston, Glenis Redmond, Alora Young, and Trapeta Mayson), all inspired by the *COTTON* photography of Philadelphia artist John E. Dowell. *COTTON* explores, in penetrating superimposed images, both African American ancestral survival strategies and the wealth of this nation, seen through the lens of the cotton industry. The performance in February 2023, featuring baritone Justin Austin and the 2017 Washington Performing Arts Ambassador of the Arts Awardee, mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves, launched the start of a multi-month education residency with Words Beats & Life. Hundreds of listeners engaged in the visual, poetic, and musical power of this work over several months, from the nearly sold-out performance in the winter to online webinars to learn from the creative team and a culminating showcase of Words Beats & Life youth poets performing their responsive work.



Top to bottom: The *COTTON* creative team, artists, and guests (© David Claypool/Kalorama Photography); Justice Ginsburg and Denyce Graves in 2017 (© Chris Burch Photography); A Words Beats & Life youth poet (© Fritz PhotoGraphics).



Our presentation of *COTTON* was also the inaugural Ruth Bader Ginsburg Memorial Recital, honoring Ms. Graves as the first RBG Fund Awardee. This recital and award commemorate the life and legacy of Justice Ginsburg, a remarkable patron of the arts in our city and dear friend to Washington Performing Arts. More than 80 supporters contributed more than \$445,000 over two and a half years to realize the endowed fund. Dozens of champions of the late Justice were in attendance to honor her memory during this remarkable evening.



Justin Austin and poet Glenis Redmond in *COTTON* (©Jati Lindsay).

Orchestral Highlights

International orchestras and artists returned with gusto and long-incubated projects came to fruition.

Britain’s City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason stunned with Thomas Adès’s *The Exterminating Angel* Symphony and Debussy’s *La Mer* under the baton of Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla at The Music Center at Strathmore.

Music Director Rafael Payare and the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal performed the monumental Mahler Symphony No. 5 and, joined by pianist Yefim Bronfman, Bartók’s intense Piano Concerto No. 2.

The Taiwan Philharmonic made its first-ever Washington Performing Arts appearance in a wide-ranging program combining new work from Taiwan with European classics. Led by conductor Jun Märkl, the program began with the world premiere of Ke-Chia Chen’s *Ebbs and Flows*, co-commissioned by Washington Performing Arts. Violinist Paul Huang soared in his performance of Bruch’s *Scottish Fantasy*, and more.

The Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, Finland’s foremost orchestra, celebrated favorite composers of its homeland and featured MacArthur “Genius Grant” recipient Claire Chase on flute. Renowned conductor Susanna Mälkki, a Helsinki native named *Musical America’s* “Conductor of the Year” for 2017, led the orchestra in spellbinding performances of Sibelius’s *Lemminkäinen’s Return*, the concluding movement of the composer’s Lemminkäinen Suite (Op. 22), based on the exploits of a Finnish mythic hero, and Kaija Saariaho’s flute concerto *Aile du songe* (“Wing of the Dream”).

The Sphinx Symphony Orchestra also played to a packed Kennedy Center Concert Hall with a deeply moving performance of Joel Thompson’s *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*, featuring members of The Washington Chorus, EXIGENCE Vocal Ensemble, and soprano Aundi Marie Moore.



Left to right: Rafael Payare (©Antoine Saito); Yefim Bronfman (© Dario Acosta); Claire Chase (© Karen Chester).

Scandinavian Flair

Superb Scandinavian artistry accented our presenting season, alongside unique opportunities to partner in celebration of cultural diplomacy—truly bringing the world to our city through artists representing Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Norway.



Norwegian pianist Leif Ove Andsnes, Icelandic pianist Víkingur Ólafsson, and the Danish String Quartet all performed at the Terrace Theater. Norwegian trumpeter Tine Thing Helseth performed with her all-female brass ensemble TenThing at Sixth & I. The night before, the band rang in the tree lighting for Norwegian Christmas at Union Station—our fifth partnership with the Royal Norwegian Embassy.



Top to bottom: Emcee Allison Seymour, Tine Thing Helseth, Ambassador Anniken Ramberg Krutnes of the Royal Norwegian Embassy, Washington Performing Arts Supervising Producer Eric E. Richardson, and Jenny Bilfield at the tree lighting (© Art Trends Photography); Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra with Susanna Mälkki, music director (Courtesy Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra).

Pianistic Prowess

Since 1965, Washington Performing Arts has featured recitals by some of the world's finest emerging and established pianists and 2022-2023 was no exception! Works by composers Bartók, Cimarosa, Chopin, Dvořák, Franck, Haydn, Mozart, Rachmaninoff, Ravel, Schubert, and many more dazzled. In concert halls and in the intimate Kennedy Center Terrace Theater, audiences were treated to performances from Hayes Piano Series artists Charles Richard-Hamelin and Víkingur Ólafsson, plus Leif Ove Andsnes, Emanuel Ax, Yefim Bronfman, Evgeny Kissin, Damien Sneed, and others.



Center: Víkingur Ólafsson (Photo by Ari Magg).



Left to right: Leif Ove Andsnes (© Helge Hansen); Damien Sneed (Photo by Starlic); Evgeny Kissin (Photo by F. Broede).

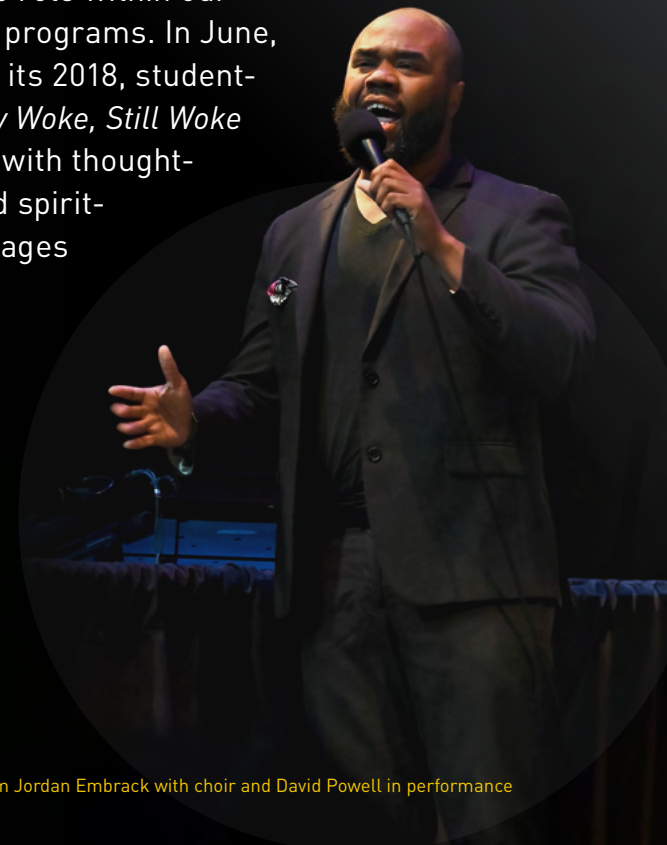
Sasha Velour and our Children of the Gospel Choir closed the season with spectacular verve, joy, and creativity—and sold-out houses.



Critically acclaimed, gender-fluid drag queen, visual artist, illustrator, and newly minted author Sasha Velour brought her immersive evening of drag, storytelling, and live art to Sixth & I. This event, presented in partnership with Capital Pride, also featured a Q&A moderated by Junior Mintt.



This season, Washington Performing Arts welcomed Children of the Gospel Choir (COTG) alumnus David Powell to our staff—as well as our stage! A 2003 graduate of our choral program and Duke Ellington School of the Arts, David brings rich experience in choral music and youth development to his leadership role within our gospel music programs. In June, COTG revived its 2018, student-produced *Stay Woke, Still Woke* performance with thought-provoking and spirit-stirring messages of resistance, surrender, anticipation, and love.



Top to bottom: Sasha Velour (photo courtesy of the artist); Children of the Gospel Choir; COTG alum Jordan Embrack with choir and David Powell in performance (COTG photos by Shannon Finney).

Arts Education Excels

Washington Performing Arts’s programs served 11,500 students in more than 80 schools throughout the DMV region through six unique school-based programs during the 2022-2023 season. We developed and launched a new collaboration with Children’s National Hospital. The year also marked the celebration of a decade of partnership with Levine Music in presenting the Misbin Family Memorial Chamber Music Competition.

The Friendship Duo (violist Robin Faye Massie and violinist Cleveland Chandler, Jr., pictured in the middle photo below)—the first ensemble laureate of the Misbin Family Memorial Chamber Music Competition’s Adult Category—returned to Washington to celebrate the competition’s 10th anniversary in glorious fashion.

Since its founding, more than 120 ensembles have received awards through the Misbin competition, which also offers opportunities to be featured in concert at prestigious venues throughout the DMV.



Center: Performers at Misbin competition (© Fritz PhotoGraphics).



Left to right: Capital Arts Partnership students (© Fritz PhotoGraphics); Jenny Bilfield, Misbin competition performers, Dr. Robert Misbin (center), The Friendship Duo, and Levine Music President and CEO Jeffery Tribble Jr. (far right) (© Fritz PhotoGraphics); Beat Ya Feet dancer Kevin “Noodlez” Davis at a Concerts in Schools event (Photo by Meiyu Tsung).

Mars Arts D.C. Shines

An array of free events across the city, indoor and outside, showcased the vibrant talent of artists that make their home here in the DMV region. Our Songbyrd, Tregaron, and Franklin Park series with Mars Arts D.C. celebrated their second year thanks to the sustained support of Mars, Incorporated and Jacqueline Badger Mars. We saw audiences continue to flock to these fantastic and fun community gatherings as well as the National Cherry Blossom Festival’s Petalpalooza, which welcomed more than 25,000 attendees from throughout the District.



Center: Wicked Sycamore at Tregaron Unplugged (© Jennifer Packard).



Washington Performing Arts Board member Lynn Parseghian is the force behind our partnership with Tregaron. Tregaron Unplugged enjoyed a second spellbinding year of artistry outdoors in one of Washington’s most special wooded sanctuaries, thanks to Mars Arts D.C. artistry and Lynn’s leadership. Lynn also led the way this season as Chair of our Strategic Planning Task Force—a yearlong effort resulting in a five-year roadmap for our future.



Left to right: Soprano Alexandria Crichlow at Tregaron Unplugged (© Jennifer Packard); Tregaron Unplugged (© Jennifer Packard); Moonshine Society at the National Cherry Blossom Festival’s Petalpalooza (Photo by Alex Galiatsatos).

Gospel Music Programs Celebrate

The 2022-2023 season marked the 30th-anniversary celebration for our Men and Women of the Gospel Choir, highlighting a homecoming concert in the fall that showcased memories, former directors, and memorabilia from decades past. Members of our Men, Women and Children of the Gospel Choirs brought the crowd to its feet at the 2023 Gala proclaiming, “Joy Comin’!” Children of the Gospel Choir (COTG) celebrated the holidays with The United States Air Force Band in their annual *Season of Hope* holiday program and Gospel Christmas at Washington National Cathedral. COTG was invited to headline NPR’s *From the Top*, a nationally recognized radio program highlighting the country’s most talented classically trained youth.



Kathy Brewington, Manager of Choir Operations, celebrated her 40th anniversary with Washington Performing Arts this summer. Mayor Bowser marked the occasion with a special proclamation recognizing Kathy’s outstanding legacy of leadership and impact. Especially inspired by her time working with founder Patrick Hayes and President Emeritus Douglas Wheeler, Kathy values her role in building community relationships and providing opportunities for generations of artists. Kathy is revered as an inspiration to countless colleagues, choir members, and their families.

Above: Men and Women of the Gospel Choir 30th Anniversary Concert (© Fritz PhotoGraphics).

Clockwise from top: A COTG Schlosberg Family Vocal Scholar performs at the Charlotte Schlosberg Vocal Recital (© Fritz PhotoGraphics); *Living the Dream...Singing the Dream* concert (Shannon Finney); COTG performance photos by Shannon Finney. Kathy Brewington photo by Ceylon Mitchell II.



Gala

This year's Gala was truly a celebration of *The World in Our City!*

From improvisational painting to performances that brought the house down and dancing the night away, we celebrated the rich diversity of heritage here in our nation's capital, with more than a dozen ambassadors and diplomats in attendance! *The World in Our City* Gala raised more than \$700,000 for our programs in the classroom, on stage, and in the community.

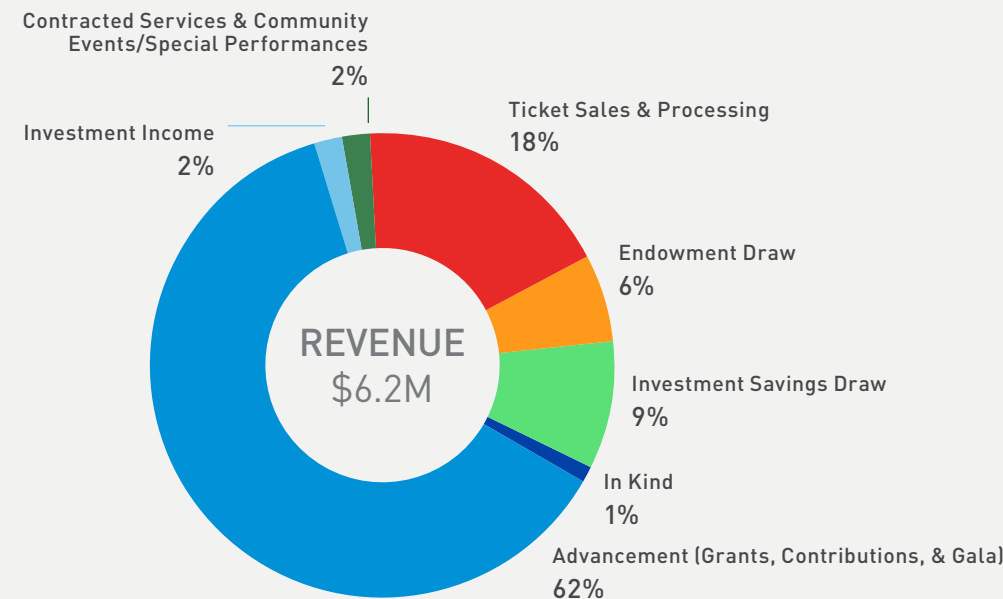


Gala photos © David Claypool/Kalorama Photography.

THE INSTITUTIONAL PICTURE

FY23 BY THE NUMBERS

As is the case across the performing arts sector nationally, in FY23 Washington Performing Arts continued to grapple with residual financial challenges of the pandemic, including audiences hesitant to return to performances and rising costs due to inflation.

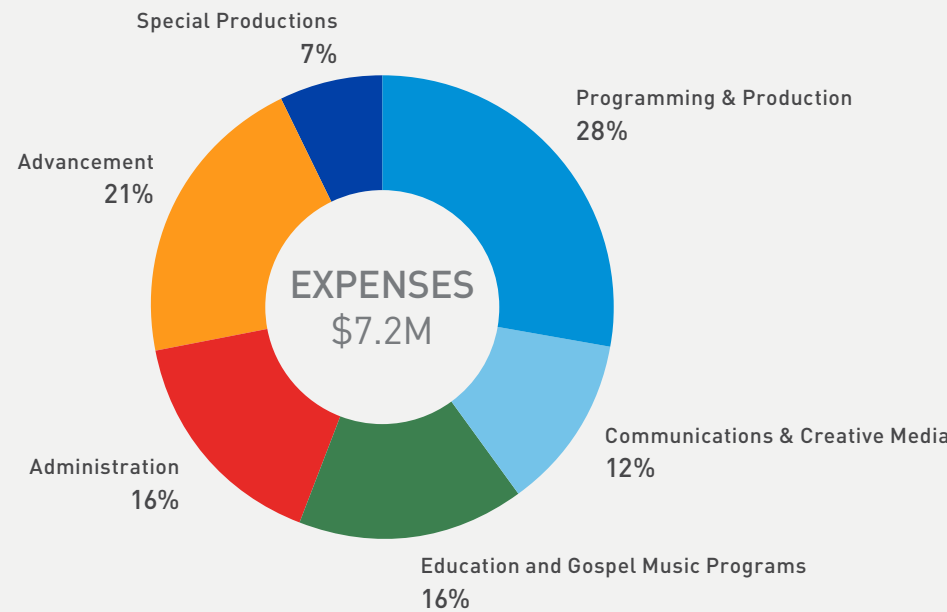


ENDOWMENT DRAW

The Washington Performing Arts endowment is invested thoughtfully with an eye toward long-term organizational sustainability. The endowment was \$8.9M at the conclusion of FY23. Washington Performing Arts draws down from the endowment annually at a Board-approved 5% spending rate, which is based on a 3-year rolling average.

INVESTMENT SAVINGS DRAW

With Board approval, Washington Performing Arts utilized accumulated, unused endowment draws from previous years (FY21 and FY22) that were conserved at a time when Washington Performing Arts received emergency funding in the form of Paycheck Protection Program loans and Shuttered Venue Operators grants and had sufficient operating cash.



Washington Performing Arts had a deficit of approximately \$1M in FY23 due to several circumstances summarized below:

Contributed revenue was 14.5% lower than budgeted. This was largely related to lower than anticipated Sponsorship revenue, particularly for orchestra concerts, as well as Gala revenue.

Ticket Sales revenue was 31% lower than budgeted, largely due to lower sales for orchestral performances and audiences not rebounding as swiftly or fully as expected.

A one-time accounting adjustment of \$100K in payroll accrual needed to be allocated in FY23 to comply with generally accepted accounting principles.

WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS

2022-2023 COMMUNITY OF SUPPORTERS

Washington Performing Arts gratefully acknowledges the following individuals and institutions whose generous contributions support our artistic and educational programming. Patrons who contributed \$500 or more in support of the 2022-2023 season (September 1, 2022-August 31, 2023) are listed below with our thanks.

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Violinist Paul Huang with Washington Performing Arts performance sponsor Christina Co Mather and friends (© David Claypool/Kalorama Photography).

THE RUTH BADER GINSBURG
MEMORIAL FUND

The Ruth Bader Ginsburg Memorial Fund was established in 2021 to honor the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s life, legacy, and passion for music with an annual award to a distinguished artist that includes the opportunity to choose a musical talent deserving of wider recognition to be presented in a Washington Performing Arts recital in Justice Ginsburg’s memory.

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