

THE ART OF SERVICE:
CENTERING CHARITABLE PURPOSE
TO CREATE BELONGING IN THE ARTS

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This paper is dedicated to my parents and siblings, who continue to inspire, challenge, and support me each day. And to Terence and Kristian, for being places of solace, guiding lights, and partners in truth and radical belonging.

The Art of Service

Centering Charitable Purpose to Create Belonging in the Arts

Nonprofit organizations are public charities that receive unique 501(c)(3) status and tax-deductible contributions because they are organized and operate for specific charitable purposes. (“Exemption Requirements”). Serving the public through Internal Revenue Service-approved charitable purpose is the primary reason for the missions, programs, and existence of all nonprofit organizations, including those in the arts. This paper serves as a resource for nonprofit organizations in the classical arts to examine and strengthen the fulfillment of their obligation as public charities. Examples in the museum and opera artistic fields are presented to demonstrate how nonprofit organizations in the classical arts can fulfill their charitable purpose of serving the public by centering community in structure, vision, practice, and artmaking to create authentic spaces of belonging.

Framing and Definitions

The research and recommendations in this paper are presented with acknowledgement of the ongoing conversations concerning the social responsibility and relevance of nonprofit arts organizations in the advancement of social justice and community connection. The framing and approach to this topic consider the shifting national demographics and historic application of the term *charitable purpose* on federal and organizational levels.

Nonprofit refers to public charities with 501(c)(3) status that receive tax-exempt contributions because their missions align with charitable purposes that serve the public (“Exemption Requirements”).

Classical arts refers to art forms of European origin or focus, specifically symphony orchestra, theater, ballet, opera, and museums. The term *nonprofit arts organizations* refers to corporations with 501(c)(3) status in the classical arts for the purposes of this paper.

In providing nonprofit 501(c)(3) distinction, the IRS does not present an exact definition of *the public*, creating an open forum for relative interpretations of who does and does not receive priority in service from nonprofit organizations. For the purposes of this paper, *public* refers to the broad representation of the United States population or the *American people* as expressed by the IRS to include past, current, and shifting national demographic groups.

Similar to the undefined *public* who benefit from the existence of nonprofit organizations, *community* is a term that lacks a clear definition despite its place in the common language of nonprofit arts organizations. Defining *community* is an ongoing conversation in many industries, not just the arts. Oxford English Dictionary defines community as “a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common” (Oxford). A secondary definition defines community as “a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals” (Oxford).

For the purposes of this paper, *community* refers to the combination of people within geographic locations in proximity to the respective nonprofit arts organization and those who seek fellowship and engagement beyond those geographic limitations. Nonprofit arts organizations exist to serve community and benefit the broader public in pursuit of “a better understanding of the past, a better analysis of the present, and a better view of the future” as expressed by the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965 (US Congress). Through collective work, nonprofit organizations implement a multi-layered approach in which service to their direct *communities* expands to benefit the broader *public*.

White supremacy refers to a culture and system in which all things associated with Whiteness are deemed more valuable, normal, or superior (“What Is White Supremacy Culture?”). This term does not refer to a person or group but rather a unique combination of cultural characteristics that support the systemic and systematic power upholding the social construct of Whiteness as superior. It should be noted that the social construct of race and the fallacy of human hierarchical value have affected the world, specifically the United States of America, for over four centuries. Such a complex, far reaching system will not be fully addressed in this paper but will serve as an example of the many influences upon the visions and practices of nonprofit arts organizations.

Nonprofit Arts Organization Examples

Two nonprofit arts organizations were examined as primary sources for this paper. Cincinnati Opera celebrated its centennial year in 2020 as the second oldest opera company in the United States with a mission “to enrich and connect the community through diverse opera experiences” through its summer festival performance model (“About Us”). During the 2019 fiscal year, the international opera company employed a combination of 150 full time, part time, and contracted administrators, artists, and workers and engaged 175 volunteers with a \$9 million annual budget (Cincinnati Opera Association).

Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History is committed to presenting “events and exhibitions co-created with individual community partners” (“About the MAH”) through its mission to “ignite shared experiences and unexpected connections” (Museum of Art). With a \$2.5 million budget, Santa Cruz MAH presented year-round, local programming with an average of fifty full time and part time staff members and 175 volunteers during its 2019 fiscal year (Museum of Art). Both organizations made intentional and effective shifts to redefine their roles

in the community by centering their undeniable purpose as nonprofit arts organizations. While these organizations do not fully represent the unique qualities and operational needs of the entire ballet, symphony orchestra, and theater fields, the combination of shifts made by this large opera company and mid-sized museum offer relevant and useful information to administrators of all performance and visual arts disciplines.

The Structure

“The idea that the arts can benefit individuals as well as groups of people implies that mission-based not-for-profit arts organizations have more to offer the communities they serve than mere entertainment” (Rosewall 242).

While “the origins of the tax-exempt sector in the United States predate the formation of the republic”, the specific 501(c)(3) status began to form under the tax code of 1954 (Arnsberger 105). It is from this code that the IRS determines nonprofit distinction, reenforcing that qualifying organizations “must be established for charitable purposes” (“Internal Revenue Code” 1455). None of the qualifying charitable purposes include the production, collection, or presentation of art as an approved charitable service to the public. As such, many nonprofit arts organization missions include a variation of educational benefit to the public and artistic engagement with their communities. The presentation of art alone is not sufficient in establishing charitable purpose (“Internal Revenue Code” 1456).

The nonprofit model thrives on a highly interdependent relationship between the organization and the public, establishing even greater need for connection with the organization’s respective community than the for-profit model. Through this relationship, communities engage in beneficial art and artmaking experiences while supporting nonprofit arts organizations through donated goods, services, and tax-deductible contributions (“Exemption

Requirements”). This allows the broader public to benefit from service through arts engagement. Because public support and community engagement are necessary for the success, health, and longevity of all nonprofit arts organizations, relevancy and value to community are indisputable factors in this public-facing, federal system.

The National Endowment for the Arts, established by an Act of Congress in 1965, is the “independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their own creative capacities” (“About”). As a federal agency, the NEA helps define national standards while working with Local Arts Agencies, artists, organizations, and the philanthropic field to support art education and engagement (“About”). The NEA funds “nonprofit, tax exempt 501(c)(3), U.S. organizations...”, making neither distinction nor separation between size, discipline, or location (“Grants”). This is noted because nonfederal designations of *community-based* organizations risk establishing different roles, expectations, and priorities for nonprofit organizations in the classical arts. All nonprofit organizations are community-based per the IRS.

Art or Community

Arts organizations face unique challenges in priorities and organizational structure compared to other nonprofit organizations because they are tasked with serving through the arts. The traditional model requires that organizations create or procure an artistic product that serves the public in fulfillment of charitable purpose. Thus, the art receives priority in an art first, service second approach. While this provides a means for serving the public, it risks overshadowing the primary purpose of the nonprofit 501(c)(3) arts organization because community-based service and engagement are not prioritized on a structural level. This dueling

consciousness often results in prioritizing artistic product and artistic excellence over community input and representation (Wilson).

This art first structure heavily informs the organization's method of operation: obtain and manage resources to develop, create, collect, and present artistic product, often engaging community only upon completion of the artistic product. Artistic and curatorial departments receive priority as the organizational teams responsible for securing and presenting the product. Development and fundraising teams secure funding and support for the product (Rosewell 154). Marketing and communication teams ensure interest in, awareness of, and access to the product after it is created (Brown 373). Education and community engagement teams foster engagement with, instruction in, and knowledge about the product. Every function of the organization is structured to support and present the product. Structural vulnerabilities arise when the product is viewed as the art rather than the service to the community. Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History and Cincinnati Opera offer examples of ways in which nonprofit arts organizations can combat this false dichotomy and center service to their communities.

When Nina Simon accepted the position as executive director of Santa Cruz MAH in 2011, the museum was a week from closure due to a financial crisis with little recognition in the community and an audience that consisted of mostly older, White retirees and young children on field trips (Simon). "We were underdelivering on our public value" (Simon). To fulfill its strategic plan of "becoming a thriving central gathering place for the community", she focused on the internal structure of the museum. Rather than adhering to the traditional model in which positions focused on the acquisition, care, and display of items, Simon ensured that "every role put community first". The focus was less about creating great tours of the museum space and more about ensuring spaces were animated to "invite participation by visitors" (Simon). This

service first structure provided the museum with a stronger foundation for benefitting the public through the presentation of art, physical space, and meaningful engagement.

Santa Cruz MAH faced concerns that prioritizing serving the community jeopardizes artistic quality and the overall functionality of the organization (Simon). As Simon began making shifts to how the museum space welcomed and engaged its community, she faced the question of whether the Santa Cruz MAH was a museum or a community center (Simon). The intentional shift in structural priority and subsequent success in engagement demonstrates that exhibitions and performances should not be seen as the enemies of centering service, but rather as tools for fulfilling charitable purpose. The quality, accessibility, and relevance of the art and the community value of the example organizations were enhanced because they prioritized service and meaningful connection. *Community* is not the enemy of artistic quality or integrity; it is the reflection of artistic excellence. When art is centered, the community exists as a means to an end in which a transactional relationship defines the health of the organization. When community is centered, the art acts as a vehicle for and a result of service.

Shared Responsibility

Cincinnati Opera faced a different challenge in organizational structure. In the earlier stages of her now thirty-five years with the company, director of community engagement and education Tracy Wilson realized that members of the local community did not know about the organization and did not feel welcome to visit the building or engage in the art despite its national reputation (Wilson). She began working to ensure community members received authentic and consistent engagement, but it was difficult to get other departments to see the value in prioritizing service because her department was being misinterpreted as sufficient community focus from the entire organization. The shared responsibility of charity to the public and service

to the community becomes lost in a structure where engaging the community is solely relegated to a specific department tasked with making the artistic product relevant to the community (Wilson).

This separation in responsibility to the community creates a hierarchy in priorities amongst staff and places the organization at a disadvantage. Evidence of this disadvantage was present in Cincinnati Opera's use of traditional development and fundraising methods that support art first structures. "The community is treated like an accessory to the artistic product" to obtain support and financial resources (Wilson). This creates deficit-based approaches in which organizations search for community connections in a reactionary manner to make community engagement fit within the requirements of grant applications (Wilson). "People used to say whatever they wanted to say just to get the grant. They didn't talk to the community" (Wilson). This was neither a sufficient nor sustainable way to serve on an organizational level, so Cincinnati Opera shifted its structure and priorities to be of service to the community with Wilson's guidance (Milligan).

To engage diverse communities in ongoing relationships, "the work must be consistent and sustained, and therefore it must be integrated into the organization's business model" (Helicon Collaborative). Cincinnati Opera's structural shift and integration of community work in its business model presented greater clarity in departmental and interdepartmental function in relation to mission, vision, and the role of the organization. With this clarity, every department's unique work now centers service to the community, allowing them to make informed decisions concerning their work while also experiencing the benefit of serving the community (Wilson). "We are a service organization" says Chris Milligan, Cincinnati Opera general director and CEO, "the art becomes secondary" in the organization's role within the community. All Cincinnati

Opera staff members regularly participate in community engagement events “and are often eager to participate again after experiencing human connection” (Milligan). With charitable purpose as priority, the primary question for each department becomes how it will help to fulfill the charitable purpose of the organization.

The Vision

If we are to be relevant in this ever-changing world, to stay artistically and financially viable, all of our museums must boldly, indeed bodaciously (sic), commit to reenvisioning (sic) what takes place in our museums, to whom our museums belong, and which colleagues have the privilege of telling important stories through the power of science, history, culture, and art. (Cole 18)

Arts organizations are not exempt from the influences and effects of societal practices, issues, and expectations. The NEA was established on the premises that “[t]he arts and humanities belong to all people of the United States ...” and that “[t]he arts and the humanities reflect the high place accorded by the American people to the nation’s rich cultural heritage and to the fostering of mutual respect for the diverse beliefs and values of all persons and groups” (US Congress). Yet, the nation created and engaged in a violent ecosystem of discrimination throughout the twentieth century, stemming from historical practices of stolen land, stolen labor, forced enslavement, and false human hierarchy. Many events shaped the country during the creation of the nonprofit 501(c)(3) status and the NEA, including the 1954 ruling for *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the murder of Emmett Till (Pruitt), the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (“Second Revolution”), the height of the Civil Rights Movement, and the beginning stages of the second wave of the feminist movement (“Second-wave Feminism”).

Many cultural characteristics of oppressive systems are reflected in the ways in which organizations value community and envision their role in the community, including lack of

representation of diverse groups, practices rooted in colonization, White-centered approaches to artistic interpretation, and prioritizing artistic product over people (Okun). Nonprofit organizations in the classical arts have an obligation to prioritize their role as a public charity, which requires addressing the influences of oppressive systems to provide more effective service and engagement.

The Influence of Systems

Legislation does not take place in a vacuum; neither do the arts. When the tax code and NEA were established, the interpretation of *community* and *public*, influenced by the oppressive segregationist, racist, and sexist undertones of United States society, did not include all the nation's citizens and their identities. While engagement in the classical arts is often attributed to education, interest, and access "it is in fact rooted in systemic racism and laws of segregation" (Howard 21). These laws, disproportionately targeting Black communities, "literally" prohibited access to and participation in activities "from opera and ballet to golf and skiing" (Howard 21). The U.S. population was 88.6% White and 11.4% "Nonwhite", consisting of "Negro, Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, and all other" racial groups and ethnicities in 1960 ("1960 Census"). Classical arts organizations operating during this time of segregation and targeted oppression served select communities and parts of the public. Population projections estimate an increase in nationalities and racial and ethnic diversity by 2060 (Vespa). Classical arts organizations must work to ensure service through the arts includes the shifts in their communities and the public.

The nation's social ecosystem, historic practices, and resulting impact cannot be dismissed as trends but must be acknowledged as major influences on arts and culture. "Predominantly [W]hite institutions exist for one main reason: racism" (Bobbitt). With every passing legislation concerning civil and human rights, nonprofit arts organizations are affected,

including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, establishment of the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities in 1965, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and many others (“Introduction”). “Art does not exclude. People exclude... Organizations are people” (Howard, *Creating Real Belonging*). Without intentional disruption and correction of systems, the organizational visions created by people within a society of oppression and false human hierarchy exclude groups and identities. The visions for classical arts organizations must be examined, and where necessary, improved to include the full scope of their communities and the public.

The lack of authentic representation of the nation’s many identities and cultures in the classical arts is not a new conversation. As arts leaders take a visceral dive into the systemic issues concerning access, education, and leadership in the arts, many are discovering the multi-faceted need for greater representation of their communities in staff, artistic product, audiences, donors, and board members (Acon). This issue involves a lack of diversity in expression of the full human being, including race, ability, education, gender, nationality, thought, socio-economic status, environment, and lived experiences, further contributing to a cycle of barriers to and misrepresentation of the *public*.

A Cause for Change

The murder of George Floyd and many others acted as a catalyst, producing unprecedented national and international calls for organizations to commit to becoming anti-racist and decolonial entities by taking committed, sustainable actions to eradicate the fallacy of White supremacy and other systematic and systemic barriers. These examinations are coupled with outcries from communities disproportionately affected by the decade-long complicity of classical arts organizations concerning racism and oppression as evidenced in the open letters,

petitions, literature, speeches, panel discussions, and conference topics in every classical arts field.

In an open letter to White American Theatre from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) theatre makers, the professionals address the “abuse” from the field’s stewards, stating that the industry leaders, critics, and creators operate within a “house of cards built on [W]hite fragility and supremacy”, a “house that will not stand” (Ground). An open letter to the classical music field from Sphinx Lead highlights the inadequate and racist approaches to representation in the orchestra and opera fields and that “the disparity in access to arts education and investment in communities of color reveals the distinct need for something different”. The leadership cohort stated that although there are many qualified BIPOC arts professionals, many are fighting for opportunities and the autonomy to make decisions as leaders (SphinxLEAD). In *Final Bow for Yellowface*, dancer, historian, consultant, and advocate Phil Chan addresses the detrimental and harmful effects of the caricaturizing Asian characters and inauthentic representation on ballet stages (Chan and Chase). The Racial Equity Pledge from Black Opera Alliance and racial equity implementation resource from Black Administrators of Opera demand change in the opera field by dismantling the industry’s “reluctance to progress beyond a White-centered approach to opera” (Black Administrators of Opera).

Every sector of life is affected by the systematic and systemic practices of inequitable access and social injustice. Philanthropy is integral in the nonprofit model as a major source of resources and support for nonprofit organizations. Philanthropic entities are currently shifting to address oppressive systems within their practices and assisting nonprofits to do the same. Changes in criteria for funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation demonstrate the expectations for nonprofits as the largest supporter of the arts and humanities in the US will now

evaluate all future applicants “based on one principal question: would their proposal help create a more just and fair society?” (Cascone).

The arts are not exempt from the desperate need to uproot the historical, systemic, and exclusionary practices that continue to alienate audiences and communities. It is neither possible to serve nor benefit the public without addressing the ways arts organizations are influenced by the systems that create barriers for their communities and the larger public. Leaders, practitioners, administrators, and stewards of the arts must actively dismantle these barriers or risk creating greater harm to their communities.

The Practices

Community relevance should be the first and foremost element of sustainability. Achieving relevance in the eyes of the community means that it is seen as a community asset rather than an isolated, self-interested non-profit. It means creating valued partnerships, not just outreach programs and reduced-price tickets. (Wolfbrown and Woronkiewicz)

In addition to structure and vision, organizations must examine the practices used to execute mission and ensure they do not threaten fulfillment of charitable purpose. It should be noted that not all current practices completely dismiss the community. Nonprofit arts organizations regularly voice the importance of their communities as audience members, donors, and representatives of the public as these are topics for ongoing conversations at major conferences within the classical arts fields. However, this still presents a limited view and value of the interdependency between the public and the nonprofit organization, evidenced by the limited power given to communities concerning the art and the art making.

This superficial relationship with the community manifests through advisory councils and external committees that work to create relevance only after a product is chosen without the

input of the community (Wilson). The practice of artistic directors and curators solely deciding what art should be presented dismisses the value of community and creates a cycle of limited and shallow engagement. Cincinnati Opera discovered this after presenting *Frida*, an opera about the life of Frida Kahlo, with the intention of engaging their Latinx and Hispanic communities (Wilson). The opera was not well received by their immediate Hispanic community. Many of the members of this specific community in the Cincinnati area practice Catholicism, a religion with which Frida Kahlo and her life choices did not align (Wilson). Because community input was not a natural and consistent part of the initial decision and art-making processes, the organization faced avoidable challenges in achieving its goals and fulfilling its obligation to its community.

Of the People

Organizations with consistent and autonomous representation of their community are better equipped to foster a culture of shared decision-making and intentional, community-driven programmatic efforts. However, ensuring authentic community representation throughout the organization can be difficult. Examining organizational practices and subsequent barriers should be done at every level, starting with the governing board which guides the organization towards fulfilling its mission (Dreeszen 163-164). They should reflect “the opinions and ideas of those whom the organization serves ... An organization providing artistic programs to a community should have a board that accurately represents the recipients of those programs” (Rosewall 70-71). Intentional representation also extends to staff members and key decision-makers for programming.

Santa Cruz MAH understood the need to examine its practices and representation after realizing its Dia del Los Muertos programs and events were received as outsiders’ interpretations of celebration that appealed to other community members, many of whom were White and did

not actively engage in Mexican culture (Simon). Those who celebrated Dia de Los Muertos felt that the events were nice for others to experience but did not feel a sense of ownership and input as the activities within the constraints of the traditional, secluded museum space did not truly speak to their culture (Simon). Santa Cruz MAH worked to become better partners who coproduce with their communities. However, they soon saw the “limitations of just partnering without people on the team who are deeply rooted in the community” (Simon). Realizing the need to shift how the organization envisioned services and practices used to execute programming, the museum began making changes to reflect their community more holistically on the board, staff, and volunteer levels (Simon).

This shift placed Santa Cruz MAH in a better position to become of, for, and by the Santa Cruz community. The museum’s subsequent Dia de los Muertos events saw an expansion of programming to include a festival, parades, food vendors, workshops, and unprecedented participation after centering the voices and needs of those who knew best from their own lived experiences (Simon). Museum leadership and staff were able to experience authentic celebration with the respective community, allowing the organization to shed the role of exclusionary classical arts museum and embrace the roles of valued community member, partner, and artmaker. Through authentic connection, artistic product becomes a tool of service to the public, fostering opportunities for the work and engagement to shape, to inspire, to reflect, and to become the art.

For the People

As organizations address the many barriers to authentic community representation and engagement, it is imperative that arts leaders and administrators consider the impact of holding practices, traditions, and particular works as epitomes of the artform. Conversations questioning

the value and presentation of works that insult and alienate communities, the lack of recognition for creators from historically ignored and silenced groups, and the battle for cultural repatriation are evidence of the harmful practices of othering and lack of belonging in the classical arts. When told the costumes that caricaturized the Asian characters in a particular *Nutcracker* production were “charming,” Phil Chan asked, “charming to whom?” (50). These practices, supported by art first structures and influenced by oppressive systems, communicate which groups are welcome, valued, and celebrated in the arts and which groups are not. Valuing the tradition of an artform is crucial to learning and understanding historical context. However, valuing traditional works and presentations over the wellbeing of the community and broader public reflects a dangerous relationship that dismisses those whom the organizations are obligated to serve.

If the cultural actors in any ballet are represented solely as they are imagined by outsiders, it can feel to members of that culture as though those powerful outsiders are assuming ownership of their culture and using it for their own purposes ... Offending the audience is the least harmful aspect of making the artistic choice not to also include the perspective of insiders from those cultures. (Chan and Chase 150)

The execution of mission through organizational practices that include forms of othering, discrimination, supremacy, colonization, and oppression cannot benefit the public when the public openly and continuously communicates the harm of such practices.

Classical arts organizations have an obligation to disrupt and dismantle the idea that the artform, now used primarily for the public benefit of communities within the United States, must remain strictly reflective of and evaluated through a European lens (Chan and Chase 7). The dangerous assumption that the canon, classic works, and artistic excellence are jeopardized by

the inclusion of the community stems from the exclusionary practices of White supremacy culture. This further upholds a system that dismisses the valuable contributions of those who do not fit within the construct of cultural norms (Howard 20-21).

Cincinnati Opera opened its doors to the community through dress rehearsal passes and tickets to performances “so they could see and experience the artform for themselves” (Wilson). Under Wilson’s direction, the organization came to understand the importance of being in the community as a committed and visible partner and created programming that involved the community at every level as a result. The annual Opera Goes to Church program bridges performances in the opera house with performances throughout religious organizations in the local community (Wilson). The singers and musicians who perform in the opera productions also attend rehearsals with the local choirs, act as substitute musicians for religious services, and engage on a level that demonstrates shared ownership of the artform. Mindful of its responsibility to benefit the public, Cincinnati Opera also considers the ways problematic works such as *Madama Butterfly* and *Porgy and Bess* are presented and from whose perspectives (Wilson). The opera company’s ability to engage audiences and tell stories in meaningful ways was enhanced because of its consistent and authentic connection to its community. The responsible presentation of traditional works offers educational opportunities concerning different customs, traditions, historical context, and artmaking. However, the twenty-first century nonprofit classical arts organization must also consider what it means to preserve, reflect, and uphold the values of its current community (Chan and Chase 47). Nonprofit arts organizations should present art for the people in their communities.

By the People

Nonprofit arts organizations can expand their roles and services by presenting art and engagement created by their communities. Using the art as the vehicle for service, Cincinnati Opera commissioned *Fierce*, an opera about the lives of young women in the Cincinnati community (Wilson). Intentionally engaging the community through every process of creation, the organization conducted interviews, attended community events, curated professional and personal development programming, and conducted libretto readings with the young women. This ongoing engagement and commissioned work are the results of cocreation with its community instead of the more traditional approach in which artistic advisors or board members program based heavily on artistic preference and finances (Wilson).

Organizations that co-create with their communities have greater value to their communities. “If you really want people to feel that they belong in your space, you have to demonstrate to them that this is a place they can own, that they can be part of, that is representative of them, and can be shifted and cocreated by them” (Simon, *Creating Real Belonging*). Santa Cruz MAH began to understand the importance of cocreation and committed to presenting consistent opportunities for the community to truly shape the museum to fit its needs. This process began with opening the museum space for visitor-centered engagement with the art and items rather than just observation in a rigid and quiet space (Simon). Guests participated in museum experiences that allowed them to touch some of the items, share their thoughts with other museum visitors through a comment board, and determine what objects and art they wanted to see in the space (Simon). Through community-driven partnerships, Santa Cruz MAH cocreated a robust schedule of activities and events of, by, and for its community. The museum’s programs became a valued component of the community’s expression of art and

culture. In fulfillment of charitable purpose, the museum's service to and with its full community came first; its programs and exhibits came second as an instrument for creating meaningful artistic experiences.

Centering Charitable Purpose in Artmaking

Against a rapidly changing demographic landscape, shaped by recent immigration and increasing ethnic and cultural diversity, there is widespread acknowledgement that traditional European art forms like ballet, opera, and the symphony can no longer be considered the sole windows into a community's artistic soul and the sole measures of this country's creativity. Art, in its highest expression, appears in many places and takes many forms. (Chew)

Art is inherent to every community. Therefore, classical arts can neither be prioritized as the artistic pinnacle nor solely identified as service in the nonprofit model. As members of a larger ecosystem and one of many components of a community, classical arts nonprofits must actively honor the value all communities bring to the art and the organization.

Organizations must devote the time to invest in their communities and go beyond the practice of presenting singular events in hopes of engaging specific audiences when most beneficial to the company. "The important thing is to understand that they cannot be one-offs" (Wilson). Engaging certain communities solely through culture-specific events or initiatives ultimately separates the respective audience from the core of the organization's programs, communicating a sense of temporary visitation rather than ownership and cocreation. "You have to ask how can I be of service. And then you have to be willing to be of service" (Wilson).

Although limitations for gathering made producing live performances difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic, arts organizations still considered ways to serve their communities. "This is about building relationships" (Milligan). Cincinnati Opera provided support to local churches

and community centers in the form of staff volunteers to assist with safely organizing and distributing food, health supplies, clothing, and other resources (Wilson). In addition, Cincinnati Opera began presenting physically-distanced performances in collaboration with community partners and neighborhoods. They were able to do so because of the mutual trust and investment built over time between the community and the organization.

“We are listeners... It is in our DNA to listen so we can learn how to be better,” says Milligan, communicating the importance of allowing the community, visiting artists, board members, and audience members to be the guiding force for decisions and programs. Authentic community engagement cannot be “periodic, depending on programming, focused on ticket sales or increased traffic” (Borwick). Learning from the mistakes of its previous structure and practices, Cincinnati Opera now centers the time and investment necessary for building and thriving together in community (Wilson). In real relationships with the community, organizations are able to remain responsive to the shifts in needs, interests, and opportunities while still maintaining a role as a valued member of the community.

The Nonprofit Purpose

The National Endowment for the Arts identifies *community arts engagement* as “a variety of programming, performance, and event activities which leverage art to engage community members in cultural, social and economic development” (“Community”). However, development, service, and benefit are defined by those who are served, not by those who are providing a service. This shift in power dynamics avoids centering “what the organization thinks best” or “seeing the organization as the expert provider of arts programming” (Borwick). Organizations in which the community does not feel a true sense of welcome or belonging fall short of fulfilling their charitable purpose.

Shifting structure, vision, and practices does not require nonprofit arts organizations to completely dismiss canon and traditional works or abandon artistic excellence and the unique characteristics of the artform. However, it does require that arts organizations embrace being shaped by and with their communities. Leaders are tasked with ways of creatively fulfilling the needs of the community through mission and programs. In this manner, the art becomes a binding entity that solidifies the connection and roles of the interdependent relationship between the nonprofit and the public.

This is a call for nonprofit organizations in the classical arts that receive the 501(c)(3) status, tax benefits, and public contributions to prioritize their role as a public charity and center service to their communities throughout all functions of the organization. As taxpayers, communities own their nonprofit arts organizations and should be able to engage in art that educates, inspires, challenges, reflects, and celebrates the public without harm. Artistic leaders must consider the implications for a nonprofit arts organization when some of its community feels alienated, used, or purposefully separated from the core product. Organizations must actively center community because it is mutually beneficial and because it is the core reason for the existence of all nonprofit organizations.

To Be of Service

Therefore, nonprofit classical arts organizations must address issues within structure, approach, and practices to better fulfill their charitable purpose. The following recommendations are presented to assist organizations with centering service in meaningful ways.

Arts administrators must address structural issues to ensure there is an organization-wide commitment to serving the community through every department of the organization. This is the

minimum requirement for all nonprofit organizations with 501(c)(3) status (“Exemption Requirements”). Once these shifts occur, the *art* versus *community* dichotomy evolves into a conversation about the ways in which the art complements the organization’s service. This approach also provides a more organic and honest form of development and fundraising. Rather than false or insufficient program information or development teams submitting information and hoping the community programs “fall in line,” applications and reports simply become an act of sharing the story of the organization and the many ways it serves others (Wilson). This same approach provides more informed and relevant artistic programming.

Organizations must go beyond “diversity and inclusion” toward actively dismantling Whiteness as the default “gaze” for nonprofits in the classical arts before the public can truly benefit (“Equity”). This requires ongoing education and shifts in organizational culture to correct issues of separation and false hierarchy on a systems level as “there is no neutrality in the racism struggle. The opposite of ‘racist’ isn’t ‘not racist’. It is ‘antiracist’ ... One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist” (Kendi). This active approach extends to all systems of oppression in which individuals and communities are seen as inferior, less capable, or less worthy of being centered in the organization’s work.

In addressing structure and approach, organizations will become better equipped to build more effective and meaningful relationships and develop more responsive practices as entities in service to the public. The community must benefit and be able to confidently communicate such benefit without dispute. This cannot be done without authentic representation from the community and an honest invitation to shape the product and the organization. Practices that prioritize intentional representation and shared power structures will allow classical arts organizations to develop and present more effective programming rather than solely relying on

advisory community councils with limited decision-making power. According to the 2020 Culture Track, cultural audiences in the United States “want arts and culture organizations to become more active participants in their communities, and they want to see their communities better reflected in these organizations” (“Culture and Community”). Arts leaders and administrators must take the time to establish trust by eliminating barriers and demonstrating commitment to community voice in staff, leadership, governance, and artistic product. This includes correcting deliberate and inadvertent messages of exclusion and othering in a way that demonstrates visible accountability to the public. Centering charitable purpose, addressing influences of oppressive systems, and engaging in practices of cocreation help forge a sustainable environment for communities and their nonprofit arts organizations.

Nonprofit arts organizations are service organizations by the very nature of their tax status. Arts leaders, administrators, and stewards must consider the ways in which organizations are structured, visions are influenced by social systems, and practices impact service and experiences. Centering community in structural priority, vision, practice, and artmaking will allow nonprofit arts organizations to better fulfill their roles as charitable organizations that serve the public through the classical arts.

Authentic connection with the public takes time and collective effort and should be of primary importance in establishing community value for every nonprofit classical arts organization. Centering real relationships allows organizations to be in community with others. There is a sense of ownership from the public in which the “community is committed, and they feel like it is theirs” (Wilson). Everyone can consider how the art, both canon and newly commissioned works, can be shaped to ensure the community feels valued and welcomed to engage. Embracing cocreation with the public in an honest and authentic manner evolves into

valuing not the art presented, but the work done with the community as the true art created by the organization.

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