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ADVISORY
BOARD
for the ARTS

Transforming Arts Organizations Worldwide

Practices for Planning an Anniversary Celebration

November 2023

Research Participants

- Advisory Board for the Arts (ABA) interviewed four individuals who shared their experiences organizing major celebrations at performing arts centers.

Michelle Bradley, Martin Marietta Center for the Performing Arts



Terrence "Terry" Dwyer, Director of The Clarice PAC, University of Maryland



Rob Tocalino and Jeremy Ganter, Mondavi Center, UC, Davis



Ty Sutton, President & CEO of Dayton Live, the not-for-profit arts organization that owns and operates the Schuster Center



- Additionally, ABA profiled the following organizations from publicly available information.



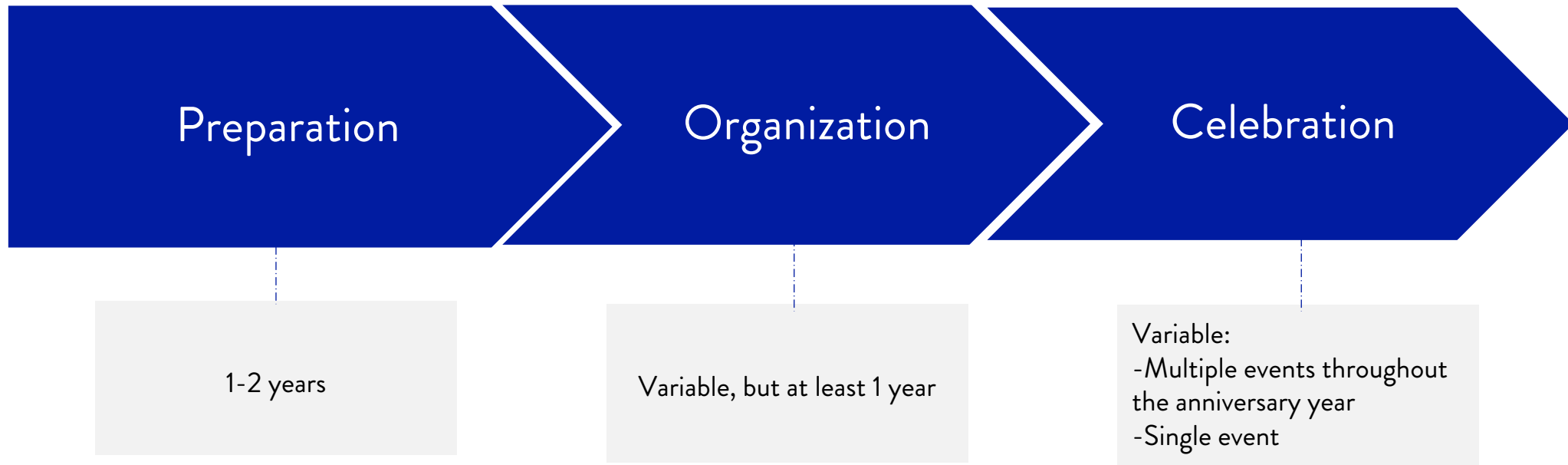
Key Takeaways

- ✓ Planning a successful celebration takes at least one year—however, the more time, the better.
- ✓ A balance between community and donor-oriented events is ideal for a comprehensive anniversary.
 - ✓ This is also a moment for the PAC to make a statement from an artistic and value perspective. Let those principles guide the events.
- ✓ An anniversary is, without a doubt, an excellent moment to reinvigorate donors.
 - ✓ Use this opportunity not only to highlight and thank your current donors, but as an opportunity to reconnect with donors who were present at your founding and early years.
- ✓ Celebrations are opportunities to engage with the on-campus and surrounding communities.
 - ✓ Celebrate your current partnerships and consider developing new ones.
 - ✓ Host some free events and have special pricing for the campus community (faculty, alums, students, etc.).
- ✓ The composition of the planning committees/commissions will ultimately depend on the anniversary’s strategic focus.
 - ✓ Reinvigorating donors: will most likely include board members in the decision-making process.
 - ✓ Community engagement: Community members must sit at the decision table.
- ✓ Set expectations and keep a transparent process from the beginning.
 - ✓ Employees are part of the celebration. Make sure they feel included.
 - ✓ Let your employees know what events they are welcome to join. If you cannot invite them to any event, have an internal celebration.
 - ✓ Hiring third parties for event planning is an investment but can be a profoundly impactful one – planning a large celebration can end up being a major weight on staff without the necessary support.

I. Insights from Interviews

No Standard Timeline, But Some Guidelines

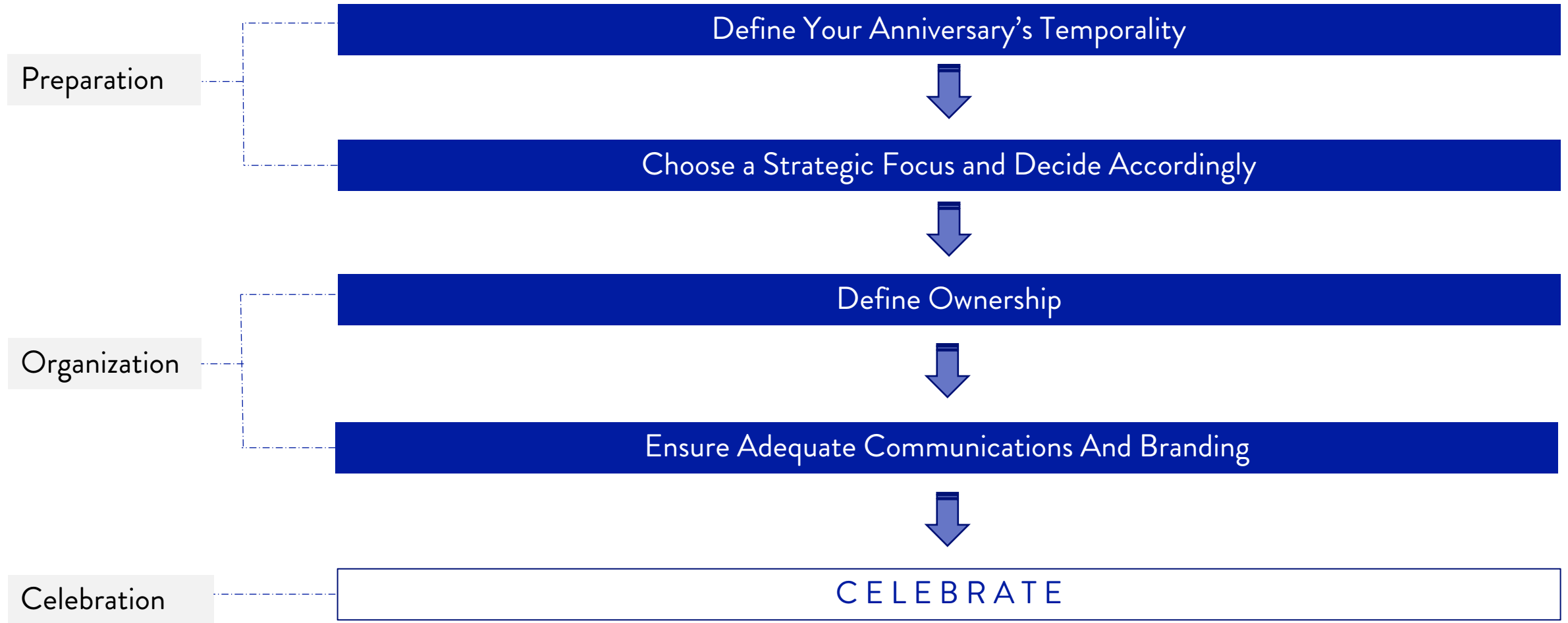
The conversations around the anniversary should begin **at least one year before the event(s)**. However, the sooner the preparations begin, the better.



“I think we all wanted more time. A year was definitely sufficient, especially with the [event] planner and our Development Director. **An extra 3-6 months would have made a world a difference though.** You can never have enough time for these events - the second you think you have everything wrapped up, something new will happen and impact things. Even though we were waiting on [the guest performer] to confirm to begin truly planning, there was a lot of conceptual planning going on prior to that. So, it was actually a slightly longer timeline. We had been talking about the anniversary communications planning since the start of the previous season, so about two years in advance.”




A Road to Celebration




Define Your Anniversary's Temporality

Celebrating an anniversary is an opportunity to place your organization in time: past, present or future.



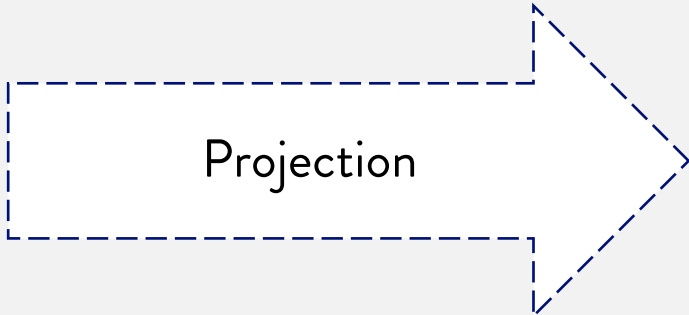
Commemoration

A moment to look back in time and celebrate what the organization has done from its inauguration until today.



Evaluation

An opportunity to reflect on the organization's trajectory while publicly presenting its current mission, values, and artistic vision.



Projection

While the anniversary may be an opportunity to look back in time, it may also be a starting point that sets a new direction for where the organization is headed.

Decide what is appropriate for your organization.

Strategic Focus – Reinvigorating Donors



- Engage with **founding donors**
- Highlight your **current donors**

An anniversary is an excellent opportunity to engage with the people who were in the PAC's early start and contributed to its building.

"We had a specific fundraising campaign around those folks - people who had moved away, stopped coming, etc. Those folks who were with us when we were built. I think those were very successful."

Publicly highlighting and thanking current donors is an excellent way to retain them for the future. Remember, they are part of the celebration.

"So the whole leadership of the University was behind the event very visibly. They are by far our biggest donors, so it was also an opportunity for us to highlight and take care of them"



- Create an anniversary campaign
- Create an anniversary fund with a meaningful purpose

A PAC may create a fundraising campaign for their upcoming anniversary or set up the bases for their next anniversary: 20 million for the 20th anniversary vs 25 million for the 25th anniversary.

Creating a fund with a particular purpose is a good way to incentivize donors to participate economically in the anniversary celebration.

"All went to the 'artistic ventures fund' which is essentially an endowment for the programming team, when we want to do a non-economically viable show."



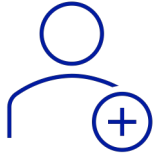
- Host high-level experiences & fundraising events while keeping art in mind

-Examples: galas, executive dinners, cocktails, private openings and performances, etc.

-Having **art as a guiding principle** in these events gives the anniversary an artistic direction and strengthens the PAC's artistic and donor relationships.

*"Our guiding principle for doing gala is from an artistic perspective which I think is not necessarily the best path from **just a pure** dollars and cents perspective. But it's what we've chosen to do is to lead with the art [...] It is also important for us to use the Gala to kind of remind people of who we are and what our values are."*

Strategic Focus - Community Engagement



Invite the community: make them feel **welcome**, not only invited.

- “Expected” community members include local stakeholders, businesses (restaurants, chambers, hotels, etc.), resident companies, county commissioners, political figures, local venues (PACs, theaters, etc.), etc.
- Be mindful to include “unexpected” members of the community into the conversations –ordinary people who play a significant role within the community.



Trust-building within the community: **listen** to the community members and make sure they sit at the **decision table**.

“It can’t feel like this is a celebration that just serves the [PAC]. It has to be a celebration to the community [beyond campus].”



Celebrate your current partnerships and consider partnering with local cultural and non-cultural organizations, such as hospitals or other artistic/educational associations.

- This is an opportunity to tell the community what the PAC stands for. Be honest and coherent.

“More importantly, we said ‘this is your space, whatever you want to do, we’ll support it.’ [It was a] celebration of a local community’s anniversary, a community Latino group, etc. Fantastic things came from letting go of control. Community leaders were programming a lot of the plaza, celebrating a lot of cultures. When we opened that plaza, we had a community opening celebration with the whole community invited. Lots of food and festivities - and free. Everything was highly visible and not hidden, it was fantastic.”



Decision Making And Ownership

Measure Your Staff's Capacity



- Does your staff have the capacity to manage an anniversary event?
- Should you hire a third party to handle a part of the process?

- Many organizations shared that planning an anniversary was a major lift on top of existing priorities.
- Be clear on responsibilities in order not to overwork staff. Remember, they are part of the celebration!
- Hiring a third-party event planner is an investment but is often well worth it to sustain staff time/energy.

Expectation Management & Transparency



- Who gets to go to which event(s)?

- If you cannot invite employees to the anniversary events due to cost or need for donor exclusivity, consider alternative options to include them in the celebration.
- Have a clear and transparent set of principles throughout the process that are shared staff-wide.

Establishing Special Committees



- Is setting up special committees necessary?

- Yes; however, the event's strategic focus will determine how many will be needed and their composition:
 - Reinvigorating donors: will most likely include board members in the decision-making process.
 - Community engagement: Community members must sit at the decision table.

Communications and Marketing

Create An Adequate Logo for the Anniversary



- The logo should be consistent with who you are as an organization.
- It should look additive –not like a major brand refresh.
- Use it in places that will impact your social media and website, like on billboards.



Ensure an Effective Communication Strategy



- Make sure your organization’s communication team is deeply involved in the celebration process.
- Ensure an effective communication timeline and strategy. **A good communications strategy will give the anniversary celebration a sense of cohesion – especially if it comprises several events.**
 - Use this celebration to pitch articles in the press –a chance to engage and reengage with audiences.
 - Track the communications process and make sure responsibilities are clear across teams.

Celebrating The 20th vs. The 25th



“We needed to tell the story of where we’ve been, where we are and what the future needs are, so we used this as the opportunity to really set up a story around the 25th anniversary as a culmination of all the work that’s happened.

So, I think in approaching it that way, it really became more about, “Hey? What’s the setup for? What’s it going to be?” [And that was] a 3 to 5 year Campaign 5 for what we needed in the future (the 25th anniversary).”

A 20th Anniversary may lay the groundwork for a bigger celebration.

It is worth celebrating a 20th Anniversary. However, planning a celebration takes time.

“I think they should absolutely celebrate it at 20. It’s a big deal... It’s not just a party but it’s a moment in time to use the attention being brought to bear to move the organization forward - not just about what happened. That’s where the surrounding community engagement can be so important. Those are critical issues to wrestle with. Organizations need to decide where they stand on those issues. A celebration like this is a great opportunity to say ‘this is what we believe in’ and build on a legacy of success to be relevant to both the campus and off-campus communities.

If it’s just about a party, don’t bother. And they should get going if the ideas are big... to do even a modest amount of the kinds of things we’re talking about takes time and planning.”



II. Anniversary Celebrations - Interviews

Anniversary Season Celebration

The anniversary was framed under a whole season that aimed to celebrate their past but also set a new direction for the future. Though the main event was a gala, its strong communications and marketing strategy, gave the whole season a cohesive sense.

ANNIVERSARY
FUND
Reinvigorating Donors

The anniversary season was partly supported by creating the **Artistic Ventures Fund**, which was essentially an endowment for the programming team for when they want to do non-economically viable shows, like the Swan Lake.

PRIVATE
EVENT
Reinvigorating Donors

The main event was an **intimate gala**.
-Positive feedback on the size.

The Gala was accompanied by a **large-scale performance** funded by the Artistic Ventures Funds.
-This decision responds to the gala's guiding principle: artistic perspective.
-Very successful among donors since they could see the materialization of their contribution.
-400 people invited.

-The gala was very **successful in fundraising** – on that night, a significant donor gave \$25K and verbally committed to renewing season sponsorship.

-**Planning timeline:** Conversations started around two years in advance, but the organization of the whole event started around one year in advance (when the performance was confirmed).

-Working groups on the staff:
·Leadership of the organization (steering committee)
·Internal working group
·Frontline staff group (planning and executing the event)



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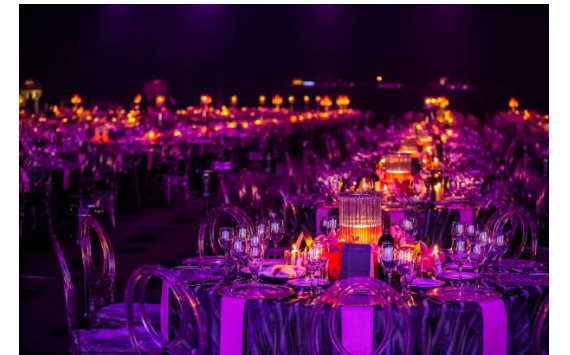


Image credit: Unsplash

“The season was used as an opportunity to celebrate some of our pre-existing relationships, but then also paint a picture of the next 5-10 years artistically. We had a distinct point of focus with the gala, but the fact that we had so many of our returning artists back doing new things was an important programming point - we wanted to make sure we were pointing in a new direction.”

The Prelude of A Future Celebration

Appealing to **nostalgia** (by honoring their past) and **optimism** (by looking to the future), the 20th anniversary was used to start telling a story that will culminate in the 25th anniversary. In this sense, the 20th-anniversary celebration began a 3-5 year fundraising campaign.

**ANNIVERSARY
CAMPAIGN**
Reinvigorating Donors

The 20th celebration consisted of acknowledging and honoring the PAC’s founders and history while building a solid fundraising base for the near future.
Campaign: 25 million for the 25th anniversary.

**PRIVATE
EVENT**
Reinvigorating Donors

The main event was a **Season Announcement Open House**, which included a Backstage Tour that had a twofold purpose:

- **Engagement and Celebrating** by giving their audiences an intimate experience.
- **Fundraising for the 25th anniversary** (future giving) by first-hand showing donors and potential donors the facilities that need renovation.

The tour was divided into two groups:

- 1) **Guests:** High-level donors, sponsors, media members, and influencers.
Two hundred people total.
- 1) **Ten sessions:** Open only to subscribers.
One hundred fifty people in each group.
Opened a bar and offered food in the lobby.
Worked to attract new subscribers.

- Donor/renewal went up by 400%.
- Staff involved:
 - COO took the lead.
 - Operations, Marketing, and Development teams.
 - Did not involve a board or committees.



Image credit: Unsplash



Image credit: Unsplash

Rebranding The PAC: New Name And Face

The Martin Marietta Center for the Performing Arts raised the curtain on its new name with three main events. Besides rebranding its name, the PAC took this moment to rebrand its image by changing its color palette.

INTERNAL EVENT Staff Engagement

Breakfast for Staff Members

- Since they could not invite their staff to the opening, they prepared a two-hour soiree, offering a large breakfast, new uniforms, t-shirts, and branded popcorn.
- +Positive feedback from employees.

PUBLIC EVENT Reinvigorating Donors

Official Unveiling

- Later that afternoon, they unveiled (lifted the curtain on the new name) with the presence of City Officials, Naming CEO, and executive staff, donors, local stakeholders, the press, department directors, etc.
- Changed digital boards, balloon drop, and three key people gave speeches (CEO, Mayor, Venue GM).
- Offered signature mocktails, unique ice cream with the PAC's new color palette, popcorn, cupcakes, cookies, and lemonade.
- +75-100 people.

PRIVATE EVENT Reinvigorating Donors

Executive Dinner on Stage

- A small dinner on stage with the naming organization executive team, city mayor, and venue GM and AGM was a success.
- +30 people.



Image credit: Unsplash



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III. Anniversary Celebrations - Profiles

Anniversary Season: From Presenters to Experience Curators

The Carolina Performing Arts Center used its 15th anniversary to recognize its evolution –how it started as a performing arts center and ultimately became an experience curator. Dedicating the season to the women in this creative industry, CPA wishes to continue evolving until becoming a global artistic leader.

Art Installations & Performances

Some examples that show the **coherence of the anniversary season:**

- An art installation honoring women who have worked to expand voting rights in North Carolina (by Craig Walsh in partnership with the Carolina Women’s Center and Southern Oral History Project).
- “The Future is Female,” a five-hour performance installation by pianist Sarah Cahill honoring female composers

Commissioned works

- “Discourse”: a musical portraying oral histories from residents of Chapel Hill.
- “The Day”: A collaboration between Maya Beiser (cellist) and Wendy Whelan (dancer).
- “Edna Lewis”: A Play about the Southern culinary icons.

Campus and community partnerships

Collaborations with:

- UNC-Chapel Hill faculty, the Arts Everywhere initiative and others.
- Local advisors and cast members: Marc Callahan from Carolina’s music department, and a contemporary music ensemble, led by a Carolina alumnus, Vincent Povázsay
- Three post-performances discussions with Durham Independent Dance Artists.

Pricing

- Carolina students: \$10 tickets to all performances.
- Staff and faculty: 15% discount on single tickets or an additional 10% discount on subscriptions.

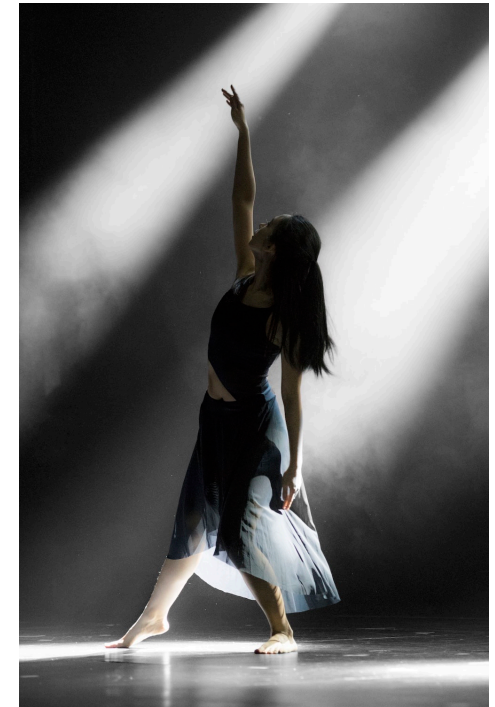


Image credit: Unsplash

“I am energized by the experiences to come for our 15th anniversary. As we welcome long-time friends and invest in groundbreaking artistic experiences, the season reflects the evolution of the institution. My hope is that the work we do inspires curiosity in all who experience the power of the arts.” - Emil Kang, executive and artistic director of Carolina Performing Arts.

Anniversary Season & Film

To celebrate its 40th anniversary, the Hong Kong Ballet designed a branding campaign called “Never Standing Still” to define what the company is today: A non-traditional, modern and innovative company that is constantly “moving forward, never standing still”

Branding Campaign

-HKB hired **Design Army**, an ad agency, to create their 40th anniversary campaign. It was published in China in May 2019.

-The campaign includes a neon-colored film and several photographs portraying the Ballet’s innovative style that combines **an ancient and futuristic aesthetic**.

-HKB created a [40th Anniversary Brochure](#) using the campaign photographs, which gave the whole season a cohesive sense.

Featured Premieres and Performances

- Gala
 - Called “The International Gala of The Starts”
 - Included a performance of the new choreographer-in-residence Hu Song Wei Ricky
 - Limited VIP Tickets

- Some of the featured performances:
 - Peter Pan
 - Romeo and Juliet
 - Jewels
 - The Nutcracker

- Workshops



HONG KONG BALLET
香港芭蕾舞團

One of Asia's premier ballet companies, Hong Kong Ballet (HKB) is celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2019. The company has a rich history of artistic excellence and innovation, and is proud to be a leading cultural institution in the region.

香港芭蕾舞團是亞洲首屈一指之芭蕾舞團，慶祝其成立四十周年。該團擁有豐富之藝術成就及創新精神，並為地區之文化機構之一。

With nearly 70 dancers from all over the world, Hong Kong Ballet is a truly international company. The company has a rich history of artistic excellence and innovation, and is proud to be a leading cultural institution in the region.

香港芭蕾舞團擁有來自世界各地之近七十名舞者，是一個真正國際化之舞團。該團擁有豐富之藝術成就及創新精神，並為地區之文化機構之一。

Image credit: Hong Kong Ballet



Image credit: Hong Kong Ballet

Celebratory Kick-off to An Anniversary Season



On September 9, 2023, Harris will host a celebratory kick-off to their 20th anniversary season with an all-day festival that will include several performances and activities.

Programming

Activities include:

- Pop-up performances near Cloud Gate sculpture
- Masterclasses
- Workshops
- Performances at the Pritzker Pavilion

General Information

- Schedule: 10am to 9pm
- Cost: Free
- Audience: All ages are welcome

Harris Fest Producer's Pass

Harris will offer an **upgrade to the festival** experience, which includes:

- Premium reserved seat in the Pritzker Pavilion seating bowl
- Celebratory reception from 4-6 PM in the Producer's Tent, featuring live music, craft cocktails, and a buffet.
- Merchandise designed by a local artist for this special occasion

Cost: \$150 USD

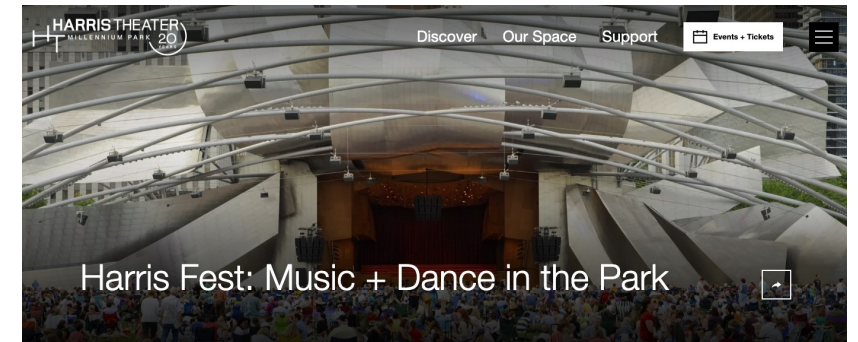


Image credit: Harris Theater



Image credit: Harris Theater

Gala Week Performances

When the UGA Performing Arts Center opened in 1996 –along with Lamar Dodd School of Art, Hugh Hodgson School of Music and the Georgia Museum of Art, they hosted a week-long celebration. Twenty-six years later*, they commemorated their 25th anniversary the same way by combining academic and artistic events for a full gala week.

*The actual 25th anniversary was in 2021, however its celebration was postponed due to the pandemic.

Sunday
April 24

- **“An Afternoon with Audra McDonald”** – at the *Hodgson Concert Hall*
25th anniversary gala concert by Broadway star Audra McDonald and pianist Brian Hertz
Cost: General Public \$25, to mark the 25th anniversary. Students: \$10.
- Party with food trucks and DJ Dan Geller

Tuesday
April 26

- **“Arts Chat: City on a Hill”** – at the Lobby of the PAC
Georgia Museum of Art’s Director William U. Eiland and the museum’s deputy director, Annelies Mondy talked about the work of three artists whose work was displayed in this space: Lamar Dodd, Josephine Bloodgood and Neil Tetkowsky.
Cost: Free

Thursday
April 28

- **UGA Symphony Orchestra** -at the *Hodgson Concert Hall*
The Hugh Hodgson School of Music performed Mahler’s “Fifth Symphony”—and “Fizzles, Sweeps, Crashes” by doctoral candidate Daniel Karcher.

Sunday
May 1

- **Atlanta Symphony Orchestra** -at the *Hodgson Concert Hall*
The gala week ended with Beethoven’s *Third Symphony* (“Eroica”) and Max Bruch’s “Scottish Fantasy”.
Cost: General Public \$25, to mark the 25th anniversary. Students: \$10.

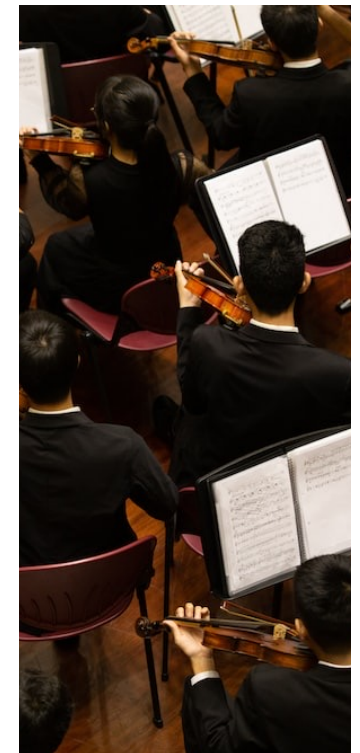


Image credit: Unsplash

Yearlong Celebrations

To celebrate Seegerstrom Center's (then the Orange County Performing Arts Center) 20th anniversary, high-profile community and donor-oriented events were spread throughout the whole year.

PRIVATE
EVENT
Reinvigorating Donors

Celebration weekends:

- At one event, the Center hosted an anniversary concert with Tony Bennett as the headliner. Local VIPs came out on stage before the show started, rolled out a birthday cake, and got the audience to sing “Happy Birthday” to the Center.
- Other activities happened on two different weekends. Some were more private/fundraising-oriented, while others were broader to welcome the whole community.

PRIVATE
EVENT
Reinvigorating Donors

Opening of the Renée and Henry Seegerstrom Concert Hall:

- The anniversary year included the opening of a new concert hall, which was marked with a concert of world premiere composers, an installation by Robert Wilson, and fireworks.
- A large tent with an all-white carpet was set up for a celebratory dinner for 100 special guests.
- Attendees received a commemorative coffee table book.
- *Planning:* the committee for the event was composed of major donors to the Center.



Images credit: Nadine Froger Photography, via BizBash

“We celebrated the anniversary all year to magnify what we were trying to accomplish with our artistic/educational programs.”

Celebrating The Community

In 2017, Segerstrom Center for the Arts celebrated the community with an inclusive, non-traditional event: the opening of a community plaza.

PUBLIC
EVENT
Community Engagement

Public opening of the Julianne and George Argyros Plaza

- The Plaza was designed to be a public gathering space hosting non-traditional events, made up of two outdoor stages and a café.
- The entire community was invited to the opening, which was highly accessible and visible.
- The event consisted of a full day of free food and festivities, including free concerts and performances.
- Segerstrom Center also partnered with non-cultural organizations from around the community to hold space at the event.
- *Planning:* the organizing committee was composed of community and staff members. Segerstrom Center's Education and Community Engagement departments were very involved in recruiting community members who would help with the celebration.

PRIVATE
EVENT
Reinvigorating Donors

Private opening of the Plaza

- In addition to the public festivities, there was a slate of private opening events, consisting of dinners and other gatherings for donors.
- The entire celebration was a **balance between community and donor-oriented** events.



Image credit: Segerstrom Center for the Arts



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