



**So much more than a stage:
How New Jersey Performing Arts Center embraced its role as
Newark's anchor cultural institution**

By John Schreiber
President and CEO, NJPAC

Nancy Cantor, the Chancellor of Rutgers University-Newark, who works just across a lovely, tree-filled park from my office at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) in Newark, has given me so much good advice and counsel throughout the years that we've both worked as leaders of nonprofit institutions in this remarkable, resurgent city.

But the chief reason I am permanently in her debt is that she introduced me to the term "anchor institution." And in so doing, she enabled me to think differently about the role of the arts in this, and in any, community.

In reality, NJPAC has been an "anchor" here in Newark since our inception — an in very much the same way that the Anchor Institutions Task Force has been defining "anchors" all this time.

But now we at NJPAC have the language and the tools to embrace our anchor-hood, so much has changed for me and for the entire leadership team at the Arts Center.

Anchor institutions are hyperlocal, they are grounded in their communities, they advance helpful initiatives and they drive change. As the anchor cultural institution in the City of Newark, and really in the State of New Jersey, here are a few examples of what being an anchor means to NJPAC:

- It means hosting the *Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival*, North America's largest celebration of the power of the word, and staging it not just on NJPAC's actual stages but in churches, parks, schools and community centers around Newark. Hundreds of events at the festival were free to students and their teachers, who pour into Newark from around the state for "the Dodge" every other year.
- It means enlisting our Dance Advisor and Board member, Tony Award winner Savion Glover, to lead a 6-week residency at our Center for Arts Education in which he creates a new musical with 40 kids from Greater Newark. He's been doing this for three summers now. It's annually one of the most compelling performances on our stages.

- It means instituting and producing a jazz vocal competition named after Newark Arts High grad Sarah Vaughan that for seven years has drawn thousands of young singers from around the world to apply and to showcase their work at our jazz festival. The winner every year gets a recording contract, a cash prize — and a berth at the Newport Jazz Festival.
- And it means that this competition is part of the Arts Center's *TD James Moody Jazz Festival* (named for one of the city's many jazz legends) that not only brings performers from around the world to our stages, but offers performances and workshops for New Jersey students, free performances for the community, and programming from our Community Engagement department that floods churches, schools and parks with jazz throughout the festival.
- And it means developing a master plan for our campus that includes a new community center, which will house arts training facilities for our students, rehearsal space for community groups, and a wide variety of community services right on our campus, alongside low-rise residential developments, retail spaces and a film center. We aim to literally build at least part of the arts-and-education corridor that is beginning to blossom across Newark's downtown, already rich in parks, universities and arts organizations large and small.

But the point is this: Having a name for what we aspire to be, having the goals of an anchor institution spelled out, and being able to look at other anchor institutions for guidance, is helping us grow as an organization — and to be ever more of a boon to our city.

NJPAC's backstory

Twenty-one years ago, when it first threw open its doors in downtown Newark, NJPAC was a big, brand-new building — with a big mission that it had taken on, but not yet put into practice.

The Arts Center had been a dream that New Jersey Governor Thomas Kean proposed in 1986. Kean spent a full decade convincing politicians, businessmen and Jerseyans of all stripes that the state needed a magnificent concert hall, a Garden State answer to New York City's Lincoln Center — and raising the funding to make it a reality. Ground was broken on the project in 1993, and by 1997, it was finally coaxed into brick-and-steel life by the governor, who worked with Newark Mayor Sharpe James, fundraiser (and later the Arts Center's first CEO), Larry Goldman, Prudential Financial CEO Art Ryan, New Jersey philanthropist Ray Chambers and Merck CEO Roy Vagelos to raise money and support for



the building and the education programs that were part of NJPAC's offerings from the very beginning.

In fact, its creators always envisioned NJPAC as a place with several roles to play. While its most obvious task was to serve as a home for world-class performances in New Jersey's largest city, NJPAC was also built to jumpstart the revitalization of downtown Newark (which by the 1990s had still not entirely recovered from the effects of the rebellion of the 1960s), to provide an exceptional education in the performing arts to New Jersey's children, and to serve as a locus for civic and community events – a “town square” for an entire state.

Our founders didn't have the term “anchor institution” to work with back in the '80s. Nevertheless, that's essentially what they imagined NJPAC would be.

NJPAC now

Remarkably, thanks to the devotion of an enormous number of supporters, today NJPAC has lived up to its ambitious mission, and even expanded on Kean's vision. The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater make a home on our stages, which are also visited by performers ranging from Yo-Yo Ma to Stephen Colbert and Gilberto Santa Rosa. More than 500 performances and events welcomed Jerseyans to Center Street last season — in a corner of downtown Newark that's been transformed, since 1997, into a bustling and art-filled neighborhood.

NJPAC's education initiative, kicked off before the Newark campus was built, is now New Jersey's largest provider of arts education programs for children, annually reaching almost 100,000 students (from Pre-K to Grade 12), teachers and families. Thousands of New Jersey kids who are exposed to world-class performances on Arts Center stages go on to classes where they can study dance, jazz, musical theater, hip hop, filmmaking and more — either in our Center for Arts Education, or in classes taught by NJPAC teaching artists at schools around the state. NJPAC's professional development opportunities for teachers — classes and workshops through which we teach regular classroom teachers how to put on a school musical, or how to teach their own students to read music or play the recorder — have added exponentially to the arts education offerings at Greater Newark schools.

Meanwhile, NJPAC has also become the home of the aforementioned biennial *Dodge Poetry Festival*, the annual *TD Bank James Moody Jazz Festival*, and the *New Jersey Speakers Series* — which last year brought President Bill Clinton, among others, to Newark. And NJPAC offers itself as a gathering place for business organizations, religious groups, and community partners, and works to bring arts events off its own campus and into locations



throughout the city — from senior centers to preschools and churches. Programming for what we call our “boundaryless campus” involves producing some 200 performances and other events every year, held away from our building, from literacy programs in libraries (which focus on books by and about performing artists like Tito Puente and Misty Copeland) to liturgical dance workshops at churches and hip hop festivals in parks, all run by our growing Community Engagement Department. A plethora of citizens’ committees representing the city’s different demographic groups — from senior citizens to New Jersey’s LGBT community — consult with our staffers and guide our choices.

That’s a lot happening in what was, until very recently, only two buildings: Our main campus, which houses the 2,840-seat Prudential Hall, an acoustically excellent modified opera hall that can accommodate everything from chamber music to rock, as well as the intimate and flexible 514-seat Victoria Theater. We also offer cabaret-style performances in our Chase Room, which can be a rehearsal space or a room for social events as well as a performance venue.

Our second building is the 35,213 square-foot Center for Arts Education — where our Saturday arts training sessions are held, and our extensive artists-in-the-schools programming is administered. It even has its own 70-seat black-box theater for student productions.

But today our programming spills out from these spaces and into every cranny of Newark. During every summer, the three-acre space in front of the Arts Center, Chambers Plaza, is the site of our free *Horizon Foundation Sounds of the City* Thursday night concerts, a kind of summer-long music festival, a gift to our neighbors, the citizens of Newark and the thousands more who work in the city’s downtown center.

How did we get here?

NJPAC pursues so many projects even as we do all the conventional things an arts center does — staging performances, commissioning new works, teaching arts classes — because of our understanding of our role as an anchor cultural institution, and in an attempt to live up to our mission statement, adopted in 2015:

The New Jersey Performing Arts Center, by celebrating diversity, shall be America's foremost urban presenter of arts and entertainment, a creative and effective leader in arts education for children, a convener of useful and enlightening civic engagement events, and a catalyst for economic development in its home city of Newark.



NJPAC, now in its 21st year, is currently enjoying a period of great success. Ticket sales and fees have more than tripled in the last 7 seasons from \$5 million to \$18 million. Our audience has grown more diverse as it has grown in size. We actively pursued both these results: We deliberately made our programming more diverse, and we've been gratified that, as we have, our audience has grown. Opening our doors to new audiences and seeking out bookings with artists from every corner of the globe, who are familiar faces to the many different immigrant groups that make up so much of New Jersey's population, has been not only the right thing to do, but it's also been a boon to our bottom line. At this point, our budget is made up of 64% earned revenue, and 36% contributed income. That's the highest earned revenue percentage we've achieved thus far, and it allows NJPAC to be ever more self-sustaining and stable.

Pursuing diversity at every level is just one of the strategic priorities NJPAC adopted for its five-year plan. Guiding our work from 2016 through 2020, this plan prioritized five goals: Making our arts education program a national model of excellence, with scalable programs that embrace the Maker philosophy; producing distinctive programming for diverse audiences; developing a sustainable business model; and maintaining NJPAC for the next generation as a vibrant destination within a dynamic neighborhood.

In one way or another, the pursuit of each of those priorities helps build NJPAC's capacities as an anchor institution, and helps grow and sustain our home city.

Let's start with programming, the heart of any arts center's offerings. We've actively sought to put the most diverse possible range of performers on our stages over the past five years. NJPAC was built as, and always will be, a home for fine-arts programming — symphony orchestras, modern dance ensembles, jazz — but we passionately believe that we should also be a home for musicians and musical styles from around the globe, for comedians who represent the astounding diversity of ethnic heritages that the people of New Jersey can claim, and for speakers on almost every topic imaginable.

As I write this, in the coming months we at NJPAC are looking forward to hosting performances by salsa star Gilberto Santa Rosa, comedians Jo Koy and Mike Marino, Italian crooner Patrizio Buanne, soul superstar Gladys Knight, India's Zakir Hussain, as well as the Indiana-born Joshua Bell and the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra. This kind of mix is not unusual for us; this is the blend we aim for, and more often than not achieve. We've been gratified that as our offerings have evolved to become more diverse, the overall size of our audience has grown.

Beyond simply diversifying our programming, we — through the exceptional work of our executive producer David Rodriguez — set about creating distinctive programming that

literally couldn't be seen anywhere else, because we created it by reaching out to the community of artists that had worked with us, and asking them to try something new.

The performances at our annual *TD James Moody Jazz Festival* are wonderful examples. At the most recent iteration of the festival, in November 2018, we took a particularly close look at Latin jazz, and how it informed the world of jazz as a whole. And we put on stage a remarkable collection of performances that were truly unique. *Congas Y Cantos: An Evening of Latin Jazz* featured world-famous percussionist Sheila E., Latin jazz pianist Eddie Palmieri and Puerto Rican salsa star Tito Rojas, together on the same stage. We had the incredible percussionist Antonio Sanchez play, live, the all-percussion score he wrote for the Oscar-winning film, *Birdman*, while the film played behind him. We brought together two incredible jazz singers — Gregory Porter and Dianne Reeves — for a night of vocal pyrotechnics.

And for a presentation of the 80-plus-year-old Count Basie Orchestra, we pulled in renowned vocalists Catherine Russell and Kurt Elling, and vibraphonist Stefon Harris to play alongside the band.

We also jointly commissioned *Ogresse*, a new work by rising jazz vocalist Cecile McLorin Salvant, in partnership with the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Kennedy Center. This new work paired the singer's searing jazz vocals and songwriting with a phenomenal chamber orchestra and a moving, metaphorical fairytale about the experiences of a monstrous woman with dark skin, a traumatic past and a taste for human flesh.

These weren't tours that happened to be passing through town; these were one-time-only performances that came together because we asked the artists to take part in something unique, or went out of our way to support artists who were already expanding their work in new and unusual ways. Because this is something we pursue, NJPAC has become an Arts Center where you don't only come to see your favorite artists perform, but you come to see them perform with talented peers, to perform new works, or to present their old favorites in a new context. We can't book programming like this every night, nor would we want to, but it makes the Arts Center a place to keep on the radar for anyone who appreciates jazz, world music, classical music or even comedy. Audiences know that special things happen here.

Expanding our programming also feeds into our goal to be more financially sustainable. Live entertainment is an unpredictable business. Performers get ill, or fall out of favor, or their fans just can't reach them because of the weather. It's just the nature of the beast. And the fine arts programming we are committed to — mounting classical music performances, modern dance concerts, sometimes jazz — is not a profitable endeavor under the best of circumstances. We know going in that we'll lose money on those performances; we believe it's our responsibility to give those genres a home in New Jersey anyway.

So we've pursued ways to ensure the Arts Center has reliable streams of income. In addition to the expected options — concessions and parking sales, for example — we've also found ways for programming to boost our bottom line. One way we do this? By creating our own touring productions and sending them out on the road.

Our biggest success story to date is *The Hip Hop Nutcracker* — a performance in which hip hop dancers spin, flip and fly through the air to Tchaikovsky's original score, amplified by a DJ and a hip hop violinist. As they dance, they tell a story that's modern, but tips its hat to the original: The plot concerns a little girl and her disgruntled parents in modern-day Manhattan, then whisks back in time to the 1980s, to when and where the parents first met, at a dance club call the Land of Sweets. We've been lucky enough to attach hip hop veteran Kurtis Blow — the emcee who brought the world "Christmas Rappin'" way back in 1979, when he became the first hip hop artist signed to a major label — to the production, opening and closing the performance with his classic hits, and a new piece made just for this show.

The Hip Hop Nutcracker just wrapped its fourth Christmas-season tour around the country in December; in January, the cast came to NJPAC and we filmed the performance for a PBS pledge special that will air next fall, which we hope will continue to feed demand for the production on the touring circuit next season. All of these activities funnel some profits back to NJPAC, supporting our arts education initiatives, our community engagement work, and our fine arts programming.

We're working on other touring productions: *Jazz in the Key of Ellison*, celebrating the musical world of African-American novelist Ralph Ellison, was created here with inspiration from Don Katz, the CEO of Audible and once a student of Ellison's. It was first performed during our annual *TD James Moody Jazz Festival* in 2016, and filled houses in San Diego and Chicago on its first venture out on the road. *Carefree: Dancin' with Fred and Ginger*, a tribute to American cinema's most iconic dance duo, directed and choreographed by the Tony-winning Warren Carlyle, was one of the first properties we created; it toured in 2016. And this year, we'll debut *The Magic Tree House: Showtime With Shakespeare*, a live stage version of an entry in the popular time-travelling tween book series. The production is touring this spring, and will perform on our own stages as well. These projects help protect NJPAC's sustainability — and bring our passion for jazz and hip hop further into the world.

NJPAC in the community

While all this goes on in the spotlight, up on a stage — here or elsewhere — some of the most important work we do happens *off* stage. Advancing our arts education programming was a key piece of our strategic plan, and we've been successful in growing these programs in



both scope and overall participation. In the last fiscal year, almost 100,000 students and families participated in our arts education programming. We bring kids here every weekend and all summer long for arts training classes in jazz, hip hop, dance and filmmaking, and where we plan and execute dozens of arts education initiatives that we use to bring arts education into public, private and charter schools across Newark and in cities throughout New Jersey.

These initiatives are extensive, and include several approaches to bringing the arts into the lives of New Jersey's kids and empowering them to become artists themselves, giving them the tools, the space and the confidence to make art that tells their own stories. Influenced by the Maker philosophy, we've created our programs to form a "pathway" for our students from observing performances, to acquiring the skills necessary to create art, and then to authoring their own work. There's a "pathway" for students to follow in each of seven artistic genres including jazz, dance, musical theater, devised theater, hip hop, poetry and filmmaking.

The first step on that journey is exposing kids to the power, and the many varieties, of live performance. More than 35,000 children every year either come to NJPAC to see one of our *SchoolTime* performances on our stages, or witness one of our assemblies, for which we bring a whole production to a school, performing in an auditorium or gymnasium. These performances all come with teacher guides and information about how the subject matter keys into New Jersey's curriculum requirements — but more importantly, these musicals, concerts, ballets and hip hop performances are often the very first live productions that the kids in the audience have ever seen. (And those performances are just the ones we arrange through participating schools. Not in that total? An almost equal number of students who come to our regular evening and weekend children's programming with their families. Whether it's *The Nutcracker* or our annual Mother's Day performances by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, or a screening of *Harry Potter* with the score performed by the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, we offer New Jersey families a plethora of ways to introduce their children to the performing arts.)

From there, we extend the opportunity to learn the skills that allow for performance to as many children as possible, often working with the Newark Public Schools or other school districts. More than 5,000 students every year learn how to waltz and foxtrot in our *Dancing Classrooms*™ residencies, to stage a musical through our *Disney Musicals in Schools* residencies, create a theatre piece based on their own lives through our Ping Chong residency, or even how to write their own musicals through our *Mercer Musical Theater* program. For each of these programs, we send a troupe of teaching artists into a school's classroom twice a week for 10 or 12 weeks. Students learn the skills needed to dance, sing, compose, write, and to pull together a performance for their teachers, peers and families at



NJPAC at the semester's end. Each residency offers the ancillary benefits of all performing arts training — a greater capacity for creativity, the ability to think critically and work collaboratively — but they also have individual bonuses built into the curriculum.

Dancing Classrooms, for example, was created to teach not just the rhumba, but social and emotional skills — confidence, persistence, respect for oneself and for others, how to win and lose gracefully. (Dance competitions are a central part of the program for exactly this reason.) *Disney Musicals in Schools* not only teaches the kids how to put on a show, it also teaches their teachers how to stage a school musical, and offers them the rights to a Disney musical production for free, for two years running. The hope is to persuade schools to maintain a permanent drama program.

In addition to performances and residencies, NJPAC is also building its teacher professional development offerings. One of our biggest successes in this field is the R.A.M.P. program — *Recorder Arts for Musical Pathways*. In the last five years, this program has tripled in size, and now involves approximately 3,300 third-graders; to put it another way, with a very few exceptions, every third-grader in the city of Newark takes part.

The outline of the program is simple: We teach a growing group of Newark Public Schools teachers how to read music and play the recorder — and how to teach their own students to do the same. The teachers return to their classrooms armed with new lessons, and enough recorders for their entire class. The kids learn how to read music, how to practice as an ensemble — and, at the end of the semester, most of them come to Prudential Hall to perform. Let me tell you: Listening to more than 2,000 kids play “Hot Cross Buns” on the recorder is an experience unlike any other! But the real joy of that performance — which usually brings most of our staff down to the stage to listen in — is watching the glee on the faces of these children.

We've also expanded our other professional development offerings, instructing almost 1000 teachers during dedicated professional development days this year, focusing on how to integrate the arts into the teaching of other subjects.

NJPAC also offers arts training classes to kids ages 10 to 18; our Center for Arts Education is jam packed with students studying modern dance, deejaying, jazz performance, classical music performances and filmmaking every Saturday, starting at 10 a.m. Among those Saturday programs, probably our most developed offering is our *Wells Fargo Jazz for Teens* program. Students in this program start their day with lessons, and then rehearse in ensembles that range from trios to our James Moody Jazz Orchestra and our premier, all-scholarship group, the George Wein Ensemble, named after my mentor, the founder of the Newport Jazz Festival. And training is just the start: These kids perform all around the city, get to meet and take master classes with visiting artists and even get to road trip to the

Newport Jazz Festival every year. We're incredibly proud of these young musicians — and especially of the ones who go on to study music at the undergraduate level. As I write, we've got four students at the Berklee College of Music on full scholarship. And in 2017, we were bowled over with pride when one of the very earliest Jazz for Teens students, Tyshawn Sorey, now an assistant professor in music at Wesleyan, was awarded a MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship.

In 2018, we staged Katie Cappiello's devised theater work, *SLUT: The Play*, an examination of rape culture and slut shaming in a high school environment, with a cast of Newark high school women — and performed it to an audience of 1500 Newark high school students. One of the most gratifying parts of the process was that the playwright, recognizing that she wrote this play based on the experiences of her students on Manhattan's Upper West Side, spent a day with our cast, discussing their experience with sexual violence and slut shaming in their own communities. She used the words and stories of our young cast — which was made entirely of Latinx and African American women — to rewrite her play in a way that felt true to their use of language and their experiences.

SLUT: The Play is a deeply moving and provocative piece. Because it is so dense and so challenging, it was important to all of us at the Arts Center that we didn't simply stage it and then walk away from the powerful emotions and questions it raised. Instead, we offered the performance in partnership with the Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey and the Mental Health Association of Morris and Essex, who provided counselors who could address these issues at Newark's high schools before the performance, who were on hand to lead a discussion at the performance itself — and who were at every single rehearsal. *SLUT: The Play* was, for the Arts Center, a wonderful learning experience, showing us how we could mount and stage a performance in a way that was also a community gathering, and a useful discussion of a particular issue within that community.

It was the fact that the leadership at NJPAC, including the senior members of our arts education staff, thinks about the Arts Center's role as an anchor institution constantly that lead us to produce this play — and not to produce it alone, but in partnership with several community organizations, and in a way that served not only our cast, but the community at large. These extra steps were built into the project from its initial conception, not tacked on as an afterthought — it made *SLUT: The Play* one of the most effective programs we have yet staged.



The news about Newark

Much of what creates the unique blend of performing arts, community building, education and civic engagement that defines NJPAC is a direct response to the fact that the Arts Center is located in — and was built expressly for — the city of Newark, New Jersey.

Newark is a fairly unusual city. It has many challenges to overcome: Approximately 28% of the population lives below the poverty line. Education outcomes here are not equal to those in the rest of the state. Only 14% of the city's population over 25 years old has a bachelor's degree or a graduate degree.

And segregation along racial lines is stark here, especially when compared with to the majority white suburbs that surround Newark, many of which — Short Hills, Summit, Livingston, Montclair — are home to extraordinarily wealthy individuals. Meanwhile, in Newark, median household income is \$31,000, and approximately 19% of the population has no health insurance. The unemployment rate hovered between 6 and 7% over the past several years, as the national rate plummeted to 4%.

By those measurements, things are dire.

And yet, it's a city that has a vibrant arts scene that is oversized given the many challenges that still exist here. In fact the National Center for Arts Research put Newark in the top ten of the country's most artistically vibrant cities.

Why is that? How can that be?

Much of this extraordinary community of artists and arts organization grew out of Newark's history. This city has always been enchanted by the arts, always considered the arts integral to the community, and has always supported public arts projects.

For example, the Newark Museum, which opened in 1909, is one of the great experiments in making a museum into a community center. Its founding director, John Cotton Dana, was an innovator in developing arts organizations that were incredibly democratic in nature. He was the director of the Newark Public Library, where he advocated for stacks that were open to the public. He started the Museum on one floor of the library; he filled it with objects from Japan, Tibet, China and from across Africa, and other galleries he filled with modern American pottery, which no one had yet come to consider art. He courted an audience of factory workers and children — people who were not, at the time, expected to avail themselves of a museum's offerings. Dana considered a museum an institution of education; he started a program that allowed schools to borrow artifacts from the museum's galleries. And he promoted and displayed the work of contemporary artists.

The Newark Museum continues to thrive today, with modern amendments like a Makerspace. (It's still got Tibetan art, too — in fact, it has an actual Buddhist altar, consecrated by the Dalai Lama.) So does the Newark Library, which itself is open for performances in the renovated galleries of its gorgeous, Italianate building, designed to imitate Florence's Palazzo Strozzi.

In more recent decades, Newark's visual arts scene has only grown larger and more varied. The availability of inexpensive real estate, even right downtown, lead to a bumper crop of galleries, all of them offering a space for innovative, boundary-challenging paintings, sculpture and installations. Artists' studios popped up in buildings abandoned by industry. By 2002, there was a great enough density of artists' studios and galleries scattered across downtown to prompt the creation of the Open Doors Studio Tour. Now a four-day extravaganza, the recently rechristened Newark Arts Festival offers a slew of artist exhibitions, forums, studio tours, performances, mural excursions, screenings and children's events across downtown, bringing visitors from across the region into the city to sample Newark's incredible mix of visual arts offerings, from the exhibitions of long-established stalwarts like Gallery Aferro on Market Street, to the brand new arts incubator, Express Newark, in the recently refurbished Hahne & Co. building. Bus tours of the city's finest murals — now one of the city's signatures, thanks to the mural-painted railroad walls lining one of the city's main arteries, McCarter Highway — are a regular feature.

Newark's other remarkable artistic heritage is its decades-long position as a preeminent home of jazz music. Jazz historian Barbara Kukla attributed Newark's musical prominence to a number of factors, among them: Southern musicians who moved North to find their fortune, but lacked funds for Manhattan digs and therefore put down roots in Newark; the boom in Newark's factories in the early 1900s, which gave rise to a population of factory workers seeking weekend entertainment; and finally, Newark's unique position as a beer town, the home of brewers including Ballantine, Pabst and Anheuser-Busch, which in turn fueled the establishment of a large number of competing night spots. By the 1930s, the city's jazz scene was thriving; Duke Ellington was said to have admonished his band to play their best in this town, where the audience was bound to be a sophisticated group of music aficionados. Most of the city's nightclubs and theaters from its mid-century musical boom are long gone — the Mosque, now known as Newark Symphony Hall, is one exception — but the city's real legacy are the many prominent jazz musicians who grew up here, including James Moody, Willie "The Lion" Smith, Hank Mobley, Wayne Shorter and, of course, the Divine One, Sarah Vaughan. The Institute of Jazz Studies, the largest and most comprehensive library and archives of jazz and jazz-related materials in the world, keeps the memory of Newark's jazz-soaked past alive on the Rutgers-Newark campus.



The city's reputation as a musical hub was also buttressed by the formation, in 1922, of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, which was based in Newark almost from its inception. The NJSO rose in prominence over the years, hitting an early high with the appointment of Henry Lewis as musical director in 1968. Lewis was the first African-American musical director of a major symphony orchestra, and he led the orchestra to new heights — often with his wife, Marilyn Horne, on board as soloist.

The NJSO has had a youth orchestra, and various arts education programs for Newark's children, since the 1950s. And its devoted fans' hope of building the NJSO a performance hall worthy of its caliber was one of many reasons city residents, and Newark natives who had moved elsewhere, were so passionate about bringing the New Jersey Performing Arts Center to this city when Kean proposed it in the 1980s.

The opening of both NJPAC and the Prudential Center (and its East Coast branch of the Grammy Museum, which chronicles the entire state's contributions to popular music) both have added to Newark's stature as an arts and entertainment hub.

It's certainly not his only qualification for the job, but it's not surprising that Newark's current mayor, Ras Baraka, is both a poet himself, and the son of famed poet and music critic Amiri Baraka.

The vibrancy of Newark's community of artists and arts lovers became real to me when I chaired Newark 350, a year-long "jubilee" of hundreds of events, pulled together to celebrate the anniversary of the city's founding in 1666. I served as Programming Chair of the Newark 350 Committee, and the city's response to the occasion was little short of overwhelming.

The Committee received more than 250 applications from artists and nonprofit organizations and presenters to produce programming in honor of the anniversary. We granted \$700,000 to more than 125 organizations; grant amounts ranged from \$2,500 to \$25,000. The events produced throughout the celebrations nodded to the city's history, its art, its music and the communities of its five wards, each more vibrant than the last.

How do I fit in?

Working at NJPAC, with its twinned mission of supporting the arts and nurturing a community, is in many ways the perfect fit for my own unique career trajectory, which has always focused on both arts and advocacy. I got my start working for legendary jazz impresario George Wein. Under his tutelage, I produced jazz festivals in communities all over America. Each of these events were hyper-specific to the communities they were in: I



produced concerts in parks and community centers, and those performances were as important to the success of each festival as the headliners — Ella Fitzgerald, Miles Davis and Herbie Hancock — who would headline the big show in the local symphony hall.

After that, I took a left turn into Hollywood, becoming the head of the social action and advocacy division of Participant Media, a movie production company that was conceived with the idea that important issues could be at the heart of great filmmaking. The company created movies like *An Inconvenient Truth*, *Waiting for Superman*, *Lincoln*, and *The Help*; for each film, we created action-driven campaigns, engaging viewers in the activism that was part of each film. All of that was a perfect prelude to taking a job at an arts center with mission in its DNA.

One of the great joys of the work I do is that I'm an arts administrator who gets to be engaged in the larger life of the city. I sit on the Board of the Newark Trust for Education, where I'm able to advocate for arts-based learning, and on the Board of the Newark Alliance, where I'm able to advocate for the arts as an economic development engine.

As NJPAC's CEO, I'm part of the Newark Anchor Collaborative (NAC) as well. This powerful group includes the heads of RWJBarnabas Health, Prudential Financial, Rutgers-Newark, NJIT, Audible — the city's most prominent employers, and the institutions that are part of the city for the long term. The goal of the NAC: to maximize the impact of anchor institutions in Newark. We've researched and adopted "buy-hire-live" strategies to infuse the local economy with capital, and make sure the city's economic revival benefits *all* of its citizens. And we've leveraged our organizations' philanthropic and organizational power to improve the lives of current and future residents of Newark in ways big and small.

How is NJPAC an anchor?

Here are some of the events and programs that NJPAC has offered as part of its work to serve as an anchor institution in Newark:

- We hosted the first gubernatorial debate for the November 2017 election. Not only did it focus attention on our home city, but it reinforced the role NJPAC can play in civic engagement.
- We invited 1,300 public high school students to see *Hidden Figures* followed by a panel of contemporary female African-American NASA engineers, airline pilots, and students. We invited in another 1400 students to watch *Marshall* — and then speak with the late Supreme Court justice's son, John, about his father's role in the fight for civil rights. Both showings were part of NJPAC's *PSEG True Diversity Film Series*, which

screens films that address issues of importance to the African-American community, each followed by panel discussions featuring experts on the topic. Now a monthly event, the series features films shown on NJPAC's campus and the Hahne & Co. building.

- NJPAC was an active member of the team that worked to bring Amazon to Newark. One of the huge reasons we billed Newark as a great place for Amazon to build its next headquarters was because of the vibrant 24-hour arts scene that fills this city's streets, galleries, stages, and indeed, covers the very walls with murals. The National Center for Arts Research that year ranked Newark one of the 10 most vibrant arts communities in the country, citing its performance spaces, support for the arts by local government and businesses, and many arts education opportunities.
- We partnered with theaters around the state to commission New Jersey playwrights to write new pieces — each set in New Jersey — through a program called *NJPAC Stage Exchange*. After initial readings at NJPAC, the plays will be given full productions at partner theaters, underwritten by NJPAC.
- And we have become a collaborative leader in the redevelopment of Newark as a residential community for citizens and new residents. A longtime dream of the Arts Center's first advocate, Governor Kean, was realized last year when we began to build on the 10 acres of land that surround our theaters, opening our new building, One Theater Square. . It's the first high-rise luxury apartment building to be built from the ground up in Newark in 60 years. When those 200-plus apartments are filled with tenants (it nearly is, and I was among the first to move in), it will give our neighborhood a population of 24/7 residents to complement the many Newark office workers who fill this area of the city by day, but go home to the suburbs by night. The building will soon open restaurants and multiple retail spaces, too. We're not building just to fill space: We have spent years masterplanning the best use of this land, and consulting with residents, business leaders and others to determine how to create a vibrant, arts-focused, 24-7 neighborhood in this corner of Newark's downtown that has long been a place where suburbanites worked and caught a show before heading out of town.

Being an anchor also means maintaining long-standing partnerships with Newark's other anchors, including hospitals, universities and corporations. Rutgers University-Newark has been a partner on any number of programs.

One of the partnerships we're most proud of is the one we have with Prudential Financial, a long-time Newark anchor itself, which has had headquarters here for more than 140 years. Art Ryan, Prudential's one-time CEO, was one of the architects of the plan to build NJPAC in



the 1980s and 1990s; he was chairman of NJPAC's Board for many years, and remains a supporter in his retirement.

Prudential, meanwhile, has become ever more involved in the revitalization of the city, and NJPAC's relationship with the company and many of its key employees has only grown over time. John Strangfeld, the just-retired chairman, chief executive officer, and president of Prudential Financial, has been the Chairman of our Board for years, and a mentor to me. His colleague Ommeed Sathe, Vice President, Impact Investments, has been instrumental in helping us develop our masterplan for our campus, and Lata Reddy, Chair & President of The Prudential Foundation, as well as the company's Senior Vice President, Diversity, Inclusion & Impact, has been an advisor and advocate as we constantly workshopped ways to pursue our mission while remaining financially viable. The company, for which our main stage, Prudential Hall, is named, continues to support the Arts Center with significant philanthropy as well.

NJPAC has embraced the fact that the performing arts can bring a community together and provide an entry point into the discussion of topics — like race, like social injustice — that can be divisive. An Arts Center is the perfect place to host difficult discussions. We also celebrate the ways that arts education can enhance the lives of students in the near-term, and in the long term provide them with skills that are critical to 21st century careers, from creative problem-solving to collaborative work styles. Creating programming that encompasses these central mission points — providing an education in the arts, robust community involvement, and empowering our young people to advance their futures and enhance their communities — is an ongoing goal for the Arts Center.

For NJPAC, essentially, nothing is off the table. If we can add value to a conversation, an initiative, program or project that enhances the lives of patrons and community members, we're game. Sometimes this means we are actively engaged as a collaborative producer; sometimes it means we have a singular conversation that acts as a catalyst for something that takes place off our campus.

There is nothing circumscribed about our definition of an anchor other than our ability to add value to the city, and to say "yes" to something new and useful whenever possible.

What comes next?

What we've grown into, in short, is what we were always meant to be, even if the men and women who built this place didn't use the words "anchor cultural institution." And better yet, thinking about the Arts Center as an anchor has led us to find new ways to expand what we



do, and how and where we do it. What we've realized is that, as an anchor institution, there are many different ways that the Arts Center can contribute to our city's vitality.

For example, we can make this neighborhood vibrant by building a space for new residents to live here. (And, significantly, we can do so without displacing anyone; One Theatre Square stands on what was once an under-used parking lot.) NJPAC's first foray into real estate development has gone well enough so far that we're pushing ahead with further plans: We have a new member of our leadership team devoted to overseeing our real estate development goals, and we hope that in the next five years we'll be able to add many new amenities to our campus, including more low-rise residential projects, a hotel and conference center, a film center and possibly a film production facility. Our new community center and arts training facility is already funded and will be built within the next five years.

Other anchor cultural institutions

There are many other arts and cultural organizations across the country that are adopting the initiatives and language of anchor institutions. The Arts Center was fortunate enough, in 2016-17, to be part of a study of cultural anchors, led by Karen Brooks Hopkins, President Emerita of Brooklyn Academy of Music, while she was a Senior Fellow at the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

The study sought to answer the question "How can anchor cultural institutions in low income communities, and communities in transition, make the maximum social, economic, and artistic impact?" The goal was to get cultural organizations more involved in the anchor conversation alongside traditional anchors, "eds and meds" — universities and hospitals — as well as to encourage arts organizations to embrace the anchor mission, thereby committing to serving their communities to the fullest.

In addition to NJPAC, the study looked at AS220 in Providence, Rhode Island and MASS MoCA, in North Adams, Massachusetts.

AS220 is a non-profit community arts organization in Downtown Providence with multiple galleries, performance spaces, a print shop, an electronics lab, a darkroom, a dance studio, 47 live-work spaces, a bar and a restaurant. The organization is grassroots, hyperlocal, and they describe themselves as "unjuried and uncensored" — meaning anyone can exhibit or perform work in their spaces. Since its founding in 1985, AS220 has become a genuine anchor in the city. They hold a total of 100,000 sq ft. in downtown Providence, over three historic buildings that represent a \$25 million investment. They've achieved all of this with an



operating budget just over \$3 million and an equal pay policy across all non-profit staff of \$19/hour.

By contrast, MASS MoCA is one of the largest contemporary art museums in the world, occupying over 600,000 sq ft. of gallery space in the former Sprague Electric Factory in rural North Adams, at the northwestern corner of the state. When the factory closed in 1984, a majority of the city's residents were out of a job. Then, MASS MoCA's founders, a group of staff members from the nearby Williams College of Art, came up with the bold idea to turn the factory into an art museum.

By highlighting these three organizations, the study proved that arts and cultural institutions of varying sizes, locations, and job descriptions can adopt the anchor mission and thrive. Although these three organizations have vastly different resources at their disposal, they were all able to make a significant difference in their communities, and all found the idea of functioning as one of their city's anchors a useful guide in planning events, programming and outreach.

The charge

So in the end, this is what I want to ask you to consider: I encourage you today, if you are located in a city, small or large, that has a really vibrant arts institution — whether it is a performing arts center, a museum, a theater company, a gallery, a public radio station, or even a sports franchise in an arena that is community minded — to reach out and start a dialogue with them. The opportunity for partnership is always there, and the outcomes are always good for the community. All you have to do is be a willing co-conspirator, an authentic and equal partner, and have the ability and the desire to say yes.

We in the arts are absolutely available and delighted to show you a good time on a Friday night in one of our performance spaces, but I encourage you to look a little deeper. We have so much more to offer.