

CROSSING BORDERS THROUGH CULTURAL EXCHANGE

A Review of the USArtists International Program



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Cover: Yang and Olivia recital at the Biblioteca in Pelotas, Brazil (as part of the Social Service of Commerce (SESC) International Music Festival). Photo courtesy of Yang and Olivia

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Introduction

by NEA Chair Maria Rosario Jackson, PhD



NEA Chair Maria Rosario Jackson led the U.S. delegation to MONDIACULT 2022, the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development in Mexico City, Mexico, in September 2022. Photo by Dionandrea Shorts

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is committed to advancing equitable opportunities for arts participation and arts practice as a means of ensuring that everyone in the United States benefits. This mission involves providing opportunities for the international exchange of artists and cultural traditions, and showcasing the formidable and influential artists and art traditions practiced in the United States for audiences worldwide.

Globally, there has always been a desire for our country's art. One indicator of worldwide demand for U.S. artists and artworks is illustrated by the nation's export surplus of arts and cultural goods and services: \$17.8 billion in 2021—an estimate that comes from the NEA and the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

A significant way the NEA helps artists share their talent and experience vibrant cultures internationally (which often impacts their own art-making) is through the USArtists International (USAI) exchange

program. USAI—a partnership between the NEA and Mid Atlantic Arts with support from the Mellon Foundation and the Trust for Mutual Understanding—provides support for U.S. dance, music, and theater ensembles to participate in international festivals and arts markets. This initiative allows U.S. artists to not only develop their art and careers through international collaborations, but also to present the diverse voices that are a part of our country’s many cultures to international audiences.

The NEA’s Office of Research & Analysis fielded a survey of USAI grantees to learn what those artists experienced—and what successes they achieved—through the USAI grants. The data, and accompanying case studies of USAI participants, will give the NEA a better understanding of the value of the program, which can be shared with other arts funders, practitioners, researchers, and the broader public.

This report summarizes results from this survey and presents six case studies of artists who have participated in the program, giving an overview and providing insights of why the program is important and how it helps artists reach new publics. Equally important, and consistent with the NEA’s interest in supporting creative process, this report also looks at how the program benefits artists creatively. As the survey and case studies show, participants in USAI say their experiences with the program have resulted in the inclusion of more diverse and innovative ideas in their artwork.

A significant finding: not only are these artists reaching new audiences, they are able to reach new heights in their artistic practices. Living an artful life, as I have noted, involves building on our personal creative capabilities and telling our own stories through art. This process of creating and growing is crucial and as important as the final art product.

We look forward to seeing the USAI program continue to evolve and to experiencing new, inspiring art from those who have benefitted from participation in the program.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Maria Losario Jackson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Maria" being the most prominent.

Background on

USArtists International Program

The National Endowment for the Arts funds opportunities for the international exchange of artists and arts and cultural traditions, which yield demonstrable benefits for the arts and artists. These activities include supporting U.S. artists to showcase their work for audiences abroad through participation in global arts events. The NEA Office of International Activities (OIA) is the lead NEA unit for these activities and achieves this mission in part by working with the U.S. regional arts organization Mid Atlantic Arts. Together, the funders support a program for U.S. performing arts individuals and ensembles that have been invited to participate in international arts markets. The program is [USArtists International \(USAI\)](#).

USAI currently supports in-person performances by American artists through engagements at international festivals and global presenting arts marketplaces outside of the United States. The program funds artists and companies across dance, theater, and music disciplines. The USAI program has awarded an average of 74 grants annually over the last five years, with an average award amount of just over \$10,000. Since the program's inception, USAI grants have supported artists traveling to 95 countries on six continents.

Executive Summary

of USArtists International Survey Report, First Edition (2022)

As part of its [Strategic Plan for 2022-2026](#), the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has pledged to provide opportunities for the international exchange of artists, artworks, and arts activities. The NEA achieves this mission in part by partnering with U.S. regional arts organization [Mid Atlantic Arts](#) on USArtists International (USAI), a program supporting U.S. dance, music, and theater ensembles that have been invited to participate in international festivals and arts markets.

To help understand the nature and extent of the NEA's contributions to artistic and cultural exchanges, the agency developed a survey of USAI grantees. This section presents highlights from the survey, which was administered to USAI grantees between May 31, 2022, and June 27, 2022.

Survey respondents had completed a USAI-sponsored performance (in-person or virtual) between October 2020 and September 2021. The survey was sent to USAI grantee organizations, typically performing arts ensembles or companies, which passed it along for completion by individual artists who had participated in USAI-sponsored events. Thirty-seven grantees were eligible to receive the survey, which then was taken by 27 artists associated with individual grantee organizations, for a total response rate of 73 percent. The respondents came from a variety of performing arts disciplines. The highest number of respondents were musicians, consistent with the profile of USAI grantees who received the survey. Just over 50 percent of respondents were first-time USAI grantees.

While the pandemic limited the number of opportunities for performing artists to travel abroad, the USAI grantees who did have in-person and virtual experiences between October 2020 and September 2021 reported many tangible benefits from professional development. Key findings from the survey include:

- Just under half of respondents **secured one or more new bookings abroad** as a result of the USAI-supported experience.
- The vast majority of respondents (96 percent) said they made **new international professional contacts** during their USAI-supported experience.
- 26 percent of responding grantees had an **interaction with a U.S. Embassy or Consulate** outside of regular visa processing.
- 89 percent of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they **learned new artistic performance strategies** for engaging international audiences. 96 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their USAI-supported experience **strengthened their visibility as artists**.
- 92 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the USAI-sponsored experience **benefited them creatively**. Two-thirds of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they **incorporated more diverse ideas (e.g., innovative, novel, or creative ideas) into their artwork** as a result of their USAI-supported experience.

The full survey can be found on the [NEA website](#).



Nelisiwe Mtsweni (left) and Alexandria Holiday in performance with D'DAT.
Photo courtesy of D'DAT Management, Inc.

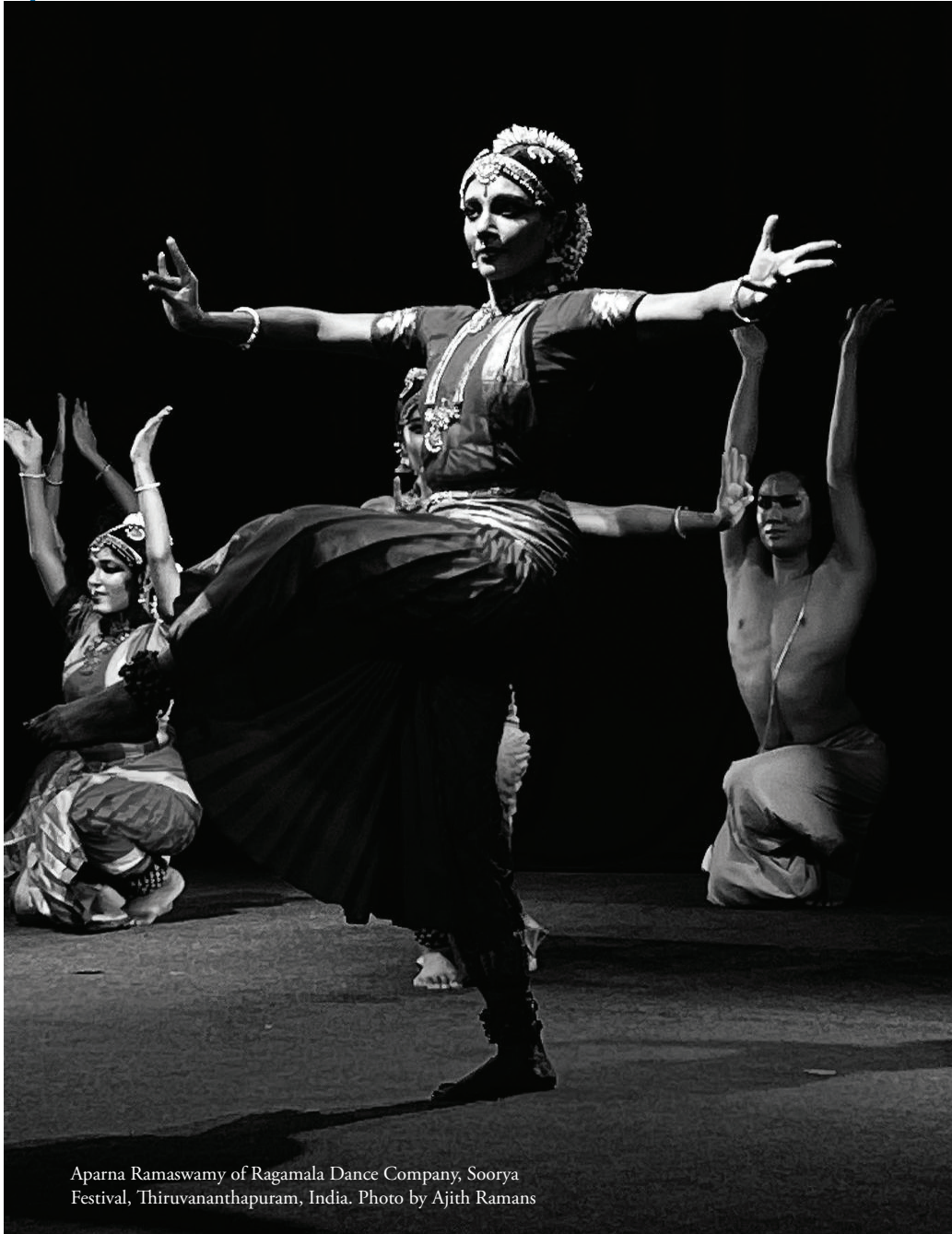
Case Studies

by Participants

The National Endowment for the Arts corresponded with six performing groups who participated in USArtists International over the past few years to get feedback on their experiences with the program.

- [Ragamala Dance Company](#) – Minneapolis, Minnesota
Soorya Choreography Festival, India (2022)
- [Making Movies](#) – Kansas City, Missouri
Macro Fest, Panama (2023)
- [Yang and Olivia](#) – Chicago, Illinois
The Social Service of Commerce (SESC) International Music Festival, Brazil (2023)
- [D'DAT](#) – Farmington, New Mexico
World of Music, Art and Dance (WOMAD), South Africa (2022)
- [Whitetop Mountaineers](#) – Whitetop, Virginia
Blue Mountains Music Festival, Kangaroo Valley Folk Festival, Dorriggo Folk and Bluegrass Festival, Australia (2022)
- [The Wooster Group](#) – New York, New York
Taipei Arts Festival, Taiwan, and the Asia Cultural Center, South Korea (2017)
Ludwigsburg Schlossfestspiele, Germany, and Choral Biennale, Netherlands (2022)

Ragamala Dance Company



Aparna Ramaswamy of Ragamala Dance Company, Soorya Festival, Thiruvananthapuram, India. Photo by Ajith Ramans

For Minneapolis-based Ragamala Dance Company, dance truly is a family business. Rooted in the South Indian dance form of Bharatanatyam, the company is led by artistic directors and choreographers Raneeramaswamy and Aparna Ramaswamy, Raneer's daughter. Another daughter, Ashwini, is a choreographic associate. Applying to USAI was a natural fit for the company, which takes a global worldview in its work and has previously performed in the United Kingdom, Indonesia, and Japan, to name a few highlights. As they explained in an e-mail interview, "As first-generation American culture-bearers and generative artists, our art is centered around the power of ancestral wisdom to extend tradition, expand creativity, and quest for a shared humanity. Through our work, we reflect on immigrant experiences, global citizenry, and the joy of the human spirit."

Ragamala used its USAI award to bring an original dance work, *Fires of Varanasi*, to the Soorya Festival in Kerala, one of India's most prestigious dance festivals. (The company also participated in the Soorya Festival in 2010 thanks to USAI support.) "In this large-scale work, we expand upon the birth-death-rebirth continuum in Hindu thought to honor immigrant experiences of life and death in the diaspora," explained the choreographers. From October 11-17, the company presented five performances for roughly 1,200 audience members at various venues in the Kerala region, including a performing arts center (Varkala), an outdoor amphitheater (Kovalam), and a university theater (Changanassery). Their performances garnered unabashed praise from audience members as well as Festival Founder and Director Soorya Krishnamoorthy, who noted, "All choreographers should learn from Raneer and Aparna Ramaswamy."

According to the company, USAI support was crucial to Ragamala's ability to perform at the Soorya Festival. "Soorya is one of the rare presenters in India that provides support for performers from abroad.... Even for a festival like Soorya, which is remarkable in its commitment to providing ground transport, lodging, meals, production, front-of-house, and marketing support to artists, the currency exchange rate makes it prohibitively expensive for the festival to cover artists' travel from the U.S. Due to these factors, this engagement would not have been possible without USAI support."

While the company enjoys an international reputation, performing in India is particularly important to them. Not only are they able to perform and interact with other Indian classical dance companies, but they also showcase the excellence of diaspora dance companies. The choreographers explained, "As U.S.-based Indian diaspora artists creating work rooted in the Indian dance form of Bharatanatyam, success and recognition in India are vital. [The Soorya Festival's] imprimatur—and the opportunity it provides to perform alongside the world's leading Bharatanatyam artists—provides a strong endorsement of our work and recognition of our stature both in India and the diaspora."

Performing in India also allows the company to strengthen existing relationships with presenters such as Krishnamoorthy, meet and develop relationships with other regional presenters, and develop and strengthen bonds with the country's cultural officials.

The choreographers noted that early in the company's history, residencies in India were a significant part of their practice, allowing them to train with their master teacher, Bharatanatyam dancer-choreographer Alarmél Valli, even as they built the company stateside. "We continue to engage in intensive study with our guru every year, but the luxury of being able to spend such long stretches of time in India is no longer feasible.... Every opportunity we have to return to India, to travel within the country, to visit temples, museums, and cultural sites, and to just live and breathe in our homeland feeds our creativity and inspires new ideas and learning."

The benefits of being able to perform in India flow both ways, enriching audiences as well as the performers. Audience members are introduced to new ways of thinking about and performing the classical form, making it a living rather than static tradition. As the choreographers explained, "Bharatanatyam is traditionally performed by solo dancers. Thirty years ago, we were among the first to create and present contemporary ensemble work; we were able to do this largely because we were in the U.S. In a genre where most choreographers feel the need to choose between upholding tradition and breaking boundaries, we demonstrate through our work that we can be simultaneously culture-bearers and creative innovators. We strongly believe that, through our innovation, we keep our lineage alive."

Ragamala Dance Company, Soorya Festival, Kovalam, India. Photo by Erik Madsen-Bond



Making Movies



The musical group Making Movies in performance. Photo by Eliel Garcia

To say that Making Movies—the Kansas City, Missouri, band led by vocalist, guitarist, and songwriter Enrique Chi—has a unique sound is an understatement. The four-person band’s music fuses influences from the global Americas (classic rock, rumba, and merengue to name a few) into a sound that’s both familiar and entirely new. “Our art is built from a theory: the deeper you dig into your

cultural roots and use them as the vehicle for innovation, then the more universal your art becomes,” explained Chi.

Given their worldly musical view, it’s not surprising that the Grammy Award-nominated band received a USAI grant. The funding supported two performances in Panama to a combined audience of roughly 6,500 people. “The first was a show alongside Pedrito Martinez as a preview to the festival and the second was Macro Fest, an important festival for the alternative scene in the country,” said Chi. “Performing internationally has allowed us to put our money where our mouth is.”



Photo by Eliel Garcia

The funding helped Making Movies significantly elevate their live show by inviting guest artist Asdrú Sierra of the Grammy-winning band Ozomatli to tour with them. Chi said, “We have toured internationally before; we started out doing DIY shows in Mexico and Panama and gradually built to being invited to notable music festivals like Vive Latino and Machaca. This grant gave us the resources to invite our friend and mentor Asdrú Sierra to play, sing, and direct our horn section. He brought his talent and experience to our show, and I don’t think it’s a coincidence that it felt like the best show of our lives.”

According to Chi, the experience checked all of the boxes for a successful tour. He enthused, “We scored a hat trick. We had an incredible showing, recorded the gig for an upcoming live album, and captured video of the show that can serve as an example to share with other festivals around the world. Yay!”

Chi said that participating in the festival also allowed the band to strengthen existing ties with international promoters and helped the band make inroads with other producers. Another benefit of the band’s festival experience in Panama was a long-hoped-for opportunity to perform with fellow Latin-influenced musicians, including one of their musical idols, Cuban percussionist Pedrito Martínez. “After the festival, we participated in a jam session with Pedrito Martínez’s band, which was electric. At the jam, Pedrito and I started daydreaming about a collaboration which is so exciting,” said Chi.

Chi allowed that among the many benefits to Making Movies as a whole, the experience was also personally significant. “We...built our band playing music in Spanish to predominantly English-speaking audiences. Our songs about missing home get a new energy when we are around the cultural elements that we miss so much. I feel like I am a sponge during every international trip and get re-invigorated in my journey as a student of music,” he explained.

Ultimately, Chi said he would encourage other performing artists to apply for USAI support. “I am reminded that the United States has a long way to go in its public support of arts, especially arts with any socially conscious or culturally important work,” he said. “Programs like USAI fill such an important need for arts in this country. I am pumped that USAI is blazing a new trail. This is important and the tip of the iceberg of what is possible.”

Yang and Olivia



Yang Liu and Dr. Olivia Tsai are a husband-and-wife duo on violin and piano, performing contemporary and classical works from around the world. The duo has performed as featured recitalists in venues within the United States and at renowned festivals and venues around the world, including the Ravinia Festival,

the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Algarve Music Festival in Portugal, and at venues in their home country of China. Liu, the violinist, has earned esteemed accolades, including being a laureate of the 12th International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow. Tsai, the pianist, is a prominent figure in the world of music, performing as a soloist with QingDao Symphony Orchestra, Southern Illinois Symphony Orchestra, and Highland Park Strings. In 2018, they founded the Yang and Olivia Foundation, which has a primary focus of advocating for diversity, equality, and inclusion through music of different cultures. During the pandemic, the foundation helped secure funding for concert venues, supported individuals in need, and virtually performed for churches and schools.

In 2023, the USAI program granted Yang and Olivia the opportunity to travel to Pelotas, Brazil, where they participated in the 11th Social Service of Commerce (SESC) International Music Festival as performers and instructors. The music festival features performances by Brazilian and international artists, documentaries, and e-learning on arts, environment, and anthropology.



Above: Yang Liu performs with the SESC festival orchestra at the closing ceremony, conducted by maestro Evandro Matté. Photo courtesy of Yang and Olivia

Opposite: Yang and Olivia. Photo courtesy of the artists

Over the span of two weeks, Yang performed a concerto with an orchestra and Yang and Olivia did a recital together. Their repertoire was a blend of Western classical, Chinese and Taiwanese folk compositions, and contemporary works. By incorporating a diverse range of musical styles, they showcased the beauty and richness of cultural fusion, creating a memorable experience for festival attendees. As a testament to their success, Yang and Olivia have been invited to return to the music festival next year.

Before receiving the USAI grant, they performed internationally and were aware of the high costs of overseas travel. Yang and Olivia noted in an email interview, “With USAI, we travel much more comfortably. We get to connect to people and explore the locale in a much deeper way. Because we are able to connect to more people by going to places and socializing with fellow musicians, a lot of our future collaborations and concert engagements are in the works.”

In terms of their visibility, it has only increased, allowing them to market themselves for other musical engagements. Yang and Olivia said, “Promoting ourselves as the recipient of such an award generates more interest from presenters and organizations about what we do.” The connections made at SESC have inspired new ideas as well. “We are working with a composer in Brazil for him to write a piece for us to perform in his orchestra. We are also applying for a Fulbright Scholarship to teach and perform at the University of Porto Alegre.”

During their time at the music festival, Yang and Olivia had the opportunity to immerse themselves in the culture of Brazil. The festival provided a platform for them to discover and appreciate the local Brazilians’ compositions, which left an impact on them. In light of this cultural experience, they decided to incorporate one of the local Brazilian’s compositions into their regular program for the 2022-2023 season. “We performed American/Chinese/Taiwanese works there, and we bring back Brazilian music to the U.S. It is all about cultural exchange,” they said.

Opposite: D'DAT (Delbert Anderson, Mike McCluhan, and Nicholas Lucero) with Nelisiwe Mtsweni (second from left) and Alexandria Holiday (fourth from left). Photo courtesy of D'DAT Management, Inc.

D'DAT



Hailing from Farmington, New Mexico, D'DAT is a multicultural musical group that blends Indigenous musical traditions with elements of native Southwest, jazz, funk, and hip-hop genres. Comprising the ensemble are frontman Delbert Anderson, an improvisational Diné (Navajo) trumpeter; drummer Nicholas Lucero; and bassist Mike McCluhan. Together, they create a cross-cultural performance that not only resonates with audiences but also serves as a conduit for sharing stories of tradition and personal identity.

In 2022, the USAI program granted D'DAT the opportunity to travel to South Africa to participate in the 40th annual World of Music, Art and Dance (WOMAD), an event that showcases a variety of artists, including Indigenous musicians. Through USAI funding, D'DAT was able to have all travel expenses covered for the entire trip.

D'DAT captivated festival audiences through a series of performances held at local venues, schools, and universities. The pinnacle of the tour was a show in Johannesburg, which maxed out its audience capacity of 2,500. Additionally, the group immersed themselves in the local culture by participating in community jams in Soweto. D'DAT engaged in panels centered on Indigenous themes, emphasizing the cultural values and significance of women within their matriarchal heritage. The performance of “Grandma’s Song” was one of the highlights of the festival for D'DAT and allowed audiences to lyrically experience the power and leadership of Indigenous and South African women. “The audiences were in tears when we featured our South African friend, Nelisiwe Mtsweni (Zulu), and our Diné ambassador, Alexandria Holiday,” said Anderson.

D'DAT’s decision to apply for USAI stemmed from a combination of factors, including an invitation to WOMAD and an ongoing album collaboration with South African artists. Having previously performed overseas where the hosting organization covered travel, lodging, and artistic fees, D'DAT recognized the value of partnering with USAI for their tour. The program streamlined logistical



Delbert Anderson of D'DAT participating in a panel centered on Indigenous themes during their USAI-supported attendance at the WOMAD festival. Photo courtesy of D'DAT Management, Inc.

arrangements, making it easier and safer for the group to perform at new venues and focus on their artistic endeavors. Additionally, being associated with USAI granted D'DAT a sense of priority and recognition, with their name being mentioned and referred to by an embassy.

Through their tour and participation in panels, D'DAT successfully established numerous connections and relationships in Johannesburg and Soweto. They forged bonds with various artists, including two-time Grammy Award-winning producer John Lindemann. This meeting proved to be highly influential as Lindemann went on to produce their album *Kindred Spirits - A Navajo and South African Story*. “*Kindred Spirits* is starting to turn into a cross-cultural project, finding the similarities of Hozho (Diné) and Ubuntu [a Zulu term meaning “humanity”] through a musical performance. The *Kindred Spirits* project has caused our residencies and performances to grow,” Anderson added. “With South Africa’s network and music labels representing the album, they were able [to] market our ensemble’s work through a much bigger audience.”

D'DAT’s global visibility increased as they reached a new fanbase in South Africa and created connections with South African artists, including performances with four Johannesburg artists. “We believe having prior collaborations overseas will increase touring success, especially when an ensemble tours where their collaborators reside,” Anderson explained.

USAI also influenced D'DAT’s creative pursuits, compelling them to embark on international projects in a nuanced way. “We began to compose music that would accommodate two different languages. We went back to early Indigenous music to find connections between Zulu and Navajo music,” said Anderson.

When asked if the opportunity was fruitful, Anderson replied, “The USAI program was a major success. We have already been invited back for many years.” D'DAT’s work emphasizes the intersection of performing arts, land, humanities, and current issues, which resonated deeply with organizations in these fields. From this cross-cultural and intersectional work, D'DAT developed a relationship with the WOMAD director and established a connection with various arts organizations and land organizations that opened the door for future collaborations.

The most important takeaway from this experience for D'DAT: “When art is at the forefront of any conversation, it brings those in the conversation back to a normal human being. When everyone sees each other as humans, issues and difficult decisions can be made because their titles and policies are stripped by the arts,” Anderson said.

Whitetop Mountaineers



The Whitetop Mountaineers: Jackson Cunningham and Martha Spencer. Photo by Susan Roark

Nestled in Whitetop, Virginia, amidst the highest mountains in the state, lies the duo Whitetop Mountaineers—Martha Spencer and Jackson Cunningham. Their performances showcase a captivating blend of old-time country duet vocals, lively up-tempo fiddling rooted in tradition, the rhythmic charm of clawhammer banjo, the melodic allure of bluegrass mandolin, and the skillful strumming of guitars. These elements come together with a vibrant display of high-energy Appalachian dance, painting a vivid picture of their musical artistry.

The Whitetop Mountaineers' journey with the USAI grant program began Down Under, as they travelled across Australia. Their performances resonated through festival scenes set in the Blue Mountains, Kangaroo Valley, and Dorrigo. Across these festivals, they graced the stage for two to three shows at each event, captivating a total audience of around 2,000 people. The energy and authenticity they brought to their performances left an indelible mark on the Australian

audience. As Spencer explained in an email interview, “There was a lot of positive feedback and venues were interested in future engagements.”

The decision to apply for the USAI grant stemmed from the Whitetop Mountaineers’ desire to share their musical heritage on a global scale. Spencer said, “We thought it seemed like [a] wonderful program to provide tour support and bring our musical and dance traditions to new places and audiences. I had traveled internationally before, but this provided extra support and less stress especially after the pandemic that made travel harder.”

The international exposure gained through USAI significantly increased the visibility of these artists, introducing their music and dance traditions to broader audiences and cultivating new fans and potential collaborators.

Beyond their performances, the Whitetop Mountaineers engaged with fellow performers, venues, and audiences, creating a professional network. This experience paved the way for collaborations with Australian artists such as Archer and Kankawa Nagarra, and plans are in the works with Irish-Australian musician Cara Robinson to create a *Woman of the Road* project. The international journey ignited the flames of creativity within Spencer. Inspired by the people, places, and festivals the duo encountered, she composed new songs that reflected her global experiences.

The impact of the Whitetop Mountaineers’ artistry extended beyond the stage, benefiting audiences through cultural exchange. Spencer explained, “We were able to share dance music traditions and I taught some flatfoot dancing and Appalachian music cultural workshops at festivals that seemed to go over well.”

Reflecting on the success of their participation in the program, the Whitetop Mountaineers expressed satisfaction. Spencer shared, “It helped us travel and perform and reach new places and audiences with our music. It was also wonderful to be able to tour internationally again after the pandemic and financially make a living.”

For Spencer, the greatest takeaway from the experience was the value of connecting with people across borders. “Meeting people, traveling to new places, and taking a piece of home with you in your music is so wonderful. It is great to be inspired by other artists as well,” she explained.

Looking ahead, the Whitetop Mountaineers are eager to embark on further international journeys, armed with the knowledge and experience gained from their participation in the USAI grant program. If given the chance, they would undoubtedly embrace the opportunity again, continuing to bridge cultures through their music and fostering connections that transcend borders.

The Wooster Group



Eric Berryman, Jasper McGruder, and Philip Moore in the Wooster Group's production of *The B-Side*. Photo by Bruce Jackson

The Wooster Group (TWG), located in New York City, is an ever-evolving collective of artists specializing in theater, dance, and media. The group presents its performances within its own artistic space and extends its reach to venues across New York and worldwide through national and international tours. Since its inception in the 1970s, TWG has maintained an unwavering commitment to nurturing a full-time ensemble that has developed more than 50 productions under the direction of co-founder Elizabeth LeCompte.

The Wooster Group's engagement with the USAI grant program includes tours of its production *THE B-SIDE: "Negro Folklore from Texas State Prisons," A Record Album Interpretation*. The piece is a collaboration with performer Eric Berryman, directed by Kate Valk, and based on a 1965 long-play vinyl of work songs and spirituals from Texas state prisons. The performance resonated with audiences around the world. The journey began in 2017 with tours to the Taipei Arts Festival in Taiwan and the Asia Cultural Center in Gwangju, South Korea. In 2022, a second USAI grant facilitated a European tour, with performances at the Choral Biennale in Haarlem, Netherlands, and the Ludwigsburg Festival in Germany. The inclusion of a third performance invitation in Barcelona, Spain, was largely attributed to the group's participation in previous festivals supported by USAI.

The company explained by email, "In all cities, *THE B-SIDE* reached audiences new to TWG and our work. We collaborated with the presenters to have the text translated into the local language so that the content of the piece would be more easily understood." In Taipei and Gwangju, cities hosting the company for the first time, audiences were excited to see the work live. In Taiwan and Barcelona, Spain, where they have their own work-song traditions, audiences especially were receptive and engaged with the performances. Haarlem audiences witnessed the company's return to the Netherlands after an 11-year hiatus, resulting in a joyous reception by attendees who traveled from different cities to experience the performance. The Ludwigsburg Festival marked the company's inaugural visit to this region of Germany, prompting audiences to engage deeply with the piece's exploration of racial issues. "It is our hope that audiences were prompted to reflect upon the deep and rich culture generated by the African diaspora in the United States," TWG explained.

Touring, for the theater company, is "a way for the work to reach a broader audience, particularly audiences who would not have the opportunity to travel to see performances in the United States. The work then becomes part of the international conversation, contributing to the advancement of the theatrical arts and fostering a greater understanding among cultures," TWG explained. While the company has a longstanding history of international touring, rising touring

costs—including expensive airfare and shipping—have elevated the significance of USAI support. As TWG’s productions are tailored for intimate venues, limiting potential box office revenue, external financial aid was essential.

“Beyond the importance of introducing our work to new audiences and new cultures, we are always eager to gain knowledge about the contemporary arts in our host countries and to interact with local artists,” TWG said. In Taipei, the group engaged with theater professor Yu Hui, exploring street theater in Kaohsiung, which is rooted in classical Taiwanese opera. Huang Kanzai, a local promoter, facilitated connections with several artists, leading to a private tour of the National Palace Museum. The group’s attendance at an all-female Korean Pansori competition in Gwangju, Korea, informed the development of a new Wooster Group collaboration with Eric Berryman.

The international tours opened up a new perspective of the company’s creative potential. The Wooster Group explained, “Feedback from audiences informed the performances on tour and will continue to inform our work. An excerpt from a recording made at the artists’ talk in Seoul eventually became part of the introduction to the piece *[THE B-SIDE]*.”

As TWG reflected on the experience, “We were deeply gratified by these tours. At all venues, there was a real interest in our way of making theater. The tours fulfilled our goal to join in the conversation across borders regarding new directions in live performance.”

Eric Berryman, Jasper McGruder, and Philip Moore in the Wooster Group’s production of *The B-Side*. Photo by Bruce Jackson



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