

Grantee Name

Eastside Arts Alliance

Project Title

To support national dialogue to strengthen the infrastructure for jazz presenting

Project Progress and Successes

Our dear friend and adviser, the poet and jazz critic Amiri Baraka passed away on January 9, 2014 -- throwing our lives and our worlds into a sort of tailspin, which we are still very much in.

Amiri was central to our jazz project. He has been a guiding light in all of our work to bring culture and politics together in ways that truly affect and better people's lives. As we now just begin to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Black Arts Movement, people all across the world are recognizing his tremendous role as the primary architect and influence of that movement.

The last time we saw Amiri before he passed was in Newark as a part of this DDCF grant. We continued to pose the question "Where are the Black musicians playing Black music?" (i.e. more specifically, jazz -- America's classical music -- particularly in the jazz festivals around the country, the club circuit, the airwaves, the school curricula...)

Our intention was/is to investigate and advocate for that network and circuit of veteran/regeneration Black jazz musicians from the West coast to the Midwest to the East coast and the South. Young jazz saxophonist and composer Howard Wiley and two key staff from EastSide (Elena Serrano and Greg Morozumi) traveled to Newark but had to depart early because of Storm Sandy approaching (we got the last plane out). In the three days we were on the East Coast we did get to participate in a sister city concert arranged by Baraka in Newark. Howard also performed at small clubs in NYC and we connected with many musicians and collaborators.

Now with Amiri Baraka's untimely and distressful departure we have to work harder to honor our mission of pushing and promoting the music from coast-to-coast as key to Black cultural self-determination. We are disappointed that we did not get to complete the residency project with Baraka we proposed to DDCF. Even though funding was not secured we continued to work and plan with Baraka right up to his final weeks. Some of the projects we last discussed with Baraka included: a cultural delegation to Cuba with him and Malaquais Montoya, the founder of the Chicano Arts Movement; continued work on The Sisyphus Syndrome (a jazz opera ESAA commissioned with Baraka and David Murray) looking at ways to integrate the work into a high school curriculum, possibly creating a digitized version; and discussing ways to help support his WEB Dubois project; and a project with bassist/composer William Parker on the music of Curtis Mayfield.

ESAA staff traveled to Newark for Amiri's funeral. Even though it was a sad and deeply somber occasion we did participate in ways that ultimately continued to lay the groundwork for the continuation of this project:

- We commissioned five musicians from New Orleans to participate in a second line dirge at the funeral.
- We deepened connections with David Murray, Reggie Workman, Craig Harris, and Hammiett Bluiett to work with them on their respective projects.
- We took steps toward a West Coast tribute to Baraka as the theme for EastSide's 14th annual Malcolm X JazzArts Festival (May 2014).

We hope that the passing of Amiri Baraka serves as our own (and others) catalyst to take our mission and hard work to the next level.

Below are general themes that guide our work and help place the list of accomplishments in context:

- Linking culture to political consciousness -- understanding the power of the arts to address issues relevant to people's lives. And recognizing the role of culture as something that defines who you are and your place in the world.

- Regeneration -- ensuring that the next generation is prepared to carry on and grow the work.

- Honoring history -- through the creation of a community archives and by supporting the works of established cultural workers we are highlighting the continuum of the work and also providing access to books, films, recordings, periodicals, art works that inform the context for the creation of new works. Through concerts, workshops, film screenings, and gallery exhibitions we are building a living archives for our community.

- Sustainability

- o Through connections to other cities, artists, venues we are building a network that can help support each other's work.

- o The EastSide Cultural Center is one of the few grassroots cultural centers owned and operated by artists and organizers of color. The road we took to secure this building provides a model of how to have a grassroots cultural center serving poor communities can work. Our multi-use space utilizes income from affordable rental housing and storefront rental space to support the cultural center.

Following is some of the work on this project since our last report:

- Trip to Newark -- formalizing Oakland, CA as the sister center to Newark, NJ.

- 13th annual Malcolm X JazzArts Festival -- we focused on the African Diaspora -- The theme of the festival was - Return to the Source and featured a line-up that went from Africa (Samba Ngo -- jazz guitar); to the Avant (The Pyramids featuring Idris Ackamoor, Kenneth Nash, and Heshima Mark Williams); to the next generation (Howard Wiley Trio paying tribute to the music of John Coltrane and Wayne Shorter); the old/next thing combining old and new all star jazz musicians honoring Black jazz for the occasion, Pre-Integration Jazz Band (Faye Carol, Freddie Hughes, Johnny Tolbert, John Turk, Jules Brussard, Danny Armstrong, and Chester Thompson).

- International Blvd work -- While we continue to build a nationwide circuit we have been invited to help build a Black cultural district in Oakland. There is a major transit project being planned right through the heart of deep East Oakland, a predominantly Black neighborhood. The California Endowment, a major health funder, has asked ESAA to participate in a project whose theme is Development without Displacement -- with culture playing a key role. ESAA is using our work with jazz to help build a circuit of performance opportunities and venues that will both keep musicians working and build community support for the creation of a cultural center that serves this neighborhood. This is the way the annual Malcolm X JazzArts Festival helped to build community support for the EastSide Cultural Center. We have applied to the NEA Our Town and ArtPlace American for funding to support the creation of five "cultural plazas" along the main street in deep East Oakland (International Blvd). These plazas will be spaces for cultural presentations and community festivals.

- Howard Wiley residency -- We received a grant from Chamber Music to work with Wiley to build a Black Youth Brass Band.

- Faye Carol residency -- Blues vocalist - Ms. Faye Carol is carrying on the traditions of blues in Oakland and through collaborations with her pianist daughter Kito Gamble (Sister Kee) she is making links with jazz and hip hop. Faye Carol received a Jazz in the

Neighborhoods residency and will be conducting a series of jazz workshops and jam sessions at The EastSide Cultural Center.

- Continued work with Leimert Park as they face losing a vital Black cultural district. We linked this work to the struggle of Marcus Books to remain open in the Fillmore District of San Francisco; the Chicano Arts "Czar" Rene Yañez in San Francisco's Mission District and the theme of our work along International -- Development without Displacement (A theme developed from the California Endowment).
- 50th Anniversary of The Black Arts Movement (BAM) Conference -- University of California in Merced, CA. This was the kickoff of events throughout the country honoring the 50th anniversary of BAM. EastSide helped curate artists and speakers and also put up a visual arts exhibition of collected historic works from our Community Archives.
- Black Arts West Tour -- This is a development that arose from the BAM conference. A group of poets and jazz musicians who worked actively in the Black Arts Movement on the West Coast want to work together to travel to the East Coast, the Midwest, and The South, connecting with other participants in BAM. This coincides exactly with ESAA's plans to develop a network and a circuit aimed at strengthening and supporting Black Jazz and a Black musicians circuit.
- Traci Bartlow -- A core member of the EastSide Arts Alliance, Traci is a choreographer and dancer. Her work currently is focused on keeping alive and passing on the history of Black Dance. We continue to work to link music and dance and have presented a series of dance concerts with musicians and dancers tracing the history of the Harlem Renaissance to today. A featured artist at The EastSide Cultural Center has been 93-year-old Ms. Norma Miller, recognized globally as the Queen of Lindy Hop. She has participated in workshops and talks at ESAA two times in the past 2-years. She speaks of travelling the world talking about Lindy Hop but EastSide has been the only place she gets to talk with Black people about her history and work.
- Marshall Tramell -- a young percussionist greatly influenced by the Black Arts Movement. Marshall has received a SOUL residency that is allowing him to work on a project with ESAA linking Black spirituals to a Black Arts Movement that now reemerges.

Upcoming projects (developed as a result of the past 2-years of DDCF funded work)

- 14th annual MXJAF -- tribute to Amiri Baraka and BAM anniversary. We are currently seeking additional funding to support bringing musicians from New Orleans; Reggie Workman (bassist for John Coltrane); and The Last Poets.
- Record the Pre-Integration Jazz band -- their presentation at last year's Malcolm X JazzArts Festival was historic and profound. We have received multiple requests to bring these players back together.

Challenges / Obstacles / Failures Encountered in the Project

- Challenge of having to raise \$500k/year.
- Broke musicians with super grand projects -- ESAA as a fairly small organization with ties to world-renowned musicians.
- Challenge of always having to explain why we continue to focus on Black culture as central to American culture and democracy.

What was learned from these that might be of benefit to others?

- Take your time
- Work never stops
- Improvise
- Stay connected to relevant issues
- Stay connected to both the elders and the youth

Links to relevant website(s) and/or project publications, reports, etc.
www.eastsideartsalliance.org
If someone wishes to speak with your organization further about your project, would there be a willing contact? Y/N
If yes, please provide contact name and information for preferred method of contact (email, phone, etc).
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