



Violinist Julie Andrijeski, of the four-member classical music ensemble Chatham Baroque, warms up in a hallway before the group's appearance on stage at the Byham Theater as part of Pennsylvania Performing Arts on Tour Artist Showcase. The event, previously open to presenters who book performers, was opened to the public for the first time last year. The internationally known Chatham Baroque, which has released five best-selling CDs, is the ensemble in residence at Chatham College and WQED-FM, Pittsburgh's classical music station.

*By Jeffrey Fraser
Photography by Richard Kelly*

25

HAVE VIOLIN...WILL TRAVEL

Scores of Pennsylvania performing artists are the new cultural ambassadors to the mid-Atlantic region, wowing audiences with everything from lofty Baroque to backroom jazz to underground opera.



Rebecca Stenn, top left foreground, and Michele de la Reza require several hours of prep time as performers with Attack Theater, which fuses dance, music, video and drama into a production that gives audiences a bold theatrical experience. Directors de la Reza and Peter Kope also commit the troupe to workshops and master classes for dance professionals in the community. Below left: Cabaret singer Daphne Alderson, with her band, offers a medley of American, French and Brazilian love songs to the PennPAT audience at the Byham. A *Post-Gazette* music critic described her as “an artist of dignified passion.” PennPAT has helped her expand her reach from the sophisticated cabaret rooms of New York to smaller-city concert halls.

Below: Two members of Pittsburgh's Dance Alloy rehearse for the upcoming PennPAT-funded production, "Stirring the Mud." The project uses dance, a musical work by New York composer Alice Shields and essays by Frostburg State University's Barbara Hurd around themes of mystery and imagination generated from a rural Maryland swamp.

Mucking around in the mud is a key part of this experience, part Boy Scout Camp, part business trip. Mark Taylor, the artistic director of the modern dance company, Pittsburgh Dance Alloy, is a long way from the dance studio that defines his daily existence, a renovated former car dealership on a traffic-clogged corner in the city's East End. Taylor has happily journeyed to the Maryland outback to take part in an unusual art project—an expression of the bog and all it conjures in movement, music and words—commissioned by nearby Frostburg State University, where it is scheduled to debut this spring.

New work is always risky business for audience-conscious presenters. Modern dance and electronic music with a bog theme is certainly no exception—a fact not lost on Frostburg State officials, who hired Taylor to direct Dance Alloy and New York composer Alice Shields in a work inspired by *Stirring the Mud: On Swamps, Bogs, and Human Imagination*, a collection of essays by Frostburg's own Barbara Hurd. “It not only presents a financial risk, but we're asking our audience to reach beyond traditional programming,” says William Mandicott, chairman of the school's Cultural Events Series Advisory Board. “We're asking patrons to trust us. That's a risk. But taking risks is what takes the arts to the next level.”

The school would not have been so bold had it not been for a groundbreaking grant from Pennsylvania Performing Arts on Tour (PennPAT). The \$15,000 check, one of the first awarded by PennPAT to promote development of new works, allowed Frostburg State to hire Dance Alloy and to leverage the rest of the \$50,000 cost to finance its collaboration of art

and environmental science. “Honestly,” says Mandicott, “we wouldn't have gone forward without it.”

PennPAT supports Pennsylvania performing artists by publishing a roster of performers who meet artistic quality and touring readiness standards. The management-funder group offers grants to presenters who cover a share of the cost of hiring artists, or who, like Frostburg State officials, commit to develop new works. It is the product of a partnership among the largest philanthropies in the state—The Heinz Endowments, The Pew Charitable Trusts, William Penn Foundation and Pennsylvania Council of the Arts—to develop and fund the only statewide initiative to ensure the vitality of Pennsylvania's performing arts community.

The program, which awarded its first grants in 1997, is based on a model used successfully by its forerunner, Pittsburgh Arts On Tour, an initiative of the Vira I. Heinz Endowment created in the 1980s to support western Pennsylvania performing artists. The idea is to help local talent in performing arts build fruitful careers by helping them get work and exposure. “Artists want to work and need to work,” says PennPAT Director Katie West.

“Hopefully, they can make a decent living and we can keep the arts accessible.”

It is not for lack of talent that the 127 Pennsylvania artists selected for the roster need a hand finding engagements. Most have chosen to travel a road less commercial. Between the covers of the PennPAT roster are virtuosos in voice, cello, guitar, African drums, bagpipe, Baroque violin and an exotic giraffe-necked musical instrument known as the archlute. Their tastes range from choir and chamber music to Piedmont blues and



Photo by Cylla von Tiedmann

The PennPAT program fulfills an important cultural heritage and historical archiving mission by offering the work of performers who might get lost in the competition for mainstream entertainment. Debby McClatchy uses the fiddle at the Byham Theater Showcase to introduce the audience to music from several regions. Her mother was from the Tennessee Appalachian Mountains; her Irish father was lured to this country by the California Goldrush. *The Boston Globe* hailed her, in reviewing a recent performance, as "...a bona fide American folk singer, accompanying her honest voice with an array of accoustic instruments."



cabaret; there are dancers of tap, ballet, Ukrainian, Khmer Classical, flamenco, sambas and salsas; and stage-tested performers of mime, puppetry, storytelling and children's theater.

PennPAT makes booking these performers more appealing by offering presenters grants to cover up to 50 percent of the artist's fee. These fee-support grants account for nearly half of the \$2.4 million the program anticipates spending this year through 2005. The majority of the grants awarded are for \$5,000 or less and typically range from 30 to 50 percent of an artist's fee, but some have gone as high as \$20,000.

For many nonprofit presenters, even a 30 percent subsidy will tip the scales in favor of hiring a PennPAT artist. Booking acts such as chamber music, ethnic dance and storytelling

almost always requires a significant infusion of cash from grants and other sources of unearned income. Presenters expect to recover only about one-third of their costs from ticket sales, 50 percent if they are lucky. "I look for ticket revenues to cover my ancillary expenses—lodging, meals, marketing, any special transportation, printing, mailing," says Frank Knerr, director of public events, The Lively Arts at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and president of Pennsylvania Presenters, a statewide performing arts managers' association. "We're not doing *Cats*. We're doing quality events, but they're not quite as popular."

Still, PennPAT reports show that a lot of performance activity can be generated with even modest underwriting.

During the past four years alone, the group has awarded more than \$1.9 million to help ensure 642 engagements by Pennsylvania artists. Those on the PennPAT roster earned a total of \$4 million in fees from those engagements.

Nearly 90 percent of Dance Alloy’s annual touring income is earned through engagements underwritten in part by PennPAT grants. Touring income, projected to be \$86,000 for 2002–2003, represents more than 13 percent of revenues—a significant amount for a company with five contract dancers, a school and a studio to support at a time when the market for dance is lean. “Financial resources are tight,” says Taylor. “Dance is expensive and it’s scary for presenters, so audiences need a little coaxing and nurturing. PennPAT helps. We can go and say, ‘Look, we have money that can follow us.’”

The PennPAT roster helps answer other questions that cause presenters to lose sleep: Are the artists of high quality? Do they negotiate in good faith? Are they cooperative? Will they show up on time? Help promote the show? Take part in educational activities in schools and community? Roster artists are screened for artistic quality, but they’re also put through a panel review that determines whether performers can handle the business end of show business. Only about half the artists who apply make the cut.

Those who do earn a distinct marketing advantage, says New York booking agent Marty Sonnenfeld, who handles out-of-state engagements for the Pittsburgh-based Paul Cosentino & the Boilermaker Jazz Band, a PennPAT member. “Presenters want to know that an artist is top quality,

professional, someone they can trust,” he says. “Being on the PennPAT roster tells them all of those things have been taken care of, that the homework has been done.”

Many presenters, particularly those in arts-poor regions, also see PennPAT’s attention to arts education as complementary to their missions. In rural Somerset County, Pennsylvania, for example, much of the responsibility for exposing residents to performances falls on Laurel Arts, a nonprofit operating out of an 1896 farmhouse on five green acres. “We are it,” says Dody-Jane Svetahor, educational/programming director. “If we don’t bring the arts to this county, I don’t think anyone else will.” She books as many as five PennPAT roster artists a year, several of whom participate in workshops and other community activities. “PennPAT enables me to offer an educational aspect. It almost forces me to include one,” she says. “And I’m a better presenter because of it.”

The PennPAT approach is one long embraced by the Endowments. The program’s more geographically narrow predecessor, Pittsburgh Arts On Tour, showed that developing an artist’s ability to travel builds creative capital—a goal of the Endowments’ Arts & Culture Program’s grantmaking. “It helps artists make a living,” says Mary A. Navarro, program officer, Arts and Culture Program. “That’s an important enough reason on its own to have the program. But another factor is that this is a statewide collaborative arts project. Coming together on a regular basis to discuss these issues is significant.”

A 2001 evaluation done by the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning suggests that PennPAT has had a

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Paul Cosentino Paul Cosentino & the Boilermaker Jazz Band

Clarinetist Paul Cosentino, top foreground, sets the pace at the Byham Showcase for his Boilermaker Jazz Band. Performing in the New Orleans tradition, the group mixes the sounds of brass bands, spirituals, gritty blues, street parades and back-street jazz in performances that have thrilled audiences around the world. Below, comedy-performance artist Dan Kamin reacts to Byham audience laughter after one of his signature provocative skits. Kamin has performed on a range of stages, from New York's Lincoln Center to London's theater district to packed high school auditoriums in Pennsylvania.

significant impact on Pennsylvania artists. In six focus groups and in written surveys, artists generally reported that they got more work, booked better-paying jobs and enjoyed a higher level of credibility after they were added to the PennPAT roster. And the longer artists were on the roster, the more financially stable they tended to be.

In 2001, nearly four years after awarding its first grant, PennPAT took a bold step. The partnership that founded it agreed to expand the program beyond Pennsylvania and extend grant eligibility to presenters in a nine-state area—Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation jurisdiction, plus Ohio. “There is no state large enough geographically and in terms of population to provide enough of a marketplace for artists to make their career

One year later, expansion appears to be paying dividends. PennPAT officials report receiving about 220 applications from presenters seeking grants to hire Pennsylvania artists—nearly twice the previous record.

Beyond that heartening statistic, both presenters and performing artists laud the expanded program as an arts appreciation generator for audiences and an experience builder for artists. “It’s a way of stirring up the pot of performers, getting them connected to new audiences and challenging them to adapt and learn,” says Navarro. Sometimes, the added exposure prompts artists to take personal stock about where they are and push off in a different direction. “It can jump-start a new way of thinking about their work; it can

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Mark Taylor Artistic Director, Dance Alloy

touring,” says Philip Horn, executive director of Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. “I worked in California, the largest touring market, and it wasn’t big enough.”

The decision to make Pennsylvania dollars available to out-of-state presenters went against the grain. Most states are loath to help underwrite out-of-state performances, even if it means restricting the market for their own state’s artists and passing up an opportunity to greatly increase the return on every fee-support grant they award. But says Horn, “When we send a dollar to a presenter in Virginia and it comes back as two dollars in the hands of one of our Pennsylvania artists, that’s something I can do all day and not feel disloyal.”

push a performer to move to the next level. It’s a program that nurtures and challenges at the same time,” says Navarro.

Pittsburgh Dance Alloy Director Mark Taylor, for instance, will be leaving the company he has directed for 12 years to work one-on-one with dancers. But it won’t happen until after *Stirring the Mud* premieres in April at Frostburg State. “I’m so thankful that I have a major project like this as a final work for the Dance Alloy. It ties together a lot of the strands of ideas I’ve tried to model into the company. The PennPAT program allowed us to do a piece that is site-specific and also very personal.” *b*

