PASSION IS ONE GREAT FORCE THAT UNLEASHES CREATIVITY, BECAUSE IF YOU’RE PASSIONATE ABOUT SOMETHING, THEN YOU’RE MORE WILLING TO TAKE RISKS.

— Yo-Yo Ma

DEAR FRIENDS,

“Looking Back, Leading Forward” is a phrase that has guided our planning for our 50th anniversary season. In reflecting on the past five decades of Penn Live Arts’ artistic programming, I feel honored to be part of an institution with such a meaningful legacy. From introducing Philadelphia to playwright August Wilson and composer Phillip Glass, to presenting countless dance companies over a 40+ year series history, to producing the longest-running children’s festival of its kind in the country, PLA has long demonstrated its commitment to inclusive, cutting-edge programming, reflective of and responsive to the challenging issues of our times and the diverse communities we serve.

Leading forward, we are building upon this proud heritage. With a continuing commitment to inclusive storytelling and the creation of new work, we are expanding our support of artists and their creative process through extended residencies and our recently launched Accelerator Program. We are deepening integration with the University, engaging students and faculty in the performing arts through curricular and co-curricular activities, and leveraging the specialized knowledge of scholars at Penn to contextualize and deepen artistic experiences within and beyond the theatre. We are pursuing collaborations across campus and the greater Philadelphia region to extend access and participation in the arts. And we are actively fundraising for the renovation and expansion of our physical infrastructure to further support the burgeoning creative community at Penn and in Philadelphia.

Thank you for accompanying us on this exciting journey, as we create the next act at Penn Live Arts together.

With gratitude,

Christopher A. Gruits

OUR MISSION

As the University of Pennsylvania’s home for the performing arts, Penn Live Arts connects diverse audiences with visionary artists and innovative ideas, engaging both the University and the greater Philadelphia community in transformative artistic experiences.
Penn Live Arts heralded its 50th anniversary season with befitting fanfare—announcing the planned construction of the new Stuart Weitzman Theatre! Named for the award-winning designer and footwear icon in honor of his leadership gift to the project, the Weitzman Theatre is the cornerstone of a multi-phase capital plan to renovate and expand the Annenberg Center and increase performance and rehearsal space across Penn’s campus.

This modern jewel of a space extending onto the Annenberg Center Outdoor Plaza will be put to immediate use by students for everything from table reads with visiting playwrights, dance troupe rehearsals and student cabaret nights, to film screenings, improv performances and chamber music. It will also provide a new venue for select PLA professional performances for which this flexible, indoor-outdoor space will be ideal.

Upon the heels of this announcement, PLA opened the 2022-23 season with a two-day community open house, featuring a second line parade on Locust Walk and free performance by the New Breed Brass Band of New Orleans, a Penn Student Band Slam, free shows and activities for neighborhood children, and a full-house welcome for the legendary gospel headliner, Blind Boys of Alabama.
Jazz festivals offered a rich mix of performances, honoring jazz icons and celebrating contemporary music. For instance, the Alice & John Coltrane Festival 2022-23 paid tribute to the Coltrane family legacy, featuring performances by Lakecia Benjamin, Brandee Younger, Ravi Coltrane, and the West Philadelphia High School Jazz Band. The festival also included a special tour and meet-and-greet with the Ravi Coltrane Quintet. Other highlights included Terence Blanchard's E-Collective with the Turtle Island Quartet, and Arturo O’Farrill and the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, which showcased a program of Philadelphia premieres.
Performances throughout the season allowed PLA to highlight connections to Penn’s research and curricular landscape—especially where epic poems were concerned! A cluster of enthusiastic English, music, and Penn Libraries faculty rallied around Benjamin Bagby’s performance of Beowulf to produce an interdisciplinary, accessible, and downright fun roundtable event exploring historical performance, translation, nationalism, and more.

Music and Italian Studies students and faculty also welcomed the husband-and-wife team of Teatro delle Albe, a devised theatre group from Ravenna, Italy. Long delayed due to pandemic and international travel challenges, the U.S. premiere of fedeli d’Amore, which evoked the last days of Dante, at last delivered an innovative experience that placed PLA on the cutting edge of presenting international theatre in Philadelphia. Italian Studies students also took part in a workshop led by Teatro delle Albe director Marco Martinelli that provided a crash course in the company’s signature creative process.

Elsewhere in the season, celebrated composers Caroline Shaw and Osvaldo Golijov, GR’91, who were part of the ListenHear series, had intimate audiences with students from Penn’s Music Composition program. In addition, visiting dance artists offered seven dance master classes throughout the season, which were opened to local high school students for the first time, to enthusiastic response.
The holiday season brought the annual A Toast to Dear Old Penn student showcase to NYC’s Carnegie Hall. The program featured an impressive collection of Penn’s talent across genres, including performances by Arts House Dance Company, iNtuitons Experimental Theatre, Penn Atma, Penn Jazz Ensemble, Penn Lions, Pennchants, Quaker Notes, and WAVe (West African Vibe). In addition to the ~450 people who saw the performance live, a livestream and subsequent recording were made available for audiences around the globe.

Throughout the academic year, Penn Live Arts supported student groups preparing for and mounting their own productions. The 2022-23 season saw 59 performances from 24 student groups across Annenberg Center stages, including Penn Players, Bloomers, Stimulus Children’s Theatre, The Inspiration, and Soundworks Tap Factory, to name a few.

Penn Live Arts production staff continued to train students and facilitate the process of livestreaming and archival recording, providing opportunities for remote audiences to experience Student Performing Arts Night, PennYo, and Penn K-Beats, among others.
Dance took center stage in Penn Live Arts 50th anniversary season, with nine companies performing across multiple styles, including contemporary, ballet, hip hop, and swing. Pilobolus opened the season with a retrospective celebrating its own 50th anniversary, followed by Pam Tanowitz Dance. Ballet Hispánico offered three Philadelphia premieres, while Rennie Harris Puremovement remounted its most celebrated work, Rome & Jewels, a reimagined Shakespearean hip hop journey through the streets of Philadelphia.

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Dance Theatre of Harlem performed the world premiere of Blake Works IV (The Barre Project), choreographed by the renowned William Forsythe, and Martha Graham Dance Company gave us the Philadelphia premiere of the remounted 1952 work, Canticle for Innocent Comedians, alongside the iconic Appalachian Spring. Paul Taylor Dance Company returned with the world premiere of If You Could Swallow the Sun, while India’s premier dance troupe, Nrityagram Dance Ensemble, joined with Chitravina Dance Company and live musicians for the Philadelphia premiere of Āhuti.

Penn Live Arts closed the 2022-23 season with tap superstar Caleb Teicher and collaborators performing the Philadelphia premiere of SWING OUT. The Lindy Hop choreography and improvisation featured live music by the Eyal Vilner Big Band and finished with an on-stage jam session with audience members. It was a joyful conclusion to the anniversary season, marking decades of bringing the best of dance to Philadelphia.
Through the Brownstein Residency for Artistic Innovation, PLA continued its investment in new, groundbreaking work that speaks to issues of our time. The Negro Ensemble Company (NEC), a historic, NYC-based Black theatre company, received extended time and support to produce several world premiere performances in PLA's 2022–23 season.

Through a juried selection process from a world-wide pool of scripts, three works were chosen to build the one-act play festival, Our Voices, Our Time. This was followed in the spring by the world premiere of Mecca is Burning, a collaboratively written piece exploring both speculative and real implications of gentrification and Black disenfranchisement.

The residency also facilitated artist engagement across the Penn and Philadelphia communities, ranging from NEC director visits to the Academically Based Community Service course, August Wilson and Beyond, to a special conversation between Mecca playwright Cris Eli Blak and the eleventh-grade humanities classes at Science Leadership Academy in Philadelphia's Fairmount neighborhood.

NEC will continue its residency in the 2023–24 season in the fall with another evening of one acts entitled No Policy, No Justice, and a spring production of Zooman and the Sign by Philadelphia's Pulitzer winning playwright, Charles Fuller.
This past season, PLA launched a new program to continue our legacy of supporting artists in their creative process. The Penn Live Arts Accelerator Program is designed to provide resources, expertise, and facilities to artist-driven projects, generating new or remounted work. PLA then premieres this work for Philadelphia audiences before it tours in communities across the country and world.

Through extended time in the theatre to rehearse and build, expanded professional production support, and enhanced marketing and audience engagement activities, these inaugural artists and companies were able to achieve the following in this first year of the program:

**The Crossing:** East coast premiere of *Ochre* by composer Caroline Shaw; World premiere of *Self-Portraits 1964, Unfinished* by composer Martin Bresnick

**Dance Theatre of Harlem:** World premiere of *Blake Works IV (The Barre Project)*, choreographed by William Forsythe

**Negro Ensemble Company:** World premieres of three one-act plays and full-length play, *Mecca is Burning*

**Pam Tanowitz Dance:** World premiere of *Walk with Me* choreographed by Pam Tanowitz for Alice & John: A Coltrane Festival

**Rennie Harris Puremovement:** Remount of seminal production of *Rome & Jewels*
The 2022–23 season was dense with activities that engaged the Penn community both at home in Philadelphia and across the country with alumni, Penn parents, and friends. Over Homecoming Weekend, the PLA Board of Advisors gathered to celebrate the inauguration of Penn’s 9th President, M. Elizabeth “Liz” Magill. That evening, renowned filmmaker and member of PLA Director’s Council Todd Lieberman, C’95, received the 2022 Creative Spirit Award at Penn’s Alumni Award of Merit Gala. An advance screening of Todd’s film, White Bird, drew out Homecoming Weekend participants, as did the ribbon-cutting for the Gabriel Donnay Memorial Recording Studio.

In addition to the Carnegie Student Showcase in December, the Penn Performing Arts Regional Council of New York hosted an outreach event on May 4th at the Museum of Broadway. The evening featured a panel discussion with Penn Alumni working on Broadway, a cameo performance by Quadramics, and a private tour of the museum.

In June, the Penn Performing Arts Regional Council of Los Angeles organized an outreach event around PLA’s newly launched Arts & Entertainment Career Connections, a program working to aggregate and amplify opportunities for students pursuing internships in the performing arts and entertainment. Penn alumni, parents, students, and friends gathered at the home of PLA board member Julie Platt, C’79, to network and hear from a panel of faculty, staff, and current summer interns.
Student Discovery programming came roaring back this season with youth-friendly, interactive performances by Ballet Hispánico, Dance Theatre of Harlem, and Rennie Harris Puremovement. PLA served nearly 7000 young people through our youth programs, more than 70% from within the city of Philadelphia. The Philadelphia Children’s Festival also returned in full for the first time since 2019, to the delight of both families and school groups. BKXkidst, a company dedicated to inclusivity and access, was the perfect complement to PLA’s new KultureCity certification as a sensory-friendly venue. Older school groups enjoyed Literature to Life’s interpretation of Lois Lowry’s classic, *The Giver*.

Responding to teacher feedback, PLA will pilot a program in FY24 to facilitate deeper engagement for young audiences. For select performances, schools can book pre-performance visits by professional teaching artists that highlight themes, stories, and techniques students will encounter in the theatre.
In summer of 2022, Penn Live Arts gathered Penn alumni, parents, and friends at the California home of PLA board member Heather Lieberman, C’94, for a soft launch of the career support program now known as Arts & Entertainment Career Connections. As part of the evening, Penn students and recent graduates shared their varied and creative pursuits in arts and entertainment, shedding light on the many ways this program could help support their professional learning experiences. Three funding awards for summer internship placements were granted in 2022, supporting students interning in Philadelphia, New York City, and Los Angeles.

Then, in the fall, PLA added the new position of Director of Education & Engagement, created in part to build the infrastructure for this emerging program. After surveying the existing landscape of arts career support on campus, the education department developed a two-part strategy of enhancing the menu of funded opportunities in the arts and collaborating more closely with existing departments and centers. The program convened PLA’s first external review committee to award funding to four students in 2023, and has begun the process of recruiting employers to commit to 2024 internships for Penn students, all of which will also be supported with stipends.
Penn Live Arts guest events soared to new heights in this first full year following pandemic closures. Between July of 2022 and early June of 2023, more than 130 unique events, attended by over 28,000 people, were managed by PLA staff. This included several new clients such as West Philadelphia-based Paul Robeson House and Museum, whose event celebrated the 125th birthday of its namesake, the acclaimed athlete, actor, singer, and political activist. PLA also hosted Jewish Family and Children’s Service for the first time for a special event featuring Philadelphia Eagles offensive tackle and championship winner Lane Johnson.

PLA also saw many return clients. Penn’s student-run TEDx Conference, the largest of its kind in the world, took over the Zellerbach Theatre and Feintuch Family Lobby with a rich line-up of speakers, including acclaimed Hollywood producer, Anthony Russo, C’92, who swept the 95th Academy Awards with his film, Everything Everywhere All at Once. Among the other returning guest clients were the University of the Arts, with winter and spring dance showcases; The Rock School for Dance, with Classic Nutcracker; and Legacy on Broad, the premier Bollywood-fusion dance competition on the East Coast. As always, the Annenberg Center remains an essential venue for many University of Pennsylvania events, including lectures, conferences, expos, graduations, and celebrations of all kinds.
The 2022–23 season saw great advancement in PLA’s efforts to build a more collaborative infrastructure for the performing arts at Penn. Following two years of intensive planning, fiscal year 2023 launched an integrated fundraising effort between Penn Live Arts and Platt Student Performing Arts House, offering a diverse and robust menu of funding opportunities for alumni, Penn parents, and friends who want to support the performing arts, as well as a clear path for volunteer engagement. These efforts also facilitated the further development of the Arts & Entertainment Career Connections program.

Plans progressed for a more unified approach to performing arts venue management across campus, with the goal of providing a more efficient, cost-effective scheduling and service model. This will benefit not only Penn students but also PLA’s professional presenting series and community arts partners, as spaces will be better utilized for maximum advantage.

This multi-faceted alignment could not come at a better time, as PLA embarks upon an ambitious capital renovation and expansion campaign to further support the flourishing performing arts scene at Penn and in Philadelphia. This project includes the renovation and expansion of the Annenberg Center, beginning with the design of the new Weitzman Theatre as well as the construction of a new student performing arts center at 33rd and Chestnut Streets. Further details on these evolving plans will be forthcoming in the year ahead. PLA’s 50th anniversary season was truly Looking Back and Leading Forward!
Penn Live Arts is sustained through a mix of contributed and earned income. We count on your generosity and support to make the performing arts accessible to all in our community.

EXPENSES
- 28% University Support Facility Advance $2,135,000
- 28% Programming $2,130,471
- 21% Production $1,557,227
- 10% Marketing $784,759
- 6% Administration $479,037
- 5% Fundraising $415,569
- 1% Education & Engagement $86,768
- 0.34% Corporate $25,000
- 0.2% In-kind $15,000

INCOME
- 29% University Facilities Advance $2,135,000
- 17% Guest Rentals $1,219,590
- 15% Individual Giving $1,092,261
- 14% Ticket Revenue $1,001,017
- 11% University Support $817,000
- 7% Foundation & Government $545,253
- 6% Other Income $44,160
- 1% Endowment $73,119
- 0.34% Corporate $25,000
- 0.2% In-kind $15,000

*FY23 gifts and special projects funding have been excluded from the above chart, as funds are earmarked for use at a later date.

86,580 total patrons reached
16,230 tickets sold for Penn student performances
8,191 people reached through PLA education & engagement programs
2,318 individual subscribers to the 2022–23 season
128% increase in West Philly Welcome tickets with $70,202 in subsidies
14 Philadelphia premieres
9 World premieres
3 Penn Live Arts commissions
2 U.S. premieres

Air Play, Acrobuffos; Photo by Florence Montmare
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Nrittyagram Dance Ensemble; Photo by Karthik Venkataraman
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It is because of our generous donor community that we are able to share innovative dance, music, theatre and film with diverse audiences across the region. Thank you for championing the arts and sharing in our celebration of more than 50 years of the performing arts at Penn and in Philadelphia.

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