

Statement of Michael M. Kaiser
President The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Rules and Administration
May 20, 2003

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Michael Kaiser and I have the great honor to serve as President of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. It is a pleasure to appear before you today to report on the diverse programs produced by the Kennedy Center. The Kennedy Center is both our national cultural center and a living memorial to President John F. Kennedy. I emphasize the word "living" since there is a vitality to the building and the institution that far exceeds anything that could have been envisioned when the Center was chartered by Congress in 1958 under President Dwight D. Eisenhower as the national cultural center.

Each year, the Kennedy Center reaches over 2 million people with our 3,000 performances in many performing arts disciplines. Our focus over the past three seasons has been on developing programming that achieves national and international acclaim as is befitting our role as the national cultural center. Our Sondheim Celebration last summer attracted audiences from all 50 states and 28 foreign countries. This season we mounted an unprecedented international ballet festival that brought together six of the world's greatest dance companies and next season we celebrate the works of the great American playwright, Tennessee Williams. These are but a few of the many projects that have brought new luster and acclaim to the Center. But our performing activities are not limited to the Washington DC area. We are committed to touring productions across the nation to make them available to all Americans.

The National Symphony Orchestra, a vital part of the Kennedy Center for 15 years, is fulfilling this mandate by expanding its national touring activities. As we speak, the NSO is residing in North Dakota providing two weeks of free performances, master classes and educational programs as part of our American Residency Program. Our Imagination Celebration on Tour program brings the best of family and children's theater to cities across the nation. And our own Suzanne Farrell Ballet Company now tours throughout the United States.

The Center is committed to making arts accessible to everyone and presents free performances every day of the year on its Millennium Stage. Three such events this year alone have drawn over 7,000 audience members and in its less than 7 years, the Millennium Stage has attracted almost 1.5 million visitors. Equally important, these performances are available free to every American via live internet broadcasts.

Our leadership in the performing arts is mirrored by our commitment to arts education.

The Kennedy Center has created one of the most extensive arts education programs in the world and spends over \$15 million a year on this effort. In the past year alone, more than 7 million people across the country have been reached through our education programs. We now train 16,000 teachers annually to bring the arts into the classroom at all levels. Our distance learning initiative, which touches over 4 million teachers and students, enables classrooms to experience world-class performances and to engage in discussions with artists at the Kennedy Center. Our Partners in Education Program mentors relationships between arts organizations and their community school systems. There are already 83 organization teams in school systems in 43 states, the District of Columbia and Mexico.

The Kennedy Center also provides training to talented young Americans who aspire to arts careers. Through our Conducting Institute, National Symphony Orchestra Music Director Leonard Slatkin is preparing the next generation of conductors. Legendary ballerina, Suzanne Farrell, hosts a 3-week summer program for talented young dancers. Through our National Music Institute, young people interested in careers as instrumentalists are mentored by members of the National Symphony Orchestra. And our American College Theater Festival identifies the next generation of actors, designers and playwrights. This Festival encourages over 20,000 students from 900 colleges by presenting productions in eight regional festivals and a national festival here at the Center.

Mr. Chairman, the Kennedy Center has recently instituted two programs which we hope will change the landscape of the arts in America: The Vilar Institute for Arts Management and the Capacity Building Program for Culturally Specific Arts Organizations. I have long been troubled by the dearth of skilled professional arts managers. Two years ago, I formed the Vilar Institute for Arts Management at the Center, where we educate young professionals from the United States and around the world to manage arts institutions effectively. Twelve Vilar Fellows participate in topical seminars and work directly with senior management at the Center for an entire season. All expenses, including a stipend for each Fellow, are paid by the Center. By this June, we will have placed 24 professional arts managers in senior arts positions around the world.

A specific concern for all of us in the arts is the management of arts organizations of color. Too few African-American, Latino, Asian-American and Native American arts organizations have attained the size and management stability that allow them to thrive. The Kennedy Center's new Capacity Building Program for Culturally Specific Arts Organizations is a unique initiative that provides management support and training to arts organizations of color across the nation. Currently 17 such organizations from Detroit and Dayton and San Jose and Jacksonville and Philadelphia and numerous other cities participate in bi-weekly web discussions focused on marketing, fundraising, strategic planning and finance. Our Vilar Fellows are developing strategic plans with each

organization and I recently convened a conference of all participants at the Kennedy Center to encourage detailed programmatic and financial planning.

In June, under the auspices of the State Department, this program will be expanded to arts organizations across the globe beginning with Mexico.

I am proud of all that the Kennedy Center has done to meet its mandate as the national cultural center but much remains to be done. Currently, we are addressing the physical needs both inside and outside the building. The Center re-opened its renovated state-of-the-art Concert Hall in 1997, which offers patrons with disabilities total accessibility with wheelchair accommodations in all areas. At present, the Opera House is being renovated and will be equally accessible to all patrons when it reopens in December. The Center is also expanding its garage facilities and improving site circulation in order to reduce traffic congestion and provide additional security.

Despite these activities, access to the Kennedy Center is not adequate and under the direction of the Department of Transportation, we are participating in the Kennedy Center Plaza Project. In September 2002, President George W. Bush signed the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Plaza Authorization Act. The Act authorizes the Department of Transportation to create a plaza that will dramatically change the face of the Center and the nation's capital. By building the Plaza over the Potomac freeway, the Kennedy Center will be far more accessible to pedestrians and bicycle riders and provide easy access to those coming to the Center from the National Mall and downtown. In addition, two buildings will be built with private money on the Plaza: one to house our extensive education programs and a second building to provide much needed rehearsal and administration space for the Kennedy Center and The Washington Opera. The new rehearsal facilities will be accessible to the public giving them an opportunity to watch professional artists at work. The education center will provide a venue for visitors to experience the arts in a way that they can't anywhere else in the world. An exhibition on the history of the performing arts will feature the extensive collections of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian Institution. Through state-of-the-art technology, visitors will also be able to participate in the arts in unique ways: they will be able to conduct a virtual orchestra, design sets and costumes for a ballet, play with lighting and sound effects on a special stage, or design their own theater season. This combination of activities will make the expanded Kennedy Center the most exciting and sophisticated arts campus in the world.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of James A. Johnson, the Chairman of the Board, our Vice Chairmen Kenneth Duberstein and Alma Johnson Powell, and all our Trustees, I thank you for this opportunity to report on the Center's operations to the Rules Committee. I would like to extend my personal thanks to you, Senator Lott, for your many years of service on the Center's Board of Trustees. Your leadership and guidance on a variety of issues before Congress were extremely helpful.

I am pleased to answer any questions that members of the Committee may have. Thank you very much.