

Written Testimony of
Neil Portnow
President/CEO
Recording Academy

before the
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

on
Fiscal Year 2018 Funding of the National Endowment for the Arts

My name is Neil Portnow, I am the President/CEO of the Recording Academy, an organization that represents 23,000 individual music creators and professionals—songwriters, performers, studio professionals, and others creatively involved in making music. I appreciate the opportunity to submit this written testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. The Recording Academy requests that the subcommittee funds the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for Fiscal Year 2018 at no less than \$155 million.

The NEA has been invaluable to the development of music creators across the country, while helping preserve America's rich music culture. Since 1966, the NEA has provided \$423.8 million in funding to domestic music programs—from teaching kids how to play an instrument to supporting festivals of international acclaim. The NEA is an essential part of the American music culture, and it must be funded to ensure that all Americans, from inner cities to rural counties, can continue to enjoy and participate in our rich music heritage.

As you consider funding levels for FY18, I encourage you to first reflect on what music means to our nation. From folks songs of centuries past, to the iconic American Jazz scene, to today's global pop stars, music is woven throughout our cultural tapestry. It binds us together as one nation with the power to bridge racial, religious, and regional divides. Music represents our shared history, our common values, and our dedication to build for ourselves a more perfect union. In times of triumph and tragedy, we turn to the abiding power of music to lift our spirits, soothe our souls, and remind us that everything will be okay.

Music and the arts give value to us as a nation beyond defined borders, ensuring that America continues to be a beacon of innovation and hope for people here and all around the world. President John F. Kennedy summed it up best, "The life of the arts is very close to the center of a nation's purpose, and is a test of the quality of a nation's civilization." His words remain true today; and for less than \$1 per person, the NEA helps foster all of this and so much more.

I understand that you are tasked with a difficult and important responsibility; but as you finalize government spending for the next year, please remember why the arts must be protected today, tomorrow, and in the future. American culture makes America strong. Music and the arts further the very priorities the budget seeks to enhance. Our creative economy, with a \$26 billion trade surplus, serves as a powerful ambassador abroad; it teaches our shared values and history in compelling ways, and it connects us as a people and as a world.

At a SXSW panel sponsored by the Recording Academy in 2014, Homeland Security Committee Chairman Michael McCaul noted:

"Music can really make a difference in changing the attitudes and governance of some of these countries and really have a positive impact. While [drones] have been successful with high-value targets, they are not alone going to kill an ideology....Music has a very strong role to play in diplomacy and in that soft power to try and change the world to make it a better place."

When we're talking about "hard power" as opposed to "soft power," what we're really talking about is the difference between coercion and control versus persuasion and influence. That is where American culture and creativity excel. American music, art, theater, and dance liberate us, teach us to think and be strong, and are great ambassadors around the world.

Simply put, we didn't win the Cold War with just missiles; we also won the Cold War with Elvis, tailfins, and *Death of a Salesman*. Earlier I quoted President Kennedy, whose leadership proved critical to the U.S. and the world during that divisive period in our history. In a speech just a month before his death, Kennedy said, "I see little of more importance to the future of our country and our civilization than full recognition of the place of the artist."

That is why I implore you and your colleagues in Congress to fully fund the National Endowment for the Arts at a level of no less than \$155 million for FY18. Help protect and renew America's commitment to the arts and to music. It's our collective responsibility to preserve what binds us and to ensure that the whole world continues to benefit from one of our most unique and economically and spiritually important assets — and exports: American music.

It is an investment worth making.