

**Written Testimony in Support of FY08 Appropriations for the
National Endowment for the Arts**

Submitted by Sheila Johnson

CEO, Salamander Hospitality; Partner, Lincoln Holdings; Co-Founder, BET
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“Role of the Arts in Creativity and Innovation”

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Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on a subject for which I hold a deep and abiding passion. I am here with Americans for the Arts to urge you to appropriate \$176 million for the National Endowment for the Arts in Fiscal Year 2008.

I am a business woman. I have achieved great success in a number of different industries.

Yet I will tell you as sure as I am sitting in front of you today, that none of my success would have been possible if not for my education in the arts.

Because, while I am known in certain circles as the CEO of Salamander Hospitality...in others as the owner of the Washington Mystics basketball team ...I will tell you that I consider myself, first and foremost, an artist.

When I was a young girl growing up in Chicago, like so many of my friends, I was looking for something at which I could excel – something that would give me comfort, instill in me a sense of discipline, and present for me the greatest opportunity for success. I found music.

Or maybe music found me.

I would practice hours on end in my room. And when my family went to bed at night, I would take my violin downstairs into the kitchen and play until well past midnight.

And while I no longer play the violin, at least not at the level I once did, I do reflect back on those times frequently. I think of how they taught me the value of practice and dedication; how improvement – more often than not – comes not exponentially, but incrementally.

Those days taught me structure. They taught me discipline. And they taught me that on the neck of a violin lies a series of notes, but that true genius is found in the infinite possibilities that exist between those notes.

You see, I'm not just an advocate of arts education – I'm a product of it. I am what's possible when the right brain is nurtured with the same passion, with the same conviction as the left.

I can give you any number of personal examples of the role that creativity has played in my own life and how the best ideas come when both sides of the brain are working in balance, but I'd rather give you one that is now the stuff of legend in my hometown of Chicago.

By the late 19th Century raw waste from the Chicago River was pouring into Lake Michigan, threatening the city's water supply. Chicago had just experienced a major cholera outbreak that killed 80,000 people, so a group of engineers was called in to see what could be done. They thought and thought and came up with nothing. Finally, one day one of them said, "The problem is the river is flowing into the lake, right? Well, what if the river flowed the other way?"

And with that simple creative thought, all the tumblers fell into place and the possibilities became evident to that team of engineers. Over the next few years they designed and built a series of locks and canals that remain to this day one of the greatest engineering feats of all time. And in the process those men, and that creative idea, not only changed the flow of the Chicago River, but the course of U.S. history.

Members of the committee, these are not easy times. Our country is at war. Terrorists threaten our very existence. And the globalization of our economy is impacting the earning power of millions of Americans.

We look at our public schools and we see aging, ill-equipped buildings, badly in need of repair. We see declining test scores and spiking drop-out rates, and we ask: what can we do? How can our children compete against the best and brightest kids from places like Japan and India? This is the computer age, we say, the age of information. How can we make sure that America produces the next Bill Gates? The next Steve Jobs?

So what do we do? We panic. We stress math and science, at the expense of almost everything else. We cut funding to arts programs. Gone are the school band and the school play. Gone are trips to the art galleries and the museums. Gone too are so many of the teachers whose passion for such things stay with children long after their lessons are forgotten.

I will tell you today, two of the most important people in my life – people whose words and actions continue to echo in my ears and live in my heart – are my high school music teacher and a music professor of mine at the University of Illinois. I graduated 37 years ago, yet I still speak to them regularly and to this day they continue to inspire and counsel me.

I don't profess to know much about the workings of the human brain, but I do know this: that when children at two and three years old have trouble detecting rhythm patterns in simple pieces of music, quite often those same children grow up to become poor readers and develop other cognitive learning disabilities.

Similarly, I once knew of a young woman who suffered a terrible head injury in an auto accident. And for weeks all she did was lay in bed in an unresponsive near-vegetative state. Then one day her parents brought in a small radio and started playing music for her. Within minutes she responded. The doctors said it was the right side of her brain responding to something that moved her.

My point is that so often the arts can serve as a back door to the mind of a child. They can breathe life into the classroom experience and can provide doctors a road map to deeper understanding of such mysteries as aptitude, motivation and performance.

I know many of you believe in the arts. But the question before you is: how should they be funded?

In the cable industry, where I spent much of my career, there is a concept called co-operative marketing. The way it works is this: when a local affiliate wants to spend money to promote a show or network, that affiliate has access to co-op marketing dollars. And whatever dollars that affiliate spends in local marketing, the network matches 50/50. The net result is that the affiliate and the network become partners, each with an equal investment in the effectiveness of the advertising. And with that joint investment comes deeper research, greater scrutiny, and often, much more fruitful results.

I think the same principle should apply in arts funding.

As I said before, I am a supporter of the arts – specifically arts education. I have donated millions of dollars out of my own pocket to ensure that students for years to come will have the same advantages that I had, or better.

I recently endowed the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia with \$5 million, which will be used to do such things as develop better testing and early detection of learning disabilities, and to help educators develop a new wave of innovative and effective arts-based curricula.

I tell you this, not to pat myself on the back; I tell you this to show you that I am not someone standing here with my hand out. I am a woman willing to put my money where my heart is; willing to shoulder my share of the load. I ask only that my government meet me half way.

In a perfect world – or at least in *my* perfect world – government and the private sector would come together as partners. Much like the national networks and local affiliates in the cable industry, we would develop a co-operative relationship. We would both invest equally and share equally in the rewards.

In closing, I'm reminded of an anecdote from one of the greatest artists and finest international ambassadors this country has ever known. Louis Armstrong.

One time, a reporter asked Armstrong to define jazz. He just looked at the writer quizzically and said, “Man, if you gotta ask that, you wouldn’t understand the answer.”

In all due respect, I think a paraphrase of the immortal Satchmo might be in order here. If any one of you has to ask me, why are the arts important to this country, I would have to shake my head and say, “Man, if you have to ask that, I’m not sure you’ll ever understand my answer.”

The only answer, as I see it, is to reunite the arts and education in the classroom and in the community – because to divorce the two would be doing a terrible disservice to our children.

By denying America’s youth an arts education, we rob them of their creativity – and by extension we run the risk of depriving them of such critical life skills as structure, focus, and the ability to relate to one another, to live in harmony, and, ultimately, solve the problems that will confront them, and us, throughout their lives.

Thank you for this opportunity.