

# CREATIVE ARTS



Courtesy Center for Excellence in the Creative Arts

*The concert theater at APSU opened in 1990, allowing for state-of-the-art acoustics and seating 600.*

by **George Mabry**

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**T**he Center of Excellence in the Creative Arts at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, established in 1985 to promote the creative arts in Tennessee, reflects the lively interest in the arts in the community, state, and region. The center builds on the university's distinctive music, creative writing, art and theater traditions by promoting a variety of more than 100 musical productions, recitals, concerts, theater performances, poetry readings, and art exhibitions annually.

In addition to giving students opportunities to study and work with nationally acclaimed faculty and guest artists, the center commissions artists with regional, national, and international reputations to create new works of art. These works and works of historical value are presented in traditional and expanded environments. In conjunction with the Roy Acuff Chair of Excellence, noted authors, musicians, artists, actors, and teachers are brought to the center as

artists-in-residence.

Center-sponsored curricular activities include classes, lectures, workshops, seminars, master classes, symposia, and public school outreach focusing on various arts disciplines and the interdisciplinary nature of the arts. This includes faculty research in the creative arts, with research being defined as scholarly and creative achievement. The center also funds undergraduate scholarships and graduate assistantships for students in the creative arts.

#### **Mission Statement**

The primary focus of the Austin Peay State University Center of Excellence in the Creative Arts is to provide a substantive and well-rounded education by engaging faculty, students, guest artists, and members of the community in art, creative writing, music, and theater. The center has a twofold mission:

- To support the creative arts in the university,

the local community, and Southeast region by sponsoring the creation, presentation, study, and research of significant and distinctive works of art.

- To provide an enriched environment conducive to the development of individual understanding and basic literacy in the creative arts disciplines through curricular and cocurricular arts education designed to meet the need of the general university student, the arts major, the general public, and the professional artist.

### Goals and Objectives

- To encourage and actively promote the highest standards of creativity, performance, education, and research in the creative arts and to instill in the university community an awareness of the creative arts' important role in the enrichment of the human spirit.
- To contribute to and enrich the cultural climate of the state and the Southeast region through development of the creative arts.
- To contribute to faculty development by sponsoring faculty projects in the creative arts and by providing for release time for research and study.

### Notable Achievements

During its 17 years, the center has become renowned for accomplishments in literature, music, and the visual arts. The center-produced literary magazine, *Zone 3*, one of the leading poetry journals in the country, sponsors a poetry competition that has drawn more than 2,000 entries annually, some from around the world. The center sponsors Border to Border, a national biennial drawing competition and exhibition that receives approximately 350 entries from artists around the nation. Dimensions, a contemporary music project that commissions and performs new compositions by world-renowned composers, features faculty and guest artists and has received national acclaim for its cutting-edge performances. The center also sponsors a Visiting Writers Series featuring premier poets such as Maxine Kumin, Howard Nemerov, and Carolyn Kizer. Annually, six concerts are offered in the APSU Community Concert Series, which brings outstanding musicians to the campus for performances and master classes.

The center, continually supportive of teacher development and arts education, works with the Tennessee Arts Commission and the Tennessee Department of Education in coordinating and sponsoring workshops in the arts for professional development.

In 1995, the center, in partnership with Clarksville-Montgomery County Schools, was selected to form one of 14 teams nationwide to

attend the Performing Arts Centers and Schools Partners in Education Institute at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., where they explored methods for planning, implementing, and administering programs to develop teachers' knowledge of the arts and empower them to use the arts in their classrooms. Since then, the center has sponsored some 36 partnership workshops affecting more than a thousand teachers, who in turn bring their knowledge to thousands of school children.

### Roy Acuff Chair of Excellence

The Roy Acuff Chair of Excellence in the Creative Arts has allowed students and the community to share the expertise of many acclaimed artists in a dynamic atmosphere of unrestricted experimentation. Honored holders of the chair have included playwright Arthur Kopit, writer David Madden, photographer Ted Orland, composer Ron J. Nelson, Columbia University emeritus professor of theater Howard Stein, poet and essayist John Haines, visual artist Jim Nutt, and music educator Timothy Gerber.

### Benefits to the State of Tennessee

The presence of the center at APSU has had a positive and significant impact on the cultural life of the university, the city, and the middle Tennessee region. Quality arts programs have been made available to thousands of Tennesseans who live in a predominantly rural environment. Community education and outreach are central to the center's mission. Programs and performances produced or presented by the center are open to the public, and many contain audience education components. Additionally, the center cooperates with community organizations to promote the arts, sustains outreach programs to public schools and surrounding rural communities, and supports the National Standards of Arts Education. By raising the standards of artistic offerings at APSU, the center has affected the quality of education at the university. Undergraduate students at Austin Peay are afforded many opportunities to experience art and to learn from renowned artists—experiences typically found at much larger universities or perhaps reserved for graduate schools. The dollar value of the center's impact on the quality of life for middle Tennesseans is inestimable; however, research shows that a significant overall economic upsurge can occur in a community with a vital and progressive arts environment. ■

*George Mabry is director of the Center of Excellence in the Creative Arts at Austin Peay State University.*

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