



Profile

Alicia B. Adams

Vice President

International Programming and Dance

Joined the Kennedy Center in 1992, first serving as Special Assistant to the Chairman, James Wolfensohn, Ms. Adams worked with him to articulate, coordinate and oversee implementation of the Center's programs and policies. For the past decade, Adams' role at the Center has been producing and presenting in the international arena. She most recently planned and produced the Center's month-long *Festival of China*, the largest celebration Chinese arts and culture in American history. She also planned and developed the center's four-year initiative on Africa, *African Odyssey* (1997-2000) and the Latin American festival *AmericArtes* (2001-2004). Currently, she is working on *JAPAN! culture + hyperculture*, which will be held in February 2008, as well as a festival celebrating the arts and culture of the Arab world for 2009. In addition to major international festivals, Adams also curates the Center's Contemporary Dance Series and the Etcetera Series. In spring 2004, she curated the *Masters of African American Choreography*, a week-long series involving 15 of the nation's top African American dancers and companies. She has worked in the field of arts management in New York City for institutions including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Belafonte Enterprises, Inc., City Center Theater, Harlem School of the Arts and International Production Associates.

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The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in the U.S. capital, Washington D.C., will hold a large-scale two-week festival "Japan! Culture + Hyper Culture" from February 5 to 17, 2008. The program has been assembled with the aim of showing some of the depth and breadth of Japanese culture through a broadly diverse cross-section of presentations ranging from the ancient and tradition arts to contemporary anime (animated film). Programs include director Yukio Ninagawa's production of *Shintoku-maru*, Kyogen performance by Mansaku no Kai, Edo period string-operated puppetry of the Youki-za, butoh performance by Sankai Juku, contemporary dance by Jo Kanamori, exhibits by artist Yayoi Kusama and architect Tadao Ando, performance by the Meiwa Denki group and showing of the anime film *Genius Party*. The person responsible for assembling this program is the Kennedy Center's international program director, Alicia Adams. In this interview, Ms. Adams talks about the objectives of the Center and the scope and intent of its international programs.

(Interviewer: Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto; May 15, 2007, Tokyo)

Could you give us an outline of the development and history of the Kennedy Center?

The official name of the Center is the John F. Kennedy Memorial Center for the Performing Arts. It is the living memorial to the late President John Kennedy and first opened its doors in 1971. It was created out of the necessity to have a proper national performing arts center for American and International artists. The United States and Russia were exchanging culture in the 1950s and when the Bolshoi Ballet came to the nation's capitol to perform they had to perform in an old movie theater because Washington D.C. had no proper theater for the performing arts at the time. This situation helped to inspire the Congressional authorizing legislation in 1958 to create the National Center for the Performing Arts. When President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, they decided to name the center for him, because of his passion for the performing arts. Senator Fulbright, for whom the Fulbright Fellows are named, by the way, was the Senator who initiated authorizing legislation to establish the Center.

Could you summarize the mission of the Center?

The Kennedy Center's mission is to put the best in terms of the performing arts and education on its stages and in its facilities. The goal is to represent the best nationally as well as internationally in all that we do and to have it reflect the culture of the people of the United States. The Center presents more than two thousand programs. This is all work that defines the mission of the Kennedy Center.

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The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts



Overlooking the Potomac River in Washington, D.C., The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is America's living memorial to President Kennedy. The Center, now in its 36th season in 2007-2008, continues its efforts to fulfill President Kennedy's vision by making the arts accessible to all people. Under the guidance of President Michael M. Kaiser, the Kennedy Center is the busiest performing arts facility in the United States with seven theaters and stages attracting audiences totaling two million; and Center-related touring productions, television, and radio broadcasts welcoming 20 million more. The Center presents the great examples of music, dance, and theater; supports artists in the creation of new work; and serves the nation as a leader in arts education.

The three main theaters at the Kennedy Center are the Opera House (2,300 seats), Concert Hall (2,442 seats), and the Eisenhower Theater (seats 1,100). Other performance venues in the Center include: The Family Theater with 324 seats, the Terrace Theater with 513 seats, the Theater Lab with 399 seats and the Millennium Stage, part of the concept of "Performing Arts for Everyone."

<http://www.kennedy-center.org/>

How is the Center sustained?

The center is a quasi-federal agency as it is the living memorial to President Kennedy. We receive funding from the government for the maintenance of the building and renovations related to the Memorial aspect of the institution. Also, we get some government funding for educational programs, but all the performances presented on our stages have to acquire support through our fund raising initiatives from corporations, foundations and individuals.

Why does the Center mount so many international festivals?

Well, that goes back to the mission of the Center, which I stated earlier. To present work that reflects a nation that is primarily one of immigrants means that international work is high on the list of priorities.

Could you explain little more about what is the quasi-federal agency? How is your organization different from the big non-profit (NPO) arts organizations in the U.S. like the Lincoln Center and the Metropolitan Opera in New York?

The Kennedy Center is a non-profit organization, with the same NPO status and operating regulations as Lincoln Center or any other non-profit arts organization in the U.S. One difference is that our Board of Trustees is appointed by the President of the United States. That makes us different from other performing arts organization and closer to the Smithsonian Institution, which also has a government appointed Board of Regents. Our Trustees serve a six-year term so it works out that we usually have a bipartisan board, meaning members of both the Republican and Democratic parties. These trustees are there to support us financially and have fiduciary responsibility, but the direction and artistic vision of the Kennedy Center are decided by the Center's President, Michael Kaiser, who is not a presidential appointee.

What is the size of the Center's budget?

As for the Center's annual operating budget, it is about \$150 million, and the part that we have to raise privately from individuals, corporations and foundations is about \$68 million annually. This is, of course, a lot of money to raise. The remaining income is revenue from ticket sales, retail operations, etc.

Since the Board of Trustees is appointed by the President of the United States, there must be some political direction in terms of policy and such coming from the President's Administration, isn't there?

No. Not at all. Our policies remain the same regardless of administration changes when there is a new President. The board of trustees may be selected because of their interest in the arts but often that is not always the case—it can be a political favor. There are other advisory boards as well, we have six boards in all. The National Symphony Board directs matters for the National Symphony Orchestra, which is one of our artistic affiliates. The Community and Friends Board and the Washington Committee on the Arts, are comprised of local people who are interested in being involved with the Kennedy Center, and that board is appointed by the Center's President, Michael Kaiser. Another board we have is called the President's Advisory Committee on the Arts, which is also appointed by the President of the United States and includes representatives from every state. The National Committee for the Performing Arts is another advisory group comprised with one member from each of the states in the U.S. Then we have a sixth board

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which is the International Committee, which supports the work that I do in the international arena. All members have to make substantial contributions to be on these boards.

Could you outline for us the programs and departments within the Kennedy Center?

There are the programming departments— international programming, theater programming and dance programming. “Performing Arts for Everyone” is another programming division which helps to make sure that anyone who wants to attend a performing arts presentation is able to do so, by presenting a free performance in the Grand Foyer every evening on our stage called the Millennium Stage. The National Symphony Orchestra and our Fortas series for chamber music are both part of the classical music division. We also have one of the largest arts Education Programs that offers Youth and Family Programs for students and their parents. We probably do more programs for young people than any non-profit organization in the country.

The other departments include development, which is responsible for all Kennedy Center fund raising; marketing, which is responsible for marketing and advertising; press which deals with all media; and production, which deals with everything involved in getting the performances on stage. And then there is Finance, Information & Technology, Administrative and Legal that handles all aspects of operating the Center. We have about 350 full time employees in all. We also have a big volunteer program which has approximately 500 people registered to support all of the programs that we do.

We have heard that the educational programs are an important part of the Center's activities. Could you tell us about them?

Yes, the education department is essential to the Center and was officially established in the authorizing legislation. It is the way we help students, teachers and audiences to have access to more knowledge and information about the arts and specifically about the work that we present at the Center. We have affiliates in every state of the U.S. and most of our programs are nationwide. We have a distance learning program that provides programs with the potential to reach every school district in America. Further, we have a separate website called “Arts Edge” <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/> which was developed as a cooperative agreement between the National Endowment for the Arts and the United States Department of Education, that reaches people throughout the world. Virtually every program we bring to the stage has an educational component to support it. When we presented the *Festival of China* in 2005, for instance, there were several programs that were developed specifically for Arts Edge to go deeper into the productions that we brought to the stage in that festival. A program on Cai Guo Qiang's artistic explosion event was developed and very well received. We also created a distance learning program with Shen Wei, who was one of our China festival artists and with whom we decided to do a five-year residency program. This was the first year of that residency and the first time that we did a distance learning program broadcast directly from the Kennedy Center. We also have touring components of our Youth and Family programs, and one of them is called “Imagination Celebration,” a program for affiliates around the country who receive programs either produced or presented by the Center to present in their own venues.

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Are there management training programs also that are part of the education programs?

Yes, Five years ago when Michael Kaiser came on board he created the Kennedy Center Fellows program that was initially called the Vilar Fellows, after a donor. It is a program for mid-career arts management professionals anywhere in the world to come and study at the Kennedy Center for a nine-month period. It is competitive and there is an application process that anyone interested must go through. We also have had an ongoing internship program for about 20 to 25 young people, who are in college or have recently graduated from college to come and work and learn at the Center for a four –month period. All are paid stipends for their participation in both of these programs.

What is the Kennedy Center Honors?

Our biggest production in the television realm is a program called the Kennedy Center Honors, which awards artists (generally at the end of their careers) for excellence in their work. This show is taped for later broadcast on CBS and usually airs around Christmas. The President attends and both the White House and the State Department host private events for Honorees and special guests of the Center each year.

I would like to ask you about the Japan program that you are going to have at the Kennedy Center in February of 2008. First of all, you chose the name “Japan! Culture + Hyper Culture.” What does the Hyper Culture term mean.

I have been producing international programs for many years now, traveling all over the world, and when I came to Japan several times to start preparing for this Japan festival I saw arts and artists that reflect the traditional culture, like Kabuki, Kyogen, Noh, Bunraku, and I also saw more contemporary work like Ninagawa's theater production, Jo Kanamori's choreography, or Strange Kinokos. But then I was introduced to a whole different world in Japanese arts like *otaku* (nerd culture), the robots, the use of art in technology such as the work of Maywa Denki or the laptop orchestra. This work to me went beyond anything else that I had seen in the world of arts. One day I was reading an article about Japanese design which they described as hyper design to define the ultra contemporary nature of the work. And I thought that this was the right word to describe this new work. So since the festival would feature a range of artists and mix of work I thought Japan! Culture and Hyperculture was a good title for it.

Why Robots as part of the festival?

No one in the world is making robots, not at the level and for the purpose that they are being made in Japan. In Washington we had the Toyota Partner Robot, (the trumpet-playing robot) to help announce our new season at a press event last March in Washington. Some people didn't realize that it was actually playing the song “What a Wonderful World.” But it was! Robots are astonishing and extraordinary, and I think they are a way to the future. At first I was puzzled why Toyota and Honda and other car manufacturers' in Japan would be making robots. But I went to the Toyota museum where I first saw the robot and learned the history of Toyota and Mr. Toyoda's avid concern about humanity as well as commerce; he really wanted to provide what the Japanese needed first and then the world. So, first he was in the textile business to be able to clothe a nation and then he started making cars after the war as he saw that Japan needed them for self-reliance—and good ones. That outlook has prevailed in the company as they look to this

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millennium and its needs. When calculating the changing demographics of Japan and the aging of society, for example, it is obvious that something has to be done to prepare for it; there will not be enough younger people to care for the aging. So, maybe a robot that can help older people or the sick will be very important. It is the way of thinking about humanity and commerce combined I think that makes this company's approach unique. Clearly, they have inspired others and further, that they are making robots that play good music is astounding,

I was impressed when I saw the schedule of programs you selected for next year's Japan festival. It looks like you tried to reflect the full diversity of Japanese culture.

Yes, and it is because I have never seen a culture so diverse as that of Japan. Japan's ancient culture is rooted in Chinese culture and its modern traditions include Japanese and western influences. So when I created the program, I tried to reflect the diversity of Japanese arts and culture including work that I feel best tells the story of Japan.

You have had several programs on Japan in the past at the Kennedy Center.

We have had a long relationship with Japan. We have a Japanese Endowment that was created in 1989 to support Japanese arts at the Kennedy Center. What we have done is to create an annual program called the "Arts of Japan" to present Japanese artists. These programs are usually presented in conjunction with the cherry blossom celebration in Washington in the spring. This year we presented a work titled AOI/KOMACHI that was created at the Setagaya Public Theater and was also being toured by the Japan Society in New York City.

You came to the Kennedy Center in 1992. Have the programs and policies of the Center changed since then?

It has expanded a lot in terms of international programs. James Wolfensohn, our former chairman and also former chairman of the World Bank during the Clinton Administration, was very interested in expanding the scope of the Kennedy Center. So we began to look around the world for programs that would appeal to many diverse audiences. We have also expanded our educational programs, fellowships and internships. In other programming, there has also been an expansion in dance and ballet programs, to the point that we present more dance than probably any other center in America. And, the companies presented are the major companies of the world from China to Europe to America. So, the answer is yes—the Center hardly has a dark night.

You have had a series of four large international programs with regional orientations, starting with Africa and then Latin America, Asia and next the Arab world. What was the background behind these series, and do you think of it as a series?

I think of it as a plan that goes back to '93 when we decided to focus on regions of the world that had been overlooked thus far. Those areas included the continent of Africa, the Latin Americas region and Asia. We also thought that there were local communities that would be natural affinity audiences for presentations of work from these regions. I am working now on the Arab world program [for 2009]. This is a region of the world that the Center has not focused on except for a bit when we did *African Odyssey* and for some world music presentations by Arab musicians on the Millennium Stage. This is an important festival for us to do because Americans know so little about this region of the world. I think that all will be amazed to see the beauty and creativity from these artists.

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As a national institution, I'm sure that there are people who will try to find a political agenda in programs like your coming Middle East festival.

When we did the Africa Odyssey festival, we presented artists from Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco and it was then that I knew that I really wanted to do an Arab festival. When Michael Kaiser came on board this festival became one on his agenda so that is the reason that we are doing it now. So, there are no political motives but really artistic motivations behind them all. Certainly, the political situation has just gotten worse and worse but we are very committed to making this festival. I too think that it will be a good festival to do in these very charged times. Art is the best tool we have to foster more understanding between people.

From your position as a Vice President of the Kennedy Center's international programs, what is the most important role of international exchange programs in your vision?

I think that America receives a rather myopic view of work from around the world on the main stages and theaters of our country—perhaps largely for economic reasons. So I believe that part of our mission should be to bring to American audiences the best from everywhere in the world—to enlighten. There is extraordinary work that I have seen around the world that I want to share with as many people as possible- it can be life-changing.