ARTS

"If we go down, then we go down together"
PARIS THE CHAINSMOKERS

Arts council reflects on year's financial challenges

BY ANGELINA KOVALCHUK
STAFF REPORTER

Local creatives celebrated the perseverance of the city's Arts Council at its 62nd annual meeting on Tuesday, where it announced new leadership and plans for a cultural arts center.

Since its founding in 1964, the Arts Council of Greater New Haven has served the Elm City and surrounding municipalities by offering financial support and other resources to local artists and arts organizations. At the meeting, held at the creative hub Skiro Studios in Hamden, the council discussed creative initiatives and fundraising efforts in the face of a financially challenging year.

"It was one of the toughest years in recent memory for the Arts Council," Hope Chávez, executive director of the council, said to the crowd.

Chávez said that because the organization was operating at a deficit, full-time staff reduced their hours and pay by 40 percent for nearly six months. She added that reduced revenue streams were outweighed by expenses, compelling the council to scale back operations.

Still, the council was able to raise $1.37 million through fiscally sponsored projects and publish 371 articles by the Arts Paper, the council's official art publication.

Its members also announced two new leadership changes, including the appointment of Joel Dodson as the council's incoming board chair and the appointment of Abiba Biao as the program director for the Youth Arts Journalism Initiative.

"We're thinking about reimagining how the Arts Council can become a hub for the different organizations and artists and creatives in the community," Dodson said to attendees. "But with that in mind, we really want to build toward the future."

Chávez also announced two initiatives the council would prioritize going forward: the construction of a community cultural arts center and a deeper focus on arts advocacy.

"Our community needs a lot of spaces," Chávez said. "We have been linking arms with people trying to build spaces."

At the meeting, Chávez said the council will remain committed to its mission of advocacy, creative commons, arts journalism and fiscal sponsorship.

Lucy Gellman, outgoing editor of the Arts Paper, said she was excited about the appointment of Biao as the Youth Arts Journalism Initiative's inaugural program director. The program, which was established in 2018, introduces New Haven high schoolers to grassroots journalism and allows them to independently research and publish articles.

"For so many years, it has been my dream to have a full-time person who can build out a really robust network of alumni and steward the program forward and grow it in beautiful and new and exciting ways," Gellman said.

Rebekah Moore, the council's programs director, said a federal grant of $200,000 enabled the initiative to appoint a full-time program director.

According to Moore, the council was awarded an additional $194,000 in federal funding to "continue the work for arts, artists and arts businesses." The funds are being used to launch the new Arts as Small Business Initiative, which will give artists the resources to market their work as a small business.

"I really want to come in here and give artists the opportunities to be a small business, a thriving business," Moore said. "Because a lot of times, art is a second thought or a side gig, and I really wanted to help artists and give them those tools."

For the meeting, the council also invited representatives from two organizations they have sponsored, the New Haven Immigrants Coalition and Ubuntu Storytellers — an ensemble of Black, brown and biracial performers. Both organizations had booths with handouts for attendees.

"The board allows the net of the Arts Council to be cast wide enough to support community organizing groups as well that use arts and culture and storytelling as part of their work," Chávez said.

The representatives of the council also asked attendees to continue supporting the council's efforts through monthly donations, advocacy participation and volunteering.

"I encourage you to leave us some of your thoughts about what you want to give to this community, what we can do better, what you think is the most critical and acute need," Chávez said.

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ANGELINA KOVALCHUK / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

On Tuesday, the Arts Council of Greater New Haven held its 62nd annual meeting to reflect on the monetary challenges and fundraising successes of the past year and announce new creative initiatives.

Brentano Quartet plays meditations across classical history

BY LAURENTIA WOO
STAFF REPORTER

The Brentano Quartet kicked off Yale's Chamber Music Series with a performance on Tuesday, placing Haydn and Beethoven alongside contemporary Latvian composer Peteris Vasks in a program titled "Dreams, Meditations, Contemplations."

Founded in 1992 at the Juilliard School, the Brentano Quartet is an ensemble in residence at the Yale School of Music. Their Tuesday program brought together three works linked by their slow, contemplative movements: Joseph Haydn's String Quartet in D Major, Op. 50, No. 5, known as "The Dream"; Vasks' String Quartet No. 4, written in 1999; and Beethoven's String Quartet No. 8 in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2.

For Misha Amory '89, the quartet's violist, the program grew out of an interest in what happens when composers approach meditation through very different musical languages.

"It's a program about dreams and meditations and contemplations," Amory said. "They're linked by the slow movements."

Amory also described the program as moving between "daydream and reverence."

The Vasks quartet's fifth and final movement, "Meditation," provided the program's most contemporary interpretation.

Amory said Vasks, a Baltic composer whose music has sometimes been compared to the meditative qualities of contemporary Estonian Composer Arvo Pärt, created music that seems to drift rather than move toward a conventional destination.

For Amory, the music is "eternal melodies spooling out over quiet tremolos" that create music that drifts "eternally over the horizon."

The program also placed the three composers in distinct moments of their lives and careers.

According to Amory, Haydn spent much of his career away from major cultural centers, experimenting with musical ideas in relative isolation. On the other hand, she said, Beethoven, increasingly isolated by his deafness, continued to push the string quartet in new directions. Vasks, centuries later, approaches meditation through a musical language that can seem to resist traditional ideas of destination and resolution.

For audience member David Atkins, the contrast was particularly striking in the Vasks.

"The first one displayed virtuosity masterfully, but it didn't speak to me," Atkins said. "The second one was unique, innovative and transportive."

Aviv Pilipski '29, another audience member, described the performance more broadly as "an absolute joy" and "such a privilege to be able to hear such masterful performers."

For the Brentano Quartet, Beethoven is becoming an increasingly central part of its future programming.

The ensemble, which has performed together for 34 years, is preparing to play a complete Beethoven quartet cycle in 2027, marking the 200th anniversary of the composer's death. The cycle will give the quartet an opportunity to approach all of Beethoven's string quartets as a body of work.

The quartet has never previously performed the complete cycle, despite Beethoven's central place in its repertoire.

Amory said the ensemble had originally been invited to present a Beethoven concert, but its members were so overwhelmed by the experience of working with the composer's music that they began developing programs that placed Beethoven alongside other composers.

The Yale performance was the first presentation of this particular program, and the quartet will also perform it at Princeton this weekend.

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LAURENTIA WOO / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

In "Dreams, Meditations, Contemplations," the quartet, an ensemble in residence at the Yale School of Music, connected three composers across centuries while looking ahead to its first complete Beethoven cycle in 2027.

Sonic exhibit at Schwarzman dome plays itself electronically

BY BRETT PENK
STAFF REPORTER

Upon entering the dome of the Schwarzman Center from Tuesday to Saturday afternoons, viewers can now feel the sound of 10 freestanding kinetic sculptures, made up of 36 hand-tuned bronze and steel gongs, ring throughout their whole body.

Designed by artist Aaron Taylor Kuffner, "Gamelatron, Sonic Immersion" is an exhibit that produces music entirely by itself through mechanical mallets that are connected to an electronic computing system. The exhibit, which opened on Sept. 1, is partially derived from Indonesia's sonic tradition, Kuffner said.



BRETT PENK / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

"Gamelatron, Sonic Immersion" features sound-producing kinetic sculptures made of gongs that are connected to an electronic computing system. The immersive exhibit will be on display until Oct. 10 in the dome of the Yale Schwarzman Center.

"With the Gamelatron project, it's really about creating opportunities for people to encounter resonance off vibrating metal objects and have that part of their daily life," Kuffner said. "I look at this work, like all my work really, as an offering to hopefully nourish in one way or another, the people that encounter it."

Kuffner, who also plays gongs, studied Gamelan music at a university in Indonesia.

"I recognize that the artwork has the potential to be more impeccable than I," he said.

Kuffner said he composes long form, nonlinear compositions "that kind of ebb and flow and never really end" so people can walk in at any time and not have to worry about a start or finish.

"It never ends, so you leave when it's time for you to leave, be it some external reason, or some internal reason where you're like, 'Yeah, I got enough. I got the dose I needed,'" he said.

Jennifer Harrison Newman DRA '11, the Schwarzman Center's associate artistic director, said in a phone interview that the center first conceived the idea of the exhibition even before its renovations were completed in 2021 and the staff had seen the inside of the building.

Harrison Newman said that she visited a version of the Gamelatron exhibit in San Francisco in 2023 and thought "Oh, this is super interesting."

For Harrison Newman, the experience of first walking into the dome when the exhibit was installed felt like walking inside an instrument itself.

"I felt like I walked into an instrument," Harrison Newman said. "The room became the instrument. You could just feel the vibrations of the pieces in your body."

Each installment of Kuffner's work is distinct due to the different spaces provided by venues, Kuffner said.

"Having the setting being less about looking at the art, and more about being inside the room, were all decisions made very much on purpose," Kuffner added. "And so this was designed about, 'How can we make this an inviting space so that people can have encounters with resonance, kind of on their own terms?'"

It took three years from Harrison Newman's visit to his San Francisco exhibit in 2023 to its actual installation, Kuffner said.

The Good Life Center in the Schwarzman Center is also displaying one of Kuffner's kinetic sculptures for the entire academic year. Some have led meditation and yoga classes in that installation, Harrison Newman noted.

Bethel Asomaning '25, the director of programming for the Good Life Center at Yale wrote in an email to the News that the center was excited for the "intersection of art, music, and wellness," adding that the installation creates a relaxing environment that allows students to slow down.

"Students have shared that they enjoy the calming music and appreciate the artwork of the gongs, and we look forward to integrating the instrument into some upcoming programming," Asomaning wrote.

The installation plays in the dome from Tuesday to Saturday, 12 p.m. to 6 p.m., until Oct. 10 and plays daily at 12 p.m., 5 p.m. and 9 p.m. throughout the entire academic year in the Good Life Center.

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