



**Written Testimony in Support FY10 Appropriations for the
National Endowment for the Arts**

Submitted by Josh Groban, Singer, Songwriter

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies

“Arts=Jobs”

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Good morning Chairman Dicks, Ranking Member Simpson and members of the Subcommittee. Please let me first express what an incredible honor it is to testify before you today on behalf of an issue that has been nothing short of transformative for me personally. My name is Josh Groban. I am a vocalist, musician, composer and actor.

I am here today along with my esteemed fellow witnesses to talk about how the arts have not only enriched my life and provided me a living, but how the decisions made here, in rooms like this to fund the National Endowment for the Arts have a direct impact on the lives of those who wish to not only pursue their passions, but to contribute as productive members of their communities. Also, I believe the arts are a refuge – not an escape – from the troubles of the day and can provide hope during these traumatic economic times. I hope my story reinforces that belief.

Early Years in the Arts

I owe my livelihood to the arts and music. Not only because I’ve been able to sing, write and act for a living, but because there is a market of those who appreciate my work and choose to buy my recordings and attend my performances. The arts are a truly interactive experience that creates a portal that connects those who want to do and those who want to enjoy - to the mutual benefit of both. Arts Advocacy Day is the perfect opportunity for me to share my story about how the power of artistic expression and the forces that enabled me to do what I love, can be the story of many others with a little help from you, our leaders.

First and foremost, when I refer to forces, I am speaking primarily of the love and commitment of my parents who are here with me today. Appreciation of the arts was just a way of life in my household. My parents are very artistic; my father, with all apologies to my fellow witness Mr. Marsalis, is an accomplished jazz trumpeter, and my mother has spent her life teaching and exploring the world of visual art and design. So I did not grow up in environment where creative expression was pressed upon me, but instead was a fundamental building block that enriched my development.

There is no doubt I had an advantage in that regard, being surrounded by a nurturing family who viewed the arts as necessary for making a well-rounded individual. But my

parents never pushed me to make that my passion. It became my passion by gravitational pull. Something in me clicked and I knew I wanted to pursue the arts in some form. You have to have the “bug.” I had been provided with an environment by my parents where my quest to find my passion was encouraged and I went with it.

As a somewhat reserved young adult, I had found my voice, metaphorically and well, as you can see you today, speaking in front of the committee, literally. The awkwardness that accompanies most of us in our formative years certainly did not miss me. Luckily, I found my language in creative expression and that opened up a way of communication that has allowed me to cultivate my talents. Still, high school was a challenge. My first foray into adolescence found me feeling like an outsider like so many kids. Along with the guidance and support of my parents and extraordinary teachers, the arts provided me with a motivation to keep up with my academics.

High School Arts Education

While my first high school was a fine academic institution, there were not many opportunities for creative outlets. This inspired me to create my own school theater club that became quite popular with other kids – and drove me to maybe look for another learning environment where I could fit in and get my theatrical fix. My artistic life took a profound turn for the better upon auditioning and then being accepted to the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts. The school specializes in the training of music, theatre, dance, visual arts, and film. It is one of two public arts high schools in Los Angeles that allows students from any district within Los Angeles County to attend. My acceptance finally deployed me onto familiar terrain: artists, musicians, actors and more than a few other “outsiders” who now had a community to explore their talents and start imagining a way to translate their gifts into productive careers. For many of the students who came from troubled and disadvantaged homes, it was a life-changing experience to be placed in an environment where the arts provided such hope and positive growth. In my opinion, their lives were saved by the arts.

During my high school years I had the opportunity to experience the far reaching influence of the federal agency that my fellow witnesses and I are here to support. I attended the highly-regarded Interlochen Arts Camp, a frequent National Endowment for the Arts grantee for providing excellence in arts education, majoring in musical theater. The camp itself is truly a national treasure, combining exceptional instruction for all the arts disciplines in a rustic and modest setting in northern Michigan. The ability to help hone my acting and vocal skills and to really start taking my talent seriously is something I will always be grateful for. Thanks to the NEA’s ability to identify worthy programs of excellent artistic merit, campers like me are able to keep being inspired.

What is sometimes lost in any discussion of the arts and in particular arts education, is that those lessons learned through whatever medium one chooses to pursue are more likely to teach you more about the world around you and how it works. Learning piano isn’t just about being able to produce notes in a melodic and harmonic structure that becomes “Moonlight Sonata.” It is about the personal discipline that is hours of practice. Trust me on this one; there is no better place than a theatrical production to test the

characteristics of humility, work ethic, patience, the value of teamwork and a commitment to a common goal. We have only our current financial mess to turn to for an examination of what happens when those values are not learned.

Career Path

Armed with the tools to pursue my dream and chosen profession, this is the point in my story where I had a little bit or a lot of luck. But as the saying goes, “luck meets preparation meets opportunity.” I’ve already gone over the preparation. Here is opportunity. A series of remarkable events started to unravel. My vocal coach had sent a tape to Grammy-winning producer and arranger David Foster who has written or produced hit songs for some lesser known artists like Celine Dion, Barbara Streisand, Chicago and Whitney Houston, and out of the blue some time later, I received a call. Sure, no pressure for a 17 year-old, but David had wanted me to sing for then governor-elect Gray Davis’ inauguration. I went from singing in my living room for family and friends to wearing an ill-fitted tuxedo in the state capitol singing for the state’s elected officials and invited dignitaries. I’m still here, so I guess it went okay, and it put me on the other end of another call from David.

This time, he invited me to come to the Grammys and possibly replace the wonderful, but intimidating voice of world-renowned and universally adored tenor Andrea Bocelli during his rehearsal with someone named Celine Dion; an equally intimidating and famous voice. My first answer was a resounding “no.” I knew the piece; an incredibly moving song named “The Prayer” well but was not sure I would be prepared enough to enter that arena yet. David coaxed me into singing the number over the phone and he decided I was ready. To put it politely, he told me to get my butt over there. I went to the famous Grammys stage and sang the duet with Celine -- who couldn’t have been more gracious and supportive.

The rehearsal was a thrill and at the time I thought I was just taking home a great memory. But around that time a string of events occurred that can only be explained as unbelievable. I was booked to appear on Rosie O’Donnell’s show, she had been in the audience for the Grammy rehearsal. I was fortunate to get an exclusive recording contract with a major label with David’s help. My appearances on the hit television show “Ally McBeal” gave me great visibility and it was my first foray into acting on national television. The episodes had created a buzz that led to a “20/20” segment that saw my debut album jump in sales from gold to double-platinum status over the next year.

Giving Back

My career has been nothing short of amazing and I never take for granted the hard-earned breaks that have given me the capacity to keep pursuing my passion. The opportunity to sing for President-Elect Obama, perform at the Vatican, and meet and befriend Nelson Mandela are not only incredible and humbling honors, but prime examples of how the arts are a universal language that connect us to each other’s humanity. I have been able to use my music to fuel philanthropic endeavors such as the Josh Groban Foundation which helps children in need through education, healthcare and the arts. It also has galvanized my fans, to whom I owe another debt of gratitude, to raising money benefitting a number

of institutions, including Noah's Ark children's orphanage in Siyawela, South Africa. The arts just keep giving.

One of the highlights of my career was to perform at the Commander in Chief Ball this year during President Obama's inauguration and also the chance to provide some comfort to those young heroes who are recuperating at Walter Reed Hospital. I was deeply moved by their personal stories of how they felt, "they were the lucky ones" having just lost limbs, and not their lives, to improvised explosive devices. To be able to bring some comfort and a couple of moments of refuge from the harsh realities of war was so gratifying. No matter how one feels about the wars, no one doubts the courage and patriotism of our soldiers. My career has allowed me to serve my country in ways that may not normally spring to mind. The arts enable me to use my talents to express my passion for important causes and endeavors. To be able to do what I love and help make a difference is incredibly gratifying.

Conclusion

So again, when asked "why do this?" the answer is it is my duty. The arts have crafted me into the person I am today. With so many of my colleagues being affected by the economic downturn, it is more important than ever that those of us who are still able to make a living inform others that creative expression means real jobs. As performances close down, the ripple effect is not only felt by the lead performer and the cast, but also the backup performers in the pit, the stage hands who are artists in their own right in bringing the production values to the fore, and everyone else from the ushers to the restaurant across the street who relies on people stopping in before or after a show.

That is why I wanted to share my story with you today. It is a great honor to be here in our nation's capital and make a case for why the arts are so vital to our communities and our bottom line. I applaud the already extraordinary efforts of this committee in providing funding for the NEA in the stimulus bill and the incremental increases in its fiscal year budgets over the last 2 years.

So much more is needed to ensure that my story is a possibility for millions of our fellow Americans, but more importantly, that we continue to fund the arts so that we maintain our cultural soul. With your help, I know we can continue to keep the hopes and dreams of artists alive so that they can continue serving their communities and our great country. I join my other colleagues here today in respectfully requesting that this committee allocate \$200 million to the National Endowment for the Arts.

Thank you again for the honor of testifying this morning. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.