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The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Announces

Meridian, Mississippi as Partner City for
Any Given Child

Program Creates a Long-Range Arts Education Plan
for Students Grades K–8

(WASHINGTON)—The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts has chosen Meridian, Mississippi as the 23rd site and first school district in Mississippi for Ensuring the Arts for Any Given Child, a program that creates a long-range arts education plan for students in grades K–8. The program will incorporate existing resources of the Meridian Public Schools, local arts organizations, and the Kennedy Center to create a customized plan for arts education for the city. Any Given Child seeks to bring access and equity to each student’s arts education. With the assistance of expert consultation services provided by Kennedy Center staff and consultants, community leaders develop a strategy for arts education that is tailor-made for the school district and community. Mississippi State University’s (MSU) Riley Center will serve as the lead arts organization for Any Given Child Meridian.

“A high quality arts education is something that every child deserves—a commitment the Kennedy Center places at the core of its education programs,” said Mario Rossero, Senior Vice President of Education at the Kennedy Center. “We know that through increased access to arts learning for students, Any Given Child provides a measurable impact. The dedication of Superintendent Dr. Carter, Mayor Bland, and Mississippi State University to this program has been inspiring and we look forward to seeing the students reap the benefits of increased arts opportunities.”
“The city of Meridian is thrilled and honored to be named the 23rd city in the nation and the fourth in the southeast to be selected as the site of the Kennedy Center’s Any Given Child initiative. Exposing our students to more art forms, teaching all subjects both in and through the arts, and giving every student equitable access to an education rich in the arts is a goal we will achieve in collaboration with the Kennedy Center’s leadership,” said Meridian Mayor Percy Bland, III.

By working with other local arts organizations and using existing resources, the program aims to minimize administrative overhead, thus remaining affordable. The Kennedy Center covers the majority of the cost, and also requires sites to contribute $25,000 toward the first four years of the program. The Riley Foundation and the Phil Hardin Foundation provided the initial funding for Any Given Child Meridian. The first phase of the program is the community’s comprehensive audit of existing arts education resources and needs assessment facilitated by Kennedy Center staff and consultants. Data collection will reveal what arts education resources currently exist and where the gaps are for students. Based on this information, the community creates a plan to bring more access to arts education for all K–8 students. The strategic planning process takes approximately nine months.

“Our children will benefit greatly from this prestigious, national program that ensures each child in Meridian Public School District has access and equity to the arts,” said Meridian Public Schools Superintendent, Dr. Amy J. Carter. “The Kennedy Center program will be a schoolwide reform movement that will involve our whole community and change the lives of our students and thereby transform Meridian itself. I am pleased to say that this opportunity will allow our schools to continue strengthening our partnership with our community.”

During the second phase of the program, a committee of community members makes recommendations to the school district and local arts groups on how to best implement the recently created plan, focusing on increasing arts opportunities for K–8 students. In addition, educators and artists can take advantage of a wealth of resources available from the Kennedy Center, such as classroom lessons with online interactive learning modules and videos available on the Kennedy Center website, and professional development for teachers and teaching artists. The goal of this second
phase is to provide a tapestry of arts education, strategically weaving together existing arts resources within the schools with those available from community providers and the Kennedy Center in order to reach every child.

“Mississippi State University is extremely proud to have been chosen as a Kennedy Center Any Given Child site,” said MSU President Dr. Mark E. Keenum. “This represents a wonderful partnership opportunity for the City of Meridian, the Riley Center, and our university to work together under the leadership of the Kennedy Center. We pledge our support to making this vital initiative successful.”

Since the program’s inception, Any Given Child sites have reported numerous successes: some school districts have hired additional teachers or added staff positions; new sources of funding for arts education have been established; communities have expanded arts offerings for students; and sites have provided professional learning for classroom teachers, arts specialists, and local arts organizations to build their capacity to deliver high quality arts education to students.

In February 2015, the Kennedy Center announced a $1 million gift from Newman’s Own Foundation in honor of A. E. Hotchner and his many contributions to the success of Newman’s Own. The grant established an endowment to help underserved communities participate in the Center’s Ensuring the Arts for Any Given Child program.

In 2009, the Kennedy Center and Mayor Kevin Johnson announced the first formal Any Given Child program in Sacramento, California. The following cities joined subsequently:

- Springfield, Missouri, February 2010
- Portland, Oregon, June 2010
- Southern Nevada, December 2010
- Tulsa, Oklahoma, May 2011
- Sarasota, Florida, June 2011
- Austin, Texas, August 2011
- Iowa City, Iowa, August, 2012
- Baltimore, Maryland, September 2012
- Fresno, California, October 2012
• Juneau, Alaska, February 2013
• Madison, Wisconsin, July 2013
• Missoula, Montana and Jacksonville, Florida, August 2013
• New Orleans, Louisiana and Harrisonburg, Virginia, August 2014
• Houston, Texas, August 2015
• Indianapolis, Indiana and Trenton, New Jersey, September 2015
• Warren, Ohio, November 2015
• San Juan, Puerto Rico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Meridian, Mississippi, September 2016

The Kennedy Center accepts applications between January 1 and March 31 of each year for a program launch in the fall of the same year.

ABOUT EDUCATION AT THE KENNEDY CENTER
The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is the national champion for arts learning and creativity. Committed to increasing opportunities for all people to participate in, learn about, and understand the arts, the Center offers programs and events that strive to reflect the nation, its communities, and that are accessible and inclusive for all. From performances and exhibits on the Center’s stages and in the community, to classroom and community partnerships, to online resources accessible nearly anywhere, the Center serves the burgeoning artist, the exploring student of any age, the teacher and teaching artist, and even the local and national infrastructure—any person interested in arts learning and utilizing the arts for positive change.

The breadth of the Center’s national education programs include: Ensuring the Arts for Any Given Child, which works with 23 municipalities and their school districts around the country to develop a long-range strategic plan for arts education; ARTSEDGE, an online resource offering standards-based materials for use in and out of the classroom; Partners in Education forges relationships between an arts organization and its neighboring school systems to build effective arts education programs for teachers and teaching artists; Explore the Arts provides insight into the cultural and historical context of the works presented on stage and sparks dialogue between audiences and the artists who have created the performances through participatory workshops, demonstrations, panels, master classes, and open rehearsals; the Kennedy Center/Stephen Sondheim Inspirational Teacher Awards acknowledges teachers of grades K-12 whose efforts have made a significant impact on their students; Kennedy Center Theater for Young Audiences on Tour brings original Kennedy Center productions for students and families into communities and performing arts centers around the country; and in 2016, the Center and the
President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities announced a strategic partnership to bring the Turnaround Arts initiative to the Center, which empowers high-need, low-performing schools with innovative arts programming and resources to help address broader school challenges and close the achievement gap.

The Center’s locally based programs serve educators and students with Changing Education Through the Arts, a program that works with seven schools in the area to affect long-term change in school culture through professional learning in arts integration; professional development opportunities for teachers trains educators to teach the arts or other subject areas through the arts; and Washington, D.C. partnership schools, where the Center provides resources and teaching artist residencies to 22 K–12 schools. Additionally, 100 plus events and performances throughout the season are offered for more than 100,000 local school-aged children. As the national performing arts center and a convener of arts and education leaders, its programming also draws from the resources of National Symphony Orchestra, The Suzanne Farrell Ballet, VSA (the international arts and disability organization), Washington National Opera, and the Performances for Young Audiences series.

Believing in the fundamental need to nurture young artists’ growth, the Center offers multiple skill and development programs for students and professionals both locally and nationally including the National Symphony Orchestra’s Youth Fellowship Program, Summer Music Institute, and High School Competition; Washington National Opera’s Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program, Opera Institute, and Kids Create Opera Partnership; the biennial New Visions/New Voices forum for development of new plays for young people; Exploring Ballet with Suzanne Farrell; Betty Carter’s Jazz Ahead; VSA’s Playwright Discovery Program, Young Soloists, and Visual Arts programs; arts administration internships; and the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival which impacts hundreds of thousands of college-aged theater students across the country and marks its 49th anniversary in 2017.

As an essential component of the living memorial to President Kennedy, the Center’s Education Division utilizes the arts to embrace the ideals of service, justice, freedom, courage, and gratitude, and to activate and support the Citizen Artists in all our audiences. For more information, please visit kennedy-center.org/education/.

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