



APRIL SAUL / Staff Photographer

Jazz Bridge, which aids local jazz and blues musicians in crisis, has received small grants for its concert series to present such artists as Odean Pope, left, and Monnette Sudler.

Pa. way off key with bill to gut funding for arts

Suzanne Cloud

is executive director of Jazz Bridge

When the Pennsylvania state House passed the penny-wise, pound-foolish House Bill 1485, I wasn't too surprised, but it didn't keep me from being existentially floored by the stupidity of the effort. Now the budget bill goes to the Senate, and all of us have to wince as they decide if 70 percent of arts funding goes into the big wood chipper of political expediency this month. But I think a small snapshot of what the loss of this funding would mean might tell a compelling story that the legislators would do well to hear.

Jazz Bridge, an organization that aids our local jazz and blues musicians in crisis, presents neighborhood concert series around the area, and we have received small grants (under \$3,000) from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts for the last two years for our eight-concert series at the Cheltenham Center for the Arts. We present the original music of such luminary talents as saxophonists Odean Pope and Ralph Bowen, singers Miss Justine and Denise King, and guitarists Monnette Sudler and Chuck Anderson — all for \$10, \$5 for students.

People bring their kids so they can see and hear live music, an endangered experience these days. Older couples on a very tight budget turn it into a terrific night out and include a meal at nearby restaurants. Music students get to see their favorite musicians up close and chat with them during the Q&A part of the evening. Every concert is an authentic exchange between audience and artist, a collective improvisa-

tion of call and response on a neighborhood scale. Pure joy.

Even more significant, these concerts employed 64 musicians over two years. The money they received was immediately spent and might have paid part of a heating bill, an out-of-pocket doctor visit, or the weekly grocery shopping. And don't forget that the rental we paid to the venue (also a nonprofit) helped its bottom line too. Many possible venues in our area lie fallow because the nonprofits that might rent them do not have the money. Funding gives us the financial wherewithal to take advantage of these underutilized cultural outposts in our midst.

The seed-money grants we received gave us a chance to expand our neighborhood concert series to Mount Airy and Media, providing even more work for local jazz artists and more enjoyment for starving jazz fans.

Before the vote on House Bill 1485, I sent out an e-mail blast to every musician and fan on our contact list imploring them to contact their local legislator to fight the spending cuts. Saxophonist Larry McKenna, one of the patriarchs of the music scene in Philly, phoned me:

"Hey, Sue, I called them. Nobody in the office seemed to know anything about it, but they took my name down. I just wanted you to know."

I said, "Thanks, Larry, but now we all have to pick up the horn and call our state senators."

Can you hear the band, Harrisburg?

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