



**Written Testimony in Support FY 2011 Appropriations for the
National Endowment for the Arts**

Submitted by Kyle MacLachlan, Actor, Director

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies

“Arts Build Communities”

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Good morning Chairman Moran, 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 I am passionate about and just happens to be my job. My name is Kyle MacLachlan. I am an actor and member of the Americans for the Arts Artists Committee.

It gives me great comfort that the former chairman of this committee is a fellow Washingtonian and U-Dub (University of Washington) alum. Any anxiety I had vanished knowing that a former University of Washington football player sits on this panel and is an arts supporter. Also, I want to echo the sentiments of my fellow witnesses in congratulating Chairman Moran on his appointment and your recent appearance on *Hardball* last week.

I am here today along with my esteemed fellow witnesses to talk about how the arts have not only enriched this country, but served as the public support for my professional career. As we toil with the current economic downturn, congressional leaders such as you face the enormous challenge of helping get more of our fellow Americans back to work. It is especially important to me to provide my perspective with you on behalf of those in the creative community who are also facing similar demands on their families.

I am not just speaking for those who have been fortunate enough to have a steady film and acting career in Hollywood and New York, but for those artists and arts educators who dedicate their lives everyday to their craft and their communities across the country. Also, something I know will respectfully get your attention and is sometimes forgotten, they also happen to be taxpayers and constituents caught in meeting the head-on task of providing for a living. It is my hope that by sharing my story I can reinforce that the arts do not only entertain, provoke thought, or provide a means of expression, but they also provide a viable way of making a living and improving communities for our fellow Americans.

Early Years in the Arts

When you have had a long career, it is always important to remember one’s roots and the early breaks that helped shape you. My first memorable experience with the arts was at

the age 10 when my mother “volunteered” my brothers and me to help out at the Yakima Little Theatre in Yakima, WA. She was a board member of the Allied Arts Alliance Council in Yakima (now Allied Arts of Yakima) and in true community theatre fashion, looked to her immediate inner circle to help out with productions—me and my brothers. Somehow my dad managed to avoid enlistment in this community service. The theatre was converted from an apple cold storage warehouse to a vibrant nonprofit performance stage and community resource that my brothers and I would help with during the summer musical.

My experience shares the same themes that Bob and others have shared in their testimony about the value of the arts from different perspectives. It was where I was first exposed to the phenomena of the theatre and performance. Second, it was where I also saw the other essential elements of creating and staging a production. That shed a light on aspects of the creative process. Literally, I shined the light as an amateur lighting man. Also, I did it all—from taking tickets to running the vending counters where the incentive was all-you-can drink soda pop. This was all part of my flashy entrance into the artistic world.

Our little theatre is a prime example of how the arts can have an economic and civic effect on a community. It was a lot of work, but the audiences certainly benefited from its existence, and it gave my mother (and many others like her) a tremendous source of pride in serving her community as well as giving me and my brothers something productive to do after school. Because it was a town hub it also helped generate some activity that quite frankly the old apple storage warehouse didn’t. Whether it was the concessions, the draw of the art exhibit that Allied Arts sponsored, or the extra traffic near the theatre for the shows, it impacted Yakima because the space certainly did not lack activity. I’ve also seen this in my career: When we film in a community, the local economy benefits tremendously from the production’s presence. What is truly important for me was that my involvement in theatre community gave me a foundation in something that would later resonate with my academic pursuits and then into my career. I just didn’t know it at the time.

High School Arts Education

It would not be exactly accurate to say that my experience at the Yakima Little Theatre was life-altering. While I certainly was drawn to it and was provided with some inspiration, I did not set out to be an actor or an artist. Shockingly, I wasn’t 100 percent sure what I specifically wanted to do with my high school education other than probably attend college. At Eisenhower Senior High School in Yakima, I was very involved in our drama group and afterschool theatre and somewhat knew that I really enjoyed this stuff, but was it a career? What I do know is that by performing in *Oklahoma* and *My Fair Lady*, it gave me the confidence to start thinking, “I could do this.” As with most teenagers the future was not foremost in my thoughts at the time. Quite frankly, I didn’t have clue of what I wanted to do.

Only now as I look back do I realize I was lucky that I had those kinds of outlets and programs in my junior and high school. Many kids are not as fortunate as I was to have a place to find their voice in things outside the standard curriculum. Combined with the

dedication of my teachers, performing all of a sudden became an option for me—an option that stuck with me as I entered college.

College Years

With a nod to my fellow U-Dub grad, 1960 Football National Champion, #63 Mr. Dicks, I went to the University of Washington in Seattle to continue my education. Now the University of Washington School of Drama has a profound history and connection to the federal impact on the arts, even besides Mr. Dicks residing on this committee. The Federal Theatre Project (FTP) was a New Deal program funded through the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and designed to provide relief for unemployed theatre artists during the Great Depression. As part of this effort, the University of Washington had two theatres built on campus for this initiative. Those two buildings, the Showboat Theatre and the Penthouse Theatre, were constructed in the 1930s to raise the visibility of the early on-campus drama program. Under the leadership of the first Washington State FTP Regional Director Glenn Hughes, a program that had been initially a division of the English Department, became the hub of actor training and provided staging venues and productions that kept actors refining their craft, but more importantly, kept them *working* during that past economic crisis.

It should be noted that on campus one of those theatres, The Penthouse Theatre, is still in use today and is widely acknowledged as the first in-the-round Art Deco arena stage of its kind.

Against that backdrop, my experience on campus really kicked into gear when I was accepted to the League of Professional Acting Program at U-Dub, a three-year course of intense stage training. I had always applied myself in high school but I didn't think it would lead to an opportunity to be part of this esteemed program that rivaled such acclaimed schools as Julliard and Yale. I had heard about the classes and checked it out. I was simply stunned by the level of quality and it became my goal to get into this program.

Our director, Dr. Robert Hobbs, was instrumental in honing this small group of 10–13 or so actors each academic year into a first-rate group of performers. But Bob also had an eye on our futures too. One of his core beliefs was to bring in regional directors from around the country to direct us in plays while we were still in school. By doing so, Bob had positioned us around the country to be evaluated by directors who would be casting productions in other communities. It is that kind of practical touch that can make a tremendous difference in the career for a working artist and I was lucky to be in a program with instructors that had an expectation were to be *working* actors. That is what we were being groomed for. The love of performing is something you are born with. To be able to provide for yourself and your family is a must.

Career

During school I had summer apprenticeships at several nonprofit professional theatre companies including the Flat Rock Playhouse in the State Theatre of North Carolina and did summer stock in Millbrook, PA, as well at the Lyric Repertory Theatre in Utah for

my senior summer. Each year we were expected to do summer theatre. These little community theatres were essential training in putting practice into action. The constant honing of the craft served me well in being ready for whatever options would be available to me and enhanced my already demanding training.

Because of the reach of our school of our Drama School at Washington, as soon as I graduated college I was able to audition and get a job at the renowned Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, OR. With the amount of student loans that I was facing, I did not have the luxury of pursuing my passion without some compensation! I needed literally be a working artist. To find a professional job right after graduation allowed me to hit the ground running.

When performing repertory theatre like the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, we were asked to switch between three different roles, five to six days a week, battling the elements of outdoor theatre from March through October at \$550 a month. That extra money came in handy with student loans staring me down. I am proud to say that back then, I actually had some net pay to save after rent and expenses. More importantly, I was working and doing what I love. Being able to put into practice all the skills and training that I had acquired through the rigors of the training program back at U-Dub was not unlike an Olympic athlete. After waiting three years for your turn it was your chance to shine and Ashland was a great place put into practice all the hard work. Playing in lead roles such as Octavius in *Julius Caesar* and Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet* was challenging, but because of my training I believe I was up to the task.

It wasn't easy. Parts of the job were tasks like providing back stage tours, but it made me appreciate very early in my career how fortunate I was to be working in my chosen field.

This was, in part, due to the work funded by this subcommittee. Many of these nonprofit theatres that shaped my early career were recipients of NEA grants, either directly or indirectly, through the state and local arts councils. The universally praised Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland is a consistent grant awardee of the NEA. It is not farfetched to say that belief in this incredible festival helped this actor enter society as productive member and pursue his passion. This year, your funding of the NEA will help bring *Hamlet* again to the 2010 Oregon Shakespeare Festival season. I am sure that the working actors, sound technicians, stage managers, wardrobe staff, electricians, carpenters, and vendors feel the impact of those federal funds in bringing high quality performances to the hundreds of thousands of people that make the trek to Ashland each year. I am proud to have been a part of that tradition.

First Film Break/Career

What came next for me will sound like a Hollywood story, only it was true. A casting director called me to her hotel room to audition for the sci-fi epic, *Dune*, directed by the great David Lynch. They were looking for an unknown to play the lead, and well, I fit the bill. As it turns out she had come across my name by contacting many of my mentors in the Seattle; Ashland; and yes, Yakima, stage community, who gave me my first breaks. I look at those experiences as paving the path for my current success.

The rest is, as they say, history. David and I again collaborated on the feature film *Blue Velvet* and the television series *Twin Peaks*, a performance that earned me a Golden Globe Award. I was fortunate to then be playing such icons as Doors' founder and keyboardist Ray Manzarek along side Val Kilmer's Jim Morrison, and Kafka's protagonist Josef K in *The Trial* with Anthony Hopkins. Roles on such hit shows as *Desperate Housewives* and *Sex and the City* along with other roles constantly find me drawing on my education and experiences back in Seattle, Ashland, and Yakima. I look at those experiences as fundamental to my success and have allowed me pursue my life's work.

Conclusion

Let me conclude my remarks first with a heartfelt "thank you" to the subcommittee for their work on behalf of the NEA. You are our champions here in the halls of Congress, and for many of us you hold our livelihoods in your hands. I know that recent years have seen increases in funding and through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act has helped save jobs in the creative workforce. Thank you. I am living proof of the tangible difference supporting these types of programs can make. It is also my hope that my story crystallizes for each of you in real terms that as artists we are working people too.

I join my other colleagues here today in respectfully requesting that this committee allocate \$180 million to the National Endowment for the Arts so that the arts and arts education remain pillars in the communities they serve.

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