



Arts organizations made the headlines this past season, struggling to survive sudden, deep cuts in state and federal funding. What sort of season did chamber music have? Looking toward an uncertain future, presenters want to know what's in the cards.

Last March, a grim Jane Alexander, chairwoman of the incredible shrinking National Endowment for the Arts, toted up for members of the House Appropriations Committee the extent of the damage wrought by Washington's assault on the arts. In real-dollar purchasing power the NEA had been reduced to its 1972 level. Only \$99.5 million was appropriated for fiscal 1996, which the agency translated into a cut of 46 percent to the grant-making portion of the budget. The endowment's music program was particularly bloodied, with only \$4.5 million remaining of what had been a \$10.6 million pot. NEA grants to state arts agencies were reduced by 30 percent, producing a potential double whammy of cuts to local presenters who rely on monies from both state and federal sources.

The doughty presenters of chamber music, however, are not so grim as Ms. Alexander. A CMA survey this spring of nineteen presenters—who offer series large and small, independent and university-affiliated, from Boston to Los Angeles—revealed considerable determination and imagination in the face of these cuts, and even some optimism about the future.

While NEA money is indeed drying up, as are some state funding sources, none of the chamber series surveyed by CMA seems in danger of disappearing. In some cases state governments remain generous, and a handful of state and local governments are stepping in to fill the shortfall in very promising ways. Presenters are also pursuing new corporate funds with vigor, and they are staging clever fundraising events to attract individual donors (see accompanying story).

One sign of health is the realistic way most presenters now assess the NEA. Like savvy players of the stock market who anticipate bad news and make their trades before a public announcement, most of them have long since written off the NEA. "Plan on nothing," says Robert Cole, the director of Cal Performances in Berkeley. "If you get something [from government], that's nice. But it's a bad strategy to count on it. Figure out how to get by without government money." Similarly, Ken Fischer, executive director of the University Musical Society at the University of Michigan, says he never plans on government funds in his budget. "We have never budgeted federal dollars," he says, "so we have always been surprised when we got them."

Among those presenters who have been cut to zero by the NEA are Jacqueline Melnick of the Musicorda Summer Festival in South Hadley, Massachusetts, who lost \$10,000 in a budget of \$340,000; Michael Geller of the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival in Connecticut, who lost \$12,900 in a budget of \$560,000; and John Giovando of Music From Angel Fire in New Mexico, who lost \$10,000 in a budget of \$115,000.

Now that the NEA has promulgated vague new rules for making grant requests, other presenters have decided that it is no longer cost effective to even approach the agency. Grant applications must now be shoehorned into one of four categories: Heritage and Preservation, Creation and Presentation, Education and Access, or Planning and Stabilization. Uncertainty about the meaning of these categories is rife, and the NEA permits only one application per applicant as a way to cut-back the reviewing task for its own reduced staff.