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BRINGING CULTURAL CREATIVITY TO COASTAL GEORGIA



From pairing gourmet food with great film to bringing professional artists directly into schools, Golden Isles Arts & Humanities is opening new windows on the cultural experience in Coastal Georgia.

Like many new nonprofits, we began as an all-volunteer group passionate about the arts. That was 26 years ago. Today we manage the Historic Ritz Theatre for the City of Brunswick and serve as the arts council for Glynn County and the City of Brunswick.



BRINGING CULTURAL CREATIVITY TO COASTAL GEORGIA

HEATHER HEATH

Executive Director,
Golden Isles Arts and Humanities



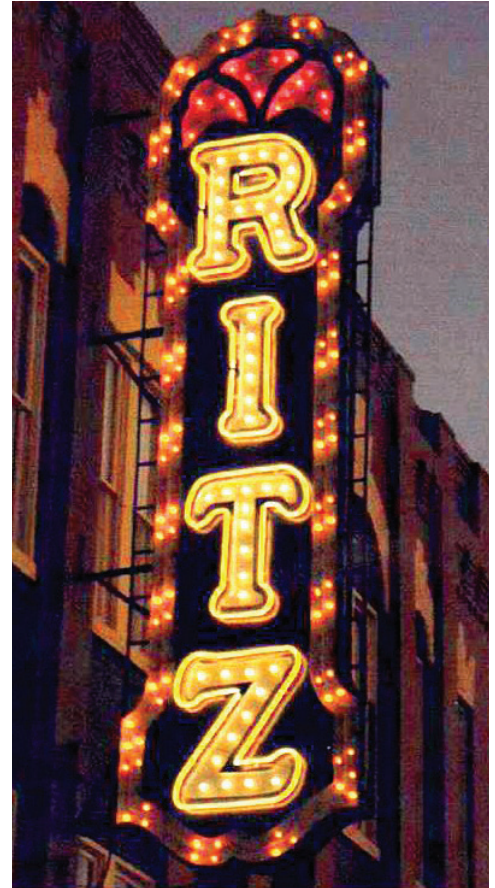
We're always looking for creative ways to engage new audiences in the arts. A terrific example is our involvement with The Big Read – an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts. Designed to bring reading literature back to the center of American culture, each year, we create a month-long, multi-media program centered around a single book or author. Our work is managed by Arts Midwest through a competitive grant program awarded to selected communities around the country. Now in our eighth year, Coastal Georgia Reads features *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston in 2015. Book discussions, film series, guest speakers and special events will take place in Glynn and surrounding counties throughout February. It's a highly anticipated event with attendance on the rise each year.

When the *Maltese Falcon* by Dashiell Hammett was featured, we launched The Ritz Radio Theatre – a live 1940s-style radio broadcast with local actors, period costumes, live sound effects and even commercials from a local sponsor. Audiences were guided to applaud and react as if in a live studio. Performances were recorded and aired later on a local radio station. The concept was so successful, it prompted us to reconsider our annual holiday production. Our third production of *It's A Wonderful Life* and second staging of *A Christmas Carol* became live radio broadcasts and aired on Christmas Day. This spring, The Ritz Radio Theatre returns with *The Wizard of Oz*.

The Big Read also involves students of all ages through The Middle and Little Big Read. Two companion books appropriate for young readers are highlighted with free copies of all books and high-quality teaching materials distributed at no cost to schools.

Another popular initiative born during the Big Read is Cinema Gourmet where we blend food and film. We led with *Pinot Noir and Noir* – a wine tasting and discussion about film noir with a screening of *Out of the Past*. More than 200 people turned out. With help from a local chef at Indigo Coastal Shanty, a list of must-see films was developed. Now in its third year, Cinema Gourmet typically sells out. All programs have a common thread; they build a sense of community. Patrons aren't just watching; they're actively participating in a shared cultural experience while enjoying food and drink, and learning why *Sunset Boulevard* is a timeless film classic.

Other highlights include Jazz in the Park, an outdoor summer concert series; a Summer Classic Movies series at the Ritz; in-depth theatre and film camps for kids fill the summer months; and an upcoming exhibit of candid presidential photographs by the late New York Times photographer George Tames is planned.



We'll also offer Cultural Expressions 2015 featuring art by local and regional African-American artists. With The Ritz Theatre available for rent, other community groups make sure something is going on almost every weekend. Why do so much? We're committed to bringing arts experiences here that might not come to this part of Georgia. Finally, a commitment to arts education is central to our mission. Since 1997 Golden Isles Arts & Humanities has sponsored in-school arts programs in all 10 elementary schools and all four middle schools in Glynn County. We reach about 9,000 students each year by booking professional performing, literary and visual artists for workshops, performances and residencies at no cost to schools. Field trips to experience live theater at the Historic Ritz are also provided to schools every year.

To promote the visual arts, The Ritz Gallery showcases our young people's creativity with two exhibits a year exclusively dedicated to student work.

In another annual show, student work hangs with art by local professional artists. We also produce an annual showcase of teachers' art to welcome the new school year.

We could not accomplish all this without support from great partners – The City of Brunswick, The College of Coastal Georgia, Marshes of Glynn Library System, Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation, St. Simons Literary Guild, local media, our board of directors and our members and patrons.

With their encouragement, Golden Isles Arts & Humanities remains at the center of cultural life in Brunswick and the Golden Isles.





EYEDRUM ART AND MUSIC GALLERY: LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

PRISCILLA SMITH

Executive Director



That's art!" one of our patrons said on an advance tour of Eyedrum Art and Music Gallery's new home. He was pointing to a pile of trash. It was one of the smaller heaps of detritus accumulated over seven years that the 1913 building was vacant.

"How did all that stuff get here?" he asked. "What's the story behind it? What if an artist changed just one thing? Just one thing." Thus, Existing Conditions was conceived — Eyedrum's inaugural show in our new home base.

The patron put his money behind his vision by commissioning 19 artists to search the 9,000 square-foot space to create installations, music, assemblages and performances. The curatorial directive was to "re-contextualize" what was there. The results were "ingenious" according to one critic for highlighting the art in its context.

That story exemplifies the innovative spirit of Eyedrum throughout its 16-year history. As the early pioneers — known as the Original Eight — expanded to larger spaces, they were encouraged by their initial success, and incorporated as a 501(c)3 nonprofit. (See Ben Johnson's article on Eyedrum's origins).

By 2002, pushing the limits of their space again, Eyedrum moved to still larger digs—a huge warehouse with plenty of parking.

Eyedrum ultimately filled the 10,000-square-foot warehouse with ideas, colors, sounds and a vibrant community. More than 150 events were produced. We received the first grant ever awarded in the South from the Andy Warhol Foundation. Our first juried

exhibition was drawn from a national call for artists. We collaborated with Georgia Tech, Agnes Scott, Georgia State and the Hammonds House Museum of African American Art.

On the music and performance side, Eyedrum provided a home for "instant composition"—music created on the spot the first Thursday of every, single month. The music/noise label Table of the Elements presented a weekend-long festival that included an orchestra of local guitarists, Tony Conrad and a recording of Beethoven's 9th Symphony stretched out algorithmically to last 24 hours. And that's barely scratching the surface.

After eight years, the building's owners wouldn't renew the lease. (A martial arts school is there now). We became itinerant artists searching for a home in over 40 locations, borrowing galleries, programming music in bars, living rooms and warehouses. The Goat Farm generously gave Eyedrum a place to produce music events.

While participating in C4 Atlanta's FUSE Arts Center — co-working space for artists — Eyedrum discovered the joys of being part of downtown Atlanta's rebirth. We found a building for sale in a great location at an affordable price.

Then fate smiled. As Eyedrum searched for funds to make the purchase, the owners came forward with an ideal situation — thanks to advice from Camille Love, director of the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs of the City of Atlanta. They offered a seven-year lease for \$1 a year. Eyedrum said yes.

It's no coincidence that the building's owners also own the adjacent parking deck and multiple lots nearby. When people visit us on nights and weekends, our guests often use their paid parking that would otherwise be empty.

For more than 15 years, Eyedrum defied the odds by maintaining a full calendar of high-quality, groundbreaking events and exhibitions with an all-volunteer staff. Since November, the curatorial and programming efforts of the artist-led board of directors were bolstered by a paid executive director. Foundations and other funders that previously passed over Eyedrum can now give the game-changing Atlanta force a serious look.

While Eyedrum has historically been the center of a community of forward-thinking artists and patrons, the downtown storefronts at 88 Forsyth Street have already demonstrated considerable value as an attraction for new audiences. Residents of downtown lofts, apartments and condos welcome the new activity in their neighborhood, happy to have an arts venue within walking distance. Office workers from the many governmental towers surrounding Eyedrum are attracted by the activity. And passersby — travelers arriving by Greyhound, suburbanites headed to Centennial Park for festivals and conventioners out exploring — are all curious to find out who we are.

We're energized by the neighborhood and the sheer volume of art Eyedrum is generating. It's an amazing moment in Eyedrum's evolution as we continue to take our place in Atlanta's growing arts scene.

FINDING EYEDRUM'S FUNDRAISING VOICE



ANN-LAURA PARKS

In the early 2000s, I was new to Atlanta and didn't know many people but I did know I wanted to be involved with Eyedrum. I was drawn to the adventurous and diverse programming, welcoming environment and lack of pretension. I offered my skills as a fundraiser to Hormuz Minina and Nisa Asokan, board chair and vice-chair at the time, and before long, I was on the board myself.

Being on the Eyedrum board was like having a second, unpaid job. Everyone was expected to work events, serve on a committee, attend board meetings, and make a financial contribution according to their ability. (Deadweight/seat-warmers did not last long—we couldn't afford them.) We met monthly and used an email list-serve to communicate about day-to-day issues. Most people wanted to develop programming awhile a handful of us were more interested in operations. Thanks to our dedicated volunteers, all critical tasks were covered.

With the wide range of personalities, work styles and the prevailing free-wheeling attitude, I quickly learned to let go of expectations regarding process and order. This presented a challenge for fundraising since event details more than a month in advance were scarce to nonexistent. There was also skepticism from some board members who felt Eyedrum was too weird for the philanthropic community and no one would ever give us money.

Our first grant applications were submitted to the Fulton County Arts Council and the Atlanta Office of Cultural Affairs with low expectations. When I announced that both proposals were funded, I recall surprise and excitement. It proved Eyedrum could be successful with traditional fundraising. We were soon receiving grant support from the Georgia Council for the Arts, the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation and more. We also collected matching gifts from employers of individual donors when available. Turner Broadcasting's employee giving program was an especially good fit.

By the time I left the board, successful fundraising proposals were being developed by others—most notably the request for \$30,000 awarded from the Andy Warhol Foundation in 2006. Credit for securing the Warhol Foundation's first ever gift in the South goes to Robert Cheatham, Woody Cornwell, Stan Woodard and the visual arts committee. It was rewarding to see the growth of fundraising confidence and expertise. I knew Eyedrum was in good hands.

Ann-Laura Parks, CFRE, helps nonprofits be their best through monstrous fundraising and communications (Be Monsterful.com). She served on the Eyedrum board from 2002 to 2007. Find her on Twitter at @BeMonsterful.



ONE OF THE ORIGINAL EYEDRUM EIGHT REFLECTS ON THE GROUP'S ORIGINS

BEN YOUNG

Eyedrum was the brain child of eight Atlanta artists, musicians, mavens and maniacs, many transplanted from places around the south (some were from Dalton, some just graduated from SCAD or Florida State). We all knew each other, hanging around town at free-thought centers like Moreland Avenue Tavern, Red Light Cafe, Frijolero's and Dottie's.

Everybody has their own origin story I'm sure, but how I remember it is, Marshall Avett and I were in Zurich in 1998 and heard about young people who rioted for their own performance and exhibition space, which we thought was really cool; you don't hear much about riots in Switzerland. They were given a place for art shows and classes with a bar and music venue, and it was awesome.

Marshall and Woody Cornwell were showing art and hosting concerts in their loft on Trinity Avenue, known as Silver Ceiling because it had one, that were drawing crowds. So when Rachel Pomberg got six more of us together it was an easy decision to do Eyedrum next door, an expanded space that could host multiple shows.

All eight of us kicked in \$100 a month, which covered rent; we built it out ourselves (thanks to board member Bill Spence) and paid for touring bands by taking donations for drinks and passing the hat.

Basically Marshall and I booked the music while Woody and Rachel (who also named the space) booked the art. Anyone could make their voice heard however; it was a truly democratic affair. Artist collectives from Savannah and Boston did shows, yet it was mostly local artists like William Downs and Charles Nelson.

I fondly remember open improv nights, which attracted some of the hottest musicians in town from nearby Georgia State University. Our music was diverse, with shows by Caroliner Rainbow, Kidd Jordan, Fly Ashtray and Don Caballero as well as locals Azure Ray, Of Montreal, San Agustin and The Rockateens. It was a real feel good experience that I often compare to Kroffworld, the short-lived, big budget amusement park at the Omni in the '70s.

Becoming a non-profit made sense (board member Robert Cheatham was instrumental to that effort). A big part of our vision was to make art accessible to people who didn't have thousands to spend on one painting, and make art shows as fun as music shows — a return to multimedia, late '60s "happening" aesthetics.

The original Eyedrum Eight scattered but since it was all handshakes and honor system, people could peel off and on if they needed to, as I did in 2002. I'm delighted the group is still flourishing, that the City of Atlanta supports it, and that it has spawned similar spaces like WonderRoot and Mammal Gallery. At the time it was the breath of fresh air Atlanta needed, bridging our art and music communities, and connecting different generations of hell raising sophisticates.

It could have happened in any other city, but it wouldn't have been as cool.

BUILDING ARTSGEORGIA'S MEMBERSHIP



WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER.

As an ArtsGeorgia member, you join other artists, administrators, patrons, educators and advocates and gain access to our valuable resources, initiatives, services and alerts. When Georgia's arts community speaks with one voice on the importance of increased arts funding, especially for our children, everyone wins.

We also offer memberships for arts organizations, giving extra benefits to your Board Chair and Executive Director, or another staff member you choose. Additional resources and opportunities to communicate with your peers are among the benefits. We welcome all arts groups including local arts councils, government arts programs, colleges and universities and all of Georgia's diverse nonprofits.

State arts funding was at its highest when Georgia Citizens for the Arts had its most members! Join ArtsGeorgia so we can work together to once again achieve greater support across our state for artists and arts education. Visit artsgeorgia.net/home/membership/

It's true. Georgia is dead last again this year in state spending on the arts — an unfortunate distinction. The word from the Gold Dome is the issue of an increase in state arts funding still won't be addressed in the 2015 legislative session as other priorities continue to take precedence. That's why it's so important for arts advocates to stick together. Our recent membership campaign says it all.

Arts Advocacy 2015

PUBLIC AWARENESS

ArtsGeorgia launches the 2015 Arts Advocacy Campaign with six new stickers. We encourage you to display these removable vinyl stickers on your car bumper or window. Choose your favorite art medium and help raise awareness of the arts as a vital industry and prized asset in every community. New members receive their choice of two stickers plus other benefits.



ARTS ADVOCACY HANDBOOK

This valuable handbook for arts advocates, the first of its kind in Georgia, is updated with the latest contact information for state legislators. Also included are examples of powerful letters to support the arts and why.



GEORGIA ARTS DIRECTORY

We also plan a statewide directory of Georgia's arts community. An advisory group is in place to guide the process. Their input will determine the scope of the project, which groups will be listed, how much information to include and the format for the end result.

Our intention is to offer one more tool to unify the arts community and make art more accessible to everyone.

STATE OF THE ARTS NEWSLETTER

Now in our third year of publication, our newsletter continues to tell the stories of arts groups around the state with a sharp focus on what's new and where we find success. So far, we've featured arts groups in Rabun Gap, Sautee Nacoochee, Gainesville, Athens, Atlanta, Stone Mountain, Douglasville, Carrollton, Columbus, Buena Vista, Macon, Statesboro and Brunswick. Archive of all issues: artsgeorgia.net/news-2/artsgeorgia-newsletter/





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STATE OF THE ARTS™

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Coastal Georgia Reads

THE BIG READ

Their Eyes Were Watching God
By Zora Neale Hurston

February 2015

ART WORKS. **Arts** MIDWEST

Book Discussions, Speakers, Film Series,
Concerts, and more throughout
Coastal Georgia!

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