

# The Washington Post

## Web audience grows for arts groups

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Americans are increasingly choosing the Internet and other new media to enjoy the arts, a new national survey has found.

While many adults still like the intimacy of live theater, particularly musical theater, over the past year an estimated 47 million of them chose to watch or listen to music, theater or dance performances online at least once a week. The results of the National Endowment for the Arts survey of arts habits, which are scheduled for release Thursday, show that while many arts disciplines remain popular, the mode of delivery is rapidly changing.

"It sends a message to us that technology is increasing access to the arts, not only to artmaking, but also arts participation," said Joan Shigekawa, NEA's senior deputy chairman. "Now you are no longer geographically bound to see a live performance. Also, there is something about this technology that emboldens people to express themselves."

In Washington, arts organizations are already responding to the public's new habits.

For the past 12 years, the Kennedy Center has broadcast its nightly Millennium Stage performances and maintains video archives of most of those performances on its Web site. The center also posts "look-ins," in which cast members from main-stage productions discuss their shows and methods.

Taking a cue from the movie business, both the Kennedy Center and the Shakespeare Theatre Company are posting trailers of current productions on their Web sites. STC, along with groups such as Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, are using YouTube and social-networking media as well. At Lerman, the staff has discovered that posting short clips has been successful in multiple ways. The dance audience can glimpse what the company is doing, and booking agents can also get a preview, said Ben Eiserike, the group's communications manager.

The Smithsonian American Art Museum

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already has almost half of its collection digitized and online. Viewers can zoom in on a work and then listen to commentary by artists and scholars. Meanwhile, the National Gallery of Art's Web site is undergoing a wholesale revamping, getting bells and whistles such as a mix-and-match game for young viewers that utilizes the museum's collection. NGA uses its Web site and YouTube to circulate audio and video clips of programs and tours.

The NEA survey -- which polled 18,000 adults -- also revealed that more people appear to be creating their own art. The numbers of enthusiasts engaging in photography, videography and filmmaking increased to 15 percent last year, a climb from 12 percent in 1992. The availability of digital media, said NEA researchers, accounted for that increase. For years, weaving and sewing were the most common forms of personal art expression (and 30 million adults still participate in them, the survey found).

With the struggling economy and more electronic access to the arts, the survey found that live audience attendance has slipped in some sectors. Overall, only 35 percent of adults attended at least one arts performance in the past year, compared to the 2002 level of 39 percent. The study also found that audiences at arts performances remain older, but even older Americans -- specifically 45-to-54-year-olds -- cut back

on arts activities, musical theater being a notable exception. (It appears that "Cats" really *will* be now and forever.)

Art museums continue to be a popular destination, but not quite as much as in the past. The NEA reported 23 percent of adults went to an art museum, a decline from 26 percent in 2002. Among the bigger surprises for NEA researchers were the changes among female arts patrons. Women stepped back from their art museum attendance, dropping from 28.2 percent in 2002 to 24 percent in 2008.

"This is the first time we saw that decline," said Sunil Iyengar, the agency's director of research. This is despite the fact that women are still the leading creators of art -- more than 60 percent of painting, drawing, sculpting and printmaking is done by women. In fact, jazz is the only area in

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which men outpace women. "Seventy-two percent of the people who create jazz or perform are men," Iyengar said.

And the news is even worse for the performing arts, where attendance continues to be poor. Over the year of the survey (May 2007 to May 2008) only 9 percent attended a classical music concert, with 8 percent taking in a jazz performance, 7 percent a dance or ballet, 5 percent a Latin or salsa event, and 2 percent an opera.

This is the sixth time since 1982 that the NEA has worked with the U.S. Census Bureau to include questions on arts participation in the bureau's surveys, and also the first time participation in Latin, salsa or Spanish music was measured.

Among young adults 18 to 24 years old, the survey found one reason to shout: More of them are now reading literature. "Over the last 20 years there has been a measurable decline in the percentage of young adults reading literature. For the first time we saw an uptick," Iyengar said. And yes, the young adults are reading online.

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