



CELEBRATING THE JOY OF DANCING ON ICE

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Statements to submit in support of arts funding to the
NYS Legislature hearing on Economic Development, and Arts
Thursday February 9, 2023

My name is Jirina Ribbens. I am the Executive Director of Ice Theatre of New York, Inc. ® (ITNY) in New York, NY. I am writing to request robust support for NYSCA and for capital funding for culture.

Ice Theatre of New York was founded in Manhattan in 1984. While we are still based in Chelsea, we provide live programming in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens, as well as virtual programming citywide. ITNY also performs on Long Island and in Lake Placid, NY. We are part of the diverse identities of the communities we serve. We support local artists, cross-market with local businesses, and employ about 40 artists every year.

ITNY is a non-profit organization whose mission is to create and advance dancing on ice as an ensemble performing art through its professional dance company, collaborating with choreographers and other artists, and presenting public performances and classes to people of all ages. We aim to inspire people to experience the balance, flow and flight of dancing on ice and to engage in a lifelong healthy activity.

Founded by Maira North, Ice Theatre of New York created the first not-for-profit professional ice dance company in the U.S. and was the first to receive funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

ITNY has been instrumental in changing the face of figure skating by creating works that integrate the sensibilities of contemporary dance, music and art; challenging the perceptions and conventional definitions of figure skating. ITNY represents NYC in its diversity and international flavor that welcomes the contribution of its talented immigrant artists and models the creative and athletic health of the district in its positive embodiment across a spectrum of ethnicity, race, gender expression and sexuality.

Our Company of 10-12 professional dancers, guest performers, and choreographers. Ice Theatre of New York is committed to increasing diversity in skating. Our ensemble includes Black, Puerto Rican, Mexican and Asian American artists.

ITNY creates ice dance performances with its professional ensemble, trains professional and recreational ice artists and does outreach for at-risk NYC public school children, serving about 1500 children each year.

Here are some testimonials about all facets of our cultural programming:

"Since 1984, Ice Theatre of New York has been dedicated to the development and promotion of figure skating as a performing art. Through community outreach, this organization enables New York City's public school children to get out on the ice and learn to skate. The New Works and Young Artists Series is widely recognized as an innovative educational program that utilizes figure skating as an effective and empowering confidence-builder and teaching tool."

Governor Kathy Hochul - 2022

"Thank you for maintaining a passion for beauty, art, and the unique sport of figure skating. We are all so fortunate to have skating in our lives and the incredibly dedicated skating family to which we all belong. Congratulations to Moira and the entire Board."

Vera Wang

"Once again thank you for allowing Zoe to participate in your concert. As always, she had a wonderful time and it was a beautiful experience for both of us. We are both happy she had the opportunity to show her love of skating in such a positive light with a wonderful company."

Jennifer Steinmuller, mother of a young apprentice performer

"Philip (Glass) is over the moon. Laurie (Anderson) was over the moon. I don't think we could have wished for a better celebration and your work and community brought quite a bit of magic into the room and made it all work. The combination of the stunning professional skaters with random New Yorkers and a robust community of artists and colleagues from Philip's history and life was magnificent. THANK YOU for your wonderful collaboration, vision and professionalism."

Linda Brumbach, Founder and Director Pomegranate Arts

"The students enjoyed the show very much and were very impressed with the ice skaters. It was extremely generous that the students who wanted to skate were able to do so at no cost being that we were a special ed school in a high need area. It was great for all the students to experience something new that they would never have had the opportunity to experience otherwise."

Jamie Kaufman, Teacher – her class participated in the New Works and Young Artists Series at Denny Farrell Riverbank State Park in Harlem

"Once again thank you for allowing Zoe to participate in your concert. As always, she had a wonderful time and it was a beautiful experience for both of us. We are both happy she had the opportunity to show her love of skating in such a positive light with a wonderful company."

Jennifer Steinmuller, mother of a young apprentice performer

"Ensemble groups like Ms. North's Ice Theatre of New York® may be the best hope for the future simply because they recall what skating has the potential to be: dancing on air."

Gia Kourlas, NY Times

The above testimonies underline why New York State needs to invest in culture and the arts. We want the best and the brightest stars in the best and the brightest star in the world to share our dancing on ice with the public.

Now is the time to invest in a continued recovery so that our cultural centers can continue to lead us to a robust and thriving future. Last year NY State distributed \$100M for arts programming through NYSCA. And an additional investment of \$150M in capital funding for cultural groups. We must have that funding renewed if we are to continue to do the work of rebuilding NY's economy and communities. A cut of the size proposed in the Executive Budget would be devastating to our recovery.

Again, we urge you to baseline FY23's level for NYSCA program and capital expense funding, which would represent just 0.1% of the FY24 state budget. Cutting it to \$40M as proposed would jeopardize communities statewide, and our standing as the nation's cultural capital. Compare these cuts to the proposed extension of tax breaks for commercial theater and film/TV producers, coupled with the payroll tax increases to fund this budget rather than commonsense revenue-raising reforms that would ensure that the wealthiest New Yorkers and corporations pay their fair share - this budget seems to pick winners and losers, enriching the already-powerful and devaluing the nonprofit arts in the process. We provide so much to the state with such modest support, and we deserve a budget that reflects our value.

Sincerely,



Jirina Ribbens,
Executive Director