

# THE STATE OF THE ARTS IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

Thursday, March 7, 2024

**Brian May, Chairman**  
**Miami-Dade County Cultural Affairs Council**

This address comes at a moment of tremendous change in our World. Monumental shifts across America are occurring politically, economically, socially, environmentally and culturally. As the Pandemic fades further into our rear-view mirror, the world grapples with war, soaring inflation; political polarization; depletion of our natural resources; and inequality across the board.

It is true that the arts are always a reflection of society and of the times; and remind us that as human beings our experience is ultimately a shared one. In the arts we find not only an endless supply of passion, imagination and creativity – but also a limitless supply of grit, determination and will to make good things happen.

I often tell people that if you want to find an example of how to do something impactful with limited resources, or bootstrap your organization, then come visit one of the over 1,000 Miami-Dade County cultural groups and thousands of artists that do these things well day after day.

In Miami-Dade, our cultural story spans decades – starting with the founding of some of our oldest cultural institutions, including The M Ensemble, the oldest Black theater company in the State of Florida; The Black Archives, founded by Dr. Dorothy Fields in 1977, and its Historic Lyric Theater which just celebrated its 111<sup>th</sup> birthday; Sosyete Koukouy, preserving Haitian culture for four decades; Diaspora Vibe Cultural Arts Incubator cultivating the work of Caribbean artists for the last 30 years; History Miami, established in 1940; and Florida Grand Opera, which was founded the following year, and whose 1951 production of Carmen inaugurated the stage of the then brand-new Miami-Dade County Auditorium in Little Havana.

This year, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of our award-winning Art in Public Places program, now with over a thousand works by renowned artists. Under the longtime leadership of Mr. Marshall Davis, our African Heritage Cultural Arts Center in Liberty City is celebrating five decades of producing stellar alumni, including Robert Battle, who recently retired after 12 years as the Artistic Director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, and Tarrell Alvin McCraney, winner of an Academy Award for the Oscar-winning movie “Moonlight.” Last month, we celebrated the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Coconut Grove Arts Festival, led by cultural champion, Monty Trainer. I want to recognize Monty as a current Council Member and long-time, tireless advocate for the arts. Thank you, Monty.

Miami-Dade County is also home to many wonderful galleries, studio spaces and private collections, from The Rubell Museum and El Espacio 23 in Allapatah to The De La Cruz Collection, which opened 15 years ago in Miami’s Design District, and many many more. Today, we want to acknowledge the passing of Rosa De La Cruz, who, along with her husband Carlos, generously opened up their private collection to share with the world, and we thank them for that.

And these are only parts of our story. Our cultural life is deep, bold and rich in flavor. So, make no mistake - our arts community is strong. There is no doubt Miami-Dade has arrived as a major cultural player in the world.

This past December after Art Basel Miami Beach, The New York Times declared: “Miami Has Matured into a Cultural Capital.” “Miami has established itself as part of the constellation of cities worldwide known for their arts and culture. Paris, London and New York had a head start getting into this elite club, with their storied museums and centuries-long commitment to arts. But no one has made an entrance quite as striking as Miami’s.”

In just one generation, Miami-Dade County has built an entire cultural life and a solid foundation for the future. But in order to firmly take our place among world-class cultural capitals, we need to ensure a stable support system for the arts, from our major institutions to our homegrown community groups; and from our international festivals and facilities to our local artists.

In 2020, and for the first time in history, we elected the first-ever woman as County Mayor, Mayor Daniella Levine Cava. And since then, we have welcomed an almost entirely new County Commission. Led by Chairman Oliver Gilbert, our County Commission is now more diverse and reflective of our community than ever, and I am proud to say our new Commission has been a strong supporter of culture. And we thank them for that.

We also have new Cultural Affairs Council Members. Our Council, appointed by the County Commission, serves as the volunteer advisory board for our Department of Cultural Affairs. And I want to thank all of our Councilors for their hard work.

We also have new leadership for the Department. Longtime Director, Michael Spring, widely regarded as the architect of our cultural story over the past 40 years, just retired. I want to personally thank Michael for his distinguished public service. For four decades, Michael was a tireless advocate, creative thinker, innovative problem solver, and, most important, always a gentleman. And today, we are a better arts community because of him.

Michael was succeeded by his Deputy Director, Marialaura Leslie. Marialaura is a 20-year County veteran and the first Latina and first woman Director. The Department also recently gained a new Deputy Director, Ashlee Thomas, the first Black woman in the Deputy role and an alum of our very own African Heritage Cultural Arts Center. I want to personally thank Mayor Levine Cava for appointing Marialaura as Director and Ashlee as her Deputy. I know I speak for the entire Council in saying that they have our complete confidence and support.

The effectiveness and success of the Department undoubtedly lies in our extraordinarily dedicated staff, and I would be remiss if I didn’t thank each and every one of them for their work.

This time of transition opens the door for new strategies for supporting the arts. As we look towards the next 20 years, we must have a clear vision of the future we want to create, building upon the solid foundation that has been carefully put together. That foundation is built upon a portfolio of 23 grants programs carefully calibrated to equitably support cultural groups, programs for children and youth, including kids with disabilities, individual artists, and major institutions. Our foundation is also built upon the continued, steadfast support from our Mayor and County Commission who understand the transformative power of the arts and provide the funding for our grants programs. And I want to thank them for doing so. Moving forward, we will need the Mayor and Commission to continue to fortify our grants program with increased funding to help our grantees catch up with ever-increasing operational costs and inflation, that unfortunately, are a lingering challenge.

As we work together to find solutions to these challenges, I want to particularly thank the Mayor, Chairman Gilbert, and the entire Commission, for stepping up and being there to support our arts community during the pandemic and after.

We also turn to our funding partners who have also stepped up, organizations like the Knight Foundation, The Children's Trust, Funding Arts Network, The Miami Foundation, the Jorge M. Perez Family Foundation, and so many more. We appreciate you and all our private sector partners for the work you do every day to solidify Miami-Dade's cultural ecosystem.

The question for us now is "what's next? what is our vision for the future and what is our plan to make it happen?"

Mayor Levine Cava has asked us to take a fresh look at the delivery systems for arts and culture in Miami-Dade County, encouraging us to seek new ways to equitably engage and innovatively promote our cultural life – asking us to ensure that our residents and visitors can enjoy affordable and equitable access to excellent cultural activities - and to ensure we do so with a mindful emphasis on under-resourced, under-privileged and underserved communities.

I am pleased to share that Mayor Levine Cava, with the support of the Commission and the Cultural Affairs Council, has announced a new strategic plan: Arts Energize 305: A New Vision for Greater Cultural Equity in Miami-Dade County.

Arts Energize 305 centers equity at all levels of the work of our Department and our cultural organizations and artists, spreading the positive economic and social impacts of the arts throughout Miami-Dade County.

Arts Energize 305 will incorporate a number of key strategies to move our arts community forward:

- Increase support for cultural institutions, arts groups and artists;

- Develop more arts spaces and cultural venues throughout the community for artists and arts organization to create, rehearse, produce, and exhibit their work; and

- Engage all residents in accessible and affordable arts activities while offering first-rate arts, festivals and cultural events for our visitors.

Arts Energize 305 also calls for collaboration and partnership as a strategy for success. As an arts community we do a good bit of it now, but we need to take it to another level in order to grow the arts throughout the community.

As part of the Arts Energize 305 plan, we are prioritizing greater connectivity for arts groups, in an effort to encourage partnerships and collaboration. In concert with the Arts and Business Council of Miami, we are publishing a new online Cultural Resource Directory with a listing of all of Miami-Dade's artistic, heritage, historical and cultural organizations and spaces, including art-centric businesses. Designed to build connections and collaborations, the Directory also provides the general public with a free searchable database of cultural opportunities in neighborhoods across the County. You can visit the beta site now at [www.DiscoverMiamiDadeArts.org](http://www.DiscoverMiamiDadeArts.org).

After taking office in 2020, Mayor Daniella Levine Cava realigned the structure of the Mayor's Office and moved the Department of Cultural Affairs under her Community Services portfolio. There, the arts are a part of a portfolio of critical service departments such as Housing, Human Services and Libraries, under the leadership of Cathy Burgos, our Chief Community Services Officer. This strategic alignment naturally promotes new collaborations throughout County government.

A great example of our interagency partnerships is our Golden Ticket Arts Guide, which provides our senior residents with free admission to cultural events in partnership with the Mayor's Office; our County Commissioners; Library System; Parks Department; Transportation and Public Works, and hundreds of nonprofit arts organizations. This year, the Mayor and Commission increased their support of the program enabling us to bring the Golden Ticket Arts Guide to 25,000 older adults in our County.

The arts have a positive impact on the well-being of older adults, and I am pleased to share that with the Community Action and Human Service Department, and as a part of Arts Energize 305, we are launching a program to bring performances directly to older adults in their 20 senior centers in low-income areas.

Another new Arts Energize 305 inter-departmental initiative is an innovative collaboration with our Miami-Dade Police Department to provide wellness activities through the arts for Miami-Dade Police Officers. The program will engage expressive artists, social service agencies and mental health and public safety professionals to help design and implement the program for our first responders.

When we think of the arts, what most typically comes to mind are images of exceptional beauty and talent – like masterful paintings, elegant dancing, cultural heritage celebrations and magnificent music. The arts are entertaining and fun. What we may not see immediately is that the arts also drive significant positive economic impact. Nationally, have an overall economic impact of \$151.7 billion each year. In Florida alone the arts are a \$5.8 billion industry and represent more than 91,000 jobs.

Our major institutions, local artists, nonprofit cultural organizations, elected officials and philanthropic partners are putting our community on the map as a global center of cultural commerce.

We just completed a national economic impact study conducted by Americans for the Arts, and our results are impressive! I am proud to report that, according to the Arts and Economic Prosperity 6 study, the arts in Miami-Dade County generate a staggering economic impact of \$2.1 billion and employ more than 32,000 full-time jobs each year - that represents more than a third of the arts jobs in the entire State of Florida. In fact, I am pleased to share the exciting news that outside of New York and Los Angeles, Miami-Dade has the highest cultural economic impact of any community in America. Folks, that is outstanding and speaks volumes to how far we have come.

The study affirms that participation in the arts in Miami-Dade County is at an all-time high, with over 20 million people attending our cultural events each year, including 4.2 million tourists that come to Miami to experience our cultural life. We are grateful to have an award-winning cultural tourism partnership with the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau, led by President and CEO David Whitaker. This includes our comprehensive online events calendar where residents and visitors alike can find first-rate cultural activities for the whole family at [www.MiamiAndBeaches.org/events](http://www.MiamiAndBeaches.org/events).

Let me close by saying that as I look around this room, I see a lot of diversity. Let us always remember that our vibrant cultural diversity is our calling card in Miami-Dade. It provides a richness to our shared identity and is the basis for our unique artistic style and creative voice. As we look to what's ahead, let us rally around that shared identity and unite in our collective unwavering commitment to the arts.

Arts Energize 305 is a blueprint for artistic resilience, cultural sustainability and continued growth that requires collaboration and partnership between all of us.

It is a call to action for us to commit to a future where culture thrives, diversity flourishes and the arts are an integral part of our shared experience - in every neighborhood and every corner of our community.

I will finish by simply saying "THANK YOU", to each and every one of you, for your enduring commitment and unrelenting efforts to ensure that the arts in Miami-Dade continue to reach new heights.