

ACTIVE ARTS

AT THE MUSIC CENTER



Dance Downtown

PHOTO BY JOHN MCCOY

The glorious noise of music, dance, story, and song that has enlivened the Music Center for the past three years returns with a new 2008 Active Arts series.

Initially launched as a novel gateway into the performing arts, Active Arts has become a second home to Angelenos wishing to flex their creative muscles while meeting like-minded people.

Active Arts' key participatory programs—*Dance Downtown*, *Drum Downtown*, *Get Your Chops Back*, *Friday Night Sing-Alongs*, and *L.A. Storytellers*—explore the flip side of the Music Center's formal arts presentations. For some aficionados, theater-going or concert attendance is a largely passive experience. Active Arts people seek a new, more participatory experience ("I always wanted to sing!") or aspire to revitalize dormant skills ("Where is my high school clarinet, anyway?").



Friday Night Sing-Along

PHOTO BY ALEX PITT

Active Arts offers learning and creativity, but it's also about enjoying the ride with others, stress-free, with no tangible goal required. There's no final exam. The point is to dig in, roll up your sleeves, and live life now.

Regarded as a mainstay in downtown's lively arts landscape, the programs don't only attract local residents. People drive in from all over L.A., bucking the traffic for a free, high-quality urban outing. Especially in summer months, outdoor dance and drum sessions swing pleasantly in L.A.'s temperate climate.

Phyllis Cheng, a Century City attorney, is a volunteer with Active Arts as well as a participant. "I've formed true friendships in the *Sing-Alongs* and the *LA Storytellers* group," Cheng says. "Our group comprises a huge swath of life from all over Los Angeles and I like that," she notes.

Richard Harris agrees. A Cal Poly Pomona instructor who lives in Signal Hill, Harris is an amateur guitarist who plugs into top-notch instruction in the *Get Your Chops Back* guitar



Summer Strum

workshops. "Active Arts values individual human expression," he says. "When I found this opportunity to get reacquainted with my guitar, I jumped right in." Harris participated in a course focused on *jarocho*, the guitar-driven folk music of Veracruz, Mexico. He also picked up new strum patterns in a workshop devoted to American folk and blues guitar genres.

Honoring L.A.'s remarkable cultural diversity is indeed a touchstone of the Active Arts mission, which seeks to cultivate individual creative potential while facilitating group cultural exchange.

Cheng's *LA Storytellers* group yielded multi-cultural results: "We began by writing memoirs of our downtown experience. An older gentleman recounted the Latino community in Chavez Ravine prior to Dodger Stadium. A Japanese lady recalled childhood memories of a beloved Little Tokyo restaurant. An African-American woman shared a life-changing encounter in a homeless shelter," Cheng says. "All of this we wove into one seamless storytelling piece."

The Active Arts calendar swings into gear with the vibrant *Dance Downtown* program on alternate Friday evenings, May through October. *A Taste of Dance*, one day of mini-lessons in a myriad of dance styles, is scheduled for March. *A Taste of Dance-a-thon*, the fund-raising celebration of L.A.'s diverse dance cultures, is slated for fall.

Drum Downtown opens with a proverbial bang the second Saturday morning of May and runs through September. The *Get Your Chops Back* workshops that oil the squeaky instruments of rusty players are slated for May. Two prior "chops" programs, the *Flute Choir* and *Summer Strum*, plan to return in summer.

Friday Night Sing-Alongs that liberate songbirds from the shower stall run one Friday evening a month in June, July, and August. *Jingle Bell Sing* again adds its cheerful sounds to the festivities of November/December. The annual *Music Center Holiday Sing-Along* tops off the season, as always, in December.

L.A. Storytellers welcomes those with a bent for verbal creativity to sessions running in spring (Feb/March) and again in fall.

Finally, Activators, the valued volunteer group at Active Arts, meet throughout the year. This year Activators will spearhead a new instrumental music program called *Public Practice* slated for spring.

For further details as the schedule is refined, refer to the website at: musiccenter.org or give Active Arts a call at (213) 972-3660.

— By Debra Levine

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Drum Circle