

ACTIVE ARTS

AT THE MUSIC CENTER

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

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