

Deep Roots Wide World

Winters Building

East Bay Center for the Performing Arts
Richmond, California



CASE STUDY OF CULTURE IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Commissioned by **LISC**

On walls throughout the Center, placards reading “Deep Roots Wide World” remind students of their charge: Forge deep roots in their own communities. Respect the many cultures that make up Richmond and the broader world.



One of East Bay Center resident companies, Son de la Tierra, at the Center's Fall Annual Gala. Photo courtesy of East Bay Center for the Performing Arts

The East Bay Center for the Performing Arts in Richmond California has a mission to engage “youth and young adults in imagining and creating new worlds for themselves and new visions for their communities through the inspiration and discipline of rigorous training in world performance traditions.”¹ In the 2016–17 school year, the Center involved 5,500 participants in its nationally-recognized programs, including year-round courses, private instruction, music, dance and theater instruction at 20 local K–8 public schools, and an intensive tuition-free Young Artist Diploma Program.² Youth performances drew nearly 30,000 audience members to a variety of community venues.

The Center’s arts programming aims not to launch students into artistic careers, although some have taken that path, but to build individual character and strengthen communities through instruction imbued with values of mutual respect, multiculturalism, and social justice.

1 “East Bay Center,” accessed August 8, 2017, <http://www.eastbaycenter.org/about/mission-and-vision>.

2 Figures are from materials supplied by the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts.

One of East Bay Center's resident companies, Iron Triangle Theater with its original production *Lost Secrets of the Iron Triangle* (2013).
Photo courtesy of East Bay Center for the Performing Arts



On walls throughout the Center, placards reading “Deep Roots Wide World” remind students of their charge: Forge deep roots in their own communities. Respect the many cultures that make up Richmond and the broader world. The Center’s arts programming aims not to launch students into artistic careers, although some have taken that path, but to build individual character and strengthen communities through instruction imbued with values of mutual respect, multiculturalism, and social justice.

In 2012, the Center opened its newly renovated home in the Winters Building, an historical structure situated on a downtown commercial corridor that has seen better days. The upgrade supported a dramatic expansion of the Center’s youth work, which reaches deep into the low-income neighborhoods of Richmond, a city with a population of about 110,000. In addition, the revitalized

building, together with nearby public improvements, may lay the groundwork for commercial revitalization along the corridor.

In April of 2017, researchers visited the East Bay Center and conducted interviews with staff, parents, and community partners to explore the social and economic impacts the Winters Building renovation and the Center itself have produced.

History and context

Throughout the United States during the 1950s and 1960s, many municipal governments cleared swaths of older and under-utilized buildings in their downtowns, hoping to attract developers to the now-vacant sites. Richmond did the same, but development never came. Fortunately, the city spared a small cluster of pre-World



War II buildings in the heart of the city’s historic commercial center. One of these, the Winters Building, has been standing at the corner of Macdonald Avenue and 11th Street since opening as a ballroom in 1920.

By 1977, the Winters Building was owned by the Richmond Redevelopment Authority, a public corporation tasked with city revitalization, and had fallen into serious disrepair. Large portions of the building were empty and the interior had been reconfigured over time into a warren of small spaces occupied by retail establishments. The city council approved \$535,000 in funding for modest renovations to accommodate ground-floor offices and to allow the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts to move in on its second floor.

By then, the Center had been in business for nearly 10 years, and was already on its way to creating a nationally

renowned youth music education program for children in some of the Bay Area’s poorest neighborhoods. Richmond itself had fallen on hard times with the loss of its manufacturing base, which had played an important role in the country’s industrial response to World War II. The decline in employment, local income, and municipal tax revenues had rendered the city perpetually short of cash, even as other Bay Area jurisdictions prospered in the post-war boom. By the 1990s, the Iron Triangle neighborhood, which abuts the traditional commercial area, reached poverty rates of nearly 30 percent.³

³ Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Neighborhood Monitoring Database. Figure is from 1990 US Census STF3 – sample data.

The Winters Building's story is, in part, the story of the community meaning of physical spaces. Its \$15 million renovation changed the building from a place that uncomfortably hosted performing arts programming to a space uniquely suited to it. Students now learn in high-quality surroundings and perform for parents and visitors in their own space. Community organizations can use these spaces as well, including the larger areas suitable for fundraisers and other events.

The Center dedicates itself to uplifting youth caught in the web of the community's social and economic distress. It creates high-quality youth performing arts programs, adding dance, theater, voice, and new media to a broad mix of music instruction. All of its programs are founded on core values of multiculturalism, community-building, and social change, and staff share an organizational ethos strong on empathy.⁴

Physical revitalization and development

In 2011, after a two-year makeover, "the old Winters Building [became] the equal of the talented children who arrive after school and on weekends."⁵ Before the renovation, the Winters Building was a poor home for the Center. The building had only 10,000 useable square feet, and the interior configuration did not adequately support the varied kinds of instructional spaces that a first-class program demanded.

Worse, 30 years after the Winters Building's first renovation, the building had not aged well, and the earlier work had only postponed a more complete treatment of the structure's deficiencies. By 2007, an elevator descending into the basement landed in a pool of standing water. The building did not meet seismic standards, the air conditioning system did not function, and the roof leaked. Structural and seismic issues required "new construction wrapped in the shell of the old building," says John Clawson, a financial consultant and project manager and member of the board of directors of the Center.⁶

FUNDING AND SUPPORT

The Center had developed the organizational strength and public reputation that enabled it to painstakingly assemble financing needed for a major renovation. The cost of the total set of renovations was over \$15 million, of which \$3.7 million came from the federal New Markets Tax Credit program by way of Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). The Bay Area LISC office provided early-stage project support, and other large single amounts came from the City of Richmond Community Redevelopment Agency, William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, and California Cultural and Historical Endowment (see Table 1).

NEWER, BETTER FACILITIES

Physical enhancement to the Winters Building enabled the Center to dramatically expand its programming. Improvements included performance theaters on the first and second floors, lower-level instructional space, all-new building systems, restoration of the historic façade, and increased classroom and office space.

4 Donnell Jones, personal interview, interview by Chris Walker, April 10, 2017.

5 John King, "Richmond's Restored Arts Center Offers Inspiration," SFGate, accessed August 2, 2017, <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/place/article/Richmond-s-restored-arts-center-offers-inspiration-2834165.php>.

6 John Clawson, personal interview, interview by Chris Walker, April 11, 2017.

TABLE 1
Winters Building Support

	Amount (\$)
New Markets Tax Credit Equity	3,743,000
City of Richmond Community Redevelopment Agency	3,200,000
William & Flora Hewlett Foundation	2,561,000
City of Richmond Community Redevelopment Agency Building/Land Donation	1,370,000
California Cultural and Historical Endowment (CCHE)	1,200,000
City of Richmond Debt Forgiveness	1,000,000
Kresge Foundation	1,000,000
Individual Donations	442,155
Interest Income	385,906
Northern California Community Loan Fund (NCCLF)	265,000
Walter & Elise Haas Fund	200,000
Other Foundations	200,000
Dean & Margaret Leshner Foundation	100,000
Corporate Donations	52,500
James Irvine Foundation	35,000
Total	15,754,561

These changes have had an impact on how the Center operates and what it provides. Student participation has risen from under 2,000 annually in 2007 to more than 4,500 today. The Center’s signature, tuition-free Young Artist Diploma Program now enrolls 130 students per year, double the number staff thought possible before the rebuilding was completed.⁷

Social impacts

For all the value of the building’s preservation as a source of community pride, its most fundamental contribution lies in the program it hosts and the social benefits that conveys. The Center’s youth initiatives have, through multiple layers of programming over a long period of time, established broad reach into Richmond’s residential communities. According to the Center’s figures, they have reached more than 56,000 youth since the Center first opened.⁸

Training and instruction at the Winters Building location includes courses, private instruction, recitals, student support services, and mentoring for 600 students in regular programming, including 130 students in the four-year diploma program. More than 90 percent of participants in the diploma program gain acceptance to four-year institutions of higher education.

Partnerships with 23 local K–8 public schools provide high-quality music, dance, and theater instruction at those sites, as well as professional development for 200 classroom teachers. Annually, about one in seven students in Richmond’s Title I K–8 schools participate in a Center program. The Center also runs nine youth and young adult resident companies, which present more than 50 public performances annually for anywhere

⁷ “Information Sheet, East Bay Center for Performing Arts,” n.d.

⁸ Ibid.



First day of East Bay Center's Young Artist Diploma Program Summer Intensive (2016). Photo courtesy of East Bay Center for the Performing Arts

from 15,000 to 20,000 people in total, some involving newly commissioned work devoted to telling the stories of Richmond and the issues residents face.⁹

A BUILDING TO BE PROUD OF

The renovated building provides high-quality spaces for low-income youth who often encounter second-rate facilities in other parts of their lives, and program staff believe that the Center's new home reinforces the program's messages of mutual respect across neighborhoods and age groups. Artistic Director Jordan Simmons says: "I see the Center as a place of hope and a call to action. Youth and families meet and recognize, experience each other's beauty in a rich and safe environment. This environment cultivates the risk taking and healthy growth that leads to both individual and communal agency."¹⁰

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Jordan Simmons, personal interview, interview by Anne Gadwa Nicodemus and Chris Walker, April 10, 2017.

The space is neutral—students leave their neighborhood and school allegiances at the door—and welcoming. And it contributes to participants' sense of pride and accomplishment, that "something for them can be high quality," says Howard Wiley, touring jazz musician, instructor at the Center, and former student.¹¹

Moreover, several people who were interviewed cited renovation of the historic building "belonging to Richmond" as a contributor to community pride citywide,¹² a sentiment reinforced by the building's role as "a place for youth, which people respond positively to."¹³ Gabino Arredondo, health and wellness coordinator for the City of Richmond, says that "because the historic

¹¹ Howard Wiley, personal interview, interview by Chris Walker, April 11, 2017.

¹² Shasa Curl, personal interview, interview by Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, April 11, 2017; Jim Becker, personal interview, interview by Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, April 10, 2017; Jones, personal interview.

¹³ Anonymous interviewee, personal interview, April 11, 2017.

building was renovated and occupied in collaboration with a community organization that directly benefits youth, its preservation is seen as a community asset and responsive to community needs and interests. Its existence counters criticisms by individuals that see historical preservation activities as simply an ‘elitist’ exercise.”¹⁴ It helps that the Center makes newly created spaces in the building available to community organizations for performances and events, expanding the building’s appeal throughout the city.¹⁵

BUILDING COMMUNITY AT THE CENTER

Youth participating in the training and instruction programs of the Center commit to arts participation as a form of community-building, founded on multiculturalism, respect for one another, tolerance, social change, and cultivation of character. For example, the Center presented a *Nutcracker* adaptation in the dance traditions of the city’s diverse peoples, the performance representing “a cultural showcase of Richmond’s communities,” says City Councilmember Eduardo Martinez.¹⁶ Student exposure to non-European musical forms, Wiley argues, helps students open their minds to the value different cultures bring, including their own.¹⁷

Much of the Center programming aims to provoke discussion of social issues and advocate for social justice. As Deputy Director Ruthie Dineen puts it: “It all begins with self-awareness and agency. Art is a way to speak for yourself through that means. This leads to finding purpose, then to giving back. Frequently our students witness or experience injustice, and agency leads to

action of some kind.”¹⁸ For example, the Iron Voices project draws on youth and young adult Iron Triangle resident interviews and creative ideas to drive art pieces—mostly theater—that define themes of neighborhood justice as well as neglected but powerful personal visions.¹⁹

THE CENTER AS A RESOURCE FOR YOUTH

In Dineen’s view, the most profound role of the Center may be “creating community that would not otherwise be available. That’s been lost but is essential to well-being and can be created by art.”²⁰ Especially in the diploma program, youth recognize themselves as “being part of a community in a place,” with the “place” being the Center but also Richmond. Several people interviewed mentioned how the art-community combination represents a calculated contribution to character-building. Councilmember Martinez noted that the Center provides youth with a safe place to learn how to cooperate with one another, conduct themselves appropriately, and express respect for others,²¹ and Wiley believes that the creation of a community provides a space for instructors, coaches, and youth to be honest about behavior and comportment and how those actions influence and affect their future in the mainstream world. He believes that it is a “level of honesty that’s not possible in ‘non-community’ spaces.”²²

The Center staff are part of this community, of course. They share an organizational ethos that is strong on empathy for the difficulties that youth have in a tough environment, building a personal relationship with kids

14 Gabino Arredondo, personal interview, interview by Chris Walker, April 12, 2017.

15 Anonymous interviewee, personal interview, April 11, 2017.

16 Eduardo Martinez, personal interview, interview by Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, April 12, 2017.

17 Wiley, personal interview.

18 Ruthie Dineen, personal interview, interview by Chris Walker, April 10, 2017.

19 Simmons, personal interview.

20 Dineen, personal interview.

21 Martinez, personal interview.

22 Wiley, personal interview.

“and supporting emergence of a community dedicated to mutual respect and cultural expression across diverse peoples,” says Donnell Jones, parent and interim executive director of Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization and co-coordinator of Operation Ceasefire for the Richmond Police Department.²³ Staff also have a commitment to welcoming everyone into the community: The bilingual receptionist greets everyone with a smile, faculty know every student by name, and all strive to create a safe space, a sense of home, and a sense of belonging for the youth.

The Center is a place that is challenging historical inequalities and supports families to address the multiple stressors they encounter day to day. Due to the safe space that they have created, families share the institutional barriers they are encountering in, for example, the criminal justice system, the immigration system due to the fear and impact of a deportation, the housing system due to evictions, or the health care system due to a health crisis. The Center and community work together to buffer and address the multiple stressors families are facing which in turn contributes to positive health outcomes.²⁴

A SYMBOL FOR RENEWAL IN RICHMOND

The Center helps change external perceptions of Richmond by breaking down stereotypes of what a distressed community is, according to Councilmember Martinez.²⁵ The program is a node of excellence within Richmond, and in Jones’s opinion, is one of the few examples of a program that has not closed or left the city of Richmond, depriving residents further of needed opportunities. Quite the contrary, the Center remains dedicated to the city.²⁶

“The Center may have become critically important to Richmond as arts and cultural exposure within African-American community has declined. The once-resident middle class is largely gone, and the practical elimination of arts and culture from the schools removes a source that once could be relied on,” Wiley says.²⁷ Indeed, the Center performances sometimes reference the artistic musical heritage of Richmond—a point noted by several interviewees—including a vibrant blues and jazz scene in the 1940s and 50s.²⁸ Indeed, the Center can be viewed as a very active element of the cultural ecosystem in Richmond in multiple respects. For example: Students perform at dozens of annual community venues and ceremonies, expressing their personal commitment to the cultural traditions of their families and communities, while Center invitations to other community arts groups (churches/schools) to participate in joint programming in turn provides performance opportunities and recognizes a wide community fabric of contributions to cultural vibrancy.²⁹

Economic and neighborhood effects

Development of the Winters Building is a highly visible event in the life of Richmond’s old commercial center, continuing a sequence of public and private investment that may have laid the groundwork for economic development. The prominent, historically significant building stands as a marker of a distinctive place, signaling to prospective investors that the area is ripe for further improvement.³⁰

23 Jones, personal interview.

24 Arredondo, personal interview.

25 Martinez, personal interview.

26 Jones, personal interview.

27 Wiley, personal interview.

28 Becker, personal interview.

29 Simmons, personal interview.

30 Martinez, personal interview.

OTHER DEVELOPMENT NEARBY

Local observers see the Winters Building renovation as contributing part of an investment stream in downtown Richmond.³¹ Not long before the building's refurbishment, the Richmond Redevelopment Authority made significant upgrades to public infrastructure—streets and sidewalks, lighting, landscaping—as well as townhouse development adjacent to the BART station two blocks from the Center.

In the vicinity of the Center, other organizations have made investments, as well. The Community Housing Development Corporation of North Richmond, supported by LISC, has developed affordable housing on MacDonald Avenue and the City of Richmond in collaboration with Pogo Park made improvements to the Elm Playlot in the nearby Iron Triangle neighborhood.

Highly visible investment of this kind may in some instances trigger other development of new commercial and retail activity. The Center's program activities and events, for example, produce foot traffic valuable to stores and restaurants, and this signals to developers and businesses that the area's economic prospects have brightened. Several interviewees shared a belief that the Winters Building has acted as a stabilizing device in the immediate neighborhood because foot traffic and the routine presence of families serves as a crime deterrent. After-hours events and activities, such as a Friday night music series, may have shifted once-valid perceptions of the area as a dangerous place, and several local observers attribute a measured drop in crime in the area to the Winters Building.

The Winters Building is thought to have influenced a national developer's recent commitment to build a

31 Curl, personal interview; anonymous interviewee, personal interview, April 11, 2017.

major mixed-use development on the two blocks adjacent to the Winters Building, a site that had been actively marketed for years without success. City officials have pointed to the development process itself as a model for equitable development: The Center leadership was consulted about aspects of site and project design,³² a process city staff cited as important to ensuring that community interests were taken into account.³³ (In the Winters Building development, requirements to hire local residents were taken very seriously; 25–30 percent of all hires were local ones.)³⁴

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

In the short run, Winters Building investments have not yet produced clear spin-off economic benefits, although observers agree that there has been some upswing in patronage for the few nearby restaurants.³⁵ The number of nonprofit organizations near the Winters Building has increased, forming a node of activity that together with larger anchors nearby, such as a Kaiser Permanente health facility, may provide a platform for further growth. Artistic Director Simmons observes that “while the neighborhood has not yet fully ‘turned its corner,’ it is definitely moving into a curve.”³⁶

The Center's work is funded through a flow of public subsidies, and so, unlike with a for-profit business at a location, continuing operation does not necessarily demonstrate the area's economic potential. That said, high-quality, civically important activity does occur at the site, which draws attention to the area. The Bay Area press widely covered the building's opening, and city

32 Amanda Elliott, personal interview, interviewed by Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, April 10, 2017; anonymous interviewee, personal interview, April 11, 2017.

33 Curl, personal interview; Elliott, personal interview.

34 Becker, personal interview.

35 Ibid.; anonymous interviewee, personal interview, April 11, 2017.

36 Simmons, personal interview.

officials and other economic developers have showcased the building and its program to prospective developers of other parcels on the Macdonald Avenue strip.

Local economic developers see the Center's programming as an important asset, lending weight to discussions around framing the commercial area's identity as a vibrant downtown that includes arts and cultural amenities, a view encouraged by the Richmond General Plan. The city has made a priority of including art in development, and public art was incorporated into local park renovations in the area.³⁷ Currently, the Winters Building participates in the annual downtown holiday festival, and Center programming and student performances are featured by the Richmond Main Street Program, which sponsors complementary activities to establish an arts-and-culture theme, such as murals and an art-in-windows program.³⁸

All this said, local area revitalization was not a primary goal for the Center itself, which is focused mainly on high-quality youth programming. Center staff have made conscious choices to limit their role accordingly. For example, the Center does not promote itself as a performance venue except in terms of making event space available to the community. The most likely effect on Richmond's economic well-being lies with the students' preparation to advance their own prospects. The Center encourages students to graduate from high school and go to college. Some Center alumni have gone on to careers in music or performance; others have returned to teach at the Center.³⁹

Political and systemic effects

Medium-sized cities like Richmond often lack the rich infrastructure of civic bodies, educational institutions, medical facilities, and business leaders that sustain support for vital public improvement efforts. In Richmond, as one interviewee explained, the Center plays a vital role as a civic actor well beyond its role in the arts strictly speaking. For example, the Center's broad connections and strong reputation enable staff to play an important role in multi-sectoral initiatives aimed to improve life in Richmond. The Center's focus on youth, which encompasses all aspects of their well-being, may play a role in its leaders' entry into diverse policy arenas.⁴⁰

Certainly the Center's mission and the breadth of its programming has obliged it to form a variety of institutional partnerships, such as those with the school district and the county's health department.⁴¹ In addition, Jordan Simmons and Ruthie Dineen form part of the leadership cadre for Healthy Richmond, part of a prominent multi-city health promotion program funded by The California Endowment, and Center staff are on the board of Richmond Main Street. The Center has formed a strong relationship with the Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization (CCISCO) to help youth program participants obtain services and perform at community events.⁴² In the view of one observer, the Center might be the most significant youth-serving organization in Richmond.⁴³

37 Arredondo, personal interview.

38 Elliott, personal interview.

39 Martinez, personal interview.

40 Anonymous interviewee, personal interview, April 11, 2017.

41 Anonymous interviewee, personal interview, April 11, 2017.

42 Richard Boyd, personal interview, interview by Chris Walker, April 11, 2017.

43 Anonymous interviewee, personal interview, April 10, 2017.



Ballet class presentations in East Bay Center's Iron Triangle Theater. Photo courtesy of East Bay Center for the Performing Arts

Less clear, but certainly present, is the Center's contribution to the city's social and civic fabric. In addition to easy access to Winters Building spaces available to other community organizations, the Center offers programming that fosters cross-cultural and cross-generational ties. Several observers point to its role as an incubator of Richmond's future civic leadership.⁴⁴ "The obvious effect is on the kids themselves, who acquire the confidence and the agency to go on to school, go on to have productive lives, and in turn, give back to the communities they came from," says Clawson.⁴⁵ This may be especially true of the diploma program, with its emphasis on perseverance, public performance, collaboration, and pride in one's community—all skills essential to active civic participation.⁴⁶ The Center provides Richmond public schools "a much-needed cultural boost to the curriculum,"⁴⁷ and the program's core commitment to social

justice has community-wide import; students participate as performers in such actions as a recent Ceasefire Citywide Walk and Healthy Richmond events around health equity.

The East Bay Center for the Performing Arts story suggests an interleaving of impacts across various aspects of public life. The organization's civic prominence stems ultimately from its generally recognized social impact on the youth participants themselves and on the broader Richmond community. This certainly contributed to the Center's ability to obtain the political and financial support it needed to undertake Winters Building development, which in turn is part of a set of investments that may lead to the kind of economic improvements that community developers have long sought along Macdonald Avenue.

44 Jones, personal interview; Arredondo, personal interview.

45 Clawson, personal interview.

46 Arredondo, personal interview.

47 Martinez, personal interview.

Interviews

Two anonymous interviewees

Gabino Arredondo, *City of Richmond*

Jim Becker, *Richmond Community Foundation*

Richard Boyd, *Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting
Community Organization*

Alicia Carmona, *Small Business Owner, Taqueria La Estrella*

John Clawson, *Equity Community Builders*

Shasa Curl, *City of Richmond*

Ruthie Dineen, *East Bay Center for the Performing Arts*

Amanda Elliott, *Richmond Main Street*

Stephanie Forbes, *Formerly of LISC*

Donnell Jones, *Richmond Ceasefire & Contra Costa
County Racial Justice Task Force*

Eduardo Martinez, *Richmond City Council*

Jordan Simmons, *East Bay Center for the Performing Arts*

Howard Wiley, *Independent Artist*



Young Artist Diploma Program student Isaac Coyle performing at Soul Endeavor Recitals (2017). Photo courtesy of East Bay Center for the Performing Arts

With residents and partners, LISC forges resilient and inclusive communities of opportunity across America—great places to live, work, visit, do business and raise families. Since 1980, LISC has invested \$17.3 billion to build or rehab 366,000 affordable homes and apartments and develop 61 million square feet of retail, community and educational space.

Launched in 2009, Metris Arts Consulting believes in the power of culture to enrich people's lives and help communities thrive. We believe those benefits should be broadly shared and inclusively developed. Metris seeks to provide high caliber planning, research, and evaluation services to reveal arts' impacts and help communities equitably improve cultural vitality. To accelerate change, we seek to share knowledge and amplify the voices of those closest to the work.

Cover: East Bay Center's Winters Building, exterior. *Photo courtesy of East Bay Center for the Performing Arts*

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