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VOICES

THE OPINION OF THE RGJ EDITORIAL BOARD

Art is good for the soul, and for the pocketbook

Last weekend, the Reno Philharmonic hosted its annual "Spirit of the Season" concerts, selling out two of three performances at the Pioneer Center for the Performing Arts.

This weekend, the A.V.A. Ballet moves into the Pioneer for its 18th annual Nutcracker ballet.

On Dec. 20, the Reno Jazz Orchestra will add its signature touch to that Christmas classic (with the Sierra Nevada Ballet) and a lot more with its popular Jazz for the Holidays concert at the University of Nevada's Nightingale Hall.

And the Reno Chamber Orchestra will end the year by hosting the Nevada Chamber Music Festival for the 10th time at a variety of venues between Christmas and New Year's.

Amid those big-name events in the Truckee Meadows will be dozens of other concerts, plays, musicals, exhibitions and what-have-you.

So it's particularly appropriate that the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis and the National Endowment for the Arts has released what they hope will be the first of annual estimates of the creative sector's contributions to the nation's economy, just as they measure other sectors such as health care and tourism.

It's an overdue acknowledgment that the arts aren't just good for the soul — they're also good for the pocketbook. But, then, we already knew that in the Truckee Meadows.

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That's one of the lessons of Artown, the month-long celebration of the arts that drew approximately 30,000 to its events in its first year, 1996, and now draws more than 300,000 primarily to downtown Reno every July. Officials estimated its economic impact in 2011 at more than $13 million.

The Reno Youth Jazz Orchestra performs during the "Jazz for the Holidays" event at Nightingale Hall in 2011. TOM SMEDES/RGJ

SNAPSHOT

ISSUE: The arts and the economy

OUR VIEW: A new report from the Bureau of Economic Analysis and the National Endowment for the Arts shows how important culture is the U.S.

Nationally, according to the NEA, arts and culture added $504 billion to the gross domestic product in 2011, accounting for 3.2 percent of the GDP. By comparison, the Bureau of Economic Analysis, estimated that travel and tourism account for 2.8 percent of GDP.

"Art and culture is a significant part of the U.S. economy," said NEA Senior Deputy Chairman Joan Shigekawa, "not just its contributions of ideas and creativity to the innovation economy, but also as an important part of the labor force and our country's GDP."

The biggest contributor to those numbers was, not surprising given its significant exports, the motion picture and video industries at more than $45 billion. (It's no wonder that Nevada is offering incentives to grab more of the motion picture and TV show production business.) The performing arts and independent arts add more than $30 billion to the U.S. economy, according to the report.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to be the audience for the "Spirit of the Season" plan to take in one of the "Nutcracker" productions, will catch some of the world-class musicians in town for the Chamber Music Festival or one of the other events in Reno-Sparks this season don't need to justify their activities in dollar and cents. We know how important the arts are to making this a better community, and we're proud of what the large number of first-class arts organizations here have accomplished in recent years. The numbers provided by the NEA and Bureau of Economic Analysis are just the icing on the cake.

YOUR VOICE

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