



“My students love coming to TPAC. They need to escape the test-oriented environment, spread their creative wings and fly into a new perspective. The arts bring learning to life.”
Teacher, Metro Nashville Public Schools

HOT History

In 1983, more than 8,000 students came to see Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie* when the Tennessee Performing Arts Center launched **Humanities Outreach in Tennessee (HOT)**. This was an imaginative, pioneering initiative for TPAC, unlike any other arts education program in Tennessee or the nation. Receiving the Governor’s Award for excellence in arts education in 1984, HOT has grown in breadth and depth over the years, while its purpose “to bring learning to life” and mission to enrich classroom learning have remained constant.

HOT was founded by Martha Ingram, who led the movement to establish TPAC, and Mac Pirkle, the artistic director of Southern Stage Productions, a Nashville-based theatre he originated in 1981. They approached then Governor Lamar Alexander with their vision for both a professional theatre in residence at TPAC and a program designed for schoolchildren statewide. Governor Alexander responded with a \$25,000 check from his discretionary fund. Additional support was received from the state department of education, the federal government, and private donors.

Prior to launching HOT, TPAC surveyed educators across the state asking them for suggestions for titles that they studied in school or complemented their classroom learning goals. *The Glass Menagerie* topped the list, as did Lillian Hellman’s *The Little Foxes*, Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*, and the plays of William Shakespeare—all presented in the early years of HOT, which hosted school groups from 75% of the counties in Tennessee. Ballet expanded the 1986-87 “Season for Young People” beyond theatre, followed by constant growth in the diversity of mediums on the HOT schedule. Opera, symphony, puppetry, and a variety of contemporary dance, music, and multi-media performances featuring professional artists companies from Nashville, across the nation, and around the world.

An outgrowth of Southern Stage Productions, Tennessee Repertory Theatre was established in 1985, with Mac Pirkle serving as the artistic director of TPAC’s newest resident company (now known as Nashville Repertory Theatre or “The Rep”).

In December 1999, HOT welcomed its one-millionth child to a performance of Peter Ekstrom’s *The Gift of the Magi*, produced by Tennessee Rep. Following an operational merger with Nashville Institute for the Arts that year, and the eventual addition of three more programs, TPAC has served more than 1.8 million students and educators since 1983.

In a public television program on TPAC’s 30th anniversary in 2010, former Governors Ned McWhorter and Winfield Dunn took part in a retrospective. Governor McWhorter, Speaker of the House when the legislature adopted the plan for TPAC, summarized the sentiments of his fellow legislators as he reflected on the effort to create a performing arts center for Tennessee: “Rural kids never had the benefit of going to a performing arts center. Many of the schools where I came from had absolutely no arts—a Christmas play and that was it...I could envision those yellow school buses and kids unloading to visit the capitol and then coming over to the performing arts center...for a program for the children in the arts...and the museum that they can visit. That really touched my soft spot. I went home and thought about it...and [I realized] that is this is what the people would say to me.... I convinced the legislators that we would have a vision that would move this community forward in Nashville. It was our state capitol and we were going to spread this effort across the state. And we have.”