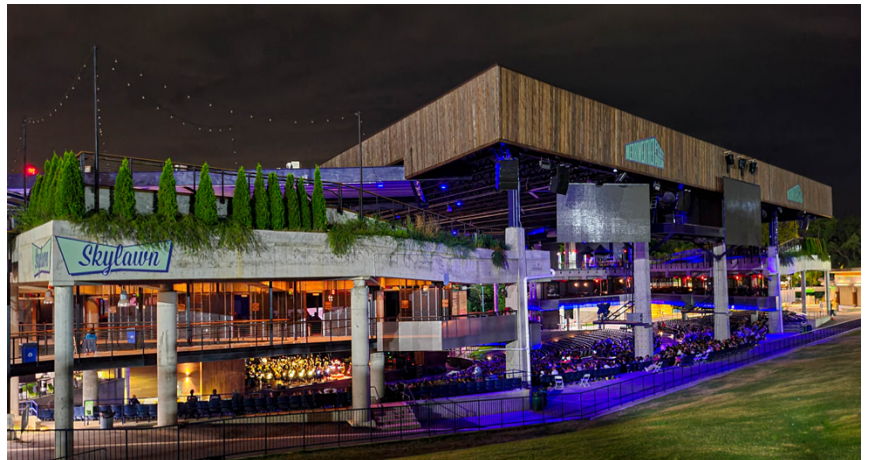


Downtown Columbia Arts and Culture Commission Annual Report for 2022

Introduction

The Downtown Columbia Arts and Culture Commission (DCACC) is a non-profit organization working to expand artistic, cultural, civic, and educational programming in and around Merriweather Post Pavilion and downtown Columbia, Maryland. The Commission was founded in 2013, and in 2016 it became the owner of Merriweather Post Pavilion, the iconic and beloved outdoor amphitheater surrounded by 40 acres of woodlands in the heart of Columbia, Maryland.

Under the Commission's ownership and oversight, Merriweather Post Pavilion has undergone a complete physical transformation and modernization, with final aspects of the project reaching completion in 2022. At the same time, the Commission has been working to augment and enhance the programmatic offerings at Merriweather Post Pavilion to create experiences for members of our community who may not otherwise attend a concert at the venue. Additionally, DCACC continues to build partnerships with local and regional organizations and institutions to help achieve our shared vision of a thriving arts and cultural ecosystem in Downtown Columbia, Maryland.



Merriweather Post Pavilion

Organization

The Downtown Columbia Arts and Culture Commission's mission and vision reflect its founding purpose to preserve and enhance the cultural significance of Merriweather through community ownership and stewardship. During the last year, DCACC undertook an assessment and re-evaluation of its mission, vision, and values with the support of an organizational consultant. As part of this effort, DCACC's consultant interviewed numerous community partners and stakeholders, as well as all members of DCACC's board and staff. The resulting assessment led to enhancements to its mission, vision, and values that will now guide the board and staff as we conceive, implement, and assess existing and new programs that better reflect and align with our community and its values, and that tell a more holistic and compelling story about DCACC and our work.

The updated mission, vision, and values are as follows:

Mission: The Downtown Columbia Arts and Culture Commission is a not-for-profit community organization dedicated to growing arts, culture and community in Merriweather Post Pavilion and

throughout Downtown Columbia. As owners of Merriweather Post Pavilion, we work to enhance this cultural centerpiece and the majestic woodland park that surrounds it through artistic and community programs and stewardship. In collaboration with community partners, businesses, government, and educational institutions, we produce, present and promote artistic and learning programs that engage, uplift, and inspire.

Vision: Our vision is to lead a thriving cultural ecosystem in Downtown Columbia, where our local, regional, and global communities come together to celebrate the best of our cultures and experience the joy and wonder of the arts. Through a constellation of places and programs, Downtown Columbia is a place where art happens regularly, spontaneously, and inclusively.

Values:

We strive to ensure that artistic and cultural opportunities are available and appealing to all residents of Columbia.

We believe the arts can help build community and are an important component in fulfilling the values upon which Columbia was founded.



2022 Howard County High School Graduations at Merriweather

We are committed to being transparent and responsive to the community.

Our success depends on partnerships and collaboration with the many existing arts and community groups who share our vision and aspirations for Downtown Columbia.

We want to expand the presence and reach of artistic and cultural programming in Columbia, including creating new spaces or incorporating art into existing spaces.

The Commission believes in supporting visionary programming and activities that reflect and engage our diverse community.

We provide programs and activities to make Merriweather Post Pavilion accessible and appreciated by our diverse community, especially youth and families.

We aim to spark joy, creativity and connection to help contribute to the vibrancy of our community and local region.

We aim to help provide engaging opportunities for every community member to be inspired and amazed by the magic of the arts.

Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, DCACC worked with its tenant—the operator of Merriweather Post Pavilion—to develop a shared set of values related to the programs and

operations of the venue. These values are aligned with the founding values of our community, Columbia, and reflect the intentions and aspirations of this Merriweather partnership. Together, the owners and operators of Merriweather Post Pavilion affirm that:

We will engage in efforts to conceive, create, and produce artistic, cultural, and entertainment programs that are inclusive and inviting to the residents of Columbia and the broader region, seeking to be visionary, forward-looking and responsive to the social and cultural context of the times.

We will nurture the critical connections that build and bolster a sense of community and a sense of place through programming and operations that are designed and implemented with intention.

We will continually assess our operations, leadership, and communications to ensure that we are rooted in these values and accountable to them.

We recognize that we are part of a larger constellation of arts and community spaces and programs, and that our success is tied to our ability to be a good partner, collaborator, and neighbor.

We recognize that music and the arts present important opportunities to consider and contemplate the unique challenges we face as a society, and we support the free expression of ideas and activism at Merriweather and throughout our community.

We will continue to foster and seek to perfect an environment where artists and guests are comfortable, feel welcome, and know that their needs will be accommodated.



2022 Battle of the Books at Merriweather

We are committed to the work of identifying and eliminating biases in our operations and programming, while collaborating with stakeholders in our community to broadly and effectively promote, observe, and uphold these values.

Leadership

The Commission's work is guided by a six-member Board of Directors, which includes five citizen directors and an ex-officio director. The current roster of directors is:

Maurice Bellan, Chair
Candace Dodson Reed, Vice Chair
Jeffrey Lavis, Treasurer
Debbie Ellinghaus, Secretary
Greg Fitchitt, *ex-officio*

Kenneth Ulman
Louis Ulman

The Commission's directors have focused on guiding and supporting the growth of the organization in a way that responds to the needs of the community, but also recognizes the opportunities before it.

Operations and Funding

In 2022, The Commission employed one full-time staff member, Executive Director Ian Kennedy, and one part-time staff member, Program Associate Megan Wills. Additionally, through a collaboration agreement with the team from the Columbia Festival of the Arts (CFA), DCACC has garnered significant and indispensable staff support. The Commission has also continued to work with several outside consultants and contractors in the areas of accounting, programming, and communications in order to achieve its administrative and programmatic goals.

While the Commission owns and oversees the management of Merriweather Post Pavilion, it does not manage the day-to-day operations of Merriweather, including the booking and production of the concerts for which the venue is most known. Operations, booking, and promotions at Merriweather are handled by It's My Amphitheater, Inc. (IMA), which manages the property according to the terms of a long-term lease between IMA and the Commission. DCACC works with IMA to schedule and produce community and cultural events at Merriweather Post Pavilion.

The Commission's operations are funded primarily by the rent payments it receives from IMA under the terms of the lease. In 2022, the Commission also received grant funding to support operations from the Maryland State Arts Council and Howard County Government. In addition, it received funding in the form of donations and sponsorships from individuals and businesses in Howard County, and while the bulk of its programming was offered to the community free of admission charges, DCACC earned programming income related to a few of the events it produced and/or presented.



Merriweather Movie Nights - Encanto

Construction funding for the Merriweather Post Pavilion redevelopment project overseen by the Commission has come in the form of grants from Howard County Government and the State of Maryland, as well as a \$16.5 million loan secured by the venue's operator. In 2022, DCACC received grant funding from Howard County Government to support the last final components of the planned renovations at Merriweather Post Pavilion.

Activities and Programs

After two years of uncertainty brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, this year provided a chance for DCACC to assess its programmatic focus and clarify its approach to fulfilling its mission. As part of this work, DCACC engaged an organizational consultant to assess DCACC's strengths and opportunities to help us refine our processes and programs.

Perhaps the most significant realization from this assessment is that DCACC's greatest potential lies in collaborative partnerships with organizations and institutions that are aligned with our vision and values. What's more, we recognize the critical importance of enhancing our role in Downtown Columbia – that we need to broaden our conception of stewardship of Merriweather Post Pavilion and recognize that a core part of this effort is making the venue the true cultural centerpiece it can be.

This is not simply about showcasing world class cultural performances, but also finding ways to weave community events and experiences at the venue into the story of every member of our community. In some cases, the popular music concerts hosted by our operator are enough to achieve that, but for most of our constituents, we need to create other opportunities to engage with Merriweather. We are committed to removing as many barriers as possible to make sure all members of our community feel welcome at Merriweather and our programs. There must be something for everyone at Merriweather Post Pavilion, and this aim is now firmly enshrined in DCACC's organizational values.

Community and Cultural Programming

Among DCACC's most important work is that which engages audiences who are normally not served by the concerts at Merriweather Post Pavilion. We hope to conceive and create experiences for these audiences that they will remember and cherish for a lifetime. In April, through our partnership with the Howard County Library System, we were able to accomplish this goal in a major way by bringing the popular Battle of the Books event to Merriweather, the first time in many years all attendees were able to participate at the same place (because this has been such a popular program, HCLS previously had to divide the event across several high schools in order to accommodate all the interested students.)

ACTIVITIES AT A GLANCE

4/29 – BATTLE OF THE BOOKS

5/15 – TIME FOR THREE WITH
THE HOWARD COUNTY HIGH
SCHOOL GIFTED AND
TALENTED ORCHESTRA

6/17 – MERRIWEATHER MOVIE
NIGHTS – ENCANTO

7/5 – LUMINUS RACE FOR THE
WORLD 5K

7/15 – MERRIWEATHER MOVIE
NIGHTS – THE GOONIES

7/21 – MERRIWEATHER MOVIE
NIGHTS – SUMMER OF SOUL

8/14 – THE BALTIMORE
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA'S FILM
WITH ORCHESTRA – HARRY
POTTER™ AND THE
SORCERER'S STONE

9/15 – RISE TO THE CHALLENGE
AWARDS

10/15 – MERRIWEATHER MOVIE
NIGHTS – HOCUS POCUS

10/29 - MDAIR UNBOUND
COMMUNITY ARTS DAY

11/4 & 11/5 – MDAIR UNBOUND
EXHIBITION

11/24 – 1/1
MERRIWEATHER SYMPHONY
OF LIGHTS

When HCLS reached out to DCACC about hosting every participating team at Merriweather, we worked collaboratively to brainstorm how to make this event successful and tailor the experience to our venue. With HCLS's experience running the event and DCACC's intimate knowledge of operations at MPP, we were confident the night would be popular – and it exceeded our expectations; nearly 1,500 students and thousands of their friends and families made for a lively, energetic, and one-of-a-kind experience that most will not soon forget. The feedback from partners and participants was universally positive, and Battle of the Books will be back at Merriweather in 2023. We hope to be the permanent home of a program that encourages our students to find joy and wonder in reading and commends their accomplishments with a one-of-a-kind celebration.

In May, DCACC worked with long-time partners and collaborators at the Columbia Festival of the Arts and the Howard County School System Fine Arts department to present 'Time for Three with the Howard County High School Gifted and Talented Orchestra.' Time for Three, a classically trained string trio from Indianapolis, traveled to make a special appearance with student musicians from all twelve high schools. And, as hoped, they gave the experience of a lifetime to The Howard County High School Gifted and Talented Orchestra, along with 700 other students, friends, and family members who crowded into the Jim Rouse Theatre for an enthralling afternoon of music from all different genres.



Time For Three with the HoCo High School Gifted and Talented Orchestra

As spring turned to summer, DCACC brought back its popular Merriweather Movie Nights series, which again drew hundreds of families to Merriweather Post Pavilion for a night of free community programming. The first offering, 'Encanto,' was already a buzzworthy film, but the extremely family-friendly event was also held on the last day of school in June, which was a welcome relief for all the kids and their family members, who piled into Merriweather to save their spots for this beautiful music-filled Disney movie.

In addition to producing and presenting events in and around Downtown Columbia, DCACC also works with community partners to support their programs and events, as it did in June when it sponsored the Women of Color Art Expo (WOCAX) held at The 3rd in Downtown Columbia June 17–19. Then, in July, DCACC and local nonprofit Luminus worked together to bring the organization's long-running Race for the World 5k to Downtown Columbia for the first time, with the start/finish line right in the middle of the venue.

Later in July, DCACC brought the community two more enriching Merriweather Movie Nights – the hilarious 80's adventure 'The Goonies' and inspiring recent music documentary 'Summer of Soul.'

Both events were popular with adults and kids alike. We provided space for community organizations and business to advertise their programs and services, and we were able to secure Kona Ice of Howard County to bring their shaved ice to the concessions offerings.

On August 14, DCACC welcomed the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra back to Merriweather Post Pavilion for the first time in more than a decade, delighting audience members young and old with a performance of 'Harry Potter™ and the Sorcerer's Stone.' The night proved to be a smashing success, and with nearly 3,000 guests in attendance, the pavilion was full of energy and enthusiasm. The feedback we've received has been overwhelmingly positive, and we are already discussing future BSO programs at Merriweather.

Additionally, ahead of the performance, DCACC worked with Howard County Government and local human service organizations to distribute vouchers for free tickets to the performance for families who may not have been able to attend otherwise. DCACC is committed to making its programs as accessible as possible, and we were thrilled to make these tickets available to our community.

As the summer came to a close, DCACC's attention turned to other planned events at the venue, including Howard County Executive Calvin Ball's Rise to the Challenge Awards ceremony. Honorees, their friends and families, and many other members of the community crowded into Merriweather to hear the stories of our community's Covid heroes' triumphs and perseverance, and to celebrate and honor all they did to help our community endure the pandemic. Several area restaurants provided complimentary food and beverages for attendees, as Merriweather once again served as a gathering space for a special community event.



The BSO's Film with Orchestra – Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

DCACC's programming season extended well into the fall. In mid-October, DCACC hosted its first ever Halloween-themed Merriweather Movie Night. After polling community members, they overwhelmingly voted for the original family-friendly classic 'Hocus Pocus,' which turned out to be a wonderful choice. Over 600 kids and parents wore their costumes and brought their treat buckets to giggle along with the movie and take part in the trick-or-treating and on-stage costume parade.

Later that month, as part of our ongoing partnership with the Merriweather District's Artist-in-Residence program, DCACC was able to create opportunities for members of our community to see and work directly with artists who had been working for months on projects as part of this program. The Unbound Community Day at Color Burst Park took MDAIR artists and their work out of the studios and into the community in dynamic, inclusive, and exciting ways—offering free workshops, discussions, craft sessions, and collaborative arts projects to spark creativity in community members of all ages. A few weeks later, in early November, the Unbound exhibition featuring the

work of the MDAIR artists took place in the Merriweather District, attracting attendees from throughout Howard County and the surrounding region.

As is tradition, DCACC and MPP's season came to a close with the annual Symphony of Lights holiday lights event hosted on the grounds of Merriweather Post Pavilion.

Merriweather Post Pavilion Renovations

Nestled in 40 acres of woods in the middle of Columbia, Maryland, Merriweather Post Pavilion is the region's premier destination for performing arts and entertainment. This world-renowned outdoor amphitheater has hosted some of the biggest acts in performing arts and entertainment each summer since its opening in 1967. Designed by famed architect Frank Gehry, the pavilion's signature roof and wooded setting have made this fan and performer favorite an iconic example of the "shed" style amphitheater.

Since its construction, the venue has played host to the most iconic performers of the last five decades—from the Grateful Dead to Taylor Swift and the National Symphony Orchestra to Aretha Franklin. It has garnered international acclaim and attracted millions of guests from every continent.

Named as one of the top four amphitheaters in the country by Rolling Stone magazine, Merriweather Post Pavilion is a driver of significant economic impact for Downtown Columbia and the entire central Maryland region, drawing more than 300,000 guests each year. Officially, the venue seats 19,000 guests, but its capacity often expands during festival shows, which make use of Merriweather Park at Symphony Woods, the parkland surrounding the pavilion.



New seating area near Merriweather lawn

Renovation Update

The planned renovations at Merriweather Post Pavilion have been completed, with the final pieces coming on-line in 2022. Those included a reconfiguration and resurfacing of Merriweather's only on-site public parking lot, which also provides parking for guests of Symphony Woods, and the construction of an enclosure for its dumpsters.

The overall renovation plans were based on physical needs assessments from 2004 and 2014, and they were developed by the Downtown Columbia Arts and Culture Commission and the pavilion's current operator. These plans included improvements to all facets of the venue.

The venue has been rebuilt to incorporate modern features and amenities that are required by performers and expected by guests, while preserving the charm and unique experience for which Merriweather is known. Care was taken to build and rebuild in ways that are harmonious with Merriweather's existing look, feel, and wooded surroundings—trees were preserved or replanted, stormwater features have been integrated into all phases, and the buildings themselves were constructed to “green” standards.

The construction process went as follows: Phase 1, completed in September of 2015, involved the complete replacement of the venue's “West Plaza,” including a new entrance, box office, concession stand, and bathrooms. Started in October of 2015, Phase 2 included the full replacement of Merriweather's stage house and backstage building to bring them up to current industry standards.

The third phase of the renovation project included the construction of a new concession stand, bathrooms, box office, VIP deck, and office/warehouse space for operations in the venue's “South Plaza.” Construction on this phase began in October of 2016, and it was fully completed by September of 2017.



New re-leveled concession plaza with merchandise stand and elevator

In the fall of 2017, the fourth phase of construction at Merriweather commenced, and included raising the original roof nearly 20 feet, new seats, and new structures to cover the venue's “loge” sections. During the raising of the roof in January of 2018, a critical failure occurred in the lifting equipment, leading to the roof falling to the bare concrete below. There were no injuries and no additional damage to the property, but this obviously complicated an already ambitious off-season construction project.

The roof was rebuilt according to its original design, and some of the original wood from the fascia was preserved and incorporated into the new structure. The venue was able to open as planned for its first concert of the 2018 season in early May.

During the 2018-19 off-season, Merriweather introduced a unique new feature that dazzled and delighted audiences all summer: SkyLawns. Constructed on top of the structures covering Merriweather's “loge” sections and above a new mezzanine level of sky boxes, the SkyLawns are sloped, grassy areas where fans with general admission tickets can see a concert like never before. The SkyLawns were also creatively used to host talks with authors at the Books in Bloom festival in June of 2019. Merriweather's SkyLawns were well-received and very popular with guests last summer, and they have helped cement Merriweather as one of the most iconic outdoor amphitheaters anywhere.

The fifth and final stage of construction began in October of 2019, and it included a complete remaking of the pavilion's eastern fan services areas. Most notably, this phase included major re-grading and terracing of the property, creating larger, flat plazas outside of existing and new concessions and merchandise stands. Additionally, a new fan services plaza with concessions was constructed on a higher terrace to better accommodate guests on the lawn. This phase also includes a new seating area with picnic tables that provides a welcome respite from the main concert area of the venue.

Additionally, the fifth phase of construction included a new restroom building that is open to the public at times when there isn't a concert or other event at Merriweather. This restroom serves visitors to Merriweather Park at Symphony Woods, which has had to rely on temporary restroom accommodations for several years.

Finally, as discussed, the last portion of the fifth phase of construction included a resurfacing of the parking lot Merriweather shares with Symphony Woods, as well as the construction of a discreet area to store dumpsters used by Merriweather Post Pavilion in its operations.



New dumpster enclosure and re-surfaced and re-stripped shared parking area.

Outlook for 2023

The Commission is looking ahead to 2023 with great optimism. DCACC has already engaged in talks with its key collaborators and stakeholders to build on its successes in 2022. and expand programming offerings in 2023. Additionally, DCACC is continuing to focus on strengthening its organizational framework through staff and board development and training and capacity growth.

While life has returned to pre-pandemic normalcy in many ways, arts organizations, in particular, are continuing to feel the pandemic's effects. Audiences have been somewhat slow to return to artistic and cultural programs, and what this dynamic means in the long-term is still uncertain. Nevertheless, DCACC will continue to focus its energy on building strong partnerships to develop accessible, inclusive, and professional programs that appeal to our diverse communities.