

Deborah F. Rutter
President

January 29, 2025

Honorable Chris Smith
U.S. House of Representatives
2373 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable John Moolenaar
U.S. House of Representatives
246 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressmen Smith and Moolenaar:

Thank you for your letter of January 24 regarding the upcoming performances at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (the Kennedy Center) of the National Ballet of China. We appreciate your perspective and insight with respect to cultural diplomacy as it relates to China.

The Kennedy Center has always presented artists from across the world, and it is vital to our mission as the National Cultural Center to present both American and international artists on our stages. The legislation that created the Kennedy Center specifically states that the Board shall, “present classical and contemporary music, opera, drama, dance, and other performing arts from the United States and other countries.”¹ As an institution, we often look to our namesake to ensure that our overarching principals remain clear and that we are guided by our mission, vision, and values. And as President John F. Kennedy famously said, “We must never forget that art is not a form of propaganda; it is a form of truth.”²

This year marks the fourth time the National Ballet of China has performed at the Kennedy Center over the past 20 years, having previously performed in 2005, 2011, and 2019. Additionally, the Kennedy Center recently welcomed dancers from the National Ballet of China as part of *10,000 Dreams: A Celebration of Asian Choreography*. This was a weeklong festival in 2024, which united dancers and choreographers of Asian descent from throughout the world. The festival focused on recognizing and elevating Asian creatives working in ballet, which featured dancers of cultural heritage of Singapore, China, Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, and more. This festival served as an extension of Final Bow for Yellowface, which originated from the Gold Standard Arts Foundation. This globally recognized initiative works to “replace caricature with character” — and create Asian representations that are culturally meaningful and engaging to all audiences.

Over the years, the Kennedy Center has invited countless Chinese, Chinese American, Taiwanese, and other Asian artists and companies from multiple backgrounds and perspectives to rent the Kennedy Center for performances, be presented by the Kennedy Center for performances, or to artistically collaborate and partner with the Kennedy Center on various programming initiatives and performances. From Ai Weiwei who participated in an Arts Summit hosted by the Kennedy

¹ [20 U.S.C. §76j\(a\)\(1\)\(A\)](#)

² John F. Kennedy, 10/26/1963, Amherst, MA. [Remarks at Amherst College On the Arts](#).

Center and the Aspen Institute in 2015, to Cloud Gate Dance Theater of Taiwan, who most recently performed at the Kennedy Center in 2022, to Shen Yun, which has rented the venue and performed annually in recent years and arrives to the Kennedy Center next month for a week's worth of performances. The Kennedy Center's main focus has always been and will always be to provide a venue for and present world-class art.

As you may not know, the Kennedy Center's originating statute prohibits the use of appropriated funds to be spent in connection with any performance. Specifically, the statute states that:

No funds appropriated...may be used for any direct expense incurred in the production of a performing arts attraction, for personnel who are involved in performing arts administration (including any supply or equipment used by the personnel), or for production, staging, public relations, marketing, fundraising, ticket sales, or education.³

Therefore, no appropriated funds support this or any other performance on our stages and we rely on ticket sales, other earned revenue, and donations for all of the Center's artistic curation, which supports nearly 2000 performances a year.

In 1962, during a televised fundraiser to raise monies for the construction of our building, President Kennedy noted that, "Art knows no national boundaries. Genius can speak in any tongue, and the entire world will hear it and listen."⁴ As the Nation's Cultural Center, cultural diplomacy remains a significant component of our work, and presenting art and artists from throughout our country and throughout the world is critical to our mission.

We are happy to further our discussions with you and your staff, and we welcome the opportunity to learn about and highlight additional artists and voices that can be presented at the Kennedy Center.

Most sincerely,



Deborah F. Rutter
President

Cc: David M. Rubenstein, Chairman

³ [20 U.S.C. § 76r\(e\)](#)

⁴ John F. Kennedy, 11/29/1962. Washington, DC. [Remarks at An American Pageant of the Arts.](#)