

THE ARTS TICKET TAKE

STATEWIDE With unemployment the third-highest in the nation, you'd expect Oregonians to upgrade their subscription to Netflix rather than shell out \$40 for a ticket to the theater. But some of the state's largest performing arts organizations experienced an increase in ticket sales during the 2008-2009 season even as contributions from individuals, foundations and businesses often dropped.

The Oregon Ballet Theatre's financial woes have made headlines, but it enjoyed a third consecutive season of record ticket sales. Revenue from ticket sales was up \$380,000 despite the drop in attendance to *The Nutcracker* caused by winter storms. Contributions were down 40%, but an emergency end-of-season fundraiser increased income 24%.

Ticket sales at both the Oregon Symphony and Eugene Symphony exceeded last year's sales, while Portland Center Stage had its second-best-selling season in history (2,000 tickets below 2007-2008, its best season to date). Eugene Symphony and Portland Center Stage also saw an increase in contributions.

"The number of people coming was really strong, but they were definitely shopping for cheaper tickets," says Cynthia Fuhrman, Portland Center Stage marketing and communications director. "Since our audiences tend to be local, with all the talk about stay-

cations they might be turning to things close to home."

Regardless of the success, all these organizations set lower budgets for next season.

Some groups saw fewer tickets sold. Sales for the Eugene Ballet Company and Portland Opera both dropped 15%. They also reported a drop in contributions. Jim Fullan, director of public relations and marketing for Portland Opera, says part of that drop is because of record box office sales in 2007-2008, when the opera performed big hits such as *Carmen* and *Aida*.

Even if ticket sales are high, arts organizations can never meet their budget through earned income alone, says Virginia Willard, executive director of Northwest Business for Culture and the Arts. Typically, sales are 60% of a performing arts organization's revenue.

"If they rely too much on ticket sales, an arts organization cannot take risks," says Willard. "If they make a budget on ticket sales, they have to charge more for their tickets."

One thing is apparent: Those Oregonians with enough financial security to afford a ticket will continue to spend money for that moment when the recession, job woes and rainy weather are locked outside, the house lights dim and the performance begins.

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