

# An Uplifting Fourth of July

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Every once in a while I have an arts experience that catches me by surprise and reminds me about the power and beauty of the arts. The first time I heard Leontyne Price sing in concert, saw Alvin Ailey's "Revelations" by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and George Balanchine's "Serenade" performed by the New York City Ballet are three such moments that come immediately to mind.

I had another magical moment this July Fourth. The Kennedy Center hosts an annual holiday event on our roof, a perfect place to see the fireworks on the national mall and to share relaxed moments with our extended Center family. It is my favorite event of the year.

Before the event this year I wandered around the building and, by chance, entered a rehearsal for our Millennium Stage, which offers a free, unticketed performance every day of the year. (If you are ever in Washington, D.C. please come see us at 6 p.m.)

This holiday the Los Angeles Children's Chorus, a remarkable group of young singers, was performing the second half of the concert.

Watching this chorus of young voices was riveting. Not just because of the youngsters' technical proficiency, which was substantial, but for the seriousness with which they took their work. They were supportive of their colleagues who had vocal or instrumental solos. They asked numerous questions of their wonderful conductor Anne Tomlinson. They questioned the acoustics of the space, commented in polite, but direct, ways when they believed the entire group was not pronouncing words appropriately, and focused completely on rehearsal. It was astonishing.

And Ms. Tomlinson was equally impressive. She answered all of their questions clearly and honestly; she did not talk down to the students but she was clearly in charge. Her directness was all the young people asked for or expected. They would have followed her over a cliff. (The performance was special for me for another reason: a former Kennedy Center Arts Management Fellow, Rachel Fine, who used to be the Executive Director of the chorus, had arranged this engagement.)

I forgot for a moment the 1,200 guests we were about to welcome to our event, the potential for rain that threatened our party, the challenges of managing the complex arts center. All that mattered was this beautiful music and these beautiful young people who were more real than any group of Glee-sters.

And while I had entered the rehearsal feeling tired from a long season, put upon by budget cuts and questioning how many more years I could do this, I realized once again why I do this work, why all arts managers do their work. The opportunity to play a role in presenting such wonderful, fresh, surprising talent is an honor and a privilege.

I had a chance to speak with several of the very proud parents of the children and to their conductor as well. They were all excited and committed to the ensemble. It reminded me that the Fourth of July is when we celebrate the best of America - and these children are simply the best.