Every arts organization seems to have someone in charge of marketing, whose role it is to build audiences, irreverently known as getting “butts-in-the seats.” The title of this book immediately points the reader toward a different and exciting vision, one which the author develops in such a compelling voice that I finally had to stop reading it at bedtime!

Many books making the connection between the arts and community-building seem to view the former primarily as a social service activity. Such an approach is alienating to many who have devoted their lives to the arts as purely aesthetic activity and emphasized the highest standards for performance quality. From their perspective, “high art” has such intrinsic value that serving the community simply means inviting the public to purchase tickets or attend occasional subsidized events. A statement from author/editor Doug Borwick on the back cover initially seems heretical to this view: “It is from community that the arts developed and it is in serving communities that the arts will thrive...communities do not exist to serve the arts; the arts exist to serve communities.” Yet Borwick in no way seeks to diminish artistic standards or aesthetic quality, and indeed shows how a community-based approach can serve to expand audiences and help the arts not only survive but thrive in challenging times.

Borwick’s own credentials as an artist are solid: He holds the Ph.D. in Music Composition from the Eastman School of Music and is an award-winning member of ASCAP. Also informing this work is his nearly thirty year tenure as educator, including directing programs in Arts...
Management and Not-for-Profit Management at Salem College in North Carolina, a small liberal arts institution for women. In addition, he is CEO of ArtsEngaged, offering training and consultation services to artists and arts organizations and publishing works such as this volume.

Following Forewords from the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts and the President of Americans for the Arts, Borwick opens with historical analysis of the “Arts-Community Divide,” designated as Part I of the book. Beginning with traditional societies in which cultural expression is part of living in the community, he accurately traces the reasons behind the individualization of the arts (to be more about the personal expression of the artist) and specialization (so that a small number of people specialize in making art while larger numbers are expected to be the consumers). He then discusses both a rationale for change and obstacles to it, including those raised by artists, arts supporters, and arts organizations.

In Part II, “The Road to Community Engagement,” Borwick adds chapters by additional authors, with topics ranging from how to evaluate outcomes to links between the arts and economic development. Six chapters are devoted to “Tools for Engagement,” such as social media and creative entrepreneurship. The most engaging aspect of this second part of the book comes in the form of stories describing innovative projects in a variety of settings and communities. The “Hip Hop Mental Health Project” and the successful development of Detroit’s Cultural District during the recent recession are two of the many examples.

It was when I reached the more extensive case studies in Part III (“The Practice of Engagement”) that I started telling colleagues I knew as reluctant to embrace community engagement, “You have to read this book!” The success stories include a wide range of established arts organizations meeting the highest artistic standards: Queen’s Museum of Art, Ballet Memphis, Providence String Quartet/Community MusicWorks, Houston Grand Opera, and Pillsbury House Theatre in Minneapolis. Many of my own preconceptions were broken in reading inspiring stories of possibilities for the most traditional art forms to take on essential roles in their communities—and not just among the wealthy patrons we usually connect with classical arts. For example, the story from Community Music Works in West Providence draws on the theory of Brazilian educator and theorist Paolo Freire, describing their intention

\[\textit{to be authentically engaged in the life of a community in such a way that we are not playing a role of cultural missionaries taking classical music to underprivileged children but instead are making music in the context of a neighborhood, inviting a dialogue with the community around us} \] (p. 223).

Setting up residence in a former grocery with large windows inviting residents to watch and come in, the musicians became a fixture in the community. The group invested in the community far beyond their music-making, however, just as residents of any community who care about more than their own self-interests. Yet they do so without compromising artistic quality.
Part IV more briefly envisions “The Future of the Arts in the U.S.” through four concluding essays. My favorite insightfully drew lessons for the arts from the “Slow Food” movement.

As a recent interim dean of a School of Music, Theatre and Dance, I heard many faculty dismiss the institution’s recent commitment to community engagement as something “we were already doing.” This mindset equates the many public performances and other events open to the community as engagement; even the administration often seemed to perceive that the arts are already about community. To anyone in that position, this book will be an eye-opener. Even before I finished the book, I was well-convinced that it should be required reading for every young person graduating from a university or conservatory arts program.

At the same time, however, the volume makes clear that community engagement is not an endeavor to be undertaken lightly by arts organizations seeking to tag onto the latest bandwagon. There are ample stories of missteps and cautions about the years of relationship building necessary to go beyond token effort. Any artists perceiving community engagement as a quick fix for filling empty seats are likely to face disappointment matching that of a community feeling “used” by arts groups. Indeed, Borwick makes clear that, to survive in the future, artists must invest in same kind of rigorous care for their communities that they have for their art.

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