

2024 Annual Report

Nebraska Crossroads Music Festival



Compiled by Erik Higgins and Olga Smola

The Numbers

or just see the highlights!

https://youtu.be/KvtGvX_62co

Total Attendance: 5,600

Including live radio audience: 16,285

Kids under 12 exposed to world-class music: 355

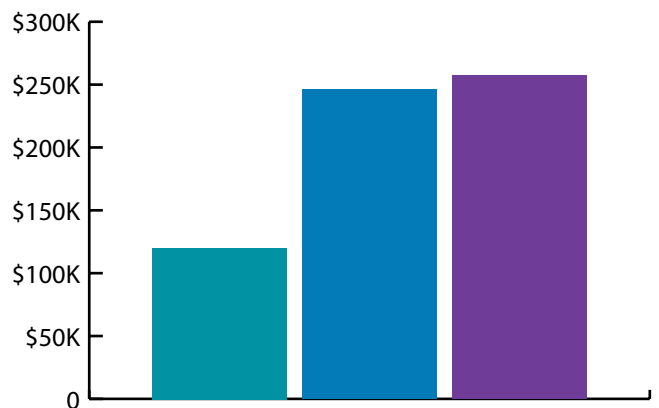
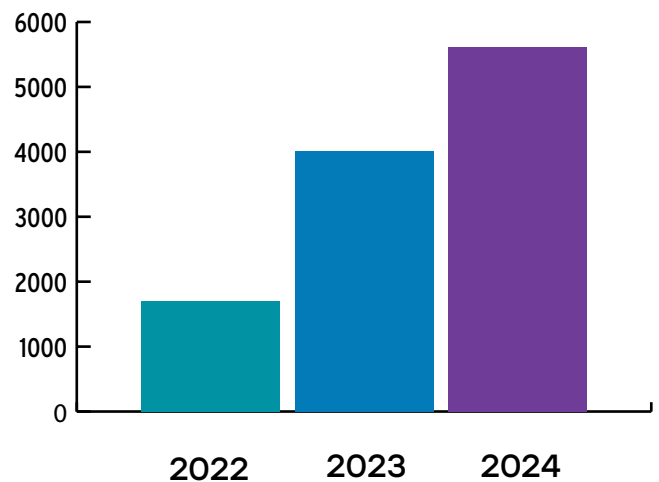
All events in 2024 were FREE

Total out-of-state visitors: 548*

*data: placer.ai/visitomaha.com

Fully Funded Budget: \$257K

we succeeded in sustaining our doubling of geographic scope and budget in 2023 through 2024.



Media Exposure

Television - Total Reach 42,000 (source: Nielsen TV ratings)

KETV Omaha-Preview (via VisitOmaha)

KOLN/KGIN Lincoln-Interview on 4pm news and early morning segments

Radio - Total Reach 272,934 (source: Nielsen Audio Ratings)

KVNO Omaha-Media Sponsor

Nebraska Public Media-Interview, Live Radio Performance, Sponsorship

KZUM Lincoln-Interview and media sponsorship

KFAB News Omaha-Interview

KIOS FM Omaha-Interview

KOBM-FM Boomer Omaha-Interview

B1073 The River Lincoln-Interview

KBBX Radio Lobo Omaha (Spanish language)-Interview

KMMQ La Nueva Omaha (Spanish language)-Interview

Print Media - Total Reach 83,499 (source: circulation data OWH and LJS)

Omaha World Herald-Preview

Lincoln Journal Star-Feature Story

Social Media - 1.3K Followers on Facebook; 612 followers on Instagram

Musicians: 62 total

Local (Lincoln/Omaha): 34

Non-local: 28

International: 8

Cultural groups/nations represented by artists:

Anishinaabe, Armenia, Canada, Cuba, Denmark, Mexico, Navajo, Ojibwe, Oneida, Peru, Ponca, Rosebud Lakota, Russia, Sweden, United States, Uzbekistan



Dream Warriors Workshop

Indigenous Hip-Hop Collective at Crossroads

Festival goers enjoyed the Dream Warriors, an indigenous hip-hop collective at the festival's showcases. But a whole different project was taking place in the festival week, behind the scenes at the Johnny Carson School for Theater and Film.

Inside the black box theatre on 12th street, the Dream Warriors began working with Swedish recording producers Fredrik Serholt and Paulina Delin to create brand new music. Visual Artist Sarah Rowe was there to soak up the vibe and sketch new art.

Dream Warriors: Gunnur Jules, Tall Paul, Mic Jordan and Twin City Tone

The goal was to record three songs. But the first day provided more than a little trepidation - this was the first time the group had met in-person. Despite half a year of monthly Zoom meetings to generate ideas and set expectations, everyone was wondering if they could pull off this project as envisioned in just a few days.

Sneaking a peek inside the theatre on the first day, one might wonder if the vibe was off; artists were quiet, looking at their phones, the mic stood to the side, no one in front of it. A closer look would reveal thumbs intensely writing and refining lyrics on note-taking apps. Soon the beats would be rolling and the mic was hammered with word after word, rhyme after rhyme. In just a handful of days, the Dream Warriors would lay down five fresh tracks.

On August 11, the final day of the festival, a public workshop unveiled those songs to the world for the first time. Attendees were able to hear the songs and witness the journey taken by the group in the previous days. The conversations around the songs revealed initial nerves around the project and the journey toward inspiration and mutual respect.

With the success of this residency, ***the festival has made official its formerly unofficial reputation: incubate new projects that have the potential to change the world.*** The Dream Warriors stage production, born in Nebraska in August, will premiere in late 2025 in Minneapolis and after, tour the world.



“

Tone: That sounds too much like a East Coast beat, and I was hearing it more like a West Coast beat...

Fredrik: But where are we anyway...somewhere in the middle?

I must say that no one who looked at the program would have predicted the performances that would mean the most to me were the ones by the Dream Warriors. Hip Hop is not generally my “go to” music. (the hours I spent listening to the Hamilton soundtrack so that I could understand it when I saw it on stage don’t count.) I appreciated both Friday and Saturday night’s performances, but the presentation on Sunday left me in awe. The mutual respect and appreciation that had developed between The Dream Warriors and Paulina & Fredrick warmed my heart. It’s difficult to trust strangers with your music and it takes a special skill and an open hearts to coax out that trust.” -Dee Erb

”



Omaha Showcase

In 2023, the festival opened an exciting chapter by expanding into Omaha with the first ever Showcase at Gene Leahy Mall. This year's Omaha Showcase was once again a top-notch cultural triumph with a program that was as surprising as it was enjoyable, as diverse as it was cohesive, featuring music with Cuban, New York, Native American and Armenian roots.

Hear the highlights:

<https://youtu.be/Mgd89tl-ZXg>

Photos (clockwise, top right)

Authentic Light Orchestra (ALO);
Mixed Harmony;
John Hadfield and Ron Blake Duo;
Dream Warriors;
MC's Sherry Brownrigg and Jeff Koterba
Darryl White with ALO.



Lincoln Showcase

The first ever Lincoln Showcase debuted in 2024 at Antelope Park, co-presented by the Asian Community and Cultural Center and hosted by Nebraska Public Media's Genevieve Randall. Great music on stage, activities for kids, food trucks, a warm welcome from Lincoln Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird made it a night to remember.

Photos (clockwise top right)

Mixed Harmony;
Authentic Light Orchestra;
Authentic Light Orchestra strings;
Emmanuel Hovhannisyan on duduk;
Crowd at Antelope Park;
John Hadfield and Ron Blake Duo;
State and Regional Youth Poet
Laureate Aliyah American Horse.



Havanna in the Heartland

“Playing at the festival reignited that fire inside me, reminding me of who I am and what I want,” says Humberto Garcia Raul Gonzales, the former bandleader and arranger for the band synonymous with Cuban music – Buena Vista Social Club. Gonzales’ journey to Nebraska Crossroads is a bewildering journey; from a global superstar, to living in relative obscurity in Iowa.

In 2023, Mixed Harmony and Gonzales debuted at the Nebraska Crossroads Music Festival. In 2024, they returned as one of the featured groups in the showcase performances. But the communications began through a combination of translators, go-betweens, and ChatGTP.



“Can I bring one more?” inquired Gonzales. “He is the best trumpet player from all of Cuba. It’s important. I need him.” Soon, Nebraska Crossroads Music Festival was hosting a 10-year reunion from Havana in Omaha and Lincoln. Here, six of the best Cuban expat musicians in the United States were together again, unleashing a joyous sound upon the Midwest summer air.

Gonzales is a man of many talents – a fantastic saxophonist and pianist – as well as songwriter and arranger. Soft-spoken and modest, every interaction he had with staff and audience; Humberto was clear how grateful he was to be playing music again. Since moving to the U.S. Gonzales has had to set music aside in favor of paying the bills. He says, “I’ve had to take on very hard jobs, working 8 to 12 hours, and when I finish, I just get home and fall asleep, with no strength left to even think about music.” It’s astonishing to think about this while listening to Mixed Harmony – and the hidden talent all across our country.

After the Lincoln Showcase, Mixed Harmony’s band members confided, “Humberto’s too modest, but he’s a mentor to all of us. He taught us everything we know about this music and he is a great musician.” The Nebraska Crossroads Music Festival audiences agree.



Contemporary Classical Concert

Heart and Soul

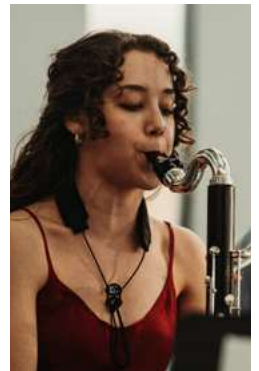
If the showcase concerts exhibit in one evening the festival's panache, it is the contemporary classical concerts where you experience the soul. These concerts are where the musicians have space to take risks, where new pieces are premiered, new relationships crystalize and magic moments happen with a rhythmic consistency.

The two concerts premiered works by John Hadfield, Valeri Tolstov, Vardan Ovsepian and Juanitío Becenti. In Lincoln, a choir led by Mary Young joined the other performers and sang works by William-Linthicum Blackhorse and Corey Payette.

Most of the music performed at these concerts was written by the artists on stage. People come to these concerts to listen intently and they leave transformed, including an elderly woman who came up to us after the concert:

“ I wanted to tell you, young man, thank you so much for this gift! I am 93 years old and I can go peacefully now. –attendee at Omaha's Contemporary Classical concert at Gallery 1516

Photos (top to bottom)
Performance at Gallery 1516;
Festival Ensemble;
The Crossroads Festival Choir
conducted by Mary White performs
works of indigenous composers;
Festival choir



Cultures in the Crossfade Film

Hasan for City Council!

It's the end of the 'Cultures in the Crossfade' screening at the Mary Reipma Ross Media Arts Center and someone in the crowd yells out, "Hasan for City Council!" Hasan, who has been in front of the crowd after playing music and speaking about the documentary he was featured in, just smiles shyly.

Hasan Khalil is something of a cultural icon: barbershop owner, musician, youth and community advocate. This night, it turns out, is a celebration of his perspective as well as a tribute to the city of Lincoln.

The documentary, 'Cultures in the Crossfade,' was filmed in Hasan's barbershop but came tonight via Los Angeles. Josh Kun, USC professor and film producer sees Lincoln as a microcosm of the United States. He turned his lens on Hasan to examine the cultural voices in the U.S.

Hasan grew up in a refugee camp in Syria after his family was forced to flee from Iraq. After 15 years in Syria, Hasan emigrated to Buffalo, N.Y. before coming to Lincoln. In Lincoln, Hasan has made a home; raising a family, running a business and playing music with people from all over. The documentary introduces us to Hasan and to Tye, a long-time Lincoln drummer who is known for hardcore, metal beats. 'Cultures in the Crossfade' examines Hasan's and Tye's relationship - two people from wildly different backgrounds - and how music has no time for the

widening cultural gap in the U.S. Tye spoke to the room after the screening, "I was one of those guys, 'This is my country. Whatever you're thinking about me right now, that's how I was. I'm that guy.'" The relationship of Hasan and Tye, beautifully witnessed in Kun's film and in the discussions and music performance after the screening was hopeful and celebratory. All of it showcasing what Kun says Lincoln has to offer to the rest of the country: an example.



“

Tye: I was one of those guys 'This is my Country.' Whatever you're thinking about me right now, that's how I was. I'm that guy.

Photos (top, below, bottom)

Tye and Hasan – still from Cultures in the Crossfade;
MOONPIE performs at Kiechel;
Vardan Ovsepian and Emmanuel Hovhannisyan perform in front of Lincoln's skyline

Music on the Rooftop

An intimate revue concert on Kiechel Art Gallery's roof



Kids Concerts

The World at Your Doorstep

Reading Rainbow taught us that through books “you can go anywhere”, but the world literally came to Nebraska’s libraries during the kids concerts of this year’s festival, with people, music and stories from every corner of the globe.

The 2024 interactive kids concerts, one in Lincoln at Bennett Martin Public Library and one in Omaha at the Downtown Branch of the Omaha Public Libraries, took 36 children on a beautiful and colorful journey through music. Five artists, one each from Denmark, Russia, Mexico, Armenia, and the U.S., wove a tapestry of music that accompanied the kids through a story of seasons and transformation in Buffy Saint-Marie’s Still this Love Goes On. Cotton-ball snow and silk-scarf wind littered the floor as the kids enjoyed the festival’s excellent artists in a hands-on and up-close environment.



Kusi Taki at SAIL Camp



Each year, since 2022, the Nebraska Crossroads Music Festival has held performances at SAIL (String Alliance in Lincoln) camp, providing young students the opportunity to see some of the top performers in the field up close and in person. This year, the collaboration with the festival went a step further when Oscar Rios of Kusi Taki coached the students and performed traditional music from Peru with them on their final concert, music that was arranged for them and the occasion.

Photos (top right, middle right) Everyone gets a chance to perform at the these kids’ concerts; Making a snowstorm out of cotton-balls; **(left)** Oscar Rios Coaches SAIL camp students on the Peruvian traditional song “Flight of the Concorde.”



Party in Omaha

Jarana (verb/noun): A cozy/ party feeling

The Latin band Jarana has been a part of the Nebraska Crossroads Music Festival since its inception and it is easy to see why: this Lincoln band with international roots gives a high-energy, dance-inducing performance every time. In 2024, they did just that at the Lakeside Pavilion at The RiverFront in Omaha.



Another Crossroads Project goes Global



Tervetuloa Suomeen!

Valeri Tolstov's arrangement of "La Folia" that was commissioned by the 2023 festival made its European debut on July 27th, as the grand finale-the last of 54 concerts-of the prestigious Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival in Finland. In addition to kickstarting the project in 2023, Crossroads also served as the fiscal sponsor for this performance. Further performances are being planned for Europe and the U.S in 2025. See the performance [here](#).

Thank You

To our artists, partners, sponsors, donors, volunteers, Board of directors, friends and family:
we couldn't do it without you!

The Nebraska Crossroads Music Festival is a non-profit organization with the **mission** to **highlight and celebrate the rich and diverse cultural heritage of our community through creative and conscientious musical programming, storytelling and workshops.**

More info at NebraskaMusicFest.org

