



NEWS FROM TCA: APRIL 2026

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This month's newsletter contains many reminders of the impact of the arts, including our grantee spotlight about Texas Filmmakers' Thin Line Fest. Photo: Joshua Butler

Young Masters Celebration April 13

The Texas Cultural Trust will celebrate the 2026 class of [Young Masters](#) during an awards ceremony and concert on Monday, April 13 at Austin's ZACH Theater. The evening will feature Ray Benson, Lauren Anderson, Elizabeth Crook, Trevor Scott, and Texas Young Masters alumni! More information on the event is available [here](#).

The Young Masters program is a joint initiative of the Texas Commission on the Arts and the Texas Cultural Trust (TXCT) and is generously supported by the Butler Texas Young Masters Endowment. The grant program provides exemplary art students in grades 8-11 with the financial help they need to pursue advanced study in the areas of visual arts, literary arts, music, theater,

dance, musical theater, folk & traditional arts, and media arts. This year's promising young students come from 12 cities across Texas and together display a variety of artistic talents.

The state's most talented young artists receive the title of "Young Master" and are awarded grants of \$5,000 per year to further their studies in their chosen arts disciplines. Students are eligible to receive the grant for two years. This gifted

group of 15 students represents the thirteenth class of Young Masters. Since the program's inception in 2002, TCA and the TXCT have named 199 Young Masters, awarding over \$1.3 million to aspiring artists from across the state.

In order to be considered for the Young Masters grant, students must be legal U.S. residents living in Texas and participating in a school-based program, a summer institute, a specialized course of study, or receiving private lessons from a qualified professional instructor. They must also maintain passing grades in all academic areas. Young Masters are selected by a TCA-convened citizen panel of experts from across the state based on artistic excellence, level of commitment and quality of their proposed plan of action.

Sydney Bridgewater, 9th Grade, Frisco, Dance ●
Emmalynne Brown, 10th Grade, Richmond, Dance/Ballet ● **Isabella Cervera**, 11th Grade, San Antonio, Musical Theater ● **Josephine Chow**, 11th Grade, Austin, Music/Piano ● **Jenny Chu**, 11th Grade, Dallas, Literary Arts/Poetry ● **Matthew Conway**, 9th Grade, Prosper, Dance ● **Alessandro Dieguez**, 10th Grade, Amarillo, Musical Theater ● **Joseph Kirillov**, 10th Grade, Prosper, Dance ● **Caroline McGowan**, 10th Grade, Dallas, Dance ● **Annie Newton**, 9th Grade, Kingwood, Music/Percussion ● **Hana Reel**, 10th Grade, The Woodlands, Music/Vocal ● **Emilia Tovar-Catete**, 11th Grade, Mission, Film/Media Arts ● **Elim Wong**, 9th Grade, Plano, Music/Violin ● **Ayden Yang**, 8th Grade, Dallas, Music/Voice ● **Jonathan Zhang**, 11th Grade, Houston, Music/Saxophone



Texas Young Masters

Upcoming TCA Application Deadline

TCA has an upcoming application deadline. As always, the TCA staff is happy to discuss your goals and eligibility to determine which programs are right for you. You may also request that a TCA staff member review your application and provide feedback. Ideally, these requests would be made at least two weeks before the application deadline.

Grant Program: Arts Respond Performance Support

This program provides professional artist fees to Texas nonprofits, schools, colleges, and units of government for hiring an artist from the [Texas Touring Roster](#) to do a performance. These applications are funded based on a percentage of contracted fees.

Activity dates must occur: Between June 15, 2026 and August 31, 2026

Application deadline: Midnight on May 1, 2026

Application form: [Online](#)

Resources: [Grant guidelines](#), [contact TCA staff](#), [FAQ](#)

TCA Speaker Series: Measure Your Impact & Boost Your Funding

On March 26, TCA held an online convening, **Creative Approaches to Accessibility**. Speakers gave insights into the evolving world of accessibility and demonstrated how organizations can integrate the frameworks and consideration outlined by the Americans with Disabilities Act with their existing mission to serve more members of their community. If you weren't able to join the live event, a recording of it is available [here](#).

Thanks again to our speakers for this session, **Celia Hughes**, Executive Director at Art Spark Texas (Austin), **Lisa Scheps**, Founder and Executive Artistic Director at Ground Floor Theatre (Austin), **Connie Hatchett Bargainer**, Head of Education at the Kimbell Art Museum (Fort Worth), and **Melissa Sztuk**, the Kimbell's Community and Bilingual Programs Coordinator.



TCA's next Speaker Series professional development opportunity is coming up in May! This free optional online webinar is titled **Measure Your Impact & Boost Your Funding**. Our speaker will discuss why quantitative data is important to funders and how organizations can raise more money effectively by capturing that information and incorporating it into communications, applications, and reports.

The virtual meeting will be on **Wednesday, May 20 from 2:00 - 3:30 pm Central**. It is open to arts nonprofits, artists, and members of the public. TCA is excited to feature **Stacy Keith**, Director of the Lubbock Cultural Arts Foundation, as the speaker for this event. She is a member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals and attained her Certified Fundraising Executive designation in December 2012. Stacy has worked in the nonprofit and higher education sector since 1999. She loves the art of fundraising and working with volunteers. After ten years as a fundraising and campaign consultant, Stacy was selected as the founding Director of the Lubbock Cultural Arts Foundation in 2020. In this role, she manages the Texas Music Friendly, Texas Film Friendly, and Texas Digital Media Friendly Certifications alongside the City of Lubbock and works to serve the artistic community.

[Register](#) today and mark your calendar! TCA selected this topic using feedback from constituents, and we expect that future meetings in this series will address other needs expressed by members of the Texas arts field.

Photo: Lacie Freelen

Register Now to Be a 2026 Blue Star Museum

The National Endowment for the Arts has opened [registration](#) for the Blue Star Museums Program, in partnership with Blue Star Families. The program encourages museums, zoos, botanical gardens, historic houses, etc. to offer free admission to active-duty military personnel and up to five family members. The program will launch on Armed Forces Day, Saturday, May 16, 2026, and continue through Labor Day, Monday, September 7, 2026.



Please consider registering for this program; it's a great way to express appreciation for service and sacrifice, and to recruit life-time museum goers!

Apply to Be a TCA Grant Evaluator

Each year, TCA invites roughly 200 Texans to serve as peer reviewers of the grant applications we receive. We are grateful to these members of our arts field who donate their time and knowledge to our panel review process and assess the quality of grant applications. The peer review process is central to the Commission's efforts to maintain an accountable, accessible awards system for the State of Texas.

If you would like insight into the grant evaluation process, we invite you to nominate yourself to serve on a panel. TCA is not able to pay for this work, but it will allow you to gain experience as a grant evaluator, see how other organizations present their programs and challenges, and ensure that TCA grant decisions can be made—we really can't do this without you. Nominations are accepted year-round and can be made [here](#).

Panels can be held online or in person in Austin. TCA reimburses for travel and hotel costs for in-person meetings. For online panels, TCA assigns reviewers no more than 25 grant applications to help keep the workload reasonable. **Evaluators can also be grant applicants**—TCA excludes evaluators from reviewing and scoring an application that they submitted or have any other conflict of interest with.

Support Texas Arts with the *State of the Arts* License Plate



TCA's chic black-and-silver *State of the Arts* minimalist design license plate is available to order at <https://www.myplates.com/go/arts>. This plate design can go on a passenger car, motorcycle, trailer, or private bus (attention, Texas bands!). TCA will receive a portion of the sales of the plate. Note that

this plate is part of MyPlates' "Lone Star Series," but only the *State of the Arts*

plate supports TCA. There is a price break for those ordering their plate for multiple years. Make a long-term commitment to the arts!

TCA Rural Tours Bring More Arts to Underserved Areas

In our continuing efforts to provide more quality performances and arts opportunities to rural areas of the state, TCA has selected five Texas Touring Roster artists and groups to provide free performances in rural counties during the spring. Each artist or group provides five performances in an assigned area, and the performances are hosted by local nonprofits, units of government, or schools. TCA pays each artist a flat fee for the performances directly, eliminating costs to host organizations. Hosts are reminded that any Texas nonprofit or unit of government, including a school or library, is eligible to apply for a Performance Support grant for up to half of a Texas Touring Roster artist's fee.



This month, we are excited to share news about recent and upcoming performances in Bosque and Wharton counties.

Meridian Independent School District students experienced performances by accordionist and trumpet player **Alex Meixner** on March 31. Alex blends cultures and styles to orchestrate a symphony of talent that transcends genres. He is known for his seamless transitions from traditional folk to unexpected covers, bringing polka music to new audiences with high energy and charisma. Meridian Elementary School students enjoyed a performance by Alex, and Meridian High School students worked with him directly during a band and brass clinic.



Nia's Daughters Movement Collective is returning to Wharton County on April 30 to delight Wharton Elementary School's second and third grade students with interactive story time performances. Nia's Daughters Movement Collective is a congressionally recognized, multigenerational dance group of like-minded Black women dance and

multidisciplinary artists. Their mission is to create and support art and wellness initiatives through the lens of Black women and girls.

If you have students at these schools, we hope they enjoy these free performances! We'll have more spring performances to share in our May newsletter. Special thanks to the fantastic artists conducting rural tours on behalf of TCA and to their host organizations.

Photos: Alex Meixner by Speedbump Media; Nia's Daughters Movement Collective by Keda Sharber of Images by Papillion

Welcome, Doreen!



On March 22, TCA welcomed a new program assistant to our staff, **Doreen Shi**. Doreen is from Lubbock, where she discovered her love of animation and digital art through classes offered at her high school. She later attended the University of Texas at Austin to earn a B.S. in Arts and Entertainment Technologies. After college, Doreen worked at TV/film production companies and the Texas House of Representatives before coming to TCA. In her free time, she likes to cook, read books, go thrifting, and try to keep her plants alive.

Photo: Max Bell

Grantee Spotlight: A World of Arts Brings Spending & Spontaneity

Every fall, TCA staff spend many, many hours reviewing report forms that grantees submit as they close out their grants. These reports share arts organizations' trials and tribulations, challenges and solutions. Many of these stories will resonate with others across our field, so we're sharing some of them through grantee spotlights.



This month, we're spotlighting **Texas Filmmakers**, which organizes the Thin Line Fest, a five-day, multidisciplinary arts festival that transforms downtown Denton into a hub for documentary film, live music, photography, and visual art. Organized entirely by an all-volunteer staff, the festival channels its resources directly into programming that highlights artists from across Texas and around the world. Films are screened at the historic Campus Theatre, live music is heard on seven stages across five city blocks, and works from photographers around the globe are exhibited. Together, these programs create an immersive festival experience where audiences can move seamlessly between screenings, concerts, exhibitions, and an arts market, all within Denton's Cultural District.

With support from a TCA Cultural District Project grant in 2025, Thin Line Fest continued to grow as a destination arts event while maintaining free admission for attendees. Registration data shows that over half of their thousands of attendees come from outside Denton, with more than 10% traveling from beyond the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. Once attendees arrive in the Cultural District for the free festival, they spend money at local restaurants, hotels, and small businesses.

The festival programming promises spontaneity and discovery to its attendees. This year, after a screening of *My Bad Sisters*, an intimate and rebellious exploration of sisterhood by London-based sisters Pollie and Sophia Duniam, audiences were treated to a lively discussion with the creators, followed by

them performing an impromptu live musical set at a popular Denton venue, turning a casual gathering into an authentic communal celebration for festivalgoers and locals alike.

As Thin Line Fest continues to grow, its organizers remain committed to strengthening Denton's Cultural District as a vibrant center for creativity and cultural tourism. Future plans include expanding their reach to audiences across Texas with destination travel packages and continuing to attract artists and visitors from around the world. Thin Line Fest demonstrates how a community-driven event can spark artistic exchange, support working artists, and bring new energy to a city's cultural landscape.

TCA is proud to be able to support Texas Filmmakers and so many wonderful organizations across the state who make the arts accessible to more of our fellow Texans.

Photo: Colby Cervantes

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