

History of the Arts in Murray City

Murray City's art traditions are about as old as the city itself. Murray's Commercial Hall built in 1893 featured a stage on the second floor which became known as Murray's Opera House where theatrical presentations were held for several decades. Willam F. Robinson, Murray's own "music man", started teaching music in 1907 by walking to each elementary school. The music program expanded to include secondary music programs with marching bands, choirs, and operettas. Other programs in visual arts, theater, and dance grew as school curriculum expanded during the 1920s. Sixth grade students anxiously prepared for the popular Maypole dance competition, part of an annual community festival sponsored by the school district during the 30s through the 50s. Arts in the broader community were developed by local musicians such as the Murray Band conducted by William V. Morris and the Olympus Male Choir conducted by Morris Cannegieter. Art related businesses thrived such as the Matt Madsen art studio and Don Blair Photography. Day Murray Music which opened in 1946 continues to serve the Murray community. The arts as we know it had its beginnings in the 1970s.

Beginning in the 1970s, Murray experienced a major expansion in the arts. In 1974, the **Murray Community Education** program was born and currently includes over 500 students in a dance program offering tap, modern, and ballet; other art organizations followed, all of which still exist today. Founded in 1975, the **Murray Symphony Orchestra** was originally named the Holladay Pops Symphony Orchestra and Chorale. When the group disbanded the following year, orchestra members reorganized and began rehearsing in Murray where its name was changed to the Murray Symphony. It has grown to membership of over 80 instrumentalists. The orchestra presents five to six concerts each year.

Murray Arts Council was formed in 1977 after the city presented two productions in the park, the first celebrating our nation's bicentennial. In 1980, the first annual musical was produced, *South Pacific*, on a temporary stage built in Murray Park. In 1985, the arts council opened the new Murray Park Amphitheater with *Cinderella* and continues to produce at least one musical each year. They produced the first Murray Idol Competition in 2008 which ran for a few years.

Other community groups began in 1986. The **Murray Concert Band** provides an opportunity for musicians of all ages and various walks of life to "make music together". The band rehearses weekly and provides four major concerts a year. The **Murray City Arts Advisory Board** was created as an official city arts board to oversee and provide future vision for the arts in the community, working with the various art groups currently functioning.

The downtown district features a core of successful art related businesses. **Day Murray Music** has been operating since 1946. The **Ballet Centre** opened its doors in 1986 originally offering ballet and ballroom dancing several times a week. In 2017, the ballroom component was closed but the costume and ballet businesses continue with 3 annual products that include free matinee programs for schools in the spring. Another major theatrical business, **Desert Star Playhouse** opened in 1989.

In 1992, the **Murray City Cultural Arts** program was created under the Parks and Recreation Department. Together, the **Arts Advisory Board** and the **Cultural Programs Office** have created year-round cultural activities including arts-in-education projects, workshops and camps, musicals, visual art exhibits and competitions. A summer and winter season, created together with local performing arts organizations, have been successfully operating since 1990. Murray Arts in the Park entertains over 13,000 patrons each summer and the winter season attracts approximately 11,000.

When the county ZAP program was approved by county residents in 1997, additional funding was available for new projects. Together, the Arts Board and Cultural Programs staff focused much of this funding on arts-in-education projects such as art and music literacy packets for all elementary teachers, professional touring performances presented in combined assemblies for students, teacher in-service, Olympic dance festival, Shakespeare festival, dance residencies, film festivals, after school musicals, and music specialists in every elementary school. **By 2014, collaborated programming had expanded to involve between 30,000-40,000 patrons and 2500 artists (young and old) each year.**