

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Why Does Detroit Matter?

Tod Hardin · Wednesday, August 14th, 2013

Cultural Weekly reached out to numerous leaders within Detroit's creative community and gave them the opportunity to tell the world one simple thing: Why this city matters. We were happily overwhelmed with responses and are delighted to share the feedback that came in.

"Because life in Detroit is so hard...the art that comes out of it has to be great."

Ismael Ahmed

Co-Founder and Director, [Concert of Colors](#), Co-Founder, Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS)

"One day Detroit will come back and it'll be as generic, commercialized and boring as every other place. Until then, everyone should come experience all the inspiration to be found here."

Toby Barlow

Award-Winning novelist, screenwriter, Chief Creative Officer at [Team Detroit](#)

"Detroit matters because, whatever the circumstances, its creativity never ceases."

Graham W.J. Beal

Director, President and CEO, [Detroit Institute of Arts](#)

"Detroit matters because it is the heart & soul of the working people of America, and every genre of music from gospel to jazz pop & rock to hip hop flourishes and is nurtured here."

Joan Belgrave

[Singer](#), songwriter, producer

"Detroit sits at the base of one of the greatest waterways of the world and it's also the Mecca of the music world."

Marcus Belgrave

Legendary [Jazz Trumpeter](#) and Educator

"It is not the bounty of life that is interesting, it is the struggle to get to that bounty. Detroit struggles. In the good and bad times Detroit's greatest product is hope."

Tom Carleton

Partner and Director, [Mindfield](#) (creative agency)

"Detroit matters because its where I'm from and even in the wake of the "Bankruptcy" it stands as a cultural beacon and will NEVER be bankrupt of culture, soul and spirit!! To do this would be going against God's plan for my hometown and we sure don't want to do that!! Right?"

James Carter

World-renowned [Jazz saxophone player](#)

"Few cities can boast the symbiotic relationship that Detroit has with jazz. Now in its 34th year, our event, along with the city, not only celebrates the history of jazz, but also the continual flow of

creative artist that grow out of Detroit.”

Christopher Collins

Creative Director of the Detroit Jazz Festival, Professor and Director of Jazz Studies at Wayne State University

“Detroit has changed your world in more ways than you can count. THE ASSEMBLY LINE, eventually giving us the ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY. MOTOWN, an attempt to bring assembly line production methods to pop music, essentially becoming a factory for making hit records, in the process altering the course of Western Civilization...and when all of the above was gone, leaving Detroit a company town with no company, DETROIT TECHNO rose from the desolation to change the course of civilization AGAIN. Detroit’s motto is ‘Resurget Cineribus’ which means ‘We will rise from the ashes.’ Res Ipsa Loquitur.”

Mick Collins

Singer, songwriter, musician – [The Dirtbombs](#), [The Gories](#)

“Detroit is a cultural lifeline in this country. I believe when Detroit starts to recognize this and starts utilizing its arts and music legacy, the country will see that Detroit does matter.

Thornetta Davis

Award-winning [blues](#) vocalist

“Detroit matters to us because we are here. Like every great city, we have our own unique social, cultural, and educational history. Add to that: an incredible geographic setting. This is our home, and we believe in its future.”

David DiChiera

Founder & General Manager, [Michigan Opera Theatre](#), internationally-acclaimed composer

“Detroit has heart, soul and a resiliency that others can only try to understand. Our challenges build character, and that character will continue to build, rebuild and sustain our city well beyond the expectations of our naysayers.”

Karen Dumas

[Communication strategist](#) and former Chief of Communications for the City of Detroit

“Bankruptcy is the declared financial status of the municipality, not the spiritual and creative status of the community. Beyond the industrial history, Detroit is an integral part of the world’s cultural continuum. Collectively, this entire region remains engaged and encouraged.”

Mike Ellison

[Singer, songwriter, slam poet](#)

“The hardships that we’ve experienced have not only required an environment of innovation, they’ve bred a culture of passionate expression and creative ingenuity. We know what it is to fight for our art, and because of that – the things we create are shaping the way creators and collectors view the world.”

Sara Frey

[Strategist at Skidmore Studio](#), Co-founder of Free Art Friday Detroit

“Detroit is a special place—a great love story! It’s good when it’s good and it’s bad when it’s bad. It’s a place of originality. If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere.”

Tyree Guyton

[Internationally-acclaimed artist](#), Founder and Artistic Director for [The Heidelberg Project](#)

“Detroit is once again at the wedge edge of devising cultural, social and politically innovative ways to solve problems and strut its stuff. The rest of the world will be wise to pay attention and learn something.”

Bill Harris

[Playwright, poet](#), Emeritus Professor of English from Wayne State University

“Detroit is a key hub for artists and creative thinkers from around the globe. Many who have played at Movement and have seen commercial success attribute the sounds of Detroit as an inspiration.”

Jason Huvaere

Director, [Movement Electronic Music Festival](#), President of Paxahau, Inc.

“Detroit IS humanity – in all its beauty, ugliness, spirit, struggle, injury, hope, despair, tragedy, love, hate, history. Detroit makes you humble. Detroit makes you real. Detroit is a provocative piece of art that won’t allow you to remain untouched, callous, or disengaged. Detroit makes you love it and work harder for it than you’ve worked for anything in your life.”

Sarah James

Fundraising and Membership Chair for [People for Palmer Park](#), and Communications Chair for University District Community Association

“Detroit is this wonderfully unique stew of people, music and culture. Notice that I didn’t say a “melting pot.” What makes Detroit cool is that each culture is represented in the “stew” and each flavor is distinct but complementary. There’s nowhere else quite like it.”

Rev. Robert Jones, Sr.

Acclaimed roots [musician](#), [artist](#), storyteller, teacher and preacher

“Detroit is the center of the worldwide automotive industry that supported the employment of tens of millions of people in the U.S. and across the world. The global wave of changing economies will not stop at our city limits.”

Njia Kai

Director of the [African World Festival](#) and Performing Arts Manager for Midtown Detroit, Inc.

“Detroit matters because for decades it has contributed to the culture of the world and for that reason it should always remember Providence and keep on steppin’.”

Yousef Lateef

Grammy Award-Winning [musician](#), composer and educator; recipient of the 2010 Jazz Masters Fellow from the National Endowment for the Arts

“Detroit is the Heartbeat of America and the World!”

Hubert Massey

Master Muralist/Artist, Kresge Fine Arts Fellow

“Detroit matters because it has stopped seeing itself through the eyes of others and realized that the raw creative spirit that defines it remains.”

Juanita Moore

President & CEO of the [Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History](#)

“Detroit is one of the most interesting cities in the world because it’s evolving in front of your eyes into what it will be in its next act. It was at the forefront of the Industrial Age in the last century and it won’t be ignored in this century either.”

Karla Murray

National Manager at [Film Detroit](#) (Detroit Film Office)

“Over six major art institutions in Detroit were founded by African Americans and maintain all or part of their missions in preservation of African American Art. For example, the Detroit Institute of Art houses the General Motors Center for African American Art, which is the only one in existence at a major museum.”

Dr. George N’Namdi

Founder of the [N’Namdi Center for Contemporary Art](#), and one of the most respected art dealers and gallery owners in America

“Detroit is the heart of a region that is four-million strong, with each and every person carrying a portion of the city’s soul – past, present and future. Its history is the history of 20th century

America, with cultural institutions that are among the nation's treasures, an architectural legacy that is unique among American cities, and a spirit that is indomitable. It was creative thinking that built this region and creative thinking will sustain it."

Rip Rapson

President and CEO, [The Kresge Foundation](#)

"What is special about Detroit, and the other cities like it, is the perseverance and courage of its citizens to overcome the policies and still strive to believe in the American dream."

Mitch Ryder

Singer, Songwriter, [Detroit rock and roll icon](#)

"Detroit—from the expanding US frontier to the birth of the industrial revolution, to the arsenal of democracy to the sound track of the civil rights movement—has been at the center of the American experience. We are the tough, gritty, tenacious, and hard working. Detroiters are builders, engineers and artists; makers of things and writers of songs. Detroit matters because Detroit represents the creative ingenuity that is the basis of American resilience."

Matt Seeger

Professor of Communication and Dean of the [College of Fine, Performing and Communication Arts at Wayne State University](#)

"Detroit has long inspired some of the most creative spirit and expression the world has ever seen. That energy – that determination to turn visions into reality – is palpable in this city, and it is exciting to be a part of it."

Nancy Sizer

Director, [Detroit Artists Market](#), a nonprofit contemporary art gallery highlighting Detroit area artists

"When I signed up with the Detroit Symphony in 2006, many people warned me that tough economic times were coming. Knowing this, I still wanted to be part of the eventual return to good times. The artistic elements of any city are one of the definitions of what makes a vibrant community. The history of the arts in Detroit is storied and continues to provide sustenance for the spirit and soul. Whether Motown, electronica, the symphony or rap, the musical treasures of our city make the preservation of this cultural heritage worth every penny of our support."

Leonard Slatkin

Music Director of the [Detroit Symphony Orchestra](#) and the [Orchestre National de Lyon \(ONL\)](#), France

"Because for one thing, PEOPLE MATTER and while the city is around half of its size, PEOPLE are still here. And new people still arrive all of the time and see Detroit as an opportunity. Those of that are from here see it as HOME. Family & friends...this is what matters. The people ARE Detroit."

R.J. Spangler

Music producer, artist manager, bandleader and award-winning [blues and jazz musician](#)

"Detroit is poised to become America's benchmark on reinvention. It's where the creative class is redefining how the world perceives Detroit."

Gary Spondike

Man about town, Connecting all the dots, Director at [Skidmore Studio](#), Co-Founder of Free Art Fridays Detroit

"Detroit matters as a contemporary illustration of how democracy cannot be assumed a right but rather a privilege to be earned by creative and intelligent citizens, including those in the artistic community, who nurture it responsibly; or it decays."

Douglas Stratton

Detroit philanthropist and founder of [The Stratton Foundation](#)

“We’re the largest port of entry into the United States – Canada from the north into the Great Lakes State of Michigan. And welcome to the border barrio called Mexican Town or Southwest Detroit – proud rock music home to Jack White – part of Detroit’s world music roots – jazz, punk, soul, R&B, techno, gospel and Afro Latin world sound beat!”

Vito Valdez

Community artist and educator in the Learning and Interpretive Dept. of the Detroit Institute of Arts

“You can feel the energy created by artists and people with innovative ideas flocking to Detroit because it’s a place where anything is possible and the only way to go is up. Detroit is consciously reinventing itself for the 21st century in incredibly imaginative ways, way ahead of the curve in the type of radical transformation other cities will have to make to remain viable. I LOVE Detroit!”

Allee Willis

GRAMMY®, Emmy, Tony and Webbie award-winning/nominated [songwriter](#), [performer](#), [artist](#), [multimediaist](#), [director](#), [collector](#), [party thrower](#).

“Detroit isn’t a city on the verge of collapse. It’s a city on the verge of transformation. Students who study here can take part in the reinvention of the American city. It’s an unprecedented opportunity.”

M. Roy Wilson, M.D.

President of [Wayne State University](#)

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