

Fannie "Fan" Turnbull Taylor

If you're wondering how an organization like the Association of Performing Arts Presenters gets its start; you need look no further than one woman. Fannie Taylor – known affectionately as "Fan" to friends and colleagues alike – was the visionary leader who brought the Association of Performing Arts Presenters to life. Fan was a staunch arts advocate, dedicated teacher, presenter, and champion of excellence in the performing arts. Her career was so dedicated to the work of arts presenting that Madison Magazine stated, "No one did more for the performing arts in this century than Fan Taylor."

In fall 1939, she began her career with a long association with the Wisconsin Union Theater. Her first job was publicity director for the Wisconsin Players, and her first assignment was to publicize the theater's premiere event, Alfred Lunt and Lynne Fontaine in "The Taming of the Shrew," on October 9 - 11, 1939. The Lunts took a break from Broadway to open the Union's magnificent new theater. Fan became publicity director of the Union Theater in 1943 and then its first director in 1946, a position she held for twenty years.

Fan's motto as theater director was, "Program for your audience, but always a little better." The entire Madison community was the beneficiary. "Until the Civic Center opened in 1980, the Union Theater was the palace of culture in Madison," said Michael Goldberg, who later became Union Theater director. "The concert series, the classical music, was the cornerstone of the programming, but it was everything else as well, from Louis Armstrong to Martha Graham. Everybody who mattered in the performing arts appeared there over the years, and that was Fan's leadership." "Fan did not have a mandate for cultural diversity," Goldberg added. "It didn't exist in the '50s and '60s. Nobody was talking that language. What Fan did was book the best, and if the best happened to be an Ella Fitzgerald, a Duke Ellington, or a Paul Robeson, that's who she presented."

Fan Taylor was not only an astute programmer, she was also a dedicated mentor who imparted her skills to students on the Union's Music Committee. Barbara Connell Manley, a former chair of the committee, recalled, "She included us in everything: the decisions regarding the famous Union Concert Series, the budget we had to work with, the open theater dates, the artists' fees we had to pay, the concert program, the publicity we needed to generate, how many tickets had to be sold to make a profit, what problems there could be at the ticket office the night of the performance." Many of Fan's students went on to careers in arts administration.

It was in 1956, that the organization now known as Arts Presenters was born when Fan helped found the Association of College, University and Community Arts Administrators (ACUCAA). She was also ACUCAA's first executive director. Who could have thought that a small organization dedicated to presenting on college and university campuses would have grown into the nation's largest service and advocacy group for the performing arts. In recognition of Fan's leadership, the Arts

Presenters “Fan Taylor Distinguished Service Award” acknowledges individuals who demonstrate exemplary service to the field of professional presenting.

At the recommendation of violinist Issac Stern, Fan moved to Washington, D.C. to accept a position with the National Endowment for the Arts as its first music program director and program information officer in 1966. Among her accomplishments was the creation of an arts residency program modeled on the Wisconsin Idea, which became vital to developing what are now modern dance touring programs.

Fan maintained her ties to the university and in 1969, helped create the arts administration graduate program in the School of Business with Professor E. Arthur Prieve, the first of its kind in the nation. The program grew out of Union student committee work that helped to develop management skills and programming sensitivities and is now called the Bloz Center for Arts Administration. Andrew Taylor, the current director of the Bolz Center, recalled, “Back in the 1950s, when only a few considered the management, marketing, and advancement of the arts a professional endeavor, Fan was teaching UW-Madison students on the subject and gathering a national coalition of her peers to learn more from each other. She fostered countless networks of professionals, encouraging all of them to find and mentor others in turn. During one of our last lunches together here in Madison, she was still curious about my students, insistent on their curriculum, and bubbling with stories of her performing past.”

Returning to Madison in 1976, Fan served as coordinator for the UW’s new Arts Consortium. Created in 1975 by Chancellor Edwin Young, the Arts Consortium was charged with developing ways of coordinating and rationalizing arts activities on campus. The committee was chaired by Dean E. David Cronon.

In 1989, Fan wrote a history of the Union Theater on its fiftieth anniversary, *The Wisconsin Union Theater—Fifty Golden Years*, which was edited by Mollie Buckley and published by the Memorial Union Building Association. It is a lavishly illustrated book which documents the glorious history of the Union Theater. In 2000, James Wockenfuss, emeritus trustee of the Memorial Union Building Association, created a fund in Taylor’s honor to support the continuation of Fan’s programming philosophy. Eight year later, the Memorial Union Building Association passed a resolution that reads, “In recognition of Fan's outstanding devotion to the students, faculty, artists, and alumni of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the Memorial Union Building Association, on behalf of more than 80,000 lifetime members, expresses its deepest appreciation and gratitude for Fan Taylor's decades of dedicated service and for her lasting contribution to the Wisconsin Union, the university and the nation.”

Fan died on April 15, 2008 at age 94. She will be remembered by her many friends and colleagues as a visionary director of the Wisconsin Union Theater, a staunch arts advocate, and a dedicated teacher.

