ArtPower Director Jordan Peimer Introduces Innovative Artists to Campus

October highlights include Huang Yi’s robot-inspired dance performance and Brian Eno’s “Music for Airports”

In his first year with ArtPower, Jordan Peimer spent a lot of time in the audience, watching performances through the eyes of students and community members. He noted what piqued their interest and stimulated their curiosity. That feedback became the basis for ArtPower’s 2015-16 season, the first curated under the leadership of Peimer, who joined ArtPower as executive director last October.

The 12th season of ArtPower—a multi-arts presenter at UC San Diego that is dedicated to engaging audiences of all backgrounds with the arts—will offer six distinctive series: chamber music, film, innovation, dance, global music and jazz. Audiences will enjoy the return of favorites such as the Calder Quartet and David Sedaris, as well as global artists making their San Diego debut. The season kicked off Sept. 25, with a performance by English violinist Irvine Arditti and UC San Diego composer Roger Reynolds, and will run through June 2016.

Working in a university environment is something Peimer has wanted to do for a long time. “I am so energized by working with the students, especially their enthusiasm and curiosity,” he said. He explained how the arts play a unique role in education, for any major.

“The arts inspire and offer new methods of thinking. It is no secret that there is a strong relationship between mathematics and music and the abstract thinking provided by the arts can help all of us approach problems from new angles. The arts help round and refine an individual.”
During his 18 years at the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles, Peimer focused on developing arts programs and festivals that would engage the region’s diverse communities. He created the popular Sunset Concert series, featuring leading global musicians; Viva!, focusing on the intersection of Latin and Jewish life; and Zeitgeist, a festival exploring Jewish life in the new Europe.

“Engagement with artists from diverse backgrounds helps break down social and intellectual barriers,” said Peimer. “It can help people erase their confirmation biases by taking them outside their own experience. The arts can create empathy to people in completely opposite circumstances from your own.”

That interest fits well with ArtPower, which is known for its audience engagement programs. Nearly all of the season’s performances are accompanied by ArtTalks. Offered either before or after a performance, these informal discussions invite audiences to talk with the artists and learn the stories behind a work’s creation.

ArtPower’s engagement efforts also include connecting artists to non-artist students. That means bringing artists into classrooms, residence halls, and in the case of Taiwanese artist Huang Yi, a robotics lab.

Huang Yi is an acclaimed dancer, choreographer, inventor and videographer who is fascinated by the partnership between humans and robots. On Oct. 14, he brings his award-winning work “Huang Yi & KUKA” to Mandeville Auditorium. The piece features a robot made by KUKA, manufacturers of industrial robots, which Huang Yi has programmed and “taught” to dance.

Before the show, Huang Yi will pay a visit to Thomas Bewley’s undergraduate course in Flow Control and Coordinated Robotics to discuss his Huang Yi & KUKA project.

“I am particularly excited by the Huang Yi & KUKA project as we will be working with the choreographer, engineering students and the KUKA robot,” said Peimer. “I expect that students could never have anticipated the kinds of uses in which Huang employs the articulated arm robot!”
Other engagement opportunities include Foovies, which are film presentations paired with special menus prepared by Zanzibar at the Loft on campus. This season, each Foovie event explores cultural and gender identity in the context of three “national awareness” months: Hispanic Heritage Month in October, Black History Month in February and Women’s History Month in March. The events also bring in community partners including the San Diego Latino Film Festival, UC San Diego Women’s Center and LGBT Center to enhance the experience.

One of the innovative works that Peimer is most excited to bring to ArtPower is “Music for Airports,” performed by the New York-based Bang On A Can All-Stars. Created in 1978 by experimental artist Brian Eno, the piece is a series of looping bits of tape that is now considered a classic of ambient music. Bang On A Can All-Stars recorded the piece in 1998 and has performed it live at airports and concert halls around the world. On Oct. 27, they will present its premiere at a U.S. airport—at the San Diego International Airport.

When asked what ArtPower brings to the San Diego arts community, Peimer brings the focus back to the students.

“We provide direct interaction with both K-12 and university students,” he said. “We are bringing artists from more than a dozen countries whose work will of course share their culture. Where else can you experience what it is like to grow up gay within a kibbutz, experience Japanese court rituals from multiple cultural perspectives, watch women directly examine gender roles and deconstruct stereotypes, hear the voices of contemporary Chicano culture, listen to songs of love and protest from both the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and the Ukrainian struggle to maintain independence, and so very much more?”

ArtPower events take place through June 2016 at six venues across the UC San Diego campus, with special events throughout San Diego. Discounted tickets are available for UC San Diego students, alumni, staff and faculty. For more information about events, tickets and subscriptions, visit artpower.