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## State Musician Sara Hickman: "Don't Cut the Arts"

by Justin Dehn and Andrew Weber | 2/17/2011

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Sara Hickman released her first album in 1986. Since then, she's been writing and touring across the state and the nation, spreading her music and her passion for children and advocating for including the arts in public education. In an interview with The Texas Tribune, Hickman, the 2010 official state musician of Texas, talks about Gov. Rick Perry's proposal to suspend funding for the Texas Commission on the Arts and what it could mean for the creative development of students in the Lone Star state. An edited transcript and video of the interview are

below.

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**Hickman:** My official title is official state musician of Texas, which was granted to me by the Texas Commission on the Arts and a team of top-secret people ... I don't know, legislators and everyday people that come together and they vote on nominees.

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TT: Who are some former state musicians?

**Hickman:** Well, I took the braids from Willie Nelson, and before Willie Nelson it was Shelley King.

**TT:** What do you want to do with your position?

**Hickman:** I want to be proactive, and I want to utilize my position to bring awareness about arts in schools and the lack of funding and the slashing of funding by our legislators.

**TT:** What are your ideas?

**Hickman:** Well, I had two ideas. One was Family Time Rocks, and I would put together this band, which happened, and it's with Jason Molin and Gray Parsons. The three of us are Family Time Rocks, and we go around the state and we play at schools and we play at festivals and at family gatherings and we present interactive music. So families learn that if they create together, they do great together.

**TT:** And the other?

**Hickman:** Well, this would be a fun way to get people to know what my music is but also a great way to build this huge fundraiser for Theatre Action Project, which takes music and theater and art into schools to empower kids to talk about issues like bullying or dating violence. So, I put together a CD of 38 songs, of my songs, and it was so exciting because I would call people up or e-mail them and say, "Here is my crazy, wonderful idea. What do you think?" And people were like "Wow!" you know? And engineers and studios and producers and musicians all donated their time. This is the part when I get all choked up. And they recorded my songs, and I told them they could do whatever they want, anything at all. And so I would get the songs back and what I had sent off as a pop song would come back as a bluegrass song or what I had sent off as a folk song would come back as a Eurodisco song. So it was totally amazing and touching. And we also planned a fundraiser at the Paramount, which Ken Stein, who I have to thank, donated for the night. And we raised \$50,000 two weekends ago with several of the people performing — Patrice Pike, Robert Earl Keen, Ruthie Foster, LZ Love, Aftermath, Colin Boyd, and Colin Gilmore, and Monte Warden; I'm trying to think of everybody. But the event that night raised \$50,000 for Theatre Action Project. So we had an event that raised \$50,000, and now they've got the CD, and we're selling the CD as a download and all the proceeds go to Theatre Action Project.

**TT:** What do you think about Gov. Perry's proposal to suspend TCA's funding?

**Hickman:** The Texas Commission on the Arts not only does wonderful things like, you know, the fact that I got to be state musician for a year, [which] was really awesome and I worked really hard. But what's more important about [the] Commission on the Arts is that they provide funding for kids to go to Interlochen [Summer Arts Camp in Michigan] or Berklee [College of Music in Boston] for a summer to take guitar, or piano, or opera, or ballet, things that low income kids or kids without those opportunities wouldn't have if it weren't for the Texas Commission on the Arts. And if you don't have the arts in Texas, really, to me, we're just a backwards state.

**TT:** What does Texas look like without art?

**Hickman:** I can't picture a world without art, music, dance, poetry, because I live in it. It just seems ... it seems intangible and impossible and it's just unfathomable. I can't imagine it. I don't know what would happen.

**TT:** Are your kids taking after your artistic tendencies?

**Hickman:** I took the things that I gleaned from my parents and then passed that on to my children. So, they grew up with art supplies and musical instruments everywhere. Even as toddlers, they were already painting and doing stuff and getting messy, because I wanted them to have that tactile sensation of what weaving is or what painting feels like or what drawing is. And, so, they're geniuses. They're brilliant.

**TT:** What do you say to kids who aren't so lucky?

**Hickman:** That's why it's important to have art and theater and music and movement in schools. Because not every child has parents like I did. And if you don't have parents like I did, I wouldn't be doing all the wonderful things that I'm doing, because they really encouraged me. So, for kids that don't have that at home, they have to have that at school or they're not going to be embellished with this wonder ... this wonderful sense of wonder, is what I have to say.

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