Part I

THE SETTINGS

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On the Dream

Every movement needs a missionary. One who carries the banner unstintingly from the first days, through all the struggles in communities large and small, on the national and local frontiers. One who is constructive and positive, cutting through all of the hesitations, fears, stops, and starts. One who is a motivator of others. One who retrenches when the battlefield changes. One who carries a single philosophy so far-reaching as never to be quite attainable in real terms, but who articulates the vision. Such a missionary of the arts council movement is Ralph Burgard. There are others who believe as unswervingly, whose contributions over the years have been parallel, who have a similar message. And it is, perhaps, dangerous to single one out. However, by so doing, one can get a glimpse of what the leadership has been like — and of some of the characteristics that have been part of the vitality of the movement.

Ralph Burgard was among the first arts council directors, and his enthusiasm is as strong today as it must have been when he became involved on the ground floor of the movement and as Director of the Winston-Salem Arts Council in 1955. He came to this special aspect of the arts almost by accident, and certainly by happy circumstance.

Lying stoically in a Buffalo hospital bed in 1952, surrounded by sand bags to cure a detached retina, he first considered leaving his field of advertising for arts administration through the suggestion of Ralph Black, then Manager of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. This conversation led

Burgard, upon recovery, to take a job as Manager of the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra. This was a beginning for his arts career. From the Rhode Island group, he moved after two years to assist Ralph Black himself with the Buffalo Philharmonic.

It was through these music circles that he met Helen Thompson, who was Executive Secretary of the American Symphony Orchestra League (ASOL). Through her interest and training as a social worker, she saw how some of the values and strengths of coordinated programs in health and welfare might be transferred to the arts field. It was then no surprise when, at her instigation, a whole session at the 1952 ASOL national convention in Erie, Pennsylvania, was devoted to discussion of the plans for coordinated arts programs in cities.

In 1954, the ASOL persuaded the Rockefeller Foundation to pursue a study of coordinated arts programs. When the survey plans began, there were only a handful of groups and 15 were included in the study; only five years later, there were 60.

In 1955, through his contact with Helen Thompson, Ralph Burgard had to choose between the potential job of manager of the Buffalo Orchestra, or a job as Director of the Winston-Salem Arts Council; he picked the Arts Council position. "There was a broader perspective—working with individuals, various cultural institutions and the entire community—that intrigued me then as it does now; I have never regretted my decision," says Burgard.

As Director of the Arts Council of Winston-Salem from 1955 to 1957, and then as Director of the St. Paul Council of Arts and Science from 1958 to 1965, he guided each community in building major arts centers and undertaking annual united arts fund campaigns. He has been helping cities plan their arts community futures ever since. Many councils will refer to their broad structure as "the Burgard plan," characterized by several tiers of involved individuals and organizations making decisions *with* the council.

It was Helen Thompson's concern for a broader perspective that led the ASOL to invite community arts councils to the annual conventions of community orchestras from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s.

In 1959, the arts councils formally incorporated, calling themselves Community Arts Councils, Inc. (CACI), but continued to meet annually as a section of the ASOL convention.

In the mid-1960s, through her role as Special Studies Director of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Nancy Hanks, later Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, commissioned many papers on several subjects, including the arts.

By this time, there were several state arts councils as well. All of these events gave impetus for a national office to implement some of the recommendations of the Rockefeller report as well as to provide assistance to the

growing number of state and community councils. To accomodate the state councils, CACI's name was changed to Arts Councils of America (ACA); a national office was established in New York City; and in 1965 Ralph Burgard became the first Director of ACA (later, Associated Councils of the Arts, and currently the American Council of the Arts). There was debate and discussion then, as there has been recently, concerning ACA's role—whether it should act as a service agency for its constituent groups or as a national spokesman for national cultural issues. Ralph Burgard's feeling has been that the local constituency is very important. "Without the local and state arts councils, there is no organized constituency to back up the national organization," he has said. ACA led early arts advocacy efforts to involve the local, state, and federal governments in the arts. This group has been instrumental in creating some widely quoted documents in recent cultural history. Some in particular are the results of the Louis Harris polls of the 1970s and 1980, which showed that Americans not only cared about the arts but were willing to pay for them.

The arts council movement has grown immensely. Today there are more than 1,000 local community organizations, and every state now has an agency. This diverse constituency was not easily serviced by one group, and so the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) and the National Assembly of Community Arts Agencies (NACAA) were spawned from ACA.

Burgard resigned from ACA in 1970 to pursue independent research in the United States and Europe concerning new ways of bringing together the arts, sciences, and people. Among many endeavors, he has completed studies on museum extension programs and arts programs in new towns for the National Endowment for the Arts, conducted seminars on cultural decentralization for cultural ministries in Europe, and completed major cultural plans for 17 cities and counties in the United States.

What does this mean? It means that for cities such as Winston-Salem and Charlotte, North Carolina, and counties such as Westchester (New York) and Santa Cruz (California), he has done the following:

- Analyzed the arts and science programs sponsored by cultural institutions, recreation departments, and college and school systems.
- Recommended programs to strengthen existing cultural groups.
- Instituted new programs that help bring together the arts, sciences, and people.
- Recommended new physical facilities where needed.
- Suggested the best organizational structure to carry out these plans.
- Recruited influential leaders to implement the recommendations.
- Outlined the budgetary requirements.
- Helped raise the funds to help implement the recommendations.

Underlying these plans is a zeal that persuades the most apathetic. At a meeting of arts councils from all over the state of Indiana, Burgard spun it out:

> Only spiritual and creative concerns will allow people in the industrial nations to survive physically and psychologically. The survival of people in a technological world is at stake. Technology alone will not nourish the soul.
>
> The arts are not the exclusive province of cultural institutions; creative instincts are found in all human beings, each to one's own measure, and cultural policy in every city must reflect this condition.[1]

With an emphasis on the individual as spectator, participant, and community celebrant, Ralph Burgard proposes that there be a greater encouragement of talent and skills. Schools should recognize the ties between the arts and the development of perception, which, with language and numbers, constitutes the way we acquire virtually all of our knowledge.

"The old reasons for community – religion, defense, and the marketplace – simply don't hold any more," says Burgard. "The need to be entertained is one of the major reasons people will come together in the 1980s; celebrations bring people together, and they are comparatively low-cost, high-visibility programs."

Thus, the mission of the community arts council can include the following: strengthening existing cultural institutions with new support dollars, public relations, and more audiences; assisting school systems to improve education through arts in education programs; assisting individual artists; making opportunities in the arts widely available to all constituencies – ethnic, racial, or social; and integrating aesthetic concerns into the decision-making process of local governmental agencies. This latter objective would use cultural resources, in part, to help local government develop neighborhood identity and pride; revitalize downtowns; and use public celebrations to bring together people who ordinarily are divided by race, age, religion, or income barriers.

Community arts councils, the vehicle for missionary work in the early years, were more apt to be service organizations and less apt to be program-oriented unless such an orientation was of direct benefit to the member organizations. Today, privately incorporated councils must decide how much independent programming is desirable, and public commissions, now expanded far beyond their original concern for civic design, have to define new functions that make sense within the expanded activities of city or county government.

The arts were first used in local projects in the late 1960s to relieve racial pressures that were exacerbated during hot summer months in the nation's major cities. Now there are programs of all kinds – directed to save

buildings, improve the physical beauty of the community, and bring people together. All are within the fabric of community concern. All are of concern to local government.

Expanded cultural institutions, the new dimensions in cultural programming, and the more sophisticated attitude of local government create a need for a comprehensive cultural policy in every community. Ralph Burgard believes that this is where we are today. As a tribute to his work, he was honored by NACAA (as of 1982, has become the National Assembly of *Local* Arts Agencies, or NALAA) at its second annual convention in Boston.

NACAA developed when the communities' constituency of ACA grew to such dimensions that the agency, torn by the services and advocacy functions described earlier, could no longer properly serve this growing group. By 1970, when Burgard resigned from the helm of ACA, the number of community arts agencies was 250, but by 1980, it was more than 1,000.

After opening an office in Washington in 1978, NACAA has established itself as the organization to look to for opinions about local arts agencies. In November, 1979, after years of surveys, research studies, and a task force as part of the prelude, the community arts council message was effectively presented to a meeting of the National Council on the Arts. NACAA staff members, surveying its membership for the most current facts, presented the overall impact of these agencies that have "created a climate for the arts to grow." With the help of slides about the work in Syracuse, New York; Bassett, Nebraska; and San Antonio, Texas, and with the ambassadors of those agencies at hand, they persuaded the Council that community arts councils had a major impact on cultural development in America.

Some of the Council members waxed eloquent afterwards. The presentation was not oversold – no one claimed that arts councils had changed the lives of our major institutions significantly, or that it had caused the proliferation of single-discipline groups such as dance companies, operas, ballets, and symphonies in every section of the United States. But arts councils *have* provided new arts opportunities for people of all ages, strengthened the work of smaller and medium-sized organizations, and sponsored tours of high-quality performers and exhibitions to benefit everyone. And if they haven't done it themselves, they have been the catalyst for others to do it. In addition, they have provided grantsmanship assistance, management workshops, consultant programs, and direct cash support.

"In many communities, arts councils have been a rallying point for all cultural forces," Ralph Burgard agrees, and increasingly, these agencies are being seen also as coordinator and local distributor of public funds.

The ultimate goal is to integrate aesthetic concerns into the decision-making processes of local government. Because the individual artist is of critical importance to this process, the local arts council should have a pro-

gram to assist local artists. This, says Burgard, takes influence and sophistication.

In the long run, Burgard believes that the creative forces in human nature will assert themselves in spite of apathetic public policies toward the arts.

> Creative desires are found, in varying degress, within every human being; *they are a condition of being human.* We have only to look at our children to realize that without any prompting from us, without the inspiration of a museum, a symphony, a set of by-laws or an arts consultant, they will make up dances, draw happily on sheets of paper, relate the most astonishing stories, or sing for hours. Engagement in creative activity will not automatically cure the personal alienation which appears to be the inevitable by-product of industrial societies, but it can reawaken the ancient sensory responses and provide people with personal inspiration, enjoyment, and a pride in self-accomplishment which work, family, and friends may not furnish.[2]

NOTES

1. Ralph Burgard, speech made at a meeting of Indiana Assembly of Arts Councils, Indianapolis, Indiana, May 1, 1980.
2. Interview with Ralph Burgard, Boston, June 1980.