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## Update on Festivals and Performing and Exhibiting Opportunities—New Places and Spaces

Performing and exhibiting opportunities, encouraged by the catalyst agencies in combination with cities, community organizations, and other agencies, are legion. The community arts service agencies have been able to put many elements together with the artists and performing groups in their communities to accomplish outreach programs, festivals, and all manner of performances and exhibits.

Festivals of every shape and variety are found in every community, from Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon—from the East Coast to the West Coast. In one Midwest region of the country, in June 1982, there were the following festivals: the Fish Festival, Strawberry Festival, Stitch-in-Time Festival, National Clay Week, Tri-State Pottery Festival, World's Biggest Yard Sale, Swiss Cheese Festival, and Rainbow's End Festival, most of which include arts and crafts exhibits and demonstrations as well as the usual rides, food, and entertainment. While there are, of course, many other kinds of festivals under many sponsorships, those sponsored by arts councils have usually emphasized the local and/or regional artist. Depending on budget size, in-kind contributions by the local government, and size of administrative staff and volunteer groups, these events range widely from one-day opportunities for local artists to show and sell, to multiday, elaborate affairs that include such plans as commissioning new works by artists, special performances, and invitational and juried exhibitions. Length and specifics of festivals in different cities may vary, but

often the arts council and/or commission, in conjunction with nonarts city departments, has made one of the best sponsors or co-sponsors.

It means that the nonarts departments can depend on the arts expertise for planning details unique to each performing group or artist. It is difficult for city administrators with other responsibilities to understand the difficulty of dancing on concrete, the preservation of a painting, or the aesthetics of a building and design. Through assistance, the city learns, the artist learns, and the council is an ombudsman in the jungle of arrangements. Councils generally know where all sizes and types of artists and arts organizations are, and can handle the details pertaining to them better than anyone else can. City support is needed for permits, public relations, and the generation of community spirit. But the administration of the festival needs focused attention.

The arts council can also act as a catalyst for other performing and exhibiting opportunities. There are the local and regional opportunities, as well as the sponsorship of touring companies. To say the least, the administration of these groups by councils without their own facilities is quite different from the management and programming of a facility. In the first instance, the agency may be the catalyst and not the sponsor per se; in the second instance, the agency is the sponsor. Illustrations abound for national, regional, and state touring: dance companies, theater companies, exhibits, and individual artists.

Generally, it can be said that the large urban agencies have concentrated on opportunities for the local artist. This makes sense when it is considered that often the largest groupings of professional artists are in the urban centers.

But city-wide festivals that are well planned and executed take priority and attention. The Houston Festival has a budget of nearly \$500,000, for instance. In 1982, some components of the Houston Festival were the Houston Grand Opera performing *Don Carlo*; an exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts of the works of Leonardo Da Vinci; outdoor events for nine consecutive days; and The Houston Festival Fringe, involving theatrical, musical, and visual arts organizations in performances and exhibits in alternative spaces throughout the city. There were commissions for original works in a variety of media and the official poster was selected from works submitted by five invited Houston artists.<sup>1</sup>

Most budgets are much smaller than that of Houston, and many of the smaller communities have used a combination of local talent and professional touring groups and residencies. The festivals in cities like Oklahoma City are a high point in the life of those communities. The specific assignment of the Arts Council in Cortland County, New York — which started when the Concord String Quartet, in residence at a nearby college campus, needed expanded performing opportunities in the area — is rarer.

Communities large and small have gathered for festivals celebrating every kind of occasion, long before the advent of arts councils. Then and now, whether or not an arts council is involved, the arts are involved. Coordination of such affairs takes organization and energy at the least, and usually some contact with the city or county, whose land and/or facilities the festival borrows for the occasion. Because arts councils are agencies with links to the city as well as to artists, they do become natural coordinators for such events. The Springfield (Ohio) Arts Council developed out of just such activity. Since 1967, there had been a summer festival in Springfield. In 1971, the all-volunteer festival group, was urged to become a year-round activity by the Ohio Arts Council. The city gives the Arts Council, a private agency, monies for the administration of the festival. By 1973, the community saw the need for continuity and professional management, and a director was hired.

The festivals *sound* wonderful. The St. Louis Arts and Education Council's Ice Cream Festival, Seattle's Bumbershoot, and the Third World Film Festival in Atlanta (22 programs of films from Nigeria, Cuba, Brazil, Senegal, et al.) are only three examples. Atlanta has had a jazz and dance festival as well, the tickets for which were gone six hours after the box office opened one year. "The festival generates economic activity in the city, assists in increased exposure, and therefore the companies (six local companies performed for three evenings) have increased enrollments in schools," say the sponsors.<sup>2</sup> In Atlanta, the city's Department of Cultural Affairs has sponsored many folk, black religious music, performing arts, neighborhood music, and dance festivals, in addition to the Third World Film Festival. The Atlanta Arts Festival is sponsored by many groups.

In 1979, the St. Louis Ice Cream Festival drew some 75,000 people and made nearly \$40,000 for the arts, and such world-shaking events as building the world's largest ice cream sundae took place. In 1980, built around the theme "Get Your Licks at the Arts and Ice Cream Festival," there was a "Lickety-Split" run and other ice-cream-related events. Many of the council's 134 member agencies have performed, and artists and craftsmen have demonstrated and exhibited.

Ethnic festivals are also among those sponsored or cosponsored by arts councils. The Director of the Cultural Resources Council in Syracuse maintains that the Council's annual ethnic festival, the Festival of Nations, has brought dignity to all of the various ethnic groups in town. In Buffalo, the Ethnic Heritage Festival is sponsored by the private Arts Development Services, Inc. and the Junior League of Buffalo, in cooperation with the Niagara Frontier Folk Art Council. With a small charge, in a recent year it generated about \$15,000 toward the operating needs of the Arts Development Service, Buffalo's council.

The Bumbershoot Festival of Seattle, now more than a decade old

and a free event for most of that time, has since found that a small admission fee must be charged to help defer costs. Over 90 musical acts form the base of this festival, along with a dozen dance companies, four visual arts exhibits, and a flag tournament in which the top 50 entries are hoisted during the opening ceremony. Other intriguing features have been "Now and Then," an exhibition featuring a current piece and a much earlier piece from each of 30 artists, and a photography exhibit, "Invisible Seattle," exploring the variety of photographic possibilities being employed by area artists. Seattle calls the Festival an opportunity for performers and visual artists to meet the public, and for the public to get a first-hand look at what's going on in the arts locally. It is multisponsored by the Seattle Arts Commission, the Seattle Center, and Department of Parks and Recreation, and supported by private donations and grants from other governmental agencies.

In Huntington, New York, three city parks are used for a festival offering 80 events. The Greater Columbus Arts Council Arts Festival, "Arts-Affair," involves some 400 volunteers. The council saw the need, consistent with its service role, to build in an arts advocacy role for the festival.

The Arts and Humanities Council of Tulsa "aids member and non-member groups in the development of arts and crafts exhibitions and festivals and encourages the development of exhibitions and festivals which provide local artists and craftsmen marketing opportunities."<sup>3</sup> One of the most interesting festivals sponsored by an arts council is the International Children's Festival, which is held at Wolf Trap Farm Park for the Performing Arts. The Fairfax County Council of the Arts has produced this three-day outdoor arts celebration for more than a decade. Proceeds from festival sales support the educational activities of the Council, such as school programs, gallery exhibits, and performances in the community. Advocacy and opportunity *are* the newer reasons for festivals. Tulsa's "Mayfest," the annual four-day performing and visual arts festival, is a celebration of spring. It is cosponsored by Downtown Tulsa Unlimited. And "Octoberfest," taken from the tradition of the German Beerfest, provides the artists and craftsmen with a "wonderful marketplace" as they are surrounded by performing artists on the banks of the Arkansas River. This festival is cosponsored by the River Parks Authority, TV station KJRH, and the Tulsa *Tribune*.

Festivals can be analyzed fairly easily. There are those that showcase local arts talent (exhibiting and performing), those that use the opportunity to bring in outside arts groups, and those providing a mixture of the two. The attempts to make both these types of festivals work financially are under constant examination, so that one finds arts councils and other groups and agencies cooperating to develop the best economic arrangements.

Opportunities for local performance and exhibit exist everywhere. However, there usually is the need for administrative attention, since no

one is employed in many institutions and corporate places to attend to such kinds of affairs; the most that is available is support and cooperation.

In most communities, it is well understood that for exhibit purposes, professional and nonprofessional artists do not mix well. The better artists, whose support is important to the quality and artistic growth of the community, have usually been identified. Sometimes galleries with ongoing exhibits are maintained separately for each.

Councils throughout the country have been the catalysts for using all kinds of spaces for performances and exhibition. While the needs of the performing groups and artists must be of paramount concern, they have been met in spaces as diverse as arcades, landmarks of all kinds, other public spaces, maxi- and miniparks and plazas, bank lobbies, and all of the traditional spaces such as storefront galleries and museums. There are exhibits in train stations, poetry on bus advertisement placards, and concerts in grocery stores. Such is the range of standard arts council programming now.

One interesting spin-off festival is Spoleto in the Piedmont, "which brings 150 performers from Spoleto Festival U.S.A. to the Greenville, S.C. area, offering residents the opportunity to hear a musical sampling of concerts presented in Charleston."<sup>4</sup>

There is a real benefit to seeing what the next city is doing — the exposure to other situations from which a locale may benefit. It is often felt that there is no way to teach quality; experiencing it is the only and best teacher. The Director of the Springfield (Ohio) Arts Council talks about the ideas about performance spaces and logistics stimulated at Spoleto, for instance, and adapted as part of the potential for Springfield. "It opened my eyes to new possibilities, and here, with a new City Hall downtown, all sorts of new performing spaces looked possible." All of this stimulated an exciting schedule of events including walking tours, lectures, ethnic groups performances, and chamber concerts; the excitement of the new format has generated positive responses from businesses, which have begun to sponsor individual festival "days."<sup>5</sup>

Not all arts commissions and councils sponsor festivals. In Chicago, ChicagoFest and the Jazz Festival are sponsored by an Office of Special Events, with which the Council works closely. So it is in some cities with parks and recreation departments. With the increased interest of recreation departments all over the country in extending their activities beyond their traditional athletic orientation, new alliances between them and arts organizations are being made all the time through the vehicle of the festivals. Typical of arts components is that of the Recreation and Leisure Services of the Department of Recreation, Montgomery County, Maryland. They employ professional artists in a variety of ways, especially in theater and visual art.

Such alliances are bound to grow, and it is evident that recreation and

parks officials have much to offer the arts in terms of funding and facilities and resources.

All across the country, men, women, and children are making it known that they want and expect the arts to be a part of their daily lives.<sup>6</sup>

One thing is assuredly true — that concerts in the park, and the likes of Lima, Ohio's SquareFest/EthnicFest are events pretty much taken for granted in the cities, towns, and communities all over America; and that many are coordinated by the local arts council. The city and citizenry have come to expect them, as they also have come to expect the arts-council-sponsored exhibits and performances in the plazas and bank lobbies.

## NOTES

1. Cultural Arts Council of Houston, "Houston Festival to Take Place March 18-28" *Houston Arts*, Winter 1981-82, p. 18.
2. Interview with Tom Cullen, Department of Cultural Affairs, Atlanta, Georgia, 1980.
3. The Arts and Humanities Council of Tulsa, Oklahoma, *Annual Report*, 1980-81, p. 5.
4. Metropolitan Arts Council of Greenville, South Carolina (brochure, 1980).
5. Interview with J. Chris Moore, Springfield (Ohio) Arts Council, 1980.
6. Bennett Schiff, "Arts in Park and Recreation Settings" (Park, Arts and Leisure Project sponsored by the National Park Service, National Recreation and Park Association and the National Endowment for the Arts, 1974), p. 7.