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Practitioners

MORE PEOPLE: BLAINE AND LOMAX

Two of the leaders in the community arts council movement have come from the municipal arts agencies:

JOHN BLAINE

Studio Watts Workshop, Watts, California: Liaison Officer. "The Meeting at Watts Towers" (consortium of arts agencies): Founder 1968–72. Seattle Arts Commission: Executive Secretary 1972–78. Cultural Arts Council of Houston: Director 1978–80. Alaska State Council on the Arts: Director. National Assembly of Community Arts Agencies: Board member 1976–80; President 1978–79 (at the time it became an independent organization).

MICHAEL LOMAX

Bureau of Cultural and International Affairs, City of Atlanta: Director 1975–77. Department of Parks, Libraries, and Cultural Affairs, City of Atlanta: Commissioner 1977–78. Fulton County: Commissioner 1979–

BACKGROUND

JOHN BLAINE: If I hadn't been sent to an ACA Conference [1969] in St. Louis, I never would have known ACA. The valuable contacts led me to the Seattle job later.

ACA has root problems because it really doesn't know who its constituency is and still manifests this in many ways.

But — if it hadn't been for ACA . . .

Arts councils have grown from nothing to something. Our success and our failure is wrapped up in the fact that we are self-created, self-motivated, and molded to the needs of each community.

MICHAEL LOMAX: Every community is different; success one place would not spell out success elsewhere.

JB: On one hand, we should be politically involved and potent. On the other hand, we don't want to be politically manipulated.

ML: There is a strong connection between public officials' taking strong positions in favor of the arts and good strong public programming.

JB: The largest issue is freedom. Arts councils have to be free — have to be allowed to make mistakes, to experiment — along with having restraint. It's an arts council's job to respond, not to mold.

ML: The impact of arts councils is that they have raised the consciousness about the arts and role of the arts beyond the exhibit space, concert hall, studio. Now, they are moving into a position of translating all of this into making sure that the arts are available to everyone.

The arts council movement has been tied to the American economy, and the challenge will be to be creative and to find new sources of funding. There will be strong advocacy needed because it is going to be a matter of priorities, as is all expenditure of the public dollar.

JB: In Washington [Seattle], there was strong citizen advocacy that has maintained involvement through the years and has been a good watchdog.

ML: Acceptance is a matter of time. Arts institutions are conservative.

[From a 1978 speech:] With the economy askew, with the public reassessing government expenditures, the arts must be vigilant if we are to get all that we need, not just to survive but to prosper. I believe that in Atlanta, we have taken the relationship between the arts and politics to a somewhat different level. Our arts programs were developed in an environment which required political diligence and sophistication. Our arts program will grow because we have main-

tained our diligence and grown in sophistication. This year [1978], the Mayor is facing a \$5 million budget shortfall and the only program that will not only survive but will grow this year is the city's Bureau of Cultural Affairs; it will continue this year with a 20 percent increase in funding. I don't know why. I don't care. Obviously, it's good politics. We have learned in Atlanta one key factor and that is that we have greater political clout than we thought. My election [as a Commissioner] demonstrated that someone whose singular association with the public's mind is the arts can win a very difficult election with support drawn exclusively from artists, from art institutions, and from their supporters. That is the kind of political power we never suspected four years ago when we started working in the arts.¹

NOTES

1. Michael Lomax, "Opening Remarks" (speech at conference on "Building Our Cultural Community," Boston, December 1978).