

Epilogue: The Future

There are two laws discreet, not reconciled;
Law for man and law for thing—
The last builds town and fleet, but it runs wild,
And doth the man unking.

From Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Ode Inscribed
to W. H. Channing" (quoted by James Backas
during interview)

Cognizant of the fact that the American people have asked for some solutions to the nation's economic problems, the tendency is to be supportive in the search for answers. But the cuts to the arts and humanities and other cultural programs, both alone and in the context of other programs concerned with the quality of our community life, promise to be greater than their "fair share."* "The President's recommendations (for the 1983 budgets at \$100 million from \$143 million) have not only threatened Endowment support, but have begun to erode a decade of modest but important growth in local government's commitment to the arts."¹

*In early 1982, the Reagan administration was proposing cuts of almost 30 percent from the 1982 actual appropriation level of \$143.04 million. The House and Senate were recommending that the level remain at least at the 1982 level, a figure which was shepherded through the legislative process *before* the House had adopted the 1981 Reconciliation Act, which effected a ceil-

Although the most recent estimates show an increase in the amount that the largest cities expended on the arts, inflation and the labor-intensive nature of the arts have caused the arts organizations to retrench in spite of the greater increases. The arts, of course, are not alone, but as someone has said, "if we don't become clamorous enough for that portion which affects one of *our* priorities, no one will."

There is growing evidence that the arts (and other amenities, ranging from clean air and efficient transit systems to community and economic development spurring preservation and conservation) are essential to economic development and social stability, and demand considered long-range solutions. Others ask for the "good fight in behalf of arts professionals," "arts as distinct from arts-as-recreation," "arts as learning experience," or "arts for social change." Many issues, many views.

The response in our communities, where an average of 3 percent of the arts budgets came from the Endowment, 9 percent from other federal sources, and 17 percent from state funds,² must be to look within the communities themselves. A considered, intelligent, and contemporary response there will take clear and enlightened leadership. Some leadership could come from the community arts councils.

Arts councils are past the definition stages. They must be a mature resource for information on local, state, and federal issues as well as a resource for what's happening in town. They must extend this to a responsibility for developing a serious and educated advocacy for the arts of the total community, and must find ways of translating what that means. They are the best vehicles for cultural planning and for linking private and public sectors, for assisting small and medium-sized groups, and for creating programs that fill the gaps. The last may differ very widely, because what is desperately needed in one community may be irrelevant in another. Councils have been coordinating efforts of one kind or another in the arts longest on the local level, and have shown many arts organizations and institutions the potential for cooperative ventures. Whether the fact is acknowledged or

ing of \$119.3 million. No one had raised a point of order, but technically the Act would be binding, and new authorization action would be required to lift the ceiling in the 1982 round of negotiation. It was noted that if the White House had its way (it looked like it would by June), one-third fewer dollars would be appropriated to the arts than had been appropriated two years before. At the same time, the proposed level of monies to the Department of Defense would indicate an expenditure there of nine National Endowment for the Arts a day. (See "Can the Government Promote Creativity -- Or Only Artists?" *New York Times*, April 25, 1982).

By mid-June, the House and Senate votes on the budget for the National Endowment for the Arts for fiscal year 1983 (\$100.875 million and \$143.04 million, respectively) differed, and a "conference committee" was working on a compromise, which, when agreed upon, had to be voted on and passed by both bodies. (See American Council for the Arts, "Washington Update," *ACA Update*, June 18, 1982, pp. 1-3.)

not, many major institutions possibly never saw the wisdom of combined efforts much before united funding, public incentives, and economic squeezes made them viable. If mailing lists can be shared, why not a host of other things? There is a need to keep all groups cognizant of their value to one another.

In a recent decision, the board of trustees of a young but highly successful performing arts organization decided to suspend operations until it could accomplish the long-range planning process that was needed to assure a solid future. Suspending operations is a difficult decision for an arts organization in motion, yet sometimes it is very necessary if structural change, fundraising, and artistic goals are to be achieved.

In one Western city, rapid arts development of the 1970s saw the number of full-seasoned theater groups (not including community theater) increase fivefold, but educated guesses indicate that attrition in the 1980s will leave only three out of five alive at the end of the decade.

Every city has felt the impact of arts growth, most in equally dramatic ways. The causes and results are multiple and complex, but it is clear and predictable that there will be leveling as the impact of the federal decisions takes its toll. This does not mean that the mix of fundraising techniques has been exhausted, nor that the limits of potential in the private and public sectors have been reached. It does mean that each community will have to look at the total complex picture realistically.

There is a mythology about how arts organizations get started and take hold in a community. Those who have started them or have the responsibility for keeping them alive know the realities, or learn them very quickly. To the public out there, decisions seem to be made in mysterious board rooms by an "in group," but truthfully, they are made through hard and deliberate long-term commitment — usually several years at least. The day has passed when a few dedicated people can start a ballet company, a museum, or even an arts council without the help of an expert group of trustees, advisors, and professionals for whom this project has priority. Gone are the immediate endowments and the privacy; the complexities are enormous.

That means that many people have cared enough over enough time recently to launch opera groups, performing arts series, artists' service organizations, film festivals, and many other community and regional organizations. Most of these people were seeing new avenues for community effort, new needs that had gone unmet. In most cases where there is an arts council, somewhere in the earliest ferment of planning there were telephone calls and/or meetings — more than likely, many of them, to help and assist the new groups.

Each organization, large or small, must spark the enthusiasm and interest of some part of the community. There will be many to be listened to

and many to be persuaded. The route to success contains a mixture of idealism and practicality, planning and flexibility, dreaming and professionalism. Timing will be ever important. There are many reasons why an idea cannot happen. But most things come about when a group has clarified why they *should*. If the timing is off, statements and events will fall on deaf ears. The arts council must try to help others understand the patterns described. It is a struggle. Intense people are not always ready to listen.

There is a critical need for planning and evaluation among arts organizations, big and small — for realizing the symbiotic relationships among them in a given community. Not only that, the ramifications in any given art form of occurrences such as orchestra strikes or an organization's demise are no longer really contained in one city, but affect sibling groups in other locations. It is impossible for an arts organization to live in isolation.

Some creative solutions to these problems will be found — for example, the development of new sources of arts dollars, such as the hotel/motel tax portion allocated to the arts in some cities. Others will be tried — bingo games in California, the Arts Lottery in Massachusetts, coal taxes in Montana, and a special arts fund in Oregon. Some answers will fit properly; others will fall by the wayside because they are poorly conceived for the purpose.

Other solutions will be reflected in new types of board commitments, new volunteer roles, and coordinated efforts that make sense because they economize on administrative and organizational costs. Necessity could breed all kinds of sensible planning.

In order for planning and problem solving to take place, there needs to be an incentive. One kind is the planning grant, such as the one by the California Arts Council for developing county and/or city plans for arts programming. This state and local partnership program, to encourage local cultural planning and decision making, hopes eventually to reach objectives such as preventing duplication and overlap among federal, state, and local program funds; expanding local private sector support for the arts; and working with local government agencies. This local planning process is being reinforced by the state with planning workbooks, resource guides, and educational seminars. Local cultural leadership, government officials, and interested individuals have been involved.

If this is a clue as to how planning may occur in the future, it certainly will be incumbent upon individual organizations to know their own priorities and goals, so that there will be some relationship between them and the total community plan of which they will be a part.

The organization that suspends operations to get a handle on a plan that meets future needs takes a brave step, but that, too, may be a model. Too often all kinds of proprietary and self-serving reasons keep organizations going far beyond usefulness, necessity, or need — and change seems

extraordinarily difficult. The handwriting is on the wall; planning is a necessity.

At this writing, there is research being done on the relationship of government funding to arts organizations, including arts councils. Data is being sought from the recipients of the funds. Will there be vast differences from the results of past work — that government funding (at all levels) can be responsible for many times its dollar amount, and substantially more in terms of local, psychological, sociological, and artistic impact?

Faced with the seesaw of arts funding from other government levels, attention for planning and resourcefulness focuses on the communities. Through the “Sputnik” years of the 1970s (although the analogy falls short, for the amounts for the sciences were of greater dimension), there were some new concepts adopted — ones that drew us out of the “unemployment” framework of WPA and into the other dimensions and directions. Corporations, those Medicis of the twentieth century, are, in the best instances, finding the ways to support all kinds of arts endeavors and the work of creative artists. But the support is as uneven as the agendas of those who are in business. Business response in the past has come from relatively few corporations that have made cultural affairs an important portion of their largesse and community commitment. That small base needs broadening; arts councils have a future role in helping to motivate other corporations to examine the many possibilities for support, from individual payroll deduction plans to corporate contributions for sustaining artists and arts organizations. There are now many kinds of programs implemented somewhere that can bolster the confidence of those needing models. The innovative councils will seek still new ways for business and the arts to work together; but in a time of retrenchment, this effort will take commitment and persistence.

In San Francisco in 1981, the American Express Company assisted the San Francisco Art Commission in its effort to save the 35-year-old traditional annual Arts Festival in the face of greatly diminished funding. Not only did the corporation establish an expansive advertising campaign, but the Arts Commission gained five cents every time an American Express card was used, and two dollars every time a new card was issued in the local market area. The company also became involved, through provision of funds, publicity, and printing, in the Neighborhood Arts programming of the Commission. The impact of this activity by a major corporation is still being felt; other businesses and the new state Fair and Exposition Agency have joined a restructured festival program that will give this activity greater ongoing stability. Everyone has gained through this symbiotic activity involving public and private sectors working together.

The Greater Washington (D.C.) Cultural Alliance became a limited partner in the Portal Associates, with the Investment Group Development

Corporation and Tyroc Construction Corporation, in the proposal for the development of Washington's Portal Site. It provided an arrangement whereby the Alliance was to participate in gross revenues, amounting to a 1.5 percent share of office space and parking revenues and a 1 percent share of hotel revenues from the development package. The corporation would build a theater and art gallery, furnish the facilities for free, and absorb all associated operating expenses. In addition, 2,000 feet of office space would be provided to the Alliance, free of charge. Although the Portal Associates were not designated as the developers of Portal Site, the plan has become a model for potential partnership between the arts and business.

These two instances may become common stories in the future.

The foundations have been reevaluating the extent of their support, after, in some cases, substantial participation in arts education and arts organizations.

There are only a few certainties:

1. There is increased interest from the public that needs to be channeled and made productive.
2. Newer organizations without their own endowments will have even a rougher time coping without the multiplicity of funding sources — one stimulating the other.
3. Smaller organizations will need ever more help in forming supportive coalitions, or even in formulating ideas and well-organized proposals for private funding sources — a problem stemming from the small size of their staffs, as well as from less sophistication among board and/or volunteer groups.
4. Business, while it has been increasingly supportive of the arts, will not be able to take up the slack left by the loss of federal and state funds altogether. The smaller organizations, without the bark and bite of large ones, will lose out with the increased pressure from high-powered groups.
5. The multiplicity of public sources starts to erode without the stimulation of federal-state funding, which was just getting to the point of including community councils in the partnerships with the public sector. It will be tricky to keep regional activities and statewide service activities afloat. Community arts groups have derived less than 10 percent of their budgets from federal sources in the past, but it is the synergistic effect of the federal cuts that has a real impact on cities.
6. The potential for the arts as "peacemaker" in our cities, as frustrations build and tensions mount, may be a rallying cause.
7. The service organization is more needed than ever, but, without distinct and compelled advocates, it could be in great trouble and

also in great demand. The situation will depend on the creativity and vision of the local leadership.

8. The arts council may be the only kind of organization that can clarify issues on a neutral ground. Community understanding of many issues – for example, differentiating the need for support for such things as revitalization and arts centers and that for arts organizations per se – is critical to the ongoing support for both. This will be an important responsibility.

The value of the arts council will be the quality and depth of services, including the ability to lead in the development of educated advocacy. This will be especially important in the area of translating the issues clearly and the needs of the artists and arts organizations accurately. It will be important whether the advocacy is for laws and governmental support on the various levels and for arts education or whether it is for opportunities for artistic innovation and experimentation.

It may mean one-on-one problem solving and planning sessions with the smaller organizations in greater depth and a look at budgets, dreams, and priorities. Funding organizations will need to address the multiple ways that private funding can be developed, especially in the corporate sector, giving a broader group of businesses the confidence to design allocations policies, employee plans, and the quid pro quos that satisfy the needs both of the corporate entity and of the cultural community.

The municipal agency really wants and needs the advocacy and support of private sector; the private agency needs and wants the support of the community's public forces. Multiple funding patterns, given all the variations of levels and relationships, are probably here to stay, which means that there are multiple roles for leaders and advocates.

Some arts councils have performed with maturity and quality, and have created the models for others who are far from reaching their potential within the community they are serving. The future goal would be to strive for that increased depth of service and vision. For that is leadership, and the arts council has the possibility of a leadership role in the community.

Over a very short period, it is said, the 50-year-old Chautauqua movement disappeared; some of the factors affecting this were the external ones, such as improved transportation and communication by radio. WPA came and went in a few short years. As has been said, strong councils have come and gone for many reasons. Will the newer municipal agencies create the role models of the 1980s, and will the strong private councils continue to find new ways to work successfully? Will the small and large older councils with changing leadership maintain their strengths? Will the new strength in the movement in the South be sustained? Will there emerge new strength in the West or in other yet-to-be determined areas? Will we see

more alliances among arts organizations such as orchestras and dance groups for coordinated efforts, as well as for other more fragmented coordinated efforts?

The idea of the community arts council is so adaptable as to be potentially applicable to settings as divergent as universities, regions, cities, and towns. It will take people with vision, a sense of community, and proper timing of appropriate actions to let the spirit continue.

Geoffrey Platt, Jr., Executive Director of NASAA, has stated:

As arts policy makers, we are often so concerned with numbers, ratios, charts, and other baggage of government work we lose sight that the end result for which we toil is essentially nonquantifiable: the effect on the human spirit. To be sure, we can produce figures to justify the means we take, their efficiency, equity, and rationale, but in the end the real effect is made, I believe, by those that present the case with passion and conviction.³

Since the greatest growth of arts councils has occurred in the last decade, those few years are no time and a lot of time — both. Obviously, there has not been enough time for enough communities to mature in their own activities to act together as a team. But there has been enough time for there to be many clues to the ways in which communities might act in the future. There have been creative solutions to many problems worked through a community context. Whether they are meaningful from community to community is a question, as the tendency is to look at the dissimilarities before acknowledging the ways in which problems are similar and might be similarly solved. There are no perfect solutions, but there is a wide variety of possible approaches to support systems, services and needs assessment, and fulfillment. The potential is often very complex and subtle, yet must be articulated and marketed well. This is the challenge to the community arts council.

Instead of being disheartened, the time has come to pull together community forces as never before. It will call for the best creative energies. When and if there is a time for the federal government to be more involved, the communities will be in a better position than ever to lead the way, because their collective thinking will have developed points of consensus. Then the local, state, and federal partnership will include leadership from and take its cues from communities. This is the next phase in the evolution of support for the arts in America.

Because of the nature of the community council movement, it has few definitive leaders at this moment. It represents many varying constituencies and varying foci. Therefore its structure, support groups, and the leadership within groups changes with the issues; the group makeup, priorities, and strategies keep changing and need reassessment. Confidence must be built up on the basis of experiences. Styles of leadership vary greatly, and

councils can easily become involved in the styles rather than the issues. Garnering leadership in such a setting challenges the problems inherent in democratic process.

The profile of communities will change; the cities growing in the 1970s may be “no-growth” communities in the 1980s. Small towns may become larger communities. Evaluation of the context and need must be continuous.

So, for the arts, a community base in the partnership sense is new. It is unnerving, tenuous, and disorienting. Former, present, and potential future leaders search for the priorities, but only through taking hold and defining them can progress be made.

The arts councils fear that they cannot keep up the pace of the last few years — most are overworked, understaffed, underbudgeted, and spread very thin. The major frustration, however, is with the level of citizen advocacy in their own communities. Citizens throughout our communities must come together, not only to look at the things that ought to be accomplished in their own communities (as in the discussions in the living-room settings of the Beer and Culture Society of Seattle in the 1950s), but to align themselves to those causes for a better cultural environment, as they have grown to do. A comment about WPA seems to apply: “The importance was, in the long run, what the people saw as valuable about the projects and whether they would fight for [their] political survival.”⁴

With a policy now formally framed at the federal level, the federal-state-local partnership could become a logically developed system. It has a beginning point; the quality of the community portion and the advocacy behind it will be the important development of the 1980s. The groundwork has been done.

And what about the arts in all of this? The arts should thrive because they have advocates who are educated and demanding, questioning and responsive, and ultimately supportive. The arts councils must know how to address the issues and how to help the community attitudes develop. That will only come with maintaining their own high standards with solidly based backgrounds and solid leadership. As the director of one arts council and president of a state alliance has said, “We are full-fledged partners in the utility of our communities.”⁵

NOTES

1. NACAA *Connections*, Spring 1982, p. 8.
2. National Assembly of Community Arts Agencies, *Report to the National Council on the Arts* (Washington, D.C.: Author, 1979), p. 6.
3. Geoffrey Platt, Jr., “Capital Comments,” NASAA newsletter, February 15, 1981.
4. Milton Meltzer, *Violins and Shovels* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1976), p. 22.
5. Philip Morris, “Development — Just Another Buzzword?” *The Alliance Connection* (Huntington, New York), Summer 1982, p. 3.