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Plato to Puccini: A \$7 Billion Future

By MILTON ESTEROW

IT has been called a cultural boom, a cultural renaissance and a cultural explosion. It has been the subject of highbrow and lowbrow essays, books, magazine articles, debates and cocktail parties. It has been described as quantitative but not qualitative; as quantitative and qualitative and as neither quantitative nor qualitative because there is no such thing as a cultural boom, renaissance or explosion.

Call it what you will, the overwhelming view is that the country is experiencing cultural ferment. Without fanfare, highbrow and lowbrow economists have been exploring the statistics of culture. The arts market, they report, is one of the fastest-growing markets of all.

Last year it was a \$3 billion market. This included everything from sales of Bach and Beatles records and productions of Shakespeare and Shaw to opera and concert hall presentations of Puccini and of Peter, Paul and Mary and purchases of works by Monet and Melville.

By the early nineteen-seventies, with or without the Beatles, the arts market is expected to amount to \$7 billion a year.

Concentrating on figures and not on whether the man who bought a Monet was dazzled by French Impressionists or was seeking to

dazzle his neighbor, the economists paint a bright picture.

Item: Consumer spending on the arts rose from 1953 to 1960 by about 130 per cent, or considerably more than twice as fast as spending on all recreation, and better than six times as fast as outlays for spectator sports.

Item: About 45 million persons went to art museums and galleries last year. Attendance at the Detroit Symphony rose from 300,000 to 700,000 in a decade.

Item: More servicemen on leave in New York City go to the Museum of Modern Art than to any other attraction except the Empire State Building. The economist who made that statement adds a word of caution: "There are no records, unfortunately, of how many visit saloons."

Item: Sales of records nearly tripled in the last decade. If the Beatles are booming, so are Bach, Brahms and Beethoven. The market share of classical records rose from 8 to 18 per cent.

Other statistics: Last year Americans spent nearly \$400 million at theaters, opera and concert halls. They bought over a billion dollars' worth of books. They shelled out \$200 million for paintings, prints, color reproductions and art materials, \$600 million for musical instruments, \$300 million to operate art museums. And in Honolulu

and Fort Wayne, Ind., symphony orchestras were sold out for the season.

There are by-products to this spending. The cultural ferment is generating the construction of theaters and multipurpose arts buildings. About 1,000 will be built in the United States in the next decade at a cost of \$4 billion.

Why all the ferment? There are many reasons, all related to the technological and economic changes of the last few decades.

Superhighways and jet planes have brought localities out of their cultural isolation. Centers of culture are more easily accessible. Cultural presentations of all kinds can tour the country at less cost and with greater mobility.

The mass production of paperback books has provided everything from Plato to Thomas Mann to miniature portfolios of paintings and titles that were out of print or that were considered too expensive to print.

The economists cite "improved product quality." This means, for example, the difference between the Victrola record of a generation ago and today's stereo recording.

Furthermore, people have higher incomes; times are generally good. There is more private, Government, industry and foundation support to the arts. There is civic pride in the arts. There is more leisure time, and there are higher education levels.

One of the most comprehensive studies of the arts market was made not long ago by the Long Range Planning Service of the Stanford Research Institute.

Arnold Mitchell, manager of research studies, reported: "The arts in general may provide people with a new kind of status area in the future. Why? Because the arts have strong associations with domains traditionally allied to status, the rich are active; there are linkages with high job status, good education, social position and the like."

What about the arts market of tomorrow? The report stated that there would be a larger group of professional artists, that they would have greater and more discriminating support and that the arts market would enlarge and "wax considerably more sophisticated."

With perhaps 120 million Americans attending arts events annually and with about 50 million participating in some form of arts activity, the economists are optimistic.

"A very pervasive, if subtle, shift in values is on the way—a shift that will help establish a new set of status symbols," Mr. Mitchell's report continued.

"We look for our society to become increasingly art-conscious at all levels." He concluded: "It would not surprise us to observe a major swing to conspicuous esthetics."