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National Endowment for the Arts (1976): Report 01

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THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS AND INTERNATIONAL
PRESENTATION OF AMERICAN ARTS*

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* Prepared by Neila Sheahan, Associate, Bicentennial Resources Development; on detail from the United States Information Agency.

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THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS AND INTERNATIONAL
PRESENTATION OF AMERICAN ARTS*

I. Introduction

At the conclusion of the National Endowment for the Arts' first decade of existence, it is well established in terms of public and Congressional acceptance, respect by artists and art consumers, and possession of internal vigor and sense of purpose. A suggestion is now being made that the Endowment's activities be further expanded in the international arts arena by eliminating the section of its authorizing legislation which restricts grant support to activities within the United States. This paper deals with the background of this suggestion, current activity in the international arts field and the spectrum of possibilities for the Endowment in the international area. It is based on interviews with Endowment personnel, State Department and U.S. Information Agency officials, and on Congressional testimony and other relevant written materials.

II. Background

The call for Endowment funding of arts activities abroad has been raised by artistic leaders and unions, citing the individual artist's need for overseas experience and financial opportunities, and cultural organizations' needs for the prestige of international acclaim. The hope is that the Endowment will be able to add its funds to the overseas programs now sponsored by the

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Department of State, or that the Endowment will replace State with a total international cultural budget larger than the latter's annual \$1 million. The issue has also been contemplated by officials of the Endowment and the artistic community, not only on the grounds that overseas arts presentations should be funded more substantially, but also that a politically neutral organization, rather than the foreign policy establishment, should perform this function.

The Endowment is regarded as a great hope with respect to both aspects of the question--greater funding and politically neutral control. In funding, it is only in the last ten years that the concept of any official federal support for the arts has been accepted, and the Endowment receives credit for this due to its impressive record and persuasiveness. In addition, since the Endowment is known to serve objectively the artist, arts organizations and the American public, and to have a sense of the contributions that international arts activity can make to serving these groups, quite apart from any connection with foreign policy concerns, it is felt that the Endowment could, by example and advocacy, contribute constructively to expanding and improving the presentation of American arts overseas.

III. Possible Directions for the Endowment in Supporting Presentation of American Arts Internationally.

- A. Non-Program Activities. This includes activities not involving provision of grants, allocation of program funds and, therefore, presumably requiring no change in the Endowment's authorizing legislation.

1. Advocacy

From ten years' experience with the needs of artists, the public, and "the arts", the Endowment is in a unique position to encourage the view that communication in the arts builds common bonds between performers and audiences, and among peoples. The arts can build international bridges by evoking emotional responses unhampered by language, as well as making a positive statement about the vigor, diversity and creativity of American society. Support for international arts activity serves not only the immediate needs of the artist and the national image but also the long term objective of better communication and understanding among states and peoples.

Advocacy of this theme can be pursued without any drastic change in the Endowment's current activities. Rather than suggesting that the Endowment's role be expanded, its officials might simply urge in public speeches, Congressional hearings, and professional meetings, that the arts be recognized as one of the most important and effective means of presenting America to foreign audiences.

It might also argue that the State Department and/or United States Information Agency budgets be increased for this purpose, and that the cultural function be institutionally removed from the short term political responsibilities of these agencies. Further, the Endowment could expand its efforts in the private sector from the current emphasis on increasing support for the arts in the U.S. to increasing support for the overseas aspects of the arts, as well.

2. Technical Assistance for Foreign Artists

A belief in the value of communication through the arts implies support for the two-way nature of exchange, and a need to assist foreign artists seeking contacts in this country. Aside from any question of financial support, it's been suggested that the Endowment offer advice and information to the small group or individual foreign artists not sponsored commercially, drawing on its growing base of knowledge about arts groups and audiences throughout the country.

3. Increased Efforts to Backstop the Agencies Responsible for the Presentation of U.S. Arts Overseas

This area encompasses the Endowment's relationship with those agencies concerned with presenting the best of American arts to foreign audiences, excluding opportunities for cooperation with the Defense Department, which offers entertainment to American audiences overseas. Thus, it includes the Smithsonian Institution, the Department of State and the United States Information Agency, touching on the Endowment's current contacts with those agencies at policy-making and operational levels, and pointing up areas of possible greater cooperation and liaison.

In general, at the highest levels, a unity of interest in maximizing resources and seeking out the best of American arts militates toward producing as much coordination and cooperation as possible. This attitude is maintained throughout the

operational levels, limited only by some conflicts of priorities and objectives, some lack of understanding of the mission of the other organizations, and shortages of time and staff.

a. Current Policy Contacts--The Inter-Agency Committee

Although the Endowment maintains liaison with the institutions noted above through informal contacts at the Director and Assistant Secretary level, the first formal liaison takes place through the Inter-Agency Committee at the Deputy Director level. This Committee, composed of members from the two Endowments, the National Collection of Fine Arts, USIA and the Department of State, was formed in 1973 to discuss major projects, policy questions, and problems of mutual interest in arts and cultural areas. According to the subject matter of each monthly session, appropriate guests from other agencies are included. Some of the topics discussed have been: copyright laws, the "Art in Embassies" program, coordination of the evaluations of American speakers and performers, and the art exhibit indemnity legislation. Until recently, the Inter-Agency Committee has been occupied with the question of providing for financial and organizational arrangements for American participation in international art festivals abroad. By combining resources, with the Arts Endowment providing budgetary support, the Committee has set up an institutional structure to sift invitations to such festivals and arrange for selection of appropriate American works. The

success of the Committee in tackling major problems such as this in a quiet, authoritative, and creative way augers well for future cooperative efforts.

b. Current Operational Contacts--the Staff Level

These contacts largely focus on the Endowment as a resource of materials and expertise for State/USIA needs. These are the major activities of State/USIA, with an indication of the Endowment's contribution:

The State Department

- (1) Selects and sends American performing artists abroad, under a \$1 million budget, with half of this amount spent in Eastern Europe. The program abroad is administered by USIA. The Endowment Program Directors and panel members have sometimes served on State selection panels for these groups. In a few emergency situations, the Endowment has provided a grant to a performing arts group selected by State for a tour abroad which has encountered pre-tour financial difficulties; the grant has generally covered rehearsal time in the United States.
- (2) Under the International Visitors Program, brings some artists and art administrators to the U.S. for orientation. The choice of visitors is made by Embassy staff overseas and may or may not include artists in any given fiscal year. The Endowment has often provided such groups or individuals information on arts administration and arts activities in the United States.

- (3) Sends some artists abroad as lecturers under the American Specialist Program. Requests for speakers in a particular field are made by posts abroad; the individual speaker is chosen by State. Endowment officials have given some of these lectures, which has also enabled them to attend international conferences, with the travel funded by State.
- (4) Provides grants-in-aid to private groups sponsoring exchanges or other special projects. A small budget is available to each geographic bureau in the cultural division of State, and projects for artistic exchanges can compete with other interests for these funds. By way of example, the State Department's contribution to the US-UK Bicentennial Exchange Fellowship Program is from this source.
- (5) Provides grants for one year (sometimes one semester) to study/teach abroad for students and professors from all fields, including the arts. Grantees must generally affiliate with an institution of higher learning. The Endowment has little connection with this program.

The United States Information Agency

- (1) Provides information in foreign countries about the state of the arts and arts administration in the U.S. The Endowment occasionally provides materials.

- (2) Presents exhibits, films and other cultural "products" to foreign audiences. The Endowment is sometimes asked for assistance in access to such materials, and for advice on what's new and good in the arts.
- (3) Sponsors concerts, theatrical events, dance performances of American works, presented by American, foreign, or combined groups. USIA stresses the contemporary and experimental rather than the well-known and prestigious. USIA can bring a group from country A to country B but generally can't "import" a group all the way from the U.S. The Endowment doesn't have input into this activity unless the post abroad asks for an artistic judgment on a group and USIA consults the Endowment.
- (4) Administers State's overseas arts presentation program. The Endowment is not involved in the overseas phase.
- (5) USIA's Voluntary Speakers Service programs American lecturers overseas, paying per diem and local travel costs, but not overseas travel. Artists and/or arts officials intending to go abroad can make their travel plans known to USIA's cultural services division if they are interested in extending their speaking program and/or increasing their professional contacts abroad.

4. Areas for Improvement in Cooperation with State/USIA

Since the Endowment represents a resource to State and USIA, rather more than the contrary, the following suggestions for improving cooperative efforts and, hence, the presentation of American arts overseas focus more on what the Endowment might do, although efforts to achieve more effective coordination are the responsibility of all.

a. Mutual Understanding

A greater effort might be made by Endowment staff to understand the extent of the overlap and the divergence of USIA/State/Endowment interests and objectives, in order to achieve greater convergence where possible and deal with the differences without exaggeration.

Given a mutual interest in presenting the best of American arts overseas, there are still philosophical differences. USIA's purpose is not first and foremost to serve the artist, but to contribute to a long-term favorable image of the U.S., viewing contact among artists and art "consumers" as contributing to this goal. This doesn't mean that USIA "rips off" the artist financially or politically, however. It, like the Endowment, lives with limited funds and tries to maximize resources. It does not ask an artist to provide a product or service at a cheaper price than he'd otherwise earn overseas. It tries to

introduce his work to an audience to whom it is unknown and presumably not yet in demand, commercially or otherwise. In exceptional cases, it is hoped that American artists share USIA's belief that presentation of our artistic heritage and innovations overseas contributes in the long term to national objectives, and will make special efforts to aid this. Politically, although USIA has a short term information (media) as well as cultural component, the functions are well separated and artists are not drawn into the day-to-day USIA role of providing "hard" information about official policies.

The State Department's cultural mission is not the presentation of American arts overseas, but the furtherance of mutual understanding between the people of this country and those of foreign states. The arts presentation activity is one means in this effort, but it is regarded by some high level State officials as the least effective of the tools available. It is viewed as producing relatively short-lived and superficial effects, as well as affecting a random and perhaps favorably predisposed audience. Much of State's relatively low priority for the arts component of the exchange activity also stems from the history of Congressional directives and limitations imposed on the arts program. If the arts element seems small now, it is large in comparison to the "bad old days".

It would be worthwhile for Endowment/State/USIA staff to recognize and discuss these variations in mission and/or philosophy, perhaps by discussing the broad questions of the purpose of overseas arts' presentation, the relationship to short and long term goals, and the relative benefits to audiences, participants and sponsors, much as in the advocacy channels mentioned above, but within the official establishment. Areas of mutual interest might be sought out and strengthened. Without a greater sense of common purpose any organizational changes may result in just additional meetings and bothersome bureaucratic layers.

b. Provision of Products

Low priority is given in the Endowment to receiving, cataloging, and preparing lists of special projects or grant products that would be of use to USIA. Endowment staff feel that for their own use this should be done, but have little time for it. USIA would very much like to have easy access to the grant products--tapes, films, photos and the like--even if eventually it were to decide not to use them overseas.

c. Rights

As with artists' fees, USIA has limited funds for purchasing films and other materials for overseas use. When these materials are produced through Endowment funding, it might be possible to make them available for appropriate use abroad so that the taxpayer is not "paying twice".

Although the Endowment has certain rights under non-exclusive licensing arrangements to use grant products, and in individual instances has arranged for use by USIA of particular products, the principle has generally been not to restrict the grant recipients' rights to products resulting from a grant, including overseas rights.

The question involves both policy and legal considerations but it is worth rethinking whether the Endowment's grant funding could or should be made conditional on provision of overseas rights to use of resulting products by USIA. This has been discussed previously, and is likely to be of increasing interest to USIA as the Endowment gets more involved in the media as documentary and art forms.

d. Selection of State-Sponsored Groups for Overseas Presentation

At one time State asked the Arts Endowment to handle its selection of overseas performing groups entirely and the Endowment was unwilling to take this on, primarily because of staff time considerations, and perhaps a reluctance to become entangled in the State panel system when the public access question appeared likely to undermine the possibilities for confidential discussion. The matter might well be raised again within State and the Endowment, since (a) Endowment panels are well qualified to make the selections, (b) Endowment panels could include consideration of the needs of the artistic groups in their deliberations,

(c) the effort would increase the Endowment's experience with international arts activities and its ability to argue for greater funding for such activities, and (d) Endowment selection systems should mitigate occasional criticism of State's choices as "unprofessional".

e. Clearinghouse Function

The State Department Arts Advisor perceives a need to bring together in a more organized information system the desires of arts groups to travel and perform abroad and the State/USIA mission to present American arts overseas. A clearinghouse operation is envisaged whereby a person/office knowledgeable in the plans of arts groups intending to travel abroad would coordinate with the programs of official posts in countries near the planned itinerary, in order to extend the tours to the maximum extent feasible. Currently, this function is performed on a small scale in the State Department, but only as groups volunteer the information about their plans. The Endowment might be a better source for keeping in touch with artistic travelers and encouraging them to inform the government overseas establishment of their plans and needs.

5. Means for Improving Cooperation

a. Liaison Personnel

In recent years, USIA has occasionally provided staff to the Endowment on a loan basis. This staff naturally feels a responsibility to be alert to activities in the Endowment that might

be of value to USIA. In the light of this experience, the Endowment might consider establishing a liaison person or office for international programs, which would be aware of the needs of State/USIA, seek out appropriate products, and coordinate overseas travel plans of arts groups. An international staff could also prepare statements and speeches for Endowment officials on the role of the arts internationally, and would logically expand to handle the Endowment's own international programs if the legislation were to be changed and the Endowment's own programs were to spread to the overseas sphere.

b. Orientation and Training Programs

State and USIA personnel might be invited to participate in the staff training programs of the Endowment--to explain their objectives, programs and problems. Similarly, the Endowment could seek to include discussion of its activities and philosophical views in the training programs of the State/USIA establishment, such as at the Foreign Service Institute, at the junior, middle management and senior levels.

c. Personal Contacts

Personnel should be encouraged to know their counterparts in other agencies--at the State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and at the USIA Cultural Services and film sections. This relates, of course, to the need to be aware of the organizations' overall missions, as well as new programs and opportunities for cooperation. Establishing and maintaining these contacts is complicated by the fact that the foreign policy

agencies rotate their officer personnel with exasperating frequency.

B. Program Activities. This encompasses direct funding by the National Endowment for the Arts in the presentation of American arts overseas.

1. Current Programs

Within its current legislative limitations, the Endowment is already involved in some aspects of American arts activities abroad and related international arts exchanges. Although restricted to arts support "in the United States", occasional international projects have a sufficient American component to satisfy the Endowment's guidelines and priorities. These include support for:

- a. State Department overseas cultural presentations (noted above);
- b. international conferences of arts groups held in the United States;
- c. an occasional foreign artist to visit the U.S. at the request of an American organization, such as in the Artist-in-Schools Program, or to work with American artists here in a unique international context;
- d. the American aspects of an international festival, such as the grant to the Spoleto Festival for its planning stage taking place in this country, or a grant to the Festival of the Two Worlds, which involved Americans travelling abroad, covering costs of administration and auditions here;

- e. individual professional development fellowship grants, defined to include the possibility for the artist to use the funds for travel overseas or shipping an exhibit abroad;
- f. international activities as part of larger projects, such as a grant to an organization which includes international work among its objectives--for example, the International Theatre Institute--or an arts group whose production is intended for presentation both here and abroad;
- g. the newly-created International Art Exhibition Office, which will coordinate U.S. participation in international arts festivals; and
- h. a grant to the League of Cities-Conference of Mayors to enable acceptance of an invitation by the Council of Europe to represent this country at the Architectural Heritage Year Conference in Amsterdam.

Except for the fellowships, the above projects are rare and considered exceptions from the bulk of the domestically oriented grants structure. Panels, the General Counsel, and the overseeing Congressional committees are aware of such projects and feel that in certain circumstances the seamless web of the international community makes it impossible to restrict all projects to 100% national elements.

It must be emphasized that these grants are exceptional not primarily because of the legal restriction, nor because of objection

by other organizations with legislative responsibilities for presentation of American arts overseas (which, on the contrary, welcome these supplements to their own meager budgets), but because the Endowment's own sense of priorities limits the bulk of projects to the domestic scene. As outlined below, changing the Endowment's authorizing legislation could have an effect ranging from minimal to drastic, depending upon the attendant changes in funding, organizational structures and philosophy underlying the concept of official support for presentation of the arts abroad.

2. Program Possibilities

If the legislation were to be altered, the Endowment could support expanded international programs from its funds in several possible ways--(a) without increased funding, (b) with an increased budget in the context of its current mission to support American arts and artists, concurrent with State and USIA pursuing their activities for their objectives, and (c) the Endowment's assumption of the entire overseas arts function, replacing State/USIA in this activity.

a. No Increased Funding.

Merely changing the legislation would not open the floodgates to increased grants for overseas projects, although many requests might ensue. Within the Endowment, opinion ranges from those who feel that artists need to break away from the belief that an international tour is a sine qua non for one's professional

reputation, to those who maintain that international exchange is important enough to deserve a piece of the budget even now. The prevailing attitude holds that overseas projects are worthwhile, but only if additional funds are made available above and beyond the normal increment in funding that's taken place over the last decade. "So much needs to be done here" is the often expressed view. Although foreign activity may serve the individual artist, the American audience is not simultaneously served--barring, of course, real exchange activities, which is a touchy question. One Endowment program director even suggested that the legislative prohibition allows the Endowment to side-step an inundation of requests from such groups as community chorales, rather than having to turn them down because of low priority or quality.

b. Increased Funding for the Endowment to Support Programs Abroad Concurrently with State/USIA.

This configuration eliminates the financial problem described in the first alternative, but involves a different set of problems--mainly organizational and policy. Although some Endowment officials feel that their Congressional oversight committees accept the rationale of the artist's need for international experience and recognize the value of international artistic exchange not justified in foreign policy terms, a substantial and conspicuous international program might cause

the committees responsible for overseeing the conduct of U.S. foreign relations to concern themselves with these programs. They may well hold the view that any officially-supported arts presentation overseas reflects on the image of the U.S., and Congress may require some degree of content control, perhaps through State Department consultation.

On policy grounds, State and USIA would not raise objections to a third party in the international arts sphere. Recognizing the Endowment's slightly different rationale, the possibility of consultation and the likelihood of occasional joint projects, State and USIA would welcome the development. In fact, these might well wish to extend to other cities the tours of a performing group sent overseas under Endowment funding. However, relations with USIA might be a little more complicated, since USIA often wishes to bring American artists into contact with their counterparts and supporters abroad through receptions, workshops, and informal gatherings. Most artists find this professionally useful, or are at least willing to be helpful in USIA's efforts to facilitate communication. Some artists may feel that this is exploitative. If they were to accept official funds from the Endowment to travel abroad, but have nothing to do with the overseas establishment, this could result in some tension between the Endowment and the USIA. Much of this might, of

course, be avoided through efforts to be aware of the common interests of the two organizations, as noted above.

Finally, any division of similar responsibilities among several organizations can create bureaucratic jealousies at the operating level, in spite of admonitions for cooperation and reminders of mutual objectives from top officials.

Another policy ramification concerns favoritism or conflict of interest. A difference in degree may become a difference in kind in the case of international programs. If the Endowment is occasionally subject to allegations of favoritism and is under political pressure to spread out its grant largesse, the conspicuousness and glamour of the international touring "goodie" could multiply these problems.

Organizationally, the Endowment would have to examine its internal structure and coordination with other overseas agencies in the administration of a foreign program. A larger number of grants would bring pressure for more staff; new guidelines would have to be set; new panel members with international experience might be called for. While these changes could probably be incorporated into the Endowment's current structure, especially if grants were confined to an expansion of the fellowship program to international activity or an expansion of touring grants to enable overseas travel, if sufficient

projects cut across disciplines and if the coordination with State/USIA and the administration of overseas activity involved substantial staff effort, the Endowment might need to develop an international program section. Some questions to consider might be:

Would grants be given to foreign sponsors to support an American touring group? What legal questions would this involve?

How would grants for overseas activities be evaluated?

Would Endowment staff need to travel abroad?

Would grants be limited to groups and individuals who could handle their own programs abroad, already having contacts with institutions or sponsors, or would grants be offered for projects that would require assistance from Embassy staff?

How about profits? State-sponsored grantees have their expenses and fees covered, and any profit beyond that is returned to the U.S. Treasury. Artists travelling under Endowment auspices might be hoping for profit from these tours. If breaking even is success to an artistic company, grants for such projects might be on a "guaranteed loss system", as followed by the British Council, which would then require some careful evaluation of the prospects for commercial success of the proposed tour.

c. Assumption by the Endowment of the Overseas Arts Function,
Replacing State/USIA in this Activity

This implies the occasionally mentioned concept of a "Ministry of Culture". The considerations noted in Section b, above, would apply in spades in this case--i.e., the need for organizational change, development of an overseas program administration, and probable Congressional concern with program content and the distribution of grants. In addition, the Endowment would inherit the problems of dealing with Eastern Europe, where cultural exchange cannot be divorced from political negotiations and issues even if we want to do so.

There is also the question of whether the Endowment would inherit an information obligation to send arts groups to areas of the world where a gap in knowledge of American art exists, and where there might be no expectation of commercial demand until such art forms become popular. This would include some areas outside of the Western Europe market, and might be of less interest to the performing arts group hoping for prestige and commercial success.

Further, the Endowment might inherit the exchange responsibility. In the more difficult years for the State cultural budget in the lanes of Congress, State was unable to persuade Congress

of the value of exchange in the arts presentation field, although this was fully accepted, and demanded, in the education field. That climate may be changing, and if exchange in arts becomes an objective, it involves assuaging union fears as well as taking on the administrative chores of handling incoming presentations. These factors, as well as the Endowment's feeling about the value of the international arts activity, in and of itself, will enter into the decision as to whether the Endowment desires to take on this role.

Before such a change could take place, an alteration in the whole philosophical basis for official support for the arts overseas would have to occur. The long-term view of the role of the arts in international relations, separated from any connection to the short-term foreign policy function, is an approach whose time may be coming among the U.S. government leaders, but is probably still some distance away. In the past, any foreign activities not politically or militarily justified in the short run have been controversial, and, as noted above, the acceptance of official support for the arts is something of a novelty. Combining the two elements might be difficult, although this climate also may be changing. Some Endowment staff express the belief that the members of the

Congressional committees reviewing the Endowment would be receptive to the concept, and State officials feel that a recession may be in the offing of the attitudinal iceberg in Congress that resulted in past drastic cuts to the arts presentation program and demands that existing programs have a direct relationship to short-term goals.

Indicative of this softening trend is the Congressional interest in the reports of two study groups--The Stanton and Murphy Commissions--which examined the problems of the linkage of short-term objectives and the long-term cultural programs in one organization, and simultaneously looked at the awkward division of cultural responsibilities between State and USIA. They recommended restructuring the organizations to eliminate the anomalies, including one proposal that the cultural and informational functions of USIA be separated and that an International Cultural Agency be established to pursue only the non-media, non-propagandistic activities of USIA and absorb the cultural activities now executed by the State Department. With some variation from the exact recommendation, such a configuration would be a kind of international counterpart to the nationally oriented Endowment, and it is conceivable that a consolidation of the two organizations might someday occur.

However, although it would seem high time for a serious re-consideration of the philosophical and organizational underpinnings of the international arts structure, there is little expectation that the Commissions' recommendations will be implemented. For the moment, it appears that State and USIA will continue to live with the ambiguities, cooperating and coordinating as best they can. Neither is pressing for these changes in toto, which obviously would involve serious costs and personnel dislocations along with any possible advantages. To implement an even more drastic change, such as the Endowment's taking on this function, would multiply the problems. At present, it appears that neither the Endowment nor the other organizations are prepared to argue for this.

IV. Comment

The likeliest and best course of action would seem to be for the Endowment to continue its steady expansion of activities according to its original legislative authority, supporting the international arts activity through backstopping the agencies currently carrying out responsibilities in that field, and building a case for the importance of the international arts exchange and its increased funding. If Congress and the public accept this view and provide resources, the Endowment might want to urge an alteration in legislation and gradually enter the international arts field, increasing funding and staff accordingly. At the same time, the

of organizational and philosophical change concerning the cultural activity in the foreign policy establishment continue and grow, perhaps fostered by Endowment leadership and advocacy, a logical and easier changeover of the whole international arts function to the Endowment may be envisioned in the future.