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Anthony L. Barresi

NATIONAL POLICY AND THE ARTS

Federal Commitment to the Arts

An Historical Tracing — CHRONOLOGY

by Anthony L. Barresi

Significant federal arts support in the United States is seen as a relatively recent phenomenon non-existent prior to the sixth decade of this century. In fact, federal arts support has been present since at least 1790, though it has varied depending upon the nation's social, economic, and political climate. Historically, government's arts involvement has had the common thread of *necessity* as a motivation: during the nation's formative years, practical necessity guided the government's response to arts patronage; the financial crisis of the Depression stimulated federal officials to respond to the economic necessity for work opportunities; and the cultural necessity of the 1960's elicited government's response to the scoial and artistic needs of its citizens and artists. Government's reactions to these varied necessities furnish the outline for this historical tracing of federal arts commitment.

Era of Practical Necessity

Early American statesmen, aware that the arts were important to the nation's development, assigned them differing priorities in respective development plans. During the era of practical necessity the young republic's preoccupation with political stability, material wealth, and westward expansion caused federal officials to support only those arts projects which were seen as performing a service for the government:

1790—Establishment of the United States Marine Band as the first musical ensemble to receive permanent support for performances at ceremonial occasions.

1800—Library of Congress established. Collections included music and art.

1846—The Smithsonian Institute established to serve as a repository for the national art and scientific collections.

1877—Representative Samuel Cox of New York unsuccessfully introduced legislation calling for the establishment of a federal arts council. Legislators failed to see its practical necessity.

1891—Congress established a National Conservatory of Music under the directorship of Antonin Dvorak. With no financial provision for continued support, its existence was brief.

1910—Congress, at the request of President Taft, established a Commission on the Fine Arts to advise about matters concerning arts for federal properties and to offer opinions on general artistic questions posed by federal officials. This body chose to limit its attention to the Capital District and never effectively broadened its scope to include the rest of the nation.

Since its inception, the government has commissioned artists to create works for the beautification of federal properties. This practical patronage has increased proportionately with the increases in federal holdings.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, government patronage of the performing arts seemed unnecessary because arts organizations were the recipients of liberal endowments from private patrons. Later, when these private sources of funding diminished, federal intervention became an economic necessity.

Era of Economic Necessity

With the advent of the Great Depression of the 1930's, government arts support on a massive basis came into being. The decline of private patronage and subsequent artist unemployment prompted the Roosevelt Administration and Congress to institute work projects to ease the economic paraly-

eral level could encourage sensitivity to the arts and good design in public places.

I also believe that greater funding should be made available for arts education programs. I strongly supported the Elementary and Secondary Education Act amendments of 1974 and 1978 which recognized that the arts should be an integral part of a child's education. Further, I have spoken out in favor of additional arrangements with various public and private cultural institutions and educational groups for the purpose of expanding arts education. Today's children are tomorrow's audiences—learning to appreciate the arts today helps assure the support of our cultural institutions tomorrow.

With respect to the handicapped, in particular, art education is of special value. The "Education For All Handicapped Children Act" in 1975, which I strongly supported, specifically encouraged art appreciation programs and the use of the arts as a teaching tool for the handicapped and as a way of reaching youngsters who had otherwise been unteachable. I continue to strongly support increased funding for such important programs.

6. Party's Platform

Some specific provisions I support:

- Increased funding for the Arts and Humanities Endowments and the Institute of Museum Services;
- Increased support for the nation's community-based art groups and for creative outreach programs designed to bring the arts to the greatest possible number of Americans;
- Meeting the cultural needs of all Americans and encouraging, on a national level, greater participation in the performing arts of artists representing all our rich cultural traditions;
- Increasing support for arts education and arts for the handicapped programs;
- A White House Conference on the Arts and Humanities, to provide an opportunity for discussion of the American arts, and to address the problems facing arts institutions and artists due to inflation;
- Creating a National Art Bank, which will encourage and support American artists through federal government purchase and subsequent lease of their works to federal agencies;
- Jobs programs for artists such as the CETA arts program, which would provide assistance to local, public and private organizations for the hiring of underemployed professional artists; an Arts Job Corps, which would train people on the state and local levels to develop arts councils in their communities;
- The Federal Building Enhancement Act, which will authorize a set-aside of a percentage of the funds expended for construction of public buildings for art work, encouraging state and local governments, as well as private contractors, to initiate similar programs;
- A National Survey report showing, on a state-by-state basis, the economic benefits flowing from artists and arts organizations. Such a study would help local officials and the general public better understand the arts' contribution to the nation's economy.

Ronald Reagan

Ronald Reagan

1. Challenges Facing The Arts

The greatest challenge facing the arts is the annual inflation rate approaching 20 percent. Historically, since the end of World War II, the annual inflation rate was between one and two percent. But whether we shall ever see a comparable rate again is problematical. I do know if this genie is not put back in the bottle it will destroy our economy and ultimately life as we have known it in the United States. Until inflation is brought under control, arts institutions will see their endowments eaten up, their operating expenses will sky rocket and ticket prices will mean smaller and smaller audiences. Control and reduction of the inflation rate will be the top priority of the Reagan administration.

2. White House Leadership

I will end as soon as possible the politicization of the National Council of the Arts so conspicuous during the Carter-Mondale administration. Members of the Council will be selected on the basis of their artistic skills rather than their political connections. Secondly, I will designate one member of my White House staff to act as liason with the National Endowment for the Arts who can act as a catalyst within the government to stimulate interest in and support for the arts.

3. Challenges Facing The NEA

In the United States only two activities, sports and the arts, are genuinely different because in both of these fields of endeavor only merit counts. With the advent of the Carter-Mondale administration, arguments of populism versus elitism were imposed and as a result, funds were spread about on the basis of geography rather than artistic merit. Secondly, the National Council was devoting less than five minutes to approving grants. This means staff control rather than council control. I would shift the awarding of individual grants to the various arts institutions to assure that merit and merit alone is the criterion for making the grant.

As to what levels of funding I would recommend for the future, I cannot say. I would hope that we could see a steady annual increase. However, I note that the ink in the Carter-Mondale administration's budget for 1981 was barely dry when orders went out to department and agency heads to further reduce the already submitted budget. I think a Reagan administration can manage better than that.

4. Support By The Private Sector

Support of the arts by the private sector is very uneven. I would take a personal interest in encouraging individuals and corporations to provide support. A program like the college and university grants, where a company matches a contribution of one of their employees to his university, might be replicated to provide a steady flow of funds to the arts.

5. Arts To Improve Society

There is no question that the arts enhance the quality of life and this is something virtually everyone seeks. But the arts, unlike some other activities, demand excellence and discipline. There are no shortcuts. Artistic creativity cannot be bought but it can be encouraged and should be without domination by any governmental body. Overall, the arts should concentrate on what they do best and leave the broader social problems to others lest the standard of excellence be lowered.

6. Party's Platform

Party platforms for the most part represent general statements of policy. I would hope that the essence of what I said above could be incorporated in the platform statement.

"During the nation's formative years, practical necessity guided the government's response to arts patronage."

sis. Special programs under the aegis of the Civil Works Administration (1933), Federal Emergency Relief Administration (1934), and the Works Project Administration (1936) employed artists to work in visual and performing arts projects. Through the Public Works Administration, funding became available for buildings which included commissioned art works. Although these programs were instituted for economic reasons, artists and the public benefited incidentally. Further, in 1938, the successes of these programs led to an attempt by Senator Claude Pepper to establish a permanent Bureau of Fine Arts. Although the Senator's legislation was defeated in Congress, his idea presaged future government involvement. With the beginning of World War II and emphasis on the war effort, art project funds were diverted to war use but some performing artists found new employment as entertainers for the armed forces.

Era of Cultural Necessity

During the period from the end of World War II to 1963, federal arts subsidies were sporadic and indirect. In general, support was limited to State Department sponsored foreign tours, White house ceremonies honoring outstanding artists, exhibits and performances for state occasions, and indirect financial support in the form of income deductions for art contributions and supplementary services.

The following events contributed the impetus and organizational patterns that resulted in the eventual funding of the arts by a national agency:

1951—President Truman requested that the existing Commission on Fine Arts investigate ways in which the arts could be aided by the federal government. The Commission's report (1953) recommended the establishment of a National Cultural Center for which Congress, in 1963, appropriated $15.5 million, the first dollar evidence of federal arts support since the Depression.

1955—While serving as Undersecretary of HEW, Nelson Rockefeller persuaded President Eisenhower to sponsor legislation creating a National Council on the Arts. Though this attempt failed in Congress, when elected Governor of New York State, Rockefeller established the New York State Council on the Arts. Many of the individuals within this state agency became influential in later federal arts programs.

1961—Secretary of Labor Arthur Goldberg intervened in the Metropolitan Opera strike. His arbitration award stated that the nation "must come to accept the arts as a new community responsibility and that part of this responsibility must fall to the federal government."

1962—President Kennedy appointed August Heckscher as Special Consultant on the Arts and requested that he report on the relationship between the arts and the federal government. This report recommended the permanent establishment of the post of Special Arts Advisor, the institution of an Advisory Arts Council, and a National Arts Foundation. All of these recommendations were implemented within the next three years.

1962-63—During the fall and spring, Congress heard arguments for federal arts support set forth by prominent arts advo-

"This was the period when even opponents of arts legislation found it expedient to seem supportive for fear of rousing public ire."

cates. Their testimony reflected their concern for the financial future of the arts, their commitment to arts opportunities for the nation's citizens, and their belief that progress and scholarship in the arts were appropriate matters of concern for the federal government.

1963—Roger L. Stevens became Special Assistant to the President on the Arts under Lyndon B. Johnson. As the first full time presidential arts advisor, he was charged with the development of congressional support for arts legislation, a charge fulfilled in part by his appearance at the Democratic National Convention, which resulted in a platform plank supporting the arts.

1964—In September, President Johnson signed the law establishing the National Council on the arts, a twenty-four member body charged to recommend ways to maintain and increase the nation's cultural resources and to encourage and develop a greater appreciation and enjoyment of the arts by its citizens.

1965—President Johnson, in his State of the Union message, recommended the establishment of a National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities (NFAH), a single foundation with two separate but equal endowments.

1965—On September 29th, the President signed Public Law 89-209 establishing NFAH as an independent agency in the executive branch of the federal government.

The enabling legislation for the NFAH Act stated that "the encouragement and support of the nation's progress in the arts, while primarily a matter for private and local initiative, is also an appropriate matter of concern to the Federal Government." Over the next fifteen years, the aims of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the arts funding wing of the NFAH, have been to make the arts more accessible to the nation's citizens, preserve our cultural heritage, strengthen cultural organizations, and encourage the creative development of the nation's finest talent. To accomplish these goals, this agency has awarded direct assistance and matching grants to individuals, arts agencies, and arts organizations. Moreover, it has acted as a catalyst for the development of private sources of patronage to inflation-crippled arts organizations and as a conduit agency for arts monies generated by other public and private bodies.

The years 1966-1970 may be described as that period within the Era of Cultural Ne-

cessity when the framework for federal arts support was built, NFAH funding procedures and programs were established, other governmental agencies became interested in arts funding, the number of state arts agencies multiplied, and a working relationship was created between key congressional leaders and the National Endowment for the Arts. This general growth pattern is reflected in the increase of NEA appropriations from $2.5 million in 1966 to $8.25 million in 1970.

"The NEA has acted as a catalyst for the development of private sources of patronage to inflation-crippled arts organizations."

Specific events occuring during this period may shed further light upon this building process:

1965—Congressional passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, to be administered by the U.S. Office of Education (USOE). Opportunities for the support of artists were identified under Titles I and II.

1966—Congress appropriated $7.9 million for NEA use in fiscal year 1967.

1967—NEA and USOE joined to publish *Federal Funds and Services for the Arts*, which listed 120 federal programs providing arts funds and services. This was the first of several similar publications appearing between 1967 and 1980.

1967—President Johnson, in his budget message, recommended an increase in NFAH appropriation.

1967—Congress passed the Public Broadcasting Act, authorizing the creation of a new, non-profit, non-commercial television agency to help in the support of non-commercial cultural radio and T.V. programming.

1967—Congressional reauthorization of NFAH under P.L. 80-83.

1968—President Nixon's inaugural contained comment favorable to the arts. He urged greater emphasis on the role of the private sector in cultural funding and placed stress on the matching funds approach to arts support.

1968—Roger Stevens resigns as Chairman of NEA.

1969—Congress displayed non-partisan support for arts legislation, led by Senators Pell and Javits and Congressmen Brademas and Ayres.

1969—President Nixon nominated Nancy Hanks as Chairman of the Arts Endowment. At the ceremony, the President espoused the "broadening and deepening of the intellectual and cultural life of our country" as one of the fundamental objectives of his administration.

1969—In a "White House Message on the Arts," the President called for the largest arts appropriation to date and proposed a three-year extension of NFAH.

1970—Congressional reauthorization of NFAH under P.L. 90-23. Congress appropriated $15 million for fiscal year 1971, a doubling of the 1970 appropriation.

The decade of the 1970's saw the embellishment of the 1960's structural framework for arts support. In fact, enthusiastic public response to arts production led many to refer to it as a period of "arts explosion." To be sure, it was a period of federal, state, and local arts agency growth and program proliferation; there was wide diversity in programs funded by NEA and other federal agencies; there was a growth in monetary commitment to the arts from Congress as reflected in the steady rise in NEA appropriations; and finally, imaginative employment of Endowment "seed" money managed to attract increasingly

FILM

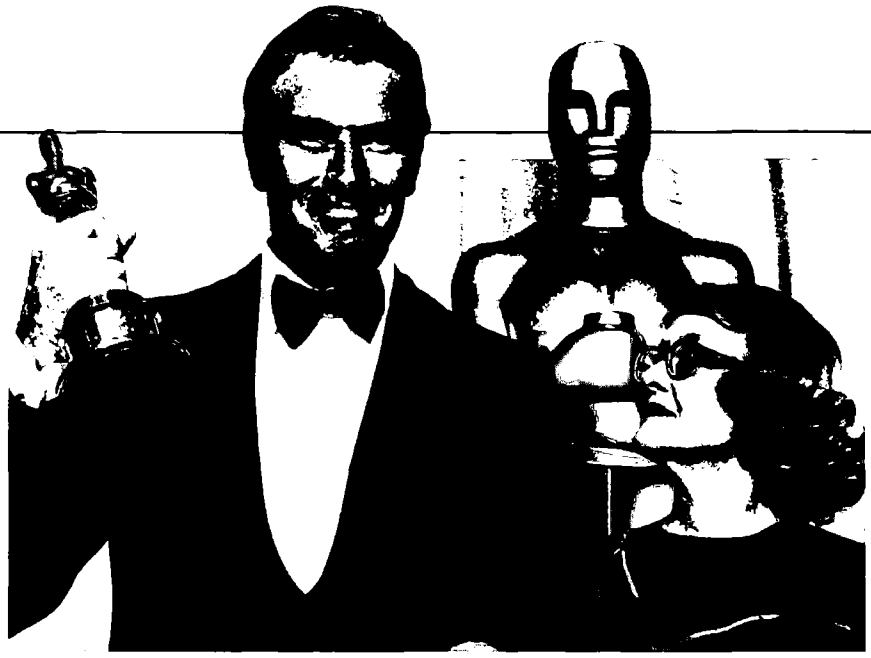

Photo: Ruth Orkin

by Arthur Knight

Arthur Knight, professor in the Film Division of the University of Southern California, is perhaps best known for his book, ***The Liveliest Art.*** *He is also the author of* ***The Hollywood Style,*** *and is a film critic and columnist for* ***The Hollywood Reporter*** *and* ***Westways.***

April is the Cruelest Month

Between mid-February, when the nominations are announced, and early April, when the man from Price, Waterhouse surrenders his fateful envelopes, Hollywood is quite literally agog with the rites and rituals attendant upon its annual Academy Awards ceremony. Not only is it the subject of cocktail chatter, but each of the major guilds (writers, producers, directors, etc.) manages to squeeze in its own annual banquet, complete with its own awards, just enough in advance of the Academy's night to have some influence on the Academy's voters. The trade papers at this time of year reap a small fortune from the Nominees' strikingly designed full-page ads in a last ditch effort to win approval from the membership, and the town's press agents work round the clock planting stories about their clients wherever they might find an inch of type—even in the throwaway press.

This year has been no different in that regard. Hollywood has always been a movie-oriented town, even though for the past twenty years television has been offering its denizens their steadiest and (except for the superstars) most lucrative employment. Even so, most T.V. people regard the big screen as the Big Time—much the same as an actor in a repertory company in Cleveland looks upon Broadway. What happens on Academy night is *important*. But behind the scenes, this year, one detects a troubled uncertainty about the future. No one expects that the Academy will disappear. No one expects that the industry will disappear. What is disappearing, to the dismay of many, is the sharp line of distinction between the big screen and the little screen.

When the movie studios began selling off their libraries of old pictures to the networks and the syndicators early in the fifties, there was some initial grumbling. Old-line executives regarded television less as a rival than as an enemy, an enemy that threatened to put them out of business. But television was able to come up with the kind of dollars that the studios needed in the face of dwindling audiences and rising costs, and calmer minds prevailed. T.V.'s purchase of old, hitherto worthless pictures would make it possible for the studios to finance new productions; and after these had completed their theatrical runs, they too would go to television.

It looked like an endless, profitable cycle, and as audiences began to return to the movie houses (although never in the numbers that attended in those halcyon pre-television days), the studios' antipapthy to television changed to a wary cooperation. They rented portions of their lots to independent T.V. producers. They began themselves to produce series for television, then—what would seem to be the most direct form of competition with their theatrical productions—full feature-length "Movies of the Week," complete with an all-star cast. Again, the lure was money. They discovered that they could turn out a "Movie of the Week" for a fraction of the cost of a standard feature (which now averages out at $8,000,000). Not only that, the entire budget was underwritten by the networks—and the studios retained the option of marketing them as features abroad. It seemed a no-risk propositon.

But of course there *were* risks. These "Movies of the Week" had to be made attractive enough, alluring enough to satisfy the ultimate bankroller, the advertisers. And if doing so meant encouraging a few million people to sit in their living rooms instead of dropping in at their favorite neighborhood movie house, that was the price one had to pay.

Naturally, there were protests from the exhibitors, launched through organizations like NATO (National Association of Theatre Owners), charging that the film industry was creating an unfair competition. The studios were providing the networks with not only their "Movies of the Week," but in many instances theatrical features within months after their theatrical runs. The studios have defended themselves against exhibitor complaints by pointing out that their films are being seen on small screens, are often re-edited specifically for television and are frequently—and irritatingly—interrupted by commercial announcements.

Technology is changing all of this. Advent and the other pioneers in projecting

more money from private sources. This was the period when even opponents of arts legislation found it expedient to seem supportive for fear of rousing public ire. Over this ten-year period, Congressional appropriations for the Endowment rose from $15 million in 1971 to $149.5 million in 1980.

Government's commitment in the 1970's is best reflected in the following events:

1971—President Nixon, in a speech to the American Council for the Arts, asserted that governments at all levels should view arts support as a responsibility and opportunity because "few investments in the quality of life...pay off so handsomely as money spent to stimulate the arts."

1971—The President directed all executive department heads to survey their operations to assess how the arts could benefit their programs and how the programs could assist the arts. Chairman Nancy Hanks was requested to coordinate replies and recommendations.

1971—Congress again doubled its appropriation to NEA for fiscal year 1972, to a total of $30 million.

1972—President Nixon announced that the government would sponsor a federal design assembly to expand the principal of federal architecture, improve the stardards of federal graphics and design, and bring professionals into government.

1973—A three-day Design Assembly in April convened with leading designers and corporate executives participating. It led to further assemblies and seminars and the inclusion of design teams in federal agencies.

1973—Congressional reauthorization of NFAH under P.L. 93-133.

1975—Congress resolved that National Arts Council appointments are subject to Senate confirmation.

1976—President Ford and presidential contender Jimmy Carter made public campaign statements strongly supportive of the arts.

1976—Representative Bella Abzug (D-NY) unsuccessfully attempted to persuade Congress to "earmark" specific CETA funds for artist job development.

1976—The Congressional bill for NFAH reauthorization added two new programs in support of cultural activities: Museum Services Institute and Challenge Grant Programs.

1977—The Ford Administration submitted a $114.6 million appropriation request for the 1978 Arts Endowment budget.

1977—In October, Nancy Hanks resigned as Chairman of NEA.

1978—President Carter appointed Joan Mondale to be Honorary Chairman of the Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities.

1979—President Carter signed P.L. 96-126 reauthorizing the NFAH for another four years. He also requested $154.4 million appropriation for fiscal year 1980.

1979—The President requested supplemental funding of $1.4 million each for a White House Conference on the Arts and Humanities.

1980—President Carter requested Congress to raise its NEA appropriation for fiscal year 1981 to $168.8 million, an 8.8% increase.

Future Necessity

It has often been stated that governments of great nations are remembered more for the quality of the arts than for their success in politics or battle. Since its earliest period our government has sought to provide assistance to artists, but that support was generated according to the identified necessities of the times. In fact, significant government support has come about through the lobbying action of arts advocates representing what they felt were the expressed needs and desires of the American public and American artists. If government's past commitment is truly the result of its sensitivity to such urgings, it would seem reasonable to assume that the amount and intensity of future federal commitment may rest with the effectiveness of arts activists. They will, to a great degree, determine the future necessity. □

Anthony L. Barresi is an Assistant Professor of Music Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and is presently involved in research on the history and programs of the National Endowment for the Arts for the years 1966-1976.