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Biddle, Livingston: National Medal of Arts (1994): Correspondence 07

Claiborne Pell

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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3901

November 24, 1992

Acting Chair Anne-Imelda Radice
National Endowment for the Arts
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20506

Dear Ms. Radice:

It is a very special pleasure for me to write you on behalf of Livingston L. Biddle, Jr., who, I understand, has been recommended for an award of the National Medal of Arts in 1993. I am delighted to add my own personal and very enthusiastic endorsement to this nomination.

As you know, the National Medal of Arts was created by Congress to recognize "outstanding contributions to the excellence, growth, support, and availability of the arts in the United States." Because of Liv's pivotal role in initiating and developing the landmark legislation that ultimately established the National Endowment for the Arts, I can think of no other individual who is more deserving of this distinguished award.

In the early 1960's as a member of my staff, Liv had the foresight and perseverance to bring the Congress and the national cultural community together in support of this first major government program to support the arts in the United States. Now, twenty-seven years later, the positive impact that the Arts Endowment has had on all our lives is incalculable. One thing is certain, however, and that is the fact that over \$2.3 billion grant dollars have been distributed by the Endowment to the arts across America. It is safe to say that this support would not have been possible without the extraordinary and visionary efforts of Livingston Biddle.

I cannot imagine a more fitting way to recognize the unique contribution that Liv has made to the culture of our nation than to award him the 1993 National Medal of Arts.

With warm regards,

Ever sincerely,

Claiborne Pell
Chairman
Subcommittee on Education,
Arts & Humanities

Sender -
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-WB
see p. 54

NYU CONFERENCE

ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

by Livingston Biddle

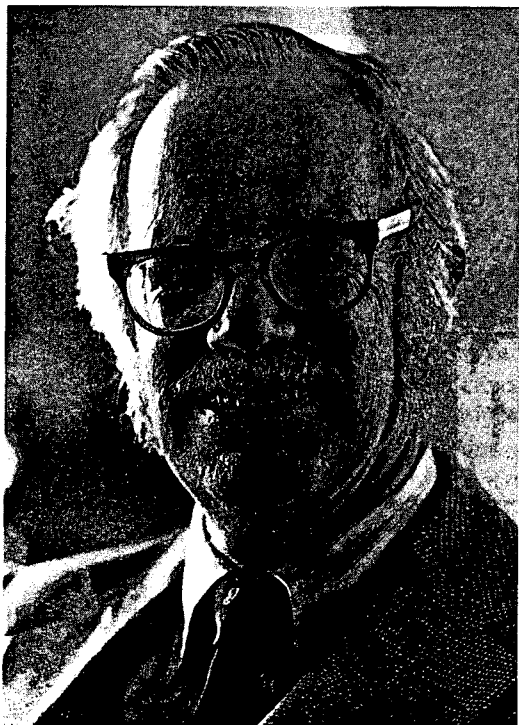
The other day, when I had the privilege of attending the first meeting of the National Council on the Arts chaired by the new chairman, Jane Alexander, I encouraged the room to kind of sing along with me, and I said, [sings] "Come on along. Come on along. It's Alexander's NEA." But it was also the NEA of Anne Radice, and I think that she did a thoroughly good job in her time—almost a year. And I wanted to say how delighted I am, also, to be here with our panel today, but especially Len Garment, with whom I have worked a long time in these vineyards and who is in my book prominently mentioned as one of the special leaders that we've had in this country in cultural progress and working for the arts. And I'm here with my wonderful wife, Catharine, who is herself a fine artist.

But I want to "accentuate the positive," because we hear a great many negatives about the

On November 17th 1993 the NYU Public Policy Series hosted a conference titled "Which Way for the NEH and NEA?" The meeting took place at NYU Law School.

The event was cosponsored by the Newington-Cropsey Foundation and the Center for the Study of Popular Culture. It brought together a diverse assortment of artists, critics, scholars, and journalists for an all-day session. The panels were moderated by NYU Dean Herbert London—who handled two sessions devoted to the NEH, the first on Lynne Cheney's legacy, and the second on Sheldon Hackney's future—while James Cooper, Director of the Newington-Cropsey Foundation and editor of *American Arts Quarterly* handled the second two NEA panels, on past controversies and future problems.

Following are five of the panel presentations.

LIVINGSTON
BIDDLE

federal program for the arts and the one for the humanities. I would like to present a more positive view. When I came to Washington 30 years ago and started working in the Senate for my old friend Claiborne Pell; I told him that I was not an economist; I was not a sociologist; I was not, in those days, an educator. The only thing that I really knew about, and perhaps could help him with, was the area of the arts. And I said, "Claiborne, how would you like to be the founder of the first program of its kind

for developing the arts we've ever had? We're the only major free country in the world that doesn't have such a program; some other countries have had this kind of help for centuries." And he looked at me in a very quizzical way, and he said, "Livvy, I'm afraid this is never going to win me a single vote, but if you say I should do it, let's do it."

So we embarked on this effort. And 30 years ago, if you were to study a map of the United States and put on it indications of where the arts activities were occurring, you would find them concentrated along the Eastern Seaboard, between, let's say, Washington and Boston. But you would have to move out to the Middle West, in and around Chicago, before you found a similar concentration. And then you'd have to move down to Texas and a couple of areas there to find again a concentration of arts activities. And then all the way over to the West Coast, between Los Angeles and San Francisco, to find activities in the arts concentrated.

So there were vast areas of our country where the arts were not even alive at all—certainly not flourishing. And 30 years later, if you were to look at a similar kind of map, with similar notations, you would find that the arts are almost everywhere active. The map has been filled out. And if the statistics are relevant—and I think they are—we would find that four to five times the number of symphony orchestras exist today, as opposed to 30 years ago; four or five times the number of opera companies; state arts programs have grown more

than 50 times over in funding; theater companies—resident professional theater companies—at a rate of 20 times; and dance companies at a similar rate.

So the arts are everywhere. I have traveled with my wife all over this country of ours and we've often gone, also, abroad to see the arts in other countries. But I think if you were to single out the one primary benefit of the National Endowment, it would be that the NEA has been the single most important catalyst for this great change. And that, I think, is an achievement that we should not neglect.

The arts bring us many benefits. If you go to a town like Winston-Salem, North Carolina, you will see that economic growth has taken place because the arts are now there to make it an attractive area for people to move to. If you look around this great city, you will see that the arts are responsible for bringing in visitors from all over the country. And if you look at a place like Lincoln Center, where I worked at one time, you will see how the arts transformed a blighted area of New York City into a blooming, wonderful place.

So a hundred thousand grants have been made by the National Endowment and this remarkably beneficial change has occurred. And I am convinced by all the studies that I have done in 30 years' time that it is the government commitment to this enterprise that has brought the overabundance of matching funding to the arts. Because if you look at what was happening in the arts 10 years before there was a National Endowment, you would find that the funding for the arts was relatively static; there was neither advance nor decline and the arts were not expanding, as they have since the Endowment was created. But now a serious danger threatens this beneficial growth of the arts in our country. And we have touched on that in the opening remarks here. I think it is a danger that is not going to disappear, by any means. And I think it is increasing. It may seem to be dormant at the moment, but it is there, and it is going to return.

I think that the most important two qualities that the National Endowment must concentrate on in the months ahead are excellence and responsibility. I think the responsibility and the excellence both relate to a review of the panels, a review of the panel structure, a review of how the panelists view their responsibilities. I think the National Council on the Arts, which is the primary private citizen group that guides the special commission report that Len Garment and John Brademas, who was

the former president of this august institution, cochaired. They pointed out that it was necessary to review how the panel structure and the council relate to the awarding of federal dollars. Panels, I think, are not only essential to the process of the National Endowment—the National Council is essential—they are the bulwark of the way this kind of a program is conducted in a democracy. But each panelist must be aware of his or her responsibilities toward the arts and toward freedom of expression. I am absolutely convinced that freedom of expression is essential to the arts in a democracy. But I am also a scholar of John Milton. And as you know, in his statements and his poetry, freedom depends on responsibility and is threatened by license. And sometimes that is the case today in the arts. License has taken the place of true freedom of expression.

I think the Endowment needs to concentrate more on interagency activities, bringing the arts into other fields of government. And I think it has to be a bipartisan approach, so that we have both sides of the aisle well-represented and well-involved. In the forward to my book, there's a statement by Isaac Stern, who was a member of the first National Council on the Arts. In talking about the first meeting of this National Council, he says, "It was a very special day for all of us. Many of my colleagues were world-renowned artists." And they were; they were the best we could find in the country. "Others well-known in the arts. Each one had known exciting and moving occasions in their disciplines. But this day was unique. Our task was to help develop excellence and make it more widely available and accessible to all our people."

That is the primary mission of the National Endowment for the Arts, that I wrote into law so many years ago. It still holds true. And I think that the excitement of those early leaders in the arts was not just reflected by a National Council on the Arts, but reflected by a National Council on the Humanities. Those scholars—those leaders in scholarship, those leaders in the various disciplines of the humanities, were convinced, in their minds, that they were embarked on a wonderful new kind of adventure in American freedom and in American democracy. Somehow we lost the way, and we need to find it again. We need to reaffirm it, under a new dynamic and strong leadership.

Livingston Biddle drafted, conceived and developed the original 1965 legislation creating the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

