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July 2016

## Briefing Book: National Endowment for the Arts (1994): Book Chapter 01

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composers. Sixteen proposals were selected by a panel of eight jazz musicians and experts. The effort is made in all cases to choose panelists who have no involvement with institutions or artists applying in the round they are reviewing. In any situation which might present a conflict of interest, participants are required to absent themselves from proceedings.

In addition to its broadly announced competitive programs, the Foundation identifies and makes grants to particular projects in the arts which may further the goals expressed in its guidelines or test possible new lines of work. In many of these grant submissions, evaluation is made by the professional staff of the Arts and Humanities Division, often with the assistance of expert consultants and/or professional curators. Each decision by in-house panels or officers is forwarded for confirmation and approval to the Board of Trustees, or to the senior management of the Foundation, depending on the size of the recommended grant. Decisions made by outside arts organizations are reported in detail to the officers of the Foundation.

In all of the grantmaking evaluations, the Foundation and the experts it uses place the greatest emphasis on artistic merit. The Foundation does not recognize political or religious restrictions in assessing the artistic worth of projects proposed to it. In funding current-day artists, Foundation officers recognize that they are sometimes supporting work which is not yet validated by time and which may not be recognized or valued by others. The judgment of peer artists and experts is acknowledged to be of particular importance in making judgments about new work. There is also attention paid, particularly in the calls for proposals but also in the judgment of them, to questions of geographic and ethnic representation, since the Foundation aspires to operate as a national and international resource and to reflect the regional and pluralistic nature of the country and the world.

In 1989, using these processes, the Arts and Humanities Division supported more than 200 artists' projects and arts organizations and, indirectly, literally thousands of artists representing all disciplines of the arts and every region of the country. Approximately 73 companies and hundreds of artists from other countries benefited from Foundation support, much of it to enable them to show their work in this country.

#### IV. Summary

Specific programmatic activity in the arts at the Foundation dates from 1963, but the disciplines of the arts and humanities have played roles at the Rockefeller Foundation throughout the 75 years of its existence. It has long been the conviction of trustees and officers of the Foundation that the well-being of mankind depends upon cultural understanding and communication, creative interpretation and understanding of the world in which we live, the best uses of the past, reverence for heritage, respect for difference, and understanding of change. Supporting art and artists is a way of helping a free society to take seriously the most important questions and concerns of its time.

Senator PELL. Thank you very much indeed, Mr. Goldmark. Mr. Keillor.

Mr. KEILLOR. Mr. Chairman, Senator Kassebaum, it is a pleasure to come down to Washington and speak in support of the National Endowment for the Arts, I think one of the wisest and happiest pieces of legislation that has ever come through.

I am grateful to the people who have very ably attacked the Endowment over the past year or so for making it necessary for people to defend it. All of us enjoy controversy. I do. And the expression of outrage is healthy. The NEA's adversaries are familiar and dear to me. My ancestors were Puritans from England who arrived, Mr. Chairman, in Rhode Island about 1648, in the hopes of finding greater restrictions here than were permissible under English law. [Laughter.]

Over the years, I think, though that we Puritans have learned something about repression. that is that man's interest in the forbidden is sharp and is constant. I think if Congress does not do something about obscene art, we will have to build galleries twice as big to hold the people who want to go see it. [Laughter.]

If Congress does do something about obscene art, the galleries will need to be even bigger than that.

All governments have given medals to artists when they were old and successful and beloved and near death, but 25 years ago, Mr. Chairman, Congress decided to boldly support the creation of art itself and not simply the recognition of it and, thereby, to encourage artists who are young and vital and unknown and alive and, therefore, dangerous. This piece of legislation, I think, really has changed life in America in lovely and small significant ways.

I think that in every part of this country, when Americans talk up their home town, they invariably mention the arts, something about the arts, an orchestra, local theater or museum or a local artist, and it did not use to be that way. I think that 40 years ago, if an American man or an American woman meant to have an artistic career, you got on the train to New York. I know all the writers from Minnesota did, as fast as they could.

Today, you can be a violinist in North Carolina, you can be a writer in Iowa, you can be a painter in Kansas, which is a revolution in this country, and the National Endowment and the U.S. Congress have helped to bring this about. The Endowment has fostered thousands of works of art, most of which will outlive the usefulness of our testimony, but even more important, the Endowment has changed how we think about the arts.

Today, there is no American family, really, that can be secure against the danger that one of its children may become an artist. [Laughter.]

I grew up in a family that never attended concerts, never went to the theater, never bought books. We were opposed to them, and I never imagined that a person could be a writer. But twice in my life, at crucial times, grants from the Endowment helped me to imagine that I could be. One was in 1969, when I was young and broke and married and had a child and was living on a farm out on the Prairie and subsisting on a little bit of cash and a lot of vegetables. I was writing for the New Yorker at the time, but they were not aware of it. [Laughter.]

I often had fantasies of a patron coming to my door and receive a letter offering me a job for 1 month in the Writers in the School's program in Minneapolis, which was funded by the NEA in 1969, directed by a woman named Molly LaBerge, which sent young writers into the schools to read and teach. In 1969, there were only three such programs in the country. in Minnesota, New York and California, and today there is at least one in every State.

My residency earned me \$300 for a month's work and was the first time that anybody paid me to be a writer and was the sort of experience that a person looks back at afterwards and wonders what would have happened if it had not come along.

In 1974, a grant from the NEA enabled us to start a Prairie Home Companion in Minnesota. Help which was crucial, because the show was not that great to start with, we had 12 people in the audience for our first broadcast, and we made the mistake of having an intermission and lost half of them. [Laughter.]

It took us a few years to figure out how to do it and by the time we had figured it out and the show became popular the Endowment had vanished from the credits. Its job had been done early on.

When you are starting out— and I think it is true in the arts as in politics—when you are starting out, it seems like nobody wants to give you anything. Then, when you have become successful and you have everything that you could ever want, people just cannot do enough for you.

The beauty of the Endowment is that it is there at the beginning, has been for so many artists, and when you are there at the beginning you never know what the outcome will be of a work of art, whether it will please you or offend you or just mystify you.

When I graduated from college the degrees were given out in reverse order of merits, so I got mine early and I had a chance to watch the others. I remember that the last graduate, the summiest cum laude walked up the stairs to the platform and on route stepped on the hem of his own gown and walked up the inside of it. Like him, the Endowment has succeeded in embarrassing itself from time to time. I wish it would do it more often, but a few is enough to the entertainment and the elucidation of all of us. But like him, the Endowment keeps on going. It has contributed so much to the creative genius of our country, to our art and music and literature, which to my wife and other foreigners is the most gorgeous aspect of this country.

I hope that it lives for 25 more years and I hope that we continue to argue about it.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Keillor follows:]

#### PREPARED STATEMENT OF GARRISON KEILLOR

Mr Chairman and members of the subcommittee: It's a pleasure to come down to Washington and speak in support of the National Endowment for the Arts, one of the wisest and happiest pieces of legislation ever to come through Congress.

I'm grateful to those who have so ably attacked the Endowment over the past year or so for making it necessary to defend it. I enjoy controversy and I recognize the adversary, they are us. My ancestors were Puritans from England. They arrived here in 1648 in the hope of finding greater restrictions than were permissible under English law at that time. But over the years, we Puritans have learned something about repression, and it's as true today as when my people arrived: man's interest in the forbidden is sharp and constant. If Congress doesn't do something about obscene art, we'll have to build galleries twice as big to hold the people who want to see it. And if Congress does do something about obscene art, the galleries will need to be even bigger than that.

All governments have honored artists when they are old and saintly and successful and almost dead, but 25 years ago Congress decided to boldly and blindly support the arts support the act of creation itself and to encourage artists who are young and dangerous and unknown and very much alive. This courageous legislation has changed American life.

Today, in every city and state, when Americans talk up their home town, when the Chamber of Commerce puts out a brochure, invariably they mention the arts—a local orchestra or theater or museum or all three. It didn't used to be this way. Forty years ago, if an American man or woman meant to have an artistic career, you got on the train to New York. Today, you can be a violinist in North Carolina, a writer in Iowa, a painter in Utah. This is a small and lovely revolution that the National Endowment has helped to bring about. The Endowment has fostered thousands and thousands of artistic works—many of which will outlive you and me—but even more important, the Endowment has changed how we think about the arts. Today, no American family can be secure against the danger that one of its children may decide to become an artist.

I grew up in a family who never attended concerts or museums, never bought books. I never imagined that a person could be a writer.

Twice in my life, at crucial times, grants from the Endowment made it possible for me to be a writer. The first, in 1969, arrived when I was young, broke, married

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with a baby, living on very little cash and a big vegetable garden. I was writing for the New Yorker at the time but they weren't aware of it. I wrote every morning and every night. I often had fantasies of finding a patron—a beggar would appear at my door one day, I'd give him an egg salad sandwich, and suddenly he'd turn into a man in a pinstripe suit, Prince Bob from the Guggenheim Foundation. But instead of him, I got a letter offering me a job for one month in the Writers in the Schools program in Minneapolis, funded by the NEA, directed by Molly LaBerge, which sent young writers into the schools to read and teach. In 1969, there were three such programs, in New York, California, and Minnesota; today, there's at least one in every state.

In 1974, a grant from the NEA enabled me and my colleagues at Minnesota Public Radio to start "A Prairie Home Companion". The help of the Endowment was crucial because the show wasn't that great to begin with. For our first broadcast, we had a crowd of twelve persons, and then we made the mistake of having an intermission and we lost half of them. The show wasn't obscene, just slow, and it took us a few years to figure out how to do a live radio show with folk music and comedy and stories about my home town of Lake Wobegon. By the time the show became popular and Lake Wobegon became so well-known that people thought it was real, the Endowment had vanished from the credits, its job done.

When you're starting out, it seems like nobody wants to give you a dime, and then, when you have a big success and have everything you could ever want, people can't do enough for you. The Endowment is there at the beginning, and that's the beauty of it.

When I was a young writer, I looked down on best-sellers as trash, but gradually over the years they improved and then suddenly one of them was mine. First, Lake Wobegon Days and then Leaving Home, and my desk filled up with offers to speak, to write, to appear, to endorse, which I've thoroughly enjoyed, but I remember very well when nobody else but my mother and the National Endowment was interested, and I'm grateful for this chance to express my thanks.

When I graduated from college, the degrees were given out in reverse order of merit, so I got mine early and had a chance to watch the others, and I remember the last graduate, the summiest cum laude, a tall shy boy who walked up the stairs to the platform and en route stepped on the hem of his own gown and walked right up the inside of it. Like him, the Endowment has succeeded in embarrassing itself from time to time—to the considerable entertainment of us all—and like him, the Endowment keeps on going. It has contributed mightily to the creative genius of America—to the art and music and literature and theater and dance which, to my wife and other foreigners, is the most gorgeous aspect of this country. Long may it wave.

**Senator PELL.** Thank you very much indeed.

I like your thought of continuing another 25 years. I am delighted you were here for the first 25. I am not sure I will make the second 25. I would like to ask a couple of questions particularly, Mr. Goldmark, in connection with the Rockefeller Foundation.

When you co-sponsored—co-funded I guess would be the word—several major programs with the NEA, if there had been restrictive language in the NEA's statute, would that affect your co-funding?

**Mr. GOLDMARK.** It is very hard, Senator, to give a broad reaction to a hypothetical down the road, but I would say, as a general rule, if the NEA were forced to go down the road of contents standards, as opposed to the peer review, because if we are forced to go down the road of contents standards, I think that we and many other private co-funders would have the gravest reservation about whether that was a wise road for us to accompany them on.

**Senator PELL.** Is it your own thought that these sub-grants allow enough accountability in the use of the public funds? How do you and the Rockefeller Foundation handle the question of sub-grants?

**Mr. GOLDMARK.** We handle the sub-grants primarily, Mr. Chairman, by reviewing the qualifications and the performance of the sub-granting organization. We cheerfully try and avoid any judgment about certainly the religious or the political content of the