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CULTURAL EXPLOSION?

Performing Arts Are in the Red

BY HERBERT KUPFERBERG

"CULTURAL EXPLOSION" to the contrary, the performing arts in America are in dire financial straits and will require permanent outside help to enable them to survive.

This is the conclusion reached by two Princeton professors in a study entitled "Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma," which was made public today by the Twentieth Century Fund. The authors, William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen, spent three years preparing the 582-page volume. Their study strips away many of the easy assumptions and loose optimism surrounding the cultural boom, and concludes that only society's willingness to pay the bill, whether through government, corporate or foundation contributions, will keep the arts flourishing.

WHAT THEY FOUND

Here are some of the major findings in the book:

- The "cultural explosion," while not a complete myth, has been exaggerated both in size and import. Actually, the authors say, "by and large the performing arts have just about held their own in the competition for the consumer's dollar" in the last 35 years.

- The New York metropolitan area alone accounts for nearly 40 per cent of receipts for classical musical performances in the entire country, and for over 50 per cent of all theatrical receipts.

- Less than 3 per cent of the American population attends as many as one live professional performance of any of the arts during the course of a year.

- The audience at a typical performance is relatively young, dominated by the professional and white collar classes, highly educated, and well-off financially—i.e., not representative of the population at large.

- The Broadway theater is the only segment of the performing arts that has come close to showing a profit in recent years, but attendance is static and total productions are declining. The dance is the only art "in which there really seems to be a substantial rate of expansion."

- Newspaper reports and advertisements induce most people to attend plays and concerts; radio and television the fewest.

have to be forthcoming, in one way or another, from the public.

Can such sums of money be found? Baumol and Bowen think they can. "Viewed in the context of the total economy, the net deficits are small," they conclude. "The sums needed are by no means beyond the capabilities of a wealthy and expanding economy and energetic individuals dedicated to the welfare of the arts."

The authors have a slight dig to make at the current craze for putting up "cultural centers" across the country. They comment: "One suspects that the planners of some of the centers have not really considered in any de-

tail what should be done with the buildings once they were completed. . . ." As for actors, musicians, dancers and others in the arts, the report says that "the working conditions of the performer fall below what might be considered reasonable standards." The average family income of a singer, dancer, actor or musician is given at \$7,275, with \$4,877 of this coming from live performances.

URGES MORE U.S. AID

In his foreword to the book, August Heckscher, the president of the Twentieth Century Fund, urges larger contributions by the government to help sustain and advance the arts. The authors of the

book give a fair and comprehensive picture of both the pros and cons of government support.

"Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma" is written in a rather academic style; it is overflowing with charts, tables, graphs and surveys. It isn't easy reading, but it gives a picture of the American artistic situation that is revealing and accurate. In its way it is even more provocative and disturbing than the Rockefeller Brothers study issued 18 months ago. Let us hope that its generally optimistic conclusion—that our society will find the wherewithal to pay the mounting cultural bill—will turn out to be justified.

WHY COSTS GO UP

In assessing the reasons for the spiraling costs of producing the arts, the Twentieth Century Fund report gives only secondary importance to such frequently cited factors as inflation, mismanagement and union featherbedding, and puts most of the responsibility on the nature of the beast itself.

The performing arts are such, the authors note, that they cannot benefit from technological improvement, automation and similar cost-cutting procedures. "Human ingenuity has devised ways to reduce the labor necessary to produce an automobile, but no one has yet succeeded in decreasing the human effort expended at a live performance of a 45-minute Schubert quartet."

This situation, the two professors find, means that the current "income gap" of between \$20 and \$25 million in the arts will rise to \$60 million by 1975. Since ticket prices cannot rise high enough to cover the gap, nor costs be cut sufficiently to eliminate it, the money will