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National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities (1965-1967): Report 05

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Senator...

Background Material... RI Reportory Theater Project...

Project: To make available to RI school students in Providence and from neighboring areas a first hand knowledge of the classics in the field of drama (performances of Shakespeare are proposed) -- to coincide with their school studies and give them a fuller appreciation of excellence. The performances would be held at an appropriate center, so that full staging would be possible, and the best talents possible utilized. It is believed that the project, in addition to exposing the student to dramatic excellence, would also serve to make more meaningful his knowledge of related subjects, such as literature, language and history -- and that it would also serve to stimulate an appreciation and enjoyment of the arts among the adult community.

Methods: These are as yet in the tentative stage. However, these factors may be worth considering:

1. Free buses which would transport the students from their schools to the center and back again.
2. Performances for the students which would be free, or at a very nominal charge. Perhaps no charge at all would be best.
3. A cooperative enterprise with the Rhode Island Reportory Theater, with its talents utilized to the full, but supplemented by nationally famous actors and actresses who would play many of the leading roles. These performers would be a resident company based in Providence for the duration of the project. Possibly three years. It would also be possible for the RI Reportory Theater to remain as a separate entity (perhaps to get some funding from the Arts and Humanities Foundation separately), with the performers in the RI Rep. group auditioning for parts with the resident company, and playing some of the roles for which they would be qualified.

4. Designation of the now unoccupied Albee Theater as the center for the Theater activities -- seats close to 2000 people, and very centrally located, with excellent acoustics... There is some thought that this theater's location should be used for city tax revenues, which might not be the case if it was the designated center... However, the theater occupied full-time would bring more business to center Providence and this could offset loss of tax revenues...

5. The resident company could put on a variety of performances, on a schedule such as this: a major Shakespeare play for a period of eight weeks, with matinees Monday through Friday for students only. On Friday night, Saturday matinee, and Sat. night, the performance would be for adults at standard prices, thus offsetting some of the costs involved. The adult performances could be different from those given for the students -- for instance, during the final five weeks of the eight-week period... It's part of the concept that student interest would serve to stimulate interest of their parents and families... but that a greater variety of programs would be needed to keep adult interest alive and avoid an over-saturation point...

Financing:

The project would be a cooperative undertaking by the Arts and Humanities Foundation and the Office of Education...

The Foundation would arrange for the performing outside group and would mount the production, assembling the best actors and actresses available throughout the country.

The Office of Education -- through Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 -- would fund the operating costs of the project. (Title III provides special educational projects, including "enrichment" classes to supplement regular educational programs; it also provides for making available specially qualified personnel, including "artists and musicians." In addition it provides for the lease of necessary facilities -- and would thus cover the various aspects of the project outlined above.)

Very confidential information on cost...

An informed that there might well be only 3 cities initially selected for this project, which would be a pilot undertaking, which if successful could be expanded in future years... Providence, Cincinnati, and Ft. Worth, Tex., could be the three cities... If the concept is endorsed by the new Foundation when it gets organized -- and in line with the President's statement at the signing that there would be established a National Repertory Theater -- the Arts Endowment could expend \$600,000 of its budget on the 3 cities -- or \$200,000 each, per annum...

The Office of Education could cooperate with \$300,000 per year in each of the three cities. (RI gets under Title III approx. \$189,000 --- Dr. Robinson, Commissioner of Education in RI, and Frank O'Connor, dir. of public schools, would have to decide that they wished to spend the \$300,000 of the Title III funds for the project -- apparently they are both enthusiastic.) Also, the Commissioner of Education would have to approve the applications -- but I wouldn't foresee a hurdle here as the initiative for this concept stems from Keppel's Arts and Humanities Branch, headed by Kathryn Bloom (she testified with Keppel at the A&H hearings.)

Note: This is how the Providence people got the idea of \$500,000 per annum financing -- though from all I can gather this figure was mentioned in a very tentative way, and also the information was given to O'Connor et al. in a similarly tentative way, and on the basis of "preliminary discussions."

Recommendations:

Think it would be unwise to hold any further meetings with the RI interested parties until the new Foundation is funded by its supplemental appropriation...

There is proper reason for this -- the Foundation has to be set up, staffed, etc., and the National Council on the Arts would have to signify its approval for the project. (Think this can be handled, but with a good deal of tact -- have some further thoughts on this to discuss with you.)

There should be a Council meeting by mid-November, but this isn't official yet... However, things -- hopefully -- will then be in a go-ahead state.