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Arts Groups Plan Protest on Aid Cuts

By JENNIFER DUNNING

New York City arts organizations are planning a citywide protest rally and possible legal action in response to the current freeze and potential cutting of \$32 million from the Congressionally approved 1981 budget of the National Endowment for the Arts.

Most of the arts groups, acting on earlier assurances by the endowment that they would get the grants — which cover the third and fourth quarters of the present fiscal year — had committed the money to programs to take place this year, some as soon as next month. With the freeze, they now face debt or uncertainty as to their futures.

"We were all prepared for the upcoming 1982-83 cuts," Arthur Aarons, manager of the American Symphony Orchestra, said. "We had a year's notice. But this, for this year, is such a devastating shock."

Among those who met yesterday were the Media Alliance, a federation of 30 groups operating throughout New York State, and a conference of industry unions, Off Broadway groups and such management organizations as the League of New York Producers and the Off Off Broadway Alliance, which met at Actors Equity.

Announced May 19, the freeze was initiated in response to what Edwin Dale, a spokesman for the Office of Management and Budget, described at the time as "a modest overrun of spending in the current fiscal year." A Presidential decision could be forthcoming next week, according to Mr. Dale, as to whether to place before Congress a proposal to rescind the freeze. "But we are allowed to hold the funds up for two to three to four weeks before the message is sent to Congress," he added. Should Congress not act on the proposal by the end of 45 legislative days, the funds would be freed for allocation to the arts organizations to which they had been committed.

The Joffrey Ballet's current national tour has been endangered by the freeze. The New York Philharmonic's free outdoor park concerts this summer may be affected. But those most seriously affected by the freeze are, for the most part, the city's medium- and small-sized arts groups, whose endowment funds form a large percentage of their budgets.

"We've been looking at the legality of rescission in terms of a possible breach of implied contract," said Arlene Schuler, executive director of Volun-

teer Lawyers for the Arts, which has been consulted by a number of the groups about suing the endowment.

Staff Without Salaries

"Whether it's right or wrong in terms of fiscal management, we depend on that money," said Linda Goode-Bryant, director of the Just Above Midtown Gallery, one of 30 arts groups that have joined and met to discuss problems the freeze has created. "The \$20,000 we expected this week was to go to the cost of current exhibitions, salaries, rent and printings. We had been developing, with endowment funds, techniques of becoming more independent from such funding sources. I've asked our realtor to hold out and the printers to wait. Closing is one option. Another is cutting back our programs, but I've never reneged on our commitments to artists. We can keep cutting away until our money runs out, but a number of the staff are already on no or half salary."

The American Symphony Orchestra had budgeted its \$60,000 endowment grant for payroll and rent "before our subscription dollars come in to help," Mr. Aarons, manager of the orchestra, said. "We've alerted foundations and corporate people as to how we hope they'll help, but that could threaten our normal fund-raising. Our nine concerts a year at Carnegie Hall are a prime concern. We could raise ticket prices. We could change the repertory to works that require 60 or 65 musicians rather than our 100. But we've already issued our prices and repertory in good faith."

It was also learned yesterday that Mary Ann Tighe, the endowment's highly respected deputy chairman for programs, has resigned as of next week to become the vice president in charge of programming development in the video division of a national television station. Miss Tighe said she had planned to leave the endowment in November, when the term of office of Livingston Biddle, endowment chairman, ended. "My decision was not based exclusively on those grounds," she said, "but certainly the drastic changes occurring at the endowment made me want to make my move sooner."