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A sad state of the arts

Since September, six new performing centers and concert halls have opened across the country. Meyerhoff Hall in Baltimore cost $22 million, which was provided by the state and $1.3 million from private donors, while East Lansing, Mich. and Colorado Springs dedicated spanking new facilities.

Two weeks ago, the Metropolitan Center in Boston suddenly announced it was shutting down because the management had discovered that the roof had structural problems. Luciano Pavarotti and the Boston Ballet's Nutcracker — the only two attractions on the Met Center's fall calendar — were hastily dispatched to makeshift performance space.

Although the Boston Symphony Orchestra has managed to better its own centennial fundraising goal last year and the Museum of Fine Arts has successfully cultivated younger donors, Boston is basically a nickel and dime state as far as the arts are concerned.

Nineteenth century patrons excluded the population at large from their board rooms and ran arts organizations like private clubs. This old-guard legacy has lingered on too long. The assumption that someone else would pick up the tab has hurt fundraising efforts and the credibility of many cultural institutions here.

Over the last decade, state government here has finally acknowledged that the arts are important to the quality of life and the economic climate of the state and increased funding levels from $1.7 million to $5.5 million in the past five years. The state has lost about $10 million from Reagan Administration cutbacks at the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities. But, more important, there is still no political will to increase funding from construction costs, but still peanuts in comparison to recent expenditures in Peoria and Eugene.

Fundraising — slightly more than $4 million so far, just $750,000 last year — covers only the original budget and has been unable to make a dent in outstanding and keep up with interest payments of approximately $12,000 a week.

Unfortunately, the Met Center didn't have enough money to do the job right at the start. Instead, it renovated the former vaudeville house for dance, opera and Broadway musicals on a piecemeal basis. In that sense, the current crunch in the face of known structural defects was predictable. Still, it's unfortunate that the shutdown came when hopes were high that new professional management and new leadership on the board of trustees would reverse the center's economic fortunes.
Massachusetts is the third largest art producer in the nation. The non-profit arts industry in Massachusetts has contributed an overall economic impact of $670 million last year.

A Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities' survey of the top 261 Massachusetts companies, conducted in the summer of 1981, indicated that the state's cultural organizations, an organization devoted to the management of the commonwealth. In comparison, corporate support is four percent in San Francisco, seven percent in Houston, and 14 percent in Minneapolis-St. Paul.

The Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities is attempting to help change this through regional business committees for the arts in Boston, Worcester, and the Berkshires by broadening the base of support for arts groups across the commonwealth. The national economic picture is grim. There has to be greater recognition and commitment to cultural needs and a broader base of support exerted on the private sector here to bear a fair share of the support.

After all, it's not as if the arts aren't protected here or as if they're not touted as one of the state's major selling points.

It is a major embarrassment that Boston is without proper performance facilities - even if it is possible to get more use out of the existing shortfalls or to use the opportunities available without a leap of faith.

Perishable, carpeting, ceiling fixtures, new marquee and so on - completed. The place has to be maintained and renovated. This is the sort of thing that ensures continued support. More than any of this, attitudes and giving patterns must change radically - unless, of course, Boston is to content to let Eugene, East Lansing and Peoria pass it by.

Moxie and red faces

"When the editors of the Five-Star Journal, the student newspaper at Eisenhower High School in Yakima, Wash., decided to do a story on how easy it was for teenagers to buy liquor illegally, they sent several students out to try the test at local package stores.

"They found that it was easier than they had thought - no questions asked, and no check or identification required for a student described in the resulting story as "obviously a minor.""

"The state's Liquor Control Board was not very happy about this - nor so much, it appears, about the fact that teenagers could buy liquor illegally, but at the bad light the Journal's story cast on its operations. Rather than being reported as a "sickening story", which were not named in the Journal's story - the agency demanded the names of the students involved for possible prosecution (purchase liquor under 21 is a misdemeanor in Washington).

Eisenhower's principal refused to reveal the students' names, fearing that he might lose the students.

The Liquor Control Board backed off - it is now doing some undercover work of its own - but the story did give the agency a good new-sensibility and its investigative zeal.

We wish to thank The Boston Globe for reminding us of the inordinately critical problem of hunger and malnutrition in our society. The several columns by Ian Menzies and the article by Christina Rubb (May 20) are corroboration of the New York Times editorial. It is a major embarrassment that Boston is not the state's finest cultural organization. The local problem of hunger seems to be greater than ever.

Hunger is not a synonym for "too much of a good thing." The local problem of hunger on our doorstep is a seemingly insurmountable issue. It is a major embarrassment that Boston is not the state's finest cultural organization. The local problem of hunger seems to be greater than ever.

Sizing it up

The best account of the Nov. 1981 paper by Bili Frey of the desert situation of California, by Bill Frigg of the desert wilderness of Calaveras County, by Bill Frigg of the desert wilderness of Calaveras County, is the June 20, 1981 issue of the Times.

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Many people in Boston are without food and as a global problem associated with war and with the gap between the haves and the have-nots. It exists here in the United States and in Britain. It has been acknowledged to the Obviously destitute and homeless. It is a major embarrassment that Boston is not the state's finest cultural organization. The local problem of hunger seems to be greater than ever.

Worldwide hunger seems looming. The local problem of hunger on our doorstep will become more insurmountable if Mr. Menzies suggests, voluntary agencies develop a roster of already-established programs. This could provide coordination and the evidence that both private and public funding must be increased.

RUTH CHARLTON EINDEA GUGGINS

Task Force on Hunger, Unitarian Society of Wellesley Hills, WA.

Wellesley Hills