

# A R T S

N E W J E R S E Y



THE NEW JERSEY STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS  
WINTER 1989/90

## STATEMENT FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In the age of the 30-second bite, when messages flash by in almost subliminal speed, it is often difficult to hear expressed a well-conceived point of view that does not resort to extremes. The competition for and expense of air time and print space, the complexity of today's social issues, and the fervent convictions held by what Eric Fromm refers to as "true believers" all make it even more unlikely these days to receive intelligent, well-reasoned, rational messages.

I am pleased to report that, for the most part, this was not the case at the Council's statewide conference "Arts in Focus II: Art and Culture by the Year 2000," and the subsequent discipline-specific public forums we held throughout the state. The presentations and discussions at both the conference and the forums addressed provocative and

controversial issues such as new definitions of art and culture, technology's impact on the arts, economic trends that suggest the pie is diminishing, and multiculturalism, but rather than inciting the crowd, they stimulated substantive discussions.

At the conference, we heard from such national leaders as Thomas Messer, director emeritus, The Guggenheim Museum; Woody King, director, New Federal Theatre; Catherine French, chief executive officer, American Symphony Orchestra League; Eliot Feld, artistic director, The Feld Ballet; and George Segal, internationally known sculptor, (in addition to those mentioned in an article which appears within these pages), who raised questions rather than provided pat answers. At our public open forums, Council members heard from some of New Jersey's arts leaders who expressed their concerns regarding the future of the arts and engaged in a dialogue with Council members about the agency's role. Both the conference and the forums will serve as a springboard as we embark on preparing our second five-year plan, which will cover 1991 through 1995.

This issue of *Arts New Jersey* takes the time to review many of the complex issues raised at the "Arts in Focus" conference. "The Drama of Change" introduces readers to several of New Jersey's smaller professional theaters and looks at their commitment to innovative programming that endeavors to attract new audiences and respond to their respective communities. Council member Carlos Hernandez writes about the imperative to ensure cultural opportunities in our urban communities and to promote cultural pluralism. The article describing the Council's Minority Arts Stabilization Initiative, and Rick Khan's article tracing the incredible evolution of Crossroads Theatre illustrate the exciting success that is possible when both the artistic and administrative components of an organization have attained excellence. Economic trends are outlined in the article "The Art of Giving," while "Burning Bright" shows us how composer/librettist Frank Lewin befriended technology to enhance his opera of that same title. David Miller's piece traces New Jersey's "quiet revolution" in the arts, with key figures looking back over the past 10 years and looking forward to an exciting new period of growth.

We invite readers to view the winter issue as a wheel; the article reporting on the conference itself represents the center, with the other articles emanating from the center as spokes that hold the wheel together. This image is an appropriate one; social and political issues, technology, demographics, and economics all interconnect with and have an impact on the arts. We must appreciate and understand this interconnectedness if we as an arts community are to thrive in the future. ▲



### *On the Cover*

*Bridge across the Bay*  
Robert Birmelin  
Acrylic on canvas  
48" x 78"  
1986

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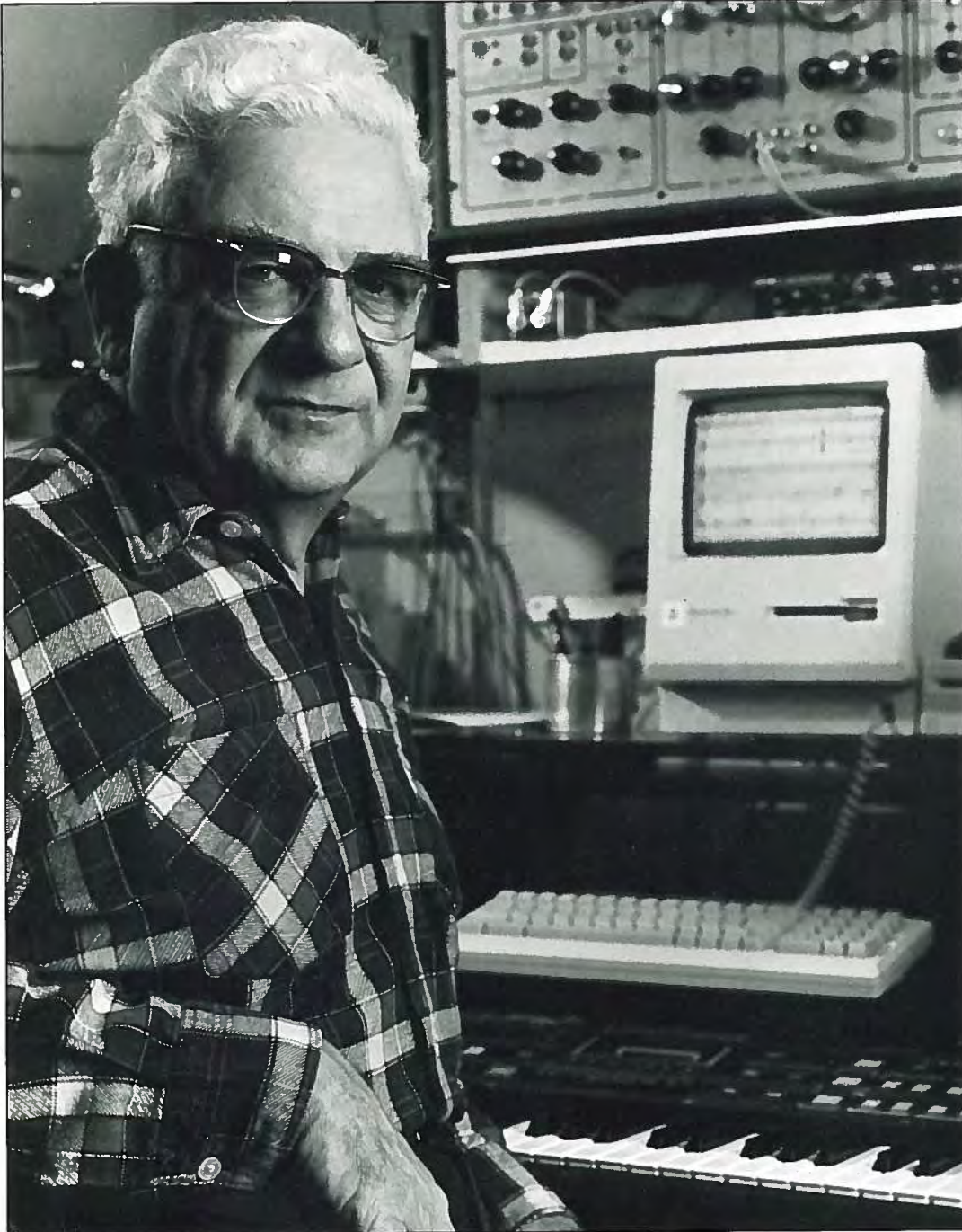
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## BURNING BRIGHT: THE BIRTH OF AN OPERA

by John Peter Holly



Composer/librettist Frank Lewin.

MICHAEL J. PETERS

When composer Frank Lewin's opera *Burning Bright* was selected by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) this past spring to receive the largest grant in the New American Works category, the Endowment set its seal of approval on an artistic vision held for almost four decades. Although the Princeton-based composer/librettist actually completed his opera in 1988, the work had its germination in 1950, when Lewin attended the Yale School of Music.

"As a student at Yale, I saw many productions at New Haven's Shubert Theater — generally try-outs on their way to Broadway. One evening, I saw a new play by John Steinbeck called *Burning Bright*. The play made a powerful impression on me."

In 1967, the power of that initial impression compelled Lewin to contact Steinbeck's agent and option the play for adaptation to the musical stage. In the 17-year interim, Lewin had established a career composing music for more than 200 films, as well as for several theatrical productions and television programs, including the award-winning CBS Television series "The Defenders." The time had come to pursue the long-contemplated project of making the play *Burning Bright* into an opera.

Lewin began to plot the scenic structure and condense the text, but decided to put the project on hold when other work intervened, including participation in the multi-composer opera *Gulliver*, eventually produced by the Minnesota Opera in 1975, and in several outdoor historic



Score from Frank Lewin's opera *Burning Bright*.

dramas for which he wrote the scores. During this period, he also joined the faculty of the Yale School of Music, teaching a course on composition for film.

A sabbatical from teaching in 1977 coincided with a fellowship from the NEA Composer/Librettist program, and that grant provided the impetus for Lewin to complete the libretto and begin composing the music. By the end of 1978, Act I was finished, but work on the other two acts spanned another 10 years, since it had to proceed side by side with Lewin's teaching and other composing assignments and commissions.

The NEA Composer/Librettist Program awarded Lewin a second grant in 1980. In 1983, he received a Music Fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts; four years later, the Council designated Lewin a Distinguished Artist and awarded him a second fellowship which he used to complete the last act.

"Completing *Burning Bright* was a long and rewarding process," says Lewin. "Steinbeck's play proved to be an ideal vehicle for me to experiment with a wide range of musical traditions and recording technology. The story itself also appealed to me as material for a truly American opera."

#### The Adaptation

*Burning Bright* has a universal theme. Middle-aged Joe Saul has one overriding desire: to produce a child that will carry on his tradition. In Act I, that tradition is performing in a circus; in Act II, it is farming; and in Act III, seafaring. Joe Saul's young wife, Mordeen, is deeply in love with him but realizes that he cannot father a child. She seduces Victor, a man her own age, and con-

ceives a child to give Joe Saul the child he so desperately wants. Victor, however, refuses to remain merely a surrogate father, and becomes involved in the emotional struggle for Mordeen's love and for the child.

"In his play," explains Lewin, "Steinbeck sought to portray the universality of the characters and their situations not only by changing locales — a circus, a farm, a ship — but also by occasionally using quasi-epic language.

"This heightened tone created a certain emotional distance," Lewin suggests, "and also made all the characters sound pretty much like one another. In my libretto,

I took a different approach. I tried to create real human beings on stage by making their language very direct and, when appropriate, quite colloquial. I knew singing — the most important element in opera — would invest the words with an emotional power that the audience might recognize as universal. I also made the locations more specific — the circus is now in the Midwest, the farm is in Pennsylvania, and the ship is moored in New York Harbor.

"I went one step further to differentiate the characters," continues Lewin. "When the locale changes from act to act, so does the ethnic provenance of the characters. I drew from Irish, French, Scottish, German, English, Swedish, and Polynesian traditions, as well

as from those of particular American regions, such as Appalachia."

Each tradition — professional as well as ethnic — supplied details which Lewin incorporated into both the text and the score. At the end of the second act, for example, in the farm kitchen, a pre-Christmas party with fiddling and dancing brings together several of the ethnic and folk traditions in an exuberant musical collage.

"*Burning Bright* became a kind of melting pot," says Lewin, "and in the process the opera acquired a pronounced American flavor — in some sections, it's like a quilt of Americana."

#### Act I

In Act I, the action takes place in a small dressing tent in the foreground, while music played off-stage, in the background, suggests that a circus performance is in progress in the big tent. The unseen circus band plays typical numbers, including marches, waltzes, and a medley of novelties that starts with a "trombone smear" reminiscent of the 1920s. In fact, the action in the first act unfolds against the backdrop of a complete circus performance that begins with a rousing Grand Entry and concludes as the Recessional trails off. A prevailing sense of nostalgia is reinforced by quoting several traditional circus melodies at strategic points throughout the act.

The relationship of the off-stage circus band to the pit orchestra varies constantly. At some points, one or the other dominates; at other times, the

two instrumental groups balance, or engage in a dialogue. In addition, realistic sounds of the circus performance can be heard sporadically: applause, laughter, the ringmaster's whistle, even animal cries — all closely synchronized with the score. The characters in the foreground drama frequently react — either subliminally or directly — to the performance heard in the background. In a way, singers, circus band, and orchestra form a three-ring circus all their own.

"The continually changing interaction of singers with contrasting instrumental groups and precisely synchronized sound effects," explains Lewin, "is patterned on the fluidity of a motion-picture

soundtrack, and requires the same kind of precise control. Circus music and associated sound effects will be played back from a multi-track tape that can be balanced with the singers and pit orchestra in the opera house."

The feasibility of this technique was explored successfully when the tape was used in a workshop of Act I in Central City, Colorado, in 1981. "The music and sounds of the circus performance became part of an emotionally charged operatic experience that cast its spell over the audience," recalls Lewin.

#### Act II

In contrast to the extensive use of off-stage music in the first act, Act II relies solely on the symphonic pit orchestra whose

partial function is to invoke the epic expansiveness inherent in Steinbeck's original work.

The effectiveness of this treatment has likewise been tested through practical demonstration. In 1986, a key scene — when Victor declares his love for Mordeen and their unborn child — was recorded with soloists Judith Caldwell and Rinde Eckert, and 76 players of the Yale Philharmonia, conducted by Otto-Werner Mueller; choral portions were sung by members of New Jersey's Westminster Choir College under the direction of Allen Crowell.

The considerable cost of producing this demonstration tape was underwritten by a patron in Princeton who strongly believes in the opera

*Conductor Otto-Werner Mueller and orchestra rehearsing for a recording of excerpts from Frank Lewin's opera Burning Bright, in Yale University's Sprague Hall, January 9, 1986.*



and wanted to provide a means for soliciting support for the production. This recording contains some of the most powerful and expressive music in the opera and has, in fact, been the work's most effective means of promotion to date.

"Everyone who hears this scene seems to experience a strong, positive, emotional reaction," Lewin shared. "Allowing the music to speak for itself has proved to be the best way to introduce the opera. I am particularly happy to have confirmation that the diverse elements of folk and popular music do merge in a cohesive texture. People respond as they would to a scene from any grand opera."

### Act III, Holography, and Computers

Act III again uses technological means to augment the performing forces. The feeling of a fog-bound harbor is evoked through realistic off-stage sound effects that contrast, or blend, with the orchestra, and evoke memories in the characters and prompt action on stage. The climactic scene of the opera, in which Joe Saul reverts to barbarism and tries to kill Victor, requires a number of exotic percussion instruments, including rare Hawaiian drums. Both the harbor sounds — some of them recorded by the composer while doing research for the opera aboard a Texaco tanker — and the unusual drums will be sampled digitally and reproduced in the theater.

The orchestration of *Burning Bright* also includes two optional instruments that may play the parts of first cello and first double bass: a tenor violin and a contrabass violin.



These instruments belong to a family of eight new violins designed and constructed by Carleen M. Hutchins of Montclair, New Jersey. They possess unique tone qualities and an extremely powerful sound. Among the methods of research that resulted in their construction is the use of holography to examine vibration patterns in the wood used for these instruments. Both a tenor violin and a contrabass violin were available for the recording session of the demonstration tape.

During the 11 years of composition on the opera, Lewin observed developments in computerized notation and hoped that by the time his score and the orchestral parts needed to be prepared, the technology would become

*The contrabass violin, a new instrument designed by Carleen M. Hutchins and played by Steve Mallardi, a member of the orchestra that recorded excerpts from the opera Burning Bright in January 1986.*

practical — and affordable — for *Burning Bright*. In recent years, that hope has become a reality, and Lewin composed some of the final passages of the opera with the aid of a notation program on the Macintosh computer. The manuscript is now being entered into the computer using the software program "Finale." The immediate product will provide scores and orchestral parts of the full symphonic orchestration. Subsequently, the material in the computer can be reformatted to produce a reduced orchestration, as well as other arrangements of the music.

### Full Circle

The first performance of the opera is scheduled for November 1990 under the auspices of the Yale School of Music. The premiere will bring *Burning Bright* full circle, for it is to take place in New Haven's Shubert Theater where the composer saw the Steinbeck play on its way to Broadway 40 years earlier. Several opera companies throughout the United States have expressed an interest in mounting subsequent productions.

"Such interest in a new work is unusual," says Lewin. "More often, a contemporary work receives few, if any performances after its premiere production." Lewin hopes that this interest indicates that *Burning Bright* will enter the repertory and prove to be that rare specimen: a viable American opera. ▲

**John Peter Holly** is conductor for the Nutley Symphony and works as a consultant to many performing arts organizations in New Jersey.

## ARTS IN FOCUS: A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE

by David W. Major



*Assemblywoman Maureen Ogden, ex officio member of the NJSCA, is warmly greeted at the conference by Harold Olejarz, a former NJSCA experimental arts fellowship recipient wearing one of his "sculptural suits."*

*(From left to right) Panel members Roger Kennedy, director, National Museum of American History; Nancy Meier, director, Arts and Business Council of New York; and Mary Campbell, commissioner of cultural affairs, City of New York.*

**A**pocalyptic predictions worthy of *Future Shock* were not issued at "Arts in Focus II: Art and Culture by the Year 2000," but nationally prominent artists, arts officials, and art commentators who attended the two-day symposium at the Hyatt Regency in New Brunswick last September do foresee inexorable changes leading to a global, multicultural arts environment.

Expressing their views with a mixture of optimism and anxiety, panelists and discussants agreed on several of these precipitating factors. Unfavorable economic forecasts, along with political controversies concerning artistic freedom, will make public support for the arts ever

more tenuous, while corporate philanthropy will continue to shift, owing, in part, to mergers and acquisitions. The nation's ethnic and racial composition will continue to change, with the United States' population becoming increasingly varied. The cultural diversity resulting from these demographic changes will alter the dominant position Western art has held in American society. New audiences will need to be developed, audiences that include multi-racial and older populations with varying income and educational levels. Finally, the speed and growth of technological change will dramatically influence the arts and artists.

Sponsored by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts (NJSCA), with contributions from AT&T; Frank and Lydia Bergen Foundation/First Fidelity Bank, Trustee; Merck & Co., Inc.; Johnson & Johnson; New Jersey Bell; Schering-Plough; Beneficial Management Corporation; and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the two-day conference initiated the Council's second five-year planning process that will determine the Council's future policies and programs. In his introductory remarks, Jeffrey A. Kesper, NJSCA executive director, said, "The goal of the conference is to challenge us to think about the future and to provide us with enough information to begin planning now

for the environment as it will exist by the year 2000. The future is before us. We can either fear it or work to shape it."

During the session "Economic Trends — 1990-2000," the first of seven panel discussions, panelists agreed that more sophisticated fundraising strategies and innovative collaborations need to be explored. Panel member Mary Campbell, commissioner of cultural affairs, City of New York, noted that at the heart of the economic issue is how the arts community can sustain its argument for public support of the arts. As social issues such as AIDS, crime, and the drug problem demand more state money, it becomes even more



*Alexandra Hunt, Rutgers University faculty member, and Ed Henry, deputy director, Museum of the Moving Image.*

critical to advocate the fundamental value of culture in our lives, especially in regard to education and the revitalization of our neighborhoods and cities.

Nancy Meier, director of the Arts and Business Council of New York, reported that while the corporate sector has decreased its general philanthropic support, this trend has been offset somewhat by an increase in other forms of business-related support for the arts, particularly through cause-related marketing.

"This is worth noting and investigating," she offered, "as new opportunities for funding shift to special projects and sponsorships, particularly when they help companies sell products and raise visibility in target markets.

"Arts groups, therefore, have to be more creative in an era of tight money, meeting businesses on their terms," said Meier, "to link philanthropic giving to corporate goals, a strategy which involves some research and case-building on the part of the funding applicant." She also pointed out that small businesses — "the fastest-growing sector of our economy" — are relatively

untapped as sources of arts support.

Citing New York's Museum of Modern Art, the South Street Seaport Museum, and Princeton University as examples of institutions that have pursued new methods of marketing and co-production, Lawrence Goldman, president of the New Jersey Center for the Performing Arts in Newark, urged arts groups to become "more entrepreneurial in unconventional ways," involving themselves in real estate, retailing, and restaurants, just to name a few.

"The age of entitlement is over," declared Roger Kennedy, director of the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. "The age of obligation and joy of achieving something difficult is here." Kennedy praised New Jersey's "extraordinary enthusiasm and feistiness" in response to the "torpor of the 1980s," and said, "New Jersey has been a pioneer ushering in a new age of responsibility, achievement, and affirmation of the role of the arts."

Dramatic developments in technology will have a signifi-

cant impact on art in the next decade, all the participants agreed. Advances in television and satellite communication will link the cultures of the world, allowing the artist to reach greater numbers of people. In his stirring keynote address, "Impact of Technological Change on the Arts," John Schott, executive producer of public television's "Alive from Off Center," claimed that technology will foster "a new relationship which encompasses both the satellite and the sacred.

"Our new mechanical and electronic environment has exploded the artist's traditional palette," Schott continued. "Technology has provided contemporary artists with new creative engines, with a challenging set of problems to solve as . . . they shuttle back and forth between artistic imagination and technological possibility, technological capability and artistic vision."

Alexandra Hunt, an opera singer and voice instructor at Rutgers University, was fearful of technology's excesses, however. As computer technology becomes ever cheaper, easier to handle, and more available, Hunt fears that young musicians will disdain the



*Lee Breuer, founder, Mabou Mines, and Thomas Messer, director emeritus, The Guggenheim Museum.*

years of study that have always been an essential aspect of classical training. "When the emphasis is on the mechanical, the human element fades."

Contrary to Hunt's fears, Jon Pareles, music critic for the *New York Times*, does not believe that people will tolerate something that does not have "the human element." Technological gimmickry, for its own sake, will never replace the human touch. He maintains that a new search for authenticity is underway, particularly in relation to the human voice, and that this will continue throughout the decade, both in classical music and rock 'n' roll.

Pareles predicts that as a result of technological advances, art will be more private and intimate in the future. With "delivery systems" such as CDs, high-definition television sets, and the Walkman, much more art will be seen, heard, and enjoyed in the privacy of one's own home, making the enjoyment of music more private and less communal. However, he concluded by saying, "The medium is the tool; what really matters is the idea, the passion."

The issue of declining attendance at live performances was addressed by Schuyler Chapin,





PETER G. BORG

*John Schott, executive producer of "Alive from Off Center."*



PETER G. BORG

*Gerald Yoshitomi, executive director, Japanese-American Cultural and Community Center, Los Angeles.*

dean emeritus of Columbia University's School of the Arts and chairman of the Independent Committee on Arts Policy, during the second keynote speech. Chapin pointed to the public's ennui and boredom with the same repertoire performed over and over again by the same orchestras and the same superstars, generally to the same audiences. He asked his audience, "Are you now exploring your own communities or depending on the same patterns of population and habit? Are you reaching out to compete with technology or surrendering to it?" He urged the arts community to explore new programming that will appeal to the many different cultures in this country. "You are guardians of our past artistic heritage. You must also become explorers of our artistic future."

The presentations given by both James Hughes, professor, Department of Urban Planning, Rutgers University, and Connie O. Hughes of the New Jersey Department of Labor, Division of Labor, Market, and Demo-

graphic Research, supported Chapin's challenge. Their extensive research on demographic trends in New Jersey and across the country indicates a need on the part of arts groups to know their audiences' tastes and lifestyles and to define their markets.

The needs of a multicultural world proved to be the recurring, dominant issue throughout the two-day conference. "As the melting pot of America melts down even further," said Lee Breuer, director of Mabou Mines Theatre Company in New York, "the issue of 'good' art is going to become even more important . . . The world is coming to us in the form of a new flood of immigrants who arrive with their own sense of cultural baggage . . . their own culture imperative and sense of beauty."

"We're living in a multicultural world," said John

Schott, "that will inevitably produce a new aesthetic . . . We're coming to recognize that the Western tradition, which has been the reference point for modernist thinking, is not a privileged tradition but one of many other traditions. It's only one tradition among many others on the globe."

Gerald Yoshitomi, conference facilitator and executive director of the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center, Los Angeles, believes cultural diversity is probably the most important issue Americans face, since it involves the question of whether or not America can survive as a nation. It is an issue that has particular relevance in the arts because of the role that culture can play in determining what America is.

In his concluding remarks, he asked, "Are we sustaining the arts that currently exist, or are we about sustaining new art and ideas that have not yet received adequate support?" He talked about New Jersey's capacity to change, and said, "This positive spirit, this unbridled energy, has carried the arts in New Jersey for the past seven years, and it is this spirit

and this energy that will carry it forward into the future."

NJSCA board chairman Elizabeth G. Christopherson recently talked about the conference's long-term effects. "'Arts in Focus II' addressed so many important issues that have stimulated a great deal of subsequent discussions among Council members and staff. It has provided us with a blueprint that will guide us in our efforts to establish the agency's goals and objectives for the next five years. Working closely with our arts constituents, the Council looks forward to sustaining a culturally rich environment for the state of New Jersey." ▲

David W. Major is the editor of *Time Off*, the arts and entertainment magazine appearing in 11 newspapers of the Princeton Packet Inc.

# THE DRAMA OF CHANGE

by Christopher Parker

On any given night, theatergoers in New Jersey can choose from a wide range of theatrical productions — from a grand musical to a Shakespearean play, from a new work by a contemporary American playwright to a collaboration involving writers and actors from South Africa. Theater and theater audiences are flourishing in New Jersey. According to Laura Aden, executive director of the New Jersey Theatre Group (NJTG), New Jersey has the largest and most diverse roster of professional theaters in the country, with the exception of New York and California. “Thanks to the incredible support from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, the corporate sector, and foundations, the growth has been unprecedented.”

The presence of a statewide association of professional non-profit theater companies, the only one in the country, testifies to the vitality of New Jersey theater. Dedicated to promoting regional theater throughout the state, the NJTG has 10 senior members, seven associates, and 15 developing theaters striving for professional status. Aden talked enthusiastically about the rise of small theaters in New Jersey and explained that “the relatively new, small professional theater contracts have helped our promising small theaters operate under an equity contract without the demands larger theaters have.”

Just as these emerging groups are coming into their own, however, they are contending with dramatic changes in the lifestyles of the audiences they serve, the state's demographics, the ways in which entertainment is dis-

tributed to the public, and corporate and foundation support. The Chinese have a way of expressing the idea of crisis with an ideogram that consists of two characters; the first character represents danger, while the lower one represents hidden opportunity. *Arts New Jersey* spoke to several of New Jersey's smaller professional theater companies — Playwrights Theatre Company, Madison; Passage Theatre, Inc., Trenton; Ensemble Theatre Company, Newark; Forum Theatre Group, Metuchen; Loaves and Fish Theater Company, Jersey City; and Stageworks Touring Company, Glassboro — to learn how they are meeting these challenges and creating new opportunities.

*Codirectors (left) Reginald C. Brown (Malcolm X) and Marvin-Kazambe Jefferson (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.) engage in a symbolic arm wrestle in a scene from The Meeting, a special Black History Month offering presented at the Stella Lass Theatre in Newark last February.*



DAVID BOOKER

**Danger: Audiences being lost to in-home electronic media.**

**Opportunity: Work with the “story awareness” of the “media generation.”**

VCRs and cable television compete for the leisure time of almost every New Jerseyan, especially younger ones. In fact, Buzz McLaughlin, producing artistic director of Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey, points out that the average American teenager spends 1,200 hours in the classroom and some 1,500 hours viewing media-related material each year. So, rather than competing with television and VCRs, Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey is utilizing them. In its Young Playwrights Program, McLaughlin and company members work with teenagers from Morris County and around the state to help these young people develop scripts for production.

“In the 20th century, there is no standardized way of learning about playwriting first-hand,” says McLaughlin. “Yet all students, whether they are gifted and talented or not, take to learning playwriting because

they were raised in a media age. They are quite familiar with dialogue and conflict, premise and conflict resolution. Once students learn the basics, they can develop critical tools to analyze the material they see on television, and with these critical tools, they will be better informed audiences, whether for television, movies, or theater.”

Marvin Jefferson, creative director of the Ensemble Theatre Company, does not see VCRs as competition for the theater. “Where I live and work, people go to church in droves every Sunday,” says Jefferson. “There's something there they need. Theater seems to serve part of that need as well.” He points out that “we had TV and that wasn't enough, so we moved to cable. Then cable wasn't enough so we bought VCRs. But people still go to church.”

**Danger: Dwindling audiences that will miss the experience of live theater.**

**Opportunity: Develop enthusiastic audiences through education and the development and production of good plays.**

Most of the creative directors of small theaters in New Jersey acknowledge the need to make a long-term commitment to and work with young people who are the theater audiences of the future. Jefferson maintains that an arts education program integrated into the school curricula would help ameliorate the problem of audience development over the next decade. “A lot of people have money for a ticket,” Jefferson says. “It's what they decide to spend it on that becomes the question. If people think art is something worth seeing, then they will buy tickets.”



*Buzz McLaughlin, producing artistic director of Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey, teaching a class in playwriting to a group of teachers and theater professionals participating in the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation Theatre Program for Teachers and Playwrights.*

Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey believes that developing future audiences means developing good professional plays as well. Its ultimate goal is not to stage full productions in its own theater, but rather to work with writers and help them perfect their scripts for production elsewhere. While the group does produce one or two plays a year, the theater's main attractions are 15 to 20 professionally staged readings of works by professional writers such as N. Richard Nash.

Forum Theatre Group is doing all it can to attract audiences to its theater by offering, at affordable prices, high-quality musical and dramatic productions that were not necessarily commercial successes on Broadway or off-Broadway, but "that have presented artistic and production challenges and have thematic/contextual merit," says Peter Loewy, artistic director. "We try to bring in works that our audiences might not have seen if not for our production. We give the show an autopsy and

see how we can improve it to present it in a fresh, new, innovative way."

He described the theater's fall production of *The Rink* as an example. "We were able to capture the essence of the show. The play needed to be performed in a smaller theater. Our production brought the play closer to the audience, with little distance between the audience, the orchestra pit, and the stage."

In addition to providing more intimate quarters than Broadway can offer, New Jersey's

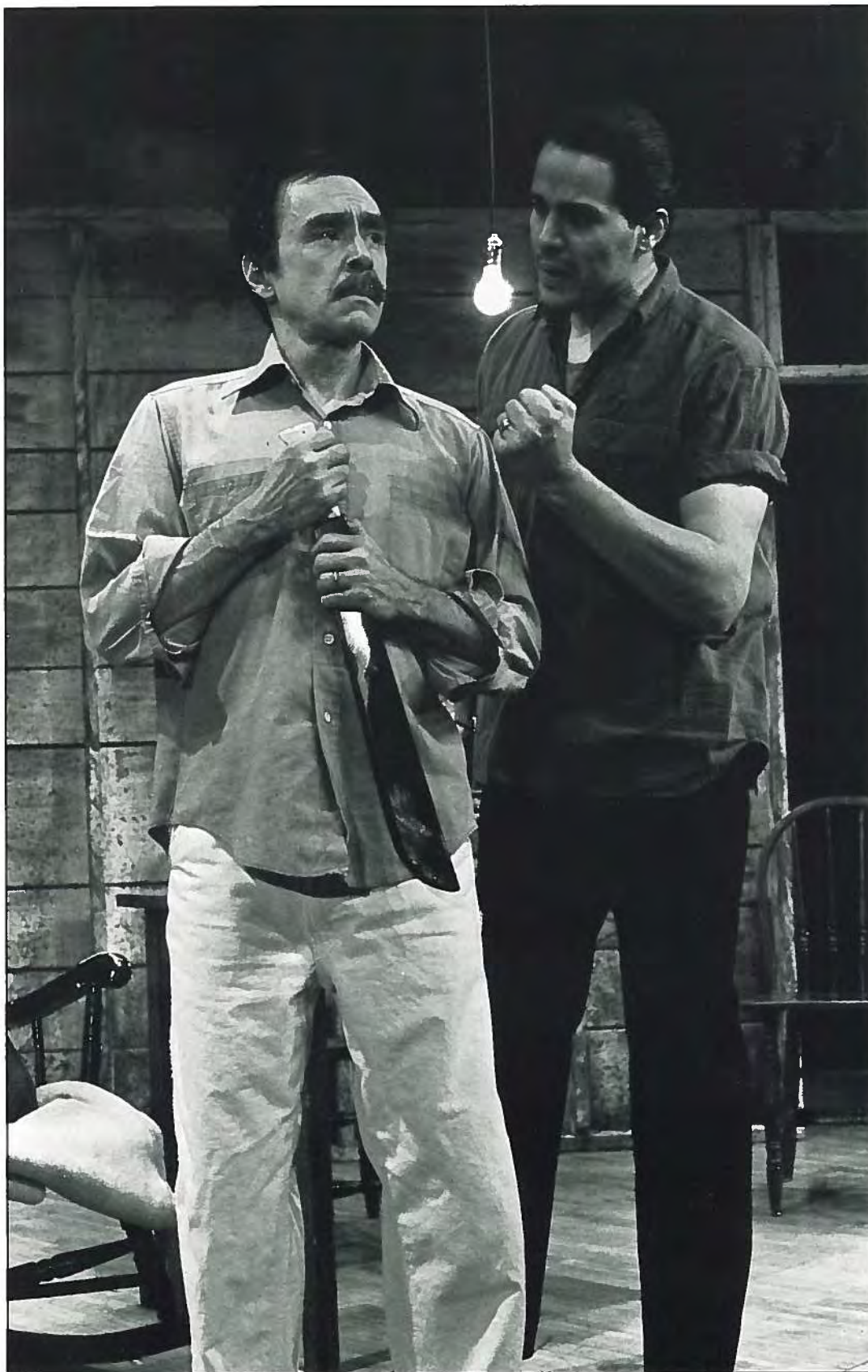
regional theaters have a subscription base that Broadway theaters do not. "Subscribers trust you," says Loewy. "They also feel they have a certain obligation to go and support the theater." While he agreed it is difficult to bring in new audiences, especially for more intellectual or unfamiliar works, he pointed out that "subscribers will always generate more business by word of mouth," and thereby draw an audience for these productions.

**Danger: Changing demographics affecting the "traditional" theatergoing audience.**

**Opportunity: Build audiences by addressing the special needs of diverse groups.**

Changing demographics within the state means at least two things to struggling professional theaters: They have to reach and attract audiences which may not be traditional theatergoing audiences, and they have to present works that relate to their audiences' culture.

One broad, sweeping demographic change is the aging of America. The nation is quickly developing the largest senior citizen population in its history. As it happens, Jersey City has the second largest senior citizen population in the United States. According to Douglas Farren, founder and creative director of Loaves and Fish Theater Company, "Senior citizens go to our theater because they remember when that is all there was. With seniors, we have to provide matinees and transportation. This is part of our responsibility to the community." He mentioned how important it is to reach out to the community leaders. "When you do that, the audiences will follow."



(Left) Ernesto Gonzalez (Abuelo) and Machiste (Carlos) in a scene from *The King of Dominoes*, a coproduction of Passage Theatre, Inc., and Loaves and Fish Theater Company.

SUZAN COOK

Veronica Brady, producing creative director of Passage Theatre, Inc., addressed the obstacle of having interested audiences who may be unable to pay for tickets. "We can't expect members of our community to come up with 25 dollars for a ticket, because the audience for Passage Theatre is not a conventional theatergoing audience and does not have the resources to be. They come from all walks of life; they are multi-ethnic, with diverse financial backgrounds." To draw them in, the theater subsidizes ticket prices, charging only about 10 dollars, which is way below the national average.

**Danger:** A changing society dictating the kinds of work produced.

**Opportunity:** Create theater that addresses the time and place in which we live.

"The '80s are over," says Jefferson. "We still have racism, sexism and classism, but now we have AIDS, drugs and poverty. People want to see situations and characters that relate to these issues and their environment. They like to see themselves on stage. The more they do, the more they feel part of the experience. If the Ensemble Theatre presented a drawing room comedy, it would not go over well."

Serving a large black population, the Ensemble Theatre instead has successfully executed Shakespeare's *Richard the Third* from an African-American perspective. A recent production of *Antigone* was set in South Africa. "The response from the audience — blacks, Jews, and Hispanics — was incredible," Jefferson recalled. "They literally leaped out of their seats when the show was over."

Brady agrees that if the production reflects the interests and concerns of the people who live in the community where the theater is based, "then you can find a way to get nontraditional theatergoing audiences into the theater." She referred to Passage Theatre's recent production of a one-act play called *Tantalizing*. In it a woman watches from her office window a homeless man. "The play shows what happens when she invites him in for a bowl of soup," Brady says. "This homeless man was a respectable person who had fallen from grace, a phenomenon that is often true in many cases."

According to Carolyn O'Donnell, producing artistic director of Stageworks Touring Company in residence at Glassboro State College, theater should contribute to and draw upon the creative energies and cultural mythology that reside in the theater's community. She gave as one example Stageworks' efforts to develop a production by interviewing people who live in the Pine-lands in southern New Jersey. The show will incorporate the stories and the music of the area.

"People in the Northeast seem to define themselves by ethnic origin," says Farren, so to respond to the melting pot of cultures in Jersey City, *Loaves and Fish* has produced Irish, Italian, and Puerto Rican plays, as well as works for black audiences, always making sure that all the shows appeal to the senior citizen audience. "We also do all we can in the area of nontraditional casting."

At the Forum Theatre last season, a production of *Shayna Maidel*, a play about the Holocaust, was followed by

EDDIE BIRCH



Anne Howard (Margaret), kneeling, and Joanne Bayes (Fanny), seated, in a scene from *Painting Churches*, a production of the *Loaves and Fish* Theater Company.

*Dream Girls*, a play based on the Supremes. "It's important to present a broad cross-section," says Loewy, "and to make sure that, in our case, for example, Jewish programming, such as *The Rothschilds* scheduled for this spring, is still mainstream so that it can appeal to many people."

**Danger: Tougher competition for corporate and foundation funding.**

**Opportunity: Find a unique niche and team up with larger organizations.**

The arts groups that attract corporate dollars tend to be well established and relatively

stable. Jefferson suggests that smaller arts groups must see the bigger institutions as potential friends rather than competitors. "The only way larger organizations can grow and maintain themselves," he believes, "is to reach out and develop a buddy system.

Smaller groups have the energy and vision; the larger groups have that as well as stability. Joining the two is the answer, to see what the groups have in common."

"No two theaters are really doing the same thing," observes Laura Aden of the

NJTG. "This can make corporate and foundation funding more possible because the theaters are really not competing for the same dollars. It's also important to remember," she continued, "that Crossroads Theatre started out as a small, storefront operation and has developed into a major impact organization not only because of the quality of the company's work but because of available funds. Many of our small theaters could establish themselves with that kind of credibility if they get to realize their potential."

#### **Crisis: Risks and Opportunities**

The challenges facing these theaters are not new to the theater community. They are, in fact, essential. Drama itself depends on conflict and crisis. Every time a curtain rises, actors, directors, and technical people all take risks. Audiences also take a chance when they decide to spend the time and money to see a particular performance. Therein lies the excitement and magic of the theater. With New Jersey's emerging theaters responding creatively to the challenges they face, audiences have numerous and wonderful opportunities to experience fine theater that has something to say to them. ▲

**Christopher Parker** is a communications specialist currently associated with Peat Marwick and a frequent contributor to *Arts New Jersey*.

# CROSSROADS THEATRE: A SONG OF CELEBRATION

by Rick Khan

On May 12, 1989, Rick Khan, producing artistic director of Crossroads Theatre Company, made a presentation to the National Council on the Arts. The following are excerpts from his presentation.

## The Mission

The year was 1978. My partner, L. Kenneth Richardson, and I were right out of graduate school at Rutgers. We were idealistic artists and dreamers, and like most young people, we had the audacity to believe, as we looked out to the world, that we could make a difference. We believed that we could create a model theater environment for artists of color in this country, one that would provide not the typical "coon" roles of earlier years, or the hate- and despair-filled roles of the sixties and early seventies, but positive artistic roles and social role models that would provide a sense of pride in ourselves and hope for our future and our young.

## The Early Years

For two years, we operated solely on CETA funds (the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act), with administrative support from the George Street Playhouse, also based in New Brunswick. We had 20 salaried people in our company, producing exciting work and charging "zip" at the box office. We were conducting workshops of every kind, free to any community organization that wanted them, and in so doing, we were creating a new audience for the theater.

This audience was equally mixed, with traditional theatergoers and non-traditional theatergoers, young and old, black and white. We were doing well, but we wanted more. We didn't want to be so reliant on CETA funds. We wanted and needed to be our own incorporated entity; as a black company in this country, that was important. So, by the start of our third year, we were incorporated with a Board of Trustees and the beginnings of a long-range plan for our company. That was the year we turned down a third grant from CETA, left the umbrella of the George Street Playhouse, and came into our own.

## The NJSCA and Continued Survival

It was also during this year, while struggling to stay afloat and relying solely on box office receipts, that I answered a phone call from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts (NJSCA). They had just held a meeting and decided to give Crossroads an emergency grant of \$20,000 in order to make sure that our dream wouldn't die. That was our first real grant as a new organization. They not only saved us with this grant, which represented a tremendous vote of confidence, but they also helped us write our first grant application to the National Endowment for the Arts. In fact, it was the Arts Council who submitted the grant request on our behalf.

Our first grant from the state sent a signal to other funders — corporations, foun-

EDDIE BIRCH



*Sheila's Day* by Duma Ndlovu, in collaboration with the cast, directed by Mbongeni Ngema, world premiere at Crossroads Theatre, 1989. (From left to right) Gina Torres, Annelen Malebo, Carla Brothers, Tu Nokwe, Valerie Rochon, Ebony Jo-Ann, Stephanie Alston, Irene Datcher, and Gina Torres; center, Letta Mbulu.



dations, and the people — and they all started supporting us. Meanwhile, the general operating grants from the Arts Council continued to increase significantly each year. The NJSCA's technical assistance program helped us learn how to get more money, as well as how to properly account for it. Development grants helped us expand our staff, thereby expanding our potential, while a challenge grant gave our endowment drive a much-needed initial boost.

#### **Major Impact Status**

Last year, for the first time, Crossroads was selected by the NJSCA for Major Impact Status and received an Artistic Focus grant. We have used this grant to catapult us even further by establishing better marketing budgets, working with consultants, and establishing a fund to attract African-American actors, directors, and writers of major national status, as well as a fund to produce our work in New York and at other nationally significant sites. You might recall a work we developed in 1985, *The Colored Museum*. With all the effort we put into that production, along with Joseph Papp's support in bringing it to New York, it was the Public Theatre that received most of the credit. Because we had no money ourselves to bring to the table, we received little recognition.

Thanks to the NJSCA Artistic Focus grant, for the first time in our history, we were able to take control of our own destiny. And that, I guess, is what it's all about. The Arts Council didn't try to tell us who we were or who to become

*Rick Khan, producing artistic director of Crossroads Theatre Company (left), and Ray Charles share a moment backstage at the State Theatre during Crossroads' Annual Benefit, "Share the Magic," October 21, 1989.*

MIGUEL PAGLIERE

with their grants. Nor have they tried to tell us how to spend the money. They first asked us what we needed to reach our highest goals, and then encouraged us, even though it would cost them more, to keep reaching for the highest stars, and to continue to envision even higher ones.

#### **Network of Support**

Also growing in our state has been another phenomenon that's been extraordinary — that of true and sincere cooperation among the state's theater companies. We have a very active theater alliance — the New Jersey Theatre Group — that supports interaction, interdependence, and mutual respect for each other. Now, because of the Theatre Group, which the Council initiated in 1978, and because of new NJSCA programs and a belief that none of us can truly survive unless we all do, we have a buddy system in New Jersey to help our emerging grass roots organizations. This, of course, is critical to the health of organizations and artists of all colors who provide, through their work, new forms, styles, and ideas.

Crossroads, for example, is a kind of "Big Brother" to the Ensemble Theatre Company, a new group based in Newark. We have helped them write by-laws and develop their board, and have provided administrative support and performance and rehearsal space free of charge. In essence, we are giving back to the community and the young, the way our Arts Council and other established New Jersey theaters gave to us. That's especially rewarding because it reaffirms our need to network and support each other. A rising tide raises



all ships; a sense of competition among arts groups is wrong.

#### **The Future Mission**

We are looking around and beyond ourselves, and seeing how important we are to each other. Our scope, hopefully, is beginning to transcend our own communities, our state, even our country, and our work is involving artists and cultures and issues from around the world.

This is so important, because if we can take just a second away from our normal, isolated grinds, we can see that our future rests on our ability to see ourselves in this society as members of a world society. I believe that as artists, it is our responsibility to reflect our

world much more fully and accurately than we have been doing up until now.

We are beginning to ask new questions, in new languages, and we are getting new answers and renewed hope by incorporating on every level, onstage and backstage, at the drawing tables, at the typewriters and calculators, a larger, more socially and culturally reflective workforce. We are putting this new sensibility and spirit on stage again and again, with the hope and belief that people will one day sit up in their theater seats and take notice of this new world, begin to imagine its real possibilities, and be what we want them ultimately to be — "transformed."

I am encouraged by the future because I am encouraged by new voices. As a

member of NEA's Professional Theaters panel for three years now, and also the overview panel, I am constantly overjoyed to learn of so many new and different voices emerging from all corners of this country. And I am ecstatic about the fact that people are listening to them.

Crossroads was and still is one of those new voices. But we represent hundreds of other such voices you normally wouldn't hear unless you bent your ear their way. Fortunately, in New Jersey, people heard us. That's why we're here today, as loud as we want to be, and calling out for others to join in. It's a song of celebration. ▲

**Rick Khan** is the producing artistic director of Crossroads Theatre Company in New Brunswick.



# TAKING THE INITIATIVE TO STABILIZE EXCELLENCE

by Marjorie Ford

When Alfred Gallman founded Newark Dance Theatre (GNDT) in 1978, he had a mission to increase the awareness and support of dance; to make dance accessible to all segments of society, showing a unique blend of technical skills in ballet, modern, and jazz dance; and to achieve artistic excellence. Through the years, the company has attained these goals on all counts.

"We have developed a strong repertory of original works and are currently building on these successes," Gallman, the company's resident choreographer, shared proudly in a telephone interview. This year's plan features modern classics from dance luminaries, world premieres by nationally emerging choreographers, and original works created by Gallman.

GNDT's performance schedule attests to the recognition it has earned for excellence. The dance company will be making its debut appearance at the prestigious Joyce Theatre in New York, where it will premiere a new work Gallman choreographed. Last June, GNDT was one of two dance companies in the nation to be invited to perform as part of the Black Modern Dance Classic Series at the American Dance Festival in Durham, North Carolina.

In addition to maintaining a busy performance schedule, GNDT provides dance training at its Dance Theatre School based at Essex County College, and conducts residencies, lecture demonstrations, and master classes in public and private schools throughout the area.

Having successfully achieved his initial goals, Gallman is now focusing his attention on a new mission: to direct GNDT toward financial and organizational success. With the help of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts' Minority Arts Stabilization Initiative, Gallman says his company is laying the foundation for that success.

"It is not unusual for arts organizations to devote their energies to their art and strive for artistic excellence, often neglecting to attend to the fundamental needs of their growing organizations," commented Jeffrey A. Kesper, NJSCA executive director. "The Council recognized this tendency, especially in New Jersey's emerging and developing arts groups, and decided to do something about it."

Two years ago, based on the recommendations of the Council's Minority Arts Issues Committee — a roundtable

composed of representatives from minority arts groups throughout the state as well as Council members and staff — the Council created the Minority Arts Stabilization Initiative (MASI) to address the problems that threatened to hinder the growth and development of New Jersey's most artistically promising minority arts groups.

"Our discussions with the field had revealed that administrative problems and, more specifically, problems relating to the lack of planning were common issues of concern," commented NJSCA board member Clement Alexander Price, who served as chairman of the committee. Since MASI's inception, the Council has invited 15 minority arts organi-

zations representing various arts disciplines to participate in the program. The list includes Gallman's Newark Dance Theatre, Dance-Compass, Aljira Arts, Inc., Crossroads Theatre Company, North Jersey Philharmonic Glee Club, Ric-Charles Choral Ensemble, Ensemble Theatre Company, The Woodson Foundation, SLUSA (a small press), Danmari Ltd. (Yass Hakoshima Mime Theatre), New School for the Arts, Newark Community School of the Arts, Newark Boys Chorus School, Hudson Repertory Theatre, and Works Gallery.

"In FY '88, the Council set aside \$100,000 from a legislative line item, and then allocated another \$95,000 from its budget to work specifically with these groups," explained Kesper. "The program was not to function as another grants program, but rather to provide technical assistance to help participants identify and eradicate any obstacles."

*Choreographer Alfred Gallman and members of Gallman's Newark Dance Theatre.*



WILLIAM E. SAURO NYT Pictures

The Stabilization Initiative was divided into a three-part program. The first step was for the Council to hire arts consultants to work directly with the staff and boards of the minority arts organizations. The next step called for the Council to introduce the minority arts organizations to major New Jersey-based corporate and private funding sources. The third step involved matching emerging minority arts groups with more established arts groups in the same discipline — a “Buddy System,” so to speak, designed to encourage the sharing of skills, resources, information, and audiences.

The Council immediately set out to hire consultants and then assigned at least one consultant to each group. “Their first task,” said Kenneth McClain, NJSCA arts development services coordinator, “was to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the organization and really get to know the operation.” According to many of the participating groups, the services of the consultants have proved to be “invaluable.”

Philip Thomas, president/ artistic director of the Woodson Foundation, a multidisciplinary arts organization that tours and presents theater, dance, music, and literary arts programs to schools, colleges, museums, libraries, and cultural centers in New Jersey and other states, providing greater access to African-American arts and culture, says the consultant “did a good



*Tiye Giraud (left) and Pam Patrick presented by the Woodson Foundation's ACE Touring Program.*

job of assessing the organization. She took the time to talk to us and find out what we were all about, and how she could be helpful.”

Referring to the consultant who came to the Ensemble Theatre Company through the Council’s technical assistance grant, Marvin Jefferson, the theater’s cofounder and artistic director, says, “In order for us to move forward, we needed an administrative structure. The consultant not only advised us to establish a board, but also assisted us in selecting board members who are compatible with the needs of our organization, and who feel that it is important for a black theater organization to thrive and grow in Newark.” The theater looks forward to additional input from the MASI consultant who was to have met with the group by January.

DanceCompass, a multi-ethnic dance troupe based in Montclair, also found the services of the MASI consultant to be “extremely helpful.” According to Sharon Stephens, DanceCompass executive director, “What the consultant made us do first was to have us stop and look ahead, and stop and look back on what we’ve accomplished in a relatively short amount of time.”

Stephens says an “outsider’s perspective” made DanceCompass realize it may not have been taking full advantage of the company’s strengths. Acting on the consultant’s recommendations, DanceCompass made it a priority to develop a brochure that has “served extremely well for two years as a marketing tool.” In addition, the group created a new Advisory Committee which, Stephens says, “has a variety of influ-

ential people, primarily from the dance world but also from theater and education.”

Stephens credits the Minority Arts Stabilization Initiative, and the NJSCA’s “overall support” with helping DanceCompass move forward to the next stage of development. As Stephens puts it, the company now has “enough of the right ingredients, creatively and managerially, to be a group that endures.”

The NJSCA obviously agrees with Stephens; this fiscal year, it presented the company with a special \$90,000 Stabilization Award to go toward artists’ salaries, administrative costs, and a cash reserve, in addition to awarding the group a general operating support grant of \$40,000.

“The Stabilization Award Project is really the next logical step in achieving the goals of the Minority Arts Stabilization Initiative and the Southern New Jersey Arts Initiative,” explains Kesper, “established to help minority arts groups and groups based in southern New Jersey to pursue excellence and assure long-range stability.” Other FY 1990 Stabilization Award recipients include Gallman’s Newark Dance Theatre, Perkins Center for the Arts, and the Composers’ Guild of New Jersey.

Stephens says the grant will surely “stabilize and secure DanceCompass’s future. Among other things, it will allow us to increase our administrative staff.”

Artistically, the DanceCompass company has already

been enjoying outstanding success. Its artistic director, Nicholas Rodriguez, has been invited to create a new work for the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble. This past summer, Rodriguez was one of three choreographers selected nationally for a residency at The Yard at Martha’s Vineyard, where he created a new work for DanceCompass. Most recently he had the privilege of introducing into the company’s repertoire a work by Paul Taylor, who personally favored this addition.

“It is so easy for any developing group to get caught up in the excitement of the here and now,” observed Kesper, “especially when the group is enjoying the applause and adulation. At the Council, we have stressed the importance of our making long-range plans and now demand that our constituents do the same.”

“It was really something to envision ourselves in the next five years,” says Gallman, who expressed appreciation for the consultant’s input into the group’s long-range planning process. GNDT followed the consultant’s suggestion to develop a stronger board that is “more responsible for the group’s long-term goals,” added Gallman. Securing a strong administrative staff was another goal, and, like DanceCompass, GNDT is using part of its Stabilization Award to hire key staffers.

“Hiring the new development person and other full-time staff was crucial to implementing the one-to-five-year plan. Most of our staff were working on a volunteer basis. What we are doing now,” explains Gallman, “is putting things in place so we can be-

come self-sufficient.” GNDT has already committed the 14-member troupe to a 40-week contract with paid salaries, so as not to lose them to other dance companies or other job opportunities.

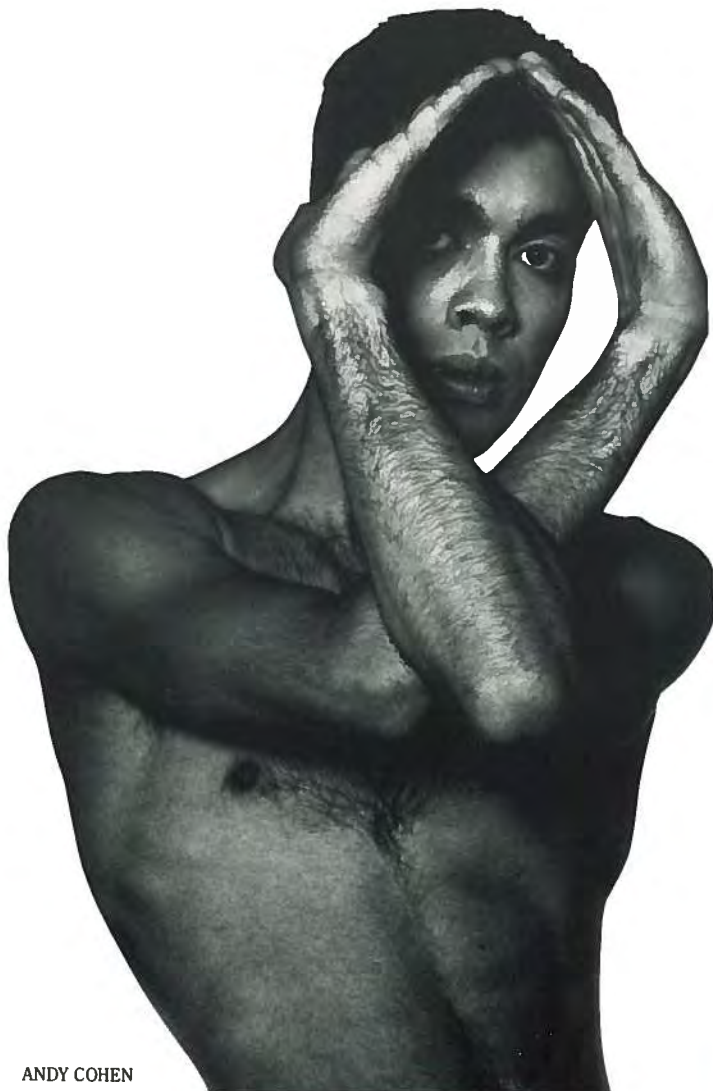
Dedicated volunteers had also provided the force behind the North Jersey Philharmonic Glee Club and Aljira Arts, Inc. Based on the consultants’ recommendations, both groups now have paid professional staffs.

According to Victor Davson, director of Aljira Arts, a gallery in Newark, “hiring an artistic director was very important. In the visual arts, it becomes a problem when someone tries to oversee both administrative and artistic concerns. You really need somebody who gets out in the field . . . who makes studio visits and can act as a liaison between the gallery and the field.”

Helping minority arts organizations move from volunteer, “owner proprietor” operations to more sophisticated “corporate” entities has been one of the major goals of the Minority Arts Stabilization Initiative, according to Price.

The “corporate personality,” says Price, “occurs when you have some people running the shop and other people *watching* the people running the shop. That’s where your board enters the picture. We live in a highly structured, corporate world, and the Arts Council has essentially *imposed* this kind of arrangement on all of the

*"Moonstruck," choreographed and performed by Nicholas Rodriguez, artistic director of DanceCompass.*



organizations that we fund to help prepare them to meet the challenges."

The "corporate personality" is expected to serve the minority arts organizations well as they participate in the second phase of MASI. McClain says the Council will hold a "corporate roundtable" in the spring of 1990 to introduce the participating minority arts organizations to major funding sources in the state. Meanwhile, a private funding workshop intended for these groups was already held last June.

"We found the workshop very informative," says Gallman. "Since that session, we have developed a corporate package and a presentation for corporate sponsors, as well as a corporate mailing list which identifies people in Newark and the Essex County area."

The private funding workshop was also "extremely, extremely positive" to the Ensemble Theatre Company. "We'd like to see more of that kind of thing," Jefferson says, "because several corporations are just now learning who we are."

Corporate help, "especially from minority corporations, is essential to keeping the arts alive," Stephens believes.

Kesper says the Council hopes the proposed "corporate roundtable" will spark enough interest among corporate leaders for them to "take one or two" of the minority arts organizations "under their wings."

The Council has similar hopes that the "Buddy System" will foster greater camaraderie among arts groups as they share "trade secrets," and will also nurture exciting collaborations. According to

McClain, possible partnerships include linking Aljira with the Montclair Art Museum and/or the Morris Museum, the Ric-Charles Choral Ensemble with the Hoboken Chamber Orchestra, the North Jersey Philharmonic Glee Club with the New Jersey Symphony, and the Hudson Repertory Theatre with the Princeton Ballet. The Ensemble Theatre Company has already been benefiting from Crossroads Theatre's input.

Based on the success of the Minority Arts Stabilization Initiative, the Council will continue implementing this program, and evaluate new minority arts organizations who have demonstrated artistic excellence and are therefore eligible to participate in the Initiative. "Our role at the Council is to facilitate," says Kesper, "that is, to help our minority arts organizations position themselves so they can create their own futures."

Thanks to the Stabilization Initiative, Stephens says DanceCompass is "suddenly playing in another league. We're operating from a position of strength."

As for GNDT, Gallman says, "Because of the State Arts Council's unique vision, we've been able to grow. I feel proud to be in Newark and in New Jersey." ▲

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**Marjorie Ford** is an independent producer/reporter and a contributing correspondent to New Jersey Network's "State of the Arts."

NORTH JERSEY  
PHILHARMONIC  
GLEE CLUB



FEDERICO DIAZ

The North Jersey Philharmonic Glee Club is one of the oldest singing ensembles in the United States still performing, and the oldest African-American arts organization in New Jersey. Founded in 1939 by Dolores C. Benjamin in Newark's old Third Ward, the Glee Club has performed for audiences throughout the mid-Atlantic states, for the poor and neglected, the sick and disabled, as well as for a long list of dignitaries. In 1948, the Glee Club made its triumphant New York debut at Town Hall and shared the stage with the great Paul Robeson.

The Glee Club's repertoire covers a wide range of music, including songs of praise and inspiration, classical selections, songs from Africa and the Caribbean, songs popularized by American musical theater, songs drawn from the gospel tradition, spirituals, and music from other cultures. The choral group has also paid tribute through song to many great American artists such as Leonard dePaur, Paul Robeson, Wendell Whalum, Jester Hairston, William Dawson, and most recently, Harold Roberts.

The current music director/conductor is Dr. DeCosta A. Dawson, who joined the North Jersey Philharmonic Glee Club in 1980 as the assistant director/accompanist, and assumed his current position in 1988. He was

formerly with the Newark Boys Chorus and the New Jersey Symphony Chorus.

Dawson is a music education graduate of Ithaca College and has M.A. and M.Ed. degrees in music education from Columbia University. A professional pianist and organist, he has performed throughout the New Jersey metropolitan area, and has also conducted major choral works. He was an assistant professor and director of choral activities at Seton Hall University for 15 years, and now teaches voice and music in the Newark school district.

The members of the Glee Club, many of whom have been associated with the group for more than 25 years, volunteer their time, committed to preserving a rich cultural heritage and striving for and achieving artistic excellence. The Glee Club presented a Fiftieth Anniversary Concert at the Paul Robeson Cultural Center, Rutgers University, Newark, in June 1989, and no doubt looks forward to another 50 years of song. ▲

# THE ART OF GIVING

by Terri Lowen Finn

In recent years, while many state arts councils around the country have suffered severe budget cuts, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts has experienced steady and often dramatic increases in its state appropriations, which soared last year to an unprecedented \$21,640,000. This fiscal year, however, the agency's budget felt a \$2-million cut, which has prompted many to speculate on the future of public funding for the arts, especially in light of other pressing budgetary issues.

If state arts funding does in fact face further reductions or no growth, would the private sector, i.e., big business, step in to fill the gap?

"Not likely," said Esther Novak, who manages AT&T's New Jersey philanthropy. "Corporations today have to take a very hard look at how philanthropic dollars are being spent. The days of continuing increases are over," a sentiment echoed by others who administer the corporate coffers.

Corporate and foundation giving to the arts in New Jersey has come to be taken for granted in the last two decades. For years, the Prudential Insurance Company, headquartered in Newark, has occupied a special niche in the arts philanthropy of that city. Its contributions have been cornerstones of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra and New Jersey State Opera, and it expects to be among supporters of the proposed performing arts complex, as well.

AT&T has funded special projects at Crossroads Theatre Company, the Garden State Ballet, and McCarter Theatre, just to name a few. This season, the George Street Playhouse in New Brunswick will present a world premiere musical, thanks to a sizable grant from AT&T.

Many New Jersey arts organizations and institutions have come to see the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation in Morristown as a loyal supporter of their efforts. Since 1974, the foundation has provided several million dollars to support the arts, especially arts education, funding innovative ventures that involve New Jersey educators and professional poets and playwrights; support the commissioning of new plays and music; and serve urban communities and ethnic populations.

While private foundations are in a class by themselves, free, for the most part, from the competitive pressures of the marketplace, several factors impact on corporate giving to the arts. The arts have come to represent a good cause worthy of corporate support, as well as an effective vehicle to promote a good corporate image, but giving to the arts still tends to be considered a luxury. Consequently, when the economy dips, or when businesses feel pressure to direct more philanthropic dollars to social issues such as literacy, hunger, homelessness, and AIDS prevention, the arts get pushed aside.

Dramatic changes in the business environment — divestitures, mergers, and acquisitions; a new generation of CEO's; and an increase in both domestic and foreign competition — have also

affected the way the corporate sector parcels out contributions to all nonprofits, including the arts. As one New Jersey corporate executive put it, "The senior managers and executives who are running American corporations today can't justify spending dollars without getting the maximum impact out of them." For the first time in two decades, managers of philanthropic arts dollars are being asked to develop strategic, long-range giving plans, in part to ensure more accountability.

According to the New York-based Business Committee for the Arts, from 1970 to 1986, business contributions increased steadily each year, rising from \$797 million in 1970 to \$4.6 billion 16 years later. During those years, the arts received approximately 10 percent to 12 percent of the total philanthropic dollar in any one year.

Today, available philanthropic business dollars for the arts have "plateaued" and are expected to remain level during the next few years. At the "Arts in Focus" conference sponsored by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and cosponsored by several corporations and the Dodge Foundation, Nancy Meier, director of the Arts and Business Council of New York, reported that operating support for the arts is down 8 percent in inflation-adjusted dollars in the last three years.

## New Jersey Corporations

Some clues to the current climate of corporate giving to the arts in New Jersey can be found in the manner in which the major contributors here — among them AT&T, Prudential, Johnson & Johnson, Squibb, and Schering-Plough — approach their grants-making process. While their criteria differ, taken together they reflect:

- Greater caution about the distribution of philanthropic arts dollars and more scrutiny of those grants;

- An unwillingness to provide general operating funds in the amounts that have been allocated in the past;

- An exploration of new initiatives such as greater emphasis on arts education, emerging arts organizations, minority arts education, and volunteerism.

Precisely how much corporations have been spending on the arts in New Jersey is unclear because many of them prefer to keep these figures a closely guarded secret. AT&T is relatively candid about such matters. Last year, the company disbursed \$4 million to the arts nationwide, and a generous portion of that went to New Jersey's arts organizations through grants that ranged from \$5,000 to \$50,000. AT&T, headquartered in Basking Ridge, has 200 facilities in the state, employing over 50,000, which explains its commitment to New Jersey.

It is only natural for businesses to direct considerable energy and philanthropic dollars toward areas where they have operating facilities or where their headquarters are based. The efforts to localize

their giving reflect, in part, a desire to respond to the interests of employees. Consequently, large-scale takeovers and mergers remain a potential threat to the regionalization of corporate philanthropy.

When Squibb left its New York headquarters in 1982 to relocate outside of Princeton, its contribution dollars followed and arts organizations such as McCarter Theatre, The American Boychoir, and the Arts Council of Princeton were enriched because of it.

"When we moved, we made a conscious decision to pay more attention to local groups and pull out of our New York organizations," said Robert Humes, senior vice president of corporate resources. "We were being besieged in the city and there's only so much money to go around." According to Humes, the recent Squibb/Bristol Meyers merger will not affect Squibb's contributions locally. Nonprofits that are

national in stature will be funded by the new company.

One of the most striking examples of at-home benevolence is Johnson & Johnson (J&J), which has played a major role in the revitalization of New Brunswick. It still concentrates most of its arts dollars there, awarding a multi-year grant to the New Brunswick Cultural Center, including a major operating grant to the State Theatre. Otherwise, J&J prefers to fund the majors — arts groups with the greatest visibility. It also sponsors a corporate art gallery that promotes New Jersey artists.

While other corporations have stabilized arts contributions, the gifts from J&J have actually increased. "It's the

*Guests study paintings by New Jersey artist Harry Devlin at an art opening hosted by Schering-Plough Corporation at the Company's executive offices in Madison, N.J.*

right thing to do," responded senior vice president John Helrich, chairman of the Contributions Committee. "We've already developed our priorities and strategies for the next decade, and we've made the "Family of the '90s" our overall theme. Under that fall all the important categories — health, education, and culture."

The Prudential Foundation funded \$761,770 to the arts in 1988, 6 percent of its annual philanthropic budget; of top priority are health and human services. Lately, the Foundation has begun to focus more on nontraditional projects that reach the "disadvantaged or underexposed audiences. We want to bring cultural experiences to a wide range of people," said program officer Eliza Puzzuoli.

Schering-Plough concentrates on the visual arts, a tradition started in 1984 when the giant pharmaceutical firm was the first corporate kid on

the block in Madison. Eager to be viewed as a "good citizen," the corporation set aside a sizable area of its new headquarters lobby to exhibit the works of New Jersey artists on loan from six major museums in the state. "We're booked into 1992," Allan S. Kushen, senior vice president of public affairs, said proudly, adding that the corporation also underwrites exhibitions elsewhere.

### Foundations

Funding requests made to private foundations undergo the same rigorous scrutiny typical of the corporate sector. Working with finite funds, foundations must make the same difficult choices. The *raison d'être* of foundations, however, is to serve the needs of a community, a region, or an organization. One such foundation is the Community Foundation of New Jersey in Morristown. It holds charitable endowments and disperses income to social services, education, cultural affairs, and environmental causes. In a given year, arts allocations have ranged from the National Association of Young Writers and All Kids Theatre to the Opera Institute of New Jersey and Whole Theatre.

The Morristown-based Dodge Foundation dedicates its services to public affairs, environmental issues and animal rights, secondary education, and cultural programming. According to Scott McVay, the foundation's executive director, the arts have always received great attention. "From the beginning, our trustees have felt there is an intrinsic relationship between the quality of life here and what is happening in the arts."



In 1989, the Dodge Foundation distributed \$1,797,000 to the arts. The preceding year, arts contributions accounted for 19 percent of the total philanthropic budget.

"With limited funds, we seek to invest them in a way that gives lift and loft to work that will touch many lives," says McVay. He mentioned the national poetry festivals held at Waterloo Village in 1986 and 1988. The last one drew more than 6,000 people. Hundreds of students and teachers from around the state benefited from the poets-in-the-schools program which complemented the festival. What also pleased McVay is the spinoff from the 1988 poetry festival — the television series entitled "Moyers: The Power of the Word," which was distributed nationally, reaching close to 10 million people. Hosted by Bill Moyers, the program was coproduced by Public Affairs, Inc., and David Grubin Productions, Inc., and presented by New Jersey Network and WNET-Thirteen, with funding provided by the Schumann Foundation, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Public Television Stations, W. Alton Jones Foundation, and the NJSCA. WNET-Thirteen produced accompanying educational materials which were underwritten by the Dodge Foundation.

The Frank and Lydia Bergen Foundation, established in 1983 and also based in Morristown, funds only those projects that will have a positive effect on the cultural climate of New Jersey. Its program priorities for 1987 through 1990 have been to increase training and conducting opportunities for

young American conductors, especially those in New Jersey; support educational outreach activities of proven performing arts groups; and support the development of music education from kindergarten through eighth grade.

"We are very interested in interdisciplinary and integrated arts projects," said Jane Donnelly, administrator, giving as an example the Appel Farm Arts and Music Center's "Create an Opera" project, which had children aged 10 to 15 write the script, compose the music, choreograph the movement, and design the scenery and costumes for and then perform in an original opera that dealt with an environmental crisis.

#### The Individual

Those who labor over grant proposals to federal and state agencies, the corporate sector, and foundations may be surprised to learn that 90 percent of all contributions to nonprofits are made by individuals, according to Patty Hutchison, executive director of New Jersey Gives, an organization dedicated to increasing volun-

teerism and promoting giving in the state. New Jersey Gives is one of 28 coalitions in the United States, "the first statewide coalition," Hutchison says, associated with the national *Give Five* program.

"The *Give Five* campaign," she explains, "was launched in 1986 by the Independent Sector, a coalition of 650 foundations, corporations, and large umbrella nonprofit organizations. The campaign asks people to donate 5 percent of their income and to give five hours a week in service to some charity. They made five the standard of giving. In New Jersey, we've tried to increase what was already there instead — to soften the market for giving and volunteering."

A survey conducted by Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics and prepared in 1988 for New Jersey Gives, reveals that only 212 respondents of the total statewide sample of 800 individuals

*Campers from Appel Farm Arts and Music Center rehearsing a scene from their original one-act opera Mother Earth, summer 1989, a project made possible in part by a grant from the Frank and Lydia Bergen Foundation.*



said they had volunteered time to a nonprofit organization in the past 12 months, while 648 respondents said they had donated money to a nonprofit group during that same time period. The smallest percentage of giving, both in terms of time and money, went to arts organizations. Religious groups ranked high in both categories. Hutchison suggests that nonprofit arts organizations have to learn how they can market themselves to individuals rather than just corporations.

New Jersey Gives, which operates under the auspices of the Community Foundation of New Jersey and is scheduled to close shop in June 1990, has initiated several projects to address this challenge. The Advertising Council of New Jersey has worked with the group to create and sponsor a generic, statewide media campaign whose theme is "Don't Give Up . . . Give More." Individual organizations are welcomed to plug in to this campaign and personalize the message. New Jersey Gives has also created a statewide volunteer hotline to connect interested individuals with voluntary action centers. Working with the Center for Nonprofit Corporations in Trenton, it has coordinated a volunteer skills bank to help nonprofits recruit and manage volunteers.

Two organizations that have formalized volunteering for individuals is the New Jersey chapter of Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts, coordinated by the Center for Nonprofits and originally initiated by the



(Below) Pulitzer Prize winner Galway Kinnell (far right) conducting an informal poetry workshop for students attending the Dodge Poetry Festival, Waterloo Village, October 1988.

(Bottom) An advertisement created by the Ad Council and distributed by the Independent Sector to promote the national Give Five program.

WILLIAM ABRANOWICZ



NJSCA, and two chapters of Business Volunteers for the Arts, BVA/Morris Area and BVA/Central New Jersey. The BVA program matches arts organizations with business executives who share their skills and expertise, and provides another way in which a corporation can offer support.

**Broadening the Base of Support**  
Despite uncertain forecasts in New Jersey's future economic climate, the arts will undoubtedly continue to receive substantial funding, for they are inextricably linked to the well-being of the state and its people. While the corporate sector is apparently shifting its focus on funding, it is certainly not abandoning its commitment to New Jersey's arts com-

munity. Finally, foundations will endure and continue to champion the efforts of organizations and groups that make a real difference in the lives of New Jersey citizens. Nonetheless, the message is loud and clear. Arts organizations and institutions should not rely on any one source, but rather broaden their base of support, which includes individuals' support, to ensure stability and growth in the future. ▲

Terri Lowen Finn writes extensively on the arts in New Jersey and is the cultural editor for *New Jersey Goodlife*.

**Just a fraction of what we spend dining out could help pick up the tab for a good cause.**

If we all shared just a small amount of our money and time with the causes we really care about, it would be a sure recipe for success.

Against hunger. For better health. Or to improve our arts and culture. Millions of people have helped establish five percent of their incomes

and five hours of volunteer time per week as America's standard of giving.

If we all reached this standard, we could generate more than \$175 billion every year. With a force equivalent to 20 million full-time workers.

So make it your goal to give five. And help keep society well nourished.

**Give Five**

INDIVIDUAL GIVING/VOLUNTEERISM CAMPAIGN  
MAGAZINE AD NO. 101-2436 88-7 10 (1)0 Soeare  
Volunteer Agency: Earle Palmer Brown, Campaign Director; Mr. C. Richard Yarrow, BellSouth Corp.

## PROFILE OF CARLOS HERNANDEZ

This past July, board members of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts (NJSCA) elected Carlos Hernandez of Jersey City to serve as the chairman of the NJSCA's Grants Committee. Hernandez, who was appointed to the Council in October 1987, also serves on the Executive Committee and the Policy and Planning Committee. He succeeds former Grants Committee co-chairmen Elizabeth C. Christopherson and Franklin V. Fischer.

"I am truly honored to serve as the Council's Grants Committee chairman, and I look forward to meeting more members of the state's arts community, and learning more about the various arts disciplines. Selfishly speaking, I see this as a wonderful opportunity for personal growth."

Educated at York College of the City University of New York, he received a Ph.D. in psychology from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

Hernandez has dedicated much of his life to community service. He was appointed to the National and New Jersey boards of ASPIRA of America, has been a member of the Puerto Rican Education Coalition of Jersey City since 1981, and was a board member of the Eastman Foundation. A past regional chairman and a statewide council member of the Hispanic Association of Higher Education, Hernandez is currently vice president for Academic Affairs and provost at Jersey City College and is responsible for all aspects of academic planning and management. He now serves as the chairman of the

Council of State College Academic Vice Presidents.

In the arts arena, Hernandez has been a consultant to the Smithsonian Institution/Cooper Hewitt Museum in New York and a research associate in the Environmental Design Research Association of the City University of New York. He also worked with the Federation of Latin American Designers, a group of professionals in the field of fashion who sought to network with each other to present their creations in a Latin American context and to serve "as role models to young fashion design students and give them the opportunity to present their own creations." Hernandez is a board member of Loaves and Fish Theatre Company and an advisory board member of the Hudson Repertory Theatre, both based in Jersey City.

When asked about the need to expand the educational and cultural opportunities in our urban communities, Hernandez spoke with some fervor about the future.

"I've always been interested in the growth and development of our cities, especially in Jersey City and Hoboken, what is referred to as the 'Gold Coast.'" What concerns me is that a tremendous amount of money and energy seems to be channeled into local businesses, the corporate structure, and new housing, while cultural and historic aspects are overlooked. There must be an equal impetus to develop the artistic, cultural, and historic sense of a city. These constitute the soul of a city. If the emphasis is placed on the physical alone, we end up with a body that has no soul. The arts are what make a city great. We have the opportunity to make our cities in New Jersey great if we include the arts in the process."

The subject of cultural opportunities in our urban environment led to an animated discussion regarding multicultural activity

and cultural pluralism. "I believe it is the Council's responsibility to broaden its definition of artistic excellence to include artistic forms of expression that depart from the popular notion of art, i.e., Western traditions. The Council has to be diligent in seeking out artistic excellence that exists in our ever-growing Hispanic, black, and Asian communities.

"I view it as a moral imperative," Hernandez continued, "especially as new people and new cultures enter our state. It also behooves us to prime the pump of excellence, that is, to look for artists and arts groups that are on the verge of becoming excellent and support their endeavors.

"As I see it," Hernandez offered, "given the current budget realities, the state's arts community is now in a survival mode. My advice to our constituents, while it may sound facile, is simply, 'Look to alternative funding sources. Don't look to the state for your preponderance of funding.'

"Organizations should also not look at NJSCA funding as an entitlement — there is a sharp distinction between merit and entitlement. Arts groups also need to talk more to each other, not only as colleagues in the arts field, but as political entities. They must sharpen their political consciousness, learn the political ropes, in order to take strategic steps that will ensure their survival. I do believe our artists and arts organizations have the potential and strength to nurture each other, and the Council will do all it can to help." ▲

# A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTS: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

by David Miller

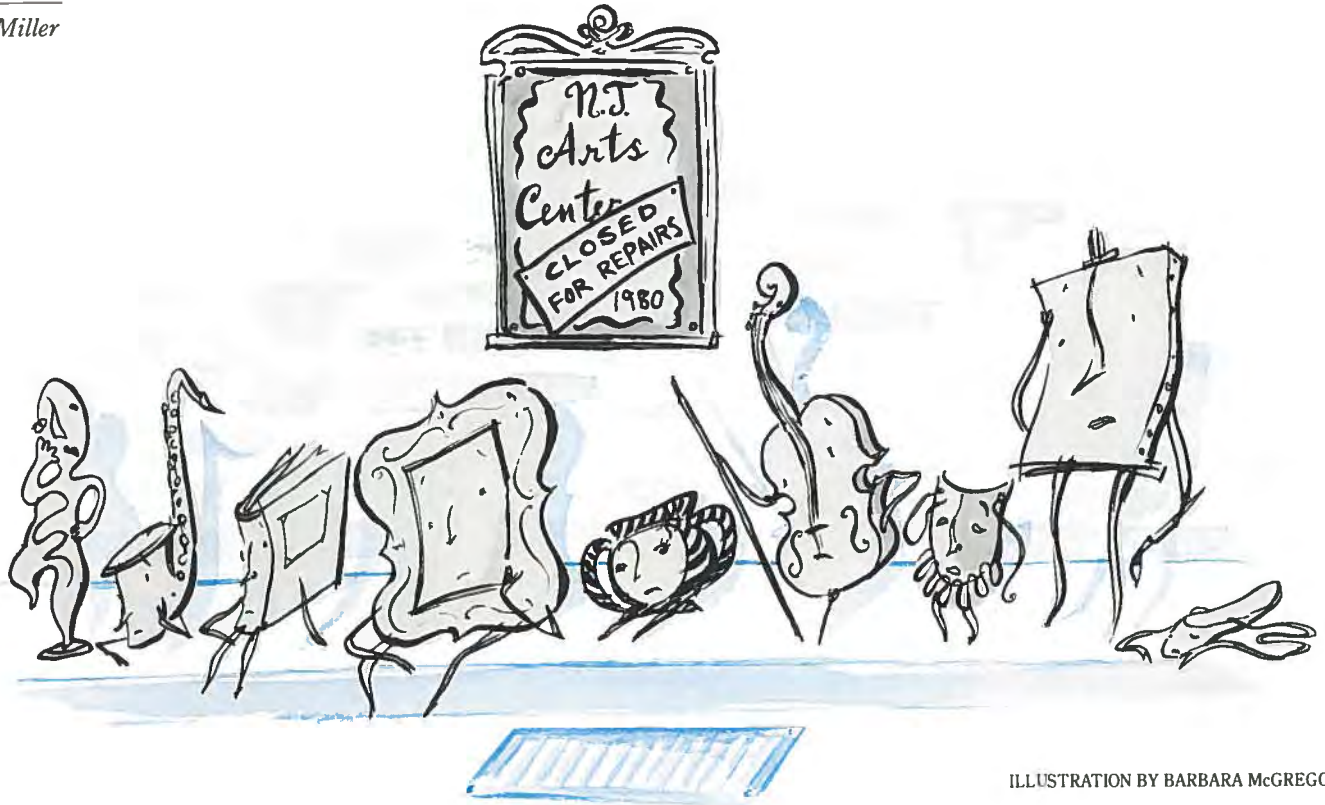


ILLUSTRATION BY BARBARA MCGREGOR

For the arts in New Jersey, the decade of the eighties could not have begun more ominously. In 1980, the National Endowment for the Arts denied New Jersey's basic state grant — an entitlement — for lack of an articulate plan, one of the few times in the Endowment's 23-year history that it would take such drastic measures. The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, homeless and floundering for both leadership and money, canceled its 1980-1981 season. Antiquated arts facilities continued their inexorable decline, as a litany of horror stories mounted, with musicians falling down elevator shafts, orchestras enduring sudden

rainshowers — indoors, piano legs punching through stage floors, and murderous seat springs impaling unwary patrons.

Ravaged by the double-digit inflation of the late seventies, and then hit with the recession, many of the state's major arts institutions lived hand-to-mouth, with little or no cash reserves. Dozens of fledgling arts groups who had creatively used the federal CETA program (Comprehensive Training and Employment Act) just to gain a toe-hold in the arts marketplace, suffered setbacks when CETA folded, and they scrambled for human resources just to stay afloat.

On the eve of a new decade, one cannot help but compare that dreary and unfocused picture to the sharp, Kodachrome snapshot of today's arts scene in New Jersey. What an amazing reversal! Peering into

a crystal ball on January 1, 1980, and looking 10 years into the future, could anyone have foreseen a \$20 million State Arts Council budget; the national acclaim the New Jersey Symphony has earned under the baton of a brilliant young conductor, and the national prominence several other New Jersey arts groups are gaining; the Paper Mill Playhouse's appearance on "Great Performances"; plans for an international arts center in Newark; a dozen or more major capital projects underway statewide, helped by a \$40 million bond program; and the unparalleled praise that the National Endowment for the Arts has bestowed upon New Jersey for its vision, leadership,

and progress in the area of arts development?

New Jersey State Council on the Arts (NJSCA) executive director Jeffrey A. Kesper has called this phenomenon a "quiet revolution" in the arts. Many credit these advances to an enlightened governor, a supportive legislature, and a proactive, well-organized, adventurous State Arts Council. But how, in 10 short years, was this rags-to-riches story wrought? And what measures have been taken to prevent a miamsic return to past woes? *Arts New Jersey* spoke with several key people who helped orchestrate the public side of this revolution, asking them to help put it in perspective.

Since 1982, Jane Burgio served as Governor Thomas H. Kean's Secretary of State, the first woman in New Jersey history to hold that position.

Presiding over a department that now comprises four of the State's cultural agencies, including the NJSCA, the New Jersey Historical Commission, the Office of Ethnic Affairs, and the New Jersey State Museum, Secretary Burgio has a unique viewpoint on both the workings of government and the role of the governor. For her, the story of New Jersey's ascendance in the arts began with Governor Kean's vision.

Secretary Burgio suggests that at the time of his election in 1981, no one fully comprehended the depth of Tom Kean's conviction that the arts are important, nor his resolve to make the arts an integral part of his plan to revitalize the state. However, she added wryly that "anyone who knows the Governor knows he doesn't just hand it to you. He makes you get it yourself."

Thus the first step was to achieve a governmental structure more conducive to delivering arts support. Secretary Burgio and former Assistant Secretary of State Alvin Felzenberg promoted the idea of transferring the Arts Council from the massive Department of Education to the Department of State, where it could receive greater attention and gain a shorter bureaucratic route to the top. They, along with interested legislators, astonished many by moving the authorizing bill through the legislature more quickly than anyone had thought possible. Secretary Burgio and Dr. Felzenberg both agree that

*(From left to right) Barbara Russo, NJSCA assistant executive director; Celeste S. Penney, former NJSCA chairman; Secretary of State Jane Burgio; Alvin Felzenberg, former Assistant Secretary of State; Lillian Levy, current NJSCA vice chairman; and Jeffrey A. Kesper, NJSCA executive director, attending a Council meeting.*



this helped pave the way for increased funding.

"I suppose the achievements of the arts constituency must start with funding," says the Secretary, "but the Governor was equally concerned that it be spent well. National prominence was his vision. That meant indentifying quality and investing it."

Felzenberg, who is now a professor of history at Princeton University, says the single feature that distinguishes today's arts constituency is its sense of unity, which he believes emerged from its self-realization of strength as well as its fuller understanding that Governor Kean's conviction was real.

He recalls the June 1985 arts rally in Trenton as a tremendous turning point for the arts movement. For the first time, the arts community demonstrated both its magnitude and

its will to have the legislature reinstate the \$1 million which it had cut from the Governor's proposed \$2-million increase to the Arts Council's budget. "We had more people down here than at any time I can remember since the Viet Nam War ended. They blocked off State Street. The place was packed."

That rally, as well as successive advocacy efforts for capital improvement funds, has led, he feels, to a new and serious regard the public and elected officials now hold for the arts. This, he believes, is a fundamental change in public perception, one that can better enable the constituency to succeed in the future.

Regarding the impact that NJSCA programs have had on the growth of the arts in New

Jersey, he maintains that the Artistic Focus grants program, launched in 1985 to help established groups attain national prominence, was at the vanguard of the arts' ascendance. He added, though, that the Council's responsiveness to the state's minority and southern-based constituencies in the form of special, ongoing funding initiatives went a long way toward achieving more comprehensive advancement.

Dr. Clement Alexander Price, who chaired the Council in the early 1980s, heartily agrees and contends that while the Artistic Focus program helped bring distinction to New Jersey's arts community, the Southern New Jersey Arts Initiative (SNJAI) may have been the most significant program launched this decade. Begun in 1987 as a grants program designed to help southern-based arts groups increase programming, visibility, and support, the

SNJAI has continued through fiscal year 1990.

It was not just the funding, but the process of thinking through the issues that Price finds so important. "That initiative," says Price, "enabled us to look at the relationship between artistry and organizational strength and location and the relative wealth of the community . . . in other words, the impact of historical and social forces on the arts. The Initiative was an attempt not so much to rectify the forces of history as to be attentive to them in the design of a meaningful program. In doing that, the Arts Council was able to look more wisely upon other issues, such as minority arts issues, inner-city arts issues, the 'new' arts issues, and a host of others."

Former Council chairman Margaret Hager Hart concurs that the strength of the Council's programs during this decade has been its diversity and hence its ability to offer important assistance to an equally diverse constituency.

Elizabeth G. Christopherson, who was appointed to the Council board in 1982, referred to the important role county arts agencies have played in stimulating local arts activity. "When the decade started, block grants to county arts agencies supported fewer than 100 local arts groups and projects. Today they support over 375. It's important to remember that some of our most promising young groups, such as Perkins Center in Moorestown, Ensemble

Theatre in Newark, and others, received their first state support indirectly through the good work of county arts agencies."

Mrs. Hart describes the work to produce the 1987 C. W. Shaver Report, which recommended a Newark-based international arts center, as her most rewarding association. "What emerged from these findings was a new awareness by our groups and our audiences that New Jersey was not second-rate in any way. Everyone gained confidence, and with that came a new willingness by audiences, patrons, corporations, foundations, and public officials not just to support the arts but to support them enthusiastically."

Price also suggests that it is easier to support the arts today because the arts groups are simply better artistically and operationally. Aside from increased state revenues, he credits this development to the Council's emphasis on a busi-

*Margaret Hager Hart, former NJSCA chairman.*



nesslike approach to the arts, an emphasis also shared by other public and private funding sources. He believes the formalization of the Council's panel process for evaluating grant proposals helped foster this new approach. "The constituency began to accept the rigors of the system and became more focused on getting through it with a solid evaluation."

Additionally, the use of outside experts decreased the arts constituency's perception that the Council's funding decisions were politically or personally motivated. "The Council became perceived as a 'trustee' of the state's commitment to the arts."

When Jeffrey A. Kesper assumed the post of NJSCA executive director in 1983, the agency had no long-range plan, and its grants program was limited to special project support, general operating support, block grants, and fellowships. From his vantage point, a strong causal relationship exists between the advances of the Council, particularly in the areas of long-range planning and program diversification, and the advances of the arts community.

"I have often called the Council's grants program the 'Horatio Alger program,' because it gives any organization at any level of development the opportunity to achieve its own goals and objectives based upon hard work, commitment to the integrity of the artistic product, and motivation to benefit from the Council's offerings. Thanks, in part, to several of the Council's new funding categories created in the latter half of the decade, such as technical assistance grants,

*Clement Alexander Price, former NJSCA chairman.*



PETER G. BORG

development grants, challenge grants, and the Artistic Focus grants, I believe our arts groups have achieved a higher standard of organizational soundness, a new sense of pride and of belonging to an arts community, and a better understanding of the symbiotic relationship between the arts and the rest of New Jersey life."

The grants mentioned above emerged directly from the Council's long-range planning process, one which produced the agency's first *Five-Year Plan: 1986-1990*. "The value of good planning," Kesper points out, "is that it helps guide your vision; it gives you signposts that not only lead you in the direction you intend to go, but that also allow you to check back, to modify your route, and make adjustments when the future holds unexpected surprises or challenges."

The \$2-million cut to the Council's FY 1990 budget provides a case in point. "The Council's board looked to its

*A musician celebrates his art on the steps of the State Capitol.*

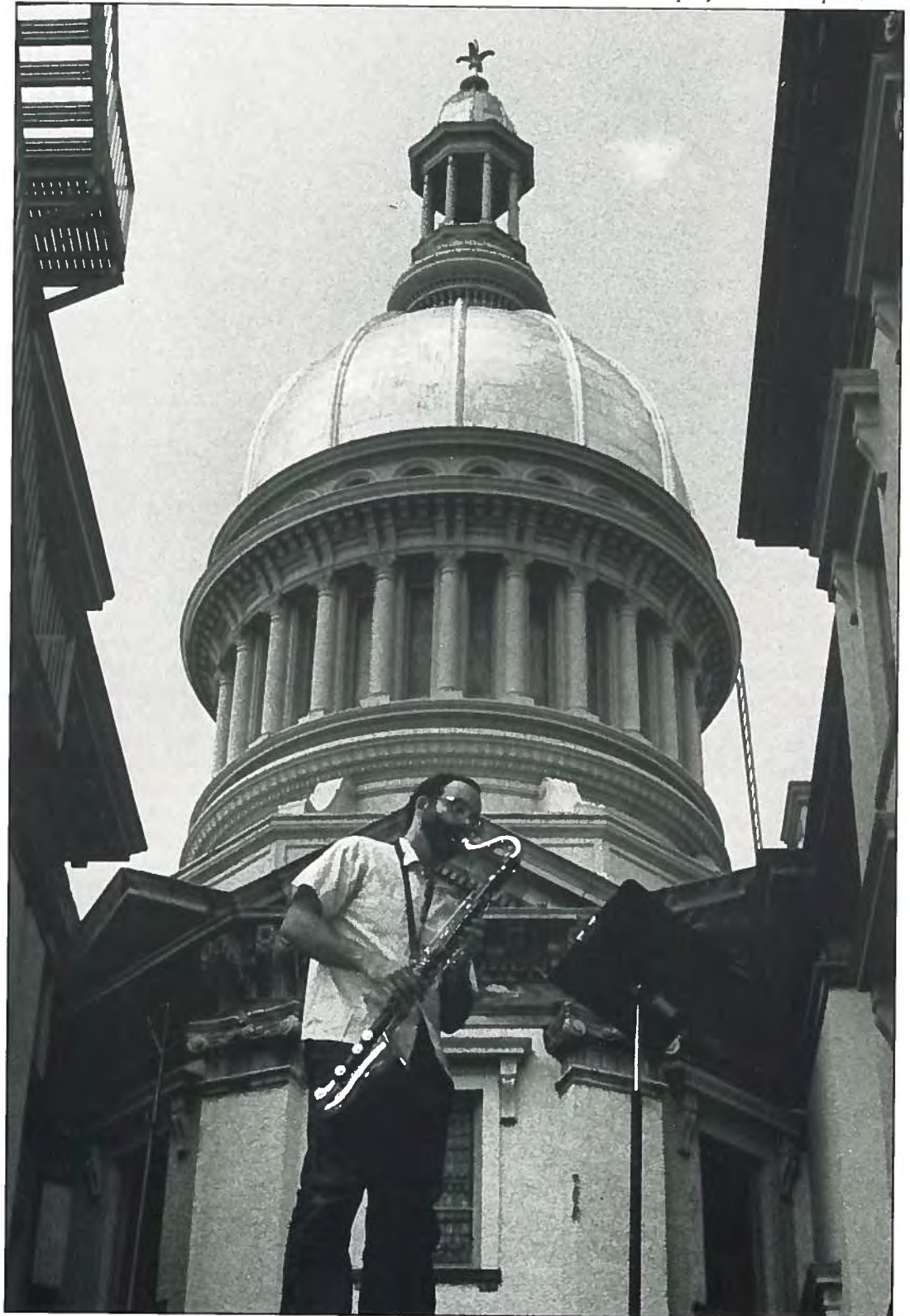
mission and priorities and recognized and reaffirmed that the Council exists to serve excellence throughout the entire state . . . not only the most established groups, but the best emerging and developing groups as well. With an effective long-range plan and a diversified grants program already in place, the Council was in a strong position to provide the support needed by all its constituents to ensure their stability and growth," a source of great personal satisfaction for Kesper.

Facing this budget setback has confirmed, in Kesper's own mind, the ability of the Council to implement its diverse programs despite funding fluctuations, "a good sign of programmatic strength, flexibility, and durability which will serve the constituency well in the future."

Celeste S. Penney, who chaired the Council during fiscal years 1988 and 1989, believes the success so many arts groups are enjoying today comes, in part, from the "Council's not being afraid to set standards and insist that arts groups set standards of artistic excellence as well."

What concerns Mrs. Penney most now is the future of arts education. The media's reports on literacy have been so bleak, and the projections on population growth and demographic change so challenging that she believes helping people achieve literacy in all important areas, including the arts, "is the most important undertaking we can resolve to do."

On July 25, 1989, the Council chairman's gavel passed from



Celeste S. Penney to Elizabeth G. Christopherson, and with it the mantle of responsibility to meet the challenges of the 1990s. In reviewing the progress to date, she concurs with her colleagues regarding the major turning points and high points.

Christopherson, who has participated actively in the Council since 1982, said, "The early 1980s represented the beginning of a new era . . . it was a time of great opportunity. Dedicated leadership and increased funding empowered the Council to initiate new programs which set the stage for exceptional growth in the arts. It was a time

to dream, to debate, and to risk . . . and we did.

"As a Council," she continued, "we looked for innovative ways to invest our increased funds wisely and serve all citizens of New Jersey. We looked to strengthen our communication network, to listen to and learn from our constituents, in order to build a strong arts community."

Asked about the new decade, Christopherson spoke enthusiastically about the challenges and the opportunities the arts community faces. "The Council eagerly looks forward to working together with Governor Jim Florio and the new administration to chart the future of the arts in New Jersey. I believe there are common goals among us: to maintain the momentum of excellence so that New Jersey

will continue to be an enticing place for both artists and audiences alike; to integrate the arts into the state's school curricula and thereby ensure cultural literacy among our young people; to make the arts accessible to the traditionally underserved, that is, the economically deprived, the physically and mentally challenged, and seniors; and to support arts programming that reflects the state's cultural diversity by supporting the efforts of black, Hispanic, and Asian artists, as well as our folk artists.

As unassuming and "quiet" as New Jersey's arts revolution

may have been, no one can deny the dramatic changes that have occurred in the past 10 years. Whether it is owing to a new sense of unity and self-esteem; improved artistry; superior management; improving facilities; greater local, regional, and national regard; or more diversified and effective NJSCA funding and support programs, the arts have established strong roots in New Jersey's cultural landscape. It is with this self-confidence and optimism that the arts community embraces the future as bearers of new opportunities. ▲

David Miller has been an NJSCA staff member since 1984 and now serves as executive assistant to the director.



ILLUSTRATION BY BARBARA MCGREGOR

## ON THE COVER

For nearly 20 years, artist Robert Birmelin has presented the everyday, gritty drama of urban life in canvases noted for their bold compositions and unsettling subjects. Described as a social realist documenting fleeting moments on Manhattan's crowded streets, he himself describes his style of painting as "psychological realism." He uses disturbing close-ups, dramatic cropping, compressed spatial planes, and blurred focus to create narrative fragments that pull the viewer into the scene and demand active participation in interpreting the situation at hand. Fear, isolation, alienation, and tension are as much his subject matter as the jostling crowds who pass randomly by one another.

Ten years ago, Birmelin wrote notes in a catalogue of his work which remain true today. "In the midst of the city crowd, one cannot remain solely an observer. Willingly or not we are enmeshed in its field of energies, participant in its tensions. A half-seen incident happening 'over there' causes an urgent clustering that then disperses as suddenly as it was formed, leaving us frag-

ments — overheard words, partially comprehended gestures and guessed at motives . . . Trajectories of other bodies pierce our personal space; we feel crowded and unwilling to focus, preferring to stare through or past into a pocket of neutralized distance."

Describing one of Birmelin's street scenes, art critic Donald Kuspit wrote that its "general air of disruption and unresolvable tension, and especially its violent spatial disjunction — the simultaneity of intimate close-ups and panoramic plentitude — are fundamental." Art critic Richard Martin suggests that "grabbing, hailing, flailing and touching are symbolic gestures for Birmelin," and says, "Birmelin's geometry of figure compositions makes the urban anguish palpable."

A few years ago, Birmelin, who was born in Newark and lives in Leonia, New Jersey, turned his vision away from the streets he



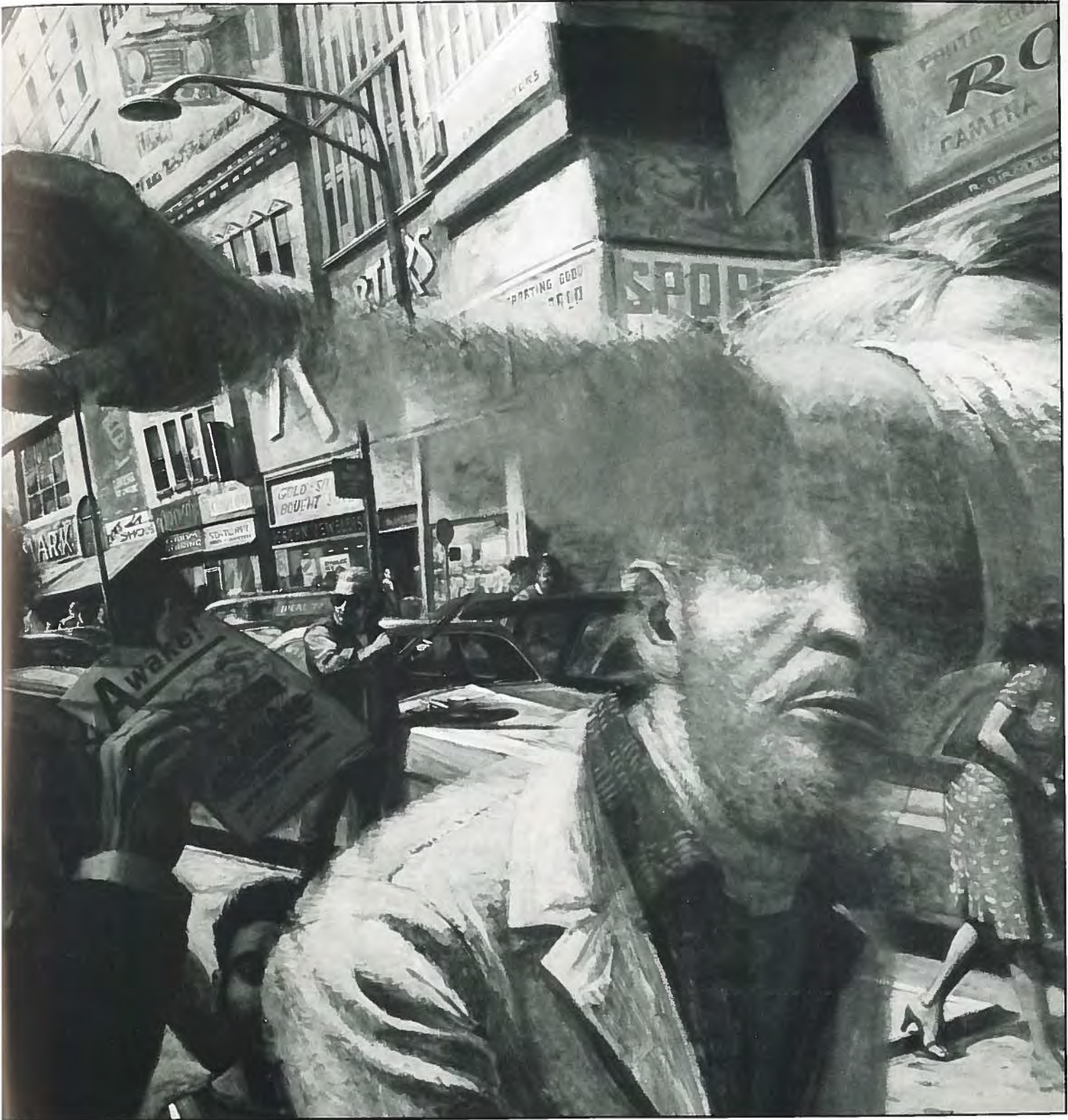
*The Man with a Rifle*  
Robert Birmelin  
Acrylic on canvas  
72" x 108"  
1987



Artist Robert Birmelin

PAUL SMITH





ADAM REICH



*Stadium Alight — Blue City*  
 Robert Birmelin  
 Acrylic on canvas  
 70" x 78"  
 1980

passes to get to his Manhattan studio, and began a new series of landscape paintings including the *Bridge over the Bay* featured on the cover of *Arts New Jersey*. "The crowd scenes were becoming unbearable," Birmelin said in a recent interview. "I literally needed to distance myself and present new images. I started drawing from my experiences driving around northern New Jersey and New York City."

Birmelin has never used photographs from which to paint, but rather relies on his own powers of observation and visual memory. "My landscapes are actually composites," he explains, "constructions from memories. The *Bridge over the Bay* was inspired by trips to the Meadowlands and New Jersey's industrial sites. The bridge itself does not actually exist."

Birmelin has continued to pursue sweeping landscapes that

possess a grandeur; he is currently working on a New Jersey Public Arts Inclusion project — two mural-sized paintings which will be placed in the main lobby of the New Jersey Department of Transportation Building in Ewing. These paintings will, in fact, be based on two specific locations. The first is a densely trafficked urban hub in northern New Jersey near the Meadowlands. The second depicts Route 55, which moves through a wooded, less urban area.

In his statement for the project, he wrote, "I have chosen to do two paintings celebrating New Jersey's highways. I have always been fascinated by the sweep of highways across the land, by the cloverleaf constructions and the interweaving arterial patterns as roads meet, connect, and diverge. For me, there is beauty in the highway landscape as well as the drama of movement through space, and these are the aspects I plan to represent. One could say that these paintings will be a symbolic tribute to the imagination and skill of planners, engineers, and construction workers, who together have

brought the highway network into being."

Birmelin was educated at Cooper Union School of Art, New York, and received his BFA and MFA from Yale University, School of Art and Architecture, New Haven, Connecticut. In a career spanning almost three decades, he has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, New Jersey State Council on the Arts, the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, as well as awards from Childe Hassam Fund Purchase Awards; American Institute of Arts and Letters; and Carnegie Prize for Painting, National Academy of Design.

A professor of art at Queens College of CUNY, Birmelin has also been a visiting artist and guest lecturer at several universities throughout the country. He has had more than 25 one-man shows and has been included in more than 40 group exhibitions. His works are in public collections of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts; Brooklyn Museum; Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, DC; The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Newark Museum and New Jersey State Museum; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and many others, as well as in several corporate collections. ▲

## BLUESTONES AND SALT HAY

by Ronnie B. Weyl

Amiri Baraka (left) talking with Allen Ginsberg at the William Carlos Williams Centennial Reading, September 18, 1983.



ROBERT LAROSA

Two products indigenous to New Jersey, bluestones and salt hay, have lent their names to a publication to be released by Rutgers Press this winter, a publication that celebrates a third indigenous product of the state, poetry.

"For years," said editor Joel Lewis in a telephone interview, "I wanted to put together a collection of poetry written by New Jersey poets and," he

added emphatically, "about New Jersey. The relationship between a writer and his or her landscape has always fascinated me. The poetry in this anthology recalls a sense of place and captures the resonance of New Jersey."

Many readers will be surprised to see such poets as Joyce Carol Oates, Allen Ginsberg, Theodore Weiss, and Kenneth Burke, all who have earned national and international reputations, included in a New Jersey anthology. Lewis claims readers are in for an even greater surprise at "the quality of writing that

has, until this publication, been an open secret known only to this state's writing community." Among the 34 poets included in the anthology, 25 have received Poetry Fellowships from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

In his enlightening introduction to *Bluestones and Salt Hay*, Lewis places contemporary New Jersey poets in historical context and refers to a "literary inheritance that (New Jersey) writers can draw upon," arguing that the poets

of New Jersey have always been a presence in American literature.

He recalls Philip Freneau (1752-1832), "considered to be one of the first noteworthy American poets," who lived most of his life at Mount Pleasant, near Middlepoint, New Jersey. Washington Irving (1783-1859), writes Lewis, began his serious literary career in Newark in 1806 and 1807, and William Cullen Bryant, a member of Irving's Knickerbocker Circle, lived in Hoboken from 1832 through 1834 and continued visiting the city in the 1840s. In fact, Hoboken witnessed much



*William Carlos Williams*

literary activity in the early 19th century; a few miles away in Newark, a literary community flourished in the 1890s. The roster of poets/writers claiming New Jersey ties also includes Walt Whitman, “the Good Gray Poet” who moved to Camden in 1873 to recover his health, and Stephen Crane, who was born in Newark in 1871 and buried in nearby Hillside.

No list of New Jersey’s *Who’s Who in American Poetry* would be complete, of course, without Rutherford poet-physician William Carlos Williams. His influence on contemporary poetry was great, his credo simple, says Lewis. “Williams

believed poetry was not merely a recording of the sublime but of imaginative transformations of everyday events.”

Lewis’s essay continues by charting the ever-growing interest in poetry throughout the country in the 1960s, and in particular, the support of poets in New Jersey during that time; he concludes that “the poetry community currently active in the state is to a great extent a continuum of the activities of the last 20 years.”

For Lewis, selecting the poems for the anthology became a process of discovery. “I knew enough people to contact initially and then investigated people whose names were recommended to me. I wanted an anthology that reflected not only the range

and diversity of the kind of poetry being written in New Jersey, but also the broad representation of the land and life in the state.”

Hence the title. Bluestone is the popular name given to the basalt rock found and, prior to the 20th century, quarried in the New Jersey Palisades, a 12-mile stretch of cliffs in northern, industrial New Jersey that rise dramatically from the Hudson River. Salt hay is the name given to the cordgrass found in the saltwater meadows of southern New Jersey’s vast Pine Barrens; once harvested and processed, salt hay has many practical

purposes, such as mulch and twine.

The anthology itself captures the state’s physical diversity and represents what Lewis believes is “a cross-section of the most interesting work going on in this state, from Alfred Starr Hamilton, one of the last writers of folk poetry, to the formalism of Theodore Weiss . . . from the political hardball of Amiri Baraka to Jim Handlin’s introspective meditations.

“The William Carlos Williams tradition can be seen in the work of both Edward R. Smith and August Kleinzahler. Allen Ginsberg, whose two early books were prefaced by Williams, is of course a poet of great influence — tracteries here found in the work of Hershel Silverman and Eliot

*Poet Alicia Ostriker*



J. P. OSTRIKER

Katz. Alicia Ostriker, a mentor to a generation of poets who have attended Rutgers University, is represented here by her wonderfully precise and insightful poems on New Jersey life.”

Lewis, who proudly describes himself as a born-and-bred New Jerseyan, compares the book to a “literary town meeting, with the poets as neighbors talking across fences, formica dinner tables, train aisles, and workbenches about their friends, families, and hometowns.” While the poets employ different approaches and styles, they “speak to their readers in the same passionate and direct way New Jersey poets have been doing since the days of Freneau.” He qualifies the inclusive nature of the anthology by saying that the volume should not be “taken as the definitive collection of this state’s poets.”

*Bluestones and Salt Hay* is the culmination of a personal crusade. Driven by a passionate belief in the inherent value of poetry and the need for it to be read, Lewis, a poet himself, as well as a music critic, and an essayist for the *American Book Review* and Poetry Project’s newsletter, knew all too well the reluctance of publishers to pursue a poetry anthology. He decided to approach Rutgers Press with his idea, and according to Rutgers Press editor Leslie Michner, “He was very persuasive.” He had to be, for he

had to tackle a policy adhered to at Rutgers Press not to publish poetry.

“Of the 70 books Rutgers Press publishes each year,” Michner said, “only two to four titles are short story collections or novels. Before Joel’s anthology, we had never considered publishing poetry for three specific reasons,” she explained. “First there’s the workload factor. We imagine receiving an incredible number of manuscripts we couldn’t possibly read.” She also pointed out that she and her staff are less capable of judging the quality of poetry than they are of judging fiction. Finally, there is the dollar factor. “Poetry books sell even more poorly than fiction; poetry is not

widely read today. Even though Rutgers Press is subsidized by the University, there is a limit to how much the Press can lose.”

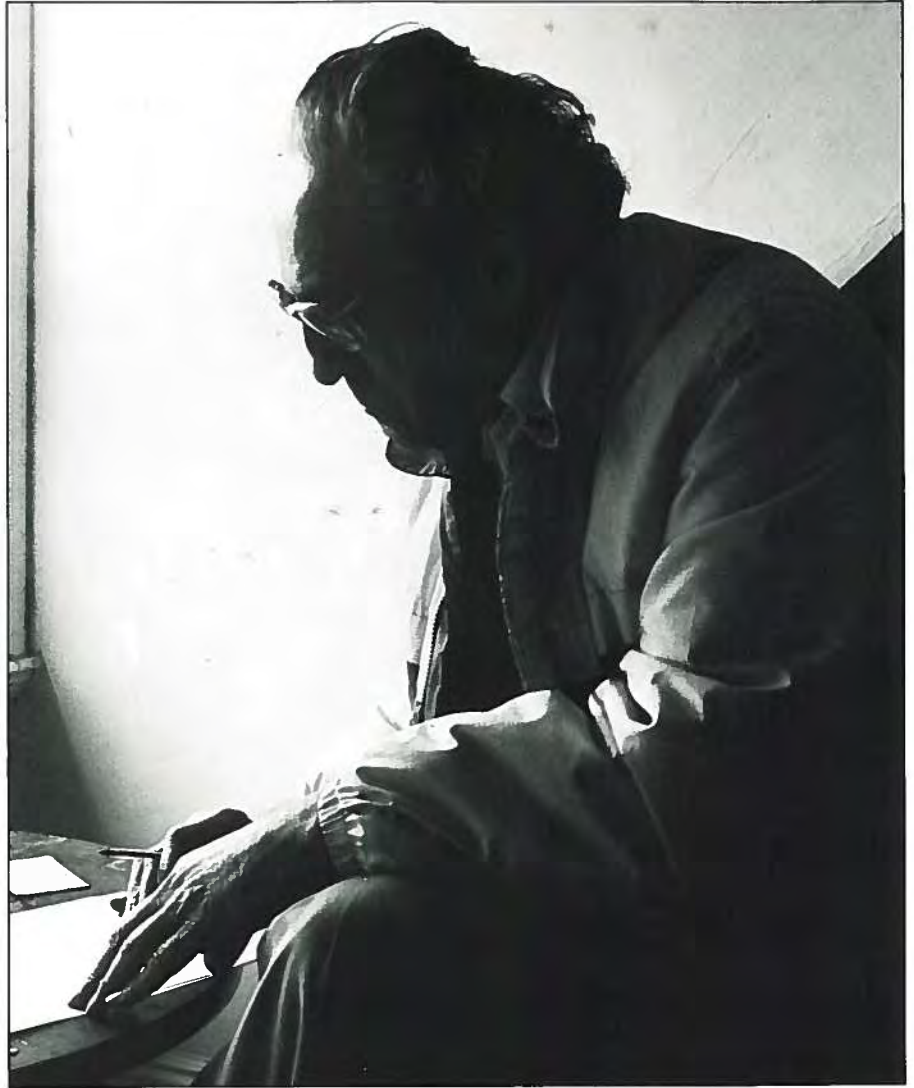
Michner was skeptical about this particular project because she had serious doubts that the poets Lewis planned to contact would agree to have their work included in a New Jersey anthology, and if they did agree, might request fees in excess of Michner’s budget. To her surprise, the prospective poets responded enthusiastically and either waived their fees or kept them at a minimum. Michner is now optimistic that *Bluestones and Salt Hay* will be received well.

*Poet Max Greenberg, whose work is included in the anthology Bluestones and Salt Hay.*

Lewis is also optimistic . . . and realistic. He knows it will probably never make the best sellers’ list but writes, “Poetry, with its small but fiercely loyal audience, represents a principle of hope to those caught in its spell, a small utopia for some of our daylight dreams.” To transport readers to that small utopia is reward enough.

*Bluestones and Salt Hay* will grace bookstore shelves this February. The 210-page volume will sell for \$32.00 cloth, \$11.95 paper. To order a copy, call 1-800-446-9323 or 201-932-7037. ▲

Ronnie B. Weyl is the editor of *Arts New Jersey*.



## "STATE OF THE ARTS" RECEIVES AN EMMY



*Scott Moniak, former host of "State of the Arts," and Nila Arinow, producer of the program, accept their Emmy Award.*

New Jersey Network (NJN) won seven Emmys at the seventh annual award competition of the Philadelphia chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (NATAS). The awards, which were presented in a gala ceremony held this past September in Philadelphia, recognized NJN's achievements in the areas of cultural programming, public affairs programming, and sports coverage.

"State of the Arts," NJN's weekly arts program cosponsored by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, received an Emmy for Outstanding Magazine Format. The award was shared by Nila Aronow, series producer, and Scott Moniak, former program host.

For Outstanding Cultural Programming, "Ballet Ruse" won an Emmy for Eric Luskin, producer, and Eric Vuolla, director. Vuolla won a second Emmy for Outstanding Individual Achievement — Director.

This year, NJN received a total of 17 nominations from the Philadelphia NATAS chapter, which made 161 nominations to 14 stations throughout the Philadelphia/Delaware Valley region. NJN ranked fourth in nominations received.

## IN MEMORIAM: MICHAEL SCOTT

Michael Scott, editor, writer, publisher, lecturer, political activist, and dynamic champion of American crafts, died in Seattle on September 21, from a heart attack. He was 65 years old.

Scott was editor of *The Crafts Report*, which he established in 1975 as a business information newsletter for professional craftspeople. For the next 15 years, he cultivated the four-page newsletter into a 56-page monthly newsletter that has become a vital resource for the international craft community.

Terry Weihs, president of The Crafts Report Education Fund, described Michael's death as an "extraordinary loss" to the craft community. Weihs says he had the insight to combine "his journalistic ability with a keen understanding of and involvement in professional crafts. From the publication's beginnings, the craft community was drawn to Michael's intellect, his incredibly inquisitive mind, his inexhaustible energy, his journalistic integrity, and his wit. Michael's contribution to the craft community cannot be overstated."

In 1983, Scott received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to conduct a survey on the policies and practices of American art museums with respect to artworks in the craft media. In 1981 he served as a member of the task force for the National Crafts Planning Project, which the NEA established to survey the needs of craftspeople in the United States and to encourage cooperation between craft-oriented federal, state, and local agencies. Scott attended the task force meeting for the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area held in Newark.

In 1985, when *Arts New Jersey* asked him to characterize the crafts movement in New Jersey, he said, "New Jersey is among a half a dozen states where things are really happening."

"Michael could make such a claim," says Hortense Green, New Jersey State Council on the Arts crafts coordinator, "because he made it his business to know about and support crafts activity throughout the country. His early vision of the craftspeople's need to reach out to one another inspired him to provide us with the most valuable publication of its kind today. Many of us in New Jersey had the opportunity to meet him at our 'Making Connections' conference and other events, and will surely remember him for his vitality, his integrity, his joy of life, his marvelous sense of humor, and his genuine concern for people." ▲



*Michael Scott  
1924-1989*

## ELIZABETH G. CHRISTOPHERSON INITIATES CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

As we greet the year and decade with a new governor and administration, we reflect on the fine legacy the arts in New Jersey have given us in recent years, and welcome new opportunities for collaboration and growth. The visual, performing, and literary arts have played a dynamic role in improving and enhancing the quality of life in the Garden State. In economic terms, the arts have contributed to the revitalization of urban centers, have stimulated an increase in tourism, and have attracted corporations to relocate their headquarters here. James Burke, former chief executive officer of Johnson & Johnson, called the arts "an investment in our society. They help attract the best and brightest employees and spark their creativity, spur economic development, and improve the quality of life for all in the community."

In more intangible terms, the arts have inspired, informed, entertained, and enlightened millions of people. They have earned New Jersey a national reputation for excellence and have become a source of pride and positive identity for our state.

The arts also have become more responsive to pressing social issues that directly and indirectly affect us all. The report prepared by New Jersey's Literacy in the Arts Task Force testifies to this phenomenon. It states, "Since 1983, America has been engaged in the most serious and most sustained push for school renewal in its history. Our goal as a nation has been to enrich the schools and strengthen our competitive advantage in world markets . . . the arts teach self-discipline, problem-solving, and creativity that are essential to achieving success — not only in school, but in the workplace, too."

Through the arts, we are able to reach people and solve problems in innovative ways; the arts offer fresh approaches. As Abraham

Maslow wrote, "If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail." For example, Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey, in association with the New Jersey Department of Corrections, uses playwriting to teach juvenile offenders how to read and write. In Hudson County, the Jersey City Museum organizes after-school workshops for "latch-key" children. Further south, in Camden, the Stedman Art Gallery reaches out to children, including those who are mentally and physically challenged, from both the inner city and rural areas, integrating the visual arts into their school curricula.

A touring theater ensemble, Hotline, developed by the Arts Foundation of New Jersey, offers teenage audiences the opportunity to gain help and information about alcoholism, AIDS, teenage pregnancy, suicide, and substance abuse. Whole Theatre in Montclair reaches out to New Jersey's children and young adults through *Thunder in the Light*, a professional, multiracial theater company which aims to "enrich and empower disadvantaged populations." The Council's January meeting will focus on the efforts of this company.

These examples represent just a sampling of the many ongoing programs that take a holistic approach to the role of the arts in our society. If we look for areas in which the arts and social concerns converge, we will have a broad-based coalition that recognizes the value the arts bring to our lives. As we face increasingly difficult problems afflicting our society, and as competition for financial resources intensifies, we have an even greater urgency to articulate the fundamental role of the arts. Together we must share, in a compelling way, what many of us know from experience and in our hearts: From combatting illiteracy to promoting urban renewal to overcoming cultural barriers, the

arts have the power to change landscapes and lives.

This is both an exciting and challenging time for the arts in New Jersey. The Council looks forward to forging new collaborations among all sectors and to creating accessible opportunities for all citizens of the state, so that everyone may enjoy the cultural resources in which we take great pride. ▲



*Elizabeth G. Christopherson*

*Elizabeth Good Christopherson of Harding Township, New Jersey, was appointed to the board of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts (NJSCA) in March 1982; she was elected chairman by her peers in July 1989.*

*Her commitment to the state's cultural life has been ongoing. Prior to joining the Council, Ms. Christopherson served as executive director of the Arts Council of Suburban Essex. Her two long-standing interests in promoting*

*arts education and supporting both emerging and established arts organizations led to her serving as vice chairman and chairman of the NJSCA's Grants and Bylaws Committees, and as a member of the NJSCA's Executive and Arts Education Committees.*

*She also served as chairman of the Council's first Policy and Planning Committee which developed the agency's first five-year plan, initiated the first Arts in Focus conference, and helped design the Artistic Focus funding program to promote New Jersey's premiere arts groups.*

*In addition to her responsibilities as NJSCA chairman, Ms. Christopherson continues to devote her time and talent to several other arts organizations in the state. She currently sits on the Board of Trustees of Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey. She is a commissioner of the New Jersey Motion Picture and Film Commission, and a member of the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation, the Ethnic Advisory Council (ex-officio), and the National Federation of Presswomen.*

*A native of New Jersey, Ms. Christopherson received her Bachelor of Arts from Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts, with a concentration in Chinese history, language, and sociology. ▲*

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The New Jersey State Council on the Arts  
4 North Broad Street  
CN 306  
Trenton, New Jersey 08625  
609 292 6130

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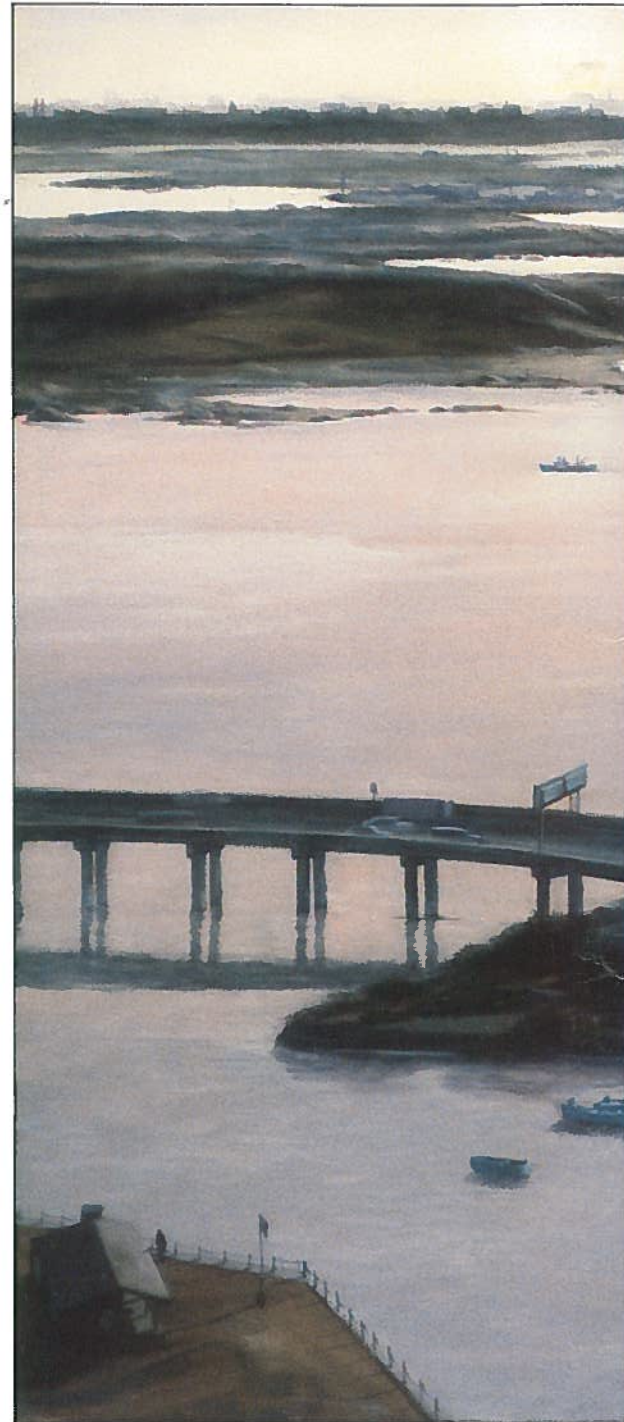
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