

## INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

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FROM: JM

DATE: November 24, 1954

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COMMENTS: I am not confident that we are yet ready for a general program or a panel. Experience at City Center and Louisville is still too uncertain. Before any general proposition I should think we need to try on an ad hoc basis assistance to at least two or three more organizations outside New York City. CAF

Special carding

SUBJECT: Ways of supporting organizations in the performing arts

I think there are ways in which the RF could systematically and advantageously consider support for organizations concerned with the performing arts, notably music, including opera, drama and the dance. As a basis for further discussion, let me outline some of the possibilities I see. Throughout, two considerations are uppermost: first, the Foundation should not get involved in continuing support over more than a few years; second, as RF support diminishes, self-support should increase, desirably, of course, to the point of being total.

The ruling principle is that which has worked so well in the British Arts Council, essentially underwriting. Consideration might be in two stages.

First, it would be necessary to determine the eligibility of the organization in question, primarily, at this point, in terms of the quality of its work and the importance of its contribution to the general artistic life of the country, i.e., in public appreciation. In this stage of consideration, there are evident alternatives. We could either make our own inquiries on these scores to persons in a position to know and use their opinions to check our own judgments; or we could set up more or less informally a panel of advisers. Personally, I am a bit drawn to the second alternative on the ground that any such panel would have to weigh a number of proposals on a more or less competitive basis. Of course, if we followed the first alternative, we should be doing this ourselves. In any case, a panel of advisers could do no more than recommend eligibility, since final eligibility would have to be determined by us on these two counts - and others.

Second, final eligibility should hinge on financial considerations. The key question would be: Can RF aid in the form of underwriting during a short maximum period bring the organization to or toward self-support? This is something with which the DH officers would themselves have to wrestle.

When the eligibility of an organization had been determined, assistance, in my mind, should take the form of making available to it over the stipulated period of years a maximum amount, it being understood from the outset that this was all the organization in question could expect to derive from the RF. The maximum amount should be determined by the DH officers with several considerations in mind. First, how would the organization in question utilize more working capital to build toward self-support? For example, by more ambitious programming in a given year, which might attract a wider public; by a more vigorous campaign for working capital from other

sources levered by RF matching requirements; or even by a well-conceived and probably productive campaign for memberships, sponsors, etc.?

I can think of some possible provisions which would assure economy and effectiveness in the use of RF funds, particularly on the underwriting principle. The RF could insist from the outset that its funds were there as additional working capital and in the sense of giving the organization during this period the means of doing a little more speculation in its operations than would otherwise be possible. Thus, if a fair estimate showed that a given organization needed underwriting to the amount of, say, \$50,000 to work out its plan for working toward self-support, some provision might be worked out that any of this fairly estimated total that remained at the end of the three-year period would then become an outright grant to the organization to remain in it as working capital. In other words, by this arrangement a balance would be struck between plausible speculation and long-range stabilization. I suspect that there are other formulae that could be adduced, but perhaps this is enough for a starter.

Just to make this a bit more real, let me mention briefly two or three organizations that might readily be regarded as eligible.

The American Chamber Opera Society is now doing well in a limited way (four New York concerts, four in Brooklyn, a few in universities) in bringing into public appreciation lesser-known but worthy earlier operas. With a certain flow of gifts, it is making ends meet and financing the necessary research. My guess is that with more working capital over a short period of years this organization might find a very much larger audience and start stabilizing its activities.

A second organization, likewise in New York, is Pro Musica Antiqua, which is doing a similar job for lesser-known instrumental music.

Another New York organization might well be the Poetry Center at the YMHA, which has done very well in developing an audience for poetry readings.

I mention these three examples nearby because one could virtually predict ~~that~~ their eligibility on grounds of quality and of the importance of their contribution, and because one can guess that this formula for support would pretty well apply in each instance.

*Jm*

J.M.

JM:MEN