

Special coding

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music

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

FROM: RWJ

DATE: June 29, 1962

TO:

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LCD		LCD
KWT		KWT
CMH RXC		CMH
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COMMENTS:

Pertinent to discussion of future HSS plans in the arts.

I suggest you share this with CMH, RXC, GF & BRC. It may be something we can discuss this week or early in September.

JUN 29 1962

SUBJECT: Music

After some reflection on the question of what the Foundation ought to be doing in music in the United States, I can report that it is easier to think of things we ought not to be doing but a good deal more difficult to identify promising opportunities for effective action in this field. Here, then, are some preliminary comments which may be useful in stimulating staff discussion and further study.

Let us begin with some of the things we ought not to be engaged in. As I understand it, since the beginning of our arts program we have been chiefly concerned with two things. First, we have been interested in encouraging new creative work on the sound premise that any art form, if it is to thrive, must be alive and growing. Second, we have sought ways for widening the economic support for the arts since in the United States today broad public support based on broad public interest seems to be the key to any ultimate artistic prosperity.

In pursuit of this first goal we have done a number of things in the field of music. Perhaps most notable at the time was the Louisville commissioning series but there have been other projects along the same pattern - grants to enable new music to be written and performed in public and through recordings. It is very difficult to judge the effectiveness of these commissioning programs because it is difficult to know what would have happened if the Foundation had not done what it did. Suffice it to say, however, that in the nine years since the Louisville experiment was begun, there has been a great deal of activity involving new commissions, a broadening of repertory in recorded music, and a somewhat more liberal programming policy on the part of symphony orchestras. As far as foundation activity is concerned, the Ford Foundation has instituted a major program in the performing arts including the commissioning of a wide variety of new music. Judging by its continued activity, the Ford Foundation seems persuaded that commissioning of new works is a useful device. I am not so sure, partly because I have not been generally impressed by the commissions in the Louisville and other series, and partly because many of the works presented obviously had been written long before they had been solicited and were merely being dusted off for the occasion. In any case, I see no profit in the Foundation pursuing the commissioning of new music. Good or bad, the original idea seems to have caught on, there is ample foundation activity and interest, avant-garde composition appears to be thriving, and it is time we moved on to something else.

Our efforts in the field of broadening the base of financial support have been much less spectacular and, on the whole, of an influence difficult to judge. Small grants have been made to the end of improving management practises of symphony orchestras through such devices as management training, studies of orchestral finance and fund raising, experiments in cooperative management facilities, and the development of organization manuals. Larger sums for the work of Young Audiences and Pro Musica have been successful in strengthening and extending the activities of those organizations but their long-range influence is difficult to assess. In any event I doubt that this type of activity needs to be pursued further. The projects we have supported certainly have had no major effect on the chronic problem of operatic and orchestral deficits; moreover, judging from the response to a recent American Symphony Orchestra League poll dealing with the question of government subsidy, there appears to be growing sentiment among musical organizations that some form of federal, state, or municipal subsidy is the only sensible solution. In the light of a history of long-standing and growing orchestral deficits, this might have been considered self-evident from the start, and organizations in the performing arts regarded much as we look upon hospitals and schools - very much needed and wanted but not necessarily to be supported through direct purchase of the product. There are, however, one or two aspects of this question to which I would like to return a bit later.

When we come to somewhat specialized fields such as opera, chamber music, and choral music, once again I see no useful role for the Foundation. The Ford commissioning program, which includes these categories, is far more extensive in scope than anything we could attempt; general problems of operatic organizations are well beyond our resources and wisdom; and our explorations of the choral music field a few years ago left us perplexed as to what we could possibly do to what ultimate advantage in this vast area.

The country appears to be well supplied with conservatories and music schools. I see no immediate role for the Foundation in their development.

Neither can I envision any effective action for us in the field of jazz which has its devotees and which seems capable of carrying on experimentation with their support.

A substantial proportion of our aid in recent years has been related to the interaction of different musical cultures. This has involved fellowships, grants in aid, travel grants, and appropriations largely designed to enable composers, performers, and music schools in the United States to familiarize themselves with non-Western music, and to introduce Western musical practise and theory to other parts of the world. Although benefit has derived from this activity as far as American music is concerned - witness the work of composers like Henry Cowell, Alan Hovhaness, Paul Bowles, and Lou Harrison - my impression is that the Foundation has pursued this interest principally for its effect on musical activity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Presumably we will continue to look for opportunities in this area but with an eye on its value for the newly developing countries rather than for its effect in the United States.

Having tried to dispose of some of the areas in which I see no prospect for immediate Foundation activity, I would like to turn to one or two things which may merit further exploration. I say exploration because we have not looked into them with any thoroughness as yet, but I do feel they offer interesting possibilities which, so far as I know, no foundation or other agency has investigated.

First, I think there are possibilities for encouraging and extending the range of musical activity in selected communities across the country in connection with the arts council movement. It seems fairly clear that some form of government assistance to the arts is on its way and I, for one, think this can be a healthy development not likely to involve the dire consequences usually associated with it. Whatever the degree and kind of government help, however, it will not cover all contingencies and there will remain ample possibility for individual private initiative. We might wish therefore to explore means for helping in the coordination of the activities of arts councils and community performing arts organizations to the end of increasing the total of those activities including the programming of music. For example, while visiting Minneapolis-Saint Paul some months ago, I was impressed by the potentialities for expanding the work of the Minneapolis Symphony. First, it was apparent that once the Guthrie Theatre began operations Minneapolis-Saint Paul was likely to develop as a major summer tourist attraction. The Symphony, which now has a regular fall-winter season, would be able to operate a summer concert series if it could air condition its hall. Moreover, it appeared that the members of the Symphony were not being utilized as effectively as they might have been were there more closely coordinated planning with other performing arts organizations in the area. For example, there seemed to be possibilities for the use of incidental music in connection with drama, and for special concerts in museums, as well as for collaboration with the Saint Paul opera. Finally, no effort had been made to bring the orchestra into working association with the University of Minnesota music school - a loss of income for orchestral members and a loss of professional teaching and demonstration talent for the University. Situations such as I found in Minneapolis-Saint Paul doubtless exist elsewhere, each with its own peculiar set of problems and circumstances. Through ad hoc study a whole range of communities might be benefited by bringing them to a fuller use of their resources in the arts, in this instance with particular reference to music. Each local situation would necessarily call for a tailor-made solution but the total, if imaginatively conceived and carefully executed, could become an important step in the encouragement of the arts in America subsequent to Foundation interest and activity already apparent in our help to Lincoln Center.

Several leading orchestras have this don't they?

Related to the above question is the matter of the 52-week orchestral year which we have discussed with Helen Thompson once or twice and which may hold the germ of an important advance in orchestral financing and scheduling. Briefly this involves the hiring of performers on a yearly basis much as the ordinary person is hired for a job. A weekly salary is paid throughout the year in return for which the musician provides the orchestra with 40 hours of his time. This would enable the orchestra management to plan a whole range of activities from subscription symphony concerts to special performances of ad hoc groups for weddings, church suppers, picnics, and the like. It would still give the enterprising musician ample free time to engage in teaching and other extracurricular activities. Hopefully, in the hands of resourceful management, it would increase the total use of musical resources and expand the total income of the musicians in the community. The viability of this approach has never been tested or even studied, as far as I know, but it has been given the blessing of the musicians' union so that no complications appear to lie in that direction. I think we should look at it further.

Beyond this, we should try, through some sort of terminal assistance to the American Symphony Orchestra League, to stabilize and to insure the continuity of our program for conductor training which the League has been sponsoring for several years. This has already received considerable discussion in principle by Foundation officers and need not be dealt with further here.

Finally, although this does not fit exactly into a statement dealing with musical activity in the United States, I feel we should continue to search for some formula designed to give both institutional permanence and the opportunity to perform extensively across the country to what is clearly the standout performing arts organization we have in America today - the City Center Ballet.

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