

THIRD NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EXCHANGE OF PERSONS

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Report of Workshop # 1 - 3: ARTS: PERFORMING

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The following major points were brought out in discussion at the above meeting: The Government's, or at least the State Department's interest in International Exchange of the performing arts springs primarily from their usefulness as aids to diplomatic relations. The Government's activities are divided into two principal groups:

1. Academic exchange, including Fulbright Scholarships, Leaders/Specialists and similar programs which are well established and are operated generally on a reciprocal basis.
2. The President's Special International Program for Cultural Presentations (a very new and courageous Departure in America) whose activity is at present limited to "export" of American performers only. The purposes of the President's Program are to demonstrate our cultural achievements through on-stage performances and to further understanding of the nature of Americans through off-stage contacts.

The problems in the administration of this program stem from the limited resources available and the difficulty in satisfying the very varied requirements of the different American diplomatic posts in the many parts of the world. However, the emphasis is placed always upon sending only the best, and in this policy the State Department, the American National Theatre and Academy (as professional administrators), and the American Embassies abroad, are all agreed.

The reports of the performing artists who had been on the President's Program emphasized the value of the off-stage contacts and the fact that even if the artistic "language" (be it music, dance or speech) may be unfamiliar, foreign audiences do not fail to recognize true art and to appreciate the great artist. The by-products of such tours were also mentioned, including the continuing contacts between the Americans and the foreign colleagues whom they come to know in the course of the tours; also, the resultant travel of foreign students and artists to America stimulated by their exposure to the American performers.

It was pointed out that it is important not only to send American performers abroad but to insist that they must include in their repertoire examples of the work of American composers, choreographers, and authors, and that if we are to have qualified artists for International Exchange, we must have support of the arts at

home to develop them.

Confusion sometimes exists abroad about the relative standing of student artists and mature performers, and it is important that our foreign friends be aware that we do not consider every student who goes abroad as an accomplished and distinguished example of his profession.

Attention was called to the need for finding aid to encourage participation of competent young artists in international competition, particularly music. Qualified people are frequently reluctant to chance the bad effect on their careers of not winning, and for those who are interested, funds are not available. On the other hand, anyone who can pay the fare has the right to enter as an American contestant. It was suggested that professional judges select the best qualified candidates for each competition and that funds be secured to support them. This would emphasize "the best foot forward" approach rather than "catch-as-catch can".

It was also pointed out that official support of the arts--and especially performing arts--in the United States has had to wait upon political necessity which has now forced us to recognize the usefulness of this new approach in the international diplomatic field. The recent rapid development of numerous Government activities in the arts has now brought concern for coordinating these activities. The first step has been the appointment of a Special Assistant to the Secretary of State, and a permanent post of Secretary of State for Cultural Affairs has been proposed. We will have to recognize the necessity of choosing between "budget worship" and the need for using this new tool in the national interest.

The operation of the President's Program under the professional administration of the American National Theatre and Academy was explained, with special reference to ANTA's responsibilities as judge of the artistic qualification of projects, as intermediary between the Government and the artists, and as manager of the touring arrangements. Although there has been very little publicity about this work, it has been successful in stimulating in America an increased appreciation of the importance of our artists and the need for supporting them at home.

It was further said that while foundations and corporations had long taken an interest in assisting educational exchange, they were only beginning now to participate in performing arts activities. Since the Government's support is presently limited to "export", there is an especially open field for private enterprise on the "import" side of the program. This activity would have not only the idealistic purpose of acquainting the American public with a variety of foreign artists not able to make their way commercially in America, but would also encourage the opening of doors in countries abroad which have been closed or are now closing to American artists because of the lack of reciprocal interest--as they interpret our failure to book their performers in America.

The use of young, unestablished artists in the President's Program was mentioned and it was explained that, although approved in principle, the present funds and other resources available made it necessary to be highly selective. The first choice must light upon the greatest artists we have produced, although in an enlarged program it would be desirable to demonstrate our cultural development at other levels.

The chief recommendation which might be drawn from the discussion would be that--whether from private or public resources--materially increased funds are necessary to make our country's exchange program in the performing arts fully effective

through sizeable enlargement of the scope of the "export" portion and through establishment of a reciprocal "import" phase. The recognition of this need on the part of the Government depends upon the education of the American people, who in turn are slow to get the information since the limited funds now available do not allow for publicity. Therefore, the allotment of additional funds and, as a preliminary condition to that allotment, the wider understanding of the nature and importance of the performing arts exchange program are basic requirements. This should be achieved through a program of education and publicity designed to reach the voting public. If the need and value are recognized nationally, the support--public or private--will be forthcoming.

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