

The Performing Arts in a New Era. By Kevin F. McCarthy, Arthur Brooks, Julia Lowell, and Laura Zakaras. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001. 137 p. Paperback. ISBN 0-8330-3041-8. \$20 US

A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts. By Kevin F. McCarthy and Kimberly Jinnett. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001. 112 p. Paperback. ISBN 0-8330-3027-2. \$15 US

In recent years, our performing arts have often appeared to be in a state of free fall. To the optimistic among us, this is only a period of transition. Nevertheless, a 2001 report Canada Council report noted a significant decrease in public funding of major arts organizations in the latter part of the 1990s, coinciding with an overall decline in attendance. The financing troubles of many of our orchestras is only a symptom of an ailment touching at the roots of the performing arts in Canada. In this environment, the two volumes considered here offer a timely injection of new ideas on government policy and arts administration.

These new publications signal the first foray into arts policy and administration for the RAND Corporation. This non-profit think tank, the name of which was coined from the term “research and development,” was established in 1946 and is now best known for its studies of social issues. The two studies considered here were funded by Pew Charitable Trusts and the Wallace-Reader’s Digest Funds, and headed by Kevin F. McCarthy.

The goal of *The Performing Arts in a New Era* was “to assist us in bringing new and useful information to the policy debate about the contributions and needs of the cultural sector at the national, state, and local levels” (iii). Relying on existing research, it considers commercial, professional non-profit and volunteer (amateur) sectors of the performing arts.

The scope of the study is wide-ranging, considering high, popular, and folk arts –theatre, opera, dance, and music– in both live and recorded forms. The objective is to better understand how these arts have changed since the 1970s and to predict where they might be headed. The authors concede that there is still inadequate data on the

volunteer sector and on the effects of digital technologies, and devote much of their attention to understanding who participates and why.

The study’s predictions will hold few surprises for North American arts administrators. It claims that we can expect a weakening of the distinction between the non-profit and for-profit sectors and a future where the major divisions “will be along the lines of big versus small arts organizations, and firms that target broad versus niche markets” (107). This is already taking place in the area of audio and video recording, where a few conglomerates dominate the marketplace, focussing on mass entertainment and leaving “marginal” art forms (like classical music) to independent labels.

The situation in the arts looks increasingly like that of the sports world. The study predicts that the number of professional performing arts organizations will contract, especially in mid-size cities, while the number of amateur or semi-professional organizations in smaller communities will grow. The artists themselves can expect to see a still wider salary gap between the average performer and the superstar.

Some aspects of the study, such as sources of funding, apply almost exclusively to the United States. The methods organizations choose to address their funding problems are, however, applicable to the Canadian context. In their discussion of public policy on the arts, the study’s authors contend that governments should play an important role in funding – a view that is probably more widely held in Canada than in the United States.

The Performing Arts in the New Era should help stimulate discussion on public policy and a reassessment of these policies is long overdue in

Canada. Recently we have seen the Quebec government unveil plans for new concert hall for the Montreal Symphony Orchestra and the Ontario government provide an infusion of funds into Toronto's arts community. While both decisions are arguably long overdue, they seem erratic and piecemeal efforts at sustaining the arts rather than the application of coherent, long-term policies. And these are the good examples. In British Columbia, the province's belt-tightening has squeezed the arts particularly hard. As the Canada Council study indicated, current funding practices in Canada are insufficient to sustain our major arts organizations. If these institutions are to survive, let alone thrive, their importance to our society will have to be reaffirmed.

A recent study by Statistics Canada has provided some data on Canadians' interests in the arts. Interestingly, it showed significant differences in the interests of French- and English-speaking Canadians. Anglophones read more books than their francophone compatriots and attend the theatre more often, especially to see Broadway-style shows. Francophones, on the other hand, are more likely attend a symphony concert or a festival. The logical next step would be to discover the reasons behind these findings.

Audience development is now called building participation, and is the subject of *A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts*. This study offers a framework consisting of "a behavio[u]ral model for understanding how people decide to participate, an integrative approach for organizations to use when implementing the

model, and a set of guidelines to apply to this task" (1). It examines why individuals decide to participate in the arts and how arts associations can influence that decision. Data was gathered from the existing literature, site visits to 13 arts institutions, and a telephone survey of 102 arts organizations in the United States.

In their findings, the authors present a behavioural model of participation, set out "guidelines for developing effective strategies and tactics in conjunction with the model" (6), and discuss "why effective participation building requires an integrative approach" (6). If the findings contain few revelations, the authors' systematic guidelines will make valuable reading for volunteer administrators and provide new ideas for experienced professionals. The behavioural model, "predicated on the assumption that one must understand how the decision-making process actually works in order to influence people's behavio[u]r" (23), is applicable to any national context. Given the need for better understanding of our audiences, this book should become essential reading for arts administrators.

Both volumes can be downloaded or ordered from the RAND Web site (www.rand.org), where one will also find two related publications: *The Performing Arts: Trends and Their Implications* (2001) and *Examining Why People Participate in the Arts* (1999).

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