Marketplace of Ideas: But First, The Bill

A Personal Commentary On American and European Cultural Funding

By William Osborne

As an American who has lived in Europe for the last 24 years, I see on a daily basis how different the American and European economic systems are, and how deeply this affects the ways they produce, market and perceive art. America advocates supply-side economics, small government and free trade – all reflecting a belief that societies should minimize government expenditure and maximize deregulated, privatized global capitalism. Corporate freedom is considered a direct and analogous extension of personal freedom. Europeans, by contrast, hold to mixed economies with large social and cultural programs. Governmental spending often equals about half the GNP. Europeans argue that an unmitigated capitalism creates an isomorphic, corporate-dominated society with reduced individual and social options. Americans insist that privatization and the marketplace provide greater efficiency than governments. These two economic systems have created something of a cultural divide between Europeans and Americans.

Germany’s public arts funding, for example, allows the country to have 23 times more full-time symphony orchestras per capita than the United States, and approximately 28 times more full-time opera houses. [1] In Europe, publicly funded cultural institutions are used to educate young people and this helps to maintain a high level of interest in the arts. In America, arts education faces constant cutbacks, which helps reduce interest.

The Rise of Neo-Liberalism As a Cultural Paradigm

The divisions between American and European arts-funding models are best understood if one briefly considers the changes that have evolved in U.S. economic policy over the last 30 years. Except for the military, there has been continual political pressure to reduce government. Even though the government’s budgets have continued to increase, arts funding has been particularly vulnerable to cuts. By 1997, the NEA’s funding was close to half its former high, and has only slowly regained some of its lost ground.
University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman stressed the value of limited taxation and unregulated global markets in the 1970s. Many influential members of the political and economic elite embraced his views. With Ronald Reagan’s election, Friedman’s proposals became established U.S. policy. Friedman’s philosophy of limited government and free trade was seen as an extension of Adam Smith’s 18th century market-liberalism, and is technically referred to by many economists as neo-liberalism. [2]

Some of neo-liberalism’s most important tenets are cutting public expenditure for social services such as health insurance, education and cultural programs. This is consistent with its other policies, such as the deregulation of the market to allow the free flow of capital and limit restrictions caused by issues such as environmentalism and job safety; privatization of state-owned enterprises such as schools, parks, toll highways, hospitals, utilities, and water supplies; and the replacement of traditional concepts such as “the public good” or “community” with values emphasizing “individual responsibility.” (We thus see that in its technical economic meanings, neo-liberalism differs from the common American political usage of the term “liberal.” Neo-liberalism refers instead to the historical meanings of market-liberalism as freed from government intervention or involvement.)

In its purest form, America’s neo-liberalism would suggest that cultural expression that doesn't fit in the marketplace doesn't belong at all. For the arts, the alternative has been to maintain a relatively marginalized existence supported by gifts from corporations, foundations and the wealthy. A system similar to a marginal and elitist cultural plutocracy evolves. This philosophy is almost diametrically opposed to the tradition of large public cultural funding found in most of Europe’s social democracies.

The Hip-Con Argument

Through the influence of neo-liberalism, it is becoming increasingly common in America to suggest that classical music must enter the marketplace in order to survive. One of the most interesting and nuanced proponents of this view is Greg Sandow, who writes for The Wall Street Journal. He argues that classical music must creatively accept the structures of the marketplace. He notes that even the fringes of the mass market are enormous. If artists can't fit into America’s relatively unmitigated capitalist
system, they are to be blamed, at least in part, for their lack of imagination and relevance. Alternatives, such as public funding for the arts, are left largely unmentioned. [3]

The general correlations between Mr. Sandow’s ideas and neo-liberalism are fairly obvious. Government is to be reduced and an unregulated market furthered. His view could also stem from his musical background. He worked as a pop music critic for *Entertainment Weekly* before moving to *The Wall Street Journal*. In his writings, he moves freely between pop and classical.

The approach of leveling pop and classical into the marketplace is both aesthetically hip and financially conservative. The younger Wall Street might even define business as an extension of the freewheeling, libertarian ethos of rock and roll. In this sense, they might be referred to as hip-cons. Rock and roll and its many pop variants are the mainstay of the corporate music industry’s income. Rock also accurately reflects something of the American business spirit of enterprise and freedom.

**The Danger of Conformity in Mass Markets**

From its beginnings, rock revolted against stifling convention and hypocrisy. Rock, however, is a form of rebellion carried by the mass media, which leaves it characterized by internal conflicts. Up front we might have a socially rebellious Bruce Springsteen, but behind him stands a massive music industry deeply rooted in the Wall Street establishment, whose purpose is not to formulate social criticism but to make money.

Mass media pop is thus distinguished by its ability to create a ready, packaged (and often benign) form of social criticism that raises protest only within the strictures the mass market will accept. This characteristic, however, must be carefully disguised or the impression of hipness is weakened. Big business is the dirty secret in the background. The current crisis with file sharing is an example of the troubles the music industry can have when its business side becomes too visible.

The best argument for pop music actually leading a social rebellion would probably be found in the '60s, but even then elements of conformity were apparent. The massive criticism of John Lennon’s comment that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus Christ was a clear illustration. Antiwar songs
and drugs were socially acceptable, but presumed insults to Christianity were not. Some recent examples of how pop must conform to the strictures of the mass market are Springsteen’s backdown from his criticisms of the New York police for brutality, the attacks on Sinead O’Conner after her criticisms of the Pope (which contributed to the end of her career), the delayed release of Madonna’s antiwar album in spite of her carefully parsed image as a fearless rebel, and the boycott and burning of the Dixie Chicks’ CDs after their criticisms of Bush and the Iraq war.

Mass pop thrives on controversy, but it must be carefully gauged to create notoriety and not shut down the show. More variation exists on the market’s fringes, but the degree is generally proportional to the size of the audience. The more unusual the stance or music, the smaller the market. The financial viability of the fringe markets thus depends on having a limited supply of artists and a specialized public for a particular view or aesthetic.

The dangers of artists being forced into conformity are apparent. Given the volatility of mass markets, Wall Street has a very particular ethos. This was clearly summarized by Ray Kroc, one of the founders of McDonald’s, who was angered by some of his franchises: “We have found out ... that we cannot trust some people who are nonconformists. We will make conformists out of them in a hurry. ... The organization cannot trust the individual; the individual must trust the organization.” The very nature of a mass market is conformity in both product and customer. [4]

Mr. Sandow’s suggestion that classical composers should tap into the fringes of the pop market is thus interesting, but of limited value. The fringes are indeed larger than the usual audience for classical music, but they could still only support a limited amount of experimental music. The industry is not in a stable condition, the audiences would be splintered, and the reactions of the public fickle and highly unpredictable, especially for kinds of avant-garde classical music they had never even heard before. Tapping into even the fringes of the pop industry would likely require elements of conformity that might not suit the wildly varied and experimental nature of modern classical music.

Even traditional types of classical music that have tried to be more commercial are often criticized for their bad taste. David Lister, Media and Culture Editor for The Guardian, created an interesting summary of some examples:
"The members of the string quartet Bond, who were trained classically, perform in skimpy tops, tight trousers and stilettos. Sometimes they are accompanied on stage by nubile dancers and a rock band, and play music with a dance beat. British chart compilers said their debut album was pop music and banned it from their classical chart but it went to the top of the American version."

"The 23-year-old violinist Vanessa-Mae can probably claim first rights on emerging from the sea in a suitably dripping outfit to promote her skills in performing a concerto. When still a teenager she used the wet look in one of her early promotional videos."

"One critic said of Russell Watson [a singer]: ‘His ability is reliant on massive amplification, and I very much doubt whether he has the stamina (or the desire) to sing an entire role in an opera.’"

"The 'Gregorian Babes' [to] whom Sir Thomas refers to [are] a desperate attempt to manufacture a classical version of the Spice Girls. The group went to the top of the classical charts, but their medieval madrigals were described by one critic as ‘estuary Latin’." 

In America, the neo-liberal paradigm has already given a corporate atmosphere to our culture that is stronger than ever before in history, and stronger than in any other country in the world. So why are we being asked to go even farther in this direction? Generally speaking, if any one system of support for artists becomes isomorphic, artistic freedom suffers. Varied systems help guarantee freedom of artistic expression. This is why Europeans have a vibrant and healthy system of decentralized public funding to provide an alternative to the commercialization of culture.

**The Rise of Crossover and Its Hip-Con Public**

Even though the yuppies of the late '70s and '80 never represented a clearly defined movement, they might be seen as interesting examples of the hip-con spirit. They were regarded as politically conservative and preoccupied with moving toward the centers of power – often with little regard for the implications. They were a counter-reaction to the far more extreme “tune-in, turn-on, drop-out” philosophy of the ‘60s. The yuppies of Manhattan were often well educated, ambitious and intelligent. The “downtown” classical
music scene became one of the chic places for the more sophisticated to be seen. The stiff, incestual establishment serialism of the uptown may have been square and alien to many hip-cons, but some of the downtowners were incorporating elements of popular music that they could relate to as cool.

For the most part, the downtown artists who incorporated elements of pop were not anything like hip-cons. They were (and still are) solidly on the political left. They knew they had been able to take advantage of the fringes of the mass market, but given the diversity of avant-garde musical expression, they generally recognized that this model was limited and suited to only a narrow spectrum of modern classical music. It was only much later, after neo-liberalism had become more established, that their work was used to support an argument that classical music should be moved to a stronger market paradigm.

Some of the most notable crossover artists were the Bang-On-A-Can All Stars, who rose to prominence with programs that included works emulating elements of the tasteful, semi-popular new-age music of Brian Eno. Programs by Laurie Anderson, such as “Home of the Brave,” were modeled on the format of rock concerts. Her song “O Superman” reached No. 2 on the British pop charts. John Zorn created collages using television cartoon music that was almost iconographic to a generation of young Americans. And the repetitive, rhythmic qualities of minimalist composers such as Reich and Glass attracted a generation brought up on rock. [5]

During the '50s and '60s, pop music had developed a central place in the American psyche. For the young people of the late '70s and '80s, a crossover with experimental forms of classical music was simply part of a quintessentially American milieu they did not even have to think about. And even though it was not a very conscious idea for the young hip-con public, the idea of widening the cultural influence of the marketplace fit the neo-liberal spirit that was a growing hallmark of the Reagan era. The musicians also seemed to be influenced. One of the most important aspects of cultural isomorphism is that artists often unconsciously adapt to and employ the larger social forces surrounding them.

One of the first writers to note the crossover forms being developed by the downtown composers was The New York Times music critic John Rockwell, who described some of the work in his 1983 book All American Music: Composition in the Late Twentieth Century. He later became a program
director for Lincoln Center’s summer festival. Partially through his influence, some members of the downtown began reaching more established midtown publics and a wider international audience.

Rockwell noted that once again the desire and ability to merge the aesthetic structures of classical and commercial was something distinctly American. What neither he nor anyone else anticipated, was that the crossover would eventually be used to support a claim that classical music and its modern composers should be more strongly shifted to the marketplace. Few understood the aesthetic, social, and economic implications of the evolving neo-liberal paradigm that was making American society and culture more isomorphic than ever. [6]

Europeans rejected most attempts in their own societies to merge commercial and classical music. Their cultures are not dominated by the mass media as in America, and they do not have the same innate relationship to pop. Given their more extensive cultural history and public arts funding, it is not surprising that Europeans hung on to (and were burdened by) more complex and historically continuous ideas of classical music. And above all, they continued to view forms of culture associated with the American mass media and corporatism as hegemonistic and potentially isomorphic, regardless of how hip they might seem.

The Increasing Political Division of Europe and America

In many respects, neo-liberalism is a manifestation of the suspicion toward government traditionally held by the American right – an ethos that contrasts strongly with Europe’s tradition of social democracies. During the '60s and '70s, however, a number of Republicans were still relatively strong supporters of the newly founded NEA. Support for the arts was still considered a part of traditional, conservative values. As the Republican Party moved increasingly to the right, the old cultured libertarian conservatives like Nelson Rockefeller or William F. Buckley moved to the background. By the '90s, mainstream libertarian conservatism seemed far less sophisticated. A new populist version with an openly bigoted crudeness along the lines of Rush Limbaugh had evolved. Rock, country western, and a kind of neo-liberal cowboy social Darwinism replaced Vivaldi’s “Four Seasons.”
Populist rightwing attacks on controversial artists such as Karen Finley, Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe were used to rationalize funding reductions for the NEA. Between 1992 and 1996 the agency’s budget was reduced by almost half – from $170 million to $97 million. Twenty categories of grants were abolished between 1990 and 1995. The Contemporary Arts Center of Cincinnati was indicted for pandering obscenity hours after the opening of the photography exhibit, Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment. In question were seven portraits, mostly of sadomasochistic acts. The partisan rhetoric of conservative politicians such as North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms raised suspicions of intimidation and censorship. And perhaps more important, the elimination of entire government agencies was a continuing theme of congressional rhetoric under Republican Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. The neo-liberal agenda of reducing government became part of the rationale for shutting down Mozart and Shakespeare along with Serrano.

Popular music also moved to meet the demands of a newly forming market on the right. Following on types of punk that incorporated a kind of tribal masculinism, by the 2000’s Eminem even metastasized black male anger into a hip-con white male anger. He endorsed, for example, extreme violence against women, but given the backlash of the '90s, this was within the strictures of the mass media’s pre-packaged forms of protest. These social statements were embraced by the music industry because the swing to a crude and somewhat bigoted form of libertarianism had made them widely accepted and provided the basis for a mass market. The racist implications in some of Eminem’s most recently revealed statements, however, are not widely accepted. We thus saw the industry that supports him quickly backpedaling.

Due to its internal tensions, being a hip-con became an increasingly difficult balancing act. White racial resentment, for example, is still difficult to define as hip. The hip-cons seemed to divide into two groups, one along the older yuppie model, and the newer along Eminem’s mean-right pattern. As early as 1992, many hip-cons had moved toward the saxophone-playing Bill Clinton and his more moderate conservatism, which included a crack down on crime. By the end of Clinton’s second term, 13% of all African-American men could not vote because they were in prison or had criminal records. The people whose music had laid the original foundations for hippingness were still strongly disenfranchised and vast numbers were still living in poverty and degradation.
After twenty years of neo-liberal Reaganomics, the political and cultural landscapes of Europe and America were farther apart than ever. The long-term forms of social democracy that Europeans might have used to approach the problems of massive racial ghettos could not even be considered. Hillary Clinton’s campaign for national health insurance -- which is a mainstay of European social policy -- failed miserably. George W. Bush was elected, and the dot.com economy collapsed. Fueled by recession, state governments began to slash or entirely eliminate arts budgets. America’s cultural institutions struggled to survive, many of them running up large deficits. The new American administration, which embraced neo-liberalism to an unprecedented degree, jeered at its traditional allies as “old Europe.”

An American Culture of Rationalization

With subtle psychological shifts that are almost impossible to deconstruct, the conflicted hip-con ethos of America became an increasingly complex network of rationalizations. The Prez plays the sax, so we’re still hip, aren’t we? If we listen to both Springsteen and Schönberg we must be egalitarian, right? Even white guys can rap, can’t they? Inside of 20 years we went from Miles Davis making obscene gestures to his white public, to a buttoned-down Wynton Marsalis playing in Lincoln Center. Many of jazz’s greats earlier in the century were firmly embraced by the white establishment, and not all jazz comes out of a spirit of protest. Nevertheless, some critics seemed to feel that the presentation of notably conservative jazz in Lincoln Center was another example of the white establishment conveniently presenting and appropriating only a specific spectrum of black culture. Both pop and jazz seemed to find a place in America’s culture of rationalization.

In many respects, hip-cons have come to represent the latest incarnation of the classic American ethos of being rebels without a cause. Listening to rock gives them a sense of breaking from the bourgeois middle and rejecting conformity to a system that is often vacuous and morally conflicted. The irony that the mass media is one of the largest manifestations of cultural isomorphism in the history of humanity is not considered.

In culturally isomorphic societies, thought is less and less likely to move outside a pre-configured set of paradigms. In the 20th century, for example,
we saw a culturally isomorphic essentialization of art in the "Gleichschaltung" of the Third Reich, in the Social Realism of the East Block, in the “Cultural Revolution” of Maoist China, and to an increasing extent in the mass media commercialization of culture in America. [7] Like the political divisions of the 20th century, these aesthetic orthodoxies reduced human expression to systemic concepts that tend toward the formulaic and reductionist. Since narrowed perspectives make it difficult to confront aspects of reality, a culture of self-referential rationalization evolves.

The European’s Defense of Communal Identity

So where does this leave the European view of America and its arts funding models today? To answer, it is important to note that continental Europeans often regard American music as a type of exotica – an art that embodies a radical departure from their own traditions. In Germany, for example, Ives, Bernstein, Cage, Reich, and laptop improvisers fit their desired image of the American spirit. Composers more in line with Germany’s still dominant forms of complex modernism, like Carter and Babbit, remain much less appreciated and performed.

Europeans thus especially appreciate the crossover forms that have become an American specialty, but they reject the argument that a commercial paradigm is an appropriate funding model for classical music. They question the breezily hip tones that tell us classical music must become commercially viable or go extinct. Rock or die? Is that the only real alternative? What does that mean for artistic integrity and the autonomy of human expression?

In the spirit of their mixed economies, Europeans would argue that many forms of artistic expression cannot be positioned or relativised within the mass market or its fringes. For them, culture must be communal and autonomous. They often see American culture as hegemonistic -- a totalizing and destructive assault on the humanistic, cultural and social structures they have worked so long and hard to create.

A general sense of the different perspectives concerning communal identity can be illustrated with an example now widely discussed in the States. Many Americans have seen how corporate-owned strip malls and Wal-Marts have deeply affected their cities and towns. The old downtown areas are
abandoned as customers move to corporate businesses on the edge of town. Communal identity and autonomy, which are an important part of cultural expression, are replaced with a relatively isomorphic corporatism.

Europeans struggle to maintain a different model. Most cities and towns have thousand year histories that are reflected in the architectural and other cultural treasures of their various municipal centers. They employ zoning laws and other regulations, as well as public education, to protect their cities from the Wal-Martization that would be caused by embracing American-styled neo-liberalism. Europeans have large department stores and the occasional K-Mart, but their influence is kept within balance. They would consider the losses to their cultural identity caused by corporate uniformity to be too great.

Europeans see Hollywood and America’s massive music industry in a similar way. They feel these institutions standardize culture into mass markets that reduce communal identity. Far from making music even more commercial, the European response has been to create a balance with public arts funding. In Germany, for example, cities with more than about 100,000 people often have a full-time orchestra, opera house, and theater company that are state- and municipally owned. A good deal of funding for these groups is set aside for new music. Europeans also administer this arts funding locally, and not from a remote Federal organization such as the NEA. [8] They are not only the recipients of mass culture; they express themselves according to their autonomous, local needs and prerogatives.

As a result, the European view is likely to reject a superficial form of postmodernism that presumes to flow with an exaggerated ease from rock to Brahms, as if distinctions between the production, marketing, and reception of commercial and classical music could be brushed aside. They know that the production costs for recording a five-piece rock band are far smaller and the audience vastly larger than for a recording of an opera that would require 200 to 400 people and reach an audience not even a tenth the size. They know that a festival for new orchestral music such as at Donaueschingen might have standing-room-only crowds year after year, but that such endeavors cannot be designed to make a profit. [9]

In Germany, classical recordings compete strongly against pop. This is not merely a matter of history or coincidence. Europeans use their local public cultural institutions to educate their children and this creates a wide
appreciation for classical music. The popularity is also based on a sense of communal pride. They support their local cultural institutions almost like they were sports teams. European society illustrates that music education leads to forms of creativity and autonomy that are often antithetic to mass media. The European view is not based on elitism or a dismissal of popular culture, but on an understanding that an unmitigated capitalism is not a seamless, all-encompassing paradigm - particularly when it comes to cultural expression.

**The Loss of Cultural Discourse in Isomorphic Systems**

Proponents of America’s neo-liberalism claim that alternatives to a singular cultural paradigm exist. In reality, the large majority of cultural offerings come from Manhattan and a few other cities, even though the country has 280 million people. Even the other boroughs of New York City, such as the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island would seem short of cultural offerings. And the situation is similar in many of our heartland cities.

International comparisons might illustrate this point. Germany, for example, has one full-time, year-round orchestra for every 590,000 people, while the United States has one for every 14 million (or 23 times less per capita.) Germany has about 80 year-round opera houses, while the U.S., with more than three times the population, does not have any. Even the Met only has a seven-month season. These numbers mean that larger German cities often have several orchestras. Munich has seven full-time, year-round professional orchestras, two full-time, year-round opera houses (one with a large resident ballet troupe,) as well as two full-time, large, spoken-word theaters for a population of only 1.2 million. Berlin has three full-time, year-round opera houses, though they may eventually have to close one due to the costs of rebuilding the city after reunification.

If America averaged the same ratios per capita as Germany, it would have 485 full-time, year-round orchestras instead of about 20. If New York City had the same number of orchestras per capita as Munich it would have about 45. If New York City had the same number of full-time operas as Berlin per capita it would have six. Areas such as Queens, Staten Island, and the Bronx would be nationally and internationally important cultural centers. The reality is somewhat different.
If America’s Northeastern seaboard had the same sort of orchestral landscape as Germany, there would be full-time, year-round professional orchestras (often in conjunction with opera houses) in Long Island, Newark, Jersey City, Trenton, Camden, Philadelphia, Wilmington, Baltimore, New Haven, Hartford, Springfield, Providence, and Boston. California would have about 60 full-time, year-round professional orchestras. Like Germany, the U.S. would suffer from a shortage of good classical musicians. There would be little unemployment for these artists. With that much creativity, it is unlikely Americans would stick to European repertoire and models. Even with half the German ratios, a starkly American musical culture would evolve that would likely change history.

It is also essential and informative to place these numbers in the context of the dismal social conditions in almost all major American cities, since these are areas where classical music would normally thrive. A recent article in *The New York Times*, for example, notes that Philadelphia has 14,000 abandoned buildings in a dangerous state of collapse, 31,000 trash-strewn vacant lots, 60,000 abandoned autos, and has lost 75,000 citizens in recent years. [10] Regions such as the south Bronx, Watts, East St. Louis and Detroit, just to name a few, show that Philadelphia is hardly an exception. The populations living in our dehumanizing ghettos are measured in the tens of millions. It seems very likely that the problems with arts funding in America are closely related to the same social forces that have caused the country to neglect its urban environments. This naturally leaves many Europeans wondering why America is so intent on exporting its economic and cultural models.

The problems of arts funding are seldom the topic of genuinely serious and sustained political discussion. The cultural and political system has become so isomorphic that most Americans do not even consider that alternatives could be created to institutions such as network television and Hollywood. With only one percent of the military’s $396 billion budget, we could have 132 opera houses lavishly funded at $30 million apiece. (That much funding would put them on par with the best opera houses in the world, and as noted, likely lead to forms of expression more distinctly American.)

The same sum could support 264 spoken-word theaters at $15 million each. It could subsidize 198 full-time, year-round world-class symphony orchestras at $20 million each. Or it could give 79,200 composers, painters and sculptors a yearly salary of $50,000 each. Remember, that’s only one
percent of the military budget. Imagine what five percent would do. These examples awaken us to the Orwellian realities of our country and how different it could be. Given our wealth, talent, and educational resources, we are losing our chance to be the Athens of the modern world.

We also see that cultural isomorphism leads to the suppression of political, social and cultural discourse. Discussions outside the neo-liberal paradigm are becoming increasingly rare. How astounding, for example, that a U.S. Senator recently gave a long interview for the American Music Center’s webzine, New Music Box, and not one question was asked or comment made about the NEA or any other form of public funding for the arts. Europeans would find this incomprehensible.

Another example of the loss of intelligent discourse is the discussion surrounding the current proposed $18 million increase for the NEA. This sum represents only seven-thousandths of one percent of the proposed 2005 U.S. budget, a number almost too infinitesimal to comprehend. And yet the topic is once again being opportunistically exploited as a political battering ram.

In Europe, by contrast, funding for the arts is a central platform of every major political party. Lively and varied artistic expression is considered one of the most important forums for national discourse. Politicians literally search for opportunities to speak about the arts because it is politically advantageous. The dialog is generally intelligent, meaningful, and carefully considered.

**Summary and Conclusion**

In review, we see that Europe’s funding traditions and models suggest several policies and administrative practices Americans might consider:

1. Europeans use public funding to provide alternatives to the marketplace for cultural expression. This reinforces freedom of artistic expression and deeply enriches their societies. America’s heavy reliance on the market as an arbiter of culture sometimes limits our options. Our government spends billions on other intellectual spheres, such as education, space exploration and scientific research, but we have seriously limited our cultural lives through a suspicion toward public arts funding.
2. European politicians avoid attacking the arts for populist and opportunistic political gains. This is a taboo that is seldom, if ever, broken and the perpetrators generally only discredit themselves. Few mainstream European politicians would make remarks such as North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms, who said, “The artists and the homosexuals ain’t seen nothing yet.” Europeans would find it absurd to eliminate almost half of a nation’s arts funding because of two or three marginalized avant-garde artists. After the traumas of both fascism and communism, Europeans realize how destructive the intimidation of artists is to the dignity and cultural identity of society. This no longer happens in Europe, and need not happen in America.

3. European arts funding is generally decentralized and administered mostly on the state and municipals levels. The NEA’s centralized funding makes it an easy target for populist political attacks. Europeans would also find it strange for a federal government to fund the arts in any specific way because it is so difficult at that level to have direct contact with the lives and work of artists and the communities they serve. The NEA and the states must continue to develop arts-funding models directly connected to cities, towns and regional communities.

4. Europeans use their cultural legacies to establish and assert their place in the world, often through extensive cultural diplomacy. American politicians should be reminded that Ella Fitzgerald, Leonard Bernstein and Louis Armstrong can often accomplish far more than an F-16, and for a tiny fraction of the costs, both economic and human. Given our talent, educational system, and wealth, we must renew our vision of how brightly our cultural light could shine.

5. Europeans combine arts education with the living presence of the performing arts within their communities. Classical music is far more relevant to young people when performing arts organizations are a highly present and esteemed part of their city or region. In America, the nearest genuinely professional full-time performing arts organization is often hundreds of miles away. America’s children should perceive the arts as part of their communities. And our more talented children should be able to think of the arts as a realistic career option, just as children in Europe do.

6. Even though Europeans often celebrate the lighter classics, they still stress classical musical for its inherent strengths. As the American
Symphony Orchestra League has noted, America has been trying to build publics by emphasizing pops (and cross-over) concerts since the 1960s. This has had a partially adverse effect through lowering the public’s expectations. Superficial programming is also increasingly influencing classical music radio stations. Through confidence in classical music’s inherent strengths, higher standards and expectations could be awakened.

7. Europeans view the city itself as the greatest and most complete expression of the human mind and spirit. Venice, Florence, Rome, Prague, Amsterdam, Dresden, Barcelona and Paris, just to name a few, are all embued with this ideal. Americans, by contrast, behave almost as if they have lost hope in their cities, as if they were dangerous and inhuman urban wastelands to be abandoned for the suburbs. This tacit assumption has had a profound but largely unrecognized effect on American political and cultural discourse. Classical music is one of the most urban of art forms. Its status will always be measured by the health and vibrancy of our cities. Ultimately, questions of arts funding will only be fully resolved when we recognize that the well-being of our cultural and urban environments are deeply interdependent.

Over the long term, these general understandings that Europeans have gained over centuries of experience could beneficially influence the political and cultural climate in America. It is not enough that people have freedom of speech; they must also have mechanisms for meaningfully expressing and debating it. Public arts funding is deeply valuable because it encourages societies to be diverse, intellectually alive, inquisitive and realistic. It furthers the discourse societies need to fully express their communal and national identity and place it in the rest of the world. It furthers our ability to heal and help. It furthers our well-being, freedom of expression, and pursuit of happiness. Public arts funding represents the deepest American ideals.

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ENDNOTES

As I note later, the U.S. does not have any year round opera houses. Even the Met only has a seven month season, but one can add up the partial seasons of the country’s few scattered companies in order to make a comparison. I gave the US a very generous estimate.

The philosopher, John Locke, first proposed the origins of liberalism in the 17th century. He argued that the purpose of law was to insure human rights through limiting the powers of monarchies. In his book, The Wealth of Nations, written in 1776, Adam Smith argued for a similar abolition of government intervention in the market place. Two forms of liberalism evolved: social-liberalism focusing on the protection of human rights, and market-liberalism emphasizing laissez-faire capitalism. Liberalism flourished in America since it did not have a monarchy to suppress it. Among the country’s founders, Thomas Jefferson stressed social-liberalism while James Madison stressed market-liberalism. In many respects, Madison’s vision prevailed. By the end of the 19th century, America was a major industrial power whose economy was largely dominated by unregulated monopolies. Huge dichotomies existed in the distribution of wealth, unions were suppressed, and issues such as job safety and public welfare were almost non-existent. After the economic collapse of the 1930s, the theories of John Maynard Keynes replaced America’s extreme market-liberalism. He argued that full employment is necessary for capitalism to grow, and that regulations are necessary to curtail abuses of the market. Governments and central banks intervened to implement his policies. Roosevelt’s social-liberalism was quickly dismantled in the anti-communist atmosphere after the Second World War, but social democracy continued in Europe and became a deeply embedded aspect of their societies. A brief attempt was made to revive social-liberalism under John F. Kennedy, but failed. By the 1980s neo-liberalism was accepted policy in the United States.

Even though the social democracies of Europe have been slow to embrace neo-liberalism, it is difficult for them to resist due to the integration of markets in global capitalism.

Mr. Sandow’s views are somewhat anti-modernist and reach instead for an aesthetic derived from his background in popular music. In his article “Access: Denied”, (Symphony, September-October 2003), he criticizes modernist music for its lack of accessibility, “Some modernist music seems really strange. Twelve-tone music, for example, inevitably […] comes off as abstract, creepy, and mechanical. What was Schoenberg doing, putting all the notes in arbitrary rows?” In “Why Classical Music Needs Rock & Roll” (published on his website), he writes, “Today, the musical roots of our culture aren't in folk songs. They're in rock, country, rhythm and blues -- the entire range of musical styles that typify pop music in the rock & roll era (even rap). Classical music won't seem natural in America until both composition and performance reflect that obvious fact.” In “Noise in New York” (Wall Street Journal, October 30, 2003), he
praises the Bang On A Can All-Stars who employ crossover elements from pop music. He describes the music of Michael Gordon and suggests, “A lot of people who've never heard this music would surely love it -- people, to start with, who listen to alternative pop. But how can they be reached? The future of classical composition might hang, at least in part, on the answer.” And in his article, “I’m Wolfgang, And I’ll Be Your Composer” (Wall Street Journal, August 27, 2002) he even suggests restaurants might hire classical composers to write background dinner music.

This does not mean that the music industry is alone in forcing artists to compromise their integrity. Academic composers often face an oppressive tenure system that is just as bad. And the European system of public funding is laden with officials who often exercise very narrow biases and insiderism in their tastes and opinions.

The uptown response, which came to fruition a little later, was in some sense a kind of neo-romantic music. By the mid 70s, George Rochberg championed a return to an early Schoenbergian chromatic tonality. John Corigliano was already gaining recognition, but was still held in strong contempt by the deeply established serial community. It wasn’t until the late 80s that representatives of these trends began to take the composition chairs at institutions such as Juilliard and win the uptown oriented Pulitzer Prize. Though they embraced a newfound relationship with the public, these composers did not aspire to the same kind of commercial crossover as many of the downtown composers.

These arguments were analogous with the way postmodern theory was later exploited. Some of the French theorists who developed postmodernism ultimately rejected many of its manifestations in America. From the outset, they felt America is deconstructive by its very nature. They felt the conscious and faddish use of postmodernism in the States sometimes led to simplistic rationalizations of superficial, provincial eclecticism. Perhaps it also contributed to neo-liberal justifications of placing art more exclusively in the marketplace.

In an earlier article, “Symphony Orchestras and Artist-Prophets: Cultural Isomorphism and the Allocation of Power in Music.” Leonardo Music Journal 9 (1999): 69-76, I have defined cultural isomorphism as a social order where artistic expression is strongly shaped by conditions such as a totalizing economic system, religious fundamentalism, hyper-nationalism, or a dominating state of affairs such as long term war.

This is not to say that a federal arts funding system is unnecessary, especially in America where a consensus for supporting the arts still needs to be built. As Dana Gioa, the director of the NEA has said, "On a broader and less pecuniary basis, the importance of the arts endowment is to articulate from a national perspective a compelling and inclusive message of the importance of arts funding. The most effective way to build a case really
comes from the national level. Otherwise, the individual states really are left without an umbrella of support." The funding, however, will become most meaningful when people learn to administer it mostly on municipal and state levels.

Germany has been able to maintain its public arts funding even though unification expanded its population by 25 percent, and with people who had virtually no economic infrastructure left.


SOME ADDITIONAL READING

Website of the National Endowment for the Arts.
http://www.nea.gov/

Website of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies.
http://www.nasaa-arts.org/

Melinda Whiting, “Renaissance Man Dana Gioia Brings Broad Interests and a Business Background to the NEA” Symphony (July/August 2003) [An excellent interview with the director of the NEA in the journal of the American Symphony Orchestra League. Among other things, he discusses the Europeans’ sense of cultural patrimony.]
http://www.symphony.org/news/room/03ja_greenroom.shtml

Roger Armbrust and Leonard Jacobs, “Arts' 2003 Funding Struggles Shift: States Replace NEA in Cutting Monies for Culture; DCA Funds Fall” [Useful statistical information about the loss of state arts funding.]
Backstage (December 30, 2003).

http://www.enquirer.com/editions/2000/05/21/loc_mapplethorpe_battle.html
“The Future of Arts Funding” [Transcription of a distinguished panel discussion hosted by the National Arts Journalism Program at Columbia University.]
http://www.najp.org/publications/occasional/or1.pdf

Bang On A Can. [Members of the group interviewed by the American Music center discuss their marketing strategies and concepts of hippness.]
http://www.newmusicbox.org/page.nmbx?id=01fp00

Benjamin R. Barber, “Jihad vs. McWorld” The Atlantic Monthly (March 1992). [Discusses the cultural and political dangers when both regionalism and globalism become excessive.]

“Arts and Minds.” [A conference on cultural diplomacy amid global tensions hosted by the National Arts Journalism Program at Columbia University. The site contains several excellent articles that discuss the European view of culture and its role in society.]
http://www.najp.org/conferences/artsminds/index.htm

http://www.corpwatch.org/issues/PID.jsp?articleid=376

Nick Gillespie, “Poor Man’s Hero” Reason (December 2003). [An interview with economist Johan Norberg who champions globalization as the best hope for the developing world.]
http://www.reason.com/0312/fe.ng.poor.shtml

J. Bradford DeLong, “Globalization and Neoliberalism” [UC Berkeley professor of economics provides a balanced discussion of positive and negative aspects of neoliberalism.]
http://www.j-bradford-delong.net/Econ_Articles/Reviews/alexkafka.html

http://www.viet-studies.org/EndofHistory.htm
http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20040112&s=sartarelli

Richard Florida, “Bohemia and Economic Geography” *Journal of Economic Geography* (2002). [The underlying hypothesis is that the concentration of bohemians in an area creates an environment that attracts other types of talented or “high human capital” individuals.]
http://ideas.repec.org/a/oup/jecgeo/v2y2002i1p55-71.html