

## ***Welcome to the Spring 2002 edition of the AFS Folklore and Education Section Newsletter!***

With this issue, we become strictly an online publication, and hope you find the newsletter as interesting and useful in this format as in its print format. In some ways, electronic publication makes using the newsletter easier than ever, as you'll be able to link directly to the many organizations and agencies whose resources are described within. In the pages that follow, any text in blue represents either an e-mail or weblink; just point and click to visit the site being described or to send e-mail to the person or address listed.

**The menu to the left organizes this issue's materials into several categories, most of which are self-explanatory. Click on either the section name or the icon to move to that part of the newsletter.** New to the electronic edition is the "Field Notes" section, which features information about activities, projects, and resources from our many correspondents across the country. The "F&E Opportunities" section lists a variety of workshops, internships, and other training, educational, or job opportunities available to people in the field.

We welcome your comments and suggestions about the newsletter's new format, and invite your contributions. Feel free to e-mail editor [Rosemary Hathaway](#) or co-editor [Gregory Hansen](#) with any and all of the above.

In light of last September's tragic events, and the budget crisis they precipitated for many arts agencies, we begin this issue with the following column on the role of the arts--and the importance of arts funding--in lean times. Written by Catherine Underhill, Director of Business Management at Hartronft Fauri Architects, p.c., and former Executive Director of The Dairy Center for the Arts in Boulder, Colorado, the article first appeared in the [Colorado Council on the Arts' Colorado Visions](#) Winter 2002 newsletter. While not focused exclusively on folklore and education, the issues it raises about the role of the arts in creating and sustaining a sense of community concern us all. (Reprinted with the permission of the author and the CCA.)

### **The Paradox of the Arts in Times of Crisis**

by [Catherine Underhill](#)

Three months ago, on September 11, we were rudely awakened from our more or less universal national oblivion to the reality of a monumental malice towards the United States that simmers in various parts of the

world. Many of us felt shaken and demoralized, struggling to understand what had happened, and why.

In the wake of September 11, significant attention has been focused on the critically important role of the arts as a means of grappling with crisis. Articles, reports and web sites across the country, including the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, New York Foundation for the Arts, and its associated [Artswire](#) site, Americans for the Arts, state and regional arts agencies around the nation, CNN, PBS--among MANY more--have devoted considerable time and space to considering how, and why, the arts can aid us in coping with the unimaginable. [Artslynx](#), which is funded in part by both the Colorado Council on the Arts and the NEA, was created to provide an index of resources for the arts. In the wake of the Columbine High School shootings, the site was expanded to include a section titled "Arts as a Force of Healing, Building and Empowerment." Following September 11, the site grew again with an index of "September 11 Resources," including essays by artists and leading arts policymakers, and links to other key websites across the nation.

In Colorado, artists and arts organizations rallied to bring community members together through arts of all disciplines. In Antonito, artist in residence poet Aaron Abeyta worked with school children to produce "rage" poems in the tradition of Ginsberg. In Denver, the Mayor's Office of Art, Culture and Film joined with the Denver Musician's Association to offer a free concert "to commemorate American heroism, pride and hope for the future." In Grand Junction, a concert and dance performance was developed to raise funds for the armed forces. Lectures, discussions, readings, performances and exhibitions have blossomed throughout Colorado and the nation in response to the heartbreak of September 11.

In an article in the December 2001 edition of [The Arts Paper](#), a journal of the Boulder Arts Commission, Patrick Pritchett writes movingly about the importance of poetry, with its laser focus on language, as a tool to bring some level of clarity and precision to our muddle of thoughts and feelings about that day. "Because poetry - and the figural language of poetry...gives a shape to our mourning... Because more than anything, the poem is that exquisite instrument that enables us to recover and transform loss." In the same publication, (which is dedicated in its entirety "to the victims of 9-11-01 and the innocent people of Afghanistan") Judy Hussie-Taylor writes about "art as sanctuary." In an essay originally intended as an avenue to explore her experience at this year's Venice Biennial, she writes, "...I believe art can serve as a kind of

sanctuary. I don't mean that art somehow protects us or numbs the mind, least of all that art offers answers. Quite the opposite, art enables us to live with the questions." Similarly, dancer and choreographer Bill T. Jones, in an interview with Bill Moyers broadcast on PBS Moyers in Conversation (Sept. 20, 2001) talks about dance as a means "to affirm that which is profound and beautiful in all that is life and particularly in those moments when it's dark." Later in the same interview he says, "...the body is a thing that can be alienated from the mind, and the heart. When we pull them together and make very simple gestures as a group, I believe that there is something that is unlocked... there is something that gives us strength."

All of this is at the heart of why we turn to artistic expression in response to trying to comprehend the incomprehensible. Arts of every discipline provide a vital means of connecting us, of uniting us--across communities, across ethnic groups, across cultures, across continents--with a universal language of common emotions. A fundamental ingredient of the power of the arts to help us cope with our pain in times of anguish, or express our joy in times of bliss, is its capacity to underscore the common experience. We are not alone --in joy, or sorrow.

In considering the importance of the arts in helping us come to grips with the attacks on September 11, I am struck by a sad irony. While we have embraced the arts in all its many forms across the nation as a means of grappling with our fear, grief and anger, we are at the same time witnessing a fundamental shift in funding priorities away from the arts in favor of more direct disaster relief efforts. It appears that the arts, which have proven to be of significant value in processing the flood of emotions triggered by this unprecedented act of domestic terrorism, may themselves be at risk in the wake of the attacks.

In a report distributed to the National Council on the Arts in November, the NEA's Daniel Beattie notes the nonprofit cultural sector is beginning to see significant financial fallout from modified and canceled programs, and shifting philanthropic priorities. These preliminary findings are supported by a study of more than 850 arts organizations conducted in October by AMS Planning and Research Corp. According to this study, arts managers reported "immediate deterioration in ticket sales compared to last year, sharply lower revenues from corporate sponsorships, and the expectation of mid-term declines in philanthropic and government support."

("National Study of Performing Arts Groups Finds Declining Revenues, Uncertain Funding Climate," AMS Summary Report, November 7, 2001.) Twenty-one percent of arts groups reported a "substantial decline" in attendance at performances held after September 11; almost half of the

organizations surveyed anticipate that ticket sales will also decline over the next 12 months. Managers report that "individual donors have put off decisions about major gifts, endowment and capital campaigns have been postponed, and many board members are reluctant to make solicitations that may be perceived to be inappropriate."

September 11 triggered the largest outpouring of charitable giving in history, yielding a record \$1.4 billion in contributions to 240 separate terror-related nonprofits. (*Newsweek*, December 17, 2001). While the disaster substantially expanded the total size of the giving pie, at least temporarily, nonprofits whose work is not directly terror-related are already finding that available funds are shrinking. Individuals, corporations and foundations have given generously to help heal the wounds left by the attack, thus decreasing the availability of funds for other causes - including the arts. Moreover, the decline in value of both individual investments and foundation assets that began earlier this year means fewer unrestricted dollars are available to distribute. Combined with significant pressure on local and state government budgets, arts organizations are already feeling the pinch.

Even in the best of times, most arts organizations operate fairly close to the margin, and Colorado's arts groups are no exception. As the economy began to lose steam last spring, we started to see the impact ripple across the cultural community over the summer. For example, for the first time in its forty year history, the Colorado Music Festival ended its season in debt. The Colorado Symphony was playing to houses of less than 100 people. Capital campaigns across the state slowed as funds became harder to secure. And the venerated Colorado Dance Festival, already financially fragile from its struggle to overcome a recurring deficit, finally closed its doors after the 2001 season.

There's no doubt that arts organizations large and small are facing a more challenging funding environment in the wake of September 11, and the economic downturn the attack has aggravated. So, what's the solution? How can we, in the cultural community, avoid being relegated (again) to the fiscal equivalent of the back of the bus, and assert our fundamental value? In his keynote address to the National Council on the Arts meeting on November 2, Michael Kaiser, President of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, suggests that organizations resist the urge to cut programs and marketing, which are often the first line items to feel the pinch. Instead, he suggests "saving on all non-performance and non-marketing areas and putting as much money on the stage as possible." In his experience with turnarounds at the Kansas City Ballet,

Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre, American Ballet theatre, and others, he has found that exciting artistic ventures combined with aggressive marketing can arrest the downward spiral of shrinking revenue and cutbacks.

Now, more than ever, in the wake of the terrible tragedy of September 11, all of us working in the arts should be holding our heads high. The arts are part of the solution, part of the cure. What we in the arts do has value--especially in this context--not only as a means of grappling with grief and anger, but as one of the most effective tools we have to begin to understand cultures other than our own. Perhaps Mr. Kaiser's suggestions bear closer examination. Perhaps part of the solution to the paradox of the arts during times of crisis is to avoid shrinking into the background, and instead to step forward into the limelight and remind our community members, corporations, foundations and government funders that the arts are vital, and deserve their continued support.

**Editor's Note:** More directly related to the role folklorists can play in the aftermath of September 11th, the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress has issued a Call for Fieldwork to collect Americans' stories and reactions to the events. For more information, [click here to see the AFC's webpage about the September 11 documentary project.](#)