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Arts in Seattle

Jean Chemnick  
*Western Washington University*

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Arts in Seattle

Jean Chemnick
Honors Senior Project
May 22, 2000
HONORS THESIS

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Signature

Date June 17, 2000
May 17, 2000

To Whom It May Concern:

Jean Chemnick was tasked with putting together information for a Greater Seattle arts brochure. She diligently worked on this for the Trade Alliance during her internship with us.

The Trade Alliance promotes the Greater Seattle region internationally for trade and business. We do this by organizing outbound trade missions, working with inbound international delegations, and publishing a variety of marketing materials on the region. Among these are our industry sector marketing brochures, of which the arts brochure will be one.

Jean showed great initiative and creativity in researching and writing the brochure. We showed her examples of other sector brochures and provided her some contacts and occasional guidance but Jean provided the rest of the work and inspiration. She organized an outline for the brochure, interviewed people in the industry and collected a variety of information. She then took the information and data and crafted it into a draft brochure.

The eagerness, energy and initiative Jean displayed were of great help to the Trade Alliance and would be of great help to other organizations as well.

Sincerely,

Sam Kaplan
Vice President
Seattle, located in the northwest corner of the United States, is a concentration of many of the brightest, most productive people in America. With a population of 2.9 million people, Greater Seattle is only the twenty-first largest metropolitan area in the country, but it leads the nation in many of its most technologically advanced and lucrative industries.

The area immediately surrounding Seattle is home to the highest concentration of computer software companies per capita in the country. Seattle's Boeing Company is the largest airplane manufacturer in the world and consistently one of the three largest exporters in the US. Greater Seattle is the top region for exports per capita in the nation, and home to foremost companies in biotechnology, electronics, medical equipment and research, environmental research, and coffee.

These industries draw one of the highest percentages of professional and technically skilled workers in the nation to Seattle. Of Seattle's adult population, 37.9% has completed a Bachelor of Arts degree or higher, compared with 23% of New York's and 19.8% of Chicago's populations, and Seattle's professionals spend drastically less on basic living expenses than people in these larger cities. The result is that Seattle residents can afford and demand more and better leisure options
than most cities its size offer, and they overwhelmingly choose to patronize the arts.

"The reason we live in the Seattle area [is the arts]. It adds a dimension to our lives unattainable otherwise. It is a reward for being human."

Source: Patron Survey from 1997 study

Seattle enjoys:

Abundance
* the most art of any city its size in the nation.
* a major symphony, opera and ballet (which no other city its size offers).
* 80 theater groups, 13 of which are professional.
* 160 non-profit arts groups with annual budgets in excess of $23,000.
* A healthy for-profit arts industry, ranging from local galleries to out-of-town performances.
* three leading theaters, each with over 20,000 subscribers per year.
* 150,000 season ticket holders for arts groups city-wide per year.
* the only successful, commercially-owned classical radio station in the US.

Diversity
* comparatively low rent for such a thriving city, which enables small arts groups to survive and growing ones to expand. Lower economic
pressures than exist in New York or Chicago mean that not every group has to cater to the same class of theater-goers.

* an openness to innovation on the part of Seattle audiences encourages artists to try new things. Ideas that originated in Seattle include Seattle Fringe Theater Festival, Cinema's Seattle International Film Festival, and the Gallery Walk in Pioneer Square, all of which have spread to other cities. Numerous new works by now famous playwrights, like Herb Gardener and David Mamet, have premiered here because theaters in larger cities are reluctant to take risks on new plays.

* a close relationship to other countries, developed through trade (which is a constant presence, contributing to one out of every four jobs in Seattle) and expanded through cultural interaction. This global perspective has enriched the city's arts. Seattle's major arts groups regularly offer special exhibits from other countries. For example, Seattle's Children's Museum recently showed an exhibition of children's art from Russia, while the Seattle Art Museum hosted Impressionism, a collection of works from European museums.

* a diverse resident population, which gives the arts variety. Theaters, museums and heritage groups devoted to specific cultural groups include Wing Luke Asian Museum and Langston Hughes Cultural Center, which primarily highlights the work of African American artists, although it is a
venue for other groups as well.

Support

* support for the arts by the thriving industries of the region and those who have been successful in them. These gifts provide generous, consistent sponsorship for arts groups and help them with renovation and expansion. The quantity of these resources is unique to Seattle. Recent gifts to both the Seattle and Bellevue Art Museums from technology industry-related sources have been very generous.

* a government commitment to the arts. One percent of all money spent on public building projects in Seattle goes toward art. This percentage may rise in the near future. Government-funded organizations like the Seattle Arts Commission, which assists artists through sponsorship programs and technical support, and the King County Office of Cultural Resources, which puts art work into the community, are also expressions of this commitment.

* independent support organizations like PONCHO and Corporate Council for the Arts (CCA), which are also vital. These organizations raise funds to support the arts. PONCHO's initial commitment this year was $1.3 million. CCA, which pools the resources of businesses as well as individuals, raises over $3 million each year for the arts.

Quality
* excellent facilities, ranging from a new world-class concert hall
(Benaroya Hall), to beautifully preserved historic theaters (Paramount and
Fifth Avenue Theater), modern, state-of-the-art, multi-venue theaters
(Seattle Repertory, Intiman Theater, A Contemporary Theater), to small
painting galleries lit with natural light from strategically placed
sunbursts (Frye Art Museum). Seattle takes pride in the places it puts its
art, as well the art itself.

Page 2: Visual art

The visual arts scene in Greater Seattle is very international in its
scope. The influence of other nations and of Seattle's own diversity can
be strongly felt in a perusal of the museums and galleries of the region.
Fine art from nearly everywhere on the globe is displayed in the city's
museums, shops, offices and galleries.

The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) in downtown Seattle, designed by
Pritzker Prize-winning architect Robert Venturi, has been called a
"world-class institution with a global perspective". Its collection
numbers 21,000 objects and is particularly strong in Asian, African,
Northwest Coast Native American and modern art, as well as European
painting and decorative arts. In addition to the permanent exhibit, there
are frequent visiting exhibitions of American and international art. An
extensive $19 million outdoor sculpture garden in north downtown is
planned for the near future, sponsored by SAM with the help of local philanthropist Paul Allen, among others.

SAM's Asian collection is housed in the Seattle Asian Art Museum in Volunteer Park. Its collection is among the top ten in the country, featuring excellent Japanese, Chinese and growing Korean collections. Its exhibits are complemented by musical and dance events and by lectures that help further educate its visitors about the cultures behind the art.

The Burke Museum on the University of Washington campus has one of the largest and most notable collections of Northwest Coast Native American art and artifacts in the United States. It possesses 7,000 objects, with an additional 6,500 objects from Alaskan and arctic cultures. They include clothing, sculptures, baskets, and canoes.

The Frye Gallery developed from the Charles and Emma Frye Collection, a bequest by a wealthy Seattle pioneer couple to the young city they helped shape. It holds the nation's foremost concentration of Munich School paintings. The museum also features American masters from colonial times to the present (Mary Cassatt, John Singer Sergeant, Winslow Homer, John Singleton Copley), and shows a great commitment to Northwest and Alaskan art. Admission is free.

In addition to ethnic diversity, the Seattle area museums offer diversity of ideas. Bellevue Art Museum is building a new museum in
downtown Bellevue that will open in January of 2001. It will have no permanent collection, focusing on the process of creativity rather than on pre-made art. It will include a hands-on "Explore" gallery devoted to teaching visual literacy (communication with images), and the sciences of color, light, vision and design. The museum will be interactive, making the experience different each visit.

In addition to museums, there are a large number of private artist's galleries throughout the city. One rather special pocket of galleries and shops is the Pioneer Square neighborhood in south downtown Seattle. This pretty, historic quarter of the city has some forty art galleries, many of which are nationally recognized. On the first Thursday of every month, galleries stay open until eight o'clock for the monthly gallery walk. Visitors by the thousands come out on these nights to see the galleries and meet the artists whose work they are exhibiting. Many artists who live and work in the area open their studios and lofts to visitors. Seattle originated this tradition, which has spread to cities like Portland and San Francisco.

Page 3: Music and Dance

The major music and dance companies of Seattle are receiving a considerable amount of financial support from the city right now as they upgrade their facilities. Further plans for expansion and renovation may
be realized in the near future.

Benaroya Hall, which occupies an entire city block in the center of downtown Seattle, opened in 1998 as the new home of the Seattle Symphony. The concert hall, which cost $111.8 million to design and build, is engineered to block outside noise and inside to mix direct and reflected music, creating the most pleasing musical experience possible. It is lauded as one of the finest facilities of its kind on the continent. The Symphony's first season in this technological masterpiece was enormously successful, and it will continue taking full advantage of its first-class performance space with the second season, again mixing "pop" music (like Art Garfunkel and Frank Sinatra, Jr), with Handel and Mozart.

The Seattle Opera attracts world-class singers and is remarkably ambitious. In addition to five productions per year, it produces a month-long opera festival around Wagner's Ring Cycle each summer, which is widely considered the premiere cultural event of the Pacific Northwest and is attended by people from all fifty states and many nations. In 1995, 53% of cycle ticket buyers were from out of state. The cycle, a four-opera production, is the most ambitious work in all opera and had only been attempted by one other American company (the Metropolitan Opera once in the twenties) when it was first produced in Seattle in 1986. The Ring established Seattle Opera as one of the great American opera companies.
Seattle audiences support their opera enthusiastically. One percent of the metropolitan area attended a recent production of La Bohème.

Anna Kinsselgoff of the New York Times wrote that "Pacific Northwest Ballet would stand out in the richest of Seasons". Clearly it has much going for it, both commercially and artistically. PNB is one of the five largest ballet companies in the country, with a budget of $11.5 million. It owes its support (once more) to the Seattle audience, which is the highest per capita in dance attendance in the country. PNB gives one hundred performances per year and has 75 works in active repertory. The company is prestigious among dance artists, especially for its reputation for preserving and performing Balanchine's choreography. The ballet school is one of the three best in the nation and trains many of the company members.

The Experience Music Project (EMP) is an interactive music museum opening at the Seattle Center in 2000. The idea, which Paul Allen put into effect, is derived from singer Jimi Hendrix's "Sky Church". Hendrix envisioned a place where musicians could exchange ideas outside the confines of the music business. The museum's concept is to combine the interpretive aspects of a traditional museum, the educational role of a school, the state-of-the-art facilities of a specialized library and the audience-drawing power of live performances and popular attractions.
The building was designed by the architect of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain.

Dimitrou's Jazz Alley is the premiere jazz club of the West Coast. It brings to Seattle jazz and blues artists of international acclaim, such as Nancy Wilson, Dr. John, Tito Puente, Joe Henderson and Shirely Horn. It also introduces local artists to its diverse audience.

Spectrum Dance Theater, which has toured nationally and internationally, is a high-energy, innovative dance company mixing the styles of jazz, modern dance and ballet with elements of theater. It attracts nationally known choreographers like Anne Reinking, and seeks to feature choreography from under-represented groups, such as people of color and women.

Seattle is America's third city for theater, trailing only the vastly larger New York and Chicago. Per capita it has the most theater of any metropolitan area in the country, nurturing eighty separate groups, and among them some truly world-class companies. Theater in general earns nearly 80 percent of its own income in Seattle. This is amazing, especially considering how much of it there is in this comparatively small metropolitan area. Seattle introduced the fringe theater festival to the nation, sustains several companies dedicated to the works of Shakespeare
(one of which, Seattle Shakespeare Festival, is professional), has served as the West Coast premiere or world premiere for so many important plays, such as American Buffalo (Empty Space), Angels in America (Intiman), and The Kentucky Cycle (Intiman).

The major theaters of Seattle are some of the most recognized in the nation, with three (Seattle Repertory Theatre, Intiman, and A Contemporary Theatre), boasting budgets in excess of three million a year. Seattle Rep's season runs from fall to spring, and the other two have performances from spring to fall, so there are major theatrical events going on year-round.

Because of their own success and the support of the community, these three major theaters are able to offer state-of-the art facilities with multiple venues and great artistic independence, and have earned a long string of honors for their work, including a Tony for Best Regional Theater for the Rep (making it one of twenty-two theaters to receive this lifetime achievement award nationwide).

One of many reasons for the health and variety of the Greater Seattle theater scene may be the theaters' own interest in nurturing and exploring their art rather than merely competing for subscriptions. All three major theaters are proud of their individual new works programs, during which each give readings or productions to new plays written by a
variety of well-known and emerging playwrights. A Contemporary Theatre includes a new play in its season every year, something that would be considered impossible for a major company in other cities because of the financial risk.

In addition, each theater regularly gears productions toward sectors of the community that are not usually represented in its audience, as with Intiman's recent production of Black Nativity (which will be performed again for the 1999 holiday season) and Radio Mambo, performed at Rep by a Hispanic company this year. This policy is innovative, and can be financially risky also, but is seen as being necessary. Financial solvency is not the primary goal of these theaters. Rep shares its subscription lists with other theaters in an effort to help them expand their audiences.

In the last decade, two houses, The Fifth Avenue Theatre and the Paramount, have opened, adding 6,000 seats between them to Seattle's performance facilities. They are both former vaudeville houses, both retain all the beauty and elegance of their former lives, and both claim the title of Seattle's best "showplace." The Fifth Avenue, which spent fifty years as a movie palace, was renovated in 1987 into a lovely venue for large-scale musical theater. It is run by the Fifth Avenue Theater Association, a nonprofit group which reinvests the proceeds from ticket sales in the community.
The Paramount, with its ornate interior and mighty Wurlitzer organ, is run by the Seattle Landmark Association and also produces musicals, in addition to concerts and other entertainments.

Seattle also has many smaller, more experimental theaters which contribute as much if not more to the Seattle art scene than their better-funded counterparts. Empty Space Theatre, located in Fremont, is this sort of theater. Seattle's third oldest not-for-profit theater was listed in Town and Country as one of the 25 "Top Regional Theaters" in America, even though it seats only 150 people. It is a venue for work by Northwest writers, new plays by big names (David Mamet, Sam Shephard, Lanford Wilson), plays by and produced by young artists, by poets (ee. cummings, Wallace Stevens), local politicians and their spouses and businessmen (Northwest Stories), and so on and so forth. Its mission is to "strive to make theater an event-bold, provocative, celebratory", and for its audience- mainly educated Seattlites- it has succeeded. It has been thriving as an intimate, unique theater since 1970.

Page 5: Festivals

One of the major ways Seattle sees internationally or nationally known artists is that they are attracted to its various arts festivals. There is a major festival for nearly every art form.

Music: The Seattle Chamber Music Festival brings together accomplished
classical instrumentalists who are not usually an ensemble for impromptu concerts likened to "musical fireworks". No two concerts are ever the same. The festival takes place every summer.

Theater: The Seattle Fringe Festival, patterned after the famous Edenbrough Festival, was the first in the United States and inspired numerous other cities to follow suit. It is an 11 day feast of non-juried, uncensored theater. Around seventy companies now perform each March at the festival's nine venues, to a combined audience of 19,000 people.

Children: Seattle International Children's Festival is the second largest performing arts festival for children in the United States. It is a six-day extravaganza on the Seattle Center Grounds of bright, colorful performance and artistry geared toward children. This "celebration of world cultures through arts" has been seen by over 500,000 children and includes artists from Siberia, Kenya, Japan, Europe and across America.

Film: The Seattle International Film Festival is a 25 day event in May and early June each year, and is the largest in the country. It is placed among the top festivals in the world, and is regularly attended by Hollywood stars. It has premiered or been the North American premiere of many films, with Emma, Trainspotting, Mrs. Brown and the Wedding Banquet being a few examples. Cinema Seattle, which runs this festival, also sponsors the Women in Cinema Festival and the Filmmakers Forum.
Dance: One Reel productions produces World of Dance and Music, which has become an annual Seattle festival, featuring performing artists from around the world. The artists are often well known within their own countries but unfamiliar to American audiences. Artists are chosen for diversity, excellence and individuality, and as ambassadors of their own cultures. Greater Seattle is the only United States city to have this festival.

Heritage: One Reel also presents Bumbershoot, a 29-year-old Labor Day tradition in Seattle. Bumbershoot showcases the talents of more than 2000 poets, painters, composers, filmmakers, comedians, video artists, performance artists and children's artists, and lasts for four days at the end of summer.

The Folklife Festival takes place at the beginning of summer in Seattle. It showcases thousands of regional and international artists who both exhibit their arts and give workshops. It attracts 200,000 visitors each year.

Page 6: Children

There are numerous arts opportunities for children in Seattle. Nearly every "grown-up" arts group has children's programs, and there are certain creative, fun institutions that exist "just for kids", seeking to expose them to the arts and develop their imaginations.
Seattle Children's Theater, housed in the Charlotte Martin Theater at Seattle Center, is a high-budget equity company that produces a full season of excellent theater each year geared toward families. It also has an extensive drama school for children of all ages, teaching many facets of the theater arts.

The Children’s Museum is a museum for the mind and the senses. Its mission is to “stretch [children’s] minds, muscles and imaginations” and it goes about doing this by offering a wonderland of games and activities designed to teach and entertain. A good example is the mountain replica equipped with (talking) trees from the Northwest forests and the animals that live there. TCM also expands its range of offerings by bringing in artists from other countries to design temporary exhibits.

Grown-up arts groups also offer extensive opportunities for children in Seattle. The Seattle Art Museum maintains a materials library and works with elementary teachers to incorporate art into their curriculums. The Seattle Symphony offers "Discover Music", a series of fun concerts that introduce children to classical music. Jazz Alley has a program that teaches jazz history and culture to at-risk youth, and Spectrum Dance Theater's dance school gives scholarships to children based on need and desire to dance, rather than on talent.

All in all, Seattle is a great place to explore the arts because it has
developed a cultural life to fit its own discriminating tastes, and that is expanding with the city itself. As the tourist industry grows in importance (it is now the fourth largest industry in the state), the arts will get their fair share of its profits, as well. Seattle's role as one of the cultural centers of America is likely to last into the twenty-first century.