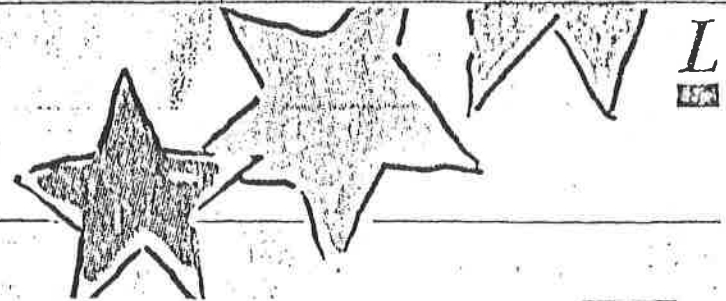


# SHOW



## STEVEN G. KELLMAN

### Warning: Funding of arts through tobacco profits can be hazardous to public health



No product commonly available in an American supermarket has been as thoroughly and extensively researched as the cigarette; and no sane person not on the payroll of a tobacco company could possibly deny the fact that cigarettes are directly responsible for widespread suffering and death. Unlike other

adding contributors to disease, smoking can be totally avoided. Yet, as scientists have accumulated more and more evidence linking smoking to disease, the tactics employed by tobacco companies to push their lethal product have become more and more crafty. Cigarette makers have become principal patrons of American art.

Since 1982, the Joffrey Ballet, for example, has received \$750,000 from Philip Morris Companies Inc. The troupe, which is a frequent and favorite visitor to San Antonio, begins a national tour this week made possible in part by a \$200,000 gift from Philip Morris, a fact that will be celebrated in the Joffrey's programs and posters. The Dance Theater of Harlem, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Metropolitan Museum, the Alvin Alley Dance Theater and the American Ballet Theater are among other recipients of Philip Morris largesse.

George Weissman, chairman of Lincoln Center, is also chairman of the executive committee of the tobacco conglomerate's board of directors. He did

not oppose making Lincoln Center the site of the Marlboro Country Music Festival. When the Whitney Museum ran out of space in its own building, it was given the first floor of Philip Morris corporate headquarters, an annex now called the Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris. To some health professionals, the name sounds as grotesque as the Warsaw Philharmonic at Auschwitz.

Philip Morris is only the most active of the tobacco arts patrons. R.J. Reynolds, which now goes by the name of RJR Nabisco, gave \$1.6 million last year. In 1985, cigarette manufacturers accounted for about one percent of the \$698 million donated by all corporations to American cultural institutions. Anyone who follows the arts, especially in San Antonio, knows that they are in desperate need of funds. But are they so desperate that they are willing to take the ill-gotten gains gained from getting people ill? Does the funding of arts through tobacco money raise the same ethical issues as a Mafia goon who puts a \$3 million check on the church collection plate?

Dr. Alan Blum believes that gift horses ought to be examined in the mouth and that if they reek of halitosis they ought to be put out to pasture. A professor of family medicine at the Baylor Medical

School, Blum is president of Doctors Ought to Care, a national organization of professionals active in public health issues. He founded DOC, which now has 40 chapters throughout the country, in 1977, in outrage over the Benson and Hedges Film Festival in Miami. In 1983, when Philip Morris paid \$3 million to bring the artistic treasures of the Vatican to New

York, Blum led 35 demonstrators in front of the entrance to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

"These people should go to jail," said Blum when I called him at his office in Houston. "They are aiming at children. . . . They are evil people." Blum sees

cigarettes as "a gateway to drugs," but also as in themselves directly responsible for hundreds of thousands of preventable deaths each year. By sponsoring artistic activities, tobacco companies are acquiring gilt by association, are buying respectability in much more insidious ways than the overt advertising that has been banned from TV and radio. Events like the Virginia Slims tennis tournaments or the Kool Jazz Festival make selling the noxious weed seem like an estimable, even noble, business. Through demonstrations, stockholder resolutions, counteradvertising and other forms of public education, Blum and DOC



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attempt to remind us that "the most profitable industry in the country" is homicidal.

"There is a kind of Marie Antoinette attitude," notes Blum. Smoking has become the lethal habit primarily of the young, the poor and the poorly educated. "How many low income people go to the ballet?" asks Blum. By sponsoring chic cultural events, the tobacco companies are able to purchase the indifference of the affluent to the plight of the fuming masses.

Still, I wonder whether the huge profits acquired by the tobacco conglomerates ought at least now to be put to worthwhile purposes. I can think of many worse uses for cigarette money than to fund museums, orchestras, dance groups and libraries. But Blum likens the situation to someone who burns villages in the morning and then endows orphanages in the afternoon.

"If you are going to be bought off," he suggests, "you might as well be bought off for a much higher price." We are facing a crisis in health care. Tobacco companies are a major contributor to the enormous increase in costs. By condoning their business, because they toss us a few George Crumbs, we drive up those public health care costs. Jazz may be cool, but the vendors of Kool ought to do more than pay the piper; they have a responsibility for the maintenance of heart clinics and cancer wards. The Marlboro Man has become Maecenas, but, implies Blum, let him also be Albert Schweizer.