

November 14—20, 1995

Vol. 15 No. 11, 68 pages
Greater Boston's Largest Circulation
Subscription Newspapers
Delivered via U.S. Mail. Published weekly by TAB
Community Newspapers, Needham, MA 02194—Two Sections

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INSIDE

Should Philip Morris butt out of the arts?

See Arts & Entertainment



Big-time



➤ At WBUR the '90s
look like fat city
despite threats of
federal funding cuts

PHOTO BY DAVID DEL POLO

BEGGARS

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT
NOVEMBER 14-20, 1995 THE WEEKLY TAB

Smoking with the enemy



Are artists compromised by taking money from Philip Morris?

By T.J. Medrek Jr. — TAB Arts Writer

Last year, when Dance Umbrella brought Bill T. Jones' controversial "Still/Here" to Boston's Wang Center, audiences saw a work that told — often in graphic detail — true stories of people living with terminal illnesses, including AIDS and cancer.

But prominently displayed in the "Still/Here" program book that was distributed to the audience were the words, "Brochure funded in part by Philip Morris Companies Inc."

The irony, that the nation's largest maker of cigarettes was helping present an art work dealing with lung cancer and other deadly diseases, was impossible to ignore.

In fact, arts organizations around the country and around the world have been accepting contributions from tobacco profits for decades.

In addition to Dance Umbrella, Boston Ballet and American Repertory Theatre have received multiple

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WINING AND DINING
A Brewer's Harvest Dinner benefits
Second Helping.
See Epicurean Agenda inside.

SMOKING

FROM PAGE 1B

grants over the years from Philip Morris. Meanwhile, the Wang Center, the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, the Boston Symphony Orchestra and, most recently, the Huntington Theatre Company, are among the local organizations that have received occasional grants from the conglomerate.

Around the country, established organizations such as Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the Metropolitan Opera and the new U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum have also received support from the company, which manufactures Marlboro, Merit and other cigarette brands as well as products such as Miller beer, Maxwell House coffee, Velveeta and Jell-O through its various divisions.

Since the company first sponsored a free outdoor concert in Louisville, Ky., in 1958, Philip Morris has become one of the arts' biggest supporters, donating an estimated \$15 million annually to cultural institutions.

That's long before there was either a surgeon general's report on the hazards of cigarette smoking or a National Endowment for the Arts. It's even before Jesse Helms was elected to the U. S. Senate in 1972.

While the North Carolina Republican is one of the tobacco lobby's staunchest defenders, Helms has also made great political hay by leading the protests against federal funding of so-called obscene or sacrilegious art. He has sponsored legislation that has imposed content restrictions on the very sort of contemporary art projects that are regularly funded by Philip Morris. And he is leading the current movement in the Senate to shut down the NEA altogether.

Helms' well-known aversion to the arts stands in sharp contrast to statements found in a 1993 report on arts projects funded by Philip Morris. In the 130-page document, the company proudly boasts of the thousands of cutting-edge art projects it has supported over the past 35 years, and goes on at length to stress that the arts are vital to a vibrant society.

While other countries have long histories of public funding for all the arts, America's arts organizations have, until fairly recently, relied on individual and corporate donations. Companies contribute to all kinds of non profit groups — social service agencies, schools and the arts — for reasons that include making the communities they operate in more desirable for their employees, building images as doers of good in the minds of their customers, and even an altruistic sense of social responsibility.

Philip Morris' decision to contribute an estimated \$15 million annually to the arts (the company reported \$65 billion in annual revenue last year) no doubt helps bolster its battered public image. And

the tobacco industry has also, on occasion, turned to arts leaders for help opposing laws that would place further restrictions on smoking.

Dance Umbrella's Jeremy Alliger, a staunch defender of the NEA, calls the conflicting agendas of Philip Morris, Jesse Helms and the NEA "one of the great ironies" facing the arts community and its ongoing struggle for funding.

Now with federal funding for the arts expected to be slashed by 40 percent this year — and perhaps



Michael Maso of the Huntington Theatre Company: "I don't think it's our job to go doing background checks on the corporate culture of institutions."

eliminated entirely in another year — corporate support for the arts is increasingly critical to the survival of cultural groups large and small.

Meanwhile, the issue over accepting money for arts projects from Philip Morris has inspired some soul-searching in some parts of the country, although apparently not in Boston.

In the late '80s, Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival turned down Philip Morris funds for a Festival Latino because of the company's target-marketing of minorities in its cigarette advertising campaign. In 1990, performance artist — and frequent Helms target — Karen Finley refused to host a modern dance award presentation because of the Morris-Helms connection. And just last month, artist Hans Haacke, whose art is specifically informed by his criticism of Helms, publicly protested sponsorship by Philip Morris of an exhibition at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.

Here in Boston, Philip Morris was the principal sponsor of Boston Ballet's 1992 "On the Edge" festival of contemporary dance. The tobacco company has since contributed about \$25,000 annually to the Ballet (although not, to date, this year), funding efforts such as the 1994 Boston International Choreography Competition ("Tchaikovsky: Anew") and last year's "American Festival."

Although Boston Ballet Artistic Director Bruce Marks is one of the nation's most outspoken NEA advocates, he says he hasn't "spent too much time thinking about" the awkward Philip Morris-Jesse Helms-NEA triangle.

Instead, Marks praises Philip Morris as one of the last hopes for

risk-taking artists.

"Philip Morris could support things that were more traditional," Marks explains. "It's harder to raise money for something new."

"My hat is off to them," Marks continues. "Thank God AT&T and Philip Morris and some others ... know what our Congress doesn't know, that the strength of our country lies in education, that arts are education. If you leave arts and the humanities out, you have a mean-spiritedness and greed out there that I think the arts counteract."

Michael Maso, managing director of the Huntington Theatre Company, also says that he sees no moral dilemma in accepting the grants. "[Philip Morris is] not asking us to talk about selling their product to anyone. They're talking about supporting work that's important."

The DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park in Lincoln has not received a direct grant from Philip Morris in over a decade, but director Paul Master-Kamik says he'd "love to have an opportunity to consider" the company as a source of funds in the future.

Master-Kamik also says he's not surprised when artists like Haacke and Finley criticize corporations such as Philip Morris.

"It's part of their art work," he says. "If you want to say, 'OK, Karen and Hans, we're absolutely pure and we don't want any kind of influence in any single way,' how are we going to support ourselves?"

Meanwhile, Robert J. Orchard, managing director of American Repertory Theatre, points out that



Dance Umbrella's Jeremy Alliger calls the conflicting agendas of Philip Morris, Jesse Helms and the NEA "one of the great ironies" facing the arts community.

it's not only Philip Morris' tobacco money that can present arts organizations with moral dilemmas.

He says, for example, that the Ford and Rockefeller foundations were "founded on profits from people who didn't have necessarily the most upright record in terms of human relations and business dealings."

"Do we as individuals have problems with the tobacco industry? Sure we do. But we have a fiduciary responsibility to the art of the theater and the community we're performing to do important work."

Adds Maso, "I don't think it's



Boston Ballet Artistic Director Bruce Marks says he hasn't "spent too much time thinking about" the awkward Philip Morris-Jesse Helms-NEA triangle.

our job to go doing background checks on the corporate culture of institutions that want to support the arts. Our job is to use the funds responsibly."

But there are others in the arts world who feel less comfortable with the issue. "It has led to the deterioration of honor and principle," Thomas Hoving, the former executive director of the Metropolitan Museum told The Philadelphia Inquirer. "It casts a huge shadow over the arts community, and it is the shadow of death."

Nevertheless, Marks clearly believes that using profits from perceived vices is one that needs to be kept in perspective.

"I enjoy a cigar occasionally, or a cigarette, and I love drinking Perrier-Jouet," he says. "We take money from Seagram's. A lot of people think it's demon stuff, that alcohol is the road to hell. I'm not terribly judgmental about those things. I don't see a cabal here."

Marks adds, to make a point, "Now I will be thinking whether we should be taking money from a government that does this or that."

Boston arts leaders might well wish for more such dilemmas these days, as they scramble to seek any form of corporate support.

On the national level, corporate giving seems to be rapidly increasing. The New York-based nonprofit Business Committee on the Arts reports that corporate contributions to the arts have increased 69 percent between 1991 and 1994.

But such dramatic increases are not being seen locally, arts administrators say.

Orchard says the ART is getting more donations from individuals, but adds, "We're not experiencing significant growth at all" in corporate contributions.

He further reports that the ART's support from government agencies reached an all-time-high of \$800,000 six years ago, but has declined to around \$300,000 in the current year. That, he says, will be cut in half next year because of NEA budget cuts.

"We're all reeling under the considerable decline of support in the governmental area," he adds.

While Orchard says it will take years before the gap left by such

funding cuts can be made up by the ART, Alliger says Dance Umbrella has been planning with the assumption of rapidly decreasing federal money for some years now, and will be able to make up the remaining difference in the future.

But, Alliger adds, "We're not going to make up the difference in corporate money ... We do stuff that's on the edge. That's one reason our corporate money is low."

Dance Umbrella for years has received money from the tobacco company (\$5,000 last year, but none so far this year, according to Alliger), and so do many of the groups it regularly brings to Boston, including Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, Mark Morris Dance Group, Urban Bush Women and others.

Alliger says he personally makes a distinction between money



"Do we as individuals have problems with the tobacco industry?" asks Robert Orchard of the ART. "Sure we do. But we have a fiduciary responsibility to the art of the theater."

received as a corporate contribution and money received for marketing purposes.

"We don't approach Philip Morris for marketing money, to say 'The so-and-so event sponsored by Philip Morris,' and therefore we are not promoting the Philip Morris product."

"Some will say it's a false distinction" he says, adding that he typically receives one or two letters of complaints each year from patrons who are opposed to Dance Umbrella taking funds from the company.

Marks, Orchard and Alliger all say that the money they have received from Philip Morris has never come with content restrictions or other artistic strings attached. Such restrictions are their bottom line, their litmus test for refusing a corporate contribution.

"I don't think anything we've ever done or any corporate money we've accepted has done anything to promote anything I would be ashamed about," says Alliger. "It's the opposite. The money we accept usually goes to promote my political agenda or that of the artist we present."

"People like Bill T. Jones or Urban Bush Women would not be able to be here to present themselves and their art and politics if it wasn't for Philip Morris." □