

Topics

Music to Our Ears

Brooklyn culture did not die when the Dodgers departed; there is much more to that borough than Bums and brownstones. Brooklynites are justifiably sensitive to the world's limited knowledge of its attractions and to the notorious reluctance of other New Yorkers, particularly Manhattanites, to cross the Brooklyn Bridge—not the least of the borough's landmarks. Olmsted's Prospect Park, as any Brooklynite knows, is bigger and better than Central Park; the 19th century survives on its streets and boulevards in row houses and tree-shaded homes.

The borough's rich heritage is now due to be celebrated by a \$569,359 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to nine major institutions in downtown Brooklyn known as the Brooklyn Educational and Cultural Alliance. The program, drawing on local arts, literature, history and science, is called Brooklyn Rediscovery and will comprise courses, lectures, exhibitions, publications and guides enlisting institutions from the Brooklyn Museum and the Academy of Music to Long Island University and Pratt and Polytechnic Institutes. At the end of two years, Brooklynites will know a lot more about Brooklyn, and it is hoped that Brooklyn-consciousness will be raised in other places.

Across the bridge in Manhattan, the good cultural news is that the Newport Jazz Festival will not decamp to Saratoga but will stay in New York. Response to the Newport Festival last year was an overwhelming 90 percent ticket sales with many sellout performances. The Schlitz Brewing Company, which has signed on as a major sponsor for next year, believes that

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the festival belongs in New York, and so it does. After all, the phrase "the big apple" is supposed to have been invented by jazz musicians of the 1940's on 52d Street during its heyday as a fount of jazz. The street has changed, but the melody lingers on.

Making the Grade

Vice Adm. James D. Watkins complained recently that the Navy was having trouble finding recruits who can read well enough to function, especially with increasingly complex equipment and weapons. One illiterate sailor did \$250,000 worth of damage to an engine, it seems, because he could not read instructions. What is more, a study of 23,000 recruits at the San Diego naval base showed that 37 percent of them could not read at tenth-grade level.

Now comes word that the Newton-Conover school district in North Carolina has decided to stiffen its standards and make a straight-C average the minimum requirement for a diploma, starting with the class of 1980. The chairman of the school board cited "gripes from employers who were hiring high school graduates who couldn't read or write." But a spokesman for the National Education Association objects, saying, "I don't think you can scare students into doing better. This method is too simple a solution for something that is really complex."

It may be simplistic, but if it addresses the reading problem, why not try? Granted that social and economic deprivation as well as individual handicaps contribute to poor school performance. But some poor performances result from nothing more complex than

poor studying—or teaching. And peer pressure can drag students down as well as up. Why not pump a little iron and try up?

Mannequins' Lib

This is the soft season in women's clothes, according to those who make up the rules out of whole cloth. The current word is that today's woman is no longer unsure of her identity and sexuality, and can therefore abandon unisex for ruffles and silk. At home, that is, but not in the office. There it is still the silly season.

The how-to-succeed stereotypes are fantasizing a dress formula for women who work. All women who mean business are to leave satin and marabou in the closet and get into neat, vested suits in muted colors, something not too masculine, of course, with skirts preferred over pants, but tailored, conservative and, well, businesslike. The woman of the office is being told to look efficient and creative or reliable—depending on whether she is an accessory to money, law, advertising, or corporate management. But never sexy! That would confuse the whole career-and-fulfillment revolution.

Now, admittedly, the gypsies of recent haute couture would look pretty foolish around the water cooler, and giving orders while gotten up as a rich peasant would have its funny side. But still more foolish is the idea that acceptance in a man's world depends on a set of prearranged signals sent out by clothes. These inanities, in the context of women's hard-won professionalism, are either a put-on or a put-down. Success is more than winning one's pinstripes in the fashion wars.