

## Rich in Art, Poor in Thanks

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New York is a city on bread and water, and caviar. While it fights for its financial life, the arts flourish. But the arts are not immune to fiscal crisis. The city needs to husband its strengths, and so must others elsewhere who draw on them.

One does not normally think of poverty among the artistic riches of New York. But the cultural paradoxes are piling up: the New York City Ballet was almost lost in costly labor negotiations; the Schomburg Center collection continues to rot in a Harlem library for want of a building fund; the city's official landmark houses, struggling to keep their roofs on and the rain out, stand locked to the public or viciously vandalized. At the other extreme, the fashionable and salable visual arts have converted SoHo into thriving real estate; it is still possible to starve in a garret, but not at cheap rent. Hit shows are sellouts with tickets at record high prices.

Struggling or thriving, the arts in New York touch people, the poor as well as the privileged. They offer a profoundly personal experience, the kind that big and anonymous cities are supposed to preclude. More than 1,500 cultural organizations, global or local, add a precious dimension to New York life. They also hold residents, draw visitors and stimulate commerce.

But they do more. As the City's Commission for

Cultural Affairs pointed out the other day, New York is a cultural resource for the entire nation. In the last two years, New York museums have lent art works and services to 322 cities in this country and to 149 cities abroad. The city's performing troupes appeared in 51 cities in the United States and 110 cities in other countries. Other places send us their stellar attractions, of course, although some excellent shows never reach here, due either to our swollen storehouses or a special New York provincialism. Whatever the reasons, we give more than we get.

This is a record that the Cultural Affairs Commission wants to make known and understood as it seeks more support from government, corporate, foundation and individual sources beyond the city. New York's own support has had to be cut back 40 percent in the last two years.

Free Shakespeare in our parks turns into the Public Theater and that theater turns into one of the creative mainstays of American theater. Or, the Weeksville restoration in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant puts a whole generation of blacks back in touch with their cultural roots. What is local here is truly worldly. Corporations may decamp, but art and ideas remain among our most important products. We need not feel embarrassed in asking for help.

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