ARTS IN THE COMMUNITY

Lecture given by Bud Beyer

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Good morning.

I wanted to thank all of you for asking me to speak at this Conference. It is my pleasure to share with you the issues and concerns that we all have about the relationships of our arts to our community, as well as to our students.

I must share with you that it seems of late more normal for me to be speaking to people from the field of music than from my own field of theatre. For reasons which still escape me, individuals from the world of music are far more open in searching for ideas from other forms. My own journey in speaking and working with musicians and people in music began when John Paynter, with whom many of you are familiar, called me some ten years ago and requested my presence at his conducting class, to speak to his conducting students. John and I had worked for some time in the Waa Mu Show at Northwestern, a large student-produced musical, and he knew I had studied mime and was a mime performer and teacher; he had got it into his head that conductors needed a new approach to physical and gestural communication and he felt that mime might offer some interesting elements for conducting students to have some connection with, and so he called me. I said, as politely as I could, that I was not a musician, did not read music, was in awe of conductors, and really would not be comfortable offering any “wisdom” in a field about which I knew nothing. John replied, “Monday, at 9:00AM.” And so the next Monday morning, I appeared before a class of 120 conducting students, and began what has become an odyssey of joy in working with people in music.

What I bring before you today is a challenge, and it is a challenge I offer to myself, as well as to you. I would offer it to anyone in

the arts. The challenge involves the communities which support our endeavors; indeed, supply us with our students and to whom, for all that, we owe a gracious note of thanks. We also owe to these communities, an opportunity for a more active involvement in the forms we represent. We are all artists and educators, probably artists first and educators second. I would believe that most people in the arts came to the art first and to the teaching of it secondarily. Given students at whatever level we teach, with the implied foundation of power and wisdom that comes automatically with being a teacher, we have, for our students, formulated a method of approach which produces results in the growth of knowledge and ability. But, to the communities which supply us the very students and most often the funds with which to operate, we give not an active involvement; we give them only our words and the results of our teaching which they may watch in passivity.

We have a problem. Teaching is safe. Oh, I know, we all would like to think that when we teach in the arts we are at great risk and that such teaching requires immense amounts of our concentration and abilities to bring these erring young souls into the world and into the rarefied air of art; and we have defined a process for ourselves by which to do that. But the more difficult and more dangerous job remains unapproached in most cases, and unsolved -- that is the necessity to actively involve individuals in the community who are not art students in experiential explorations in the arts so they may understand firsthand, in their own sense, in their own experience, what it is that we are exploring and creating with our students.

We have forgotten something which we need to remember. We need to remember the innocence of our initial approaches to our

art and we need to admit to issues which have arisen in our teaching. The difficulty in teaching in the arts is that we spend a good deal of the time creating a structure based upon studies that we have undertaken with numerous individuals, and then we assimilate that into a new structure we unfortunately refer to as a "creative process", which we then attempt to impart to the student. Along with all that learned knowledge -- and here is one of the dangers in teaching in the arts-- we also attempt to impart that which made us artists, that spark, that flame, that awareness, that intuition, that intuitiveness, that sensory level of understanding that was not linear and not process-oriented that created the flame of our own work. Instead of producing our own work, we attempt to teach that element of ourselves to our students, and in doing so, we give something away that is quite precious and may be irreplaceable. Eventually, we just talk about the art. Words become our protection, our defense against the fear that we have lost some profound part of ourselves.

Unhappiness and frustration with our own creative output often marks the teacher in the arts. It is because we have forgotten an important and irrefutable fact. Though we learned from many people, an "art process," the actual process by which we created something in our art, was less definable than the way we teach it. We took tools from a thousand different places, tools of images and experience -- a word and a phrase here, a fingering there, a way of approach, a kind of breathing here. We piled all that onto ourselves. But when we made our art, we were less aware of all that process-oriented learning, and more aware of touching that inner spark, what Yeats called, "the seat of the soul, where the outer and inner worlds meet". Creative process, I've come to believe, is oftentimes a phrase created by teachers who are trying to codify what is mystical and instantaneous into a linear and

learnable model. Rudolf Steiner said, “All the languages of art have been developed to transform the instantaneous into the permanent.” We have learned to talk about our art; but when our art was our art, it was without words. It was in action. It was momentary and instantaneous. The older I become and the more experienced as a teacher in the arts and the more confident -- “more confident” meaning that I cease to have nightmares that someone will discover tomorrow that I don’t really know what I am doing and fire me! -- the more I realize that a linear approach to learning is something created by us as educators, but not experienced by us as artists.

Ask any successful practicing artists how they work or what they do or what they use and the answer is always somehow unsatisfactory because the images they verbalize have no linear process that we can learn from. Great artists often make great teachers, but they do so because they demand great art, not because they have codified anything into a linear process of approach. When, for instance, you ask well known actors how they work, you are liable to get the answer....”well, I um try to find a hook”...ah, we think, a hook...what the hell does that mean? Or another actor will say, “I try to not get in the way”.. hmmm, try not get in the way.....

What happens to us is that with that sensibility that we now can speak about that which was really unspeakable, we speak...we are teachers, so we explain... -- take music, for instance -- we didn’t go into it to find language or words; it is an abstraction, it is an emotion, it is a feeling -- we probably went into it because we can express things in music we could not express in words because music is nonverbal.

We came to music, as Diane Ackerman says, in The Natural History of the Senses, because "music rallies people to action as civil rights' marches, live aid concerts, political demonstrations, Woodstock, and other mass communions; work songs and military cadence calls make long marches and repetitive tasks less boring; mothers sing lullabies to babies around the world; music accompanies weddings, funerals, state occasions, religious holidays, sports, and even television news. It is a shared culture of songs. It is our heartbeats. Music, the perfume of hearing, probably began as a religious act to arouse groups of people. The odd thing about music is that we understand and respond to it without actually having to learn it. Say the words, 'It's a gift to be simple, It's a gift to be free, It's a gift to come down where we ought to be' and nothing much happens; yet, if you add the tuneful Shaker music that goes with it from Copeland's Appalachian Spring, its haunting melody will cause you to hum, whistle, or sing all day long. Oh, Holy Night, Amazing Grace -- one can create the emotional turmoil of an affair, a disappointment, a religious ecstasy in as small a space as a concerto. 'Show, don't tell', writing teachers counsel their students. Say what one will, words rarely capture the immediate emotional assault of a piece of poignant music which allows the composer to say, not, 'It felt something like this', but as T.S. Elliott puts it, 'Music heard so deeply that it is not heard at all, but you are the music while the music lasts.' "

We came to music as the Aboriginal in Australia came to music to find their songline, a mystical maze of invisible roads across which they traveled to conduct the normal affairs of their lives, and this path is the song which they must learn to sing. We came to music to sing, not to talk. We are already in danger in our classrooms in the arts in that we talk too much, because we think

we have the answer in words and because we have a need to be safe. Where we fall completely apart and rely totally upon words is when we begin to deal with the communities -- not students of the arts, but just people. To them, because we feel we can, we begin to discuss and to talk about the wonder of teaching music and of their children learning to make music and why music is an important issue and element and should be in everyone's life, blah-blah-blah-blah.....

We must learn to change head-life into heart-life.

There is an internal landscape, a geography of the soul; we search for its outline all our lives. For the Greeks, they found joy in their bodies, the cosmos was in the body. Since the fifteenth century, we have lost the experience of the permeation of the physical body by the soul. In ancient times, the artistic was considered absolutely vital to civilization; now, it is a luxury. We need to return to the importance of the physical, the creative, and the moment. We need to feel through rather than think through.

The American Indians have no word for "art". In traditional Indian thinking, there is no separation between what is beautiful and what is functional. Art, beauty, and spirituality are so firmly intertwined in the routine of living; and yet, to the people in our communities, we talk. We have forgotten something that we already know.

It is a point of vision, a way of seeing. It is the manner in which the artist perceives the world. The very best example in description of this is from a marvelous book by James Michener that few have read, called The Fires of Spring; it is autobiographical. And in it, a young writer asks an older writer

what it means to be an artist and how to see the world, and the old writer says, “When you can see a moment in time with the astonishment of innocent youth and in the same breath see that beat of time with the wisdom and distance of age, then you have seen the world as an artist must see it.” We know that, but to be only that in front of our students is to be vulnerable and so we protect ourselves. To be that to the relative strangers of our communities is unthinkable.

Michener’s quote, by the way, is the explanation for the face of the Mime. Astonished eyebrows give the energy of innocent first looks, and an everflowing tear provides the sadness of the last view....all in the same eye in the same moment.

I have already said to you that teaching our students is a far safer activity than going into a community and attempting to offer them the experience of the creation that an artist feels. To do rather than to talk about it, to give them the actuality of the experience. Here lies the challenge, and I believe that we need to rethink the linear quality of how we teach students, and how afraid we are to offer them the unknown that we ourselves as artists faced as we began our own explorations in the arts. But it is in the community, from which we need support and understanding, that we are failing even more profoundly.

I want to give you two examples of experiences that I have had in dealing with community-based experiences in the arts, for I believe philosophically at the center of them are the possibilities for you, for all of us, to find our own imaginative answers as to how to approach this issue.

In the middle 1960s, a painting teacher in northeast Wisconsin, an arts educator, realized that there was money to be had to build some arts programs under the old Kennedy doctrine of Title III money. He and the head of an immense school district which covered most of northeast Wisconsin, applied for what at the time was an outrageously large grant of over a million dollars a year for three years to fund the insertion of art into the community of northeast Wisconsin. What they did was to avoid all normal expenditures of such a grant in building arts programs in schools, and instead of hiring arts educators, they hired artists. Young professionals, we had just made our way, we were making our way, and they brought us for two years, three years, a year, to northeast Wisconsin, and turned us loose on the community. We went to the schools, not just to teach students, but to teach teachers -- by example, by performance, by our energy, by our enthusiasm, by the instantaneousness of our work, by the intuition of our creation.

The painters and the sculptors and the printmakers found abandoned stores in Green Bay, Wisconsin, rented them for nothing, put up signs, saying “Art Studio -- Everyone Welcome!” and students and adults and truck drivers and teachers and everyone could come. There was a printmaker who had come out of Vietnam, where he had been a helicopter pilot, a crazy man who could make the most breathtaking silk screens and people stood around and he led them into the process and before an evening was over, someone was running his own screen. In the back was the charming and beautiful wife of one of the writers in the program. She was from the South, Patricia Gaines was her name, a tiny little blonde, perfectly Southern woman, welding raw rusted steel with an acetylene torch. She had a backpack acetylene torch and would wander through the junkyards of

Green Bay, cutting off interesting looking pieces of metal. She became legend, and the children and the adults and everyone followed her energy into those studios and they picked up torches and welded things together and became, in that spasmodic, incredible, confusing, creative moment, artists. Everyone wants to be a writer, and the writers held workshops. They held workshops for young people and old people and people on farms and people anywhere who had the bug, who thought they might, who thought they could, and they did, and they worked, and they wrote, and they created, and it didn't take long.

And as soon as the sculptor's studio opened in some abandoned storefront a few weeks later, landlords descended with increased rents and it closed and opened someplace else. But the damage had already been done. People already had smelled what it was to be an artist. There was a string quartet hired.....to give you some idea of the quality of all this -- the young man who was the violist in the group, when next I saw him, we were both teaching at Northwestern, only now he was the first chair in the Chicago Symphony -- they taught music to anybody who wanted to learn it, and if they didn't have musical instruments, they taught them how to clap in rhythm or hum melody. They found somewhere a bunch of scarred, out-of-tune, battered, old violins and they taught people to pick them up and make a note and make a sound. People who had never held something in their hands before discovered how difficult, how phenomenal, how magical, how wonderful it was, to be even for an instant, a musician. Letters from farmers begging us to hold more ballet classes because it had changed their child's life and their lives. The impact was such that when the grant was over, this Northeast Wisconsin school district floated over a bond issue and hired two artists to

serve the district. Not enough, but a phenomenon that no one would have ever predicted three years before.

People's lives were changed because the project was not simply education-based, but was community-based. Everyone benefited, not just the students and the educational system, though they also benefited. It was truly a community-based arts program.

Not too many years ago, Northwestern received a large Ford foundation grant to create a program called Integrated Arts. The proposal was to form a program, a certificate program, which would mean that a student, going through a number of courses, exploring all the arts in their integration, would come out at the end with a certificate saying they had completed this program. Further, the program was to be designed to give students who were not arts majors, an experiential, active involvement in the creative aspect of making art; and they were to do that in the Graphic Arts, in Theatre, in Dance and in Music. All of us who were arts educators spent an entire summer planning this course of study. When we all came into the room the first day of the first week, we walked out at the end of the day with everyone absolutely in unanimous agreement that this was impossible. That it would never work, it would never happen, nobody wanted to do it, it was idiocy, what foolishness, who thought this up.

Six weeks later, we walked out of the room with a complete course of study in which non-arts majors were given an opportunity to explore in what amounts to, in Northwestern's community, a community-based program in the arts. All it took was a little imagination. I have seen composers from Northwestern's School of Music take a group of inner city kids

when we will do workshops or students from the Technological Institute with no musical training, and within an hour's time, they have taught them the intricacies of rhythm and melody. They've done it by getting them to make sounds or to clap or to hum. It takes an immense amount of energy. It would be so much simpler just to stand around and talk about it and tell them what it's like. But to actually involve them! In every area of the program, teachers have struggled to find new ways of approach to create experiences in the making of art accessible to students regardless of their major. The program is wildly successful, the grant is over, and the program continues, financed by all the departments of the university. We need to find ways to re-invent the involvement in community in what we do.

To involve or re-involve the community in what we are doing we need not to be afraid to demystify our forms and practices. Some of us, not all of us, but some of us like to create a kind of mystery about what it is that we do, as if by mystifying, we somehow make what we are doing even more special. But all that does is alienate those around us who are not artists. The way of the artist and the way of the mystic are related; the only difference is that the mystic doesn't have a craft; it is our craft that holds the artist to the world. There are ways for us to share that craft and to give those in the community, the opportunity for the experience of being that which we teach. I do not mean music education classes. We need to broaden our thinking and go beyond the boundaries.

We need to follow the advice given by elders to a young native american at the time of his initiation....."as you go the way of life, you will come to a great chasm...

Jump...

It is not as wide as you think....

What would happen, for instance, if we are band directors in high schools, if we had conducting workshops for parents and for community in the same way that music offers conducting workshops for its own. With a few rudimentary exercises and with the band serving as the musicians to be conducted, and with the positive energy that exists in those workshops within music still existing, we could give community the opportunity to experience the ecstasy of what it means to conduct a group of musicians, to stand on the pulpit (I mean podium) and to feel that power and that responsibility. No amount of talking, no amount of theorizing or philosophizing, no amount of poetry can possibly capture the one incredible moment of experience of stepping onto the podium with the baton in your hand and raising it and having music follow your every motion.

These are not solutions now; these are only sparks to inflame your own imaginations into better ideas and more complete answers. But what would happen if we took a look at the performance space. What would happen in music, for instance, if we would take a look at the structure of how we present music and reacquaint ourselves with the responsibility of the relationship between the audience for music and music. The following is a quote from the September 25th issue of the Chicago Tribune in an article discussing the designs of British concert halls. “Bridgewater Hall, on the other hand, combines the shoebox design with another well-established type, the vineyard design. Vineyard halls arrange the audience in smaller, friendly groups close to the musicians, drawing them into the performance.”

We began to speak about this in Minnesota last summer at the week-long Wind Band Symposium for conductors at the

University of Minnesota. Perhaps next summer, we will begin to explore some ideas for the re-arrangement of music in relationship to the listener. Could we involve our audiences, our community, in a more active way, if we broke down the passive stance of the audience sitting in the auditorium, with the music happening up on the stage. What if we put the music in varying spaces and let the conductor roam about the musicians in order to contact them and enforce the kind of communication. What if we sat the audience in among the musicians, so they might experience in the fullness, what it means to be a part of, a particle of, the creation of sound and melody. We could involve those individuals who came in responses after the experience to talk about whether it assisted or negated what the music was doing, what the experience of listening was when they were more actively involved. Anything to engage the community back into the active elements of our work.

We need to be honest with ourselves if we are going to walk into this kind of dangerous territory and meet head-on those individuals who now we hold at distance with words. I wonder if we could admit, for instance, that oftentimes in music, audience response is almost automatic and that standing ovations are offered more for musical events as a part of the audience participation than as an actual response to the quality of the evening. Perhaps we could start with discussions among ourselves about what our relationship is to the audience. In the theatre, we cannot operate without an audience. Two actors going into a room by themselves to do a scene is an ultimately unsatisfying experience until that is placed before an audience. But I believe that it is true that for some musicians, going into a room alone and playing is as fulfilling or more fulfilling than even the act of performance. What is the audience to us in the

performance of music. Is it there, can it affect us, can a good audience make us better, can a bad audience make us worse? Do we have that quality of contact? Is the audience a part of the players? Is the audience a part of the evening? Or are they simply there in passivity. Questions to be discussed and answered, all of which impact upon our relationship to the community outside ourselves. We must invite them in. We must have them as a part of our world, not simply in observation of our mystic creations.

To do this we must also find new ways to learn and new ways to teach. A linear world in the arts is like the opening of deer-hunting. In the Indian's words, "To make deer-hunting medicine, first you learn to see the bush that's in front of you, then the bush behind that bush, and then finally the deer behind the bush behind the bush that's in front of you, then the spirit of that deer. Now you can call the deer, his spirit, and he'll walk up to you. The people with the strongest medicine learn to fly out their spirits and they find the deer that way." I wonder if that is not the point of view of the artist. That the linear approach to revealment is a path for some people, but that most often, the artist flies out and finds the deer in another way. We must learn to give it all away. We must learn to take away all the secretness of what we do and make it open for all people.

All Sioux ceremonies end with the words, "Mitakuye oyasin", "All my relations", meaning we are all related, meaning every living human being on this earth, every plant and animal down to the smallest flower and tiniest bug. We, in the arts, must learn to embrace that humanity and let go of our necessity to be special by remaining above and secret.

Our art is for our people. For our students, for our communities, for everyone.

It takes a little effort and an awful lot of courage to move beyond a linear way of thinking.....to move beyond the hidden protection of language and words to risk complete failure in the attempt to bring people to a living and breathing experiential understanding of what it is that we represent as artists...to share with strangers, what it is that burns in our souls.

Thank you.