

Clark Mitze

Executive Director of *Missouri*, 1965-68
Executive Director of *California*, 1976-78
Executive Director of *Illinois* 1978-81

Interviewer: *Maryo Ewell*

Date, location of interview: *12/27/04; by telephone*

Clark Mitze current contact information:

Clark Mitze

626 Rivercrest Dr.

Sacramento, CA 95831

916-422-1222

[*cymitze@sbcglobal.net*](mailto:cymitze@sbcglobal.net)

I. Think back on those early days of SAA's, when you were new in your job and the whole "field" was in formation.

A. What was the "big idea" behind the formation of the NEA and SAA's?

When Kennedy wanted to establish a thing in the arts – do you know why he picked Roger Stevens? It was at the request of Adlai Stevenson – he had been the financial advisor for most of his campaigns. At Stevenson's request that Roger was hired, brought in as director of, essentially, a District of Columbia thing, and it gradually, he worked it around and they finally got a bill passed through congress for the arts and humanities.

It was political, yes, but it was a combination of getting the colleges (who wanted the humanities) and getting the arts people (as Roger always said, it was the rich Republicans who always supported the arts, so they would be for it.) And it was sort of true, the big wheels got together with the humanities and they got it through that way.

Missouri came about in an interesting way: I was doing music and arts reviews for the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, and Howard Adams called a meeting to get going on an arts council. I covered it; I wrote a big story about it and the Governor then asked me to be the director of it when it started. Howard Adams brought the Missouri painter - Thomas Hart Benton – his grandfather had been a very famous senator, and they brought him in and he talked to the legislature and he helped get it through the state of Missouri. He entertained,

and he poured plastic cups of wine that he passed out, and he told all these senators about the great models and so forth in Paris, and what a great time it was. They loved it. As he stood up to speak to them, he used a phrase of his grandfather's. He said "It's a pleasure to talk to so many distinguished sons of bitches at one time." And they loved it!

The NY Council had started first, of course; they were sort of the model. They helped get the national council started.

B. What was your "big idea" when you took your job – what was the situation in your state, and where were you hoping to go?

Well, the arts were – where were they: we had 2 areas of the arts: St. Louis and Kansas City. A lot of people wanted to get in on the action and that is what finally got it going. (By any chance, do you remember the guy, the Missouri politician that was picked as a vice-presidential running mate, but had to drop out because of a nervous breakdown?) He was the Secretary of State in Missouri at the time, and I had long talks with him, about how to word this thing to get it straightened out.

[Q: So the people from St. Louis and Kansas City...]

They got together, that's right. The first office was in Kansas City. I know I went over there and stayed a month before I could open up an office in St. Louis.

[Q: So you had 2 offices?]

For a long time. Matter of fact all the time I was there we had 2 offices. Remember Norman Worrell? He came in as director of the Kansas City thing – he wasn't called director, they were very careful about that, but he was the "manager" of the Kansas City office.

[Q: So you traveled a lot between the two offices?]

Quite a bit.

[Q: What about the rural areas?]

The first council that was picked, they had several from some of the rural

places. And they were beginning to establish community councils. So we began working on that, trying to help them get going. We were helping all we could.

I just thought of a wonderful story: One of the things we wanted to do right off the bat was to make a tour of the St. Louis Symphony throughout the state. So I got going trying to arrange it. I got two concerts on the “east coast” and two concerts on the “west coast” but I needed one in the middle. We were down south, so I tried all kinds of places, and nobody could handle it, have the place for it, except the College of the Ozarks in Branson – it was just being built; the students were building it, you know. They had built an auditorium, one of the first things. And so this guy said, “Come down here, I think we can handle this.” So I went down there, and they didn’t have any sidewalks, they had planks going around, very wooden, very rural; and they had outdoor toilets. I said, “I’m sorry, I don’t think we can manage this, I don’t think it will work for the symphony concert.” A week later I got a telegram from the president of the college saying, “In deference to, in honor of, the St. Louis Symphony coming, they were installing indoor plumbing!” I told that to the players and they cheered – they had accomplished something!

[Q: What were you hoping to do when you started out?]

I’m not so sure there was any specific goal outside of just helping the arts get operating. We wanted to get to the rural – we thought that was one of the ways to do it; but we didn’t look upon them as a separate goal – just one of the things you do to achieve getting more arts in the state. The big organizations needed support; we worked hard for that. Later on, that became a real big thing. The St. Louis Symphony (Peter Pasterak particularly) was very much involved, working with the state legislature, getting money for big organizations.

I’m very proud of some of the things we did. For instance, we had the cultural “orgy” in St. Louis, where we invited every school in the eastern part of the state to send 2 students, they had to be juniors in school, and we would pay their expenses, for a weekend of seeing everything there was in St. Louis. A symphony concert, plays, architectural tours, [unclear] came out and talked to the kids after the symphony concert. It was a really wonderful, huge success. And then the next year they did it in Kansas City.

[Q: So wherever it could happen, you were trying to get more arts?]

That’s right, wherever we could push it.

C. *When you left your job, do you think you had made progress in achieving your “big idea?” Or did you change your mind about what was needed?*

Well, first of all we were the second highest paid –the most money [of any state]. We started out getting \$75,000 the first year; by the time we left, we were getting around \$2 million, something like that. It was hard work.

[Q: \$2 million from the legislature?]

I can't be sure of the amounts, but we got quite a bit. Oh: I remember Lyman Field (sp?). He was the Chairman of the MAC and he had been – back to my painter, Benton, again: he was Benton's lawyer. We used to sit in the committee room of the legislature, the room of the Thomas Hart Benton murals, and there was Lyman Field in one of the murals. We had a lot of things going that way and we worked every one we could.

[Q: You were the second highest funded?]

We were. New York always got more than we did, but we were the 2nd-state after NY to really get a state budget, and we were the second highest for a lot of the time.

[Q: What about your goal of getting arts exposure everywhere?]

That was going pretty good, very well. We had a lot of different communities were starting community arts councils and we were going around talking – Verla is standing here in the kitchen with me and I'm sure she remembers the day that we had to drive over to Jefferson City to speak to some people and we had to “eat on the run,” so to speak – I picked her up after work. And on the way over, she suddenly started laughing at me, because in eating some of my dessert I was also eating my tie! So we have lots of wonderful memories about stuff we did, running around like that.

D. What were you proudest of having achieved during your time in office?

The general progress I guess – the fact that they were recognizing that the symphonies, the museums and so forth needed support. They were getting a lot of publicity that way. The legislature was beginning to recognize it.

[Q: You mean, recognize how much support was needed, and that they could do something about it?]

That's right.

[Q: Was the legislature proud of it?]

Some were and some weren't. I was talking to Dave Sennema – he sent me an e mail the other day – I asked him what he remembered about stuff – and he recalled that there several states where legislators tried their best to stop the arts councils. And that actually happened in St. Louis: that one legislator was going to sue the various members, but we got passed that – because it was not the state business, to support the arts. Everybody was a little leery about it.

E. What was most frustrating to you?

In those days, we'd take 5 steps forward and 2 back. Later on, it was 3 steps forward and 2 back! There were lots of times that we were just frustrated about what we wanted to do; we could see what needed to be done, so much; and what we were doing seemed to be so little, compared to what was needed. Still, we were terribly optimistic and we always ran it on "the glass is more than half full" all the time. Put it that way. I didn't come out of there with frustrations; it was really going good when Chuck Mark – you remember Chuck – Chuck called me and wanted me to come to the Endowment. So something was going OK.

F What was most surprising to you?

It would be the sophistication of the cities. I told you about the St. Louis tour. Well the St. Louis Symphony, they put out a concert they were going to do in Sedalia. It had Beethoven's fifth symphony, real standard stuff. The people called me and said, "Why do they do this old-fashioned stuff? Why don't we get something new and different, something that the orchestra could be proud of?" And Kovally (sp??) was so delighted with that, he was just so pleased that they wanted something more than the usual. If I recall they ended up doing the Brahms Double Concerto for one thing, and Petrushka, I believe it was.

G. What was your agency's relationship with the NEA like? With other SAA's? With ACA? With local arts agencies?

How do I say it ...they knew we were there, we knew they were there. We were friendly. I'd known Chuck – Chuck had come from St. Louis, he'd been the director of the Arts Council of St. Louis, so I had known him before. When they came up with the first thing the first year, when they were giving \$25,000 to every state, that was the beginning of it. We had Roger Stevens come – we did a real big dinner up on the top of the Chase Hotel, the tallest hotel in St. Louis; a wonderful dinner, and Roger Stevens was the primary speaker (he was a lousy speaker by the way – “Old Mumbles” we used to call him). We had good relations that way.

[Q: So they sent you \$25,000, it was a good relationship but otherwise didn't relate much?]

I don't think they related much with any state. They were just trying to, doing their best to make some footprints. They weren't up to that point of developing relationships yet. They were just making some footprints. But when I went there, Roger was very, very enthused about the states. As a matter of fact, Roger got some money back. And so he put \$250,000 I think it was – no, \$100,000 – we had a contest, and we would give \$10,000 to the 10 states that had the best ideas. I remember W. Virginia had a great thing with a bunch of jazz artists. I asked, in the middle of it, I asked Roger what he would have done with \$10,000 and he said, “I would have hired a public relations outfit.” Which I thought was fascinating. We had \$100,000, we gave 10. I called a panel to make the decisions: it was George Irwin, Bunny Fayne (sp?)

[Q: What about other state arts councils?]

We had a great deal to do with them. Because we had gotten started they were calling us all the time and asking for help. By that time, Francis [Poteet] had joined, and she was corresponding with a lot of people, showing them, giving them stuff we had done, programs and so forth. I went out and spoke to a lot of them, she did several of them, and we got to be very close with a lot of the directors.

ACA – they had a conference at New York University. I remember a whole bunch of the states went there. I'm not so sure [that it was the first ACA conference] but it was right around there.

[Q: At the time of the conference, did all the states have arts councils?]

Oh no, some of the states were very slow. Some of the states came out with arts and humanities, which sort of confused the issue. Like, I believe that Louisiana was the last one to join up and that was when Mrs. Earl K. Long became the chairman and Mrs. Lucille Blum became the director. Between the two of them they decided what was going on. (Does the name Lucille Blum mean anything to you? Well, she caused the financial department at the Endowment to have an absolute fit. They got their first state grant; what they did was, she divided it up and put it into the private checking accounts of her program directors. They couldn't believe it. But the best part of it was, they did everything right – it worked! They didn't fool around with it, they really did it right. That was the easiest way for them to do it. If they had it in a private account they could just write a check and go. I remember that the director went down there and he came back with his eyes just wandering around: "That woman Oh!"

[digression while we compare notes on the whereabouts of the early directors]

The biggest challenge vis a vis the NEA was ACA. Howard Adams was my first chair in Missouri, and I was ready to resign – and then he went to ACA! But he didn't like Roger Stevens nor Chuck Mark – he wanted to be the national presence, not the NEA. The issue wasn't the public funding, but just the credit – he wanted the credit. The states were confused ... I remember Howard gave a speech about the federal government trying to take over everyone's programs ... Roger Stevens was furious. But the animosity [between ACA and the NEA] dissolved after Howard left.

[Q: What about local arts councils?]

Very rare. I think, if I remember correctly, there were about a dozen working local arts councils in Missouri by the time I left that were actually generating programs of their own.

[Q: How many were there when you started?]

None. Well, there was St. Louis of course. And sort of Kansas City, but in Kansas City it was more the opera, the symphony, the museum...a combination, they didn't have a real arts council. But St. Louis had a real arts council that Chuck had started, and then Michael Newton came in.

What was the single biggest issue or challenge the SAA field had vis a vis the federal government, the regionals, other states, the local arts agencies?

The biggest challenge was the Associated Council on the Arts. Howard Adams was my first chairman in Missouri, and Francis and I have often talked about the fact that I had written up my resignation; I wasn't going to work for this SOB any more – the day he resigned to go be the director of ACA. He'd been very much involved in ACA. But he did not like Roger Stevens and he did not like the Endowment, he did not like Chuck Mark – they wanted to run it; they didn't want the federal government to be involved. They had to wait till Howard was gone, really, before they could kind of get together more. Ralph Burgard [who came next at ACA] – Ralph and I, that smoothed out a lot then.

[Q: So Howard wanted to be the national presence, not the NEA?]

That's exactly right. He didn't object to the money, but he didn't want – he wanted to get the credit for it. Howard later ended up with the museum in Washington, DC.

[Q: Did the states feel like they had to take sides?]

They were confused. I remember the first ACA meeting that I attended was in Chicago, and it was below 0 (and the poor guy from Hawaii came without a coat). Howard made a speech about: "Be careful of the federal government; they're going to come in and try to run your programs for you, so don't let those guys in there." I know that Roger was just so furious. But that animosity quickly dissolved after Howard left. He was a jerk.

[Q: I hadn't known that ACA and the Endowment were competitors.]

It took some doing to get it back together again.

[Also see the second paragraph under "typical day" below when he recalls something he should have mentioned here about ASOL.]

G. Can you think of an anecdote that tells us something about the arts in the political climate of your state at that time? Can you tell us who – if anyone – was a special political ally to you in those days (the governor? A

legislator?)

I can tell you one. In testifying before Appropriations one time, I said something about the St. Louis Symphony. And one of the directors from one of the rural counties said to me, “Just a minute, young fella. Do you mean to tell me that the sound of the orchestra is better than the sound of a hunting hound?” Lyman Field was saying, “Careful, careful, careful!!” I said, “To tell you truth, I’ve never been invited to hear the sound of a hunting hound so I can’t compare the two.” He said, “Well, young man, you should come down.” And I said, “Is that an invitation, sir?” So that ended it. The rural counties, cities and towns, they were suspicious – it was more a big city/small city competition. They thought the arts were strictly big city.

[Q: Does that mean that all the urban legislators supported it?]

Not necessarily, but most of them did. From the political standpoint they’d look at it like, “How much money is my area going to get?”

H. How did you use your time:

1. Can you describe a prototypical day?

When I moved the office back to St. Louis, and we put an office down in Gaslight Square. I was looking for a secretary, and Francis [Poteet] was working for the building there, and she came in and we were talking about it. She was a viola player and I had known her because she played for one of the orchestras there. So she decided she wanted to come work for us. We’ve often talked about, the first week, the only telephone calls we got were from her husband and my wife. It took a while. Plus the fact that there was - I remember the St. Louis Museum director was just so snobbish – “’you people’ really hink that you’re going to help us????” (The director - I can’t remember his name, he was a PhD and a jerk from Ohio - who made a speech in Ohio: “The Cleveland orchestra, the Cleveland Museum, they should get behind him and he’d see to it that they got someplace!” He didn’t have a budget, he didn’t have anything.)

Something else on that one, now this was later: when they started out, the Symphony Association – the ASOL (matter of fact they had a joke about the WC of the ASOL – the women’s committee!) had been really opposed to the Endowment being started; on their own they were going to go get [money] .

This continued up until Nancy Hanks came in. Because we had a meeting in New York with the major symphony orchestras. The chairman of the Baltimore Symphony got up and made a long speech about "These Washington people are backing the wrong horse" and Nancy got up and said, "I was named for a race horse, and what we need are people who can jump over the hurdles we seem to find today." A beautiful response. But they finally came around, and the Endowment started helping symphony orchestras but before that time they had not. ASOL did their best to keep the Endowment from being established. ACA was connected more with ASOL; that was the beginning of the real conflict. They were more connected with symphony orchestras than anything else. The symphony orchestras were very active in their trying to prevent it [the creation of the NEA]. It [ASOL and ACA] was a lot of the same people. [Personal digression to remember someone.]

2. In a typical year at the beginning, can you give a general idea of how your time divided (in percents, roughly):

The bulk of our time was calling people together to talk about what should be done. As Dave Sennema pointed out to me, when we began we were supposed to know about all aspects of all the arts. So here we were, calling , trying to found out from all the people we could, what would be the best way to go.

(As a matter of fact in Florida, they would call people in from outside the state, to read over their things and tell them how to spend their money. I did it one year and we got in a big fight, because one of the things the director wanted to do was give money to the junior league for a dinner or something. I said no, that that would be terrible. Boy, she got angry with me!)

We were trying to do all things at once. The money was so little; politics hadn't gotten into it yet. When politics got into it, there was a whole new thing that had to be considered.

30% grant administration

30% advocacy/lobbying with public officials

30% field/constituency communication We were supposed to know about all aspects of all the arts, and we didn't of course, so we had to spend a lot of time calling people in to help us.

0% agency strategic planning

0% program development (There wasn't enough money to do program planning)

0% fundraising

10% partnership building (with other government agencies, with other types of nonprofits, with private sector, with arts/cultural agencies at other levels of government) –

We were thinking totally about money from other state organizations, for instance, the Dept of Education, we tried to work with them on programs. We weren't too successful, I mean, who were we? We gradually made some inroads, but they didn't throw money at us! But that was true about all my life in the arts. As long as they can take credit for it, and use your money, they'll do it.

3. Did your time use change in any noticeable way from the beginning to the end of your time at the SAA?

Oh yeah. Because as we began to get enough funding to begin to make some inroads, we were talking more about programming, talking to various organizations about developing programs.

[Q: What were some of your first programs – artists in residence?]

No, that was a touchy one from the beginning. It was all nonprofit organizations. Schools wanted to have us give them money to do things for themselves, and we generally said, "You've got more money than we have." I would hesitate to say that there was a specific goal; we were just trying to do the best we could with the most we could.

[Q: So there were no "planning processes?"]

No, there was no point to it. We'd get together – the ACA would have their meetings, state arts council meetings, and you'd talk there with each other about things, but again, it was more "gee whiz it worked there, let's try it here!"

I. What else – information, stories – can you tell us that you think people in the future ought to know about your agency, or the SAA world in general?

They were good people. There were 2 of us for the first year, plus a secretary in Kansas City; she had been there when I got there. She and her husband were involved with the theater and the opera. She ran that office; it was difficult not to develop competition between the two offices. So we would talk a lot.

[Q: What about state arts councils in general? What was that whole world like?]

Chaos. Tenderfoot people trying to feel their way. We were all aware of what each other was doing, in a way, because nobody really knew what was going to work.

[ME: So you stayed in touch, just to see what the ideas were.]

That's right.

II. Have you stayed in touch with the state arts agency field since you left your position as Executive Director? *NO*

A. If so:

1. From your experience, how has the role and the activities of SAAs changed since you began your career?
2. From your experience, what skills/competencies do you think are most important to incoming SAA staff? To SAA leadership?
3. Would you pursue a career in SAAs/public arts management today if you were starting out?
4. Has the field lived up to its promise? Why or why not?

B. If you have NOT stayed in touch with the field, why not?

The California thing ... it went so completely political for a while. Last year, one of the guys I hired was retiring, going someplace else. They asked me to come to the meeting. I didn't know anybody. I told a story about how we got money by the time; the director said, "Well now I know why they had so much trouble." It was kind of a funny story. When I came out here, Gary Snyder was our chair and he was great. But one time he brought Ginsberg, the poet., with him, to a little meeting. I had to go up and talk to a legislator, and Gary said, "You know, he has always wanted to see how this works, why don't you take him with you?" And it was the most conservative guy in all the world. Fortunately, he had no idea who I was, let alone Ginsburg; though his staff was delighted. Our budget office was \$750,000; the budget office told me I should ask for \$850,000 and I said, "No, we're going to ask for \$4 million." They laughed at me, so I went down and talked to the chairman of the appropriations committee. He met me at the door and said, "First thing I want you to know is, I hate the

arts. The only decent movie I've seen in the last 10 years is Dirty Harry." So I went back to the office and Clint Eastwood had often come to our meetings, so I called his office down in a little town down here, talked to his secretary. When we came went to the hearing this chairman walked in and said, "I don't why really we're having a meeting, these people want \$4 million, and I think we ought to approve it." And our financial officer (who's still here) said: "No, you're only going to recommend \$800,000." He said, "Young lady, how can they possibly do a program, do the things they have to do, with only \$800,000?" He said, "I'm voting the unanimous approval, with the chairman abstaining, for \$4 million." And she was not very happy.

[Q: Had Clint Eastwood called?]

He'd called up and said, "See what you can do." We got the money. But I've never felt welcome there. Well, I've never felt welcome going back to Missouri, Things have moved on, and that's the way it should be.

[Q: And you say it's also gotten "political?"]

Oh, it was terribly political. California right now is in the dumps; they went from \$36 million 2 years ago, down to \$1 million this year.

III. Think about the time when you were starting your work with SAA's. What have you changed your mind about, if anything, from then to now?

Politics, absolutely. It was a dream to think we would be supporting arts for arts sake – that was a dream, not a very realistic one. I guess it is [inevitable that it's political] .

[Q: Are there other things?]

I don't sense the states rely on each other as much as they used to. I think they're more in competition, than trying to help each other.

IV. Do you have a single piece of advice for a young person entering the field of public sector arts administration today?

Try and get a job with a theater or an orchestra first, not as a gopher, but

something in the line where they have to learn the work, learn the job, learn what it's all about. There's nothing worse than the person who has all the theories and none of the common sense. There's been several of them that way, and they see that this is not their field and they get out of it.

V. Information about you:

A. Education

1. Educational Level (has, ba, some grad, ma, PhD)

MA

2. Major/field

Music

- B. What skills/competencies did you have did you bring to your leadership position at an SAA? How had you acquired these skills? (Experience, professional development training, formal degree education)

I liked all_of the arts. I have to admit, I was not totally taken by the country fiddlers, but I appreciated them. It was just not my thing. I guess my whole life I've been pretty much involved – more plays, more concerts – I'm interested. I wish I knew more about all of them, but I hope I know some of it.

C. Work Experience

1. Specific arts management experience vs. non-arts management Experience
2. Did you work for a SAA either before or after your time as Executive Director?

I also worked as director of the California and Illinois arts agencies.

3. Did you work for a public sector agency – not an SAA – either before or after your time as Executive Director?

After Missouri I went to the NEA as States director. Then to the California and Illinois councils.

4. It may be necessary for us to just ask them to make a list of their work experience in chronological order – no need for years - including the SAA, and then for us to categorize – jotting one Of these categories after they have named the job:

- private sector management
- government agency management
- gallery/performance group
- fundraising/grant administration
- performer/critic/writer
- lobbyist/advocate
- nonprofit sector experience
- elected office holder
- arts education/teacher
- academic
- service organization experience: national or other

Work Chronology:

I was on the Music faculty of Washington University for 15 years; also during this time I was music critic and had a record review every month and weekly summary of things for the Globe-Democrat. Even while I was in the arts council, because this newspaper was a very conservative one; the chancellor of Washington University, he said: “Be an emissary between us. We can’t talk to those people, they can’t talk to us, so you’ll be the go-between here for a while.” It worked out pretty well. The chancellor of Washington University was Tom Eliot, TS Eliot’s nephew. When I got this job offer I went down and I talked to him and he said, “We’ll give you a sabbatical for a year, and we’ll pay you half salary.” At the end of the year he said: “What do you think?” and I said, “It’s going pretty good, I’d like to do another year.” And he said “OK, but we’ll only give you a quarter salary.” How about that?

[Q: You mean you were on half salary from the Globe during your first year with MAC? And quarter salary the second?]

Can you imagine a university doing that, these days? Tom was a real nice guy. They were enthused about the idea. At that time it was a real venture; they were enthused about that.

MAC

NEA; I did some for the Washington Post, was a stringer with them for a while.

California Arts Council

Illinois Arts Council.

Retired. Since retiring I was doing music reviews for public radio station here in Sacramento. But I've stopped that now.

D. Do you pursue any art form? Which?

Music/criticism till 2003.

E. *Demographic information:*

1. Gender *M*
2. Age *86*
3. geographic region he or she lives now *Sacramento, California*
4. political/partisan identification *Independent/but anti-republican*