

Donald R. Streibig

Executive Director of Ohio from 1967 through 1972

Interviewer: Susan Neumann

Date, location of interview: 10/29/04, Columbus, Ohio

Donald R. Streibig current contact information:

4692 Knightsbridge Blvd.

Columbus, OH 43214

614-459-5820

streibigdon@aol.com

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?

As I recall it was an after flow...result of John F. Kennedy's instituting the National Council of the Arts and with Mr. Johnson fulfilling his role as the new president; he wanted to build on that. The word was out that there was money to be had from the federal level to initiate and start state arts councils. And so when I first heard about arts councils, most states were in the first stages of naming a council, finding an executive director and funding it at some minimal source.

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?

I came into the situation in Ohio after about 8 or 9 months of an earlier executive director who had been a faculty member at Kent State, a friend of chairman, and his position didn't work out and he was dismissed and they were looking for a replacement. So I was visiting the USA, still working in Munich for the United States Army Special Services—that is the entertainment side of the secret service but the special service active in soldier shows--and the chairman of the arts council at the time was a retired army officer and the chairman of the search committee was also a retired colonel in the army so I was kind of shoe-in because of my military background. But I had been out of the country, out of the USA, for 15 years for all practical purposes so it was like a new job and a new...I was coming back to my home state but I really didn't know Ohio, I didn't know Columbus so I was relying very much on the Council in those early stages to find pockets of support in legislature as well as in the artistic community. So my first goal was just to find out who's on first, where do you go to get a typewriter, it's almost as basic as that.

How did you actually hear about the job? I heard about the job through my friend E Ray Scott who had worked with me in Army Special Services in Europe. We had been neighbors; I was in Munich and he was in Stuttgart. He had come back to the states about 6 years before I did with my family and it was through Ray that I heard about his position with the state arts council of Michigan and subsequently I discovered when I came on reemployment leave with the Army that there were 17 states looking for executive directors and Ray directed me to an office in New York that was acting as a

consultant to states agencies who were looking for arts administrators. So I got in line, luckily, and ended up in Ohio.

Ralph Burgard whose office I can't remember...Arts in America, Arts...the word "art" was in his title...and they were, I think it was not more than a 2 or 3 man office but Burgard's influence in the East Coast arts world was sufficient to get the assignment to help states find arts administrators so they acted as a search committee or a screening device for people who could be recommended for the position. So on my visit passing through New York City on my way to Columbus, I stopped off and made myself known to Burgard and company; applied in that fashion.

Did you have any idea where you would go with the job at that point? Not in the broad sense that you have when you've been out of a job and you look back and you see "Oh, if we'd done that, this might have happened; if we'd avoided that project, we could have done so and so." But when you're in the midst of it, and everybody was new, you were calling your friends and they say, "Well, we don't know. We haven't come to that problem yet." But the arts council opened with one secretary, one telephone, one typewriter, one filing cabinet, in the corner of the Board of Regents office and from there we were supposed to make art happen so it was primitive. It would be like going to a missionary station out in the back roads of India and saying, "What do you need? How can we help?" I had to orient myself, too, as any new director would have to find out, what is available, a kind of a survey of the arts. The obvious ones I already knew from my childhood...the Cincinnati Symphony and the Cleveland Orchestra...and things like that but I hadn't been in touch with it for so many years.

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?

I was with the arts council 7 years and by the time I was leaving, the arts council was definitely known in the community...we were definitely known in the legislature. Our funding was not as great as it eventually became but we were making strides in that direction. My emphasis always had been to include smaller communities as well as the obvious centers of culture. Ohio is blessed with so many centers...metropolitan areas...that whatever small subsidies we had from the state legislature were very quickly divided and could have been absorbed by any one of the major cities. Cleveland could have used all of our...I think our first year we had \$35,000 to work with and you can't buy very many musicians for that or subsidize them so it was a question of getting legislators to understand what our purpose was and then to make them understand that arts were essential to (a) the economy, (b) to their educational institutions and the social benefits that come with having a strong cultural community.

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

At the time I think I was proudest of the balance between the major institutions and the smaller ones. As I left the Council was still struggling with how do we divide the pie. I think that's an ongoing question. And it was shortly after I left, the Council approved the formula...the financial formula that had a certain percentage that was authorized to major institutions, those with a budget of a certain amount...and then the minor moneys were

left over to be divided among the smaller communities. And if you're going to persuade a legislator in a rural district, an Appalachian district of the state, then you had to provide some evidence that state moneys were coming to his community or else he wasn't going to vote for it.

E. What was most frustrating to you?

This is a new question. I haven't thought of frustrations. There are frustrations. When you have played your flute and done your song and dance in the legislature and then have it ignored...your requests have been ignored...or you got only a small percentage of what your perceived needs were, that would be the frustration. I came to conclusion very early on that energy expended had no relationship to results. As I later found out in the managing of the Ohio Theatre, there were certain events that were a shoe-in...bring in Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians and you sold out the house with no effort on your part but try to bring in an avante garde theatre company and you get 300 people in an empty auditorium and you pulled every publicity stunt you could think of. That would be frustration...energy expended and results.

F. What was most surprising to you?

Could I come back to that? I don't have a surprise like "Wooo."

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

NEA - It was very strong. I remember Clark Mitze especially was very helpful to individual states. Nancy Hanks who came after Roger was warm and friendly and could work the room and make things happen. I felt a personal connection to Washington; it wasn't some far off place that we had to pretend to be something that we weren't. It was a good relationship.

SAA's - I think we were all brothers and sisters in this organizing level we were all trying to get. There wasn't any sense of competition, at least not in my perceptions. We were eager to borrow from each other. In fact the first thing I did when I got my job, I spent a week in Michigan finding out what they had accomplished in the year that they had been more active than we had. In turn Indiana was not as active as Ohio was so it was a question of sharing. We tried in some instances what we would call in theatre block booking...two or three states getting together to share a program...which wasn't very successful as I recall because we didn't have enough resources and our staffs were so small that we didn't have time for somebody to coordinate any major event.

ACA - They were very helpful, too. They acted as an information source. I can't recall if they had any printed material that came out; of course, this was before the age of the internet so that communication was limited. But again we knew they were there and could be helpful. As I'm recalling it now, New York state had had an active council for maybe 10 or 15 years before we got started so we looked to New York but their situation was so far beyond us with their concentration of arts not only in New York City, Manhattan, but throughout the state and their budget at the time made ours look like we could buy an ice cream cone. But it's been my joy in retrospect during the latter years to see the progress the state arts agency in Ohio has made in being a leader as opposed to being a follower; innovative, Ohio has been innovative. I regard those early days as

getting a rocket off the launching pad. You need a certain kind of lift to get you into orbit, then after you're in orbit you can do lot of other things and the original plans and ideas need to be exchanged for longer range scheme. I think there's different kinds of skills that are needed at different times in the growth of any organization be it a newborn child or a stuttering senior citizen.

LAA's – Well, certain communities had none and I enjoyed going out to smaller towns like Urbana and Solon, and smaller cities, Ashtabula along the lake...places that stood in shadow of a Cleveland Orchestra or the Dayton Ballet Company... and being able to go in and saying, "What resources do you have? How can we help you?" and they found they had artists in their own community, not of their caliber perhaps but needed to be encouraged as well as money being funneled off to bigger arts organizations.

H. (this can be a probe question from g above) 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?

NEA – At this juncture my memory is not very good about any controversy or issue with the states versus the federal government. We were called upon at various times to lobby our congressmen and I think we made one or two visits to the halls of Congress in connection with one of our national conferences to stand up and be counted but my memory is that we worked well together. Yes, I would say the relationship with the Ohio Arts Council and the federal level was good. We never felt as though we were being neglected or ignored. Maybe we didn't get as much money as we wanted but we weren't in a position to argue. We were in the primitive stage and just trying to establish a presence in the community in Ohio.

Regionals – Regional as I eluded to earlier with a Cleveland versus Cincinnati and Columbus wasn't in the picture because we didn't have the artistic venues to compete with them, there was a kind of a north/south rivalry between the two but the Council members at the time were wisely chosen to be a diversified group representing the major cities, as I recall, that I met when I took the job. We had museums directors from the Cleveland Museum, the Toledo Museum, the Cincinnati Art Museum and representatives from artistic...the musical community including Boris Nelson, the arts/music critic for the Toledo Blade, people from the black community, women, men, and people we would now classify as from the socially...the patrons of the arts as well; and there were several educators on the board, too, so with those first 15 members, I think they had certainly credentials and gave me support.

LAA's – No, they were just all standing up in line with their presentations but no issues as such. It was just a question of trying to serve the state when you only had enough maybe to run a city the size of Springfield.

I. 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?)

Well, in the very early days...I can remember within the first six months...I was made very politically aware that there was an effort in a rural part of state to establish the outdoor drama at New Philadelphia. And a very active lady whom I am still in contact with through her legislators from her section of the state was looking for a line item in the

budget that would have been larger than the Arts Council's budget. The question at time: Do you have an outdoor drama or do you have a statewide arts council? And that was a political tug-of-war.

So working through that issue, who was your most effective political ally at the time?
This would have been the chairman at time, not a legislator. But he was from nearby in that part of the state. That's William, Bill Taylor, professor journalism at Kent State University, and his knowledge of particularly the Republican side of aisle helped us through that so that the outdoor drama got its funding but it was separate from Arts Council funding and we had no over their funding. It wasn't an "either-or"; it turned out to be both. It wasn't until a real political ally came when John Gilligan became governor who was definitely an arts patron and came down on our side wanting more funding for the arts.

J. How did you use your time:

1. Can you describe a prototypical day?

In its early days before we had a staff to make site visits, I was it so I was out of the office about half the time on the road being exposed to parts of the state I'd never visited before having to give talks about the Arts Council to Rotary's and Women's Clubs and potential decision makers. I don't think I ever judged any competitions but I saw a lot of performances and exhibits. And also to get ourselves known, we got a traveling art exhibit that I personally went around and hung up. I've often wondered where those prints are; I think they're still floating someplace. They were prints from a variety of sources. We purchased them, had them framed and took them out to high schools and community centers and so forth. I remember taking them down to Portsmouth once. A part of this whole early stage was establishing the arts advisory panels. That did two things; it helped us to put the decision-making in the hands of qualified people taking the responsibility of the final...well, the Council had the final say-so but they followed pretty much the recommendations of the various advisory panels. But I think we had 7 or possibly 8 advisory panels each of which were composed of maybe 5 to 7 and 8 people which then became our kind of spokespeople out in the community. It was a perk for that person to be asked to be chair of the literary committee or the film/communications committee and they, in turn, could speak if they were connected to their community and their legislators. And that was one of the fun parts for me was to meet the artists or the practitioners of the arts and to become involved with their world. Bear in mind I had been out of the country for 15 years so that it was a good introduction to what Ohio was doing.

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

45% - Grant administration
15% - advocacy/lobbying with public officials
25% - field /constituency communication
0 - agency strategic planning
0 - program development**

* - fundraising

15% - partnership building (with other government agencies, with other types of nonprofits, with private sector, with arts/cultural agencies at other levels of government)

*Fundraising was lobbying the legislature

** We didn't do anything. We were responding to the needs of the community. We had one or two one-day conferences, I can recall. It was on visual pollution. "Beautiful Ohio" we called it and poked fun at the god-awful street signage and that sort of thing. And that was a statewide conference; it was held for one day at one of the hotels. I still have the poster in my bathroom.

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

I can't discern any change. As I left, I think we had staff of, what, 6 and we were just beginning to have delegation of assignments to people like Ira but it didn't have a public relations director as such. (When did Peter Shinbach start?) We did have a public relations person. He was with us less than a year. I guess, if you want to go back, say change would have been that tasks were originally assigned to director because there was nobody else to do it were diversified by that time but those people were just getting their feet wet and there was still lack of funding to make any major...we were pretty much begging the legislature for support and then diverting it into the Cleveland Orchestra, wherever...

K. *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?*

I think by the time Gilligan was elected governor we were part of his...we had his endorsement. We were involved in his inauguration; people performed because of the governor's involvement in the arts. They were there for the arts quotient rather than for the political involvement. This was a governor who recognized the arts because he liked them. It was under his administration we started the annual Ohio Arts Council award. I think a lot of us in the Midwest here were looking always to New York; if New York did it, maybe we could do it, too. A lot of our...I'm thinking back now...some of our recognition programs were echoes of what New York was doing and I quoted it many, many times, Nelson Rockefeller's talk that was printed...I still have a copy of it... "Good art is good business and good politics" or something of that nature. It wasn't something to be added on; it was all part of the whole structure of the community, of the society.

II. Have you stayed in touch with the state arts agency field since you left your position as Executive Director?

I've stayed in touch with directors but not the field itself.

A. *If so,*

1. *From your experience, how has the role and the activities of SAAs changed since you began your career?*

Obviously some of the state agencies are now global in its intent, namely the Ohio Arts Council. I'm very proud of Wayne and your staff that have looked beyond Ohio and how Ohio's arts can be exchanged with other parts of the world. Of course, those things that

are being exchanged have been in existence before the Arts Council formed. I'm not aware of any new project that come along; there probably are but I'm not in touch with it. Wayne's efforts in South America, Cuba...I'm not sure how that helps the legislator from Ironton but it does go well for the State of Ohio's reputation in the global sense. We are a swing state.

2. From your experience, what skills/competencies do you think are most important to incoming SAA staff? To SAA leadership?

I haven't talked to any recent graduate with a "arts administration" degree. Most of us came to it because we had been involved in some other field that was similar to it, mine being army entertainment where I was dealing with a military mind and an audience that was always between 18 and 22 years of age and a transient authority. In my last job, I was there for 13 years and went through 6 or 8 changes in command. So the job was one of adaptability and always educating the newest officer that came through the door with his colonel insignia and explaining to him what special services was...what the arts and the army were all about. Transferring those skills to a state situation, you have always a constant turnover of legislators so in a sense you're dealing with a new audience every two to three years. But now the Arts Council having been in existence for 30 years, there is a tradition and a record so new legislator coming in has to admit or has to acknowledge that tradition and rather than tearing it down or ignoring it saying it doesn't need funding, she or he is now swept along with a tradition that Ohio is strong in arts and they can do great things and give our state a great image and so forth so that the early rocket stage as I was describing a few minutes ago, we're not back at that stage. We always have to keep it in orbit. I'm not sure that makes sense but...

3. Would you pursue a career in SAAs/public arts management today if you were starting out?

No way. I saw that earlier on your list and I was prepared for that answer. You noticed I looked you squarely in the eye as I said it. It's a very demanding job from the standpoint of, well, like a doctor, you're always on call. The phone rings and it's somebody in Ashtabula that wants to know why they were denied their mini-grant for whatever...you have to be all things to all people. Now remember you're talking to a man approaching his 78th year; I've been used to sitting in my rocking chair for a few years. If you were to ask me that at age 50 I would have said, "No, I love it." I do love it. But it's a young man's game, it seems to me. One who is willing to spend hours on the road. Maybe that isn't the case now with internet but it seems to me that unless you go out, you don't know what's going on and sometimes your strongest supporter is somebody from a small community that's doing the basket-weaving festival and, if you're not there, or give some representation from the state arts council, you cut yourself off from that person's world. I didn't take course in schmoozing.

4. Has the field lived up to its promise? Why or why not?

I'm not aware of the current scene but I am aware of field of arts consultants and I know that by numbers they have exploded exponentially; those who can't give counsel. A friend of mine who was a head hunter that got me the job in Jersey, Joe Ziegler by name, he said when he was a Yale graduate, he said that at the time he entered the profession, he

could name 4 or 5 people that were full-time arts consultants; he said now he can't name them all. That speaks well for the arts community as far as expanding but as far as being good at what they do, I don't know.

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

Some of my friends that I stay in touch with are no longer in the field and, therefore, our conversation goes to other directions; or they have left the field and are doing something else.

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

About arts management? (And about the field) I'm thinking that, in the early stages, it was pretty much like Mickey Rooney, "Hey, Judy, let's put on a show." We were concerned with taking care of the immediate challenge of getting agency started in state that had, in Ohio's case, a strong arts community already. We had to convince the arts community, the establishment, that there was a need for an arts council. I can recall direct, just like the outdoor drama in New Philadelphia, there was a move at one time to have direct government subsidy of the various major arts institutions. Why do we need another level of administration? And we had to persuade them that united we stand; we can get more, we can make a better play if we all stick together instead of squabbling over, at that time, minimal monies that were available. So that part of it...I seemed earlier to stress persuading legislators, but at the same time we were working on the arts community to let them know that, if they went it alone, they could probably convince them but then they'd all be at the same trough and it would have been ugly. It would have been ugly.

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

Yes, the advice is that, like playing professional basketball or baseball, only a few reach the top; only a few get the big bucks; that it's not a place where you can expect to make a killing but you can make a reasonable income and it's rewarding in that you can see your efforts bring things together that wouldn't have been possible unless you were in there pitching. I used again a baseball term. You have brought elements together that may not have come together without your assistance.

V. Information about you:

A. Education

- 1. Educational level (hs, ba, some grad, ma, Phd) MA from Bowling Green State University*
- 2. Major/field Play righting; 3rd play righting student there (1st was Mary Bill)*

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)

Some writing skills, editorial skills helped in grants writing; theatre experience helped with public speaking; had some experience teaching public speech and theatre in Wilkesburre; also directing shows

C. Work Experience

1. Specific arts management experience vs non-arts management experience

U.S. Army Special Services in Germany, France and Italy, presenting 7,000 performances from 1964-1967

2. Did you work for a SAA either before or after your time as Executive Director?

No

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

No

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
- Will give me his resume

Work Chronology

1964-1967

Chief of Soldier Shows, US Army Special Services, Munich, Germany – *government agency management; performing group*

1967-1974

Executive Director, Ohio Arts Council, Columbus, Ohio – *government agency management*

1974-1982

Executive Director, Columbus Association for the Performing Arts, Ohio Theatre, Columbus, Ohio – *private nonprofit sector experience*

1983-1986

Executive Director, New Brunswick Cultural Arts Center, New Brunswick, New Jersey – *private nonprofit sector experience*

1986-1987

Arts Management Consultant, Donald R. Streibig, Inc., New Brunswick, New Jersey –
arts consultant

1987-1990

Supervisor of Customer Services, Tax Masters, Inc., Beneficial National Bank, Peapack,
New Jersey – *private sector management*

D. Do you pursue any art form? Which?

Theatre; still direct; haven't acted for a long time

E. Demographic information:

1. *Gender* - Male
2. *Age range now* – 78; November 12, 1926
3. *geographical region he or she lives now* - Ohio
4. *political/partisan identification* - Democrat