

## Lessons from the Field

### The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts – Part 1 (2001–2003)

Washington, D.C.

Michael M. Kaiser, 2005

*In 2001, the Kennedy Center was financially stable and not in need of a “turnaround”. For the next two years a focus on presenting distinctive arts and educational programming helped the organization more fully realize its mission as the nation’s center for the performing arts.*

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Shortly after my resignation from the Royal Opera House was announced, I was phoned by Jim Wolfensohn, Chairman of the World Bank, asking if I would be interested in running the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. I had known Jim casually for some years and had spent a bit more time with him during my tenure in London. We were united by both a deep interest in the performing arts and, especially, a friendship with Valery Gergiev, the dynamic maestro of the Kirov.

To be honest, while I told Jim I would certainly enjoy discussing this position with the appropriate people—my initial thought was that the Kennedy Center job was not right for me. I had often remarked to Claudette Donlon—my right hand for so many years—when we brought American Ballet Theatre (ABT) to the Kennedy Center that the staff size seemed bloated and that there didn’t seem much to do. (I was soon to learn how wrong I was.) I also felt that Lincoln Center, whose own President had announced his resignation within weeks of the same announcement from the President of the Kennedy Center, was a more natural fit for me. I thought of New York as home and I knew then, as I do now, that Lincoln Center is the most amazing agglomeration of performing arts organizations in the world.

But as I studied both organizations from a distance, I learned that the organization structures of these two places were radically different. Lincoln Center housed a dozen or so separate arts organizations with separate managements and Boards. The Kennedy Center was one organization with many art forms coordinated by its President. I would have far more artistic latitude in Washington than in New York. I could develop programming that crossed art forms far more easily in Washington. And, of course, no one from Lincoln Center was knocking down my door!

I met with Jim Johnson, the hugely successful Chairman of the Kennedy Center, over lunch in London. He explained the array of possibilities the Kennedy Center had open to it. He made a persuasive case and he seemed to think I was a logical candidate for the top job.

I met with Tom Wheeler, the Chair of the Search Committee, also in London, and then had a series of interviews in Washington and New York. Carter Brown, the former Director of the National Gallery and a member of the Kennedy Center Board had me to his home for lunch with Alma Powell, wife of Colin Powell. I met with Ted Kennedy

(and his dog) at his office in Congress. Senator Kennedy has maintained a deep interest in the Center that honors the memory of his brother. I met with Dennis Hastert, the Speaker of the House. It was all rather heady. The entire search process was remarkably well organized, very different from my experiences at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Foundation, ABT or the Royal Opera House. And it was the first time in my life that an organization actually came after me for a job—I was used to having to work hard to convince a Board to hire me.

Throughout the search process, I was asked to give ideas of the things I would want to accomplish at the Center and of projects that I thought might make a difference. I believed that the Kennedy Center did far better work than it was credited; my predecessors, especially the outgoing President Larry Wilker, had developed a huge array of artistic and educational programs but the world did not know about them and the Center was mistakenly viewed as little more than a regional arts presenter.

I explained that I wanted to make the Kennedy Center an arts destination, with people coming to Washington in order to go to the Kennedy Center, not simply buying tickets because they happen to be in Washington anyway. I would work to bring more acclaim to the Center through a focused institutional marketing effort and with some high profile, unique programming. I had had an idea over 10 years before to do a cycle of Sondheim musicals in repertory to dispel myths about the work of the greatest Broadway composer. The Search Committee seemed to like this idea.

Coincidentally, I was invited to a dinner with Leonard Slatkin, the Music Director of the National Symphony Orchestra, a vital part of the Kennedy Center. Leonard was in London to assume leadership of the BBC Symphony. Leonard and I hit it off immediately and I believe he added his recommendation to the Search Committee.

After a three-month process, I was formally offered the job of President and quickly accepted. I would start work in January of 2001, a month after leaving the Royal Opera House.

My appointment was announced at a press conference held on the stage of the Eisenhower Theater in July 2000 at the Kennedy Center. I had no qualms about meeting the press *en masse* but I was scared I would call it ‘Lincoln’ Center rather than Kennedy Center. I didn’t. After London, I was prepared for the worst but the splendid press director for the Kennedy Center, Tiki Davies, had prepared me well. The conference could not have gone better and I sensed that both Jim Johnson and Tom Wheeler felt I performed well.

That night, my appointment was celebrated at a dinner held in Statuary Hall in Congress, or at least that is how it felt. In truth, the event had been planned long before I was engaged as a thank-you to major donors and Board members, but the timing was most fortuitous. I had an opportunity to meet many of the major players in Washington and at the Kennedy Center, including several of the Congressional members of the Board: Trent Lott, Dick Gephardt and Tom Daschle.

In a story by *The Washington Post* the next day, Ted Kennedy was quoted as saying that if I could make Trent Lott laugh I was going to do well in Washington. A feature story in the *Post* months later was equally encouraging. It was a great departure from the press “welcome” in London. (The British press made this new job seem like a real comedown from the Royal Opera House; what was this Kennedy Center anyway?)

After this heady introduction to Washington, I traveled back to London to complete my tenure at the Royal Opera House. Several senior members of the Kennedy Center staff came to visit to discuss plans for major projects including the Sondheim festival that was becoming a reality very quickly.

I returned to Washington twice before starting work: once to complete budgets for the following year and once to attend the Kennedy Center Honors in early December. The Honors is a unique event: Washington power meets Broadway power meets Hollywood power meets corporate power. The audience is as famous as the honorees and the stars who come to pay tribute to them. This years honorees—Clint Eastwood, Placido Domingo, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Chuck Berry, and Angela Lansbury—were the “typical”, diverse, extraordinary group.

The world knows the Honors through the television broadcast on the ever-loyal CBS, but most people have no idea of the social whirl that precedes the televised performance.

The weekend started with a white-tie ball on Friday night in support of the National Symphony Orchestra. Saturday included business meetings with two national support groups and a lunch for 600 donors. At this lunch, Jim Johnson made an extended speech that ended with a presentation of a concept for a new Plaza in front of the Kennedy Center, conceived by the Department of Transportation; the Plaza would link the Center to downtown Washington and would offer the opportunity for two new buildings. It seemed intriguing. There was no time to ponder this possibility, however, since next up was a spectacular dinner for 300 at the State Department, where the Honors are actually given to each winner. I sat with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Misha Baryshnikov and his guests. Each honoree was toasted by a special guest; the highlight for me was Leontyne Price singing her toast to Placido Domingo. Wow. This State Department dinner is perhaps the hardest ticket to get in DC and I can understand why. It is an intimate, star-laden, warm, celebratory evening.

On Sunday, CBS hosted a brunch for selected guests, as did George Stevens, the producer of the Honors since their inception. Jim Johnson hosted a small lunch at his home and then we all went, in black tie, to the White House. The honorees and the leadership of the Center meet with the President and First Lady and have their picture taken with the First Couple. Jim and Larry Wilker were gracious enough to ask me to be a member of this party. We waited, for what seemed to be an hour, before the Clintons appeared for the photographs. We then went upstairs and participated in a larger gathering as the President paid tribute to each honoree.

The entire group then traveled to the Kennedy Center for the Honors performance. Followed by a dinner for 1400! Jim Johnson mentioned me from the stage, a lovely

gesture, and I felt truly respected and welcomed. And exhausted. The Honors weekend is a marathon and I could not understand how the Kennedy Center staff managed it all so professionally. I was so wrong about the amount of work they had to do. The entire Honors experience made me realize what a remarkable institution I was joining; I returned to London for my final week at the Royal Opera House filled with excitement and pride.

I finally came to Washington to start work on Martin Luther King Day weekend in 2001. There were many challenges ahead: the current forecast for the fiscal year projected a deficit of over \$1 million, the forthcoming British festival seemed uninteresting and unpromotable, our AmericArtes Festival of Latin American arts was horribly behind budget, and the Executive Vice President, Kevin McMahon, announced he was leaving the day I arrived.

I had little time to ponder these challenges. My first week coincided with the inauguration of George W. Bush as President and I was invited to a slew of inaugural receptions. Ann Stock, the Vice President of Institutional Affairs and the former Social Secretary for the Clintons, took me to every party and introduced me to everyone in Washington. Everyone. Ann seemed to remember every name, every party affiliation, every history. I remembered nothing.

Just after the inauguration we had my first Board meeting. Larry Wilker was still at the Center and was warm and welcoming. I felt uncomfortable presenting at his last meeting since I was explaining my goals for the Center: to turn it into a true arts destination. I wanted to do programming that would excite audience members, donors and the press on a national level. I wanted to dispel the notion of the Kennedy Center as a regional arts presenter.

I also had three major programs to announce: the next season would include our Sondheim Celebration, the Kirov Opera and Ballet had agreed to come for the next ten years and Alberto Vilar was going to contribute \$50 million over the same ten-year period to pay for the Kirov visits and for a new arts management institute. The Board response was rhapsodic and I felt I overshadowed Larry's departure, which was not my intention.

On February 14 we announced the Vilar gift to the press. The Center was filled with press and staff. Jim Johnson and I made opening remarks; Alberto spoke at length and answered questions. He was very much on form and the press response was enthusiastic. We were starting the process of convincing the world that we were a true arts leader, the national cultural center that Congress had named us.

Shortly thereafter, Tiki and I met with the entire editorial board of the Washington Post. Even Katherine Graham was there. (Mrs. Graham gave one of her famous dinner parties for me on my arrival. Queen Noor, Justice Breyer, and several other Washington notables attended. The following year I was asked to be the music director for Mrs. Graham's funeral; a sad assignment.) I spelled out my plans for the Center and included mention of the Plaza Project. I had conceived of uses for the two buildings that could be

erected on the Plaza: one would house rehearsal space and office space (in short supply in the existing building) and the second would house our educational programs and a museum for the performing arts. The editors seemed excited by my ideas and placed a story about my vision for the future, including the Plaza designs, on the front page the following day. Rather quickly, we were becoming the “hot” arts organization in town.

This impression was confirmed when we announced our season to the press in early March. Not only did we have the Kirov Opera and Ballet and the Sondheim Celebration, we also had the Bolshoi Ballet, the Joffrey Ballet, Ballet Nacional de Cuba, Midori, Josh Bell, Pinchas Zuckerman, James Galway, Paul Taylor Dance Company, Alvin Ailey, a huge jazz program and on and on. I had made the decision to announce the entire Kennedy Center and National Symphony Orchestra season together. In the past, the plans for each art form were announced separately. By announcing the entire program together, we showed how rich and diverse our programming was. We even placed full-page ads in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* announcing the season.

The press went wild. While the Sondheim Celebration was the lead in most stories, we also had substantial coverage for the rest of the season. The *USA Today* called our ballet season, “the best ballet season ever.” I was invited to appear on the Charlie Rose Show, Breakfast with the Arts on A&E and numerous other radio and television programs.

The public was excited as well. One donor from New York sent us \$100,000, saying that he had never been to the Kennedy Center, but was excited by our plans. A major New York arts figure wrote that she would deny it if I ever quoted her, but that we were doing the programming that should be in New York and that she was tempted to move to Washington.

Another important couple was reading this coverage: Catherine and Wayne Reynolds. Catherine had recently sold her business for a huge sum and had created a philanthropic foundation. The Reynolds asked to see me and I invited them to lunch. They had read the press coverage of the past few weeks and wanted to know how they could help. They were devoted to the arts, to education and to quality. I suggested that what I needed most was money to do amazing work of the highest quality that we could otherwise not afford. Over the next few months we discussed how a grant could be structured and eventually they offered a grant of one million dollars a year, for ten years, to do one extraordinary set of performances each year. This was a programmers dream. We announced the grant at Honors weekend of 2001 to huge press and public excitement.

But developing programming plans is one thing, and implementing them is another. Most of the 2001–2002 season fell within the standard activities of the Kennedy Center. Booking foreign dance companies, managing the National Symphony, engaging jazz artists, etc. all demand a great deal of knowledge and expertise, but the staff had those to spare. Creating six new productions of Sondheim musicals was another story.

By the time we announced the Celebration, we had already been working on the Festival for almost a year. While I was still with the Royal Opera House, Jim Johnson had suggested I meet with Eric Shaeffer, the Artistic Director of the Signature Theater in

Virginia, who was directing a musical in London. Eric had successfully directed several productions of Sondheim's musicals and had a great relationship with him. Eric is a remarkable man: he is a truly talented director who is optimistic and practical at the same time. In other words, Eric is a dream director for any producer.

Eric agreed immediately to become the Artistic Director of the Sondheim Celebration and contacted Steve to see if he would endorse the concept. Steve was skeptical. He was willing to discuss the project but was not sure how we could do so many productions at the same time.

Eric and I met with Steve on December 20, 2000, three days after I left London for good. (I had been invited to a White House event that night but this was not a hard decision: Sondheim trumped a President any day.)

The meeting with Mr. Sondheim was a dream for me. When I was asked who I would like to have dinner with, I would always quickly answer, "Stephen Sondheim." Now here he was. In the flesh. In his living room. More amazing, when we met, he mentioned that he had read about my work at the Royal Opera House in *The Observer*, a British paper. I was astonished.

But I had work to do. I had to convince him that we could mount six high quality productions, in rotating repertory no less, at the same time. He asked why I wanted to do this. I answered that my goal was to mimic a museum retrospective. I wanted people to see several shows back-to-back, to appreciate the diversity of his work. I used the opera house production model as a guide; opera houses routinely mount several productions at one time and perform them in repertory. Eric, Max Woodward (the theater producer at the Kennedy Center) and I had thought through many of the production issues; Steve seemed impressed and agreed to the project.

But first we had to pick the six works. We quickly eliminated *Follies*, *Into the Woods* and *Assassins* (major New York productions were already in the works) and settled on *Sweeney Todd*, *Company*, and *A Little Night Music*. I insisted on *Sunday in the Park* (my favorite) and Steve wanted *Merrily We Roll Along*. I wanted to do *Anyone Can Whistle* but Steve felt *Whistle* required too many book changes. Eric wanted *Passion*, one of my favorites as well, and there we were. We all appreciated the combination of favorites and less familiar works.

We spent many weeks discussing directors. Eventually we agreed that Eric would direct *Sunday* and *Passion*; Sean Mathias, who had great success with *A Little Night Music* in London, would direct *Company*, Chris Ashley would direct *Sweeney Todd* and *Merrily*, and Mark Brokaw would direct *Night Music*. Of the four, only Eric was primarily known as a director of musicals; but the group seemed young and edgy and appropriate for this daring venture.

The directors and designers (Derrick McClain on sets and Howell Binkley on lights) met with Steve and Max and me at a dinner at Steve's house where we reviewed ground rules, budgets and schedules. We discussed casting and music directors. Steve said he wanted

each director to feel free to do their own versions of the shows; they were “licensed” to have their own visions.

We wanted the Celebration to be even more comprehensive than six shows. I am convinced that one way to make programming feel more important is to package productions with other types of programming. Steve suggested a Japanese production of *Pacific Overtures* that he admired greatly and we agreed to bring it over. Over time we added a children’s version of *Into the Woods*, suggested by Freddie Gershon, and one person shows by Barbara Cook and Mandy Patinkin. We started the entire festival with a symposium: Frank Rich interviewing Steve.

Picking the plays and directors was easy; casting them was a lot harder. We had a secret weapon: Tara Rubin. Tara is an amazingly astute casting director who Max selected to cast all six shows. She did a remarkable job. Her first *coup* was landing Brian Stokes Mitchell and Christine Baranski for the leads in *Sweeney Todd*. These two major stars and great talents, and greater people, set a tone for the entire festival. Their casting encouraged other great performers to sign on. We will be forever in their debt.

Over time, other major casting emerged: Lynn Redgrave, John Barrowman and Alice Ripley in *Company*, Melissa Erico and Raul Esparza in *Sunday*, Michael Hayden, Miriam Shor, Emily Skinner and Raul in *Merrily*, Michael Cerveris, Judy Kuhn and Rebecca Luker in *Passion* and John Dossett, Blair Brown, Doug Sills and Randy Graf in *Night Music*. It was a remarkable group.

While we were planning the Sondheim project we had other work to do. I had to restructure the senior staff after Kevin McMahon’s departure. I asked Claudette Donlon to come to the Kennedy Center to take over the administration of the Center, including all construction activities. It was great to have her back with me. I engaged David Kitto, who had run the marketing for Carnegie Hall for 17 years, to become our Vice President of Marketing and I promoted Marie Mattson to Vice President of Development. Along with Roman Terleckyj, Vice President of Artistic Planning and Lynne Pratt, our Chief Financial Officer, I felt I had a stellar top management team.

We mounted the planned British festival, including orchestral, ballet, modern dance, chamber music and theater performances. While it was wonderful for me to have the Royal Ballet come visit me in my new home, the entire festival did not seem to add up to much. Nor did the summer musical in the Opera House: *Kiss Me Kate*. The Broadway version had been spectacular and had won a Tony for Brian Stokes Mitchell. The road version was so stripped down it drowned in our Opera House. It convinced me more than ever that producing our own shows was imperative.

More successful was the National Symphony Orchestra’s tour to Oklahoma. Each year, the NSO visits one state that does not typically host many touring performing groups. In 2001, the NSO visited Oklahoma and I was able to witness just a few of the over 150 master classes, concerts, school lectures and other performances given by the NSO musicians. A brass quintet even performed at a special session of the Oklahoma State Legislature. The response of the public, especially children, government officials and the

press was overwhelming. In subsequent years, we traveled to South Dakota (where Tom Daschle was the narrator for Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*) and to North Dakota.

The National Symphony Orchestra is a key component of the Kennedy Center. Founded in the 1930's, the NSO merged with the Kennedy Center in the late 1980's. The "affiliation" allowed the NSO to benefit from the cushion of the Kennedy Center's fiscal resources and also allowed staff departments to merge to reduce costs. It has sometimes been a painful union. Since the NSO does not have an endowment that matches other major symphonies, substantial annual fund-raising is required. Some of the money raised is designated by the donor to be used specifically for NSO programs; roughly an equal amount comes from general Kennedy Center contributions. Over time, some staff and Board members have questioned whether the Kennedy Center should dedicate as much to the NSO as it does; from the beginning of my tenure, it appeared to me to be an important investment, since the NSO is the central producing element of the Center.

Just after Labor Day of 2001, we opened our Arts Management Institute. Twelve young arts administrators from around the nation and the world arrived to begin a one-year program. I was proud of Derek Gordon and Darrell Ayers, who ran our Education Department, for moving so fast and so well to create this program. We announced the grant on February 14. By early September, we had twelve motivated Fellows and an entire faculty ready to go.

This Institute is just one of the many vital educational programs developed at the Center. We take pride in hosting the largest arts-education program in the nation, spending over \$25 million a year on these activities that focus on training teachers to bring arts into the classrooms (over 16,000 trained annually across the nation), bringing performances to children (through satellite networks and tours of theater performances for children), training talented young dancers and conductors and musicians and set designers, fostering theater in colleges (through our American College Theater Festival) and numerous other outreach activities.

The Fellows took class every morning; Marie Mattson taught fund-raising, David Kitto taught marketing, I taught planning, etc. After class they worked in one of our departments on a high level project; after 3 or 4 months they rotated to another department. The Fellows also came to most Kennedy Center events and to all staff meetings. I believe this set of experiences gave each Fellow a strong background in managing arts organizations and engrained in them my philosophy of arts management.

While we had thought through each element of the program, nothing could have prepared our Fellows for their fifth day at the Kennedy Center: September 11, 2001. Early that morning Senator Kennedy did a live interview on the Today Show from the Center; we were planning to celebrate that evening, a gift from the Kennedy Family to establish an internship program for developmentally disabled young people.

The staff of the Center was sitting in a meeting when we received word of the two planes hitting the World Trade Center. Shortly thereafter, we saw the Pentagon go up in smoke out of the windows of the Center's restaurant. Within minutes, we were warned that a



fourth plane was on its way to Washington and we needed to evacuate immediately. The staff of the Center left quickly and quietly. Most of the senior staff joined me in my nearby apartment. We cancelled all the day's performances and events immediately. And then we watched in horror along with the rest of the world.

I felt it was important that we reopen on September 12. I believe the work we do is important and I believed that audiences needed solace and inspiration at this difficult time. While most people supported the decision (and the full houses suggested it was a good one), others were skeptical. I stood before the musicians of the National Symphony on September 12 and explained my feelings; they were supportive if scared. Some were skeptical. Over the summer there was a management change at the NSO; it was hard for them to find trust in their new leadership in this most unsettling environment.

Immediately we set to work to create a performance to honor those who died on September 11, and especially to console the families of the Pentagon victims. The orchestra musicians, and all employees, agreed to donate their service to this project. WETA, the local public television station, agreed to telecast the event. Frederica von Stade, Mary Chapin Carpenter, James Galway, and soloists from The Washington Opera all agreed to participate. And Mrs. Bush and Senator Kennedy agreed to serve as hosts. On September 24, just 13 days after the tragedy, a major performance was mounted and telecast. All the families of the Pentagon victims were invited but we took special pains to ensure that they were not exploited by the press. It was a tragic series of events but the staff and musicians of the Kennedy Center and the NSO came through magnificently.

Appropriately overshadowed by these events was the end of our fiscal year. We had managed to make up the deficit I inherited and showed a small but proud surplus for the fiscal year.

Gradually, things got back to normal. Although what the new definition of "normal" might be was anyone's guess. Just one month after September 11, a new form of terror came to light: anthrax.

Our Mark Twain Award for lifetime achievement in American humor was to be given to Whoopie Goldberg. An all-star line-up had agreed to come to perform for our audience and for a television special. But Whoopie got scared by both September 11 and the anthrax attack at the Capitol. It took days of convincing, primarily by Ann Stock, to get our reluctant honoree to attend her own awards ceremony. A second anthrax attack occurred in the offices of Tom Daschle the day of the Awards. After this attack all mail delivery to federal buildings was stopped for months.

It was extremely difficult to conduct business without mail. Returned tickets were not received. Invitations were not received. Bills were not received. Donations were not received. And since most people and corporations were getting their mail, they did not realize we were not. So we had scores of angry audience members, donors and creditors.

Unfortunately, we had just mailed our Honors invitations before the anthrax scare as well. So we did not receive Honors orders and had to call everyone entitled to tickets.

We had a stellar group of honorees once again: Quincy Jones, Van Cliburn, Jack Nicholson, Luciano Pavarotti and Julie Andrews.

The process of seating everyone at Honors, and at all Honors weekend activities, is astonishing. There are lunches, dinners and performances. No one can sit next to the same person twice, unless they specifically ask. The events range in size from 50 at some dinners on Saturday night to 2,200 in the Opera House for the performance itself. Where one sits is crucial. Those in the front of the orchestra get to turn around and see the President and the honorees. These and the box seats are prime. The competition for these seats is tremendous. The only fair way to distribute them is to offer the best seats to those who contribute more. Needless to say, there is much jockeying for position, many threats, and numerous calls to Board members from people trying to upgrade. I pity my development staff especially Marie Mattson who even had her life threatened by one angry donor!

As Honors season ended, we could focus once again on several important projects. First among them was the Plaza Project. While everyone was excited by the concept of the Plaza, receiving funding was a different story. The plan had been to include the Plaza in the Highway Trust Fund legislation but that was at least two years away. I naively asked Senator Kennedy whether we could get authorization through separate legislation. He said there was no reason why not and we began the process of lobbying for approval of the project.

We also announced our 2002–2003 season. Developing this season was a challenge since we were planning to renovate our Opera House and this important facility would be closed for much of the season. We needed to compensate by having some major projects in other theaters. Highlights included our International Ballet Festival featuring the Bolshoi, Kirov, Royal and Royal Danish Ballets, as well as Miami City Ballet and American Ballet Theatre on two spectacular programs. In addition we had the Bolshoi *Nutcracker*, the San Francisco Ballet, an all-star concert version of *Carmen Jones*, our new Prelude Festival to open our season, *Medea* starring Fiona Shaw, *Pacific Overtures*, the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Honors, a full NSO season including a festival, *Soundtracks: Music on Film*, to be co-directed by John Williams and Leonard Slatkin, and the inauguration of a new relationship with the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC).

I was looking for a few additional companies with which to develop long-term relationships. I knew the Kirov visits would be superb. I thought it would be great to find a theater company that could also make regular appearances. I had a strong relationship with the Royal Shakespeare leadership from my time in London. I contacted the Chairman, Lord Alexander, and we began a discussion that culminated in an announcement of a five-year relationship.

The RSC visit was meant to be a highlight of an otherwise muted theater season. I had purposefully not planned to produce our own theater since I wanted to go through the Sondheim Celebration and see what we learned before we planned any further self-productions. One highlight of our forthcoming season could not be announced: *Oklahoma*. The highly successful London production was moving to Broadway and the

producer, Cameron McIntosh, did not want us to announce this tour until the show had opened in New York.

We eventually did announce the show that was meant to be the most sellable element of our theater subscription. I wish we hadn't. When the show did not do as well as planned in New York, the tour was cancelled and we were left with a big hole. The remaining elements of our subscription were nice but not big crowd pleasers. And, when all was said and done, the RSC production of *As You Like It* turned out to be a big disappointment.

We worked for months and months to find an alternative to *Oklahoma*. We considered mounting new productions of several major musicals but could not get the rights. We got the rights to two shows, but the star we wanted asked for more money than we could afford and the widow of the author of the book for one show would not allow the show in a large theater like the Eisenhower. We had the idea for a revue, but could not entice the talented people we wanted. In the end, after months of conceiving, budgeting, casting and cajoling, we had nothing. And then an idea: why not bring back Barbara Cook to do a new concert. She had been so spectacular the year before. It was not the big show that *Oklahoma* was, but it was high quality and ended our theater season on a high note.

It is a strange element of working in the arts, that while you are announcing one season, and planning several seasons thereafter, one also is mounting the season you announced the year before. It requires an ability to focus on several moving targets at once.

In February 2002, the Kirov Opera and Ballet made their first of ten visits. Valery Gergiev, my great friend, conducted both *Khovanschina* and *Macbeth*. The critics were not enthralled but the audiences were. The ballet did not fare much better. The opening, *Sleeping Beauty*, was a faithful recreation of the original production. I thought it would be a good way to introduce the company; I was wrong. The production is long, too long for our audiences. The dancing was good but not great. We all expected more. The next production, *Jewels*, however, delivered what we wanted. It was breathtaking. Only the *New York Times* took exception though the same critic raved when the Kirov danced the same ballet in New York months later. All in all, it was a bit disappointing that more of a fuss was not made about the visit. But the groundwork for future visits was laid.

As a sidebar to the Kirov visit, we mounted an exhibition about Rudolph Nureyev, a graduate of the Kirov school, featuring the works of Jamie Wyeth. Jamie and his wife Phyllis had a long friendship with Nureyev and did a number of drawings and paintings. With the Farnsworth Art Museum, the Brandywine River Museum and the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, we created an exhibition that included the drawings and paintings as well as costumes and videos. It was a beautiful show.

While I wanted every presentation to be perfect (and knew that was unrealistic), it was clear that the press and the public were focusing on the forthcoming Sondheim Celebration. The day before the box office opened, the *Washington Post* ran a huge story. The next day—pandemonium. We set an all-time Kennedy Center box office

record, selling over \$600,000 of seats for Sondheim. The number of patrons – at the box office and on the phone seemed endless. It was a great boost to our confidence.

While Sondheim sales were growing, the NSO was mounting a major project of its own: an extended tour of Europe. I was fortunate to join the tour twice: in Dublin and in Paris. I have always tried to join tours of my artists; it is important that they see you and develop trust in your interest. This makes it a bit easier to deal with challenging issues when they emerge. This tour, given the quality of the cities and venues, was grueling, but it did a good deal to convince the music world that the NSO was truly on an artistic upswing.

For all of us at the Kennedy Center, the summer of 2002 will always be known as the Sondheim summer. After all the preparatory work, we finally went into rehearsal for *Sweeney Todd*, the first show. The night before, I hosted a party for the cast and designers in my home. We wanted to create a warm atmosphere so the artists felt safe to do their best work and to take risks. We also felt we had something to prove; since many of the performers came from New York, we wanted them to know we knew how to run a theater project, even if we were new at it. Our two Company Managers—Dan Hagerty and Chuck Andres—did an amazing amount to provide a warm welcome and earned the love and respect of everyone associated with the project.

Those first few rehearsals were magical. To hear such talented people dive into their remarkable roles reminded us why we had been planning this for so long. The cast members were also incredibly nice. There was no temperament. Just talent. Steve came to the first rehearsal—it all seemed historic.

Each week another cast would arrive and we repeated the process. Each group was different; all were talented. And all got into the rhythm of “Camp Sondheim.” After rehearsals, and later, after performances, the actors would gather at the restaurant across the street and the casts could intermingle. The theater world is a small one and so many of the performers had worked together before.

Shortly after rehearsals began, we held the first event of the Sondheim Celebration, a symposium with Frank Rich interviewing Steve. Originally, we planned to hold this in the Terrace Theater which seats 500. After all the press we received, we moved it to the Concert Hall and filled all 2,400 seats. I made a short speech and was immensely gratified by the public’s warm and enthusiastic greeting when I entered the stage. It was clear the public was thrilled that this project was about to begin.

Steven and Frank were perfect. They were funny and warm and informative and the audience roared with approval. It augured well for the rest of the festival.

The tech week for *Sweeney Todd* did not. We had only allowed a few days on the stage for each cast. (Typically, a Broadway show will have several weeks to get the sets and lights and sound to work properly and for the cast to become familiar with the stage.) This was a decision we would all regret, but was forced by financial concerns. Working in rep, with a different show each night, is extremely expensive. We had also developed

the schedule when we had anticipated very simple sets. Although the set designs became more elaborate, we were stuck with the original rehearsal and performance schedule since tickets had already been sold.

The *Sweeney* set was complicated. Huge pieces of scenery were moved by stagehands and the actors. The lighting was complicated and the sound system tricky. (It never worked very well and was the weakest part of the festival.) The dress rehearsal on Friday afternoon (we opened that night) was a fiasco. At one point, Brian Stokes Mitchell almost fell 10 feet to the floor, as a staircase was not moved in time to the proper place. We all were petrified about the opening that night. We did not want our vaunted Sondheim Celebration to go down as a huge fiasco. We did not want the few people who questioned our ability to mount such a large project to be able to gloat.

But the theater gods smiled on us and it was one of those magical performances. The audience went wild from the first stage picture and did not stop. Brian and Christine were unbelievably good. The entire ensemble gelled perfectly. The curtain calls were as ecstatic as I have ever seen. Backstage we were all sobbing, including Steve. We had been so tense all week and yet we had produced a truly great show.

The reviews were ecstatic as well, except for the *Washington Post* that was admiring but reserved. We were disappointed, but the avalanche of great reviews elsewhere made up for it. *The New York Times* raved.

The cast of *Company* watched the first performance of *Sweeney Todd* and was concerned that their show would not measure up. It was a stormy rehearsal period and the cast had not had the benefit of an audience to laugh at the extended book scenes. While tech week was not as harried as *Sweeney's* the week before, everyone was nervous. Opening night was another triumph. The critics were even more enthusiastic. We were on a roll.

*Sunday in the Park* is my favorite Sondheim musical; Eric had devised an ingenious ending to the first act that took one's breath away; every audience applauded as his *coup de theatre* was revealed. The first three shows ran in repertory while the second set of three was rehearsed. Our children's version of *Into the Woods* gave student performers a chance to take the stage; Steve cried at the opening. Mandy Patinkin and Barbara Cook gave us beautiful one-person shows; Barbara also led a master class that revealed why she is so admired.

By the time we opened our second set of shows, we were far more experienced. *Merrily* opened with unanimous praise for Raul's amazing performance of Charlie. Each night during the overture, the entire cast came on stage and danced. We called it the dance party. Even Steve joined in one night. *Merrily* was, for me, the surprise of the series. Eric's *Passion* was an astonishing accomplishment. It was the jewel of the series. And Blair Brown and John Dossett and Doug Sills and Randy Graf gave us a wonderful *Night Music*.

On the last night of *Night Music*, I asked the entire organization to join the curtain call: the stagehands who had worked so hard to mount so many shows, the ushers and the

administrators. It was a joyful and sad moment. We were all so proud of the artistic accomplishment and the remarkable press we had received.

None of us wanted it to end and I decided to attempt a one-night compendium of our Celebration in New York. Almost all of the principals made themselves available for what turned into a love-fest at Avery Fisher Hall. For us, it was a fitting reunion of Camp Sondheim.

Before, during, and after the Celebration, the press was astonishing. From virtually every American city, and many foreign cities, journalists covered our celebration. It helped bring audience members from all 50 states and 28 foreign countries. I was trying to turn the Kennedy Center into a destination, but this was far more than I could have dreamed. Virtually every critic named the Sondheim Celebration as one of the top ten theater events of the year and *Entertainment Weekly* named us number one.

The after-effects of the Celebration will take years to evaluate. But it was clear that the Kennedy Center was no longer just a touring house and it was equally clear that despite an economic recession, a major artistic project could flourish and could contribute to the organization. Contributions reached record levels despite the stock market and the recession.

The impact on our staff was equally dramatic. There was a pride that we had done something amazing. Even the stagehands union decided to give a \$25,000 donation to the Kennedy Center after the Celebration. They wanted to encourage us to do work like this again.

But Sondheim was not the only thing happening at the Center. The first entry in the Catherine B. Reynolds Foundation Series for Artistic Excellence was a remarkable evening that paired the Bolshoi Opera and the Bolshoi Ballet in a very rare joint performance. The performance was followed by a lavish dinner with a stellar guest list, including three Supreme Court Justices and a who's who of Washington. It was a fitting way to begin this fantastic series.

But we had no time to rest. September 2002 was the busiest month in our history. We mounted a concert to honor the anniversary of September 11, we opened our first Prelude Festival, we received Congressional authorization for the Plaza Project, we initiated our Capacity Building Program and we welcomed our second class of Fellows.

The September 11 concert was broadcast nationally on NBC with Tom Brokaw as host. President Bush, Mrs. Bush and Caroline Kennedy appeared on the stage (we had to film this sequence first so the President was free to leave), and a host of talented performers and celebrities contributed their services, including: Gloria Estefan, Placido Domingo, Renee Fleming, Aretha Franklin, Rudolph Giuliani, Al Green, India.Arie, Chris Isaak, Alan Jackson and Reba McEntire.

We also created a new festival called Prelude to open the season. I felt the year before that the Washington arts season just seems to start without any fanfare, unlike the big openings in New York City. I wanted to do something big and special to mark the new

season and I wanted to focus on popular attractions that would bring many people to the arts. I also wanted to allow many other DC-area arts organizations to participate.

The Prelude Festival included NSO concerts, a play reading festival (that included involvement of many local theaters), the Washington Opera, the Washington Ballet, dancing on the River Terrace, the Flying Karamazov Brothers and a sing-along screening of *The Sound of Music*. Thousands of fans of the movie showed up in costume to sing along with the movie. It was a ridiculous and fun event. Our Open House event (during which every theater of the Center runs all day with special programming at no cost to the audience) formed the centerpiece of the Festival. Thousands and thousands of people came to Prelude events and we all believed a new tradition had started.

As the Prelude Festival concluded, we received authorization from Congress for the Plaza Project. It had taken almost one full year to receive approval from the two relevant committees and the two Houses of Congress and to get the signature from President Bush. We had spent hundreds of hours lobbying for this piece of legislation that authorized Congress to spend \$400 million on the Plaza Project and to authorize us to raise money to pay for the two new buildings. The lobbying process is a complicated and mysterious one, and as a novice, I was especially frustrated. One talks and talks to members of Congress and hopes that the legislation will happen. Behind the scenes, the wonderful Congressional staff members make the process work. We gave a special dinner to thank these staff members most involved with the project. We had hoped to have the legislation passed in June but time ran out and we had to wait until September for H.R. 5012 to be passed. I was given a copy of the legislation with one of the President's pens. It is a treasured souvenir of a mammoth effort.

Unfortunately, Congressional authorization does not mean you get the cash. We began the lobbying effort to have the funds appropriated to the Department of Transportation that would manage the project.

While the legislation passage was the highlight of the month, it was probably not the most important thing that happened. I believe the Capacity Building Program is one of the most significant new programs we have started at the Kennedy Center.

I had grown increasingly concerned about the fate of America's African-American, Latino, Asian-American and Native-American arts organizations, since only three had budgets of more than \$2 million. Too many hang by a thread and are threatened with closure almost daily. I thought that the Kennedy Center could play a role in training the leaders of these arts organizations. We began with a symposium at Yale University in early 2002. Several minority theater executives joined together to discuss fund-raising and boards and marketing. After the seminar concluded, the groups were unanimous in asking for additional help. I thought about this all summer and devised the Capacity Building Program for Culturally Specific Performing Arts Organizations. We selected a group of 17 arts organizations from Washington, New York, San Antonio, St. Louis and numerous other cities to participate. We paid all expenses.

Every two weeks I got on-line with the leaders of these arts organizations to discuss a particular subject: building an individual donor base, for example. Typically I would send out some materials ahead of time. The chats give everyone a chance to ask questions and share experiences. In March, everyone gathered at the Kennedy Center for a three-day symposium, taught by our senior staff. Each group worked with a Fellow to develop a plan for the organization. It was a very rewarding session. I believe if the Kennedy Center is to be *the* national cultural center, we must take care of smaller arts organizations. If we are to have a healthy arts ecology, we need all kinds of organizations to thrive.

Using the Fellows to facilitate the Capacity Building Program was a major addition to the Fellowship program. Each of the Fellows wrote a plan for one of the organizations in the Capacity Building Program. I thought this was especially important, since their experiences at the Kennedy Center skewed their thinking about arts management issues; the Center is huge and the issues we face are not necessarily the same addressed by much smaller organizations—I felt the balance of large and small was a helpful educational tool.

Despite the growing problems in the economy and the size of the Sondheim Celebration, we once again had a surplus for the 2001–2002 fiscal year. This seemed like a huge accomplishment, under the circumstances, and confirmed my belief that expansive programming tied to aggressive marketing can yield successful financial results.

Too many organizations were cutting back in this environment. I remain concerned that many will fall in the trap experienced by Ailey or ABT or the Royal Opera House; by trying to “save their way to health” they will actually reduce future revenue streams dangerously. The “Sondheim year surplus” has given me added ammunition when discussing this philosophy with troubled arts organizations.

Marketing is a particular focus of mine. I spend time every day with our head of marketing, David Kitto, and head of press, Tiki Davies, discussing ways to promote our organization. I am convinced that it has been my aggressive approach to marketing that has created success in the arts institutions I have run. It makes fund-raising and ticket-selling so much simpler. David and I worked on creating a new look for the Center’s publications; Tiki and I worked on increasing substantially our presence in national printed and electronic press. Both worked. But for any of this to make a difference, the art must be wonderful and exciting, and the Sondheim project was the first vehicle we could exploit.

For the second Catherine B Reynolds Foundation Series for Artistic Excellence, I wanted to do something very different from the Bolshoi and very special. Roman had recommended we consider mounting a concert version of *Carmen Jones*, Oscar Hammerstein’s re-work of Bizet’s *Carmen*. It made great sense to me since we could showcase the National Symphony Orchestra and could entice many leading performers to fill the wonderful roles in that work.



The casting process quickly led to Vanessa Williams and Harolyn Blackwell, but we had a difficult time finding a tenor who could be believable and could sing the part. Roman heard about an African-American tenor who was working in England. On a trip there, I heard Tom Randle and was impressed. He helped complete the picture. Roman convinced Oscar de la Renta to do the costumes and I asked Placido Domingo to conduct. With over 200 in the cast, it was a remarkable project and brought a truly diverse audience to the Center.

While *Carmen Jones* was a very public success, I had a very private moment that ranks with the most exciting of my career: I was invited to have lunch with the Supreme Court. All of the Justices. Justice Stephen Breyer, a music enthusiast, issued the invitation. I had already met Justices O'Connor, Ginsburg, Scalia and Kennedy at Kennedy Center performances and events. But to sit down to lunch with all nine was astonishing. We discussed the challenges of running arts organizations, the impact of the economic decline, the way arts are funded in Europe, the future of the Kennedy Center and a range of other arts-related issues. All nine Justices were active participants and all were extremely gracious to this overwhelmed arts administrator. It placed in sharp relief the advantages of running a national cultural center.

From the intimacy of the Supreme Court I moved quickly to the blitzkrieg surrounding the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Kennedy Center Honors. We had a special group of honorees: Chita Rivera, James Levine, Elizabeth Taylor, James Earl Jones and Paul Simon. I was especially pleased that James Levine accepted the award. He has always been a hero to me. The press, of course, focused on Ms. Taylor who could not have been more charming during the entire Awards weekend. Paul Simon was a replacement for Paul McCartney who had accepted the Honor and then had to decline, owing to a family wedding. We were obviously disappointed but Paul Simon was a most deserving honoree in any event.

This Honors weekend was made special because we were able to announce an extraordinary grant. The Catherine B. Reynolds Foundation pledged \$100 million for our Plaza Project campaign. I had been talking with Catherine and Wayne about their participation in the Plaza Project. Every time we talked, they reiterated their belief that this was one of the most significant projects in the arts in America. And every time we talked, they increased the amount they were willing to pledge. It was astonishing. When Jim Johnson announced the gift at the Honors performance, the Reynolds got a most deserved standing ovation and the press coverage (including a 60 Minutes piece that Mike Wallace did about Catherine) was spectacular.

As the Center became more successful, I was asked to do an increasing number of public speeches. So many arts groups asked me to speak that I had to say "no" too often. But I did speak at the annual meeting of the American Symphony Orchestra League, at the Aspen Institute, at a meeting of orchestra union executives and on and on. I also spoke twice at the National Press Club. The first speech described my vision for the Kennedy Center. It went extremely well and was broadcast nationally on C-SPAN.

My second speech outlined my concerns for the arts environment. I discussed my fear that too many arts organizations were cutting back on programming just at the time they needed to expand. I discussed my concerns about arts management training, about arts education and diversity, and about the implosion of the recording industry. Not everyone agreed; some in the industry thought I was too negative.

In January of 2003 we announced the engagement of Rafael Vinoly as our architect of the Plaza Project. His appointment followed a 10-month search process, during which we interviewed dozens of architects, flew to view buildings, took references and reviewed design concepts. The diverse Search Committee was unanimous in its decision to select Rafael.

His concept for the Plaza immediately made sense to everyone. He reduced the Plaza size, created a monumental fountain, extended our back porch over the Potomac, moved the buildings closer together and did it all with a grace and style that attracted the committee, the public and the press. The architecture critic for the *Washington Post*, Ben Forgy, was enthusiastic in his praise. As were the leaders of the various agencies who have to approve the project: the Department of Transportation, the District of Columbia, the National Park Service, the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capitol Planning Commission. (It is not easy getting anything done in Washington!)

As we worked to disseminate the Vinoly plan, I was conscious that we could not put so much emphasis on the Plaza Project that the work we do, the reason we exist, was forgotten. In February 2002, we mounted our International Ballet Festival. Since we were renovating the Opera House, we needed to move some of our ballet series into the Eisenhower Theater. I wanted to do something special there, not just present ballet in a smaller venue. We decided to bring six major companies to the Kennedy Center and ask them to present smaller works that would work well in the Eisenhower.

The first week included the Royal Danish Ballet in Bournonville excerpts, the Bolshoi Ballet in a potpourri of Russian gala-type pieces and American Ballet Theatre in *Fancy Free*. Week two included Miami City Ballet in *The Four Temperaments*, the Kirov Ballet in the “Shades Scene” from *La Bayadere* and a group of English dancers led by Adam Cooper in a MacMillan piece. (Originally the Royal Ballet was to have been the British representative but owing to a new production of *Sleeping Beauty*, they had to cancel. I felt that having Adam, a former Royal principal, in a MacMillan piece—it was the tenth anniversary of his death—made great sense as a substitute.)

My goal was to show the differences in national styles and the diversity of “classical” ballet. I think we did that and the audiences seemed enthusiastic, but the critics were muted. It was a disappointment.

In January, Jim Johnson announced that he would step down as Chairman in early 2004. While the news was not unexpected, it was still a blow. Jim had been the most supportive Chairman with whom I have ever worked. He let me do my job and, at the same time, gave me every support possible. He has also had an historic impact on the

Center. He professionalized management, built the fund-raising effort, led the Plaza project and, most important, created the Millennium Stage.

His shoes would be difficult to fill, not just because he had been so prolific, but also because the role of Chairman changed over time. When the Center was opened in 1971, the Chairman and President were one person, Roger Stevens. As the Center grew, the need for both a professional President and a stellar Chairman grew as well. With the challenges of fund-raising for both a huge annual effort and for the Plaza Project, the new Chairman would have to play a central role in the fund-raising effort while still leading this complex institution. But the rewards of playing a leadership role at the Kennedy Center are huge.

All of us at the Center have an opportunity to attend remarkable events. I was invited by the Reynolds to their annual Academy of Achievement weekend in Washington, D.C. The Academy brings the most talented college students together with individuals of tremendous achievement: from politics, sports, medicine, the arts, etc. At the final dinner I sat with Elie Wiesel, Ken Burns, Bob Strauss, Coretta Scott King, Shimon Peres and George Lucas! I felt like I was in a wax museum.

Another pleasure was announcing the 2003–2004 season. I truly believe all the work we had done at the Kennedy Center for two years led up to this announcement. The range of art was astonishing. And while the Sondheim Celebration had been a clear highlight two seasons ago, the 2003–2004 season was a season of highlights; every art form had a range of performance of the highest caliber.

We announced a festival dedicated to Tennessee Williams (with three new productions of his plays, an evening of one-acts and an evening of Williams' letters), a new musical by Stephen Sondheim, a highly praised production of *The Taming of the Shrew* by the RSC, Ballett Frankfurt, Cleo Laine, Cecilia Bartoli, the Berlin Philharmonic with Sir Simon Rattle and on and on.

We also planned a Tchaikovsky Festival that would open with the NSO and Leonard Slatkin with Yefim Bronfman, Gil Shaham and Yo-Yo Ma on a single concert and also would include the Kirov Opera with Valery Gergiev, the Kirov Ballet, the Suzanne Farrell Ballet and the Vermeer String Quartet. This festival suggested the Center's ability to program across art forms; exactly the kind of curation I wanted to feature. We also announced a French Festival that would include a full slate of NSO performances, the American debut of L'Opera Comique, several theater productions, Les Arts Florissants, Lyon Opera Ballet and a series of jazz performances. Funding this festival would be a challenge given the prevailing political climate between the United States and France, but I felt that holding the festival, after three years of planning, was essential to show that arts and politics cannot mix. Even at the national cultural center.

Another innovation for this season would be the introduction of our Conservatory Project. I wanted to focus on presenting the best young performers when they are still students. We arranged with eight great American conservatories to present an evening of their best students, one night per conservatory. These performances would take place in

the intimate Terrace Theater but would be part of the Center's Millennium Stage performances. (Every day of the year, the Center presents a free performance at 6 pm. These performances are also broadcast over the Internet. This remarkable series allows people with little knowledge of the arts, or little to spend, to experience the performing arts. The entire series was the idea of Jim Johnson and has created a whole new audience for the Center. Each year in early March we celebrate the anniversary of the Millennium Stage with a special performance featuring a major celebrity group. The entire Grand Foyer is packed with up to 8,00 people for Kool and the Gang or the Pointer Sisters. During our Americartes festival, we had the pop star Juanes perform on the Millennium Stage; 9,000 young people came and screamed for an hour.)

For me, one of the highlights of the 2003–2004 season was certain to be the first appearance by the New York City Ballet since 1987. While they were the “arch rivals” of ABT, the City Ballet is obviously an American treasure. Unfortunately, the City Ballet's contract requires its own orchestra to play at all performances, at home or on tour. And the Kennedy Center's contract requires the use of its own Opera House Orchestra at all ballet performances. We solved that problem in 2002 by getting both orchestras to agree to sharing the work; our orchestra plays one year, theirs the next—a simple solution to a problem that kept a premier organization out of Washington. The first engagement, in March 2004, would feature the works of George Balanchine, the founder of the City Ballet in his 100th anniversary year.

One of the joys of running the Center has been collaborating with four great artists on this programming. Leonard Slatkin has had a remarkable impact on the National Symphony Orchestra. He has attracted great musicians and soloists and created important and illuminating festivals. He has also had a major impact on Kennedy Center programming. His ideas for the French Festival and a forthcoming 1940s festival have inspired other programmers to create important programming of their own.

Of these programmers, one must single out Dr. Billy Taylor. It has been a pleasure to work with this jazz genius. It was Billy who inspired our new jazz club; when he performed at an intimate donor dinner party, I suggested that it would be great for audiences to hear jazz in informal settings. He agreed instantly and the KC Jazz Club was born. It has been a huge success.

Suzanne Farrell came to the Center to create a summer workshop for young dancers. This grew into the Suzanne Farrell Ballet Company that has become an important ballet company in its own right. Suzanne, one of the most important graduates of the New York City Ballet, trains young dancers and Balanchine veterans with skill and modesty. The Company is building an annual tour and will be a central element in the Center's dance programming for years to come. I was most honored when Suzanne agreed to present me the Capezio Dance Award in 2002 prior to a performance of her Company.

And working with Joseph Kalichstein is like coming home again. He was my grandfather's chamber music partner and it brings my career full circle to work with him on our Fortas Chamber Music Ensemble. He brings imagination and wit to his programming and great skill to his playing; I am honored he accepted my invitation to

have his Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson trio become our resident chamber music ensemble.

Being President of the Kennedy Center entails a tremendous amount of travel. I visit artists, reporters, donors and other arts institutions frequently. I also visit with the number of affiliate organizations we have at the Center: the President's Advisory Council on the Arts, appointed by the President of the United States and the National Committee on the Arts (appointed by us) are two supportive groups who bring our message across the nation. And since our educational programming is produced in all 50 states, this representation is important. I also started a third group: Kennedy Center International Committee on the Arts that includes people with a strong interest in our international work and that is a place for foreign donors to participate. Each year we meet in a foreign city. Paris and Rome were the first two trips. Not bad!

In 2003 I was named a Cultural Ambassador by the State Department. I had been approached by Patrician Harrison, Assistant Secretary of State, to discuss artists who might represent our nation abroad. I expressed my concern that many countries of the world believed they were already exposed to enough American culture through television and movies. So many foreign arts organizations were threatened since government subsidies, which were the principal source of funding in most countries, were falling. Why couldn't we export expertise in arts management? This would provide stability for the arts in the foreign country and give prestige to the U.S. for providing a solution.

Pat seemed to like the idea and I was asked to become a Cultural Ambassador. My first assignment was to teach arts leaders in Mexico and to work with the Mexican government to create funding systems that encourage the development of new sources of funding. This great opportunity allowed me to do the things that are most challenging to me: solving problems, performing on an international level, teaching, and building arts management capacity. It also seems an appropriate extension of my work at the Kennedy Center.

After three years on the job, I finally felt that I was in a place that could occupy me for many more years to come. I had a Plaza to build, national and international capacity building programs to develop, educational programs to enhance, arts managers to train, and, most important, artistic initiatives to develop. As George says at the end of Sunday in the Park, "So many possibilities..."