

I - The Boom in Culture

Americans No Longer Cultural Morons; Appreciation of Arts Claimed in Infancy



CULTURAL GROWTH—In the above photo the stage is set for the inaugural concert of Lincoln Center's new Philharmonic Hall in New York. In large and small cities

Editor's Note: The United States has shaken off its inferiority complex concerning the arts, and a boom in culture is under way in big towns and small. This is the word of the experts in a series of five dispatches by Harry Ferguson, UPI national reporter.

By HARRY FERGUSON

Washington (UPI)—There are 1,252 symphony orchestras in the United States, and last year more persons listened to concerts than attended all the baseball games played in the major and minor leagues. That is the favorite statistic and statement of persons who proclaim America has come of age in the arts and is enjoying a boom in culture that is only in its infancy. The figures bear them out: The number of books published in this country in 1962 exceeded by 3,000 those of the previous year; little theaters have become almost as common as the county court house; Americans now buy almost \$800 million worth of musical instruments and sheet music a year.

Sociologists use the phrase "cultural explosion" to describe what is happening, but actually it was more gradual than violent. Most experts think Americans, who heard themselves denounced for years as cultural morons, now have shaken off their inferiority complex.

Take a Beating In the process they took a bad beating. H. L. Menckel made a reputation and considerable money by clouting Americans on the head once a month with a magazine

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throughout the United States last year, more persons listened to concerts than attended major and minor league baseball games. (UPI)

called The American Mercury. "The general average of intelligence, of knowledge, of competence, of self respect, is so low that any man who knows his trade, does not fear ghosts and has read 50 good books stands out as brilliantly as a wart on the head."

Europeans jeered at the American savages when Henry James, one of this nation's best novelists, decided his native climate was unsuitable to creative effort and went to London and took out British citizenship. British authors were held in such high esteem by the brow-beaten Americans that Charles Dickens made a killing on a lecture tour here and went home to tell jokes about the people who paid to hear him.

Oscar Wilde, landing in New York to reap some lecture money from the yokels, was asked by the customs inspector if he had anything to declare. "Nothing but my genius," Wilde replied and Americans accepted without question his own estimate of himself. They spent their money freely to hear him talk while the poetry of Walt Whitman and the novels of James Fenimore Cooper went largely unread and almost unsold.

Become Discouraged

Over the years American workers in the arts became discouraged and a belief grew up that they would be better off if they acted like foreigners. Miss Lucy Hickenlooper, a talented pianist in Texas, was going nowhere with her career, but when she changed her name to Olga Samaroff things picked up immediately. Ernest Hemingway decided he could write better in Paris and Havana than he could on American soil. In the twenties young writers flocked to Paris to sit at the feet of Miss Gertrude Stein, who had shaken the dust of Pennsylvania from her shoes but still wanted Americans to buy her books and acknowledge that she was saying something profound when she wrote "A rose is a rose is a rose," and "Pigeons on the grass, alas."

The cultural inferiority complex of Americans became more traumatic when they received a one-two punch in 1920 and 1922 from Sinclair Lewis with his novels "Main Street" and "Babbitt." One of them depicted the

American small town as a cultural wasteland where the inhabitants talked about nothing except crops and the weather. "Babbitt" was an indictment of the American business man as a dull fellow who did nothing but chase money and boost his home town.

Things Change The big depression of 1929 changed things, and the circulation of Menckel's magazine fell sharply. Americans were at grips with problems larger than small town culture and home town boosting. John Steinbeck's novel "The Grapes of Wrath"—the story of an Oklahoma family driven from their farm by dust storms—caught the mood of the day. Most sociologists think World War II was the turning point for the American patient and his inferiority complex. U.S. soldiers discovered that people in Europe were not pre-occupied with culture, but with the problem of daily existence. Millions of Englishmen have never been to Stratford-On-Avon and never will go. Frenchmen do not spend all day in sidewalk cafes arguing about poetry; Italians do not devote all their time to strolling the streets singing operatic arias.

A post-war do-it-yourself craze developed, and Americans discovered it do not have to be limited to using wood to working tools. You could put on plays, organize orchestras, paint pictures, play the violin and have fun without journeying to the Broadway theater, the Louvre or the Metropolitan Opera House.

Radio and television began to bring culture into your living room. The phonograph was developed to the point where even the most carping critic could hear faithful reproductions of famous orchestras playing good music.

The heroine of Sinclair Lewis "Main Street" was named Carol Kennicott and in 1912 she married and moved to Gopher Prairie, Minn. In revolt against the dullness of her life, she exclaimed to a school teacher friend: "It's a relief to have somebody to talk something besides crops. Let's make Gopher Prairie rock to its foundations. Let's have afternoon tea instead of afternoon coffee."

Today Carol would turn the television dial and drink her tea as she listened to the Festival of Performing Arts. Next: The decline of Hollywood movies.

Small Worlds Around Us

By LYNN M. WATKINS
(Register and Tribune Syndicate, 1963)

Worm-Shell Eligible for Top Spot in Category of Curious It's only natural that in a family of living creatures numbering many thousands of species there should be some that are oddballs, some that depart so far from the conventional as to be actually ridiculous.

Such a one is the "worm-shell." This character, a true mollusk related to the oyster and the whelk, departs widely from the conventional design of other mollusks. It is eligible for number one place in the category of the curious.

Hatched from a tiny egg in a warm sea, the little worm-shell builds about itself a shell in the shape of a spiral. During infancy it seems well organized and perfectly adjusted to its shallow water environment, with each whorl regular and neatly coiled. Nature seems to be doing the right thing for this little creature, starting it out in life in an orderly manner. Then for some obscure reason everything gets fouled up; the coils lose their sense of direction; the whorls become widely separated and go off in odd ways.

Hopelessly Neurotic Now having apparently decided to be highly unusual, it twists and turns, spirals off in unexpected directions. The little mollusk itself is terribly elongated and hopelessly neurotic. It becomes a mixed-up mollusk; it just keeps on building its limestone home, in a twisting manner, until it is 10 or 12 inches long. It becomes a crazy looking object. The amazed human who walks along an ocean beach may find one of these worm-shells and notice its striking similarity to a petrified angleworm, even to the color and shape.

The worm-shell is unique among all the mollusks in the unusualness of its shape. It gets together with others of its kind and intertwines itself with them, until they become a hopeless jumble of twisted shapes, too. "Misery loves company" and this apparently applies to the worm-shells as well as

to the highest order of living beings, for a group of worm-shells attempts to gather close with their fellows and become an inextricable mass. The group becomes about the worst mess that could be imagined.

Each Its Own Each worm-shell of the group, which may number several hundred individuals, follows its own twisted way of shell building. The group becomes so entangled every individual in the group loses its identity. It is impossible to tell where one mollusk leaves off and another begins. The snarl is as badly tangled as the back-lash of a fish line. It couldn't be likened to a pile of jackstraws, for they are all straight pieces, while no two worm-shells are twisted the same way, or assumes the same shape.

The snarl may grow until the mass is as large as a half-bushel basket; thousands of the mollusk shells hopelessly intertwined together in a complicated imbroglie, a pandemonium of twisted forms, each shell holding an elongated living mollusk.

The peculiar color of the individual worm-shell is a dark tan or yellowish color, looking for all the world like a petrified angleworm. Taken all together in the mass of individuals, the net work resembles a great gob of earthworms, supposedly frightened into a jumble of confusion by some age-old upheaval of the earth or the sea bottom and petrified by time and pressure into a tangled skein of twisted limestone tubes.

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