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H&S Scene

Anonymous

Frank Bozo

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Elizabeth Sayad
A Woman of Achievement

A woman of achievement. Those are the words that best describe Elizabeth Sayad, wife of St. Louis senior partner Homer Sayad. In recognition of her many contributions to arts and education in Missouri over the years, the St. Louis Globe-Democrat named Elizabeth that city's Woman of Achievement in Civic Responsibility for 1976. The award, presented last January, was one of ten the newspaper gave to women for service in such diverse fields as medicine, childcare and social welfare.

An accomplished pianist, Elizabeth has devoted much of her time to furthering the arts, particularly music, in her community. In 1959 she helped found the New Music Circle, a group that provides a forum for the presentation and discussion of contemporary music. She serves on the boards of the Opera Theater and the Mississippi River Festival, and was a founder of the Missouri State Arts Council.

Because of her concern for the quality of education in St. Louis, Elizabeth headed a fund-raising campaign to establish the New City School, an elementary school where students are encouraged to work at their own pace rather than being placed in a particular grade simply because of age. Regular visits by the children to museums, police stations, newspapers and hospitals give them opportunities to relate educational experiences to everyday life. "Self-motivation is the most important thing being taught at the school," Elizabeth says. "Students learn because they want to, not merely because a teacher is telling them that they must."

The latest and most outstanding of Elizabeth's achievements was her organization of BHAM (Bicentennial Horizons in American Music and the Performing Arts), an arts festival that lasted three weeks and brought thousands of people to St. Louis during the bicentennial year. "I began planning for BHAM in December 1973," Elizabeth recalls, "I knew other cities were arranging bicentennial activities that involved historical reenactments and restorations, and I thought that an arts festival would be a unique way for St. Louis to pay tribute to America's rich cultural heritage, which, of course, goes back much further than 1776."

In order to put her idea for an arts festival into action, Elizabeth enlisted the aid of several prominent people in St. Louis, beginning with Mayor John H. Poelker. According to her, "having the mayor put his name on a declaration of support for the project helped get BHAM off the ground. Another key figure whose assistance ensured the program's success was Congressman James W. Symington, who introduced me to several influential leaders of the Washington cultural community."

With Congressman Symington's help, Elizabeth was able to get financial support for BHAM from two federal agencies, the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Park Service. "Having federal backing," Elizabeth pointed out, "made things a lot easier when the time came for soliciting funds in the community. But Washington's aid aside, I think the key to BHAM's success was that it was a truly grassroots effort. More than 1,500 volunteers, organized into twenty-eight committees, worked on the project, and 90 percent of the $1,250,000 we spent on the festival was raised right here in the St. Louis area." In addition to individual support, a number of local organizations, such as the Daughters of
the American Revolution, Kiwanis Clubs, the National Council of Jewish Women and the St. Louis Consular Corps got behind BHAM, helping to raise funds and providing volunteers.

Finally, after months of preparation, BHAM got off to a rousing official start with a performance by the United States Military Academy Band on June 14. For the next three weeks St. Louis celebrated America's cultural heritage with more than 250 presentations that included films, dance, concerts, poetry readings and an American Indian arts festival.

Music lovers could enjoy the foot-stomping rhythms of the St. Louis Ragtimers or listen to rarely heard works performed by the St. Louis Symphony. Visitors to the festival were treated to the American premiere of Iran's Mahalli folk dancers, a Stuttgart band that played Dixieland and an operatic version of Mark Twain's The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.

On July 4, the St. Louis-New Orleans Bicentennial Showboat left St. Louis for a tour down the Mississippi River. In stops at six cities, a theatrical troupe aboard the showboat presented reenactments of historical events that had taken place in the Mississippi Valley. Back in St. Louis, Independence Day presentations, three hours of which were seen on network television, included Afro-American dances, early American folk music and water skiing and air shows. The day's events were capped by a dramatic fireworks display over the majestic Gateway Arch on the banks of the Mississippi.

Unlike the fireworks, however, the special glow that BHAM brought to St. Louis didn't fade after July 4. There are two permanent legacies of the festival that make all the time and energy she put into BHAM well worth the effort for Elizabeth Sayad. The first of these is a book entitled Music in American Society 1776-1976. From Puritan Hymn to Synthesizer. The book is an outgrowth of a symposium on American music sponsored by BHAM. In it, participants in the symposium, such as composer William Schuman and music critic Edward Jablonski, have written about various aspects of American music. "The contents of the book," Elizabeth explains, "demonstrate how American music reflects the diverse heritages of the American people. It makes clear how European harmonies, African rhythms and regional folk melodies evolved into uniquely American musical forms such as gospel, jazz, ragtime and blues."

A second legacy of BHAM is a thirty-minute documentary about the festival entitled "St. Louis Gives a BHAM." Written by Elizabeth Sayad, the film spotlights performances by opera singers Grace Bumbry and Felicia Weathers, both natives of St. Louis; the Katherine Dunham Dancers; the New Orleans Olympia Brass Band; and the Stuttgart Youth Choir. Also part of the film are Elizabeth's interviews with several celebrities who participated in the festival. Among these are William Schuman, jazz trumpeter Al Hirt and choreographer Erick Hawkins. "St. Louis Gives a BHAM" was first seen at a gala premiere in Washington, D.C., where Elizabeth received a certificate of appreciation from the American Revolutionary Bicentennial Administration in recognition of her contributions to the Bicentennial.

The film will be distributed through the National Park Service and the United States Information Agency, and the Iranian government purchased a print to be shown on television. Elizabeth takes great pride in the documentary because "it shows how St. Louis met the challenge of the Bicentennial. It was one thing to have a wonderful festival, and I'm proud of the high artistic excellence that BHAM maintained. But the vitality that the book and the film will bring, not only to St. Louis, but also to the performing arts in America, is the most important thing BHAM contributed."

Now that BHAM and the Bicentennial are behind her, what next? "I'd like to get back to some professional activities in the arts," Elizabeth says. "I need to refresh my mind — brush up on my writing and music. I'm not the type who can sit still for very long."
Mixing Business
With Art

What do Haskins & Sells and the Brooklyn Academy of Music have in common? They were both honored recently by the Arts and Business Council for their contributions to the arts.

Each year the Council presents ten awards, divided equally between members of the business and arts communities. Bergen County PIC Frank Borelli, who, along with New York manager Jay Conefy contributed much time to ABC, accepted the award given to H&S this year. At a luncheon held in Manhattan, the Firm was praised for assisting "groups representing a variety of artistic disciplines to solve their individual financial problems."

The Arts and Business Council was established in 1973 in order to encourage business support of the arts. It serves as a clearinghouse through which members of the business and arts communities can make contact for their mutual benefit. The arts organizations receive advice on effective management and utilization of funds. And the business members receive valuable information about arts groups that helps them decide which groups merit their support.

H&S began its association with ABC when the New York State CPA society asked Frank Borelli, who was then with our New York office, to participate in the Council's skills/services/resource program, which enlists people from the business world who can contribute their skills and knowledge to the arts groups by counseling them on administrative problems.

"In order to enable these volunteers to advise arts organizations more effectively," Frank explained, "ABC sponsors a two-week training program on arts administration at New York University twice a year. The courses cover such topics as public relations, legal affairs and fund-raising techniques. I was asked to teach a class on the financial aspects of arts groups, including accounting, reporting, taxation and budgeting. At the end of the training program, the volunteers begin assisting various arts organizations with specific problems on an individual basis."

Frank participated in the training program twice, and he managed to get Jay Conefy interested in the Council's work. "Frank asked me if I'd be willing to teach the finance course," Jay recalls. "At the time, I had very little knowledge of or experience with the arts. Before I began the class at NYU, I read everything I could get my hands on about the management of arts organizations."

After teaching the course, Jay became deeply involved with the Arts and Business Council. He took part in panel discussions for theater groups and gave advice on administrative matters to a number of arts organizations. Jay points out that businesses, as well as the arts, have much to gain from their association with ABC. "The Council," Jay explains, "provides business with an effective method for contributing to the arts. It saves corporations time by providing them with reliable, detailed information on members of the arts community to which they might wish to donate time, talent or funds."

ABC's arts members include such varied groups as the American Symphony Orchestra, Lincoln Center and the Lower East Side Print Shop, where parents work with their children in making prints. "The Council attracts people from all walks of life," according to Jay, "everyone from Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III and Leonard Bernstein to directors of neighborhood theater groups. Working with people like these has broadened my horizons, both personally and professionally. I now regularly receive invitations to premieres, concerts and art shows. Not only has it expanded my cultural life and outlook, it has provided me with opportunities to meet many new and interesting people."

Jay's enthusiasm for the Arts and Business Council spread to other members of the New York staff. He was able to interest staff accountants Bob Giordano, Ed Langley, Michael Shires, Sue Petreski and Bob Miller in the program. Jay also assisted ABC directly by helping it to implement an accounting system. As assistant treasurer and a member of the board of directors, he plans to continue working with the Council, and he doesn't hesitate to recommend such participation to others. "I can't think of a nicer way to be introduced to the arts," Jay says.