In 1981, when Rand McNally published its *Places Rated Almanac*, Lafayette ranked dead last in the arts. Of the 277 metropolitan areas in the United States, Lafayette ranked 10th in "personal economic opportunity," only one notch below Houston. But it came in 277th in the category of "cultural facilities." Ranking above Lafayette were such cultural hot spots as Laredo, Tex.; Fort Smith, Ark.; Sioux Falls, S.D.; and nearby Alexandria, La.

But that was before Alexander Godunov danced in Lafayette. It was before Ella Fitzgerald sang, Mikhail Baryshnikov danced and opera singer Roberta Peters performed here. It was before Lafayette Community Theatre found a home downtown. It was before Lafayette Civic Theater Co. announced a season of six musicals at the Municipal Auditorium, 24 performances in all.

In a very short time, Lafayette has begun to grow up culturally. Like a gawky adolescent, it has experienced furious, quick, almost uncontrolled artistic growth in the last two or three years.

Having prospered quickly, Lafayette citizens are no longer satisfied going to New Orleans or Houston for entertainment. They want ballet, theater and music to come here. By the hundreds, they will pay premium prices to see world-famous dancers or Broadway musicals at the Municipal Auditorium.

But like that of a gawky adolescent, Lafayette's value system is still in flux, and local arts organizers say the values have not yet matured. Lafayette loves light musicals but scowls at serious drama.

Yet the city is heading towards cultural adulthood, and many of the people responsible for bringing the arts to Lafayette are excited about the possibilities.
Lafayette has smashed its image as a city devoid of culture

was nothing artistically going on apart from USL activities and the Community Concerts. There was no community effort backing the arts."

"It was in the midst of this cultural void that two organizations were established here: Acadiana Arts Council and Fine Arts Foundation. Both organizations celebrate their 10th anniversaries this year, and much of the arts community agrees that the two groups, when they weren't busy feuding over programming, did more than any other institution to further the arts in Lafayette."

"With the establishment of the Foundation and the Arts Council, a huge interest in the arts was generated," he says. "The growth has been really consistent and it's still going on."

"It didn't happen overnight. "It took a long time to take seed," Curry says. "People were treading on ice for a long time because everything was so new. I think in any profession and any new venture, the waters have to be tested for so long before things happen and the more the waters are tested, the more things happen."

"When things really began to take off, Curry doesn't hesitate. "It was Alexander Godunov, and that was only two years ago," he says. In late 1982, the Russian ballet dancer performed before a packed house at the Municipal Auditorium, in a performance sponsored by the Fine Arts Foundation. Since then, Curry has brought Ella Fitzgerald, the Prague Symphony Orchestra and the Tokyo Ballet, among many others, to Lafayette.

"To bring its successes to a climax, the Fine Arts Foundation is presenting a 10th anniversary ballet gala on July 28, which will feature stars from the Stuttgart Ballet, Ballet National de Marseille, Royal Winnipeg Ballet, American Ballet Theatre and five other companies. "This is the only city in the United States where these dancers are dancing together," Curry says. "It takes us up another level. It means we can put together a program that is totally unique and make it work."

"WHILE THE FINE ARTS FOUNDATION brings in world-known performers, Tom Boozer works in the Acadiana Arts Council's building in downtown Lafayette to nurture local artists. Whereas Curry is an impresario, Boozer is an administrator."

"The appreciation has always been here," says Boozer, who came to Lafayette in 1977 to become the Council's executive director. "But I think there's been a unification of efforts in this community that's pretty damn sophisticated, which you didn't have before. I think there's a significant amount of money put in the arts that wasn't put in before."

"The Council is designed to serve as an umbrella organization for many of the other arts organizations in the area—a clearinghouse for the arts," Boozer says. "A lot of the new organizations that have formed—ones that have been formed to fill gaps—I certainly hope have benefited from having the guidance and help of the Arts Council. We try to serve member organizations," Boozer says.

"One of the Acadiana Arts Council's major projects is the bringing of arts—both local and national—into the schools. In the 1983-84 school year, the Council paid $13,800 to over 25 local artists, in both the performing and fine arts, to share their talents in the classrooms, and Boozer is hoping the project will help produce a generation of culturally-aware kids.

"Perhaps the most significant effect of the two groups' energies is that they have helped give birth to a second generation of arts organizations. Groups such as Moving South (a modern dance company), Lafayette Community Theatre, Vermilion Chamber Orchestra and Lafayette Civic Theater Co. have taken root in a new, more culturally aware Lafayette, one that may have been unable to support those groups 10 years ago."

"RICHARD SMITH SITS AND PAGES through three looseleaf binders crammed with outlines and charts, letters and photographs, and he talks eagerly about the project he is working to launch: a local theater company that will present a whole season of musicals at the Municipal Auditorium."

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"Smith, executive/artistic director of the Lafayette Civic Theater Co., is brimming with optimism that he will be able to fill at least 8,000 seats over four nights each time the company presents a show. The six shows scheduled for this year include My Fair Lady and Jesus Christ Superstar. Smith's annual budget is $500,000, he says."

"Our goals are very high,\" he adds.\"My response now is 100 percent positive and I would say that only in Lafayette could something like this happen.\"

"Smith may well have hit on the perfect formula. "The only successful performing arts in America today is Broadway,\" he says. "The song, the dance, the happy ending—it's just a product that sells."

"The fact that musicals sell, but dramas don't, may be a boon to Smith, but it frustrates others."

"This community is not exactly what I would call culturally avant-garde. They'll support opera, but the opera will have to be Verdi,\" says John Fiero, director of Lafayette Community Theatre.

"Fiero says he speaks to theater owners all over the country, and many of them express the same frustration he finds in Lafayette: to make money, a theater company has to perform "Neil Simon-type dramas" and other "fluffy stuff" rather than serious theatre.

"Fiero was considering Lanford Wilson's Hot L Baltimore as the first play in the company's new downtown home. "But that's a play that uses "fuck" every other line, and people may receive that cold," he says. Instead, the company performed Rms Riv Vu."

"You can't afford to experiment and stay solvent," Fiero says. "At the same time, if you don't experiment, you won't have your talent [i.e. actors] interested for very long."

"We're in our infancy," says Julie Calzone, who has brought a number of Broadway road shows, including A Chorus Line and Evita to Lafayette. "We don't have the opportunity in our
Drama is not the only genre the city resists. Carolyn Krantz, director of Moving South, says she cannot get over 700 people to a modern dance performance, *When the Times did a cover story on Moving South, the audience increased to 750, she says.*

Krantz feels that many Southerners are seeking the romance and nostalgia of the Old South, which is why they embrace ballet and reject the often-violent modern dance. Krantz says modern dance often has violent and disturbing imagery, "because that's the society we live in."

When the dance company did a piece called "XX Cafe," which had certain sexual implications, "a lot of people were shocked," Krantz says.

Krantz, Calzone and Biero all believe Lafayette is moving towards a more mature appreciation of the arts. "Let's face it, a ballet performance wasn't acceptable until recently, Calzone says.

Most of the city's arts leaders agree the city needs to be educated. "We are doing public education in the papers and in the schools," Krantz says. "We spend a great deal of effort going to the schools, both on our own and in the

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**Julie Calzone**

*It's all in the packaging*

[Acadiana Arts Council's] Bright New Worlds program.

"Fiero and Calzone believe that once someone is exposed to drama, that person will become more likely to appreciate it in the future. Fiero notes that in Abbeville, where the Abbey Players is a community institution, residents will come to watch a controversial drama because they have come to trust the theater company.

Calzone says she is considering bringing a series of shows, both musicals and dramas, to Lafayette. If people buy series tickets, they will come to both the musicals and the dramas, and they might find themselves enjoying the dramas.

"You package it so that it doesn't cost them a lot to experiment with their own personal taste," she says.

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**Herman Mhire at University Art Museum**

*Looking for donors to support a museum*

Herman Mhire at University Art Museum

"One day we're going to have a major museum of fine art, I mean a major museum."

—Robert Cusimano

"Looking for donors to support a museum..."

"One of those organizations is the Community Development director Phil Lank, and Curry himself. "All of us are about the same age," he notes. (Curry is 31.)

Curry believes the work of some of these people has motivated others, creating a cultural snowball effect. When asked what has inspired the second generation of arts organizations, Curry says, 'Success. Just by doing what we're doing and making it work.'

He pauses, asks, "Is that too simple?" decides it is not, and proceeds.

"When very talented people see the Fine Arts Foundation being very successful and bringing in very talented stars, they say, 'I'm an artist and I can do what I need to do in this community and be a success.'""

"When prodded, Fuller speculates that the Vermilion Chamber Orchestra may not have been formed if he didn't personally take the initiative. "Most orchestras are started by one person who says, 'This can be done,'" he says.

"Most orchestras, yes. But also most theater companies, dance companies, and other cultural organizations. Almost every leader in the arts community agrees that Lafayette's cultural growth is a product of the work of a number of strong idealistic people, most of them relatively young—in their 30s or thereabouts.

"Lafayette is a community where a whole generation has actually seen their dreams become reality," says Fine Arts Foundation's Michael Curry. He ticks off the names of some of the people who he thinks have made a contribution to the arts renaissance: University Art Museum director Herman Mhire, artist Randall Labry, Times editor James Edmunds, city Community Development director Phil Lank, and Curry himself. "All of us are about the same age," he notes. (Curry is 31.)

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availability. The more [culture] becomes available, the more it becomes accessible, not just the socially acceptable thing to do but the really meaningful thing."

IT TAKES MONEY TO MAKE THE cultural world go ‘round. And public funding, which some organizations depend on, is dismal at the moment.

"If you don’t have the political support, forget it. The arts can’t support on the private dollar alone," Boozier says. Public support, he says, is "at about 1 percent of what it should be."

Boozier says support from the Reagan administration has been "terrible. We’ve had to fight him every step of the way. I think Reagan considered the arts a low priority. In fact, [budget director] David Stockman recommended when he first came into office that the [National] Endowment [for the Arts] be cut in half. Every year we’ve had to battle him and every year we’ve won."

Boozier adds that support on a state level is equally dismal. Last year, he says, Louisiana gave less than $1 million to the arts.

"How can we answer the needs of the state for less than $1 million?" he asks. "The state must consider this as a nagging toy. They’ve got to fund us to shut us up. But they’re not understanding that it’s so important to life. [Life] is more than just roads and sewage and parks and baseball."

Boozier says the local delegation has been supportive; in fact Sen. Armand

Richard Smith
Happy endings sell

Brinkhaus tried unsuccessfully this year to restore cuts in arts funding. And, he says, the "newly elected city council and parish council have really shown enlightenment way past what other councils have shown."

This year, each council gave the Acadiana Arts Council $15,000.

Culture leaders are more optimistic that private funding will continue to fund the growing cultural life in Lafayette.

"The monies are not finite," says Fuller. "There are dollars out there and people will give them if they feel they are making a contribution to the community."

Curry agrees. "I think the business part of the arts has not been tapped to the full extent," he says, "Lafayette has a thriving economy that is not just oil-based. We are a huge retailing center. We are the center of a large metropolitan area which has a lot of free time and expendable money."