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# Distinctly Cleveland: How the Arts are Helping to Revitalize Rust Belt Cities

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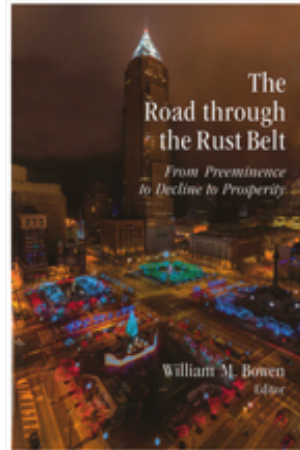
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# 6

## Distinctly Cleveland

### How the Arts are Helping to Revitalize Rust Belt Cities

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*Faced with the decline of the traditional manufacturing-based economic engine, a handful of fading Rust Belt cities turned to the arts as a means for revitalizing their local economies. Among them is Cleveland, a city known for its rich cultural heritage. While the arts may not replace the number of high-wage factory jobs lost in manufacturing, it does offer different types of benefits related to quality-of-life that help redefine a community's concept of prosperity.*

Downtown Grand Rapids, Michigan, was once in decline. Hurt by international competition, its manufacturing plants were closing, and, at the same time, residents began moving out of the city to the suburbs. In the mid-1990s the situation started to change, and the turning point seemed to be the opening of the Van Andel Arena in the middle of downtown (Thompson 2006). Civic leaders, however, realized that revitalization was not simply a matter of constructing large public buildings; they needed a grand strategy to draw people back into the core of the city.

In 2005, under the leadership of Urban Marketing Collaborative, a new “Arts and Entertainment Strategy: Downtown Grand Rapids” report was created (Urban Marketing Collaborative 2005). The vision captured in this document called for Grand Rapids to capitalize on “its growing reputation as a destination arts and entertainment area” (p. 1). It would have three distinct arts “attitude districts,” interconnected but

distinct, that would draw audiences and enable them to be immersed in a vibrant city core containing a broad cross section of arts. The values reflected in this large arts district were to be “diversity, eclecticism, urbanity, sophistication, high culture,” and it would become “a living laboratory to experiment, explore, learn and share” (p. 2).

Although the document called for better marketing and promotion efforts, no mention was made of what would become one of the most important revitalization tools of Grand Rapids: the annual fall ArtPrize contest. Created in 2009 by Rick DeVos, grandson of Amway founder Rich DeVos, this contest annually transforms downtown Grand Rapids into a living museum of art. But the distinguishing feature is that the substantial prizes, until recently, were awarded not by professional art critics, but by the visiting public.<sup>1</sup> In 2011, the festival drew approximately 322,000 visitors, who experienced the works of 1,580 artists in 162 separate venues (Linn 2012).

The payoff to the city is the financial boost given by the visitors to the community. A study by Anderson Economic Group (2011) of East Lansing, Michigan, estimates that the 2011 ArtPrize competition added \$15.4 million to the local economy. In addition, the *Detroit Free Press* reports that the competition has been so successful that it is now being copied in such cities as Akron, New York, and Los Angeles (Stryker 2012). Clearly, the arts strategy envisioned in the 2005 strategic plan has succeeded in a significant way, and it presents a model of urban revitalization for other midwestern Rust Belt cities.

Milwaukee is also steeped in a manufacturing heritage but is now counting on the arts to develop a new economic future. The Cultural Alliance of Greater Milwaukee spearheaded the creation of a regional arts economic development strategy, entitled Creativity Works! The approach focuses on design, performing arts, visual arts, media and film, and culture and heritage organizations (Creative Alliance Milwaukee, n.d.). The Milwaukee region possesses a strong concentration of creative workers and hopes to leverage this advantage through four arts-based initiatives. The steps include growing the creative industries, expanding the local creative talent base, developing sustainable infrastructure for creative industries, and fostering leadership systems to integrate these industries (Creative Alliance Milwaukee 2011a).

A recent redevelopment effort that followed the strategy developed in Creativity Works! occurred when Milwaukee launched an innova-

tive program to animate a faltering retail space. The Shops at Grand Avenue in downtown Milwaukee were “dedicated to presenting quality creatives and small business owners a place in which to teach, work, perform, and exhibit their work” (Creative Alliance Milwaukee 2011b). This program filled the underutilized retail spaces with local artists, artisans, and performers.

While the final outcome of the Shops at Grand Avenue is not yet known, Milwaukee advocates are committed to the Creativity Works! strategy. Indeed, a recent study indicates that in 2010, nonprofit arts organizations had a \$300 million impact on the Milwaukee economy, representing a 20 percent increase over the 2005 figure (Creative Alliance Milwaukee 2012).

## **PERSPECTIVES ON THE ARTS AND URBAN REDEVELOPMENT**

The turn to the arts for urban economic redevelopment follows upon the publication of several influential studies. The contribution of arts and creative industries has been recognized at least since the release of Richard Florida’s *Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), and it has been developed further by Ann Markusen, Greg Schrock, and Martina Cameron (2004) in their work on “the artistic dividend.” Florida links twenty-first-century economic vitality to concentrations of people who earn their living through creativity and innovation, including artists, artisans, performers and writers, of both popular and high art, as well as to a regional cultural ecosystem that innovative people find attractive. Markusen and her colleagues show that the work of artists is connected in interesting and important ways to the growth of urban economies, although there is “no clear relationship between artistic strength and either overall regional employment size or recent growth rates” (p. 19).

Cleveland is yet another manufacturing-oriented city in the Midwest that has suffered from changes in the global economy. As if to prove Markusen’s point, although the area has traditionally had strong arts institutions, it has suffered significant losses of jobs and population. Like Grand Rapids and Milwaukee, however, the city is now looking hard at building upon the arts to help its economic recovery.

Indeed, there are already intriguing signs of improvement, including the refurbished Euclid corridor, a transformed Gordon Square, the Global Center for Health Innovation (a part of the new Cleveland Convention Center), the Horseshoe Casino, the continued growth and development of Playhouse Square, and the renewal of Cleveland State University's campus (Farkas 2013).

In addition, despite population losses citywide, the two districts that actually gained population in the 2010 census were downtown and University Circle, suggesting that hip young members of the creative class are finding urban life in Cleveland appealing (Smith and Exner 2011). Since 2000, for example, the downtown neighborhood has experienced a 73 percent surge in population (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). These residents are well educated: 49 percent have at least a bachelor's degree, compared to only 25 percent of the population in the Cleveland metropolitan statistical area (MSA). Downtown inhabitants are also youthful: 71 percent of the population is 44 years of age or younger (U.S. Census Bureau 2011).

Finally, while the economic recovery has stalled in much of the nation, Northeast Ohio has been buoyed by manufacturing growth (Helper, Krueger, and Wial 2012). As confirmation of this forward movement, it is interesting to note that Portland, Oregon, a city widely regarded as one of the top magnets for the creative class, has recently sent a delegation to study Cleveland's economic progress. "Cleveland is an innovative city," wrote the delegation's organizers, and it excels "in the areas most critical to urban success: talent, connections, innovation, and distinctiveness" (Miller 2012).

In discussing Cleveland's distinctive arts scene, we will also use the term "cultural ecosystem" because we want to suggest a broad definition of "arts" that includes both high and low forms, a wide range of related nonprofit organizations, commercial art, and both formal and informal activities. Bulik et al. (2003) argue that to be a vibrant and distinctive community, a city must have a large range of arts activity, "from large arts organizations to street festivals, world-class artists to amateurs" (p. 8). We believe that Cleveland has such a strong mix.

How can Cleveland leverage its traditional strengths in the arts to further this economic recovery? There are many theories of how cities prosper, 18 of which are ably summarized and categorized in Joseph Cortright's *City Success: Theories of Urban Prosperity* (2008). Cortright

argues that while cities share many common problems, “each city will need to fashion its own distinct solution” (p. 4). Among the most relevant approaches to Cleveland’s revitalization, we believe, are those he entitles the “attraction city,” the “amenity city,” and the “distinctive city,” respectively. The “attraction city” theory suggests that cities succeed by developing “iconic attractions” that appeal to visitors and establish a city’s unique brand (p. 50). The “amenity city” theory suggests that cities grow and thrive by providing social amenities, not only good schools, safety, and parks, but also various kinds of appealing entertainment (p. 53). The “distinctive city” theory holds that cities flourish by creating a special identity and related attitudes that clearly differentiate the city from others (p. 59). We believe that building upon Cleveland’s traditionally strong arts scene will help the community achieve all three goals, becoming a distinctive city with nationally known attractions and plentiful amenities.

The significance of a city’s distinctiveness is underscored by Cortright in a 2002 article in which he analyzes the unique nature of the Portland, Oregon, region; he concludes that, like Portland, each city has its “own unique set of opportunities, shaped by its residents’ tastes and previous development” (p. 13). Moreover, the cities that will best thrive are those that do not try to copy the successes of others but build upon the facets of their own histories and the special tastes and skills of their current populations. Although many midwestern industrial cities, like Grand Rapids and Milwaukee, are now turning to the arts for revitalization, we believe that Cleveland has a distinctive arts profile that will serve it well as it rebuilds in the new global economy.

## **CLEVELAND’S STRATEGIC PLAN**

The examples of Grand Rapids and Milwaukee underscore the importance of having a strategic plan, and, indeed, Cleveland has one. In 1997 the Community Partnership for Arts and Culture (CPAC) was created by the Cleveland and George Gund Foundations (CPAC 2011). The partnership was immediately commissioned to write a strategic plan for the arts in Cleveland. That plan was completed in 2000, and since then, CPAC has sought to facilitate its implementation.

Under the leadership of its president, Thomas Schorgl, CPAC promotes a closer connection between a lively arts scene and a vigorous community (T. Schorgl and M. Van Voorhis, personal communication, August 26, 2011). CPAC advocates for public policy that will sustain the local arts and culture community, provides assistance to individual artists and arts organizations, and conducts research related to the arts sector.

As examples of the proactive nature of CPAC's activities, we can cite its two conferences entitled "From Rust Belt to Artist Belt." The first was held in 2008 and focused on the opportunities created by the arts for the traditional manufacturing centers of the upper Midwest. The second was held in 2010, and its focus was artist-based community development. The report of the first conference emphasizes the mutually beneficial relationship between artists and the communities in which they reside. Rust Belt cities can offer artists affordable housing and workplaces as well as a context rich with already existing high-quality arts institutions. Artists can provide renewed population for inner cities; sweat equity (as they restore dilapidated houses and studios with their own hands and thus increase property values); and, finally, a positive impact on the economies of the cities they adopt (CPAC 2008). The second conference resulted in a program to encourage artists to settle in the Collinwood arts district on Cleveland's East Side. The initiative is a partnership between CPAC and New York-based Leveraging Investments in Creativity (Ott 2011).

For 14 years, then, CPAC has been promoting community growth by helping to build and unify the local arts culture. Are its efforts paying off by luring more of the creative class to Cleveland? Thomas Schorgl believes they are. He points to two recent articles that suggest that young artists in the culturally rich city of New York are moving to Cleveland. In Crain's *New York Business*, Souccar (2010) describes the severe difficulties experienced by artists who try to live in New York; she then notes the increasing interest of New Yorkers in a housing development for artists in Cleveland's Collinwood area. Collinwood is working to continue this trend with the funding provided by CPAC and Leveraging Investments in Creativity.

This phenomenon is explored in more detail by Alter (2009) in a *Wall Street Journal* article. Alter discovers artists working to revamp houses in Cleveland's Detroit-Shoreway neighborhood and in Collin-



wood. What's more, Cleveland has adopted artist-driven renovation as a strategy to counteract recent depopulation, investing \$500,000 in 50 citizen-led pilot projects to reclaim vacant property. Alter focuses on the journey of two New York artists, Michael Di Liberto and Sunia Boneham, to a Collinwood project planned by Northeast Shores Development Corporation. Di Liberto, Boneham, and others are being lured to Cleveland by its rich arts offerings coupled with a low cost of living.

Collinwood's commercial district, the centerpiece of a once run-down neighborhood, is being renovated by a collective of 12 artists, named Arts Collinwood. The group bought a 5,000-square foot building in 2004 and has transformed it into an art gallery, a café, and nine art studios. This initial investment opened the door to "a flood of musicians, painters, and sculptors" (Alter 2009). The new residents, in turn, opened three new art galleries, a recording studio, and a stained glass studio. All of these serve as tangible evidence of urban revitalization. This trend needs to be better documented through further research, but the two articles in New York publications suggest that Cleveland is becoming a magnet for young artists.

## **THE CITY'S ARTS PROFILE**

### **Major Cultural Institutions**

If Cleveland must develop its distinctive cultural ecosystem in order to prosper, what is its characteristic arts profile? Here one must begin with the older, established arts institutions. Eric Wobser, executive director of Ohio City Incorporated, identifies "the big five" cultural institutions of the community as the Cleveland Orchestra, the Cleveland Museum of Art, Playhouse Square, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and the West Side Market (E. Wobser, personal communication, July 25, 2011). No one who has listened to the Cleveland Orchestra play in the majesty of Severance Hall or who has spent hours either exploring the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame or navigating the various booths in the West Side Market could disagree. The Cleveland Museum of Art, which opened in 1916, houses 43,000 works of art and is especially noted for its Asian and Egyptian collections. It closed in 2005 to begin a major

renovation and expansion to 592,500 square feet, a project designed by New York architect Rafael Viñoly. The work is expected to cost \$350 million, an amount that dwarfs anything else comparable in Ohio (Litt 2008). In 2008, the museum began reopening in stages. When completed, 30 percent more gallery space, including new east and west wings and a large central court, will have been added.

While a dwindling population base has turned Cleveland into one of the smaller major-league cities, it is remarkable that the community has such high-quality and long-established cultural landmarks (T. Schorgl and M. Van Voorhis, personal communication, August 26, 2011). The “big five” institutions play a key role in making Cleveland an “attraction city,” and they certainly draw tourists. For instance, more than 90 percent of visitors to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame come from outside the Cleveland region (Rock and Roll Hall of Fame 2011). The strengths of these institutions are sources of civic pride for a town that has endured many difficult setbacks. Karen Gahl-Mills, the director of the region’s recently founded public arts-granting organization, Cuyahoga Arts and Culture, comments that “growing up in Cleveland, one just assumes that great cities have great cultural institutions” (K. Gahl-Mills, personal communication, July 7, 2011). Her experiences in different parts of the country, however, suggest that this is not always true of other American cities of comparable size. It is clear that these major organizations can play a role in attracting the young professionals Cleveland needs in order to increase its size and dynamism, but they are not sufficient.

### **Additional Cultural Assets**

Indeed, Cleveland has significant riches beyond the big five. The city, for example, is the birthplace of “rock and roll,” and the presence of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame indicates the importance of that musical genre to the community. The popular music scene in Cleveland is alive and well, with exciting performance venues, such as the Grog Shop, the Beachland Ballroom, and the Happy Dog, regularly featuring a large selection of musical choices to a local audience that Sean Waterson, co-owner of the Happy Dog, finds to be very sophisticated in its musical tastes (S. Waterson, personal communication, July 26, 2011).

In addition, Cleveland has a large number of nonprofit arts organizations that sponsor a wide variety of arts experiences. Cuyahoga Arts and Culture, for example, funds 150 different arts organizations, and more than half of these have budgets of under \$1 million (K. Gahl-Mills, personal communication, July 7, 2011). Thomas Schorgl commented that Cleveland is indeed a kind of laboratory for small-scale arts development.

Another distinctive element to Cleveland's cultural ecosystem is that it is not concentrated in one area. Of the big five, only the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Playhouse Square are located in downtown Cleveland. The Cleveland Orchestra and the Cleveland Museum of Art are five miles to the east in University Circle. As a part of the City Beautiful campaign in the early twentieth century, Cleveland's leaders chose to develop University Circle to house the community's new arts establishments, as well as some of its major educational institutions. University Circle was chosen because of its pastoral setting, which presented a sharp contrast to the industrialized sector to the west. According to Charles Michener, former senior editor of *The New Yorker* and *Seattle*, this decision created in effect two centers, which has made it harder to unite the city (C. Michener, personal communication, June 20, 2011).

In addition to downtown and University Circle, other small pockets of arts activity are scattered throughout the city. Three such centers on Cleveland's near West Side are the Gordon Square district, which is home to Cleveland Public Theatre and the Capitol Theater; the Tremont area, which is now bustling with visitors to new upscale restaurants; and the Ohio City area, which is concentrated around the West Side Market and is now dense with new bars and restaurants, including Great Lakes Brewery. There are others; there is no single arts and culture center to Cleveland, and this poses a problem when one raises the question of where Cleveland's development dollars should be spent. Some observers see this dispersal as a major disadvantage, complaining that Cleveland's cultural ecosystem lacks coherence and connectivity. Others, like Evan Lieberman, Professor of Film at Cleveland State University and guitarist with the rock group Poland Invasion, find this to be an attractive aspect of the city [E. Lieberman, personal communication, July 14, 2011]. A native of Atlanta, Georgia, Lieberman has become one of Cleveland's most enthusiastic

supporters. Lieberman finds the arts ubiquitous in Cleveland, part of the terrain and cultural landscape, and as a musician and filmmaker, he could not be happier.

### **Other Unique Features**

Cleveland is also a place of binary divisions. The famed East Side-West Side split is perhaps the most entrenched, as it goes back to the very earliest days of the city and the legendary battle between Cleveland and Ohio City over competing bridges in 1836 (Miller and Wheeler 1997). Beyond the obvious topographical distinctions, the two sides find themselves divided along lines of class, race, and ethnic cultures. But this is also true for the cultural ecosystem. Raymond Bobgan, Director of Cleveland Public Theatre, for example, finds a significant difference in arts funding opportunities between the two areas. He finds the established institutions on the East Side to be “massively capitalized,” while the newer arts organizations on the West Side struggle (R. Bobgan, personal communication, August 4, 2011).

Michener sees this difference as an opposition between the old East-Side elites and Cleveland’s working classes. Society members of the East Side were descendants of Cleveland’s early industrial tycoons, who viewed the city as the last outpost of the great Northeast and looked toward New York for their ideas of good art and culture. On the West Side are the descendants of the men and women who labored in the tycoons’ factories and plants, often of various ethnicities recently emigrated from Europe. It is probably an oversimplification to see the East Side-West Side divide as reflecting only Michener’s binaries, but those elements certainly have played a role in creating this situation.

What does seem to be true is that the arts scene in the University Circle area is largely more established and has a more formal atmosphere. Other parts of the Cleveland cultural ecosystem are more contemporary and edgy. The Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland (MOCA) in its new and strikingly contemporary building (designed by Farshid Moussavi and located in University Circle) is, perhaps, the exception that proves the rule (Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, n.d.). Cleveland Public Theatre (CPT), located on the West Side, is also dedicated to the work of contemporary artists, specifically those from Northeast Ohio.

The story of the founding of CPT is perhaps one of the best examples of arts helping to revitalize a neighborhood. In 1982, James Levin founded a New York–style experimental theater in Cleveland, and he was encouraged to look to the East Side, particularly to University Circle, as a place to begin (J. Levin, personal communication, July 14, 2011). In those days, it was difficult for people to imagine a major cultural organization being located outside of University Circle. Levin rejected that notion and wanted his theater to have a part in city rejuvenation. He settled on the Gordon Square District, which in those days was a run-down, crime-infested neighborhood. His venue was to be an old vaudeville theater, which was then a used-furniture store. He launched the project, made progress, and, in 2005, handed over the leadership of CPT to Raymond Bobgan.

According to Bobgan, no other market in the United States has a theatre exactly like CPT. Across the street is the refurbished Capitol Theater, which is the sole arts cinema on Cleveland’s West Side. Building on momentum, a \$3 million dollar streetscape project visually unified the neighborhood (Gordon Square Arts District 2012). Today, the square is home to a variety of attractive businesses, and CPT’s major fund-raising event, *Pandemonium*, in Gordon Square each fall, is a night of raucous carnival and a feast of contemporary arts of all sorts. In sum, Gordon Square has become the kind of hip and authentic neighborhood that draws young professionals back to the city, and its transformation began with an investment in the arts.

Two other aspects of Cleveland’s arts scene differentiate it from larger, better-known destinations. First, as noted earlier, the town’s affordability is a major attractive feature for the creative class. Second, unlike New York and Los Angeles, Cleveland is not a leading center for the arts and entertainment industries, although work by Ivan Schwarz and the Cleveland Film Commission, especially on the promotion of the Ohio film tax incentive, has recently been paying dividends (E. Lieberman, personal communication, July 14, 2011). In 2011 alone, seven major movies were shot in Cleveland, and notable producers on the West Coast are starting to look to the city as a venue for filming. Lieberman notes that Cleveland is rich in different kinds of topography and architecture, making it ideal for just about any kind of film. The same attributes that attract individual artists to Cleveland also appeal to commercial studios. Cleveland is an affordable place to make motion

pictures, and the city works diligently to ensure that it is easy for film companies to obtain the required permits.

The fact that Cleveland is not an industry center is especially important to Evan Lieberman, who has lived and worked in Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, he argues, the industry and the bottom line dictate what artists write. In Cleveland, because artists are not tied directly to the commercial entertainment industry, they can be more authentic. Indeed, “authenticity” is a common theme when talking about the Cleveland cultural ecosystem and the neighborhoods in which it resides [e.g., T. Schorgl and M. Van Voorhis, personal communication, August 26, 2011]. In Cleveland, artists don’t have to take a stand either for or against commercialism, and they are less likely to obtain huge contracts. Instead, they are more inclined to simply want to translate their life experiences into art. Indeed, Lieberman insists that the value that the arts contribute to the quality of life goes well beyond the economic. Arts, he argues, give us new ways of viewing the world, and they help us to lose ourselves in the artistic moment. They either surround our worlds in beauty or help us explore life’s misery and problems, and in the end, they help us to imagine new possibilities. In a culturally rich city like Cleveland, especially one that is not tied directly to the commercial entertainment industry, these noneconomic aspects of the arts also directly improve the everyday lives of the region’s citizens. (J. Michener, personal communication)

Cleveland, then, has a base in the arts that can be used to attract members of the creative class, but what needs to happen to make that base stronger? When asked what could be done to improve Cleveland’s arts scene, Michener remarked that “the cultural institutions need to do a better job of knitting the city together.” Indeed, the need to increase connectivity—bridging Cleveland’s geographical and social divisions, creating new partnerships among arts organizations, and bringing people together with art—was high on the list of most of the experts we interviewed. In Cleveland, art is everywhere, but it needs to be drawn together more coherently and efficiently. Schorgl, for example, spoke of the need to grow cross-sectional partnerships between various segments of the city’s economy. In addition, the established institutions need to attract wider (and younger) audiences, and the smaller, more popular arts institutions need to further the sense of community in their own neighborhoods.

The good news for Cleveland is that the arts community understands these imperatives. The more established organizations, for example, have developed aggressive outreach and educational programs. With a lead endowment of \$20 million from the Maltz Family Foundation, the Cleveland Orchestra has created an initiative, the Center for Future Audiences, to draw a new generation of patrons to its concerts (Cleveland Orchestra, n.d.). The goal is to create the youngest symphony audience worldwide by 2018 (Suttel 2011, p. 12). During the summers, the orchestra performs at Blossom Music Center, located in Cuyahoga Valley National Park, just south of Cleveland. This venue is much more family friendly than Severance Hall, and it has an expansive grass campus on which people can picnic and listen to the orchestra play. The Orchestra's Director of Communications, Ana Papakhian, revealed that, as of the summer of 2011, anyone under 18 years old has been able to attend these summer concerts for free, a key strategy for building a new and younger audience (A. Papakhian, personal communication, August 18, 2011). The hope is that an even more dynamic and youthful arts scene will be the catalyst not only to retain young artists and professionals in Cleveland but also to draw additional members of the creative class to make Cleveland their home.

## **INITIATIVES FOR THE FUTURE OF THE ARTS**

The arts leaders we interviewed were optimistic about Cleveland's future: there is a sense that the Cleveland cultural ecosystem is part of a larger movement toward a more vibrant city. As noted, although Cleveland's population again dropped in the 2010 census, key areas of the city, downtown and University Circle, defied that trend. Indeed, downtown is alive with new additions like the Global Center for Health Innovation and the Horseshoe Casino on Public Square, and these point the way to greater density and traffic in the downtown area. Euclid Avenue has been fully renovated with a sleek new rapid transit system, the Health Line, running down the center, linking downtown with University Circle. In the concluding pages, we highlight four important initiatives, both large and small, that are creating a more dynamic arts scene for Cleveland and, thus, hope for Cleveland's further development.

## Classical Music Moves West

Sean Waterson moved back to Cleveland several years ago with the intent to have a direct positive impact on his community. The result was Happy Dog, a music venue that serves specialty hot dogs to accompany upbeat music. Waterson's goal is to help build a community on the near West Side, and he wants Happy Dog to be the Gordon Square District's "living room." Happy Dog features live music five nights a week, and 85 percent of its repertoire is rock. But what makes this venue so special is that it also offers classical music and polka on a regular basis. "If New Orleans is jazz, Cleveland is rock and classical," says Waterson, and his programming reflects that belief.

Waterson started offering classical music at the Happy Dog after meeting Cleveland Orchestra flutist Joshua Smith. Together they invented "Orchestral Manoeuvres at the Dog," a regular series of classical concerts. The first concert was a sellout, with lines of interested customers running out the front door and down the block. Waterson thought that the risk inherent in playing in a less-than-perfect environment actually created a palpable energy in the bar. In his blog, Smith (2010) agrees that the evening was a big success, but he points out that playing classical music in bars is not a new idea. Nevertheless, the concept seems to have caught on particularly well at the Happy Dog, and the promise is that this classical music programming will continue. If a major problem in Cleveland arts is interconnectivity, Waterson has found a way to link West Side residents with the classical music scene, which heretofore has been largely an East Side, Severance Hall phenomenon.

Sean Waterson was not satisfied, however, with his success in "Orchestral Manoeuvres at the Dog." He wanted to build more bridges between West Side audiences and the heritage arts institutions on the East Side. Thus was born "Gordon Square Goes to the Orchestra" and "Gordon Square Goes to the Art Museum." Both of these efforts were organized through Facebook. The idea was to gather an audience from the Gordon Square area, hire a bus, and transport the participants to East Side art institutions. After the visits, the group dined at Happy Dog. Both trips were sold out in 24 hours. (Smith 2010)



## **Public Support for the Arts**

A second reason for hope is the availability of significant public arts funding in Cuyahoga County, which includes Cleveland and its suburbs. Michener describes past funding of the Cleveland arts community as basically top-down, the result of a sense of noblesse oblige on the part of the East Side elite toward the entire community, but this, he says, is changing. Cleveland has a long history of active grant-making organizations, such as the Cleveland Foundation and the George Gund Foundation, but what is new and absolutely essential for the community is the advent of a public arts financing mechanism.

In 2006, the citizens of Cuyahoga County passed a 10-year cigarette tax to be used to fund the arts. As a result of this ballot initiative, Cuyahoga Arts and Culture (CAC) was born, with a mandate to spend approximately \$20 million each year to promote the arts in the county. The scale is massive. Schorgl commented that, if Cuyahoga County were a state, it would have the third-largest public state budget for the arts in the country, just behind New York and Minnesota. This large infusion of funds has been transformative.

As noted earlier, CAC assists about 150 arts organizations. In addition, although CAC is not permitted to finance individual artists directly, the organization does play a role in cultivating local artists through the agencies it supports. Cleveland's Creative Workforce Fellowship, for example, which is funded by CAC, gives out \$20,000 fellowships to individual artists on an annual basis. Gahl-Mills argues that, if you want to find the best indicator of the city's distinct arts and culture scene, you need to look at what is happening in the neighborhoods; there Cleveland offers a rich variety of experiences, many at least partially financed by public tax dollars.

## **Arts and Education Partnerships**

The growth of creative partnerships among arts and educational institutions provides a third positive force. These collaborations will be important components in the bid to make the city's arts scene even more vibrant. Downtown Cleveland has a concentrated theater center located just blocks east of Public Square, with massive venues from the heyday of classic movies in the early twentieth century. Forty years

ago, this neighborhood was run-down, and all the theaters except the Hanna were closed. Because of the pioneering efforts of people like Raymond Shephardson and Joseph Geary, the Cleveland community rallied to save this area and created Playhouse Square, making it the world's largest theater-restoration project.

Today, with all the theaters going through at least one round of significant renovations, Playhouse Square is the second-largest live theater district in the country, right behind Lincoln Center in New York. Nine separate performance spaces, including the State, the Ohio, and the Palace Theaters, are currently in operation. Playhouse Square draws 1 million visitors per year, and it is estimated that it has a \$43 million impact on the city economy (Playhouse Square 2011).

One of these spaces, the Allen Theater, a classical old movie house in Italian Renaissance style, was underutilized, being occupied only about 90 days per year (Collins 2011). At the same time, two other community players were facing operational challenges. The art and drama programs at Cleveland State University (CSU), located just east of Playhouse Square, were operating in antiquated, substandard buildings, and university leaders wanted to build a new Fine and Performing Arts Center to house both disciplines. The cost of such a new building, however, was prohibitive. The state's capital budget would not sustain such expenditures, and only two major community donors came forward to offer support for the plan. The university was caught in a difficult situation. Sixty blocks to the east of Cleveland State was the Cleveland Play House, the oldest and perhaps most prestigious regional theater in the country. Located near the world-famous Cleveland Clinic, the Cleveland Play House found itself with an extensive physical plant to maintain and diminishing audiences. Michael Bloom, former Artistic Director of the Cleveland Play House, commented that the organization was facing a very uncertain future.

Faced with the Great Recession of 2008–2009, the leaders of these three organizations came to realize that a partnership could be a cost-effective way to solve their problems. The vision was to move both the Cleveland Play House and CSU's drama and dance programs into a remodeled Allen Theater. Through cooperation, both organizations could move into affordable new space right in the middle of a thriving arts district in downtown Cleveland, building upon the critical mass of live theater that was already available there.

This visionary project is now complete, but many obstacles had to be overcome to make it happen. First, money needed to be raised to remodel the Allen Theater into a contemporary venue with multiple performance areas. As it was, the Allen had a relatively new and well equipped stage house, whose existence would save the project about \$10 million in construction costs. However, the theater itself was much too large for the kind of intimate experience envisioned by CSU and the Cleveland Play House. Its 2,500-seat theater had to be cut back to about 500. In addition, two theater venues needed to be created in the parking lot adjacent to the Allen. These would be a new lab theater and a 250-seat highly adjustable Second Stage, a novel performance space that would not have been possible if each of the partners had tried to accomplish this separately.

A team of seasoned fundraisers from all three partners, called “The Power of Three,” was assembled, with the goal of raising \$32 million. But a second building was needed to house offices, classrooms, and rehearsal spaces for both CSU and the Cleveland Play House. Located around the corner from the Allen is the Middough Building, a five-story edifice, in which two floors were completely vacant. The “Power of Three” team then created yet another partnership, with Middough Inc., one of Cleveland’s most distinguished architectural and engineering firms. As a result of this arrangement, all of the partners, excluding Playhouse Square but including CSU’s art department, now fill Middough’s five large floors, and a new CSU Fine Arts campus has been created. The campus includes not only the Allen Theater and the Middough Building, but also a structure on the corner of 13th Street and Euclid, which gives CSU’s art gallery, now called the Galleries at CSU, storefront space in Playhouse Square. All in all, several powerful partnerships will boost Playhouse Square’s artistic profile, and make this region a national model for creating synergies between education and entertainment. Playhouse Square is certainly one more element that will transform Cleveland into a major attraction city.

### **Arts Festivals**

A fourth encouraging factor that is helping to create a more dynamic arts scene is the growth of distinctive arts festivals in Cleveland. These events are important because they draw large numbers of people

together from different parts of the city. Two programs that are especially noteworthy are the Cleveland International Film Festival and the Ingenuity Festival.

In 1977, Jonathan Forman inaugurated the Cleveland International Film Festival, screening eight films from seven countries at the Cedar Lee Theater (Cleveland International Film Festival 2013). Over the years, the festival, supported by the Cleveland and George Gund Foundations, as well as CAC, grew significantly, and in 1991, it moved to Tower City, located downtown in Cleveland's iconic Terminal Tower. By 2011, the festival was screening approximately 150 feature films, grouped thematically, from 60 different countries. It had a budget of over \$1.5 million and about 1,000 members (Magaw 2011). Filmmakers from around the world were drawn to Cleveland, and there was also a markedly engaged audience of about 78,000 fans, a 122 percent increase in attendance over the past eight years (Blackaby 2011; Magaw 2011).

Meanwhile, the Ingenuityfest was created in 2005 by James Levin and Thomas Mulready as a celebration of creativity at the nexus of arts and technology (Brown 2010). Over the years, it has continuously moved: from the Warehouse District to Playhouse Square to the lower deck of the Detroit-Superior Bridge, and, finally, to Piers 30 and 32 of the Port of Cleveland. At its current location, it literally brings together Cleveland's East and West Sides. In 2011 it drew about 40,000 people to the center for three days of festivities (Ewinger 2011). Some exhibitions are pure art; others focus squarely on technology; and still others, like Jared Bendis's surround-sound audio game, "Treasure of the Wumpus," combine both in interesting ways (Rosenberg 2011).

In some respects, there is no more appropriate way to celebrate the existence and achievements of what Florida (2002) has called the creative class, and this festival continues to draw ever-larger crowds paying homage to creativity, in whatever form it takes. Like the ArtPrize contest in Grand Rapids, both Ingenuityfest and the Film Festival are well on their way to becoming iconic attractions, drawing more and more people into the heart of the city.

## THE ARTS AS A PATH TO REVITALIZATION

A dean of the Levin College of Urban Affairs at CSU once remarked that Cleveland's size put it in a sweet spot—large enough to enjoy major league sports and many other big-city amenities, but small enough not to suffer from a variety of urban problems, especially the curse of gridlock and giant traffic jams. Whether or not this is true generally—Cleveland still has plenty of big city challenges—it does seem to be the case with respect to the arts. On one hand, Cleveland has world-class arts organizations that are the envy of many other cities its size or even bigger. On the other, Cleveland is small enough for one man or one woman, like James Levin, to make a significant difference by building upon the arts to promote city development.

As in Grand Rapids and Milwaukee, the arts are playing a crucial role in community revitalization, but Cleveland's path to greater prosperity is building upon its own distinctive amenities, iconic attractions, and arts profile. Nevertheless, several critical aspects of this momentum are transferable. As we have seen, the multiple Cleveland strategies for urban development through the arts include

- having a thoughtful and detailed strategic plan,
- strengthening the city's major artistic infrastructure and cultivating new initiatives,
- making purposeful efforts not only to tie together widely dispersed artistic venues but also to capture younger audiences for the fine arts,
- creating significant arts and education partnerships,
- supporting art through significant public funding,
- providing artists and arts organizations an affordable and welcoming place to work, and
- creating multiple festivals to highlight the arts and draw audiences from the suburbs and beyond into the city.

It may well be that the broad scope and unique profile of these combined efforts is the most distinctive aspect of Cleveland's arts development strategy.

Rocco Landesman, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, has offered independent confirmation of the importance of the arts to Cleveland's redevelopment efforts. Appointed by President Obama in 2009, Landesman has made the linkage between artistic activity and economic development a centerpiece of his strategy to build the Endowment (Litt 2011). After visiting Cleveland and touring its arts attractions, he concluded that local arts organizations were indeed helping to revitalize the city. "We're talking about it; you're doing it," he said. Overall, Landesman believes that Cleveland is "an arts city," and that other cities would do well to follow its lead.

## Notes

1. As of 2012 there is also a juried prize.

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