

**SAN FRANCISCO MIME TROUPE
FINAL REPORT TO THE CULTURAL EQUITY GRANTS PROGRAM
40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION**

With generous support from the Cultural Equity Grants Program, the San Francisco Mime Troupe=s weekend of performances and symposia in conjunction with its 40th Anniversary celebration proved to be a major success. All project goals were achieved, including:

- \$ Producing a day-long symposium on political theater on December 5 and a 40-year retrospective performance on December 6;
- \$ Generating a presence in major local media outlets, including newspaper and television;
- \$ Attracting a capacity audience for the December 6 retrospective performance;
- \$ Gathering footage for a new Mime Troupe documentary;
- \$ Financing the event totally through ticket sales and grants; and
- \$ Creating a sense of history and future for the Mime Troupe in terms of long-term audience members and the next generation of Mime Troupe supporters.

The Events

Mime Troupe founder R.G. Davis, who left the company in 1970, organized the day of discussion at the Cowell Theater on December 5. Mr. Davis assembled a roster of past Mime Troupers and noted activists and authors, including columnist Alexander Cockburn of *The Nation*, director Luis Valdez of El Teatro Campesino, writer Saul Landau, environmentalist activist/writer Ernest Callenbach and long-time Mime Troupe playwright Joan Holden. During the morning, Mr. Davis presented a paper on the counter-culture, with responses from three panelists. After a lunch break, there were performances by past Mime Troupers, showing how their Mime Troupe roots influenced the work with which they are currently involved. In the evening, there was a second panel discussion on how the counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s evolved into the environmental movement of the 90s.

The December 6 retrospective evening at the Palace of Fine Arts Theater reunited more than 50 Mime Troupe actors, musicians directors and technicians recreating sets, moods and performances from the past four decades. Many of the performers flew in from distant parts of the country, at their own expense, to participate. Rehearsal time was anywhere from four weeks for Bay Area residents to four days for out-of-towners. The result was extraordinary. In front of an extremely appreciative audience, the performers recreated classic Mime Troupe productions that represented the movements and social changes of the past 40 years. While the running time was three and one-half hours, the energy never flagged. The cast received a sustained standing ovation at the conclusion.

Media Presence

A major objective was to generate a significant presence in the media, both to ensure that word of the anniversary weekend activities reached a wide audience and to create new materials with which to update Mime Troupe booking materials.

Locally, the Mime Troupe received a four-page photo spread in the November 21 issue of the Sunday

Examiner Magazine, and a two-page article in the November 22 issue of the Sunday *Chronicle Datebook*. Theater Bay Area put the Mime Troupe on the cover of the December issue of *Callboard Magazine*, and ran a comprehensive story. Two days after the event, *Chronicle* drama critic Steven Winn wrote an extremely positive review of the December 6 performance. Each piece will be a welcome addition to the booking packet.

KRON-TV aired a four-minute piece about the Mime Troupe=s 40 years of free political theater on the 6 p.m. newscast on Friday, December 3, and repeated it on Sunday morning, December 5.

Audience

The December 6 retrospective performance sold out two weeks in advance. This goal was achieved through a direct mail campaign to 18,000 people on the current Mime Troupe mailing list; repeated announcements about the event from the stage at summer park shows; advertising in *The San Francisco Bay Guardian*, *SF Weekly* and the *East Bay Express*; posterizing throughout San Francisco and the East Bay; and direct ticket sales through Cody=s Books in Berkeley, and City Lights Bookstore and Modern Times Bookstore in San Francisco.

The audience was diverse, with approximately 70 percent comprising long-time Mime Troupe supporters over 45 years of age, and 30 percent between the ages of 21 and 44. This composition was consistent with the Troupe=s goal of attracting significant support from a newer generation of Bay Area residents.

Documentary

Jim Mayer of Ideas in Motion shot footage of rehearsals and interviews with collective members past and present beginning in November. He also taped the December 5 and 6 events in their entirety. Mayer will soon begin the editing process; however, it will be necessary to renegotiate his fee, as he ended up putting in many more hours than planned.

Funding

Somewhat miraculously, the Mime Troupe received each projected grant for this project. In addition to the CEG/OPG award, the Mime Troupe was successful in obtaining \$10,000 from The Nonrecurring Events Fund of Grants for the Arts and \$34,000 from The James Irvine Foundation. A \$10,000 grant from The [Name Withheld] Foundation in the fall was an unanticipated windfall, as this foundation is usually a \$2,500 annual donor. In-kind donations of housing, food and services also helped to offset the extraordinary expense budget.

Ticket sales, originally projected at \$20,000, grossed \$30,011. The difference is due primarily to the unexpected demand for the top-price, \$100 tickets, which included a pre-performance reception and priority seating.

Impact on Future Activities

A major objective was to generate a positive ~~A~~bounce@from the event going into the new century. While it is still too early to ascertain the scope of that bounce, it is evident to all who participated that the event generated much positive morale within the Troupe and even more good will among the company=s supporters. It is hoped that audience turnout for the summer 2000 show will be affected favorably by the memory of this celebration.

The response to the annual winter fundraising appeal, which hit most households the week after the event, may be a good gauge. The response has been healthy and many gifts are from people who had purchased tickets to the event.

Summary

\$Both events were successful in generating goodwill among Mime Troupe audiences from different generations.

\$Local media coverage met or exceeded expectations.

\$Footage was shot for a documentary, but it will be necessary to identify additional funds to edit the final product.

\$Project funding and ticket sales exceeded expectations.