

MIAMI, FLORIDA



Photograph courtesy of the Convention and Visitors Bureau of Miami.

Straddling Biscayne Boulevard, on a construction site alongside I-395, the sleek steel ribs of Cesar Pelli's inspiring Miami Performing Arts Center of greater Miami (PAC) started to take shape in October 2003. It was—and remains—a potent symbol of the disconnect between Miami's dreams for the arts and their scruffy reality.

This is a city of flamboyant, fleshy opulence, where Latin rock stars cruise South Beach, urbane patrons attend the excellent Miami City Ballet, and wealthy collectors drop millions at Art Basel Miami Beach, since 2002 the local outpost of the most prestigious contemporary art fair in the world.

Yet Miami also has the lowest median household income of any major city in the nation, a population 59 percent foreign-born and an urban center that feels like a shabby small town. Miami's immigrants—from countries including Cuba, Brazil, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic—live in a checkerboard of neighborhood enclaves, making it nearly impossible to mount citywide support for anything, never mind the arts. But Miami's fledgling city-arts budget is less than \$1 million, anyway, and the Florida State legislature slashed arts funding last year from \$29 to \$6 million. Tourism, the palm-

lined city's next-biggest industry after development, still has not fully recovered from September 11.

In spite of all this, Miami is forging ahead with PAC. The new Children's Museum went up in 2003, and there are plans for a \$175 million Miami Art Museum. If all this sounds slightly contradictory, it is—until you realize that in Miami, the name of the game is real estate. Arts lovers and city planners fervently hope the center will spawn an arts district that will have a domino effect on nearby Wynwood, the Design District—where the South Beach crowd goes to flee the tourists—and, eventually, downtown itself.

It's a beautiful vision. But it may be slightly premature. Two years after PAC broke ground in 2001, one of its major tenants-to-be, the Florida Philharmonic, went bankrupt. Its anchor tenant, the Concert Association of Florida, has been in the red for two years. Meanwhile, the arts center's budget has ballooned from \$132 million to \$344 million, and its opening has been delayed until 2006. Even that date isn't firm. Nevertheless, declares Concert Association impresario Judy Drucker, "we need it desperately. One of the biggest problems in the past is that we haven't had decent theaters." Two huge con-

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editor
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cert halls—2,480 seats for ballet and opera; 2,200 seats for orchestra concerts—plus the much-needed 200-seat Studio Theater should help.

The big question, though, is, can they fill the seats? Maybe. One future tenant—the New World Symphony, a youth academy led by San Francisco maestro Michael Tilson Thomas—is enormously popular and fabulously endowed, though another, the Florida Grand Opera, is routinely described as “mediocre.”

Demographic shifts have played a decisive role in the decline of Miami’s classical music scene. Only 12 percent of the city’s population is white and non-Hispanic and, says Drucker, the Jewish middle class, which once patronized classical music, has long since moved away. “We have a great Hispanic community here now that has not been brought up with classical music,” she explains. “They have been brought up with ballet, though.”

This may explain why, in the middle of a recession, Miami City Ballet managed to mount a capital campaign for a new headquarters and finish a substantial 2003-04 season with a surplus. Of course, the company—led by former New York City Ballet star Edward Villella—is world-class, and dance of all kinds flourishes in Miami, including Maximum Dance Ballet and festivals of international ballet companies and Afro-Cuban and Brazilian dance.

But Miami’s strongest suit by far is the visual arts. Since 2002, the city has hosted Art Basel Miami Beach, and it is also home to two of the most remarkable private showcases of contemporary art in the world—the Rubell Family Collection and the Margulies Collection at the Warehouse—both in the Design District. North Miami’s Museum of Contemporary Art has a well-deserved reputation for cutting-edge shows. The city and surrounding area are peppered with hip museums such as South Beach’s Wolfsonian, which showcases decorative and propaganda arts, and the nearby Bass Museum, recently expanded by architect Arata Isozaki. The gallery scene is red-hot, too, particularly for Latin artists such as José Bedia and Hernan Bas. “I go to cities and art fairs all over the world,” *ARTnews* editor Milton Esterow told *The Miami Herald*, “and the level of activities here is extraordinary. I have never seen anything like it.”

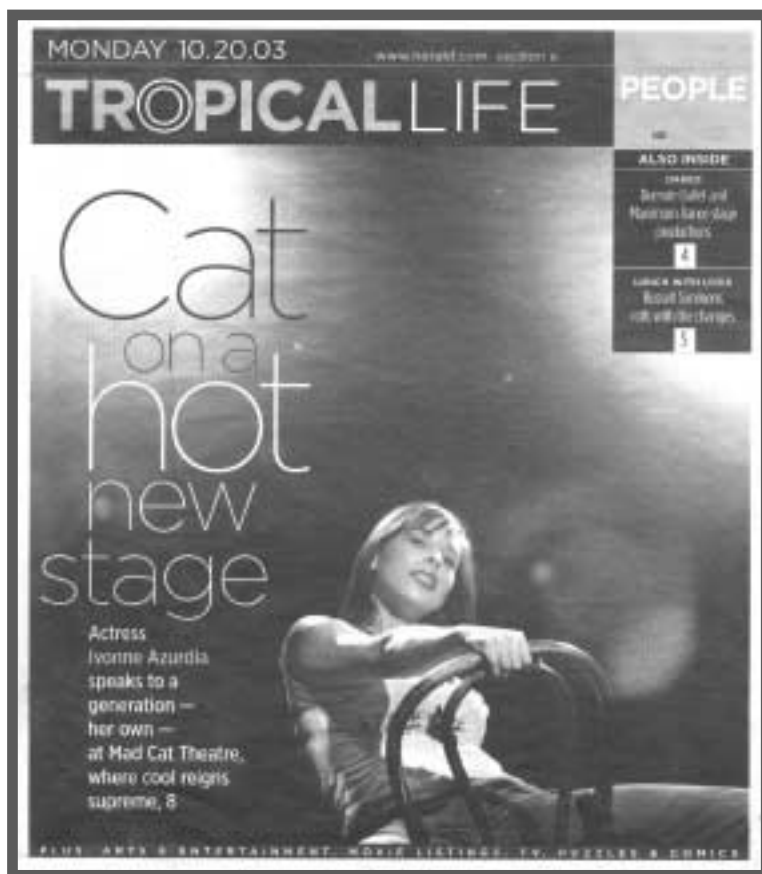
Architecture is also strong, with the continued success of the flamboyant Arquitectonica, which designed the Children’s Museum, and Duany Plater-Zyberk, whose new urbanism influenced the progressive zoning of public and

private spaces in the Design District.

Miami’s theater scene emerged as a player last year as well, after the New Theatre premiered Cuban-American playwright Nilo Cruz’s *Anna in the Tropics*, which won a Pulitzer and went on to Broadway. The graceful old Coconut Grove Playhouse puts up original productions and hosts touring Broadway shows. Actor’s Playhouse, on Coral Gables’s Miracle Mile, offers original musicals and revivals and, come summer, Miami theater lovers enjoy Teatro Avante’s International Hispanic Theatre Festival.

In a city that is 66 percent Hispanic, it’s not surprising that Latin pop rules. Miami’s Latin-dominated entertainment industry generated \$2.5 billion in 1999, and the city hosts all the major Latin music awards shows. It is also the headquarters for the Latin American divisions of nearly all the multinational recording labels, as well as for such networks as Mexico’s Televisa and North America’s Univision and Telemundo.

Oddly, though, the live-music scene is, well, pretty dead. Recent signs of life have been



THE MIAMI HERALD

observed at clubs such as the Design District's I/O and Little Havana's Hoy como Ayer, and local artists like Bacilos, Trick Daddy and Dashboard Confessional have broken out nationally. But Miami is by and large a deejay dance town, where people watch for celebrities like Jennifer Lopez and Colombian rock star Carlos Vives—not the band. An exception would be Miami's festivals and fairs—such as Trinidadian Carnival and Miami Carnival—a popular antidote to the city's cultural fragmentation.

But how do you sell concert tickets at a parade? How does art thrive in a city where quality arts groups are young, scant and scattered and there is not much of a tradition of giving? Michael Spring, director of Miami-Dade County's Department of Cultural Affairs, notes that county arts nonprofits have exploded from 100 to 1100 in the last 20 years, and thinks PAC and the arts district are the right first step. Spring says, "Florida is trying to change its image as simply being a vacation destination into a more sophisticated place, where tourism, high-tech business and international business should come and live."

He has some cause for optimism. His budget

has tripled in seven years, to \$12.5 million. The city finally formed an arts council in late 2002. And whereas groups used to start up optimistically, then fail after a couple of years, cutting-edge performance programs at the Miami Light Project and Miami-Dade County College's Cultural Del Lobo have survived hard times.

Still, one has to wonder if Miami has the cart before the horse. The Miami Art Museum owns a mere 189 paintings. "Isn't [a central museum] a nineteenth-century idea for an industrial city?" says Museum of Contemporary Art Director Bonnie Clearwater. "This is a twenty-first-century city in a postindustrial age." Indeed, when transnational corporations are making cell-phone calls from Miami neighborhoods to such countries as Spain, Argentina and the Antilles, the Miami arts community may be applying a modern paradigm to a postmodern reality.

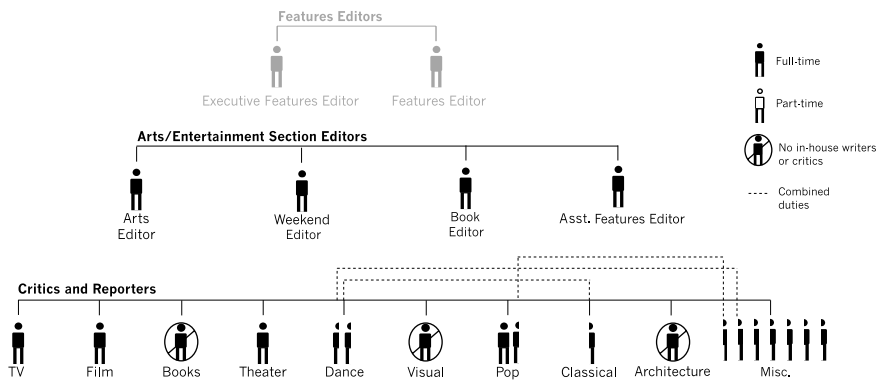
Back in 1998, a mysterious archeological site called the Miami Circle was unearthed by a condo developer at the mouth of the Miami River. After spending \$26.7 million on the excavation of the Native American structure, no one could agree on how to display it, so it was reburied. One hopes the same fate does not await the steel struts of the Miami Performing Arts Center.

BY PAUL DE BARROS

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In-house Arts Staff (does not include features staff, copy desk and freelancers)



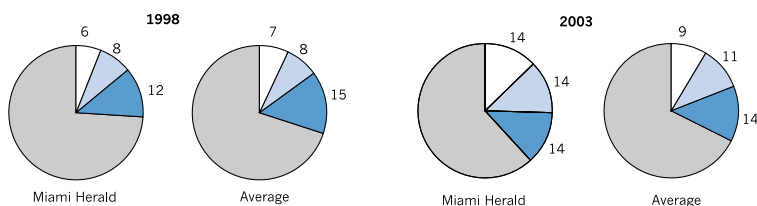
The Miami Herald

1998-2003

- Daily circulation:
- Arts-and-culture newshole:
- Number of arts-and-culture articles:
- In-house arts staff:

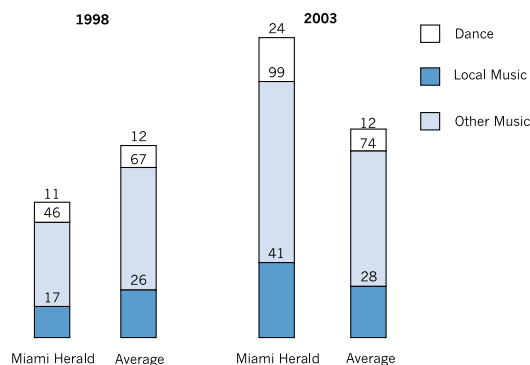
Prominence of Arts and Feature Sections

percentage of overall pagination devoted to daily A&L sections , weekend arts supplements and non-arts feature sections



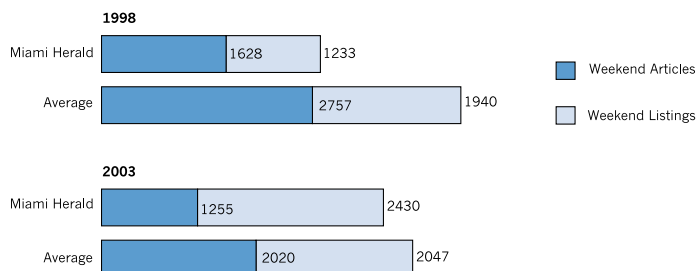
Music & Dance

number of articles on music and dance



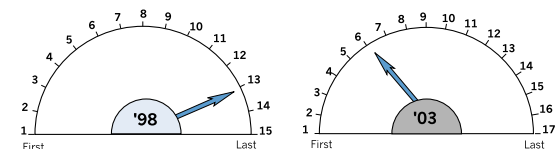
Weekend Newshole

space (in column inches) devoted to arts-and-culture in weekend arts supplements



Daily Journalism

ranking among all newspapers studied for space (in column inches) in daily A&L sections devoted to arts-and-culture articles (listings excluded)



TROPICAL LIFE HAS ARRIVED on the Miami scene, a daily tabloid arts-and-lifestyles supplement that bucks the trend in our study. While most other newspapers have focused on weekend coverage and cut back on the daily, *The Miami Herald* not only increased the pagination of its daily section as a proportion of the overall newspaper but also increased its daily newshole for articles.

The *Herald* was also one of only three metropolitan newspapers to increase its arts-and-culture story count. The *Herald's* increase was by far the greatest. Since 1998 almost every newspaper we studied has shrunk the average length of its arts-and-culture articles. At the *Herald*, Tropical Life's tabloid format led to a larger than average reduction. So the *Herald's* arts-and-culture journalism newshole shrank slightly, and its newshole for listings remained stable. The Weekend A&E supplement switched from articles to listings: The former's newshole was cut back; the latter's volume doubled.

Much of the makeover embodied by Tropical Life was in the

Herald's format rather than content. The paper discontinued its stand-alone advertising sections, folding ad pages into editorial sections. Thus the *Herald* beefed up the pagination of its A&L section, its Weekend A&E supplement and its sports. Tropical Life was the only A&L section among the metropolitan newspapers we monitored to assign more than 10 percent of its pages to full-page ads. This means that Tropical Life did not increase its newshole in proportion to its pagination. Indeed, its listings were actually smaller than in the daily Living & Arts section of 1998, with large shrinkage in the space for the daily TV grid and for its accompanying journalism.

Instead, the *Herald* allocated more resources to music and the performing arts. The number of music articles doubled, though none of the increase was accounted for by reviews, which remained unchanged in 2003. As for the performing arts, the *Herald's* boost represented a change from outstandingly low to merely normal—except for dance, a field in which the *Herald* became a leader.—AT

ARTS COVERAGE IN MIAMI: A CRITICAL VIEW

LAST SEPTEMBER, *The Miami Herald* rolled out Tropical Life, a splashy new daily tabloid that folds arts coverage into features. The new section is typical of a paper skilled at finding innovative and resourceful solutions for tight budgets and a confusingly fluid community.

True, Tropical Life may give the casual reader the impression that frothy gossip and flesh-baring models—male and female—are more important than probing arts stories. But take a step back. What other U.S. daily has bilingual critics covering Latin popular music, South American soaps and Spanish-language theater; a nationally respected freelancer who appears regularly on the architecture beat; and a movie critic who lives in New York City? And what other daily places arts stories in nearly every section of the paper, linking arts to neighborhoods, real estate, small business, ethnic identity and urban personalities? That goes for page 1, too, which recently featured in-depth stories on Art Basel Miami Beach and cop surveillance of hip-hop groups.

At the *Herald*, the arts don't just cozy up to features, they're tight with the news, too.

Tropical Life, which takes its name from a previous Sunday section, has a core theme each day. Arts gets the cover Friday and Sunday; other days it's people, health, fashion, food and religion. Because of press requirements, the section reverts to a broadsheet Saturday and Sunday. Friday offers mostly film reviews, using star ratings; fizzy, clever columns about celebrities, clubs, dating and deejays; reviews of video games and DVDs; and an extensive listings section. Copy is short and snappy, "smart boxes" and story summaries abound, and the layout is clean, precise and readable. Sunday is more leisurely, with longer features and book and television reviews.

Not surprisingly, Tropical Life is aimed at youth. "Young people have been oriented by TV and Web pages for a quick read," says features editor Kendall Hamersly. "That doesn't necessarily mean sophomoric or simplistic, but stuff you can get quickly."

Some arts advocates and *Herald* critics themselves complain that the new format has cut into arts coverage. In truth, culture stories—with cover teasers—appear almost every day in

Tropical Life. Space is reserved Monday for weekend reviews, while weekday arts coverage has increased at the *Herald* overall since 1998. However, articles do tend to be shorter, and the fact that they are obscured by covers about abs and eczema increases the perception that the arts have disappeared. "People don't open it," says rock critic Evelyn McDonnell, who notes a dramatic decline in e-mail reader response since the redesign. "They see what's on the cover, and five days a week it has nothing to do with arts and culture."

A more frequent complaint is that reviews as such are no longer valued. While the number of reviews has remained constant since 1998, they comprise a smaller percentage of the paper's music coverage. Less than 20 percent of the *Herald's* music-performance stories last October constituted reviews, compared to 34 percent five years ago. This is intentional, however. "We're a news features department," asserts deputy features editor Joan Chrissos. "Most of us came from the news side. We have the mantra of trying to get on the front page."

Understandably, this philosophy does not please arts organizations. "It's a complete disaster," says Judy Drucker, whose Concert Association presents classical music stars. "We just got a wonderful new critic, whom I adore. And they stop him."

Drucker has a point. When the *Herald's* classical music critic died, the paper hired a replacement, then promptly recast him as a "culture critic." Now that its dance writer has moved to Latin popular music full-time, the paper has no dedicated staffer for dance, classical music or visual arts. Arts coverage meanwhile lost a general-assignment position, and the responsibilities of a major features editor, who left last fall, were reassigned to existing staff. These are just a few of the staffing anomalies at a paper where features and news reporters are regularly enlisted to cover the arts. The paper had more than 70 different people writing about the arts last October, yet neither the architecture nor visual arts critic is a staffer.

One result of such chronic understaffing is strikingly low morale. Two reporters characterized the *Herald* as "not a happy place" where writers are "overworked and underpaid." Says Hamersly: "I don't think you could ever be happy with the staff level at a corporate-owned newspaper."

The corporation he's referring to is Knight Ridder, which moved its headquarters from

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The Miami Herald

Miami to San Jose, Calif., in 1998, a major blow to a Pulitzer Prize-winning paper that was once the company flagship. Since then, in spite of brand-name columnists like Dave Barry, Carl Hiassen and Leonard Pitts Jr., the *Herald's* status has plummeted. Then there's its circulation, down from 342,029 in 1998 to 325,032 in 2003 on the daily and 470,393 to 447,326 Sundays. "I would love to have a bigger arts section," says publisher Alberto Ibargüen, who is passionately involved in the Miami arts scene. "Newspapers are community institutions, and I absolutely believe in the arts as community builders. But in the real world, I think we balance our role in the community and our obligation to shareholders better than most. I make no apology for it. We're still putting out a quality and enthusiastic page."

Not everyone agrees. "Part of the problem with the print media here is that it's episodic," says Miami-Dade County's Department of Cultural Affairs Director Michael Spring. "There isn't a vision guiding the coverage. The *Herald* stumbles on stories but doesn't connect the dots." Hamersly responds, "That's probably a legitimate criticism. The downside of having a capable art critic who is stretched very thin is that the time to do a step-back piece isn't there."

Do readers have alternatives? Not many. Miami is a one-newspaper town, unless you count the *Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel*, which, ambitiously, just changed its name to *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* and increased daily circulation. This year the *Sentinel* collected two arts nominations at the Sunshine State Awards, whereas the *Herald* got none.

For Spanish speakers, the editorially sepa-

rate *El Nuevo Herald*—popular with the Cuban-exile community and by no means a translation of the English-language *Herald*—offers quality in-depth reviews of Latin arts, as does the original Spanish-language daily, *Diario Las Americas*. The alternative weekly *Miami New Times* has published irreverent, in-depth stories on the flailing Miami Performing Arts Center and the fledging Miami Art Museum. Its putative competitor, *Street*, the *Herald's* faux-alt weekly, appears to be merely a cynical ploy to grab advertising dollars.

Miami radio is mostly barren when it comes to cultural affairs, except for public radio's WLRN 91.3, which features *South Florida Arts Beat*, a one-hour show offering live performances as well as informative interviews. WRLN-TV offers the comparable half-hour show *Art Street*.

In his 1983 groundbreaking book *Imagined Communities*, political scientist Benedict Anderson theorized that newspapers helped establish the modern nation-state by defining the public sphere, both physically—"I live in this city"—and ethnically—"I am Indonesian." Looked at this way, expecting a newspaper to fulfill that role in a transnational, transcultural city like Miami is perhaps an anachronism. "It all moves very quickly," says features editor Enrique Fernandez. "It never stays put. Try to find Cubans in Little Havana. Where is Little Haiti? Everybody's now living in Broward County."

Wherever Miami is, Fernandez and the *Herald* are hoping that, at the very least, it is unanimously in love with Tropical Life. That may be the best they can wish for.

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