

## PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA



Photograph courtesy of the Convention and Visitors Bureau of Philadelphia.

When you talk to people in Philadelphia, you keep hearing two conflicting ideas: Philadelphians are intensely proud of their city and Philadelphians suffer from an inferiority complex. “The proximity to New York can overshadow Philadelphia,” says Janice Price, president and CEO of the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts and a former Lincoln Center executive.

But Philadelphia has a bustling arts scene of its own, featuring everything from long-established organizations such as the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Rodin Museum to new galleries run by young artists and thriving festivals of film, literature and music. And what other city boasts a street running right through the center of town called Avenue of the Arts? That boulevard gained a new anchor with the December 2001 opening of the Kimmel Center, a high-profile neighbor to established residents like the Academy of Music, the Wilma Theater, the Merriam Theater and University of the Arts.

The Kimmel Center has transformed the arts landscape in Philadelphia. Its \$265 million building, designed by Rafael Viñoly, is like an urban park, with two freestanding theaters set in

a courtyard, the whole covered by a tremendous glass canopy. It was designed to be “open, public, porous, and accessible,” says Price. “It’s meant to bring new people in.”

And it does. The Kimmel Center created a stunning new home for its resident companies—the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, PHILADANCO, American Theater Arts for Youth, and the Philly Pops. The Opera Company of Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Ballet were thus able to book more time in the historic Academy of Music, which had previously also been home to the orchestra. And like New York’s Lincoln Center, Kimmel Center Presents has become a hub in its own right, providing space for visiting musicians who previously had no place to perform. Since the opening, the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonics gave their first Philadelphia concerts in more than 30 years, and soprano Cecilia Bartoli and pianist Lang Lang made their Philadelphia recital debuts.

While the complex has won plaudits from both architectural and musical perspectives, its main concert space, Verizon Hall, has received mixed reviews for its acoustics, which are still a work in progress. There is also work to be done

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Janice Price  
president and CEO  
the Kimmel Center for  
the Performing Arts

financially. The center ended its first year with a deficit of \$3.8 million on an operating budget of \$25 million, and estimates that it will have a \$2 million deficit in 2004. However, it hopes to have balanced its budget by next year.

It's also been a time of great change for the Philadelphia Orchestra. In addition to moving into the Kimmel Center, the orchestra got a new musical director, Christoph Eschenbach, in September 2003. Financially, though, it has been going through a difficult period; last year it was almost forced to cancel its one free concert for lack of funding. But lately things have been looking up. In September 2003 the Annenberg Foundation announced a \$50 million gift to the orchestra's endowment on condition that the organization's decade-long deficit be balanced to within 1.5 percent by the 2005-2006 season.

The Annenberg grant has propelled the orchestra towards finding new ways to cut its structural deficit, which used to be smoothed over with income from recordings and donations. To that end, the orchestra fired seven employees and asked staff members making over \$60,000 a year to take a week's unpaid vacation. Vice president and senior adviser Judith Kurnick says that everyone else—including musicians, guest artists, vendors and even Eschenbach—was asked to give back 10 percent of their salaries. The orchestra is currently in negotiation with its musicians, whose contract runs out in September 2004; as this piece was going to press, the two sides remain far apart.

But there are arts organizations all over Philadelphia, not just on the Avenue of the Arts. The Philadelphia Museum of Art celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2001, and as of June 2003 it had raised almost \$200 million as part of an anniversary fund and received a commitment of \$25 million in matching funds from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for a variety of capital projects. The museum has also organized a number of notable exhibitions in the past five years, including *Manet and the Sea*, *Degas and the Dance* and the first retrospective in 30 years of the works of Barnett Newman.

There is great energy in younger, less established arts organizations as well. According to Lori Hill, arts and books editor of *Philadelphia City Paper*, "One thing that's great about Philadelphia is that some of the people who own restaurants and bars are real patrons of the arts." For instance, BRAT Productions, a theater company whose motto is Theater that Rocks, has performed at Fergie's Pub, an Irish bar, as well as in the Kimmel Center.



PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS

Hill's competitor, *Philadelphia Weekly's* arts and entertainment editor Doree Shafir, agrees about the vibrancy of the city's non-mainstream arts scene. She points to numerous art schools as one reason for the preponderance of young artists. In addition, there are several galleries started by artists, such as Space 1026—founded in 1997, it features a gallery, studios and an online store—and Union 237, which represents a number of graffiti artists. "There are a lot of young artists who find this a really great place to live—painters, fashion designers, writers, filmmakers," she notes.

Philadelphia has a number of arts festivals, most notably Philly Fringe, which was started in 1997. Based on the Edinburgh Festival, the Fringe began with 60 artists and an audience of 12,000, and by 2003 had grown to include 230 contributors and 47,000 attendees. The Philadelphia Film Society sponsors both the Philadelphia International Film Festival and the Philadelphia International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. The 215 Festival, now in its third year, holds combined readings/concerts featuring such

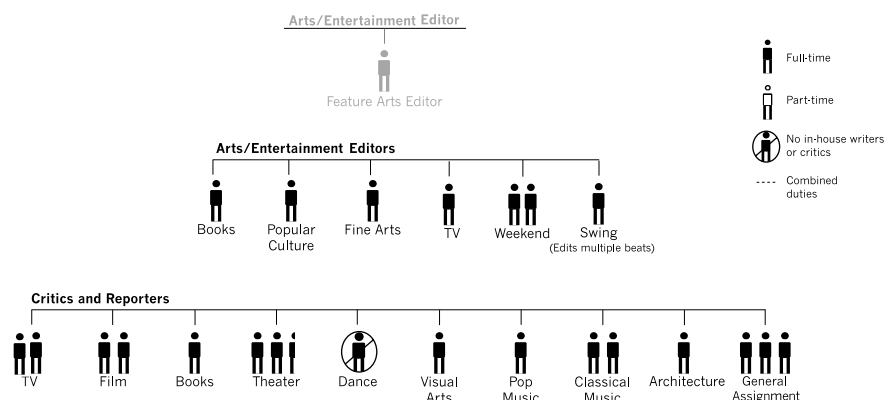
performers as Zadie Smith, Jeffrey Eugenides and They Might Be Giants. “That festival has been really valuable, and has gotten people out to places they haven’t gone before,” says *City Paper*’s Hill.

That could be Philly’s motto: Come to a place you’ve never been before. Philadelphia isn’t just a train station halfway between New York and Washington—there’s a whole world of art going on.

BY LAURIE MUCHNICK

*“There are a lot  
of young artists  
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Doree Shafrir  
arts and entertainment  
editor  
*Philadelphia Weekly*

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

1998-2003

Daily circulation:

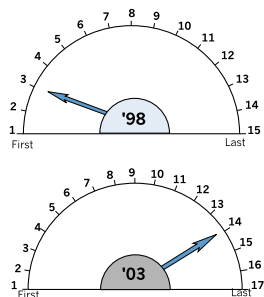
Arts-and-culture newshole:

Number of arts-and-culture articles:

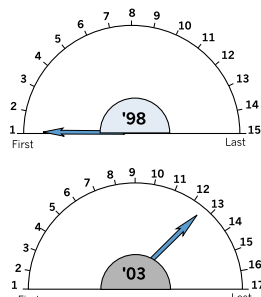
In-house arts staff:

**Article Length**

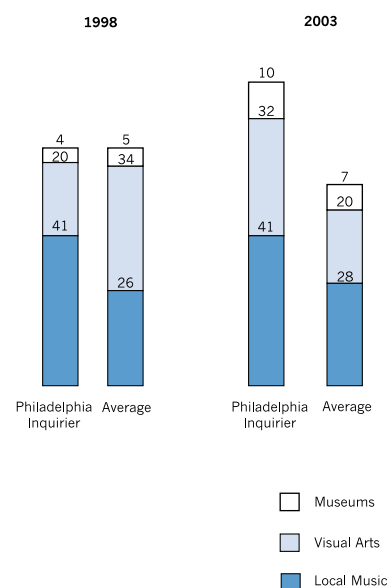
ranking among all newspapers studied for average length of arts-and-culture articles (listings excluded)

**Decorative Arts**

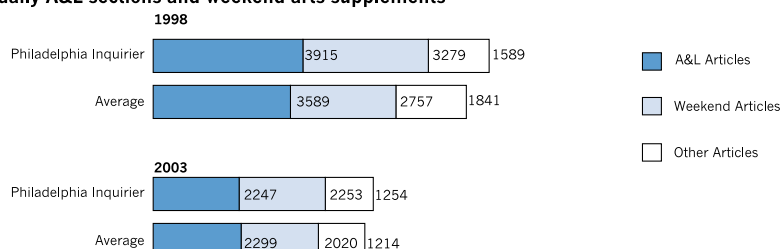
ranking among all newspapers studied for number of articles on interior design, haute couture, arts and crafts and other decorative arts

**Local Music, Visual Arts & Museums**

number of articles on local music, the visual arts and museums

**Newshole for Journalism**

space (in column inches) devoted to arts-and-culture articles (listings excluded) in daily A&L sections and weekend arts supplements



THE BIG CHANGE IN ARTS AND CULTURE coverage at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* over the last five years has been a radical reduction in the average length of its stories. Back in 1998 *Inquirer* articles averaged nearly 17 column inches. By 2003 they had shrunk to below 12 column inches. While almost all the newspapers we studied ran shorter articles than they used to, the *Inquirer's* 33 percent cutback had few parallels. The newspaper was thus in the odd position of dramatically decreasing its A&C coverage while substantially remaining the same. Its monthly story count was static—with nine fewer articles in 31 days—while its newshole for articles suffered unusually heavy losses.

Most of the newshole cuts were to be found at the *Inquirer's* scaled-back daily arts-and-lifestyles section, entitled Magazine. The section, which accounts for a mere 6 percent of the paper's pages, is published only on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. The TV grid finds a home in Health/Science on Mondays and Home/Garden on Fridays. Magazine would take up an even smaller proportion of the newspaper were it not so ad-heavy. At the same time the paper's arts supplements—Weekend on Fridays, Reviews on Saturdays and A&E

on Sundays—accounted for 14 percent of the *Inquirer's* entire pagination. No newspaper in our study gave its weekend supplements greater prominence.

Coverage of the decorative arts—interior design, high fashion, crafts and so on—has taken an exceptionally hard hit since 1998. Back then the *Inquirer* was a leader in this field; by 2003 it was a laggard. The *Inquirer's* coverage of museums and the visual arts did increase in 2003—although that still represented only 6 percent of its entire newshole for A&C articles.

In contrast to the *Philadelphia Daily News* tabloid, the *Inquirer* specialized in reviews, ranking third, behind only the Chicago newspapers. Judging by the content of both its main daily papers, Philadelphia is a musical city. The *Inquirer* was a leader in covering classical music and the local music scene. The two papers, though, approached the music beat differently. More than one-third of the *Inquirer's* journalism consisted of reviews, unlike the review-light *Daily News*. During the past five years the *Inquirer* also boosted music listings, which meanwhile were tiny at the *Daily News*.—AT



## ARTS COVERAGE IN PHILADELPHIA A CRITICAL VIEW

IT HAS BEEN A TUMULTUOUS five years for the staff of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. During that time they've seen three editors, two rounds of buyouts and the demise of their Sunday magazine. Several foreign bureaus were eliminated, the foreign desk was merged with the national desk, and the *Inquirer* now pulls most of its foreign news from company-wide Knight Ridder bureaus. Meanwhile the arts and entertainment department lost its general assignment reporters, creating a larger workload for the staff critics. "There's been a terrible downsizing here," says architecture critic Inga Saffron. "It's a different place than 10 years ago."

The perception is that the *Inquirer's* owner, Knight Ridder, is more interested in the bottom line than in quality journalism, and the upheaval has taken its toll on the paper, which has seen its weekday circulation drop from 399,339 in 1998 to 387,692 in 2003, and on Sundays from 820,104 in '98 to 769,257 in '03.

The arts area that has taken the biggest hit is books coverage. In early 2001 the Sunday book section was changed from a four-page stand-alone to two-and-a-half pages in the A&E section. At the same time, book reviews were added to the daily paper Mondays through Thursdays. The total number of reviews stayed about the same. But in February 2003 the section was cut further, to one or one-and-a-half pages on Sundays, and overnight the yearly editorial budget was slashed from more than \$100,000 to \$30,000. Editor Frank Wilson had to start taking the weekday reviews off the wires and writing a column of his own in the Sunday section. He also cut the fee he paid reviewers from an average of \$200 to about \$150.

Things appeared grim. Yet since Amanda Bennett took over as editor in June 2003, she has increased the prominence of arts stories in the news section as well as on the front page. The arts staff has a newfound sense of optimism. "There used to be a real ghetto attitude about the arts—that the arts belong in the arts section," says classical music critic Peter Dobrin. "Now, as the city has changed and the leadership of the paper has changed, the boundaries are much more permeable than they used to be."

A large proportion of the *Inquirer's* arts-and-entertainment coverage is currently made up of reviews, but the editors would like to

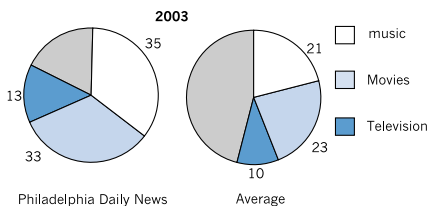


THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

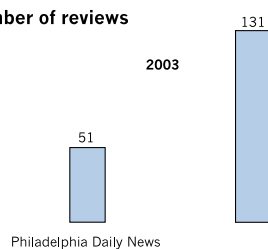
change the balance. "I'm trying to wean the critics from writing the 'duty review,'" says fine arts editor Jeff Weinstein. With the loss of general assignment reporters, critics are being asked to do more feature writing. This has caused some concern in the arts community: "The media is blurring the line between criticism and reporting," says Judith Kurnick, vice president and senior adviser at the Philadelphia Orchestra.

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

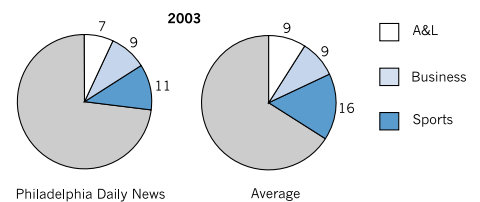
percentage of arts-and-culture newshole for articles (listings excluded) assigned to coverage of music, movies and television

**Reviews**

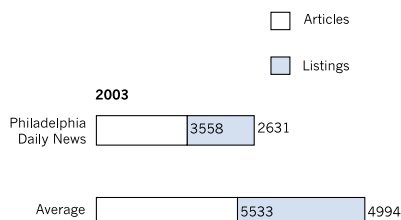
number of reviews

**Prominence of Daily Sections**

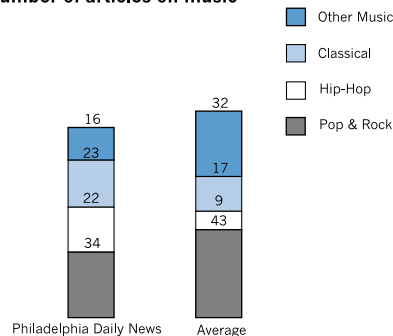
percentage of overall pagination assigned to A&L, business and sports section

**Arts-and-Culture Newshole**

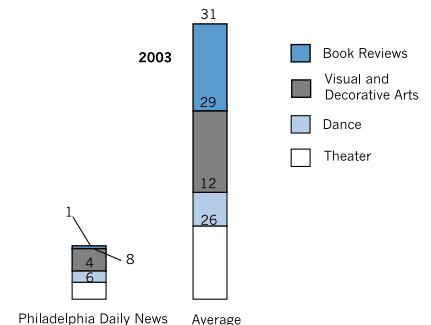
space (in column inches) devoted to articles and listings

**Music**

number of articles on music

**Journalism on Selected Artforms**

number of articles on theater, dance, visual-and-decorative arts and book reviews



THE PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS was one of the two additions to our study that we had not monitored in 1998, so we cannot interpret its 2003 format as part of a trend.

The paper assigned a very small newshole to arts and culture. Only two local newspapers in our study devoted less space to articles, and only one devoted less space to listings. In general, reviews of most mediums were rare in the *Daily News*. Instead the paper relied largely on feature coverage of arts and culture, such as previews and profiles. Almost all of its newshole for articles was devoted to the trio of music, movies and television. Music, in particular, was its specialty. The paper led all newspapers in hip-hop coverage, and wrote heavily about classical music.

The remaining fields of A&C were all but ignored. In October 2003, readers of the *Daily News* did not even see one article each day on the following eight beats combined: theater, dance, opera, painting, photography, book reviews, architecture and interior design/fashion/crafts. At the same time, most metropolitan newspapers in our study averaged more than three stories each day on those same combined beats.

Much of the explanation for the diminutive arts newshole derives from the nature of the newspaper itself. The *Daily News* not only is a tabloid but also publishes just six days a week, so its overall newshole across all beats—arts and non-arts—is constrained. All four of the tabloids in our study were specialists in sports, with the *Daily News* the leader, assigning fully 28 percent of its pagination to its Sports section. Its daily arts-&-lifestyles section, entitled *Yo!*, was well represented, however, with 12 percent of the newspaper's weekly pages. In our study only *Tropical Life* at *The Miami Herald* was more prominent. The *Daily News* made *Yo!* so large by folding all its feature coverage under the A&L section head and dispensing with any non-arts feature sections.

The *Daily News* assigned 9 percent of its overall pages to Big Fat Friday and Saturday's smaller Weekend Calendar. Yet even that low percentage exaggerates how much A&C coverage those sections represent. Fully 21 percent of their pages consisted of full-page ads. No other local newspaper made its weekend arts supplements so ad-heavy.—AT

"Sometimes you can't really tell if something is an opinion or a news story."

One upside of the closing of the *Inquirer's* foreign bureaus has been that there's more travel money available for arts reporters to write about foreign events. For instance, Wilson was sent to Dublin to cover the centennial of Bloomsday, the June day on which James Joyce set the action in *Ulysses*. And Saffron went to Bosnia to report on the rebuilding of the historic bridge in the city of Mostar that was destroyed during the recent civil war.

The *Inquirer's* competitor the *Philadelphia Daily News* is also owned by Knight Ridder. It, too, has endured recent buyouts and turmoil. The paper used to have a full-time entertainment editor, but that job is now covered by the features editor. The paper's circulation has also dropped, from 162,434 in 1998 to 139,983 in 2003 (it doesn't have a Sunday edition).

Like the *Inquirer*, the *Daily News* places arts and entertainment stories on the paper's front page. But the tabloid is more likely to write about a television show than trouble at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In fact, a page one package on the finale of *Sex and the City* sold more papers than any other cover that month, according to television critic Ellen Gray.

The *Daily News* is very pop-culture-oriented, and its staff focuses on movies, popular music and television. The paper does, though, have a regular freelancer who writes about classical music if "there's a hot babe who plays the cello," says features editor Theresa Johnson. Recently the *Daily News* also started a hip-hop section called Yo! Steez, which runs every Thursday. The cover conveniently defines the slang term "steez" for those not in the know.

Philadelphia's two alternative weeklies are hard for the casual reader to tell apart, though editors at both agree that *Philadelphia City Paper* focuses more on the arts, while *Philadelphia Weekly* is stronger on news reporting. The editors say they are not competing with either the *Inquirer* or the *Daily News*, since they offer something those papers don't. "I

think [younger readers] want to read things that are ahead of the curve rather than behind the curve, and it's tough for a daily to do that," says *Philadelphia Weekly* editor-in-chief Tim Whitaker.

The arts coverage in both papers is driven by current cultural happenings. "We consider ourselves an event-based paper," said Lori Hill, *City Paper's* arts and books editor. In practice this means that both papers cover music, movies, theater, dance and visual arts while virtually ignoring television. They include books only when there's a local angle. *City Paper* also runs Book Quarterly, an approximately seven-page section devoted to local features and more general reviews. *City Paper* has a larger arts staff, with a managing editor devoted to arts and entertainment, and three separate editors—for music, arts and books, and movies—though they don't have a dedicated arts writer. *Philadelphia Weekly* has one arts and entertainment editor, Doree Shafir, who was hired in December 2003 to bring more energy and a younger perspective to the paper.

There isn't much arts coverage in Philadelphia's broadcast media. Fresh Air, the influential National Public Radio arts program hosted by Terry Gross, is based at WHYY, but the show does not focus on local issues. The radio station has one arts reporter, Joel Rose, whose stories are broadcast during the local segments of NPR's Morning Edition. KYW, the 24-hour news station, doesn't cover much arts and culture, but when they do, "it reaches everybody," says Philadelphia Orchestra's Kurnick. "There's definitely a symbiosis among editors—KYW can influence TV and other radio stations," she notes.

"The arts are a huge factor in Philadelphia, a unifying force in the community," says *Inquirer* managing editor Anne Gordon. There is so much going on around Philadelphia that it is hard for the media to cover it all. But the newspapers at least are grappling with the problem, trying to find creative ways to use their limited resources to their best advantage.

*"We simply  
don't have  
the staff to be  
the paper of  
record, to cover  
everything."*

Jeff Weinstein  
fine arts editor  
*The Philadelphia  
Inquirer*

BY LAURIE MUCHNICK

## RADICAL MEASURES AT THE SHREVEPORT TIMES

AS NEWSPAPERS ATTEMPT to improve arts and entertainment coverage, *The Shreveport Times* seized upon a novel strategy: They stopped running reviews. And while the paper later rescinded that decision, it caused major concerns within the cultural community.

The upheavals started in February. “The *Times* will no longer do reviews of plays, symphonies, ballets and art shows. The *Times* will expand and improve its arts coverage during the coming year,” Executive Editor Ronnie Ramos announced. “These last two sentences are not mutually exclusive. Not running reviews does not mean the *Times* is cutting back on its arts coverage. We want to improve it.”

Ramos’ decision to eliminate reviews at the Gannett-owned paper in favor of more arts-related feature stories was met with “utter shock and outrage” from the local arts community, said Pam Atchison, executive director of the Shreveport Regional Arts Council. The organization provides technical assistance and grants to about 40 arts groups in this Louisiana community. “It’s not about ticket sales,” she said. “It’s about validation, and your community’s commitment to the arts as well as the individual artists in the community.”

Not surprisingly, Ramos saw it differently. “Reviews take up, at times, a huge portion of arts writer Lane Crockett’s time,” he wrote in his notice. “Crockett, who has covered the arts in Shreveport for 34 years ... has a wealth of knowledge and expertise about our arts community. We want to take advantage of that knowledge.”

But Crockett didn’t stick around long enough for the *Times* to tap his store of knowledge: Since writing reviews was eliminated from his duties, he took an early retirement.

About 30 members of the community attempted to persuade Ramos to reconsider. Following a meeting, they barraged the newspaper with e-mails and letters, at one point even considering an advertising boycott and a subscription-cancellation campaign.

Ramos was unimpressed. He labeled the efforts “threats” and refused to vacate his edict. He then left the *Times* to become sports editor of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. In April the *Times*’ managing editor Alan English took over Ramos’ job, promising to review his predecessor’s policy and saying he hoped to find a solution before the beginning of the fall season. “Reviews help point out the level of the talent and the seriousness of the art in the community,” he said. “The issue I face is now trying to find someone qualified to do it within the paper’s means.”

Atchison said the arts community took a wait-and-see attitude towards English, who quickly added two weekly arts features, interviews with local artists and artist profiles to the *Times*. But the paper’s no-review policy, Atchison said, could not have been instituted at a worse time for Shreveport, a city of 410,000 that boasts a symphony, eight dance companies, eight theater troupes, an opera company and 10 visual-arts organizations. “The arts here are just growing by leaps and bounds,” said Atchison, noting that an arts district is developing around the city’s \$2.5 million renovated Art Space, which opens this fall, and the Louisiana Film Center, which is slated to open in December 2005. “For the *Times* not to review, I’m afraid it will stop that momentum.”

Before too long, though, English moved to fill the staffing void created by his predecessor, and hired a freelance theater critic. Replacing a full-time critic with a freelance writer was less than ideal. Yet as English noted, “I hope the community sees this as an acknowledgement of the need to do a better job of reflecting the quality of life in the Shreveport-Bossier area.”

BY VALERIE TAKAHAMA