

THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA, CALIFORNIA



Photograph by Phil Coblenz, courtesy of the Convention and Visitors Bureau of San Francisco.

When we left off with the San Francisco Bay Area in 1998, it was a region struggling to come to terms with its success. Like no other zone in the United States, the Bay Area personified the rise and fall of the dot-com economy, and the region and its arts scene emerged from the 1990s more than a little punch-drunk. The razzle-dazzle of the new economy seduced many; this was especially true at the large arts institutions that filled their coffers with dot-com donations and cash from plentiful ticket sales. Ambitious expansion plans were announced, while inflated rents exiled city artists.

Many groups were thus shocked by the harsh realities of the post-bubble years. Some organizations were able to hold on to the momentum of the nineties and complete big-time projects. The Asian Art Museum plumbed a combination of city and private support to fashion a gorgeous new home that opened its doors in 2003; Gae Aulenti's conversion of the Civic Center's main library for the Asian Art Museum made an arduous eight-year, \$160.5 million journey. A city bond and a \$15 million gift from Silicon Valley businessman Chong-Moon Lee allowed the project to break through the finish line. And the M.H. de Young museum is on track to open a newly upgraded building in 2005.

Other institutions were not as successful, however. Our 1999 report noted that the Jewish Museum and the Mexican Museum both planned to move to flashy new buildings in downtown's growing Yerba Buena Center arts district in the near future. Those projects are now languishing. Meanwhile both the San Francisco Opera and the San Francisco Symphony finished 2003 with a deficit. And in 2002, San Jose lost its 123-year-old namesake symphony to money problems.

The local economy was hard hit. From 2000 to 2003, the Bay Area lost 378,000 jobs—a decline of 10 percent in its labor force—while between 2001 and 2002, San Francisco shed population faster than any other large city in the country. Even so, the city's residents are firm in their advocacy of the arts. In the shadow of California Gov. Gray Davis' "total recall" and Arnold Schwarzenegger's rise, San Francisco ushered in a new era by electing Gavin Newsom mayor to replace Willie Brown. An arts-themed mayoral debate in October 2003 attracted a standing-room-only crowd. As Pam Rorke Levy, producer of *Spark*, a new Bay Area public-television arts show on KQED, notes, "One thing that surprised all the candidates is the kind of people who advocate for the arts. They are vocal, they vote, they have jobs in the city and they pay taxes

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Susan Gerhard
arts editor
San Francisco
Bay Guardian

in the city. Gavin Newsom is on notice in a way that past mayors haven't been."

Newsom seems to be responding. While campaigning, the mayor-to-be released a policy paper titled "Art for the City, City for the Arts," pushing the belief that a strong art scene attracts a robust business climate. He called for city enterprise zones, started a cultural-affairs office to market San Francisco's arts offerings and beefed up the film office to attract business.

One of the more important items on Newsom's arts to-do list is to fight for more funding from the California Arts Council (CAC). The state dropped its contributions from \$32 million in 2000-01 to a scant \$1 million in 2003-04. Smaller arts organizations such as Los Cenzontles Mexican Arts Center were the most affected. The center reports that it lost 25 percent of its budget when the CAC went on a crash diet. On the city level, San Francisco's Grants for the Arts is having to contend with the decreased tourist trade that fills that fund's coffers. "There's more reliance on city support here, so when the economy tanks and the funding goes down, it's really felt," says Richard Newirth, director of cultural affairs for the San Francisco Arts Commission. To lessen the impact of reduced funds, in May 2004 Newsom announced a controversial proposal to cut 25 percent of the Grants for the Arts' funding for the city's large institutions like the symphony, ballet and opera in order to create some padding for smaller arts organizations.

The Berkeley Repertory Theatre might be said to personify the challenges and triumphs of the Bay Area scene over the past five years. With its two theaters—a 400-seat thrust stage and the 600-seat Roda Theatre—the Rep is the centerpiece of Berkeley's urban renewal. Its site, on Addison Street, is framed by a freshly poured walk engraved with 123 city-themed poems. Flanking the Roda are an affiliated theater school and other culture organizations, all of which have turned the street into an arts district. Things were going great for the Rep in the spring of 2001, when it cut the ribbon on the Roda. With the decline in the economy, though, the Rep was shouldering a \$300,000 deficit by 2003.

But Rep Artistic Director Tony Taccone still sees the bright side for arts organizations in this environment. "It's made us all clever," he says, noting how in 2003 the Rep paired with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival to produce David Edgar's sprawling political play *Continental Divide*. By joining forces, both companies were able to save money by splitting rehearsal time, set-design costs and commission fees.



SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

Likewise, Intersection for the Arts, an alternative-arts organization and space that is home to theater, literary readings, visual-arts exhibitions and jazz performances, has actually grown since 1999 by cultivating collaborations. It is therefore not surprising that Taccone calls those in the trenches of the Bay Area's arts scene "stalwart warriors," and he's on to something. True San Franciscans—not these Web-site-come-lately types—are hardy. This is a city that survived the original gold rush, the earthquakes, the Summer of Love and the onset of the AIDS epidemic. Many, such as San Francisco-based novelist Sylvia Brownrigg, point to the Bay Area's yeasty literary scene as a sign of the city's resurgence. Dave Eggers' encampment with his liter-



SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS

ary magazine, *The Believer*, and the Francis Ford Coppola-funded publication *Zoetrope*, among others, are contributing what Brownrigg calls “a great boon” to the scene.

collaboratively based movement as a true reflection of the state of the city. “The strategies these artists use,” she says, “remind me of the strategies everyone’s using to survive in this economy.”

BY CARYN BROOKS

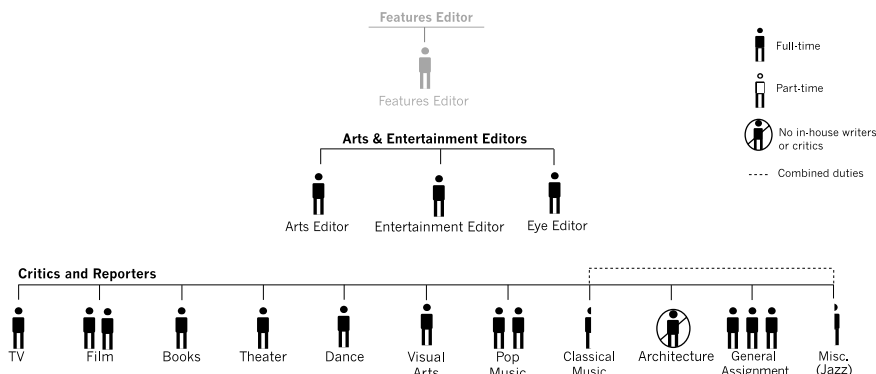
Though hard to quantify, ethnic arts in the Bay Area are flourishing. So is the ethnic population, especially in outlying areas. “One proof is the Ethnic Dance Festival, which auditions more than 100 Bay Area groups—sometimes a lot more—every year for 25 spots,” reports *San Jose Mercury News* dance critic Anita Amirrezvani. “The festival runs for three weekends. That’s a lot of ethnic dance for one area.”

Oakland meanwhile is an incubator for a nascent underground music scene, with unadvertised warehouse shows that provide a stage for genre-fusing music. “I’ve heard people compare Oakland to Williamsburg, Brooklyn,” says *SF Weekly* music editor Garrett Kamps of the once-unlikely hive of arts activity outside Manhattan. Also undeterred is the visual-arts scene, according to Susan Gerhard, an arts editor at the alt-weekly *San Francisco Bay Guardian*. In 2002 the *Guardian* ran a cover story entitled “The Mission School,” which outlined the verve of the city’s scrappy Dumpster-diving street artists, who have synthesized their passion for the underground languages of rock, hip-hop, skateboarding, graffiti, comic books and political activism into work that’s been getting international notice. Gerhard sees this community-minded and

“One thing that surprised all the candidates is the kinds of people who advocate for the arts. They are vocal, they vote, they have jobs in the city and they pay taxes in the city. Gavin Newsom is on notice in a way that past mayors haven’t been.”

Pam Rorke Levy
producer
Spark

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



San Jose Mercury News

1998-2003

Daily circulation:

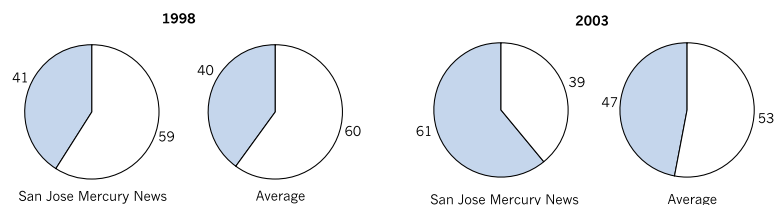
Arts-and-culture newshole:

Number of arts-and-culture articles:

In-house arts staff:

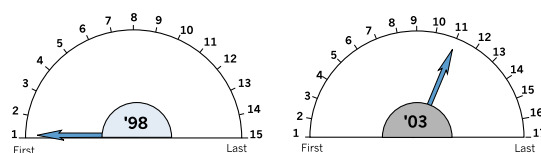
Distribution of Arts-and-Culture Coverage

percentage of arts-and-culture newshole assigned to articles and listings



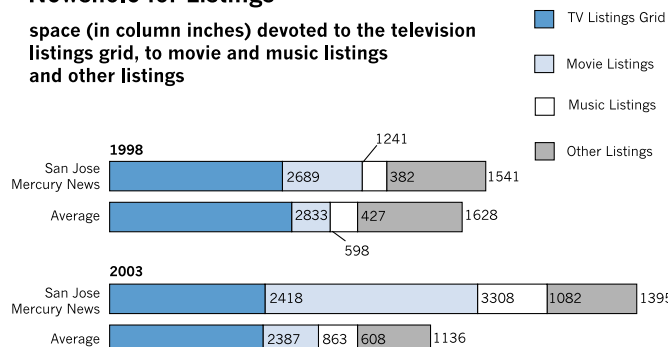
Article Length

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



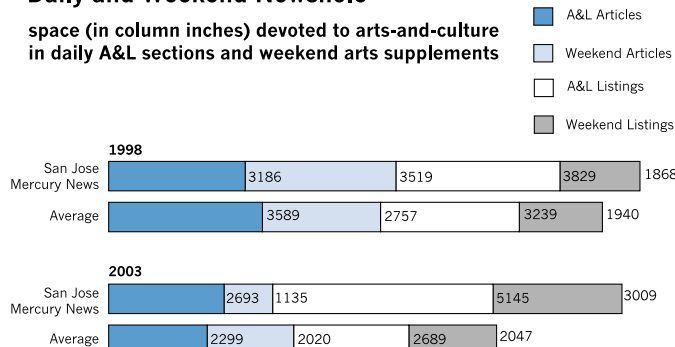
Newshole for Listings

space (in column inches) devoted to the television listings grid, to movie and music listings and other listings



Daily and Weekend Newshole

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



A MAJOR TREND DISCOVERED by *Reporting the Arts II* was the reallocation of arts and culture coverage away from articles toward listings. In all, six of the 15 metropolitan newspapers we tracked simultaneously shrank their newsholes for articles while increasing their newsholes for listings. None of those other five performed as extreme a transformation as what was observed at the *San Jose Mercury News*. The paper's volume of movie listings almost tripled over the last five years. Rated high five years ago, they increased to an astronomical level. A similar trend, but less extreme, occurred in music coverage.

Listings mania was most dramatic in the *Mercury News's* weekend arts supplement. The Eye section switched from a predominance of articles five years ago to mostly listings in October 2003. Its listings were more voluminous than at any of the weekend supplements we

monitored except for the *Contra Costa Times*. The *Mercury News* also increased by one third its volume of listings in its daily arts and lifestyles section entitled A&E. Its A&E's listings were unsurpassed by any other newspaper's A&L section and almost twice the average volume. Besides the *Mercury News's* editorial listings, 10 percent of the A&E section consisted of full-page advertising, a much higher proportion than at most metropolitan newspapers.

The accompanying reduced emphasis on journalism was brought about by an extreme reduction in the length of the average story. The number of articles the *Mercury News* published declined moderately, while their average length was slashed from almost 18 column inches to less than 13. Only three others of the metropolitan newspapers we tracked made such draconian cuts.—AT

ARTS COVERAGE IN THE BAY AREA A CRITICAL VIEW

AS MUCH AS THE BAY Area is known for its world-class arts offerings, perhaps the most-watched drama coming out of the region in the last five years has been the ever-changing, fantastical media scene that has left even seasoned journalism junkies agape.

Our last report went to press just as the Hearst Corporation—at that timeowner of *The Examiner*—bought its longtime competitor, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and put *The Examiner* on the market. There were questions as to whether *The Examiner* would continue operating; Hearst executives suggested that unless they could find a buyer, the paper would fold.

Then, in 2000, Hearst sold *The Examiner* to the Fang family, publishers of a community newspaper called *The Independent*. To avoid possible Department of Justice issues, Hearst subsidized the Fangs with \$66 million, paid out over three years, to create the appearance of a competitive playing field. And since the *Chronicle's* management had promised no layoffs for anyone onboard at the time of the merger, the staff of *The Examiner* was simply folded into the *Chronicle's* ranks in November 2000, and the odd transformation of former competitors into workmates began.

The proceedings started down the rabbit hole when former San Francisco mayoral candidate and local businessman Clint Reilly filed a federal lawsuit to block the sale of the *Chronicle* to the Hearst Corporation, claiming it would harm him

as a reader to be without two truly competing papers. This antitrust suit dragged the sale into tabloid territory when *Examiner* publisher Timothy White testified that, during the period his company was trying to close the *Chronicle* deal, he had met with Mayor Willie Brown and offered to “horse-trade” favorable coverage of the Brown administration if the mayor would support Hearst’s acquisition of the *Chronicle*. Brown, a Fang ally, had initially called into question the *Chronicle* sale and pushed for *The*

“We’re still paying attention to arts and entertainment, but also broadening our concept of how people spend their leisure time.”

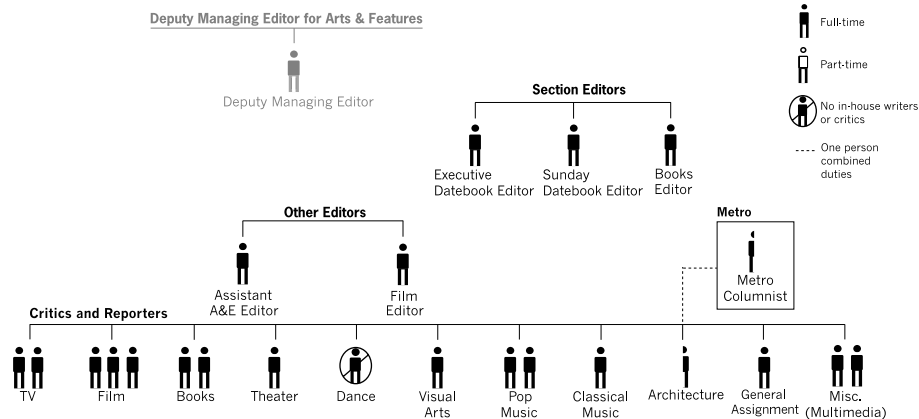
Katherine Fong
assistant managing
editor for arts and
entertainment
*San Jose
Mercury News*



THE EXAMINER

Examiner to keep publishing—a move that some felt smacked of grandstanding—in order to steer the paper toward the Fangs. And while Judge Vaughn Walker ultimately ruled in favor of the *Chronicle* sale, his written decision called into question the cronyism at the heart of the Fangs’ sweetheart deal.

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



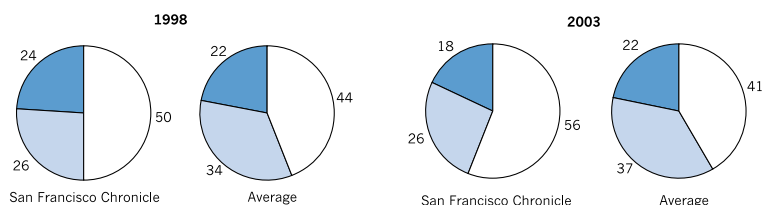
San Francisco Chronicle

1998-2003



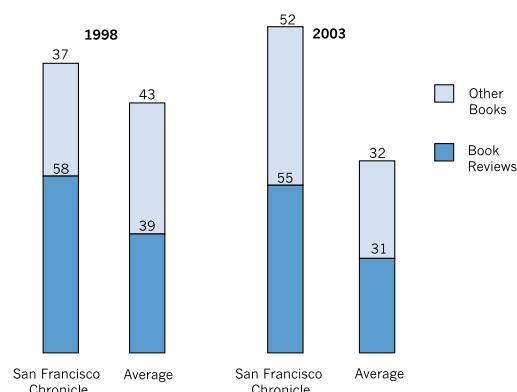
Distribution of Arts-and-Culture Journalism

percentage of arts-and-culture newshole for articles (listings excluded) assigned to daily A&L sections, weekend arts supplements and other sections



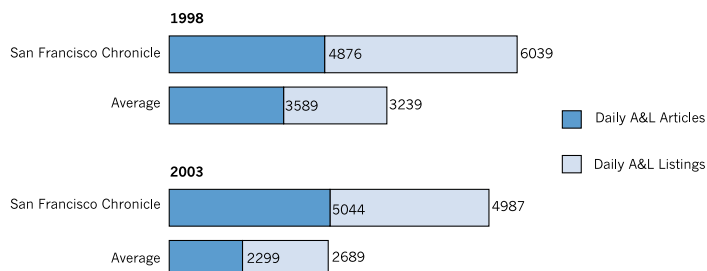
Books

number of book reviews and articles on books



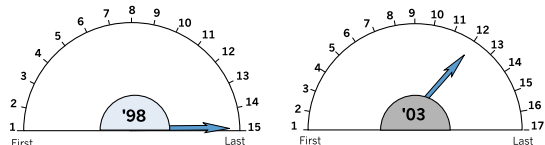
Daily A&L Supplements

space (in column inches) devoted to arts-and-culture in daily A&L sections



Television Journalism

ranking among all newspapers studied for percentage of arts-and-culture journalism newshole (listings excluded) devoted to television



THE VOLUME OF DAILY arts coverage at the *San Francisco Chronicle* was enormous. Its Datebook section contained a bigger newshole for articles than any other arts and lifestyles section in our study. Its daily volume of listings was just as large, surpassed by only one other newspaper. This does not mean that its weekend supplements—a weekend Datebook and its book and movie sections—were negligible. Their volume of articles ranked behind only four other newspapers we monitored, yet the weekend listings service was relatively skimpy.

Overall the *Chronicle* jockeyed with the *Chicago Tribune* for our study's leadership role. Its newshole for articles-plus-listings was slightly larger than the *Tribune's*, while its space for articles alone was smaller. These were the only two newspapers of those we monitored to increase their average arts and culture article length. Since 1998 the *Chronicle* has increased its commitment to books. That section surpassed movies as its largest single beat, tying with the *Tribune* for the largest number of book reviews published.

The *Chronicle* has also profited by the collapse of its former rival, the *San Francisco Examiner*, whose volume of coverage rivaled that of

the *Chronicle* five years ago. The *Chronicle's* overall effort on the A&C beat, though, has not increased to pick up the slack. In fact Datebook has shrunk in prominence in the newspaper's overall pagination, while non-arts feature sections have increased instead. An exception was television. The *Chronicle* was the only newspaper in our study to have beefed up its newshole for TV journalism. Admittedly the *Chronicle's* TV journalism represented the smallest share of any newspaper in our study in 1998. It has now increased to just above average.

The *Chronicle* was a standout in several areas five years ago but has since scaled back. In 1998 it led coverage of the visual and decorative arts. By 2003 pieces on the local visual arts scene remained consistent, but the out-of-town beat was cut back. Interior design, high fashion, and arts and crafts all received considerably less attention. Music, too, has been reduced, even though five years ago it was barely more than average. By October 2003 the *Chronicle* had decreased its music story count and shifted some of its effort away from articles toward listings. The net result was that the paper's music coverage represented the smallest slice of A&C journalism of any newspaper we monitored.—AT

During the summer of 2000, amid all the *Chronicle/Examiner* instability, Knight Ridder's *San Jose Mercury News* made a play for the San Francisco market by introducing a zoned edition that dropped San Jose from its name and simply went by *Mercury News*. The first issue of the Fangs' *Examiner* appeared in November 2000. In October 2001 Florence Fang fired her son Ted, who was acting as publisher and executive editor. Four months later she got rid of *Examiner* editor David Burgin. A year after that *The Examiner* laid off most of its staff and became a free tabloid produced with a skeletal editorial crew of about 15. By early 2004 Denver billionaire Phil Anschutz bought the gasping paper and promised a renewed *Examiner*.

Corporate sales also rocked the broadcast world of the Bay Area. Around the time Hearst got rid of *The Examiner*, it also sold its sister media outlet, KRON television, to New York-based Young Broadcasting. KRON had been an NBC affiliate, but its new owners claimed NBC's financial demands were unacceptable and dropped the network to go independent. NBC ended up buying San Jose station KNTV to edge into KRON's territory, and this ignited a local broadcast war that is now being looked at by the FCC.

The crash of the dot-com economy swiftly took its toll on the entire Bay Area media scene. In March 2001 *Mercury News* publisher Jay T. Harris dramatically quit his position in protest over what he termed Knight Ridder's attention to profit over quality journalism. Soon after, *Mercury News* cut its San Francisco edition and slashed 120 jobs through buyouts. The Knight Ridder paper *Contra Costa Times* eliminated 8 percent of its workforce with a voluntary buyout program as well. After September 11, the *Chronicle* engaged in some serious surgery to control costs by cutting 220 jobs while at the same time keeping its promise to protect the jobs of employees on board during the merger. Public-broadcasting stalwart KQED reduced its staff by 11 percent, and ANG Newspapers, publisher of the *Oakland Tribune*, laid off 49 employees, constituting 7 percent of its workforce.

DAILY ARTS COVERAGE IN THE BAY AREA

It seems to be unanimous: People connected to the arts scene universally mourn the death of a competitor for the *Chronicle*. Notes Pam Rorke Levy of *Spark*, KQED's televised arts show, "*The Examiner* barely exists in the minds of readers; there's little arts coverage and a small reader-

ship." For Glenn McCoy, executive director of the San Francisco Ballet, this absence is palpable. "It was certainly better for us when there were two papers reviewing work. Often reviews were the opposite of each other, and that helps readers see that it's a subjective art and that even experts disagree," he says. Calls and e-mails asking for comment from *The Examiner* went unreturned. Though the region hosts other daily newspapers, including *Mercury News* and the *Contra Costa Times*, the *Chronicle's* hefty readership of 501,135 in late 2003, up from 456,742 in late 1998, holds sway over the market and the life of arts organizations. At the same time, the Sunday edition dipped to 553,983 in 2003 down from 578,541 in 1998. As Berkeley Rep's Tony Taccone puts it, "It's the *Chronicle* and nothing else."

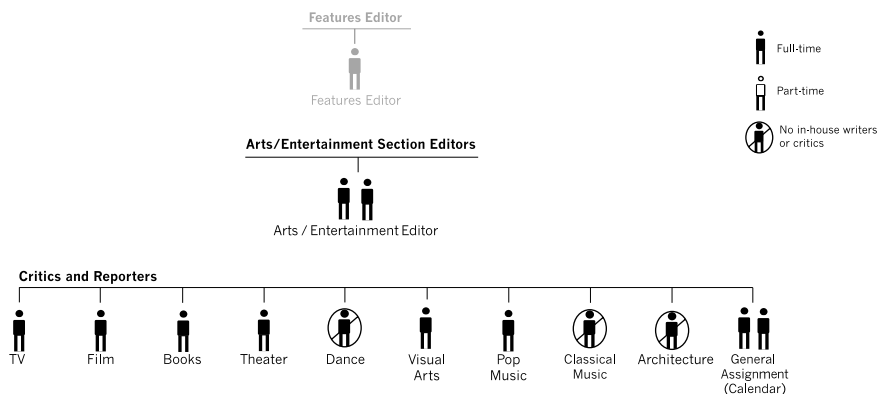
"The past five years have been some of the most turbulent in the paper's 139-year history. Absorbing two arts staffs into one was not easy," says David Wiegand, executive editor of Datebook, the daily section that covers the arts. Wiegand has been at the *Chronicle* since 1992. "Both papers went through a lot of advance preparation, but nothing can really prepare you for it," he says. "These are people we all knew. We used to be competing with each other."

Since the merger, the *Chronicle's* Datebook has gone through several regime changes, which have influenced its focus. The Sunday Datebook tabloid, once famously pink, was bleached white in 2001, and the pages devoted to film absorbed into another section. Under the stewardship of Carolyn White, the deputy managing editor for features, the pink was brought back with a dramatic Classic Coke-like unveiling in 2003, and the film section was folded back in. Karen Hershenson, arts and entertainment editor at the *Contra Costa Times*, says things seemed shaky over at the *Chronicle* for a while but that Datebook appears to be standing on firmer ground these days. "I think we benefited from their instability for a long time," she says. "We're sort of bummed because we think their instability is diminishing."

White, who was brought in by new managing editor Robert Rosenthal, has put her magazine background to work. Her recent fixes include more feature stories, sentence-length headlines with random words highlighted in red, and a consumer focus. "The biggest change, and the one that we're working with now, is expanding the daily Datebook from an arts section to an arts and features section," says Wiegand. This strategy is one that seems to be in the works at

"It was certainly better for us when there were two papers reviewing work. Often reviews were the opposite of each other, and that helps readers see that it's a subjective art and that even experts disagree"

Glenn McCoy
executive director
San Francisco Ballet

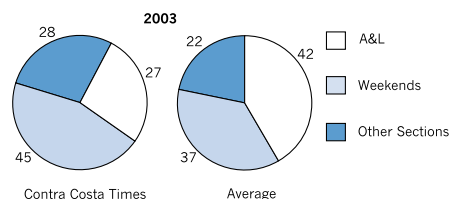
In-house Arts Staff (does not include features staff, copy desk and freelancers)**CONTRA COSTA TIMES**

1998-2003

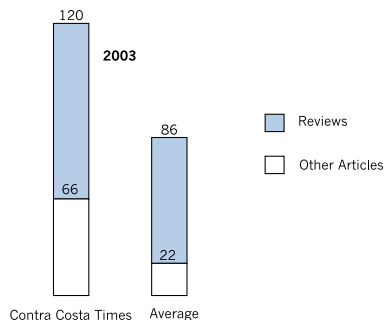
Daily circulation:

Arts-and-culture newshole: **na**Number of arts-and-culture articles: **na**In-house arts staff: **na****Distribution of Arts-and-Culture**

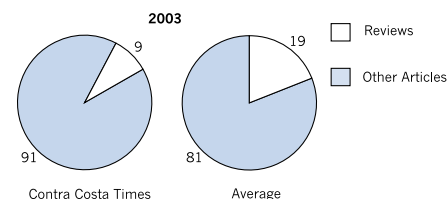
percentage of arts-and-culture newshole for articles (listings excluded) assigned to daily A&L

**Syndicated Columns and Newswires**

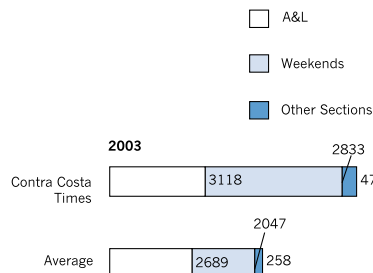
number of reviews and articles taken from syndicators and wire services

**Television Journalism**

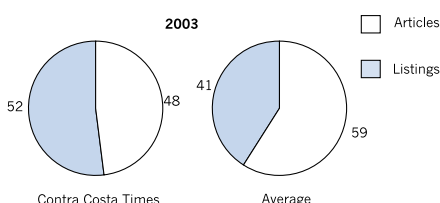
percentage of newshole for television articles (listings grid excluded) assigned to reviews

**Newshole for Listings**

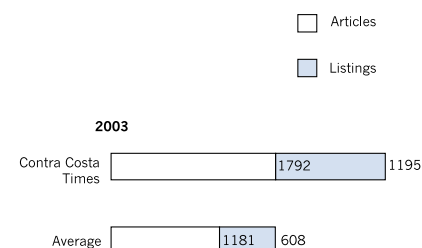
space (in column inches) devoted to arts-and-culture listings

**Distribution of Movie Coverage**

percentage of newshole for movies assigned to articles and listings

**Music Newshole**

space (in column inches) devoted to music articles and listings



THE CONTRA COSTA TIMES was not included in the original *Reporting the Arts* study, so we cannot measure its changes since October 1998. Yet in 2003 it was distinctive for its voluminous listings and its sparse daily arts-and-lifestyles section TimeOut, which represented just 6 percent of the newspaper's pagination. Only one of the other 17 metropolitan newspapers tracked in *Reporting the Arts II* devoted a smaller proportion of pages to its daily A&L section. The TimeOut newshole for arts-and-culture articles represented just 27 percent of the paper's total effort in arts journalism. Here, too, we found only one other metropolitan newspaper giving a smaller percentage of space to daily coverage.

By contrast, the *Times's* daily and weekend listings were both enormous. It was one of only four metropolitan newspapers whose newsholes for listings were actually greater than their space for articles. In its weekend supplements—a tabloid format of TimeOut and Sunday A&E—fully 59 percent of its space was assigned to listings. Its daily TimeOut section was even more listings-heavy, at 63 per-

cent. Its volume of weekend listings was larger than that of any other newspaper we studied, even *The New York Times*. Of all artistic disciplines, television with its daily grid routinely has more space devoted to listings than to journalism. *The Contra Costa Times's* listings were unusual in that the majority of the performing arts and visual arts newsholes were also dominated by listings.

The *Times's* story selection for articles focused heavily on music. It was one of only two newspapers to assign more than one quarter of its space for articles to that discipline. The paper also made heavy use of syndicated and newswire material, assigning only one third of its articles to staffers. On the weekends its proportion of staffer-bylined articles was lower than that of any other newspaper we monitored. It was also the only newspaper to publish more reviews by syndicated columnists than by its own staffers. TV reviewing, in particular, was almost totally absent from the paper. The *Times* was one of only two newspapers to devote less than 10 percent of its television coverage to reviews.—AT

all the area papers. When contacted for this report, *Mercury News* was likewise planning an overhaul. According to Katherine Fong, the assistant managing editor for arts and entertainment, about five years ago *Mercury News* made a decision to go from a daily features page to a daily arts-and-entertainment page. “The pendulum is now swinging back a bit; we’re still paying attention to arts and entertainment, but also broadening our concept of how people spend their leisure time,” she says. Reports Hershenson of the *Contra Costa Times*: “We’re going to make some changes in the Sunday section, make it a lot more dynamic—take the listings out and add a critic’s-pick type of feature, a ‘best of what’s out there now.’”

The ceding of traditional arts-criticism space to feature stories and “thumbs-up-or-down” service pieces doesn’t sit well with many arts-scene activists, who call the *Chronicle’s* new approach into question. “Obviously the newspaper is doing just what customers want, and my response is to create an intelligent customer base rather than to write to the lowest common denominator,” says Berkeley Rep’s Taccone. “It’s disappointing, to say the least. The focus is on personality rather than ideas, on fashion rather than cultural analysis.” Intersection for the Arts’ Deborah Cullinan notes, “It would be great if we could have more dialogue in our paper about what is really going on, rather than just rating events.” Wiegand admits that the changes have resulted in negative feedback from some arts groups. “The frustrating thing is that nothing has been lost; we haven’t cut a single story in order to accommodate feature stories,” he says. “We don’t sell tickets here—that’s not our job. My job is to get readers, and the way I get readers is to have interesting stories in the paper.” According to our research, Wiegand’s assertion about the *Chronicle’s* coverage is correct; the volume of arts and culture reporting has remained stable over the last five years.

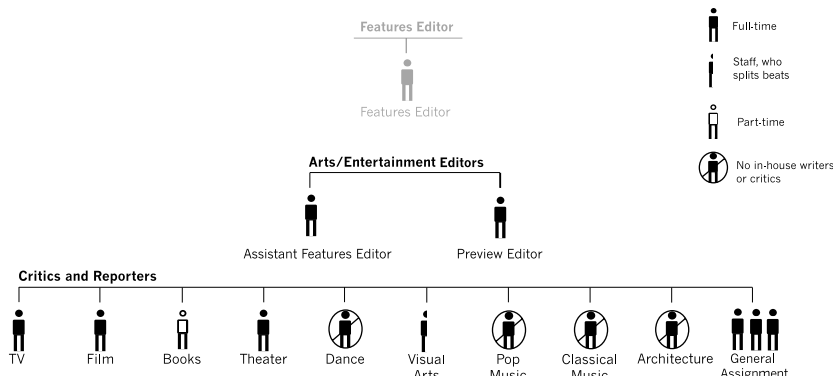
Almost every media outlet in the Bay Area has gone through significant cutbacks in staff and budgets in the same period. The *Chronicle’s* arts staff hasn’t replaced the full-time dance critic who left over a year ago, which has caused some consternation in that community. Though Wiegand says that management believes the paper as a whole to be overstaffed, the employee count in the arts section hasn’t dramatically changed since *Reporting the Arts* last looked at it in 1998. However, this stasis must be examined in light of the trend toward workforce reduction at other papers. Even though *Contra Costa*



CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Times's daily circulation has been on an upward trend—98,337 in 1998 to 186,335 in 2003—Hershenson reports that “we’ve been told to cut back our freelance budget, and we’re in a hiring freeze. It’s pretty lean times around here.” According to our research, *Contra Costa* stood out as a heavy user of syndicated and newswire copy, while *Mercury News*, which has seen its daily circulation drop from 285,848 in 1998 to 279,539 in 2003, has seen its article space shrink. Specifically, we found an extreme reduction of

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



The Oakland Tribune

1998-2003

Daily circulation:

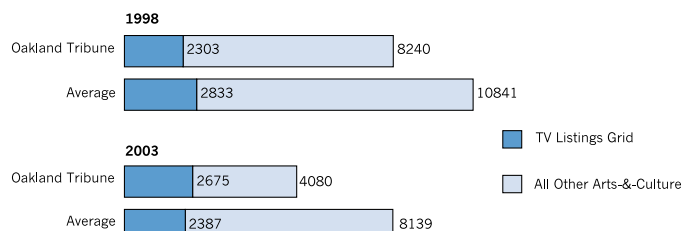
Arts-and-culture newshole:

Number of arts-and-culture articles:

In-house arts staff:

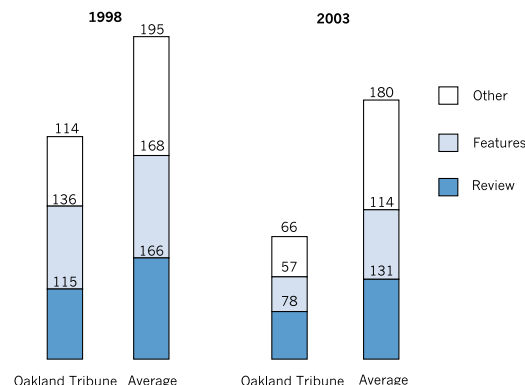
Television Listings

space (in column inches) devoted to television listings grid compared with the remainder of the overall arts-and-culture newshole



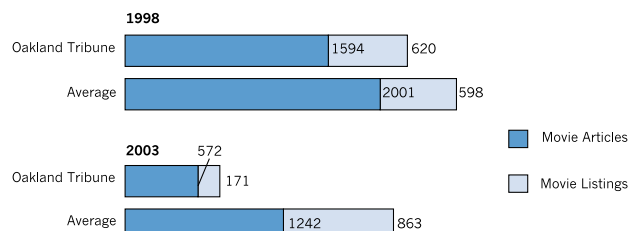
Story Count

number of arts-and-culture articles (listings excluded)



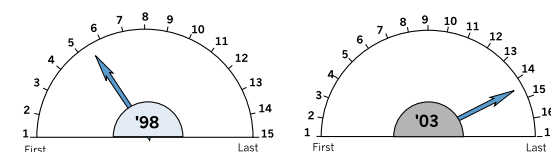
Movies Newshole

space (in column inches) devoted to movies articles and listings



Movie Journalism

ranking among all newspapers studied for percentage of arts-and-culture journalism newshole (listings excluded) devoted to movies



THE OAKLAND TRIBUNE HAS undergone massive changes since *Reporting the Arts* first took a look at the paper in 1998. At the *Tribune* the entire newspaper suffered cutbacks, though its arts and culture beat was not singled out. Its daily arts-and-lifestyles section *Living* and its weekend *Preview* combined took up 13 percent of the newspaper's pagination in October 2003, an amount barely changed from the 14 percent five years earlier when its well-paginated A&L section was called *Cue*.

Nevertheless the newshole for arts and culture articles was just half its former size. The monthly total of articles was reduced to just 201, fewer than at any newspaper we studied except for the decimated *San Francisco Examiner*. The *Tribune* was ranked low in its story count for every type of article. It was third-to-last for reviews, second-to-last for arts news, second to last for features and dead last for the number of gossip items. These statistics are somewhat exaggerated because of our failure to obtain two issues of *Preview* and one of *Living* for our study. The trend, however, is not distorted. The volume of listings has not been cut as drastically because the television grid survived intact. Taken together the paper's overall arts-and-culture newshole—

which includes both articles and listings—made it the third-lowest-ranked newspaper in our study.

Hardest hit in all these cutbacks were the movies—both in absolute terms (64 percent fewer column inches) and in relative importance. As a result, at the paper it shifted from the single most prominent arts beat to second place behind the performing arts. The *Tribune* also assigned the smallest newshole to movie journalism of all the papers we looked at. Its theater coverage, on the other hand, suffered only minor cutbacks, maintaining a story count that was barely below average.

The *Tribune* averaged only one article a day on music and registered enormous cutbacks in its coverage of the visual and decorative arts. Television articles, too, were dealt absolute cuts, but as we have noted, the daily TV grid survived unscathed amid the surrounding decline. So, stated in percentage terms, television articles and listings combined grew to represent an astonishing 45 percent of the entire arts and culture newshole. This was a larger share than at any metropolitan newspaper we studied.—AT

story length, from 17.7 column inches in 1998 to a recent 12.4 average, with a plumping up of arts and culture listings. The *Oakland Tribune*, which has the distinction of decreasing its arts coverage more than any other paper studied except *The Examiner*, has been hurt by cuts in space and manpower. "In May 2003 the paper faced layoffs, the features section lost two full-time writers, and one position was unfilled after the person left," says features editor Kari Hulac. "Space—overall it's tighter, and anecdotally the papers have been smaller." Hulac is correct. Our findings show that the *Tribune's* arts and culture newshole amounts to half of what we measured in 1998.

OTHER MEDIA IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA: A CRITICAL VIEW

The Bay Area's alternative weeklies continue to stay on course as far as arts coverage is concerned, though changes in business structures mirror that of the dailies. In 2001 the Phoenix-based chain New Times bought Berkeley's *East Bay Express* to add to a portfolio that already included *SF Weekly*. In early 2004, alt-weekly stalwart *The San Francisco Bay Guardian* cut positions from an already lean staff. "The *Bay Guardian* is run like a tight ship now," says arts editor Susan Gerhard. "Our freelance budget got significantly smaller, and we do more in-house writing." Metro Newspapers, which publishes a Silicon Valley alt weekly, shed its community-newspaper division in 2002 when the parent company amicably split in two, leaving Metro with the alt-weekly arm. *Pacific Sun*, the second-oldest alt weekly in the country behind *The Village Voice*, is still busy covering the North Bay area.



THE OAKLAND TRIBUNE

Many people connected to the arts scene see the weeklies as a healthy addition to coverage in the dailies, but not a determining factor in its health. "Of the alt weeklies, the *Bay Guardian* is the strongest one for us; they've been really supportive," says Intersection for the Arts' Cullinan. "*SF Weekly* does cover us, mostly in the calendar—we often get picks." Danny Plotnick of Film Arts says he prefers *SF Weekly*. "A lot of people are blinded by the fact that *SF Weekly* is corporate-owned, but I think it's a good paper," he says. "With the *Bay Guardian*, I know what they're going to say before I even read it."

As far as broadcast goes, one bright spot is the emergence of *Spark*, a weekly arts-focused

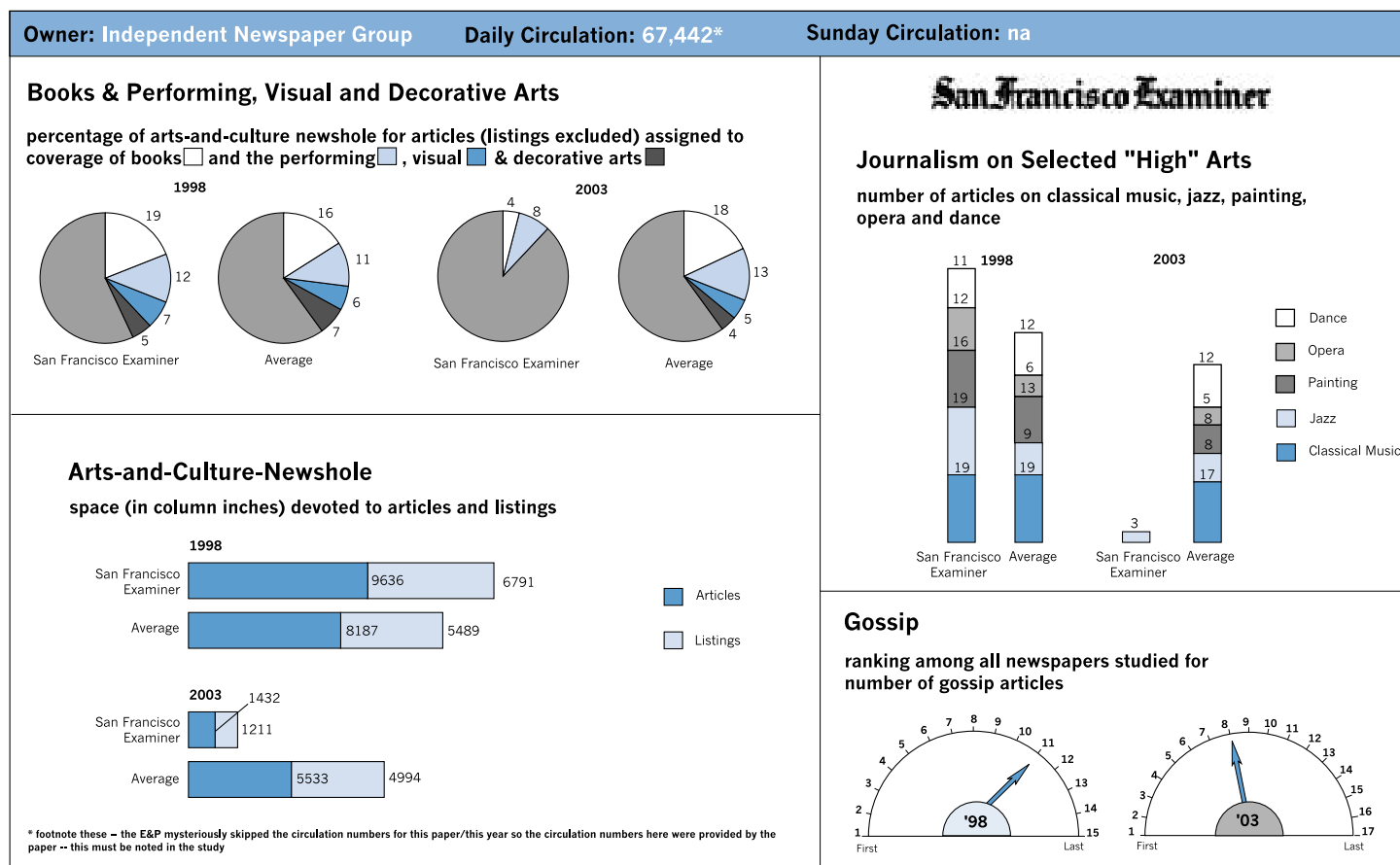
"We don't sell tickets here—that's not our job. My job is to get readers, and the way I get readers is to have interesting stories in the paper."

David Wiegand
Datebook section editor
San Francisco Chronicle

show on public television. In-depth segments on area artists have caught the attention of scene watchers. *Spark* producer Levy notes that her team is lucky in some ways. “We don’t

have the same pressures of the commercial world. We have a mission to raise interest in the arts—it’s part of our mandate,” she says. “We look at ratings, but we’re not driven by it.”

BY CARYN BROOKS



THE SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER is a case study of what arts-and-culture coverage can survive when an entire editorial operation is deconstructed. What is the minimum content that a newspaper can continue to publish when costs have been cut beyond the bare bones?

Between October 1998 and October 2003, the *Examiner* was sold off by the Hearst Corporation. The current owner no longer co-produces the joint weekend Datebook supplement with its rival, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and also cut back its daily A&C newshole, resulting in overall cuts of more than 80 percent, making it drop from above average to minimal in *Reporting the Arts II*. At least the arts did not fare as badly as Business, which had its daily section abolished altogether. While the total proportion of pagination designated to arts sections was halved, the major hit, obviously, went to the weekend supplements. The Friday Weekend section accounted for just 5 percent of the pagination in 2003, while the supplements made up 19 percent back in October 1998. The daily arts-and-lifestyles section, Arts & Culture, was also a fraction of its former self. The newsholes

for both A&C articles and listings were slashed.

The average length of articles was cut by one-third, and reviews took a disproportionate hit. Topics such as the performing arts, books, the visual arts and the decorative arts, which took up 43 percent of the space devoted to A&C articles in October 1998, were reduced to 12 percent in October 2003. But stating the reduction in percentage terms does not begin to describe the absolute cutbacks in view of these before-and-after comparisons: Articles on classical music went from 19 to 0; jazz, from 19 to 3; theater, from 31 to 4; opera, from 12 to 0; dance, from 11 to 0; book reviews, from 58 to 0; painting, from 16 to 0; architecture, from 7 to 0; interior design, furniture, high fashion and crafts, from 18 to 0.

So what was left after all the cutting? Hollywood gossip. Movie coverage—much of that the aforementioned Hollywood gossip—accounted for more than half of the newshole for A&C articles. It was published at a rate in excess of two per weekday and thus accounted for 50 of the month’s 137 articles.—AT