

MIAMI, FLORIDA

Miami is a city of contradictions. And so it makes sense that the two most characteristic aspects of Miami's culture, its newness and its incredible diversity, are both its strongest and its weakest points. On the positive side, youth means energy, and Miami has plenty of it. For a city that was a pioneer swamp settlement just over a century ago and a seasonal tourist town only 40 years ago, the amount of arts activity in Miami is extraordinary. There are major classical institutions in the metropolitan Miami-Dade County, encompassing municipalities from Hialeah to Miami Beach: the Florida Philharmonic, the Florida Grand Opera, the New World Symphony, Miami City Ballet, two contemporary arts museums, the New World School of the Arts and arts departments at other colleges and universities. Add to that a range of galleries, theater and dance companies, individual artists in every medium, as well as a plethora of festivals like Calle Ocho, Trinidadian Carnival, the Miami Bookfair, the Hispanic Theater Festival, the Miami Film Festival, and the Florida Dance Festival. A major new performing arts center with a symphony and ballet hall, opera house and smaller theater is also slated to open in 2002.

But volume doesn't always mean depth or quality. All this activity has some shaky underpinnings. "Smoke and mirrors," is how executive director Michael Spring of the Miami-Dade Cultural Affairs Council describes the flourishing appearance of Miami's cultural scene, where compared to other cities, a higher percentage of Miami's arts money comes from government rather than from private and corporate sources. "It's incredibly fragile financially and organizationally." The city's short cultural history means that except for a small core group in each field, the arts are not a regular part of most people's lives. Major organizations have a hard time building an audience base. Smaller groups struggle tremendously. And if it's hard to get people to buy tickets, it's even harder to get them to donate or serve on boards.

The youth of Miami's cultural scene is also felt in an audience that is by and large not as sophisticated or well-educated in the arts, and that doesn't necessarily assume the arts are an integral part of life, as is true in cities with older cultural traditions such as Boston or San Francisco. That dearth of in-depth understanding (always excepting a tiny core audience) tends to be felt most strongly among smaller and contemporary groups. Another central missing link

is a lack of smaller venues, whether for theater, dance, performance or live music. One of the great mysteries in Miami is why, with all the Latin and Caribbean musical traditions, there are so few live music clubs. This is particularly true of performance spaces that present different kinds of artists regularly and allow them to both develop their work and their audiences.

But newness means possibility too. Whatever you want to do in Miami—choreograph, present new plays, make new music—you can probably do it. A combination of naïveté, cheap space, lack of competition, and the sense that Miami is a city in process, where new things are happening and cultures are coming together in new ways, can be invigorating and inspiring. Whether you can get audiences to care is another issue. Burnout and talent drain are a big problem. Every couple of years the young and the heartfelt start performance spaces or theater groups, only to give up soon after, stymied by small audiences and overwhelming financial struggles. If artists don't stick around, changing and maturing and helping their audience mature with them, Miami will never become a place that grows its own culture—rather than importing it—will never have a sense that good art comes from here.

Even more striking than its youth is this city's dizzying spectrum of nationalities and languages and colors, a mix that penetrates every aspect of life and makes a concrete experience out of any abstract, politically correct notions of diversity. This is a city where Trinidadian carnival music, images of Haitian voodoo or Spanglish references to Santeria saints are the norm. In any other city, Latin culture is an exotic specialty. In Miami, Latin culture is in the majority.

But if diversity and the constant flow of immigration are a source of energy and distinction, they are also a great stress. Immigrants have to concentrate on survival first; art is a luxury that comes years, often a generation, later.

This has been and continues to be a big reason for the lack of private financial support for the arts and for a relatively low level of cultural sophistication. And people tend to stay bonded to their national identity and culture, rather than with the broader cultural life of the city or the United States. Where in other places culture is something people have in common, in Miami it often defines difference. Culture is about *my* music, *my* poets, *my* dance as a Cuban or a Jamaican or a Jew, often regardless of quality. As a result, art becomes part of a mental ethnic ghetto. The situation is not helped by the big institutions, which by and large have not been very welcoming of other cultures on their boards or in their programming.

This is a pity, because all these different national traditions provide an energizingly different sense of what culture can be, of what “American” culture is becoming. Often it's a different, more integrated sense of art than the formal western sense of something you go see in a museum or a concert hall. Take the widespread practice of the Afro-Cuban religion of Santeria, with dance and music ceremonies, and elaborate altars in people's homes. It's not what we think of as “art” in this country, but it uses artistic mediums as a way of understanding the world.

Miami's arts scene seems so frustratingly and perpetually in the process of becoming that it's easy to forget how much it has grown. It's not mature yet. It may not be for several generations. But there is so much promise here, and the process is so interesting. It is fun, too, if you can stay open-minded about how and in what language you get your culture. Miami is “America Next.” It's a place where a future American pop-music style—Cuban rumba and hip-hop—could evolve, where a new Caribbean-American school of painting could grow. Ultimately, Miami's culture is most exciting not for how much it lives up to older traditions, but for how it forges its own.

MIAMI METROPOLITAN
AREA POPULATION:
3,514,403

TOP FIVE CULTURAL
INSTITUTIONS
(BASED ON ATTENDANCE)

1. Miami Art Museum
2. Miami Museum of Science and Natural History
3. Museum of Contemporary Art
4. Lowe Art Museum
5. The Wolfsonian

The Herald

In no other city is the challenge of writing for a multicultural audience as pronounced as in Miami. *The Miami Herald* must not only keep up with Latin American and Caribbean cultures, but it needs to translate those influences for its Anglo readership.

The other priority of the Knight Ridder-owned paper is reporting on popular entertainment, especially the movies. This is often done at the expense of other art forms. On the weekends, listings and stories about the movies take center stage in the *Herald's* supplements. For example, the release of Oprah Winfrey's "Beloved" was the *Herald's* single most heavily covered arts story during October 1998, the month of this study.

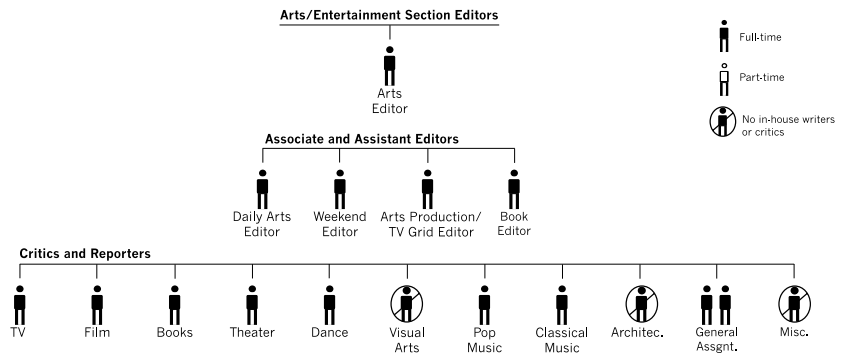
Building on Miami's strengths as a city of music, fashion and celebrities, and with its burgeoning high-culture scene, the *Herald* has recently decided to revamp its arts coverage as well as respond to research that shows that the arts are a way to attract Hispanic, female and young readers. Yet rather than concentrating arts coverage in its daily "Living & Arts" section or its "Weekend" supplement, the *Herald* spreads many of its arts and culture stories across a variety of sections. The *Herald's* expanded Sunday edition also includes a four-page section pitched toward high arts. Overall, a high proportion of the paper's arts coverage is devoted to books, an approach that is unusual, especially the paper's decision to place the articles in the "Week in Review" section.

More changes are on the way. Its profitable "Weekend" may soon appear as a street edition aimed at young readers. The daily features section, "Living & Arts," will soon include more entertainment.

The *Herald* has such specialized beats as Spanish-language TV. And while it also has zoned editions for its diverse audiences as well as a Latino sister publication, *El Nuevo Herald*, the arts staff is largely English-speaking and Caucasian. The *Herald*, moreover, uses fewer freelancers than any other newspaper in our study to round out its arts coverage. This explains why, along with the *Houston Chronicle*, it ranks near the bottom in the study in the coverage of music and the performing arts, beats that are typically freelance-friendly.

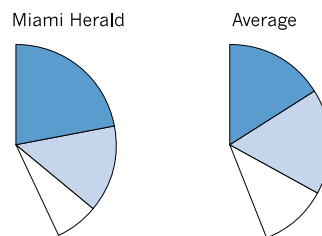
Owner: Knight Ridder Daily Circulation: 356,803 Sunday Circulation: 477,969

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



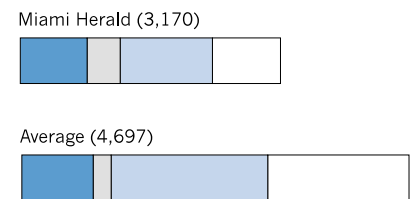
1. Artistic Discipline

- Books (22% vs. 16% avg.)
- Music (14% vs. 17% avg.)
- Performing Arts (7% vs. 11% avg.)



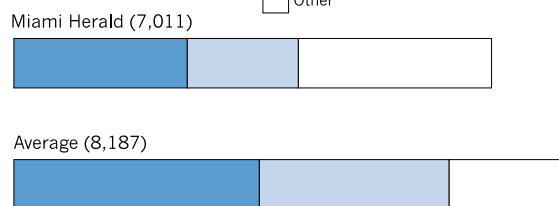
2. Weekend Arts Supplements

- Movie Stories
- Movie Listings
- Other Stories
- Other Listings



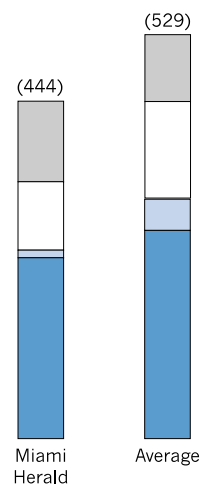
3. Stories by Section

- Arts & Living
- Arts Supplements
- Other



4. Bylines

- No Byline
- Synd.
- Freelance
- By Staff



Notes (All data for October 1998. Comprehensive data available at www.najp.org.)

1. Proportion of editorial space assigned to arts and culture stories, listings excluded, devoted to books, music and the performing arts compared with the 15-newspaper average
2. Volume of coverage devoted to arts and culture in the weekend arts supplements compared with the 15-newspaper average with the number in parentheses indicating total coverage in column inches
3. Volume of coverage, devoted to all arts and culture stories, listings excluded, by type of section compared with the 15-newspaper average
4. Number of arts and culture stories, listings excluded, written by in-house staffers, freelancers and syndicates compared with the 15-newspaper average with the number in parentheses indicating the total number of articles

ARTS COVERAGE IN MIAMI: A CRITICAL VIEW

Even as Miami's cultural scene has exploded, coverage of the arts, particularly in *The Miami Herald*, the city's only daily newspaper and most important source of arts coverage, has contracted. In fact, coverage seems to have shrunk in direct proportion to the city's growing amount and sophistication of arts activity. At the *Herald*, the shortfall is great enough that readers have complained that they can't depend on it as a reliable source of arts information. "The role of a newspaper is to impart information and knowledge and to educate," says arts publicist Lisa Palley. "At the *Herald* they don't take a leadership role. Things are happening in our city, and if your major newspaper is not talking about them, then that must mean they're not important."

The *Herald* and *El Nuevo Herald*, its Spanish-language version, are so important because arts coverage elsewhere in Miami is so limited. The *Miami New Times*, the weekly alternative paper, covers pop music and Cuban music very well, and has some theater reviews. Otherwise, its coverage is limited to movie reviews and a centerfold of highlighted events. Cultural stories tend to be exposés, rarely in-depth stories on trends, issues, or individual artists or events.

On commercial television and radio the arts are pretty much nonexistent, except for the rare novelty or celebrity item. On radio, the local NPR affiliate, WLRN-FM, and another community FM station, WDNA, play some local music and do interviews with musicians. The classical station, WTMI, gives performance information, while a few individual shows on AM stations focus on national genres like Jamaican dancehall. The PBS television affiliate, WPBT, runs mostly national programs like "Great Performances," yet it schedules them at odd hours. There's almost no arts programming on the sister television station to the NPR affiliate, WLRN, except for badly produced public access shows. There are a few small city and ethnic papers that help make up gaps in neighborhoods or individual national communities, but their coverage is not comprehensive or in-depth.

Which leaves the *Herald*. In general, the *Herald's* critics, writers and freelancers do coverage by the numbers, with movies, pop music, and listings or calendar items getting more and

more space. Meanwhile, in-depth stories on fine arts or issues and reviews get less. Often stories play to easy ethnic interest, human interest or local interest, instead of to broader relevance or news value. As the *Herald* becomes more of a local paper, arts stories are also more narrowly local or event oriented, ignoring important national news and trends.

This is most visible in the amount of space given to the arts. The daily "Living & Arts" section is light on the arts. Reviews used to run in Monday round-ups in this section, which, though limited, was at least consistent. Now, reviews are scattered in local news, and production deadlines make running timely next-day reviews virtually impossible. The Friday "Weekend" section is a prime forum to discuss the arts in a city where most arts events take place on weekends. It concentrates on movie reviews, abbreviated pop music stories, restaurant reviews, nightlife—but underemphasizes theater, classical music and visual arts. The Sunday "Arts" section, the most prominent showcase for arts stories, is now folded inside a new features section called "In South Florida," which further reduces its visibility.

This doesn't mean that there aren't fine, in-depth stories and good writing in the *Herald*—there just aren't enough of them. In recent years, the *Herald* hasn't devoted enough staff or resources to cover the arts in Miami the way the city deserves. In a city with a burgeoning local and international visual arts scene, with two museums and a third one being built, the *Herald* doesn't even have a full-time visual arts critic. Meanwhile, editors and some critics are overwhelmed and battling burnout from having to do endless listings and clerical work. During the past year, though, there has been a renewed focus on the arts section and a corresponding rise in morale.

In the past few years, the *Herald* has made covering Latin culture in English a norm. This may be the only major daily in the country where a Latin pop star is as likely to be on the cover of the "Weekend" section as an Anglo star. However, most of that is of the dominant Cuban culture; non-Cuban latinos and other Caribbean nationalities often get short shrift. The paper has also gotten faster and better at covering news in the cultural arena, and editors are hopeful for a new arts and living section to be launched this year.

El Nuevo Herald often does better than the English paper in consistently reporting on concerts and events. But it doesn't have the same quality of critical writing as the *Herald* in

"We do use focus groups as a 'disaster check'—usually after we have developed a plan, we trot it by a focus group to make sure we're not severely delusional."

Kendall Hamersly
Deputy Features Editor
The Miami Herald

English. It still translates English stories, and it has an even stronger bias toward easy entertainment stories. Last year there were many changes at *El Nuevo Herald*, including a new publisher and added staff in the news section, and separate newsstand sales. It remains to be seen if or how these changes will affect its arts coverage.

With so many people from so many countries here, the newspaper's role of educating people

about and examining the arts, of bringing people together in a sense of a shared culture, is tremendously important. So too is intelligent, sophisticated coverage in a city trying to develop a mature cultural life—one that is still often ahead of the media. There is a lot going on in the arts in Miami, much of it new and different from what is happening elsewhere in this country. But more of it could be covered.

VOICES FROM THE STAFF

We have a large Latin and Caribbean influence here in South Florida. One theme which pervades all of our coverage is the intensely multicultural nature of the community, the heady mix and diversity which extends into the cultural realm. One challenge is to cover the arts in a way that really takes into account all the multicultural themes, and to do it so that everybody's tastes and interests are accommodated.

Recreation is really big here. People like to go out, and they need a lot of information about where to go. It is really important for us to provide accurate information. There is also a lot of night life and glitz—celebrities, Madonna, that kind of stuff—so we need to be on the lookout for that.

All parts of the newspaper must be high quality. As we look at our strategic objectives for this and the coming years, at the top of the list is expanding our reach to Hispanics, females and younger readers, and therefore, so is leveraging arts, culture and entertainment coverage. We want to have strong leadership in that area.

We believe that our Hispanic readers are particularly interested in cultural news and fashion. I recently sent out a memo with our page one philosophy. One of the ideas was to find high-quality stories that are linked to arts and culture. We are looking at revamping our daily "Living" section to put more emphasis on that kind of news. We are also looking in our daily local section at having even more events—a "Last Night" kind of column—about places people went to and places people are talking about. We are going to significantly upgrade and jazz up our "People" column as part of the general redesign of the paper.

Larry Olmstead, Managing Editor, *The Miami Herald*