

## THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA, CALIFORNIA

Can disaster be a good thing for the arts? In the San Francisco Bay Area, the answer is a qualified “yes.” A terrible earthquake has shaken loose millions of dollars for the arts, while urban sprawl has boosted the development of arts centers right in the communities where people live.

After the Loma Prieta earthquake struck in 1989, many key institutions were declared unsafe and had to be closed, fixed and primped. Here’s what reopened in the past five years alone: American Conservatory Theatre (ACT), the city’s major repertory theater, for \$27 million; the War Memorial Opera House, home of the San Francisco Opera and Ballet, for \$88 million; and on the fine arts front, the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, for \$40 million; and the Cantor Center for the Visual Arts at Stanford University, for \$37 million. Another \$130 million is being raised to rebuild the seismically crippled M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, and at least \$30 million is being sought to repair the Berkeley Art Museum.

Within San Francisco itself, a vital visual arts center has been forged just within the last five years with the opening of the new \$62 million San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. Meanwhile the Jewish Museum, the Asian Art Museum, the Mexican Museum and a new African-American cultural center all plan to move to seismically safe buildings in the area in the next two years. Art galleries, on the other hand, limp along compared with those in Los Angeles or New York. One spokesperson, who didn’t wish to be named, at a major San Francisco museum puts it bluntly: “San Francisco is still not so good for rising young artists, but for dead artists it’s getting a lot better.”

The San Francisco Bay Area is perhaps better known as a performing arts destination. University of California at Berkeley’s Cal Performances and the independent San Francisco Performances present international stars like Mikhail Baryshnikov, Salif Keita and Itzhak Perlman. The Bay Area also has one of the most enthusiastic dance audiences in the country, supporting major touring groups as well as the acclaimed San Francisco Ballet, at least eight smaller ballet companies with regular seasons, plus about a dozen modern dance troupes and even a festival of Japanese Butoh dance.

In the last few years, the San Francisco Symphony has gotten a boost under the leadership of charismatic conductor and “great salesman” Michael Tilson Thomas, and the symphony

signed an amicable new contract after a tense nine-week strike that ended in 1997. Meanwhile, San Francisco Opera has been praised for its bold decision to take on the “Ring” cycle this year, although it is also under attack by critics who charge that it has been failing to bring in top talent. But the most significant thing about classical music, according to Georgia Rowe, the classical music critic at the *Contra Costa Times*, is “the sheer volume of music being produced here, with groups at every level from amateur to top quality.” Regional symphonies, choral groups and the early music community, led by Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, are particularly strong.

The theater still faces certain challenges. One repertory house, ACT, is the big fish in a small theater pond. A “Best of Broadway” series brings in major musicals like “Rent” and “Bring in ’Da Noise, Bring in ’Da Funk,” and local gay theater is thriving. But the region’s big weakness is a “minor-league attitude—an unwillingness to embrace something new unless it’s already been tried out of town,” according to *Contra Costa Times* theater critic Pat Craig. That may explain why the area doesn’t originate many touring plays.

Recently, the Bay Area has been dubbed with the hopeful moniker of “Hollywood North,” now that a few more L.A. filmmakers are choosing to make their films in the Bay Area, partially because hangars on decommissioned military bases have become available as sound stages. The proximity of Silicon Valley talent helps explain why Pixar, with its creation of “Toy Story” and “A Bug’s Life,” leads the way in producing computerized animation for film, while George Lucas’ Industrial Light & Magic regularly wins Oscars for its high-tech special effects. The area is also a hotbed of documentary filmmaking. Just last year, five Bay Area documentaries were accepted at the Sundance Film Festival out of a total of 16. Why? As film pundit Mark Taylor has been quoted saying: “Northern California is a place where people are unafraid to try things; it’s always been a frontier.”

The Bay Area is a destination for any major rock, country or jazz act, and it has lately produced its share of top rock bands including Green Day, Counting Crows, Third Eye Blind and Rancid, as well as jazz stars such as Benny Green and Joshua Redman. One music industry

wag, though, says the local rock scene suffers from “enthusiastic mediocrity.” Rob van Haaren, an internationally known swing instructor, meanwhile has called the Bay Area “the swingiest city in the world” with its profusion of zoot-suited dance bands and the thriving underground hip-hop scene.

The Bay Area’s strong ethnic communities often organize their own arts events underneath the radar of critics and major arts institutions. The Mexican rock group Mana recently filled large stadiums with fans without being reviewed by most of the English-language daily newspapers. Bay Area Mexican, Chinese, Filipino, Indian and Cuban arts groups are especially active.

Arts funding remains a mixed bag. Within the city of San Francisco, organizations benefit from a built-in hotel tax that awarded \$11 million to nearly 200 groups last year. Others depend heavily on NEA funding, and many were disappointed when skimpier awards were announced in 1998. Smaller organizations that have survived the cutbacks often attribute their success to intensifying their relationship with their communities. As usual, the really big money goes to the largest, most established groups. Everyone else struggles.

One unusual factor puts the squeeze on Bay Area arts. In the dead of winter, snowed-in Bostonians or Minnesotans might opt for a cozy visit to museums or the theater. But Bay Area residents can always choose a hike at Stinson Beach, followed by citrus risotto at gourmet restaurant Chez Panisse. The great outdoors and a thriving culture of food compete with the arts year-round.

Geography, as they say, is destiny. As the Bay Area grows and traffic worsens, arts centers are expanding and new ones are springing up to meet increased local demand. Affluent San Jose residents, for example, support the San Jose Repertory Theater, the San Jose Symphony, the San Jose Museum of Art and the new \$96 million Tech Museum of Innovation, plus an explosion of dance. Even suburban areas near San Francisco, such as Marin and Contra Costa, fund their own theater groups, symphonies and dance companies. Arts lovers can no longer go to San Francisco and see it all, for the future seems to promise even stronger arts hubs around the Bay.

SAN FRANCISCO  
METROPOLITAN AREA  
POPULATION: 6,605,428

TOP FIVE CULTURAL  
INSTITUTIONS  
(BASED ON ATTENDANCE)  
1. California Academy of  
Sciences  
2. Alcatraz  
3. Exploratorium  
4. San Francisco Museum  
of Modern Art  
5. Fine Arts Museums

# San Francisco Chronicle

After a feisty, decades-long news war with William Randolph Hearst's *Examiner*, the 130-year-old *Chronicle* was recently bought by its rival. If the morning and afternoon papers merge, the *Chronicle* may soon be the only local paper left on San Francisco's newsstands.

Despite the long and bitter struggle, the two papers entered a joint operating agreement. A cornerstone of their cultural détente is the "pink" weekend "Datebook" supplement—affectionately called "The Bible." The 70-or-more-page section is edited at the *Chronicle*, and it has proven so popular that newspapers in other cities use it as a model for their own advertising-heavy arts and entertainment tabloids.

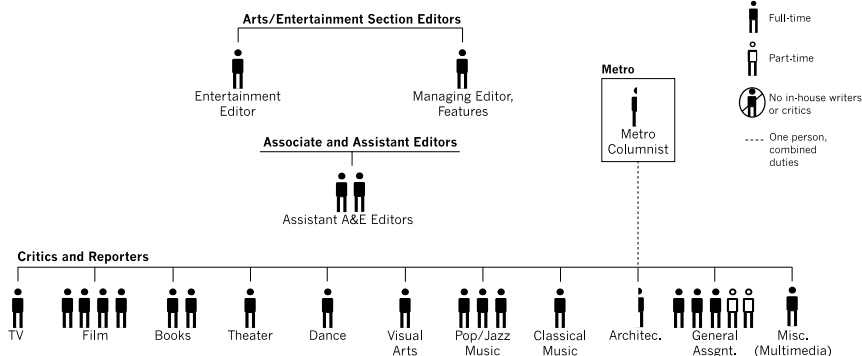
After some belt-tightening in the mid-1990s, the paper has been pursuing a moderate growth strategy. The *Chronicle* put a new editorial structure in place, expanded its pop-culture coverage and increased its emphasis on the Bay Area scene. Part of this strategy means that the *Chronicle* no longer aspires to be a national daily paper—much to the chagrin of staff critics who had grown accustomed to great freedom and large travel budgets. Still, resources dedicated to arts are enviable, and not just when it comes to "Datebook." The paper not only employs four movie critics, but also full-time critics in oft-neglected beats such as visual arts and dance. The *Chronicle* is also one of only a handful of dailies to still have a full-fledged stand-alone book review section.

Culture-savvy San Franciscans are famously critical of their newspapers' arts coverage. In order to please them, the *Chronicle* offers its readers a large daily dose of high culture and decorative arts, emphasizing visual and performing arts—in particular opera—as well as architecture, interior design and fashion. This daily emphasis goes against the newspaper industry trend of clumping most arts coverage at the weekend.

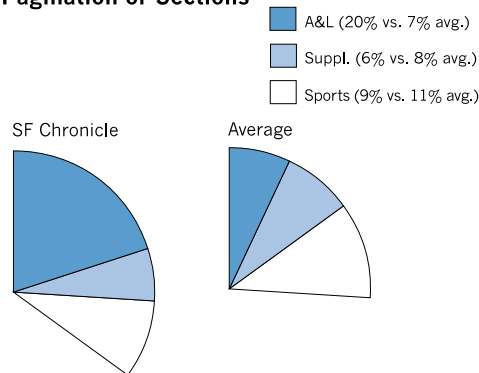
Of all the papers we studied, the *Chronicle* was the paper with the most total arts column inches as well the one with the greatest proportion of total pagination dedicated to the daily arts section. It was so large that it even beat out its own sports section.

Owner: Hearst Newspapers Daily Circulation: 455,923 Sunday Circulation: 625,106

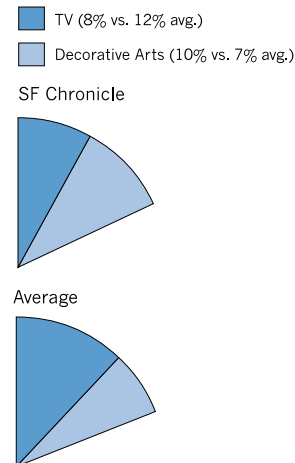
## In-house Arts Staff (does not copy desk and freelancers)



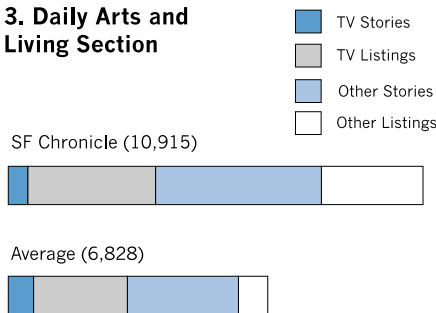
### 1. Pagination of Sections



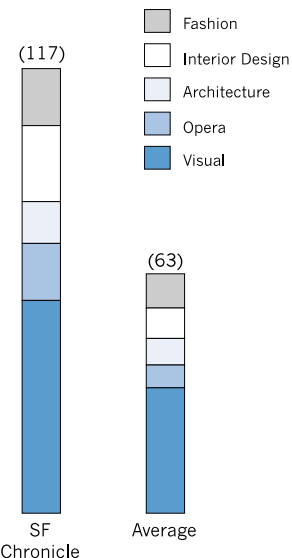
### 2. Decorative Arts and Television



### 3. Daily Arts and Living Section



### 4. Artistic Disciplines



### Notes (All data for October 1998. Comprehensive data available at [www.najp.org](http://www.najp.org).)

1. Percentage of pages devoted to daily Arts & Living sections, weekend arts supplements and sports compared with the 15-newspaper average

2. Proportion of editorial space assigned to all arts and culture stories, listings excluded, devoted to decorative arts and television compared with the 15-newspaper average

3. Volume of coverage devoted to arts and culture in the daily Arts & Living section compared with the 15-newspaper average with the number in parentheses indicating total coverage in column inches

4. Number of stories in various disciplines compared with the 15-newspaper average with the number in parentheses indicating the total number of articles

## ARTS COVERAGE IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA: A CRITICAL VIEW

The San Francisco Bay Area is second only to the Big Apple in what it has to offer in the fine and popular arts. Unfortunately, coverage by major metropolitan dailies and TV and radio stations varies wildly and is not, overall, on a par with that offered in comparable markets such as Los Angeles, New York and Chicago. Geography is clearly a factor. The logistics (read: round-the-clock gridlock) are such that each paper, in the end, is forced to concentrate on its own backyard. This is good news for the papers in or close to San Francisco, bad news for the *San Jose Mercury News* and other papers in the South Bay, which, in turn, take on a more provincial flavor. The cynic is tempted to observe that Bay Area readers, listeners and viewers get what they deserve: Silicon Valley Gen-X'ers are so glued to the fast track, that they aren't as vigilant as they might be in monitoring—or demanding—comprehensive coverage. However, to stave off TV and the new

media, changes appear to be in the wind.

*San Francisco Chronicle*: The proverbial 800-pound gorilla isn't resting on its laurels, and for now it is still too soon to tell how the recent buyout by its competitor, *The San Francisco Examiner*, will play out. Instead of basking in its predominance, the *Chronicle*, to its credit, is beefing up coverage, doing more intradepartment enterprise projects, and selling its writers as personalities in an ambitious TV-radio ad campaign. The *Chronicle's* Sunday "Datebook" lives up to its reputation as the Bay Area's most comprehensive arts guide. It is chock full of listings and stories on the fine and popular arts, anchored by a regular "Letter from the Editor" column that suggests a thoughtful, overriding approach to coverage. The writing by the staff is for the most part chatty, humorous and ferociously anti-intellectual. The *Chronicle* is fun to read, but it is not always what one would call especially deep or analytical. Too often in movie reviews, we're told, "Hey, it's *only* a movie." While TV coverage by John Carmen is bright and timely, and theater and classical music reviews are detailed and written with authority. High-tech

### VOICES FROM THE STAFF

Research is useful. We do a lot of research, but it's just a starting point or a building block. I find that it confirms gut instincts. Focus groups are used very sparingly. We show them prototypes. For example, when we launch a new Friday section, prototypes are shown, and fine-tuning will happen.

The San Francisco Newspaper Agency hired a company called the Kackle Group. They made some presentations, and we listened and gave it the attention it deserved. But I wouldn't say it's steering what we do here. The headline about arts and entertainment was that we so thoroughly dominated the market that there wasn't much else we could do. Not only were we a category-killer in movies, but also in fine arts. People are supposed to be thoroughly satisfied with what we do. It made me disappointed because I thought I would be able to use the findings to ask for more bodies.

Liz Lufkin, Editor, "Datebook," *San Francisco Chronicle*

I think this paper doesn't know what to do with the arts. Despite that, it does a lot for the arts. From studying comparable newspapers, the sheer number of column inches given to the arts is considerable. But it only begins to touch the arts activity in this region.

In the past, we would cover things quite casually. We did coverage based on when space was available. Things have since tightened up organizationally, which is probably a good thing. It simplifies my duties.

At the paper, I have space that is institutionalized. I have a sacrosanct Saturday gallery column where I cover shows and the occasional museum exhibition. I am given good play in the paper when an event of some wide interest comes up, even if it is out of town. As a writer, I am well represented here. God knows, I appreciate that. They trust me to define for myself in a day-by-day way what I think I am doing in terms of what should be covered. I should have, though, gone to Berlin to see the wrapping of the Reichstag, not the least because Christo has done projects here. It was something worthy of international attention. There comes a point at which one's professional standing is at stake if one is out of the loop.

Kenneth Baker, Art Critic, *San Francisco Chronicle*

*"When I go to journalism conferences and I say that we have three to four film critics, a full-time dance critic and full-time visual arts critic, people are blown away."*

Liz Lufkin  
Editor, "Datebook"  
*San Francisco Chronicle*

# San Francisco Examiner

William Randolph Hearst received the *San Francisco Examiner* as a graduation present from his father in 1887. The gift marked the launch of a flamboyant publishing empire, as well as the beginning of an infamous news rivalry between the *Examiner* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. And even though the competition continues today, the two papers jointly create the crown jewel of San Francisco's arts coverage, the massive and much-imitated Sunday "pink section" "Datebook." How long the two papers will appear as separate publications is unknown, especially with the newest twist in their tangled history, the recent *Examiner* purchase of the *Chronicle*.

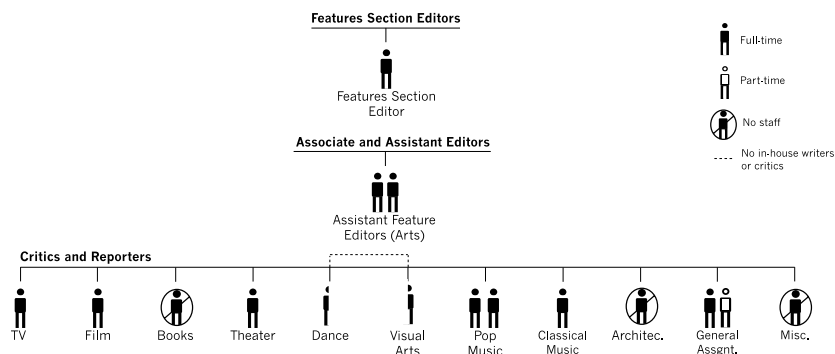
The *Examiner's* arts coverage has likewise seen its twists and turns. After years of declining circulation, William Randolph Hearst III took over as publisher in the mid-1980s. He brought with him an ambitious plan that included top-notch coverage by a beefed-up arts staff. A golden age ensued. But after Hearst's departure, management cut the staff. In the past three years, the arts have regained some of their lost ground. Even so, the paper's writers struggle to keep up with their beats in a city famed for the San Francisco Symphony, the San Francisco Opera and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

During the week the *Examiner* runs a small daily features section, "Time Out," which combines lifestyle and arts coverage. The section is particularly welcoming to reviews, which take up almost half of its non-listings space. But whereas the *Chronicle* packages its arts coverage on a daily basis, the *Examiner* concentrates it at the weekends. Besides the arts friendly coverage in "Datebook," the paper also publishes a second weekend supplement on Fridays. Coverage is exceptionally strong in jazz and opera. However, there is no stand-alone book section.

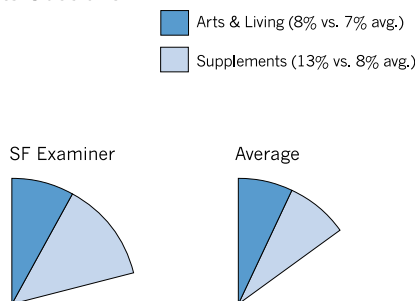
Of the 15 papers NAJP analyzed, the *Examiner*, along with the *Chronicle*, appeared at the top of the list with the most total column inches as well as the largest proportion of the paper's pagination devoted to the arts.

Owner: Hearst Newspapers Daily Circulation: 120,856 Sunday Circulation: 625,106

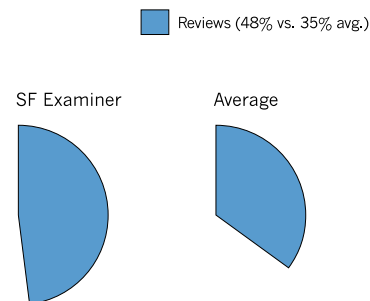
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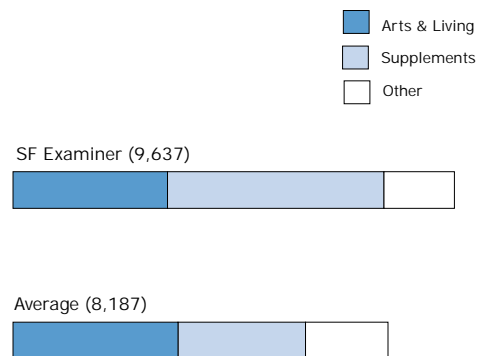
### 1. Pagination of Arts Sections



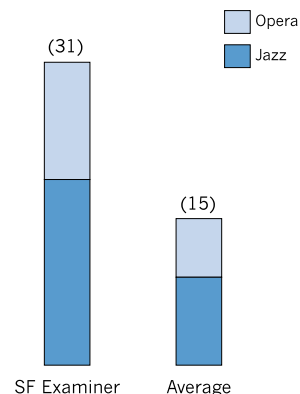
### 2. Reviews



### 3. Stories by Section



### 4. Jazz and Opera



## Notes (All data for October 1998. Comprehensive data available at [www.najp.org](http://www.najp.org).)

1. Percentage of pages devoted to daily Arts & Living sections and weekend arts supplements compared with the 15-newspaper average
2. Proportion of editorial space assigned to all arts and culture stories, listings excluded, devoted to reviews compared with the 15-newspaper average
3. Volume of coverage devoted to all arts and culture stories, listings excluded, by type of section compared with the 15-newspaper average with the number parentheses indicating total coverage in column inches
4. Number of jazz and opera stories, listings excluded, compared with the 15-newspaper average with the number in parentheses indicating the combined total number of jazz and opera articles

#### VOICES FROM THE STAFF

San Francisco is a fantastic city in which to cover the arts. Not only does it have dynamic arts institutions, but it has a sophisticated audience. It is manageable, sort of bite sized. You can know everyone here. If you go to the theater, you will meet the mayor. That helps us to do a good job. It makes it an interesting and coverable city.

The earthquake of 1989—which was followed by the recession—dealt the arts a double blow. The San Francisco Opera, MoMA and the Geary Theater were all closed for retrofitting. It also affected retail business; people from the suburbs stopped coming into the city to go to cultural destinations. It was a bad time for the city. Now we have come through it. There is more culture. The institutions that had to close down because of the earthquake are now back stronger than ever. New institutions have joined them. In the last few years, the *Examiner* has been able to scale back up somewhat from the losses suffered in the middle of the decade.

The *Examiner* is looked to by the arts community for its very high level of arts critics. The quality is high. Our arts coverage reflects the dynamics of the arts of the city. Two years ago we did a fall series called the “Art Biz.” Our critics turned into arts reporters, and I found out something I had never heard. What they turned up was that at a time when the NEA was very much under the gun, arts institutions were healthier than they had ever been because their endowments were invested in the stock market.

We are being asked to get younger readers. A year ago we took on a part-time columnist who writes a young party column about the night club scene, with a gay but not a specifically gay orientation. His nom de plume is Lord Martin. Hiring younger writers as critic jobs open up is an attempt to appeal to younger readers, to take them seriously and acknowledge their intelligence.

Heidi Benson, Editor, “Style,” *The San Francisco Examiner*

*“There are certain times the readers think the stories we have are the most important things going. There are other days we are very frustrated because they are more interested in the latest drive-by.”*

David Dayton

Entertainment Editor  
*San Francisco Examiner*

entertainment coverage, so far, has been indifferently researched.

*San Francisco Examiner*: San Francisco’s “other” newspaper, by virtue of its size, has to try harder. This does not translate into “beating the *Chronicle* at its own game.” That, the editors and critics know, is a race they’re fated to lose, given the *Chronicle*’s budget and resources. Instead, the *Examiner* has traditionally played up what makes it different: longer, richer arts stories. While you won’t find the variety of coverage found in the *Chronicle* and the *San Jose Mercury News*, you will find (fronting the abundant wire fillers) profiles and reviews in the *Examiner*’s “Style” section that have more personality, more oomph. This is in the process of changing. With the *Examiner*’s future always shaky at best, “Style” editor Heidi Benson owns up to the paper’s new agenda: to court a younger, hipper, more culturally diverse readership. To understand how this plays out, compare Michael Sragow’s film coverage of a few years back to the coverage of 23-year-old new hire Wesley Morris. The former was thoughtful, textured, long-winded; the latter is trippy, glib, determinedly antagonistic—more flash than depth. The paper’s TV coverage is adequate; its theater and music coverage (by a trio of vets) is considerably better.

*The Oakland Tribune*: The one-time flagship of the ANG Newspapers chain makes the best of limited resources and provides more than basic coverage. The paper’s big entertainment push is on Friday, when “Cue,” the daily entertainment section, commands a section of its own. Still, given the limitations in space, the *Tribune*’s arts staff do a creditable job, particularly in local coverage. While one could quibble with main Oscar coverage ripped from the wire, most weekdays offer a nice mix of locally generated theater, music, TV, dance and classical music. The stories are usually short, appealingly displayed and highly readable. Particularly impressive is “Stage Scene,” a full Thursday page devoted to excerpts from past theater reviews.

*San Jose Mercury News*: In 1995, this Knight Ridder workhorse issued its new mission statement, which forever shifted priorities away from conventional coverage. Instead of being a medium-circulation paper that did many things well, why not become the paper of record on Silicon Valley and all things high-tech? With this change came a conscious decision to downplay features and entertainment. Hence, the *Mercury News* no longer goes toe-to-toe with the *Chronicle* on big entertainment stories. Now, instead of attempting comprehensive TV, theater and film coverage, the *Mercury*

*News*' critics, writers and freelancers concentrate much of their energy on local entertainment stories and anything with a high-tech component. Trenders and box office updates ("The Blair Witch Project," surprise successes, etc.) remain priorities. To attract a younger demographic, so does rock coverage (the paper has two rock critics). Editors can't fault space restrictions: The paper boasts a daily entertainment front, a Friday tabloid and a Sunday broadsheet. But thanks to new pagination deadlines, arts coverage lacks the immediacy of that of other Bay Area papers. The future, though, looks promising—the paper's new executive editor, David Yarnold, and features editor, Steve Wright, have made improving entertainment and features a priority. Not surprisingly, given its slant, the *Mercury News* has a vibrant, user-friendly entertainment web site, "Just Go."

*Contra Costa Times*: Since being purchased by Knight Ridder in 1995, the *Contra Costa Times* has been redesigned and beefed up. And this goes for its arts coverage as well, which, given the paper's mid-Peninsula home, has a schizoid cosmopolitan/parochial feel. The paper's new entertainment editor, Randy Myers, brings vision and ambition to the job. His small staff of critics and writers travel to arts events such as

the Sundance Film Festival ignored by its wealthier sister to the south, the *San Jose Mercury News*. *Contra Costa* and *San Jose* share a lot of copy. They also share a troubling eagerness to "Wire it!" at the drop of a hat. The *Contra Costa Times* boasts a fun web site (hotcoco.com).

*Radio/TV*: The best way to sum up what's wrong with Bay Area arts coverage on TV and radio is to recount an anecdote. In a pitch meeting with KGO radio, a newspaper writer talked about doing on-air film reviews. The station manager's response: "Umm, I don't know if we want to be controversial and go on the attack, or promote the arts." Beset by this dilemma, radio and TV stations, for the most part, have opted for the latter and become shameless boosters. KGO radio (an ABC affiliate), at one point ran drive-time reviews by a Blockbuster Video executive. How can an area this sophisticated and culturally diverse support such subpar TV and radio arts coverage? Most stations make do with L.A. feeds or print personalities who come off as pontificating heads. The ubiquitous Jan Wahl—who covers for KCBS-AM, Ch. 4 and Bay-TV—describes herself as "arts diva." That sounds right. With her big hats, she resembles Hedda Hopper and often lapses into her Mae West impression.

*"My constant worry is that I am going to lose my good writers to better papers because of the salaries."*

Lisa Wrenn  
Features Editor  
*Contra Costa Times*

#### VOICES FROM THE STAFF

Arts and culture is key to the paper's new strategy for two reasons. This is a very affluent circulation area, in which people travel widely for work and to enjoy popular and fine arts. So we need to do a good job in the arts. Secondly, for our own well being, we need to make it clear to readers that they shouldn't just think of us only as the source of local news, and turn to others—specifically, the *Chronicle*—for overall coverage. The *Chronicle* has been wanting to come into the East Bay and pick off the high demographics. One of their big selling points was the "Pink" arts and entertainment section. The *Contra Costa Times* has had to therefore continuously upgrade its quality, specifically as to how it relates to arts coverage.

Some of the dilemmas that surround arts coverage are similar to those surrounding business coverage. Are we writing to the CEO or the average person? In the arts, the same is true. Take dance. It is a challenge to review ballet in a way that is both illuminating for an expert and accessible to someone who doesn't know ballet that well. The piece should tell what makes the ballet, which has been performed for 150 years, worthy of note.

What I would love to do—but this is more in the dream stage—I would love to have at least one more staff critic in the fine arts. We rely mostly on freelancers. We're fortunate here in the Bay Area. This is such a high-quality arts community, and the quality of freelancers is very high. Yet while I am pleased with the quality of freelancers, I would be pleased to have another staff critic.

Saundra Keyes, Managing Editor, *Contra Costa Times*

*Star Wars* in and of itself is an excellent example of what arts and entertainment editors and writers are grappling with. We can't let the story go, because everybody is going to town with it. That is when competition is bad. There is so much entertainment news out there, so to compete we've got to be all over it. That's terrible. It sucks up so many resources. It's the whole Hollywood publicity machine, and the way we are forced to dance with it.

Lisa Wrenn, Features Editor, *Contra Costa Times*

## San Jose Mercury News

Few news organizations face an opportunity as formidable and desirable as the challenge confronting *San Jose Mercury News*: to serve America's bellwether community—Silicon Valley.

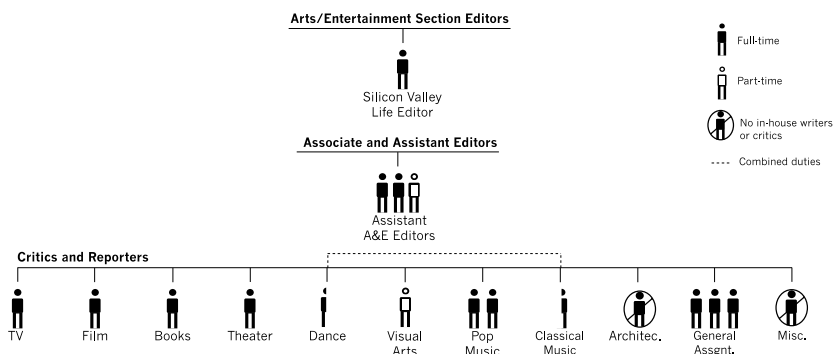
While the emphasis at the *Mercury News*, apart from local news, is on the coverage of business developments at the ground zero of the technology revolution, the paper views the arts as an increasingly important part of its pages. This has been fueled by the area's growing affluence as well as a cultural boom that includes a new repertory theater and even a planned opera house. There is a lot for the *Mercury News* to write about, and during the month of our study, the city even inaugurated its new Tech Museum of Innovation.

The *Mercury News* runs its weekday arts coverage inside a daily themed features section, "Silicon Valley Life," which specializes in decorative arts and crafts. Recently a growing number of the paper's arts stories have also appeared on its front cover. Last year, the paper changed the focus of its Sunday "Silicon Valley Life" section, making it a pure arts and culture section that complements the existing listings-heavy Friday arts and entertainment tabloid, "Eye." And while the paper publishes very few television stories, film—for which the paper considers itself in direct competition with the *Los Angeles Times*—is unusually prominent in its weekend supplement, a full one-third of which is devoted to movie listings and stories. This fall the paper will also launch a broadsheet Thursday entertainment guide that is being geared to the weekend. Appropriately for a paper that serves Silicon Valley, it was one of the first to launch a web site; it lavishes particular attention on arts coverage.

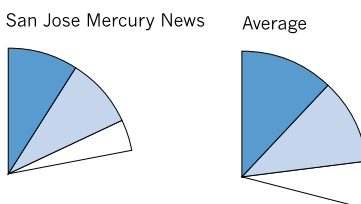
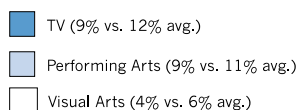
Arts staffing is relatively generous, but the *Mercury News* also relies heavily on wire copy, especially for reviews. Meanwhile, as a news source to a region with a sizable minority population, the *Mercury News* must cover ethnic arts groups in order to maintain reader loyalty. Unfortunately, few if any of the staff writers have an understanding of, let alone expertise in non-traditional minority cultures.

Owner: Knight Ridder Daily Circulation: 288,730 Sunday Circulation: 342,902

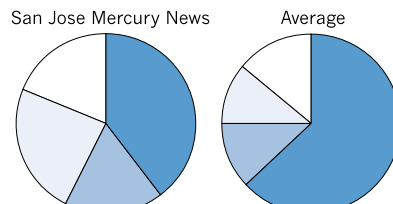
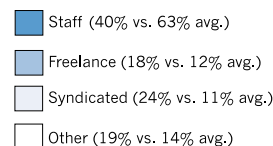
### In-house Arts Staff (does not include features staff, copy desk and freelancers)



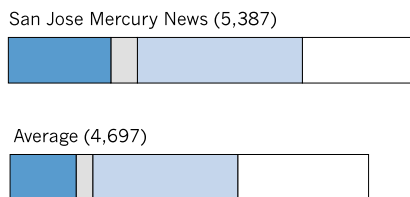
### 1. Artistic Disciplines



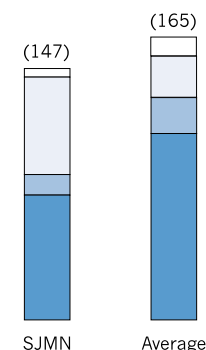
### 2. Bylines



### 3. Weekend Arts Supplements



### 4. Reviews



### Notes (All data for October 1998. Comprehensive data available at [www.najp.org](http://www.najp.org).)

- Proportion of editorial space assigned to all arts and culture stories, listings excluded, devoted to television, the performing and visual arts compared with the 15-newspaper average
- Proportion of editorial space assigned to arts and culture stories, listings excluded, written by in-house staffers, freelancers and syndicated wire services compared with the 15-newspaper average
- 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
- Number of reviews written by in-house staffers, freelancers and syndicated wire services compared with the 15-newspaper average with the number in parentheses indicating the total number of articles



## CONTRA COSTA TIMES: A SOLID SUBURBAN

Readers in Contra Costa county, a 45-minute drive northeast of San Francisco, do not have to make a choice between arts-rich big-city papers and a flimsy suburban daily. The *Contra Costa Times* (CCT) delivers solid reporting tailored to an upwardly mobile community with diverse cultural interests.\* How it handles its arts and entertainment coverage is an illustration of the typical opportunities and challenges confronting medium-size newspapers today.

The CCT was one of four family-owned Bay Area papers purchased by Knight Ridder in 1995. It was, and remains, the largest of the group, commanding more than half of the combined 200,000 daily circulation. The four papers retain their autonomy, building on a franchise of strong coverage, and combining forces to publish a joint zoned Sunday edition.

Headquartered in a well-clipped, leafy neighborhood of generously sized homes and neatly groomed gardens, the CCT serves a community that is more established than the cookie-cutter developments sprouting up around Silicon Valley. Its readers have access to a variety of local arts organizations and national touring acts, not to mention San Francisco's arts scene. The paper therefore appropriately offers its readers a rich diet of theater, music and dance coverage.

Having to contend with the high-circulation Sunday "Datebook" supplement put out by the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Examiner*, the CCT has decided to approach its arts and entertainment coverage by focusing on the local. Fortunately, resources from Knight Ridder have allowed the CCT to do just that. As part of its strategy to make the CCT "the only paper you need"—especially for arts—editors have increased space and budget allotted to arts. A 1998 survey revealed the positive effect of the changes as many readers say they now use the CCT as their primary source for information on culture. And because the arts department has contributed to gains in key demographic areas, its stature inside the paper has likewise improved.

The CCT patterned its reassessment of arts and entertainment on industry trends. The paper fused its arts and lifestyle coverage. "Time Out," its daily features section, is set up as a patchwork of articles dealing with the different ways readers pass their leisure time, from the arts to cooking to the outdoors. The paper meanwhile offers its big arts days on Sunday and Friday, with its 60-page tabloid-size listing guide. More arts stories now also make it to the front page.

In general, CCT journalists must work within the constraints of a relatively small paper, with typical weekday arts and entertainment coverage amounting to no more than three pages inside the features section. Because of such restrictions, editors must decide between covering fine arts or popular entertainment. An additional challenge facing the staff is balancing commitments between semi-professional and professional arts. This has become difficult as local arts groups increasingly press editors to cover them in depth.

To do that, the paper would have to increase its staff and space available for arts pieces, but here as elsewhere resources are tight and no immediate expansion is planned. Dance and visual arts are covered by the same critic. There is no full-time classical music, pop music or jazz writer. As a result, the paper relies heavily on freelancers, especially for fine arts coverage. And during the week, wire copy is used to round out staff resources, with the paper pulling about a quarter of its arts and entertainment material from such services.

One recent and popular innovation has been the "Book Club." Every six weeks or so, a paperback by a living author that is not on the best-seller list is selected for review. Readers are asked to send in their comments. Those writing the best items are invited to a dinner, often with the author. The reader's insights then appear in the paper alongside the critic's review. "Our readers feel very proprietary about this club," says managing editor Sandra Keyes, who has served as a Pulitzer juror for criticism. To everyone's surprise, the party celebrating the first anniversary of the series was a sell-out event.

*\* Because of technical difficulties, a statistical analysis of the Contra Costa Times could not be included in this report at the time of publication. This summary relies on on-site interviews with the paper's editorial staff.*

#### VOICES FROM THE STAFF

Our deadlines are very early in the day. We often have a review or a story a day after the other papers do because the other papers' deadlines are late enough. That's aggravating. There is always more we would like to get in the paper.

Our mission for the whole ANG group is to focus on the local. The arts are a little different because art by its nature tends to be a little bit larger than local. We review or preview the local choral society, the city symphonies, the important traveling productions and touring shows and the community theaters. On a weekly basis, we will review the one or two major movies. We run wire as little as possible. But there are times we use them, certainly for the movies. In a week when seven movies open, our reviewer will go only to three.

Our writers are newspaper reporters whose beat happens to be the arts, as opposed to city council or crime. I look for somebody who has those basic journalism building blocks to write a good news story. Then—as you would when looking for a crime writer—I look for people with the knowledge and background in the field they are writing about, yet still are able to report breaking news.

Catherine Schutz, Assistant Editor, *The Oakland Tribune*

I would like to pull back on the number of days we do arts coverage, be more selective about what we cover, but spread it out all week and do a better job on Friday. Maybe do a "Datebook"-style section like some of our competitors.

When it comes to balancing popular and high arts, sometimes it seems we tend to favor one over the other. When symphonies start their seasons, we do more high end. In the summer we do more rock 'n' roll acts. We're also seeing more country music.

Our readership is mainly older, middle aged and white. So they like to read about the stuff that interests them. They like the Rolling Stones, but we are also reaching out to the younger readers. If we're going to grow, we've got to write to them. As a result, we have to know what's going on out there. I like to keep up with what's going on. I long ago gave up listening to easy listening music and have forced myself to listen to the music kids are listening to. That's the way you do it. You have to be connected.

Keith Jones, Features Editor, *The Oakland Tribune*

*"When I first started this job I tried to return all the phone calls from the local and national arts advocacy people. Now I don't. The media guide people are particularly annoying."*

Keith Jones  
Features Editor  
*The Oakland Tribune*

# The Oakland Tribune

Saddled with a small newshole and tiny staff, editors at the *Oakland Tribune* have mastered the art of doing more with less. It is one of many challenges the paper has faced in recent years, during which it overcame near-bankruptcy and was bounced out of its headquarters by an earthquake.

The *Tribune* is the largest of six jointly operated newspapers. To benefit from economies of scale, the papers are run out of a shared office building a half-hour drive from Oakland, a setup that severs them from their home turf. There the newsroom is divided into "pods" of writers for each paper, with shared back office and production departments. Joint editors supervise individual areas of coverage, an unusual structure that likewise keeps some editors away from their staff.

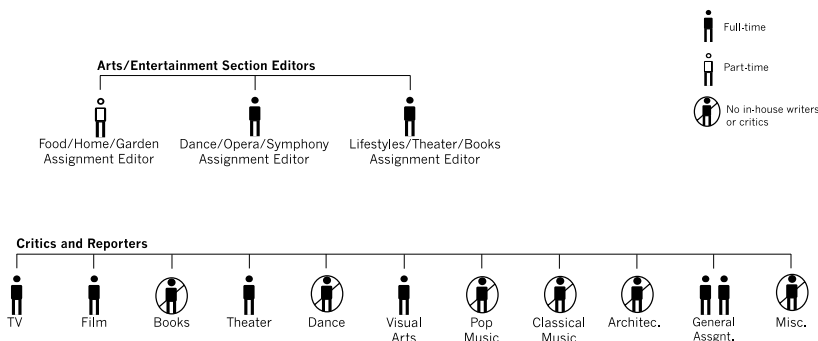
Because of its meager overall pagination, the *Tribune* cannot afford to cover the arts extensively. The shared production facilities also require that arts stories be filed by 3 p.m., causing the paper to miss overnight reviews. As a result, the *Tribune's* efforts pale next to those of the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Examiner*, and they lag behind mid-size Bay Area publications, such as the *San Jose Mercury News* and the *Contra Costa Times*. In our study, only the *Providence Journal* ran fewer articles, and only the *Charlotte Observer* devoted fewer column inches to arts coverage.

Yet unlike many of the other papers in this study, the *Tribune* does not cluster the arts into a weekend supplement. Instead, the *Tribune's* coverage is firmly subsumed inside a daily lifestyle section, "Cue," which contains all of the paper's features material and takes up more space even than the *Tribune's* business section. Although its total pagination is small, "Cue" has a higher proportion of pagination than the arts sections of all but the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

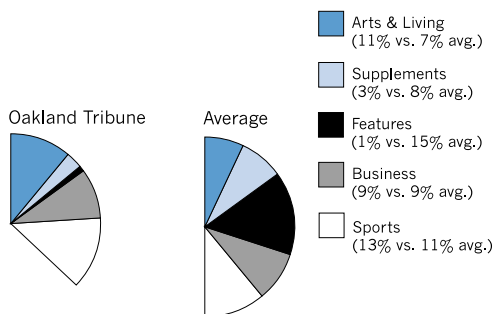
In general, the paper relies on the wires to free up its own staff to report about the local arts, resulting in an equal proportion of staff-written and wire stories. Infrequently used freelancers cover dance, classical and popular music. The two arts beats that suffer the most are music and books. And again skirting the trend found in the 15 papers studied, the *Tribune* relies very little on pictures and graphics to illustrate its arts journalism.

Owner: MediaNews Inc. Daily Circulation: 86,017 Sunday Circulation: 84,077

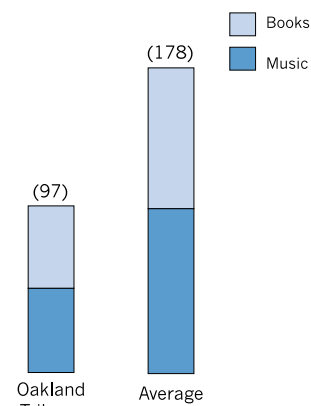
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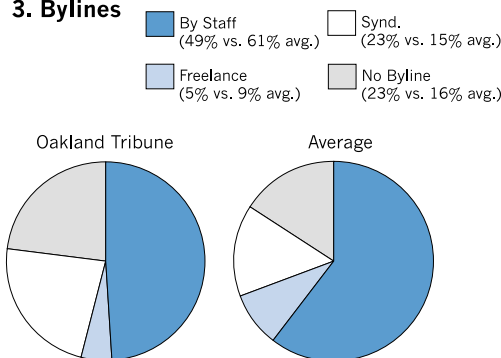
### 1. Pagination of Arts and Features Sections



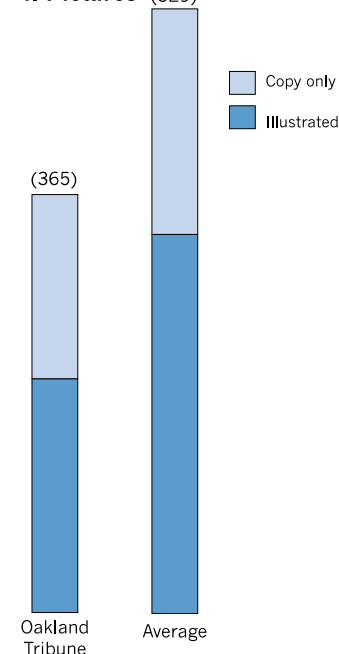
### 2. Books and Music



### 3. Bylines



### 4. Pictures



### Notes (All data for October 1998. Comprehensive data available at [www.najp.org](http://www.najp.org).)

- Percentage of pages devoted to daily Arts & Living sections, weekend arts supplements, other feature sections and other daily sections compared with the 15-newspaper average
- Number of books and music stories, listings excluded, compared with the 15-newspaper average with the number in parentheses indicating the total number of books and music articles
- Proportion of editorial space assigned to arts and culture stories, listings excluded, written by in-house staffers, freelancers and syndicated wire services compared with the 15-newspaper average
- Number of stories illustrated with pictures or graphics, listings excluded, as opposed to copy-only stories compared with the 15-newspaper average with the number in parentheses indicating the total number of articles

## THE ALTERNATIVE PRESS IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA: A CRITICAL VIEW

The San Francisco Bay Area boasts perhaps the country's most vital collection of alternative newspapers. The region is home to more than a half-dozen alternative weeklies, three of which—the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, the *East Bay Express*, and the *Pacific Sun*—date back to the 1970s. The other alternative papers of note are the *San Francisco Weekly*, launched in 1982 and now owned by New Times, Inc., which runs a number of alternative papers around the country, and the *Metro*, which is headquartered in San Jose and now bills itself as “Silicon Valley’s Weekly Newspaper.” All five papers are free.

These alternative papers are not “fringe” publications in any sense. They are well established, trusted media outlets that have matured, for better and worse, into stable and even predictable publications. And while the *San Francisco Chronicle* serves as the dominant daily voice in the region, essentially unchallenged except around San Jose, competition among the weeklies for advertising and readers is fierce.

A few general observations can be made about the weeklies’ coverage of arts and entertainment. As is the case with most newspapers, the Bay Area alternative papers devote the largest chunk of their arts coverage to film. To their credit, the weeklies generally avoid the inherently uncritical movie preview pieces that get so much space in such leading dailies as the *San Francisco Examiner*, *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *San Jose Mercury News*. Dance and theater are areas generally covered extensively, while arts that receive less coverage than they should include the visual arts and classical music. Although some of the Bay Area weeklies consider food criticism a category unto itself, separate from the arts, it is worth noting that all five of the papers devote significant space to restaurant reviews. That is hardly a surprising fact in a region positively obsessed with cuisine.

On the whole, the alternative papers in the Bay Area offer arts coverage that is more exuberant and more sharply critical, if sometimes less serious, than what’s published in the daily press. Their arts sections are much more likely than the dailies’ to cover younger, up-and-coming artists. The alternative papers continue to provide the region’s best popular music coverage, and also

employ a number of fine film critics. Like the dailies, the alternative papers could do a better job reporting on the arts as an industry.

*San Francisco Bay Guardian: The Bay Guardian*, with a circulation of 150,000, has always been known primarily as a political paper, a reputation stemming from the muckraking spirit of its founder and editor, Bruce Brugmann. Brugmann’s zeal for taking on big political targets has been both a curse and a blessing for the paper’s arts coverage. While that coverage maintains a certain second-class, back-of-the-book status at the *Guardian*, Brugmann generally gives his arts editors free reign. And since the paper is the thickest weekly in the region, those editors have more pages to work with each week than their alternative-press colleagues. The *Guardian* has played an important role in covering areas the dailies have missed, such as the surging popularity of Asian films and local pop music. And the political focus of the paper can sometimes have unexpected benefits for arts coverage. In late 1998, the *Guardian* devoted both op-ed and news section space to a growing controversy over a police crackdown at the legendary 924 Gilman St. punk club in Berkeley, thus shedding light on a story with large cultural and music-world ramifications.

*San Francisco Weekly: Since the New Times bought the paper in 1997, San Francisco Weekly* has evolved from a thin, boisterous, and uneven paper, which consciously aimed for a younger readership than the *Guardian’s*, to a bigger one with a circulation of 120,000 that has directly challenged its rival. New Times papers are known for editorial volatility, and lately this trait has struck hard at the paper’s arts coverage, leading to the departure late last year of arts editor Bill Wyman. Wyman had given the arts and entertainment pages a successful makeover, showing an inclination to hire both chatty, informal entertainment writers and high-toned critics. So far, no successor has been named, yet Mark Athitakis, a local freelancer, was hired in late 1998 as the paper’s new music editor. He has shown an interest in broadening the scope of the paper’s already strong music coverage. Another area of strength is the *Weekly’s* movie coverage, which benefits from the New Times company’s ability to run the same reviews simultaneously in a number of its weeklies, luring experienced critics while exploiting an economy of scale. Other areas are up in the air after Wyman’s departure, including theater, an area in which the paper had

begun to give consistently strong coverage to the region's thriving "black box" theater scene.

*Metro*: The *Metro* covers the South Bay, including San Jose—now the most populous city in Northern California—and adjoining Silicon Valley. This area has never been a hotbed for arts and culture, though that may change as computer industry multimillionaires engage in more extensive local philanthropy. Each week, the *Metro*, with its 100,000 circulation, runs three to five mid-length essays on such topics as film, music and theater. This is followed by an opening calendar spread it calls "Metro Guide," and a largely utilitarian arts and entertainment listings. Unfortunately, the paper, perhaps because of its newly solidified focus on Silicon Valley, has not shown an inclination to devote much space to San Francisco or East Bay arts events.

*Express*: The *Express* is dedicated specifically to covering Berkeley and Oakland. That focus shows in its arts coverage, where the emphasis is on informed depth rather than scope. The paper has a circulation of 65,000, and it includes short, critical columns on San Francisco events in its listings section. This is a new and overdue addi-

tion, but otherwise, its reviews and listings stick to the East Bay. For its size, the *Express* publishes a large amount of arts coverage, including the most extensive and opinionated calendar listings of any paper in the Bay Area. It is also the only weekly to cover classical music on a regular basis. The *Express* is known for long, and sometimes overlong, articles, and its arts reviews are generally heftier than those in the other weeklies or the dailies, running up to 1,800 words.

*Pacific Sun*: The *Pacific Sun*, with a circulation of 48,000, is similar to the *Express* in terms of its highly educated readership, but the paper serves Marin County, an area relatively devoid of arts and entertainment venues. Thus, its readers regularly travel to San Francisco and Berkeley to see live performances. The paper responds in two ways to this fact. It sometimes stretches to cover San Francisco events, and it includes within its arts and entertainment section some unusual editorial categories, including "Fashion," "Hikes" and "Technology." The paper runs several short arts essays each week, plus a music column, and it begins its short listings section with a two-page calendar highlights spread called "SunDial."

*"It's not unusual for a newspaper's ambitions to outrun its reach. We wish we could do more than we do, but we think we do a hell of a job nonetheless."*

David Beck  
Entertainment Editor  
*San Jose Mercury News*

#### VOICES FROM THE STAFF

Our biggest challenge in our coverage is to be much more inclusive of the multiple cultural events and arts and entertainment programs that are presented here. We are giving birth to how this will happen. I expect that our reporting will be deeper on the arts and entertainment of the community.

The main population in our circulation area has changed dramatically over the years. It is now 49% white, 25% Asian and 25% Hispanic. We have one of the largest populations of Indians in the U.S., as shown by the number of Indian restaurants, the traditional Indian arts schools and other cultural events. We also have large Vietnamese and Chinese populations, and a good number of people with ties to Mexico. Our challenge is therefore to cover the cultural and arts and entertainment events in these diverse communities in a way that introduces some of their arts and entertainments to an Anglo audience. And we must do it without dumbing down the coverage. We recently reviewed two films by a famous Indian director. After that article came out, the people who went to it, including Indo-Americans who work here, said they had never seen so many white people at such an event.

Apart from being multicultural, it is very important to me that the staff has a reporting background. You can call them critics or whatever, but I expect my dance critic to be an arts reporter. If there is a funding crisis with a regional dance program, I expect the critic to be on top of that. I came from 15 years in *Metro* and most recently spent six months as an assistant business editor for technology. I look for people with a reporting background, with a sense of urgency, who recognize news, and want to get it in.

Steve Wright, Editor, "Silicon Valley Life," *San Jose Mercury News*