

*Americans for the Arts presents  
the 19th Annual Nancy Hanks Lecture  
on Arts and Public Policy*



# Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts & Public Policy

*an evening with*

**William Safire**

*Monday, March 13, 2006*

*Eisenhower Theater*

*The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts*

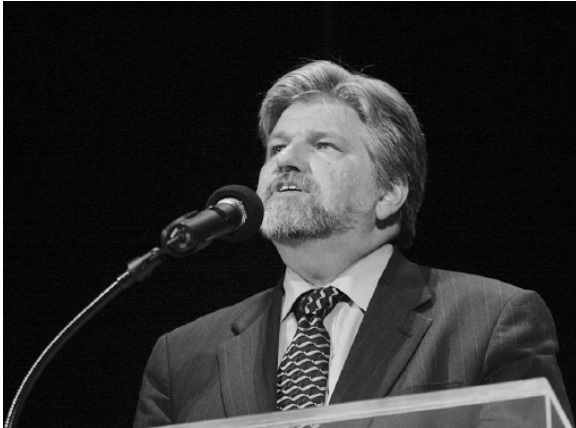
*Washington, DC*

Presented by  
Americans for the Arts  
in partnership with  
The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

Sponsored by  
The Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Foundation  
The Robert Sterling Clark Foundation  
The Betty R. Sheffer Foundation





OPENING REMARKS BY **ROBERT L. LYNCH**

Robert L. Lynch, president and CEO, Americans for the Arts

Good evening. On behalf of the Board of Directors of Americans for the Arts, I welcome all of you to the 19th Annual Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy. We have more than 1,000 of you with us tonight, including many of our nation's most influential cultural leaders. My name is Bob Lynch, and I am the president and CEO of Americans for the Arts, and I thank each one of you for what you do to bring the arts to every child and every community in America.

Americans for the Arts is the national network of 68,000 organizations, citizens, and leaders working to advance all of the arts for all of America. For 45 years, we have worked to create a climate in which the arts can thrive in every American community, to generate more money for the arts and for arts education, and to build more individual appreciation for the arts.

Our policy work includes a cultural policy development network of more than 200 convenings annually nationwide, including tonight's lecture, focusing on both private- and public-sector cultural policies. Our research development team fuels these convenings with the necessary cultural facts and figures for about 5,000 communities.

Also last year, we launched Americans for the Arts Action Fund, modeled to be a Sierra Club for the arts, if you will. Our goal is to recruit

100,000 citizen activists during the next five years to help make sure that arts-friendly policies and public funding initiatives are adopted at every level of government. In just the last 12 months, more than 13,500 citizen members have joined, and I invite each one of you to join the Arts Action Fund.

On the private-sector philanthropy front, we announced a year ago the merger of the Arts & Business Council into Americans for the Arts. By combining our resources and programming initiatives, this merger enables us to work more effectively to increase private-sector contributions to the arts, especially among corporations.

Last October, during National Arts and Humanities Month, Americans for the Arts sponsored "creative conversations" for emerging leaders. In 45 separate gatherings all around the country, 1,000 young arts leaders gathered to network with each other and to discuss new ways to support the arts in their communities.

We also continue to strengthen our longtime partnership with groups like The United States Conference of Mayors, and are now working closely with the National Association of Counties, The Film Foundation, and the National School Boards Association to promote arts education and enlist their help in making all of your voices heard.

To help us broadcast our arts message to millions of Americans, our national public service ad campaign partnership with the Ad Council—using television, radio, and print ads like this one featuring Martha Graham (see p. 2)—has reached an all-time high. We have exceeded our goal and have hit \$120 million in donated media, and the *Art. Ask for More.* ads have reached more than 150 million households nationwide.

We have with us tonight 88 of the nation's leading national arts service organizations and 350 Arts Advocacy Day delegates from across the nation, representing thousands of cultural institutions and educational organizations from cities and states throughout the country. They are here as a united force and as the national co-sponsors of Arts Advocacy Day on Capitol Hill tomorrow. Let's give them all a hand.

Americans for the Arts, along with our colleagues from the state of Vermont, is pleased to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of one of this nation's great arts leaders.

Senator Jim Jeffords has served in the United States Congress since 1975. He has dedicated much of his time and energy to championing the arts and humanities in America.

As a congressman, Jim Jeffords co-founded the Congressional Arts Caucus in the United States House of Representatives, and later as a senator, he co-founded the new Senate Cultural Caucus. As the past chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education and Labor, he led the fight to preserve the National Endowment for the Arts when it was under attack. He also wrote the legislation authorizing after-school educational programs, giving children yet another opportunity to experience the arts.

In 1997, Americans for the Arts awarded Senator Jeffords with our first Congressional Arts Leadership Award. At the end of his term this year, Senator Jeffords will retire from the United States Senate. It is now my privilege to ask Senator Jim Jeffords to stand and accept the sincere thanks of a very grateful arts community. [Senator Jeffords receives standing ovation.]

For those of you who are new to our lecture series, it was originally developed 19 years ago to honor the memory of the late Nancy Hanks, who served as the chairman of our board before being appointed by President Nixon in 1969 to become chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year.

During her eight-year tenure as the NEA chair, the agency's budget grew an astounding 1,400 percent, which ultimately changed the face of public funding for the arts in this country. And tonight, we have in the audience two of our federal arts agency leaders, current NEA Chairman Dana Gioia, and former NEA Chair Frank Hodsoll, and I would like to ask both of these individuals to also stand and be recognized.

I want to give special recognition to some people who are always there for the cause: the co-

THERE'S NOT ENOUGH ART IN OUR SCHOOLS.

NO WONDER PEOPLE THINK

**MARTHA GRAHAM**

IS A SNACK CRACKER.

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AMERICANS FOR THE ARTS

chair of the Congressional Arts Caucus, Congresswoman Louise Slaughter. And on his way from the airport, but along with Senator Jeffords, his co-chair of the Senate Arts Caucus, Senator Norm Coleman, and also Congressman Tom Cole are here with us tonight.

We have some great friends from the dance world—Liz Lerman, Graham Lustig, and Pierre Dulaine, inspiration for the film *Mad Hot Ballroom*. Thank you all for joining us.

And from the theater and film worlds, Brian Stokes Mitchell and Alec Baldwin, who has been a relentless partner, a great friend, and the voice of the ad campaign.

And some of the hardest working people I know, the Board of Directors of Americans for the Arts. Thank you, board members, for all that you do for our organization, and thank you to all of our friends tonight.

And finally, we would like to recognize the people and the organizations that have made this

event possible. Starting with our host, this is the 14th consecutive year that The Kennedy Center has co-hosted the presentation of this lecture series, and I thank them for their generosity. I want to especially thank Peggy Ayers and the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation for their long-standing support of the Hanks Lecture series and our advocacy efforts in general.

And additionally, I want to thank very much Hinda Rosenthal and her family at the Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Foundation for their 6th consecutive year of support of this lecture series. They are also helping to support a first for us. I'm pleased to announce that you'll be able to download a podcast of Mr. Safire's lecture tomorrow morning on our website at [www.AmericansForTheArts.org](http://www.AmericansForTheArts.org). Thanks to all of you for your support of the arts in this country.

And now, I am delighted to introduce a special performance in honor of our speaker, William Safire.

In years past, on the occasion of the Nancy Hanks Lecture, Americans for the Arts has brought you two separate events: first, a talk by a well-known speaker closely involved in the arts, and then a brief performance by an outstanding performing arts company.

Tonight, at the suggestion of our speaker, we are going to relate the two. The presentation of a taste of the most famous American modern dance classic will be making a point about the future of arts audiences, and that point will find an echo in the policy covered by the Hanks Lecture.

The pioneering Martha Graham Dance Company celebrates its 80th anniversary beginning next month.

Far from resting on its laurels, the Graham Company is taking a fresh approach to presenting the dances that inspired a new American art form. That approach to giving the audience the keys to understanding the art is having its success in other fields. Museums have been revitalized by audio tours; opera has lifted a new curtain with supertitles. And the Graham Company is experimenting with ways to bring more context, more points of

access, to audiences never before exposed to its modern masterworks.

Tonight the dancers bring us one example of the company's outreach. At the Hollywood Bowl recently, the Graham Company partnered with the Los Angeles Philharmonic to create a "video program note." This four-minute introduction, created by filmmaker Wayne Baruch, was projected on giant screens just before the performance of the famous modern ballet, *Appalachian Spring*.

We begin tonight with that filmed eye-opener and a brief sample from that ballet following the film. Then we will be introduced to our Nancy Hanks lecturer—and I don't want you to leave after that because after his lecture, we will conclude with another selection from *Appalachian Spring*, which the American composer Aaron Copland originally titled *A Ballet for Martha*. I hope you'll enjoy it. Thank you.

[Whereupon, a video was shown.]

Ms. Graham: *Appalachian Spring* is a joyous dance. It has its moments of darkness, too, but it is essentially joyous.

Mr. Copland: Many people have an idea that when they listen to the suite from *Appalachian Spring*, they told me they can just see the mountains, the Appalachians, and they can feel spring in the music, and they love it because of that. And I'm sometimes tempted to tell them that when I wrote the music, I hadn't any idea what it was going to be called.



Members of the Martha Graham Dance Company perform *Appalachian Spring*

Ms. Graham: This is the story of a young married couple who are coming into their home for the first time. It begins in the daylight and ends in the evening when they are alone. The preacher is the itinerant preacher who teaches and preaches the evils that love can lead one into, and the followers are the ones who are charmed and seduced by him, and the pioneer woman is the one who has experienced all this before.

Mr. Copland: It never occurred to me to wonder what she was going to call it, so when I came to Washington to hear the first performance, the first thing I said to her was, “Martha, what did you call the ballet?” And she said, *Appalachian Spring*. And I said, “Oh, what a nice name, where did you get it?” And she said, “Well, it’s the name of a poem by Hart Crane.” Well, I said, “Is the ballet anything to do with the poem?” She said, “No, I just like the title, so I just borrowed it.”

Ms. Graham: I could never have done the dance except for the two men who worked with me so carefully and so wholeheartedly, Aaron Copland on the score, which is utterly charming, and Isamu Noguchi, whose building and indication of set are so provocative.

Mr. Copland: It seems to me that when you write music for the dance, the point is to have the music itself reflect the general emotional feeling of the dance. Wouldn’t you say that was true, Martha?

Ms. Graham: Oh, yes, and that’s wonderful.

Mr. Copland: And I think, too, that in writing a thing like *Appalachian Spring*, I had very much in the front of my mind the personality of the dancer I was working for, Ms. Graham, because another dancer who had submitted the exact same story might have gotten a different sort of music out of me, being a different sort of dancer.

Ms. Graham: Well, I’m very fortunate I got it.

[Whereupon, the Martha Graham Dance Company performed.]

Wow. Remember that they will be back after this evening’s lecture.

I am particularly pleased to introduce our next speaker. Americans for the Arts first got to work with Norm Coleman when he was a great mayor for the arts. Less than a year ago, United States Senator Norm Coleman of Minnesota joined Senators Kennedy, Enzi, and Jeffords in sending an extraordinary “Dear Colleague” letter to all members of the Senate. In their letter, they wrote:

“Arts and culture are among the most prominent means by which we communicate within our communities, our country, and across the world. We are establishing a Senate Cultural Caucus to bring focus to the arts and humanities and the positive impact they have on our daily lives.”

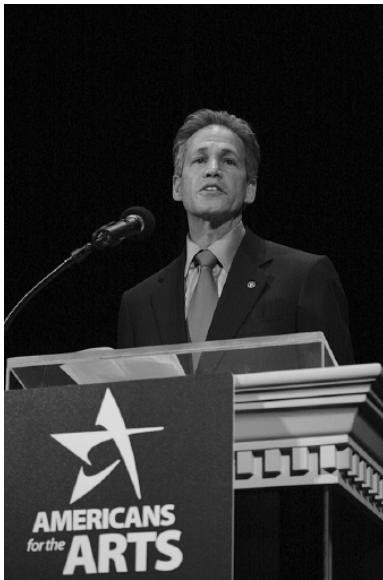
With his co-chairs, Senator Coleman then recruited 30 senators to join—all in less than a year. The caucus is now formulating a program of special events that will make our U.S. Capitol a symbol not only of American democracy, but also of American arts and culture. I know that all of us look forward to that time.

Please join me in giving a warm welcome to Senate Cultural Caucus Co-Chair Norm Coleman, who will be formally introducing his friend, William Safire.

**“Appalachian Spring is a joyous dance. It has its moments of darkness, too, but it is essentially joyous.”**

**—MARTHA GRAHAM**

## INTRODUCTION BY SENATOR NORM COLEMAN



Senator Norm Coleman introduces William Safire

**T**hank you. I have no alternative but to support the arts. My wife was a professional ballerina, and my daughter aspires to be one.

It's an honor to be associated with this event tonight and introduce our main speaker. As I said, the arts are an important part of my life and my service in the Senate. The arts appeal to the better "angels" in all of us.

There are far too many things that tend to drive us apart at this moment in history. The arts have always played the role of bringing us back together by encouraging a long view both back and forward. I grew up in New York and am familiar with the outstanding work of the Dana Foundation, and I want to thank all of you for lending your support to this event tonight.

It would not be so intimidating to be around William Safire if you didn't have to use words. Since this is an arts event, I considered introducing him with interpretive dance, but I couldn't think of a polite republican motion for *New York Times*.

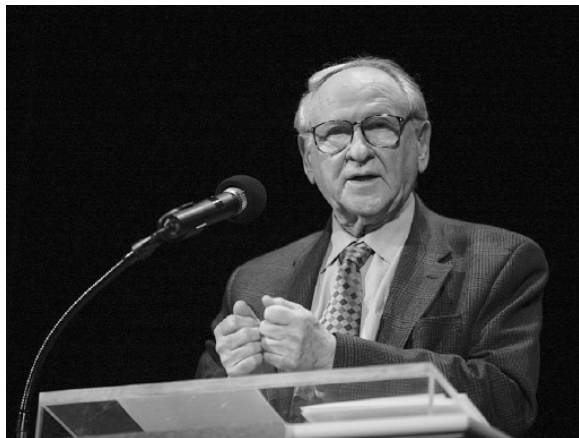
I'll forge ahead, but I have to tell you that I have been having this recurring nightmare about a follow-up column entitled "Senator's Syntax Shreds Civilization."

I want our speaker to know that his advice on language is being taken very seriously in the United States Senate. We've almost agreed to amend our standing rules with his third rule of writing, which goes like this: "If you reread your work, you will find that, on rereading, that a great deal of repetition can be avoided by rereading and editing."

We also follow the E.B. White corollary to it, "be obscure clearly." We have an FCC to protect the airwaves, we have an FAA to protect the skies, we have an FDA to protect the food supply, but we have no one to protect something just as valuable—the meaning of words. So, our guest tonight has taken that upon himself. He is a self-appointed Fort Knox of American language usage. He is America's pre-eminent lexicographer. He brought Nixon and Khrushchev together in their famous "kitchen debate." He wrote speeches in the White House. He won the Pulitzer Prize. By God's plan, or maybe just because of providence's sense of humor, all we have to connect with each other and to try to run the world is words. Dedicating a life to putting meaning back into words and teaching us how to use them is a monumental task, but I can't think of another one that's more important.

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome William Safire.

## WILLIAM SAFIRE



William Safire delivers the 2006 Nancy Hanks Lecture

**T**hank you, Senator Norm Coleman. You're the husband of a dancer and the father of another dancer, which means you belong here and believe in what Americans for the Arts is doing. I kind of like the idea that a graduate of the James Madison High School in Brooklyn, New York, is introducing a graduate—at the bottom of his class—of the Bronx High School of Science, and now we're both spending the rest of our lives here in Washington, DC.

We've just seen here on this stage the first part of a live performance by a pioneer American dance company, with its message set in context by electronic means, on this huge, inescapable screen. The dancers will be back, as Bob Lynch told you, before this evening ends, which was his shrewd way of keeping you in your seats throughout the 19th Annual Nancy Hanks Lecture.

I was careful to observe the way the Martha Graham dancers took their bow at the end of this opening sequence. Bows come in all varieties, from the deep floor-sweeper to the short and mincing curtsy. I watched this bow closely because it gives me a necessary metaphor for the theme of my speech tonight.

It happens that two of my colleagues at the Dana Foundation studied with that American

artistic icon, Martha Graham, years ago. Barbara Rich was a student at her school, then went on to take her doctorate in education, and now directs most of our arts and education work. Janet Eilber was a renowned principal Graham dancer and is now the artistic director of the Martha Graham Center, as well as Dana's principal arts consultant.

One day last fall, after a particularly paralyzing PowerPoint presentation, a grantee of ours took an exaggerated bow, and Barbara and Janet said in unison, "Never show the audience the back of your neck!"

That stern admonition, it seems, was frequently delivered by Martha Graham to her dancers. But it is more than a great choreographer's warning. First, it can be taken as a metaphor opposing excess humility. Do you remember when people said "thank you," the proper response was "you're welcome"? Now our reply is an obsequious "thank you." Graham saw the applause as the audience saying "thank you," and the performer's correct response was to signify in a bow, "you're welcome."

Second, the admonition about not showing the back of the neck is a rejection of mistaken detachment and a call for continuous contact between performer and audience. This calls to my mind the need for a triple interface—if you can imagine that—among artists and educators and cognitive scientists.

Third, in Graham's warning, is a word-picture, a trope of hope, for the need to make classic works of art relevant to what's in the minds of today's audiences. That's why I have taken it as the title of my talk tonight—"Never Show the Audience the Back of Your Neck."

But in the words of the great democratic chairman and orator Bob Strauss, "Before I begin this speech, there's something I want to say."

There's a good reason that Americans for the Arts calls this the Nancy Hanks Lecture. I knew this remarkable woman during the Nixon years in Washington when I worked in the White House. My fellow speechwriter, Ray Price, was enlisted by this Rockefeller Brothers





Americans for the Arts Board Chair Steven D. Spiess, William Safire, and Robert L. Lynch

arts enthusiast in the cause of federal support for the arts. The NEA had been launched during Lyndon Johnson's presidency but was languishing in budgetary neglect. I should note parenthetically here that not one single White House speechwriter in the history of the United States has gone to jail.

Expectations were low, to say the least, for President Nixon's support of the arts. But Nancy Hanks and Ray Price had a powerful ally in Leonard Garment, the former Nixon law partner and later White House Counsel, who in his youth played clarinet in Woody Herman's band. Nancy kept in close touch with Len, providing all the artistic arguments, and Len in turn worked over the president, who admired Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra. But I can hear Nixon's voice now, saying to me from his place in purgatory—he's in purgatory because he has to expiate the sin of imposing wage and price controls. And I wrote that speech. But I can hear his voice now, saying—and this is accurate—"You know, Bill, there's not a single vote in this for me," which was true.

**"The vogue word in the vocabulary of education has become 'accountability,' and the essence of that is 'measurement.' Math and science and reading results are measurable, but how do you score, with absolute objectivity, a child's ability to learn to dance or tootle a horn or emote onstage?"**

**—WILLIAM SAFIRE**

And as Len candidly recounted in the 1989 Nancy Hanks Lecture, Nancy and he found what he called a "policy window," which he said was "like the windows of good weather that NASA watches for when planning a space shot." That policy window, he said, was a war. "It was the country's biggest problem that provided Nancy and me with our opportunity... The Vietnam War had turned America into two mutually hostile camps... the president wanted for his own an issue that would not divide his audience into sympathetic hawks and hostile doves... this was the reason my arguments for the arts found favor." Nixon then essentially refounded the National Endowment for the Arts, doubled its budget, got the appropriation from Congress, and named the person who had pushed so relentlessly—Nancy Hanks—to take charge. That governmental support of the arts—along with the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency and Pat Moynihan's welfare reform—is, of course, why Nixon is remembered so fondly by liberals today.

I had to say that because I see that Alec Baldwin is here tonight, and will be with his date, Maureen Dowd, my old colleague.

But seriously, it was the perseverance of the soft-spoken lady [Nancy Hanks], whose picture should now be up on the screen, that was a primary source of that breakthrough. She and her determined cohort maintained political eye contact with her target; she "never let the audience see the back of her neck."

Now to the lecture in her name. As a vice presidential candidate once asked in a television debate, "Why am I here?" What's a longtime vituperative right-wing scandalmonger doing, talking to this audience about the value of education in the arts and the need for a new relevance in the presentation of the classics?

The Dana Foundation, a medium-sized philanthropy that I chair, is active mainly in two areas: brain science and arts in education. We make grants to scientists who make innovative and sometimes daring investigations in neuroscience and the new field of neuroimmunology. Fifteen years ago, when the “decade of the brain” was having trouble getting off the ground, we organized the Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives. This alliance of brain scientists, now including 10 Nobel laureates, set understandable goals, led the way out of the ivory tower, and talked plainly to the public; that continuing campaign has had a lot to do with the major increase in private and public support of brain research.

Six years ago, Dana began to develop a niche—niche or niche—well, there will be three grammatical errors in today’s presentation—they’re a test. It’s a test.

Our interest was in funding organizations that taught professional artists how to become educators—to teach in public schools. You’ll notice that in their late 30s, many dancers have to change careers, they just can’t keep dancing, and they become teachers and educators in the arts. But they haven’t had any training in teaching; their lives have been training in arts, and we wanted to join that movement of teaching artists how to teach in public schools.

We started a series of grants for the teacher training of musicians, actors, playwrights, and dancers in the metropolitan areas of New York, DC, and Los Angeles, and this year began to use

**“When children take training in some performance art—music, dance, drama—does cognitive improvement take place in their brains? For example, it’s obvious that some kids with a knack for learning to play a musical instrument also have a knack for mathematics. Does that mean that studying one actually helps the other?”**

**—WILLIAM SAFIRE**



Representative Louise Slaughter, co-chair of the Congressional Arts Caucus, and William Safire

that experience in rural areas around the country. Some of our grantees in the DC area are here tonight, which is why you’ll occasionally hear scattered applause.

Then a lightbulb went on in our brains. That’s not a technical term, it’s a work of art. Why not apply the expertise of some of our great neuroscientists to one of the urgent needs of arts education?

Here’s the problem in arts ed: as you know better than anyone, in many school districts that are hard pressed for money, the teaching of the arts is treated as a fringe benefit—nice if you can afford it, but the first area that the school board cuts when budgets tighten. And you can hardly blame the harried budgeteers for asking: how do we know if training in the arts makes you any smarter? School is all about teaching the brain to learn. Art may be fun, they say, but math, science, reading comprehension—those are the subjects that build the brain, and those can accurately be tested for progress.

The vogue word in the vocabulary of education has become “accountability,” and the essence of that is “measurement.” Math and science and reading results are measurable, but how do you score, with absolute objectivity, a child’s ability to learn to dance or tootle a horn or emote onstage?

At Dana, we’re also high on science education, and today marks the start of our 11th annual “Brain Awareness Week,” celebrated in schools in 65 countries; also, the Dana Center at the

University of Texas has helped raise the math scores of students throughout that state, and its innovations are being replicated elsewhere. But with one foot planted in neuroscience and the other in education, we wondered: isn't there a way to prove that the study of the arts is also important in brain development? Put in more scientific terminology: can the latest imaging techniques that enable us to see functional activity inside our brains help us determine if its physical connections are somehow strengthened by studious exposure to the arts?

You may remember that a dozen years ago, much was made of a "Mozart effect." An experiment had shown that a person listening to complex classical music for a while before taking a test did better than someone who was listening to nothing beforehand. Publicity about that had some pregnant women listening to more than a little night music in hopes that their infants would be born brilliant. It's safe to say that it didn't hurt. And before taking an IQ test, you're probably better off listening to music, to Mozart or Schubert, than listening to a tape urging you to relax or just staring at a blank wall and worrying. But the flurry of interest in a hoped-for effect of music on the brain showed a desire for some practical benefit.

That took us into the world of cognitive neuroscience, the study of the way the brain perceives and evaluates information and stores it in memory. I define this relatively new field as the study of thinking and learning and remembering knowledge. Several of the scientists we work with directed us to the man often described as the father of cognitive neuroscience: professor Michael Gazzaniga of Dartmouth, president of the American Psychological Society.

The question we put to him was this: when children take training in some performance art—music, dance, drama—does cognitive improvement take place in their brains? For example, it's obvious that some kids with a knack for learning to play a musical instrument also have a knack for mathematics. Does that mean that studying one actually helps the other?

When I put that question to professor Gazzaniga, he replied, "That means that talent in music is



William Safire

often correlative with math aptitude—but is it causal?" Just to keep my semantic hand in, I asked if he meant "causal" or "causative," and that stopped him for a moment. I do that to assert my own area of expertise. But causal and causative mean the same thing—making something happen. Scientists prefer causal, so I go along.

That's the first step: can brain scientists establish a causal link between arts training and other cognitive skills? And beyond that potential "near transfer" of a specific skill, is there a "far transfer" of some underlying advantage to early arts training, such as a general ability to focus attention? That ability to concentrate is often the beginning of learning anything.

Now, advances in imaging techniques have given us new ways of measuring the connections and networks in the developing and mature human brain. The time is ripe, it seems, to go after the answers about the effects of arts education that were beyond the reach of scientists only five or 10 years ago.

We asked professor Gazzaniga what talent and



William Safire and Sen. Norm Coleman

money would be needed for a long-term, wide-ranging scientific study of this question so central to both educators and artists. He knew many of the leading investigators in this field and in what universities their far-flung laboratories were located, and came up with a plan for the enlistment and coordination of some of the best minds in brainwork. The Dana Arts and Cognition Consortium was born. The scientists in a three-year, eight-laboratory study included his colleagues and former students in Dartmouth and Harvard in the East; University of Michigan in the Midwest; and the University of Oregon, Stanford, and University of California at Berkeley in the West. It helped that most of the scientists knew and respected one another and could tie together their progress through private Internet connections as well as interim meetings and reports of independent reviewers looking over their shoulders.

I was excited at the prospect of providing some much-needed scientific ammunition to the coalition of educators and artists in their dealings with school boards and legislatures. But Gazzaniga cautioned that the results would not be influenced by wishful policy thinking: if the scientists concluded that no causal relationship could be found—no near or far transfer of skills from one domain in the brain to another—then that's what they would report publicly. This from the author of a book published this year called *The Ethical Brain*,

and who was frequently the dissenting voice on the president's Bioethics Panel.

We chewed over this gamble with Dana's chief scientific consultant, Dr. Guy McKhann of Johns Hopkins. He pointed to recent research on children brought up in bilingual homes who showed an advantage of learning skill in brain domains other than language. The Dana board decided to take its chances and granted \$2 million for the three-year project. Two million bucks doesn't sound like much here in Washington, DC, but in the world of innovative neuroscience research, it supports a lot of dedicated brainwork.

Just as an aside about the scope of the word "billions," I was writing the introduction to the budget message in the early '70s, and I went into the Cabinet room for a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Policy—CabComEcoPol, we called it. And there was William McChesney Martin left over from the previous era, and Dr. Arthur Burns and Dr. Paul McCracken and Dr. Herb Stein—classy bunch of guys, nobody went to jail—and I said, "Look, gentlemen, I'm sorry, I can't stay for the whole meeting. I just have to write the introduction, can you give me the figure, what is the budget deficit this year going to be?" And Dr. Burns sighed deeply and said, "\$20 billion," and everybody nodded sagely. And I shook my head, and Dr. Burns said, "What's the matter, Mr. Speechwriter, you don't like the size of the deficit?" And I said, "Dr. Burns, I don't profess to know anything about economics, I just write the president's economic addresses, but \$20 billion won't do. Make it \$19.5, make it \$21.3—make it look as if you worked on it," and Dr. McCracken

**"The incentive to practice instills a habit of discipline in students that will be needed in the workplace, and thereby may help American graduates compete in global markets."**

—WILLIAM SAFIRE

**“That’s why some of us who seek to discover how the study of the arts affect the brain would do well to open our own minds to the hidden treasure in the arts. By encouraging some study beforehand—or even by using new technology to heighten understanding while the show is on—we take audience members into the artists’ confidence, thereby enriching the receptive experience of what is created onstage or on the screen or in the air.”**

**—WILLIAM SAFIRE**

said, “You know, the kid’s got a point there,” and Dr. Burns said, “Okay, \$21 billion.” And I thought, to my shock and horror, I had just cost the taxpayers a billion dollars. So, when we toss around figures here in Washington, DC, you’ve got to remember that most of them are projections, pie-in-the-sky, and who knows. But when we’re talking about what a foundation is laying out for a study, \$2 million is a lot of money.

Now, even if the study does not show causality, we knew there were still strong arguments for public support of the inclusion of arts in the school curriculum, and you know them better than most. One, participation in the performing arts brings kids to school even on the rainiest days. Two, it raises the sense of self-worth needed by pupils discouraged by struggles with academic subjects. Sports does, too. Three, the incentive to practice instills a habit of discipline in students that will be needed in the workplace, and thereby may help American graduates compete in global markets.

Finally, and to most of us most important, active understanding of what it means to perform and appreciate art enriches life during school years and long after graduation.

Tonight, however, a little over halfway through our three-year study, I’m here to report some preliminary results that are not conclusive but show the possibility of adding a fifth reason, one of accountability, to the argument for support of the performing arts in schools. The visual arts are not yet on our agenda for study, but given some encouraging results in dance, drama, and music, they will be.

The Dana Consortium cognitive neuroscientists, and I presume other neuroscientists as well, are developing new measurement capabilities to explain how signals from different parts of the brain combine to drive an entire pattern of behavior. By providing images of the physical and functional connections between brain regions, these scientists should find it possible to obtain information about the neural networks underlying individual arts and test whether and how arts training alters the brain.

I concede this is heavy going—for both of us—and I have no intention of burdening us all with a PowerPoint presentation of diffusion tensor imaging showing how long fibers called white matter carry signals to gray matter regions. The scientists sent me several charts to show you this, and I am not burdening you with it today.



William Safire

The scientists report, though, that as children learn to read, those fibers grow—and you can see them on these images—and members of the consortium are investigating which types of education help them grow. It may be—and I’m being very careful to say that we don’t know for sure yet—that training in the arts helps develop the fibers necessary for reading, math, and language.

Here’s a study going on at the University of Oregon that seems especially promising. Helen Neville and her associates are studying how arts education affects cognition in three- to five-year-old kids. To avoid the problem of self-selection that calls many studies into doubt, the Oregon team randomly assigned children from Head Start schools to music or arts training, or to a control group that received no such training. Though the number of children is small, this controlled, prospective experiment is well designed to get at the causality issue. What do early results of this limited test show? After the music and arts training, there are significant, even robust, increases in several tests of language, in skill with numbers and math, and in spatial reasoning. I didn’t know what spatial reasoning was, and it was explained to me that it is something that is probably improved by dance training. It has to do with being able to figure out in advance how much wrapping paper you will need for a given box. For artists, it’s very important because it’s helpful in figuring perspective. It’s a very important thing in the brain. I’m not good at it at all. I keep trying to put the package together with not enough wrapping paper—but I never learned to rhumba, either.

Now, here is what the first indications show: children in the Head Start group taking arts and music training improved in language scores, while children in the control classes not exposed to such arts training showed no significant gains. This finding indicates that arts training has a specific causal effect—not “Mozart effect,” but causal effect—on cognition. The consortium scientists, at a meeting I attended a few months ago, urged Dana to extend this rigorously controlled experiment to a larger group, which we did, and we should have some solid evidence about this in our full report next year.

Now, does this encouraging preliminary finding mean that if your kids spend 10 hours a week practicing the piano, they’ll be better at math?

Could be; however, let’s be realistic. If they spend those same 10 hours a week studying more math, it’s likely they’ll be even better at math—but what kind of people will they grow up to be? We don’t expect arts participation at an early age to be a panacea, but there’s reason to hope we may soon have evidence that it helps the whole brain to focus—which would be of importance in every field—as well as possibly to transfer the benefits of arts learning to other specific domains in the brain.

**“Your current activism in advocacy brings me to a final facet of Martha Graham’s vivid admonition about not showing your neck. One challenge to the arts in America is the need to make the arts, especially the classic masterpieces, accessible and relevant to today’s audience. As we go all-out to advance arts in education, we all could use more education in the arts themselves.”**

**—WILLIAM SAFIRE**

That’s a glimpse of some of what these Dana Consortium scientists are working on, about halfway through the project. In the middle of 2007, we’ll have our report, and I have a hunch it will stimulate further research.

The U.S. Department of Education has not shown interest, but that’s okay because we are not looking for federal help. On the other hand, Chairman Dana Gioia at the National Endowment for the Arts had professor Gazzaniga and Ms. Eilber in for a briefing early on, and we’ll keep the folks at Nancy’s old outfit informed as we move along. If the consortium study comes out as I hope, it would give new impetus to an appreciation of the value of support of the arts in American education to parents, teachers, and students.

It might help many of you, too. I know that Americans for the Arts helps channel the energies of tens of thousands of citizens, urging private and public support of actors, dancers, play-

wrights, musicians, and students who dream of being all of the above. Many of you have come to Washington, DC, to take part in Arts Advocacy Day tomorrow. As a foundation-nik, I can't buttonhole anybody to lobby for anything, but you can—and more power to you as you show your activism and involvement. It may be, if our hypotheses hold up, that you will soon have some additional persuasive arguments.

Your current activism in advocacy brings me to a final facet of Martha Graham's vivid admonition about not showing your neck. One challenge to the arts in America is the need to make the arts, especially the classic masterpieces, accessible and relevant to today's audience. As we go all-out to advance arts in education, we all could use more education in the arts themselves.

We know how museums of fine arts are making their walls come alive with audio tours, and how opera companies are using technology to make their foreign-language productions understandable to people who speak English, or even American. Some artists believe that teaching an audience about the background and meaning of the classic presentation they are about to see or hear is talking down to that audience. They believe that a work must speak for itself, that a writer or performer must assume that the audience enters the hall primed and ready to interpret all the nuances that go into artistic expression. They treat a complex movement or a jazz musician's intricate riff as caviar to the general. I don't agree. Of course any audience member has the right to opt out of any access to understanding. But most people, I think, would welcome some engagement about what to look for beforehand. Illuminating a performance will make an audience not just more appreciative, but more demanding and more likely to come back again.

That's what I try to do in writing my column about language. I just used the expression "caviar to the general" as if it meant "an expensive delicacy appreciated by big shots like army generals." That's the opposite of what the playwright who coined the phrase meant. Caviar, from a Turkish word, means "salty fish eggs," and "the general" meant "the general public,"

which in Shakespeare's time rejected caviar as an exotic dish of foul-smelling fish eggs. So, when Hamlet tells the players, "The play, I remember, pleased not the million; 'twas caviar to the general," he was saying that most people in the general public rejected the play as fishy, even stinky. Now, when you next go to *Hamlet*, and you hear that line, you will get its true meaning—disliked by the great majority—and believe me, you'll be sure to point it out to your companion at the next intermission.

Knowing inside stuff is a great one-up; never say you didn't learn anything useful at a Nancy Hanks Lecture.

My point is that there are hundreds of such little insights in that one classic, not to mention the profound psychological insights. Dana published a book a few years ago titled *The Bard and the Brain*, showing how the playwright presented what we are now coming to better understand as mental pathologies. It's an example of how art can be prescient—a word from "prescientific"—just as cognitive science today can help illuminate classic art.

That's why some of us who seek to discover how the study of the arts affect the brain would do well to open our own minds to the hidden treasure in the arts. By encouraging some study beforehand—or even by using new technology to heighten understanding while the show is on—we take audience members into the artists' confidence, thereby enriching the receptive experience of what is created onstage or on the screen or in the air.

Let me apply this to the art we are participating in tonight, relating this lecture to performance. Bob Lynch told us that the Martha Graham Company is to launch its 80th anniversary celebration next month. The dancers will be appearing in schools and museums and other venues all over New York starting April 18, and later on the road around the nation and the world. They are taking a fresh approach to presenting the dances that inspired a new American art form. The center's goal is to present classics in context, more intimately involving today's audiences by letting them in on what's going on. And you saw a lit-

tle taste of that in that film from the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Back in the '80s—excuse me—back in the '90s—the years all run together—I went to the Library of Congress to see a performance of the most famous American modern dance, *Appalachian Spring*. A half-century before, the library had commissioned the composer Aaron Copland and choreographer Martha Graham to create the work—which, by the way, turned out to be a pretty good early example of U.S. government support of the arts. You saw the excerpt from that a little while ago, and will get another taste in a minute. When I first saw it at the library, I didn't know from modern dance. It struck me as a simple story of a couple pledging themselves to each other on their wedding day. With the ministrations of a Preacher and his Followers, and the blessings of a character called the Pioneering Woman, they settle into a new home on the edge of the frontier. Pleasant story, catchy music, delightful dancing—and that was it, in my mind.

But of course this quintessentially American work is much more profound than that. From the notes back and forth between the composer and choreographer during World War II, we have learned how their artistic contribution to the war effort—and that's what they called it—was in creating a multilayered metaphor for the American experience. A key theme in Copland's music was a then-little-known Quaker hymn about the gift of freedom and the discipline of simplicity; in the sets by Noguchi is the sense of frontier spaciousness beyond the horizon; in the movement of the dancers—from the foot-stomping, thigh-slapping do-si-do expressing a spirit of youthful exuberance—we are moved by the unique American vernacular. As it was explained to me, and then as I applied it to my own life's experiences, the underlying creative purpose of the wartime classic became clear: in the surge of all this sound and motion, culminating in a swooping lift, is the message of American optimism and determination in the face of great challenges.

Because *Appalachian Spring* is timeless, it has never been more timely. I think it has become the obligation of the presenters and performers



Tadej Brdnik and Miki Orihara of the Martha Graham Dance Company

today to let today's audience in on the context of our classics as well as to reveal what's behind the creation of new classics.

Never underestimate the power of the human brain to respond to metaphor. Never fear to make our deepest themes accessible to a wider audience. Never assume that early study of the arts in school is not connected with the development of the brain and the tuning of attention. Never break contact with your audience when pressing your case or taking your bows. Listen to Martha; emulate Nancy; “Never show the audience the back of your neck.”

[Whereupon, the Martha Graham Dance Company entered for closing performance.]

**“Never underestimate the power of the human brain to respond to metaphor. Never fear to make our deepest themes accessible to a wider audience. Never assume that early study of the arts in school is not connected with the development and the tuning of attention.”**

**—WILLIAM SAFIRE**



CONCLUDING REMARKS BY **STEVEN D. SPIESS**



Steven D. Spiess,  
Chair, Americans for  
the Arts Board of  
Directors

**T**hat's a hard act to follow. Good evening. I'm Steve Spiess, the chairman of the board of Americans for the Arts, and I have the task of asking you to join me in tonight's thank yous. First and foremost, to William Safire for an absolutely inspirational talk.

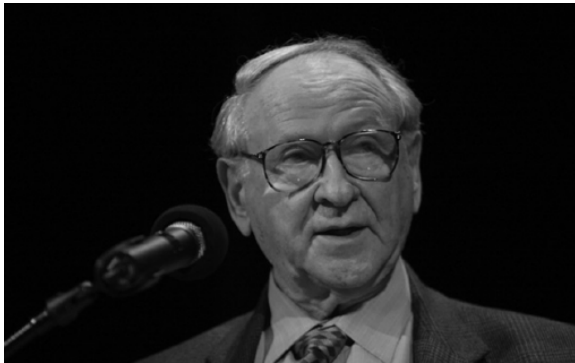
And next to the truly inspirational Martha Graham Dance Company.

Senator Coleman. And to our hosts here at The Kennedy Center.

And finally, the last thank you of the night goes to you all. We have some old friends who have been here for many or most of the Hanks lectures and some new friends who are here tonight for the first time, and we thank you all for the work that you do every day in trying to bring the arts to your communities and to every child across the country. So, to you, thank you.

And finally, last but not least, an invitation to you all to please join us upstairs in the Atrium for a reception in honor of tonight's presenters. There are volunteers in the back of the theater who will show you how to get up there. Thank you very much, and we look forward to seeing you next year. Good night.

## ABOUT THE LECTURER



William Safire, winner of the 1978 Pulitzer Prize for distinguished commentary, joined the *New York Times* in April 1973 as a political columnist. He now writes a Sunday column, “On Language,” which has appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* since 1979. This column on grammar and usage has led to the publication of books and makes him the most widely read writer on the English language.

Before joining the *Times*, Mr. Safire was a senior White House speechwriter for President Nixon. He had previously been a radio and television producer, a U.S. Army correspondent, and began his career as a reporter for a profiles column in the *New York Herald Tribune*. From 1955 to 1960, Mr. Safire was a public relations executive in New York City. He was responsible for bringing Mr. Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev together in the 1959 Moscow “kitchen debate.” In 1968, he left to join the campaign of Richard Nixon.

He is the author of four novels, including *Freedom*, a novel of Lincoln and the Civil War. His dictionary, *The New Language of Politics*, has helped two generations of politicians and voters understand one another. His anthology of great speeches, *Lend Me Your Ears*, is the best seller in that field.

Mr. Safire was born in 1929 and attended Syracuse University; a dropout after two years, he returned a generation later to deliver the commencement address and is now trustee. He has served as a member of the Pulitzer Board, and is now chairman and chief executive of the Dana Foundation, a philanthropic organization supporting brain science, immunology, and arts education.

## ABOUT THE PRESENTERS



Americans for the Arts is the nation's leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts in America. With 45 years of service, it is dedicated to representing and serving local communities and creating opportunities for every American to participate in and appreciate all forms of the arts. With offices in Washington, DC, and New York City, and more than 5,000 organizational and individual members across the country, Americans for the Arts is focused on three primary goals: 1) to foster an environment in which the arts can thrive and contribute to the creation of more livable communities; 2) to generate more public- and private-sector resources for the arts and arts education; and 3) to build individual appreciation of the value of the arts. To achieve its goals, Americans for the Arts partners with local, state, and national arts organizations; government agencies; business leaders; individual philanthropists; educators; and funders throughout the country. It provides extensive arts industry research and information and professional development opportunities for community arts leaders via specialized programs and services, including a content-rich website and an annual national convention.

Local arts agencies throughout the United States comprise Americans for the Arts' core constituency. A variety of unique partner networks with particular interests like public art, united arts fundraising, arts education, and emerging arts leaders are also supported. Through national visibility campaigns and local outreach, Americans for the Arts strives to motivate and mobilize opinion leaders and decision-makers who can make the arts thrive in America. Americans for the Arts produces annual events that heighten national visibility for the arts, including The National Arts Awards honoring private-sector leadership and the Public Leadership in the Arts Awards (in cooperation with The U.S. Conference of Mayors) honoring elected officials in local, state, and federal government. Americans for the Arts also hosts Arts Advocacy Day annually on Capitol Hill, convening arts advocates from around the country to advance federal support of the arts, humanities, and arts education. For more information about Americans for the Arts, please visit [www.AmericansForTheArts.org](http://www.AmericansForTheArts.org).



The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, overlooking the Potomac River in Washington, DC, is America's living memorial to President Kennedy. Under the guidance of President Michael M. Kaiser, the seven theaters and stages of the nation's busiest performing arts facility with audiences totaling two million; Center-related touring productions, television, and radio broadcasts welcome 20 million more. Now in its 35th season, the Center presents the greatest examples of music, dance, and theater; supports artists in the creation of new work; and serves the nation as a leader in arts education. With its artistic affiliate, the National Symphony Orchestra, the Center's achievements as a commissioner, producer, and nurturer of developing artists have resulted in over 200 theatrical productions, dozens of new ballets, operas, and musical works. The Center has produced and co-produced *Annie*, *Guys and Dolls*, *The King and I*, the American premiere of *Les Misérables*, the highly acclaimed Sondheim Celebration as well as the three-play *Tennessee Williams Explored*. The Center's Emmy and Peabody Award-winning *The Kennedy Center Honors* is broadcast annually on the CBS Network; *The Kennedy Center Mark Twain Prize* is seen on PBS.

Each year more than 11 million people nationwide, take part in innovative and effective education programs initiated by the Center—performances, lecture/demonstrations, open rehearsals, dance and music residencies, master classes, competitions for young actors and musicians, and workshops for teachers. These programs have become models for communities across the country. As part of the Kennedy Center's Performing Arts for Everyone outreach program, the Center and the National Symphony Orchestra stage more than 400 free performances of music, dance, and theater by artists from throughout the world each year on the Center's main stages, and every evening at 6:00 p.m. on the Millennium Stage. The Center also offers the nation's largest Specially Priced Tickets program for students, seniors, persons with disabilities, military personnel, and others with fixed low incomes.

## ABOUT THE **NANCY HANKS LECTURE**

Nancy Hanks was president of Americans for the Arts (formerly the American Council for the Arts) from 1968–69, when she was appointed chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, a position she held for eight years. Until her death in 1983, she worked tirelessly to bring the arts to prominent national consciousness. During her tenure at the National Endowment for the Arts, the agency’s budget grew 1,400 percent. This year marks the 19th Annual Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy, established to honor her memory and to provide an opportunity for public discourse at the highest levels on the importance of the arts and culture to our nation’s well-being.

### PAST NANCY HANKS LECTURERS

- 2005 Ken Burns, documentary filmmaker
- 2004 Doris Kearns Goodwin, journalist and author
- 2003 Robert Redford, artist and activist
- 2002 Zelda Fichandler, Founding Director of Arena Stage in Washington, DC, and Chair of the Graduate Acting Program at New York University
- 2001 Frank Rich, op-ed columnist for *The New York Times*
- 2000 Terry Semel, past Chairman and Co-CEO of Warner Bros. and Warner Music Group
- 1999 Wendy Wasserstein, playwright
- 1998 Dr. Billy Taylor, jazz musician and educator
- 1997 Alan K. Simpson, former U.S. Senator
- 1996 Carlos Fuentes, author
- 1995 Winton Malcolm Blount, Chairman of Blount, Inc., philanthropist, and former U.S. Postmaster General
- 1994 David McCullough, historian
- 1993 Barbara Jordan, former U.S. Congresswoman
- 1992 Franklin D. Murphy, former CEO of the Times Mirror Company
- 1991 John Brademas, former U.S. Congressman and President Emeritus of New York University
- 1990 Maya Angelou, poet
- 1989 Leonard Garment, Special Counsel to Presidents Nixon and Ford
- 1988 Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., historian

## AMERICANS FOR THE ARTS LEADERSHIP

As the leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts in this country, Americans for the Arts works with a broad range of leadership, including corporate, philanthropic, and artistic leaders from across the country. Under the leadership of President and CEO Robert L. Lynch, Americans for the Arts' governing and advisory bodies and their leadership are as follows:

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March 12, 2007

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*Robert MacNeil*

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