

MONOGRAPHS

▼ Published Monthly for Members

▼ Volume 1, Number 3

▼ December 1992

Olimpíada Cultural It's More Than a Game

by Charles F. Dambach

Charles F. Dambach was the first executive director of the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies, and has been executive director of two local arts agencies. He was head of the delegation for the U.S. Canoe and Kayak Team for the Seoul Olympics and an official for the International Canoe Federation in Barcelona. He is executive director of the National Council of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers in Washington, D.C.

Olimpíada



Cultural
Olympic Rings Barcelona '92

The world's largest cultural celebration is the Olympic Games. I use the term culture in two contexts. First, the Games bring more people and cultures (values and lifestyles) of the world together in peace and friendship than any activity of any kind. Second, the Olympic Games present the world's largest cultural (arts) festival. Unfortunately, the television-watching public only sees and hears about the sports competition and the national medal count. They miss the whole point. If we do not take advantage of the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, we will miss an opportunity.

More nations participated in Seoul and Barcelona than are members of the United Nations. The athletes, coaches, officials, press, and spectators share a common experience of the greatness of the human spirit. Even the addition of professionals could not diminish the essence of the Games.

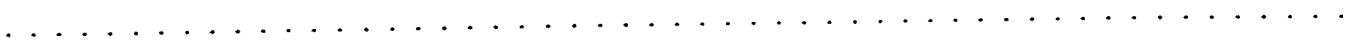
The Olympics create a dramatic transition from nationalism to globalism. They begin with a grand procession of athletes into the stadium behind their respective flags. As they march, their fans wave their national flags, and the people back home beam with patriotic pride as they watch their heroes on television. It is an awesome ceremony.

Throughout 16 days of intense competition, the anthems of the winning athletes proclaim national as well as personal achievements. Everyone at home follows the medal count to see which countries are better or worse than we. The pride of the nations is at stake.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF
LOCAL ARTS AGENCIES



MONOGRAPHS is one benefit of membership in the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies, mailed monthly to all members. Please send submissions to Olive Mosier, Executive Vice President, National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies, 927 15th Street N.W., 12th Floor, Washington, DC 20005. For advertising rates, call Deborah Bissen, Director of Communications, at 202.371.2830.



"From the beginning, the Olympic Games have been a great cultural festival the cultural components of the Games virtually equal the sports in attendance and quality."

However, during it all, the athletes, coaches and officials are living together in the "Olympic Village." They are becoming friends. They trade training secrets, and they share their triumphs and tragedies.

At the end, after all of the games have been played and all of the races have been run, they assemble again in the Olympic Stadium. This time, they do not march behind their national flags. Rather, they gather from the grandstand to the field arm-in-arm—regardless of country. For hours thereafter, they celebrate their common achievements and their humanity. They trade uniforms and mementos. By the end, a distance runner from Kenya may wear a Hungarian gymnast's shirt; a rower for the USA may proudly display the Cuban flag; and a German swimmer may don a Korean jacket.

These proud, strong, tough athletes are transformed from national heroes into citizens of the world. Few people outside the Olympic Family notice this final ceremony of universal brotherhood, but it is the reason the Olympic movement has survived. Even gold medal winners will affirm that this ceremony is their greatest experience of the Games. It is the reason the movement must always survive.

There is, however, another cultural attribute to the Games that is also ignored by the media. From the beginning, the Olympic Games have been a great cultural festival. Unfortunately, few in America know about it. In fact, very few professionals in the arts know it. We perceive the Olympics as a sports event. Yet, the cultural components of the Games virtually equal the sports in attendance and quality.

The Olympic charter requires the host city to provide a cultural festival along with the sports events. Unfortunately, the U.S. cities that have hosted the Olympics have offered only the minimum to satisfy the International Olympic Committee standards. The cultural events in Lake Placid and Los Angeles did not compare with those in Seoul and Barcelona.

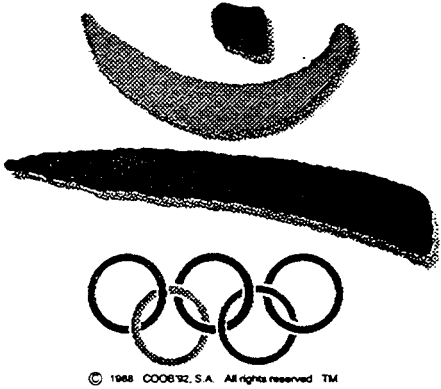
The most obvious cultural celebrations at the Games (and the only parts covered by television) are the opening and closing ceremonies. They feature music, dance, sculpture, and theater on the grandest scale imaginable. The cast for the opening ceremonies in Seoul was 15,000. The television audience was over a billion. Most of the



.....
". . . . the Olympic cultural
.....
celebration is far more than
.....
the massive ceremonies
.....
in the main stadium. It is
.....
hundreds of concerts, plays,
.....
and exhibits of the best in
.....
the arts from the host country
.....
and around the world."

performers were dancers and actors from the best schools in the country. They presented a stunning pageant to share with the world the glory and drama of Korea's colorful history.

In Barcelona, the ceremonies celebrated the great contribution of this cultural giant of a city. The television audience was even larger than before. Barcelona has been home to Gaudi, Picasso, Miro, Casals, and several of the world's premier opera singers and dozens more of the greatest artists of the modern world. The cast for the opening ceremonies included Placido Domingo, Joan Pons, Josep Carreras, and Monsterrat Caballe. Victoria de Los Angeles was added to the cast for the closing ceremonies. Their medley of opera arias was a highlight of the entire program. Even the competition-hardened athletes and coaches were stunned by the beauty and power of their voices. The pageant created the greatest moment of the Games when an archer clad in white shot a flaming arrow over the top of the stadium to ignite the Olympic flame.



But, the Olympic cultural celebration is far more than the massive ceremonies in the main stadium. It is hundreds of concerts, plays, and exhibits of the best in the arts from the host country and around the world. The great orchestras of the world (except those from the USA) traveled to Seoul for sold-out performances. Over 170 sculptors participated in the Olympic sculpture conference and they created wonderful works for permanent display in the 170-acre Olympic sculpture garden.

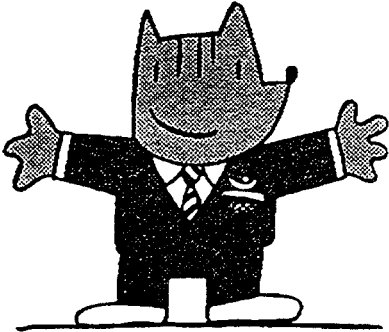
The program for the "Olimpíada Cultural" in Barcelona featured 60 music events, over 100 drama performances in 14 theaters, 48 dance performances, four operas with extended runs, and at least 50 special art exhibits. In addition, 144 programs were presented outdoors at Barcelona al Parc de la Ciutadella in a program similar to Charleston's Piccolo Spoleto.

"Our greatest cultural characteristic is the diversity of our people and the vigor with which we participate in community activities. The local arts agencies of America are in the vanguard of that vigor, and they could be the leaders of a tremendous Cultural Olympic movement in 1996."

This list does not include hundreds of unofficial events staged everywhere at all hours of the day and night. There were few spontaneous performances in Seoul, but the streets of Barcelona were bustling with musicians, dancers, and painters. They are a part of the normal Barcelona milieu but, during the Games, they were triplefold. Las Ramblas, the world's greatest pedestrian mall, was a veritable moving gallery and concert hall.

My schedule did not allow much time to attend the events, but I had a hard time getting into those I could have seen. Virtually everything was SRO or sold out.

One of my favorite guitarists, Narciso Yepes, performed at the Iglesia del Pi at 11:00 p.m. I waited in line with a British friend for an hour for tickets only to see the last one sold some 25 people ahead of me. Fortunately, a friendly scalper let us have some for only double the original price. Yepes enchanted the audience in spite of sweltering heat, and we demanded four encores even at 1:00 a.m.



© 1988 COOB'92, S.A. TM

I missed the concert by the Berlin Philharmonic, the recital by Marilyn Horne, and the play "La Mort" de Woody Allen. (It would have been interesting in Spanish.) But I made it to many of the street shows and gallery exhibits. They were open at all hours since Barcelona seems never to sleep except in the afternoon.

The Olympic Games come to Atlanta in 1996, and the United States has another opportunity to present its cultural assets to the world. Our greatest cultural characteristic is the diversity of our people and the vigor with which we participate in community activities. The local arts agencies of America are in the vanguard of that vigor, and they could be the leaders of a tremendous Cultural Olympic movement in 1996. We could, if we are willing, demonstrate our cultural resources to the world and to America.

Most of the attractions in Seoul and Barcelona featured local talent from communities throughout their countries. Atlanta could do the same, and local arts agencies could



cooperate with the Atlanta organizing committee to present a national Olympic Festival of the Arts. America and the world just might notice.

..... local arts agencies
.....
..... could cooperate with
.....
..... the Atlanta organizing
.....
..... committee to present a
.....
..... national Olympic Festival
.....
..... of the Arts."

The Olympic name is magic. It brings instant recognition, prestige and money to those authorized to use it. It stands for the pursuit of excellence and the highest achievements of the human spirit. It includes the arts. Its use, however, is closely guarded. In order for the local arts agencies to present a nationwide Olympic arts festival, permission will have to be obtained from the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games.



They will not grant use of the name for anything but the best. But, if the LAA (local arts agency) movement is ready and willing to present a premier national program, Billy Paine and the Atlanta Committee may give the Olympic identity to it. This could denote a new era of respect and attention for community-based arts in America. ▼