

Selland: booster for city's cultural arts

By DAVID HALE
Bee arts writer

For years Mabelle M. Selland has contributed, sometimes as volunteer but in one way or another as community activist and scholar to improve public awareness of the "beautiful mosaic of cultures" that makes up the ethnic mix in Fresno.

Now she has won a position in city government which pays her specifically for her interest in things ethnic. The one-time president of Fresno's Sister City Committee, who summarizes her own cultural heritage in the phrase, "just your ordinary Scandinavian from Omaha," is the new coordinator of cultural affairs for the City of Fresno.

Selland was appointed recently as supervisor of the cultural arts division of the city's Parks and Recreation Department, a position she had held for about a year on an interim basis.

Her office is responsible for overseeing Creative Arts for Youth, the city-wide program in creative arts classes, for administering the city's grants to cultural agencies and generally working with museums, schools and arts groups to enrich the community's cultural life.

An increasingly important aspect of Selland's job is seeking out funds, public and otherwise, to assist arts organizations. One of her latest, and most valuable she thinks, is a \$10,000 matching funds grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The objective: To finance the Wright Brothers, a Fresno gospel ensemble, as artists-in-residence in local schools.

Three of the Wright Brothers, Jessie, Jimmie and Walter, have pledged to carry on with the program, despite the death last weekend of William Wright, 67, the fourth member of the group.

So far the brothers have made about 30 appearances, before school grade levels ranging from kindergarten to high schools.

"I can only tell you subjectively, Selland said of the singers. "I think they've just been tremendous. They have a marvelous way with kids. It's partly because of their entertainment value, of course. Young people relate to the way they use movement, how they're able to use their voices like instruments."

"But the Wrights have a most important contribution to make this entertainment. Their program is also about education, it's about preservation, the music the Wright Brothers do goes back to slave times, when music was the black's

his patrons the late Peggy Guggenheim.

A United States resident since 1959, Vianello has done many major commissions. His first, in 1962, was an 18-foot monument for the World's Fair. His work is noted for its realistic detail and visual power.

Boos has shown his art in galleries in New York City as well as in California, Arizona and Texas. He is best known for Western themes, particularly drawings of cowboys and Indians in a shaded style similar to illustrators of the Victorian period. Other typical concerns are classic European scenes, always emphasizing the human figure.

As a demonstrating artist, Boos is noted for his speed of hand. He draws (or paints) from his imagination, preferring not to do preliminary sketches or to use photographs.

The exhibition of art by Vianello and Boos will continue through May 8. Regular hours for the gallery are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays.

By AMY BERMANT
Newhouse News Service

WASHINGTON — If Shakespeare's belief that "What's past is prologue" is true, then some of tomorrow's stars are in training today with the Acting Company, the only professional touring theater repertory company in the nation.

Modeled after theatrical touring companies in Europe, the Acting Company — a "touring arm" of Washington's Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts — has become a well-established training ground for many well-known actors and actresses today.

Included are: Patty Lupone, Broadway's original Evita; Kevin Kline, the original prince king in Joseph Papp's "Pirates of Penzance;" and David Ogden Stiers, who plays Maj. Charles

Renaissance in a concert

Renaissance costumes will be in fashion when the Chamber Singers of Stanislaus State University perform music from that age Friday at 8 p.m. in the Shrine of St. Therese, Wishon and Floradora avenues.

The Fresno Early Music Society will present the 16-member ensemble and the 65-member Concert Chorus.

Choir director is Dr. Gary Urnh, a native of Reedley and an alumnus of Occidental College.

Besides being on the Stanislaus faculty he is music director for the Covenant Church in Turlock and has traveled extensively in this country and Europe as a clinician and director under the aegis of the American Choral Directors Association.

The Concert Chorus will take its second trip to Europe this summer.

Besides the Chamber Singers' renditions of Elizabethan and Renaissance works, the program will include the larger group in music by such composers as Brahms, Mendelssohn, and Britten.

Admission will be \$5 for the general public and \$1 for students.

Winchester on the "M-A-S-S-I" television series.

The Kennedy Center provides the company with financial support, which center Chairman Robert Stevens said gives "young actors a chance to be seen and heard in classical roles across the nation."

Acting Company executive producer and co-founder Marjorie Harley said creation of the company filled certain voids in the country's theatrical world. "The Acting Company's reason for being is a firm commitment to the development of skilled actors in the United States and the development of a professional-level repertory company which would bring theater to communities who would otherwise never see this kind of theater," Harley said in a recent interview.



MABELLE M. SELLAND
— arts booster

only release. It's so important because it's the basis of barbershop quartets, jazz, blues, rock and roll — all our popular music."

Besides the performance, the gospel music lesson for school children also involves a classroom guide. The booklet tells about the music and the technique for performance, and provides a bibliography dealing with black music.

"It's really a history lesson in black culture," Selland said.

However, a hitch has developed: To get the full grant, to continue the program through about 100 performances the rest of the school year, the community needs to raise \$5,000 by Thursday. As of late last week, it appears the Wright Brothers will be able to work only this week. That's because the fund-raising effort is still about \$1,500 short.

"Of course it will be a terrible disappointment if we fail," Selland said. "I believe in what the program does, or I wouldn't have started it."

Selland believes the problem is a matter of education, or of the failure, somehow, to communicate the importance of the program to the public. The Wright Brothers are nationally renowned (their performances have ranged from churches up and down the state to Smithsonian Institution folk music festivals), only not enough people in Fresno know about them yet.

"Other people do know them," Selland said. "I also applied for

grants for two other local groups, but the NEA turned those down. They knew the Wright Brothers are authentic. The fact that they gave us the matching funds on a two-to-one basis instead of one-to-one, is one proof of that."

The Wright Brothers project is but one of many in which Selland has been involved, celebrating the variety of cultural heritages in Fresno.

Her concern with the subject dates back to her girlhood in the Midwest where, she said, she became fascinated with the differences and similarities between peoples she encountered in studying history.

"It was all intellectual," she said. "In the Midwest there wasn't a cultural mix. I always thought I'd love to be able to travel to learn more about cultural heritages. Then I came to Fresno and found all those things right here."

Selland, who has a bachelor's degree in history and a master's in Asian history, both from Fresno State University, considers the melting pot aspect of Fresno the heart of the city's colorful culture. During a stint as the executive director of the Fresno City and County Historical Society, she wrote several essays and booklets on local history.

She has written on Mexican history in particular and also on ethnic churches. The church study turned out to be a sequel to an earlier guide she produced for a walking tour, and grew out of an anthropology class she took at the university.

As a volunteer, Selland has received awards for her service in the Sister City program and acted as a consultant in ethnic history and museums for various local projects. She has a working knowledge of Chinese and has traveled, as the guest of the government, to the People's Republic of China.

Since joining the city recreation department she has produced the first of what she hopes will be a series of educational films on ethnic groups. That project was financed by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

As an interested layman, she has lent her knowledge to the Alliance for the Arts and the Meux House Museum, on whose executive boards she serves, and she is also a member of the Fresno County Historic Records and Landmarks Commission, the 15th Congressional District Arts Committee and the newly-formed Fresno County Arts Advisory Committee.

Her job as supervisor of the city's

cultural arts program has Selland involved in a liaison capacity with all kinds of arts groups, and in the management of the Memorial Auditorium theater and the Meux home.

But her best known charge is CAFY, or the city-wide Creative Arts for Youth program (which begins a new eight-week session this week). About 1,600 persons take classes in about 75 subjects, usually with college graduates in the respective subjects in charge, in four eight-week sessions a year.

In a word, Selland is proud of the program's achievements.

"You can't overestimate its importance to the quality of life here," Selland says of CAFY. "We're going into the seventh year, and the program has changed a lot."

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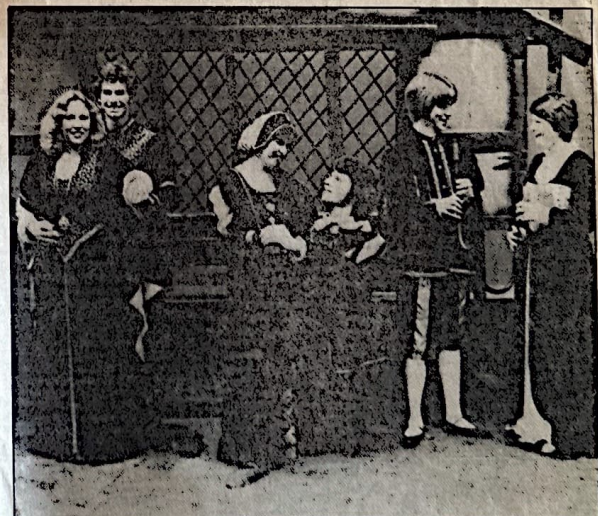
in shape, and though it's really non-academic, I think CAFY is needed for the same reasons as adult education and other enrichment programs.

"We began with 180 sessions charging \$2 a class. I don't know how they ever did it. Now we have about 130 — still a tremendous variety — and the fee is up to as much as \$22."

The program has its critics. "Everybody understands quite well CAFY should be offering classes in physical fitness, karate, decoration or dog obedience."

"Obviously there's a need a market for such things because people ask for them," Selland says. "There is no other mechanism CAFY for people to get it. We do consider ourselves in competition with private institutions, as some people complain."

"What we do is offer someone a chance, at a modest fee, to learn in eight weeks what his interests are. We also are interested enough, he'll go on to private agencies."



Some of the Chamber Singers of Stanislaus State University

Tomorrow's stars in today's repertory

performance question-and-answer sessions for school groups and classes at local universities. When the company is not touring, it holds rehearsals and acting-related classes in New York.

"It takes a special kind of person to belong to this company," Harley said. "Most actors — vocally — can't take the company's performance schedule ... not to mention the extensive traveling we do. Most actors today just don't have the enormous stamina required to last."

The company's theatrical repertory is composed of both classical and modern plays. Harley said the classical works are "anything from (George Bernard) Shaw and back," Harley said.

Members of the touring company are from the nation's leading

regional theaters and professional theater programs — including Yale, Carnegie-Mellon and the Goodman. Harley said more than 65 percent of the company is from Juilliard's Theater Center School, where training focuses heavily on the technical disciplines and the internal life of the actor.

This year the company is celebrating its 10th anniversary on tour by performing six repertory plays in 30 states and 38 communities. From its recently completed two-week performance of "Twelfth Night" and "The Country Wife" at the Kennedy Center, the company moved on to Florida, Pennsylvania and New York.

To date, the Acting Company has staged 45 plays before more than 1 million people in 210 cities.