

Opinion

Steve Barnaby editor/477-5450

23352 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48024

Philip Power chairman of the board
Richard Agnien president
Dick Isaham general manager
Dan Chovanec advertising director
Nick Sharkey managing editor
Fred Wright circulation director

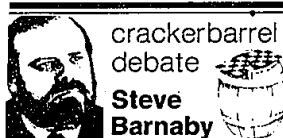
14A(F)

O&E Thursday, March 20, 1984

Musicians hurt by rule change

I HEAR AN echo in the Crackerbarrel. I swear I do. The lid must be shut. Hey, out there. Some of you folks just aren't listening.

I could've sworn last week I wrote a column lauding a dream turned to reality. The ideal: children and adults from several communities, from several ethnic groups, races and creeds, working together to promote and perform classical music.



Ah, spring. The world isn't that bad after all, I told myself.

But thanks to a stunt pulled by the Farmington Musicales, I have been reminded of the harsher realities which exist out there — parochialism and narrow-mindedness, diseases which continually hold us back from being the society we could and should be.

Seems the folks over at the Musicales suddenly have taken a dislike to awarding their scholarship to the most talented applicant.

In an abrupt and rather unceremonious move, the board voted to cut off those students who, although they may attend school in Farmington or Farmington Hills, don't live here.

They made this new policy known by sending back applications to scholarship hopefuls who were disqualified because of the new rule.

THE LOGIC is explained by Barbara Grover, this year's competition chairwoman, who explained that last year's winner "won't be contributing her talents here."

Now that's really some kind of strange logic when it comes to doling out scholarships for music — the international language.

Imagine the Tchaikovsky-competition committee in the Soviet Union announcing that it no longer would allow anyone from the U.S. to compete. That competition, by the way, was responsible for catapulting classical pianist Van Cliburn to world attention.

Mercy High School music teacher Larry Teevens justifiably is miffed since the

ruiling wipes out most of his students from the competition.

Taking issue with Musicales philosophy, he noted that music students are national treasures who "belong to all of us." He believes that music enthusiasts should be opening up new avenues for talented musicians and steering them to where the action is rather than cutting off their opportunities.

Hard to believe is the statement made by Musicales president Lois Swanson, who justifies the new policy by saying scholarship money should be returned to those who pay taxes in the community.

A person has got to believe that kind of thinking died along with the dinosaur. It's difficult for anyone who appreciates the arts to equate it with paying taxes.

HARD AS it may be to believe on the eve of income-tax month, there are some things in this world that take precedence over paying taxes.

Too few opportunities now exist for music students in our society without a group which purports to support them making it even more difficult.

This reminds me of the time the Little League Association banned Taiwan from playing in the League's World Series. The reason given was because the team was from outside the United States.

The real reason was that Taiwan kept winning.

The ban was vigorously protested by those who realized that we only improve ourselves by competing against the best.

The Taiwan ban was lifted the next year. Hopefully the Farmington Musicales will do the same.

Press accountable, but only to the public

CBS NEWSMAN Ted Koppel and an entourage from the TV program Viewpoint visited Southfield last week to broadcast an hour-long discussion of press coverage of business.

On the panel were such luminaries as W. Michael Blumenthal, chairman of the Detroit-based Burroughs Corp.; Av Westin, head of CBS news; the influential Herb Schmetz, a vice president of Mobil Oil Corp.; and, by satellite hookup, Mike Wallace of 60 Minutes.

Discussion centered on strategies and tactics used by reporters (particularly TV newsmen) and the press' ability to impart news about business.

The business moguls questioned whether reporters involved in covering business have adequate knowledge of the subject and whether they have proper background to write about or broadcast intelligently news stories about business.

They questioned whether the press is really fair in its desire to portray a story as dramatically as possible. And the representatives of business were almost of one mind in their complaint that the press answers to no one.

THEY REASONED that governmental actions are tempered by the government's responsibility to the voters; that, similarly, business must consider its stockholders and the consuming public. The press, they lamented, can do just about as it pleases, protected by the First Amendment and answerable to no one.

A representative of Gannett Newspapers, the nation's largest chain, said in defense that newspapers — and, by inference, the electronic media — are answerable to the public in the marketplace.

If the public does not respect what newspapers are printing, if the public doubts it is fair, complete and accurate, then it will stop buying the newspapers, or presumably, stop watching a particular station, which will suffer as ratings go down. Unfortunately, this is not the entire answer.



A GOOD deal of accountability in the press and in broadcast journalism is instilled by the fear of losing a libel lawsuit and having to pay the tremendous sums that juries are awarding these days for unwarranted besmirchment of the name, character or integrity of an individual or a business.

In the end, though, the judgment of any news organization rests on the credibility that it manages to build. As Weston pointed out to his fellow panelists, "Our credibility is all that we have."

We have to expect that the public will be knowledgeable and informed enough to judge whether a news organization is acting fairly and responsibly and that the public will, indeed, shun those that act irresponsibly and support those that act fairly and responsibly.

Would we have it any other way? Would we have a governmental organization or elected politicians or a panel of business titans overseeing what the press should or shouldn't do?

Clearly not. The Founding Fathers feared control of the press much more than any irresponsibility on the press' part when they framed the Bill of Rights.

As long as we have a free press, we should expect that periodically there will be complaints about the faults of the press and charges that the press is responsible to no one.

The ensuing discussion may help the press take a look at and improve itself, but there really can be no way to make the press accountable to anyone but the general public, just as it is now.



Sloppy way to halt child abuse

MANY OF you will think I'm a Scrooge, but that's all right. I can respect your opinion if you can respect mine.

I didn't check either of those boxes on the state personal income tax return.

One would authorize the treasurer to deduct \$2 from my refund and turn it over to the Children's Trust Fund for the prevention of child abuse. The other would allow \$2 to be turned over to the new non-game Wildlife Fund.

As I read our Michigan Constitution, we elect a governor and 144 members of the Legislature, giving them awesome powers to levy taxes and spend money with the advice of bureaucrats, staff budget analysts and lobbyists.

Let our 145 officials do their jobs. If they think innocent children and non-game wildlife should be protected, let them spend whatever it takes to do the job and tax whatever it takes to cover spending. Then let them stand on their records.

THE CHILDREN'S Trust Fund, now in its second year, is particularly troubling.

Last year the state collected about \$400,000 from public-spirited souls (other than myself) who donated \$2 apiece of their tax refunds.

Part of the money was bankrolled to earn interest. More than \$300,000 was awarded in grants to local child abuse programs from Sault Ste. Marie to De-



troit, according to Gov. James J. Blanchard.

What did they do with the \$300,000? A newsletter from the Neglect Services Division of the Michigan Department of Social Services shows how some grant money was used. Items:

- A speakers bureau covering 15 topics (e.g., children's rights, identification) was set up in one county.
- Workshops for parents of abused and neglected children were offered.
- A crisis phone line was set up.
- A play called "Babylonian Encounter" is being produced in one county for performance before school children. Central character is a cute alien from Babylon, where all inhabitants live in invisible bubbles and are deprived of the sense of touch. The alien, Bub, arrives on Earth, where two children free her from her bubble. Trouble is, Bub doesn't know the difference between the four kinds of touching: positive, negative, confusing and "forced sexual."

One wonders if the stepchildren of that

Upjohn heir out in Kalamazoo County might have benefited from seeing such a play early enough in their lives.

FAIR QUESTION: Is \$300,000 enough for programs like that in a state of 9.1 million people? Too little? Too much?

Someone in Lansing needs to look at all the data and make a decision about how large the child abuse program should be. Right now, millions of persons getting state income refunds are making spur-of-the-moment \$2 decisions as they fill out their tax returns. It's a sloppy way to take care of abused kids.

We now have a second such voluntary contribution program for the aid of non-game wildlife. (Game wildlife — deer, pheasants — are "managed" like crops through funds from hunting licenses and other such fees.)

We should have learned our lesson back in the 1950s, when the highway trust fund was rolling in dough and new freeways were crossing the landscape, while at the same time our teachers were going begging and our mental patients were warehoused in state hospitals built during the Civil War.

The system is known as "earmarking" revenues. It's a lousy system, and this taxpayer won't be part of it.

FOOTNOTE: Blanchard's 1984 budget proposes \$1.5 million for the Detroit Zoo. Contrast that to the Children's Trust Fund.

Group-home bias dies slowly

WESTLAND MAYOR Charles Pickering recently wrote an angry letter to state officials protesting the proposed construction of a group home in his city.

Livonia and Southfield's combined appeal of a court decision regarding group homes will be heard by the Michigan Supreme Court later this year.

Canton Township officials are suing the state over a group home.

Redford Township homeowners have threatened to file a law suit to delay construction of a group home.

Farmington residents recently told the city council that they didn't want any more retarded persons living in their subdivisions.

WHAT ARE GROUP homes, and why have they created such a fuss?

Since 1977 Michigan has had a state policy of moving "developmentally disabled" persons out of institutional hospitals and into smaller group or foster homes, where they become part of a community. Retarded persons make up the majority of "developmentally disabled," but it also includes those suffering from epilepsy, autism and cerebral palsy.

Today there are 129 group homes in Oakland and Macomb counties and 110 in Wayne County.

Recent criticism of group homes is tame by comparison to the emotional and often violent opposition of the late 1970s.



JERRY PROVENCAL has been placing people in group homes since 1972. He works for the state Department of Mental Health. As director of Macomb-Oakland Regional Center and Wayne Community Living Services, he's responsible for the group homes in Oakland and Wayne counties.

"We find much better tolerance for group homes today as compared to a few years ago," he said. "There's little hysteria and alarm. The understanding of the rights of the retarded is greatly improved."

Newspaper reporters have gone out and visited neighborhoods where a few years ago there was violent opposition to group homes," Provencal said. "They always find that the neighbors have adjusted, and any complaints are minor."

The argument that group homes lower property values has proven a myth by eight national studies between 1973 and 1980.

THE LAW is clear about the rights of

mentally disabled persons to live in neighborhood group homes.

Livonia City Attorney Harry Tatiglob admits there is little hope communities can successfully resist the homes. He said that the Supreme Court's willingness to hear the Livonia and Southfield appeal comes more from a desire to "put the issue to bed" than an indication it might overturn the lower court rulings.

Thus, long legal battles to resist group homes are a waste of taxpayers' money.

In the months to come, we will hear more about group homes. Plans are being made for 20 new homes in Oakland and Macomb counties and 20 more in Wayne County.

In addition, three Wayne County agencies which placed persons in group homes were merged last fall into the new Wayne Community Living Services office to improve efficiency.

"We will be as cooperative as possible in working with local governments and neighborhood groups," said Provencal with polite determination. "We will not back off in helping the mentally retarded, but we don't want to make enemies."

Attitudes may have improved since the late 1970s, but Provencal has a challenge before him. It would be nice to believe that local opposition to group homes has ended. But in suburban communities, old prejudices die slowly.