



BY KATHLEEN CRAVEN

# SAFE HARBOR

The role of the arts in a turbulent world

**W**ar, stringent budget cuts, terrorism, massive layoffs. Clearly this is not a world for the fainthearted. So where can you turn to find hope and the courage to face the future? Cubist artist Pablo Picasso once noted that, “The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls.” As it tackles the “dust” of stress and worries, the importance of the arts in today’s society has never been more clear.

Why does art play such a pivotal role? Because art provides a window to our souls. Or if not our souls, at least to our hopes and dreams. Long after we're dead and gone, the art we leave behind will offer a glimpse of who we were and where we saw ourselves in the grand scheme of life. It will be a precise record of our thoughts and feelings at any given moment in time. That's because art is often the first place we turn to express ourselves when life's events send us seemingly spinning out of control.

## VOCAL MUSIC

**T**he social history of any society is musical. Songwriters in every era have used music to reflect and comment on the events of their lifetimes, and a song written by the witness of a specific event has the power to create a visceral understanding more profound than the best historical text.

What sets vocal music apart from other art forms is its accessibility. Vocal music is, at its most basic, poetry communicated through music. More people will listen to a song than will read a poem. These texts are carefully created and composed to create a forum for examining societal issues.

"Artists are often more aware than ordinary citizens of how a society needs to evolve," says Giselle Wyers, director of choral activities at Boise State, "because they are comfortable pushing themselves to the edge by creating new ways of seeing the world, and seeking out a connection to aesthetic values."

Because their music reflects their political and social stances, many vocal performers and songwriters are seen as social activists. During the years of American slavery, the "Negro

Take for instance the tragedy of the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. Fueled by extensive television coverage, a massive shockwave instantly swept through the country, leaving people bewildered and confused. Artists responded by creating sculptures, paintings and other artistic endeavors to help them cope with how they were feeling.

In Boise, a resulting exhibition was put on display in the Hemingway Center at Boise State as a way to assist others in coming to

spirituals" that slaves sang while working were laden with symbolism that promoted escape, and in the 1960s many folk musicians were actively speaking out against war and racial discrimination with their music.

"Throughout history we see ways in which musicians were concerned with peace and writing works designed to raise awareness about the importance of reconciling conflict," Wyers says.

This trend continues today. The current climate of war and uncertainty has sparked numerous songs that are both supportive and critical of America, reflecting the artists' personal views. All of these voices are tools to help people come to understand their own feelings during times of political and social unrest.

Folksinger Ani Difranco's song "I.Q." sums up her feelings on why she composes her songs: "I sing sometimes / for the war that I fight / because every tool is a weapon / if you hold it right."

— **Patri Ann Thompson**

grips with their own fear, disbelief and anxiety.

"For me, it was one of the most rewarding things I've done as a gallery director," says Richard Young, chairman of the Boise State art department and gallery director. "The events of 9/11 impacted us so closely and intensely ... I'm sure the artists had never produced work like that before."

Throughout history, artists have used a variety of media to create order from chaos. In 1880, Tchaikovsky composed the "1812 Overture" to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Russia's victory over Napoleon in 1812. More than 100 years later, the emotionally resonant piece is still a concert hall hit. In the McCarthyist 1950s, an instant classic was born in the film *High Noon*, which depicts a man of solid integrity standing alone against the foe after being abandoned by the very friends and neighbors he has pledged to defend. And today visitors continue to be moved by the power of the national Vietnam

Memorial's black granite walls.

There are as many reasons we intuitively turn to the arts for comfort as there are challenges and tragedies in life.

"It's community," says Gordon Reinhart, a Boise State professor of theatre arts. "Many other things in life are isolated, but art involves coming together. It's part of why we go, and also why we sometimes stay away."

Craig Purdy, a Boise State professor of music,



## DANCE

remembers conducting an orchestra performance in Meridian shortly after war broke out in Iraq earlier this year. “One of the first things I said to the audience was that, under the circumstances, it was nice to be able to come together for a brief period to take our minds off what was happening in the world,” he says. “As a performer, I find [music] to be an escape from the realities of the world.”

Art also speaks to our humanity in a way no other medium can. Of all the animals, only humans consciously create art as a way to express specific ideas and influence others.

“The need to express and create is one of the hallmark traits of being human,” says Marla Hansen, director of Idaho Dance Theatre, Boise State’s resident dance company. “When times are tough, it’s even more important that we are able to express our concerns and our problems, to use art as a catharsis.”

In fact, mankind has been using art as a tool for understanding and as a shelter from the storms of life almost since the beginning of time. The ancient Greeks, tiring of decades of war, offered social commentary from the stage in an effort to change the way things were. Euripides’ *Medea* and Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* were two plays that bemoaned the seemingly endless saga of battles, looting and bloodshed. In later years, Shakespeare also used the theater to promote civic dialogue, although he set modern problems in different time periods or different locales in order to not lose favor with his patrons and the queen.



Dance doesn't say it, it shows it. One of the most expressive of all art forms, dance's physical nature sets it apart.

“Everyone gets a vicarious sensation when they watch dancers,” says Marla Hansen, director for Idaho Dance Theatre (IDT), which is affiliated with Boise State. “I love language, but it is very specific. Dance is abstract, as opposed to theater.

“You’re not using words which can inflame people’s emotions. But if you create something distressing [in dance], they can feel it for themselves.”

Dance has long called on distress and other emotions to serve as a forum for social discussion, albeit silent. The June 2003 issue of *Dance Magazine* notes that many choreographers have let their dances be their voices raised in social protest.

“The Green Table,” one of the most enduring, was an anti-war piece first

More recently, Americans have struggled to define their feelings about the situation in Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries. Paintings like Picasso’s “Guernica,” with its emotional portrayal of the horrors of war, continue to move those who oppose armed conflict, while songs like country singer Darryl Worley’s “Have You Forgotten?” stir up a new generation of loyal patriots.

But art isn’t always about action. It’s also an escape, a place to

performed in 1932. Created by Kurt Jooss, it was inspired by World War I, but based on the medieval “Dance of Death.” Dances have focused on everything from military matters to the modern Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “Xenophobia!,” the Disney-fication of war.

On other occasions, messages are more subtle. A recent Idaho Dance Theatre piece, titled “Romanza,” was about the machine of war and how it can eat you up, Hansen says. But the piece did so by expressing an exhilaration for life. Another dance, “Calculate,” humorously portrayed how modern society is tied to cell phones and other technology.

Boisean Carl Rowe, IDT artistic director who has been dancing for 30 years, notes that good dance is rarely born out of political reasons. “If used to express political or religious beliefs in a way it becomes propaganda,” he says. But when it’s done well, dance is so powerful that it is difficult for someone to watch and not feel its passion.

“Like all art, the best dance goes beyond national borders or religious beliefs, and it speaks to the heart of every human being,” Rowe says.

— Sherry Squires

retreat from our problems. The lavish musicals of the 1930s allowed people to forget, if just for a few hours, that beyond the stage door times were bad. Even today, people flock to theaters, concert halls and art museums as a way to take a short hiatus from real life. A look at the recent Tony Awards shows the strong comeback of the Broadway musical, a classic form of escapist entertainment. Shows like *Chicago* and *Hairspray* joined the larger-than-life Disney extravaganza.

## ILLUSTRATION

Times have changed since illustration was used as war propaganda and illustrators such as Norman Rockwell achieved fame for their work.

History is rich with examples of illustrations used to promote war, notes Boise State art professor Bill Carman, who coordinates the university's illustration program. "Illustration had a much stronger following," he says.

Carman says illustration has lost much of its power because people now tune in more to television and other media. "It's less a tool for the general masses," he says. "I don't see illustration as being a rallying point. It has changed a lot."

While Rockwell is a household name for his illustrations from the 1920s to the 1950s, Carman says people today would be hard pressed to name an illustrator or illustration, "particularly one that has to do with war."

Although illustration isn't the force it used to be in drumming up patriotism during hard times, Boise illustrator Ward Hooper (BFA, art, '86) says recent events have prompted a return of some of those themes.

"What I see people asking me to



do is red, white and blue — nostalgic American," says Hooper.

Hooper says Sept. 11 influenced his decision to make a series of posters he designed for a Boise public arts project reminiscent of the 1920s and '30s. "I've found that people are really attracted to that kind of style because it brings back a simpler time," he says. "It gives people a breather from all the darkness."

Because their work is shaped by the clients who hire them for ads or promotions, illustrators don't have the freedom of other artists to make political and social statements about war.

"You can't go hog wild as an illustrator," Carman says. "You wouldn't have anywhere to publish it."

— Liz Melendez

ganza *The Lion King* in helping audience members forget life's worries.

For most of us, involvement in the arts amounts to watching a performance or viewing a display. For others, it involves actual creation — not only with paint or clay, but also with words.

"All of us use spoken or written language daily," says Tom Trusky, a Boise State English professor and director of the Idaho Center for the Book, explaining why poetry is so popular as an artistic outlet. "So it's

a form we feel we can use for expression."

Although the poetry created during stressful situations may not be of lasting worth, its value lies in people's freedom and ability to express themselves honestly, and to share with others as they do so, Trusky says. It's that act of creation, followed by reflection that brings us to greater understanding and helps us cope with our problems.

Poet and Boise State education professor Jamie Armstrong remembers his feelings in the period build-

ing up to the war with Iraq.

Enjoying a run through Hulls Gulch, the quiet yet incessant sound of running water in an otherwise peaceful setting brought current events to his mind.

"I was looking at [the water] and a voice in my head said, 'Even here this war won't leave you alone.'" After that, the words of a poem began to flow into his head.

*Water sings all the way down til losing itself  
in thundering breakers and crashing storms*

*Another force chills me, even here  
The will that gravitates men to war.*

Within hours he had a complete poem on paper and was able to put his jumbled thoughts to rest. "It's a way to make sense of our own thoughts and feelings," he says.

"Art takes our minds off what's happening in the real world," agrees Purdy.

Because performance art like music, theater or dance is about the event, not about the audience, it gives us a chance to step away from our problems and take a breather.

But a successful performance will still require some audience participation in one sense or another.

By forcing us to use our imaginations in creative ways, the arts help us see our problems in a different light — one that is hopefully more manageable, or at least more tolerable.

"It allows people to escape the trauma of another day of coverage on CNN," says Trusky.

It can also lead us to a more

enlightened state, Armstrong says. “The arts provide as much a ‘going to’ as an ‘escape from.’ When we are engaged with art we make a connection with it so we don’t have as much awareness of ourselves. Our imagination is engaged in the work.”

Reinhart agrees that art can be an escape, although he says that’s not always a good thing.

“Escapism is like a carnival ride,” he says. “The illusion is that you are traveling, but you’re really getting dropped off right back where you started.”

Instead, the kind of art that endures beyond the crisis that launched it will almost always take you from one mind-set to another.

“When it comes to escapism, there are two different sensibilities,” Reinhart says.

“One looks to the arts to show us our faults and tell us our story. In the other instance, we ask it not to tell us our story, because we can’t take it; we ask it to tell us something else instead.”

The first example produces art that survives over time, Reinhart says. The second does not. “What lasts are those works that try to tell us the truth about what is happening.”

Finally, art is about the artists. It’s about the need to create and come to peace with the world around them.

“All of us who do arts do it for ourselves first and foremost,” says Idaho Dance Theatre’s Hansen. “Then we pray that someone will come, that they will appreciate it and be moved by it.”

“Many other things in life are isolated, but art involves coming together. It’s part of why we go, and also why we sometimes stay away.”

— Gordon Reinhart



**W**hen a national poetry symposium at the White House was canceled last February amid concerns it would provide a platform to protest the imminent war in Iraq, poets in Boise and across the nation responded by holding local readings as part of a grassroots “poets against the war” movement.

The Boise event was held in a small downtown bar and drew perhaps 100 people. The evening began with a reading by an elderly woman whose husband had been held in a Japanese internment camp during World War II. It concluded nearly three hours later with a reading by a woman who had served in the 1991 Gulf War and whose two children were in the U.S. military and headed for the Middle East. In between were poems that covered a vast range of emotional and ideological terrain.

For Martin Corless-Smith, a Boise State English professor and poet who helped organize the reading,

## POETRY

the gathering accomplished something important: It allowed people to express themselves through the powerful medium of poetry.

Poetry provides “an authentic experience” that is especially important during difficult times, says Corless-Smith. “What poetry can do is to continue to articulate at the edge of experience,” he says. “People who read poetry have to really read it. It’s a serious relationship.”

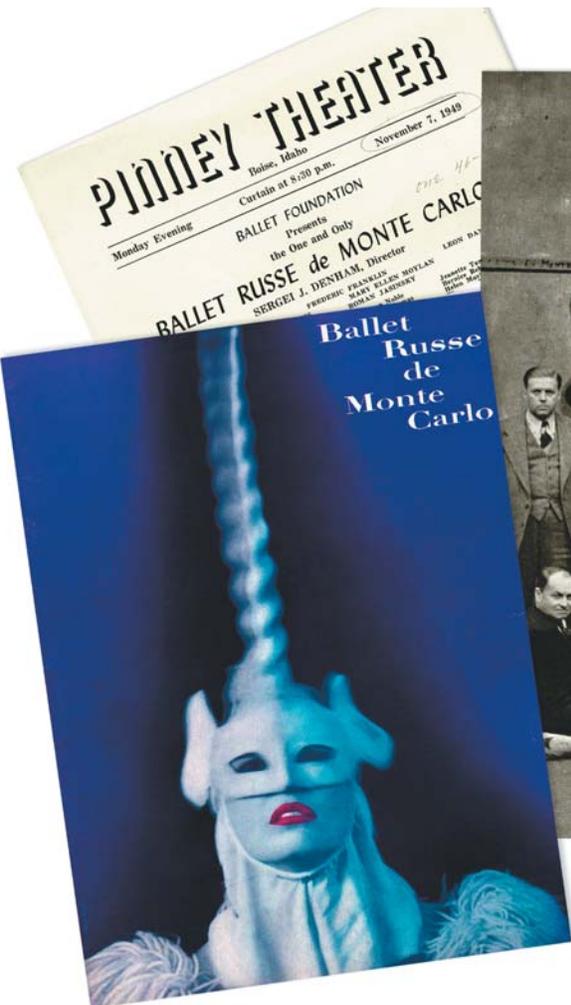
For most of recorded history, poetry has played an important role in culture and civilization, notes Corless-Smith. A long line of poets, including such celebrated figures as John Milton and Walt Whitman, explored political and social philosophies in their works that helped define the issues of their days.

Poetry is powerful because it places daily life in the context of metaphor, notes poet Janet Holmes, a Boise State English professor and director of Ahsakta Press. And that can be especially valuable when reality is overwhelming.

“A good poem doesn’t tell you what to think or how to react,” Holmes says. “But it can help you discover your own feelings.”

— Janelle Brown

# BOISE'S CLASS ACT



A 1940s program for The Pinney Theater features the Ballet Russe. Performing arts, including music, theater and dance, thrived in 20th century Boise.

## Theater played leading role in valley's history

BY JUSTIN ENDOW

**E**ven during times of turmoil and hardship, the arts have remained tightly woven into Boise's cultural fabric. Boise Music Week, local theater productions and musical and dance performances are among the local events that have provided solace and inspiration for more than a generation of patrons.

"There's always been a healthy interest in music in the Boise Valley, attested to by the fact that there were a number of organizations that were succeeding," says Jack Best, a professor of music at Boise Junior College and Boise State from 1947-98.

"During the war periods, that interest was accentuated by people's deep desire to make music and other performing arts more meaningful."

One of the area's premier events is Boise Music Week, an institution for the past 84 years. Since 1919, it has offered children's performances, church music and organ recitals at no cost to its patrons, making it the nation's first admission-free music week. In its 40th anniversary year, Boise Music Week began including performances of Broadway musicals. Through the 1920s, the Great Depression and World War II, the music festival became the largest cultural event in the Treasure Valley.

Kaye Andrijeski, 68, remembers a time when the entire Boise community would turn out on a May evening each year to watch children parade through the city's streets toting homemade lanterns.

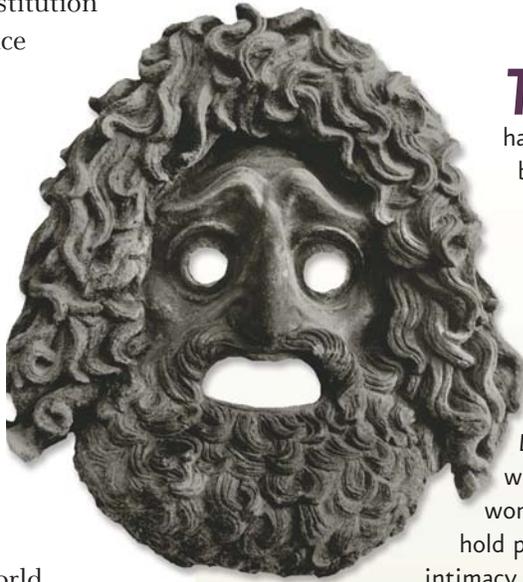
A Boise Music Week volunteer and former area dance instructor, Andrijeski marched alongside her peers and performed in other Music Week festivities throughout her childhood in the 1930s and '40s.

"Some of the most exciting times for me growing up in Nampa were the trips to Boise to see or be involved in performance-oriented events," she says. "It provided us with an opportu-

nity to experience something different from our everyday dance classes. People could step out and away from their normal lives."

Best, who directed the Boise Music Week performances of *Carousel* in 1963 and *My Fair Lady* in 1964, noted how the community came together for Music Week.

"It was a week of total public involvement and interest," he says.



**T**heater has long been used as a tool for social change. From the early Greek *Lysistrata*, where women withhold physical intimacy until the men agree to end the

war, to Berthold Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, an epic anti-war play of the early 1940s, the stage has been used to question policy and stimulate action in various arenas.

"Theater as a vehicle for protest and social criticism has been with us for a long time," says Richard Klautsch, Boise State theatre arts department chair, "particularly [in the area of] political commentary."

Theater is especially powerful in encouraging audiences to rethink their values.

During the 1930s, the Workers' Theatre Movement based performances on current headlines as a propaganda tool. Because their topics affected the common man, they successfully spurred people to action.

"The largest crowds came to the Broadway musicals, but many people showed up for the daily activities, and all of the schools, from elementary through senior high, observed Music Week events."

Andrijeski recalls similar support of the few touring companies that managed to route through Boise, including the Ballet Russe

## THEATER

As a method of escapism, theater also allows audience members to work through crises that aren't their own or to pretend, if just for a moment, that those crises don't even exist.

Sometimes, says theatre arts professor Gordon Reinhart, "we don't want to be taught, we want to be entertained."

With its bright lights, upbeat music and lavish costumes and sets, theater is well-suited for the role of entertainer. During World War I and the Depression, and again during World War II, shows tended to be larger than life, offering audiences a break from the all-too-real worries of life.

That hasn't changed with time. Productions such as *The Lion King* and *Les Miserables* transport audiences to a different dimension, where problems are checked at the door. At the same time, theater intended to promote social action is also thriving, as with *The Laramie Project*, a look at the Matthew Shepard story, recently staged in Hailey, Idaho.

And it will almost certainly continue to thrive, no matter what direction society takes. In the words of English dramatist Thomas Heywood, "The world's a theater, the earth a stage, which God and nature do with actors fill."

— Kathleen Craven

“It provided us with an opportunity to experience something different from our everyday dance classes. People could step away from their normal lives.”

— Kaye Andrijeski

## SCULPTURE

To know the power a sculpture can hold, look no further than the recent war in Iraq. Images of the statue of Saddam Hussein being pulled down and dragged through the streets of Baghdad attest to sculpture’s ability to serve as a lasting symbol.

“Steel is such a powerful substance that it displays power,” says Zella Bardsley, a Boise State alumna and local sculptor. When crafted into an artistic creation, it speaks powerfully.

Sculpture’s inherent lasting quality makes it a popular forum during times of either political or social unrest or patriotic celebration.

Numerous examples exist in the nation’s capital. Closer to home, Boise sculptors have recently created patriotic sculptures, sculptures of protest and abstract pieces.

Bardsley herself created three pieces, *Flags over Idaho*, *Liberty and The Shield of Justice*, that were inspired by the times in which we live. *Flags over Idaho* portrayed the American flag and the state flag wrapped around symbols of Idaho.

“Artists respond to the happenings of the world around them by creating,” she says. “Sculpture is often very symbolic.”

Boise State alumna and sculptor Susan Latta says sculpture appeals to the masses because it is hands on, three-dimensional and lasting.

She recently created a 7 1/2-foot sculpture titled *Evolution*, an orb that is representative of the globe. The orb is splitting apart like a seedling that breaks open to make way for new plants.

“In times like these, I feel like people deserve to have something that’s very personal and art — sculpture — is very personal,” she says.

“There’s nothing that can reach the core of us like art.”

— Sherry Squires



de Monte Carlo, an offshoot of the original Ballet Russe that was founded in Russia in the early 1900s and became the pre-eminent touring dance company in Europe.

“It was so amazing, for those days, to have a chance to watch such spectacular performers,” she says of the shows she attended in the late 1940s. “All of us dancers looked forward to going to Boise for Ballet Russe every year. The old Pinney Theater was so big and beautiful inside, such a neat place for us to watch ballet.”

The Pinney Theater also housed theatre performances and movies for more than 60 years until its demolition in 1970.

One of the many companies to perform at this facility was the Boise Little Theatre group, which staged its inaugural performance, *Arsenic and Old Lace*, at the Pinney in August 1948.

The group moved to an old theater at Gowen Field and experienced eight increasingly successful seasons. However, at the end of that season a fire broke out during a performance, killing two members of the theater technical crew and rendering the building useless.

The group rallied thanks to the support of community donations, hard work from volunteers and a land grant from the city to build a new theater. Boise Little Theatre spent the 1956-57 season in the Boise High School auditorium, and in August 1957 performed *High Tor* at its new domed art house at Fort

and Garrison streets, which is now considered a Boise landmark.

Through the '60s and the Vietnam War era, Boise Little Theatre continued to improve its facilities and performances.

Charles Lauterbach, a Boise State professor emeritus of theatre arts and a former member of the Boise Little Theatre board of directors, says that the theater's success can be attributed to a long-standing reputation for staging quality community theater as well as having a nice facility in which to work.

"By the time I came to Boise in the early '70s, Boise Little Theatre had already seen a lengthy period of growth and development," says Lauterbach.

"There was amazing support of the arts in those days, as evidenced by the new theater organizations that eventually began cropping up around the valley. More and more of those groups were composed of either university or theater-trained actors and directors, many of whom were coming out of Boise State."

And as a result of that unwavering dedication to the success of the arts, from all sectors of the community, Boiseans today have numerous performing arts options that range from intimate musical and modern dance presentations to the Idaho Shakespeare Festival and nationally recognized tours hosted at the Morrison Center.

Much of the variety of performing arts options in the Boise area can be traced back to the constant and diligent support from the community, even through difficult social and



**L**ike a drug, it can cause your eyes to tear, your heart to pound, or your foot to move seemingly of its own volition.

To experience how instrumental music evokes strong reactions, pause for a moment and imagine your own responses to: a lone trumpeter playing "Taps" at a military funeral; a jazz band performing "In the Mood" in a nightclub; or your high school dance DJ spinning Edwin Starr's 1970 hit "War."

"We associate so many emotions with the sounds that we hear," says Boise State music professor Liana Tyson, "and that tends to be true in all cultures."

Since humans first picked up animal bones and banged them together to scare away predators or blew on a conch shell to signal their neighbors, people have relayed communal messages through music, says Marcellus Brown, another Boise State music professor.

political periods, says Lauterbach, who also serves on the board of directors for Boise Music Week. But he is quick to note that Boise was unlike many parts of the country at that time.

"Some areas of the country saw classical plays put on as war protest dramas or the development of guerilla theater as a minor kind of art," Lauterbach says. Boise, however, appeared to have remained relatively untouched by the sociopolitical upheaval of the

## INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Throughout military history, the compelling tone of bugles and stirring beat of drums have conveyed battlefield signals and inspired soldiers to fight for God and country.

And when that military band plays a rousing march in a parade through town, "the music is part of what makes that young person want to be a part of it, march along, join and sign on the dotted line," says Brown.

Instrumental music can also be an expression of protest against societal conditions or a way to cope with tough times. During the French Revolution, known for its gory public beheadings and brutal social upheaval, light operas were the pop music of the day.

"It tends to be really kind of saccharin and very, very light and easy-going and fun to listen to," says Tyson. "It seems odd that at this time of incredible turmoil we had tons of this music coming out of France in the late 18th century."

Whether in patriotism, protest or diversion, instrumental music is universally at the heart of human expression.

— Pat Pyke

period.

"There were only two television stations and two theater groups [Boise Little Theatre and the BJC theatre department] in town," he says.

"People didn't have that many options. Now we have a number of theater groups, events and venues, and a much larger pool of trained talent from which to draw."

And Boise's performing arts scene looks to a future that promises as much success as its past.