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## **DCAC Archive : Director's Letters November : December 2010**

The other day I was listening to a re-broadcast of "Cavalcade of America," a radio program from the 1940's. The broadcast also included advertisements from its sponsor, in this case the Du Pont Company. Perhaps you are familiar with their slogan, "Better things for better living through chemistry." I have heard that slogan hundreds of times, maybe thousands (I have listened to a lot of old radio programs, and in fact, it was their slogan until 1999) and as you can imagine, I always mentally change the last word to art. "Better things for better living through art."

But of course I can't let it stop there, because for me, a theater man, art is not about creating things. And I'd have to say that for most artists, regardless of medium, it isn't the thing that is created, but the spirit, provocation or experience of the thing that is most important. So now we get to something like: "Better provocative spiritual experiences for better living through art." Okay, so it doesn't roll off the tongue as easily, but it serves the purpose. Probably should lose the first "better" too, and come up with something like: "Provocative spiritual artistic experiences for better living." I don't know, maybe not; but we could work on this all day, I think you catch my drift. The point is that in my opinion, life is better with artistic experiences, just as it is better with scientific advancement. In case you are wondering what Du Pont changed their slogan to in 1999, it is now: "The Miracles of Science." I'm not so moved to change the last word in that one to "art." Maybe. Catch me at the bar sometime and we can hash that one out.

But what I really want to get to (and I'm sure you were wondering by now) is that in the commercial for Du Pont, they actually gave a little bit of a chemistry history lesson focused on ammonia. They talked about how the ancient Egyptians used ammonia in fabric dyeing, and that the same process utilizing the chemical, sunlight and the dew from grass was used for many centuries to bleach fabric before it was dyed in order to keep the purest colors intact. Apparently this was quite a lengthy process, taking months to complete. They wrapped it up with: "So whenever you ask for ammonia, remember that you are speaking a little bit of ancient Egyptian." I'm not so sure how accurate that was, but it got my mind off the slogan thing and onto the history thing.

I began to muse on how most of the art we create has such ancient roots. Yeah, I know about the cave paintings, and Greek theater, and the countless shards of pottery that are unearthed all around the world, and I am not trying to stun anyone with this revelation. It's just that we have to figure that the artists, or artisans, got some of the same feeling we do as contributors to the

society. For them, they were creating better things for better living; it was way more objective for them. And I'm sure the person who figured out that a cup would be better if had a handle took a lot of pride in that innovation. They were probably hailed as an innovator, a visionary who could imagine drinking hot liquids and not scalding their guests' hands.

For us it's more difficult. We have to justify our work as making life better though seeing it, watching, reading or hearing it. We must believe that we are offering something singular to our audience, and while it may not have a practical application by which to give it value, it is the difference in one's consciousness after the artistic experience that is our contribution to the betterment of our society. And while that may not always be tangible, it is a real and measureable phenomenon. That's where I get into the ancient aspect of what we are doing. It's like the old adage: "What's the first step in making a chair? Imagine sitting." That imagination is what we carry with us as artists, and I have to believe that it is the same sense of wonder and ability to create that brought us all that ancient art that we marvel at today. I think a lot of us create because we want to help make our world a better place. It's really our driving force here at DCAC. Whenever we think about what makes us important to our community, specifically Adams Morgan, the best answer I ever have is that we make it a better place. Whether every citizen in our neighborhood comes to our events or not, I'm sure they think that an arts center in the heart of it all is a good thing, and makes them feel that they live in a more civilized place.

Hmm.... how about: "Better things for better living through DC Arts Center?" Okay, I'm done; it's probably a good thing we aren't searching for a slogan. Hope to see you here soon.

**B Stanley,**  
Executive Director