

“Attention Must Be Paid”

By Richard Stein

In what is arguably the most riveting moment of Arthur Miller’s “Death of Salesman,” Linda Loman’s outcry never fails to shock audiences as she admonishes us about her husband’s desperate condition.

No outcry gave warning to the recent demise of Opera Pacific and few words have been uttered about its passing, suggesting to many that Orange County is doing its best to put it out of mind and to pay as little attention to it as possible.

But attention has been paid outside of Orange County, in newspapers like *The New York Times*, in gatherings of arts leaders around the world and in the nation’s halls of power, where people are asking, “What kind of community allows its opera company to fail?”

This is the same community that regularly attracts attention for its wealth and opulence in unflattering television depictions of an empty-headedness that does great disservice to the wealth of intellectual and artistic talent resident here and to the resourcefulness and entrepreneurial spirit that has catapulted Orange County to be an international leader in so many ways.

Orange County is home to world class and emerging artists and artistic organizations, and as significant and meaningful as they have proven to be, the sad truth is that the support for them has fallen on the shoulders of a relatively small community of passionate and generous philanthropists, the same names of whom appear on almost every donor list.

Perhaps most citizens of Orange County are unaware of the fact that the arts are not self-supporting. It’s time to correct that misconception.

In our community’s zeal to demonstrate to the world its belief that taxpayer dollars should not support anything but “essential services,” it has chosen to define the arts as “non-essential”—a position that no great civilization has ever held.

As absurd as it is to have to make a case for community support for the arts—both from its citizens and from its government—it appears that in Orange County, we may have to return to “square one.”

Attention must be paid to securing the health of the vibrant creative community in Orange County—or other organizations will join the ranks of Opera Pacific.

Richard Stein is Executive Director of Arts Orange County, the leader in building appreciation, participation and support for the arts and arts education in Orange County through its annual Imagination Celebration, the annual Orange County Arts Awards and other programs, including its newly launched website, SparkOC.com.