

News For A People's World

REPORTING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Volume 1, Number 3

April, 1993

MONEY, POWER, AND PEOPLE'S RADIO

What's Causing Static At KPFA?

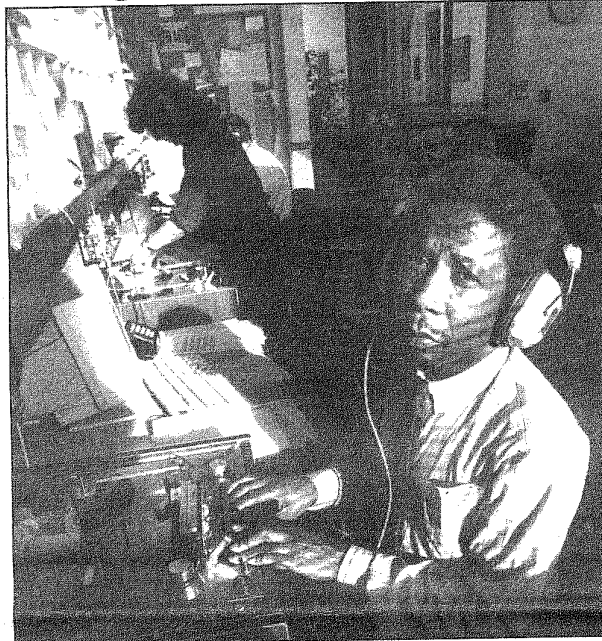
By Nick Alexander

SPECIAL
REPORT

BERKELEY—KPFA, the Bay Area's premier listener-sponsored radio station, is in the throes of a crisis that is at once political and administrative. Both sides of the conflict accuse opponents of resisting changes needed to fulfill station founder Lew Hill's dream to fight for the rights of the marginalized, downbeaten and voiceless elements of society. At the center of the turmoil are a dispute over organizational hierarchy and charges that KPFA's national board of directors is trying to create a left-leaning alternative to National Public Radio (NPR).

Since its founding 44 years ago, KPFA has been racked by continual upheavals. Its periodic problems mirror those of the U.S. left itself—bitter factionalism, disputes over organizational structure, a tendency to transform personal conflicts into political splits and the frustration of trying to operate cooperatively, progressively and creatively in a society that encourages none of those qualities. Somehow the station has coped its way through it all, managing to produce some of the best progressive radio in the country.

The current tumult, however, seems particularly severe. Union issues, bargaining, and decision-making struggles have grown rancorous in recent months. Unpaid staff members have come to distinguish themselves sharply from paid staff, management, and the National Board of Directors of Pacifica Radio, which



News Reporter and Union Steward Wendel Harper: KPFA Department heads needs to be accountable to staff and the community.

oversees five stations nationwide. And volunteers and paid personnel are questioning how much personal sacrifice should be expected of them in exchange for promoting Pacifica's stated mission of encouraging social change. This collision of interests "has been especially anguished because Pacifica should view its own workplace relations as qualitatively different from profit-making enterprises," according to Asata Iman, director of the station's Apprenticeship Program and a member of Local 1412 of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (UE), which represents paid staff.

While other left institutions have been devastated economically and politically in recent years, financial conditions at KPFA

and other Pacifica outlets have been less severe, due in large measure to a preponderance of unpaid staff who have produced programs of wide ranging interest not heard on mainstream outlets. This, in turn, has led to a steady increase in listener support for most of the decade. But the station's woes are partly attributed to Pacifica's push for a major expansion with little open discussion of the matter.

Among the questions raised by the conflict: Is Pacifica's active search for funding from corporate foundations potentially compromising the network's progressive mandate? Will Pacifica's plan to increase national programming reduce input from KPFA's listeners and diminish the station's role as the Northern

INSIDE LOOK

3 Bay Area Tells U.N.: "Women's Rights are Human Rights"



6 Books: "The American Way of Birth"

8 Local Airline Workers Stall Concessions

East Bay Activists Say No To Shopping Center

2 Readers Write
7 No. Calif. Calendar

California progressive community's "bulletin board"?

One view of the dispute is that it's a debate between those on the sectarian left who are wedded to the idea that foundation funding represents "corporate blood money," and those with "new thinking,"

continued on page 4

BRIEF...NEWS IN BRIEF...NEWS IN BRIEF...NEWS IN BRIEF...NEWS IN BRIEF...NEWS IN BRIEF...NEWS IN BRIEF...N

SWEET SMELL OF VICTORY FILLS KETTLEMAN CITY

KETTLEMAN CITY—Residents of Kettleman City are smelling victory in their five-year battle to prevent construction of a hazardous chemical waste incinerator. After the last hearings, permits for the incinerator were denied. If the appeal by the prospective owners, Chemical Waste Management, is denied, the project will be put to rest.

Mary Lou Mares, a leader of People for Clean Air and Water (PCAW) in Kettleman City, said that Waste Management and county politicians thought they could ram the project through. "They kept telling us that we were ignorant, and that emissions from the incinerator would not be harmful to our health," she said. In fact members of PCAW read all the reports, and went to all the hearings. They put out leaflets talking about the hazards of the chemicals the incinerator would emit. The campaign built unanimous sentiment against the incinerator within Kettleman City, and caused the county elected officials to drop their support.

farmworkers. Average family income there is \$13,000 per year. According to Mares, residents already have more than their share of toxic problems from pesticides and an existing waste dump run by Chemical Waste. Chem Waste promised that the incinerator would bring jobs to the economically strapped town, but residents decided that their health would not be sold for a promise of a handful of jobs. The campaign against the incinerator was highlighted by a 1991 rally which brought several thousand people to Kettleman City. Rally speakers included U.S. Representative Maxine Waters and the Reverend Jesse Jackson. In the course of their organizing, PCAW joined with California Rural Legal Assistance to force authorities to make hearings and documents accessible to Spanish-speaking people.

Greenpeace and other environmental groups provided technical assistance.—Jay Barry

PORT CHICAGO—JUSTICE AT LAST?

CONCORD—There is cause for optimism among those

stoppage at Port Chicago in Concord, California during World War II. In response to years of agitation by community activists and pressure from members of Congress, including Ron Dellums and Barbara Boxer, on January 14, 1993 Secretary of the Navy Sean O'Keefe reversed the court-martial conviction of one of the men, Seaman Second Class Samuel Cooper, and ordered the Navy's Board of Correction to reinvestigate the events surrounding the July 1944 munitions explosion at Port Chicago (now known as Concord Naval Weapons Station). That blast killed 320 men, including over two hundred African Americans loading ammunition in segregated units under the supervision of whites. The exact cause of the explosion was never determined. In a high-profile military trial, seamen who had refused to return to work because of fear for their lives were sentenced to prison for terms of up to 15 years. Protests from civil rights groups led to the release of the men in 1946, but their convictions and dishonorable discharges remained on their records. They and their families have always been entitled to any veterans' benefits.

Static At KPFA?

continued from page 1

who want a financial "jump start" to spread Pacifica's progressive message beyond a left enclave. (See, for example, "East Bay Express," Mar. 5, 1993.) Others say the problem is more complex: that given Pacifica's top-down structure, there is the danger that national programmers will engage in self-censorship as a tradeoff for large infusions of money from major funding sources.

"It's not a question of morality. Lew Hill set up listener sponsorship not because he thought the money [of advertisers] was evil but because he found that there was no freedom to broadcast the truth when you were dependent on advertisers," contends Peter Franke, former President of Pacifica Foundation.

The crisis began building to its present level when KPFA's management sent a letter in mid-December to a dozen hosts of community-oriented shows informing them their prime time slots would be canceled as of January. The rationale given for this was to open up these time slots to more diverse programming. Station manager Pat Scott also told broadcasters of the popular public affairs program Flashpoints that they would be terminated at the end of 1992 unless they agreed to sign contracts separate from the stationwide union agreement. In a public memo, Scott said that making Flashpoints staff permanent would deny the station "program flexibility" to "respond to future community needs." But Iman says many saw Scott's action as an attempt to "divide the KPFA staff and break the back of the station's union local."

Some of these decisions were put on hold after strident protests in and outside the station. Community activists formed a Listeners Participation Group and issued a set of demands they say is aimed at reclaiming the station's mandate. They call for the establishment of a "grassroots, democratic council" of listener representatives (functioning alongside a staff council) to help oversee the station, as well as the election of regional representatives to the Pacifica National Board of Directors.

Activists also demanded an end to the station's "gag rule." Programmers had been warned that if they discussed the controversy on the air they would be suspended and possibly lose their time slots. Defending the decision, Scott maintained that "most public and community stations abide by this policy on the premise that valuable air time should not be used to promote the personal agendas of individual programmers." Scott has since agreed to airing a monthly call-in show focusing on listener issues.

Listeners Group representative Marianne Torres says listeners are particularly incensed at the threat to axe Flashpoints and prime time programming which "provided in-depth coverage and analysis of issues given short shrift" by the 6 to 7 p.m. evening newscast. She asserts that the newscasts rely too much on establishment figures and institutions for comments on national and international affairs instead of activists and left and progressive analysts. It is only during fundraising marathons, contend Listeners Group members, that more radical perspectives are adequately represented, in special programming.

UNION-BUSTING?

Ironically Scott, who has taken the brunt of criticism from staff and listeners, echoes their concerns when she complains about the lack of weekly

programs focusing on the homeless and the dearth of relevant public affairs programming. "What I've tried to do is create a system so our station's programming can organically change with the demographics and the social issues that need to be addressed and are not addressed by the mainstream outlets....That's hardest to address because someone gets into a slot and they don't want to be moved, even though what they are doing may no longer be germane to what is going on in the world."

In the case of Flashpoints, created as an emergency response to the Persian Gulf War, Scott said she wanted to extend the interim union contract for another two years, without making Flashpoints programmers permanent staff, because "two years from now what they really are good at may not be any good for KPFA."

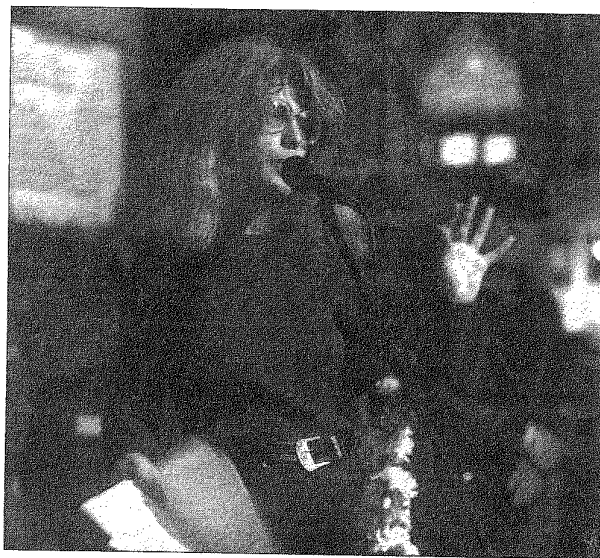
UE shop steward Reed Derleth responds that "paid journalists don't have a shelf-life of two years, and their programs can be kept relevant by using interns and volunteers from the communities we want to represent." The union argued that agreeing to individual contracts would weaken its collective strength and violate its contract. It charged that management's attempts to get separate agreements with Flashpoints personnel was an unfair labor practice and threatened to file a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board. Derleth said the union resisted "going to the public and asking it to boycott subscriptions [because] we felt this vital institution should be protected...but we were ready to go out on strike." Union and management finally agreed to make the Flashpoints team permanent union employees, but the five programmers will split the equivalent of one-and-a-half full-time salaries.

Union members charge that it was clear after the Flashpoints controversy that the station is going in the direction of replacing volunteers and full-time paid workers with part-time employees hired without benefits or job security, who could be removed at the whim of management.

Some unionists feel that the long hours they put in goes with the territory of working in a progressive non-profit organization. But some feel management has taken advantage of this spirit of cooperation and dedication, and are angered that the station pushed so hard for concessions from staff who typically work more than what they're paid for. According to Iman, during union negotiations concluded in October, management strenuously resisted union demands that part-time staffers have health benefits, even though most nonprofit organizations, including many progressive unions, have adopted such a standard.



Jude Thilman of the Flashpoints team.



photos by Casey

Listeners Group member Peggy Noten wants the station to air more left analysis.

But management argued that the private sector generally does not give health coverage to half-time employees. Iman, a member of the union's negotiating committee, says that while the final contract did extend health coverage to part-time workers, the local was "forced into a battle that none of us really wanted... the fact that we had to fight for benefits for employees' kids was horrid."

DIRTY MONEY?

While paid staff and volunteers see their personal sacrifice as a trade-off for a greater social purpose, some are increasingly concerned about Pacifica's vision as an alternative media outlet. Many people, with the exception of management, are upset by the plans to increase national programming, with little input from listeners or staff, and many are leery of the network's search for large-scale funding from corporate foundations "that threatens to dilute the content and analysis that we depend on for our own political survival," contends Marianne Torres, one of five people elected to represent listeners at meetings of the KPFA Staff Group, an organization of dissident station personnel.

The network already receives 20 percent of its revenue from the federal government's Corporation for Public Broadcasting as well as small equipment donations from private donors. However, Pacifica's "Strategy for National Programming" raises the prospect of more funding by large foundations. In its development director Dick Bunce writes that the network should become "players and partners" and form "trusting and working relationships" with nonprofit foundations like Ford, Pew, MacArthur, and Rockefeller. Pew funds right-wing evangelical groups and think tanks like the Heritage Foundation, and its current mission statement says its policy is to help "shape a new world order." Rockefeller, Ford, and the health insurance-funded MacArthur foundation are considered more liberal but all of them are heavily involved in funding right-wing and centrist organizations, said Sara Diamond, author of "Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right."

The foundation support will help pay for a five-year plan to develop an evening half-hour national news broadcast and morning news magazine put together in Washington under the direction of Gail Christian, a former executive with the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). Christian hopes the promise of higher salaries and job security could be used to pull "well established people" away from

other networks. She doesn't want to "raid" Pacifica's own stations for personnel. The news program will go on the air in July with a satellite that enables some 550 stations around the country to pick it up at low cost.

Scott says the newscast will eliminate wasteful and costly duplication by Pacifica's five outlets and provide a multitude of small communities with "Pacifica's progressive hit on national and international events...I know we'll have to take something off the air at KPFA...but we have to realize that helping them is also helping ourselves...and the movement for social change." This has drawn a fierce response from some staffers who fear that their avowedly non-commercial network would be badly compromised by corporate foundation funding.

Bunce contends the funds are only intended to "jump start" the news service, and that the expanded listenership will eventually pay for the program once it's launched. He argues that Pacifica has no intention of becoming "addicted" to foundation funding. He says that "trusting and working relationship" means that "you can't go to somebody who you haven't had a connection with and say give me \$100,000...it takes time to develop a relationship... part of the process is meeting people and having them get familiar with the service you are offering..."

However, dissident staff like Maria Gilardin, also KPFA's former development director, contend that this could be the recipe for self-censorship by national programmers. Gilardin points to non-corporate sponsorship as the key difference between KPFA and other public radio stations such as KQED, NPR and PBS, which allow programming to be underwritten by AT&T or Chevron. Getting corporate foundation money to fund a program on the human brain, the life of a jazz pianist or even a famous deceased American radical, she argues, may be considerably easier than for a show on labor organizing or Third World revolutions.

She contends that funding even from "friendly" nonprofit institutions could skew the programming direction and make KPFA less free to take the risks it now takes. "How are we going to be 'players and partners' with MacArthur at a time when health insurance will be a very important issue on our air... How are we going to explain to union members that we are taking money from Pew that for decades financed anti-union activities?"

The programming strategy also calls for an aggressive campaign to enlarge the

funds from individual donors who can afford annual contributions of \$250 or more, increasing the network's revenue from the donor program from \$12,000 to \$100,000 annually at the end of five years. Diamond is concerned about the consequences of skewing programming toward more upscale tastes. She argues that smaller and more diverse contributions preserve Pacifica's activist base. "If the purpose of alternative media is to build progressive movements, then it needs to reach out to larger numbers of middle and lower income people who can make \$25 and \$45 donations and spread out the accountability..."

Both sides of the debate agree that Pacifica, outgunned in money and resources, can compete with NPR nationally only by offering listeners something different and discernably to the left.

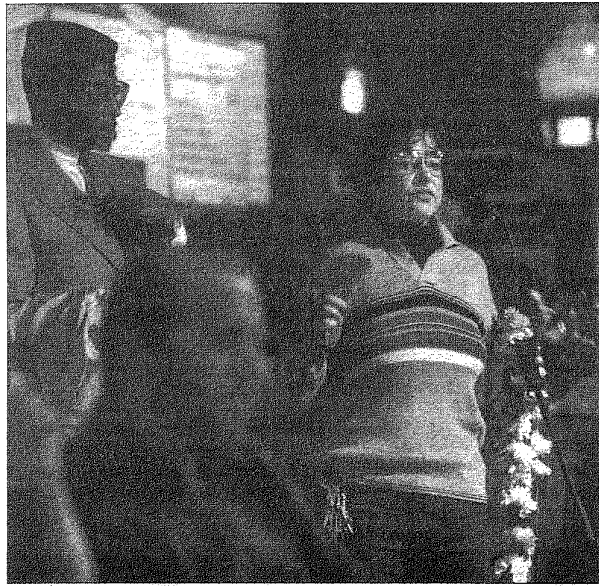
In recent years the Pacifica National News has cut back significantly on local and international stringers and has substituted longer feature stories produced in Washington. The new budget continues that trend with the addition of new editors and anchors and a marginal increase in money for local correspondents. Andrew Phillips, program director at WBAI in New York City, argues that the Washington Bureau could stand to divert money away from a bloated management and new editorial staff and "better use the energy and talent that flows in Pacifica's system."

INTERNAL DEMOCRACY?

Some staff are unhappy with what they say is a pecking order, with management and department heads at the top, and all other paid staff and the preponderance of volunteers at the bottom. Major programming decisions are made by the general manager in coordination with the Program Council, a group made up of the heads of KPFA's six departments and the program director. This structure puts the department heads, who are all union members, into a management position of deciding who's on and off the air.

Two years ago the station's Unpaid Staff Organization released a survey that revealed that a significant number of the staff had low morale, felt their work was unappreciated and feared reprisals for openly questioning the management styles of some department heads. In November, volunteers initiated the formation of a Staff Coordinating Group, including unpaid and paid personnel, which is working on proposals for a democratic decision-making structure. "What's key here is a new spirit of unity [in which] we are no longer afraid of getting burned out or being pushed out," says Staff Group member Mary Berg, host of KPFA's early Sunday morning music program.

With the exception of KPFA news reporter Wendel Harper, few paid staff have committed themselves to working with the group. "Most are just interested [in working through the union] for wages and



KPFA programmers Mary Berg and Doug Edwards (far left), pictured here at Listeners Group meeting, want the station to live up to founder Lew Hill's fight for the marginalized.

benefits," Harper contends. This contradiction came to a head when management, in coordination with the Program Council, moved to change the way the coveted primetime slot is allotted, without adequately warning volunteers of the proposed changes.

Scott said the new plan would revoke the permanent hold that a disproportionately large number of white programmers have had on prime time and clear the way for a highly produced and more culturally diverse on-air presence. "It was also partly a question of organization, if programmers produced a series that could run for 12-13 weeks then the programmer could go out and work on another program, and open up a time slot to someone else..."

According to Women's Department Director Amelia Gonzalez-Garcia, the plan was temporarily shelved after strident protests from volunteers who contend that management offered no scheme to help bring in programmers from underrepresented communities.

Some also contended that the time required to prepare a 12-13 week segment would push out activists with families and jobs. "The only people left would be that exclusive class of people financially well-off enough to do the programming," argues Mona Tamimi, host of "Voices from the Arab World."

Scott acknowledges there has not been enough communication between management and staff, but says current proposals to increase staff input into station affairs are "unnecessarily convoluted and bureaucratic...we will never get anything done."

The Staff Group wants, among other things, the Program Council expanded to include an unpaid staffer elected from each department, and wants additional meetings to be held at times convenient to staff representatives, so as not to exclude those with job, childcare or other responsibilities.

Some argue that much of the perception of listeners and staff that KPFA is undemocratic and unresponsive and even abusive can be traced to the absence of a mechanism to hold department heads accountable. Harper, a shop steward, and long-time programmer Robbie Osman contend the union has helped foster this image by giving lifetime tenure to people who are essentially in management roles. Both advocate taking department heads out of the union's bargaining unit. Osman argues that department heads should be given three-year contracts, and that their continued employment be contingent on a favorable evaluation by a committee composed of department staff and community leaders.

OPENING UP THE STATION

Just how much influence listeners should have in station affairs is a complex topic. In contrast to most other local public radio and television stations, KPFA and Pacifica have self-perpetuating boards that fill vacancies with recommendations from incumbents. Other than electing two members to the national board, KPFA's local board has no real power.

Some in the Listeners Group advocate an elected listener board of directors that has influence over all major programming

decisions. That prospect could disqualify the station from receiving funds from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), according to the David LePage of the National Federation of Community Broadcasters.

The notion of listener control over programming has received a mixed reception from programmers. Berg says, "If CPB money is the 'only hang-up,' I would be in favor of going back to the approach of Lew Hill in the first place and working as hard as we can to increase listener support...There are vast regions of people within our earshot who have never heard of KPFA, where the Folio is not distributed...We are not doing a tenth of what we should be doing to expand our reach."

Others, like long-time staffer and former News Director Lincoln Bergman, believe that programming decisions should be made by the programmers and that the general manager should have no direct involvement. He argues that it is partly a question of division of labor. With the manager involved in budgetary and organizational tasks, "creativity (in programming) percolates upward" from the programmers themselves.

That listeners have no institutional means of influencing station policy is a legitimate complaint, says David Salniker, executive director of Pacifica. He supports the idea of having elected positions on KPFA's local advisory board, though for only two or three of its 15 members. Salniker argues that the present board has a careful mix of race, gender, and skill, which would be difficult to reproduce in an open election. He also points to miserably low voter participation by KPFA subscribers in past experiments with direct board elections.

Others, like Philip Maldari, KPFA's director of public affairs, argue that in board elections, candidates who win come from tightly knit organizations. "If we open up all the positions on the board, what is to prevent KPFA from being opened up to any nudnik or sectarian group that can pick up a hundred votes?"

Osman, a former member of Pacifica's national board, responds that "there is no more tightly organized group of people than the current advisory board, which will continue to recruit and seat people in an open election...The point here is that we need to have an elected board that is not beholden to the Pacifica's National Board and executive director..."

Under normal circumstances, people will look at candidates and vote for the incumbents, predicts Osman, "Things will continue pretty much the same as they are now, with many of the current board members remaining in power; only they won't have the last word." But in times of crisis or controversy, when people are upset with what's going on at the station, voter participation will increase. "The question really is: do we see democracy and input from the community as a threat or as protection of the station?"

BRIEF...NEWS IN BRIEF...NEWS IN BRIEF...NEWS IN BRIEF...NEWS IN BRIEF...NEWS IN BRIEF...N

continued from page 3

Sheen and religious activist Rev. William Sloane Coffin will take part in nonviolent direct action there.

A national march on the Labs will be held June 5, sponsored by the Livermore Conversion Project, Greenpeace, American Peace Test, Nevada Desert Experience, and other groups. On June 7 there will be nonviolent direct action at the Labs.

For information on the campaign contact the Livermore Action Project, (510) 567-4337. —John Trinkl

IRISHMEN FIGHT EXTRADITION

SAN FRANCISCO—Trials of two of the three Irish men currently held in Bay Area jails for passport fraud and participation in a 1983 38-man escape from prison in

Northern Ireland are scheduled for April. The extradition trial of Jimmy Smyth has been tentatively rescheduled for April 5. Kevin Artt will be sentenced on passport fraud charges April 30.

Both Smyth and Artt are fighting the passport fraud and extradition charges because they face political and religious persecution in Northern Ireland. They say their lives would be in danger were they returned. The extradition treaty between the U.S. and Great Britain has been amended so that extradition may be denied if the judge finds that the person's life would be in danger on account of religious or political beliefs.

Artt was convicted of murder on the word of a paid informer and a confession obtained through torture.

During Smyth's bail hearings, the court was presented with independent reports by human rights organizations

such as Amnesty International and Helsinki Watch documenting torture, death-squad activity, and discrimination against Irish nationalists.

Paul Brennan is the third man alleged to have participated in the 1983 Long Kesh prison break who has been arrested in California in the past eight months. Like Smyth and Artt, Brennan, 39, has lived quietly in California for the past nine years. The H-Block 3 Committee is coordinating efforts to bring public support behind Smyth, Artt, and Brennan. On April 4, the Committee is sponsoring a benefit concert at the Hall of Flowers on Ninth Avenue in Golden Gate Park. The Committee may be contacted for more information at 2033 Hayes Street, San Francisco, CA 94117.

—Suzanne Forsyth