

Message Text

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SUBJ: PERFORMING ARTS GROUP REQUESTED FOR PORTUGAL

SUMMARY: THE NEXT TEN MONTHS WILL SEE A HEAVY INFLUX OF SOVIET AND EAST EUROPEAN PERFORMING ARTISTS IN PORTUGAL. THE U.S., WHICH HERETOFORE HAS RELIED ON U.S. ARTISTS PERFORMING COMMERCIALY IN PORTUGAL TO DEMONSTRATE THE EXCELLENCE AND VITALITY OF AMERICAN CULTURE, WILL BE BLOWN OUT OF THE WATER UNLESS THE GOVERNMENT STEPS IN AND UNDERWRITES A TOUR IN PORTUGAL BY FIRST-CLASS AMERICAN PERFORMING GROUPS. WE FEEL PORTUGAL SHOULD BE GIVEN A HIGH PRIORITY FOR USG FUNDS FOR THIS PURPOSE TO ENSURE THAT THE CULTURAL FIELD IS NOT LEFT AS THE VIRTUAL EXCLUSIVE PRESERVE OF THE SOVIETS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE EMBASSY RECOMMENDS THAT THE DEPARTMENT CONSIDER WHAT MIGHT BE DONE FOR PORTUGAL IN THE CULTURAL AREA OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY. DR. JOAO DE FREITAS BRANCO, DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR CULTURAL AFFAIRS, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, TOLD THE PAO SEPTEMBER 26 THAT THE SAO CARLOS OPERA HOUSE COULD BECOME A SHOWCASE FOR EAST EUROPEAN PERFORMING ARTISTS, WHICH HE SAID IS NEITHER IN PORTUGAL'S INTEREST NOR IN THE INTEREST OF THE WESTERN DEMOCRACIES.

2. FREITAS BRANCO IS THE FORMER DIRECTOR OF THE SAO

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CARLOS OPERA HOUSE. THE SAO CARLOS OPERA HOUSE IS TO

PORTUGAL WHAT LA SCALA IS TO ITALY. THE 1974-75 OPERA SEASON IS PRETTY WELL SET. PORGY AND BESS, WHICH OPENED THE 1972-73 SEASON, WILL BE REPEATED NEXT FEBRUARY. THE PROSPECTS OF SOVIET, EAST GERMAN, POLISH, AND OTHER EAST EUROPEAN PERFORMING ARTISTS PERFORMING IN PORTUGAL ON A LARGE SCALE ARE VERY HIGH INDEED. THERE IS A READY-MADE AUDIENCE FOR THEM. (SEE STEPHEN ROSENFELD'S COLUMN ON PORTUGAL IN SEPTEMBER 21 EDITION OF WASHINGTON POST, WHEREIN HE QUOTES FOREIGN MINISTER MARIO SOARES AS SAYING, "THERE IS AN ANTI-AMERICAN CAMPAIGN IN PORTUGAL, BUT IT IS IDEOLOGICAL. THE MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE ARE FOR THE UNITED STATES.")

3. SOARES SHOULD BE TAKEN AT HIS WORD. THE ANTI-AMERICAN CAMPAIGN BEING WAGED BY THE INTELLECTUAL LEFT IN PORTUGAL IS POISONOUS. THE OTHER HALF OF WHAT SOARES SAYS IS EQUALLY TRUE: IDEOLOGICALLY UNCOMMITTED PORTUGUESE--AND THEY ARE A MAJORITY--ARE NOT ANTI-AMERICAN SO MUCH AS THEY ARE CAUGHT UP IN THE EXCITEMENT OF WHAT'S CURRENT AND NEW. EAST EUROPEAN AND SOVIET PERFORMING GROUPS FALL IN THE LATTER CATEGORY.

4. A THIRD-RATE COMPANY OF THE BOLSHOI BALLET PERFORMED IN LISBON SHORTLY AFTER THE REVOLUTION OF APRIL 25. WHILE TECHNICALLY PROFICIENT, THE COMPANY PERFORMED ROUTINE, CONVENTIONAL PAS DE DEUX. THE CRITICS PROTESTED THAT THE SOVIETS WERE TREATING PORTUGAL LIKE A CULTURALLY UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRY. THERE IS NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE RUSSIANS DID NOT GET THE MESSAGE. IT IS CLEAR THEY DO NOT INTEND TO REPEAT THE MISTAKE. THE FOLLOWING SOVIET CULTURAL PRESENTATIONS HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED: SOVIET GYMNASTIC GROUP (LATE 1974); UKRAINIAN SONG AND DANCE GROUP (SPRING, 1975); DON COSSACK DANCERS (1975); LENINGRAD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA (FALL, 1975); KIROV BALLET (1976).

5. UNTIL NOW, THE US HAS BEEN WELL-REPRESENTED IN PORTUGAL BY ARTISTS APPEARING COMMERCIALY UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE GULBENKIAN FOUNDATION AND THE SAO CARLOS OPERA COMPANY. BUT IN RECENT YEARS, THESE ARTISTS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HAVE TENDED TO BE SOLOISTS OR SMALL ENSEMBLE GROUPS, E.G. REGINA RESNIK, EVELYN LEAR, THE MURRAY LEWIS DANCE COMPANY.

6. THE DANCE THEATER OF HARLEM WAS SCHEDULED TO PERFORM HERE IN OCTOBER, BUT CANCELED IN JULY ALLEGEDLY BECAUSE OF THE AMBIGUITIES OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION HERE. A GOOD HALF OF THE AMBASSADOR'S CALL ON PRIME MINISTER

VASCO GONCALVES OCTOBER 7 WAS TAKEN UP BY THE PRIME MINISTER'S EXPRESSIONS OF CHAGRIN OVER THIS CANCELLATION AND HIS HOPES THAT OTHER AMERICAN CULTURAL GROUPS WOULD COME TO PORTUGAL TO BALANCE THE SOVIET EFFORTS.

7. ACTION REQUESTED: REQUEST THE DEPARTMENT CONSIDER SPONSORING A LISBON STOP FOR ONE OF THE GREAT AMERICAN BALLETS OR ORCHESTRAS TOURING EUROPE IN THE SPRING OF 1975. WHILE WE ASSUME THAT THE HARLEM DANCE THEATER IS UNAVAILABLE, PERHAPS THEY WOULD BE PREPARED TO CORRECT THE BAD IMPRESSION LEFT BY THEIR RECENT CANCELLATION IF USG SUPPORT WERE FORTHCOMING. A COMPANY COMING TO PORTUGAL SHOULD BE PREPARED TO PERFORM IN AT LEAST TWO CITIES, LISBON AND OPORTO, AND POSSIBLY IN A REGIONAL INDUSTRIAL CENTER. USG SPONSORSHIP OF A HIGH-IMPACT PERFORMING ARTS GROUP IN THE SPRING OF 1975, OR EARLIER, WOULD BE TAKEN AS EVIDENCE THAT THE US CARES ABOUT PORTUGAL. IN THE CURRENT POLITICAL CLIMATE IN PORTUGAL, WE FEEL THE US WOULD BE DOING A DISSERVICE TO ITS INTERESTS TO LEAVE THE CULTURAL FIELD TO THE SOVIETS AND EAST EUROPEANS. WE THEREFORE FEEL THAT PORTUGAL SHOULD BE GIVEN A HIGH PRIORITY FOR AVAILABLE FUNDS.
SCOTT

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