

Stephen H. Baird
P.O. Box 570
Cambridge, MA 02138
November 20, 1981

Harvard Square Business Association
56 Boylston Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

Dear Members of the Harvard Square Business Association:

I am writing this letter in hope the Harvard Square Merchants will develop a more congenial and mutually supportive relationship with the Cambridge area street performers (Within constitutional guidelines of course, see Goldstein v. Nantucket 477 F. Supp. 606 (1979)).

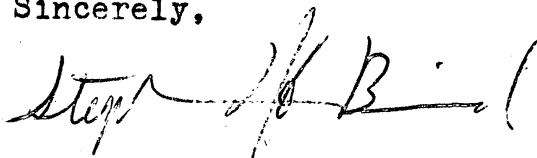
Many of the Cambridge street performers are being lured away from Harvard Square by art councils, merchant associations, institutions, and entrepreneurs for other communities within the state, country, and world. For example: Fantasy Jugglers spent last summer on a "Year of the Family", United Nations' Tour; Loco-Motion Circus recently finished their second tour to Saudi Arabia and continue to teach at the Barnum and Bailey Circus School in Florida; Brother Blue has done several European tours and he has appeared frequently on PBS radio; The Shakespeare Brothers perform and help coordinate events at the Childrens' Museum; John Bigalow and Lorraine Salter recently appeared in concert at Carnegie Hall; Slap Happy has performed at the Charles Play House and many college campuses; I have performed at the Kennedy Art Center, hundreds of college campuses across the country, and on a recently aired PBS television documentary film.

The following communities invited Cambridge street performers to perform at "street fairs" on their pedestrian malls, blocked off streets, and street corners: Boston, New York, Baltimore, Pittsfield, Springfield, Worcester, Hartford, Salem, Marblehead, Newburyport, Newton, Brookline, Lexington, and many more. Banks in Marshfield, Newburyport, Bedford, and Wilmington have sponsored street performances.

All the area newspapers and television stations have written or broadcast favorable reviews of the Harvard Square street performers. I am sure the increased traffic has helped the shops and restaurants.

I do hope the Harvard Square Merchants do not take the street performers for granted. I am enclosing an editorial from the American Bar Association Journal, which I feel is pertinent. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Stephen H. Baird

cc: Cambridge City Council, Cambridge Arts Council, Cambridge Chronicle, Street Performers..

OUT IN FRONT

Are silly laws taking the fun out of your city?

The less romantic among us view cities as places of brick and asphalt and take measure of them by their highrise buildings, teeming expressways, and perhaps a grandiose new stadium.

Others gauge cities in terms of people. They see the promise inherent in urban diversity and the contrasting poverty of slums and ghettos. They see educational, occupational, cultural, and social opportunities abounding side-by-side with crime, deprivation, and rank ugliness.

What few of us see clearly enough is a role for law in making cities livable. And I'm not just talking about maintaining law and order and enforcing zoning ordinances.

Creating a captivating, engaging city takes more than chamber of commerce hype, topless night life, or vast federal programs. Sports complexes, urban renewal, and that highly-touted downtown mall are, after all, just new applications of brick and concrete. They can be, and generally are, quite sterile. The physical makeup of the city, new or old, is not what counts. It's what people do with it—what they are allowed to do with it.

Consider the French Quarter of New Orleans. On the whole, it's a bit tacky, but anyone who gets beyond the honky-tonks of Bourbon Street to the quaint shops of Rue Royale or the almost-carnival atmosphere that is Jackson Square on Sunday quickly senses the quarter's organic qualities. It is alive. That fact spawns the comfortable ambience that delights natives and tourists.

Any of the American cities commonly thought of as romantic and attractive—and some not regarded that way—have subtle charms. Street musicians and artists complement San Francisco's physical backdrop of cable cars and gingerbread architecture. Garish, bustling New York gains a down-to-earth touch from its street personalities—the cabbies, the cops, and the pushcart vendors of flowers, fruit, and those wondrous soft pretzels that are also a streetcorner mainstay in Philadelphia, a city unfairly scorned by many.

But in many cities, stifling, archaic and decidedly shortsighted laws help drain simple but colorful activity from the public ways, making city life far less than the showcase of human-ness that it ought to be.

In Chicago last year, the city council removed from the books an ordinance prohibiting the flying of kites. This particular law, to be sure, was a dead letter. The campaign against it, led by a radio station that for years has sponsored springtime kite flies with the cooperation of the Chicago Park District, took on aspects of a farce.

But Chicago, which is widely thought of as one of the nation's most physically attractive cities, bans many activities that elsewhere are found charming. It prohibits streetcorner sales of flowers, pushcart vendors of just about anything, and even sidewalk cafes. Its Maxwell Street open market, for generations a Sunday bazaar, perennially is threatened with extinction.

Such prohibitions have various ori-

gins. Once, there was a rationale for the ban on sidewalk cafes. At the turn of the century, Chicago had so many horses that their collective droppings—ground to powder in traffic and lofted by the city's famed winds—made outdoor food consumption a significant health hazard.

The horses are gone. The purposeless ban remains.

But let's not pick on Chicago. It merely provides some examples of what appear to be groundless prohibitions or simple but often delightful touches to urban life. Most cities have them, or are fighting them off. A couple of years ago voters in traditionally free-wheeling San Francisco were asked to endorse curbs on the street artists.

They did not, but how many of our cities have been that considerate? How many see peddlers and performers as an attraction, not a nuisance? May your local artisans display their wares each Sunday in a public square, or must they be sequestered until some shopping district whips up a weekend art fair once a year?

Has no one ever connected the forced demise of so many "unsightly" traditional open-air markets and today's proliferation of suburban flea markets? Why do we wonder that central cities are dying? Haven't we made them so antiseptic, so neat, so ordered, that there is little allure left? We have forgotten, it seems, that it is the loose ends and curious corners of a city that most fascinate us.

Lawyers might effect more urban reform than a long string of expensive government projects by becoming leaders in opening up cities to their residents—a true revitalization. Each large city, and many smaller ones, must have a few ordinances that have outlived their time, if ever they had a time. Why not a Lawyers' lobby to sweep away frustrating and foolish uses of a city's police power? This ought to be a natural for local bar associations.

Not every hamlet will convert to "Fun City," and not every day will become a civic holiday as a result, but the effort might just halt the unfortunate trend of trying to pour each aspect of city life into a mold. To have a community, we must be encouraged and able to commune. Or we may all drift our separate ways, closeted in our homes in front of television sets—and call that civilization.

—John Woytash

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Comm. from Stephen H. Baird relative to the
relationship of Harvard Square merchants and
Cambridge area street performers.

In City Council,

November 23, 1981

11/23/81

Placed on File -
~~WITH~~ Comm on Tourism -
handled by L. Ennis

copy sent to Committee on Tourism
12/3/81