

The Big Black Fiddle of Pablo Casals

By REYNOLDS GIRDLER, *Vice President, Public Relations and Advertising, Sinclair Oil Corporation.*

TO THE readers of most New York newspapers, Puerto Ricans are cape men who spend most of their days—and nights—in rumbles, stomps, and murders.

And Puerto Rico itself is a litter of cribs and crazy shacks on stilts—a mean and miserable place which exports its human debris to New York's ever-receptive relief roles. But before this revolting image can fix itself permanently in the collective mind of the thinking public, *there stands the big black fiddle of Pablo Casals.*

The big black fiddle is a stopper. It hooks the eye and intrudes on the mind and the emotions, proclaiming quite another story of Puerto Rico. Reinforced by the white purity of San Jose Church, the architectural beauty of the governor's mansion, or the gay and dainty collection of little girls in a ballet school, the fiddle largely obliterates the unsavory chronicle of the daily press.

The current four-color magazine advertising of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico started out to be primarily a tourist promotion-industrial development campaign. But it has become something much more significant. It is probably the most effective public relations program now being carried on in the U.S. As such, it is an outstanding example of a truth largely overlooked by the communications industry: the best public relations programs today are being executed in the form of paid advertising.

The environment into which this tourist advertising was originally plunged was a forbidding one, apparently condemning any such promotional effort to certain failure. Like all new immigrant groups preceding them, the Puerto Ricans had to take the most menial jobs and quarter themselves in the worst of the city slums. Pushing in chattering groups into subways and buses, milling on the fetid sidewalks of East Harlem, tossing their rank garbage out the windows on any passerby, these unfortunate people were poor advertisements indeed for their native land. For the past thirty years, in New York City at least, they have been the

despair of the sociologists and the principal problem of the welfare workers. Moreover, the impressions brought back to the U.S. by travelers stopping at San Juan when on Caribbean cruises were hardly calculated to encourage tourism or inspire respect for Puerto Rico. Altogether, the job of making Puerto Rico and its people attractive to the average American would, a few short years ago, have appeared hopeless.

BUT today, the *Norteamericanos* think of Puerto Rico as an island staking an industrial and cultural renaissance, as a place with the kind of resorts, climate, and beaches ideal for escape from northern ice and cold, and as a land of pleasant people and pleasing landscapes.

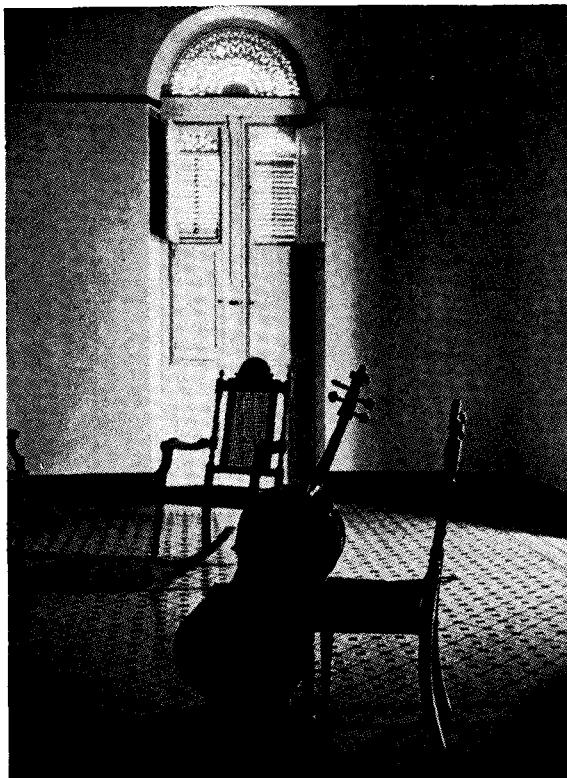
The big black fiddle of Pablo Casals has largely overpowered the cape man. And in Puerto Rico itself there is evidence that, as life imitates art, so the people there are striving to make themselves into the images projected by the color photographs of Tom Holliman and others.

It is hard to believe that the public relations triumphs of this four-color

magazine advertising could have been achieved by the assorted techniques of the standard "public relations" campaign. Instead of a simple, dramatic message, colorfully pictured and endlessly repeated and restated month after month, conventional public relations would have called for a wide variety of news and feature stories. There would have been the inevitable house organ, prepared in agony and edited by people none of whom had ever had magazine experience, and mailed to 25,000 "thought leaders," none of whom would ever read it.

There would have been contrived speeches made before indifferent lunch and dinner gatherings, and reprinted for mailing to people protected from such nonessentials by coldly efficient secretaries with unerring eyes for the wastebasket. Compared to the blazing visibility and single-theme concentration of the paid advertising campaign, such a typical "public relations" effort obviously lacks unity, coherence, and emphasis — and therefore lacks effectiveness.

When the men with public relations titles who maintain the proceedings



—Elliott Erwitt.

of public relations trade organizations gather at their expensive meeting places to make big medicine, they like to pontificate that "those who know you well, think well of you." But that's not necessarily so. "They," that vague appellation for everybody else, will think well of you only if you give them a simple, understandable *reason* for doing so. And who can think ill of Casals and his fiddle? Who can take umbrage at a gaggle of little ballet girls in white? Who can say, "This is *not* Puerto Rico"? On the other hand, who can think well of you, or even think of you at all, when all you tell them is a witless miscellany of unrelated tidbits?

IF the Puerto Rico tourist campaign were the only example of effective public relations programs executed in the form of paid advertising, no general moral could safely be drawn from it. But it is not alone. It is simply an outstanding example of the *genre*.

The Weyerhaeuser Company's conservation advertising, with its beautiful forest scenes, inevitably made more appealing by the presence of a sassy, happy red fox, or a preoccupied mother duck hustling her little ones to safety down a Weyerhaeuser log, has just about laid the ghost of "the ruthless industrial exploitation of our forest resources." Demagogues who, when not building federally-financed housing projects on the valuable sponge areas of their home districts (thereby abetting disastrous floods), would like to attack the lumber interests, simply have to shut their big mouths in the presence of this commanding portrayal of expert conservation practiced by private enterprise. If ever there was a public relations *program* that exemplified "being good and getting credit for it," surely the Weyerhaeuser campaign is it. Nor does the company stop with the wide audience attracted by its forceful magazine advertising. The Weyerhaeuser organization is permeated by this conservation philosophy. This philosophy is the guiding spirit of the entire organization, lifting its corporate activities to the lofty public service plane of a crusade — a plane far above the attainments of politicians and the lesser imitators of the late Bernard De Voto. Even De Voto would find it difficult to write today as he once did, with this public exhibition of the good of private enterprise ever before him — and his readers.

In its latest annual report, illustrated by a striking green cover showing Canada geese in flight over endless stretches of conifers, the company has a number of allusions to even further improvements in its program by which "Wood, water, recreation, payrolls, taxes and

other benefits will always be provided by Weyerhaeuser timberlands, generation after generation." What intellectual critic of big business can match, with his trivial daily doings, that resounding statement? And what a statement to repeat again and again in just that same form, free from any copy-desk or rewrite man's garbling!

Side by side with the Weyerhaeuser public relations advertising stands that of the Caterpillar Tractor Company. Here is the perfect example of the corporation's taking its private interest in the manufacture and sale of earth-moving equipment and extending this interest into a public service effort in behalf of plentiful, clean water, protection of forest and soil, and food for the hungry. Currently, Caterpillar is training its salutary guns on the water problem — forcefully reminding literate America that the water shortage is *not* a future problem, but a problem right of this moment. It serves the cause of conservation with dignity and effectiveness, and presents to the public an admirable picture of a private corporation engaged in admirable activities. True, if every community would awaken to the need for better zoning and planning, for intelligent antipollution measures, proper forestation of its surrounding hills, proper protection of its as yet "undeveloped" areas, why, there would be an enormous increase in the demand for Caterpillar equipment. But there would be an even greater increase in decent living conditions and in freedom from flood damage. There would be an enormous increase — following the Caterpillar philosophy — in recreation areas, cleaner air and adequate water for home, industrial, and recreational use. Compared to the majesty of Caterpillar's corporate message, the public welfare platforms of politicians appear for exactly what they are.

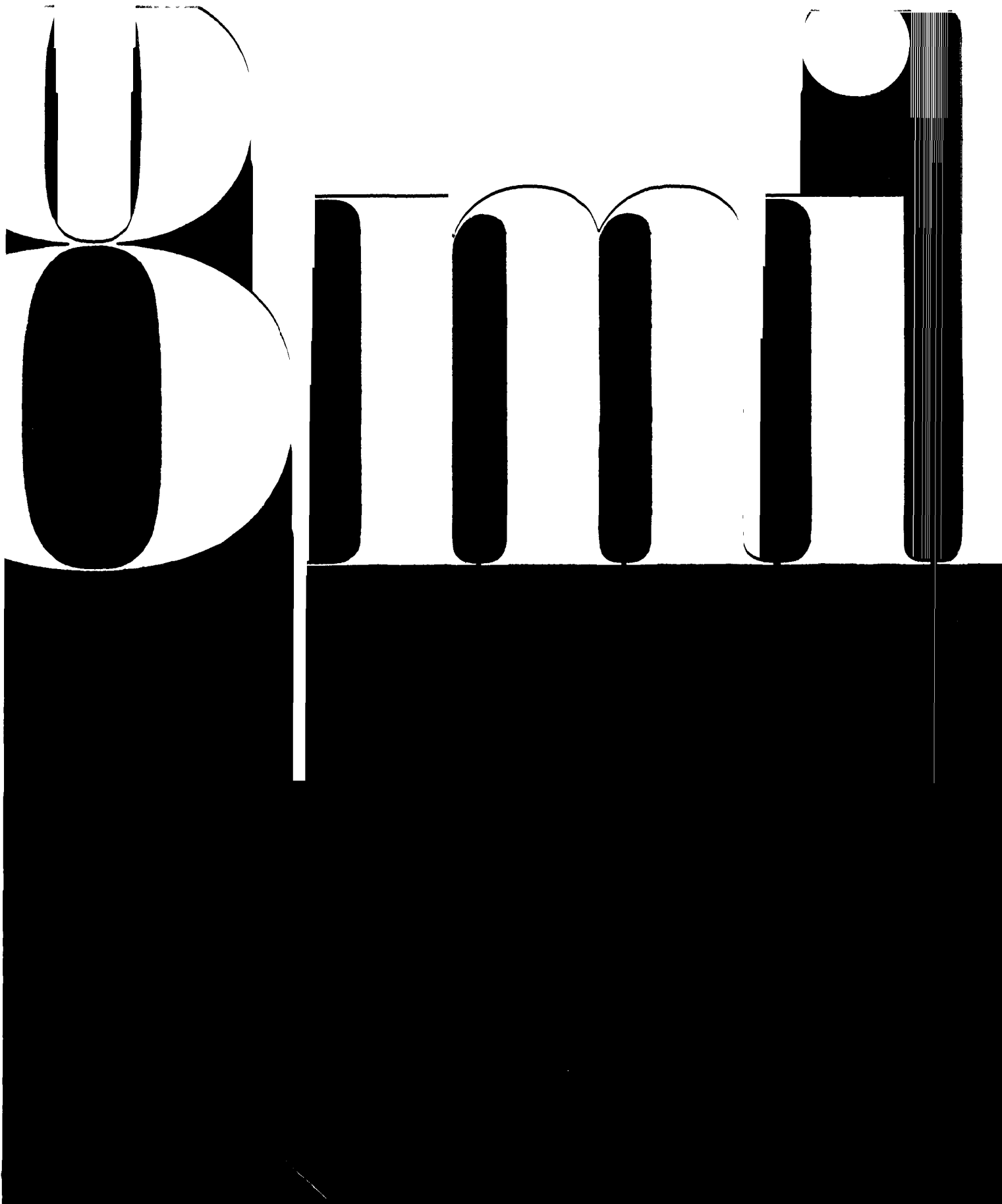
Even the Standard Oil Company (New Jersey) has finally found in paid advertising the means of articulating an excellent public relations program which makes sense and gives every promise of being effective. Again and again, defenders of free enterprise have made the general statement that the ordinary operations of a private corporation bestow many economic and social benefits on the various publics with which it comes into association, or which it affects. To the everlasting credit of Jersey, this company, in its "How minding our own business gets a lot of other things done" campaign, has somehow put flesh and blood into the familiar generality. In simply told and nicely illustrated ads, it gives concrete, specific cases of the benefits inherent in the operations of a private corporation as it obeys its charter and

goes about the business for which it was organized. Curiously, the theme of conservation often bobs up in this series, though some particular messages specify more immediate pocketbook benefits. In any event, the series succeeds in dramatizing what others have sought to convey in the cumbersome and dry language of the dismal science. If Jersey would merchandise the campaign to its own employees, and through them to its various publics, it could make the series much more effective.

It is probably unfair, in a critique of this sort, not to give equal attention to such public service campaigns as Metropolitan Life's famed health series, really the daddy of them all, or the crisp and biting copy of Warner & Swasey's economic series, which has brought so much cheer to businessmen by saying in effective language what so many corporation officers feel without being articulate enough to express. While other machine tool manufacturers stick to nuts-and-bolts copy, Warner & Swasey aims at the top officer, gives him the phrases he can use in political discussions, and earns for its salesmen the red carpet treatment from the front office. And there are still people on Madison Avenue who talk glibly of the hard sell! From the standpoint of getting orders, this is as effective an advertising campaign as has ever appeared in print.

FOR some time now, the advertising business, through its various trade groups, has been writhing and screeching under the lash of widespread criticism. The public, it seems, does not always appreciate — in its living rooms — the high colonic and lower rectal realism that distinguishes so many television commercials. The Federal Trade Commission even has the temerity to question the ability of a shaving cream to dissolve sandpaper. The so-called intellectuals, whose motives may not always be of the purest, are questioning the social justification of the entire institution of advertising, and are being heeded by the public. And while it probably means nothing, there are, we are reminded by the advertising columnists, some 200 bills in the Congressional hopper aimed at the advertising business. So suddenly the knights of the plans boards and copy groups have summoned Christendom for swords about the cross, and called for a vigorous defense. They have even engaged a public relations firm to tell them how to alter the gray flannel suit.

Meanwhile, their finest exhibit, the kind of advertising which each year ultimately qualifies for *Saturday Review* awards, is utterly neglected. Here is
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BEST 8 million. All women. It's the circulation of McCall's—
NUMBER more than Life (7,000,000), Look (7,000,000),
IN or the Post (6,500,000). It also happens to be the greatest
TOWN number of women to buy any magazine, anywhere.

PRODUCED 2005 BY UNZ.ORG
McCALL'S: FIRST MAGAZINE FOR WOMEN—FIRST IN CIRCULATION—FIRST IN ADVERTISING.
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Corporate Advertising: What Can It Say?

By ELMO ROPER

DISCUSSIONS of corporate advertising usually center around one question: What is the best way of getting the story of your company over to the public? The question itself would have been an eyebrow-raiser not too many decades ago, when most corporations were content merely to go about their business, worrying about only one judgment by the public, the one rendered in the market place. This change from corporate self-sufficiency—or the belief in corporate self-sufficiency—is perhaps the most significant corporate story of the century. Does it mean a loss of rugged independence, an abandonment of self-reliance for the soft compromises of public placation? Has American business lost its nerve?

I don't think so. Just as when an adolescent leaves behind his fierce insistence on his uniqueness and independence, notices the world around him, and begins to look for his place in it, I think this is just a case of business growing up. The development of social graces makes life easier for all of us, and the development of a real sense of social responsibility is a requisite of maturity, for institutions as well as individuals.

I am not suggesting that business has renounced its self-interest in favor of a pure devotion to the public interest, nor am I suggesting that it should. Such Pollyanna ethics would have no bearing on the real world of people and corporations; that real world is an inevitable mixture of intelligent self-interest and social interest, with the emphasis on the former. But the substitution of enlightened for blind self-interest makes an enormous difference in motivation and behavior. And in addition, proof that American business has gone a long way toward developing a genuine sense of public responsibility, a genuine understanding that what benefits the country as a whole is likely to benefit General Motors as well, can be demonstrated with a single statistic: Corporate giving to higher education rose from \$43 million in 1950 to \$178 million in 1960, more than quadrupling in a decade.

This transition from a minding-the-store mentality to a serious interest in public relations has not been made

without blunders and blind spots, some of which are still crippling communications between industry and the public. The most tempting trap for eager novices in the field was to "tell 'em anything they'll believe"—which has often been extended to "tell 'em anything that sounds good," whether or not it's within the bounds of believability. There is no more dangerous approach to corporate relations—or human relations—than the big or little lie, the half or quarter truth. One can get by with it for a while, if it's told cleverly enough to people who don't know enough to know the difference. But sooner or later, people will find out enough, from the multiple sources of information and experience available to them, to reject specious arguments and distorted evidence and stop henceforth listening to their source. This is the strongest probability, at any rate, and any firm that bets against that probability is taking a heavy risk with its economic solvency as well as its good name.

This P. T. Barnum approach to public relations is more suitable to a traveling circus than to modern corporate advertising, and by and large its self-defeating tendency in the sophisticated world of contemporary consumer relations has become evident. It remains a threat in isolated spots but I am more concerned over another threat: that of corporate advertising so myopic in its focus that it rouses the public only to a yawn.

FROM the time of the tribal campfire, the successful telling of a story has always had two essential requirements: someone who wants to tell it and someone who wants to hear it. But sometimes creators of corporate advertising seem to forget that the second is as essential as the first and frame their messages without regard to the interest and receptivity of their hoped-for audience. Like garrulous old men who assume that what interests them is bound to fascinate everyone else, they fill acres of advertising space with messages of absorbing interest to themselves but to which hardly anybody else is listening.

What corporate advertisers should keep in mind is this: *Most* people are not particularly interested in you; they are interested in themselves. *Most* peo-

ple are busy, they are occupied with a hundred hopes, worries, and personal concerns; and they are not going to give you very much time to tell your story or expend much effort to understand it. This is no indictment of the American public; it is simply a description of the normal state of much of the audience for corporate advertisements.

A second and related point is that the American public is pragmatic rather than ideological. In my opinion, and there is survey evidence to support it, some of the least effective corporate advertising is that which tries to get across some such idea as: "Free enterprise made our country great; let's keep things that way." By this I don't mean that people don't think free enterprise had a lot to do with making our country great; they do—and quite properly so. But they aren't very much interested in reading ads about it. The American public has a healthy admiration for American business and industry, but not because they are living proof of the value of the free market or any other theoretical consideration. They admire business for the simple reason that it has done so much for them. Surrounded by labor-saving devices, enjoying the highest standard of living known to man, the public is happy to give business the bulk of the credit for the American cornucopia. But only so long as the cornucopia keeps flowing. Let recession bring the economy to a limp, or unemployment throw up its threatening shadow, or inflation loom, and the public, like a fickle lover, will withdraw its admiration and ask that someone *do* something—and the someone they ask is usually government. At such times, free enterprise becomes just two words from an economics textbook, and of as little interest to the public.

What applies to business as a whole applies to companies and industries in particular. Most people have no abstract interest in the ideological conditions a company considers necessary to its well-being. Their main interest is in what the company has done, can do for them. They are interested, above all, in good products and useful services. A good product is the best advertisement a firm can have, and no amount of eloquence in print will redeem a company whose products or