

# Better Not Bad-Mouth Bayonne

By **BOB DROGIN**  
Observer Staff Writer

John W. Mazzola, president of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, recently complained about a proposal to cut New York City's cultural affairs budget.

"Without the arts, New York would be Bayonne, N.J. — and I grew up in Bayonne, N.J.," he told *The New York Times*.

Well, just a minute, Mr. Mazolla. I grew up in Bayonne, too, and I resent that. Bayonne may not be the Big Apple, but it's got class with a capital K.



Drogin

I grew up in a house overlooking Newark Bay, a large body of sludge which caused second degree burns. Golden red sunsets shimmered through the smog each afternoon. Jets from Newark Airport roared overhead every three minutes.

## Under Liberty's Arm

I attended Bayonne High School, a large gothic structure that has produced some of America's leading mobsters. Students joined gangs as extracurricular activities, and often settled disagreements with can openers, sticks and chains. Gang leaders encouraged creativity and study of the classics; police once hauled in a homemade set of African blow darts and a medieval crossbow.

Bayonne's 75,000 residents live on a peninsula surrounded by Newark Bay, the Kill van Kull and scenic New York Bay, where the Statue of Liberty proudly holds her torch. We had a stunning view of Liberty's armpit from my grandmother's apartment.

The Bayonne Bridge, which spans the Kill van Kull, is the world's longest steel arch span bridge, according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The encyclopedia ignores the fact that the bridge only goes to Staten Island, a foreign land notable because the drinking age was only 18, not 21 as in New Jersey.

Richard Maschal, *The Observer's* music critic, is from Bayonne. Some consider that a contradiction in terms, but I assure you music is in Bayonne's soul. The organist, for example, in a now-departed rock group called Vanilla Fudge

was from Bayonne.

We may not have Beverly Sills, Mr. Mazzola, but Bayonne has had its share of celebrities.

## Bayonnets Of Note

There was Chuck Wepner, the "Bayonne Bleeder" who donated his red corpuscles in a 15-round title bout with Muhammad Ali in 1975; Dr. Arthur Burns, former head of the Federal Reserve Board; Metropolitan Opera star Raymond Michalski; actor Frank Langella and beach blanket bimbo Sandra Dee.

Also from Bayonne are underworld boss Joseph "Bayonne Joe" Zicarelli, a member of the Joseph "Joe Bananas" Bonanno crime family, and Harold "Kayo" Konigsberg, who worked with Anthony "Tony Pro" Provenzano and dispatched his friends with a baseball bat.

And finally, there was our congressman, Cornelius Gallagher, D-N.J. I remember when *Life Magazine* published stories in 1967 and 1968 calling him a "tool and collaborator of the Mafia."

The stories alleged something about a body in the congressman's basement and lots of negotiable securities in his top desk drawer. Gallagher eventually served 17 months in federal prison after pleading guilty to income tax evasion.

The body belonged to a man named Barney O'Brien, an avuncular purveyor of soft ice cream who occasionally poured concrete for the mob. Legend had it that Barney found eternal peace in the huge concrete base of the Verrazano bridge, which was being built at the time. Investigators later found Barney's shoes near a lime pit on a southern Jersey chicken farm.

## Bayonne And The Law

Bayonne isn't all beer and skittles, of course. They tell the story of a Harvard lawyer trying a case in Bayonne some years back. The lawyer carried a stack of lawbooks and boasted he had a surefire case. The opposing attorney sat with his pencil and a smile.

"He may have the law," the Bayonne lawyer said, "but I've got the judge."

When in Bayonne, Bob Drogin may be found at George Petrides' hot dog stand on West 25th Street.