

MAGAZINE FOR MEMBERS

OCTOBER 1994

WETA

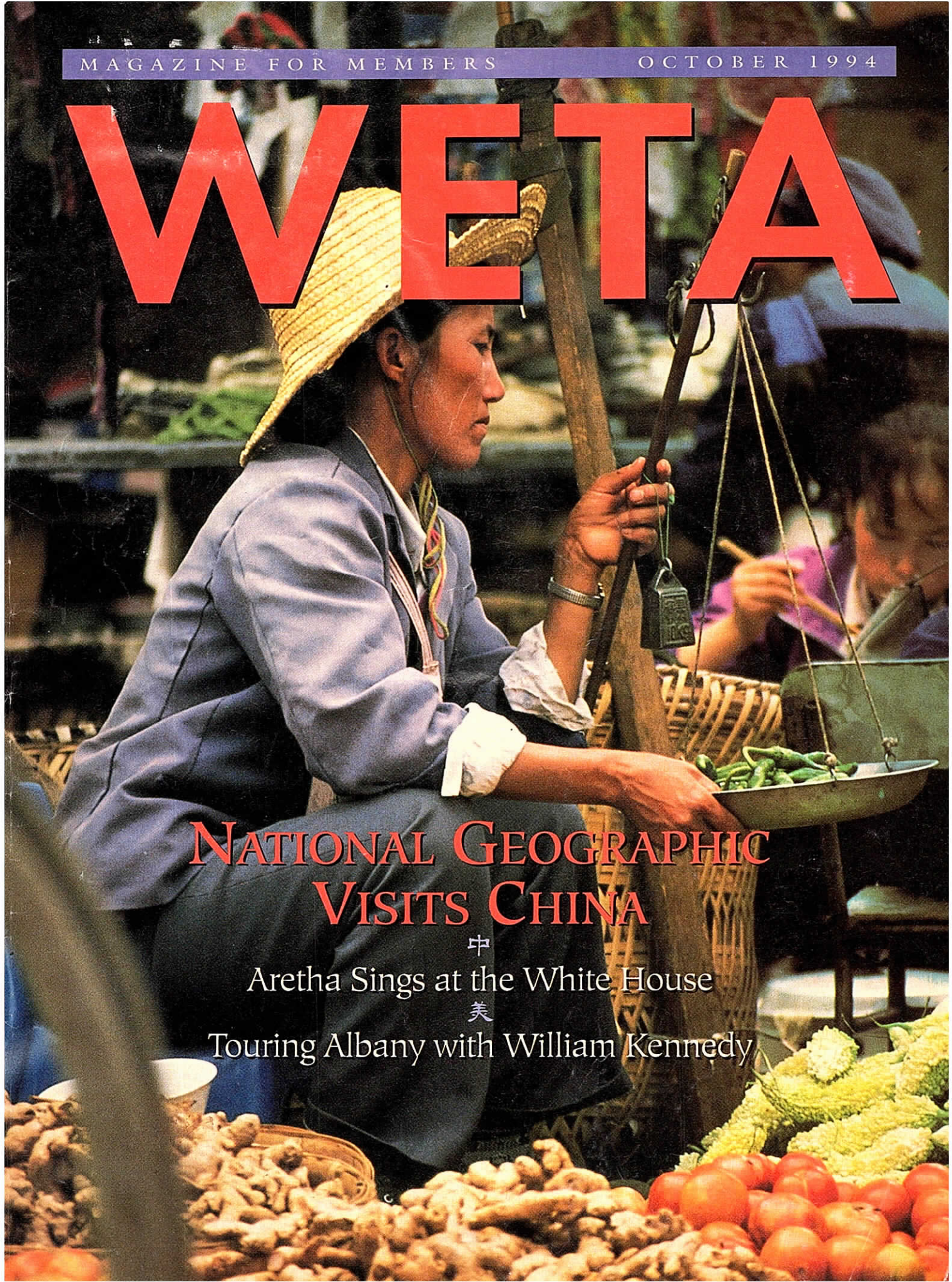
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC VISITS CHINA

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Aretha Sings at the White House

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Touring Albany with William Kennedy



Marching Along Together

Last month I had the pleasure of seeing *The Kennedy Center Presents*, WETA's first collaborative effort with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. The event was an important moment for both cultural institutions in that their separate constituencies were linked through television. As I enjoyed the presentation, it struck me that WETA has contributed dramatically to the cultural life of the Washington area. I thought of the many years I have been privileged to be associated with the station over its long and productive history.

It has been over three decades that this joint effort between WETA and area cultural institutions has enriched the lives of the community. My children and I have benefited through the efforts of WETA to increase our understanding and enhance our appreciation of the arts. Our support of its efforts has been an investment in ourselves as well as our community.

One of the people most responsible for WETA's strong relationship with other institutions in the community is Senior Vice President for Cultural Programming Tamara Robinson. Tammy works with a talented staff and together they have forged solid bonds with local institutions as well as

national ones. This month, in connection with two of them, WETA is presenting *In Performance at the White House* and *National Geographic's China: Beyond the Clouds*. Next month we will have a film biography of Frederick Douglass. WETA has coproduced television series such as *Smithsonian World*, the special *For the Living* on the Holocaust Memorial Museum and several radio series like the *Baltimore Symphony Orchestra* concerts. WETA has presented over a dozen films made under the aegis of the National Gallery of Art.

We at WETA welcome such associations. These strengthen the individual organizations and add new dimension and opportunity for both of us. The cultural, arts, science and history organizations in this area are resources for the entire country and WETA has an opportunity to be a wellspring for them. The scope of their collections, their research and their talent can be made available to all Americans through these programs.

Cultural organizations across the country are faced with shrinking resources. There are fewer corporations or individuals who are able to underwrite the cost of a major museum exhibition or a series of concerts or plays with minimum admission fees. Alliances with these other institutions whose goals and missions are similar to WETA's provide a chance to increase understanding, knowledge and access to particular disciplines and institutions. Such alliances can serve to inform and enlist new generations of concert-, theatre-, opera- and museum-goers. This also brings the arts to those who can no longer attend live performances.

When like-minded institutions unite to present a concert or play or film, everyone benefits: WETA, the institutions and, most of all, the public.



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Marvin Weissberg

Marvin Weissberg
Member, Program Committee
WETA Board of Trustees

October 1994

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On the cover: The Lijiang, China farmers' market provides local color as well as an array of produce. Photo: River Films

WETA MAGAZINE

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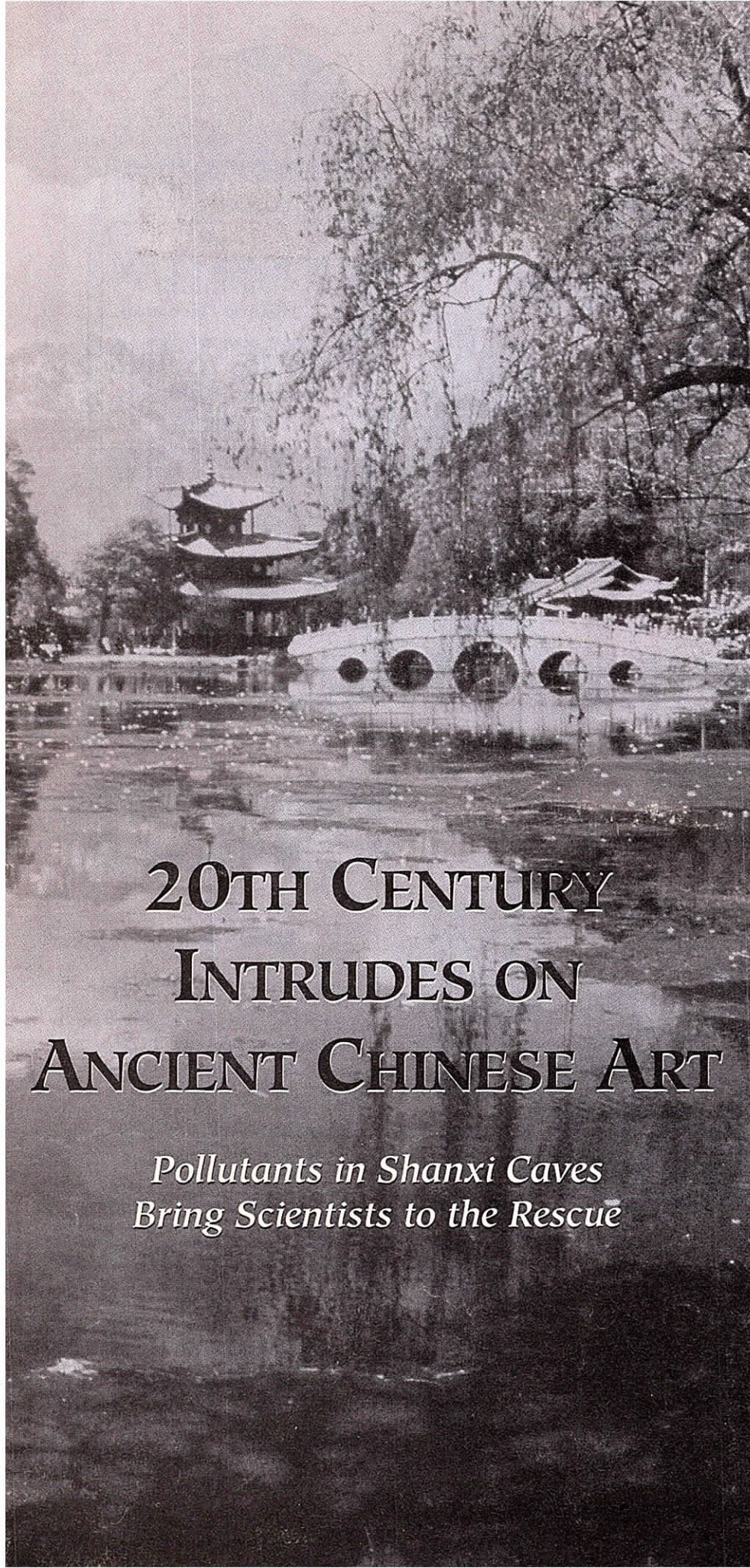
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WETA Magazine is published monthly by the Greater Washington Educational Telecommunications Association for its members. Three dollars of each member's dues is designated for magazine subscription.

© 1994 by Greater Washington Educational Telecommunications Association. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be reproduced in any form without written permission. Second class postage paid at Arlington, VA 22210 and additional offices. Send address changes to WETA, Box 2626, Washington, D.C. 20013. Volume 8, Number 1. ISSN No. 1041-2700.



NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC'S CHINA ON
OCTOBER 3 AND 4
EXAMINES THE IMPACT
OF MODERNIZATION
ON TRADITIONAL
CHINESE LIVING

BY LYNN SALMON

20TH CENTURY INTRUDES ON ANCIENT CHINESE ART

*Pollutants in Shanxi Caves
Bring Scientists to the Rescue*

I spent April of 1991 working in China on an air pollution study in Yungang Grottoes. The Grottoes, near Datong in the People's Republic, have been designated a World Cultural Heritage Site by the United Nations and are located in a region with severe air pollution problems. The Grottoes contain about 50,000 carvings on the walls and ceilings, dating back to the 5th century A.D. and efforts to preserve or restore the sculptures from assault by abrasive and possibly chemically reactive airborne contaminants are underway.

The lake at Black Dragon Park, north of Lijiang, reflects the snowy peaks of Jade Dragon Mountain, one of the area's many serene and beautiful scenes. There are similar spots amidst the bustle of the 20th century throughout China.

Photos on these pages by River Films

I was traveling with two co-workers: Christos, a Cypriot graduate student from Caltech, and Po-Ming, a research fellow at the Getty Conservation Institute (sponsor of my research). We had 170 kilos of excess baggage: several crates of equipment that hadn't been ready to ship in advance. We worried what the airline security would make of all these little electronic gadgets we were carrying, but they didn't bat an eye at the weird stuff in my bags going through the x-ray, and instead concerned themselves with the buckles on my shoes setting off the metal detector.

We arrived in Datong just before sunset [on the third day of our trip from Los Angeles]. Everyone from



the train seemed to be in a tremendous hurry to get out of the station as fast as they could, though they did take time out to stare unabashedly at the strange foreigners on the platform.

Our work went more smoothly than we ever dreamed possible. We had done similar studies locally and at the Grand Canyon, but the China project was going to be considerably bigger in scope and over a shorter period of time and much too far from home to run back to the lab for that piece of tubing we forgot. Fortunately, we didn't forget a thing and we were even able to make all of our equipment function on the somewhat erratic Chinese power supply, supplemented by two 5,000-watt generators for the more sensitive instruments.



Among the faces of Lijiang are one of the town's elderly grannies (left); Grannie Ni, wearing the dress of the Nazi minority (right); and two country men (above) bundled against the cold.

We had the great experience of working with enthusiastic and eager Chinese from the Grottoes, plus visiting chemists from Beijing. . . . We didn't find communication to be very difficult as a lot of our work can be learned by watching and we draw pictures and point a lot.

One of our interpreters was a young geologist from Taiyuan, the capital of Shanxi province. Another geophysicist supposedly studied English for only three months, but he was one of the easiest people to communicate with. We also had the wonderfully sweet Miss Li, a chemist from Beijing who was very quick to pick up on anything and chattered to me constantly in Chinese. The local electrician was a particularly impressive individual: he stripped wire with his teeth and generally didn't bother with circuit breakers.

We typically worked an 18-plus-hour day, sometimes round-the-clock for 48-hour samplings, but the Chinese staff, who were always at our sides, never protested. We noticed some power struggles between "underlings" (scientists and engineers) and the people "in charge" (typically only high-school educated). Some of the Chinese felt a need to be careful when they spoke in the presence of others.

Meals were an important ritual and we soon learned the Chinese take great stock in eating at precisely the same time every day. We could keep them awake working all night without a complaint, but make them five minutes late for lunch and the restlessness became very noticeable. Every meal was a feast. It seemed you hadn't been fed enough unless you'd been given three times what it was possible to consume.

After nine days, we took a breather from work to explore our surroundings. Yungang has two main streets, the first runs parallel to the front of the caves and dead ends into the other, main shopping street of the town. At the post office, trying to mail some letters, we ran into trouble. The people in Yungang refused to accept our foreign exchange certificates when we tried to use them, both at the post office and in local stores.

Christos led us on a desperate search for coffee, taking us to every shop in town; none to be found, however. The shops had an odd assortment of goods, each very like all the others. They had beer, cigarettes, flashlights, tea,



soda, peanuts, shoes, sewing gear, sardines, sometimes film or cooking pots.

Work continued falling more-or-less into a routine for the rest of my stay. My husband joined me in Yungang, as we were setting off on our own adventures after my work was finished.

At last, the time came to say good-bye to the friends we had made. Everyone got into a gift-giving mode during the last couple of days. I had taken a lot of books with me (for all that spare time I never had) and I gave most of them away. ▲

Lynn Salmon is a research engineer in the environmental quality laboratory at the California Institute of Technology.