

## **A Celebration of the Arts Luncheon**

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Keynote Address by

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ARTSFUND

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### **Seattle and the Challenges of a New Arts Age**

Thank you for that lovely introduction. I am deeply honored to be here with you today. Those of us in the national arts community have long looked to Seattle as a beacon of sorts not only for the vibrant, exciting work produced here and the inspiring breadth of the local arts ecology—important groups in every discipline, ranging from small, experimental organizations to large institutions, from the traditional to the avant-garde—but for your stunning philanthropic community of supporters—donors who inspire and set the bar for others around the country. Indeed, all of you by virtue of your presence today are making a statement of support—and I am humbled to be asked to speak to many of you today.

The size of this gathering today is indeed evidence of the impact the arts have had here—impact that many of you can cite with me: impact on the local economy, with every dollar spent on a performing arts ticket leveraging \$5-7 additional dollars for the local economy, for example; impact on educational achievement, as tests have shown, where students engaged in the arts typically are four times more likely to participate in science fairs, four times more likely to run for class office, demonstrate greater verbal acuity, greater self-esteem, greater tolerance for ambiguity, are exponentially more likely to graduate from high school and score more than 120 points higher on their SAT's than their non-arts colleagues; and impact on our social fabric—indeed, as a UCLA study notes, showing that a kid who has been in a play is 42 percent less likely to tolerate racist behavior than a kid who has never been in a play. For these reasons and more, all of us can stand together and proclaim: If you care about the local economy, you must care about the arts; if you care about educational achievement for your children, you must care about the arts; if you care about a tolerant, inclusive society, you must care about the arts.

Nevertheless, it would be disingenuous for me to stand before you and to suggest that all is well in the world of the arts—and indeed, it is about the challenges of the future—challenges that in many ways Seattle is among the first to face—that I wish to talk to you today.

At the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation where I work, we recently convened 700 performing arts professionals in a series of 22 meetings in 14 cities—including a meeting dedicated to jazz here in Seattle—to discuss the current state of the arts. What I heard was a level of upheaval and uncertainty unlike any I have heard in my more than 30 years in the field—concern about the

very real under-compensation, not only of artists, but of managers, technicians and administrators; concern about organizational fragility and the undercapitalization of arts groups, challenges that have plagued nonprofit arts for decades and that we have yet to solve. In a newer vein, we heard concern about an impending generational shift of leadership as a founding generation of leaders retire or move on—concern that raises two distinct challenges: finding those potential leaders to assume these roles, and readying our organizations to accept their new visions, their new energy and insights, realizing that relatively few will be likely to be contented to serve as mere custodians of that which they have inherited.

Trumping all of these was the issue of technology—that force which increasingly defines the world in which we live and a topic that seems especially fitting for our time together today—and its yet not fully understood impact on the arts. Today, our lives rush at a faster and faster pace and arts groups seek to attract an audience from a populace characterized by unprecedented exhaustion and over-scheduling, a time in which (according to a Yankelovich poll) half of consumers across all income levels say that lack of time is a bigger problem than lack of money, when 42 percent of men and 55 percent of women say they are too tired to do the things they want to do and when the number one answer about most eagerly anticipated use of a free evening is no longer socializing, dating or attending a special event but “a good night’s sleep.” Not surprisingly, in every field, we heard concerns that, after decades of growth, our audiences are shrinking, and that our own financial needs, in tandem with negative shifts in funding, mean escalating ticket prices that threaten to place attendance beyond the reach of many in our communities that we wish to serve.

And while many of us initially embraced emerging web technology for its marketing potential, we now realize that it is if anything, too effective: in trying to attract the attention of potential ticket buyers, we now compete with (depending on whom you read) at least 3,000-5,000 different marketing messages a typical American sees every single day. In fact, technology has emerged as our biggest competitor for leisure time: Gen X-ers spend 20.7 hours every week on television and online combined. Gen Y-ers spend even more—22.8 hours—with the majority on line and growing, and last year, computer gaming outsold movie and music recordings combined. According to Google CEO Eric Schmidt, a new blog is being created every second of every day. Most profoundly, perhaps, technology is altering the basic assumptions of consumption: thanks to the web, we believe we can get whatever we want, whenever we want it, customized to fit our personal needs. We can shop at eight at night, three in the morning, expectations of customization and personalization that live performing arts organizations—a field that demands set curtain times, specific geographic venues and the attendant inconveniences of travel, parking, forced scheduling etc.—cannot meet. In an age when young people especially can get their culture on demand through YouTube and iTunes any time they want it and at little or no apparent cost, we must ask what will it mean in the future when we ask someone to pay \$100 or more for a symphony, opera or theatre ticket when that customer has become accustomed to downloading on the internet for a mere 99 cents a song or for free?

However powerful these issues may feel to the arts in particular, we are just a part of a larger realignment of cultural expression and communication—a realignment that is shaking the newspaper and television industries, the publishing and book industries, and (in an indication of what may be yet to come for many of us) has left the music recording and distribution industries largely in disarray. Not surprisingly, audiences are down; funding—state, government and foundation, is down, and as Adrienne Rich has written in “The Dream of a Common Language XIII,” “We’re out in a country that has no language, no laws....Whatever we do together is pure invention. The maps they gave us were out of date by years...”

And aren’t you glad you invited me here to brighten your day?

In a time of such seismic change, I am inspired by the words of two different thinkers—of Abraham Lincoln, who said, “The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. As our case is new, so must we think anew and act anew.” And hockey player Wayne Gretzky, (and when was the last time you heard Lincoln and Gretzky compared in the same breath?) who, when asked why he was such a great hockey player, said, “Because I skate to where the puck will be.”

How do we in the arts skate to where the puck will be?

Chris Anderson, editor of *Wired* magazine and author of *The Long Tail*—sees in technology the unleashing of a veritable tsunami of creative artistic energy. With the invention and now affordability of cell phones, mini cams, computer software and more, he notes, the means of artistic production have been democratized. In the 1930’s if you wanted to make a movie, you had to work for Warner Brothers or RKO, for who could afford a movie camera, studio space, lights, editing equipment and more? Now who among us does not know a 14 year old hard at work on her second, third or fourth film?

Furthermore, the means of artistic distribution have been democratized. Warner Brothers and RKO again played this role in the 1930’s, but today anyone can release anything on line, through blogs, through YouTube and more.

This double impact is occasioning a massive redefinition of authorship and the cultural market. Today, everyone is a potential author. We are seeing the emergence of a class of amateurs doing work at a professional level—a group dubbed elsewhere as Pro Ams—a group whose work populates YouTube, independent film festivals, dance competitions and more. And knowing that we graduate 400,000 MFA’s in this country every year—a number far too high for the arts industry to absorb—this highly skilled, professionally capable yet avocationally driven artistic pool is destined to increase—a time predicted perhaps by our Secretary of State, a trained concert pianist who continues to play chamber music with professional musicians, even as her career has called her elsewhere.

In this shifting landscape, the increasing challenge and opportunity for us in the arts world lies in this new marketplace defined by participation—a participation economy where value will no

longer be consumed but where value will be co-created. Let me say that again: in the future, value will no longer be consumed. Value will be co-created.

We already see the emerging power of consumer participation in other industries. The monolithic power of the restaurant critic has been shattered by Zagat where the collective consumer passes judgment and defines a restaurant value. “Dancing with the Stars,” “So You Think You Can Dance,” “American Idol” even the iPod—which went beyond the downloading emphasis of Discman or even Napster to invite the user to move beyond consumption into co-creation through creating podcasts or personally curated play lists—all of these predicated on the active involvement of the consumer.

Properly seen, this rising sense of co-creation is an invitation—an invitation to reframe our arts education programs and replace them with community engagement programs, to expand conversation forums and materials. It is an invitation to see our missions, not merely in creating products to be consumed, but in offering experiences that will serve as springboards to our audience’s own creativity—to nurture what Henry Jenkins calls a Convergence Culture, utilizing multi-platform narrative and marketing, inviting everyday people to reassert their right to actively contribute to their culture, channeling creative energies to come together. This is a call to a field to see ourselves, not merely as presenters, perhaps, but as activators, engagers, harvesters of creative energy.

This is, if we have the courage to face it, a moment of renaissance for the arts—a rebirth, a moment, as media specialist Doug Rushkoff says, of a “collective renegotiation of old ideas to reach a new consensual reality”—a rebirth in which the salient challenge lies in nourishing the aspirations and hopes of an emerging and future generation of artists without dismantling the still vibrant achievements of the past.

Such moments of renegotiation require us to be open to new ideas and new practice; they require us to be clear about what we value and about the differences that separate the creativity and expressivity that we see all around us—the creativity that floods YouTube and Blogs—from art, a realm defined not by genre or discipline or the for profit/not for profit divide but by rigor, discipline, craft, by the way it invites us to access, not the easiest or most facile parts of ourselves, but the best parts, the deepest parts, the deepest emotions, the most generous impulses, and yet at times the most urgent fears. Moreover, as we move forward, it increasingly requires us to risk—not to be irresponsible (which is how many hear the word risk) but to arm ourselves with our best knowledge, our best instincts, the counsel of others more expert than we, and push past our traditional points of comfort and behavioral custom, recognizing that the business that does not risk does not grow; the relationship you have with husband, wife or partner without risk does not grow; that the artist who does not risk—however technically capable—never reaches that transcendent moment, that moment beyond the predictable, the true moment of artistic inspiration. Indeed, the three greatest regrets of retirees are that they did not spend more time in reflective thinking. They were not clearer about the purpose of their lives. They did not risk more. We cannot lead lives or organizations that we will regret.

I for one am hopeful about the future for the arts, even though I may not have sounded so until this moment—not least of all because of my experience at PopTech, an annual high tech conference in Camden ME for 500 high tech folks. Contrary to my expectations, this conference does not focus on startups or financing: it was—and is—a conference where we the tech community and thought leaders from various fields gather to think about the human brain. Global warming. International warfare and terrorism. AIDS research. And more.

Central to this entire conference, however, is the arts: artists sit on many panels—indeed, Elizabeth Streb knocked their socks off, for example, with her explanation of the relationship of physics to dance—and every session is followed by a performance by a live artist—a solo cellist playing using technology to create a quartet of sound, a hip hop dancer dancing on crutches, a remarkable spoken word artist Vanessa German who blew the roof off with her passionate poetry and raw release of feeling.

On the one hand, I find hope in the live nature of the conference. Camden, ME is not an easy place to access, and if any community can convene virtually, this one can. Yet through PopTech and TED and more, this community insists on coming together because of the unique value of live, face to face, collective experience, to conspiring—meaning in its Latin origins “to breathe together.” And throughout PopTech, a minor chord, a palpable hunger throbbed in the background. These tech leaders were desperate to slow down, to lead less frenetic lives, to find more consistent connection to their passions. More and more, they placed a premium on contemplation, on captivation, on focus and extended surrender to single experience—experiences that would captivate, resonate emotionally, stimulate intellectually, at its best enhance spiritual value—to the very things that we in the arts do.

They responded deafeningly to Daniel Pink, (interestingly enough a man in his 30’s) who in his new *A Whole New Mind*, writes of the emerging emphasis on right brain thinking, “one that creates artistic and emotional beauty, to craft a satisfying narrative and to combine seemingly unrelated ideas into something new—as well as the ability to empathize with other, to understand the subtleties of human interaction, to find joy in one’s self and to elicit it in others, and to stretch beyond the quotidian in pursuit of purpose and meaning,” to quote him.

They recognized the ultimate irony of their own success—that prosperity without spiritual enrichment does not bring fulfillment, and in the face of a growing culture dedicated to convenience—to no-iron shirts and microwave meals, to hands free parking and more, all striving to convince us that ease is good and effort is bad, there is value—irreplaceable value in the difficult, in the complex, in the ambiguous and the real.

Indeed, marketing expert Bill Breen tells us that public hunger is deepest for authenticity, defined by four criteria: a sense of place, a strong point of view, the service of a larger purpose and integrity. God knows if we cannot position ourselves in this environment, we do not deserve to exist.

We now look to Seattle, a community of technological leaders and a community that feels daily the attendant shifts into this new age, for a new chapter in arts and civic leadership.

In a time when the internet silos us and inadvertently contributes to an erosion of social cohesion—no matter how paranoid you may be, there is a website out there to confirm your worst fantasy—we look to you to recognize and celebrate the role of the arts in exploring common meaning.

In an age when we strive for scientific certainty and technological supremacy, we look to you to champion those realms which resist scientific scrutiny—remembering, as neuroscientist Jonah Lehrer notes, that we are not just stuff, we are the stuff dreams are made on.

In an age of rising venture capital philanthropy—a system that emphasizes bringing business to scale through short-term infusion of significant capital, taking organizations from local to global, from individual to systemic, creating dominant institutions with measurable results,—we look to you to create a holistic philanthropic structure in Seattle—one that takes a venture equity approach of long, decades long investment and prizes not only the global but the local as well, not just the systemic but the individual and idiosyncratic—indeed, we love Picasso or Graham or Nureyev because there is only one of them and we all know how deeply unsatisfying and removed from its generative impulses replicated art—the fifth bus and truck of a Broadway show—is destined to be.

And in a time when, for all of our national prosperity, we still remain unfulfilled, we look to you to cherish the arts—not merely for their extrinsic educational and social impact, but for their intrinsic value and the role in the formation of our collective and individual characters, especially the character of the young, who are increasingly subjected to “bombardment” of sensation through violent film and video. In the arts, we stand instead for contemplation, deep understanding and digestion of experience, especially in a popular cultural context that often seems to value humiliation over humanity. We are living reminders of what it means to be humane rather than merely human. And in an age of demonization and fear of difference, in a time when the most frequently heard public message is “Ladies and gentlemen, please report any suspicious individuals to the authorities nearest you”—an admonition that encourages us to view our fellow human beings with fear and hostility and suspicion—we in the arts gather audiences to look at their fellow human beings with curiosity and generosity. If we have ever needed such capacity in our nation’s history, we need it now.

In an election year, it seems especially appropriate to close with the words of a politician—the president whose dedication to the arts led indirectly to the formation of the National Endowment for the Arts and the explosion of government arts philanthropy. Less than a month before his assassination, John Kennedy gave a speech at Amherst College in honor of Robert Frost. He concluded by saying:

*I look forward to a great future for America—a future in which our country will match its military strength with our moral strength, its wealth with our wisdom, its power with our purpose.*

*I look forward to an America which will not be afraid of grace and beauty, which will protect the beauty of our natural environment, which will preserve the great old American houses and squares and parks of our national past, and which will build handsome and balanced cities for our future.*

*I look forward to an America which commands respect throughout the world, not only for its strength but for its civilization as well.*

Forty-five years after these words were spoken, while we continue to look forward to that America— you do more than merely wait for its appearance. Although we may elect our leaders every four years, we elect our values and the lives that will be the fulfillment of those values every single day. You know that, in electing to give your support to the arts, you honor the past, you commemorate the present, you shape and change the future in a way that does honor to all and violence to none. Through the arts, you build a Seattle—often one district at a time, one organization at a time, sometimes one child at a time. You are more than arts supporters, you are activists, pledged and dedicated to a world of understanding, of tolerance, of compassion, of hope.

I salute, not only our extraordinary honorees today but you all as activists shaping and changing Seattle; I promise you that the hand of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation remains outstretched to the national arts community both now and for years to come; and I thank you for your kindness and patience in listening to me this morning. Thank you and God speed.

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