2017 CREATIVE EXCHANGE KEYNOTE

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ARTS FOUNDATION OF CAPE COD

CAPE SYMPHONY

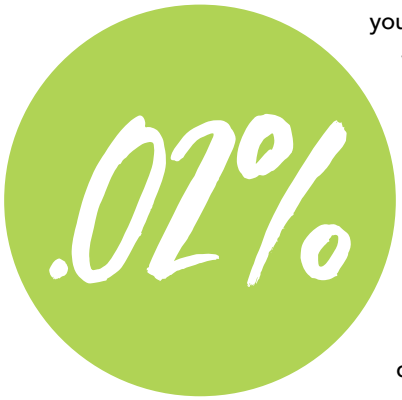
creative EXCHANGE 2017

Arts Foundation of Cape Cod



Beyond "Pleasant"

It's an honor to be here at the second annual Creative Exchange. I think the word "exchange" is super. Not "seminar" or "workshop," but exchange, because none of us, especially myself, have all the answers. One reason that the answers are not there is that not all the questions are there yet. The world is changing so fast, we have a hard time imagining the possibilities and the challenges that face us in this new era of digital arts and entertainment.



I sometimes feel like the comedian Mort Sahl (or for our younger friends, Stephen Colbert), ripping inspiration from the headlines. Last week, it was reported that the faculty at the well-known "Fame" School in New York, La Guardia High School, had an uprising from its faculty because its principal has been dismantling arts programs in favor of academic programs, scrapping the position of instrumental music coordinator, and courses on jazz, Bach, orchestration, and conducting.

This shift in priorities in our education system is well documented, but it's also a reflection of how our society in general views the arts. The arts have long been regarded as a luxury, a pleasant diversion, and a nicety that those with extra time and income can participate in.

This is reinforced by the fact the Federal funding for the arts is .02 percent of the national budget.

Remember that number. If that doesn't make you feel marginalized, I'm not sure what will. Generally, anything below one percent is considered insignificant. Even on nutritional labels, they don't bother listing the ingredients below one percent. Those ingredients are noted as providing insignificant amounts of nutritive value.

But instead of feeling disempowered, it seems timely to stand up and take the offensive as artists. Along with several invigorated social causes, now seems to be the perfect time to think of ourselves as revolutionary entrepreneurs. It's a righteous position and cuts to the heart of what it means to be an artist.

It's time to define ourselves as heroes, and not victims. We are the symbols of a free democracy. We are the voice of ideas, courage and creativity. We are the risk takers and the final firewall between us and artificial intelligence. Elon Musk and Stephen Hawking offer an apocalyptic vision of the future with computers outthinking humans, resulting in our own demise. One could make the same argument about computers and the arts. Impossible, you say. The future is here (see links below).



CLICK THE PICTURE TO LISTEN.

This piece has been entirely composed by robots.



CLICK THE PICTURE TO WATCH THIS ROBOT CONDUCT.

Meanwhile, my job is not safe.

Where does this digital competition leave us? How do we compete against a thousand cable stations, and binge watching hundreds of hours of fantastic new TV series on Netflix and Amazon? Not to mention the arrival of 3D Television and 360 virtual reality where you can be in the middle of an opera, symphony, theater or ballet, in a huddle at a football game, on a fantastic journey among the cells in the human body, wandering under the sea or in outer space, all while in your living room.

How did we get into a situation where we feel like bystanders and wall flowers at the dance? And how can we be the leaders in society rather than just the beneficiaries?

At one time, the arts, side by side with science and democracy, were considered to be the greatest legacy a civilization could leave the world. The Greeks understood the symbiotic connection between the arts and sciences. Two of the greatest minds of human history, Leonardo Da Vinci and Albert Einstein easily understood this inextricable connection. They were both seamlessly artists and scientists.

During the Medieval and Renaissance periods, people were specialists. One acquired skills through the apprenticeship of a master, and those masters belonged to guilds. Creating art became a craft.

When universities began in the medieval period, they stressed seven areas of study:

ARITHMETIC
GEOMETRY
ASTRONOMY
MUSIC THEORY
GRAMMAR
LOGIC
RHETORIC

Obviously, the most unexpected subject in this list is Music Theory. Reaching back to Pythagoras, music was considered a glorious manifestation of the mathematics of sound, science and nature. These sounds were even thought to have influences upon our psychology and health. What a distance we have traveled where today music and art are used like wallpaper in popular culture. It has little intrinsic value, and in most cases, it's considered something that is free on YouTube. No effort and no value.

We need to start a "farm to table"-type revolution of teaching the rewards of creating art by ourselves, and not by technology. We need to explain why handmade art, with a brush, pen, or violin, is closer to the human experience than what a computer program decides is most interesting for us by some predetermined algorithm.

When music and the arts became academic "majors" of study, they had to be codified in order to be taught, systematized in textbooks and curriculum so that they can be measured and graded in ways that can pass state and national standards for testing. The human relationship between artist and audience gradually was lost to the academic relationship between teacher and student, giving a grade rather than appreciation or applause. We all know that art is based on emotion, ideas and beauty, but somehow we weakened its meaning by divorcing it from its primary purpose of sharing the human experience. As artists, we live in danger of being exiled to an island of self-importance. We need to get back to teaching music and the arts in the context of real human contact, not as a technical exercise of skill.

On the side of the disconnect, we artists are not inspired to think entrepreneurially because there is no Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, or Warren Buffet for the arts as our role model. There are not many billionaires who made a fortune creating something exquisitely beautiful and artistic that people love. Sure, there are the few high-priced soloists, fiction writers, gallery painters, or Hollywood actors who have won the career lottery, but most of the time, their finances were orchestrated by business managers and agents. But for those of us in the "arts," we're the 99 percent who are left to believe that tremendous financial success, let alone moderate success, is not easily attained. We teach the arts as a lofty and rarified journey, separate from the mundane topics of marketing, budgeting, fund raising, board development, and other practical banalities that can actually help a career survive. I never got this training, and yet it preoccupies about 90

percent of my day.

We're given the impression that thinking about business is beneath the artist's spirit and is déclassé. When we negotiate or strategize, we're seen to have broken the unspoken oath of purity. What is lost in history is that many of the greatest artists were practical business people. Beethoven kept scrupulous books of his expenses, and Franz Joseph Haydn was a savvy promoter of his own projects and concerts. Now, I'm not preaching that money is the way to salvation, but I am advocating that we should be proud to be business people. I often describe myself as a businessman first. I just happen to be in the business of beauty and emotion.

human experience. That horse has left the barn, and we need to get on it right now. If we do nothing, there is a palpable price to pay. From hearing from my dear colleagues on the Cape and around the country, attendance at live events is waning. The threats we face are in not in the form of a Home Depot or Walmart in a big box, but rather an app on your phone that costs $1.99. It's about infinite choices and convenience at rock bottom prices.

The arts are one of the last bastions of the lack of choice, especially the live performing arts. What we present is anachronistic in every sense. Imagine going to a restaurant with not only a prix fixe menu option, but only one appetizer, one entrée and one dessert.

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Over the many decades I've sought out inspiration from the for-profit world. By the way, as you might guess, I hate the term "non"-profit. It almost gives the mandate that we're to lose money and that we're not supposed to think like a "for profit" company. We're not supposed think about growth and acquisition, research and development, and mass marketing or consumer trends. And yet, that's exactly how great businesses think.

I've studied how Herb Keller grew Southwest Airlines, how Steve Jobs envisioned Apple, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, and others. I've tried to learn how to be those kinds of leaders and visionaries. None of them built his business primarily on technology, but rather an idea or purpose. The one belief they all shared is that every person – EVERY person – deserves the opportunity to have something wonderful or necessary in an accessible way. I happen to believe that is true about the arts as well. Great art, like adequate nutrition, good education, and reasonable health care, should be the God-given right of every child and every adult.

But we can't wait for the world to change to our benefit. We can't wait for the world to beat a path to our door. We can't wait for everyone to put technology in reverse and give up their iPhones in favor of a real

Conceptually, we're asking people to make one choice for that evening and be fine with that. While there is a generation that accepts that paradigm, the next generation is being transformed to expect something far more flexible and affordable. So we too have to be flexible enough to evolve the way we offer our art.

Related to the issue of choice, so much creativity is now in the hands of the consumers. For many, their Facebook page is an endless means of expression. You can post pictures, share videos or products you find interesting; you can document and portray your life in a never-ending way as a means of expression. Everyone is starring in their own story. So the consumer will increasingly wonder, "Why should I see another's person's interpretation of the world when I can create my own?"

Now I know there are people who say, "You'll never replace live performance, the energy of being in the same room with another human being." Those are the same people who say, "You'll never get people to give their credit card over the internet," or "You'll never get someone to buy a shirt online without trying it on," or "We'll never have driverless cars because people won't trust them." It's past time for people to say what will never happen, and it's up to the rest of us to deal with the problem once it's here. There is a wave of change

coming and unless we're prepared for this tsunami that's already upon us, we're going to be swept away.

So what do people want?

In our industry, we're taught that if we're a steak house it's about the steak. The ambience, customer service, price point, all these things are supposed to take a back seat. Well, the truth is that most people come to our performances not for the music, but for an experience. Most of our dear visitors to the Cape Symphony do not have 10 recordings of the Beethoven symphonies, like perhaps some did in the 1960s attending the New York Philharmonic. They don't really care about whether a piece is in the key of A major or D minor. They don't care if this an early Mozart work or late. They come for the exact same reasons you or I go to anything, whether it's a movie or a restaurant. We're hoping for a transformative experience.

Somewhere along the way, the term "art for art's sake" became a mantra. What about "art for people's sake?" What about the need to reach the hearts of the world, and create a more empathetic, enlightened and caring society? Like Jonas Salk who gave his life's work of a polio vaccine to the public for free to be manufactured for only $.25 a dose, we also have a solution for what the world needs now more than ever. And like Salk, we have a moral imperative to spread our own vaccine against pessimism and fear. But we have to learn how to be more effective in getting our "vaccine" to the entire community, not just to those who can afford or appreciate it. With the Cape Symphony, it can be reassuring that we reach about 2,500-4,000 people on an average weekend. But I'm humbled to remember that that's about one percent of the Cape population. If Salk reached only one percent of the population, he would have considered it a moral crime, and he would have been right.

Let today be about empowerment, giving us the tools to be entrepreneurs, business people who are in the business of reinvigorating the spirit and souls of our community. Let us learn more tools to fight the good fight and dream the good dream. Let us compete toe to toe with the Amazons and Netflixes of the world, and prove that the era of digital media will need to share the stage with real human beings who live and love each other.

To paraphrase John F. Kennedy, whose name was in the news once again last week, "We choose to be artists not because it is easy, but because it is hard." It is a struggle defined by a sense of purpose to change the world, to make it more human.

I don't think anyone in this room is having an easy time of it. The greatest enemy of an artist or any entrepreneur is doubt, and believe me, we all have doubt. By being here today, we can help dispel that doubt because we all believe in what we're doing. The problem is that we do it alone and that is what gives us the false impression that our challenges are unique. Yet all of us on the Cape dream about growth and transformation. I've learned that the definition of an artist is someone who sees something beautiful that other people ignore or are unable to conceive by themselves. And so I'm taking a moment to say that the fact that there are 150 dreamers in this room is a beautiful and artistic moment.

What about "art for people's sake?" What about the need to reach the hearts of the world, and create a more empathetic, enlightened and caring society?

Despite my concerning observations about where we are, I believe there's major change in the air, and it's not at all apocalyptic. We see that people are awakening to the fact that we do have a choice. We can choose to be more connected to our food, our environment, our friends, our communities, our government. People are seeking greater meaning for their existences, and it's not found through a news feed or app, but it's found in our neighborhood coffee shops and theaters. It's found in the gathering places where people want to express their humanity by being somewhere real.

I predict ultimately there will be a reaction against the "virtual" in favor of the "real", and a move away from the "convenient and cheap" in favor of the "worthwhile and rewarding." How do I know this? How do you know that I'm not just being optimistic? It's because against all the odds of trending, shrinking orchestras, the Cape Symphony has one of the largest per capita symphony audiences in New England and perhaps one of the largest in the country. This, despite the relatively small population on the Cape. The secret is not the symphony's conductor or its wonderful musicians, or hard-working staff or supportive board. There are many other fine orchestras that have these ingredients. Instead it's the philosophy that we share with our sister organization, the Cape Conservatory. And it's not a secret, yet it's difficult to talk about because it's so simple, it's painful. It's so hopeful, it's silly. The philosophy is not about the art, but about the purpose.

About seven years ago, I helped encourage our organization to change our mission from simply presenting classical music to inspiring joy. I'm grateful it was widely adopted. We began including in our extraordinary musicians' contracts a pair of unprecedented sentences:

"The primary goal for the Cape Symphony is to present musical performances that are emotionally and demonstratively communicative with the audience.

In keeping with the symphony's mission "To Inspire Joy," it is important that all perform with demonstrative energy, charisma and artistry."

These words can make me cry any day of the week. The fact that the musicians and the union chose to keep these words are reason enough that I will fight the good fight on their behalf until my last breath. This is an extraordinary goal that defies all the cynicism that often accompanies our profession.

I naively believe that the only reasons we exist as artists is to bring joy, love, hope, truth, and beauty. That's it. Like the words in Burt Bacharch's song, "Lord knows, we don't need another mountain," and like the Beatles sang, "All you need is love." I have to believe that's why people come to our concerts. It's not about me or Beethoven or about any self-proclaimed importance. It's about them. It's about putting a smile on their faces, or holding their hands as they wax on about how a piece of music made them feel. It's about reminding everyone in that sometimes hot and stuffy or way too cold concert hall that we're all a family who can laugh together, applaud together, cry together, and love together. Ideally, they come to experience each other.

So let's stand tall together as artists and say we're going to take back our world and our destiny, and we'll be strong, entrepreneurial and relentless. Let's rely upon each other throughout this day, and every day. Let's support each other, admire each other, and yes, love each other. We are our own best friends. Let's get beyond the one percent. Let's get to 10 percent, 50 percent…100 percent! None of us can do this alone, but together we can get to 100 percent. Let this key not be to a safe where we keep our art like an expensive wine, but rather to a floodgate that releases itself unto the world.

Let's stand tall together as artists and say we're going to take back our world and our destiny, and we'll be strong, entrepreneurial and relentless.

So for this exchange, thank you for patiently receiving my thoughts, and now I look forward to you "exchanging" back to me and our colleagues. Thank you!

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