

REMARKS FOR MOPD'S ART MEDALLION

Thank you, Brent, for your remarks. I'm constantly amazed by your insights and your humor, and it is a pleasure working beside you for over two decades

And to Senator Mark Leno, please know that I, and we, appreciate your energy and dedication not only to moving our state progressively but by being such a strong and consistent advocate for the arts in our society.

(Other elected officials here)

To all the folks at the Museum of Performance and Design:

Elyse Eng, President

Muriel Maffre, Director

Holly Suich, Event Chair

and the MOPD Board of Trustees, thank you. Your commitment to keeping our cultural legacy alive and accessible in your new Folsom Street home, which will bring the history of the arts to the forefront for generations to come. And I am deeply touched and honored to be the latest of the luminous recipients – several of whom are here – to be given the Arts Medallion.

Growing up, I was lucky. I was brought up in a family that not only loved the cultural wealth of San Francisco and the Bay Area, and also ensured that we, as children, were exposed to the arts. No offense, but being a fidgety seven-year going to the Opera was not exactly what I had in mind as “fun”. But something worked: even though I hated taking piano lessons and to this day am totally untrained, an appreciation for performances and shows stuck. I *got* how important the arts is to all of us, that “culture”, however defined, is the foundation of a vibrant civilization. So it's fair to ask, “what would our society look like without the arts, without the opportunities to express oneself or read a book that changes your perspective or see a piece of art that makes you think?”

Well, there are many in our nation who don't think the arts are really that important. The NEA - the National Endowment for the Arts - is attacked year after year as "unnecessary" and "wasteful". In our state, funding of the California Arts Council, designed to support local programs of all sizes and shapes, dropped from nearly \$40 MM 12 years ago to just under \$5 MM today. And we all are keenly aware of the deterioration or elimination of arts programs in our schools: the days of band practice or sculpture in public high schools has disappeared for a generation or more of students. The arts aren't appreciated as much today because we as a people certainly aren't making the arts as important as it once was.

It is both the larger traditional cultural bastions - and especially the smaller, less stable institutions - that suffer as a consequence. But we who've been a part of them also share the blame for the arts becoming less of a priority. For many years, decades even, we've thought, well, we'll keep doing the same thing, only we'll just do it better.

Yet, look around us. If Twitter and Facebook and Yahoo and Google thought, let's do what has only been done, this region would never become the global center of innovation. If two guys in a garage didn't think, let's build something different, we'd never have Apple. We attract talent because this is a place that encourages new thinking, celebrates risk-taking, and considers failure to be a badge of courage when pushing the boundaries.

We need that thinking in our cultural institutions. At the Symphony, we've stayed true to the same format: a two-hour performance, where you have to sit on your hands until a piece is completed, you have 5 minutes to go to the bathroom or (God forbid) get a drink during intermission, and you rush in and rush out because parking and traffic is a mess. Who does that work for anymore? I'd say, no one.

Let's think and get out of the box. Let's first of all, *listen*. The next generation loves the arts as much as we do – just in a different way. We need to present our product on *their* terms, available and accessible 24/7, on a moment's notice, and through every distribution method possible.

We need to *engage*. Remember the Magic Key that we used to get at Disneyland many years ago, as my wife Marcia reminded me? It allowed you to go on any ride at any time – and it was golden. Why not have a Magic Key for all our cultural institutions, so folks who never have stepped foot into Davies Symphony Hall or experienced ACT or Philharmonia Baroque can come in for a night and learn what we do. Breaking down barriers to entry is absolutely critical if we're to engage others. And doing so collaboratively with each other will help all of us succeed.

And last, we need to *let them lead*. We can do all the focus groups in the world, but we will never reflect the great diversity of our Bay Area until we reflect our communities and have them influence, change, and guide our institutions. The mantle of leadership should be passed on to them, and the sooner the better.

The arts are essential to our society, in my opinion, and we need a strong culture of “culture” to be a better people. So let's make the arts enduring, reflective of the talent, the energy, and the resourcefulness of those who are transforming San Francisco and the region.

Thank you so much for bestowing me with this year's Arts Medallion, and please know that I am personally dedicated to a great and exciting future for the arts everywhere.