

*The Morrison Artists Series presents **Nordic Voices**
February 20, 8pm in SF State's McKenna Theater*

Boston's new Art & Culture Czar

*A Morrison Chamber Music Center post
from Artistic Director Richard Festinger*



By a fortuitous coincidence, my recent visit to Boston fell on the same November weekend that the Sunday Boston Globe's *Ideas* section devoted four full *Opinion* pages and no less than ten op-ed pieces to an examination of the place and aspirations of arts and culture in New England's metropolitan hub city. The stimulus for this decidedly unusual focus was the creation of a cabinet level position for arts and culture in the city government by Boston mayor Martin J. Walsh. The first occupant of the new position, identified through a nation-wide search, is Julie Burros, who begins her new job this month after serving for some 15 years as Director of Cultural Planning for the city of Chicago.



Boston mayor Martin Walsh

Quoting from the administration's September 23, 2014 press release, "The Arts + Culture cabinet was created by Mayor Walsh to elevate arts and culture by separating it from the previous administration's Office of Arts, Tourism, and Special Events... Burros will seek to grow the arts in Boston across disciplines, from theater to dance, to the visual arts to public art."

This move on mayor Walsh's part has sparked great local interest, and for good reason – according to the lead editorial, Massachusetts, with a population a sixth that of California, is home to some 6,000 arts and culture organizations. In piece after piece in the *Globe*, personages no less than novelist Sue Miller and the Boston Symphony's new music director Andris Nelsons expressed their hopes, suggestions and optimism for a renewed commitment of focus and resources for the city's extensive arts community.

Walsh and Burros themselves contributed a short piece, which began with a quote from an article by John F. Kennedy, published in the December 18, 1962 issue of *Look* magazine: "...the life of the arts, far from being an interruption, a distraction, in the life of a nation, is very close to the center of a nation's purpose--and is a test of the quality of a nation's civilization." The entire Kennedy article, expressing viewpoints more needed today than ever, is an eloquent articulation of the importance of culture in every aspect of our lives, and well worth reading in full – you can find it at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9061>.



Julie Burros

One hopes that governors, legislators and mayors throughout the U.S. will take note of Mayor Walsh's lead. Here in California the picture is not so rosy. In 2011, the most recent year for which I found figures readily available, California ranked 48th among the states in support for the arts, also coming in behind the Virgin Islands, the District of Columbia, the Northern Marianas, Puerto Rico, Guam, and American Samoa. Only Arizona and Georgia were more parsimonious in denying culture more than a beggar's share at the communal table. Bear in mind that California, with 12% of the nation's population, accounts for 13% of the US economy, ranking it as the 8th largest economy in the world, next in line behind China, Japan, Germany, France, England and Brazil, in that order.

Just so you get the full picture, state appropriations for the arts in California in 2011 were just 12 cents per capita, and total spending, taking into account other sources of state revenue than those specifically designated by our un-culture-minded legislators (e.g. fees from customized license plates, etc.), raised that up to a munificent 15 cents per capita for the year. To provide some perspective, that's in contrast to \$5.87 per capita in Minnesota and \$5.19 per capita in Hawai'i, the two top ranking states. Even Wyoming managed \$3.91 per capita, 26 times California's desultory showing.

The Bay Area is fortunate to have local support for culture boosted in a big way by a number of philanthropic foundations, such as the Hewlett, Haas, Gerbode, Zellerbach and Osher Foundations, to mention but a few. San Francisco based arts groups also benefit enormously from the city's Grants for the Arts program, funded largely by hotel taxes. And what an extraordinary gift to our city that the Morrison Artists Series is able to present its admission free chamber music programs in perpetuity thanks to the long range vision and generosity of the May Treat Morrison Chamber Music Foundation.



Nordic Voices

And on that subject, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the Morrison Artists Series' next concert, on February 20, 2015, when the a capella group Nordic Voices, from Oslo, Norway, takes the McKenna Theater stage in what promises to be a fascinating program of music both very old and quite new, featuring works by two of the great renaissance masters, Luca Marenzio and Clément Janequin, alongside works by Maurice Ravel, modernist giant György Ligeti, and Norwegian composers Lasse Thoresen, Frank Havrøy and Maja Ratkje. Nordic Voices is one of the top ensembles of its kind active in the world today. You don't want to miss this!