

File: A Conversation with Board Chair Julie Muraco (Julie Final.wav)

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CLARE: Hi, my name is Clare Sherlog. I am the Arts Action Fund Membership and Fundraising Associate here at Americans for the Arts.

DENNIS: And my name is Dennis Barrett. I am the Local Arts Services Associate with Americans for the Arts.

CLARE: And today we have the pleasure of speaking with Julie Muraco. Julie has been elected as Chair of the Board of Americans for the Arts for a two year term. She succeeds Abel Lopez, associate producing director at GALA Hispanic Theatre, who served since 2013. Today, we look forward to hearing about her vision and goals as Board Chair.

DENNIS: Julie C. Muraco is founder and Managing Partner of Praeditis Group LLC, a capital markets & business consultancy. She founded Praeditis Group with a concentration on the “permanent private capital” and “impact investment” business models in 2008.

Prior to founding Praeditis Group, Ms. Muraco was a Senior Managing Director and head of Global Capital Markets for The NASDAQ. She has also worked on Wall Street as a Vice President with J.P. Morgan, and a managing director with Smith Barney.

Welcome Julie, thanks so much for taking the time to chat with us today.

JULIE: Thank you for having me today.

DENNIS: Alright, so you’ve served on the Americans for the Arts Board of Directors in various capacities since 2005. Now what initially drew you to the arts and how did you first get involved with Americans for the Arts?

JULIE: So, at the time, I worked for JP Morgan and the JP Morgan Foundation was terrific about engaging their employees for opportunities for grantees, and one of those grantees was the Arts and Business Council of New York. That was the initial Board that I was on. Once we had merged Americans for the Arts with the Arts and Business Council, I came on to the Americans for the Arts board.

CLARE: After you first got involved with Americans for the Arts, what then inspired you to take on some additional leadership and responsibility as Chair?

JULIE: I’ve taken on the role as Chair and was elected by my board members, but I think what initially drew me to this particular point is the state of change of the economy that we’re in right now. It’s in part driven by the technological advancements that we have allowing many organizations to actually do some rebranding and redefinition of their contributions to society, and that is also so for the not-for-profit sector. I believe that we are in an acute area of change for creativity and innovation in our economy and that we need empathy and compassion in our society. And what better way to handle all four of those characteristics by incorporating the arts. I think we’re in a time where the arts as a field can step out in front of the line and lead in all four of those characteristics and we can cast a brighter light on past contributions made, as well as

grow a larger network of diverse advocates for the future. So, we're in an era of change on a lot of fronts, and change is a state which I feel very comfortable, and I think that's what attracted me to the role at that time.

CLARE: What does it mean to you now to be the first female Chair under the Americans for the Arts organizational name?

JULIE: I am very humbled that my board of directors and colleagues have elected me to this role. It is really meaningful to have the respect and the confidence of your peer colleagues. It is also a huge responsibility and a lot of work, but I want to do a good job because I don't want to be the last. I also want to put this into perspective, AFTA itself has gone through probably five or six different mergers - I'm not quite sure at this point in time - but I want to mention that there are many, many women whose shoulders that I stand on, who have led the role, and have led in the arts whether it's our local agencies, state agencies, in the Federal government, and we obviously had the Nancy Hanks Lecture; Nancy Hanks being the first woman chair of the NEA. There are many who have been coming before me.

CLARE: Since your time starting now in leadership, or previously since 2005, has anything surprised you at all about AFTA or the arts community and what might that be?

JULIE: Well, I think even over these last two days, when we did a very deep dive into the organization as a board; the breadth, the scope, and the depth of the organization and all the touchpoints that we have, and the partnerships that had been created over the years, that is really overwhelming. The arts as a society has had a certain definition, and certainly we talk to people all the time who think that music or literature are not part of the arts; they are thinking that they are part of the performing arts. But we are also in a period of time where there are so many more opportunities within the creative industries and throwing open that definition and that moniker. Those creative industries that we have talked about in our research—there are 700,000—and they can include music, film, theater, the digital arts, and I'm talking about new distribution models too, like Spotify and Netflix. People are consuming arts in such a different way than we did five years ago or ten years ago. That's been the most overwhelming change, I think.

DENNIS: So, Americans for the Arts has continued to lead the field during your tenure as one of the board members, can you talk about what your vision is now as Chair and what you'd like to see happen as well as some challenges that you anticipate.

JULIE: So, I just mentioned the role of the creative industries. My vision for Americans for the Arts is to cast this wider net for the 700,000 organizations that are part of the creative industries. With that recognition, I think that AFTA is going to have available for us and to us, human and financial capital well beyond what we are tapping into right now, and that's how we are going to grow our own advocacy work. Many of these creative industry groups are impacting areas in social justice, in diversity, inclusion, community development, and they are all areas that dovetail with the current programs areas that we have right now; whether it is the local arts agency, or private sector, our own cultural equity statement. So that's one example of a vision. The other example is about the role of social impact. The social impact could play a huge role on our financial opportunities. There is a lot of new funding mechanisms that are being developed in social impact and that also can play a role with cultural equity. The third thing I will talk

about is the role of technology. There are so many technological advances and changes that have been and will continue to be disruptors for our field. So those are some of the things I want to focus on.

CLARE: You already talked a little bit about your excitement about the creative industries and you already added a task force specifically this year, so I wonder if you could talk a little bit more in detail about what you might hope this task force is going to accomplish in the near future.

JULIE: I think it is going to allow the field itself to be recognized in an entirely different way. I think that in some respect we put the arts and cultural field on defense. We are continually seeing considerable funding levels decline. This is going to be able to put us back on offense, and as I just mentioned, there are so many different areas of these organizations that are responsible for the creation and distribution of arts over all, contributing \$730 billion of economic impact to this country. I think that AFTA has an opportunity to engage with many of these organizations and advance our own work, and advance the work of current artists in the field to evolve themselves.

DENNIS: So, it sounds like you are really going to touch on those creative industries, but do you think that you get to that from your day job?

JULIE: Well my current day job is to help launch new businesses, so it always has me in different pockets of new technologies that are being advanced, new business models, different fields that are evolving, whether it is renewable energy, and safe agriculture and those types of things. But from my role at NASDAQ I saw that a lot of the technological changes were occurring in certain pockets of the country, Silicon Valley. We can really blow open the ceiling on that. I think that the goal right now is to grow the constituent and the supporters within those fields. In turn, if we develop the creative industries in a very big way, I think it is going to help to support a lot of the organizations and people in this country.

DENNIS: That sort of lead into the next question that we have, are there trends or shifts in the financial markets today that you think would benefit the nonprofit arts sector?

JULIE: We talked about it yesterday at the board meeting where Clay Lord had talked about the role of social impact and the work that we're doing. I'm glad that you asked this question because it's a real big growing movement within certain sectors of our society. It actually developed from technology people. A lot of what we call Social Entrepreneurs or Venture Philanthropists who did not just want to write a check and be passive about their investment, if you will. These people are very hands on. So you're seeing not only the technology guys that are moving in this direction, but also foundations, community foundations, and also millennials who are very concerned about the importance of people, planet, and profit, all being considered in equal measure.

CLARE: To follow up on that as well, what do you think the business community, the for profit sector at large and businesses in general have to learn from the arts community and vice versa?

JULIE: Creativity and innovation. There are so many different opportunities for artists to participate in corporations and we are constantly, in the corporate world, saying that we need to have a creative and innovative workforce. And what does that mean? In the past business model, where you had strong hierarchies of management, that's all gone. Now, corporations are

responding to peer-to-peer development, and that means you might be sitting remotely in an office some place by yourself and you have to solve your own problems. So outside of creativity and innovation it is also creating this critical thinking skills that are really important to our economy.

DENNIS: Great! How has your time on the board influenced how you approach finance?

JULIE: So, when I became Treasurer, happened a long time ago, I think I was Treasurer for about eight years, the budget of the organization was about \$8 million total, and that had actually just doubled because of the Ruth Lilly gift. Last year, we passed a budget of \$18 million. There is been quite a lot of growth in the organization, from a financial perspective in my tenure as Treasurer. We are one of the largest endowments with that Ruth Lilly gift as well of over \$100 million. To answer the question, it is not really an approach of finance that is changed, it is really that the numbers have gotten a lot bigger. What that means to the organizations that will transfer into the field is that we are able to take big bet decisions and push the edge of the envelope and feel comfort in our financial acumen, and those calculated risks had been forwarded in areas like the Full Court Press where we got \$1 million three years ago now, the board had allocated \$1 million to the visibility under the nomenclature of Full Court Press. Last year, in a very rapid response board meeting, we developed an opportunity for \$2 million to be appropriated in an emergency appropriation for the NEA. And that itself, that opportunity and flexibility with our finances, allowed our board and our development team to raise another \$900,000 behind that \$2 million, so it was a good return on our investment.

CLARE: We've covered a lot of ground today, but is there anything else you'd like us to ask that we didn't ask, or anything else you'd like to share with us today?

JULIE: I'd like to share that I am constantly inspired and elevated when I come to meetings with Americans for the Arts, with the different council members that we have, with the different people that we continuously attract around the table, and the intellectual capacity, and I hope that always stays in the room for the future. There's one other thing that I'd like to impart upon here, which is that the transition from Abel Lopez to myself as Board Chair has been very seamless in the organization. We have very different backgrounds, we have very different styles, but we are respected colleagues, and his focus on cultural equity and the tremendous growth that we've had in our organization and in the field will be continued across all program areas that I am hoping to develop in the field.

CLARE: Thank you again, so much, for taking the time to talk with us today. It's honestly been so great to hear from you and hear about your vision as Chair. All of us at Americans for the Arts are certainly just very excited to have you as Chair for the next two years.

JULIE: Thank you so much.

DENNIS: Thank you again, Julie.