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Dec. 5, 2011

Sanford Weill

New York, NY

Dear Mr. Weill:

I'm writing to you because of your love for and support of the arts. If one thing hasn't changed for thousands of years, it is the reliance of the arts on the patronage of the generous, and your work with universities, Sonoma State, Carnegie Hall, and classical music in general is impressive, and much needed. It's individuals like you who help people like me spend their youth in the cheap seats at the Baltimore Opera and the Met soaking up Verdi and Mozart.

I'm a musician and an artist in Portland, Oregon, and one of my current projects is called "Make an Artist a Millionaire." Until recently, the method of the project was to get one million people to donate one dollar, which has proved difficult, but not unfruitful. The money is being saved, not spent, since the purpose is to collect and invest it, enabling me to live off the interest and to achieve the ultimate goal: to free up time to work on my artistic endeavors without the need for a day job. Time is money, but for artists especially, money is time. How many works have suffered, or never been created at all for lack of time? How would you like to help me become a millionaire?

You might ask, "Why do you, a person with a job and only the needs of an individual, deserve a donation?" I grew up lower middle class in Pennsylvania and got my first job when I was 12, in my mom's bookstore. I played music and developed a visual art practice while washing dishes in high school, then while shucking oysters to help pay for college. Though the progress has been slow, I've had some success, and given and received more joy from music and art than from anything else in life. I still work hard all day at my day job, and then into the evening on my own projects, but the job saps most of my energy and focus, which feels squandered on other peoples' business. And now, just as I have more unrealized ideas and plans than ever before, and my band has reached a pinnacle, my job requires me to leave Portland, and probably spells the end of a very, very special collaboration between four people.

It's up for debate (and I'd love to hear your opinion about this), but the fact that finance is a great way to earn a living and the arts is often a lousy way is just a matter of chance. They both bring value to human life, both require an enormous amount of work and dedication, as well as talent honed by training. Businesses and the people that depend on them could not function without investment; and the spirit would not be human without culture. Wouldn't you agree that life would be impoverished indeed without Beethoven? I can't explain the inequity of compensation between the arts and business, I can only recognize it and look for ways to beat it.

Enclosed is a gift (and proof that I'm an artist!), one of a series of my "24 illustrations of Schubert's "Winterreise"" song cycle. This print illustrates the song "Die Stadt." I learned about Schubert while studying music at St. John's College (the Great Books school), and still think his songs beat John Lennon's any day. This is one small-scale example of the kind of commissioned work I could make for you in return for your generosity.

I get out to the east coast when I can to visit family and would love to meet you in New York if you'd be interested, we might have a lot to talk about! I hope this letter finds you in good health. Thanks for your time in reading it.

Best,

Dan Nelson