

THE
ECONOMIC
CLUB OF
CHICAGO

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The Club was honored to have renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma as a guest speaker and performer for our Fifth Night Celebration on May 10, 2017, at Chicago's Symphony Center. Member Jay Henderson, former chairman of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association and former vice chairman, client services at PricewaterhouseCoopers, moderated a conversation with Mr. Ma that was interspersed with ensemble performances.

Mr. Ma serves as the Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's Negaunee Music Institute, which aims to create connections to music for individuals and communities in Chicago and around the world. At the beginning of the conversation, Mr. Henderson acknowledged Mr. Ma's dedication to the project.

"The work that you've done with your leadership and advocacy, the work that's gone on around CPS, leadership with Ingenuity, the support of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra – over the last three years, the number of schools in the Chicago Public School system that have a rating of strong or excellent in their arts education program has more than doubled," said Mr. Henderson.

Mr. Ma's involvement in arts education is one way he shares culture, a word for which he provided his own personal definition.

"[Culture] is whatever you think gets passed on that people remember. It's all about memory. I think that's what separates us from any other living form, is that we have that capacity," he said, including a quick example of the many ways things can become part of culture: "Does anyone know where the story of Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer came from? Montgomery Ward. They wanted to sell more toys. Here a business said we want a new toy, and then something entered into the culture forever."

Mr. Ma expanded on the notion of cultural citizenship and the ways individuals express the responsibility they have to culture.

"You do more than just vote and pay your taxes. You care about things. And when you care about things, you give of yourself. Every teacher is a cultural citizen. Every parent who cares about their child," said Mr. Ma. "If you don't know what you can do, you can always read a book, which is a cultural act, because you're putting your mind to study something else. You can, through the arts, open your mind to possibilities. You open your mind to wonder. You open your mind to seeing what actually should be there and isn't there."

Mr. Henderson moderated live questions from the audience that evening, including one from a member who asked how culture can be used to create dialogue during such a politically divided time. Mr. Ma emphasized seeking out those alternative opinions.

“When there’s a divide, it’s always interesting finding out what someone else’s point of view is. We say there is an empathy deficit, it’s an empathy deficit on all sides,” he said. “People say if you really disagree with somebody, spending 30 respectful minutes with someone else who has a different opinion actually helps in changing their minds eventually. I am from that school. I try not to be partisan as much as possible, because music should be for everybody.”

Interspersed throughout the conversation were performances, including: Bach’s Allegro from Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G Major performed by musicians from the Civic Orchestra of Chicago and students from The People’s Music School; My Love by Danny, performed by musicians from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Yo-Yo Ma, cello and Sarah Ponder, Mezzo Soprano; and lastly, Handel’s Laschi ch’io piangia from Rinaldo and Joplin’s Maple Leaf Rag by musicians from the Civic Orchestra of Chicago and Yo-Yo Ma, cello.

After the final performance of the evening, members and their guests were invited to a dinner reception in Buntrock Hall and Rotunda. They were treated to food, drink and music by two student pianists from Merit School of Music alternated playing the piano.