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## For the sake of For Art's Sake

### K.J. should listen to his friend Wynton Marsalis

By [Nick Miller](#)

**Critics argue that Mayor Kevin Johnson's** arts revitalization efforts lack teeth. Perhaps—but they can't say they lack star power.

The mayor himself of course has celebrity draw, and it was put to good use last week when he shocked some 150 arts-community members at a monthly For Art's Sake initiative meeting. After a lengthy, winning introduction—K.J. realizes the power of a charming anecdote—the mayor presented a surprise guest: Wynton Marsalis. And the legendary trumpet player and arts-education advocate spoke for nearly a half-hour on America's arts heritage and also took questions.



Photo By NICK MILLER

Marsalis didn't tiptoe around what's wrong with the arts in America. In our schools, curriculum is pretty much nonexistent, he reminded, noting that students never pick up instruments, let alone learn about America's rich musical heritage.

[Find out more.](#)

Marsalis argued that you don't fund arts because it's necessarily a good fiscal investment, you do so because it's vital to your city's soul.

The mayor's For Art's Sake hopes to raise enough funds to do exactly this: help the arts community withstand challenging times. Five committees will explore funding, marketing and development options. All Sacramento's arts-community game changers are on board. An action plan is due to the mayor in March 2010.

Marsalis, who speaks all over the world, repeatedly emphasized the significance of exposing kids

to the arts. “We need to get kids to go to events whether they like it or not,” he said.

But in Sacramento, one of the biggest hang-ups for kids is that there simply aren’t many outlets for them to explore artistic creativity, be it design, fashion, music, film, performances, visual arts—even skateboarding.

There are sustainable business models in other cities in America and around the world, however, and Sacramento can steal these.

Publicly subsidized film collectives, such as those in France and throughout Europe, expose kids to good movies—not G.I. Joe or the like. Part of For Art’s Sake’s film agenda should be to subsidize a film co-op, at a new location or even at an existing theater whose business model fits the bill, such as the Crest Theatre.

Also, K.J. has stated he wants more Hollywood productions filmed in Sac, so why not establish a platform where a local film community can thrive, such as in Austin, Texas, which during the past 20 years has evolved into a bona fide film scene, like 1960s Paris. Filmmakers, photographers and audio engineers could hone their chops on city-subsidized projects, maybe even at a university home base such as Sacramento State. This would provide out-of-town productions with a decent home-base facility and also eager, talented local help.

An all-ages venue in Midtown, operated as a collective like Los Angeles’ The Smell, which has been praised in the pages of The New Yorker, would get young high-school kids in the habit of going out to see live music instead of hibernating, playing Halo 3.

And, of course, there needs to be a new public option when it comes to arts education. Instead of classrooms, why not urban centers, where aspiring singers, guitarists and even trumpeters can put down Kanye West and put on the Beethoven or Duke Ellington and learn to play? Make it a required extracurricular activity?

As Marsalis put it, you have to “force these kids.”