

Morton Marcus Memorial Reading to Feature Arthur Sze

Santa Fe poet is the late Santa Cruz icon's kindred spirit

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by Steve Palopoli on Nov 06, 2012

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Arthur Sze is the featured poet at the Morton Marcus Memorial Reading Saturday at Cabrillo.

Arthur Sze never met Morton Marcus.

And yet, as Santa Fe poet Sze travels to Santa Cruz this week to appear at the third annual Morton Marcus Memorial Reading at Cabrillo, he can't help but feel he's honoring a kindred spirit.

It's not just that Sze was reading and admiring Marcus' work way back when the Santa Cruz icon was writing in *kayak*, the groundbreaking literary magazine founded in the '60s by UCSC professor George Hitchcock. Nor that Sze served as poet laureate of Santa Fe, just as Marcus surely would have in Santa Cruz had the position existed before he died in 2009. (The host of this year's Marcus memorial, Gary Young, was named the first Santa Cruz poet laureate in 2010.)

No, what truly links the two poets is a shared philosophy. As Sze puts it: "Poetry is really for all

people."

"I try to work in the community in different ways," he says. "I think Morton would have appreciated some of the things I've done."

Those things include teaching poetry in New Mexico schools and institutions for the deaf, on Indian reservations and death row. He has taken poetry to the rain forest islands of Alaska, and read in India, China, Paris and London.

"I've tried to do a kind of outreach with poetry," says Sze, in what may win for Poetry Understatement of the Year. His long crusade for the art form, along with the body of work he has produced over the last four decades (including eight books of poetry, beginning with 1972's *The Willow Wind*) led to him being named a Chancellor to the Academy of American Poets in January.

"I still feel like a beginner after writing for 40 years," says the American Book Award winner. "I feel very blessed. I never could have foreseen any of this."

Truth be told, though, he doesn't want to foresee much of anything, including what his next poem is going to be at any given time.

"It's a mysterious process for me," he admits. "I basically make a mess on the page. After time, it starts to



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coalesce. I have to lose my way in order to find it.”

Sze is also known for his skill as a translator, thanks to his unusual collection *The Silk Dragon*. Translating a single poet’s work is difficult enough, but Sze made it exponentially harder for himself when he chose 18 different Chinese authors to translate for the book—meaning a multitude of different styles and idiosyncrasies he had to master to capture the true essence of the original works.

And he’s not going to kid anybody about it being easy. “Translation is an impossible task,” he says. “I’m aware of the Italian phrase, ‘Translator, traitor.’ Having said that, we need translation more than ever.”

That desire to expose a global audience to new voices in poetry is something Sze believes he shared with the man he’ll pay tribute to at the reading.

“He was a force for poetry,” says Sze of Marcus. “Not just *his* poetry.”

The Morton Marcus Memorial Reading is Saturday, Nov. 10, 7pm at Cabrillo Samper Recital Hall. Admission is free.

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