



the voice of opera in Canada / la voix de l'opéra au Canada

Opera.ca brief to the Standing Committee on Finance

2014

Submitted to:

Christine Lafrance
Clerk of the Standing Committee on Finance
[fina@parl.gc.ca](mailto: fina@parl.gc.ca)

For more information, please contact:

Christina Loewen
Opera.ca
[c_loewen@opera.ca](mailto: c_loewen@opera.ca)
Tel. 416 591 7222
Toronto, Ontario

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Opera.ca appreciates the opportunity to submit a brief to the Standing Committee on Finance as part of its pre-budget consultations 2014.

Opera.ca is the voice of Canada's opera sector: the companies, artists, businesses and organizations that bring opera to Canadians, and indeed beyond. Our members are an important part of their community, be that community a large urban centre or a smaller town or city. Through partnerships and collaborations, we reach out to Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

The Canadian opera sector brings economic and cultural value to Canadians and Canada; our sector is at the core of Canada's \$46B creative economy; it contributes to the quality and well-being of our communities; and, it fosters and celebrates creativity in our people.

In order of funding priority, our recommendations are:

1. Increase the Canada Council for the Arts' Parliamentary appropriation by \$35 million in 2015 with a long-term goal of reaching \$300 million.
2. Increase Canada's presence on domestic and international stages for 2017 by establishing a \$25 million pilot program over three years for Canada's 150th birthday.
3. As a part of Digital Canada 150, invest in the creation of a comprehensive Canadian Cultural Digital Strategy that would enable the creation, dissemination and engagement of Canadian cultural content online.

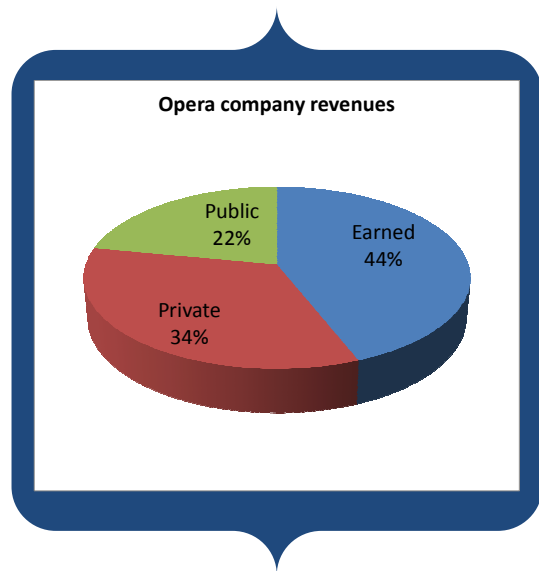
Recommendation I – Increase core investment to the Canada Council for the Arts

1. *Opera.ca recommends that the Government of Canada increase the Canada Council for the Arts' Parliamentary appropriation by \$35 million in 2015 towards a longer range target of \$300 million.*

Opera companies - boards, volunteers, artists and audiences -- across the country were encouraged to see the Government of Canada make permanent a \$ 25 million contribution to the Council's parliamentary appropriation that had previously been renewed on an annual basis. This investment supports an array of arts and cultural activities that includes the creation and production of art, public access to Canada's artistic product, and organizational health and sustainability through operating or core funding.

Although much appreciated, unchanged levels of investment do not address the endemic shortfall between core funding as demonstrated by current investment in the Canada Council for the Arts, and the growth and development of the sector, which continues to widen.

Core funding creates stability for organizations and their communities. In opera, the federal contribution to the sector in real dollars has been flat for over ten years. Because of inflation, the purchasing power of this contribution has essentially declined over the past decade. Factor in the rising costs of producing opera, including artist fees and production expenses, with the need to keep ticket prices affordable, and the result is a meaningful and significant limitations on how opera companies operate, engage artists and employees, and interact and contribute to their communities.



An increased investment in the Canada Council for the Arts will ensure that arts organizations, like opera companies, are able to engage, innovate and develop the best of artistic creation and practice.

With a balanced federal budget in sight, it is time to ensure that the Canada Council is able to affirm its historic commitment to providing Canadians with affordable access to diverse cultural experiences, while catalyzing local and regional economic growth through increased engagement in the arts.

Recommendation 2 – Increase Canada’s presence in domestic and international stages for 2017

Opera.ca recommends that the Government of Canada increase Canada’s presence locally and on the world stage for 2017 by establishing a \$25 million pilot program over three years for Canada’s 150th birthday.

Opera on the World Stage

Canada’s opera artists – our singers, directors and creators – are some of our greatest cultural exports, carrying our country’s spirit far and wide to all corners of the globe.

In addition to our artists, our opera companies are also leaders on the world stage, but are increasingly challenged in finding new ways of bringing Canada’s values and creativity to the world, despite demand.

For companies like Opera Atelier, who are in demand on international stages, touring presents opportunities to showcase Canadian artists in the best light. This benefits the entire sector by increasing international familiarity with Canadian creators, products, and builds future opportunities for artists, and the art form to flourish.

Opera in Home Markets

Audience demand for fresh, exciting productions have increased no doubt augmented by raised expectations from Metropolitan Opera HD broadcasts.

Co-productions, whereby two or three opera companies collaborate to create and build a new and exciting opera production, allows for entire productions to tour more economically across the country. Sets, costumes and creative teams move from city to city, but produced using local orchestra, chorus, and lead singers. Not only does this model increase equal access for Canadians to share in artistic excellence, it creates opportunities for international exposure through subsequent rentals of these high quality productions to opera companies abroad.

Canadian Stories

Opera relies on creativity and relevance. While masterpieces like Puccini’s *Boheme* and *Aida* will always have a place in audiences’ and opera’s repertoire, the ability of opera companies to tell stories, Canadian stories through the art form, is what will engage Canadians today and in the future. In 1967, the Canadian Opera Company celebrated Canada’s centennial with the commissioning of the opera, *Louis Riel*, a re-telling of the story of the iconic and controversial nineteenth-century Métis leader from Manitoba,

Canada’s Opera Atelier recently toured to Versailles in May 2014, with its production of baroque masterpiece *Persée*.

This was the first time Lully’s landmark opera has been on that stage since its fateful premiere in 1770, celebrating the marriage of Marie Antoinette and King Louis XVI.

the central themes of which still resonate with contemporary Canadian audiences. In 2017, the Canadian Opera Company hopes to remount this Canadian masterpiece. *Lillian Alling*, commissioned by Vancouver Opera and Calgary Opera's *Filumena*, *Frobisher*, and *The Inventor*, are all new, full-length operas that tell stories of Canadian history and experiences, inciting discussion, dialogue and deeper understanding among us.

A strategic investment to increase Canada's presence in 2017 in international and domestic markets will enable companies and artists to tell Canadian stories, create access for Canadians to share in their cultural right, and unveil the creativity, innovation and excellence of leading Canadian companies globally.

Recommendation 3 – Investing in a comprehensive Canadian Cultural Digital Strategy

As part of Industry Canada's Digital 150, invest in the creation of a comprehensive Canadian Cultural Digital Strategy that would enable the creation, dissemination and engagement of Canadian cultural content online.

The Digital Canada 150 program states that, "Canadians will have easy online access to Canadian content that will allow us to celebrate our history, arts and culture." Yet, Digital Canada 150 includes no new economic opportunities for supporting the creation, engagement or dissemination of Canadian cultural content online.

Since the end of the Canadian Culture Online (CCO) initiative a decade ago, Canada's lack of investment in a comprehensive digital strategy for arts and culture has widened a cultural trade gap that sees far more foreign cultural content flowing in, than coming out. Today, Canadians can spend \$20 to go to their local movie theatre, and watch operas made in New York City, featuring American artists, or theatre productions made in the UK with British actors, while local Canadian arts organizations who support Canadian artists, employees, and local businesses, struggle to sell tickets, while meeting audience demand for technologically-advanced, live arts experiences.

This has set up an imbalance, and anti-competitive market for Canadian opera organizations to maintain market share, compete in a digital world, and limits access by Canadians to Canadian opera productions.



To increase the competitiveness of Canadian arts organization in the digital realm, a three part cultural digital strategy would enable opera companies and arts organizations to explore innovations in:

1. Content/Creation – Such an investment would allow for the application and integration of new digital technologies in the practice of producing the live opera that will enhance the user experience, as well as content designed specifically for the digital medium.
2. Engagement – An investment here would allow Canadians to become more engaged with the art form through digital means, before, during and after the live performance, building on mobile technology, exploring new operating models, and audience engagement schemes that create greater cultural value.
3. Dissemination – An investment in digital dissemination would remove barriers to Canadian live opera participation and create equal access to our country’s rich cultural heritage, and at affordable price points. Such a program would support initiatives such as live simulcasts in public parks, regional movie theatres and sports arenas, or content streaming platforms on the internet.

Conclusion

Opera.ca’s member companies are run as some of this country’s most efficient businesses, but their raison d’être is not to create monetary wealth. Canadian opera companies exist to bring expression and definition to the values and challenges we face as Canadians, in our communities and our country.

Opera.ca values the opportunity to make recommendations to the Standing Committee on Finance on the upcoming 2014 federal budget. In this submission, we have proposed a series of constructive measures that will enhance the contribution opera companies make for Canadians in a wide array of unique communities.

In short, a vibrant and adequately supported opera sector is an essential part of Canadian values, directly contributing to Canada’s productivity and innovation.