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Chair

Ms. Julie Dabrusin

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• (1545)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.)): We will start our 163rd meeting. We are continuing our study on the Canada Council for the Arts.

We have with us Mr. Jean-François Dubé, from the Front des réalisateurs indépendants du Canada.

[*English*]

We have the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres, with Boomer Stacey and Nick Tracey. As well, by video conference, we have The Old Trout Puppet Workshop, with Judd Palmer.

We'll begin with The Old Trout Puppet Workshop, please, by video conference, just in case we run into any technical difficulties.

Mr. Judd Palmer (Co-Artistic Director, The Old Trout Puppet Workshop): Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

My name is Judd Palmer. I am one of the three co-artistic directors of The Old Trout Puppet Workshop, a collective of artists based in Calgary, Alberta.

Our main focus is the creation of experimental puppet theatre, mostly for adults, which we tour across the country and abroad, but we also make sculptures, paintings, illustrated children's books, operas and films, teach widely, and curate an international puppet festival in our hometown.

The founding of our company almost 20 years ago is a tale that resonates with the mandate of this hearing. Nowadays, Alberta's theatre scene is thriving and cosmopolitan and brimming with world-class talents, but in the late 1990s when I was young and given to brooding, I believed that any artist worth their salt had to move east. Therefore, full of grandiose ambitions, I packed up a rickety orange Volvo station wagon and drove to Toronto to hurl myself at the great walls of central Canadian theatre.

The great walls of central Canadian theatre did not exactly crumble under my onslaught. I found myself wandering the streets forlornly in search of a community that would take me in, and as my courage dwindled, I felt more and more as though maybe I just wasn't up to standard. I yearned for the community I knew, the people I grew up with, out in the far-flung wilderness, distant from the intimidating institutions of cultural power.

Then one pivotal day it dawned on me that maybe that distance was actually an opportunity. Maybe there was something unique and wondrous about being an Albertan artist that needed nurturing by friends and family and shared experience and that couldn't sprout in other lonelier climes. Maybe we could invent our own traditions, our own strange styles, our own institutions. I called up all my oldest friends, who by now were scattered across the globe on similar sorrow-stricken missions, and asked if they wanted to move back home and start a company together.

I had two things I could offer. The first was a coal-heated shack on my family's ranch in southern Alberta, where we could live and work in exchange for feeding the pigs and collecting the eggs. The second was a Canada Council grant I had managed to secure for \$8,000 to create a show. To us, that was a staggering sum. We managed to live for months on that grant and premiered our first production in the bunkhouse to an audience of cowboys and Hutterites, with frost-rimed cattle snorting steam outside the windows against a backdrop of the howling winter prairie beyond.

Thus, our company was born, a company founded in provincial patriotism, out of a new-found love for hearth and home, and a revitalized sense of who we were and who we might become, supported, ironically, by a national institution that saw better through our own fears than we did. It was the Canada Council that gave us both the resources and the confidence we needed to begin, a gesture of approval given precisely because we were willing to stake a claim in the literal wilderness for Albertan arts and culture.

In other words, the Canada Council made it possible for our company to exist. Without the confidence of those long-forgotten jurors, I would probably still be lost and alone in some alley in Toronto, making children sad with a puppet show out the back of the same old Volvo.

My testimony today is principally this: To me, the Canada Council has always been an impossibly beautiful institution to which I owe, in many ways, my whole life. One of the things I love dearly about it is that it is an expression of the grand foundational Canadian idea that a country in its entirety is made stronger by taking care of all of its parts.

I'm not really able to offer an educated high-level analysis regarding regional inequities under the old or new funding model. Other witnesses have testified to a disparity between council funding for Alberta and for the rest of the country, and I fully support their desire for that disparity to be rectified. I believe the council is honestly working to do so. However, I must also speak to our own experience.

Our company has prospered since the days on the ranch, with significant support from the council throughout our history. We have rarely been turned down for a grant. Under the new model, our core funding has tripled. We're not sure why we have received council support where others apparently haven't, but we are enormously grateful for it and dearly hope in the coming years that the council finds ways to extend the same support to more artists from our province.

Of course, we do have some suggestions.

One thing that has always been a bit of an issue with funders at all three levels of government is how long it takes between making an application and receiving a decision. It can take three to six months for the council to tell you whether you got the money to go ahead with your project, and then another month to actually receive it. As a company that does a certain amount of international touring, that can be problematic, since presenters abroad often make their decisions on much tighter timelines. We had hoped that the new online portal and funding model would streamline the decision-making process at the council, but it doesn't appear to help, at least not yet, anyway.

As a small company with minimal administrative support, anything that reduces the amount of work involved in accessing council funds is a huge boon. Grant writing takes up a significant portion of my time, and although, of course, it's a necessary step in the process of public funding, it's not what I'm trained to do or necessarily good at. I think that's a significant obstacle for many people in the industry, especially those working at a grassroots, independent level.

The strides the council made under its new model towards efficiencies in this area are, I believe, truly impactful, and I hope the council will remember this important objective as it continues to hone its programs and processes.

Here's a small thing. Each level of government has its own funding body and each funding body has roughly the same programs, but the actual application process is just different enough so that you have to rewrite applications for the same project three times—or more, if you count private foundations—reframing it to meet slightly different criteria or to fit different formats, even though the substance is the same.

This is obviously not the direct purview of the council, but council could act as a leader in solving this problem, advocating with provincial and municipal funders to standardize the application process across all three levels, as they have with CADAC, the financial and statistical format adopted by many granting agencies.

If it were possible to write one application and then send it to multiple funders, this would save a truly amazing amount of unnecessary work for artists across the country.

There's one last thing. A few years ago, the Canada Council launched a program called “new chapter”, a one-time only project grant program in commemoration of Canada's 150th anniversary, with a maximum ask of up to half a million dollars—much larger than any previous project grant maximum, in my lifetime, at least.

There were over 2,000 applicants from across the country and my company was one of the 200 or so successful ones. Using that grant and additional support leveraged through it from the National Arts Centre creation fund, we created our own puppet opera in partnership with the Calgary Opera and the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. It is playing in Calgary as we speak. Through the new chapter program, we were given an opportunity to make something bigger and more wonderful than anything we've ever attempted before, and we believe it has enormously enlarged our potential as an organization.

My wish is that our national political leaders, all of you attending these hearings, and the council, recognize the vast impact this program has had and will continue to have on the national arts ecology, and find a way to keep the program going somehow. Maybe it's only every few years and maybe it continues in a more limited scope, but I dearly hope for more chances for more artists—artists of the future—to be given the same opportunity.

We don't have the same system of private profit-based investment that drives the American theatre economy, and I'm glad for it. But for our artists to create work at a truly global level, it must be possible to access transformative developmental support at that scale without leaving the country, even if it's only once in a lifetime.

I and my company have been recipients of enormous support from the Canada Council and other funders. We would like to express heartfelt gratitude to the people who administrate those programs. It can't be easy, but we are certainly striving with honesty and great diligence for the common good of all Canadians.

We would also like to thank the people of Canada, Alberta and Calgary, who entrust us with their faith and support. We do our best to deserve it.

Thank you for listening.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mr. Jean-François Dubé, of the Front des réalisateurs indépendants du Canada.

Mr. Jean-François Dubé (General Director, Front des réalisateurs indépendants du Canada): Good afternoon.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as part of your study on the funding of the Canada Council for the Arts, or CCA.

During this appearance, I will put the organization and its members in context, as well as the relationship in the media arts between industry and independent creation. I will also address some of the issues related to the funding that the council can provide to the Front des réalisateurs indépendants du Canada and its members. In conclusion, I will talk about the advances and adjustments needed to foster the vitality of media arts in the Canadian francophonie.

I'm going to start by giving you a little background on the Front des réalisateurs indépendants du Canada, known as the FRIC.

The FRIC was created in 2004 with the support of the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française, or FCCF, the National Film Board, or NFB, and the CCA. It is a national service organization that brings together francophone media artists from official language minority communities, or OLMCs. These artists work in documentary, fiction, experimental video and digital arts, in different formats and on different platforms, whether television, the Web or others.

The FRIC currently has 64 members in three main regions: Acadia, Ontario, and the west and north. It has had only one part-time employee, four days a week, for more than five years. The annual budget of the FRIC ranges from \$120,000 to \$165,000.

I would like to point out that, starting this year, the FRIC will for the first time receive programming funding from Canadian Heritage, which will allow the organization to consolidate. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Department of Canadian Heritage for its support. The funds were obtained thanks to new investments in the 2018-2023 Action Plan for Official Languages. However, this portion of the organization's funding cannot cover professional development, or development and creative activities, which are more within the purview of the CCA.

I will now turn to the funding provided by the CCA to the FRIC.

The FRIC may submit grant applications for projects to the CCA. Since its inception in 2004, the FRIC has received funding for eight projects. However, as it did not receive project funding between 2013 and 2018, the FRIC is unfortunately not eligible for programming funding and will therefore not be able to benefit from the increase in the budget envelope of the CCA.

In terms of the relationship between the industry and independent creation, I would say that it is very difficult to develop original content independently in the Canadian francophonie outside the industry without a producer. Since OLMCs do not have the same levers as artists in Quebec, television is the best way to enable the creation and promotion of works in francophone communities. If there were no television industry in OLMCs, there would simply be no Franco-Canadian content on screens, or there would be very little.

According to the CCA, the artist must have full creative control over his work. In the industry, however, it is the producer and broadcaster who have the final say on production. As a result, for a long time, directors from OLMCs were not recognized by the council and its peer committees, since they worked mostly with the industry. This situation has caused a lot of discontent and discouragement over the years. Several FRIC members decided to abandon these efforts, after many refusals from the CCA. It is also for this reason that the number of projects submitted was and remains very small.

These are the results of applications made by artists to the CCA between 2015 and 2018. In 2015, the CCA accepted two requests. In 2016, no applications were accepted because none were filed. In 2017, three requests were selected; in 2018, only one.

I will now talk about media arts funding at the federal level.

At the federal level, you must be a corporate entity to propose the design or creation of a project, whether it be to the Canada Media Fund, for television or the Web, or to Telefilm Canada. Only CCA funding is available to artists.

Although there is a strategic fund for OLMCs at the Canada Council for the Arts and some incentives offered by Telefilm Canada, it is only the Canada Media Fund that has an envelope strictly reserved for Franco-Canadian minority production. The impact of this fund is tangible, and the television industry among OLMCs is doing quite well.

• (1555)

For example, I would like to talk about the situation of feature-length fiction and documentary films, which the CCA and Telefilm Canada are funding. We have just celebrated Telefilm Canada's 50th anniversary in 2017. The FRIC conducted a census to determine the number of fiction and documentary feature films created by OLMC artists with the support of Telefilm Canada. We found that, in 52 years, 13 feature-length fiction films were made and produced, and no feature-length documentaries were made. It's really very little.

Since 2017, there appear to have been significant improvements made by the council, particularly with respect to the eligibility of FRIC members for funding. The problem with this inherent duality of FRIC and its members, the relationship between industry and independent creation, seems to be a thing of the past in terms of artists' eligibility for funding. It is very encouraging to see that this first barrier has been removed. However, there still seems to be an inequality in the composition of peer review committees. The reality is that, most of the time, the peers who form the committees are almost all Quebecers and do not know the reality and artists outside Montreal very well, or not at all.

I will move on to the relationship between industry and independent creation.

We are in a very complex era for the creation of media arts content, whether in terms of funding, distribution or otherwise. With digital and multiplatform broadcasting, the container no longer seems to matter: it is the richness of content that is essential. The industry should no longer be a barrier to content creation for the CCA.

In this regard, FRIC welcomes the new CCA program, in partnership with CBC/Radio-Canada, which aims to support artists and arts organizations in the digital age by providing an innovative way to access Radio-Canada's digital platforms. We hope that this program, which is a step forward, given that Radio-Canada is part of the industry, will meet our expectations and those of francophone creators, and that it will open the door to greater collaboration between the two sectors.

The new CCA funding model is still in its infancy, and that is why we believe that immediate action is needed. First, the commitment to increase CCA funding to 2020 must be maintained. Then, a rigorous consultation and engagement exercise must be put in place this year with the stakeholders involved in this funding, to evaluate the current approach and make the necessary adjustments to the new funding model.

There is therefore still a long way to go to ensure the full development of media arts in the Canadian francophonie. We are more convinced than ever that collaboration is the key to success.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Now we'll go to the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres, with Boomer Stacey and Nick Tracey.

• (1600)

Mr. Boomer Stacey (Interim Executive Director, Professional Association of Canadian Theatres): Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

My name is Boomer, and I am the Interim Executive Director of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres, known as PACT.

I'm joined by my colleague Nick Tracey, Senior Director of Administration for Young People's Theatre and recently appointed chair of our advocacy committee.

We are here today to represent PACT's members, 150-plus professional theatre companies operating across the country.

Ms. Nick Tracey (Director, Advocacy Portfolio, Professional Association of Canadian Theatres): PACT's membership is diverse, ranging from the largest performing arts organizations in Canada to small independent or rural theatre companies.

We want to offer an overview of the importance that our members place on the Canada Council for the Arts and a brief evaluation of the council's funding modernization and renewed investment. We recently completed a member survey about their perceptions of and interactions with the council's new model. Of our 150 members, 116 responded, of which 100, or 86%, received council funding.

Theatres receive funding for creation and development projects, production and core operating dollars. In those surveyed, 90% had received core operating funding and 28% received special project grants.

Since the new funding model began, 40% of our survey respondents remained at a flatlined funding level and 59% of respondents saw their funding change, 94% of which received an

increase. That means many of PACT's members can now hire more artists and staff, increase salaries, upkeep their facilities, reach new audiences and support greater and increased artistic programming.

We are happy to see funding going to first-time recipients and pleased to hear that the council aims to triple its investment with indigenous artists and organizations. We would be pleased to also see the government step up in other ways to further support the sharing of indigenous stories and creation of indigenous theatre across the country, including sustained funding to the NAC's newly created indigenous theatre section.

The most pressing message we bring today is that the arts sector is thrilled with the doubling of the investment. It is empowering many to enhance the delivery of their visions and missions, which reach and impact Canada's diverse communities. We applaud the council in implementing a new model, opening access and addressing major creative shifts in Canada's cultural ecosystem. We're at the crux of this shift and we must see the doubling of the investment continue over the next two years. This time period is necessary for us to see the return on such a historic investment truly take shape.

Mr. Boomer Stacey: We imagine it is no easy undertaking for the council to undergo a huge strategic shift at the same time as receiving an incremental doubling. PACT, most of our members, the Canadian Arts Coalition and many others advocated for the doubling of the budget. Many of our members are long-standing council recipients and are likely to come to you with concerns about the rollout. These concerns are legitimate in respect to council-client relations and the integrity of arm's-length decision-making. We see these concerns as opportunities for evaluation and readjustment in the council, and we will no doubt require consultation, open communication and action by council leadership.

This is the spirit in which we come to you today, to encourage more responsiveness, reciprocal dialogue and action between the council and its clientele as we undergo this strategic shift and doubling of the budget together.

Our members had mixed responses as to how easy it was to identify which funding stream they should apply under. Thirty-five per cent of our surveyed members found it easy to identify, 40% were neutral and 25% found the process difficult. We believe that the council's current cross-country outreach sessions and presentations, along with client-officer relations, will help ease some of these difficulties.

Program officers presented at our national conference two weeks ago in Saskatoon, giving an important opportunity for theatres to understand the new funding streams and the criteria for assessment, and to clarify any confusion or misinformation that theatres had about eligibility. We value this close relationship with council and hope to continue this opportunity for officers to meet with our members.

We understand that council staff are also undergoing a learning curve with the new model. As a result, our members were split fifty-fifty on whether or not staff were helpful. In terms of overall communication, including that from the leadership, 58% said that communication was not transparent and 61% felt that it was unclear. This is especially troublesome in two areas. For one, many were told before they applied under the new funding model to dream big, to reach for the stars, to be aggressive in their budgetary ask. This set unrealistic expectations and was especially frustrating for recipients who remained flatlined or who saw a decrease in their funding. We believe that the council is now well aware that they did not set realistic expectations in the first year, especially since the doubling of the investment is incremental, not fully realized in year one.

Second, a huge change was made to the peer jury assessment process, the lifeblood of the arm's-length funding decision-making. The Canada Council and provincial and municipal councils have always had other artists and arts practitioners assessing and ranking the applications and have then allocated funding amounts to each recipient. Previously staff and leadership were required to approve and have the final sign-off only on funding allocations over certain amounts.

We met with a program officer this week to discuss our member survey, which helped demystify the new jury process for us. Under the new model, jury members rank and submit recommendations but the council staff make the final funding allocations. It is our understanding that officers adhere to the jury's ranking and allocate funding increases of as close as possible to the applicant's budgetary ask. Under the new ranking system, juries have three choices: green, fund an increase; yellow, flatline; or red, decrease. Juries are reminded of the implications of their decisions; however, it can be easy to fall into the yellow flatline zone, and for juries who rank many green, the funding might run out before it makes its way down the list.

In addition, it is clear that well-written funding applications continue to be well assessed. The council and others are doing outreach sessions across the country on how to write a good grant application, and we believe in the importance of developing grant-writing skills. However, small theatres with limited staff capacity who must undertake multiple roles in addition to grant writing or some companies that may have limited experience with grant writing but that have no less merit in their artistic or operational abilities risk making their way into the yellow or red categories. We will continue efforts to build grant-writing skills across the country; however, we need to determine how to assess merit as expressed in something beyond a well-written application.

Many of our members are also questioning whether jury makeup is as diverse as it should be. We have submitted our concerns and our survey results to the Canada Council officers with whom we work most closely. However, we are looking for more open dialogue and

active consultations with the council's leadership, especially as this new model is evaluated. We are looking to, first, an understanding of new strategic decisions and then to readjustments of the model as necessary to truly benefit the council's clientele and their communities. We see a lot of promise through our artists and arts organizations that the doubling investment of \$180 million will realize its full impact, all while the council and its clients work together to ensure that the new model is as strong as it can be.

● (1605)

Thank you for your time, and we look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Because we had votes and started a bit later, what I propose is that we do a round of three five-minute questions.

We'll begin with Mr. Long for five minutes, please.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon to my colleagues.

Thank you for coming in this afternoon and giving us your presentations.

My riding is Saint John—Rothesay. It's in southern New Brunswick. It's home to the beautiful—built in 1913—Imperial Theatre, Saint John Theatre Company and Symphony New Brunswick. If anybody knows full well the importance, the benefit, that the Canada Council brings, it's me.

I'm just going to start with a show of hands. Who thinks that the Canada Council funding is fair, distributed fairly, equitable and consistent? Let's have a show of hands.

A voice: One.

Mr. Wayne Long: I wasn't asking you, Pierre.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): He's been like that all day.

Mr. Wayne Long: I'm glad to see he's back into it.

On a serious note, with regard to an application process, a funding entity, it's of utmost importance that those applying, those sending in applications and taking the time to fill out applications, feel that it's fair and consistent.

I want to start with you, Mr. Stacey and Ms. Tracey. In your experience, do you think there are disparities in Canada Council funding for members based upon region? Do you see that? Do you see a disparity where more goes to Ontario and less goes to Alberta and what have you? Can you just give me some comments on that please?

• (1610)

Mr. Boomer Stacey: We are hearing from our members that they feel that there is disparity. I don't think that there's any region—

Mr. Wayne Long: Do you think there is?

Mr. Boomer Stacey: Do I think there is?

I haven't seen stats that I accurately believe in to show what the exact numbers are. Again, we're hearing very clearly from our members that they feel that there is some disparity regionally, but also in other aspects of looking at merit as well.

Mr. Wayne Long: You have members who feel that there's disparity. In your opinion, what do you feel is wrong? What are you hearing from your members is wrong with the process, and what do you think could be done to improve that?

Mr. Boomer Stacey: My colleague Jean-François mentioned the makeup of the juries. We feel that in order for people to understand the context and how our members are making work across the country... We recognize that in rural situations, in northern situations, and province by province, the context is different, so to have a jury made up of peers who understand those particular contexts will help even that out if it's the juries that are, indeed, making the funding recommendations. I think that's part of the process.

Again, I don't believe that regional merit or regional parity is the only merit that we need to look at. We have a number of companies that exist in a very rural context, in an indigenous context and in a multicultural context, and we want to ensure that there's parity amongst all of the ways that you can carve the money.

Mr. Wayne Long: I can speak for one of the organizations in my riding that always, unfortunately, views it with skepticism. You know, they see their organization and then they see almost an identical one in Nova Scotia that received the 28% increase. They're very appreciative of the funding, of course, but they're also always asking, "How come this or that?" and they don't ever really feel that they get a clear answer as to what they deem is some disparity.

Mr. Dubé, do you have any comments on that and on what you feel we could suggest to Canada Council to make it better?

[Translation]

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds to respond, Mr. Dubé.

Mr. Jean-François Dubé: Very well.

In the case of media arts and official language minority communities, peer committees receive context sheets. Do they really have the desired effect? I'm wondering.

I myself was a member of a committee and found myself in a situation where I had to take a position and intervene on a Franco-Canadian project that was on the edge of acceptability. In the end, it was the Canada Council for the Arts officer who told me not to worry and that the project would not lose its funding.

Something must be done with peers to ensure that they understand the reality and situation of Franco-Canadian artists. Right now, there is so much discouragement, especially in the field of media arts. There is no motivation. The Canada Council for the Arts is somewhat open, but that is still very minimal.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much.

[English]

Now we will go to Mr. Yurdiga, for five minutes, please.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for joining us here today.

My first question is going to Mr. Stacey.

In my community, it's quite diverse. We have bigger centres, smaller centres and some northern communities. It seems that the more successful groups in the larger centres are able to secure funding, whether it's through the Canada Council, the municipality or industry.

From your perspective, should there be a separate category to address the northern communities? They don't have the financial means. The community is too small. They have a very small population.

Do you think there's a need to have a separate pot of money to address these smaller communities that have very few resources? They're very talented people, but it seems like their needs are not met. Can you comment on that?

• (1615)

Mr. Boomer Stacey: I would never say no to an extra pot of money. If that were possible, we would say yes to that. What I would add is that I think it is a challenge, whether it's rural companies, small independent companies.

We try to talk about that with regard to the well-written application. If you're a small company without the capacity to hire a professional grant writer or to have that person exist within your theatre, it's a challenge to write a well-written grant, especially if you're existing outside of the colonial context.

That, for us, is a concern, and it's part of why we want to talk about the merit of "well written". What does "well written" mean? Whether you're from northern Canada or exist in a small rural context anywhere, or in an independent context—an indigenous context, a multicultural context—I believe there are challenges to completing that application.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Does your association help with the grant application process, or do you give any courses to help out? How far do you go with your association?

Mr. Boomer Stacey: We have professional development for our members, so we lead some sessions ourselves. We also promote.... There are many across the country that do grant writing sessions, such as the Canada Council. Most of the provincial granting organizations and municipal associations are also doing professional development to that end.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Going back to the northern communities, how many members come from isolated communities, like further north in the Northwest Territories, the Yukon and those sorts of areas? How many members are there?

Mr. Boomer Stacey: I don't have an exact number for you, but we have a rural caucus that is made up of companies from across the country, which has over 25 members out of our 150. It's a very strong, very engaged caucus.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you.

My next question goes to Mr. Palmer.

You have a unique sort of workshop. Where do you get your funding from, primarily? Do you get municipal funding, funding from industry or commercial funding? What percentage of your budget is from the grant application or from the Canada Council?

Mr. Judd Palmer: We receive operating funding from all three levels of government. Occasionally, we also access funds from private foundations, such as the Calgary Foundation. We're not of a scale of organization that's particularly well suited to achieving sponsorship or corporate dollars, but we're well supported by public funders.

The proportion of our operating budget over the past few years that has come from the Canada Council has changed. Prior to the new funding model, it was around 20%, and now it fluctuates between 40% and 50%.

Mr. David Yurdiga: I've heard many people say that it's a challenge just to start to get funding. The application is difficult and they're not really sure how to write the application.

After you get your first grant, does it become easier to secure funding in the following years, or is it the same challenge year by year?

The Chair: Could I ask for 30-second answers?

Mr. Judd Palmer: I think a track record is helpful, absolutely. Any public funder has to have a sense of trust with regard to the recipients of the grants—that they're going to do what they say they're going to do with it. It's something that can only be established through a history of practice.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Nantel now has the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses.

Our chair has gotten us all used to always giving priority to witnesses who appear by video conference, in case we lose the signal

due to a technical problem. So I'm going to ask you a question right now, Mr. Palmer.

It was interesting to hear you talk about your journey, how it started and how the Canada Council has helped you at various stages. You also gave us a good explanation of the difficulties you encountered. I think the adventure of puppet shows in the trunk of your old Volvo was really great.

Do you feel that the Canada Council's programs have evolved in a way that reflects reality?

The Canada Council for the Arts wanted to revise its programs and also received this incredible manna that allowed it to meet the needs and ambitions of artists.

In today's market, there is a lot of electronic competition, and fewer companies. Indeed, companies are finding it increasingly difficult to provide for themselves. Here, I am thinking, among other things, of record companies and the fact that artists are becoming more autonomous.

In this context, do you have the impression that the Canada Council for the Arts has been able to modernize over the years?

I would also like to hear the opinions of Mr. Stacey and Ms. Tracey.

This may have been a strange time to receive twice as much money, just as the Canada Council for the Arts was redesigning its network. I think you made that point, Mr. Stacey.

Is the evolution keeping pace with creators' needs?

Do you think it was an odd time to get all that money, while they were redesigning the organization?

• (1620)

[English]

Mr. Judd Palmer: It's actually transformative. The funding has changed our capacity to do our work and our capacity to reach Canadian audiences at an unprecedented level.

Also, I think it has been an immensely challenging time for the Canada Council in modernizing its grant-making systems and procedures at the same time that the budget received this great increase. There will be challenges, but in my experience, I believe they've handled them well and, by and large, the Canada Council is responding well to the creative needs of the country.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: That's great news.

[Translation]

Ms. Tracey, I understand you work in the field of children's theatre.

[English]

Ms. Nick Tracey: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: The Canada Council for the Arts has obviously sought to adjust its new funding programs, particularly for First Nations. I'm a little off topic, but I'd like to know if children's theatre is part of a subdivision of the six grant programs and if it receives special attention from the Canada Council for the Arts.

Mr. Stacey, I believe that getting such a fantastic budget increase at a time when you're redesigning the system is almost like receiving a poisoned gift. I'd like you to come back to that.

[English]

Ms. Nick Tracey: For the company that I work for, which is Young People's Theatre in Toronto, Canada's largest and oldest national professional theatre for young audiences, it has been an extremely generous gift for us. Not only has it allowed us to stretch our programming, it has also allowed us to work on areas that have become very important to us over the last few years.

Absolutely, indigenous programming is one of those, but accessibility is also, and not just from a financial perspective of bringing in kids who are unable to access programming. It's also accessibility in terms of ASL, audio description and relaxed performances.

When we put in our last grant application for this four-year core funding, that was a key component of what we talked about. We felt very much like the Canada Council heard us and realized this was something that was core to our business, possibly not to every theatre company's, but they took us for who we were and what it was that we needed and how important that was to us. We've been very pleased with the change, at least in terms of how that's been viewed for us at YPT.

The Chair: I'm just going to jump in here.

Unfortunately, we're over time. I can give you a quick moment to respond in a very quick fashion, please.

Mr. Boomer Stacey: Sure.

If I understood you, you're asking about the timing of the shift and the doubling of the money. As far as we understand it, it has been part of a five-year strategic plan, so we understand that there are going to be some challenges as we all grapple with what those changes mean. However, the fact that it is part of that strategic vision, for us, gives us hope that this is the right direction as we all learn what those new boxes are. To go from 150 boxes to six boxes, that's a lot of change, which we're all grappling with, but we feel that it's in the best interests of modernizing the entire system.

•(1625)

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Thank you to all the witnesses.

[English]

It's been really interesting to get your feedback and some different perspectives on the programs.

We're going to suspend briefly. We have several people coming in on video conference, so I'm going to need a few minutes to transfer over to the next panel. Thank you.

•(1625)

_____ (Pause) _____

•(1630)

The Chair: We are going to start again. We have a new panel with us now. We do have three people joining us by video conference.

I'm going to ask that, when I call out your name or the name of your organization, you put your hand up to let everyone know who you are.

We have, from Decidedly Jazz Danceworks, Kathi Sundstrom.

[Translation]

We also welcome Mr. Martin Théberge and Ms. Marie-Christine Morin, of the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française.

[English]

From Miami, Florida, we have Why Not Theatre, with Ravi Jain and Owais Lightwala. From Whitehorse, Yukon, we have the Yukon Arts Centre, Casey Prescott.

Let me go to our witness from Yukon. We have three by video conference and I'd like to go with you first in case we have any technical difficulties.

We'll work our way up the list, starting with Casey Prescott from the Yukon Arts Centre, please.

Mr. Casey Prescott (Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director, Yukon Arts Centre): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm here to represent the views and experiences of the Yukon Arts Centre with regard to the new Canada Council funding increases and the administration and delivery of these new resources to create more balance and equity on the distribution of funds to the Canadian arts community. I will also share some thoughts and observations on the different experiences that others have had with the introduction of these models and guidelines in the Yukon.

As way of background, the Yukon Arts Centre is one of Canada's most unique and impactful arts organizations, serving a broad presentation, programming, training and community engagement mandate to promote the health and vitality of the arts sector in Yukon territory. YAC focuses on building bridges and opportunity for diverse northern artists and artisans to produce and present their work in all disciplines for both local and tourist audiences, to help artists disseminate their work and invest in their practice, and to promote and share their stories with the world.

The Yukon Arts Centre Corporation was created by the Arts Centre Act, an act of the Yukon legislative assembly, in 1988. The arts centre itself opened in 1993, and since then, the centre has grown to a multi-venue organization playing a key role in supporting artistic programming in the territory. It is the largest arts centre north of 60. It has a 420-seat main stage theatre, an industry-standard public gallery, a community gallery, a youth gallery, a downtown multi-use venue called “The Old Fire Hall”, an outdoor amphitheatre called “The Wharf” and a seasonal visual arts house in the outlying community of Carcross.

Yukon Arts Centre programming includes an average of 32 visual arts exhibitions per year, a robust interdisciplinary presentation series averaging 30 to 35 performances, over 70 community events per season, a children's festival, a monthly children's arts workshop, a performing arts touring program that brings visiting artists to the territory's communities, and the management of the N3 network, which encourages and steers the continued development of touring arts networks in northern Canada.

The Yukon Arts Centre has also supported intern programs in visual arts curation and technical theatre since 2007, offering opportunities for the next generation of arts leaders to hone their skills and create career momentum and networks in a dynamic northern artistic environment. The Yukon Arts Centre also offers several artist residency programs where artists can develop and showcase their artistic vision, including the YAC performing arts residency program, Chilkoot Trail residency, Jenni House residency and the Chu Niikwān residency. Embedded in all of our programming—design and planning—is the active cultivation of relationships, synergies, trust and partnerships that serve the needs of all 14 Yukon first nations.

It goes without saying that the role of the Canada Council for the Arts in the national arts ecology is extremely significant. Without it, our vibrancy and momentum cease. I do applaud the efforts and the courage of the council's administration to tackle reform and seek deeper equity, transparency and access to its programs. Even a doubling of funding only goes so far when you are dealing with a country with so much rich creative output and potential. I also realize that addressing something of this nature will almost undoubtedly be a polarizing exercise for the community it serves. The status quo is disrupted for those who benefited and relied upon it. Others see no increases where increases were anticipated, and some experience unanticipated increases.

This is where we fall in. The Yukon Arts Centre has benefited enormously from the new program restructuring. Previously, we were only eligible under the old guidelines to receive operating money for our gallery, but with the new program we were eligible to apply as an interdisciplinary arts organization. This change in status allowed us to see a very significant increase in our core operating funds, which has allowed us to invest in our community and expand our programming in the north in many exciting ways. It has been a game-changer for our organization and allowed us to flow new and consistent support back into our community, which has had a ripple effect across the territory.

However, most of the council's northern constituents are in much smaller organizations or are independent artists. I have listened to some of the earlier testimonies from my colleagues and echo some of

the points that have been made in terms of application feedback—questions of merit and excellence, and ultimately how these comments intimidate and become a barrier for future applications. I have heard this from artists in the Yukon and how it has negatively affected them personally. More needs to be done with the council's communication style and it should not only be reactive but be part of an ongoing, fulsome plan to engage with the north.

● (1635)

I understand that Simon Brault will be travelling to the north this summer to tour and consult. This is a very positive development. Canada Council for the Arts senior leadership need to be present more consistently to help their programs adapt to the needs of all Canadian northern territories. Our challenges are very real and unique to the rest of Canada.

Here are some further recommendations.

Do not underestimate our geography. Even in the digital age, northern Canada is a long way from Ottawa. You must be physically present. You must engage and listen. You must devise an outreach schedule that goes beyond info sessions.

Your engagement with Yukon first nation communities needs to be personalized, genuine and proactive. Meet and share in their culture. Be present at significant cultural events and look for ways to have your funding respond. Presence and trust are key to encouraging their participation.

Decentralize. Look to Canadian Heritage as a better model of having regional offices. The north requires council representatives on the ground who are building relationships with our artists and advocating for the arts sector in the north on an ongoing basis. I think that this could go a long way to increasing funding equity and participation across the country.

Have a plan for rural artist engagement. Be encouraging and accommodating in all of your communication with these remote communities.

Finally, reconsider thematic funding. I am not a personal fan of the digital strategy fund. I find its criteria far too academic and not practical enough for most arts organizations to participate. It is a big pool of money that could have been more useful to the sector in a different form. In future, keep all of your criteria practical, inclusive and connected to the real needs of Canadian artists and arts organizations.

In summary, I see the transition of this new funding model as a process—one that we are in the middle of—of which this session is a vital part. I would like to think that we are all here to encourage and make the program stronger as we are all building this for the next generation of Canadians.

My thanks to the committee for giving me the opportunity to speak here today.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we travel all the way south to the Why Not Theatre, please.

• (1640)

Mr. Ravi Jain (Artistic and General Director, Why Not Theatre): Hi.

We're in Miami for a conference. We're actually based in Toronto.

The Chair: I figured you were. I would have other questions about the Canada Council funding otherwise.

Mr. Ravi Jain: Yes, exactly. We're representing the nation proudly; don't you worry.

Thank you for this time and thank you for that great presentation.

Good afternoon to you all. My name is Ravi Jain and I am the founding artistic director of the international company based in Toronto, Ontario, called Why Not Theatre.

When I returned to Toronto in 2007 after living and training abroad for a number of years, no institution would hire me. Even though I had a stellar international resumé, institutions were busy doing their own work, often led by a single artistic director, and their casting did not have the vision or imagination to include me.

I, like many others before me, was forced to form my own company if I wanted to make work. I founded Why Not Theatre in 2007. We are a company with an outstanding international reputation for creating award-winning, innovative, accessible theatre.

By 2017, 10 years in, we had worked on over 80 projects, touring to 30 different cities on five continents, and we slowly grew to an annual operating budget of about \$500,000. We were a team of three people doing the work of six, and we struggled to not only make our own work but to also support the work of many artists who did not have the resources that we managed to grow. Even at that time, we were defying the odds.

At that time it was impossible to grow a company with the support of the councils. Funding was static, with the majority of funds going to the fewest and oldest institutions that were born out of the Massey commission.

I'm sure all of you know that the 1951 Massey commission was a landmark report, and it's generally seen as the first major steps by the Canadian government to nurture, preserve and promote Canadian culture. The commission was successful in establishing foundational institutions for the arts, but those institutions were mostly rooted in Eurocentric and colonial values.

The text of the Massey commission includes a quote that says, "The impact of the white man with his more advanced civilization and his infinitely superior techniques resulted in the gradual destruction of the Indian way of life." The report also said that

"since the death of true Indian arts is inevitable, Indians should not be encouraged to prolong the existence of arts which at best must be artificial and at worst are degenerate." The report concludes that, "The Indian arts thus survive only as ghosts or shadows of a dead society."

At the heart of this report, which would shape Canada's cultural voices for decades to come, is a narrative that did not imagine a world where indigenous cultures even existed. That narrative also excluded racialized people and other minority groups. Vincent Massey would never have imagined me as an artistic leader of an institution that is defining Canada's culture, which, let me be clear, I am.

The history of funding has caused a stasis in the system where the majority of funds go to the small number of the oldest organizations. Another way to look at it is that there is only one opera, one symphony, one ballet and one regional theatre in each city.

With few exceptions, it is next to impossible to build a new institution of the size and scale of the oldest companies born out of that Massey commission. For me as an artistic leader, my only option for growth is to apply to very few jobs at institutions that have perpetuated decades of exclusionary practices. I'd have to expend energy changing the vision of that institution, rather than being given the support and the opportunity to build a new institution with a broader vision of what Canadian identity could be.

Then, in 2017, as the previous gentleman said, there was a game-changer. We were awarded one of the Canada Council's 200 new chapter grants for a dream project of producing the new adaptation of the ancient Indian epic of the *Mahabharata*. It is one of the most important South Asian stories ever.

The \$375,000 investment allowed us to create a three-part international multimedia production that will play at the largest stage at the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake. For the first time we now have the resources to build a show at a scale that is equal to what only major institutions get to do.

Now in our partnership with the Shaw Festival, we come to the table as equals. This is historic because this institution has served a single audience for over 50 years. This partnership will create unprecedented access for a whole new audience, many of whom have never participated in Canadian performing arts.

Then, in 2018, we became clients at Canada Council in operating funding. In our first application to the operating contest, we were awarded \$175,000 in operating funding. For some perspective, we were getting \$25,000 from the Ontario Arts Council and \$30,000 from the Toronto Arts Council. The Canada Council's investment was a meaningful investment that propelled us into the position of leadership we were meant to be in. Because of that investment, we were able to increase other fundraising, attracting new corporate and philanthropic donors who, just two years ago, were totally out of reach.

• (1645)

Now we are growing on an exponential trajectory, with a \$2-million operating budget and a full-time staff of nine in 2020. We're projecting to hit \$3 million in 2021, and even more in years to come. Most importantly, we're able to serve hundreds of artists whose voices haven't been heard, bringing their work to millions of Canadians who have never seen themselves represented on stage.

Finally, our vision of what Canada can look and sound like is starting to be given the same weight as that of those Eurocentric institutions that came out of the Massey commission. If we were to get more support, imagine what impact we could have on what arts and culture mean to all Canadians.

The Canada Council has made one major move to address historical inequities by prioritizing equity and funding new voices with substantial investments. We need to see this change through. We need to continue to change where the support is going. Redistribute the wealth we have to offer more dynamic and innovative companies like Why Not the means to grow and become new institutions—not to replace but rather to support, to work alongside and to be equal partners in shaping our national identity.

Right now, with Why Not's growth, we're a total outlier, and two years from now, we must be the norm. It's important to note that this change and rebalancing of the scales would never have happened without the much-needed increase to the Canada Council's budget, and we can only continue to see this change with continued investment and growth. We can only make room for more if there is more to go around.

I hope the Canada Council goes further with this move. I hope they are bolder. It would not only change who tells the story. It would change who comes to see the story. I hope that the Canada Council's actions inspire Canadian Heritage to do the same, as many of the heritage programs are outdated and primarily serve those older, Eurocentric institutions.

Canadian heritage is a strange idea to wrap one's head around. Is it about preserving the past, a Massey inheritance that did not consider my existence? Or is it about shaping the future, one in which my existence is essential for the country to define our mission and voice? To me, it's clear. We have finally made one step in the right direction. Now let's take five more.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to Decidedly Jazz Danceworks.

Kathi Sundstrom, you have the floor, please.

Ms. Kathi Sundstrom (Executive Director, Decidedly Jazz Danceworks): Good afternoon. I thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Kathi Sundstrom, and I'm the Executive Director of Calgary-based Decidedly Jazz Danceworks, DJD.

DJD is one of a handful of jazz dance companies in North America. Our mission is to enrich lives by engaging people in exploring, evolving and promoting the art of jazz dance. I have been in my role for 26 years, and in those years I've applied for hundreds of grants. I have also been involved with many committees, town halls and one-on-one meetings with colleagues and funders on reviewing, evaluating and dissecting how funds are awarded and what criteria are used, and I have offered many opinions on granting processes.

This is what I have learned. There is no perfect system and there will never be enough money to satisfy the requests. The asks will always exceed the resources and when you receive the letter that you are not successful, you are never happy about that. Each grant and every level of government have different criteria, different objectives and different ways to award funds.

In my opinion, the most challenging thing for government funders has been the lack of growth to their budgets and how to deal with the realities of increased demands for funds as the sector has grown, and the almost impossible and very unforgiving task of funders having to make difficult decisions to reduce funds to one organization and give them to another.

The unprecedented decision of the federal government to double the funding to the Canada Council is, in my 26 years as an arts administrator, the largest increase and vote of confidence and so-needed investment in the arts sector that I have witnessed. I applaud those who make that decision. Thank you.

You have asked me here today to comment on how council has handled managing the increases and specifically on whether the system ensures that artists everywhere have access to funding. I would like to speak for a few moments on DJD's relationship with council and our funding history.

We were founded in 1984. We became a full-time company in 1987 due to a federal Canadian job strategy grant, and we began applying for council funding in the mid-nineties. When we began to apply, they only funded three forms of dance: ballet, modern and experimental. Jazz dance was not recognized as a legitimate form, and technically we were not eligible to apply. We applied regardless. We lobbied our case. Changes were made at the council and in time our peers recognized us.

Sixteen years later we received our first operating grant. DJD came of age in the 1990s, as did many organizations, entering the quest for operating funding when governments arts budgets were not increasing. It was next to impossible for funders to make changes to historical funding patterns. The new modernized model at the council has made a monumental impact on us and on the arts sector in Canada. DJD has been designated as an institution, one of only seven dance institutions and the only non-ballet-focused company. Montreal and Calgary are the only cities that have two institutions for dance. We've come a long way since the time we weren't recognized.

Under the new priorities of assessment—artistic leadership, engagement and resilience—we have been successful in making a strong and compelling case for support to our peers. We have seen our operating budget rise from 3.5% to 13% of our budget. This increase makes a revolutionary change to our operations and the community in which we operate. We will hire more dancers for more weeks, we will invest in original creations and we will tour to eastern Canada, to name a few things we will do.

You ask about access. I outlined that in the nineties the council only recognized three forms of dance for funding. Now there would be perhaps over 30 eligible forms and the openness of the council now no longer places those old constraints of who can and cannot apply for funding, what is dance and what is not. If you meet the criteria as a professional organization or as an artist, and you present a case that speaks to the specifics of the program, you will be eligible. You will be assessed by your peers. Yes, it is a competitive process and each application has to reach a minimum standard for consideration for funding, but there is broad access to funding.

Let me speak for a moment about peer assessment. The council began this process of evaluation in the eighties and by the nineties virtually all grants were awarded this way. I have sat on two juries under the new model and on juries before the change. Canada Council demonstrates extreme integrity in the execution of the peer jury process. In my experience, council staff work very hard to have diversity in the selection of the jury. I have been impressed with the attention they give to constituting a jury with individuals who bring varied backgrounds and experiences to best review the files, and the staff 100% respects and facilitates the role of the “peer” in the jury in assessing the files.

● (1650)

Sitting as a jury member is daunting at times, with the degree of material to review and the responsibilities that have been vested in you. With all of the juries I have served on, I leave impressed and confident with the process, the thoughtfulness and level of commitment everyone shares to make the best decisions.

I would also add that, as an arts administrator with a small staff, I appreciate the streamlining of the application and reporting processes under the modernized model. Yes, there were a few bumps in the road in getting the portal working, but that is to be expected with a change this large. The end result, though, is an improvement over the past.

One of the factors that cannot be overlooked in Alberta is that our province and, in the case of Calgary, civic governments, have not made it a priority to renew investment in the funding of the arts and

have not kept pace with the growth in the sector, nor even inflation, in allocating their budgets.

Provincially, despite Alberta's heyday of the past, Alberta Foundation for the Arts' budget has decreased in 10 years by 12.5%. In 2009, AFA's budget was \$36 million. Last year it was \$31.5 million. Ten years ago, our AFA operating grant was 12% of our budget; today it's 7%.

Our operating grant from the City of Calgary over the last 10 years has gone from \$89,000 to \$95,000, basically flat. The City of Calgary has one of the lowest per capita art spends. In 2019, though, thankfully, city council in Calgary finally increased the budget from \$6.4 million to \$12.4 million. We are about to enter the application process, so we are unsure how it will affect our frozen operating grant, but we trust we will see some level of increase.

It is interesting to offer a comparison on the role of government funding. DJD recently completed a \$28.5-million capital campaign to build a new dance centre in downtown Calgary. Fifty-two per cent of the funds raised came from the three levels of government, with the city investing the most at 22%, the province second at 18% and the federal government via the Department of Canadian Heritage at 12%. When we look at our operating budget for 2019-20, 27% will come from three levels of government, and the order of magnitude of investment is completely reversed. The federal government will be at 14%, the province at 7%, and civic at 5%.

In the last three juries I have sat on for the Canada Council, sadly there have been very few applicants from Alberta. The federal government has made this massive reinvestment in the arts, a very wise decision. We need you to encourage your provincial counterparts to follow your lead.

The job to support the arts in Alberta is not the federal government's alone. The other two levels of government need to commit to renewed investment. If that investment was there, you would see a stronger base of artists and arts organizations in Alberta, resulting in more activity from organizations and artists who would in turn be making more applications to the council for funds.

Thank you.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Finally, I will now give the floor to Mr. Martin Th  berge and Ms. Marie-Christine Morin of the F  d  ration culturelle canadienne-fran  aise.

Mr. Martin Th  berge (President, F  d  ration culturelle canadienne-fran  aise): Hello, everyone. My name is Martin Th  berge and I am the President of the F  d  ration culturelle canadienne-fran  aise, the FCCF. I am accompanied by Marie-Christine Morin, the executive director of the federation.

The FCCF is the national voice of arts and culture in the Canadian and Acadian francophonie. For us, the vitality of francophone arts and culture enriches the artistic, social and economic landscape in Canada.

Our network brings together 22 member organizations: seven national groups in theatre, literature, song and music, media arts and visual arts, 13 organizations working for cultural and artistic development in 11 Canadian provinces and territories, as well as a group of performing arts distribution networks and an alliance of community radios. Through its members, the FCCF oversees more than 3,125 artists and more than 150 organizations from more than 180 French-speaking communities.

First of all, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as part of your study on Canada Council for the Arts funding.

Our remarks will have three anchor points. We will first talk about the increased funding for the Canada Council for the Arts and how this is good news for our sector. We will then mention some necessary adjustments. We will conclude with a call for true collaboration with the council.

Increased funding is good news for the sector. It would be impossible for us not to welcome, loudly and clearly, the government's decision in 2016 to double the budget of the Canada Council for the Arts. This was, as many have said, the largest reinvestment in arts and culture in Canada in 30 years and across the G7.

The country's entire cultural sector was behind the efforts to persuade the government to do this. The Canada Council for the Arts could not have done it alone. We all called for increased investment with one voice. Together, we succeeded.

Finally, many of our artists will be able to access funding, and several organizations will be able to consolidate their activities, all of them aiming to advance their artistic vision and nurture their contribution to Canadian society.

To those who would question this reinvestment, we point to these times of great upheaval and identity erosion in which we are plunged, too often with violence. More than ever, we need to mobilize the creative forces within us to ensure that social inequalities are reduced and mobilization efforts are peaceful.

April 29 was International Dance Day, established in 1982 by the International Dance Council in collaboration with UNESCO. To mark the occasion, an international message written by a dance personality is broadcast everywhere. For the 2019 edition, Karima Mansour, an Egyptian dancer, choreographer and educator, received this honour. Ms. Mansour's message is as follows: "It is in dance that cultures are shared and that borders are dissolved in a place of inclusion and unity, where the silent language of universality is

spoken. Dance is a healer. Dance is the place where humanity can come together."

Mrs. Marie-Christine Morin (Executive Director, F  d  ration culturelle canadienne-fran  aise): I will now talk about the adjustments made necessary by the provision of new funding to the Canada Council for the Arts.

The news of increased funding from the Canada Council for the Arts was like a balm for the entire sector. In the Canadian francophonie, there was a long way to go, for all kinds of reasons related to history, linguistic insecurity and systemic difficulties.

We see that we have made progress. Indeed, compared to 2015, that is before the injection of new funds, funding to francophone artists and organizations more than doubled. In 2018-2019, the council received 566 applications from francophone artists, a 34.4% increase over 2017-2018. Of these, 283 were selected.

Unfortunately, much remains to be done. There is still cause for concern if we look at the data a little more closely.

Historically, the number of applications from individual francophone artists has always been lower than that of their anglophone minority colleagues in Quebec. Why? Is it because there are fewer francophone artists in minority communities than anglophone artists in Quebec? Yes, but that doesn't explain everything. So what is the reason? Based on reports from artists themselves, here are some initial answers.

Some artists feel that their project will be taken more seriously if they apply in English. Others are advised to file their application in English, supposedly because it is simpler and more direct. Indeed, an artist from a minority language community must certainly make greater efforts to maintain his documentation in both languages. In addition, some people are insecure about expressing their ideas in French. For some, it is a real complex.

English being the predominant language among the peer juries, the council covers the translation costs of the applications that will be evaluated. However, translation raises very real risks that the value and nuance of the subject matter of the artistic approach being evaluated may be modified. In our opinion, it is much more beneficial to have francophone juries to evaluate francophone projects.

Other people, after having been refused several times in the past without a satisfactory explanation, have chosen not to apply to the Canada Council for the Arts again. Not all of these discouraged people are emerging creators; some have already been recognized, sometimes even on the international scene.

There are also these famous systemic barriers, these program modalities that disadvantage potential beneficiaries from minority language communities even before they have applied.

How can we explain that a visual artist's artistic experience is not recognized as professional when he or she exhibits works in a community space? However, in some communities, these infrastructures equipped with arts facilities are the only ones that can welcome these artists and allow them to present their creations to their public. In the reality of our official language minority communities, cultural and community centres are unifying places that allow people to have access to a living environment in French, including the arts.

The situation is just as complex if the artist wishes to move to professionalize himself or make his work travel. It is very likely that an artist living in a minority linguistic environment, often in remote areas, will have to travel, often at great expense, given our vast country.

Making the application process more complex, ignoring the real costs of travel, all of this limits the ability of artists and works from minority language communities to shine, here and elsewhere.

There is also a lack of sensitivity on the part of the Canada Council for the Arts to the realities of minority artists when it comes to talking about their relationship with industries. Indeed, why can't a media artist whose career path includes television experiences be recognized by the council? To live from your art in the Canadian and Acadian francophonie, you have to be a jack-of-all-trades. This means creating television works as well as independent cinematographic works.

Many of these systemic barriers are known to the council, but there is little movement, little change. We talk about issues, we talk about challenges, but often we go no further than the findings.

We need to adjust our sights. We must work to identify and eliminate these barriers that prevent the minority francophone arts community from taking its place.

• (1700)

By acting on these issues, the council will not only influence the artist's own ability to promote his or her artistic approach, and support a whole community ecosystem in which we invest, and in which we believe, to address this host of linguistic concerns.

• (1705)

Mr. Martin Théberge: I'll now talk about the importance of working together and soliciting true co-operation.

Midway through these investments, the Canada Council for the Arts has an opportunity to show leadership in engaging the arts and culture sector in Canadian and Acadian French-speaking communities to find solutions to ongoing concerns.

Gone are the days when organizations simply wanted to be consulted. People who do marketing, invent products or shape public policy will tell you that the process of engaging stakeholders in an initiative is now just as important as the program itself.

Instead of sending representatives to promote the programs alone, we can work with our organizations in the field to connect with artists, support them and encourage them to submit strong applications.

The transformation taking place at the Canada Council for the Arts is still in its early stages. However, two immediate measures must be taken. First, we recommend that the commitment to increase the council's funding until 2021 be upheld. Second, we recommend that a rigorous consultation and engagement exercise be carried out this year with the stakeholders involved in the funding to assess the current approach and make the necessary adjustments to the new funding model.

The Chair: Mr. Théberge, your 10 minutes are up. I'd like you to wrap up your presentation.

Mr. Martin Théberge: I'll finish up quickly.

The Chair: That's fine, thank you.

Mr. Martin Théberge: In light of the progress under way, but especially to ensure that the council complies with its own internal policies and its commitment to the development and vitality of minority language communities, the time has come to set the record straight. The practices related to French-speaking clients must be assessed in light of a deeper understanding of their unique characteristics. In addition, more work must be done internally to raise awareness.

Together we've managed to convince an entire country of the value of investing in creation. We're ready to work hand in hand with the Canada Council for the Arts to ensure that the Canadian and Acadian French-speaking communities benefit from these investments in keeping with their creativity, talent and ambition.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

As with the last panel, we will do five minutes each and we'll begin with Mr. Boissonnault.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Thanks very much.

[Translation]

I'll start with Mr. Théberge and Ms. Morin.

Mr. Théberge, do you think that the francophone communities outside Quebec could benefit from a readjustment that would reflect the proportion of the population in general or the proportion of the French-speaking population? What do you think of a model consisting of regional juries, such as one jury out west, in Alberta or British Columbia, and another jury in the Atlantic region that could work together at the national level?

It would be radical. However, this model was brought up by Ms. Petrov from the Winspear Centre, a music centre in Edmonton. It's time to allocate a set overall amount to each region. There could be juries or regional groups that decide who receives the money, which may include francophones.

What do you think?

Mr. Martin Théberge: In addition to the regional aspect, I think that the juries should also take into consideration the linguistic and cultural aspect. I agree that there should be a jury in the Atlantic region, for example, but in that case there should be a francophone Acadian jury and an anglophone jury.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Joëlle Préfontaine from the UniThéâtre said the same thing. There's a very large francophone component in Western Canada, including a Franco-Albertan component and a Franco-Saskatchewanian component.

[English]

I'm going to go to Calgary, because I have only about three and a half minutes left. It goes so fast.

Kathi, since you've been with the company, how many times have you met with your Canada Council for the Arts rep in person?

Ms. Kathi Sundstrom: Do you mean in person? I couldn't tell you that. I'm sorry.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Did it happen?

Ms. Kathi Sundstrom: Yes.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: How many times—five, three, two, 10?

Ms. Kathi Sundstrom: I would say it was more than five.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: That was in how many years?

Ms. Kathi Sundstrom: I'm sorry, but I can't give you that data off the top of my head.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: You said that no system is perfect, but what would you say to a system that had more regional balance in it? We've heard the statistics. As Albertans, we're 12% of the population, we're 8% of the artists, we're 5% of the jurors and we get about 5% of funds.

Should the CCA be directed to take some of this new money and have it rebalance some of the regions that simply aren't getting their share?

Ms. Kathi Sundstrom: I see that as very difficult. From the standpoint of sitting on a jury, if we had to take a lens that so much has to go to each province, there would be.... Excellence of the applications still has to apply. If there weren't good applications from Alberta, we would be denying good applications from other regions. Regional equity is a very difficult thing.

I do believe that part of the problem in Alberta is that we don't have that base of provincial and government support. DJD would never have existed. Our first grants were always civic and provincial, so we don't have that base to create the organizations that can then graduate, for lack of a better word, to larger and different programs, to apply to the council.

• (1710)

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Calgary is in a tougher position than Edmonton, because Edmonton's tripled its arts funding—

Ms. Kathi Sundstrom: Yes.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: —in the last 10 years, and that hasn't been the case for Calgary city council. You made a very clear case for the Alberta piece.

I want to go to the Yukon with whatever time I have left. Do you think there's a need for any sort of regional balance for what we're talking about, Casey, or is it all based on merit and you just have to do good art that 66% of the jurists in Ontario and Quebec think is good art?

Mr. Casey Prescott: I would say the north is a little different. I think the north is very much eager to see people face to face. There are a lot of artists out here, but it's very different from downtown Toronto. I think that building that trust.... There's probably a lot of nuance to some of the criteria the Canada Council would consider if they were here regularly speaking to our community. They would understand that a lot of their criteria are probably responding to more urban constituents. That's where I'm coming from.

I still feel merit is key. I would agree with Kathi. I'm not sure about carving up the pie regionally. However, what I'm really advocating for here is that the north is a very distinct part of the country that has some very unique challenges. I would very much like to see somebody from the Canada Council here more regularly.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: When was the last time somebody travelled to Yellowknife or the Northwest Territories, to meet with you in person?

Mr. Casey Prescott: In the Yukon, we had an info session around the new funding models, but I haven't personally seen anyone outside of the info team.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: How accessible are they by phone or email?

The Chair: I'm sorry. Your time is up.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I'm out of time. Maybe I'll get back to that in a future round.

The Chair: There is no future round. I don't mean to sound....

I'm moving to Mr. Shields now for five minutes.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for being here today. We appreciate it.

Calgary, good luck with the council now, and the economic and tax situation in Calgary. I think that's going to be a tough one for the next few years. Good luck with it.

For the Yukon, if you could replicate the model you have, many communities like mine—15,000 to 20,000 people—would think that would be great.

I loved your recommendations. I think they're right on for a lot of people out there, but the one I found interesting was “Eurocentric”, because we need to change this. We may have a funding model, but we have another issue here. I think you nailed it perfectly in what you described, but we need to get it outside of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. I live in a city that's small but we have 100 different ethnicities in my community, and we never see anything but the Eurocentric culture. We have to find a mechanism because I think you've identified a real piece.

I'm all for equitable. I'm with Randy. We need to find a way to decentralize it. We have many solitudes in this country. It might be complicated, as you say, but we need to find a way to decentralize it. We need to have that piece, the ethnic piece and the cultures that you're talking about.

I'll give you one more shot to talk about that one, maybe beyond Toronto.

Mr. Owais Lightwala (Managing Director, Why Not Theatre): I think it's a very important point you make. Absolutely, the spread of cultural diversity is harder to do in rural settings and in areas that are not urban centres, because of the population and the size. You need a critical mass before change can happen, before people can finally not have any other option, but you cannot ignore diverse populations when they're the size they are in Toronto or Vancouver. That critical mass is the challenge in a smaller community.

Due to the prioritization of funding, that can be countered by prioritization of equity, by council and by local funding options.

• (1715)

Mr. Martin Shields: Outside the major centres...how?

Mr. Owais Lightwala: Absolutely.

Why we even have Eurocentric models is that it's what the incentives were set up for. It was decided, as Kathi mentioned, that this kind of art form, ballet, is valid dance, but jazz is not. The same thing applies with saying that the European tradition of theatre is valid and Shakespeare is valid, but this ethnic form of community theatre is not valid.

Mr. Martin Shields: Is there any possibility that you could write us something, in the sense of how you would broaden that scope from the major centres, how you could get that funding, and how you would see that model working outside of the major centres?

We haven't the time for you to answer here, but do you have the expertise to write us something on that?

Mr. Owais Lightwala: With a little bit more time than five minutes maybe.

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes, that's what I'm asking for. I'm asking for a follow-up, because I think you have something very important and critical to this country, and we need to have it as part of this.

Could you submit something within a week's time?

Mr. Ravi Jain: Yes, possibly. We would need more thought, but yes.

Mr. Martin Shields: One page, two pages, we need something in writing.

Mr. Owais Lightwala: Right. Absolutely.

Mr. Martin Shields: That would be fantastic.

I want to go back to Calgary. When you say the municipal part... I know you're playing a fine line, but we've heard about this equitability from a number of witnesses. I know you've walked a fine line with it, but it is tough in Calgary, in Alberta, with the equitability.

You have a certain amount of money. Is it ever feasible, in your mind, that it could be equitable?

Ms. Kathi Sundstrom: Do you mean equitable as far as the council funding goes?

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes, the council funding...in the sense of population distribution in this country.

Ms. Kathi Sundstrom: I don't see it, no. That can't be the only criteria, because it's not an even....

I don't know the statistics off the top of my head. You know how much money is going to Alberta. However, there are fewer organizations in Alberta because there is less infrastructure to build those organizations. Many artists leave Alberta because there is more funding in other places and because there are not as many theatre companies. They go to Toronto where there are more acting gigs.

It's a complicated question.

Mr. Martin Shields: Didn't you just describe the reason? It's because of lack of funding that they go somewhere else.

Ms. Kathi Sundstrom: There's not a base of funding. The provincial and civic funding have not grown, and none of the established organizations are going to say, "Hey, you can take some of my money because we should support these new organizations." We're not that generous.

Mr. Martin Shields: I've raised before that I don't see Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver wanting to give up some of their money either.

Ms. Kathi Sundstrom: Even for institutions that were founded in Alberta in the Lougheed years, when they got into the operating stream—and that's kind of grandfathered because it's hard for funders to take money away—there's just no room to nurture new organizations and new artists because there hasn't been a growth in funding.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you.

The Chair: We're going to have to leave it there.

Thank you very much.

[Translation]

We'll now give the floor to Mr. Nantel for five minutes.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses.

Ms. Sundstrom, thank you for your expertise and objectivity.

Mr. Shields, I completely share your concerns about the distribution of funding and how the distribution can be interpreted. The Canada Council for the Arts obviously appears to be providing less money to Alberta. However, it seems that this outcome is the result of various factors. Ms. Sundstrom tried to explain it properly. I'm pleased about this, because I honestly feel uncomfortable with the fact that we're taking advantage of the presence of witnesses in this study to build a case regarding the lack of funding in Alberta. I hope that Mr. Boissonnault and I can talk about this again in a few years.

The figures show that the Canada Council for the Arts gives less money to Alberta. However, I believe that there are reasons for this. We certainly have some issues to resolve, but I think we were a little overzealous.

Thank you, Ms. Sundstrom.

Mr. Jain and Mr. Lightwala, I hope to have the opportunity to speak to you, because I completely share Mr. Shields' enthusiasm for your analysis. I think that you perfectly described the modernity that we should aspire to. You're right to say that this model is Eurocentric. I'm pleased to see that the council has made the necessary adjustments.

I'll now turn to the representatives of the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française.

I realize that we don't want to rob Peter to pay Paul. We should be able to trust that the size of the budget allocated to the council will support new theatrical traditions in Canada, such as the pieces presented by Mr. Lightwala and Mr. Jain.

I'm also grateful to you for clearly reminding us that if artists exhibit their work in a cultural centre that operates as a non-profit organization, it's not because the artists aren't good enough for a professional centre. Instead, the location is the only place in their community where they can exhibit their work. I found that you qualified your assertions.

That said, are you saying that you should have had more support? Do you feel that you received better or worse service in the past? Do the recent structural changes in the council seem promising to you? If not, what are your specific concerns?

• (1720)

Mr. Martin Thériège: We're asking the Canada Council for the Arts to show strong leadership with respect to francophone minority communities. There used to be systemic issues. These issues still exist, despite the increase in funding, and they must be resolved. The council must show leadership.

Artists shouldn't automatically be considered non-professional, and therefore not eligible for funding, simply because they organize their exhibitions or perform in community halls. For example, artists from Chéticamp exhibit their work at Les Trois Pignons or in the school-community centre because these places are the only venues available. Even though the location is an NPO or a community hall, these rooms are still professional venues. The fact that artists exhibit their work at these places doesn't make them non-professionals and

doesn't justify the denial of grants. This is just a community reality, but it isn't being taken into consideration at this time. That's what we're saying.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Prescott, do you share that opinion? I imagine that your community doesn't have festivals the size of the event at Massey Theatre, does it?

[English]

Mr. Casey Prescott: There are a number of festivals.

I still come back to the idea that a lot of the funding design of the Canada Council would change if they were on the ground in some of these areas and these regions. Being here physically and talking to people really does affect how you design your programming. With no disrespect to Ottawa, but when you're in downtown Ottawa, it's very hard to really meet and....

In the Yukon, it's an enormous territory. There are people in very tiny communities, but they're very vibrant and they have lots of artistic ambition. The council does not get to them. That's what I'm very much advocating for.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Nantel, your five minutes are up.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: I'm sorry.

Thank you.

The Chair: I want to thank all the witnesses.

[English]

It has been an interesting study.

I know that all of the members had the opportunity to put forward witness names, and we've had some diverse perspectives on how the Canada Council works. I appreciate that.

We are going to suspend briefly, because we will be moving in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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