



Canadian Dance Assembly

L'Assemblée canadienne de la danse

Brief to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage
on the impact of the budget cuts to arts and culture programs
9 March 2009

Presentation from the Canadian Dance Assembly

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Submitted to:

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House of Commons
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To the members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage,

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. My name is Shannon Litzenberger and I am the Executive Director of the Canadian Dance Assembly - the national association representing Canada's professional dance sector. Our membership includes over 350 professional dance organizations and individuals from all regions of the country including performance companies, training institutions, presenting organizations, dancers, choreographers, educators, agents and managers. We are a founding member of the Performing Arts Alliance and a member of the Canadian Arts Coalition and the Canadian Conference of the Arts.

I will speak specifically about the sector-wide impact of recent cuts to PromArt, Trade Routes and the Canadian Arts and Heritage Sustainability program. As you know, decisions to remove or reduce investment in these and other programs were made without consultation with the stakeholders they impact. In the case of PromArt and Trade Routes, claims of the programs' administrative inefficiencies in no way supports the conclusion to retract investment from critical areas of activity that enable dance and arts organizations to remain competitive in a global economy.

For many dance organizations from Vancouver to Moncton, international export is a vital component of a sound business strategy that ensures the investments made in the creation and production of Canadian works will leverage revenue returns through business development in foreign markets. As an art form that is not connected to a major commercial cultural industry, touring is the only form of distribution for dance. Touring internationally provides added workweeks for artists and production staff, and leverages revenue returns through performance fees that are substantively higher in foreign markets than they are domestically.

As you've heard from several witnesses who work in the performing arts sector, the impact of these cuts means cancelled tours, stalled contract negotiations, lost workweeks for artists and the ultimate disappearance of Canadian art from the world stage. Furthermore, these cuts have sent a clear message to foreign buyers whose ability to present Canadian work is compromised by the fact that Canada will no longer cover travel and shipping costs for their artists to perform abroad - a universal industry practice among exporting countries.

This government claims to be investing \$13 million in touring through the Canada Council for the Arts and I'd like to clarify for the committee that in fact, the Council invests primarily in domestic tours through programs that were designed in complement to PromArt and Trade Routes. It was not until very recently that the Council introduced a pilot program that distributes a very modest level of investment to support international touring in response to reductions to cultural export investment by the federal government in 2005 and 2006.

To reinforce this point, I have compiled figures that help illustrate the real situation in dance. In 2007-08, dance companies received less than \$400,000 in total support for international touring and foreign market development from the Canada Council. In the same year, PromArt and Trade Routes invested a combined total of over \$1.3 million in support of over 650 dance performances abroad. As you can see from these numbers, failure to reinvest funds cut from PromArt and Trade Routes effectively evaporates support for international export and the promotion of artists abroad.

As we are all well aware, the economic environment has drastically shifted since the time these cuts were made. The government articulated in the January Throne Speech that "old assumptions must be tested and old decision must be rethought". Like the government, the priority of the dance sector is to protect jobs and ensure companies can remain stable and sustainable over this volatile period and beyond. The demand for Canadian cultural product abroad during this period of recession is a testament to the excellence of Canadian artists and their work. Preventing the sector from responding to this demand by retracting funding is both irresponsible and illogical.

I would like to stress that we do value this governments expressed commitment to arts and culture, in particular through recent investment in the Canada Council for the Arts, national arts training, cultural spaces and festivals. We recognize that levels of investment have increased and we know the Government must make choices. However, despite these good efforts and intentions, I am here to tell you that failing to replace investment in international touring will compromise the effectiveness of other funding commitments and the ultimate viability and sustainability of the sector as a whole.

On behalf of the professional dance sector, I am therefore recommending to every member of this committee that you advocate to our Prime Minister for a minimum of \$12 million in new federal

investment specifically to support international touring and foreign market development - enabling arts organizations to remain competitive in the global economy.

I also wish to recommend that this committee support renewed federal commitments to organizational sustainability measures through the Canadian Arts and Heritage Sustainability Program. Specifically, I recommend the renewal of the Endowment matching program and renewed investment in capacity building measures for small and mid-sized organizations. The Capacity Building program that was cut by \$1.8 million has allowed dozens of primarily small and medium sized dance organizations such as Mile Zero Dance in Edmonton, Sampradaya Dance Creations in Mississauga, and Atlantic Ballet Theatre in Moncton to take important steps forward in their development, building organizational capacities not otherwise possible through regular operational revenues.

Finally, I cannot leave today without reinforcing the need for new, substantive investment to the Canada Council for the Arts. The Canada Council is the most effective deliverer of federal investment for the arts and I recommend that this committee advocate for \$100 million in new, permanent investment to Council.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Shannon Litzenberger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Shannon Litzenberger
Executive Director
Canadian Dance Assembly