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Chair

Ms. Julie Dabrusin

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• (1605)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.)): This begins the 162nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

We started late because of the votes, and I would really like to make sure we have time to hear from the witnesses as well as to do a single round of five minutes for each set of witnesses. That should have us wrap up in time if we get going now.

[Translation]

We are first hearing from Sheri Somerville, who is the Executive Director of Ballet Edmonton. Afterwards, Adam Growe, Treasurer of the Canadian Association of Stand-up Comedians, will appear by video conference from Toronto. Finally, we also have with us Hunter Cardinal, who is the Director of Story at Naheyawin.

[English]

We should start with the video conference just in case we have any technical difficulties with it.

Mr. Growe, we will start with your presentation, please.

Mr. Adam Growe (Treasurer, Canadian Association of Stand-up Comedians): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to the rest of the committee for inviting me to speak to you today on behalf of the Canadian Association of Stand-up Comedians, CASC.

I want to take a moment to clarify that our newly incorporated not-for-profit organization, as of May 1, also now includes members who are sketch and improv artists, as well as stand-up comedians. Since we started this endeavour in July 2017, we have grown to over 880 members in communities across the country in all provinces and territories.

CASC is pleased to learn that the Canada Council for the Arts has been managing an increase from budget 2016. That's good news for artists. We're very excited as well to learn more about the council's transition to a modernized funding model.

The motion mandating the study, which your committee adopted, also stated your intent to examine how the council's new funding model will ensure that artists, no matter where they live in Canada, have the support they need to contribute to the creative sector. I'd like to speak to that last part on behalf of comedians across the country.

With full respect to the committee, in addition to ensuring the council funds and supports artists no matter where they live, I believe it's time now to also ensure it funds and supports artists no matter what kind of art they create. The council has taken a bold approach to this idea in reducing their funding streams from 150 to six, and reducing the number of fields of practice, or artistic disciplines, that applicants can opt into.

Historically, under the old model, comedians have been excluded from the council. This conspicuous absence of comedy has sent a message to comedians over the decades, a message that I believe has compromised our art and been a disservice to the creative sector in this nation, a nation that is recognized on the global stage as a comedy nation.

With the newer model, comedians were initially advised to make an applicant profile under the theatre field of practice. Comedy, of course, is a practice in its own right, and many comedians still face barriers in accessing council funds, even in just getting to the point where they're approved to submit an application. They're told that they do not meet the general background requirements of a theatre artist, and of course, many of us don't. We generally have different training and different peers, and typically perform in different venues.

Last week we met with Canada Council for the Arts staff for the second time, including with the director general. We learned more about the council's new emerging-career profile, which the council has encouraged comedians, as potential first-time recipients, to apply under. We also understand that the council wants to provide 25% of the new investment to first-time recipients, something that likely would not be possible without the historic doubling of the council's budget.

Canadian comedians continue to innovate and develop boundary-pushing work, take risks and reach new audiences. We do so just like many other artists in this country. CASC is optimistic that comedians will finally get a seat at the table with the Canada Council for the Arts.

There are barriers that remain for comedians who will not apply under the emerging-career profile, or as they receive funding in future years, will still be required to apply under the theatre or writing profiles. This means they may run into the same dead ends. Right now, we create a theatre profile, apply hopefully to get a grant as a theatre artist, and then are rejected based on eligibility criteria before any consideration is given for the artistic creation.

While opening the fields of practice to be more broad is theoretically a good thing, the risk is that the council's program officers and peer assessors will not adequately understand the unique contexts across very specific disciplines. We believe it is crucial that comedians be active participants in developing, assessing and delivering the council's new model. Comedians must be consulted in order to establish a more clear understanding of the art that is created in the stand-up sketch and improv disciplines so that program staff at the council, those who help design, oversee and evaluate grant applications, can more accurately identify comedians who do satisfy the council's eligibility criteria and do support its mandate.

We've been informed that comedians can already apply to be on peer assessment committees at the council. With an absence of any comedy influence from within the council for decades, however, we believe the council must ensure that comedians are on the team, joining a diverse range of artists and arts professionals who evaluate, score and rank eligible applications.

All of our federal public support programs for the arts, including those within Canadian Heritage, are fundamental to a thriving comedy landscape in this country, and they benefit comedy artists by creating opportunities to train and perform, but none of them provide funding directly to the comedy artists, the ones who perform the discipline. This is why our relationship and access to the Canada Council for the Arts is an integral part of the health and growth of Canadian comedy.

Having had us call ourselves something else in order to work around or accommodate the process implies that we are not artists. It suppresses our perspective of ourselves and the world around us, and it discourages the very expression that the council is mandated and professes to compel within the Canadian artistic community of creators.

If the fields of practice are now both more open but still limiting, at the same time, what other new accommodations might be indoctrinated in the new council funding model that alienate comedians or other artists for another 60 years?

As arts distribution and presentation models change and as, seemingly, less programming and content are being properly supported and created in Canada by Canadian artists, CASC believes the country's creative sector is in crisis. Therefore, it's more important than ever for the council to get it right.

Advancement for artists doesn't necessarily mean mainstream success or reaching massive audiences on the global stage. For many comedians, it does, but for some comedians who have searched for an outlet, exhausted all avenues and perhaps even given up hope of being able to express their innovative voice to Canadian audiences, the council is one of their only prospects for the kind of advancement that is meaningful to them.

This is the first time in history in Canada that there's been an association like CASC. With the council's current transition to a modernized funding model, the timing is optimal for comedians to be active participants in creating legislation, policies and funding programs that foster and promote the arts and that bolster the production of works in the arts.

Furthermore, in nurturing and advancing Canada's creative sector, it's crucial that Canadian policy-makers protect not only big domestic corporations but also Canadian artists, when fighting to protect our distinct culture from foreign influence and ownership. That's why CASC is asking this committee to direct the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Canada Council for the Arts to collaborate with all private and public stakeholders in the arts community, including comedians, to ensure we maximize all possible avenues to build upon Canada's brand as a comedy nation.

I thank you, Madam Chair, for the time.

We're grateful for the opportunity to speak to the committee today. We look forward to working with the Canada Council for the Arts on their new funding model.

● (1610)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to Sheri Somerville, from Ballet Edmonton, please.

Ms. Sheri Somerville (Executive Director, Ballet Edmonton): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, everybody, for inviting me here today.

I'd like to begin by saying it is tremendously important to me to be able to speak to the industry that has shaped my life. I want to acknowledge what a complex task it is to determine how funding is allocated across such a vast country and I appreciate the efforts of many of the employees of the Canada Council who do their jobs with integrity.

Before I express my own views on the historic 2016 increase in funding to the Canada Council and how I think it has impacted Alberta, I'd like to give you some context as to who I am to be able to speak with an informed voice.

I am an Alberta-born artist, born in Grande Prairie, Alberta, a small town of 11,000 at the time. I have earned my living subsequently as a performer, artist and administrator for nearly 40 years and I've had the privilege of performing all over the world, including an invitation to sing for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Currently I am the Executive Director of Ballet Edmonton, an Alberta-based contemporary ballet organization, and I also sit as a governor and senator at the University of Alberta, so I am familiar with large billion-dollar budgets and the scope of competing needs.

I spent the first 12 years of my professional career living in Toronto and having an eastern career and travelling around the world from there. I went back to Alberta in 1991, and I feel I have a comparative Canadian experience from which to draw my conclusions.

I appreciate this committee's understanding of how important support for the arts sector across this country is, not just for the artists but also for Canadians. It's clear that we share a belief that art is a powerful tool for wellness, quality of life, community building and reconciliation. It is also an economic driver in every province.

I hope you also, therefore, share my belief that it's vital we address the very real issue of the historically inequitable funding that continues to exist at the Canada Council.

At the heart of my discontent is the realization that Alberta artists for many decades have been impacted by loss of artistic opportunity, the opportunity to engage with our public, to take artistic risks, to create new work, to develop artistic relationships with our colleagues from across Canada, to tour and to be recognized nationally. This inequity has impacted our provincial artistic growth and inhibited our ability to contribute to the overall cultural identity of Canada.

The people of Alberta make up 11.6% of the population of Canada, yet for the past 20 years our province has endured a systematic cap on funding. In 2001, we received 6.7% of Canada Council funding. In 2018, two years after the doubling of the budget, we are at 5.4%. That is a decrease of a percentage point, this despite historic funding.

The refusal to democratize funding across Canada has diminished our voice and put into question Alberta's value to the Canadian arts ecosystem. We are a robust and passionate community with a history of producing amazing artists with careers that resonate around the world, yet we seem to be nothing more than a footnote to the Canada Council.

Bearing in mind the geographic challenges and access to resources of some of our remote provinces and territories, I am here to suggest that funding be mandated to be proportionate to populations, with a few exceptions for those remote communities. This would allow all Canadians to reap the benefits of being nourished by a healthy arts community.

While it's true that Alberta did see the council raise the per capita percentage variance of Alberta's artists from \$1.97 in 2014 to \$2.71 in 2018, it's also true that at the same time, the province with the highest per capita spending went from \$5.77 to \$8.53. It is outrageous to suggest that excellence was at the heart of those funding decisions when it's clear that systemic bias is at the heart of those funding decisions.

Despite the influx of all those new dollars, the council's new funding model has not corrected the imbalance. The incremental increases to Alberta are a testament to that. In fact, Edmonton Opera receives less operating money than it did in 2004. Until this year, the Art Gallery of Alberta saw no funding increases for 10 years, and this year saw \$25,000. One of the most well-attended, beloved regional theatres in Edmonton, the Varscona Theatre, gets no council support despite housing four resident theatre companies.

●(1615)

What formula allows for this kind of imbalance to happen for decades, and why is that formula not discarded, as it clearly allows inequities to keep occurring? I am left to conclude that there are deeply held provincial biases and a wilful blindness to allow them to remain unchallenged. The council for far too long has used the words "merit" or "excellence" to disguise the resistance to change that would see the redistribution of art across this country.

Funding inequity does not impact just Alberta artists; it impacts Albertans. It impacts our public, our patrons, who have been denied programming, denied the outreach that we so longingly want to implement, denied seeing more of their own stories on stage and denied the opportunity for the shared experience that art facilitates in communities. Funding inequity has seen Alberta artists' careers

stunted; artists who have refused to leave the province and for whom remaining there meant a much diminished capacity for expression. Those lost years cannot be recaptured.

How would a jury, regardless of its arts experience, have a genuine sense of regional artistic practices when there is not an individual from each province or territory on a jury pool? How would the council understand the transformative change that any given artist or arts group has on a community when they use a measurement model that reflects their own community and therefore their own artistic preferences? It's worth noting that on any given jury pool at the Canada Council there is an average of 63% central Canadian and between 0% and 5% Albertan jurists.

To suggest that excellence across Canada looks and sounds the same everywhere is a deeply flawed assumption and in many cases leads to art that is designed to secure national funding, not to create authentic, inspired, honest art.

To justify static funding levels by claiming Alberta lacks significant output is to assume funding has no impact on output. Of course communities that are richly funded create more art; well-funded artists have more capacity, more energy, more resources, and, of course, more confidence to bring their art to life.

Alberta alerted the executive of the Canada Council that our inequitable funding for as long as I can recall must stop, and yet we were simply told that regional funding is not possible because funding depends on merit and excellence, so that the message we hear is that our art is inferior.

Art is supposed to act as a bridge. It unites communities across this vast geography. Art is supposed to help us teach and inform each other about each other, and the council has a responsibility to use its own internal creativity to develop a transparent funding strategy to ensure that can occur everywhere in Canada.

If federal arts funding continues to be politicized, it fundamentally is a broken system, and it defeats the entire purpose of a national arm's-length agency.

Our strength as a nation, as artists and as people, is in our regional diversity. Our art should reflect that diversity. Homogenous art is a failure.

I urge you to see that steps are taken to realign or reinforce the mandate of the council to allow for an accurate reflection of Canadian artists' identity to finally emerge. Our civic and provincial funders can assist the council in determining the best needs of the communities they represent. They are the boots on the ground. This is possible only if the council will allow a meaningful, transparent dialogue, followed by an action plan that is also transparent, to be developed in consultation with leaders across the arts sector.

My comments today are provoked into existence by my four decades of lived experience and my deep and profound respect for the artists I have worked with, I have known and I have witnessed in my province. I am so proud to be a Canadian artist, and I am proud to be an Alberta artist. I look to this committee to ensure that the council honours that.

● (1620)

The Chair: We will now go to Hunter Cardinal, please, Director of Story at Naheyawin.

Mr. Hunter Cardinal (Director of Story, Naheyawin): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*Witness spoke in Cree*]

Greetings, my friends. The flame of my spirit greets the flame of yours.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that we are gathered here today on the unceded territories of the Algonquin nation. I would also like to bring greetings from the city of Edmonton on Treaty 6 territory, as well as from the Sucker Creek Cree first nation of Treaty 8, which is the territory of my people, the Sakawithiniwak.

When I was asked to travel here to speak with you about the future of funding the arts in Canada, I found myself initially feeling that the honour was misplaced. In the tradition of my ancestors, gathering a diversity of people in a circle like this one, around a problem or an idea or a new technology, taking turns to go around and to one by one describe what we see from our place in the circle, to listen and to trust one another, so that we may co-create a multi-dimensional understanding of the thing in the centre, is a sacred and important governance process. What could I, a 25-year-old actor from the Prairies, possibly describe from my place in your circle that would be of value to your study?

The truth is that I have had the great fortune and privilege of having a career that many would consider a great success, but I have always considered that success a product of countless individuals and organizations that have supported me on my journey. From having access to training and experiences in the arts from a young age, to being encouraged to pursue my acting and singing professionally, to being invited to perform on the world stage, to returning to Edmonton to ensure that I was doing my part to open up the arts for indigenous peoples, and finally, to producing, writing and performing in my own first work, I have seldom been without the means and encouragement to take my next steps. I have always known that my experience has been an exception to the rule.

This afternoon, I'd like to use my time in your circle to share my story so that perhaps I may shine a light on the support I have been given along the way that has enabled me to do more in my short career than many are able to do in a lifetime. You can imagine, with me, an answer to the question that I have asked myself when thinking about the good fortune I have: What if all artists in Canada had the same privileges that I have had?

One of my very first memories is of the Edmonton fringe festival, the oldest and largest fringe theatre festival in North America. In my family, attending it was a staple of every summer. It demonstrated to me that the performing arts were a valued and important part of life. My early discovery of my love of acting, singing and dancing made

it that much easier for me to consider this a viable career path. It was made still easier by the support from my high school drama department and such extracurricular opportunities as the young companies at the Citadel, the Edmonton Kiwanis Music Festival, and Rapid Fire Theatre's Nosebowl High School Theatresports Tournament. Growing up, each of these stepping stones taught me to work hard, dream big and continue working on my craft.

When I was 18, I was fortunate enough to secure a place in the University of Alberta's Bachelor of Fine Arts acting program to further develop my skills and professional acumen. The small class size and world-class instructors pushed me to my limits, and sometimes beyond, and strengthened my belief in the importance of storytelling as a means of building community and identity. Upon my graduation at 21, my first professional gig was *Evangeline*, a co-production between the Citadel in Edmonton and the Confederation Centre in Charlottetown. In that show, I was fortunate enough to be mentored by Brent Carver, a Tony award-winning actor, and to make professional and personal connections with other actors and artists from across Canada.

The confidence gained from that experience, as well as from being cast in my first lead role, for the Edmonton Freewill Shakespeare Festival's *Romeo and Juliet*, that summer inspired me to take the leap in moving to Toronto to pursue further classical training at Soulpepper Theatre's academy. In that program, at just 22 years old, I was able to work with some of the country's most treasured artists on such fulfilling projects as True North Cabaret, where, in my off-Broadway debut, I read a passage of work from Richard Wagamese and sang Joni Mitchell's song *Both Sides Now*. My performance was critically praised in the New York Times, and added fuel to the fire that had begun to grow in me during my time in Toronto and burned with questions: How was I vitalizing myself as an indigenous artist, not just a Canadian artist? How was I using the gifts I was born with, and given, to lift up my people as a whole?

● (1625)

They were the questions that my artistic community supported me in asking. At 23 I decided to take a cultural sabbatical to delve into them more fully, and I was supported in that as well.

I returned to Edmonton to engage with ceremony and the history of my people. To support myself I joined my sister and business partner, Jacquelyn Cardinal, at a company we started together, Naheyawin.

Naheyawin is a consultancy working to help organizations and communities build capacity for abundance, kindness and reinvigoration of the spirit of treaty by implementing indigenous principles into everyday business practices and processes. We often say that we invite others to peer through our indigenous lens with us and feel empowered to travel the bridges to the places we dream of going and in that journey, transform into the people we believe we can be.

In the last two years since I returned to Edmonton, Jacquelyn has testified on our behalf before the Senate on two occasions about our approach and impacts of our work in our indigenous and non-indigenous communities.

An example of such work was our assistance last year in the development of an award-winning 10-year arts and heritage plan for Edmonton called Connections & Exchanges, which included the policy recommendations to ensure indigenous peoples have the opportunity to participate in and develop our past, present and future manifestations of our cultures.

I cannot overstate the significance of being invited to walk alongside the organizations that helped me transform into a contributing artist as they themselves transform into a future of truth and reconciliation. It has truly been an honour.

When I felt I had gained enough rootedness and sense of place to begin my artistic development, once more in parallel to my continued work at Naheyawin, I was welcomed with open arms by my community. I was given the role of Hamlet at Freewill Shakespeare Festival last summer. That enabled me to produce, write and perform in my first original stage play called *Lake of the Strangers*, a co-production between Naheyawin and Edmonton's Fringe Theatre, which debuted in January of this year.

Both projects allowed me to combine all that I learned in my training and work experience with all that I had learned from my journey in vitalizing myself as an indigenous person and consequently were what I believe are my greatest professional achievements to date.

The Sterling nominations honouring excellence in Edmonton theatre—I learned just last night I have one for my leading performance in *Hamlet*, and there are four for *Lake of the Strangers*, including best new play—are a testament to what is possible when time, space and encouragement are afforded to emerging artists.

To close I would humbly urge the committee to consider the circle we sit in today as a smaller part of an even larger one, which is ultimately describing what we value as Canadians. I don't speak for all artists, but I do believe that my story of enormous and transforming support should be commonplace among all those who contribute to the creative sector in Canada. We should all be able to follow the love of our crafts down winding paths of learning, reaching, failing and reinvention so that we may, together, continue to do the work of artists, to make sense of the past, uncover who we are today and venture into the future.

[*Witness spoke in Cree*]

● (1630)

The Chair: Thank you.

We are going to go with a modified question and answer period because of our time. Each party will have five minutes.

We will begin with Mr. Boissonnault, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Okay, that's shorter so we're going to have rapid fire.

Mr. Cardinal, thank you for joining us.

Quickly, who are your funding sources? Who supported you financially to get to where you are today in all your success?

Mr. Hunter Cardinal: They are the Edmonton Community Foundation, the Edmonton Arts Council, as well as incredibly gracious individual and private donors.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Have you yet applied to the Canada Council for the Arts?

Mr. Hunter Cardinal: I have.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Have you received anything from the Canada Council for the Arts?

Mr. Hunter Cardinal: No, I was seen as ineligible.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Did they tell you why you were ineligible?

Mr. Hunter Cardinal: No.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Okay, note to self.

Ms. Somerville, thank you, and congratulations on your distinguished career.

We're at 12% of the population, as Albertans; I rounded up. Eight per cent of Albertans are artists, 5% of the jurors at the CCA are from Alberta, and we get 5% or less of the funding.

When our government announced a few years ago that we were doubling the CCA funding, what did you hope would happen in our region in new entrants?

Ms. Sheri Somerville: Obviously we hoped it meant an equalization of regional funding. We assumed our protests had been heard and that the council would use this opportunity to at least begin with doubling Alberta's funding and go from there. Of course we never saw it. The needle hasn't moved.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: What did CCA tell us that we would see happen across the country based on our doubling of their funding?

Ms. Sheri Somerville: That art would be made available to all Canadian artists.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Okay, and you've just said that hasn't materialized, so that's helpful.

We heard from Monsieur Brault that there were about 1,400 applications from individual artists in British Columbia, and yet from Alberta, which has almost as many people, there were around 840 or 850. How do you account for that discrepancy? I've heard from artists that there's just no point. There's a sense of defeat. There's no need to apply because they're not going to get anywhere.

How do you explain that significant difference between the two provinces?

Ms. Sheri Somerville: Absolutely. Many, many Alberta artists, career artists, have felt diminished by their inability to secure funding. Stewart Lemoine, a famous and highly awarded Canadian playwright who has 72 published plays has, in his 27 years, received two project grants 15 years ago, and he gave up after five more years of trying. He said it was too insulting to apply for funding.

He has self-selected, as have many organizations. It is a big administrative task, especially for small organizations, to apply for funding and when you're told year after year to keep applying because you're almost there, it feels disingenuous.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: You and others were able to attend a meeting that brought arts groups together from Alberta almost a year ago in Edmonton. Minister Rodriguez attended. During that almost hour and a half at the Winspear Centre, you shared a very striking comment. It was a shocking comment. It was so shocking that it shocked the minister.

I'm wondering if you could share that comment from a senior official at the Canada Council for the Arts who told you how Alberta artists might just get more funding.

Ms. Sheri Somerville: In short, I was sort of on a bit of a dialogue about my impassioned feeling about being an Alberta artist and I was cut off, and the person said, "You know, in the end, it's all about merit and excellence, so if you just continue to pursue your art, I'm sure eventually funding will come your way."

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Are you telling us that you were told that if we just had better art in Alberta, maybe Canada Council for the Arts would fund us?

Ms. Sheri Somerville: Yes, we've been told over and over again that it's about merit. It can't be regional. It can't be equitable. It's about merit and excellence.

That is a disguise for resistance to change.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: How many times has an official of the Canada Council for the Arts been to Edmonton or Alberta, to your knowledge, in your storied career?

Ms. Sheri Somerville: I have been aware of two visits, and they were for three-hour workshops by junior-level bureaucrats.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Over how many years is that?

Ms. Sheri Somerville: It's over the last 25.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: That's two visits, amounting to about six hours in 25 years.

Ms. Sheri Somerville: Yes. They're usually workshops to unveil new platforms and how to fill in forms.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: What does this tell you about the kind of understanding the CCA might have about the reality of Alberta arts right now?

Ms. Sheri Somerville: What it tells me is that the CCA is not interested in a relationship with Alberta. We want a relationship with the Canada Council for the Arts. We believe in the Canada Council for the Arts. What we want is our place at the table. We want to be taken seriously. We are tired of being disregarded as the regions. We are tired of being looked at as less than.

•(1635)

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: What was your reaction to Mr. Brault's stating on the record and on television that he will come to Edmonton and participate in a round table that I am happy to moderate?

Ms. Sheri Somerville: Oh, my reaction was that I can't wait, and I look forward to meeting him.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Thank you both very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to Mr. Yurdiga, for five minutes.

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses who are joining our study.

This is very frustrating from the perspective of me and my colleagues. There is an inequity from coast to coast to coast. It seems that the money migrates one way and it's usually communities like mine that are really not recognized for the amazing talent that is out there.

I'd have to agree with my colleague across the floor, Randy, that there is a problem and we have to do something to change it.

My first question is for Adam.

Thank you for joining our study. Over the years, we've seen hundreds and hundreds of comedians change their direction and move to another market, the U.S. market, and it seems there's not enough support from the Canada Council for the Arts for comedians. From my perspective, comedy is an art form.

Do you think more Canadian comedians would stay in Canada instead of going to the U.S. market if there truly were support for our artists on the ground?

Mr. Adam Growe: Well, the support would have to come from all the facets of public support programs. The Canada Council for the Arts is just one avenue for a population within the comedy community across the country.

There would be other streams for artists who want to reposition themselves, but indeed, our president, Sandra Battaglini, has spoken about the comedy scene in the country. This applies to comedy artists—improv, sketch and stand-up—who live in Alberta and are susceptible to the same geographical restraints, for instance. This is systemic for the entire genre of comedy across the country. Sandra calls it a circle of entrapment. There's only so far you can go into Canada, into Canadian entertainment, and find support for innovative voices or boundary-pushing work as well.

So artists either quit, give up, or they do go to countries where there are opportunities. We want to change that, but not only through other funding programs. We've never even had a voice or seat at the table at all, ever, at the Canada Council for the Arts, and we think this is a great place to start, and one of our first initiatives was to get the government to recognize comedians and comedy as art in the country.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you.

At this point, is the art form of being a comedian not recognized as an art form?

Mr. Adam Growe: Everybody we talk to in government and in industry and the many people, the thousands of people, we talk to in public spaces all seem to agree, "Of course comedy is art. Isn't it already recognized as an art form?" The government has told us in response to our e-petition to have it recognized officially by the government, that they already support humour through the various funding for spaces, training and presentation.

Our point is that, especially without the opportunity to even apply to the Canada Council for the Arts, there's no funding directly to comedy artists. There's funding for presenters of festivals. There's funding for training facilities. There's funding for the construction and renovation of spaces. Those are all vital and very important, but individual artists don't have an opportunity to receive funding directly. We're told to go to the Canada Council for the Arts and apply as theatre artists, and then, very similar to what Sheri was describing, the message is that we're not valid, that we're not artists, and we don't count.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you.

My next question is for Sheri.

In your experience, you've seen a lot of talent and amazing performers coming through the doors. Have you seen a migration of performers moving to where the money is? How is that hurting communities such as yours?

Ms. Sheri Somerville: Oh, absolutely, we see a drain of people following the funding. It's a famous thing. People will say, "I have to go to Toronto; I have to get this produced" or that there's just more work there. I think part of what Toronto is suffering from right now is a glut of migrated artists out of a province. Then, of course, it diminishes relationships that have been built, both for those artists.... We've seen many, many artists follow funding and ending up not employed in those centres, and then it's too expensive to come home. I know many careers that have ended after people have left thinking that they would stand a better chance in another province.

It hurts our local economy, and it demoralizes artists who feel that we are a launching pad for a national career, especially someone like me, who has had a national and international career, and I am proud to remain in my community. I have the experience and the wisdom to know that you can duke it out from wherever you are, but not every artist does.

• (1640)

Mr. David Yurdiga: I have 15 seconds. You mentioned merit and excellence a number of times. Is that the arts council's definition?

Ms. Sheri Somerville: It's from the assessment jury and then from the executive who makes the final funding decisions.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

We now go to Mr. Nantel for five minutes.

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

Thank you very much to all the witnesses.

I must admit that I was surprised to note that the Canada Council for the Arts did not at least provide a response to what was said yesterday.

Mr. Cardinal, I believe I saw in the news, yesterday or today, that you were up for a Sterling Award. Congratulations.

Do you receive support from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts for your participation in the Edmonton International Fringe Theatre

Festival? Has the Canada Council for the Arts provided support to that festival in the past?

[*English*]

Mr. Hunter Cardinal: I apologize. I was desperately trying to understand—

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Okay, there's no issue.

I was congratulating you because you've just received some Sterling award nominations.

Mr. Hunter Cardinal: Yes, the Sterling Awards.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: That's really nice, and it concerns your participation in what you wrote for the fringe festival.

Mr. Hunter Cardinal: Yes.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: How is the fringe festival supported? Is it supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts? Is it supported by the Canada Council for the Arts? You didn't get direct support for your production. Did the festival receive some support from the Canada Council for the Arts?

Mr. Hunter Cardinal: I can't speak to the funding sources for the fringe as an organization, but what I can say is that the fringe had, through their funding sources, the ability and capacity to develop a unique relationship with me and my organization to be able to afford us to use their space, to bring our show, hire our people and tell our story.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Yes, I can say that it's a very beautiful story, what you just told us today, knowing of the privilege you had to be surrounded by so many caring people around you, and now you want to bring it back to your community, which is outstanding. I think the work that you are doing is truly outstanding.

Mr. Hunter Cardinal: Thank you.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: My other question will be for CASC.

Mr. Grove, first of all, clearly you have a super talent, because I know how serious you try to be. But there is something that makes us smile, even though you described that your mom is sick—

Mr. Adam Grove: I was going to start with a joke, but Madam Chair used my favourite joke when she petitioned on our behalf to get it recognized as an art form. It's one of my favourite knock-knock jokes, so I had to—

Mr. Pierre Nantel: You mentioned that comedy, be it in French or English, is not a sector that is recognized by the arts council. As a matter of fact, Canadian comedians have very little recognition.

I mean, we all love to laugh with you. We all enjoy a good time. We all enjoy a good Tuesday night on CBC with the comedy shows that we have. However, there is a lack of recognition of the.... Clearly, in Quebec there is more recognition, because of the school, École nationale de l'humour.

We've heard many of your arguments, but what would make things easier for you to be recognized by all money funders and the arts council?

Mr. Adam Grove: Well, it would be an insistence by the private and public sectors and this committee to the Department of Canadian Heritage and to the Canada Council for the Arts of more comedy creation in this country.

Right now, whether it be live or produced—and obviously, as I mentioned, the distribution channels are changing dramatically—we are still recognized as a comedy nation. We are missing the boat in terms of the volume of content that's been created for all of the streams.

Comedy, either stand-up, sketch or improv, is one of the most immediate forms of theatre and storytelling in the world, and it's not even recognized as an art form and funded directly to comedy artists in this country. If there's no insistence on comedy creation in terms of content, whether it be streaming, programming or directly in live environments....

I stated that I did a scan of the 2017-18 prime-time schedule. On English Canada television, aside from CBC, less than 7% of the prime-time television programming originated in Canada.

The Massey commission started its study in 1951 because of a bleak cultural landscape in this country. It stated that only 14 English novels were created in an entire year.

CASC believes that we're in a similar crisis right now. We need to embrace and insist on the creation of content here, and fuel it—as you heard from Hunter Cardinal—in respect to all communities, to make sure we continue to thrive in terms of the volume of comedy content.

• (1645)

[Translation]

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

[English]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: I'm sorry about that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much to all of our witnesses.

We're going to be suspending briefly so that we can transition to the next panel.

Thank you.

• (1645)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1650)

The Chair: We're going to start.

We're still waiting for someone on video conference. However, to make sure we have enough time for a round of questions for everyone, I'd like to begin with the witnesses who are present.

[Translation]

We are hearing from Joëlle Préfontaine, Artistic Director and Co-General Manager of UniThéâtre.

[English]

From Theatre Calgary, we have Jon Jackson, Executive Director.

[Translation]

We will soon establish a video conference connection with Annemarie Petrov, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Winspear Centre.

Let's start with Joëlle Préfontaine, from UniThéâtre.

Ms. Joëlle Préfontaine (Artistic Director and Co-General Manager, L'UniThéâtre): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Distinguished members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, good afternoon.

I am Joëlle Préfontaine, Artistic Director and Co-General Manager of the only professional francophone theatre company in Edmonton, UniThéâtre. I have held this position for 16 months, but I am very familiar with the company, since I worked there for 10 years as an actress, instructor and stage director.

UniThéâtre was created in 1992. It resulted from a merger of two theatre companies: Théâtre français d'Edmonton, founded in 1967, and Boîte à Popicos, created in 1978.

I am from the Franco-Albertan community of Legal, located in north Edmonton. I lived below the poverty line as a bilingual artist for 15 years, while I worked full time, putting in over 40 hours a week. I had to get into debt to survive. I am sharing that information with you because I know that many artists will see themselves in my story.

Despite everything, arts are doing well in Alberta. A growing number of artists are choosing to set up in Edmonton to practice their art. I could attend two shows a week without managing to see everything that is happening in my sector.

So it is a privilege for me to be joining you today. I thank you for giving me this opportunity to meet with you.

I will more specifically focus on four themes: increasing the budget of Canada Council for the Arts, or CCA; communications with the CCA; representation of the Canadian francophonie on CCA juries; and the future of the CCA's funding.

After the funding of the Canada Council for the Arts stagnated for a few years, the Government of Canada announced in 2016-2017 that it was committing to double the CCA's budget by 2021. I need not to tell you that we liked that news.

The capping of the CCA budget before the 2016-2017 announcement hindered the development of the arts community. The CCA did not have means to support the proposals of new artists or established artists for new projects. During that time, the development of Alberta's artistic organizations such as UniThéâtre was limited by the lack of resources available to them. Despite those conditions, my company has remained in touch with its community.

However, even with the planned increase of the CCA's budget, the organization will still not be able to meet the real needs of the arts community. The announcement of new investments in the Canada Council for the Arts came with another piece of news, which was the restructuring of its programs. So the CCA has reduced the number of its programs. Previously, there were some 150 of them, and then the organization ended up with six so-called flexible and more open programs. It is true that it is easier to navigate in CCA's new operating model. However, some aspects of the implementation are lacking.

Before the new model was implemented, UniThéâtre would contact a specific CCA officer capable of directing it toward programs that would be likely to support its projects. As he was our main interlocutor at the CCA, the officer had a view of all facets of our activities. He understood what was involved in managing a francophone theatre company in a minority setting.

A company like UniThéâtre has a double mandate, which is both artistic and community-based. We exist to support and present the work of French speaking artists, but we are also promoters of French language and culture. I add that I relearned French through my experiences in the theatre. We are helping shape the Franco-Albertan identity.

So our officer understood the roles we play. Now, if UniThéâtre wants to use more than one CCA program, it must contact more than one officer. That is a considerable change. It means that every officer has only a partial vision of who we are and what we do. We have to repeatedly introduce ourselves to every one of them, in the hope that they will learn not only to know us, but to understand us. That lack of familiarity harms the fluidity of our relationship with the CCA.

In addition to the relationship UniThéâtre has with the CCA as a client, the organization sometimes invites me to be part of its peer juries to assess certain funding requests submitted to it. That other point of contact with the CCA is important to me and to UniThéâtre. Every one of those experiences is learning in itself. Finding out what my peers are doing and how they are doing it is essential to my artistic development. That said, I know that, when I accept those invitations, I will be the only Franco-Canadian to participate in the assessments. So I will have to represent nine provinces and three territories.

•(1655)

Despite the context sheets proposed by the CCA, the other members of the jury, mainly from Quebec, knew relatively little about artists from the Canadian francophonie, the challenges associated with creating in a minority language context and the gaps between the provinces and territories in terms of public funding for the arts. They don't know that there is only one vocational theatre program in French at the post-secondary level in western Canada. This is a large task I am proud to carry out, but I think it would be important to include at least one other artist from the Canadian francophonie on francophone juries, in order to lighten the burden of the person who must represent the entire country instead of one province in particular.

As the general co-director of UniThéâtre, I pay special attention to current events that could affect my company. For example, the federal election next October is on the horizon. Funding for arts and culture is rarely mentioned during an election campaign, but, since I have your attention, I am putting the following request to the political parties represented on this committee: make the commitment to maintain the announced increase to the Canada Council for the Arts budget, to consolidate it and even to enhance it after 2021. That money will not be wasted. The funding provided to a theatre company like mine is used to cover the cost of hiring companies and artists we use in our projects. It allows us to sell our tickets at affordable prices, so that as many people as possible can attend our productions. That way, we generate economic benefits for our city,

our province and our country. In addition, we contribute to the quality of life of our fellow citizens. Those are accomplishments UniThéâtre is proud of.

I want you to know that I am forever grateful to the Canada Council for the Arts for its support to my personal and artistic journey, as well as to that of UniThéâtre. The funding we receive helps us live our dreams, create opportunities to share stories with our audience, and grow. The arts bring us together, help us learn and be heard.

Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

I am happy now to be able to welcome Annemarie Petrov from Winspear Centre.

Because you are joining us by video conference, we will go to you now, to make sure we don't run into any technical difficulties.

Ms. Annemarie Petrov (President and Chief Executive Officer, Winspear Centre): Sure.

Thank you for the introduction.

Today I'm bringing a perspective to this hearing, which I suppose is what you're calling it, as a Canadian, not as an Albertan.

My position right now is President and CEO of the Winspear Centre and of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra.

[*Translation*]

I was born in Montreal, and that is where I studied music at university. I then lived in Europe for a few years, after which I returned to Montreal.

•(1700)

[*English*]

My first job in Canada as an administrator was in New Brunswick.

[*Translation*]

I worked at the Saint John Symphony Orchestra, which is now called Symphony New Brunswick. I spent about four years there as the chief executive officer. I then moved to Ottawa, where I worked at the National Arts Centre for four years. After that, I worked in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where I stayed for about 10 years. I then moved to Edmonton, where I still work.

[*English*]

It is from this vantage point that I speak to you today, because as a Canadian—and I'm a staunchly fierce, proud Canadian—I think there is a real palpable difference from one region of this country to another. I think you have a real challenge in any funding body to be able to develop a method where the various solitudes of this country are truly considered.

I was very lucky. When I was going to McGill University, one of my professors was Hugh MacLennan. You do remember, I hope, one of his many great books and the one that stuck with me, *Two Solitudes*. Really, I've contemplated this so much since those days. I would say that there are five or six solitudes in Canada. You have the Maritimes. You have Quebec. You have Ontario. You have the midwest, Alberta, and then B.C., and then, of course, in fact you have northern Canada, as well.

For me, the beauty of this country is exactly all those very different cultures that we embrace as Canadians. I think it's this part that has been lost as a result of the funding model within the Canada Council. I don't believe it was ever done intentionally, but it is one of the outcomes of the way that funding is evaluated through artistic merit. Having also sat on juries for the Canada Council, I myself have witnessed the challenges that jury members faced in evaluating the different context within which each application was being evaluated.

This is really what I wanted to share with you today, that there are some very distinct differences within this country, and I think that the very best way to consider applications and consider funding is through a much more proportionate representation of population.

I do remember a distinct circumstance. When I was already working in Alberta, I sat on a jury where there were some applications from the Maritimes, a lot of applications from Ontario and from Quebec, a few from Manitoba, almost none from Alberta and a few from B.C. It was a very interesting conversation. Despite people's best efforts, it was very hard for them to understand the context within which these applications were being submitted.

Really, that's the extent of what I would like to present today. I'm happy to take questions later.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now move to a presentation from Jon Jackson from Theatre Calgary, please.

Mr. Jon Jackson (Executive Director, Theatre Calgary): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let me read something for you:

By 2021, Canadian artists and arts organizations will share their work with a larger and more diverse public, including youth — in person, in print, and online.

Artists and arts organizations will have more resources to experiment and take artistic risks to create excellent work that is shared across the country and around the world.

Further on it is stated:

Canada's major arts organizations will be models of diversity and innovation. They will contribute to the quest for excellence and renewal in their artistic practices, and to the vitality of their cities and communities. Their programming and institutional decisions will reflect Canada's diversity — including its cultural diversity, Deaf and disability communities, and official language minority communities. They will flourish and reach more Canadians than ever.

Madam Chair, members of the standing committee, my name is Jon Jackson, and I am the executive director for Theatre Calgary. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today on the Canada Council for the Arts and how they are managing their increased budget.

What I've just read to you is an excerpt from Canada Council's vision for 2021. Theatre Calgary and arts organizations across the country embrace this vision and applaud the council's incredible ambition. We fully support the Canada Council's commitment to creating more opportunities for artists across our country, as well as expanding and diversifying the number of artists and arts organizations receiving funding.

Unfortunately, I am here today to discuss with you that these efforts are not being provided equitably across our country, particularly in Alberta. With the federal government providing the Canada Council with increased funding to invest in the arts, it is also the time to change the system and make it fair and equitable for all Canadians to not only create art but engage in it as well.

In 2017-18, artists in Alberta received \$11.2 million in funding from the Canada Council for the Arts, for artists, arts organizations and projects. Alberta received \$991.30 per artist. This is the second lowest in the country, despite being home to the fourth highest number of artists of any province.

In spite of that, Alberta is creating some of the best art in Canada and showcasing it for international audiences. For instance, Theatre Calgary has made a point of partnering globally over the years, from the development of the world premiere of *The Little Prince* with Lamplighter Drama in London to our ongoing co-producing relationship with the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, which most recently resulted in the theatrical adaptation of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*; and our most recent collaboration with New York artists Bobby Cronin and Crystal Skillman on the world premiere of *Mary and Max—A New Musical*, which will make its European premiere this fall at Austria's Landestheater Linz.

Alberta Ballet is the only ballet company in the world to which Elton John, Joni Mitchell, k.d. lang, Sarah McLachlan, Gordon Lightfoot and The Tragically Hip have entrusted their music to create ballets.

Alberta is also home to Indefinite Arts Centre, Canada's oldest and largest disability arts organization. They currently have an exhibition in Dubai and enjoyed great success in Hong Kong last year.

Every artist and arts organization in Alberta is producing incredible work like this while receiving inequitable funding from the council. We are helping them fulfill their commitment to raising the international profile of Canadian art and artists without the support that Alberta artists and arts organizations deserve.

The Canada Council has indicated that they have decreased the proportion of funding to arts organizations from 67% to 50%, with more funding being allocated to projects and individual artists. While we applaud and support an increased investment in artists, giving them more flexibility on where and how they create the art, we would like to take this time to remind the council that arts organizations employ those artists and provide them with stable income and the opportunity to take risks and showcase their work to broader audiences.

Over the last five years alone, Calgary Opera, Theatre Calgary, Alberta Ballet, and the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra have employed 5,135 artists. Without our companies, many of these artists may have to leave Alberta to find work. On top of that, each of us is supporting and encouraging new artists. Over the last three years, our organizations have invested over \$2.6 million in our emerging artist and mentorship programs.

●(1705)

These initiatives provide new and developing artists paid opportunities to work, furthering the development of their art and their knowledge of the professional world. Without equitable funding from the council putting Albertans on a par with our peers across the country, we will not be able to continue these programs, which will have a lasting negative effect on the Alberta art sector.

While we are excited that the Canada Council utilizes a peer system for their investments—after all, who better to judge artistic work than artists?—this is another example of inequity. In 2017-18, the council utilized 624 assessors from across Canada. The Atlantic provinces had 62, and despite having twice the population and almost twice the number of artists, Alberta had only 34. How are Alberta artists and arts organizations from this province able to be equitably evaluated when Albertans do not have a voice at the table?

Mr. Brault has said that the Canada Council is not receiving enough applications from Alberta to provide the council the opportunity to increase funding to Alberta artists and arts organizations. I would ask him what he has done to connect with Albertans to make them aware of the opportunities available and to educate them on the application process.

I would challenge him to ensure that both he and the program officers spend more time in Alberta, meet with our organizations, meet with our artists, especially our indigenous artists, and help them apply. I know for a fact that Calgary Arts Development, our municipal arts funding organization, would be very happy to work with Mr. Brault to facilitate and coordinate this.

My challenge extends beyond simply making Albertans aware of opportunities. I'm also talking about relationship building. While the Canada Council has a mandate for the equitable distribution of information, we in Alberta are continuously challenged in receiving information and connecting with the council.

In the past year, I have spoken with my project officer once; this is despite numerous attempts on my part to connect. Another organization, Wordfest, has had five changes in their project officers in the last two years. Not only do organizations struggle to speak directly with their officers, but they are also consistently advised that feedback calls on recent applications will take weeks and months to be completed. How are we supposed to build a relationship with the council if we don't know who we are supposed to build it with?

We are in the middle of a transformative period. The doubling of the Canada Council's budget is a thrilling and unprecedented opportunity to provide Canadian artists with the chance to ascend the world stage. As a proud Canadian, a proud Albertan and a proud arts worker, I would ask that this opportunity be provided equally to all provinces.

Thank you.

●(1710)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

We will begin the question and answer period.

Mr. Breton, go ahead for five minutes please.

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank all the witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Préfontaine, we can see the passion in your eyes and your words. Thank you for your testimony.

I think that you received \$63,000 from the Canada Council for the Arts two years ago.

Ms. Joëlle Préfontaine: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Is that the only funding you have received recently? Did you receive any money before the government doubled the funding of the Canada Council for the Arts? What did you think of the Canada Council for the Arts' funding request process?

Ms. Joëlle Préfontaine: The last amount UniThéâtre received goes back to the fall of 2017, before I took over this role. Since 2015, we have been receiving \$63,000. Before the new model was implemented, we were told that this was because there was a change in the artistic direction.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Were you already receiving \$63,000 per year?

Ms. Joëlle Préfontaine: Yes. In 2013, that amount was increased to \$70,000. It was then reduced to \$65,000, and then to \$63,000 in 2015.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Okay. Is that an amount you receive annually?

Ms. Joëlle Préfontaine: Yes, that's right. We will submit a multi-year funding application in October.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Okay.

You are a francophone organization in Alberta. So you are in a minority situation. Are you facing additional challenges as far as the Canada Council for the Arts is concerned?

Ms. Joëlle Préfontaine: Yes.

Mr. Pierre Breton: What is the procedure like?

Ms. Petrov, I will have the same question for you.

Ms. Joëlle Préfontaine: Our organization must have a presence across the province, but we find it very difficult to serve all the regions of Alberta. It is very costly to go to the regions if we take into consideration transportation, accommodations and talent fees we pay our artists for their work. However, we strongly believe in that part of our activities and we have once again started to provide workshops in schools to be able to remain in touch with all those people.

It is certain that an increase in subsidies from the Council for the Arts would facilitate that kind of work. It would enable us to go on tour with our creations. We were actually planning an Albertan tour with our production of *La fille du facteur*. That is a play by Josée Thibeault, who has been living in Alberta for 25 years and is a very successful local writer.

Mr. Pierre Breton: I have a question that is not related to the Canada Council for the Arts.

As you are in a minority situation, I assume that you are entitled to subsidies through funding initiatives supporting official languages. Are you involved with those programs?

Ms. Joëlle Préfontaine: Yes, but it depends on the projects.

Last year, we submitted a request to the Canada Council for the Arts for translation of plays and surtitling. All our productions for the general public are subtitled to make them accessible to as many people as possible.

• (1715)

Mr. Pierre Breton: So you are making requests for funding under initiatives supporting official languages, including for your translations, right?

Ms. Joëlle Préfontaine: Yes, to the Canada Council for the Arts.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Very well.

Ms. Petrov, did I understand correctly that you have worked in three different provinces?

Ms. Annemarie Petrov: I am now actually at five: Quebec, New Brunswick, Ontario, since I worked in Ottawa, Manitoba, when I was in Winnipeg, and now Alberta, in Edmonton.

Mr. Pierre Breton: My question is pretty simple.

When it comes to the Canada Council for the Arts, have you noted any differences in terms of the process or the funding across the various provinces where you have worked?

Ms. Annemarie Petrov: That is a very good question, as the situation is complicated.

May I answer in English?

Mr. Pierre Breton: Please do.

[English]

Ms. Annemarie Petrov: Just to make sure the focus stays on the fact that it's really about inequity, suffice it to say that what the Canada Council does in this country is exceptional. It's extraordinary because for me, it's a Canadian priority to make sure that we understand that the arts speak for our culture, and it's one of the best ways that we can get the word out of what it means to be Canadian.

As you can see, I have several years of experience. I've been working in the arts field for almost four decades and it is fascinating to see the importance that the arts play in this. As far as Canada Council goes, its work in the country is incredibly important, but over the years, I have seen a change. Part of it is just as a result of its own success now becoming its downfall. In other words, in the day when the focus was really on artistic excellence, I got it. That was important and there were a lot of great things that happened in the seventies, eighties, and nineties. But the thing is now there isn't an amount of resources that you require to become artistically excellent.

When you don't have the resources, you can't advance your artistic excellence. Those provinces that have less continue to get less, and those provinces that have more continue to get more because they're able to invest in their art.

The Chair: I will have to cut you off there because you're well over time.

We'll now go to Mr. Shields.

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

It's very interesting. It's great to hear from Theatre Calgary. The Arts Commons in Calgary is a great experience in the sense of what you've developed in the arts community with the theatre and galleries in that area. I think it's an excellent promotion of that.

I have a question for the witness from the Winspear Centre. You talked about a conversation you had. What was that conversation with regard to the lack of applications?

Ms. Annemarie Petrov: Do you mean when I was sitting on a jury, for example, at the Canada Council? Is that what you're referring to?

Mr. Martin Shields: You referred to a conversation, but you didn't say what the conversation was. You mentioned all the applications from various places—

Ms. Annemarie Petrov: Right. I've been happy to sit on juries at Canada Council over the years. There is a palpable difference at the jury table when, with the applications you receive, you see the disparity in the country by the volume of the applications and the quality of the applications that are submitted.

Mr. Martin Shields: What's the conversation on the jury when that happens?

Ms. Annemarie Petrov: Then as a representative in my case, because I represent some more of the minority provinces, I speak up, and then that works. Then I'm able to bring a voice to the discussion that brings balance to the conversation. The challenge, as you can appreciate, is that at the jury as well you have a high preponderance of representatives from the Quebec and Ontario areas just because that's where the larger population exists.

• (1720)

Mr. Martin Shields: When you referred to equity, if there was this pot of money and we said equity goes by population, what would the reaction be in the arts community in the country?

Ms. Annemarie Petrov: I can't speak for what it would be across the whole arts community, but I think it would be very defensible and very smart.

Mr. Martin Shields: Would you suggest that people in Ontario and Quebec be willing to give up some of their funding so it could go somewhere else?

Ms. Annemarie Petrov: I can't speak for them, but I would tell you that it's a very defensible and progressive way to think about things.

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes, I agree it's defensible, but you've worked in five provinces and you won't tell me what you think the arts community's reaction would be. I think you have an opinion.

Ms. Annemarie Petrov: I can't speak for the arts community, but I can speak for myself as an artist and being responsible for a pretty significant organization in this country, and say that it's a smart idea. So, yes, I agree with it.

Mr. Martin Shields: Okay.

Ms. Annemarie Petrov: Also, I think I'd agree with that no matter where I lived.

Mr. Martin Shields: I very much appreciate that.

Mr. Jackson, I will ask you the same question. Do you think the arts communities in other provinces would agree if they suddenly gave up a whole lot more dollars to Alberta?

Mr. Jon Jackson: I would echo that I think it's a defensible position. It's one that the government could stand behind.

As to how other provinces would react, I wouldn't be able to speak to that. I've lived in Alberta, and I've been employed in the arts in Alberta. What we in Alberta want is the opportunity to compete on an equal playing field. Right now, with only receiving 5% of the funding despite being 11% of the population, we're not able to. We're seeing an exit of artistic talent from Alberta to go to other provinces.

Mr. Martin Shields: I would agree with that. I saw the Alberta Ballet with Joni Mitchell the other night at the National Arts Centre. That performance was incredible, to see how they're doing that, from Alberta, here. It was incredible to see that kind of performance.

I have one more question for the other witness.

Would you have an opinion on what the arts...? I know where the majority of MPs are in this country, so I know where the pressure is going to come from at the other end, but what do you think the artistic world would say if they had to give up money so it could go to Alberta?

Ms. Joëlle Préfontaine: Maybe we'd have some of our artists who moved away come back, which would be interesting, but I don't think that I can answer that either. I think it would be a bit of a tough transition, but I think that Albertans would be ready to accept the extra flow of money towards the arts. We'd do some great things with it.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Nantel, you have five minutes.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank all of our witnesses for being here.

Ms. Préfontaine can understand me well when I speak in French.

Mr. Jackson, you can hear the interpretation.

Ms. Petrov, you understand French, but you can also use the interpretation to English, no problem.

Ms. Préfontaine, your testimony shows all the importance of the theatre, especially when it comes to children. In addition, you provide surtitles, which is a very good idea. You are engaged in cultural mediation in the country in our official languages.

I must absolutely stop here to share with my colleagues my inability to understand the report on copyright submitted by the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. I will actually move a motion to that effect.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

I think the motion is out of order.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: It may be out of order, but I have already asked for permission to read it. Nice try.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Okay.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: The report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology does not mention our report at all, despite ministers' letters specifically asking that those reports take each other into account, especially the industry committee's report, as we submitted ours before.

In addition, there are major contradictions concerning the cultural community, and people from that community are outraged. They were all very happy with the report we submitted. However, most of the issues they are facing have been ignored by the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. So I feel I have an obligation to move this motion:

That the Committee express its dismay that the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology has chosen to ignore this Committee's report on Remuneration Models for Artists and Creative Industries, in addition to ignoring the reference letter to the Industry Committee from the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, specifically requesting that this Committee's conclusions and "relevant policy considerations" be "accounted for in (their) final report" on Copyright; and that the Committee regret the Government's mismanagement of the mandatory Copyright Review, leading to two contradictory reports, four months before an election, two years late, with no Copyright reform legislation in sight.

I am convinced that people from the creative community can understand that certain things like these, unfortunately, must be done in a committee. As a lover of arts and culture, of Canadian content and of Quebec content, when I see that people feel poorly served by an organization as central as the Canada Council for the Arts, it is definitely disturbing.

Mr. Jackson or Ms. Petrov, changes have been made to the structure by reducing the number of programs and by grouping them into six large programs. To what extent are your problems directly related to that restructuring?

Have you received any signs from the Canada Council for the Arts that the situation would be remedied?

• (1725)

[English]

Mr. Jon Jackson: I will speak to my experience specifically.

From a core funding perspective, it hasn't made a difference. We have been at the same level of funding now with the Canada Council since 2013. On the project funding, which is task-specific or initiative-specific, we were contacted by the Canada Council and encouraged to apply for the digital strategy fund, which is one of the projects that they are really pushing, so we did. We spent about 100 hours on the application only to receive a letter after it had been adjudicated to say that due to our standing on our core grant, we were not eligible to succeed on this grant.

We were told, "Here's an opportunity for you to apply for funding to get better and to improve the quality of your work", only to be told, "We're not going to give you the money because you're not good enough."

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Ms. Petrov, what do you think about the situation I just described?

[*English*]

Ms. Annemarie Petrov: You said a lot.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: There was a big part that was not directed towards you.

Ms. Annemarie Petrov: Okay. What I understood you were asking was whether with the reform that happened at Canada Council we have noticed any changes and any impact from that. That's what you were asking.

No. Like Mr. Jackson, I've not noticed that it impacted the proportional amount of funding that was received.

What I can tell you, because there are nuances to this that make it slightly more complex, is that we actually have a very good

relationship with our program officer in music. He's excellent. All of our dealings with the Canada Council are excellent, but the outcome does not change.

I will say, if I'm speaking specifically for an organization, that we received an increase of late, as did almost every other organization recently. For that we are very grateful, but it comes back down to your question of whether the reform has impacted or changed the way that arts organizations are successful specifically in Alberta. I would say that it has had no impact.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: It's over; time is already up.

[*English*]

I would like to thank the witnesses. It was really helpful to have the addition of your testimony today.

We're going to let you go, and then we have a few minutes of work to do here.

Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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