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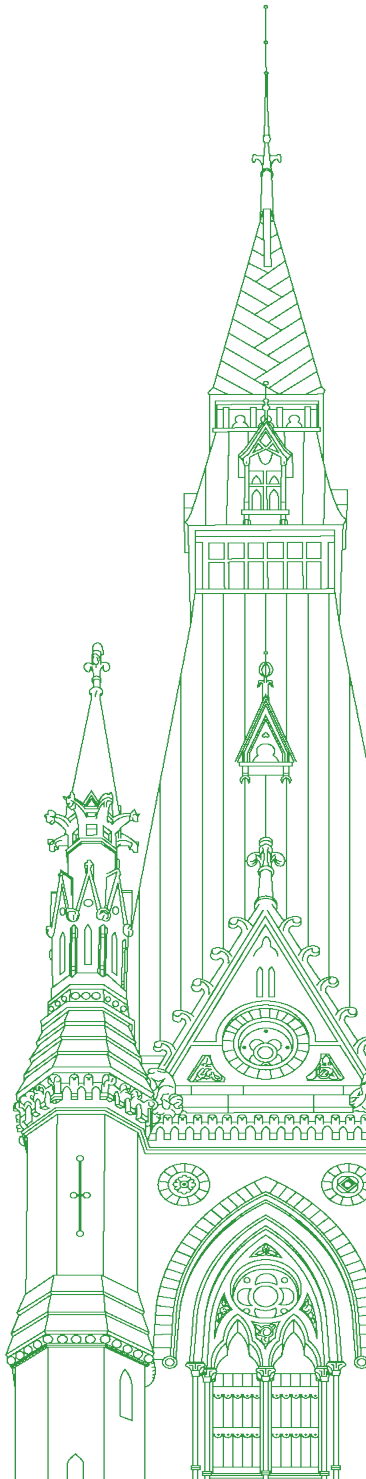

Chair: Lisa Hepfner

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● (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Good morning, everyone. Welcome to meeting number 40 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

Before we begin, I'll ask all in-person participants to read the guidelines written on the cards on the table in front of you. They are measures in place to help prevent audio incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including our interpreters. You will notice that there's a QR code on the card. It links to a short awareness video.

Pursuant to the routine motion adopted by the committee, I can confirm that the witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of this meeting.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

Finally, the clerk has distributed to the members an operating budget of $32,600 for our current study. I need someone to move this for approval.

Alana Hirtle (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): I so move.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hirtle.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are meeting today for our second meeting on our study of the state of creative and performance spaces across Canada.

With us in the room is Christina Santiago Keenan, president and CEO of Secret City Studio. We also have André Myette, executive director, Marigold Cultural Centre. We have Frédéric Messier, president of RIDEAU, who is joining us online. We have S.E. Grummett from So.Glad Arts in the room with us. Online is Kelly Straughan from Theatre Aquarius, one of my favourite places to go. Jonathan Bunce from the Wavelength Music Arts Projects is with us in the room.

Welcome, everyone. Thank you for being here.

Each of you will have five minutes for an opening statement, and then we'll turn to questions from members. We'll start with Secret City Studio.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Christina Santiago Keenan (President and Chief Executive Officer, Secret City Studio): Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee. It's an honour to speak to you today.

I'd like to present to you a case to consider heritage sites as a platform for immersive experiences, a means to support the next generation of artists and a way to build Canada's performing arts and entertainment industry.

There's a clear generational shift in how people relate to narrative entertainment and to each other. The generation that grew up with the Internet didn't just consume content: They participated in it. They built worlds in Minecraft; they co-wrote fan fiction, and they adventured together in virtual worlds. Audiences no longer want to watch. They want to play a part.

We're seeing this behavioural shift in performing art and entertainment everywhere. In music, Jacob Collier, who's lauded as the modern-day Mozart, sells out concert halls, conducting audiences in live vocal harmonies and producing viral content that reaches millions.

In film and TV, Netflix opened Netflix House last year, with permanent venues where fans can step inside their favourite shows and films, from being a participant in *Squid Game* to a Hawkins resident in *Stranger Things*.

In theatre, Punchdrunk transformed a 100,000-square-foot warehouse into a fully immersive set. *Sleep No More* broke the fourth wall and invited audiences to wander freely and follow characters throughout. This ran in New York and Shanghai for over a decade.

These are not fringe experiments. These experiences have entered the mainstream.

What is the opportunity for Canada?

Disney Experiences—a division with parks, resorts and cruises—posted record operating income of $36 billion last year. They built artificial worlds at enormous costs and became a global destination. Canada already has the real thing: Casa Loma, the Village at Black Creek heritage park, Hatley Castle and 1,000 more across the country. These aren't theme parks. They're authentic heritage sites with real stories.

For over 11 years, Secret City has shown what becomes possible when you merge site-specific storytelling with escape room game mechanics and immersive theatre. We've built a world-class, cross-disciplinary creative team of producers, writers, directors, actors, designers and technologists.

In the tunnels and towers of Casa Loma, you get to play World War II U-boat researchers, join Rocco Perri's prohibition gang or sign up as constables recruited to find Canada's beloved Detective Murdoch. At Old Mill Toronto and Peter Pan bistro, we're reimagining dinner theatre where you get to interrogate characters, investigate your meal as part of a puzzle and try to solve a murder.

We've partnered with Fort Edmonton Park and Heritage Park to launch Canada's largest outdoor escape room as part of their nightlife activation, and we recently launched a family-friendly, screen-free video game called “Lost & Found” at the Village at Black Creek, in which players take on quests from townsfolk as if playing a live RPG.

While we take kernels of history and develop them into more modern narratives, the heart of our stories celebrate our values, culture and what it means to be Canadian. We attract tourists and locals alike, as well as a younger and diverse audience who might not have visited these sites otherwise. The good news is that they keep coming back.

Over the last decade, we've shown that when you activate a heritage space in a way that gives people agency and buy-in, they feel a deeper connection to the stories we tell, the places they're in and the people they're with. You make these places matter to a new generation; you make it profitable, and you create ambitious careers for creatives.

What I'm asking this committee for today is to imagine Canada as a global destination for immersive, location-based art and entertainment where stories come to life not behind a preserved velvet rope, but embodied and experienced. To take practical steps towards this vision, I'd ask this committee to consider updating funding programs so that they include this form of participatory performing arts, to invest in the infrastructure needed to make these heritage sites fit for this purpose and to develop partnership frameworks for artists, organizations and businesses to have shared risk, shared reward and a win-win.

Canada has a rare advantage to meet this new generation where they are. We already own the most compelling stages on earth, and we have a rare opportunity to lead what comes next.

Thank you.

● (1105)

The Chair: Now I really want to go to one of your theatres.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: That was great. I kept thinking of more places that would align really well with your idea. Thank you for that.

We'll turn now to the Marigold Cultural Centre.

André Myette, you have the floor for five minutes.

André Myette (Executive Director, Marigold Cultural Centre): Thank you.

Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today.

I'm here representing the Marigold Cultural Centre, located in the heart of Truro, Nova Scotia. We are a not-for-profit, multi-purpose facility, housing a 208-seat theatre, an art gallery and education space, and a celebration of local sports heritage. Day in and day out, we see first-hand what happens when a community gathers in a shared physical space to experience the magic of the performing arts.

I did not travel to Ottawa to speak only about our theatre. I'm here because, as a representative of the wider east coast arts ecosystem, I want to share the broader picture of what our sector is facing right now. Our community is feeling a deep sense of uncertainty about the future.

We cannot talk about supporting the next generation of artists without looking at the stability of the infrastructure that supports them. Recently, the cultural sector in Nova Scotia has experienced significant shifts due to the provincial budget. This included notable reductions to arts and cultural funding, including a 30% reduction to Arts Nova Scotia's budget and the conclusion of several creative programs.

Among those changes was the loss of funding for programs such as artists in schools. These initiatives are vital, because they place professional creators in classrooms, sparking the imaginations of young Nova Scotians who might otherwise never have the chance to experience live theatre, music or visual art.

I must note that these latest budget cuts didn't hit us as hard as others, simply because we had recently received a substantial grant the year prior. That funding was ultimately reduced by 20%. Although losing a portion of our funding presents its challenges, we remain incredibly grateful for the support we receive.

However, while the Marigold is in a position to manage this transition for the time being, many of our peers, including smaller community halls, fringe spaces, grassroots festivals and independent galleries across the province are finding it much more difficult to sustain their operations. When regional grants are reduced by 20% to 30%, it impacts the human resources required to keep these doors open. Without these spaces, we risk losing the next generation of Canadian storytellers to other regions or seeing them step away from their crafts entirely.

Nova Scotia has always punched far above its weight culturally. Our province boasts a wealth of talent that has graced the Marigold stage, featuring artists who have gone on to capture the hearts of the audiences nationwide and globally.

I see one right there. Hey, David.

Every household name started as an emerging artist looking for a welcoming local stage to test their voice. Performance spaces are the true incubators for Canadian identity. If we do not protect and preserve these spaces, the next generation of artists loses the very places in which they can safely learn, grow and perfect their crafts.

Furthermore, let's consider the social impact these spaces have on our youth. In an increasingly digital world, younger generations are navigating growing feelings of isolation. Creative spaces offer a meaningful solution. When a teenager walks into our theatre, puts down their phone and engages with a live performance, it builds empathy and connection. They see their own lived experiences reflected on stage and realize they're part of a larger community. We are protecting a vital social and emotional lifeline for our youth by ensuring these spaces stay funded.

We live in a modern, often distanced society. We've been told for years that everything can be streamed, digitized and experienced from afar, but a screen simply cannot replicate the collective experience of a live audience, the shared connection of a dark theatre or the standing ovation that brings a room of strangers together.

Our performance spaces serve as the civic living rooms for our communities. They are places where we connect, find common ground and celebrate our shared humanity.

The federal government has a meaningful role to play in supporting this ecosystem. When local and provincial funding models shift or fail, federal collaboration and systematic support for infrastructure and operations become essential. I urge this committee to view investments in creative spaces not as secondary expenditures but as essential infrastructure for regional economies, our community well-being and our national identity. Nova Scotia certainly needs it now more than ever.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

● (1110)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Champoux, you have the floor.

Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Chair, I didn't mean to interrupt our witness's remarks.

I would just like to draw the witnesses' attention to the fact that the interpreters are doing their best to keep up with the pace in order to provide the most accurate interpretation possible. Perhaps they could keep in mind that speaking more slowly would make it easier for the interpreters to accurately convey the remarks we're listening to so attentively.

The Chair: Thank you.

Frédéric Messier, from RIDEAU, you now have the floor for five minutes.

Frédéric Messier (President, RIDEAU): Madam Chair, members of the committee, RIDEAU is the professional association of performing arts presenters. We represent close to 170 members, including about 100 performance presenters at about 350 performance spaces in Quebec. Together, our members make it possible to raise the curtain over 20,000 times for nearly 5.2 million audience members each year.

Our members are primarily multidisciplinary presenters. This means that, in a single season, they present works from various performing arts disciplines and also help showcase emerging talent. In their communities, they are often the primary professional gateway to the performing arts. Above all, our members are not merely venue managers, they are a fundamental link in the artistic chain. They select the works, take the artistic risks, build audiences and support the touring of productions across Quebec and Canada. They enable works to leave their birthplace to reach audiences in major urban centres and across the regions.

For the next generation of artists, their role is crucial. An emerging artist doesn't just need a space to create; they need a venue willing to program and promote their work, and to take an artistic risk.

Supporting presenters also means supporting the artists and companies that depend on works going out on tour to advance their careers and reach their audiences. That's why our message today is unambiguous: If performance spaces become vulnerable, Canada's entire capacity to support its artists, take its works out on tour and reach Canadian audiences also becomes vulnerable. Unfortunately, this vulnerability is already very palpable.

Yet, presenters make a significant contribution to the economy. A study conducted for RIDEAU by the Canadian Association for the Performing Arts found that its members generate $23.7 million in net tax revenue for various levels of government. Their local impact is also significant. A study commissioned by Réseau Scènes estimates that, each year, its member presenters in the Greater Montreal area generate an average of $2.38 million in indirect economic spinoffs in their communities.

Unfortunately, despite these well-documented contributions, presenters remain underfunded. Before the pandemic, multidisciplinary presenters received less than 30% of their total revenue, on average, from public funding, with barely 2.9% coming from the federal government.

The Canada arts presentation fund is one of the few federal tools that directly recognize the role of organizations that present professional arts festivals or performing arts series. The government has announced a $46.5 million investment in this fund over three years, starting in fiscal year 2026-27.

This is a step in the right direction, but it's still woefully inadequate given the real increase in costs and the responsibilities assumed by presenters. Today, presenters must contend with rising operating costs across the board. The financial model for live performance relies heavily on ticket sales, but according to RIDEAU data, over 70% of any show's revenue is already absorbed by artist fees, royalties and performance rights before presenters can even cover their own expenses.

Now, add to this the issue of maintaining assets and infrastructure. A recent report by Théâtres associés shows that the net cost of performance space management increased by 53% between fiscal year 2017-18 and fiscal year 2023-24, while inflation was at 20.4%. Every dollar spent on maintaining infrastructure is a dollar that doesn't go to programming, artists, emerging talent or audience development. We cannot claim to support the next generation of artists if the spaces that must welcome them, showcase them and help them gain exposure are themselves placed in a state of constant vulnerability.

RIDEAU therefore makes three recommendations.

First, the Canada arts presentation fund should be substantially increased so that it can adequately meet the needs of presenters and reflect the reality of presentation costs, as well as the strategic role presenters play in artists' careers.

Second, a strong federal capacity for cultural infrastructure should be re-established—one that is not limited to specialized equipment but also supports asset maintenance, renovations, universal accessibility, the energy transition, climate adaptation and venue safety.

Third, presenters should be explicitly recognized as essential partners in any strategy for emerging talent. The next generation will not develop solely through creation; they will develop through engagement with audiences, the exposure of works and performance spaces' ability to take artistic risks.

● (1115)

For decades, governments have invested in a network of cultural venues that constitutes a collective heritage, but this network cannot be taken for granted. Without strong performance spaces, there is no way to sustainably guarantee that works gain exposure. Without strong presenters, there is no equitable access to the performing arts. Without engagement with audiences, there is no true career advancement for artists.

Thank you very much. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Next I will turn to So.Glad Arts, and S.E. Grummett is in the room.

You have the floor now for five minutes.

S.E. Grummett (Performer and Creator, Creepy Boys, So.Glad Arts): Thank you.

I'm Grumms. I go by S.E. Grummett professionally, and I use the pronouns they and them. I'm a transgender theatre artist from Treaty 6 territory, Saskatoon. I'm here today representing So.Glad Arts, a queer theatre company based in Saskatoon. As well, I'm one half of the performance art comedy theatre duo Creepy Boys.

After graduating from theatre school over a decade ago, I became increasingly frustrated with the limited opportunities for trans artists like myself within mainstream theatre. I wasn't seeing artists like me on stage or the kind of work I wanted to make. I started making and touring my own things. For me, self-creation was and continues to be a way out.

In 2016, I founded So.Glad Arts, an independent theatre company with a focus on creating new queer and queer-led performances. Over the past decade, So.Glad Arts has grown from producing locally to touring on an international scale to 11 different countries, presenting work at some of the biggest arts festivals and venues in the world. As a company, we have also shifted from producing in fringe and indie spaces to more year-round national and international touring, as well as curated festivals, professional commissions and presentations.

In 2024, we received creative export Canada funding for a 10-week U.K. and European tour of our queer clown show, *Creepy Boys*, touring it to five different countries: Ireland, Iceland, the U.K., Germany and Denmark. This tour allowed us to solidify our profile in the U.K. and Europe, and it allowed us to build relationships with international venues and presenters. One in particular, LiteraturHaus in Copenhagen, has since invited us back for a two-week Denmark tour in 2025 and is presenting our new show, *Slugs*, later this fall. This includes supporting us in building additional tour stops across Denmark. These relationships with international presenters would not have been possible without this funding. This tour also allowed us to lay the groundwork for future touring and allowed us to build our audiences abroad.

Now, two years later, we are still seeing the real impact of this funding. Last August, we premiered our new show, *Slugs*, at the largest arts festival in the world, the Edinburgh Fringe, to success far beyond our wildest dreams. For context, the Edinburgh Fringe is an incredibly competitive and difficult market, with over 4,000 different shows in the month-long festival; there is everything from large-scale musicals that end up in the West End to someone's grandma putting on their first-ever show in the basement of a burrito restaurant.

It was here that *Slugs* sold out its entire run; received 14 four- and five-star reviews, including one from The Guardian; won two awards; and was nominated for the largest award in its category, the Edinburgh Comedy Award. This is often called the "Oscars of Comedy". Past nominees include Flight of the Conchords, Suzy Eddie Izzard and fellow Canadian Mae Martin. Not only did *Slugs* have financial and critical success far beyond what we imagined, but we found that the international audience at the festival devoured it, with every single performance ending in a standing ovation. I believe our success with this show is directly related to the funding we received, allowing us to dream bigger and go further.

This international success has continued to open doors at home in Canada that we previously thought to be out of reach for us as scrappy prairie artists. This includes a recent presentation at PuSh International Performing Arts Festival and the upcoming CINARS Biennale, which are some of Canada's largest and most prestigious arts marketplaces. We're currently gearing up for our largest international tour yet in 2026, our second international tour just this year.

I'm a weird kid from the prairies, so I never really imagined myself touring across the country, let alone internationally. Saskatchewan artists are vastly under-represented on both national and international stages, but because of this funding, all of this has been possible. The funding we received from Canadian Heritage— as well as provincial funding and Canada Council for the Arts funding— is the backbone of our recent success and, frankly, our entire careers.

It has taken years of building relationships and gaining international recognition, as well as experience in producing at an increasingly large scale, to prime us for our recent critical and commercial breakthrough. If we did not have the funding to support us through each stage from development to production and touring, it is incredibly unlikely that we would have created the boundary-pushing work we have been so recently recognized for. We likely would never have been able to share that work with an international audience, particularly one that is largely unfamiliar with Canadian performance. Funding has allowed us to ask big questions, take bold risks and be a part of an international conversation about performance.

Abroad, when people talk to us after a show, we are often met with the phrase, "And you're Canadian?" This is meant as a compliment. We always take this as a moment when someone realizes that their perception of what is Canadian, and what Canada is, has changed. This audience member is now offered a window into the complicated, beautiful, intellectual, hilarious mess that is the place we come from. I ask for this committee to ensure that this funding continues to be accessible for small companies—and indie artists—like the one I come from.

● (1120)

With funding like this from Canadian Heritage, I believe we can see more outcomes like ours: emerging voices from unexpected places, work that takes big swings and bold creative risks, and work that is uniquely Canadian and unlike anything else in the world.

The Chair: Thank you. Congratulations on all your success.

S.E. Grummett: Thank you.

The Chair: I will turn next to Kelly Straughan from Theatre Aquarius. She is online.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Kelly Straughan (Executive Director, Theatre Aquarius): Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Kelly Straughan, and I am the executive director of Theatre Aquarius in Hamilton, Ontario.

For 53 years, Theatre Aquarius has been a cornerstone of Hamilton's arts community. We are the only professional theatre in the city. We own our building, which includes a 702-seat mainstage theatre, a 120-seat studio space, a carpentry shop, a rehearsal hall and a beautiful lobby space. We produce five main-stage shows each season, as well as three studio productions. We employ more than 300 people each year, from artists, directors and designers to production personnel.

We are deeply committed to supporting Canadian artists. In the last five years alone, 22 of the 29 productions on our mainstage were written by Canadians and featured Canadian casts and creative teams.

Theatre Aquarius is also home to the national centre for new musicals, a program dedicated to the development of new Canadian musicals. Since its launch in 2023, we have supported eight new musicals, with more than a quarter of a million dollars in funding. Our commitment to new musicals also extends to our mainstage, including our recent production of *It's a Good Life If You Don't Weaken*, featuring the music of The Tragically Hip.

Within our community, we are one of the primary supporters of local artists through programs such as our Brave New Works festival, which supports development of new Canadian plays; Biindigan, our indigenous mentorship program; our artist residency program, offering free rehearsal and performance space; our apprentice program, dedicated to supporting IBPOC and female-identifying individuals pursuing careers in technical theatre and production; and our theatre school and summer camps, which engage more than 500 children and youth each year.

Truly, I could go on and on. This is only the tip of the iceberg. The work happening in our theatre extends far beyond what most people see on stage.

While our ambitions continue to grow, the reality of operating our building comes with significant capital pressures. I come to you today as a voice for those of us with venues to make sure we are a part of the conversation.

For example, Aquarius recently undertook a $600,000 roof restoration project to keep the building operational after rain began leaking onto the stage and into our costume storage areas. We also need to replace theatre seating that is more than 30 years old, and we need to install a new elevator. Every year expenses grow, and we cannot raise ticket prices to match the increase. It would make coming to the theatre unaffordable for most people.

The Canada cultural spaces fund provides a valuable support for specialized equipment, but where can arts organizations turn for assistance with essential building repairs and capital needs? Across the country, many arts organizations are operating in aging facilities that require significant investment simply to remain functional. Every dollar spent repairing a roof is a dollar that cannot be invested in artistic programming. For theatres that own and operate their venues, this is an ongoing and difficult reality that directly affects our ability to fulfill our cultural mandate.

What can be done to help theatres across Canada?

Well, I encourage this committee to seriously consider the live performing arts accelerator, a labour tax credit modelled after successful film and television incentives. This credit would offer a 25% tax rebate on production-related labour expenses.

I know this idea is not new to you. The performing arts sector has been advocating for the implementation of this credit for several years. It would be a game-changer for our industry, allowing us to invest more in productions, employ more people and alleviate some of the financial pressures faced by theatres like Aquarius.

It is also worth pointing out that theatre buildings and all the activities held within their walls animate downtowns, create employment and support tourism. We are economic drivers. Last year, approximately 125,000 people attended more than 265 performances at Theatre Aquarius. A full theatre means thriving downtowns. For example, our recent production of the Tragically Hip musical generated an estimated $6 million in economic impact.

The value of the arts is undeniable. The future of Canadian culture depends not only on the artists but also on the spaces that make artistic creation possible. Without support, we risk losing the very foundations that allow Canadian stories to be created and experienced.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of Theatre Aquarius.

● (1125)

The Chair: Thank you for everything that Theatre Aquarius does for Hamilton.

Finally, we have Jonathan Bunce from Wavelength Music Arts Projects here in the room.

You now have the floor for five minutes.

Jonathan Bunce (Artistic and Executive Director, Wavelength Music Arts Projects): Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee. It's wonderful to have the opportunity to speak to you alongside my esteemed colleagues.

My name is Jonathan Bunce. I am the co-founder and artistic and executive director of Wavelength Music, a non-profit organization in Toronto that has supported emerging Canadian artists for more than 25 years through concerts and festivals, and now a conference. I'm also a co-author of two recent research studies on the wider independent live music sector: “Reimagining Music Venues” and a forthcoming report titled “New Sounds, New Spaces”.

Across Canada, there are hundreds of creative and performance spaces that are largely invisible at a policy level. These are grassroots music venues, as well as rehearsal spaces, artist hubs and DIY community cultural spaces. These spaces are where artists develop their craft, build audiences and launch their careers, yet most survive with little to no public support and operate primarily as commercial businesses.

The central finding of our research is simple: Creative and performance spaces are cultural infrastructure, but Canada largely treats them as commercial real estate. This creates what I would call a “value-capture” problem.

The Canadian live music sector generates more than $10 billion annually and supports over 100,000 jobs, yet many of the artists, venues and community organizations that generate this cultural activity are the least financially secure participants in this whole system. Too much of the economic value flows elsewhere—to landlords, ticketing companies, multinational promoters and surrounding real estate—while the cultural infrastructure at the foundation of the ecosystem remains chronically undercapitalized.

Our research points to three key challenges.

First, Canada is losing the lower and middle rungs of the cultural ladder. Emerging artists depend on affordable small and mid-sized spaces to perform, rehearse, experiment and build audiences. Despite their high demand, these spaces face rising rents, insurance costs and operating expenses. If we care about the next generation of Canadian artists, then we must care about the spaces in which they get started.

Second, the market alone is not solving the problem. Artists feel that they're underpaid; audiences feel that tickets are too expensive, and venue operators face increasing costs. The issue is not a lack of demand for culture; it's that the economics of providing cultural space no longer work on their own.

We invest in libraries, recreation centres and museums because they produce public benefit. Grassroots performance spaces also produce public benefit, yet they are expected to survive on limited commercial revenue alone. Primarily, that means sales of refreshments.

Accessibility is another consequence of this market failure. In high-cost cities, such as Toronto, cultural organizations are often forced into the oldest and least expensive buildings they can find. Such spaces are rarely fully accessible, forcing operators to choose between affordability and accessibility, when both should be a top priority.

When we look internationally, particularly to countries in Europe, we see a different approach. Local governments frequently provide underutilized buildings to cultural organizations at low cost and support them with ongoing operational funding. These spaces are then able to focus on culture rather than mere survival.

Third, cultural spaces require ongoing stewardship, not just capital funding. The recent insolvency of Artscape in Toronto offers an important lesson. The challenge is not simply building cultural spaces; it's ensuring that they remain affordable and mission-driven 20 years later. Capital funding alone is not enough; long-term operating support matters too.

I'd like to leave the committee with four recommendations.

First, recognize grassroots creative spaces as essential cultural infrastructure.

Second, create dedicated capital and operating support streams for community-based creative and performance spaces. We welcome the ongoing support of the Canada arts presentation fund and the Canada cultural spaces fund, and we would love to see these programs not just renewed but have their budgets increased to match not only inflation but also the economic realities we live in now in the 2020s.

Third, support a national network approach to cultural infrastructure—music hubs, rehearsal facilities, artist workspaces and performance venues distributed across communities rather than concentrated in a handful of major institutions.

Fourth, develop a national cultural space strategy that supports community ownership, long-term affordable tenancy and operational sustainability. International examples such as the U.K.'s Music Venue Trust or the Trans Europe Halles network demonstrate how community ownership can protect cultural spaces from displacement and rising rents. Canadian examples, such as Hugh's Room Live and It's OK* Studios, both in Toronto, show that similar approaches can work here as well, though they're still in their infancy.

Twenty-five years ago, Ontario's cultural renaissance invested heavily in major institutions, such as the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Four Seasons Centre. A national approach should complement those investments with support for the smaller grassroots spaces in which future generations of Canadian artists will be developed. It's time for a cultural renaissance 2.0.

● (1130)

In closing, Canada is known globally for our successful work to support artistic creation and presentation. We've been less successful at supporting the essential physical spaces in which culture grows. Europe doesn't simply subsidize art; it also subsidizes the spaces in which art happens. If we fail to invest in those spaces, we risk losing the infrastructure that makes Canadian culture possible in the first place.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now turn to questions from members, starting with Mrs. Thomas for six minutes.

You have the floor.

Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you so much.

Thank you to each of you for taking the opportunity to come here today to share your successes as well as your needs and the opportunities that you see within the industry.

My first questions are for S.E. Grummett.

You talked quite a bit about your success overall and the fact that federal funding helped make it possible for you to take your show, *Creepy Boys*, to places in Europe and the U.K. Did you say Iceland as well?

S.E. Grummett: Yes.

Rachael Thomas: That's very cool.

In terms of taking that funding and exporting a product, you talked about its being uniquely Canadian. Talk about the show itself and how it's a reflection of Canada's culture.

S.E. Grummett: It's a reflection of Canada's culture because it's made by two Canadians. This is the thing I feel strongly about: When we go internationally, people have an assumption of what Canada is, because it's what we've been putting out there forever, but it's two scrappy little queer guys. Anything we do on stage is very distinctly different, and it's connecting deeply with audiences internationally.

We really try to put Canadian art in a box, but anything that exists outside of that also deserves to be funded, because it shows that this place is more than one thing. It's more than just polite, nice theatre performances, music and dance. It can be anything, and it can be everything.

Rachael Thomas: What I'm trying to drill down into here.... I appreciate what you're saying. The funding would come under Canadian Heritage, which now is very much, as the name would suggest, focused on creating a sense of Canadian identity and conveying our values as a nation.

You made a list of some things that were not just these, but then, what are we, and what's being reflected in the art form that you're presenting?

● (1135)

S.E. Grummett: Specifically, I'm going to get into the nitty-gritty of the performance style we use.

Often, when we're touring in Europe, we'll see this style of clown that is very European, or we'll see a style that is a very LA clown, which is very ironic and sarcastic. To me, there's this beauty of Canadian performance, at least in the realms that I play in, that is a lot more open-hearted and has a lot more care for the audience without being saccharine and without being hand-holdy.

It comes back to the artistic lineage of the clown practice here in Canada. It came from a practitioner named Richard Pochinko, who studied the European clown style and then brought it back and worked.... He was a bit more of a 1970s hippie. The Canadian clown scene has grown up out of that practice, and it presents something really different from what you see, let's say, at the Edinburgh Fringe and other clown performances, which tend to be a lot more ironic. Our work is dark, but it's not hopeless. I think there is a hope that we try to bring.

My clown teacher would often say, “What is the gift for the audience? What is the gift you're giving them?” In the work we make, for us, it's giving our audiences—who tend to be a lot of younger, poorer, queer folks—a sense of catharsis and a sense of feeling that they're not alone. Particularly in the work we make and in the work that a lot of the other folks here make, we're aiming for things that you could only create there in that moment that's interactive with the audience. We're all here in a special shared space, as “hippie woo-woo” as that sounds.

That's the thing that is so needed right now, and we're seeing that from audiences. There's a show called *Every Brilliant Thing* that's on Broadway right now that is just completely selling out, and I think it is because it is interactive. It is asking something of the audience, which is to be a participant in the art.

That is something we do really well here, and it doesn't often get an opportunity to be seen internationally.

Rachael Thomas: That was great. Thank you.

These comments about participatory art forms were also made by Christina Santiago Keenan.

What does that participation look like in your show?

S.E. Grummett: For us, we build audience participation moments from a place of consent. I often use the phrase “being a good clown” or “being a good host” and make sure that folks feel included. My first solo show was getting audience members to yell things out. We play games together. In a more recent show, we were in the audience, crawling through them.

The thing we're going for is, what can audiences not get at home on their screens? That's something we try to present as an alternative. I've done a show in which we're all dressed up as houses, roaming around through the public space. People get to interact and play with us, and that is always very interesting. It's something very unique in terms of what your day-to-day, going on Netflix or something like that might look like.

I hope that answers your question.

Rachael Thomas: I think so, yes.

I think that's basically my time.

The Chair: You had 10 seconds.

Rachael Thomas: That's not enough to ask my question.

I'll come back.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Al Soud, it's over to you for six minutes.

Fares Al Soud (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you all for being with us today.

Ms. Santiago Keenan and Mr. Myette, not long ago I was at the Mississauga art gallery for the media launch of Polish Day. It's an annual festival that happens in my beautiful riding of Mississauga Centre, at Celebration Square, and it really celebrates Polish Canadian heritage.

The gallery itself isn't all that big, but it fulfills a variety of functions, in part because it has to in order to stay financially viable. As you all know well, this is increasingly a reality for public arts venues.

Secret City Studio partners with major companies like Netflix and Nintendo while operating in cultural spaces across Toronto, Vancouver and Edmonton. You're also very unique in our arts ecosystem in that you blend commercial entertainment and immersive storytelling in public cultural spaces.

The Marigold Cultural Centre serves as a theatre, a gallery, a sports hall of fame and an educational space all under one roof.

I'd like to offer you both the opportunity to speak to either the increasing need to rely on commercial partnerships or on multi-use business models to stay commercially viable.

● (1140)

Christina Santiago Keenan: One thing I'm very proud of about Secret City is that for the last 10 years we have not had to pay rent—touch wood. Because we have taken shared risks with our partners, we've been able to find the win-wins. At Casa Loma, at nighttime, nobody's walking through the towers. I wonder what's happening here at nighttime.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Christina Santiago Keenan: You can activate these spaces and bring new people to places they wouldn't have otherwise. It's really crucial for our business to partner with these venues.

In terms of the more commercial studios, it's really helpful to reach audiences who think that escape rooms or immersive theatre are these fringe things. They're actually quite accessible, and what makes them accessible is the stories that people can connect to.

André Myette: For us, it's mostly trying to leverage our own community and people who support the arts in going through sponsorships for shows. That helps significantly, as does trying to find ways to make extra money or save some where we can through partnerships, with some of the alcohol we sell in our bar or things to that effect.

Partnering with community groups is certainly something that I'm very passionate about, because I came to this theatre from being part of a community theatre group. Leveraging that, our community and the wonderful patrons that we have, as well as a membership that we offer, has been very helpful.

As far as the commercial side of things goes, yes, basically reaching out and trying to find help with funding some of those shows through sponsorships has helped a lot with some of the more expensive shows. As a not-for-profit, we generally try not to make very much profit or lose money, but we also want to try to keep it as affordable as possible so the tickets can be affordable for the community. That's what we try our best to do. Thankfully there are many local businesses that help. We could use more, but you could always use more. That helps a lot.

Fares Al Soud: Fantastic.

Thank you both.

Mr. Bunce, you have an incredibly rich depth of experience in the realities of accessing venues, funding and touring infrastructure. In an interview with CTV, you noted, “Original live music is actually one of Canada's biggest cultural exports, and without these vital spaces to incubate original music, we might see this...die out.” You also said, “You can't get all the way up to the Rogers Stadium without going along all the steps [on] the ladder.”

I'd like to offer you the opportunity to expand on that, as well as on your report in partnership with U of T.

Jonathan Bunce: Thank you so much. I appreciate that.

Yes, the venue ladder is a really interesting concept, in that we often see more media visibility for the top end of the venue ladder—Rogers Stadium, Rogers Centre and other places named after telecoms. The major arenas, which are really important, are the end goal for some, but not all, artists. Not all artists are going to rise up the venue ladder.

At Wavelength, we specialize in the lower rungs of the ladder, mostly the small or middle venues that have a capacity of 500 and under. These are the spaces in which you've seen, historically, music scenes develop—the small stages that might be your neighbourhood café, the neighbourhood bar or a small to mid-sized concert theatre. These spaces were the kinds of places that, traditionally, if you were an emerging band, a garage band, you could book at no cost. That element has really gone away.

In the music scene that I came up in, during the 1990s and into the 2000s, the accessibility of these spaces for emerging artists was key to unbridled creativity in the music scene. If you could get a Tuesday night at a bar like Sneaky Dee's in Toronto, you could put on a show with three other bands; you could charge a modest ticket price, and your friends would come. That's how scenes developed across all genres.

Avril Lavigne, The Weeknd and Drake all started out in these small rooms, and then some of them climbed the venue ladder. Other artists who put out music that is just as amazing might reach a lower level on the ladder, but that's still important.

Now, postpandemic, we've seen that these spaces, even these small venues, can no longer afford to allow emerging artists or presenters to book space at no cost. Now we're seeing facility fees. As those cost barriers increase, ticket prices get passed on to the consumer—that's why you see rising ticket prices—and of course, that starts to create a negative feedback loop in which people go out less. You then see less viability and less support for these concerts, especially when, at the higher end of the venue ladder, you see more corporate consolidation going on. When there is one multinational promoter that also owns one of the biggest ticketing companies in the world, that's what causes ticket prices for the bigger concerts to increase; that eats up people's entertainment dollars, and they have less money to go out to support smaller artists.

● (1145)

Fares Al Soud: Thank you all.

The Chair: That was really valuable testimony. I think it gets right to the heart of why we even called for this study. It also took me back to my days working at the El Mocambo in Toronto when I was in journalism school.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Champoux, you have the floor for six minutes.

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I, too, want to thank the witnesses for appearing before the committee this morning to share their experiences, their expertise, their recommendations and, in some cases, their grievances.

I'm going to speak with you, Mr. Messier, from RIDEAU, who is joining us online today.

You talked about your organization, but I want to go into a bit more detail about the members you represent, because they are very diverse. There aren't just members in Quebec, and all kinds of members are part of the RIDEAU association: cultural centres, performance spaces and a large number of small and medium-sized festivals.

However, I believe there's a recurring issue for many of your members who stage performances. You mentioned it in your opening remarks: It's the maintenance of the buildings. Even though this study is still in its early stages, we've already heard about this situation, which poses a major problem for many performing arts presenters and theatre companies, among others, who have to manage buildings that are often dilapidated—and for which there is simply not much support for restoration and maintenance. Often, as you said, they have to cut back on their programming budget.

I'd like us to discuss this further. Tell me about what this means in terms of problems and challenges for troupes and organizations that are already forced to manage an extremely tight budget.

Frédéric Messier: Yes, as you said, this is becoming a very serious concern, because, as you are no doubt aware, maintenance costs and fixed costs in general have risen significantly for owners, and even, in some cases, for tenants of performance spaces.

There is also an economic factor: Demands and needs are increasing in an economic context where public funding is gradually being scaled back, both at the federal and provincial levels, as we can also see.

We therefore find ourselves in situations where we are forced to redirect funds normally earmarked for our mission—funds that should be used to pay artist fees, cover travel and accommodations for professional technicians, welcome audience members in a highly professional manner or fund promotional activities. We sometimes have to use these funds to cover the costs of maintaining and upkeeping assets and equipment, for which support is becoming increasingly scarce and difficult to obtain.

So that is certainly a problem.

Martin Champoux: That means that a producer might decide to choose one production over another because that production will involve lower costs and, for example, fewer actors on stage, fewer technicians and fewer staff members to pay. So it's not just this organization that will be affected; in a way, it will ultimately affect the entire cultural sector.

Frédéric Messier: Yes. As you say, we mainly see that this can impact the producer's decision regarding the structure of their show. However, what we see most of all is that shows are touring the regions less frequently. Productions won't necessarily be smaller, but they'll tour less, because the cost of moving them has become too high.

In Quebec's case, we therefore have a large network of performance spaces covering the entire province, but shows are no longer reaching its outlying areas as well as they used to. This is a really serious concern for us. We are documenting it more and more, because this is a trend that is accelerating and significant.

Martin Champoux: You see this when you are out in the regions. We often see productions that are very successful in major urban centres, but when they are presented in the regions, they have a smaller cast to be more flexible, as you say. Deep down, we know very well that it's underfunding that forces the troupes to do this.

Let's go back to the issue of performance spaces. In your recommendations, you refer to performing arts presenters as essential links and partners.

That leads me to believe that this disengagement or lack of recognition on the part of the federal government toward performing arts presenters will, in the long run, result in disengagement or disinterest among your members. At some point, some may decide they're fed up with being forced to cut back and make sacrifices they never should have had to make before, and that they'd rather do something else. We see this a lot. We saw it during the pandemic as well: Technicians and actors decided to leave the profession to do something else, because it had become too difficult.

Is this also becoming a trend among performance arts presenters, who say they're going to do something else, or among performance space owners, who say they're ultimately going to do something else with their space?

● (1150)

Frédéric Messier: First of all, what's certain is that we're seeing fatigue build up in the teams. There are more and more sick leaves, and, generally speaking, the precarious state of mental health is a cause for concern. This stems from the fact that they don't necessarily have the resources needed to achieve their ends. So, they've had to get used to working miracles on a daily basis with the resources they have, which is exhausting and draining. We see this a lot.

Next, regarding today's topic, I would say that without strong performance spaces willing to do what it takes to champion a work, draw audiences into the space and facilitate encounters between the audience, the artist and the work, the creative funding policy certainly loses a lot of its impact. The work is funded and created, but if it has only a few performances, or even just one performance in a major urban centre, if it doesn't tour or reach audiences, we're kind of missing the mark.

There is a concept that you amplify the impact when you have a robust performance network capable of taking a production and bringing it to audiences everywhere.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Waugh, you now have the floor for five minutes. Are you ready?

Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon South, CPC): I'm ready.

May I call you “Grumms”?

S.E. Grummett: Yes. I like that as a first name.

Kevin Waugh: Congratulations: At university in 2016, you earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts honours degree.

Was Henry Woolf involved?

S.E. Grummett: No, he was gone by then.

Kevin Waugh: He was.

Talk about the city of Saskatoon. I'm from there. You've been there. It's a unique city for arts.

S.E. Grummett: It is.

It's the big city in a.... It's the central hub. Artists from all over the province end up there, which is quite a unique space. It's not quite Edmonton or Winnipeg in terms of an arts scene.

My mentor, Yvette Nolan, calls artists from there theatre rats. We do a bit of everything. You're doing a little stage design. You're doing a little directing and writing. Certainly my bachelor's degree was that. We would put on plays at lunch with our friends.

I feel that my performance practice, which is now international, is still that. It's getting in a room with friends and putting on shows.

I think Saskatoon has a really hard time being able to pay folks proper wages in the arts. A lot of the time, you're doing a profit share, so you're having to rely on ticket sales. Even then, I've done shows there and, at the end of them, you've been working for months and months, and you make $200. That's certainly the indie scene.

Then you have more established theatres, such as Persephone Theatre and Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan, which is our summer Shakespeare festival. I find that, right now, those institutions are programming a lot of what I would say are safe bets, with things that are known IP or a Disney sort of musical. Those institutions aren't working with local playwrights. They're not working with local artists to create something new.

Persephone in particular—pre-pandemic, anyways—cut its entire back, deep-end series. It was not its mainstage 400-seater, but a 90-seater where a lot of young emerging playwrights and even actors would come out. They would do smaller-scale, newer Canadian work.

I had to turn to the fringe festival circuit to start making and honing my own voice, as well as the indie theatre scene, Live Five. That's where those profit shares come from, when you can't pay yourself. Most artists there will have to juggle two day jobs, even though the rents aren't like they are in Toronto or Vancouver.

● (1155)

Kevin Waugh: That's one of the questions I had for you.

Are you making a living today, or do you have a second job?

S.E. Grummett: I am making a living.

Kevin Waugh: Okay.

S.E. Grummett: I do this full-time.

I think it's because I left. I think it's because I tour. There wasn't enough work for me there to work only in Saskatoon and Saskatchewan.

Kevin Waugh: I agree with you.

I've been down to the Fringe Festival lots on Broadway, but it's not the same now. I don't know if COVID changed everything, but it's struggling.

You're lucky. You worked very hard, and you were rewarded.

What kind of advice would you give those following you? When we look at your résumé, you check a lot of the boxes.

S.E. Grummett: I think the real success we've had is because of being able to access funding.

The Canadian fringe circuit is very different from Edinburgh, for example

The Canadian fringe circuit is all lottery-based. You'll put your name in a hat and, if you're drawn, you get an opportunity to do a show. What's great is the access; the barrier to entry is much lower. You pay something like $700. You get your venue, technician, seven performances and registration in the festival. Oftentimes these festivals will house you as well.

You have this gaggle of artists that will go from city to city throughout a summer touring a show. That's what I came up in. I was doing that for a few summers.

With Edinburgh, on the other hand, the joke is that you could sell out your whole season, and we did. If we hadn't had funding, we would have lost $10,000. It is so expensive to do. The barrier to entry, to be seen on those international stages, is high.

I agree about the Saskatoon Fringe Festival. I worked for them in their first summer back after COVID, and it was a struggle. It is a struggle.

I think artists—on that circuit, anyway—will often just do the fringe festival in the summer. Some were full professional artists throughout the full year. There's no bridge between those fringe festivals and professional mainstage shows, particularly in the pay and prices.

Kevin Waugh: Let me ask you this, because I'm running out of time: What was the application process when you got an $11,000 grant from Canadian Heritage? I think that's what we all want to hear. What was that process about?

S.E. Grummett: For me, the questions on those applications are very different from those when applying for something from the Canada Council for the Arts, where you're speaking to a jury of peers. I've gotten this advice from program officers there. You just want to nerd out about the thing you want to make. Canadian Heritage is a lot more about corporate speak, which I am not used to, as an indie artist. I think I benefited from a funding organization in Saskatchewan called Creative Saskatchewan, which was a huge stepping stone for me because it allows us to apply for things like marketing costs, which are so important in these big festivals.

Those applications are a bit of a barrier. I'm somebody who's very good at math, at doing a budget and at knowing how to talk to those forms because of Creative Sask. I don't know whether other artists would be able to answer effectively and get that funding.

Kevin Waugh: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Rachael Thomas): I'm sorry. That's time. Thank you very much.

We're going over to MP Hirtle for five minutes.

Alana Hirtle: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I really wish I could take you all out for a beer afterwards. This is so cool. This is so amazing.

We'll go to Mr. Myette.

You mentioned youth programming in your statement. I wonder if you could expand a bit on what kind of youth programming happens at the Marigold.

André Myette: There are several organizations that operate out of the Marigold with youth programming built into their infrastructure.

Hubtown Theatre is one. They have a youth players group. We also host a spotlight theatre every year, at which kids audition for a play. They get to come in, learn every step of the way and put on a production at the end of it. There's another theatre camp we do throughout the summer months. Summer is a harder sell for tickets in our area. Usually, the weather's nice, so people like to get out and do stuff. This gives us a way to offer something to the community while offering students and kids something to do during the summer months.

Alana Hirtle: That's amazing. Thank you.

I'm from the same town, just so you know. I've been in the Marigold many times when there was an event in the theatre, a rehearsal in the workshop and something else happening in the boardroom. Obviously, there's demand for space there.

What would you say are the most significant barriers facing artists and community organizations seeking access to affordable rental studio performance spaces?

● (1200)

André Myette: It's cost. Everything is very expensive. Our building is an older building. It was originally a movie theatre many years ago, and it was then converted into a performing arts centre. Look at what it costs just to fix the heating system. We've gone through that quite a bit this past year, as well as during the winter. It seems as if every time we think we have a handle on it, something else happens. As far as keeping those costs as low as we can, on top of all the other things....

When it comes to the performing part of it—the acts we get in—we walk an interesting line. We're trying to provide theatre for our community in an affordable way, but we also want to bring them cool acts that appeal to many different multicultural groups. To find a way to do that—to charge a low ticket price so people can get out, and to afford those acts....

The most significant barriers, I would say, are fees. We're trying to pay artists what they're worth but also keep the ticket prices low enough that our community can afford to come out and enjoy a night of culture.

Alana Hirtle: Thank you for that.

As a rough guess, how many days would you say the theatre is dark in the run of a year?

André Myette: Oh, it's not that many, thankfully, because we do a lot of community stuff. We have theatre groups, and we offer them free space to rehearse. They rent the theatre for when they do performances, but they get free space to rehearse. We have all the different classes, rehearsal spaces and boardrooms. As a rental space, we have a lot of organizations using us for AGMs, community events, awards and stuff with the business community.

Thankfully, it's not very many. I would say that there might not be anybody in there once or twice a week. It's rare, which is nice.

Alana Hirtle: I would agree. There's always something happening at the Marigold.

Extrapolating from that, how large an impact would you say events happening at the Marigold have on economic development and tourism in northern Nova Scotia?

André Myette: I would say that it's quite significant.

We're in Truro. We're not in Halifax, but we are doing our best to try to offer our people some of the acts and performances they would get there a lot more easily. Because of that, I'm trying to bring in lots of acts that would bring lots of folks to our area outside of the normal realm.

I'm also working on trying to make our venue more of a festival space as well. There are a lot of things I haven't cleared with my board yet, so I don't want to list off all my plans. There was a very significant blues festival in Truro that went away, and I'd like to see it come back. There are also other convention-type things that go on in the nerd community. I'd like to help bring out stuff like that too.

Alana Hirtle: The nerd community....

André Myette: Yes, I'm a very proud member of that.

Alana Hirtle: I love that. I hope you're going to talk to Grumms afterwards about bringing the creepy clowns there.

André Myette: Absolutely. I'm looking forward to that.

Alana Hirtle: I have a few seconds left.

How can the federal government help the municipality preserve cultural spaces and identity?

André Myette: I'm fairly new to this position. I started acting on an interim basis in September and was given the position in January.

The CAPF funding that we get, the creative presenter fund, has been very helpful. There's lot of work in the way that can supplement bringing in larger acts to keep ticket prices low. That has helped a lot.

Say we bring in something like a ballet. We recently had Ballet Kelowna, which is a beautiful, amazing show. We did not sell out the theatre, but there were 80 people there. Unfortunately, it is a very expensive show. We are very happy to present them. The 80 people who came loved it. They saw something they wouldn't normally get to see in our area. However, the cost of that is significant to us. It would be nice to have something in place. I love the idea of tax incentives, which was mentioned earlier. That sounds wonderful.

Funding like that tends to help so that we can supplement a high-cost show but offer an option to keep those ticket prices low. That's the most important thing.

Alana Hirtle: We're out of time.

Thank you.

André Myette: We need more of that, please.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Champoux, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Martin Champoux: Thank you.

I'll come back to you, Mr. Messier.

Earlier, at the end of your response to my previous question, you raised a point that I found very interesting. You talked about the state of the troupes, if you will. You said that more and more people in your sector are starting to find it difficult. There's a sense that the burden is heavy and that conditions are becoming increasingly difficult.

As I said earlier, one of your recommendations is to recognize presenters as an essential link, a partner.

Do you get the impression that the people who create the programs designed to support the sector and performing arts presentation, such as the Canada arts presentation fund, are aware of the state people who work in this sector are in?

Are they also aware that a very high percentage of cultural consumers consider access to the performing arts essential to maintaining good mental health?

I think all of this is quite interconnected, as you pointed out earlier. I would like to hear you expand on this a little more.

● (1205)

Frédéric Messier: To answer the question, I would say no, we don't always get the impression that the situation of people behind the scenes in performance spaces and in the cultural community in general is assessed fairly. Nor is the quality of their work assessed fairly; these people are true cultural professionals who are on the job and doing exceptional work, with exceptional results.

It's also true that we can have a tremendous social impact in our communities. I can tell you about my performance space, because I'm also the executive director of the Maison de la culture de Waterloo, near Granby, in the Eastern Townships. We really are the social heart of our town of 5,800 residents. A group of about a hundred volunteers helps welcome audience members and they are there throughout the year. The community is really involved, and this gives great meaning to its involvement in the municipality.

So the impact on the social fabric is truly significant.

Martin Champoux: I completely agree with you about cultural centres. Often, it is precisely the municipalities, the regional towns, that must support these cultural organizations. At some point, it becomes a huge burden, and this withdrawal of federal government support is also felt at the local level.

Do you notice this in your area, in Waterloo, as we do in mine, Drummond and L'Avenir, among other places, where we have a very lively cultural centre?

Frédéric Messier: Absolutely. We feel that right now, it's extremely difficult for municipalities to honour their commitment to provide financial support to performance spaces, because they, too, are facing challenges related to maintaining infrastructure, which is in a rather dire state across Quebec. So, we feel that it's difficult for them.

We've managed to build close ties with the municipalities, which allows us to keep them well informed and on our side, but their resources are so limited that they can't keep up either. So, everything's difficult.

Martin Champoux: Thank you very much, Mr. Messier.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Hardy, welcome to the heritage committee. You have the floor now for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Hardy (Montmorency—Charlevoix, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to everyone for being here today.

Dear witnesses, I think the parallel we have been able to draw for the past little while is that everyone ends up saying that life is very expensive, that everything ultimately costs too much. You talked about building renovations and venue rentals. Ultimately, the price of just about everything has gone up.

Being an artist is a tough job. Artists are having a hard time making ends meet. They sometimes work part-time. They're trying to get by.

The reality is that we're in a recession. There are 2.2 million people lining up at food banks. Everyone, including artists, farmers and workers alike, is being hit hard by this reality.

However, I think that culture is essential. Culture has to be there. People have the right to dream; people have the right to create and entertain. It was said earlier that access to culture is essential and that it's important to share our view of life, maybe inspire the world to dream in more difficult times. I think everyone agrees that the cost of living is out of control and that our money maybe needs to be invested better.

My first question is for S.E. Grummett. Out of respect for taxpayers, how can we ensure that every dollar spent will be seen as profitable and that all taxpayers will take pride in it? People can say that they're investing in it and that they're very proud to have done so, because it raises our international profile, which enables Quebec and Canada to take great pride in it around the world. How can that be justified?

[*English*]

S.E. Grummett: One argument is that with all the funding we received, we were able to pay a lot of Canadian artists. It wasn't just going to Airbnbs in Edinburgh. I think that's why our show was so successful: We were able to field a really big team. I think there's one justification there. It actually creates a lot of jobs.

The other justification is—

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Hardy: I'm sorry to interrupt. I have a quick question for you.

Earlier, you said that if it hadn't been for the subsidy, you would have been short by $10,000. You would have lost that amount.

Was it still positive in the end? Are taxpayers going to say that it was profitable or that, without their money, you wouldn't have succeeded?

[*English*]

S.E. Grummett: I think that is profitable in the way that we are seeing these ripples year after year. For the two international tours we are doing currently, we are now getting to a place at which our touring can be supported by presentation fees from international partners and ticket sales in a way that, two to three years ago, we weren't seeing. It has taken us years.

It's similar to the venue question of what is the small to mid-range support we need, as we are playing to small and mid-range. We're still playing to small and mid-range, but we have now built an audience internationally. We have built a repertoire of reviews and awards internationally such that our shows can be successful without taxpayer funding. It can be profitable without taxpayer funding, and it can get international recognition without needing to be subsidized, but it has taken years of building to that place.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Hardy: Basically, what you're saying is that the initial investment enabled artists to live independently, without having to continue receiving funding. It helped you launch your career, and today, you're able to make a living from your art without constantly having to ask the government for money. Is that correct?

[*English*]

S.E. Grummett: Yes, absolutely, and particularly because we aren't playing to 400- to 700-seaters every night, we need to show presenters and venues that our show has merit and has reviews. Oftentimes, when you're premiering a new work, you look at it as a loss, because you're investing in something that's going to keep touring five to 10 years down the road. We look at other industries and we go, “Yes, that's worth the creative investment for that period of time.” The life cycle of these shows and these artists is a lot longer than we necessarily assume.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Hardy: Thank you.

Ms. Santiago Keenan, you received $151,000 for an immersive experience in the form of murder-mystery dinner shows presented in the United States and London. A four-course meal was served, so people also go there to eat.

How many Canadian dishes were served at that event? Basically, I'm just trying to see what part of our culture and know-how here is exported and ends up on the international stage.

Do people get to taste Canadian dishes? Are they experiencing Canadian values? What is ultimately exported for $151,000?

[*English*]

Christina Santiago Keenan: Thank you for your question.

We do partner with local restaurants both in London and in Boston, but what we're exporting, I think, is a new genre that we made up—invented—because this funding was very supportive of that. Making food part of the puzzles is part of this experience. It is a murder mystery inspired by *Murdoch Mysteries* to some extent and by that genre of entertainment. While there's not a specific Canadian beef, necessarily, that we are exporting to these restaurants—

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Hardy: The person who's going to experience it there—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Hardy. You're out of time for questions.

Ms. Auguste, you have the floor for five minutes.

Tatiana Auguste (Terrebonne, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Messier, thank you for being here today. You really have a vast network of people and rooms across Quebec and Canada. The Terrebonne cultural development society, which is now called La nouvelle société, is part of your network. As mentioned, it too is experiencing problems related to infrastructure and all of that. You're also everywhere in Lanaudière or in more remote places.

Could you tell us a bit more about maintaining assets in communities that are a bit more rural or farther away from urban centres?

Frédéric Messier: There are various cases. In fact, many venues in the regions are in pre-existing locations that have been converted. For example, churches have been transformed into theatres. In some cases, newer buildings have been planned out and designed to serve as theatres. Certainly, when it comes to operating in more remote locations, in buildings that have been “recycled”, it's harder to meet safety standards, technical standards and other standards, because the buildings weren't originally designed for that.

Requirements are gradually increasing. Things are moving forward; it's 2026. Standards are becoming more and more present, and that leads to a lot of new spending. There's also universal accessibility, the ecological shift and green energy, to name a few. Keeping up to date on these things inevitably takes major investments. Funding for that is harder to find at the moment. Sometimes, we're really forced to use our surpluses—which should instead go toward our mission—so that we can maintain our assets.

● (1215)

Tatiana Auguste: Thank you very much.

Ms. Santiago Keenan, I'm a big fan of what you do. I find your approach to theatre very interesting. Not only are you using the heritage we already have in Canada, but you're also reaching populations who are a bit younger. These people often have a way of putting theatre in a bit of a box, but they can now see it in a much newer, much more creative way.

Could you talk a bit about the types of people who come to see your immersive experiences?

[*English*]

Christina Santiago Keenan: It's so interesting. They're from all walks of life. We have birthday parties for 10-year-olds and for 70-year-olds. We have locals. We have tourists. Yes, I think a lot of lawyers, for some reason, really like our experiences simply as a profession.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Christina Santiago Keenan: If we think about what we're used to and how we're experiencing digital life, we're taking those behaviours to the real world. I think there's a generation who's just expecting to participate, so I'm seeing more mainstream people than not, honestly. As for the age ranges, again, we have young professionals come in and older folks and families. We do a lot of corporate team building. Yes, it really is a crosswalk of life.

[*Translation*]

Tatiana Auguste: Thank you very much.

Could you tell us a little more about where this approach of marrying a place's heritage with this new immersive experience comes from?

[*English*]

Christina Santiago Keenan: It's from a lot of inspiration, I would say. We did some research around the world. We went to London. Also, we do some work in warehouses in Los Angeles, and we did an experience at Knott's Berry Farm, which has an artificial western town.

We were approached by Liberty Entertainment Group 10 years ago, which runs the Casa Loma programming, and they invited us to do an escape room there. We have brought all these international experiences of live theatre. We also fell in love with escape rooms, and it just felt like the right fit.

Also, frankly, it was like a clear opportunity. I don't necessarily like having to pay large amounts of rent, and these partners were willing to take risks with us and to share revenue from ticket sales. They were also willing to co-market the experiences, so it really was a win-win to find the right partnership.

[*Translation*]

Tatiana Auguste: Thank you very much.

I would love to see you in my region and a bit more in Quebec.

[*English*]

The Chair: I keep thinking, you have to go to the Kingston Penitentiary—"escape from the prison".

Christina Santiago Keenan: Oh, yes.

The Chair: Who's next?

Ms. DeRidder, are you ready? You've got the floor now for five minutes.

I think you're sharing with Mrs. Thomas. Go ahead.

Kelly DeRidder (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Myette, I wanted to ask you my first question. In my riding of Kitchener Centre, we're fortunate to have a vibrant arts and culture community, from local theatres to our Centre In The Square and festivals like the Blues Festival and grassroots organizations like The Registry Theatre, which bring people together at a local level.

What do you think about the future of Canada's creative sector, and how important are community-based cultural spaces?

André Myette: I think they're incredibly important. Canada is so vast, and each of our small communities has such a breadth of what they've offered in the countrywide conversation—but also locally.

Earlier, I mentioned a blues festival that Truro used to have. It was called the Dutch Mason Blues Festival, named after Dutch Mason, who was a big blues artist from our area. Given what he's contributed to Canadian culture, as well as to the blues industry in general, it was very rewarding in our community to celebrate that on a national stage and bring in lots of other artists from all across different places who work within that world. Even Dan Aykroyd was there with the Blues Brothers at one point, which was very cool.

As far as our identity goes, being from Nova Scotia, I feel as though we are a very small player in the national conversation sometimes. There are a lot of amazing artists who come out of our area, and some go on to massive success.

I was just at the East Coast Music Awards, and Goldie Boutilier was there—who is now in LA doing amazing things, but she's from Cape Breton. It was very cool to celebrate that and see her creative voice get to such a large level, but it all started in Cape Breton.

● (1220)

Kelly DeRidder: Thank you so much.

Christina, I'll go to you next. Can you tell me what parts of the $150,000 investment in your theatre for your murder mystery are Canadian content?

Christina Santiago Keenan: The whole thing was written by a Canadian team. We partnered with Netflix, on their film *Glass Onion*, as a strategic play to get marketing eyes and resonance with a larger audience.

Kelly DeRidder: Because the funding was meant to celebrate our heritage and Canadian culture, I'm just going to ask again, what piece of that concerns our Canadian heritage and culture?

Christina Santiago Keenan: Do you mean in terms of the storyline or in terms of the actors?

The whole production itself was a homegrown creation by Canadian actors and designers.

The story itself is fictional. It's about Maribelle Moore, a chef who has a group of friends and is sort of doing a revenge dinner and revealing a dark past.

Kelly DeRidder: What is the rationale of a $150,000 investment by Canadian Heritage that does not showcase our amazing Canadian heritage? What is the...?

Christina Santiago Keenan: It's putting us on the map in the world for doing an innovative, creative new genre. Nothing like this has been produced in the world.

There have been plenty of murder mysteries, but in this case, you're interrogating characters and you're playing with your food to solve a puzzle. This is—

Kelly DeRidder: Is there are way we could have created the characters or played with the food and celebrated our history in that as well?

Christina Santiago Keenan: We could have. This was an export grant, so it was already developed. We did it and bootstrapped it ourselves, and we are very thankful to have been chosen for the export grant—but it was to showcase Canadian innovation and talent.

Kelly DeRidder: I just wanted to clearly get it on record today that the purpose of the grant was to celebrate Canadian heritage. I'm not 100% sure that the return on investment in this case was actually celebrating our heritage.

Thank you, Christina, for your time today.

I have one last question for Mr. Messier.

It seems as though inflation is even affecting the arts and culture sector. You mentioned in your speech that the increase has been 20%. I'm going to assume that this same percentage can't be applied to ticket sales because of the affordability crisis we're facing here in Canada as well. Can you give us a couple of ideas of how this government can support the arts beyond just funding in relation to affordability in Canada?

[*Translation*]

Frédéric Messier: We certainly have our local network and our own way of doing things in Quebec. As for the change in ticket prices at the venues represented by RIDEAU, that has nothing to do with the average ticket price for international productions presented in large arenas, if that's what you're referring to. The increase in ticket prices is much smaller.

What can you do to help us? Personally, I believe that performing arts presenters can embody a kind of stability in Canadian culture. Here, when we welcome artists, whether they're new artists or they're at their first show, for example, there's always guaranteed pay that generally amounts to a few thousand dollars. For them, these are important opportunities to make themselves known while earning significant pay.

The funding for this guaranteed fee comes in part from the funding we get from the government, but it mainly comes from the surpluses we generate when we host more established artists, artists who generate more revenue.

We need stability in funding. More and more studies show that we manage to multiply every dollar we receive from the government. That means that the returns are greater than the dollar we received. I think it's important to say that.

I would like to take this opportunity to mention that, regarding the program to build strong rural communities, it would be important to set aside a minimum threshold for cultural infrastructure. When you're drowning in all the infrastructure needs, it's easy to put culture on the back burner. However, the impact of cultural venues in rural areas and communities is so significant that their funding should have some minimum protection. It's really important.

● (1225)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Kelly Straughan, I want you to stay engaged in the conversation. I'm not sure if you've taken a question yet.

I know we've spoken at this committee today about the importance of smaller venues. I'm not sure if Theatre Aquarius counts as a smaller venue. In musicals, for example, Michael Rubinoff has debuted a couple of his new musicals at Theatre Aquarius. How important do you think it is to have such a venue for a Canadian musical to debut?

Kelly Straughan: In terms of our community, we are the cultural hub for all the indie arts happening in the city. They need venues, and they need rehearsal halls. Our studio space is in high demand for all kinds of new work to premiere. We are never dark. There is always something going on, even in our lobby space. We will have theatres that come, and because they can't afford to have an office space, they use our lobby space. We have three companies that come in. The wonderful part is that they get to interact with each other, and we get to have conversations with them, so we really are a cultural hub in our city.

As I mentioned, we're the home for the national centre for new musicals. Musicals are not sole ventures. You need the book writer. You need the composer. You need all kinds of people as part of the creative team getting this thing up and running. Of course, you need a venue to come to and you need a place.

We designed the program so that in January, we have artists throughout the building. They are creating. Then we do a National Musical Theatre Summit. We have people from across the country and internationally coming to that summit to see the new musicals that are being presented with the idea that they will have a life outside of our national centre for new musicals.

It really is about being the incubator and being the space where people can come and where they can create what they need to create.

You're right that Michael Rubinoff is absolutely a part of that. He is best known as the originating producer of *Come from Away*. Of course, we all know that is the saddest story in musical theatre because it is one of the greatest successes. It is the most produced musical in North America.

Also, because Canadians didn't invest in it, every time it is produced, Americans get rich. A big Canadian family sits down and watches *Come from Away* in London, Ontario—it just closed at the Grand last week—and Americans make money. I think that points to our need to invest in these cultural spaces, in artists and in new works.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

I'll now turn the floor over to Mr. Myles for five minutes.

Oh, sorry. Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

Rachael Thomas: Chair, I have just a quick clarification. The chair, of course, has the prerogative to ask questions, but generally in other committees, it then counts towards the round for that political party. Certainly when I've taken the chair, I've treated it that way, and so I'm curious about how you're treating it.

The Chair: No, for every committee I've sat on, the chair just has a prerogative when they want to ask a question, so I did not add it on. I know that the Conservatives had an extra two minutes on their last question, so I thought it was an appropriate time to take that.

Rachael Thomas: No, it's a great clarification of rules for the future when I'm in the chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Myles.

David Myles (Fredericton—Oromocto, Lib.): Thank you very much. We have fun in this committee.

This is a really important study and one that I'm so glad we're doing. I thought it was important to bring this study forward. Jonathan spoke about this in particular. We often celebrate artists once they're exporting, once they're in the big rooms. However, the reality is we will not have artists in the big rooms unless we support them when they're in the small rooms. It requires a lot of risk, a lot of failure, like every other business that we invest in in Canada. They don't always work. Not every show works. It's about experimentation and creating spaces in which people can take those risks without breaking the bank.

This group today has been really important. We've talked about the importance of networks.

● (1230)

[*Translation*]

I think networks like RIDEAU are very important in Canada.

[*English*]

Particularly since we have an artist here, it's important for us to have a sense of that journey.

You've talked about playing in the basement of a burrito restaurant.

S.E. Grummett: That was not me, but it is very similar.

David Myles: We've all experienced that—where you start to what it looks like to support that bottom rung of the venue ladder.

What did the bottom rung of the venue ladder look like? Was it anywhere near public funding? In lots of cases, it's some sort of all-ages venue. It's a basement somewhere in which you put up your own lights, or whatever.

What did the journey look like for you? Now you've arrived at a place where people are going, “Yay, you're exporting. You're doing us proud.”

What did it look like in the beginning?

S.E. Grummett: We're still at a place where we're putting up our own lights. As I said, I started on the Canadian fringe circuit, and I think uniquely because I'm from Saskatchewan, I was able to access Creative Saskatchewan's touring funding to support that Canadian fringe tour, and we could ourselves a living wage, because otherwise we're making lunch money. From there I was able to scale my work up, hire other people to come on as directors or outside eyes; I think lots of artists have to keep it in the basement of a burrito restaurant. That funding doesn't exist in other provinces, so lots of other artists can't take their work from those fringe spaces to a more professional stage or invest in tech, other people, outside eyes and even marketing, which is so important when you're trying to stand out in these big festivals of 4,000 shows. That was the bottom rung.

With the Creative Sask funding, I was able to make another show and then start sneaking my toes into international venues. I think I am not a unique artist in that it wasn't until I took my work abroad that I got recognition at home and doors opened to me back at home. They were completely shut to me for a very long time, until I was getting reviews from abroad. I could then take them it to venues and go, “See, The Guardian loves us. Please let us into your space.”

I'm currently in this weird middle space in which I'm not quite emerging anymore, but I'm not quite established. Yes, I'm still putting lights up in my own venue, but that's okay. That's a bit of the bottom rung.

If I wasn't able to access that provincial funding, and then eventually Canada Council funding and Canadian Heritage funding, I would never have been able to continue to tour, scale up my work and take those creative risks that have resonated so deeply with audiences around the world.

Speaking to what is “Canadian” about this Canadian heritage, we don't expect work from the U.K. to speak about the Queen or work from the States to speak about the founding fathers. We have this weird pressure as Canadian artists in which we always have to be speaking about our history or where we come from. Some of the work that has broken through from Canada—things like *The Kids in the Hall*; a movie called *Dead Lover*, which been sweeping the indie film circuit; and *Nirvana the Band the Show*—are weird pieces of our realities and our life. It's not always a historical play. Yes, I think encouraging funding for work that is unexpectedly Canadian....

David Myles: I certainly agree. There is a difference between history and culture. Culture is a living thing—it moves forward—and it's certainly not up to parliamentarians to decide what that is, I would say.

S.E. Grummett: It's up to audiences, and I think audiences are speaking to that.

David Myles: I agree.

Jonathan, can you speak quickly to how space plays a role, and supporting space, in the artistic journey?

Jonathan Bunce: Absolutely. The music equivalent of the burrito place is sometimes a burrito place as well.

As I was saying, there are spaces that exist in the commercial sphere that have taken on an accidental role as cultural centres, such as for the concertgoer who's going to the El Mocambo, Club Soda or the Commodore Ballroom. Concertgoers view these spaces as being culture centres. The showgoer often doesn't know where the funding is coming from and may not be aware that these are often places that started out as bars that booked entertainment in order to sell more alcohol. It's the old 20th-century economic model that these spaces are based upon. That is not working anymore.

In my opinion, these important spaces are the first stages that allow people to springboard up the venue ladder, to build their careers and to get to that level of international acclaim. They need to be viewed more like cultural community centres or libraries and given a modest investment of public funding because they provide important public health, economic, vibrancy and safety benefits for communities, in addition to providing this fertile ground in which artists can experiment and launch their careers.

● (1235)

David Myles: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Champoux, you have the floor for roughly two and a half minutes.

Martin Champoux: I really enjoyed the last few moments of this committee, Madam Chair.

I'm a bit fed up with hearing that, when we fund culture, we expect something in return. S.E. Grummett said it well. I don't want us to ask to see maple syrup, moose antlers and poutine in every production we invest in. I'm fed up with that.

When we fund culture, what we're funding is our talent, our creativity. We also want to show the world that we can compete with other nations, such as the Americans and the Europeans, who have more resources than we do. When people ask where the poutine was in the film that we funded with public money, it frustrates me to hear that, you have no idea.

The other thing that deeply frustrates me is the fact that culture is still seen as an expense, and people expect a production that yields a profit, like that of S.E. Grummett. Artists are told that they have been given money and are then asked how much the production made. However, culture shouldn't be viewed as project-by-project funding, which will bring in money per project. Culture is an investment in society that generates $65 billion in gross domestic product, or GDP. The GDP of culture in Canada is $65 billion. Every dollar invested in culture yields $29 in benefits of all kinds. We shouldn't just look at the individual production of one organization or one troop. We have to look at everything that production generates in general, including with restaurants, hotels, the taxis we take to go see a show or film, the babysitters we hire to babysit our children, and so on. Money flows when we go see a show, far beyond the ticket we buy and the popcorn we buy when we get there.

I am fed up with this narrative that portrays culture as an expense and a luxury. It's a societal need. It's part of our identity, and I would like us to start seeing it that way. That applies to the opposition parties and the government, in the way we create programs. We have to stop saying that we can't afford to increase the funding for this or that program. No, we can't afford not to increase it. We can't afford to underfund culture. I'm really sick and tired of us holding every production to account because it didn't have enough maple syrup, antlers or hockey. It's becoming unbearable to listen to.

I'm looking at the figures that were published in a Canadian Chamber of Commerce study. This wasn't published by a Quebec lobby group peddling its rhetoric; this was from the Canadian chambers of commerce, people who must know a thing or two about grants and investments. Are we going to turn our noses up at tax revenue for governments to the tune of $17 billion per year, just because we think it's a luxury to fund culture, or that S.E. Grummett's production won't bring in enough money to pay back what we have invested? It's a bit ridiculous to think like that.

Thirteen jobs are generated per million dollars of production. That's still from the same study. That's more than oil and gas, if that works as an argument for my colleagues. I think the government should start considering culture not as an expense, but as a need, a necessity. It's our identity that we're expressing. It's being exported, and we must not attach requirements and conditions when we decide to fund culture in all its forms.

Thank you.

The Chair: That's very well said, Mr. Champoux.

Mr. Hardy, I would like to apologize: I didn't know you were a francophone the first time I spoke to you. You now have the floor for five minutes.

● (1240)

Gabriel Hardy: Thank you, Madam Chair. No problem.

I agree with my colleague on the core of his thinking. Culture is extremely important. It's a foundation of society. We need it in order to move forward and know where we have come from.

That said, it's a bit funny to hear him say that we shouldn't associate it with figures and then hear him give us all the figures related to return on investment in his next sentence. The principle is the following: Public funds come from taxpayers. I agree that every dollar invested yields a return on investment of $29. We need to support culture. It's very important. We need to support our artists.

I'm really proud of what you answered, S.E. Grummett. You said that, as a result, you have been able to make a living from your art and showcase it internationally. You're the Canadian artist who is now making a name for themselves everywhere, so it's a good investment.

However, when it comes to asking whether there's something Canadian in a production funded to the tune of $151,000, I'm not asking to pour maple syrup over the world's head. That's not the point. Will someone who goes through the experience understand that it's offered by Canadians? That's why I asked the question earlier. It wasn't a question to oppose what's being done. If someone goes out, experiences something in Boston just a few steps from their house, goes back home and has no idea that they just had an experience that was paid for by Canadians, then we may be missing the mark.

It's important to stay focused on the objective, because the program, as it's defined—I may go back to this question—is meant to promote Canadian culture. It states that it aims "to increase export revenues for Canada's creative industries". That means it's directly linked to revenue. That's stated in the definition. We aren't attacking culture when we ask for a return on investment. We're just linking the very definition of the funding program to the expectation of a return on investment. The goal of that question wasn't to tell everyone to put on antlers and wear plaid. That wasn't the point. We want to support culture, and we agree. However, if there's a publicly funded program that aims to export our knowledge and increase our export revenues, then I think it's normal to ask questions about those revenues. I don't understand why my colleague lost it, saying he's fed up of hearing that everyone has to wear arrowhead sashes. That isn't the point.

I just want to say thank you again, S.E. Grummett, because you're an example of a success story who has been funded and has a return on investment internationally. Bravo.

Ms. Straughan, you said that people watch American content and that, in the meantime, a Canadian artist loses their work. Is that what you said?

[*English*]

Kelly Straughan: Are you referencing *Come from Away*?

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Hardy: No.

I'm referring to the chair's question. I think that you told her that many people are turning to American productions and that, in the meantime, artists here in Canada receive less media attention or coverage, which results in the loss of their work. Is that right?

[*English*]

Kelly Straughan: No. I think it was in reference to *Come from Away*. When you're talking about developing new Canadian work, and specifically a large-scale work like a musical, we are not able in a meaningful way to give the amount of investment needed for new musicals to happen in Canada.

Come from Away was developed by two Canadian artists, two Canadian writers. They shopped it around—so to speak—in Canada, asking, "Can you invest in this product? Can you invest in this story?"

It did have some investment from Sheridan College, which had a musical incubator program at the time, run by Michael Rubinoff. Sheridan gave them some workshop time.

It's just like we're doing for our national summit. We invite producers from across the country to tell them, "Here is a story that has legs, could make some money and is excellent art that ticks all of the boxes."

Canadians didn't invest. It was actually Americans and voices from the regional theatres that incubate to Broadway who said, "Okay, come over here, and we'll invest."

When something commercializes, when it moves from a not-for-profit model to commercial model, you need investors. The investors were almost exclusively American. This means that every time the show is produced anywhere, other than the Canadian writing team—and there were a couple of Canadian actors who were invested in it—it's Americans who are making the money.

● (1245)

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Hardy: So, basically, it's—

[*English*]

Kelly Straughan: What a loss for Canadians. I think that's what I was referencing.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Hardy: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for that clarification.

Mr. Ntumba, you have the floor.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba (Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Santiago Keenan, as a child, my mother attended a school in her village where Canada had a presence through educational and cultural initiatives. Later, when the time came to choose the country where she wanted to raise her children, she chose Canada. I'm one of her children. Today, I have the honour of being before you as a member of Parliament. This shows how the ties between Canada and communities around the world can have a lasting impact on future generations.

My question is the following. How can cultural spaces—

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Ntumba. There's a point of order.

[*English*]

Rachael Thomas: I'm sorry, but the interpreters are not able to interpret, because of sound quality.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: The interpreters can't hear you well enough, Mr. Ntumba.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: I'll keep talking to make sure that people can hear me. Can you hear me when I have my microphone closer to my mouth? Can the interpreters hear me properly?

The Chair: We'll try to continue the discussion. The connection is good, but the sound is cutting out from time to time.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Okay.

Ms. Santiago Keenan, I was saying that I have the honour today of being before you as a member of Parliament. This shows how the ties between Canada and communities around the world can have a lasting impact on entire generations.

My question is the following. How can cultural spaces [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] passing on the values and history of our communities while [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, there's an issue with the sound. It isn't good for the safety of the interpreters. It isn't just a comprehension issue. It's more of a sound quality issue, which can have an impact on them.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Ntumba, I'll give the floor to Ms. Royer because we don't have much time left.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: I would like to give my question [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] so that he can ask it for me.

The Chair: We still can't hear you very well. You can send your questions to the committee.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Yes.

The Chair: We can ask them for you.

[*English*]

Ms. Royer, I'm going to give you the floor for the final two and a half minutes.

Zoe Royer (Port Moody—Coquitlam, Lib.): Okay. Yikes....

In the cities and communities I represent—Coquitlam, Port Moody, Anmore and Belcarra—we have two theatres. Those are a 200-seat theatre in Port Moody and a 257-seat theatre in Coquitlam, the Evergreen Cultural Centre black box.

Years ago, when I was still on city council, cities were doing these cultural mapping exercises. There are two that really stick out. One is Kelowna, and the other one is Coquitlam. In Coquitlam, they created an arts, culture and heritage strategic plan for 2015-30. It was everything from cultural mapping and community consultation to facilities planning and infrastructure assessment. It treated culture as an economic engine, growing a cultural ecosystem.

Where can the intersection be between cities that know and that have worked so closely with the many arts groups that make up their communities...? How can the federal government intersect with communities to identify...? We know that programming isn't the biggest challenge; it's the space. That's one.

I also really wanted to ask about the tax credit. How would it work in practice, and what would it look like? In the seconds left, who is the best person to answer?

I want to leave you with this as well. You're all such incredible witnesses. Please send us written statements that can be used in testimony. This will help enrich our study. Each one of you has so much to contribute to this, and I don't want anything to be left behind.

Grumms, take it away.

● (1250)

S.E. Grummett: Oh, I can't speak to the tax credit. Don't ask me. I'm not a venue guy.

Zoe Royer: The spaces....

Jonathan, please go ahead.

All of you....

Jonathan Bunce: In terms of access to cultural space, a theme that comes up often, at least in music [*Inaudible—Editor*] and related to live music, is that there's often a recommendation to make more use of underutilized space, but there's not often much recommendation on how that space can be activated.

I would encourage the federal government to work in partnership with the provincial and municipal governments to identify spaces that might be underutilized and that might benefit from adaptive reuse for culture. Then, identify local arts and culture partners and transfer, if not ownership, at least operation or long-term lease of these spaces to arts groups at nominal rent. You see this all over Europe. Obviously, it's a very different environment over there, in terms of urban space. In Europe, they have old coal stations, train stations, military barracks and a lot more available real estate really asking to be used.

It may not be the same in Canada, in terms of the available real estate, but I think that looking at creative ways of taking underused warehouses, buildings, power plants, libraries, churches.... Artists are creative. Artists are very good at making do with a little, which doesn't mean you shouldn't fund us, but we will always give you a great investment because we're used to doing a lot with a little.

Zoe Royer: Thank you. Please write in to us.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Waugh, you have the floor now for five minutes.

Kevin Waugh: Thanks.

You know, Mr. Bunce, that's so true. I was a school board trustee. We have beautiful theatres in the Saskatoon public school system: Aden Bowman, after Robert Hinitt; Bedford Road; Walter Murray; and Evan Hardy. We spent hundreds of thousands of dollars, and we use them 10 months of the year.

Grumms, thank you. We don't often talk about a provincial scene. You mentioned Creative Saskatchewan. It wasn't always there. There were a lot of headwinds in our province.

I would encourage each and every one of you. Yes, you can write submissions to Canadian Heritage, but don't forget where you've come from. In Saskatchewan, we've had a long and tenuous battle with the arts community, if you don't mind, in my province. We've made some inroads in the last several years, but it does take time. Also, for municipalities, sit down with your mayors and councillors, because they know the spaces that could be available to each and every one of your groups, more so than you. They have a handle on what's open and what's not.

In saying that, Madam Chair, I would like to move a motion this afternoon on the matter at hand. I have copies in both official languages for the clerk to distribute to everyone.

It's in response to the recent CRTC decision proposing to increase the contribution requirement of some online streaming firms. In particular, it's important that we have a discussion here, in the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. The decision will have a major impact, as we know, on the arts and culture sector in this country, and it is a matter of great importance at this committee. We have focused on Canadian culture in this country, and we know that this is very relevant to our study today on the state of creative and performance spaces across this country.

Additionally, it's very relevant right now because we know the minister is heading down to Washington to talk about CUSMA and the potential trade irritants of the Americans that we've heard about since the CRTC made the decision to go from 5% to 15% and billions of dollars.... I've had a couple of companies in my office in the last couple of days. We're going to lose billions of dollars in foreign production investment in this country. It's going to be affected by this major change in regulation, and I think we definitely need to hear from the minister on this.

We've heard from the government. They're stating that the CRTC is at arm's length. They're not. Subject to section 2:

> ...the Governor in Council may, by order, issue to the Commission directions of general application on broad policy matters with respect to
>
> (a) any of the objectives of the broadcasting policy set out in subsection 3(1); or
>
> (b) any of the objectives of the regulatory policy set out in subsection 5(2).

We're going to stand to lose significant foreign investment, in the billions of dollars. This is a major issue in this country. It will affect everybody in this room. I therefore move the following motion, which reads, in English: " The Canadian radio-television commission, better known as the CRTC, has issued a decision to increase from 5% to 15% the contribution requirement of some online streaming firms, such as Netflix, Disney+, Amazon Prime, and that Ms. Vicky Eatrides, the CEO of CRTC, appear at the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage for 2 hours to explain this decision of 5% to 15%. And given that the Cabinet has ultimate authority over such decisions, the Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages, appear at this Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage for 2 hours to probe how Canada's interest will be protected, considering the profound impact that this decision will have on the CUSMA negotiations that will be entered into in the next month."

● (1255)

Thank you, Madam Chair. I move this.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Waugh.

I do not agree that this motion on CRTC's decision is relevant to today's study on creative and cultural spaces. Therefore, I will take this as a notice of motion and not move it today.

I'm going to suspend for a moment while we look at this.

● (1255)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1255)

The Chair: Just to clarify, there's no debate—

Rachael Thomas: I'm challenging the chair.

The Chair: The Conservatives are challenging my decision.

You can take the floor.

Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Chair.

My colleague Mr. Waugh just moved a motion with regard to the streaming tax at a cost of 15% that will be applied to Canadians because of a CRTC decision, which is backed by this Liberal government. This will negatively impact the cost for consumers. It will negatively impact investment with regard to business in the creative industry. It will impact our trade relationship with the United States of America.

Given that it has to do with creative spaces, artistic expression and support for the industry, it does, in fact, directly relate to the matter at hand, so I would challenge your ruling, Chair.

● (1300)

The Chair: Okay. That is a dilatory motion, so we will call the vote.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 7; nays 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Seeing that we're out of time, I will thank the witnesses for their incredible testimony today.

Go ahead, Mr. Champoux.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, we just voted on your ruling. However, I just want to make sure that the notice of motion read by Mr. Waugh was tabled. We didn't reject this motion, since we didn't vote on it. It's still on the agenda for debate. Is that right?

The Chair: That's what I understood.

[*English*]

Thank you for your testimony today.

As you heard from Ms. Royer, please submit to us through the clerk anything you've forgotten to say or any thoughts that you have, and then we can use that information when our analysts come to do a report at the end of this study.

That was really interesting and valuable testimony today. Thank you very much. We appreciate you.

The meeting is adjourned.