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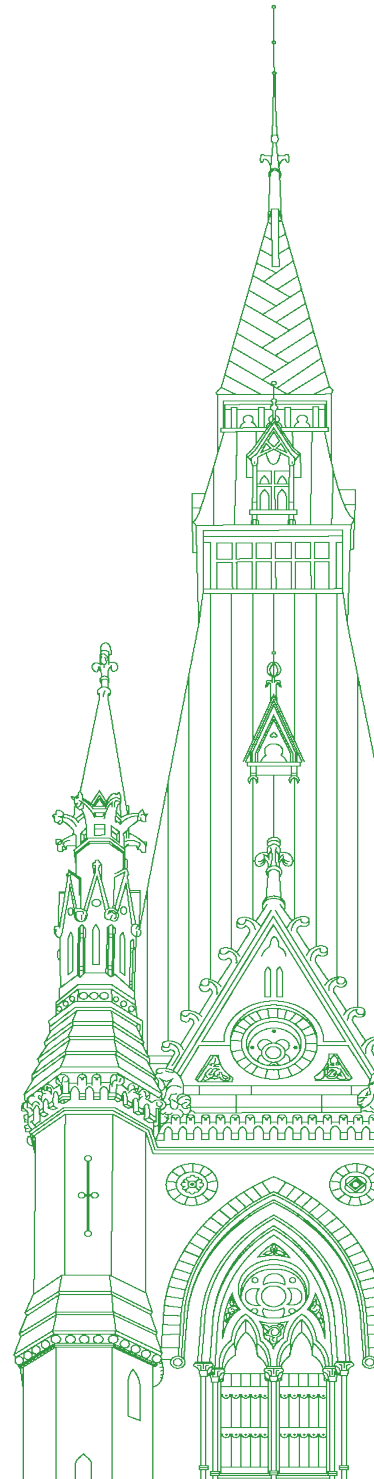
Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 042

Tuesday, June 9, 2026

Chair: Lisa Hepfner



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• (1120)

[English]

The Chair (Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.)): I think everybody is here, so I'll call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 42 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

Before we begin, I'll ask all in-person participants to read the guidelines written on the updated cards on the table. They are the measures in place to prevent audio feedback incidents and protect the health and safety of all participants, especially our interpreters. You'll notice 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 all witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of this meeting if they're joining us online.

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

Before I go any further, I think we have a birthday among us today.

Mr. Waugh, is it 30 again?

Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon South, CPC): I wish.

Voices: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Happy birthday, sir. Mine is next week, so we're all Gemini, I guess.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we're meeting today for our fourth and final meeting regarding our study on the state of creative and performance spaces across Canada.

We have with us today Ariane Caron Lachance, executive director of Antitube and Cinéma Beaumont, by video conference.

From Ballet Vancouver, we have Joshua Beamish here with us in the room.

[Translation]

From the Conseil québécois du théâtre, we have Caroline Gignac and Rachel Billet, who are with us in the room.

From the École de musique Alain-Caron, we have Angel Blanco, master's in musical performance, who is also with us in the room.

From the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française, we have Nancy Juneau, who is in the room, and Laurence Dubuc, who is joining us by video conference.

[English]

We also have, from PAVED Arts, David LaRivière, who is here with us in the room.

Each organization will have five minutes for an opening statement, and then we will turn to questions from members.

I will advise you that we are expecting another vote in the House of Commons in the next hour or so, so we will likely have to take a break from this committee and then come back. If we have unanimous consent from members, we can go a little bit past one o'clock if everybody's available. I'll canvass members closer to the time to see if everybody's willing to do that.

We'll start here in the room with Ariane Caron Lachance from Antitube.

[Translation]

Excuse me, she is joining us by video conference instead.

Ms. Caron Lachance, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ariane Caron Lachance (Executive director, Cinéma Beaumont, ANTITUBE): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good morning. My name is Ariane Caron Lachance. I was told to speak slowly today because I did not send any notes to the interpreters. So I am going to take my time.

I am, indeed, the director of Cinéma Beaumont, a small independent movie theatre in Quebec City. I am also the director of the Spira co-operative, which is an artist-run centre for filmmakers outside large urban areas. The co-operative is also a film distributor, and it manages a pool of film production and post-production equipment.

These two organizations, both located in Quebec City, have been in existence for 30 and 50 years, respectively. By supporting artists, they help ensure the survival of independent cinema, from production all the way to theatrical release. The co-operative is the only film distributor in Quebec City. It is therefore a key player in the world of independent filmmaking, especially outside large urban areas.

These two organizations are tenant members of Méduse, which is also a co-operative. I know this can get a little confusing. Méduse brings together 11 arts organizations in a single building, with spaces designed to meet the needs of each organization at an affordable rent. The building was built in 1995, at the initiative of Mayor Jean-Paul L'Allier, so that artist-run centres could continue to operate in downtown Quebec City.

I would like to take this opportunity to talk about one of the main challenges we face: building maintenance. The Méduse co-operative, which is home to 11 artist-run centres in Quebec City, is located in a building that was constructed 30 years ago and has not been well maintained over the years for various reasons, but particularly because its management was delegated to the directors of the individual artist-run centres. While we may be versatile people with a great capacity to learn, maintaining buildings is not necessarily part of the skill set of artist-run centre directors.

No acquisition fund has been set up for that. The building would require major funding to continue being used. However, we are currently in a period when funding for capital expenditures has largely been frozen. If Quebec City were to lose a building that houses the majority of its professional arts centres, it could have a decisive impact on its future. This is something I wanted to mention to you here.

In addition, one of the main funding sources that allowed us to at least maintain the equipment inside the buildings, the Media Arts Equipment Acquisition Fund, was discontinued last year. Since then, we no longer have access to funds for purchasing building equipment.

I would now like to comment on my field, independent filmmaking as part of audiovisual arts. Personally, I have been working for about ten years in independent theatres, such as the Cinéma Moderne, the Cinéma Public and the Cinéma Beaubien in Montreal, and now the Cinéma Beaumont in Quebec City. It would be interesting to recognize the importance of these small theatres, which offer a different kind of film programming from what we are used to seeing in traditional commercial cinema, which is just as relevant, but complementary.

The work we do is primarily audience development and cultural mediation. However, we often find ourselves in a gap between funding for more commercial projects and funding intended for organizations that are more like artist-run centres offering production support. For our part, we are really focused on presentation, and there are few funding streams available to support these projects.

Yet the impact of our work in terms of audience development, particularly among young people, is enormous. Generally, our theatres welcome between 20,000 and 30,000 people each year, and the vast majority of these attendees—well over 50%—are young people under the age of 30. Given that in Canada, we hear people talking quite openly about how difficult it is to connect with young audiences, it would be interesting to take a closer look at the work these theatres are doing.

Of course, I am talking about the reality in Quebec. I know that in the rest of Canada, there may be fewer small independent theatres. However, we can see that in Quebec, there has been a boom

since 2018, with five new theatres opening. Something is happening there, and it will be important to pay attention to that.

• (1125)

Some of you have certainly heard about the report that the Working Group on the Future of the Audiovisual Sector in Quebec published last year. One of the conclusions expressed very clearly in the report is that we have lost our cultural connection with young people and that we have lost the battle to capture their attention against streaming platforms, at least in the audiovisual sector.

Small and medium-sized organizations have enormous potential as testing grounds for introducing people to culture. Generally, these organizations have teams with expertise, are deeply rooted in their communities, and are very flexible when they are being proposed new projects. They would be ideal places to carry out pilot projects, measure their impact, and expand their reach if they are successful. In recent years, the funding we have received for these types of projects has mainly been used to pay consultants who, more often than not, produce reports that we are then forced to shelve because we lack the funds to implement their recommendations.

This might be a good time to trust the expertise of existing teams and to provide funding for human resources to set up projects of this kind.

One thing that—

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ariane Caron Lachance: Is my time up already?

The Chair: Yes. If you have a few words to add, that is fine, but the six minutes are already up.

Ariane Caron Lachance: No, that is fine. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Okay. I am sure there will be questions.

[English]

Next, we'll turn to Joshua Beamish from Ballet Vancouver.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Joshua Beamish (Artistic Director, Ballet Vancouver): Hello, Madam Chair and committee. I am Joshua Beamish, the artistic director of Ballet Vancouver. I offer additional insight as a past member of the City of Vancouver's arts and culture advisory committee, with a subfocus on spaces.

Ballet Vancouver, the new operating name of Movement Dance Productions Society, is mandated to revitalize our city's access to professional classical ballet. We operate with gratitude on the ancestral and unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh first nations.

Emerging from the pandemic, our organization has seen remarkable growth. From 2023 to 2025, our per-performance attendance rose by 50%. This season, our transition to Ballet Vancouver prompted another 50% increase. In just one year, our individual donations have risen by 1,600%. By April, our organization's 2026 year-to-date actuals had doubled our entire 2025 operating budget. With half the year still remaining, our 2026 actuals are expected to quadruple those of 2025.

Budgetary jumps of this magnitude are extremely rare. These figures illustrate an objective reality: Our public wants access to professional ballet. They are readily engaging as donors, subscribers, single-ticket buyers and outreach participants. This is a homegrown Canadian success story driven by the celebration of our nation's cultural sovereignty.

Our performances are self-presented at Vancouver Civic Theatres through rental grants to offset occupancy. At first glance, our 2026 grant suggests an encouraging 107% increase. However, our venue usage increased by 275%. This paints a troubling picture of the Canadian cultural ecosystem. The theatre rental grants program was not given a budget increase for 2026, and our growth could not be accommodated at a viable level. Our 2025 subsidy rate was 57%. Despite community enthusiasm, this subsidy is now just 33%. This has upset the sustainability of our presentation model.

Given limited theatre availability and rising presentation costs, we are challenged to add performances. At our current pace, we will outgrow the 668 seats of Vancouver Playhouse within just two seasons. With no 1,000-seat venue for dance, we are faced with cutting performances to expand to a 2,700-seat space. Our audience, conditioned to the increased date flexibility and intimacy of a smaller theatre, would have fewer options to attend our work in a venue four times the size.

To address this, Ballet Vancouver has joined the Vancouver Cultural Precinct planning committee. Under the leadership of Suzanne Anton, the former attorney general of B.C., this coalition joins over 30 organizations across dance, opera, music and theatre. Combining new builds with renovations to existing structures, the committee envisions a four-venue complex encompassing discipline-specific halls at 400, 900, 1,750 and 2,000 seats.

The need is urgent and significant. Between 2001 and 2030, Vancouver's population will have risen by 67%, with residents spending more on performing arts than the national average. Vancouver's last new major performance venue was built in 1997. Three decades have passed. With venues at capacity, arts groups cannot secure the dates they need to program effectively.

While Ballet Vancouver's example of rapid organizational growth is unusual, sector-wide artistic limitations also present a compelling case for reimagining the city's cultural landscape. Vancouver must move beyond a generic approach to outfitting presentation venues. Increased fly space and backstage areas would enable the programming of larger-scale work with greater production value. Similar to London's South Bank or Montreal's Place des Arts, such community amenities as restaurants and cafés would further activate public interest and contribute revenue.

Action is overdue. Canadian Heritage has an opportunity to react to the pulse of public enthusiasm and recognize circumstances of extraordinary growth. Infrastructure support is vital, but what is the purpose of investing in venues if organizations cannot afford to use them? This vision will be inconsequential if affordable rental access is not simultaneously considered and addressed.

● (1135)

To secure and celebrate our cultural autonomy, there must be responsive, agile support for the unprecedented.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

I will now turn the floor over to the representatives of the Conseil québécois du théâtre, Ms. Caroline Gignac and Ms. Rachel Billet.

You have the floor for a total of five minutes.

Caroline Gignac (Director General, Conseil québécois du théâtre): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, thank you for giving the Conseil québécois du théâtre the opportunity to contribute to this reflection.

My organization represents professional theatre practitioners and organizations in Quebec. We represent 310 individual, organizational and association members, comprising more than 2,000 people.

Today, I am joined by a member of our association, Rachel Billet of Théâtres associés, who speaks on behalf of theatre institutions and advocates for performance venues among her peers in Quebec across all disciplines of the performing arts.

The issue of the state of creative and performance spaces in Canada, as well as their role in supporting the next generation of artists, is crucial. Theatre institutions and specialized theatre presenters offer much more than just venues for performances: they provide spaces for artists and audiences to gather, meet and network.

We estimate that in 2024, there were approximately 4,588 theatrical performances in Quebec. They attracted 1.2 million people and generated \$35.1 million in box office revenue. These venues serve as true incubators for the entire theatre ecosystem. However, their viability is endangered because they depend directly on the vitality of the creative forces that work there. That is why, before planning the future of our infrastructure, we must understand the reality facing the Quebec theatre community, which is operating under intense pressure.

Rachel Billet (Director General, Théâtres associés, Conseil québécois du théâtre): This pressure affects the entire chain of research, creation, production and distribution. Its most devastating effects are felt at the very root of our sector—that is, among artists. The lack of a genuine safety net perpetuates an unacceptable level of systemic precariousness. In Montreal, the average income for an artist is around \$17,400 a year.

We saw just how fragile our ecosystem is during the recent crisis in the cultural sector, which shook the entire chain—from creation to presentation. Unfortunately, the effects of underfunding are still being felt today. Last week, another production from the Centre du théâtre d'aujourd'hui's upcoming season was cancelled due to a lack of funding.

Creative and performance spaces are also bearing the brunt of this vulnerability, as they face ever-increasing financial pressure. In fact, between 2017 and 2024, venue-related costs rose by 53%, while overall inflation stood at around 20%. These costs include the operating expenses of performance venues, as well as maintenance and asset upkeep. This data is at the heart of the report "Nos scènes fragilisées, nos arts vivants menacés" by Théâtres associés. The report was co-signed by 34 performance venues in Quebec, including the Société des arts technologiques, and about ten partner organizations, including the Conseil québécois du théâtre, the Union des artistes and the Association professionnelle des diffuseurs de spectacles, whose representatives you have met over the past few days. The report highlights the urgent need to address the costs of operating and maintaining performance venues, which are rising faster than inflation.

The costs associated with asset maintenance are added to operating expenses and include an unpredictable component. Planning and securing the funding for a major renovation project are complex and time-consuming. Performance venues are forced to carry out emergency repairs using their own resources, which threatens their financial stability. They must adapt to address requirements for universal accessibility, climate change impacts, and safety and inclusion standards. Without predictable funding, they will be unable to modernize their infrastructure and meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

In short, performance venues must prioritize the maintenance of their infrastructure in order to host artists and audiences safely. That is done at the expense of the very core of their mission: presenting a program of performances to the public. The sharp rise in venue-related costs creates a downward spiral that forces these venues to make significant cuts in both artistic and human resources.

• (1140)

Caroline Gignac: How can we improve working conditions for artists and increase resources for access to the arts amid this constant pressure? This question raises the crucial concept of intergenerational equity. As a passing of the torch takes place in our community, new voices carrying a renewed vision of artistic creation are emerging. How can we enable this next generation to flourish and become a lasting part of our ecosystem?

So today, the question is not just where the artists of tomorrow will create, but how people will be able to become and remain

artists. We need to consider how creative and performing arts institutions can support project-based theatre companies and emerging artists.

In our view, spaces for creation and performance should be thought of as living infrastructure that serves an ecosystem. To achieve this, we believe three recommendations are essential: strengthening the social safety net, providing better funding for the Canada Council for the Arts, and adopting an equitable territorial vision in all funding for culture and within the build communities strong fund.

To effectively support the next generation of artists and promote our culture, we need to shift our mindset. Creative spaces are not just places to be preserved; they are also strategic tools for building a strong, resilient and sustainable artistic ecosystem.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I now give the floor to Angel Blanco, from the École de musique Alain-Caron.

[English]

He is master of music performance. That's a wonderful title.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Angel Blanco (Master of Music Performance, École de musique Alain-Caron): Thank you, Madam Chair and honourable members of the committee.

I sincerely thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. It's a great honour for me to be here.

I appear today both as an independent recording artist and, by choice, representing École de musique Alain-Caron, located in Rivière-du-Loup. I speak from a concrete reality, that of artists working outside major urban centres where talent exists but opportunities remain uneven.

I also appear as an international recording artist who has carried Canada's name abroad, while maintaining a living connection to my Mexican and American heritages. From this experience, I have learned that culture is not a decorative element but the living infrastructure of a country.

The central challenge we face is not the absence of culture but the lack of connection between cultures.

In Canada, indigenous musical traditions remain significantly under-represented in formal educational and institutional contexts, despite being a vital and living part of our collective identity. Across the Americas, these traditions are not only the heritage of long-gone civilizations such as the Inca and Mexica empires, where musical systems were highly developed and formally cultivated, but also living systems of knowledge that continue to involve and inform the present.

At the same time, the continent's musical history is more interconnected than is commonly taught. This includes early forms of transmission and intercultural contact in the 17th century, such as those associated with the Mi'kmaq communities and Grand Chief Membertou. This history is inviting us not to simplify the past but to deepen our understanding of it.

Internationally, we can already see models of integration between tradition and innovation. Countries such as Burkina Faso have developed cultural policies that actively embed local traditions into education, contemporary creation and national identity, showing that tradition and modernity are not opposites but deeply interdependent.

This principle is also reflected in technological innovation in music education. In the United Kingdom, tools such as Soundbeam and the BBC micro:bit demonstrate how music can become accessible, inclusive and creatively empowering from an early age, including for persons with disabilities. These innovations echo earlier visionary work such as the Omnifón, an early didactic synthesizer system, created in 1960 by my compatriot Raúl Pavón Sarrelangue, that anticipated the idea of music technology as an educational and creative tool.

Technology does not replace art. It amplifies it. Canada must continue to develop and support similar initiatives.

However, innovation is not only technological; it is also conceptual.

In this sense, there is a historic opportunity in the development of microtonal music. From the “13th sound” system of Julián Carrillo to the natural system of music of Augusto Novaro and the works of Canadian composer Bruce Mather, a coherent field of sonic exploration emerges that extends beyond experimentation into a genuine line of musical thought.

This body of work should not be treated as an isolated curiosity but as a meaningful contribution to contemporary music language, with clear implications for education, research and artistic creation. We are seeing today a growing presence of this language within Quebec's contemporary music scene.

In this regard, microtonal music offers an opportunity to expand curricula, diversify pedagogical tools and deepen the understanding of sound within our institutions, particularly in Quebec, where interest in these practices already exists.

Finally, as a union member of the American Federation of Musicians, spanning Canada and the United States, I see first-hand how collective organization strengthens cultural ecosystems. Broader co-operation is not abstract; it's structural.

Madam Chair, the next generation of artists does not only need spaces; it needs a connected system. If we align institutions, knowledge, technologies and territories, Canada will not only preserve cultural diversity but build a living, integrated cultural ecosystem.

A strong society is not sustained by the economy alone. It's also sustained by science, art, sport and philosophy, which are essential pillars of human formation and collective progress.

Thank you for your attention.

• (1145)

The Chair: Hear, hear.

[Translation]

I now give the floor to the representatives of the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française: Nancy Juneau, who is here with us in the chamber, and Laurence Dubuc, who is joining us via video conference.

You have the floor for a total of five minutes.

Nancy Juneau (Chair, Fédération culturelle canadienne-française): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, I am delighted to be here today.

To begin with, I would like to say that the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française, or FCCF, faces many of the challenges and issues mentioned by my colleagues sitting at this table today and supports many of the solutions they have proposed.

For nearly 50 years, the FCCF has acted as a voice for the arts and culture sector on behalf of the Franco-Canadian and Acadian communities. Our network brings together 22 national organizations in all disciplines, as well as provincial and territorial organizations that promote cultural activities in their communities. Through them, we represent an ecosystem of around 350 organizations.

We are here today specifically to discuss the state of cultural infrastructure in the arts and culture sector of Canada's francophone minority communities. We use the term “cultural infrastructure” in the broadest sense to include the physical conditions essential for experimentation, production, training and rehearsals, as well as for the exhibition and promotion of works and artists across the region.

In our communities, cultural infrastructure plays a vital role in identity-building and social cohesion, as it often represents the only access points to cultural offerings in French. It also supports a thriving economy and helps to attract and retain francophone and francophile populations from diverse backgrounds within the region.

However, at present, recent changes to the Canada cultural spaces fund, or CCSF, which is managed by Canadian Heritage, are raising legitimate concerns about the federal government's commitment and ability to meet the specific cultural infrastructure needs of our communities.

In the latest federal budget, the funding allocation for the CCSF—which until now had funded a wide range of cultural infrastructure projects—has been reduced and reallocated. Over the next two financial years, the CCSF will fund only the acquisition of specialized equipment. Other infrastructure needs will be channelled into a new fund, namely the build communities strong fund, or BCSF, which is managed by Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada.

The Chair: Excuse me, I hate to interrupt you.

[English]

We have bells now ringing for a vote. We are just around the corner from the chamber. I would need unanimous consent from members to continue for another 10 minutes or so.

I have Mr. Champoux.

• (1150)

[Translation]

Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): For someone who walks very slowly, it takes 30 seconds to get to the House of Commons. I think we can easily carry on for another 20 minutes if everyone agrees.

The Chair: Do we agree to carry on for another 20 minutes?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Ms. Juneau, please accept my apologies once again. You may continue your remarks. You have two and a half minutes left.

Nancy Juneau: Thank you.

Unlike the CCSF, which I mentioned earlier, the new fund, the BCSF, is not a program exclusively dedicated to cultural infrastructure. As no minimum funding is earmarked for our sector within this new program, there is a real fear that cultural infrastructure across the country will be underfunded, particularly as demand for the CCSF has been exceeding its resources for several years. For these reasons, the FCCF is making three recommendations.

Firstly, a portion of the BCSF funding should be set aside for cultural infrastructure. Funds must be allocated to the sector.

Secondly, in keeping with the spirit of part VII of the Official Languages Act, funds within this budget should be set aside for cultural infrastructure serving Canada's francophone and Acadian communities. These infrastructures face challenges specific to a context often characterized by remoteness from major centres, the small size of communities, higher project implementation costs and limited access to certain technical skills and resources.

Within the framework of this earmarked fund, flexibility should be shown with regard to the program's eligibility criteria and eligible expenses. Indeed, federal institutions must recognize the unique nature of the realities and characteristics of minority communities—which differ from one another and from those of majority communities—in order to take positive measures that will enable the Government of Canada to fulfill its commitments regarding official languages.

Thirdly, the federal government should fund, through the means it deems most appropriate, research activities aimed at gathering reliable and regularly updated data on cultural infrastructure in all provinces and territories, as well as across all artistic disciplines, whose needs may vary.

As set out in section 41 of the Official Languages Act, federal institutions must, as far as possible, base their positive measures on analyses derived from research and evidence. However, at present, this picture remains incomplete and does not allow for fully informed decision-making.

Thank you for your time. We are now ready to answer any questions you may have about cultural infrastructure or any other topic relevant to the study you are conducting.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Juneau.

[English]

Finally, David LaRiviere from PAVED Arts, you have the floor for five minutes.

David LaRiviere (Artistic Director, PAVED Arts): Thank you for this opportunity.

I am the artistic director of PAVED Arts, an acronym for photography, audio, video, electronic and digital, an artist-run media arts centre located on Treaty 6 territory in Saskatoon. We serve a local community of artists, writers, curators and interested public, but the greater question of our purpose requires some unpacking. At the level of community, on a grassroots register, we work to democratize and demystify various media as tools of artistic expression. Democratizing gives access. Demystifying gives permission.

We democratize by wearing down barriers of access. Unlike a commercial model that must prioritize a profitable return on investment, we receive public funding that enables us to subsidize the equipment and facilities that we offer, making them as open and available to our community as possible. PAVED Arts brings artists from across the country to stage exhibitions and delivers educational workshops, which we offer free to our members. We keep membership rates low and waive fees where cost is a barrier. As with many artist-run centres in Canada, PAVED Arts proactively involves marginalized and equity-seeking artists, and we advocate for decolonization undertaken in good faith.

We demystify by placing the tools of production into the hands of people. What dominates artistic expression as delivered in Cinéplexes or on television is largely shaped by market-driven imperatives, which are opaque by nature and, at its limit, focus-group determined. More fundamentally, the culture industry as such presupposes an anonymous consumer. There is no living relation between Hollywood and the local community.

By profound contrast, when a member in our community picks up a video camera for the first time, the effect is instantaneous. The physical engagement with the tools of production is itself a motor for ideas. Consequently, we discover our voice in the act of making. By engaging our programs, artists gain insight into the construction of media and begin to grapple with its implications. The issue is not simply access to equipment but the difference made when an artist retains full creative control of their expression.

Surely we are all familiar with the studies on the economic impact of the arts and the outsized value of each dollar invested in this sector. Such reckoning is persuasive and speaks the language of economists, politicians and many constituents, yet the real value of creative and performance spaces across Canada is not always so tangible. These spaces serve the social and civic health of our communities. For example, a recent Hill Strategies report funded by the Canada Council for the Arts, Canadian Heritage and the Ontario Arts Council found strong statistical connections between arts participation and public health. This is not to suggest that art is medicine; it is to say that people need more than passive consumption. People need spaces to gather, learn, experiment and speak back to the images and sounds that shape public life.

We protect creative and performance spaces because communities need the capacity to produce something strange and peculiar, something idiosyncratic, something that comes from this artist in this place, at this time. Along 20th Street in Saskatoon, on Treaty 6 territory, this kind of singular, artist-controlled work is being made every day. The people who keep these spaces running do so on goodwill, passion and chronically insufficient wages. The sector functions because of an enormous devotion that can never be fully honoured by public investment.

Imagine what becomes possible when organizations plan across years rather than scramble through grant cycles, retain experienced staff, deepen community relationships and speak back to the social challenges of our time. In a period of accelerating commercial enclosure of culture, where algorithms too often determine what gets seen, the capacity to produce something independent, artist-controlled and expressive of community is not ornamental. It may be exactly what holds us together.

Thank you.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you.

I will now turn the floor over to Monsieur Bernard Gagnéux.

[Translation]

You have the floor for six minutes.

Bernard Gagnéux (Côte-du-Sud—Rivière-du-Loup—Kataskomik—Témiscouata, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses for their presentations. It has been very interesting indeed.

Today, we have a splendid line-up of witnesses from all sorts of organizations across Canada. As I only have six minutes of speaking time, I will ask them to keep their answers brief, where possible.

Mr. Blanco, you said that technology does not replace art, but that it amplifies it.

Does artificial intelligence, which is now used in our creative spaces, also form part of the technology you're talking about?

[English]

Angel Blanco: Thank you for your question.

Yes, it could be part of it, but the idea is that it shouldn't replace it. Actually, it will never replace it, because there is a part that, as a performer, you need to perform yourself. It could be a tool, and I would really welcome it if we could use it more, but we must always keep in mind that it's for assisting the creation of the artists and in the educational background.

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt.

Mr. Blanco, can you stay a bit further back from the microphone? The interpreters have very sensitive.... It's difficult. Just keep that in mind.

Angel Blanco: Okay. Like this...?

The Chair: Speak slowly, away from the microphone, and everyone will be safe.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Bernard Gagnéux: At a music school such as the École de musique Alain-Caron in Rivière-du-Loup, is technology—including artificial intelligence—used more widely today than it was in the past? Do you notice any difference?

• (1200)

[English]

Angel Blanco: I wouldn't say that AI per se is used right now at the École de musique Alain-Caron, but for sure we use the Soundbeam. We have adopted the Soundbeam.

The Soundbeam is a common tool in England. It is an instrument that is especially for composers, but at the same time, it's really special for people with disabilities because it is like the old theremin. It's an instrument that you don't touch. Just by moving your body, you create harmonies, melodies, etc.

I will say that, yes, we are the champions of Soundbeam right now, at least as far as I know, in the province of Quebec and maybe in Ontario. I haven't heard that much from Soundbeam in Canada. Yes, indeed, we use it.

[Translation]

Bernard Gagnéux: Ms. Gignac, you raised a fundamental question in your opening address: where and how will artists create? This goes far beyond the question of the venue. Artists, such as Mr. Blanco, are told that they are being offered a space, but when it comes to enabling them to create, we are touching on a fundamental issue. Beyond physical spaces, there are the spaces, within Canada, that artists occupy to define what we wish to represent as a nation and as creators. This is an issue that goes beyond the venue itself, from what I have gathered from your question.

As we represent the Canadian government here today, we are trying to find a way to help the arts sector as a whole spread its wings.

What more could we do beyond what is currently being done?

Caroline Gignac: Thank you for your question.

Today, our message is primarily to invite you to engage in a more strategic and in-depth reflection. You explained it very well: We must try to look beyond the building itself.

What we have sought to highlight today is the fundamental role that creative spaces and performance venues play in supporting emerging artists and established artists alike.

If I have one recommendation to make to the government, it is to support us and guide us in this strategic reflection towards a paradigm shift with regard to venues. A theatre venue is not just a place where the audience comes to sit; it is a place where we welcome theatre companies, a venue where we foster a close relationship with the audience.

In the context of the work currently being carried out by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, I believe it is essential that this aspect be reflected in its report and in the discussions that will follow. It is therefore really a matter of engaging in strategic thinking.

Bernard Gagné: Just last weekend, in fact, I went to see an amateur theatre production in La Pocatière, featuring people I know very well, and I took my 12-year-old granddaughter, who wants to be an actress. She certainly doesn't take after her grandfather.

Could bringing more young people into these venues be a way of fostering hope when it comes to the dissemination, interpretation and creation of works?

Obviously, I don't have any hair left myself, but there was nothing but grey heads in the auditorium. There weren't many young people there. My granddaughter was the only one. It seems to me that we should do more to enable young people to attend theatre performances. I know that Quebec is doing this to some extent, through various programs.

Could the federal government also play a role in this regard?

Caroline Gignac: Yes, indeed, but I'd also like to return to several points raised by those who have appeared here, such as the difficulties faced by the people who run these venues. They're busy plugging leaks in the ceiling and trying to balance budgets that are impossible to balance.

It is clear that this connection with young people and audience development lies at the heart of these venues' mission, but it takes time and resources to fulfill that mission. It is difficult when a manager or any staff member in the cultural sector has to juggle challenges relating to the building's structure.

Bernard Gagné: Would you say there is a disparity between the very large organizations, which are generally well funded, and the smaller ones, which receive far less funding? Do you see a disparity in the allocation of public funds at present?

Caroline Gignac: Where I see the greatest disparity is really between the time invested in the core mission—that is, hosting artists, organizing outreach activities and maintaining close ties with audiences—and the time spent juggling impossible challenges. The cultural sector is very adept at working magic, but that magic has reached its limits.

• (1205)

Bernard Gagné: Ms. Caron Lachance said that funding was being provided to produce reports or analyses, but that there was no money for projects once the reports had been completed. Could there be too much red tape involved here? I'm trying to understand what's going on.

Caroline Gignac: The problem is not so much down to bureaucracy as to the time allowed for theatre professionals to devote themselves fully to their work.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Al Soud, the floor is yours for six minutes.

[English]

Fares Al Soud (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and good morning, everyone. Thank you all for taking the time to be with us today.

A few months ago now, I was in Vancouver, and while I was there I made a point of visiting an organization called Arts Umbrella. They do phenomenal work ensuring that young people, regardless of circumstances, have access to a high-quality arts education. They do a bit of everything in the arts—theatre, music, film and dance. I mention them because we heard in almost all of your opening remarks today the importance of not just creating spaces but creating a system.

Mr. Beamish, you know this well. Your career in dance has taken you across Canada and around the world, working in both contemporary and classical ballet. I'd like to offer you the opportunity to expand on something you said in your opening remarks.

How can Canada better support its dance sector so that artists can build strong careers at home while still remaining competitive on the global stage?

Joshua Beamish: I think we're in this very clear moment of cultural sovereignty, where we're trying to advocate for keeping Canadian talent at home.

For us with Ballet Vancouver, this is a primary part of our mandate. I'm a Canadian, and as the leader of the organization, I value having Canadian performers representing Canadian choreographers, designers and composers across the mediums within our work.

I think one thing that's challenging economically is that if you go to Europe as a young dancer, you get a 13-month contract. You're a government employee in some of these places. We don't have systems in place, and I don't believe that we will. I don't see that coming in the future, but that is a big challenge in terms of retaining top-level talent, for sure.

Ultimately, we have this system of operating companies and project companies. In our case, we are still a project company in terms of our funding at all levels of government, so we don't have guaranteed funding every year to enable us to do long-range planning to ensure year-round contracts for dance artists.

I personally feel that there has been a big push towards supporting those who are emerging now. Many of us who were emerging, at that time, did not receive that support. What's happened is that the people in this kind of mid-level, mid-career, mid-life organization state didn't receive the support when emerging that those emerging receive now. That funding is being rededicated to emerging, so it is a challenge for mid-level organizations.

I believe it's important to support emerging artists. I also think organizations are well equipped as well to provide support for emerging artists if they're given support to have a sustainable structure. That's something that I advocate for: the health of organizations versus giving a lot of money out to young people making things for the first time.

I think that this will give people like me more confidence in feeling that they should stay in Canada and that Canada will invest in them to have longevity.

I'll leave it there.

Fares Al Soud: Fantastic.

[Translation]

Ms. Billet and Ms. Gignac, you represent a wide range of theatre practitioners and organizations from one end of Quebec to another. In your opening remarks, you said that it wasn't just a matter of knowing where tomorrow's artists would create, but also how.

How can we ensure that the next generation of theatre workers is on track for long-lasting careers in the sector?

Caroline Gignac: I'll give you an answer similar to the one I gave Mr. Gagnéux.

To ensure them a career with longevity, we have to take a step back and look critically at the model put in place for this generation of artists. Our sector is based on a financial and structural model that dates back to a specific era and that functioned well for a time. Today, we are urging the committee to show vision, to take a broad, strategic approach and consider the model from different angles. The goal is to come up with multiple levers that can be put in place to ensure career longevity.

One example clearly shows why this model is outdated. In the past, companies could reach a point where they obtained what in Quebec we called "mission support", which consisted of recurrent or cyclical funding. It was the holy grail of funding in a way, because it gave full recognition to their work. Following the financial challenges facing our country, however, this support is no longer open to new recipients.

That's also why we were focused on intergenerational fairness earlier. What are we offering new generations of artists? When I speak of new generations of artists, please understand that I'm not necessarily talking about people who graduated school two or three years ago. I'm talking about established artists with 15 years of experience who have won awards and proven themselves.

So, the goal is to reflect on the model put in place and come up with a structure or ecosystem that allows these companies a minimum of predictability moving forward, but also recognition of the expertise they have gained through all these years.

• (1210)

Fares Al Soud: Thank you.

Madam Chair, I have 15 seconds left so I will stop here.

[English]

The Chair: We will suspend this meeting during the vote.

When we come back, I'll give the floor to Mr. Champoux for six minutes, and we'll continue.

I apologize for the interruption, but we are suspended.

• (1210)

(Pause)

• (1235)

The Chair: I will reconvene this meeting. We are back in session.

[Translation]

Mr. Champoux, the floor is yours.

Martin Champoux: Before my speaking time begins, I would like to confirm how long the meeting is expected to last after 1 p.m., because some of us may have schedule conflicts. What kind of time extension did you have in mind?

The Chair: Personally, I would be willing to extend the meeting by 15 or 20 minutes, if that's possible.

Would anyone like to intervene?

• (1240)

Bernard Gagnéux: Madam Chair, I have other meetings at 1 p.m., I can't—

The Chair: You can't stay longer than that?

Bernard Gagnéux: No, I absolutely can't stay longer, and I think that Mr. Waugh can't stay longer either.

The Chair: Do the Liberal members have anything to add to that?

[English]

We're talking about what time we should finish because we've lost time due to votes. We have resources to continue for an extra half an hour after the meeting. We'll see how it goes.

Mr. Gagnéux and Mr. Waugh are not in favour of that, but we'll see how it goes. Is that sufficient?

[Translation]

Martin Champoux: Doesn't it take the committee's unanimous consent to extend a meeting?

I'm told no, that is not the case. If I understand correctly, a simple quorum is sufficient. That's fine.

The Chair: I believe that everyone is here and that we're ready to resume the meeting.

Mr. Champoux, the floor is yours.

Martin Champoux: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Once again, I want to thank the witnesses for joining us.

I'm going to call on Ms. Gignac and Ms. Billet to talk, first and foremost, about responsibilities related to the infrastructure and maintenance of buildings that house theatre companies and presenters in general.

Ms. Billet, you belong to an organization, *Théâtres associés*, which has conducted an exhaustive study on this topic. I would like you to talk to us about the challenge posed by Canadian Heritage's disengagement from funding and maintaining infrastructure, and how this disengagement affects culture.

Rachel Billet: Thank you very much for the question.

Indeed, the preliminary figures published by *Théâtres associés* show a 53% increase in costs with 20% inflation over the same period. In practical terms, this is leading to cutbacks in variable spending, in other words, spending on artists and creation. We are talking about a 28% reduction in creation. This is what's known as "artistic shrinkflation". It's the reason why we consider it vital to enhance infrastructure funding so that these sites can fulfill their mission.

Keep in mind that the business model followed by theatre institutions relies very little on government funds. For example, for a hall with a seating capacity of over 800, federal funding varies from 15% to 19%. The remainder is generated by box office receipts, own-source revenues and private funding.

Ms. Juneau talked about the realignment of the Canada cultural spaces fund. This fund had very limited resources, so the arts and culture community really saw the build communities strong fund as an opportunity for better infrastructure support.

However, we are still very concerned in some regards. It is imperative that minimal funding is set aside for the arts and culture sector. It is also imperative to ensure regional equity, since not all provinces are equal. In fact, some receive no infrastructure funding. This fund should be accessible in every province, and in remote regions or large urban centres alike.

Furthermore, theatre renovation projects require specific expertise related to the nature of what we do, which is to create, to appear before an audience and so on. It requires cultural expertise.

Today, I believe that our role as witnesses is not only to provide you with a list of problems, but also to suggest solutions. Apart from the funding needed for cultural infrastructure, we could also introduce measures that might not cost much, but that can make a big difference. For example, it could be offering predictable, multi-year funding indexed to inflation to cover infrastructure-related costs, as well as all the other costs associated with the property management specialists who will set up these projects.

We are firm believers in maintaining our real estate inventory. In the current economic context, it's important to clearly understand that we are not there to increase our cultural real estate inventory, but to maintain and improve what we have. We cannot ignore the importance of prioritizing accessibility, climate resilience and her-

itage conservation issues in relation to cultural infrastructure funding criteria.

Moreover, it's important that federal, municipal and provincial governments adopt a coordinated approach.

● (1245)

Martin Champoux: Since we're talking about funding, do you think the government understands that part of the work your members do and the energy and investment it takes? It must be absolutely gruelling. As you said, it's not expertise you can necessarily find just anywhere. You have to spend time on things other than your art.

When you talk to government officials, do you think they understand your reality?

You said there needs to be funding specifically for the cultural sector, because the expertise required is different from that of other sectors. Do you have the sense the government understands what you're talking about when you're making your case?

Rachel Billet: As I said, the challenge isn't just about funding; it's also about carrying out projects. The big challenge we have in Quebec is the lack of predictability when it comes to technical audits, for instance. It's tough to find the resources and professionals available to do the technical auditing and plan for the next 10 to 15 years.

It's common practice in the co-op housing sector, for example, and a requirement for non-profit organizations. In the cultural sector, we're not under that constraint, but governments do understand that the lack of predictability is problematic for us as well. Solutions are needed to address that lack of predictability. Some clarity would be welcome on that front.

Martin Champoux: The government made the decision to shift the funding for maintaining infrastructure from Canadian Heritage to a new fund. What does that mean for you? Does it feel as though you're starting from scratch, having to make your case all over again? It must constantly feel like an uphill battle.

Rachel Billet: That shift created a lot of uncertainty. Canadian Heritage ended up sending out communications to clarify things around the transition, but people are definitely anxious.

Going back to Quebec and the funding programs available to us there, I can tell you they have very specific streams and deadlines. We can't submit applications that cover a whole project. It's a real headache. It's actually not possible to have funding alignment between the provincial and federal programs.

Martin Champoux: Quickly, I'd like to talk about funding, because that tends to be the crux of the issue. The cultural sector was in need of increased funding on many levels, but has instead seen modest increases here and there. Certain sectors in particular saw bold increases, but not performing arts such as dance or theatre.

The Canada Council for the Arts estimated that it needed another \$140 million but ended up getting just \$6 million in the fall budget. What's your take on that? How do you work with that?

Caroline Gignac: In the beginning, we really mobilized to try to keep the government from reducing the budget of the Canada Council for the Arts. At the time, budget cuts were on the horizon. The government had made clear its intent to make cuts.

It isn't as much as we were hoping for, obviously. It also isn't enough to address the challenges. The \$140-million budget request took into account pandemic-level investments. Our figures show that the challenges caused by the pandemic made the postpandemic financial situation worse. It was thought that the \$140 million would provide ongoing support to the various communities after the pandemic.

Martin Champoux: Do you think culture is still underfunded by the federal government?

Rachel Billet: Absolutely.

Further to my colleague's remarks, I'd like to share an exercise I did. I compared the funding grants the Canada Council for the Arts had given to individual artists over a 20-year period. The difference between constant dollar and current dollar value is about \$140 million, so the sector's funding request in relation to the Canada Council for the Arts was truly warranted. The idea is to make up for the budget's not being indexed to inflation.

Martin Champoux: Thank you for coming here with figures and sharing your expertise with us. The information is very helpful to the committee.

[English]

The Chair: Next, I will turn the floor over to Mr. Garnett Genuis, who joins us online.

Welcome to the heritage committee, sir. The floor is yours for five minutes.

• (1250)

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's great to be back at the heritage committee.

When I was here on February 28, we heard testimony, explosive testimony, about foreign interference by the CCP in the arts sector. At the time, I moved a motion to condemn that interference. It was a motion that I felt was pretty simple and straightforward and could have been quickly adopted without interfering with witness time.

At that time, the parliamentary secretary, Mr. Myles, moved to adjourn debate on that. He said it was necessary, from the government's perspective, for them to have more time to review that motion. I suggested at the time that we set aside some time for consideration of that motion.

I understand that time hasn't been set aside so far. It has been 12 days since that motion was moved. I think the government and other members have certainly seen this motion and have had time to look at it. I think we can and should deal with it quickly. This is a very serious issue of foreign state interference trying to intimidate artists and undermine the work of the arts community.

With that in mind, Chair, I'd like to move that we resume consideration of the motion that I moved on May 28.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Given that this committee has had proper notice of that motion, I will declare that it is in order. I will entertain hands from the floor.

I have Mr. Diotte and Ms. Kronis for now.

Mr. Diotte.

Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Thanks, colleague, for moving that.

One thing about the arts community is that you need to have audiences there to watch. The very fact that these artists were having a hard time even performing their art is just a travesty. I do think that it is absolutely essential that we call this kind of thing out.

As I said, it's just a travesty. I would think that it would take precedence over many of the other things we concern ourselves with when artists simply cannot have an audience because of things like bomb threats and so forth. It's from a foreign entity, which is absolutely ridiculous, in my view.

I hope we can roundly and soundly condemn this.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Diotte.

I erred in opening the floor to comments, because it is a dilatory motion, in fact, to resume debate on that topic.

I will turn to the clerk to call the vote.

Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. On a point of order, I know that a resumption motion is a dilatory motion. However, there was no objection to it, so to my understanding, it was adopted unanimously. You didn't err in allowing the motion to be adopted, since there was no objection. Nobody requested a recorded vote.

I would think that we are now currently debating that motion.

The Chair: No, I think we will call the vote on that motion.

Garnett Genuis: Mr. Diotte spoke, so—

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Clerk.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, you still have the floor for questions for another three minutes.

Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Well, that was disappointing and a circus. Since we're at the heritage committee, I should clarify that I mean a circus in the bad sense, not in the good sense. Government members have seen this motion before. It's been before this committee for 12 days. It simply condemns foreign interference by the CCP in the Canadian arts sector.

I'm surprised and I'm disappointed that the government is not allowing this to go forward. Twelve days ago, their reason for not allowing it to proceed was that they needed more time to see the motion. That's fair enough, but now they've had 12 days and they're still blocking it.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis. I'm going to interrupt you there because we've already voted to not continue debate on that motion.

If you don't have any questions for these witnesses, I'll turn the floor over to Ms. Royer.

Dan Albas (Okanagan Lake West—South Kelowna, CPC): I have a point of order.

I may be new to the committee, but I'm certainly not new to parliamentary time. The member had, as you said, about three and a half minutes. It's his time and he can use it to ask questions of the witnesses or he could ask questions of the room. I understand that members can be disappointed and they'll want to share some of their feelings with their colleagues. I don't think you can just take away a member's time simply because you disagree with what he has to say.

The Chair: I take your point. My point is that we've already adjourned debate on that topic, so I'd like to move on to the topic of the day.

Mr. Genuis, do you have—

Dan Albas: Could you rule on whether or not a member's time is a member's time?

The Chair: It is a debate and the procedure at this committee has been to try to stay on topic.

I'll turn it back to Mr. Genuis.

You have another minute.

[Translation]

Martin Champoux: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Monsieur Champoux, go ahead.

[Translation]

Martin Champoux: I'd like to provide a clarification regarding your ruling.

Members can indeed use their time how they wish, as long as they stay on topic. You told Mr. Genuis that he can't talk about the topic he wants to raise. If he can tie it to today's topic, I think he can, but I don't think he did that at the beginning of his remarks. Nevertheless, if he makes the connection to the topic at hand, he is definitely allowed to use his time for that.

The Chair: Yes, I agree.

[English]

Mr. Genuis, I'll give you another minute.

Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, I think my disappointment is clear with how you've handled this process, as well as, frankly, with all the Liberal members for opposing concrete efforts to bring this committee together in condemning foreign interference in our arts sector. I don't really have anything to add to that. I think the public sees and will share my disappointment. I'll yield the rest of my time to Mr. Diotte.

The Chair: I think your time is effectively up.

I'll pass the floor now to Ms. Royer for five minutes.

Zoe Royer (Port Moody—Coquitlam, Lib.): Thank you to every person who's appearing here today.

Mr. Beamish, in less than three years, Ballet Vancouver has made incredible strides in the development of B.C.'s performing arts sector and in the professional classical ballet space. You have been instrumental in repatriating top Canadian talent from other countries and from some companies, such as the American Ballet Theatre and San Francisco's ballet company, etc.

How important is the repatriation and the retention of professional artists to our cultural sovereignty?

Joshua Beamish: It's of vital importance. We don't have a national culture without the artists of our nation who create the work that creates our Canadian identity.

I think it's completely paramount. I think we're in a key moment as a country to reflect on what it is to be a Canadian artist, and what the responsibility of Canadian institutions is to be putting Canadian work forth to be danced by Canadians.

Zoe Royer: How important is the critical cultural infrastructure to this piece of being able to actually retain and repatriate artists?

Joshua Beamish: Quite simply, it comes down to a few things. Top talent dancers want to dance great work, they want to perform consistently and they want to be compensated at international professional standards. For example, looking at our organization in a 668-seat theatre, paying these principal dancers could be one-quarter of our entire box office. At 668 seats, the model is not sustainable. Then we move to 2,700 seats and we have to cut our performances down to just two. Suddenly these dancers are performing six shows a year. What are we doing with them for the rest of the year, and how are we generating revenue to sustain their salaries?

We need a space where we could present a week or two weeks of shows. Right now at Vancouver Playhouse, it's incredibly challenging for any organization to have more than one week. All around the world, you'll see.... For example, I was just in Oslo. The Norwegian National Ballet is premiering a new *Romeo and Juliet* now, and then it's going to come back again later in the year. This is not something that we could do. We have a one-shot, one-weekend space to present something. You can't use word of mouth to build on having people come back the next week. There's not venue availability and we can't afford it.

We're specifically challenged by the limitations of the cultural infrastructure.

• (1300)

Zoe Royer: In your opening remarks, you said that individual donors were up 1,600%, and ticket sales were up 50%. You are experiencing exponential growth, and I know that your operating budget will need to quadruple in the next year.

With that growth, how can the federal government better support that type of extenuating circumstance?

Joshua Beamish: I think there needs to be agile funding to support extenuating circumstances. There is obviously operating funding at the Canada Council for the Arts, but it comes up only every four years, I believe, and it was also suspended due to the pandemic. That program is in a particularly challenging moment and we won't be able to access it for a number of years, so how do we capitalize upon this momentum?

One of the things that I think could be most helpful for organizations is support for development: support to empower us to raise our own funds. We're really an example of this. We have had around maybe \$100,000 in grant support to get to what we've done, and maybe \$130,000 over the last year and a half. We are looking to end this with a \$1.3-million operating budget.

If we had a development staff member specifically focused on raising funds, it wouldn't be an afterthought to everything else that a lean organization has to do to try to keep raising money, and we wouldn't have to keep coming back to the federal government for everything.

Zoe Royer: Thank you very much.

In my 20 seconds remaining, I have a quick question for Ms. Juneau.

I know that the build communities strong fund doesn't necessarily have a carve-out for cultural spaces. Can you speak just a bit to that?

[Translation]

Nancy Juneau: Yes, I'd be pleased to. Thank you for your question.

Under that huge fund the government created, the arts and culture sector will obviously be competing with other sectors and their infrastructure needs. A bridge is an example that comes to mind. Yes, a bridge is important. We don't disagree, but the arts and culture sector, creative, production and performance spaces, are just as important to the health of our nation.

Earmarking a portion of the funding for arts and culture infrastructure specifically would mean that we weren't at a disadvantage, having to compete with sectors completely different from ours.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Champoux, you may go ahead. You have two and a half minutes.

Martin Champoux: I'd like to talk about something we are unfortunately seeing more and more: shows being cancelled, fewer artists going on tour, fewer tour stops being scheduled and so on. As you pointed out, the cancelling of performances is a growing phenomenon. What impact is it having?

Right off the bat, it means less income for actors, technicians and everyone in the company, but over the long run, what impact does the phenomenon have on the cultural sector?

Caroline Gignac: I'll give you a clear example to answer that. In our presentation, we referred to Montreal's Centre du théâtre d'aujourd'hui and the show *Juste des bonhommes qui bougent*, by Camille Giguère-Côté.

Small venues use a co-presentation model, where the theatre assumes some of the costs and the artist contributes a portion. The funding comes from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec or the Conseil des arts de Montréal. The artist didn't receive any funding, so she would've had to assume all the financial risk of putting on the show. As a young creator, she may have even had to go into debt.

• (1305)

Martin Champoux: I assume it's a long time before these artists develop another project.

Do the artists who fall victim to these cancellations, who have to do these kinds of things, tend to be emerging artists or artists on the fringes? Conversely, is everyone affected?

Caroline Gignac: No, it's not at all about being on the fringes. The problem is really the limited investment going into the arts right now.

The model is based on a jury of peers, and the artist in question had already received support under a previous phase. That means she had received project funding, and artistic recognition for the research and creation component. When it comes time to fund the presentation of the show and all you have are bits and pieces of funding because of budget constraints, the work won't be supported, even though it has peer recognition, is part of the venue's lineup and has been selected by the artistic director. In that case, the artist has to borrow the money themselves in order to practise their craft.

I don't know about the members of the committee, but I know of few professions where workers have to go into personal debt to practise their craft.

Martin Champoux: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Diotte, I'll turn the floor over to you for five minutes.

Kerry Diotte: Thank you, Madam Chair.

These questions are for David LaRiviere from PAVED Arts.

David, I know you mentioned something along the lines of your attempt to wear down the barriers to access art, and you look for marginalized artists and that sort of thing. In September 2025, PAVED Arts installed a large-scale pro-Palestinian billboard, and it included 35 different pro-Palestinian statements and links to QR codes with more information.

My question is this: Was the same opportunity offered to the Jewish community to share their statements?

David LaRiviere: The way programming happens at PAVED Arts is that it's certainly freely open to anybody to apply. We have an annual call for submissions on September 15. We don't screen anything in terms of disallowing anyone from applying. That particular work was by Keeley Haftner, who did a residency with us and was engaged in.... As you say, the work included *35 Sentences on Palestine*, but it also led to a rigorously researched data website where people could follow up on and verify all of the facts that were on the billboard.

Kerry Diotte: If somebody from the Jewish community approached you to do a similar art form, would you have said that it's okay?

David LaRiviere: I can't say yes or no in this moment. We would have to look at the project, because that's what we did in the other regard as well. It is actually adjudicated. We put together peer juries.

Kerry Diotte: What's your feeling on that, though? Would you personally approve something like that?

David LaRiviere: I could see it in the realm of possibilities. Without actually looking at the work, I can't comment in any kind of detail. If you're talking about, though, some sense of balance where, well, this is said so that should be said, that isn't really my place or my inclination.

Kerry Diotte: Then you wouldn't have balance or you wouldn't have.... That's not in your—

David LaRiviere: If somebody actually applied with work like that—which I have not seen—then it would be considered.

• (1310)

Kerry Diotte: Okay.

You did mention that Keeley Haftner was the artist-in-residence, and during her residency, she hosted several pro-Palestinian installations. She actually did an exhibit where she had repaired faded and torn Palestinian flags submitted by local residents.

Have any artists-in-residence hosted pro-Jewish installations?

David LaRiviere: No, there have been no pro-Jewish ones.

Kerry Diotte: Was there any offer to repair flags of Israel?

David LaRiviere: No. That wasn't Keeley's project.

There are kind of mixed signals coming here when you say pro-Jewish, because Judaism is a religious faith.

You mean the State of Israel.

Kerry Diotte: Okay...pro-Israeli.

Do you think that PAVED Arts is a safe space for Jewish artists and community members?

David LaRiviere: Absolutely.

Kerry Diotte: How so?

David LaRiviere: There was a project that occurred at PAVED Arts where we reached out to ensure that the Jewish community were invited to a public event and that they should feel safe in the space.

Kerry Diotte: Shouldn't everybody be invited to public events? Why would you have to reach out to the Jewish community and say, you can come here?

David LaRiviere: For this particular event, there were concerns raised by a couple of people in the community. When those concerns were raised, we reached out to say, you are most welcome to be here.

Kerry Diotte: Do you think having—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Diotte. Your time's up.

I'm going to pass the floor over to Mr. Ntumba for five minutes.

I understand you're sharing your time.

[Translation]

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

I'll be sharing my time with Mr. Myles.

Canada is a richly diverse country, and I'm glad to see the witnesses we have with us.

Mr. Lariviere, as I was listening to you answer questions, I realized how much effort you had put into making your event inclusive, so that everyone could participate.

Our study today is about the state of creative and performance spaces across Canada. Those venues are struggling to fill seats because young people and other audiences aren't going. Often, a bar is set up nearby to attract more people.

What is the main thing you recommend we do to turn things around right away?

Rachel Billet: As cultural institutions, we are economic drivers, places that welcome people, places where people gather, places where people find meaning.

We hear from our members about events and programming. Unfortunately, the hardest venues to fill these days are those that showcase complex questions about the world with the changing world order and so forth. It's really important for people to attend shows and have that shared experience.

Nancy Juneau: As far as the purpose of the committee's study goes, I would just add that artistic and cultural infrastructure is even more important because it provides places for people to come together, to experience a sense of community. To some extent, they've replaced churches as places where people gather, where they feel a sense of belonging, where they feel part of something bigger, where they feel included.

That's why our communities need these spaces, places that offer an array of activities that appeal to all kinds of people.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Thank you.

David Myles (Fredericton—Oromocto, Lib.): Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I want to ask a question I asked other witnesses at other meetings.

I wonder whether we define cultural spaces and cultural infrastructure broadly enough in Canada. Should we expand the definition to include spaces that are more experimental?

I don't know how it works in the provinces or in Canada, but this study is mainly about emerging artists and their need for accessible and affordable spaces where they can experiment and work on their art. I'd like to talk about that a bit.

You can go first, Ms. Juneau.

• (1315)

Nancy Juneau: Yes, absolutely. I believe we even talked about that in our presentation.

As minority language communities, we don't tend to satisfy number or area-based requirements, which are much better suited to

other communities with larger populations. That's why artistic and cultural infrastructure supports need to be flexible. They need to take into account the realities of the different communities. I'm talking about French-Canadian and Acadian communities, but the same is true for all kinds of communities in Quebec's regions and remote regions across Canada. The challenge is the same. The struggle is the same.

My answer is yes, we need to broaden how we define cultural spaces. Presentation spaces in our communities tend to be located in community centres, which are shared by many organizations. Those presentation spaces aren't as well equipped; they don't always have the equipment or expertise needed to put on shows up to the standards of other venues. That, too, has to be taken into account. These are flexible spaces, so the program requirements should also be flexible.

[English]

David Myles: Go ahead, Joshua.

Joshua Beamish: There's a lack of support for residency space to experiment.

For example, the theatre rental grant with Vancouver Civic Theatres predominantly supports the performance days. If you want artists to be experimental and to be able to produce innovative work, we need time in the spaces in which the work is going to be performed in order to feel the full creative vision of what could be possible. This could be support for something like Vancouver Civic Theatres to create a residency program or to offset that, or support for other venues in rural or regional areas to have residencies that then activate other communities, and it's a two-birds-with-one-stone situation—not that I advocate for violence against animals.

David Myles: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's all the time we have for today.

I appreciate all of our witnesses' being here and their excellent testimony today.

If there's anything you forgot to say or anything you didn't manage to get on the record, please send a letter to our committee via the clerk. It's information we can consider when our analysts put together our report on this study.

This concludes the testimony for this study. We really appreciate everything that you've brought to us today. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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