



1897 THE CANADIAN CLUB 1997
of Toronto

Taking the Lead: The Crucial Role of Arts Philanthropy

***with RICHARD MONETTE, MICHAEL MEIGHEN and COLIN FOX
of the Stratford Festival***

Monday, May 4, 1998
Royal York Hotel Canadian Room
Luncheon 12 noon, Address 1:00 pm

Distinguished voices of the present join those of the past at this special event to celebrate the leadership of those who help create and sustain a nation's cultural life.

Sixty-two years ago, on February 24, 1936, the Right Honourable Arthur Meighen, former Prime Minister of Canada, gave a legendary Canadian Club address on "The Greatest Englishman of History": William Shakespeare. Today, Shakespeare and other great playwrights find a distinctively Canadian voice at the Stratford Festival - in the recent history of which Arthur Meighen's grandson, Senator Michael Meighen, has played a crucial role.

Immediate past President of the Festival's Board of Governors, Chairman of its \$13 million Act III Renewal Campaign (which actually raised \$15.6 million), Chairman of its forthcoming Endowment Campaign, and a generous arts philanthropist in his own right, Senator Meighen will speak on the private sector's vitally important leadership role in an age of decreasing public funding of the arts.

Senator Meighen will be introduced by the Festival's current Artistic Director, Richard Monette. Recently appointed to the Order of Canada, and himself a past speaker at the Club, Mr. Monette has led the Festival through some the most successful seasons in its history, and has been instrumental in raising its profile abroad through such initiatives as the forthcoming transfer of two productions to City Center in New York.

Concluding this unique event will be an appearance by a theatrical legend of the past, the late Sir Tyrone Guthrie - as portrayed by actor Colin Fox in a brief excerpt from the one-man show *Guthrie on Guthrie*, a warm, engaging and hilarious portrait of the Stratford Festival's first Artistic Director.

**MICHAEL MEIGHEN
REMARKS TO THE CANADIAN CLUB
MONDAY, MAY 4, 1998**

It's one thing for an artist, like Richard, to stand up here and tell you about the importance of the arts in Canada. That's like a life-insurance salesman telling you about the necessity of having comprehensive coverage. It doesn't mean it's not true; it's just that prudent people, like us, will naturally tend to be sceptical about the source.

But it's another thing for someone like me, who is not an artist but a consumer of the arts, to tell you how important they are. While I have the luxury of being able to do this without seeming self-serving. I genuinely do believe that the arts are vitally important to our country and that it is up to people like us to do our part to ensure that they continue to flourish.

Why do I think that? Is it because I believe the arts are good for you, like flossing your teeth or jogging or eating broccoli? I could certainly argue the benefits of getting up from the TV and going out to the opera or the ballet or the theatre. But somehow that doesn't make art sound like much fun. Eat up your Shakespeare, dear, it's good for you!

And whatever else you can say about them, the arts are supposed to be fun. They're something we go to for pleasure, just as we go to a baseball game. Great cultural institutions, like great sports facilities, are a tremendous asset to their communities. Because of the economic activity they generate, they make their communities wealthier and more desirable places to live and work. They add to the quality of life.

If you were a company president looking for a place to locate a new plant, I'd tell you, all other things being equal, to put it in a town that's got a great stadium, or a fabulous golf course, or a terrific theatre, like Niagara-on-the-Lake or Stratford, Ontario.

So why aren't I up here telling you how important it is that you take a leadership role in support of baseball? The reason is simply because the arts are on quite a different level of importance to us. Valuable though baseball and broccoli may be, neither of them constitute a basic human need. There are plenty of societies that get on perfectly well without either of them but I can't think of one society that has managed to function without creating and enjoying some form of art.

The arts are not just good for us; they don't just add to our "quality of life." They are among the things that make life worth living. They are among the things that make us human.

If I were asked to name something comparable in human experience to an engagement with the arts, there is only one thing I can think of, and that is being in love. Love can be difficult. It can be costly. It can be perplexing. You can be disappointed in love many times before you find the real thing, but when you do find it, it changes your life, and there is never any question that it has all been worth it.

There are perfectly valid pleasures to be gained from playing a round of golf or doing a crossword puzzle or watching TV. But once you've discovered the far more intense pleasures that great art can offer, it's hard to limit yourself to something less. There's some work involved, to be sure, but the rewards for that work are without compare.

I speak from experience here: I didn't get married until I was 39 and it took me almost as long to discover the love of Shakespeare. But the same is true of anything else: you can't enjoy the pleasure of skiing, or playing the piano or conversing with someone in another language unless you've invested the effort to master those skills. Just as you need to spend a bit of time exposing your palate to a range of tastes before you learn to fully appreciate fine wine, so does it take a little bit of work - though much less than many people imagine - to become familiar with the language and conventions of a Shakespeare play. But once you do, a whole new world opens up to you. For example, it's extraordinary how, watching Julius Caesar or Richard III, or even Coriolanus, you begin to find yourself gaining insights into the political life of today!

Maybe this message of sustained effort producing commensurate reward is the one my grandfather tried to impart when, as a teenager, I would travel from Montreal to visit him in that rather strange city called Toronto where there was no baseball on Sunday afternoon - or precious little else for that matter! The pleasure of seeing my grandfather was only slightly marred by the certain knowledge that I would be subjected to the same three tests.

The first, of a physical nature, was more daunting in the anticipation than in the execution - - - walking from his house on Castle Frank Crescent for what seemed to be miles and miles to his office at King and Bay! But he was firmly convinced that walking was essential to the well-being of both body and soul!

The second consisted of reporting in excruciating detail on my progress in learning French. For someone like me - a committed member of one of the two solitudes in Montreal - this seemed an impossible challenge but gradually I realized that even my rudimentary knowledge was better than his and I could easily convince him that Molière and I were on intimate terms.

The third was considerably more problematic. Fixing me with a stern gaze my grandfather would inquire as to what books I was reading and, in particular, what Shakespearean work I was studying - for in those days, as you will remember, Shakespeare was taught in all our schools. Knowing that the Hardy Boys was unlikely to elicit an approving smile, I would rack my brains to come up with the Shakespearean play of the moment. The invariable response from my grandfather was an unequivocal tribute to the literary worth of the Bard followed by a lengthy quotation from the play - - - a quotation which to my wonderment seemed to go on and on and on!

Learning to speak French and to enjoy Shakespeare is work, but for myself, they have, each in their own way, provided lifelong pleasure and satisfaction.

Art enables us to share emotional experiences with each other, and to draw comfort and strength from that sharing. We can all feel the poignancy of the struggles so powerfully and unflinchingly portrayed in Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

Art is a way of examining and embracing all human experience, good and bad. It makes us more at home in the world. It makes us feel less alone. It makes us feel that life has meaning after all, that it is good to be human, that there is so much more to life than just the business of "getting and spending," as Wordsworth called it. Love does much the same thing.

Some people can live without art in their lives, just as some people can live without love. But what sad and empty lives theirs must be. How much of their potential must be denied them.

I hope that I have succeeded in convincing you of why I think art is important. But love is an intensely private pursuit: no one else's business but that of the parties involved. Isn't the same true of art? We may each of us in this room have our own private relationship with the arts. What does that have to do with our public lives, with our particular roles in society?

As John Donne wrote, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." Each of us has his or her own private agenda, our own desires and motivations, our own instinctive drive to get ahead of the next person. And each of us also has a sense of something beyond that, nobler ideals that we can't necessarily achieve on our own. We have a sense not only of our own identities but of our collective identity as part of a society.

We are impelled by that larger sense of self to create civilization. We try to organize ourselves into a structure, to focus our individual energies into some kind of coherent whole that will be more than just the sum of its parts. This is the foundation of our belief in the concept of government. Governments, we hope, exist to help us to realize our larger selves, our yearning for something more than we can achieve individually. At its best, by giving us the means to act collectively to achieve our highest aspirations, government makes it possible for us to have a civilization.

And if civilization is a collective striving towards the best we can imagine, there can be no civilization without art, for art is the imagination's most eloquent expression.

Art is a way of sharing in other human experiences. People are drawn together in a theatre to share an emotional, intellectual and spiritual experience. And the individual spectator is put in touch not just with the people who happen to be there on that particular afternoon or evening, but also with the text, with words that may have been written four hundred or two thousand years ago. A bridge is built across the gulf of time, to give us access to all of humanity.

Imagination, the ability to see through another's eyes, to feel through another's heart, is a prerequisite for civilization. It is a prerequisite for life itself, for without it we are mere shells and shadows - "worse than senseless things," in Shakespeare's felicitous phrase.

This is why ensuring that we continue to have art - and, just as important, ensuring that we have inexpensive and readily accessible art - is a matter of concern to us in our public lives as well as our private ones.

In the best of all possible worlds, anyone who wanted to see a play at Shaw or Stratford could do so, without having to worry about how much it costs. Everybody should be able to share in the arts, for everyone contributes, for better or worse, to the collective imagining we call civilization. Unfortunately economic realities that get in the way of that ideal.

We look, in the first place, to governments to help us overcome those obstacles. But, as we all know, governments are currently retreating from their role in the arts.

In the U.S., a significant growth in arts activities over the past three decades, has in recent years outstripped the available support. A recent report prepared by the National Endowment for the Arts identified four areas of concern:

- * Many Americans do not recognize the relevance of art to their lives.
- * Government, private and corporate support is down.
- * The audience is aging.
- * Art is being ignored or neglected in the schools.

Here in Canada, despite the fact that arts and cultural industries are the country's fifth largest employer and the second fastest growing occupation, and that they generate at least three dollars for every dollar invested in them., the picture is regrettably similar. That's why the highest priorities of most arts organizations today include education through school programmes, broadening their bases of support, replacing aging audiences and finding ways to cope with continuing government cuts.

The last of these usually means increasing reliance on self-generated revenue while keeping a firm hand on costs. And this has to be accomplished in an increasingly competitive environment - not only increased competition for audiences from the commercial entertainment industry, but also increased competition for charitable dollars from the rapidly growing not-for-profit sector.

Sooner or later, the question arises: Can we continue to produce art or will we have to eschew it in favour of lesser fare that will "fill the house," in order to balance our books? When we regard art purely in terms of profit and loss, the answer becomes depressingly inescapable.

But if we accept that art is about something more than profit and loss, if it represents some sort of quest for the things that finally make life worth while, we have to accept too that any quest involves experimentation, and with experimentation come success and failure. And if we mean to be serious about the arts, we must accept that like most things worth having, they come with a cost.

That cost cannot be met by the marketplace alone, for the concerns of the marketplace are not - and cannot be - those of art.

Governments do, I think, still realize this. It's worth noting that, though government support for the arts has declined across the board in recent years, it has not been eliminated. ** Despite the cuts, the various arts councils are still being given funds to support us, and as long as that continues we take heart from this evidence that governments are paying more than lip service to the notion that arts are part of a nation's fabric.

Nonetheless, the situation is critical. Cultural spending remains a very small portion of total government spending, and even small percentage reductions in that spending can have crippling effects. Governments change, policies change and economic circumstances change, and the arts are very much at the mercy of those shifts in climate. And if public resources cannot bridge the gap between what the arts cost and what they can win from the marketplace without hopelessly diluting themselves, then it is to business leaders and philanthropists that we must turn.

The business community is full of people who are natural leaders: people committed to growth and development, people who understand the value of investment, people who can imagine a world that is healthier and stronger. So perhaps it is not as surprising as one might at first think that such people can find common ground with those who work in the arts.

There is an all-too-common perception of arts organizations as stereotypical welfare dependents, living from one handout to the next. In fact, most arts organizations today are shrewd and careful strategic planners. They need to be. They realize the vital importance of investing sensibly in their own futures by educating and developing new audiences. This requires the acquisition of (and training in) new technology, the devising and implementing of sophisticated marketing programmes and the renewal or replacement of aging facilities.

Most arts organizations today also realize the importance of building an endowment fund: a kind of insurance policy to ensure that the arts will still be here for future generations. Such a fund not only offers protection against unforeseen operational shortfalls, but also provides for the training of actors, for artistic ventures such as the workshopping of new plays, and for ongoing capital needs - all of them essentials that simply cannot be funded through annual revenues.

When I became President of the Board, the Stratford Festival had an enviable reputation as the home of some of the finest theatre in the world. It also had aging facilities, increased annual needs and an insufficient endowment. Our first step towards ensuring that our future would be worthy of our past was the Act III capital campaign to renew our flagship Festival Theatre. Our biggest worry in embarking on this campaign was that it might draw support away from our annual fundraising campaign. In fact, there was little or no cannibalisation and not only did Act III exceed its original goal, we actually saw a significant increase in our annual fund!

We learned some important lessons during this campaign, lessons that we intend to apply as we move on to create a fund that will meet the needs of the Festival on an annual basis and secure its future for today and for all time. Those lessons are:

1. **Appeal to your loyal base.** Our Members, loyal patrons and sponsors believe in the mission of the Festival: "to produce the best works of theatre in the classical and contemporary repertoire, with special emphasis on the works of William Shakespeare." This is what they want us to do, and what they are willing to invest in. It is to them that we turn first but while nurturing those relationships we must also build new ones through careful stewardship and cultivation.

2. **Communicate your case.** Support of the arts need not be and is indeed not an exercise in pure altruism. Art is an investment, not charity and like mercy, arts support "blesseth him that gives and him that takes." There are good business reasons to be a supporter of the Stratford Festival - reasons that make sense to individuals wishing to invest their assets or to the marketing departments of corporations looking for a solid property with which to work towards achieving their marketing objectives. We successfully demonstrated to our donors that there was a payback for contributing to Act III in addition to making an annual donation. And as we embark on our new endowment campaign, we will once again demonstrate a compelling business case for investing in the Festival.

3. **Raise the Sights of Your Donors.** Start with your Board - in our case, we were able to achieve 100% participation in our Act III Campaign. Find a formula to help donors increase their gift - for example, for an endowment or capital campaign, an amount equal to 10 times the amount of the annual gift. Remember that the Federal Government has recently made it considerably more attractive for gifts of appreciated stock in publically traded corporations. The essential point here is that donors must be helped to think in greater terms than they might if left to their own devices.

4. **Demonstrate sound management of the invested funds.** It is essential to show clearly the return both to the Festival and to the donor. We are as much a business as any for-profit organization. The difference is that our profit is the art we produce - and it is not our profit alone but that of everyone whom it touches.

The word "philanthropy" means, literally, "the love of one's fellow man." The arts are indeed good for us, as love is good for us. They enlarge us, illuminate us and bring us one step closer to that most elusive of all human goals, happiness. We profit from them, in ways that cannot be shown on a balance sheet.

I leave you with an exhortation to be philanthropists, in heart and in deed. For in doing so you help create civilization, that collective imagination that is nourished and articulated by the arts; you fulfil more completely the leadership role for which your talents and inclinations have already shown you to be fitted; and you open your own lives to the possibility of limitless rewards.