

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR BUSINESS IN THE ARTS

by

ARNOLD EDINBOROUGH

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There has, in the last few months, been a lot of fussing and fighting about funds for the arts. The 1812 Committee, so-called because the War of 1812 was the only one Canada ever won, held meetings all over the country to protest the freezing of Canada Council funds. Mr. Arthur Gelber has said that he will wear the knees out of his trousers praying for more money for the National Arts Centre. The Progressive Conservative party caucus, under the able leadership of David Macdonald, has produced a series of position papers on arts matters. And so has the NDP under Cyril Symes.

There are several reasons for this. Inflation has hit the arts harder than any other form of endeavour, for the arts are labour intensive: you cannot play a quartet with fewer than four instruments, or Beethoven's 9th symphony without a large orchestra and chorus. Aida has to have both conquering and conquered armies and you can't have Falstaff this summer at Stratford without Prince Hal and Hotspur. And salaries for actors, musicians, singers and dancers have had to increase even to maintain their accepted subsistence level of pay.

Expansion has been another factor. We now have a greater variety of offerings in the performing, visual and written arts than ever before in Canada's history. Thirty

years ago we did not have any of our present summer festivals (Stratford, Shaw, Charlottetown, Lennoxville, Guelph and Ottawa). We had neither the National Ballet nor the Grands Ballets Canadiens - and none of the regional theatres now so well established in Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, London, Toronto, Montreal, Quebec City, Halifax and Fredericton.

The Canada Council was established in 1957; the Ontario and other provincial arts councils only in the 60's and lotteries for the arts only in the 70's.

Nationalism has also played a part. We have deliberately devised policies to spend tax money at all levels - federal, provincial and municipal - to help foster a sense of Canadianism. Expo started it; the Parti Quebecois has, by transference, fostered it. And where can one better plug nationalism than on the stage, on the screen and in books and periodicals?

The total budget for our 94 major performing arts companies in this country in the 1977-78 season was over \$76 million dollars. This season it will be well over \$81 million. The number of people who will see the dozens of plays and attend literally hundreds of symphony, pop and light classical concerts will be over 8 million - one in every two Canadian adults.

Similarly, the great arts organisations - and the great Canadian artists - will be used to show Canada abroad. The Toronto Symphony went to China last year; the Grands Ballets Canadiens was in Latin America. Michael Snow has walked his walking woman all the way to a one-man show in the Place Beaubourg in Paris going on at this moment. The Canadian Brass will open the Ambassador's Weekend next month at the Alabama Spring Festival of the Arts in Birmingham and In Praise of Older Women was showing at the Odeon, Leicester Square when I was in London, England, last week.

In other words, the cultural explosion we have had in the last twenty years is now seen to be, by others as well as ourselves, as the expression of a vibrant, dynamic, innovative society, different from the United States, and yet, by European and Asian standards, part of North American culture.

Now we have always been different from the United States, and the way in which we have supported our cultural institutions shows that difference beautifully. The States has always been a relatively laissez-faire society with as little government interference in people's lives as possible. They have had no nationally-owned airline, or railway. Crown corporations are a mystery to Wall Street. Our close regulation of communications is anathema to CBS,

NBC, ABC and ATT. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is to them an anomaly, just as PetroCan is.

But we have always had a mixed economy. How else could we have held together the few million people who live in this sprawling land-mass which stretches from the North Pole to Point Pelee and from Anticosti to the Queen Charlotte's?

So we have had a mixed approach to our cultural organisations: the older ones have all been the result of private enterprise. The Toronto Symphony Orchestra would not have made it, had not Colonel Albert Gooderham regularly picked up the tab for its deficit in the first ten years of its life. Stratford would never have got the tent up in 1953 had not Vincent Massey lobbied his wealthy friends in industry. The National Ballet was due entirely to the devoted efforts of a group of businessmen, lobbied and pressured by what one might call in retrospect a bunch of Trojan women.

Nor has the business sector ever relinquished either its interests or its efforts. In the recent Financial Post Awards, the Hamilton and Region Arts Council cited the involvement of Dofasco in the cultural life of Hamilton.

"The Company encourages its individuals to be involved in the community and currently has numerous members on community boards and committees in the cultural field.

It was under the chairmanship of John Sheppard, Executive Vice-President, Financial, that the Art Gallery of Hamilton mounted the campaign for its new building (\$5,766,600).

"Dofasco was one of the major leaders in bringing about the beautiful Hamilton Place theatre. Whereas the company's support was predominantly in 'bricks and mortar' as a major contributor, Dofasco employees played a leading role in actively soliciting funds. The company has also played a major role in renovation support of the Royal Hamilton College of Music. Dofasco sponsors the National Ballet at Hamilton Place, and with it Karen Kain and Frank Augustyn, both originally Hamiltonians. In addition, the company also sponsors a series of performances by the Hamilton Philharmonic at Hamilton Place."

In citing the similar involvement of the Aquitaine Company in Calgary, the Calgary Region Arts Foundation had back-up letters from every single professional arts group in that city saying how they had been supported by Aquitaine, both by money and manpower.

In Vancouver, the Vancouver Symphony has every single concert this season sponsored by a commercial organisation. And the Toronto Symphony is not far from that 100% goal.

The Federated Co-operatives of Saskatoon not only, through their corporate headquarters, commissioned a play

from 25th Street House: they persuaded their affiliate stores in 40 different prairie communities to underwrite a performance in each of those communities.

In the visual arts, some corporations, especially Rothmans of Pall Mall Canada Limited, have sponsored touring exhibitions of first-class work. Shell Canada and Gulf Canada have set out to create major collections by contemporary artists to hang in their new office buildings in Calgary. The Toronto-Dominion Bank and the Bank of Nova Scotia are doing the same in regional headquarters in Moncton, Edmonton and Vancouver.

Such involvement - whether by IBM in ballet, Imperial Oil in films, Mutual Life in theatre - has another dimension. When the creation of a national identity is part of national policy in the arts, the danger is to let propaganda supersede or overwhelm art. People will see what government wants them to see. The entertainment side of things can then be neglected. How many operas, films and plays do we really need about Luis Riel? And how many more times are we going to see the laying of the CPR tracks from sea to sea? More importantly, how many American, British and French artists are going to be denied a chance to show their work in Canada? And how many new plays by Pinter and Stoppard and Simon do artistic directors have to deliberately sandwich between

plays by fledgling playwrights in order to keep their Canada Council money flowing? This is particularly difficult in music, where all Canadian music is modern music and therefore not to the taste of about three-quarters of the musical audience.

I believe, therefore, that private sponsorship, and lay boards between them, whether in the visual or performing arts, are also a counter weight to a kind of artistic chauvinism which we have seen all too often in Canadian theatre and television.

In other words, to be Canadian we do not have to be isolationist. I happen to think that Shakespeare as played at Stratford is, in itself, Canadian theatre: Martha Henry's interpretation of Isabella in Measure for Measure two seasons ago was a Canadian triumph; Louis Quilico's Rigoletto at the Canadian Opera Company was a Canadian triumph - just as Jon Vicker's singing of Britten's Rape of Lucretia was at Guelph in 1976. And, to revert to Stratford again, the wrestling match in As You Like It last year showed the virility, toughness and bounce of Canada, especially when compared with the piddling exhibition in the British television production of the play recently seen on OECA.

What we have to do is to consolidate our present standards of stage, concert hall and art gallery by bringing

in more people to share the experience and to keep art out of any one guiding hand, however well intentioned and with-it that one guiding hand may be.

To do so, the private sector has to be involved even more. Because the Canada Council and provincial councils have become major sources of funds we should not let them become sole sources. For artistic politics are as ruthless as ordinary politics (and often a good deal more vehement).

What I foresee happening in the best of all possible cultural worlds is this:

First,

The raising of the amount of money brought in at the box office, by putting more human seats on theatre seats - what I call the "more behinds before" syndrome.

To do so, business should offer its marketing expertise to theatre, opera and ballet companies. Already the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres / has a proposal for this which is being studied by a consortium of advertising agencies brought together by The Council for Business and the Arts in Canada. It will need money and I sincerely hope that major corporations, when they see what the ad agencies have devised, will be eager to offer their help in both dollars and diverted advertising space.

Second,

The spread of art collecting by corporations and

partnerships. The amount of new office space within two blocks of this hotel is enormous - some 5 million square feet of office space abuilding and perhaps another 3 just moved into. And if there is 8 million square feet of floor space, there must be 30 million square feet of wall space, less windows.

What a virgin territory for Canadian artists. And what acres of outdoor space for sculpture.

I hope that architects and clients will seek out artists and that Visual Arts Ontario, Canadian Artists Representation and other umbrella organisations will be putting together slide shows and other audio-visual presentations to catch their imagination, and persuade owners to set aside at least 1% of their new building cost to make the work-place as pleasant a place to be as possible.

Third,

I hope that corporations will come soon to see that buying subscriptions to theatres and symphony concerts will be as acceptable to their suppliers and customers as the present custom of buying boxes for the Blue Jays, the Maple Leafs and the Argos. (And certainly good seats at the opera, Stratford and the National Ballet are as hard to come by.)

Fourth,

Board membership is a challenging, often exciting addition to one's own business life. I would like to see

more middle management people made available by corporations to give smaller cultural organisations the benefit of their expertise. In areas like marketing, forward planning, cost-effective accounting, budgetting, public relations, advertising, building maintenance, handling of funds and labour relations, the corporate sector has much to offer. Many boards of smaller arts organisations know nothing of these matters, and to see arts people trying to re-invent the wheel at their meetings is sad.

Fifth,

Above all, corporations must see that public taste has changed; that the present quality and variety of our cultural life in Canada has come about because the people wanted it and demanded it, cheerfully picking up the tax tab to pay for almost a billion dollars worth of capital and operating funds in the past decade.

To become more involved with this movement is only good business sense to my way of thinking - and to the thinking of the 100 corporate members of The Council for Business and the Arts in Canada. It shows also that corporations do not just do business with society but within that society, that they are an integral part of it and can help shape it. Any country - and especially a trading country like ours - lives by its creative minds, and one must cherish them.

And where are they more likely to be than amongst those people who are prepared to live with less material goods than most, because they prefer to live more intensely and speculatively than most.

And it will help us all. For we will have a better-balanced, more audience-oriented, more popular and representative culture than we might otherwise have.

That is the challenge. Yet what an enormous reward if we can face it enthusiastically, generously and successfully.