



September 18, 2009

The Honourable Gordon Campbell
Premier, British Columbia
P.O. Box 9041, Stn. Prov. Govt.
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

Dear Premier Campbell,

I am writing to you today on behalf of the 800 members of Canadian Actors' Equity Association that live in the Province of British Columbia. Canadian Actors' Equity Association is the professional association representing 5500 performers, directors, choreographers, fight directors and stage managers in English Canada engaged in live performance in theatre, opera and dance.

Recognizing that the arts are vital to life and that artists make an invaluable contribution to our society, Equity supports the creative efforts of its members by seeking to improve their working conditions and opportunities. The business of Equity is to negotiate and administer collective agreements, provide benefit plans, information and support, and act as an advocate for its membership. Equity strives for fairness, integrity and compassion in all its endeavours.

We have been following the story the British Columbia Ministry of Culture's arts funding cuts with increasing dismay. These decisions seem to have come right out of the blue and with no rationale attached.

The figures we have seen suggest that funding will drop from \$47.8 million (2008-2009 figures) down to a pittance of \$3.657 million in 2011-2012. The budget update delivered by Minister Colin Hansen earlier this month makes no particular reference to arts and culture and certainly doesn't explain why you see the need to cut funding by over 90%. This is a completely disproportionate share of the burden. When times are tough, we all recognize the need for restraint, but the cuts you propose are far more severe than mere fiscal prudence. Furthermore, Minister Hansen suggests that while it is expected that the B.C. economy will shrink by 2.9% in 2009, he is anticipating 1.9% growth in the next year, (cited on page 2 of the September Budget Update 2009) so it is unclear to us why such draconian cuts are necessary in our sector.

There has been much anxiety over the last couple of weeks with respect to funding of the B.C. Arts Council and what will become of the long-term commitments made to arts organizations and artists receiving gaming grants. I would urge your government to immediately inform those expecting funding what monies they may actually expect this year, when they may expect it and what will happen to funding promised for future years. I have members who have made commitments to work with companies whose grants will be eliminated and that may leave some companies with contractual liabilities that we will be forced to sort out. These decisions will leave some companies in very difficult financial circumstances as they are likely to have already made long term commitments which they may now not be able to fulfill.

Every other government in Canada is looking at the Creative Economy as a way to revive dying industrial and resource-based economies, and the arts are a driving force in that new landscape. At a time when your government is investing tens of millions of dollars in other industries, the cuts in arts funding represents a tiny percentage of your overall expenditures and yet means so very much to our industry. I would ask that your government explain to the thousands and thousands of artists in the province why their jobs are not important but other people's are.

It appears from the public statements made by Minister Krueger in July, that the "Culture and the Arts" portion of the Tourism, Culture and Arts Ministry has little value to your government but I would ask that you seriously reconsider this decision. Imagine for just a moment what a world without arts and culture would look like. You would turn on your television and see nothing but local news and weather. There would be no books to read, nor any magazines. There would be no theatre, dance or opera to see and nothing playing at the local movie theatre. There would be empty spaces in your home where paintings, photographs, sculptures and other artifacts used to be. No music would play on the radio or be performed live. You would not be able to add to your CD or DVD collections. That is not a society that most of us would choose to live in and not one that most of us would consider to be in any way civilized or advanced. Yet that is effectively what you sanction upon essentially eliminating arts funding in your province.

On behalf of the Canadian Actors' Equity Association membership, our arts colleagues across B.C., and the citizens of the province who value the quality of life in the province, I strongly urge your government to re-think your decision to make such onerous and debilitating cuts. The very culture of the province to be showcased at the 2010 Olympics may well be irreversibly damaged before the event comes to fruition if these cuts stand.

Yours truly,

CANADIAN ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION



(Ms.) Arden R. Ryshpan
Executive Director

Cc: Kevin Krueger – Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts
Rich Coleman – Minister of Housing and Social Development
Colin Hansen – Minister of Finance
James Moore – Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages
Jack Poole – Chairman, Vancouver 2010 Board
Jane Danzo – Chair, British Columbia Arts Council