

Good morning. My name is Mitchell Krieger, and I'm Executive Director of the Victoria Symphony. I'm here with my colleague Michael Shamata, Artistic Director of the Belfry Theatre. We speak directly for our colleagues in the Pro Art Alliance, and indirectly for the thousands of artists and arts workers that work so hard to make the cities and towns of British Columbia culturally rich. We are here to implore the government to reconsider the series of actions that threaten the viability of the sector – a sector which, make no mistake, more than earns its support from the government and community by giving back culturally, socially and economically on a daily basis. In fact, throughout this discussion, one statistic is inescapable: for every dollar invested in the arts by the province of British Columbia, \$1.36 is returned to the Treasury in taxes. Where else could the government (or anyone else) get a 36% return on investment? For that reason alone, we hope the Members here and the Ministers of the Cabinet will take a breath and realize that they are making a mistake in cutting funding to the arts.

But that is far from the only reason. The loss of this funding will have a deeply negative result in many areas of our communities and lives, far beyond the arts community. Here are some of the things that will happen if the funding is not restored.

Jobs – Many jobs will be lost. In the arts directly, since more than 80% of expenditures is on personnel, the projected cut of \$40 million will result in at least \$32 million lost directly in jobs within the arts – over 1200 jobs. These will be joined by losses of jobs in restaurants, hotels, retail stores, parking and other businesses. Many hundreds, if not thousands of families, will have less to put into the economy, and tax revenues will fall further.

Education – Both arts programs in schools and programs offered by arts organizations are threatened by these cuts. Students involved in the arts have better grades and lower dropout rates, higher empathy and tolerance towards other racial groups, higher scores in creative thinking, expression of ideas, and risk taking in learning. Young people involved in the arts are much less likely to become involved in gangs or drugs. An overwhelming majority of parents want arts to be part of their children's lives.

Social Benefits – Involvement in the arts is healthful. Seniors involved in the arts have significantly lower rates of doctor visits and need for medication. Active people, the kind who participate in and attend the arts, perform better at work with increased productivity, less absenteeism, and fewer on-the-job accidents. The arts build community pride and social cohesion – if any of you witnessed the crowds all over Victoria during the Fringe Festival, or at the opening of the Pacific Opera Victoria season last Thursday, or on Granville Street in Vancouver on Monday night for the Film Festival, or the 40,000 people gathered around the Inner Harbour for the 20th Victoria Symphony Splash in August, you could not have missed the great positive energy.

Creative Economy – The seminal work of sociologist Richard Florida has demonstrated that creative communities thrive economically. Communities that have a vibrant arts scene attract successful entrepreneurs and workers, and as the creative economy grows, big business. The future of British Columbia's economy could be as the creative capital of Western Canada; but to accomplish that we must have the kinds of cities that will be inviting to those kinds of leaders.

Cultural Accessibility – The province's investment in the arts keeps our cultural activities affordable and accessible; the planned cuts could force arts organizations to hike admission prices significantly.

Loss of stability – Most funders, including British Columbia, tell arts organizations that they must work for stability in our financial planning and execution. These cuts undermine years of effort on the part of both the province and its grantees to accomplish such stability.

Loss of revenue to the Treasury – As I've said, up to \$1.36 comes into the BC treasury in taxes for each dollar invested in the arts. This statistic comes from an report commissioned by the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs two years ago. We are part of the solution for the downturn in the economy. I'll say that again: we are part of the solution, and cutting funding to the arts will only make the province's financial problems worse. This is clearly recognized by many other provinces and both the Canadian and US federal governments – some of them are in fact increasing funding, recognizing the power of the arts as a spur to the economy. On this fact alone, these cuts make absolutely no sense.

Make no mistake – the grants to the arts from the Arts Council and the Gaming Commission are not gifts or largesse. **We earn every penny and return great value to the people and government of British Columbia.** Nor does money invested in the arts does not go into a shareholder's pocket – it goes out into the community! The people of British Columbia deserve the restoration of an investment that has proven its value again and again. Please restore the full \$40 million for the arts to the current and coming fiscal years. You will not regret such a decision. Thank you.

And now I ask you to give your attention to my colleague Michael Shamata.