

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

B.C. arts groups applaud council chair's resignation



Jane Danzo stepped down to protest against cuts

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As arts organizations around British Columbia learn of another round of devastating provincial funding cuts, the now former chair of the B.C. Arts Council (BCAC) is being applauded by the arts community for her surprise decision to resign. Jane Danzo says she stepped down in order to freely express her concerns about arts funding in the province.

In an interview with *The Globe and Mail*, Danzo called her term as chair “extremely difficult” as the BCAC was forced to deal with funding cuts, while the council’s recommendation to restore funding was rejected.

“I wanted to bring to the government’s attention that these are serious concerns that I had and the only way that I could really make a statement was by stepping down,” Danzo said from Victoria, where she lives.

Danzo, 69, stepped down last week, about 11 months after being named chair (she was appointed to the council four years ago). In her letter of resignation, she highlighted the government’s decision to disregard a BCAC recommendation – echoed by the bipartisan Standing Committee on Finance – to restore Arts Council funding to 2008-09 levels (\$19.5-million) in the budget last March. Instead, funding to the BCAC was cut to \$7.9-million.

Danzo called the process of figuring out how to distribute the diminished funds “devastating” and “extremely stressful” for the BCAC, and noted in her letter that “the devastating impact of that decision is now being felt by artists and arts organizations throughout the province as they receive notification of substantial cuts to their core funding.”

Indeed, Ballet Victoria has recently learned that it has lost all of its provincial funding. Victoria Symphony's provincial operating grant has been cut by just over 70 per cent. The Vancouver Fringe Festival reported a 60 per cent cut in arts council funding this year. The Cultch in Vancouver has lost almost 50 per cent of its BCAC funding – \$51,000. "It's huge. It's massive," said Cultch executive director Heather Redfern. "It's terrifying."

Others, such as the Victoria Fringe Festival, have lost all of their gaming grants (operated by a separate ministry). The Community Arts Council of Richmond has closed its Artisans Galleria, citing funding cuts.

In the March budget, the government also announced a \$30-million Arts Legacy Fund - a surprise to the BCAC, which learned of it on budget day and for months had to remain "awkwardly silent," Danzo wrote, until the government released more information.

Danzo was "extremely disappointed," by the announcements, and says the new fund was the kind of initiative she should have been aware of ahead of time. "I would have expected that somehow or other the board would have been given a heads up."

It has recently emerged that the legacy money will fund BC Spirit Festivals, to be held for three years to mark the Olympic anniversary.

Danzo feels the money could have been better spent.

"I would have perhaps suggested that that money be directed to sustaining the work of the artists and organizations that made [the Cultural Olympiad] possible. ... That to me would be a legacy."

She added: "I felt I had to step down in order to speak out about the failure of the government to follow through with a consultative process that would have been expected."

In her letter, Danzo also expressed concern about the lack of an arms-length relationship between the government and the BCAC, which does not have its own staff or funding. That makes it difficult, Danzo said, for the BCAC to perform its advocacy role properly.

"It's a conflict," she said.

"I really feel inspired by what Jane has done. I think she's demonstrating a great deal of courage and integrity," said Amir Ali Alibhai, executive director of the Alliance for Arts and Culture.

"The whole arts community will be incredibly grateful to her for doing this," added Lindsay Brown, who runs the Stop BC Arts Cuts website. Brown predicted more resignations will follow.

Brown's group is again calling for the resignation of Tourism, Culture and the Arts Kevin Krueger. Krueger was not available for comment on Wednesday.

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