



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau
Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland

March 17, 2020

The Honourable Steven Guilbeault
Minister of Canadian Heritage

The Honourable William Francis Morneau
Minister of Finance

The Honourable Mona Fortier
Minister of Middle-Class Prosperity
Associate Minister of Finance

The Honourable Navdeep Bains
Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry

The Honourable Mélanie Joly
Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages

Re: Mass cancellations put artists' livelihoods at risk; arts organizations in financial distress

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau; Deputy Prime Minister Freeland; and Ministers Guilbeault, Morneau, Fortier, Joly, and Bains,

We write as the leadership of Opera.ca, the national association for opera companies and professionals in Canada. In light of recent developments around COVID-19 and the waves of cancellations as a result of bans on mass gatherings, Opera.ca is urgently requesting federal aid on behalf of the Canadian opera sector and its artists -- its most essential and vulnerable people -- while pledging its own emergency support for artists in desperate need.

Opera artists are the heart of the opera sector, and their economic survival is in jeopardy. In response to the dire need captured by a recent survey conducted by Opera.ca, the board of directors of Opera.ca today voted for an Opera Artists Emergency Relief Fund to be funded by the association. Further details will be announced shortly.

Of the 14 professional opera companies in Canada, almost all have cancelled their current production and some the remainder of the season. This is an unprecedented crisis with long-reaching implications for the entire Canadian opera sector. Opera artists face an even more precarious situation as contractors, freelancers and self-employed people with primary work in performance and secondary work in education, two sectors effectively shut down as of March 13.

Over the weekend, we asked our organizational members and opera artists to share the impact the cancellations are having on them through two surveys, and the response has been overwhelming, critical and urgent:

Over **500 opera artists** report that:

- cancelled engagements totalling over 890 to date, and financial losses totalling over \$2M and counting. A single engagement can consist of many services.
- 60% of artists will need aid for basic necessities (rent, food and bills) in 1 month; half of those will need that aid within two weeks, and 1 out of 10 is in immediate need of aid.

Opera companies report that:

- cancellations are affecting over 913 contracted artists, but the numbers are actually much higher, as most opera artists have smaller and varied engagements outside the major opera companies.
- lost box office revenue is in the amount of \$4.7M and net overall losses of nearly \$5.7M from the current cancellations, with more pending.

Numbers do not tell the story of personal impact. Beyond these short facts, artists have responded with dozens of impassioned impact statements that describe how these devastating cancellations affect them and their families. The Opera.ca Emergency Opera Artists Relief Fund will be deployed swiftly for those in the most urgent need, but the association is limited in its financial capacity to assist these precarious workers.

In support of thousands of opera artists' lost fees and the financial losses to opera companies due to the widespread cancellations of productions across the country during the growing COVID-19 crisis, Opera.ca appeals to you for the following:

1. Federal Government to provide an urgent relief fund and aid programs for self-employed, freelance and contract artists

Opera artists are contracted, self-employed and freelance agents and as such do not have access to Employment Insurance benefits. A relief fund for self-employed, freelancers and contract artists would help those most in need experiencing sudden and extreme disruptions in earnings. As we are now in tax season, other immediate measures could include credits to reduce taxes paid this year on 2019 income and/or allowing for interest-free postponement of income tax payments at this critical time.

2. Ensure that the arts and culture sector is included in any large scale fiscal stimulus packages, and that organizations can access these programs quickly so that they may guarantee artists' contracts and their own survival.

We are encouraged by the announcement of a fiscal stimulus package and urge the government to ensure that the opera and arts sectors are included in large scale fiscal stimulus packages and can access these programs, so that they are able to honour artist contracts and ensure sectoral and arts organizations' recovery.

Announcements like the one made recently by [Germany's Culture Minister](#), and by [Quebec's Ministry of Culture and Communications](#) show deep public responsibility by pledging financial support to cultural institutions and artists, providing stability in this moment of chaos. We ask the Canadian Government to introduce similar measures to support the opera sector and stabilize those whose very viability is at risk.

Opera.ca submits these recommendations on behalf of a broad constituency including large and small scale opera producers, opera artists including singers, instrumentalists, stage directors, music directors, stage managers, teachers, and university and young artist programs from coast to coast.

We are unified in our shared belief that opera contributes positively to the quality and meaning of life for Canadians, and gives voice and definition to the values we uphold in our communities and in our country. We are a small arts service organization and our hearts are bigger than our capacity to effectively help. We ask for your partnership.

As the situation is rapidly changing and developing, Opera.ca wishes to work with you in consideration of any and all ways to achieve these recommendations, and offers you its consultative capacity among its membership and stakeholders for rapid feedback.

We urge you to consider these measures in these extraordinary times.

Sincerely,

Christina Loewen
Executive Director
Opera.ca
c_loewen@opera.ca

Michael Mori
Chair of the Board of Directors
Opera.ca
mmori@tapestryopera.ca

Electronic cc:

Opera.ca membership
Dominic Cormier, Policy Advisor, PMO
Hélène Laurendeau, Deputy Minister of Canadian Heritage
Stéphen Piché, Assistant Deputy Minister Cultural Affairs, Department of Canadian Heritage
Paul Rochon, Deputy Minister of Finance
Pat Kelly, Shadow Cabinet Minister for Finance
Simon Kennedy, Deputy Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry
Mathieu Bouchard, Chief of Staff, Canadian Heritage
Rebecca Caldwell, Director of Policy, Canadian Heritage
Irene Cheung, Policy Advisor, Canadian Heritage
Steven Blaney, Heritage Critic CPC
Nelly Shin, Deputy Heritage Critic CPC
Alexandre Boulerice, Heritage Critic NDP
Caroline Desbiens, Heritage Critic BQ
Martin Champoux, Heritage Critic BQ

Pierre Poilievre, Finance Critic
Gabriel Ste. Marie, Finance Critic BQ
Peter Julian, Finance Critic NDP
Daniel Blaikie, Deputy Finance Critic NDP
Michelle Rempel Garner, Innovation, Science and Industry Critic CPC
Earl Dreeshen, Deputy Critic, Innovation, Science and Industry CPC
Brian Masse, Innovation, Science and Industry Critic NDP
Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay, Innovation, Science and Industry Critic BQ
Julie Dabrusin, Parliamentary Secretary, Canadian Heritage
Finance Sean Fraser, Parliamentary Secretary, Finance
Ali Ehsassi, Parliamentary Secretary, Innovation, Science and Industry
Omar Alghabra, Parliamentary Secretary, Interdepartmental Affairs