



ASSOCIATION FOR
OPERA IN CANADA

JOBS, EQUITY & INNOVATION

Written Submission

Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2021 Budget

Submitted to:

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Association for Opera in Canada (AOC) appreciates the opportunity to submit a brief to the Standing Committee on Finance as part of its pre-budget consultations in advance of the 2021 budget.

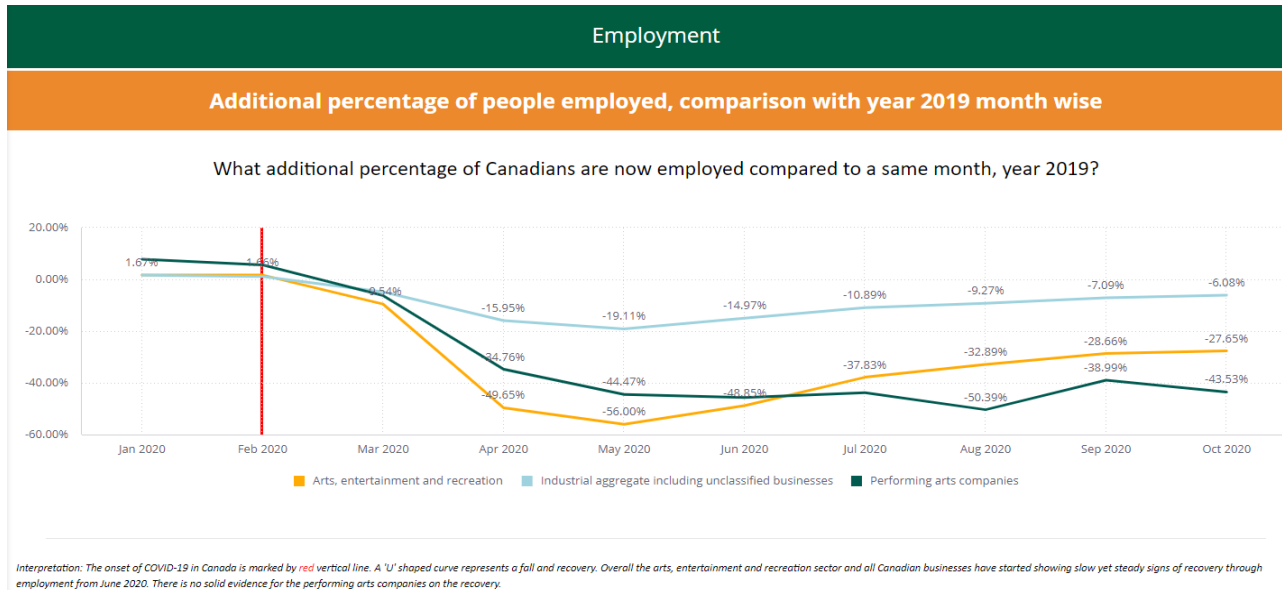
AOC is the voice of Canada's opera sector: the companies, artists, businesses, and organizations that bring opera to Canadians and beyond. Our members are an important part of their community – be that a community in a large urban centre or a smaller town or city. Through partnerships and collaborations among the cultural sector, with community organizations and businesses, we reach out to Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Context for Opera in Canada During the Pandemic

Since March 2020, the pandemic has closed the opera sector from live production almost entirely with catastrophic repercussions for artists, arts organizations, and the people employed at these organizations. The closure of the opera sector has proven to be a long and protracted one and will likely be one of the last sectors to re-open. A fully vaccinated public is the only indicator for when the sector can fully re-open. Based on what we know from federal vaccination schedules in the news, it will be another year from now before the sector can return to anything close to pre-pandemic levels of activity. Many companies in Canada are now planning for a full return no sooner than winter 2022, which will have been a full two years of closure since the pandemic began, at a future moment in time still one year away from today. The major impacts of this long closure are lost jobs, increasing inequity and precarity, but also the potential for longer-term opportunities to develop resilience and build back better through equitable investments.

Jobs

Lost jobs in the sector continue to be the most prominent impact of the pandemic on our sector. An analysis of StatsCan data from the Labour Force Survey reveals that Recovery in terms of employment in the live Performing Arts (StatsCan 7111) continues to lag behind other industry aggregates, and even behind the broader StatsCan sector for Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (711).



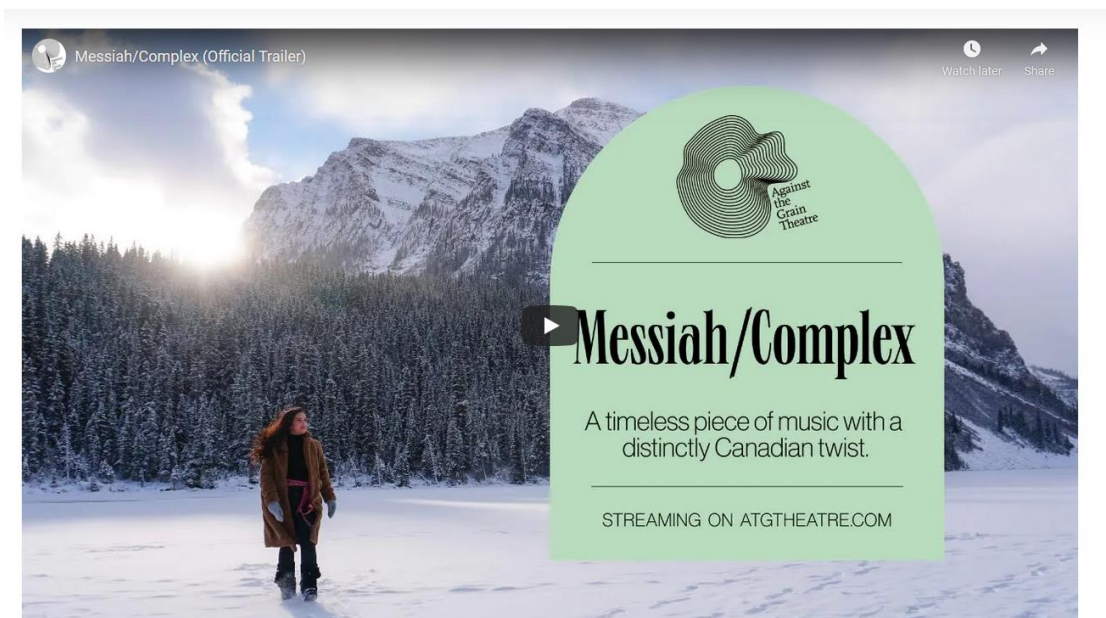
Equity

The pandemic has also highlighted and exacerbated inequities and precarity in the sector. Opera artists, already the most vulnerable in terms of income and work precarity, have borne the brunt of the pandemic through cancelled contracts, loss of work, and increased pressure to learn, adapt, and develop new skills, even as they grieve the loss of the professional artistic opportunities they have trained for their entire lives. In some areas, there is an emerging fear we may lose an entire generation, as many find employment outside a performing practice and may never return. Such a “brain drain” of our cultural capital would not only impact Canadians, but global markets too since Canadian opera artists are renowned world-wide as some of our finest cultural ambassadors key to our cultural diplomacy goals.

Innovation

Even in crisis, there are opportunities. For opera organizations, whose doors have been closed to public gatherings for almost a year, they have seized the opportunity to adapt rapidly behind the scenes, harnessing new digital skills, innovating and planning for re-opening and building back better to become a more resilient, equitable, innovative, sustainable and inclusive sector.

Most notably, the opera sector has rapidly transformed from live to digital producers. Examples are plentiful including Tapestry Opera's [Sketch Opera Series](#), Vancouver Opera's [Digital Opera Season](#), Calgary Opera's [Valentine's Day Brunch and Concert](#), Pacific Opera Victoria's [Opera Etc.](#), Manitoba Opera's [The Sopranos of Winnipeg](#), Edmonton [Opera's At Home Series](#), l'Opera de Montreal's [Streaming Series](#), and Against the Grain Theatre's uplifting [Messiah/Complex](#) which captured the attention of tens of thousands of viewers across Canada, and 43 other countries around the world.



The official trailer for Messiah/Complex. Edited by Coffeeshop Creative.

Practically every opera company in Canada has presented virtual opera since the pandemic began. Even with these transformations however, questions remain on how virtual programming can solve the sector's lost revenue problem as business models for monetizing digital content are unpredictable. Longer term, the sector also grapples with how to entice audiences to return to live, in-person programming when it is safe to do so, and how to retain new digital skills and adaptive capacities as the re-opening stages begin.

For both artists and arts organizations, the stress is high, uncertainty is high, yet both remain somewhat optimistic. Both companies and artists say they need resources to adapt digitally and continue their innovative output.¹ Most importantly the sector is united in its desire to bounce back, build back better, and re-emerge a more equitable inclusive sector in the future.

The sector greatly appreciates the emergency funding provided to date to the sector including the CEWS to support arts organizations. Association for Opera in Canada is aligned with the federal support provided to artists through the CRB program, which we also backstop through our own [Opera Artist Emergency Relief Fund](#) (for when benefits run out or emergencies occur). The special emergency funding through the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Canada Council for the Arts has also had a stabilizing effect on the sector, critical to keeping it from collapse.

Association for Opera in Canada makes the following recommendations to ensure the survival of organizations and artists, to rebuild the sector, and to put it on stronger footing for re-opening, and the building of resilience to withstand future crises.

Our recommendations are as follows:

CEWS and CRB for the Arts

Whereas the arts and cultural sector is lagging behind other sectors in recovery and job losses consider an arts sector-specific funding program to continue the Canada Wage Subsidy Program to stabilize arts organizations and the Canada Response Benefit with specific measure to ensure self-employed arts workers receive basic support throughout the emergency and rebuilding period in the live performance sector. We also recommend that as we approach the one-year mark of the pandemic, that eligibility for these programs are benchmarked to a normal year of activity rather than a comparison with the same month the previous year.

Emergency Funding Stabilization

The COVID19 Emergency Support Fund administered by the Canada Council for the Arts last June 2020 in the early days of the pandemic allowed arts organizations to immediately mitigate the cascading losses from a complete shutdown of the sector and its ripple effects. We recommend implementing a significant, multi-year increase in funding via the Canada

¹ National Arts and Culture Impact Survey (NACIS) November 2020, Individuals: https://oc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/NACIS_Individuals_EN.pdf, Organizations: https://oc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/NACIS_Organizations_EN.pdf

Council for the Arts to continue to support arts and culture organizations and artists during the precarious recovery period.

Project Funding for Resilience, Innovation, Equity and Sustainability

Provide project-based funding in the amount of \$150 million over 5 years to support the rebuilding of a more resilient, innovative, equitable and sustainable arts sector. This could be achieved through existing programs such Strategic Initiatives at Canadian Heritage or through Canadian Heritage's existing National Arts Service Organizations to form a re-granting networking ensuring broader access to the funds. Accountability measures and flexible KPIs for a Resilience framework are currently in development by Association for Opera in Canada and will be ready for scaling to the broader Arts Sector by June 2021. Resilience is defined across four broad theme areas of Sustainability, Equity, Capitalization, and Adaptive Capacity.

Capitalization Fund/Strategy

Change needs capital. We recommend a federal donation matching fund to match all level of organizational giving to incentive and build all forms of capital including deficit elimination, working, risk and growth capital, in addition to the existing Endowment Incentives, which is a longer-term capitalization strategy that unequally benefits larger, more established organizations. A broad Capitalization program that matches all private donations provides greater equity as smaller, newer organization have different capital needs than larger ones, and will also ensure that larger organizations who can meet the minimum eligibility thresholds for endowment matching funds, are not the only beneficiaries of this investment. Past models for building a Working Capital Program exist such as The Creative Trust program from the early 2000-2009 in Toronto.