



ASSOCIATION FOR
OPERA IN CANADA

Written Submission

Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2022 Budget

Submitted to:

The Standing Committee on Finance
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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 2022 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.

Our recommendations are as follows:

Recommendation 1: An injection of wage, rent and income relief support through to Re-Opening September 2022

We recommend relief support in the form of relaxed revenue drop requirements in the THRP, or relief funding similar to what was provided in fall 2020 and summer 2021 through Canada Council for the Arts and Canadian Heritage.

Recommendation 2: Supports for self-employed, contract artists and arts workers

We recommend relief supports for self-employed and contract artists and arts workers in the form of funding, similar to amounts available from the CRB or \$2,000/month to help them bridge the current closures, lockdowns and restrictions that are affecting their livelihoods, to the better times that are just around the corner as the sector looks forward to a full re-opening.

Recommendation 3: Re-Opening Support

With regard to Canadian Heritage's upcoming Arts and Culture Recovery Program, we recommend that adequate funding is provided to this program, as well as flexibility around eligibility considerations. We support recommendations that this program assume the structure of a ticket matching program as well as support the call for the provision of government backed event cancellation insurance, not unlike the \$50M Telefilm Canada insurance support for Film and Television.

Opera sector not yet out of the woods, relief measures needed again

The recent focus of federal supports has been around re-opening and recovery, and indeed many in the opera sector have been looking forward to winter 2022 as a time of re-opening to live audiences after a long 2 year absence. With the recent spreading variants and public health restrictions, the opera sector is again in turmoil, with dozens of postponed and cancelled performances, only this time without the supports of the wage, rent and income federal subsidies which have been so essential through the pandemic. The opera sector again finds itself in need of relief funding.

In a recent survey of our opera company members, half had planned to re-open in winter 2022 and had to cancel or postpone productions, wiping out revenues for productions that were fully rehearsed and ready to go. Of those who went ahead with re-opening, (in jurisdictions that allowed for this), the majority did so at 50% reduced capacities.

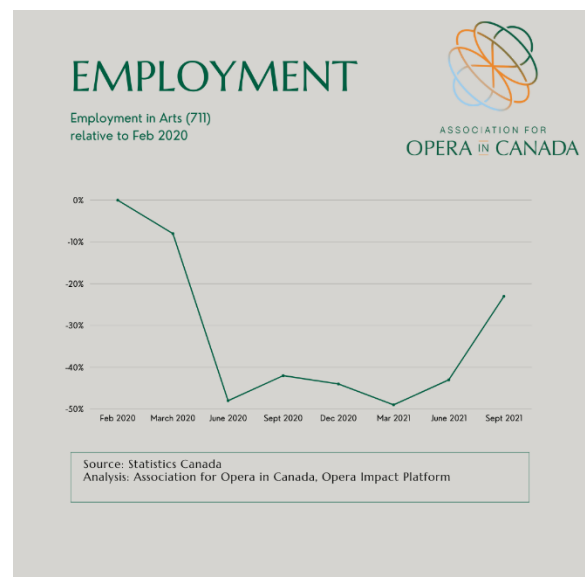
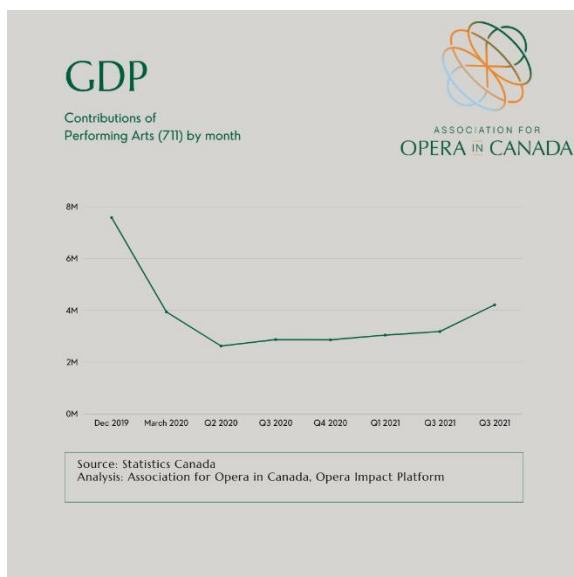
When will the sector re-open?

With public health restrictions now loosening, re-openings are again planned for late winter and early spring, many at reduced capacities to boost audience confidence, provide adequate spacing, and to ensure the safety of artists and audience members.

When will the sector recover?

When the sector might recover is another thing entirely. Through our internal Opera Impact Platform data tool, we have been tracking StatsCan data for the Performing Arts (711) since the pandemic began in terms of GDP and employment. After a precipitous drop in GDP and Employment at the start of the pandemic, performing arts figures stayed relatively flat for 18 months, finally trending slightly upwards by the end of the third quarter of 2021, job numbers which have subsequently tumbled again to those of the first quarter of 2021 as result of omicron lockdowns.¹

With a six-month setback as a result of variant spread, we can anticipate that recovery will begin in September 2022, although a full recovery is not expected for at least two years after that.



¹ [Employment among arts and entertainment industries falls back to square one - Canadian Association for the Performing Arts \(capacoa.ca\)](https://www.capacoa.ca/news/employment-among-arts-and-entertainment-industries-falls-back-to-square-one)

Recommendation I : An injection of wage, rent and income relief support through to Re-Opening September 2022

We recommend that relief support could take the form of relaxed revenue drop requirements in the THRP, or relief funding similar to what was provided in fall 2020 and summer 2021 through Canada Council for the Arts and Canadian Heritage.

We appreciate the re-opening supports made to Canada Council for the Arts and Canadian Heritage available to some opera companies. The sector also gratefully acknowledged the inclusion of the performing arts in the THRP and the HHBRP supports.

On closer review however, most companies have been unable to access these supports for a number of reasons. Re-opening funds are earmarked for productions that can actually re-open and less half of opera companies have been able to do so date. In surveying our members, we asked about accessing the THRP program, and 58% of respondents said they do not qualify, 40% stating it was because they do not meet the stringent revenue drop requirements, and 17% stated they did not meet the limited definitions of QPHR, despite being restricted to 50% capacities.

In the absence of accessing the THRP program, opera companies critically have been without subsidy since end of October 2021 and out of pocket for the expenses of re-opening in the winter of 2022. Re-opening is an expensive and time-consuming process that involves re-hiring, rehearsing, and a high front-end loaded outlay of expenses well before revenue can be realized through ticket sales.

Health restrictions, capacity limits and lockdowns due to omicron, have reduced these potential revenues to anywhere from zero to at best 50%. This drop in revenues is further confounded by ineligibility to access the THRP since a 50% capacity restriction is not a Qualifying Public Health Restriction.

Further complicating this is the reality that with rapidly spreading variants, opera companies, who take health and safety seriously, must guarantee the safety of its artists and audiences, and therefore will test personnel diligently and close down after even one reported case. The few opera companies who have been able to go ahead and open to live audiences have had to foot the bill themselves for PPEs for artists and audiences to ensure a safe space and instill audience confidence.

There is currently no subsidy or support for opera companies being responsible and pre-emptive in their efforts to reduce the spread.

Recommendation 2: Supports for self-employed, contract artists and arts workers

We recommend relief supports for self-employed and contract artists and arts workers in the form of funding, similar to amounts available from the CRB or \$2,000/month to help them bridge the current closures, lockdowns and restrictions that are affecting their livelihoods, to the better times that are just around the corner as the sector looks forward to a full re-opening.

Beyond the plight of the opera companies, is the desperate situation of opera artists, most of them self-employed, without the protections of EI, and who might realize only part of their contracted fees from a cancellation, postponement, or lockdown.

Since CRB ended in October, artists have been without subsidy. AOC has extended our limited resources and mandate to providing emergency funding to opera artists in immediate need of dollars for basic necessities through our own Opera Artist Relief Fund.

The fund has had as many requests in the first three weeks of 2022 as it had in the first 18 months of the pandemic.

We recognize the CWLB, which provides \$300/week, but only 18% of surveyed opera artist members qualify as it compares income to periods in 2020 when most artists had no work at all due to the pandemic.

We also recognize and appreciate the announcement of funding to support workers in the performing arts such as the \$60M to Canadian Heritage Performing Arts Workers Resiliency Fund. This program is promising but we note that it caps support at \$2,500 per artist, the equivalent of a month of living expenses, when artists have to survive for six more months before the sector fully re-opens.

Opera Artists need immediate access to relief funding similar to the CRB or \$2,000/month to help them bridge the current closures, lockdowns and restrictions that are affecting their livelihoods, to the better times that are just around the corner as the sector looks forward to a full re-opening in September 2022.

Recommendation 3: Re-Opening Support

With regard to Canadian Heritage's upcoming Arts and Culture Recovery Program, we recommend that adequate funding is provided to this program, as well as flexibility around eligibility considerations. We support recommendations that this program assume the structure of a ticket matching program as well as support the call for the provision of government backed event cancellation insurance, not unlike the \$50M Telefilm Canada insurance support Film and Television.

As the sector re-opens, proposed programs like Canadian Heritage's Arts and Culture Recovery Program which could potentially include a ticket subsidy program will be essential for opera companies experiencing audience hesitancy.

Companies have reported on the risk associated with re-opening and that expenses associated with ramping up again are rising faster than levels of audience confidence to return creating a critical imbalance. In a survey of members, 67% are currently experiencing lower than expected sales, indicating audience hesitancy to return despite implementing and communicating increased health and safety measures, and socially-distanced seating when possible.

An Arts and Culture Recovery Program that would match ticket sales for live performing arts to compensate for reduced capacity would pave the way for a smooth, confident opera sector re-opening.

Further ensuring a smooth re-opening for the opera sector would be a government backed event cancellation insurance program, similar to the \$50M Telefilm Canada insurance support Film and Television. Such backing would allow engagers mitigate the risk of re-opening and to recoup lost expenses as well as fully compensate self-employed workers should a cancellation occur.

Conclusion

The sector is united in its desire to re-emerge safely despite recent setback, and greatly appreciates the opportunity to make recommendations on how the Government can enable our recovery.

