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Arts and Education Forum 2000

**City Hall -- Rotunda
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**Speaking Remarks
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Thank you very much, Merrilee, for your kind introduction... and good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Bonjour, mesdames et messieurs. Let me add my own congratulations to the organizers of the Arts and Education Forum 2000.

During my years at TVOntario, we were successful in building strong and innovative partnerships between educators and broadcasters. I'm delighted, therefore, to try to make the same case this morning for imaginative partnerships between educators and arts organizations -- arts organizations like the NAC.

Traditionally, some arts advocates have advanced a strong economic argument for public support of the arts: the amount of tourism dollars, commercial activity, and the tax revenues they generate. The numbers make a compelling argument.

The education community, however, can make an equally powerful argument for the arts, based on a completely different set of criteria.

The arts clearly stimulate innovation and creativity. They open new channels in our thinking and make us more receptive to new ideas. The arts stimulate activity on the right side of the brain, which handles insight, imagination, 3-D forms, and music awareness. Increase the synapses on the right side and you also stimulate the left side, which controls number skills, language, reasoning, and science skills.

And so it's no surprise, therefore, that many of the most gifted scientists and mathematicians are also gifted musicians... and it's no surprise that many of the great historic periods of scientific and technological innovation were also great periods of artistic creation.

At the beginning of a new millennium, Canada has an opportunity to create an environment where innovation in both the arts and the sciences can flourish simultaneously. In a knowledge-based economy, this kind of innovation will form the basis of Canada's standard of living and quality of life.

I know that I'm preaching to the converted here. Any one of us could make the case for arts education with passion and conviction. The challenge is to convince others -- especially the public and our "public policy" decision-makers.

Well... what if we demonstrated? What if we put on our coats, walked out that door, and marched down Sussex Drive to Parliament Hill to make our case. Never mind federal versus provincial jurisdictions -- the eyes of the entire nation are here. What if we marched from City Hall, past the Ontario government offices, and up to Parliament Hill to make a statement?

We would gather strength en route. We would march past some of the nation's outstanding arts and science institutions -- the National Research Council's building across the street; a bit further down the road, the National Gallery of Canada. I'm sure the people in those buildings would agree with us... and they'd join us in our demonstration.

When we got to the Ontario government offices at the end of Sussex, our demonstration would turn right, and march up Parliament Hill. We would march past my own arts institution -- the National Arts Centre. I'm sure we could recruit everyone in that building, from the administrative and support staff to the actors rehearsing in the theatre; from the orchestra members performing a matinee concert... to the students who came in to hear them play.

I'm convinced that, with every block, we would pick up more supporters -- people who recognize the need for arts and science education to support each other. And when we got to Parliament Hill, I think we'd find a pretty receptive audience among the policy makers. Increasingly, the politicians see how arts and sciences thrive together in what we might describe as a very delicate eco-system.

So we have this massive demonstration, with a compelling message: in order to flourish in a knowledge-based economy, we need more arts education! We speak with one united voice, right?

Wrong.

Because, along our way up Sussex Drive, we'll also have passed the National Mint and the National War Museum. And while the people who poured out of those buildings to join our march agree with us on the importance of arts education, they'd also remind us of two very hard realities.

The people from the Mint would remind us that there's a limit to the supply of money. And the people from the War Museum would remind us that events move very fast -- over half a century has passed since the Second World War. Time passes quickly. In fact, if there's one thing that is in shorter supply than money in our education system, it's time.

Everyone wants more of it. More time for math and science. More time for business education, and developing Internet skills. More time for history; for sports; for social interaction.

Everyone here should be grateful that we've all taken the time out of our very busy schedules to attend today's forum. Grateful... because I believe that, by working together, we can leverage our time -- we can make a lot more happen with it.

I also believe that the very real institutions and organizations that joined us in our "virtual" demonstration can provide some of the solutions for arts education to stretch both time and money.

Our "virtual" demonstration recruited people from the buildings along the way: the National Research Council, the Mint, the War Museum, the National Gallery, and the National Arts Centre.

Any one of these institutions has resources that can be applied in the classroom. Every one of them is looking for opportunities to connect more directly with Canadians -- to reach out and participate in the community, and to open its doors to let the community in.

Let me give you just a brief sampling from the National Arts Centre.

First, reaching out. The NAC Orchestra went on a national tour last year. A whirlwind tour - twelve concerts in ten cities over five time zones in 16 days. The tour included 40 outreach activities including master classes and in-school concerts.

One reporter described how the students at the Winnipeg Youth Symphony felt about a working session with the NAC's music director, Pinchas Zukerman: "Imagine," the reporter said, it's like "a team of teenaged hockey players about to receive coaching from Wayne Gretzky."

The Orchestra's national tour was a big event and it got a lot of headlines. The NAC is also involved in many outreach programs that are less spectacular, but no less effective. We're very active in the Ottawa region of course, but under the guidance of Maestro Zuckerman, we're also at the forefront of using the Internet to promote tele-learning in music across Canada. The NAC's mandate is a national one. We're not the "Ottawa Arts Centre"... we have to be able to reach out to all Canadians.

Outreach to the community is very important to us. So is letting the community in. We host local and regional events for schools. Any of you who have come to the ticket office during the day time hours and found the school buses lined up outside the door will be very aware of this. We also host events that affect arts education on a national scale. Any of you who have attended the National Improv Games might agree with me that, if we could ever find a way to harness the energy of the performers and audience at these events, we could set up a generator at the NAC that could power the whole city.

Letting the community in also involves finding innovative ways to fill seats. The other night, I attended a performance where Southam Hall was filled to 80 percent capacity. That's pretty good for a week night. But 80 percent capacity means there are still over 200 empty seats.

We've got to fill those seats. And we've got to encourage younger people to see live performances. Otherwise the NAC and other live venues will go the way of vaudeville.

What would happen if we made rush seating available at a price that competed with the price of a ticket to the movies? What would happen if, every night after 6 PM, high school, college and university students... and our arts educators... could go "on-line" to find out what seats were available at NAC that night? What would happen if they could pay eight or ten dollars over the Internet for thirty, fifty or eighty dollar seats?

A night at the theatre or at the NAC Orchestra could become the hottest date since the movie theatres introduced "two-fifty Tuesdays." The NAC would become the place where young people meet.

We wouldn't lose money. We'd help cover some of our costs.

And arts education would get a major boost because nothing is going to inspire young people to get involved in the performing arts more than the opportunity to attend performances themselves.

I won't take up our time here with an extensive list of NAC's outreach and open-door activities. We do a lot... and we're looking for ways to do more.

But the point is that a national organization such as the NAC has the resources and mandate to make a pivotal difference in the ability to bring arts to the classroom.

This is especially true now that the Ontario Ministry of Education, for one, has increased its expectations for the arts, in line with its expectations for other subjects in the K-8 curriculum. It has dedicated the time, but the resources from the province are still limited. The challenge is then placed squarely on the shoulders of elementary school teachers, many of whom do not have enough training in the arts.

One of the solutions has been to bring professional artists and performers into the classroom. The teacher becomes the facilitator; the artist/performer provides the expertise through live performance or interactive arts experience.

I suggest that there is an important third partner in this matrix - the arts organizations. We can provide learning materials. We can serve as a bridge between artists and teachers. And we can get young people into the theatres, concert halls and galleries. This is very important... because we have to show young people that the arts aren't just something to be studied in the classroom. They are to be experienced. They are to be shared. They can send shivers up your spine.

The technology-minded among us say that we live in an "age of convergence." The convergence of computer and telecommunications technologies, for example, led to the Internet -- arguably the most influential technology of our time. We should look at the impact of convergence on arts education as well: converge the skills of teachers, of artists, and of national organizations like the NAC... and we have a powerful force for arts education. Our combined strength through working together adds up to much more than the sum of our individual strengths.

Earlier in my remarks this morning, I described an imaginary scenario -- converting this forum into a march on Parliament Hill. That's not going to happen today. Our time will be better spent in the workshops and listening to Roch Carrier. But let me leave you with a few more imaginary scenarios this morning... or to put it differently, let me leave you with a few "what ifs" ?

What if the arts were not treated as a separate area of learning and appreciation, but were infused directly into the general curriculum?

What if, each year, the Governor General or some other national figure recognized the achievements of teachers in arts education, the way that the Prime Minister now does with awards for teaching in science, technology, and mathematics?

What if Canada became recognized the world over as being at the forefront of using the information highway for arts education?

What if the NAC were to become the nation's cyber arts centre, with on-line connections to every school in the country through SchoolNet or other on-line partners?

What if national organizations, such as the NAC, became the facilitators... bringing students, educators and artists together -- not just at the community level, but on a national scale?

What if both artists and educators could turn to national institutions as a "one-stop" point of contact to connect with one another's services, and to respond to one another's needs?

What if national institutions became a place where teachers and artists could learn more about each other's disciplines -- so that teachers learned new performing and artistic skills, and artists and performers learned more about how to teach?

A lot of "what-ifs." A lot of questions. But then again, you've come here today to raise these kinds of questions and to work out some of the answers.

I wish you every success in your forum today... and I want to assure you that the National Arts Centre will be eager to hear your ideas and to find ways that we can

contribute to solutions. We're your national arts centre... and we want to work together to build exciting partnerships that will dramatically enhance arts education in this new century.

Thank you.