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**Policy Forum 2000 -- Canadian Culture and the Larger World:  
Steps to Success**

**School of Policy Studies  
Queen's University**

**Opening Remarks  
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Director General and CEO  
National Arts Centre**

Thank you very much, Bill... and good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

Before I make some brief opening remarks, I'd like to say a few words about Naomi Alboim, the person who recruited this morning's panel. I was lucky enough to have worked with Naomi for a number of years when I was at TVOntario, and she was one of the great Deputy Ministers in the Ontario Government. She was also one of the most eloquent "champions" of the arts in this province, and I think that the School of Policy Studies at Queen's is extraordinarily fortunate to have her working here.

A few weeks ago, I had lunch with Lloyd Axworthy, Canada's External Affairs minister. We're old friends from university days so we gossiped a little, chatted about the state of Canadian politics... and then "segued" into a lengthy discussion about the explosion of artistic talent that's occurred in Canada over the past fifteen years.

We talked about the "richness" of our novelists and short story writers; the startling international success of our music performers (from Shania Twain and Céline Dion to Sarah MacLachlan and Ben Heppner); the increasing impact of our filmmakers (Norman Jewison, David Cronenberg, Atom Egoyan, Patricia Rozima, Denys Arcand, etc); and the great popularity of our comedy writers and performers. He wrapped up the conversation by remarking on how important our artists had become as cultural "exports", and that it was high time that Canada gave "cultural diplomacy" a far greater emphasis than it's historically been given.

In a curious way, it was the Government of Canada echoing the Indigo Book Store slogan -- "the world needs more Canada"... and in particular, more Canadian artists.

I've been a strong advocate of that proposition for a long time -- the international exposure is tremendously helpful for our artists from a career point of view; our artists get to test their work against the very best in the world; and increasingly, it's important for Canada's identity and reputation in the world.

It's safe to say that there aren't many people in the middle East or Europe who are likely to develop an understanding or appreciation of Canada because of their interest in our business leaders; and it's an equally safe proposition that there aren't many people in Asia or Latin America who know much about our political leaders.

But, since the publication of "The English Patient", Michael Ondaatje has become an international literary icon... as are Carol Shields, Peggy Atwood, Tiff Finlay and Mavis Gallant. And people line up in many parts of the world to see a new Atom Egoyan film, a Martin Short comedy, a Luc Plamondon musical, a Diana Krall performance or a Ben Heppner concert.

I would argue that Canada is defined more and more by its artists, and I think it's up to all of us working in the arts to find ways "to showcase" our best artists internationally on a continuing basis.

We've had a lot of success stories in recent years, and I'd like to give you a few (and quite different) examples of a real international payoff from this kind of "showcasing".

1) This fall, the National Arts Centre Orchestra will be the first Canadian orchestra to visit the Middle East. We'll be playing in Tel Aviv and Amman, and we'll be doing a range of educational outreach activities in the Palestinian communities. In other words, the Middle East portion of the NAC's Tour has -- as Hollywood would say -- a wonderful story line: a prominent Canadian Orchestra... led by an internationally acclaimed Israeli conductor, Pinchas Zukerman... performing in front of Jordanian audiences... and doing workshops and masterclasses with young Palestinians. That's a powerful example of Canadian cultural diplomacy, and it has even more resonance when you see... as I have... the Jordanian and Israeli ambassadors to Canada working side by side to make the Orchestra's Tour a success.

2) I was involved in a different kind of cultural diplomacy in China two years ago. It began when TVOntario made a substantial investment in a major, six hour arts series -- Inspired by Bach, produced by Canada's renowned Rhombus Media, and hosted by the wonderful cellist Yo-Yo Ma. It was a brilliant and evocative series, with each of the six episodes directed by a different Canadian filmmaker.

TVOntario became so enthusiastic about the series that we acquired the Canadian and the Chinese rights, and we set out to sell the series to CCTV, the Chinese national network.

To make the project economically viable, we approached Air Canada to sponsor the series in China... and Air Canada, interested in some business diplomacy of its own, quickly agreed. We launched the telecast of the series in China with a live concert by Yo-Yo Ma in the People's concert Hall in Beijing, and it led to some remarkable synergy between the arts, cultural diplomacy and business diplomacy.

The television series got a tremendous amount of publicity throughout China because of Yo-Yo's concert in Beijing; the concert itself was a "tour de force"... and completely sold

out; and Air Canada managed... discretely of course... to discuss its desire for new air routes to China with Chinese officials at the ceremonies before and after the concert.

3) Cirque du Soleil is another impressive example of our artists planting the Canadian flag all over the world. A decade ago, Cirque du Soleil was largely a Canadian phenomenon -- a unique blend of the circus and the performing arts -- looking for an international audience.

Today... at last count, they have nine touring companies; US headquarters in Orlando (where they're partnered with Disney); several lucrative stages in Las Vegas; and a booming business in Asia. They've clearly redefined all of our preconceptions about circuses... and for their intensely loyal audiences around the world, circus and Canada go hand in hand at least as much as hockey and Canada.

4) I watched some of that same process take place in the 1980's, when the Stratford Festival embarked on an ambitious "Stratford America Tour". The Tour started in Los Angeles... and to some skeptics, it was a show business variation of bringing coals to Newcastle.

Los Angeles probably had more actors, directors and stagehands than any place on earth, but within a few days, the "word of mouth" in Hollywood was surprisingly consistent: "this Canadian theatre is the real thing -- professional, stylish and entertaining... and the actors are among the best in the world."

It became a "hot ticket" overnight, and it did a lot to put Canadian actors and Canadian theatre companies on the map in Los Angeles.

These examples are part of a recurring theme. Give Canadian artists... and Canadian arts organizations... a chance to showcase their work in other parts of the world, and we've got an exceptionally good chance of success.

And those artists have not only been remarkable ambassadors for Canada, they've also defined Canada in quite different terms for the rest of the world. All things being equal, I think most of us would rather have Michael Ondaatje, William Hutt, Carol Shields, Dan Ackroyd, Denys Arcand, or Ben Heppner represent Canada to the world... then many of the bankers, industrialists, accountants and lawyers who normally make up the "Team Canada" roster on our international trade missions.

As you can tell, I'm pretty enthusiastic about how Canadian artists are doing in the world. We do, however, have to make sure that Canada maintains a strong international focus, that we find all kinds of ways to support and encourage our artists, and most of all... given the competition globally, we have to remember that is no time for "the faint of heart."

Thanks very much!