

Hello. Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for inviting me here today. I'm Antoni Cimolino, Artistic Director of the Stratford Festival.

Last week, my colleagues Carol Stephenson, our Board Chair, and Anita Gaffney, our Executive Director, were here to present the economic case for why our province needs the Stratford Festival. They spoke of the \$135 million in economic activity the Festival generates each year. The 3,400 jobs it creates. The \$56 million it yields in taxes.

I'm here today to present the other half of the case: the Stratford Festival's vital importance to our cultural landscape. And I want to begin by offering you a difficult choice.

Suppose you had to choose *either* to make money for your immediate community *or* to do something of significance in the world, something that would give your province and your country "more than wealth and industry to be proud of." What would you do?

That was the choice offered sixty-eight years ago by Tyrone Guthrie, the man who'd been invited to turn the idea of a theatre festival in Stratford, Ontario, into a reality. He was speaking to a committee of townsfolk, who wanted such a festival not for high-minded artistic reasons but to save the economy of their town, which had lost its major industry.

Those people were bold: they opted for significance.

But here's the twist: in the nearly seven decades since, the Stratford Festival has been *both* an economic powerhouse *and* a hugely significant cultural jewel. And that's no accident.

The people of Stratford stood behind their choice in moving and meaningful ways. The Stratford Festival was built on the dreams of average Ontarians. People who gave a dollar or two – sometimes less, sometimes more – to ensure that this dream would become a reality. We have the ledgers and they bring tears to my eyes, as I'm sure they would yours. The broad-based support was unparalleled and remains so. It is that spirit that inspires us to this day to keep the Stratford Festival strong and vibrant and significant.

It has now grown to become the largest performing arts organization in Canada and the largest not-for-profit theatre in North America. In a normal year, we employ – directly – around a thousand people, including actors, designers, craftspeople, technicians and all the many others who are directly responsible for putting our work on stage.

We draw audiences from all over Canada, from the United States and beyond: half a million people each year – fully 25% of those from the U.S., bringing new money into our province, spending \$300 for every ticket purchased.

But that is the money side. In terms of cultural importance, think of the 325,000 Ontarians who come to Stratford each year. Who come to the Festival for experiences they can't get anywhere else.

Almost 50,000 of those are our students. The Festival spends nearly \$1 million a year on educational work for Ontario students, contributing greatly to the growth of young minds in our province. We subsidize buses to bring students to Stratford, and we coach teachers and train teaching artists to go into the classroom. We run a variety of summer theatre camps and work with Ontario Universities to deliver advanced drama courses and workshops. For many young people, a rewarding career in the arts starts in Stratford. For others, it is here that they get that first experience of live theatre that will turn into a lifelong passion.

But there is another side to education at the Festival – in the form of artist training. No other theatre on the continent has the scope of the Stratford Festival. We work with an annual budget of 60 to 70 million dollars. We build our shows from the ground up – employing carpenters, painters, sewers, designers, sound and lighting technicians, musicians, composers, writers, ushers, marketing professionals and more. The skills these people learn and develop at Stratford enrich the work of other performing arts groups here in Ontario and beyond.

Hundreds of young actors have graduated from our Birmingham Conservatory since it began in the late 1990s. And dozens of directors have been trained in our newer Langham Workshop for Classical Direction. Most of these people are now working regularly at theatres here and around the world.

In recent years, we've operated a research-and-development department where our artists work with Canada's Indigenous artists and with artists from various cultures as we expand the diversity of work on our stages and stages beyond Stratford.

We have an active new play development department. At any given time we are working with between 20 and 30 Canadian playwrights – creating works that will go on to be produced not only on our stages, but at theatres throughout the province, across the country, in the U.S. and the U.K. – introducing non-Canadians to the great work of our outstanding writers.

There are many centres of artistic excellence in this province, but we are the one where all roads meet. We attract not only actors but also singers, dancers and musicians – we are one of the very few theatres in North America that has a full orchestra.

We are a central hub for the talents, the skills and the knowledge base that inform theatrical work across the country. We are a centre for training, for education, for the development of new work worthy of any theatre in the world.

There is a reason why Guthrie's either-or choice all those years ago proved unnecessary; a reason why the Stratford Festival can do so much of significance while also generating economic wealth. Art is big business. And it's big business because it is important to people's lives. People will seek it out, as they seek out water – and the real choice that faces us is whether we want them to find it here in Stratford, Ontario, or whether we're content to have them take their entertainment dollars to Broadway or the U.K.

As you know from our last appearance here, we need your help. We are asking you for up to \$8 million, in some combination of loan and grant. I know it's a lot to ask; I know there are

countless other deserving causes that need help right now. But I also know that societies need the spiritual, emotional and intellectual sustenance that the arts bring into their lives – and that those arts in turn generate economic wealth far beyond their cost.

If such a fundamental resource, such a pillar of pride, as the Stratford Festival were to be lost, it's not just the economy of Ontario that would be diminished. So too – and just as drastically – would the quality of life in this province.

Thank you.