

SUPPLEMENTAL SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS



July 04, 2020

Dear Committee Members,

We thank you for the opportunity we had to present personally (via Zoom) to the Committee on June 25, and for the keen interest that committee members showed to Soulpepper, and our current challenges in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. We were delighted to hear how many of you have enjoyed visits to Soulpepper in the past, and how clear your understanding is of both our role in the community, and our impact on the city.

We were keen to use our time before the committee to make four clear recommendations:

1. That the Government of Ontario provide clear guidance on the timeline for re-opening our venues as it becomes available, and any new protocols that will be required of us. We were encouraged by the conversation that suggested sectoral representatives might helpfully sit 'at the table' as this thinking develops.
2. That the Government of Ontario provides active positive messaging in support and celebration of the cultural sector as live events re-start and venues re-open, inspiring confidence in the ticket buying public. We were pleased to hear that committee members would be keen to 'be seen' at performances, and to share their experiences on social media.
3. That the Government of Ontario consider multi-year measures that support the financial resilience of our sector, including direct recovery investment, and initiatives to incentivise charitable giving through improved tax incentives and matched funding programs. We were happy to hear that committee members are already looking at examples of how such programs are benefitting the cultural sector in other provinces.



4. That the Government of Ontario consider a significant increase in funding to the Ontario Arts Council, as a body uniquely skilled and strategically positioned to equitably support the recovery of the sector across the entire province. We learned from you that many of our peers have also used their presentations to stress their support for the OAC.

During questions, MPP Dave Smith asked us specifically about the costs and challenges of preparing to film live performance, for broadcast on platforms such as ontario.live. MPP Smith asked that we submit a few further thoughts through the written submission process, which we are happy to do here. The idea has certainly been a part of our thinking as we strategize about the future of theatre in Ontario, given the likely continued uncertainties for our sector.

As we spoke to in our presentation, we, and many of our peers, have turned to digital content during this time to provide work for artists, and deliver moments of engagement, entertainment and reflection for our communities. Soulpepper has created a program that includes masterclasses from elite practitioners, 'Fresh Ink', a weekly episode of writers reading and discussing their new work, and short 'Coffee Concerts', which provided an uplifting blast of poetry and music, widely viewed on social media. All of this has been delivered with relatively modest equipment already owned by the company; largely laptops, iPhones, and some simple editing and livestreaming software. They have all been made available for public consumption free of charge, as we feel it is our charitable mission at this time to serve our community in this way.

Rigging our theatre to record live performance, to a standard that would be appropriate for online streaming, would require capital investment with which to purchase appropriate camera, sound and editing equipment. Prices vary significantly, but we are advised that a budget of \$200,000 per production would provide for us a good package with which to deliver to sufficient quality.

In addition to the technical infrastructure, there are variable costs of preparing a performance for production, including artists fees, physical design and rehearsal. Ranging from a simple one person show, to a larger ensemble piece with full production values, this could range from \$50k - \$350k. These costs are usually offset by ticket revenue, and in the case of a production specifically for filmed release, could be partially mitigated by a small



socially distanced audience in situ, or by monetising access to the content online. It may be worth noting that our friends at the Stratford Festival have only been able to undertake their wonderful filming project with significant government and corporate investment.

Committee members will be aware that Soulpepper collaborates with a number of major Toronto arts organisations as part of the 'Group of 8'. We are keen to work in partnership, and it may be possible that a package of investment could provide shared equipment that would support work across a number of these organisations. In particular, the National Ballet of Canada and the Canadian Opera Company have developed a detailed understanding of how best to prepare their venues for filming, which could be of real help to this continued investigation.

Similarly, there is close partnership between the city's peer theatres, who could present a consortium proposal for investment in film equipment, that could lead to a number of exciting broadcast opportunities.

We thank you again for the opportunity to present to the Committee, and for your specific interest in this question in particular. We would be happy to engage in more detailed conversation as best suits your ongoing decision making.

Very best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emma Stenninig'.

Emma Stenninig
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Weyni Mengesha'.

Weyni Mengesha
Artistic Director