

February 25, 2019

Legislative Services
City of Victoria
1 Centennial Square,
Victoria, BC V8W 1P6

Re. Royal Theatre User Group Request to Address Council

Dear Mayor and Council,

The Victoria Symphony, Dance Victoria and Pacific Opera Victoria respectfully request the privilege of addressing Council regarding the future use of the Royal Theatre.

As you are aware, the Royal & McPherson Theatres Society (RMTS) announced in November the imposition of an extraordinary 100% rent increase and restricted access to the Royal Theatre for the resident non-profit arts organizations. RMTS intends that these changes will free up time in the theatre schedule for commercial producers, who will contribute little to the cultural life of Greater Victoria, and whose impact on the region will be negligible compared to the resident non-profit performing arts. The imposed changes will have a dramatically negative impact on arts audiences, artistic programming, and will threaten the continued success of the region's abundant arts and culture ecosystem.

In light of these developments, Pacific Opera Victoria, the Victoria Symphony, and Dance Victoria founded the Royal Theatre User Group to advocate for the Royal Theatre as the premier venue for resident professional performing arts creation and presentation. We have convened all the resident non-profit arts users, to ensure our advocacy appropriately represents their concerns. Collectively these organizations contribute 74 percent of the Royal Theatre's total revenues and generate 78 percent of audiences.

We seek your assistance to establish a collaborative process to address the sustainability of the Royal Theatre and align the mandate of our civic theatres with Victoria's Cultural Policy. This is an important inflection point for the arts in Victoria, and creates an opportunity to engage the municipalities, the resident arts organizations and the communities they mutually serve in a values-based exploration of the future use and purpose of the community's performing arts infrastructure.

We are recommending to the Councils of Victoria, Saanich and Oak Bay, and the CRD:

- A formal third-party review of the civic theatres' governance and operating models
- A comprehensive stakeholder consultation to establish the future use of the civic theatre
- Creation of a civic theatre mandate to address the values and needs of the municipalities, the resident arts organizations, and the communities they serve
- The establishment of a governance and operating model to serve that mandate

We recognize our leadership role in supporting our civic theatres and encouraging the arts in the Capital Region. We believe that all partners – Victoria, Saanich, Oak Bay, the CRD, and the resident performing arts organizations that bring their vibrant presentations to the stage – should share equitably in this responsibility. Together we must effect change that will mutually benefit our community and its cultural life.

Sincerely,



Kathryn Laurin
CEO, Victoria Symphony



Stephen White
Executive Producer, Dance Victoria



Ian Rye
CEO, Pacific Opera Victoria

Enclosed: User Group Backgrounder, Summary and Media Resources

User Group Backgrounder

ALIGNMENT WITH CULTURAL POLICY

The User Group are aligned with the City of Victoria's commitment to a thriving cultural ecosystem. Pacific Opera, Dance Victoria and the Victoria Symphony created 68 symphony, dance and opera performances and generated attendance of 68,138 at the Royal Theatre last season, plus 56,300 at community events and served 25,700 youth through our school programs. We foster regional and national artistic talents, engaging 421 symphony, dance and opera artists last season. Resident arts commitment to creativity and innovation is demonstrated by our curation and commission of new music, dances, operas and designs. Artistic excellence is upheld by our commitment to professional artists, alignment with four collective agreements, and our investment in young artist training and residency programs.

We promote increasing diversity on our stages, in our boardrooms and our audiences. We deliver artistic programs that explore indigenous, francophone, multi-cultural, and contemporary subjects. We create meaningful experiences with our audiences, build knowledge, and make space for genuine engagement. We foster a welcoming environment that is inclusive of people from diverse backgrounds and experiences, seeking ways to engage in meaningful ways. As convenors of community and as active arts leaders, we address cultural, civic, and social needs through our work and through our partnerships with cultural organizations throughout the region.

Resident arts organizations are committed to Truth and Reconciliation by engaging Indigenous artists to create and tell the stories of their people, their territories, their languages, music and dance. We support the City's commitment to preserve artistic legacies by re-interpreting works of classical repertoire in relevant contexts, while commissioning contemporary works to contribute to the canon of Canadian art. We help to animate public spaces, curating performances at the Royal Theatre, and contributing to the cultural lives of the community through our place-making initiatives including the Baumann Centre, Dance Victoria Studios and Symphony Splash.

The three performing arts organizations lead in culture-economic development, generating a direct economic impact of \$16.4 million per year, and producing \$6.7 million direct employment income in the CRD. We create additional economic and cultural development by collaborating and exporting performances regionally, nationally and internationally. Commercial producers generate a fraction of this impact.

RENTAL INCREASES AND RESTRICTED ACCESS

The Royal & McPherson Theatres Society (RMTS) announced in November the imposition of extraordinary rent increases and restricted access to the Royal Theatre for non-profit arts organizations, including:

- rental increases of over 100%;
- a restriction of only one dark day between performances;
- a requirement that one weekend per month be available for commercial bookings; and
- December blackout dates for resident non-profit arts organizations

Imposed rental rates are as much as three times that of other civic theatres in western Canada. The imposed Royal Theatre rental is \$2.92 per seat versus \$1.63 in Vancouver; and \$0.89 in Calgary. For Pacific Opera, these changes would mean an increase of \$120K in theatre rental costs in 2019/20; the dark day restrictions would mandate the rescheduling of four weekend performances per year onto weekdays beginning in 2020/21. For Dance Victoria, the changes imposed will mean an additional \$30K rental expense per year and reduced stage time for setup and rehearsals beginning in 2020/21. The December blackout dates would threaten seasonal programming for Ballet Victoria. For the Victoria Symphony, the uncertainty of these measures resulted in their decision in early December to move half the orchestra's 2019/20 programming to the University of Victoria Farquhar Auditorium. There is no alternate venue in the region with the technical and audience capacity for most opera and dance performances.

User Group Backgrounder

Changes to rates and access were made unilaterally by the RMTS, and imposed after only two meetings with Pacific Opera, Dance Victoria and the Victoria Symphony, and without consultation with any other stakeholders. The RMTS has not provided a compelling financial rationale for such dramatic rate increases. They were unable to produce financial projections to demonstrate financial need; while confirming that the theatre has generated six-figure operating surpluses in the last two years, in addition to six-figure transfers to the capital fund, and reporting that the theatre's future capital needs are being met. They have provided no evidence to justify displacing resident non-profits with restricted access, and confirmed that no market research has been conducted to demonstrate demand for the theatre from the commercial sector.

The imposed changes to rates and restricted access represent a fundamental change of use and purpose of the Royal Theatre. Such dramatic change demands the participation and consent of all key stakeholders, including the municipal owners and funders of the Royal Theatre, the arts organizations who serve audiences, and the communities whom civic arts infrastructure is intended to benefit.

The User Group has made two requests of the RMTS board:

- an 18-month reprieve from any changes to rental rates and theatre access, allowing time for;
- a transparent process of consultation with key stakeholders to establish the future purpose and use of the Royal Theatre

The RMTS board met January 25 and February 8 to consider the User Group's request, and we await their response.

ADVOCACY

The User Group has met with the CRD and with the Mayors of Victoria, Saanich, and Oak Bay. In January we made a presentation to the board of RMTS, with councillors from all three municipalities and the Chair of the CRD in attendance. We made the case for the efficient use of the theatre by the non-profit art users; the cultural and economic impact of art made in Victoria versus touring commercial acts; and the intrinsic value of art made by artists who are part of the fabric of this community.

The User Group is maintaining regular communications with the community and our memberships through presentations, media and direct correspondence. We have coordinated meetings with other critical stakeholders, including the Canada Council for the Arts, BC Arts Council, the CRD Arts Service, the City of Victoria Arts Culture and Events Office, the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Canadian Federation of Musicians Local 247, International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees Local 168, and Canadian Actors Equity Association.