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## **Cries of crisis latest way to get cash**

**By Chip Martin -- London Free Press**

A baseball team, let's say the Expos, warns if Montreal doesn't build a new stadium, it's moving out. A deadline is set.

A hockey team owner, say a Rod Bryden, warns if ticket sales for the Senators don't jump, the team is hitting the road. A deadline is set.

An orchestra, say Orchestra London, suddenly warns if city hall doesn't cough up \$110,000, within hours its board will make drastic cuts or go bankrupt.

Brinkmanship and crisis management are increasingly being used to draw attention to the demands of various groups. It's working.

A theatre, say the Grand Theatre, is running out of cash and wants more. Wonder what tactic it will adopt?

A museum, say the London Museum of Archeology, is short of cash and may have to move or close. What tactic will we see?

Suppose an art gallery, say the London Regional Art and Historical Museums, finds the till is dangerously low. What will it do?

The precedents have been set. The die is cast.

On Monday night, city council succumbed to brinkmanship by lending the orchestra \$110,000 to get over its latest crisis. The orchestra is a fine institution and should probably receive more than the \$125,000 a year it gets to cover the rental of its host facility, city-owned Centennial Hall. But by yielding to its ultimatum, the politicians set themselves up for another "crisis." If not from the orchestra again, from other local institutions feeling a cash crunch.

Enough, says one city councillor. The best course would have been to let the orchestra go bankrupt.

"I have always supported the orchestra," says Coun. Megan Walker. "But I do believe the best thing that could have happened was for them to go bankrupt. It forces them to rethink and start anew."

Walker notes it was barely two months ago the orchestra wangled an emergency \$128,000 loan from city coffers to deal with health insurance woes. And slightly more

than three years ago, an emergency loan of \$150,000 was provided by city council to keep the orchestra afloat.

"We tend to reward those who don't run their operations efficiently," she says. "It's incredibly upsetting they come in crisis mode always saying, 'Give me money or else.' "

In approving the latest loan, council directed city administration to sit down with orchestra officials to work out a long-term financial management and business plan.

Those talks must include a possible merging of administration, box office and marketing of the three major cultural institutions in town -- the orchestra, theatre and museum.

Don Jones, the arts entrepreneur who operates Centennial Hall for the city, suggests such an amalgamation could produce annual savings of at least \$500,000, improving the viability of all three groups.

If something like that doesn't occur, hold on to your hats, taxpayers. Another "crisis" lies just around the corner.