

December 1999 Crescendo
From The President's Pen

Is There A Y2K Arts Bug?

Millennium this, Millennium that! Everywhere you look people seem pre-occupied with the coming of the new Millennium. Is it really that big of a deal? Surely it's significant enough that we should all plan to take some time to celebrate the beginning of a new century with our family and friends. The end of any year is a time that I find myself reflecting upon issues of personal concern. But what about those dreaded year 2000 (Y2K) bugs that some predict will reap havoc upon our overly micro-processed lives at the stroke of midnight on December 31st? Personally, they are not my biggest concern. Not by a long shot!

As your President; as a full-time musician; and as a parent of four children, I'm more concerned about the future of the arts as we enter this new Millennium. The evidence of a pending crisis is everywhere! Although the problems are not directly related to the beginning of the new Millennium, this may be the ultimate Y2K bug faced by the arts community. It's time we got down to the serious business of addressing the problems.

Just what are the problems? First and foremost, I believe much of our society simply lacks an understanding of the significant role the arts plays in their everyday lives. Despite study after study that highlights the life long benefits to our children of arts related education in our schools, funding for these programs continue to decline. Where will the great musicians of the next century come from? Despite the cultural enrichment the arts bring to our communities, overall support continues to decline. Where will these great musicians perform? Will they be forced to find a way to supplement their musical income just to remain in the occupation they so dearly love?

Society's lack of commitment to the arts may be reflected in ongoing Federal and Provincial funding cutbacks to arts organizations. These governments also continue to place obstacles in the way of willing corporate sponsorship. It seems somewhat hypocritical that these governments collect millions of dollars in tax revenues from legally distributed products while at the same time restricting the use of their advertising budgets.

Although my analysis may seem grim, I believe that solutions can be found. This year's strike by AFM symphony musicians in Montreal was settled in part because the Quebec Provincial government intervened with a commitment to increased funding for the orchestra. That's a good sign!

AFM musicians of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra (TSO) have been on strike since September 25th. This struggle, much like Montreal's, may be one of artistic survival. Because of the low pay these musicians receive, (relative to other world class orchestras) the TSO is finding it increasingly difficult to recruit top musicians to their auditions.

Although we've heard little from Premiere Harris or Mayor Mel Lastman, I remain optimistic that this dispute will be settled soon. The striking musicians continue to build support through a well-organized community "outreach" campaign.

AFM musicians of the Kitchener/Waterloo Orchestra are currently in negotiations with their management to attempt to arrive at a new agreement. Like any negotiation, its successful completion must provide a solution of mutual benefit to both sides. The orchestra faces many of the same problems identified in my previous remarks. The most pressing of these issues seems to be the realization that operating deficits will continue unless funding and ticket sales revenues improve. I'll keep you posted of the situation, as further details become available.

I want to make one point very clear before commenting on the health of the arts in London Ontario. The problems I've spoken about confront all arts organizations regardless of where they are located. These mostly not-for-profit organizations simply can't continue to survive without increased community, government and corporate support. It's that simple!

What is not so simple is finding a way to present a concert or production of the highest artistic merit at a ticket price that is attractive to the widest segment of the community. Some suggest that arts organizations should live and die by the same rules as any other business. Turn a profit or close the doors! I couldn't disagree more. I believe the arts are an essential part of our lives, of our community. I'm not willing to place a dollars and cents value on the benefits they bring.

Now, a look in our own back yard. The Grand Theatre has just announced that it has reached the half way point in an effort to raise five hundred thousand dollars. This is wonderful news! It is expected that Orchestra London will announce a new fund raising effort as well in the New Year. After posting a small surplus in 1998, the orchestra experienced a decrease in revenues during the 1999 season. The LMA Executive Board has recently made a donation of \$1,000.00 to the Orchestra. We will continue to work closely with Orchestra London management to assist them in their fund raising efforts. To this end, I encourage all members to consider making a donation in support of our brothers and sisters who perform with the orchestra. Please give what you can!

Over all, how are the arts doing in London Ontario? We need to do much better. Is their sufficient community support for the arts? No. Do our Federal, Provincial and Civic governments do enough to support the arts in London? No. Will the dream of a new Performing Arts Centre ever become a reality? Yes. Will our children be denied the opportunity of artistic expression in our schools? I prey the answer is no! What role should the London Musicians' Association play within our arts community? A much more active one.

OK.....I've stated the questions and given you my response. How would you answer them? I need to know. Your Executive Board needs to hear your thoughts on these

important issues so that we can continue to make informed decisions that reflect your wishes.

Speaking of wishes.....I'd like to extend the very best of them to all our members and their families for a safe and joyous holiday season. Don't forget to put the arts on your wish list to Santa. Better yet; why not consider giving the gift of the arts to someone else this Christmas? Orchestra London concert tickets make a great gift!

The beginning of the new Millennium affords an opportunity to review the past, to look to the future, and to confirm our full support of the arts. Let's deal with the Y2K arts bug. It starts with you and I. We are musicians. If we won't do it, who will?

See you at the General Meeting.

Paul Sharpe
President