

LONDON FREE PRESS Wednesday March 22, 2000

## **OUR OPINION**

### **Managing the music**

Any city that doesn't embrace and foster the arts risks becoming a cold and soulless home for its citizens.

Sewers, curbs and garbage collection are necessary services, but they don't stir the mind like a play at the Grand Theatre, a symphony by Orchestra London or a Paul Peel at the art gallery.

So it is discouraging to hear anti-arts forces decrying help for desperately cash-strapped Orchestra London.

The orchestra is an essential element of London and its continuation should not be a subject of debate. Of course, radical change is mandatory. No element of the status quo is acceptable, except the quality of the performance.

Orchestra London needs \$1.2 million to eliminate debt and cover this year's obligations. The filing of a Proposal for Restructuring with the courts may be the first positive step in a while, with multi-year plans, fund-raising benchmarks and reimbursing creditors.

The city must begin to ask some fundamental questions about its role in all of the arts. The Grand is working itself through its own crisis. But London needs to decide how much orchestra it can reasonably afford. Is it giving enough? Is the orchestra, with no other home, subsidizing a hall that should have been replaced long ago?

Taxpayer support for Orchestra London must be a given. But taxpayers deserve better management in return.