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Orchestra cuts budget 10 per cent

By JOE MATYAS, Free Press Arts & Entertainment Reporter

Orchestra London has cut its budget by about 10 per cent for the 2000-2001 season as part of its new program of fiscal responsibility.

The orchestra's board of directors unveiled a reduced budget of \$2 million yesterday, down from \$2.2 million for the season just ended.

A business plan that calls for annual budgets of about \$2 million for the next three years was presented to the orchestra's staff, musicians, volunteers and patrons at a closed meeting in Centennial Hall.

After battling successfully all spring to discharge \$330,000 in debts and avoid bankruptcy, the orchestra wants to stay on solid financial ground, board chairperson John St. Croix said after the meeting.

"We lifted ourselves out of our immediate problem and we don't want to be in the same position again."

A fiscal responsibility committee consisting of board members Martin Rust and Jim Dunlop and financial administrator Lynne Williams has been struck to monitor income and expenses, said St. Croix. "We want to know what financial position we're in at all times so we're able to make adjustments as necessary."

St.Croix said the orchestra's new budget is more realistic. "Projections on revenues have been overly optimistic in the past."

Cost-cutting measures include cancelling three Sunday afternoon family concerts, reducing guest artists fees, limiting part-time musicians to 70 services (rehearsals and performances) during the year (down from 78) and leaving two administrative positions vacant. David Haward, a bassoonist who was also the orchestra's general manager, is giving up the GM's post for the sake of the bottom line.

"A lot of my administrative work was related to the artistic side of our operation and our new music director, Timothy Vernon, will be taking on that work," said Haward.

Orchestra concert master Joseph Lanza described Vernon as a proven conductor who has worked with tight budgets with Pacific Opera in Victoria, building it from scratch into a solid organization.

"He's a great Canadian conductor who brims with enthusiasm and charisma," said Lanza. "As musicians, we're looking forward to Tim's leadership."

Lanza said the orchestra's 27 full-time and 17 part-time musicians are all aware that "We'll be part of an austere organization for a while. But there's reason for optimism."

With Vernon and St. Croix at the helm, "We have potency in two key positions," he said.

"We need to grow our audience, our donations and our endowments," said Lanza. "We have an excellent orchestra capable of playing timeless music in a variety of styles. We're due for a good run. The time is right for it to happen."