

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LONDON FREE PRESS Saturday March 4, 2000

Analysis of revenues doesn't ring true

Larry Cornies, in his column, Orchestra must change -- or fold (Feb. 26), does a meaningless dance with numbers when he goes into a comparative analysis of orchestras "in terms of the percentage of revenue derived from municipal grants."

He is right when he says national and provincial grants could be more -- in fact, they were more -- but obviously, if these grants are reduced, for whatever reason, an orchestra's "percentage of revenue derived from municipal grants" will increase without the city adding a nickel.

One could therefore argue, using Cornies's logic, that the municipal grant should be reduced to maintain its previous percentage, which in turn would provide the other levels of government with an excuse to reduce funding to an organization which is, in their words, "beginning to sink."

The mathematical limit of this process is zero.

The important number Cornies does not mention is the size of the budget, which, at roughly \$2 million a year for Orchestra London, has not increased in 10 years, while federal and provincial funding has been curtailed. I doubt Free Press advertising rates have remained constant during that period; certainly the subscription rate has risen.

The fact is that a resident professional symphony orchestra, doing the repertoire which is popularly associated with such an institution, be it Beethoven or Tchaikovsky or John Williams, requires a budget in excess of this amount (Kitchener's is in the \$3 million range; Toronto's is in excess of \$17 million). That London has had its orchestra as long as it has is a reflection of a great deal of streamlining of repertoire and economies with respect to conductors', soloists' and musicians' fees and numbers; indeed, the amount of musical bang achieved for the buck has been extraordinary. But the full extent of what can be cut in this area without damaging the musical product has been reached, even surpassed.

In 1989, my Plymouth Reliant listed for \$10,460, without extras; compare that to the cost of a new compact car today, then multiply \$2 million by the same factor and you will have a more meaningful orchestral budget study.

JEFFREY WALL
Violinist
Orchestra London