

Provincial Funding Cuts, HST, Bard and You

Over the past few months, you have likely heard announcements from both the government and culture industry representatives regarding provincial funding. There is a great deal of confusion surrounding government announcements and the actual impact. It is difficult to summarize in a small space. However, I feel it is important for our loyal patrons to be apprized of what is happening in the arts and culture industry in British Columbia and what it means to Bard on the Beach.

I have reviewed the three-year government service plans, had conversations with industry colleagues and attended a round-table meeting with the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, Kevin Krueger. Here, in a nutshell, is what I can tell you. Provincial funding for the BC Arts Council is dropping by 82%, from \$19.5 Million (2008/09) to \$3.5 Million (2009/10 and 2010/11).

In addition, the Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) will be implemented starting July 1. Effectively this means that tickets to all arts and culture events and activities will increase by 7%, with no additional funding being received by the industry and you not receiving any increased services from the industry.

What is the impact to Bard? Combined funding for Bard on the Beach from the BC Arts Council (tax payer funded) and Direct Access Gaming (gambling and lottery funded) will drop from \$80,500 (2009) to a budgeted \$39,200 (2010) and \$14,900 (2011). In addition, the HST, in combination with regular inflationary and cost of living adjustments, means our regular evening ticket price will jump from \$34 to as much as \$38.

We understand that we are still in the midst of one of the largest recessions in Canadian history. We also understand that each industry, company and individual must share in the burden of such an economic downturn. However, we do not accept that a cut of at least 82% is indicative of 'sharing'. We also do not accept the argument that arts funding must be cut in order to support health or education. It is a false comparison that should not be tolerated. Funding the arts at \$19.5 Million has little if no impact on the ability to fund education (\$5 BILLION) or health (\$14 BILLION).

These funding cuts certainly impact Bard directly, and the arts and culture industries more broadly, and we will be doing what we can to advocate against them. But, in reality, we feel it has to do with you, your family, and your friends. Government funding of arts and culture ensures that it remains accessible to everyone. As funding drops, arts and culture slowly becomes something less and less affordable by the general public. We at Bard on the Beach believe that art, in all its forms, is for everyone, and this is a core part of our mandate.

We are NOT suggesting you advocate for one political party over another. We ARE asking you to consider advocating for the arts as something that is compulsory for the government to support at an effective and effectual funding level as part of our civil society. This isn't just about Bard on the Beach. This is about every theatre company, dance company, opera company, symphony, choir, gallery, museum, sculptor, painter, and actor in this province. Without funding, art becomes just for those who can afford it. We ask that you take the time now to contact your MLA and the Premier to tell them why YOUR government must allow you, your friends and your family participate in arts and culture for generations to come. We ask you to tell them they can do this by reinstating funding to the BC Arts Council now. Or you can visit www.allianceforarts.com/speak-out-about-bc-arts-cuts