

An open letter to Kevin Krueger,
BC Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts

August 19, 2010

Art is the psyche of a society

Dear Minister Krueger:

I am a co-founder of Headlines Theatre (1981) and have been the Artistic Director since 1984, having worked in the professional theatre since 1975.

As I know you are aware, it has been a very difficult year: specifically for arts and culture in British Columbia, and for all social services. The devastation of current funding cuts is creating permanent damage in what used to be a healthy community. Very recently, however, the difficulty over funding cuts has escalated into a deep concern for our eroding democracy.

I am grateful to Jane Danzo, past Chair of the BC Arts Council for the courage, commitment, and integrity it took for her to resign, in order to be able to speak openly about the relationship between government and arts funding. The alarm bell she is ringing about lack of consultation, erosion of a sacred arms-length policy, and the inexplicable history of the government ignoring the advice of its own bipartisan Standing Committee on Finance to restore arts funding is essential. Her letter is available here:

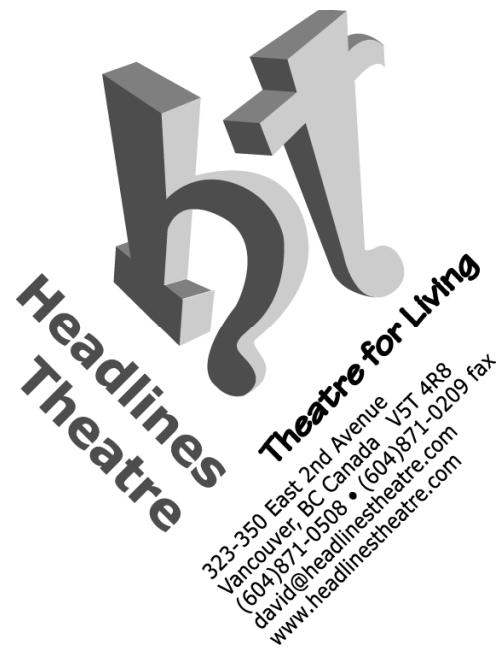
<http://www.scribd.com/doc/36032945/Jane-Danzo-s-Letter-of-Resignation>

There are, however, other things that need to be said:

Somehow, in the midst of deep cutting, you have found “new money” that equals \$30 million dollars in Legacy Funding (over three years) to alleviate the effects of cuts to the arts. These funds must be given to the BC Arts Council with no strings attached so the Council can do its job: nurturing arts and culture in BC.

I would like to give you the benefit of the doubt, Minister Krueger. I hope that when you announced the “Arts Legacy” program “to celebrate and renew the pride and excitement British Columbians experienced during the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games”, with a timetable in which the programming must happen during the month of February 2011, the anniversary of the Olympics, that you somehow meant well. I am trusting that you do not fully understand the ramifications of these actions.

Government exists at arms length of the content of cultural expression across Canada for very important reasons. Cultural expression is the psyche of a society. When governments in other countries use culture for their own ideological agendas, people around the world have legitimate reasons for concern.



Freedom of thought and expression is crucial to a healthy individual and to a healthy society. Do we condone any level of government telling citizens what they can or should think in BC? I hope the answer to that question is an emphatic “no”.

Humans think in metaphor. Art is a metaphoric language. Diversity of artistic expression is the manifestation of a society’s psyche. When funding is available to arts and cultural groups with the caveat that the work must focus into a certain arena, as is the case with the Legacy funding, this is an attempt to control the content of artistic expression.

Throughout history, when governments have tried to control the content of cultural expression, whether from a left or a right ideology, societies have suffered terribly. All of us must be vigilant. It does not go unnoticed, for instance, that the logo of the BC Arts Council used to read “supported by the Province of British Columbia” and now reads, “an agency of the Province of British Columbia”. Someone decided to change the letterhead and it must have happened as part of an ideological shift regarding the purpose of the BC Arts Council and the artistic expression it has facilitated.

We appear to have entered a frightening time in BC and all of us need to pay attention. This IS how the fragility of democracy erodes. It is a very slippery slope.

Minister Krueger, I urge you, having found \$30 Million in the midst of deep and devastating cutting, to give the funds to the BC Arts Council, no strings attached, and let them do their job.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D. Diamond." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Diamond, Artistic and Managing Director
Headlines Theatre