



**Independent
Media Arts Alliance**
**Alliance des arts
médiatiques indépendants**

Arts Day on the Hill 2014

Video Interview conducted by the Independent Media Arts Alliance

October 21, 2014

The IMAA interviewed Members of Parliament as part of Arts Day on the Hill 2014. Arts supporters from across Canada gathered in Ottawa on Tuesday October 21st to meet with Members of Parliament for the Arts Day on the Hill, organized by The Canadian Arts Coalition: <http://www.canadianartscoalition.com>. The key discussions focused on the role that federal arts investment plays in the economic and social health of Canada. Arts Day on the Hill 2014 saw more than 100 art supporters take part in scheduled meetings with Members of Parliament, senators and senior officials from all parties.

Irene Mathysen

MP for London - Fanshawe (NDP)

Transcript

Can you talk about a memorable art experience that's affected your life?

I was thinking about this all last evening and probably the most significant was my first trip to Stratford. I was a kid in a country school, and there were no resources, I mean we did well to have pencils, and this is the old story, "we walked all up the hill both ways, to school and home from school..."

We had a little library in the classroom and I managed to fish out a Tales of Shakespeare and just got lost in it. So finally by the time I got to high school I was determined I was going to Stratford and it wasn't that far away, it was relatively close by, and it was magic.

I remember everything about the day, it was a perfect October afternoon, crisp and warm, and I saw Henry V and I was in love with the Festival Theatre and every actor on the stage and it was just... magic! And that's I think what sticks with me, the magic. And of course it's been part of my life every since.

I make an effort to get to Stratford as many times as humanly possible and then in the area in London area we have wonderful theatres, small theatres, summer theatres, Grand Bend, Blyth, and they serve an extraordinary array of musicals and comedy and just wonderful summer fare. I am most fortunate to have the Grand Theatre in my home town of London, Ontario.

We've seen the likes of Martha Henry, she was the artistic director for a number of years, so my experience of the arts is been extraordinary I feel most blessed. In the middle nineties I guess more accurately. I was the junior Minister for

culture and the arts and so I met some fabulous people who had a vision of what we can contribute as a community to artists and what they contribute back. It's an ongoing love affair, I guess you would say.

4% of Canada's workforce is employed in the cultural sector. This sector is growing all the time, and every dollar invested generates large returns into the Canadian economy. Yet levels of public investment have remained stagnant for over a decade. Do you support an increase to the Canada Council's operating budget to the level of \$300 million annually?

Without a doubt the old adage that a country, a community suffers it can't grow and can't be dynamic unless it recognizes and celebrates its culture and its arts. We know that intrinsically these elements add a great deal to the community, not just for the sake of the wonderful culture and telling our stories but there's an economic benefit as well.

We forget that, I think, at our peril. The federal government has a leadership role in terms of making sure that it is providing support, funding, opportunity, in any way that it can in order to support and encourage the arts.

In London, Ontario we have summer festivals, and they're wonderful festivals, the most famous is Sunfest, and Sunfest brings in tours from all of North America.

It started out very very small, nobody thought it would fly but in 19 short years it's probably the number one arts festival of the summer in North America.

They bring in artists from across Canada and around the world, and the really wonderful thing is that the CBC is there to record and document the festival, and that is distributed around the world, around Canada.

It also helps to showcase up and coming new artists, so it's very very important. We used to have other ethnic festivals, we used to have the African community, the Chinese community, the Muslim community, the Spanish community, the Italian community, converge on Market Square which is right downtown.

Every weekend of the summer, one after another.

We don't have that anymore because the federal government's pulled the funding, they can't find the financing they need to make these incredible festivals thrive and the tragedy is of course that when the Italians were in Market Square all Londoners came out and they were all Italians for the weekend.

And when the Muslim community came out there was a learning opportunity and joining of hands of neighbors and community.

We missed that this summer and I think it's a tragedy. We need to make sure that those kinds of entities are supported, encouraged, financed, so that we can indeed be the kind of community that's celebrating of our diversity.

I think that the federal government has an important role and I regret very much that they've stepped back from that. The federal government... again, a leadership role. We have some opportunities in terms of digital media.

We know that the federal government was trying to sell access to digital media, I'm not sure how well that went.

The resources that would be gleaned from those sales need to be reinvested into the broadband sector, so that not just people in Toronto, not just people in London, Ontario can have access to the arts but people across the country in rural and remote communities.

If you think about rural and remote communities we have incredible Native artists. I mean this country is famous for its First Nations and Inuit art.

Why aren't we capturing that and broadcasting that all over the world? Cultural diplomacy is absolutely essential to us re-establishing our place in the world, in a lot of ways we've lost it. We have to get it back. The digital medium is an important aspect of that, so again government step up, do what you must do, do what is intelligent. Support our poets, our authors, our filmmakers, the incredible people who make music and dance. We need to show the world just what kind of incredible talent we have here.

And we should, and if it's possible at all and there is a change of government, we will.

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The Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMAA) is a member-driven non-profit national organization working to advance and strengthen the media arts community in Canada. Representing over 90 independent film, video, audio, and new media production, distribution, and exhibition organizations in all parts of the country, the IMAA serves over 16,000 independent media artists and cultural workers.

Media art is understood to apply to all forms of time-related art works which are created by recording sound or visual images. Time-related art works include works in the fields of sound, video and computer art, both installations and internet projects, and single channel works.