

ENTERTAINMENT

Alberta artists rally for their survival

by Gilbert Bouchard

A capacity crowd of 800 filled the Citadel's Shoctor theatre on Sunday night for Edmonton's first ever Rally for the Arts.

The rally was organized by Edmonton's performing and visual artists both to protest the various government cutbacks to the arts and to educate the public and the government to the economic and social importance of the arts.

"We have a selling job to do," said rally master of ceremony Fil Fraser. "We have to make the public and the politicians aware of how important the arts are to the economy."

The three and one-half hour rally featured 25 speakers — including keynote speakers Mel Hurtig, Sharon Pollock, and Curtis Barlow — and various Edmonton performing artists who sang, danced and presented several satirical skits.

The rally also represents a turning point in the lobbying strategies of the arts community. Keynote speaker Barlow, executive director of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres and president of Canadian Conference of the Arts said "It's time we got sophisticated in our lobbying."

Barlow and the other speakers concentrated on facts and figures, selling the validity of arts grants and subsidies on material and philosophical grounds. "The arts are Canada's eleventh largest industry," said Barlow. "They contribute 7.7 billion to Canada's GNP, are the fourth largest employer, and the sixth largest generator of wages and salaries."

Barlow went on to add that the arts are labour intensive. "It costs less to create a job in the arts than in any other sector," he said. Cutbacks in the arts will negate any other job creation programs that the government might implement."

Singer Connie Kaldor also commented on the cost effectiveness of Canadian artists. "Unlike the oil industry and the other industries that get support, we (artists) are not driving around in Cadillacs."

Playwright and keynote speaker Sharon Pollock continued in this vein adding that "artists are the country's greatest renewable resources."

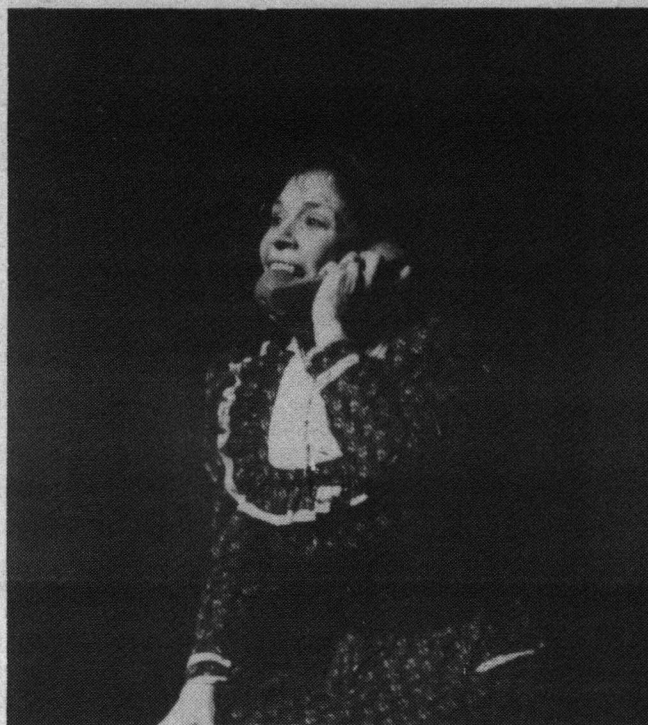
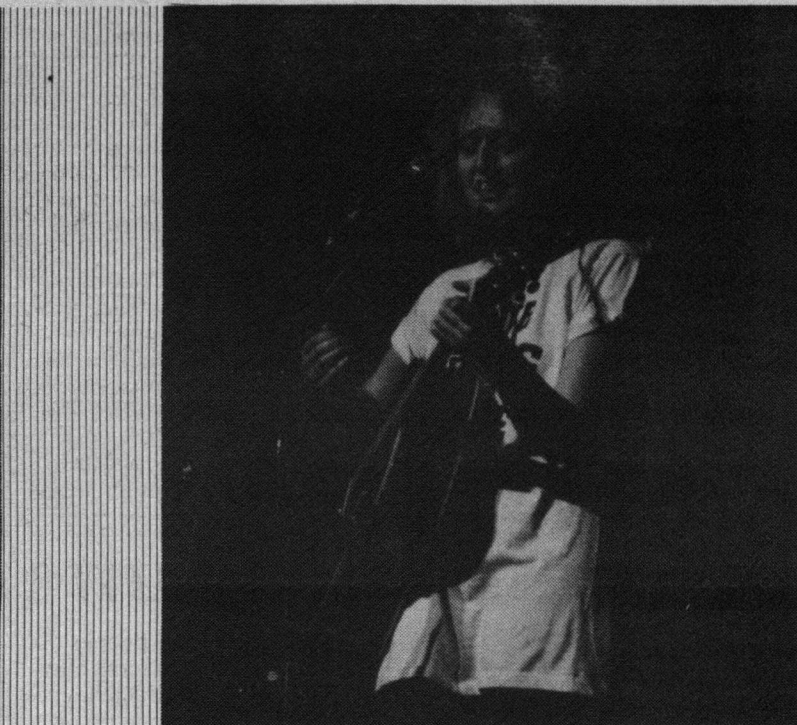


Photo Lance Progenitor



Gale Garnett (left) and Connie Kaldor: artists aren't driving in Cadillacs.

Photo Lance Progenitor

Speakers also attacked portrayals of the arts industry as beggars in search of an easy handout. "We're not asking for help — we're asking for investments," said Dr. Paul Fleck, president of the Banff School of the Fine Arts. "We are not a failing company asking for a bail-out; we are a success."

Undoubtedly, the most controversial speaker of the evening was writer and U of A professor Rudy Wiebe. Wiebe described the federal PCs as "a party known for cutbacks and scandal" and was soundly booed and heckled for his effort.

One heckler even screamed out "stick to the arts — not politics."

Despite the verbal abuse, Wiebe continued to speak and received the evening's loudest applause.

Another U of A professor, poet Ted Blodgett, defended the discussion of politics when debating the funding of the arts. "Poetry is politics," said Blodgett. "Any support of

the arts is a political act."

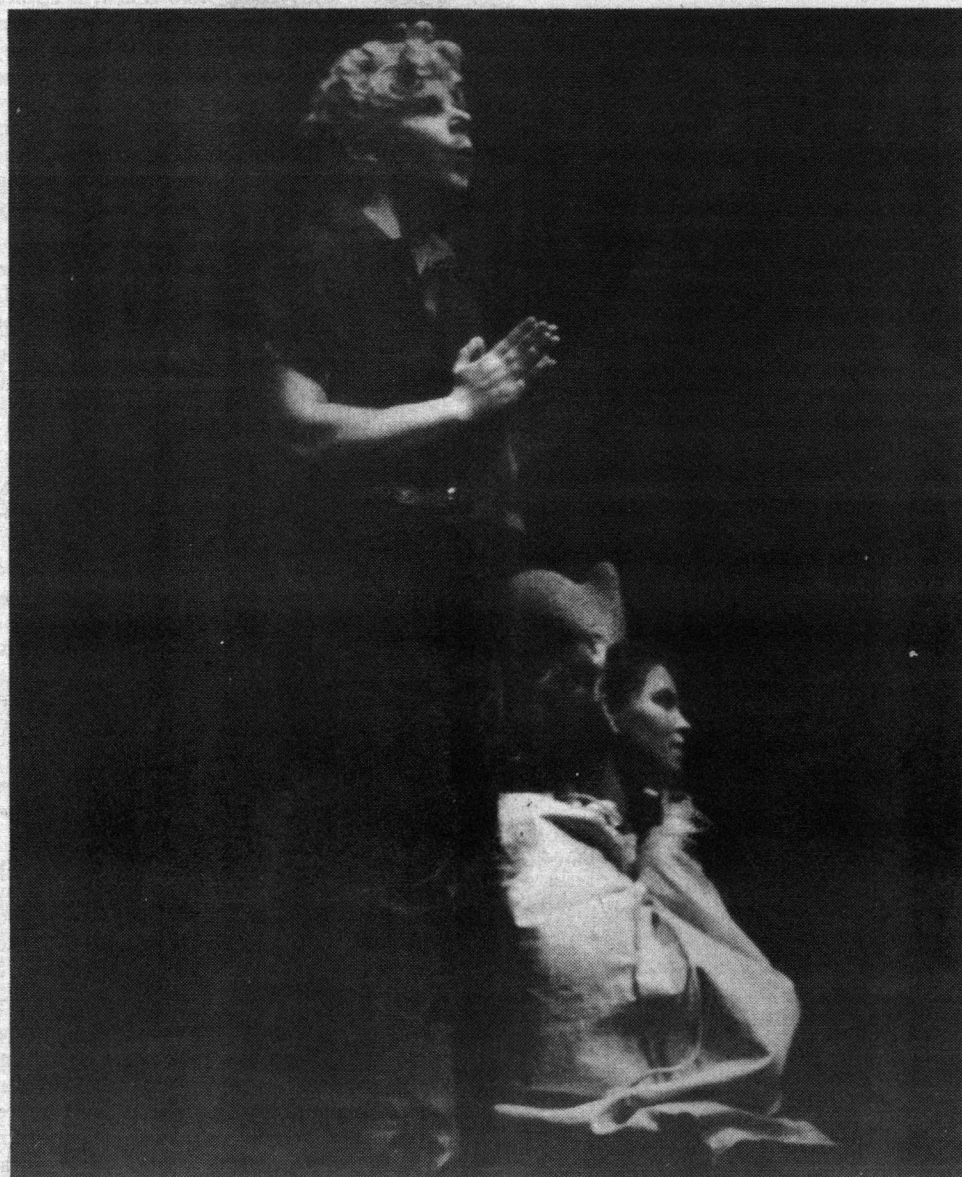
Blodgett also pointed out the effects of the cutbacks on Canada's international visibility. "Without culture, Canada is an invisible nation. This funding policy is designed to make Canada invisible."

Other speakers were also concerned that the new policies might be foreshadowing increasing government interference in the arts and the death of "arms length funding."

"My film, *Arrival*, questions authority and makes a political statement and was possible because of a political grant," said Marcelle Bienvenue of the Calgary Society of Inde-

pendent Filmmakers. "I fear that this kind of art will be impossible because of the cutbacks."

Fraser best summed up the importance of this lobby effort and the drastic nature of the cuts by reminding the audience of the lasting importance of the arts as compared to the more fleeting concerns of government. "Great civilizations are not remembered by their GNP, but by their artists. It doesn't matter if Plato balanced his books or if the Renaissance was a product of government grants," he said.



The Comedy Commission performs: great civilizations are not remembered for their GNP.

Photo Lance Progenitor

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