

# ENTERTAINMENT

## Spectre of arts cutbacks looms large

Edmonton's municipal government has set the city's theatres reeling with a wave of cutbacks and a proposed arms length committee for arts and multicultural funding.

"These latest cutbacks have been without any reason and are willy nilly," said Phoenix Theatre artistic director Bob Baker. "The board at the city is ill informed and unmotivated."

With the exception of the Chinook Theatre, the cutbacks have affected all of Edmonton's professional playhouses. The cutbacks are so severe that one theatre may not be able to complete their season.

Nexus publicity manager Richard Patterson gives his theatre a ninety per cent chance of finishing this season. He was also uncertain if the theatre would be able to get off the ground next season.

All the theatres affected by the cutbacks are appealing them.

Not only can the city's theatre mull over the effects of this latest wave of cutbacks they can also contemplate the recommendations of a special mayor's task force into arts and multicultural funding.

Last Friday, members of this task force came to the Edmonton Art Gallery in an open forum sponsored by *The Edmonton Bulletin* and the Arts Administration Resource Centre (AARC).

The recommendations put forth by this task force are three fold: arts and multicultural organizations share common funds and a common committee be set up to allocate these funds; a set portion of the mill rate be set aside for arts and multicultural funding and the committee that would be formed to allocate these funds be totally autonomous from any government agency.

Donna Cardinal, executive director of the AARC was pleased that the city of Edmonton is finally developing a consistent policy and that their recommendations stress an arms length committee.

"Edmonton hasn't done bad in the amount of money allocated to the arts but has failed in their lack of a consistent policy in allocating those funds," she said. "I am convinced of the validity of arms length funding because we live in a province that has the highest level of funding to the arts but such funds are delivered through the provincial department of culture and not through an arms length funding organization."

The city's artistic community is uncertain about the task force's recommendations. One member of last Friday's audience called the task force's findings utopian, and other participants were concerned that the "marriage" of the arts and multicultural groups would lead to reduced art funding. Concern was also raised as to the composition of the committee and to how its members were chosen.

Task force members stressed that recommendations would not mean a reduction of funds to theatre groups and that the set share



Photo Tim Kubash

Nexus Theatre: Only ninety percent sure they can finish this year

of the mill rate would mean the yearly battles over funds could be alleviated.

"I phoned alderperson Percy Wickman

(chair of the task force) and I asked him if this would take money away from the arts," said task force member Helen Collison. "He said

## Theatres to continue lobbying

The repercussion of last week's rally for the arts in the Citadel's Shctor Theatre are still being felt as the various arts groups are re-organizing and fortifying themselves for further lobby efforts.

Rally organizer and Phoenix Theatre artis-

tic director Bob Baker was pleased with the rally and thinks "the arts community wants to continue the momentum."

"We have to keep up our profile as a lobby group," he said. "why have people let it go so long. We have to start explaining and

it was impossible to assess this question because they don't know how much money they'll have to allocate. What these recommendations are trying to do is to stabilize the amount of money that is going to the arts from the city."

Another task force member, David Bye, continued in the same vein by adding, "This committee would avoid the annual financial competition between the various artistic and multicultural groups. This committee will stabilize and coordinate funding regardless of the city's administration."

Collison answered queries as to the committee's composition, saying that the committee's composition hasn't been finalized and "No mechanism has been determined in how all the members of the committee will be chosen. It's up to the arts community to tell the city how they want their representatives chosen."

The committee structure being proposed by the task force is still only a proposition. City council has the option to refuse the recommendations outright or make any amendments they wish.

If this committee structure is ratified by council it will be unique in all of Canada. Such a committee is unprecedented and it is therefore impossible to predict the effects of this committee on Edmonton's art scene.

## Theatre council formed

Another lobby innovation that emerged from the rally for the arts was the public announcement made by Theatre Network artistic director Stephen Heatley concerning the creation of the Edmonton Professional Theatre Council.

"The idea behind the council is to gather the chairs of the boards of directors of Edmonton's professional theatres and rally them together so they can lobby," said Heatley. "What was missing in the past was a lack of knowledge on the public and the government's part about the volunteerism of the boards of Edmonton's theatres. This council will help the boards communicate and give them a higher profile."

Theatres that have already joined include: Chinook, Citadel, Workshop West, Network, Nexus, Phoenix, Catalyst, and Northern Light. I feel it is a very promising move that thea-

tres all the way from the Citadel to the Nexus are meeting and working together," said Heatley.

"The duties of the council will be three-fold," he said.

"The first is to analyze and respond to issues of mutual interest and concern. The second is to promote the acceptance of professional theatres as corporate citizens and to have the public recognize their contributions to the social and economic development of the community. The third will be to develop cooperation among the various professional theatre groups.

"This council is not just another bureaucracy. It is going to be a forum where theatres can meet and discuss areas of common concerns and speak to the government with one voice," said Heatley.

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