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Lorin Moore: "No other city in Canada has had the artists that we've had."

Whether festivals would go here during the summer, I don't know. We could end up in the regular season by presenting the three, one night after the other. But it all has to wait four or five years in planning.

G: Now let's talk about the more practical side: finances. Who supports the opera?

LM: Well, the Canada Council first and foremost. Then the Province of Alberta, and the City of Edmonton. Those are our three big granting bodies. Then we get the Edmonton Opera Guild who do an awful lot of work. We get a big donation from EFFORT, and we are now receiving grants from the DuMaurier Foundation which will increase each year. The rest comes from corporate and individual sources: You get corporations that give us six or seven hundred dollars; you get private people who give us ten. But you take all those ten dollars and add them up. Last year we wrote a letter to all our subscribers because we had a deficit, and we said if we can get ten dollars from every subscriber, this would help. It worked.

G: You removed your deficit!

LM: We removed our deficit. We're the only place in Canada, outside of the Toronto Symphony, without a deficit at the moment. We've wiped out the deficit and ended up with a surplus. But having a surplus doesn't mean we're in the black, because we are now into a four-year opera season, and that surplus is gone pretty fast. We'll be in the red again this year unless we can get increased funds because tickets sales only bring in 50%. It's not nearly enough. It's costing us \$26,000 for three nights, just for sets alone.

G: What about a simple backdrop, with greater emphasis upon lighting effects?

LM: Well, that of course, again, is up to the Artistic Director. When he chooses the opera, and the board has approved the opera, then he contacts the designer. And between the two of them

they work out their conception of it. And you've got to get a Designer who agrees with the Director's ideas, because the Director is the person who has to work with the set. Certainly a cheaper set would save us costs with stage crew, because this runs into money too. But what operas could you do with it?

G: I was wondering if that would be a way of doing say the Flying Dutchman?

LM: Yes, Flying Dutchman would be the only one that I can think of at the moment.

G: Do you think that it's worth a gamble to try?

LM: I think that it's worth a gamble if you have the right opera. Certainly if you have the right opera, you can dress a set up with projections and beautiful costumes. Costumes are the lesser of the two expenses. But it certainly has to be the right opera. You can't do an Aida like that or Norma or anything like that.

G: Do you think, say, that one performance a year of a Handel opera for example in a concert performance would be possible?

LM: I don't think we're going into concert performance. We stopped doing concerts; you recall that we did Stratas, Caballe, Tucker and Merrill, but that was in order to spread our season out. Now that we're into four operas, I don't think we'll do anything like that.

G: What is the international reputation of the EOA?

LM: There's an organization in the United States called Opera America which is made up of every opera company, from the Metropolitan down. It's based on your budgets; what your box office returns are; and your repertoire. There are three Canadian companies in it: Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton. Of those 44 (if you eliminate the top such as the Met, San Francisco, Chicago and Sante Fe and the Canadian Opera - they're the top ones because of their funding) we end up - you'd be surprised - sixteenth. Agents, years ago, used to say, "Come to Edmonton" and you got

the usual answers. Now they all know where we are. We get phone calls every day. We're known in England. We've no problem in getting artists from anywhere. They all want to come because they know that we put on good productions. They also get a chance to do productions here they wouldn't want to try, say, at the Met or San Francisco. Try it out here, like Beverly Sills did with her first Lucia EVER, right here in Edmonton. Take our own Heather Thompson. She did her first Traviata with us; she did her first Butterfly. No other city in Canada has had the artists that we've had, and the Edmonton public don't realize how lucky they are. The people in Vancouver are jealous. Toronto has not had any artist of the calibre that we've had. We created a monster really, because bringing these artists (the Sills and Sutherlands), well, it's a hard act to follow. Who do you follow it with? And they don't come cheap.

G: What about Canadian artists other than Heather Thompson?

LM: We've done very well by Canadian artists. Last year in our season every artist was Canadian with the exception of two. But there are so few of them that you can't bring back the same Canadian artist time after time again, when there are so many other marvellous singers in the world. And Canada Council has not put pressure on us in that way.

G: Speaking of Canadian artists, what about Canadian repertoire?

LM: Louis Riel, Ginger Coffee, Heloise and Abelard. We want to do a Canadian opera some day. But even Toronto lost a bundle on all three of these productions.

G: I thought that the productions went over with reasonable success.

LM: Artistically yes, but box office - they lost their shirts. Louis Riel has been heavily funded by the Council, but still they're only getting 60% box office. We cannot work on 60% box office. We must operate on at least 85%

G: Do you feel that the association has a certain responsibility, occasionally, of going out on a limb regarding repertoire?

LM: It's not for us. Toronto can do it because of their season. They do six or seven operas a season and they can do this and this is what they've done. They're doing their share and they're doing a very good job of it. But they are the ones in Canada who are taking a chance.

G: What does the public have in store for them with Norma?

LM: We've got a very, very good conductor, who is an opera conductor; he only conducts opera. You have sets entirely different from what you have seen here before. I think they're in for a very good treat. It's a static opera. You don't see action in it like you'd see in Boheme. But I think, judging from what I saw last night, and from a production that I saw in San Francisco, I think we're going to have a better production.

G: The association has grown to four productions a year; what lies in store for the future?

LM: Well next year there are four productions, and the year after there will only be four productions; that will be our 15th season. Maybe we'll be into five productions, maybe we'll develop into two operettas and three operas, and we could have two series; for the people who want the operetta and don't want the opera; and there's a lot of people who go to the opera who don't want the operetta. It all depends on the funding and where the economics of the thing will be.

G: Do you have any other comments?

LM: When we started the opera, the opera was glamorous. Opening night was a very social thing. Everybody was in their tuxes and beautiful gowns. They still are. But there are many in blue jeans and we're delighted to have them there. There's no snobbishness about it at all. People are there not to dress; they're there to enjoy the opera.

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Joan Sutherland & Richard Bonyng