



**Canadian Actors' Equity Association  
Response to:**

***Canadian Content in a Digital World***

**Department of Canadian Heritage**

---

*The enabling and supporting of our artists and the protection of their space of practice are essential in the creation and sustenance of a truly functioning society. The health of its cultural space and practitioners is reflective of the quality of their host society.*

Excerpt from speech by Irish President Michael D. Higgins at the International Federation of Actors' Live Performance Conference Liberty Hall, Dublin - Thursday, 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2015

---

**Canadian Actors' Equity Association  
44 Victoria Street, 12th floor  
Toronto, ON M5C 3C4  
tel: 416-867-9165  
fax: 416-867-9246  
communications@caea.com  
www.caea.com**

In April 2016, the Minister of Canadian Heritage launched the first phase of a conversation on how to strengthen the creation, discovery and export of Canadian content in a digital world. The time has come to build a framework for how the federal government can best foster creativity and support Canadian culture by addressing the concerns of citizens while respecting the role of professional artists.

The focus of this conversation remains on information and entertainment content as presented in television, radio, film, digital media and platforms, video games, music, books, newspapers and magazines. That said, all creators, cultural stakeholders and citizens have a role to play in the future of the creative economy.

In particular, the consultations offer the cultural community an opportunity to advocate for the re-imagined and strengthened role of the CBC in which live performance can take centre stage in the households of Canadian families.

What follows are some points related to the core questions that the Ministry has developed as a result of the pre-consultation process.

**1. What does a cultural system that supports creators and respects citizen choice look like to you?**

Canada has a unique and distinct culture that's worth celebrating and helps define who we are as Canadian citizens. Any comprehensive digital strategy must incorporate the live performance industry. This cultural system requires stable and sustainable support that allows Canadians to fluidly and affordably access Canadian theatre, films, television, and music while fairly remunerating individual artists. By doing so, the Ministry will make the appreciation, preservation and support of culture a given in everyday life, valued in the same way Canadians regard socialized medicine and other fundamental services.

**2. How can we meet the challenge of promoting Canada's creativity in a digital world and how can we use Canadian content to promote a strong democracy?**

In order to use digital technology to connect Canada and the global economy, key productions at anchor organizations (e.g. The Stratford Festival, Canadian Opera Company, Citadel Theatre, Royal Winnipeg Ballet, etc.) need to be recorded in English, French and Native languages (when appropriate). Funds need to be made available to organizations for capital costs related to equipment and personnel required to create the recordings and/or broadcast the productions. The CBC is the logical partner in this initiative as the primary platform for the dissemination of both simulcast and recorded performances to primetime audiences.

A further role for the CBC in nurturing an educated citizenry would be to produce work that is critically engaging, objective and far less commercially-oriented such as:

- Long-form dramatic work
- News
- Documentaries
- Sport
- Live and recorded performances in theatre, dance and opera

The success of the Tragically Hip concert that was broadcast via CBC in August 2016 was a visionary example of how live performance can galvanize a country by targeting representative content that resonates with the population. More than 11 million Canadians connected with the power of the performance.

In Equity's recent *Pre-budget Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance*, we put forward the idea that additional funds to support initiatives connected to the creation and dissemination of new Canadian content via the CBC would come from:

- regulating new media internet service providers (i.e. Netflix) through the CRTC much like traditional broadcasters.
- collecting both Value-Added Taxes (HST, PST and GST) as well as income taxes from these service providers.
- insisting on contributions of 5% of gross revenues from new media internet service providers devoted to the development of Canadian content through a third party administrator like the Canadian Media Fund.

If the Ministry were to implement these recommendations, benefits to society would be reflected in:

- additional work opportunities for Canadian artists.
- increased consumption of Canadian content by the general population.
- a digital library of productions that creates a legacy for Canadian citizens.
- a strengthened understanding of Canadian values and identity.

### **3. How do we support Canada's artists, content creators and cultural entrepreneurs in order to create a cultural ecosystem in which they thrive and that will benefit the growth of our middle class at home, and help them reach beyond our borders?**

As a major engine of job growth for the middle class the cultural sector needs sustained funding. Canada's cultural industries account for more than 600,000 jobs and generate 3 percent of Canada's GDP, or \$47.7 billion a year.

When we look outside our borders, culture needs to be reinstated as a pillar of international diplomacy. Foreign missions need to be sufficiently resourced so that they offer a robust platform for appreciating Canadian cultural values (including democracy) abroad.

In terms of more direct support for live performance, currently, there is insufficient funding for touring to reach international arts audiences – this can be particularly problematic as some productions have considerable touring costs (i.e. opera, ballet) associated with them.

## **Summary**

The demand for cultural content has never been as great as it is today. Developing a smooth consumer-friendly model for accessing content that incorporates fair compensation to artists needs to be a priority for the Ministry. Live performances should be highlighted within the new framework with an understanding that digital technology can be harnessed to distribute carefully curated content that speaks to Canadians throughout the far reaches of this vast country. The CBC provides the obvious distribution platform with funding derived from the regulation of internet-based media providers. Culture is an economic driver that also has a vital role to play in promoting Canadian values internationally.

By engaging Canadians with more critical content we create a more discerning population that is better equipped to effectively participate in the democratic process. At a time when democratic institutions are being reconsidered and traditional values threatened through misinformation, we need art's ability to filter out the noise and provide insight. Irish President, Michael D. Higgins, a poet by training, sums it up well in the following quote.

*Conflict, intolerance and extremism are on the rise in many regions of the world, often based on abusive interpretations of sacred texts. A shared understanding of the diversity and processional nature of culture provides the ground on which interactions between traditions can take place in peace and mutual regard. Culture can be a space of healing and a space of celebration, but it can only perform such a function if it is treated as central to democracy and citizenship and not as a mere commodity of economic surplus, not as a palliative but rather as a component of life that is energising and emancipatory of the self and society.*

**(Excerpt from speech by Irish President Michael D. Higgins at the International Federation of Actors' Live Performance Conference, Liberty Hall, Dublin - Thursday, 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2015)**

## **About Equity**

Canadian Actors' Equity Association (Equity) is the voice of professional artists working in live performance in English Canada. We represent close to 6,000 artists working in theatre, opera and dance from coast-to-coast-to-coast. Our membership includes performers (actors, singers, dancers), directors, choreographers, fight directors and stage managers. Equity is encouraged by many of the much-needed cultural investments that the Canadian Government has committed to in its mandate

