

June 18, 2009

Dear Colleagues,

One of the great sources of ongoing inspiration for me has been the opportunity to reflect upon the earliest days of the Canadian Conference of the Arts. The efforts of Lawren Harris, F.R.Scott, Elizabeth Wynn Wood, Herman Voaden and dozens of others of Canadians committed to the development and expression of the Canadian voice came together 64 years ago to found what we know today as the Canadian Conference of the Arts.

They did so with no government funding, no infrastructure and no effective communication technologies like email or the internet. They worked from the strong conviction that their efforts were important to the nation and to our collective future together. There were few other professional arts service organizations, cultural labour organizations, producer groups or umbrella organizations representing our artists, creators and arts professionals.

It is easy to lose sight of the valiant beginnings of the CCA. Today as coalitions proliferate, and arts service organizations become more professional and articulate, the environment in which the CCA must operate is almost as challenging as those first days leading up to the Kingston Conference in 1945.

Funding challenges persist, the delicate dance of representing the interests of the sector with a government that scrutinizes every word and action for traces of lobbying or partisan political taint continues as never before. The internal dynamics of the cultural sector continue to be both blessed and plagued by individuals who are painfully articulate in their support and criticism of this and other organizations. We have yet to find a path to the inclusion of the diverse and aboriginal communities that are so central to the evolving sense of our national identity. There are still mountains to climb both for the CCA and the sector.

For all of the challenges and frustrations that the Board of Governors and the Secretariat must address, it is important to recognize that these have been the foundations on which the CCA was built and has endured. The most dangerous thing for an organization like the CCA to do is to become paralyzed by preoccupations of the moment. There have been many moments in the 64 years of the life of the CCA where this would have been a temptation. Happily, neither the Board, nor the membership or the Secretariat would tolerate such a catastrophic capitulation.

As I prepare to take my leave of this organization for a second time, I can only wish you all the courage and the tenacity necessary to move the CCA forward in this complex and daunting environment. I will always appreciate the opportunities that the CCA has given me over the years to work for the benefit of the arts and culture sector. While there have been moments of great frustration, they have been eclipsed by our collective triumphs, the fellowship and support of Board and staff members, and the many artists, creators and arts professionals who have joined the fray on so many occasions.

In leaving, I would like to reflect on the efforts of our founders, and you and their successors with pride and satisfaction, and like the Cheshire cat leave behind only a grin.

Good luck to you all!

Keith Kelly