

# The Gazette

Mardi, 19 mai 2009

## Ottawa missed cue on funding arts: critics

### No details on proposal meant to help Canada be 'cultural capital'

MIKE DE SOUZA  
CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

OTTAWA — Five months after the Harper government created a \$25-million fund that it said would put Canada on the map as a “cultural capital” of the world, critics are frustrated that there are still no new details or federal support to better enable Canadian artists to perform on the international stage.

“It’s the most revolting and frustrating experience I have lived through,” said Alain Dancyger, executive director of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal. “None of the arguments brought forward by this government make sense. This is what I find most frustrating.”

The government’s new proposal, the Canada Prizes for the Arts, was introduced in the federal budget last January after the Conservatives came under fire for cancelling several million dollars in funding that was previously used to support Canadian artistic performances abroad. But the proposed international competition was quickly denounced by artists from across the country who said it could wind up helping only foreign performers, instead of the Canadians who struggle to make ends meet.

“We all wonder where they are going with this,” said Liberal heritage critic Pablo Rodriguez. “Did they cancel (the competition)? If it’s still there, how’s it going to work? Who’s going to benefit? It’s not responsible that it was announced months ago and they have nothing to say about it now.”

As Dancyger’s 52-year-old company prepares to leave at the end of the month for its first tour in the Middle East, a government spokesperson said Heritage Minister James Moore was “looking at options” about his \$25-million proposal, which replaced the grants that were cut by the Conservatives.

The federal cuts left a \$250,000 shortfall in the dance company’s \$1-million tour that includes an invitation for a performance at celebrations marking Tel Aviv’s 100th anniversary.

“I think (the Conservative government) is still trying to figure it out,” said NDP heritage critic Charlie Angus. “But we’ve got internationally respected arts organizations that are taking the hit for ideologically driven cuts that were done last summer.”

Dancyger said he could not cancel the Middle East tour because the company’s international reputation was at stake. It covered some of its losses through new donations and a special grant from the Quebec government, but warned that it risks losing its market share and future tours to its main competitors from Europe, which he said are getting up to 85 per cent of their funding from government sources to cover travel, cargo and other costs that are not usually included in contracts.

If there were no more tours for the company, its employees could lose up to two months of work per year, he warned.

“It’s that much more insulting and unacceptable that our own companies are starving and they are rewarding international (performers),” Dancyger said in an interview. “Could the government justify giving a prize to an international automobile manufacturer for the most beautiful car while our own manufacturers are laying people off and shutting down factories? It’s completely stupid.”