

ENGLISH-LANGUAGE **ARTS** NETWORK

June 13, 2007

Dear Timothy W. Casgrain and Robert Robinovitch,

ELAN was invited to make a presentation before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage: CBC's Mandate Review. The members of the English Arts Language Network (ELAN) have a long and mostly happy relationship with CBC, which plays an essential role in providing information to and about our local community. Two of our board members made brief presentations which we are pleased to forward to you. Kirwan Cox spoke about CBC television and Ian Ferrier spoke about CBC radio. We trust that their comments on behalf of ELAN will help inform the final recommendations of the committee.

Sincerely,

Susie Arioli,

President

**ELAN Speech to Parliamentary Committee on CBC Review
May 24, 2007**

Thank you for letting us speak to you tonight, but first, I would like to introduce our delegation from ELAN: Guy Rodgers, Ian Ferrier, Anna Fuerstenberg, Kirwan Cox.

ELAN is the English-language Arts Network of Quebec, and it has reached a milestone this month. We now have 1000 members. You may wonder who these English-speaking artists might be. You've heard or seen our work, if not recognized our names.

We are musicians such as Oscar Peterson, Kate and Anna McGarrigle, Oliver Jones, Arcade Fire, Rufus Wainwright, and the current Chair of ELAN, Suzie Arioli and her band.

We are writers of plays, crime novels, and poetry such as David Fennario, Louise Penney, MacArthur Prize Winner Anne Carson, Leonard Cohen, and Mavis Gallant.

We are dancers like Margie Gillis, Vincent Warren, and former Chair of ELAN, Lin Snelling.

We are painters and video artists like Betty Goodwin, Ghitta Caiserman-Roth, Nelson Henriks, and Ingrid Bachmann .

We are actors such as Claire Coulter, Christopher Plummer, Walter Massey and Jack Langedijk.

Of course, we also work in film and television. We are producers such as Arnie Gelbart and Kevin Tierney whose film "Bon Cop, Bad Cop" broke box office records in Canada.

We are directors like Brian McKenna, Colin Low and John N. Smith, who is best known for coming back to Montreal after directing the hit Hollywood movie "Dangerous Minds" with Michelle Pfeiffer.

Of course, some never came back- from Norma Shearer to William Shatner and Donald Sutherland. Producer Jake Eberts keeps a cottage in the Eastern Townships and donates to McGill so he is here in spirit.

I took the time to list these names so you know who we are- a vibrant official language minority that has an impact across Canada and around the world. We only wish so many of us didn't have to leave Quebec to make a living doing what we love to do, and can do so well when given the opportunity.

As we read in the Globe this morning, “Most people work to make a living, but artists make a living to work.”

Exactly 75 years ago public broadcasting began in a room like this before another parliamentary committee. A young Graham Spry spoke five words that clarified the issues and galvanized those parliamentarians. He said that Canada faced a simple choice in broadcasting: “The State or the States”.

Today, let us say as loudly and clearly as possible: we support public broadcasting. We support it unequivocally and passionately- both as creators and as viewers and listeners. As Canadians, we need public broadcasting because it connects us to every corner of our country, and to ourselves. It provides a diversity of viewpoints and programs that we cannot get on commercial TV or radio.

We hope that some day CBC TV will become a public broadcaster, just as the CBC radio is. Right now, chronically underfunded for decades by short-sighted Liberal and Conservative governments, the CBC has been driven to maximize commercial revenue. The more commercial revenue the CBC must make, the more it compromises its public service mandate and the goals of the Broadcasting Act. The CBC simply does not have the funding to fulfill its mandate under the Act.

Yet, it is not possible to look at the CBC in the 21st century in isolation. We must look at it as part of the broadcasting system, and the English-Canadian broadcasting system is a mess.

Three years ago Kirwan Cox did a study (“Through the Looking Glass”, Kirwan Cox, May, 2004) comparing the broadcasters in Canada, Australia, the U.S., and the U.K. I discovered that Canadian broadcasters receive the lowest per capita TV advertising revenue among the countries studied. Why? Probably because of spillover advertising from the United States.

In turn, English-Canadian broadcasters pay the lowest license fees (as a percentage of budget) among those countries studied. Why? Because the public subsidies designed to support independent Canadian production have ended up indirectly subsidizing the broadcasters. They can afford to reduce the license fees they pay for Canadian content and still meet their CRTC obligations.

What do they do with the money saved by paying low license fees? Here the private broadcasters differ from the CBC.

The private broadcasters use the money saved underpaying for domestic programming by overpaying for American programming at auction in Los Angeles- thus driving up the cost of these programs to a record \$688 million last year. In the end, English-Canadian commercial broadcasters pay more for foreign programming than they pay for domestic programming- unlike any other broadcasters in the developed world.

When private broadcasters spend 2/3rds of a billion dollars in program money in Los Angeles instead of Canada, the independent Canadian producer and the creative community here must absorb the cost. The situation has been getting worse over the years for Canadian producers. The average independent English-Canadian program budget has fallen by 41% in constant dollars from 1984 to 2001.

As we can see, there is money in the commercial TV system to improve the quality and quantity of Canadian programming, but it needs to stay in Canada. We need private broadcasters who spend more on Canadian programs than they spend on foreign programs.

Generally speaking, the CBC does not compete with the private broadcasters as long as it follows a domestic programming strategy while they follow a foreign programming strategy. In fact, our private broadcasters have even given up the freedom to program their own prime time schedules to benefit from simulcasting American network programs.

We need a public broadcaster that is not driven by the commercial objectives of the private broadcasters, but is publicly funded. That means significant and dependable increases in parliamentary appropriations- not more advertising.

Here in Quebec, CBC radio is especially needed by the arts community to hear news about what is happening in our disciplines. We need radio production in Montreal that uses our talent, and that speaks to anglophones throughout the province. With the abdication of cultural programming on CBC TV, CBC radio is our lifeline. It does more than any other broadcaster, but erosion of funding has cut its quality. CBC radio needs more public funding, not advertising as the Association of Canadian Advertisers has requested.

We need more TV program expenditures by the CBC, and more decision-making here. We need better communication with the CBC, and we need to see the CBC's executives on a regular basis so relationships can be developed. We would like an advisory committee between the CBC and the production community which can draw up and manage a national "terms of trade" agreement with independent producers.

We would also like the Canadian Independent Film and Video Fund budget increased because that is the one production fund that is not controlled by broadcasters and, therefore, spends money in the regions on the smaller producers. Dollar for dollar, it is the most important source of production funding in English-Quebec.

Should increasing the CBC budget be a parliamentary priority?

Yes, at least more so than increasing the military budget, because in the 21st century we need to redefine our idea of national sovereignty. The 49th parallel is a media border, a cultural border, and not just a geographical line. We can only defend our country in the minds of our

people with TV and radio programming that helps us see ourselves and our country, and not someone else's.

We want to work, and we want to see our work on our screens- big and small- without having to go to Hollywood to be paid with our own dollars to create someone else's vision.

CBC Radio

We would also like to speak for a minute purely on behalf of CBC radio, as it is the medium which has had the most effect on the careers of the poets, writers and performers, in paying them for work to be presented on air, in promoting the work of the English language literary community to our minority here in Quebec, and in presenting Quebec English literature to the rest of Canada.

When we go to the Eastern Townships and to Gaspé, CBC radio IS the voice and core of the English language community in Quebec. In places where the numbers of English speakers are low, and the culture is threatened, everyone listens, and CBC is how they define who the English community is.

In Montreal, CBC radio is the voice of Quebec English literature, as, with a very few exceptions, the commercial stations just don't carry literature. If our writing colleagues have any celebrity in this province it is because of CBC radio. They invite us on the air, talk about our books, present our work both to the English audience in Quebec and to the larger Canadian audience who avidly listens to shows like *Wiretap* and finds out from *Canada Reads* that Montreal's Heather O'Neill has written one of the hottest books of the season.

They are the station which shows that it pays to be literate, and by doing so they promote literacy like no other broadcaster in the province. CBC sponsors contests for writers and presents prizes to writers. They are at the Blue Metropolis literary festival and the Voix d'Amérique spoken word festival. We can say without exaggerating that without CBC radio much of Quebec English language culture would be unavailable even to the community in which it is created.

In Quebec the core mandate of CBC Radio has been to present the best of English language culture to the minority English language community, and to show that community all of the smaller communities of which it is composed. From this core, the mandate extends into giving English speakers more insight into the French majority who surround us, and—as more and more regional programming goes national—into showing the range and excitement of Quebec English culture to the rest of the country.

The fact that funding has not increased for the CBC is an effective cut for each year that this policy remains in place. It means that each year there are fewer producers, fewer shows, more reruns, and less work being heard by Canadians for Canadians.

For radio in particular this is critical, as it is right on the verge of becoming an archival medium. Each week the CBC receives calls asking “how do I find copies of *Wiretap* and *Ideas*, how can I hear that music special that was on *Roots Montreal* last week, etc.

The CBC’s mandate—and the key to the CBC’s future— is to be in a position to present content to their listeners when they want it, how they want it and where they want it. And in the future the key portal for CBC to fulfill this mandate will be the internet.

This means that the show a producer worked on for months won’t disappear after a broadcast or two. In an ideal world it will be available to any CBC listener who wants to hear it. And in the process it will create an authoritative archive of our culture which people can download and listen to any time they like.

All of this costs money, and we think the best thing you could do would be to fund the CBC such that they are not effectively cut each year, so that they can take on this challenge and extend their range into this new world where the excellent work they do will have continuing relevance to anyone who has access to the internet.

Thank-you,
ELAN