

IT IS EASY TO SEE the immediate reasons why the Atlantic Symphony is currently undergoing a severe financial crisis. Such enterprises as theatre companies, ballet companies, symphony orchestras, and opera companies have always been supported by patrons of the arts, whether private individuals, corporations, or governments. As everyone involved in a project like the Atlantic Symphony would admit, the arts—on this sort of scale—have never been, and cannot and ought not be expected to be, self-supporting.

But few people in the Maritimes seem to understand the necessity for supporting this endeavour. The Canada Council supplies a third of the orchestra's budget; the province of Nova Scotia a little over a tenth; the city of Halifax and the province of New Brunswick about one-fortieth each. Yet—to give an example—when the orchestra approached the Fredericton city council in November for a grant of \$1,000—about one four hundredth of the orchestra's budget—it was flatly turned down. The Fredericton city council is not alone in this, though its example has perhaps received the most publicity; few of the communities who directly benefit from the symphony's activities seem eager to undertake to pay any of the symphony's bills.

IT'S HARD TO UNDERSTAND how municipal — and provincial — governments can ignore the obvious arguments for supporting the orchestra. The Atlantic Symphony is the only way symphonic music can be produced in the Atlantic region. There are just no other possibilities: there are only about two million people in the four provinces, and they are simply not going to be able to support more than one orchestra. No city of only two million can support one respectable orchestra.

The Atlantic Symphony was created to serve the entire region; it offers subscriptions concert series in Halifax, Saint John, Moncton and Fredericton and gives or plans to give concerts in Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and smaller urban centres in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. If the Atlantic Symphony were to die, there would simply be no live symphony in most of these places, and certainly no indigenous musical activity of this kind in any of them except perhaps Halifax.

Moreover, the symphony is committed to giving school concerts throughout the area. In its first season it gave 32 such concerts in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick; this year 56 are planned. This function—an educational one in the truest sense of the word—is one that cannot possibly be accomplished in any other way. No professional orchestra imported from Toronto or New York is going to have this kind of effect on the cultural attitudes of our children. No other orchestra can be expected to perform the crucial service of expanding the potential audience for serious music in eastern Canada. Recorded music is clearly incapable of performing this educative function; anyone who has witnessed the reaction of school children to a live orchestra knows this. If nothing else, there is a sense of occasion that records can never capture.

NOTHING BUT SUCH A SYMPHONY can be expected, either, to establish and support a genuine musical community in the Maritimes, to attract talented people to live in and contribute to the region. If there is no symphony orchestra, there are no symphonic-quality musicians in the area; it's as simple as that.

And finally, of course, the orchestra also makes an economic contribution to the areas in which it plays. As Lionel Smith, executive vice president of the symphony, pointed out to the Fredericton city council, the orchestra

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RUSSELL HUNT SAYS YES!



spends something like \$21,000 in the Fredericton area alone. "Four times a year," he says, "50 people come to this town with a need for accommodation, food and other commodities. The parent organization maintains an office here which buys advertising, printing and services of all kinds." The same sort of economic effect would, of course, occur wherever the orchestra played.

There are some indirect but still persuasive arguments that ought to be considered as well. For instance, when the areas directly served by the orchestra fail to pay back even a microscopic percentage of the value they receive—Fredericton for instance, refused a grant of \$1,000 even though it costs the orchestra about \$35,000 to put on the four subscription and four school concerts that Frederictonians will enjoy this year—the example that is set is a disastrous one. If the people directly enjoying the orchestra will not support it, can we expect those who hope to benefit in the future to lay out cash now?

AND CAN WE EXPECT the Canada Council to continue supporting an organization which is not being supported by the people it benefits? And, perhaps most important, can we expect them to support other regional cultural endeavours, here and elsewhere in Canada, which are designed to counter the traditional cultural impoverishment of thinly-populated areas?

It seems clear that we cannot, that our only choice is to support the Atlantic Symphony by our attendance, by encouraging local governments to grant money to the orchestra, by making donations if we have the money to donate. The alternative — the death of the Atlantic Symphony and of serious music in Atlantic Canada — is clearly unacceptable.

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RUSSELL HUNT SAYS NO!



IT CAN HARDLY COME AS A SURPRISE that the Atlantic Symphony is in financial trouble. Pretty nearly every symphony orchestra in the world is in trouble, and it's easy to see why. The major reason is a twofold economic one: first, a symphony orchestra is an unbelievable extravagance. Even the Atlantic Symphony, a small and second-rate organization, requires \$8,000 to put on a concert (that works out to more than \$8 a seat even in a fairly large auditorium). Second, with the advent of high fidelity recording systems, brilliantly performed concert music is available at minimum cost to almost everyone—certainly to everyone you might meet at a symphony concert. It's all very well to talk of the immediacy of live music, but is it worth \$8,000 to put on three hours of music for the few hundred people who usually show up?

And there are other reasons which apply to this specific situation. You can, for instance, label it the "Atlantic Symphony" in letters as big as you like, but it's still just the Halifax Symphony with the addition of all the talent that has been siphoned out of other places with the demise of orchestras like the New Brunswick Symphony. One might be able to understand why Halifax, and perhaps the province of Nova Scotia, can justify granting thousands of dollars to the symphony, but the benefits to other areas of the Maritimes are pretty minimal; musically talented people are forced to move to Halifax to support themselves and to be part of a congenial musical community. The other areas—mostly larger urban areas—get a few concerts. Is there really all that much difference between getting a few concerts from the Atlantic Symphony and getting a few concerts from touring symphonies from larger centres—which might well be better orchestras?

On the other hand, if we're not really as much interested in size and quality of orchestra as we are in local involvement, why not a Saint John Orchestra, a Charlottetown Symphony, a Sydney Philharmonic? Certainly the sense of local involvement and the effect on the community would be greater and more gratifying; more musicians would be supported; more, and more flexible and useful, school concerts could be given; more participation in community endeavour would be possible.

THE OBJECTION TO SUCH A SCHEME would be, of course, that the orchestra would be bad. But aren't we being sucked in by the myth of excellence, the same myth that judges all music by Orphean standards and thus prevents anyone from making music for himself? The standards that claim that since the kid next door isn't as good as Gordon Lightfoot, he ought to break his guitar? And, back on the other hand again: if we accept that standard of excellence — if we want the best orchestra available — shouldn't we tell the Atlantic Symphony to break its guitar because it's not as good as the New York Philharmonic?

But there's another argument that doesn't have anything to do with whether the orchestra is big or little, good or bad, local or remote, Maritime or Upper Canadian or American. It is this: is it worth \$400,000 a year to preserve and promote what is essentially a museum for the preservation of outworn and irrelevant musical forms which are of interest to at most about three per cent of the population? Is symphonic music really a part of any live culture, anywhere in the world? Who is writing music in this form than anyone actually listens to (that is, aside from background music for films)? Who cares about atonalism, electronic music, random music, the theory of noise? The "serious music" of the twentieth century is clearly a dead end; and the preservation and performance of the music of previous ages is, as clearly, no more than an exercise in virtuosity and irrelevance. And a costly exercise: if that \$400,000 were channeled into the support of cultural forms that really make a difference to large numbers of people, we might eliminate some of the sense of alienation from society and its values that plagues so many people in the twentieth century.

IT IS, AFTER ALL, THE TAX MONEY of all of us that is used to support this toy of a few. Why should a percentage of the taxes paid by a fisherman in Come-By-Chance or an Indian in Shubenacadie or a farmer on Keswick Ridge be used to subsidize an activity relevant only to the richest people in our society?

Surely the first question we ask ought not to be how we can make life easier for the upper middle class, but how we can make it easier and fuller for the man who has been disculturated by poverty, education and industrialism.

NOTE:

Contributing editor Russell Hunt, asked to produce an article on the financial problems and prospects of the Atlantic Symphony, became progressively more schizoid over a period of weeks and eventually produced the two part article we print here. "I haven't got the faintest notion what the answer to the problem is," he said on finishing the article. "Both arguments are closed systems, complete and convincing in themselves. I believe whichever one I'm thinking about at the moment. If anybody has an overriding argument I'd love to know about it, so I can decide whether to go to the next concert."