

Public-Private Partnership in Giving for the Arts - The Future of
Sustaining Our Culture and Traditions

by
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Ottawa, Canada, September 20, 2001

Introduction by Mr. Mitchell Sharp:

Our guest speaker this morning is uniquely qualified to talk about the power and the possibilities of arts education. James Wolfensohn has been a driving force in the United States for including the arts in the school curriculum. Most of you probably know James Wolfensohn in his capacity as President of the World Bank. He's led that institution during a period of unprecedented global economic growth, and global integration, but also during a time in which the gap between the rich and the poor grew ever larger. In that context, Mr. Wolfensohn was instrumental in initiating the first comprehensive debt reduction program to address the needs of the world's poorest, most heavily indebted countries. But you should also know that Jim Wolfensohn is a Renaissance Man; someone who straddles the worlds of finance and art, and that he's been one of America's most influential figures in the performing arts over the past 20 years. He was chairman of the board of Carnegie Hall in New York, from 1980 to 1991, and then assumed the role of chairman of the board of the Kennedy Centre in Washington DC from 1990 to 1995. He's an accomplished cellist, and he's celebrated both his 50th and 60th birthdays by playing classical music at Carnegie Hall with some of the world's greatest musicians. Now he'll tell you more about those evenings, but I've talked to some of the musicians who have played in those events, and they were memorable, unforgettable evenings. If you've ever heard Jim Wolfensohn speak, you'll know what to expect. For those of you who haven't had that privilege, let me say simply that his content will be as compelling as his delivery. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming James Wolfensohn.

James Wolfensohn:

Thank you very much Peter, Mitchell Sharp, Ministers and friends. Let me quickly get out of the way my musical competence. There's a T-Shirt they sell in New York which says "How do you get to Carnegie Hall" on the front, and on the back it says, "Practice, practice, practice." There's another ways to get to Carnegie Hall and that's by being chairman, and it has nothing to do with the quality of one's playing. But it does have to do with the quality of one's friends and my last concert I played with these two, under-recognized musicians at the table, Mr. Ma and Mr. Zuckerman, and I'm here because I owe them. And my next birthday is coming up. You have the dates ready?

Let me say, in all seriousness, that I seriously considered coming up here because of the events of last week in the United States. There were abundant reasons not to come, in terms of what I have to do and generally the mood in the United States at this moment. I had a memorial service last Friday which lasted fifteen minutes at the bank, and fifteen minutes consisted of my having nearly 2000 people in the lobby of the bank. I had a cellist and a violinist who played first the Sarabande that Yo-Yo played recently at the funeral in Washington of Kaye Graham. Then I spoke for nearly four minutes, and there were 2 minutes of silence. The American Executive Director spoke for less than a minute. And then we had the Arioso of Bach, and I got everybody to hold hands, 142 nationalities, and there was not a dry eye in the room. I decided then I'd come up, because I felt at that moment that there are many levels at which we relate to each other, but there is a level in terms of music and the arts which I've long been privileged to participate in, which is a level beyond finance, beyond budgets, beyond economics, beyond politics, a level which is the inner resource that most of us don't talk about most of the time because it's sort of soft. And it's sort of a luxury, but when things really come down to it, it's the thing that really makes a difference in life. I believe that passionately. I've always believed it, and in periods of good and bad in my life, I have turned to the arts. And my kids have turned to the arts. It's not a sense of being a Renaissance man or having some sense of cultural imperialism or being arrogant about it, it is what, for me, as a child, meant everything in terms of meaning. And as I get older, as I was in that ceremony a week ago, it made me recognize that there is a different dimension in terms of human contact that comes through culture and the arts.

Your Minister of Culture and I were at a conference in Florence which we called last year. We expected a few hundred people, 700 turned out from 140 countries. Because it's not just in elite countries that you have culture. One of the real issues today as we build a global society, is to ensure that we're not homogenized, and secondly, that we treasure and understand the cultures, starting with our own, and reaching out to others. But you can't understand others unless you understand your own. You need a base. Yo-Yo is now doing a remarkable program on the Silk Routes, in terms of trying to restore and represent the artistic cultures of those trade routes. Not alone for their beauty, which is considerable, but also because it is a statement of the unity of the arts on a global basis. And I have felt, in my own life, that I could contribute certainly in terms of my professional contribution, whatever it's been. But I also felt that unless it was balanced by some conscious recognition of this other aspect of life, life wasn't worth a hell of a lot. In fact, I took up the cello when I was 41 years, which is why the notion that I'm an accomplished cellist is, as I get older, a wonderful accolade, but not wholly true. Although, of course it is true of Mitchell Sharp's capacity as a conductor. And I hope, Mr. Sharp, when I'm 90, that I'll also be allowed to play the Devotia (?) Concerto, and that your audience will in fact cheer me as well as they cheered you last night.

But let me move for a moment from the philosophy to the practice. I read, with great interest, the report which was done on this National Arts Centre, which was established during Pearson's time as the Kennedy Centre

was established during Eisenhower's time, not very different in terms of years, you were the precedent, actually, in Canada, by a couple of years. What was fascinating to me was that when George Bush asked me to become Chairman of the Kennedy Centre, after I had done 20 years service at Carnegie Hall, I discovered a Kennedy Centre which was in much the same position as you are here. Mr. Stevens, who I'm sure Hamilton Southam knew, had a special interest in theatre, but the funding had gone down, the building was almost derelict, the music quality had diminished enormously, there was little creative work going on, and the National Outreach was negligible. The program for students was at a level that you wouldn't want to send your kids to. There was no real dynamism and drive, either in terms of artistic leadership or in terms of lay leadership. It was just sort of there, it had the Kennedy Centre Honors once a year, which was a good party and that was it. I came into this and recognized right at the beginning that in order to support the Kennedy Centre, which was the National Centre in the performing arts, the first thing you had to do was to distinguish it from all the other art centres around the country, but also to deal with the fundamental issue, which was to get a group of people together who passionately believed in the importance of this. And then, having that passionate belief, which you must have, and which doesn't require a lot of people, then leverage that to try to build it outwards in terms of establishing the case for a National Centre for the performing arts.

I had a similar experience at Carnegie Hall which Pinkie knows. Now nearly 30 years ago, I came in as treasurer. Our dear friend Isaac Stern had managed to save the building, but the content of what was going on was not tremendously great, and the building, nearly 100 years old, was about to fall down, and take with it all the memories that were in the walls and so on. At that time, we were raising less than 100,000 per year, for the primary artistic, musical institution in New York, displaced significantly by Lincoln Centre. And so we decided to build Carnegie Hall on the basis of one thing, which was quality and creativity, re-establish the quality, try and make it an international center, and to get some people engaged in it who could understand that this is something they wanted to leave to their kids. I remember getting Sandy Wilde, who has been chairman since I retired. Sandy had never been to a concert. He came to Carnegie Hall with me; it

was a night when they did the first movement of the Tchaikovsky Trio; we had on stage Rostropovitch, Horowitz, and Isaac Stern, playing the first movement of the Tchaikovsky Trio, after which Sandy came up to me and threw his arms around me, and said, 'you've got me, I've never heard anything like it.'

That was a One hundred Million Dollars ago. Sandy is still running Carnegie Hall, and we got Jim Johnson to come in at the at the Kennedy Centre whose knowledge of the arts was also not enormous. But that was 30 Million a year ago. Now in terms of what we did at the Kennedy Centre which could be, I think, of relevance and interest to you, let me start with the fact that there has to be commitment, and the belief that the arts need a priority. You need some people who feel that the techniques of raising money or the techniques of organization don't mean a hell of a lot, but who believe that you have to have content, you have to have

belief, you have to have creativity, you have to have concern, and you have to have passion.

You don't need hundreds of people. You need a few people that really are prepared to do it, people like David Layton and Peter, but also people from the private sector and also individuals. That is the condition precedent. You also need friendly ministers. You need particularly friendly Finance Ministers, though I don't know who your finance Minister is, although I'm sure he's a man of warmth and sensitivity and understanding and charm, and he has a remarkable wife, and I'm sure that he has all those things. I'm not familiar with Canadian politics, so I can't really say that, but I've heard that he's like that, so that's another thing that you need. And you of course need leaders like the five leaders you have of the artistic organization here, of whom I know one particularly well, and the reputations of the other four. So you're off to a terrific start, but then why a National Arts Centre in Ottawa, when there is a Toronto Centre and then you've got Montreal and you've got Vancouver and you've got centres all over the country. Why something here?

I think it goes back to the reason that the institution was started originally, that there is something about having it nationally recognized in your capital as a sense of identity, not just for the local community, with your Rush programs and your outreach programs which you must have, bilingual, - je vais parler Francais aussi pour l'instant, autrement je ne serai pas politiquement correcte. But now I've spoken French as an Australian, and I can demonstrate to you that I can speak French. But, for the benefit of those of you who don't understand French, I'll continue in English.

My point here is that what we discovered at the Kennedy Centre was that if you could establish quality levels at the Centre, and you could get recognition from the highest levels of government, and you could serve as a centrepiece for the coming together in your case, of two cultures, that's critically important. And reaching out in terms of what you gave up here, which was tours by orchestra, by theatre, by ballet, by your creation of new works, by the recognition of creative artists, the outreach which you can get from giving it a platform at the centre is sort of a National stamp of approval, which no centre, be it in Toronto, or Montreal or Vancouver or wherever else, can give. It needs to be part of the heart of the country and the heart of the country is in the National Capital. You've made that commitment at the time that it was set up over 30 years ago. It would be a terrible thing, in my judgment, for Canada to be one of the leaders in the world, as you are in so many political and other things, without understanding, developing and giving visibility to your own culture.

In Mali, which is the first African country I went to, I discovered that they used to have an empire that went up to Egypt, and it was a distinguished cultural empire. I'd never heard of it, I regret to tell you. My father used to tell me to go to Timbuktu, and I thought that was a name he had made up, until I discovered that in Mali, there was Timbuktu. I also discovered that the president of Mali was a poet, and we

started a program of cultural identity in Mali, as the base of getting young people to come together as Malians.

Well, you're not Mali, you're Canada. And you have a distinguished history. The notion that this not be carried forward in schools and by the National Arts Centre is something I just can't believe. I just cannot believe that it's debated. How can you represent Canada without knowing what Canada is? How can you possibly be a leader without nurturing the creativity and the history of your country in its cultural field? It's not something for an outsider born in Australia and living in America to come and lecture you about. I speak as a global citizen. I would like to see a Canada that is Canadian, that reflects the best in Canada. It strikes me that, along with economic and political advancement and the leadership that you give in so many areas that have so much to contribute in the artistic and cultural field, that in the world into which we're going, it is mandatory that that challenge be grasped. That's my view. It's not everybody's view, but I just think back to last Friday's vision in Washington, when I had this memorial gathering.

It wasn't words, it's music that, on that occasion, touched everybody. It can be theatre, and it can be painting and it could be dance, but there is a level at which we need to live, and insights that we need to give our children, that you cannot give just by mathematics and history and learning how to run businesses. You need to have a well-run business, in the Centre here, that's clear. I think this report, which no doubt you all have, is remarkable in its simplicity and its directness in what's needed. You have along way to go.

When I started in Australia, we had a similar heritage. There was a similar recognition or belief that government provided most of the money. When I came to the United States, I was astonished to find myself in a community in which there was a true public-private partnership. And here, for the Minister of Finance, whoever he is, the notion of a public-private partnership is good for government in terms of budget, but it's also good for the private sector. Because the private sector can contribute not only money, but people and time and skills. The hidden advantage of the United States system is not just the resources, which are enormous - I just got the report, last year, which says that giving in the United States tops 200 billion dollars. It's an economy ten times the size of Canada, that means 20 billions dollars in charity for Canada. Of the 20 billion dollars, 5.6 percent or roughly 11 billion plus go to the arts and humanities. 11 billion dollars.- What is so brilliant about it in the U.S. is that the decisions on which arts organizations are going to thrive is made not by a central government, but by individuals, and by corporations. There is a competition in the marketplace. They provide a significant amount of the funding, balanced by funding from governments, and of course, by ticket sales. And it varies from museums to performing arts institutions, whether ticket sales make 30 percent or 40 percent or 50 percent, but there is this huge gap. The thing which is crucial about the gap, which is the objective of your document, is that if you can get corporations and individuals to come in, you get a partnership with government, you get the selectivity being made by the individuals in the community, and you get the hidden plus of their help.

That participation is the key, in my judgment, to what makes the difference in American artistic and cultural institutions, all based on the single, most essential element, which is the quality, the creativity, the outreach to children, which you can now do in many ways, both directly and, as Pinchas knows in terms of his own leadership, technologically. So there's nothing complicated about this; there are well worn paths. The Kennedy Centre was in exactly the same position five years ago as you're in today. Carnegie Hall was in the same position. What I simply say to you is that you have everything that is needed to bring about this resurgence; you truly need a National Centre to give prominence and outreach, both in terms of tours and co-productions, and many things that you can do.

But most importantly, you need to establish, without any sense of insecurity, that in good and bad times, you can proclaim that you care about the heritage, you care about the arts, and you care about the creativity and soul of your kids. To me, that's not a debate. It's only a question of making the decision to get on and do it. I can say this because I'm not going to benefit from it, I've only got one more birthday party that I have to try and convince these two guys to come and play at, at least that's the only one I'm thinking of at the moment. So there is really no ulterior motive other than a sense that as a great admirer of your country, as now a neighbor, and as a global citizen, I just hope that you're going to grasp this challenge, and that today and the weeks and years to come, will make you feel, when you talk to your kids and when they go to concerts and arts programs with you, and when their kids benefit from it, and when the two great cultures that you have plus the Native Cultures are united, that the result will not be measured in terms of GDP, but in terms of GDP in soul and heart. I have very little doubt that you will do it, and if I can make any help at any time, I'd be glad to do it.