

CULTURE » FUNDING

# The money story for arts groups is no comedy

BY SIMON HOUPPT

If art is good, it should be able to turn a profit. That's the argument people make against government funding of culture. But what happens when the numbers don't add up?

Last weekend, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra made a triumphant visit to New York, where a sold-out Carnegie Hall crowd gave a standing ovation to its rendition of Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 11*. But if the tour was an artistic and critical success, those viewing it simply through a prism of profit and loss would call it a failure: The performance fee paid by Carnegie Hall didn't come close to covering even half of the orchestra's \$466,000-plus costs.

On a much smaller scale,



Victor Ertmanis, Tara Hughes and Gord Rand in *Goodness*. RACHEL ROBERTS

the tiny Toronto-based theatre company Volcano is currently trying to figure out how to manage a two-week trip to Rwanda's Arts Azimut Festival next September. In

commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, the festival will feature works that address issues of slavery, apartheid and ethnic cleansing.

Volcano's production of *Goodness*, a searing drama by Canadian playwright Michael Redhill about an encounter between the descendant of Holocaust survivors who lost many members of his family and the survivor of another, unnamed genocide, won the Best of Edinburgh award at the 2006 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. On a tour to New York last year, a New York Times critic compared *Goodness* to work by Bertolt Brecht and said it had, "the intimacy and discordant reach of a late Beethoven string quartet."

But Brecht was funded by the German government; even Beethoven needed wealthy patrons to make ends meet. And now Volcano also finds itself facing the cold reality of a budget that, quite literally, doesn't add up: to

rehearse and take its bare-bones production of *Goodness* to Rwanda will require an estimated \$88,000.

The theatre festival is paying a performance fee of \$31,000 – very generous by international standards – to bring in *Goodness*, the only Canadian production on the program. The rest has to be made up with a combination of government funding and philanthropy.

Volcano is very savvy at fundraising, and already has about \$7,000 from individuals and private foundations, but the company still has about \$50,000 to raise. And with the recent cancellation of PromArt, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's \$4.7-million cultural diplomacy program that sent performance groups abroad as ambassadors of

Canada, its options are now even more limited.

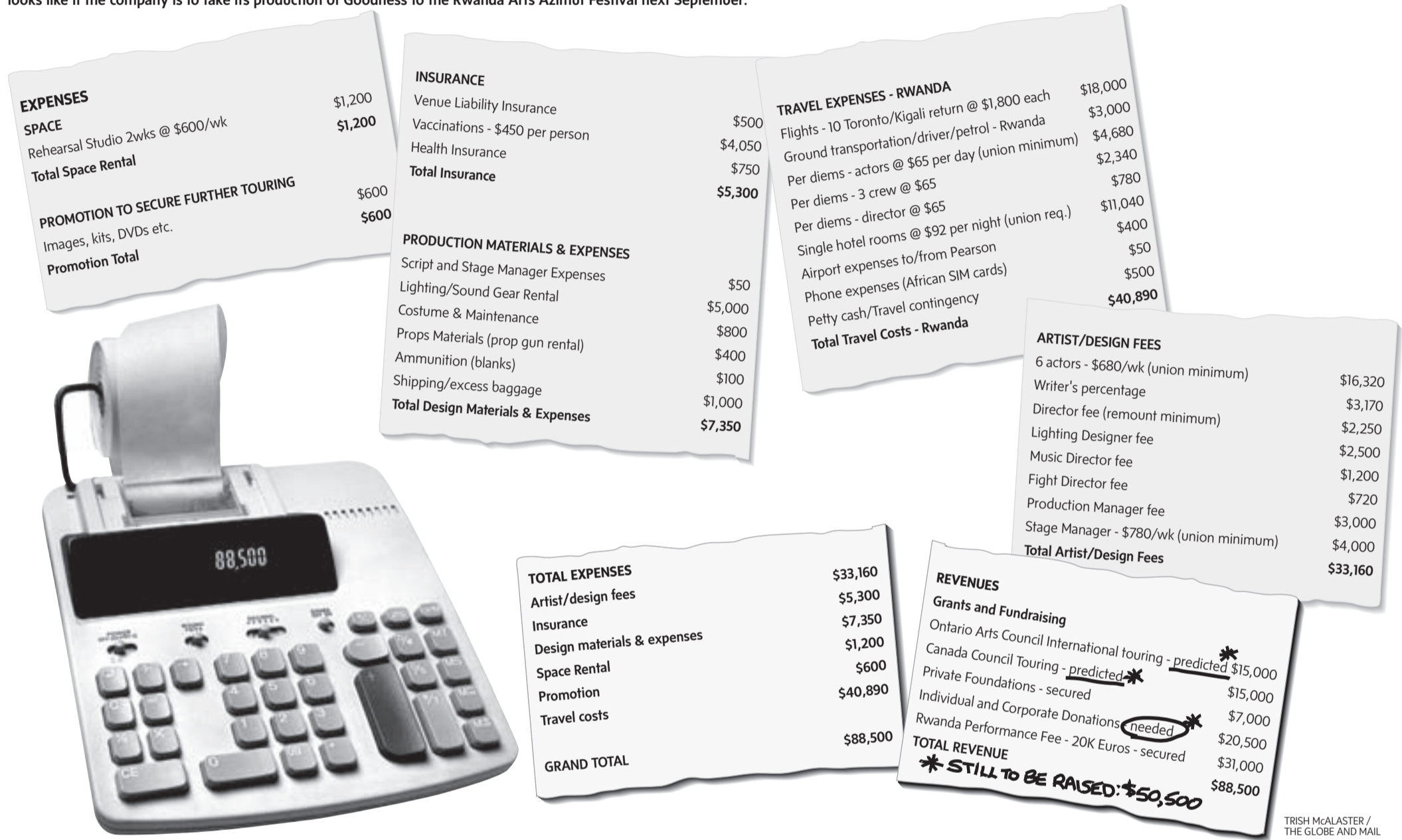
That is why Volcano has taken the unprecedented step of opening its books, to show Globe and Mail readers exactly what is required to take even an award-winning show abroad.

There are no frills to be found here: a mere two weeks of rehearsal, cut-rate travel arrangements and a union minimum for the actors of \$680 a week. And Volcano has some unusual expenses, like \$4,050 in vaccinations.

A careful read of this balance sheet tells a tale as stark as any drama. For right here, in black and white, are the sort of challenges facing most of our performers – actors, dancers, musicians and others – as they seek to represent Canada in the world.

## The breakdown, and the bottom line

Volcano, a Toronto-based theatre company, took the unusual step of opening its books to The Globe and Mail. Here's what the budget looks like if the company is to take its production of *Goodness* to the Rwanda Arts Azimut Festival next September:



TRISH McALASTER / THE GLOBE AND MAIL

## THE FEDERAL ELECTION » PLATFORM COMPARISON

# Where the parties stand on arts and culture

BY JAMES BRADSHAW

The politicians' promises are now before voters, and decision day is nigh. With three days left until the vote, arts and culture have enjoyed their most prominent election exposure in recent memory, amid heated debates over funding cuts, censorship and the ability of Canadians to tell their own stories. A slew of open letters and rallying cries have encouraged Canadians to vote for culture, but the question remains: Where should voters place that confidence?

After making nearly \$45-million in cuts to arts-and-culture funding, the incumbent Conservatives have recently unveiled two promises.

They have backed off the controversial provision in Bill C-10 that would have allowed the government to retroactively block tax credits to films and television productions deemed offensive.

They also have promised a tax credit for families to be put toward up to \$500 in eligible fees for music, art or drama lessons for children under age 16.

The party estimates the tax credit will cost \$150-million a year, although tax experts point out that families will only see a percentage of the \$500, perhaps amounting to more like \$75.

"The government certainly still spends a lot of money on support to organizations and arts councils and the like, but

this is balancing it with a very significant investment in a more populist approach to investment in future artists," says Kory Teneycke, Stephen Harper's communications director.

All four of the major opposition parties, meanwhile, have agreed on four points: to reverse the Tory cuts; to introduce income averaging for artists (in order to balance the tax burden between lean years of production and the occasional lucrative bout of sales or awards); to increase the budget of the Canada Council for the Arts (the Liberals have offered the most generous figure, doubling that budget to \$360-million); and to revoke the disputed Bill C-10 provisions.

The Liberals have also promised \$160-million in additional tax credits for film-and-video production, as well as millions for cultural diplomacy and museums. Their strategy contrasts with that of the Conservatives by asserting "that support begins at the institutional level," where leading figures can drive Canada's "competitiveness and quality of life."

The strategy of the NDP focuses heavily on film, video and digital media, seeking to create a high-quality product "for everyday Canadians to enjoy," and promising substantial reforms and funding to promote "the cultural and linguistic reality of programming for Quebec and the francophone community."

The costs of those promises are listed as a grand total – \$500-million over four years – with few hints about how much money would be spent where.

As the party furthest from power, it's probably not surprising that the Greens make the most audacious suggestions, including establishing base funding for the arts as a percentage of the overall federal budget, and increasing support for the arts to make it "commensurate" with increases to such other sectors as transport, automotive, health care, and oil and gas. The platform is woefully light on figures, with the party preferring to paint a picture of revenue neutrality in which taxes on polluters, and

transfers from sectors benefiting from the arts (such as health and education) would foot the bill. The Green platform takes a page from the Conservative and their cuts to the GST, promising to remove the GST entirely from arts and culture products and services.

The Bloc offering, rife with demands that federal cultural responsibilities be transferred to Quebec, is also notable for its promises affecting the whole country. Initiatives such as extending Employment Insurance to self-employed workers, and abolishing the provincial sales tax on books, would have consequences reaching far beyond the party's traditional sovereigntist concerns.

| LIBERALS   | CONSERVATIVE   | NDP   | BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS  | GREEN  |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| <b>THE IDEOLOGY</b><br>Strengthen Canada's foremost cultural institutions in order to create "exciting, vibrant" cultural and artistic products.   | <b>THE IDEOLOGY</b><br>Populist approach that favours dispersing small amounts of money to any Canadian, and makes artistic education for youth more affordable. | <b>THE IDEOLOGY</b><br>A strong focus on film and television as well as central, national institutions to protect and promote accessibility to culture for everyday Canadians.  | <b>THE IDEOLOGY</b><br>Transfer more federal funds to Quebec to allow it to defend its own culture.   | <b>THE IDEOLOGY</b><br>The arts should be supported on an equal footing with other industries, at the expense of polluters.  |
| <b>WHAT THEY SAY IT WILL COST</b><br>\$530-million over four years.  | <b>WHAT THEY SAY IT WILL COST</b><br>\$150-million a year.   | <b>WHAT THEY SAY IT WILL COST</b><br>\$125-million a year in each of four years.  | <b>WHAT THEY SAY IT WILL COST</b><br>Unspecified.   | <b>WHAT THEY SAY IT WILL COST</b><br>Revenue-neutral.  |
| <b>KEY PROMISES</b><br>» Reverse \$45-million in Tory cuts to arts-and-culture programs.<br>» Double Canada Council for the Arts budget to \$360-million.<br>» Increase film-and-video-production tax credit to 30 per cent.<br>» Provide income averaging for artists.<br>» Increase funds for cultural diplomacy and museums.<br>» Revoke controversial provision of Bill C-10.<br>» Launch new Canadian Digital Media Strategy. | <b>KEY PROMISES</b><br>» Tax credit on up to \$500 for artistic lessons for children under 16.<br>» Revoke controversial provision of Bill C-10.                 | <b>KEY PROMISES</b><br>» Reverse \$45-million in Tory cuts to arts-and-culture programs.<br>» Increase funding to Canada Council for the Arts.<br>» Provide income averaging for artists.<br>» Provide stable funding for bodies such as the CBC, Radio Canada, Telefilm and the Canadian Television Fund.<br>» Reform the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, especially enhancing its role in Montreal.<br>» Revoke attempts at censoring artists through legislation, such as the controversial provision of Bill C-10.<br>» Expand federal tax credits on films to include postproduction costs.<br>» Establish regulations on foreign ownership of Canadian television and telecommunications networks. | <b>KEY PROMISES</b><br>» Continue to promote Quebec culture.<br>» Demand transfer of cultural responsibilities to Quebec so the province can better defend its identity.<br>» Reverse \$45-million in Tory cuts to arts-and-culture programs.<br>» Provide five-year income averaging for artists.<br>» Increase Canada Council budget to \$300-million.<br>» Demand that responsibility for part of \$30-million festivals fund be transferred to Quebec.<br>» Abolish PST on books.<br>» Establish feature-film fund by \$50-million, \$20-million of which would go to Quebec. | <b>KEY PROMISES</b><br>» Reverse \$45-million in Tory cuts to arts-and-culture programs.<br>» Increase funding to make support for the arts commensurate with funding levels of other sectors of the economy.<br>» Provide stable funding for the CBC.<br>» Eliminate Bill-C10.<br>» Establish base funding for the arts as a percentage of the overall federal budget.<br>» Equalize provincial and municipal arts funding, in line with the best current standards.<br>» Mandate 20-per-cent Canadian content in cinemas and video chains.<br>» Increase CRTC bandwidth for independent and non-profit stations.<br>» Provide income averaging for artists.<br>» Restore axed government transport service for artworks and artifacts. |

» James Bradshaw.