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To: ["Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"](#)

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Date: 5/15/2018 8:57:37 AM

Subject: Memo - Vancouver Symphony Society and Theatre Rental Grant Allocations – Fall 2018 and Spring 2019

Attachments: Memo - Vancouver Symphony Society and Theatre Rental Grant Allocations – Fall 2018 and Spring 2019.pdf

Dear Mayor and Council,

The agenda for the Regular Council Meeting on May 15, 2018 includes a report recommending Theatre Rental Grant Allocations for Fall 2018 and Spring 2019. Those recommendations include grants to the Vancouver Symphony Society and the VSO School of Music. The City has a long history of financial support for the VSO and the evolution of that support over time, including several specific decisions by City Council, is somewhat complex.

The attached memo from Sandra Singh provides additional detail regarding the history of funding provided to the VSO through the Theatre Rental Grant program, as well as other cash grants.

Please do not hesitate to contact Sandra Singh, General Manager, Arts, Culture and Community Services at 604.871.6858 with any questions.

Best,
Paul

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MEMORANDUM

May 15, 2018

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Sadhu Johnston, City Manager
Paul Mochrie, Deputy City Manager
Katrina Leckovic, City Clerk
Lynda Graves, Administration Services Manager, City Manager's Office
Rena Kendall-Craden, Communications Director
Kevin Quinlan, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office
Naveen Girn, Community Relations Director, Mayor's Office

FROM: Sandra Singh
General Manager, Arts, Culture and Community Services

SUBJECT: Vancouver Symphony Society and Theatre Rental Grant Allocations – Fall 2018 and Spring 2019

Dear Mayor and Council,

The purpose of this memo is to provide background on the City of Vancouver's support of the Vancouver Symphony Society (VSO) through both cash grants and the Theatre Rental Grant program.

BACKGROUND

The City of Vancouver has a long history of supporting the Vancouver Symphony as an important cultural institution with a significant role in Vancouver's large and diverse cultural ecology. Over the years, this support has been through both cash grants and the Theatre Rental Grant (TRG) program.

2018/2019 THEATRE RENTAL GRANT RECOMMENDATIONS

The TRG program is one of many programs, awards, and services that the City offers to advance the cultural goal of supporting a diverse and thriving cultural ecology in Vancouver.

For the 2018/19 performing arts season, \$3,806,603 in rental support was requested and a total of \$2,796,330 is recommended, a difference of \$1,010,273 as outlined in Table 1 of the administrative report dated May 15, 2018 (RTS #12154).

2018/2019 TRG requests exceed available resources as a result of expanded levels of cultural activity in the community, requested additional usage, and due to the increasing overall

difference between the annual grants budget and theatre rental rate increases. As a result of this difference between demand and available budget, the TRG process is competitive and not all requests meet the evaluation criteria to the same degree as other applicants in the competition. Therefore, not every eligible organization can be recommended for funding to the level of their request.

The 2018/2019 TRG report recommends grants to 61 organizations for a total allocation of \$2,796,330 for use of Vancouver Civic Theatres (VCT) during the 2018/19 performing arts season.

The 2018/2019 TRG season at VCT features a wide range of classical and contemporary performances in dance, theatre, film, and music. The work reflects the diversity of Vancouver's cultural communities, which include Indigenous and LGBTQ2+ communities, as well as performers from South Asia, Philippines, Taiwan, and Latin America. In addition, the TRG program is recommending support for several new or long absent applicants, including Chibi Taiko Association, Electric Company Theatre, Greater Vancouver Professional Theatre Alliance, Latincouver, and support for other venue presenters who want to present larger, more complex productions such as the Vancouver East Cultural Centre and the Italian Cultural Centre.

Further, while the report does not recommend that the VSO receive the full amount requested in 2018 (\$1,747,666), the report does recommend \$1,284,884 to this organization. The report also recommends that the VSO School of Music receive the full amount requested of \$11,744. Together, this represents a combined total of \$1,296,628 in support to the VSO through the TRG program.

VSO remains the single largest recipient of TRGs, with City staff recommending almost 50% of the total TRG budget to support the Vancouver Symphony Society and the VSO School of Music. This is consistent with the level of support the VSO has received over many years.

HISTORY OF THEATRE RENTAL GRANT PROGRAM

In 1979, City Council approved the Theatre Rental Grants program which assigned recommended annual "base level" uses to cultural organizations to access to the Civic Theatres annually. The VSO was one of these cultural organizations.

In 1995, Council approved the process for Theatre Rental Grants, which provided for seasonally-based grants allocated in July of each year for the coming "fall" (the second half of a given year) and "spring" (the first half of the following year). Recommendations for the spring of the following year were approved in principle, in advance of the Operating Budget Review for that year so that cultural organizations could plan their full artistic season.

On September 12, 2000, Council approved the establishment of a "reserve pool" of theatre rental uses to assist established performing arts organizations that did not have designated "base level" uses of the Civic Theatres. These uses could also be accessed by regular users if additional uses were needed in a given season.

On July 13, 2006, Council approved a budget of \$20,000 to establish a Theatre Rental "Projects" Grant program, to replace the Baxter Grant Program, which had been established to assist occasional, new and diverse non-profit arts and cultural organizations wanting access to Vancouver's Civic Theatres. The Baxter Grant Fund was established through the Vancouver Foundation and was administered by the City through Cultural Services and was wound up with all funds disbursed in 2005, as intended.

On June 26, 2008, Council approved the *Culture Plan Implementation Phase 1 – Review of Grants Programs*, which directed staff to streamline programs and administration to align with the City's new strategic cultural priorities. Changes to the Theatre Rental Grants Program included shifting from a seasonal allocation to a calendar year allocation, eliminating the "base use" level and reserve pool allocation to an annual "lump sum" award based on past use trends and proposed use needs, increasing access to Civic Theatres for occasional, new and diverse groups, and including the Theatre Rental Grant applicants in the annual application process for Cultural Grants. Further changes to the program were to be made in tandem with the strategic review of Civic Theatre operations, scheduled to commence in 2010.

HISTORY OF CITY SUPPORT FOR THE VSO

In a September 26, 1979 Report to Council, it was unanimously approved:

- A. THAT the City and the Vancouver Symphony Society establish the 1979 usage of 119 performances and related uses as the base level for the Vancouver Symphony Society's use of the Orpheum.
- B. THAT the City provide a grant equal to rent for that level of usage at the then current rates.
- C. THAT usage by the Vancouver Symphony Society beyond the above specified level would be paid for at the then prevailing Class II rates.
- D. THAT these conditions be used as the basis for recommendations to future Councils on grants to the Vancouver Symphony Society.

While the recommendations above signalled an aspiration for a certain level of support for the VSO in future years, the 1979 resolution was a recommended approach for future Councils and did not (and as a matter of law could not) bind future Councils to any particular level of (or any) funding.

In a May 6, 1988 report when the Vancouver Symphony was faced with bankruptcy, Council approved the following:

THAT the City provide for continued office space for the VSO in the basement of the Orpheum at a rental cost of \$100,000/year, but that this rental be offset with a grant of \$100,000 to the VSO.

THAT the City continue its practice of providing the VSO with a grant equal to Theatre rent for use of the Orpheum Theatre.

THAT the City support the principle of an annual cash grant to the VSO and that for 1988 the grant be \$50,000.

The report further states the new annual cash grant of \$50,000 was recommended in consideration of the reduction in the number of uses of the Orpheum by the VSO. The VSO received the \$100,000 cash grant offset for office space rental from 1988 until 2011, when the VSO moved into its new offices at 843 Seymour St.

As already noted above, in June 2008, Council approved the *Culture Plan Implementation Phase 1-Review of Grant Programs*, which saw changes to TRG, including eliminating the “base level” and reserve pool allocation and replacing it with an annual lump sum award based on past use trends and proposed use needs. This report also recommended increasing the TRG budget to increase access to civic theatres for occasional, new and diverse groups, and including the TRG applications in Cultural Services grant annual process. (The number of groups receiving TRG support expanded from 18 in 2008 to 61 for the 2018/19 season.)

In a March 1, 2010 report, Council approved a permanent increase to the Theatre Rental Grants budget of \$250,000 to reflect the City’s historical support of the VSO in the Orpheum. This was the cost of annual unaccounted stage use time for the VSO and granted to the VSO in that report. Staff had recommended that this amount be added to the Theatre Rental Grants budget and these uses by the VSO be included in the TRG program process, subject to the usual reviews and approvals. The total grant to the VSO at this time (2010), including the additional \$250,000, was \$1,125,475, their full request amount.

The history of VSO’s TRG funding history over the past 10 years is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Summary VSO TRG Funding History over the past 10 years

Year	Request \$	Approved \$	%
2018	1,747,666	1,284,884 (Rec)*	74% (R)
2017	1,418,204	1,277,170	90
2016	1,379,721	1,281,506	93
2015	1,482,333	1,355,996	91
2014	1,310,279	1,356,410	104
2013	1,265,860	1,265,860	100
2012	1,334,240	1,174,930	88
2011	1,308,670	1,125,475	86
2010	1,125,475	1,125,475	100
2009	993,815	935,960	94
2008	841,670	849,050	101

*This does not include the \$11,744 recommended for the VSO School of Music

In addition to the TRG, from 1988 to 2016, the VSO received the annual \$50,000 cash grant, and since 2017 this amount has increased to an annual \$70,000 cash grant. It should be noted that while the number of uses by the VSO of the Orpheum has fluctuated since 1988, the City has not reduced its cash grant amount to the VSO.

CONCLUSION

The Vancouver Symphony is a renowned performing arts institution reflecting artistic excellence. Cultural Services staff will continue to recommend support for the VSO in multiple ways – including through the TRG program and cash grants – because of its vital role in Vancouver’s cultural ecology. Further, Cultural Services staff will continue to liaise regularly with VSO representatives to ensure an appropriate understanding of the organization’s aspirations for its future.



Sandra Singh
General Manager, Arts, Culture and Community Services

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