

## Arts philanthropy a winning formula for artists, wealthy



Lawrence J. Wiliford, right, performs in a production of *The Magic Flute*.

AARON HARRIS/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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When a prominent arts patron recently let it be known that she had given \$13-million to Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, her intentions were altruistic.

"I don't want any stories about me," Constance V. Pathy said as she declined an interview request to discuss her gift, the largest in history to a Quebec ballet company by an individual. "I just hope I can motivate others to support the arts in Canada."

It's a noble sentiment, and not the least because arts patronage in Canada lags other charitable donations. The most recent Statistics Canada survey shows that Canadians donated \$10.6-billion to charitable and non-profit organizations between 2007 and 2010, but just 3 per cent went to arts and culture.

Artists must go cap in hand to support their enterprises. And often it's the same people doing the giving – high-net-worth individuals, whose largesse supports the arts while advancing their status as philanthropists. It's a winning formula, but only if you can find the people who willing to open their pockets.

High-net-worth people are usually defined as those with investable assets of between \$1-million and \$10-million, says Darren Farwell, senior wealth adviser with ScotiaMcLeod in Toronto.

"Many in this group look for ways to support the arts and culture community, both through their own involvement and through financial contribution," Mr. Farwell says.

Ms. Pathy and other patrons donate to the arts because they see a need that needs fulfilling.

"High-net-worth individuals who donate to the arts usually aren't looking for their names to be up in lights, but they do play a significant role in keeping the lights on," says Maria Antonakos, a former philanthropic consultant who is now the director of advancement at the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics in Waterloo, Ont.

"Philanthropy is not about the size of the gift or even perhaps the prestige of the organization being supported," she says. "Philanthropy is a practical manifestation of the human instinct to help others."

A long-time board member at Les Grands Ballets, Mrs. Pathy has earmarked her \$13-million donation for the building of a new home, a \$25.8-million project that is about three-quarters funded thanks mostly to corporate and government donations. Since 1980, Les Grands Ballets has been housed in a converted garage in the city's rough-and-tumble east end.

The new space, to be built next door to Place des Arts, Montreal's premiere performing arts venue, will be 10 times bigger than the current location and is expected to open in 2017.

Among other wealthy people who have donated to the visual arts in Canada are the Sobey family. They established the Sobey Art Award, a contemporary art prize that annually recognizes a deserving artist. With a cash prize of \$50,000 going to the winner and \$5,000 going to each of four finalists, it is the country's largest prize for Canadian artists.

The Sobey Family Foundation recently gave another \$2-million to the National Gallery's foundation in Ottawa.

Canadian businessman David Thomson, whose family company owns The Globe and Mail among other enterprises, is donating to the foundation a personal collection of photography. His father, the late Kenneth Thomson, donated nearly 2,000 artworks worth \$300-million (U.S.) to the Art Gallery of Ontario.

"Global players like David Thomson and the Sobeys are taking the initiative and supporting Canadian art in a way that allows them to communicate intelligently with museums, galleries, artists and the public across the country," says Marla Wasser, an international art consultant who is the president of Pursuits Inc., a Toronto-based arts advisory and curatorial firm.

"It's a kind of localized philanthropy that goes out into the world, sparking new relationships and new areas of inspired cultural growth," she says.

Earlier this year, Vancouver businessman and art collector Michael Audain opened his namesake Audain Art Museum in the ski resort town of Whistler, B.C. The \$30-million building houses the collection of Mr. Audain and his wife, Yoshiko Karasawa, including aboriginal masks, Emily Carr landscapes and the photography of Jeff Wall.

Speaking at a recent luncheon organized by Canadian Art magazine and held at the Albany Club in Toronto, Mr. Audain said amassing a multimillion-dollar art collection and supporting local artists has thrilled him more than building residences through his company, Polygon Homes Ltd.

"I think Canadian art, or more specifically British Columbia art, should be celebrated. Why see what's everywhere, the Hirsts and the Warhols? Why not see works that can stand on their own in the pantheon of art making and that are made right here, at home?"

Emotions run deep where arts patronage is concerned. A cynic might not see that, preferring to regard art donations as a tax writeoff.

"My experience in Canada has been that people are suspicious of donations. It's perceived to be a tax dodge," says Ydessa Hendeles, a Toronto-based artist and curator.

But the bigger reality, she says, is that "artists want their works to be seen," and patrons who can facilitate that feel they have contributed something of meaning to society. They've given back.

The Canadian Art Song Project rewards patrons who give by making them feel part of the creative process.

"We want them to be part of the artistic experience," says tenor Lawrence Wiliford, its founder, with pianist Steven Philcox. CASP is a registered charity that relies on donor gifts to commission works for its Toronto season of concerts.

Mr. Wiliford adds that it costs \$5,000 in donations for CASP to commission a new piece of vocal music. "We invite them to workshops and rehearsals, we introduce them to the composers and to the singers."

One of those singers is Canadian soprano Carla Huhtanen, who describes the relationship she has with patrons as one of deep respect and mutual admiration. "It becomes almost like a friendship," she says.

"We offer them more than just entertainment, and they give us not just their patronage but a valued perspective on what we are trying to achieve through the arts," she says. "We want to be relevant. Our donors help us do it."

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