



Impact Story:

Organization of
Saskatchewan Arts Councils

by
DAVE MARGOSHES



Saskatchewan
Arts Alliance



In Spring 2021 Axis Theatre's Th'owxiya: The Hungry Feast Dish - The Film, was presented in 57 Saskatchewan schools as a virtual presentation to replace in person performances.



Ghostboy performing at Showcase 2017. Their performance resulted in 24 shows performed in the 2018/2019 touring season.

For more than 50 years, the **Organization of Saskatchewan Arts Council** – better known by its acronym OSAC – has been bringing arts, culture and entertainment to small towns throughout the province.

Pop songstress Jann Arden performed in Weyburn in 2019 and opera superstar Ben Heppner was in Yorkton and Prince Albert in 2008. Comedian Brent Butt has done multiple appearances throughout the province. Going back to the organization's early years, it brought big names like Liona Boyd, Maureen Forrester and Jon Vickers to small-town Saskatchewan. And many lesser known performers from Saskatchewan and beyond got boosts from OSAC shows in the early years of their careers.

OSAC executive director Kevin Korchinski says "likely the biggest 'Oh

Wow' moment" came in October 2006 when the Canadian Tenors performed more than 10 times. Now known simply as the Tenors, they perform around the world.

On the visual side, artists such as Catherine Blackburn, Joe Fafard, David Garneau, Donna Langhorne, and David Thauberger have been among the hundreds whose work has toured into small art galleries with OSAC over the years.

Turnout varies, but is usually big, often packing house. Korchinski notes that some of the communities OSAC serves have populations as small as 500 to 1,000, "so a hundred people at a concert is a big percentage." In 2018/2019, OSAC's last "normal year," its Stars for Saskatchewan Community Series drew 28,000 ticket buyers, Performing Arts in Schools had over

SHOWCASE

OSAC



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Over the Moon performs at the 2019 Showcase. The band is touring around the province in 2021. Check out the dates [here](#).

26,000 students attend and the Arts on the Move Visual program saw over 46,000 people visit galleries or spaces hosting an OSAC exhibition.

OSAC's motto of "Bringing the Arts to You" pretty much sums up what this uniquely Saskatchewan organization is all about. "It's based on our belief that having high quality artistic events in a person's home community is an important part of successful, liveable communities," Korchinski says.

"Arts are a key part of life in Saskatchewan, and Canada, with many proven benefits to physical and mental health, so it is key for the overall health of communities for the general public, as well as all levels of government to continue to support the Arts."

Funding for OSAC's activities comes largely from the **Saskatchewan Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation***, which is "a unique funding model in Canada," Korchinski notes, "and is the envy of many of my colleagues across the country – so buy those lottery tickets!"

Formed in 1968 by a group of volunteers representing eight arts councils across the province, OSAC now boasts a membership of 42 councils and over 57 school centre associate members from Yorkton to La Ronge, from Lloydminster to Assiniboia, and dozens of art galleries, museums, theatres and schools in 80 communities across the province.

In the 2019/2020 season, which was cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Performing Arts Program brought 129 performances by 25 different artists to 40 communities. The School Touring Program had three tours travel to 47 schools in 31 communities. The Visual

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Foreground works by Catherine Blackburn, *Steep, Sip, and Speak*, rabbit fur, beads, tea bag, birch bark, sinew, 2017, 9.2 x 21.0 x 16.5 cm, 9.0 x 19.5 x 20.5 cm, 8.3 x 22.0 x 20.5 cm, Collection of the artist. From the exhibition *I do not have my words*: Joi T. Arcand, Catherine Blackburn, Audrey Dreaver.

and Media Arts Program toured 20 exhibitions to 32 Arts Councils. Dozens of other performances and exhibitions were postponed.

The highlight of OSAC's year is the annual Showcase, which had been planned for October 16, live, but with the recent upsurge of the pandemic, has been

canceled. Instead, OSAC's annual general meeting and Visual Arts Exhibitions will still take place on that date via Zoom.

Normally, Showcase is used as a vehicle for performers and artists to audition for arts councils, with OSAC acting as a middleman.

As it is, because over 200 shows were postponed from March 2020 through June 2021, Korchinski explains, line-ups are already set for the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 seasons. "Showcase 2022 will hopefully have a return to full showcases for the 2023 / 2024 season," he said.

And, barring any return to a full pandemic lockdown, which so far the government has resisted, things should be returning to normal. Sort of.

***Dave Margoshes** is a fiction writer and poet living in the rural Saskatoon area after many years in Regina. He was a newspaper reporter and editor, in New York, San Francisco, Calgary, Vancouver and points between, before escaping to the literary life.*