

From: Preston Cooper

Sent: Tuesday, January 23, 2024 6:41 PM

To: Budget Committee <BudgetCommittee@london.ca>; City of London, Mayor <mayor@london.ca>; Stevenson, Susan <sstevenson@london.ca>

Cc: Evan Klassen

Subject: [EXTERNAL] City of London Budget Committee - Attention Elizabeth Pelozza, Chair. Letter of Advocacy on behalf of the Grand

To Elizabeth Pelozza and the London Budget Committee,

My love and passion for the arts was born, cultivated, and honed at the Grand Theatre. Born and raised in London, I had no clue what I wanted to do growing up. In high school, I didn't truly have any passions that could be suitably transferable to a career: no direction as to my future career prospects. Until, that is, I was "volun-told" for a production of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* at my high school and subsequently a field trip to the Grand's 2014 holiday production of *Shrek: The Musical*. Without this swift and magical introduction as to what live theatre could be, I definitely wouldn't have opened my eyes to the unbridled power of live theatre. *Shrek*, as well as *Joni Mitchell: River*, (2016) *The Mountaintop* (2015), and *A Christmas Carol* (2017) all solidified for me that the arts were the avenue I most wanted to professionally pursue. I most certainly wouldn't have auditioned for the High School Project: *Les Misérables* (2016) without the Grand's subsidized holiday shows and their student matinees as an introduction.

The impact the High School Project had on my life is immeasurable. Through my time in the High School Project, I was nudged in the direction of auditioning for and studying at Sheridan College in the Bachelors of Music Theatre Performance program. My time studying there, I saw many partnerships between Sheridan and the Grand. Michael Rubinoff, formerly of the Sheridan faculty whom headed the Canadian Music Theatre Project, had a strong relationship with the Grand through the High School Project and with the presentation of *GROW*, a musical I watched workshops of for class that eventually moved to the Spriet Stage of the Grand Theatre. My time studying at Sheridan solidified, for me, the importance of the Grand on a national and international level. Amazing theatre is made by the Grand, both inside and outside of its walls on Richmond Street. The Grand is a monolith of Canadian theatre: creating and mentoring new works through the COMPASS New Play Development Program, staging bold and brave new musicals, and a paragon at presenting classic plays with newfound passion and heart: an architectural and artistic highlight of this city.

Upon leaving school, moving back to London, and looking for work in the industry, the Grand was the first place that came to my mind in terms of seeking out employment opportunities. Since joining the Grand in an admin role this past June, I've gotten to see, first hand, the resources and hard work that tirelessly goes into sharing amazing theatre productions and experiences with our community. I ask you to look at an increase in the Grand's annual operating funding as an investment in the future of London children who don't know that live theatre will be their passion. For children who will become future arts educators, philanthropists, and entrepreneurs; but haven't realized it yet.

All the best,
Preston Free Cooper

Preston Free Cooper | Interim Marketing Project Manager

they/them

519-672-9030 x267

