



Music London Celebration Centre

Executive Summary August 2013



CELEBRATION CENTRE – A UNIQUE COMMUNITY INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY

Introduction

Music London has engaged community stakeholders and private sector partners to create an enviable team of leaders poised to move forward with this exciting initiative. They look forward to working with the community and the City to turn this dream into reality in time for Canada's 150th birthday in 2017. The proposed mixed use development will build on City investments such as Covent Garden Market, and the Budweiser Gardens. It will leverage new residential and commercial investment by the private sector that will provide a significant return on the City's investment. Much needed jobs will be created and new tax dollars will flow to the City of London.

The Need

Orchestra London Canada has been the primary user of Centennial Hall for the past 45 years. The Orchestra is the region's largest provider of live music and consistently strives to work with key members of the London arts community, to develop the best designed venues to welcome guest artists from around the world.

In response to the City of London invitation for ideas to create economic prosperity for London, Orchestra London established the Music London Community Action Team (Music London) to conduct significant research to develop a clear case for support and feasibility for a new music and dance centre in downtown London. A venue which will stimulate economic activity and in which Londoner's can be proud.

It is a well-known fact that Centennial Hall, the primary acoustics music hall in London, is at the end of its service life. In a study commissioned by the City of London; Feasibility and Condition of Centennial Hall Final Report concluded, in June 2007 the following:

Status Quo

- a) Because Centennial Hall is a substandard venue which is at the end of its service life as a building, the status quo is not a recommended option for the city to pursue.

Modernization and Significant Improvements

- b) Because the basic design of the facility as a live performance venue is flawed and because the base of the building fabric and systems are substantially below current standards, the scope of modernization and improvements would be equal to constructing a new building, and because Centennial Hall is not an optimal location, modernization and improvement is not a recommended option for the City to pursue.

Removal and Re-development

- c) Because re-development on the existing Centennial Hall site is not a recommended option; and because there are no comparable existing facilities in London on which to rely, this report recommends that the City of London consider constructing a replacement venue (no later than the year 2017.)

The Opportunity

Jobs, private and public sector investment, new City tax revenues, and economic growth in the downtown.

The Celebration Centre will provide a wide range of economic benefits by being in walking distance to local business such as café's, shops, nightclubs, boutiques, hotels and also add to and diversify the growing number of major cultural attractions in the City.

Music London engaged Ellis Don and Global Spectrum, the same successful business partners at Budweiser Gardens, to ensure the Celebration Centre achieves the same international recognition as a destination for great artists, to support local talent, and to provide a world class entertainment experience while achieving a track record of financial success.

Music London has also engaged local Heritage Architect John Nicholson, Urban Planners Russell Schnurr and Urban Planner Laverne Kirkness, and international music hall designers ARUP to engage the community with the final design and site location so that Celebration Centre will be a significant and



dynamic cultural icon that reflects London’s rich history and traditions and an exciting and dynamic future.

The mixed use development will facilitate inspirational performances, deliver maximum economic impact, be safe and accessible, close to parking, on major bus routes, and close to the train and bus station. Working together we can build a memorable architectural building that will attract visitors and inspire the general public.

The addition of a private sector commercial and residential builder demonstrates visionary partnerships between business and the music and dance community. The City of London will see a significant return on it’s investment as the mixed use development will add new net revenue to the tax base of the City.

Music London has produced an exciting initial design for a specialized, purpose-built and professionally managed facility that will present, promote and develop the music and dance community in London. It will be a vibrant and creative center of civic pride, intelligent design, and a successful community economic asset. Celebration Centre will be capable of accommodating a wide range of professional and community performance events as well as non performance uses such as social and corporate functions, community events, seminars, conferences, meetings, exhibits, fundraising events and much more.

A properly designed and functioning site requires an estimated 80,000 square feet to host four principal areas, being the Main Stage, the Dance and Rehearsal Studio, the Community Centre Lobby and the Civic Plaza. The **Main Stage** will have a flexible seating capacity of up to 1300 seats. It will have an orchestra pit to accommodate more elaborate tours and musical productions. Audience members will enjoy excellent sightlines and proximity to the stage, *world-class acoustics* and an intimate connection to the performers and dancers on stage. This venue will accommodate the acoustical requirements of a wide range of performance types – from choirs, touring musicians and professional shows, symphony and chamber orchestras to spoken word plays.

The **Community Dance and Rehearsal Studio** will have a flexible “black box” space that will be used for professional dance series presentations, community presentations and music rehearsals, as well as corporate and social events. This room is designed to hold up to 400 people.



The community **Welcome Centre Lobby** will have the capacity to accommodate a large group of patrons and can serve as a unique focal point for community interaction, collaborations, receptions, exhibitions, corporate functions and civic events. The lobby will host local artifacts and mementos from London rich history of music and the arts and its open design concept will create a unique and sought after location for social events.

Celebration Centre seeks to be a landmark in the downtown from an architectural and urban design standpoint. A public plaza will welcome patrons, heighten the sense of arrival, and serve as a social gathering space. Four strategic locations in the downtown are under consideration at this time, the final site to be selected after further community consultation and engagement.

The Benefits

Celebration Centre will have a profound impact on the artistic growth and development of our local music dance and entertainment community. Over the years the City has collaborated with the community to build a strong foundation and awareness for the performing arts. The Creative City Task Force and the more recent Cultural Prosperity Plan have documented just how active and important the arts industry is to our community. Recent Music Canada studies emphasize the importance of live music and music education to the economy, business attraction, and individual learning.

London is poised to reach its creative and productive capacity in terms of scope, quality and volume of programs and performances that it can deliver to the regional community. The Celebration Centre will be the long overdue catalyst that will allow the City's local performing music, dance, and artistic industry to increase their creative capacity, reach new heights of artistic excellence, and deliver richer and more diverse performances that will ultimately grow a sustainable audience. The Centre will stimulate support and promote the creative energy and growth of a vibrant music, dance and entertainment industry in London.

Music London's overriding goal is to provide the citizens of London with a broad range of excellent performance opportunities that will both inspire and delight. The Centre will eradicate the embarrassment and disappointment associated with an aging facility and become among the top ten music hall destinations in North America. The reputation of the City as a cultural leader in Ontario will



demonstrate in tangible terms that Londoners take pride in the artistic expressions and the energies of its own citizens. In this respect, the Celebration Centre will signify the image of the whole community and its authentic commitment to creativity, diversity and excellence.

By enhancing the overall quality of life, a new music and dance venue will reinforce London's attractiveness as a place to invest, live, to locate a business, to attract private sector recording studios, and foster provincial and federal investments recently announced to stimulate the music and dance industry. This initiative will add jobs in one of the fastest growing employment sectors in the country.

The Celebration Centre will energize its surrounding neighborhoods, providing stimulus to restaurants and other retailers specifically the downtown Business Improvement Area businesses

Examples of communities where a new cultural venue has had a beneficial effect on the arts and business environments are numerous. Examples include Guelph, Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, North York, Toronto, Thunder Bay, Windsor, Burlington, Brampton, Oakville and Mississauga. In these communities new arts groups have sprung up, existing groups were strengthened by having enhanced facilities in which to perform and showcase their art, new performing arts series were launched, and businesses and community organizations found new opportunities for partnerships.

Such positive results of new performing arts spaces are nearly universal throughout Canada and the U.S.A (ARUP Consultants)

Return on Investment

A strong declaration of intent from the City of London to contribute dollars will be the linchpin on which all provincial, federal and private sector funding will depend. .

Investing in culture and the arts makes business sense. During the late 1990's the City set their sights on downtown revitalization by developing a number of programs to provide incentives to private investors and to foster residential growth in downtown London. Over the past 5 years property values are on the rise and City investment has been surpassed by almost 3 to 1 over the last 10 years. Over 1,500 new residential units and an additional 3,000 Londoners live downtown. Property assessment has risen from \$568 million to over \$700 million in 2010. The Budweiser Gardens is recognized as one of the top ten



venues in North America. The new downtown library is the busiest in Southwestern Ontario, Covent Garden is thriving, and families can now enjoy the Forks of the Thames through local festivals and activities. The Fanshawe School for the Performing Arts is nearing completion. The momentum for the core of London was further emphasized by the Downtown MasterPlan.

London City Council endorsed a mixed use centre in the downtown as one of the top 5 priorities for economic development in a concerted effort to attract more residents to the core, expand the city tax base, leverage private investment and build the capacity of the arts to increase visitors and support local business. The city investment of \$10 million dollars will provide a much need civic asset and unite the community in time for Canada's 150th birthday, while enjoying a return on that investment as follows:

- ✓ Provide 1,000 jobs
- ✓ Increase City tax revenues by \$100 million dollars in the next 20 years
- ✓ Private Investment will build a 200 unit, \$55 million Downtown Luxury Condominium
- ✓ Private investment will build a 12 storey, \$90 million Commercial Tower
- ✓ Increase new development fees of approximately \$7 million
- ✓ Attract \$30 million of senior level government support for the Celebration Centre
- ✓ Enable \$ 7.5 million of corporate and individual contributions
- ✓ Leave a legacy endowment for music and dance of \$5 million
- ✓ Build community pride and prosperity through a unique civic investment opportunity

Conclusion

For over 25 years, a number of community action groups have discussed building a quality venue to showcase London live acoustic music and dance talent. Past initiatives have fallen short. But we are on the verge of making that vision a reality.

Sincerely,

David Canton
dcanton@harrisonpensa.com
519-661-6776
Chair, Music London
Community Action Team