

Cuts predicted if TVO privatized

Public broadcaster offers 'haven' from commercial TV, CEO says

BY CHRISTOPHER HARRIS
Arts Reporter

TORONTO — Some "very real risks" are attached to the idea of privatizing TVOntario, says its chairman and chief executive officer Peter Herrndorf.

"We believe that today's TVOntario — a more cost-conscious and entrepreneurial organization — represents a far better 'value for money' proposition for the people of Ontario than a private sector alternative, with all its conflicting imperatives," Herrndorf said yesterday in a speech to a predominantly business-oriented audience at the Canadian Club in Toronto.

TVOntario was established as a public service, he said. If it were sold, he argued, the organization "would be forced to cut back dramatically on its public service commitments" to make itself commercially viable.

Herrndorf was responding to one of the campaign promises of Ontario's four-month-old Conservative government, which had pledged last year to examine the merits of selling the province's 25-year-old educational broadcaster to the private sector. The promise was repeated in last month's Throne Speech.

In his speech yesterday — on the

subject of "celebrating 25 years of educational broadcasting in Ontario" — Herrndorf noted his organization's determination to reduce its reliance on government funding by "sharply increasing" its self-generated income, and trimming its non-programming costs "to the bone."

He then offered up a tally of the risks that he believes would follow if TVO and its French-language sister station, TFO, were sold and forced to live "by the rules of the marketplace."

The risks he cited are: "That there would be a significant reduction in the educational services we provide — at the very time that Ontario needs these services most; that TVOntario would no longer be able to afford either the quality or quantity of the original Canadian programming that we produce today; that our superb educational programming for children is simply not commercially viable for the private sector; that the access to our broadcast signal would be cut back for financial reasons, disenfranchising the minority of viewers (in remote regions of the province) who rely on us most."

The people of Ontario, he added, "would no longer have a direct and vital say in what we do — through

our board, our regional councillors, our members, our volunteers, or more importantly, as our shareholders."

"There's an even greater risk that it wouldn't take long for TVOntario to cease being a 'haven' in the sea of television commercialization that it's been for 25 years."

Herrndorf said that commercial North American broadcasting is driven by the economic imperative of delivering audiences to advertisers. This means, he said, that commercial broadcasters must produce programs that meet profit-driven goals, "and not necessarily the public service goals that they might prefer."

A public educational broadcaster like TVOntario, he said, "can... take possession of a small part of the television landscape and harness the power of the medium for the public good. For purposes that don't have to do with maximizing profits, but, rather, for providing our kids with a safe, healthy environment... and for giving the rest of us an opportunity to expand our minds and discover the world."

TVOntario has an annual operating budget of \$82.4-million, of which about \$66-million comes from the public sector.



Writer-director Paulette Phillips uses video clips in this play about a director and her postfeminist film.

Stranded between satire and drama

IN *Controlling Interest*, writer Paulette Phillips, herself a film and video director, has integrated video clips into a stage play about a director working on a postfeminist film. Hip and hard Linda is creating an experimental film about a physically perfect stripper/prostitute that is filled with deep implications about sex, power and gender. (The project sounds like Atom Egoyan on a bad day.) Having dragooned old pal Les, a down-to-earth forty-something loner, into doing the camera work, she hires the beautiful young Zoë and the equally sexy young Fred to star in it. From their first scenes, the sexual and emotional tension in this foursome threatens to erupt as Linda copes with her attraction to Fred, her dependence on Les and her jealousy of Zoë while the young thing herself tries a pass at the cameraman.

I can't help but feel that the creator has sabotaged the character here. As Phillips has written her, Linda is believable enough — we all know people awkwardly attempting to live their emotional lives in rational ac-



THEATRE REVIEW

CONTROLLING INTEREST

Written and directed by Paulette Phillips

Starring Tracy Wright, Sigrid Johnson, Brian Tree and Brian Sweetapple

At Theatre Passe Muraille Backspace until Sunday

Rating: ★★½

Reviewed by Kate Taylor

older angered by the younger's beauty, the younger bemused by the older's bitterness, does build up some more emotionally engaging tension as the play progresses but its conclusion is ambiguous. Phillips never shows much sympathy for Linda's struggle with the personal and the political, leaving the play stranded in some cramped space between satire and drama.

If Phillips has not resolved her themes nor point of view in *Controlling Interest*, she has, as director, not only successfully integrated the video clips into the play, but also drawn excellent performances from her cast. Wright finds Linda's combination of intellectual power and powerful self-consciousness with ease; Brian Sweetapple makes Fred sexually eager in a friendly kind of way; Sigrid Johnson deftly manoeuvres her way around Zoë, a character who remains a bit of a cypher and has the difficult task of portraying bad acting; and, as the one person mature enough not to be game playing, Brian Tree fits the emotionally cautious Les like a glove.

cordance with their politics — but the game she's playing is so obvious it's painful to watch. As Zoë, the wise innocent, eventually points out, the ever-intellectualizing Linda is not honest enough to deal with her real feelings and instead is projecting them onto the screen. The early scenes are especially excruciating — a testament to the acting in this ensemble if not the script. The relationship between the two women, the

Monet fascinated by Norway's icy beauty

Reuters News Agency

PARIS — A century ago, Claude Monet set himself a task that he feared was impossible — to paint the air, ice and snow of Norway's winter.

After a gruelling, 66-hour journey by train and boat, the farthest he ever travelled from France, the noted impressionist declared:

"I want the impossible... I want to paint the air around the bridge, the house, the boat. The beauty of the air... is nothing other than impossible. Oh, if only I could content myself with the possible!"

Twelve of his 28 paintings from Norway are on display in a centenary exhibition at the Musée Rodin in Paris until Dec. 3, casting a spotlight on a little-known facet of Monet's art.

The works include views of the village of Sandviken near Oslo, the rugged Kolsaas hill, houses in snow and the Oslo fiord.

The rich spectrum of colours he uses is a revelation for anyone who thinks snow is white.

Monet was fascinated but frustrated by the abrupt shifts of the Nordic winter, from snowstorms to fog to low-slanting sunlight.

In Norway, he wrote of "effects of snow that are absolutely stupefying but of an untold difficulty."

He ended up in the snows switching from one painting to another — often eight to 10 canvases in a day — as the light changed. Toward the end of his two-month stay, he raced as the March thaw melted the ice.

In some letters, he writes of depression and the cold. In others, he gleefully recounts a sled ride through the forests, saying his beard became comically frozen with chunks of ice.

The Norwegian paintings have an almost Japanese flavour — Monet chose the village of Sandviken because the arch of a bridge in the centre of town reminded him of Japanese prints he loved. And Monet oddly likened the rounded bulk of the Kolsaas hill to the cone of Mount Fuji in Japan.

Monet called his own works from Norway "brutal and unfinished." But he said on his return to France: "I am not too dissatisfied with what I am bringing back."

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