

HONG KONG PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY

SUBMISSION TO PANEL ON HOME AFFAIRS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Strengthening the software and humanware for culture and the arts in Hong Kong

The Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra (HKPO) is pleased to have an opportunity to address the Panel on Home Affairs in relation to the challenges faced by the Hong Kong Government and the performing arts sector in the development of performers and resident performing companies in Hong Kong in readiness for the West Kowloon Cultural District.

Our mission

The mission of the Hong Kong Philharmonic is to be a financially secure institution that inspires and expands musical appreciation in Hong Kong and brings distinction to the community through the Orchestra's enriching performances and premier regional standing.

The pursuit of excellence

Fundamental to the HKPO's ability to achieve its objective is a commitment to the highest possible artistic standards through thoughtful and challenging programming, intensive rehearsals, the engagement of first class guest conductors and stringent recruitment and performance assessment procedures.

Since 2004, under the leadership of Artistic Director and Chief Conductor Edo de Waart, the HKPO has grown into one of the finest orchestras in the region and has boosted its reputation in the last 12 months through a series of acclaimed performances in major cities in Mainland China, including Shanghai (Shanghai Spring International Music Festival – May 2007), Beijing (Beijing Music Festival – October 2007) and Guangzhou (Xinghai Concert Hall, January 2008), thereby promoting Hong Kong as a cultural metropolis.

Enriching the community

At home, the Orchestra's performances have garnered increasingly enthusiastic critical reaction in the last four years as the results of Maestro de Waart's leadership have become more and more apparent. The ticket-buying public has shown its support and appreciation with significant increases in paid attendance and subscriber numbers and the community at large participates more fully through an expanded program of education and outreach activities which are offered free of charge to both school students and the general public:

| | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------------|----------------|
| Paid attendance | 93,478 | 101,941 (↑9%) | 124,491 (↑22%) |
| Average paid capacity | 56% | 72% | 81% |
| Participation in outreach | 69,488 | 71,293 (↑3%) | 94,112 (↑32%) |

Up to the end of January 2008, the HKPO's 2007/08 concert season has averaged 89% paid capacity, continuing the upward trend of public support for and appreciation of the Orchestra's performances.

The Orchestra's education program brings thousands of primary and secondary students into the Concert Hall to experience the full impact of a major orchestra in action, and is complemented by a network of school visits in which small groups of musicians perform interactive educational programs in school halls and classrooms across the territory. In 2006/07, the HKPO's education program reached 64,000 school children from 460 different schools.

For adults, the HKPO presents a range of pre-concert talks and adult education seminars to deepen the public's understanding of music and to heighten appreciation of the performances.

Since 2006, the HKPO has presented an annual, free open-air concert, Symphony Under The Stars, attracting in excess of 15,000 to experience superb music in a magical setting – a unique experience for the Hong Kong public.

Investing in the next generation of musicians

As well as offering an expansive music education program for school students, the HKPO, under Maestro de Waart's direction, has initiated two major projects to invest in the next generation of Chinese orchestral musicians.

Each year, Maestro de Waart and the entire Orchestra devote a full week to a residency program in the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. A program of full-scale and challenging orchestral works is selected and Maestro de Waart conducts an intensive week of rehearsals of a massed orchestra comprising the best APA students and seasoned professionals from the HKPO sitting side-by-side throughout the ranks of the Orchestra. HKPO musicians act as coaches and mentors to the students, giving insights into the professional life of a musician and helping to prepare the students for the culminating concert in the Hong Kong Cultural Centre which is conducted by Edo de Waart before a public audience.

In 2006, the HKPO developed a new initiative in association with the Robert HN Ho Family Foundation. Having identified numerous talented young graduates from the major music academies of China and Hong Kong who were frequently unsuccessful in auditioning for the Orchestra, the HKPO devised a professional development program to offer outstanding young Chinese musicians the chance to gain high level orchestral experience for an entire year under the guidance of Maestro de Waart and HKPO Concertmaster John Harding. Up to 10 musicians are selected each year to join the Robert HN Ho Family Foundation Orchestral Fellowship Scheme, bridging the gap between conservatorium training and entry into the profession.

Both the APA residency and the Orchestral Fellowships Scheme embody the HKPO's commitment to investing in the future of Chinese musicians.

Where we are now

The last four years of tremendous growth in artistic quality, community engagement and audience development have taken place in an environment of severely reduced Government funding. Indeed, Government funding for the Hong Kong Philharmonic has reduced dramatically in the last ten years and is now more than \$12 million lower than it was in 1998/99:

| | |
|-----------|--------------|
| 1998/1999 | \$68,941,022 |
| 1999/2000 | \$64,368,341 |
| 2000/2001 | \$62,955,689 |
| 2001/2002 | \$63,683,000 |
| 2002/2003 | \$64,173,000 |
| 2003/2004 | \$61,733,000 |
| 2004/2005 | \$59,078,000 |
| 2005/2006 | \$56,538,000 |
| 2006/2007 | \$56,538,000 |
| 2007/2008 | \$56,538,000 |

The HKPO has been able to achieve its recent expansion and growth primarily through greatly increased revenue from sponsorship and fundraising, and to a lesser extent income from ticket sales. The annual budget of \$107.4 million is made up of the following revenue streams:

| | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------|--------|
| Government funding | \$56.5 million | 52.5% |
| Sponsorship and fundraising | \$28.2 million | 26.25% |
| Ticket sales and concert fees | \$22.7 million | 21.25% |

Although the HKPO has been impressively successful in raising revenue from sponsorship and fundraising since the advent of the de Waart era (from \$5.5 million in 2003/04, \$9.2 million in 2004/05, \$12.6 million in 2005/06, \$23 million in 2006/07 and a projected \$28.2 million in the current financial year) such continued growth is unsustainable and the HKPO believes that the current annual target of \$28.2 million represents a ceiling.

In every major city of the world, orchestras and opera companies are the costliest performing arts institutions. This is a natural result of the size of the employee base of these companies – the musicians and performers are the company and an orchestra, by definition, is a large body of professional musicians, trained to an extremely high degree and contributing to the cultural lifeblood of the city both through orchestral performance and by virtue of being among the best qualified instrumental teachers in that city.

While the Hong Kong Philharmonic is the largest professional performing arts company in Hong Kong, with 90 full-time musicians, it is nevertheless one of the smallest in the region, as a result of funding cuts which reduced the establishment size of the Orchestra from 93 to 90. In comparison, our nearest musical neighbours are much closer to full international strength:

| | |
|--|---------------|
| NHK Symphony (Tokyo) | 110 musicians |
| China Philharmonic Orchestra (Beijing) | 102 musicians |
| Shanghai Symphony Orchestra | 101 musicians |
| Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra (KL) | 98 musicians |
| Singapore Symphony Orchestra | 96 musicians |
| Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra | 90 musicians |

The way forward

As the Government prepares to make a huge commitment to Hong Kong's cultural and artistic future by creating the West Kowloon Cultural District, the well-being of Hong Kong's resident companies and the breadth and knowledge of the audience need equal attention now. All of Hong Kong's resident performing arts companies have suffered over the last five or more years as the Government has reduced expenditure on arts and culture in line with its overall expenditure reduction policy. The HKPO, while receiving the highest level of subvention from the Government, has also lost the largest amount, as percentage cuts were enforced.

The HKPO is committed to continuing its growth and development in order to raise artistic standards even higher, attract and inspire increasing numbers of music-lovers and become the flag-bearer for Hong Kong's ambition to be a cultural and creative metropolis. Having reached a threshold in our income generating capacity, the Hong Kong Philharmonic is now depending on the Hong Kong Government to increase its support to all of the performing arts companies in Hong Kong as an essential investment in ensuring that the West Kowloon Cultural District achieves its full potential.

Prepared by

Timothy Calnin
Chief Executive
Hong Kong Philharmonic Society Limited

4th February 2008