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29th September 2004

The Cultural Commission
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Dear Sirs,

I write following the appearance of your chair's letter in the Fife Herald seeking contributions from readers.

I write as a Scot who has returned to live in Scotland yet has always been interested in the Arts and has sampled them in many countries. Nothing has caused me greater concern about the values of the Scottish Executive than the recent treatment of Scottish Opera. They are sending out negative signals about our nation's aspirations to be a part of mainstream Europe.

I appeal to your Commission to recommend that Scottish Opera be allowed a subsidy the equal in money terms of that given to Welsh National Opera.

It is clearly wrong that managements should ignore budgets with impunity. But Scottish Opera were required to operate on a standstill budget for a number of years at a time when they were committed to their 'Ring' – only the second in Scotland's history. The budget to which they have to work requires management to cut back the programme of productions to something representative of the third-rate. I wish that the cuts in employment inflicted on Scottish Opera for going over budget were inflicted proportionately on Scottish politicians for the way in which they 'managed' the construction of the Scottish Parliament. The waste of money here could have funded a decent subsidy for Scottish Opera many times over. (I speak here as a professional construction manager and qualified member of the Chartered Institute of Building).

I am lucky enough to have seen opera performances – and musical and theatre performances – over much of the world, in Malaysia, at the Met and the Maryinsky, from France to Italy, through Bayreuth to the Baltics.

Yet some of the greatest and most intense artistic experiences of my life have been provided by Scottish Opera. I remember performances in each decade from the 1960s onwards. I've seen a number of 'Rings', having memories of Scottish Opera's first. Just after the recent Ring, last autumn I saw English National Opera's new production of Valkyrie, and despair – at their treatment of a masterpiece – mingled in my breast with pride at the thought that the

team at Scottish Opera had reached such a high level of achievement at a fraction of the budget available to ENO.

For some years I have been travelling to the Baltic States, and find there that they have access to greater subsidy, for instance judging by the production values evident on stage – particularly with regards to the size of the chorus. Of course they also support sizeable companies delivering classical ballet, something we in Scotland have destroyed. I've been to many performances in Vilnius in particular and have been impressed by the extent to which the Lithuanians (with a population significantly smaller than Scotland's at 3.6m) see the provision of European cultural values through the performance of opera and ballet as an expression of nationality.

The Scottish Executive is said to be encouraging potential immigrants, mainly from 'Europe'. Do these characters really think we can be seen as an attractive place in which to live and work when we offer so much less in the Arts than most other European countries?

Young Scots are emigrating to other European countries – and not returning. Could this be because of Arts provision?

I repeat my heartfelt plea to increase the subsidy of Scottish Opera until it reaches Welsh then European levels and is again able to flourish as in the past.

Yours faithfully

Iain Fraser

PS. I am copying this letter to my MSP

Ian

From: Fraser, Iain S [Iain.Fraser@abertay.ac.uk]

Sent: 01 October 2004 08:40

To: info

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Subject: Submission[Scanned]

Please find attached my letter

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