

## Looking Ahead to Vancouver: A Perspective on Olympic Arts Festivals <sup>i</sup>

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### Evidence given to Whistler Chamber of Commerce, July 21, 2005.

It is a distinct pleasure to be back in Canada, to be welcomed to the shared traditional territories of the First Nations, and especially to be here in Whistler, which indeed will be the alpine heart of the 2010 Olympic Winter Games.

The last time I was here related to the Olympics, was in November of 2003 when, in Vancouver, a panel was discussing 2010: Boom or Bust for Arts & Culture. So much has been accomplished since that time especially here in Whistler.

I, of course, want to thank the Whistler Chamber of Commerce, Maureen Douglas of the Whistler and Sea to Sky Corridor and Shauna Hardy Mishaw of the Whistler Film Festival for the invitation to speak.

I was asked today to speak of my insights, the lessons learned, if you will, on what worked and what did not work in regard to the 2002 Olympic Arts Festival. My lessons learned were Olympic by both scale and proportion.

But, since Maureen Douglas has already written me as to the “very successful” relationship between the organizing committee, IOC and host communities, and, since Anne Popma, in her report commissioned by the Whistler Arts Council, has already captured lessons learned from previous host communities, including Salt Lake City’s, with your permission, I’d like to use my time with you today to look beyond the Olympics.

It is where the great legacy of the Olympic Games lies, despite the great pressures on all of you to put on the Games. And, in actuality, the challenges Salt Lake City faced (the body-blow of 9/11 and the Olympic bid scandal) and the principle challenge I faced in the Olympic Arts Festival (zero funding) are, not likely, God willing, to be challenges faced by Vancouver 2010.

I want to focus beyond the Games, as well, because in Salt Lake City, we spent so little time thinking about what happens after the Games, that the legacy of the Games in Salt Lake City was little more than a photo album to offer our world visitors. And

this, despite a \$101 million dollar surplus! Why? Because the typical role of an organizing committee is to put on the Games not to provide legacies for them. Our singular focus in Salt Lake City was simply to put on the Games. In this regard, you are, thankfully, well ahead of any organizing committee's work that I know of.

So with this indulgence, I'll begin my comments, and a few recommendations, by sending along my congratulations to Burke Taylor, now the Vice President of Culture and Ceremonies for the Vancouver Organizing Committee. When I first took the job of Artistic Director of the 2002 Olympic Arts Festival, where I moved to Utah from New York & Florida, I called upon my colleague Geoffrey Babcock, director of the 1996 Atlanta Cultural Olympiad for advice. He said "Ray, it's a once in a lifetime opportunity and you'll only want to do it once in your life."

I mentioned I was in Vancouver in November of 2003. At that time, Burke was the Director of the Office of Cultural Affairs for the City of Vancouver. Now, Burke gives new meaning to the advice I received having already served as the Director of the Performing Arts Program for the Calgary Olympic Arts Festival. He's back for more. That alone should qualify him for the Olympic Order.

Actually, I am a great advocate of the Olympic Movement because, in my experience, despite its very public failings, the Olympics are a vital social movement. It is a movement that does transcend sport. And arts and culture is, and will be here, in Whistler, an integral part of a cultural celebration.

When I witnessed, for example, North and South Korea march for the first time together into the stadium at the opening ceremonies of the Sydney Games, I can attest that that was an historic "cultural event." The sport competitions had yet to begin. The arts and humanities are the *raison d'être* of the Olympic Movement.

Your Olympic Arts Festival doesn't need to be "the world's largest tailgate party" as Malcolm Jones Jr. of Newsweek described the cultural events surrounding the 1996 Atlanta Games. Yet, he went on to say, "No one who attends one of these moveable feasts ever remembers what he ate or drank. Yet these parties are inextricably part of the ritual."

Well, Olympic Arts Festivals can be so much more than a "tailgate party." And, thankfully, the ritual of the Games is enriched by local communities in their hosting of the Games.

Given the preparation, talent, convening, and participation by so many already here in Whistler and in Vancouver and, I suspect,

all over the provinces, the Olympics as a world social gathering will allow this growing community of 10,000 to celebrate its achievements and, along the way, debunk some myths about itself. And you will look magnificent in the eyes of the world. And, many eyes will be on you.

In Salt Lake City in 2002, our Opening Ceremonies alone were broadcast in 183 countries and seen by 3.5 billion people. In America, the newspaper USA Today had a headline that read: "The little city that could did."

Sadly, that was followed by a headline that appeared in The New York Times on May 25, 2002 that read "Olympics Over, Salt Lake City Struggles to Save Its Downtown. And, the Los Angeles Times headline from May 14th read - "SLC Suffers From Post-Oly Hangover."

Now Whistler will do more than successfully host the Games. The Games will bring new vitality to the global brand called Canada and the Resort Municipality of Whistler. But, how? And, what role can the arts play? How will you use the media? How will you feed the hunger for stories? Unless you begin now to commission and tell the stories that celebrate what this community aspires to be, the media and, dare I say, The Vancouver Sun, The Globe and Mail, The Toronto Star, The Toronto Sun, The Calgary Herald,

the Gazette in Quebec, and many other publications, will write on the topics you dread, at least during the Olympics; traffic, transportation flaws, environmental degradation, security or lack thereof, and over-development.

Of course, the work that this community has already done in taking a leadership role in sustainability bodes very well for heading off these issues. But don't just head them off, talk about them within the context of the Olympic Games.

As some of you now know, I have the great privilege of serving as the Executive Director for Programming for Robert Redford's Sundance. And, having just organized the Sundance Summit: A Mayor's Gathering on Climate Protection, which brought together over 40 U.S. Mayor's, a former U.S. Vice President, Al Gore, and former U.S. Energy Secretary and now Governor of New Mexico, Bill Richardson, I thought to myself, this would be a terrific meeting to convene during the Olympics. Why? Precisely because the eyes of the world are watching you and global warming is not a problem that is going away anytime soon. And, if not confronted by Whistler, and Sundance, the Olympic Movement and other resort communities, we may not have much snow to attract skiers to. One estimate during our Sundance conference suggested

Utah many not have even have a significant ski industry in forty years! Now that's a reason to use the Olympics as a "call to action." And, if not under the banner of arts, culture, youth, and education, where? Why not here in Whistler?

This kind of conference is, by the way, not without precedence. During the 2002 Olympic Arts Festival, I convened a major gathering on Human Rights. It was not a favorite program, by the way, of the chairman of the IOC Commission on Culture and Olympic Education, who, in addition to the CEO of the SLOC, I reported to, albeit indirectly. He happened to be from China. But then again, nor was the rodeo I organized welcomed in some circles. But the programs went on, some to significant acclaim. 380,000 people attended Olympic Arts Festival programs during the Salt Lake City Games. In some cases, it was the only way Utah residents could touch the Games. And, I would argue, that these experiences merged both sport and art. And, this merger of sport and art is the very essence of the Olympic movement - the definition of Olympism. We sold 93% of all tickets to cultural events during the Games.

Please allow me a few more few thoughts on the power of the media in connection to the Games.

Prior to the 2002 Olympic Winter Games, a survey suggested that only 4% of Europeans even knew Utah was a state in the United States of America. Now, Utah has the distinction of having hosted, in the words of the Chicago Tribune - "a smash hit." The Denver Post said "Foreigners Give Utah High Marks." Even the Los Angeles Times; commenting on an Olympic Arts Festival commissioned work, said "its local premiere at the Capitol Theatre launched the performance component of the city's Cultural Olympiad in a blaze of reflected glory." So, tell your stories and celebrate the sense of place you call Whistler. Why? Because, on February 12th, 2011, the media, at least, will return to Whistler to see how you have capitalized on your success. You must not disappoint. You have an obligation to deliver a legacy of the Games.

The organizing committee of the Games, at least according to the IOC Charter, has no responsibility to deliver a legacy of the Games. But, the communities that host the Games have a different obligation.

So here, in Whistler and in Vancouver, you must not disappoint - not for the sake of the media, but to celebrate the contributions of what might be 25,000 volunteers who will make the Games of 2010 a success. It is right and proper that the success of any Games rises and falls on the participation of volunteers.

The celebration of the amateur is another beautiful essence of the Olympic Movement.

The challenge for the community leaders, the arts community, not always known as a cooperative bunch, and the Chamber and the Municipality here in Whistler is to determine, now, what imaginative and compelling stories to tell beyond the Games and how to creatively tell those stories.

In this, the importance of the artist should not be underestimated.

[It is also not lost on me that this is a luncheon and we need to get on to the business of lunch or at least having our [coffee & dessert] so I'll be brief in outlining a few thoughts for the future.]

I believe artists live and work in community and they give community a sense of place. As you race toward 55,000 plus bed units, be mindful of place. "Sense of Place" should be the focus of Whistler. Keeping it affordable for artists, along with many others, to "live, work, and play" here [as your Whistler 2020 Sustainability Study promotes,] will be a greater challenge than hosting the Games themselves.

With that said, this sense of place – the atmosphere of the Games, if you will, – was the magic of the Salt Lake Games and will be the compelling story of your Games

and the single biggest reason for world visitors to return to Whistler.

Olympic history has suggested it is this atmosphere of the Games that people remember even after the memories of who won what medal fade.

Artists also find the "uncommon in the commonplace." That is why their voice, when sought out, will allow Whistler to become the premier mountain resort community it seeks to be. With, of course, some friendly competition from Park City, Utah.

Here it seems appropriate to define what I mean when I reference, broadly, arts and culture. "Arts and culture" encompasses all creative expression – in support of, or in opposition to, a nation's or a community's flavor and essence, that ally it with and distinguish it from other nations or communities – that can be read, heard, viewed, and/or participated in.

Now, legacy is another term frequently used within the context of the Olympic Games. Merriam-Webster's defines legacy as "something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past." I am especially mindful here of the legacy, both past and present, of the First Nations. By celebrating the First Nations in telling their stories, you

guarantee credible and authentic Games and allow Canada to showcase its great contributions to nature, the arts and humanities in front of a world audience.

As you already know, the arts and cultural heritage are drivers of community development and economic development not just nice amenities. Culture is at the heart of this community's passion for life, a passion you need to share with the media and world audiences during the Olympics and beyond.

One of our cultured American Presidents, John F. Kennedy, called the arts our "contribution to the human spirit." That's not an American thought, that's a universal clarion call that ties the arts and the Olympic movement to the quality of life in the Resort Municipality of Whistler, the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia, and for all people of Canada.

As you seek to be a "sustainable community," how will artists and the arts be sustained? The arts and humanities, by definition, defines what we aspire to be.

By all accounts, the successful hosting of the Salt Lake Games, with nearly 80 countries and 3,500 athletes represented, gave Utah the unrivaled privilege of "broadening our understanding and celebration of the human experience." So the big question for Whistler, even now, is what to do beyond the Games?

Do you fold up your tent on March 22, 2010 following the Paralympics and say we achieved what we aspired to be? Hardly. The Olympics for Whistler is a beginning and an opportunity.

I believe these opportunities should be celebrated with an annual gathering following the Games - a "Spirit of the Games" festival if you will - that reflects on what will be great accomplishments. This festival can also point to your future plans and aspirations as a community, business and cultural center, and recreational and sports Mecca.

Now many will remind use that we are in the information age. Perhaps so, but we can merge high tech with high touch. The arts do this very well. And, if in the information age, talent is king, than, in the arts, creativity is the "coin of the realm."

The art and culture experiences I speak of, delivered by MY Place, the Whistler Film Festival, Arts Council, Museum & Archives, Public Library, Forum for Dialogue, and many other groups now in existence, or yet to be formed, are not for the privileged elite. Sadly, it too often seems so. But, increasingly, the economic numbers connected to the cultural sector are becoming as impressive as some of the programmed experiences of the distinguished organizations I just mentioned.

I can't speak with any authority on the economic impact of the arts in Canada. But, the numbers from America in this regard are impressive.

According to the most comprehensive impact study of the nonprofit arts industry ever conducted in the United States in 2003, (Americans for the Arts) America's nonprofit arts industry generates \$134 billion in economic activity every year, resulting in \$24.4 billion in federal, state, and local tax revenues. The \$134 billion total includes \$53.2 billion in spending by arts organizations and \$80.8 billion in event-related spending by arts audiences. That's 4.85 million full-time equivalent jobs. And, that's one savvy audience.

In Utah in 1999, payroll for nearly 21,000 full and part-time cultural sector employees exceeded \$40 million. Cultural organizations spent \$33 million on the purchase of goods and services alone. The Sundance Film Festival alone infuses annually \$42 million dollars into the economy of the State of Utah. And, \$25 million dollars of that stays in Park City, Utah, another mountain resort community.

As Whistler embraces tourism, know that a growing number of visitors are becoming special-interest travelers who rank the arts, heritage, and other cultural activities as one of the top five reasons for traveling. In the U.S, nearly 93 million Americans say

they included at least one cultural, art, heritage, or historic activity or event while traveling in 2001. [According to a survey conducted by the Travel Industry Association of America.]

Cultural travelers spend more (\$631 vs. \$457), travel longer (5.1 nights vs. 3.4 nights), and use more hotels, motels, & B&B's' (62% vs. 56%.)

This profile resembles, in many ways, what will be your Olympic visitors and future visitors to Whistler. So, I'd like to suggest that Whistler has much to gain by capitalizing on its own inherent beauty, culture and recreational opportunities using the Olympics, not as a panacea, but as a springboard.

The Olympics, in the minds of many people, placed Utah on the map. The images of our mountains and desert landscape, sport venues, cultural centers, national parks and the faces of volunteers and athletes are indelibly fixed on film. The images of Whistler will be equally compelling.

Celebrating, in some substantive form, an annual recognition of the Games with international sport competitions, major local, national, and international arts, culture, and food experiences, along with visits to Canada's heritage sites, makes sense from an economic and community development perspective. It will also allow Whistlerites to relive their participation in the Games

and the atmosphere surrounding the Games they helped create.

Considerable detail has already gone into the planning of the 2010 Games. Much more planning and dialogue will continue right up to January 15th, 2010 when you begin your Olympic Arts Festival and the evening of February 12th, 2010 when the Games themselves begin. For me, the lessons learned from my Olympic experience have helped inform my own ideas about how to organize and champion an annual celebration. I offer seven (7) suggestions for your consideration:

- 1) Don't miss the opportunity of February 2011 (twenty-eleven)!
- 2) Work together. If every there was an idea to bring together restaurants, hotels, Ski Associations, arts councils, Province history, the airport authority, the athletic foundation, sports commission, film commission, travel councils, and chambers, - this is it.
- 3) Make it easy for the participant resident/visitor. Integrate the marketing, advertising and ticketing of all organizations into one festival plan. Who said sports activities can't be marketed alongside cultural events? Current web-site technology holds wonderful opportunities. Over 85% of the Salt Lake Olympic Games tickets were purchased on-line.

4) Make transportation convenient and, to the extent possible, seamless. The concept employed during the Salt Lake Games where your ticket to an event (cultural or sport) allowed for free or low cost transportation to that event is critical. This also provides a way for the community to "show off" its innovation in transportation systems, its Valley Trail, or improvements of the Sea to Sky highway.

5) Advance the field. The media attention that I suspect will surround February of 2010 provides an opportunity to tell the story of the future of Whistler, its advances in sustainability, the Sea to Sky trail, newly commissioned works by arts organizations, etc. - you get the idea.

6) Keep it affordable and intelligent. Unlike during the Olympics, Whistler cannot count on, as much as it wishes to, vast corporate hospitality groups with extravagant expense accounts paying considerable prices for the experiences you create.

7) Most importantly, commemorate, in a significant way, the contribution Canadians and Whistlerites will have made in advancing the Olympic Movement through the hosting of the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games of 2010. Think of it as a great big reunion with guests from throughout the



world. This annual celebration gives you the opportunity to relive the great atmosphere of the Games and to thank those volunteers and community leaders who made it possible.

The inspiration of the First Nations peoples and those who first settled Whistler in the early 1900's; the work of the Vancouver Organizing Committee, and the individuals and organizations who labor for a sustainable future for Whistler today, reminds me of the early pioneers of the American West.

I've thought a lot lately about Pioneers. I work for one. The word in this community, I suspect, needs no explanation. I am rather fond, though, of one of Webster's definitions of pioneer - "a person or group that originates or helps open up a new line of thought or activity or a new method or technical development."

This definition seems so aligned with renewing Whistler's vision, looking beyond the Games, and meeting global and local

challenges.

Olympians and those who are committed to advancing this movement of peace, including many in this room, are pioneers. The new immigrant communities are pioneers. And, perhaps, through our thinking here today, brought about by this community's hosting of the 2010 Games, we can all, in our own way, open up a new line of thought.

Thank you for your time.

**About the Author:**

Raymond T. Grant is artistic director of the 2002 Olympic Arts Festival. Prior to joining the Salt Lake Olympic Committee, he headed the performing arts and film area of a division of the Walt Disney Company - The Disney Institute. He previously served as general manager of the American Symphony Orchestra in Carnegie Hall in New York City. He is a graduate of the University of Kansas and holds a Master of Arts degree in Arts Administration from New York University.

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<sup>1</sup> Evidence given to Whistler Chamber of Commerce, British Columbia, Canada, July 21, 2005.