

# All's well that . . .

**W**ho says Canadians sit on their hands when it comes to supporting the arts? Not the National Arts Centre — at least not any more.

When hockey star Alexei Yashin pulled back on his million-dollar gift to the NAC amid allegations of secret side deals, he and his parents were called fair-weather patrons. As for NAC, it was not only hit with a shortfall, its fundraisers looked — well, incompetent is the kindest spin we can put on their colossal fumble with the “pucks and tux” donation. Let's just say that after having been supported by the federal government for most of its 30-year existence, NAC needs remedial training to impress upon it that the key to successful fundraising is keeping the money, not giving half of it back.

But disaster was transformed into triumph when news of the sad tale hit the streets. Instead of ridicule, the beleaguered arts centre was showered with

spontaneous gifts worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. Three people made unsolicited donations in a single day. Pianist Anton Kuerti offered \$1,000. Then Michael Potter, founder of an Ottawa software firm, promised \$200,000. The largest gift came from Toronto businessman Grant Burton, who offered \$400,000 and promised to double that if the NAC can come up with a matching \$800,000 by the end of March.

The Kuerti gift, while generous, is not too surprising. But the other two benefactors have no connection to the arts. They simply dug into their pockets in response to a bad situation. Mr. Burton, who has been to the NAC only once, had the best explanation: “The arts are a very important part of any nation's identity,” he explained, “and I believe the nation's capital deserves a place like this.”

All of which goes to show that there is no such thing as bad publicity.