



Musical notes and heartstrings

by Catherine Morrison

This issue's meander through the back streets and byways of public sector purchasing has turned up a number of buys that should strike some chords and tug at the heartstrings.

In the late summer, the National Library posted a requirement for the construction and custom crating of a travelling exhibit that chronicles the life and work of Canada's legendary jazz pianist Oscar Peterson.

The exhibit, which opened at the Canadian embassy in Washington on November 13, 2002, is an abbreviated version of a show that was mounted by the Library in Ottawa in 1999-2000. The original exhibit (www.nlc-bnc.ca/4/2/index-e.html) featured some 200 items from the Library's Peterson collection, including photos, posters, record jackets, telegrams, awards and films. That show turned out to be "far more popular than forecast" says Randal Ware, the Library's director of Programs, chalking up an estimated 25,000 visitors.

One of the items the Library required for the travelling show is a sound dome. The dome will enclose a unique highlight of the show, a Disklavier, a sort of updated electronic player piano made by Yamaha, one of the world's best-known piano manufacturers.

The Disklavier plays works recorded by Peterson. As it plays, its keys rise and fall, just as though the legend himself were sitting at the keyboard. The sound dome is required to prevent the music "from bleeding into the rest of the exhibit," says Ware. You might wonder who among Oscar Peterson fans would be offended by his music spilling over into a space devoted to the man. Probably no one, but the reason for containing the Disklavier's sound is to allow an undistracted experience of audio from the film component of the exhibit.

The custom crating requirement is also interesting. Crating must meet stringent new European rules for the import of anything made of wood that might carry unwanted pests or disease. Although everything in the travelling show is a copy, "we still can't risk fumigation once it gets to Europe," says Ware. The exhibit is headed for Paris in June 2003, and potentially for Japan and Australia thereafter. The Library hopes to tour it across Canada in 2004-2005, starting in Montreal, Peterson's birthplace.

Music has certainly been in the air of late in the public sector procurement sphere. Two recent Request for Proposals (RFPs) concerned the supply and repair of musical instruments for Canada's armed forces cadet bands, which has been stretching its musical instrument inventory a very long way, not to mention wringing a lifespan out of those instruments that would horrify your average musician.

The cadet band in St-Jean sur Richelieu, Quebec, has \$25 K this year to buy badly needed replacements – 55 instruments, including flutes, clarinets, saxophones, drums, and of course, a set of bagpipes. Not many new instruments, considering that there are some 3,000 musicians between the ages of 12 and 18 in the Quebec/Ottawa region's program.

According to Major Vincent Lime, in charge of the music program for the region, the cadet program is able to supply only 500 of the instruments required. The bulk of those come by way of the regular

forces' bands, which first send them to the Reserve bands when they are their last legs. The Reserve bands wear them out a little more than pass them on to the cadet bands. No wonder the bands also have to purchase repair services, as the program in Cold Lake, Alberta was attempting to do in a recent posting on MERX.

The cadets, their parents, or their schools, supply most of the instruments, says Major Lime. But cadets in the program can achieve the equivalent of entry to the Royal Conservatory of Music Level Six – well worth sticking with it.

And worth it, no doubt, to all those people who are treated to performances by the cadet bands, which can play a surprisingly wide range of music, says Lime. His band repertoire includes not only the usual marches, but also such pieces as Beethoven's *1812 Overture*, the *Fanfares* from Tchaikovsky's *Ode to Joy*, not to mention today's popular tunes.

On another note, guaranteed to pluck at the heartstrings, is the story behind a terse posting by the City of Ottawa for a vendor "to supply and deliver a Stuffed Animal Replica of EMS Mascot." What could they be thinking, buying stuffed toys with taxpayer dollars?

EMS is the city's Emergency Medical Services. City spokesman Chris Wightman, says that the city-run paramedical service is part of a North America-wide "Care Bear" program that helps emergency services deal with emergencies involving children. According to Wightman, children can be particularly intimidated during an emergency, say a fire, making it tough for a big, scary uniformed person to help them.

Under Care Bear-type initiatives, emergency personnel carry stuffed animals into an emergency situation and when they encounter a child, they offer the warm, fuzzy toy. "An instant bond is created," says Wightman, "which makes it much easier for emergency personnel to do the job" of rescue, or whatever might be required in a given crisis.

Ottawa's EMS has chosen a golden retriever as its mascot – a stuffed replica of which will be used in educational outreach activities, as well as for creating that crucial bond with tiny types needing rescue and retrieval. ♪♪

Catherine Morrison, a writer based in Chelsea, Quebec, has been published in the Ottawa Citizen and the Globe and Mail's print and online editions, as well as in Canadian Consumer, Asia Pacific Magazine, the Edmonton Journal and C.A.R.P. Magazine. She was a full-time writer/broadcaster for CBC Network Television and CBC TV and Radio, Winnipeg and a contributing editor and columnist for Winnipeg Magazine.

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