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MONUMENTS FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
A DESIGN ANALYSIS OF SIX MAJOR THEATRE BUILDINGS
IN TORONTO'S THEATRE DISTRICT

by

Beryl Corber B.A.

A (thesis) submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Canadian Studies

Carleton University

OTTAWA, Ontario

December 7, 1994.

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"Monuments for the Performing Arts.
A Decision Analysis of Six Major Theatre Buildings
in Toronto's Theatre District"

submitted by Beryl Corber, B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the social and technological phenomena that determined the design decisions for the six extant theatres built during the twentieth century in Toronto's theatre district. The analysis demonstrates that five interrelated factors consistently affected these decisions. In order to show the influence a given era had upon design, the theatres are studied within the context of three time periods.

By demonstrating how design decisions are part of the continual process of societal change, this documentation creates a history of the theatre as a building type in the City of Toronto during the twentieth century. This information provides heritage conservationists with a means to better evaluate the unique architectural contribution these historic theatres make to the cultural fabric of Toronto.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
DEDICATION	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	x
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1 THE ROYAL ALEXANDRA THEATRE	7
CHAPTER 2 THE ELGIN AND WINTER GARDEN THEATRES	31
CHAPTER 3 THE PANTAGES THEATRE	59
CHAPTER 4 THE O'KEEFE CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS ...	78
CHAPTER 5 THE ST. LAWRENCE CENTRE FOR THE ARTS	103
CHAPTER 6 THE PRINCESS OF WALES THEATRE	123
CONCLUSION	144
ILLUSTRATIONS	151
BIBLIOGRAPHY	229
ILLUSTRATION CREDITS	238

FIGURES

Figure	Description	Page
1.1	Façade of The Royal Alexandra Theatre	152
1.2	American Theatre longitudinal section	153
1.3	American Theatre ground floor plan	154
1.4	Royal Alexandra Theatre plan	155
1.5	Trafalgar Theatre, London	156
1.6	Gaiety Theatre, New York	157
1.7	Royal Alexandra Theatre boxes	158
1.8	Order Dorique A Study of Shades	159
2.1	Shea's Victoria Theatre, Toronto	160
2.2	The American Theatre and Roof	161
2.3	Elgin/Winter Garden proposed site plan	162
2.4	Elgin/Winter Garden plans	163
2.5	Elgin/Winter Garden longitudinal section	164
2.6	Abbey Theatre, New York	165
2.7	Elgin auditorium	166
2.8	Winter Garden loges	167
2.9	Elgin auditorium dome	168
2.10	Elgin/Winter Garden Grand Staircase	169
2.11	Elgin/Winter Garden court elevation	170
2.12	Elgin auditorium plan	171
2.13	Elgin/Winter Garden, Victoria St. elevation	172
2.14	Elgin/Winter Garden, Yonge St. elevation	173
2.15	Winter Garden auditorium	174
2.16	Elgin/Winter Garden plan of lobby corridor	175
2.17	Elgin auditorium seating plan revision	176
3.1	Shea's Hippodrome, Toronto	177
3.2	Regent Theatre, Toronto	178
3.3	Interior of Regent Theatre	179
3.4	Pantages Theatre plan of lobby corridor	180
3.5	Pantages Theatre longitudinal section	181
3.6	Pantages Theatre lobby corridor	182
3.7	Pantages Theatre lower lobby and auditorium	183
3.8	Pantages Theatre auditorium theatre boxes	184
3.9	Pantages Theatre balcony	185
3.10	Pantages Theatre proscenium arch	186
3.11	Elgin Theatre proscenium arch	187
3.12	Pantages Theatre, Yonge Street elevation	188
3.13	Pantages Theatre, Victoria Street elevation	189
3.14	Vancouver Capitol lobby corridor	190
3.15	Pantages Theatre main floor plan	191
3.16	Pantages auditorium dome	192

Figure	Description	Page
4.1	O'Keefe Centre site plan	193
4.2	Benvenuto Place Apartment Hotel	194
4.3	Rendering of O'Keefe Centre	195
4.4	O'Keefe Centre ground floor plan	196
4.5	O'Keefe Centre plan of lower ground floor	197
4.6	O'Keefe Centre plan of balcony foyer	198
4.7	O'Keefe Centre foyer mural	199
4.8	Plan of Royal Festival Hall, London	200
4.9	O'Keefe Centre auditorium seating	201
4.10	O'Keefe Centre model	202
4.11	Lever House, New York City	203
4.12	Kleinhaus Music Hall, Buffalo, New York	204
4.13	Toronto City Hall	205
5.1	August 1965 plan of SLC	206
5.2	November 1966 revised plan of SLC	207
5.3	SLC site plan	208
5.4	SLC site plan	209
5.5	SLC longitudinal section	210
5.6	SLC first floor plan	211
5.7	SLC second floor plan	212
5.8	SLC plans before and after renovations	213
5.9	SLC façade after renovation	214
5.10	SLC diagram of seating arrangement	215
5.11	SLC ground floor plan	216
5.12	SLC original façade	217
6.1	Princess of Wales ground floor plan	218
6.2	Princess of Wales orchestra plan	219
6.3	Princess of Wales balcony plan	220
6.4	Princess of Wales longitudinal section	221
6.5	Princess of Wales, diagram of seating plan	222
6.6	Princess of Wales façade	223
6.7	Collage by Frank Stella	224
6.8	Princess of Wales lobby mural	225
6.9	Princess of Wales auditorium dome mural	226
6.10	Princess of Wales auditorium side boxes	227
6.11	Princess of Wales lobby	228

ABBREVIATIONS

JRAIC Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada

SLC St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts

TAF Toronto Arts Foundation

INTRODUCTION

Spiro Kostoff has defined architecture as the material theatre of human activity. It is a discipline inseparable from the context which it serves. Throughout history, the type of structure, its form, materials and interior design reflect the economic conditions, technological advances and social norms of the times.

Whereas certain building types did not exist prior to the Industrial Revolution, e.g. factories, railway stations or airports, theatre buildings have formed a part of architectural history since communal places for observing ritual or spectacle became part of the human experience. The Greek word "theatron" from which the word theatre derives means "a place for seeing".

Toronto is the only Canadian city that can claim a distinct theatre district. The oldest surviving building among the six under study, the Royal Alexandra Theatre, dates back to 1907. The newest, the Princess of Wales Theatre, opened in 1993. Together they serve as historical bookends enfolding the theatrical architectural legacy of this area in the twentieth century.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the social and technological phenomena that determined the design decisions for the six extant theatres built during this century in

Toronto's theatre district. These theatres are the Royal Alexandra (1907), the Elgin (1913) and Winter Garden (1914), the Pantages (1920), the O'Keefe Centre for the Performing Arts (1960), the St. Lawrence Centre for the Performing Arts (1970) and the Princess of Wales (1993). These design decisions were consistently affected by five interrelated factors.

The first of these factors was need. The theatres were built and designed primarily to accommodate a specific type of performance. The required facility was either non-existent or in short supply at the time of the theatre's construction. The type of theatre was therefore responsible for the form of the theatre building.

The second factor involved the input of the architect. His architectural training and design philosophy would affect the interpretation of the project and therefore its ultimate design. How the architect chose to adapt his architectural ideology to the Toronto context is also examined.

Despite the most imaginative ideas, the plans could not be implemented without the corresponding technology, the third factor. The importance of particular technologies and their effect upon the design are discussed. It is noted that the latest technology would be incorporated into the design of the theatres because those theatre owners who

could boast having the most up-to-date facility would gain a competitive edge over their rivals.

The fourth factor concerned the influence that social norms and patron expectations exercised on theatre design. As examples, the habit of circulating at intermission, the consumption of liquor and food in a theatre and the needs of the disabled have affected design. Customs change over time and new attitudes are correspondingly reflected in theatre plans.

The last factor to be considered was the restrictions - the limitations placed on the design process in the name of economics, conformity and safety. Financial constraints had a direct bearing on the design because the size of the project and the choice of materials were related to costs. Site selection was often contingent upon economics as well since initial costs and property taxes varied with the size and location of the lots. Building codes dictated structural specifications. As well, city bylaws for buildings that were places of public assembly were concerned primarily with patron safety. Regulations for fireproofing, e.g. the location of dressing rooms, and the number of exits and fire escapes, dictated many design decisions. These issues were interrelated but all affected the final design.

The relative influence of these five factors differed for each theatre. As an example, issues such as

fireproofing which are discussed very extensively in the earlier theatres are given less discussion in later ones. This is because safer building materials and modern fire extinguishing methods have been incorporated into the design process thus reducing the need to consider safety as a separate factor of the design.

In order to show the relevance of a given era, the theatres are studied within the context of three time periods. The first period spans the years 1907 to 1920 when the Royal Alexandra, the Elgin and Winter Garden and the Pantages theatres were built. During this time the legitimate stage shared the limelight with vaudeville, the era's most popular form of mass entertainment. As well, the motion picture industry had started to develop and would eventually affect the design of vaudeville houses.

The second period examined spans the sixties and early seventies when the O'Keefe and St. Lawrence centres were built. Post-war optimism and a booming economy, as well as an emerging social consciousness, gave rise to a new era of publicly funded theatre complexes. A rising nationalism in Canada encouraging Canadian performance, in part fostered by our impending Centennial, resulted in a commitment to public funding of the arts not previously seen in Toronto. These theatres were not privately owned nor was profit a prime motive in their creation. Boards of directors not

individual owners now dictated design.

The third period focuses on the eighties to the present when the Princess of Wales Theatre was built. This is the era of the mega-musical, a technically complex form of theatre. The complicated specifications for these types of productions plus the demands of a sophisticated and affluent audience have necessitated a theatre design that relied even more heavily upon the expertise and collaboration of architects, engineers and interior designers.

To obtain the necessary information to prepare this thesis, the following methodology was adopted. Each theatre was first studied during an on-site visit. All the accessible areas of the buildings were observed. In many cases, renovations had altered the original format of certain sections. However general layout was consistent with the initial design.

Archival material was then consulted. As many primary sources as possible were examined, especially for the decision-making process leading up to the creation of the theatres. Interviews with architects and theatre managers were conducted. Where primary sources were unavailable, secondary sources were reviewed. These included texts, newspaper and periodical articles, and information brochures.

By documenting the changes of design in these six

buildings, the theatres are now seen as a collectivity that represents the history of the theatre as a building type in the City of Toronto during the twentieth century. This permits heritage conservationists and social historians to better evaluate the unique architectural contribution these historic theatres make to the cultural fabric of Toronto.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ROYAL ALEXANDRA THEATRE

"It is therefore with much gratification that we announce the success of a local Canadian architect in having executed one of the most praiseworthy theatres, from an architectural standpoint, on the continent of America" ("Royal Alexandra Theatre", 1907:37).

The architect cited was John McIntosh Lyle, a Toronto practitioner who had opened his office in the city less than two years previously. The acclaimed building was the Royal Alexandra Theatre on King Street West (Figure 1.1). The publication was Construction, one of three Canadian journals devoted specifically to architectural discussion (Crossman, 1987:3).

Theatre design had developed into a specialty, and because of that, "...little or no consideration has been given to local architects in the manner of planning high-classed theatres on this continent" ("Royal Alexandra Theatre", 1907:37). The article further states that "This structure has been selected for illustration as an example of the great improvement taking place in the architecture of the country, and also as an instance of the ability of Canadian architects to design and execute buildings of the

most monumental character and involving the most intricate problems the prospective builder may confront them with" (1907:37). That Lyle had been chosen to design the theatre was a coup for Canadian architecture.

The national pride evidenced in the announcement was testament to a growing confidence and belief in the competency of Canadian architects. The year 1895 marked the beginning of a dramatic change in attitude towards Canadian architecture. Practitioners were coming to recognize that, despite the inevitable inclusion of foreign elements in the design of Canadian buildings, the architecture of the land should reflect the country that produced it (Crossman, 1987:3). During the next twenty-five years, professional architectural associations were formed in Ontario and Quebec (1987:34) and the standards for architectural education within these provinces became more stringent (1987:56). Thus by the time of the Royal Alexandra's construction, Canadian architectural publications such as Construction were quick to laud the achievements of a "native son".

Ironically, Lyle had not trained in Canada but at the Yale School of the Fine Arts in New Haven, Connecticut during the years 1891-2 and at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris from 1892 to 1896. He lived in New York City from 1896 until his return to Canada in 1905 (Hunt, 1982:132). However he had been raised in Hamilton (1982:10) and because

he had now opened his own practice in Toronto, he was readily embraced by the emerging Canadian architectural establishment as one of their own.

It is not known why Lyle was selected to design the Royal Alexandra Theatre. The commission came into the New York office of Carrère and Hastings, a prominent Beaux-Arts architectural firm with which John Lyle was associated during his last three years in the city. The project may have been assigned to Lyle because he was the Canadian on staff (Hunt, 1982:21,69). Despite the increased confidence in Canadian architects, many clients still wanted the prestige and expertise of a large American firm.

Even in later years, this view was encouraged by, among others, Eustace G. Bird, Carrère and Hastings' Canadian representative in Toronto (Bird Scrapbook:5), who stated in 1910, that because Canada was a new country, its architecture was understandably undeveloped and that "Canadians should go to New York to obtain the best results". Furthermore Canadians should deal with the firm of Carrère and Hastings "conceded to be the leading architects of North America" (Bird Scrapbook:68).

The Royal Alex was the brainchild of Cawthra Mulock, an enterprising Toronto businessman of only twenty-one years of age. In 1905, along with three other associates, Robert Smith, Stephen Haas and Lawrence Solman, he established the

Alexandra Company for the purpose of constructing the Royal Alexandra Theatre. A royal patent was granted to them by 1906, so that the word "royal" could legitimately appear in the title. The theatre was named in honour of Queen Alexandra, consort of King Edward VII (Saddlemeyer, 1990:230). It was their intention to provide the City of Toronto with a comfortable and up-to-date cultural facility (O'Neill, 1976:1). In the context of attitudes towards Canadian architects, a logical move would be to seek out the services of a leading American architectural firm with several theatre commissions to its credit, such as Carrère and Hastings (Bird Scrapbook:3).

The site chosen was the former playing field of the original Upper Canada College on King Street West (O'Neill, 1976:50), across the street from the Lieutenant-Governor's residence and thus removed from the commercial area further east. The large lot, one hundred feet wide by eighty-five feet deep (1976:50), provided ample space for a building that was designed as a cultural landmark for the city. As a monumental structure, it had to occupy a prominent position on the street. Therefore no consideration was given towards compromising the façade to save on taxes as was done for later commercial theatres.

By their very nature, all theatre buildings contain four essential areas. An example of an early theatre that

illustrates this is Charles C. Haight's 1893 American Theatre in New York City (Figure 1.2). The ground floor plan of this theatre (Figure 1.3) shows the location of three of these areas. The first is the administrative and circulation space that contains the entrance lobby, ticket booth, manager's office (if present), the foyers and retiring rooms.

The next section is the auditorium. At this time the halls were arranged with ground floor seating and two balconies. Boxes were generally included (Figure 1.2). The third area is the performers' domain - the stage, wings and accompanying dressing rooms (Figure 1.3). Rooms for props and set storage (if present) would be included in this section. Lastly, there is a mechanical area that contains the building's heating and ventilation systems (Figure 1.2). The interior plan of every theatre differs with respect to the layout and proportions of these sections.

Lyle had never before built a theatre, but he had worked for John Galen Howard who had designed the Majestic Theatre in Boston (Hunt, 1982:69). As well, Carrère and Hastings had been responsible for the remodeling of the Metropolitan Opera House and the rebuilding of the Empire Theatre in New York City (Bird Scrapbook:3). Lyle may well have gained experience in theatre design during his association with them (Hunt, 1982:69).

The heart of the design of Lyle's buildings lay in the interior plan and not in the outward appearance (Hunt, 1982:27). Beaux-Arts education in the 19th century stressed the importance of clearly articulated floor plans (Calloway, 1991:384). Thus in designing the Royal Alex, Lyle first arranged the spaces in the theatre according to their function. The ground floor of the building was divided into three distinct sections: an administrative and circulation area, the auditorium proper, and the stage and accompanying dressing rooms. Each area comprised roughly one third of the total space (Figure 1.4). The mechanical area was in the basement (O'Neill, 1976:63).

The Beaux-Arts dicta of symmetry and axial planning evident throughout the ground floor plan are particularly noticeable in the administrative area. The box office, manager's room, men's smoking room, cloakroom and lavatory, and gallery entrance on the right are balanced with the owner's room, ladies' waiting room, cloakroom and lavatory, and gallery exit on the left (Figure 1.4).

After World War I, changing norms deemed it acceptable for both male and female theatre-goers to circulate at intervals (O'Neill, 1976:55). However custom at the time of the Royal Alex construction dictated that "ladies rarely leave their seats during the performance, and only a slight proportion of the men make use of the foyers" (qtd. in

Russell, 1989a:62). Capacious foyers were then not required, although Lyle designed a fairly large ground floor lobby. Innovative as he was, Lyle could not have foreseen future social attitudes. Therefore the additional lobby space was included to achieve the necessary axial balance required for the floor plan. The tenets of the Beaux-Arts School played a significant role in Lyle's design decisions. Although the foyer space is not as large as that found in theatres today, for its time it was considered more than ample and would come to be appreciated by succeeding audiences.

Patrons at the balcony level had access to a relatively large promenade foyer which offered a tearoom (O'Neill, 1976:59). The consumption of spirits was not acceptable in a theatre in Ontario during these times (Lindsay, 1986:8) and bar areas were therefore not included in the design of theatres as they are today. The balcony foyer also reflects Lyle's awareness of such spaces in European theatres where lounges were provided on every level often with accompanying refreshment rooms such as in Walter Emden's Trafalgar Theatre in London, England (Figure 1.5).

The auditorium drew comments for its dimensions. It measured 75 feet wide by 66 feet deep. A reporter for the Toronto World noted that the area was "broader and shallower than is usual" (qtd. in O'Neill 1976:57). This was

intentional for two reasons. Firstly, by having a shallower auditorium, more of the audience was closer to the stage which meant they could hear better. This was the era before mega-musicals and body mikes. And although well trained actors could amply project their voices, spectators in close proximity to them did "relieve the performers of considerable strain and worry in making their voices audible to the audience" ("Royal Alexandra Theatre", 1907:40). Secondly, what was lost in depth was recovered in breadth (1907:40), so that seating capacity was not sacrificed. The theatre sat 1525 persons (Lindsay, 1989:8).

Lyle did not attempt to cram as many people as possible into his theatre. Unlike many theatre builders who wanted to squeeze every possible penny out of their investment and therefore instructed their architects to plan the "auditorium so that every inch could be stuffed as full of people as the law allowed" (qtd. in O'Neill, 1976:54), Cawthra Mulock built his theatre primarily as a "public and cultural service" (MacDonald, 1957:28) for the citizens of Toronto. His intent was in part philanthropic and not solely financial. Not motivated by greed, but by function, comfort and beauty, Lyle's generous seating plan would please current and future audiences who enjoyed the additional space offered at the Royal Alex, space not found in many older theatres (O'Neill, 1976:73).

This trend was to continue. When Edwin Mirvish refurbished the theatre in 1963, the seating capacity was further reduced to 1497 seats, as he felt that "these seats and the profit they generated could be sacrificed for more leg room" (Lindsay, 1986:10).

The balconies were not supported by pillars, an impediment to acoustics but more importantly to sight lines. Instead, they were "carried on heavy girders of clear span from wall to wall with steel cantilevers resting on same" ("Royal Alexandra Theatre", 1907:41). This was considered very daring engineering, but made possible because the entire building was constructed using a system of lattice and cantilevered grids of structural steel (Lindsay, 1986:6). Claims were made that the Royal Alexandra Theatre was the first theatre in North America to employ the cantilever principle (O'Neill, 1976:64). However the New Amsterdam Theatre built in 1903 in New York City by Henry Herts and Hugh Tallant was equipped with cantilevered balconies (Russell, 1989a:33). Nonetheless, it was the first such theatre in Canada, thereby setting the standard for future buildings of this genre.

Due to their location at the side of the auditorium, box seats tended to give a poorer view of the stage. A photograph showing the position of the box seats in the 1894 Gaiety Theatre in Boston confirms this fact (Figure 1.6).

To improve the sight lines of this area in the Royal Alexandra, Lyle projected the boxes out from the side wall well past the proscenium opening (O'Neill, 1976:59) and angled them to face the stage more directly (Figure 1.4). The upper boxes shared the same orientation as the lower ones with the additional feature of a two-tiered floor (Figure 1.7). Now the privacy of a box seat was not compromised by poor sight lines.

The use of boxes also emphasized that the Royal Alex was a venue for the most respectable members of society (Middleton, 1923:404). Also as the provincial capital, Toronto was home to the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, who, as his majesty's representative, "required a place apart from his people, yet visible to all of them" (O'Neill, 1976:58). Protocol was satisfied with the inclusion of boxes.

The sight lines in the Royal Alex were perfect (Hunt, 1982:69). No columns obstructed the view. The 652 seats in the orchestra were angled to directly face the stage so that it was possible to see clearly from any seat in the house (Figure 1.4). The shallow auditorium ensured that patrons in the last row would also see well because they would not be that far from the stage. Considering that it was quite acceptable in these days for patrons to see only two-thirds of the stage (Russell, 1990:135), providing such excellent

sight lines was indeed remarkable. Because the balcony was curved, every seat looked to the stage. For the sight lines to work properly in the gallery, the floor was very steeply raked at a 55 degree angle (Lindsay, 1986:8).

The acoustics in the theatre were excellent (Hunt, 1982:70). The plaster has relief sculptures decorating the box and balcony fronts and the curved arrangement of the balconies augmented the acoustics by acting as sound reverberators. American theatre architect Arthur Meloy recommended that "the depth of any theatre where speaking parts are to be given should not exceed 75 feet from the curtain line to the rear seats, as the human voice will not carry more than that distance without straining" (1916:3). The sixty-six foot depth of the hall ensured that all patrons would be able to hear clearly. As the ventilation system moved the air about in the theatre, it created air currents over which sound would travel. Thus the moving currents of air also contributed to the acoustics in the theatre (O'Neill, 1976:63).

The dimensions of the stage house were 75'6" wide by 58'4" deep by 86'6" high (O'Neill, 1976:56). The actual stage floor was just under 42 feet wide by 35 feet deep, and was flanked by 17-foot wing spaces (Lindsay, 1986:11). The stage floor was built with twenty-eight movable sections, one of which contained a trap door. If a trap was required

for a certain production, the section with the trap door was moved into that position on the stage, thus eliminating the need to cut holes in the floor every time one was necessary ("Royal Alexandra Theatre", 1907:41). In addition, "the stage had two bridges, sections of the floor which could be raised to varying levels" (O'Neill, 1976:56). These features not only contributed to more visually interesting performances but also minimized the amount of labour required to produce the effects.

The stage size was the only area where Lyle did not have a completely free hand. Since the Royal Alex was built to accommodate road shows supplied by the Shubert theatrical circuit (O'Neill 1976:42), like other theatres on the circuit, it had to conform to the size of the travelling sets.

The proscenium opening measured 38 feet wide by 40 feet high. The height was lower by ten feet than that in the nearby Princess Theatre (1889), but within the range for a first-class house (O'Neill, 1976:55-56). To achieve the best sight lines, a balance had to be struck between the size of the stage volume, its appropriateness for sets and the number and placement of seats in the auditorium. Many factors had to be considered as they were all interrelated.

The theatre contained an orchestra pit, large enough to accommodate a full-sized theatre orchestra. The pit was

accessible from beneath the stage (Lindsay, 1986:8). The theatre had its own orchestra of ten players on staff (O'Neill, 1976:340).

The dressing rooms were located behind the stage (Figure 1.4) arranged in four tiers. They were cut off from the rest of the theatre by a solid brick wall and approached by fireproof staircases. This area also contained the chorus apartments, property rooms and a scene painting room ("Royal Alexandra Theatre", 1907:40).

Because the Royal Alex primarily housed touring productions, the theatre was not built with rehearsal space or with rooms for set construction and storage (O'Neill, 1907:56). A 1969 report by the Ontario Council for the Arts noted that this did present problems in later years when there were resident companies (Ontario Council, 1969:85). However, Robert Brockhouse, Literary Manager for Mirvish Productions affirmed that the theatre is still primarily a roadhouse for touring shows. And although the space behind the stage is not extensive, sets are easily loaded and unloaded as one production ends and another begins (Personal Interview, April 23, 1993).

Ornament, lavishly applied, served a decorative effect and was also used to convey the building's function as a theatre. Cornice entablatures above the boxes were sculpted with the words "Comedy" and "Tragedy". The classical

iconography of the balcony mouldings and the ornamentation used to decorate the proscenium and door surrounds, all designed by Lyle, harken back to ancient Greek and Roman theatres. These were very prominent, being "executed in large scale and in high relief" (Hunt, 1982:70). Even the newel posts were carved with classical references.

Ornament was a device used by Beaux-Arts architects to visually convey a building's purpose (Hunt, 1982:16). The decorative details associated with particular ideas from the past provided an architectural language through which buildings would "speak". It was in this tradition that Lyle formulated his designs (1982:16). Once the plan and elevation were established, painting, sculpture and other art forms were then called upon "to visually associate the building with its purpose" (1982:16).

The crimson act curtain designed by Lyle contained the Royal Emblem affirming the theatre's mandate from the crown. The mural over the proscenium, painted by the Toronto artist Frederick Sproston Challener called "Venus and Attendants Meeting Adonis and Cupid", was another classical reference as was the delicate plaster tracery in the centre of the ceiling ("Royal Alexandra Theatre", 1907:42).

Lyle's work, from his early commissions to his later designs, was marked by an unfailing integrity in his use of form and materials. He was an exceptionally gifted artist,

and one who would never compromise on quality. In addition to designing a building's exterior, Lyle would often be called upon to complete the interior features of the project, thus giving the composition a degree of unity and cohesiveness not generally found in other structures. For the Royal Alexandra Theatre, "Every feature of the detailing from hardware to the interior furnishings was designed by Lyle" (Hunt, 1982:70).

Once the spatial and decorative requirements of the theatre were satisfied, technical aspects such as fireproofing and ventilation then needed to be addressed. The Royal Alexandra was the first fireproof theatre in Canada (O'Neill, 1976:64). Preceding the time of its construction, buildings in general seemed to succumb to flames with alarming frequency (Sachs and Woodrow, 1968: 127-8), since much of their structure was composed of wood and stringent fire codes and fireproofing methods were not very well developed. Theatres seemed particularly vulnerable to destruction because of the use of additional inflammable materials for costumes, sets and props. "Most theatre fires had started on stage or backstage areas, and were fueled by quantities of highly combustible materials used for scenery" (Russell, 1990:172). Newly developed electric footlights were another potential hazard (Stagg, 1968:52).

The Grand Opera House (1881) in London, Ontario, burned on February 23, 1900 when a major property-room caught fire. The Russell Theatre (1897) in Ottawa burned down the following year (Benson, 1989:242,478). In March 1903, fire gutted the interior of the Toronto Opera House (Saddlemyer, 1990:226).

In many instances little loss of life was incurred as the blazes took place when the houses were closed (Meloy, 1916:70). However, on December 30, 1903, a devastating fire ravaged the Iroquois Street Theatre in Chicago, the flagship of the large New York-based Klaw and Erlander theatrical syndicate. In fifteen minutes, 602 of the 1600 people crammed into the building, lost their lives. Those in the balconies were hardest hit. The aisles were badly planned, many of the exit doors were sealed shut, and fire escapes were inadequate (Stagg, 1968:52).

Shock, horror and outrage reverberated across the United States. In the weeks that followed the Chicago fire, the city of New York amended its fire code for all theatres and places of public assembly (Stagg, 1968:52). At this time Lyle was practising architecture in New York City (Hunt, 1982:21). It would have been highly unlikely, given that it would be necessary for him to know current building codes, that the grave consequences of inadequate fireproofing would have escaped his attention.

When it came time to draft the plans for the Royal Alex, the issue of fireproofing seems to have invaded every design decision. "In its material and construction, the Royal Alexandra Theatre is as thoroughly fireproof in every particular as modern invention will permit" ("Royal Alexandra Theatre", 1907:37).

The walls were 2'5" thick (O'Neill, 1976:50) and were made of steel and concrete and faced with Indiana limestone ("Royal Alexandra Theatre", 1907:42). The floors, stairs, walls and roof contained nothing but non-combustible materials, and fire doors protected all exterior openings (1907:42). It must be noted, however, that the walls of the auditorium were panelled in quarter cut oak and the staircase foyers were finished in Circassian walnut (1907:42). [By 1913, Toronto bylaw 6401 stipulated that wood wainscoting up to six feet high was allowed, if the inside of the walls contained fireproof materials and that all woodwork, scenery, curtains and decorations be coated with fireproof paint (Russell, 1990:30).]

In the event of a fire, when lowered, the asbestos fire curtain would seal off the stage from the auditorium and would be sprayed with water at the same time ("Royal Alexandra Theatre", 1907:42). Ventilators above the stage house would open and suck out smoke and fumes (Lindsay, 1986:10). In addition a 12,900 Imperial gallon water tank

on the roof would supply any needed water to extinguish the flames (Lindsay, 1986:10).

Six sets of fire exits on each side of the auditorium and separate exits in the balcony and gallery with their own set of fire escapes ensured that a full house could be emptied in two-and-a-half minutes (Lindsay, 1986:10). The fire escapes led to courts or alleys on each side of the building ("Royal Alexandra Theatre", 1907:40).

To ensure that the doors would open, a special safety device termed a "push" lever measuring about fourteen inches long was placed horizontally across the centre of the door. Twenty pounds of applied pressure, that easily supplied by a youth, would cause the door to fly open in case a rush was made at the exit (1907:40).

These fire precautions were instituted many years before the City of Toronto amended its bylaws for theatre construction in 1913. This may have proven to be a factor in the longevity of the building, since the neighbouring Princess Theatre erected in 1889, without benefit of this fireproofing, burned in 1915 (Benson, 1989:433).

The Royal Alexandra was equipped with an early form of air-conditioning. The Toronto Telegram credits the theatre with being the first to have such a system in North America (O'Neill 1976:63). However, "by 1902, Alfred R. Wolff, a consulting engineer, had designed air-cooling systems for

Carnegie Hall and several other buildings in New York City" (Baker, 1989, 1:180).

The Telegram also stated that the model for the ventilation system came from the Gaiety Theatre in London, England. Lyle modified the system somewhat, by placing strong fans in the basement of the building (rather than in the attic as in the Gaiety), that drew the air over tons of ice that had been shovelled into large tanks (O'Neill, 1976:63). The air was forced up into the auditorium and came out of vents placed under the seats. An exhaust vent in the ceiling kept the air moving so that the temperature could be maintained at 65 degrees Fahrenheit during the summer (Lindsay, 1986:10). The technology was still in its infancy and the methods varied from inventor to inventor. However, by 1911, air-conditioning had become a recognized branch of engineering (Baker, 1989, 1:180).

In colder months, fresh air was drawn over two cast iron boilers and heated. It circulated in the theatre in the same manner (O'Neill, 1976:63).

As the various aspects of the theatre are described, it becomes very obvious how important function was in the design of the building. The architect must first address the issue of a theatre's fundamental purpose and then proceed to design its forms accordingly.

In 1908, American theatre architect Clarence Blackall

stated that "sight lines took precedence over every other consideration in modern theatre design" (qtd. in Russell, 1990:135). The acoustics too had to be excellent. Lyle's use of a shallow auditorium achieved both of these aims. Also, technology had advanced enough by 1907 to permit Lyle the use of cantilevered balconies which eliminated the use of support pillars that obstructed the view and were an impediment to the acoustics. The placement and decoration of the boxes, the steep rake of the gallery and the angle of the seats were all calculated to achieve the primary purpose of the plan - to allow the audience to hear and see as clearly as possible. Thus the purpose of every element in the theatre would come to dictate its form. Furthermore, the proximity of the audience to the stage created a sense of intimacy in the theatre, which facilitated the interaction of the performers with their audience. This interaction is the crux of live theatre and without its existence, a show does not reach its full potential. Creating this atmosphere is then a crucial aspect of the design.

Lyle's Beaux-Arts education taught him to analyse the requirements of each design problem. By responding to the fundamental needs of a theatre building, he created a playhouse of legitimate theatricality and lasting worth.

The École des Beaux-Arts promoted the use of the latest

technology and its architects had no difficulty reconciling the modern functions of the building with the use of historically derived detail (Calloway, 1991:385). That Lyle included every modern convenience in the Royal Alex again demonstrates his integration of the school's principles into his design decisions.

Another fundamental precept was a division between function and ornament. "In the Beaux-Arts system, there existed an inherent dichotomy in the design process. The plan and basic form were created separately from the application of any style, ornament or decoration" (Hunt, 1982:15-16). The system was flexible enough to allow the application of a variety of styles (1982:18). Thus once all the physical requirements of the theatre were satisfied, Lyle was free to embellish the building in the style that was most appropriate for the theatre. He chose an interpretation of late French Renaissance architecture referred to as Louis XVI, its classical references redolent of ancient meeting places (Figure 1.1).

The École stressed the importance of surface, light and volume in a composition and taught these techniques by assigning drawing projects to its students (Hunt, 1982:12-13). A drawing that Lyle did during his first term at the École called a "Study of Shades - Ordre Dorique" (Figure 1.8) illustrates the balance between areas of darkness and

light (1982:62-63). Later in his career, the exteriors of his buildings were "meticulous expressions of scale and proportion, attention being paid to the play of light and shade with a sharp interplay of textures to heighten the overall effect" (1982:27-28).

The façade of the Royal Alexandra Theatre is a noble example of this (Figure 1.1). The planes of the building project and recede. The windows on the second storey are recessed and flanked by delicate Ionic pilasters, and surmounted by festoons, cartouches and consoles. Balustrades project from the base of these windows. The large marquee shades the entrance. The stone banding on the first floor is clearly articulated. The dentilated cornice is topped with a mansard roof containing bonnet dormers. Thus the face of the theatre resonates with light and shadow, an effect which is particularly evident at night when it glows with artificial illumination. This is also very dramatic - an excellent characteristic for a theatre.

A version of the French Renaissance style was frequently employed by the firm of Carrère and Hastings (Calloway, 1991:385), with whom Lyle was associated. Used primarily on houses, the façades characteristically contained pilasters, balustrades, rusticated bases, and carved limestone ornamentation such as console brackets, cartouches and festoons that surrounded the windows

(1991:385). As these features figure prominently on the face of the Royal Alex, one may surmise that Lyle's association with that firm reinforced the use of these decorative elements on this building.

In École teaching "...fenestration and the disposition of wings were often symmetrical" (1991:384). Again the similarity of these ideals to those features expressed in the Royal Alex are striking. The windows were similarly symmetrically balanced and the blocky massing and projecting façade give the appearance of wings flanking the central block (Figure 1.1).

Repeating the details that appeared on the exterior of the building with those required for the interior was a device used by Beaux-Arts practitioners to unify a composition. Often a single architectural theme was used (Calloway, 1991:385). Lyle achieved "a consistent decorative effect throughout the façade and the interior" by using "a free interpretation of Louis XVI style" (Hunt, 1982:70). The Ionic pilasters on the façade were repeated as columns in the balcony lobby, as were the limestone garlands and cartouches over the windows as plaster mouldings on the fronts of the upper boxes (Lindsay, 1986:6). The tapestries, woodwork, furniture and plaster-work maintained the Louis XVI theme throughout the interior, making it one of the few buildings in the city designed in

this manner ("The Royal Alexandra Theatre", 1907:37).

The Royal Alexandra Theatre was built during a period when Beaux-Arts architecture flourished in Canada. The design of the theatre was John Lyle's own variation of New York and European models that fully exemplified the tenets of the École des Beaux-Arts. In many ways the theatre was reflective of architecture in Canada at that time, a beautifully executed building in classical design that did not express any national sentiment or Canadian ideals. Lyle was not a specialist in theatre design, yet he incorporated many innovative features into the design. These features have set the theatre apart from its earlier commercial predecessors and in no small measure have contributed to its longevity.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ELGIN AND WINTER GARDEN THEATRES

When the Royal Alexandra Theatre was built in 1907, legitimate theatre shared the stage with a very popular form of mass entertainment known as vaudeville. It flourished in North America from the 1870's until the beginning of World War II. At its peak during the first quarter of this century, audience size for vaudeville outnumbered that for legitimate theatre, by a factor of ten to one (Benson, 1989:579,580), making it the most popular form of entertainment on the continent (Russell 1990:240). So great was the competition, that even Toronto's two legitimate theatres, the Royal Alexandra and the Princess, featured vaudeville presentations in 1921 and 1922 (Benson, 1989:580). To respond to this demand, existing theatres were used for vaudeville shows and new ones were constructed (Benson, 1989:580). An examination of the aspects of this entertainment form will explain the rationale for the erection of vaudeville theatres in Toronto.

Vaudeville was a descendent of European "variety", where travelling performers would entertain local populations with a medley of acts. Unlike variety, whose material was often salacious, vaudeville was considered

clean, wholesome, respectable entertainment for the entire family (Stein, 1984:xiii). No "off-colour" language was permitted and there were no performances on Sunday (1984:xiii).

Vaudeville was divided into two main categories, big-time and small-time (Smith, 1976:7). A first-class (big-time) vaudeville bill would generally feature eight 15 to 20 minute live acts. Two shows a day, a matinee and an evening performance, would be presented (Benson, 1989:579). Salaries for the performers were high as was the price of admission (Russell, 1990:240).

Small-time vaudeville ran three to six shows daily, with cheaper admission costs than big-time, and after the turn of the century included movies in the program (Russell, 1990:241). The two classes were further distinguished by the quality of the dressing rooms and the size and capability of the orchestra (Smith, 1976:7). Vaudeville's low admission cost also contributed to its wide audience appeal. Patrons could attend a vaudeville theatre for as little as ten cents and stay as long as they liked (Russell, 1990:4).

By 1913, vaudeville was a mass entertainment industry, tightly controlled by powerful theatrical syndicates who jealously guarded their territories. The New York-based Keith-Albee circuit effectively dominated the eastern

portion of the continent with their ownership of 1500 theatres in the United States and Canada (Benson, 1989:579). In addition, Keith-Albee dictated the hiring and dismissal of most of the performers through their booking agency, the United Booking Office (U.B.O.), thus allowing them to virtually monopolize first-class vaudeville theatres and vaudeville acts (Russell, 1989a:21).

Keith-Albee was represented in Toronto at Shea's Victoria, located at Richmond and Victoria Streets. The theatre was part of a small chain run by the Buffalo-based Mike and Jerry Shea, who were affiliated with U.B.O. Shea's Victoria (1910) was the first theatre built in Toronto specifically as a vaudeville house (Figure 2.1). It seated just over two thousand people and reigned as Toronto's largest and only luxurious vaudeville theatre for the next three years (Russell, 1989a:21).

Omnipotent as Keith-Albee was, it could not control the many changes that were occurring in the mass entertainment industry at this time. Small-time vaudeville was growing and although Keith-Albee had swallowed three additional big-time circuits, its entertainment monopoly was being challenged (1989a:24).

At this time, an additional form of entertainment had started to emerge - the motion picture. Shown in makeshift theatres known as nickelodeons (because the admission cost

was five cents), the industry was still in its infancy and not perceived as a threat to vaudeville. An enterprising operator of these early movie houses, named Marcus Loew, decided to combine vaudeville with motion pictures. He launched his vaudeville career in 1909 by purchasing the Royal Theatre in Brooklyn to present this combination form of entertainment (1989a:25,31). As Loew began to rapidly expand his chain of small-time vaudeville theatres across the United States, he would soon come to challenge the Keith-Albee monopoly (1989a:24).

Loew had not been viewed by U.B.O. as competition because his small-time operation catered to a different audience. However, in 1912, Loew acquired big-time performers who had been blacklisted by Albee. He added these stars to his cheaper shows and raised his prices. Marcus Loew was essentially running "high class" shows and this now placed him in direct competition with big-time vaudeville (Russell, 1990:28).

Loew's circuit headquarters was located in a double-decker theatre called the American Theatre and Roof in New York City (Figure 2.2). It was here, in the summer of 1911, in the upper theatre that the newly assembled high class entertainment was featured (Allen, 1980:277). The lower theatre continued its offering of traditional small-time fare, satisfying the tastes of its patrons while subsidizing

the new venture in the upper house (Russell, 1990:29).

In 1913, Loew expanded into Canada by building a double-decker theatre in Toronto. The Toronto theatre was his first in this country and he intentionally modelled the structure on his New York headquarters, The American Theatre and Roof, and featured the same hybrid form of entertainment. In so doing, he was affirming that the new theatre "... was to be the first link in a chain of Loew's theatres on Canadian soil" (Russell, 1989b:18). Also the construction of a double-decker theatre in Toronto would serve as a type of trademark, identifying Marcus Loew's enterprises. That the design was based upon a theatre from New York City indicates that the Yonge Street theatre building had clear American precedents and was not reflective of architecture in the city.

By featuring the same combination of entertainment as he had at the American Theatre and Roof, he was also placing himself in direct competition with Shea's high class vaudeville at the Victoria Theatre. Named Loew's Street Theatre and Winter Garden, it was the first and only double-decker theatre building ever constructed in Canada (Russell, 1989b:23-25). The creation of the theatre nonetheless was a response to a mushrooming demand for vaudeville coupled with the shrewd, competitive instincts of a burgeoning theatre magnate.

When Marcus Loew expanded into Canada, he was following a well-trodden path to a beckoning audience. The presence of foreign theatre was not new to Toronto. As mentioned, not only did the American-based Shea brothers own Shea's Victoria, but the entertainment bill was also controlled by American interests, their booking office, U.B.O. The Royal Alexandra Theatre at this time was a Shubert house and featured productions by the Messrs. Shubert as well as other Americans such as Arthur Hammerstein, William Morris and Louis Meyer (O'Neill, 1976:414,413,416). Canadian talent such as the Montreal Opera Company and the Canadian Conservatory of Music did perform on the Royal Alex stage (O'Neill, 1976:389,408). However, there was a strong preference for imported talent and the "Direct from New York!" billing seemed to have had an alluring appeal.

Included among the American financial backers of the Marcus Loew venture was Canadian support. Toronto automobile manufacturer Robert Bongard was listed among the investors (Russell, 1989a:27) as was Lawrence Solman, part-owner and manager of the Royal Alexandra Theatre (O'Neill, 1976:1) and of Shubert operations in Canada (Russell, 1989a:28). Apparently, it was Solman who envisioned the idea for such a large theatre as well as suggesting its site (1989a:28). The Royal Alex's presentations would not compete with those to be shown at Loew's and investment in

each was perfectly compatible. Solman was involved in varied business interests in the city, ranging from theatre to sport team ownership and amusement parks and in time would become a vice-president of Loew's Canadian chain (1989a:27).

To herald his debut on the Canadian vaudeville scene, Loew called upon New York architect Thomas White Lamb. Lamb had renovated the American Theatre in 1909 by converting its open-air roof theatre into a two-storey enclosed house. It was renamed the American Theatre and Roof (Russell, 1989b:6). Although Lamb had designed other theatres such as the City Theatre at 116 E. 14th Street (1909) for William Fox, he had never before constructed one theatre on top of another (Russell, 1989a:44). When Loew approached Lamb, he had never built a theatre outside of the United States (Russell, 1989b:24). Largely self-taught in commercial theatre design (Russell, 1989a:43), by 1913 Lamb had over a dozen theatre commissions to his credit, including theatre renovations as well as designs for new theatres (Russell, 1989b:4-6). He was justifiably considered a specialist in this branch of architecture. It may be recalled that when John Lyle was hired to design the Royal Alexandra he had never before built a theatre.

Besides the New York precedent, there were other reasons behind a two-theatre design. This was first and

foremost a commercial structure and decisions regarding site and materials were based upon financial considerations. The theatre was to occupy a site that was "the most expensive site on which a theatre could be built; a site on the east side of Yonge Street, just north of Queen Street; a site in the very heart of the shopping district" ("The New Loew Theatre", 1913:33). Therefore the erection of a double-decker theatre would economize on land costs.

A choice location such as this was suitable because it would yield more patrons. The flip-side, however, was the cost of such prime real estate: \$600,000 (Russell, 1990:13). What better way to offset expenses than to build two theatres in the place of one. However the building proper was to be constructed on cheaper land one block east of Yonge on Victoria Street. It was linked to a small two-storey structure thirty-eight feet wide which fronted on Yonge. The proposed site plan shows the theatre proper on Victoria linked by a corridor that fronts on Yonge just to the left of the Heintzman Building (Figure 2.3).

An entrance on the busier Yonge Street would attract more patrons than one on the quieter Victoria. More importantly, property taxes were considerably less if the smaller frontage on Yonge was considered as the front of the building than if the larger 148-foot frontage on Victoria Street was used (Russell, 1989a:52). Thus, even before the

theatre was constructed, site location and basic design were dependent upon economics.

An examination of the plans of the building will illustrate how financial considerations invaded many of the design decisions (Figure 2.4). To link the entrance on Yonge with the theatre proper a lobby corridor of 169 feet was built. The lobby corridor served several purposes. As noted, it linked the entrance situated on more costly real estate to the theatre on cheaper land. In addition, because no amenities such as washrooms or lounges could be provided in such a narrow space and had to be built into the theatre building itself, it ensured that anyone using such facilities had to first buy a ticket (Russell, 1990:89). Also an inside ticket booth at the end of the lobby corridor eased outside lineups as well as offering some protection against the elements (1990:92).

Despite its prime commercial considerations, the corridor was nevertheless beautifully decorated with plaster ceiling mouldings, nine floral tapestried panels flanked with Corinthian columns of scagliola, and panelled terrazzo floors ("Loew's Yonge Street Theatre", 1915:133). However, one must note that scagliola and terrazzo are both decorative finishes that imitate marble (Calloway, 1991:521). Visually they were as effective as the real thing to the casual observer, but were far less expensive.

The drawing of the building's longitudinal section illustrates how the two theatres were housed on top of each other in a seven-storey structure (Figure 2.5). The lower auditorium occupied approximately two-thirds of the length of the building; the remaining area was divided between the stage house and its dressing rooms and lobby space and amenities. The upper theatre, although shorter in length, was similarly apportioned. The majority of the theatre space then was given over to seating, unlike the Royal Alex where only a third of the building was reserved for the auditorium. This use of space was similar to that found in commercial New York theatres such as the American Theatre (Figure 1.2) and the Abbey Theatre (Figure 2.6).

The Elgin and Winter Garden Theatres were both built with a single balcony (Figure 2.4). The lower theatre (Figure 2.7), which opened two months before the upper one, was the first of the large Toronto stage theatres built without a gallery (Russell, 1989a:78). This was becoming more and more common for many reasons. The increased height of the gallery made its construction the most costly, yet the poorer vantage point of the seats would only command the cheapest prices (Russell, 1989a:78). Clearly this made no economic sense for commercial theatre.

Also vaudeville patrons did not pay very much for a seat in the first place, compared to legitimate theatre, so

there was little incentive for them to "sit in the gods" and have a poor view of the stage and movie screen (Russell, 1989a:78). As well, it must be remembered that movies at this time were silent and the audience was required to read subtitles to fully understand the storyline. Doing this from a great distance would have proven difficult (Russell, 1990:136).

The balconies for both theatres were curved and extended into loge boxes. These were beautifully decorated with ornamental plaster in the lower theatre (Figure 2.7) and painted lattice grids in the upper one (Figure 2.8), to conform to the decor of their respective auditoriums. The loges in both halls were surmounted with brass railings.

Because of their proximity to the stage and their exclusive status, the loges were considered to be the choice seats and were priced accordingly. By the time the Loew's complex was built, cantilevered construction was well established in the architectural vocabulary and the erection of such structures easily served to augment the decoration as well as the revenues (Russell, 1990:133).

Under the loges were the theatre boxes (Figures 2.7, 2.8). Despite their poor vantage point, they continued to be built to associate vaudeville theatres with the prestige of the legitimate stage. That they were considered as a prime location justified their higher price, a price not

necessarily obtainable for similarly placed orchestra seats. This was a further incentive for their construction (Russell, 1989a:133).

Unlike the Royal Alexandra Theatre, the sight lines in both theatres while generally very good were not perfect. In an attempt to have as many seats (and thus as much revenue) as possible, Lamb placed some rows behind and between rear columns which would not give as full a view of the stage (Russell, 1989a:79). This contradicted the recommendations of theatre architects Arthur Meloy and Clarence Blackall who felt that because movies were shown as part of the vaudeville bill, sight lines should never be compromised, because the entire screen needed to be viewed by the audience. This would be more important in later years when vaudeville was dropped from the bill and only movies were featured.

The second critical feature in a theatre auditorium is the acoustics. The auditorium of the lower theatre was exceedingly large, seating 2149 patrons, almost 50% greater than the hall of the Royal Alex, which at the time seated 1525. Any devices that would facilitate sound transmission were particularly useful in a hall of such dimensions.

Aside from its breathtaking effect, the ceiling dome reflected sound as did the sounding board and the curvature of the balconies (Figures 2.9, 2.7). In his book The

Planning and Construction of American Theatres, William H. Birkmire noted how important circular enclosures were to conveying sound and recommended that ceilings be concave (1906:83-84). As well, the plaster relief on the balcony fronts and boxes served the same acoustical purpose as they did at the Royal Alex.

The Winter Garden Theatre seated 1410 persons. Its smaller dimensions (patrons in the last row were 69 feet from the stage compared to 94 feet in the lower theatre) made hearing easier. Construction magazine also noted that "In order to furnish the proper acoustical effect that portion of the roof which forms the sounding board is constructed of metal lath and plaster..." ("Loew's Yonge Street Theatre", 1915:133).

The theatres were linked by a dramatic seven-storey grand staircase (Figure 2.10). Because the height of the complex was so great, two adjacent elevators were provided. A third one was built in April 1918. The elevators would only stop at the orchestra level of each theatre and required an operator for service. They were of the open cage type. In case of emergency, they could open from one to the other to facilitate the escape of trapped passengers. The building was the first theatre in Toronto to have passenger elevators (Russell, 1989a:62).

The remainder of the building contained the stage house

and dressing rooms (Figure 2.4). The two stages were of different sizes and were smaller than that recommended by theatre architects of the day. The lower stage measured 29'9" deep with a proscenium opening of 39'6" wide by 26' high. The upper stage measured 22' deep with an apron of 4'6" and a proscenium opening of 36'6" in width and a height of 20' at the centre and 15' at the sides (Russell, 1990:187-189). By comparison, the Royal Alex stage was 35' deep and its proscenium width and height were 38' by 40'.

A backstage elevator located along the Victoria Street side of the building carried scenery and performers from one stage to the other. The elevator cab was small (9'3 1/2" x 4'4" x 8') and could only accommodate smaller sets and props. However, off loading at the Winter Garden level meant crossing the roof of the lower stage house in the open. This awkward arrangement was rectified in July 1914, when a roof was added over this path (1990:196-197).

There were 23 dressing rooms arranged in seven tiers, located at the side of the stage, along the court side of the building (Figures 2.11, 2.12). They ran from the stage of the lower theatre up to the stage of the Winter Garden and were accessible to both theatres since the same performers played both shows (Russell, 1989a:88).

Normally, a discussion of a façade is fairly straightforward; one is concerned with describing that

portion of a building's exterior that faces the street. However, in the case of the Loew's theatre, which elevation do we mean, the theatre proper on Victoria (Figure 2.13) or main entrance on Yonge (Figure 2.14)?

There is a further irony. Traditionally, as part of their attraction, theatres had grand entrances and large façades. Even the earliest movie theatres, sparse as their interiors were, had as opulent a façade as possible. "It was the façade that induced people to come to the show, and by day and night it proclaimed its presence to passers-by" (Morrison, 1974:7). Although the frontage on Victoria Street measured 148 feet long and the building rose to seven storeys, this unpretentious two storey, 38-foot frontage on Yonge was all that announced this unique, monumental structure to the world. This was a new departure for Toronto, but this modest façade, in time, became "a movie palace prototype" because it permitted the owners to maximize their investment in prime real estate (Russell, 1989a:57).

The style of the Yonge Street façade was in keeping with its small scale (Figure 3.14). A Classical tradition was observed, which would identify the building with legitimate theatre and give it an air of respectability (Herzog, 1981:22). The main floor was "composed of white marble columns, with Canadian granite base" (qtd. in

Russell, 1990:68), while the second storey, made entirely of terra cotta, contained three Roman arches interspersed with roundels and flanked by Ionic columns. The keystones in the arches supported dramatic masks that served as the façade's only theatrical reference (Russell, 1989a:57). This classical manner was very typical of small-time vaudeville theatre design at this era (Herzog, 1981:20).

In contrast to this stately exterior were the marquee and electric sign. Although fairly modest, the original marquee, jutting out over the theatre vestibule only (and not the adjacent store), was nevertheless "delineated by white electric bulbs, while four brilliant carbon arc lights defined its corners" (Russell, 1989a:57). The upright must have been very impressive because the only comment the façade drew from Construction's description of the new building was that it was "conspicuous mostly for the large electric sign above" ("Loew's Yonge Street Theatre", 1915:132). In addition the marquee included the name of the theatre, the price of the show, and that it was a venue for vaudeville (Russell, 1989a:58).

The juxtaposition of this classical façade with its glaring signage was testament to vaudeville's mixed origins (Herzog, 1981:22). At the same time, the inclusion of these "huge upright signs and light-studded marquees" would become portents of the movie palace to come (Russell, 1989a:57).

The overhang of the marquee created an exterior vestibule under which was placed an attractively decorated outside ticket booth. Both were features of the nickelodeon and would reappear in movie palace architecture (Russell, 1989a:87). The purpose of the booth was to tempt passers-by into buying a ticket (Sexton & Betts, 1927, 2:9). Despite inclement winter weather, the kiosk proved very popular and served its purpose well until its removal in 1919 (Russell, 1989a:87).

Although the Victoria Street elevation was technically the back of the building, some attempt was made to provide additional decorative features. Hilary Russell concluded that this was done to further the pretence concocted by Loew and Lamb that this was indeed a legitimate façade and deserved to be treated as such (1989a:57). Thus, the wall of brick was treated with "terra cotta decorative elements, brickwork in circular and rectangular patterns" and an "arched corbel table at the roof lines of the stage houses and the Winter Garden auditorium" (1989a:69). There were four small windows at the Winter Garden level, as well as three tiers of exterior fire escapes along the side of the building and additional doors on the ground floor (Figure 2.13).

The Royal Alexandra and Loew's Yonge Street are pre-World War I theatres. Both display classical references as

design elements in their façades as was common at the time. The Royal Alex dominates its site, the theatre name elegantly carved into the entablature (Figure 1.1). The large signage of Loew's face (Figure 2.14) compensates for its small size, but this also detracts from the classical features which were meant to link it to legitimate theatre in the first place. Ironically, this association is also a façade, for the prime profit motive underneath.

The decor in the lower theatre was loosely modeled on the work of Robert Adam. The upper theatre was decorated to resemble a garden. Using different means, both auditoria removed their audiences from their daily existence to a place of escape and delight. Thomas Lamb said, "...we must cut our audience off from the rest of the city life and take them into a rich and self-contained auditorium, where their minds are freed from their usual occupations and freed from their customary thoughts" (qtd. in Valerio and Friedman, 1982:21).

It would be fair to state that the decoration of the auditorium of the lower theatre struck a happy balance between transporting its patrons to a place of gilded enchantment without excessive ostentation. Gold and crimson were the primary colours used because they created feelings of warmth and material comfort. Gold was a useful colour because its patina reflected the dimmer lights in the

auditorium and augmented it (Russell, 1989a:67). Overhead, an immense dome decorated with panels of ornamental plaster was similarly gilded (Figure 2.9).

The design of the upper theatre was unparalleled in Canada. The interior decoration of Lamb's American Roof was the direct antecedent of the Toronto Winter Garden. This was affirmed in a pre-construction article in the Toronto World which stated that "There will be a roof garden on the house, with elevator connections, and constructed on the same lines as that in the new American Theatre in New York" ("Two Big Vaudeville Houses", 1913:1).

Although the American Roof was its prototype, Lamb's embellishment of the Toronto theatre was a far more exuberant display of foliage and flowers (Russell, 1989a:71). The theatre was decorated as an outdoor garden with an abundance of leafy boughs suspended from the main ceiling, the balcony ceiling and the arches over the loggia ("Loew's Yonge Street Theatre", 1915:133). Intertwined among the 5000 real beech branches were artificial flowers made of coarse dyed cotton that were meant to resemble wisteria (Russell, 1989a:71). Supporting pillars were disguised as tree trunks, balcony fronts were painted with lattice grids, garden murals decorated wall surfaces, and overhead, opalescent glass lanterns of different colours lit the auditorium (Figure 2.15). A backlit plaster moon

completed the fantasy (Russell, 1989a:75).

So unusual a structure as a double-decker theatre had not been seen in Toronto before 1913 and it might prove difficult to justify its construction within the existing building codes. These codes were also in the process of being amended at that time. On "April 1, 1913, bylaw 6401 governing theatres and public buildings was passed by Toronto City Council" (Russell, 1989a:50). "Bylaw 6401 was mainly concerned with fire prevention and the provision of safe, adequate exits. It regulated not only the construction and layout of the theatre building, but fire-fighting equipment, space used for non-theatrical purposes, adjoining stores, and open space around a theatre" (Russell, 1989a:17).

The theatre contained many elements that did not conform to these new rules. Of particular concern were the height of the building and fire escapes (Russell 1989a:52). The building permit was only granted after two Toronto City officials journeyed to New York to inspect other double-decker theatres and were thus assured of the safety and feasibility of the project (1989a:51).

Even after the permit was issued, controversy still swirled around the project. The contentious issue was the proposed entrance on Yonge Street with its lobby corridor of 169 feet linking it to the auditoria on Victoria Street on

the other side of the block. Also half of the width of the lobby corridor up to a length of 95 feet was leased as store space (Figure 2.16). But the bylaws only allowed theatres to have stores if they were no more than 30 feet long (1989a:52). This was clearly not the case.

Avoiding taxes was not new. Using such a stratagem in a theatre in Toronto was. Such lobby corridors had been employed in New York City and the practice was considered quite common (Russell, 1989a:52). Perhaps anticipating further impediments to his enterprise, Loew did not follow legitimate channels to approve the corridor and store combination, but instead circumvented City Hall and had the plans drawn up as the "Victoria Street Theatre" with no mention of the Yonge Street address (1989a:52). Thus practices which had not been previously employed in Toronto found their way into use through an association with an American company.

However, prompted by this incident and other irregularities in the City of Toronto Architect's Department, the City called an investigation (Russell, 1989a:17). The 1914 Denton judicial enquiry investigating corruption in the City's Architecture Department concluded that no collusion took place between Loew and City officials to ensure the erection of the theatres. However it was not agreed that City bylaws had been followed either, especially

regarding the length of the lobby corridor and the complex's height (Russell, 1990:17). Although these issues were not resolved satisfactorily at this time, the building remained.

As a postscript, a similar scheme in early 1914 for a movie theatre at the corner of Yonge and Grenville was quelled. But a few years later, Thomas Lamb designed both Loew's Uptown Theatre and the Pantages with similar lobby arcades, presumably to also maximize the investments in this very competitive industry (Russell, 1989a:21).

By now, city bylaws stipulated minimum crush space, although audiences still preferred to remain in their seats. As noted earlier, this would change after the first World War. However, the complex's "minimum functional requirement" (Russell, 1990:93) would prove adequate for the present.

Bylaws also dictated the number of rows that were permitted in an auditorium as well as the amount of spacing between the seats. Toronto City bylaws required that seats be spaced 32" from seatback to seatback. In order to increase the seating capacity, Loew applied to have the bylaw amended. Lamb's drawing of the seating plan revision was included with the application (Figure 2.17). He was permitted to have the seats spaced only 30 inches apart with a knee clearance of 12" (Russell, 1990:137). To maintain a reasonable space between rows, Lamb shortened the length of

the seats to 17" (Russell, 1989a:79) and reduced the knee clearance to 11" instead of the 12 inches agreed upon (Russell, 1990:137). The rationale as Lamb stated was, "We sacrifice the comfort of the seat to the width of the aisle" (qtd. in Russell, 1990:138). The net result was two more rows of seating (Russell, 1990:138) and increased revenue.

Toronto building bylaws were particularly stringent about steel regulations which "required heavier girders in buildings than those in railway and highway bridges across the country" (qtd. in Russell, 1990:40). The support of the tremendous weight of these stacked theatres would not have been possible without steel frame construction. Also steel weighed far less than its masonry predecessor and occupied far less floor space, space that was necessary for the numerous and varied requirements of a theatre building.

All first-class theatres (those that seated over a thousand) that were built after April 1913 had to be completely fireproof (Russell, 1990:173). Because much of the fireproofing regulation was based on that of New York City, many of the safeguards in the Loew theatre building mirror those of the Royal Alex.

The Elgin complex not only met these regulations, but the theatre contained more safety features than the laws required (1990:174). This may in part have been commercially motivated because patrons felt more secure in

"safe" theatres and would therefore be more likely to frequent them (1990:174). Also New York City bylaws regarding fire protection were more stringent than those in Toronto at that time (1990:173), and Lamb, who was familiar with those stipulations, may have incorporated them into the design of the building as a matter of course.

An area not previously of great concern in the fireproof issue until the advent of film was the projection booth. Because the nitrate film used at that time was highly combustible, certain precautions were necessary. The booths for both theatres measured 18' x 9' and were centrally placed at the back of their respective balconies. The walls of the booths were made of cement and covered in cement plaster and had self-closing shutters over the openings. Only the booth of the upper theatre had the required ventilator in its roof, however. Although the booths had neither separate rewind rooms nor toilets for their projectionists [this was recommended by theatre architects such as Arthur Meloy, but were not as yet stipulated as part of Ontario or Toronto bylaws (Russell, 1990:145)], they "were among the first substantial, fireproof booths architect-designed from the beginning for large Toronto theatres" (1989a:80).

Building theatres of fireproof materials was an important first step. However, once a fire broke out, other

contingency measures were necessary. These were similar to those at the Royal Alex. The Loew's complex had a "wet type" sprinkler system connected to two rooftop water tanks, each with a capacity of 10,000 gallons. Although it was not yet required by Toronto bylaws, (but absolutely mandatory in New York), skylights above both stages were installed. These would draw out smoke and fumes and prevent them from entering the auditorium. Each stage was equipped with an asbestos fire curtain and a deluge water curtain that covered the proscenium opening. In 1928, a fire started under the stage of the lower theatre. The emergency devices worked properly and far more extensive damage was prevented (Russell, 1990:321-322).

Fire escapes had to lead people to the safety of the street to be effective. For this reason, theatre architects had to include alleyways along the side of the building that would lead people out to the street. Buildings with one frontage, such as the Loew's complex, had to have two such open courts. Lamb designed laneways along the north and west sides of the building (Russell, 1990:74).

To further facilitate the safe passage of theatre patrons from the building, Lamb designed brick enclosed fire towers that led from the roof to the sidewalk. They were not directly connected to the building, so that they would remain free of any smoke or fire that originated in the

theatres (Figures 2.4, 2.12). Patrons would enter the tower from the fire escape and walk down a wide, gradually winding stairway out to the safety of the open courts. The fire tower was a first for Toronto and Lamb was credited with its invention (Russell, 1990:76-77).

Although the Royal Alexandra and Elgin complex were built within six years of each other, they represent different architectural solutions to theatre design. What sets them apart ideologically is the basic purpose for which they were intended. As a legitimate theatre, the Royal Alex was conceived as a public monument and thus had to occupy a prominent position in the surrounding urban space. Furthermore its spatial planning and interior design had to reflect the expectations of people who attended the legitimate theatre.

The Elgin complex was a commercial theatre built to capitalize on the growing demand for vaudeville, a burgeoning new form of mass entertainment. The design of these theatres was therefore geared to making as much profit as possible. Also specialists in theatre design such as Thomas Lamb who were deliberately employed by the theatre companies would understand how to best achieve this.

A site was chosen where access to patrons was greatest. Yet efforts were made to pay the least in taxes. This resulted in new forms such as the long lobby corridor and

the stacked theatres. A minimalist façade and utilitarian elevations were also employed to reduce costs. This did not make a significant statement to the streetscape as did the monumental façade of the Royal Alexandra.

To maximize revenues, the interior plan was designed to provide as much seating space as possible thereby reducing administration and lobby space to a minimum.

These approaches to design had originated in the United States and being new to Canada prompted a review of the Toronto bylaws, thereby permitting forms such as long lobby corridors to be erected in later years. Lamb's creation was an American import imposed on the Toronto landscape without apology. Because the design of the Elgin/Winter Garden was based on a New York prototype, the creation of the complex provided the mechanism whereby American theatre design entered Canada. As Lamb and other American theatre architects continued to build in Canada, designs developed in the United States would find expression in this country.

The requirements of the vaudeville stage led to the form of the vaudeville theatre. Loew's combination of movies and vaudeville acts was a new hybrid form of entertainment for Toronto and resulted in the introduction of a new theatre type for the city (Russell, 1990:6).

Loew's small-time vaudeville theatre represented an important transitional phase in the entertainment industry;

a time when films were featured with variety acts and came into their own as a valid new medium. The building type only lasted a few years, from 1907 to 1914, but it provided an important link between the movies' first showcase, the nickelodeon, and the movie palace to come (Russell, 1990:5).

The waning popularity of vaudeville and the emergence of sound movies resulted in the closure of the upper theatre in 1928 and the renovation of the lower one into a movie house in 1935, although it had switched to a straight movie policy five years before (Russell, 1989a:119,131,132). The lower theatre continued to offer movies until the early eighties, although by the seventies, mostly violent and semi-pornographic films were the norm. And although the Loew's was not divided into numerous smaller cinemas, the fate of many movie palaces at that time, it finally closed its doors on November 14,1981 (1989a:142,144).

Ironically, the very facilities initially installed for vaudeville performance would be one of the reasons the complex was purchased by the Ontario Heritage Foundation in 1981. Its mandate was to restore the structure for use as a live theatre performing arts complex.

In 1982, the building was declared a National Historic Site. The restoration began in May 1987 and the refurbished Elgin and Winter Garden Theatres opened on December 15,1989 (Russell, 1989a:146).

CHAPTER THREE

THE PANTAGES THEATRE

Commercial theatres were never built on a whim. Their construction was either carefully planned to compete with existing venues or aimed at a future business expansion. A theatre from one chain would often be built soon after the erection of a theatre from a rival circuit.

Shea's Hippodrome on Bay Street (Figure 3.1), affiliated with Keith-Albee, a rival of Marcus Loew, was rushed into completion once Loew announced that he intended to build the Yonge Street theatres. The Hippodrome opened just two months after the Winter Garden in April 1914 and, to directly compete with Loew's, featured the same kind of entertainment, at the same low prices as Loew's lower theatre. It became Toronto's largest house, seating 2,622 patrons (Russell, 1989a:21).

Just as Marcus Loew challenged big-time vaudeville by acquiring and building new theatres, similar entrepreneurial aspirations existed in Canada towards acquiring national chains. Several smaller Canadian vaudeville-cum-movie circuits were founded around the turn of the century (Benson, 1989:580), when the film industry started to develop. Along with vaudeville, the growing interest in

motion pictures would have an effect on theatre design in Toronto and in the rest of Canada.

One of these early Canadian circuits was founded in 1906 by the Allen family of Brantford, Ontario. Starting with a 150-seat store theatre called the "Theatorium", they soon expanded their operation and created the first national movie circuit in Canada (Russell, 1975:18). The Allens had made an arrangement through their film exchange, the Allen Amusement Corporation, formed in 1908 (Morris, 1978:2), to secure exclusive rights to Adolph Zukor's Famous Player-Lasky Films which were distributed by Paramount. This acquisition of first run options on American films was instrumental in their successful expansion (Cox, 1979:48). The movies then became the basis of their syndicate which was abetted by the spread northward of American commercial entertainment.

Another Canadian aspirant in this field was Nathan Louis Nathanson, a salesman for E.L. Ruddy outdoor signs (King, 1980:78). He would one day become the Allens' greatest competitor. In 1913, with the financial backing of four prominent businessmen, including his employer E.L. Ruddy, Nathanson formed the Regent Theatre Company to convert the Majestic Theatre on Adelaide Street into a movie playhouse. It was renamed the Regent, seated 1,475 and was the city's first deluxe theatre built exclusively to show

movies (Russell, 1975:37) (Figure 3.2).

The following year, the Allens built a 1700-seat house to out-class the Regent (Jacobs, 1967:55). In time, the competition in Toronto between the Allens and Nathanson would escalate into a national theatre-building war, resulting in most of the movie palaces being built in Canada at this time (Russell, 1975:40).

Nathanson was an aggressive competitor. In 1919 the Allens refused Zukor's offer of partnership as part of the terms to renew the Paramount franchise (Cox, 1979:48). In January 1920, Nathanson created Famous Players Canadian Corporation by selling Zukor his chain of theatres in return for the Canadian distributing rights to Paramount pictures (Russell, 1975:83). The Allens were now deprived of their franchise, and up against the financial might of the Zukor-backed Canadian Famous Players, their locally floated shares for theatre building could not compete with Nathanson. They declared bankruptcy in 1922 (Morris, 1978:92). The following year, Nathanson, acting for Zukor, bought the 53-theatre Allen chain at a fraction of its worth (Cox, 1979:48), thereby establishing Famous Players as the prime force in Canadian film exhibition (Morris, 1978:92).

The foregoing explanation is meant to illustrate how intent N.L. Nathanson was on becoming a major contender in the Canadian entertainment industry. By 1919, his Regent

Theatre Company (now called Paramount Theatres Limited, but in no way connected to Zukor's Paramount films) had acquired a number of theatres in Ontario. He set up Regal Films Limited, the distribution company of his theatre operation, to handle major releases from American filmmakers such as Metro, Triangle and Select (Russell, 1975:82-83).

Despite Nathanson's concentration in the film industry, if he truly wanted to dominate the entertainment field, he would have to include vaudeville in his operation because it was still the most popular form of mass entertainment on the continent. Accordingly, he decided to build the largest vaudeville house in Canada and approached Alexander Pantages, owner of the largest independent vaudeville circuit in North America (Benson, 1989:580).

Pantages opened his first theatre in Seattle in 1902 (Morgan, 1960:154) and by 1909 Pantages theatres extended along the West Coast from Seattle to Los Angeles and as far east as Kansas City (Saloutos, 1966:140). In the summer of 1912, Pantages announced that he would build theatres in Canada. The Pantages in Edmonton was the first to be constructed in 1913, followed by theatres in Winnipeg (1913) and Victoria (1914) (Saloutos, 1966:142).

Toronto was already home to two rival eastern vaudeville syndicates, Keith-Albee and Marcus Loew. Pantages was anxious to move east (Olsheski, 1989:49) and

there was enough demand for vaudeville for Nathanson to incorporate a third circuit into his expansionist plans. Pantages' large operation could easily supply the acts for the new house.

Because this was small-time vaudeville, both live performance and movies were presented in a similar format to the nearby Elgin. Although the theatre was given the name Pantages, it was never part of that chain (Rodger, 1989:16). It was owned by Famous Players Canadian Corporation (City of Toronto Assessment Rolls, 1921:105).

Nathanson's success in film prompted him to expand into the wider entertainment market of vaudeville. His new theatre, associated with vaudeville circuit owner Alexander Pantages, would fall under the classification of a commercial house and would therefore be subject to the primary concern of making a substantial profit.

Eastern Theatres Limited was formed to finance the construction of the theatre. The advertisement in the Toronto Evening Telegram stated that the company had been "incorporated under Dominion Charter for the purpose of owning and operating a circuit of Theatres in Canada similar to the well known Pantages Theatres in the United States" (qtd. in Olsheski, 1989:26).

By 1920 a new era in the mass entertainment industry was emerging, one that involved the motion picture. As

well, social norms regarding audience circulation had changed considerably since the outbreak of World War I. These new requirements would be reflected in the plan of new theatres.

Thomas Lamb was hired to design the Toronto Pantages Theatre. By this time, such buildings were considered a genre in their own right and thus required a practitioner who specialized in theatre architecture. As was noted earlier, Lamb began his career as a theatre architect about 1909 in New York City. He designed theatres for entertainment moguls William Fox and Marcus Loew (Russell, 1989b:4). As movies increased in popularity, he turned his talents to designing lavish movie palaces for which he is best remembered. For many of these buildings he favoured an Adam style for the decor although he had used Spanish and garden themes as well (1989b:6). In Canada, Lamb's commissions included building about sixteen theatres from the ground up and remodelling three others (1989b:25).

One of these remodelling jobs was Nathanson's Regent Theatre. Lamb was hired to redesign the building. The auditorium was deep and relatively narrow. Lamb replaced the two balconies with a single gallery that had a long sloping rake (Figure 3.3). Lamb first installed a single balcony with a gradual slope in the Regent Theatre in New York City, "the first deluxe theatre for showing movies"

(Hall, 1961:106). Previously double balconies had been the rule. This distinguished the theatre from other vaudeville houses of the time (Russell, 1975:28) and set a precedent for future ones.

Lamb decorated the Toronto Regent in the Adam style, by now his preferred mode of embellishment and used a profusion of gold and blue in the colour scheme (Russell, 1975:37,40). These same colours were later used to decorate the Pantages.

The site chosen for the Pantages Theatre was on Yonge Street backing onto Victoria between Shuter and Dundas in downtown Toronto. Nathanson purchased part of lot 11 fronting on Yonge Street which was linked to a parcel of four lots on Victoria (Insurance Plans, 1954:37).

The plans of the building show two entrances, one on Yonge Street (Figure 3.4), considered as the main one and another on Victoria Street (Figure 3.5), that allowed patrons to walk directly to the main level of the auditorium. According to Construction, the Victoria Street entrance was "provided primarily for the accommodation of motorists" ("New Toronto Theatres", 1920:341), although theatre-goers arriving on foot would also appreciate the access.

The Yonge Street entrance was linked to the main body of the building on Victoria with a corridor that measured twenty-five feet wide by one hundred and forty-four feet

long (Figure 3.4). It did not lead to the ground level of the auditorium as did the lobby corridor in the lower Loew's theatre. Instead, the corridor led patrons up and over a service lane (now called O'Keefe Lane), through a set of etched glass doors that opened onto the mezzanine level of the two-storey grand lobby (Olsheski, 1989:39). Having two main entrances that directed people to two different floors facilitated crowd movement and control of arriving patrons. This was especially necessary at the Pantages because the theatre seated 3626 spectators. It was then the largest theatre ever built in Canada (Russell, 1989b:25).

The corridor itself was similar to the Loew's Elgin/Winter Garden. Ionic columns of scagliola flanked mirrors and fabric panels of Royal blue silk brocade ("New Theatre Opens", 1920:8). The passageway ended in a flight of marble steps (Figure 3.6).

Because this was a vaudeville theatre with continuous performance, there were no intermissions. Thus, there was not the opportunity for in-house movement we have today. But Toronto bylaws regulated the amount of public space (150 feet for every hundred seats) which included foyers, corridors and lounges as well as the lobbies (Russell, 1990:93). The lobby corridor provided much of this floor space. The lower lobby also served as the back of the auditorium (Figure 3.7), as there was no wall separating the

two spaces.

About this time patrons were also gradually acquiring the European habit of frequenting lounges and washrooms (Sexton and Betts, 1927, Vol.2:24). Both the ladies retiring room and the men's smoking lounge were large, well-furnished rooms that contained fireplaces ("New Theatre Opens", 1920:8).

The size and splendour of the Pantages Theatre satisfied the fantasies of its audience. The cavernous auditorium had the distinction of being the largest in the Dominion ("New Toronto Theatres", 1920:341). Each side of the hall contained three loges and three theatre boxes in a similar configuration to that of the Loew's theatres (Figure 3.8). There was the standard single balcony divided into ten seating sections. The projection room was centrally situated above the balcony (Figure 3.9).

The stage house was equipped with generous wings, fly galleries, dressing rooms and a property room. The stage was thirty-five feet deep ("New Theatre Opens", 1920:8) and stretched nearly seventy-five feet to the sides of the wings. The opening was fifty feet wide by thirty-six feet high (Olsheski, 1989:40) and was framed with an elaborately decorated proscenium arch, similar in shape to that of the Elgin Theatre (Figures 3.10, 3.11).

The unusually large width of the stage was necessary

because of the one hundred foot width of the auditorium (Olsheski, 1989:40). A wider proscenium opening would be needed for optimum sight lines. This wide opening also necessitated the creation of one of the largest concrete girders ever poured in Toronto. F.E. Brown reported in Contract Record that a girder of fifty-one feet long by thirteen feet deep by two feet, two inches was required to properly span the proscenium opening (1920:122).

The sight lines and acoustics were reported to be excellent ("New Toronto Theatres", 1920:341). There were two sets of supporting pillars on either side of the auditorium and the seats were so arranged that the posts should not have interfered with viewing. The considerable size of the house, one hundred feet wide by approximately 110 feet deep meant that, even if their view was not obstructed, patrons sitting at great distances from the stage would be at some disadvantage. In addition, because the auditorium extended into the lobby space, there was no back wall to enclose the sound (Figure 3.7).

Fortunately, much of the vaudeville program included music from the orchestra that accompanied acts where no dialogue was involved, such as animal routines, acrobatics, and dancers. Singers and actors by necessity were adept at projecting their voices.

A \$40,000 4-manual Warren pipe organ was installed a

few weeks after the theatre opened ("New Theatre Opens", 1920:8). It was located in a specially designed loft over the loggia (Insurance Plans, 1954:37), hidden behind an ornate grille of gilded plaster. There was also an echo organ "in the space above the main ceiling near the rear of the house" ("New Toronto Theatres", 1920:341).

The Loew's theatres were not initially designed to contain organs. Warren theatre organs, such as the one in the Pantages, were installed in both theatres in 1912 after fairly extensive alterations that included special provisions for fireproofing the new organ chambers (Russell, 1990:306-307).

The presence of an organ in a vaudeville theatre was an indication that the movies were becoming an important part of the program. The music and sound effects that an organ could produce were a necessary accompaniment to the silent films (1990:306).

One of the similarities between the Pantages and the Elgin complex built six years before was their narrow front elevations. Construction magazine, commenting on the façade of the Pantages, stated that a wide street frontage had been avoided and that this was "...in keeping to a large extent with the tendency in modern theatre construction" (New Toronto Theatres", 1920:339). The article made no apologies about the sole intended purpose of the Yonge Street façade,

no longer a novelty in Toronto, by stating that "...the exterior ... mainly serves to give entrance to the lobby connecting with the auditorium and is principally denoted by embellishments of line and external electrical effects" (1920:339).

This device of the long lobby corridor, used in the Elgin complex and repeated for both Loew's Uptown and for the Pantages, was also employed by Lamb for Famous Players' Vancouver Capitol and for the Loew's in London, Ontario (Lindsay, 1983:106,108).

The Yonge Street façade rose three storeys. The marquee overhung the sidewalk and a large key-shaped upright, the Pantages trademark, was illuminated with red and white lights (Figure 3.12). There was a box office at the entrance (Olsheski, 1989:35).

The Victoria Street façade rose five storeys and was covered in yellow brick. There was a marquee over the entrance and the wall above it contained classical embellishments of pilasters with Corinthian capitals, a dentilated cornice and semi-circular pediment, all made of stone. Two tiers of fire escapes ran along the side and led to the fire tower (Figure 3.13).

In contrast, both Shea's Victoria and Shea's Hippodrome, Toronto's other two vaudeville theatres, built by Rochester architects Leon N. Lempert and Son, were

impressive structures that dominated their sites (Figures 2.1, 3.1).

In keeping with its mandate of creating a total theatre experience, the decoration of the theatre began in the lobby corridor. Whereas the link of the Loew's complex was quietly ornate, its counterpart at the Pantages was a giddy expression of Lamb's interpretation of the architecture of Robert Adam (Figure 3.6). The cross vaulted ceiling of the four identical bays flaunted polychromatic Adamesque motifs of urns, cameos and fluted medallions, set in rectangles of contrasting hues. The side panels just beneath the ceiling bore semi-circular tympani painted in similar colours. Crystal chandeliers, suspended in each bay, heightened the ceiling's decorative exuberance as they illuminated the corridor.

Interestingly, an examination of early theatre photographs has shown that the design of the lobby corridor ceiling of the Vancouver Capitol (Figure 3.14), built for Famous Players in 1921, replicated in almost every detail that of the Pantages (Figure 3.6). Also, corresponding motifs appear in the banding that runs across the frieze.

An elliptical dome surrounded by alternating large and small medallions dominated the grand lobby. A sweeping scagliola bannister encircled the upper level and descended alongside the marble steps of the split grand staircase

(Figure 3.7). When the theatre was restored in 1989, a new wall with entrance doors was erected into what was originally orchestra seating, so that a capacious lower foyer was created (Figure 3.15).

The auditorium was resplendent in regal colours of blue and gold, the same colour scheme that Lamb employed for the refurbished Regent. The large circular ceiling dome, with its massive crystal chandelier, repeated some of the design motifs introduced in the dome of the grand lobby (Figure 3.16).

Going to the theatre encompassed the total experience of the stage show and being transported to a place beyond the ordinary. The entire building was designed to reflect this. One of the era's most famous showmen, S. L. Rothafel stated that "theatre entertainment...takes place, not only on the stage, but in the box office, in the lobby, in the foyer, the restrooms, and the auditorium itself" (qtd. in Russell, 1975:32).

As successive vaudeville theatres came to be built in downtown Toronto, they became larger and larger. Shea's Victoria (1910) sat 2373, the Elgin complex (1913-1914) seated 2149 and 1410 for a total of 3559 places. Not to be outdone, the Hippodrome (1914) accommodated 2622, followed by Loew's Uptown (1920) with 2931 seats. The 3626-seat Pantages Theatre contained Toronto's as well as Canada's

largest single auditorium until its conversion to a six-theatre cineplex in 1972-73 (Adilman, 1972:7).

Arthur Meloy felt that larger and more pretentious houses would draw greater crowds because people felt they had a better chance for a seat in a larger theatre (1916:3). However, this tendency to larger and more palatial buildings was in greater measure due to the democratization of the mass entertainment industry. "The great mass of people seldom could afford to go to the theatre. Today, rich and poor alike attend the theatre regularly...All people pay practically the same price; people of all classes sit side by side and enjoy the same performance" (Sexton and Betts, 1927, 2:14).

The process started with vaudeville. In the United States, "the men who founded vaudeville...sought to make money by satisfying the needs of the working class for inexpensive and popular entertainment" (Stein, 1984:xi). Because Canadian vaudeville entrepreneurs such as C.W. Bennett and John Griffin were affiliated with American circuits, or running similar operations in Canada (Benson, 1989:580), it would be fair to say that the same applied in this country.

As competition to secure patrons increased, theatre owners offered better facilities, more lavishly decorated houses and superior acts to attract audiences. This

resulted in higher costs. To keep prices low, larger auditoria were required (Herzog, 1980:75).

The large scale of the theatres was complemented by classical architecture and artwork, plush decors, crystal chandeliers and a profusion of gilded surfaces. The opulence and splendour of these combination houses, soon termed movie palaces, allowed ordinary people to be part of an experience once reserved for the upper classes. "The masses revelling in luxury and costly beauty, go to the theatre, partly at least to be thrilled by the gorgeousness (sic) of their surroundings which they cannot afford in their home life" (Sexton and Betts, 1927:14).

Another well known theatre architect of the time, George Rapp was aware of this when he designed his palatial structures.

Watch the bright light in the eyes of a tired shopgirl who hurries noiselessly over carpets and sighs with satisfaction as she walks amid furnishings that once delighted the hearts of queens. See the toil-worn father whose dreams have never come true, and look inside his heart as he finds strength and rest within the theatre. There you have the answer to why motion picture theatres are so palatial. (qtd. in Hall, 1961:136)

"Hollywood had captured the modern American plurality. Opulence had been used for centuries to indicate social rank, but never before the movie palace had it been used to bring together such diverse classes and ethnicities"

(Valerio and Friedman, 1982:15).

It would be inaccurate to consider theatre owners and their architects as social reformers. Their main goal was to attract as many people as possible into their establishments. Also, the lavish movie palaces would distance the industry from its humble origins in store backrooms with its lower-class clientele (Russell, 1975:32). Whatever the motivation, however, the net result changed the expectations of the viewing public of the mass entertainment industry.

A comparison of the decor of the Royal Alex, Elgin complex and Pantages Theatre illustrates the great care both architects took to ensure that their patrons were removed from the ordinary. In the Royal Alex, the luxuriant materials were part of the whole concept of the legitimate theatre "as a baroque milieu for elegant social snobbery and opulent display" (Acland, 1963:31). In the Pantages and Elgin and Winter Garden Theatres, the decoration was a purposeful attempt to simulate the palatial grandeur associated with lower and middle class perceptions and reflected a shrewd understanding on the part of the owners of the public need for such fantasies.

By 1920 the Canadian population was almost double what it had been at the turn of the century. As well, since the 1870's, people from rural areas had been moving into large

industrialized urban centres such as Toronto (Kalbach, 1985:1453; Careless, 1985:1833), so that an extremely large mass market had developed in the city. The commercial entertainment industry would therefore resort to the necessary means to capture as much of this audience as possible and adapted the designs of their theatres accordingly.

Theatre size increased dramatically, decors became more lavish and amenities for patrons improved during these years. Such theatres, among them the Pantages, were termed movie palaces. The building type lasted less than a decade in Canada, with the majority of the houses being built after World War I, between 1919 and 1921. Very few movie palaces were constructed after that date because enough had been built to fulfill the needs of Canada's relatively small population (Russell, 1975:33).

The Pantages began as a combination house and switched to an all-movie policy in 1935. In 1972-73, it was converted to a six-theatre cineplex (Adilman, 1972:7), part of the growing trend among film exhibitors towards smaller auditoria. Through a series of convoluted business deals, the theatre came under the auspices of Cineplex Odeon in 1988 (Crew, 1988:F1).

Its potential as a live theatre venue was recognized and a reconstruction process was begun in the same year.

The restoration of the Elgin/Winter Garden had started the previous spring. The Pantages renovation was completed in under a year. As a commercial venture, it was important to get the house into production as soon as possible. However, the reborn Pantages opened its doors on September 20, 1989, three months before the Elgin/Winter Garden. Co-incidence or competition? The realities of commercial theatre were as relevant in 1989 as they were in 1920 when the Pantages Theatre was built.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE O'KEEFE CENTRE

In January of 1955, Mayor Nathan Phillips received an offer from the E.P. Taylor interests to build a \$12,000,000 civic centre at a yet-to-be-determined site in downtown Toronto. The proposed building would contain an auditorium, a modern theatre, exhibition space and meeting rooms for conventions, and be situated at a central downtown location ("Offered by Taylor Interests", 1955:1-2). "The ownership of the centre would be vested in a non-profit foundation to be known as the O'Keefe Centre Foundation and would be managed by a board of trustees on which the city could be represented" (qtd. in "Offered by Taylor Interests", 1955:2).

This proposal was prompted by the long-standing need in Toronto for a proper cultural centre for the arts. Until this offer was made, no private sponsorship or public money had been advanced for such a project ("A Handsome Offer", 1955:5).

However the idea for such a centre was first conceived ten years before when E.P. Taylor had been approached by Floyd Chalmers, president of Maclean Hunter, "to find ways of financing an arts complex to house the Royal Conservatory

of Music, a concert hall to replace Massey Hall, and a central TV studio for the CBC" (Walker, 1991:2). Such a facility though had never been proposed to any of the earlier administrations ("Offered by Taylor Interests", 1955:2).

In 1955, with the city's population around 1,500,000, there was great potential for the development of music, ballet and drama, potential that wasn't being fulfilled because of a lack of proper facilities ("A Handsome Offer", 1955:5). Existing venues were either too small or badly in need of repair.

As mentioned, both the Pantages (now called the Imperial) and the Elgin/Winter Garden had long abandoned live performance and were now movie houses. Shea's Victoria and the Hippodrome had suffered similar fates and were demolished in 1956 and 1957 respectively. The smaller Regent had succumbed to the wrecker's ball in 1938 (Russell, 1989a:23).

The Royal Alexandra Theatre "was the only commercial theatre in the city where professional touring companies could play" (Walker, 1991:2). Its former rivals, the Grand Opera House and the Princess Theatre (burnt in 1915 and rebuilt), were both gone by 1930 (Russell, 1989a:22). However, the Royal Alex only seated 1525 patrons and, by the fifties, was badly in need of refurbishing. It might even

have been destroyed had not Edwin Mirvish purchased and restored it in 1963 (Benson, 1989:476).

Massey Hall (1894) was, until the 1920's, the only building in Canada designed primarily for musical performance (Hall, 1985:1096). It too required rehabilitation and, despite its excellent acoustics, the suggestion was made that a civic arts centre "could allow for the closing of Massey Hall with the transfer of its assets to the foundation" (qtd. in "Offered by Taylor Interests", 1955:2).

Both Hart House which seated up to 500 and the Crest Theatre with a capacity of 842 were fairly small venues (Benson, 1989:255,119). Suitable for intimate performance, both theatres encouraged Canadian plays, especially the Crest, which was "firmly committed to developing Canadian theatre" (1989:120).

The only location in the city that could accommodate a substantial number of people (7000-plus for stage attractions) was Maple Leaf Gardens (Moore, 1960:11). A converted hockey arena with makeshift stage facilities could not be considered as a permanent location for the presentation of grand opera or classical ballet. A 3000-seat theatre that could be used for different types of performance was needed. At that time, no such facility existed in the city.

Therefore given this scarcity of adequate performance space, Taylor's offer to build the O'Keefe Centre for the Performing Arts was welcomed as a venture that would benefit the arts in Toronto. The Centre however was not a gift to the city but a non-profit commercial enterprise that would recoup its operating costs from the rental of space, while providing a public service to the people of Toronto ("Not a Gift", 1955:3). Therefore the primary motivating force behind the erection of the theatre was the need to provide a large capacity facility suitable for the presentation of all manner of current entertainment.

No land was included in the offer. Therefore a suitable site had to be selected. A central downtown location was preferred by O'Keefe so that the greatest number of people would have access to the centre ("Offered by Taylor Interests", 1955:2). Among the suggestions were the 7.5-acre grounds of the Ryerson Institute of Technology, the St. Lawrence Market site on Front Street and the Royal Conservatory of Music at College and University ("Moulton College", 1955:5). The most desirable site was seen as the Queen-Bay-Richmond-York block facing the new civic square ("Fear Clash", 1955:3).

To facilitate acquisition of the land, a private bill was introduced by E.L. Weaver PC, MPP for Toronto St. David and presented by Mayor Phillips and City Solicitor J. Palmer

Kent to the Ontario Legislature to give the City of Toronto broad powers of expropriation without assent of the voters ("O'Keefe Centre Land", 1955:1). On March 19, 1955, the Ontario Legislature passed a revised bill allowing the City of Toronto to expropriate only those lands required for the centre, should it prove necessary, and sell it at cost to the O'Keefe Foundation ("O'Keefe Auditorium", 1958:28).

At the mayor's suggestion (Walker, 1991:4), the site that was finally chosen consisted of two properties, north and south of Front Street, east of Yonge, from the Esplanade to Wellington (Morgan, 1960:461-462). The foundation was able to purchase all the lots on the open real estate market over a two-year period and despite having the option of using the city's powers of expropriation did not have to resort to using them ("O'Keefe Auditorium", 1958:28).

Unlike the three previous theatres in this discussion where site selection preceded any design decisions, the original concept for the centre was envisioned before the final site on Front Street was chosen. Therefore certain ideas that required more space than the site provided had to be abandoned. Thus the O'Keefe Company plan of having the centre located in a parkette setting similar to that of New York's Rockefeller Center ("Plan for Civic Centre", 1955:4) was simply not possible.

Other features that included the erection of a large

office building on the site to subsidize the cost of operating the auditorium were soon abandoned as being too costly. In the end only one building was constructed (Morgan, 1960:462).

The initial plans for this building included a 3000-seat multipurpose auditorium, an 800-seat theatre, over 100,000 square feet of exhibition space, convention facilities with numerous meeting rooms and a restaurant. Finally, the complex was to be served by two levels of underground parking (Walker, 1991:7).

Of the two properties flanking Front Street, the southern portion was larger. However, further study of the two-and-a-half acre site revealed that there wasn't enough room to include all the requested features (Morgan, 1960:462). Also, according to the complex's managing director Hugh Walker, a major Toronto contracting firm told the architects the cost of the design as shown would be close to \$100 million (1991:7). Since no more than \$12,000,000 could be spent on the project, and the cost of land, consultant and architect fees had already amounted to three million dollars (Walker, 1991:7), major modifications would have to be made to the design of the building.

Other related construction nearby also had a bearing on the final design. The erection of the Queen Elizabeth Building on the CNE grounds, which included a 1300-seat

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theatre and 70,000 square feet of exhibition space, and the completion of the new convention wing in the Royal York Hotel contributed to the decision to eliminate all convention facilities for the complex. Fortunately, this coincided with the need to drastically reduce construction expenditures for the centre (Walker, 1991:8).

To further reduce costs, the underground parking was also eliminated (Walker, 1991:8). The greatest loss, however, was the removal of the legitimate theatre. Although this was primarily done to save money, the theatre was crowding other necessary elements in the building (Morgan, 1960:462).

Realistically, only a limited number of the initially proposed features could be incorporated on that size of site and within the allotted resources, so that the final design of the initial grandiose project came down to a large multi-use theatre with ample foyers, numerous lounges and a rehearsal room. The site plan (Figure 4.1) shows the final design of the building that incorporated these features. Thus the size of the site and the amount of money available for the project were responsible for drastic alterations in the design of the centre.

In March of 1956, E.P. Taylor commissioned Toronto architect Earle C. Morgan to draw some preliminary sketches for the centre. He had done previous work for Taylor, such

as the new Woodbine Race Track, Greenwood Race Track, as well as several houses (Walker, 1960:4). Based on this previous record, it would be fair to assume that E.P. was familiar with the sort of work Morgan did and found it to his liking.

However, architectural critic Adele Freedman suggests the primary reason Morgan received the O'Keefe commission was because he was married to E.P. Taylor's sister (1991:5). Because his was a small office, Morgan felt it would be prudent to associate with another Toronto practice. He chose Page and Steele, an established firm that was becoming a leader in modern design (Freedman, 1990:15). Morgan convinced Hugh Walker that Page and Steele's skill in combining traditional architecture with strong modern influences was needed for the O'Keefe Centre (Walker, 1991:5). Their Benvenuto Place Apartment Hotel built in 1955 (Figure 4.2) "set the standard for Modern apartment design during the post-war period and remains a model for sophisticated urban housing in Toronto" (Toronto Modern Architecture, 1987:60). Page and Steele became affiliated with the project two weeks after Morgan received the commission (Morgan, 1960:462).

In 1950 Forsey Page hired neophyte English architect Peter Dickinson as chief designer for his firm. Dickinson had won third prize for the vertical feature called the

Skylon in the 1951 Festival of Britain, a state sponsored exposition of technology and the arts. His work had been published in Architect and Building News the previous year where it had caught the eye of Forsey Page who was looking for a "hotshot designer" (Freedman, 1990:3,5). Page had chosen well, for Dickinson was partner-in-charge for the Benvenuto project (Toronto Modern Architecture, 1987:60).

An article in the Globe and Mail credits the development of the Centre's design to Peter Dickinson ("Two Years of Study", 1957:3). In his book The O'Keefe Centre, Hugh Walker includes a rendering of the Centre by Dickinson (Figure 4.3), while it was being designed in 1957 (1991:5). Earle Morgan, in his 1960 JRAIC article on the construction of the Centre, does not mention Dickinson in any capacity, although he does include references to the Royal Festival Hall (built in conjunction with the Festival of Britain), since some features of the O'Keefe were based on it (Morgan, 1960:462).

Adele Freedman champions Dickinson as the primary architect. "Morgan is the architect of record, but not in fact...Conscious of his limitations, he was looking for a designer. Dickinson was eager. He thought of the O'Keefe as his baby" (1990:15). Unfortunately the project kept shrinking. Dickinson's design was so badly compromised that he nearly destroyed all his drawings. He left the firm in

January of 1958, two-and-a-half years before the O'Keefe Centre opened (Freedman, 1990:16).

Theatre design, which had developed into an individual specialty over fifty years earlier, now required the combined expertise of many due to its complex nature. Consultants knowledgeable in the various aspects of construction were required to collaborate on the O'Keefe project. In the early stages, when the scheme was first conceived as a civic centre, an additional architectural firm, Eggers and Higgins of New York, was retained because of its expertise in designing such complexes ("O'Keefe Auditorium", 1958:28).

American consultants experienced in acoustics, mechanical engineering, stage construction and lighting were hired to work with their Canadian counterparts (Morgan, 1960:462). Each had a bearing on the outcome of the final design. Morgan noted how a team approach was crucial for the project (Morgan, 1960:462). There were still changes being made once construction started in January 1958, (Walker, 1991:8) when Peter Dickinson left Page and Steele.

The site was in the shape of a parallelogram (Figure 4.1) and contained a nine-foot slope from north to south, which would permit the floor underneath the auditorium to be built largely at grade level (Morgan, 1960:462). Thus the hall and stage of the building were positioned in the centre

of the property to take advantage of this. Ancillary elements, the entrance, administrative area and rehearsal space, abutted this central rectangle in a manner that conformed to the parameters of the site (Figure 4.1). The remaining spaces were filled with landscaped courtyards.

The O'Keefe Centre was breaking new ground in many aspects of theatre design in Toronto. The main reason for this was that no new live performance facilities had been built in the city for close to four decades and during this time many new developments in building technology had emerged as well as new attitudes towards the requirements and comfort of both patrons and performers. An examination of the plans will illustrate the many innovations of the theatre.

The vast circulation areas were a first for a Toronto theatre. The plans of the three floors show the ample main foyer on the ground floor as well as the expansive lounges that flanked the auditorium on all three levels (Figures 4.4, 4.5, 4.6). Although the emphasis was on space, a compatible decor was also a factor. Along one wall stretched Ronald York Wilson's one hundred-foot mural. Its title, "The Seven Lively Arts", codified the Centre's theme in an exuberant abstract depiction of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Music, Literature, Drama and Dance (Figure 4.7).

All the lounges were equipped with refreshment facilities. As well, the lounge of the lower ground floor was serviced by a food counter with an adjacent kitchen (Figure 4.5). When not in use for a performance, this space could be leased for meetings, receptions and banquets ("O'Keefe Auditorium", 1958:28).

When the Royal Alex, Elgin and Pantages Theatres were first designed, they were built without refreshment stands in the lobbies. Later on, these were added. In these early years though, if refreshments were even provided, they were most likely to be brought into the auditorium by attendants (O'Neill, 1976:54-55,319). The inclusion of such facilities at the O'Keefe Centre is another indication of the changing demands of audiences.

The inspiration for these ample circulation spaces came from the Royal Festival Hall in London, England (Morgan, 1960:462). Here the main foyer was "planned as promenade space, equipped with its own bar", and could be used "either for concert hall purposes or for other uses such as receptions" ("The London County Council", 1949:432) (Figure 4.8). The auditorium itself was a self-contained shape enclosed in an envelope of rooms servicing the public: lounges, refreshment areas and a restaurant (Martin, 1952:197). The ample area under the auditorium at the Royal Festival Hall was modified in the O'Keefe Centre plan to a

space that surrounded the auditorium on the ground and lower ground floor (Figures 4.4, 4.5).

Unlike the auditoria discussed earlier in this paper which were designed primarily for one form of entertainment, the O'Keefe Centre was built to accommodate all the performing arts. The building's original design recognized the importance of having at least two distinct sizes of theatres to respond to the specific needs of different forms of entertainment. Even though this plan was abandoned, somehow the concept of hosting every type of cultural presentation under one roof was not.

The *raison d'être* for having a single hall work equally well for the spoken word, ballet, opera or musical recital boils down to economics. It is the opinion of George Izenour that the basis for this view is founded in the failure of North American culture to develop a tradition of economic support of the arts at both the public and private level as it exists in Europe (1972:33). We in Canada (and in the United States) have developed a highly sophisticated taste for the performing arts but have been reluctant to recognize that such cultural enrichment requires a fair degree of subsidy. Izenour concludes that such ambivalent attitudes have resulted in the development of the multi-purpose auditorium and the engineering technology required for its creation (1972:33). As a result, the multi-use

auditorium was an attempt to satisfy the needs of those clients who wanted a hall so adaptable that any type of performance could be presented (Mielziner, 1970:92).

This type of facility first appeared in Canada in 1955 when the Jubilee Auditoria in Edmonton and Calgary were built. Both had large seating capacities of 2700. The construction of the O'Keefe was preceded by a similar all-purpose auditorium, Vancouver's 2815-seat Queen Elizabeth Theatre, erected in 1959 (Benson, 1989:27).

The O'Keefe auditorium was designed so that the farthest row was 124 feet from the stage. To incorporate the desired large number of seats and maintain good sight lines, a fan shaped space was adopted (Figure 4.4). The use of the fan shaped auditorium can be traced back to 1876 when Richard Wagner used Gottfried Semper's design for his opera house in Bayreuth, Germany. The floor was sharply ramped for clear viewing, although the seats were laid out in straight lines. It was here that the first installation of continental seating occurred (Mielziner, 1970:53).

Although not incorporated into the Bayreuth design, the previous year, French designers Davioud and Bourdais had devised a seating plan that staggered the seats to further improve sight lines. This plan came to be considered as the ideal solution to the problem of sight lines in fan shaped auditoria (Mielziner, 1970:53).

The O'Keefe Centre does not have continental seating. Instead, the front section of the orchestra contains two aisles and the main body of the auditorium is divided by four more (Figure 4.9). Hugh Walker was against having a solid block of seats, since he felt it would be far easier for patrons to reach their places if numerous aisles were provided (1991:18).

To increase the flexibility of the theatre, the size of the house could be reduced from 3200 to 1200 seats by drawing an acoustic curtain in front of the balcony to provide a more intimate venue when needed. Accordingly, the sixty by thirty foot proscenium opening would be reduced to thirty-six by eighteen feet to balance the revised seating (Benson, 1989:394).

The orchestra pit was also designed in this mode of adaptability. Normally the pit would accommodate fifty musicians. However this number could be increased to ninety with the use of additional space behind the regular pit and under the forestage (Benson, 1989:394; Walker, 1991:16). At the other extreme, when no musicians were required, the pit would be raised to audience level and fifty-six additional seats would be adjoined. This would also create a greater feeling of intimacy between the performers and the audience (Walker, 1991:16).

The downsizing feature was incorporated into the

O'Keefe's design to provide for those infrequent but necessary occasions when the Centre would be needed for stage plays or other events that required a smaller venue. The theatre was built primarily to host large scale spectacles. Musicals led the priority of use, followed by international artists, opera, ballet and, as a last resort, plays (Walker, 1991:16).

The stage was the largest in Canada. Including wing space, it measured 125 feet wide by 60 feet deep. The 60' by 30' proscenium could be reduced to 36' by 18' (Benson, 1989:394), to correspond to any changes in the auditorium size. The adaptable capacity of the hall and orchestra pit plus the variable proscenium opening demonstrate how the form of the theatre was intentionally designed to fulfill its mandate as a multi-use facility.

The stage tower rose 104 feet above the stage floor and was of double wall construction for proper sound insulation (Yolles, 1960:482). Its gigantic size was intended to allow the centre to mount any type of production.

The west wing of the theatre contained the dressing rooms and green room (Figure 4.5). Green rooms had existed in older and more spacious theatres in England since the 1700's and were for the use of performers when they were not on stage. They were originally painted green, hence their name (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989, 6:819). Until the

construction of the O'Keefe Centre, green rooms were not included in the design of Toronto theatres. Since that time new and restored theatres have incorporated such a room into their backstage facilities.

This wing also contained a rehearsal hall (Figure 4.5), whose dimensions matched those of the performance area of the stage (Walker, 1991:19). Earlier Toronto theatres did not contain rehearsal studios because commercial houses rarely provided such rooms (Mielziner, 1970:113).

In vaudeville days, Monday morning was usually reserved for rehearsal (Russell, 1989a:101) and this generally took place directly on stage, since the theatre would be closed at that time. Similarly, rehearsals at the Royal Alex could be accommodated on stage during the day. As a road house that received completed productions, space to practice, apart from the stage itself, wasn't necessary. Therefore at the time of its construction, such a feature apparently was not of great concern. Today, theatres with resident companies consider a rehearsal room with an area equivalent to that of the stage essential (Mielziner, 1970:113). Even though the O'Keefe Centre did not house a resident company when it was first conceived, it was the first theatre in Toronto to include rehearsal space.

By the time of the construction of the O'Keefe Centre, architectural acoustics had become a recognized field. Its

purpose of improving the sound quality of music and speech would be vital in a multi-purpose facility such as the O'Keefe where the complete spectrum of the performing arts, each with its own acoustical needs, would be presented.

Concert music requires a hall that has a large volume-audience-capacity ratio so that a long reverberation time that sustains the fluidity of the musical tone is created (Henderson, 1960:478; Izenour, 1972:35). Conversely, for the clarity and precision needed for speech, a short reverberation time (about one-half to three-fifths of that required for symphony) with a quick delay of sound is necessary (Henderson, 1960:478; Izenour, 1972:35). Opera, musicals and chamber music fall between these two extremes (Izenour, 1972:35). A.L. Henderson, acoustical engineer for the O'Keefe Centre, realistically stated that "bookings will vary all the way from symphony concerts to commentaries on ladies' fashions, and nothing less than a range of reverberant conditions can do justice to them all" (1960:478). As well as considering the specific acoustical needs of these different art forms, it was also recognized that sound volume decreases with distance at a rate of six decibels with each doubling of distance from the source" (Henderson, 1960:477).

All these factors would have to be taken into account in the design of the auditorium. Thus the depth and shape

of the hall, the contours of the ceiling, the height of the balcony and the materials used for the walls were all designed to maximize the sound quality of the auditorium.

As noted earlier the last row was placed no further than 124 feet from the stage. The fan shaped space as well as providing good sight lines would contribute to good sound reception for the greatest number of people. The floor was steeply raked, not only for sight lines but also as an accommodation for the acoustics, because "high frequency sounds do not diffract around substantial objects such as heads" (Henderson, 1960:477). Once the basic shape of the auditorium was established, the form of the walls and ceiling, their material composition and the height of the balcony had to be resolved to achieve the best possible acoustics.

The ceiling was contoured to diffuse sound evenly in the upper part of the house. The balcony was placed fairly high above the orchestra. This was done to allow sound to pass freely underneath and be heard by those at the farthest reaches of the auditorium. While this may have enhanced the acoustics, theatre critic Mavor Moore complained that the balconies were placed too high and too far from the stage to do justice to the performances (Moore, 1960:11).

The side walls were made of cherry plywood panels over concrete block arranged in a waffle pattern. These

acoustical panels would move to provide either a hard resonant reflective surface or an absorbent one, depending on the need for long or short reverberation time (Henderson, 1960:477-478). That these panels were made of wood necessitated fireproofing them in a manner that would not interfere with their acoustical function (Morgan, 1960:462). The rear walls of both the balcony and orchestra were built to be highly absorbent of sound to prevent echoing in the theatre (Henderson, 1960:476).

A huge movable shell above the stage reflected the sound of the orchestra into the auditorium. The installation of this shell was to accommodate the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, which might be obliged to relocate from Massey Hall then in a state of growing disrepair (Walker, 1991:16). It was not the intention to use the O'Keefe Centre as a concert hall (1991:16), but in endeavouring to fulfill its mandate as a multi-use hall, additional accommodations were made.

Up until the construction of the O'Keefe Centre, no theatre in the city had the design of its auditorium so manipulated for the production of good acoustics. This was primarily due to the multi-use purpose of the theatre and the resultant necessary range of its acoustical requirements. However such demands were unrealistic and despite all their efforts to equip the hall with as broad a

range of acoustical properties as possible, Hugh Walker stated that the engineers could not completely overcome the inherent problems of a multi-purpose theatre (1991:22).

Mechanical areas were reduced to a minimum and kept as far away from the stage and auditorium as possible. This was for ease of maintenance and to keep noise levels low. A sophisticated ventilation system ensured that the temperature in each area of the building was properly controlled, despite great potential for fluctuations (Granek, 1960:479).

A model of the building clearly illustrates its main components as six distinct geometrical shapes (Figure 4.10). The bold protruding square of the canopy (A) abuts from the triangular administrative and reception area (B). The large rectangular platform with its slight curvature (C) contains the reception foyers and ground floor of the auditorium. The fan shaped roof form (D) encloses the balcony. The prominent rectangular projection (E) is the stage tower which includes the stage and wings. Lastly, to conform to the contours of the site, the plans incorporate a quadrilateral (F) that contains the dressing rooms, rehearsal hall and mechanical area.

The tenets of modernism are clearly expressed. The lines of the building are clean, simple and functional. Each shape delineates a separate part of the building and

thus its purpose. There are no extraneous elements or superfluous decoration.

Although they are vastly different structures, the massing of the O'Keefe Centre is reminiscent of Gordon Bunshaft's Lever House (1951) of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (Figure 4.11). Both contain a large rectangular body that is visually supported by piloti. The rectangle in turn serves as a platform that supports the main slab in the case of Lever House and for the O'Keefe, other sections of the building. Lever House was one of Dickinson's favourite compositions of the International Style (Freedman, 1991:18), and in formulating the design for the O'Keefe Centre, he may have incorporated the essence of its massing as a central theme.

Unlike the earlier theatres, the O'Keefe Centre embodies the idea of structure as sculpture. The external elevations of the Royal Alexandra also display a movement of surface, but the forms are all rectangular (Figure 1.1). Lamb's two houses are utilitarian boxes with connecting links that reserve their artistry for the interior (Figures 2.13, 3.13). In contrast, Dickinson's forms are moulded and varied and have been manipulated to achieve a balance of proportion and weight. The design of the O'Keefe Centre is thus appreciated from all perspectives.

According to Adele Freedman, the inspiration for such

plasticity may have come from Finnish architects Eero and Eliel Saarinen's Kleinhaus Music Hall (1938) in Buffalo, New York (Figure 4.12), which Dickinson personally viewed (1990:18). The building boasts a fan shaped 3000-seat auditorium and an 800-seat theatre (the same initial features proposed for the O'Keefe). Both are enclosed in semi-circular forms linked by a rectangular bridge. The shape of the building is meant to resemble a violin (Christ-Janer, 1979:92).

Whereas Saarinen's forms are more organic than Dickinson's, they are both attempting to use sculpted masses to define their structures symbolically and functionally. This was not seen in Toronto again until Finnish architect Viljo Revell designed Toronto City Hall in 1958 (Figure 4.13) which was completed in 1965.

The O'Keefe Centre was faced in Alabama limestone. The city's promise to curtail smoke nuisances encouraged the use of this material (Morgan, 1960:462). The base of the structure was of granite and glass (O'Keefe, 1958:70), with doors, cladding and trim made of bronze, a preference stipulated by the owners (Morgan, 1960:462). The roof form was enclosed in bronze and granite (O'Keefe, 1958:70).

Included as part of the design were landscaped courtyards that flanked the rear and sides of the building (Figures 4.1, 4.10). This had not been seen in a Toronto

theatre before. In warmer weather, doors opened from the lounges to allow people to spill out onto these terraces. The modernist conception of merging structure with landscape found concrete expression in the continual movement of the people as they passed into and out of the building.

Despite all the thought that went into the planning of the O'Keefe Centre, much criticism was levelled at the design of the theatre. Fault was found with its acoustics, the cavernous size and fan shape of its auditorium (Currie, 1990:C2) and the height of the balcony (Moore, 1960:11). Nonetheless, from a design perspective, the Centre was creative, innovative and modern.

Its sculpted massing and landscaped courtyards redefined external building expression for theatre architecture in Toronto. The facilities for performers - adequate dressing rooms, rehearsal space, a Green Room and mammoth stage dimensions - demonstrated a respect for performers' needs not previously heeded. The consideration of its patrons was reflected in a capacious auditorium with comfortable seating and excellent sight lines. The unprecedented circulation space with abundant refreshment facilities contributed to a total entertainment experience.

Technological advances enabled the Centre to provide excellent air quality and temperature control, state of the art lighting effects both on the stage and in the rest of

the theatre, acoustical manipulation in the auditorium, and sound proofing for the building. Adjusting the size of the hall also relied on these mechanical innovations.

The concept of a multi-purpose theatre was new for the city and would not be so ambitiously repeated. The building type, unique for Toronto, did however reflect a trend in theatre design prevalent in North America in the sixties and seventies.

The O'Keefe Centre was the first theatre constructed in the city that so totally embraced the principles of modernism. Its concept, form, decor and technological attributes exemplified ideals that had been developing for decades, but which only started to find expression in Canada in the late fifties. In a sense it was a brave experiment that challenged long held notions of theatre architecture. The shortcomings of the plan even more than its strengths provided a valuable lesson for future playhouse construction in the evolving process of theatre design.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ST. LAWRENCE CENTRE

In 1963, the city was still without an 800-seat playhouse that could house a resident company to encourage indigenous Canadian talent. The two main theatres, the three-year-old O'Keefe Centre and the newly restored Royal Alexandra Theatre, primarily hosted foreign productions. The Centennial was four years away and national culture, once an elusive notion, was becoming an important issue for many Canadians.

A new playhouse for the City of Toronto named the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts was erected in 1970 in response to this need for intimate performance space. Its creation also provided a facility whereby local artistic talent could be expressed. An examination of the background of the centre's formation will demonstrate how this influenced the design of the theatre.

In 1963 the City of Toronto Planning Board commissioned a study of the downtown core to best determine how the area should be developed. The findings revealed that Toronto lacked "a focal point, a centre of gravity, for the expression of its arts" (qtd. in Moore, 1968:4) and that, as the core of a growing metropolis, the cultural growth of the

downtown area was imperative (TAF Progress Report, 1965:1). The Planning Board then proposed the creation of a St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts near St. Lawrence Hall (1850), a historic building that was once the centre of the city's cultural and political life. The City of Toronto Redevelopment Advisory Council unanimously approved the concept of such a centre and its proposed location (TAF Progress Report, 1965:1).

In 1963 the Federal and Provincial governments, in preparation for the 1967 Canadian Centennial, announced per capita grants for municipalities for Centennial projects. This money was for the erection of buildings that would be used solely for cultural purposes (SLC Fact Sheet, 1968:1). City Council approved a proposal that Toronto's official Centennial project be the renovation of St. Lawrence Hall and the "provision of some part of the St. Lawrence Centre" (TAF Progress Report, 1965:1).

To oversee the completion of this project City Council appointed an eight-man Executive Committee headed by John C. Lockwood. The members of the committee were prominent citizens, many of whom were businessmen. When the committee concluded that this project would be better served if it was co-ordinated with existing cultural facilities, the group became known as the Toronto Arts Foundation in recognition of its broader scope (TAF Progress Report, 1965:2).

The Foundation described itself as "...a non-profit organization of citizens to assist in co-ordinating and planning the financing and physical development of our city's cultural facilities and activities" (TAF Progress Report, 1965:1). The Foundation operated through the eight-person Executive Committee and reported to a sixteen-member Board of Governors. Included on the Board was Floyd S. Chalmers, LL.D, a patron of the arts, who in 1964 established the Floyd S. Chalmers Foundation to assist young artists (Laine, 1985:313). The Mayor and two members of City Council were to be ex officio members. At the time of the Foundation's inception, they were His Worship, Mayor Philip G. Givens, Q.C., and Controllers William L. Archer, Q.C. and Herbert Orliffe, Q.C. (TAF Progress Report, 1965:5).

The Toronto Arts Foundation was given the responsibility of conducting an enquiry to determine what cultural facilities were most urgently needed for the city (Moore:1968:4). To do this, the Foundation employed the services of Urwick, Currie, an independent management consulting firm (Moore 1968:4-5). Their report, "An Assessment of Toronto's Cultural Facilities and Requirements", recommended the construction of an 800-seat theatre, a 500-seat concert hall and a facilities building containing rehearsal and workshop space and storage rooms.

They also recommended the renovation of Massey Hall, the expansion of the Art Gallery of Ontario and the restoration of St. Lawrence Hall (Moore, 1968:4-5).

On June 19, 1964, Toronto City Council approved the Foundation's proposal for a five-project Centennial program based on the recommendations in the Urwick, Currie Report. The St. Lawrence Centre of the Arts would comprise two buildings that would be City-owned and operated by the Foundation (TAF Progress Report 1965:3).

By January 1965, the Foundation reported that the architects for the project, Gordon S. Adamson & Associates were completing the preliminary plans for the Festival Hall and Arts Building (TAF Progress Report, 1965:6). An early scheme for the project was published in August 1965 with the two buildings spaced a block apart on two separate sites at Front and Esplanade Streets respectively, east of Yonge (Figure 5.1).

Shortly afterwards, due to rising costs and the proposed construction of a School for the Performing Arts, the Foundation decided to postpone the erection of the Arts Building (also referred to as the Facilities Building) and to rent such space as needed (SLC Fact Sheet, 1986:2).

In November 1966, a new design was approved by City Council. It was a two-building complex comprising a theatre and a concert hall (Figure 5.2). The theatre was still

planned for the original site, but the second building containing the concert hall was to be erected on the current site of the St. Lawrence Centre on the south side of Front, east of the O'Keefe Centre (Elte, 1970:42).

However the lowest bid for building the Centre was \$2,900,000 more than the amount available for its construction which was \$5.4 million. The project then had to be re-examined (Moore, 1968:6). By combining the buildings under one roof on the less expensive south site (Figure 5.3), a considerable amount of money could be saved and the chances of the project coming in under budget were improved (Moore, 1968:6; Elte, 1970:42-43). This new plan was designed in the fall of 1967 ("St. Lawrence Centre", 1970:35).

As a further measure, the City and the Foundation approached the Federal Government for additional assistance. Secretary of State Judy Lamarsh gave financial approval for the revised plan (Figure 5.3), but only on condition that the site for the Centre become part of the first phase of an urban renewal scheme in the south-east section of downtown Toronto ("St. Lawrence Centre", 1970:35). Accordingly, the Federal and Provincial Governments would share land costs with the City. Construction of the Centre began in June 1968 with a total cost of \$5.4 million dollars (SLC Information Bulletin, 1968:1).

In a similar scenario to the construction of the O'Keefe Centre, the plans of the complex were hampered by site restrictions resulting from monetary constraints. However, based on the recommendations in the Urwick, Currie Report, the St. Lawrence Centre was still to provide the city with a much needed mid-sized theatre, an intimate concert hall and rehearsal and workshop space (Moore, 1968:5).

It has been the thesis of this study that theatre begets theatre architecture. The legitimate stage generated the building of the Royal Alex. Vaudeville and movies were responsible for the construction of the Elgin, Winter Garden and Pantages Theatres. Grand scale spectacle was the main reason behind the completion of the O'Keefe Centre, its adaptable auditorium designed to compensate for the shortage of mid-sized venues in the city.

The creation of the St. Lawrence Centre is consistent with this argument. A more intimate type of performance space was needed to properly present plays, chamber music, folk dancing and debate. However its mandate went further. The type of theatre (the term being used in the broadest sense) to be presented on its stages was to have a Canadian flavour. The St. Lawrence Centre was to be considered Toronto's civic cultural centre and was to be a focus for Canadian performing arts. It would also recognize the

diverse ethnicity of the city, our Canadian mosaic, and encourage its expression (SLC Fact Sheet, 1968:3).

The Centre was not a privately run operation but owned by the City of Toronto and administered by a board of management, a standing committee of the Toronto Arts Foundation (SLC Fact Sheet, 1968:3). Once the domain of the aspiring entrepreneur, performance halls were now also the responsibility of civic administrations intent upon enriching the cultural life of the citizenry. In 1968, Canadian Breweries Ltd., the parent company of O'Keefe Breweries, gave the O'Keefe Centre to the City of Toronto in exchange for the original land costs, \$2.75 million (Currie, 1990:C2).

Although the O'Keefe endeavoured to augment the cultural life of the city, its mandate was not restricted to Canadian content. However by becoming the performing house of the National Ballet of Canada and the Canadian Opera Company, the Centre did foster Canadian talent. Similarly, when the City of Montreal built Place des Arts in 1963, its main hall, the 2952-seat Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier, became home to the Montreal Symphony Orchestra and the Montreal Opera. Both centres are examples of theatres in Canada that receive government subsidy.

The notion of public funding for the arts followed upon the establishment of the Canada Council in 1957. Its

mandate defined by Parliament was "to encourage the study and enjoyment of the arts, humanities and social sciences, as well as the production of related works". In turn, its creation and success was a direct result of government decisions to support the development of a national cultural identity (Kattan, 1985:263).

The completion of the National Arts Centre in Ottawa in 1969 provided the country with a state supported theatre that also fulfilled this directive. The 1966 National Arts Centre Act declared that the purpose of the Centre was "to develop the performing arts in the National Capital region and to assist the Canada Council in the development of the performing arts elsewhere in Canada" (qtd. in Wagner 1985:1193).

The St. Lawrence Centre was a civic version of this ideal. "As a "community arts centre", the St. Lawrence complex must have a continuing relevance to the community of Toronto, as a city, a provincial capital, and Canada's largest English-speaking city" (SLC Fact Sheet, 1968:3). The larger hall was named the Theatre, the smaller one was called the Town Hall.

A Design and Construction sub-committee of the TAF, headed by Alan Eaton, was responsible for the selection of architects for the project. Eaton reported that the firms interviewed were Toronto based and "had substantial

experience in theatre and music hall design and construction" (TAF Executive Committee Minutes, 1964:4). The firm of Adamson & Associates was selected because of their "distinctive and timeless approach to design" and because of their "wide experience in the planning of auditoria" (TAF Press Release, 1964:1).

Toronto commissions completed by the firm included the erection of the E.J. Pratt Library (1961) on Queen's Park Crescent and alterations to the Royal Canadian Military Institute (1955) on University Avenue (McHugh, 1985:108,124). Although the firm did not specialize in theatre design, they were responsible for the plans of the Edward Johnson School of Music at the University of Toronto which contained the MacMillan Theatre and the Music Hall (TAF Press Release, 1964:1).

According to Garfield MacInnis, partner-in-charge of project, his was the original design, but the subsequent drawings were done by a team of architects (Personal Interview, October 16,1994). Architectural critic Hans Elte credited the designers with solving the basic requirements of the building although he felt the site was too small to properly proportion many elements in the complex (1970:42).

The size of the site for the St. Lawrence Centre is 200 feet by 180 feet, about one-quarter that of the adjacent O'Keefe (Figure 5.3). It contained a similar north to south

downhill slope of nine feet. The architects positioned the rake of the building's two auditoria (Figure 5.4) to take advantage of this natural gradient ("St. Lawrence Centre", 1970:36).

The plan of the longitudinal section (Figure 5.5) shows the division of the building's three floors. The common entrance foyer was on the middle level and opened onto the lobbies of both theatres (Figure 5.6). The two halls were positioned beside one another, with the smaller Town Hall set slightly behind the Theatre. On the first floor, they were separated by a solid wall so that it was not possible to go from one lobby to another (Figure 5.6).

Hans Elte considered these lobbies too small for easy circulation. Moreover, he felt that the generous outside space just beyond could have been put to better use if it had been incorporated into the interior design of the building (1970:42).

Unlike the lobby on the main floor, the mezzanine lounge of the Theatre contained no windows (Figure 5.7). It was the view of the architects that by extending an unbroken surface along the entire length of the second floor, the composition achieved a greater degree of unity. The adjacent mechanical area also encouraged the design of a solid plane. As well, the unbroken interior wall would provide a surface for art exhibition. To compensate for the

lack of windows and to create a feeling of more expansive space inside, skylights replaced the conventional ceiling and opened the lounge to the sky ("St. Lawrence Centre", 1970:38). The lounge of the Town Hall, positioned behind the mechanical area, was similarly serviced with these apertures (Figure 5.5).

Again Elte found fault with these concepts, claiming that the connection with the outside world could not be achieved with skylights. Windows would not only have enhanced the façade but would also have defined these areas as distinct sections of the building (1970:44).

Although these lobbies were not as generous as those at the neighbouring O'Keefe Centre, they were still proportionally larger than those initially built for the Elgin complex and the Pantages Theatre as shown in their respective plans (Figures 2.4, 3.5). Because of budget constraints for the St. Lawrence Centre, compromises had to be made and expansive lobbies were not a top priority. When the Theatre was redesigned in 1983 ("St. Lawrence Centre", 1983:32), the lobby size was increased and circulation improved significantly (Figure 5.8). A model made of the theatre after the renovation shows that three sets of windows were punched out of the concrete along the north lobby wall (Figure 5.9).

The Town Hall, as its name implied, was to serve as a

meeting place for the community. Its dimensions were intended for performance that required a more intimate setting such as chamber music, folk singing, lectures and film (SLC Fact Sheet, 1968:4). The 483-seat auditorium was separated by a cross-aisle which divided the hall into an upper and a lower section. Patrons entered the hall from the lobby onto this cross-aisle. The rows flared out slightly from the stage. The house had neither balcony nor boxes (Figures 5.6, 5.7).

The stage was a fixed open concert form with an apron front. There was no fly gallery. Therefore any scenery used had to be self-supporting. Performers accessed the stage from four tunnels in the auditorium, from the wings and from the traps below ("St. Lawrence Centre", 1970:36).

The Town Hall was equipped with 16 and 35mm film projectors and contained a sound and lighting system. Television conduits were also available (SLC Information Bulletin, 1968:2).

Of all the theatres in this discussion, the Town Hall is the smallest and the least complex. Nevertheless it successfully hosted numerous types of performance and events suited to its format. Its small size precluded any difficulties pertaining to a good actor-audience relationship. As a venue for film, the hall was better served without loges. In 1985 the Town Hall was renamed the

Jane Mallett Theatre after the renowned Canadian actress who had died the year before. Seating was increased to 498 including ten spaces that could be removed for wheelchair access (Figure 5.10).

The St. Lawrence Theatre seated 831. Its intimate scale meant that no seat was further than 65 feet from the stage ("St. Lawrence Centre", 1970:36). The auditorium was designed without balcony or loges. Like the Town Hall, it was divided by a cross-aisle that led out to the lobby (Figure 5.6). An upper and lower seating area radiated out from the stage in a fan shape (Figure 5.7). To maximize sight lines the floor was very steeply raked (Laufer, 1974:43). Although smaller in scale, the auditorium of the Theatre was similar to that of the O'Keefe and reflected current theatre design belief that the poor sight lines afforded by loges was ample reason to dispense with them.

Because the mandate of the theatre was to stage all forms of drama, the seating in the auditorium should have been tightly focused onto the front of the stage to increase the interaction between the actor and the audience. However once the Theatre went into production it became apparent that the fan shape of the auditorium did not achieve this. Seen as an ideal solution during the last three decades for larger halls such as the O'Keefe Centre, this type of arrangement did not create the intimacy needed for dramatic

production.

Still, in order to fulfill its promise of accommodating as many types of performance as possible, the stage format of the Theatre could change from one type to another. It could alternately contain a proscenium arch, convert to an apron (or thrust stage) or change to a three-sided or triptych form. The proscenium opening was adaptable much like its counterpart at the O'Keefe Centre. Its width could vary from thirty-six to eighty-two feet, its height from sixteen to twenty-one feet. Overall the thrust stage measured fifty-two by twenty-five feet and could assume a variety of levels, shapes and sizes by means of four elevators containing traps. It could also be used as an orchestra pit when necessary ("St. Lawrence Centre", 1970:36).

The first thrust stage in Canada was designed by Tanya Moiseiwitsch for the opening season of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival in 1953 (Benson, 1989:504). When the Festival Theatre was built in 1957, its stage was the first permanent thrust built in Canada. Its effectiveness caused it to be widely imitated (Mann, 1985:1750) and its creation can be credited almost exclusively with reviving Shakespearean staging techniques (Taylor, 1994:C5).

The triptych stage employed large movable panels placed in the large wing space beside the proscenium arch that

would "embrace the audience in caliper fashion" ("St. Lawrence Centre", 1970:38).

The three stage forms could be used individually or in combination with one another depending on what effect was required. Seating could be rearranged to offer better sight lines for each type of performance ("St. Lawrence Centre", 1970:38), although part of the audience would often have some difficulty seeing in each case (Benson, 1989:502). The adaptable Theatre stage was made possible not only because of mechanical technology but also because of the ingenuity of its designers. Actor and playwright Mavor Moore was the centre's first General Director. He was involved in many of the decisions regarding the design of the stage (MacInnis, Personal Interview, October 16, 1994).

Despite all these innovative adaptations, Murray Laufer, the Centre's first resident designer, discovered that certain of the theatre's features presented problems. Having determined that the thrust stage appeared to work best for most of the Centre's productions, he noted that the thrust and the house did not complement each other. The audience space did not relate to the stage in either width or volume. The steep rake of the auditorium encouraged a separation of actor and audience (Benson, 1989:502) and focused the attention of the viewers onto the stage floor, making it appear too prominent and thus detracting from the

performance (Laufer, 1974:43).

Nonetheless Laufer did find ingenious solutions for each production. For Brecht's "Galileo" (1971), to bridge the gap between stage and house, Laufer used ceiling pieces that jutted out from the stage. Because the thrust stage needs three-dimensional materials for best effect, he used a corrugated metal structure for Brecht's "Good Woman of Setzuan" (1974). These devices helped to overcome any shortcomings in the design of the hall (Laufer, 1974:43).

Back stage facilities were located behind the stage areas and under both auditoria. The receiving entrance and stage door were located on the ground level at the rear of the building so that sets, costumes and equipment could easily be loaded onto either stage (SLC Fact Sheet, 1968:6).

The performers' dressing rooms were placed under the seating of each auditorium, at a level that was slightly lower than the stage ("St. Lawrence Centre", 1970:36) (Figure 5.11). They were a considerable distance from their respective stages, unlike earlier houses where the dressing rooms were located beyond the wings.

The Theatre of the St. Lawrence Centre was the first in the city to be built expressly for a resident company (Benson, 1989:502). At that time the company was called CentreStage and was part of the Toronto Arts Foundation. In 1988 it merged with Toronto Free Theatre and was renamed the

Canadian Stage Company. It is currently one of the country's largest arts organizations (Benson, 1989: 85,76).

It was noted previously that theatres with resident companies thought it imperative to provide rehearsal space within the building. Accordingly a generous rehearsal hall as well as a musicians' practice room were included in the plans. Both were located on the ground floor behind the Town Hall and Theatre respectively (Figure 5.11). The inclusion of two new rehearsal studios in the 1987-89 Elgin/Winter Garden restoration demonstrates the continuing importance of these spaces for Toronto theatres (Russell, 1989a:150).

The green room was located on the ground floor between the two rehearsal halls (Figure 5.11). Such areas where performers could receive their friends and obtain refreshment were now standard features of backstage facilities. Such rooms also recognized the attention that was being paid to performers' needs.

Storage areas for properties and sets were found on the ground floor between the two halls. The workshop was located behind the stage of the main theatre, conveniently adjacent to the receiving dock (Figure 5.11).

A costume room with accompanying laundry facilities was situated between the dressing rooms behind the Theatre (Figure 5.11). These services illustrate the evolving needs

of theatre production in Toronto during these years.

Mechanical rooms were placed on the ground and second floors in the northwest corner of the building well distanced from the stage. The cooling tower was beside the mechanical room on the second floor (Figure 5.7). Unlike the O'Keefe where most of the ventilation system was contained in a separate wing of the building, such facilities at the St. Lawrence Centre were integrated within the complex, but situated as far away as possible from the performing areas.

To complement the height of the other structures on the street the architects kept the geometry of the building low and had recommended the use of brick for the façade. However the cheaper cost of concrete resulted in its use for the elevations (MacInnis, Personal Interview, October 16, 1994). The building was therefore finished with poured-in-place concrete, bronzed aluminum panels, paving brick and glazing. It was the intention of the architects to use a minimum of materials, both for the exterior and for the interior of the complex ("St. Lawrence Centre", 1970:38).

A continuous soffit supported on columns created a covered open space that ran the width of the complex along Front Street. The façade at this level was fully glazed with plate glass and glass mullions along its entire length to permit a continuous exchange between the interior of the

building and the outside foyer ("St. Lawrence Centre", 1970:36-38) (Figure 5.12).

The second floor was faced with concrete panels and had large skylights in its roof. These allowed light to enter the lounges below. The stage tower of the theatre loomed above, its upper section protruding over the roof beneath (Figure 5.12).

The style of the Centre appears to reflect current architectural ideology with its use of the Brutalist aesthetic. The philosophy of this idiom with its minimal use of materials favouring the rough concrete known as béton brut, provided a very practical solution for a project that definitely had to come in under budget. Concrete's relatively inexpensive cost and construction method permitted the architects to complete the program within the constraints of the budget.

The design of the project was compromised considerably when the project was downsized from two buildings to one. (Mackintosh, 1983:13). Not surprisingly many criticisms were levelled at the complex shortly after it was built. Poor spatial planning appeared to be its most obvious flaw (Elte, 1970:44). But more importantly, within the Theatre itself, the audience space did not connect properly with the stage and this was crucial for successful theatre.

The Theatre's resident producing company CentreStage,

aided by private and public funding, initiated the St. Lawrence Centre Theatre Transformation in 1981. In 1983 the Thom Partnership renovated the Theatre to create a better atmosphere for live theatre. The form of the Theatre was changed significantly (Figure 5.8). The house was reshaped into a more rectangular form by reducing its depth and width. A balcony was added as well as three cascading boxes on each side of the hall. The Theatre now resembled the format of a nineteenth century proscenium theatre (Mackintosh, 1983:14). It was renamed the Bluma Appel Theatre after its major patron.

These changes were the result of a re-examination of the rationale for theatre design that had been occurring for some time. The St. Lawrence Centre's 1983 renovations marked a turning point for theatre design in Toronto. This was because the next new theatre in the city, the Princess of Wales, constructed in 1993, adopted this same auditorium format for the same reasons. The Main Hall of the North York Performing Arts Centre, erected the same year, also has a similar configuration thus demonstrating the importance of design that captures the essence of live theatre.

CHAPTER SIX

THE PRINCESS OF WALES THEATRE

The eighties ushered in a form of performance known as the mega-musical that would come to impact on theatre design. These productions were characterized by sweeping scores, brilliant choreography executed by a large chorus, spectacular costumes and sets, and special effects so complicated that computers were needed for their execution.

The first show of this type to play in Toronto was "CATS" which opened in March 1985 at the Elgin Theatre (Russell, 1989a:147). Its two-year run and \$40 million gross proved that Toronto was capable of sustaining such expensive productions long enough to recoup their great investment.

Following the success of "CATS", "Les Misérables" opened in 1989 at the venerable Royal Alexandra Theatre for two long-run engagements that totalled twenty-nine months (Taylor, 1993a:C1). This demonstrated once again that a blockbuster musical could easily fill a house for an extended period.

Rather than continue to stage such productions at the Royal Alex or Elgin, the option of new venues emerged. Two months after announcing the formation of Cineplex Odeon's

Live Entertainment Division in January 1988, Garth Drabinsky revealed that he planned to restore the Imperial S.x movie house on Yonge Street to its original splendour as a showcase for live theatre (Crew, 1988:F1). Four months later he triumphantly reported that he had secured the Canadian rights for the British mega-musical "The Phantom of the Opera" which would open the reborn Pantages Theatre in the fall of 1989 (Rochon, 1988:C4). He geared its restoration towards the accommodation of this production (Olsneski, 1989:94).

Among the Canadian theatre producers bidding for the "Phantom" rights were Ed and David Mirvish of Mirvish Productions and owners of the Royal Alexandra Theatre. In anticipation of a successful bid, David Mirvish commissioned Toronto architect Peter Smith to design a temporary building with an undecorated exterior that would be painted to look like the Paris Opera. The intent was to demolish the building once the show ended (Taylor, 1993a:C1). Although this temporary structure was not built, it demonstrated the willingness of Toronto theatre producers to create new venues for these extremely popular musical shows.

The idea of a temporary theatre resurfaced in 1990 when Cameron Mackintosh, the London producer of "Miss Saigon", agreed to co-produce the musical with the Mirvishes (Knelman, 1991:18). Because the Royal Alex was too small to

accommodate all the special effects, Mirvish Productions planned to erect a temporary structure on an empty lot on King Street, one block west of the Royal Alexandra, at a cost of \$10 million. The building would be torn down after the musical closed (Bemrose, 1993:36). However falling downtown real estate values made it impractical to erect a temporary building on the site (Taylor, 1993a:C1).

Also parking became an issue. According to city bylaws, the new structure would require one parking space for every five seats in the theatre, located within 300 metres of the building (Taylor, 1993a:C1). Since the closest offsite parking was at least 360 metres away at Aetna and at First Canadian Place, David Mirvish requested a variance of 50-100 metres (Friedlander, 1991:D1). Such variances were regularly granted by City Hall, an assurance Mirvish received in 1991 (Bemrose, 1993:36; Friedlander, 1991:D1).

Nonetheless, Garth Drabinsky lodged a formal statement complaining that the Mirvishes would be receiving preferential treatment if the application was approved. Unwilling to get involved in a lengthy legal battle, the Mirvishes revised the plans of the building and created a four level 418-space parking garage under the theatre (Friedlander, 1991:D1). This added six months and approximately \$5 million to the project (Mirvish, Personal

Interview, October 19,1994).

Happily some benefit was derived from this setback. There was now no doubt that the theatre was to be permanent. Given this change of circumstances, David Mirvish subsequently explored new interior decorative possibilities, enlisting the talents of New York artist Frank Stella and Toronto interior designers Glenn Pushelberg and George Yabu. In the end a better and more beautiful theatre was created (Bemrose, 1993:36).

An application was made to Buckingham Palace to name the new playhouse the Princess of Wales Theatre. Permission was granted on January 20,1993, just four months before the opening. As well as its association with the Royal Family, the name made historical reference to the original Princess Theatre built in 1889 that once stood on King Street, three blocks east of this new building (Adilman, 1993:B6).

The Princess of Wales Theatre was built to provide Toronto with an ideal venue in which to present the latest mega-musical, "Miss Saigon". David Mirvish stated that the reason they were able to build the theatre was because of this production (Portman, 1993:F1). "You can't build a new theatre without a strong show to drive it. That's the history of the theatre" (qtd. in Bemrose, 1993:35).

However, constructing a theatre for just a single production despite its overwhelming popularity would

demonstrate a lack of vision, not a characteristic of the Mirvishes. Thus, David Mirvish felt if he could build the Princess of Wales to accommodate "Miss Saigon", he would be able to use the theatre for anything (Personal Interview, October 19, 1994). As well, a two-year run of "Miss Saigon" would not entirely pay for the theatre and a second hit show would be needed (Bemrose, 1993:35).

David Mirvish chose architect Peter Smith of Lett/Smith Architects of Toronto to design the theatre. They had first worked together when Smith was hired to do a safety study of the Royal Alexandra (Taylor, 1993a:C1). With over thirty public theatre commissions to his credit (Smith, Personal Interview, August 23, 1994), Smith possessed a profound understanding of live theatre design. It was Smith's understanding of the relationship between actor and audience that was instrumental in his obtaining the Princess of Wales commission (Mirvish, Personal Interview, October 19, 1994).

Smith's 1975-8 restoration of the Grand Theatre (1901) in London, Ontario was the recipient of the Governor General's medal for architecture. This is the only theatre in Canada that has received this honour (Benson, 1989:29; Taylor, 1993a:C1).

The Grand was reconstructed as well as restored. The proscenium arch and boxes were preserved, but the rest of the building was new and included those features that have

become standard in modern theatres: ample lobby space with refreshment facilities, a rehearsal studio and administrative area (Benson, 1989:243). Peter Smith said when they took the Grand Theatre apart in the course of the restoration, they learned a tremendous amount about the effectiveness of old theatres (Personal Interview, August 23, 1994). This knowledge would prove useful for the design of the Princess of Wales.

Smith also worked alongside Ron Thom when the Shaw Festival Theatre in Niagara-on-the-Lake was created in 1973 (Taylor, 1993a:C1; Benson, 1989:493). The auditorium of the theatre was praised for its intimacy (Benson, 1989:493). This was because the Shaw Committee insisted that as a venue for plays, "for words, for wit and ideas", the theatre must above all else have the quality of intimacy ("Shaw Festival Theatre", 1974:21).

It was mentioned previously that Thom was responsible for the 1983 renovation of the St. Lawrence Centre that saw a vastly different form emerge from the one originally built. The key point of the remodelling process was to create that same intimate atmosphere. Despite the much larger capacity of the Princess of Wales auditorium, succeeding critics, among them John Bemrose, have also lauded the design for its "Edwardian intimacy" (1993:35).

The shift to more intimate venues away from the fan

shaped auditoria of modernist theatres had been gradually occurring for many years, so by the time of the Princess of Wales' construction, other elements of nineteenth century theatre design were once again part of the architectural vocabulary.

Like its earlier predecessors, the Elgin complex and the Pantages, the plan of the theatre was driven by commercial requirements. Peter Smith stated, "It's not a monument or a landmark. When the chips are down, the building is being built so it can return the investment" (qtd. in Taylor, 1993a:C1). Two main objectives had to be met: the stage had to be large enough to accommodate the special effects required for "Miss Saigon" (including the roof landing of a helicopter and a 1959 Cadillac floating on a cloud), and the auditorium had to seat at least 2000 to generate sufficient box office revenues (Mirvish, Personal Interview, October 19, 1994).

Given that this was essentially a large theatre on a small site and that the stage and auditorium were the prime considerations (Smith, Personal Interview, August 23, 1994), grand entrances and vast lobbies were not feasible. Taking his cue from 19th century commercial theatres (Taylor, 1993a:C2), Smith designed a linear entrance foyer that runs parallel to the street (Figure 6.1).

On the succeeding three levels are U-shaped lobbies

that wrap around the auditorium (Franklin, 1993:18) (Figures 6.1, 6.2, 6.3). These foyers are visible from the outside so that patrons can look out to the city and be seen in return. The floor to ceiling glazing also enables patrons who are using wheelchairs to fully appreciate the view. Toronto architect Bruce Kuwabara felt the design of the lobbies "mediate between the street and the theatre. They induce a dreamy quality, like floating in space" (qtd. in Bemrose, 1993:34).

A large lounge under the orchestra seats and accessed from the entrance foyer provides additional circulation space. All areas are serviced with refreshment facilities.

The box office is situated across the lobby opposite the main entrance. On either side of this area are coat check rooms. The main washroom facilities are located on this level on either side of the auditorium. They are only accessible for ticket holders (Figure 6.1).

Two souvenir kiosks flank the entrance and sell memorabilia of the performance and the theatre (Figure 6.1). Such boutiques were also created for the refurbished Pantages Theatre and Winter Garden complex. Their practical purpose is to contribute to theatre revenues but they also allow patrons to carry away a few sentimental mementos.

The plan of the building may have been driven by economic concerns, but its heart revolved around the essence

of live theatre. David Mirvish said, "The whole core of the building is the audience and its relationship to the actor. That's the principle from which the building evolved... if we don't make the show work, the building means nothing" (qtd. in Portman, 1993:F1).

Physically, this core is the stage and auditorium. Mirvish and Smith both agreed that this space must create that necessary bond between the actor and his public that is essential for live theatre. They felt that a horseshoe shaped auditorium (Figure 6.3) would best achieve this because its wrap-around form brings more people closer to the stage (Taylor, 1993a:C1).

Iain Mackintosh expressed these same sentiments ten years before when investigating the remodelling of the St. Lawrence Centre. In this instance, Ron Thom chose to use cascading balconies to obtain this same sense of intimacy.

Also when Thom and Smith designed the Shaw Festival Theatre in 1973, Smith stated that, "The architects were anxious to pull the balcony as close to the stage as possible....By wrapping the sides around so that the people on the very outer edges come quite close to the stage..." (qtd. in "Shaw Festival Theatre", 1973:26).

For the Princess of Wales auditorium, Smith took the horseshoe form (which he had also used for the DuMaurier Centre in Hamilton, Ontario) and set it inside a shoebox-

shaped room (Figure 6.3). Compared to its 19th century antecedent, it is wider and has fewer boxes (Taylor, 1993a:C1). There are two balconies (the lower one is called the dress circle as in London theatres) stacked on top of each other (Figure 6.4). They wrap around the side walls of the auditorium and end at the side box on either side of the stage (Bemrose, 1993:37), so that there is a continuous line of people. Without this, the side walls would be empty, creating a greater gap between the performers and the audience (Taylor, 1993a:C1).

Smith stated, "The horseshoe balconies give some segment of the audience a closer connection with the performers and that way reactions get transmitted around the wings and back to the body of the balcony" (qtd. in Bemrose, 1993:37). The rake of the balconies is shallow enough to require only low railings so that the sight lines are not compromised (Kardonne, 1993:8).

If the purpose of the Princess of Wales was to host extremely costly productions, the auditorium had to seat at least 2000 people to be financially feasible. The orchestra seats 1060, the dress circle 506 and the balcony 442 for a total of 2008 (Franklin, 1993:20). Of these 22 places can convert for wheelchair use (Friedlander, 1993:T4).

David Mirvish said that he adopted a combination of aisle and continental seating so that the performers would

not have to look down an empty centre aisle (Personal Interview, October 19, 1994). The first eight rows of the orchestra comprise a solid block of seats. The remainder of the floor is divided by two aisles (Figure 6.5).

The ends of the rows are finished with cast iron sculptures that repeat the abstract motifs first encountered in the foyer murals. These same themes appear as plaster bas relief on the front of the balconies and boxes.

As mentioned the Princess of Wales had to be built with stage dimensions large enough to accommodate the full-sized London production of "Miss Saigon" which required a stage depth of 55-60 feet (Mirvish, Personal Interview, October 19, 1994). At sixty feet deep and forty-nine feet wide (Portman, 1993:F1), the stage is one of the largest to be found in a contemporary commercial theatre (Kardonne, 1993:8). Accordingly a fairly high proscenium arch of 40 feet was needed (Franklin, 1993:20). The size of the opening also had to be balanced with the dimensions of the auditorium. The stage tower is 120 feet high to accommodate the numerous sets including the life-sized helicopter that descends onto the stage (Taylor, 1993a:C2).

Under the stage, 140 computer-controlled electrical motors regulate the movement of sets and props (Steen, 1993:6). The orchestra pit can accommodate up to 75 musicians which would allow the theatre to host grand opera.

Backstage amenities include the dressing rooms, green room and a large wardrobe area for the costumes (Figure 6.1). Because this is not a production house, but a long-run touring house, there is no rehearsal hall.

The façade of the theatre (Figure 6.6) was designed to complement the other structures on the block (Franklin, 1993:18). Situated between two warehouses, the theatre "respects the height, the materials, the spirit of its streetmates" (Hume, 1993a:C1). The King Street elevation is constructed of "limestone and glass with stainless steel soffits over a granite base" and contains an expansive glazed central bay flanked by stone and glass stair towers (Franklin, 1993:18,20). A canopy supported on oval columns shelters the entrance and runs the width of the bay. The Pearl Street façade is of brick and metal (1993:20).

The exterior walls of the stage tower will be painted with Frank Stella murals (Godfrey, 1993:C11), adding a festive flavour to the streetscape as well as integrating the interior artwork with the outside of the building.

The presence of artist Frank Stella is felt throughout the theatre. His creation of over 10,000 square feet of artwork has earned the distinction of "the world's most lavish art gallery dedicated to the work of one man" (Steen, 1993:5). As well, Stella "...has completed the largest mural project in modern times since architectural painting

of this magnitude stopped after the 18th century" (qtd. in Bowen, 1993:13).

A devoted fan of Stella's for over thirty years, David Mirvish felt Stella's artwork, so reminiscent of public spaces, would be ideal for the Princess of Wales (Hume, 1992:A13). Mirvish's aspiration was to make the theatre a more interactive place for a greater number of people. He felt using the talents of Frank Stella who "has captured the public imagination more than any other abstract artist of his generation" (qtd. in Hume, 1992:A13) would achieve this goal. Because the artwork was to be so much a part of the theatre, Stella and Smith worked together from very early on in the project (Hume, 1992:A13).

Stella was commissioned to create a series of sweeping murals for the foyers (Hume, 1992:A1). He chidingly refers to his art as "debris d'atelier", but its creation is a complex process. The murals begin as collages formed from everyday objects found in his studio: wire mesh, paper cut-outs, honeycomb aluminum, strips of canvas, mounted on styrofoam (Figure 6.7). These are then photographed, enlarged, reproduced by laser scanner into a four-colour scan of pixel computer dots. This information is then read into a computer which sprays the dots onto canvas panels which are finally applied much like wallpaper to the walls of the lobbies. The technique creates a three-D effect on a

flat surface, a trompe l'oeil, which Stella sees as a fitting theatrical effect. The murals (Figure 6.8) are meant to depict people milling about in a crowd (Bemrose, 1993:37; Godfrey, 1992:C11; Kardonne, 1993:9), very much like the patrons in the theatre.

The crowning glory of the auditorium is the wildly polychromatic dome mural created by Frank Stella (Figure 6.9). The inspiration for the design came from the smoke rings of Stella's cigars. Stella affirmed that, "The images themselves come from computer generated work. That's the way they came out graphically" (qtd. in Bowen, 1993:13).

To produce the work, Stella made a large collage of an exploding square shape and photographed it. He recomposed five or six photos of the collage into a shape that would fit around the dome. A colour transparency of this was made and projected onto the theatre ceiling. He then had a team of fifty Toronto art students and graduates paint the mural using a special drip-free paint. It took about six weeks to complete (Bowen, 1993:13; Kardonne, 1993:9).

Stella supervised the entire operation and considers it a unique Toronto creation. He stated, "It's a mural for Toronto, designed for Toronto and painted by Toronto" (qtd. in Bowen, 1993:13).

The side piers of the boxes extend up and across the stage in a wide segmented band to form the proscenium arch

(Figure 6.10). The themes of the dome mural are repeated in these panels creating a proscenium mural of dazzling colour. Frank Stella's art, introduced to patrons in the foyers, leads them through the theatre to the auditorium and ultimately to the stage.

In order to finish the building on schedule, Smith and Mirvish agreed it would be necessary to contract out to interior designers. Accordingly the Toronto firm of Yabu Pushelberg was hired to complete the rest of the interior design (Taylor, 1993a:C2). The lobbies were planned with vaulted ceilings, stencilled walls, bulging columns and mosaic tile in the floors and ceilings (Figure 6.11). The mosaics were intentionally included to link the Princess of Wales to her sister theatre, The Royal Alexandra, whose lobby floor is made of mosaic tile (Mirvish, Personal Interview, October 19,1994).

The lobbies have traditional Venetian terrazzo flooring inlaid with these mosaics. There are reputed to be only six craftsmen in Canada who are knowledgeable of the method used to hand-install such floors. They are of Italian origin and their company, Gem-Campbell Terrazzo and Tile Incorporated, employed to do the floors for the Princess of Wales, is the only one in Canada to do this kind of work (Kardonne, 1993:8). David Mirvish was particularly gratified to find such craftsmanship in Canada, because he believes in

promoting the abundant talent that exists in this country (Steen, 1993:6).

The luxuriant finishings - sconces that resemble faces masked with metal mesh and crying bulbous glass tears, hand-blown glass newel posts, gleaming mahogany bars decorated at their base with fringes of small metal chains like those found at the bottom of stage curtains - serve as subtle theatrical references as they complement the exotic decor.

The building has incorporated many features that display a sensitivity to the needs of the disabled. Those that arrive at the main entrance on King Street can push either of two red buttons prominently placed in the columns flanking the entrance to automatically open the doors. In the garage, reserved spaces for the disabled are close to a short ramp with protective railings that leads to an elevator that stops at the main foyer. Additional elevators access all floors. Their doors are equipped with electronic sensors to open automatically and the operating panel, which includes braille lettering, is placed within easy reach for those people sitting in wheelchairs (Friedlander, 1993:T4). Provision for wheelchairs within the auditorium has already been discussed. The theatre also provides infra-red hearing devices as well as wheelchairs for those who need such assistance once they arrive (1993:T4).

The composer of "Miss Saigon", Claude-Michel Schonberg,

has only the highest praise for the theatre's acoustics. He said, "The auditorium has a warm and generous sound. You never know why you have a sound like that. The Opera Bastille in Paris doesn't have it. It's a miracle!" (qtd. in Bemrose, 1993:37).

John O'Keefe, P.Eng. of Aercoustics Engineering Ltd. designed the acoustics for the Princess of Wales. He received the commission because he had worked with Peter Smith on the latter's DuMaurier Centre for Theatre Aquarius in Hamilton (Taylor, 1993b:C6). The project represents one of the largest contracts ever awarded to a Canadian firm, because, in the past, such ambitious programs were usually given to American firms despite the abundance of competent acousticians in Canada ("Ontario P. Eng.", 1993:13).

As well as creating intimacy in the house, the choice of a horseshoe shape allows the audience to hear both the direct sound from the stage as well the sound that bounces off the walls. This differs from a fan shape hall such as the O'Keefe Centre where side sound is lost because of the wide angle of the walls (Taylor, 1993b:C6).

The balcony in a single gallery theatre is usually quite deep compared to those in a two balcony house. Therefore, in the former type of theatre, more patrons are sitting beneath an overhang and consequently do not receive the full benefit of the acoustics. Therefore, O'Keefe and

Smith agreed that a double balcony plan would provide the best acoustics for the greatest number of people (Taylor, 1993b:C6).

The walls of old theatres were formed of wet plaster which would dry to a solid hard surface. Sounds would rebound off such walls back into the audience to create excellent acoustics. To duplicate this effect at the Princess of Wales, the auditorium drywall was nailed and glued directly to the concrete, instead of being mounted on wooden studs, the method usually employed. The latter approach would create a gap in the wall which would then absorb the important low frequency sound instead of reflecting it ("Ontario P. Eng.", 1993:13).

After constructing a computer model to determine the sound reflection in the room, O'Keefe recommended sloping the proscenium arch at an angle that would deflect the sound to the front balconies. This was done to compensate for the large hole in the ceiling needed for the lighting. He also asked Smith to tilt the back corners of the ceiling down so that the sound that reached this area would also be redirected back to the spectators (Taylor, 1993b:C6).

Sound diffusers were installed in the orchestra pit to help the musicians hear one another and at the back of the auditorium to eliminate sound reflections that disturb the singers ("Ontario P. Eng.", 1993:13). Before the invention

of such devices, the plaster relief on the balconies of old theatres served to diffuse sound. Frank Stella's sculptures, as well as being decorative, enhanced the acoustics and gave a "better blend of sound" (Taylor, 1993b:C6).

To control sound beyond the auditorium, O'Keefe ensured that well sealed double entrance doors were installed to block out the noise from the street. As well, the air handling units were placed on the sides of the roof and noises from the mechanical systems were controlled ("Ontario P. Eng.", 1993:13).

John O'Keefe acknowledges that, while unpredictable things can affect acoustics, he tried to achieve the balance of speech intelligibility and reverberance needed for a lyric theatre such as the Princess of Wales (Taylor, 1993b:C6).

David Mirvish had the financial resources to build a theatre to his own specifications. As an independent entrepreneur not accountable to a board of directors, he was free to select those professionals he felt would best fulfill his agenda.

His choices, with the exception of New York artist Frank Stella, have a Canadian flavour. Lett/Smith Architects is a Toronto firm, as are the interior designers, Yabu Pushelberg. Acoustical engineer John O'Keefe is a

Canadian and his company Aercoustics Engineering Limited is based in Rexdale, Ontario. As well, construction, mechanical and electrical contracts were awarded to Canadian firms. Even the specialized floor mosaics were done by Italian-Canadians. And although Frank Stella is an American artist, he designed the dome mural specifically for Toronto.

The Canadian factor did not stop with the construction of the theatre. Of the 47 roles in "Miss Saigon", 38 of them, including the female lead, are performed by Canadian actors. David Mirvish said, "Usually 20 per cent of a production's cast is Canadian. We spent nine months and a quarter of a million dollars to find Canadians. But they were all hired on merit and could perform their roles anywhere in the world" (qtd. in Steen, 1993:6).

Much has changed since 1913 when Marcus Loew and Thomas Lamb awarded most of their contracts to American companies. The theatre business is still highly competitive however and while nationalist pride is commendable, the Canadians hired by the Mirvishes had, by necessity, to be extremely competent in their respective fields.

Technologically, the Princess of Wales Theatre is a product of the computer age. Computers are employed to achieve the best acoustics for the house. They are used during the performance to control sets and lighting effects. Ticket reservations are handled by computer as they are for

most theatres. Ironically, the one area that would seem exempt from machine intervention, namely mural painting, relied the most on this advanced technology.

Despite the sophistication and complexity of "Miss Saigon" and the technology required for its execution, the success of the theatre rests within its intimate hall where performer and audience connect. Only a design that is sensitive to the requirements of live theatre will achieve this harmony.

What has set the theatre apart from others of its genre is the depth of its composition. The collaboration of architect, artist and interior designer has created an essay that marries many arts and thus functions on many levels. This conclusion verifies the argument of architectural critic Mark Franklin who stated that, "It is this gentle friction between the work of the various collaborating designers which gives the theatre its richness" (1993:19). The end result is a building very much of its time, but one that will nevertheless be appreciated long into the future.

CONCLUSION

Despite the existence of a significant number of playhouses in Toronto by 1990, a new genre of theatre, the mega-musical, necessitated the creation of the Princess of Wales Theatre in 1993. The leit-motif of theatre performance begetting theatre architecture has been a recurring theme in the City of Toronto since the Royal Alexandra was built in 1907. The exorbitant construction costs of new theatres coupled with the potentially great financial risk involved in theatre production would seem to preclude the erection of new structures. Yet public response to this form of musical theatre has outweighed these concerns so that new houses become feasible to build.

The popularity of vaudeville in the teens and twenties motivated theatre magnates Marcus Loew and N.L. Nathanson to undertake the construction of the Elgin and Winter Garden and Pantages Theatres respectively. As shrewd businessmen, neither would have undertaken such projects if the financial rewards were not clearly possible.

While the O'Keefe and St. Lawrence Centres were not built to house one specific type of performance, they were created to showcase a plethora of forms that did not currently have suitable venues for their expression. The need for appropriate performance space was the initial

reason for their construction.

Only two of the architects who built these theatres, Thomas Lamb and Peter Smith, would be considered theatre specialists. Lamb was designing theatres at the height of the vaudeville-movie era when hundreds of such structures were built in North America. It was therefore feasible for Lamb to devote so much of his practice to theatre design.

While Smith's theatre commissions do not run into the hundreds, with over thirty projects to his credit, he is considered an authority on theatre design in Canada. Both architects have successfully solved the basic requirements of their respective theatres. The spaces work properly and the necessary intimacy between actor and audience has been created.

Conversely the O'Keefe and St. Lawrence Centres were designed by architects whose commissions included a wide variety of building types. As well, at the time these theatres were constructed, new modes of theatre design, i.e. blank-walled, fan-shaped auditoria had come into use. Their ineffectiveness however for live theatre eventually came to be recognized. That these architects chose newer forms in favour of more traditional designs may be due in part to their lack of opportunity to design more traditional theatres.

It may appear ironic that with no previous theatre

commissions to his credit, John Lyle was able to design a theatre of lasting worth. I believe the availability of nineteenth century models, both in Europe and in New York, plus his analytical Beaux-Arts training, compensated for any lack of previous theatre design experience.

Cantilevered construction, which was considered such daring engineering in 1907, has become so incorporated into the design of theatres that architects no longer have to consider the problem of compromised sight lines due to support pillars. Similarly, advances in steel frame construction have given architects the ability to build taller structures and span spaces of great distance increasing their freedom of design.

The technical ability to change the auditorium size of the O'Keefe Centre facilitated its purpose as a multi-use hall. The adaptable stages of the O'Keefe and St. Lawrence Centres also demonstrated engineering advances that were needed for the many types of performance. The computer-controlled movement of scenery on the Princess of Wales stage again reflects the incorporation of the latest technology into theatre design.

Air purification and temperature control have progressed from manual implementation to computer-regulated systems where every section of a theatre building can now be programmed to its greatest level of comfort. The air-

handling units can also be positioned where the noise of the machinery is least noticed.

Fireproofing regulations and methods are now so improved from those at the turn of the century that fires rarely occur. Capacious lobbies are supplied with numerous exits and main entrances contain multiple doors so that even a 3000-seat auditorium can empty in under three minutes.

Acoustics, once enhanced by hard white plaster walls and bas relief sculptures, sounding boards and domed ceilings, are now improved with sophisticated techniques developed by acoustical engineers. The design of auditorium ceilings, the angle of proscenium arches, the use of sound diffusers and better techniques of sound proofing are design considerations implemented to improve the overall quality of any performance.

Social norms stressed more egalitarian attitudes that developed over the course of the century. Women were permitted to leave their seats at intervals and class distinctions became less apparent. Plush retiring lounges and better washroom facilities were created. The habit of circulating before performances and at intermission resulted in the design of roomier lobbies which eventually led to the incorporation of food and beverage facilities for patrons.

The post-war period can be credited with the construction of facilities that further increased the

comfort and enjoyment of both patrons and performers. Post-war thinking re-emphasized democratic ideals which translated into greater sensitivity to the needs of the individual. Most recently, this has been demonstrated by design accommodations for the needs of the disabled. For the performers, this resulted in better dressing room facilities, wardrobe and laundry rooms, and the inclusion of green rooms and rehearsal halls.

Overall the greatest restriction that affected the design of the six theatres was money. Lamb's theatres created new forms such as the long lobby corridor and one theatre stacked upon another in the hopes of reducing construction costs and future taxes. As well, seating was jammed to capacity to increase revenues. Site selection, dictated by budgetary restraints, compromised the design of both the O'Keefe and the St. Lawrence Centres. The very concept of a multi-purpose auditorium arose from an attempt to combine several specialized halls into one.

The exception to this is the Royal Alexandra Theatre where Lyle exceeded his budget by \$300,000 in the hopes of creating the best possible theatre for Cawthra Mulock. David Mirvish likewise did not compromise the design of the Princess of Wales when the issue of indoor parking had to be resolved. However the theatre was built as a commercial venture and the 2000 required seats were comfortably

incorporated into the design.

The origins of the designs of the theatres have to a significant degree followed the overall Canadian architectural pattern of adopting foreign forms and adapting them to the Canadian context.

The Royal Alexandra reflected American and European influences that Lyle modified to suit Toronto audiences. Although Lamb's theatres were direct American importations, Toronto building codes forced him to use heavier steel than he was accustomed to. He also resorted to designing more embellished façades for the main bodies of the theatres to attempt to conceal their true purpose.

The International/Expressionist style of the O'Keefe Centre also had British and American antecedents. Unlike Lamb's American "impositions", Peter Dickinson was seeking to introduce new forms of design that would transform the city skyline into a more universal and ahistoricist landscape.

The Brutalist aesthetic of the St. Lawrence Centre originated primarily in England and its practical application soon found expression in North America. The Centre's use of concrete was the chief element borrowed from this style.

The collaborative, multi-team approach to the design of the Princess of Wales Theatre reflects the complex response

to formal issues affecting late twentieth century design. The style celebrates originality and responding to local environments. This is amply demonstrated in the materials, in the façade and in the juxtaposition of different decors within the theatre. Its reversal to an earlier theatre form set within a modern context is also consistent with contemporary "post-modern" ideologies.

By examining these six extant buildings in Toronto, this analysis has demonstrated how the evolution of theatre design in the twentieth century is an interwoven fabric of social and technological factors. Such documentation has resulted in a history of the theatre as a building type. This thesis has also shed light on the habits of the Toronto theatre-going public, thus providing an integrated study of one aspect of the history of the city.

Furthermore such an approach demonstrates that heritage conservation must consider architecture as a process of continuation that celebrates a recognition of past worth adapted to current needs. Seen in this manner, the Princess of Wales Theatre is not an isolated modern building, but a renewal of the theatrical architectural legacy of Toronto. The blending of old and new structures increases our appreciation of past traditions and provides the understanding that is the foundation for future achievement.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1.1 The Royal Alexandra Theatre, Toronto, Ontario.
John M. Lyle, architect.

LONGITUDINAL SECTION.

Figure 1.2 The American Theatre, New York City.
Charles C. Haight, architect.
Longitudinal section.

Figure 1.3 The American Theatre, New York City.
Charles C. Haight, architect.
Ground floor plan.

Figure 1.4 The Royal Alexandra Theatre, Toronto, Ontario.
John M. Lyle, architect.
Ground floor plan.

Figure 1.5 Trafalgar Theatre, London, England.
Walter Emden, architect.

Figure 1.6 Gaiety Theatre, Boston.
J.B. McElfatrick & Son, architects.
Note poor view of stage afforded by the private boxes.

Figure 1.7 The Royal Alexandra Theatre, Toronto, Ontario.
Position of upper boxes in the auditorium.

*Study of Shades
Ordre Dorique.*

*John M. Lyle
Water Colorist & Engraver.
Paris Sept 22/93*

Figure 1.8 "Study of Shades - Ordre Dorique."
A drawing by John M. Lyle.

Figure 2.1 Shea's Victoria Theatre, Toronto, Ontario.
Leon H. Lempert & Son, architects.

EIGHTH-AVENUE FRONT OF THE AMERICAN THEATRE.

Figure 2.2 The American Theatre and Roof, New York City.
Charles C. Haight, architect.

This would become Loew's circuit headquarters in 1911.

2.6 Stanley Makepeace's plan of the theatre site, 1912 (AO, Heintzman Piano Co. Records)

Figure 2.3 Proposed site plan of Elgin/Winter Garden.
Yonge & Victoria Streets, Toronto.

Figure 2.5 Elgin/Winter Garden Theatres, Toronto.
Longitudinal Section.

PARQUETTE AND PARQUETTE CIRCLE. ABBEY'S THEATRE.

Figure 2.6 Abbey Theatre, New York.
J.B. McElfatrick & Son, architects.
Ground Floor Plan.

Figure 2.7 Elgin Theatre auditorium showing ground floor seating, loges and single balcony.

Figure 2.8 Winter Garden loges

Figure 2.9 Elgin Theatre Ceiling Dome.

Figure 2.10 Elgin/Winter Garden Theatres.
Bottom of Grand Staircase.

Figure 2.11 Elgin/Winter Garden Theatres.
Court elevation showing dressing rooms.

Figure 2.12 Elgin Theatre.
Plan of auditorium showing location of dressing rooms
and fire towers.

Figure 2.13 Elgin/Winter Garden Theatres.
Victoria Street Elevation.

Figure 2.14 Elgin/Winter Garden Theatres.
Yonge Street Elevation.

Figure 2.15 Winter Garden Theatre.
Auditorium decorated as an outdoor garden.

Figure 2.16 Elgin/Winter Garden Theatres
Lobby corridor showing store.

Figure 2.17 Elgin Theatre.
Seating Plan Revision.

Figure 3.1 Shea's Hippodrome, Toronto, Ontario.
Leon H. Lempert & Son, architects.

Figure 3.2 Regent Theatre, Toronto.

Figure 3.3 Interior of Regent Theatre, Toronto.
Renovations to the theatre were done by Thomas Lamb.

Figure 3.4 Pantages Theatre, Toronto
Lobby corridor linking entrance on Yonge Street to
mezzanine level.

Drawing by David Mesbur Architect Ltd.
for Pantages Theatre restoration (1988).

3 of/de 3

PM-1 3½"x4" PHOTOGRAPHIC MICROCOPY TARGET
NBS 1010a ANSI/ISO #2 EQUIVALENT

PRECISIONSM RESOLUTION TARGETS

Figure 3.5 Pantages Theatre, Toronto.
Thomas W. Lamb, architect.
Longitudinal section showing entrance on Victoria Street.

Figure 3.6 Pantages Theatre, Toronto.
Lobby corridor showing ceiling decoration.

Figure 3.7 Pantages Theatre, Toronto.
Lower lobby and back of auditorium.

Figure 3.8 Pantages Theatre, Toronto.
Auditorium showing location of loges and theatre boxes.

Figure 3.9 Pantages Theatre, Toronto.
Balcony showing seating sections. The openings for the
projection booth are centrally located above the balcony.

Figure 3.10 Pantages Theatre, Toronto.
Proscenium arch.

Figure 3.11 Elgin Theatre, Toronto.
Proscenium arch.

Figure 3.12 Pantages Theatre, Toronto.
Yonge Street elevation.

Figure 3.13 Pantages Theatre, Toronto.
Victoria Street elevation.

Figure 3.14 Capitol Theatre, Vancouver.
Ceiling of lobby corridor.

Figure 3.15 Pantages Theatre, Toronto.
Main floor plan (1988) by David Mesbur Architect Ltd.

Figure 3.16 Pantages Theatre, Toronto.
Auditorium ceiling dome.

Figure 4.1 The O'Keefe Centre for the Performing Arts.
Earle C. Morgan and Page & Steele, architects.
Site plan.

Figure 4.2 Benvenuto Place Apartment Hotel, Toronto.
Page & Steele, architects.
Peter Dickinson, partner-in-charge of project.

Figure 4.3 Rendering of the O'Keefe Centre (1957)
by Peter Dickinson while it was being designed.

Figure 4.4 The O'Keefe Centre for the Performing Arts.
Ground floor plan.

Figure 4.5 The O'Keefe Centre for the Performing Arts.
Lower ground floor plan.

Figure 4.6 The O'Keefe Centre for the Performing Arts.
Plan of balcony foyer.

Figure 4.7 The O'Keefe Centre for the Performing Arts.
Foyer mural "The Seven Lively Arts" by Ronald York Wilson.

Figure 4.8 The Royal Festival Hall, London England.
Robert H. Matthew, architect.
Longitudinal section.

Figure 4.9 The O'Keefe Centre for the Performing Arts.
Auditorium showing seating sections.

Figure 4.10 The O'Keefe Centre for the Performing Arts.
Model showing (A) canopy, (B) reception area,
(C) ground floor, (D) balcony, (E) stage tower,
(F) rehearsal hall.

Figure 4.11 Lever House, New York City.
Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, architects.

Figure 4.12 Kleinhaus Music Hall, Buffalo.
Eero and Eliel Saarinen, architects.

Figure 4.13 Toronto City Hall.
Vilyo Revell, architect.

Figure 5.1 The St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, Toronto.
 Gordon S. Adamson & Associates, architects.
 Site plan August 1955.

Figure 5.2 The St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, Toronto.
 Gordon S. Adamson & Associates, architects.
 Revised plan November 1966.

Figure 5.3 The dark square shows the final site location of the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts. The dotted lines show the previous site locations (1967).

Figure 5.4 The St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, Toronto.
Theatre and Town Hall.
Site Plan

SECTION THROUGH THEATRE

SECTION THROUGH TOWN HALL

Figure 5.5 The St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, Toronto.
Theatre and Town Hall.
Longitudinal sections.

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

0 10 20 40

1 THEATRE	10 WINE
2 STAGE	11 CASH ROOM
3 TOWN HALL	12 LOBBY
4 HANGAR	13 STORAGE
5 OFFICE	14 BOX OFFICE
6 CORRIDOR	15 GENERAL OFFICE
7 VESTIBULE	16 ARTS
8 VESTIBULE	17 ACTORS HALL
9 LOCKERS	18 POWER
	19 BUNK

ST. LAWRENCE CENTRE FOR THE ARTS
THEATRE AND TOWN HALL
 TORONTO ONTARIO

Figure 5.6 The St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, Toronto.
 Theatre and Town Hall.
 First floor plan.

Figure 5.7 The St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, Toronto.
Theatre and Town Hall.
Second floor plan.

Figure 5.8 The St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, Toronto.
Comparison of lobby and theatre size before and after
renovations done by The Thom Partnership, architects.

Figure 5.9 The St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, Toronto.
Façade after renovation by The Thom Partnership,
architects.

St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts

BLUMA APPEL

Balcony (Over Orchestra)

LEGEND

	Rows A-D		Rows J-N		Boxes
	Rows AA-CC		Rows E-H		Rows O-R

Row A or AA is the closest to the stage on all levels. Numbers on map indicate range of seat numbers in section

JANE MALLET

Row A is the closest to the stage on all levels.

Numbers with arrows indicate range and direction of seat numbering.

LEGEND

	Rows A to D
	Rows F to J
	Rows Jj
	Rows K to N
	Rows O to R

Figure 5.10 The St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, Toronto. Current seating arrangement for both theatres.

Figure 5.11 The St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, Toronto.
Theatre and Town Hall.
Ground floor plan.

Figure 5.12 The St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, Toronto.
Original façade.

Figure 6.1 The Princess of Wales Theatre, Toronto.
Lett/Smith, architects.
Ground floor plan.

Figure 6.2 The Princess of Wales Theatre, Toronto.
Lett/Smith, architects.
Orchestra level plan.

BALCONY LEVEL

Figure 6.3 The Princess of Wales Theatre, Toronto.
Lett/Smith, architects.
Balcony level plan.

Figure 6.4 The Princess of Wales Theatre, Toronto.
Lett/Smith, architects.
Longitudinal section.

The Princess of Wales Theatre

Orchestra

LEGEND

- Row AAA
- Rows AA to GG
- Rows A to J
- Rows K to W
- Boxes

Row A or AAA is the closest to the stage on all levels.

Numbers on map indicate range of seat numbers in section.

Dress Circle (above Orchestra)

Balcony (above Dress Circle)

Figure 6.5 The Princess of Wales Theatre, Toronto.
Diagram of auditorium seating plan.

Figure 6.6 The Princess of Wales Theatre, Toronto.
King Street elevation.

Figure 6.7 Collage composed of studio objects
by artist Frank Stella.

Figure 6.8 The Princess of Wales Theatre, Toronto.
Lobby mural.

Figure 6.9 The Princess of Wales Theatre, Toronto.
Auditorium dome mural.

Figure 6.10 The Princess of Wales Theatre, Toronto.
Position of side boxes in auditorium.

Figure 6.11 The Princess of Wales Theatre, Toronto.
Entrance lobby.

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Christ-Janer, Eliel Saarinen Finnish-American Architect and Educator: Fig. 4.12.

Cineplex Odeon Files. David Mesbur drawings of the Pantages Theatre: Figs. 3.4, 3.15.

Construction: Fig. 1.4 (November 1907).

Curtis, Modern Architecture Since 1900: Fig. 4.11.

Freedman, Sight Lines: Fig. 4.2.

Globe and Mail: Fig. 6.6 (May 15, 1993); Fig. 6.7 (July 25, 1992); Fig. 6.9 (May 8, 1993).

Hunt, John M. Lyle Towards a Canadian Architecture: Fig. 1.8.

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Lindsay, Royal Alexandra: The Finest Theatre on the Continent: Fig. 1.7.

_____, Turn out the Stars Before Leaving. The Story of Canada's Theatres: Figs. 3.7, 3.8, 3.14.

Olsheski, Pantages Theatre: Rebirth of a Landmark: Figs. 3.5, 3.6, 3.9, 3.10, 3.12, 3.13, 3.16.

Russell, Loew's Yonge Street and Winter Garden Theatres. A Structural, Architectural and Social History to 1961:
Figs. 2.3-2.5, 2.7, 2.11, 2.12, 2.15, 2.16, 3.11.

_____, "All That Glitters. A Memorial to Ottawa's Capitol Theatre and its Predecessors": Figs. 3.2, 3.3.

_____, Double Take: The Story of the Elgin and Winter Garden Theatres: Figs. 2.1, 2.8-2.10, 2.13, 2.14, 2.17, 3.1.

Sachs and Woodrow, Modern Opera Houses and Theatres: Fig. 1.5.

St. Lawrence Centre, Everyone's Flocking to the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts: Fig. 5.9.

Seats: Figs. 5.10, 6.5 (1994).

Toronto Modern Architecture 1945-1965: Fig. 4.13.

Walker, The O'Keefe Centre Thirty Years of Theatre History:
Figs. 4.3, 4.7, 4.10.

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