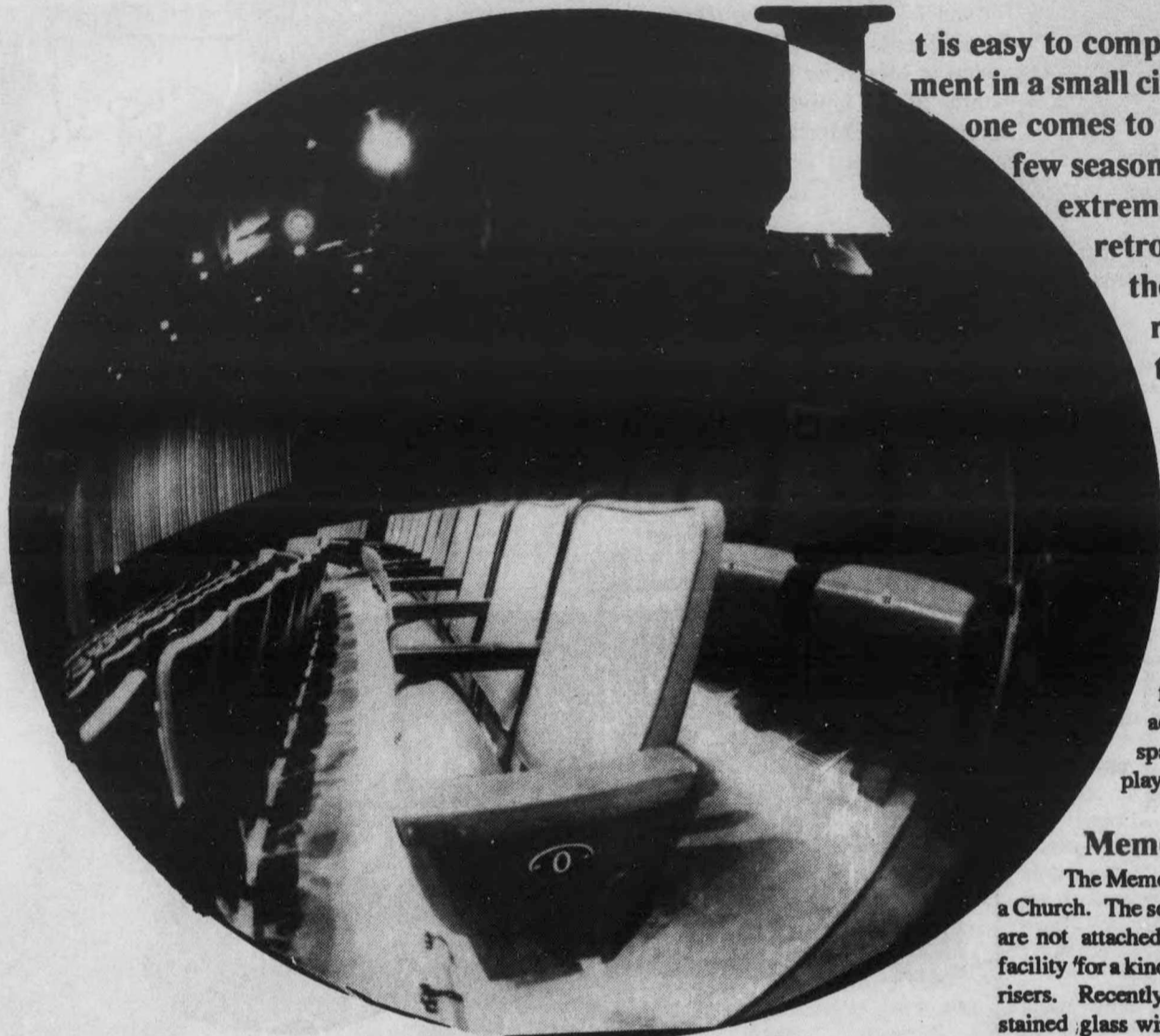


Theatre Spaces in Fredericton



Theatre New Brunswick's The Playhouse is the best equipped space on campus. Unfortunately it is too large a space for small scale productions



Memorial Hall is built like a church but remains one of the best spaces for theatre productions at UNB. The time may be ripe for a new and more modern space.

It is easy to complain about the lack of live entertainment in a small city like Fredericton - it is easy because one comes to expect this. Fortunately, there are a few seasons of plenty in this small town that are extremely encouraging. I embarked on a retrospective on theatre in this city over the past few months, and I am happy to report that there is much active theatre taking place here.

It is important to appreciate the significance of this statement. We are not a city overflowing with well-equipped and accessible theatre space. One can list the few spots: Marshall d'Avery Auditorium, a relatively small theatre with limited lighting capabilities and a wide and shallow stage with very little backstage room. The arch is extremely low there and there is little fly-space for innovative work that goes beyond a few feet upwards. There is no cyclorama nor is there a facility to hang a backdrop, the acoustics in the space are fair although there is a deadness of sound even when an actor with a resonant voice projects to the fullest. The space is used for lecture series, recitals and the occasional play.

Memorial Hall

The Memorial Hall is a fairly well-equipped Hall which is built like a Church. The seating includes a balcony and all the seats in the main hall are not attached to the floor. The stage is classic proscenium with the facility for a kind of apron stage to be erected through the addition of few risers. Recently, an immense cyclorama was put in place to cover the stained glass windows, that, while being quite attractive in themselves, made every production in that place look like a show being staged on the set of *Murder in the Cathedral*. The lighting system in Memorial Hall is completely computerized - a recent innovation and there a quite a large number of lights including a follow spot and very effective cyc-back lights. The stage itself has some depth and never appears too restrictive in size, however the boards are old and squeaky and the absence of a backstage area renders set building and removal almost impossible.

The Memorial Hall theatre is a space that maintains its hall-like quality despite what is done to it. Some productions have eschewed the proscenium and elected to use the house as a staging area. This has had varied results. I would seem that the sheer imposition of the large proscenium arches is too dominant to allow for any easy alteration in the design. Acoustically, the Hall is not entirely satisfactory. From the floor, the voices carry fairly well although they become somewhat diffuse because of the immense height of the ceiling and the absence of any buffers to direct the sound to the audience. From the balcony, the sound is atrocious.

There is a very useful and well-equipped sound system in the theatre complete with turntable, C.D. player and tape deck. The large prop room and woodwork shop in the basement of the theatre are particularly useful additions. Changing room space is adequate at best and for a large show, extremely cramped. The theatre is used for a multiplicity of productions, but it becomes clear to anyone working there that a large house has to be secured if the actors are to feel comfortable. When the theatre is empty it feels completely hollow and the acoustics are poor.

The Edmund Casey Hall

Like Memorial Hall, the Edmund Casey Auditorium at St. Thomas University has no back-stage space to talk of. That theatre is not as well equipped as the former, but acoustically it is far more interesting and pleasant. The Hall is essentially a lecture theatre so that the seating rises up from the stage creating an arena effect. This does a great deal for acoustics and for sight-lines. The seats are equipped with folding desks which can be a bother for people who are in to watch a play. The lighting system, while lacking the sophistication of Memorial Hall is nevertheless adequate and unlike Memorial Hall the lamps are closer to the stage thus allowing for greater definition of lighting spaces. The theatre has a cyclorama which is aging, and two very spacious wings which to some extent make up for the absence of a back stage area. I have seen that space transformed (with far greater ease than Memorial Hall) into innovative sets because the rigidity of the proscenium does not molest the space. There is little doubt in my mind that for the experimental theatre artist, the Edmund Casey Auditorium is the best space on campus for staging plays.

The Cellar Theatre

But it is not the only other space. In the basement of Carleton Hall a small lecture room has been dubbed The Cellar Theatre by enthusiastic English drama students and faculty at UNB. Room 139 is a cramped lecture theatre with the tiniest of stage areas. There is a single tier elevation between the front row seats and the back wall which is covered by a black board. The lights in the room can

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