

News of the arts

Vancouver's Orpheum reborn

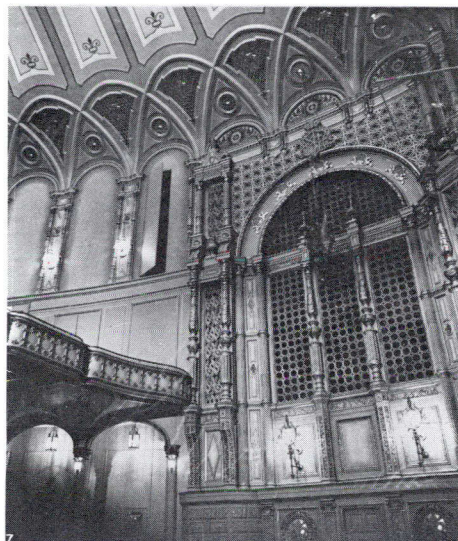
The Orpheum Theatre of Vancouver, once a faded vaudeville-house *cum* movie theatre reopened this month with its velvet draperies and elegant interior resplendent after five years and \$7 million of restoration work. (See also *Canada Weekly* dated February 16, 1977.)

The inaugural event took place on April 2 with a concert by the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, with Kazuyoshi Akiyama conducting, and Canadian contralto Maureen Forrester as guest artist. Necessity and nostalgia were the main criteria for renovating the old theatre, said Vancouver city manager Fritz Bowers. The Orpheum will be home to the Vancouver Symphony and will take the strain off Vancouver's other major concert facility, the Queen Elizabeth Theatre which is usually booked to capacity.

Many people remember the Orpheum as a movie theatre where, particularly during the Depression, one could enjoy hours of escapism for a dime.

Much of the interior has been retained. Columns, arches and large dome were cleaned, repaired and replaced. Ornate decorations were regilded and 100 crystal chandeliers were cleaned and restored. A "superior" design for acoustics included enlarging the stage and enclosing it in a sound shell of plaster reinforced with steel, with moveable panels to control the sound reflection from brass and percussion.

Kazuyoshi Akiyama, who was appointed music director of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra in the 1972/73



The Orpheum's "Spanish renaissance" interior glitters with gold.

season, compared the acoustics of the new Orpheum with those of Carnegie Hall in New York. The Orchestra's move to its new home marks the building's fiftieth anniversary. The Orpheum housed the Vancouver Symphony from the Orchestra's season in 1930, to 1959, when it moved to the Queen Elizabeth Theatre.

The city of Vancouver bought the old theatre from its original owners, Famous Players, who were considering splitting up the old building into six movie houses. Lotteries, benefit concerts, private donations and municipal grants helped to buy the 2,788-seat theatre. The city donated \$4.7 million to the project, the Federal Government contributed \$2 million and the government of the province of British Columbia gave \$333,000.00.

National unity (Continued from P. 2)

that they had been told they still cannot get a decent chance, still cannot get ahead, unless they will speak, work – and eventually live – in a language not their own. And the thousands of young people graduating... simply won't take that any more!

Language importance

But why won't they, why won't all Quebeckers, just "be sensible" and speak English? Why is French so important to them? The answer is, I suppose, "for the same reason that your own language is important to you."

The majority of Quebeckers are not bilingual. Just like you, most of them speak only one language. There are about five million francophones living in Quebec – and three-quarters of them speak only French. Think of it: about as many Quebeckers who speak only French as the combined total population of all three Prairie provinces.

Like English for you, speaking French for them is not a luxury for the rich, the snobbish, the college-educated. Just as when you speak English, when a Quebecker speaks French it is something he does naturally and automatically – almost like breathing. That is precisely why language is so important: because when you limit a person's use of his language, it is almost like interfering with his breathing. When we cannot speak our own language, we feel stifled, a bit as if we are choking. We feel, to borrow a famous phrase, like someone was "ramming something down our throat...!"

Federal language program

Despite irritants and problems – which we are in the process of correcting – the official languages program is succeeding. We have now reached the stage where we are able to shift the emphasis to greater support for teaching French in the schools – where it should be taught – rather than in crash programs for public servants. This change is now possible because in contrast to the 1960s, we can generally provide federal services to the public in either official language; francophone participation in the Public Service is increasing without harming the opportunities of English-speaking Canadians for government careers.



Maestro Akiyama conducts the Vancouver Symphony in their first concert

in the Orpheum, the orchestra's new permanent home.