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Influence of the arts on Canadian society can make us better people

G. Hamilton Southam, retiring director general of the National Arts Centre, addressing the Men's Canadian Club in Ottawa on February 10, described the achievements of the "national showcase" since its opening in 1969. Mr. Southam, who helped found the three-theatre complex in the heart of Ottawa, was appointed its first director in March 1967 (see *Canada Weekly* dated November 24, 1976).

He told his audience that, up to the end of last season, 6,008 performances had been given — about 860 a year — but more important than the "mere quantity", he said, was the quality. "Ottawa today has the best orchestra in Canada, one of the best in North America — now that I am leaving I can say things like that."

Mr. Southam announced that, for the first time, one of Festival Canada's opera productions, Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, would be televised live from the Centre on July 8 at 8 p.m., to Canadian and possibly American audiences from coast to coast — "a breakthrough of major proportions."

He expressed the following views on the influence of arts on society:

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"...Thus far I have spoken to you as I thought I should, giving you the best account possible of my stewardship at the Centre these last few years, with what I hope has been a reassuring display of statistics. We have done a lot for Ottawa, I think, and perhaps with the help of the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) we are beginning to do something for the rest of Canada.

"But national unity? When I look at the condition of Canada today I am both sad and puzzled, as it may be you are too. Whatever we have done seems not enough, not nearly enough, for the needs of this beloved country. Nine years ago I told you: 'The Arts Centre will be an utter failure — they will have laboured in vain that built it — if it does not prove a rallying point, in our national capital, for the composers

we need, the playwrights in both our languages, to show us how to understand and love this country as it deserves.'

"Looking around today I am haunted by the laden words of John Donne: 'Tis all in peeces, all cohaerence gone; All just supply, and all Relation....'

"What has gone wrong? Where did we go wrong? And what can we do to mend matters? These are times when every Canadian, whatever his field of action may be, must ask himself such questions and then — as we used to say in the army — not stand there, but do something!

* * * *

"I must begin with the general statement that the arts — all the arts — are good for people — any people — in times like these. They are indeed a bridge over troubled waters or, as Plato



The National Arts Centre Orchestra, conductor Mario Bernardi, will have given a total of 152 concerts in Ottawa and 70 other Canadian communities by season's end. They are seen here in the National Arts Centre.

