

By David
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Canadian culture usurped

— fine arts but no jobs

Gerild Delahunty is one of the hundreds of Canadians who go yearly to the world entertainment centres of New York, London, and Hollywood to try and 'make it'.

He graduated from York two years ago with a BA in English and spent a year struggling to make a living by acting in Toronto. He gave up and went to New York last year where he has gotten a few good jobs. He returned to Canada recently for a visit and I spoke with him on the condition of Canadian culture, a subject that interests him immensely, and on the rapidly expanding fine arts department at York.

EXCALIBUR: It was revealed last week that Mavor Moore, who has been a sort of guiding light for the new St. Lawrence Centre for the Performing Arts, suddenly resigned to take up a position with the fine arts department at York. I find it rather odd and perhaps a bit disturbing that someone who is such a cultural bulwark in Toronto should give up his active position and retreat into the groves of academe, as it were. One imagines that Moore could be doing many great things at the St. Lawrence Centre.

DELAHUNTY: Oh, I think that's a very tragic fault in Canada. Like those who can do things teach. You end up with these hundreds and hundreds of presumably creative people teaching. I think what Mavor Moore's move indicates is that he didn't think there was much of a future for himself with the St. Lawrence Centre. I think he has only been with it a few months now that it has opened. It's funny that he would retreat into the university, trying to teach, because there's so much work to be done in the real world, trying to help the arts, to make it into something. Just to quit suddenly, and to say: 'Well, I'm going to teach people. . .'

EXCALIBUR: It rather makes you wonder about the whole concept of the fine arts department. Here you have all these presumably very talented people teaching art, and theatre and filmmaking to these kids. You wonder what the basic purpose of it is. What are these kids going to do when they leave. Is there going to be anywhere where they can use their abilities and talents. Maybe the whole thing is a facade that allows people to be arty for a few years.

Fine arts a farce

DELAHUNTY: It's not a facade. It's a farce. That's what the whole joke is. The arts in Canada at the moment are starving. There's very little opportunity for young people coming out of university or out of technical schools to get directly or even indirectly into the arts. I found that out soon enough. It's a fantastically competitive field and what

there is of the arts in Canada is of a very commercial nature.

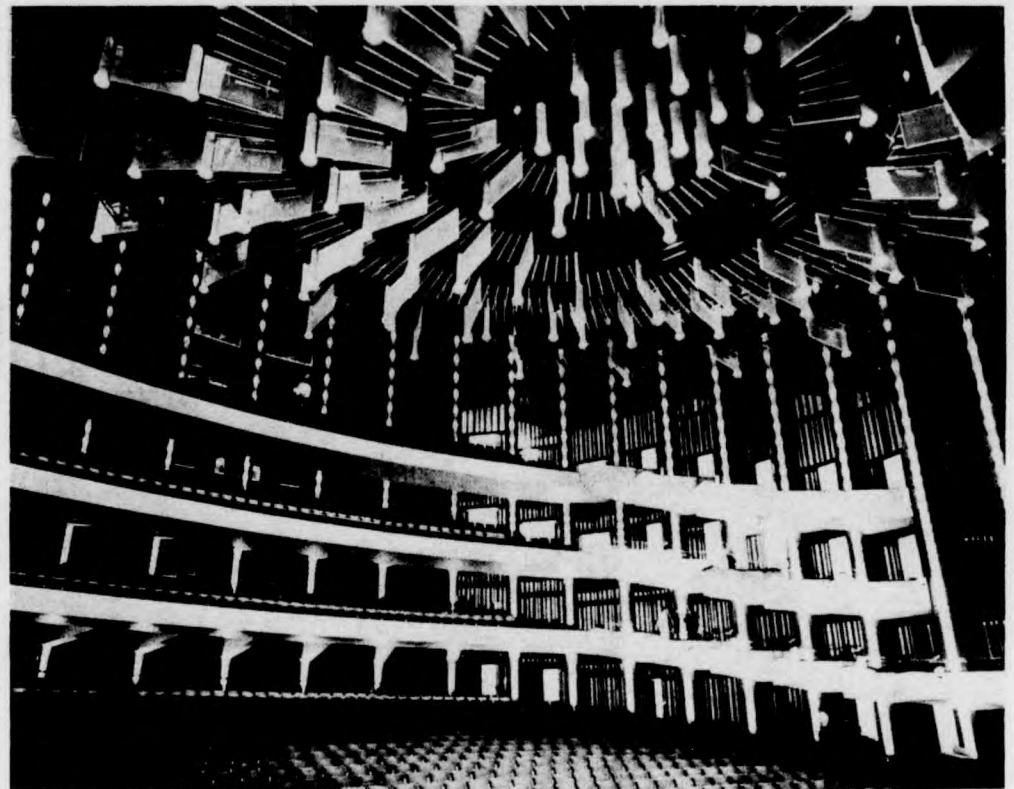
EXCALIBUR: What's happened in the past few months is certainly indicative of the whole situation. The Trudeau government has reduced the grants to the arts very much. Robert Fulford has a good article on this in Saturday Night. The Canada Council has had to cut back on grants. The National Film Board is releasing a large number of employees and the CBC is frozen. I just wonder what these kids are going to be doing.

DELAHUNTY: Ya, this is the funny thing. Whenever they cut back, the government or some big corporation involved in cultural activities, it's always the creative side which gets hurt most. The bureaucrats manage to survive or hang on. When you walk down Bloor Street around Avenue Road, I think you'll notice that the Design Canada showplaces will be gone. Another victim.

EXCALIBUR: And they have just spent \$50-million on the National Cultural Centre in Ottawa and they don't want to spend to fill it up. Marlene Dietrich is hardly Canadian culture.

DELAHUNTY: It is obvious to anyone involved in the arts or trying to be that it is very difficult. There is so little work around and you get very little for it. Whatever there is is on a very commercial nature. You read about Hair being so successful, its the most successful play in Canada's history, you probably know that it's a very commercial play, it's a Broadway play. Most of the avant-garde theatres in Toronto, and there are about four or five, are having a very difficult time and the people working in them are lucky to get subsistence money. Things don't look that well. That's why I think it's so funny when you have so many fine arts departments in universities across the country and when you have so many students enrolled in them. And these departments are not just a question of a couple of fine arts courses taken by students in the faculty of arts to broaden their horizons or make them more artistic. There are complete faculties with complete programs. People major in the subjects with the intention of going into them as professions and they are very serious about it. It seems that these professors are really kidding these kids because there won't be any jobs.

EXCALIBUR: But it must be indicative of something when you do have all these hundreds of people interested in these things, theatre and film and the like. It's strange how they can be at once stressed so



Business booms in the National Arts Centre in Ottawa.

much at the university, so popular, and neglected in the public realm.

The ivory tower

DELAHUNTY: Ya, but I think that the average Canadian citizen thinks of university as a good thing, and he wants his kids to go to university, the government thinks it's a good thing, business thinks it's a good thing, so you get a tremendous amount of money at universities, and it is dispersed among the faculties. There is enough to start complete departments of fine arts complete with resident novelists, and resident musicians and you get all these academic and non-academic people teaching things. They get all this money because the university has this very good image in society, but of course the university is like an ivory tower, it's really withdrawn from society and it is so removed that it doesn't see what is happening or maybe these people do see what's happening but they find that the university is a very nice refuge, an enclave, and they find it very profitable to teach things.

EXCALIBUR: Look for instance, at the Canadian Film Development Corporation, which got all this government money two years ago to foster the Canadian film industry. They just back up these mock-Hollywood productions and B movies.

Hollywood in Canada

DELAHUNTY: The hang-up of the Canadian Film Development Board is that they are trying to create a Hollywood in Canada and they are thinking in big terms. They want concrete big films with very commercial backers and some American money and with scripts that are very commercial and with distribution set-up and with stars that are significant and that's why they back films in the very expensive categories like \$500,000 and up and to them anything that's less is amateurish and underground.

EXCALIBUR: And there is Senator Davey's media commission

currently in Ottawa. It's very revealing about the sad state of journalism in this country. There are really only three national Canadian magazines and none is very good and they are always very thin because of the little advertising they get. You look hard at any newstand in town before you discover a Canadian magazine.

DELAHUNTY: This is the problem in the magazine field. It's hard to create a Canadian consciousness when most magazines are American.

EXCALIBUR: Someone once said that a nation gets the culture that it deserves, or the art it deserves. Such maybe is the case here. I don't see how you create a national consciousness from magazines. It must be a little more inherent.

DELAHUNTY: Back to the fine arts department. I'm intrigued by what Mordecai Richler said about teaching the creative writing course at Sir George Williams last year. He knew it was a joke, a game and he even said that it's something you just can't teach. And I think that what he said about his class pertains to all the fine arts courses. I mean, it is valuable to have technical knowledge and I guess that's all they really do. You can't really teach the arts. People have to learn their own way. There's very little that can be taught. I mean, you can't teach people to be filmmakers from textbooks.

EXCALIBUR: I wonder how many really good writers have ever come out of creative writing classes. I can't think of one. The classroom situation stifles creativity instead of fostering it.

DELAHUNTY: Serious writers laugh at these classes. I don't think any good writer would want to teach one of those classes. The people who teach them are second-rate and are just doing it for a living. Most of the good people who teach, like Richler, make it explicit that they are not really going to be helping much. That's what honesty is and that's what I think is lacking in all the fine arts courses. The situation is getting pretty ludicrous.