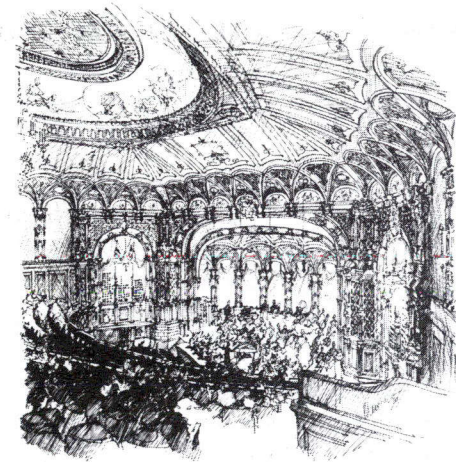


# News of the arts

## Vancouver Symphony to open Canada's largest concert hall

The Vancouver Symphony Orchestra opens its new home, the refurbished Orpheum Theatre, on April 2 under the baton of its music director, Kazuyoshi Akiyama. One of Canada's foremost singers, Maureen Forrester, will be guest artist.

Renovation of the Orpheum, located on the Granville Mall in the heart of downtown Vancouver, began in November 1975. With its 2,788 seats, the refurbished Orpheum will be Canada's largest concert hall. It is one of the few halls in the country to be used exclusively for concert performances.



Artist's sketch of renovated Orpheum Theatre in Vancouver.

Billed as one of the most magnificent playhouses in the world when it opened in 1927, the Orpheum was built at an original cost of \$500,000 and was the local link in the great chain of vaudeville entertainment palaces built by the Chicago-based Orpheum circuit. At that time, it was the largest theatre in Canada.

The elegant features of the original decor of the theatre have been maintained and 100 crystal chandeliers have been restored. All painting, plaster work and decoration is consistent with the original design of the hall. A special sound shell has been constructed in the stage area and the stage has been enlarged to accommodate a full symphony orchestra and chorus. A series of acoustical baffles will "float" above the orchestra.

The Orpheum, now owned by the City of Vancouver, was purchased from Famous Players Theatres Limited at a cost of \$3.9 million. Cost of renova-

tions is expected to reach \$3.2 million. Of the \$7.1 million needed for the project, \$4,636,037 was contributed by the City of Vancouver, by private donations and two lotteries. Two million dollars was contributed by the federal Department of the Secretary of State; \$333,333 came from the province of British Columbia, and \$100,000 was donated by the Vancouver Foundation.

## Unknown people in history

*The Wait Letters*, a book introduced and edited by Mary Brown and published by Press Porcepic, illustrates some of the unknown drama of Canadian history.

The letters tell the remarkable tale of 24-year-old Benjamin Wait, who was captured during the 1837 Rebellion and sentenced to be hung, drawn and quartered for treason. His wife made the arduous trip by ship and stagecoach from their home in Upper Canada to Quebec City, where she persuaded Governor-General Lord Durham to stay execution and succeeded in getting the message to the jail in Niagara, just 30 minutes before the scheduled hanging.

Benjamin Wait was subsequently ordered to be transported to a penal colony in Tasmania. His letters to Canada describe the brutality of the journey and the horrors of prison life. He succeeded in escaping and made his way back to Canada four years later but his gallant wife died in childbirth a year after his return.

*The Wait Letters* is based on a transcription recently found in London, Ontario, by Mary Brown, an English professor at the University of Western Ontario.

## Liberace discovers unique puppeteers

One of Canada's unusual and successful theatre ventures, the Famous People Players, is a puppet troupe featuring life-size figures of such famous entertainers as Elvis Presley, Liberace, Barbra Streisand, Wolfman Jack and Anne Murray.

When Liberace himself was invited to see the company perform in

Toronto's O'Keefe Centre in 1974 at a benefit for the Metro Association for the Mentally Retarded, he was so impressed he immediately booked the group to appear as a back-up act for his show in Las Vegas. But what Liberace did not know at the time was that of the 11 puppeteers, eight were themselves mentally retarded. Diane Dupuy of Hamilton, Ontario, however, the 28-year-old artistic director and coach of the company, is adamant that the troupe be judged on their merits.

## Smash hit

The troupe was a great success in Las Vegas. "The company of 11 inspired and gifted young people is sure to be listed among Lee's most illustrious discoveries," wrote Forrest Duke, the Las Vegas *Journal* entertainment columnist. Another reporter with *The Vegas Visitor* overheard many members of the audience state it was "the greatest show I've ever seen" as they left the performance.

Diane Dupuy, who has studied "black light" puppetry techniques in Canada, was a voluntary worker with the mentally retarded, and dreamed of forming her own troupe with the retarded and of beginning with a puppet of Liberace whom, she hoped, one day would see the show. Such dreams rarely come true. She founded the troupe with a \$40,000-federal grant and chose seven retarded youngsters (average age 21) from Toronto's Hainey Centre. A lot of hard work followed.

Of her company, Diane Dupuy says, "I find retarded people more professional than others in the business."



Anne Laitin of Famous People Players with Wolfman Jack puppet.