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# KULTURE

The future put in doubt by

# Rebecca Cohn's new status

by Dor Michel Arie

Quite some time has passed since information first came to light which suggested that the Dalhousie Arts Centre — funded entirely by Dalhousie University since 1971 — might have to shut its doors. Those with their ears to the ground foresaw the possibility of Dalhousie University divorcing itself of any responsibility for funding the centre as far back as the spring of 1988. Others knew even prior to that period. The reality of the situation has been known for several weeks. With the aid of a provincial grant

for \$300,000, the Dalhousie Arts Centre is remaining open, but the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium and the James Dunn Theatre will become rental-only facilities. Artists desiring to perform in either performance space must be able to afford expensive rental fees or find a local sponsor to lend financial support.

While the facts surrounding the Dalhousie Arts Centre and its attendant woes have been well-documented, there has not been much media coverage dealing with the local artistic community and its response to the issue. Surprisingly, some rather prominent performance groups such as the Nova Scotia Symphony and the Nova Scotia Kiwanis Music Festi-

val, though disappointed by the new-found status of the Cohn and the Dunn as rental facilities, do not see any immediate effects upon their performance schedules in the near future.

According to Shirley Whiston, executive director of the Nova Scotia Kiwanis Music Festival, there was great disappointment upon hearing of the straits in which the Cohn found itself. The music festival had long been held in church halls and school auditoriums prior to the advent of the arts centre in 1971. Since that time it has been held, and the performance space rented, in the centre. Whiston went on to say that having such a prominent arts facility in our midst has made the task of bringing in adjudicators from other parts of Canada an easy one. In recent years, however, she says that the centre's level of maintenance has dropped and that we must ask ourselves whether it is not compromising matters by keeping the arts centre open despite its continual qualitative deterioration.

Dena Simon, executive director of the Nova Scotia Choral Federation, agrees with Whiston with regards to the municipality's need for a quality performance space which can accommodate virtually any type of performance. She says that the Cohn provided the local choral groups with an acoustically sound auditorium within which to perform. The Choral Federation has rented space in the past so finding itself in this position once again is no great shock. Nonetheless, Simon brings attention to the fact that rental space is expensive in the Dalhousie Arts Centre and smaller performance groups might well have to charge high ticket prices in order to meet rental costs. The state of dance performances in Halifax is certainly jeopardized if dance groups must perform at a financial risk and Simon expresses concern that while the symphony and the theatre are both going strong locally, it is the dance aficionado who may have to do without.

"The loss of the Cohn as a pres-

enting house is a tremendous blow," says Barbara Richman, director of the Halifax Dance Association. "The Cohn dance series brought us a broad cross-section of international artists. We could see new work, invite guest dancers to give master classes and make contacts for training opportunities for our students. The series was wonderful for audiences, students and performers. It brought to a community which has no dance company of its own a sense of the breadth and excitement of performance dance."



photo by: P. Jordan

This statue, outside the Cohn, might become more popular now that the inside space is too expensive to rent.

From a symphonic standpoint, the Nova Scotia Symphony has long rented its time and space (from the Cohn and its performances are booked anywhere from one to one and a half years in advance. The general manager of Symphony Nova Scotia, Luc Charlebois, said that the overall effect of turning the Cohn into a rental facility will be a diminution of artistic performances for Halifax. He went on to say that a gap will likely exist as smaller, financially insecure performance groups fall to the wayside because of an inability to find local sponsors or promoters. Artistically speaking, it may take one or two years, however, to recognize the effects of the Cohn's new status upon the local area. Charlebois said that, like Whiston, he thinks funding for the Cohn should be a tripartite responsibility maintained by Dalhousie University, and the provincial and municipal governments. According to Whiston, Dalhousie should definitely uphold some funding responsibility to the Cohn. "University is more than just books."

The question of whether or not Halifax is going to become increasingly isolated from the rest of the Canadian artistic community remains to be answered, but there is no doubt that the rental-only status of the Cohn is a decidedly backwards step for performance arts in Halifax.



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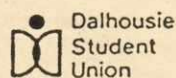
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