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THE PERFORMING ARTS IN CANADA

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For a number of years, progress and growth -- in particular economic growth -- have been regarded as synonymous and most Canadians have tended to equate a rising gross national product with a rise in both national and individual well-being. Yet there are those who have now begun to question this view. To them, the measuring of human satisfaction purely in terms of material advance is not enough but must include those elements which contribute to spiritual and social enrichment. Most persons also have more leisure than their parents and grandparents and this, along with higher levels of education and modern communications, has resulted in the pursuit of a fuller life. More and more people are looking to the arts to add beauty and grace to their existence. For many, a stimulating program can provide help in understanding the challenging issues of a changing world and the perspective for possible action and solution to problems of the day. Music, drama and the dance are also evolving as vital parts of the educational curriculum. The emphasis is on the arts as a tool in the learning process and a stimulus to creative expression and personal development of all young people. Developmental drama (dramatic activity within human development both personal and cultural) has a growing number of applications. These include the use of drama programs in teacher-training, in recreation, in social work, in therapy, in medical practice, in industry and in the field of human relations.

The Early Developments in Drama

Theatre in Canada traces its origins to Acadia and New France. The first dramatic presentation to be offered in what is now Canada was a marine masque, *Le Théâtre de Neptune*. The play, which was a welcome to Samuel de Champlain on his return from one of his expeditions, was performed by Indians and *voyageurs* and the performance took place on the shores of the Annapolis River on the Bay of Fundy on November 14, 1606. The first play to be presented in Quebec was a tragedy performed in 1640 to celebrate the birthday of the Dauphin of France. One of the earliest Canadian plays had dialogue in French and also the languages of the Huron and Algonquin peoples, and was staged in Quebec in 1658.

During the eighteenth century, touring companies of English and American professionals began to appear in Canada. The plays performed were those then current in the London repertoire. A three-act comedy written in

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Halifax in 1774 and entitled *Acadius or Love in a Calm* is considered perhaps the first original work by an English-speaking playwright. By the latter years of the century, dramatic performances by both professional and amateur groups had become fairly frequent. During the nineteenth century, performances in English, both professional and amateur, continued to increase, while dramatic performances in French remained relatively infrequent.

The first real theatre in Montreal, the Theatre Royal, opened in 1825. There was a theatre of sorts in Toronto before 1830; and gradually theatres came into being in cities and towns where there was adequate support. In some areas these theatres endured for many years, while in others there was a succession of houses or several changes in name and management. In 1862, British Columbia's first theatre was opened. The same year also saw the formation of the Garrick Club in Hamilton, Ontario, out of which the still active Players Guild was developed. By 1870, soldiers stationed in Winnipeg were staging dramatic performances and French groups had become established in the West, especially in St. Boniface, Manitoba, and Edmonton, Alberta.

During the latter years of the nineteenth century, and well into the present century, a system of touring companies, known as the *Road*, flourished and brought to Canada many eminent British and United States performers. For a number of reasons, the *Road* came to an end between the two world wars. Competition from the cinema and radio, the increased expense of production and travel, the loss of audience support because of a deterioration in the standard of touring companies, the long-run system in London and New York, the Depression and, especially, the growing decline in the number of suitable theatres, all contributed to its eventual disappearance. Control of most of the theatres was acquired by the moving-picture chains, thus making them unavailable for legitimate stage productions. Valiant attempts at establishing native repertory companies achieved no permanent success.

In the 1930s, while the professional theatre languished, radio began to provide Canadians with their national theatre and remained the principal vehicle for artistic expression until the advent of television in the early 1950s. A wide spectrum of classical and contemporary plays was presented on radio by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation during the period and radio became the showcase for Canadian writers and actors, both English-speaking and French-speaking.

The Musical Heritage

For many years, church music and folk-songs were the chief types of music in Canada. Cantatas were written for national events and concerts given by the local choir, aided perhaps by a visiting celebrity, were among the great occasions of the year. Confederation brought the demand for a national song and, of the many written, two have won lasting popularity: "The Maple Leaf Forever" (1867) by Alexander Muir and "O Canada" (1880) by Calixa Lavallée. Popular music was provided by the *coureurs des bois* and the *habitants*. The outstanding creators of authentic Canadian folk-songs were the *voyageurs*, whose creative spirit was evident in the adaptation of some of the old-country songs to the new environment and in the invention of new songs. Canada has

long been an importer in the grand concert field and the Canadian concert-goer has learned to expect to hear the world's most outstanding performers.

By the mid-1880s, opera as an art form had gained acceptance in Canada, with productions in Quebec, Montreal and Toronto. During the latter half of the century, touring companies from the United States and overseas began visiting Canada. By the end of the century, nearly every Canadian city, large and small, had what was referred to as an opera house. However, they bore little resemblance to the European houses and seldom, if ever, was grand opera staged in them. The first attempt to produce grand opera on a large scale was in Montreal in 1910, and additional performances were given in Toronto, Rochester (Alberta), Quebec and Ottawa. A second season was presented the following year. Although an artistic success, both seasons showed such severe financial losses that the project had to be abandoned. The next important venture was the successful staging of *Hansel and Gretel* by a newly-created Toronto company in 1928. The efforts of this company persisted until they were curtailed by the Second World War.

Ballet is a relatively new art form in Canada and began its growth only in the 1930s, when two distinguished teachers extended their activities to include dance groups made up of their pupils -- the Volkoff Canadian Ballet was established in 1938 and the Winnipeg Ballet in 1939. These two companies, though amateur in status, dominated the domestic ballet scene for the next ten years and gave numerous performances in many Canadian cities.

A Diverse Folklore

Canada has a rich folklore, or rather several folklores. The effort is to preserve the mosaic rather than the melting-pot tradition. Folk-music and folk-dancing in Canada are as varied as the different origins of the population. In addition to the folk arts of the Indians and Eskimos, people of many nationalities have brought their music and dances to Canada, all distinctive of the countries from which they came. At the annual Mariposa Folk Festival, now held in Toronto, singers, instrumentalists and songs of every type are represented.

Native Indian dances have been performed since the earliest known times. All the principal events of life were portrayed ritually and the dance was the chief means of expression. The dances were performed to the chanting of one or more persons or the beating of a drum. In the dances of the West Coast Indians, drama and religion were as closely linked as they were in medieval Europe. Some of the Indian dances invoked the world of the supernatural and called for the painting of faces and wearing of elaborate regalia and grotesque masks. With skilful staging, giant totemic animals and birds manifested themselves. The greatest of all the rituals and festivals of the plains was the Sun Dance. There were also snake dances and war dances; in Alberta, rain dances are still held in June. In the traditional dance of the Eskimos, those taking part perform individually, chanting as they dance. The dancer frequently provides his own sound by using a wooden mallet to strike the edge of an enormous drum which he carries.

The songs of the Canadian Indian constitute both the oldest and the most divergent repertory of Canadian folk-music. They are interesting not only because of their mythical and linguistic content but also because of their unusual musical idioms.

Financing of the Arts

Possibly the greatest problem facing the performing arts in Canada is that of financing. Financial insolvency is a constant threat to the survival of companies that have achieved high artistic reputations and constitute cultural assets of immense value. Given the consensus that these assets should be an integral part of Canada's culture and should therefore be available to all persons, regardless of their financial position, operating costs cannot be obtained entirely through box-office revenue. Now, however, it is almost universally accepted that the provision of opportunities of pleasure in the best practice in music, theatre and the other arts is a justifiable part of the activity of a modern state. The first example of Federal Government subsidy for the arts in Canada was the formation of the Canada Council.

An awareness that the Canadian people felt that it was necessary to restore the balance between the attention paid to material achievements and the rather less tangible, but more enduring, parts of Canada's civilization, and that this could not be accomplished without effort, inspired the creation, in 1949, of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences. In 1951, the Commission submitted a report recommending the foundation of a council to encourage these activities. A direct outcome of the recommendation was the establishment by Act of Parliament on March 28, 1957, of the Canada Council for the Encouragement of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. The purpose of the Council was to "foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in, the arts, humanities and social sciences".

In providing assistance to the performing arts, the Canada Council has looked both to the individual artist and to those organizations that provide him with a living. The main strategy of the forces deployed by the Council is "directed to the end that artists in Canada should live and work in such dignity and ease as it may be their wish and ability to command in society, and that increasingly the society in which they live and work should by constant exposure and involvement come to value them for the grace they lend to our existence and for the healthy irritants they provide to our complacencies".

The Council's approach is on three fronts, and the first is directed towards the welfare of the individual with potential talent. Individual artists are thus assisted in pursuing their studies or in establishing themselves in their chosen field at home or abroad.

The second concern of the Council is to ensure as far as possible the artist's means of communication with the public. To this end, subsidies are provided for orchestras, theatres, dance troupes, opera companies and other deserving organizations. It has been the Council's policy, in

particular, to recognize those institutions that have achieved a high standard of excellence and to make grants to assist in maintaining or increasing this excellence. In many cases the grants are for specified purposes such as touring, additional rehearsal time for the preparation of new works and the like. Other professional or semi-professional groups may be assisted when they are of significance to the region they serve. The Council also seeks to encourage development of the arts across Canada as a whole by subsidizing tours to smaller centres. This latter aspect of the work uses a very large part of the funds and meets to some extent the needs of the public, from whom the funds derive.

The Council's third main line of attack is directed towards support services for the arts, and to special projects designed to reinforce the work of artists and their means of communication. The Council has also undertaken to help launch programs aimed at the development of young people interested in the arts as administrators, technicians, etc., in theatres and orchestras. Funds are directed to institutions that facilitate the exchange of information on a national scale and provide services and act as a binding force for artists and organizations scattered across Canada. The Council also assists in promoting Canadian cultural relations with other countries and has helped several groups to perform abroad. In addition, the Canada Council tries not to neglect the Canadian composer and playwright. However, the Council does not initiate projects, nor does it commission plays or musical compositions. These measures are designed to ensure that there will be no loss of artistic freedom as a result of government contribution to the financing of the arts.

The income from the endowment fund established by Parliament when it created the Council contributed to the rapid development of the arts in Canada, but it soon became inadequate to meet the growing demand. The Canada Council therefore asked the Federal Government for additional annual appropriations. In the 1970/71 fiscal year, the total income of the Council amounted to \$35.2 million, of which \$24.2 million was an outright grant from the Federal Government.

The provincial governments have also established agencies with public funds for the support and encouragement of the arts. Like the Canada Council, the provincial agencies give preference to professional groups and are specially concerned with getting theatres and other organizations to visit as many parts of the various provinces as possible. Ontario has its Council for the Arts and Quebec its Ministry of Cultural Affairs, with a theatre division. The three Western provinces had been giving assistance to their theatre groups long before the establishment of the Canada Council. Saskatchewan has its Saskatchewan Arts Board, Alberta its Recreational and Cultural Division of the Department of the Provincial Secretary, and Manitoba its Council of the Arts. British Columbia has its Centennial Cultural Fund Advisory Committee and the Atlantic Provinces also have agencies or divisions charged with the responsibility of fostering the arts. Substantial aid is also provided by municipal governments, particularly those of the larger cities. Government support is augmented by donations from business and industry and through the enthusiastic fund-raising activities of public-spirited private individuals.

Recent Developments

The modern history of the Canadian theatre began a few years before the birth of the Canada Council with the arrival of television, the establishment of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival, the emergence of Le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde and Le Rideau Vert in Montreal and the Crest Theatre and the itinerant Canadian Players in Toronto. The early 1950s saw the first round in a struggle to develop a wholly professional theatre where an actor could begin to earn a living from the exercise of his talents. Television is part of the story, because it initially provided more and better-paid employment than radio had been able to offer to many who could not support themselves from intermittent work in the live theatre.

A full account of the developments since then should include reference to such significant events as the evolution of the French-Canadian theatre, the progress of the Stratford Festival and the other important summer festivals, the rise of the National Ballet, the establishment of the National Theatre School and the National Ballet School and the emergence of the English-speaking "separate" stage. It should also be concerned with the development of a nation-wide chain of professional theatre organizations, the emphasis on the provision of productions and performances for young people and the search of the Dominion Drama Festival to find new ways to contribute to a changing situation.

Resurgence in French Canada

Since the Second World War, the most widely acknowledged advances in French-Canadian cultural life have taken place in the theatre. Before the War, the Province of Quebec had no theatrical company of professional standing and no repertory available for continuous performance. Starting almost from scratch, the movement has gained so much momentum that Montreal today boasts several professional companies presenting regular seasons. Montreal is now the most important French-speaking theatre centre outside Paris and Brussels and, after New York, the most important theatre city in North America.

The rebirth dates to the establishment, in 1938, of Les Compagnons de Saint-Laurent, who, for almost 15 years, set the pace for theatrical revival in French Canada. A rival group, L'Equipe, composed of radio actors with a realism in their productions borrowed from the American stage, was formed in 1944 and held its own for five seasons. In 1948, several actors from L'Equipe formed a group to be known later as Le Rideau Vert. Le Rideau Vert now has the most varied and ambitious of Montreal's theatrical repertoires.

When they disbanded in 1952, Les Compagnons de Saint-Laurent left a significant heritage, the French classics had been revived, foreign plays had been performed and the way had been paved for the acceptance of modern and even contemporary plays. In 1951, two former members of Les Compagnons established a new group -- Le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde. This new group was well received in Montreal and has since become a truly international company. French theatre has been the mainstay of Le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde but it has also given notable productions of foreign plays. In 1954, plays by Canadian authors were presented for the first time.

Until the advent of professional theatre in French Canada, it was difficult to create a distinctive dramatic literature that reflected French-Canadian society. Since the professional theatres (with few exceptions) have made it a practice to present each season at least one play by a Quebec writer, French-Canadian drama has built up an interesting repertoire. Mainly devoted to exploring psychological and social themes, the work of these dramatists is generally well received by the Quebec public and in recent years their plays have attracted the largest audiences.

The "Englang" (English language) theatre in Quebec reflects the vitality of its French-speaking counterpart. As is the case with the French theatre, English theatre activity in Quebec is situated almost exclusively in Montreal. The "Englang" repertoire provides a window on world culture, is sophisticated and lively in its views and makes an important contribution to Montreal theatre. Established in 1969, the Centaur Theatre group is the leading English company in the province. Although it can be classed as an "establishment" theatre, it is not afraid to challenge itself and its audience to new approaches. It also seeks out native playwrights and undertakes the responsibility of presenting new works.

The giant of the theatre world in English-speaking Canada is the Stratford Festival. Opened in 1953 to give summer seasons of Shakespearean plays, Stratford was a success from the beginning and has maintained its reputation throughout its existence. The Festival is now one of the most important theatre events in the world and the company is one of the best in North America. The advent of good theatre in the relaxed atmosphere of summertime has added a new dimension to the cultural evolution of Canada. Situated on the banks of the Avon River, the physical facilities of the Festival are impressive and have had no less impact than the artistic aspects. The Festival opened in the largest tent in existence, containing, rather than the traditional proscenium stage, a "thrust" stage, which projected into the audience. In 1957, the tent was replaced by a permanent theatre with the same type of stage.

The Festival has extended the length of its season and has expanded to include contemporary drama and other attractions such as opera, concerts and art exhibits. It has also created an opera and drama workshop where actors can learn something of music and singers can be coached in drama. Other celebrated festivals include the Charlottetown Summer Festival and the Shaw Festival at Niagara-on-the-Lake. The latter was founded in 1964 to perpetuate the work of Shaw. Emulating the Stratford Festival, it has expanded to include the work of other playwrights and a music festival has been added.

Rise of the "Separate" Stage

While French-speaking artists have for some time been developing a truly French-Canadian tradition in the arts, English-speaking artists have continued to be borrowers and imitators of British and American theatre. In particular, the Canadian playwright in English-speaking Canada has not attained the acceptance and professional standard achieved by writers in the other literary arts.

This is now changing, and across Canada new kinds of experimental theatre are emerging. They call themselves everything from community theatres to theatre communes, from experimental laboratories to underground playhouses, from guerilla theatres to outlets for Canadian playwrights. This "separate" stage is charged with nationalism and it likes to think of itself as "a home for the Canadian playwright". In addition to producing new playwrights, these theatres offer the most important "break-in" centres for new directors, actors and designers.

Indian culture is also undergoing a resurgence. The participation of Indian artists in Canada's centennial celebrations started the organization that today is advancing the cause of Indian cultural relations. Never has the outlook been more promising for the development and encouragement of Canada's native people as actors, singers, musicians, dancers, directors and playwrights.

The Dominion Drama Festival was formed in 1932 to help live theatre to survive in Canada. Theatre Canada, its successor, adheres to the original philosophy and objectives, tailored to the needs of the 1970s. For four decades the Festival has thus been a stimulating and constructive influence on Canada's theatre. Its nation-wide competitions and the encouragement given to Canadian playwrights and the formation of drama companies have contributed much to the vitality of the stage in Canada. By moving around the country, the Dominion Drama Festival fulfilled the implication of the "Dominion" in its name. It is probably less important that the theatre it offered was non-professional than that it provided an outlet for several generations of actors who maintained themselves by other occupations during the day.

While the Festival's main purpose was simply to hold a three-act play competition, it has contributed to a much wider area of Canadian theatre. Its 13 regions, set up to provide preliminary competitions, also serve as the geographical and organizational basis for drama and theatre groups and other organizations. As new opportunities for employment in the professional theatre have appeared, many "graduates" of the Dominion Drama Festival have filled them. In recent years, other organizations and media have also begun to take on the responsibility of supplying members to the professional stage, but the Drama Festival has continued to expand its role by involving itself in the solution of problems of the Canadian theatre. At the same time, it has maintained its role of providing the opportunity for participation in, and appreciation of, the theatre at the non-professional level.

Developments in Music

The production and performance of good music has increased notably in Canada in recent years. While Canadian composition generally reflects international trends, inspiration from Canadian literary and historical sources and Indian, Eskimo and French-Canadian motifs can be detected. Publicly-controlled broadcasting and television have proved of great benefit to Canadian composers, both in making their work known and in contributing to their income. Commercial sponsorship too has been the source of much assistance.

By the mid-1950s, symphonic music was widely accepted by Canadian audiences and, in the larger cities, had reached an appreciable level of maturity. Since then, considerable development has taken place, perhaps the most significant indication of the growth being the emergence of the Montreal and Toronto orchestras on the international scene. Canadian symphony orchestras now number more than 30 and over a third of them are fully professional.

One of the keys to Canada's musical future is the work of Les Jeunesses Musicales du Canada and the National Youth Orchestra, membership of which is confined to players under 25 years of age. The national concert circuits of these groups give work to many talented young professionals and a greater understanding of the music of our time to younger audiences. Another recent milestone was the forming in 1969 of the orchestra of the National Arts Centre. In the short space of the three years since its foundation, this orchestra has earned a reputation as one of the leading small orchestras in North America.

Chamber music has not yet achieved the measure of acceptance accorded to the other forms of musical expression in Canada. A series of concerts of new music, similar to those being offered in Montreal over the past several years, is now being offered to the Toronto public for the first time. Created to provide an outlet for contemporary composers to hear their own works in performance and foster a more vital approach to chamber music, these concerts will feature works by both Canadian composers and composers from other countries.

Despite its early acceptance, a flourishing native operatic tradition has yet to develop in Canada. Even in the larger centres, no company yet boasts a season of more than a few weeks' duration. By 1954, there was a fully professional company in Toronto, which, in 1959, became the Canadian Opera Company. That same year a touring program was introduced. However, although progress is slow, opera in Canada is growing in popularity and support. Five Canadian centres at present offer opera on a more or less regular basis -- Montreal, Quebec City, Toronto, Edmonton and Vancouver. Stratford also offers opera, but its operatic activities take place as an adjunct to the Shakespearean Festival. Save for occasional visits by the Canadian Opera Company or similar ensembles, cities and towns in the Atlantic Provinces are not at present likely to hear grand opera.

During the past several years, there has been a revolution in original recording of Canadian artists and Canadian music. By far the most active region is Quebec. The development of the cult of the *chansonnier*, in particular, has depended on the record industry and public demand for such recordings has reached considerable proportions. These poet-singers, who compose their own lyrics and music, have long had the reputation of reflecting the aspirations and sentiments of their compatriots. Few of the record companies concern themselves with serious music. In English Canada, most of the original recording is also devoted to music of a popular nature, although there have been several notable instances in which the recording companies have co-operated in the recording of more serious works.

While ballet has been a late-comer among the arts, it has made astonishing progress and has become one of the pre-eminent arts in Canada. The country is at present supporting three main ballet companies -- the National Ballet of Canada, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. In 1950, after a short period as a semi-professional group, the Winnipeg Ballet was able to become fully professional, and in 1952 its name was changed to the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. The National Ballet Company was formed in 1951 by a group of interested Toronto citizens, called the National Ballet Guild. In 1957, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens was founded in Montreal. The National Ballet was given the honour of performing at the opening of Canada's National Arts Centre in Ottawa, and was the only classical dance company invited to perform at Expo 70 in Osaka, Japan. To celebrate its twentieth anniversary season, the National Ballet Company recently made its first professional tour of Europe.

Although contemporary dance is a typical North American form of expression, it has taken root slowly in Canada, and then, it is interesting to note, only in cities that also have a major ballet company. However, Canadian dance is now beginning to show signs of the development of its own tradition.

Education for the Arts

Training for the theatre takes place in workshops and theatre schools, mainly those affiliated with community theatres. Attention to the theatre has also spread to the universities. Courses in departments of drama, as well as in English departments with theatre facilities, such as laboratories, are teaching not only the theory and literature of the theatre but also its techniques. The late 1960s were marked by a deepening commitment on the part of the universities to professional theatre.

The most important school in the country is the National Theatre School, which was established in Montreal in 1960. Its creation was the culmination of eight years of dedicated effort by theatre-lovers, amateur and professional alike, who shared the dream of a truly professional theatre in Canada. The purpose of the school is "to prepare actors, designers and technicians for the theatre". The programs of study are intensive, arduous, challenging and creative. The promise of the school to its students is not to produce competent artists but rather to provide them with a concrete basis on which they may build their art. The school makes use of the most talented members of the theatrical profession as faculty members and consultants.

The National Theatre School is a "co-lingual" institution, with the French-speaking and English-speaking students being trained in separate but similar programs. When the subject matter requires it, both groups combine for classes. By meeting and working together, the students can become familiar with each other's traditions. It is hoped that, in time, this can result in an approach to theatre that is unique, and distinctly Canadian. The school is in close contact with the growing number of theatrical organizations across Canada and, through its graduates, effectively strengthens such organizations. This infusion of strength makes it possible for more Canadian theatres to be established, in which traditional as well as contemporary and

experimental drama can be performed. In the short space of a dozen years, the school has already turned out several first-rate actors and actresses, as well as designers, technicians, stage-managers and directors who are making significant contributions to the Canadian theatre scene.

The high standard of dancing in the National Ballet stems mostly from the formation of the National Ballet School in 1959. While it grew out of the needs of the National Ballet, the National Ballet School quickly achieved its own identity. The school, which attracts students from across Canada, also offers a full academic course, thus providing ballet training by international standards and a formal education simultaneously.

Basic music training has usually been carried on outside school hours in private studios, and this situation still prevails today. Conservatories, colleges and schools of music organize the private teaching activity into a balanced system of training. Music courses are now offered in nearly all Canadian universities.

Observance of Canada's centennial accounted for the construction and acquisition of a number of buildings for the performing arts across Canada. Imposing new structures, with facilities for the most ambitious and complex productions, were built in several provinces, and more and more of the old opera houses and empty cinemas are being converted for the use of local groups and touring companies. The universities, too, are providing accommodation for the performing arts. With more theatres available, the number of resident professional companies has increased, resulting in a growing decentralization of the professional theatre.

In 1964, the National Arts Centre in Ottawa was approved as a centennial undertaking. It is a Crown corporation, the objectives of which are to operate and maintain a National Arts Centre to develop the performing arts in the National Capital region and to assist the Canada Council in the development of the arts elsewhere in Canada. The opening of the Centre in May 1969 signified much more than the provision of a much-needed group of auditoriums. Time could well show that the National Arts Centre can serve two purposes, as "a centre for national arts and a national centre for the arts".

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